

VERT-VERT.

A POEM.

IN FOUR CANTOS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF

J. B. L. GRESSET.

WITH ILLUSTRATORY NOTES.

BY M. MONTAGU.

LONDON.

HENRY STARIE. 23 TICHBORNE STREET.

M.D.CCC.XL.

525.

VERT-VERT.

INSCRIBED TO MADAME ____ . ABBESS OF ____*.

CANTO I.

You ! around whom the modest Graces' train
Shine without art and unassuming reign :
You ! whose pure mind, with truth alone for end,
Knows with severer virtues how to blend
Agreeable freedom—playfulness—and taste,
And culture flowers amidst the barren waste :
Since 'tis your will I to your view should trace
A noble Bird's calamitous disgrace,
Be you my Muse, do you my accents warm,
And lend me those sweet tones of winning charm—

* These names have not been preserved.

Those tender tones—your lyre awoke sometime,
 When fair *Sultana**, in her vernal prime,
 Untimely from your mournful loves was torn,
 And to the darksome realms lamented borne.
 My Hero's splendid woes, and tender years,
 Not less may hope your sympathising tears :
 His virtue—thwarted by an envious fate,
 His voyage and long wanderings, to relate,
 Another *Odyssey* might well compose,
 With twenty cantos making Readers doze :
 With threadbare fables from their old abodes
 One might call up the Devils and Demi-Gods ;
 Whole years with one short month's events employ ;
 And, on a dull sublime's high key to cloy,
 A *Parrot's* hapless fate hold sadly forth—
 To *Æneas* not inferior as to worth—
 And more unfortunate, nor pious less.
 But—too much verse brings too much tediousness :
 The Muses are inconstant bees for song ;
 Their taste is rambling, shuns all works too long ;

* A favourite lap-dog.

And, sipping but the flower, with changeful mood
Soon flies elsewhere in search of novel food.
To me your lessons made these maxims known :
May in my verse your laws be truly shown !
If, too sincere these portraits to display,
Some hidden mysteries I shall here betray—
The Parlour's craft, the Grate's arcana, all
The serious nothings, trifles mystical,—
Your candour will forgive what they disclose :
Your reason, free from weaknesses like those,
Exempts you from such littlenesses' aid :
On your pure mind, alone by duty sway'd,
Illusion's power was never exercised :
Too well you know a brow by art disguised
Less than a winning frankness pleases Heaven.
To Mortals' view should Virtue's form be given,
'Twould not be by grimace affecting truth,
Nor under features rugged and uncouth,
But under yours—or 'neath the Graces' air—
She'd come to claim the altars we should rear.

I've read in many a learned Author's page
 One suffers by too great a travelling rage.
 Folk seldom grow improved with varying creeds
 A wandering life but into error leads*.
 Much better 'mong our Household-Gods remain
 And, peaceful home-abiders, safely plain,
 On our own hearths our virtue taintless keep,
 Than roam far distant lands and sail the deep:
 Too surely else, in snareful dangers caught,
The heart returns with foreign vices fraught,
 The Hero's mournful fate, my song records,
 Of this sad truth a moving proof affords:
 The echoes, that *Nevers'* sad parlours fill,
 Confirm my verse, should any question still.

Then, 'mong the *Visitation*†-Nuns received,
 Erst at *Nevers* a far-famed *Parrot* lived;
 Whose playful grace and imitative art,
 Whose many virtues e'en and generous heart,

* See Appendix.

† A Religious Order so called. See Appendix.

If hearts thus good were always happy here,
 Should have ensured a fortune less severe .
 VERT-VERT (was thus the feather'd hero called)
 From India's shore transplanted, here enthralled,
 Still young and knowing nothing yet of aught,
 To this same Convent for his good was brought :
 Fair, showy, sprightly, but a fickle thing,
 Frank, amiable, as in young life's sweet spring,
 Still innocent tho forward for his age ;
 In short—a Bird fit for such holy cage,
 And worthy of a Convent for his clack :
 'Tis saying all. Not needs, recalling back,
 Describing here the Nuns' and Sisters' care ;
 And next to her Confessor—each one there
 Loved nought so much: e'en in more hearts than one
 (So saith a Chronicler gainsaid by none)
 The Father often yielded to the Bird :
 With him he shared whatever eates occur'd—
 And sweets, wherewith the much loved Sire in God,
 Thanks to the gifts the Novice-Nuns bestow'd,
 Was wont his holy stomach to improve.
 Permitted object of their idle love,

