

"Come with me, my son, and you shall see her; but be calm, and pray for strength."

The fearful truth flashed upon Dante's heart; but there was that in the father's deportment which awed and silenced the stern conflict of his soul. They passed on through the various apartments, until they came to Beatrice's door. Portonari paused for a moment; then opening it, he turned to Dante:

"Enter my son," said he, "and behold all that is left us of our earthly treasure."

A veil must be drawn over the agony of that hour. Dante could scarcely believe that his soul's idol, the pulse of his heart, had indeed gone. But the sad paraphernalia of death surrounded her. The wax tapers were burning at her head and feet, and the black cross lay upon her bosom. A changed being was Duranti Alghieri, when he went forth from that silent chamber of death.

Love has been often said to form the whole of woman's being, while it is but an episode in the busy, bustling life of man. But if Duranti Alghieri's love for Beatrice Portonari was an episode, it was one that coloured his whole after existence, and deepened the violet hues of his poetical temperament, to darkest purple, casting gloom and shadow over all his stormy and unquiet life. Had Beatrice lived, in his own happy home the spirit of unrest in Dante's bosom would have been exorcised, and his interest centred there. He would not have plunged headlong into the political divisions and excitements of Florence; but this very circumstance probably brings him down to us a greater poet than if he had been nursed in the lap of repose. The noblest works of genius have been produced in times of tumult and confusion, and the most powerful minds have been developed by these trying occasions which crush the weak; when every man must be his own master, and the boldest heart can alone take precedence. Dante and Milton afford striking examples of the effect of political excitements upon a high order of epic mind. They were similarly situated; both struggling for liberty; both suffering neglect and persecutions for their principles; and both finding a resource against enemies, and the world's struggles, in the creations of their fancy.

Macaulay, with his diamond nibbed pen, has drawn a beautiful parallel between these gifted men. "Their poetry," he observes, "has in a great measure taken its character from their moral qualities. They are not egotists. They rarely obtrude their idiosyncracies upon their readers. They have nothing in common with

those beggars after fame, who extort a pittance from the compassion of the inexperienced, by exposing the nakedness and sores of their own minds; yet it would be difficult to name two writers whose works have been more completely though undesignedly coloured by their personal feelings. The character of Milton was distinguished by loftiness of thought, that of Dante by intensity of feeling.

"In every line of the Divine Comedy, we discern the asperity which is produced by pride, struggling with misery. There is perhaps in the world no work so deeply and uniformly sorrowful. The melancholy of Dante was no fantastic caprice. It was not, as far as at this distance of time we can judge, the effect of external circumstances. It was from within. Neither love nor glory, neither the conflicts of earth, nor the hope of heaven could dispel it; it turned every pleasure and every consolation into its own nature. It resembled that noxious Sardinian soil, of which the intense bitterness is said to have been perceptible even in its honey. His mind was, in the language of the Hebrew poet, 'a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and where the light was as darkness.' The gloom of his character discolors all the passions of men, and all the face of nature, and tinges with its own livid hue the flowers of Paradise, and the glories of the Eternal Throne. All the portraits of him are singularly characteristic. No person can look on the features, noble to ruggedness, the dark furrows of the cheek, the haggard and woful stare of the eye, the sullen and contemptuous curl of the lip, and doubt they belonged to a man too sensitive to be happy.

"Milton was, like Dante, a statesman and a lover, and like Dante had been unfortunate in ambition and love. He had survived his health, and his sight, the comforts of his home, and the prosperity of his party. Of the great men, by whom he had been distinguished at his entrance into life, some had been taken away from the evil to come, some had carried into foreign climes their unconquerable hatred of oppression; some were pining in dungeons, and some had poured forth their blood upon the scaffold. That hateful proscription facetiously turned the 'act of indemnity and oblivion,' had set a mark upon the poor blind, deserted poet, and held him up by name to the hatred of an inconstant people, and profligate court. Venal and licentious scribblers, with just sufficient talent to clothe vile thoughts in the style of a bell-man, were the favorite writers of the sovereign and the public. It was a loathsome horde, which could be compared to nothing so fitly as to the rabble of Comus, grotesque monsters, half bestial, half human, dropping with