

The first division describes the state of man in his youth, when overcome by his passions, which are included under the generic term of Love. Love is overcome, when maturer age is reached, by Chastity, and both in turn are vanquished by Death, the universal conqueror. But fame can triumph even over Death, and preserve the memory of man from the grave. Fame, however, must yield at last to Time, who blots out the memory of all things, but who is himself conquered by Eternity, or Divinity, the one supreme and final cause, who not only subdues his rivals, but crowns Love, Chastity and Fame with new honours, and restores the ravages of Time and Death.

The metre used in the *Trionfi* is the terza rima of Dante. It would seem, therefore, that Petrarch did not invent any new form of verse, but used, and in many cases altered and beautified, existing forms.

The subject of Petrarch's poems was decided by the two influences which governed his life. "Two loves," says Bartoli, "inflamed the heart of Petrarch, and contributed to render him great and famous, the love of his country, and the love of Laura." Great and genuine as the patriotic element was in Petrarch's nature, it has left comparatively little trace on his poetical work, a very few sonnets and odes being all that he produced under its influence; although among these are three of his finest odes, those addressed to Giacomo Colonna, Cola da Rienzi, and to the Nobles of Rome; but these are brilliant exceptions. All those sentiments usually so potent in the poet's heart, whether love of country, nature or art, hold an entirely subordinate place in Petrarch's poetry, and are usually found in connection with the ruling theme. This is the more surprising since Petrarch was an ardent politician, closely connected during the greater part of his life with the foremost men of his day, and associated with every important movement in Italy.

The chief source of inspiration was Petrarch's love for Laura. The *Canzoniere* contains upwards of 300 sonnets and poems entirely occupied with her praises. The story of their love is well known. Petrarch met her first in the church of St. Clara, at Avignon, in 1327. She was then twenty years of age, and already the wife of Hugues de Sade. From that time till her death in 1348, he was her constant friend and lover. Never, surely, had lover so little to sustain his love, or poet so little to record in his poems. Laura's love for Petrarch, if any existed, was hidden under a cloak of unvarying coldness and reserve. Their intercourse was limited to meetings at public gatherings, or to the reunions of friends at her husband's country house, where, as Petrarch tells us, she reigned a queen through her charms both of body and mind. Though living at a time, and in a court, noted for the vanity and corruption of its morals, no breath of slander seems ever to have attacked her. "No biting slander," says Petrarch, "dared ever wound with envious tooth the fame of this lady. None ever found cause of reproach either in her actions, her words, her looks, or her gestures." Maffei, in his *History of Italian Literature*, cites other witnesses who confirm this testimony. There is no allusion in any of Petrarch's poems to a private interview, and this alone is sufficient proof that such a meeting never took place, for, as Sismondi remarks, "where an opportunity for picking up her glove furnished material for four sonnets, an interview with her alone would surely have been celebrated in a thousand verses." For twenty-one years Petrarch's love for Laura was the ruling passion of his life, the main influence of his existence; and during the whole period he has no more special marks of favour to record than a friendly glance, an occasional kind word, or a passing expression of regret at his departure. These rare tokens of regard are received with the gratitude of one who "desires much, hopes little, and expects nothing." He wanders from Italy to France, from France to Germany, from Germany to England; but the image of Laura is constantly before him, and draws him, sooner or later, back to her side. He is never weary of the praises of her beauty, her gentleness, and her innocence. The purity of his love is sufficiently attested by the purity of his poetry. From beginning to end of the *Canzoniere* there is not a single line unworthy of that "fair soul," whose love was the "sweet light that points out the path which leads to Paradise." He himself clearly asserts the purity of his affection, in the dialogues with St. Augustine, which are practically his confessions. On the saint's reproving him for his excessive devotion to Laura, he passionately defends it on the ground of her divine purity and beauty, and continues, "I call thee to bear witness, O Truth, that there was never anything earthly or base in my love; never anything deserving reproach, save its excess. If it were pos-

sible to behold my affection, as I behold the face of Laura, it would be found as pure and spotless. I will say more, I owe to Laura all that I am; I should never have attained to fame if she had not, by these most noble affections, caused to spring up those seeds of virtue which Nature had sown in my heart. She held back my youthful mind from all wickedness, and gave me wings to soar heavenwards, and gaze upon the great First Cause; for it is one result of love, that he who loves is transformed into the likeness of the object loved."

