

THE OWL.

VOL. VIII.

OTTAWA UNIVERSITY, MAY, 1895.

No. 9.

AN ALLEGORY OF LIFE.



EARLY all our great epics are more or less allegorical. But there is one which in an especial manner, and by the use of characters and incidents, not at all overstepping the limits granted to the poet, has given us an instructive and very pleasing view of the *battle of life*. Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, to the superficial reader, might seem to be only a charming description of how the Holy City, after great toil and marvellous deeds of valor, had been rescued from the hands of impious Moslems, and made free to all Christian pilgrims. Yet to the student there lie just below the surface, within easy reach, deep principles of conduct, incidents which show us the vicissitudes of this life, examples which prove that true success and happiness live in virtue, and, that after all, our lives should tend not to an earthly, but to a heavenly destination—in short, an allegory of life. Towards the end of this essay the writer will say more on this feature of the poem.

We are reminded forcibly by the present time of Torquato Tasso himself. April 25th, 1895, was the 300th anniversary of the death of Italy's great poet. Sorrento, his birth place, commemorated the event by a festival lasting ten days. The King of Italy and the Prince of Naples encouraged the committee in charge a great deal, and Mr. Marion Crawford, the novelist,

whose home is there, took an active part in the celebration. The life of Tasso, apart from his great Epic, is a strange mixture of success and failure; it is, perhaps, another added to that long list of great men who have been severely dealt with by their own age, but whose greatness has increased with time. However paradoxical the expression may seem, it is certain that many of his friends were his worst enemies. He manifested his poetical tendencies at an early age; but his father, also a poet of considerable note, had grave doubts as to the advisability of his son taking up a profession which had brought so many calamities on himself. After a sound philosophical and literary training at Padua and Bologna, young Tasso was formally attached to the great House of Este, whose history he has glorified in the 17th canto of *Jerusalem Delivered*, as shown by the shield given to the hero Rinaldo who is represented as belonging to this House. At the age of 27, Tasso had already written eight or nine cantos of his great Epic; in another year he added ten cantos, and at the age of 30 that poem which has immortalized his name was completed. Our English Spenser, who has drawn much from Italian sources, who has in fact taken many of our poets verses for his *Fairie Queene*, was then studying at Cambridge.

The orthodoxy of his poem was a source of continual anxiety to Tasso; and much against the will of his friends he submitted it to the Pope for strict examination. He