ФРАНЧЕСКО ПЕТРАРКА

THE SONNETS, TRIUMPHS, AND OTHER POEMS OF PETRARCH

Франческо Петрарка

The Sonnets, Triumphs, and Other Poems of Petrarch

Петрарка Ф.

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Содержание

Francesco Petrarca
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PREFACE

The present translation of Petrarch completes the Illustrated Library series of the Italian Poets emphatically distinguished as "I Quattro Poeti Italiani."

It is rather a singular fact that, while the other three Poets of this world-famed series—Dante, Ariosto, and Tasso—have each found several translators, no complete version of the fourth, and in Italy the most popular, has hitherto been presented to the English reader. This lacune becomes the more remarkable when we consider the great influence which Petrarch has undoubtedly exercised on our poetry from the time of Chaucer downwards.

The plan of the present volume has been to select from all the known versions those most distinguished for fidelity and rhythm. Of the more favourite poems, as many as three or four are occasionally given; while of others, and those by no means few, it has been difficult to find even one. Indeed, many must have remained entirely unrepresented but for the spirited efforts of Major Macgregor, who has recently translated nearly the whole, and that with great closeness both as to matter and form. To this gentleman we have to return our especial thanks for his liberal permission to make free use of his labours.

Among the translators will be found Chaucer, Spenser, Sir Thomas Wyatt, Anna Hume, Sir John Harington, Basil Kennett, Anne Bannerman, Drummond of Hawthornden, R. Molesworth, Hugh Boyd, Lord Woodhouselee, the Rev. Francis Wrangham, the Rev. Dr. Nott, Dr. Morehead, Lady Dacre, Lord Charlemont, Capel Lofft, John Penn, Charlotte Smith, Mrs. Wrottesley, Miss Wollaston, J.H. Merivale, the Rev. W. Shepherd, and Leigh Hunt, besides many anonymous.

The order of arrangement is that adopted by Marsand and other recent editors; but to prevent any difficulty in identification, the Italian first lines have been given throughout, and repeated in an alphabetical index.

The Life of Petrarch prefixed is a condensation of the poet Campbell's two octavo volumes, and includes all the material part of that work.

York Street, Covent Garden,
June 28, 1869.

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF PETRARCH'S LIFE

1304. Born at Arezzo, the 20th of July.

1305. Is taken to Incisa at the age of seven months, where he remains seven years.

1312. Is removed to Pisa, where he remains seven months.

1313. Accompanies his parents to Avignon.

1315. Goes to live at Carpentras.

1319. Is sent to Montpelier.

1323. Is removed to Bologna.

1326. Returns to Avignon—loses his parents—contracts a friendship with James Colonna.

1327. Falls in love with Laura.

1330. Goes to Lombes with James Colonna—forms acquaintance with Socrates and Lælius—and returns to Avignon to live in the house of Cardinal Colonna.

1331. Travels to Paris—travels through Flanders and Brabant, and visits a part of Germany.

1333. His first journey to Rome—his long navigation as far as the coast of England—his return to Avignon.

1337. Birth of his son John—he retires to Vaucluse.

1339. Commences writing his epic poem, "Africa."

1340. Receives an invitation from Rome to come and be crowned as Laureate—and another invitation, to the same effect, from Paris.

1341. Goes to Naples, and thence to Rome, where he is crowned in the Capitol—repairs to Parma—death of Tommaso da Messina and James Colonna.

1342. Goes as orator of the Roman people to Clement VI. at Avignon—Studies the Greek language under Barlaamo.

1343. Birth of his daughter Francesca—he writes his dialogues "De secreto conflictu curarum suarum"—is sent to Naples by Clement VI. and Cardinal Colonna—goes to Rome for a third and a fourth time—returns from Naples to Parma.

1344. Continues to reside in Parma.

1345. Leaves Parma, goes to Bologna, and thence to Verona—returns to Avignon.

1346. Continues to live at Avignon—is elected canon of Parma.

1347. Revolution at Rome—Petrarch's connection with the Tribune—takes his fifth journey to Italy—repairs to Parma.

1348. Goes to Verona—death of Laura—he returns again to Parma—his autograph memorandum in the Milan copy of Virgil—visits Manfredi, Lord of Carpi, and James Carrara at Padua.

1349. Goes from Parma to Mantua and Ferrara—returns to Padua, and receives, probably in this year, a canonicate in Padua.

1350. Is raised to the Archdeaconry of Parma—writes to the Emperor Charles IV.—goes to Rome, and, in going and returning, stops at Florence.

1351. Writes to Andrea Dandolo with a view to reconcile the Venetians and Florentines—the Florentines decree the restoration of his paternal property, and send John Boccaccio to recall him to his country—he returns, for the sixth time, to Avignon—is consulted by the four Cardinals, who had been deputed to reform the government of Rome.

1352. Writes to Clement VI. the letter which excites against him the enmity of the medical tribe—begins writing his treatise "De Vita Solitaria."

1353. Visits his brother in the Carthusian monastery of Monte Rivo—writes his treatise "De Otio Religiosorum"—returns to Italy—takes up his abode with the Visconti—is sent by the Archbishop Visconti to Venice, to negotiate a peace between the Venetians and Genoese.

1354. Visits the Emperor at Mantua.

1355. His embassy to the Emperor—publishes his "Invective against a Physician."

1360. His embassy to John, King of France.

1361. Leaves Milan and settles at Venice—gives his library to the Venetians.

1364. Writes for Lucchino del Verme his treatise "De Officio et Virtutibus Imperatoris."

1366. Writes to Urban V. imploring him to remove the Papal residence to Rome—finishes his treatise "De Remediis utriusque Fortunæ."

1368. Quits Venice—four young Venetians, either in this year or the preceding, promulgate a critical judgment against Petrarch—repairs to Pavia to negotiate peace between the Pope's Legate and the Visconti.

1370. Sets out to visit the Pontiff—is taken ill at Ferrara—retires to Arquà among the Euganean hills.

1371. Writes his "Invectiva contra Gallum," and his "Epistle to Posterity."

1372. Writes for Francesco da Carrara his essay "De Republica optime administranda."

1373. Is sent to Venice by Francesco da Carrara.

1374. Translates the Griseldis of Boccaccio—dies on the 18th of July in the same year.

THE LIFE OF PETRARCH

The family of Petrarch was originally of Florence, where his ancestors held employments of trust and honour. Garzo, his great-grandfather, was a notary universally respected for his integrity and judgment. Though he had never devoted himself exclusively to letters, his literary opinion was consulted by men of learning. He lived to be a hundred and four years old, and died, like Plato, in the same bed in which he had been born.

Garzo left three sons, one of whom was the grandfather of Petrarch. Diminutives being customary to the Tuscan tongue, Pietro, the poet's father, was familiarly called Petracco, or little Peter. He, like his ancestors, was a notary, and not undistinguished for sagacity. He had several important commissions from government. At last, in the increasing conflicts between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines—or, as they now called themselves, the Blacks and the Whites—Petracco, like Dante, was obliged to fly from his native city, along with the other Florentines of the White party. He was unjustly accused of having officially issued a false deed, and was condemned, on the 20th of October, 1302, to pay a fine of one thousand lire, and to have his hand cut off, if that sum was not paid within ten days from the time he should be apprehended. Petracco fled, taking with him his wife, Eletta Canigiani, a lady of a distinguished family in Florence, several of whom had held the office of Gonfalonier.

Petracco and his wife first settled at Arezzo, a very ancient city of Tuscany. Hostilities did not cease between the Florentine factions till some years afterwards; and, in an attempt made by the Whites to take Florence by assault, Petracco was present with his party. They were repulsed. This action, which was fatal to their cause, took place in the night between the 19th and 20th days of July, 1304,—the precise date of the birth of Petrarch.

During our poet's infancy, his family had still to struggle with an adverse fate; for his proscribed and wandering father was obliged to separate himself from his wife and child, in order to have the means of supporting them.

As the pretext for banishing Petracco was purely personal, Eletta, his wife, was not included in the sentence. She removed to a small property of her husband's, at Ancisa, fourteen miles from Florence, and took the little poet along with her, in the seventh month of his age. In their passage thither, both mother and child, together with their guide, had a narrow escape from being drowned in the Arno. Eletta entrusted her precious charge to a robust peasant, who, for fear of hurting the child, wrapt it in a swaddling cloth, and suspended it over his shoulder, in the same manner as Metabus is described by Virgil, in the eleventh book of the Æneid, to have carried his daughter Camilla. In passing the river, the horse of the guide, who carried Petrarch, stumbled, and sank down; and in their struggles to save him, both his sturdy bearer and the frantic parent were, like the infant itself, on the point of being drowned.

After Eletta had settled at Ancisa, Petracco often visited her by stealth, and the pledges of their affection were two other sons, one of whom died in childhood. The other, called Gherardo, was educated along with Petrarch. Petrarch remained with his mother at Ancisa for seven years.

The arrival of the Emperor, Henry VII., in Italy, revived the hopes of the banished Florentines; and Petracco, in order to wait the event, went to Pisa, whither he brought his wife and Francesco, who was now in his eighth year. Petracco remained with his family in Pisa for several months; but tired at last of fallacious hopes, and not daring to trust himself to the promises of the popular party, who offered to recall him to Florence, he sought an asylum in Avignon, a place to which many Italians were allured by the hopes of honours and gain at the papal residence. In this voyage, Petracco and his family were nearly shipwrecked off Marseilles.

But the numbers that crowded to Avignon, and its luxurious court, rendered that city an uncomfortable place for a family in slender circumstances. Petracco accordingly removed his

household, in 1315, to Carpentras, a small quiet town, where living was cheaper than at Avignon. There, under the care of his mother, Petrarch imbibed his first instruction, and was taught by one Convennole da Prato as much grammar and logic as could be learned at his age, and more than could be learned by an ordinary disciple from so common-place a preceptor. This poor master, however, had sufficient intelligence to appreciate the genius of Petrarch, whom he esteemed and honoured beyond all his other pupils. On the other hand, his illustrious scholar aided him, in his old age and poverty, out of his scanty income.

Petrarch used to compare Convennole to a whetstone, which is blunt itself, but which sharpens others. His old master, however was sharp enough to overreach him in the matter of borrowing and lending. When the poet had collected a considerable library, Convennole paid him a visit, and, pretending to be engaged in something that required him to consult Cicero, borrowed a copy of one of the works of that orator, which was particularly valuable. He made excuses, from time to time, for not returning it; but Petrarch, at last, had too good reason to suspect that the old grammarian had pawned it. The poet would willingly have paid for redeeming it, but Convennole was so much ashamed, that he would not tell to whom it was pawned; and the precious manuscript was lost.

Petracco contracted an intimacy with Settimo, a Genoese, who was like himself, an exile for his political principles, and who fixed his abode at Avignon with his wife and his boy, Guido Settimo, who was about the same age with Petrarch. The two youths formed a friendship, which subsisted between them for life.

Petrarch manifested signs of extraordinary sensibility to the charms of nature in his childhood, both when he was at Carpentras and at Avignon. One day, when he was at the latter residence, a party was made up, to see the fountain of Vaucluse, a few leagues from Avignon. The little Francesco had no sooner arrived at the lovely landscape than he was struck with its beauties, and exclaimed, "Here, now, is a retirement suited to my taste, and preferable, in my eyes, to the greatest and most splendid cities."

A genius so fine as that of our poet could not servilely confine itself to the slow method of school learning, adapted to the intellects of ordinary boys. Accordingly, while his fellow pupils were still plodding through the first rudiments of Latin, Petrarch had recourse to the original writers, from whom the grammarians drew their authority, and particularly employed himself in perusing the works of Cicero. And, although he was, at this time, much too young to comprehend the full force of the orator's reasoning, he was so struck with the charms of his style, that he considered him the only true model in prose composition.

His father, who was himself something of a scholar, was pleased and astonished at this early proof of his good taste; he applauded his classical studies, and encouraged him to persevere in them; but, very soon, he imagined that he had cause to repent of his commendations. Classical learning was, in that age, regarded as a mere solitary accomplishment, and the law was the only road that led to honours and preferment. Petracco was, therefore, desirous to turn into that channel the brilliant qualities of his son; and for this purpose he sent him, at the age of fifteen, to the university of Montpelier. Petrarch remained there for four years, and attended lectures on law from some of the most famous professors of the science. But his prepossession for Cicero prevented him from much frequenting the dry and dusty walks of jurisprudence. In his epistle to posterity, he endeavours to justify this repugnance by other motives. He represents the abuses, the chicanery, and mercenary practices of the law, as inconsistent with every principle of candour and honesty.

When Petracco observed that his son made no great progress in his legal studies at Montpelier, he removed him, in 1323, to Bologna, celebrated for the study of the canon and civil law, probably imagining that the superior fame of the latter place might attract him to love the law. To Bologna Petrarch was accompanied by his brother Gherardo, and by his inseparable friend, young Guido Settimo.

But neither the abilities of the several professors in that celebrated academy, nor the strongest exhortations of his father, were sufficient to conquer the deeply-rooted aversion which our poet had conceived for the law. Accordingly, Petracco hastened to Bologna, that he might endeavour to check his son's indulgence in literature, which disconcerted his favourite designs. Petrarch, guessing at the motive of his arrival, hid the copies of Cicero, Virgil, and some other authors, which composed his small library, and to purchase which he had deprived himself of almost the necessaries of life. His father, however, soon discovered the place of their concealment, and threw them into the fire. Petrarch exhibited as much agony as if he had been himself the martyr of his father's resentment. Petracco was so much affected by his son's tears, that he rescued from the flames Cicero and Virgil, and, presenting them to Petrarch, he said, "Virgil will console you for the loss of your other MSS., and Cicero will prepare you for the study of the law."

It is by no means wonderful that a mind like Petrarch's could but ill relish the glosses of the Code and the commentaries on the Decretals.

At Bologna, however, he met with an accomplished literary man and no inelegant poet in one of the professors, who, if he failed in persuading Petrarch to make the law his profession, certainly quickened his relish and ambition for poetry. This man was Cino da Pistoia, who is esteemed by Italians as the most tender and harmonious lyric poet in the native language anterior to Petrarch.

During his residence at Bologna, Petrarch made an excursion as far as Venice, a city that struck him with enthusiastic admiration. In one of his letters he calls it "*orbem alterum*." Whilst Italy was harassed, he says, on all sides by continual dissensions, like the sea in a storm, Venice alone appeared like a safe harbour, which overlooked the tempest without feeling its commotion. The resolute and independent spirit of that republic made an indelible impression on Petrarch's heart. The young poet, perhaps, at this time little imagined that Venice was to be the last scene of his triumphant eloquence.

Soon after his return from Venice to Bologna, he received the melancholy intelligence of the death of his mother, in the thirty-eighth year of her age. Her age is known by a copy of verses which Petrarch wrote upon her death, the verses being the same in number as the years of her life. She had lived humble and retired, and had devoted herself to the good of her family; virtuous amidst the prevalence of corrupted manners, and, though a beautiful woman, untainted by the breath of calumny. Petrarch has repaid her maternal affection by preserving her memory from oblivion. Petracco did not long survive the death of this excellent woman. According to the judgment of our poet, his father was a man of strong character and understanding. Banished from his native country, and engaged in providing for his family, he was prevented by the scantiness of his fortune, and the cares of his situation, from rising to that eminence which he might have otherwise attained. But his admiration of Cicero, in an age when that author was universally neglected, was a proof of his superior mind.

Petrarch quitted Bologna upon the death of his father, and returned to Avignon, with his brother Gherardo, to collect the shattered remains of their father's property. Upon their arrival, they found their domestic affairs in a state of great disorder, as the executors of Petracco's will had betrayed the trust reposed in them, and had seized most of the effects of which they could dispose. Under these circumstances, Petrarch was most anxious for a MS. of Cicero, which his father had highly prized. "The guardians," he writes, "eager to appropriate what they esteemed the more valuable effects, had fortunately left this MS. as a thing of no value." Thus he owed to their ignorance this treatise, which he considered the richest portion of the inheritance left him by his father.

But, that inheritance being small, and not sufficient for the maintenance of the two brothers, they were obliged to think of some profession for their subsistence; they therefore entered the church; and Avignon was the place, of all others, where preferment was most easily obtained. John XXII. had fixed his residence entirely in that city since October, 1316, and had appropriated to himself the nomination to all the vacant benefices. The pretence for this appropriation was to prevent simony—in others, not in his Holiness—as the sale of benefices was carried by him to an enormous height. At every promotion to a bishopric, he removed other bishops; and, by the meanest impositions, soon

amassed prodigious wealth. Scandalous emoluments, also, which arose from the sale of indulgences, were enlarged, if not invented, under his papacy, and every method of acquiring riches was justified which could contribute to feed his avarice. By these sordid means, he collected such sums, that, according to Villani, he left behind him, *in the sacred treasury*, twenty-five millions of florins, a treasure which Voltaire remarks is hardly credible.

The luxury and corruption which reigned in the Roman court at Avignon are fully displayed in some letters of Petrarch's, without either date or address. The partizans of that court, it is true, accuse him of prejudice and exaggeration. He painted, as they allege, the popes and cardinals in the gloomiest colouring. His letters contain the blackest catalogue of crimes that ever disgraced humanity.

Petrarch was twenty-two years of age when he settled at Avignon, a scene of licentiousness and profligacy. The luxury of the cardinals, and the pomp and riches of the papal court, were displayed in an extravagant profusion of feasts and ceremonies, which attracted to Avignon women of all ranks, among whom intrigue and gallantry were generally countenanced. Petrarch was by nature of a warm temperament, with vivid and susceptible passions, and strongly attached to the fair sex. We must not therefore be surprised if, with these dispositions, and in such a dissolute city, he was betrayed into some excesses. But these were the result of his complexion, and not of deliberate profligacy. He alludes to this subject in his Epistle to Posterity, with every appearance of truth and candour.

From his own confession, Petrarch seems to have been somewhat vain of his personal appearance during his youth, a venial foible, from which neither the handsome nor the homely, nor the wise nor the foolish, are exempt. It is amusing to find our own Milton betraying this weakness, in spite of all the surrounding strength of his character. In answering one of his slanderers, who had called him pale and cadaverous, the author of Paradise Lost appeals to all who knew him whether his complexion was not so fresh and blooming as to make him appear ten years younger than he really was.

Petrarch, when young, was so strikingly handsome, that he was frequently pointed at and admired as he passed along, for his features were manly, well-formed, and expressive, and his carriage was graceful and distinguished. He was sprightly in conversation, and his voice was uncommonly musical. His complexion was between brown and fair, and his eyes were bright and animated. His countenance was a faithful index of his heart.

He endeavoured to temper the warmth of his constitution by the regularity of his living and the plainness of his diet. He indulged little in either wine or sleep, and fed chiefly on fruits and vegetables.

In his early days he was nice and neat in his dress, even to a degree of affectation, which, in later life, he ridiculed when writing to his brother Gherardo. "Do you remember," he says, "how much care we employed in the lure of dressing our persons; when we traversed the streets, with what attention did we not avoid every breath of wind which might discompose our hair; and with what caution did we not prevent the least speck of dirt from soiling our garments!"

This vanity, however, lasted only during his youthful days. And even then neither attention to his personal appearance, nor his attachment to the fair sex, nor his attendance upon the great, could induce Petrarch to neglect his own mental improvement, for, amidst all these occupations, he found leisure for application, and devoted himself to the cultivation of his favourite pursuits of literature.

Inclined by nature to moral philosophy, he was guided by the reading of Cicero and Seneca to that profound knowledge of the human heart, of the duties of others and of our own duties, which shows itself in all his writings. Gifted with a mind full of enthusiasm for poetry, he learned from Virgil elegance and dignity in versification. But he had still higher advantages from the perusal of Livy. The magnanimous actions of Roman heroes so much excited the soul of Petrarch, that he thought the men of his own age light and contemptible.

His first compositions were in Latin: many motives, however, induced him to compose in the vulgar tongue, as Italian was then called, which, though improved by Dante, was still, in many respects, harsh and inelegant, and much in want of new beauties. Petrarch wrote for the living, and for

that portion of the living who were least of all to be fascinated by the language of the dead. Latin might be all very well for inscriptions on mausoleums, but it was not suited for the ears of beauty and the bowers of love. The Italian language acquired, under his cultivation, increased elegance and richness, so that the harmony of his style has contributed to its beauty. He did not, however, attach himself solely to Italian, but composed much in Latin, which he reserved for graver, or, as he considered, more important subjects. His compositions in Latin are—Africa, an epic poem; his Bucolics, containing twelve eclogues; and three books of epistles.

Petrarch's greatest obstacles to improvement arose from the scarcity of authors whom he wished to consult—for the manuscripts of the writers of the Augustan age were, at that time, so uncommon, that many could not be procured, and many more of them could not be purchased under the most extravagant price. This scarcity of books had checked the dawning light of literature. The zeal of our poet, however, surmounted all these obstacles, for he was indefatigable in collecting and copying many of the choicest manuscripts; and posterity is indebted to him for the possession of many valuable writings, which were in danger of being lost through the carelessness or ignorance of the possessors.

Petrarch could not but perceive the superiority of his own understanding and the brilliancy of his abilities. The modest humility which knows not its own worth is not wont to show itself in minds much above mediocrity; and to elevated geniuses this virtue is a stranger. Petrarch from his youthful age had an internal assurance that he should prove worthy of estimation and honours. Nevertheless, as he advanced in the field of science, he saw the prospect increase, Alps over Alps, and seemed to be lost amidst the immensity of objects before him. Hence the anticipation of immeasurable labours occasionally damped his application. But from this depression of spirits he was much relieved by the encouragement of John of Florence, one of the secretaries of the Pope, a man of learning and probity. He soon distinguished the extraordinary abilities of Petrarch; he directed him in his studies, and cheered up his ambition. Petrarch returned his affection with unbounded confidence. He entrusted him with all his foibles, his disgusts, and his uneasinesses. He says that he never conversed with him without finding himself more calm and composed, and more animated for study.

The superior sagacity of our poet, together with his pleasing manners, and his increasing reputation for knowledge, ensured to him the most flattering prospects of success. His conversation was courted by men of rank, and his acquaintance was sought by men of learning. It was at this time, 1326, that his merit procured him the friendship and patronage of James Colonna, who belonged to one of the most ancient and illustrious families of Italy.

"About the twenty-second year of my life," Petrarch writes to one of his friends, "I became acquainted with James Colonna. He had seen me whilst I resided at Bologna, and was prepossessed, as he was pleased to say, with my appearance. Upon his arrival at Avignon, he again saw me, when, having inquired minutely into the state of my affairs, he admitted me to his friendship. I cannot sufficiently describe the cheerfulness of his temper, his social disposition, his moderation in prosperity, his constancy in adversity. I speak not from report, but from my own experience. He was endowed with a persuasive and forcible eloquence. His conversation and letters displayed the amiableness of his sincere character. He gained the first place in my affections, which he ever afterwards retained."

Such is the portrait which our poet gives of James Colonna. A faithful and wise friend is among the most precious gifts of fortune; but, as friendships cannot wholly feed our affections, the heart of Petrarch, at this ardent age, was destined to be swayed by still tenderer feelings. He had nearly finished his twenty-third year without having ever seriously known the passion of love. In that year he first saw Laura. Concerning this lady, at one time, when no life of Petrarch had been yet written that was not crude and inaccurate, his biographers launched into the wildest speculations. One author considered her as an allegorical being; another discovered her to be a type of the Virgin Mary; another thought her an allegory of poetry and repentance. Some denied her even allegorical existence, and deemed her a mere phantom beauty, with which the poet had fallen in love, like Pygmalion with the work of

his own creation. All these caprices about Laura's history have been long since dissipated, though the principal facts respecting her were never distinctly verified, till De Sade, her own descendant, wrote his memoirs of the Life of Petrarch.

Petrarch himself relates that in 1327, exactly at the first hour of the 6th of April, he first beheld Laura in the church of St. Clara of Avignon,[1] where neither the sacredness of the place, nor the solemnity of the day, could prevent him from being smitten for life with human love. In that fatal hour he saw a lady, a little younger than himself[2] in a green mantle sprinkled with violets, on which her golden hair fell plaited in tresses. She was distinguished from all others by her proud and delicate carriage. The impression which she made on his heart was sudden, yet it was never effaced.

Laura, descended from a family of ancient and noble extraction, was the daughter of Audibert de Noves, a Provençal nobleman, by his wife Esmessenda. She was born at Avignon, probably in 1308. She had a considerable fortune, and was married in 1325 to Hugh de Sade. The particulars of her life are little known, as Petrarch has left few traces of them in his letters; and it was still less likely that he should enter upon her personal history in his sonnets, which, as they were principally addressed to herself, made it unnecessary for him to inform her of what she already knew.

While many writers have erred in considering Petrarch's attachment as visionary, others, who have allowed the reality of his passion, have been mistaken in their opinion of its object. They allege that Petrarch was a happy lover, and that his mistress was accustomed to meet him at Vaucluse, and make him a full compensation for his fondness. No one at all acquainted with the life and writings of Petrarch will need to be told that this is an absurd fiction. Laura, a married woman, who bore ten children to a rather morose husband, could not have gone to meet him at Vaucluse without the most flagrant scandal. It is evident from his writings that she repudiated his passion whenever it threatened to exceed the limits of virtuous friendship. On one occasion, when he seemed to presume too far upon her favour, she said to him with severity, "I am not what you take me for." If his love had been successful, he would have said less about it.

Of the two persons in this love affair, I am more inclined to pity Laura than Petrarch. Independently of her personal charms, I cannot conceive Laura otherwise than as a kind-hearted, loveable woman, who could not well be supposed to be totally indifferent to the devotion of the most famous and fascinating man of his age. On the other hand, what was the penalty that she would have paid if she had encouraged his addresses as far as he would have carried them? Her disgrace, a stigma left on her family, and the loss of all that character which upholds a woman in her own estimation and in that of the world. I would not go so far as to say that she did not at times betray an anxiety to retain him under the spell of her fascination, as, for instance, when she is said to have cast her eyes to the ground in sadness when he announced his intention to leave Avignon; but still I should like to hear her own explanation before I condemned her. And, after all, she was only anxious for the continuance of attentions, respecting which she had made a fixed understanding that they should not exceed the bounds of innocence.

