

# V E R - V E R T ;

O R,

THE PARROT OF NEVERS:

A P O E M,

IN FOUR CANTOS.

FREELY TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

J. B. GRESSET.

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O X F O R D :

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## TO THE READER.

**V**ER-VERT has, on the Continent, been long considered as one of the best productions of its kind; and ranks with the *Secchia rapita* of Tassoni, and the *Lutrin* of Despreaux. In my opinion, it is in some respects superior to both these celebrated poems; and, in point of elegant ease and genuine humour, comes nearer to Pope's incomparable *Rape of the Lock*, than any other composition.

ON its first appearance in France, although its author was not known, it excited the admiration of the first geniuses of the time. "I have never seen," said J. B. Rousseau, "a publication that has so much astonished me as this; and I am not sure, but that all we modern poets will do better to renounce the profession, after the apparition of this singular phenomenon. If ever the author shall learn the art of versifying somewhat more *difficultly*, I foresee, that he will surpass us all." — "In any other hands," said D'Alembert, "VER-VERT would have been an insipid,

“ monotonous story, destined to die in the cloister that gave it birth: but its author, young as he then was, had the sense and sagacity to preconceive what degree of sportive pleasantry would make it agreeable to the great world.”—Our poet Grey, though not apt to be lavish in his commendations, bestows liberal eulogies on this and other poems of Gresset: and, I believe, all persons of taste, who have read them in the original, will own that they have much merit. With respect to *VER-VERT*, there seems to be but one opinion; namely, that it is by far the best of them.

THIS has often made me wonder, that it has not been translated into English<sup>a</sup>; and, finding recently a little leisure from serious application, I amused myself in attempting a faithful, but free version of it. I have retrenched nothing, or very little from the original text; but I have sometimes changed the arrangement of lines and sentences, and sometimes expanded the author's thoughts, by additions that seemed to arise naturally from the subject; such as, I am confident, Gresset himself would not have disapproved of in an English translation; and I trust that the *Pannus assuitur* of Horace will not here be found applicable.

ALL that I have been able to gather of the Author's life, amounts to this: JOHN-BAPTIST GRESSET was born at Amiens in 1709. He entered among the Jesuits at the age of 16, and left

<sup>a</sup> Since writing this, I have learned that there is a translation, of the whole, or a part of it, by Mr. Gilbert Cooper, in some collection of fugitive pieces, which I have not seen.

them at the age of 26 ; partly on account of this poem ; and partly for other reasons. Indeed he never seems to have had any vocation to that sort of life : and the following words, which he puts in the mouth of one of the reverend Mothers of Nevers, in a little piece, called a *Critique on Ver-vert*<sup>b</sup>, are doubtless expressive of the truth : “ I am not surpris’d,” says one of the Ladies, “ that Father Gresset is the author ; I never thought him fit to be a Jesuit : “ his manners and mien are totally repugnant to the humility of “ St. Ignatius.” — “ True,” says the Mother Superioresse ; “ and “ therefore let us use our joint endeavours to get him expelled out “ of a society, which he so much disgraces.” — This was easily brought about : that same year he left the order ; but left it without dislike to its members. He seems even to have left it with regret. In a letter to the Abbé Marquet, called *Adieux aux Jesuites*, and which has been translated into English, he gives them great praise ; and concludes with these generous lines :

Que d'autres, s'exhalant, dans leur haine insensée,  
 En reproches injurieux,  
 Cherchent, en les quittant, à les rendre odieux :  
 Pour moi, fidele au vrai, fidele à ma pensée,  
 C'est ainsi qu'en partant je leur fais mes *Adieux*.

Thus rendered, by Mr. Reeves, I think :

Let others, breathing malice keen,  
 Seek to asperse them in their spleen :  
 To justice I, and conscience, true,  
 In parting bid them thus—*Adieu*.

<sup>b</sup> I had once a mind to translate this little *Comedy in one act* ; and add it to *VER-VERT* : but short as it is for a play, it is rather too long for an appendix.

ON quitting the Jesuits he returned to Amiens, where he married a rich woman, and had besides a lucrative office in the finances. In 1748 he was received into the French Academy, in the place of Mr. Darchet; and had the honour of complimenting, in the name of that body, the unfortunate Lewis XVI. on his coming to the crown. By that monarch he was ennobled in 1775; and died, without children, at Amiens on the 16th of June, 1777, in the 68th year of his age.

HIS works have been collected and printed at different times, and in different places: but the best edition is that of Paris in 1785, in 3 vol. in 12<sup>mo</sup>. They consist of *Odes*, *Epistles*, a *Translation of Virgil's Eclogues*, a Tragedy called *Edward*<sup>c</sup>; two Comedies, *Sidney*, and *Le Mechant*, or *Malevolent-man*; which our Grey calls the best comedy he had ever read: but which, certainly, would never succeed on an English theatre, however it may please in the closet. As to *Edward* and *Sidney*, they are both unworthy of Gresset. His prose *Discourses* are still more exceptionable; being frothy, puerile declamations.

IT appears that he had written a *ffib Canto*, or second Part to VER-VERT; called *L'Ouvroir des Nonnes* (*The Nuns Work-room*), fraught with as much humour, and more Attic satire, than the first Part: but this he only read in select companies; and burned the MS. in his last illness. I have been assured by a French

<sup>c</sup> Edward III. of England.

gentleman now in Oxford, that the author having read it twice to *Monsieur*, the French King's brother, the latter could repeat every word of it by heart : so that there is still a possibility of its appearing in print.—I shall conclude this Preface with the only *distich* that I have seen on the death of Gresset :

Hunc lepidique sales lugent, veneresque pudicæ :  
Sed prohibent mores ingeniumque mori.

## E R R A T A.

- P. 31. note, *read*, The Touriere is a lay-fister, who attends at the gate, goes the convent's errands, &c.
- P. 35. l. 10. *for* motify *read* modify.

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# V E R E V E R T.

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## I N V O C A T I O N.

TO THE LADY ABBESS OF THE PARACLET.

