

a relief from the gloomy solitude in which she had lived, an escape from the heartless people by whom she had been surrounded in her late time of trial, the restoration of the old man's health and peace, and a life of tranquil happiness. Sun, and stream, and meadow, and summer days, shone brightly in her view, and there was no dark tint in all the sparkling picture.

The old man had slept for some hours soundly in his bed, and she was yet busily engaged in preparing for their flight. There were a few articles of clothing for herself to carry, and a few for him; old garments, such as became their fallen fortunes, laid out to wear; and a staff to support his feeble steps, put ready for his use. But this was not all her task, for now she must visit the old rooms for the last time.

And how different was the parting with them from any she had expected, and most of all from that which she had oftenest pictured to herself. How could she ever have thought of bidding them farewell in triumph, when the recollection of the many hours she had passed among them rose to her swelling heart, and made her feel the wish a cruelty, lonely and sad though many of those hours had been! She sat at the window where she had spent so many evenings—darker far than this—and every thought of hope and cheerfulness that had occurred to her in that place came vividly upon her mind and blotted out all its dull and mournful associations in an instant.

Her own little room too where she had so often knelt down and prayed at night—prayed for the time which she hoped was dawning now—the little room where she had slept so peacefully, and dreamed such pleasant dreams—it was hard not to be able to glance round it once more, and to be forced to leave it without one kind word or grateful tear. There were some trifles there—poor useless things—that she would have liked to take away; but that was impossible.

This brought to mind her bird, her poor bird, who hung there yet. She wept bitterly for the loss of this little creature—until the idea occurred to her—she did not know how or why it came into her head—that it might by some means fall into the hands of Kit, who would keep it for her sake, and think perhaps that she had left it behind in the hope that he might have it, and as an assurance that she was grateful to him. She was calmed and comforted by the thought, and went to rest with a lighter heart.

From many dreams of rambling through light and sunny places, but with some vain object unattained which ran distinctly through them all, she awoke to find that it was yet night, and that the stars were shining brightly in the sky. At length the day began to glimmer and the stars to grow pale and dim. As soon as she was sure of this, she arose, and dressed herself for the journey.

## TASSO.

The Jerusalem, observes Mr. Hallam, is the great epic poem, in the strict sense, of modern times. It was justly observed by Voltaire, that in the choice of his subject Tasso is superior to Homer. Whatever interest tradition might have attached among the Greeks to the wrath of Achilles and the death of Hector, was slight to those genuine recollections which were associated with the first crusade. It was not the theme of a single people, but Europe; not a fluctuating tradition, but certain history; yet history so far remote from the poet's time, as to adapt itself to his purpose with almost the inflexibility of fable. Nor could the subject have been chosen so well in another age or country; it was still the holy war, and the sympathies of his readers were easily excited for religious chivalry; but, in Italy, this was no longer an absorbing sentiment, and the stern tone of bigotry, which perhaps might still have been required from a Castilian poet, would have been dissonant amidst the soft notes that charmed the court of Ferrara.

This great poem arose from the union of the dominant classical taste with the lingering love of romance or chivalry, blended, as it were, and harmonised by the strong religious feeling which had arisen out of the reviving Catholicism. Tasso himself is the irrefragable authority for his own design of harmonising in one poem the noble characteristics of the modern romance and the ancient epic; the richness and variety of the one, with the symmetry and unity of the other. The tender and sensitive temperament of Tasso, which turned away in unconquerable repugnance from the study of the law, applied itself with the severest study to the principles of poetical criticism. An epic poet at the age of eighteen; his Rinaldo had already something of the union of chivalrous interest and adventure with a simpler fable. But in his discourse on heroic poetry, which M. Ranke assigns to the twenty-first year of his age (A.D. 1564), Tasso developed the whole theory of his poetical design. After an eloquent description of the variety and unity of the world, he proceeds, 'So do I conceive that by an excellent poet, who is called *divine* for no reason but because he resembles in his work the Supreme Artificer, a poem might be formed, in which, as in a little world might be read, here the array of armies; here battles by land and sea, sieges, skirmishes, single combats, joustings; here descriptions of famine and of drought, tempests, conflagrations, prodigies; there might be found the councils of celestial and infernal beings, seditions, wanderings, chances, enchantments; there deeds of cruelty, of daring, of courtesy, of generosity; there love-adventures, happy or unhappy, joyous or melancholy; yet, nevertheless, the poem which comprehends this variety might be one, one in form and spirit; and that all these things

should be arranged in such a manner as to have a mutual relation and correspondence, a dependence either of necessity or of verisimilitude upon each other, so that one part either taken away, or changed in its position, would destroy the unity of the whole.'

