

him, cracks some joke or other, and breaks out into a hyæna-like laugh. He may be an honest wag after all, but I confess my mind is poisoned with suspicion from the tales I have read in Spanish Travellers.

You will, however, wish to hear something no doubt of the smiling villages and the luxuriant trees which give life and beauty to the banks of the Guadalquivir. Well as I have told you nothing but the truth, hitherto, so will I continue to do. A more monotonous, solitary, treeless scene than I never witnessed, varied only with occasional troops of mules and cattle—and few are the vessels on this full navigable stream, which runs up from the sea sixty miles to Seville, the third city of Spain—but Spain is unlike any other European country.

After a twelve hours voyage I am here established at the Fonda della reyna, where I am rejoiced to find a very intelligent Englishman who is travelling in Spain on business, and with whom I made acquaintance at Cadiz. In my next I hope to give you some account of this city, and in haste,

Believe me, &c.

## LETTER III.

ON THE STILE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF DANTE.

University Club.

SIR,

PRESUMING you have now had sufficient of Petrarch, I come to a poet, who deserves much more of your attention, the great Dante Alighieri—the sixth as he stiles himself among the ancient poets. My admiration would claim for him a much higher rank among them; while among modern poets I am inclined to think he stands second to none.

I am aware indeed of the sneers of Voltaire, and that Warton the learned author of the history of English poetry, has treated him with a very supercilious kind of indifference; but remembering that the land of his birth, and that too the land of Petrarch, Ariosto and Tasso, has stiled him the father of her language and her poetry, that Florence established a professorship on purpose to lecture on his great poem, and that

the celebrated Boccaccio was first appointed to fill that professor's chair—I think we may disregard both the sneers of the lively Frenchman, and the superciliousness of the laborious Englishman, when opposed to such a proof of his literary merits.

I purpose to confine myself in this correspondence to the first part of the divine Comedy, viz. the Inferno—to afford a sketch of its plot, and to remark on the characteristics of Dante's stile in general, which will be quite sufficient for this first letter: proposing in subsequent letters to go through each Canto of this division of the poem, in successive order.

The subject of this great poem which he entitled *Commedia* in contradistinction to the epic or lofty stile of poetry, and to which the admiration of the Italians afterwards prefixed the epithet *Divina*, is a description of the three worlds of departed spirits, Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, a popular subject at that time, which much and unprofitably engaged the speculation of the world. We know indeed that masques were performed in those days on the Arno, pre-

tending to give a visible representation of the infernal world, during the time of the Carnival, and accompanied, no doubt, amidst all the horrors of the scene displayed, with no lack of the buffooneries usual to that festive season. It seems, likewise, that the credulity of that age induced some to believe that a real insight had been gained into the state of the future world, by the story current of the old woman who pointed out Dante to her companion as the adventurous traveller who had just returned from a visit to the infernal regions; and “mark,” said she, “how the fire has scorched his beard.”

Such was the popular subject, then, that he chose for a poem containing about four thousand stanzas, consisting of three verses each, each verse in the several stanzas corresponding in alternate *double* rhymes—a truly Herculean task, which, under the unpretending title of *Commedia*, he commenced in his native city, Florence, and continued working at for more than twenty years, amidst all the wanderings and vicissitudes of his exiled life, when banished by the victorious political party opposed to him, he

was driven to the hard necessity of begging the shelter of an asylum from the great and powerful through the different states of Italy. A memorable instance this of a noble spirit ! rising superior to its fate, and a proof that he was not only a great poet, but that he deserved the still prouder title of a great man. Unconquered by the strokes of Fortune, amidst all the humiliations he was doomed to undergo, still he pursued with unflagging wing this noble and enduring monument of his genius.

As I believe the reading public of this country were little acquainted with the *Commedia* before Mr. Cary's excellent translation appeared, for the sake of those who have only read Dante through this medium, I beg here to introduce a few observations upon that work.

It seems to me much to be regretted that the Rev. translator did not endeavour to present his original in a more popular form, by softening down many of Dante's obscurities and difficulties ; and as the words applied by M. Artaud, a French translator of Dante in prose, to a version of Grangier's, appear to me in a great

degree to apply to Mr. Cary's, I shall here quote them: "Il s'est toujours efforcé de rendre mot pour mot, sans chercher à donner la moindre grace à son travail. Aussi est-il presque toujours plus obscur que le Dante."

