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Francesco Petrararch, *Some Love Songs* [1915]

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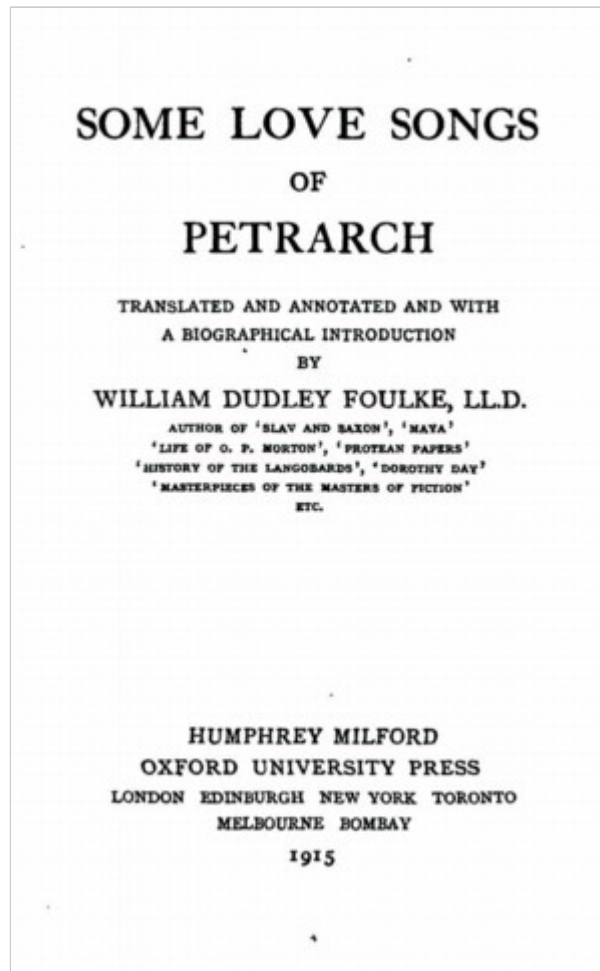
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### Edition Used:

*Some Love Songs of Petrarch*, translated and annotated with a Biographical Introduction by William Dudley Foulke (Oxford University Press, 1915).

Author: [Francesco Petrarch](#)

Translator: [William Dudley Foulke](#)

### About This Title:

A collection of 49 poems, mostly love poems to his friend Laura.

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## ODE TO PETRARCH

Across the centuries and in every land  
His name is honoured still. In that long night  
When learning's flame was quenched, it was his hand  
That lit the torch and brought the welcome light.  
So says the world, and yet we treasure more  
These songs that tell of frailties like our own—  
The fruitless love which many a year he bore  
That grew the brighter when its hope was gone.  
The lays wherein his passion was enshrined  
Outlast the ages. While from day to day  
I read his lines, old age is left behind  
And youth returns; these scattered locks of gray  
Turn brown once more, and solemn wisdom dies  
Under the witchery of my lady's eyes.

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## INTRODUCTION AND BIOGRAPHY

Few names in literature have been more widely and permanently distinguished than that of Petrarch. Crowned with the laurel upon the Capitol at Rome as a great poet and historian, honoured above all others of his time, the chosen guest, companion, ambassador, and adviser of prince, pontiff, king, and emperor, he has come down to us after six centuries as second only to Dante among the five great classic authors of Italy and as worthy of the companionship of Homer, Virgil, Horace, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Milton, and Goethe on the world's roll of fame.

His reputation.

He was one of the great poets, and yet, except to those who are conversant with the Italian language, Petrarch is little more than a bright name. Few have read his works. Doubtless, much of his fame is due, not to his writings, but to the fact that he was foremost among the great scholars who awakened the world to the knowledge and the literature of antiquity after the long sleep of the Middle Ages. He loved the Roman poets, orators, and philosophers—Virgil, Cicero, Seneca—with a perfect love. He was indefatigable in his search for manuscripts, rummaging in libraries and archives and copying the texts with his own hand, and he discovered among other works the *Institutes* of Quintilian and some of the letters and orations of Cicero.

Of his voluminous writings all except the *Canzoniere* or Song Book are in Latin, but although these constituted, during his lifetime, his chief title to distinction in scholarship and literature, they are now, with the exception of his personal letters, mostly forgotten. It is those poems in the Italian tongue, which he at one time depreciated, that are still read and admired wherever that tongue is spoken.

What is there in this collection of poems which gave to their author such widespread and lasting renown? Macaulay insists that their popularity is largely due to a curious tendency of human nature to enjoy in literature that egotism and revelation of personal characteristics and sufferings which we detest in conversation and of which the popularity of Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Lord Byron are such obvious illustrations.

Its causes.

The poems of Petrarch are little more than the expression of his feelings upon a subject in which the world is greatly interested—the love of a woman. He was, moreover, if we except Dante, the first distinguished writer of amatory verse in modern times, after woman had assumed that new claim to veneration and respect which had been allowed to her by Christianity, by chivalry, by the tourney, and by the courts of love. Not that Petrarch's poems were strikingly original. He imitates in many places the formal and artificial style of the troubadours as well as the more natural methods of some of his Italian predecessors, and he engrafts upon this modern poetry much that he has drawn from his rich classical resources. But at their best, the lyrics of Petrarch are indescribably beautiful and entitle him to a high place among the immortals.



Petrarch lived, moreover, close to the dawn of Italian literature; he had much to do with giving to the Italian language its present poetical and polished character. ‘No term which he employed is become obsolete, and each of his phrases may be, and still is, written without quaintness.’<sup>1</sup> He was followed for more than a century by imitators who were greatly his inferiors. He had also the good fortune, which even Dante did not possess, to have such distinguished commentators and critics as Muratori, the creator of critical and diplomatic history in Italy, and four poets of distinction, Tassoni, Foscolo, Leopardi, and Carducci.<sup>2</sup> It is undoubtedly true, as in the case of Dr. Samuel Johnson, that the interest which attaches to the man has greatly enhanced the reputation earned by the merit of his writings.

It seems singular, considering this reputation, that except among those who are acquainted with the Italian language, there are comparatively few to-day who have any considerable personal acquaintance with his works. The knowledge of Homer and the Greek dramatists, of Virgil and Horace, of Dante and Boccaccio, of Cervantes and Goethe, is widely disseminated in every civilized country, but the poems of Petrarch are still largely unknown in other lands than his own. The main reason undoubtedly is that the beauty of these poems has not been and perhaps cannot be adequately communicated by any translation.

Commentators assure us that ‘there is no other language capable of rendering them’, and that ‘he will never be disfigured by translators without soul and without ears’.<sup>1</sup> Even Muratori doubts whether his poetry will ever succeed ‘on the other side of the mountains’.<sup>2</sup>

Difficulties of translation.

Why is it that his songs cannot be readily rendered in another tongue? No kind of literature is more difficult to translate than lyric poetry, and this is because its beauty depends so largely upon its form, including the metre and the rhyme employed. In epic and dramatic poetry (as well as in all prose) other things predominate—the story to be told, the thing to be described, the character to be delineated. The translation of Homer may be almost equally good whether made in rhyme, in blank verse, or in rhythmical prose, and if made in verse, the particular kind of metre is not very essential. But lyric poetry cannot be well rendered in a prose translation nor even in verse which differs very greatly from that of the original. This is no doubt one of the reasons why Pindar, one of the greatest of the Greek poets, is not so widely known as the dramatists. The difficulty of adequate translation is especially great in the case of lyrics in rhyme, and most of all in the case of those where the system of rhyme employed is complex and artificial. Unless the translation reproduces something of this, it cannot faithfully represent the original.

Now no lyric poems ever depended more for their beauty upon their form and the metre and the rhymes employed than those of Petrarch. He was not so much distinguished for originality of conception, liveliness of narrative, wealth of imagery or faithful portraiture of character, as for his delicate taste and the exquisite form in which his thoughts are embodied. It is said of him that each of his poems is like an enamel. He revised them again and again, some of his corrections being made years after the first composition, until in his old age he said, ‘I could correct my works and improve them all except my Italian poems, where I think I have reached the highest perfection I can attain.’<sup>1</sup>

The translator of Petrarch, therefore, if he would seek to give a true notion of these lyrics, should employ forms of verse and rhyme similar to the original, yet the restrictions which this involves are often fatal to an adequate rendering of the poetry itself. Too many repetitions of the same rhyme are required. The Italian language lends itself to the rhymes demanded by the Petrarch sonnet in a way that English does not, and certain licences are permitted in Italian and forbidden to us; for instance, the so-called equivocal rhymes or the use of identical words with different meanings for rhyming purposes. These were often employed in the *Canzoniere*. Petrarch himself occasionally varies the form of his sonnets, but all the forms he employs are usually difficult to reproduce exactly in English, and the effect in most cases seems to be quite well retained in the Shakespearean sonnet. I have therefore generally used the latter. In the one sestina translated, the form of the original has been exactly reproduced, although it is extremely artificial and not at all adapted to modern poetry. In two of the madrigals I have followed the original metre exactly. In the *canzoni* the original form has in some cases been closely, and in one or two instances exactly imitated. In the ‘Hymn to the Virgin’ this is the case except that the seventh and tenth lines, although they rhyme with each other, do not also rhyme with the third and sixth as they do in Italian. There seemed no object in giving this double assonance, and the stanza is quite as harmonious in English without it.

Form of the verse.

In the celebrated canzone ‘Clear, fresh, sweet waters,’ more liberty has been taken, since the poetry of this wonderful ode would be too greatly cramped by attempting to translate it in the exact metre of the original. The same is true of some of the other *canzoni*. In the original those vary considerably in form, but the following rules are observed. The lines are either of eleven or seven syllables each (rendered in English by the iambic pentameter or trimeter), and each stanza corresponds with the others in rhymes, measures, and pauses. The *canzoni* must contain no more than fifteen stanzas (they usually contain not more than seven) and the stanza must have no more than twenty lines (usually it has about fourteen), and the poem terminates with a conclusion or ‘envoi’ containing fewer lines than the other stanzas, and in which the poet addresses his own ode. ‘It rarely happens’, says Sismondi,<sup>1</sup> ‘that this addition, which brings the poet himself upon the scene, does not destroy, with some trifle of vanity or gallantry, the impression made by the rest of the poem with its loftier thoughts and more lyrical movement.’ Some of Petrarch’s concluding stanzas, however, are exceedingly graceful and appropriate.

Methods of translation.

## BIOGRAPHY

Francesco Petrarca was born at Arezzo, Italy, July 20, 1304. He was the son of Ser Petracco di Parenzo, a notary of Florence, and Eletta Canigiani, his wife. On January 27, 1302, in the struggle between Guelphs and Ghibellines, or between the ‘Blacks’ and ‘Whites’, as they were then called, the former finally triumphed and banished from Florence some six hundred of their leading adversaries. Among these were the poet Dante and the notary Petracco.<sup>1</sup> Some of the exiles fled to Pistoia, some to Pisa, some to Arezzo. Among the latter were the notary Petracco and his wife. After a period of about two years and a half, the ‘Whites’ attempted to recapture Florence and a small detachment actually

1304. Birth of Petrarch.

entered the town, but owing to a succession of blunders the attempt failed. It was on the very day of this attack, in which his father took part, that Petrarch was born.

But the child did not remain long at Arezzo. In the little city of Incisa, south-east of Florence, the notary possessed a piece of property which had escaped confiscation. His wife was not included in the decree of banishment, and seven months after his birth, the boy was taken thither by his mother, and was almost drowned in the Arno on the way. Despite the decree of banishment, the husband and wife were sometimes together, for two other children were born to them at that place, one who died in infancy and one Gherardo, born in 1307. The family were reunited in 1312 in Pisa, where the father was then established in business.

Early life at Incisa.

In the following year, however, the notary determined to leave Italy and seek his fortune beyond the Alps, at Avignon.

1312. Pisa.

Pope Clement V, who had wandered from place to place, was then at that city, although it had not yet been established as the permanent seat of the papal court.

Avignon.

On the way thither the vessel which carried the notary and his little family narrowly escaped shipwreck near Marseilles, and Petrarch was filled with an aversion and terror of the sea from which he never recovered.

Avignon at this time was a constituent part of the earldom of Provence, and King Robert of Naples was its hereditary lord. It was a city situated upon a bluff on the east bank of the Rhône, and, as Petrarch afterwards wrote to Guido Settimo, his youthful friend, ‘The town was small for the Roman pontiff and the Church which had but newly wandered with him thither, at that time poor in houses and overflowing with inhabitants. Our elders determined that the women and children should move to a neighbouring spot. We two, then boys, went with the others, but were sent to a different destination, namely, to the schools of Latin.

Carpentras was the name of the place, a small city, but the capital of a little province. Do you remember those four years? What happiness we had there; what safety, what peace at home, what liberty abroad, what leisure, and what silence in the fields!’ [1](#)

Carpentras.

One Convevole, a native of Prato, near Florence, who had also emigrated to Provence, was Petrarch’s schoolmaster, and instructed the boy, first in reading and afterwards in rhetoric and Latin. In this school, where many who were subsequently distinguished received their education, Petrarch was the favourite of his master, for he afterwards writes, [2](#) ‘Cardinal Giovanni, of blessed memory, used to joke with him, for he delighted in the conversation of this simple old man and excellent grammarian, and would ask him when he came to visit him, “Tell me, master, among so many great scholars of yours whom I know you love, is there some place for our Francesco?” And he, with his eyes full of tears, either kept silence or went away, or, if he could speak, would solemnly swear that he had never loved any of them all so much as poor wretched me.

1312. Convevole.

‘As long as my father lived he helped him generously, for poverty and old age, importunate and difficult companions, were pressing on him. After my father’s death, he placed all his hopes on me. But I, albeit little able, feeling myself nevertheless bound by faith and duty, helped him to the utmost of my resources, so that, when money fell short (as was frequent) I succoured his poverty among my friends by standing surety, or by prayers, and with the usurers, by pledges. Thousands of times he took from me for this purpose books and other things, which he always brought back to me until poverty drove out fidelity. Hampered more than ever, he treacherously took from me two volumes of Cicero, one of which had been my father’s and the other a friend’s, and other books, pretending that they were necessary to him for a work of his. For he used daily to be beginning some book, and he would make a magnificent frontispiece and a consummate preface (which, although it stands first in the book, is wont to be composed last), and then he would transfer his unstable imagination to some other work. But why do I thus prolong the tale? When the delay began to arouse my suspicions (for I had lent him the books for study, not to relieve his indigence), I asked him point blank what had happened to them, and on hearing that they had been put in pawn, I besought him to tell me who it was who had them, that I might redeem them. Tearful and full of shame, he refused to do this, protesting that it would be too disgraceful to him if another should do what was his bounden duty. If I would wait a little longer he would fulfil his duty quickly. Then I offered him all the money which the transaction required, and this also he refused, begging me to spare him such a disgrace. Though trusting little to his promise, I held my tongue, being unwilling to give sorrow to him whom I loved. In the meanwhile, driven by his poverty, he returned to Tuscany, whence he had come, and I, remaining in my transalpine solitude near the source of the Sorgue, as I was wont to do, did not know that he had gone away, until I knew of his death by the request of his fellow citizens that I would write an epitaph to be placed on the tomb of him whom they had tardily honoured by bearing him to the grave crowned with laurel. Nor afterwards, in spite of every diligence, could I ever find the least trace of the lost Cicero, for the other books mattered to me much less, and thus I lost books and master together.’

It was in this way that the *De Gloria* of Cicero vanished from the world.

Under Convenevole, Petrarch learned to admire that author very greatly. Indeed, he tells us that even before he could understand the meaning of Cicero’s sentences ‘the sweetness and the sonorous sound of the words so held him captive that every other book he read or listened to appeared to him harsh and discordant’.

Petrarch’s father was detained by business at Avignon most of the time, but frequently came to see his family at Carpentras, and being there on one occasion with the uncle of Guido Settimo, they determined to visit Vaucluse, a narrow valley where the river Sorgue rushes forth from a cavern in the rock at the foot of a steep and lofty mountain. The boys begged to accompany them, and were put on horseback with a trusty servant who rode behind to protect them. When they reached the beautiful spot, Petrarch, as he afterwards wrote to his friend Settimo, was so impressed by its loveliness that he said to himself, ‘Here is a place most suited to my nature which, if the opportunity be given me, I shall some day prefer to the greatest city.’

Early visit to  
Vaucluse.

In 1319 Petrarch's father, impressed with the necessity of giving the boy an education which would enable him to make a living, sent him with his brother Gherardo to the law school at Montpellier not far away. Here, however, Francesco devoted himself not so much to the law as to the great writers of ancient Rome. He had indeed managed to collect a small library of classical authors. His father once visited him unexpectedly, and the poet thus describes what happened. 'All the books I had been able to collect of Cicero and of some of the poets, as enemies to lucrative study, were in my very sight dragged out of the secret places in which I (fearing what soon came to pass) had hidden them, and committed to the fire as though they were the works of heretics, which spectacle I lamented as though I myself were being cast into the flames.

1319. Montpellier.

Then my father, as I remember, seeing me so unhappy, straightway snatched two books, already half-scorched by the fire, and holding Virgil in the right hand and Cicero's *Rhetoric* in the left, he held out both to me, smiling as I wept. "Keep this", he said, "for an occasional solace to your mind, and the other to help you in your law studies." And being comforted by these companions, so few but so great, I restrained my tears.' [1](#)

His father burns his books.

After remaining four years at Montpellier, Petrarch, at the command of his father, went with his brother Gherardo to the University of Bologna (which was then, next to Paris, the most celebrated in the world) in order to continue his studies. Here, too, he attended lectures upon the civil law. While he was at this university he made an excursion with one of his instructors to Venice and saw the pride and prosperity of the republic of the lagoons at its highest point before it became weakened by the destructive wars with Genoa.

1323. Bologna.

After three years at Bologna, the news of their father's death, which took place April 6, 1326, recalled the two brothers to Avignon. Their mother survived her husband only a short time and died at the age of thirty-eight years. Petrarch wrote her eulogy in a poem of thirty-eight hexameters, one for each year of her life.

1326.

The slender estate left by Petracco was dissipated by the dishonesty of his trustees, and the two brothers, now in straitened circumstances, appear to have taken holy orders, because it opened to them the best path to a livelihood. [1](#)

In such a city as Avignon, however, this did not involve the renunciation of worldly pleasures, and the poet, writing long afterwards to his brother, thus speaks of their habits and their personal vanity:

Early life at Avignon.

'Do you remember that excessive display of most elegant attire which still, I confess, holds me captive, though growing less day by day? That trouble over putting on and putting off, a labour repeated morning and evening; that dread lest when, once arranged, our hair should get loose, or a light breeze should ruffle the elaborate arrangement of our locks; how we fled from advancing or retreating horses lest our perfumed and brilliant raiment should receive any adventitious dirt! Truly how vain are the cares of men, but especially of youths! . . . What shall I say of our shoes? See with how grievous and continuous a war they

Frivolities.

pressed that which they seemed to protect! . . . What shall I say of the curling irons and the business of our hair-dressing?

How often did that labour put off our sleep, and then disturb it!

1326.

What slave-driver would inflict more cruel tortures than we inflicted with our own hands? What nocturnal scars did we see in the morning in our mirror burned across our red foreheads, so that we, who wished to make a show of our hair, were compelled to cover our faces!'[1](#)

But now an event occurred which controlled the whole course of Petrarch's life. On April 6, 1327, he first saw the lady Laura in

1327. Meets Laura.

the church of Santa Clara at Avignon, and became enamoured of the beautiful vision. His passion was the inspiration of nearly all his poetry, both during the twenty-one years she lived and more than ten years afterwards. Indeed his hopes of rejoining her in Paradise were expressed in his corrections to one of his 'Trionfi' only a few weeks before his death. There is much controversy among his commentators upon the question who this lady Laura really was. The matter is carefully considered in Appendix I.

Petrarch had in Avignon a number of learned and estimable friends—among others, one Soranzio, a celebrated lawyer and the owner of an excellent library, who placed his books at Petrarch's disposal and lent him a number of valuable works, including some by Varro and Cicero. In return Petrarch copied manuscripts for him. But the most important friendship which he formed was that of James Colonna, son of Stephen, who was the head of the great house of Colonna in Rome.

Friends.

James had been a student at Bologna while Petrarch was there, but their acquaintance had not ripened into intimacy until they met again at Avignon.

James Colonna.

James Colonna had won the favour of John XXII, who was then pope, by the following circumstance. On January 17, 1328, King

1328.

Louis of Bavaria, in spite of the opposition of the Holy See, was crowned as emperor, and on April 18, in an assembly which he had illegally summoned, he caused the pope to be denounced as a heretic and Antichrist. Four days later, the young Colonna, who was a papal chaplain and canon of the Lateran, suddenly appeared with four masked retainers on the place in front of the church of San Marcello in Rome, read to the multitude there assembled a papal bull against the emperor and his adherents, and offering to maintain with his sword the truth of the accusations therein contained, with his own hands he nailed the bull to the door of the church. Thereupon he mounted his horse and rode away with his companions, and the armed troops of the emperor were unable to capture him.

The pope rewarded this bold deed by bestowing upon him the bishopric of Lombez, a little city south-west of Toulouse on one of the northern spurs of the Pyrenees.

In the spring of 1330, the new bishop prepared to visit his diocese and invited Petrarch to go with him.[1](#)

1330. Journey to Lombez.

Petrarch attributed his invitation partly to the keen interest which the bishop took in the poetry of the country. A halt was made at Toulouse. This city was the literary centre of the troubadours whose poetry, although then in its decline, was still held in honour.

In 1323, ‘The Gay Company of the Seven Troubadours’ of that city wrote a circular letter in Provençal verse to the various poets of Languedoc inviting them to come to Toulouse on May 1, 1324, with their productions, and promising to give a golden violet to him whose verses should be considered the most worthy of the prize.

Troubadours. 1323.

The poets appeared on the day appointed, the prize was given to Arnaud Vidal for a poem on the Blessed Virgin, and the magistrates, wishing to perpetuate these contests, promised to distribute every year the same prize at the expense of the city.<sup>2</sup>

1324.

Petrarch has been called ‘the first of the humanists and the last and greatest of the troubadours’. He is indebted to the latter for many of his metres and systems of rhyme. A number of his metaphors, similes and conceits are taken from their poems, and in some places he has imitated their style, transforming it, however, into something far better than the original. While there is no direct evidence, it is probable that he acquired much of his knowledge of their poetry upon this journey.

1330.

On the way from Toulouse to Lombez the weather was bad and the roads frightful. Petrarch found the country and the manners of the people rude and unattractive, and yet he afterwards spoke of his happiness during his sojourn, and it was at Lombez that he formed two of his most lasting and intimate friendships. One was with Lewis of Campinia, a Fleming, whom the poet called ‘Socrates’ and to whom he dedicated long afterwards his ‘Familiar Letters’. The other was with Lello Stefani, a Roman, whom Petrarch called ‘Laelius’ after the name of the follower and companion of his hero, Scipio Africanus.

Socrates and Laelius.

When the poet returned to Avignon from Lombez, in the fall of 1330, the bishop presented him to others of his family: to his brother, Cardinal John Colonna, and later to his father, Stephen, who came to Avignon in 1331 to visit his two sons; also to Stephen’s brother, John of San Vito, lord of Gensano, who had travelled in Persia, Arabia, and Egypt, but whose passion for the Eternal City was shared by the young poet and formed a close bond of sympathy between them.

The Colonnas.

Petrarch soon entered the service of Cardinal Colonna and became a member of his household. He wrote of him long afterwards in his ‘Letter to Posterity’: ‘I lived under him for many years, not as under a master but a father, nay not even that, but as with a most affectionate brother or indeed as if I had been in my own home.’ The patronage of the powerful house of Colonna did much to advance the fortunes of the young poet.

1331.

Nothing in Petrarch’s character was more marked than his eagerness to see new things, and in the spring of 1333 he set out

1333. Paris and the Netherlands.

on his first important journey, visiting Paris and the Netherlands. Paris was then the first seat of learning in Europe. Here Petrarch enjoyed the congenial society of scholars—of Robert de' Bardi, chancellor of the University, and of the Augustinian monk, Dionysius, professor of divinity and philosophy, who became the poet's intimate friend and probably his confessor.

Petrarch confided to him his passion for Laura. Dionysius counselled him to struggle earnestly against it, and gave him a small but beautiful manuscript of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine for his instruction. From this time began the struggle in Petrarch's soul between his religious convictions and his passion, a battle which remained undecided for many years.

Dionysius.

St. Augustine, who was a scholar like himself, was Petrarch's favourite among the Fathers of the Church. This book of confessions being easily portable, was constantly with him on his journeys; he often referred to it, and its influence appears in one of the most important of his works, *The Secret*, containing his own similar confessions in the form of a dialogue.[1](#)

After leaving Paris, Petrarch visited Ghent and other places in Flanders; Brabant, famous for woollen manufactures and weaving, and Liège, where he went book-hunting and discovered two orations of Cicero, of which he transcribed one and got a friend to copy the other, though 'ink was almost impossible to obtain, and what there was, was as yellow as saffron'.

Thence he visited Aix-la-Chapelle, which had been the capital of Charlemagne's empire, and having bathed in the warm waters of its springs, he proceeded to Cologne. 'It happened to be the vigil of St. John the Baptist', he writes, 'when I arrived, and it was near sunset. According to the wish of some friends of mine (for I have friends here whom my fame rather than my merit has procured for me), I was immediately conducted from the inn to the edge of the river to behold an extraordinary sight. Nor was I disappointed. All the river bank was covered with an immense and splendid concourse of women. I was astonished! Good God! what lovely forms and faces! And what dresses! Whoever had been heart-free must have fallen in love with one of them. I had taken my stand upon a bit of rising ground from which one had a good view of what was going on. The crowd was unbelievable and yet there was no disorder. I saw them all, half hidden by the sweet-scented grass, joyously turn up their sleeves above the elbow and bathe their hands and white arms in the stream, holding pleasant talk in their foreign tongue.'[1](#)

1334. Cologne.

Petrarch asked the meaning of all this, and was informed that it was a common belief that any misfortunes impending during the coming year would be washed away in the stream.

On his return to France he traversed alone the Forest of Ardennes, and this, too, in time of war. 'It was already known to me from books,' he writes, 'and is a truly wild and dreadful place, but, as they say, God takes care of the unwary.'[2](#)

Ardennes.



When he reached Lyons he was greatly disappointed to learn that the Bishop of Lombez, with whom he was to go to Rome, had already set out alone for that city, and Petrarch wrote him a letter of bitter reproaches, but learned afterwards that the bishop had been called thither suddenly to support his family in a critical feud which had broken out with their hereditary enemies, the Orsini. Petrarch was compelled to renounce his journey and to resume his wonted literary occupations in the house of the Cardinal Colonna at Avignon.

In December 1334, Pope John XXII died and was succeeded by Benedict XII. Petrarch addressed to this pontiff two poetical epistles urging him to restore the Holy See to Rome, and the pope (no doubt at the instance of the Colonnas) bestowed upon the poet the office of Canon of Lombez.

This was his first preferment in the Church.

Canon of Lombez.

Although Petrarch had renounced the profession of the law, yet this year he was unexpectedly called upon to become an advocate and he accepted the task. Orlando Rossi had been tyrant of Parma, and Mastino della Scala, lord of Verona, had driven him from the government of that city and confided it to Guido da Correggio. Rossi appealed to the pope, and Correggio sent his brother Azzo, with William of Pastrengo, to defend his claim to the city before the papal consistory.

Azzo, young, handsome, and a friend of letters, though an unprincipled man, won the favour of Petrarch, and secured his services. They were successful. The Scaligers were confirmed as lords of the city and Correggio continued to administer its affairs. Azzo and Pastrengo remained for many years intimate and devoted friends of the poet.

Azzo da Correggio.

In April 1336, Petrarch with his brother, Gherardo, did a thing quite unusual in those days—they climbed for pleasure and curiosity a mountain not far from Avignon, called Mont Ventoux, an isolated peak some 6,200 feet in height. The ascent was rough and difficult, but the summit gave wonderful views of the Alps, the Rhône, and the Mediterranean.

1336. Mont Ventoux.

Petrarch thus describes, in a letter to his confessor, Dionysius, what he saw and how he felt. ‘The highest peak of all’, he says, ‘is called “The Grandson” by a sort of contradiction, for it seems rather to be the father of all the mountains in the neighbourhood. There is a little plot upon the summit, where we were all very glad to sit down. . . . At first, I was so affected by the unaccustomed spirit of the air, and by the free prospect, that I stood as one stupefied. I looked back; clouds were beneath my feet. I began to understand Athos and Olympus since I found that what I heard and read of them was true of a mountain of far less celebrity. I turned my eyes to that Italian region to which my soul most inclines and the great rugged Alps seemed quite close to me, though they really were at a great distance. I confess that I sighed for that Italian air, more sensible to the soul than to the eyes, and an intense longing came upon me to behold my friends and my country once more. Then a new reflection arose in my mind, I passed from place to time. I recollected that on this day ten years had elapsed since I terminated my youthful studies in Bologna, and, O immortal God! O immutable Wisdom! how many changes had that interval witnessed! [1](#) . . . I wished to recollect my past uncleanness, and the

1336. Mont Ventoux.

carnal corruptions of my soul, not because I love them, but because I love Thee, O my God. I no longer love what I used to love; nay, that is not true; I do love still, but with more modesty and a deeper melancholy. Yes, I still love, but unwillingly, in spite of myself, in sorrow and tribulation of heart.<sup>1</sup> . . . I could very clearly see the mountains about Lyons on the right, and on the left the Bay of Marseilles, which is distant some days' journey. The Rhône flowed beneath our eyes. But whilst I was admiring so many objects of the earth, and my soul rose to lofty contemplations by the example of the body, it occurred to me that I would look into the book of Augustine's *Confessions*, which I owe to your kindness, and which I generally carry about with me, as it is a volume of small dimensions, though of great sweetness. I opened it at a venture, meaning to read whatever might present itself, for what could have presented itself that was not pious and devout? The volume opened at the tenth book. My brother was expecting to hear the words of Augustine from my lips, and he can testify that in the first place I lighted upon it was thus written: "There are men who go to admire the high places of mountains, the great waves of the sea, the wide currents of rivers, the circuit of the ocean, and the orbits of the stars, and who neglect themselves." I confess that I was amazed; I begged my brother, who was anxious to hear more, not to interrupt me, and I shut the book, half angry with myself, that I, who was even now admiring terrestrial things, ought already to have learnt from the philosophers that nothing is truly great except the soul.

I was sufficiently satisfied with what I had seen upon the mountain, and I turned my eyes back into myself, so that from that hour till we came to the bottom, no one heard me speak. . . . You see, most beloved father, that there is nothing in me which I desire to conceal from your eyes, since I not only disclose to you my whole life, but even my individual reflections. Father, I crave your prayers, that whatever in me is vague and unstable may be strengthened, and that the thoughts I waste abroad on many things, may be turned to that one thing, which is true, good and secure. Farewell.<sup>1</sup>

1336. Mont Ventoux.

At the end of this same year, 1336, Petrarch was able to set out upon his journey to Rome, a city which had long been the object of his enthusiastic devotion. On his way thither he halted for about three weeks, on account of the dangerous condition of the roads, at Capranica, thirty miles away, where he was the guest of Count Orso del Anguillara, the husband of Agnes, sister of the Bishop of Lombez. The bishop joined him here on January 26, 1337, and they presently started for Rome accompanied by a troupe of a hundred horsemen to protect them from the hostile Orsini and from the robbers who infested the country. During his stay in Rome, he visited the aged Stephen Colonna and wandered about the city under the guidance of his brother John of San Vito. The Baths of Diocletian used to be their favourite restingplace, and they would climb to its vaulted roof to enjoy the prospect and discuss together the history of the glorious past and the ignoble present of the Eternal City.

First Journey to Rome.

In the month of August the poet had returned to Avignon. In the interval it would appear that he again visited Lombez, where he now had a canonicate, and from a poetical letter to the Bishop of Lombez about this time it would seem that he had made a sea-trip to some point from which he could see 'the mountain hardened by Medusa's eye', that is, some part of

Journey to the English Channel.

the Mount Atlas chain, and proceeding northward came to the place ‘where the swollen wave of the British sea wears away with its tide the shores that stand doubtful which shall receive its stroke’. The allusions to this journey are so obscure, however, that many critics believe it to be imaginary.

Petrarch had always an abhorrence of the bustle and confusion of the city, and he especially detested Avignon, which he called Babylon and considered as the abode of every foul and wicked thing, so he determined to seek another home. He says long afterwards, in his ‘Letter to Posterity’, ‘I looked for some retreat to which I could escape for shelter, and at fifteen miles from that city is the very small but solitary and pleasant valley which is called Chiusa (Vaucluse), where, queen of all fountains, the Sorga gushes forth. Charmed by the beauty of the place, I brought my books thither and there fixed my abode.’

Vaucluse.

