

## Vert-Vert, the Parrot.

A POEM BY THE JESUIT GRESSER.

### Thy original Innocence.

ALAS! what evils I discern in  
Too great an aptitude for learning!  
And fain would all the ills unravel  
That aye ensue from foreign travel;  
Far happier is the man who tarries  
Quiet within his household "Lares!"  
Read, and you'll find how virtue vanishes,  
How foreign vice all goodness banishes,  
And how abroad young heads will grow dizzy;  
Proved in the underwritten Odyssey.

10

In old Nevers, so famous for its  
Dark narrow streets and Gothic turrets,  
Close on the brink of Loire's young flood,  
Flourished a convent sisterhood  
Of *Ursulines*. Now in this order  
A parrot lived as parlour-boarder;  
Brought in his childhood from the *Antilles*,  
And sheltered under convent mantles:  
Green were his feathers, green his pinions,  
And greener still were his opinions;  
For vice had not yet sought to pervert  
This bird, who had been christened *Vert-Vert*;  
Nor could the wicked world defile him,  
Safe from its snares in this asylum.  
Fresh, in his teens, frank, gay, and gracious,  
And, to crown all, somewhat loquacious;  
If we examine close, not one, or he,  
Had a vocation for a nunnery.\*

20

The convent's kindness need I mention?  
Need I detail each fond attention,  
Or count the tit-bits which *in Lent* he  
Swallowed remorseless and in plenty?  
Plump was his carcass; no, not higher  
Fed was their confessor the friar;  
And some even say that our young Hector  
Was far more loved than the "Director." †  
Dear to each novice and each nun—  
He was the life and soul of fun;

30

\* "Par son caquet digne d'être en couvent."

† "Souvent l'oiseau l'emporta sur le Père."

Though, to be sure, some hags censorious  
 Would sometimes find him too uproarious. 40  
 What did the parrot care for those old  
 Dames, while he had for him the household?  
 He had not yet made his "profession,"  
 Nor come to years called "of discretion;"  
 Therefore, unblamed, he ogled, flirted,  
 And romped like any unconverted;  
 Nay sometimes, too, by the Lord Harry!  
 He'd pull their caps and "scapulary."  
 But what in all his tricks seemed oddest,  
 Was that at times he'd turn so modest, 50  
 That to all bystanders the wight  
 Appeared a finished hypocrite.  
 In accent he did not resemble  
 Kean, though he had the tones of Kemble;  
 But fain to do the sisters' biddings,  
 He left the stage to Mrs. Siddons.  
 Poet, historian, judge, financier,  
 Four problems at a time he'd answer  
 He had a faculty like Cæsar's.  
 Lord Althorp, baffling all his teasers, 60  
 Could not surpass Vert-Vert in puzzling;  
 "Goodrich" to him was but a gosling.\*

Placed when at table near some vestal,  
 His fare, be sure, was of the best all,—  
 For every sister would endeavour  
 To keep for him some sweet *hors d'œuvre*.  
 Kindly at heart, in spite of vows and  
 Cloisters, a nun is worth a thousand!  
 And aye, if Heaven would only lend her,  
 I'd have a nun for a nurse tender! † 70

Then, when the shades of night would come on,  
 And to their cells the sisters summon,  
 Happy the favoured one whose grotto  
 This sultan of a bird would trot to:  
 Mostly the young ones' cells he toyed in,  
 (The aged sisterhood avoiding),  
 Sure among all to find kind offices,—  
 Still he was partial to the novices,  
 And in *their* cells our anchorite  
 Mostly cast anchor for the night; 80

\* At this remote period it is forgotten that "Prosperity Robinson" was also known as "Goose Goodrich," when subsequently chancellor of the exchequer.—O. Y.

† "Les petits soins, les attentions fines,  
 Sont nés, dit on, chez les Ursulines."

Perched on the box that held the relics, he  
Slept without notion of indelicacy.  
Rare was his luck ; nor did he spoil it  
By flying from the morning toilet :  
Not that I can admit the fitness  
Of (at the toilet) a male witness ;  
But that I scruple in this history  
To shroud a single fact in mystery.

