

ing to her, and concluded by hoping, that she would be kind to the child.

This sort of compromise, or treaty, was forced on both sides, and therefore, like those made in greater life, not likely to subsist any longer than the contrasting parties could with convenience break it,—which soon happened on the part of the young lady; for her governess, the next day being gone out of the school, she fairly lock-

Rantipole at Calabar, upon the beautiful river Socamboa; and the creature had human form, with actions greatly resembling those of the *Marinulet*, or *little, little, little, little Monkey*; with narrow back, legs amazingly slender, was profuse in its imitations of laughter, and had an extreme propensity to utter divers modern languages, but hardly ever with so much success as to be perfectly understood.

44

* A person generally kept to say white is black, or black is white, according as the weather-cock of her lady's inclination may happen to change or turn about.

It has not unfrequently been the lot of men of genius, in all nations, and in every age, to be persecuted during their life, and to be variously spoken of after their death. This seems to be still more generally the fate of epic poets, than of the other votaries of the muse. Homer, Milton, Cambray, and Tasso in particular, may be cited as instances of the assertion. The fate of this last

was so much the harder, as he was perhaps more than any of the others endowed by nature, with a genius for epic poetry. At eight or nine years of age he had Homer and Virgil by heart, in their original languages, and had already begun to compose verses in his own. At seventeen, he published a poem in twelve cantos (*Il Rinaldo*); he was hardly twenty when he conceived the plan

XUM

plan of his *Jerusalem delivered*. Several cantos of it soon afterwards appeared, which awakened at once admiration and envy: these attended the poem when it was published entire; and over all Italy it was at the same time applauded and condemned.

It is not the life of Tasso that I mean to write; and the history of his misfortunes would here be misplaced. Every one knows the passion which he conceived for one of the sisters of the Duke of Ferrara, and the disgrace which was the consequence of it: the temporary loss of his reason is also known; and that, becoming a prey to melancholy, he wandered from town to town, till at last he was confined in the hospital of St Anne, where, however, he continued to produce sometimes essays, philosophical dialogues, or answers to criticisms on his poem; sometimes little pieces of poetry, which do not betray, any more than his prose, the alienation of his mind; being at last delivered from this place of constraint, and restored to the possession of his judgment, he had to struggle against new calamities; and, to complete his hard fate, death prevented his enjoying the triumph which after many unjust obstructions was preparing for him in the capitol.

All these circumstances, which make the story of his life so interesting, I mean not to consider; neither do I intend to mention his *Aminta*, the master-piece of pastoral poetry. It is by his *Jerusalem delivered* that he is seated conspicuously on the brow of Parnassus, and to this poem alone I confine my observations.

When it first appeared, that of Ariosto enjoyed the highest and most unanimous reputation. All other poets took it for their model, but their efforts to imitate it were vain. The young *Torquato* was sensible, that if he could equal that poet, it would not be by perusing the same

path: he knew that the *Orlando Furioso* possessed all the perfection that the epic romance is capable of, but that the regular epopee, the epopee of Homer and of Virgil, remained still unattempted by the Tuscan muses, and he hoped to come off with honour, from the arduous enterprise of treading the same difficult ground with them. He sincerely admired Ariosto, and neither hoped nor desired to push him from his place; but he was agitated night and day with the hope of obtaining a station equally distinguished, by a method which he no doubt considered as superior: and this appears from a letter of his to Horatio Ariosto, nephew to the poet.

Notwithstanding this admiration, and notwithstanding the care that Tasso took to steer a contrary course, his enemies accused him of having the presumption to cope with Ariosto; they harried him with criticisms; the editions of his poem were multiplied in every part of Italy, and the number of those that envied him increased with his reputation. His partisans defended him; indifferent persons hesitated in their opinions, as is always the case, before the reputation of a work is established; and the men of letters occupied themselves in publishing dissertations on the title, the plan, and the allegories of the poem. What satisfaction must it not give to a poet, thus to see, even at the expence of his piece, his native country entirely engrossed with his works!

