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VITTORIA COLONNA

Standard Biography

LIFE

OF

VITTORIA COLONNA.

BY

T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE.

A LIFE of Vittoria Colonna, the most beautiful and most gifted woman of Italy, will certainly not be out of place among the biographies of our Household Library.

Vittoria Colonna belonged to one of the great feudal families of Italy, and her life affords an interesting picture of the society of her times. She married one of the greatest captains of the age, and her life incidentally reveals to us the source of all the woes of Italy.

She was the companion of popes and princes, the friend of mighty men of genius like Michael Angelo, and her life recalls the most splendid period of Italian art.

She was herself a famous poetess, and the highest peninsular courts felt themselves honored by her presence.

"Vittoria Colonna," says her biographer, "has survived in men's memory as a poetess. But she is far more interesting to the historical student, who would obtain a full understanding of that wonderful sixteenth century, as a Protestant. Her highly gifted and richly cultivated intelligence, her great social position, and, above all, her close intimacy with the eminent men who strove to set on foot an Italian reformation which should not be

incompatible with the Papacy, make the illustration of her religious opinions a matter of no slight historical interest."

The author of this biography is Mr. T. Adolphus Trollope, brother of the novelist, and son of the woman who made herself famous by her abuse of the Americans. It forms a part of his *Decade of Italian Women,* in regard to which the London ATHENÆUM says: "This book breathes of the very air of Italian life. . . . The fascination is the greater that the author seems unconscious of the subtle perfume in which his page is steeped. The book opens to the English reader curious pictures of the life and manners of Italy in the brilliant and troublous times of the Middle Ages."

A point of especial interest in this Life of Vittoria Colonna, is, that it contains translations of her finest poems.

We began our series with the life of the most remarkable woman of France, and, after having wandered long among the imperial lords of creation, we are happy to add a very pleasant life of the most remarkable woman of Italy.

O. W. WIGHT.

July, 1859.

VITTORIA COLONNA.

(1490—1547.)

CHAPTER I.

Changes in the Condition of Italy.—Dark Days.—Circumstances which led to the Invasion of the French.—State of things in Naples.—Fall of the Arragonese Dynasty.—Birth of Vittoria.—The Colonna.—Marino.—Vittoria's Betrothal.—The Duchess di Francavilla.—Literary Culture at Naples.—Education of Vittoria in Ischia

The signs of change, which were perplexing monarchs at the period of Vittoria Colonna's entry on the scene, belonged simply to the material order of things; and such broad outline of them, as is necessary to give some idea of the general position of Italy at that day, may be drawn in few words.

Certain more important symptoms of changes in the world of thought and

speculation, did not rise to the surface of society till a few years later, and these will have to be spoken of in a subsequent page.

When Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan, was murdered in 1476, his son, Gian Galeazzo, a minor, succeeded to the dukedom. But his uncle Ludovico, known in history as "Ludovico il Moro," under pretence of protecting his nephew, usurped the whole power and property of the crown, which he continued wrongfully to keep in his own hands even after the majority of his nephew. The latter, however, having married a grand-daughter of Ferdinand of Arragon, King of Naples, her father, Alphonso, heir apparent of that crown, became exceedingly discontented at the state of tutelage in which his son-in-law was thus held. And his remonstrances and threats became so urgent, that "Black Ludovick" perceived that he

should be unable to retain his usurped position, unless he could find means of disabling Ferdinand and his son Alphonso from exerting their strength against him. With this view he persuaded Charles VIII. of France to undertake with his aid the conquest of the kingdom of Naples, to which the French monarch asserted a claim, derived from the house of Anjou, which had reigned in Naples, till they were ousted by the house of Arragon. This invitation, which the Italian historians consider the first fountain head of all their calamities, was given in 1492. On the 23d of August, 1494, Charles left France on his march to Italy, and arrived in Rome on the 31st of December of that year.

On the previous 25th of January, Ferdinand, the old King of Naples, died, and his son, Alphonso, succeeded him. But the new monarch, who during the latter years of his father's life

had wielded the whole power of the kingdom, was so much hated by his subjects, that on the news of the French King's approach they rose in rebellion, and declared in favor of the invader. Alphonso made no attempt to face the storm, but forthwith abdicated in favor of his son Ferdinand, fled to Sicily, and "set about serving God," as the chroniclers phrase it, in a monastery, where he died a few months later, on the 19th of November, 1495.

Ferdinand II., his son, was not disliked by the nation; and Guicciardini gives it as his opinion, that if the abdication of his father in his favor had been executed earlier, it might have had the effect of saving the kingdom from falling into the hands of the French monarch. But it was now too late. A large portion of it had already declared itself in favor of the invaders. Ferdinand found the contest hopeless

and early in 1495 retired to Ischia. Charles entered Naples the 21st of February, 1495, and the whole kingdom hastened to accept him as its sovereign.

Meantime, however, Ludovico, Duke of Milan, whose oppressed nephew had died on the 22d of October, 1494, began to be alarmed at the too complete success of his own policy, and entered into a league with the Venetians, the King of the Romans, and Ferdinand of Castile, against Charles, who seems to have immediately become as much panic stricken at the news of it as Alphonso had been at his approach. The French, moreover, both the monarch and his followers, had lost no time in making themselves so odious to the Neapolitans, that the nation had already repented of having abandoned Ferdinand so readily, and were anxious to get rid of the French and receive him back again. Towards the end of May, 1495,

Charles hastily left Naples on his return to France, leaving Gilbert de Montpensier as Viceroy; and on the 7th of July, Ferdinand returned to Naples and was gladly welcomed by the people.

And now, having thus the good-will of his subjects already disgusted with their French rulers, Ferdinand might in all probability have succeeded without any foreign assistance in ridding his country of the remaining French troops left behind him by Charles, and in re-establishing the dynasty of Arragon on the throne of Naples, had he not at the time when things looked worst with him, on the first coming of Charles, committed the fatal error of asking assistance from Ferdinand the Catholic, of Castile.

Ferdinand the Catholic and the crafty, did not wait to be asked a second time; but instantly despatched to his aid, Consalvo Ernandez d'Aguilar,

known thereafter in Neapolitan history as, "Il gran Capitano," both on account of his rank as Generalissimo of the Spanish forces, and of his high military merit and success. Ferdinand of Arragon, with the help of Consalvo and the troops he brought with him, soon succeeded in driving the French out of his kingdom; and appeared to be on the eve of a more prosperous period, when a sudden illness put an end to his life in October, 1496. He died without offspring, and was succeeded by his uncle Frederick.

Thus, as the Neapolitan historians remark, Naples had passed under the sway of no less than five monarchs in the space of three years: to wit—

Ferdinand of Arragon, the first, who died the 25th of January, 1494.

Alphonso, his son, who abdicated on the 3d of February, 1495.

Charles of France, crowned at Na-

ples on the 20th of May, 1495, and driven out of the kingdom immediately afterwards.

Ferdinand of Arragon, II., son of Alphonso, who entered Naples in triumph on the 7th of July, 1495, and died in October, 1496.

Frederick of Arragon, his uncle, who succeeded him.

But these so rapid changes had not exhausted the slides of Fortune's magic lantern. She had other harlequinade transformations in hand, sufficient to make even Naples tired of change and desirous of repose. Frederick, the last, and perhaps the best, and best-loved of the Neapolitan sovereigns of the dynasty of Arragon, resigned but to witness the final discomfiture and downfall of his house.

Charles VIII. died in April, 1498; but his successor, Louis XII., was equally anxious to possess himself of

the crown of Naples, and more able to carry his views into effect. The principal obstacle to his doing so was the power of Ferdinand of Spain, and the presence of the Spanish troops under Consalvo of Naples. Ferdinand the Catholic, could by no means permit the spoliation of his kinsman and ally, Frederick, who loyally relied on his protection, for the profit of the King of France. Louis knew that it was impossible he should do so. But the Most Christian King thought that the Most Catholic King might very probably find it consistent with kingly honor to take a different view of the case, if it were proposed to him to go shares in the plunder. And the Most Christian King's estimate of royal nature was so just, that the Most Catholic King acceded in the frankest manner to his royal brother's proposal.

Louis accordingly sent an army to

invade Naples in the year 1500. The unfortunate Frederick was beguiled the while into thinking that his full trust might be placed on the assistance of Spain. But, when on the 25th of June, 1501, the Borgia Pope, Alexander VII., published a bull graciously dividing his dominions between the two eldest sons of the Church, he perceived at once that his position was hopeless. Resolving, however, not to abandon his kingdom without making an attempt to preserve it, he determined to defend himself in Capua. That city was however taken by the French on the 24th of July, 1501, and Frederick fled to Ischia ; whence he subsequently retired to France, and died at Tours on the 9th of November, 1504.

Meanwhile, the royal accomplices having duly shared their booty, instantly began to quarrel, as thieves are wont to do, over the division of it. Each

in fact had from the first determined eventually to possess himself of the whole; proving, that if indeed there be honor among thieves, the proverb must not be understood to apply to such as are "Most Christian," and "Most Catholic."

Naples thus became the battle-field, as well as the prize of the contending parties; and was torn to pieces in the struggle while waiting to see which invader was to be her master. At length the Spaniard proved the stronger, as he was also the more iniquitous of the two; and on the 1st of January, 1504, the French finally quitted the kingdom of Naples, leaving it in the entire and peaceful possession of Ferdinand of Spain. Under him, and his successors on the Spanish throne, the unhappy province was governed by a series of viceroys, of whom, says Colletta [1] "one here

[1] Storia di Nap. lib. i. cap. 1.

and there was good, many bad enough, and several execrable," for a period of 230 years, with results still visible.

Such was the scene on which our heroine had to enter in the year 1490. She was the daughter of Fabrizio, brother of that protonotary Colonna, whose miserable death at the hands of the hereditary enemies of his family, the Orsini, allied with the Riarii, then in power for the nonce during the popedom of Sixtus IV., has been related in the life of Caterina Sforza. Her mother was Agnes of Montefeltre ; and all the biographers and historians tell us, that she was the youngest of six children born to her parents. The statement is a curious instance of the extreme and very easily detected inaccuracy, which may often be found handed on unchallenged from one generation to another of Italian writers of biography and history.

The Cavaliere Pietro Visconti, the latest Italian, and by far the most complete of Vittoria's biographers, who edited a handsome edition of her works, not published, but printed in 1840 at the expense of the prince-banker, Torlonia, on the occasion of his marriage with the Princess Donna Teresa Colonna, writes thus at page 55 of the life prefixed to this votive volume :—"The child (Vittoria) increased and completed the number of children whom Agnes of Montefeltre, daughter of Frederick, Duke of Urbino, had presented to her husband." He adds, in a note, "this Princess had already had five sons, Frederick, Ascanio, Ferdinando, Camillo, Sciarra."

Coppi, in his "Memorie Colonnesi," makes no mention[1] of the last three, —giving as the offspring of Fabrizio and

[1] He speaks, indeed, (p. 236,) of Sciarra as a brother of Ascanio · adding, that he was illegitimate.

Agnes, only Frederick, Ascanio, and Vittoria. Led by this discrepancy to examine further the accuracy of Visconti's statement, I found that Agnes di Montefeltre was born in 1472; and was, consequently, eighteen years old at the time of Vittoria's birth. It became clear, therefore, that it was exceedingly improbable, not to say impossible, thatshe should have had five children previously. But I found farther, that Frederick the eldest son, and always hitherto said to have been the eldest child of Agnes, died according to the testimony of his tombstone,[1] still existing in the Church of Santa Maria di Pallazzola, in the year 1516, being then in his nineteenth year. He was, therefore, born in 1497 or 1498, and must have been seven or eight years younger than Vittoria; who must, it should seem, have been the

[1] Coppi, Mem. Col. p. 269.

eldest and not the youngest of her parents' children.

It can scarcely be necessary to tell even the most exclusively English reader, how ancient, how noble, how magnificent, was the princely house of Colonna. They were so noble, that their lawless violence, freebooting habits, private wars, and clan enmities, rendered them a scourge to their country ; and for several centuries contributed largely to the mass of anarchy and barbarism, that rendered Rome one of the most insecure places of abode in Europe, and still taints the instincts of its populace with characteristics, which make it one of the least civilizable races of Italy. The Orsini being equally noble, and equally powerful and lawless, the high-bred mastiffs of either princely house for more than 200 years, with short respites of ill-kept truce, never lost an opportunity of fly-

ing at each other's throats, to the infinite annoyance and injury of their less noble and more peaceably disposed fellow-citizens.

Though the possessions of the Colonna clan had before been wide-spread and extensive, they received considerable additions during the Papacy of the Colonna pope, Martin V., great uncle of Fabrizio, Vittoria's father, who occupied the Papal chair from 1417 to 1431. At the period of our heroine's birth the family property was immense.

Very many were the fiefs held by the Colonna in the immediate neighborhood of the city, and especially among the hills to the east and south-east of the Campagna. There several of the strongest positions, and most delightfully situated towns and castles, belonged to them.

Among the more important of these

was Marino, admirably placed among the hills that surround the lovely lake of Albano.

Few excursionists among the storied sites in the environs of Rome make Marino the object of a pilgrimage. The town has a bad name in these days. The Colonna vassals who inhabit it, and still pay to the feudal lord a tribute, recently ruled by the Roman tribunals to be due (a suit having been instituted by the inhabitants with a view of shaking off this old mark of vassalage), are said to be eminent among the inhabitants of the Campagna for violence, lawlessness, and dishonesty. The bitterest hatred, the legacy of old wrong and oppression, is felt by them against their feudal lords; and this sentiment, which, inherited, as it seems to be, from generation to generation, speaks but little in favor of the old feudal rule, does not tend to make

the men of Marino good or safe subjects. Many a stranger has, however, probably looked down from the beautifully wooded heights of Castel Gandolfo on the picturesquely gloomy little walled town creeping up the steep side of its hill, and crowned by the ancient seignorial residence it so much detests. And any one of these would be able to assure a recent intensely French biographer of Vittoria, that he is in error in supposing that the town and castle of Marino have so entirely perished and been forgotten, that the site of them even is now unknown![1]

On the contrary the old castle has recently been repaired and modernized into a very handsome nineteenth century residence, to the no small injury of its outward appearance in a pictu-

[1] Which is the truly wonderful assertion of M. le Fevre Deumier, in his little volume entitled "Vittoria Colonna;" Paris, 1856, p. 7.

resque and historical point of view. The interior still contains unchanged several of the nobly proportioned old halls, which were planned at a time when mighty revels in the rare times of peace, and defence in the more normal condition of clan warfare, were the object held in view by the builder. Many memorials of interest, moreover, pictures, and other records of the old times were brought to Marino from Paliano, when the Colonna family were in the time of the last Pope, most unjustly compelled to sell the latter possession to the Roman government. Paliano, which from its mountain position is extremely strong and easily defended, seemed to the government of the Holy Father to be admirably adapted to that prime want of a Papal despotism, a prison for political offenders. The Colonnas, therefore, were invited to sell it to the state; and

on their declining to do so, received an intimation, that the paternal government having determined on possessing it, and having also fixed the price they intended to give for it, no option in the matter could be permitted them. So Marino was enriched by all that was transferable of the ancient memorials that had gathered around the stronger mountain fortress in the course of centuries.

It was at Marino that Vittoria was born, in a rare period of most unusually prolonged peace. Her parents had selected, we are told, from among their numerous castles, that beautiful spot, for the enjoyment of the short interval of tranquillity which smiled on their first years [1] of marriage. A very successful raid, in which Fabrizio and

[1] As it would appear they must have been, from the dates given above to show that Vittoria must have been their first child.

his cousin Prospero Colonna had harried the fiefs of the Orsini, and driven off a great quantity of cattle,[1] had been followed by a peace made under the auspices of Innocent VIII. on the 11th August, 1486, which seems absolutely to have lasted till 1494, when we find the two cousins at open war with the new Pope Alexander VI.

Far more important contests, however, were at hand, the progress of which led to the youthful daughter of the house being treated, while yet in her fifth year, as part of the family capital, to be made use of for the advancement of the family interests, and thus fixed the destiny of her life.

When Charles VIII. passed through Rome on his march against Naples at the end of 1494, the Colonna cousins sided with him; placed themselves under his banners, and contributed

[1] Coppi. Mem. Col., p. 228.

materially to aid his successful invasion. But on his flight from Naples in 1495, they suddenly changed sides, and took service under Ferdinand II. The fact of this change of party, which to our ideas seems to require so much explanation, probably appeared to their contemporaries a perfectly simple matter; for it is mentioned as such without any word of the motives or causes of it. Perhaps they merely sought to sever themselves from a losing game. Possibly, as we find them rewarded for their adherence to the King of Naples by the grant of a great number of fiefs previously possessed by the Orsini, who were on the other side, they were induced to change their allegiance by the hope of obtaining those possessions, and by the Colonna instinct of enmity to the Orsini race. Ferdinand, however, was naturally anxious to have some better hold over his new friends

than that furnished by their own oaths of fealty; and with this view caused the infant Vittoria to be betrothed to his subject, Ferdinand d'Avalos, son of Alphonso, Marquis of Pescara, a child of about the same age as the little bride.

Little, as it must appear to our modern notions, as the child's future happiness could have been cared for in the stipulation of a contract entered into from such motives, it so turned out, that nothing could have more effectually secured it. To Vittoria's parents, if any doubts on such a point had presented themselves to their minds, it would doubtless have appeared abundantly sufficient to know, that the rank and position of the affianced bridegroom were such, as to secure their daughter one of the highest places among the nobility of the court of Naples, and the enjoyment of vast and wide-spread pos-

sessions. But to Vittoria herself all this would not have been enough. And the earliest and most important advantage arising to her from her betrothal was the bringing her under the influence of that training, which made her such a woman, as could not find her happiness in such matters.

We are told, that henceforth, that is, after the betrothal, she was educated together with her future husband, in the island of Ischia, under the care of the widowed Duchessa di Francavilla, the young Pescara's elder sister. Costanza d'Avalos, Duchessa di Francavilla, appears to have been one of the most remarkable women of her time. When her father Alphonso, Marchesa di Pescara, lost his life by the treason of a black slave on the 7th of September, 1495, leaving Ferdinand his son the heir to his titles and estates, an infant five years old, then quite recently be-

trothed to Vittoria, the Duchessa di Francavilla assumed the entire direction and governance of the family. So high was her reputation for prudence, energy, and trust-worthiness in every way, that on the death of her husband, King Ferdinand made her governor and "châtelaine" of Ischia, one of the most important keys of the kingdom. Nor were her gifts and qualities only such as were calculated to fit her for holding such a post. Her contemporary, Caterina Sforza, would have made a "châtelaine" as vigilant, as prudent, as brave and energetic as Costanza. But the Neapolitan lady was something more than this.

Intellectual culture had been held in honor at Naples during the entire period of the Arragonese dynasty. All the princes of that house, with the exception, perhaps, of Alphonso, the father of Ferdinand II., had been lovers

of literature and patrons of learning. Of this Ferdinand II., under whose auspices the young Pescara was betrothed to Vittoria, and who chose the Duchessa di Francavilla as his governor in Ischia, it is recorded, that when returning in triumph to his kingdom after the retreat of the French, he rode into Naples with the Marchese de Pescara on his right hand, and the poet Cariteo on his left. Poets and their art especially were welcomed in that literary court; and the tastes and habits of the Neapolitan nobles were at that period probably more tempered by those studies, which humanize the mind and manners, than the chivalry of any other part of Italy.

Among this cultured society Costanza d'Avalos was eminent for culture, and admirably qualified in every respect to make an invaluable protectress and friend to her youthful sister-in-law.

The transplantation, indeed, of the infant Colonna from her native feudal castle to the Duchessa di Francavilla's home in Ischia, was a change so complete and so favorable, that it may be fairly supposed, that without it the young Roman girl would not have grown into the woman she did.

For in truth Marino, little calculated, as it will be supposed, such a stronghold of the ever turbulent Colonna was at any time to afford the means and opportunity for intellectual culture, became shortly after the period of Vittoria's betrothal to the heir of the D'Avalos, wholly unfit to offer her even a safe home. Whether it continued to be the residence of Agnes, while her husband Fabrizio was fighting in Naples, and her daughter was under the care of the Duchessa di Francavilla in Ischia, has not been recorded. But we find that when Fabrizio had deserted the

French king, and ranged himself on the side of Ferdinand of Naples, he was fully aware of the danger to which his castles would be exposed at the hands of the French troops as they passed through Rome on their way to or from Naples. To provide against this, he had essayed to place them in safety by consigning them as a deposit in trust to the Sacred College.[1] But Pope Borgia, deeming, probably, that he might find the means of possessing himself of some of the estates in question, refused to permit this, ordering that they should, instead, be delivered into his keeping. On this being refused, he ordered Marino to be levelled to the ground. And Guicciardini writes,[2] that the Colonna, having placed garrisons in Amelici and Rocca di Papa, two other of the family strongholds, abandoned all the rest of

[1] Coppi. mem. Col., p. 243. [2] Book v. chap. ii.

the possessions in the Roman States. It seems probable, therefore, that Agnes accompanied her husband and daughter to Naples. Subsequently the same historian relates,[1] that Marino was burned by order of Clement VII in 1526. So that it must be supposed, that the order of Alexander for its utter destruction in 1501 was not wholly carried into execution.