VERT-VERT was of that residence the soul ;
 And, save some moody Crones who held controul
 And watch'd the younger hearts with jealous fear,
 To all the house the favourite Bird was dear.
 Not yet arrived at years surnamed "discreet,"
 Full free—he all could say or do was meet ;
 Still sure to charm and please, whate'er the way ;
 The good Nuns' labours lightening with his play,
 At bands and ruffs he peck'd uncurb'd by aught ;
 No party pleasant or complete was thought,
 Were he not there to saunter skip and sing ;
 He wanton'd, but with modesty of wing,
 With that soft air of smooth and timid port
 Which Novices exhibit e'en at sport ;
 By twenty voices task'd on every side
 To all in turn with aptness he replied :
 So Cæsar simultaneously erewhile
 To four dictated—each a different style.

Admitted every where (if true they state)

The darling Pet at the refectory ate ;
 All there his daintiest desires forestalled ;
 Moreover, for his leisure time, unpalled,

To occupy his never-sated powers,
 At intervals between the table hours,
 A thousand choicest things—a thousand sweets—
 Each Sister's pocket loaded for his treats.
 'Tis said the small attentions and kind cares
 Took birth among the Sisters of *Nevers*.
 Each day the blest VERT-VERT experienced this ;
 More cocker'd than a proud Court-Parrot is ;
 All thoughts to please the handsome Boarder went.
 His days were in ennobled leisure spent :
 The general dormitory for the most
 At eve received him ; there, by all engross'd,
 He'd but to chuse his cell—to any free ;
 And happy Sister then—too happy she—
 Whose chamber, with the night's returning race,
 He with his presence should vouchsafe to grace !
 The ancient Mothers, colder in their love,
 But seldom harbour'd him ; the neat alcove
 Of tidy Novices he still preferr'd ;
 For—mark—in all he was a tasty Bird.
 At evening, when the youthful Anchorite
 Had fix'd his place of lodging for the night,

Till Venus should her early beams display,
 Reposing on the *Agnus*-box* he lay;
 At waking, there, unbidden to withdraw,
 The blooming Novice at her toilet saw :
 I "toilet" say, and low the word I speak ;
 Yes, somewhere have I read—that, howso meek,
 Veil'd brows not less a faithful glass require,
 Than those in lace and ribbons' gay attire :
 As there's a fashion for the World and Courts—
 An art—a taste that fittingly assorts,
 There is not less a manner for the veil—
 A skill of fold—a finish of detail,
 Can give the gauze—the simplest lawn—a charm ;
 Ofttimes the sportive Loves' audacious swarm,
 The swarm that pierces doors and grates with ease,
 Confers on bands a nameless grace to please ;
 To flowing veils imparts a modish air :
 In short—before at Parlour to repair,
 One owes the glass at least a look or two :
 Be this in whisper said and *entre nous*.

* A box for amulets or relics.

To our Hero, without more digression thence :
In this abode of peaceful indolence,
VERT-VERT lived free from tedium toil or pain,
In every heart held undivided reign ;
For him the Sparrows were forgotten quite ;
Thence four Canary birds had died of spite ;
And two Tom-Cats—once favourites, left to pine,
From envy now were in a deep decline.
Who'd e'er have said in these delightful days
That all for ill were rear'd his winning ways !—
That time should come—a time of crimes accur'd,
When this VERT-VERT, each heart's dear idol erst,
An object of disgust and dread they'd deem ?
Hold, Muse ! and stay awhile the tearful stream
His sorrows' picture for our eyes prepares,
Too bitter fruit of these good Sisters' cares !

END OF CANTO I.

CANTO II.

ONE well may judge that in a school like this
The chatty Bird was seldom much remiss
At conversation : he, tongue-tied at meat,
Ceased talking—like a Nun—alone to eat :
He talk'd indeed like any book, and then
In tone that showed he knew the World and Men :
He none was of that coxcomb Parrot crowd
The age's air has made so vain and proud ;
And who, by worldlings taught for merely show,
Learn only mundane vanities to know :
VERT-VERT a pious Parrot was and pure,
An upright Soul, well-led in paths secure :
He never an idea had of wrong,
Nor e'er immodest word profaned his tong' ;
But in their stead he knew *Oremuses*—
Hymns—canticles—and mystic colloquies ;

He well his *Benedictè* could say,
 "Our Mother!" and "Your charity: I pray."
 He even could soliloquise by rote,
 And aptly *Marie Alacoque** could quote.
 He 'neath this learned roof possess'd indeed
 Whate'er facilities to knowledge lead;
 For, many a deeply reading Maid was here,
 Who mingled science with their rule austere;
 And in their heads could word for word retain
 Each carol or of old or modern strain.
 Instructed by their frequent lessons well,
 The Pupil soon his Tutors learn'd to excel:
 Observant copyist of their very tones,
 The Sisters' song, sweet doves! their saintly groans—
 The holy sighs—the pause of languid rest—
 The pious slowness—closely he express'd;
 And finally VERT-VERT now knew by heart
 Whate'er Choir-Mothers know of sacred art.