At last the dialogue entitled *Pellegrino* appeared, on the subject of epic poetry. This work, in which Tasso was elevated far above Ariosto, and which gave his poem the preference in respect of plan, of manners, and of style, put all Italy into a ferment. It became the apple of discord. The numerous partisans of Ariosto exclaimed loudly against the pamphlet, but the loudest were the

the academicians of *La Crusca*. They wrote an answer to the dialogue. The spirit of party and the spirit of rival institutions, as dangerous in literature as in any art or science, pre-
sided over the dispute.

The *Jerusalem*, say the academicians, far from being a poem, is only a tedious and rigid compilation. The unity that reigns in it is dull and vulgar, like the dormitory of a convent, while that of the *paradiso* is lucid and elegant, like the facade of a palace. Tasso's plan is like a diminutive house, narrow and disproportioned, much too low for its length, and built, or rather heaped on ancient walls, like the vile rubbish that we see accumulated on the baths of Dioclesian. The author has only related, in Italian rhymes, histories that have been written in other languages: he is, therefore, not a poet, but a compiler in verse of a story not his own; and that story is more uncouth in the verse he has thought proper to employ, than metaphysics would be, if sung to the air of a jig. The web that Ariosto has woven is grand and magnificent; that of Tasso is not so much a web as a belt; and if he takes offence at the comparison, let him be told that his web is so long and so narrow, that it is like a mere thread than a belt. In his poem, if it deserves the name, the expressions are so contorted, harsh, forced, and disagreeable, that they are with difficulty understood. Ariosto conjoins brevity with perspicuity; but the brevity of Tasso ought rather to be called contipation. If he had meant to be concise, he would never have written so many little conceits on impertinent subjects, conceits so irksome to the reader, that he would almost sooner be put to the torture than read them again. This stuff, rugged, and unequal poem, is not

only destitute of perspicuity, but involved in the profoundest obscurity; in no place is it written with energy; in no place is it capable of awakening, far less of rousing, or of stimulating the passions; in every place it is tedious and without taste; it is every where stuffed with words that are either pedantic, foreign, or provincial, and which for the most part are not words, but barbarisms, &c.

It is difficult, at this day, to believe, that such things were spoken of Tasso in the name of an academy, and in the face of all Italy.

Tasso replied to this production, with a moderation and a modesty that brought the public over to his side. Many champions entered the lists for him, and many a lance was broken in his behalf, with these Florentines. Time produced its common effect; the criticisms and the attacks were forgotten, but the poem that had occasioned them, remained. The highest place was assigned to it in several parts of Italy, and no where was it ranked below the second.

The most learned and most intelligent, declined pronouncing between the merits of Tasso and of Ariosto. Indeed their subject, their genius, and their style, are so very different, that there is hardly any thing in both that can be the object of comparison. But it may truly be said, that in their different walks they are both the first. This was observed, and affirmed by Horace Ariosto, in the heat of the dispute; it has also been maintained by Metastasio in later times; who, however, says, that if he were obliged to decide between two such great men, his natural prepossession in favour of order, regularity, and precision, would make him incline to the side of Tasso.

The fate of the *Jerusalem* was in some measure happier in France than in Italy. Although at first known there

there only by wretched translations, it excited great admiration. It was ranked along with the Iliad and the Æneid, and towards the middle of the last century, it was even preferred to both.

Boileau, who at that time watch-

Tous les jours à la cour, un sot de qualité
Peut juger de travers avec impunité;
A Malherbe, à Racan, préférer Theophile,
Et le clinquant du Tasse à tout l'or de Virgile.

This expression was seized on by the enemies of Boileau, to turn him into ridicule; and many of them accused him of not understanding Tasso; availing themselves of this adage of Quintilian: 'We ought not to censure great men but with modesty and reserve, lest we be found to condemn what we do not understand.'