1337. Vaucluse.

Jerrold thus describes this wonderful valley:[1](#)

‘It is shut in by limestone rocks, one of which rises so tall and sheer at the end of the defile as to appear like the impassable gateway of some giant’s prison. Before we have advanced thus far, however, we are in a land of fruit-trees and gardens, through which the river wins its rapid, turbulent way, and as we learn from Petrarch, often holds its own against the gardeners, destroying in one night the work of months. As we proceed, figs and mulberries, vines and olives, give place to a growth of small shrubs, to the box and the ilex, that wizard tree which seems to have woven into its branches the immemorial magic of the world. The valley narrows, the aspect becomes more threatening, we have reached the imprisoning barrier whose arching pent-roof seems to frown upon us, and lo! beneath it is the famous *speco*, the grotto of the fountain of the Sorgue. The water is wonderfully dark in hue; no one seems to satisfy himself in describing its colour; it is not green, or violet, or blue, or black; it seems to be as elusive as the eyes of Laura, and perhaps best corresponds to Shelley’s ‘firmament of purple light’; it wells up pure and still into an untroubled lake, and, when it has reached the brim, it overflows and rushes on its impetuous course. The forbidding sternness of the grotto, the mysterious calm of the rising water, the force and fury of the torrent, the austere hillside, gradually lending itself to cultivation, and dimpling down the valley, almost a poem in itself, was surely no inadequate setting for a poet’s soul.’

In this valley Petrarch now lived, devoting himself in part to the studies of which he was so fond and in part to the enjoyment of nature, a simple, comfortable, and idyllic life which he himself has repeatedly described.

‘In the middle of the night’, he says, ‘I arise. In the early morning I leave the house and think, study, read, and write under the open sky just as if I were at home. So far as is possible I keep sleep from my eyes, softness from my body, the desire of the senses from my soul, and indolence from my work. I wander around for whole days upon the sunny mountains and through the valleys and grottos, fresh with dew.’[1](#)

And again (this is written long afterwards): 'I never see the face of a woman, except that of my bailiff's wife, and if you saw her, you might suppose yourself to be looking on a patch of the Libyan or Ethiopian desert. 'Tis a scorched, sunburnt countenance, with not a trace of freshness or juice remaining. Had Helen worn such a face, Troy would still be standing; had Lucretia and Virginia been thus dowered, Tarquinius had not lost his kingdom, nor Appius died in his prison. But let me not, after this description of her aspect, rob the goodwife of the eulogy due to her virtues. Her soul is as white as her skin is swarthy. . . . There never was a trustier, humbler, more laborious creature. In the sun's full blaze, where the very grasshopper can scarce bear the heat, she spends her whole days in the fields and her tanned hide laughs at Leo and Cancer. At evening the old dame returns home, and busies her unwearied, invincible little body about household work, with such vigour that you might suppose her a lass fresh from the bedchamber. Not a murmur all this time, not a grumble, no hint of trouble in her mind, only incredible care lavished on her husband and children, on me, on my household, and on the guests who come to see me, and at the same time an incredible scorn for her own comfort. . . . Well, this is my eyes' discipline. What shall I say of my ears? Here I have no solace of song or flute or viol, which, elsewhere, are wont to carry me out of myself; all such sweetness the breeze has wafted away from me. Here the only sounds are the occasional lowing of cattle and bleating of sheep, the songs of birds, and the ceaseless murmur of the stream. What of my tongue, by which I have often raised my own spirits, and sometimes perhaps those of others?

Now it lies low and is often silent from dawn to dusk, for it has no one except me to talk to. As to my gullet and belly, I have so disciplined them, that my herdsman's bread is often enough for me, and I even enjoy it, and I leave the white bread, brought me from a distance, to be eaten by the servants who fetched it. To such an extent does custom stand me in the stead of luxury. . . . Here I have fashioned me two little gardens, the most apt in the world to my fancy and desire; should I try to picture them to you, this letter would be long drawn out. In a word, I think the world scarce holds their like, and if I must confess my womanish frivolity, I am in a huff that such beauty should exist anywhere out of Italy. The one I always call my Transalpine Helicon, for it is bowered in shade, made for study as for nothing else, and consecrated to my Apollo. It lies close to the pool in which the Sorgue rises, beyond which is only a trackless crag, quite inaccessible except to wild animals and birds. My other garden lies close to my house; it has a better-tilled appearance and Bromê's nursling (Bacchus) has his favourite plant there. This, strange to say, lies in the middle of the beautiful swift river, and close by, separated only by a little bridge at the end of the house, hangs the arch of a grotto of natural rock, which under this blazing sky makes the summer heat imperceptible. It is a place to fire the soul to study, and I think not unlike the little court where Cicero used to declaim his speeches, except that his place had no Sorgue flowing by it. Under this grotto, then, I sit at noon; my morning is spent on the hills, my evening in the meadows, or in that wilder little garden, close to the source where design has embellished nature, where there is a spot in mid-stream overshadowed by the lofty crag, a tiny spot indeed, but full of lively promptings by which even a sluggard soul may be goaded to high imaginings.' [1](#)

Life at Vacluse.

Petrarch had a neighbour who came from time to time to a castle on the heights overlooking Vacluse, whom he often visited and to whom he soon became bound by ties of intimate friendship. This was Philip of Cabassoles, the Bishop of Cavaillon, a town not many miles away.

Philip of Cabassoles.

It was at Vacluse that Petrarch's most important literary work was done. Here he began his ambitious Latin epic *Africa*, in honour of Scipio Africanus. It was at this place that a great part of his letters were written, as well as nearly all his eclogues. Here he conceived his project of a great work on the 'Illustrious Men of Roman History'. It was here that he developed the outlines of his work on the 'Repose of the Cloister' and 'Concerning the Life of Solitude'. All these productions were written in Latin, but it was also here that the greater part of his Italian love songs were composed, since the solitude by which he had hoped to heal his passion had inflamed it anew. [1](#) From 1337 to 1353, although his residence was interrupted by a number of voyages and sojourns in other places, Vacluse was Petrarch's home.

Literary Work in Vacluse.

1337.

It was in this same year 1337 that Petrarch became the father of a boy to whom he gave the name John. Who was the boy's mother is unknown. We learn through the bull of Pope Clement VI, by which, in September 1348, the child was made legitimate, that she was an unmarried woman, and it is probable she was the same by whom he had a daughter in 1343. From what he says in his 'Letter to Posterity' it would seem that his heart was not engaged. She may have been a woman of low origin with whom he became associated in Avignon. There is no evidence that she ever came to Vacluse. The connexion seems to have attracted little attention, doubtless because such relations were common enough at this time even among the clergy, a mistress having been attributed to Pope Clement VI himself. Petrarch's bitterest enemies never appear to have criticized or censured him on this account.

As we have already seen, Robert, King of Naples, was Count of Provence, and therefore hereditary lord of Avignon and Petrarch's suzerain. He was a lover of literature and a patron of learning. He had lived in Avignon from 1318 to 1324, while Petrarch was at Montpellier and Bologna, and in 1338 he sent to Petrarch an epitaph which he had composed upon his niece, the widow of King Louis X of France, and he asked Petrarch's judgement upon it. The reply of the poet was full of enthusiasm if not of fulsome flattery. 'An unwonted gleam', he said, 'has dazzled my eye. Blessed the pen to which such words were entrusted. What shall I first admire, the classical brevity of expression, the sublimity of thought, or the godlike charm of its eloquence?' [1](#)

Robert of Naples.  
1338.

It must be said in justice to Petrarch, that to the end of his life he remained an extravagant admirer of King Robert. It is likely that Dionysius, Petrarch's confessor, had first called Robert's attention to the poet. Dionysius had stopped at Avignon on his way from Paris to Naples, where he afterwards lived at the court of this king, who in March 1339 appointed him Bishop of Monopoli. The agency of the bishop is also suspected in the subsequent efforts made

1339.

(in which the poet himself participated) to obtain for Petrarch the laurel crown which was offered to him the following year.

The Roman emperor Domitian, in imitation of the Panathenaea and the Pythian festivals,<sup>2</sup> had decreed that every five years a contest in musical and gymnastic arts should be held, including literature and poetry. These festivals continued as long as the western empire existed, and a dim recollection of the coronation of the poets on the Capitol was preserved during the Middle Ages, and was renewed during the thirteenth century in laurel crowns (substituted for the oak leaves of Domitian), which were conferred upon poets at various times and places. This was the commencement of a title that is still perpetuated in the designation of a poet laureate in England. Petrarch had an intense longing for this laurel crown. Intertwined with this desire was his love for Laura, with whose name the laurel seemed in his imagination to be identified. He founded his claims to this classic honour principally upon his Latin productions, especially upon the great epic *Africa*, on which he was then working. But very little of this epic had yet been written, and, as he himself afterwards confessed, his reputation was hardly ripe for such an honour. At first he desired to receive this crown from King Robert, and wrote to Dionysius in 1339 that he would not wish it bestowed by any other hand, adding, ‘If I am of sufficient merit to be invited, well; if *not*, *I shall pretend to have heard something, or as doubting the sense of the letter which he sent me* in his supreme and most kindly condescension toward an unknown man, *I shall go into those parts that I may seem to have been invited!*’<sup>1</sup>

The Laurel Crown.

Dionysius at Naples, the Colonna family at Rome, and his friends in Paris, all appear to have been enlisted in the cause, and the result was that in September 1340, while he was wandering alone in a meadow at Vaucluse, he received a letter from the Roman Senate inviting him to be crowned in that city, and at six in the evening of that day a messenger from Paris brought a letter from Robert de’ Bardi, chancellor of the University, inviting him to receive the laurel in that city.

He conferred with Cardinal Colonna as to which invitation he should accept. Naturally Colonna urged the claims of Rome, which was Petrarch’s own preference, and he accordingly accepted the invitation of the Senate, and proceeded to that city, but by way of Naples, where he visited King Robert. He thus describes what occurred.

1340.

‘When we had talked together of a thousand different things, I showed him my poem *Africa*, which pleased him so much that he begged me, as a singular favour, to dedicate it to him. I could not but consent to such an honourable request, nor indeed had I any wish to refuse. And for that which was the object of my journey, he fixed a day on which he examined me continuously from midday till evening.

1341.

And because the time was too short for the many matters which arose for discussion, he continued the examination during the two following days. So for three days he put my poor abilities to the proof, and at last pronounced me worthy to receive the laurel. He offered it to me there in Naples, and earnestly besought me to accept it there, but the love of Rome had more power over my mind than even the august wishes of that great king.’<sup>1</sup>

Examination at Naples.

Therefore Petrarch resumed his journey to Rome. King Robert would have accompanied him, to place the crown upon his head with his own hand, but the infirmities of age forbade it. When Petrarch left Naples, the king kissed him, and threw around him his own purple mantle, so that the poet should have the appropriate apparel for the ceremony. The crown was placed upon his head by the Senator Orso del Anguillara, upon the Capitol, on Easter Day, April 8, 1341, and a contemporary writer thus describes the event.

‘Twelve boys arrayed in scarlet, each fifteen years old, and all sons of distinguished nobles and citizens, declaimed many verses composed by Petrarch in praise of the Roman people. After them came six citizens dressed in green cloth, and wearing wreaths of flowers of various kinds. Then the Senator strode forward, his head decorated with a laurel wreath, and after he had seated himself on the chair in the Hall of the Assettamento, Francesco Petrarca was summoned by trumpet and fife, and advanced clothed in a long garment and cried three times, “Long live the Roman people, long live its Senators, and God maintain it in its freedom;” and then he kneeled before the Senator, who said, “I first crown merit”, and took the wreath from his own head and put it on that of Master Francesco, who declaimed a beautiful sonnet in praise of the brave old Romans, and the festival was ended with great praise of the poet, since the whole people cried, “Long live the Capitol and the poet!”’ [1](#)

The Coronation.

Besides the sonnet, which is now no longer extant, Petrarch delivered a short speech describing the difficulties of the art of poetry and its reward, the laurel, possessing and conferring immortality. He was then conducted to St. Peter’s, where he deposited the crown as an offering. [2](#) In his diploma, as Gibbon says, ‘the title and prerogatives of poet laureate are revived after the lapse of thirteen hundred years, and he receives the perpetual privilege of wearing at his choice a crown of laurel, ivy, or myrtle, of assuming the poetic habit and of teaching, disputing, interpreting, and composing in all places whatsoever, and on all subjects of literature’ [.3](#)

1341.

The crown undoubtedly added greatly to Petrarch’s reputation, because it was the recognized symbol of distinction, and it gave him much greater power than he would otherwise have possessed, of disseminating among mankind the ‘new learning’ of which he was the foremost apostle.

On leaving Rome, armed robbers fell upon him not far from the walls, and he escaped with difficulty back into the city. On the following day he departed again, protected by a troop of armed men, and from Pisa he wrote an account of the ceremony to King Robert.

Thence he proceeded to Parma, and entered that city with Azzo da Correggio, who, with his brothers, had revolted against the Scaligers, to whom they owed their position, and had assumed the sovereignty of the city themselves. Here Petrarch remained for a year, and continued his work upon his epic *Africa* with such goodwill that he brought it near its completion.

Parma.

It was at this place that he was visited by an old blind man, who kept a school at Pontremoli, and who was filled with such ardent enthusiasm for the poet that, guided by his son, he followed him to Naples. Petrarch had already left that city, and the blind man then followed him to

Blind man of Pontremoli.

Rome, but found him gone, and returned home; but hearing afterwards that Petrarch was at Parma, he crossed the Apennines, found the object of his devotion, and for three days never left the poet's side.

It was while he was at Parma that Petrarch lost his early friend, the bishop, James Colonna. On the night of his death the poet had a dream of that event.

In January 1342 his confessor Dionysius died at Naples.

1342.

Although the Correggi treated him with the utmost consideration during his stay, and he was reluctant to leave Italy, he was called back to Avignon, probably by Cardinal Colonna, in the spring of 1342.

Or perhaps another motive actuated him. On April 25, Pope Benedict XII died, and Clement VI succeeded him. Petrarch may well have been anxious to acquire the favour of the new pontiff, since his livelihood was largely dependent on papal patronage.

1342.

The Romans sent an embassy to congratulate Clement on his accession, to solicit the return of the papacy to Rome, and to ask permission for a jubilee in that city in 1350. It is said that Petrarch was made a member of this embassy. This is not certain, but it is known that Cola di Rienzi was its spokesman, and that Petrarch formed his acquaintance while on this mission.

The poet also addressed to Clement a long epistle in verse, urging his return to the Holy City; but if he would not, then asking him to restore the churches there, and to celebrate the great jubilee therein. The latter favour was conceded, and the poet appears to have been rewarded for his effort by the grant of the priorate of Migliarino, in the diocese of Pisa.

Meets Rienzi.

With the accession of Clement, the appearance of the papal court was greatly changed, and a magnificence and luxury were introduced theretofore unknown. Clement was a great lover of horses, and celebrated for his gallantries. Promotions in the Church went by favour, and were distributed largely by Cécile de Commenges, Viscountess of Turenne, who apparently governed the papal curia in much the same way that Pompadour and Du Barry reigned in the Court of Louis XV. The immoralities which prevailed were afterwards denounced by Petrarch in unmeasured terms, not only in his eclogues and letters, but in three sonnets, the publication of which was subsequently forbidden by the *Index*. One of these sonnets, *Fiamma dal Ciel* (written probably between 1347 and 1351), is as follows:

Debauchery in papal court.

A fire from heaven rain upon thy head,  
Base creature! who in humble penury born,  
With water from the stream and acorns fed,  
Art grown so great in wealth from others torn!  
How it delights thee to do deeds unjust!  
O nest of treason, hatching every ill,  
Servant of wine and gluttony and lust,  
Where luxury to the brim her cup doth fill!  
Within thy halls young girls and aged sires



Go wantoning together, while the fiend  
Stirs with his bellows the infernal fires!  
Of old, in such soft shades thou wert not screened,  
But naked to the winds, mid thorns, unshod,  
And now thy noisome stench ascends to God!  
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His personal relations with Clement, however, were always friendly. The pope was uniformly kind and generous, whether it was that he did not know of these invectives, or was magnanimous enough to overlook them, or whether it was on account of the feeling of reverence and almost of sanctity which a great poet and scholar at that time inspired.

Petrarch betook himself again to his solitude at Vacluse, where, however, his studies were interrupted by floods of letters from all parts of Europe, and by frequent visits from hosts of admirers. A mania for composing poetry became epidemic. Ecclesiastics, artisans, and peasants felt the call of the Muses, and began to write in rhyme, sending their verses to Petrarch for his judgement and criticism. An old man reproached him because his son, misled by the poet's example, had given up his legal studies and consumed his time in making verses.<sup>1</sup>

1342. Returns to Vacluse.

Epidemic of versemaking.

In this same year of 1342 Petrarch's brother Gherardo abandoned his worldly life, and entered the Carthusian monastery at Montrieu, near Marseilles. The occasion for this step is said to have been the death of the woman to whom he had been deeply devoted. Petrarch appears to have sympathized with his brother's misfortune, and one of his tenderest sonnets<sup>2</sup> is believed to have been inspired by this circumstance.

Gherardo enters convent.

In January 1343 King Robert died, leaving as his heir his granddaughter, Joanna, a girl of sixteen, married to her cousin Andrew, son of the King of Hungary, also a minor. A wild factional struggle broke out in Naples concerning her guardianship, and the pope, as the over-lord of the kingdom, selected Petrarch, as his representative, to go to Naples and maintain the rights of the Papal See.

1343.

Petrarch found everything in confusion and disorder. A crafty Franciscan monk, the former teacher of Andrew, ruled the kingdom in the name of the youthful pair. Cruel gladiatorial sports were openly given, from which Petrarch fled in horror; crime was rampant everywhere; a dreadful storm wrought havoc in the harbour and the city. Near the close of the year he departed from Naples, having failed to accomplish the mission which the pope had entrusted to him. He did not return at once to Avignon, but stopped on the way at Parma, and remained there more than a year.

Embassy to Naples.

During his stay there were quarrels among the Correggi, and in November 1344 the lords of Milan and Mantua laid siege to the

Parma. Second visit.

1344.

city. For some three months Petrarch endured the discomforts of a beleaguered town, and then determined to escape.

On the night of February 23, after passing successfully through the camp of the besiegers with a small unarmed escort, he was attacked by a troop of robbers and was only saved by flight. His horse fell and threw him, the guides lost their way, and Petrarch, wounded from the fall, spent the night upon the ground in the midst of a raging storm. By this storm, however, his little company avoided an ambush which had been prepared for them, and the next day proceeded over the mountain paths to Modena, and thence to Bologna.

1345.

Later he visited Verona, at which place he had the good fortune to find in a church library a valuable manuscript of the letters of Cicero, probably his letters to Atticus.<sup>1</sup> He immediately made with his own hand a copy of this new treasure.

Verona. Letters of Cicero.

Near the close of this year we find him again in Vaucluse, where he writes to Cardinal Colonna, giving a lively description of his struggles with the water-nymphs, who had broken a dam he had built for the protection of his garden.

In 1346 Pope Clement offered him the influential and lucrative position of papal secretary, but the poet declined on the ground that he could not give up his liberty, as he would have to do if he accepted such a place. The pope was not offended at his refusal, but bestowed upon him a canonicate at Parma, and later (probably in 1348) the office of archdeacon in the same city. According to the ecclesiastical custom of the time, it was not necessary that these offices should be personally administered by those who held them. They were sinecures granted by the pope as a pure matter of patronage.

1346. Refuses papal secretaryship.

We have seen that Petrarch first met Cola di Rienzi when the latter had come to Avignon, in 1342, as the spokesman of the embassy to Clement VI. It was during this visit that Rienzi first inspired the poet with his own ardent zeal for the regeneration of Rome, until Petrarch was moved to tears by Rienzi's picture of the miseries and oppressions inflicted upon the Eternal City, the city that, as they both believed, had been designed by God to be the capital of the world, the pope and emperor being the representatives, the one of its spiritual, the other of its temporal dominion. Petrarch's mind was fertile soil for the sowing of Rienzi's propaganda. From his classical studies the poet had imbibed even the prejudices and aspirations of the ancient Romans, until he had almost come to consider as barbarian all things that were not Roman.<sup>1</sup> In a letter, written almost immediately after Rienzi's departure from Avignon, Petrarch says, 'When I recall to my mind the most holy and weighty discourse which you held with me three days ago . . . I become all enkindled, and am as though I deemed an oracle had issued from the divine sanctuary, and seem to myself to have listened to a god rather than a man. So prophetically did you seem to deplore the present state, nay rather, the downfall and ruin of the republic, so penetratingly to put the fingers of your eloquence upon our wounds, that, as often as the sound of your words returns to my ears in memory, tears rise to my eyes, and grief comes back into my soul. . . . Often, with my mind wavering between one emotion and the other, I say to myself, Oh, if ever! Oh, if it

Rienzi inspires Petrarch.

might happen in my days! Oh, if I might be a partaker in such a splendid work and in so much glory!’<sup>1</sup>

On May 20, 1347, Rienzi accomplished that remarkable yet bloodless revolution by which it was believed that Rome was to be delivered from the tyranny of its nobles, the old freedom of the city re-established, and all Italy reunited in a single commonwealth. This too was Petrarch’s dream, the dream of united Italy, not realized until five hundred years later, when it became an accomplished fact under Cavour, Garibaldi, and Victor Emmanuel. But it seemed then as if it were on the eve of accomplishment. Rienzi became master of Rome under the ancient and honoured title of Tribune of the People, and caused new ordinances to be established by acclamation for reforming many of the abuses which existed. The domination of the noble houses, with the Colonna and Orsini at their head, had been sheer brigandage. But now every murder was to be punished with death; trials must be completed within fifteen days; guards were to be placed in every part of the city and upon the roads around it; widows and orphans were to be befriended, and cloisters and churches protected by the State; the nobles were forbidden to fortify their dwellings or to give asylum to malefactors. Rienzi demanded a colleague, and chose for that office the vicar of the Pope, in order to conciliate the Holy See. Absolute power was given to the tribunes; the nobles themselves were compelled to swear allegiance to the Commonwealth; strict justice was administered without regard to the rank of the offender; public tranquillity was restored; the cities and communes of Italy were invited to send representatives to a general parliament to consider the peace and freedom of the whole peninsula; the pope himself at first confirmed the election of the two tribunes, and the sovereigns of Europe sent ambassadors to confer with them.

1347. Rienzi becomes Tribune.

Petrarch was dazzled by the delightful illusions which these things promised. He sent to Rienzi numerous letters of advice, congratulation, and encouragement. His exasperation against the nobles who had oppressed the city was unbounded. Fearing lest the Romans should again fall under their yoke, he even advised that no quarter be given them, since mercy to them was cruelty to the State. But among these nobles were his own friends of the house of Colonna, of whom he declared at a later time that no princely house in the world was so dear to him, yet added, ‘Dearer to me is Italy, dearer Rome, dearer the public good.’<sup>1</sup> He seemed to fancy himself another Brutus, and denounced the Orsini and Colonna families as usurpers and barbarians, the former coming from Spoleto, and the latter from the banks of the distant Rhine.

Petrarch’s enthusiasm.

It is easy to see that a continuance of his former relations with Cardinal Colonna would now become impossible. Even his presence at the papal court at Avignon became embarrassing, for the pope soon repudiated Rienzi, whose messenger was beaten and insulted on his way to Avignon. Petrarch determined, therefore, to leave Provence, and betake himself to Italy.

On November 20, 1347, he set out from Avignon for Rome. But in the very beginning of his journey, news came that things were

1347. Petrarch leaves for Italy.

going ill with Rienzi. His sudden rise to power had turned his head.

He appeared in public with great splendour. He bathed in the porphyry vase where Constantine was baptized; he placed on his head the 'seven spiritual crowns'; he coined money in his own name; he remained seated while the nobles stood bareheaded before him; he summoned the two claimants to the imperial throne, Louis the Bavarian and Charles IV, that he might decide between them; he demanded that the papal court should return to Rome, and he declared that even the right of proclaiming pope or emperor belonged to the Roman people.<sup>1</sup>

Rienzi's follies.

Petrarch remonstrated, begging Rienzi not to destroy his own work nor tarnish his fame, nor make of himself a spectacle at which his friends must weep and his enemies laugh. 'I was hastening toward you', he wrote, 'with all my heart, but I have changed my plan.' After a short stay at Genoa he proceeded, not to Rome, but to Parma, and there he awaited the outcome.

Rienzi's troops had won in a fierce fight with the barons, close to the walls of Rome, in which the leading members of the Colonna family were killed, so that the aged Stephen was left almost the only survivor, yet the tribune frittered away his victory in vain triumphant processions, and a month later, after having been excommunicated by the papal legate, he was deserted by the people, when a small band of reactionaries under the Count of Minorbino took possession of the city.

Parma. Third visit.

Rienzi became panic-stricken, laid aside the insignia of his office, took refuge in the castle of St. Angelo, and thence fled in disguise to Naples, while the nobles re-entered and took their revenge. 'At least', said Petrarch, 'he might have died gloriously in the Capital which he had freed.'<sup>2</sup>

Rienzi. His overthrow.

Two of the Colonnas who had been killed in the fight with Rienzi had been friends of Petrarch, and after many months' embarrassing delay, urged by his friends, the poet wrote a letter of condolence to the Cardinal which, although beginning with a feeling acknowledgement of all that he owed to his princely patron, continued and concluded like a 'rhetorical exercise upon death'.<sup>1</sup>

Five years later, when Rienzi was a prisoner at Avignon, Petrarch urged the Roman people to demand his liberation, which Rienzi afterwards secured, not on the merits of the case, but (as Petrarch relates the incredible tale) because it was rumoured and believed that the tribune was a poet! The papal court was unwilling to destroy a thing so precious! So Rienzi, in 1354, was sent back to Rome with the title of senator, but after four months of unsuccessful administration he was massacred in a tumult of the people, which had been fomented by the barons.

1354.

At Parma, Petrarch took possession of the canonicate which had been conferred upon him in that city, and afterwards learning of Rienzi's overthrow, he determined upon a longer stay, built himself a house, and busied himself with the completion of his Latin epic *Africa*.

1347.

In the beginning of 1348 he went to Verona, where he was the guest of Pastrengo and of Azzo da Correggio, and where, on January 25, he was witness to a terrible earthquake.

1348.

But a more dreadful calamity than this was close at hand. In the beginning of 1348 the plague appeared, brought by merchants out of India through Constantinople. Whole cities were depopulated, fertile districts were laid waste, and the bonds of social order were dissolved. It spread rapidly. As early as January it appeared at Avignon, and lasted for seven months. Those who were attacked generally died at the end of three days. It was at its height in Lent, and during the three days which preceded the fourth Sunday thereof 1,400 persons died in that city.<sup>1</sup>

The Plague.

Among its victims was Laura. She fell ill, probably about April 2 or 3, and died upon the 6th of that month, as appears from Petrarch's note on the margin of his manuscript of Virgil, written by him when the news reached him on May 19, on his return to Parma. The note is as follows:

Laura's death.

'Laura, distinguished by her own virtues and long celebrated in my songs, first appeared to my eyes in the days of my youth, in the year of our Lord 1327, on the 6th day of the month of April, in the church of Santa Clara at Avignon, in the morning hour; and in the same city, on the same month of April, on the same 6th day and at the same first hour, but in the year 1348, that light was withdrawn from the light of day, when I by chance was then at Verona, ignorant, alas! of my fate. But the unhappy news reached me at Parma by the letter of my Lewis, in that year, in the month of May, on the 19th day, in the morning. That most chaste and beautiful body was buried in the Franciscan church, on the same day of her death, in the evening. But I persuade myself that her soul indeed (as Seneca says of Africanus) returned to heaven from whence it came. And it seemed fitting that with bitter sweetness I should write this in mournful memory of the event, and particularly in this place which often comes under my eyes, so that I may realize by frequently looking at it that there ought to be nothing more that will please me in this life, and now since this, my greater bond is broken, that it is time for me to flee from Babylon, and that under the guidance of God I may be moved by this reflection on my most fleeting life, that it will consist (to one who thinks of the past in a clear and manly way) of nothing but empty cares, vain hopes and events that are wholly unexpected.'<sup>1</sup>

Note in Virgil MS.

Nor was this the only loss Petrarch sustained during this dreadful year. The pest counted many of his friends among its victims—Robert de' Bardi in Paris, who sought to bring the poet thither to receive in that city the laurel crown; Sennuccio del Bene, to whom Petrarch had written, and from whom he had received many a sonnet, and who had been his confidant regarding Laura and his love; also Cardinal Colonna, in whose house the poet had so long been an inmate. In spite of their estrangement during the preceding year, Petrarch was deeply affected. Only three of his intimate friends now remained, Settimo, Laelius, and Socrates.

Other friends die.

The poet could no longer remain at Parma, and he set forth upon his journeys. We find him with the Gonzagas at Mantua, visiting the birthplace of Virgil; at Verona,

renewing his companionship with Pastrengo; and in March 1349 at Padua, where James II of Carrara, a type of the Italian tyrant common at that time, had been ruling the city since 1345, after putting to death his cousin Marsilio, who was lawfully entitled to the throne.

He was, however, an able ruler, and a patron of literature and the sciences. He had pressing invited Petrarch to reside at Padua, and had bestowed upon him a canonicate in that city. Petrarch, who could see little evil in those who were personally kind to him, accordingly took up his abode there, and his relations with Carrara soon became those of the most intimate friendship. On June 20 he took possession of his new office, and he made short visits to other places. For instance, he was entertained at a banquet on June 28 by the Gonzagas at their castle of Luzzera, which he describes as ‘a home of flies and fleas, enlivened by the croaking of an army of frogs’.

1349. Padua. James II of Carrara.

But the time was now approaching for the great jubilee at Rome, and the poet determined to betake himself with other pilgrims to the Holy City.

He visited Verona on the way thither, he stopped at Parma during the heat of summer, and in October he paused for a few days at Florence, the city from which his father had been exiled, which he himself had never seen, and into which, according to the decree of expulsion, he was forbidden to enter. But no one thought of enforcing the prohibition, and among those who came to welcome him was Boccaccio, who was the third with Petrarch and Dante in the great trinity of the founders of Italian literature. There began an intimacy, the most important in Petrarch’s later years. Here, too, began his attachment to Francesco Nelli, prior of the church of the Holy Apostles in Florence, whom Petrarch nicknamed ‘Simonides’.

1350.

Florence.

Boccaccio.

On his way from Florence to Rome, Petrarch injured himself so seriously by a fall from his horse, that he was laid up at Rome for a fortnight. Of this visit he writes, ‘It is fourteen years since I first went to Rome from a desire to see its wonders; after a few years’ interval I was drawn there for the second time by the sweet, but perhaps immature desire for the laurel; my third and fourth journeys were occasioned by compassion for my illustrious friends; 1 this, my fifth, and it may be my last Roman pilgrimage, is so much happier than the others, as the care of the soul is more excellent than that of the body, and eternal salvation more to be desired than human glory.’

The Jubilee.

The Colonna family at this time was wellnigh extinct. Stephen was still living, after the death of all his sons, but he had fallen into the dementia that so often accompanies old age.

Petrarch did not stay long at Rome among the multitudes of pilgrims that thronged the city.

On his return journey he stopped at Arezzo, his native town, where the citizens were delighted to welcome a man who had given such honour to his birthplace, and the multitude marched before him in the street as they would have done if he had been a king. He was shown the house where

Arezzo.

he was born. 'A little house,' he calls it, 'and one fit for an exile,' and he was told that the city had forbidden any change to be made in it.

He stopped a short time a Florence, and proceeded thence to Padua, where he found to his horror that his friend James of Carrara had been murdered in his palace by one whom he had made a member of his household.

Padua.

Soon after his arrival in Padua, the government of Florence determined to revoke the decree of exile and of confiscation of Petrarch's property. An interested motive was behind this tardy act of justice. The Florentines desired to establish a university in their city, and were anxious that it should be honoured by this distinguished poet and representative of the new culture in Italy. The decree of restoration to civil rights was brought to him by his friend Boccaccio, with the invitation to a chair in this new institution of learning. Petrarch wrote an elaborate letter of thanks which, however, was quite indefinite as to accepting the chair, and later the Florentines, finding he did not come, revoked the decree restoring his property! The poet justly observed, that other cities had treated him far better than his own, and he visited Florence no more.

Invitation from Florence.

Padua had lost its attraction for him now that his friend was no longer living, and although Francesco, the new lord of Carrara, continued toward him the same favourable disposition that his father had shown, yet Petrarch's restless nature was not inclined to remain in that city.

He resolved to return to Vaucluse, where he had left the greater part of his library. He departed from Padua on the 4th of May, 1351, and on the 27th of June we find him again at his home, in the narrow valley of the Sorgue. Here amid the scenes with which Laura was closely connected, the recollections of the past, and visions of the cherished image which he would see no more in life, again beset him, and destroyed his peace of mind, and many of his most exquisite sonnets and *canzoni* bear testimony to the depth of his sorrow.