The kingdom and city of Naples was during this time by no means without a large share of the turmoil and warfare that was vexing every part of Italy. Yet whosoever had his lot cast during those years elsewhere than in Rome was in some degree fortunate. And considering the general state of the Peninsula, and her own social position and connections, Vittoria may be deemed very particularly so to have found a safe retreat, and an admirably

[1] Book xvii. chaps. iii. and iv.

governed home on the rock of Ischia. In after life we find her clinging to it with tenacious affection, and dedicating more than one sonnet to the remembrances which made it sacred to her. And though in her widowhood her memory naturally most frequently recurs to the happy years of her married life there, the remote little island had at least a strong claim upon her affections as the home of her childhood. For to the years there passed under the care of her noble sister-in-law, Costanza d'Avalos, she owed the possibility, that the daughter of a Roman chieftain who passed his life in harrying others and being harried himself, and in acquiring as a "condottiere" captain the reputation of one of the first soldiers of his day, could become either morally or intellectually the woman Vittoria Colonna became.

CHAPTER II.

Vittoria's Personal Appearance.—First love.—A Noble Soldier of Fortune.—Italian Wars of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries.—The Colonna Fortunes.—Death of Ferdinand II.—The Neapolitans carry Coals to Newcastle.—Events in Ischia.—Ferdinand of Spain in Naples.—Life in Naples in the Sixteenth Century.—Marriage of Pescara with Vittoria.—Marriage Presents.

From the time of her betrothal in 1495 to that of her marriage in 1509, history altogether loses sight of Vittoria. We must suppose her to be quietly and happily growing from infancy to adolescence under the roof of Costanza d'Avalos, the *châtelaine* of Ischia, sharing the studies of her future husband and present playmate, and increasing, as in

stature, so in every grace both of mind and body. The young Pescara seems also to have profited by the golden opportunities offered him of becoming something better than a mere *preux chevalier*. A taste for literature, and especially for poesy, was then a ruling fashion among the nobles of the court of Naples. And the young Ferdinand, of whose personal beauty and knightly accomplishments we hear much, manifested also excellent qualities of disposition and intelligence. His biographer Giovio[1] tells us that his beard was auburn, his nose aquiline, his eyes large and fiery when excited, but mild and gentle at other times. He was, however, considered proud, adds Bishop Giovio, on account of his haughty carriage, the little familiarity of his manners, and his grave and brief fashion of speech.

[1] Giovio, Vita del Mar. di Pescara, Venice, 1557, p. 14.

To his playmate Vittoria, the companion of his studies and hours of recreation, this sterner mood was doubtless modified; and with all the good gifts attributed to him, it was natural enough that before the time had come for consummating the infant betrothal, the union planned for political purposes had changed itself into a veritable love-match. The affection seems to have been equal on either side; and Vittoria, if we are to believe the concurrent testimony of nearly all the poets and literateurs of her day, must have been beautiful and fascinating in no ordinary degree. The most authentic portrait[1] of her is one preserved in the Colonna gallery at Rome, supposed to be a copy by Girolamo Muziano, from an original picture by some artist of higher note. It is a beautiful face of the true Roman type, perfectly

[1] Visconti, Rimi di Vit. Col., p. 39.

regular, of exceeding purity of outline, and perhaps a little heavy about the lower part of the face. But the calm, large, thoughtful eye, and the superbly developed forehead, secure it from any approach towards an expression of sensualism. The fulness of the lip is only sufficient to indicate that sensitiveness to, and appreciation of beauty, which constitutes an essential element in the poetical temperament. The hair is of that bright golden tint that Titian loved so well to paint; and its beauty has been especially recorded by more than one of her contemporaries. The poet Galeazzo da Tarsia, who professed himself, after the fashion of the time, her most fervent admirer and devoted slave, recurs in many passages of his poems to those fascinating "chiome d'oro;" as here he sings, with more enthusiasm than taste, of the

"Trecce d'or, che in gli alti giri,
Non è che' unqua pareggi o sole o stella;"

or again where he tells us, that the sun and his lady-love appeared

"Ambi con chiome d'or lucide e terse."

But the testimony of graver writers, lay and clerical, is not wanting to induce us to believe, that Vittoria in her prime really might be considered "the most beautiful woman of her day" with more truth than that hackneyed phrase often conveys. So when at length the Colonna seniors, and the Duchessa di Francavilla thought, that the fitting moment had arrived for carrying into effect the long-standing engagement—which was not till 1509, when the *promessi sposi* were both in their nineteenth year—the young couple were thoroughly in love with each other, and went to the altar with every prospect of wedded happiness.

But during these quiet years of study and development in little rock-bound Ischia, the world without was anything but quiet, as the outline of Neapolitan history in the last chapter sufficiently indicates; and Fabrizio Colonna was ever in the thick of the confusion. As long as the Aragonese monarchs kept up the struggle, he fought for them upon the losing side; but when, after the retreat of Frederick, the last of them, the contest was between the French and the Spaniards, he chose the latter, which proved to be the winning side. Frederick, on abandoning Naples, threw himself on the hospitality of the King of France, an enemy much less hated by him than was Ferdinand of Spain, who had so shamefully deceived and betrayed him. But his high Constable, Fabrizio Colonna, not sharing, as it should seem, his sovereign's feelings on the subject, transfer-

red his allegiance to the King of Spain. And again, this change of fealty and service seems to have been considered so much in the usual course of things, that it elicits no remark from the contemporary writers.

In fact, the noble Fabrizio, the bearer of a grand old Italian name, the lord of many a powerful barony, and owner of many a mile of fair domain, a Roman patrician of pure Italian race, to whom, if to any, the honor, the independence, the interests, and the name of Italy should have been dear, was a mere Captain of free lances,—a soldier of fortune, ready to sell his blood and great military talents in the best market. The best of his fellow nobles in all parts of Italy were the same. Their profession was fighting. And mere fighting, in whatever cause, so it were bravely and knightly done, was the most honored and noblest profes-

sion of that day. So much of real greatness as could be imparted to the profession of war, by devotion to a *person*, might occasionally—though not very frequently in Italy—have been met with among the soldiers of that period. But all those elements of genuine heroism, which are generated by devotion to a *cause*, and all those ideas of patriotism, of resistance to wrong, and assertion of human rights, which compel the philosopher and philanthropist to admit that war may sometimes be righteous, noble, elevating, to those engaged in it, and prolific of high thoughts and great deeds, were wholly unknown to the chivalry of Italy at the time in question.

And, indeed, as far as the feeling of nationality is concerned, the institution of knighthood itself, as it then existed, was calculated to prevent the growth of patriotic sentiment. For the com-

monwealth of chivalry was of European extent. The knights of England, France, Italy, Spain, and Germany, were brothers in arms, linked together by a community of thought and sentiment infinitely stronger than any which bound them to the other classes of their own countrymen. The aggregation of caste wholly overbore that of nationality. And the nature of the former, though not wholly evil in its influences, any more than that of the latter is wholly good, is yet infinitely narrower, less humanizing, and less ennobling in its action on human motives and conduct. And war, the leading aggregative occupation of those days, was proportionably narrowed in its scope, deteriorated in its influences, and rendered incapable of supplying that stimulus to healthy human development which it has in its more noble forms, indisputably sometimes furnished to mankind.

And it is important to the great history of modern civilization, that these truths should be recognized and clearly understood. For this same period, which is here in question, was, as all know, one of great intellectual activity, of rapid development, and fruitful progress. And historical speculators on these facts, finding this unusual movement of mind contemporaneous with a time of almost universal and unceasing warfare, have thought, that some of the producing causes of the former fact were to be found in the existence of the latter; and have argued, that the general ferment, and stirring up, produced by these chivalrous, but truly ignoble wars, assisted mainly in generating that exceptionally fervid condition of the human mind. But, admitting that a time of national struggle for some worthy object may probably be found to exercise such an in-

fluence, as that attributed to the Italian wars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is certain that these latter were of no such ennobling nature. And the causes of the great intellectual movement of those centuries must therefore be sought elsewhere.

From the time when "il gran Capitano" Consalvo, on behalf of his master, Ferdinand of Spain, having previously assisted the French in driving out the unfortunate Frederick, the last of the Aragonese kings of Naples, had afterwards finally succeeded in expelling the French from their share of the stolen kingdom, the affairs of the Colonna cousins, Fabrizio and Prospero, began to brighten. The last French troops quitted Naples on January 1, 1504. By a diploma, bearing date November 15, 1504,[1] and still preserved among the Colonna archives, eighteen

[1] Coppi, Mem. Col., p 249.

baronies were conferred on Prospero Colonna by Ferdinand. On the 28th of the same month, all the fiefs which Fabrizio had formerly possessed in the Abruzzi were restored to him; and by another deed, dated the same day, thirty-three others, in the Abruzzi and the Terra di Lavoro, were bestowed on him.

In the mean time, earth had been relieved from the presence of the Borgia Vicegerent of heaven, and Julius II reigned in his stead. By him the Colonna were relieved from their excommunication, and restored to all their Roman possessions. So that the news of the family fortunes, which from time to time reached the daughter of the house in her happy retirement in rocky Ischia, from the period at which she began to be of an age to appreciate the importance of such matters, were altogether favorable.

But the tranquil life there during these years was not unbroken by sympathy with the vicissitudes which were variously affecting the excitable city, over which the little recluse court looked from their island home. The untimely death of Ferdinand II, on Friday, October 7, 1496, threw the first deep shade over the household of the Duchessa di Francavilla, which had crossed it since Vittoria had become its inmate. Never, according to the contemporary journalist, Giuliano Passeri,[1] was prince more truly lamented by his people of every class. Almost immediately after his marriage, the young king and his wife both fell ill at Somma, near Naples. The diarist describes the melancholy spectacle of the two biers, supporting the sick king and queen, entering their capital side by side. Every thing that the science of

[1] Note 1.

the time could suggest, even to the carrying in procession of the head as well as the blood of St. Januarius, was tried in vain. The young king, of whom so much was hoped, died; and there arose throughout the city, writes Passeri, "a cry of weeping so great, that it seemed as if the whole world were falling in ruin, all, both great and small, male and female, crying aloud to heaven for pity. So that I truly think, that since God made the world, a greater weeping than this was never known."

Then came the great Jubilee year, 1500; on which occasion a circumstance occurred, that set all Naples talking. It was discussed, we may shrewdly conjecture, in a somewhat different spirit in that Ischia household, which most interests us, from the tone in which the excitable city chattered of it. At the beginning of April,[1] the Neapolitans,

[1] Passeri, p 122.

in honor of the great Jubilee, sent a deputation, carrying with them the celebrated Virgin, della Bruna dello Carmine, who justified her reputation, and did credit to her country by working innumerable miracles all the way as she went. But what was the mortification of her bearers, when arrived at Rome, the result of the fame arising from their triumphant progress was, that Pope Borgia, jealous of a foreign Virgin, which might divert the alms of the faithful from the Roman begging boxes, showed himself so thorough a protectionist of the home manufacture, that he ordered the Neapolitan Virgin to be carried back again immediately. This had to be done; but Madonna della Bruna, nothing daunted, worked miracles faster than ever as she was being carried off, and continued to do so all the way home.

In July, 1501, there came a guest to

the dwelling of Costanza d'Avalos, whose coming and going must have made a durable impression on the opening mind of Vittoria, then just eleven years old. This was Frederick, the last of the Aragonese kings. When all had gone against him, and the French had taken, and most cruelly sacked Capua, and were advancing on Naples,[1] he sought refuge with his wife and children on the Island of Ischia, and remained there till he left it on the 6th of September to throw himself on the generosity of the French King. Fabrizio Colonna was, it is recorded, with him on the island, where the fallen king left for a while his wife and children; and had then an opportunity of seeing,—as far as the brave *condottiere* chieftain had eyes to see such matters,—the progress his daughter had made in all graces and good gifts during six

[1] Passeri, p. 126.

years of the superintendence of Costanza d'Avalos.

Then there came occasionally events, which doubtless called the Duchessa di Francavilla from her retirement to the neighboring, but strongly contrasted scene of Naples; and in all probability furnished opportunities of showing her young pupil something of the great and gay world of the brilliant and always noisy capital. Such, for instance, was the entry of Ferdinand of Spain into Naples, on November 1, 1506. The same people, who so recently were making the greatest lamentation ever heard in the world over the death of Ferdinand of Aragon, were now equally loud and vehement[1] in their welcome to his false usurping kinsman, Ferdinand of Castile. A pier was run out an hundred paces into the sea for him and his queen to land at, and a tabernacle, "all of fine

[1] Passeri, p. 146.

wrought gold," says Passeri, erected on it for him to rest in. The city wall was thrown down to make a new passage for his entrance into the city; all Naples was gay with triumphal arches and hangings. The mole, writes the same gossiping authority, was so crowded, that a grain of millet thrown among them would not have reached the ground. Nothing was to be heard in all Naples but the thunder of cannon, and nothing to be seen but velvet, silk, and brocade, and gold on all sides. The streets were lined with richly tapestried seats, filled with all the noble dames of Naples, who, as the royal cortege passed, rose, and advancing, kissed the hands of the king, "et lo signore Re di questo si pigliava gran piacere." It is a characteristic incident of the times, that as quick as the cortege passed, all the rich and costly preparations for its passage were, as Passeri tells

us, scramb led for and made booty of by the populace.

The Duchessa di Francavilla, at least, who had witnessed the melancholy departure of Frederick from her own roof, when he went forth a wanderer from his lost kingdom, must have felt the hollowness and little worth of all this noisy demonstration, if none other among the assembled crowd felt it. And it may easily be imagined how she moralized the scene to the lovely blonde girl at her side, now at sixteen, in the first bloom of her beauty, as they returned, tired with the unwonted fatigue of their gala doings, to their quiet home in Ischia.

Here is a specimen from the pages of the gossiping weaver,[1] of the sort of subjects which were the talk of the day in Naples in those times.

In December, 1507, a certain Span-

[1] Passeri, p. 151.

iard, Pietro de Pace, by name, a hunchback, and much deformed, but who "was of high courage, and in terrestrial matters had no fear of spirits or of venomous animals," determined to explore the caverns of Pozzuoli; and discovered in them several bronze statues and medals, and antique lamps. He found also some remains of leaden pipes, on one of which the words "Imperator Cæsar" were legible. Moreover, he saw "certain lizards as large as vipers." But for all this, Pietro considered his adventure an unsuccessful one; for he had hoped to find hidden treasure in the caverns.

Then there was barely time for this nine days' wonder to run out its natural span, before a very much more serious matter was occupying every mind, and making every tongue wag in Naples. On the night preceding Christmas day, in the year 1507, the Convent of St.

Clare was discovered to be on fire. The building was destroyed, and the nuns, belonging mostly to noble Neapolitan families, were burnt out of their holy home ;—distressing enough on many accounts. But still it was not altogether the misfortune of these holy ladies that spread consternation throughout the city. It was the practice, it seems, for a great number of the possessors of valuables of all sorts, "Baruni od altri," as Passeri says,[1] in his homely Neapolitan dialect, to provide against the continual dangers to which movable property was exposed, by consigning their goods to the keeping of some religious community. And the nuns of St. Clare, especially, were very largely employed in this way. The consequence was, that the almost incredibly large amount of three hundred thousand ducats worth of valuable articles of all sorts was de-

[1] Passeri, p. 152.

stroyed in this disastrous fire. Taking into consideration the difference in the value of money, this sum must be calculated to represent at least a million and a half sterling of our money. And it is necessary to bear in mind how large a proportion of a rich man's wealth in those days consisted in chattels to render the estimate of the loss at all credible.

The prices, however, at which certain of the products of artistic industry were then estimated, were such as to render such an accumulation of property possible enough. For instance, among the valuables recorded by Passeri as belonging to Ferdinand of Aragon I, were three pieces of tapestry, which were called "La Pastorella," and were considered to be worth 130,000 ducats.

And thus the years rolled on. Naples gradually settling down into

tranquillity under the Spanish rule, administered by the first of the long list of viceroys, the "Gran Capitano," Don Consalvo de Corduba, and the star of the Colonna shining more steadily than ever in the ascendant, till in the year 1509, the nineteenth of Vittoria's and of the bridegroom's age, it was determined to celebrate the long arranged marriage.

It took place on the 27th of December in that year; and Passeri mentions,[1] that Vittoria came to Ischia from Marino on the occasion, escorted by a large company of Roman nobles. It appears, therefore, that she must have quitted Ischia previously. But it is probable that she did so only for a short visit to her native home, before finally settling in her husband's country.

The marriage festival was held in Ischia, with all the pomp then usual

[1] Passeri, p. 162.

on such occasions; and that, as will be seen in a subsequent page, from the accounts preserved by Passeri of another wedding, at which Vittoria was present, was a serious matter. The only particulars recorded for us, of her own marriage ceremony, consist of two lists of the presents reciprocally made by the bride and bridegroom. These have been printed from the original documents in the Colonna archives, by Signor Visconti, and are curious illustrations of the habits and manners of that day.

The Marquis acknowledges to have received, says the document, from the Lord Fabrizio Colonna and the Lady Vittoria:—

1. A bed of French fashion, with the curtains and all the hangings of crimson satin, lined with blue taffetas with large fringes of gold; with three mattresses and a counterpane of crim-

son satin of similar workmanship ; and four pillows of crimson satin garnished with fringes and tassels of gold.

2. A cloak of crimson raised brocade.

3. A cloak of black raised brocade, and white silk.

4. A cloak of purple velvet and purple brocade.

5. A cross of diamonds and a housing for a mule of wrought gold.

The other document sets forth the presents offered by Pescara to his bride :—

1. A cross of diamonds with a chain of gold of the value of 1000 ducats.

2. A ruby, a diamond, and an emerald set in gold, of the value of 400 ducats.

3. A "desciorgh" of gold (whatever that may be) of the value of 100 ducats.

4. Twelve bracelets of gold, of the value of 40 ducats.

Then follow fifteen articles of female

dress, gowns, petticoats, mantles, skirts, and various other finery with strange names, only to be explained by the ghost of some sixteenth century milliner, and altogether ignored by Ducange, and all other lexicographers. But they are described as composed of satin, velvet, brocade; besides crimson velvet trimmed with gold fringe, and lined with ermine; and flesh-colored silk petticoats, trimmed with black velvet. The favorite color appears to be decidedly crimson.

It is noticeable, that while all the more valuable presents of Pescara to Vittoria are priced, nothing is said of the value of her gifts to the bridegroom. Are we to see in this an indication of a greater delicacy of feeling on the part of the lady?

So the priests did their office—a part of the celebration, which, curiously enough, we learn from Passeri, was

often in those days at Naples, deferred, sometimes for years, till after the consummation of the marriage—the Pantagruelian feastings were got through, the guests departed, boat load after boat load, from the rocky shore of Ischia; and the little island, restored after the unusual hubbub to its wonted quiet, was left to be the scene of as happy a honeymoon as the most romantic of novel readers could wish for her favorite heroine.

CHAPTER III.

Vittoria's Married Life.—Pescara goes where Glory awaits Him.—The Rout of Ravenna.—Pescara in Prison turns Penman.—His "Dialogo di amore."—Vittoria's Poetical Epistle to her Husband.—Vittoria and the Marchese del Vasto.—Three Cart-loads of Ladies, and three Mule-loads of Sweetmeats.—Character of Pescara.—His Cruelty.—Anecdote in Proof of it.

The two years which followed, Vittoria always looked back on as the only truly happy portion of her life, and many are the passages of her poems which recall their tranquil and unbroken felicity, a sweet dream, from which she was too soon to be awakened to the ordinary vicissitudes of sixteenth century life. The happiest years of

individuals, as of nations, afford least materials for history, and of Vittoria's two years of honeymoon in Ischia, the whole record is that she was happy; and she wrote no poetry.

Early in 1512 came the waking from this pleasant dream. Pescara was, of course, to be a soldier. In his position not to have begun to fight, as soon as his beard was fairly grown, would have been little short of infamy. So he set forth to join the army in Lombardy, in company with his father-in-law, Fabrizio. Of course there was an army in Lombardy, where towns were being besieged, fields laid waste, and glory to be had for the winning. There always was, in those good old times of course. French, Swiss, Spanish, German, Venetian, Papal, and Milanese troops were fighting each other, with changes of alliances and sides almost as frequent and as confusing as the changing of

partners in a cotillion. It is troublesome and not of much consequence to understand who were just then friends and who foes, and what were the exact objects all the different parties had in cutting each other's throats. And it will be quite sufficient to say that the Duchy of Milan was at that moment the chief bone of contention,—that the principal pretenders to the glory of "annexing" it were the King of France and the King of Spain, who was now also King of Naples—that the Pope was just then allied with Spain, and the Venetians with France, and that Italy generally was preparing for the destiny she has worked out for herself, by the constant endeavor to avail herself of the destroying presence of these foreign troops, and their rivalries, for the prosecution of her internal quarrels, and the attainment of equally low and

yet more unjustifiable, because fratricidal aims.