**O** THOU! whom ev'ry solitary grace  
Adorns; without the Solitude's grimace:  
In whose pure breast all virtues are combin'd  
With gay good-humour and a taste refin'd:  
Be THOU my MUSE; since Thou wilt have me string  
Mine idle lyre a PARROT's dirge to sing:  
Warm ev'ry thought; enliven ev'ry tone;  
And make my notes harmonious as thine own;  
Such as, of late, o'er thy SULTANA's<sup>a</sup> tomb,  
(Whom Death snatch'd from thine arms, in vernal bloom)

<sup>a</sup> A favorite Spaniel.

Flow'd from thy plaintive Harp—My VER-VERT's bier  
Demands no less thy sympathetic tear.

His virtue struggling with a wayward fate,  
His voy'ges, wand'rings, and last forlorn state  
Would form an whole *Odyssy* in the lays  
Of Grecian Bards—if such were in our days.  
Gods, dæmons, witches might be group'd, to make  
A score of *Cantos* for a Hero's sake,  
Whose name, illustrious in the rolls of Fame,  
Rivals, at least, the great ÆNEAS' name :  
His prowess equal, piety not less ;  
And far, far greater his extreme distress !

BUT many rhymes might modern readers tire,  
And quench, perhaps, the modern Muse's fire,  
Who loves, like bees, to skip from flow'r to flow'r,  
And change her subject with the fleeting hour.  
These maxims, ABBESS ! must be strictly true,  
For this plain cause—I copy them from You.



O! may the *Copy* never greatly fall  
Below the rare and rich *Original*.

IF, too sincere, I haply have, at times,  
Betray'd some secret myst'ries in my rhymes :  
Th' important *Notblings* of the cloister'd state ;  
The science of the *Parlour* and the *Grate* :  
From THEE, my friend, so courteous and so kind,  
An easy pardon I expect to find.  
To duty THOU, and duty only tied,  
Canst laugh, with me, at ev'ry thing beside.

'Tis not a forehead sanctified by art,  
That Heav'n approves—but a pure simple heart.  
Were VIRTUE now, to mortals here below,  
Herself in all her native charms to show,  
None other semblance would the Goddess bear  
Than that which YOU—and all the GRACES wear.

By antient authors—and by modern too—  
It has been stated—I believe, most true

It has been stated, as a certain thing,  
 That little *Good* accrues from *travelling*.  
 The trade of running up and down the world  
 Has many a christian into error hurl'd.  
 Better in virtuous ignorance remain,  
 And live, at home, a pleas'd unpolish'd swain ;  
 Than, hunting knowledge through Earth's various climes,  
 Come loaded back with folly, and with crimes.  
 Of this great truth proof other need I bring  
 Than the disastrous fate of HIM I sing ?  
 Should stubborn sceptics doubt of what I say,  
 All *Nevers'* parlours will attest my lay.

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## C A N T O I:

AT NEVERS, then, a PARROT of great fame  
 Dwelt, not long since ; and VER-VERT was his name :  
 Who, when his *wisdom* and his *worth* we rate,  
 Might seem to merit a less rig'rous fate ;

If happiness, on this sublunar spot,  
Of worth and wisdom always were the lot.

HIM, yet an infant, from his native shore  
An unrelenting *Bourdeaux*-sailor bore  
To *Gallia*'s land; where Fortune fix'd his station  
Among the Ladies of the *Visitation*<sup>b</sup>:  
And, sure, no better station could befall  
A captive Parrot, on this earthly ball.  
Young, handsome, playful, volatile and gay,  
In harmless mirth he pass'd the live-long day:  
For, yet, no guilt his tender heart had stung;  
Nor words profane defil'd his mimic tongue.

NEED I to say what pains the Fair-ones took  
To make their Captive his confinement brook?  
To their dear *Father-Confessor* alone  
Were more attachment, more attention show'n.

<sup>b</sup> A sort of Religious Order instituted by the famous Bishop of Geneva, S. Francis de Sales.

Nay some soft fifters, in the bloom of youth,  
 (If Nevers-annals always speak the truth)  
 Prefer'd the *Fowl!*—at least, it certain is,  
 The *Fowl* partook of all the *Father's* blifs :  
 In ev'ry soupe and fyrop, were prepar'd  
 To cheer the *Father's* heart, the *Parrot* shar'd !  
 To win his favour *Nun* with *Nunlet* strove :  
 For *He's* no object of forbidden Love.

As reason's age he had not yet attain'd,  
 His frolic freedoms never were restrain'd :  
 Say what he list, or do whate'er he will ;  
 None took offence—twas “ charming, charming,” still.  
 Whether he half-unveil'd their hidden charms,  
 Or tore their bands, or bit their milk-white arms ;  
 Flutter'd, or whistled ; humm'd a *Psalm*, or *Song* :  
 'Twas *right*—for HE, like KINGS, could do no *wrong*.

YET had he, in his sporting and his speech,  
 That modest air which convents only teach :

Such

Such as in docile Novices appears  
 So pretty—during their probation-years.

To ev'ry question, which the Nuns would put,  
 He had a proper answer, ready cut :  
 Thus Origen, as authors grave advance,  
 To sev'n quick scribes could dictate talks, at once !

At dinner-time, the pamper'd glutton ate  
 Whate'er he lik'd ; from any Mother's plate :  
 All this beside the secret sugar'd things  
 That some good-natur'd Sister hourly brings.  
 For VER-VERT's indefatigable paunch,  
 Tho' ever cramming, was for ever staunch.  
 The *Petty-Cares* ° among those Dames, 'tis thought,  
 Were either born, or to perfection brought !  
 This VER-VERT found.—Not ev'n at Court, tis said,  
 To the Queen's *Poll* was more attention paid.

° *Les petits-soins* : for which, I think, we have no just equivalent.

WHEN night approach'd, He, like a *Sultan*, chose  
 The fav'rite cell, in which he would repose.  
 Nice was, indeed, his choice ; for, it appears,  
 He never harbour'd with a Nun of years :  
 But where he found a Nunlet young and neat,  
 There he was sure to make his ev'n-retreat.  
 Upon the box, her *Agnuses*<sup>d</sup> that kept  
 And other holy toys, he perch'd, and slept.  
 Whether, with her, his ev'ning hymn he said ;  
 Or, graceless, went, without a pray'r, to bed ;  
 It is not known—Yet probably, I ween,  
 HE to *her* orisons might say : “ Amen.”  
 Nor is it known what were his holy dreams :  
 Ideal cracknels ? or ideal creams ?  
 All that, as yet, I have for certain found  
 About his sleep, is—that his sleep was found.

