



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

The History Of English Poetry

From The Close of the Eleventh To The Commencement of the Eighteenth
Century

Warton, Thomas

London, 1781

Section XXXI. Sackville's Induction to the Mirrour of Magistrates.
Examined. A prelude to the Fairy Queen. Comparative view of Dante's
Inferno.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-51323](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-51323)

S E C T. XXXI.

SACKVILLE'S INDUCTION, which was to have been placed at the head of our English tragical story, and which loses much of its dignity and propriety by being prefixed to a single life, and that of no great historical importance, is opened with the following poetical landscape of winter^a.

The wrathfull winter, proching on apace,
 With bluftring blasts had all ybard the treene;
 And old Saturnus with his frosty face
 With chilling colde had pearst the tender greene:
 The mantels rent, wherein enwrapped been
 The gladfom groves, that nowe laye overthrowen,
 The tapets tornè, and every bloom downe blowne.

The soile that earst so seemly was to seen,
 Was all despoyled of her beauty's hewe;
 And foote freshe flowres, wherewith the sommers queen
 Had clad the earth, now Boreas blastes downe blewe;
 And small fowles flocking in theyr song did rewe
 The winters wrath, wherewith eche thinge defaste
 In wofull wise bewayld the sommer paste.

Hawthorne had lost his motley lyverye,
 The naked twigges were shivering all for colde;
 And droppinge downe the teares abundantly,
 Eche thing, methought, with weping eye me tolde
 The cruell feason, bidding me witholde

^a See fol. cxvi.

The

Myselfe within: for I was gotten out
Into the felde where as I walkt about.

When loe the night, with mistie mantels spred,
Gan darke the daye, and dim the azure skies, &c.

The altered scene of things, the flowers and verdure of summer deformed by the frosts and storms of winter, and the day suddenly overspread with darknes, remind the poet of the uncertainties of human life, the transient state of honour, and the instability of prosperity.

And forrowing I to see the sommer flowers,
The lively greene, the lusty leas forlorne,
The sturdy trees so shattred with the showers,
The fieldes so fade, that floorisht so before;
It taught we wel, all earthly thinges be borne
To dye the death, for nought long time may last:
If sommors beauty yeelds to winters blast.

Then looking upwards to the heavens beams,
With nightes starres thick-powdred every where,
Which erst so glistened with the golden streames
That chearfull Phebus spred downe from his sphere,
Beholding darke, oppressing day, so neare;
The sodayne sight reduced to my mynde
The sundry chaunges that in earth we fynde.

Immediately the figure of SORROW suddenly appears, which shews the poet in a new and bolder mode of composition.

And strayt forth stalking with redoubled pace,
For that I sawe the night drew on so fast,
In black all clad there fell before my face
A piteous wight, whom woe had all forwaft;
Furth from her iyen the crystall teares outbraft,

And

And syghing fore her haunds she wronge and folde,
Tare al her haire that ruth was to beholde.

Her body small, forwithered and forespent,
As is the stalke that sommers drougt opprest;
Her wealked face with wofull teares besprent,
Her colour pale, and, as it seemed her best,
In woe and playnt repofed was her rest:
And as the stone that droppes of water weares,
So dented were her cheekes with fall of teares.—

I stoode agast, beholding all her plight,
Tween dread and dolour so distreynd in hart,
That while my heares upstart with the fight,
The teares outstreamde for forowe of her smart.
But when I sawe no ende, that could aparte
The deadly dole which she so fore dyd make,
With dolefull voyce then thus to her I spake.

Unwrap thy woes, whatever wight thou be!
And stint betime to spill thyselfe with playnt.
Tell what thou art, and whence, for well I see
Thou canst not dure with forowe thus attaynt.
And with that worde, of forrowe all forfaynt,
She looked up, and prostrate as she laye,
With piteous founde, lo! thus she gan to saye.

Alas, I wretche, whom thus thou seeest distrayned,
With wasting woes, that never shall aflake,
SORROWE I am, in endeles tormentes payned,
Among the Furies in the infernall lake;
Where Pluto god of hell so grieslie blake
Doth holde his throne, and Lethes deadly taste
Doth reive remembrance of eche thyng forepast.

Whence come I am, the dreary destinie,
 And luckles lot, for to bemone of those,
 Whom Fortune in this maze of miserie,
 Of wretched chaunce, most wofull myrrours chose:
 That when thou seest how lightly they did lose
 Their pompe, their power, and that they thought most sure,
 Thou mayest soon deeme no earthlye joye may dure.

SORROW then conducts the poet to the classial hell, to the place of torments and the place of happines.

I shall thee guyde first to the griesly lake,
 And thence unto the blisfull place of rest:
 Where thou shalt see and heare the playnt they make,
 That whilom here bare swinge^b among the best.
 This shalt thou see. But great is the unrest
 That thou must byde, before thou canst attayne
 Unto the dreadfull place where those remayne.

And with these wordes as I uprayed stood
 And gan to folowe her that straight forth paste,
 Ere I was ware, into a desert wood
 We nowe were come: where hand in hand embraced,
 She led the way, and through the thicke so traced
 As, but I had beene guyded by her might,
 It was no waye for any mortal wight.

But loe! while thus amid the desert darke
 We passed on, with steppes and pace unmeete,
 A rumbling roar confusde, with howle and barke
 Of dogs, shooke all the grounde under our feete,
 And strooke the din within our eares so deepe,
 As half distraught unto the ground I fell,
 Besought returne, and not to visit hell.—

^b Sway.

An

An hydeous hole al vast, withouten shape,
 Of endles depth, orewhelmde with ragged stone,
 With oughly mouth and griesly jawes doth gape,
 And to our sight confounds itself in one.
 Here entred we, and yeding^c forth, anone
 An horrible lothly lake we might discerne,
 As black as pitche, that cleped^d is Averno.

A deadly gulfe where nought but rubbish growes,
 With fowle blake swelth in thickened lumpes that lyes,
 Which upp in th' ayre such stinking vapour throwes,
 That over there may flye no fowle, but dyes
 Choakt with the noysom vapours that aryse.
 Hither we come, whence forth we still did pace,
 In dreadfull feare amid the dreadfull place.