* Marguerite, surnamed Marie Alacoque, was one of the Visitation Sisterhood (of the Convent of *Parai* in Burgundy, instituted for the adoration of "The Sacred Heart of Jesus") and eminent for piety and holiness. She also wrote some devotional effusions—but more remarkable for warmth than sobriety.

Within a Cloister's limits too confined,
Soon widely spread a worth of such great kind :
In all *Nevers*, from morn till night, supreme,
The happy Sisters' Parrot was the theme,
Nought else was talk'd about, nought else was heard ;
From e'en *Moulins* they came to see the Bird.
The sweet VERT-VERT now ne'er the Parlour left ;
Young Sister Prue, in ruff of finest weft,
Supported him : To the Spectators' eyes
She exhibited his coat of gorgeous dyes—
His sweet demeanour—and engaging grace :
Nor fail'd they to remark his happy face :
The beauties of the tender Neophyte
Yet least their admiration did excite ;
Soon as their ears his voice's accents caught,
All those attractive graces went for nought ;
Deck'd—fill'd—with sentences of saintly pith,
The youngest Novices supplied him with,
Th' illustrious Bird began rehearse his part :
At every moment some new turn or art,
Still varying with fresh charms his narrative :
Unusual praise, nor easy to believe,

For him who speaks in public tho adept,—
 Not one in all his auditory slept !
 What Orator perhaps could say so much ?
 They listen'd—praised his memory—ne'er was such !
 Yet he, experienced, humble in success,
 And well convinced of glory's emptiness,
 Still stuff'd himself devoutly like a Dean,
 And bore his triumph with a modest mien.
 When thus his knowledge he'd retail'd around,
 With closing beak—and in a cadenced sound,
 He bent with air demure and sanctified,
 And left his audience duly edified :
 He'd only said some nothings—trifles pat ;
 Save scraps of slander, or such girlish chat,
 As at the grate by chance one took on trust,
 Or that our Sisters in their fold discuss'd.

In that soft nest, as Senior—Sage—and Saint,
 Thus Father VERT-VERT lived, without restraint ;
 To many a Hebe dear, with free access ;
 Fat as a Monk—nor venerable less,
 As angel handsome, learn'd as an Abbé,
 Beloved—as lovely, amiable and gay,

Trimm'd__civilized__dress'd__drill'd__bedeck'd__and
 bevelled,
 Happy, in short, if he had never travelled !
 But came at length that time of mournful date__
 That time eclipsing all his glories late :
 Oh sad remembrance ! Oh disgrace ! Oh crimes !
 Oh fatal voyage !__Why to future times
 Could not its history be conceal'd from Fame !
 Alas, how dangerous is a lofty name !__
 Obscurity is aye a happier lot :
 On this example, here mistrust me not__
 That too great talents and too much applause
 Oft times our manners' depravation cause.
 Thy name, VERT-VERT ! thy charms of form and mind
 Were not to these exclusive climes confined ;
 Renown declared them on a distant shore,
 And e'en to *Nantes* thy glory's rumour bore.
 There, as 'tis known, The *Visitation* has
 Its fold of Reverend Mother Nuns ; a class,
 Who, in this land, as is elsewhere the case,
 Are not the last to know whate'er takes place :
 These, learning from the former on that head
 What of the boasted Parrot there was said,

To know its truth indulged a strong desire :
 A lay-Maid's wish is a consuming fire ;
 A Nun's is ten times worse—as closer pent.
 Already to *Nevers* all hearts are sent :
 Straight twenty heads are turning upside down
 For one poor Bird : At once they to that Town
 To their Superior write in *Nevernese*,—
 Beseeching that the Bird so skill'd to please
 Should for a time be sent them, by the Loire ;
 And that, conducted on the *Nantese* shore,
 He might himself his glory there enjoy
 And their fond wishes and desires employ.
 The letter goes : Will come the answer —when ?
 In twice six days : What ages until then !
 On letter letter follows—terms more strong :
 Sleep flies them : Sister *Cicely* lives not long .
 At length the epistle at *Nevers* arrives :
 They hold grand Chapter—it concerns their lives :
 The vast demand at first them robs of breath.—
 “ What ! lose *VERT-VERT* ? Oh Heavens ! Nay, rather
 death.
 “ Within these tombs—these gloomy towers and lone—
 “ What should we do if that dear Bird were gone !”

