

ROSE-BELFORD'S  
CANADIAN MONTHLY  
AND NATIONAL REVIEW.

NOVEMBER, 1879.

AMERICAN AND CANADIAN SONNETS.

BY JOHN LESPERANCE, MONTREAL.

I.

THE sonnet is the cameo of literature. It is small in compass, but complete in itself, and the slightness of its shape is compensated by the perfection of its art. It is difficult of construction, being made up of numerous prosodiocal intricacies, but the result is a combination of rhythm and rhyme, both satisfactory to the mind and soothing to the ear. Of all the forms of composition it is that whose peculiar and perhaps arbitrary requirements have been most rigidly adhered to by poets, and it is remarkable that the failure of a sonnet is often in proportion to its deviation from those prescribed external rules. What these rules are it is unnecessary to repeat here, as they belong to elementary instruction in *belles lettres*, but it may be stated generally that the Italian method has always enjoyed a canonical force, both because it is the original one, and the one most beset with the temptation of ingenious difficulty. This consists, of course, of the fourteen lines, divided

into two quatrains and two tercets, the three uneven and the three even lines rhyming together. It is often the case that the two last lines are so constructed as to contain the epigram or *conceit*, which the Italians regard as the essence of the sonnet, but this rule is less observed in the other modern languages. In place of further explanation, we may as well cite Petrarch, the king of sonneteers, taking as an example his beautiful apostrophe to Love and other objects which adorn Vauclose.

Amor che meco al buon tempo ti stavi  
Fra queste rive a' pensier nostri amiche,  
E per saldar le ragion nostre antiche  
Meco e col fiume ragionando andavi :  
Fior, frondi, erbe, ombre, antri, onde, auro  
soavi,  
Valli chiuse, alti colli, e piagge apriche,  
Porto dell' amorose mie fatiche,  
Delle fortune mie tante e si gravi :  
O vaghi abitator de' verdi boschi ;  
O ninfe ; e voi che'l fresco erboso fondo  
Del liquido cristallo alberga e pasce :  
I miei di fur si chiari ; or son si foschi,  
Come Morte che'l fa. Così nel mondo  
Sua ventura ha ciasun dal di che nasce.

As showing how early the frame of the sonnet was fixed, and with what perfection it was cultivated, I am in-