Our author appears to have felt and to have conceived with true taste, that very romantic part of Virgil's Eneid which he has here happily copied and heightened. The imaginary beings which sate within the porch of hell, are all his own. I must not omit a single figure of this dreadful groupe, nor one compartment of the portraitures which are feigned to be sculptured or painted on the SHIELD of WAR, indented *with gashes deepe and wide.*

And, first, within the porch and jaws of hell
 Sat deep REMORSE OF CONSCIENCE, all besprent
 With tears; and to herself oft would she tell
 Her wretchedness, and, cursing, never stent
 To sob and sigh, but ever thus lament
 With thoughtful care; as she that, all in vain,
 Would wear and waste continually in pain:

^c Going.

^d Called.

F f 2

Her

Her eyes unstedfast, rolling here and there,
Whirl'd on each place, as place that vengeance brought,
So was her mind continually in fear,
Toft and tormented with the tedious thought
Of those detested crimes which she had wrought ;
With dreadful cheer, and looks thrown to the fky,
Wifhing for death, and yet she could not die.

Next, faw we DREAD, all trembling how he fhook,
With foot uncertain, profer'd here and there ;
Benumb'd with fpeech ; and, with a gaffly look,
Search'd every place, all pale and dead for fear,
His cap born up with with staring of his hair ;
'Stoin'd and amazed at his own fhade for dread,
And fearing greater dangers than was need.

And, next, within the entry of this lake,
Sat fell REVENGE, gnafhing her teeth for ire ;
Devising means how she may vengeance take ;
Never in reft, 'till she have her defire ;
But frets within fo far forth with the fire
Of wreaking flames, that now determines she
To die by death, or 'veng'd by death to be.

When fell REVENGE, with bloody foul pretence,
Had fhov'd herself, as next in order fet,
With trembling limbs we foftly parted thence,
'Till in our eyes another fight we met ;
When fro my heart a figh forthwith I fet,
Ruing, alas, upon the woeful plight
Of MISERY, that next appear'd in fight :

His face was lean, and fome-deal pin'd away,
And eke his hands confumed to the bone ;
But, what his body was, I cannot fay,

For

For on his carcase rayment had he none,
Save clouts and patches pieced one by one ;
With staff in hand, and scrip on shoulders cast,
His chief defence against the winter's blast :

His food, for most, was wild fruits of the tree,
Unless sometime some crumbs fell to his share,
Which in his wallet long, God wot, kept he,
As on the which full daintly would he fare ;
His drink, the running stream, his cup, the bare
Of his palm closed ; his bed, the hard cold ground :
To this poor life was MISERY ybound.

Whose wretched state when we had well beheld,
With tender ruth on him, and on his fears,
In thoughtful cares forth then our pace we held ;
And, by and by, another shape appears
Of greedy CARE, still brushing up the breers ;
His knuckles knob'd, his flesh deep dinted in,
With tawed hands, and hard ytanned skin :

The morrow grey no sooner hath begun
To spread his light, e'en peeping in our eyes,
But he is up, and to his work yrun ;
But let the night's black misty mantles rise,
And with foul dark never so much disguise
The fair bright day, yet ceaseth he no while,
But hath his candles to prolong his toil.

By him lay heavy SLEEP, the cousin of Death,
Flat on the ground, and still as any stone,
A very corpse, save yielding forth a breath ;
Small keep took he, whom fortune frowned on,
Or whom she lifted up into the throne
Of high renown, but, as a living death,
So, dead alive, of life he drew the breath :

The

The body's rest, the quiet of the heart,
 The travel's ease, the still night's fear was he,
 And of our life in earth the better part ;
 Rever of fight, and yet in whom we see
 Things oft that chance and oft that never be ;
 Without respect, esteemed equally
 King CROESUS' pomp and IRUS' poverty.

And next, in order sad, OLD-AGE we found :
 His beard all hoar, his eyes hollow and blind ;
 With drooping cheer still poring on the ground,
 As on the place where nature him assign'd
 To rest, when that the sisters had untwin'd
 His vital thread, and ended with their knife
 The fleeting course of fast-declining life :

There heard we him with broken and hollow plaint
 Rue with himself his end approaching fast,
 And all for nought his wretched mind torment
 With sweet remembrance of his pleasures past,
 And fresh delights of lusty youth forewaste ;
 Recounting which, how would he sob and shriek,
 And to be young again of Jove beseeke !

But, an' the cruel fates so fixed be
 That time forepast cannot return again,
 This one request of Jove yet prayed he,——
 That, in such wither'd plight, and wretched pain,
 As eld, accompany'd with her lothsome train,
 Had brought on him, all were it woe and grief,
 He might a while yet linger forth his lief,

And not so soon descend into the pit ;
 Where Death, when he the mortal corpse hath slain,
 With recheless hand in grave doth cover it ;

Thereafter

Thereafter never to enjoy again
 The gladfome light, but, in the ground ylain,
 In depth of darknes waste and wear to nought,
 As he had ne'er into the world been brought :

But who had seen him sobbing how he stood
 Unto himself, and how he would bemoan
 His youth forepast,—as though it wrought him good
 To talk of youth, all were his youth foregone,—
 He would have mus'd, and marvel'd much, whereon
 This wretched Age should life desire so fain,
 And knows full well life doth but length his pain :

Crook-back'd he was, tooth-shaken, and blear-eyed;
 Went on three feet, and, sometimes, crept on four;
 With old lame bones, that rattled by his side;
 His scalp all pil'd, and he with eld forelore,
 His wither'd fist still knocking at death's door;
 Fumbling, and driveling, as he draws his bread;
 For brief, the shape and messenger of Death.

And fast by him pale MALADY was placed:
 Sore sick in bed, her colour all foregone;
 Bereft of stomach, favour, and of taste,
 Ne could she brook no meat but broths alone;
 Her breath corrupt; her keepers every one
 Abhorring her; her sickness past recure,
 Detesting physick, and all physick's cure.

But, O, the doleful sight that then we see!
 We turn'd our look, and on the other side
 A grisly shape of FAMINE mought we see:
 With greedy looks, and gaping mouth, that cry'd
 And roar'd for meat, as she should there have dy'd;
 Her body thin and bare as any bone,
 Where to was left nought but the case alone,

And

And that, alas, was gnaw'n on every where,
 All full of holes; that I ne mought refrain
 From tears, to see how she her arms could tear,
 And with her teeth gnash on the bones in vain,
 When, all for nought, she fain would so sustain
 Her starven corpse, that rather seem'd a shade
 Than any substance of a creature made:

Great was her force, whom stone-wall could not stay:
 Her tearing nails snatching at all she saw;
 With gaping jaws, that by no means ymay
 Be satisfy'd from hunger of her maw,
 But eats herself as she that hath no law;
 Gnawing, alas, her carcases all in vain,
 Where you may count each finew, bone, and vein.

