

## HOW, WHEN AND WHERE?

"A history of how and where works of imagination have been produced would often be more extraordinary than the works themselves," remarked L. E. L. Inspired by her happy thought, it has occurred to me to lead you to a mental journey to the *adyta*, whence issued some of the *chefs d'œuvres* of literature, and to recall the circumstances which brought them into existence. Evidence as to when and where of the work's production is often obtainable; but what first suggested it, and by what processes the airy nothing gradually took a local habitation and a name, is rarely known, and can but be surmised. Whence came Mrs. Browning's earliest idea of "The Lost Bower," or what suggested "The Raven" to Edgar Poe: whether Motherwell's "Jeannie Morrison" was a real personage, and Beranger's house keeper the original "Lisette," may be impertinent curiosity to enquire: but, rightly or wrongly, the public will peep and pry into the *sacra sanctorum* of the *genus irritabile*, and, whether helped or hindered, will deem all the belongings and surroundings of authors, their incomings and their outgoings, their words, their deeds, and even their very thoughts, common property. Whether this be only justifiable hero-worship, or morbid inquisitiveness need not now be debated. We only request the reader to grasp our hand, and, for the nonce, assuming the character of Asmodeus, we will lead him "where they did it."

Dr. Johnson is reported to have said that after the "Newgate Calendar," the biography of authors is the most sickening chapter of the history of man, and a considerable portion of Johnson's own life goes towards corroboration of the truth of the dictum. It was while residing in Gough Square, says Chalmers, where "his house was filled by dependents, whose perverse tempers frequently drove him out of it," that Johnson wrote his only imaginative work "Rasselas," and it was written with a view to raise a sum to defray the expenses of his mother's funeral, and to liquidate

some little debts which she had contracted.

Turning to a story of a far greater man, and a far more unfortunate one—is it not humiliating to learn that the author of the "Divine Comedy," even whilst that magnificent masterpiece of the human intellect was seething in his brain, was wandering to and fro on the earth homeless, and it is not improbable, a beggar? For there is one awful passage in his poem which would lead one to deem that Dante himself may have had to stand in the public way, and "stripping his visage of all shame," may have had to hold forth his hand for charity! "How hard it is to climb other people's stairs," he hath told us himself, and "how salt the taste of bread that is not our own."

It is needless to linger over Tasso's cell, or to take more than a momentary peep into the shut-in Valley of Provence, where the greater part of the works were composed by Laura's lover, that said Petrarch, who died with his head upon a book.

Let us pass to Recanti. In the March of Ancona, where in a decayed palatial residence, is beheld Leopardi, the greatest literary genius modern Italy has produced. Hopeless and companionless he sought and found temporary solace in the solitary library of that secluded town, which henceforth the glory of his name will cause to be a "Mecca of the mind." If ever poet did "learn in suffering what he taught in song," Leopardi was he: and what he taught in song was chiefly wrought out in the precincts of that gloomy book-world of "old and forgotten lore in Recanti.

Homeward to England, and another poet is discovered. "The sleepless boy who perished in his pride" is beheld engaged in manufacturing his manuscripts. Poor child! but scant justice has yet been meted out to him, whilst laudatory lives and reviews of his contemporary Walpole are issued from the press with undeviating regularity. The room in which Chatterton wrote the Rowley poems is octagonal-sided, and stands over the north porch of St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, justly deemed one of the finest specimens of ecclesiastical architecture in England. This