

## RAVENNA.

**I**N the rocky, wave-beaten western coast of Italy, where few cities, ancient or modern, ever grew to any great importance, stands Ravenna, in slumberous seclusion, cut off from her old time position on the Adriatic by the centuries of deposit washed down by the river Po. Beautified and adorned in turn by the emperors, at one time the very seat of Byzantine art, which flourished here like the vines in her marshes, and rescued from the ravages of pillage and purchase by her remoteness, Ravenna possesses no slight attractions in her treasures of art; but the memories that hang over its pineta, the famous pineta that furnished Augustus with the timber for the fleet that wafted him to Actium, are more than them all.

Here where now peasants may be seen picking up pine cones for the market and huge oxen move lazily in and out among its fallen trunks, here wandered Byron and Boccaccio, and one other noble shade, that dwarfs them into insignificance. It is that of Dante, the sorrow-crowned King of exile. Here in these paths, and beside the sluggish canal, he would pace, day after day, crushing the fragrant pine-needles beneath his feet, and the ever-sighing branches above him, his thoughts in far-off, dearly beloved Florence whither his feet dared not follow his longing heart, and Ravennese peasant women would point him out to wondering-eyed children

"Lo! he strolls to Hell and back.

At will. Behold him! how Hell's reek

Hath singed his beard and scared his cheek!"

Other men have given up country, home and friends to become voluntary exiles, careless, happy, holding no one spot more sacred than another because it gave them birth, or because it held anything dearer to them than another might. Other men, like Byron, have even learned to hate their country on account of the ridicule of a few British Bards and Scotch

Reviewers, but this man, persecuted, scorned, and hated by his countrymen loved beautiful Florence with a passionate love that left him no peace in absence, day or night. There is not a work of his during all his exile that does not contain some allusion to the bitterness of it, not a line that does not breathe the sadness of it.

"Thou shalt relinquish every thing of thee beloved most dearly.

This, that arrow is shot from the bow of exile first of all,

And thou shalt prove how salt a savor hath the bread of others,

And how hard a path, to climb and descend a stranger's stairs."

Other men have taken a morbid delight in laying bare to the world their most sacred sorrows, and have learned to glory in their misfortunes like beggars in their sores, but says Dante, "In almost all parts where the Italian language is spoken, I have gone, compelled, a wanderer, well nigh a beggar, to show against my will the wound of fortune."

It has been said of Byron that, in want of a real sorrow, he was accustomed to break his heart in verse once every six months, but this man literally held heart-break at bay for twenty years, till his task was ended.

Of all the portraits of the poet that we have, the profile that we are most accustomed to see of Dante, is the most interesting. Carlisle describes it as simple and grand, outlined as it were upon vacancy, the eyes ever beholding the unseen, the proud underlip curled in God-like scorn of the thing that was eating his heart, while he seems to listen to the voice of fate. Florence thou shalt never see, but Hell and Purgatory and Heaven, thou shalt surely see.

Florence, living, he never saw. She partly relented toward him and granted him permission to return if he would acknowledge the justice of his sentence and promise allegiance for the future, but with stern pride he replies, "If I can only return by calling myself guilty, I will never return." And he never returned.