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SKETCHES OF THE ITALIAN POETS.

NO. III.

METASTASIO.

"WILL you go with me to Florence, Gravina?" said the literary Lorenzini to a noble looking man, with whom he was sauntering down one of the most public streets in Rome; 'Apostolo Zeno's Iphiginia' is to be performed at the Florentine Theatre; it is said to be the best drama ever written, and I *must* see it. Zeno himself has come on from Vienna, to arrange its getting up, and it will be an intellectual feast,—will you not go with me?"

"It would hardly repay me for the trouble," replied Gravina. "It is too far to go for merely one evening's amusement; if the play is truly good, I shall enjoy reading it to myself, in my quiet room, more than in hearing it amidst the noise and glare of the Theatre; I have, too, business of importance to attend to, which I cannot leave."

"Ah! Gravina, I would starve before I would be such a drudge to business; you labour at your proxy law books, reading the commentaries and pandects, till your mind loses its relish for the beauties of nature and art. Ah! fie, Gravina."

"You mistake, Lorenzini; my zest for all intellectual pleasures is but increased by my necessary attention to the serious concerns of life; many hours of each day must be devoted, in justice to others, to my legal studies; these strengthen my mind, and prepare it for recreation. I allow, in the study of nature, and in lighter intellectual pursuits, that—"

"Hush!" said Lorenzini, "listen to that sweet music."

The two cavaliers stopped to listen to some exquisite strains sung by a gentle, delicate voice, and looked round to see if they could find whence the melody proceeded; the tones were like those of a woman's voice, but they were in one of the busiest parts of the town, which was filled with coarse and working-day people, and they could see no one from whom such music could be expected. On the opposite side of the street was one of those small booths so common in Rome, filled with oil and wine, and meal, where the humble tradesman who could gain a little sum, turned an honest penny by

selling in minute quantities to those poorer than himself. At the door of this booth stood a beautiful boy about seven years old; he held in his hand a bright plumaged bird, a petted favourite, if one might judge by his caressing manner, and the quietness of the bird, which made no attempt to escape, but ever and anon gave a merry chirp to his young master. The invisible music had ceased, and Lorenzini and Gravina were just proceeding on their walk, despairing of finding out the sweet songster, when the strain broke forth again, in words they could distinctly hear:

I caught thee on the wing,
Thou pretty little thing,
And I'll not let thee fly,
Again to yonder sky.
How soft thy feathers are,
The shade so rich and rare,
Thine eye so bright and blue,
Heaven's own lovely hue;
Vocal little ranger,
Tuneful little stranger,
Crimson throated warbler,
Gay and feathery rover—
I caught thee on the wing,
And now I bid thee sing.

As if in obedience to the child's commands, the bird, which still rested on his hand, poured forth a song of rich melody, filling the air with its glad notes. Astonished at what they heard and saw, Gravina and Lorenzini crossed the street to where the child stood; the bird fluttered at their approach, and the boy, putting it into a small cage which stood by him, turned to enter the booth, but Gravina gently called to him:

"Come here, my boy," said he, "and let me see your pretty bird."

Timidly the child held the cage towards him, and Gravina praised and admired the pretty creature to the child's content, and thus won his heart, so that he looked up to him with all the trusting confidence of childhood.

"Do you often sing as you did just now?" said Gravina.