Thus spoke the younger Veils, whose glowing hearts,
 Still warm, and tired of their inactive parts,
 To harmless pleasure yet outspread their wings.
 And, truth to say, it was the least of things
 That this pure flock, so closely penn'd and press'd,
 And who—besides—no other Bird possess'd,
 Should at the least a wretched Parrot have.
 Howe'er, the Assistant-Mothers, sagely grave,
 This Senate's Presidents time out of mind,
 Whose older hearts less warmly loved,—opined
 To send the charming Pupil, as was prayed,
 A fortnight's visit: for, like prudent Maid,
 They fear'd lest persevering to refuse
 Might with their Sisters' House a feud induce.
 So will'd the hooded State, and spoke its will.
 The Peeresses thus having passed the Bill,
 A fearful tumult followed on th' event :
 " How e'er to such a sacrifice consent !"
 " Is't true then ? (Sister Sarah cried)—Is't so ?"
 " What ! we still live, and is VERT-VERT to go ?"
 Elsewhere the Vestry-Mother midst her cries
 Three times grows pale—thrice sequent deeply sighs —

Weeps—shivers—sinks—and speechless swoons away !
 Now all is grief : in gloomy hues all day
 Some presage seems to sketch the voyage out ;
 Horrific dreams, the mournful night throughout,
 Still more increase the day's appalling glooms.
 Too vain regrets ! the fatal moment comes :
 Now all is ready on the destined shore,
 One fain must part—perhaps to meet no more—
 Begin a cruel absence from one's love !
 Each Sister, uttering sobs of turtle-dove,
 Already mourns a tedious widowhood.
 What fondest kisses, when to leave for good,
 VERT-VERT received ! what high—what tender fears !
 They struggle for—they bathe him with their tears :
 The nearer now he's this abode to quit—
 The more he's found replete with charms and wit.
 At length, howe'er, the final wicket's pass'd :
 With him Love from the Convent flees outcast.
 “ Go—fly, my Son ! where honour calls—pursue : ”
 “ Return still charming and return still true : ”
 “ May gentlest Zephyrs waft thee o'er the tide ; ”
 “ While I, in dull seclusion fain to bide, ”

" In painful exile languish here and cold,"
 " Grieved—sad—unknown—and ne'er to be consoled !"
 " Go, dear VERT-VERT ! and as thy pinion roves,"
 " Be still thou deem'd the eldest of the Loves !"
 Was such a blooming Nunnikin's farewell ;
 Who, to divert her languor and repel,
 On her lone couch—unwitness'd and unheard—
 Had oft a rebel orison* preferr'd ;
 And who would doubtless now, on good pretence,
 The chatty Bird have followed far from thence.

But 'tis resolved on : they embark the Youth,
 Till now all worth—ingenuousness—and truth,—
 Till now all modesty in word as thought :
 Oh may his heart, still guarded, back be brought,
 And for the Cloister yet his virtue save !
 Howe'er it be, the oars now cleave the wave,
 The air repeats the ruffled waters' tone,
 The wind is fair, the Vessel goes—she's gone !

END OF CANTO II.

* See Appendix.

CANTO III.

THE buoyant Bark, now speeding undelayed,
 That o'er the wave the holy Bird conveyed,
 A Monk—two Gascons*—three Dragoons, o'er more
 A Nurse—and pair of liberal Ladies bore :
 For Youngster fresh from Monastery-hall
 This was in goodly company to fall !
 So, stranger to their ways—the while he scann'd,
 VERT-VERT was here as in a foreign land ;
 New language and new lessons here he heard ;
 Their style was jargon to the wond'ring Bird :
 'Twas here no more those Bible-terms well sought,
 Those pious colloquies with unction fraught,
 Those scraps of Scripture or of mental prayers,
 'Mong our sweet Vestals wont to soothe his ears ;
 But big loud words, nor of the holiest kind,
 That might have well alarm'd a stronger mind :

* "Gascons" are the Wild-Irish of France: on them are fathered all "bulls"—rough-and-ready wit—and rhodomontades.

