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.....GIACOMO LEOPARDI.....

.....HIS LIFE, HIS WORKS.....

....AND HIS PHILOSOPHY....

By

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

A thesis submitted to the faculty
of the Graduate School of the
University of Minnesota,
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS. 22nd of May 1913.

.....I.....

THE LIFE.

Giacomo Leopardi writing, ten years before his death, to his friend Count Carlo Pepoli of Bologna, composed, in a few words, one of the best documents of his biography.

"I am sending you the uninteresting news of my life. My father is Count Monaldo Leopardi of Recanati, a town near Ancona, and my mother is the Marchioness Adelaide Antici of the same town.

I was born in Recanati on the 29th of June 1798. I lived in my native town until my 24th year. I had not any teacher except those who taught

me the rudiments. But I had the use of a well stocked library belonging to my father, who is very fond of literature. In this library I spent the greater part of my life, that is, as long as I was permitted by my health, soon undermined by continuous study. Study, to which at the age of ten I dedicated myself independently, without the help and direction of any instructor, became my exclusive occupation.

As soon as, unaided by any teacher, I learned the Greek language, I consecrated my time and my energies to philology, and I persevered in this science for seven years. Then, being hindered for an entire year from reading because of the bad condition of my sight, I began to meditate, and, naturally therefore, to love philosophy. Philosophy and literature, which are wedded, have since then been my only work.

When 24 years old, I went to Rome where I declined a prelacy and all the promises of a rapid

career offered to me by Cardinal Consalvi, to whom I had been warmly recommended by Niebhur, envoy extraordinary of the Prussian Court to Rome. I returned to my native town and from there I went to Bologna.(I.)"

The life of our poet, though not offering any of those tragic happenings, which appeal to the imagination of romantic people, was a true drama of suffering and sadness. In spite of the relatively high social rank of his family which allowed him the leisure and the protection refused by destiny to other great writers, in spite of the magnificent gifts of his genius which won for him, when still a young man, fame and glory, he began to shed bitter tears in the dawn of his existence and his silent martyrdom ceased only on the day of his death.

In the first part of our existence three are the greatest sources of happiness. From these

(I.) Lettere di G. Leopardi.

sources often springs that which gives to our life a psychological color not easily changeable in after years. These very sources are the love which attaches us to the place of our birth, the communion which unites our heart so tenderly to our own family, and the splendid blooming of our youth. Leopardi did not know these three sources of happiness. They did not exist for him. He was as a pilgrim without country and without home.

The first of his misfortunes was to be born in a dull, insignificant spot. Recanati was a small melancholy town of the pontifical states, known, even in our own time, only for its having given to the world the greatest poet of pessimism. If even today, after the national unity has entirely transformed Italy, Recanati remains one of the most solitary, monotonous, forgotten places of the peninsula, we may easily imagine what were its conditions of life more than a century ago, when it was almost completely

isolated from the large centers of the country. Its population belonged to three thoroughly distinct classes: the working people, poor, ignorant and extremely religious; the provincial aristocracy, full of superstitious veneration for its titles, and the clergy. At that time the clergy, at least as a whole, was the most educated element existing in the papal kingdom, but, though composed of persons of a certain literary training, its members were generally destitute of large comprehension and sound culture. The inhabitants of small places have always somewhat unpleasantly narrow in their character, in their opinions and tastes. A man of superior mind and noble aspirations cannot live among them without feeling, at every moment, the striking conflict between his mentality and the mentality of his surroundings. Our poet, who, because of an intelligence exceptionally precocious, was already in his early youth a man of broad knowledge, began

when he was a mere boy to feel deeply, almost tragically, the lack of a congenial, intellectual atmosphere. Among those folks generally so ignorant in whom he recognized only the natural gift of an excellent pronunciation of their own language, among those little nobles so pompously mummified in their mental vacuity, among those good, unlearned country priests, whose minds were a mixture of inflexible authoritative principles and instinctive horror for the dangers of novelty, this young man, intellectually mature, liberal in his views, impatient of all kinds of despotism, was a stranger, an intruder, an enemy, in his own town. At home he could not bear the frivolous conversation of the local aristocrats and the unctuously ponderous discourses of the priests, who were the only guests admitted to the honor of his parents' intimacy. Outside of his home, he could not even endure the sight of the rude, illiterate people who looked at him with humiliating commiser-

ation, who sometimes cruelly insulted him in the streets because of his physical deformity. So that at home and abroad, almost completely in solitude, consoled partly by the affection of his brother, Carlo, and his sister, Paolina, he felt the absolute lack of the moral oxygen indispensable for the life of his ardent heart and his vast intelligence. Everything disturbed, fatigued, suffocated him within the mediaeval walls of his small deserted town. It is evident from many of the poet's letters, that as soon as he had the full use of his reason he was tormented by one supreme desire: to leave his prison, to go far away, to live in places more enlightened, where men were not only prosperously vegetating, but working and thinking, to meet, somewhere, persons capable of understanding, admiring and loving him.

Nothing, perhaps, is more sad in our poet's correspondence, than some of the letters which deal with the first period of his existence. They betray

a strange pathos which moves the reader deeply even when expressed in outbursts of unjust hatred. In one of his letters he wrote: "I constantly wish, with all my heart, to leave this dirty town, where I do not know whether men deserve more to be called rascals than asses. I know well, anyhow, that they are both rascals and asses." (I.)

On another occasion he confessed to Giordani, a noble writer of his time, that the bitter sentiment felt for Recanati could suggest to him sufficient material to compose an entire treatise against love of country: "Do not speak about Recanati. It is so dear to me that it might inspire me with beautiful ideas for a book on hatred of one's native place." (II.) As some of his friends, living in famous cities, reminded him of the fact that many illustrious men of ancient and modern times born in little towns, remained tenderly attached to them in spite of their insignificance and of the vulgarity of their

(I.) Lettere di G. Leopardi.

(II.) Id.

inhabitants, he answered them ironically in the following words: "It is very well to tell me that Plutarch and Alfieri loved Craeronea and Asti; they loved them, but they left them; and so shall I love my native place when I am away from it. Now I shall hate it because I am in it." (I.)

The bitterness caused in the poet's soul by the invincible hostility felt towards his own town was by no means attenuated by any sweet joy of domestic happiness.

His father, Count Monaldo Leopardi, was a man of letters, of learning and humor. Born and educated under the influence of traditional doctrines, before the triumph of democracy, up to his last moment he remained faithful to the spirit of the past. In religion he was an extremely rigid Catholic, in politics he was a strict follower of the monarchial principle, in manners, in dress even, he was a champion of the old ways which the French revolution,

(I.) Lettere di G. Leopardi.

through Napoleon's invasion, was rapidly destroying in Italy. In spite, however, of the conservative limitations of his view, he was a man with some sympathetic traits. He was strong, loyal, noble, consistent, frank, bold as a knight of old.