Petrarch found in Laura not only the ideal of womanly perfection, but the type of spiritual beauty. At times "she is to him the only woman;" at times he sees her through the mystic and celestial atmosphere, with which the poets of the thirteenth century loved to envelop the women of their choice. But with Petrarch the human element is always predominant, and in the end triumphant. In the *Paradise* of Dante, Beatrice appears entirely divested of those natural and human traits which she possesses in the *Vita Nuova*, and it would seem that Dante desires to present her in this light, so free in her character from the weakness and tenderness of human love. Her human identity is swallowed up in the new and glorified nature; she is not even a disembodied spirit, she is a symbol, a reflection of heavenly truth. Petrarch's Laura is infinitely more woman in the second part of the *Canzoniere* than in the first; she is no longer a goddess, an angel, or an ideal being, she is once more the woman of his love. There is in the first part a perpetual warfare and unrest in the poet's heart, at times he invests Laura with every bodily charm, every spiritual grace; at times he reproaches her with cruelty, hardness, and even coquetry. He sees in her the messenger of heaven to lead him into paths of holiness, and again he laments the years wasted in his fruitless love, and confesses his fault with bitter self-reproach. Probably none of these portraits fairly represent the true Laura; Petrarch's feelings vary with every mood of his versatile and sensitive nature. The tumult of his mind expresses itself in the sonnet beginning "*Pace non trovo*," first translated by Sir Thomas Wyatt.

I find no peace, and all my war is done;
I fear and hope, I burn and freeze likewise;
I fly above the wind, yet cannot rise;
And nought I have, yet all the world I seize on
That looseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison
And holds me not, yet can I scape nowise;
Nor lets me live nor die at my devise,
And yet of death it giveth none occasion
Without eyes I see, and without tongue I plain;
I wish to perish, yet I ask for health,
I love another, and yet I hate myself,
I feed in sorrow, and laugh in all my pain;
Lo, thus displeaseth me both death and life,
And my delight is causes of my grief.

In the second part of the *Canzoniere*, this conflict is over; the doubts and anxieties which trouble him during Laura's lifetime vex him no more. He sees her only as the love and friend of his life, he forgets the coldness, the repulses, he had so often endured, or sees in them the means of his salvation. He persuades himself that she at last sees the purity of his affection, and returns it. In dreams he sees her, "ever fair and ever young," encouraging him with the hope of their reunion, and the assurance of her happiness. He can find consolation for her loss in revisiting the scenes of her life, and in the associations which cling to every hill and stream, every wood and field which has known her presence. Two sonnets written during this period are specially characteristic of the calmer grief which had displaced the disquieting passion of former years, and reveal the two chief sources of his solace.

My spirit rose in dreams o'er time and space
Where she I love, but find on earth no more,
Dwells with the blest on heaven's eternal shore;
Less baughty and more fair I saw her face,
She held my hand and said: "In this blest place
Thou soon shalt be, if hope deceive no more.
I caused thy life's fierce conflict heretofore,
And, ere the twilight fell, had run my race;
No human thought my bliss can understand,
I wait till thou shalt come, and hope to wear
The veil of beauty thou didst love again."
Why did she cease to speak, and loose my hand?
For at those tones breathing so pure an air
Almost I hoped in heaven to remain.

The second sonnet breathes the tranquillizing influence of the familiar scenes of Vaucluse.