1351. Return to Vaucluse.

It was about this time that another offer was made to him of the position of secretary to the pope. Two cardinals, friends of his, pressed him so earnestly to accept it, that he unwillingly consented. It was always hard for him to say 'no'. But he wrote the necessary Latin thesis required of candidates as a trial of skill, in such an elaborate and elegant style, that it was considered 'unfit for the humble and simple correspondence of the Holy See'! and Petrarch, being asked to simplify it, 'spread the wings of his spirit to lift himself so high as to vanish from the sight of those who would make him a slave.' He afterwards wrote to his friend Simonides: 'They wanted to send me to school at my age, to teach me to write in a low and crawling manner.' And again, 'I am well pleased that those who thought themselves high up, found I was flying quite above their sphere. But I shall not expose myself another time to the same danger.' [1](#)

Papal secretaryship.

In 1352 Clement fell ill, and Petrarch wrote him a letter filled with flattering and friendly expressions but warning him against

1352. Quarrel with the physicians.

his physicians. The pope told his doctors of this, and one of them wrote a personal attack upon the poet, to which he replied, first in a letter filled with abuse, and afterwards in an elaborate polemic denouncing the profession. The medicine of that day was for the most part ignorant quackery, yet for all this, it was a most unedifying squabble in which Petrarch was engaged, quite unworthy of his reputation. His 'Invectives against a Certain Physician' were composed in part at Avignon and in part afterwards at Milan. At the latter place the poet had been suffering from the tertian fever, and its effects can be seen in these unfortunate productions. They sound as if a sudden madness had overtaken him. They are filled with vilification, and in one of them occurs a passage which, if it were not inconsistent with the rest of his life and writings, would condemn his character to the charge of unfeeling brutality. For he says, 'Doctors can no longer deceive and murder the educated, but only the ignorant masses, and there is very little need to weep over the destruction of these.'<sup>1</sup>

And this from the enthusiast who was sharing Rienzi's dreams of popular liberty! If the two things are to be reconciled, it must be because Petrarch's sympathy was for the Roman citizen rather than for the human being.

Petrarch's restless disposition again induced him to depart from Avignon; possibly these controversies hastened his determination. He set forth upon his journey to Italy, November 16, 1352, and stopped on the way at Cavaillon to bid good-bye to his friend the bishop. A terrific storm came on, and after passing a sleepless night and learning that the road to Nice and Genoa was beset with armed bands, he followed the bishop's counsel and delayed his departure, returning in the meantime to Vaucluse. On December 3, Pope Clement died and Innocent VI succeeded, a pontiff who reformed many of the abuses of the Church, but a man of limited intelligence who had considered Petrarch a sorcerer on account of his intimate acquaintance with the poems of Virgil!

1352. Resolves to return to Italy.

Before his final departure, Petrarch determined to visit his brother, Gherardo, in the Carthusian monastery of Montrieu, and there the brothers met for the last time. It was April 26, 1353, before the poet finally left Vaucluse for Italy.

On passing through Avignon he did not go to the palace to pay his respects to the pope. Cardinal Talierand urged him not to leave without performing this duty, but Petrarch refused. 'I feared', he said, 'to do him harm by my sorceries, or else that he would do me harm by his credulity.'<sup>1</sup>

1353.

Petrarch appears to have undertaken this final journey to Italy without any specific destination in view. He had already a house at Parma, and possessed a canonicate at that city as well as one near Pisa and one at Padua. His son and some of his dearest friends were at Verona, and at all these places he would have been more than welcome. But when on his way he halted at Milan, he met John Visconti, archbishop and ruler of that city and then the most powerful of the princes of Italy.

Final departure from Vaucluse.

Visconti saw the advantage of having a man so distinguished in learning and literature as an ornament of his court, and in the most flattering terms he asked the poet as a personal favour to

1353. Milan and Visconti.



remain at Milan. He anticipated Petrarch's objection that he desired quiet and an opportunity to work by offering to place at his disposal a house in a retired situation and amid healthful surroundings, close to the church of St. Ambrose and with a delightful view of the Alps, as peaceful a retreat as he could find in the country. Petrarch should be the master of his own time and no service was expected of him, the poet's presence alone being sufficient honour.

Petrarch could not resist these flattering importunities. He yielded and thereby incurred the reproaches of some of his closest friends, for Visconti was a tyrant who ruled his subjects and his dominions with despotic power. That Petrarch should become a satellite at his court was utterly inconsistent with the poet's championship of the popular liberties of the people of Rome when he espoused the cause of Rienzi. From Petrarch's Florentine friends, Nelli and Boccaccio, the remonstrances were emphatic. Boccaccio employed Petrarch's own device of allegory and upbraided Sylvanus (Petrarch) for betraying Amaryllis (Italy) and aiding the oppressor, Egon (Visconti), the false priest of Pan, a monster of treachery and crime. Petrarch's replies to his friends were quite inconclusive, and give the impression that he could not resist the solicitations of the great and of those who were kind to him, and that he had been overcome by the stronger will and the tactful methods of Visconti.<sup>1</sup>

His friends  
remonstrate.

When this powerful family once got the laureate in its possession it used him not only for display but also for actual service. He was in the *cortège* that went to meet Cardinal Albornoze, the Pope's ambassador, when his horse shied and landed him on the edge of an embankment, where he might have been killed but for the courageous aid of Galeazzo Visconti, nephew of the archbishop, a man with whom in after years the poet lived on terms of intimacy.

Visconti.

The Genoese, overthrown by the Venetians in a naval war, offered their city to Visconti, and Petrarch was asked by the archbishop to deliver to the embassy that came to convey the offer, a speech of acceptance, but he deemed it more fitting that this should be done by the archbishop himself. Visconti now sought peace with Venice, and Petrarch was sent as an ambassador to the Venetians to secure it.

On November 8 he delivered before the Doge and Council a speech filled with humanitarian sentiments and classical allusions. But the practical statesmen of the victorious republic (which was now allied with a number of independent cities of northern Italy and had sought with good promise of success the support of the Emperor Charles IV) rejected the overtures of Milan, and Petrarch's mission was without result.

Embassy to Venice.

Archbishop Visconti died on October 5 of the following year. His three nephews, Matteo, Bernabò, and Galeazzo, succeeded to the sovereignty. Matteo was a debauchee who took little part in the government and died soon afterwards, murdered, it was charged, by his brothers, who shared in the succession. Bernabò was a monster of cruelty. Galeazzo was a brilliant but unscrupulous man, who so dazzled Petrarch that he won his close friendship and his most unrestrained admiration and praise.

1354. Archbishop  
Visconti dies.

On October 7, 1354, the new lords of Milan took formal possession of their inherited domain. Petrarch was commissioned to announce the change of government, and proceeded to deliver an address containing a eulogy of the archbishop and an admonition to his hearers that they should now serve the new sovereigns with equal devotion. His speech was interrupted by the court astrologer, who declared that the favourable moment had come for executing the deed of partition between the heirs of the throne. Petrarch accordingly desisted. In a few moments the astrologer learned that the conjunction of the planets was still not precisely what was desired and asked him to resume, but the orator laughingly answered that he had finished, so the multitude waited in silence for the auspicious moment.<sup>1</sup>

Petrarch announces the succession.

Since the fall of Rienzi had blighted all hope of delivering Rome from oppression by means of a popular tribune, Petrarch had become insistent that the emperor should re-establish his authority in the imperial city. He had written to Charles IV as early as February 1351, imploring him to come to Rome to receive the imperial crown.

This letter had been followed by others, and in the fall of 1354 came the welcome news that the emperor was on his way to Italy, whereupon Petrarch sent him still another epistle

Charles IV comes to Italy.

comparing him to Aeneas seeking his father Anchises in Hades! The lords of Milan were perhaps not unwilling that their poet laureate should be on friendly terms with Charles, as they themselves desired amicable relations with him, since his friendship with Venice and her allied cities in northern Italy boded them no good. When Charles arrived at Mantua, in November, they sent an embassy to him. Petrarch was not among the ambassadors. Probably his fruitless mission to Venice and his impractical character admonished the Visconti that a more skilled diplomat was needed. Charles, who had little ambition, showed a strong inclination for peace and a desire to replenish his exhausted treasury for his own kingdom of Bohemia, so it was settled that the Visconti were to be his vicars and representatives in Milan and Genoa, and were to pay him a large sum of money. A few days after the return of this embassy to Milan, Petrarch received a formal invitation from the emperor to visit him at Mantua.

The poet did not delay, but set forth on December 12. Charles received him in a most friendly manner, and long conferences

Petrarch visits him.

followed night after night. Charles asked the poet about his writings and especially concerning his book *The Lives of Illustrious Men*, and requested that it might be dedicated to him. Petrarch told him that he would be worthy of this when he should have joined the ranks of the great, not by the splendour of a name or the glitter of a crown alone, but by noble actions and a virtuous soul.<sup>1</sup> He presented to the emperor a number of coins bearing the effigies of the Caesars and asked him to emulate their deeds. Charles took all this in good part and invited Petrarch to accompany him to Rome, since he said he wished to see the city with the poet's eyes and not merely with his own. This invitation, however, Petrarch was unable to accept. Possibly the Visconti would not have it so. Presently the emperor visited Milan and became their guest, and was crowned with the iron crown of Lombardy in the church of St. Ambrose. Then, proceeding to Rome, he received the imperial crown on Easter Day in that city.

Charles IV had owed his election to papal support, and his presence in Italy was with the approval of the pope, to whom the emperor was uniformly submissive. He had secretly agreed long before with the predecessor of the present pontiff, that he would depart from Rome on the very day of his coronation, and he kept his word, returning by way of Pisa, where on May 14 he bestowed the laurel crown on Zanobi da Strada, a former friend and correspondent of Petrarch. His act in making this respectable but commonplace versifier a rival to our poet has never been explained. Possibly the emperor was piqued because Petrarch would not go to Rome with him; perhaps he wanted a laureate of his own and Zanobi was the only one available.

1355. Coronation.

The emperor proceeded northward in June, to Petrarch's intense disgust and mortification, and returned to Germany. The poet now addressed to him a long letter filled with reproaches. 'A noble thing have you accomplished, great Caesar, by your march through Italy, so long postponed, and by your hasty return. You bring home the iron and the golden crown, but at the same time a mere empty name of imperial authority. You will be called emperor of the Romans, while in truth you are only king of Bohemia. Would to God that you were not! Perhaps then your ambition, confined within too narrow limits, would try to rise and your needs would bestir you to recover your patrimony. Laelius brought me your farewell, which has been for me like the stroke of a dagger. He sent to me from you an antique with an image of Caesar. If this medal could have spoken, what would it not have said to you to prevent you from making a shameful retreat! Farewell, Caesar, compare that which you leave with that which you go to seek.' <sup>1</sup> Petrarch has been much praised for these bold words, and it has been said that they also speak well for the magnanimity of Charles, who could read them and still maintain his friendship and kindly spirit for their author. I find no evidence, however, that Charles ever received this letter. It may well be that it was never sent.

Charles IV leaves Italy.

1355.

After his departure civil war broke out in Italy on every side. The rulers of a number of the smaller Lombard cities, fearing the annihilation of their power by the Visconti, united against them, and the latter, threatened by many foes and alarmed at the report that the king of Hungary was arming for an invasion of Italy and that the emperor was likely to join the coalition, were anxious to detach him from the ranks of their adversaries and resolved to send Petrarch to Charles at Prague, hoping that his winning personality might accomplish better results than an ordinary diplomatic embassy. Petrarch learned while upon this mission that it was not the emperor's intention nor that of the king of Hungary to invade Italy, but Charles's representative in Tuscany took part openly against the Visconti and even ventured to summon them as common criminals before his tribunal, a measure which they pretended to believe was not authorized by the emperor. But though Petrarch was not wholly successful in his mission to Bohemia, he was treated personally almost as if he were a member of the imperial family. Presents and favours were bestowed upon him, and after his departure he was made a Count Palatine. Still later the Empress Anna wrote him an autograph letter announcing the birth of a son.

Embassy to Prague.

He returned to Milan in September to find the Visconti in serious trouble. The cities of the Lombard League were waging relentless war against them, and had desolated extensive territories with fire and sword. Important places were torn from their sovereignty. Among others, Genoa recovered her independence. An extraordinary thing occurred at Pavia.

James Bussolari, an Augustinian monk, filled with enthusiasm for democratic ideas, led an insurrection against the Beccaria, the reigning house in that city, organized a republican government, and expelled the tyrants. This was a movement which any friend of Rienzi should have supported. But the Beccaria made an alliance with the Visconti.

1357. Bussolari.

The allies besieged the city but failed to take it, and later, Galeazzo, unable to renew the siege, sought to secure its peaceful surrender by diplomatic means. He persuaded Petrarch that Bussolari was a mere adventurer, and the poet addressed to the monk a long epistle urging him to renounce his authority as inconsistent with his monastic duties and to co-operate in the re-establishment of peace. Evidently Petrarch's association with the Visconti had greatly weakened his enthusiasm for popular government. Naturally his letter was fruitless. The courageous monk continued to defend the freedom of Pavia for two years longer. Finally, however, it was compelled to surrender to Galeazzo.

1357.

In 1357, in order to avoid the violent heat of the summer, Petrarch rented a house at Garignano, a short distance from Milan, a house which he called 'Linterno' from the name of the country seat of Scipio Africanus. From this place he writes to his friend Settimo, who had asked for a description of his life, his occupations, his projects, &c., a letter containing the following: 'My health is so good, my body so robust, that neither my riper age nor more serious occupations, neither abstinence nor blows can succeed in entirely expelling that obstinate beast of the flesh upon which I am always making war. . . . So far as my fortune is concerned I am in a golden mean, equally separated from the two extremes.

Linterno.

I enjoy a happy mediocrity except in one single point, which may excite envy, and that is that I enjoy much more consideration than I desire and more than is good for me. Not only the greatest prince in Italy and all his court cherish and honour me, but his people do me more honour than I deserve and love me without knowing me and without seeing me, for I seldom show myself, and this is perhaps the reason for their love. . . . I live in a retired corner of the city on the west side. An ancient spirit of devotion attracts the people every Sunday to the church of St. Ambrose, of which I am a neighbour; the rest of the week it is a desert. . . . I love solitude and silence, but I am a prattler among my friends. This is so perhaps because I see them rarely. I compensate for the chatter of a day by the silence of a year. When my friends are gone I become mute again. There is nothing so fatiguing as intercourse with the public or with some one we do not love and who has not the same interests that we have. As soon as I felt the approach of summer I took a pleasant country house, a league from Milan, where the air is very pure. I am there now.' <sup>1</sup>

Life in Milan.

Early in the spring of 1359 he received a visit at Milan from his friend Boccaccio, who, on returning to Florence, sent him a copy of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which Petrarch had never read. In his

1359. Letter on Dante.

letter to Boccaccio acknowledging the gift, he tells the reason for this, and takes occasion to repel a rumour that he hated and despised this great poet.

‘Why should I hate him?’ he asks; ‘I never saw him but once in my childhood, or rather he was shown to me. He grew up with my father and my grandfather, older than the one, younger than the other. The same whirlwind carried them away from their country on the same day. . . . My father yielded to fortune and busied himself with bringing up his family. *The other*, on the contrary, resisted, and followed the path he had taken, thinking only of glory and neglecting all else. Neither the injustice of his fellow citizens nor his own quarrels, nor exile, nor poverty, nor the love of wife and children — nothing could distract him from his studies, although poetry demands silence and repose. In that, I cannot too much admire and praise him. I see in this reason for loving him and never for hating him, and still less for despising him. His genius and his style, *excellent in their class*, put him beyond the reach of contempt. This calumny is founded upon the fact that in my early youth, when I was hunting with incredible ardour for books that were considered lost and of which there remained scarcely a hope, I showed less eagerness for a book I could easily procure. I admit the fact but deny the evil intention. At this time I was devoted to the common tongue. I knew nothing better. It never came into my head *that I could rise higher*. As youth is flexible, drawn to admiration and imitation of what it admires, I feared that in reading the works of those who had written in the same language, I would become, without knowing it or wishing it, their copyist. Perhaps there was too much confidence and presumption in my act, but I wanted to rise without the help of others, to fly with my own wings with a manner and style that was peculiar to myself, in a word to be original. It is for others to judge if I have succeeded. Let me not be accused of being a plagiarist. If there is found in my writings anything that resembles what is read in the writings of another, it is pure chance that has caused it. I have always carefully avoided plagiarism and even imitation. If shame and modesty had not had this effect on me, a certain pride of youth would have produced it. But now, being cured of the fear I had of becoming a copyist, I read everything with pleasure, and above all *the author in question* to whom I award the prize *in the eloquence of the common tongue*. . . . One of the reasons which made me renounce the Italian language which occupied my youth is that I feared that which I saw happening to others and above all to this man, whose verses I heard torn to pieces on the crossways and in the theatres, since I did not dare to flatter myself that I could make tongues any more flexible and the pronunciation of my verses softer. . . .

1359. On Dante.

Those who are envious of me insist that I am envious of this poet. I have long said I am envious of no one, but perhaps I do not deserve to be credited upon my word. Let us seek the truth. How could I be envious of a man who *passed his whole life in a kind of work which only served to amuse my youth*, a man who had made his principal and perhaps his only occupation that which to me was only a game and trial of my wit? Tell me, I ask you, is there any reason for envy in this? What could I envy him? The hoarse applause of the fullers, cabmen, butchers, and other people of this kind, whose praises do more harm than honour? *I rejoice and congratulate myself that with Virgil and Homer I am deprived of these things.*<sup>1</sup>

1359. On Dante.

In spite of his disclaimer, these words do not indicate that Petrarch was free from the feelings attributed to him. It is to be noticed, too, that in this letter even the name of Dante does not appear.

In 1359 Petrarch determined to sort out and arrange what he had written at various periods of his life. The work was long and tedious, as his manuscripts were in great disorder and many of them in bad condition. In this revision more than a thousand letters and poems were thrown into the fire, or, as he expresses it, ‘sacrificed to Vulcan, not without a sigh, indeed, for why should I be ashamed of my weakness?’

Revision of manuscripts.

He had resolved to dedicate and to send his prose writings to his friend Socrates and his verse to another friend, Barbato, and he wrote a preface for those which were to go to Socrates. Two years afterwards he closed his collection with a second dedication to his friend. ‘With you I began,’ he says, ‘with you I finish. Here, my Socrates, you have what you asked for . . . I began this work in youth, I finish it in old age, or rather I am still continuing what I then began, for this is the one pursuit of mine to which death alone will put the finishing touch. How can I expect to cease from chatting with my friends until my life ceases?’<sup>1</sup>

Revision of Petrarch’s letters.

But about this time Socrates died, and the collection was again revised and a few more letters added, and it was not until 1365 that Petrarch arranged the series as it now exists, containing 347 letters divided into twenty-four books. This was his series of ‘Letters on Familiar Things’. Besides these there was another series of ‘Miscellaneous Letters’, and later he commenced a third collection, entitled, ‘Letters Written in Old Age.’ There was still a fourth collection called ‘Letters without Title’—invectives against the corruption of the Church and clergy—which he kept secret, and even the names of those to whom they were addressed did not appear. The recipients were often requested to return them, and their scandalous contents have caused them to be omitted from the exhaustive collection made by Fracassetti. Petrarch’s precautions were all the more necessary, since everything he wrote was so highly prized that his letters were often opened and read by the curious on their way to their destination, and were in some cases retained by those who took them.

1365.

About this time Petrarch was visited by a serious domestic affliction. His son had long been a source of grief to him. The poet’s wandering and restless life had made it impossible to keep the boy always with him, and he had been sent from one teacher to another, and each received the injunction not to spare the rod. The boy showed a great disinclination for study, and had apparently a surly disposition. ‘When in my presence,’ Petrarch says, ‘whether through fear of me or shame of his ignorance, he preserves an obstinate silence. I cannot get a word out of his lips.’ Petrarch had applied for a benefice for the boy, and the latter was made a canon at Verona when only fifteen years of age. When he went to that city he was entrusted to two of Petrarch’s oldest friends, but the father wrote to him that the reports received showed that his conduct grew every day more disgraceful and that he would punish him by refusing to write or send him money.

Petrarch’s son.

In October 1359 (at that time the boy was living with his father in Milan), a robbery occurred in Petrarch's house which was attributed to the servants, and it is probable that the son participated, since the father immediately afterwards drove him from home. In a letter to his old friend Settimo, Petrarch says, 'The slave of his passions, he has abandoned himself to debauchery; he is envious, disobedient, and rebellious; he hates knowledge and virtue.' The boy wrote, asking how long his banishment was to continue. Petrarch answered that it would end when he had wholly changed the tenor of his life. 'You may not cross my threshold so long as you are what you were when you left me. If you wish to return to me everything must be changed. Your habits, tastes, step, gestures, carriage, the sound of your voice, the movements of your eyebrows.'<sup>1</sup>

1359.

Petrarch, however, afterwards relented, and it is said began to hope for better things, when his son died suddenly of the plague in 1361, and the father, who had so bitterly reproached him, was deeply afflicted.<sup>2</sup>

After the robbery Petrarch abandoned his dwelling near the church of St. Ambrose and took quarters in a Benedictine cloister.

In the winter of 1359-60, at Galeazzo's request, he crossed the Alps at the head of an embassy to King John of France. This king, after his disastrous war with England, had been imprisoned in that country and held for an enormous ransom. Galeazzo had offered him a very large sum of money on condition that his daughter Isabella should marry Galeazzo's son. The wedding had been celebrated, the king had been ransomed, and Petrarch led the embassy to congratulate him upon his liberation. The theme of his address to the king at the state reception was, 'The Vicissitudes of Fortune,' rather a delicate subject, and some of his auditors, including the prince, proposed to refute his thesis, that fortune was a mere name, and in a later discussion with them Petrarch came off with credit. His reception in Paris was gracious and honourable, and the king endeavoured ineffectually to persuade him to remain.

1360. Embassy to France.

After his return to Milan in 1361, the plague broke out there with great fury, and Petrarch removed to Padua. But the plague attacked that city also, and the poet, careful of his safety, in spite of the contempt of death so often expressed in his writings, betook himself to Venice, a city still free from the epidemic. It was in this second attack of the terrible scourge that the dearest of his remaining friends was taken away. Socrates died in May 1361, in the following year Azzo da Correggio passed away, and in 1363 Laelius and Simonides.

1361.

At Venice, Petrarch was treated with much consideration, and on the occasion of a great public festival his seat was upon the right hand of the Doge. He offered the Republic his library with all the manuscripts he might thereafter acquire, the books not to be sold or divided after his death but kept in a protected room, and he asked in return for this the use of 'a modest but respectable house'. The library was accepted, and the Palace of the Two Towers on the Riva Schiavoni was assigned to him as a residence. The library, however, has disappeared. There is, indeed, some doubt how much of it remained in Venice after Petrarch had himself gone elsewhere, and as it appears that many if not all of his books were at Padua in 1379, after his death, it is

hardly likely that Francesco da Carrara, the lord of that city, would voluntarily send them to the unfriendly Republic of Venice. It is known that at least a part of this library finally passed into other hands.<sup>1</sup>

Petrarch settled permanently in Venice in the fall of 1362, and lived there five years. His daughter Francesca had married a young nobleman of Milan, Francesco da Brossano, and the two came to Venice and lived with the poet, not only during his stay in that city, but until his death. He was much attached to them. They had one daughter, named, after Petrarch's mother, Eletta, and later, in 1366, a son, Francesco, was born—a great favourite with his grandfather—but he died two years later.

1362.

It was about the time of Petrarch's removal to Venice, or perhaps shortly before this event, that his friend Boccaccio wrote him that a Carthusian monk had brought him a message from a holy brother, Peter of Siena, who had had a vision telling him that Boccaccio was soon to die and that he must at once amend his life, cease to write of love, give up the study of poetry and profane letters, and devote the rest of his days to prayer and repentance if he would escape eternal punishment. Boccaccio, who had a strong trace of superstition in his nature, was greatly terrified, and wrote to Petrarch that he must get rid of his books and devote himself to an ascetic life, and he offered his library to his friend at whatever price the latter chose to give for it.

Petrarch's answer was the manly and reasonable counsel of a genuine friend. The vision of Peter of Siena, he said, was wonderful if it were genuine; but was it in fact from the Lord, or had its author used the Lord's name to give weight to it? And what was there in this tale, even if true, to cause such distress? Boccaccio knew without the telling that he had not very long to live. The advice to reform his life was good, but why forsake learning? Learning never hindered any one from becoming holy. There were many roads to heaven, but ignorance was the only one for the idle. 'Show me the greatest saint you can find ignorant of letters and I will show you a scholar still more holy.'<sup>1</sup> If Boccaccio is determined to sell his books Petrarch says he will buy them, but he would dissuade him, and urges his friend to come and share his home. Boccaccio's fears were allayed, he returned to his studies, and in the following year, 1363, he paid Petrarch a visit of three months at Venice.

Advice to Boccaccio.

He was accompanied by Leontius Pilatus, a native of Calabria, whom he had established as Professor of Greek in the University of Florence, and from whom he had himself taken private lessons in that language.

1363.

Both he and Petrarch were anxious to secure a Latin translation of the poems of Homer. Petrarch had a Greek manuscript of these poems, which had been sent to him some time before by one Nicholas Sigeros, but which was to him a closed book. At the request of the two friends (Petrarch paying the cost of it), Leontius appears to have made a translation of these poems, and they were doubtless the subject of study during the time of this visit. Leontius was a disagreeable companion, ugly, unmannerly, with a bad temper and with nothing to recommend him but his Greek. Still Petrarch and Boccaccio bore with him, and when the latter returned home he wished to take him back to Florence, but Leontius wilfully and obstinately set out for Constantinople instead. Two years later he decided to return to Italy, but was killed by lightning on his return voyage.

Translation of Homer.



His translation of Homer had been completed, however, and Boccaccio afterwards sent a copy to Petrarch.

1365.

During his residence at Venice, Petrarch frequently visited Padua to perform the duties of his canonicate in the latter city, and during the summer he was generally the guest of Galeazzo Visconti at Pavia. He was in possession of a good income, but his expenses were large, for he employed several copyists, two servants, and several horses for his journeys, and he had many dependants.

It was about this time that he described in one of his letters the efforts made by the itinerant singers of Italy to secure his poems for their performances. He says, 'I have often undergone their importunities. They come to me more rarely now, perhaps on account of my age, or because my studies have changed. Perhaps also they are repelled by my refusals, for quite often, exasperated by their insistent demands, I treat them with harshness and they find me inflexible. Sometimes, touched by the wretched condition of the petitioner and by his humility, I let myself be persuaded and I use some hours of my time in drawing from my fancy a production which gives him a livelihood. I have sometimes seen them leave, half naked and miserable after they got what they wanted of me, and come back some time afterwards clothed in silk, their purses well furnished, to thank me for having brought them out of their misery. This touched me to such a degree, that looking upon what I was doing for them as a kind of alms, I determined not to refuse them any more, but the annoyance and importunity made me soon change my mind.'<sup>1</sup>

Itinerant singers of poems.

But at last an event occurred which made Petrarch dissatisfied with his residence at Venice and led to his return to Padua. In spite of his denunciations of the papal court, and notwithstanding some of the irregularities of his own life, Petrarch was an earnest and orthodox Churchman and had a wholesome horror of all forms of heresy. There were in Venice at this time many followers of Averroes, a philosopher and disciple of Aristotle, who had flourished under the dominion of the Moors in Cordova. One of these visited Petrarch and said to him, with a mocking laugh and an air of pity, 'Be a good Christian as much as you like; for my part I don't believe anything of all of that. Your Paul, your Augustine, and all the rest you boast of, were only prattlers. Ah! if you could read Averroes you would see how superior he is to all such folk.' Petrarch adds, 'I confess that this blasphemy put me into a fury. I could not contain myself. "Go!" I said to him, "and talk this way somewhere else," and taking him by the cloak, I put him out more rudely than agrees with my character.'<sup>2</sup>

Ejects heretic.

Now it seems that four young men, also disciples of Averroes, had often been hospitably entertained by Petrarch, had flattered him and loaded him with gifts and testified toward him a kind of veneration, until the poet, as he said, 'received them as if they had been angels' and talked to them without reserve. When they found that he despised the doctrines of Aristotle, however, they met in council and investigated his opinions in a pretended trial.

1367. Four young Venetians.

One of them was appointed, like an *advocatus diaboli*, to plead his cause, and urged his extensive reputation and his eloquence,

Judgement on Petrarch.

but it was decided this had nothing to do with his real knowledge, that one could speak well and still be very ignorant, and it was solemnly and unanimously decided that Petrarch 'was a good man but illiterate'.

This pronouncement attracted much attention at Venice. Petrarch might well have looked with contempt upon such impudence, but his literary vanity was wounded. This was the tenderest spot in all his character, and he proceeded to write in answer an elaborate and venomous polemic filled with invective and satire, entitled 'Concerning his own Ignorance and that of Several Others'.<sup>1</sup>

In this work, although he spoke of these young men as his 'friends', he attacked them as atheists and revilers of religion, and evidently did what he could to expose them to the flames of the Inquisition. He was so deeply offended that he moved back to Padua, where, under the patronage of Carrara, the atmosphere was more congenial. This was probably about the close of 1367, though his invective was not concluded until the following year.<sup>1</sup>

*De Ignorantia sua.*

Francesco da Carrara was a patron of science, art and literature, and much devoted to him, showing him the respect and affection of a son, and Petrarch dedicated to him at his request an essay on 'The Method of Administering a State', filled with commonplace observations, much idealistic exhortation, and a few practical suggestions.

In the spring of 1368, at the urgent entreaty of Galeazzo, Petrarch went to Pavia that he might participate in negotiations for peace between Milan and the pope, who was at the head of a powerful alliance against the Visconti. He returned from that city by boat upon the Po, and notwithstanding the country was beset by troops engaged in a destructive war, he suffered no molestation, although unarmed, both sides offering him wine, fruit, and other provisions, and treating him with the utmost respect.

1368. Pavia.

After his return to Padua he found the noise and confusion of the city unbearable, and in 1369 he betook himself to Arquà, a village ten miles to the south in a beautiful situation among the Euganean Hills, where he stayed until driven into the city by the breaking out of war between Padua and Venice in 1371.

Pope Innocent VI had died September 12, 1362, and the college of cardinals had selected his successor outside of their own number, choosing a simple abbot, who was crowned under the name of Urban V. Petrarch waited nearly four years before addressing him upon the subject of the return of the papacy to Rome, but in 1366 he sent him an elaborate letter reminding him that he was putting off too long the one essential matter of his reign.

1369.

'When you shall shortly appear', he said, 'before the judgementseat of Christ, in Whose presence you stand not as a master, and we as slaves, but He only as Master, and you, like ourselves, a slave, what if these words are addressed to you: "Poor and humble, I raised thee from the ground, not merely as the equal of princes, but as one above them all. Thou, then, where hast thou left the Church I trusted to thy faith? For so many gifts vouchsafed to thee, what is thy return? To have kept on the rock of Avignon the

1366. Letter to Urban V.

seat placed by My hand upon the Capitol! . . . ” Whatever be your final decision, one prayer at least your Rome addresses to you. May it seem just to you to restore to her her other consort, the emperor, whom your predecessor, Innocent VI, succeeded by a rash engagement in divorcing from her. Deign to remove that impediment, and to command that Caesar should return to Rome. As long as Rome remains deprived of both her chiefs, human affairs can never go right, nor can the Christian republic enjoy peace. If either of them return, all will go well; if both, perfectly, and in the plenitude of glory and success. May Christ our Lord prolong your days and open your heart to counsels, not smooth or flattering, but just, sincere, and, as I believe, acceptable to God.’<sup>1</sup>

Urban had long been desirous of moving the papal see to the Eternal City. The opposition of France and of the French cardinals was bitter and obstinate, but on April 30, 1367, he departed from Avignon and reached Rome on October 16 of the same year. Petrarch wrote him a letter of congratulation, and the pope, after his arrival, pressingly invited the poet to that city. Petrarch determined to go, and at last, in the spring of 1370, he made his will and set out upon the journey.

1367. Papacy removed to Rome.

He was, however, overcome at Ferrara by a sudden illness so severe that for a long time he remained unconscious. He was tenderly cared for by the lords of that city, but had to give up his intended visit, and was brought back to Padua by boat upon the river.

1370.

It was, perhaps, fortunate that he did not reach his destination, for Urban, harassed by the incessant disturbances in Rome and overcome by the importunities of the French cardinals, determined to return to Avignon, and reached the latter city in September.

Urban returns to Avignon.

Petrarch, filled with chagrin at the failure of the project so near his heart, addressed to the sovereign pontiff a letter filled with reproaches.

‘Did you not, like St. Peter, when you fled from Rome, meet Christ upon your way? “*Domine, quo vadis?* I go thither to be crucified again since you are departing from it.” ’

Petrarch’s reproaches.