When Napoleon the First, going to Rome, passed at the head of his army under the windows of the municipal palace, the Count, who happened to be there, remained in his chair because "a gentleman must not put himself out in order to see a rascal." This fact, trifling in itself, reveals the character of this man. As a father he was not worse than the other Italian fathers of his day and his class. Some letters of our poet, in which, in moments of desolate sorrow, he poured out all the sufferings of his soul, made many persons believe that his father was a man without humanity. Leopardi condensed all he felt and wrote to his friends against his father into a few lines in his "Pensieri" in which he lifted

his personal experiences into a universal theory;
"Read the lives of the great men and you will find few of them who did not lose their father in their infancy.....The paternal sway in all nations implies a kind of enslavement of the children. This enslavement is more oppressive than civil tyranny." (I.)
For a long time then the legend was held, almost as an undeniable fact, that the rigid Count treated his glorious son as a tyrant treats his victim. But the truth, as it appears from the most recent studies, not only does not confirm that which until lately, was accepted by the popular phantasy, but it rehabilitates the poet's father in the eyes of impartial judges. He was not, in fact, a cruel man, not a miser, not a despot. He was reserved, authoritative, severe, nor did he ever allow his children to be familiar with him. This is true, yet he loved them, - especially the son whom he considered the hope of his family - with a profound affection. His coldness was in keeping

(I.) Pensieri - G., Leopardi.

with the custom existing at that time among people of his class. Aristocracy yesterday, much more than today, was fond of formality and introduced its tyranny even within the domestic walls, even between parents and children. The Count was even accused of having forced his son into the ecclesiastical state. The truth is, that had his son become a clergyman, he would have been pleased. Knowing his son's intelligence and learning, he was sure that a splendid career lay open to him. But he did nothing to violate his conscience. In a letter addressed to his son, alluding to this subject, he wrote: "Never mind, even without becoming a priest you can be saved. In order to be accepted in Heaven it is not necessary to present a Bishop's certificate of ordination." (I.) But if Leopardi's father was not a tyrant and if he loved his son as he did, it is certain that he was not the ideal father for so sensitive a man as our poet. The boy needed to be loved. Writing in after

(I.) G. Leopardi, M. Scherillo.

years, to his brother Carlo, he implored: "Love me; I need love, I need love." (I.)

When his father became aware of the ill effects of his behavior, he tried to apply a remedy, but it was too late. This his son declared to him frankly: "I protest with all possible truth that I love you as tenderly as a son can love his father, and that I know quite well the love which you bear for me. I feel that I would willingly shed for you the last drop of my blood. But the habit formed when a child - an invincible habit because contracted in tender years - prevents me from being confident and intimately demonstrative with you, as you sometimes desire." Later the estrangement between father and son grew wider. The son changed his ideas and lost his faith. He became a sceptic and a pessimist, while his father remained faithful to his early convictions which represented in his eyes, the most sacred expression of truth, morality and wisdom. Their hearts and their

(I.) Lettere di G. Leopardi.

minds were thenceforth separated.

Leopardi's mother deserves a more severe judgment than that passed on his father. She belonged by birth to an aristocratic family. When she married Count Monaldo Leopardi, the fortune of her husband was almost wrecked by his extravagancies and his impractical management. She took up the administration of the family estate and succeeded, by rigorous economy and remarkable ability, in restoring it to prosperity. She was a good woman, very religious and devoted to her duties. Her temperament, however, was cold, austere, unbending. In dealing with her husband she was overbearing, and with her children she lacked maternal sweetness. She imposed her will upon all, heedless whether her attitude was a cause of suffering to the members of her family. Her character and manners recall to mind "Brand" the stern hero of the most famous of Ibsen's dramas.

Her son though not showing the same severity towards her as he manifested towards his father, left a terrible denunciation of her: "I knew a mother intimately, who was not at all superstitious, but well grounded and scrupulous in the practice of Christian religion. This mother not only did not pity those parents who lost their children, when they were in infancy, but she envied them sincerely because they went straight to Heaven without any risk of damnation, freeing, at the same time, the parents from the burden of supporting them. When her children were in danger of death, she did not pray that they might die, - because that is forbidden by religion - but she was glad in her secret heart and she was even vexed to see her husband in tears. She was very faithful in nursing those poor sick children, but in the depths of her soul she desired that her efforts might be in vain. Once she acknowledged that, when

questioning the doctor, her only anxiety was lest he should answer that they would live. Seeing in the sick children a sign of approaching death, she felt a profound joy which she tried to hide only from persons who blamed her. The day of their death was a happy one for her and she could not understand how it was that her husband was so weak as to give way to sadness. She considered beauty as a misfortune and she thanked God, not through heroic fortitude, but in the gladness of her heart, when her children were ugly and deformed. She did not help them to hide their defects, but she thought that, because of those defects, they should renounce the vanities of life even in their youth. If they resisted, if they clung to life, if they succeeded in some degree in making the best of their circumstances, she was angry, she minimized their achievements. She never let pass any occasion to chide them, making them feel, with a cruel and ferocious veracity, the inevitable

consequences of their shortcomings and unfortunate conditions. She rejoiced in the failures of her children, and she preferred to talk to them about what she had heard unfavorable to them. She did all this to free them from the dangers of eternal perdition. She felt infinite pity for sinners, but very little for ills that afflicted the body. Sickness, pathetic deaths of young men, leaving the world in the bloom of their youth, did not affect her. She said we should not heed when, but how people die. She talked about these sad events with a marmoreal coldness....." (I.)

This sad document, unique in the history of literature, shows better than any possible description, both the character of the mother, and the sentiment which the unhappy son had for her.

How can we be astonished then if the poet's physical deformity and weakness, the bitterness engendered in him by his solitary life in a despised little place, and the lack of tender domestic affections,

(I.) Lettere di G. Leopardi.

shrouded all his youth in gloom? His ardent heart would have naturally sought consolation in love for which, as well as for knowledge and glory, he was yearning. But, after some illusions, he became convinced that even love was a forbidden joy for him. His women friends had a sincere pity for him, some of them had a real affectionate sympathy, but none loved him passionately as his nature needed. His person was unattractive, and it is said that women are not often inflamed by the presence of mere genius.

In Recanati, he tenderly loved an humble girl, Sylvia, to whom, after her immature death, he dedicated a sad and beautiful poem. This was perhaps the only woman whose sentiment answered sympathetically to the nostalgic appeal of his heart.