We have no distinct account how her husband regarded the homage of Petrarch to his wife—whether it flattered his vanity, or moved his wrath. As tradition gives him no very good character for temper, the latter supposition is the more probable. Every morning that he went out he might hear from some kind friend the praises of a new sonnet which Petrarch had written on his wife; and, when he came back to dinner, of course his good humour was not improved by the intelligence. He was in the habit of scolding her till she wept; he married seven months after her death, and, from all that is known of him, appears to have been a bad husband. I suspect that Laura paid dearly for her poet's idolatry.

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[1] Before the publication of De Sade's "Mémoires pour la vie de Petrarque" the report was that Petrarch first saw Laura at Vaucluse. The truth of their first meeting in the church of St. Clara depends on the authenticity of the famous note on the M.S. Virgil of Petrarch, which is now in the Ambrosian Library at Milan.

[2] Petrarch, in his dialogue with St. Augustine, states that he was older than Laura by a few years.

No incidents of Petrarch's life have been transmitted to us for the first year or two after his attachment to Laura commenced. He seems to have continued at Avignon, prosecuting his studies and feeding his passion.

James Colonna, his friend and patron, was promoted in 1328 to the bishopric of Lombes in Gascony; and in the year 1330 he went from Avignon to take possession of his diocese, and invited Petrarch to accompany him to his residence. No invitation could be more acceptable to our poet: they set out at the end of March, 1330. In order to reach Lombes, it was necessary to cross the whole of Languedoc, and to pass through Montpelier, Narbonne, and Toulouse. Petrarch already knew Montpelier, where he had, or ought to have, studied the law for four years.

Full of enthusiasm for Rome, Petrarch was rejoiced to find at Narbonne the city which had been the first Roman colony planted among the Gauls. This colony had been formed entirely of Roman citizens, and, in order to reconcile them to their exile, the city was built like a little image of Rome. It had its capital, its baths, arches, and fountains; all which works were worthy of the Roman name. In passing through Narbonne, Petrarch discovered a number of ancient monuments and inscriptions.

Our travellers thence proceeded to Toulouse, where they passed several days. This city, which was known even before the foundation of Rome, is called, in some ancient Roman acts, "Roma Garumnæ." It was famous in the classical ages for cultivating literature. After the fall of the Roman empire, the successive incursions of the Visigoths, the Saracens, and the Normans, for a long time silenced the Muses at Toulouse; but they returned to their favourite haunt after ages of barbarism had passed away. De Sade says, that what is termed Provençal poetry was much more cultivated by the Languedocians than by the Provençals, properly so called. The city of Toulouse was considered as the principal seat of this earliest modern poetry, which was carried to perfection in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, under the patronage of the Counts of Toulouse, particularly Raimond V., and his son, Raimond VI. Petrarch speaks with high praise of those poets in his Triumphs of Love. It has been alleged that he owed them this mark of his regard for their having been so useful to him in his Italian poetry; and Nostradamus even accuses him of having stolen much from them. But Tassoni, who understood the Provençal poets better than Nostradamus, defends him successfully from this absurd accusation.

Although Provençal poetry was a little on its decline since the days of the Dukes of Aquitaine and the Counts of Toulouse, it was still held in honour; and, when Petrarch arrived, the Floral games had been established at Toulouse during six years.[3]

Ere long, however, our travellers found less agreeable objects of curiosity, that formed a sad contrast with the chivalric manners, the floral games, and the gay poetry of southern France. Bishop Colonna and Petrarch had intended to remain for some time at Toulouse; but their sojourn was abridged by their horror at a tragic event[4] in the principal monastery of the place. There lived in that monastery a young monk, named Augustin, who was expert in music, and accompanied the psalmody of the religious brothers with beautiful touches on the organ. The superior of the convent, relaxing its discipline, permitted Augustin frequently to mix with the world, in order to teach music, and to improve himself in the art. The young monk was in the habit of familiarly visiting the house of a respectable citizen: he was frequently in the society of his daughter, and, by the express

[3] "The Floral games were instituted in France in 1324. They were founded by Clementina Isaure, Countess of Toulouse, and annually celebrated in the month of May. The Countess published an edict, which assembled all the poets of France, in artificial arbours, dressed with flowers; and he that produced the best poem was rewared with a violet of gold. There were, likewise, inferior prizes of flowers made in silver. In the meantime, the conquerors were crowned with natural chaplets of their own respective flowers. During the ceremony degrees were also conferred. He who had won a prize three times was pronounced a doctor '*en gaye science*,' the name of the poetry of the Provençal Troubadours. This institution, however fantastic, soon became common, through the whole of France."—*Warton's History of English Poetry*, vol i. p 467.

[4] I have transferred the following anecdote from Levati's Viaggi di Petrarea (vol. i. p. 119 et seq.). It behoves me to confess, however, that I recollect no allusion to it in any of Petrarch's letters, and I have found many things in Levati's book which make me distrust his authority.

encouragement of her father, undertook to exercise her in the practice of music. Another young man, who was in love with the girl, grew jealous of the monk, who was allowed to converse so familiarly with her, whilst he, her lay admirer, could only have stolen glimpses of her as she passed to church or to public spectacles. He set about the ruin of his supposed rival with cunning atrocity; and, finding that the young woman was infirm in health, suborned a physician, as worthless as himself, to declare that she was pregnant. Her credulous father, without inquiring whether the intelligence was true or false, went to the superior of the convent, and accused Augustin, who, though thunderstruck at the accusation, denied it firmly, and defended himself intrepidly. But the superior was deaf to his plea of innocence, and ordered him to be shut up in his cell, that he might await his punishment. Thither the poor young man was conducted, and threw himself on his bed in a state of horror.

The superior and the elders among the friars thought it a meet fate for the accused that he should be buried alive in a subterranean dungeon, after receiving the terrific sentence of "*Vade in pace*." At the end of several days the victim dashed out his brains against the walls of his sepulchre. Bishop Colonna, who, it would appear, had no power to oppose this hideous transaction, when he was informed of it, determined to leave the place immediately; and Petrarch in his indignation exclaimed —

"Heu! fuge crudeles terras, fuge littus avarum."—Virg.

On the 26th of May, 1330, the Bishop of Lombes and Petrarch quitted Toulouse, and arrived at the mansion of the diocese. Lombes—in Latin, Lombarium—lies at the foot of the Pyrenees, only eight leagues from Toulouse. It is small and ill-built, and offers no allurement to the curiosity of the traveller. Till lately it had been a simple abbey of the Augustine monks. The whole of the clergy of the little city, singing psalms, issued out of Lombes to meet their new pastor, who, under a rich canopy, was conducted to the principal church, and there, in his episcopal robes, blessed the people, and delivered an eloquent discourse. Petrarch beheld with admiration the dignified behaviour of the youthful prelate. James Colonna, though accustomed to the wealth and luxury of Rome, came to the Pyrenean rocks with a pleased countenance. "His aspect," says Petrarch, "made it seem as if Italy had been transported into Gascony." Nothing is more beautiful than the patient endurance of our destiny; yet there are many priests who would suffer translation to a well-paid, though mountainous bishopric, with patience and piety.

The vicinity of the Pyrenees renders the climate of Lombes very severe; and the character and conversation of the inhabitants were scarcely more genial than their climate. But Petrarch found in the bishop's abode friends who consoled him in this exile among the Lombesians. Two young and familiar inmates of the Bishop's house attracted and returned his attachment. The first of these was Lello di Stefani, a youth of a noble and ancient family in Rome, long attached to the Colonnas. Lello's gifted understanding was improved by study; so Petrarch tells us; and he could have been no ordinary man whom our accomplished poet so highly valued. In his youth he had quitted his studies for the profession of arms; but the return of peace restored him to his literary pursuits. Such was the attachment between Petrarch and Lello, that Petrarch gave him the name of Lælius, the most attached companion of Scipio. The other friend to whom Petrarch attached himself in the house of James Colonna was a young German, extremely accomplished in music. De Sade says that his name was Louis, without mentioning his cognomen. He was a native of Ham, near Bois le Duc, on the left bank of the Rhine between Brabant and Holland. Petrarch, with his Italian prejudices, regarded him as a barbarian by birth; but he was so fascinated by his serene temper and strong judgment, that he singled him out to be the chief of all his friends, and gave him the name of Socrates, noting him as an example that Nature can sometimes produce geniuses in the most unpropitious regions.

After having passed the summer of 1330 at Lombes, the Bishop returned to Avignon, in order to meet his father, the elder Stefano Colonna, and his brother the Cardinal.

The Colonnas were a family of the first distinction in modern Italy. They had been exceedingly powerful during the popedom of Boniface VIII., through the talents of the late Cardinal James Colonna, brother of the famous old Stefano, so well known to Petrarch, and whom he used to call a phœnix sprung up from the ashes of Rome. Their house possessed also an influential public character in the Cardinal Pietro, brother of the younger Stefano. They were formidable from the territories and castles which they possessed, and by their alliance and friendship with Charles, King of Naples. The power of the Colonna family became offensive to Boniface, who, besides, hated the two Cardinals for having opposed the renunciation of Celestine V., which Boniface had fraudulently obtained. Boniface procured a crusade against them. They were beaten, expelled from their castles, and almost exterminated; they implored peace, but in vain; they were driven from Rome, and obliged to seek refuge, some in Sicily and others in France. During the time of their exile, Boniface proclaimed it a capital crime to give shelter to any of them.

The Colonnas finally returned to their dignities and property, and afterwards made successful war against the house of their rivals, the Orsini.

John Colonna, the Cardinal, brother of the Bishop of Lombes, and son of old Stefano, was one of the very ablest men at the papal court. He insisted on our poet taking up his abode in his own palace at Avignon. "What good fortune was this for me!" says Petrarch. "This great man never made me feel that he was my superior in station. He was like a father or an indulgent brother; and I lived in his house as if it had been my own." At a subsequent period, we find him on somewhat cooler terms with John Colonna, and complaining that his domestic dependence had, by length of time, become wearisome to him. But great allowance is to be made for such apparent inconsistencies in human attachment. At different times our feelings and language on any subject may be different without being insincere. The truth seems to be that Petrarch looked forward to the friendship of the Colonnas for promotion, which he either received scantily, or not at all; so it is little marvellous if he should have at last felt the tedium of patronage.

For the present, however, this home was completely to Petrarch's taste. It was the rendezvous of all strangers distinguished by their knowledge and talents, whom the papal court attracted to Avignon, which was now the great centre of all political negotiations.

This assemblage of the learned had a powerful influence on Petrarch's fine imagination. He had been engaged for some time in the perusal of Livy, and his enthusiasm for ancient Rome was heightened, if possible, by the conversation of old Stefano Colonna, who dwelt on no subject with so much interest as on the temples and palaces of the ancient city, majestic even in their ruins.

During the bitter persecution raised against his family by Boniface VIII., Stefano Colonna had been the chief object of the Pope's implacable resentment. Though oppressed by the most adverse circumstances, his estates confiscated, his palaces levelled with the ground, and himself driven into exile, the majesty of his appearance, and the magnanimity of his character, attracted the respect of strangers wherever he went. He had the air of a sovereign prince rather than of an exile, and commanded more regard than monarchs in the height of their ostentation.

In the picture of his times, Stefano makes a noble and commanding figure. If the reader, however, happens to search into that period of Italian history, he will find many facts to cool the romance of his imagination respecting all the Colonna family. They were, in plain truth, an oppressive aristocratic family. The portion of Italy which they and their tyrannical rivals possessed was infamously governed. The highways were rendered impassable by banditti, who were in the pay of contesting feudal lords; and life and property were everywhere insecure.

Stefano, nevertheless, seems to have been a man formed for better times. He improved in the school of misfortune—the serenity of his temper remained unclouded by adversity, and his faculties unimpaired by age.

Among the illustrious strangers who came to Avignon at this time was our countryman, Richard de Bury, then accounted the most learned man of England. He arrived at Avignon in 1331, having

been sent to the Pope by Edward III. De Sade conceives that the object of his embassy was to justify his sovereign before the Pontiff for having confined the Queen-mother in the castle of Risings, and for having caused her favourite, Roger de Mortimer, to be hanged. It was a matter of course that so illustrious a stranger as Richard de Bury should be received with distinction by Cardinal Colonna. Petrarch eagerly seized the opportunity of forming his acquaintance, confident that De Bury could give him valuable information on many points of geography and history. They had several conversations. Petrarch tells us that he entreated the learned Englishman to make him acquainted with the true situation of the isle of Thule, of which the ancients speak with much uncertainty, but which their best geographers place at the distance of some days' navigation from the north of England. De Bury was, in all probability, puzzled with the question, though he did not like to confess his ignorance. He excused himself by promising to inquire into the subject as soon as he should get back to his books in England, and to write to him the best information he could afford. It does not appear, however, that he performed his promise.

De Bury's stay at the court of Avignon was very short. King Edward, it is true, sent him a second time to the Pope, two years afterwards, on important business. The seeds of discord between France and England began to germinate strongly, and that circumstance probably occasioned De Bury's second mission. Unfortunately, however, Petrarch could not avail himself of his return so as to have further interviews with the English scholar. Petrarch wrote repeatedly to De Bury for his promised explanations respecting Thule; but, whether our countryman had found nothing in his library to satisfy his inquiries, or was prevented by his public occupations, there is no appearance of his having ever answered Petrarch's letters.

Stephano Colonna the younger had brought with him to Avignon his son Agapito, who was destined for the church, that he might be educated under the eyes of the Cardinal and the Bishop, who were his uncles. These two prelates joined with their father in entreating Petrarch to undertake the superintendence of Agapito's studies. Our poet, avaricious of his time, and jealous of his independence, was at first reluctant to undertake the charge; but, from his attachment to the family, at last accepted it. De Sade tells us that Petrarch was not successful in the young man's education; and, from a natural partiality for the hero of his biography, lays the blame on his pupil. At the same time he acknowledges that a man with poetry in his head and love in his heart was not the most proper mentor in the world for a youth who was to be educated for the church. At this time, Petrarch's passion for Laura continued to haunt his peace with incessant violence. She had received him at first with good-humour and affability; but it was only while he set strict bounds to the expression of his attachment. He had not, however, sufficient self-command to comply with these terms. His constant assiduities, his eyes continually riveted upon her, and the wildness of his looks, convinced her of his inordinate attachment; her virtue took alarm; she retired whenever he approached her, and even covered her face with a veil whilst he was present, nor would she condescend to the slightest action or look that might seem to countenance his passion.

Petrarch complains of these severities in many of his melancholy sonnets. Meanwhile, if fame could have been a balm to love, he might have been happy. His reputation as a poet was increasing, and his compositions were read with universal approbation.

The next interesting event in our poet's life was a larger course of travels, which he took through the north of France, through Flanders, Brabant, and a part of Germany, subsequently to his tour in Languedoc. Petrarch mentions that he undertook this journey about the twenty-fifth year of his age. He was prompted to travel not only by his curiosity to observe men and manners, by his desire of seeing monuments of antiquity, and his hopes of discovering the MSS. of ancient authors, but also, we may believe, by his wish, if it were possible, to escape from himself, and to forget Laura.

From Paris Petrarch wrote as follows to Cardinal Colonna. "I have visited Paris, the capital of the whole kingdom of France. I entered it in the same state of mind that was felt by Apuleias when he visited Hypata, a city of Thessaly, celebrated for its magic, of which such wonderful things were

related, looking again and again at every object, in solicitous suspense, to know whether all that he had heard of the far-famed place was true or false. Here I pass a great deal of time in observation, and, as the day is too short for my curiosity, I add the night. At last, it seems to me that, by long exploring, I have enabled myself to distinguish between the true and the false in what is related about Paris. But, as the subject would be too tedious for this occasion, I shall defer entering fully into particulars till I can do so *vivâ voce*. My impatience, however, impels me to sketch for you briefly a general idea of this so celebrated city, and of the character of its inhabitants.

"Paris, though always inferior to its fame, and much indebted to the lies of its own people, is undoubtedly a great city. To be sure I never saw a dirtier place, except Avignon. At the same time, its population contains the most learned of men, and it is like a great basket in which are collected the rarest fruits of every country. From the time that its university was founded, as they say by Alcuin, the teacher of Charlemagne, there has not been, to my knowledge, a single Parisian of any fame. The great luminaries of the university were all strangers; and, if the love of my country does not deceive me, they were chiefly Italians, such as Pietro Lombardo, Tomaso d'Aquino, Bonaventura, and many others.

"The character of the Parisians is very singular. There was a time when, from the ferocity of their manners, the French were reckoned barbarians. At present the case is wholly changed. A gay disposition, love of society, ease, and playfulness in conversation now characterize them. They seek every opportunity of distinguishing themselves; and make war against all cares with joking, laughing, singing, eating, and drinking. Prone, however, as they are to pleasure, they are not heroic in adversity. The French love their country and their countrymen; they censure with rigour the faults of other nations, but spread a proportionably thick veil over their own defects."

From Paris, Petrarch proceeded to Ghent, of which only he makes mention to the Cardinal, without noticing any of the towns that lie between. It is curious to find our poet out of humour with Flanders on account of the high price of wine, which was not an indigenous article. In the latter part of his life, Petrarch was certainly one of the most abstemious of men; but, at this period, it would seem that he drank good liquor enough to be concerned about its price.

From Ghent he passed on to Liege. "This city is distinguished," he says, "by the riches and the number of its clergy. As I had heard that excellent MSS. might be found there, I stopped in the place for some time. But is it not singular that in so considerable a place I had difficulty to procure ink enough to copy two orations of Cicero's, and the little that I could obtain was as yellow as saffron?"

Petrarch was received at most of the places he visited, and more particularly at Cologne, with marks of great respect; and he was agreeably surprised to find that his reputation had acquired him the partiality and acquaintance of several inhabitants. He was conducted by his new friends to the banks of the Rhine, where the inhabitants were engaged in the performance of a superstitious annual ceremony, which, for its singularity, deserves to be recorded.

"The banks of the river were crowded with a considerable number of women, their persons comely, and their dress elegant. This great concourse of people seemed to create no confusion. A number of these women, with cheerful countenances, crowned with flowers, bathed their hands and arms in the stream, and uttered, at the same time, some harmonious expressions in a language which I did not understand. I inquired into the cause of this ceremony, and was informed that it arose from a tradition among the people, and particularly among the women, that the impending calamities of the year were carried away by this ablution, and that blessings succeeded in their place. Hence this ceremony is annually renewed, and the ablution performed with unremitting diligence."

The ceremony being finished, Petrarch smiled at their superstition, and exclaimed, "O happy inhabitants of the Rhine, whose waters wash out your miseries, whilst neither the Po nor the Tiber can wash out ours! You transmit your evils to the Britons by means of this river, whilst we send off ours to the Illyrians and the Africans. It seems that our rivers have a slower course."

Petrarch shortened his excursion that he might return the sooner to Avignon, where the Bishop of Lombes had promised to await his return, and take him to Rome.

When he arrived at Lyons, however, he was informed that the Bishop had departed from Avignon for Rome. In the first paroxysm of his disappointment he wrote a letter to his friend, which portrays strongly affectionate feelings, but at the same time an irascible temper. When he came to Avignon, the Cardinal Colonna relieved him from his irritation by acquainting him with the real cause of his brother's departure. The flames of civil dissension had been kindled at Rome between the rival families of Colonna and Orsini. The latter had made great preparations to carry on the war with vigour. In this crisis of affairs, James Colonna had been summoned to Rome to support the interests of his family, and, by his courage and influence, to procure them the succour which they so much required.

Petrarch continued to reside at Avignon for several years after returning from his travels in France and Flanders. It does not appear from his sonnets, during those years, either that his passion for Laura had abated, or that she had given him any more encouragement than heretofore. But in the year 1334, an accident renewed the utmost tenderness of his affections. A terrible affliction visited the city of Avignon. The heat and the drought were so excessive that almost the whole of the common people went about naked to the waist, and, with frenzy and miserable cries, implored Heaven to put an end to their calamities. Persons of both sexes and of all ages had their bodies covered with scales, and changed their skins like serpents.

Laura's constitution was too delicate to resist this infectious malady, and her illness greatly alarmed Petrarch. One day he asked her physician how she was, and was told by him that her condition was very dangerous: on that occasion he composed the following sonnet:[5]—

This lovely spirit, if ordain'd to leave
Its mortal tenement before its time,
Heaven's fairest habitation shall receive
And welcome her to breathe its sweetest clime.
If she establish her abode between
Mars and the planet-star of Beauty's queen,
The sun will be obscured, so dense a cloud
Of spirits from adjacent stars will crowd
To gaze upon her beauty infinite.
Say that she fixes on a lower sphere,
Beneath the glorious sun, her beauty soon
Will dim the splendour of inferior stars—
Of Mars, of Venus, Mercury, and the Moon.
She'll choose not Mars, but higher place than Mars;
She will eclipse all planetary light,
And Jupiter himself will seem less bright.

I trust that I have enough to say in favour of Petrarch to satisfy his rational admirers; but I quote this sonnet as an example of the worst style of Petrarch's poetry. I make the English reader welcome to rate my power of translating it at the very lowest estimation. He cannot go much further down than myself in the scale of valuation, especially if he has Italian enough to know that the exquisite mechanical harmony of Petrarch's style is beyond my reach. It has been alleged that this sonnet shows how much the mind of Petrarch had been influenced by his Platonic studies; but if Plato had written poetry he would never have been so extravagant.

[5] Quest' anima gentil che si disparte.—Sonnet xxiii.

Petrarch, on his return from Germany, had found the old Pope, John XXII., intent on two speculations, to both of which he lent his enthusiastic aid. One of them was a futile attempt to renew the crusades, from which Europe had reposed for a hundred years. The other was the transfer of the holy seat to Rome. The execution of this plan, for which Petrarch sighed as if it were to bring about the millennium, and which was not accomplished by another Pope without embroiling him with his Cardinals, was nevertheless more practicable than capturing Jerusalem. We are told by several Italian writers that the aged Pontiff, moved by repeated entreaties from the Romans, as well as by the remorse of his conscience, thought seriously of effecting this restoration; but the sincerity of his intentions is made questionable by the fact that he never fixed himself at Rome. He wrote, it is true, to Rome in 1333, ordering his palaces and gardens to be repaired; but the troubles which continued to agitate the city were alleged by him as too alarming for his safety there, and he repaired to Bologna to wait for quieter times.

On both of the above subjects, namely, the insane crusades and the more feasible restoration of the papal court to Rome, Petrarch[Pg xxviii] wrote with devoted zeal; they are both alluded to in his twenty-second sonnet.

The death of John XXII. left the Cardinals divided into two great factions. The first was that of the French, at the head of which stood Cardinal Taillerand, son of the beautiful Brunissende de Foix, whose charms were supposed to have detained Pope Clement V. in France. The Italian Cardinals, who formed the opposite faction, had for their chief the Cardinal Colonna. The French party, being the more numerous, were, in some sort, masters of the election; they offered the tiara to Cardinal de Commenges, on condition that he would promise not to transfer the papal court to Rome. That prelate showed himself worthy of the dignity, by refusing to accept it on such terms.

To the surprise of the world, the choice of the conclave fell at last on James Founder, said to be the son of a baker at Savordun, who had been bred as a monk of Citeaux, and always wore the dress of the order. Hence he was called the White Cardinal. He was wholly unlike his portly predecessor John in figure and address, being small in stature, pale in complexion, and weak in voice. He expressed his own astonishment at the honour conferred on him, saying that they had elected an ass. If we may believe Petrarch, he did himself no injustice in likening himself to that quadruped; but our poet was somewhat harsh in his judgment of this Pontiff. He took the name of Benedict XII.

Shortly after his exaltation, Benedict received ambassadors from Rome, earnestly imploring him to bring back the sacred seat to their city; and Petrarch thought he could not serve the embassy better than by publishing a poem in Latin verse, exhibiting Rome in the character of a desolate matron imploring her husband to return to her. Benedict applauded the author of the epistle, but declined complying with its prayer. Instead of revisiting Italy, his Holiness ordered a magnificent and costly palace to be constructed for him at Avignon. Hitherto, it would seem that the Popes had lived in hired houses. In imitation of their Pontiff, the Cardinals set about building superb mansions, to the unbounded indignation of Petrarch, who saw in these new habitations not only a graceless and unchristian spirit of luxury, but a sure indication that their owners had no thoughts of removing to Rome.

In the January of the following year, Pope Benedict presented our poet with the canonicate of Lombes, with the expectancy of the first prebend which should become vacant. This preferment Petrarch is supposed to have owed to the influence of Cardinal Colonna.

The troubles which at this time agitated Italy drew to Avignon, in the year 1335, a personage who holds a pre-eminent interest in the life of Petrarch, namely, Azzo da Correggio, who was sent thither by the Scaligeri of Parma. The State of Parma had belonged originally to the popes; but two powerful families, the Rossis and the Correggios, had profited by the quarrels between the church and the empire to usurp the government, and during five-and-twenty years, Gilberto Correggio and Rolando Rossi alternately lost and won the sovereignty, till, at last, the confederate princes took the city, and conferred the government of it on Guido Correggio, the greatest enemy of the Rossis.

Gilbert Correggio left at his death a widow, the sister of Cane de la Scala, and four sons, Guido, Simone, Azzo, and Giovanni. It is only with Azzo that we are particularly concerned in the history of Petrarch.

Azzo was born in the year 1303, being thus a year older than our poet. Originally intended for the church, he preferred the sword to the crozier, and became a distinguished soldier. He married the daughter of Luigi Gonzagua, lord of Mantua. He was a man of bold original spirit, and so indefatigable that he acquired the name of Iron-foot. Nor was his energy merely physical; he read much, and forgot nothing—his memory was a library. Azzo's character, to be sure, even with allowance for turbulent times, is not invulnerable at all points to a rigid scrutiny; and, notwithstanding all the praises of Petrarch, who dedicated to him his Treatise on a Solitary Life in 1366, his political career contained some acts of perfidy. But we must inure ourselves, in the biography of Petrarch, to his over-estimation of favourites in the article of morals.

It was not long ere Petrarch was called upon to give a substantial proof of his regard for Azzo. After the seizure of Parma by the confederate princes, Marsilio di Rossi, brother of Rolando, went to Paris to demand assistance from the French king. The King of Bohemia had given over the government of Parma to him and his brothers, and the Rossi now saw it with grief assigned to his enemies, the Correggios. Marsilio could obtain no succour from the French, who were now busy in preparing for war with the English; so he carried to the Pope at Avignon his complaints against the alleged injustice of the lords of Verona and the Correggios in breaking an express treaty which they had made with the house of Rossi.