I breathe once more the well known air and see
The far hills rise where that fair light had birth,
Which oft, while lent by heaven to comfort earth,
Has stirred my heart with joy or misery.
O hopes of bygone years, O memories dear!
The grass is faded, hushed the water's play,
Empty and cold the nest wherein she lay;
Yet I in life or death would linger here,

Rest from my grief, and from those eyes divine,
Whose beauty burnt my soul with quick desire;
For this I pine, weary and tempest tost,
A cruel and hard-hearted Lord was mine,
He did consume the fuel of my fire,
I weep its ashes scatter'd now and lost.

Bartoli in his introduction to the *Canzoniere* dwells largely on the two-fold aspect of Laura existing in the first part, and finds in the reconciliation of the real and the ideal woman which took place after her death the explanation of the calmer atmosphere pervading the second part. This conception of the final triumph of the human element over the mystical gives, Bartoli believes, the keynote to Petrarch's poems, and is necessary to a right understanding of his art. "The novelty of this art," says Quinet, "consists in the fact that Petrarch was the first to feel that each moment of our existence contains in itself the subject of a poem that each hour contains in immortality." To this criticism Bartoli adds: "This is most true, but it is not the whole truth concerning the novelty of the great poet's art. The other half consists in his having sung a real and human love; in his having thrust aside the philosophies and allegorical tendencies of Guinicelli and his school; in his having brought the woman of his love down to earth and set her up once more on the altar of humanity."

It was this strong human element in Petrarch's poems, even more than their literary merit and beauty, which has given him his lasting hold on the hearts of the Italian people. The effect of his work on the literature of his country was of incalculable importance. It has seldom happened that the influence of a single poet has produced such rapid and lasting results on the language and poetry of a country as the poems of Petrarch produced on the language and poetry of Italy. Of those countries where Latin had been spoken, Italy was the last to acquire a language and literature of its own. But little more than a hundred years before the birth of Petrarch in 1304, the Italian language did not exist; no real Italian was written before the end of the twelfth century, and very little before the middle of the next. It was not till the days of Dante and Petrarch that its use became general for prose writing. During the lifetime of these two poets there was a steady progress in development, and at the time of Petrarch's death in 1374, the formation of the Italian language was complete; and the additional refinements and improvements of succeeding generations of poets were like the labours of painters and sculptors on a building whose structure is already finished. The formation of the English language and literature was of far slower growth, and was the work of many minds. The gradual development which took place in England, and which culminated in Shakespeare in the sixteenth century, is the history of an epoch rather than of an individual. A long and brilliant list of names precede and accompany the advent of Shakespeare. Dante and Petrarch, "the morning stars of Italian literature," stand by themselves, and the history of early Italian poetry is the history of these two poets. Their poems have made us familiar with the names of many other poets, as Guinicelli, Quittion d'Arezzo, Cino da Pistoia, Cavalcanti, but the works of these poets were of comparatively slight importance, and had little effect in moulding and perfecting the Italian language. Petrarch, no doubt, owed something to these earlier writers, and Cino da Pistoia, in particular, influenced his poetical work. Petrarch alludes to him in one of his sonnets as "our loving master, Cino," and it was perhaps from him that he derived that form of verse. But Cino's poems, principally inspired by an early attachment, though sometimes showing real feeling and beauty, display in general a very mechanical and conventional tone, and it is doubtful if Petrarch was indebted to him for more than the form of some of his poetry.

The work of Dante and Petrarch differed in its results. The "*Divina Commedia*" by the "higher dignity of its interests," and the more universal nature of its subjects, is at once placed on a different plan from Petrarch's work and must be judged by itself. But though bearing the stamp of a mind infinitely richer in thought and creative faculty than that of Petrarch, Dante's poems had less immediate influence than those of his successor on the taste of his age. And this for a two-fold reason; partly because the very grandeur and vastness of his subject prevented its direct appreciation by the general public; and partly because it was practically impossible that a long poem such as the "*Divina Commedia*" should become generally known at a time when books existed only in manuscript. The short poems of Petrarch were produced in forms already familiar through the poetry of Provence, and this, together with the beauty of their style and the popular nature of their theme, rapidly procured for them