It is doubtful whether Urban received this final epistle, since he died in December of that year and was succeeded by Gregory XI, and Petrarch, perhaps reproaching himself for his bitter words to one who had at least attempted to restore the papacy to its ancient seat, grieved for his death, and in spite of failing health went with Carrara to attend his obsequies at Bologna in January 1371.

1370.

Petrarch had acquired in 1370 a bit of land at Arquà, upon which he built a comfortable house where he might pass the declining days of his long and busy life. His health continued to fail.

In May 1371 he had an attack so severe that the doctors declared that unless he were kept awake he could not outlive the night. He disregarded their advice, went to sleep trusting in God, and the next morning they were astonished to find him at work at his desk.

1371.

Malatesta.

Pandolfo Malatesta, a soldier of fortune who had become lord of Pesaro, was much devoted to Petrarch, and in earlier years had had two portraits of the poet painted for himself. He now invited his friend to Pesaro, but Petrarch's health and the disorderly condition of the country made the journey impossible.

Malatesta had asked for a copy of the Italian works of the poet,

1373.

and on January 4, 1373, Petrarch sent him a manuscript of his *Canzoniere* with a letter in which he speaks of his poems as trifles which were the amusement of his youth, and adds (perhaps with some affectation), 'It is shameful for an old man to send you things of this kind, but you have asked for them with eagerness.

Can I deny you anything? With what face would I refuse you verses which are current in the streets, which are on the lips of everybody, and which are preferred to the more substantial works that I have written at a riper age'.<sup>1</sup> Malatesta died shortly after receiving them. The manuscript thus sent is regarded as perhaps the most valuable now existing of the Italian poems of Petrarch.

*Canzoniere.*

Our author was engaged at this time on another work, far less edifying. A French monk had written a criticism of Petrarch's letter to Pope Urban congratulating him on his return to Rome, and in this criticism he had praised France and disparaged Italy. Whereupon Petrarch took up the gauntlet and wrote his *Apology against the Calumnies of a Frenchman* with his usual controversial bitterness.

*Apologia.*

Francesco da Carrara had been defeated in his war with Venice, and had made a disgraceful treaty of peace, conceding considerable territory, giving a large indemnity, and agreeing to go or send his son to beg pardon of the Venetian Senate. Petrarch, urged by the claims of friendship, accompanied the son to Venice, and appeared with him before that body on the day appointed, but found himself unable to speak the discourse he had prepared, as his memory had entirely failed. The session adjourned until the following day, when he delivered, in the name of Carrara, an address which was highly praised by those who heard it.<sup>1</sup>

Petrarch now returned to his home at Arquà, and resumed his literary work. It is very likely at this period<sup>2</sup> that he began his autobiography, his so-called 'Letter to Posterity,' a fragment which remained unfinished at his death, a work which Macaulay considers 'a simple, noble and pathetic composition, most honourable both to his taste and to his heart, and which Koerting, with less charity, regards as the product of his vanity. In it he gives a picture of himself as he would like to be remembered by posterity.'<sup>3</sup>

'Letter to Posterity.'

In spite of his long friendship with Boccaccio, Petrarch had never read the *Decameron* until this year. The author now sent him a copy. He was especially pleased with the opening chapter describing the plague, and with the final tale, the story of Griselda, which he translated into Latin to give it a wider circulation outside of Italy.

*Decameron.*

Griselda.

But Petrarch was now at the close of his long and laborious career.

On July 18, 1374, he was found dead in his library, his head bent over one of his books. He was buried with solemn ceremonies in the presence of Carrara and of many ecclesiastical dignitaries in the village church at Arquà, and six years later his son-in-law, Francesco da Brossano, transferred the body to a massive stone sarcophagus erected in front of that building.

1374. Death.

Petrarch was a handsome man, tall and slender in his youth, but more inclined to corpulency in his old age. His expression was often merry, yet always dignified; his look earnest and piercing, yet mild; his voice musical and charming. Those who spoke with him sometimes continued the conversation merely to hear him talk. His complexion was soft and clear. His hair became grey quite early in life. The fresco painting attributed to Guariento, in Petrarch's dwelling at Padua, which was transferred in 1816 to the bishop's palace in that city, may be authentic, and, despite its unattractive headgear, its fine, spiritual features indicate a certain tenderness, and even softness, of character. [1](#)

Appearance.

The characteristic that first impresses the student of Petrarch's life is his wonderful versatility, and closely connected with this, his many inconsistencies. He was a scholar, poet, musician, collector of manuscripts and coins, letter-writer, historian, philosopher, traveller, diplomat, and politician.

Versatility.

He was a man who delighted in solitude, yet sought for and adorned the society of the great; he was enraptured with nature and yet a devotee to art; he was a passionate lover of Laura during twenty-one years of her life and ten years afterwards, yet the father of two illegitimate children by an unknown mother; he was a sensualist and an ascetic; a passionate lover of liberty, yet the companion, associate and tool of the greatest tyrants of the age; he was a faithful son of the Church, yet wrote violent invectives against the papal court; called Benedict XII a drunkard, Clement VI a profligate, and Innocent VI a fool, yet continued on terms of friendship with them all, and accepted favours and benefices at their hands; he would restore the Roman republic under the tribune Rienzi, and the empire under Charles IV, and the papacy under every successive pope; he professed the greatest contempt for riches, yet accepted gifts and pecuniary favours from the princes who sought his companionship, and died a wealthy man.

Inconsistencies.

His conduct was controlled by feeling rather than by reason. He was always delicately sensitive to the conditions around him. If we are to believe his poems, his tears were flowing much of the time, yet the cheerfulness of his correspondence and the gaiety of much of his life seem to belie these extravagant expressions of grief. Yet they were by no means mere affectations. So far as externals go, few men were more fortunate than Petrarch. No one was more admired, honoured, fêted, and generally beloved. His primacy in scholarship and literature was practically undisputed; yet with an affectation of modesty he was intensely vain, and was stung to the quick if his authority was even questioned. He had the artistic temperament, with waves of great discouragement and unhappiness. Usually gentle, impressionable, and affectionate, yet sometimes vindictive when he thought himself mistreated, he was by no means stable in his character; his moods and purposes were constantly fluctuating. His spirit was restless to the last degree, incessantly requiring a change of scene, but this,

instead of rendering his work futile and abortive, had the effect of making him a broader and a greater figure, more cosmopolitan probably than any other man in the history of literature.

With all his inconsistencies, it will not do to reproach him with conscious hypocrisy. His writings and his life indicate that he was sincere but volatile. He saw things as they were coloured by his surroundings. A prince who was gracious to him was a good and great man, and he did not look at the dark crimes under the shining surface.

His sincerity.

Moreover, amid all the paradoxes which startle us in his biography, there were certain great and lasting enthusiasms to which he was constant at every period of his career. The first of these was his intense love of learning and literature.

His lasting enthusiasms.

In the words of Macaulay, 'He was the votary of literature, he worshipped it with an almost fanatical devotion; he was the missionary who proclaimed its discoveries to distant countries; the pilgrim who travelled far and wide to collect its relics; the hermit who retired to seclusion to meditate on its beauties; the champion who fought its battles; the conqueror, who in more than a metaphorical sense led barbarism and ignorance in triumph.'

His devotion to Literature.

Nothing could divorce him from this devotion, neither the love of woman, nor the admonitions of religion, nor the delights of social and political preferment. In the pursuit of literature his industry was unflagging down to his latest breath.

He robbed his nights of sleep, and pursued his work amid many distractions with indomitable assiduity. 'Whether I am being shaved or having my hair cut, whether I am riding on horseback or taking my meals,' he says, 'I either read myself or get some one to read to me. On the table where I dine and by the side of my bed, I have all the materials for writing, and when I awake in the dark I write, although I am unable to read the next morning what I have written.'<sup>1</sup> It was a fitting termination of such a life that his body was found after his death, with his head bent over one of his manuscripts.

His industry.

Inseparably connected with his love of literature was his love of classical antiquity, which in his day was almost the only source from which all that was valuable in literature could come. He studied, it is true, the productions of the troubadours, and knew them well, and for some of them he had a high regard, but how insignificant were they by the side of the treasures of the past! His knowledge of ancient literature and history, however, was confined to the literature and history of ancient Rome, and Rome became glorified in his eyes as the mistress of the world who had given all these treasures to mankind. What, then, could be compared with the Eternal City, adorned with her long array of heroes and statesmen, poets, orators, philosophers? He had loved the sonorous periods of Cicero even before he could understand their meaning, and his enthusiasm for all things Roman grew ever more intense. His dream was that Rome should be again what she had been, the repository of the power and art and science of the world, and with this absorbing thought he would do what he could to restore and regenerate her, and deliver her from the bonds of mediaeval anarchy and decay. What matter whether it

His love of antiquity.

be pope or emperor or tribune, who would lift the Holy City from the slough of her degradation? His enthusiasm for this great object was embodied in one of his most celebrated odes—*Spirto gentil*.

Commentators have disputed for centuries as to the person to whom this ode was addressed. It was at first generally believed that Rienzi was the ‘noble spirit’ who was to deliver Rome, but the concluding stanza, which declared that the poet had never met him, makes this impossible, since Rienzi and Petrarch had met at Avignon some years before Rienzi rose to power. De Sade believes that the ode was addressed as early as 1332 to the younger Stephen Colonna, but a note on one of the manuscripts states that it was sent to Bosone da Gubbio when he, in October 1337, was chosen Senator. Whoever it was, Petrarch had conceived extravagant hopes of him. The following most inadequate translation of the first and the last three stanzas of this canzone will at least show the enthusiasm of the poet.

*Spirto gentil.*

### ***Spirto Gentil Che Quelle Membra Reggi.***

Choice Spirit! that dost stir the mortal clay  
Which in this earthly pilgrimage doth hold  
A noble lord, skilful and wise and bold;—  
Since thou hast won the rod of state, to sway  
Rome and her erring sons and point the way  
She trod in ancient days, on thee I call,  
For nowhere else can I discern one ray  
Of virtue in the world; ’tis vanished all!  
None can I find who blush at doing ill!  
I know not what my Italy doth will,  
Nor what she yearns for. Careless of her woe,  
Decrepit, idle, slow,  
Shall she for ever sleep? Will no one dare  
To rouse her? Would my hands were twisted in her hair!  
Seldom indeed when unto high emprise  
Injurious fortune doth not bar the way.  
Ill doth she sort with actions bold and wise,  
But if she clear the path thou dost essay,  
I will forgive her sins of long ago,  
Now that in this her ways are changed and new;  
For in the story that the world doth know  
Ne’er unto man such path was spread to view  
To win eternal fame, as unto thee,  
Since thou canst lead (unless I falsely see)  
The world’s great empire on its glorious way!  
What rapture could we say  
‘In youth did others guide her destiny,  
He in her withered age from death did set free.’  
Bear, wolf, and lion, eagle and coiling snake<sup>1</sup>  
Clamour around a marble column high<sup>2</sup>  
To vex it, yet more harm themselves do take,  
And our fair lady<sup>3</sup> lifts a mournful cry

*Spirto gentil.*

And calls thee to uproot and bear away  
Those noisome weeds that know not how to bloom!  
And now the thousandth year is in its tomb  
Since those great souls to other lands did stray  
Who fixed in Rome of yore their dwelling place.  
Ah! this unbridled haughty upstart race,  
Scornful of such a mother fair and great!  
Thou art her sire, her mate;  
Succour from thee she doth await and ask,  
The while her greater lord<sup>4</sup> toils at some other task.  
Song, on the rock Tarpeian thou shalt see  
A knight that honoureth all Italy,  
Of others' weal more thoughtful than his own.  
Say to him, 'One to whom thou'rt yet unknown,  
But in whose heart thy fame hath found a home,  
Declares that mighty Rome  
With softened eyes, which bitter sorrow fills,  
Asks succour at thy hands from all her seven hills.'  
liii

Petrarch's enthusiasm was an enthusiasm for Rome and Italy, not for humanity at large. Italy was his fatherland, and divided as it was into little separate sovereignties, engaged in constant war with one another, its pitiable condition awakened his keenest sympathy and he longed to see it united under the leadership of Rome. Most grievous of all, among the afflictions from which it was then suffering, were the hordes of foreign mercenaries employed by each of the little principalities in warring with its neighbours. These mercenaries devastated the country and, in his eyes, made it again what it had been centuries before, the spoil of barbarian hordes. It was his indignation at these outrages, and his desire to see peace re-established, which led him to compose at a later period (probably at Parma, in 1344 or 1345) another noble ode, *Italia mia*.

Seeks Italian unity.

### ***Italia Mia, Ben Che 'L Parlar Sia Indarno***

My Italy! though speech may be in vain  
Those mortal wounds to heal  
That on thy body sweet so thickly lie,  
Yet I my heavy grief cannot conceal  
That Tiber and fair Arno do constrain,  
And Po upon whose banks I sit and sigh.  
Ruler of heaven! I cry,  
May pity, that once drew Thee here below,  
Direct Thee now to Thy dear Italy!  
O gracious Master, see  
What idle cause engenders strife and woe!  
Thy pitying grace bestow  
And tender charity  
On hearts made hard and bitter by the sword!

*Italia mia.*



And may Thy truth (unworthy though I be)  
By my poor lips through all the land be heard.  
Ye in whose hands fortune hath placed the rein  
To rule these regions fair,  
And whose proud hearts no pity hath subdued,  
Against your brothers why do strangers bare  
Their keen and cruel swords? Why do ye stain  
Your soil with slaughter by this savage brood?  
Vain dreams your souls delude:  
He is most blind who deems that most he knows.  
Can you win love from the base souls ye pay?  
The goodlier your array  
The more are ye encompassed by your foes!  
What deluge overflows  
From regions dark and wild,  
Pouring on our sweet land its raging sea!  
If thus by our own hands we have defiled  
Our native soil, whose arm shall set us free?  
Wisely and for our good, kind Nature wrought,  
When that high Alpine wall  
She set between us and the Teuton rage,  
But blind ambitions did our souls enthrall  
And to a body sound, infection brought  
With festering sores no physic could assuage.  
Now, prisoned in one cage  
Wild beasts and gentle flocks together dwell,  
Until the good must suffer from the base.  
And these are of the race  
(For greater shame!) of lawless tribes and fell  
Which Marius did quell,  
And on their fleeing ranks such wounds did make  
That history tells the tale how, by the flood  
Of a swift stream, seeking his thirst to slake  
He stooped and drank—not water, but men's blood!  
And Caesar too, on many a plain and shore  
Hath made the greensward red  
From veins of those through whom he drove the sword.  
But now, beneath some star malign and dread  
The wrath of heaven doth afflict us sore.  
Thanks be for this to each contentious lord,  
Who in disputes abhorred  
Would all this goodly land with blood imbrue!  
What madness, fate or sin your souls did lure  
To crush the weak and poor  
And their wrecked fortunes scatter and pursue  
With some wild alien crew  
That for your gold did sell  
Their guilty souls to spill their blood in fight.

*Italia mia.*

I do but speak the bitter truth to tell,  
And not from hate of others nor despite.  
And after many a proof is it not plain  
That sham Bavarian<sup>1</sup> game,  
That lifted finger<sup>2</sup> turning death to play?  
Great is the harm but greater still the shame.  
And the red blood from your own veins doth rain  
More copious; fury fights another way!  
Some sober time of day  
Think for yourselves and you will clearly see  
If he love you who holds himself so base!  
O noble Latin race,  
From this fell burden set thy country free!  
Let no mere name to thee  
Become an idol vain.<sup>1</sup>  
That a dull brood from stubborn folly grown,  
Should conquer us by work of skill or brain  
Is monstrous, and the fault is all our own.  
Is not this precious earth my native land?  
And is not this the nest  
From which my tender wings were taught to fly?  
And is not this the soil upon whose breast,  
Loving and soft, faithful and true and fond,  
My father and my gentle mother lie?  
'For love of God,' I cry,  
'Some time take thought of your humanity  
And spare your people all their tears and grief!  
From you they seek relief  
Next after God. If in your eyes they see  
Some mark of sympathy,  
Against this mad disgrace  
They will arise, the combat will be short  
For the stern valour of our ancient race  
Is not yet dead in the Italian heart.'  
Look! rulers proud! The hours are pressing on,  
And life steals fast away.  
Behold pale Death above your shoulders stand!  
Tho' now ye live, yet think of that last day  
When the soul, naked, trembling, and alone  
Shall come unto a dark and doubtful land;  
O, ere ye press the strand,  
Soften those furrowed brows of scorn and hate,  
(Those blasts that rage against the spirit's peace)  
From strife and slaughter cease,  
From hatching grievous ills, and consecrate  
Your lives to a better fate,  
To deeds of generous worth,  
To gracious acts that cheer and bless mankind;

*Italia mia.*

Thus will you gather joy and peace on earth  
And heaven's pathway opened wide will find.  
Song, I admonish thee  
Thou speak thy speech with gentle courtesy,  
For thou among proud folk thy path must find.  
Steeped is the human mind  
In evil ways by old authority,  
Truth's constant enemy.  
With the great-hearted few  
Thy fortune try. 'Who bids my terrors cease?' [1](#)  
I ask, 'and which of you  
Upholds my cry "Return! O heaven-born peace"?'  
cxxviii

Another trait that was always strong and often predominant with Petrarch was his love of fame. This is shown at a very early period, in his hexameters written after his mother's death, wherein he assured her of immortality with himself: 'We shall live equally and both will be remembered.' It also appears in his eagerness to obtain the laurel crown, and his intrigues to secure it, while in that confidential self-analysis in his work 'On Contempt of the World', which he also calls 'his secret', St. Augustine reproaches him with this passion, and declares that it is alienating him from his love of God. But perhaps the frankest expression of his ambition is found in his Ode to Fame, *Una Donna più bella*, of which the first stanza is as follows:

His love of fame.

A lady fairer far than is the day,  
And brighter than the sun, and just as old,  
With face of rarest mould,  
Won me in youth to join her bright array.  
In thought and word and action did she go  
In stately majesty  
Ever before me (rare it was to see!)  
On all the thousand paths that men do know.  
For her I ceased to be  
What I had been, and soon as I could bear  
To look upon her presence, for her love  
I did devote my life to toil and care.  
Now if I win the port whereto I move,  
By her sweet guidance led,  
Long do I hope to live, after men deem me dead.  
cxix

Ode to Fame.

Throughout his poems to Laura there appears here and there the consciousness that he has achieved renown not merely for himself, but for the object of his love, as in the following:

Love of fame.

Only of her, living or dead I sing—  
(Nay she will always live—immortal made—)

That the dull world shall with her praises ring  
And bring her sweet renown that will not fade.  
cccxxxiii

Another characteristic of Petrarch which continued from his youth until old age, was his warm and constant affection for his friends. 'He had a genius for friendship.' He was a good lover and a good hater, but his hatreds were few and his friendships were many. Settimo, James Colonna, Laelius, Socrates, Correggio, Pastrengo, Dionysius, King Robert, Philip of Cabassoles, the two Carraras, father and son, Simonides, Boccaccio, Galeazzo Visconti, Malatesta, were only the chief among his hosts of friends. With all these he was on terms of close personal intimacy, and in each instance the friendship lasted until death.

His friendships.

Only with Cardinal Colonna and his father was there any diminution of affection, and that was because Petrarch conceived that the higher claims of his beloved Rome and Italy were inconsistent with its continuance. Even then there was no positive break. Petrarch was a correspondent of the Cardinal until the time of his death, and afterwards, in one of his sonnets [1](#), joined the name of his friend with that of Laura in lamenting his double loss. Nor is there any evidence of personal ill feeling either toward or from the aged Stephen. It is seldom that Petrarch speaks of the family except with respect, though he appears to have fancied at one time that its overthrow or even its destruction was necessary to the welfare of the state. In 1366, late in the poet's life, young Stephen, a grandson, visited Petrarch in Venice, and whatever wounds there may have been were healed on this occasion.

The Colonnas.

Petrarch's philosophy of friendship was a very simple one. In a letter to Simonides he says, 'I practise no art except to love utterly, to trust utterly, to feign nothing, to hide nothing, and in a word, to pour out everything into my friends' ears, just as it comes from my heart.' [1](#)

Among his friends Petrarch was an active peacemaker. On one occasion some intermeddler had told Laelius that Socrates had declared he (Laelius) was untrue to Petrarch, and had opposed the poet's interests at Avignon. Laelius was indignant, and Petrarch, hearing of the quarrel, wrote him a long, affectionate letter reproaching him for having believed a falsehood, and declaring that he ought to have known that his friend was incapable of such an act. 'Friendship is a great, a divine thing,' he goes on, 'and quite simple. It requires much deliberation, but once only and once for all. You must choose your friend before you begin to love him; once you have chosen him, to love him is your only course. When once you have had pleasure in your friend, the time to measure him is past. 'Tis an old proverb that bids us not to be doing what is done already. Thenceforward there is no room for suspicion or quarrel. There remains to us but this one thing—to love.' [1](#)

When Laelius read the letter he went with it to Socrates, and the reconciliation was complete. When Petrarch heard of this, he wrote to Laelius, 'All your life you have done me pleasure on pleasure, but never a keener pleasure than this.' [1](#)

There must have been something very lovable in the man who could thus maintain these constant friendships, and who also, in relation to his princely patrons, had that winning charm which made him their companion and confidant rather than their mere dependant.

But a passion stronger and deeper than friendship took possession of him when, at the age of less than twenty-three years, he saw Laura in the church at Avignon. It was a passion which continued for a period of twenty-one years until her death, which inspired his poems for ten years more, and the memories of which returned and adorned his 'Triumphs', the poems of his old age. Before he met Laura, he tells us, he was quite insensible to the assaults of love, and after he met her, both his songs themselves and his remaining writings indicate that she was the only object of his genuine affection. At least, this is what he wishes us to believe, and although there are commentators who insist that some of his love poems were really addressed to other women, there is no sufficient evidence that this is the fact. In one sonnet, indeed (cclxxi, *L'ardente nodo*), he tells us that after death had released the bond which held him one and twenty years, Love, unwilling to lose him, had stretched another snare amid the grass, and kindled another fire, so that he would have escaped with difficulty, and that if it had not been for the experience of his first sorrows he would have been taken and consumed, all the more readily, since he was no longer 'green wood'; but that death had released him again, and broken the knot and quenched and scattered the fire, against which neither power nor skill availed. Commentators differ as to whether the death of which he last speaks in this sonnet was that of a new object of his affection, or of Laura herself, the memory of whose death had returned and restrained him from the pursuit of another love. We have no hint anywhere in his writings to tell us anything further of the woman referred to. On the contrary, in his 'Letter to Posterity', he says, 'In youth I felt the pains of love, vehement in the extreme, but *constant to one object* and honourable, and I should have felt them longer had not death, bitter indeed but useful, extinguished the flame as it was beginning to subside.' In this declaration, however, Petrarch cannot be entirely accurate. His first sestina (xxii, *A qualunque animale*) shows that his love at first was not altogether of the honourable character he intimates, and some of the poems of a broken heart, written shortly after Laura's death, would indicate that his flame had not subsided very greatly at that time. Petrarch was a man of varying moods, and his love did not always seem the same to him. But the general constancy of his passion toward one supreme object appears clear enough in spite of his inconsistencies.

His love of Laura.

Whether or not Laura in her heart responded to his affection will remain unknown. Petrarch's own belief as to her love varied at different times. After her death he fancied that she had loved him. (See ccii, *Levommi il mio pensier*.) In his poem the 'Triumph of Death', written in his old age, he refers to an incident which, if true, would give some justification for this belief, since her spirit says to him from heaven:

An equal flame over our hearts did steal,  
 When once I knew thy love was deep and pure,  
 But I would hide it and thou wouldst reveal.

. . . . .

Yet every veil from off my heart I tore  
Once when alone I heard thy tender words,  
Singing, 'Our love doth dare to speak no more.'<sup>1</sup>

Petrarch's songs themselves are the best evidence of the character and depth of his affection. The story of his love was one which had few external incidents, but it was a tragedy of the soul. His was a passion both of the flesh and of the spirit, a passion unhappy and tormenting, and, like his whole life, often self-contradictory. There were bright illusions of felicity alternating with black shadows of despair. It was 'a continued battle between his desires and his conscience, between reason and the senses, between heaven and earth, between Laura and religion. Now the poet blesses the place and hour in which he first saw her; now he reveals his hope, born from some slight favour, that at last she will pity him and yield; now he complains of her cruelty, her pride, her contempt; now he is filled with remorse and resolves to abandon his fruitless passion. In fact, he repeatedly flies from her presence, taking long journeys in the hope that it will disappear, but he returns and flits again around the fateful flame, and finds that his efforts have been in vain'.<sup>1</sup>

And yet, through all the vicissitudes of this story of his love, there is still a certain underlying unity in the *Canzoniere*. Petrarch's passion became greatly exalted and purified by the tender, yet reserved and virtuous behaviour of his mistress. While Laura is far more a daughter of earth than Dante's Beatrice, she still appears in his songs as a noble and gracious, as well as a very lovable, character, not at all the 'heartless coquette' that Macaulay calls her. If there was apparent coquetry in her conduct, it would seem to be due to pity and perhaps affection for her lover struggling with duty rather than to pleasure in inflicting pain. In the poems written after her death, when she had become glorified in his recollection and imagination, she approached more closely to the type of Beatrice, and in some of these poems Dante's influence (which Petrarch avoided in his earlier productions) is distinctly traceable.

*In the words of Cochin<sup>1</sup> the Canzoniere describes 'a passion ardent and carnal at the outset, but restrained by the honour and virtue of the lady whom he loved, and which, purified by sorrow at her death, was raised to an ideal love, and this too finally transformed into the love of God'. From the first passionate sestina to the noble 'Hymn to the Virgin' at the end, this is the history recorded in Petrarch's love songs. His moods change from day to day, but through the long years we can trace the progress of a gradual spiritual development.*

And this brings us to consider another sentiment which powerfully influenced the poet, at least during the later portion of his career, namely, his deep religious feeling. It appears that he had this even in his early life, and he represents St. Augustine in the *Secretum* as reproaching him with the fact that it became less after he fell in love with Laura. It could not have been a very strong conviction, for he and his brother took part in the frivolities of society in Avignon, and he received the minor orders of the Church merely to gain a livelihood, and without any special calling or inclination for the clerical profession. In his early poems and other writings there is little evidence of devotion. He does not appear at first to have considered his love of Laura as especially blameworthy, although she

His religious feeling.

was a married woman, and he a servant of the Church. It was in 1333, when, in Paris, he became closely associated with the Augustinian friar Dionysius, that this devotional feeling appears to have taken serious hold upon him, and from that time, religion, love, and the passions of the senses continued to clash with one another in his spirit, through a decade of anxious and unhappy years. Sometimes, with the fervour of an anchorite, Petrarch condemns and renounces earthly things, only to return to them again with greater zest. In the mere matter of belief, he was always an orthodox Churchman, and those who fancy that they see in his denunciation of the papacy at Avignon a forerunner of the Reformation are greatly mistaken. But his life was long at variance with his faith.

In several places he speaks of a new love as one of the cures prescribed to heal an old one, and it may be that he chose the mistress who became the mother of his children as an antidote to his unhappy love for Laura, but the remedy, too, tormented his conscience, and we have a faithful portrait of the conflict in his soul in his imaginary dialogues with St. Augustine in the *Secretum*.<sup>1</sup>

His religious feeling.

He himself fixes the date of his renunciation of the pleasures of the senses at a period shortly after his daughter Francesca was born (1342 or 1343), for he tells us in his 'Letter to Posterity' that after his fortieth year he not only renounced these pleasures, but lost all recollection of them 'as much as if he had never seen a woman'. The completeness of his conversion at this early date may well be doubted, but in spite of the fluctuations of his moods, the influence of the religious sentiment, in the long run, appears to increase. In a canzone written not long before Laura's death (cclxiv, *I' vo pensando*), this struggle and desire for spiritual help are distinctly shown. The canzone opens thus:<sup>2</sup>

Thoughtful I go, and in my communings  
So strong a pity for myself I see,  
As oftentimes leadeth me  
To other tears than I am wont to shed.  
Since day by day the end nears visibly,  
A thousand times I ask of God those wings  
On which to Heavenly things  
The mind can rise that here is prisonèd.

But it was the death of Laura in 1348 which undoubtedly produced the greatest change in him, and we find that his poems written after that time are imbued with a far deeper spiritual character than those written before. And later still, his religious convictions seem to have been confirmed on his pilgrimage to Rome in 1350. Years afterwards, in a letter to Boccaccio, he says, 'I hope the grace of Christ entirely delivered me many years ago, but *especially since the Jubilee*.'<sup>1</sup>

Yet, even in 1357 he tells us that neither abstinence nor blows can entirely expel 'that obstinate beast of the flesh' upon which he is always making war.

Still later, in 1366, we find a rather grotesque product of his 'conversion' in the shape of a so-called philosophical treatise written to console his friend Azzo da Correggio,

who had suffered from the vicissitudes of fate. It was entitled 'Remedies against Good and Evil Fortune', and had been written with such deliberation, that when it was finished Azzo had been dead two years! The book is a curious collection of paradoxes to show that all things which we deem good in this world are really evil, and that all sorrows and misfortunes are really blessings. In the portion of it which treats of love and matrimony, Petrarch assumes the rôle of a violent woman-hater, and advocate of celibacy. Nothing but pure spiritual love, love of God, of holy things and of one's friends, was fitting for a wise man. Every other love was an evil, especially if it awakened a corresponding affection. Only by separation, distracting occupations, or a new love, could the old love be healed. But the most effective antidotes were sickness, ugliness, and old age! Women were not worth being loved, since they were a wanton and giddy sex to whom deception had become a habit! Strife and discontent come into the house with a wife, especially if she be rich and of a noble family. He who has been once married and enters upon a second marriage is a fool, and he who gives a step-mother to his children, throws with his own hand a burning torch into his house. If it were not a sin and forbidden by God, concubinage would be better than a second marriage. Children are the source of continual care and unrest. Such are the sentiments to be found scattered in different places through this extraordinary work.<sup>1</sup>

But although Petrarch now assumed more constantly than heretofore this monastic attitude toward life (which indeed he had often taken spasmodically even in his earlier years), and while his habitual temperance and abstinence had ripened, with his vigils and his fasts, into something closely resembling asceticism, yet he was still free from the grosser superstitions of the time. Whatever fanaticism might demand, he never believed that the claims of religion called on him to renounce his studies, and he always had a great contempt for astrology and kindred arts, and a great respect for the literature and ideals of pagan antiquity. Indeed, the resuscitation of that literature and the restoration of many of these ideals was the great work of his life.

For whatever his excellence as a poet, it was as a humanist that he has had the widest influence upon the world. 'Standing within the threshold of the Middle Ages he surveyed the kingdom of the modern spirit and by his own inexhaustible industry in the field of scholarship and study he determined what we call the revival of learning. By bringing the man of his own generation into sympathetic contact with antiquity he gave a decisive impulse to that European movement which restored freedom, self-consciousness, and the faculty of progress to the human intellect.'<sup>1</sup>

The Humanist.

In showing how greatly he differed from the mediaeval type and how closely he resembled the modern man, some of his biographers have exaggerated both the contrast and the similarity. For instance, it is said he was the first man to collect libraries, and to advocate the preservation of manuscripts. This statement is refuted by the previous existence of libraries and manuscripts already collected and preserved in mediaeval monasteries. His Latin, while fluent and superior to most of that used in the Middle Ages, was still far from classic, and the different traits which are described as separating him from the mediaeval and uniting him with the modern world, his egotism, his boyish curiosity, his love of travel, his restless nature, his versatility, his strong individualism, his cosmopolitan character, his love of literature and learning



for their own sake, and his national feeling were things in which he generally differed from his predecessors more in degree than in kind. Dante and other learned and distinguished men of the Middle Ages had many of these characteristics, and Petrarch himself had in his devotional spirit and his asceticism much of the Middle Ages in his disposition. The transition from one period to another in history is a work of development which goes on by degrees that at the time are generally imperceptible. It was because Petrarch had more modern characteristics, and some of them in greater degree than any of his predecessors or his contemporaries whom we know, that he is called by many the 'first modern man'. He had, moreover, the power of communicating his ideals and his modern spirit to a degree which was not possessed by any other man of his time nor perhaps of any time in history. His enormous reputation, his association with all the princes and literary men of the period made him the chief distributor of the new learning. Although he was never an instructor in any educational institution he has been well called a *praeceptor mundi*, a 'teacher of the world', greater than Voltaire at Ferney or Goethe at Weimar.