Azzo had the threefold task of defending, before the Pope's tribunal, the lords of Verona, whose envoy he was; the rights of his family, which were attacked; and his own personal character, which was charged with some grave objections. Revering the eloquence and influence of Petrarch, he importuned him to be his public defender. Our poet, as we have seen, had studied the law, but had never followed the profession. "It is not my vocation," he says, in his preface to his Familiar Epistles, "to undertake the defence of others. I detest the bar; I love retirement; I despise money; and, if I tried to let out my tongue for hire, my nature would revolt at the attempt."

But what Petrarch would not undertake either from taste or motives of interest, he undertook at the call of friendship. He pleaded the cause of Azzo before the Pope and Cardinals; it was a finely-interesting cause, that afforded a vast field for his eloquence. He brought off his client triumphantly; and the Rossis were defeated in their demand.

At the same time, it is a proud trait in Petrarch's character that he showed himself on this occasion not only an orator and a lawyer, but a perfect gentleman. In the midst of all his zealous pleading, he stooped neither to satire nor personality against the opposing party. He could say, with all the boldness of truth, in a letter to Ugolino di Rossi, the Bishop of Parma, "I pleaded against your house for Azzo Correggio, but you were present at the pleading; do me justice, and confess that I carefully avoided not only attacks on your family and reputation, but even those railleries in which advocates so much delight."

On this occasion, Azzo had brought to Avignon, as his colleague in the lawsuit, Guglielmo da Pastrengo, who exercised the office of judge and notary at Verona. He was a man of deep knowledge in the law; versed, besides, in every branch of elegant learning, he was a poet into the bargain. In Petrarch's many books of epistles, there are few letters addressed by him to this personage; but it is certain that they contracted a friendship at this period which endured for life.

All this time the Bishop of Lombes still continued at Rome; and, from time to time, solicited his friend Petrarch to join him. "Petrarch would have gladly joined him," says De Sade; "but he was detained at Avignon by his attachment to John Colonna and his love of Laura:" a whimsical junction of detaining causes, in which the fascination of the Cardinal may easily be supposed to have been weaker than that of Laura. In writing to our poet, at Avignon, the Bishop rallied Petrarch on the imaginary existence of the object of his passion. Some stupid readers of the Bishop's letter, in

subsequent times, took it into their heads that there was a literal proof in the prelate's jesting epistle of our poet's passion for Laura being a phantom and a fiction. But, possible as it may be, that the Bishop in reality suspected him to exaggerate the flame of his devotion for the two great objects of his idolatry, Laura and St. Augustine, he writes in a vein of pleasantry that need not be taken for grave accusation. "You are befooling us all, my dear Petrarch," says the prelate; "and it is wonderful that at so tender an age (Petrarch's tender age was at this time thirty-one) you can deceive the world with so much art and success. And, not content with deceiving the world, you would fain deceive Heaven itself. You make a semblance of loving St. Augustine and his works; but, in your heart, you love the poets and the philosophers. Your Laura is a phantom created by your imagination for the exercise of your poetry. Your verse, your love, your sighs, are all a fiction; or, if there is anything real in your passion, it is not for the lady Laura, but for the laurel—*that is*, the crown of poets. I have been your dupe for some time, and, whilst you showed a strong desire to visit Rome, I hoped to welcome you there. But my eyes are now opened to all your rogueries, which nevertheless, will not prevent me from loving you."

Petrarch, in his answer to the Bishop,[6] says, "My father, if I love the poets, I only follow, in this respect, the example of St. Augustine. I take the sainted father himself to witness the sincerity of my attachment to him. He is now in a place where he can neither deceive nor be deceived. I flatter myself that he pities my errors, especially when he recalls his own." St. Augustine had been somewhat profligate in his younger days.

"As to Laura," continues the poet, "would to Heaven that she were only an imaginary personage, and my passion for her only a pastime! Alas! it is a madness which it would be difficult and painful to feign for any length of time; and what an extravagance it would be to affect such a passion! One may counterfeit illness by action, by voice, and by manner, but no one in health can give himself the true air and complexion of disease. How often have you yourself been witness of my paleness and my sufferings! I know very well that you speak only in irony: it is your favourite figure of speech, but I hope that time will cicatrize these wounds of my spirit, and that Augustine, whom I pretend to love, will furnish me with a defence against a Laura who does not exist."

Years had now elapsed since Petrarch had conceived his passion for Laura; and it was obviously doomed to be a source of hopeless torment to him as long as he should continue near her; for she could breathe no more encouragement on his love than what was barely sufficient to keep it alive; and, if she had bestowed more favour on him, the consequences might have been ultimately most tragic to both of them. His own reflections, and the advice of his friends, suggested that absence and change of objects were the only means likely to lessen his misery; he determined, therefore, to travel once more, and set out for Rome in 1335.

The wish to assuage his passion, by means of absence, was his principal motive for going again upon his travels; but, before he could wind up his resolution to depart, the state of his mind bordered on distraction. One day he observed a country girl washing the veil of Laura; a sudden trembling seized him—and, though the heat of the weather was intense, he grew cold and shivered. For some time he was incapable of applying to study or business. His soul, he said, was like a field of battle, where his passion and reason held continual conflict. In his calmer moments, many agreeable motives for travelling suggested themselves to his mind. He had a strong desire to visit Rome, where he was sure of finding the kindest welcome from the Bishop of Lombes. He was to pass through Paris also; and there he had left some valued friends, to whom he had promised that he would return. At the head of those friends were Dionisio dal Borgo San Sepolcro and Roberto Bardi, a Florentine, whom the Pope had lately made chancellor of the Church of Paris, and given him the canonship of Nôtre Dame. Dionisio dal Borgo was a native of Tuscany, and one of the Roberti family. His name in literature was so considerable that Filippo Villani thought it worth while to write his life. Petrarch wrote his funeral

[6] Dated 21st December. 1335.

eulogy, and alludes to Dionisio's power of reading futurity by the stars. But Petrarch had not a grain of faith in astrology; on the contrary, he has himself recorded that he derided it. After having obtained, with some difficulty, the permission of Cardinal Colonna, he took leave of his friends at Avignon, and set out for Marseilles. Embarking there in a ship that was setting sail for Civita Vecchia, he concealed his name, and gave himself out for a pilgrim going to worship at Rome. Great was his joy when, from the deck, he could discover the coast of his beloved Italy. It was a joy, nevertheless, chastened by one indomitable recollection—that of the idol he had left behind. On his landing he perceived a laurel tree; its name seemed to typify her who dwelt for ever in his heart: he flew to embrace it; but in his transports overlooked a brook that was between them, into which he fell—and the accident caused him to swoon. Always occupied with Laura, he says, "On those shores washed by the Tyrrhene sea, I beheld that stately laurel which always warms my imagination, and, through my impatience, fell breathless into the intervening stream. I was alone, and in the woods, yet I blushed at my own heedlessness; for, to the reflecting mind, no witness is necessary to excite the emotion of shame."

It was not easy for Petrarch to pass from the coast of Tuscany to Rome; for war between the Ursini and Colonna houses had been renewed with more fury than ever, and filled all the surrounding country with armed men. As he had no escort, he took refuge in the castle of Capranica, where he was hospitably received by Orso, Count of Anguillara, who had married Agnes Colonna, sister of the Cardinal and the Bishop. In his letter to the latter, Petrarch luxuriates in describing the romantic and rich landscape of Capranica, a country believed by the ancients to have been the first that was cultivated under the reign of Saturn. He draws, however, a frightful contrast to its rural picture in the horrors of war which here prevailed. "Peace," he says, "is the only charm which I could not find in this beautiful region. The shepherd, instead of guarding against wolves, goes armed into the woods to defend himself against men. The labourer, in a coat of mail, uses a lance instead of a goad, to drive his cattle.[Pg xxxiii] The fowler covers himself with a shield as he draws his nets; the fisherman carries a sword whilst he hooks his fish; and the native draws water from the well in an old rusty casque, instead of a pail. In a word, arms are used here as tools and implements for all the labours of the field, and all the wants of men. In the night are heard dreadful howlings round the walls of towns, and and in the day terrible voices crying incessantly to arms. What music is this compared with those soft and harmonious sounds which. I drew from my lute at Avignon!"

On his arrival at Capranica, Petrarch despatched a courier to the Bishop of Lombes, informing him where he was, and of his inability to get to Rome, all roads to it being beset by the enemy. The Bishop expressed great joy at his friend's arrival in Italy, and went to meet him at Capranica, with Stefano Colonna, his brother, senator of Rome. They had with them only a troop of one hundred horsemen; and, considering that the enemy kept possession of the country with five hundred men, it is wonderful that they met with no difficulties on their route; but the reputation of the Colonnas had struck terror into the hostile camp. They entered Rome without having had a single skirmish with the enemy. Stefano Colonna, in his quality of senator, occupied the Capitol, where he assigned apartments to Petrarch; and the poet was lodged on that famous hill which Scipio, Metellus, and Pompey, had ascended in triumph. Petrarch was received and treated by the Colonnas Like a child of their family. The venerable old Stefano, who had known him at Avignon, loaded our poet with kindness. But, of all the family, it would seem that Petrarch delighted most in the conversation of Giovanni da S. Vito, a younger brother of the aged Stefano, and uncle of the Cardinal and Bishop. Their tastes were congenial. Giovanni had made a particular study of the antiquities of Rome; he was, therefore, a most welcome cicerone to our poet, being, perhaps, the only Roman then alive, who understood the subject deeply, if we except Cola di Rienzo, of whom we shall soon have occasion to speak.

In company with Giovanni, Petrarch inspected the relics of the "eternal city:" the former was more versed than his companion in ancient history, but the other surpassed him in acquaintance with modern times, as well as with the objects of antiquity that stood immediately before them.

What an interesting object is Petrarch contemplating the ruins of Rome! He wrote to the Cardinal Colonna as follows:—"I gave you so long an account of Capranica that you may naturally expect a still longer description of Rome. My materials for this subject are, indeed, inexhaustible; but they will serve for some future opportunity. At present, I am so wonder-struck by so many great objects that I know not where to begin. One circumstance, however, I cannot omit, which has turned out contrary to your surmises. You represented to me that Rome was a city in ruins, and that it would not come up to the imagination I had formed of it; but this has not happened—on the contrary, my most sanguine expectations have been surpassed. Rome is greater, and her remains are more awful, than my imagination had conceived. It is not matter of wonder that she acquired universal dominion. I am only surprised that it was so late before she came to it."

In the midst of his meditations among the relics of Rome, Petrarch was struck by the ignorance about their forefathers, with which the natives looked on those monuments. The veneration which they had for them was vague and uninformed. "It is lamentable," he says, "that nowhere in the world is Rome less known than at Rome."

It is not exactly known in what month Petrarch left the Roman capital; but, between his departure from that city, and his return to the banks of the Rhone, he took an extensive tour over Europe. He made a voyage along its southern coasts, passed the straits of Gibraltar, and sailed as far northward as the British shores. During his wanderings, he wrote a letter to Tommaso da Messina, containing a long geographical dissertation on the island of Thule.

Petrarch approached the British shores; why were they not fated to have the honour of receiving him? Ah! but who was there, then, in England that was capable of receiving him? Chaucer was but a child. We had the names of some learned men, but our language had no literature. Time works wonders in a few centuries; and England, *now* proud of her Shakespeare and her Verulam, looks not with envy on the glory of any earthly nation. During his excitement by these travels, a singular change took place in our poet's habitual feelings. He recovered his health and spirits; he could bear to think of Laura with equanimity, and his countenance resumed the cheerfulness that was natural to a man in the strength of his age. Nay, he became so sanguine in his belief that he had overcome his passion as to jest at his past sufferings; and, in this gay state of mind, he came back to Avignon. This was the crowning misfortune of his life. He saw Laura once more; he was enthralled anew; and he might now laugh in agony at his late self-congratulations on his delivery from her enchantment. With all the pity that we bestow on unfortunate love, and with all the respect that we owe to its constancy, still we cannot look but with a regret amounting to impatience on a man returning to the spot that was to rekindle his passion as recklessly as a moth to the candle, and binding himself over for life to an affection that was worse than hopeless, inasmuch as its success would bring more misery than its failure. It is said that Petrarch, if it had not been for this passion, would not have been the poet that he was. Not, perhaps, so good an amatory poet; but I firmly believe that he would have been a more various and masculine, and, upon the whole, *a greater poet*, if he had never been bewitched by Laura. However, *he did* return to take possession of his canonicate at Lombes, and to lose possession of his peace of mind.

In the April of the following year, 1336, he made an excursion, in company with his brother Gherardo, to the top of Mount Ventoux, in the neighbourhood of Avignon; a full description of which he sent in a letter to Dionisio dal Borgo a San Sepolcro; but there is nothing peculiarly interesting in this occurrence.

A more important event in his life took place during the following year, 1337—namely, that he had a son born to him, whom he christened by the name of John, and to whom he acknowledged his relationship of paternity. With all his philosophy and platonic raptures about Laura, Petrarch was still subject to the passions of ordinary men, and had a mistress at Avignon who was kinder to him than Laura. Her name and history have been consigned to inscrutable obscurity: the same woman afterwards bore him a daughter, whose name was Francesca, and who proved a great solace to him in

his old age. His biographers extol the magnanimity of Laura for displaying no anger at our poet for what they choose to call this discovery of his infidelity to her; but, as we have no reason to suppose that Laura ever bestowed one favour on Petrarch beyond a pleasant look, it is difficult to perceive her right to command his unspotted faith. At all events, she would have done no good to her own reputation if she had stormed at the lapse of her lover's virtue.

In a small city like Avignon, the scandal of his intrigue would naturally be a matter of regret to his friends and of triumph to his enemies. Petrarch felt his situation, and, unable to calm his mind either by the advice of his friend Dionisio dal Borgo, or by the perusal of his favourite author, St. Augustine, he resolved to seek a rural retreat, where he might at least hide his tears and his mortification. Unhappily he chose a spot not far enough from Laura—namely, Vaucluse, which is fifteen Italian, or about fourteen English, miles from Avignon.

Vaucluse, or Vallis Clausa, the shut-up valley, is a most beautiful spot, watered by the windings of the Sorgue. Along the river there are on one side most verdant plains and meadows, here and there shadowed by trees. On the other side are hills covered with corn and vineyards. Where the Sorgue rises, the view terminates in the cloud-capt ridges of the mountains Luberoux and Ventoux. This was the place which Petrarch had visited with such delight when he was a schoolboy, and at the sight of which he exclaimed "that he would prefer it as a residence to the most splendid city."

It is, indeed, one of the loveliest seclusions in the world. It terminates in a semicircle of rocks of stupendous height, that seem to have been hewn down perpendicularly. At the head and centre of the vast amphitheatre, and at the foot of one of its enormous rocks, there is a cavern of proportional size, hollowed out by the hand of nature. Its opening is an arch sixty feet high; but it is a double cavern, there being an interior one with an entrance thirty feet high. In the midst of these there is an oval basin, having eighteen fathoms for its longest diameter, and from this basin rises the copious stream which forms the Sorgue. The surface of the fountain is black, an appearance produced by its depth, from the darkness of the rocks, and the obscurity of the cavern; for, on being brought to light, nothing can be clearer than its water. Though beautiful to the eye, it is harsh to the taste, but is excellent for tanning and dyeing; and it is said to promote the growth of a plant which fattens oxen and is good for hens during incubation. Strabo and Pliny the naturalist both speak of its possessing this property.

The river Sorgue, which issues from this cavern, divides in its progress into various branches; it waters many parts of Provence, receives several tributary streams, and, after reuniting its branches, falls into the Rhone near Avignon.

Resolving to fix his residence here, Petrarch bought a little cottage and an adjoining field, and repaired to Vaucluse with no other companions than his books. To this day the ruins of a small house are shown at Vaucluse, which tradition says was his habitation.

If his object was to forget Laura, the composition of sonnets upon her in this hermitage was unlikely to be an antidote to his recollections. It would seem as if he meant to cherish rather than to get rid of his love. But, if he nursed his passion, it was a dry-nursing; for he led a lonely, ascetic, and, if it were not for his studies, we might say a savage life. In one of his letters, written not long after his settling at Vaucluse, he says, "Here I make war upon my senses, and treat them as my enemies. My eyes, which have drawn me into a thousand difficulties, see no longer either gold, or precious stones, or ivory, or purple; they behold nothing save the water, the firmament, and the rocks. The only female who comes within their sight is a swarthy old woman, dry and parched as the Lybian deserts. My ears are no longer courted by those harmonious instruments and voices which have so often transported my soul: they hear nothing but the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the warbling of birds, and the murmurs of the river.

"I keep silence from noon till night. There is no one to converse with; for the good people, employed in spreading their nets, or tending their vines and orchards, are no great adepts at conversation. I often content myself with the brown bread of the fisherman, and even eat it with pleasure. Nay, I almost prefer it to white bread. This old fisherman, who is as hard as iron, earnestly

remonstrates against my manner of life; and assures me[Pg xxxvii] that I cannot long hold out. I am, on the contrary, convinced that it is easier to accustom one's self to a plain diet than to the luxuries of a feast. But still I have my luxuries—figs, raisins, nuts and almonds. I am fond of the fish with which this stream abounds, and I sometimes amuse myself with spreading the nets. As to my dress, there is an entire change; you would take me for a labourer or a shepherd.

"My mansion resembles that of Cato or Fabricius. My whole house-establishment consists of myself, my old fisherman and his wife, and a dog. My fisherman's cottage is contiguous to mine; when I want him I call; when I no longer need him, he returns to his cottage.

"I have made two gardens that please me wonderfully. I do not think they are to be equalled in all the world. And I must confess to you a more than female weakness with which I am haunted. I am positively angry that there is anything so beautiful out of Italy.

"One of these gardens is shady, formed for contemplation, and sacred to Apollo. It overhangs the source of the river, and is terminated by rocks, and by places accessible only to birds. The other is nearer my cottage, of an aspect less severe, and devoted to Bacchus; and what is extremely singular, it is in the midst of a rapid river. The approach to it is over a bridge of rocks; and there is a natural grotto under the rocks, which gives them the appearance of a rustic bridge. Into this grotto the rays of the sun never penetrate. I am confident that it much resembles the place where Cicero went to declaim. It invites to study. Hither I retreat during the noontide hours; my mornings are engaged upon the hills, or in the garden sacred to Apollo. Here I would most willingly pass my days, were I not too near Avignon, and too far from Italy. For why should I conceal this weakness of my soul? I love Italy, and I hate Avignon. The pestilential influence of this horrid place empoisons the pure air of Vaucluse, and will compel me to quit my retirement."

It is clear that he was not supremely contented in his solitude with his self-drawn mental resources. His friends at Avignon came seldom to see him. Travelling even short distances was difficult in those days. Even we, in the present day, can remember when the distance of fourteen miles presented a troublesome journey. The few guests who came, to him could not expect very exquisite dinners, cooked by the brown old woman and her husband the fisherman; and, though our poet had a garden consecrated to Bacchus, he had no cellar devoted to the same deity. His few friends, therefore, who visited him, thought their angel visits acts of charity. If he saw his friends seldom, however, he had frequent visitants in strangers who came to Vaucluse, as a place long celebrated for its natural beauties, and now made illustrious by the character and compositions of our poet. Among these[Pg xxxviii] there were persons distinguished for their rank or learning, who came from the farthest parts of France and from Italy, to see and converse with Petrarch. Some of them even sent before them considerable presents, which, though kindly meant, were not acceptable.

Vaucluse is in the diocese of Cavaillon, a small city about two miles distant from our poet's retreat. Philip de Cabassoles was the bishop, a man of high rank and noble family. His disposition, according to Petrarch's usual praise of his friends, was highly benevolent and humane; he was well versed in literature, and had distinguished abilities. No sooner was the poet settled in his retirement, than he visited the Bishop at his palace near Vaucluse. The latter gave him a friendly reception, and returned his visits frequently. Another much estimated, his friend since their childhood, Guido Sette, also repaired at times to his humble mansion, and relieved his solitude in the shut-up valley.[7]

Without some daily and constant occupation even the bright mind of Petrarch would have rusted, like the finest steel when it is left unscoured. But he continued his studies with an ardour that commands our wonder and respect; and it was at Vaucluse that he either meditated or wrote his most important compositions. Here he undertook a history of Rome, from Romulus down to Titus

[7] Guido Sette of Luni, in the Genoese territory, studied law together with Petrarch; but took to it with better liking. He devoted himself to the business of the bar at Avignon with much reputation. But the legal and clerical professions were then often united; for Guido rose in the church to be an archbishop. He died in 1368, renowned as a church luminary.

Vespasian. This Herculean task he never finished; but there remain two fragments of it, namely, four books, De Rebus Memorandis, and another tract entitled Vitarum Virorum Illustrium Epitome, being sketches of illustrious men from the founder of Rome down to Fabricius.

About his poem, Africa, I shall only say for the present that he began this Latin epic at Vaucluse, that its hero is his idolized Roman, Scipio Africanus, that it gained him a reputation over Europe, and that he was much pleased with it himself, but that his admiration of it in time cooled down so much, that at last he was annoyed when it was mentioned to him, and turned the conversation, if he could, to a different subject. Nay, it is probable, that if it had not been for Boccaccio and Coluccio Salutati, who, long after he had left Vaucluse, importuned him to finish and publish it, his Africa would not have come down to posterity.

Petrarch alludes in one of his letters to an excursion which he made in 1338, in company with a man whose rank was above his wisdom. He does not name him, but it seems clearly to have been Humbert II., Dauphin of the Viennois. The Cardinal Colonna forced our poet into this pilgrimage to Baume, famous for its adjacent cavern, where, according to the tradition of the country, Mary Magdalen passed thirty years of repentance. In that holy but horrible cavern, as Petrarch calls it, they remained three days and three nights, though Petrarch sometimes gave his comrades the slip, and indulged in rambles among the hills and forests; he composed a short poem, however, on St. Mary Magdalen, which is as dull as the cave itself. The Dauphin Humbert was not a bright man; but he seems to have contracted a friendly familiarity with our poet, if we may judge by a letter which Petrarch indited to him about this time, frankly reproaching him with his political neutrality in the affairs of Europe. It was supposed that the Cardinal Colonna incited him to write it. A struggle that was now impending between France and England engaged all Europe on one side or other. The Emperor Lewis had intimated to Humbert that he must follow him in this war, he, the Dauphin, being arch-seneschal of Arles and Vienne. Next year, the arch-seneschal received an invitation from Philip of Valois to join him with his troops at Amiens as vassal of France. The Dauphin tried to back out of the dilemma between his two suitors by frivolous excuses to both, all the time determining to assist neither. In 1338 he came to Avignon, and the Pope gave him his palace at the bridge of the Sorgue for his habitation. Here the poor craven, beset on one side by threatening letters from Philip of Valois, and on the other by importunities from the French party at the papal court, remained in Avignon till July, 1339, after Petrarch had let loose upon him his epistolary eloquence.

This letter, dated April, 1339, is, according to De Sade's opinion, full of powerful persuasion. I cannot say that it strikes me as such. After calling Christ to witness that he writes to the Dauphin in the spirit of friendship, he reminds him that Europe had never exhibited so mighty and interesting a war as that which had now sprung up between the kings of France and England, nor one that opened so vast a field of glory for the brave. "All the princes and their people," he says, "are anxious about its issue, especially those between the Alps and the ocean, who take arms at the crash of the neighbouring tumult; whilst you alone go to sleep amidst the clouds of the coming storm. To say the truth, if there was nothing more than shame to awaken you, it ought to rouse you from this lethargy. I had thought you," he continues, "a man desirous of glory. You are young and in the strength of life. What, then, in the name of God, keeps you inactive? Do you fear fatigue? Remember what Sallust says—'Idle enjoyments were made for women, fatigue was made for men.' Do you fear death? Death is the last debt we owe to nature, and man ought not to fear it; certainly he ought not to fear it more than sleep and sluggishness. Aristotle, it is true, calls death the last of horrible things; but, mind, he does not call it the most horrible of things." In this manner, our poet goes on moralizing on the blessings of an early death, and the great advantage that it would have afforded to some excellent Roman heroes if they had met with it sooner. The only thing like a sensible argument that he urges is, that Humbert could not expect to save himself even by neutrality, but must ultimately become the prey of the victor, and be punished like the Alban Metius, whom Tullus Hostilius caused to be torn asunder by horses that pulled his limbs in different directions. The pedantic epistle had no effect on Humbert.

Meanwhile, Italy had no repose more than the rest of Europe, but its troubles gave a happy occasion to Petrarch to see once more his friend, Guglielmo Pastrengo, who, in 1338, came to Avignon, from Mastino della Scala, lord of Verona.

The moment Petrarch heard of his friend's arrival he left his hermitage to welcome him; but scarcely had he reached the fatal city when he saw the danger of so near an approach to the woman he so madly loved, and was aware that he had no escape from the eyes of Laura but by flight. He returned, therefore, all of a sudden to Vaucluse, without waiting for a sight of Pastrengo. Shortly after he had quitted the house of Lælius, where he usually lodged when he went to Avignon, Guglielmo, expecting to find him there, knocked at the door, but no one opened it—called out, but no one answered him. He therefore wrote him a little billet, saying, "My dear Petrarch, where have you hid yourself, and whither have you vanished? What is the meaning of all this?" The poet received this note at Vaucluse, and sent an explanation of his flight, sincere indeed as to good feelings, but prolix as usual in the expression of them. Pastrengo sent him a kind reply, and soon afterwards did him the still greater favour of visiting him at Vaucluse, and helping him to cultivate his garden.

Petrarch's flame for Laura was in reality unabated. One day he met her in the streets of Avignon; for he had not always resolution enough to keep out of the western Babylon. Laura cast a kind look upon him, and said, "Petrarch, you are tired of loving me." This incident produced one of the finest sonnets, beginning—

Io non fut d' amar voi lassato unquanco.

