AN EARLY ESSAY BY PANIZZI.

SIR ANTONIO PANIZZI occupies so remarkable a position in the annals of British bibliography that, I think, the readers of 'The Library' will be interested in a notice of one of his early contributions to literature, unrecorded by Mr. Louis Fagan, his biographer.

Panizzi reached England after a romantic escape from the Two Sicilies, where his Liberalism had brought him into disfavour with the authorities, and his first efforts at gaining a living were made in Liverpool, where he was a successful teacher of the Italian language. There was plenty of literary interest in the town by the Mersey, and the place which was the home of William Roscoe, the historian of the Medicis, and of William Shepherd, the biographer of Poggio, could not be indifferent to the talent and charm of Panizzi. There he met Brougham, to whom was due both his London professorship and his introduction to the British Museum—with what memorable results for English scholarship is a matter of history.

A memorial of his intercourse with the literary coterie of Liverpool is to be found in 'The Winter's Wreath' of 1828. This was one of the annuals that were so fashionable in the earlier half of the nineteenth century. It was, however, rather
 10 more serious in character than some of its con-

temporaries, and was published yearly from 1828 to 1832. We are, however, only concerned with the first issue :

THE WINTER'S WREATH; a collection of original contributions in prose and verse. London: published by Geo. B. Whittaker, J. Hatchard and Son, and George Smyth, Liverpool, 1828. 12mo. Pp. xi. 400. With nine plates.

The preface signed A. H. explains that 'the object originally was to present a volume to young persons in which nothing injurious in example or sentiment should be introduced; to blend instruction with amusement, and to unite what is too often separated, although not necessarily, principle with taste.' These laudable, if not novel, intentions resulted in an interesting volume. Many of the articles were anonymous, but those of which the authorship is acknowledged include contributions by William Wordsworth, Hannah More, Charlotte Grant of Laggan, John Bowring, Felicia Hemans, William Roscoe, Jane Roscoe, and W. S. Roscoe. More notable still is the fine translation by Macaulay of Filicaja's noble ode on the deliverance of Vienna.

After this glance at the general character of the 'Winter's Wreath,' we may turn to the contribution of the Italian exile, to whom fate had assigned the task of converting the British Museum into a national library of which all lovers of literature are justly proud. 'Un Improvvisatore sotto un governo dispotico,' is the title of the article, which is wholly in Italian. Although the art is not entirely unknown in other tongues, the structure of the Italian language lends itself more readily to

improvisation than perhaps any other modern form of speech. A 'Sonetto a rime obbligate' is one in which fourteen words are supplied to the poet as compulsory rhymes, and his task is to fill up each line and to weave them all into a poem. Even without these obligatory restraints the sonnet is not always successful, and with them the poet may be said to be dancing in chains. This is not always a graceful performance, but it is certainly remarkable that anyone should be able to do it at all. It is of such a sonnet that Panizzi gives the serio-comic history. At the birth of 'L'Aiglon' all the intellect of Italy was expected to pay tribute to the infant King of Rome, and there were persons found to sing the praises of the son of the man who had despoiled Italy of her art treasures and had decreed Rome, Florence, Turin, and Genoa to be parts of the French Empire. At this time some young men were supping together at Parma; one of the group, Jacopo Sanvitale, aged about twenty, was already well known for his talent as an improvisatore. Fourteen odd and incongruous words were contributed by the assembled friends, and arranged as the rhymes of the octave and sestet of a sonnet, and he was begged to make them into a poem on the birth of the King of Rome. As they expected something clever the young men took down as well as they were able the words as they fell from the lips of the poet. Here is the sonnet :

'Io mi caccio le man nella parrucca
 Per la rabbia che propio il cor mi tocca,
 Se compro vate i vaticinj scocca,

E un regio Mida canticchiando stucca :
 Poi m'arrovello se Firenze o Lucca
 Chitarrino strimpella o tromba imbocca,
 Per un bimbo che in culla si balocca,
 E sallo Iddio s'avrà poi sale in zucca.
 Egli è del conio, è dell' istessa zecca
 Che rammenta la rana che s'impicca,
 Perchè l' astro del dì moglie si becca.
 Ecco che l' ugne in sen d' Italia ficca,
 E le trae sanguinose, e'l sangue lecca
 Ei che par la potea libera e ricca.'¹