Quick at all arts, our bird was rich at  
That best accomplishment, called chit-chat ;  
For, though brought up within the cloister,  
His beak was not closed like an oyster,  
But, trippingly, without a stutter,  
The longest sentences would utter ;  
Pious withal, and moralising  
His conversation was surprising ;  
None of your equivoques, no slander—  
To such vile tastes he scorned to pander ;  
But his tongue ran most smooth and nice on  
“ Deo sit laus” and “ Kyrie eleison ;”  
The maxims he gave with best emphasis  
Were Suarez’s or Thomas à Kempis’s ;  
In Christmas carols he was famous,  
“ Orate, fratres,” and “ OREMUS ;”  
If in good humour, he was wont  
To give a stave from “ *Think well on’t* ;” \*  
Or, by particular desire, he  
Would chant the hymn of “ *Dies iræ.*”  
Then in the choir he would amaze all  
By copying the tone so nasal  
In which the sainted sisters chanted,—  
(At least that pious nun my aunt did.)

90

100

110

### *His fatal Renowne.*

The public soon began to ferret  
The hidden nest of so much merit,  
And, spite of all the nuns’ endeavours,  
The fame of Vert-Vert filled all Nevers ;  
Nay, from Moulines folks came to stare at  
The wondrous talent of this parrot ;  
And to fresh visitors *ad libitum*  
Sister Sophie had to exhibit him.  
Drest in her tidiest robes, the virgin,  
Forth from the convent cells emerging,

120

\* “ *Pensez-y-bien,*” or “ *Think well on’t,*” as translated by the titular bishop, Richard Chaloner, is the most generally adopted devotional tract among the Catholics of these islands.—PROUT.

Brings the bright bird, and for his plumage  
 First challenges unstinted homage ;  
 Then to his eloquence adverts,—  
 “ What preacher’s can surpass Vert-Vert’s ?  
 Truly in oratory few men  
 Equal this learned catechumen ;  
 Fraught with the convent’s choicest lessons,  
 And stuffed with piety’s quintessence ;  
 A bird most quick of apprehension,  
 With gifts and graces hard to mention :  
 Say in what pulpit can you meet  
 A Chrysostom half so discreet,  
 Who’d follow in his ghostly mission  
 So close the ‘ fathers and tradition ? ’ ”  
 Silent meantime, the feathered hermit  
 Waits for the sister’s gracious permit,  
 When, at a signal from his mentor,  
 Quick on a course of speech he’ll enter ;  
 Not that he cares for human glory,  
 Bent but to save his auditory ;  
 Hence he pours forth with so much unction  
 That all his hearers feel compunction.

130

140

Thus for a time did Vert-Vert dwell  
 Safe in his holy citadelle ;  
 Scholared like any well-bred abbé,  
 And loved by many a cloistered Hébé ;  
 You’d swear that he had crossed the same bridge  
 As any youth brought up in Cambridge.\*  
 Other monks starve themselves ; but his skin  
 Was sleek like that of a Franciscan,  
 And far more clean ; for this grave Solon  
 Bathed every day in *eau de Cologne*.  
 Thus he indulged each guiltless gambol,  
 Blest had he ne’er been doomed to ramble !

150

For in his life there came a crisis  
 Such as for all great men arises,—  
 Such as what NAP to Russia led,  
 Such as the “ FLIGHT ” of Mahomed ;  
 O town of Nantz ! yes, to thy bosom  
 We let him go, alas ! to lose him !  
*Edicts*, O town famed for *revoking*,  
 Still was Vert-Vert’s loss more provoking !  
 Dark be the day when our bright Don went  
 From this to a far-distant convent !  
 Two words comprised that awful era—  
 Words big with fate and woe—“ *IL IRA !* ”

160

\* *Quere—Pons Asinorum ?*

Yes, "he shall go;" but, sisters! mourn ye  
The dismal fruits of that sad journey,—  
Ills on which Nantz's nuns ne'er reckoned,  
When for the beautiful bird they beckoned.

170

Fame, O Vert-Vert! in evil humour,  
One day to Nantz had brought the rumour  
Of thy accomplishments,—“acumen,”  
“*Novè*,” and “*esprit*,” quite superhuman:  
All these reports but served to enhance  
Thy merits with the nuns of Nantz.  
How did a matter so unsuited  
For convent ears get hither bruited!  
Some may inquire. But “nuns are knowing,”  
*And first to hear what gossip's going.\**  
Forthwith they taxed their wits to elicit  
From the famed bird a friendly visit.  
Girls' wishes run in a brisk current,  
But a nun's fancy is a torrent; †  
To get this bird they'd pawn the missal;  
Quick they indite a long epistle,  
Careful with softest things to fill it,  
And then with musk perfume the billet;  
Thus, to obtain their darling purpose,  
They send a writ of *habeas corpus*.

