

# MILTON'S DREAM:

A LOVE STORY.

BY MISS H. B. MACDONALD.

"Boast not thy victory, Death!  
It is but as the cloud's o'er the sunbeam's power,  
It is but as the winter's o'er leaf and flower;  
That slumber the snow beneath,  
—Thou art the victor, Love!"

MRS. HEMANS.

THOSE who are familiar with the history of the poet Milton, know that about the twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth year of his life, he visited Italy. We always love to think of Milton in Italy, and have little doubt that the classic and artistic fashioning of his mind, owed no little to the influence of that genial clime—then in the hey-day of its literary and artistic career, with a national mind on fire with the eloquence of a Dante and a Petrarch, and sublimed and refined beneath the creations of a Rafaele, and that painter host, whom heaven exhibited in the arena of one brief era, to accomplish triumphs of which all after time was to reap the fruits; where could he pass without seeing beauty, where could he converse, without being warmed into a loftier and more spiritual life! Nor was this the sole influence exerted in the formation of his character at this period; for it was during his residence at Florence that his heart passed through that ordeal, destined, in a constitution like his, where the affections give so pre-eminently a tone to the whole man, to exert such a sway on the future life—namely, its first love.

Milton is described at this period of his life as being singularly handsome. A genuine English figure—slight, middle sized, compact, with long gold coloured curls, falling, after the fashion of the period, on either side of a fresh complexion, and rather delicate features; while the fire of his eye, and robust strength of his frame, redeemed him from anything bordering on effeminacy. He was much the rage in Florence, and courted and carressed by the beauties and the *belles* of that luxurious city; and no less for the fascination

of his manners, than on account of his dawning literary reputation, which, at this period, in Italy, was in all circles the surest recommendation to success. Yet had he hitherto moved about with a heart untouched. No *belle* or beauty could flatter herself with having made the slightest impression upon him. "A most unaccountable creature," said the young Condessa Francesca Piccini, who was a vast heiress, the most desired of desirable matches, and a beauty to boot. "A most unaccountable creature, with blood as cold as the northern bears, on the confines of whose native country they tell me he was born; and whom I would have dismissed at the back door of my thoughts, long ago, if it were at all possible to live without him." *Le bellissime* did not know what to make of him. Half these glances and sighs would have turned an Italian head long ago. But that blue eyed son of the north, though delightful and fascinating to all, only seemed to live among them to tantalize them individually, and to show how inaccessible a thing a man's heart may become, when a disposition is manifested to take it by storm.

Milton was extremely fond of society at this period, in which his brilliant wit, as well as frank address, eminently calculated him to shine; and he was the favoured guest of the most distinguished circles of Florence.

There was a *festa* at the palazzo Orfino, and Milton was among the expected guests. There was no palazzo in or around *la bella Firenze*, more beautiful or more richly decorated than this of Orfino; and a great display was awaited—the *festa* to begin at high noon, and to continue till any