At last in the winter of 1822, through the insistence of his uncle, he was permitted by his father to leave Recanati and to go to Rome. He lived there for a short time with his uncle, Marquis

Carlo Antici. Though an object of admiration to the Italian and foreign scholars, he did not care to remain in the eternal city. Writing to his brother Carlo he said: "The dullest fellow-villager of Recanati has a greater share of good sense than the best of the Romans. The most sacred names are profaned, the most absolute follies are praised to the skies, the greatest spirits of the century trampled under foot as inferior to the smallest literary man in Rome. Philosophy is despised, genius, imagination, feeling, are names, - I do not say things - unknown and alien to these professional poets and poetesses. Antiquarianism placed at the summit of human learning and considered invariably and universally as the only true study of man!" (I.)

After his short sojourn in Rome he went to Milan, to Bologna, to Pisa and to Florence, where he met Alessandro Manzoni. His letters show that he was dissatisfied, not only in Recanati, and in Rome,

(I.) "Lettere di G. Leopardi."

but everywhere. The reason of his suffering was within and not without. Men of great learning, throughout Italy, manifested for him their enthusiastic admiration. He could have obtained, if he desired it, a chair in Rome; a chair was offered to him even by the University of Berlin, but he declined.

In 1832 he went to Naples and lived there fraternally with Ranieri, a man who loved him with a sort of adoration; and there overtaken by disease, when he was planning to go back to Recanati and to rest in the peace of his father's fireside, he died, on the 24th day of June 1837 - a man without a country, though deeply proud of his race; without family, though so sore in need of domestic consolations, and without youth, though so richly endowed with all the aspirations, the feelings, the dreams, of an eternal spring of heart and imagination.

THE WORKS. . .

Leopardi's intellectual activity was precocious; he began to write when still a boy. His works may be grouped in two quite distinct categories, those of his early youth, and those of his more mature age. The first period of his productivity extends from 1810, when the poet was only twelve years old, to 1817; the second from 1817 to 1837, the year of his death. This division, which may seem at first sight arbitrary, is justified, not only by the great perfection reached by our poet in the second period of his literary work, but above all, by the radical change which took place, in the beginning of the second period, in his soul and in his inspiration - a change that conferred a new and definite character on all his later writings. The first period, in fact, was strictly Christian in ideas, in sentiments and aims; the second, on the contrary, was inspired by incredulity and bitter

pessimism.

The poet, from his tenth year on, as he confessed in his letter to Count Carlo Pepoli, had no teacher. Between 1810 and 1817 he learned several languages, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, Spanish, English; studied philology, history and the classic literatures. In the course of less than a decade, he succeeded in storing up, in his mind, a wonderful reserve of various and deep knowledge. During this year of hard solitary study, besides having built a solid basis for his intellectual structure and having prepared ample material for the books he had proposed to compose in the future, he wrote several works, both in Latin and in Italian. Some of these works are merely literary translations from the Greek and the Latin, but the others are writings of philology, of erudition, of Church history, and of pure literature. The most important works of the first period of Leopardi's activity, are comprised

in the following list:

- "Odi di Orazio" tradotte da G. Leopardi.
- "L'arte poetica di Q. Orazio Flacco" travestita ed esposta in ottava rima" G. Leopardi.
- "Commentario della vita e degli scritti di Esichio Milesio" G. Leopardi.
- "Porphyrii De vita Plotini, et ordine Librorum ejus Commentarius Graece, et Latine Ex Versione Marsilii Ficini emendata." Graeca illustravit, et Latina emendavit Jacobus Leopardi.
- "Commentarii De vita et scriptis Rhetorum quorundam qui secundo post Christum saeculo vixerunt," J. Leopardi.
- "Fragmenta Graecorum veterum Ecclesiasticae Historiae scriptorum collecta et illustrata," J. Leopardi.
- "Fragmenta patrum Graecorum secundi saeculi et veterum auctorum," J. Leopardi.
- "Eppigrammi" di G. Leopardi.
- "Pompeo in Egitto," tragedia di G. Leopardi.
- "Storia della astronomia dalla sua origine fino all'anno 1811," G. Leopardi.
- "Saggio sopra gli errori degli antichi," G. Leopardi.

All these early compositions, as others of minor importance which I have not cited, are proofs of the intellectual power of the author. The writings of erudition were praised by many scholars of the day as works of great learning. Niebhur, a learned German, living in Rome, says of our poet: "Conceive

of my astonishment when I saw standing before me in the poor little Chamber a mere youth, pale and shy, frail in person and obviously in ill health, who was by far the first, in fact the only Greek philologist in Italy, the author of critical comments and observations which would have won honor for the first philologist in Germany, and yet he was only twenty two years old. He had become then profoundly learned without school, without instructors, without help, without encouragement, in his father's house. I understand too, that he is one of the rising poets of Italy. What a nobly gifted people." (I.)

The translation and the commentary of Plotinus, which he presented to his father at the age of sixteen, was quoted and largely utilized by Creuxer, the old German scholar, who studied this subject during almost all his life. Sainte-Beuve talking of this fact, in his splendid essay on Leopardi, exclaims: "One who has studied Plotinus, his whole existence, could find something useful in the work of a boy." (I.)

(I.) Italian Literature by W. Howells.

(II.) Portraits Contemporains: Leopardi par C.A. Sainte-Beuve.

His first works of mere literature, besides the translations, were "Gli Epigrammi" and the play in verse "Pompeo in Egitto," Both manifest, not the specific qualities of the literary kind to which they belong, but a great ability in the use of the language and of the poetic style. "Gli Epigrammi" though generally somewhat deficient in humor, often contains witty observations and satiric conclusions. "Pompeo in Egitto," a tragedy in three acts, lacks the tragic force, the structure and all the technical elements of the theatre. It was inspired by the great French writers, Corneille and Racine, and by Metastasio. Some characters of the play, however, are rather well drawn, especially the King Tolomeo, in whom Leopardi portrayed himself. But as a whole, this work is merely a collection of beautiful thoughts, and of long, often eloquent declamations.

The most remarkable works of this first period are two: "La Storia dell'Astronomia," and

"Il Saggio sopra gli errori degli Antichi." His history of astronomy rather than a scientific treatise is a learned narration. He speaks in it more of the lives of the astronomers, than of their science in itself. Already so familiar with the ancient ages, he shows, in this writing, his large knowledge of the physical doctrines of the remote past, rather than the discoveries of the modern times. It would be an easy task to find fault with such a work, from the strict scientific point of view; but if its value as a work of science is relatively small, its value is great as a documentary demonstration of our poet's mental habits. In these pages he manifests, in fact, besides his strong poetic instinct, as in all his works, that philosophical tendency which will lead him, in the course of a few years, to pure speculation and to the study of the most subtle problems of life. It was before the tremendous and magnificent spectacle of the luminous worlds, which course above our heads, that,

he felt, for the first time, the greatness of the mystery of the universe and he became a philosopher.