Tired, did you say, of loving you? Oh, no!
I ne'er shall tire of the unwearying flame.
But I am weary, kind and cruel dame,
With tears that uselessly and ceaseless flow,
Scorning myself, and scorn'd by you. I long
For death: but let no gravestone hold in view
Our names conjoin'd: nor tell my passion strong
Upon the dust that glow'd through life for you.
And yet this heart of amorous faith demands,
Deserves, a better boon; but cruel, hard
As is my fortune, I will bless Love's bands
For ever, if you give me this reward.

In 1339, he composed among other sonnets, those three, the lxii., lxxiv., and lxxv., which are confessedly master-pieces of their kind, as well as three canzoni to the eyes of Laura, which the Italians call the three sister Graces, and worship as divine.[8] The critic Tassoni himself could not censure them, and called them the queens of song. At this period, however seldom he may have visited Avignon, he evidently sought rather to cherish than subdue his fatal attachment. A celebrated painter, Simone Martini of Siena, came to Avignon. He was the pupil of Giotto, not exquisite in drawing, but famous for taking spirited likenesses.

Petrarch persuaded Simone to favour him with a miniature likeness of Laura; and this treasure the poet for ever carried about with him. In gratitude he addressed two sonnets to the artist, whose fame, great as it was, was heightened by the poetical reward. Vasari tells us that Simone also painted the pictures of both lovers in the chapel of St. Maria Novella at Florence; that Simone was a sculptor as well as a painter, and that he copied those pictures in marbles which, according to Baldelli, are still extant in the house of the Signore Pruzzi.

[8] Canzoni 8, 9, and 10.

An anecdote relating to this period of Petrarch's life is given by De Sade, which, if accepted with entire credence, must inspire us with astonishment at the poet's devotion to his literary pursuits. He had now, in 1339, put the first hand to his epic poem, the Scipiade; and one of his friends, De Sade believes that it was the Bishop of Lombes, fearing lest he might injure his health by overzealous application, went to ask him for the key of his library, which the poet gave up. The Bishop then locked up his books and papers, and commanded him to abstain from reading and writing for ten days. Petrarch obeyed; but on the first day of this literary Ramazan, he was seized with ennui, on the second with a severe headache, and on the third with symptoms of fever; the Bishop relented, and permitted the student to return to his books and papers.

Petrarch was at this time delighted, in his solitude of Vaucluse, to hear of the arrival at Avignon of one of his dearest friends. This was Dionisio dal Borgo a San Sepolcro, who, being now advanced in years, had resigned his pulpit in the University of Paris, in order to return to his native country, and came to Avignon with the intention of going by sea to Florence. Petrarch pressed him strongly to visit him at Vaucluse, interspersing his persuasion with many compliments to King Robert of Naples, to whom he knew that Dionisio was much attached; nor was he without hopes that his friend would speak favourably of him to his Neapolitan Majesty. In a letter from Vaucluse he says:—"Can nothing induce you to come to my solitude? Will not my ardent request, and the pity you must have for my condition, bring you to pass some days with your old disciple? If these motives are not sufficient, permit me to suggest another inducement. There is in this place a poplar-tree of so immense a size that it covers with its shade not only the river and its banks, but also a considerable extent beyond them. They tell us that King Robert of Naples, invited by the beauty of this spot, came hither to unburthen his mind from the weight of public affairs, and to enjoy himself in the shady retreat." The poet added many eulogies on his Majesty of Naples, which, as he anticipated, reached the royal ear. It seems not to be clear that Father Dionisio ever visited the poet at Vaucluse; though they certainly had an interview at Avignon. To Petrarch's misfortune, his friend's stay in that city was very short. The monk proceeded to Florence, but he found there no shady retreat like that of the poplar at Vaucluse. Florence was more than ever agitated by internal commotions, and was this year afflicted by plague and famine. This dismal state of the city determined Dionisio to accept an invitation from King Robert to spend the remainder of his days at his court.

This monarch had the happiness of giving additional publicity to Petrarch's reputation. That the poet sought his patronage need not be concealed; and if he used a little flattery in doing so, we must make allowance for the adulatory instinct of the tuneful tribe. We cannot live without bread upon bare reputation, or on the prospect of having tombstones put over our bones, prematurely hurried to the grave by hunger, when they shall be as insensible to praise as the stones themselves. To speak seriously, I think that a poet sacrifices his usefulness to himself and others, and an importance in society which may be turned to public good, if he shuns the patronage that can be obtained by unparasitical means.

Father Dionisio, upon his arrival at Naples, impressed the King with so favourable an opinion of Petrarch that Robert wrote a letter to our poet, enclosing an epitaph of his Majesty's own composition, on the death of his niece Clementina. This letter is unhappily lost; but the answer to it is preserved, in which Petrarch tells the monarch that his epitaph rendered his niece an object rather of envy than of lamentation. "O happy Clementina!" says the poet, "after passing through a transitory life, you have attained a double immortality, one in heaven, and another on earth." He then compares the posthumous good fortune of the princess to that of Achilles, who had been immortalized by Homer. It is possible that King Robert's letter to Petrarch was so laudatory as to require a flattering answer. But this reverberated praise is rather overstrained.

Petrarch was now intent on obtaining the honour of Poet Laureate. His wishes were at length gratified, and in a manner that made the offer more flattering than the crown itself.

Whilst he still remained at Vaucluse, at nine o'clock in the morning of the 1st of September, 1340, he received a letter from the Roman Senate, pressingly inviting him to come and receive the

crown of Poet Laureate at Rome. He must have little notion of a poet's pride and vanity, who cannot imagine the flushed countenance, the dilated eyes, and the joyously-throbbing heart of Petrarch, whilst he read this letter. To be invited by the Senate of Rome to such an honour might excuse him for forgetting that Rome was not now what she had once been, and that the substantial glory of his appointment was small in comparison with the classic associations which formed its halo.

As if to keep up the fever of his joy, he received the same day, in the afternoon, at four o'clock, another letter with the same offer, from Roberto Bardi, Chancellor of the University of Paris, in which he importuned him to be crowned as Poet Laureate at Paris. When we consider the poet's veneration for Rome, we may easily anticipate that he would give the preference to that city. That he might not, however, offend his friend Roberto Bardi and the University of Paris, he despatched a messenger to Cardinal Colonna, asking his advice upon the subject, pretty well knowing that his patron's opinion would coincide with his own wishes. The Colonna advised him to be crowned at Rome.

The custom of conferring this honour had, for a long time, been obsolete. In the earliest classical ages, garlands were given as a reward to valour and genius. Virgil exhibits his conquerors adorned with them. The Romans adopted the custom from Greece, where leafy honours were bestowed on victors at public games. This coronation of poets, it is said, ceased under the reign of the Emperor Theodosius. After his death, during the long subsequent barbarism of Europe, when literature produced only rhyming monks, and when there were no more poets to crown, the discontinuance of the practice was a natural consequence.

At the commencement of the thirteenth century, according to the Abbé Resnel, the universities of Europe began to dispense laurels, not to poets, but to students distinguished by their learning. The doctors in medicine, at the famous university of Salerno, established by the Emperor Frederic II., had crowns of laurel put upon their heads. The bachelors also had their laurels, and derived their name from a baculus, or stick, which they carried.

Cardinal Colonna, as we have said, advised him, "*nothing loth*," to enjoy his coronation at Rome. Thither accordingly he repaired early in the year 1341. He embarked at Marseilles for Naples, wishing previously to his coronation to visit King Robert, by whom he was received with all possible hospitality and distinction.

Though he had accepted the laurel amidst the general applause of his contemporaries, Petrarch was not satisfied that he should enjoy this honour without passing through an ordeal as to his learning, for laurels and learning had been for one hundred years habitually associated in men's minds. The person whom Petrarch selected for his examiner in erudition was the King of Naples. Robert *the Good*, as he was in some respects deservedly called, was, for his age, a well-instructed man, and, for a king, a prodigy. He had also some common sense, but in classical knowledge he was more fit to be the scholar of Petrarch than his examiner. If Petrarch, however, learned nothing from the King, the King learned something from Petrarch. Among the other requisites for examining a Poet Laureate which Robert possessed, was *an utter ignorance of poetry*. But Petrarch couched his blindness on the subject, so that Robert saw, or believed he saw, something useful in the divine art. He had heard of the epic poem, Africa, and requested its author to recite to him some part of it. The King was charmed with the recitation, and requested that the work might be dedicated to him. Petrarch assented, but the poem was not finished or published till after King Robert's death.

His Neapolitan Majesty, after pronouncing a warm eulogy on our poet, declared that he merited the laurel, and had letters patent drawn up, by which he certified that, after a *severe* examination (it lasted three days), Petrarch was judged worthy to receive that honour in the Capitol. Robert wished him to be crowned at Naples; but our poet represented that he was desirous of being distinguished on the same theatre where Virgil and Horace had shone. The King accorded with his wishes; and, to complete his kindness, regretted that his advanced age would not permit him to go to Rome, and crown Petrarch himself. He named, however, one of his most eminent courtiers, Barrilli, to be

his proxy. Boccaccio speaks of Barrilli as a good poet; and Petrarch, with exaggerated politeness, compares him to Ovid.

When Petrarch went to take leave of King Robert, the sovereign, after engaging his promise that he would visit him again very soon, took off the robe which he wore that day, and, begging Petrarch's acceptance of it, desired that he might wear it on the day of his coronation. He also bestowed on him the place of his almoner-general, an office for which great interest was always made, on account of the privileges attached to it, the principal of which were an exemption from paying the tithes of benefices to the King, and a dispensation from residence.

Petrarch proceeded to Rome, where he arrived on the 6th of April, 1341, accompanied by only one attendant from the court of Naples, for Barrilli had taken another route, upon some important business, promising, however, to be at Rome before the time appointed. But as he had not arrived on the 7th, Petrarch despatched a messenger in search of him, who returned without any information. The poet was desirous to wait for his arrival; but Orso, Count of Anguillara, would not suffer the ceremony to be deferred. Orso was joint senator of Rome with Giordano degli Orsini; and, his office expiring on the 8th of April, he was unwilling to resign to his successor the pleasure of crowning so great a man.

Petrarch was afterwards informed that Barrilli, hastening towards Rome, had been beset near Anaguia by robbers, from whom he escaped with difficulty, and that he was obliged for safety to return to Naples. In leaving that city, Petrarch passed the tomb traditionally said to be that of Virgil. His coronation took place without delay after his arrival at Rome.

The morning of the 8th of April, 1341, was ushered in by the sound of trumpets; and the people, ever fond of a show, came from all quarters to see the ceremony. Twelve youths selected from the best families of Rome, and clothed in scarlet, opened the procession, repeating as they went some verses, composed by the poet, in honour of the Roman people. They were followed by six citizens of Rome, clothed in green, and bearing crowns wreathed with different flowers. Petrarch walked in the midst of them; after him came the senator, accompanied by the first men of the council. The streets were strewed with flowers, and the windows filled with ladies, dressed in the most splendid manner, who showered perfumed waters profusely on the poet[9]. He all the time wore the robe that had been presented to him by the King of Naples. When they reached the Capitol, the trumpets were silent, and Petrarch, having made a short speech, in which he quoted a verse from Virgil, cried out three times, "Long live the Roman people! long live the Senators! may God preserve their liberty!" At the conclusion of these words, he knelt before the senator Orso, who, taking a crown of laurel from his own head, placed it on that of Petrarch, saying, "This crown is the reward of virtue." The poet then repeated a sonnet in praise of the ancient Romans. The people testified their approbation by shouts of applause, crying, "Long flourish the Capitol and the poet!" The friends of Petrarch shed tears of joy, and Stefano Colonna, his favourite hero, addressed the assembly in his honour.

The ceremony having been finished at the Capitol, the procession, amidst the sound of trumpets and the acclamations of the people, repaired thence to the church of St. Peter, where Petrarch offered up his crown of laurel before the altar. The same day the Count of Anguillara caused letters patent to be delivered to Petrarch, in which the senators, after a flattering preamble, declared that he had merited the title of a great poet and historian; that, to mark his distinction, they had put upon his head a laurel crown, not only by the authority of Kong Robert, but by that of the Roman Senate and people; and that they gave him, at Rome and elsewhere, the privilege to read, to dispute, to explain ancient books, to make new ones, to compose poems, and to wear a crown according to his choice, either of

[9] Valery, in his "Travels in Italy" gives the following note respecting out poet. I quote from the edition of the work published at Brussels in 1835:—"Petrarque rapporte dans ses lettres latines que le laurier du Capitole lui avait attiré une multitude d'envieux; que le jour de son couronnement, au lieu d'eau odorante qu'il était d'usage de répandre dans ces solennités, il reçut sur la tête une eau corrosive, qui le rendit chauve le reste de sa vie. Son historien Dolce raconte même qu'une vieille lui jetta son pot de chambre rempli d'une acre urine, gardée, peut-être, pour cela depuis sept semaines."

laurel, beech, or myrtle, as well as the poetic habit. At that time a particular dress was affected by the poets. Dante was buried in this costume.

Petrarch continued only a few days at Rome after his coronation; but he had scarcely departed when he found that there were banditti on the road waiting for him, and anxious to relieve him of any superfluous wealth which he might have about him. He was thus obliged to return to Rome with all expedition; but he set out the following day, attended by a guard of armed men, and arrived at Pisa on the 20th of April.

From Pisa he went to Parma, to see his friend Azzo Correggio, and soon after his arrival he was witness to a revolution in that city of which Azzo had the principal direction. The Scalas, who held the sovereignty of Parma, had for some time oppressed the inhabitants with exorbitant taxes, which excited murmurs and seditions. The Correggios, to whom the city was entrusted in the absence of Mastino della Scala, profited by the public discontent, hoisted the flag of liberty, and, on the 22nd of May, 1341, drove out the garrison, and made themselves lords of the commonwealth. On this occasion, Azzo has been accused of the worst ingratitude to his nephews, Alberto and Mastino. But, if the people were oppressed, he was surely justified in rescuing them from misgovernment. To a great degree, also, the conduct of the Correggios sanctioned the revolution. They introduced into Parma such a mild and equitable administration as the city had never before experienced. Some exceptionable acts they undoubtedly committed; and when Petrarch extols Azzo as another Cato, it is to be hoped that he did so with some mental reservation. Petrarch had proposed to cross the Alps immediately, and proceed to Avignon; but he was prevailed upon by the solicitations of Azzo to remain some time at Parma. He was consulted by the Correggios on their most important affairs, and was admitted to their secret councils. In the present instance, this confidence was peculiarly agreeable to him; as the four brothers were, at that time, unanimous in their opinions; and their designs were all calculated to promote the welfare of their subjects.

Soon after his arrival at Parma, he received one of those tokens, of his popularity which are exceedingly expressive, though they come from a humble admirer. A blind old man, who had been a grammar-school master at Pontremoli, came to Parma, in order to pay his devotions to the laureate. The poor man had already walked to Naples, guided in his blindness by his only son, for the purpose of finding Petrarch. The poet had left that city; but King Robert, pleased with his enthusiasm, made him a present of some money. The aged pilgrim returned to Pontremoti, where, being informed that Petrarch was at Parma, he crossed the Apennines, in spite of the severity of the weather, and travelled thither, having sent before him a tolerable copy of verses. He was presented to Petrarch, whose hand he kissed with devotion and exclamations of joy. One day, before many spectators, the blind man said to Petrarch, "Sir, I have come far to see you." The bystanders laughed, on which the old man replied, "I appeal to you, Petrarch, whether I do not see you more clearly and distinctly than these men who have their eyesight." Petrarch gave him a kind reception, and dismissed him with a considerable present.

The pleasure which Petrarch had in retirement, reading, and reflection, induced him to hire a house on the outskirts of the city of Parma, with a garden, beautifully watered by a stream, a *rus in urbe*, as he calls it; and he was so pleased with this locality, that he purchased and embellished it.

His happiness, however, he tells us, was here embittered by the loss of some friends who shared the first place in his affections. One of these was Tommaso da Messina, with whom he had formed a friendship when they were fellow-students at Bologna, and ever since kept up a familiar correspondence. They were of the same age, addicted to the same pursuits, and imbued with similar sentiments. Tommaso wrote a volume of Latin poems, several of which were published after the invention of printing. Petrarch, in his Triumphs of Love, reckons him an excellent poet.

This loss was followed by another which affected Petrarch still more strongly. Having received frequent invitations to Lombes from the Bishop, who had resided some time in his diocese, Petrarch looked forward with pleasure to the time when he should revisit him. But he received accounts that the Bishop was taken dangerously ill. Whilst his mind was agitated by this news, he had the following

dream, which he has himself related. "Methought I saw the Bishop crossing the rivulet of my garden alone. I was astonished at this meeting, and asked him whence he came, whither he was going in such haste, and why he was alone. He smiled upon me with his usual complacency, and said, 'Remember that when you were in Gascony the tempestuous climate was insupportable to you. I also am tired of it. I have quitted Gascony, never to return, and I am going to Rome.' At the conclusion of these words, he had reached the end of the garden, and, as I endeavoured to accompany him, he in the kindest and gentlest manner waved his hand; but, upon my persevering, he cried out in a more peremptory manner, 'Stay! you must not at present attend me.' Whilst he spoke these words, I fixed my eyes upon him, and saw the paleness of death upon his countenance. Seized with horror, I uttered a loud cry, which awoke me. I took notice of the time. I told the circumstance to all my friends; and, at the expiration of five-and-twenty days, I received accounts of his death, which happened in the very same night in winch he had appeared to me."

On a little reflection, this incident will not appear to be supernatural. That Petrarch, oppressed as he was with anxiety about[Pg xlviii] his friend, should fall into fanciful reveries during his sleep, and imagine that he saw him in the paleness of death, was nothing wonderful—nay, that he should frame this allegory in his dream is equally conceivable. The sleeper's imagination is often a great improvisatore. It forms scenes and stories; it puts questions, and answers them itself, all the time believing that the responses come from those whom it interrogates.

Petrarch, deeply attached to Azzo da Correggio, now began to consider himself as settled at Parma, where he enjoyed literary retirement in the bosom of his beloved Italy. But he had not resided there a year, when he was summoned to Avignon by orders he considered that he could not disobey. Tiraboschi, and after him Baldelli, ascribe his return to Avignon to the commission which he received in 1342, to go as advocate of the Roman people to the new Pope, Clement VI., who had succeeded to the tiara on the death of Benedict XII., and Petrarch's own words coincide with what they say. The feelings of joy with which Petrarch revisited Avignon, though to appearance he had weaned himself from Laura, may be imagined. He had friendship, however, if he had not love, to welcome him. Here he met, with reciprocal gladness, his friends Socrates and Lælius, who had established themselves at the court of the Cardinal Colonna. "Socrates," says De Sade, "devoted himself entirely to Petrarch, and even went with him to Vaucluse." It thus appears that Petrarch had not given up his peculium on the Sorgue, nor had any one rented the field and cottage in his absence.

Benedict's successor, Clement VI., was conversant with the world, and accustomed to the splendour of courts. Quite a contrast to the plain rigidity of Benedict, he was courteous and munificent, but withal a voluptuary; and his luxury and profusion gave rise to extortions, to rapine, and to boundless simony. His artful and arrogant mistress, the Countess of Turenne, ruled him so absolutely, that all places in his gift, which had escaped the grasp of his relations, were disposed of through her interest; and she amassed great wealth by the sale of benefices.

The Romans applied to Clement VI., as they had applied to Benedict XII., imploring him to bring back the sacred seat to their capital; and they selected Petrarch to be among those who should present their supplication. Our poet appealed to his Holiness on this subject, both in prose and verse. The Pope received him with smiles, complimented him on his eloquence, bestowed on him the priory of Migliorino, but, for the present, consigned his remonstrance to oblivion.

In this mission to Clement at Avignon there was joined with Petrarch the famous Nicola Gabrino, better known by the name Cola di Rienzo, who, very soon afterwards, attached the history of Rome to his biography. He was for the present comparatively little known; but Petrarch, thus coming into connection with this extraordinary person, was captivated with his eloquence, whilst Clement complimented Rienzo, admitted him daily to his presence, and conversed with him on the wretched state of Rome, the tyranny of the nobles, and the sufferings of the people.

Cola and Petrarch were the two chiefs of this Roman embassy to the Pope; and it appears that the poet gave precedency to the future tribune on this occasion. They both elaborately exposed

the three demands of the Roman people, namely, that the Pope, already the acknowledged patron of Rome, should assume the title and functions of its senator, in order to extinguish the civil wars kindled by the Roman barons; that he should return to his pontifical chair on the banks of the Tiber; and that he should grant permission for the jubilee, instituted by Boniface VIII., to be held every fifty years, and not at the end of a century, as its extension to the latter period went far beyond the ordinary duration of human life, and cut off the greater part of the faithful from enjoying the institution.

Clement praised both orators, and conceded that the Romans should have a jubilee every fifty years; but he excused himself from going to Rome, alleging that he was prevented by the disputes between France and England. "Holy Father," said Petrarch, "how much it were to be wished that you had known Italy before you knew France." "I wish I had," said the Pontiff, very coldly.

Petrarch gave vent to his indignation at the papal court in a writing, entitled, "A Book of Letters without a Title," and in several severe sonnets. The "Liber Epistolarum sine Titulo" contains, as it is printed in his works (Basle edit., 1581), eighteen letters, fulminating as freely against papal luxury and corruption as if they had been penned by Luther or John Knox. From their contents, we might set down Petrarch as the earliest preacher of the Reformation, if there were not, in the writings of Dante, some passages of the same stamp. If these epistles were really circulated at the time when they were written, it is matter of astonishment that Petrarch never suffered from any other flames than those of love; for many honest reformers, who have been roasted alive, have uttered less anti-papal vituperation than our poet; nor, although Petrarch would have been startled at a revolution in the hierarchy, can it be doubted that his writings contributed to the Reformation.

It must be remembered, at the same time, that he wrote against the church government of Avignon, and not that of Rome. He compares Avignon with the Assyrian Babylon, with Egypt under the mad tyranny of Cambyses; or rather, denies that the latter empires can be held as parallels of guilt to the western Babylon; nay, he tells us that neither Avernus nor Tartarus can be confronted with this infernal place.

"The successors of a troop of fishermen," he says, "have forgotten their origin. They are not contented, like the first followers of Christ, who gained their livelihood by the Lake of Gennesareth, with modest habitations, but they must build themselves splendid palaces, and go about covered with gold and purple. They are fishers of men, who catch a credulous multitude, and devour them for their prey." This "Liber Epistolarum" includes some descriptions of the debaucheries of the churchmen, which are too scandalous for translation. They are nevertheless curious relics of history.

In this year, Gherardo, the brother of our poet, retired, by his advice, to the Carthusian monastery of Montrieux, which they had both visited in the pilgrimage to Baume three years before. Gherardo had been struck down with affliction by the death of a beautiful woman at Avignon, to whom he was devoted. Her name and history are quite unknown, but it may be hoped, if not conjectured, that she was not married, and could be more liberal in her affections than the poet's Laura.

Amidst all the incidents of this period of his life, the attachment of Petrarch to Laura continued unabated. It appears, too, that, since his return from Parma, she treated him with more than wonted complacency. He passed the greater part of the year 1342 at Avignon, and went to Vaucluse but seldom and for short intervals.

In the meantime, love, that makes other people idle, interfered not with Petrarch's fondness for study. He found an opportunity of commencing the study of Greek, and seized it with avidity. That language had never been totally extinct in Italy; but at the time on which we are touching, there were not probably six persons in the whole country acquainted with it. Dante had quoted Greek authors, but without having known the Greek alphabet. The person who favoured Petrarch with this coveted instruction was Bernardo Barlaamo, a Calabrian monk, who had been three years before at Avignon, having come as envoy from Andronicus, the eastern Emperor, on pretext of proposing a union between the Greek and Roman churches, but, in reality for the purpose of trying to borrow

money from the Pope for the Emperor. Some of Petrarch's biographers date his commencement of the study of Greek from the period of Barlaamo's first visit to Avignon; but I am inclined to postpone it to 1342, when Barlaamo returned to the west and settled at Avignon. Petrarch began studying Greek by the reading of Plato. He never obtained instruction sufficient to make him a good Grecian, but he imbibed much of the spirit of Plato from the labour which he bestowed on his works. He was very anxious to continue his Greek readings with Barlaamo; but his stay in Avignon was very short; and, though it was his interest to detain him as his preceptor, Petrarch, finding that he was anxious for a settlement in Italy, helped him to obtain the bishopric of Geraci, in Calabria.

The next year was memorable in our poet's life for the birth of his daughter Francesca. That the mother of this daughter was the same who presented him with his son John there can be no doubt. Baldelli discovers, in one of Petrarch's letters, an obscure allusion to her, which seems to indicate that she died suddenly after the birth of Francesca, who proved a comfort to her father in his old age.

The opening of the year 1343 brought a new loss to Petrarch in the death of Robert, King of Naples. Petrarch, as we have seen, had occasion to be grateful to this monarch; and we need not doubt that he was much affected by the news of his death; but, when we are told that he repaired to Vaucluse to bewail his irreparable loss, we may suppose, without uncharitableness, that he retired also with a view to study the expression of his grief no less than to cherish it. He wrote, however, an interesting letter on the occasion to Barbato di Sulmona, in which he very sensibly exhibits his fears of the calamities which were likely to result from the death of Robert, adding that his mind was seldom true in prophecy, unless when it foreboded misfortunes; and his predictions on this occasion were but too well verified.

Robert was succeeded by his granddaughter Giovanna, a girl of sixteen, already married to Andrew of Hungary, her cousin, who was but a few months older. Robert by his will had established a council of regency, which was to continue until Giovanna arrived at the age of twenty-five. The Pope, however, made objections to this arrangement, alleging that the administration of affairs during the Queen's minority devolved upon him immediately as lord superior. But, as he did not choose to assert his right till he should receive more accurate information respecting the state of the kingdom, he gave Petrarch a commission for that purpose; and entrusted him with a negotiation of much importance and delicacy.

Petrarch received an additional commission from the Cardinal Colonna. Several friends of the Colonna family were, at that time, confined in prison at Naples, and the Cardinal flattered himself that Petrarch's eloquence and intercession would obtain their enlargement. Our poet accepted the embassy. He went to Nice, where he embarked; but had nearly been lost in his passage. He wrote to Cardinal Colonna the following account of his voyage.