On her while we thus firmly fix'd our eyes,
 That bled for ruth of such a dreary sight,
 Lo, suddenly she shrigh in so huge wise
 As made hell gates to shiver with the might;
 Wherewith, a dart we saw, how it did light
 Right on her breast, and, therewithal, pale DEATH
 Enthrilling it, to reve her of her breath:

And, by and by, a dumb dead corpse we saw,
 Heavy, and cold, the shape of Death aright,
 That daunts all earthly creatures to his law,
 Against whose force in vain it is to fight;
 Ne peers, ne princes, nor no mortal wight,
 No towns, ne realms, cities, ne strongest tower,
 But all, perforce, must yield unto his power:

His dart, anon, out of the corpse he tooke,
 And in his hand (a dreadful sight to see)
 With great triumph estfoons the same he shook,

That

That most of all my fears affrayed me;
 His body dight with nought but bones, pardy;
 The naked shape of man there saw I plain,
 All save the flesh, the finew, and the vein.

Lastly, stood WAR, in glittering arms yclad,
 With visage grim, stern look'd, and blackly hued:
 In his right hand a naked sword he had,
 That to the hilts was all with blood imbrued;
 And in his left (that kings and kingdoms rued)
 Famine and fire he held, and therewithal
 He razed towns, and threw down towers and all:

Cities he sack'd, and realms (that whilom flower'd
 In honour, glory, and rule, above the rest)
 He overwhelm'd, and all their fame devour'd,
 Consum'd, destroy'd, wasted, and never ceas'd
 'Till he their wealth, their name, and all oppres'd:
 His face forehew'd with wounds; and by his side
 There hung his TARGE, with gashes deep and wide:

In mids of which depainted there we found
 Deadly DEBATE, all full of snaky hair
 That with a bloody fillet was ybound,
 Outbreathing nought but discord every where:
 And round about were pourtray'd, here and there,
 The hugy hosts; DARIUS and his power,
 His kings, his princes, peers, and all his flower.—

XERXES, the Persian king, yet saw I there,
 With his huge host, that drank the rivers dry,
 Dismounted hills, and made the vales uprear;
 His host and all yet saw I slain, pardy:
 Thebes too I saw, all razed how it did lie
 In heaps of stones; and Tyrus put to spoil,
 With walls and towers flat-even'd with the foil.

But Troy, (alas!) methought, above them all,
 It made mine eyes in very tears consume;
 When I beheld the woeful word befall,
 That by the wrathful will of gods was come,
 And Jove's unmoved sentence and foredoom
 On PRIAM king and on his town so bent,
 I could not lin but I must there lament;

And that the more, sith destiny was so stern
 As, force perforce, there might no force avail
 But she must fall: and, by her fall, we learn
 That cities, towers, wealth, world, and all shall quail;
 No manhood, might, nor nothing mought prevail;
 All were there prest, full many a prince and peer,
 And many a knight that fold his death full dear:

Not worthy HECTOR, worthiest of them all,
 Her hope, her joy, his force is now for nought:
 O Troy, Troy, Troy, there is no boot but bale!
 The huge horse within thy walls is brought;
 Thy turrets fall; thy knights, that whilom fought
 In arms amid the field, are slain in bed;
 Thy gods defil'd, and all thy honour dead:

The flames upspring, and cruelly they creep
 From wall to roof, 'till all to cinders waste:
 Some fire the houses where the wretches sleep;
 Some rush in here, some run in there as fast;
 In every where or sword, or fire, they taste:
 The walls are torn, the towers whirl'd to the ground;
 There is no mischief but may there be found.

CASSANDRA yet there saw I how they hal'd
 From PALLAS' house, with spercled tress undone,
 Her wrists fast bound, and with Greek rout impal'd;

And

And PRIAM eke, in vain how he did run
To arms, whom PYRRHUS with despite hath done
To cruel death, and bath'd him in the baign
Of his son's blood before the altar slain.

But how can I describe the doleful fight
That in the shield so lively fair did shine?
Sith in this world, I think, was never wight
Could have set forth the half not half so fine:
I can no more, but tell how there is seen
Fair ILIUM fall in burning red gledes down,
And, from the foil, great Troy, NEPTUNUS' town.

These shadowy inhabitants of hell-gate are conceived with the vigour of a creative imagination, and described with great force of expression. They are delineated with that fulness of proportion, that invention of picturesque attributes, distinctness, animation, and amplitude, of which Spenser is commonly supposed to have given the first specimens in our language, and which are characteristic of his poetry. We may venture to pronounce that Spenser, at least, caught his manner of designing allegorical personages from this model, which so greatly enlarged the former narrow bounds of our ideal imagery, as that it may justly be deemed an original in that style of painting. For we must not forget, that it is to this INDUCTION that Spenser alludes, in a sonnet prefixed to his Pastorals, in 1579, addressed *To the right honourable THE LORD OF BUCKHURST, one of her maiesties priuie councill.*

In vaine I thinke, right honourable lord,
By this rude rime to memorize thy name,
Whose learned Muse hath writ her owne record
In golden verse, worthy immortal fame.

G g 2

Thou

Thou much more fit, were leifure for the fame,
 Thy gracious foveraignes prayfes to compile,
 And her imperiall majestie to frame
 In loftic numbers and heroick stile.

The readers of the FAERIE QUEENE will easily point out many particular passages which Saekville's INDUCTION suggested to Spenser.

From this scene SORROW, who is well known to Charon, and to Cerberus the *hideous bound of hell*, leads the poet over the loathsome lake of *rude Acheron*, to the dominions of Pluto, which are described in numbers too beautiful to have been relished by his cotemporaries, or equalled by his successors.

Thence come we to the horreur and the hell,
 The large great kyngdomes, and the dreadful raygne
 Of Pluto in his trone where he dyd dwell,
 The wide waste places, and the hugie playne;
 The waylinges, shrykes, and sundry sorts of payne,
 The syghes, the sobbes, the depe and deadly groane,
 Earth, ayer, and all refounding playnt and moane^e.

Thence did we passe the threefold emperie
 To the utmost boundes where Rhadamanthus raignes,
 Where proud folke waile their wofull miserie;
 Where dreadfull din of thousand dragging chaines,
 And baleful shriekes of ghosts in deadly paines

^e The two next stanzas are not in the first edition, of 1559. But instead of them, the following stanza.