I shall also remark that Mr. Cary's blank verse has the effects of turning the *Commedia* into its very opposite, viz. an epic poem; and that whereas Dante, nine times in ten, closes his sense with the stanzas, Mr. Cary carries it on from verse to verse, occasioning continual breaks in the versification, and dealing with the dislocated and disjointed poet very much as with a potter's vessel, namely, breaking him into a thousand little fragments. Again, where Dante rises to his highest flights, Mr. Cary is sometimes very tame. For his versification, which sometimes limps most lamentably, the great inequality of Dante may be pleaded as his excuse, who is himself occasionally terribly prosaic, when the translator has then an ungrateful and heavy task to perform.

But upon the whole, considering the difficulties of translating such a work as the *Commedia*, few

indeed could have performed it better than Mr. Cary, though I by no means agree with the Quarterly Review, that any future attempt is hopeless; for be it remembered that many as are the translators of Goëthe's Faust, Dr. Ainstey's, the last of them, has left all the preceding ones far behind. But I shall now endeavour to present you with a short outline and sketch of the plot of the Inferno.

In the year of our Lord 1300, Dante being then in his thirty-fifth year, "il mezzo cammin di nostra vita," describes himself in the opening canto as having strayed from the direct path, and bewildered himself amidst a dark and entangled forest. By this forest he typifies a worldly and sensual course of life, in which he had wandered from the path of virtue. While thus lost, first Pleasure and Luxury, under the emblematic form of the speckled panther, then Avarice, under that of a lean and insatiable wolf, and, finally, Ambition, under that of a lion, successively harrass him by dodging his steps, and arrest his progress towards a sunny height (under which, probably, he figures the spiritual

repentance of religion) which opens on his eyes amidst surrounding gloom and obscurity. In the midst of his terror and distraction, Virgil, his favorite poet, suddenly presents himself before him, and announces that he is sent to his aid by the command of Beatrix, whom the commentators have assumed to represent the allegorical personification of Theology. This lady was his earliest love, and seems to have exercised the same influence over him, as Laura over the heart of the complaining Petrarch, but withal a more manly one.

If I am not refining too far, it appears to me that by this mission of Virgil to his assistance, he would intimate the effect which poetry, so highly an intellectual occupation of the mind, produced upon him, by reclaiming him from his former course of life, and withdrawing him from more worldly and sensual pursuits.

On his first appearance Virgil exhorts him to put himself under his guidance, and promises to conduct him to that sunny eminence in the distance, which he tells him is the source of every joy; but by a journey so adventurous as might



make the stoutest heart to quail, namely through the three mysterious worlds of spirits, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Such was the journey with all its incidents that the poet undertook to describe, and it is a subject, which, embracing the punishment awarded to sin, the penitence necessary according to the Catholic doctrine to expiate it, and the reward which awaits the truly repentant, that was amply sufficient to engross his mind, and divert him from the trifles that engage the idler, or the vices which enslave the profligate.

Under Virgil's guidance then he sets forward on his adventurous journey, but not without much hesitation, and having arrived at the awful gate of hell, finds himself, after having passed through it, among those condemned negative characters neither distinguished by virtue, or notoriously infamous from their vices. Reaching the river Acheron, he beholds the guilty spirits awaiting the pleasure of Charon to ferry them over; and while he stands surveying the scene, the ground quakes beneath him, a whirlwind springs up, accompanied with lightnings, and he falls to the earth overcome by a sudden trance.

On his recovery he finds himself conveyed to the edge of the infernal pit.

Having as yet but entered the vestibule of hell, he is now about to descend into its bowels, and visit its different circles of torment, which are twenty-four in number, each being the condemned abode of a different class of sinners. These different circles are represented as running round the side of a deep pit or well in spiral grooves, having various modes of communication with each other.