This precept is certainly dictated by sound wisdom; but unfortunately Boileau is now become one of those great men, whom we dare hardly censure, without exposing ourselves to the risk from which Quintilian would guard us. But let us endeavour to investigate the sense of the expression, before we examine its justice; and for fear of being guided by prejudice, let us bring Boileau himself to be his own interpreter.

Passing over the more moderate opinion that he had formed of Tasso when he wrote his art of poetry, the following anecdote is handed down by the Abbé d'Olivet, in the history of the academy, at the article *le Clerc*.

'Since the occasion invites me, I shall here relate what Boileau said, a little before his death, to a person who asked him if he had not changed his mind with regard to Tasso. So far am I, said he, from having changed my mind, that when I lately read his poem again, I was angry that I had not explained myself more at large on the subject of it, in some of my re-

ad over the interests of good taste, with the vigilance of a magistrate and the ability of a legislator, boldly attacked what he thought a literary heresy; and launched the thunder of his satire against it in a single verse.

'lections on Longinus. I would have begun by acknowledging, that Tasso's genius was sublime, inventive, and happily suited to poetry, and to the higher poetry. But then, coming to the use which he made of his talents, I would have shewn that judgment is not at all times with him a prominent feature; that in the greater part of his narrations, he is less anxious about what is necessary than what is agreeable; that his descriptions are almost always loaded with superfluous ornaments; that in painting the violent passions, and in the midst of the distresses excited by them, he often degenerates into pretinesses which instantly annihilate the pathos of the scene; that he is full of florid images, affected turns, and frivolous thoughts, which, far from being suited to the spirit of his poem, would have been more properly placed in the *Aminta*. Now, said he, all this being opposed to the solidity, the gravity, the majesty of Virgil, what is it else but *tinzel* compared with gold?

'I was present at the conversation, said the Abbé d'Olivet, and I am sensible, that the desire of preserving the last lessons of so great a master, has made me wander from my own subject, &c.'

This opinion, formed of Tasso, after a recent reading, when the judgment and taste of Boileau had attained

tained their utmost degree of perfection, and which the Abbé d'Olivet calls the lesson of a great master, I shall endeavour to investigate.

That Tasso's genius was sublime, inventive, and happily suited to poetry, and to the higher poetry, is what I think cannot be doubted, when one has read his poem. The subject of it is grand and elevated, the characters are noble and well supported, the thoughts and sentiments are warm and forcible, the speeches eloquent, the descriptions rich and varied; the plan is regular, without being monotonous, the incidents are unexpected, though naturally brought about, the episodes are interesting, the style is rapid, harmonious, and poetical. We find the author all along full of his subject, and are obliged to acknowledge, that the enthusiasm which dictated the beginning of his poem, never leaves him till its conclusion.

The subject which he undertook to celebrate was at that time a popular one. The memory of the ancient crusades was by no means extinct; and a century had scarcely passed since Pope Pius II. had projected a new one. Tasso was accordingly biassed by the spirit of his age, and he endeavoured likewise, in imitation of Virgil and of Ariosto, to involve a particular interest in the general one of his poem. As Virgil had sung the fabulous origin of the Augustan race, Ariosto celebrated that of the house of Este; and Tasso chose for his hero one of the branches of the same house, and took every opportunity of celebrating that Alphonso, who paid as little regard to his praises as the Cardinal Hypolito did to those of Ariosto.

But while Tasso and Ariosto appropriated to themselves the adulatory fictions of Virgil, they were unable to annex to their imitations the same degree of interest. There was a great difference between the Em-

peror of the world, and the petty sovereign of Ferrara. Ariosto gave himself little concern about this difference; the house of Este he continually presents to our view, and though we are sometimes disgusted with the frequency of its appearance, we cannot help admiring the art of the poet in offering up his incense in such various ways. But as Tasso was writing a real epic poem, and not a romance, he contented himself with giving a place in his work, to a prince of the house of Este, and of making him the Achilles of his new Iliad. He, therefore, speaks only once of the heroes of his race, and then dedicates to them but a few stanzas at the end of his seventeenth canto.