Indeed humanism in many ways was more like a new religion than a new school of learning, and if so regarded, Petrarch may well be considered the founder of the new cult. As Calthrop well observes:<sup>1</sup> 'It is to Petrarch, not to his predecessors, that we rightly attribute the inauguration of the Renaissance; they were its forerunners, not its founders; they handed down the torch of learning unextinguished; some quality in him enabled him to fire the world with it. His method was not merely to study the classics as ancient literature, but to bring the world back to the mental standpoint of the classical writers. To do this it was essential to spread the knowledge of those writers as widely as possible, and we have seen how diligent he and his friends were in the discovery and reproduction of texts. Then men had to be convinced that the affairs of old Rome were of vital interest to fourteenth-century Italy, and so Petrarch gave to the world the stimulating conception of the continuity of history. . . . Lastly it was necessary to set up again the fallen standard of criticism. . . . This intellectual faculty was conspicuously lacking in the men of the Middle Ages, but the classical men possessed it in rich abundance. Now of all the classical writers known to Petrarch he esteemed Cicero "far and away the chief captain", the wisest thinker, the most discerning critic, the supreme master of style. Saturated himself with the Ciceronian spirit, he set himself to diffuse it through Europe. . . . Like all true apostles, he was less concerned to imitate the manner of his models than to preach their gospel. This was probably the secret of his success; the revival of classical learning became in his hands a resurrection of the classical spirit.'

The Humanist.

From the day they were first given to the world, Petrarch's works had an immense vogue. At first, of course, they were circulated in manuscript, but upon the invention of printing no books were more eagerly published or more generally sought. The first printed edition of the *Canzoniere* appeared in Venice in 1470, only a short time after that event. There were thirty-four editions before the century closed, one hundred and sixty-seven in the sixteenth century, seventy in the seventeenth, forty-six in the eighteenth, &c.<sup>1</sup> and at the present time they are still multiplying rapidly. Six folio editions of his *Epistles* and other prose works were printed at Basle and Venice between 1494 and 1500. Professor Marsan, of Padua, collected eight hundred works relating to Petrarch and his writings, which were purchased in 1829 by Charles X of France and placed in the

Editions of his works.

library of the Louvre.<sup>1</sup> The late Professor Willard Fiske made a still larger collection, which is now in the library of Cornell University. The bibliography is enormous.

The Italian followers and imitators of Petrarch were very numerous, but their productions were generally of poor quality. He had a better fate among the early English poets.

His followers.

Geoffrey Chaucer was at Padua in 1373, at the time when Petrarch, then an old man, was staying there. He saw Petrarch's Latin version of the story of Griselda, or perhaps (as Warton<sup>2</sup> thinks) heard the story from the Italian poet's own lips, and, turning it into English verse, incorporated it in his *Canterbury Tales*. He thus speaks of the source from which it was derived:

Chaucer.

I wol yow telle a tale which that I  
Lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,  
As preved by his wordes and his werk.  
He is now deed and nayled in his cheste,  
I prey to God so geve his soule reste!  
Fraunceys Petrark, the laureat poete,  
Highte this clerk, whos rethoryke sweete  
Enlumined al Ytaille of Poetrye.

Chaucer imitates Petrarch in other places, and in one instance, 'The Song of Troylus,' he makes a reasonably accurate version of one of Petrarch's sonnets in which the antithetical conceits of the troubadours are imitated. Petrarch's sonnet ('*S'amor non è, che dunque è quel ch' io sento?*' cxxxii), which I have quite closely translated, is as follows:

If love it is not, what is this I feel?  
And yet how strange a thing if love it is!  
If good, why its effect so deadly ill?  
If bad, then why is every torment bliss?  
If by free choice I suffer, wherefore mourn?  
If it be fate, how fruitless to lament!  
O death in life! O pain from rapture born!  
How canst thou sway me save that I consent?  
If I consent, all senseless is my woe;  
Mid adverse winds I toss in fragile bark,  
Through stormy seas all rudderless I go,  
Of knowledge void, yet filled with errors dark,  
Till I know not myself which way I turn,  
But freeze in summer and in winter burn.

The following is 'The Song of Troylus':

If no love is, O God, what fele I so?  
And if love is, what thinge and whiche is he?  
If love be gode, from whennes comth my wo?  
If it be wykke, a wonder thynketh me,

Whenne every torment and adversite,  
That cometh of him, may to me savory thynke;  
For ay thirst I the more that Iche it drynke.  
And if that in myn owne lust I brenne,  
From whennes cometh my wailynge and my pleynte?  
If harme agree me, whereto pleyne I thenne?  
I noot, ne why, unwery, that I feynte.  
O quyke deth! O swete harm so queynte!  
How may I se in me swiche quantite,  
But if that I consente that it so be?  
And if that I consente, I wrongfully  
Compleyne ywis; thus possed to and fro,  
Al sterelees withinne a boot am I  
Amyd the see, betwexen windes two,  
That in contrarie standen ever mo.  
Allas! what is this wonder maladye?  
For hete of cold, for cold of hete I dye.

Two other imitators of Petrarch soon appear. Puttenham says,<sup>1</sup> ‘In the latter end of the same king’s reigne,<sup>2</sup> sprong up a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir Thomas Wyat th’ elder and Henry, Earle of Surrey were the two chieftaines, who having travailed into Italie, and there tasted the sweete and stately measures and stile of the Italian poesie, as novices newly crept out of the schooles of Dante, Ariosto, and Petrarch, they greatly polished our rude and homely manner of vulgar Poesie, from that it had bene before and for that cause may justly be sayd the first reformers of our English meetre and stile.’

An illustration of Surrey’s imitations is found in the extremely artificial form of a sonnet with only two rhymes in the entire fourteen lines. It is entitled ‘Description of Spring, wherein every thing renews, save only the lover’,<sup>3</sup> and it is an imitation of Petrarch’s sonnet, *Zefiro torna* (ccc), included in the following collection:

The soote season, that bud and bloom forth brings  
With green hath clad the hill, and eke the vale.  
The nightingale with feathers new she sings;  
The turtle to her mate hath told her tale.  
Summer is come, for every spray now springs;  
The hart has hung his old head on the pale;  
The buck in brake his winter coat he flings;  
The fishes flete with new repaired scale;  
The adder all her slough away she slings;  
The swift swallow pursueth the flies smale;  
The busy bee her honey now she mings.  
Winter is worn that was the flowers’ bale.  
And thus I see among these pleasant things  
Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs!

The following version by Wyatt of *Pace non trovo* [cxxxiv] comes even closer to the original:

I find no peace, and all my warre is done;  
I fear and hope, I burne, and frese like yse;  
I flye aloft, yet can I not arise;  
And nought I haue, and all the world I season;  
That lockes nor loseth, nor holdeth me in pryson;  
And holdes me not, yet can I scape no wise;  
Nor lettes me liue, nor dye, at my deuise,  
And yet of death it geueth me occasion.  
Without eye I se, without tongue I playne;  
I wish to perysh, yet I aske for helth;  
I loue another, and thus I hate my selfe;  
I fede me in sorow, and laugh in all my payne;  
Lo, thus displeaseth me both death and life,  
And my delight is causer of this strife.

A few concluding words as to the contents of the *Canzoniere*. There are 366 poems in all, 317 sonnets, 29 odes, 9 sestines, 7 ballads, and 4 madrigals, besides the epic poem, *I Trionfi* or Triumphs of (1) Love, (2) Chastity, (3) Death, (4) Fame, (5) Time, (6) Eternity.

With the exception of thirty sonnets and five odes, all these poems are upon the subject of Madonna Laura and his love for her. Such a subject, where there are few external incidents, is necessarily limited in its scope, and Petrarch's imagination, while delicate and exquisite, was not remarkably exuberant, nor was his vocabulary extensive. He gives us not so many new ideas as the same idea in many different lights. His work has been compared to a kaleidoscope, presenting a limited number of objects in many varied and beautiful combinations. In such a collection, however, there is sure to be some monotony and much repetition.

I have attempted to translate only a portion of the *Canzoniere*, and have omitted those poems which are filled with elaborate mythological allusions, metaphors, and similes, such as the well-known canzone of the *Metamorphoses*; or with excessive punning upon the name of Laura, or with catalogues of other names as of rivers and of other objects. I have also omitted most of those poems filled with the artificial conceits of the troubadours and those which seem to be gymnastic exercises in the art of rhyming, such as Canzone III (No. xxix, *Verdi panni, sanguigni*), consisting of eight strophes of seven lines each, where each line rhymes with the corresponding line of the following strophe, and there are therefore in the whole poem only seven rhymes. Our modern ears refuse to carry a rhyme so far away, and the English language cannot be restricted by such limitations as to the concluding syllables of each line. Still more difficult is No. ccvi (*S'il dissi mai*), where in six stanzas of nine lines each there are three rhymes (*ella, ei, ia*), with one of which (recurring the same number of times in each stanza) each line must conclude. I have also omitted a great deal which seemed like repetition, and indeed all except that which appeared to me fairly illustrative of

Petrarch's best work, so far as that work was at all capable of reproduction in another tongue.

***PETRARCH***

From The Italian Of Carducci

Master Francesco, I have come to thee  
And to thy friend, that gentle, fair-haired dame,  
To calm my angry spirit and set free  
My grim soul by sweet Sorga's crystal stream.  
Look! shade and rest I find beneath this tree!  
I sit, and to the lonely shore I call;  
Thou comest, and a choir encircles thee  
Who greet me with a friendly welcome all.  
And that sweet choir—they are those songs of thine,  
Down whose fair sides their golden tresses fall—  
Escaping from the rose-wreaths that entwine  
Their gathered folds, in ringlets prodigal;  
And one doth shake her locks, and the rebel cry  
Breaks from her tuneful lips, 'Rome! Italy!'

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## LOVE SONGS OF PETRARCH

These poems are numbered in the order in which they appear in the Vatican manuscript, 3195, which was Petrarch's own definitive edition, about one-third of it being written in his own hand. This is also the numeration followed in the edition of Scherillo (Milan, 1908). The numeration differs so greatly in different editions that the only certain way of identifying these poems is by the initial lines. The dates of the comparatively few poems whose dates are known are given in a foot-note. The translations are not arranged in the order of the originals, but so far as possible according to the subject-matter, in which arrangement, however, chronological sequence, while not controlling, has not been entirely disregarded.

Goethe has said that every poem of Petrarch was an occasional poem. It is therefore important to trace, whenever we can, the circumstances to which it owed its origin.

It was on April 6, 1327, a day which according to mediaeval tradition was the anniversary of the Crucifixion of our Lord (and which fell in that year, not on Good Friday, but on Monday of Holy Week), that Petrarch first saw Laura, in the church of Santa Clara at Avignon. He at once became enamoured of her beauty, but she gave no sign of responding to his passion. This meeting is the subject of the following sonnet.

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***Era Il Giorno Ch'Al Sol Si Scoloraro***

It was the day when the sun's heavy rays  
Grew pale in pity of his suffering Lord,  
When I fell captive, lady, to the gaze  
Of your fair eyes, fast bound in love's strong cord.  
No time had I wherein to make defence  
Or seek a shelter from Love's sudden blows;  
I walked secure, no harm perceiving, whence  
My griefs began amid the general woes.  
Love found me all disarmed, and through my eyes  
Where tears are wont to flow, he saw the way  
Wide open to my heart. His arrow flies  
And strikes the mark where it must ever stay.  
Scant honour his to wound me thus, nor show  
To you, well armed against him, even his bow!  
iii

While she was still unconscious of his love, Laura appears to have treated Petrarch with friendly indulgence, but when she understood the ardour of his passion she sought protection behind her veil, of which he complains in the following ballad.

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## Ballad I

### *Lassare Il Velo O Per Sole O Per Ombra*

Lady, I have not seen you draw aside  
In shadow dark or under skies serene  
The veil wherein your gracious face doth hide  
Since first you did perceive the passion keen  
That from my heart doth drive all else away.  
While I could keep my precious thoughts concealed—  
Those dreams that all my burning senses slay—  
I saw compassion in your face revealed,  
But after Love his yearning did betray,  
A veil around your golden locks you threw,  
And your kind glance within itself withdrew.  
What most I cherish now no more I see—  
So close that heavy veil restraineth me,  
Which both in summer airs and wintry skies  
Doth darken the sweet light of your fair eyes.  
xi

This reserve appears to have continued (perhaps intermittently) for a long period, for it is the subject of a sonnet written to Orso, Count of Anguillara, whom Petrarch visited at Capranica on his way to Rome in 1337, and from whom he afterwards received the laurel crown upon the Capitol.



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***Orso, E' Non Furon Mai Fiumi Nè Stagni***

Orso, there never was a pool nor stream,  
Nor sea (whereto all brooks and rivers run),  
Nor shadow of a wall or hill or limb,  
Nor mist, that bathes the earth and hides the sun,  
No bar to feet, nor obstacle to sight  
That frets me like that veil, which seems to say,  
While it doth stifle all the gracious light  
Of two fair eyes—'Now weep and pine away.'  
Her downcast look my greeting doth deny—  
From modesty or pride? It kills my joy;  
'Twill be the cause that ere my time I die.  
Her white hand too doth bring my heart annoy  
That makes itself a barrier to mine eyes  
And hides her face behind its frail disguise.  
xxxviii

Petrarch's remonstrances are gracefully expressed in the following sonnet, which greatly resembles the gallantries and conceits of the troubadours.

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***Mille Fiate, O Dolce Mia Guerrera***

A thousand times to make my peace I sought  
With your fair eyes, O my sweet warrior foe,  
And offered you my heart; but little thought  
Had your proud spirit to look down so low.  
Yet if another would that heart enchain,  
She lives in fickle hopes and dreams untrue;  
Since I despise all things that you disdain,  
It is no longer mine when scorned by you.  
If driven forth, it cannot find at all  
Harbour with you upon its wandering way,  
Nor stand alone, nor go where others call,  
Far from its natural pathway must it stray.  
On both our souls this heavy sin will rest,  
But most on yours, for you my heart loves best.  
xxi

1330-3. See Mascetta, 117.

During the years that ensue the poet often treats of his love for Laura in lighter vein, and nowhere more exquisitely than in the three madrigals which follow.

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*Non Al Suo Amante Più Diana Piacque*

When all unclad, within the waters cool  
By chance he saw her, Dian did not please  
Her lover l more than now, when in a pool  
Washing her dainty veil that from the breeze  
Confines her golden locks that roam at will,  
This creature wild doth on my fancy seize,  
Until, though heaven glows with warmth, I still  
Do freeze and tremble with an amorous chill.  
lii

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*Nova Angeletta Sovra L'Ale Accorta*

A wondrous little angel, wise of wing,  
Flew down from heaven upon the river side  
Where I by chance alone was loitering.  
When me thus all unguarded she espied,  
And naught suspecting, snares of silken thread  
She wove among the tender grass and spread  
Where it grew thick and made the pathway green.  
Thus was I caught, but feel no shame nor dread,  
So sweet a light in her soft eyes was seen.  
cvi

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***Or Vedi, Amor, Che Giovenetta Donna***

Look, God of Love! a woman young and fair  
Thy reign despises, pitying not my woes!  
Secure she deems herself between such foes!  
Thou'rt armed, but she in gown, with waving hair  
Sits amid flowers and grass, her dainty feet  
Disrobing, and her heart with pride replete.  
Captive am I, but if thine arrow fleet  
May yet avenge the shame we both do know,  
And serve the ends of mercy, bend thy bow!  
cxxi

In similar vein he reproaches her with too strong an affection for her mirror, which he calls his rival.

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*Il Mio Adversario, In Cui Veder Solete*

My glittering rival in whose fickle face  
You see the orbs which Love and heaven do prize,  
Charms you with beauty not his own, a grace  
Joyous and sweet beyond all mortal guise.  
'Twas by his evil counsel, lady mine,  
That from your gentle heart you drove me forth.  
Sad exile! Now in solitude I pine,  
Unfit to dwell with such exceeding worth.  
If once securely I were fastened there  
You should not harm me with your mirror bright,  
Pleasing yourself alone, so proudly fair!  
Think of Narcissus and his vain delight!  
Like him you will become a flower, but where  
The greensward worthy of a plant so rare?  
xlv

1333. See Mascetta, 172.

The following sonnet also preserves this gayer mood. As its number indicates, it appears in the latter part of the collection in the Vatican manuscript, yet its reference to Petrarch and Laura as both young shows that it could hardly have been written as late as its position would indicate. This is one among many indications of the occasional violation of chronological order in that manuscript.

It was said that King Robert of Naples, in a garden of Avignon, plucked the roses as described in the sonnet, giving one to Petrarch and the other to Laura. Robert was the hereditary lord of the district in which Avignon lay, and although Petrarch and the king were on terms of intimacy, yet his recorded visit to Provence occurred before Petrarch and Laura met, and it seems improbable that he was the 'lover old and wise' to which the poem refers.

It is more likely that it was Senuccio del Bene, who was Petrarch's confidant regarding his love for Laura, and to whom several of the poet's sonnets were addressed.

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### ***Due Rose Fresche E Còlte In Paradiso***

Two roses fresh that grew in Paradise  
The day that May was born in all her pride,  
As a fair gift, a lover, old and wise,  
'Twixt two who still were youthful, did divide;  
And added such sweet speech and smile so gay  
That e'en a savage heart to love would turn,  
And glow and sparkle with an amorous ray;  
And thus with changing hues their faces burn.  
'Ne'er did the sun such pair of lovers see,'  
Laughing (yet not without a sigh), he said,  
And then, embracing each, he turned away.  
Thus flowers and words he portioned; till in me  
Around my heart a trembling gladness spread.  
O blessed gift of speech! O joyful day!  
ccxlv

Many and various are the conceits that appear everywhere throughout the *Canzoniere*. Some are mere mediaeval affectations, others, however, have a curious charm; for instance, the following where the lady Laura stands in the sunshine accompanied by Love and where the bright god of day and the poet himself are imagined as rivals for her favour.

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***In Mezzo Di Duo Amanti, Onesta, Altera***

My lady stood between her lovers twain  
Stately and proud, and with her there was one—  
A lord who reigneth over gods and men—  
And I on this side, and on that the sun.  
Yet while she was engirdled by the rays  
Of him who was more fair, all tenderly  
To eyes of mine she turned her radiant gaze,  
(O that she ne'er had been more stern to me!)  
And now to gladness all the jealousy  
Was quickly changed that I at first had felt  
Within my heart for my bright enemy.  
Then came a cloud with rainy tears to melt  
Before his face, grown dark with sullen gloom  
So much it vexed him thus to be o'ercome.  
cxv

1339. See Mascetta, 464.

In more serious vein, but still exultant, is the following:



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### ***Quando Fra L'Altre Donne Ad Ora Ad Ora***

When, day by day, midst other women fair  
Love comes to me in one sweet face and rare,  
As others are less beautiful than she,  
So grows the longing that enamours me;  
And I do bless the place and hour and day  
Wherein mine eyes did look so high; and say,  
'O soul of mine, most grateful shouldst thou be  
That thou wast worthy such felicity!  
From her doth come to thee that loving mood  
Which doth direct thee to the highest good,  
Disprizing that which other men desire;  
From her doth come to thee the quickening fire  
That up to heaven thine eager feet will guide.'  
And thus I walk, radiant in hope and pride.  
xiii

But a feeling far deeper than one which could be expressed in these graceful lines is at last developed. One of the first poems in which this burning passion is clearly revealed, is written in the artificial Provençal form of the sestina, a poem of six stanzas of six lines each (with three concluding lines). There are no rhymes, but in each stanza each line must conclude with the same word, and that too a noun, as some line in the preceding stanza and these words must follow in a certain order. Thus the last word of the first stanza is repeated at the end of the first line of the second stanza, the second line of the second stanza concludes with the same word as the first line of the first stanza, &c., the order being:

1st Stanza 2nd Stanza 3rd Stanza 4th Stanza  
a b c d e f f a e b d c c f d a b e e c b f a d  
5th Stanza 6th Stanza Conclusion  
d e a c f b b d f e c a e d b

The exact form of this sestina is preserved in the following translation.

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## Sestine I

### *A Qualunque Animale Alberga In Terra*

Unto whatever creature dwells on earth,  
(Save only those whose eyes do hate the sun)  
The time to toil is while it still is day;  
And when at last the heavens light their stars,  
Man homeward turns, the beasts hide in the wood  
And find repose at least until the dawn.  
But I, from the first hour when early dawn  
Shakes off the darkness from around the earth,  
Awakening the beasts in every wood,  
No truce in sighing have I with the sun,  
And when at night I watch the flaming stars  
I go lamenting, longing for the day.  
When evening drives away the shining day,  
And our deep night to others brings the dawn,  
Sadly I gaze upon the cruel stars  
That formed my body out of sentient earth,  
And I do curse the day I saw the sun,  
Until I seem like one reared in the wood.  
Nor do I dream there ever browsed in wood  
So wild a creature, either night or day,  
As she whom I lament in shade and sun,  
And weary not with weeping, eve or dawn,  
Since, though my mortal body be of earth,  
My love unchanging cometh from the stars.  
Ere I return to you, O shining stars,  
Or fall to dust within this passionate wood,  
And leave my body a dull clod of earth;  
May she have pity who in one short day  
Might for long years atone! Who ere the dawn  
Could bless me, from the sinking of the sun!  
O were I but with her from set of sun,  
And none to watch us but the silent stars  
Only one night! And might there be no dawn!  
Nor should she be transformed to leafy wood,  
Escaping from my arms, as in that day  
When Phoebus followed Daphne upon earth.  
But confined shall I lie in senseless wood  
And day shall come all full of tiny stars  
Ere upon such sweet dawn shall shine the sun.  
xxii

1333. See Mascetta, 233.

The same depth of feeling is shown in the following exquisite fifth stanza of the fifth canzone, *Ne la stagion che 'l ciel rapido inchina*, written at a somewhat later date.

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***E Perchè Un Poco Nel Parlar Mi Sfogo***

Because I must a little ease my pain  
Therefore I sing. The oxen come again  
Unyoked at eve from field and furrowed hill;  
Why, then, from sighing am I never free,  
Whate'er the hour, but toil with heavy chain?  
Why are mine eyelids wet by night and day?  
O wretched me!  
What was my foolish will  
That I so held them fixed on one fair face  
To sculpture it in fancy in a place  
Whence it can ne'er be moved by force or skill  
Till I shall be the prey  
Of Death that endeth all? Nor do I know  
If even on him my trust I may bestow.  
1

Early in 1337, perhaps at Capranica. Cochin, 53.

On one occasion when the lady Laura fell seriously ill Petrarch wrote several poems upon this illness and her recovery, of which the following is an illustration.

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### ***Già Fiammeggiava L'Amorosa Stella***

The star of Love<sup>1</sup> already was ablaze  
Throughout the East in the clear morning air,  
And in the North, spreading its glittering rays,  
The star that stirred the wrath of Juno fair.<sup>2</sup>  
The agèd housewife rises, stirs the fire  
Barefoot, ungirt, and sits her down to spin;  
Fond lovers soon must quench their hearts' desire  
And all unwilling, mark the day begin.  
Now she who had been close to death appears  
(How changed she is!)—not by the custom'd way,  
Which sleep has closed and grief has filled with tears,  
But by the path of dreams—and seems to say,  
'Take heart once more, why should thy courage flee?  
Not yet these eyes of mine are lost to thee.'  
xxxiii

1333. See Mascetta, 121.

Laura's eyes were the subject of three famous *canzoni* called 'The Sisters', greatly admired by all Italian critics, though not easy to translate effectually into another language. The following is the second of these *canzoni*.

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### *Gentil Mia Donna, I' Veggio*

O gentle lady mine,  
Within your eyes a gracious light I see;  
The path that leads to heaven it showeth me!  
Deep in those spheres divine  
Where I am wont to sit with love alone,  
All visibly your burning heart doth shine  
And lights me to fair deeds. To glory's throne  
It points the way and from the ignoble throng  
Doth draw my soul apart. No tongue can tell  
The pure delights that to those orbs belong  
Nor the rapture that they bring,  
Both when the frost of winter clothes the earth,  
And when the year again renews its birth,  
(Then first I loved you) in the smiling spring.  
And I reflect, 'Up there  
Where the Eternal Mover of every star  
Hath deigned to show us what His glories are,  
If all His other works are half so fair,  
Fling wide the prison door  
That doth restrain me from my heavenward way!  
And then I turn me to my strife on earth,  
Blessing the happy day that gave me birth,  
Which hath reserved me for such sovereign bliss,  
And praising her who raised me from the abyss  
To such high hopes. Till I saw her I lay  
In self-abasement chilled;  
But in that hour I woke to joy. She filled  
With lofty thoughts and sweet idolatry  
The heart whereof her fair eyes hold the key.  
For never yet did Love and fickle chance  
Such happiness bestow  
On him for whom their friendship most they show,  
That I would change it for a single glance  
From those dear eyes whence cometh my repose  
As the tree grows  
From roots within the soil—angelic rays  
That streaming, shed their joy  
Upon my soul when Love doth light the blaze  
That sweetly doth consume me and destroy!  
As every other glory doth depart  
Wherever yours doth shine,  
So from my heart,  
Whene'er your tender eyes on me incline,  
All other hopes, all other thoughts are gone

And Love with you remaineth there alone.  
However sweet the grace  
That in the heart of happy lovers lies,  
Yet if it all were gathered in one place,  
'Twere naught to what I feel  
When from those dreamy eyes  
Between the black and white the soft rays steal  
Wherein love sports and plays.  
And I believe that from my infancy  
Kind heaven did provide this remedy  
For all my weakness and my evil days.  
Oft-times your veil doth wrong me, that doth screen  
Your face, and the fair hands that pass between  
My one supreme delight  
And eyes of mine that flow both day and night  
With passionate longing from an ardent breast  
Cheered by your love, by your disdain oppressed.  
Since I with sorrow see  
That nature to my soul was mean and hard,  
Nor made me worthy of such dear regard,  
Therefore I strive to be  
A man more fit for such felicity,  
And for the gentle flame wherewith I burn;  
And thus with patient care my soul doth learn  
To be slow to evil, swift to all good things,  
Spurning the idle joys the vain world brings.  
Perchance if this I do  
'Twill help me to her favour kind and true,  
And the end of all my woe  
Shall come (full well my sorrowing heart doth know)  
From the sweet trembling of relenting eyes  
A faithful lover's last and dearest prize.<sup>1</sup>  
lxxii

Sometimes Laura relents and awakens the liveliest expressions of joy from her lover, as in the following:

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*La Donna Che 'L Mio Cor Nel Viso Porta*

The lady who holds my heart in her fair face  
I saw before me in sweet thought entranced  
Sitting alone, and I, to do her grace,  
With pale and reverent countenance advanced.  
Then she, when she perceived my state forlorn,  
Turned to me with a smile so fresh and clear,  
That from Jove's hands his armour 'twould have torn  
And calmed his wrath and smoothed his brow austere.  
Then she passed on. I trembled with surprise  
At words so sweet I could not bear to hear,  
Nor watch the glistening of her tender eyes;  
And now, reflecting on that welcome dear,  
I am so filled with hope and teeming joys  
That pain and grief and sorrow disappear.  
cxi

1333-6(?). Mascetta, p. 185.

It was not till late in 1336 that Petrarch was able to set out for Rome, which had been the city of his dreams. He arrived in Italy early in 1337, and it was then that the following sonnet was written and was addressed (in all probability) to his patron James Colonna.



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### *L'Aspetto Sacro De La Terra Vostra*

The sacred face of your dear land I see,  
And pity for its evil fate it brings.  
'Rise, wretched one!' I cry; 'what aileth thee?'  
And the sight stirs my soul to higher things.  
Then with this thought another doth contend  
And asketh of me, 'Wherefore dost thou flee?  
Bethink thee! Why thy time thus vainly spend?  
We must return our lady's face to see.'  
And while I mark the words, my heart grows cold,  
Like one who doth some fateful message hear;  
Then my first fancy doth return and hold  
My spirit, while the other flees in fear.  
And thus these thoughts in constant strife do dwell;  
Which will prevail at last, I cannot tell.  
lxviii

Sometimes in despair Petrarch prays for deliverance from his hopeless passion, as in a sonnet written April 6, 1338, a day regarded as the anniversary of the death of Christ, and eleven years after he had first met Laura in the church of Santa Clara.

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***Padre Del Ciel; Dopo I Perduti Giorni***

Father in heaven, lo! these wasted days  
And all these nights in vain imaginings spent,  
My thoughts enkindled to one maddening blaze,  
On one alluring presence all intent!  
May't please Thee now that by Thy light I bend  
My life to better things—some worthier aim—  
And that my foe his snares in vain extend,  
And at his bootless wiles be filled with shame,  
'Tis now, O Lord, the eleventh circling year  
Since I am fettered by this pitiless chain  
Which to the weak is ever most severe;  
Have mercy on my undeservèd pain!  
Guide Thou my wandering thoughts some better way,  
Remind them Thou wast on the cross to-day!  
lxii

Of a similar religious nature is the following, which it is believed was addressed by Petrarch to his brother Gherardo, who had lost by death the lady to whom he was passionately attached, and who some years later, after intervals of despair, devoted himself to the monastic life.

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*La Bella Donna Che Cotanto Amavi*

The lady fair whom thou didst greatly love,  
Did pass, when least we thought, beyond our gaze,  
And well I hope hath risen to heaven above,  
So gentle and so gracious were her ways.  
It is now time to take back both the keys 1  
(Which in her life she held) of thy sad heart,  
Then by the straight road, follow her with ease,  
No earthly burden left thy soul to thwart.  
For, when delivered of thy heaviest load,  
From what remains thou canst be quickly free,  
And like a pilgrim to thy new abode  
Rise all unburdened. Thou canst clearly see  
How all things move to death. Well may we pray  
The soul go light upon its perilous way.  
xci

1337. Cochin, pp. 73-4.

It is possibly to this same brother, when about to enter the monastic life, that Petrarch addressed the following:

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***Poi Che Voi Et Io Più Volte Abbiam Provato***

Since you and I full many a proof can bring  
That vain and false have been each hope and joy,  
Lift up your heart unto a better thing,  
That highest good that never brings annoy.  
This earthly life is like a meadow green  
Where the snake lies in flowers and grass entwined,  
And where the eyes delight in what is seen,  
The vision charms and captivates the mind.  
If therefore you would have your soul unstirred  
By the world's tumult ere the final day,  
Follow the few and not the common herd.  
I hear your answer, 'Brother, thou the way  
Showest to others where full often thou  
Thyself wert lost and never more than now.'  
xcix

Petrarch's mystical temperament also appears in the following:

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***Io Son Sì Stanco Sotto Il Fascio Antico***

I am so weary of the heavy load  
Of all my sins and all my wicked ways  
That I do fear to faint upon the road  
And in my enemy's hands to end my days.  
Lo! a true friend to rescue me draws nigh;  
Unspeakable His courtesy and grace;  
Then far beyond my sight He soars on high  
So that in vain I strive to see His face.  
But still His voice re-echoes with the strain,  
'Ye who are heavy laden come to Me;  
I am the way that others bar in vain.'  
What grace, what mercy, what divine decree  
Will clothe me with the pinions of the dove  
To rise from earth and find my rest above?  
lxxxix

1338 (?). Mascetta, p. 337.

The tumult in his soul is thus described in the metaphor of a storm at sea:

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***Passa La Nave Mia Colma D'Oblio***

My bark the raging surges overwhelm,  
Tossing at midnight on the winter sea  
'Twixt Scylla and Charybdis. At the helm  
Sits Love, my master and my enemy.  
At each oar stands some wicked thought and bold  
That scoffs at death and shipwreck and the gale;  
A driving blast, incessant, wet and cold  
Of sighs and hopes and longings, strikes the sail;  
Now tears rain hard in mists of wrath and scorn;  
The weary sheets hang fluttering limp and drenched,  
Twisted by ignorance, by error torn,  
And my two beacon lights in gloom are quenched.  
Amid these waves knowledge and skill are vain,  
And I despair of reaching port again.  
clxxxix

1338. See Mascetta, p. 325.

Sometimes he resolves to break off his unhappy attachment and even imagines he has succeeded in doing so, as in the following madrigal.

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***Per Ch' Al Viso D'Amor Portava Insegna***

Bearing love's ensigns on her shining face,  
A wandering fair one stirred my foolish heart;  
No creature else seemed clothed with such a grace,  
And through the fields I followed her apart;  
When lo! a far clear voice called unto me,  
'How many steps thou takest all in vain!'  
Then in the shadow of a mighty tree  
I paused in thought, and looking round again  
I saw the perils that beset my way,  
And turned me back, while it was still noonday.  
liv

*Circa* 1339. Cochin, p. 56.

But his new liberty brings him no relief, as he declares in a sonnet addressed to some other women, who perhaps had rallied him on his deliverance.

