

TORQUATO TASSO.

BY T. D. F.

"Thus, ill-fated Tasso, whom you praise,
Romans, amid his wrongs, could yet console
The beautiful, the chivalric, the brave;—
Dreaming the deeds—feeling the love he sung."

It was a festal night at the ducal palace. The Princess Lucretia, after a few years of wedded misery, had returned to her brother's home, to claim his and her mother's protection, and all Ferrara were summoned to give welcome to their beloved lady.

A gay and brilliant scene it was—that lofty palace blazing with lights, which were flashed back, and magnified by the sparkling jewels that glittered in the dark hair, and on the white arms and slender waists of the fair Ferrarese. Lordly nobles, stately dames, the high in rank and the gifted in genius, were gathered there, for all such did Alphonso love. But none knew his neighbour. The mask concealed all faces; and it was only by the voice or air that friend recognised friend. Yet this was no restraint upon the gaiety of the scene. In the large hall of the palace, inspiring music sent forth its call; and young men and maidens obeyed its summons. Others formed themselves into groups; and the merry jest, the sharp wit, the keen reply, passed with more freedom than if the speakers had been face to face.

The company had been received by one of the officers of the household; and the duke and his fair sisters did not make their appearance till late in the evening. The guests had begun to speculate upon the cause, when a peal of martial music announced their approach. The large doors at the end of the saloon were thrown open, and the duke, with Lucretia hanging on his arm, attended by her sister, and many ladies of the court, entered. Silence for a moment prevailed; then a spontaneous burst of welcome was uttered; and the guests were pressing forward to greet their much-loved lady, when one, in the garb of a troubadour, with a low hat and drooping feather concealing his face, a small lute resting on his arm, stepped before the rest, knelt with lowly reverence at the feet of the duchess, and poured forth, in the name of all Ferrara, a heart-felt welcome. It was only a sonnet's length, but

each word was forcibly expressive; and as he finished, a murmur of applause rang through the room. With moistened eye and swelling heart, Lucretia bent on him her sad, sweet glance.

"I thank you, Sir Troubadour," she said, "for your greeting. I receive it as the expression of the feeling of my beloved Ferrara, which is rendered to me dearer than ever by my long absence and many sorrows; and for you, willingly would I bind you to become my minstrel—to relinquish the wanderer's garb, to dwell with us in our courtly circle—to greet the coming, and bless the departing with your magic lays. Say, is there any way in which we can charm you to our service?"

As she spoke, she unloosed from her throat a delicate chain, to which was attached a Maltese cross of great value, and threw it over the neck of the minstrel, who still knelt with bowed head before her.

"Lady! it needs not golden fetters to bind where the heart is already a slave. I live but to do thy bidding, and that of thy noble sister; and I am but too happy if my feeble lay has given you pleasure."

Leonora, who had watched the scene with much interest, on hearing the allusion to herself, came forward, and drawing from her finger a ruby ring, with her own signet upon it, gave it to the seeming troubadour, saying,

"Accept this token, not as a reward, but as a remembrance of this pleasant hour."

The troubadour pressed the ring to his lips, and bending low, rose and mingled with the crowd.

"It is Tasso! it is Tasso!" echoed a hundred voices. "Thanks to Tasso for so nobly expressing the welcome of Ferrara!"

Then all crowded round the princess, whose feelings almost overwhelmed her at these proofs of the love of her people.

Having divested himself of his troubadour dress, Tasso returned to the company, and was