

**PETRARCH AND HIS
INFLUENCE ON
ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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Petrarch and His Influence on English Literature by Peter Borghesi

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BOLOGNA

NICHOLAS ZANICHELLI

1906



PREFACE

It was our wish to know something about the influence which Petrarch had on English literature. We tried to find a book on the subject both in Italy and England, but, as our researches were in vain, we undertook to treat of it ourselves and we have succeeded in writing these few pages.

Of course all that we have written is not the fruit of our personal observations alone; we have consulted, besides the works of all the authors mentioned in this essay, many other books including those of eminent historians and critics,

such as Warton, Courthope, Saintsbury, Ten Brink, Taine, Einstein, Segrè, to whom we avow our obligations.

In the course of our researches we have observed that, although the English have never been slavish imitators of any particular people or individual, yet they owe to Petrarch much more than we at first believed.

We have divided our modest essay into two parts: in the first we have treated of the influence of Petrarch on the English literature and chiefly of the English humanism of the XIV and XV centuries; in the second we have dealt with the English Petrarchism in the XVI century and we have extended our observations also to the XVII, when it died out altogether in England.

We should have liked to have given more quotations from the authors referred

to, and to have drawn more parallels with Petrarch, but we are sorry that the scanty information we have in our Italian libraries and the short time we were able to spend in England have not allowed us to treat the subject in a more exhaustive way. On the other hand we have thought also that, to treat fully a subject like this, the work would become too long, tiresome and monotonous, and even though it were admissible to compare Petrarch with a single Petrarchist, it would not be so in an essay where about thirty English authors are compared with our great singer of Laura. Therefore our chief aim has been to put before the eyes of our readers a few pages from which the influence of Petrarch on English literature may be clearly and readily seen.

Have we succeeded? Our readers will judge. We shall be satisfied if, having

commenced the work, it may be the means of inducing others to add to our researches.



The XIV and XV centuries.

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No doubt, intercourse between England and Italy began with the Roman conquest in the time of the Emperor Claudius, but, although the Romans remained in England for about four centuries, they nevertheless did not leave behind any great influence.

It was the ardour of the new spirit of Christianity which gave origin to the many and lasting ties that joined England to Rome and consequently to Italy. First Italian missionary monks went there to introduce Christianity, and afterwards, even before the Norman conquest, Italian laymen went there for commercial purposes. So it is certain that regular and active commercial intercourse existed between England and Italy even before 1229.

At that time commerce in our country was very prosperous and was always increasing, so that in the first half of the XIV century it was so renowned abroad that we were unrivalled by any other nation. At that time moreover Italian merchants in England had attained to such a degree of importance, and commerce between the two countries had become so considerable that in 1372 Chaucer, with two Genoese gentlemen, James Pronan and John de Mari, went to Genoa to consider the selection of a place on the English coast where the Genoese might found a commercial establishment.

During the last centuries of the Middle Ages Italy had also led the way in literature; hence we see many young Englishmen coming here to study in our old and renowned universities — chiefly at Bologna and Padua. The first thing that a student does when abroad is naturally to learn the language of the country where he is, and just as the Italian merchants who resided in England tried to speak