Here pul'd the babes, and here the maids
 unwed
 With folded hands their sorry chance be-
 wayl'd;

Here wept the guiltless Slain, and lovers
 dead
 That slew themselves when nothing else
 awayl'd.
 A thousand sorts of sorrows here that
 wayl'd
 With sighs, and teares, sobs, shrieks, and
 all yfere,
 That, O alas! it was a hell to here, &c.

Tortur'd

Torturd eternally are heard most brim[†]
Through silent shades of night so darke and dim.

From hence upon our way we forward passe,
And through the groves and uncoth pathes we goe,
Which leade unto the Cyclops walles of brasse:
And where that mayne broad flood for aye doth floe,
Which parts the glad some fields from place of woe:
Whence none shall ever passe t' Elizium plaine,
Or from Elizium ever turne againe.

Here they are surrounded by a troop of men, *the most in armes bedight*, who met an untimely death, and of whose destiny, whether they were sentenced to *eternal night* or to *blissfull peace*, it was uncertain.

Loe here, quoth SORROWE, Princes of renowne
That whilom fate on top of Fortune's wheele,
Now laid full low, like wretches whurled downe
Even with one frowne, that staid but with a smile, &c.

They pass in order before SORROW and the poet. The first is Henry duke of Buckingham, a principal instrument of king Richard the third.

Then first came Henry duke of Buckingham,
His cloake of blacke, all pild, and quite forlorne,
Wringing his handes, and Fortune oft doth blame,
Which of a duke hath made him now her skorne;
With gaffly lokes, as one in maner lorne,
Oft spred his armes, stretcht handes he joynes as fast,
With rufull cheere and vaped eyes upcast.

[†] Breme, i. e. cruel.

His

His cloake he rent, his manly breast he beat;
 His hair all torne, about the place it layne:
 My heart so melt^e to see his grief so great,
 As feelingly, methought, it dropt away:
 His eyes they whurled about withouten staye:
 With stormy syghes the place did so complayne,
 As if his hart at eche had burst in twayne.

Thryse he began to tell his doleful tale,
 And thryse the syghes did swalowe up his voyse;
 At eche of whiche he shryked so withale,
 As though the heavens ryved with the noyse:
 Til at the last recovering his voyse;
 Supping the teares that all his breast beraynde
 On cruell Fortune weping thus he playnde.

Nothing more fully illustrates and ascertains the respective merits and genius of different poets, than a juxtaposition of their performances on similar subjects. Having examined at large Sackville's *Descent into Hell*, for the sake of throwing a still stronger light on his manner of treating a fiction which gives so large a scope to fancy, I shall employ the remainder of this Section in setting before my reader a general view of Dante's Italian poem, entitled *COMMEDIA*, containing a description of Hell, Paradise, and Purgatory, and written about the year 1310. In the mean time, I presume that most of my readers will recollect and apply the sixth Book of Virgil: to which, however, it may be necessary to refer occasionally.

Although I have before insinuated that Dante has in this poem used the ghost of Virgil for a mystagogue, in imitation of Tully, who in the *SOMNIUM Scipionis* supposes Scipio to have shewn the other world to his ancestor Africanus, yet at the same time in the invention of his introduction, he seems to have had an eye on the exordium of an old forgotten Florentine

* Melted:

poem

poem called *TESORETTO*, written in *Frottola*, or a short irregular measure, exhibiting a cyclopede of theoretic and practic philosophy, and composed by his preceptor Brunetto Latini about the year 1270^b. Brunetto supposes himself lost in a wood, at the foot of a mountain covered with animals, flowers, plants, and fruits of every species, and subject to the supreme command of a wonderful Lady, whom he thus describes. "Her head touched the heavens, which served at once for a veil and an ornament. The sky grew dark or serene at her voice, and her arms extended to the extremities of the earth^c." This bold personification, one of the earliest of the rude ages of poetry, is *NATURE*. She converses with the poet, and describes the creation of the world. She enters upon a most unphilosophical and indeed unpoetical detail of the physical system: develops the head of man, and points out the seat of intelligence and of memory. From physics she proceeds to morals: but her principles are here confined to theology and the laws of the church, which she couches in technical rhymes^d.

Dante, like his master Brunetto, is bewildered in an unfrequented forest. He attempts to climb a mountain, whose summit is illuminated by the rising sun. A furious leopard, pressed by hunger, and a lion, at whose aspect the *air is affrighted*, accompanied by a she-wolf, oppose his progress; and force him

^b See *supr.* vol. ii. 219.

^c See *supr.* vol. ii. 263.

^d Brunetto's *TESORETTO* was abridged by himself from his larger prose work on the same subject, written in old French and never printed, entitled *TESORO*. See *supr.* vol. ii. 116. 222. And *HIST. ACAD. INSCRIPT.* tom. vii. 296. seq. The *TESORO* was afterwards translated into Italian by one Bono Giamboni, and printed at Trevisa, viz. "IL TESORO di Messer Brunetto Latino, Fiorentino, Precettore del divino poeta Dante: nel qual si tratta di tutte le cose che a mortali se appartengono. In *Trivisa*, 1474. fol. After a table of chapters is another title, "Qui incomincia el Tesoro di S. Brunetto

"Latino di firenze: e parla del nascimento e della natura di tutte le cose." It was printed again at Venice, by Marchio Sessa, 1533. octavo. Mabillon seems to have confounded this Italian translation with the French original. *IT. ITALIC.* p. 169. See also Salviati, *AVERTIS. DECAM.* ii. xii. Dante introduces Brunetto in the fifteenth Canto of the *INFERNO*: and after the colophon of the first edition of the Italian *TESORO* abovementioned, is this insertion. "Risposta di Dante a Brunetto Latino ritrovato da lui nel quintodecimo canto nel suo inferno." The *TESORETTO* or *Little Treasure*, mentioned above in the text, has been printed, but is exceedingly scarce.

menſe perpendicular cavern, which opening as it deſcends into different circles, forms ſo many diſtinct ſubterraneous regions. We are ſtruck with horror at the commencement of this dreadful adventure.

The firſt object which the poet perceives is a gate of braſs, over which were inſcribed in characters of a dark hue, *di colore oſcuro*, theſe verſes.

Per me ſi v'è nella città dolente :
 Per me ſi v'è nel eterno dolore :
 Per me ſi v'è trà la perduta gente.
 Giuſtizia moſſe'l mio alto fattore :
 Fece me li divina poteſtate,
 La ſomma Sapienza, e l'primo Amore*.
 Dinanzi a me non fur coſe create :
 Se non eterne, el io duro eterno.
 Laſſate ogni ſperanza voi ch'entraſte †.