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### *Fuggendo La Pregionc Ove Amor M'Ebbe*

After long years, escaping from the cell  
Where Love, to work his will, imprisoned me,  
O women, long the tale if I should tell  
How I repented of my liberty.  
My heart confessed it could not live a day  
Apart from love and hope, and then there came  
Craftier than I, a traitor on my way  
In such false mask, he lured me to my shame.<sup>1</sup>  
And many a time, sighing for what is past,  
I cry, 'Alas! the yoke and bond and chain  
Were sweeter than to walk released and free.'  
O wretched me! I know my fate at last,  
Too late, delivered with still bitterer pain  
From the sweet pangs that had encompassed me.  
lxxxix

Again and again his passion returns. In 1339 or 1340 Simone Martini, a distinguished painter of Siena, was employed at the papal court at Avignon, and Petrarch induced him to paint a miniature of Laura which the poet could carry with him upon his journeys. Petrarch wrote two sonnets on this theme, of which the following is one.



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***Quando Giunse A Simon L'Alto Concetto***

While Simon mastered his conception high,  
When at my wish his hand had grasped the brush,  
If to her features and the delicate flush  
Of those fair cheeks he also could supply  
Both voice and soul, he had freed from every sigh  
One who cares not for what most men hold dear.  
All humble to my sight she doth appear  
And her sweet face assureth me of joy;  
And after, when I talk with her fair eyes,  
She seems to listen in a kindly way  
But cannot answer me the things I say!  
Pygmalion, how greatly shouldst thou prize  
The face that a thousand times did talk with thee,  
While not once will these fair lips answer me!  
lxxviii

Sometimes the poet's despair awakens compassion on the part of his mistress and he is comforted by some kindly salutation or gracious speech as in the following ballad.

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*Volgendo Gli Occhi Al Mio Novo Colore*

Turning your eyes upon that ashen hue  
Which bids all men remember them of death,  
'Twas pity moved your soul and from you drew  
That kindly greeting which did keep the breath  
That stirs my heart; the fragile life that dwells  
In this weak flesh did your fair eyes bestow,  
And that angelic voice that softly wells  
With rippling music. 'Tis from them I know  
My very being. As sluggish beasts will start  
Stung by the rod, so is the slumber rent  
In my dull soul. The keys 1 to my sad heart,  
Lady, you have them both. I am content,  
Ready with any wind to sail the sea;  
Since all that comes from you is sweet to me.  
lxiii

1339. See Mascetta, p. 455.

Laura was especially kind to her lover when he was about to leave her for a considerable time on one of his journeys, as appears from the following sonnet describing their last meeting prior to his departure for Italy.

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*Quel Vago Impallidir, Che 'L Dolce Riso*

That pallid hue, which clothed her gentle smile  
In tender mist, gave with such delicate grace  
Its kindly welcome that my heart the while  
Leaped forth in greeting through my eager face.  
Then did I know how souls in Paradise  
Do gaze on one another. I saw revealed  
That pitying thought, unmarked by other eyes  
Than mine alone which to all else were sealed.  
Every angelic look or gracious mien  
Of womankind where love might chance to be,  
Was proud disdain to that which I have seen.  
Silent she asked (as it did seem to me)  
While down to earth her gracious eyes did bend,  
'Who drives away from me my faithful friend?'  
cxxiii

1345. See De Sade, ii. p. 223.

And when Petrarch is away her image is constantly before him—witness the following sonnet, composed as early as 1333, while he was journeying through the forest of Ardennes on his way back from Flanders, as well as the succeeding ode, which was written at a much later period on one of his journeys in Italy and shortly before his return to Vacluse, possibly in 1345 while he was at Verona.

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***Per Mezz' I Boschi Inospiti E Selvaggi***

Through forests inhospitable and drear  
Where even men at arms in danger go,  
I walk secure, and naught shall make me fear  
Save the sun's rays that full of love do glow.  
And here I sing of her (O foolish dream)  
Whom heaven cannot keep apart from me.  
In pine and beech I see her, and there seem  
Matrons and maids in her sweet company;  
I hear her as the summer breezes pass,  
In rustling leaves, in songs that fill the glades  
And in the brooks that murmur through the grass,  
Till the low music of these sylvan shades  
Is grateful to my heart, save that the light  
Of my sweet sun is too much quenched in night.  
clxxvi

The foregoing sonnet, as well as the three *canzoni* which follow, illustrates the fact that Petrarch constantly surrounds his mistress with natural beauties and establishes an intimate and mysterious connexion between her and Nature.

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***Di Pensier In Pensier, Di Monte In Monte***

From fancy unto fancy, peak to peak,  
Love guideth me. Frequented ways I fly.  
The paths of men are irksome to my peace;  
But if on lonely shore a fount or creek  
Or shadowy vale between the hills doth lie,  
There doth the tumult of my spirit cease;  
And then, as Love may please  
I laugh, I tremble, I am bold, I weep;  
My face reflects my soul where'er I go,  
And bright or dark doth grow,  
Yet but a little time its mood doth keep,  
Till practised eyes do mark me and declare,  
'He loves, yet knows not if his fate be fair.'  
Where hill or lofty pine doth cast its shade  
I halt, and on the nearest rock I see  
Limned by my fancy, her fair countenance!  
When I revive, behold! my breast is made  
All soft with tears; I cry: 'Ah, wretched me,  
Where art thou? Why awaken from thy trance?'  
For while that tender glance  
Doth hold my heart in sweet imprisonment,  
Forgetful of itself, gazing on her,  
I do feel love so near  
That with the dream alone I am content;  
So fair doth she appear on every side,  
I ask no more if these sweet visions bide.  
Full oft her living image have I seen  
In the clear waters or upon the grass  
Or in the trunk of some widespreading tree  
Or on a floating cloud. Her face hath been  
So fair that Helen's it did far surpass,  
As the bright sun constrains the stars to flee.  
Though wild the spot may be,  
On lonely shore—in forest sere and brown—  
All the more fair my thoughts her form portray.  
And when truth drives away  
The sweet delusion, then I sit me down,  
Dead stone on living rock, cold with my fears,  
And think, and weep, and write my song in tears.  
Within my heart a keen desire doth rise  
To scale the steepest, loftiest peak of all  
Where shade of other mountain cannot go.  
There I begin to measure with mine eyes  
How great my loss, and into weeping fall,

My heart all filled with a thick mist of woe,  
Whene'er I look and know  
What spaces part me from that radiant face  
That still is near, even when far away!  
Low to myself I say,  
'Poor soul, why weep? Perchance in that far place  
Thine absence grieves her and she sighs for thee.'  
And with that thought my soul again is free.  
O song, beyond those Alps,  
Where heaven is more serene and skies more gay,  
Thou'lt see me soon near a swift-running stream  
Where the soft air doth teem  
With odours from a laurel grove astray.  
My heart and she who took it both are there,  
Only my empty image bideth here.  
cxxix

1345. Cochin, p. 92.

But his most vivid pictures of Laura are at Vaucluse in the narrow valley between steep mountains where the Sorgue rushes forth from a cavern and flows swiftly down the valley. This stream was then bordered with groves of oak and beech and laurel, and its banks were carpeted with sod on which wild flowers grew luxuriantly. It would seem that Petrarch and Laura had met in this valley on one or more occasions, and the memory of her presence there gave rise to the most exquisite poetry in the whole *Canzoniere*. His thirteenth ode, *Se 'l pensier che mi strugge*, preliminary to the one which is deservedly reckoned his masterpiece, thus sets forth in its sixth stanza the reasons why each spot is so precious to him:

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### *Ovunque Gli Occhi Volgo*

Where'er I turn mine eyes  
A joy serene I find,  
While fancy whispers 'Here her glance she threw'.  
The flowers and grass I gather, I do prize  
When memory brings to mind,  
'She pressed the gracious soil whereon ye grew,  
Wandering between the mountain and the stream.  
Perchance she made of you a fragrant chair  
Blooming and fresh and fair!'  
Thus not one spot is lost in my sweet dream.  
I think 'tis better so  
Than if each place I did more surely know!  
O spirit blest, what must thy graces be,  
That thou canst make such worshipper of me!  
cxxv

After 1337. Cochin, p. 90.

The fourteenth ode, here given in full, is in the original perhaps the most finished love song ever written. Only a very small part of its grace and beauty can be transferred to another tongue. The picture presented by the fourth stanza especially is one which has hardly a superior in lyric poetry.

De Sade believes this ode refers to some place near Avignon where Petrarch had met Laura, and to which he went frequently in the hope of seeing her (i. 207). Most commentators are satisfied that it refers to Vaucluse, since not only does the description correspond, but Petrarch in other poems also declared, as he does here in the second stanza, that it was in this place that he hoped to die.

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### *Chiare, Fresche E Dolci Acque*

Clear, fresh, sweet waters,  
Where she who seems to me  
The only one among earth's daughters  
Hath laid her dainty limbs; thou stately tree,  
(I sigh remembering it) she made of thee  
A shaft whereon her gracious form might lean;  
O flowers and herbage green  
The which (with her angelic bosom fair)  
Her graceful gown did hide;  
And thou, soft air,  
Calm, holy and serene  
Where Love with those bright eyes did open wide  
The portals to my heart; give heedful ears  
To these my last wild words of grief and tears.  
If it be fate and heaven's firm decree  
That Love shall close my weary eyelids weeping,  
Some grace it still shall be,  
When back to its own goal  
Returns my naked soul,  
That gives my poor frail body to your keeping.  
Death will have less  
Of pang and bitterness  
If to its dark defile that hope I bring;  
For never spirit faint with heavy wing  
From the tormented flesh could flee or stir  
In port more calm, more tranquil sepulchre.  
The time perchance draws on apace  
When to the old familiar place  
That creature wild  
Will come once more, all beautiful and mild  
And turn her gaze with longing, nay with glee  
To where she saw me on that happy day,  
And seek my face again; but woe is me!  
Seeing among the rocks I am but clay,  
Love may inspire her such a way  
That she will softly sigh  
And ask me as a guerdon from the sky  
Till heaven perforce must yield, the while she dries  
With her fair veil her weeping eyes.  
Ah! sweet in memory! from these branches fair  
Upon her gracious lap there fell soft showers  
Of fluttering flowers!  
Yet sat she there,  
Lowly and meek amid that pageant proud,



All covered with a radiant cloud  
Of love! One flower did stray  
Upon her garment's hem; one on her curls  
That to my sight that day  
Were made of burnished gold and shining pearls.  
One rested on the earth; one on the stream;  
Another, lingering slow, did softly move  
And turn again, then wandering, did seem  
To speak and say, 'Here reigneth Love.'  
How many times I said,  
Inspired with reverent dread,  
'This creature sure was born in Paradise!'  
Her port divine, her eyes,  
Her angel's face,  
Her soft words, and the grace  
Of her laughter did so bear me down  
With sweet forgetfulness and drown  
My thoughts in dear illusions, I did sigh  
And questioning cry,  
'How came I here, and when?'  
And thought I was in heaven, and from then  
Till now I so have loved this greensward fair  
That I can find no joy nor peace elsewhere.  
O song of mine, hadst thou the graces meet  
To match thy keen desire and eager mind,  
Forth from the forest couldst thou turn thy feet  
And walk with fearless step among mankind.  
cxxvi

It was the custom of every troubadour to remind his mistress of the long period of his devotion, and Petrarch follows this usage in a number of his sonnets, one of which, written fifteen years after he first met her, is here given. In this poem, however, he also imitates a well-known ode of Horace (Book I, Ode 22) to the 'sweetly laughing Lalage', expanding the thought of that poem with considerable elaboration.

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***Pommi Ove 'L Sole Occide I Fiori E L'Erba***

Put me where all things wither in the sun,  
Or where his beams grow faint 'mid ice and snow,  
Or where through temperate climes his car doth run,  
Or where the morn doth break or evening glow;  
Clothe me in purple fortune or in grey,  
Let skies be dark and dull, or airs serene,  
Let it be night, or long or short the day,  
Or ripening years or adolescence green;  
Put me in heaven, on earth or down in hell,  
On lofty mountain or in vale or moor,  
As spirit freed or still in mortal shell,  
With fame illustrious or with name obscure;  
Through lustrums three I cherish, sigh, adore,  
And so will I continue evermore.  
cxlv

1342.

Many are the sonnets which, at various times, Petrarch devotes to the praise of the charms and perfections of his mistress. Witness the following:

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*I' Vidi In Terra Angelici Costumi*

Here upon earth I saw those heavenly charms  
Unique in all the world; those angel ways  
Whose memory both delights me and alarms,  
Till all I see seems shadow, dream and haze.  
In tears I saw those two entrancing eyes  
Whose beauty was the envy of the sun,  
And heard the sound of such sweet words and sighs  
As made the rivers stand and mountains run,  
Love, honour, tender pity, grief sincere,  
Weeping did utter sweeter melodies  
Than any that the world is wont to hear;  
While heaven attentive, drank the harmonies,  
And every leaf on every branch was stilled;  
With such delight the charmèd air was filled;  
clvi

1346. See De Sade, ii. p. 260.

De Sade thinks some sorrow had befallen Laura perhaps the death of her mother, but this seems unnecessary for the explanation of the sonnet. The combination of love, honour, pity, and grief might well refer to her pity and sorrow for her lover from whom her honour required her to withhold her favours. Tears from such a cause might well account for Petrarch's ecstasies.

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*In Qual Parte Del Ciel, In Quale Idea*

In what bright spot of heaven did it bide,  
The pattern from which nature's hand did bear  
That gracious countenance, then turned aside  
To show on earth what she could do up there?  
What nymph or woodland goddess e'er unbound  
Such golden tresses to the zephyr's breath?  
Where in a single breast such virtues found,  
Although the chief has brought me to my death?  
He looks in vain for beauty all divine  
Who never gazed on this fair creature's eyes  
Nor saw how softly they did move and shine;  
And he who never knew her tender sighs  
Nor heard her gentle words or laughter gay  
Knows not how Love can heal, how Love can slay.  
clix

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*Amor Et Io Sì Pien' Di Meraviglia*

O love! we need no further marvel seek  
(Like one who never a strange thing hath known)  
Gazing on her who, if she laugh or speak,  
Is like none other than herself alone!  
Beneath the shadow of her quiet brow  
Shine those two faithful stars from azure sky;  
No other light he needs his path to show,  
Who hath resolved his love be pure and high.  
What miracle to see her on the grass,  
Where like a flower she sits! Or watch her press  
Her breast on that green bush; or mark her pass  
In the fresh springtime, in her loveliness,  
By her own thoughts attended, chaste and fair,  
Twining a garland for her golden hair!  
clx

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***Stiamo, Amor, A Veder La Gloria Nostra***

Love, let us stand our glory to behold!  
Things beyond nature in their charm and worth!  
Look! Beauty rains on her in showers of gold!  
Behold the light that heaven shows to earth!  
What art can deck with pearls and purple meet  
That body fair whose like was never seen!  
And how divinely tread those dainty feet  
This shady cloister of fair hills and green!  
Here in a thousand hues the scattered flowers  
That spread themselves upon the tender grass  
Which that old blackened oak shades and embowers  
Pray that her foot may press them if she pass!  
The stars are kindled round her, and the skies  
Rejoice they are made clear by her bright eyes.  
cxcii

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*In Nobil Sanguine Vita Umile E Queta*

Tranquil and meek her life, noble her blood;  
A lofty mind; a pure heart filled with grace;  
Mature the fruitage, tender still the bud;  
A joyful spirit in a thoughtful face;  
On one fair woman did her happy star—  
Nay, King of all the stars—these gifts combine  
With worth, true honour, fame from near and far;  
To praise her well might weary bard divine!  
For chastity in her is joined with love,  
And gracious ways with nature's comely guise;  
With silent charm doth every gesture move,  
And she hath that within her eloquent eyes  
To darken day or bring night clear and calm,  
Turn honey bitter or make wormwood balm.  
ccxv

In spite of the transitory gleams of hope and consolation from the kindness of his beloved, there returns to Petrarch again and again the conviction of the essential hopelessness of his passion, as in the following sonnet, which, although it appears quite early in the manuscript collection, was apparently written in one of the calmer and more reflective moments of his maturer years.

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***Quanto Più M'Avicino Al Giorno Extremo***

The closer I draw near that final day  
That hath the power to shorten human pain,  
The swifter do the moments fly away  
And all my hopes of them prove false and vain.  
I say unto my thoughts, 'We shall not go  
Together far; our talk of Love must cease;  
This dull and heavy body, like fresh snow  
Is melting fast away; we shall find peace;  
And when it comes that hope will disappear  
Which fills us with our vain imaginings,  
Our laughter and our sorrow, rage and fear,  
And we shall clearly see what idle things  
Are those for which we strive and pray and cry,  
How fruitless are the joys for which we sigh!'  
xxxii

But no mood lasts long in the course of Petrarch's love, and his poems are filled with continual changes and inconsistencies. There is none of them which reveals more fully the contradictions in his life and feelings than the following sonnet full of antitheses after the model of certain Provençal songs.



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***Pace Non Trovo, E Non Ho Da Far Guerra***

I find no peace, yet am not armed for war;  
I hope and yet I fear; I freeze, I burn;  
On earth I lie, above the heavens I soar;  
I would embrace the world, yet all things spurn;  
And she doth hold me in a cell confined  
Who neither makes me hers nor sets me free;  
Love will not kill, nor yet my cords unbind,  
Nor wills I live, nor ends my misery.  
I have no tongue, yet speak, no eyes, yet see;  
I long to perish, yet I call for aid;  
I loathe myself, yet love with constancy,  
Weeping I laugh and on affliction feed;  
And life and death I hold in equal hate.  
Through you, my lady, comes this evil state.  
cxxxiv

1340-1. See Mascetta, p. 479.

During the years that elapsed after the time when Petrarch and Laura met, her youthful beauty must have diminished, especially when her health was broken. It was perhaps on some such occasion when Petrarch had noted this that he composed the following exquisite sonnet recalling her appearance when he first met her and the love then awakened which could not now be quenched at a later time on account of the changes he perceived.

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*Erano I Capei D'Oro A L'Aura Sparsi*

Flung to the breezes was her golden hair,  
Into a thousand knots its tresses wound,  
Beyond all telling glowed the sunshine fair  
From those soft eyes where now no light is found.  
I cannot tell if it be true or no,  
Methought her face to pitying colours turned;  
My breast love's touchstone was; at love's first glow  
What wonder that with sudden fire I burned!  
Nor did she walk like any mortal thing,  
But every motion was celestial grace;  
Her words were like the angels' when they sing;  
A living sun, a heavenly spirit's face  
Was what I saw. If such it is not now  
No wound is healed by slackening the bow.  
xc

1338. See Mascetta, p. 361. (Probably later.)

At the end of twenty years from the time when he first met Laura in the church at Avignon, Petrarch thus describes his own condition.

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***Beato In Sogno, E Di Languir Contento***

Happy in dreams; content in languishing;  
Shadows I clasp; I swim in shoreless seas;  
I chase the summer airs with aimless wing;  
Build on the sand and write upon the breeze.  
I plough the waves in vain; the sun I woo  
Till by its withering rays my powers are spent;  
A swiftly fleeing deer do I pursue  
With sluggish ox, crippled and maimed and bent;  
Save to my own harm I am blind to all;  
That harm I seek with fluttering heart and torn.  
On Love, my lady, nay on Death I call,  
And twenty years these torments have I borne.  
Still am I filled with sighs and tears and gloom,  
Yet dearly love the fate that weaves my doom.  
ccxii

1347.

In 1347, when Petrarch set out for Rome with the intention of co-operating with Rienzi, it seems that a presentiment of some calamity was in Laura's mind when he left her, and the poet afterwards, reflecting upon her appearance and conduct at their final interview, also becomes filled with forebodings of some impending danger, as appears in the following.

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***Qual Paura Ho Quando Mi Torna A Mente***

With what keen dread do I recall the day  
When I did leave my lady—and my heart!  
Pensive and grave was she when we did part.  
No other image in my thought will stay!  
Amid fair women in their fine array,  
Humble I see her stand. She seems a rose  
’Mong lesser flowers. No joy nor pain she shows,  
But a dim dread as one who cannot say  
What he doth fear. Her mirth is put away,  
Her pearls, her garments gay, her garlands choice;  
Silent her songs and laughter and sweet voice.  
And thus I left her, to dark doubts a prey.  
Now portents, dreams and many a boding thought  
Assail my heart; Pray God they come to nought!  
ccxlix

1347. Cochin, p. 115.

Soon this foreboding takes definite shape in a dream in which Laura tells him that this parting is their final one.

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*Solea Lontana In Sonno Consolarme*

My love was wont to comfort me in dreams,  
Smiling with angel face from far away;  
But now with gloom and dread the vision teems  
And help is none, my terrors to allay.  
For tender pity, joined to solemn grief  
Full often in her face I seem to see,  
And hear the thing that fills me with belief,  
Yet strips my heart of all felicity.  
'Dost thou remember not', I hear her say,  
'That final evening when we needs must part?  
Late was the hour; I could no longer stay,  
And left thee tearful, but I had no heart  
To tell thee then what now is proved and plain:  
Hope not on earth to see my face again.'  
ccl

1347. Cochin, p. 115.

These forebodings were only too well founded, for it was while Petrarch was still in Italy that Laura died. His first sonnet afterwards is a wild, incoherent wail of despair, in which he recalls and invokes her face, her look, her bearing, her speech, her laughter, her soul, in all of which he needs must dwell and can feel or know no other sorrow now that he is deprived of these.

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***Oimè Il Bel Viso, Oimè Il Soave Sguardo***

Ah, that sweet face! Alas! that sóft regard!  
That noble bearing, winsome, blithe, and free,  
That speech to soothe a nature fierce and hard,  
And make the weak grow strong! Unhappy me!  
Ah! that sweet laughter whence the dart has flown  
Whose wound must end in death, my happiest fate!  
Ah! regal soul most worthy of a throne,  
Hadst thou not fall'n upon the world too late!  
In you I needs must dwell and breathe and glow,  
Since I was always yours; if you depart,  
No other sorrow can I feel or know.  
With hope and fond desire you filled my heart,  
When I did say farewell, yet longed to stay!  
And now the wind has borne the words away!  
cclxvii

1348. Cochin, p. 124.

The bitterness of his soul also finds expression in the following:

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***Quanta Invidia Io Ti Porto, Avara Terra***

O sordid earth, what envy do I bear  
To thee who claspest her I see no more,  
Since thou dost hide from me those features fair  
Wherein I found my peace in bitter war.  
Heaven too I envy, that shuts in and bars,  
And treasures for itself so grudgingly  
That spirit meek which humbly sought the stars,  
Yet opens nevermore its gates to me!  
I envy too the souls who now enjoy  
On high her sweet and gracious company,  
Which I, with yearning keen, so long have sought;  
I envy hateful Death who did destroy  
My life with hers in ruthless cruelty,  
Yet stands in her fair eyes, and calls me not!  
ccc

1351-3. Cochin, p. 132.

But his grief sometimes strikes a more plaintive chord in which Christian resignation is blended.

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***Occhi Miei, Oscurato È 'L Nostro Sole***

O eyes of mine, our sun is dark to-day,  
Or rather rises to heaven and shines in state!  
There shall we see her yet, for she doth wait  
Our coming—perhaps she grieves at our delay!  
O ears of mine, her angel words convey  
A deeper meaning there than you can know!  
O feet of mine, ye have no right to go  
Where she who oft hath drawn you wends her way.  
Wherefore on me wage ye this bitter strife?  
It was not I who shattered all your joy  
Of seeing, hearing, following her in life;  
Blame rather Death who did your hopes destroy.  
Or better, praise Him who doth bind and free  
And after mourning grants felicity.  
cclxxv

On July 3, 1348, only a few months after Laura's death, Petrarch's friend and patron, Cardinal Colonna, was also carried off by the plague. In the following sonnet the column (Colonna) and the laurel (Lauro) signify respectively his friend and his beloved.



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***Rotta È L'Alta Colonna E 'L Verde Lauro***

Broken the column tall and laurel green  
That were my shade and my security,  
And I have lost what shall no more be seen  
From western ocean to the Indian sea.  
'Twas Death who from mine arms these treasures bore,  
Wherewith I lived in joy and walked in pride,  
And now no lands nor empires can restore  
Nor gems nor gold allure them to my side.  
If human will be ruled by destiny,  
What else than bitter anguish can I choose  
With downcast face and eyes suffused with tears?  
That life of ours that is so fair to see,  
How swiftly in one morning doth it lose  
All that it won through many weary years!  
cclxix

1348-9. Cochin, p. 126.

With the returning of another spring the memories of Laura awaken a new pang.

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***Zefiro Torna, E 'L Bel Tempo Rimena***

Again with gladsome feet Zephyr returns  
Mid grass and flowers, his goodly family  
And Procne chatters, Philomela<sup>1</sup> mourns,  
While Spring comes forth in all her finery.  
The meadows laugh; the skies are bright and fair,  
And Aphrodite wins the smile of Jove,  
While full of passion is the earth and air  
And every creature turns his thoughts to love.  
For me, alas! these vernal days are shorn  
Of all delight and laden with the sighs  
Which from my heart's recesses she hath torn  
Who bore its hopes and pangs to Paradise!  
Till birds and flowers and woman's graces mild  
To me are but a desert, stern and wild.  
cccx

The same note of inconsolable grief appears in the following:

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*Nè Per Sereno Ciel Ir Vaghe Stelle*

Neither the stars that wander through the sky,  
Nor stately ships upon a tranquil sea,  
Nor troops of gallant horsemen prancing by,  
Nor blithe and agile beasts in wood and lea,  
Nor tidings fresh from one for whom we fear,  
Nor speech of love in grand and lofty air,  
Nor amid verdant lawns with fountains clear  
The tuneful songs of gentle dames and fair,  
Nor aught beside can move my stony heart  
Which she hath carried with her to the tomb,  
Who to mine eyes did light and joy impart  
Till now without her life is naught but gloom,  
And I do call for death with longing keen.  
O but to see her! Would I ne'er had seen!  
cccxii

And when he returns to Vaucluse, the familiar scenes arouse again the consciousness of his loneliness.

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***Sento L'Aura Mia Antica, E I Dolci Colli***

I feel the soft breeze on my cheek; I see  
The hills before me where that light was born  
Which held mine eyes in its sweet sorcery,  
And still doth hold them weeping and forlorn!  
O idle fancies! withered hopes and dreams!  
Empty and cold the nest where she did lie,  
Lonely the grassy banks, turbid the streams  
Where still I live and where I hoped to die!  
For I did think to end my weary days  
Here where her gracious feet might press the sward  
Upon my grave and her fair eyes might gaze.  
But I have served a hard and cruel lord!  
All that did feed my flame I rashly burned,  
And now I mourn my hopes to ashes turned.  
cccx

1351. Cochin, p. 137.

Petrarch's sorrow at Laura's death is none the less profound because their relations shortly before her death had begun to take on more and more the form of intimate friendship as her dread of the violence of his earlier passion gradually disappeared. He gives utterance to this change of feeling in the following.

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***Tutta La Mia Fiorita E Verde Etade***

At last my blossoming and vernal age  
Was passing, and I felt my youthful fire  
Grow calmer. Life had reached its crowning stage  
And soon would seek the valley and expire.  
Little by little my dear enemy  
Began to win assurance from her fears,  
And her pure heart and stainless honesty  
Would take in fancied jest my sighs and tears.  
For it was near the time when Love doth walk  
With chastity, and lovers may have leave  
To sit together and in friendly talk  
To tell how they did dream and yearn and grieve.  
But envious Death, to quench my hopes in woe  
Rushed in between us like an armèd foe.  
cccxv

But less than two years after Laura's death the poet is assailed by the temptation of another love, and in the following canzone he defies the fair god to ensnare him again.

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*Amor, Se Vuo' Ch' I' Torni Al Giogo Antico*

If thou wouldst bend me to thy yoke anew,  
O God of Love, as all thy pains do show,  
Ere thou my spirit shalt again subdue,  
A new strange test thyself must undergo.  
Find me the treasure that lies hid away  
In the dark grave and left me stripped and poor.  
Find that wise heart and pure  
Wherein the fount of all my being lay.  
Then, if thy power be such as men do say  
In heaven above and in the abyss below,  
(What things among us here thy skill can do,  
So oft are proved and true  
I think that every gentle soul doth know)  
Take back from Death the prize his arm doth bear,  
And set thine emblems on that visage fair.  
Grant that again her gracious look I see,  
Which like a sun did melt the ice away,  
And let me on that path discover thee  
Where went my heart and evermore did stay.  
Take thou thy golden arrows and thy bow,  
And let me hear again the cord rebound,  
And the words of tuneful sound  
That taught me all the depths of love to know!  
Move thou the lips in which the charm did lie  
That bound me; hide thy snare  
Within her clustering hair!  
To lure me elsewhere vainly wilt thou try.  
But fling again those tresses to the wind,  
And all content, my spirit thou canst bind.  
For naught could free me from the threads of gold  
That in her rippling ringlets did appear,  
Nor from the fragrant breath that did enfold  
Her gracious presence, tender yet austere.  
Both day and night they kept my love more green  
Than the fresh laurel hid in sylvan glades  
When summer foliage fades;  
Or myrtle, when the winter blast is keen;  
But now that cruel death so stern hath been  
And broke the bond from which I could not fly,  
In all the world no other wilt thou find  
My heart again to bind.  
What use, O Love, to try?  
Thine arms are lost; my spirit now is free,  
I fear thee not; what canst thou do to me?

cclxx

Date shown by manuscript, commenced June 9, 1350, finished 1351. Cochin, pp. 125-6.

But in his dreams of Laura the thoughts of his own fame as a poet are not wholly absent. His earlier songs had been written to give his heart relief; now he would more willingly write to please the world, but with her death his inspiration had passed and her memory calls him away.

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*S' Io Avesse Pensato Che Sì Care*

Had I but known how welcome were the rhymes  
I fashioned from my sighs and deep despair,  
Still other stanzas had I shaped betimes  
In numbers greater and in charms more rare.  
But she is dead who did inspire my heart,  
Who on my peaks of fancy stood aloft,  
And of myself I have no wit nor art  
To make my rough dull verses clear and soft.  
For all my labour in that earlier time  
Was but to give my burdened heart relief  
As best I might, not unto fame to climb;  
I sought to grieve, but not renown from grief.  
Now would I please, but she with noble pride  
Doth call me, dumb and weary, to her side.  
ccxciii

In the two following stanzas, taken from the twenty-sixth canzone, he contrasts the days of his former journeys, when hope as well as memory accompanied him, with his present state now that hope is gone and he must live on memory alone. If he had only understood the meaning of Laura's look at their last meeting and had then died, his lot would have been happy compared with his present loneliness.



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### ***Solea Da La Fontana Di Mia Vita***

From my life's fountain I was wont to stray,  
And wandering over lands and seas would go,  
Not by desire impelled but destiny;  
And ever went (such aid did Love convey)  
To banishment (how bitter, Love did know),  
Pasturing my heart on hope and memory.  
Now I surrender and my arms resign  
Unto a fortune pitiless and stern  
That hath despoiled me of my hope benign;  
And now to memory only must I turn,  
Feeding my longing heart with dreams alone,  
So faint with fasting hath my spirit grown.

\* \* \* \* \*

If my dull mind had been with me at need,  
And my vain longings had not sought to bend  
My thoughts another way, in the sweet face  
Of my dear lady I could plainly read  
That I had reached of all my joy the end  
And the beginning of much bitterness,  
And learning this and finding swift release  
While still she lived, from my affliction sore—  
This grievous veil of flesh,—in joy and peace  
I might have gone before,  
And watched them raise in heaven her dwelling fair;  
Now I must follow her with snowy hair.

\* \* \* \* \*

Song, say to him who in his love is blest,  
'If thou art well contented, die to-day,  
For timely parting is not grief, but rest;  
Who can die happy, let him not delay.'

cccxxxi

In the twenty-fifth canzone, *Tacer non posso, e temo non adopre*, the goddess of Fortune, who rules and foresees the destinies of men, converses with the poet in the fifth, sixth, and seventh stanzas, and thus describes the birth, the childhood and early womanhood of Laura, in a series of brilliant images, where the presence of only one dark cloud portended her approaching doom.

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### *Il Dì Che Costei Nacque, Eran Le Stelle*

The day that she was born, those stars did shine  
In high and chosen places  
That most do shed on earth their favouring graces.  
Each to the other did with love incline;  
Venus and Jove with countenance benign  
Did hold the lordliest state, serene and high;  
While every orb malign  
Was chased in shame from out the smiling sky.  
The sun had never opened day so fair;  
Jocund the blooming earth, the sky and air,  
Peace on the waters of the seas and streams!  
Yet while with friendly light the vision teems,  
One distant cloud doth grieve me, dark with care,  
The which may melt, I fear, in tears of woe,  
Unless the heavenly powers some pity show.  
When to this nether world her spirit flew  
(Which for such gentle soul was all unmeet)  
'Twas a strange thing and new  
To see a child so saintly and so sweet.  
She seemed a white pearl in a golden nest!  
Now creeping, now with trembling steps and slow,  
Her baby feet did go,  
Till the wood and rock and greensward that they pressed  
Grew soft and fresh and warm,  
And the field bloomed beneath her innocent eyes,  
And balmy grew the skies,  
And calm the wind and storm,  
While she with lips just weaned went prattling on!  
Thus to a world as blind and deaf as stone  
The light and glory of the heavens were shown.  
When she in years and virtue grew apace,  
And reached the age of adolescence green,  
I do believe such glory and such grace  
The sun had never seen!  
Her eyes with modesty and joy were filled,  
Her speech with health and happiness did glow,  
Till every other tongue would soon be stilled  
If it should seek to tell what thou dost know!  
Her countenance did shine with heavenly light,  
And with its dazzling beauty blind your sight,  
And from her earthly tenement a fire  
Did come to fill thy heart with such desire  
That none did ever burn with flame so bright!  
But when her sudden parting I did see,

Methought it must bring bitter days to thee.

cccxxv

Petrarch's grief is expressed with great tenderness and grace in a sonnet to a nightingale mourning its mate, and in another to a little feathered wanderer in the dark days of winter.