"Il Saggio sopra gli errori degli Antichi" is a scientific, theological and literary work. The author speaks here of the physical mistakes of the ancient peoples, of their religious fables, and of their false moral conceptions. In order to sustain his observations, he makes a great use of quotations from the historians, the poets, and the philosophers of the classic times. Considered as a whole, this book of extraordinary erudition, is simply an apology for the Christian religion. The intention of the writer and the central idea of the book are evidently the vindication of the church. Leopardi is still very religious, he loves his faith, he believes it to be the supreme good of humanity. His object then is to show its truth and its beauty, but he attains his purpose through a clear exposition of the facts and with historical comparisons rather than, in imitation

of the mediaeval polemicists, through abstract dis-
-sertions on dogmatic tenets. Knowing thoroughly
the ancient times and the Greek and Latin literatures,
he can easily demonstrate the moral superiority of
Christianity compared with the Pagan conception.
In the first part of this work the writer, following
the system of some ancient apologists, tries to es-
tablish this fact: Whatever good and truth is found
in the paganism it is a partial retention of the
Jewish revelations, and therefore, it is an anti-
cipated ray of Christian light.

The "Saggio" reveals several remarkable
things: first of all, a great historic knowledge of
the etic and religious doctrines, a perfect familiar-
ity both with the classic teachings and with the
theories of the fathers of the church, a subtle power
of observation on the defects and qualities of human
nature. It reveals at the same time, in him, -

in spite of his sincere orthodox rigor - a strong unconscious tendency towards those principles which he successfully tries to crush in the name of faith. He loved the ancient epochs, and in this work he betrays some of that great adoration which he professed for the classic world after the radical change of his mind. Even when he confutes, with the struggling zeal of an ardent apostle, the errors of the old enemies of the church, he shows, here and there, more sympathy for the ideas of the pagan writers than for the interpretations of the fathers.(I.) The conflict is then already beginning in his mind, between the believer and the critic; between the poet, loving the art and the beauty which the ancients knew how to represent in magnificent colors, and the spirit of the austere ideal of the Christian standards.

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(I.) "Scritti di G. Leopardi" B.Zumbini.

The works of the second period of Leopardi's intellectual activity are "Lo Zibaldone" "I Dialoghi" and "Le Poesie."

"Lo Zibaldone" found and published only a few years ago, is a voluminous collection of thoughts, a kind of diary in which our poet condensed, almost every day, the essence of his reflections. It reminds us, in several points, of "Le Journal" of F. Amiel. It is, like "Le Journal" the history of a noble and sick soul. It was begun in 1817 and was finished 1832, five years before the death of Leopardi. In the first part, the poet shows himself still a believer; in the rest he shows, without any attenuation, his incredulity and his pessimism. From a simply literary point of view, the book is a very remarkable work of Italian prose. Many pages of it are master-pieces of noble dignity of form and of sober elegance. As a book of thought it reveals, in a fragmentary way, that subtle

faculty of analysis, that penetrating clearness of comprehension, and that discursive power which are shown most strikingly in the "Dialoghi." As a document of life "Lo Zibaldone" is of the most considerable importance. With the full account of all the phases, of all the conflicts, of all the crises through which the poet had to pass before entering the threshold of eternal rest, it offers us the elements necessary for the reconstruction, in our mind, of the complete history of one of the greatest dramas of modern times.

"I Dialoghi" are philosophical studies. Their author speaks and defends here his views, in a Socratic manner, through the mouth of certain historical personages, as in the "Porfirio e Plotino," in the "Torquato Tasso ed il suo genio familiare" and in the "Copernico", or through the mouth of legendary personifications as in the "Ercole ed Atlante." The title of one of the best ~~written~~ and the most desolate dialogues is "Colloquio tra la luna e la

terra." The Leopardian dialogues - just as well as the Leopardian "Opere Morali" - are considered by the critics, as the perfection of style, and they are classified among the best Italian prose both ancient and modern. From the point of view of thought "I Dialoghi" are a remarkable contribution to philosophy. The thesis which is defended in all these studies, - developed with a calm serenity of mind difficult to find in the moderns, yet with cruel inexorability - is the vanity of the world and the tragedy of our life. In the dialogue "Porfirio e Plotino," which is one of the most impressive of the whole collection, the writer declares that suicide, if it would not bring suffering upon our relatives and our friends, would be in itself very reasonable, the only reasonable thing for *such* unfortunate beings as men are. Without sharing the desperate conclusions of the author, every impartial student has to admit the seriousness and

the intellectual value of these works.

Leopardi, like Petrarch, is known everywhere, even in Italy, almost exclusively as a poet. His poetical productions are not very voluminous. He wrote about forty poems, some of which are rather short and two only of which, "La Ginestra" and "Palinodia," are of considerable length. The meters used by the poet were various: he passed from verses of six syllables to those of eleven. His "Canzoni," like those of Dante and Petrarch, consist of verses of several measures. He did not always use rhyme, but he used both rhyme and blank verses with perfect mastery.

Leopardi's poetical works may be divided according to the kind of their inspiration, into three distinct groups; love poems, patriotic poems and philosophical poems. The love poems, the best of which are "Silvia," "Consalvo," "Aspasia," "Il primo amore" and "Amore e Morte," are made up of

several elements. There is idyllic ingenuousness, romantic idealism, vivacious reality, elegiacal color, and classic sobriety. Leopardi loved woman. On more than one occasion he said that nothing is more sweet, more beautiful, more touching than the vision of a young woman in the bloom of her innocent charms. He even said that the pure face of a fascinating maiden possesses something divine in her smiles and in her looks.(I.) He certainly felt deeply the magic power of feminine grace. His letters and his memoirs, but above all his poems, show ineffaceable traces of the sentiments which the women whom he met aroused in his heart - sentiments sweet and elegiacal in "Silvia"; and nostalgic and intense in "Consalvo;" sad and resentful in "Aspasia". "Silvia" and "Consalvo," perhaps, are the two poems through which are best expressed the two kinds of love which moved Leopardi, pure tenderness and passion. In the first poem, he, lamenting in touching verses, the death of a humble

(I.) Zibaldone - G. Leopardi.

daughter of the people, conceives woman in her reality, it is true, but seen under a pathetically innocent aspect.

"O Sylvia, dost thou remember still,
That period of thy mortal life,
When beauty so bewildering
Shone in thy laughing, glancing eyes,
And thou so merry, yet so wise,
Youth's threshold then wast entering?

How did the quiet rooms,
And all the paths around
With thy perpetual song resound,
As thou didst sit, on woman's work intent,
Abundantly content,
With vague future, floating on thy mind!
Thy custom thus to spend the day
In that sweet time of youth and May!