The subject chosen by Tasso for his great poem, combined with singular felicity the truth of history with the richest fiction. It lay in a period in which history itself was romance; in which the wildest adventures of chivalry mingled with the vivid realities of life; its scene was placed in the marvellous East, independent of its sacred associations, so rich in wonder—in which the imagination of Europe had long wandered—among the courts of gorgeous satraps and sultans—in battle-fields where the turbaned and misbelieving hosts swarmed in myriads—the realms of boundless wealth, of pride, of magic, of seductive beauty, and of valour which made its chieftains worthy antagonists of the noblest chivalry: above all, it was a war of religion, it was Christendom against Mohammedanism, the cross against the crescent, the worshipper of Christ against the Saracen. It was, in this severe and solemn spirit, which the revival of Roman Catholicism had spread almost throughout Italy, that Tasso conceived and accomplished his poem.

Tasso had been educated in a school of the Jesuits, that order which was now in the first outbreak of its fervent piety, and zealous intolerance. He had received the sacrament at nine years old, and though comprehending little of the mystic significance of that holy rite, his heart had been profoundly impressed by the majesty of the scene and of the place, the preparation, the visible emotion of the communicants, who stood around with deep suppressed murmurs, or beating their breasts with their hands. The hatred of unbelief and heresy, mingled up with all these deep religious sentiments, found its free vent in a holy war against the infidels: while the exquisite tenderness of Tasso's own disposition, his amorous sensibilities, which—however we dismiss the tale of his passionate and fatal attachment to the royal Leonora—breathe throughout his youthful sonnets and madrigals, constantly relieved the ferocity of barbarous war, and the terrors of diabolical enchantment, by gentle and pathetic touches. The Sophronia, the Raminia, the Gildippe, and even Clorinna in her last hours, are the creatures of a mind sensitively awake to all that is pure, gentle and exquisite in woman; even over Armida herself, before he parts with her, the tender spirit of Tasso cannot help throwing some pathetic interest. It is this earnest religious sentiment which appears to harmonise the wild and incongruous materials assembled by Tasso in his poem. No great poet, perhaps scarcely Virgil himself, has imitated so copiously as Tasso. The classical reader is perpetually awakened to reminiscences of the whole cycle of the Latin poets; but it is all blended and fused together; it is become completely his own; his sustained style, of which almost the sole variation is from stately dignity to, sometimes, perhaps, luscious, sweetness—in which the grandeur not seldom soars into pomp, the softness melts into conceit—nevertheless appropriates, as it were, and incorporates all these foreign thoughts, images, and sentiments.

That which was the inspiration of his poem, this high wrought feeling, was fatal to his peace. It is clear that it was no hopeless passion, but a morbid dread of religious error, which is the key to his domestic tragedy. He was haunted with the consciousness that his mind was constantly dallying with awful thoughts and prescribed opinions. His terror, as was the natural consequence, deepened his doubts—his doubts aggravated his terror. Self-convicted he offered himself in his agony to scrutiny; he subjected himself to inquiries, and solemn acquittal could alone give rest to his perturbed spirit. "First," as M. Ranke truly states, the distressing case, "he appeared voluntary before the inquisitor at Bologna, who dismissed him with good advice. Soon after he presented himself before the inquisitor at Ferrara; he too gave him absolution. Yet even this did not content him. It appeared to him that the investigation had not been sufficiently searching, and that the absolution was not sufficiently full and authoritative: he wrote letters to the tribunal of the Inquisition at Rome, to the great inquisitor himself, to obtain a more ample absolution." All this with the degrading sense of his servile and dependent state at the court of Ferrara, the consciousness of great powers and great poetic achievements, which seemed unrequited or unhonoured; the envy of his enemies, which appeared to justify his mistrust of all mankind; his ill-judged, if not ill-intentioned treatment by his royal patrons, who, while they were proud of the fame which he reflected on their court, at one moment seem to have pampered him with misdirected kindness, the next irritated him by contemptuous harshness—all this, embittering and exasperating the religious doubts which he would shake off, but which clung to him—overthrew at length the harmony of his soul; and seemed to call for that restraint which, if he was not already mad, must inevitably make him so.

His poetic mind never recovered this fearful trial. In his more sober mood, he laid desperate hands on his own immortal poem, which was happily already too deeply stamped on the hearts of the people: the music of its high-wrought stanzas was already on the lips of the peasant or the gondolier, where it is still heard; the poem had been far too widely disseminated to submit to the process of reformation, to which he dedicated some unprofitable years. It is curious to examine the cold and pedantic Giudizio, in which he establishes the principles on which he chilled down the bright and youthful Jerusalemme Liberata to the lifeless Jerusalemme Con-

quistata. All the romance has withered away; the very exuberance, the tenderness, now find no responsive chord in the heart; the balance is destroyed; it drags down its heavy weight all on one side; the classical regularity and the historic truth of the fable or the religious orthodoxy of the sentiments, are the exclusive points on which he dwells. He boasts that every one of the characters in the *Jerusalem* finds a parallel in his poem, and that almost all the incidents are counterparts of his great model. In all that relates to the Deity or the preterhuman world, it is his sole study to prove his rigid orthodoxy; he quotes the authority of St. Jerome, St. Thomas, and that strange work which exercised such unbounded influence on the imagination of the dark ages, and attributed to St. Dionysius the Areopagite, became the indisputable authority with regard to the monarchy of heaven, the names, nature, and offices of all the hosts of the angels. If it could be read by any one familiar with the exquisite original, the *Conquistata* would be the most melancholy book in any language.