"I embarked at Nice, the first maritime town in Italy (he means the nearest to France). At night I got to Monaco, and the bad weather obliged me to pass a whole day there, which by no means put me into good-humour. The next morning we re-embarked, and, after being tossed all day by the tempest, we arrived very late at Port Maurice. The night was dreadful; it was impossible to get to the castle, and I was obliged to put up at a little village, where my bed and supper appeared tolerable from extreme weariness. I determined to proceed by land; the perils of the road appeared less dreadful to me than those by sea. I left my servants and baggage in the ship, which set sail, and I remained with only one domestic on shore. By accident, upon the coast of Genoa, I found some German horses which were for sale; they were strong and serviceable. I bought them; but I was soon afterwards obliged to take ship again; for war was renewed between the Pisans and the Milanese. Nature has placed limits to these States, the Po on one side, and the Apennines on the other. I must have passed between their two armies if I had gone by land; this obliged me to re-embark at Lerici. I passed by Corvo, that famous rock, the ruins of the city of Luna, and landed at Murrona. Thence I went the next day on horseback to Pisa, Siena, and Rome. My eagerness to execute your orders has made me a night-traveller, contrary to my character and disposition. I would not sleep till I had paid my duty to your illustrious father,

who is always my hero. I found him the same as I left him seven years ago, nay, even as hale and sprightly as when I saw him at Avignon, which is now twelve years. What a surprising man! What strength of mind and body! How firm his voice! How beautiful his face! Had he been a few years younger, I should have taken him for Julius Cæsar, or Scipio Africanus. Rome grows old; but not its hero. He was half undressed, and going to bed; so I stayed only a moment, but I passed the whole of the next day with him. He asked me a thousand questions about you, and was much pleased that I was going to Naples. When I set out from Rome, he insisted on accompanying me beyond the walls.

"I reached Palestrina that night, and was kindly received by your nephew John. He is a young man of great hopes, and follows the steps of his ancestors.

"I arrived at Naples the 11th of October. Heavens, what a change has the death of one man produced in that place! No one would know it now. Religion, Justice, and Truth are banished. I think I am at Memphis, Babylon, or Mecca. In the stead of a king so just and so pious, a little monk, fat, rosy, barefooted, with a shorn head, and half covered with a dirty mantle, bent by hypocrisy more than by age, lost in debauchery whilst proud of his affected poverty, and still more of the real wealth he has amassed—this man holds the reins of this staggering empire. In vice and cruelty he rivals a Dionysius, an Agathocles, or a Phalaris. This monk, named Roberto, was an Hungarian cordelier, and preceptor of Prince Andrew, whom he entirely sways. He oppresses the weak, despises the great, tramples justice under foot, and treats both the dowager and the reigning Queen with the greatest insolence. The court and city tremble before him; a mournful silence reigns in the public assemblies, and in private they converse by whispers. The least gesture is punished, and *to think* is denounced as a crime. To this man I have presented the orders of the Sovereign Pontiff, and your just demands. He behaved with incredible insolence. Susa, or Damascus, the capital of the Saracens, would have received with more respect an envoy from the Holy See. The great lords imitate his pride and tyranny. The Bishop of Cavaillon is the only one who opposes this torrent; but what can one lamb do in the midst of so many wolves? It is the request of a dying king alone that makes him endure so wretched a situation. How small are the hopes of my negotiation! but I shall wait with patience; though I know beforehand the answer they will give me."

It is plain from Petrarch's letter that the kingdom of Naples was now under a miserable subjection to the Hungarian faction, aid that the young Queen's situation was anything but enviable. Few characters in modern history have been drawn in such contrasted colours as that of Giovanna, Queen of Naples. She has been charged with every vice, and extolled for every virtue. Petrarch represents her as a woman of weak understanding, disposed to gallantry, but incapable of greater crimes. Her history reminds us much of that of Mary Queen of Scots. Her youth and her character, gentle and interesting in several respects, entitle her to the benefit of our doubts as to her assent to the death of Andrew. Many circumstances seem to me to favour those doubts, and the opinion of Petrarch is on the side of her acquittal.

On his arrival in Naples, Petrarch had an audience with the Queen Dowager; but her grief and tears for the loss of her husband made this interview brief and fruitless with regard to business. When he spoke to her about the prisoners, for whose release the Colonnas had desired him to intercede, her Majesty referred him to the council. She was now, in reality, only a state cypher.

The principal prisoners for whom Petrarch was commissioned to plead, were the Counts Minervino, di Lucera, and Pontenza. Petrarch applied to the council of state in their behalf, but he was put off with perpetual excuses. While the affair was in agitation he went to Capua, where the prisoners were confined. "There," he writes to the Cardinal Colonna, "I saw your friends; and, such is the instability of Fortune, that I found them in chains. They support their situation with fortitude. Their innocence is no plea in their behalf to those who have shared in the spoils of their fortune. Their only expectations rest upon you. I have no hopes, except from the intervention of some superior power, as any dependence on the clemency of the council is out of the question. The Queen Dowager, now the most desolate of widows, compassionates their case, but cannot assist them."

Petrarch, wearied with the delays of business, sought relief in excursions to the neighbourhood. Of these he writes an account to Cardinal Colonna.

"I went to Baiæ," he says, "with my friends, Barbato and Barrilli. Everything concurred to render this jaunt agreeable—good company, the beauty of the scenes, and my extreme weariness of the city I had quitted. This climate, which, as far as I can judge, must be insupportable in summer, is delightful in winter. I was rejoiced to behold places described by Virgil, and, what is more surprising, by Homer before him. I have seen the Lucrine lake, famous for its fine oysters; the lake Avernus, with water as black as pitch, and fishes of the same colour swimming in it; marshes formed by the standing waters of Acheron, and the mountain whose roots go down to hell. The terrible aspect of this place, the thick shades with which it is covered by a surrounding wood, and the pestilent odour which this water exhales, characterize it very justly as the Tartarus of the poets. There wants only the boat of Charon, which, however, would be unnecessary, as there is only a shallow ford to pass over. The Styx and the kingdom of Pluto are now hid from our sight. Awed by what I had heard and read of these mournful approaches to the dead, I was contented to view them at my feet from the top of a high mountain. The labourer, the shepherd, and the sailor, dare not approach them nearer. There are deep caverns, where some pretend that a great deal of gold is concealed; covetous men, they say, have been to seek it, but they never return; whether they lost their way in the dark valleys, or had a fancy to visit the dead, being so near their habitations.

"I have seen the ruins of the grotto of the famous Cumæan sybil; it is a hideous rock, suspended in the Avernian lake. Its situation strikes the mind with horror. There still remain the hundred mouths by which the gods conveyed their oracles; these are now dumb, and there is only one God who speaks in heaven and on earth. These uninhabited ruins serve as the resort of birds of unlucky omen. Not far off is that dreadful cavern which leads, *they say*, to the infernal regions. Who would believe that, close to the mansions of the dead, Nature should have placed powerful remedies for the preservation of life? Near Avernus and Acheron are situated that barren land whence rises continually a salutary vapour, which is a cure for several diseases, and those hot-springs that vomit hot and sulphureous cinders. I have seen the baths which Nature has prepared; but the avarice of physicians has rendered them of doubtful use. This does not, however, prevent them from being visited by the invalids of all the neighbouring towns. These hollowed mountains dazzle us with the lustre of their marble circles, on which are engraved figures that point out, by the position of their hands, the part of the body which each fountain is proper to cure.

"I saw the foundations of that admirable reservoir of Nero, which was to go from Mount Misenus to the Avernian lake, and to enclose all the hot waters of Baiæ.

"At Pozzuoli I saw the mountain of Falernus, celebrated for its grapes, whence the famous Falernian wine. I saw likewise those enraged waves of which Virgil speaks in his Georgics, on which Cæsar put a bridle by the mole which he raised there, and which Augustus finished. It is now called the Dead Sea. I am surprised at the prodigious expense the Romans were at to build houses in the most exposed situations, in order to shelter them from the severities of the weather; for in the heats of summer the valleys of the Apennines, the mountains of Viterbo, and the woods of Umbria, furnished them with charming shades; and even the ruins of the houses which they built in those places are superb."

Our poet's residence at Naples was evidently disagreeable to him, in spite of the company of his friends, Barrilli and Barbato. His friendship with the latter was for a moment overcast by an act of indiscretion on the part of Barbato, who, by dint of importunity, obtained from Petrarch thirty-four lines of his poem of Africa, under a promise that he would show them to nobody. On entering the library of another friend, the first thing that struck our poet's eyes was a copy of the same verses, transcribed with a good many blunders. Petrarch's vanity on this occasion, however, was touched more than his anger—he forgave his friend's treachery, believing it to have arisen from excessive admiration. Barbato, as some atonement, gave him a little MS. of Cicero, which Petrarch found to

contain two books of the orator's Treatise on the Academics, "a work," as he observes, "more subtle than useful."

Queen Giovanna was fond of literature. She had several conversations with Petrarch, which increased her admiration of him. After the example of her grandfather, she made him her chaplain and household clerk, both of which offices must be supposed to have been sinecures. Her letters appointing him to them are dated the 25th of November, 1343, the very day before that nocturnal storm of which I shall speedily quote the poet's description.

Voltaire has asserted that the young Queen of Naples was the pupil of Petrarch; "but of this," as De Sade remarks, "there is no proof." It only appears that the two greatest geniuses of Italy, Boccaccio and Petrarch, were both attached to Giovanna, and had a more charitable opinion of her than most of their contemporaries.

Soon after his return from the tour to Baiæ, Petrarch was witness to a violent tempest at Naples, which most historians have mentioned, as it was memorable for having threatened the entire destruction of the city.

The night of the 25th of November, 1343, set in with uncommonly still weather; but suddenly a tempest rose violently in the direction of the sea, which made the buildings of the city shake to their very foundations. "At the first onset of the tempest," Petrarch writes to the Cardinal Colonna, "the windows of the house were burst open. The lamp of my chamber"—he was lodged at a monastery —"was blown out—I was shaken from my bed with violence, and I apprehended immediate death. The friars and prior of the convent, who had risen to pay their customary devotions, rushed into my room with crucifixes and relics in their hands, imploring the mercy of the Deity. I took courage, and accompanied them to the church, where we all passed the night, expecting every moment to be our last. I cannot describe the horrors of that dreadful night; the bursts of lightning and the roaring of thunder were blended with the shrieks of the people. The night itself appeared protracted to an unnatural length; and, when the morning arrived, which we discovered rather by conjecture than by any dawning of light, the priests prepared to celebrate the service; but the rest of us, not having yet dared to lift up our eyes towards the heavens, threw ourselves prostrate on the ground. At length the day appeared—a day how like to night! The cries of the people began to cease in the upper part of the city, but were redoubled from the sea-shore. Despair inspired us with courage. We mounted our horses and arrived at the port. What a scene was there! the vessels had suffered shipwreck in the very harbour; the shore was covered with dead bodies, which were tossed about and dashed against the rocks, whilst many appeared struggling in the agonies of death. Meanwhile, the raging ocean overturned many houses from their very foundations. Above a thousand Neapolitan horsemen were assembled near the shore to assist, as it were, at the obsequies of their countrymen. I caught from them a spirit of resolution, and was less afraid of death from the consideration that we should all perish together. On a sudden a cry of horror was heard; the sea had sapped the foundations of the ground on which we stood, and it was already beginning to give way. We immediately hastened to a higher place, where the scene was equally impressive. The young Queen, with naked feet and dishevelled hair, attended by a number of women, was rushing to the church of the Virgin, crying out for mercy in this imminent peril. At sea, no ship escaped the fury of the tempest: all the vessels in the harbour —one only excepted—sunk before our eyes, and every soul on board perished."

By the assiduity and solicitations of Petrarch, the council of Naples were at last engaged in debating about the liberation of Colonna's imprisoned friends; and the affair was nearly brought to a conclusion, when the approach of night obliged the members to separate before they came to a final decision. The cause of this separation is a sad proof of Neapolitan barbarism at that period. It will hardly, at this day, seem credible that, in the capital of so flourishing a kingdom, and the residence of a brilliant court, such savage licentiousness could have prevailed. At night, all the streets of the city were beset by the young nobility, who were armed, and who attacked all passengers without distinction, so that even the members of the council could not venture to appear after a certain hour.

Neither the severity of parents, nor the authority of the magistrates, nor of Majesty itself, could prevent continual combats and assassinations.

"But can it be astonishing," Petrarch remarks, "that such disgraceful scenes should pass in the night, when the Neapolitans celebrate, even in the face of day, games similar to those of the gladiators, and with more than barbarian cruelty? Human blood is shed here with as little remorse as that of brute animals; and, while the people join madly in applause, sons expire in the very sight of their parents; and it is considered the utmost disgrace not to die with becoming fortitude, as if they were dying in the defence of their religion and country. I myself, ignorant of these customs was once carried to the Carbonara, the destined place of butchery. The Queen and her husband, Andrew, were present; the soldiery of Naples were present, and the people flocked thither in crowds. I was kept in suspense by the appearance of so large and brilliant an assembly, and expected some spectacle worthy of my attention, when I suddenly heard a loud shout of applause, as for some joyous incident. What was my surprise when I beheld a beautiful young man pierced through with a sword, and ready to expire at my feet! Struck with horror, I put spurs to my horse, and fled from the barbarous sight, uttering execrations on the cruel spectators.

"This inhuman custom has been derived from their ancestors, and is now so sanctioned by inveterate habit, that their very licentiousness is dignified with the name of liberty.

"You will cease to wonder at the imprisonment of your friends in this city, where the death of a young man is considered as an innocent pastime. As to myself, I will quit this inhuman country before three days are past, and hasten to you who can make all things agreeable to me except a sea-voyage."

Petrarch at length brought his negotiations respecting the prisoners to a successful issue; and they were released by the express authority of Andrew. Our poet's presence being no longer necessary, he left Naples, in spite of the strong solicitations of his friends Barrilli and Barbato. In answer to their request that he would remain, he said, "I am but a satellite, and follow the directions of a superior planet; quiet and repose are denied to me."

From Naples he went to Parma, where Azzo Correggio, with his wonted affection, pressed him to delay; and Petrarch accepted the invitation, though he remarked with sorrow that harmony no longer reigned among the brothers of the family. He stopped there, however, for some time, and enjoyed such tranquillity that he could revise and polish his compositions. But, in the following year, 1345, his friend Azzo, having failed to keep his promise to Luchino Visconti, as to restoring to him the lordship of Parma—Azzo had obtained it by the assistance of the Visconti, who avenged himself by making war on the Correggios—he invested Parma, and afflicted it with a tedious siege. Petrarch, foreseeing little prospect of pursuing his studies quietly in a beleaguered city, left the place with a small number of his companions; but, about midnight, near Rheggio, a troop of robbers rushed from an ambuscade, with cries of "Kill! kill!" and our handful of travellers, being no match for a host of brigands, fled and sought to save themselves under favour of night. Petrarch, during this flight, was thrown from his horse. The shock was so violent that he swooned; but he recovered, and was remounted by his companions. They had not got far, however, when a violent storm of rain and lightning rendered their situation almost as bad as that from which they had escaped, and threatened them with death in another shape. They passed a dreadful night without finding a tree or the hollow of a rock to shelter them, and had no expedient for mitigating their exposure to the storm but to turn their horses' backs to the tempest.

When the dawn permitted them to discern a path amidst the brushwood, they pushed on to Scandiano, a castle occupied by the Gonzaghi, friends of the lords of Parma, which they happily reached, and where they were kindly received. Here they learned that a troop of horse and foot had been waiting for them in ambush near Scandiano, but had been forced by the bad weather to withdraw before their arrival; thus "*the pelting of the pitiless storm*" had been to them a merciful occurrence. Petrarch made no delay here, for he was smarting under the bruises from his fall, but caused himself to be tied upon his horse, and went to repose at Modena. The next day he repaired to Bologna, where

he stopped a short time for surgical assistance, and whence he sent a letter to his friend Barbato, describing his misadventure; but, unable to hold a pen himself, he was obliged to employ the hand of a stranger. He was so impatient, however, to get back to Avignon, that he took the road to it as soon as he could sit his horse. On approaching that city he says he felt a greater softness in the air, and saw with delight the flowers that adorn the neighbouring woods. Everything seemed to announce the vicinity of Laura. It was seldom that Petrarch spoke so complacently of Avignon.

Clement VI. received Petrarch with the highest respect, offered him his choice among several vacant bishoprics, and pressed him to receive the office of pontifical secretary. He declined the proffered secretaryship. Prizing his independence above all things, excepting Laura, he remarked to his friends that the yoke of office would not sit lighter on him for being gilded.

In consequence of the dangers he had encountered, a rumour of his death had spread over a great part of Italy. The age was romantic, with a good deal of the fantastical in its romance. If the news had been true, and if he had been really dead and buried, it would be difficult to restrain a smile at the sort of honours that were paid to his memory by the less brain-gifted portion of his admirers. One of these, Antonio di Beccaria, a physician of Ferrara, when he ought to have been mourning for his own deceased patients, wrote a poetical lamentation for Petrarch's death. The poem, if it deserve such a name, is allegorical; it represents a funeral, in which the following personages parade in procession and grief for the Laureate's death. Grammar, Rhetoric, and Philosophy are introduced with their several attendants. Under the banners of Rhetoric are ranged Cicero, Geoffroy de Vinesauf, and Alain de Lisle. It would require all Cicero's eloquence to persuade us that his comrades in the procession were quite worthy of his company. The Nine Muses follow Petrarch's body; eleven poets, crowned with laurel, support the bier, and Minerva, holding the crown of Petrarch, closes the procession.

We have seen that Petrarch left Naples foreboding disastrous events to that kingdom. Among these, the assassination of Andrew, on the 18th of September, 1345, was one that fulfilled his augury. The particulars of this murder reached Petrarch on his arrival at Avignon, in a letter from his friend Barbato.

From the sonnets which Petrarch wrote, to all appearance, in 1345 and 1346, at Avignon or Vaucluse, he seems to have suffered from those fluctuations of Laura's favour that naturally arose from his own imprudence. When she treated him with affability, he grew bolder in his assiduities, and she was again obliged to be more severe. See Sonnets cviii., cix., and cxiv.

During this sojourn, though he dates some of his pleasantest letters from Vaucluse, he was projecting to return to Italy, and to establish himself there, after bidding a final adieu to Provence. When he acquainted his nominal patron, John Colonna, with his intention, the Cardinal rudely taxed him with madness and ingratitude. Petrarch frankly told the prelate that he was conscious of no ingratitude, since, after fourteen years passed in his service, he had received no provision for his future livelihood. This quarrel with the proud churchman is, with fantastic pastoral imagery, made the subject of our poet's eighth Bucolic, entitled Divortium. I suspect that Petrarch's free language in favour of the Tribune Rienzo was not unconnected with their alienation.

Notwithstanding Petrarch's declared dislike of Avignon, there is every reason to suppose that he passed the greater part of the winter of 1346 in his western Babylon; and we find that he witnessed many interesting scenes between the conflicting cardinals, as well as the brilliant fêtes that were given to two foreign princes, whom an important affair now brought to Avignon. These were the King of Bohemia, and his son Charles, Prince of Moravia, otherwise called Charles of Luxemburg.

The Emperor Lewis of Bavaria, who had previously made several but fruitless attempts to reconcile himself with the Church, on learning the election of Clement VI., sent ambassadors with unlimited powers to effect a reconcilement; but the Pope proposed conditions so hard and humbling that the States of the German Empire peremptorily rejected them. On this, his Holiness confirmed the condemnations which he had already passed on Lewis of Bavaria, and enjoined the Electors of the empire to proceed to a new choice of the King of the Romans. "John of Luxemburg," says Villani,

"would have been emperor if he had not been blind." A wish to secure the empire for his son and to further his election, brought him to the Pope at Avignon.

Prince Charles had to thank the Pontiff for being elected, but first his Holiness made him sign, on the 22nd of April, 1346, in presence of twelve cardinals and his brother William Roger, a declaration of which the following is the substance:—

"If, by the grace of God, I am elected King of the Romans, I will fulfil all the promises and confirm all the concessions of my grandfather Henry VII. and of his predecessors. I will revoke the acts made by Lewis of Bavaria. I will occupy no place, either in or out of Italy, belonging to the Church. I will not enter Rome before the day appointed for my coronation. I will depart from thence the same day with all my attendants, and I will never return without the permission of the Holy See." He might as well have declared that he would give the Pope all his power, as King of the Romans, provided he was allowed the profits; for, in reality, Charles had no other view with regard to Italy than to make money.

This concession, which contrasts so poorly with the conduct of Charles on many other occasions, excited universal indignation in Germany, and a good deal even in Italy. Petrarch exclaimed against it as mean and atrocious; for, Catholic as he was, he was not so much a churchman as to see without indignation the papal tiara exalted above the imperial crown.

In July, 1346, Charles was elected, and, in derision, was called "the Emperor of the Priests." The death of his rival, Lewis of Bavaria, however, which happened in the next year, prevented a civil war, and Charles IV. remained peaceable possessor of the empire.

Among the fêtes that were given to Charles, a ball was held at Avignon, in a grand saloon brightly illuminated. Thither came all the beauties of the city and of Provence. The Prince, who had heard much of Laura, through her poetical fame, sought her out and saluted her in the French manner.

Petrarch went, according to his custom, to pass the term of Lent at Vaucluse. The Bishop of Cavaillon, eager to see the poet, persuaded him to visit his recluse residence, and remained with Petrarch as his guest for fifteen days, in his own castle, on the summit of rocks, that seemed more adapted for the perch of birds than the habitation of men. There is now scarcely a wreck of it remaining.

It would seem, however, that the Bishop's conversation made this retirement very agreeable to Petrarch; for it inspired him with the idea of writing a "Treatise on a Solitary Life." Of this work he made a sketch in a short time, but did not finish it till twenty years afterwards, when he dedicated and presented it to the Bishop of Cavaillon.

It is agreeable to meet, in Petrarch's life at the shut-up valley, with any circumstance, however trifling, that indicates a cheerful state of mind; for, independently of his loneliness, the inextinguishable passion for Laura never ceased to haunt him; and his love, strange to say, had mad, momentary hopes, which only deepened at their departure the returning gloom of despair. Petrarch never wrote more sonnets on his beloved than during the course of this year. Laura had a fair and discreet female friend at Avignon, who was also the friend of Petrarch, and interested in his attachment. The ideas which this amiable confidante entertained of harmonizing success in misplaced attachment with honour and virtue must have been Platonic, even beyond the feelings which Petrarch, in reality, cherished; for, occasionally, the poet's sonnets are too honest for pure Platonism. This lady, however, whose name is unknown, strove to convince Laura that she ought to treat her lover with less severity. "She pushed Laura forward," says De Sade, "and kept back Petrarch." One day she recounted to the poet all the proofs of affection, and after these proofs she said, "You infidel, can you doubt that she loves you?" It is to this fair friend that he is supposed to have addressed his nineteenth sonnet.

This year, his Laura was seized with a defluxion in her eyes, which made her suffer much, and even threatened her with blindness. This was enough to bring a sonnet from Petrarch (his 94th), in which he laments that those eyes which were the sun of his life should be for ever eclipsed. He went to see her during her illness, having now the privilege of visiting her at her own house, and one day

he found her perfectly recovered. Whether the ophthalmia was infectious, or only endemic, I know not; but so it was, that, whilst Laura's eyes got well, those of her lover became affected with the same defluxion. It struck his imagination, or, at least, he feigned to believe poetically, that the malady of her eyes had passed into his; and, in one of his sonnets, he exults at this welcome circumstance.[10] "I fixed my eyes," he said, "on Laura; and that moment a something inexpressible, like a shooting star, darted from them to mine. This is a present from love, in which I rejoice. How delightful it is thus to cure the darling object of one's soul!"

Petrarch received some show of complacency from Laura, which his imagination magnified; and it was some sort of consolation, at least, that his idol was courteous to him; but even this scanty solace was interrupted. Some malicious person communicated to Laura that Petrarch was imposing upon her, and that he was secretly addressing his love and his poetry to another lady under a borrowed name. Laura gave ear to the calumny, and, for a time, debarred him from her presence. If she had been wholly indifferent to him, this misunderstanding would have never existed; for jealousy and indifference are a contradiction in terms. I mean true jealousy. There is a pseudo species of it, with which many wives are troubled who care nothing about their husbands' affection; a plant of ill nature that is reared merely to be a rod of conjugal castigation. Laura, however, discovered at last, that her admirer was playing no double part. She was too reasonable to protract so unjust a quarrel, and received him again as usual.

I have already mentioned that Clement VI. had made Petrarch Canon of Modena, which benefice he resigned in favour of his friend, Luca Christino, and that this year his Holiness had also conferred upon him the prebend of Parma. This preferment excited the envy of some persons, who endeavoured to prejudice Ugolino de' Rossi, the bishop of the diocese, against him. Ugolino was of that family which had disputed for the sovereignty of Parma with the Correggios, and against whom Petrarch had pleaded in favour of their rivals. From this circumstance it was feared that Ugolino might be inclined to listen to those maligners who accused Petrarch of having gone to Avignon for the purpose of undermining the Bishop in the Pope's favour. Petrarch, upon his promotion, wrote a letter to Ugolino, strongly repelling this accusation. This is one of the manliest epistles that ever issued from his pen. "Allow me to assure you," he says, "that I would not exchange my tranquillity for your troubles, nor my poverty for your riches. Do not imagine, however, that I despise your particular situation. I only mean that there is no person of your rank whose preferment I desire; nor would I accept such preferment if it were offered to me. I should not say thus much, if my familiar intercourse with the Pope and the Cardinals had not convinced me that happiness in that rank is more a shadow than a substance. It was a memorable saying of Pope Adrian IV., 'that he knew no one more unhappy than the Sovereign Pontiff; his throne is a seat of thorns; his mantle is an oppressive weight; his tiara shines splendidly indeed, but it is not without a devouring fire.' If I had been ambitious," continues Petrarch, "I might have been preferred to a benefice of more value than yours;" and he refers to the fact of the Pope having given him his choice of several high preferments.

Petrarch passed the winter of 1346-47 chiefly at Avignon, and made but few and short excursions to Vaucluse. In one of these, at the beginning of 1347, when he had Socrates to keep him company at Vaucluse, the Bishop of Cavaillon invited them to his castle. Petrarch returned the following answer:—

"Yesterday we quitted the city of storms to take refuge in this harbour, and taste the sweets of repose. We have nothing but coarse clothes, suitable to the season and the place we live in; but in this rustic dress we will repair to see you, since you command us; we fear not to present ourselves in this rustic dress; our desire to see you puts down every other consideration. What matters it to us how we appear before one who possesses the depth of our hearts? If you wish to see us often you will treat us without ceremony."

