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VOL. I.

THE LIFE OF LORENZO DE' MEDICI,
BY WILLIAM ROSCOE. VOL. I.

HEIDELBERG,
PRINTED BY JOSEPH ENGELMANN.

MDCCCXXV.

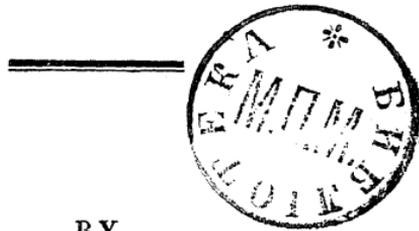


LORENZO DE MEDICI.

*From a Bust by Michaelagnolo, presented by
the Marquis Capponi of Florence, to the Author.*

THE LIFE
OF
LORENZO DE' MEDICI,

CALLED
THE MAGNIFICENT.



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P R E F A C E.

The close of the fifteenth, and the beginning of the sixteenth century, comprehend one of those periods of history which are entitled to our minutest study and inquiry. Almost all the great events from which Europe derives its present advantages, are to be traced up to those times. The invention of the art of printing, the discovery of the great western continent, the schism from the church of Rome, which ended in the reformation of many of its abuses, and established the precedent of reform, the degree of perfection attained in the fine arts, and the final introduction of true principles of criticism and taste, compose such an illustrious assemblage of luminous points, as cannot fail of attract-

ing for ages the curiosity and admiration of mankind.

A complete history of these times has long been a great desideratum in literature, and whoever considers the magnitude of the undertaking will not think it likely to be soon supplied. Indeed, from the nature of the transactions which then took place, they can only be exhibited in detail, and under separate and particular views. That the author of the following pages has frequently turned his eye towards this interesting period is true, but he has felt himself rather dazzled than informed by the survey. A mind of greater compass, and the possession of uninterrupted leisure, would be requisite to comprehend, to select, and to arrange the immense variety of circumstances which a full narrative of those times would involve; when almost every city of Italy was a new Athens, and that favored country could boast its historians, its poets, its orators, and its artists, who may contend with the great names of antiquity for the palm

of mental excellence. When Venice, Milan, Rome, Florence, Bologna, Ferrara, and several other places, vied with each other, not in arms, but in science, and in genius; and the splendor of a court was estimated by the number and talents of learned men, who illustrated it by their presence; each of whose lives, and productions, would in a work of this nature, merit a full and separate discussion.

From this full blaze of talents, the author has turned towards a period, when its first faint gleams afford a subject, if not more interesting, at least more suited to his powers. When, after a night of unexpected darkness, Florence again saw the sun break forth with a lustre more permanent, though perhaps not so bright. The days of Dante, of Boccaccio, and of Petrarca, were indeed past; but under the auspices of the House of Medici, and particularly through the ardor and example of Lorenzo, the empire of science and true taste was again restored.

After the death of Boccaccio, the survivor

of that celebrated triumvirate who had carried their native tongue to a high pitch of refinement, and endeavoured, not without success, to introduce the study of the ancient languages into Italy, a general degradation of letters again took place; and the Italian tongue in particular was so far deteriorated, and debased, as, by the acknowledgment of the best critics, to have become scarcely intelligible. The first symptoms of improvement appeared about the middle of the fifteenth century; when Cosmo de' Medici, after having established his authority in Florence, devoted the latter years of a long and honourable life, to the encouragement, and even the study of philosophy, and polite letters. He died in 1464, and the infirm state of health of his son Piero, who was severely afflicted by the gout, did not permit him to make that progress in the path which his father had pointed out, that his natural disposition would otherwise have effected. After surviving him only about five years, the greater part of which time he

was confined to a sick-bed, he died, leaving two sons; to the elder of whom, Lorenzo, the praise of having restored to literature its ancient honours is principally due. In succeeding times, indeed, that praise has been almost exclusively bestowed on Giovanni de' Medici, afterwards Leo the tenth, the second son of Lorenzo, who undoubtedly promoted the views, but never in any degree rivalled the talents of his father.

Certain it is that no man was ever more admired and venerated by his contemporaries, or has been more defrauded of his just fame by posterity, than Lorenzo de' Medici. Possessed of a genius more original and versatile than perhaps any of his countrymen, he has led the way in some of the most estimable species of poetic composition; and some of his productions stand unrivalled amongst those of his countrymen to the present day. Yet such has been the admiration paid by the Italians to a few favourite authors, that they have almost closed their eyes to the various excellencies

with which his works abound. From the time of his death no general collection was made of his writings for upwards of sixty years, and after their first publication by Aldus in 1554, upwards of two centuries elapsed without a new edition. Neglected in Italy, they seem to have been unknown to the rest of Europe. A French historian*, in whose narrative Lorenzo makes a conspicuous figure, assures his readers that the writings of this great man, as well in verse, as prose, are irrecoverably lost; and that he would no longer be known as an author, were it not from the commendations bestowed upon him by his friends, and the attention paid to him by Paulus Jovius, who has assigned a place to his memory in his eulogies on the modern writers of Italy.

