

may remain buried with myself, except that only which begins,

‘Or che l’aura mia dolce altrove spireva.’

“The oration I made at Ferrara, at the opening of the academy, I should be glad to have published, and also four books on heroic poetry: the last six cantos of Godfrey, and of the first two, such stanzas as may seem least faulty, if they all be previously corrected by Signor Scipio Gonzaga, Signori Venieri and Guarini, who, from the friendship and connection I have with them, will not, I am persuaded, refuse to take the trouble. Let them know, moreover, I would have them cut out, and repress, anything, without saving, which may appear superfluous or indifferent. But in making additions, or alterations, let them be most particular, as the work cannot be other than imperfect. If any other of my compositions should be deemed worthy of publication, they are at liberty to dispose of them as they please. As for my robes; they are in pledge to Aaron, for twenty-five lire and seven pieces of tapestry, which are in pledge for thirteen Scudi, to Signor Ascanorio. As for the rest in this house; I wish it to be sold, and the money appropriated to placing the subjoined epitaph on the tomb of my father, whose body is buried at Saint Paul. And if any impediment should occur in effecting these objects, let Signior Ercole apply to the most excellent Madame Leonora, who, I think, will, on my account, be liberal to him.”

This singular document proves the low state of Tasso’s finances, since his very garments were pledged; and it bears a touching proof of his devoted love to his father, and his wish to perpetuate it by erecting a suitable monument to his memory. But it was not to be the poet’s fate to require the aid of executors so soon. He had but barely tasted the troubled cup of life; and he was to live to drain its very dregs, made doubly bitter by cruel neglect and misunderstanding.

At the French court, Tasso met the most gratifying reception. Charles the Ninth was a warm patron of literature and the fine arts; and he heaped many testimonials of regard upon the poet. Perhaps, the most gratifying one to Tasso’s feelings was, the life of a poet who had seriously offended his Majesty, and was condemned to death. Friends interceded for him: his wife and children supplicated, with tearful eyes, on bended knee; but Charles was inexorable, till Tasso, who had become interested in the hopeless fate of the poet, begged his life as a personal favor to himself; and the monarch

granted, to the request of genius, what he had refused to natural affection.

But Tasso did not long enjoy his residence at the French court. His poverty subjected him to much insolence from the pampered menials of the cardinal; and his sensitive pride took alarm at the mere fancied coolness of his patron, which he attributed to the evil influence of the enemies which the favor he enjoyed with the monarch had raised up against him. He shrunk from the idea of being a neglected dependant; and asked, and obtained permission, to return to Italy; and he was soon once more in Ferrara, basking in the light of Leonora’s presence.

He made application to be received once more into Alphonso’s service; and the request was not only granted, but the conditions on which he entered it made so very advantageous, that he was enabled once more to resume his studies and literary pursuits. His gratitude to the duke for this indulgence was expressed with the greatest fervor, not only when speaking of him, but in his poems. In the commencement of the Jerusalem, he thus addresses him:

“August Alphonso! whose benignant hand
Welcomed a wandering stranger to thy land;
And guided safe, mid rocks and billows tost,
My sinking bark. To thee, much-honored host,
•The grateful offerings of my muse belong;
Nor thou disdain the dedicated song.
Thy name perchance my future theme may be,
And the great deeds I tell be told of thee!”

“He drew me,” said the poet to his friend Gonzaga, speaking on this subject, “from the darkness of my base condition to the light and reputation of the court. He relieved me from distress, and placed me in a comfortable position: he gave value to my writings, by hearing them often and willingly, and by honoring me with every kind of favor; he deemed me worthy of a seat at his table, and intimate conversations; nor was I ever denied my him any favor I asked.”

It was now that he felt himself in a condition to continue his “Jerusalem Delivered” with the steadiness it required; and he pursued it with unabated ardor, until interrupted by a serious illness, which left him in an exceedingly weak and nervous state. Before he had regained his usual health, the Duchess Barbara died, and he was obliged to tax his powers for the condolence of the duke, who was deeply grieved by the death of his amiable consort. At this time, and for his patron’s amusement, he composed the “Aminta,” a beautiful pastoral.

Before he could resume his pursuit with any ardor, he was attacked with a quartan ague that prevented him from writing through the winter.