

## OUR BIOGRAPHICAL BUREAU.

"Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And departing, leave behind us  
Foot-prints on the sands of time."

## Tasso.



IN the 11th of March, 1544, was born at Sorrento, near Naples, Torquato Tasso, the great author of the *Gerusalemme Liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*). His father was Bernardo Tasso, also a scholar and a poet, in his own day of considerable repute. The life of Tasso was almost from its commencement a troubled romance. His infancy was distinguished by extraordinary precocity; but he was yet a mere child when political events induced his father to leave Naples, and, separating himself from his family, to take up his abode at Rome. Hither Torquato, when he was only in his eleventh year, was called upon to follow him, and to bid adieu both to what had been hitherto his home, and to the only parent whom it might almost be said he had ever known. The feelings of the young poet expressed themselves upon this occasion in some lines of great tenderness and beauty, which have been thus translated:

"Forth from a mother's fostering breast;  
Fate plucks me in my helpless years;  
With sighs I look back on her tears  
Bathing the lips her kisses press;  
Alas! her pure and ardent prayers  
The fugitive breeze now idly bears;  
No longer breathe we face to face,  
Gathered in knot-like close embrace;  
Like young Ascanius or Camill', my feet  
Unstable seek a wandering sire's retreat."

He never again saw his mother; she died about eighteen months after he had left her. The only near relation he now had remaining besides his father was a sister; and from her also he was separated, those with whom she resided after her mother's death at Naples preventing her from going to share, as she wished to do, the exile of her father and brother. But after the two latter had been together for about two years at Rome, circumstances again occurred which again divided them. Bernardo found it necessary to consult his safety by retiring from that city, on which he proceeded, himself, to Urbino, and sent his son to Bergamo, in the north of Italy. The favorable reception, however, which the former found at the court of the Duke of Urbino, induced him in a few months to send for Torquato; and when he arrived, the graces and accomplishments of the boy so pleased the Duke that he appointed him the companion of his own son in his studies. They remained at the court of Urbino for two years, when, in 1559, the changing fortunes of Bernardo drew them from thence to Venice.

This unsettled life, however, had never interrupted the youthful studies of Tasso; and after they had resided for some time at Venice, his father sent him to the University of Padua, with the intention that he should prepare himself for the profession of the law. But all views of this kind were soon abandoned by the young poet. Instead of perusing Justinian he spent his time in writing verses, and the result was the publication of his poem of *Rinaldo* before he had completed his eighteenth year. We can not here trace minutely the remaining progress of his shifting and agitated history. His literary industry in the midst of almost ceaseless distractions of all kinds was most extraordinary.

His great poem, the "*Jerusalem Delivered*," is said to have been begun in his nineteenth year, when he was at Bologna. In 1565 he first visited the court of Ferrara, having been carried thither by the Cardinal Luigi d'Este, the brother of the reigning duke Alphonso. This event gave a color to the whole of Tasso's future existence. It has been supposed that the young poet allowed himself to form an attachment to the Princess Leonora, one of the two sisters of the Duke, and that the object of his aspiring love was not insensible to that union of eminent personal graces with the fascinations of genius which courted her regard. But there hangs a mystery over the story which has never been completely cleared away. What is certain is, that, with the exception of a visit which he paid to Paris in 1571, in the train of the Cardinal Luigi, Tasso continued to reside at Ferrara, till the completion and publication of his celebrated epic in 1575. He had already given to the world his beautiful pastoral drama the "*Amita*," the next best known and most esteemed of his productions.

From this period his life becomes a long course of storm and darkness, rarely relieved by a fitful gleam of light. For several years, the great poet, whose fame was already spread over Europe, seems to have wandered from city to city in his native country, in a state almost of beggary, impelled by a restlessness of spirit which no change of scene would relieve. But Ferrara was still the central spot around which his affections hovered, and to which, apparently in spite of himself, he constantly after a brief interval returned. In this state of mind much of his conduct was probably extravagant enough; but it is hardly to be believed that he really gave any cause for the harsh, and if unmerited, most atrocious measure to which his former patron and friend, the Duke Alphonso, resorted in 1579, of consigning him as a lunatic to the hospital of St. Anne. In this receptacle of wretchedness the poet was confined for about seven years. The Princess Leonora, who has been supposed to have been the innocent cause of this detention, died in 1581; but neither this event nor the solicitations of several of his most powerful friends and admirers could prevail upon Alphonso to grant Tasso his liberty.

Meanwhile, the alleged lunatic occupied, and no doubt lightened, many of his hours by the exercises of his pen. His compositions were numerous, both in prose and verse, and many of them found their way to the press.

At last, in July, 1586, on the earnest application of Don Vincenzo Gonzaga, son of the Duke of Mantua, he was released from his long imprisonment. He spent the close of the year at Mantua; but he then resumed his wandering habits, and, although he never again visited Ferrara, his old disposition to flit about from place to place seems to have clung to him like a disease. In this singular mode of existence he met with the strangest vicissitudes of fortune. One day he would be the most conspicuous object of a splendid court, crowned with lavish honors by the prince, and basking in the admiration of all beholders; another, he would be travelling alone on the highway, with weary steps and empty purse, and reduced to the necessity of borrowing, or rather begging, by the humblest suit, the means of sustaining existence. Such was his life for six or seven years.

At last, in November, 1594, he made his appearance at Rome. It was resolved that the greatest living poet of Italy should be crowned with the laurel in the imperial city, as Petrarch had been more than two hundred and fifty years before. The decree to that effect was passed by the Pope and Senate; but ere the day of triumph came, Tasso was seized