'A jest's prosperity lies in the ears of him that hears it,' and Sanvitale's burlesque sonnet was soon all over Parma. Amongst those who did not see the humour of the joke was the prefect, who reported the matter to Paris, and as a consequence Sanvitale was arrested in the middle of the night, and imprisoned in the fortress of Fenestrelle. After an

¹ This cannot be regarded as a model of poetic lucidity, and I have invoked the aid of my friend Sig. Azeglio Valgimigli on its obscurer passages. To turn it into an English sonnet would be a hopeless task, and a rough prose version must suffice. 'I thrust my hands into my wig, through the rage that gnaws my heart. If you approve he hurls anathemas at you, whilst a royal Midas humming, tires you out. Then I am puzzled if at Florence or at Lucca a guitar is scraped or a trumpet is blown for a baby that is frolicking in his cradle. God knows if he will have any sense (*salt in his pumpkin*). He is of the same stamp and the same mint that brings to my memory the frog who hung himself because the sun was taking a wife. Behold he thrusts his claws into Italy's bosom and draws them out again smeared with blood—he that could have made her free and opulent.' The allusion to the frog is explained by a fable of a batrachian who, having heard that the sun was about to marry, fell into the melancholy reflection that if one sun could cause so much suffering by drying up the marshes there was no further hope for the creatures of frogland if there arose children of the sun inheriting the strength and nature of their father.

imprisonment of twenty-seven months Sanvitale managed to escape. In the daytime the prisoners were allowed to walk about the castle, but at night the drawbridge was raised and each man had to retire to his cell. No visitors were allowed unless furnished with a special permit, and no one had access to the castle except the country folk, men and women, who came to sell the produce of their gardens to the prisoners. Sanvitale, who was a beardless, smooth-faced, and not tall young man, obtained the dress of a peasant girl, and thus attired and carrying a basket on his head he marched out under the eyes of the zealous warders and sentries. His friends were waiting at a short distance to meet him, and after a time he reached Milan, which was the capital of the kingdom of Italy. But though now outside the 'French Empire' he was not out of danger. He lived very quietly, but one night went to the theatre with the daughter of his landlady, and whilst there heard his name mentioned by persons as to whose kindly intentions he felt grave suspicions. The girl was nearly fainting at the danger in which he was placed. He advised her to imitate a fainting fit, and made this a pretext for taking her aside into the fresh air. As he was leaving he asked the police officials to take care of a hat which he left on his seat, as a token of intended return. Sanvitale quickly and unceremoniously left the lady. As soon as possible he obtained a bogus passport, and in the pretended character of a physician reached Como. Dr. Micheli allowed his landlord to suppose that he

10. belonged to a family of distinction, and that an

austere father had temporarily banished him because he would not give up a girl whom he desired to marry but of whom his parents disapproved. As Dr. Micheli was also a student and a poet, his solitary and apparently misanthropic existence needed no further explanation. The landlord was further impressed by the books he found in the rooms of his lodger, and especially by a polyglot Bible, the unknown characters of which suggested the thought of communication with the world of spirits. The landlord fell ill, and when the country doctor was sent for it was found that he was some distance away on a visit. The landlady begged Dr. Micheli to prescribe for her husband. Sanvitale now found himself a veritable *médecin malgré lui*, but put a good face on the matter, and had the good luck to see his patient quickly on the way to recovery. When the village doctor returned he requested an introduction to his learned and skilful colleague, and being a man of less learning and talent, did not penetrate the secret, but, on the contrary, was full of generous admiration of the stranger, and whenever a difficult case occurred he recommended his patients to apply to Dr. Micheli. The poor poet lived in daily terror of increasing the death-rate, but the fall of Napoleon released him from exile, and removed one of the dangers to the health of Como.

Panizzi assures the reader that his narrative is not fiction but sober fact. Jacopo Sanvitale was a real person, who was afterwards secretary of the University of Parma; but became suspected during the rule of the Austrians, and was again imprisoned

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in 1822 and 1823. It would certainly be difficult to find another sonnet, good, bad or indifferent, so fruitful in scenes of tragi-comedy as that of which Panizzi has made himself the sympathetic historian.

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