As the actions of Achilles do not make the intrigue of the Iliad, but his absence from the army of the Greeks, so it is the absence of Rinaldo from the camp of the Christians, which prolongs the siege of Jerusalem, and gives occasion to the incidents of the poem. Every thing previous to that absence, is only a preparation for what is to follow; the consequences of this exile make his return desirable; he does return and all obstacles give way; the Christians now find nothing to oppose them, Jerusalem is taken, and the poem ends.

The romantic spirit which animates the whole work, furnishes the means for removing Rinaldo from the Christian army: the same magic which forms the machinery and the marvellous of the poem, detains him far from the camp, and operates his return. Indeed, the greatest art is displayed in the management of this part of the action. The whole poem is almost entirely conducted with the same address; the incidents arise naturally out of one another, and concur to form a whole, which develops itself with the most lucid order. The poet proceeds rapidly towards his goal, and if he sometimes

stops by the way, we are always pleased to stop with him. In a word, with regard to fable or plan, few poets are equal to him, and perhaps none superior.

The diversity of people, of religions, and of customs, furnished him with an opportunity of drawing a great variety of portraits, and of characters. Of the persons in the Christian army, he makes some stand out on the foreground of his canvas, while the others are thrown back to a greater distance; but the whole perform their parts without embarrassment or confusion. The principal personages in the Pagan army, are represented with heroic characters of different kinds, and are shewn to so much advantage, that we sometimes think they eclipse the Christian heroes. The Egyptian army, which appears at the end of the poem, to give additional eclat to the valor of the Christians, furnishes new characters, new incidents, and new descriptions of foreign manners and customs; and affords another proof of the fertile imagination of Tasso, and of the *inventive* powers of his genius.

The evidence of its *sublimity*, may in some measure, be found, over the whole poem. It may be found in the invocation addressed to that muse, 'who, not with fading laurel, encircleth her brow on the fabled Helicon, but with a golden crown, studded with inextinguishable stars, among the celestial quires!' We find it in the proposition of his subject; in the look which the Eternal throws upon Syria and the Christian host, a look which penetrates the heart of all its chiefs; we find it in the abrupt and terrible annunciation of the character of Argantes, when he shakes his robe before the assembled Christians, and seems to let loose from it fury, discord, and war. The infernal counsel, though imitated, and almost translated from Vida,

the death of young Sueno, and his speech before the combat: the flight of Soliman; the description of the throne of the Eternal, and of that parching drought that brought the Christian army to the brink of destruction; an infinite number of thoughts and sentiments, sometimes expressed in the noblest and most poetical style, as in the instance of that sage who shewed Rinaldo the true good, not in enchanted plains, amidst fountains and flowers, with nymphs and syrens; but on the rugged top of that mountain where virtue dwells; sometimes merely indicated by the expression given to the features of the face, as when the same Rinaldo, being informed of Goliath's design to seize him, smiled contemptuously before he spoke, and a dreadful rage shewed itself in his smile; in short, a thousand circumstances every where through the poem are striking proofs of the elevation and *sublimity* of Tasso's genius.

But let us see whether all these beauties are not obscured, by the faults which Boileau ascribes to the poem.

In the first place, it must be observed, that the *Jerusalem delivered* was begun when Tasso was still very young. As he finished a canto, he took pleasure in reading it to his friends; he lent it to them without suspicion, and they copied it without reserve. It was accordingly against his will, and before he was able to correct the different parts of it, that his poem was published and dispersed over Italy. A little time after its publication his misfortunes commenced, and put it out of his power to make the corrections he saw better than any body else it required. His opinion of its imperfections, and his intentions to remove them, appear in many of his own letters, and in those of his friends. Judge then if at this day, that poem can be considered as faultless, the imperfections of which

were

were seen and acknowledged by the author, and which at a more advanced period in life he used to call the pasture of his youth. But let us examine more particularly, whether the matter and the friend of Racine has justly appreciated the merits of Tasso.