For—your Dragoons, no very pious race,
 Here used their Pot-house language—as in place ;
 To lighten thus the tedium of the road,
 They worshipp'd none except the jolly God.
 The Demireps and Gascons, nothing nice,
 Of Alley phrases gave an ample spice.
 The Boatmen, on their side, not more repress'd,
 Storm'd—cursed—blasphemed—and swore fierce oaths in jest ;
 Their voices, pitch'd in masc'line tones and round,
 Pronounced all full—without one loss of sound.
 Amidst the din embarrass'd and confused,
 VERT-VERT in dull compulsive silence mused ;
 Sad—doubtful—timid, fearing all display,
 He knew not what to think nor what to say.
 Along their route they thought, as a resource,
 To lead the pensive Parrot in discourse ;
 When Brother Robin in a worldly tone
 'Gan questioning the pretty tristful one :
 With sweeting air the Saintly Bird drew nigh ;
 And, breathing forth a puritanic sigh,
 He *Ave, Sister!* answered—drawling out.
 Judge if this "*Ave*" raised a laughter shout ?

Together all burst forth, nor quickly ceas'd,
In chorus laughing at the feather'd Priest.
Thus jeer'd, the Novice, nettled and dismayed,
Felt something had been wrong in what he'd said ;
And fear'd he might sustain the Jills' attacks,
Should he not talk the language of the Jacks :
His heart—by nature proud, and which—high-bred—
Had with sweet incense hitherto been fed,
In that assault of withering disdain
Could not his modest fortitude retain ;
And losing patience, as he took offence,
VERT-VERT then lost his pristine innocence.
Thenceforth ungrateful, to himself he curs'd
Those Sisters dear—his tutors best and first,
Who had not known how teach him to discern
Politer french's elegance of turn—
Its nervous sounds—and tasteful niceties :
To acquire them, then, he all his cares applies,
Not talking much, but thinking not the less :
At once the Bird, naught wanting in address,
To furnish room for novel modes of speech,
Saw he must now for ever—all and each—

Forget the *Gaudès** he'd been stuff'd withal :
 In twice a day they were forgotten all ;
 So much he found the idiom of Dragoons
 In better taste than that of Convent Cronos.
 Of willing aptitude at oral skill
 (Alas, young minds too readily learn ill !)
 The Bird, an eloquent and docile mime,
 Grew coarsely clever in the shortest time :
 He soon like any Trooper† learn'd to swear,
 And could blaspheme with a Satanic air :
 Those maxims he belied of olden times—
 Wherein 'tis said one reaches to great crimes
 But by degrees‡: he was a finish'd rip—
 At once profess'd—without apprenticeship.

* This refers to some of the Romish Chaunts or Litanies beginning with that word. The name of "Gaudy-Day," as applied to some festival days still kept up at our Universities, has probably the same etymology.

† The Original hath it "Better than an old Devil at the bottom of a holy-water font." As the Reader may never have heard one of those gentlemen imprecate in such a situation, our more vernacular phrase has been substituted.

‡ "Nemo repente fuit turpissimus."

Too well his memory he engraved upon
 The boatmen of the Loire's whole lexicon :
 Whenever one of these in some wild fit
 Let fly a "H_____!" VERT-VERT straight echoed it :
 Applauded then by all the vulgar train,
 Of his poor merit satisfied and vain,
 Thenceforth he but the shameful honour loved
 To be by a corrupting World approved ;
 And, thus degrading his colloquial art,
 No longer acted but a laic part.
 Must thus examples of seductive evil
 Entice young hearts from Heaven to enrich the Devil !
 Chaste Irises of Nevers' Convent ! say,
 Meanwhile these mournful scenes—thro many a day—
 What in your desert cloisters woke your cares ?
 Ah ! doubtless ye made penances and prayers
 For an ungrateful libertine's return—
 A fickle heart unworthy your concern—
 And who, to other chains a willing slave,
 Despised your loves nor longer cared to have.
 The Monastery's portals then, no doubt,
 Were sore beset by tedium ill kept out ;

The Grate in solitary mourning wept ;
 And silence then perhaps was almost kept.—
 Your wishes cease.—VERT-VERT deserves no more :
 No more VERT-VERT's that reverend Bird of yore,
 That Parrot so sweet-temper'd, nought self-willed,
 That mind so pure, that heart with fervour filled :
 Must I then say—he's but a ruffian coarse,
 A vile apostate, and blasphemous worse !
 The faithless winds and Nereids of the flood
 Have reap'd the fruit your generous labours sowed :
 No longer vaunt his knowledge—rare on Earth :
 Ungraced by virtue—what is genius worth ?
 Forget him then : the shameless wretch, nor loth,
 Debases now his heart and talents both.