<sup>d</sup> An *Agnus*, or *Agnus Dei*, is a circular piece of white wax, stamped with the figure of a Lamb ; solemnly blessed by the Pope ; and kept as a sort of *talisman* by the Devout of the Romish Church.

BUT soon as break of day begins to peep ;  
 And busy bells rouse lazy Nuns from sleep ;  
 He too awakes, to view with curious eyes,  
 Fresh from her couch, the lovely Vestal rise :  
 To see her lave, and dress—in short, to share  
 In all her little Toilet's morning care.  
*Toilet*, I say, but say in lowly tone,  
 What to the vulgar ought not to be known—  
*Toilet*, I say—For I have heard it said,  
 That Nuns themselves call in the Toilet's aid  
 To raise their charms, and make them still appear  
*Devoutly decent*, ev'n in holy gear.  
 Not a less faithful mirrour is requir'd,  
 When holy fronts are meant to be attir'd  
 In simple gauze, than is requir'd to place  
 On fronts profane *bijoux* and Bruffels-lace.  
 For, as the Court and City have *their* modes ;  
 Just so it happens in *those* blest abodes ;  
 Where as much art and taste may be display'd  
 In the adjustment of a simple braid,

As by the mundane Fair-one is employ'd  
To deck herself in all the pomp of pride.

NAY, oft the free and fancy-following Loves,  
Forfaking Parks, and Palaces, and Groves,  
Have wing'd their way o'er Convent-walls and gates;  
And, 'spite of bolts, and bars, and iron grates,  
Shed all their influence on a Vestal's face,  
And giv'n to weeds and veils refittless grace.  
This by the bye—Now to my tale again,  
Of which no more I mean to break the chain.

IN this abode of ease and indolence  
VER-VERT resided, like a Persian prince.  
Idle, inactive, without toil or care,  
He reign'd in all the hearts of all the Fair:  
For him, her sparrows, ah! how hard their lot!  
Her darling sparrows sister *Ann* forgot.  
Four sweet Canaries, once the Parlour's pride,  
Now disregarded, broke their hearts, and died!



Ev'n the two Mastiffs, guardians of the door,  
 And mighty, mighty favourites before,  
 Neglected lie upon uncushion'd benches ;  
 And, through pure envy, waste away by inches !

Who could have thought, who would have dar'd to say,  
 That e'er should come the dread, the dismal day,  
 When this great Idol of each heart should prove  
 No more an object worthy of their love ?  
 But, after all their pains and cares, should be  
 A Reprobate, in the supreme degree !

SUSPEND, O Muse ! a while, the tears and sighs  
 Of their soft bosoms, and sweet melting eyes ;  
 Which his apostacy, from Virtue's laws  
 And mild monastic discipline, must cause.  
 Alas ! such is the bitter, baneful fruit  
 That daily springs from fond *Indulgence*' root.

## C A N T O II.

W E may suppose, that, in a school like this,  
 To have the gift of speech he could not miss.  
 The gift of speech so fully he possess'd,  
 That, save at meals, his tongue was ne'er at rest.  
 And so correctly all his words he spoke,  
 As if he read his lesson in a book !

No faucy coxcomb *Paroquet* was He ;  
 Such as in Barbers' shops we sometimes see ;  
 And who, in accents insolent and loud,  
 Blatter abuse upon the gaping crowd.  
 V E R - V E R T ' s discourse was decent and devout :  
 He learn'd no evil, and no evil thought.  
 No word obscene his modest lips escap'd ;  
 For wicked *Worldlings* he had never ap'd.

But

But *Hymns*, and *Psalms*, and *Canticles* he knew ;  
 And rare *Ejaculations* not a few :  
 Could promptly say his *Benedicité*,  
 And *Nótre Mere*, and *Vótre Cbarité*.  
 Nay, I have heard, he sometimes tried his voice  
 On *Mary Alacoque's* <sup>d</sup> foliloquies !

IN that learn'd residence he had, indeed,  
 The means abundant, that to science lead.  
 There, all the Christmas-carols, old or new,  
 By Mem'ry many sapient Sisters knew.  
 This precious lore our Parrot took so fast,  
 That he his tutoreffes soon surpass'd.  
 He mimick'd ev'n the languor of their tones,  
 Their sighs, their sobbings, and their dove-like moans.  
 To sum up all, this well instructed Fri'r  
 Knew all that's known by MOTHERS of the Choir.

<sup>d</sup> *Margaret-Mary Alacoque* was a visionary of the same order ; of whom we have a very curious life, written by Languet Archbishop of Sens.

SUCH matchless merit, in a Parrot found,  
 Must soon be known beyond the Cloister's bound.  
 The common *Nevers*-talk, from morn to eve,  
 Was all about the happy Nuns' *Eleve*.  
 From *Moulins*, and more distant cities too,  
 The curious came, the wondrous Bird to view.

THE pleasant charge to bring him to the grate,  
 Was giv'n, by gen'ral vote, to Sister *Kate* :  
 For Sister *Kate*, of all the holy tribe,  
 Knew best his worth ; and could it best describe.  
 Besides, her little sweet imposing face,  
 And *guimpe* \* adjusted with unequal'd grace,  
 Were pow'rful magnets to th' inquiring race.

SHE, with uncommon eloquence and skill,  
 Descants upon the beauty of his bill ;  
 The heav'nly colours that his frame infold  
 In various tints of azure, green, and gold :

\* A sort of stomacher, peculiar to Nuns.

His head so pretty, and his neck so neat,  
 His legs so handsome, and so clean his feet ;  
 His innocent and edifying mien,  
 His grave demeanour, and his look serene,  
 His shape so elegant—from top to toe  
 The perfect emblem of a perfect Beau !