1. *Judgment*, says he, *is not at all times with him a prominent feature*. By judgment, he means that which Horace says is the foundation and source of the art of writing well. It is that judgment which is an enemy to all extravagance, which is void of affectation, and is far fetched thoughts, which always confines the most exuberant genius and the most fertile imagination within just bounds. It shines with a mild light in the works of all the good authors of antiquity, because the ancients lived nearer to nature, they consulted her alone, and in order to paint her, they borrowed no colours but those she herself furnished them with. But it is a quality found rarely among the moderns, because, in all nations, authors rather follow the taste of their own times than the voice of nature; and because that taste, like the manners of the times, is but an absurd compound of prejudice and barbarism.

Few authors have courage enough to despise the taste of their nation and their age. When Tasso wrote, Italy was infected with affectation and scholastic philosophy. Tasso had introduced a sort of spiritism or mysticism in love, and his followers, who had not the genius of their original, imitated his faults, till their writings became totally unintelligible. They invented a number of far-fetched expressions, which, perhaps, were at that time too frequent not to seem natural. The first poems of Tasso, notwithstanding the superiority of his understanding, shew, that he was far from being able to guard against the false refinement of his age.

When he began his *Jerusalem*, he undoubtedly meant to change his manner, and to imitate, both in style and otherwise, Homer and Virgil, whom he incessantly studied, and of whom he never spoke without a degree of enthusiasm. But we know the power of habit on the mind as well as on the body. In spite of all his efforts, we but too often find, in the midst of the greatest beauties of his poem, the unhappy vestiges of his original habits.

The heroic or epic romances, with which Italy had been teeming from the *Morgante* to the *Orlando furioso*, had also crowded the language and imagination of the Italians, with expressions and ideas irreconcilable with good sense or good taste. Being seduced, as it were, from his youth, with the reading of those works, and having himself, at the age of seventeen, figured as an author in that line, it was impossible for Tasso, notwithstanding the just notions he had acquired of the true Epopee, to abstain from the faults he had been accustomed to excuse, and even to imitate in the romances of chivalry.

The philosophy of Tasso was that of Aristotle, conjoined with that of Plato. He had learnt from the former, all the cunning and subtilty of disputation, of which he takes advantage in his prose works. From Plato he had learnt to addict himself to contemplation, and his soul easily received the idea of that moral beauty which the first of philosophers so well conceived, and has so eloquently expressed. We discover evident traces of platonism throughout his poem, in the ideal beauty of his thoughts and maxims; but we likewise discover them in those metaphysical expressions of love which Petrarch had made fashionable, and which, in their pleasures, their pains, and their complaints, Tasso's lovers never fail to employ, instead of the language

XUM

language of nature. From Plato too, he had received an excessive taste for allegory. He was so much convinced that the poems of Homer and Virgil were allegorical, that he wished the *Jerusalem* to be considered as an allegory.

Such are the prejudices which Tasso had early imbibed, and which

he had not sufficiently overcome when his *Jerusalem* was composed. They seem also to form the weight of the argument against him, for all the faults with which he is reproached by Boileau, may be regarded as the effect and necessary consequence of these early prejudices.*

the kingdom of Sicily and Sardinia; in which places, if a Jew be found, and he deny the Popish religion, he is in danger to be condemned, and executed for it; and yet profit and benefit allureth them to dwell in those countries, notwithstanding their fears and dangers; and themselves are willing to forget and so neglect to teach their children their native language, rather than they will lose

be members, which could by record prove themselves to be native Jews; and for defect herein, I observed above three hundred refused; though, doubtless, they were true-born Jews, yet they could not by record prove themselves so to be; and for this they were not admitted to be members of the council; but they did abide without the rail with the strangers that were there; and the num-