Pescara, as a Neapolitan subject of the King of Spain, joined the army opposed to the French, under the walls of Ravenna. Vittoria, though her subsequent writings prove how much the parting cost her, showed how thoroughly she was a soldier's daughter and a soldier's wife. There had been some suggestion, it seems, that the marquis, as the sole surviving scion of an ancient and noble name, might fairly consider it his duty not to subject it to the risk of extinction by exposing his life in the field. The young soldier, however, wholly refused to listen to such counsels; and his wife strongly supported his view of the course honor counselled him to follow, by advice, which a young and beautiful wife, who was to remain surrounded by a brilliant circle of wits and poets, would scarcely have

ventured on offering, had she not felt a perfect security from all danger of being misinterpreted, equally creditable to wife and husband.

So the young soldier took for a motto on his shield, the well-known "With this, or on this;" and having expended, we are told, much care and cash on a magnificent equipment, was at once appointed to the command of the light cavalry. The knowledge and experience necessary for such a position comes by nature, it must be supposed, to the descendant of a long line of noble knights, as surely as pointing does to the scion of a race of pointers. But the young warrior's episcopal[1] biographer cursorily mentions, that certain old and trusty veterans, who had obtained their military science by experience, and not by right of birth, were attached to his person.

[1] Giovio, Bp. of Como, Life of Pescara, book i.

The general of light cavalry arrived at the camp at an unfortunate moment. The total defeat of the United Spanish and Papal army by the French before Ravenna on the 9th of April, 1512, immediately followed. Fabrizio Colonna and his son-in-law were both made prisoners. The latter had been left for dead on the field, covered with wounds, which subsequently gave occasion to Isabella of Aragon, Duchess of Milan, to say, "I would fain be a man, Signor Marchese, if it were only to receive such wounds as yours in the face, that I might see if they would become me as they do you." [1]

Pescara, when picked up from the field, was carried a prisoner to Milan, where, by means of the good offices and powerful influence of Trivulzio, who had married Beatrice d'Avalos, Pes-

[1] Filocalo, MS. Life of Pescara, cited by Visconti, lxxxii.

cara's aunt, and was now a general in the service of France, his detention was rendered as little disagreeable as possible, and he was, as soon as his wounds were healed, permitted to ransom himself for six thousand ducats.[1]

During his short confinement he amused his leisure by composing a "Dialogo d'Amore," which he inscribed and sent to his wife. The Bishop of Como, his biographer, testifies that this work was exceedingly pleasant reading —"summæ jucunditatis"—and full of grave and witty conceits and thoughts. The world, however, has seen fit to allow this treasury of wit to perish, notwithstanding the episcopal criticism. And in all probability the world was in the right. If, indeed, the literary general of light horse had written his own real thoughts and speculations on love, there might have been some interest in

[1] Giovio, lib. i.

seeing a sixteenth century soldier's views on that ever interesting subject. But we may be quite certain, that the Dialogo, "stuffed full," as Giovio says, "of grave sentiments and exquisite conceits," contained only a reproduction of the classic banalities, and ingenious absurdities, which were current in the fashionable literature of the day. Yet it must be admitted, that the employment of his leisure in any such manner, and still more, the dedication of his labors on such a subject to his wife, are indications of an amount of cultivation and right feeling, which would hardly have been found, either one or the other, among many of the preux chevaliers, his brothers-in-arms.

Meanwhile, Vittoria, on her part, wrote a poetical epistle to her husband in prison, which is the first production of her pen that has reached us. It is written in Dante's "terza rima," and

consisted of 112 lines. Both Italian and French critics have expressed highly favorable judgments of this little poem. And it may be admitted that the lines are elegant, classical, well-turned, and ingenious. But those who seek something more than all this in poetry—who look for passion, high and noble thoughts, happy illustration or deep analysis of human feeling, will find nothing of the sort. That Vittoria did feel acutely her husband's misfortune, and bitterly regret his absence from her, there is every reason to believe. But she is unable to express these sentiments naturally or forcibly. She, in all probability, made no attempt to do so, judging from the models on which she had been taught to form her style, that when she sat down to make poetry, the aim to be kept in view was a very different one. Hence we have talk of Hector and Achilles, Eolus,

Sirens, and marine deities, Pompey, Cornelia, Cato, Martia, and Mithridates —a parade of all the treasures of the schoolroom. The pangs of the wife left lonely in her home are in neatly antithetical phrase contrasted with the dangers and toils of the husband in the field. Then we have a punning allusion in her own name :—

"Se Vittoria volevi, io t' era appresso ;
Ma tu, lasciando me, lasciasti lei."

"If victory was thy desire, I was by thy side ; but in leaving me, thou didst leave also her."

The best, because the simplest and most natural lines, are the following :—

"Seguir si deve il sposo e dentro e fora ;
E, s' egli pate affanno, ella patisca ;
Se lieto, lieta ; e se vi more, mora.
A quel che arrisca l'un, l' altro s' arrisca ;
Eguali in vita, eguali siano in morte ;
E ciò che avviene a lui, a lei sortisca."

"At home or abroad the wife should follow her husband; and if he suffers distress, she should suffer; should be joyful if he is joyful, and should die if he dies. The danger confronted by the one should be confronted by the other; equals in life, they should be equal in death; and that which happens to him should be her lot also,"—a mere farrago of rhetorical prettinesses, as cold as a school-boy's prize verses, and unanimated by a spark of genuine feeling; although the writer was as truly affectionate a wife as ever man had.

But, although all that Vittoria wrote, and all that the vast number of the poets and poetesses, her contemporaries, wrote, was obnoxious to the same remarks; still it will be seen, that in the maturity of her powers she could do better than this. Her religious poetry may be said, generally, to be much superior to her love verses; either be-

cause they were composed when her mind had grown to its full stature, or, as seems probable, because, model wife as she was, the subject took a deeper hold of her mind, and stirred the depths of her heart more powerfully.

Very shortly after the despatch of her poetical epistle, Vittoria was overjoyed by the unexpected return of her husband. And again for a brief interval she considered herself the happiest of women.

One circumstance indeed there was to mar the entirety of her contentment. She was still childless. And it seems, that the science of that day, ignorantly dogmatical, undertook to assert, that she would continue to be so. Both husband and wife seemed to have submitted to the award undoubtingly; and the dictum, however rashly uttered, was justified by the event.

Under these circumstances, Vittoria

undertook the education of Alphonso d'Avalos, Marchese del Vasto, a young cousin of her husband's. The task was a sufficiently arduous one;[1] for the boy, beautiful, it is recorded, as an angel, and endowed with excellent capabilities of all sorts, was so wholly unbroken, and of so violent and ungovernable a disposition, that he had been the despair and terror of all who had hitherto attempted to educate him. Vittoria thought that she saw in the wild and passionate boy the materials of a worthy man. The event fully justified her judgment, and proved the really superior powers of mind she must have brought to the accomplishment of it. Alphonso became a soldier of renown, not untinctured by those literary tastes which so remarkably distinguished his gentle preceptress. A strong and lasting affection grew between them; and

[1] Visconti, p. 77.

Vittoria, proud with good reason of her work, was often wont to say, that the reproach of being childless ought not to be deemed applicable to her whose moral nature might well be said to have brought forth that of her pupil.

Pescara's visit to Naples was a very short one. Early in 1513, we find him again with the armies in Lombardy, taking part in most of the mischief and glory going.

Under the date of July the 4th in that year, the gossiping Naples weaver who rarely fails to note the doings of the Neapolitan General of light horse with infinite pride and admiration, has preserved for us a rather picturesque little bit of Ariosto-flavored camp life. The Spanish army, under Don Raymond di Cardona, who, on Consalvo's death had succeeded him as Viceroy of Naples, was on its march from Peschiera to Verona, when a messenger

from the beautiful young Marchioness of Mantua came to the General-in-chief to say that she wished to see those celebrated Spanish troops, who were marching under his banners, and was then waiting their passage in the vineyards of the Castle of Villafranca. "A certain gentle lady of Mantua, named the Signora Laura, with whom Don Raymond was in love," writes the weaver, was with the Marchioness; and much pleased was he at the message. So word was passed to the various captains; and when the column reached the spot, where the Marchioness with a great number of ladies and cavaliers of Mantua were reposing in the shade of the vines, "Don Ferrante d'Alarcone, as Chief Marshal, with his bâton in his hand, made all the troops halt, and placed themselves in order of battle; and the Signor Marchese di Pescara marched at the head of the infan-

try, with a pair of breeches cut after the Swiss fashion, and a plume on his head, and a two-handed sword in his hand, and all the standards were unfurled." And when the Marchioness from among the vines looking down through the chequered shade on to the road saw that all was in order, she and her ladies got into three carts, so that there came out of the vineyard, says Passeri, three cartsful of ladies surrounded by the cavaliers of Mantua on horseback. There they came very slowly jolting over the cultivated ground, those three heavy bullock carts, with their primitive wheels of one solid circular piece of wood, and their huge cream-colored oxen with enormous horned heads gaily decorated, as Leopold Robert shows them to us, and the brilliant tinted dresses of the laughing bevy drawn by them, glancing gaudily in the sun-light among the soberer coloring of

the vineyards in their summer pride of green. Then Don Raymond and Pescara advanced to the carts, and handed from them the Marchioness and Donna Laura, who mounted on handsomely equipped jennets prepared for them. It does not appear that this attention was extended to any of the other ladies, who must therefore be supposed to have remained sitting in the carts, while the Marchioness and the favored Donna Laura rode through the ranks "con multa festa et gloria." And when she had seen all, with much pleasure and admiration, on a given signal three mules loaded with sweetmeats were led forward, with which the gay Marchioness "regaled all the captains." Then all the company with much content, —excepting, it is to be feared, the soldiers, who had to stand at arms under the July sun, while their officers were eating sugar-plums, and Don Raymond

and Donna Laura were saying and swallowing sweet things,—took leave of each other, the army pursuing its march towards Verona, and the Marchioness and her ladies returning in their carts to Mantua.[1]

The other scattered notices of Pescara's doings during his campaign are of a less festive character. They show him to have been a hard and cruel man, reckless of human suffering, and eminent even among his fellow captains for the ferocity, and often wantonness of the ravages and wide-spread misery he wrought. On more than one occasion, Passeri winds up his narrative of some destruction of a town, or desolation of a fertile and cultivated district, by the remark, that the cruelty committed was worse than Turks would have been guilty of. Yet this same Passeri, an artisan, belonging to a class which had

[1] Passeri, p. 197.

all to suffer and nothing to gain from such atrocities, writes, when chronicling this same Pescara's[1] death, that "on that day died, I would have you know, gentle readers, the most glorious and honored captain that the world has seen for the last hundred years." It is curious to observe how wholly the popular mind was enslaved to the prejudices and conventional absurdities of the ruling classes; how entirely the feelings of the masses were in unison with those of the caste which oppressed them; how little reason they conceived they had to complain under the most intolerable treatment, and how little hope of progressive amelioration there was from the action of native-bred public opinion.

Bishop Giovio, the biographer and panegyrist of Pescara admits, that he was a stern and cruelly-severe disci-

[1] Passeri, p. 326.

plinarian ; and mentions an anecdote in proof of it. A soldier was brought before him for having entered a house *en route* for the purpose of plundering. The General ordered that his ears should be cut off. The culprit remonstrated ; and begged, with many entreaties, to be spared so dishonoring and ignominious a punishment, saying in his distress that death itself would have been more tolerable.

"The grace demanded is granted," rejoined Pescara instantly, with grim pleasantry. "Take this soldier, who is so careful of his honor, and hang him to that tree ! "

In vain did the wretch beg not to be taken at his word so cruelly, no entreaties sufficed to change the savage decree.

It will be well that we should bear in mind these indications of the essential nature of this great and glorious

captain, who had studied those ingenuous arts which soften the character, and do not suffer men to be ferocious, as the poet assures us, and who could write dialogues on love, when we come to consider the curious phenomenon of Vittoria's unmeasured love for her husband.

CHAPTER IV.

Society in Ischia.--Bernardo Tasso's sonnet thereon.—How a wedding was celebrated in Naples in 1517.—A Sixteenth Century trousseau.—Sack of Genoa.—The Battle of Pavia.—Italian conspiracy against Charles V.—Character of Pescara.—Honor in 1525.—Pescara's treason.—Vittoria's sentiments on the occasion.—Pescara's infamy.---Patriotism unknown in Italy in the Sixteenth Century.—No such sentiment to be found in the writings of Vittoria.—Evil influence of her husband's character on her mind.—Death of Pescara.

MEANWHILE, Vittoria continued her peaceful and quiet life in Ischia, lonely indeed, as far as the dearest affections of her heart was concerned, but cheered and improved by the society of that select knot of poets and men of learn-

ing, whom Costanza di Francavilla, not unassisted by the presence of Vittoria, attracted to her little island court. We find Musefilo, Filocalo, Giovio, Minturno, Cariteo, Rota, Sanazzaro, and Bernardo Tasso, among those who helped to make this remote rock celebrated throughout Europe at that day, as one of the best loved haunts of Apollo and the Muses,—to speak in the phraseology of the time.

Many among them have left passages recording the happy days spent on that fortunate island. The social circle was doubtless a charming and brilliant one, and the more so, as contrasted with the general tone and habits of the society of the period. But the style of the following sonnet by Bernardo Tasso, selected by Visconti as a specimen of the various effusions by members of the select circle upon the subject, while it accurately illustrates

the prevailing modes of thought and diction of that period, will hardly fail to suggest the idea of a comparison—mutatis mutandis—between this company of sixteenth century choice spirits, and that which assembled, and provoked so severe a lashing in the memorable Hôtel de Rambouillet, more than an hundred years afterwards. But an Italian Molière is as wholly impossible in the nature of things, as a French Dante. And the sixteenth century swarm of Petrarchists and Classicists have, unlike true prophets, found honor in their own country.

Gentle Bernardo celebrates in this wise these famed Ischia meetings :—

"Superbo scoglio, altero e bel ricetto
Di tanti chiari eroi, d'imperadori,
Onde raggi di gloria escono fuori,
Ch' ogni altro lume fan scuro e negletto;
Se per vera virtute al ben perfetto
Salir si puote ed agli eterni onori,
Queste più d' altre degne alme e migliori

V' andran, che chiudi nel petroso petto.
Il lume è in te dell' armi; in te s'asconde
Casta beltà, valore e cortesia,
Quanta mai vide il tempo, o diede il cielo.
Ti sian secondi i fati, e il vento e l' onde
Rendanti onore, e l' aria tua natia
Abbia sempre temprato il caldo e il gelo!"

Which may be thus "done into English," for the sake of giving those unacquainted with the language of the original, some tolerably accurate idea of Messer Bernardo's euphuisms.

"Proud rock! the loved retreat of such a band
Of earth's best, noblest, greatest, that their light
Pales other glories to the dazzled sight,
And like a beacon shines throughout the land,
If truest worth can reach the perfect state,
And man may hope to merit heavenly rest,
Those whom thou harborest in thy rocky breast,
First in the race will reach the heavenly gate.
Glory of martial deeds is thine. In thee,
Brightest the world e'er saw, or heaven gave,
Dwell chastest beauty, worth, and courtesy!
Well be it with thee! May both wind and sea
Respect thee: and thy native air and wave
Be temper'd ever by a genial sky!"

Such is the poetry of one of the

brightest stars of the Ischian galaxy; and the incredulous reader is assured that it would be easy to find much worse sonnets by the ream, among the extant productions of the crowd, who were afflicted with the prevalent Petrarch mania of that epoch. The statistical returns of the ravages of this malady, given by the poetical registrar-general Crescimbeni, would astonish even Paternoster Row at the present day. But Vittoria Colonna, though a great number of her sonnets do not rise above the level of Bernardo Tasso in the foregoing specimen, could occasionally, especially in her later years, reach a much higher tone, as will, it is hoped, be shown in a future chapter.

It has been suggested, that the religious feelings which inspired her latter poetry, were, though not more genuine, yet more absorbing than the conjugal love, which is almost exclu

sively the theme of her earlier efforts. And it is at all events certain, that the former so engrossed her whole mind, as to sever her in a great measure from the world. This the so fervently sung pangs of separation from her husband do not appear to have effected.

Besides the constant society of the select few, of whom mention has been made, there were occasionally gayer doings in Ischia ; as when in February, 1517, a brilliant festival was held there on occasion of the marriage[1] of Don Alfonso Piccolomini with Costanza d'Avalos, the sister of Vittoria's pupil, the Marchese del Vasto. And occasionally the gentle poetess, necessitated probably by the exigencies of her social position, would leave her beloved Ischia for brilliant and noisy Naples. And when these necessities did occur, it is recorded, that the magnificence

[1] Passeri, p. 234.

and pomp, with which the beautiful young wife made her appearance among her fellow nobles, was such, as few of them could equal, and none surpass.

One of these occasions is worth specially noting, for the sake of the detailed account, which has been preserved of it by that humble and observant chronicler, our friend the weaver. For it contains traits and indications, curiously and amusingly illustrative of the life and manners of that time in Naples.

It was December 6, 1517, and high festival was to be held for the marriage of the King of Poland with Donna Bona Sforza. The guests comprised the whole nobility of Naples; and worthy Passeri begins his account with an accurate Morning-Post-like statement of the costume of each in the order of their arrival at the church. Doubtless the eager weaver, a shrewd

judge of such matters, had pushed himself into a good place in the front row of the crowd, who lined the roadway of the noble guests, and might have been seen with tablets in hand, taking notes with busy excitement to be transferred to his journal at night. One after another the high-sounding titles, very many of them Spanish, are set forth, as they swept by, brilliant with gold and every brightest tint of costly fabric, and are swallowed up by the dark nave of the huge church.

It is not necessary to attempt a translation of all the changes Master Passeri rings on velvet, satin, gold, brocade, and costly furs. Merely noting that the bride's dress is estimated to be worth seven thousand ducats, we let them all pass on till "The illustrious lady the Signora Vittoria, Marchioness of Pescara," arrives. She is mounted on a black and white jennet, with hous-

ings of crimson velvet, fringed with gold. She is accompanied by six ladies in waiting, uniformly clad in azure damask, and attended by six grooms on foot, with cloaks and jerkins of blue and yellow satin. The lady herself wears a robe of brocaded crimson velvet, with large branches of beaten gold on it. She has a crimson satin cap, with a head-dress of wrought gold above it; and around her waist is a girdle of beaten gold.

Some of the assembled company, one might think, would require their girdles to be of some more yielding material. For, on quitting the church, they sat down to table at six in the evening, "and began to eat," says Passeri, "and left off at five in the morning!" The order and materials of this more than Homeric feast, are handed down to posterity with scrupulous accuracy by our chronicler. But the stupendous

menu, in its entirety, would be almost as intolerable to the reader, as having to sit out the eleven hours' orgy in person. A few particulars culled here and there, partly because they are curious, and partly because the meaning of the words is more intelligible than is the case in many instances, even to a Neapolitan of the present day, will amply suffice.

There were twenty-seven courses. Then the quantity of sugar used, was made, as we have noticed on a former occasion at Rome, a special subject of glorification. There was "puttagio Ungarese," Hungary soup, stuffed peacocks, quince pies, and thrushes served with bergamottes, which were not pears, as an English reader might perhaps suppose, but small highly scented citrons, of the kind, from which the perfume of that name is, or is supposed, to be made. With the "bianco

mangiare," our familiarity with "blanc-mange," seems at first sight to make us more at home. But we are thrown out by finding, that it was eaten in 1517, "con mostarda." The dishes of pastry seem according to our habits, much out of proportion to the rest. Sweet preparations also, whether of animal or vegetable composition, seem greatly to preponderate. At the queen's own table, a fountain gave forth odoriferous waters. But, to all the guests, perfumed water for the hands was served at the removal of the first tables.

"And thus having passed this first day with infinite delight," the whole party passed a second, and a third, in the same manner!

That eleven hours should have been spent in eating and drinking is of course simply impossible. Large interludes must be supposed to have been occupied

by music, and very likely by recitations of poetry. On the first day a considerable time must have been taken up by a part of the ceremonial, which was doubtless far more interesting to the fairer half of the assembly than the endless gormandising. This was a display, article by article, of the bride's trousseau, which took place while the guests were still sitting at table. Passeri minutely catalogues the whole exhibition. The list begins with twenty pairs of sheets, all embroidered with different colored silks; and seven pairs of sheets, "d'olanda," of Dutch linen, fringed with gold. Then come an hundred and five shirts of Dutch linen, all embroidered with silk of divers colors; and seventeen shirts of cambric, "cambraia," with a selvage of gold, as a present for the royal bridegroom. There were twelve head-dresses, and six ditto, ornamented with gold

and colored silk, for his majesty; an hundred and twenty handkerchiefs, embroidered with gold cord; ninety-six caps, ornamented with gold and silk, of which thirty-six were for the king. There were eighteen counterpanes of silk, one of which was wrought "alla moresca;" forty-eight sets of stamped leather hangings, thirty-six others "of the ostrich egg pattern," sixteen "of the artichoke pattern," and thirty-six of silk tapestry. Beside all these hundred sets, there were eight large pieces of Flanders arras, "con seta assai." They represented the seven works of mercy, and were valued at a thousand golden ducats. There was a litter, carved and gilt, with its four mattrasses of blue embroidered satin. Passing on to the plate department, we have a silver waiter, two large pitchers wrought in relief, three basins, an ewer, and six large cups, twelve

large plates, twelve ditto of second size, and twenty-four soup plates made "alia franzese," a massive salt-cellar, a box of napkins, spoons, and jugs, four large candlesticks, two large flasks, a silver pail, and cup of gold worth two hundred ducats for the king's use. Then for the chapel, a furniture for the altar, with the history of the three kings embroidered in gold on black velvet; a missal on parchment, with illuminated miniatures, bound in velvet ornamented with silver clasps and bosses; and a complete set of requisites for the service in silver. Then, returning to the personal department, came twenty-one gowns, each minutely described, and one of blue satin spangled with bees in solid gold, particularly specified as being worth four thousand ducats.