Meanwhile to *Nantes* the Voyager drew near,
 Where our impatient Sisters languish'd drear ;
 The day for their fond wishes came too late,
 For them the day had too confined a date ;
 While flattering Hope—their tedium to relieve—
 (False Hope, for aye ingenious to deceive !)—
 There promised them a cultivated mind,
 A well-bred Bird, with sentiments refined,

A modest—edifying tongue, meek spirit,
 Good principles, in short—accomplish'd merit.
 But Oh distress !—Oh expectations vain !
 What grief awaits the breasts who entertain !
 The bark arrives ; the crew descend to land :
 A Warder-Nun was seated on the strand :
 Since their first letter to *Nevers* was sent,
 There every day to take her seat she went ;
 Discursive o'er the wave's remotest verge,
 Her eyes appear'd the Hero's keel to urge.
 There disembarking near the hooded Crone,
 The cunning Bird knew by her looks and tone—
 Her prudish eye half closed—her plaited ruff—
 Her lofty cap—her gauze of finest stuff—
 Her dying voice—the snow white gloves she wore,
 And—better still—her little Cross* before.
 He shudder'd : and 'tis thought, howe'er uncivil,
 That—Soldier-like—he pitch'd her to the D—l ;
 More liking much to follow some Dragoon,
 Whose slang he understood, companion boon,

* See Appendix.

Than go anew 'mong Nuns to take the vows
 And learn their lessons litanies and bows.
 But, maugre struggles, our vext scamp was fain
 Perforce to follow to the hated den ;
 Despite his cries the Warder bore him off :
 Along the way he bit her—not in scoff—
 But right good earnest, some say here—some there—
 On the arm—the throat, nor is it certain where ;
 Besides—what matters it ? By force at last
 Our Crone within the Convent gets him fast.

She announces him : With rumour far and wide
 The notice spreads : as its first news betide,
 The great bell rings : 'twas prayer time : this hear
 All's instant left, they rush to meet the Bird :
 “ He's in the Parlour, Sister ! yes, 'tis he ! ”
 In crowds they fly, they burn—they broil—to see ;
 The Elders e'en, with their symmetric gait,
 Of tardy years have now forgot' the weight ;
 Old age grows young ; and with the briskest Nuns
 For her first time now Mother Judith runs !

END OF CANTO III.

CANTO IV.

At length they see, nor feast enough their eyes
 To view our Bird's fair form and brilliant dyes ;
 And justly, for the fellow in this mood
 Was not less handsome for the being less good ;
 That coxcomb air, that warlike eye and warm,
 To his good looks e'en lent an added charm.
 Alas, that a deceitful traitor's brow
 Should thus with every soft attraction glow !
 Why cannot we distinguish at its sign
 A wicked heart by features as malign !
 To praise his various charms of hues and beak
 Now all the Sisters all together speak.
 To hear that buzzing swarm discussing o'er,
 One scarce had heard the nearest thunder roar :
 Yet he, amidst the din—as if nought stirr'd,
 Nor deigning to pronounce one pious word,
 Leer'd round him with a youthful Deacon's air.
 This gave offence : So bold a look to wear,

D

Was unbecoming such a holy place :
 Then when the Mother Prioress, thro grace,
 With awful mien—like self-communing Maid,
 Would have address'd the Bird, and something said,
 For his first words and all reply thereto,
 With a contemptuous tone and some ado,
 Unheeding of what horrors he let fall,
 My Youngster answers with a priggish drawl—
 “ Odd rat 'em !— What ridiculous things are Nuns !”
 While late with the Dragoons (the story runs)
 From one of them he'd heard the shocking words.
 At this exordium of the impious Bird's,
 Young Sister Bridget, who'd have check'd him, came
 And smoothly said—“ Dear Brother ! fye, for shame !”
 The right dear brother, as he rudely swore,
 Retorted with a “ perfect rhyme ” in *ore*.
 “ Heavens ! he's a conjuror,” (upcolouring,
 Rejoins the Nun) “ Lord ! what a wicked thing !
 “ Is that the pious Parrot as we'd heard ?”
 At this VERT-VERT, like genuine gallows-bird,
 Apostrophized her with a “ d—— your eyes !”
 To stop the Grenadier's profane replies,