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*Quel Rosigniuol, Che Si Soave Piagne*

That nightingale who doth so softly mourn  
His little ones, perchance, or loving mate,  
In lays melodious from a heart forlorn,  
And fills the air with notes disconsolate—  
Through the long night he seems to stay with me  
To talk to me of all my grief and pain.  
It was my fault these eyes could never see  
That e'en o'er heavenly spirits death might reign!  
Him that is sure, how easy to betray!  
Her two fair eyes, far brighter than the sun—  
Who would have thought to see them senseless clay?  
Now do I know the course my life must run;  
How I shall live, and weep, and clearly see  
That here no precious thing can stay with me.  
cccxix

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*Vago Augelletto Che Cantando Vai*

Thou little wandering bird of plaintive lay  
Mourning thy brighter time of past delight,  
Who seest behind thee summer and the day,  
And close beside thee winter and the night;  
If thou couldst understand my evil state,  
As thine own keen affliction thou dost know,  
Thou'dst come unto this breast disconsolate,  
And we would each divide the other's woe.  
I know not if our sorrows equal be,  
Perchance the mate thou mournest liveth still,  
While death and heaven so churlish were to me;  
Yet these dark days, this season sad and chill  
With memories of my sweet and bitter years,  
Move me to talk with thee and share thy tears.  
cccliii

In another sonnet he sends his verses to her tomb.

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*Ite, Rime Dolenti, Al Duro Sasso*

Go, mourning rhymes, unto the senseless stone  
That hides my precious treasure in the ground;  
There call her, she will answer from her throne,  
Although her body to the earth is bound.  
Tell her that I am weary of my days,  
Tossing for ever on this angry sea;  
I fain must follow, step by step, the ways  
She trod, and gather leaves of memory.  
Only of her, living or dead, I sing  
(Nay she will always live—immortal made),  
That the dull world shall with her praises ring,  
And bring her sweet renown that will not fade.  
O may she run to meet me when I die,  
And call, and lead me to her home on high  
cccxxxiii

So deep is his grief that he believes he could not live except for that which is his greatest consolation, the appearance of Laura in his dreams.

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***Ripensando A Quel Ch' Oggi Il Cielo Onora***

When I do think on her fair countenance—  
The soft inclining of that head of gold,  
Her angel's voice, her smile and tender glance  
Which once did warm my heart that now is cold;  
I know that still alive I could not be,  
If she, of women fairest and most pure,  
Came not in dreams at early morn to me,  
The time when every dream is true and sure.  
What sweet and chaste and holy welcoming!  
And how intently doth she bend her ear  
To the long story of my suffering,  
Until the garish daylight doth appear!  
Then—for she knows the way—she seeks the skies,  
The tears still glistening in her tender eyes.  
cccxliii

But there are times when the dreams will not come, and the poet thus remonstrates:

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***Dolce Mio Caro E Precioso Pegno***

O pledge of mine, precious and sweet and dear,  
Whom heaven doth guard, tho' earth doth keep thy clay,  
Why should thy kindly pity disappear—  
Thou who hast been of all my life the stay?  
For it was once thy wont to make my sleep  
Worthy thy shadowy presence. Now I mourn  
Without thee, comfortless. Who still doth keep  
Thine image from my side? Surely such scorn  
Dwells not in heaven, though sometimes here below  
A gentle heart doth feed on other's pain,  
And Love in his own realm doth overthrow.  
Thou who dost see and know my sorrow vain,  
And who alone canst bring my heart relief,  
Come in my dreams once more and calm my grief.  
cccxl

There is a speedy answer to his prayer.



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*Deh Qual Pietà, Qual Angel Fu Sì Presto*

What pitying soul, what angel kind and fleet,  
Carried to heaven the tidings of my grief?  
For now my lady cometh, fair and sweet,  
With all her comely ways, for my relief;  
To still my heart and calm my choking breath.  
Her pride is gone, all gentleness is she;  
So gracious that I loose the bonds of death,  
And live once more, and life is ecstasy!  
Blest is the soul that could my memory bless  
With those fond names we two alone did know;  
She said—her face all filled with tenderness—  
'Dear faithful heart! How do I feel thy woe;  
'Twas for our good that I thy love did shun,'  
And added words that might have stayed the sun.  
cccxli

But his visions of Laura are not confined to those that visit him in sleep. In fancy he meets her in heaven.

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***Levommi Il Mio Penser In Parte Ov' Era***

She whom I seek, no more on earth abides;  
So I did lift my longing thought to where  
She dwells with those whom heaven's third circle<sup>1</sup> hides,  
And there I saw her, gentle and most fair.  
She took my hand and said, 'Thou'lt be with me  
Within this sphere, unless desire shall stray.  
Yes; I am she who made such war with thee,  
And ere the evening came did end her day.  
My bliss no human mind can ever know;  
Only I long for thee and for that veil<sup>2</sup>  
Which thou didst love and which remains below.'  
Why dropped her hand? Why did her sweet voice fail?  
When at the sound of words so chaste and kind  
In heaven with her I fain had stayed behind.  
ccci

Thus does he imagine her entrance into heaven:

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*Li Angeli Eletti, E L'Anime Beate*

The chosen angels and the spirits blest,  
Inhabitants of heaven, on the day  
When first my lady passed, around her pressed,  
And marvelling, among themselves did say:  
'What light is this? What beauty rare and sweet?  
So fair a soul, such queenly majesty  
Ascending from the world to this high seat  
Never before in heaven did we see.'  
And though with her new home she seemed content,  
And no soul there more perfect was than she,  
From time to time backward her gaze was bent  
To watch if I might come, and wait for me.  
Thus heavenward my thoughts and hopes I lift,  
And dream I hear her pray my feet be swift.  
cccxlvi

But toward the close of the *Canzoniere* the feelings of religion are again uppermost in Petrarch's mind, and he laments the wasted days of this earthly passion and implores Divine aid to redeem his soul in its final hour.

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*I' Vo Piangendo I Miei Passati Tempi*

I go lamenting all my wasted days.  
That I consumed loving a mortal thing,  
Nor had the will my languid soul to raise,  
That for a loftier flight had ample wing.  
O Thou invisible, immortal King,  
Thou who dost know my shameful sins and base,  
Help Thou my spirit frail and wandering!  
Strengthen its weakness with Thy boundless grace!  
So that although I lived in storm and war,  
I die at peace in port, and though in vain  
My stay on earth, my parting may be fair!  
In death and these few years that yet remain,  
May Thy strong hand be near to succour me!  
Thou know'st I have no hope except in Thee!  
ccclxv

Still more clearly are his religious aspirations and longings expressed in his celebrated 'Hymn to the Virgin' with which he closes his *Canzoniere*, with the evident desire that this shall be regarded as the expression of his final resolution and his hope of heaven.

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### *Vergine Bella, Che Di Sol Vestita*

O Virgin fair, who in the sun arrayed,  
And crowned with stars, to a greater Sun did'st bring  
Such joy that He in thee His light did hide!  
Deep love impels me that of thee I sing.  
But how shall I begin without thy aid,  
Or that of Him who in thy womb did bide?  
I call on one who answereth alway  
When simple faith we show.  
Virgin, if extreme woe  
In things of earth thou wouldst with joy repay,  
In my hard struggle be thy succour given!  
O hear me while I pray,  
Though I be clay,  
And thou the queen of heaven!  
O virgin sage and of the blessed number  
Of those wise virgins honoured by their Lord,  
Yea, thou the first with brightest lamp of all!  
Thou shield of the afflicted from the sword  
Of evil fortune and in death's deep slumber,  
Rescue and victory come at thy call;  
Thou refuge from the passions, blind and dark,  
Of frail mortality!  
Virgin, in agony  
Thy fair eyes saw each nail and cruel mark  
Upon the body of thy precious Son.  
Look on my desperate state!  
Disconsolate  
To thee for help I run.  
O virgin pure, perfect in every part;  
Daughter and mother of thy gentle Child,  
Sunbeam on earth, bright gem in heaven's array!  
The Father's Son and thine, O undefiled,  
Through thee (window of heaven that thou art!)  
Came to redeem us at the final day!  
And God among all dwellings of the earth  
Selected thee alone,  
O virgin, who the moan  
Of hapless Eve hast turned to joy and mirth;  
O make me worthy His unending love,  
Thou who in glory drest,  
Honoured and blest,  
Art crowned in heaven above.  
O virgin holy, filled with every grace;  
Who by thy deep and true humility

Didst rise to heaven, where thou my prayer dost hear!  
Thou hast brought forth the Fount of Piety,  
The Sun of Justice, by whose shining grace  
An age in errors dark grows bright and clear.  
Three precious names united are in thee:  
Mother and wife and child!  
O virgin undefiled,  
Bride of the King whose love hath set us free  
From all our bonds and our poor world hath blest;  
By His wounds' holy balm  
O may He calm  
My heart and give it rest!  
Virgin, who wast in all the world unique  
Enamouring heaven with thy comeliness,  
No other near or like thy perfect state!  
Pure thoughts and gracious deeds thy life did bless,  
And thou thy fruitful maidenhood and meek  
A living shrine to God didst consecrate!  
By thee my sad life can with joy resound,  
If thou but ask thy Child,  
Virgin devout and mild,  
Where sin abounded grace shall more abound;  
My spirit's knees in orisons I bend,  
Be thou my guide, I pray;  
My devious way  
Bring to a happy end.  
O shining virgin, steadfast evermore!  
Thou radiant star above life's stormy sea,  
And every faithful mariner's trusty guide!  
In this wild tempest turn thy thoughts to me.  
See how I am beset! No helm nor oar!  
What shrieks of death are near on every side!  
My soul despairing puts her trust in thee.  
Sin will I not deny;  
Virgin, to thee I cry,  
Let not my pangs delight thine enemy!  
'Twas to redeem our sins, remember well,  
That God took on afresh  
Our human flesh  
Within thy virgin cell.  
Virgin, how many were the tears I shed,  
How many years I prayed and longed and sighed!  
What was my guerdon? Grief and sorrow vain.  
Since I was born where Arno's stream doth glide,  
From land to land my restless feet have sped,  
And life was naught but bitterness and pain.  
For mortal charms and gracious ways and dear  
Have clogged my heart and mind.

O virgin holy, kind,  
Delay not. Haply 'tis my final year.  
My days like flying arrows speed away!  
In sin and misery  
They swiftly flee  
And death alone doth stay.  
Virgin, I mourn for one that now is clay,  
Who, living, filled mine eyes with many a tear,  
Yet of my thousand woes not one could see!  
And had she known them all, the griefs that were  
Would still have been; since any other way  
To me were death, to her were infamy.  
Thou queen of heaven, O goddess virginal—  
Thus may I name thee aright—  
Virgin of clearer sight  
Than ours, thou knowest all! Though others fail,  
The task is easy for thy powers supreme;  
End, then, my grief and woe,  
Thy grace bestow,  
And my poor soul redeem.  
Virgin, my only hope doth rest in thee!  
I know that thou wilt help my sad estate.  
Forsake me not upon death's dark defile!  
Look not on me but Him who did create!  
Though I be naught, His image lives in me,  
And that must win thy care for one so vile!  
My Gorgon sin hath turned me into stone.  
Vain humours I distil.  
Virgin, do thou but fill  
With tears devout this aching heart and lone;  
That at the end my love may holier be,  
Without the taint of earth,  
Which at its birth  
Was wild idolatry.  
O Virgin meek, and of all pride the foe;  
Thy lowly birth win thee to hear my song;  
Have pity on an humble contrite heart!  
If with such constancy I could so long  
On one frail mortal clod my love bestow,  
What might I do for thee, God's counterpart!  
If by thy hand I now may rise again  
From out my low estate,  
Virgin, I consecrate  
Unto thy service tongue and heart and brain,  
My thoughts, my songs, my sighs and anxious fears!  
Guide me in better ways  
And crown with praise  
These new desires and tears.

My hour draws on, it is not far away  
(Thus fleeting time doth run);  
Virgin, thou only one!  
Upon my heart remorse and death do prey!  
Unto thy Son, true man, true God, commend  
My soul; to Him I cleave.  
May He receive  
My spirit at the end.  
ccclxvi

Macaulay says of this ode, 'It is perhaps the finest hymn in the world. His devout veneration receives an exquisitely poetical character from the delicate perception of the sex and loveliness of his idol.'

In his very first sonnet, which he evidently wrote after all the rest and as an explanation of the whole, Petrarch thus speaks of the emptiness and vanity of his passion, but feels sure that those who have known love in their own experience will find pity and pardon for his changing moods.



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### *Voi Ch' Ascoltate In Rime Sparse Il Suono*

O ye who hear in these my scattered rhymes  
The sound of sighs that on my heart did prey,  
Drawn from the errors of those youthful times  
When I was other than I am to-day:  
Where'er ye be who love by proof have known,  
I sure shall pity find and pardon free  
For changing moods wherein I laugh or moan  
With empty hopes or vain despondency.  
Amid the multitude, I clearly see  
Of idle jest I long have been the theme,  
Until I blush at my simplicity,  
And all the fruit of love is bitter shame  
And vain repentance, till it clearly seems  
The things that charm the world are idle dreams.  
i

Some time after these lyrics had been completed, the example of Dante's *Divina Commedia* (which earlier in life he had refrained from reading lest he should imitate it) inspired Petrarch to undertake a longer poem in which Laura should be the pervading figure as Beatrice had been in Dante's great work. The *Trionfi*, or Triumphs (of Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time, and Eternity), were the result. The poem as a whole was not equal to the sonnets, odes, ballads, and madrigals of the *Canzoniere*, but it contains much that entitles it to a creditable rank in literature, and there is one passage so delicate and beautiful that it may well form a fitting conclusion to this little book of selections from his poems. He thus describes the death of Laura as it presented itself to his imagination in the *Trionfo della Morte*.

Not like a flame that by the wind is spent,  
But one that of itself doth fade away,  
She did depart in peace, her soul content;  
As if it were some soft and gentle ray  
Whose nourishment hath failed, which waneth slow,  
Yet keepeth to the end its wonted way.  
Not pallid she, but whiter than the snow  
That in the calm air on a hill-side lies,  
She rests like one who doth aweary grow.  
A slumber sweet, falling on tired eyes,  
A spirit parting from its earthly place:  
Of these the witless speak and say, 'She dies,'  
And death seems beautiful in her fair face.

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## APPENDIX I LAURA

Who was Laura? This question has given rise to the liveliest controversies. Some of the commentators say that she was not flesh and blood at all, but a symbol, an abstraction, an allegorical representation of poetry, of virtue, of philosophy, or what you will. Others declare that there were many Lauras, the objects of Petrarch's love poems. Others can give her age, her birthplace, and her characteristics, but do not assume to know her name or her ancestry. Some say she was unmarried, others that she was a matron, the mother of many children. Some declare she was the daughter of Henry of Chiabaux, Lord of Cabrières, others that she belonged to the family of the Baux Adhemar de Cavaillon, &c. Probably the majority of the students of Petrarch accept the results of the arguments and documents of the Abbé de Sade in his *Memoirs for the Life of Petrarch*, and believe she was the daughter of Audibert de Noves and the wife of Hugues de Sade. Among these divergent views, which is correct?

That Laura was not a mere creation of Petrarch's fancy is shown by Petrarch himself in a letter, written December 21, 1335, to his friend, Bishop James Colonna, who had jestingly denied her existence.

'Would to God', he says, 'that my Laura were an imaginary person and that my passion for her were only feigned! Alas, it is a madness! How difficult and grievous it would be to feign it for a long time, and what extravagance to act a play like this! One can counterfeit illness in conduct, voice, and gesture, but one cannot give himself the air and colour of a sick person. How many times have you been a witness to my pallor and my torments! I know well that you only speak in irony.'<sup>1</sup>

Laura's actual existence is also shown in a poetical epistle to this same friend, written in Latin, probably in 1338, shortly after Petrarch's return from Rome and his emigration to Vaucluse.

'Exceedingly dear to me is a woman (*mulier*) who is known for her virtue and her noble blood. My songs have glorified and have spread her fame afar. My mind ever returns to her and she ever assails me with new grief of love, and it does not seem as if she will ever renounce her dominion over me.'

He describes his efforts to shake off the yoke, and his wanderings through distant lands and his flight to the sequestered valley he has chosen for his abode. Yet even here his beloved one visits him in sleep and demands him back as her slave. Then his limbs stiffen and the blood runs to his heart from all his veins, and he awakens in consternation bathed in tears, springs from his couch, and before the dawn, flees from the house and wanders over mountains and groves, looking around him in fear lest he should meet her in his wandering.<sup>2</sup>

Equally conclusive as to the actual existence of Laura are the three books written by Petrarch in 1343, *De Contemptu Mundi*, in the form of dialogues between himself and St. Augustine. This work, which he also called his 'Secret', was not originally intended for publication, and it was in the nature of an intimate and frank confession of his own shortcomings and weaknesses. St. Augustine, after exhorting him to meditate on death, and after reproaching him for his vanity, ambition, cupidity, and incontinence, as well as a certain pessimism in his nature (*acidia*), expresses his astonishment that a man of Petrarch's talent could devote a great part of his life to the adoration of a mere mortal woman. Petrarch answers with enthusiastic praise of his beloved, and Augustine replies that if he were once to see her lying dead he would be ashamed of his passion. Petrarch declares he hopes this dreadful sight will be spared him as he is the elder of the two, and Augustine answers that the body of his beloved has been already greatly weakened by her illnesses and her frequent anxieties.<sup>1</sup>

Petrarch answers that his own health is also shaken by cares and that he hopes to die before her. He insists that his love is pure and believes that he sins only in its excess. All that he has been he owes to her. Augustine declares that this belief is a dangerous illusion, and that his mortal love had separated him from the love of heavenly things. Petrarch declared that it is not the body but the soul of his beloved with which he is enamoured, that with her increasing age her body became less beautiful but her spirit constantly developed and his love increased. Augustine asks if he would have loved her if she had been ugly. Petrarch answers that he would have done this only if the beauty of her spirit could have been set before his eyes. 'Therefore', answers Augustine, 'you have loved only her visible body although her spiritual graces have helped to maintain your passion.' Petrarch finally admits that he loves her body as well as her soul. Augustine reminds him that in his youth his fear of God and his love of religion was much greater than at present, and says Petrarch must admit that the change occurred when his love began. Augustine asks how it happened that his beloved did not lift him again to virtue. Petrarch answers that she had done all she could by example, admonition and reproaches, that in spite of his efforts he had never obtained from her the least favour to the disparagement of her honour, and that when she saw that nothing could restrain him and that he was going headlong to destruction, she preferred to abandon rather than to follow him. Augustine now reminds Petrarch that he has admitted his unlawful desires which he had just now denied, and adds that lovers know not what they will nor what they say. Petrarch declared that these desires had ceased, and that for this he is grateful to this lady. Augustine says that his flame is perhaps enfeebled but that it is not extinguished, and he reminds the poet that he has had a portrait of the lady made by a skilful painter and that he carries it everywhere with him, and that he extends his affection to everything that bears her name, and goes about with the laurel tree in his head and on his lips as if he were a priest of Apollo or a dweller on the banks of the Peneus. Why did he seek with such eagerness that laurel crown which was formerly the reward of the poets? It was the connexion of laurel and Laura which made him cross the seas and mountains and submit to an examination at Naples and receive this crown at Rome. How can a man with such a passion be mindful of God? Petrarch now admits all and asks what he shall do not to despair of salvation. Augustine answers that he must seek all other means of cure, and recommends a change of scene. Petrarch says he has already tried this in vain. But Augustine insists he has done this without the necessary resolution not to look back

and to break finally with the past. Petrarch asks if there are not other remedies. Augustine answers that Cicero names satiety, shame, and reflection. The first he will not consider, but under the second head he asks Petrarch if he has not seen himself in a mirror and has not perceived any change in his appearance. Petrarch admits his grey hairs, and Augustine seeks to shame him into the belief that he is too old to play the rôle of a lover.

The saint also recommends reflection. Petrarch should consider the loftiness of the spirit, the weakness of the body, and the shortness of life. He should further reflect how inflexible his beloved has shown herself toward him, and he should encourage himself to devote his life to better things.

Augustine next reproaches Petrarch for his excessive desire for fame and immortality and admonishes him not to prefer this to virtue. Finally he urges the poet to let his epic *Africa* remain unfinished and devote himself to the contemplation of his approaching death and the transitory character of all earthly things.<sup>[1](#)</sup>

After Petrarch had gone to Italy, ‘Socrates’, the poet’s intimate friend, urgently entreats him to return to Avignon, and Petrarch thus replies in a letter written in 1345. ‘To make me change my purpose, you put before my eyes the errors of my youth, which I ought to forget, a passion whose torments have made me take flight because I had no other resource, the frivolous attractions of a perishable beauty with which I have occupied myself far too much.’<sup>[2](#)</sup>

The love poems of Petrarch themselves testify to Laura’s actual existence in a way he could hardly simulate with such effect if she were an imaginary being. A mere ‘symbol’ would hardly be born and die at a particular day of a particular year, nor wear gloves, nor be kissed by a prince at a public festival, nor be kept at home by jealousy, nor tempt its lover to suicide, nor be the subject of a score of incidents in his poems which are applicable to a woman only and not to a spirit nor an imaginary being.

Moreover, after these poems had long since been written and after the woman they celebrated had long been mourned in them as dead, the poet tells us near the close of his own life, in his ‘Letter to Posterity’, that in his youth he had been the prey of a very ardent love, but honourable, and *his only one*, and that he would have suffered from it still longer if death, cruel but salutary, had not extinguished it.

The foregoing extracts clearly demonstrate that Laura actually existed, and show us quite plainly the character of Petrarch’s passion for her.

Nor was she multifarious, but single. There is no good reason to believe that Petrarch in his poems intended to designate, as several commentators believe, now one person and now another as the object of his passion. The evidence is the other way. His incontinence, indeed, he confesses in his letters, in his dialogue with St. Augustine, in his epistle to posterity, and elsewhere, but he recognizes only a single ideal love worthy to be celebrated in his poems.

Another controversy exists among the commentators of Petrarch as to whether Laura was married or single. Those who insist that she was a young girl when he first saw her and remained unmarried, refer to a sonnet (cxc), *Una candida cerva*: ‘A white doe, with golden horns, appeared to me above the green meadow between two streams in the shade of a laurel at sunrise in the springtime. . . . She had written around her fair collar, “Let no one touch me, my Caesar saw fit to make me free.”’ The deer was sacred to Diana, and this sonnet doubtless referred to Laura’s chastity and to the resistance which she offered to Petrarch’s passion. The inscription might well mean that her Caesar (God) had freed her from human frailty, and it need not at all follow that she was unmarried. To deduce a biographical fact from an obscure allegory like this may be very misleading.

Another sonnet speaks of the time when Love gave Petrarch his first wound, and the ‘tresses now wound in pearls and gems, but then unbound, which she scattered so sweetly and gathered again in such graceful ways that his mind trembles as he thinks of it. Afterwards’, he adds, ‘time twisted it in stronger knots.’ This might be construed into an inference that she was then unmarried, and that it was only afterwards that she was bedecked with the pearls and gems that matrons might wear. But are there no times when even those who are entitled to bedeck themselves with jewels may still go without them? The unsatisfactory nature of such conclusions is apparent.

Another argument is this: Would her husband have suffered Petrarch during a long period of years thus to testify to his passion in these numerous poems, most of which were well known at the time? Would the Church have permitted it in one who had already taken holy orders? At the present day such an argument would be a strong one, but the fourteenth century in France was quite different from the twentieth century in England and America. In France even to-day a young girl of the higher classes, educated usually in a convent, sees nothing of the world before her marriage. Marriage is usually an affair of convenience managed by the parents, and whatever there be for her of love or romance in life comes afterwards. This was so at that time in Provence. The marriage settlements still preserved show the business character of matrimony as then existing. We find that the adoration and the songs of the troubadours and the minnesingers were directed almost without exception to married women and not to maidens. This was the day of the tourney and the courts of love.

The Abbé de Sade gives an instance.<sup>1</sup> Agnes of Navarre, wife of Phoebus, Count of Foix, is in love with William of Machaut, one of the best French poets of the age of Petrarch. She makes verses for him which breathe her passion. She desires him to publish in his own the circumstances of their love. He is jealous without reason. She sends to him a priest to whom she has confessed, who certifies not only to the truth of her feeling toward him but also her fidelity and the injustice of his suspicions. Yet Agnes of Navarre was a virtuous princess of unblemished reputation. Such was the spirit of the age, and Petrarch has in many instances taken the lays of the troubadours as the models of his love poems.

Those who recall the *cicisbeo* of later Venetian days and the *cavaliere servente* who attended upon almost every lady of fashion in Italy in still more recent times, will find little difficulty in understanding that there was nothing extraordinary in Petrarch’s

love for a married woman during the corrupt period when the Roman court was at Avignon and when even those in clerical orders took part in the gallantries which were all but universal.

Petrarch himself in another place reproaches the men of Avignon who quietly let their wives be carried off from them.<sup>2</sup> The husband of Laura, however, as we shall see elsewhere, does not appear to have been quite so indifferent as this.

The reasons for believing that Laura was a married woman are very strong. As Hallam says, there is no passage in Petrarch whether in poetry or prose which speaks of Laura as a maiden or gives her the usual appellations of an unmarried woman, *puella* in Latin or *donzella* in Italian, not even in his poem 'The Triumph of Chastity', where so obvious an opportunity presented itself of celebrating her virginity. On the contrary she is always called *donna* or *madonna* in Italian and *mulier* in Latin, the generic names for 'woman' and 'lady'. Dante, just before Petrarch's time, distinguishes clearly between *donna* and *donaella*, and Petrarch somewhere would certainly have called Laura *donzella* had she been unmarried. Moreover, Laura's resistance to the passion of her lover during more than twenty years of devotion, retaining his affection yet denying her favours, is much more easily explained by the insurmountable obstacle of her marriage than in any other way. As Hallam remarks, 'From all we know of the age of Petrarch the only astonishment is the persevering virtue of Laura. The troubadours boast of much better success with Provençal ladies.'

But far more conclusive are two sonnets in which Petrarch complains of the jealousy which deprives him of her company. One of these is the following:

### ***Liete E Pensose, Accompagnate E Sole***

'Ye dames, who go conversing on your way,  
Joyous yet sad, together, yet alone,  
O tell me of my life, my death, my own;  
Why is she absent? Whither doth she stray?'  
'Joyous our memories of her, but to-day  
We sorrow for her gracious company,  
Which *envy* keeps from us and *jealousy*,  
Those passions that on others' welfare prey.'  
'Who shall make laws to fetter lovers true?'  
'Their bodies, not their souls, can anger bind,  
This doth she know and this we too may find,  
Oft in the face the heart is plain to view,  
Now doth her beauty fade in grief and fears,  
And her fair eyes are wet with dew of tears.'  
ccxxii

Now who could be jealous of her and at the same time have the power to restrain her liberty except her husband?

In the dialogue between Petrarch and St. Augustine, the saint says, ‘Corpus eius crebris ptbus exhaustum.’ The contracted word *ptbus* has been rendered *perturbationibus*, ‘anxieties’, and *partubus*, ‘child-bearings’, and Hallam in his *Middle Ages*<sup>1</sup> insists that *partubus* is much the better Latin. If Petrarch’s Laura was indeed Laura de Sade, who had eleven children, this interpretation of the words of St. Augustine would be appropriate.

In several of Petrarch’s sonnets he speaks of the precious stones which she wears, of the pearls which she bound in her hair, and of her rich and costly dresses. At the time when he wrote, the unmarried woman did not usually wear pearls nor precious stones. They were simply clothed and appeared but little in the world. Taken all together, the reasons for believing Laura to be a married woman seem quite conclusive.

But to what family did she belong, where was she born, where did she live, what was her age when she and Petrarch met? There is a curious silence upon these matters in the writings of Petrarch both in prose and verse. He describes certain incidents which must have identified her to her contemporaries, as for instance in the following sonnet, when, upon a festal occasion, a certain prince, in whose honour it was given (perhaps Charles of Luxemburg, afterwards Emperor of Germany), selected her from among the other guests, drew her to him, and kissed her forehead and her eyes as a tribute to her beauty.

### ***Real Natura, Angelico Intelletto***

It was a royal heart, a noble mind,  
Clear soul, and ready eye with vision keen,  
Quick foresight and a happy thought combined,  
And all most worthy of his state serene.  
Amid a goodly group of women fair  
Chosen to deck a stately festal day,  
His eye discerned what face beyond compare  
Was the most perfect in that cluster gay.  
Others, in rank and fortune proud and high,  
He, with the motion of his hand, dismissed,  
Then drew her to himself and graciously,  
In fair salute, her eyes and brow he kissed.  
While, mid the applause and joy of all the rest,  
This sweet strange deed with envy filled my breast.<sup>1</sup>  
ccxxxviii

But these contemporaries, as well as Petrarch himself, have said so little from which we can at this time determine her identity that they could hardly have concealed it better if there had been a conspiracy of silence. Subsequent investigators have laboured with great diligence to unravel the mystery.

Among the first of these was Velutello of Lucca, who travelled to Avignon near the beginning of the sixteenth century and found that there was a tradition in that city that Laura belonged to the family of De Sade. Velutello had several conferences with

Gabriel de Sade, a man very old and very noble, who told him that Laura was the daughter of John de Sade, who had his property at Gravesand, two leagues from Avignon, where he passed the summer; but as his informant said she lived about the year 1360 or 1370, Velutello prematurely gave up his inquiries in that direction, and visiting the little village of Cabrières, he examined the baptismal register there, and among several Lauras, found one, the daughter of Henry of Chiabaux, who was baptized June 14, 1314, and he concluded that this was the Laura in question, and placed her meeting with Petrarch at L'Isle, a town between the two arms of the Sorgue, on Good Friday, 1327, upon her return from a pilgrimage to Vaucluse. But there are several reasons against such a conclusion. If this was Petrarch's Laura, she was only twelve years and nine months old when Petrarch met her, a very early age for her to inspire such a passion.

In Petrarch's dialogue with St. Augustine, Petrarch says, 'She will grow old with me,' and the saint refers to the small number of years in which he is her senior. But at the time of the meeting in 1327, Petrarch, who was born in 1304, would have been nearly twice her age and the words of St. Augustine would have been inappropriate. Moreover, in the note written by Petrarch, shortly after her death, on the manuscript copy of his Virgil, now in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, he says: 'Laura, distinguished by her own virtues and long celebrated in my songs, first appeared to my eyes in the days of my youth in the year of our Lord 1327, the 6th day of the month of April, in the church of Santa Clara at Avignon in the morning hour; and in the same city, in the same month of April, on the same 6th day and at the same first hour but in the year 1348, that light was withdrawn from the light of day when I by chance was then at Verona, ignorant, alas! of my fate.' [1](#)

If this note is genuine (as seems now established) Petrarch did not meet her at L'Isle. Moreover, the calendar shows that the 6th of April of that year was not Good Friday and hence there would have been no returning group of pilgrims from Vaucluse on that morning. Moreover, Velutello discovered that Henry of Chiabaux was a man of slender means, while Petrarch all through his poems describes everywhere the rich garb and jewellery worn by his lady. Velutello declared, moreover, that Laura de Chiabaux remained unmarried. We have already seen that this in all probability was not true of Petrarch's Laura.

The views of the Abbé de Sade appear to be better sustained. They are in brief as follows. Laura was the daughter of a nobleman, Audibert de Noves and his wife Ermessende. She was born at Avignon in 1307, and married January 16, 1325, Hugues de Sade, the son of a prominent man who had been repeatedly mayor of Avignon, and she received as a legacy from her father the sum of 6,000 *tournois*, about \$15,000, then a large amount, as well as two dresses, one green and one scarlet, a silver wreath, &c. Laura de Sade had eleven children, and died, a victim to the plague, April 6, 1348, having made her will three days before. She was buried in the Franciscan church in the suburbs of Avignon.

This hypothesis is supported by the following facts. Firstly, the age of Laura de Noves appears to correspond with the observation made in the dialogue with St. Augustine that she was but few years his junior. The contract of marriage, which the Abbé de



Sade claims to have copied from the family records, is dated January 16, 1325, and she would probably have been about 18 years of age at that time, being born not far from 1307.