When all this and much more had been duly admired, there were brought forward an empty casket and fifteen

trays, in which were an hundred thousand ducats of gold, which were put into the casket "before all the Signori." But our chronicler is compelled by his love of truth to add reluctantly that there were several false ducats among them.[1]

It is evident from the nature of many of the articles in the above list, that this "trousseau" was not merely a bride's fitting out purchased for the occasion, but was a collection of all the Lady Bona's chattel property, and represented, as was then usually the case with all wealthy persons, a very large, if not the principal part, of the worldly goods.

It may well be imagined, that Vittoria was not sorry to return to the quiet and intellectual society of Ischia after these tremendous three days at Naples. There she was cheered from

[1] See Note 2.

time to time by three or four short visits from her husband; and by continual tidings of his increasing reputation and advancement in dignity and wealth; a prosperity which she considered dearly purchased by his almost continual absence. The death of her father Fabrizio in March, 1520, and that of her mother in 1522, made her feel more poignantly this loneliness of heart.

In October of 1522, Pescara made a flying visit to his wife and home. He was with her three days only, and then hastened back to the army. It was the last time she ever saw him. His career with the army meantime was very glorious. In May, 1522, he took and sacked Genoa; "con la maggior crodelitate de lo mundo," writes admiring Passeri. The plundering lasted a day and a half; and "da che lo mundo fo mundo," never was seen a sacking of so great riches, "for there was not a

single solder who did not at the least get a thousand ducats." Then, with the year 1525 came, on the 24th of February, the memorable day of Pavia, which was so glorious that, as Passeri writes, the desolation inflicted by it on the country around was such, that neither house, tree, nor vine was to be seen for miles. All was burned. Few living creatures were to be met with, and those subsisting miserably on roots.

The result of that "field of honor" is sufficiently well known. Pescara, who received three wounds, though none of them serious, in the battle, considered that he was ill-used, when the royal captive Francis was taken out of his hands to Spain, and made complaints on the subject to his master Charles V, who had succeeded Ferdinand on the thrones of Spain and Naples in 1516. He was now, however, at the age of

thirty-five, general-in-chief for that monarch in Lombardy, and enjoyed his perfect confidence, when circumstances arose calculated to try his fidelity severely. Whether that, almost the only virtue recognized, honored, and professed by his own class at that day, remained altogether intact and unblemished is doubtful. But it is certain, that in any view of the case, his conduct was such as would consign him to utter infamy in any somewhat more morally enlightened age than his own, and such as any noble-hearted man, however untaught, would have instinctively shrunk from even then.

The circumstances briefly were as follows :—

Clement VII, who had succeeded to the Popedom in 1523, had, after much trimming and vacillation between Francis I and Charles V, become, like the rest of Italy, exceed-

ingly alarmed at the preponderating power of Charles, after the discomfiture of the French at Pavia. Now the discontent of Pescara, mentioned above, being notorious, the Pope and his counsellors, especially Giberti, Bishop of Verona, and Morone, Chancellor and Prime Minister of the Duke of Milan, thought that it might not be impossible to induce him to turn traitor to Charles, and make use of the army under his command to crush once and for ever the Spanish power in Italy. The prime mover and agent in this conspiracy was Morone, who had the reputation of being one of the profoundest and most far-sighted statesmen of his day. Guicciardini[1] has recorded, that he (the historian) had often heard Morone declare, that there did not exist a worse or more faithless man in all Italy than Pescara. The conspir-

[1] Ist. Ital., lib. xvi. cap. 4.

ing Chancellor, therefore, being empowered by the Pope to promise the malcontent general the throne of Naples as the price of his treason, thought that he might well venture to make the proposal.

Pescara received his overtures favorably, saying, that *if he could be satisfied that what was proposed to him could be done without injury to his honor*, he would willingly undertake it, and accept the reward offered to him.[1] Upon this reply being communicated to the Pope, a couple of cardinals forthwith wrote to the Marchese, assuring him that the treason required of him was, "according to the dispositions and ordinances of the laws, civil as well as canon,"[2] perfectly consistent with the nicest honor. Meanwhile, however, it chanced, that one Messer Gismondo

[1] Varchi, Storia Fiorentina, vol. i. p. 88, edit. Firenze, 1843.
[2] Varchi, p. 89.

Santi, who had been sent by the conspirators with letters on the subject into France or Switzerland, was murdered for the purpose of robbery, by an innkeeper with whom he lodged at Bergamo, and was buried under the stair-case, as was discovered some years afterwards. And as no tidings were heard of this messenger, all engaged in the plot, and Pescara among them, suspected that he had been waylaid for the sake of his dispatches, and that thus all was probably made known to Charles. Thereupon Pescara immediately wrote to the Emperor, revealing the whole conspiracy, and declaring that he had given ear to their proposals only for the purpose of obtaining full information of the conspirators' designs.

Such is the version of the story given by Varchi, probably the most trustworthy of all the numerous contemporary historians. He adds, "it is not un-

known to me, that many say, and perhaps think, that the Marchese, acting loyally from the beginning, had all along given the Emperor true information of every thing; all which I, for my part, knowing nothing further than what I have said, will not undertake to deny. It would, indeed, be agreeable to me to believe that it was so, rather than that the character of so great a soldier should be stained with so foul a blot. Though, indeed, I know not what sort of loyalty or sincerity that may be, which consists in having deceived and betrayed by vile trickery and fraud a Pope, who, if nothing else, was at least very friendly to him, a republic such as that of Venice, and many other personages, for the sake of acquiring favor with his master. This I know well, that the lady Vittoria Colonna, his wife, a woman of the highest character, and

abounding in all the virtues which can adorn her sex, had no sooner heard of the intrigue on foot, than, wholly untempted by the brilliant hope hung out to her, she with infinite sorrow and anxiety wrote most warmly to her husband, urging him to bethink him of his hitherto unstained character, and to weigh well what he was about, assuring him that as far as she was concerned, she had no wish to be the wife of a king, but only of a loyal and upright man."

This letter from Vittoria, urging her husband not to be seduced to swerve from the path of honor and duty, is recorded by most of the writers; and Visconti asserts, that it was the means of inducing Pescara to abandon the idea of betraying his sovereign. At all events, the existence of such a letter is very strong evidence that Pescara had *not* from the first informed Charles of the plot, but *had* at least hesitated whether

he should not join in it, inasmuch as his communications to her upon the subject had given her reason to fear lest he should do so.

On the other hand, it is fair to observe, that several of those concerned in the intrigue saw reason to suspect the possibility of Pescara's having from the first listened to their overtures only to betray them; as is proved by extant letters from one to another of them.[1]

Perhaps this, too, was consistent with the nicest honor, as defined "by the ordinances of canon and civil law." But whether he were a traitor to his king or not, he was determined to shrink from no depth of treachery toward his dupes, that could serve to ingratiate him with his master. While still feigning to accede to their proposals, he sent to Morone to come to him

[1] Lettere de Principi, vol. i. p. 87. See Letters from Giberto to Gismondo Santo, and to Domenico Sanli.

at Novara, that all might be arranged between them. Morone, against the advice of many of his friends, and, as Guicciardini thought,[1] with a degree of imprudence astonishing in so practised and experienced a man, went to the meeting. He was received in the most cordial manner by Pescara, who, as soon as they were alone together, led him to speak of all the details of the proposed plan. The trap was complete; for behind the hangings of the room in which they were sitting, he had hidden Antonio da Leyva, one of the generals of the Spanish army, who arrested him as he was quitting the house, and took him to the prison of Novara, where Pescara the next day had the brazen audacity to examine as a judge the man whom a few hours previously he had talked with as an accomplice.[2]

[1] Storia, lib. xvii. chap. iv. [2] Guicciardini, lib. xvii. chap. iv.

Surely, whichever version of the story may be believed, as to Pescara's original intentions, there is enough here in evidence to go far towards justifying Chancellor Morone's opinion, that he was one of the worst and most faithless men in Italy. Some modern Italian writers, with little moral, and less historical knowledge, have rested the gravamen of the charge against him on his want of patriotic Italian feeling on the occasion. In the first place, no such motive, however laudable in itself, could have justified him in being guilty of the treason proposed to him. In the second place, the class of ideas in question can hardly be found to have had any existence at that period, although distinct traces of such may be met with in Italian history 200 years earlier. Certainly the Venetian Senate were not actuated by any such; and still more absurd would

it be to attribute them to Pope Clement. It is possible that Morone, and perhaps still more, Giberti, may not have been untinctured by them.

But Pescara was one of the last men, even had he been as high-minded as we find him to have been the reverse, in whom to look for Italian "*fuori i barbari*" enthusiasm. Of noble Spanish blood, his family had always been the counsellors, friends, and close adherents of a Spanish dynasty at Naples, and the man himself was especially Spanish in all his sympathies and ideas. "He adopted,"[1] says Giovio, "in all his costume the Spanish fashion, and always preferred to speak in that language to such a degree, that with Italians, and even with Vittoria his wife, he talked Spanish." And elsewhere he is said to have been in the habit of expressing his regret that he was not born a Spaniard.

[1] Vita. lib. I.

Such habits and sentiments would have been painful enough to a wife, a Roman and a Colonna, if Vittoria had been sufficiently in advance of her age to have conceived patriotic ideas of Italian nationality. But though her pursuits and studies were infinitely more likely to have led her mind to such thoughts, than were those of the actors in the political drama of the time to generate any such notions in them, yet no trace of any sentiment of the kind is to be found in her writings. Considering the extent of the field over which her mind had travelled, her acquaintance with classical literature, and with the history of her own country, it may seem surprising that a nature, certainly capable of high and noble aspirations, should have remained untouched by one of the noblest. That it was so is a striking proof of the utter insensibility of the age to any feelings of the sort.

It is possible, too, that the tendencies and modes of thought of her husband on the subject of Italy may have exercised a repressing influence in this respect on Vittoria's mind; for who does not know how powerfully a woman's intelligence and heart may be elevated or degraded by the nature of the object of her affections; and, doubtless, to Vittoria as to so many another of every age do the admirable lines of the poet address themselves:—

"Thou shalt lower to his level day by day,
What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathize with clay.
As the husband is, the wife is; thou art mated with a clown,
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag thee down."

When we come to examine the tone of sentiment prevailing in Vittoria's poetry, other indications of this deteriorating influence will be perceptible,

and if much of nobleness, purity, high aspiration be nevertheless still found in her, this partial immunity from the evil influence must be attributed to the trifling duration of that portion of her life passed in her husband's company.

Pescara was not unrewarded for the infamy with which he covered himself in the service of his master. He obtained the rank of Generalissimo of the imperial forces in Italy. But he enjoyed the gratification for a very little while. In the latter end of that year, he fell into a state of health which seems to have been not well accounted for by the medical science of that day. The wounds he had received at Pavia in the previous February, are specially described by Passeri as having been very slight. Some writers have supposed that either shame for the part he had acted in the Morone

affair; or, with greater probability, misgiving as to the possibility of the Emperor's discovering the real truth of the facts, (for the fate of Gismondo Santi and his papers was not known yet), was the real cause of his illness. It seems clearly to have been of the nature of a sudden and premature decay of all the vital forces.

Towards the end of the year he abandoned all hope of recovery, and sent to his wife to desire her to come to him with all speed. He was then at Milan. She set out instantly on her painful journey, and had reached Viterbo on her way northwards, when she was met by the news of his death.

It took place on the 25th of November, 1525. He was buried on the 30th of that month, says Giovio, at Milan; but the body was shortly afterwards transported with great pomp and magnificence to Naples.

CHAPTER V.

Vittoria, a Widow, with the Nuns of San Silvestro.—Returns to Ischia.—Her Poetry divisible into two classes.—Specimens of her Sonnets.—They rapidly attain celebrity throughout Italy.—Vittoria's sentiments towards her Husband.—Her unblemished Character.—Platonic Love.—The Love Poetry of the Sixteenth Century.

VITTORIA became thus a widow in the thirty-sixth year of her age. She was still in the full pride of her beauty, as contemporary writers assert, and as two extant medals, struck at Milan shortly before her husband's death, attest. One of them presents the bust of Pescara on the obverse, and that of Vittoria on the reverse; the other has the same por-

trait of her on the obverse, and a military trophy on the reverse. The face represented is a very beautiful one, and seen thus in profile is perhaps more pleasing than the portrait, which has been spoken of in a previous chapter. She was moreover even now probably the most celebrated woman in Italy, although she had done little as yet to achieve that immense reputation which awaited her a few years later. Very few probably of her sonnets were written before the death of her husband.

But the exalted rank and prominent position of her own family, the high military grade and reputation of her husband, the wide-spread hopes and fears of which he had recently been the centre in the affair of the conspiracy, joined to the fame of her talents, learning, and virtues, which had been made the subject of enthusiastic praise by nearly all the Ischia knot of poets and wits,

rendered her a very conspicuous person in the eyes of all Italy. Her husband's premature and unexpected death added a source of interest of yet another kind to her person. A young, beautiful, and very wealthy widow, gave rise to quite as many hopes, speculations, and designs in the sixteenth century as in any other.

But Vittoria's first feeling, on receiving that fatal message at Viterbo, was, that she could never again face that world, which was so ready to open its arms to her. Escape from the world, solitude, a cell, whose walls should resemble, as nearly as might be, those of the grave, since that asylum was denied to her, was her only wish. And she hastened, stunned by her great grief, to Rome, with the intention of throwing herself into a cloister. The convent of San Silvestro in Capite—so called from the supposed possession by the com-

munity of the Baptist's head—had always been a special object of veneration to the Colonna family; and there she sought a retreat. Her many friends, well knowing the desperation of her affliction, feared, that acting under the spur of its first violence, she would take the irrevocable step of pronouncing the vows. That a Vittoria Colonna should be so lost to the world was not to be thought of. So Jacopo Sadoleto, Bishop of Carpentras, and afterwards made a cardinal by Pope Paul III, one of the most learned men of his day, himself a poet, and an intimate friend of Vittoria, hastened to Pope Clement, whose secretary he was at the time, and obtained from him a brief addressed to the abbess and nuns of San Silvestro, enjoining them to receive into their house and console to the best of their ability the Marchesana di Pescara, "omnibus spiritualibus et temporalibus consola-

tionibus," but forbidding them, under pain of the greater excommunication, to permit her to take the veil, "impetu potius sui doloris, quam maturo consilio circa mutationem vestium vidualium in monasticas."

This brief is dated the 7th December, 1525.

She remained with the sisters of San Silvestro till the autumn of the following year; and would have further deferred returning into a world which the conditions of the times made less than ever tempting to her, had not her brother Ascanio, now her only remaining natural protector, taken her from the convent to Marino, in consequence of the Colonna clan being once again at war with the Pope, as partisans of the Emperor.

On the 20th of September, 1526, this ever turbulent family raised a tumult in Rome to the cry of "Imperio! Im-

perio! Libertà! Libertà! Colonna! Colonna!" and sacked the Vatican, and every house belonging to the Orsini;[1] the old clan hatred showing itself as usual on every pretext and opportunity.

The result was a papal decree, depriving Cardinal Colonna of his hat; and declaring confiscated all the estates of the family. Deeply grieved by all these excesses, both by the lawless violence of her kinsmen, and by the punishment incurred by them, she left Marino, and once more returned to the retirement of Ischia in the beginning of 1527. It was well for her that she had decided on not remaining in or near Rome during that fatal year. While the eternal city and its neighborhood were exposed to the untold horrors and atrocities committed by the

[1] Contemporary copy of the Act of Accusation, cited by Visconti, p. ci.

soldiers of the Most Catholic King, Vittoria was safe in her island home, torn indeed to the heart by the tidings which reached her of the ruin and dispersion of many valued friends, but at least tranquil and secure.

And now, if not perhaps while she was still with the nuns of San Silvestro, began her life as a poetess. She had hitherto written but little, and occasionally only. Henceforward, poetical composition seems to have made the great occupation of her life. Visconti, the latest, and by far the best editor of her works, has divided them into two portions. With two or three unimportant exceptions, of which the letter to her husband already noticed is the most considerable, they consist entirely of sonnets. The first of Signor Visconti's divisions, comprising 134 sonnets, includes those inspired almost entirely by her grief for the loss of her

husband. They form a nearly uninterrupted series "In Memoriam," in which the changes are rung with infinite ingenuity on a very limited number of ideas, all turning on the glory and high qualities of him whom she had lost, and her own undiminished and hopeless misery.

> "I only write to vent that inward pain,
> On which my heart doth feed itself, nor wills
> Aught other nourishment,"

begins the first of these elegiac sonnets; in which she goes on to disclaim any idea of increasing her husband's glory, —"non per giunger lume al mio bel sole;" which is the phrase she uses invariably to designate him. This fancy of alluding to Pescara always by the same not very happily chosen metaphor, contributes an additional element of monotony to verses still further de-

prived of variety by the identity of their highly artificial form.

This form, it is hardly necessary to remark, more than any other mode of the lyre, needs and exhibits the beauties of accurate finish and neat polish. Shut out, as it is, by its exceeding artificiality and difficult construction from many of the higher beauties of more spontaneous poetical utterance, the sonnet, "totus, teres atque rotundus," is nothing if not elaborated to gem-like perfection.

Yet Vittoria writes as follows:—

"Se in man prender non soglio unqua la lima
Del buon giudicio, e ricercando intorno
Con occhio disdegnoso, io non adorno
Ne tergo la mia rozza incolta rima,
Nasce perchè non è mia cura prima
Procacciar di ciò lode, o fuggir scorno;
Nè che dopo il mio lieto al ciel ritorno
Viva ella al mondo in più onorata stima.
Ma dal foco divin, che'l mio intelletto
Sua mercè infiamma, convien che escan fuore
Mal mio grado talor queste faville.

E se alcuna di loro un gentil core
Avvien che scaldi, mille volte e mille
Ringraziar debbo il mio felice errore."

Which may be thus Englished with tolerable accuracy of meaning, if not with much poetical elegance.[1]

"If in these rude and artless songs of mine
I never take the file in hand, nor try
With curious care, and nice fastidious eye,
To deck and polish each uncultured line,
'Tis that it makes small portion of my aim
To merit praise, or 'scape scorn's blighting breath;
Or that my verse, when I have welcomed death,
May live rewarded with the meed of fame.
But it must be that Heaven's own gracious gift,
Which with its breath divine inspires my soul,
Strike forth these sparks, unbidden by my will.
And should one such but haply serve to lift
One gentle heart, I thankful reach my goal,
And, faulty tho' the strain, my every wish fulfil."

Again, in another sonnet, of which the first eight lines are perhaps as favorable a specimen of a really poetical image as can be found throughout her

[1] See Note 3.

writings, she repeats the same profession of "pouring an unpremeditated lay."

"Qual digiuno augellin, che vede ed ode
Batter l' ali alla madre intorno, quando
Gli reca il nutrimento; ond egli amando
Il cibo e quella, si rallegra e gode,
E dentro àl nido suo si strugge e rode
Per desio di seguirla anch' ei volando,
E la ringrazia in tal modo cantando,
Che par ch' oltre 'l poter la lingua snode;
Tal' io qualor il caldo raggio e vivo
Del divin sole, onde nutrisco il core
Più del usato lucido lampeggia,
Muovo la penna, spinta dall' amore
Interno; e senza ch' io stessa m'avveggia
Di quel ch' io dico le sue lodi scrivo."

Which in English runs pretty exactly as follows:

"Like to a hungry nestling bird, that hears
And sees the fluttering of his mother's wings
Bearing him food, whence, loving what she brings
And her no less, a joyful mien he wears,
And struggles in the nest, and vainly stirs,
Wishful to follow her free wanderings,
And thanks her in such fashion, while he sings,
That the free voice beyond his strength appears;

So I, whene'er the warm and living glow
Of him my sun divine, that feeds my heart,
Shines brighter than its wont, take up the pen,
Urged by the force of my deep love; and so
Unconscious of the words unkempt by art
I write his praises o'er and o'er again."

The reader conversant with Italian poetry will have already seen enough to make him aware, that the Colonna's compositions are by no means unkempt, unpolished, or spontaneous. The merit of them consists in the high degree, to which they are exactly the reverse of all this. They are ingenious, neat, highly studied, elegant, and elaborate. It may be true, indeed, that much thought was not expended on the subject matter; but it was not spared on the diction, versification, and form. So much so, that many of her sonnets were retouched, altered, improved, and finally left to posterity, in a form very different from that in which they were first handed round the literary world

of Italy.[1] The file, in truth, was constantly in hand; though the nice fastidious care bestowed in dressing out with curious conceits a jejune or trite thought, which won the enthusiastic applause of her contemporaries, does not to the modern reader compensate for the absence of passion, earnestness, and reality.

