

TORQUATO TASSO.



HE successor of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio and Ariosto, the predecessor of Alfieri, Torquato Tasso ranks among the great poets of Italy, and of the world.

Living as he did in the 16th century, the period of growth and development of the European literature in general, but of decline for the Italian in particular, his glory, at least during his lifetime, was dimmed by the recollection of those who had gone before; Dante and Petrarch were dead. After the sunset twilight falls. Tasso perhaps was the first star that glimmered through this twilight; a star that shone with a clear and steady light but whose radiance was very different from, and very inferior to, the fiery, penetrating liquid light of the sun. A comparison between Tasso and the author of the "*Divina Commedia*" would be superfluous, and uncalled for. There be degrees of glory. In one of the chapels of the beautiful monastery of *Sant Onofrio*, in Rome, is a monument in honor of Tasso, on the base of which is inscribed the simple expression: *Pro Fide*. These two words are the very note of his famous epic, the *raison d'être* of the "*Jerusalem Delivered*" and his surest vindication of the accusations made against him. "For the Faith" he wrote; in the faith he died.

The same century, almost the same year that saw the Italian poet tuning his lyre to sing the glories, the virtues, the chivalry and the faith of the Christians bombarding the walls of Jerusalem, beheld the English Spenser, his flight arrested, his wings clipped by the earthward tendencies of the so-called Reformation, writing his laborious pastoral, his intended epic poem, in honor of the virtues, the graces and the golden locks (?) of "good Queen Bess." Which poet wrote with the nobler object need not be asked; the one heads the long list of English "literary snobs," to cull one of Thackeray's choice expressions; the other clasps hands with the "great and gentle spirits who rule us from their ruins"—he forms a link in the long chain of the great ones, great in consecrating their minds, their

results and all their energies to the faith; who found but one motto worth their acceptance, *Pro Fide*. In Tasso's age, the crusades were still considered "Holy wars." The glorious result of the first crusade was not yet forgotten; a ninth crusade was yet a possibility and men still dreamed that one day the Kingdom of Jerusalem would be re-established. Thus the theme of his poem was popular—a necessity for success. Written as it was when the poet's mind was sometimes clouded by insanity and always darkened by brooding melancholy, mingled perhaps with remorse for the short-comings of his youth, these considerations condone many pages that are reprehensible from a moral standpoint. The heart of a poet is exacting, and Tasso's was not an exception; Like every other of the noblest gifted his life had little happiness aside from his exceptional misery of a long and harsh imprisonment.

His "*Jerusalem*" received critical and appreciative praise from all sides, save from those whom he most wished to hear, or at least notice his work. The few generous words of admiration he waited for in vain from a certain number in "high places" outweighed, in his morbid disappointed judgement, the flood of praise that poured in upon him from the rest of world.

A few months before his death Pope Clement VIII. summoned him to Rome to receive the laurel crown, which in his younger days he had so ardently longed for. The poet, worn out in body, and with his mind no longer filled with the illusions of earthly glory, in obedience to this summons, returned to Rome, where, refusing to accept the costly apartments prepared for him, he lived quietly and peacefully with the monks of *Sant Onofrio*, and in the sunny gardens of the monastery even yet is shown the old oak tree, under which was Tasso's favorite seat. The month of April was appointed for the ceremony of the coronation, but as the winter glided by the poet's health became more feeble and his mind more detached from worldly things.

It was on the morning of the 25th of April, 1595, the eve of the day fixed for