That is, “By me is the way to the woeful city. By me is the way to the eternal pains. By me is the way to the damned race. My mighty maker was divine Juſtice and Power, the Supreme Wiſdom, and the Firſt Love. Before me nothing was created. If not eternal, I ſhall eternally remain. Put away all hope, ye that enter.”

There is a ſevere ſolemnity in theſe abrupt and comprehensive ſentences, and they are a ſtriking preparation to the ſcenes that enſue. But the idea of ſuch an inſcription on the brazen portal of hell, was ſuggeſted to Dante by books of chivalry; in which the gate of an impregnable enchanted caſtle, is often inſcribed with words importing the dangers or wonders to be found within. Over the door of every chamber in Spenser's necromantic palace of Buſyrane, was written a threat to the champions who preſumed to attempt to enter ‡. This total excluſion of hope from

* He means the Platonic *Egos*. The Italian expoſitors will have it to be the Holy Ghoſt.

† CANT. iii.

‡ FAIR. QU. iii. xi. 54.

hell, here so finely introduced and so forcibly expressed, was probably remembered by Milton, a disciple of Dante, where he describes,

Regions of sorrow, dolefull shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, HOPE NEVER COMES
THAT COMES TO ALL'. ——— ———

I have not time to follow Dante regularly through his dialogues and adventures with the crouds of ghosts, antient and modern, which he meets in the course of this infernal journey. In these interviews, there is often much of the party and politics of his own times, and of allusion to recent facts. Nor have I leisure particularly to display our author's punishments and phantoms. I observe in general, that the ground-work of his hell is classical, yet with many Gothic and extravagant innovations. The burning lakes, the fosses, and fiery towers which surround the city of Dis, and the three Furies which wait at its entrance, are touched with new strokes*. The Gorgons, the Hydra, the Chimera, Cerberus, the serpent of Lerna, and the rest of Virgil's, or rather Homer's, infernal apparitions, are dilated with new touches of the terrible, and sometimes made ridiculous by the addition of comic or incongruous circumstances, yet without any intention of burlesque. Because Virgil had mentioned the Harpies in a single word only[†], in one of the lothsome groves which Dante passes, consisting of trees whose leaves are black, and whose knotted boughs are hard as iron, the Harpies build their nests[‡].

Non frondi verdi, ma di color fosco,
Non rami schietti, ma nodosi e'nvolti,
Non pomi v'eran, ma stecchi con tofco.

Cacus, whom Virgil had called *Semifer* in his seventh book,

* PAR. L. i. 65.
‡ See CANT. ix. vii.

† Gorgones, HARRYEQUE, vi. 289.
‡ CANT. xiii.

appears

appears in the shape of a Centaur covered with curling snakes, and on whose neck is perched a dragon hovering with expanded wings^w. It is supposed that Dante took the idea of his *INFERNO* from a magnificent nightly representation of hell, exhibited by the pope in honour of the bishop of Ostia on the river Arno at Florence, in the year 1304. This is mentioned by the Italian critics in extenuation of Dante's choice of so strange a subject. But why should we attempt to excuse any absurdity in the writings or manners of the middle ages? Dante chose this subject as a reader of Virgil and Homer. The religious MYSTERY represented on the river Arno, however magnificent, was perhaps a spectacle purely orthodox, and perfectly conformable to the ideas of the church. And if we allow that it might hint the subject, with all its inconsistencies, it never could have furnished any considerable part of this wonderful compound of classical and romantic fancy, of pagan and christian theology, of real and fictitious history, of tragical and comic incidents, of familiar and heroic manners, and of satirical and sublime poetry. But the grossest improprieties of this poem discover an originality of invention, and its absurdities often border on sublimity. We are surprised that a poet should write one hundred cantos on hell, paradise, and purgatory. But this prolixity is partly owing to the want of art and method: and is common to all early compositions, in which every thing is related circumstantially and without rejection, and not in those general terms which are used by modern writers.

Dante has beautifully enlarged Virgil's short comparison of the souls lingering on the banks of Lethe, to the numerous leaves falling from the trees in Autumn.

Come d'Autunno si levàn le foglie
L'un appresso del'altra, infn che'l ramo
Vede a la terre tutte le sue spoglie;

^w CANT. XXV.

H h 2

Similmente

Similmente, il mal seme d'Adamo

Getta sì di quel lito ad una ad una

Per cenni, com'augel per suo richiamo †.

In the Fields inhabited by unhappy lovers he sees Semiramis, Achilles, Paris, and Tristan, or sir Tristram. One of the old Italian commentators on this poem says, that the last was an English knight born in *Cornovaglio*, or Cornwall, a city of England †.

Among many others of his friends, he sees Francisca the daughter of Guido di Polenta, in whose palace Dante died at Ravenna, and Paulo one of the sons of Malatesta lord of Rimini. This lady fell in love with Paulo; the passion was mutual, and she was betrothed to him in marriage: but her family chose rather that she should be married to Lanciotto, Paulo's eldest brother. This match had the most fatal consequences. The injured lovers could not dissemble or stifle their affection: they were surpris'd, and both assassinated by Lanciotto. Dante finds the shades of these distinguished victims of an unfortunate attachment at a distance from the rest, in a region of his *INFERNO* desolated by the most violent tempests. He accosts them both, and Francisca relates their history: yet the conversation is carried on with some difficulty, on account of the impetuosity of the storm which was perpetually raging. Dante, who from many circumstances of his own amours, appears to have possessed the most refined sensibilities about the delicacies of love, enquires in what manner, when in the other world, they first communicated their passion to each other. Francisca answers, that they were one day sitting together, and reading the romance of *LANCELOT*; where two lovers were represented in the same critical situation with themselves. Their changes of colour and countenance, while they were reading, often tacitly betrayed

† CANT. iii.

‡ In the sixteenth Canto of the *PARADISO*, king Arthur's queen *GENEURA*,

who belongs to sir Tristram's romance, is mentioned.

their

their yet undiscovered feelings. When they came to that passage in the romance, where the lovers, after many tender approaches, are gradually drawn by one uniform reciprocation of involuntary attraction to kiss each other, the book dropped from their hands. By a sudden impulse and an irresistible sympathy, they are tempted to do the same. Here was the commencement of their tragical history.

Noi leggiavam' un giorno per diletto
 Di LANCIOTTO, comme amor le strinse;
 Soli eravamo, et senza alcun sospetto.
 Per più fiate gli occhi ci sospinse
 Quella lettura et scoloroc' il viso:
 Ma sol un punto fù qual che ci vinse.
 Quando legemmo il disiato riso
 Esser baciato dà cotanto amante
 Questi che mai da me no fia diviso
 La bocca m' basciò tutto tremante:
 GALEOTTO^a fù il libro, et chi lo scrisse
 Quel giorno più non vi legemmo avante^b.

