



Petrarch's Secret: The Soul's Conflict with Passion

Francesco Petrarca

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Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion - Three Dialogues Between Himself and S. Augustine - FULL ENGLISH TRANSLATION - Translated From the Latin by William H. Draper - Mrs. Jerrold indeed goes so far as to say that Petrarch "plunges into the most scathing self-examination that any man ever made. Whether the book was intended for the public we may well doubt, both from the words of the preface and from the fact that it does not appear to have been published till after the author's death. But however this may be, it remains one of the world's great monuments of self-revelation and ranks with the Confessions of S. Augustine"—a verdict which to some critics will seem to have a touch of overstatement, though hardly beyond the opinion of Petrarch's French students, and not altogether unpardonable in so enthusiastic an admirer of her subject, and a verdict which at least would not have been displeasing to Petrarch himself. Most modern writers on Petrarch agree in stating that of all his works the Dialogues which he calls *Secretum meum* are the one which throws most light upon the man himself. Yet no English translation has hitherto been published. A French version by M. Victor Develay was issued a few years ago, and received the recognition of the French Academy; and, considering the great importance of Petrarch in the history of the Renaissance, not merely in Italy but in Europe, it is time that a similar opportunity of knowing him more fully was offered to English readers; for there are signs on both sides of the Atlantic that the number of those interested in him is steadily growing. The reason for this is undoubtedly the fact that, as the whole work of Petrarch comes to be better known, interest in him as a man increases. Mr. Sidney Lee has lately reminded us of his wide range and predominating influence in the matter of the sonnet in France and in Elizabethan England, as well as in his own country; and yet that influence was very far indeed from revealing all that Petrarch was. It was largely an influence of style, a triumph of the perfection of form, and his imitators did not trouble much about the precise nature of the sentiment and spirit informing the style. When this came to be weighed in the balances of a later day, the tendency of English feeling was to regard his sentiment as a trifle too serious and weak. The love-making of the Cavaliers brought in a robuster tone. When once the question was raised, "Why so pale and wan, fond lover?" there was really no good answer to it on Petrarchan lines, and the consequence was that his name and fame suffered something of eclipse among us.

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