Each now came up—and got in turn her own :
 The young demure ones mocking in their tone,
 He imitated their loquacious rage ;
 Still keener on the scolds of riper age,
 He mimick'd their orations' nasal twang.
 'Twas worse when, with a Privateer's-man's slang,
 Fatigued with their dull lectures oft rehears'd,
 With passion swell'd and foaming nigh to burst,
 He thunder'd out all those appalling words
 He'd borrowed from the learned Boatmen's hoards ;
 And, cursing—swearing—with a voice of shrew,
 All H_____s* strange Devils† passing in review,
 The d_____s and bl_____s‡ disported round his beak !
 The younger Sisters thought him talking greek :

* There may be persons who might imagine "H_____" to mean the fabulous *Hades*: but they would be in error, as it is only a contraction of the "Black Hole," not that of Calcutta—but one lower down and hotter still, said to be the residence of the ancient Nicholas.

† The *Vert-Verts* of Italy (as Menage tells us) in their objurgations enumerate so many as 30,000: "*Trenta mila Diavoli!*" See Appendix.

‡ Some words of *mauvais ton*, used by one of the interlocutors here, are, according to custom, abridged with a dash: but, as we

"Confound it! Curse my liver! Smash my pate!"
 At these terrific words the general Grate
 Are horror struck; the speechless Novices
 As if for life—flying—cross themselves and bless;
 All, thinking sure the World is at an end,
 Their steps post-haste towards the cellar bend;
 And Mother Martha, falling on her nose,
 Is doom'd her last remaining tooth to lose!
 Scarce uttering a sepulchral voice's sound—
 "Good Heavens! (moans Sister Tabitha) who found,"
 "Good Heavens! who's given us this Son of evil—"
 "This Infidel—this sad incarnate Devil!"
 "Oh blessed Lady! how in conscience e'er"
 "Like some lost soul can thus he curse and swear?"
 "Is this the sense—the knowledge all approved"—
 "Of that VERT-VERT so vaunted and beloved?"
 "Forthwith expel him—send at once away."
 'Oh Gracious Lord! (cries Sister Dorothy)
 'What horrors! At our Sisters' of *Nevers*'
 'Do thus they talk? Is this sad language theirs?'

would not be thought to "talk greek," the uninitiated Reader is informed that d___ stands for "drat" and b___ for "blow."

'Is't thus they educate and bring up youth?'
 'Why—what a heretic! Oh heavenly truth!'
 'Ne'er let him enter here: you'll have all Hell'
 'With this sad imp in garrison as well.'

To end: VERT-VERT is in his cage replac'd.
 'Tis settled: They determine in all haste
 At once to send the foul-mouth'd sinner back:
 The Pilgrim, too, desired no better track.
 He's straight proscribed, declared a wicked wretch,
 Indicted and convicted in his speech
 Of having tamper'd with—for ends malign—
 The holy Sisters' virtue. All now sign
 His sentence, weeping yet the culprit lad:
 For, what a pity he should be so bad,
 So young—still in his age's flower and pride;
 And, 'neath such lovely plumage, thus should hide
 A finish'd scoundrel's cunningness and art—
 A pagan's air—and reprobate's hard heart!
 At length, borne by the Warder to the port,
 He goes, this time not biting save in sport;
 A passage-boat the reverend rogue receives;
 And this sad shore without regret he leaves.

Such was the Iliad of our Hero's woes,
Alas—not ended yet ! Meanwhile he goes :
What deep despair when now, at length returned
Where he so long—his first abode—sojourned,
To give like music and like scandal came !
What shall our wretched Sisters do for shame ?
With weeping eyes, while horror them assails,
In mantles long and duplefolded veils,
Nine Ancients enter to the Council-room :
Conceive, deliberating on his doom,
Nine Centuries met ! There hopeless on the floor,
Without those Sisters who'd have pleaded for,
In open Court within his cage enchained,
VERT-VERT appears, unfriended and disdained.
The votes are call'd : On sable scrolls forthwith
Already two have destined him the death :
Two others, something less severe than they,
Will that—to his unhappy fate a prey—
He be return'd to that far pagan Earth
That with the dark-hued Brahmin gave him birth :
But the remaining five, with one consent,
Determine on the Culprit's punishment :