Such is a brief sketch of the plot of the *Inferno*, and as I purpose to go through the thirty-four cantos into which this first division of the *Commedia* is divided, I need not here give you a summary of the wonderful things that are to be seen in these circles and their subdivisions. But though I have thus traced the groundwork of the plot, I shall not pretend when we come to the poem, to lead you as a guide through its many complicated details, in which I almost suspect Dante himself has sometimes intentionally mystified his readers, for by what river or bridge, or when or how I have passed from one

circle to another has often puzzled me, nor is there any Virgil at hand among the commentators to set me right.

In the manner in which he has filled up this frame-work of his poem, there are assuredly abundance of inconsistencies and extravagances—a mixture of history and fable, of christianity and heathen mythology, all jumbled together in strange confusion, which might somewhat startle the present age. But in the thirteenth century even religion itself had much of this pagan leaven by which in the earlier ages of the church, it had gained so many converts to its doctrines from the heathen world, and therefore a christian poet might well be indulged at that time in the liberty of introducing a Cerberus and a Charon into his description of the infernal world. Even in pourtraying the last judgment on the walls of the Papal chapel, we know that Michelangelo embodied several of the fanciful ideas of the *Commedia*.

Deeming it unnecessary to labour an apology of Dante for such inconsistencies, for he wrote for the inconsistent age in which he lived, I now

pass on to consider some of his characteristics as a poet.

That he is a master of the terrible, I need hardly observe to you, unrivalled, and that he has occasionally soared to the height of the sublime, I need only remind you of his well known inscription over the gate of hell, than which poetry never produced any thing more highly wrought in its way, and of his magnificent description of the angel, in the eleventh canto, sent from heaven to open an entrance into the city of Dite to him and his guide. But I would also call your attention to another characteristic of our poet, not less undoubted, though perhaps less striking; viz. his tenderness and sensibility.

In referring you to these qualities displayed in the *Commedia*, the celebrated tale of Francesca di Rimini, will immediately occur to you, but I dwell not on this, because it forms an episode by itself—but beg you to remark throughout the *whole* of the *Inferno*, how repeatedly you will find Dante the sympathizing and compassionate spectator of the torments he awards against the sinners of every rank, nation, and grade, whom he

cites before his tribunal without distinction of party and with equal impartiality, whether friend or foe: — how often overwhelmed by his tears, and with his voice choked by sobs, he deposes the task of interrogating the spirits of the dead to his guide—of the tender nature of the connexion which subsists between himself and Virgil, showing the dutiful reverence of a son on the part of the one, and the affectionate care and watchfulness of a parent on the other.

As however, when I come to the poem, I shall have an opportunity of commenting on numerous instances in proof of the sensibility of his nature, I go on to consider some few peculiarities of his stile and diction: and the first thing that strikes me is the economy of his words, contrasted with the prodigality of his imagination so fertile in ideas, and how disdainful all the trickeries of language, by the use of a few simple words he so often electrifies his reader. The force of the idea, which he may be said merely to sketch, he marks with so strong and clear an outline, that expressing much in a little, he sets the reader's mind to ruminate over the teeming

image which he so concisely places before it. For example, when he questions one of the spirits, and prays to learn his name, the spirit returns him this answer ;

“ Vedi, che son un che piango.”

Beholding a wretched sinner carrying his severed head about with him, and using it as it were a lantern, Dante says,—

“ E quel mirava noi, e dicea, O Me !”

This is one of the characteristics of his stile in which he stands unequalled.

Upon the subject of his stile, however, there is one thing, I must confess, that has often astonished me, namely, his having declared that his favorite poet Virgil was his model ;

“ Tu sei colui da cu' io tolsi

“ Lo bello stile che m' ha fatto onore.”

This declaration does astonish me, because I can find no two poets much more unlike. The one even, flowing, dignified, correct, and steering aloof from all daring innovations, poured forth such harmonious numbers as were well adapted to the refined ears of the imperial Augustus. The other, unequal, ardent, abrupt, concise to

the verge of obscurity, indulging in every freak of his fancy, bitter in irony, indignant against the corruptions of the church, and the vices of his country—a severe moralist, a rigid censor, and a bold uncompromising patriot, addresses himself to the people in a strain of republican hardihood and energy. I can perceive then no point of resemblance between such opposite and strongly contrasted stiles, though certain pedants in the shape of commentators, gifted no doubt with microscopic eyes, have pretended to discern what is invisible to common powers of vision.