Then, again, the declaration of the songstress of these would-be "wood notes wild," that they make no pretension to the meed of praise, nor care to escape contempt, nor are inspired by any hope of a life of fame after the author's death, leads us to contrast with such professions the destiny that really did,—surely not altogether unsought, —await these grief-inspired utterances of a breaking heart during the author's lifetime.

[1] See advertisement "ai lettori" of Rinaldo's Corso's edition of the sonnet. Venice, 1558.

No sooner was each memory-born pang illustrated by an ingenious metaphor, or pretty simile, packed neatly in its regulation case of fourteen lines, with their complexity of twofold rhymes all right, than it was handed all over Italy. Copies were as eagerly sought for as *the* novel of the season at a nineteenth-century circulating library. Cardinals, bishops, poets, wits, diplomatists, passed them from one to another, made them the subject of their correspondence with each other, and with the fair mourner; and eagerly looked out for the next poetical bonne-bouche which her undying grief and constancy to her "bel sole" should send them.

The enthusiasm created by these tuneful wailings of a young widow as lovely as inconsolable, as irreproachable as noble, learned enough to correspond with the most learned men of the

day on their own subjects, and with all this a Colonna, was intense. Vittoria became speedily the most famous woman of her day, was termed by universal consent "the divine," and lived to see three editions of the grief-cries, which escaped from her "without her will."

Here is a sonnet, which was probably written at the time of her return to Ischia in 1527; when the sight of all the well-loved scenery of the home of her happy years must have brought to her mind Dante's—

"Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria!"

Vittoria looks back on the happy time as follows:—

"Oh! che tranquillo mar, oh che chiare onde
Solcava già la mia spalmata barca,
Di ricca e nobil merce adorna e carca,
Con l' aer puro, e con l' aure seconde,

Il ciel, ch'ora i bei vaghi lumi asconde
Porgea serena luce e d' ombra scarca;
Ahi! quanto ha da temer chi lieto varca!
Chè non sempre al principio il fin risponde.
Ecco l' empia e volubile fortuna
Scoperse poi l' irata iniqua fronte,
Dal cui furor sì gran procella insorge.
Venti, pioggia, saette insième aduna,
E fiere intorno a divorarmi pronte;
Ma l' alma ancor la fida stella scorge."

In English, thus:—

'On what smooth seas, on what clear waves did sail
My fresh careenèd bark! what costly freight
Of noble merchandise adorn'd its state!
How pure the breeze, how favoring the gale!
And Heaven, which now its beauteous rays doth veil,
Shone then serene and shadowless. But fate
For the too happy voyager lies in wait.
Oft fair beginnings in their endings fail.
And now doth impious changeful fortune bare
Her angry ruthless brow, whose threat'ning power
Rouses the tempest, and lets loose its war!
But though rains, winds, and lightnings fill the air,
And wild beasts seek to rend me and devour,
Still shines o'er my true soul its faithful star."

Bearing in mind what we have seen of Pescara, it would seem evident, that

some monstrous illusion with respect to him must have obscured Vittoria's mind and judgment. It might have been expected that she would have been found attributing to him high and noble qualities, which existed only in her own imagination. But it is remarkable that, though in general terms she speaks of him as all that was noblest and greatest, yet in describing his merits, she confines herself to the few which he really had. This highly-cultured, devout, thoughtful, intellectual woman, seems really to have believed, that a mercenary swordsman's calling was the noblest occupation earth could offer, and the successful following of it the best preparation and surest title to immortal happiness hereafter.

The following sonnet is one of many expressing the same sentiments.

"Alle Vittorie tue, mio lume eterno,
Non diede il tempo o la stagion favore;

La spada, la virtù, l' invitto core
Fur li ministri tuoi la state e' verno.
Col prudente occhio, e col saggio governo
L' altrui forze spezzasti in si brev' ore,
Che 'l modo all' alte imprese accrebbe onore
Non men che l' opre al tuo valore interno.
Non tardaro il tuo corso animi altieri,
O fiumi, o monti ; e le maggior cittadi
Per cortesia od ardir rimasir vinte.
Salisti al mondo i più pregiati gradi;
Or godi in ciel d'altri trionfi e veri,
D' altre frondi le tempie ornate e cinte."

Which may be Englished as follows :—

"To thy great victories, my eternal light,
Nor time, nor seasons, lent their favoring aid;
Thy sword, thy might, thy courage undismay'd,
Summer and winter serv'd thy will aright.
By thy wise governance and eagle sight,
Thou didst so rout the foe with headlong speed,
The manner of the doing crown'd the deed,
No less than did the deed display thy might.
Mountains and streams, and haughty souls in vain
Would check thy course. By force of courtesy
Or valor vanquish'd, cities of name were won.
Earth's highest honors did thy worth attain;
Now truer triumphs Heaven reserves for thee,
And nobler garlands do thy temples crown."

Often her wishes for death are checked by the consideration, that haply her virtue may not suffice to enable her to rejoin her husband in the mansions of the blest. Take the the following example :—

"Quando del suo tormento il cor si duole
Sì ch' io bramo il mio fin, timor m' assale,
E dice; il morir tosto a che ti vale
Si forse lungi vai dal tuo bel sole?
Da questa fredda tema nascer suole
Un caldo ardir, che pon d' intorno l' ale
All alma; onde disgombra il mio mortale
Quanto ella può, da quel ch' l mondo vuole.
Cosi lo spirto mio s' asconde e copre
Qui dal piacer uman, non già per fama
O van grido, o pregiar troppo se stesso;
Ma sente 'l lume suo, che ognor lo chiama,
E vede il volto, ovunque mira, impresso,
Che gli misura i passi e scorge l'opre."

Thus done into English :—

"When of its pangs my heart doth sore complain,
So that I long to die, fear falls on me,
And saith, what boots such early death to thee,
If far from thy bright sun thou should'st remain.

Then oft from this cold fear is born again
A fervent boldness, which doth presently
Lend my soul wings, so that mortality
Strives to put off its worldly wishes vain.
For this, my spirit here herself enfolds,
And hides from human joys; and not for fame,
Nor empty praise, nor overblown conceit;
But that she hears her sun still call her name,
And still, where'er she looks, his face doth meet,
Who measures all her steps, and all her deeds beholds."

A similar cast of thought, both as regards her own disgust of life and the halo of sanctity, which by some mysterious process of mind she was able to throw around her husband's memory, is found again in this, the last of the sonnets, selected to illustrate this phase of our poetess's mind, and exemplify the first division of her writings.

"Cara union, che in si mirabil modo
Fosti ordinata dal signor del cielo,
Che lo spirto divino, e l' uman velo
Legò con dolce ed amoroso nodo,
Io, benchi lui di si bell' opra lodo,
Pur cerco, e ad altri il mio pensier non celo,

Sciorre il tuo laccio; ni più a caldo o gelo
Serbarti; poi che qui di te non godo.
Che l' alma chiusa in questo carcer rio
Come nemico l'odia; onde smarrita
Ne vive qui, nè vola ove desia.
Quando sarà con suo gran sole unita,
Felice giorno! allor contenta fia;
Che sol nel viver suo conobbe vita."

Of which the subjoined rendering, prosaic and crabbed as it is, is perhaps hardly more so than the original.

"Sweet bond, that wast ordain'd so wondrous well
By the Almighty ruler of the sky,
Who did unite in one sweet loving tie
The godlike spirit and its fleshy shell,
I, while I praise his loving work, yet try—
Nor wish my thought from others to withhold—
To loose thy knot; nor more, through heat or cold,
Preserve thee, since in thee no joy have I.
Therefore my soul, shut in this dungeon stern,
Detests it as a foe; whence, all astray,
She lives not here, nor flies where she would go.
When to her glorious sun she shall return,
Ah! then content shall come with that blest day,
For she, but while he liv'd, a sense of life could know."

In considering the collection of 117

sonnets, from which the above specimens have been selected, and which were probably the product of about seven or eight years, from 1526 to 1533—4 (in one she laments that the seventh year from her husband's death should have brought with it no alleviation of her grief); the most interesting question that suggests itself, is,—whether we are to suppose the sentiments expressed in them to be genuine outpourings of the heart, or rather to consider them all as part of the professional equipment of a poet, earnest only in the work of achieving a high and brilliant poetical reputation? The question is a prominent one, as regards the concrete notion to be formed of the sixteenth-century woman, Vittoria Colonna; and is not without interest as bearing on the great subject of woman's nature.

Vittoria's moral conduct, both as a

wife and as a widow, was wholly irreproachable. A mass of concurrent contemporary testimony seems to leave no doubt whatever on this point. More than one of the poets of her day professed themselves her ardent admirers, devoted slaves, and despairing lovers, according to the most approved poetical and Platonic fashion of the time; and she received their inflated bombast not unpleased with the incense, and answered them with other bombast, all *en règle* and in character. The "carte de tendre" was then laid down on the Platonic projection; and the sixteenth century fashion in this respect was made a convenient screen, for those to whom a screen was needful, quite as frequently as the less classical whimsies of a later period. But Platonic love to Vittoria was merely an occasion for indulging in the spiritualistic pedantries, by which the classicists of that

day sought to link the infant metaphysical speculations then beginning to grow out of questions of church doctrine, with the ever-interesting subject of romantic love.

A recent French writer,[1] having translated into prose Vittoria's poetical epistle to her husband, adds that she has been "obliged to veil and soften certain passages which might damage the writer's poetical character in the eyes of her fair readers, by exhibiting her as more woman than poet in the ardent and 'positive' manner, in which she speaks of her love." Never was there a more calumnious insinuation. It is true indeed that the Frenchwoman omits, or slurs over some passages of the original, but as they are wholly void of the shadow of offence, it can only be supposed that the translator

[1] Madame Lamaze, Études sur Trois Femmes Celèbres; Paris, 1848, p. 41.

did not understand the meaning of them.

There is no word in Vittoria's poetry which can lead to any other conclusion on this point, than that she was, in her position and social rank, an example, rare at that period, not only of perfect regularity of conduct, but of great purity and considerable elevation of mind. Such other indications as we have of her moral nature are all favorable. We find her, uninfluenced by the bitter hereditary hatreds of her family, striving to act as peacemaker between hostile factions, and weeping over the mischiefs occasioned by their struggles. We find her the constant correspondent and valued friend of almost every good and great man of her day. And if her scheme of moral doctrine, as gatherable from that portion of her poems which we have not yet examined, be narrow,—as how should

it be otherwise,—yet it is expressive of a mind habitually under the influence of virtuous aspiration, and is more humanizing in its tendencies, than that generally prevalent around her.

Such was Vittoria Colonna. It has been seen what her husband Pescara was. And the question arises,—how far can it be imagined possible that she should not only have lavished on him to the last while living, all the treasures of an almost idolatrous affection; not only have looked back on his memory after his death with fondness and charitable, even blindly charitable indulgence; but should absolutely have so canonized him in her imagination as to have doubted of her own fitness to consort hereafter with a soul so holy! It may be said, that Vittoria did not know her husband as we know him; that the few years they had passed together had no doubt shown her only the better

phases of his character. But she knew that he had at least doubted whether he should not be false to his sovereign, and had been most infamously so to his accomplices or dupes. She knew at least all that Giovio's narrative could tell her; for the bishop presented it to her, and received a sonnet in return.

But it is one of the most beautiful properties of woman's nature, some men say, that their love has power to blind their judgment. Novelists and poets are fond of representing women whose affections remain unalterably fixed on their object, despite the manifest unworthiness of it; and set such examples before us, as something high, noble, admirable, "beautiful;" to the considerable demoralization of their confiding students of either sex. There *is* a tendency in woman to refuse at all risks the dethroning of the sovereign she has placed on her heart's throne.

The pain of deposing him is so great, that she is tempted to abase her own soul to escape it; for it is only at that cost that it can be escaped. And the spectacle of a fine nature "dragged down to sympathize with clay," is not "beautiful," but exceedingly the reverse. Men do not usually set forth as worthy of admiration—though a certain school of writers do even this, in the trash talked of love at first sight —that kind of love between the sexes, which arises from causes wholly independent of the higher part of our nature. Yet it is that love alone which can survive esteem. And it is highly important to the destinies of woman, that she should understand and be thoroughly persuaded, that she cannot love that which does not merit love, without degrading her own nature; that under whatsoever circumstances love should cease when respect, appro-

bation, and esteem have come to an end; and that those who find poetry and beauty in the love which no moral change in its object can kill, are simply teaching her to attribute a fatally debasing supremacy to those lower, instincts of our nature, on whose due subordination to the diviner portion of our being all nobleness, all moral purity and spiritual progress depends.

Vittoria Colonna was not one whose intellectual and moral self had thus abdicated its sceptre. The texture of her mind and its habits of thought forbid the supposition; and, bearing this in mind, it becomes wholly impossible to accept the glorification of her "bel sole," which makes the staple of the first half of her poems, as the sincere expression of genuine feeling and opinion.

She was probably about as much in earnest as was her great model and

master, Petrarch, in his adoration of Laura. The poetical mode of the day was almost exclusively Petrarchist; and the abounding Castalian fount of that half century in "the land of song," played from its thousand jets little else than Petrarch and water in different degrees of dilution. Vittoria has no claim to be excepted from the "servum pecus," though her imitation has more of self-derived vigor to support it. And this assumption of a mighty, undying, exalted and hopeless passion, was a necessary part of the poet's professional appurtenances. Where could a young and beautiful widow, of unblemished conduct, who had no intention of changing her condition, and no desire to risk misconstruction by the world, find this needful part of her outfit as a poet, so unobjectionably as in the memory of her husband, sanctified and exalted by

the imagination to the point proper for the purpose.

For want of a deeper spiritual insight, and a larger comprehension of the finer affections of the human heart and the manifestations of them, with the Italian poets of the "rénaissance," love-poetry was little else than the expression of passion in the most restricted sense of the term. But they were often desirous of elevating, purifying, and spiritualizing their theme. And how was this to be accomplished? The gratification of passion, such as they painted, would, they felt, have led them quite in a different direction from that they were seeking. A hopeless passion, therefore, one whose wishes the reader was perfectly to understand were never destined to be gratified—better still, one by the nature of things impossible to be gratified—this was the contrivance

by which love was to be poetized and moralized.

The passion-poetry, which addressed itself to the memory of one no more, met the requirements of the case exactly; and Vittoria's ten years' despair and lamentations, her apotheosis of the late cavalry captain, and longing to rejoin him, must be regarded as poetical properties brought out for use, when she sat down to make poetry for the perfectly self-conscious, though very laudable purpose of acquiring for herself a poet's reputation.

But it must not be supposed that any thing in the nature of hypocrisy was involved in the assumption of the poetical rôle of inconsolable widow. Everybody understood that the poetess was only making poetry, and saying the usual and proper things for that purpose. She was no more attempting to impose on anybody than

was a poet when on entering some "academia" he termed himself Tyrtæus or Lycidas, instead of the name inherited from his father.

And from this prevailing absence of all real and genuine feeling, arises the utter coldness and shallow insipidity of the poets of that time and school. Literature has probably few more unreadable departments than the productions of the Petrarchists of the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Vittoria, when she began to write on religious subjects, was more in earnest; and the result, as we shall see, is accordingly improved.

CHAPTER VI.

Vittoria in Rome in 1530.—Antiquarian rambles.—Pyramus and Thisbe medal.—Contemporary commentary on Vittoria's poems.—Paul the Third.—Rome again in 1536.—Visit to Lucca.—To Ferrara.—Protestant tendencies.—Invitation from Giberto.—Return to Rome.

The noble rivalry of Francis I. and Charles V. was again, in 1530, making Naples a field of glory in such sort, that outraged nature appeared also on the scene with pestilence in her hand. The first infliction had driven most of the literary society in Naples to take refuge in the comparative security of Ischia. The latter calamity had reached even that retreat; and Vittoria some time in that year again visited Rome.

Life was beginning there to return to its usual conditions after the tremendous catastrophe of 1527. Pestilence had there also, as usual, followed in the train of war and military license. And many in all classes had been its victims. Great numbers fled from the city, and among these were probably most of such as were honored by Vittoria's personal friendship. Now they were venturing back to their old haunts on the Pincian, the Quirinal, or those favorite Colonna gardens, still ornamented by the ruins of Aurelian's Temple to the Sun. The tide of modern Goths, who had threatened to make the eternal city's name a mockery, had been swept back at the word of that second and "most Catholic" Alaric, Charles V. Cardinals, poetasters, wits, Ciceronian bishops, statesmen, ambassadors, and artists, busy in the achievement of immortality, were once more forming a

society, which gave the Rome of that day a fair title to be considered, in some points of view, the capital of the world. The golden Roman sunlight was still glowing over aqueduct, arch and temple; and Rome the Eternal was herself again.

By this varied and distinguished society Vittoria was received with open arms. The Colonna family had become reconciled to Pope Clement, and had had their fiefs restored to them; so that there was no cloud on the political horizon to prevent the celebrated Marchesana from receiving the homage of all parties. The Marchese del Vasto, Vittoria's former pupil, for whom she never ceased to feel the warmest affection, was also then at Rome.[1] In his company, and that of some others of the gifted knot around her, Vittoria visited the ruins and vestiges of ancient

[1] Lettere di Bembo, vol. i., p. 115, ed. 1560.

Rome with all the enthusiasm of one deeply versed in classic lore, and thoroughly imbued with the then prevailing admiration for the works and memorials of Pagan antiquity. Vittoria's sister-in-law, Donna Giovanna d'Aragona, the beautiful and accomplished wife of her brother Ascanio, in whose house she seems to have been living during this visit to Rome, was doubtless one of the party on these occasions. The poet Molza has chronicled his presence among them in more than one sonnet. His muse would seem to have "made increment of any thing." For no less than four sonnets[1] were the result of the exclamation from Vittoria, "Ah, happy they"—the ancients, "who lived in days so full of beauty!" Of course, various pretty things were obtainable out of this. Among others, we have the gallant Pagans responding to

[1] Edit. Serassi, pp. 14, 15, 37, 40.

the lady's ejaculation, that on the contrary their time was less fortunate than the present, in that it was not blessed by the sight of her.

It would have been preferable to have had preserved for us some further scraps from the lips of Vittoria, while the little party gazed at sunset over that matchless view of the aqueduct-bestridden Campagna from the terrace at the western front of the Lateran, looked up at the Colosseum, ghostly in the moonlight, from the arch of Titus, or discoursed on the marvellous proportions of the Pantheon.

But history rarely guesses aright what the after-ages she works for would most thank her for handing down to them. And we must be content to construct for ourselves, as best we may, from the stray hints we have, the singularly pleasing picture of these sixteenth century rambles among the

ruins of Rome by as remarkable a company of pilgrims as any of the thousands who have since trodden in their steps.

Vittoria's visit to Rome upon this occasion was a short one. It was probably early in the following year that she returned to Ischia. Signor Visconti attributes this journey to the restlessness arising from a heart ill at ease, vainly hoping to find relief from its misery by change of place. He assumes all the expressions of despair to be found in her sonnets of this period, to be so many reliable autobiographical documents, and builds his narrative upon them accordingly. To this period he attributes the sonnet, translated in a previous chapter, in which the poetess declares that she has no wish to conceal from the world the temptation to suicide which assails her. And in commemoration of this mood of mind, he adds, in further proof of the sad truth,

a medal was struck upon this occasion, in Rome, of which he gives an engraving. It represents, on one side, the inconsolable lady as a handsome, well-nourished, comfortable-looking widow, in mourning weeds, more aged in appearance, certainly, since the striking of the former medal spoken of, than the lapse of seven years would seem sufficient to account for. And, on the reverse, is a representation of the melancholy story of Pyramus and Thisbe, the former lying dead at the feet of the typical paragon, who is pointing towards her breast a sword, grasped in both hands, half-way down the blade, in a manner sure to have cut her fingers. The two sides of the medal, seen at one glance, as in Signor Visconti's engraving, are, it must be admitted, calculated to give rise to ideas the reverse of pathetic.

To this period too belongs the sonnet,

also previously alluded to, in which Vittoria speaks of the seventh year of her bereavement having arrived, without bringing with it any mitigation of her woe. Signor Visconti takes this for simple autobiographical material. It is curious, as a specimen of the modes of thought at the time, to see how the same passage is handled by Vittoria's first editor and commentator, Rinaldo Corsi, who published her works for the second time at Venice in 1558. His commentary begins as follows:—"On this sonnet, it remains for me to speak of the number Seven as I have done already of the number Four. But since Varro, Macrobius, and Aulus Gellius, together with many others, have treated largely of the subject, I will only add this,—which, perhaps, Ladies, may appear to you somewhat strange; that, according to Hippocrates, the number four enters twice into

the number seven; and I find it stated by most credible authors as a certain fact, and proved by the testimony of their own observation, that a male child of seven years old has been known to cure persons afflicted by the infirmity called scrofula by no other means than by the hidden virtue of that number seven," &c., &c., &c.