BUT VER-VERT'S beauty, howsoever rare,  
 Was of his merit but the smallest share.  
 Soon as he open'd his mellifluous throat,  
 His *air*, and *shape*, and *plumage* were forgot.  
 Words sweet as honey from his tongue distill'd,  
 Which ev'ry ear with admiration fill'd.

SLOW his exordium, and in tone so meek,  
 One seem'd to hear a *Minnim*-preacher speak :  
 But, in the progress of his sage discourse,  
 He grew more warm, and urg'd his *points* with force ;  
 In varied cadences his periods fall,  
 And charm, and captivate the souls of all.

Rare eulogy ! If we may credit story,  
No person slept in VER-VERT'S auditory !  
Could Bourdaloue, of oratorical fame,  
Of his court auditories say the same ?

YET not by all th' attention and applause,  
That father VER-VERT from his audience draws,  
Is he puff'd up with pride :—but, having made  
His peroration, droops his modest head ;  
And with an edifying air departs ;  
Leaving his *doctrine* in his hearers' hearts.

OUR Neophyte as yet had never spoke  
A wicked thing, in earnest or in joke ;  
Save some small scraps of little love-like tales,  
Which he had, haply, heard behind the rails,  
In broken words by *younger* sifers told ;  
And some detractions, learn'd among the *old*.

IN this retreat, or in, or out of cage,  
 Liv'd Father VER-VERT, like a faint and sage.  
 Plump as a Monk, and knowing as an Abbé,  
 He stole the heart of many a cloister'd *Hebé* :  
 Beauteous beyond comparifon, and ftill  
 By all belov'd ; 'caufe ftill delectable.  
 Well taught, well ufed, well fofter'd, and well fed :  
 Happy ! if he had never *travelled*.

BUT comes the time, of memory accurft,  
 When all this bag of happinefs muft burft.  
 One fatal voy'ge fhall blaft his well-earn'd fame,  
 And quickly turn his glory into fhame !  
 Why cannot I upon the Mufe prevail  
 From future times to veil the difmal tale ?  
 No, no : the Mufe, remonstrate as I may,  
 Muft have, will have, her own accuftom'd way.  
 Reader ! attend, and learn, from what ſhe fings,  
 The danger from *Celebrity* that fprings.

Surely, far happier is the Man, whose name  
 Was never blazon'd by the trump of fame,  
 Than he who reach'd the summit of renown,  
 To be with more precipitance let down.  
 Superior talents and extreme success  
 Too oft concur to make a Hero less.

THY fame, O VER-VERT ! and thy brilliant acts,  
 (For who dare question strong and stubborn facts ?)  
 Were not confin'd to the inhabitants  
 Of *Nevers, Moulins*.—Ev'n the Nuns of *Nantes*  
 (The cradle of the *Holy Visitation*)  
 Heard of thy fame, and godly conversation.  
 They heard ; and, hearing, greatly wish'd to know  
 If, what of THEE they heard, were truly so ?  
 A *Virgin's* wish is a consuming fire :  
 But ten times stronger is a *Nun's* desire.  
 Each head was frantic, ev'ry bosom panted  
 After a *Parrot* !—but a *Parrot* fainted.



STRAIGHT, in the *Nivernois*-dialect,  
 An eloquent Epistle they direct  
 To the superior of the congregation  
 That had the MIRACLE in their possession.  
 Th' Epistle was in prose ; But I rehearse,  
*Jubente Musa*, its contents in verse.  
 “ The Nuns of *Nantes* to *Nevers*' Nuns send greeting :  
 “ We all, assembled in a gen'ral meeting ;  
 “ And after having first invok'd the Lord,  
 “ Have deem'd it proper, with a joint accord,  
 “ To beg what, if we rightly understand,  
 “ Our rev'rend Mother strictly might demand :  
 “ We beg, we pray, that for a month's short space  
 “ VER-VERT be sent our Monast'ry to grace.  
 “ For those, who e'er have seen him, all agree,  
 “ No mortal Parrot speaks such things as He.  
 “ Refuse not, then, to send the Bird so dear ;  
 “ That He may *edify* the Sisters here.”

THE letter parts—But they must count the sum  
 Of twelve long days, before an answer come.  
 O what an age!—A second letter flies!  
 Sleep all forfakes! Sister *Cecilia* dies!

MEANWHILE the missive finds it's ready way  
 To *Nevers*.—'Twas upon a festal day;  
 When, in a *Chapter* for the purpose call'd,  
 The scroll was read—and ev'ry heart appall'd.  
 "What? lose our VER-VERT! Heav'ns! 'tis worse than death!  
 " (Exclaim'd the young ones, with one common breath.)  
 "Entomb'd alive in these enchanted tow'rs,  
 "How shall we pass the solitary hours,  
 "If VER-VERT leave us?"—And, to say the truth,  
 When we reflect, that, in the bloom of youth,  
 Those cloister'd Maidens in their hearts might feel  
 The warmth of something else than fervent zeal,  
 We cannot wonder, since none other Beau  
 They had at hand, to soothe their inward woe,  
 That they were loth to let their PARROT go.

NOT so the rev'rend Mothers of the Choir,  
 Whose bosoms glow'd not with so keen a fire.  
 They, in their wonted prudence, judg'd it best,  
 To grant their *Nantine* Sisters their request ;  
 Left the refusal of so small a thing  
 Might dire contention in the *Order* bring.

THOUGH thus, in *upper* House, the Bill had pass'd,  
 It in the *lower* rais'd a mighty blast.  
 " Can it be true ?" sweet *Seraphina* cry'd,  
 " That we must lose the Convent's greatest pride ?  
 " Must V E R - V E R T , charming V E R - V E R T hence depart ?  
 " The very thought brings daggers to my heart !"  
 The sister *Sacristan*, who oft had fed  
 The darling Parrot, often seen to bed,  
 Thrice changes colour, four deep sighs emits,  
 Weeps, fumes with rage, and flutters into fits.  
 On ev'ry face there sits a fullen gloom,  
 As if predictive of the Parrot's doom :

Ill-boding omens haunt them all the day,  
 And horrid dreams, by night, drive sleep away.