[10] Sonnet cxcvi.

His visits to Vaucluse were rather infrequent; business, he says, detained him often at Avignon, in spite of himself; but still at intervals he passed a day or two to look after his gardens and trees. On one of these occasions, he wrote a pleasing letter to William of Pastrengo, dilating on the pleasures of his garden, which displays liveliness and warmth of heart.

Petrarch had not seen his brother since the latter had taken the cowl in the Carthusian monastery, some five years before. To that convent he paid a visit in February, 1347, and he was received like an angel from heaven. He was delighted to see a brother whom he loved so much, and to find him contented with the life which he had embraced. The Carthusians, who had heard of Petrarch, renowned as the finest spirit of the age, were flattered by his showing a strong interest in their condition; and though he passed but a day and a night with them, they parted so mutually well pleased, that he promised, on taking leave, to send them a treatise on the happiness of the life which they led. And he kept his word; for, immediately upon his return to Vaucluse, he commenced his essay "*De Otio Religioso*—On the Leisure of the Religious," and he finished it in a few weeks. The object of this work is to show the sweets and advantages of their retired state, compared with the agitations of life in the world.

From these monkish reveries Petrarch was awakened by an astounding public event, namely, the elevation of Cola di Rienzo to the tribuneship of Rome. At the news of this revolution, Petrarch was animated with as much enthusiasm as if he had been himself engaged in the enterprise. Under the first impulse of his feelings, he sent an epistolary congratulation and advice to Rienzo and the Roman people. This letter breathes a strongly republican spirit. In later times, we perceive that Petrarch would have been glad to witness the accomplishment of his darling object—Rome restored to her ancient power and magnificence, even under an imperial government. Our poet received from the Tribune an answer to his epistolary oration, telling him that it had been read to the Roman people, and received with applause. A considerable number of letters passed between Petrarch and Cola.

When we look back on the long connection of Petrarch with the Colonna family, his acknowledged obligations, and the attachment to them which he expresses, it may seem, at first sight, surprising that he should have so loudly applauded a revolution which struck at the roots of their power. But, if we view the matter with a more considerate eye, we shall hold the poet in nobler and dearer estimation for his public zeal than if he had cringed to the Colonnas. His personal attachment to *them*, who were quite as much honoured by *his* friendship as *he* was by *theirs*, was a consideration subservient to that of the honour of his country and the freedom of his fellow-citizens; "for," as he says in his own defence, "we owe much to our friends, still more to our parents, but everything to our country."

Retiring during this year for some time to Vaucluse, Petrarch composed an eclogue in honour of the Roman revolution, the fifth in his Bucolics. It is entitled "La Pieta Pastorale," and has three speakers, who converse about their venerable mother Rome, but in so dull a manner, that, if Petrarch had never written better poetry, we should not, probably, at this moment, have heard of his existence.

In the midst of all this political fervour, the poet's devotion to Laura continued unabated; Petrarch never composed so many sonnets in one year as during 1347, but, for the most part, still indicative of sadness and despair. In his 116th sonnet, he says:—

> "Soleo onde, e 'n rena fondo, e serivo in vento."
> I plough in water, build on sand, and write on air.

If anything were wanting to convince us that Laura had treated him, during his twenty years' courtship, with sufficient rigour, this and other such expressions would suffice to prove it. A lover, at the end of so long a period, is not apt to speak thus despondingly of a mistress who has been kind to him.

It seems, however, that there were exceptions to her extreme reserve. On one occasion, this year, when they met, and when Petrarch's eyes were fixed on her in silent reverie, she stretched out her hand to him, and allowed him to detain it in his for some time. This incident is alluded to in his 218th sonnet.

If public events, however, were not enough to make him forget his passion for Laura, they were sufficiently stirring to keep his interest in them alive. The head of Rienzo was not strong enough to stand the elevation which he had attained. Petrarch had hitherto regarded the reports of Rienzo's errors as highly exaggerated by his enemies; but the truth of them, at last, became too palpable; though our poet's charitable opinion of the Tribune considerably outlasted that of the public at large.

When the papal court heard of the multiplied extravagances of Rienzo, they recovered a little from the panic which had seized them. They saw that they had to deal with a man whose head was turned. His summonses had enraged them; and they resolved to keep no measures with him. Towards the end of August, 1347, one of his couriers arrived without arms, and with only the symbol of his office, the silver rod, in his hand. He was arrested near Avignon; his letters were taken from him and torn to pieces; and, without being permitted to enter Avignon, he was sent back to Rome with threats and ignominy. This proceeding appeared atrocious in the eyes of Petrarch, and he wrote a letter to Rienzo on the subject, expressing his strongest indignation at the act of outrage.

Petrarch passed almost the whole of the month of September, 1347, at Avignon. On the 9th of this month he obtained letters of legitimation for his son John, who might now be about ten years old. John is entitled, in these letters, "a scholar of Florence." The Pope empowers him to possess any kind of benefice without being obliged, in future, to make mention of his illegitimate birth, or of the obtained dispensation. It appears from these letters that the mother of John was not married. He left his son at Verona under the tuition of Rinaldo di Villa Franca. Before he had left Provence in this year, for the purpose of visiting Italy, he had announced his intention to the Pope, who wished to retain him as an honour to his court, and offered him his choice of several church preferments. But our poet, whose only wish was to obtain some moderate benefice that would leave him independent and at liberty, declined his Holiness's *vague* offers. If we consider that Petrarch made no secret of his good wishes for Rienzo, it may seem surprisingly creditable to the Pontiff's liberality that he should have even *professed* any interest in the poet's fortune; but in a letter to his friend Socrates, Petrarch gives us to understand that he thought the Pope's professions were merely verbal. He says: "To hold out treasures to a man who demands a small sum is but a polite mode of refusal." In fact, the Pope offered him *some* bishopric, knowing that he wanted only *some* benefice that should be a sinecure.

If it be asked what determined him now to leave Avignon, the counter-question may be put, what detained him so long from Italy? It appears that he had never parted with his house and garden at Parma; he hated everything in Avignon excepting Laura; and of the solitude of Vaucluse he was, in all probability, already weary.

Before he left Avignon, he went to take leave of Laura. He found her at an assembly which she often frequented. "She was seated," he says, "among those ladies who are generally her companions, and appeared like a beautiful rose surrounded with flowers smaller and less blooming." Her air was more touching than usual. She was dressed perfectly plain, and without pearls or garlands, or any gay colour. Though she was not melancholy, she did not appear to have her wonted cheerfulness, but was serious and thoughtful. She did not sing, as usual, nor speak with that voice which used to charm every one. She had the air of a person who fears an evil not yet arrived. "In taking leave of her," says Petrarch, "I sought in her looks for a consolation of my own sufferings. Her eyes had an expression which I had never seen in them before. What I saw in her face seemed to predict the sorrows that threatened me."

This was the last meeting that Petrarch and Laura ever had.

Petrarch set out for Italy, towards the close of 1347, having determined to make that country his residence for the rest of his life.

Upon his arrival at Genoa he wrote to Rienzo, reproaching him for his follies, and exhorting him to return to his former manly conduct. This advice, it is scarcely necessary to say, was like dew and sunshine bestowed upon barren sands.

From Genoa he proceeded to Parma, where he received the first information of the catastrophe of the Colonna family, six of whom had fallen in battle with Rienzo's forces. He showed himself deeply affected by it, and, probably, was so sincerely. But the Colonnas, though his former patrons, were still the enemies of a cause which he considered sacred, much as it was mismanaged and disgraced by the Tribune; and his grief cannot be supposed to have been immoderate. Accordingly, the letter which he wrote to Cardinal Colonna on this occasion is quite in the style of Seneca, and more like an ethical treatise than an epistle of condolence.

It is obvious that Petrarch slowly and reluctantly parted with his good opinion of Rienzo. But, whatever sentiments he might have cherished respecting him, he was now doomed to hear of his tragic fall.

The revolution which overthrew the Tribune was accomplished on the 15th of December, 1347. That his fall was, in a considerable degree, owing to his faults, is undeniable; and to the most contemptible of all faults—personal vanity. How hard it is on the great mass of mankind, that this meanness is so seldom disjoined from the zeal of popular championship! New power, like new wine, seems to intoxicate the strongest heads. How disgusting it is to see the restorer of Roman liberty dazzled like a child by a scarlet robe and its golden trimming! Nevertheless, with all his vanity, Rienzo was a better friend to the republic than those who dethroned him. The Romans would have been wise to have supported Rienzo, taking even his foibles into the account. They re-admitted their oligarchs; and, if they repented of it, as they did, they are scarcely entitled to our commiseration.

Petrarch had set out late in 1347 to visit Italy for the fifth time. He arrived at Genoa towards the end of November, 1347, on his way to Florence, where he was eagerly expected by his friends. They had obtained from the Government permission for his return; and he was absolved from the sentence of banishment in which he had been included with his father. But, whether Petrarch was offended with the Florentines for refusing to restore his paternal estate, or whether he was detained by accident in Lombardy, he put off his expedition to Florence and repaired to Parma. It was there that he learned the certainty of the Tribune's fall.

From Parma he went to Verona, where he arrived on the evening of the 25th of January, 1348. His son, we have already mentioned, was placed at Verona, under the tuition of Rinaldo di Villa Franca. Here, soon after his arrival, as he was sitting among his books, Petrarch felt the shock of a tremendous earthquake. It seemed as if the whole city was to be overturned from its foundations. He rushed immediately into the streets, where the inhabitants were gathered together in consternation; and, whilst terror was depicted in every countenance, there was a general cry that the end of the world was come. All contemporary historians mention this earthquake, and agree that it originated at the foot of the Alps. It made sad ravages at Pisa, Bologna, Padua, and Venice, and still more in the Frioul and Bavaria. If we may trust the narrators of this event, sixty villages in one canton were buried under two mountains that fell and filled up a valley five leagues in length. A whole castle, it is added, was exploded out of the earth from its foundation, and its ruins scattered many miles from the spot. The latter anecdote has undoubtedly an air of the marvellous; and yet the convulsions of nature have produced equally strange effects. Stones have been thrown out of Mount Ætna to the distance of eighteen miles.

The earthquake was the forerunner of awful calamities; and it is possible that it might be physically connected with that memo[Pg lxviii]rable plague in 1348, which reached, in succession, all parts of the known world, and thinned the population of every country which it visited. Historians generally agree that this great plague began in China and Tartary, whence, in the space of a year, it spread its desolation over the whole of Asia. It extended itself over Italy early in 1348; but its severest ravages had not yet been made, when Petrarch returned from Verona to Parma in the month of March,

1348. He brought with him his son John, whom he had withdrawn from the school of Rinaldo di Villa Franca, and placed under Gilberto di Parma, a good grammarian. His motive for this change of tutorship probably was, that he reckoned on Parma being henceforward his own principal place of residence, and his wish to have his son beside him.

Petrarch had scarcely arrived at Parma when he received a letter from Luchino Visconti, who had lately received the lordship of that city. Hearing of Petrarch's arrival there, the Prince, being at Milan, wrote to the poet, requesting some orange plants from his garden, together with a copy of verses. Petrarch sent him both, accompanied with a letter, in which he praises Luchino for his encouragement of learning and his cultivation of the Muses.

The plague was now increasing in Italy; and, after it had deprived Petrarch of many dear friends, it struck at the root of all his affections by attacking Laura. He describes his apprehensions on this occasion in several of his sonnets. The event confirmed his melancholy presages; for a letter from his friend Socrates informed him that Laura had died of the plague on the 1st of April, 1348. His biographers may well be believed, when they tell us that his grief was extreme. Laura's husband took the event more quietly, and consoled himself by marrying again, when only seven months a widower.

Petrarch, when informed of her death, wrote that marginal note upon his copy of Virgil, the authenticity of which has been so often, though unjustly, called in question. His words were the following:—

"Laura, illustrious for her virtues, and for a long time celebrated in my verses, for the first time appeared to my eyes on the 6th of April, 1327, in the church of St. Clara, at the first hour of the day. I was then in my youth. In the same city, and at the same hour, in the year 1348, this luminary disappeared from our world. I was then at Verona, ignorant of my wretched situation. Her chaste and beautiful body was buried the same day, after vespers, in the church of the Cordeliers. Her soul returned to its native mansion in heaven. I have written this with a pleasure mixed with bitterness, to retrace the melancholy remembrance of 'my great loss.' This loss convinces me that I have nothing now left worth living for, since the strongest cord of my life is broken. By the grace of God, I shall easily renounce a world where my hopes have been vain and perishing. It is time for me to fly from Babylon when the knot that bound me to it is untied."

This copy of Virgil is famous, also, for a miniature picture expressing the subject of the Æneid; which, by the common consent of connoisseurs in painting, is the work of Simone Memmi. Mention has already been made of the friendly terms that subsisted between that painter and our poet; whence it may be concluded that Petrarch, who received this precious MS. in 1338, requested of Simone this mark of his friendship, to render it more valuable.

When the library of Pavia, together with the city, was plundered by the French in 1499, and when many MSS. were carried away to the library of Paris, a certain inhabitant of Pavia had the address to snatch this copy of Virgil from the general rapine. This individual was, probably, Antonio di Pirro, in whose hands or house the Virgil continued till the beginning of the sixteenth century, as Vellutello attests in his article on the origin of Laura. From him it passed to Antonio Agostino; afterwards to Fulvio Orsino, who prized it very dearly. At Orsino's death it was bought at a high price by Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, and placed in the Ambrosian library, which had been founded by him with much care and at vast expense.

Until the year 1795, this copy of Virgil was celebrated only on account of the memorandum already quoted, and a few short marginal notes, written for illustrations of the text; but, a part of the same leaf having been torn and detached from the cover, the librarians, by chance, perceived some written characters. Curiosity urged them to unglue it with the greatest care; but the parchment was so conglutinated with the board that the letters left their impression on the latter so palely and weakly, that the librarians had great difficulty in making out the following notice, written by Petrarch himself: "Liber hic furto mihi subreptus fuerat, anno domini mcccxxvi., in Kalend. Novembr., ac deinde restitutus, anno mcccxxxvii., die xvii. Aprilis, apud Aivin^{o}."

Then follows a note by the poet himself, regarding his son: "Johannes noster, natus ad laborem et dolorem meum, et vivens gravibus atque perpetuis me curis exercuit, et acri dolore moriens vulneravit, qui cum paucos et lætos dies vidisset in vita sua, decessit in anno domini 1361, ætatis suæ xxv., die Julii x. seu ix. medio noctis inter diem veneris et sabbati. Rumor ad me pervenerat xiii^{o} mensis ad vesperam, obiit autem Mlni illo publico excidio pestis insolito, quæ urbem illam, hactenus immunem, talibus malis nunc reperit atque invasit. Rumor autem primus ambiguus 8$^{vo.}$ Augusti, eodem anno, per famulum meum Mlno redeuntem, mox certus, per famulum Dom^{ni} Theatini Roma venientem 18$^{me.}$ mensis ejusdem Mercurii, sero ad me pervenit de obitu Socratis mei amici, socii fratrisque optimi, qui obiisse dicitur Babilone seu Avenione, die mense Maii proximo. Amisi comitem ac solatium vitæ meæ. Recipe Xte Ihu, hos duos et reliquos quinque in eterna tabernacula tua."[11] He alludes to the death of other friends; but the entire note is too long to be quoted, and, in many places, is obscured by contractions which make its meaning doubtful.

The perfect accordance of these memoranda with the other writings of the poet, conjoined with historical facts, show them incontestably to have come from the hand of Petrarch.

The precious MS. of Virgil, containing the autograph of Petrarch, is no longer in Italy. Like many other relics held sacred by the Italians, it was removed by the French during the last conquest of Italy.

Among the incidents of Petrarch's life, in 1348, we ought to notice his visits to Giacomo da Carrara, whose family had supplanted the Della Scalas at Padua, and to Manfredi Pio, the Padrone of Carpi, a beautiful little city, of the Modenese territory, situated on a fine plain, on the banks of the Secchio, about four miles from Correggio. Manfredi ruled it with reputation for twenty years. Petrarch was magnificently received by the Carraras; and, within two years afterwards, they bestowed upon him the canonicate of Padua, a promotion which was followed in the same year by his appointment to the archdeaconry of Parma, of which he had been hitherto only canon.

Not long after the death of Laura, on the 3rd of July of the same year, Petrarch lost Cardinal Colonna, who had been for so many years his friend and patron. By some historians it is said that this prelate died of the plague; but Petrarch thought that he sank under grief brought on by the disasters of his family. In the space of five years the Cardinal had lost his mother and six brothers.

Petrarch still maintained an interest in the Colonna family, though that interest was against his own political principles, during the good behaviour of the Tribune. After the folly and fall of Rienzo, it is probable that our poet's attachment to his old friends of the Roman aristocracy revived. At least, he thought it decent to write, on the death of Cardinal Colonna, a letter of condolence to his father, the aged Stefano, who was now verging towards his hundredth year. Soon after this letter reached him, old Stefano fell into the grave.

The death of Cardinal Colonna was extremely felt at Avignon, where it left a great void, his house having been the rendezvous of men of letters and genius. Those who composed his court could not endure Avignon after they had lost their Mæcenas. Three of them were the particular friends of Petrarch, namely, Socrates, Luca Christine and Mainardo Accursio. Socrates, though not an Italian, was extremely embarrassed by the death of the Cardinal. He felt it difficult to live separated from Petrarch, and yet he could not determine to quit France for Italy. He wrote incessantly the most pressing letters to induce our poet to return and settle in Provence. Luca and Mainardo resolved to

[11] *Translation.*—In the twenty-fifth year of his age, after a short though happy existence, our John departed this life in the year of Christ 1361, on the 10th of July, or rather on the 9th, at the midhour between Friday and Saturday. Sent into the world to my mortification and suffering, he was to me in life the cause of deep and unceasing solicitude, and in death of poignant grief. The news reached me on the evening of the 13th of the same month that he had fallen at Milan, in the general mortality caused by that unwonted scourge which at last discovered and visited so fearfully this hitherto exempted city. On the 8th of August, the same year, a servant of mine returning from Milan brought me a rumour (which on the 18th of the same fatal month was confirmed by a servant of *Dominus Theatinus*) of the death of my Socrates, my companion, my best of brothers, at Babylon (Avignon, I mean) in the month of May. I have lost my comrade and the solace of my life! Receive, Christ Jesus, these two, and the five that remain, into thy eternal habitations!

go and seek out Petrarch in Italy, in order to settle with him the place on which they should fix for their common residence, and where they should spend the rest of their lives in his society. They set out from Avignon in the month of March, 1349, and arrived at Parma, but did not find the poet, as he was gone on an excursion to Padua and Verona. They passed a day in his house to rest themselves, and, when they went away, left a letter in his library, telling him they had crossed the Alps to come and see him, but that, having missed him, as soon as they had finished an excursion which they meant to make, they would return and settle with him the means of their living together. Petrarch, on his return to Parma, wrote several interesting letters to Mainardo. In one of them he says, "I was much grieved that I had lost the pleasure of your company, and that of our worthy friend, Luca Christino. However, I am not without the consoling hope that my absence may be the means of hastening your return. As to your apprehensions about my returning to Vaucluse, I cannot deny that, at the entreaties of Socrates, I should return, provided I could procure an establishment in Provence, which would afford me an honourable pretence for residing there, and, at the same time, enable me to receive my friends with hospitality; but at present circumstances are changed. The Cardinal Colonna is dead, and my friends are all dispersed, excepting Socrates, who continues inviolably attached to Avignon.

"As to Vaucluse, I well know the beauties of that charming valley, and ten years' residence is a proof of my affection for the place. I have shown my love of it by the house which I built there. There I began my Africa, there I wrote the greater part of my epistles in prose and verse, and there I nearly finished all my eclogues. I never had so much leisure, nor felt so much enthusiasm, in any other spot. At Vaucluse I conceived the first idea of giving an epitome of the Lives of Illustrious Men, and there I wrote my Treatise on a Solitary Life, as well as that on religious retirement. It was there, also, that I sought to moderate my passion for Laura, which, alas, solitude only cherished. In short, this lonely valley will for ever be pleasing to my recollections. There is, nevertheless, a sad change, produced by time. Both the Cardinal and everything that is dear to me have perished. The veil which covered my eyes is at length removed. I can now perceive the difference between Vaucluse and the rich mountains and vales and flourishing cities of Italy. And yet, forgive me, so strong are the prepossessions of youth, that I must confess I pine for Vaucluse, even whilst I acknowledge its inferiority to Italy."

Whilst Petrarch was thus flattering his imagination with hopes that were never to be realized, his two friends, who had proceeded to cross the Apennines, came to an untimely fate. On the 5th of June, 1349, a servant, whom Petrarch had sent to inquire about some alarming accounts of the travellers that had gone abroad, returned sooner than he was expected, and showed by his face that he brought no pleasant tidings. Petrarch was writing—the pen fell from his hand. "What news do you bring?" "Very bad news! Your two friends, in crossing the Apennines, were attacked by robbers." "O God! what has happened to them?" The messenger replied, "Mainardo, who was behind his companions, was surrounded and murdered. Luca, hearing of his fate, came back sword in hand. He fought alone against ten, and he wounded some of the assailants, but at last he received many wounds, of which he lies almost dead. The robbers fled with their booty. The peasants assembled, and pursued, and would have captured them, if some gentlemen, unworthy of being called so, had not stopped the pursuit, and received the villains into their castles. Luca was seen among the rocks, but no one knows what is become of him." Petrarch, in the deepest agitation, despatched fleet couriers to Placenza, to Florence, and to Rome, to obtain intelligence about Luca.

These ruffians, who came from Florence, were protected by the Ubaldini, one of the most powerful and ancient families in Tuscany. As the murder was perpetrated within the territory of Florence, Petrarch wrote indignantly to the magistrates and people of that State, intreating them to avenge an outrage on their fellow citizens. Luca, it appears, expired of his wounds.

Petrarch's letter had its full effect. The Florentine commonwealth despatched soldiers, both horse and foot, against the Ubaldini and their banditti, and decreed that every year an expedition should be sent out against them till they should be routed out of their Alpine caverns. The Florentine troops directed their march to Monte Gemmoli, an almost impregnable rock, which they blockaded

and besieged. The banditti issued forth from their strongholds, and skirmished with overmuch confidence in their vantage ground. At this crisis, the Florentine cavalry, having[Pg lxxiii] ascended the hill, dismounted from their horses, pushed forward on the banditti before they could retreat into their fortress, and drove them, sword in hand, within its inmost circle. The Florentines thus possessed themselves of Monte Gemmoli, and, in like manner, of several other strongholds. There were others which they could not take by storm, but they laid waste the plains and cities which supplied the robbers with provisions; and, after having done great damage to the Ubaldini, they returned safe and sound to Florence.

While Petrarch was at Mantua, in February, 1350, the Cardinal Guy of Boulogne, legate of the holy see, arrived there after a papal mission to Hungary. Petrarch was much attached to him. The Cardinal and several eminent persons who attended him had frequent conversations with our poet, in which they described to him the state of Germany and the situation of the Emperor.

Clement VI., who had reason to be satisfied with the submissiveness of this Prince, wished to attract him into Italy, where he hoped to oppose him to the Visconti, who had put themselves at the head of the Ghibeline party, and gave much annoyance to the Guelphs. His Holiness strongly solicited him to come; but Charles's situation would not permit him for the present to undertake such an expedition. There were still some troubles in Germany that remained to be appeased; besides, the Prince's purse was exhausted by the largesses which he had paid for his election, and his poverty was extreme.

It must be owned that a prince in such circumstances could hardly be expected to set out for the subjugation of Italy. Petrarch, however, took a romantic view of the Emperor's duties, and thought that the restoration of the Roman empire was within Charles's grasp. Our poet never lost sight of his favourite chimera, the re-establishment of Rome in her ancient dominion. It was what he called one of his principles, that Rome had a right to govern the world. Wild as this vision was, he had seen Rienzo attempt its realization; and, if the Tribune had been more prudent, there is no saying how nearly he might have approached to the achievement of so marvellous an issue. But Rienzo was fallen irrecoverably, and Petrarch now desired as ardently to see the Emperor in Italy, as ever he had sighed for the success of the Tribune. He wrote to the Emperor a long letter from Padua, a few days after the departure of the Cardinal.

"I am agitated," he says, "in sending this epistle, when I think from whom it comes, and to whom it is addressed. Placed as I am, in obscurity, I am dazzled by the splendour of your name; but love has banished fear: this letter will at least make known to you my fidelity, and my zeal. Read it, I conjure you! You will not find in it the insipid adulation which is the plague of monarchs. Flattery is an art unknown to me. I have to offer you only complaints and regrets. You have forgotten us. I say more—you have forgotten yourself in neglecting Italy. We had high hopes that Heaven had sent you to restore us our liberty; but it seems that you refuse this mission, and, whilst the time should be spent in acting, you lose it in deliberating.

"You see, Cæsar, with what confidence an obscure man addresses you, a man who has not even the advantage of being known to you. But, far from being offended with the liberty I take, you ought rather to thank your own character, which inspires me with such confidence. To return to my subject —wherefore do you lose time in consultation? To all appearance, you are sure of the future, if you will avail yourself of the present. You cannot be ignorant that the success of great affairs often hangs upon an instant, and that a day has been frequently sufficient to consummate what it required ages to undo. Believe me, your glory and the safety of the commonwealth, your own interests, as well as ours, require that there be no delay. You are still young, but time is flying; and old age will come and take you by surprise when you are at least expecting it. Are you afraid of too soon commencing an enterprise for which a long life would scarcely suffice?

"The Roman empire, shaken by a thousand storms, and as often deceived by fallacious calms, places at last its whole hopes in you. It recovers a little breath even under the shelter of your name;

but hope alone will not support it. In proportion as you know the grandeur of the undertaking, consummate it the sooner. Let not the love of your Transalpine dominions detain you longer. In beholding Germany, think of Italy. If the one has given you birth, the other has given you greatness. If you are king of the one, you are king and emperor of the other. Let me say, without meaning offence to other nations, that here is the head of your monarchy. Everywhere else you will find only its members. What a glorious project to unite those members to their head!

