

SKETCHES OF THE ITALIAN POETS.

No. I.

PETRARCH.

“Petrarch, who in an age
Of savage warfare, and blind bigotry
Cultured whatever could refine, exalt,—
Leading to better things !”

It was on a lovely Italian evening, that the poet of Vaucluse was seen traversing with rapid steps, the lawn before his house, pausing occasionally to examine with earnest look, some papers which lay upon a small table placed beneath a spreading laurel tree. The large official seal which they bore, declared them to be communications of importance, and the mild face of Petrarch lighted up with pleasure, as he ever and anon, glanced at these tributes to his genius, for they were, in fact, invitations from the University of Paris, and from the King of Naples, summoning the bard to hasten and receive the poet's crown, which he so well deserved to wear.

But, flattering as were these proffered honours, Petrarch had just penned to them a refusal,—his love for Vaucluse, and for the beautiful Laura, prevailed over the temptations of ambition, and he chose rather, in his calm retirement, to devote his hours to studious pursuits, and to the praises of his beloved mistress, than become the tool of those in power, which he believed he must do, if he condescended to accept favours from their hands.

He was still in meditation on the subject, and silently enjoying that gratification, which even the most gifted mind experiences, when conscious that its efforts are appreciated, yet marvelling how he, who had never sought fame, should so easily have won it, when a page approached and delivered to him still another letter. “From Rome,” he said, and obeying a signal of his master's hand, immediately retired.

Petrarch cut the silken string of the envelope, and beheld inclosed the sign manual of the Pope. One more honour, on this memorable day, was showered upon him, and that, the greatest he had yet received, for the missive he held in his hand, contained a request, almost a command, from the papal throne, for him to repair forthwith to Rome, there to receive the honour of citizenship, together with the poet's crown, a distinction which had never yet been conferred upon any individual in the Eternal City. If Petrarch had before felt pleasure in learning that the sweetness and grace of his verses had made his name familiar in far off countries, how much more exquisite were his emotions now, when

the conviction came home to him, that in his own beloved Italy, his genius was at last felt and acknowledged.

There was, however, a long struggle in his heart before he could persuade himself to renounce, even for a time, the dreamy luxuries of his existence at Vaucluse, yet he could not, he ought not, to resist the offers of the mistress of the world,—imperial Rome,—the nurse of poets, orators, historians,—they were too flattering to be withstood, and he yielded his assent. But fearing to trust himself to a night's reflection, lest he should be tempted to revoke it, he wrote on the instant a grateful reply to the Sovereign Pontiff, pledging himself to be in Rome on Easter day, the eighth of April, the time named by his highness for the contemplated ceremony.

Distrusting his own qualifications for the high honour intended him, or perhaps wishing to prove in the eyes of the world that he was worthy of it, Petrarch addressed a letter to Robert, the erudite king of Naples, requesting that he would give him a public examination in the arts and sciences, before he repaired to Rome. Robert readily granted this request, for he was a warm friend, admirer, and patron of the Italian bard, and on the day appointed for the examination he assembled his whole court, to witness, and render, by their presence, the ceremony as imposing as possible.

The whole range of literature and science furnished the learned king with questions, to which Petrarch's ready answers, elicited the admiration of all present. For three days the literary joust was held with unabated interest, and then the monarch presented his own royal robe to Petrarch, enjoining him to wear it as a mark of his esteem on the day when he should receive the high honours, to which he had proved himself so justly entitled.

King Robert would gladly have crowned the poet in his own capital, and with his own hand, and thus have bequeathed his name to posterity indissolubly united with that of the “father of poetry,” but Petrarch was pledged to the Pope; he felt, too, that it was a higher honour to receive the laurel crown on the steps of the capitol, where the