How could I, then, at times
In those fair days of youth,
The only happy days I ever knew,
My hard tasks dropping, or my careless rhymes,
My station take, on father's balcony
And listen to thy voice's melody,
And watch thy hands, as they would deftly fly
O'er thy embroidery!
I gazed upon the heaven serene,
The sun-lit paths, the orchards green,
The distant mountain here,
And there, the far-off sea.
Ah, mortal tongue cannot express
What I then felt....." (I.)

In the second of these two poems, "Consalvo," on the

(I.) "Silvia" - G. Leopardi.

contrary, the poet, - now older and celebrated throughout Italy - fallen in love with a lady - famous for her beauty and her spirit among the Florentine aristocracy - addresses to her, through the mouth of "Consalvo," appeals of burning love:

"Thou leavest me forever, wilt thou not
One kiss bestow? A single kiss in all
My life? A favor asked, who can deny
Unto a dying man? Of the sweet gift
I ne'er can boast, so near my end, whose lips
To-day will by a stranger's hand be closed
Forever. Saying this, with a deep sigh,
Her hand beloved he with his cold lips pressed.

She compassion took,
Upon his love, which she had known so long;
And that celestial face, that mouth, which he
So long had coveted, which had, for years,
The burden been of all his dreams and sighs,
Close bringing unto his, so sad and wan,
Discolored by his mortal agony,
Kiss after kiss, all goodness, with a look
Of deep compassion, on the trembling lips
Of the enraptured lover she impressed." (I.)

The "Silvia" is considered, by critics, as a true master-piece. The "Consalvo" is judged unfavorably by some - by Carducci, for instance -, and by others - as Michele Scherillo - it - is esteemed very highly.

(I.) "Consalvo" - G. Leopardi

"Consalvo" in fact, in the opinion of all, has made many people weep - especially, as Galducci says, "young men and women." This is the most eloquent proof that this lyric contains true and spontaneous poetry. Some writers compare the love of Leopardi, as it is manifested in his verses, with the idealistic love of the earliest Italian poets, others with the sentimental love of Werther and others still, with the volcanic love of Byron. None of these opinions, separately considered, is well founded; but there is truth in them collectively. In Leopardi's love poems, indeed, there is some of the delicate idealism of the Italian "Trecentisti," some of the romantic sentiment of the German hero, and, - here and there, but especially in "Consalvo," - some of the passionate fire of the adventurous English bard. If we had to give a clear and definite judgment we should say that our poet in his verses, loved woman deeply, yet in a sane and noble fashion, without either transubstantiating

her into an ethereal being, as the medieval poets did, nor debasing her to vulgar materialism.

The patriotic poems of Leopardi are three: "Sopra il monumento di Dante," "Ad Angelo mai" and "All'Italia." Italy in Leopardi's time was in a pitiful state both politically and morally. The old illustrious race seemed to have lost, in its enslavement, all its physical and intellectual energies. One must read the memoirs of travel of W. Goethe, and the "Corinna" of Madame De Stael in order to form an idea of the shameful lethargy in which the foreign dominations and the petty Italian despots had sunk the sons of Rome. The most ancient and noble cities of Europe, from which civilization was twice spread all over the world, were as venerable cemeteries, places of pilgrimage for scholars and sentimental tourists. But Italy, as it has been said over and over again, is the land of surprises and glorious resurrections. In that sad period of

her history, the same phenomenon happened again which was witnessed in the age of Petrarch and Boccaccio. On the eve of the Renaissance Petrarch and Boccaccio, and the other immortal apostles of learning, resuscitated Italy in the name of Rome; and in the first part of the last century the same miracle was accomplished by Manzoni, Alfieri and Leopardi. The popular Italian consciousness, sometimes sleeping, but never dead, awoke, rebelled, against tyranny, threw aside the rags of misery and ignorance, and created the new Italy. The three Leopardian patriotic poems are inspired by the contrast between the ancient glory and the present shame. The occasion which suggests to the poet this contrast, eminently tragic for a people so naturally proud as the Italians, and inspiring the poem "Angelo Mai" is the discovery made by the learned Cardinal of some lost writings of Cicero.

"Italian bold, why wilt thou never cease

The fathers from their tombs to summon forth?
Why bring them, with this dead age to converse,
That stifled is by enemies and by sloth?
And why dost thou, voice of our ancestors,
Thou hast so long been mute,
Resound so loud and frequent in our ears?
Why all these grand discoveries?
As in a flash the fruitful pages come,
What hath this wretched age deserved
That dusty cloisters have for it reserved
These hidden treasurex of the wise and brave?
Illustrious man, with what strange power
Does Fate thy ardent zeal befriend?
Or does Fate vainly with man's will contend?

Without the lofty counsel of the gods,
It surely could not be that now,
When we were never sunk so low,
Each moment comes a cry renewed,
From our great sires, to shake our souls, at last!
Heaven still some pity shows for Italy;
Some God hath still our happiness at heart;
Since this, or else no other, is the hour,
Italian virtue to redeem,
And its old lustre once more to impart,
These pleading voices from the grave we hear;
Forgotten heroes rise from earth again,
To see, my country, if at this late day,
Thou still art pleased the coward's part to play.

And do ye cherish still,
Illustrious shades, some hope of us?
Have we not perished utterly...." (I.)

In the poem "Dante Alighieri" the suggestion of the
contrast is made by the dedication in Florence of

(I.) "Angelo Mai" - G. Leopardi.

a monument in honor of the author of the Divine
Comedy,

"Turn, turn, my country, and behold,
That noble band of heroes old,
And weep, and on thyself thy anger vent,
For without anger, grief is impotent;
Oh, turn and rouse thyself for shame,
Blush at the thought of sires so great,
Of children so degenerate!

Are we forever lost?
Is there no limit to our shame?
I, while I live, will never cease to cry:
"Degenerate race, think of thy ancestry!"
Behold these ruins vast,
These pictures, statues, temples, poems grand!
Think of the glories of thy native land.
If they thy soul cannot inspire or warn,
Why linger here? Arise! Begone!
This ~~holy~~ ground must not be thus defiled,
And must no other shelter give
Unto the coward and the slave!
Far better were the silence of the grave!" (II.)

In the poem "All'Italia" the same suggestion is made
by the sight of the ruins of the distant ages.

My country, I the walls, the arches see,
The columns, statues, and the towers,
Deserted, of our ancestors;
But, ah, the glory I do not behold,
The laurel and the sword, that graced
Our sires of old.
Now, all unarmed, a naked brow,
A naked breast dost thou display.
Ah, me, how many wounds, what stains of blood.." (II.)

- (I.) "Dante Alighieri" - G. Leopardi.
(II.) "All'Italia" - G. Leopardi.