But this picture, in which nature, sentiment, and the graces are concerned, I have to contrast with scenes of a very different nature. Salvator Rosa has here borrowed the pencil Correggio. Dante's beauties are not of the soft and gentle kind.

— — Through many a dark and dreary vale
 They pass'd, and many a region dolorous,
 O'er many a frozen many a fiery Alp^c.

A hurricane suddenly rising on the banks of the river Styx is thus described.

^a He is one of the knights of the Round Table, and is commonly called Sir GALHAAD, in ARTHUR'S romance.

^b CANT. v.

^c Milton, PAR. L. ii. 618.

Et

Et già venia sù per le torbid onde
 Un fracasso d'un suon pien di spavento,
 Per cui tremavan amendue le sponde;
 Non altrimenti fatto che d'un vento
 Impetuoso per gli avversi ardori
 Che fier la salva senz' alcun rattento
 Gli rami schianta i abatte, et porta i fiori,
 Dinanzi polveroso vâ superbo,
 Et fa fuggir lè fiere et glipastori^d.

Dante and his mystagogue meet the monster Geryon. He has the face of a man with a mild and benign aspect, but his human form ends in a serpent with a voluminous tail of immense length, terminated by a sting, which he brandishes like a scorpion. His hands are rough with bristles and scales. His breast, back, and sides have all the rich colours displayed in the textures of Tartary and Turkey, or in the labours of Arachne. To speak in Spenser's language, he is,

— A dragon, horrible and bright^e.

No monster of romance is more savage or superb.

Lo dosso, e'l petto, ad amenduo le coste,
 Dipinte avea di nodi, e di rotelle,
 Con più color sommessè e sopraposte
 Non fur ma' in drappo Tartari ne Turchi,
 Ne fur tar tale per Aragne imposte^f.

The conformation of this heterogeneous beast, as a fabulous hell is the subject, perhaps immediately gave rise to one of

^d CANT. ix.

^e FAIR. QU. i. ix. 52.

^f CANT. xvii. Dante says, that he lay on the banks of a river like a Beaver, the CASTOR. But this foolish comparison is

affectedly introduced by our author for a display of his natural knowledge from Pliny, or rather from the TESORO of his master Brunetto.

the

the *formidable shapes* which fate on either side of the gates of hell in Milton. Although the fiction is founded in the classics.

The one seem'd woman to the waste and fair,
But ended foul in many a scaly fold
Voluminous and vast, a serpent arm'd
With mortal sting ^e.——

Virgil, seeming to acknowledge him as an old acquaintance, mounts the back of Geryon. At the same time Dante mounts, whom Virgil places before, "that you may not, says he, be exposed to the monster's venomous sting." Virgil then commands Geryon not to move too rapidly, "for, consider, what a new burthen you carry!"

—— "Gerion muoviti omai,
"Le ruote large, e lo scender fia poco:
"Pensa la nuova soma che tu hai ^b."

In this manner they travel in the air through Tartarus: and from the back of the monster Geryon, Dante looks down on the burning lake of Phlegethon. This imagery is at once great and ridiculous. But much later Italian poets have fallen into the same strange mixture. In this horrid situation says Dante,

I sentia già dalla man destra il gorgo
Far sotto noi un orribile sfoscio:
Perche con gli occhi in giù la testa sporfi
Allor fu io più timido allo sfoscio
Perioch i vidi fuochi, e sente pianti,
Oud' io tremando tutto mi rancosco ^c.

This airy journey is copied from the flight of Icarus and Phaeton, and at length produced the Ippogrifo of Ariosto. Nor

^e PAR. L. ii. 649.

^b CANT. xvii.

^c Ibid.

is it quite improbable, that Milton, although he has greatly improved and dignified the idea, might have caught from hence his fiction of Satan soaring over the infernal abyfs. At length Geryon, having circuited the air like a falcon towering without prey, deposits his burthen and vanishes ^k.

While they are wandering along the banks of Phlegethon, as the twilight of evening approaches, Dante suddenly hears the found of a horn more loud than thunder, or the horn of Orlando ^l.

Ma io fenti fonare alto corno :—
Non sono fi terribilmente Orlando ^m.

Dante descrics through the gloom, what he thinks to be many high and vast towers, *molte alti torri*. These are the giants who warred against heaven, standing in a row, half concealed within and half extant without an immense abyfs or pit.

Gli orribili giganti, cui minaccia
Giove del cielo ancora quando tuona ⁿ.

But Virgil informs Dante that he is deceived by appearances, and that these are not towers but the giants.

Sappi, che non son torri ma giganti
E son nel pezzo intorno della ripa
D'all umbilico in guiso, tutti quanti ^o.

One of them cries out to Dante with horrible voice. Another, Ephialtes, is cloathed in iron and bound with huge chains.

^k In the thirty-fourth CANTO, Dante and Virgil return to light on the back of Lucifer, who (like Milton's Satan, ii. 927.) is described as having wings like sails.

Vele di mar non vid' io mai est celi.
And again,

— Quando l'ale furo aperte assai.

This Canto begins with a Latin line,

Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni.

^l Or Roland, the subject of archbishop Turpin's romance. See *supr.* vol. i. 132.

^m CANT. xxxi.

ⁿ Ibid.

^o Ibid.

Dante

Dante wishes to see Briareus: he is answered, that he lies in an interior cavern biting his chain. Immediately Ephialtes arose from another cavern, and shook himself like an earthquake.

Non fu tremuoto già tanto rubesto,
Che schotesse una torri così forte,
Come Fialte a scuoterfi fu presto².

Dante views the horn which had founded so vehemently hanging by a leathern thong from the neck of one of the giants. Antaeus, whose body stands ten ells high from the pit, is commanded by Virgil to advance. They both mount on his shoulders, and are thus carried about Cocytus. The giant, says the poet, moved off with us like the mast of a ship³. One cannot help observing, what has been indeed already hinted, how judiciously Milton, in a similar argument, has retained the just beauties, and avoided the childish or ludicrous excesses of these bold inventions. At the same time we may remark, how Dante has sometimes heightened, and sometimes diminished by improper additions or misrepresentations, the legitimate descriptions of Virgil.

One of the torments of the Damned in Dante's *INFERNO*, is the punishment of being eternally confined in lakes of ice.