## CRITIQUE ON THE OLD POETS.

From an Introduction to the works of Beaumont and Fletcher.

There are few things more extraordinary in our Old Poets, than the violent contrast between what is good and what is bad in their verses: you perpetually find tulips growing out of sandbanks, lilies attached like lichens to the dry rocks; you not unfrequently catch the perfume of Sabaz amidst the pestilential rocks of Lethe's wharf, pluck Hesperian fruit from crabtrees, and, after being fed upon husks or wash-tubs, are regaled with a breakfast fit for the cherubim—three grains of ambrosia and a nut-shell crowned with nectar. The works of these poetic creators are like worlds produced by a sort of Manichean power, a double principle of Good and Evil, wherein the latter much predominates as to quantity, but the former is pre-eminent as to quality, and each counteracts the other without pause. Or they are the Deserts of Ammon, now presenting us immense reaches of dust, with here and there a stunted shrub or tuft of scutch-grass, now an oasis which raptures the eye of the mind with verdure the most luxuriant, the most refreshing. It may be hard to decide in some cases, whether this more provokes or pleases the student: certainly an English blonde looks fairer if we happen to see her among the brunettes of Caffraria, as all jewels are set off by foil. But, on the other hand, it is disagreeable to be prepared for a dose of wormwood by a spoonful of honey, to step from velvet turf upon sharp rubble. The flowers of this Antique Wilderness do indeed bloom aloft like red rose on triumphant briar,—which precious blossoms, if you attempt to gather, he generally has to wade through a mass of bramblewood, nettles, thistles, and robin-run-the-edge,—perhaps plunging ankle or chin deep into a hidden pool,—and comes out bearing his rose above his head like Caesar saving his Commentaries; but unlike him, pierced and beset as if he had been rolled down a hill in Regulus's barrel. Throughout Beaumont and Fletcher's poetic domain, the Enchantress, who appears when half visible a Venus rising from the sea, is a Syren and ends in a fish's tail. We must confess that Shakespeare himself scrawls by times with a dead-struck hand, though the huge flaccid grasps betrays a Briareus in paralysis; most often his weakness becomes manifest by a wrong choice of subject; he writes with disproportionate lengthiness round some futile conceit, like a boa strangling a squirrel, or gambols unwieldy about a pun, like a whale playing with a cockleshell. Milton seems to have been our first bird of untireable pinion, who could sustain himself for a long flight through the loftiest empyrean without almost one descent from his sublime level—in truth a 'mighty Orb of Song,' which power so divine projected, that it could swerve but little out of its course till completed. But our earlier poets are heteroclitic beings, half giants, half dwarfs.

Perhaps the unsettled and unconventional state of our language at that period may have rendered all composition very difficult—private letters prove what extreme trouble the richest minds had to lay themselves out on paper, the best educated to use even comprehensible grammar—and this would go some length towards explaining both why our earlier poets produced so much that we consider worthless stuff, when to produce aught whatever like verse was such a miracle; and also, why they often produced poetry far beyond ours, as their prodigious efforts to write, concentrated and exalted all their powers, ensuring either signal success or failure. The great ease with which now-a-days language may be wielded, with which we can express ourselves in any form or tone without any particular effort, without summoning or summing up our total energies, or putting them to their utmost for the production of verse, is one reason why modern poetry, while it never sinks so far beneath the medium height as ancient, never rises so far above it. A cultivated language falls of itself into sweetenings, which satisfy the writer and the reader.

The first remarkable sweetening and softening, united with weakening of our poetic language into its present state, may, I think, be observed in Beaumont and Fletcher; for Spenser, if he did not strengthen it, can hardly be said to have enfeebled what was rather rough than firm before him. Shakespeare had bred up the English courser of the air to the highest wild condition, till his blood became fire and his sinews Nemean; Ben Jonson, put a curb in his mouth, subjected him to strict manege, and fed him on astringent food, that hardened his nerves to rigidity; but our two authors took the reins off, let him run loose over a rank soil, relaxing all his fibres again, again to be fortified by Milton, and again to be rendered over-flexible by subsequent pamperers; not judicious trainers or masters. Such undulations the stream of every language must exhibit.