180

190

Off goes the post. When will the answer  
Free them from doubt's corroding cancer?  
Nothing can equal their anxiety,  
Except, of course, their well-known piety.  
Things at Nevers meantime went harder  
Than well would suit such pious ardour;  
It was no easy job to coax  
This parrot from the Nevers folks.  
What, take their toy from convent belles?  
Make Russia yield the Dardanelles!  
Filch his good rifle from a “Suliotè,”  
Or drag her “Romeo” from a “Juliet!”  
Make an attempt to take Gibraltar,  
Or try the old corn laws to alter!  
This seemed to them, and eke to us,  
“Most wasteful and ridiculous.”  
Long did the “chapter” sit in state,  
And on this point deliberate;  
The junior members of the senate  
Set their fair faces quite again' it;

200

210

\* “Les révérendes mères  
A tout savoir ne sont pas les dernières.”  
† “Désir de fille est un feu qui dévore,  
Désir de nonne est cent fois pis encore.”

Refuse to yield a point so tender,  
 And urge the motto—No surrender.  
 The elder nuns feel no great scruple  
 In parting with the charming pupil ;  
 And as each grave affair of state runs  
 Most on the verdict of the matrons,  
 Small odds, I ween, and poor the chance  
 Of keeping the dear bird from Nantz.  
 Nor in my surmise am I far out,—  
 For by *their* vote off goes the parrot.

220

### Épis civil Voyage.

*En ce tems là*, a small canal-boat,  
 Called by most chroniclers the "Talbot,"  
 (TALBOT, a name well known in France!)  
 Travelled between Nevers and Nantz.  
 Vert-Vert took shipping in this craft,  
 'Tis not said whether fore or aft ;  
 But in a book as old as Massinger's  
 We find a statement of the passengers ;  
 These were—two Gascons and a piper,  
 A sexton (a notorious swiper),  
 A brace of children, and a nurse ;  
 But what was infinitely worse,  
 A dashing Cyprian ; while by her  
 Sat a most jolly-looking friar.\*

230

For a poor bird brought up in purity  
 'Twas a sad augur for futurity  
 To meet, just free from his indentures,  
 And in the first of his adventures,  
 Such company as formed his hansel,—  
 Two rogues ! a friar !! and a damsel !!!  
 Birds the above were of a feather ;  
 But to Vert-Vert 't was altogether  
 Such a strange aggregate of scandals  
 As to be met but among Vandals ;  
 Rude was their talk, bereft of polish,  
 And calculated to demolish  
 All the fine notions and good-breeding  
 Taught by the nuns in their sweet Eden.  
 No Billingsgate surpassed the nurse's,  
 And all the rest indulged in curses ;

240

250

\* " Une nourrice, un moine, deux Gascons ;  
 Pour un enfant qui sort du monastère  
 C'était échoir en dignes compagnons."

Ear hath not heard such vulgar gab in  
The nautic cell of any cabin.  
Silent and sad, the pensive bird,  
Shocked at their guilt, said not a word.\*

Now he "of orders grey," accosting  
The parrot green, who seemed quite lost in  
The contemplation of man's wickedness,  
And the bright river's gliding liquidness, 260  
"Tip us a stave (quoth Tuck), my darling,  
Ayn't you a parrot or a starling?  
If you don't talk, by the holy poker,  
I'll give that neck of yours a choker!"  
Scared by this threat from his propriety,  
Our pilgrim thinking with sobriety,  
That if he did not speak they'd make him,  
Answered the friar, PAX SIT TECUM!  
Here our reporter marks down after  
Poll's maiden-speech—"loud roars of laughter;" 270  
And sure enough the bird so affable  
Could hardly use a phrase more laughable.

Talking of such, there are some rum ones  
That oft amuse the House of Commons:  
And since we lost "*Sir Joseph Yorke*,"  
We've got great "*Feargus*" fresh from Cork,—  
A fellow honest, droll, and funny,  
Who would not sell for love or money  
His native land: nor, like vile Daniel,  
Fawn on Lord Althorp like a spaniel; 280  
Flatter the mob, while the old fox  
Keeps an eye to the begging-box.  
Now 'tis a shame that such brave fellows,  
When they blow "*agitation's*" bellows,  
Should only meet with heartless scoffers.  
While cunning Daniel fills his coffers,  
But Kerry-men will e'er be apter  
At the conclusion of the chapter,  
While others bear the battle's brunt,  
To reap the spoil and *fob the blunt*. 290  
This is an *episode* concerning  
The parrot's want of worldly learning,  
In squandering his tropes and figures  
On a vile crew of heartless niggers.