And now a word or two upon the *difficulties* of his stile. Formidable as they are now, because the language is antiquated, at the time in which he wrote what language could have been more intelligible even to the lower classes of his countrymen, than that colloquial style he has adopted, employed in their every day and familiar intercourse with each other, of which the Tuscan idiom formed the ground-work, although occasionally he has introduced some of the provincial idioms peculiar to the other states of Italy, and enriched the Italian (for he was the creator of the

literary language of his country) with several Latin words? And if we require a proof how well his stile was adapted to common apprehension, the following two stories related of Dante afford very satisfactory ones.

As he was walking one day about the streets of Florence, he heard a tinker at work singing some stanzas of his poem, but so mutilating the harmony of the verse by his mispronunciations and false quantities, that the indignant poet no longer able to contain himself, burst into his shop and began retaliating on the pans and kettles of the offending songster, by throwing them out of the window. To the expostulations of the amazed tinker, Dante asked him of what trade he called himself, to which the mender of pans and kettles having returned a suitable answer; "Know, thou knave," replied the poet, "that I also follow a trade, that of composing verses, and that in thus dealing with thy old iron, I do but repay some part of the injury thou hast inflicted on my poetry." Another day he overtook a peasant driving his ass, who in like manner was solacing his task by carolling some of the



stanzas of his *Commedia*, and as regularly as he came to the end of each, he shouted out "Arri, "Arri," to urge on his lagging beast. "What "means't thou," asked Dante, rousing the peasant's attention with a stroke of his cudgel, "by "thrusting thy own words, Arri, arri, into the "verses which I have composed?"

But I think you will now agree with me, upon the familiarity of the stile of the *Commedia*, the poetry of which was in the mouths of tinkers and peasants, and that the author of it wrote not merely for the learned, nor for princes, lords, lordlings, nor ladies, but for the great mass of his fellow-countrymen. Dante was in short, in all respects a *popular* poet.

I shall now conclude with briefly adverting to the beauty, ingenuity and appropriateness of his similes and comparisons. You will observe how refreshingly they intervene to the mind of the reader, amidst all the horrors that Dante conjures up, by recalling him to images drawn from the most chearful and familiar objects of common life. Thus to illustrate the river of boiling pitch in which the usurers are immersed, he refers

to the cauldrons of tar which stand boiling in the arsenal of Venice to caulk the leaky sides of the weather-beaten vessel, and takes the opportunity of presenting us with a picture of so bustling and animated a scene. Again he compares them as they lift their heads above the surface to relieve their torments, to frogs peering with their muzzles above the water of a marshy pool, and immediately afterwards to a troop of dolphins lifting their arched backs above the billows, and like faithful friends prognosticating to the mariner the approaching gale. On another occasion, he likens the waving flames, each of which imprison the soul of an unhappy sinner, to swarms of fire-flies in the dusk of evening, winging their glittering flight amidst vineyards and harvest-fields.

I have thus comprised in as small a compass as I was able these prefatory remarks on Dante and his *Inferno*, and before we enter upon the *Commedia*, I must warn you that you are not to expect in such a poem the sustained march of the epic dignity and stateliness, or to grow out of humour with our author if he takes all

advantage of the license afforded to him by the term by which he designates it.

You will in truth find him every thing by turns, as the passion or humour of the moment is ascendant—terrible, sublime, tender, satirical, and even sportive, to the point of setting on his sinners at times to bandy abuse with each other. But whatever the latitude he may indulge himself in, whatever improprieties and inconsistencies may be charged against him, let this be recorded to his honour, and more it is than can be said for some writers of a more Christian age, and amongst them for Goëthe, the *Rousseau* of Germany, that never in a single instance has he played the pander to vice, or furnished from a polluted imagination the incentives to kindle into combustion the perhaps dormant passions of his readers. Dante on the contrary, is ever the stern uncompromising enemy of vice in every form as well as the eloquent advocate of virtue and morality.

Believe me, my dear Sir, &c.

To Trelawney Tomkinson, Esq.

Land's End, Cornwall.

## LETTER IV.

ACCOUNT OF SEVILLE—HEAT OF THE CLIMATE—CHARACTER OF THE SCENERY—SPANISH DANCING—EVENTS ATTENDING THE PROCLAMATION OF THE CONSTITUTION.