In this sort, Messer Rinaldo Corso composed, and the literary ladies, to whom throughout, as in the above passage, his labors are especially dedicated, must be supposed to have read more than five hundred close-printed pages of commentary on the works of the celebrated poetess, who, in all probability, when she penned the sonnet in question, had no more intention of setting forth the reasons for her return to Ischia, than she had of alluding to the occult properties of the mysterious number seven. The natural supposition

is, that as she had been driven from her home by the pestilence, she returned to it when that reason for absence was at an end.

There she seems to have remained tranquilly employed on her favorite pursuits, increasing her already great reputation, and corresponding assiduously with all the best and most distinguished men of Italy, whether laymen or ecclesiastics, till the year 1536.

In that year she again visited Rome, and resided during her stay there with Donna Giovanna d'Aragona, her sister-in-law. Paul III., Farnese, had in 1534 succeeded Clement in the chair of St. Peter; and though Paul was on many accounts very far from being a good Pope or a good priest, yet the Farnese was an improvement on the Medici. As ever, Rome began to show signs of improvement when danger to her system from without began to make itself

felt. Paul seems very soon to have become convinced that the general council, which had been so haunting a dread to Clement during the whole of his pontificate, could no longer be avoided. But it was still hoped in the council chambers of the Vatican, that the doctrinal difficulties of the German reformers, which threatened the Church with so fatal a schism, might be got over by conciliation and dexterous theological diplomacy. As soon as it became evident that this hope was vain, fear began to influence the papal policy, and at its bidding the ferocious persecuting bigotry of Paul IV. was contrasted with the shameless profligacy of Alexander, the epicurean indifferentism of Leo, and the pettifogging worldliness of Clement.

Between these two periods came Paul III., and the illusory hopes that the crisis might be tided over by find-

ing some arrangement of terminology, which should satisfy the reformers, while Rome should abandon no particle of doctrine on which any vital portion of her system of temporal power was based. To meet the exigencies of this period, Paul III. signalized his accession by raising to the purple a number of the most earnest, most learned, and truly devout men in Italy. Contarini, the Venetian; Caraffa, from Naples; Sadoleto, Bishop of Carpentras; Pole, then a fugitive from England; Giberti, Bishop of Verona; and Fregoso, Archbishop of Salerno, were men chosen solely on account of their eminent merit.

With most, if not all of these, Vittoria was connected by the bonds of intimate friendship. With Contarini, Sadoleto, and Pole, especially, she corresponded; and the esteem felt for her by such men is the most undeniable

testimony to the genuine worth of her character. It is easy to imagine, therefore, how warm a reception awaited her arrival on this occasion in Rome, and how delightful must have been her stay there. She had now reached the full measure of her reputation. The religious and doctrinal topics which were now occupying the best minds in Italy, and on which her thoughts were frequently busied in her correspondence with such men as those named above, had recently begun to form the subject-matter of her poems. And their superiority in vigor and earnestness to her earlier works, must have been perfectly apparent to her reverend and learned friends.

Accordingly, we are told that her stay in Rome on this occasion was a continued ovation; and Signor Visconti informs us, on the authority of the Neapolitan historian Gregorio Rosso,

that Charles V. being then in Rome, "condescended to visit in their own house the ladies Giovanna di'Aragona, wife of Ascanio Colonna, and Vittoria Colonna, Marchesa di Pescara."

The following year, 1537 that is, she went, Visconti says, to Lucca, from which city she passed to Ferrara, arriving there on the 8th of April, "in humble guise, with six waiting-women only." [1] Ercole d'Este, the second of the name, was then the reigning duke, having succeeded to his father Alphonso in 1534. And the court of Ferrara, which had been for several years pre-eminent among the principalities of Italy for its love of literature and its patronage of literary men, became yet more notably so in consequence of the marriage of Hercules II. with Renée of France, the daughter of Louis XII. The Protestant tendencies

[1] Mem. per la St. di Ferrara, di Antonia Frizzi, vol. iv. p. 333.

and sympathies of this Princess had rendered Ferrara also the resort, and in some instances the refuge, of many professors and favorers of the new ideas which were begining to stir the mind of Italy. And though Vittoria's orthodox Catholic biographers are above all things anxious to clear her from all suspicion of having ever held opinions eventually condemned by the Church, there is every reason to believe that her journey to Ferrara was prompted by the wish to exchange ideas upon these subjects with some of those leading minds which were known to have imbibed Protestant tendencies, if not to have acquired fully-formed Protestant convictions. It is abundantly clear, from the character of her friendships, from her correspondence, and from the tone of her poetry at this period, and during the remainder of her life, that her mind was absorbingly

occupied with topics of this nature. And the short examination of the latter division of her works, which it is proposed to attempt in the next chapter, will probably convince such as have no partisan Catholic feelings on the subject, that Vittoria's mind had made very considerable progress in the Protestant direction.

No reason is assigned for her stay at Lucca. Visconti, with unusual brevity and dryness, merely states that she visited that city.[1] And it is probable that he has not been able to discover any documents directly accounting for the motives of her visit. But he forbears to mention that the new opinions had gained so much ground there that that Republic was very near declaring Protestantism the religion of their state. After her totally unaccounted-for visit to the heresy-stricken city, she

[1] Vita., p. cxiii.

proceeds to another almost equally tainted with suspicion.

It is no doubt perfectly true that Duke Hercules and his court received her with every possible distinction on the score of her poetical celebrity, and deemed his city honored by her presence. He invited, we are told, the most distinguished poets and men of letters of Venice and Lombardy to meet her at Ferrara. And so much was her visit prized that when Cardinal Giberto sent thither his secretary, Francesco della Torre, to persuade her to visit his episcopal city Verona, that ambassador wrote to his friend Bembo, at Venice, that he "had like to have been banished by the Duke, and stoned by the people for coming there with the intention of robbing Ferrara of its most precious treasure, for the purpose of enriching Verona." Vittoria, however, seems to have held out some hope that she might

be induced to visit Verona. For the secretary, continuing his letter to the literary Venetian cardinal, says, "Who knows but what we may succeed in making reprisal on them? And if that should come to pass, I should hope to see your Lordship more frequently in Verona, as I should see Verona the most honored as well as the most envied city in Italy."[1]

It is impossible to have more striking testimony to the fame our poetess had achieved by her pen; and it is a feature of the age and clime well worth noting, that a number of small states, divided by hostilities and torn by warfare, should have, nevertheless, possessed among them a republic of letters capable of conferring a celebrity so cordially acknowledged throughout the whole extent of Italy.

[1] Letter dated 11th September, 1537, from Bembo's Correspondence, cited by Visconti, p. cxv.

From a letter[1] written by Vittoria to Giangiorgio Trissino of Vicenza, the author of an almost forgotten epic, entitled "Italia liberata da Goti," bearing date the 10th of January (1537), we learn that she found the climate of Ferrara "unfavorable to her indisposition;" which would seem to imply a continuance of ill-health. Yet it was at this time that she conceived the idea of undertaking a journey to the Holy Land.[2] Her old pupil, and nearly life-long friend, the Marchese del Vasto, came from Milan to Ferrara, to dissuade her from the project. And with this view, as well as to remove her from the air of Ferrara, he induced her to return to Rome, where her arrival was again made a matter of almost public rejoicing.

The date of this journey was probably about the end of 1537. The society

[1] Visconti, p. cxiv. [2] Visconti, p. cxvi.

of the Eternal City, especially of that particular section of it which made the world of Vittoria, was in a happy and hopeful mood. The excellent Contarini had not yet departed[1] thence on his mission of conciliation to the Conference, which had been arranged with the Protestant leaders at Ratisbon. The brightest and most cheering hopes were based on a total misconception of the nature, or rather on an entire ignorance of the existence of that undercurrent of social change, which, to the north of the Alps, made the reformatory movement something infinitely greater, more fruitful of vast results, and more inevitable, than any scholastic dispute on points of theologic doctrine. And at the time of Vittoria's arrival, that little band of pure, amiable, and high-minded, but not large-minded men, who

[1] He left Rome 11th November, 1538. Letter from Contarini to Pole, cited by Ranke. Austin's trans., vol. i. p. 152.

fondly hoped that, by the amendment of some practical abuses, and a mutually forbearing give-and-take arrangement of some nice questions of metaphysical theology, peace on earth and good-will among men, might yet be made compatible with the undiminished pretensions and theory of an universal and infallible Church, were still lapped in the happiness of their day-dream. Of this knot of excellent men, which comprised all that was best, most amiable, and most learned in Italy, Vittoria was the disciple, the friend, and the inspired Muse. The short examination of her religious poetry, therefore, which will be the subject of the next chapter, will not only open to us the deepest and most earnest part of her own mind, but will, in a measure, illustrate the extent and nature of the Protestantizing tendencies then manifesting themselves in Italy.

CHAPTER VII.

Oratory of Divine Love.—Italian Reformers.—Their tenets.—Consequence of the doctrine of Justification by Faith.—Fear of Schism in Italy.—Orthodoxy of Vittoria questioned.—Proofs of her Protestantism from her writings.—Calvinism of her Sonnets.—Remarkable passage against Auricular Confession.—Controversial and religious Sonnets.—Absence from the Sonnets of moral topics.—Specimen of her poetical power.—Romanist ideas.—Absence from the Sonnets of all patriotic feeling.

The extreme corruption of the Italian church, and in some degree also the influence of German thought, had even as early as the Pontificate of Leo X., led several of the better minds in Italy to desire ardently some means of religious reform. A contemporary writer cited by Ranke,[1] tells us that in Leo's

[1] Caracciolo, Vita di Paolo 4, MS. Ranke, Popes, vol. i. p. 136, edit. cit.

time some fifty or sixty earnest and pious men formed themselves into a society at Rome, which they called the "Oratory of Divine Love," and strove by example and preaching to stem as much as in them lay the tide of profligacy and infidelity. Among these men were Contarini, the learned and saint-like Venetian, Sadolet, Giberto, Caraffa (a man, who, however earnest in his piety, showed himself at a later period, when he became pope as Paul IV., to be animated with a very different spirit from that of most of his fellow-religionists,) Gaetano, Thiene, who was afterwards canonized, &c. But in almost every part of Italy, not less than in Rome, there were men of the same stamp, who carried the new ideas to greater or lesser lengths, were the objects of more or less ecclesiastical censure and persecution; and who died, some reconciled

to, and some excommunicated by the Church they so vainly strove to amend.

In Naples, Juan Valdez, a Spaniard, Secretary to the Viceroy, warmly embraced the new doctrines; and being a man much beloved, and of great influence, he drew many converts to the cause. It was a pupil and friend of his, whose name it has been vainly sought to ascertain, who composed the celebrated treatise, "On the Benefits of the Death of Christ," which was circulated in immense numbers over the whole of Italy, and exercised a very powerful influence. A little later, when the time of inquisitorial persecution came, this book was so vigorously proscribed, sought out and destroyed, that despite the vast number of copies which must have existed in every corner of Italy, it has utterly disappeared, and not one is known to be in exist-

ence.[1] It is impossible to have a more striking proof of the violent and searching nature of the persecution under Paul IV. Another friend of Valdez, who was also intimate with Vittoria, was Marco Flaminio, who revised the treatise "On the Benefits of Christ's Death."

In Modena, the Bishop Morone, the intimate friend of Pole and Contarini, and his chaplain, Don Girolamo de Modena, supported and taught the same opinions.

In Venice, Gregorio Cortese, Abbot of San Giorgio Maggiore, Luigi Priuli, a patrician, and the Benedictine Marco, of Padua, formed a society mainly occupied in discussing the subtle questions which formed the "symbolum" of the new party.

"If we inquire," says Ranke,[2] "what was the faith which chiefly inspired

[1] Ranke, ed. cit., vol. i. p. 217. [2] Ed. cit., vol. i. p. 188.

these men, we shall find that the main article of it was that same doctrine of justification, which, as preached by Luther, had given rise to the whole Protestant movement."

The reader fortunate enough to be wholly unread in controversial divinity, will yet probably not have escaped hearing of the utterly interminable disputes on justification, free-will, election, faith, good works, prevenient grace, original sin, absolute decrees, and predestination, which, with much of evil, and as yet little good consequence, have occupied the most acute intellects, and most learning-stored brains of Europe for the last three centuries. Without any accurate knowledge of the manner in which the doctrines represented by these familiar terms are dependent on, and necessitated by each other, and of the precise points on which the opposing creeds have fought

this eternal battle, he will be aware that the system popularly known as Calvinism, represents the side of the question taken by the reformers of the sixteenth century, while the opposite theory of justification by good works was that held by the orthodox Catholic Church, or unreforming party. And with merely these general ideas to guide him, it will appear strangely unaccountable to find all the best, noblest and purest minds adopting a system which in its simplest logical development inevitably leads to the most debasing demonolatry, and lays the axe to the root of all morality and noble action; while the corrupt, the worldly, the ambitious, the unspiritual, the unintellectual natures that formed the dominant party, held the opposite opinion, apparently so favorable to virtue.

An explanation of this phenomenon by a partisan of either school would

probably be long and somewhat intricate. But the matter becomes intelligible enough, and the true key to the wishes and conduct of both parties is found, if, without regarding the moral or theological results of either scheme, or troubling ourselves with the subtleties by which either side sought to meet the objections of the other, we consider simply the bearings of the new doctrines on that ecclesiastical system, which the orthodox and dominant party were determined at all cost to support. If it were admitted that man is justifiable by faith alone, that his election is a matter to be certified to his own heart by the immediate operation of the Divine Spirit, it would follow that the whole question of his religious condition and future hopes might be, or rather must be, settled between him and his Creator alone. And then what would become of ecclesiastical authority

and priestly interference? If the only knowledge possible to be attained of any individual's standing before God, were locked in his own breast, what hold can the Church have on him? It is absolutely necessary to any system of spiritual tyranny, that no doctrine should be admitted by virtue of which a layman may tell a priest that despite the opinion he, the priest, may form upon the subject, he, the layman, has the assurance of acceptation before God, by means of evidence of a nature inscrutable to the priest. Once admit this, and the whole foundation of ecclesiastical domination is sapped. Nay, by a very logical and short route, sure to be soon travelled by those who have made good this first fundamental pretension, they would arrive at the negation and abolition of all priesthood. Preachers and teachers might still have place under such a system, but not

priests, or priestly power. To this an externally ascertainable religion is so vitally necessary, that the theory of justification by good works was far from sufficient for the purposes of the Catholic priesthood, as long as good works could be understood to mean a general course of not very accurately measurable virtuous living. This was not sufficient, because, though visible, not sufficiently tangible, countable, and tariffable. Hence the good works most urgently prescribed, became reduced to that mass of formal practices so well known as the material of Romanist piety, among which, the most valuable for the end in view, are of course those which can only be performed by the intervention of a priest.

But it must not be supposed that all this was as plainly discerned by the combatants in that confused strife as it may be by lookers back on it from a

vantage ground three centuries high. The innovators were in all probability few, if any of them, conscious of the extent and importance of the principle they were fighting for. And, on the other hand, there is no reason to attribute an evil consciousness of motives, such as those nakedly set forth above, to the conservative party. The fact that a doctrine would tend to abridge Church power and endanger Church unity, would doubtless have appeared to many a good and conscientious man a sufficient proof of its unsoundness and falsity.

Indeed, even among the reformers in Italy the fear of schism was so great, and the value attached to Church unity so high, that these considerations probably did as much towards checking and finally extinguishing Protestantism in Italy as did the strong hand of persecution. From the first, many of the

most earnest advocates of the new doctrines were by no means prepared to sever themselves from the Church for the sake of their opinions. Some were ready to face such schism and martyrdom also in the cause; as, for instance, Bernardino Ochino, the General of the Capuchins, and the most powerful preacher of his day, who fled from Italy and became a professed Protestant, and Carnesecchi, the Florentine, who was put to death for his heresy at Rome.

But it had not yet become clear how far the new doctrines might be held compatibly with perfect community with the Church of Rome at the time when Vittoria arrived in that city from Ferrara. The conference with the German Protestants, by means of which it was hoped to effect a reconciliation, was then being arranged, and the hopes

of Vittoria's friends ran high. When these hopes proved delusive, and when Rome pronounced herself decisively on the doctrines held by the Italian reformers, the most conspicuous friends of Vittoria did not quit the Church. She herself writes ever as its submissive and faithful daughter. But as to her having held opinions which were afterwards declared heretical, and for which others suffered, much of her poetry, written probably about this time, affords evidence so clear, that it is wonderful Tiraboschi and her biographers can deem it possible to maintain her orthodoxy.

Take, for example, the following sonnet :—

"Quand' io riguardo il nobil raggio ardente
Della grazia divina, e quel valore
Ch' illustra 'l intelletto, infiamma il core
Con virtu' sopr' umana, alta, e possente,
L' alma le voglie allor fisse ed intente
Raccoglie tutte insième a fargli onore;

Ma tanto ha di poter, quant' è 'l favore
Che dal lume e dal foco intende e sente.
Ond' ella può ben far certa efficace
L' alta sua elezion, ma insino al segno
Ch' all autor d'ogni ben, sua mercè, piace.
Non sprona il corso nostro industria o ingegno;
Quel corre più sicuro e più vivace,
C' ha dal favor del ciel maggior sostegno."

Thus rendered into English blank verse, with a greater closeness to the sense of the original than might perhaps have been attained in a translation hampered by the necessity of rhyming:—

"When I reflect on that bright noble ray
Of grace divine, and on that mighty power,
Which clears the intellect, inflames the heart
With virtue, strong with more than human strength,
My soul then gathers up her will, intent
To render to that Power the honor due;
But only so much can she, as free grace
Gives her to feel and know th' inspiring fire.
Thus can the soul her high election make
Fruitful and sure; but only to such point
As, in his goodness, wills the Fount of good.
Nor art nor industry can speed her course;
He most securely and alertly runs
Who most by Heaven's free favor is upheld."

The leading points of Calvinistic doctrine could hardly be in the limits of a sonnet more clearly and comprehensively stated. Devotional meditation inclines the heart to God; but the soul is powerless even to worship, except in such measure as she is enabled to do so by freely-given grace. By this means only can man make sure his election. To strive after virtue is useless to the non-elect, seeing that man can safely run his course only in proportion as he has received the favor of God.

Again, in the following sonnet will be remarked a tone of thought and style of phrase perfectly congenial to modern devotional feeling of what is termed the evangelical school; while it is assuredly not such as would meet the approval of orthodox members of either the Roman Catholic or Anglo-Catholic churches:

"Quando dal lume, il cui vivo splendore
Rende il petto fedel lieto e sicuro,
Si dissolve per grazia il ghiaccio duro,
Che sovente si gela intorno al core,
Sento ai bei lampi del possente ardore
Cader delle mie colpe il manto oscuro,
E vestirmi in quel punto il chiaro e puro
Della prima innocenza e primo amore.
E sebben con serrata e fida chiave
Serro quel raggio; egli è scivo e sottile,
Si ch' un basso pensier lo scaccia e sdegna.
Ond' ei ratto sen vola; io mesta e grave
Rimango, e 'l prego che d' ogni ombra vile
Mi spogli, acciò più presto a me sen vegna."

Which may be thus, with tolerable accuracy, rendered into English :—

"When by the light, whose living ray both peace
And joy to faithful bosoms doth impart,
The indurated ice, around the heart
So often gather'd, is dissolved through grace,
Beneath that blessed radiance from above
Falls from me the dark mantle of my sin;
Sudden I stand forth pure and radiant in
The garb of primal innoeence and love.
And though I strive with lock and trusty key
To keep that ray, so subtle 'tis and coy,
By one low thought 'tis scared and put to flight.
So flies it from me. I in sorrowing plight

Remain, and pray, that he from base alloy
May purge me, so the light come sooner back to me."

Here, in addition to the "points of doctrine" laid down in the previous sonnet, we have that of sudden and instantaneous conversion and sanctification; and that without any aid from sacrament, altar, or priest.

Similar thoughts are again expressed in the next sonnet selected, which in Signor Visconti's edition immediately follows the preceding:—

"Spiego per voi, mia luce, indarno l' ale,
Prima che 'l caldo vostro interno vento
M' apra l' aere d' intorno, ora ch' io sento
Vincer da nuovo ardir l'antico male;
Chè giunga all' infinito opra mortale
Opra vostra è, Signor, che in un momento
La può far degna; ch' io da me pavento
Di cader col pensier quand' ei più, sale.
Bramo quell' invisibil chiaro lume,
Che fuga densa nebbia; e quell' accesa
Secreta fiamma, ch' ogni gel consuma.
Onde poi, sgombra dal terren costume,
Tutta al divino amor l' anima intesa
Si mova al volo altero in altra piuma."

Thus done into English :

"Feeling new force to conquer primal sin,
Yet all in vain I spread my wings to thee,
My light, until the air around shall be
Made clear for me by thy warm breath within.
That mortal works should reach the infinite
Is thy work, Lord! For in a moment thou
Canst give them worth. Left to myself I know
My thought would fall, when at its utmost height.
I long for that clear radiance from above
That puts to flight all cloud; and that bright flame
Which secret burning warms the frozen soul;
So that set free from every mortal aim,
And all intent alone on heavenly love,
She flies with stronger pinion towards her goal."