THE morn arrives, the sad, the fatal morn,  
 When VER-VERT must be to the vessel borne.  
 Ah! how shall I, ev'n aided by the muse,  
 Be able here to paint their dear adieus?  
 No Turtle yet, forsaken by her mate,  
 More mourn'd her loss, than now did Sister *Kate*:  
 Nor she alone—for ev'ry Sister strove  
 By some kind token to express her love.  
 By turns, they snatch him from each other's arms,  
 They stroke, they kiss, and weep o'er all his charms:  
 Charms, which that day with double lustre shone,  
 And seem'd, till then, to have been barely known.  
 Yet must he go—see! through the gate he hies!  
 And LOVE, that moment, from the convent flies!

“ Go, go, sweet Bird! where honour thee attends :

“ But, ah! be faithful to thy former friends.

“ Return

" Return as charming as thou go'st away !  
 " So, may the gentle zephyrs thee convey  
 " Along the wave—Go, go, while I remain,  
 " And languish here ; and silent hug my chain ;  
 " Midst all the apathy of dull repose,  
 " That neither change, nor consolation knows.  
 " Go, go, sweet Bird !—and, wheresoe'er you move,  
 " Be taken for—the *eldest son* of Love !"  
 Such were the parting accents, it is said,  
 Were to him whisper'd by *one* tender Maid ;  
 Who oft, by prying sisters had been seen  
 Reading, abed, her *Vespers* in *Racine* :  
 And who, it may be thought, with all her heart  
 Wish'd, that same day, with V E R - V E R T to depart.  
 Vain was her wish.—But I pursue my theme :  
 V E R - V E R T embarks upon the Loire's deep stream.  
 O ! when to *Nevers* he returns again,  
 May all his virtues with him still remain !

BUT,

BUT, lo! the oars are fet, unfurl'd the sails,  
 And nothing wanted but propitious gales;  
 A feasonable breeze, that moment, blows;  
 And, fwift as air, the well-trim'd veffel goes.

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### C A N T O III.

I N the fame galliot, that our Hero bore,  
 Of other paffengers were half a fcore.  
 A pair of playful Nymphs, two droll Gascoons,  
 A Monk, a Fri'r, and two or three Dragoons.  
 " Companions fit!" you'll fhake your head and fay,  
 " For one who left his convent but to-day."

I N truth, poor V E R - V E R T fadly felt the change:  
 Their garb, their gait, their language—all was ftrange.  
 For not one fyllable of Gospel-lore,  
 Which he with fo much care had learn'd before,

Fell from their antichristian lips, I ween ;  
 But filthy words, and purposes obscene.  
 The bluff Dragoons, whose race was never thought  
 To be with over-much devotion fraught ;  
 To make the time less tedious, drink like swine ;  
 And talk of nought but *women, wars, and wine.*  
 The Nymphs retail the language of the stews :  
 The two Gascoons the Monk and Fri'r abuse :  
 While the rude sailors rend th' indignant skies  
 With hell-born oaths, and horrid blasphemies.  
 Each word, inspir'd by strong Stentorian lungs,  
 Comes full articulated from *their* tongues.

IN this new scene of riot and of noise  
 Our Hero durst not raise his timid voice.  
 Pensive he sat, in silent admiration  
 Of what he saw and heard on this occasion.  
 But soon, alas ! too soon he's doom'd by fate  
 To be awak'd from his inactive state.

For Friar-father *Bonaventure*, (who  
 All the deep subtleties of *Scotus* knew ;  
 And had, when young, moreover, it appears,  
 Taught *School-Divinity* for twenty years)  
 For one good *supper*, undertakes to break  
 The Parrot's silence ; and to make him speak.

THE project pleas'd. — The *Fri'r* the *Fowl* addresses ;  
 And, after some sweet innocent caresses,  
 “ *Parlez, mon frere !*” in godly accents cries.  
 “ *Avé ! ma sœur !*” the pious Bird replies.  
 It may be guess'd, what peals of laughter broke  
 From the whole crew, when thus the Parrot spoke.  
*Avé ! ma sœur !* from ev'ry mimic lip,  
 From stern to prow, re-echo'd through the ship.

VER-VERT perceives, that he has spoken ill ;  
 And shame and rage his little bosom fill.  
 His heart so great, and flatter'd now so long,  
 Cannot endure the hissings of the throng.

Thus



Thus many a youth, well train'd in Virtue's school,  
 Yields up his *Innocence* to *Ridicule*.

OUR debauchee, ungrateful and unkind,  
 His former teachers curses, in his mind,  
 For having not instructed him, while young,  
 In all the *beauties* of the *Gallic* tongue.  
 To these he, now, his whole attention pays ;  
 Much, much he thinks, but little yet he says.  
 His first great care was to eradicate  
 Each idle, old idea from his pate :  
 'Twas soon achiev'd ; for VER-VERT was not dull :  
 In three short days he had unbar'd his skull  
 Of all the notions which, it would appear,  
 He had been gath'ring the whole foregoing year.

So much he finds the language of Dragoons  
 More manly, more refin'd than that of Nuns ;  
 That, in a trice, the little forward Devil  
 (Ah me ! how readily we learn what's evil !)

Not only understands whate'er they say,  
But talks as firm and fluently as they !

THAT thread-bare maxim fairly he belied,  
That " Large to Vice from Virtue is the stride :"  
From Virtue, here, behold a Parrot skip  
To Vice's height, without a novice-ship !  
No wicked Dæmon, who had long possess'd,  
By God's permission, some unlucky breast,  
When forc'd by *Exorcisms* and *Holy-water*  
To quit his hold, was ever heard to spatter  
More impious words and sentences, than fell  
From the foul tongue of this new child of Hell.  
The *Loire's* whole alphabet by heart he knew,  
And could pronounce each letter just and true.  
Whatever sounds his nerves acoustic strike,  
Without a stammer he returns the like.  
Puff'd with applause, he now grows bold in sin,  
And values Virtue not a single pin :

To please his fellow-passengers (O shame !)  
 Is now his chief, is now his only aim.  
 Ah ! must a foul, by bad example driv'n,  
 Be thus perverted, and bereft of Heav'n !