\* This canal-boat, it would seem, was not a very refined or fashionable conveyance: it rather remindeth of Horace's voyage to Brundisium, and of that line so applicable to the parrot's company—

"Repletum nautis, cauponibus, atque malignis."

The "house" heard once with more decorum  
Phil. Howard on "the Roman forum."\*

Poll's brief address met lots of cavillers  
Badgered by all his fellow-travellers,  
He tried to mend a speech so ominous  
By striking up with "DIXIT DOMINUS!" 300  
But louder shouts of laughter follow,—  
This last roar beats the former hollow,  
And shews that it was bad economy  
To give a stave from Deuteronomy.

Posed, not abashed, the bird refused to  
Indulge a scene he was not used to ;  
And, pondering on his strange reception,  
"There must," he thought, "be some deception  
In the nuns' views of things rhetorical,  
And sister Rose is not an oracle. 310  
True wit, perhaps, lies not in 'mattins,'  
Nor is *their* school a school of Athens."

Thus in this villanous receptacle  
The simple bird at once grew sceptical.  
Doubts lead to hell. The arch-deceiver  
Soon made of Poll an unbeliever ;  
And mixing thus in bad society,  
He took French leave of all his piety.

His austere maxims soon he mollified,  
And all his old opinions qualified ; 320  
For he had learned to substitute  
For pious lore things more astute ;  
Nor was his conduct unimpeachable,  
For youth, alas ! is but too teachable ;  
And in the progress of his madness  
Soon he had reached the depths of badness,  
Such were his *curses*, such his evil  
Practices, that no ancient devil, †  
Plunged to the chin when burning hot 330  
Into a holy water-pot,  
Could so blaspheme, or fire a volley  
Of oaths so drear and melancholy.

\* See "Mirror of Parliament" for this ingenious person's maiden speech on Joe Hume's motion to alter and enlarge the old House of Commons. "Sir, the Romans (a laugh)—I say the Romans (loud laughter) never altered their Forum" (roars of ditto). But Heaven soon granted what Joe Hume desired, and the old rookery was burnt shortly after.

† "Bientôt il seut jurer et mougréer  
Mieux qu'un vieux diable au fond d'un bénitier"



Must the bright blossoms, ripe and ruddy,  
 And the fair fruits of early study,  
 Thus in their summer season crossed,  
 Meet a sad blight—a killing frost?  
 Must that vile demon, Moloch, oust  
 Heaven from a young heart's holocaust? \*  
 And the glad hope of life's young promise  
 Thus in the dawn of youth ebb from us? 340  
 Such is, alas! the sad and last trophy  
 Of the young rake's supreme catastrophe;  
 For of what use are learning's laurels  
 When a young man is without morals?  
 Bereft of virtue, and grown heinous,  
 What signifies a brilliant genius?  
 'Tis but a case for wail and mourning,—  
 'Tis but a brand fit for the burning!

Meantime the river wafts the barge,  
 Fraught with its miscellaneous charge, 350  
 Smoothly upon its broad expanse,  
 Up to the very quay of Nantz;  
 Fondly within the convent bowers  
 The sisters calculate the hours,  
 Chiding the breezes for their tardiness,  
 And, in the height of their fool-hardiness,  
 Picturing the bird as fancy painted—  
 Lovely, reserved, polite, and sainted—  
 Fit "*Ursuline*." And *this*, I trow, meant  
 Enriched with every endowment! 360  
 Sadly, alas! these nuns anointed  
 Will find their fancy disappointed;  
 When, to meet all those hopes they drew on,  
 They'll find a regular DON JUAN!

### The awfull Discoberie.

Scarce in the port was this small craft  
 On its arrival telegraphed,  
 When, from the boat home to transfer him,  
 Came the nuns' portress, "sister Jerome."  
 Well did the parrot recognise  
 The walk demure and downcast eyes; 370  
 Nor aught such saintly guidance relished  
 A bird by worldly arts embellished;  
 Such was his taste for profane gaiety,  
 He'd rather much go with the laity.