But we are not to consider Lorenzo de' Medici merely in the character of an author, and a patron of learning. As a statesman he was without doubt the most extraordinary

* Varillas, *Anecdotes de Florence, ou l'histoire secrète de la Maison de Medicis*, p. 149. *Ed. La Haye*, 1687.

person of his own, or perhaps of any time. Though a private citizen and a merchant of Florence, he obtained not only the decided control of that state, at a period when it abounded with men of the greatest talents and acuteness; but raised himself to the rank of sole arbiter of Italy, and operated with considerable effect upon the politics of Europe. Without attempting to subjugate his native place, he laid the foundation of the future greatness of his family. His son, and his nephew, were at a short interval successively raised to the pontifical dignity; and in the succeeding centuries his descendants became connected by marriage with the first European sovereigns. The protection afforded by him to all the polite arts, gave them a permanent foundation in Italy. In the establishment of public libraries, schools and seminaries of learning, he was equally munificent, indefatigable, and successful; and these objects were all accomplished, by a man who died at the early age of forty-four years.

It is not however the intention of the author of the following work, to confine himself merely to the relation of the life of an individual, however illustrious. Of a family of whom so much has been said, and so little with certainty known, a more particular account cannot be uninteresting. In aiming at this purpose, he has been unavoidably led to give some account of the rise of modern literature; and particularly to notice many contemporary authors, whose reputation, at least in this country, has not yet been adequate to their merits. In an age when long and dangerous expeditions are undertaken to develop the manners of barbarians, or to discover the source of a river, it will surely not be thought an useless attempt, to endeavour to trace some of those minute and almost imperceptible causes, from which we are to deduce our present proficiency in letters, in science, and in arts.

Of the several narratives of the life of Lorenzo de' Medici hitherto published, the

most ancient is that of Niccolo Valori a Florentine, eminent for his rank and learning, the contemporary and friend of Lorenzo. This account, written not inelegantly in Latin, and which composes a small octavo volume of sixty-seven pages, remained in manuscript, till Laurentius Mehus gave it to the public in 1749. An Italian translation had indeed been published at Florence, as early as the year 1560. The principal events in the Life of Lorenzo are here related with accuracy and fidelity: but upon the whole it gives us too distant and indistinct a view of him. Though sensible in some respects of the magnitude of his subject, Valori seems not to have been sufficiently aware of the distinguishing characteristic of Lorenzo — the strength, extent, and versatility of his mind. Hence he has exhibited him only in one principal point of view; either wholly omitting, or at most slightly noticing, his many other endowments; closely adhering to his purpose, he confines himself to too small a circle, and enters not

into those discussions respecting collateral events and circumstances, which a full display of the character of Lorenzo requires. The work of Valori may however be considered, not only as a well-written and authentic piece of biography, but as the foundation of all subsequent efforts on the same subject; although it wants that interest which it would have derived from a closer and more intimate examination of the temper, the character, and the writings of Lorenzo.

By what strange fatality it happened, that the reputation of the most eminent man of his own age should have fallen into almost absolute neglect in the course of that which immediately succeeded, it is difficult to discover; particularly when we consider that the Italians have been by no means inattentive to their national glory, and that the memoirs of the lives of many of the contemporaries of Lorenzo, who were inferior to him in every point of view, have been fully, and even ostentatiously set forth. Whatever was the cause, it is

certain that from the publication of the work of Valori in its Italian dress, till the year 1763, no professed account of Lorenzo de' Medici made its appearance in public; although few authors have touched upon the history of those times, without paying him the passing tribute of their applause. This is the more extraordinary, as the materials for enlarging, and improving the narrative of Valori, were obvious. In the year last mentioned, the poems of Lorenzo were reprinted at Bergamo; and a new account of the life of the author was prefixed to the work.* From this however, little is to be expected, when it is understood, that the biographer, in his introduction, acknowledges that it is entirely founded on that of Valori; upon whose authority he solely relies, and protests against being answerable for any fact alledged by him, further than that authority warrants. To an exertion of this kind, as he

* Poesie del Magnifico Lorenzo de' Medici, con alcune Memorie attenenti alla sua vita, Testimonianze, etc. Bergamo, 1763, appresso Pietro Lancellotti.

justly observes, neither the deep research of criticism, nor the assistance of rare books, nor even of those that lay ready by him on the subject, were necessary. In the few attempts which he has made to afford additional information, he has resorted principally to Negri,* and Varillas,** whose authority, nevertheless, he has himself deservedly impeached; and whose inaccuracy renders their testimony of little weight, when not expressly confirmed by other writers.

About twenty years since, several learned Italians united in drawing up memoirs of such of their countrymen as had distinguished themselves in different branches of science, and arts;*** and the *Life of Lorenzo*, amongst others, fell to the pen of P. Bruno Bruni, professor of divinity in Florence. Unfortunately

* *Istoria degli scrittori Fiorentini*, opera postuma del P. Giulio Negri. *Ferrara*, 1722.

** *Anecd. de Florence. ut sup.*

*** *Elogj degli Uomini illustri Toscani. In Lucca*, 1771, etc. 4 vol. 8vo.