Seville.

DEAR SIR,

ACCORDING to the well known Spanish lines, "Quien no ha visto Sevilla, no ha visto maraviglia," you will naturally expect to hear that Seville is a very marvellous city. Having seen those wonders, the old Moorish tower (la Giralda), the famous Cathedral, the Alcazar, or ancient Moorish palace, the tobacco-factory, and the Consulado, or Exchange, I must declare that, in my opinion, the Menai bridge and the Plymouth break-water more truly than any of them deserve the name of wonders.

But to lose no time in giving you some description of them. First of the Giralda not much need be said—It is one of those square massive towers (probably a watch-tower) con-

structed of that excellent and solid brick-work for which the Moors were so famous, with a curious staircase winding round the interior, which you may ascend with as little trouble as a hill of moderate elevation, it being contrived without steps—nay, you may carry your horse up with you if you wish to gratify him with the prospect from the top. It is an ingenious specimen of Moorish architecture; but in the cathedral adjoining the Spaniards have far surpassed this work of their civilizing conquerors, and I will confine myself to a sketch merely of its interior.

The form of the church is a Latin cross, divided into a nave and double aisles, and intersected by a transept. The choir, as is the custom in all Spanish churches, is placed in the centre, inclosed by a screen, thus breaking the unity of the coup-d'œil; but with this single exception, you will find nothing to regret; for turn your eye wherever you will, whether upwards to the richly groined vault towering above your head, resting immediately upon those massive and gigantic columns, or cast it down the

vistas opening between them in such lengthened perspective, over which the painted windows high up throw a light so rich and subdued, you will be struck with a picture of vastness, grandeur and solemnity, which I think I may venture to say Europe cannot match: I hardly except St. Peter's, larger as it is, and more magnificent, certainly not for the solemnity of the effect it produces.

You might fancy yourself in a vast quarry of stone, chiselled by the art of man into the form of beauty and proportion: and at whatever hour you enter this glorious structure you will see it under some new aspect, as an Andalusian sun in its daily circuit pours its light through the windows in the different parts of the building: and here you must excuse my entering into details of this or any object I endeavour to describe, for were I to copy extracts from guide-books, how should I ever get through this correspondence? I, therefore, confine myself entirely on this and all other occasions to giving you a sketch as short as possible of general impressions.

While I stood admiring this solemn temple,



which, when left to silence and solitude, wears an air of deep religion, a procession of priests entered, chaunting in chorus, and preceded by torch and incense bearers. After completing the circuit of the church, and stopping to perform their genuflexions before the different altars, they marched into the choir in grand parade. The organ pealed forth a martial air of triumph, more suited to some conquering army, methought, than to the functionaries of a religion which breathes humility: the service began, the mysterious drama was enacted with all its accompanying ceremonies, prostrations, genuflexions, changing of robes, tossing up of incense vessels, lighting and extinguishing candles, tinkling a little bell, &c. &c. edifying, no doubt, to the catholic, but which, I confess, I have always looked on as a passing show, and a spectacle of gorgeous pageantry, in which the music alone found an avenue to the heart.

Not far from the Cathedral stands the Consulado, or Exchange, a large square building, "simplex munditiis," and of the chastest stile of architecture, forming an exception to the stile of this class of buildings in general, which

usually display some mark of bourgeois finery, betraying rather the influence of wealth than of good taste. The rendezvous within of the commercial world is a very handsome arcaded court with a fountain in the centre, and never did I see a quieter, cleaner, more gentlemanly and deserted exchange. It is an agreeable and tranquil shelter from a noon-tide sun; nor is the purity of the marble pavement soiled with hundreds of dusty shoes. The Consulado is, in short, a monument of a once flourishing commerce that has passed away most probably never to return.

Under this same roof is likewise comprised the Court of Archives, on the first story, to which you ascend by a staircase worthy of a palace. Here, in a superb gallery exquisitely paved with a variety of marbles, are preserved in mahogany cases, which line each side of the walls, a vast collection of public documents relating to the discovery of America, the MS. letters of Columbus, Pizarro and Cortez, historical papers and title-deeds of Spanish colonists.

And now is that mighty empire across the Atlantic passed away from the mother country,