CHAP. V.

A Letter from a Nun of Padua, *the Grand-Daughter of* Lewis Cornaro.

Lewis Cornaro was, by the ill-conduct of some of his relations, deprived of the dignity of a noble Venetian, of which he was possessed, and which he deserved for his virtues, and by his birth. He was free to remain in Venice, if he pleased; but seeing himself excluded from the public employments of the Republic, he retired to Padua, where he took up his residence.

He married at Udine, a city of Friuli; his wife's name was Veronica, of the family of the Spilenbergs. She was a long time barren, and as he ardently wished for children, he neglected nothing which might give him that satisfaction. At last, after many vows, prayers, and remedies, his wife became pregnant, and was delivered of a daughter, who was named Clara.

This was an only daughter, who was married to John Cornaro of the family, which was distinguished by the sir-name of Cornaro del Episcopia. It was a very powerful family before the loss which Christendom suffered, by losing the kingdom of Cyprus, where that family had a considerable estate.

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Clara had eleven children, eight sons and three daughters. Lewis Cornaro had also the pleasure to see himself, as it were, revived by miracle, in a great number of successors; for though he was very ancient when Clara came into the world, yet he lived to see her very old, and his offspring to the third generation.

Cornaro was a man of understanding, merit, and courage. He was naturally liberal, nevertheless without profuseness. His youth was infirm; and he was very passionate; but when he perceived what damages the vices of his temper caused him, he resolved to correct them, and to conquer his passion, and those extravagant humours to which he was subject. After this glorious victory, he became so moderate, mild, and affable, that he gained the esteem and friendship of all that knew him.

He observed the rules which he mentions in his writings, and dieted himself always with so much precaution, that finding his natural heat decaying in his old age, he also diminished his diet by degrees, so far as to stint himself to the yolk of an egg for a meal, and a little before his death, it served him for two meals.

By this means he preserved his health, and was vigorous to the age of an hundred years; his mind did not decay, he never had need of spectacles, neither lost his hearing. Nay, he preserved his voice so clear and harmonious, that at the end of his life he sang with as much strength and delight as he did at the age of twenty-five.

When he felt that his last hour drew near, he disposed himself to leave this life with the piety of a Christian. He made his will, and set all his affairs in order; after which, he received the last sacraments, and expected death patiently in an elbow chair. He seemed in good health, feeling no manner of pain; having also his mind and eye very brisk, when

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a little fainting fit took him, which was instead of an agony, and made him fetch his last breath.*

He died at Padua, the 26th of April, 1566, and was buried the eighth of May following.

His wife died some years after him. Her life was long, and her old age as happy as that of her spouse, only her latter days were not altogether like his. Some time before her death, she was seized with a lingering distemper, which brought her to her grave. She gave up her soul one night in her bed without any convulsive motions, and with so perfect tranquillity as not to be perceived.

They were both buried in St. Anthony's church, without any pomp, according as they had ordered by their last will and testament.

* The death of extreme old age is generally sudden and without any struggle. Nature exhausted, is incapable of those efforts to resist annihilation and retain life, which occur at an earlier age; and the suspension of the principal function for a few seconds produces an irrecoverable collapse, or syncope, so that a fainting or a sigh only marks their exit.

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