

wine, and bloated with gluttony. Amidst these, his muse was placed, like the chaste Lady of the Masque, lofty, spotless, and serene, to be chattered at, pointed at, and grinned at, by the whole rabble of satyrs and goblins. If ever despondency and asperity could be excused in any man, it might have been in Milton. But the strength of his mind overcame every calamity. Neither blindness, nor gout, nor age, nor domestic afflictions, nor abuse, nor neglect, had power to disturb his sedate and majestic patience. His spirits do not seem to have been high, but they were singularly equable. His temper was serious and stern, but it was a temper which no sufferings could render fretful or sullen. Hence it was, that though he wrote *Paradise Lost*, at a time of life when images of beauty and tenderness are beginning to fade even from these minds in which they have not been effaced by anxiety or disappointment, he adorned it with all that is most lovely and delightful in the physical and moral world. His poetry reminds us of the pinnacles of Alpine scenery. Nooks and dells, beautiful as fairy land, are embosomed in its most rugged and gigantic elevations. The roses and myrtles bloom unchilled on the verge of the avalanchè.

Such is the distinction between these two great poets, drawn by the master essayist of the day. Had they changed birth-places, their peculiar dispositions would have appeared influenced by the varying climates. Milton's radiant and beautiful spirit seemed to have been born under the sunny skies of Italy, where no cloud dims the brightness of the heavens; while Dante's fitful, gloomy temperament, seemed more fitted to be the child of the fogs and storms of England.

Dante's early life was a happy one. His family was one of the most ancient in Florence. Some records say, that Eliseus, the father of the race, existed in the time of Julius Cæsar, but this idea has been rejected, yet it is allowed he acquired great distinction in the time of Charlemagne, when he removed from Rome to Florence. One of the descendants of this Eliseus married into the noble family of Aldighieri, or Alghieri of Ferrara, and his son assumed his mother's name, and became the immediate ancestor of Dante, who was born at Florence, in the month of May, of 1265, and christened by the name of Duranti, afterwards abbreviated to the one he has rendered so immortal.

Visions, prophecies, dreams, and many remarkable events pointed him out for a wonderful child, and according to Boccacio, this light of Italy, by the special grace of God, was welcomed at his birth, by as many lofty hopes as tender

caresses. His father died too early to see any of the predictions verified, but his mother cherished them in her heart; and, strengthened by them, performed with unwearied faithfulness all her maternal duties. Dante was placed very early with Brunetto Latinti, one of the first scholars of the age, and he fostered and developed with great care, the powers which early showed themselves in the young Duranti. He had not only a great taste for poetry, but a decided talent for music and painting, which he cultivated with great success. One of his early and strong friendships was formed with Giotto and Aderigo, then the universal themes of admiration for their paintings; the taste for the art just beginning to revive in Italy. Giotto begged as a favour, that he might be permitted to take a likeness of him; so that we have the portrait of the first poet of his age, drawn by the first painter of his time.

Like the head of our modern Satanic school of poetry, Byron, Dante was very young when he first felt that love which has indelibly associated the name of Beatrice Portonari with his works and himself. In his ninth year, he was invited to keep May-day, with several young companions, at her father's, when the quiet, gentle beauty of the young "Brice," as she was called, attracted him, and the sentiment in a few years became the absorbing one of his being. To this he attributes the early exercise of his muse, and the following sonnet is the first of his printed ones. It is an address to the initiated in love, who could alone be supposed to understand him :

"To every captive soul, and gentle heart,  
For whom I sing, what sorrows strange I prove !  
I wish all grace; and may their master, Love,  
Present delight, and happy hopes impart.  
Two thirds of night were spent, but brightly clear,  
The stars were shining, when surprised I saw  
Love, whom to worship is my will and law !  
Glad was his aspect, and he seemed to bear  
My own heart in his hand, while on his arms,  
Garmented in his many-folded vest,  
Madonna lay with gentle sleep oppressed,  
But he awoke her, filled with soft alarms,  
And with that burning heart, in humble guise,  
Did feed her, till in gloom the vision fled my eyes."

We cannot but believe that the account Dante has himself given of his early passion was too much exaggerated by the warmth of his imagination; but it shows what an absorbing power it had upon him; and we can imagine how deeply the severing of a tie which had been cherished for so many years must have affected him, although he says he was prepared for it by visions and prophecies. But he struggled with his grief, entered again into the service of the republic, and instead of brooding upon his loss,