Secondly, Petrarch speaks of her green dress with violets when he first saw her, and there are many allusions to this green dress in his sonnets. In the marriage contract two dresses were given her, one green, the other scarlet, and Paul de Sade, her father-in-law, in his will acknowledges that he received these dresses.

Thirdly, Petrarch tells us that his Laura was of noble blood. Now the father of Laura de Noves was the descendant of an earlier Audibert de Noves, who was, up to the year 1222, chancellor of Raymond, sixth Count of Toulouse. He held the first rank at Noves, a town two leagues from Avignon, and also had a house in that city.

Fourthly, in Petrarch's note on the Virgil manuscript, he says she died at Avignon, April 6, 1348, and was buried the same day at evening in the Franciscan church. In one of his sonnets he also gives the same date for her death, and in his eleventh eclogue, as well as in one of his letters and in one of his odes, he gives us to understand that she died of the plague, which seems confirmed by the fact that in his manuscript note he says she was buried on the day of her death, which would only occur if there were some special reason, such as an epidemic.

On April 3, Laura de Sade made her will, stating that she was sound in mind though ill in body. The family records also show that she could not have lived very long after this, because on November 19, 1348, her husband married Verdaine de Trentelivres.

In her will she chooses as her burial-place the Church of the Lesser Brothers (the Franciscans) in the city of Avignon, in which church the family of De Sade had built a chapel dedicated to St. Anne, and under this Hugues de Sade had built another, the Chapel of the Cross, where the family arms were sculptured, a star with eight rays. Here he was buried, and here also was buried Verdaine, his second wife.<sup>1</sup>

In 1533 a body was exhumed in this chapel and a leaden box found in the grave, containing a medal bearing the figure of a woman with the letters M. L. M. J.,<sup>2</sup> and also a sonnet of which the following is a close but unrhymed translation:

### ***Qui Riposan Quei Caste E Felici Ossa***

Here do repose those chaste and blessed bones  
Of a spirit gentle and unique on earth.  
Hard stone! thou hast with thee beneath the earth  
True honour, fame, and beauty! Death hath shaken,  
Moved and uprooted from the laurel green  
Its fresh root and the prize of my long strife  
Of twenty years (and more, if my sad thought  
Errs not) and shuts it in a narrow grave.  
A blessed plant in town of Avignon  
Was born and died, and here with her doth lie

The pen, the stylus, ink and power of thought.  
O delicate limbs! and thou, O living face,  
Which dost inflame and slay me while I kneel,  
Let each pray God He welcome thee in peace.<sup>1</sup>

This sonnet sounds like an impudent forgery. Cardinal Bembo, to whom it was submitted in 1533, declared that these verses were not only below the marvellous and almost divine genius of Petrarch, but that even the most mediocre poet would disavow them, and that the most common laws of Italian poetry were violated. Moreover, Petrarch was far away in Italy at the time Laura was buried.

The interpretation given to the four letters on the medal, M. L. M. J., *Madonna Laura morta jace*, 'Madonna Laura lies dead',<sup>2</sup> also seems absurd.

Moreover, the originals of the family records and other documents by which the Abbé de Sade supports all his contentions, and verbatim copies of which he inserts in his memoirs, no longer exist. He had the copies certified by lawyers and citizens of Avignon as genuine, but this fact, as well as their great detail and their remarkable concurrence with what is known of Laura's personality and life, has awakened mistrust rather than confidence. Laura de Sade was the ancestor of the family to which the Abbé belonged, and there has been a strong suspicion that these documents are not all genuine, although their manufacture may not have been due to the Abbé himself but to those from whom he may have innocently received them.

The fact of the De Sade chapel, however, in the Franciscan church seems established, and that Petrarch's Laura was buried in that church appears from the memorandum on the Virgil manuscript.

Velutello, as we have seen, says that some two hundred years after her death he found that the opinion was current in Avignon that Petrarch's Laura was Laura de Sade, which of itself is a pretty strong circumstance, and even if the documents are fictitious it may well be that they were manufactured in order to give conclusive proof of that which was only a probability without them. On the whole, the De Sade hypothesis seems more likely to be true than any other.

Where was Laura born? This question, too, is contested. In one of his earlier sonnets (iv, *Quel ch' infinita providenzia et arte*) Petrarch compares the birth of Laura to that of the Messiah. Bethlehem, he says, was preferred to Rome as the birthplace of the Saviour, so now from a little town, *piccolo borgo*, God gives this new light to the world.

He showed no grace to Rome when He was born,  
But to Judea. Thus it ever pleased Him  
To lift humility to the highest station.  
Now from a little town a sun He gave us  
Such that both nature and the place give thanks  
So fair a woman to the world was born.

What was the 'little town' to which Petrarch refers in these lines? His biographer, Dr. Gustav Koerting, believes that it was Avignon, for which the poet had so great a contempt in comparison with his beloved Rome, with which it is here contrasted, and this may have been the case, though at the beginning of the fourteenth century, when Laura was born, it was still a considerable city and it was greatly extended and largely rebuilt after it became the seat of the papal Court. La Crusca defines a *borgo* as a street or collection of houses not surrounded by city walls, and more properly the suburbs or faubourg of a walled city. Villani gives the name of *borghi* to the faubourgs of Florence, therefore the Abbé de Sade claims that Laura was born in that faubourg of Avignon where the Franciscan convent was located, and he says that near the city gate leading to this faubourg, and close to an inn called the 'White Horse', there was still existing in the sixteenth century a house built of yellow stone, before which the Sorgue passed, which was called the house of Madame Laura, and where tradition said she was born.

Lorenzo Mascetta, in his work *The Canzoniere of Petrarch arranged chronologically*, has an elaborate and laboured introductory article on Laura, in which he seeks to deduce the principal events of her life from the poems of Petrarch, taking certain lines from one poem and putting them side by side with lines from another in a very ingenious manner. His arguments are far from convincing, however, since they imply too great precision on the part of Petrarch in poems where the poet's fancy as well as the demands of verse and rhyme require much latitude. He believes that it was impossible that Avignon was the small town referred to, although in a letter in Latin verse to Bishop Colonna Petrarch speaks of her birthplace as a 'beloved city'. Neither of these terms Mascetta considers applicable to Avignon, and after considering many other extracts he concludes that she was born in the spring of 1314, in the town of L'Isle, not far from Avignon, where the two branches of the Sorgue separate and form an island, and that she was buried also in the Franciscan convent there. The difficulty with this hypothesis is that the latter part of it contradicts entirely the memorandum of Petrarch in his Virgil manuscript.

In some of the old texts and editions certain verses are found beginning thus:

Where Sorgue and Durance into a greater vessel  
Together join their waters, clear and turbid,  
There once was my academy and Parnassus  
And there unto my eyes that light was born, &c.

Since the Sorgue and Durance both flow into the Rhône close to Avignon, De Sade believes that Avignon is intended. Mascetta insists that the verses are an imposture, and that the family of De Sade was very generous in securing literary support to its claims of descent from Petrarch's Laura. While it cannot be said, even if she was the daughter of Audibert de Noves, that the place of her birth has been satisfactorily established, yet here too the probabilities would seem to favour the contention of De Sade, that Avignon, the city where she lived and died, was also the place where she was born.

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## APPENDIX II

### ‘EPISTLE TO POSTERITY’ 1

‘Francis Petrarch to Posterity—Greeting’

‘Perhaps, future reader, you may have heard somewhat about me, doubtful though it may be whether a name so humble and obscure as mine is likely to travel far in point either of time or space. Perhaps, even, you may wish to know what sort of man I was, or what was the fate of my works, and of those in particular whose reputation may have reached you, or whose name, however faintly, you may have heard.

‘As to the first point, indeed, men’s opinions will differ; for nearly every one speaks pretty much, not as truth but as inclination urges: there are no bounds either to eulogy or to blame. One of the human family like yourself, I was but a child of earth and mortal; of an origin neither particularly illustrious nor humble, my family, as Augustus Caesar says of himself, was ancient. Nature gave me neither a bad nor an immodest disposition, had not the contagion of social intercourse injured it. Youth deceived me; manhood carried me away; but old age corrected me, and by experience taught me thoroughly that truth which I had long before studied, namely, that youth and pleasure are vanities. Of a truth the Fashioner of every age and time suffers poor mortals, who are puffed up about nothing, at times to go astray, that they may realize, though late, the remembrance of their sins.

‘My body, when I was a young man, was not remarkable for strength, but had acquired considerable dexterity. I do not pride myself on any excellence of form, beyond such as might be pleasing to a man of greener years. My complexion was lively, half-way between fair and dusk. My eyes were sparkling, and for a long time my sight was extremely keen, until it failed me unexpectedly when past my sixtieth year; so that I was forced, much against the grain, to have recourse to spectacles. Old age came at last upon a body which had never known what illness was, and besieged it with the accustomed array of diseases.

‘I was born of honourable parents of the city of Florence. Their fortune was scanty, and, to tell the truth, verging towards poverty; but they were exiles from their country. I was born in exile at Arezzo, on Monday, July 20, 1304. Riches I held in sovereign contempt, not because I did not wish to have them, but because I hated the labour and anxiety which are the inseparable companions of wealth. I cared not for abundance of sumptuous repasts; on the contrary, with humble fare and common food I led a more enjoyable life than all the successors of Apicius, with their most exquisite dishes. Banquets, as they are called—or rather eating entertainments, inimical alike to modesty and good manners—have always been displeasing to me. I have counted it an irksome and a useless thing to invite others to such gatherings, and no less so to be invited by others. But to associate with my friends has been so agreeable to me, that I have held nothing more grateful than their arrival, nor have ever willingly broken bread without a companion. Nothing displeased me more than show, not only because it is bad and contrary to humility, but because it is irksome and an enemy of repose. In

youth I felt the pains of love, vehement in the extreme, but constant to one object and honourable; and I should have felt them longer had not death—bitter, indeed, but useful—extinguished the flame as it was beginning to subside. As for the looser indulgences of appetite, would indeed that I could say I was a stranger to them altogether; but if I should so say, I should lie. This I can safely affirm, that although I was hurried away to them by the fervour of my age and temperament, their vileness I have always inwardly execrated. Soon, indeed, as I approached my fortieth year, while I still retained sufficient ardour and vigour, I repelled these weaknesses entirely from my thoughts and my remembrance, as if I had never known them. And this I count among my earliest happy recollections, thanking God, who has freed me, while yet my powers were unimpaired and strong, from this so vile and always hateful servitude.

‘But I pass on to other matters. I was conscious of pride in others, but not in myself; and insignificant as I might be in reality, I was always more insignificant in my own estimation. My irritable temper often injured myself, but it never injured others. Honourable and trusty friendships I keenly sought and cultivated—I fearlessly boast that, so far as I know, I speak the truth. Although easily provoked, I was ready to forget offences, and mindful of kind actions. I was favoured with the familiar intercourse of princes and kings, and with the friendships of the great to an extent that excited the envy of others. But it is the penalty of men who grow old that they have to deplore the death of their friends. The most illustrious sovereigns of my own times loved and honoured me—why, I can hardly say; it is for them, not me, to explain; but as I lived with some of them on the same terms on which they lived with me I suffered not at all from the eminence of their rank, but rather derived from it great benefits. Yet many of those whom I dearly loved, I avoided; so great was my innate love of liberty that I studiously shunned any one whose very name might seem to restrict my freedom.

‘My mind was rather well balanced than acute; adapted to every good and wholesome study, but especially prone to philosophy and poetry. And yet even this I neglected, as time went on, through the pleasure I took in sacred literature. I felt a hidden sweetness in that subject, which at times I had despised; and I reserved poetry as a mere accomplishment. I devoted myself singly, amid a multitude of subjects, to the knowledge of antiquity; since the age in which I lived was almost distasteful to me—so much so that, had it not been for the love of those who were very dear to me, I should always have wished to have been born at any other time, and to forget the present, ever struggling to engraft myself upon the past. Accordingly, I delighted in historians—not, however, being in any way the less offended at their contradictions, but following, when in doubt, that path which verisimilitude or the authority due to the writer pointed out.

‘As a speaker, some have said I was clear and powerful; but, as it seemed to myself, weak and obscure. Nor indeed in ordinary conversation with my friends or acquaintances did I ever aspire to eloquence; and I wonder that Augustus Caesar took pains to excel in conversation. But when the subject itself, or the place, or the hearer seemed otherwise to demand it, I made somewhat of an effort—though with what success I know not; let those judge of that in whose presence I spoke. So that I have

lived well, I care but little how I talked: it is a windy sort of glory to seek fame from the mere glitter of words.

‘My time, whether by fortune or inclination, was thus divided. The first year of my life, and that not wholly, I spent at Arezzo, where nature first made me see the light, the six following years at Incisa, a small estate of my father’s fourteen miles from Florence. My eighth year, after my mother had been recalled from exile, I spent at Pisa; my ninth and subsequent years in transalpine Gaul, on the left bank of the Rhône. Avignon was the city’s name, where the Roman Pontiff maintains, and has long maintained, the Church of Christ, although a few years ago Urban V seemed to have returned to his true home. But his intention miscarried even in his lifetime, for (what affects me most) he gave it up, as if repenting of his good work. Had only he lived a little longer, he would doubtless have known what I thought of his departure. The pen was already in my hands, when suddenly he found his glorious resolution cut short with his life. Alas! how happily might he have died before the altar of Peter, and in his own home! For whether his successors had remained in the august see, and completed the work he would have begun, or whether they had departed from it, his merit would have been the more illustrious, and their fault the more conspicuous to the world. But this is a tedious and irrelevant complaint.

‘There, then, by the banks of that windy river, I spent my boyhood under my parents’ care, and afterwards the whole period of my early youth, abandoned to my own caprices; not, however, without long intervals of absence. For during this time I stayed for four whole years at Carpentras, a small town lying near Avignon on the east; and in these two places I learned a smattering of grammar, and as much of dialectics and rhetoric as the age could afford—as much, that is to say, as is wont to be taught in the schools; though how little that is, you know, dear reader, well enough. Thence I went to Montpellier to study law, where I spent another four years; thence to Bologna; and there I remained three years, and attended lectures on the whole *corpus* of civil law; being then a young man of great promise, as many thought, if I persevered in my work. But I abandoned that study altogether; and shortly afterwards I lost my parents. I abandoned it, not because the authority of the laws was irksome to me, which doubtless is great, and redolent of that Roman antiquity in which I delight, but because the practice of those laws is depraved by the wickedness of men. I was disgusted at the thought of having to study thoroughly that which I was resolved not to turn to dishonourable, and could scarcely turn to honourable, uses, for such prudery would have been attributed to ignorance. Accordingly, in my twenty-second year I returned home. By home I mean that exile at Avignon where I had been since the close of my childhood; for custom is second nature. There I had already begun to be known, and my acquaintance to be sought by men of eminence, though why I confess now I know not, and wonder. At that time, indeed, I was not surprised at seeming to myself, after the fashion common to men of my age, well worthy of all honour. I was sought after, above all, by the illustrious and noble family of the Colonnas, who then frequented—I should rather say adorned—the Court of Rome. Especially, I was invited, and I was held in honour—undeserved, certainly, at that time, if not also now—by that illustrious and incomparable man, Giacomo Colonna, then Bishop of Lombes, whose equal I know not if I have seen, or am likely to see. In Gascony, at the foot of the Pyrenees, I spent an almost heavenly summer, in the delightful society of

my lord and our companions—so delightful that I always sigh when thinking of that time. Returning thence, I remained for many years with his brother John, the Cardinal Colonna, not, as it were, under a patron, but under a father—nay, not even that, say rather a most affectionate brother, with whom I lived as at home and in my own house.

‘At that time a youthful longing drove me to travel through France and Germany; and although other reasons were invented, in order to recommend my going in the eyes of my elders, yet the real reason was my ardour and eagerness for new scenes. In that journey I first saw Paris, and took delight in finding out for myself what reports were true and what were false about that city. Returning thence, I went to Rome, a city I had longed to see from my infancy. Stephen Colonna, the noble-minded father of that family, and a man equal to the ancients, I loved so dearly, and was so kindly welcomed by him in return, that there was scarcely any difference between myself and any one of his sons. The love and affection of this excellent man continued towards me in unbroken tenor to the last hour of his life, and survive in me still, nor shall ever desert me till I die.

‘Returning again from Rome, and being ill able to endure the hatred and weariness implanted in my mind in that most wearisome abode of Avignon, seeking some by-way of retirement as a port of refuge, I found a valley, tiny in size but solitary and agreeable, called Vaucluse, fifteen miles from Avignon, where the Sorga, the king of streams, takes its source. Charmed with the sweetness of the spot, I betook myself thither with my books. It would be a long story were I to proceed to trace at length my life there for many, many years. The sum of it all is this, that nearly every work that I have published was either finished, or begun, or conceived there. Those works have been so numerous as to exercise and fatigue me even to this day. For my mind, like my body, was remarkable rather for dexterity than strength; and thus I found many things easy to meditate which I neglected afterwards as difficult to carry out. Here the very aspect of the neighbourhood suggested to me to attempt a bucolic poem, a pastoral, as well as the two books on “Solitary Life” dedicated to Philip, a man great at all times, but then a humble Bishop of Cavaillon, now the bishop of a much greater diocese, and a cardinal, who is now the sole survivor of all my old friends, and who loved, and still loves me, not episcopally, so to speak, as Ambrosius loved Augustine, but as a brother.

‘As I roamed about those hills, on the sixth day of the great week, it occurred to me, and I determined, to write a poem in heroic verse on Scipio Africanus the Elder, him, I mean, whose marvellous name was always dear to me from my first boyhood. What I then began, ardent with the impulse of the moment, I soon discontinued under the distraction of other cares; but from the name of the subject I gave the title of *Africa* to the book—a work which, I know not by what fortune, its own or mine, was a favourite with many before it was generally known.

‘While I was thus spinning out my leisure in that retreat, on one and the same day I received letters both from the Senate at Rome and from the Chancellor of the University of Paris, sending rival invitations to me—the former from Rome, the latter from Paris—to accept the laurel crown of poetry. Elated with pride, as was natural

with a young man at these proposals, and judging myself worthy of the honour, inasmuch as men of such eminence had thought so, yet weighing not my own merit, but the testimonies of others, I hesitated, nevertheless, for awhile as to which invitation I should prefer to accept. On this matter I wrote to Cardinal Colonna, whom I have mentioned, asking his advice; for he was so near a neighbour that although I had written to him late, I received his answer before nine o'clock the next day. I followed the advice he gave me, and my answers to him are still extant. Accordingly, I set out; and although, as is the way young men, I was a very partial judge of my own productions, still I scrupled to follow the testimony given by myself, or of those by whom I was invited—though doubtless they would not have invited me, had they not judged me worthy of the honour thus offered. I determined, therefore, to land first at Naples, where I sought out that distinguished king and philosopher, Robert—not more illustrious as a sovereign than as a man of letters, and unique in his age as a king and a friend of science and virtue—for the purpose of enabling him to express his personal opinion about me. His flattering estimate of me, and the kindly welcome he gave me, are matters now of wonder to me; and you, reader, if you had seen it, would wonder too. When he heard the cause of my arrival, he was marvellously delighted, reflecting as he did on my youthful confidence, and thinking perhaps that the honour which I was seeking was not without some advantage to his own reputation, inasmuch as I had chosen him of all men as the sole competent judge of my abilities. Why should I say more? After innumerable colloquies on various subjects, and after having shown to him the “Africa”, with which he was so delighted as to ask me, as a great kindness, to dedicate it to himself—a request which I could not and certainly did not wish to refuse—he appointed a certain day for the matter on which I had come, and detained me from noon till evening. And as the time fell short from the abundance of matter, he did the same thing on the two following days, and thus for three whole days I shook off my ignorance, and on the third day he adjudged me worthy of the laurel crown. He offered it to me at Naples, and even urged me with entreaties to accept it. My affection for Rome prevailed over the gracious solicitation of so illustrious a king; and thus, seeing my purpose was inflexible, he gave me letters and dispatches to the Senate of Rome, in which he expressed his judgement of me in highly flattering terms. And, indeed, what was then the judgement of the king agreed with that of many others, and especially with my own, though at this day I differ from the estimate then formed of me by him, as well as by myself and others. Affection for me and the partiality of the age swayed him more than respect for the truth. So I came (to Rome), and however unworthy, yet trusting and relying upon so high a sanction, I received the laurel crown while I was still but an unfledged scholar, amid the utmost rejoicings of the Romans who were able to take part in the ceremony. I have written letters on this subject both in verse and in prose. This laurel crown gained for me no knowledge, but a great deal of envy. But this story also has strayed beyond its limits.

‘Departing from Rome, I went to Parma, and stayed some time with the Lords of Correggio, who were the best of men and most liberally disposed towards myself, but sadly at enmity among each other; and who at that time were ruling in such a fashion as the city had never experienced before within the memory of man, nor I believe will ever in this age experience again. Mindful of the honour I had accepted, and anxious lest it might seem to have been conferred upon an unworthy recipient, having one day, after climbing by chance a mountain in the neighbourhood, been suddenly struck with



the appearance of the place, I turned my pen once more to the interrupted poem of “Africa” and finding that fervour rekindled which had appeared quite laid to sleep, I wrote a little that very day. I added afterwards a little day by day, until, after returning to Parma and obtaining a retired and quiet house, which I subsequently bought and still retain, my intense ardour, which even now I am amazed at, enabled me before long to bring the work to a conclusion. Returning thence, I sought once more the Sorga and my transalpine solitude, just as I was turning my back on my four-and-thirtieth year<sup>1</sup>; having spent a long while at Parma and Verona, being welcomed with affection everywhere, thank God—far more so, indeed, than I deserved.

‘After a long while, having gained the favour of a most worthy man and one whose equal, I think, did not exist among the nobles of that age—I mean Giacomo di Carrara—I was urged by him with such pressing entreaties, addressed to me for several years both through messengers and letters even across the Alps, when I was in those parts, and wherever I chanced to be in Italy, to embrace his friendship, that I resolved at length to pay him a visit, and to discover the reason of this urgent solicitation from a man so eminent and a stranger to myself. I came, therefore, tardily indeed, to Padua, where I was received by that man of illustrious memory not only with courtesy, but as happy spirits are welcomed in heaven; with such abundant joy and such inestimable kindness and affection, that I must fain suppress it in silence, being hopeless of doing justice to it in words. Knowing, among many other things, that I had embraced from boyhood the clerical life, and with a view to attach me the more closely not only to himself but also to his country, he caused me to be appointed a Canon of Padua; and, in short, if his life had only been longer there would then have been an end of my wandering and my travels. But, alas! there is nothing lasting among mortals, and if aught of sweetness chanced to present itself in life soon comes the bitter end, and it is gone. When, ere two years had been completed, God took him from me, his country, and the world, He took away one of whom neither I, nor his country, nor the world (my love to him does not deceive me) were worthy. And although he was succeeded by a son, conspicuous alike for his sagacity and renown, and who, following in his father’s footsteps, always held me in affection and honour, nevertheless, when I had lost one whose age was more congenial to my own, I returned again to France, not caring to remain where I was, my object being not so much the longing to revisit places I had seen a thousand times before, as a desire, common to all men in trouble, of ministering to the *ennui* of life by a change of scene.’

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## APPENDIX III CATALOGUE OF PETRARCH'S WORKS

The number of his Latin works is very large. Those that are written in prose include (a) seven treatises of a philosophical and religious character; (b) four that are historical and geographical; (c) three polemical writings; (d) four orations; (e) two works of an autobiographical character; (f) four collections of letters; (g) some psalms and prayers; and (h) the translation of Boccaccio's story of Griselda.

(a) His so-called philosophical works comprise his treatises concerning:

(1) 'The Antidotes for Good and Evil Fortune' (*De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*).

(2) 'The Solitary Life' (*De Vita Solitaria*).

(3) 'The Repose of the Cloister' (*De Otio Religiosorum*).

(4) 'The Best Methods of Administering a State' (*De Republica optime administranda*).

(5) 'The Duty and Virtues of a General' (*De Officio et Virtutibus Imperatoris*).

(6) 'The Means of Avoiding Avarice' (*De Avaritia Vitanda*).

(7) 'True Wisdom' (*De Vera Sapientia*).

(b) His historical and geographical works comprise:

(1) 'Remarkable Occurrences' (*De Rebus Memorandis*).

(2) 'Lives of Celebrated Men' (*De Viris Illustribus Vitae*).

(3) Epitome of the 'Lives of Celebrated Men' (*Vita rum Virorum Illustrium Epitome*).

(4) 'Handbook of a Syrian Journey' (*Itinerarium Syriacum*).

(c) His polemical writings comprise:

(1) 'Invectives against a Certain Physician' (*Contra Medicum quendam Invectivae*).

(2) 'Defence against the Calumnies of an Anonymous Frenchman' (*Contra cuiusdam Anonymi Galli Calumnias Apologia*).

(3) 'Dissertation concerning his own Ignorance and that of many' (*De sui ipsius et multorum Ignorantia*).

(d) His orations embrace his

(1) Speech on receiving the laurel crown.

(2) Speech to the Council of Venice.

(3) Speech at Novara.

(4) Speech at Paris to King John and his Court.

(e) His works of an autobiographical character comprise:

(1) 'Letter to Posterity' (*Epistola ad Posterios*). See Appendix II.

(2) 'Dialogues with St. Augustine concerning Contempt of the World' (*De Contemptu Mundi*). See Appendix I.

(f) His collections of letters embrace:

(1) 'Concerning Familiar Things' (*De Rebus Familiaribus*).

(2) 'Miscellaneous Letters' (*Variae*).

(3) 'Letters without a Title' (*Sine Titulo*).

(4) 'Letters of Old Age' (*De Rebus Senilibus*).

(g) His Latin poems comprise:

(1) His epic 'Africa'.

(2) Twelve Eclogues, containing in allegorical form bitter criticisms of the Court of Avignon.

(3) His poetical Epistles.

In the Italian language only one specimen of his prose writings exists, his speech at Milan, considered by many a translation of an address originally delivered in Latin.

His Italian poems included in his *Canzoniere* comprise:

(a) Lyrics.

(1) 'In the Life of Madonna Laura.'

(2) 'On the Death of Madonna Laura.'

(3) 'On Miscellaneous Subjects.'

These are all found together in a single Vatican manuscript.

(b) His epic poem, the 'Triumphs' of

(1) Love.

(2) Chastity.

(3) Death.

(4) Fame.

(5) Eternity.[1](#)

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[\[1\]](#) Foscolo, p. 93.

[2] Mascetta, Introduction, p. xiii.

[1] De Sade, Introduction, p. cii.

[2] Ibid., p. cxi.

[1] Ibid., i. p. 87.

[1] Vol. iii, p. 514.

[1] The name was later changed to Petrarca, perhaps for euphony, though the reason is not definitely known. The name Petracco is a familiar variation of 'Peter' (Koerting, p. 49). Sismondi observes (vol. iii, p. 511) that this family did not yet have its own name, as was the case in those times with many of the families of the common people.

[1] Jerrold, p. 4.

[2] Ibid., p. 5.

[1] Jerrold, p. 9; Calthrop, p. 19.

[1] Koerting, p. 75.

[1] Jerrold, p. 14.

[1] Koerting, p. 78.

[2] De Sade, vol. i, pp. 154-5.

[1] See Appendix I.

[1] Jerrold, p. 32.

[2] Ibid., p. 33.

[1] Reeve, pp. 86, 87.

[1] De Sade, i. p. 290.

[1] Reeve, pp. 87-9.

[1] pp. 49-50.

[1] Koerting, pp. 133-4.

[1] Calthrop, p. 160 et seq.

[1] Koerting, p. 140.

[1] Koerting, p. 150.

[2] Gibbon's *Roman Empire*, chap. 70.

[1] Jerrold, p. 65.

[1] Jerrold, p. 67.

[1] Koerting, p. 172.

[2] Jerrold, p. 69.

[3] Gibbon's *Roman Empire*, chap. 70.

[1] Koerting, p. 204.

[2] See xci, *infra*, p. 147.

[1] Calthrop, p. 115.

[1] Sismondi, iii. p. 516.

[1] Jerrold, p. 78.

[1] Reeve, p. 115.

[1] Ward, p. 142.

[2] Calthrop, p. 134.

[1] Ward, p. 147.

[1] De Sade, ii. p. 456.

[1] De Sade, vol. iii, Appendix, p. 31.

[1] The third visit was on his way to Naples, the fourth on his return from that city.

[1] De Sade, iii. pp. 248-9.

[1] 'Strages minime flenda est,' Koerting, p. 309.

[1] De Sade, iii. p. 302.

[1] Calthrop, pp. 180-1.

[1] Ward, p. 170.

[1] Reeve, p. 129.

[1] De Sade, iii. pp. 412-13.

[1] De Sade, iii. pp. 449-51.

[1] De Sade, iii. pp. 508-12.

[1] Calthrop, p. 216.

[1] Ward, p. 188.

[2] Foscolo, p. 149.

[1] Jerrold, p. 233.

[1] Ward, p. 207.

[1] De Sade, iii. pp. 655-6.

[2] Ibid., iii. p. 660.

[1] De Sade, iii. p. 756.

[1] Koerting, pp. 429-33.

[1] Reeve, pp. 139-40.

[1] De Sade, iii. p. 789.

[1] De Sade, iii. p. 792.

[2] By some of the commentators the composition of this letter is assigned to a much earlier period, viz. while he was at Vacluse in 1351-2. From the contents of the letter itself, referring to his old age, and to the failure of his eyesight after he had passed his sixtieth year, this seems impossible.

[3] See Appendix II.

[1] Koerting, pp. 455-6.

[1] Foscolo, p. 156; Koerting, p. 515.

[1] The arms of the families opposed to the Colonna, viz.: bears, of the Orsini; eagles, of the counts of Tusculum; wolves, of another branch of the same family; lions, of the Savelli; serpents, of the Gaetani (Carducci).

[2] The Colonna family.

[3] Rome.

[4] The Pope.

[1] The Bavarians were the first German mercenaries in Italy.

[2] In sign of collusive surrender to save themselves in a war for which they cared nothing.

[1] Carducci thinks this refers to the exaggerated reputation for courage and military skill attributed to the Germans.

[1] Lady Dacre's translation furnished the suggestion of the last three lines.

[1] cclxix, *Rotta è l'alta colonna*.

[1] Calthrop, p. 202.

[1] Calthrop, p. 202.

[1] Ibid., p. 203.

[1] It is not clear from the text which of the two sang these words. They were apparently taken from some song current at that time.

[1] Piumati, 38.

[1] p. 139.

[1] See Appendix I.

[2] I use Jerrold's translation, p. 155.

[1] Jerrold, p. 163.

[1] Koerting, pp. 549, 555.

[1] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Petrarch.

[1] p. 220.

[1] Reeve, p. 1.

[1] Reeve, p. 3.

[2] *History of English Poetry*, Sec. 15.

[1] *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Arber, 1869, Book I, ch. 31, p. 74.

[2] Henry VIII.

[3] Surrey's *Poems*, p. 3.

[1] Actaeon is here incorrectly designated by Petrarch as Diana's lover.

[1] Venus.

[2] Callisto, a nymph beloved by Jupiter and transformed into a star in the Great Bear.

[1] For the last two lines I am indebted to Lady Dacre's translation.

[1] Of joy and sorrow.

[1] One of the commentators believes that Petrarch here hints at the attractions of another. This seems unwarranted.

[1] Of joy and sorrow.

[1] The swallow and nightingale into which the unhappy daughters of Tereus were transformed.

This sonnet was imitated in English at a very early date by Henry, Earl of Surrey; see Introduction, p. 125.

[1] Circle of Venus.

[2] Her mortal body.

[1] De Sade, i. p. 283.

[2] Koerting, pp. 689-92.

[1] De Sade insists that the word contracted in various manuscripts to *ptubs* is *partubus*, 'childbirths'. Others render it *perturbationibus*, 'anxieties'.

[1] Koerting, pp. 639-46.

[2] De Sade, ii. p. 236.

[1] Vol. i, p. 118.

[2] De Sade, ii. 481, note b.

[1] Chap. ix, Part 2, note.

[1] This seems inconsistent with the hypothesis that the prince in question was Charles of Luxemburg, since Petrarch in another place tells us that he had not met Charles at this time. Yet the envy he speaks of may have been that which he felt when first hearing afterwards of the occurrence described in this sonnet, at which he may not have been present.



[1] De Sade, vol. iii, appendix, p. 31.

[1] De Sade, vol. i, appendix, pp. 9-12.

[2] Ibid., pp. 13, 14.

[1] De Sade, vol. iii, appendix, p. 41.

[2] Ibid., vol. i, appendix, p. 14.

[1] Translation in Reeve's *Petrarch*, p. 17.

[1] This date is incorrect. Petrarch was thirty-eight when he returned to Vacluse in 1342.

[1] Koerting, pp. 528, 529, 530.