All these poems are magnificent in their inspiration, in their statuesque relief, in their structure and style. The most popular and the most perfect of them, however, is this, the poem which is dedicated to Italy. It is a truly monumental civil poem. Its picturesqueness, eloquence and passion move and exalt. In some points the poet breaks out into a cry that makes the heart quiver. We see the poet standing in the midst of the glorious ruins as a ghost of the heroic past and we hear his terrible voice:

"Where is the ancient force?
Where are the arms, the valor, constancy?
Who hath deprived thee of thy sword?
What treachery, what skill, what labor vast,
Or what o'erwhelming horde
Whose fierce, invading tide, thou could'st
not stem,
Hath robbed thee of thy robe and diadem?
From such a height how couldst thou fall so low?
Will none defend thee? No?
No son of thine? For arms, for arms, I call;
Alone I'll fight for thee, alone will fall...."

The Leopardi's philosophical poems - if we may thus call poems with a profound meaning - are very numerous

The most noted of them, however, are: "Canto notturno di un pastore" "Palinodia" and "La Ginestra." "La Ginestra" is held by eminent critics to be the most tragic creation, from a universal point of view, of poetic genius. Schopenhauer said - alluding mostly to this poem - that Leopardi succeeded in expressing the sadness and the misery of life with a perfection both of analysis and language never before attained by any writer. (I.) Carducci, speaking of this poem said: "Leopardi è il Lucrezio ed il Giobbe d'Italia." (II.) The literary beauties of the Leopardian philosophical verses, about which we will speak again in the next chapter, are similar to those which we admire in Leopardi's love and patriotic lyrics. Their construction is imposing, their pictures are vivid and striking, and their language is of a simple and majestic elegance. Their content is invariably the tragedy of human life in all her forms and developments. Their philosophy is distilled as in an

(I.) Le Monde comme volonté - Schopenhauer.

(II.) Leopardi - G. Carducci.

ample urn - gigantic symbol of death - in the famous poem "La Ginestra."

...III...

THE PHILOSOPHY.

There are men who are born philosophers and yet, have never written a systematic treatise. The author of a serious novel or of a serious drama, who succeeds in giving life to characters incarnating an idea and developing it in themselves consistently, may be sometimes a more representative thinker than an avowed speculative investigator. All literatures, especially in our own time, boast of thinkers of this kind. Ibsen, Tolstoi, Fogazzaro, Maeterlink, Shaw, are - each of them in his own field and according to his own principles - men of letters and, at the same time, students of the greatest riddles of life. But a long time before the genesis of the psychologic novel and of the problem-play, there was another soil, the poetic

field which, though in its own nature apparently the least adapted for cultivation of deep thoughts, has been abundantly productive of profound reflections concerning our origin, our being and our fate. Poetry, in fact, to which in our industrial times men do not attach so great an importance as they did in the past, has been since the most remote centuries a region capable of giving life not only to flowers for the fair, not only to laurels for the brave, but also fruits full of substantial nutriment for the supreme aspirations of the soul and for the imperious needs of the mind. Moses taught ethic principles in his tables of the law, but David too, singing on his golden harpe, uttered words of wisdom; Cicero speculated in his immortal prose, but Lucretius too philosophized in his verses; Thomas Aquinas built a monumental structure of thought by systematizing human knowledge, but Dante Alighieri too, in his "Divine Comedy," erected a glorious temple in which humanity does not know

whether to admire more its magnificent beauties or its gigantic speculations. In the past the intellectual work was not so specialized as it is today. In Italy, during the immortal period of the Renaissance, a great painter was often an excellent architect, a great scientist was often a suggestive writer, and a poet was often, very often, a philosopher, just as well as a philosopher was a poet.

Giacomo Leopardi, emulator of the ancients, even in this, succeeded in uniting several elements in a perfect harmony, learning, art and thought. The results of his philosophical investigations are expressed, more or less directly, in almost all his literary productions, even in some of his numerous letters to friends and admirers. "Lo Zibaldone" "I Dialoghi" and several of his poems, especially "Brutus" "Amore e Morte" "Palinodia" and "La Ginestra," contain the complete distillation of his ideas on the most complex problems of the universe.

Though our poet's ideas are not coordinate in an ample, systematic structure, he reveals in what he wrote, a true general view, logically connected, of creation and existence. The last Leopardian conception of cosmic and human life is desolate, is extremely desolate, in its premises just as much as in its conclusions and applications. He is known everywhere as a great, as the greatest probably, poet of pessimism. But before becoming a pessimist he passed through a dramatic process which led him from sincere piety to dark incredulity and bitter desolation. In his early youth, as we have already said, when speaking of his life and his first works, he was very religious. Not only did he conform, during that time of strong faith, to all the practices of worship, not only did he find in his belief the consolation necessary for his heart and the certitude necessary for his mind, but he was even gathering the knowledge requisite for writing

a full apology in defense of Catholic doctrine. He confesses himself somewhere that the vast erudition of ancient Christianity with which he enriched his young mind, was acquired, not so much with the purpose of becoming a scholar, as of becoming a strenuous champion of the church. "I Padri della chiesa" and "Il Saggio sugli errori popolari degli antichi" demonstrate the apologetic direction which their author intended to give to his studies. He was then, in his first period, somewhat of an historian, of an apologist, and of a theologian of the church. He seems, such was the fervor of his faith, to have had even the desire of becoming a martyr, for in his poem "Lo Appressamento della morte" he generously offered his hopes and himself wholly to God. (I.) As all men of passionate temperament, he was, at that time, towards those who did not share his belief, stern and intolerant. He wrote that "independent philosophy is systematized wickedness."

(I.) "Leopardi." - B. Zumbini.

How then did he pass from such rigorous orthodoxy to incredulity and pessimism? How the author of the mystic verses "Lo Appressamento" could become the writer of "La Ginestra?" The solution of the mysteries of the soul is always an extremely difficult task, but in our case, the documents of Leopardi's life, as well as the writings of his religious phase, help us in finding the elements which, once developed in the mind of the poet, could not fail to change radically his mental attitude. These writings, in fact, in spite of the author's willingness to persevere in his old creed, contained the germs of his future spiritual and intellectual transformation. Leopardi loved nature with a sort of worship, that is with tenderness, confidence and filial abandonment. (I.) He was a naturalist, the poet of the romanticism of J.J.Rousseau. For him, just as well as for the Genevan writer, nature was the mother of humanity. the bosom from

(I.) "Zibaldone." -Leopardi.

