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DURANTI ALGHIERI.

BY T. D. F.

FLORENCE during the thirteenth century, was disturbed by a series of cabals and divisions, which for a time threatened it with destruction, and rendered it an unmeet residence for the quiet and peaceful. The rival factions of the Guelphs and Ghibelines, the Bianchi and Neri, were almost as fatal to the beautiful city, the Italian Athens, as the desolating war of the "Roses," which not long after deluged fair England with the blood of its bravest and best. Daily skirmishes took place in the city between the adherents of the different parties, and the councils of state were disturbed by the angry disputes of factious leaders, too intent upon the struggle for favour to care for the real interest of those who looked to them for guidance and support. Happy was it for those who, living retired from the city, could avoid the daily conflict; and many of the wealthy nobles, who took no decided interest in either faction, retired to their mansions in the country.

Among the most lovely of the retreats which studded the banks of the Arno, was the palace Portonari, alike remarkable for its elegance and beauty of location. Its owner had in early years engaged in public life, by turns the senator, the warrior, and the ambassador; but wearied at last with the constant exertion, and with the ingratitude and deception he had found among men, he retired in disgust, and sought happiness in the country, where he could enjoy, undisturbed by political excitement, the pleasures of domestic life.

His son had taken his place in the political arena, and was one of the principal leaders of the

Guelph party; but the Count himself found sufficient enjoyment in the society of his beloved wife and daughter. The leisure he had, gave him an opportunity for the cultivation of his tastes, which were of a high order. He delighted to pore over the works of Virgil and Homer, and would often amuse himself by painting upon canvass the scenes so vividly depicted by them; and though he guided not the pencil of a Romano or a Guido, he was no mean proficient in an art which he practised for amusement,—they for immortality and life. Beatrice, his daughter, was the companion of his studies, and she gathered from him more classic lore than was the common possession of ladies of that period. Her's was a richly cultivated mind, and its progress and development were a never-failing source of enjoyment to her father.

When not engaged with her father, or embroidering with her mother, it was Beatrice's chief delight to wander about among the beautiful grounds attached to her father's residence; and her eye never wearied, and her heart never ceased to enjoy the loveliness with which she was surrounded. On one side the silvery Arno glided along in tranquil beauty, bordered by the rich vineyards and dark olive trees, which give such peculiar depth of light and shade to an Italian landscape; on the other the undulating surface dotted with lovely villages, formed a *coup d'œil*, seldom surpassed. But her favorite resort was the "Lady's Bower," where her father in his fondness, had clustered all things bright and beautiful. Boccaccio himself could not more luxuriantly or tastefully have arranged the scene.