In the following lines, which form the conclusion of a sonnet, in which she has been saying that God does not permit that any pure heart should be concealed from His all-seeing eye "by the fraud or force of others," we have a very remarkable bit of such heresy on the vital point of the confessional, as has been sufficient to consign more than one victim to the stake :—

"Securi del suo dolce e giusto impero,
Non come il primo padre e la sua donna,
Dobbiam del nostro error biasimare altrui;
Ma con la speme accesa e dolor vero
Aprir dentro, *passando oltra la gonna*
I falli nostri a solo a sol con lui."

The underlined words, "passando oltra la gonna," literally, "passing beyond the gown," though the sense appears to be unmistakable, are yet sufficiently obscure and unobvious, and the phrase sufficiently far-fetched, to lead to the suspicion of a wish on the part of the writer in some degree to veil her meaning. "That in the captain's but a choleric word, which in the soldier is foul blasphemy." And the high-born Colonna lady, the intimate friend of cardinals and princes, might write much with impunity which would have been perilous to less lofty heads. But the sentiment in this very remarkable passage implies an attack on one of

Rome's tenderest and sorest points. In English the lines run thus:—

"Confiding in His just and gentle sway
We should not dare, like Adam and his wife,
On other's backs our proper blame to lay;
But with new-kindled hope and unfeigned grief,
Passing by priestly robes, lay bare within
To Him alone the secret of our sin."

Again, in the conclusion of another sonnet, in which she has been speaking of the benefits of Christ's death, and of the necessity of a "soprannatural divina fede" for the receiving of them, she writes in language very similar to that of many a modern advocate of "free inspiration," and which must have been distasteful to the erudite clergy of the dominant hierarchy, as follows:—

"Que' ch' avrà sol in lui le luci fisse,
Non que' ch' intese meglio, o che più lesse
Volumi in terra, in ciel sarà beato.
In carta questa legge non si scrisse;
Ma con la stampa sua nel cor purgato
Col foco dell' amor Gesù l' impresse."

In English :—

"He who hath fixed on Christ alone his eyes,
Not he who best hath understood, or read
Most earthly volumes, shall Heaven's bliss attain.
For not on paper did He write His law,
But printed it on expurgated hearts
Stamped with the fire of Jesus' holy love."

In another remarkable sonnet, she gives expression to the prevailing feeling of the pressing necessity for Church reform, joined to a marked declaration of belief in the doctrine of Papal infallibility ; a doctrine, which by its tenacious hold on the Italian mind, contributed mainly to extinguish the sudden straw blaze of reforming tendencies throughout Italy. The lines run as follows :—

"Veggio d' alga e di fango omai sì carca,
Pietro, la rete tua, che se qualche onda
Di fuor l' assale o intorno circonda,
Potria spezzarsi, e a rischio andar la barca;
La qual, non come suol leggiera e scarca,
Sovra 'l turbato mar corre a seconda,

Ma in poppa e'n prora, all' una e all' altra sponda
E' grave sì ch' a gran periglio varca.
Il tuo buon successor, *ch' alta cagione*
Direttamente elesse, e cor e mano
Move sovente per condurla a porto.
Ma contra il voler suo ratto s' oppone
L' altrui malizia; onde ciascun s' è accorto,
Ch' egli senza 'l tuo aiuto adopra in vano."

Which may be thus read in English blank verse, giving not very poetically, but with tolerable fidelity, the sense of the original :—

"With mud and weedy growth so foul I see
Thy net, O Peter, that should any wave
Assail it from without or trouble it,
It might be rended, and so risk the ship.
For now thy bark, no more, as erst, skims light
With favoring breezes o'er the troubled sea;
But labors burthen'd so from stem to stern,
That danger menaces the course it steers.
Thy good successor, *by direct decree*
Of providence elect, with heart and hand
Assiduous strives to bring it to the port.
But spite his striving his intent is foiled
By other's evil. So that all have seen
That without aid from thee, he strives in vain.'

The lofty pretensions of the Bishop

of Rome, which our poetess, with all her reforming aspirations, goes out of her way to declare and maintain in the phrase of the above sonnet marked by italics, were dear to the hearts of Italians. It may be, that an antagonistic bias, arising from feelings equally beyond the limits of the religious question, helped to add acrimony to the attacks of the transalpine reformers. But there can be no doubt, that Italian self-love was active in rendering distasteful to Italians a doctrine, whose effect would be to pull down Rome from her position as capital of the Christian world, and no longer permit an Italian ecclesiastic to issue his lofty decrees "Urbi et Orbi." And those best acquainted with the Italian mind of that period, as evidenced by its literature, and illustrated by its still-existing tendencies and prejudices, will most appreciate the extent to which such feelings unquestion-

ably operated in preventing the reformation from taking root, and bearing fruit in Italy.

The readers of the foregoing sonnets, even those who are familiar with the language of the original, will probably have wondered at the greatness of the poetical reputation, which was built out of such materials. It is but fair, however, to the poetess to state, that the citations have been selected, rather with the view of decisively proving these Protestant leanings of Vittoria, which have been so eagerly denied, and of illustrating the tone of Italian Protestant feeling at that period, than of presenting the most favorable specimens of her poetry. However fitly devotional feeling may be clothed in poetry of the highest order, controversial divinity is not a happy subject for verse. And Vittoria, on the comparatively rare occasions, when she permits

herself to escape from the consideration of disputed dogma, can make a nearer approach to true poetry of thought and expression.

In the following sonnet, it is curious to observe how the expression of the grand and simple sentiment of perfect trust in the will and intentions of the omnipotent Creator, which, in the first eight lines, rises into something like poetry, becomes flattened and debased into the most prosaic doggrel, as soon as the author, recollecting the controversies raging round her on the subject, bethinks her of the necessity of duly defining the theological virtue of "Faith," as being of that sort fit for the production of works.

"Deh! mandi oggi, Signor, novello e chiaro
Raggio al mio cor di quella ardente fede,
Ch' opra sol per amor, non per mercede,
Onde ugualmente il tuo voler gli è caro!
Dal dolce fonte tuo pensa che amaro
Nascer non possa, anzi riceve e crede

Per buon quant' ode, e per bel quanto vede,
Per largo il ciel, quand' ei si mostra avaro.
Se chieder grazia all' umil servo lice,
Questa fede vorrei, che illustra, accende,
E pasce l' alma sol di lume vero.
Con questa in parte il gran valor s' intende,
Che pianta e ferma in noi l' alta radice,
Qual rende i frutti a lui tutti d'amore."

Which may be thus rendered :—

"Grant to my heart a pure fresh ray, O Lord,
Of that bright ardent faith, which makes thy will
Its best-loved law, and seeks it to fulfil
For love alone, not looking for reward;—
That faith, which deems no ill can come from thee,
But humbly trusts, that, rightly understood
All that meets eye or ear is fair and good,
And Heaven's love oft in prayers refused can see.
And if thy handmaid might prefer a suit,
I would that faith possess that fires the heart,
And feeds the soul with the true light alone;
I mean hereby, that mighty power in part,
Which plants and strengthens in us the deep root,
From which all fruits of love for him are grown."

In the following sonnet, which is one of several dictated by the same mood of feeling, the more subjective tone of her thought affords us an auto-

biographical glimpse of her state of mind on religious subjects. We find, that the new tenets which she had imbibed had failed to give her peace of mind. That comfortable security, and undoubting satisfied tranquillity, procured for the mass of her orthodox contemporaries, by the due performance of their fasts, vigils, penitences, &c., was not attained for Vittoria by a creed, which required her, as she here tells us, to stifle the suggestions of her reason.

"Se con l' armi celesti avess' io vinto
Me stessa, i sensi, e la ragione umana,
Andrei con altro spirto alta e lontana
Dal mondo, e dal suo onor falso dipinto.
Sull' ali della fede il pensier cinto
Di speme, omai non più caduca e vana,
Sarebbe fuor di questa valle insana
Da verace virtute alzato e spinto.
Ben ho già fermo l' occhio al miglior fine
Dei nostro corso; ma non volo ancora
Per lo destro sentier salda e leggiera.
Veggio i segni del sol, scorgo l' aurora;

Ma per li sacri giri alle divine
Stanze non entro in quella luce vera."

Englished as follows :—

"Had I with heavenly arms 'gainst self and sense
And human reason waged successful war,
Then with a different spirit soaring far
I'd fly the world's vain glory and pretence.
Then soaring thought on wings of faith might rise,
Armed by a hope no longer vain or frail
Far from the madness of this earthly vale,
Led by true virtue towards its native skies.
That better aim is ever in my sight,
Of man's existence; but not yet 'tis mine
To speed sure-footed on the happy way.
Signs of the rising sun and coming day
I see; but enter not the courts divine
Whose holy portals lead to perfect light."

A touch of similar feeling may be observed also in the following sonnet, united with more of poetical feeling and expression. Indeed, this sonnet may be offered as a specimen of the author's happiest efforts :—

"Fra gelo e nebbia corro a Dio sovente
Per foco e lume, onde i ghiacci disciolti

Sieno, e gli ombrosí veli aperti e tolti
Dalla divina luce e fiamma ardente.
E se fredda ed oscura è ancor la mente,
Pur son tutti i pensieri al ciel rivolti;
E par che dentro in gran silenzio ascolti
Un suon, che sol nell' anima si sente;
E dice; Non temer, chè venne al mondo
Gesù d' eterno ben largo ampio mare,
Per far leggiero ogni gravoso pondo.
Sempre son l' onde sue più dolci e chiare
A chi con umil barca in quel gran fondo
Dell' alta sua bontà si lascia andare."

If the reader, who is able to form a judgment of the poetical merit of this sonnet only from the subjoined translation, should fail to find in it any thing to justify the opinion that has been expressed of it, he is entreated to believe that the fault is that of the translator, who can promise only that the sense has been faithfully rendered :—

"Ofttimes to God through frost and cloud I go
For light and warmth to break my icy chain,
And pierce and rend my veils of doubt in twain
With his divinest love, and radiant glow.
And if my soul sit cold and dark below

Yet all her longings fixed on heaven remain;
And seems she 'mid deep silence to a strain
To listen, which the soul alone can know,—
Saying, Fear nought! for Jesus came on earth,—
Jesus of endless joys the wide deep sea,
To ease each heavy load of mortal birth.
His waters ever clearest, sweetest be
To him, who in a lonely bark drifts forth,
On his great deeps of goodness trustfully."

It will probably be admitted, that the foregoing extracts from Vittoria Colonna's poetry, if they do not suffice to give the outline of the entire fabric of her religious faith, yet abundantly prove, that she must be classed among the Protestant and reforming party of her age and country, rather than among the orthodox Catholics, their opponents. The passages quoted all bear, more or less directly, on a few special points of doctrine, as do also the great bulk of her religious poems. But these points are precisely those on which the reforming movement was based, the cardinal points of difference be-

tween the parties. They involve exactly those doctrines which Rome, on mature examination and reflection, rightly found to be fatally incompatible with her system. For the dominant party at Trent were assuredly wiser in their generation than such children of light, as the good Contarini, who dreamed that a purified Papacy was possible, and that Rome might still be Rome, after its creed had been thus modified. Caraffa and Ghislieri, Popes Paul IV and Pius V, and their inquisitors knew very clearly better.

It is, of course, natural enough, that the points of doctrine then new and disputed, the points respecting which the poetess differed from the majority of the world around her, and which must have been the subject of her special meditation, should occupy also the most prominent position in her writings. Yet it is remarkable, that in

so large a mass of poetry on exclusively religious themes, there should be found hardly a thought or sentiment on topics of practical morality. The title of "*Rime sacre e morali*," prefixed by Visconti to this portion of Vittoria's writings, is wholly a misnomer. If these sonnets furnish the materials for forming a tolerably accurate notion of her scheme of theology, our estimate of her views of morality must be sought elsewhere.

There is every reason to feel satisfied, both from such records as we have of her life, and from the perfectly agreeing testimony of her contemporaries, that the tenor of her own life and conduct was not only blameless, but marked by the consistent exercise of many noble virtues. But, much as we hear from the lamentations of preachers of the habitual tendency of human conduct to fall short of human professions, the op-

posite phenomena exhibited by men, whose intuitive moral sense is superior to the teaching derivable from their creed, is perhaps quite as common. That band of eminent men, who were especially known as the maintainers and defenders of the peculiar tenets held by Vittoria, were unquestionably in all respects the best and noblest of their age and country. Yet their creed was assuredly an immoral one. And in the rare passages of our poetess's writings, in which a glimpse of moral theory can be discerned, the low and and unenlightened nature of it is such, as to prove, that the heaven-taught heart reached purer heights than the creed-taught intelligence could attain.

What could be worse, for instance, than the morality of the following conclusion of a sonnet, in which she has been lamenting the blindness of those

who sacrifice eternal bliss for the sake of worldly pleasures.

She writes :—

"Poichè 'l mal per natura non gli annoia,
E del ben per ragion piacer non hanno,
Abbian almen di Dio giusto timore."

In English :—

"Since evil by its nature pains them not,
Nor good for its own proper sake delights,
Let them at least have righteous fear of God."

She appears incapable of understanding, that no fear of God could in any wise avail to improve or profit him, who has no aversion from evil, and no love for good. She does not perceive, that to inculcate so godless a fear of God, is to make the Creator a mere bugbear for police purposes; and that a theory of Deity constructed on this basis would become a degrading demonolatry!

Vittoria Colonna has survived in men's memory as a poetess. But she is far more interesting to the historical student, who would obtain a full understanding of that wonderful sixteenth century, as a Protestant. Her highly gifted and richly cultivated intelligence, her great social position, and above all, her close intimacy with the eminent men who strove to set on foot an Italian reformation which should not be incompatible with the Papacy, make the illustration of her religious opinions a matter of no slight historical interest. And the bulk of the citations from her works has accordingly been selected with this view. But it is fair to her reputation to give one sonnet at least, chosen for no other reason than its merit.

The following, written apparently on the anniversary of our Saviour's cruci-

fixion, is certainly one of the best, if not the best in the collection :—

"Gli angeli eletti al gran bene infinito
Braman oggi soffrir penosa morte,
Acciò nella celeste empirea corte
Non sia più il servo, che il signor, gradito.
Piange l' antica madre il gusto ardito
Ch' a' figli suoi del ciel chiuse le porte;
E che due man piagate or sieno scorte
Da ridurne al cammin per lei smarrito.
Asconde il sol la sua fulgente chioma;
Spezzansi i sassi vivi; apronsi i monti;
Trema la terra e 'l ciel; turbansi l' acque;
Piangon gli spirti, al nostro mal si pronti,
Delle catene lor l' aggiunta soma.
L' uomo non piange, e pur piangendo nacque!"

Of which the following is an inadequate but tolerably faithful translation :—

"The angels to eternal bliss preferred,
Long on this day a painful death to die,
Lest in the heavenly mansions of the sky
The servant be more favored than his Lord.
Man's ancient mother weeps the deed, this day
That shut the gates of heaven against her race,
Weeps the two piercéd hands, whose work of grace,

Refinds the path, from which she made man stray.
The sun his ever-burning ray doth veil;
Earth and sky tremble; ocean quakes amain,
And mountains gape, and living rocks are torn.
The fiends, on watch for human evil, wail
The added weight of their restraining chain.
Man only weeps not; yet was weeping born."

As the previous extracts from the works of Vittoria have been, as has been stated, selected principally with a view to prove her Protestantism, it is fair to observe, that there are several sonnets addressed to the Virgin Mary, and some to various Saints, from which (though they are wholly free from any allusion to the grosser superstitions that Rome encourages her faithful disciples to connect with these personages), it is yet clear that the writer believed in the value of saintly intercession at the throne of grace. It is also worth remarking, that she nowhere betrays the smallest consciousness that she is differing in opinion from the recognized

tenets of the Church, unless it be found, as was before suggested, in an occasional obscurity of phrase, which seems open to the suspicion of having been intentional. The great majority of these poems, however, were in all probability composed before the Church had entered on her new career of persecution. And as regards the ever-recurring leading point of "justification by grace," it was impossible to say exactly how far it was orthodox to go in the statement of this tenet, until Rome had finally decided her doctrine by the decrees of the Council of Trent.

One other remark, which will hardly fail to suggest itself to the modern reader of Vittoria's poetry, may be added respecting these once celebrated and enthusiastically received works. There is not to be discovered throughout the whole of them one spark of Italian, or patriotic feeling. The ab-

sence of any such, must, undoubtedly, be regarded only as a confirmation of the fact asserted in a previous chapter, that no sentiment of the kind was then known in Italy. In that earlier portion of her works, which is occupied almost exclusively with her husband's praises, it is hardly possible that the expression of such feelings should have found no place, had they existed in her mind. But it is a curious instance of the degree to which even the better intellects of an age are blinded by, and made subservient to, the tone of feeling and habits of thought prevalent around them, that it never occurs to this pure and lofty-minded Vittoria, in celebrating the prowess of her hero, to give a thought to the cause for which he was drawing the sword. To prevail, to be the stronger, "to take great cities," "to rout the foe," appears to be all that her beau ideal of heroism required.

Wrong is done, and the strong-handed doer of it admired, the moral sense is blunted by the cowardly worship of success, and might takes from right the suffrages of the feeble, in the nineteenth as in the sixteenth century. But the contemplation of the total absence from such a mind as that of Vittoria Colonna, of all recognition of a right and a wrong in such matters, furnishes highly instructive evidence of the reality of the moral progress mankind has achieved.

CHAPTER VIII.

Return to Rome.—Her great reputation.—Friendship with Michael Angelo.—Medal of this period.—Removal to Orvieto.—Visit from Luca Contile.—Her determination not to quit the Church.—Francesco d'Olanda.—His record of conversations with Vittoria.—Vittoria at Viterbo.—Influence of Cardinal Pole on her mind.—Last return to Rome.—Her death.

Vittoria arrived in Rome from Ferrara in all probability about the end of the year 1537. She was now in the zenith of her reputation. The learned and elegant Bembo [1] writes of her, that he considered her poetical judgment as sound and authoritative as that of the greatest masters of the art of song.

[1] Bembo. Opere, vol. iii. p. 65.

Guidiccioni, the poetical Bishop of Fossombrone, and of Paul III's ablest diplomatists, declares [1] that the ancient glory of Tuscany had altogether passed into Latium in her person; and sends her sonnets of his own, with earnest entreaties that she will point out the faults of them. Veronica Gambara, herself a poetess, of merit perhaps not inferior to that of Vittoria, professed herself her most ardent admirer, and engaged Rinaldo Corso to write the commentary on her poems, which he executed as we have seen. Bernardo Tasso made her the subject of several of his poems. Giovio dedicated to her his life of Pescara, and Cardinal Pompeo Colonna his book on "The Praises of Women;" and Contarini paid her the far more remarkable compliment of dedicating to her his work "On Free Will."

[1] Opere, ed. Ven., p. 164.

Paul III was, as Muratori says,[1] by no means well disposed towards the Colonna family. Yet Vittoria must have had influence with the haughty and severe old Farnese. For both Bembo, and Fregoso, the Bishop of Naples, have taken occasion to acknowledge that they owed their promotion to the purple in great measure to her.

But the most noteworthy event of this period of Vittoria's life, was the commencement of her acquaintance with Michael Angelo Buonarroti.[2] That great man was then in his 63d year, while the poetess was in her 47th. The acquaintanceship grew rapidly into a close and durable friendship, which lasted during the remainder of Vittoria's life. It was a friendship eminently honorable to both of them. Michael Angelo was a man whose influence on his age was felt and ac-

[1] Annales, ad. ann. 1540. [2] Viscouti, p. 123.

knowledged, while he was yet living and exercising it, to a degree rarely observable even in the case of the greatest minds. He had, at the time in question, already reached the zenith of his fame, although he lived to witness and enjoy it for another quarter of a century. He was a man formed by nature, and already habituated by the social position his contemporaries had accorded to him, to mould men—not to be moulded by them—not a smooth or pliable man; rugged rather, self-relying, self-concentrated, and, though full of kindness for those who needed kindness, almost a stern man; no courtier, though accustomed to the society of courts; and apt to consider courtier-like courtesies and habitudes as impertinent impediments to the requirements of his high calling, to be repressed rather than condescended to. Yet the strong and kingly nature of this high-souled old man was

moulded into new form by contact with that of the comparatively youthful poetess.