Eran l'ombre dolenti nell ghiaccia
Mettendo i denti in nota di cicogna⁴.

The ice is described to be like that of the Danube or Tanais. This species of infernal torment, which is neither directly warranted by scripture, nor suggested in the systems of the Platonic fabulists, and which has been adopted both by Shakespeare and

² Ibid.

³ Dante says, if I understand the passage right, that the face of one of the giants resembled the Cupola, shaped like

a pine-apple, of saint Peter's church at Rome, *ibid.* *CANT.* xxxi.

Come la pina di san Pietro a Roma,

⁴ *CANT.* xxxii.

Milton, has its origin in the legendary hell of the monks. The hint seems to have been taken from an obscure text in the Book of JOB, dilated by saint Jerom and the early commentators*. The torments of hell, in which the punishment by cold is painted at large, had formed a visionary romance, under the name of saint Patrick's Purgatory or Cave, long before Dante wrote†. The venerable Bede, who lived in the seventh century, has framed a future mansion of existence for departed souls with this mode of torture. In the hands of Dante it has assumed many fantastic and grotesque circumstances, which make us laugh and shudder at the same time.

In another department, Dante represents some of his criminals rolling themselves in human ordure. If his subject led him to such a description, he might at least have used decent expressions. But his diction is not here less sordid than his imagery. I am almost afraid to transcribe this gross passage, even in the disguise of the old Tuscan phraseology.

— Quindi giù nel foffo

Vidi gente attuffata in uno sterco,

Che dagli uman privati para moffo ;

Et mentre che laggiu con l'occhio cerco :

Vidi un, co'l capo fi da merda lordo,

Che non *parea s'era laico, o cberco*†.

The humour of the last line does not make amends for the nastiness of the image.

It is not to be supposed, that a man of strong sense and genius, whose understanding had been cultivated by a most exact education, and who had passed his life in the courts of sovereign princes, would have indulged himself in these disgusting fooleries, had he been at all apprehensive that his readers would have been disgusted. But rude and early poets de-

* JOB, xxiv. 19.

† See *supr.* vol. ii. 199. And ADD. EMEND. *ibid.*

† CANT. xviii.

scribe every thing. They follow the public manners: and if they are either obscene or indelicate, it should be remembered that they wrote before obscenity or indelicacy became offensive.

Some of the Guilty are made objects of contempt by a transformation into beastly or ridiculous shapes. This was from the fable of Circe. In others, the human figure is rendered ridiculous by distortion. There is one set of criminals whose faces are turned round towards their backs.

— E'l piante de gli occhi
Le natiche bagnava per lo fesso *.

But Dante has displayed more true poetry in describing a real event than in the best of his fictions. This is in the story of Ugolino count of Pisa, the subject of a very capital picture by Reynolds. The poet, wandering through the depths of hell, sees two of the Damned gnawing the skulls of each other, which was their daily food. He enquires the meaning of this dreadful repast.

La bocca sollevò dal fiero pasto
Quel peccator, forbendola a capelli
Del capo ch'egli havea di retro guasto *.

Ugolino quitting his companion's half-devoured skull, begins his tale to this effect. "We are Ugolin count of Pisa, and
"archbishop Ruggieri. Trusting in the perfidious counsels of
"Ruggieri, I was brought to a miserable death. I was com-
"mitted with four of my children to the dungeon of hunger.
"The time came when we expected food to be brought. In-
"stead of which, I heard the gates of the horrible tower more
"closely barred. I looked at my children, and could not speak.

— " L' hora s' appressava
" Che'l cibo ne soleva essere adotto ;
" E per suo sogno ciascun dubitava :

* CANT. XX.

* CANT. XXVIII. They are both in the lake of ice.

“ Ed io senti chiavar l'uscio di sotto

“ A L'ORRIBILE TORRE, ond'io guardai

“ Nel viso à miei figliuoli, senza far metta.

“ I could not complain. I was petrified. My children cried:
“ and my little Anselm, *Anselmuccio mio*, said, *Father, you look*
“ *on us, what is the matter?*

—— “ Tu guardi fi, padre, che hai?”

“ I could neither weep, nor answer, all that day and the following night. When the scanty rays of the sun began to glimmer through the dolorous prison,

“ Com'un poco di raggio si fù messo

“ Nel doloroso carcere, ——

“ and I could again see those four countenances on which my own image was stamped, I gnawed both my hands for grief. My children supposing I did this through a desire to eat, lifting themselves suddenly up, exclaimed, *O father, our grief would be less, if you would eat us!*

“ Ambo le mani per dolor mi morfi :

“ E quei pensando ch'io'l fessi per voglia

“ Di manicar, di subito levorfi

“ Et disser, *Padre, assai ci fia men doglia*

“ *Se tu mangi di noi!* —— ——

“ I restrained myself that I might not make them more miserable. We were all silent, that day and the following. Ah cruel earth, why didst thou not swallow us up at once!

“ Quel di, et l'altro, stemmo tutta muti.

“ Ahi! dura terra, perche non l'apristi?

“ The fourth day being come, Gaddo falling all along at my feet, cried out, *My father, why do not you help me*, and died.

“ The

“ The other three expired, one after the other, between the fifth and sixth days, famished as you see me now. And I being seized with blindness began to crawl over them, *sovrà ciascuno*, on hands and feet; and for three days after they were dead, continued calling them by their names. At length, “ famine finished my torments.” Having said this, the poet adds, with distorted eyes he again fixed his teeth on the mangled skull *. It is not improbable, that the shades of unfortunate men, who described under peculiar situations and with their proper attributes, are introduced relating at large their histories in hell to Dante, might have given the hint to Boccace’s book *DE CASIBUS VIRORUM ILLUSTRUM*, On the Misfortunes of Illustrious Personages, the original model of the *MIRROUR OF MAGISTRATES*.

Dante’s *PURGATORY* is not on the whole less fantastic than his *HELL*. As his hell was a vast perpendicular cavity in the earth, he supposes Purgatory to be a cylindric mass elevated to a prodigious height. At intervals are recesses projecting from the outside of the cylinder. In these recesses, some higher and some lower, the wicked expiate their crimes, according to the proportion of their guilt. From one department they pass to another by steps of stone exceedingly steep. On the top of the whole, or the summit of Purgatory, is a plat-form adorned with trees and vegetables of every kind. This is the Terrestrial Paradise, which has been transported hither we know not how, and which forms an avenue to the Paradise Celestial. It is extraordinary that some of the Gothic painters should not have given us this subject.