which springs all our joys, and the only source of innocence, of strength and beauty. According to his opinion the triumph of reason in the world - the spreading of civilization of which we are so proud - was fatal to men. It destroyed in men what once, in the prehistoric and in the classic times, made them really happy - in other words; illusion, astonishment, heroism and poetic feeling. Nature and intelligence in his system of thought, are two discordant elements: nature is hostile to intelligence, intelligence is hostile to nature. The less then a man is dominated by reason, the happier and the greater he will be. This principle once admitted, it follows, as a logical consequence, that the co-existence of those two discordant elements in our modern society, is the origin of all our miseries and our weaknesses. This very love for nature induced Leopardi to study and cherish ardently those peoples and those ages which lived nearer to her

and obeyed more faithfully her voice. Antiquity, with its fables, its heroic deeds, its undisturbed tranquility of conscience, was for him the ideal epoch of the history of mankind. Such attitude towards nature and towards the classic world was, at least unconsciously, pagan. Certainly it could not long harmonize with the faith which our poet was still professing. Even a superficial knowledge of the writers of the church, who, throughout the centuries have been considered as the most reliable interpreters of her traditions, is enough to convince anyone of the strong aversion professed by Christianity towards nature - the cause of sin - and paganism - the religion of falsehood and sensuousness. Was not Christianity, after all, with its aspirations after truth and its lofty idealism the very cause that decisively contributed to the destruction of the mythological and classic ages? And was not civilization,

so sternly rebuked by our poet in the name of the legendary happiness of the primitive peoples, produced, in a great part, by the evolution to which the new religious and moral teachings were calling humanity? Therefore, to adore nature and exalt classicism on one side, to condemn reason and anathematize civilization on the other, was neither more nor less than to deny, implicitly the spirit, the standards, and the noblest glories of Christianity. Leopardi saw the difficulty of his position, but instead of correcting his heterodox opinions, he tried to explain them at the expense of Christianity, thinking, in perfectly good faith, that he was still an exemplary believer. This fact is not new in the history of literature and art, at least in Italy. Famous writers and artists of the Italian Renaissance were thoroughly pagan in their thought and yet, with striking

candor of soul, they meant to remain earnest Christians. Leopardi wrote: "My philosophy regarding the world, and the fact that I attribute all, or almost all to nature, and nothing, or very little to reason, that is to the work of man, this is not opposed to Christianity." (I.)

In spite, however, of this declaration, his love for antiquity, and the partiality of his philosophy, unfavorable to the Christian ideals, forced him to assail them more directly. He wrote in the same book: "The ancient religions, containing a greater number of natural beliefs based upon a deeper ignorance, held man nearer to nature and they contributed much more to his happiness than Christianity is able to do." (II.) From such a recognition to an open accusation, the space is extremely short. Leopardi said in another part of the "Zibaldone": "Christianity (and I do not intend to accuse her) has, in a certain way, effec-

(I.) "Zibaldone" - G. Leopardi.

(II.) Id.

tively made men worse. The cruel barbarity of the middle ages ~~was~~ not caused merely by ignorance, but by ignorance mixed with Christian religion." (I.) And, carrying the problem into another field, he added: "The same religion has rendered men inactive, made them contemplative. Then ~~it~~ favored despotism not as a principle, because Christianity neither approves tyranny nor condemns a revolt against it, but as a material consequence. If a man, in fact, considers this world merely as an exile, and takes care only to prepare an abode in the next world, he cannot be preoccupied with tyranny.."

In the mind of Leopardi, besides this excessive love for nature and classicism, there always existed a dangerous habit of reasoning too subtly about religious matters. St. Paul calls religion, "rationabile obsequium" it is true, but he says in another part of his epistles "scientia inflat". Too much reasoning, too much subtlety,

(I.) "Zibaldone" - G. Leopardi.

in such a delicate and complex problem - in which not only intelligence, but all the faculties, even the most inexplicable subconscious forces of man are involved, - seems to be very dangerous. In the book, "Saggi sugli errori degli antichi," though written in order to demonstrate the falsity of the pagan religious and moral conceptions, we can perceive the presence of rationalism. Browne, an able English critic, says, and in my opinion with good reason, that Leopardi was already in those essays virtually an atheist.(I.) As soon as he has taken another step he will avail himself of all the arguments already valiantly used against the pagan fables, to assail Christianity. Beneath all religions there is a certain common basis; when this common basis has been destroyed by the pickaxe of extreme criticism even under the most rudimental form of belief, the necessary support is weakened under all the others. As Leopardi analysed the pagan

(I.) Leopardi - Browne. (Mac Millan's Magazine, June 1887.)

beliefs in a destructive spirit, so will he treat the tenets and the symbols of Christianity; as he cast down from their pedestals the gods of Olympus so will he endeavor to overthrow the founder of the religion of his own fathers; - as he derided the naive credulity of the primitive people, so will he laugh at the doctrines and promises of the Church. He will laugh all the more because the pagan legends were the fruit of simple and childish natures, while Christian dogmas are vindicated in the name of reason. Leopardi, then, as his father's intuition had dimly foreseen some years before, finally renounced the faith which only a short time previously he had defended with such ardor. Now that he has lost his faith - (the only consoling interpretation of life) - the universe becomes, in his eye, a vast chaos in which things move without aim, driven on by a blind, brutal power. Nature, our poet has said repeatedly, has placed in man's heart the desire of happiness; man seeks this happiness in

wealth, in power, in fame, in pleasure, in love,
but as the end of all these things is death, man's
lot is a delusion and sorrow. (I.)

Leopardi reached pessimism almost at
the same moment that he reached incredulity. Even
his pessimism, like his incredulity, existed poten-
tially in the Christian period of his life. As we
find symptoms of incredulity in his religious works,
so we find, in the same works, symptoms of pessimism.

Leopardi, aside from the unfortunate conditions of
his youth and from the lack of love which made him
intensely sad until the end, aside from a temperament
too sensitive to give him happiness in the satis-
faction of material pleasure, he was profoundly
melancholy through the influence exercised over him
by familiarity with some religious writings which
speak with terrific directness of the vanity of life.
The reading, indeed, of ascetic books, too arid
and severe for his tender age, warped him little

(I.) "Zibaldone" - G. Leopardi.

"I Dialoghi" - G. Leopardi.

unbelief?

by little into sadness. The author of "Ecclesiastes", with his dreary pictures, and the writer of The Imitation of Christ, with his subtle psychology, instilled in him a dread, of existence. Too soon he learned the discouraging aspects of life. In the springtime of his youth, when his tender soul needed rather the sunshine of illusion, he became intimate with death. So long as he accepted his faith, he was melancholy, even sad perhaps, but not pessimistic. When he lost his faith, which had been the only light of his early youth, he remained alone in his sorrow. His scepticism, his bitterness and his gloom became funereal. He was like an abandoned heart weeping alone in the desert. All his poems, ten excepted perhaps, reveal the drama of his soul. We feel in them the continuous conflict between the desires and the dreams of a great imagination on one side, and on the other, the miseries of the real world.