They doom to two months' abstinence, moreo'er
 To three of exile, and of silence four ;
 Meanwhile sweet biscuits__toilets__and alcoves
 Shall be forbidden him__and garden groves :
 Nor is this all ; they for his jailor chuse,
 His guard__and sole companion to amuse,
 The Alecto of the House, a hideous fright,
 A surly cross-grain'd hag, a living blight,
 A pale octogenarian skeleton,
 Form'd for repentant sin to look upon.
 Yet, in despite his rigid Argus' care,
 Oft friendly Sisters stole to see him there ;
 And, mourning with kind sympathy his fate,
 His exile's rigours wont to mitigate.
 Ofttimes, from matins coming with her chums,
 Sweet Sister Rose had brought him sugar-plums :
 But ah ! in chains__beneath a jailer's lash__
 The choicest sweetmeats are but tasteless trash !

By stern misfortune taught, and stung with shame,
 Or tired to see his plaguy comrade Dame,
 The contrite Bird at length his error knew ;
 Monk__Boatmen__and Dragoons forgotten grew ;

And, with our Sisters now in tune and chord
 To full and perfect harmony restored,
 He more than any Canon grew devout.
 When he'd of his conversion left no doubt,
 The old Divan, their vengeance softening yet,
 Abridged the penance of the banish'd Pet.
 Ah sure the happy day of his recall
 Shall be a day of joyfulness to all!—
 To fondness given—its moments, as they run
 By Love's own hand in raptures shall be spun :
 Alas! what do I say? Oh faithless joys!—
 Oh false allurements of terrestrial toys!
 With flowers was every dormitory strewn,
 Songs—perfect coffee—sports—attend the boon,
 Full liberty—sweet tumult—bliss confess'd,
 All charming ardours everywhere express'd.
 Nought threaten'd neighbouring woes: But, sad reverse!—
 Of our kind Sisters indiscretion worse!—
 From his long diet's ills of scanty meats
 Too quickly passing to a flood of sweets,
 With sugar cramm'd and burnt with syrups hot,
 VERT-VERT, unsated, falling on the spot,

To gloomy cypress saw his roses turn !
 In vain the Sisters sought with fond concern,
 His flitting Soul and parting sighs to stay;
 This sweet excess thus hurrying him away,
 Blest victim of the love his heart desired,
 In pleasure's lap he blissfully expired !
 His dying words were echoed by their cries.
 'Tis o'er ! But Venus, as she closed his eyes,
 Amidst Elysium's sacred bowers reclin'd—
 With Hero-Parrots has his place assign'd,
 Near him, whose shade and wisdom teaching tong'
 By soft Corinna's lover* erst was sung.

Who may relate what deep regrets deplored
 The illustrious departed ? To record
 Its sad details, the Keeper-Sister 'non
 Drew up the Official Circular thereon,
 From which I've drawn the story of his fate.
 For after ages to perpetuate,
 His features—copying nature—were pourtrayed ;
 More hands than one, with Love's instructing aid,

* See Appendix.

By mimic colours and the needle's art
 A second life did to his limbs impart ;
 While sorrow, mitigating thus its wound,
 Embroider'd tears and painted them around.
 Were paid him all funereal honours, those
 That Helicon on famous Birds bestows.
 His tomb was 'neath a myrtle's branches made,
 Which still the modern mausoleum shade :
 There by those tender Artemisas' hands,
 Around an Urn begirt with flowery bands,
 In golden letters was inscribed this verse :
 The tearful current trickles to rehearse.—

YE! TO OUR ELDER SISTERS WHO UNKNOWN,
 WITHIN THESE GROVES CONVERSE AND PLAY,
 A MOMENT—IF YE CAN—YOUR WARBLINGS STAY,
 AND MAKE OUR WOES YOUR OWN.
 YE'RE HUSH'D! IF THIS BE TOO SEVERE RESTRAINT,
 THEN SPEAK, BUT SPEAK TO ECHO OUR COMPLAINT :
 ONE WORD OUR TENDER SORROWS' CAUSE IMPARTS—
 HERE LIES VERT-VERT: WITH HIM HERE LIE ALL HEARTS!

'Tis said, howe'er (now with another word
To end my Tale) the manes of the Bird
No longer lodge within the aforesaid tomb ;
But that, obedient to predestined doom,
His spirit in a Convent rests in bliss ;
And evermore, by metempsychosis,
The immortal Parrot thro the Nuns in death
Transmits his soul and chattering tongue therewith.

END OF CANTO IV.