Dante describes not disagreeably the first region which he traverses on leaving Hell. The heavens are tinged with sapphire, and the star of love, or the sun, makes all the orient laugh. He sees a venerable sage approach. This is Cato of Utica, who, astonished to see a living man in the mansion of ghosts, questions Dante and Virgil about the business which brought them hither.

* *Ibid.* See *supr.* vol. i. 390. And *ESSAY ON POPE*, p. 254. † *PURGAT. CANT. i.*

Virgil

Virgil answers: and Cato advises Virgil to wash Dante's face, which was soiled with the smook of hell, and to cover his head with one of the reeds which grew on the borders of the neighbouring river. Virgil takes his advice; and having gathered one reed, sees another spring up in its place. This is the golden bough of the *Eneid*, *uno avulso non deficit alter*. The shades also, as in Virgil, crowd to be ferried over Styx: but an angel performs the office of Charon, admitting some into the boat, and rejecting others. This confusion of fable and religion destroys the graces of the one and the majesty of the other.

Through adventures and scenes more strange and wild than any in the Pilgrim's Progress, we at length arrive at the twenty-first Canto. A concussion of the earth announces the deliverance of a soul from Purgatory. This is the soul of Statius, the favorite poet of the dark ages. Although a very improper companion for Virgil, he immediately joins our adventurers, and accompanies them in their progress. It is difficult to discover what pagan or christian idea regulates Dante's dispensation of rewards and punishments. Statius passes from Purgatory to Paradise, Cato remains in the place of expiation, and Virgil is condemned to eternal torments.

Dante meets his old acquaintance Forese, a debauchee of Florence. On finishing the conversation, Forese asks Dante when he shall have the pleasure of seeing him again. This question in Purgatory is diverting enough. Dante answers with much serious gravity, "I know not the time of death: but it cannot be too near. Look back on the troubles in which my country is involved!" The dispute between the pontificate and the empire, appears to have been the predominant topic of Dante's mind. This circumstance has filled Dante's poem with strokes of satire. Every reader of Voltaire must remember that lively writer's paraphrase from the *INFERNO*, of the story of count Guido, in which are these inimitable lines. A Franciscan friar abandoned to Beelzebub thus exclaims.

* CANT. XXIV.

— " Monsieur

- — “ Monsieur de Lucifer !
 “ Je suis un Saint ; voyes ma robe grise :
 “ Je fus absous par le Chef de l'Eglise.
 “ J'aurai, toujours, repondit le Demon,
 “ Un grand respect pour l'Absolution ;
 “ On est lavè de ses vieilles sotises,
 “ Pourvu qu'après autres ne soient commises.
 “ J'ai fait souvent cette distinction
 “ A tes pareils : et, grâce a l'Italie,
 “ Le Diable fait la Theologie,
 “ Il dit et rit. Je ne repliquai rien
 “ A Belzebut, il raisonnoit trop bien.
 “ Lors il m'empoigne, et d'un bras roide et ferme
 “ Il appliqua sur ma triste épiderme
 “ Vingt coups de fouet, dont bien fort il me cuit :
 “ Que Dieu le rend à Boniface huit.”

Dante thus translated would have had many more readers than at present. I take this opportunity of remarking, that our author's perpetual reference to recent facts and characters is in imitation of Virgil, yet with this very material difference. The persons recognised in Virgil's sixth book, for instance the chiefs of the Trojan war, are the cotemporaries of the hero not of the poet. The truth is, Dante's poem is a satirical history of his own times.

Dante sees some of the ghosts of Purgatory advancing forward, more meagre and emaciated than the rest. He asks how this could happen in a place where all live alike without nourishment. Virgil quotes the example of Meleager, who wasted with a firebrand, on the gradual extinction of which his life depended. He also produces the comparison of a mirror reflecting a figure. These obscure explications do not satisfy the doubts of Dante. Statius, for his better instruction, explains how a child grows in the womb of the mother, how it is enlarged, and by degrees receives life and intellect. The drift of our
 author

author is apparent in these profound illustrations. He means to shew his skill in a sort of metaphysical anatomy. We see something of this in the *TESORETTO* of Brunetto. Unintelligible solutions of a similar sort, drawn from a frivolous and mysterious philosophy, mark the writers of Dante's age.

The *PARADISE* of Dante, the third part of this poem, resembles his *PURGATORY*. Its fictions, and its allegories which suffer by being explained, are all conceived in the same chimerical spirit. The poet successively views the glory of the saints, of angels, of the holy Virgin, and at last of God himself.

Heaven as well as hell, among the monks, had its legendary description; which it was heresy to disbelieve, and which was formed on perversions or misinterpretations of scripture. Our author's vision ends with the deity, and we know not by what miraculous assistance he returns to earth.

It must be allowed, that the scenes of Virgil's sixth book have many fine strokes of the terrible. But Dante's colouring is of a more gloomy temperature. There is a sombrous cast in his imagination: and he has given new shades of horror to the classical hell. We may say of Dante, that

— Hell

Grows DARKER at his FROWN *.——

The sensations of fear impressed by the Roman poet are less harrassing to the repose of the mind: they have a more equable and placid effect. The terror of Virgil's tremendous objects is diminished by correctness of composition and elegance of style. We are reconciled to his Gorgons and Hydras, by the grace of expression, and the charms of versification.

In the mean time, it may seem a matter of surprise, that the Italian poets of the thirteenth century who restored, admired, and studied the classics, did not imitate their beauties. But while they possessed the genuine models of antiquity, their

* PAR. L. ii. 720.

unnatural

unnatural and eccentric habits of mind and manners, their attachments to system, their scholastic theology, superstition, ideal love, and above all their chivalry, had corrupted every true principle of life and literature, and consequently prevented the progress of taste and propriety. They could not conform to the practices and notions of their own age, and to the ideas of the ancients, at the same time. They were dazzled with the imageries of Virgil and Homer, which they could not always understand or apply: or which they saw through the mist of prejudice and misconception. Their genius having once taken a false direction, when recalled to copy a just pattern, produced only constraint and affectation, a distorted and unpleasing resemblance. The early Italian poets disfigured, instead of adorning their works, by attempting to imitate the classics. The charms which we so much admire in Dante, do not belong to the Greeks and Romans. They are derived from another origin, and must be traced back to a different stock. Nor is it at the same time less surprising, that the later Italian poets, in more enlightened times, should have paid so respectful a compliment to Dante as to acknowledge no other model, and with his excellencies, to transcribe and perpetuate all his extravagancies.