Leopardi's poems are often terrific questions.
The poet almost always begins by painting
a scene of beauty or a spectacle of greatness, then
he shows the ruins into which all men's fair
dreams and lofty structures are doomed to fall.
Do you love a sweet and dear face, which gazes at
you with touching tenderness?

"Such wast thou; now in earth below,
Dust and a skeleton thou art.
Above thy bones and clay
Here vainly placed by loving hands,
Sole guardian of memory and woe,
The image of departed beauty stands.
Mute, motionless, it seems with pensive gaze,
To watch the flight of the departing days.
That gentle look, that, wheresoe'er it fell,
As now it seems to fall,
Held fast the gazer with its magic spell;
That lip, from which as from some copious urn,
Redundant pleasures seems to overflow;
That neck, on which love once so fondly hung,
That loving hand whose tender pressure still
The hand it clasped, with trembling joy would thrill;
That bosom, whose transparent loveliness
The color from the gazer's cheek would steal;
All these have been; and now remains alone
A wretched heap of bones and clay,
Concealed from sight by this benignant stone." (I.)

Are you thrilled by wealth? by pleasure? by fame?

(I.) "On the Portrait of a Beautiful Woman Carved
on her monument." - G. Leopardi.

"Full well I know that honor and renown
Are phantoms; pleasures but an idle dream;
That life, a useless misery, has not
One solid fruit to show....." (I.)

Have you consecrated your energies to the greatness
of your country and humanity? to art? to science?
to progress?

"And in my heart a cruel pang I feel,
At thought, how all things earthly pass away,
And leave no trace behind. This festal day
Hath fled; a working-day now follows it,
And all, alike, are swept away by Time.
Where is the glory of the antique nations now?
Where now the fame of our great ancestors?
The empire vast of Rome, the clash of arms?
Now all is peace and silence, all the world
At rest; their very names are heard no more..." (II.)

Death, death, ever death is the last note of the
Leopardian songs:

"Death is today the only relief left."

Some critics compared Leopardi and his philosophy
to Schopenhauer's. It is undeniable that their
ideas up to a certain point are similar. But
if they agree in the recognition of the sorrowful

(I.) "Recollections" - G. Leopardi.

(II.) "The Evening of the Holiday." - G. Leopardi

faces of mortal existence, their final conclusions are radically different. Leopardi's ultimate attitude is humanitarian, is, in its spirit, Christian. (I.) Shopenhauer despised the world and mankind; Leopardi, on the contrary, pitied and loved his fellow creatures. Shopenhauer's supreme rule of conduct is as follows: "Neither love nor hate; this is half of the highest wisdom. Neither say a word nor believe anything; this is the perfect wisdom; because the world from an aesthetic point of view is a museum of caricatures; from an intellectual point of view it is an insane asylum, and from the moral point of view, it is an inn full of rascals." (II.) Leopardi never, not even in his most despairing moments, blasphemed against humanity, as did the German philosopher. Leopardi, on the contrary, urged all men to band themselves, if not in the name of a Divinity (because he was no longer a believer) at least in the name of their own common misfortune,

(I.) "La Ginestra" - G. Pascoli.

"Saggi Critici" - F. De Sanctis

"Les Idées morales du temps présent." - E. Rod

(II.) "Aforismi della Saggezza" - Shopenhauer.

in a pact of universal love and succour. The end of "La Ginestra", which is, as it were, Leopardi's testament is an eloquent appeal to those sentiments preached by Christianity in the name of charity, and vindicated by socialism in the name of solidarity.

"...truly noble, wise is he,
Who bids his brethren boldly look
Upon our common misery;
Who frankly tells the naked truth,
Acknowledging our frail and wretched state,
And all the ills decreed to us by Fate;
Who shows himself in suffering brave and strong,
Nor adds unto his miseries
Fraternal jealousies and strifes,
The hardest things to bear of all,
Reproaching man with his own grief,
But the true culprit
Who, in our birth, a mother is,
A fierce step-mother in her will.
Her he proclaims the enemy,
And thinking all the human race
Against her armed, as is the case,
E'en from the first, united and arrayed,
All men esteems confederates,
And with true love embraces all,
Prompt and efficient aid bestowing, and
Expecting it, in all the pains
And perils of the common war...." (I.)

(I.) "La Ginestra" - G. Leopardi.

.....SUMMARY.....

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Leopardi's life was marked by unending suffering, first- because in his early age he lacked an homogeneous intellectual atmosphere, the consolation of domestic happiness and the spring of youth; second- because in his mature age he missed , with health, the compensations of love which was one of the most imperious needs of his tender and passionate nature, and because, having lost the faith , he beheld existence through a pessimism ever growing gloomier.

Intellectually speaking he was a man of superior mind, one of the great and universal intelligences which honored humanity in the modern times. He united

in himself the learning of a scholar, the depth of a philosopher, the plasticity of form of an artist, and the vivid and fecund imagination of a poet. His historical and philological writings were praised by the most famous erudite critics of his time, both in Italy and in Germany; his philosophical productions were esteemed by illustrious thinkers as manifestations of profound and comprehensive thought, and his literary works, in prose and in verse, have ever been considered, as a whole, a monument of classic beauty.

Of all his intellectual activities, which extended from pure erudition to theological investigation, there are two in which Leopardi left the striking imprint of his genius— philosophy and poetry. As a philosopher he was deep and minute in observation, exceptionally clear in expression and logical development; but his speculation, as a systematic doctrine, was neither initially original nor, from a speculative or pragmatic point of view, unassailable.

His dreary ideas concerning the gravest and

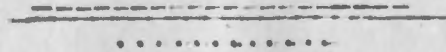
the most disquieting problems of the universe were sincere and conscious; his negative attitude towards faith was serious just as his belief was serious before the definitive crisis of his soul. In spite of all the destructive principles of his conception of the world, he was, nevertheless, in his conclusions regarding our conduct towards men, humanitarian and Christian.

Leopardi's fame will remain immortal in the history of culture as that of a poet, for his genius, though variously productive, reached his most perfect expression of creative power in the domain of the Muses. In poetry his personality stands unique, not only in his own country, but in the whole world. He will remain for all time the most powerful and suggestive interpreter of universal sorrow.

" O toi qu'appelle encor ta patrie.....
Dans ta tombe précoce à peine refroidi,
Sombre amant de la Mort, pauvre Leopardi,
.....
.....
Telle fut la vigueur de ton sobre génie,
Tel fut ton chaste amour pour l'apre vérité,

.....65.....

" Qu'au milieu des langueurs du parler d'Ausonie,
Tu dedaignas la rime et sa molle harmonie,
Pour ne laisser vibrer sur ton luth irrité
Que l'accent du malheur..... " (1)



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