WHILE in the ship these scenes are acting, say,  
 How pass'd our Sisters their sad time away ?  
 In close retreat our pious Sisters mourn,  
 And make *Novaines* <sup>f</sup> for VER-VERT'S safe return.  
 All entrance to the convent was deny'd,  
 All mirth and recreation laid aside :  
 The *Grate* itself with sable serge was veil'd ;  
 And—almost *Silence* ev'ry where prevail'd !  
 All this for an *Ingrate*.—Cease, cease your cares,  
 Relax your sorrows, and suspend your pray'rs :  
 The rev'rend VER-VERT, rev'rend now no more,  
 Lost all his virtues, when he left your shore :  
 By water-nymphs debauch'd, he no more minds  
 Your chaste embraces, than the passing winds ;

<sup>f</sup> A *Novaine* is a nine days retreat ; during which a certain number of prayers and litanies are said, for some particular intention.

But,

But, ev'ry tie of sacred love forgot,  
 Swears like a trooper, tipples like a sot.  
 That heart, so pure, is now a sink of crimes !  
 That tongue, so pious, curses only chimes !  
 Let his great science be no more your boast :  
 For what's a *genius*, when to *virtue* lost ?  
 A traitor, lost to virtue and to shame,  
 May move your pity, not affection claim.

WHILE thus employ'd the *Nevers*-Nuns remain ;  
 The Nuns of *Nantes* are equally in pain  
 About the Bird's arrival.—Ev'ry day  
 Appears to roll too tardily away ;  
 And still more tardy seems the slow return  
 Of each impatiently-expected morn.  
 For flatt'ring hope, ingenious to deceive,  
 Had in their fancy, as you may believe,  
 Depicted ev'ry beauty, great or less,  
 That any mortal Parrot can possess.

A Parrot *this*, of a superior kind !  
 A Parrot with a cultivated mind ;  
 Sweet voice, soft manners, elevated mien :  
 In short—the rarest Parrot e'er was seen !

AT length the ship arrives—O wish'd-for hour !  
 Hard by the harbour, on the sandy shore,  
 A faithful *Touriere*\*, ever since the day  
 The *second* Letter went from Nantes away,  
 Had daily been upon th' incessant watch  
 The galliot's canvas with her eyes to catch.  
 The Bird is landed ; when, with some surprize,  
 On the *Beguine* he casts his rambling eyes.  
 For well he knew her, by her prudish air,  
 Her gauze, her gloves, the coiffure of her hair ;  
 Her sentences in drawling voice express'd,  
 And the small cross that hung upon her breast.

HE gaz'd, he grinn'd ; and ev'n was so uncivil  
 ('Tis said) as send the virgin to the devil

\* The Nun who attends at the grate, to admit and attend visitors, &c.

*En militaire.* For, as he now had seen  
 A soldier's life, more pleas'd he would have been  
 To follow the *Dragoons*, than the *Beguine*.  
 But, maugre his repugnance and his cries,  
 The *Touriere* to the convent with him hies.  
 Thrice on the way he bit—some say, her neck;  
 Some say, her arm; and other some, her cheek.  
 All this avails not: will, or will he not,  
 He to the convent is in triumph brought.

}

STRAIGHT, busy Rumor flies on all his wings,  
 And the glad tidings to the MOTHER brings.  
 From her the tidings fly from tongue to tongue:  
 A *Chapter's* summon'd; and the bells are rung.  
 'Twas choir-time; but the vehement desire  
 Of seeing VER-VERT keeps them from the choir.  
 To the great Parlour with uncommon speed  
 Mothers and Sisters instantly proceed:  
 All order laid aside, each onward rushes:  
 Nun jostles Nun, and Novice Novice pushes:

Ev'n mother *Angelique*, at full four score,  
Was seen to run, who never ran before !

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C A N T O IV.

A L L come, all see this object of delight ;  
And all are ravish'd at the charming fight.  
Nor without reason—for the rogue had not  
Of his attractions lost a single jot.  
His crimes had nothing in his form derang'd :  
A single plume its colour had not chang'd.  
Nay, his new, pert, and *Petit-maitre*-air,  
His warlike look, and confidential stare  
Enhanc'd his other beauties—Why, just Heav'n !  
Should such attractions to a knave be giv'n ?  
Why should not those, who are devoid of grace,  
Have reprobation's marks upon their face ?

But hark!—The mothers now their clack begin.

*Jove's*

Not ~~God's~~ own thunder makes a greater din.

Three score of tongues, let loose together, raise

Their notes discordant in *sweet* VER-VERT's praise!

But He, to their surprise, without regard

Beheld their transports, and their praises heard.

Like a young *Carmelite* his eyes he rolls;

And looks with pity on those humble souls.

FIRST cause of scandal this.—The Prioress

Would now the brazen-fronted Fowl address;

And, in a serious, half-commanding strain,

Rebuk'd his petulance.—The Bird, amain,

Replies (the answer ev'ry sister stuns)

“*What fools, egad! what fools be all the Nuns!*”

This wicked fragment of a wicked song

The *Nymphs* had taught him, as he sail'd along.

“Good Heav'ns!” cried mother *Paula*; “such a phrase

“I never, never heard, in all my days:

“Fie,



“ Fie, Brother ! fie ; fuch naughty tricks give o’er.”

The Brother, rhyming richly, answer’d : “ Wh—e !”

“ *Vive Jefus !*” Mother *Magdalena* cried :

“ *Vive Jefus !*” Mother *Monica* replied :

“ Sure he’s a forc’rer in a bird’s difguife:

“ How could our Sisters fuch a Parrot prize ?

“ How could they fuffer fuch a cannibal

“ To live among them ?” *Devil burft you all!*

Was his *refponfe*.—Alternately, they try

His talk profane to mend, or motify.

They try without effect : for He makes fun

Of ev’ry Novice, and of ev’ry Nun.

He imitates, with a pedantic air,

The precious prattle of the younger fair :

But apes, with a more grave, important face,

The nafal gruntings of the antique race.