"I am aware that you dislike all innovation; but what I propose would be no innovation on your part. Italy is as well known to you as Germany. Brought hither in your youth by your illustrious sire, he made you acquainted with our cities and our manners, and taught you here the first lessons of war. In the bloom of your youth, you have obtained great victories. Can you fear at present to enter a country where you have triumphed since your childhood?

"By the singular favour of Heaven we have regained the ancient right of being governed by a prince of our own nation.[12] Let Germany say what she will, Italy is veritably your country * * * * * Come with haste to restore peace to Italy. Behold Rome, once the empress of the world, now pale, with scattered locks and torn garments, at your feet, imploring your presence and support!" Then follows a dissertation on the history and heroes of Rome, which might be wearisome if transcribed to a modern reader. But the epistle, upon the whole, is manly and eloquent.

A few days after despatching his letter to the Emperor, Petrarch made a journey to Verona to see his friends. There he wrote to Socrates. In this letter, after enumerating the few friends whom the plague had spared, he confesses that he could not flatter himself with the hope of being able to join them in Provence. He therefore invokes them to come to Italy, and to settle either at Parma or at Padua, or any other place that would suit them. His remaining friends, here enumerated, were only Barbato of Sulmona, Francesco Rinucci, John Boccaccio, Lælius, Guido Settimo, and Socrates.

Petrarch had returned to Padua, there to rejoin the Cardinal of Boulogne. The Cardinal came back thither at the end of April, 1350, and, after dispensing his blessings, spiritual and temporal, set out for Avignon, travelling by way of Milan and Genoa. Petrarch accompanied the prelate out of personal attachment on a part of his journey. The Cardinal was fond of his conversation, but sometimes rallied the poet on his enthusiasm for his native Italy. When they reached the territory of Verona, near the lake of Guarda, they were struck by the beauty of the prospect, and stopped to contemplate it. In the distance were the Alps, topped with snow even in summer. Beneath was the lake of Guarda, with its flux and reflux, like the sea, and around them were the rich hills and fertile valleys. "It must be confessed," said the Legate to Petrarch, "that your country is more beautiful than ours." The face of Petrarch brightened up. "But you must agree," continued the Cardinal, perhaps to moderate the poet's exultation, "that ours is more tranquil." "That is true," replied Petrarch, "but we can obtain tranquillity whenever we choose to come to our senses, and desire peace, whereas you cannot procure those beauties which nature has lavished *on us*."

Petrarch here took leave of the Cardinal, and set out for Parma. Taking Mantua in his way, he set out from thence in the evening, in order to sleep at Luzora, five leagues from the Po. The lords of that city had sent a courier to Mantua, desiring that he would honour them with his presence at supper. The melting snows and the overflowing river had made the roads nearly impassable; but he reached the place in time to avail himself of the invitation. His hosts gave him a magnificent reception. The supper was exquisite, the dishes rare, the wines delicious, and the company full of gaiety. But a small matter, however, will spoil the finest feast. The supper was served up in a damp, low hall, and all sorts of insects annoyed the convivials. To crown their misfortune an army of frogs, attracted, no doubt, by the odour of the meats, crowded and croaked about them, till they were obliged to leave their unfinished supper.

[12] Petrarch's words are: "civi servare suo;" but he takes the liberty of considering Charles as—adoptively—Italian, though that Prince was born at Prague.

Petrarch returned next day for Parma. We find, from the original fragments of his poems, brought to light by Ubaldini, that he was occupied in retouching them during the summer which he passed at Parma, waiting for the termination of the excessive heats, to go to Rome and attend the jubilee. With a view to make the journey pleasanter, he invited Guglielmo di Pastrengo to accompany him, in a letter written in Latin verse. Nothing would have delighted Guglielmo more than a journey to Rome with Petrarch; but he was settled at Verona, and could not absent himself from his family.

In lieu of Pastrengo, Petrarch found a respectable old abbot, and several others who were capable of being agreeable, and from their experience, useful companions to him on the road. In the middle of October, 1350, they departed from Florence for Rome, to attend the jubilee. On his way between Bolsena and Viterbo, he met with an accident which threatened dangerous consequences, and which he relates in a letter to Boccaccio.

"On the 15th of October," he says, "we left Bolsena, a little town scarcely known at present; but interesting from having been anciently one of the principal places in Etruria. Occupied with the hopes of seeing Rome in five days, I reflected on the changes in our modes of thinking which are made by the course of years. Fourteen years ago I repaired to the great city from sheer curiosity to see its wonders. The second time I came was to receive the laurel. My third and fourth journey had no object but to render services to my persecuted friends. My present visit ought to be more happy, since its only object is my eternal salvation." It appears, however, that the horses of the travellers had no such devotional feelings; "for," he continues, "whilst my mind was full of these thoughts, the horse of the old abbot, which was walking upon my left, kicking at my horse, struck me upon the leg, just below the knee. The blow was so violent that it sounded as if a bone was broken. My attendants came up. I felt an acute pain, which made me, at first, desirous of stopping; but, fearing the dangerousness of the place, I made a virtue of necessity, and went on to Viterbo, where we arrived very late on the 16th of October. Three days afterwards they dragged me to Rome with much trouble. As soon as I arrived at Rome, I called for doctors, who found the bone laid bare. It was not, however, thought to be broken; though the shoe of the horse had left its impression."

However impatient Petrarch might be to look once more on the beauties of Rome, and to join in the jubilee, he was obliged to keep his bed for many days.

The concourse of pilgrims to this jubilee was immense. One[Pg lxxvii] can scarcely credit the common account that there were about a million pilgrims at one time assembled in the great city. "We do not perceive," says Petrarch, "that the plague has depopulated the world." And, indeed, if this computation of the congregated pilgrims approaches the truth, we cannot but suspect that the alleged depopulation of Europe, already mentioned, must have been exaggerated. "The crowds," he continues, "diminished a little during summer and the gathering-in of the harvest; but recommenced towards the end of the year. The great nobles and ladies from beyond the Alps came the last."

Many of the female pilgrims arrived by way of the marshes of Ancona, where Bernardino di Roberto, Lord of Ravenna, waited for them, and scandal whispered that his assiduities and those of his suite were but too successful in seducing them. A contemporary author, in allusion to the circumstance, remarks that journeys and indulgences are not good for young persons, and that the fair ones had better have remained at home, since the vessel that stays in port is never shipwrecked.

The strangers, who came from all countries, were for the most part unacquainted with the Italian language, and were obliged to employ interpreters in making their confession, for the sake of obtaining absolution. It was found that many of the pretended interpreters were either imperfectly acquainted with the language of the foreigners, or were knaves in collusion with the priestly confessors, who made the poor pilgrims confess whatever they chose, and pay for their sins accordingly. A better subject for a scene in comedy could scarcely be imagined. But, to remedy this abuse, penitentiaries were established at Rome, in which the confessors understood foreign languages.

The number of days fixed for the Roman pilgrims to visit the churches was thirty; and fifteen or ten for the Italians and other strangers, according to the distance of the places from which they came.

Petrarch says that it is inconceivable how the city of Rome, whose adjacent fields were untilled, and whose vineyards had been frozen the year before, could for twelve months support such a confluence of people. He extols the hospitality of the citizens, and the abundance of food which prevailed; but Villani and others give us more disagreeable accounts—namely, that the Roman citizens became hotel-keepers, and charged exorbitantly for lodgings, and for whatever they sold. Numbers of pilgrims were thus necessitated to live poorly; and this, added to their fatigue and the heats of summer, produced a great mortality.

As soon as Petrarch, relieved by surgical skill from the wound in his leg, was allowed to go out, he visited all the churches.

After having performed his duties at the jubilee, Petrarch returned to Padua, taking the road by Arezzo, the town which had the honour of his birth. Leonardo Aretino says that his fellow-[Pg lxxviii]townsmen crowded around him with delight, and received him with such honours as could have been paid only to a king.

In the same month of December, 1350, he discovered a treasure which made him happier than a king. Perhaps a royal head might not have equally valued it. It was a copy of Quintilian's work "De Institutione Oratoria," which, till then, had escaped all his researches. On the very day of the discovery he wrote a letter to Quintilian, according to his fantastic custom of epistolizing the ancients. Some days afterwards, he left Arezzo to pursue his journey. The principal persons of the town took leave of him publicly at his departure, after pointing out to him the house in which he was born. "It was a small house," says Petrarch, "befitting an exile, as my father was." They told him that the proprietors would have made some alterations in it; but the town had interposed and prevented them, determined that the place should remain the same as when it was first consecrated by his birth. The poet related what had been mentioned to a young man who wrote to him expressly to ask whether Arezzo could really boast of being his birthplace. Petrarch added, that Arezzo had done more for him as a stranger than Florence as a citizen. In truth, his family was of Florence; and it was only by accident that he was born at Arezzo. He then went to Florence, where he made but a short stay. There he found his friends still alarmed about the accident which had befallen him in his journey to Rome, the news of which he had communicated to Boccaccio.

Petrarch went on to Padua. On approaching it, he perceived a universal mourning. He soon learned the foul catastrophe which had deprived the city of one of its best masters.

Jacopo di Carrara had received into his house his cousin Guglielmo. Though the latter was known to be an evil-disposed person, he was treated with kindness by Jacopo, and ate at his table. On the 21st of December, whilst Jacopo was sitting at supper, in the midst of his friends, his people and his guards, the monster Guglielmo plunged a dagger into his breast with such celerity, that even those who were nearest could not ward off the blow. Horror-struck, they lifted him up, whilst others put the assassin to instant death.

The fate of Jacopo Carrara gave Petrarch a dislike for Padua, and his recollections of Vaucluse bent his unsettled mind to return to its solitude; but he tarried at Padua during the winter. Here he spent a great deal of his time with Ildebrando Conti, bishop of that city, a man of rank and merit. One day, as he was dining at the Bishop's palace, two Carthusian monks were announced: they were well received by the Bishop, as he was partial to their order. He asked them what brought them to Padua. "We are going," they said, "to Treviso, by the direction of our general, there to remain and establish a monastery." Ildebrando asked if they knew Father Gherardo, Petrarch's brother. The two monks, who did not know the poet, gave the most pleasing accounts of his brother.

The plague, they said, having got into the convent of Montrieux, the prior, a pious but timorous man, told his monks that flight was the only course which they could take: Gherardo answered with courage, "Go whither you please! As for myself I will remain in the situation in which Heaven has placed me." The prior fled to his own country, where death soon overtook him. Gherardo remained in the convent, where the plague spared him, and left him alone, after having destroyed, within a few

days, thirty-four of the brethren who had continued with him. He paid them every service, received their last sighs, and buried them when death had taken off those to whom that office belonged. With only a dog left for his companion, Gherardo watched at night to guard the house, and took his repose by day. When the summer was over, he went to a neighbouring monastery of the Carthusians, who enabled him to restore his convent.

While the Carthusians were making this honourable mention of Father Gherardo, the prelate cast his eyes from time to time upon Petrarch. "I know not," says the poet, "whether my eyes were filled with tears, but my heart was tenderly touched." The Carthusians, at last discovering who Petrarch was, saluted him with congratulations. Petrarch gives an account of this interview in a letter to his brother himself.

Padua was too near to Venice for Petrarch not to visit now and then that city which he called the wonder of the world. He there made acquaintance with Andrea Dandolo, who was made Doge in 1343, though he was only thirty-six years of age, an extraordinary elevation for so young a man; but he possessed extraordinary merit. His mind was cultivated; he loved literature, and easily became, as far as mutual demonstrations went, the personal friend of Petrarch; though the Doge, as we shall see, excluded this personal friendship from all influence on his political conduct.

The commerce of the Venetians made great progress under the Dogeship of Andrea Dandolo. It was then that they began to trade with Egypt and Syria, whence they brought silk, pearls, the spices, and other products of the East. This prosperity excited the jealousy of the Genoese, as it interfered with a commerce which they had hitherto monopolized. When the Venetians had been chased from Constantinople by the Emperor Michael Paleologus, they retained several fortresses in the Black Sea, which enabled them to continue their trade with the Tartars in that sea, and to frequent the fair of Tana. The Genoese, who were masters of Pera, a suburb of Constantinople, would willingly have joined the Greeks in expelling their Italian rivals altogether from the Black Sea; and privateering hostilities actually commenced between the two republics, which, in 1350, extended to the serious aspect of a national war.

The winter of that year was passed on both sides in preparations. The Venetians sent ambassadors to the King of Arragon, who had some differences with the Genoese about the Island of Sardinia, and to the Emperor of Constantinople, who saw with any sensation in the world but delight the flag of Genoa flying over the walls of Pera. A league between those three powers was quickly concluded, and their grand, common object was to destroy the city of Genoa.

It was impossible that these great movements of Venice should be unknown at Padua. Petrarch, ever zealous for the common good of Italy, saw with pain the kindling of a war which could not but be fatal to her, and thought it his duty to open his heart to the Doge of Venice, who had shown him so much friendship. He addressed to him, therefore, the following letter from Padua, on the 14th of March, 1351:—

"My love for my country forces me to break silence; the goodness of your character encourages me. Can I hold my peace whilst I hear the symptoms of a coming storm that menaces my beloved country? Two puissant people are flying to arms; two flourishing cities are agitated by the approach of war. These cities are placed by nature like the two eyes of Italy; the one in the south and west, and the other in the east and north, to dominate over the two seas that surround them; so that, even after the destruction of the Roman empire, this beautiful country was still regarded as the queen of the world. I know that proud nations denied her the empire of the land, but who dared ever to dispute with her the empire of the sea?

"I shudder to think of our prospects. If Venice and Genoa turn their victorious arms against each other, it is all over with us; we lose our glory and the command of the sea. In this calamity we shall have a consolation which we have ever had, namely, that if our enemies rejoice in our calamities, they cannot at least derive any glory from them.

"In great affairs I have always dreaded the counsels of the young. Youthful ignorance and inexperience have been the ruin of many empires. I, therefore, learn with pleasure that you have named a council of elders, to whom you have confided this affair. I expected no less than this from your wisdom, which is far beyond your years.

"The state of your republic distresses me. I know the difference that there is between the tumult of arms and the tranquillity of Parnassus. I know that the sounds of Apollo's lyre accord but ill with the trumpets of Mars; but if you have abandoned Parnassus, it has been only to fulfil the duties of a good citizen and of a vigilant chief. I am persuaded, at the same time, that in the midst of arms you think of peace; that you would regard it as a triumph for yourself, and the greatest blessing you could procure for your country. Did not Hannibal himself say that a sure peace was more valuable than a hoped-for victory! If truth has extorted this confession from the most warlike man that ever lived, is it not plain that a pacific man ought to prefer peace even to a certain victory? Who does not know that peace is the greatest of blessings, and that war is the source of all evils?

"Do not deceive yourself; you have to deal with a keen people who know not what it is to be conquered. Would it not be better to transfer the war to Damascus, to Susa, or to Memphis? Think besides, that those whom you are going to attack are your brothers. At Thebes, of old, two brothers fought to their mutual destruction. Must Italy renew, in our days, so atrocious a spectacle?

"Let us examine what may be the results of this war. Whether you are conqueror or are conquered, one of the eyes of Italy will necessarily be blinded, and the other much weakened; for it would be folly to flatter yourself with the hopes of conquering so strong an enemy without much effusion of blood.

"Brave men, powerful people! (I speak here to both of you) what is your object—to what do you aspire? What will be the end of your dissensions? It is not the blood of the Carthaginians or the Numantians that you are about to spill, but it is Italian blood; the blood of a people who would be the first to start up and offer to expend their blood, if any barbarous nation were to attempt a new irruption among us. In that event, their bodies would be the bucklers and ramparts of our common country; they would live, or they would die with us. Ought the pleasure of avenging a slight offence to carry more weight with you than the public good and your own safety? Let revenge be the delight of women. Is it not more glorious for men to forget an injury than to avenge it? to pardon an enemy than to destroy him?

"If my feeble voice could make itself heard among those grave men who compose your council, I am persuaded that you would not only *not* reject the peace which is offered to you, but go to meet and embrace it closely, so that it might not escape you. Consult your wise old men who love the republic; they will speak the same language to you that I do.

"You, my lord, who are at the head of the council, and who govern your republic, ought to recollect that the glory or the shame of these events will fall principally on you. Raise yourself above yourself; look into, examine everything with attention. Compare the success of the war with the evils which it brings in its train. Weigh in a balance the good effects and the evil, and you will say with Hannibal, that an hour is sufficient to destroy the work of many years.[Pg lxxxii]

"The renown of your country is more ancient than is generally believed. Several ages before the city of Venice was built, I find not only the name of the Venetians famous, but also that of one of their dukes. Would you submit to the caprices of fortune a glory acquired for so long a time, and at so great a cost? You will render a great service to your republic, if, preferring her safety to her glory, you give her incensed and insane populace prudent and useful counsels, instead of offering them brilliant and specious projects. The wise say that we cannot purchase a virtue more precious than what is bought at the expense of glory. If you adopt this axiom, your character will be handed down to posterity, like that of the Duke of the Venetians, to whom I have alluded. All the world will admire and love you.

"To conceal nothing from you, I confess that I have heard with grief of your league with the King of Arragon. What! shall Italians go and implore succour of barbarous kings to destroy Italians?

You will say, perhaps, that your enemies have set you the example. My answer is, that they are equally culpable. According to report, Venice, in order to satiate her rage, calls to her aid tyrants of the west; whilst Genoa brings in those of the east. This is the source of our calamities. Carried away by the admiration of strange things, despising, I know not why, the good things which we find in our own climate, we sacrifice sound Italian faith to barbarian perfidy. Madmen that we are, we seek among venal souls that which we could find among our own brethren.

"Nature has given us for barriers the Alps and the two seas. Avarice, envy, and pride, have opened these natural defences to the Cimbri, the Huns, the Goths, the Gauls, and the Spaniards. How often have we recited the words of Virgil:—

> "'Impius hæc tam culta novalia miles habebit,
> Barbarus has segetes.'

"Athens and Lacedemon had between them a species of rivalship similar to yours: but their forces were not by any means so nearly balanced. Lacedemon had an advantage over Athens, which put it in the power of the former to destroy her rival, if she had wished it; but she replied, 'God forbid that I should pull out one of the eyes of Greece!' If this beautiful sentiment came from a people whom Plato reproaches with their avidity for conquest and dominion, what still softer reply ought we not to expect from the most modest of nations!

"Amidst the movements which agitate you, it is impossible for me to be tranquil. When I see one party cutting down trees to construct vessels, and others sharpening their swords and darts, I should think myself guilty if I did not seize my pen, which is my only weapon, to counsel peace. I am aware with what circumspection we ought to speak to our superiors; but the love of[Pg lxxxiii] our country has no superior. If it should carry me beyond bounds, it will serve as my excuse before you, and oblige you to pardon me.

"Throwing myself at the feet of the chiefs of two nations who are going to war, I say to them, with tears in my eyes, 'Throw away your arms; give one another the embrace of peace! unite your hearts and your colours. By this means the ocean and the Euxine shall be open to you. Your ships will arrive in safety at Taprobane, at the Fortunate Isles, at Thule, and even at the poles. The kings and their people will meet you with respect; the Indian, the Englishman, the Æthiopian, will dread you. May peace reign among you, and may you have nothing to fear!' Adieu! greatest of dukes, and best of men!"

This letter produced no effect. Andrea Dandolo, in his answer to it, alleges the thousand and one affronts and outrages which Venice had suffered from Genoa. At the same time he pays a high compliment to the eloquence of Petrarch's epistle, and says that it is a production which could emanate only from a mind inspired by the divine Spirit.

During the spring of this year, 1351, Petrarch put his last finish to a canzone, on the subject still nearest to his heart, the death of his Laura, and to a sonnet on the same subject. In April, his attention was recalled from visionary things by the arrival of Boccaccio, who was sent by the republic of Florence to announce to him the recall of his family to their native land, and the restoration of his family fortune, as well as to invite him to the home of his ancestors, in the name of the Florentine republic. The invitation was conveyed in a long and flattering letter; but it appeared, from the very contents of this epistle, that the Florentines wished our poet's acceptance of their offer to be as advantageous to themselves as to him. They were establishing a University, and they wished to put Petrarch at the head of it. Petrarch replied in a letter apparently full of gratitude and satisfaction, but in which he by no means pledged himself to be the gymnasiarch of their new college; and, agreeably to his original intention, he set out from Padua on the 3rd of May, 1351, for Provence.

Petrarch took the road to Vicenza, where he arrived at sunset. He hesitated whether he should stop there, or take advantage of the remainder of the day and go farther. But, meeting with some

interesting persons whose conversation beguiled him, night came on before he was aware how late it was. Their conversation, in the course of the evening, ran upon Cicero. Many were the eulogies passed on the great old Roman; but Petrarch, after having lauded his divine genius and eloquence, said something about his inconsistency. Every one was astonished at our poet's boldness, but particularly a man, venerable for his age and knowledge, who was an idolater of Cicero. Petrarch argued[Pg lxxxiv] pretty freely against the political character of the ancient orator. The same opinion as to Cicero's weakness seems rather to have gained ground in later ages. At least, it is now agreed that Cicero's political life will not bear throughout an uncharitable investigation, though the political difficulties of his time demand abundant allowance.

Petrarch departed next morning for Verona, where he reckoned on remaining only for a few days; but it was impossible for him to resist the importunities of Azzo Correggio, Guglielmo di Pastrengo, and his other friends. By them he was detained during the remainder of the month. "The requests of a friend," he said, on this occasion, "are always chains upon me."

Petrarch arrived, for the sixth time, at Vaucluse on the 27th of June, 1351. He first announced himself to Philip of Cabassoles, Bishop of Cavaillon, to whom he had already sent, during his journey, some Latin verses, in which he speaks of Vaucluse as the most charming place in the universe. "When a child," he says, "I visited it, and it nourished my youth in its sunny bosom. When grown to manhood, I passed some of the pleasantest years of my life in the shut-up valley. Grown old, I wish to pass in it my last years."

The sight of his romantic hermitage, of the capacious grotto which had listened to his sighs for Laura, of his garden, and of his library, was, undoubtedly, sweet to Petrarch; and, though he had promised Boccaccio to come back to Italy, he had not the fortitude to determine on a sudden return. He writes to one of his Italian friends, "When I left my native country, I promised to return to it in the autumn; but time, place, and circumstances, often oblige us to change our resolutions. As far as I can judge, it will be necessary for me to remain here for two years. My friends in Italy, I trust, will pardon me if I do not keep my promise to them. The inconstancy of the human mind must serve as my excuse. I have now experienced that change of place is the only thing which can long keep from us the *ennui* that is inseparable from a sedentary life."

At the same time, whilst Vaucluse threw recollections tender, though melancholy, over Petrarch's mind, it does not appear that Avignon had assumed any new charm in his absence: on the contrary, he found it plunged more than ever in luxury, wantonness, and gluttony. Clement VI. had replenished the church, at the request of the French king, with numbers of cardinals, many of whom were so young and licentious, that the most scandalous abominations prevailed amongst them. "At this time," says Matthew Villani, "no regard was paid either to learning or virtue; and a man needed not to blush for anything, if he could cover his head with a red hat. Pietro Ruggiero, one of those exemplary new cardinals, was only eighteen years of age." Petrarch vented his indignation on this occasion in his seventh eclogue, which is a satire upon the Pontiff and his cardinals, the interlocutors being Micione, or Clement himself, and Epi, or the city of Avignon. The poem, if it can be so called, is clouded with allegory, and denaturalized with pastoral conceits; yet it is worth being explored by any one anxious to trace the first fountains of reform among Catholics, as a proof of church abuses having been exposed, two centuries before the Reformation, by a Catholic and a churchman.

At this crisis, the Court of Avignon, which, in fact, had not known very well what to do about the affairs of Rome, were now anxious to inquire what sort of government would be the most advisable, after the fall of Rienzo. Since that event, the Cardinal Legate had re-established the ancient government, having created two senators, the one from the house of Colonna, the other from that of the Orsini. But, very soon, those houses were divided by discord, and the city was plunged into all the evils which it had suffered before the existence of the Tribuneship. "The community at large," says Matthew Villani, "returned to such condition, that strangers and travellers found themselves like sheep among wolves." Clement VI. was weary of seeing the metropolis of Christianity a prey to

anarchy. He therefore chose four cardinals, whose united deliberations might appease these troubles, and he imagined that he could establish in Rome a form of government that should be durable. The cardinals requested Petrarch to give his opinion on this important affair. Petrarch wrote to them a most eloquent epistle, full of enthusiastic ideas of the grandeur of Rome. It is not exactly known what effect he produced by his writing on this subject; but on that account we are not to conclude that he wrote in vain.

Petrarch had brought to Avignon his son John, who was still very young. He had obtained for him a canonicate at Verona. Thither he immediately despatched him, with letters to Guglielmo di Pastrengo and Rinaldo di Villa Franca, charging the former of these friends to superintend his son's general character and manners, and the other to cultivate his understanding. Petrarch, in his letter to Rinaldo, gives a description of John, which is neither very flattering to the youth, nor calculated to give us a favourable opinion of his father's mode of managing his education. By his own account, it appears that he had never brought the boy to confide in him. This was a capital fault, for the young are naturally ingenuous; so that the acquisition of their confidence is the very first step towards their docility; and, for maintaining parental authority, there is no need to overawe them. "As far as I can judge of my son," says Petrarch, "he has a tolerable understanding; but I am not certain of this, for I do not sufficiently know him. When he is with me he always keeps silence; whether my presence is irksome and confusing to him, or whether shame for his ignorance closes his lips. I suspect it is the latter,[Pg lxxxvi] for I perceive too clearly his antipathy to letters. I never saw it stronger in any one; he dreads and detests nothing so much as a book; yet he was brought up at Parma, Verona, and Padua. I sometimes direct a few sharp pleasantries at this disposition. 'Take care,' I say, 'lest you should eclipse your neighbour, Virgil.' When I talk in this manner, he looks down and blushes. On this behaviour alone I build my hope. He is modest, and has a docility which renders him susceptible of every impression." This is a melancholy confession, on the part of Petrarch, of his own incompetence to make the most of his son's mind, and a confession the more convincing that it is made unconsciously.