The religious portion of the great artist's nature had scarcely shaped out for itself any more defined and substantial form of expression than a worship of the beautiful in spirit as well as in matter. By Vittoria he was made a devout Christian. The change is strongly marked in his poetry; and in several passages of the poems, four or five in number, addressed to her, he attributes it entirely to her influence.[1]

Some silly stuff has been written by very silly writers, by way of imparting the "interesting" character of a *belle passion*, more or less platonic, to this friendship between the sexagenarian artist and the immaculate Colonna. No argument is necessary to indicate the utter absurdity of an idea which

[1] See Harford's Michael Angelo, vol. ii. p. 148, *et seq.*

implies a thorough ignorance of the persons in question, of the circumstances of their friendship, and of all that remains on record of what passed between them. Mr. Harford, whose "Life of Michael Angelo" has been already quoted, was permitted, he says, to hear read the letters from Vittoria to her friend, which are preserved in that collection of papers and memorials of the great artist, which forms the most treasured possession of his descendants;[1] and he gives the following account of them:[2]

"They are five in number; and there is a sixth, addressed by her to a friend, which relates to Michael Angelo. Two of these letters refer in very grateful terms to the fine drawings he had been making for her, and to which she alludes with admiration. Another glances with deep interest at

[1] Note 4. [2] Harford's Michael Angelo, vol. ii. p. 158.

the devout sentiments of a sonnet, which it appears he had sent for her perusal . . . . . Another tells him in playful terms that his duties as architect of St. Peter's, and her own to the youthful inmates of the convent of St. Catherine at Viterbo, admit not of their frequently exchanging letters. This must have been written just a year before her death, which occurred in 1547. Michael Angelo became architect of St. Peter's in 1546. These letters are written with the most perfect ease, in a firm, strong hand; but there is not a syllable in any of them approaching to tenderness."

The period of Vittoria's stay in Rome on this occasion must have been a pleasant one. The acknowledged leader of the best and most intellectual society in that city; surrounded by a company of gifted and high-minded men, bound to her and to each other

by that most intimate and ennobling of all ties, the common profession of a higher, nobler, purer theory of life than that which prevailed around them, and a common membership of what might almost be called a select church within a church, whose principles and teaching its disciples hoped to see rapidly spreading and beneficially triumphant; dividing her time between her religious duties, her literary occupations, and conversation with well-loved and well-understood friends; —Vittoria can hardly have been still tormented by temptations to commit suicide. Yet in a medal struck in her honor at this period of her life, the last of the series engraved for Visconti's edition of her works, the reverse represents a phœnix on her funeral pile gazing on the sun, while the flames are rising around her. The obverse has a bust of the poetess, showing the features a

good deal changed in the course of the six or seven years which had elapsed since the execution of that silly Pyramus and Thisbe medal mentioned in a previous chapter, though still regular and well formed. The tendency to fatness, and to a comfortable-looking double chin, is considerably increased. She wears a singularly unbecoming head-dress of plaited linen, sitting close to and covering the entire head, with long pendants at the sides falling over the shoulders.

These pleasant Roman days were, however, destined to be of brief duration. They were cut short, strange as the statement may seem, by the imposition of an increased tax upon salt. For when Paul III resorted, in 1539, to that always odious and cruel means of pillaging his people, Ascanio Colonna maintained that, by virtue of some ancient privilege, the new tax

could not be levied on his estates. The pontifical tax-gatherers imprisoned certain of his vassals for refusing to pay; whereupon Ascanio assembled his retainers, made a raid into the Campagna, and drove off a large number of cattle.[1] The Pope lost no time in gathering an army of ten thousand men, and "war was declared" between the sovereign and the Colonna. The varying fortunes of this "war" have been narrated in detail by more than one historian.[2] Much mischief was done, and a great deal of misery occasioned by both the contending parties. But at length the forces of the Sovereign got the better of those of his vassal, and the principal fortresses of the Colonna were taken, and their fortifications ordered to be razed.

It was in consequence of these mis-

[1] Coppi. Mem. Col., p. 306.

[2] Especially Adriani, Storia di suoi tempi.

fortunes, and of that remarkable "solidarity" which, as has been before observed, united in those days the members of a family in their fortunes and reverses, that Vittoria quitted Rome, probably towards the end of 1540, and retired to Orvieto. But the loss of their brightest ornament was a misfortune which the highest circles of Roman society could not submit to patiently. Many of the most influential personages at Paul III.'s court visited the celebrated exile at Orvieto, and succeeded ere long in obtaining her return to Rome after a very short absence.[1] And we accordingly find her again in the eternal city in the August, of 1541.

There is a letter written by Luca Contile,[2] the Sienese historian, dramatist and poet, in which he speaks of a visit

[1] Visconti, p. cxxvii.
[2] Contile, Lettere, p. 19; Venice, 1564.

he had paid to Vittoria in Rome in that month. She asked him, he writes, for news of Fra Bernardino (Ochino), and on his replying that he had left behind him at Milan the highest reputation for virtue and holiness, she answered, "God grant that he so persevere!"

On this passage of Luca Contile's letter, Visconti and others have built a long argument in proof of Vittoria's orthodoxy. It is quite clear, they say, that she already suspected and lamented Ochino's progress towards heresy, and thus indicates her own aversion to aught that might lead to separation from the church of Rome. It would be difficult, however, to show that the simple phrase in question had necessarily any such meaning. But any dispute on this point is altogether nugatory; for it may be at once admitted that Vittoria did not quit, and in all probability would not under any cir-

cumstances have quitted, the communion of the Church. And if this is all that her Romanist biographers wish to maintain, they unquestionably are correct in their statements. She acted in this respect in conformity with the conduct of the majority of those eminent men whose disciple and friend she was during so many years. And the final extinction of the reformatory movement in Italy was in great measure due precisely to the fact, that conformity to Rome was dearer to most Italian minds than the independent assertion of their own opinions. It may be freely granted, that there is every reason to suppose that it would have been so to Vittoria, had she not been so fortunate as to die before her peculiar tenets were so definitively condemned as to make it necessary for her to choose between abandoning them or abandoning Rome. But surely all the

interest which belongs to the question of her religious opinions consists in the fact that she, like the majority of the best minds of her country and age, assuredly held doctrines which Rome discovered and declared to be incompatible with her creed.

A more agreeable record of Vittoria's presence in Rome at this time, and an interesting glimpse of the manner in which many of her hours were passed, is to be found in the papers left by one Francesco d' Olanda,[1] a Portuguese painter, who was then in the eternal city. He had been introduced, he tells us, by the kindness of Messer Lattanzio Tolemei of Siena to the Marchesa de Pescara, and also to Michael Angelo; and he has recorded at length several conversations between these, and two or three other members of their society, in which he took part.

[1] Note 5.

The object of his notes appears to have been chiefly to preserve the opinions expressed by the great Florentine on subjects connected with the arts. And it must be admitted, that the conversation of the eminent personages mentioned, as recorded by the Portuguese painter, appears, if judged by the standard of nineteenth century notions, to have been wonderfully dull and flat.

The record is a very curious one even in this point of view. It is interesting to measure the distance between what was considered first-rate conversation in 1540, and what would be tolerated among intelligent people in 1850. The good-old-times admirers, who would have us believe that the ponderous erudition of past generations is distasteful to us, only by reason of the touch-and-go butterfly frivolousness of the modern mind, are in error. The

long discourses which charmed a sixteenth century audience, are to us intolerably boring, because they are filled with platitudes;—with facts, inferences, and speculations, that is, which have passed and repassed through the popular mind, till they have assumed the appearance of self-evident truths and fundamental axioms, which it is loss of time to spend words on. And time has so wonderfully risen in value! And though there are more than ever men whose discourse might be instructive and profitable to their associates, the universality of the habit of reading prevents conversation from being turned into a lecture. Those who have matter worth communicating, can do so more effectually and to a larger audience by means of the pen; and those willing to be instructed, can make themselves masters of the thoughts of

others far more satisfactorily by the medium of a book.

But the external circumstances of these conversations, noted down for us by Francesco d'Olanda, give us an amusing peep into the literary life of the Roman world three hundred years ago.

It was one Sunday afternoon that the Portuguese artist went to call on Messer Lattanzio Tolemei, nephew of the cardinal of that name. The servants told him, that their master was in the church of San Silvestro, at Monte Cavallo, in company with the Marchesa di Pescara, for the purpose of hearing a lecture on the Epistles of St. Paul, from a certain Friar Ambrose of Siene. Maestro Francesco lost no time in following his friend thither. And "as soon as the reading and the interpretations of it were over," the Marchesa turning to the stranger, and

inviting him to sit beside her, said ; "If I am not mistaken, Francesco d'Olanda would better like to hear Michael Angelo preach on painting, than to listen to Friar Ambrose's lecture."

Whereupon the painter, "feeling himself piqued," assures the lady that he can take interest in other matters than painting, and that however willingly he would listen to Michael Angelo on art, he would prefer to hear Friar Ambrose when St. Paul's epistles were in question.

"Do not be angry, Messer Francesco," said Signor Lattanzio, thereupon. "The Marchesa is far from doubting that the man capable of painting may be capable of aught else. We, in Italy, have too high an estimate of art for that. But, perhaps, we should gather from the remark of the Signora Marchesa the intention of adding to the

pleasure you have already had, that of hearing Michael Angelo."

"In that case," said I, her "Excellence would do only as is her wont;—that is,to accord greater favors than one would have dared to ask of her."

So Vittoria calls to a servant, and bids him go to the house of Michael Angelo, and tell him, "that I and Messer Lattanzio are here in this cool chapel, that the church is shut, and very pleasant, and ask him if he will come and spend a part of the day with us, that we may put it to profit in his company. But do not tell him that Francesco d'Olanda the Spaniard is here."

Then there is some very mild raillery about how Michael Angelo was to be led to speak of painting;—it being, it seems, very questionable whether he could be induced to do so; and a little bickering follows between Maestro

Francesco and Friar Ambrose, who feels convinced that Michael will not be got to talk before the Portuguese, while the latter boasts of his intimacy with the great man.

Presently there is a knock at the church door. It is Michael Angelo, who has been met by the servant as he was going towards the baths, talking with Orbino, his color-grinder.

"The Marchesa rose to receive him, and remained standing a good while, before making him sit down between her and Messer Lattanzio." Then, "with an art, which I can neither describe nor imitate, she began to talk of various matters with infinite wit and grace, without ever touching the subject of painting, the better to make sure of the great painter."

"One is sure enough," she says at last, "to be completely beaten, as often as one ventures to attack Michael An-

gelo on his own ground, which is that of wit and raillery. You will see, Messer Lattanzio, that to put him down and reduce him to silence, we must talk to him of briefs, law processes, or painting."

By which subtle and deep-laid plot the great man is set off into a long discourse on painters and painting.

"His Holiness," said the Marchesa, after a while, "has granted me the favor of authorizing me to build a new convent, near this spot, on the slope of Monte Cavallo, where there is the ruined portico, from the top of which, it is said, that Nero looked on while Rome was burning; so that virtuous women may efface the trace of so wicked a man. I do not know, Michael Angelo, what form or proportions to give the building, or on which side to make the entrance. Would it not be possible to join together some parts of the ancient

constructions, and make them available towards the new building?"

"Yes," said Michael Angelo; "the ruined portico might serve for a bell-tower."

This repartee, says our Portuguese reporter, was uttered with so much seriousness and *aplomb*, that Messer Lattanzio could not forbear from remarking it.

From which we are led to infer, that the great Michael was understood to have made a joke. He added, however, more seriously; "I think, that your Excellence may build the proposed convent without difficulty; and when we go out, we can, if your Excellence so please, have a look at the spot, and suggest to you some ideas."

Then, after a complimentary speech from Vittoria, in which she declares that the public, who know Michael Angelo's works only without being ac

quainted with his character, are ignorant of the best part of him, the lecture, to which all this is introductory, begins. And when the company part at its close, an appointment is made to meet again another Sunday in the same church.

A painter in search of an unhackneyed subject, might easily choose a worse one than that suggested by this notable group, making the cool and quiet church their Sunday afternoon drawing-room.

The few remaining years of Vittoria's life were spent between Rome and Viterbo, an episcopal city some thirty miles to the north of it. In this latter her home was in the convent of the nuns of St. Catherine. Her society there consisted chiefly of Cardinal Pole, the governor of Viterbo, her old friend Marco Antonio Flaminio, and Archbishop Soranzo.

During these years the rapidly increasing consciousness on the part of the Church of the danger of the doctrines held by the reforming party, was speedily making it unsafe to profess those opinions, which, as we have seen, gave the color to so large a portion of Vittoria's poetry, and which had formed her spiritual character. And these friends, in the closest intimacy with whom she lived at Viterbo, were not the sort of men calculated to support her in any daring reliance on the dictates of her own soul, when these chanced to be in opposition to the views of the Church. Pole appears to have been at this time the special director of her conscience. And we know but too well, from the lamentable sequel of his own career, the sort of counsel he would be likely to give her under the circumstances. There is an extremely interesting letter extant,

written by her from Viterbo to the Cardinal Cervino, who was afterwards Pope Marcellus II, which proves clearly enough, to the great delight of her orthodox admirers, that let her opinions have been what they might, she was ready to "submit" them to the censorship of Rome. We have seen how closely her opinions agreed with those which drove Bernardino Ochino to separate himself from the Church, and fly from its vengeance. Yet under Pole's tutelage she writes as follows:—

"Most Illustrious and most Reverend Sir,

"The more opportunity I have had of observing the actions of his Eminence the Cardinal of England (Pole), the more clear has it seemed to me that he is a true and sincere servant of God. Whenever, therefore, he charitably condescends to give me his opinion on any point, I conceive myself safe

from error in following his advice. And he told me that, in his opinion, I ought, in case any letter or other matter should reach me from Fra Bernardino, to send the same to your most Reverend Lordship, and return no answer, unless I should be directed to do so. I send you therefore the enclosed, which I have this day received, together with the little book attached. The whole was in a packet, which came to the post here by a courier from Bologna, without any other writing inside. And I have thought it best not to make use of any other means of sending it, than by a servant of my own." * *

She adds in a postscript:—

"It grieves me much that the more he tries to excuse himself the more he accuses himself; and the more he thinks to save others from shipwreck, the more he exposes himself to the

flood, being himself out of the ark which saves and secures." [1]

Poor Ochino little thought probably that his letter to his former admiring and fervent disciple, would be passed on with such a remark to the hands of his enemies! He ought, however, to have been aware that princesses and cardinals, whatever speculations they may have indulged in, do not easily become heretics.

She returned once more from Viterbo to Rome towards the end of the year 1544, and took up her residence in the convent of Benedictines of St Anne. While there she composed the Latin prayer, printed in the note,[2] which has been much admired, and which, though not so Ciceronian in its diction as Bembo might have written, will bear comparison with similar compositions by many

[1] Visconti, p. cxxxi. Printed also by Tiraboschi, vol. 7.
[2] Note 6.

more celebrated persons. Several of the latest of her poems were also written at this time. But her health began to fail so rapidly as to give great uneasiness to her friends. Several letters are extant from Tolomei to her physician, anxiously inquiring after her health, urging him to neglect no resources of his art, and bidding him remember that "the lives of many, who continually receive from her their food—some that of the body, and others that of the mind—are bound up in hers."[1] The celebrated physician and poet Fracastoro, was written to in Verona. In his reply, after suggesting medical remedies, he says, "Would that a physician for her mind could be found! Otherwise the fairest light in this world will, from causes by no means clear (*a non so che strano modo*) be extinguished and taken from our eyes."[2]

[1] Lettere del Tolomei. Venezia, 1578. [2] Visconti, p. cxxxiv

The medical opinion of Fracastoro, writing from a distance, may not be of much value. But it is certain that many circumstances combined to render these declining years of Vittoria's life unhappy. The fortunes of her family were under a cloud ; and it is probable that she was as much grieved by her brother's conduct, as by the consequences of it. The death also of the Marchese del Vasto, in the flower of his age, about this time, was a severe blow to her. Ever since those happy early days in Ischia, when she had been to him, as she said, morally and intellectually a mother, the closest ties of affection had united them ; and his loss was to Vittoria like that of a son. Then again, though she had perfectly made up her mind as to the line of conduct it behooved her to take in regard to any difficulties of religious opinion, yet it cannot be doubted that the necessity

of separating herself from so many whom she had loved and venerated, deserting them, as it were, in their falling fortunes, must have been acutely painful to her. Possibly also conscience was not wholly at rest with her on this matter. It may be that the still voice of inward conviction would sometimes make obstinate murmur against blindfold submission to a priesthood, who ought not, according to the once expressed opinion of the poetess, to come between the creature and his Creator.

As she became gradually worse and weaker, she was removed from the convent of St. Anne, to the neighboring house of Giuliano Cesarini, the husband of Guilia Colonna, the only one of her kindred then left in Rome. And there she breathed her last towards the end of February, 1547, in the 57th year of her age.

In her last hours she was visited by her faithful and devotedly attached friend Michael Angelo, who watched the departure of the spirit from her frame; and who declared,[1] years afterwards, that he had never ceased to regret, that in that solemn moment he had not ventured to press his lips for the first and last time, to the marble forehead of the dead.

She had directed that her funeral should be in all respects like that of one of the sisters of the convent in which she last resided. And so completely were her behests attended to, that no memorial of any kind remains to tell the place of her sepulchre.

[1] Condivi. Vita.

NOTES

TO THE

LIFE OF VITTORIA COLONNA.

1.—Page 49.

Guiliano Passeri, the author of the diary quoted in the text, was an honest weaver, living by his art at Naples in the time of Ferdinand of Spain and Charles V. His work appears to have been composed wholly for his own satisfaction and amusement. The entire work is written in the form of a diary. But as the first entry records the coming of Alphonso I to Naples, on "this day the 26th February, 1443," and the last describes the funeral of the Marchese di Pescara, Vittoria's husband, on the 12th May, 1526, it is difficult to suppose that these could have been the daily jottings of one and the same individual, extending over a period of 83 years, although it is *possible* that they may have been so. As the work ends quite abruptly, it seems

reasonable to suppose that it was carried on till the death of the writer. The probability is, that the memorials of the earlier years are due to another pen. The work is written in Neapolitan dialect, and con cerns itself very little with aught that passed out of Naples. It has all the marks of being written by an eye-witness of the circumstances recorded. The accounts especially of all public ceremonies, gala-doings, etc., are given in great detail, and with all the gusto of a regular sight-seer. And the book is interesting as a rare specimen of the writing and ideas of an artisan of the 16th century.

It was printed in a 4to volume at Naples in 1785, and is rather rare.

2.—Page 99.

These false ducats gave rise, we are told, to the king's saying, that his wife had brought him three gifts:—

Faciem pictam,
Monetam fictam,

to which the ungallant and brutal royal husband added another, the statement of which ending in "strictam," is so grossly coarse, that it cannot be repeated here, even with the partial veil of its Latin clothing.

3.—Page 125.

The translations of the sonnets in the text have been given solely with the view of enabling those, who do

not read Italian, to form some idea of the subject-matter and mode of thought of the author, and not with any hope or pretension of presenting any thing that might be accepted as a tolerable English sonnet. In many instances the required continuation of the rhyme has not even been attempted. If it be asked, why then were the translations not given in simple prose, which would have admitted a yet greater accuracy of literal rendering?—it is answered, that a translation so made would be so intolerably bald, flat, and silly-sounding, that a still more unfavorable conception of the original would remain in the English reader's mind that that, which it is hoped may be produced by the more or less poetically-cast translations given. The originals, printed in every instance, will do justice (if not more) to our poetess in the eyes of those acquainted with her language, for the specimens chosen may be relied on as being not unfavorable specimens. And many readers, probably, who might not take the trouble to understand the original in a language they imperfectly understand, may yet, by the help of the translation, if they think it worth while, obtain a tolerable accurate notion of Vittoria's poetical style.

4.—Page 214.

When Mr. Harford heard these letters read, the exceedingly valuable and interesting museum of papers, pictures, drawings, etc. of Michael Angelo, was the

property of his lineal descendant, the late minister of public instruction in Tuscany. When dying, he bequeathed this exceedingly important collection to the "Communità," or corporation of Florence. The Tuscan law requires that the notary who draws a will, should do so *in the presence of the testator.* Unfortunately, on the sick man complaining of the heat of the room, the notary employed to draw this important instrument, retired, it seems, into the next room, which, as a door was open between the two chambers, he conceived was equivalent to being in presence of the testator, as required by law. It has been decided, however, by the tribunals of Florence, that the will was thus vitiated, and that the property must pass to the heirs at law. An appeal still pending (September, 1858) lies to a higher court; but there is every reason to believe that the original judgment must be confirmed. In the mean time, the papers, etc., are under the inviolable seal of the law.

5.—Page 222.

The MS. of François de Holland, containing the notices of Vittoria Colonna, given in the text, is to be found translated into French, and printed in a volume entitled, "Les Arts en Portugal, par le Comte A. Raczynski. Paris, 1846."

My attention was directed to the notices of Vittoria to be found in this volume, by a review of M. Deumier's book on our poetess, by Signor A. Reumont, inserted in the fifth volume of the new series of the "Archivio Storico Italiano, Firenze, 1857," p. 138.

6.—Page 235.

The prayer written by Vittoriâ Colonna is as follows:—

"Da, precor, Domine, ut eâ animi depressione, quæ humilitati meæ convenit, eâque mentis elatione, quam tua postulat celsitudo, te semper adorem; ac in timore, quem tua incutit justitia, et in spe, quam tua clementia permittit, vivam continue, meque tibi uti potentissimo subjiciam, tanquam sapientissimo disponam, et ad te ut perfectissimum et optimum convertar. Obsecro, Pater Pientissime, ut me ignis tuus vivacissimus depuret, lux tua clarissima illustret, et amor tuus ille sincerissimus ita proficiat ut ad te nullo mortalium rerum obice detenta, felix redeam et secura.'

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