

But unfortunately for Petrarch's happiness, this cherished object of his affections was the wife of another, and it is therefore the more surprising that his passion for her should have remained fervent and enduring, as it did, even to the latest period of his life, and when death had taken from his sight the beautiful inspirer of his sweetest and most tuneful strains. Left when very young with a large dowry, the mother of Laura had prevailed on her to marry, in order to escape the many suitors whom her beauty and her fortune would attract, and had chosen for her Ugo di Sade, a man only a few years older than herself, but of a morose and unaffectionate disposition.

Of Laura's person, Petrarch has left us many descriptions, but they are almost too brilliant and sparkling to convey any distinct idea of her appearance. They tell us that "her hair was of a golden hue, her complexion like the snow, her eyes so bright they resembled the stars, but withal soft and tender. In stature, she was tall, and very graceful in her movements—her voice was clear and musical, and her manner of conversing always indicative of the dignity and sweetness which had an equal share in her character. The splendour of her dress corresponded to her beauty: sometimes it was of purple, embroidered with flowers of gold, and bordered with azure; at others, her delicate form seemed enshrined among roses, and richly adorned with pearls and diamonds. Her hair was generally left to flow loose over her neck and shoulders, but it was sometimes fastened in a knot and plainly parted on the forehead."

Of her mind, it is said she possessed a natural flow of wit and intelligence, but had received little advantage from education; that it was not less lovely than her person, however, we may infer from the perfect and undeviating propriety of her deportment towards Petrarch. Had she not been armed with virtuous principles, her conduct would have been far different, and her lover's passion, in consequence, but a transient emotion, furnishing a passing subject for his muse;—whereas, the sonnets that he wrote, not only during her life, but after her death, exhibit the feelings of a doting but bereaved heart, and attest equally the intensity of his affection, and the entire respect which he yielded to her purity and her virtues.

In a manuscript Virgil still preserved in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, the following memorandum exists, written in Petrarch's own hand, simply and affectionately recording the date of his first meeting with Laura, and likewise that of her death.

"Laura, illustrious by her own virtues, and widely celebrated in my verses, first met my eyes, while I was yet in my youth, on the morning of the sixth of April, 1327, in the church of St. Clair, at Avignon. In the same city, in the same month, and at the same hour, but in the year 1348, she was taken

from this world, while I was at Verona, ignorant of her fate; but intelligence of the fatal event was sent me by my friend Louis, at Verona, where it reached me on the nineteenth of May. Her most chaste and beautiful body was deposited the same evening in the church of Minor Friars, but her soul, I am persuaded, returned, as Cicero says of Africanus, to Heaven, whence it came. It seems good to me to record, as I do with melancholy pleasure, this sad event, and in a place which most frequently meets my eye, that I may be admonished by it to value nothing more in this world, but that being free from bondage, I may escape altogether from Babylon, and be taught by contemplation, and a right view of the uncertainty of life, boldly to employ the grace of God, properly considering the vanity of my past pursuits."

This is indeed a touching and heartfelt tribute to the virtues of Laura, penned, not as were his sonnets, for the public eye, but in a volume which was his daily companion, exhibiting the record of his true feelings, unexaggerated by poetic ornament or metaphor. After Laura's death, religion, which had heretofore been sought by him, only to grace and adorn his verse, became the abiding feeling of his soul, and he found in it that consolation under his bereavement, which fame and the homage of the world had not power to yield. He employed his time chiefly in writing religious works, and in lifting his voice in eloquent remonstrances against the vices of the age.

Occasionally he came forth from his retirement, to still the troubled waters of political strife, and so great was his influence, that when all other endeavours to procure peace failed, the princes and nobles of Italy called upon Petrarch for aid, which seldom was lent in vain. The last public act of this kind in which he exerted his interest, was on the breaking out of a war between the Paduans and Venitians, when, at the earnest entreaty of the former, he undertook a mission to Venice, in behalf of his adopted home. Arrived there, accompanied by the younger Carrara, he was granted an audience, but when he rose to address the assembly, either his strength or his resolution failed, for he was unable to speak, and they retired dispirited to their homes. But on the following day they again convened, when Petrarch regained his accustomed vigour, and his eloquence was rewarded by the delighted attention of the Venitians, who yielding to the poet, what the statesmen of Padua would not have won, granted him a treaty, which put an end to the threatened hostilities.

But the exertion he had made proved too much for his enfeebled strength, and brought on a slow fever, which gradually undermined his health; yet he would not give up his literary pursuits, but read and wrote as constantly as usual. On the 13th of July, 1374, he retired after dinner to his library,