In the summer of 1352, the people of Avignon witnessed the impressive spectacle of the far-famed Tribune Rienzo entering their city, but in a style very different from the pomp of his late processions in Rome. He had now for his attendants only two archers, between whom he walked as a prisoner. It is necessary to say a few words about the circumstances which befell Rienzo after his fall, and which brought him now to the Pope's tribunal at Avignon.

Petrarch says of him at this period, "The Tribune, formerly so powerful and dreaded, but now the most unhappy of men, has been brought hither as a prisoner. I praised and I adored him. I loved his virtue, and I admired his courage. I thought that Rome was about to resume, under him, the empire she formerly held. Ah! had he continued as he began, he would have been praised and admired by the world and by posterity. On entering the city," Petrarch continues, "he inquired if I was there. I knew not whether he hoped for succour from me, or what I could do to serve him. In the process against him they accuse him of nothing criminal. They cannot impute to him having joined with bad men. All that they charge him with is an attempt to give freedom to the republic, and to make Rome the centre of its government. And is this a crime worthy of the wheel or the gibbet? A Roman citizen afflicted to see his country, which is by right the mistress of the world, the slave of the vilest of men!"

Clement was glad to have Rienzo in his power, and ordered him into his presence. Thither the Tribune came, not in the least disconcerted. He denied the accusation of heresy, and insisted that his cause should be re-examined with more equity. The Pope made him no reply, but imprisoned him in a high tower, in which he was chained by the leg to the floor of his apartment. In other respects he was treated mildly, allowed books to read, and supplied with dishes from the Pope's kitchen.

Rienzo begged to be allowed an advocate to defend him; his request was refused. This refusal enraged Petrarch, who wrote, according to De Sade and others, on this occasion, that mysterious letter, which is found in his "Epistles without a title." It is an[Pg lxxxvii] appeal to the Romans in behalf of their Tribune. I must confess that even the authority of De Sade does not entirely eradicate

from my mind a suspicion as to the spuriousness of this inflammatory letter, from the consequences of which Petrarch could hardly have escaped with impunity.

One of the circumstances that detained Petrarch at Avignon was the illness of the Pope, which retarded his decision on several important affairs. Clement VI. was fast approaching to his end, and Petrarch had little hope of his convalescence, at least in the hands of doctors. A message from the Pope produced an imprudent letter from the poet, in which he says, "Holy father! I shudder at the account of your fever; but, believe me, I am not a flatterer. I tremble to see your bed always surrounded with physicians, who are never agreed, because it would be a reproach to the second to think like the first. 'It is not to be doubted,' as Pliny says, 'that physicians, desiring to raise a name by their discoveries, make experiments upon us, and thus barter away our lives. There is no law for punishing their extreme ignorance. They learn their trade at our expense, they make some progress in the art of curing; and they alone are permitted to murder with impunity.' Holy father! consider as your enemies the crowd of physicians who beset you. It is in our age that we behold verified the prediction of the elder Cato, who declared that corruption would be general when the Greeks should have transmitted the sciences to Rome, and, above all, the science of healing. Whole nations have done without this art. The Roman republic, according to Pliny, was without physicians for six hundred years, and was never in a more flourishing condition."

The Pope, a poor dying old man, communicated Petrarch's letter immediately to his physicians, and it kindled in the whole faculty a flame of indignation, worthy of being described by Molière. Petrarch made a general enemy of the physicians, though, of course, the weakest and the worst of them were the first to attack him. One of them told him, "You are a foolhardy man, who, contemning the physicians, have no fear either of the fever or of the malaria." Petrarch replied, "I certainly have no assurance of being free from the attacks of either; but, if I were attacked by either, I should not think of calling in physicians."

His first assailant was one of Clement's own physicians, who loaded him with scurrility in a formal letter. These circumstances brought forth our poet's "Four Books of Invectives against Physicians," a work in which he undoubtedly exposes a great deal of contemporary quackery, but which, at the same time, scarcely leaves the physician-hunter on higher ground than his antagonists.

In the last year of his life, Clement VI. wished to attach our poet permanently to his court by making him his secretary, and Petrarch, after much coy refusal, was at last induced, by the[Pg lxxxviii] solicitations of his friends, to accept the office. But before he could enter upon it, an objection to his filling it was unexpectedly started. It was discovered that his style was too lofty to suit the humility of the Roman Church. The elevation of Petrarch's style might be obvious, but certainly the humility of the Church was a bright discovery. Petrarch, according to his own account, so far from promising to bring down his magniloquence to a level with church humility, seized the objection as an excuse for declining the secretaryship. He compares his joy on this occasion to that of a prisoner finding the gates of his prison thrown open. He returned to Vaucluse, where he waited impatiently for the autumn, when he meant to return to Italy. He thus describes, in a letter to his dear Simonides, the manner of life which he there led:—

"I make war upon my body, which I regard as my enemy. My eyes, that have made me commit so many follies, are well fixed on a safe object. They look only on a woman who is withered, dark, and sunburnt. Her soul, however, is as white as her complexion is black, and she has the air of being so little conscious of her own appearance, that her homeliness may be said to become her. She passes whole days in the open fields, when the grasshoppers can scarcely endure the sun. Her tanned hide braves the heats of the dog-star, and, in the evening, she arrives as fresh as if she had just risen from bed. She does all the work of my house, besides taking care of her husband and children and attending my guests. She seems occupied with everybody but herself. At night she sleeps on vine-branches; she eats only black bread and roots, and drinks water and vinegar. If you were to give her anything more delicate, she would be the worse for it: such is the force of habit.

"Though I have still two fine suits of clothes, I never wear them. If you saw me, you would take me for a labourer or a shepherd, though I was once so tasteful in my dress. The times are changed; the eyes which I wished to please are now shut; and, perhaps, even if they were opened, they would not *now* have the same empire over me."

In another letter from Vaucluse, he says: "I rise at midnight; I go out at break of day; I study in the fields as in my library; I read, I write, I dream; I struggle against indolence, luxury, and pleasure. I wander all day among the arid mountains, the fresh valleys, and the deep caverns. I walk much on the banks of the Sorgue, where I meet no one to distract me. I recall the past. I deliberate on the future; and, in this contemplation, I find a resource against my solitude." In the same letter he avows that he could accustom himself to any habitation in the world, except Avignon. At this time he was meditating to recross the Alps.

Early in September, 1352, the Cardinal of Boulogne departed for Paris, in order to negotiate a peace between the Kings of[Pg lxxxix] France and England. Petrarch went to take his leave of him, and asked if he had any orders for Italy, for which he expected soon to set out. The Cardinal told him that he should be only a month upon his journey, and that he hoped to see him at Avignon on his return. He had, in fact, kind views with regard to Petrarch. He wished to procure for him some good establishment in France, and wrote to him upon his route, "Pray do not depart yet. Wait until I return, or, at least, until I write to you on an important affair that concerns yourself." This letter, which, by the way, evinces that our poet's circumstances were not independent of church promotion, changed the plans of Petrarch, who remained at Avignon nearly the whole of the months of September and October.

During this delay, he heard constant reports of the war that was going on between the Genoese and the Venetians. In the spring of the year 1352, their fleets met in the Propontis, and had a conflict almost unexampled, which lasted during two days and a tempestuous night. The Genoese, upon the whole, had the advantage, and, in revenge for the Greeks having aided the Venetians, they made a league with the Turks. The Pope, who had it earnestly at heart to put a stop to this fatal war, engaged the belligerents to send their ambassadors to Avignon, and there to treat for peace. The ambassadors came; but a whole month was spent in negotiations which ended in nothing. Petrarch in vain employed his eloquence, and the Pope his conciliating talents. In these circumstances, Petrarch wrote a letter to the Genoese government, which does infinite credit to his head and his heart. He used every argument that common sense or humanity could suggest to show the folly of the war, but his arguments were thrown away on spirits too fierce for reasoning.

A few days after writing this letter, as the Cardinal of Boulogne had not kept his word about returning to Avignon, and as he heard no news of him, Petrarch determined to set out for Italy. He accordingly started on the 16th of November, 1352; but scarcely had he left his own house, with all his papers, when he was overtaken by heavy falls of rain. At first he thought of going back immediately; but he changed his purpose, and proceeded as far as Cavaillon, which is two leagues from Vaucluse, in order to take leave of his friend, the Bishop of Cabassole. His good friend was very unwell, but received him with joy, and pressed him to pass the night under his roof. That night and all the next day it rained so heavily that Petrarch, more from fear of his books and papers being damaged than from anxiety about his own health, gave up his Italian journey for the present, and, returning to Vaucluse, spent there the rest of November and the whole of December, 1352.

Early in December, Petrarch heard of the death of Clement VI., and this event gave him occasion for more epistles, both against the Roman court and his enemies, the physicians. Clement's death was ascribed to different causes. Petrarch, of course, imputed it to his doctors. Villani's opinion is the most probable, that he died of a protracted fever. He was buried with great pomp in the church of Nôtre Dame at Avignon; but his remains, after some time, were removed to the abbey of Chaise Dieu, in Auvergne, where his tomb was violated by the Huguenots in 1562. Scandal says that they

made a football of his head, and that the Marquis de Courton afterwards converted his skull into a drinking-cup.

It need not surprise us that his Holiness never stood high in the good graces of Petrarch. He was a Limousin, who never loved Italy go much as Gascony, and, in place of re-establishing the holy seat at Rome, he completed the building of the papal palace at Avignon, which his predecessor had begun. These were faults that eclipsed all the good qualities of Clement VI. in the eyes of Petrarch, and, in the sixth of his eclogues, the poet has drawn the character of Clement in odious colours, and, with equal freedom, has described most of the cardinals of his court. Whether there was perfect consistency between this hatred to the Pope and his thinking, as he certainly did for a time, of becoming his secretary, may admit of a doubt. I am not, however, disposed to deny some allowance to Petrarch for his dislike of Clement, who was a voluptuary in private life, and a corrupted ruler of the Church.

Early in May, 1353, Petrarch departed for Italy, and we find him very soon afterwards at the palace of John Visconti of Milan, whom he used to call the greatest man in Italy. This prince, uniting the sacerdotal with the civil power, reigned absolute in Milan. He was master of Lombardy, and made all Italy tremble at his hostility. Yet, in spite of his despotism, John Visconti was a lover of letters, and fond of having literary men at his court. He exercised a cunning influence over our poet, and detained him. Petrarch, knowing that Milan was a troubled city and a stormy court, told the Prince that, being a priest, his vocation did not permit him to live in a princely court, and in the midst of arms. "For that matter," replied the Archbishop, "I am myself an ecclesiastic; I wish to press no employment upon you, but only to request you to remain as an ornament of my court." Petrarch, taken by surprise, had not fortitude to resist his importunities. All that he bargained for was, that he should have a habitation sufficiently distant from the city, and that he should not be obliged to make any change in his ordinary mode of living. The Archbishop was too happy to possess him on these terms.

Petrarch, accordingly, took up his habitation in the western part of the city, near the Vercellina gate, and the church of St. Ambrosio. His house was flanked with two towers, stood behind the city wall, and looked out upon a rich and beautiful country, as far as the Alps, the tops of which, although it was summer, were still covered with snow. Great was the joy of Petrarch when he found himself in a house near the church of that Saint Ambrosio, for whom he had always cherished a peculiar reverence. He himself tells us that he never entered that temple without experiencing rekindled devotion. He visited the statue of the saint, which was niched in one of the walls, and the stone figure seemed to him to breathe, such was the majesty and tranquillity of the sculpture. Near the church arose the chapel, where St. Augustin, after his victory over his refractory passions, was bathed in the sacred fountain of St. Ambrosio, and absolved from penance for his past life.

All this time, whilst Petrarch was so well pleased with his new abode, his friends were astonished, and even grieved, at his fixing himself at Milan. At Avignon, Socrates, Guido Settimo, and the Bishop of Cavaillon, said among themselves, "What! this proud republican, who breathed nothing but independence, who scorned an office in the papal court as a gilded yoke, has gone and thrown himself into the chains of the tyrant of Italy; this misanthrope, who delighted only in the silence of fields, and perpetually praised a secluded life, now inhabits the most bustling of cities!" At Florence, his friends entertained the same sentiments, and wrote to him reproachfully on the subject. "I would wish to be silent," says Boccaccio, "but I cannot hold my peace. My reverence for you would incline me to hold silence, but my indignation obliges me to speak out. How has Silvanus acted?" (Under the name of Silvanus he couches that of Petrarch, in allusion to his love of rural retirement.) "He has forgotten his dignity; he has forgotten all the language he used to hold respecting the state of Italy, his hatred of the Archbishop, and his love of liberty; and he would imprison the Muses in that court. To whom can we now give our faith, when Silvanus, who formerly pronounced the Visconti a cruel tyrant, has now bowed himself to the yoke which he once so boldly condemned? How has the Visconti obtained this truckling, which neither King Robert, nor the Pope, nor the Emperor, could ever obtain? You will say, perhaps, that you have been ill-used by your fellow-citizens, who have

withheld from you your paternal property. I disapprove not your just indignation; but Heaven forbid I should believe that, righteously and honestly, any injury, from whomsoever we may receive it, can justify our taking part against our country. It is in vain for you to allege that you have not incited him to war against our country, nor lent him either your arm or advice. How can you be happy with him, whilst you are hearing of the ruins, the conflagrations, the imprisonments, the deaths, and the rapines, that he spreads around him?"

Petrarch's answers to these and other reproaches which his friends sent to him were cold, vague, and unsatisfactory. He denied that he had sacrificed his liberty; and told Boccaccio that, after all, it was less humiliating to be subservient to a single tyrant than to be, as he, Boccaccio, was, subservient to a whole tyrannical people. This was an unwise, implied confession on the part of Petrarch that he was the slave of Visconti. Sismondi may be rather harsh in pronouncing Petrarch to have been all his life a Troubadour; but there is something in his friendship with the Lord of Milan that palliates the accusation. In spite of this severe letter from Boccaccio, it is strange, and yet, methinks, honourable to both, that their friendship was never broken.

Levati, in his "*Viaggi di Petrarca*," ascribes the poet's settlement at Milan to his desire of accumulating a little money, not for himself, but for his natural children; and in some of Petrarch's letters, subsequent to this period, there are allusions to his own circumstances which give countenance to this suspicion.

However this may be, Petrarch deceived himself if he expected to have long tranquillity in such a court as that of Milan. He was perpetually obliged to visit the Viscontis, and to be present at every feast that they gave to honour the arrival of any illustrious stranger. A more than usually important visitant soon came to Milan, in the person of Cardinal Egidio Albornoz, who arrived at the head of an army, with a view to restore to the Church large portions of its territory which had been seized by some powerful families. The Cardinal entered Milan on the 14th of September, 1353. John Visconti, though far from being delighted at his arrival, gave him an honourable reception, defrayed all the expenses of his numerous retinue, and treated him magnificently. He went out himself to meet him, two miles from the city, accompanied by his nephews and his courtiers, including Petrarch. Our poet joined the suite of Galeazzo Visconti, and rode near him. The Legate and his retinue rode also on horseback. When the two parties met, the dust, that rose in clouds from the feet of the horses, prevented them from discerning each other. Petrarch, who had advanced beyond the rest, found himself, he knew not how, in the midst of the Legate's train, and very near to him. Salutations passed on either side, but with very little speaking, for the dust had dried their throats.

Petrarch made a backward movement, to regain his place among his company. His horse, in backing, slipped with his hind-legs into a ditch on the side of the road, but, by a sort of miracle, the animal kept his fore-feet for some time on the top of the ditch. If he had fallen back, he must have crushed his rider. Petrarch was not afraid, for he was not aware of his danger; but Galeazzo Visconti and his people dismounted to rescue the poet, who escaped without injury.

The Legate treated Petrarch, who little expected it, with the utmost kindness and distinction, and, granting all that he asked for his friends, pressed him to mention something worthy of his own acceptance. Petrarch replied: "When I ask for my friends, is it not the same as for myself? Have I not the highest satisfaction in receiving favours for them? I have long put a rein on my own desires. Of what, then, can I stand in need?"

After the departure of the Legate, Petrarch retired to his *rus in urbe*. In a letter dated thence to his friend the Prior of the Holy Apostles, we find him acknowledging feelings that were far distant from settled contentment. "You have heard," he says, "how much my peace has been disturbed, and my leisure broken in upon, by an importunate crowd and by unforeseen occupations. The Legate has left Milan. He was received at Florence with unbounded applause: as for poor me, I am again in my retreat. I have been long free, happy, and master of my time; but I feel, at present, that liberty and leisure are only for souls of consummate virtue. When we are not of that class of beings, nothing

is more dangerous for a heart subject to the passions than to be free, idle, and alone. The snares of voluptuousness are *then* more dangerous, and corrupt thoughts gain an easier entrance—above all, love, that seducing tormentor, from whom I thought that I had now nothing more to fear."

From these expressions we might almost conclude that he had again fallen in love; but if it was so, we have no evidence as to the object of his new passion.

During his half-retirement, Petrarch learned news which disturbed his repose. A courier arrived, one night, bringing an account of the entire destruction of the Genoese fleet, in a naval combat with that of the Venetians, which took place on the 19th of August, 1353, near the island of Sardinia. The letters which the poet had written, in order to conciliate those two republics, had proved as useless as the pacificatory efforts of Clement VI. and his successor, Innocent. Petrarch, who had constantly predicted the eventual success of Genoa, could hardly believe his senses, when he heard of the Genoese being defeated at sea. He wrote a letter of lamentation and astonishment on the subject to his friend Guido Settimo. He saw, as it were, one of the eyes of his country destroying the other. The courier, who brought these tidings to Milan, gave a distressing account of the state of Genoa. There was not a family which had not lost one of its members.

Petrarch passed a whole night in composing a letter to the Genoese, in which he exhorted them, after the example of the Romans, never to despair of the republic. His lecture never reached them. On awakening in the morning, Petrarch learned that the Genoese had lost every spark of their courage, and that the day before they had subscribed the most humiliating concessions in despair.

It has been alleged by some of his biographers that Petrarch suppressed his letter to the Genoese from his fear of the Visconti family. John Visconti had views on Genoa, which was a port so conveniently situated that he naturally coveted the possession of it. He invested it on all sides by land, whilst its other enemies blockaded it by sea; so that the city was reduced to famine. The partizans of John Visconti insinuated to the Genoese that they had no other remedy than to place themselves under the protection of the Prince of Milan. Petrarch was not ignorant of the Visconti's views; and it has been, therefore, suspected that he kept back his exhortatory epistle from his apprehension, that if he had despatched it, John Visconti would have made it the last epistle of his life. The morning after writing it, he found that Genoa had signed a treaty of almost abject submission; after which his exhortation would have been only an insult to the vanquished.

The Genoese were not long in deliberating on the measures which they were to take. In a few days their deputies arrived at Milan, imploring the aid and protection of John Visconti, as well as offering him the republic of Genoa and all that belonged to it. After some conferences, the articles of the treaty were signed; and the Lord of Milan accepted with pleasure the possession that was offered to him.

Petrarch, as a counsellor of Milan, attended these conferences, and condoled with the deputies from Genoa; though we cannot suppose that he approved, in his heart, of the desperate submission of the Genoese in thus throwing themselves into the arms of the tyrant of Italy, who had been so long anxious either to invade them in open quarrel, or to enter their States upon a more amicable pretext. John Visconti immediately took possession of the city of Genoa; and, after having deposed the doge and senate, took into his own hands the reins of government.

Weary of Milan, Petrarch betook himself to the country, and made a temporary residence at the castle of St. Columba, which was now a monastery. This mansion was built in 1164, by the celebrated Frederick Barbarossa. It now belonged to the Carthusian monks of Pavia. Petrarch has given a beautiful description of this edifice, and of the magnificent view which it commands.

Whilst he was enjoying this glorious scenery, he received a letter from Socrates, informing him that he had gone to Vaucluse in company with Guido Settimo, whose intention to accompany Petrarch in his journey to Italy had been prevented by a fit of illness. Petrarch, when he heard of this visit, wrote to express his happiness at their thus honouring his habitation, at the same time lamenting that he was not one of their party. "Repair," he said, "often to the same retreat. Make use of my

books, which deplore the absence of their owner, and the death of their keeper" (he alluded to his old servant). "My country-house is the temple of peace, and the home of repose."

From the contents of his letter, on this occasion, it is obvious that he had not yet found any spot in Italy where he could determine on fixing himself permanently; otherwise he would not have left his books behind him.

When he wrote about his books, he was little aware of the danger that was impending over them. On Christmas day a troop of robbers, who had for some time infested the neighbourhood of Vaucluse, set fire to the poet's house, after having taken away everything that they could carry off. An ancient vault stopped the conflagration, and saved the mansion from being entirely consumed by the flames. Luckily, the person to whose care he had left his house—the son of the worthy rustic, lately deceased—having a presentiment of the robbery, had conveyed to the castle a great many books which Petrarch left behind him; and the robbers, believing that there were persons in the castle to defend it, had not the courage to make an attack.

As Petrarch grew old, we do not find him improve in consistency. In his letter, dated the 21st of October, 1353, it is evident that he had a return of his hankering after Vaucluse. He accordingly wrote to his friends, requesting that they would procure him an establishment in the Comtat. Socrates, upon this, immediately communicated with the Bishop of Cavaillon, who did all that he could to obtain for the poet the object of his wish. It appears that the Bishop endeavoured to get for him a good benefice in his own diocese. The thing was never accomplished. Without doubt, the enemies, whom he had excited by writing freely about the Church, and who were very numerous at Avignon, frustrated his wishes.

After some time Petrarch received a letter from the Emperor Charles IV. in answer to one which the poet had expedited to him about three years before. Our poet, of course, did not fail to acknowledge his Imperial Majesty's late-coming letter. He commences his reply with a piece of pleasantry: "I see very well," he says, "that it is as difficult for your Imperial Majesty's despatches and couriers to cross the Alps, as it is for your person and legions." He wonders that the Emperor had not followed his advice, and hastened into Italy, to take possession of the empire. "What consoles me," he adds, "is, that if you do not adopt my sentiments, you at least approve of my zeal; and that is the greatest recompense I could receive." He argues the question with the Emperor with great force and eloquence; and, to be sure, there never was a fairer opportunity for Charles IV. to enter Italy. The reasons which his Imperial Majesty alleges, for waiting a little time to watch the course of events, display a timid and wavering mind.

A curious part of his letter is that in which he mentions Rienzo. "Lately," he says, "we have seen at Rome, suddenly elevated to supreme power, a man who was neither king, nor consul, nor patrician, and who was hardly known as a Roman citizen. Although he was not distinguished by his ancestry, yet he dared to declare himself the restorer of public liberty. What title more brilliant for an obscure man! Tuscany immediately submitted to him. All Italy followed her example; and Europe and the whole world were in one movement. We have seen the event; it is not a doubtful tale of history. Already, under the reign of the Tribune, justice, peace, good faith, and security, were restored, and we saw vestiges of the golden age appearing once more. In the moment of his most brilliant success, he chose to submit to others. I blame nobody. I wish neither to acquit nor to condemn; but I know what I ought to think. That man had only the title of Tribune. Now, if the name of Tribune could produce such an effect, what might not the title of Cæsar produce!"

Charles did not enter Italy until a year after the date of our poet's epistle; and it is likely that the increasing power of John Visconti made a far deeper impression on his irresolute mind than all the rhetoric of Petrarch. Undoubtedly, the petty lords of Italy were fearful of the vipers of Milan. It was thus that they denominated the Visconti family, in allusion to their coat of arms, which represented an immense serpent swallowing a child, though the device was not their own, but borrowed from a standard which they had taken from the Saracens. The submission of Genoa alarmed the whole of

Italy. The Venetians took measures to form a league against the Visconti; and the Princes of Padua, Modena, Mantua, and Verona joined it, and the confederated lords sent a deputation to the Emperor, to beg that he would support them; and they proposed that he should enter Italy at their expense. The opportunity was too good to be lost; and the Emperor promised to do all that they wished. This league gave great trouble to John Visconti. In order to appease the threatening storm, he immediately proposed to the Emperor that he should come to Milan and receive the iron crown; while he himself, by an embassy from Milan, would endeavour to restore peace between the Venetians and the Genoese.

Petrarch appeared to John Visconti the person most likely to succeed in this negotiation, by his eloquence, and by his intimacy with Andrea Dandolo, who governed the republic of Venice. The poet now wished for repose, and journeys began to fatigue him; but the Visconti knew so well how to flatter and manage him, that he could not resist the proposal.

At the commencement of the year 1354, before he departed for Venice, Petrarch received a present, which gave him no small delight. It was a Greek Homer, sent to him by Nichola Sigeros, Prætor of Romagna. Petrarch wrote a long letter of thanks to Sigeros, in which there is a remarkable confession of the small progress which he had made in the Greek language, though at the same time he begs his friend Sigeros to send him copies of Hesiod and Euripides.

A few days afterwards he set out to Venice. He was the chief of the embassy. He went with confidence, flattering himself that he should find the Venetians more tractable and disposed to peace, both from their fear of John Visconti, and from some checks which their fleet had experienced, since their victory off Sardinia. But he was unpleasantly astonished to find the Venetians more exasperated than humbled by their recent losses, and by the union of the Lord of Milan with the Genoese. All his eloquence could not bring them to accept the proposals he had to offer. Petrarch completely failed in his negotiation, and, after passing a month at Venice, he returned to Milan full of chagrin.

Two circumstances seem to have contributed to render the Venetians intractable. The princes with whom they were leagued had taken into their pay the mercenary troops of Count Lando, which composed a very formidable force; and further, the Emperor promised to appear very soon in Italy at the head of an army.

Some months afterwards, Petrarch wrote to the Doge of Venice, saying, that he saw with grief that the hearts of the Venetians were shut against wise counsels, and he then praises John Visconti as a lover of peace and humanity.

After a considerable interval, Andrea Dandolo answered our poet's letter, and was very sarcastic upon him for his eulogy on John Visconti. At this moment, Visconti was arming the Genoese fleet, the command of which he gave to Paganino Doria, the admiral who had beaten the Venetians in the Propontis. Doria set sail with thirty-three vessels, entered the Adriatic, sacked and pillaged some towns, and did much damage on the Venetian coast. The news of this descent spread consternation in Venice. It was believed that the Genoese fleet were in the roads; and the Doge took all possible precautions to secure the safety of the State.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.