At laft, worn out his patience, he exclaims,

To the aftonifhment of all the Dames :

“ *Garce ! Bougre ! Foutre ! Sacre ! Ventre-bleu !* ”

And all the other horrid terms, he knew !

Struck silent, here, each rev'rend Mother stands ;

And lifts to Heav'n her eyes and trembling hands :

While the more simple, as they hear him speak

Such hard, harsh words, imagine it is *Greek*.

WITH the same hurry, through the Parlour-door,

They now rush *out*, as *in* they rush'd before.

Good Mother *Cunegunda* runs so fast,

She falls ; and of her grinders drops the last.

Crossing themselves a thousand times, they press,

Post-haste, to reach the cellar's deep recess :

And had there been, within the convent's bound,

A deeper, darker dungeon to be found ;

Thither, it is believ'd, they would have run,

Such diabolic company to shun.

“ FATHER eternal ! whence among weak women

“ Came this infernal, this incarnate Dæmon ?

“ He

" He must be Antichrist himself, or worse !  
 " How can he have the conscience so to curse ?  
 " Sweet Saviour ! guard us ; is it thus, in truth,  
 " Our *Nivernois* Sisters train up Youth ?  
 " All that *Jansenius, Calvin, Luther* taught,  
 " Compar'd with VER-VERT's blasphemy, is nought.  
 " Spirit divine ! preserve us from all evils :  
 " And save, ah ! save us from this prince of Devils."  
 Such was the pray'r, which, in a piteous note,  
 Pour'd Mother *Maude* from her sepulchral throat.

A COUNCIL now is summon'd to debate  
 Upon the Scandal-giving Parrot's fate.  
 Short, but determinate, was the decision  
 Of this most *holy* female *Inquisition* :  
 No Roman *Congregation* ever drew  
 A *Censure* up, more accurately *true*.

His *Propositions* are defin'd to be,  
*Respectively*, in *this* or *that* degree,

*False,*

*False, novel, temerarious* ; and, withal,  
 To Schism *inducing* ; yea, *schismatical* :  
*Injurious* to the *Church*, and *Church's Peers* ;  
 And quite *offensive* to all *pious ears* :  
 Nay, if not *formal Heresy*, at least  
 First *cousin-german* to that frightful *Beast* !  
 In short, our culprit is declar'd to be  
 An impious, execrable *Debauchee*,  
 Who has attempted by his wicked prate  
 The *Sisters* morals to contaminate.

SUCH crimes as these, in Portugal or Spain,  
 A *san-benito* <sup>b</sup> would be sure to gain.  
 But Gallia's laws secure a milder doom :  
 VER-VERT is only *cenfur'd*—and *sent home*.  
 He wish'd no better : for he hop'd, once more,  
 To find such mess-mates as he found before,  
 When he embark'd from the *Nevernian* shore.

<sup>b</sup> A *san-benito*, more properly *faco-benito*, is a piece of yellow linen, resembling a scapular, with which the holy Inquisitors decorate the criminal, before they send him to be roasted.

To this *Decision* all the Sisters set  
 Their hands and seals ; yet not without regret.  
 “ For ah ! (they said and sigh’d) how great the pity,  
 “ That such a youth, so charming and so pretty,  
 “ Should, in a form so like a saint’s, contain  
 “ All the black vices of a rogue in grain ?”

Most willingly he quits this dull abode :  
 Nor bites, as erst, the Touriere on the road  
 That leads them to the port.—The vessel stood  
 Unmoor’d, and ready to replough the flood.  
 Soon as the sailors well-known voice he hears,  
 He leaps for joy, and answers with three cheers.  
 Whether again he met with his Dragons,  
 His Monk, his Friar, his Nymphs, and his Gascoons ;  
 And what new loads of precious nautic lore  
 He had laid in, before he reach’d the shore ;  
 My records say not.—Haste we to the close  
 Of the great *Iliad* of our Hero’s woes.

NOT less offensive to the *Nevers-Saints*  
 Was his behaviour, than to those of *Nantes*.  
 Nay, greater was the scandal, in the place  
 Where he had first receiv'd the seeds of grace.  
 Shock'd at his dire apostacy, (we're told)  
 They in the hall a *bed of justice* hold.  
 Nine chosen judges, sober, learn'd and sage,  
 And each the perfect emblem of an age,  
 Assume their seats : chain'd in his cage appears  
 The luckless V E R - V E R T , and their sentence hears.

THEIR sentence was severe : for, by *their* laws,  
 No *Gerbier*<sup>1</sup> was allow'd to plead his cause.  
 The votes are counted :—*Two* black balls decree,  
 That instant death his punishment shall be !  
*Two* other, not so black, doom him to go  
 Back to his native land—to worship Fo !  
 But *five*, who thought he still might be reclaim'd,  
 A milder penalty, or Penance nam'd :

<sup>1</sup> A celebrated lawyer ; the *Erskine* of France, in his day.

To which the rest consented.—“ He must fast  
 “ On bread and water, till two months be past !  
 “ As many more, although allow'd to eat,  
 “ He must remain in absolute retreat !  
 “ And, worst of all, *one* word he must not say  
 “ Till four lunations more have roll'd away.”

FROM garden, grotto, parlour, grate, alcove,  
 And ev'ry other scene of sport and love,  
 He is excluded : and, to fill the cup  
 Of his misfortunes to the very top,  
 Th' *Alecto* of the convent, who in shape  
 Resembled less a woman, than an ape ;  
 A sulky, four, septagenarian maid  
 Is made the keeper of the *Renegade*.  
 Not Argus, with his hundred eyes, could be  
 More strictly watchful of his trust, than she.

YET, 'spite of all her vigilance, they say,  
 Some tender-hearted Sisters found their way

To his retreat ; and cheer'd his fasting gums,  
 From time to time, with soutes and sugar-plums.  
 But ah ! the sweetest, daintiest cates must be  
 Worm-wood and rue—to *him* who is not *free*.

