

that for many years he devoted his talents and his personal energies exclusively to its service, though at frequent intervals retreating to Vauclusa, for the quiet repose which his wearied spirit never failed to find amid its beautiful shades.

In 1343 he was drawn from that lovely retreat by the earnest solicitations of Pope Clement VI., who was desirous of sending him to congratulate Queen Joan of Naples, on her accession to the crown. Petrarch's attachment to the memory of the new queen's grandfather, King Robert, whom he had loved and revered as one of his earliest friends and patrons, induced him the more willingly to comply with the wishes of the pope. It was while absent on this mission that he heard of the death of his beloved Laura, which event filled him with the deepest anguish, and elicited some of the sweetest and most plaintive efforts of his muse.

He was now no longer happy at Vauclusa—Laura's death had changed it from a scene of delight, into one of sorrowful and corroding remembrance—and, bidding it a sad adieu, he repaired to Milan, and entered into the service of the Visconti.—There he devoted himself to political affairs and negotiations, till in his old age, full of honours, he sought a final retreat from the turmoils of life at Arquà, near Padua, a most delightful place, given him by his friend, Francis de Carrara. Here he died in 1374, at the advanced age of seventy, and the soil which received his ashes has become hallowed ground. Thousands of pilgrims climb the Euganean hills, a place formerly almost unknown, to visit

“A lonely tomb beside a mountain church,”

on which is inscribed the honoured name of Petrarch.

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We have given but a brief glance at Petrarch in mature life, when he stood with all

“His blushing honours thick upon him,”

his brows wreathed with the laurel of enduring fame, and the great and mighty of the earth pressing around him to render homage to his genius. We have seen him, the most distinguished man of his age, the popular poet, the able statesman, the graceful diplomatist, the amiable friend, but winning as he is in each of these characters, it is perhaps as the tender, yet unfortunate lover, that he awakens our deepest interest, and is most frequently associated in our minds, and it may therefore be well to look back to his early history, and note the circumstances in his life, which most strikingly aided in the formation of his character.

Petrarch was, like Dante, the descendant of an ancient Florentine family. His father, Pietro Petrarco, of Petrarcola, having taken part in the fac-

tions that agitated Florence, was expelled from thence; at the same time that Dante suffered banishment, and retired with his wife to Arezzo. Here he joined in the various plans of the Neri, for the recovery of their rights, and bore arms in the descent upon the city on the 20th of July, 1304, and it was on the very night of that vain attempt, that Francesco, the subject of this sketch, was born.

The sentence of exile passed on Petrarch not having been extended to his wife, she, when the infant Francesco was but seven months old, retired to an estate of her husband's, at Amisa, in the valley of the Arno, about fifteen miles from Florence. In the course of her journey thither, the child narrowly escaped drowning in the river which they were crossing. An old servant of the family, to whose care he was entrusted, had placed him in a basket, which he slung upon the saddle bow, and quite unobservant of the height to which the waters had suddenly risen, he plunged in with his precious charge, when the force of the waves loosened the basket from its position, and it was with the greatest difficulty that the poor infant, all unconscious of its future greatness, was rescued from a watery grave.

For seven years the parents of Petrarch were obliged, in consequence of the proscription, to live in a most secluded manner, Pietro venturing only occasionally to pay a stolen visit to his wife and child; but despairing at last of any change which should restore them to Florence, he removed with his family to Avignon, the capital of the Roman see. Here the young Francesco was placed under the care of Conventuale, a schoolmaster from Pisa, and so rapid was his progress, that the old man was wont to say, “that of the many noble pupils he had taught, he loved Petrarch best of all.”

With this teacher he had been about five years, when his father went with some friends to visit Vauclusa, and took the young scholar with them. His mother was unwilling he should go on this excursion, as he had never been separated from her, but overcome by his entreaties she at length consented. He went, and that journey left impressions on his mind which were never afterwards effaced. Then awoke his first love for the beautiful scenery of Vauclusa, whose name is so intimately blended with his subsequent history, and it is related that he no sooner beheld the fountain, half hidden among the wildest and most picturesque solitudes, than he exclaimed with enthusiasm: “How beautiful is this spot! I would give whole cities, did I possess them, to purchase it!”

This place has obtained celebrity, not only for having been the chosen retreat of Petrarch, but for the rare and exquisite beauty of its scenery, combining as it does the gentle and lovely features of nature, with her most sublime and lofty characteristics. The river Sorgia, which winds through a wild and