\* "Faut-il qu'ainsi l'exemple séducteur  
 Du ciel au diable emporte un jeune cœur?"

Fast to the bark he clung; but plucked thence,  
 He shewed dire symptoms of reluctance,  
 And, scandalising each beholder,  
 Bit the nun's cheek, and eke her shoulder! \*  
 Thus a black eagle once, 'tis said,  
 Bore off the struggling Ganymede.†  
 Thus was Vert-Vert, heart-sick and weary,  
 Brought to the heavenly monastery.  
 The bell and tidings both were tolled,  
 And the nuns crowded, young and old,  
 To feast their eyes with joy uncommon on  
 This wondrous talkative phenomenon.

380

Round the bright stranger, so amazing  
 And so renowned, the sisters gazing,  
 Praised the green glow which a warm latitude  
 Gave to his neck, and liked his attitude.  
 Some by his gorgeous tail are smitten,  
 Some by his beak so beauteous bitten!  
 And none e'er dreamt of dole or harm in  
 A bird so brilliant and so charming.  
 Shade of Spurzheim! and thou, Lavater,  
 Or Gall, of "bumps" the great creator!  
 Can ye explain how our young hero,  
 With all the vices of a Nero,  
 Seemed such a model of good-breeding,  
 Thus quite astray the convent leading?  
 Where on his head appeared, I ask from ye,  
 The "nob" indicative of blasphemy?  
 Methinks 't would puzzle your ability  
 To find his organ of scurrility.

390

400

Meantime the abbess, to "draw out"  
 A bird so modest and devout,  
 With soothing air and tongue caressing  
 The "pilgrim of the Loire" addressing,  
 Broached the most edifying topics,  
 To "start" this native of the tropics;  
 When, to their scandal and amaze, he  
 Broke forth—"Morbleu! those nuns are crazy!"  
 (Shewing how well he learnt his task on  
 The packet-boat from that vile Gascon!)  
 "Fie! brother poll!" with zeal outbursting,  
 Exclaimed the abbess, dame Augustin;

410

- \* "Les uns disent au cou,  
 D'autres au bras; on ne sait pas bien où."  
 † "Qualem ministrum fulminis alitem.  
 Cui rex deorum regnum in aves vagos  
 Commisit, expertus fidelem  
 Jupiter in Ganymede fiavo."

HOR.

But all the lady's sage rebukes  
Brief answer got from poll—"Gadzooks!"  
Nay, 'tis supposed, he muttered, too,  
A *word* folks write with W. 420  
Scared at the sound,—“Sure as a gun,  
The bird's a demon!” cried the nun.  
“O the vile wretch! the naughty dog!  
He's surely Lucifer *incog*.  
What! is the reprobate before us  
That bird so pious and decorous—  
So celebrated?”—Here the pilgrim,  
Hearing sufficient to bewilder him,  
Wound up the sermon of the beldame  
By a conclusion heard but seldom— 430  
“Ventre Saint Gris!” “Parbleu!” and “Sacre!”  
Three oaths! and every one a *whacker*!

Still did the nuns, whose conscience tender  
Was much shocked at the young offender,  
Hoping he'd change his tone, and alter,  
Hang breathless round the sad defaulter:  
When, wrathful at their importunity,  
And grown audacious from impunity,  
He fired a broadside (holy Mary!)  
Drawn from Hell's own vocabulary! 440  
Forth like a Congreve rocket burst,  
And stormed and swore, *flared up* and cursed.  
Stunned at these sounds of import stygian,  
The pious daughters of religion  
Fled from a scene so dread, so horrid,  
But with a cross first signed their forehead.  
The younger sisters, mild and meek,  
Thought that the culprit spoke in Greek;  
But the old matrons and “the bench”  
Knew every word was genuine French; 450  
And ran in all directions, pell-mell,  
From a flood fit to overwhelm hell.  
’Twas by a fall that Mother Ruth\*  
Then lost her last remaining tooth.

“Fine conduct this, and pretty guidance!”  
Cried one of the most mortified ones;  
“Pray, is such language and such ritual  
Among the Nevers nuns habitual?  
’Twas in our sisters most improper  
To teach such curses—such a whopper! 460

\* “Toutes pensent être à la fin du monde,  
Et sur son nez la mère Cunégonde  
Se laissant choir, perd sa dernière dent!”



Public Execution of a Criminal in London.

1847