WHETHER impell'd by *sorrow*, or by *shame* ;  
 (The Jesuits teach us, it is all the same <sup>k</sup>)  
 Or struck with horror at the ghastly sight  
 Of his *Duenna*, he *appears* contrite,  
 No more he talks the language of dragoons,  
 Lewd girls, rude sailors, and profane buffoons ;  
 But symphonizes with each pious note,  
 That by his new directress he is taught :

<sup>k</sup> It has been a long and warm controversy among the grave divines of the Romish Church ; whether the sinner, in order to be reconciled to Heaven, must have a *perfect* sorrow, arising from supernatural motives : namely, the love of God, and the innate turpitude of sin ; or if an *imperfect* sorrow, founded on less disinterested motives ; such as shame, the fear of Hell, &c, be not sufficient, with sacramental absolution, to obtain at least the complete pardon of the *guilt*, if not always of the *pain* ? The former, strenuously supported by the Janenists, was called *Contrition* ; the latter, chiefly maintained by the Jesuits, was named *Attrition*.



Re-echoes all her sayings, and her sighs ;  
 And *Mea culpa!* most devoutly cries.

SUCH symptoms of repentance could not fail  
 With the most rigid Casuist to prevail.  
 Had stern *Nicole*, or *Opstraet*<sup>1</sup>, been his guide,  
 His absolution had not been deny'd.  
 In the *Divan* it, then, was wisely judg'd,  
 That VER-VERT's penance ought to be abridg'd.  
 No time so fit—as when there hap'd to be  
 O'er all the Church a gen'ral jubilee :  
 And HE, who holds, on earth, the keys of heav'n,  
 Had then a *plenary Indulgence*<sup>m</sup> giv'n :  
 By which, as ev'ry theologue can tell,  
 The greatest rogue may 'scape, not only Hell,  
 But ev'n that purging fire and transient pain  
 Which souls, not perfectly contrite, sustain

<sup>1</sup> Two celebrated rigidists of the last century.

<sup>m</sup> A remittance of all the *temporal* punishment due to sin, both in this life and in the next.

In the *next* world ; if they have not in *this*

By due atonement pav'd their way to blifs.

ARRIVES the morn, when VER-VERT is to be  
From *sin* and *cenfures* both, at once, fet free.

What joyful day, to all the Sifters, *this*?

Its moments one fucceffive tide of blifs !

A ferief of delights ; a texture wove

In Pleafure's loom, by the foft hand of Love.

All hours, that day, are recreation-hours :

Hall, parlour, *dortoirs* are beftrew'd with flow'rs :

At breakfast, chocolate—and, when they dine,

A double portion, with Burgundian wine :

*Caffé au-crême* ; *liqueurs* of various forts :

Songs, running, jumping, and fuch other fports.

In fine, throughout the convent, unreftain'd

Convivial mirth, and holy tumult reign'd.

DELUSIVE fcene ! How falfe are human joys,  
Which one fmall accident at once deftroys !

The fickle Pow'r shall turn, before to-morrow,  
 This house of mirth into a house of sorrow.  
 Yet nothing preannounc'd our Hero's doom :  
 No dismal omen spoke an early tomb :  
 His death was by no fullen traitor plann'd :  
 He fell not by a vile affassin's hand :  
 Too too much kindness (if the truth you'd know)  
 Sent him, abruptly, to the shades below.

So long accusom'd to a diet spare,  
 This glut of luxury he could not bear :  
 With sugar cloy'd, and by liqueurs oppress'd,  
 He drops his head upon his heaving breast,  
 And softly sinks into eternal rest. }  
 In vain the Sisters him attempt to save,  
 By their endearments, from the yawning grave ;  
 Their cares but sooner serve to stop his breath,  
 And only hasten his predestin'd death.  
 Yet, where's the mortal who would not desire,  
 Like him, in pleasure's bosom to expire ?

The Queen of Love his parting breath receives ;  
 And one more Parrot to Elysium gives.

WHAT tongue can tell, what eloquence express,  
 What mind conceive the dolence and distress  
 Of the good Dames ?—Soon as his eyes are clos'd,  
 A sad *Encyclic Letter* is compos'd ;  
 And sent to ev'ry convent, in the nation,  
 That bears and boasts the name of *Visitation*.

To keep the dear departed still in view,  
 His portrait Sister *Apollonia* drew,  
 As big as life ; from which the rest procure  
 A faithful copy, each, in miniature.  
 The needle boldly with the pencil vies,  
 To trace his figure, and to paint his dyes :  
 On ev'ry work-bag, cushion, carpet, screen,  
 The beauteous VER-VERT is embroider'd seen.  
 Those sister-arts, and these immortal *rhymes*  
 Shall hand his mem'ry down to future times.

His fun'ral service solemn was, and rare ;  
 Such as not oft falls to a Parrot's share.  
 Full fifteen days, like all the other *Great*,  
 Expos'd he lay upon a bed of state :  
 While, every other hour, some Sister stole,  
 To say a *De profundis* <sup>a</sup> for his soul.

UNDER an ever-verdant myrtle's shade  
 His lifeless limbs by gentle hands were laid.  
 Then o'er the spot, upon a marble base,  
 An urn of polish'd porphyry they place ;  
 On which, engraven with a skill divine,  
 The following words in golden cyphers shine.  
 Ah ! who can read them, as he passes by,  
 Without a tear ?—at least, without a sigh ?

<sup>a</sup> The Psalm, *From the depth have I cried to thee* : which is supposed to have a wonderful efficacy in relieving the souls in Purgatory.

## E P I T A P H .

*YOUNG Novices, whene'er ye hap to rove,*

*Without the Sisters' knowledge, to impart*

*To one another, in this sacred grove,*

*The genuine feelings of a tender heart :*

*Suspend, sweet souls! if possible, your talk*

*One moment, my misfortunes to bewail;*

*And, as around this monument you walk,*

*Read, and rehearse this short, but moving, tale :*

*A single line this simple tale imparts :*

HERE VER-VERT LIES, WITH ALL THE SISTERS' HEARTS!

'TIS said, however, with no small degree

Of analogic probability,

That VER-VERT'S self not in this tomb reposes :

But that He still, by a *metempsychosis*,

Transmits, like an hereditary chattel,

From Nun to Nun, his *Spirit* and his *Prattle* !

F I N I S .