

**HEATH'S GERMAN SERIES.
GOETHE'S TORQUATO
TASSO, EDITED FOR THE
USE OF STUDENTS**

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Heath's German Series. Goethe's Torquato Tasso, Edited for the Use of Students by Calvin Thomas

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Johann Wolfgang Goethe.

HEATH'S GERMAN SERIES.

GOETHE'S TORQUATO TASSO.

EDITED FOR THE USE OF STUDENTS

BY

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PREFACE.

IN preparing this edition of Goethe's *Tasso*, I have addressed myself rather to the student of literature, the student of Goethe, than to the student of the German language in and for itself. The book is not intended for beginners in German, but for such readers as have already become familiar with the every-day facts of the language. The grammatical and lexical notes are therefore few in number, and deal only with what is peculiar or exceptional. Translations are also given but sparingly, it being the editor's opinion that much help of that sort is baneful. Usually, where it has seemed necessary to give assistance with regard to the meaning of a passage, I have preferred to do so by means of a paraphrase, leaving to the student the valuable exercise of working out for himself a correct and felicitous translation.

But while in the grammatical and lexical notes the utmost brevity has been essayed, the historical and literary commentary will be found rather copious than scanty. The greater works of Goethe are, as is well-known, closely related to his life, and his *Tasso* is particularly so. To understand and enjoy it, one must be in a position to read between the lines, and to sympathize, intellectually at least, with the moods and the experiences that gave it birth. Hence the somewhat extended Introduction. *Voir venir les choses*, to see the thing coming, is, wherever it is practicable, the best method of literary study. If any are disposed to think that I have said more than enough upon the relation of the play to its author's personal experiences, I will only quote in self-defence the opinion of the lamented Wilhelm Scherer, that in matters of this kind we cannot go too far (*Zusätze über Goethe*, p. 126).

While the Introduction deals amply with the genesis and the psychological import of the play, the Notes aim to throw as much light as possible upon the poet's mode of procedure. Particularly I have sought to illustrate fully his manner of dealing with the materials offered him in his Italian authorities. Hence the numerous quotations from Serassi and others. The student should be admonished that the point of these notes is not to settle the comparatively idle question, *whether* the poet has in any case "followed history," but rather to show *how*, in general, he has transfigured history by choosing, rejecting, amplifying, moulding, and embellishing his materials to suit his own artistic purpose.

For an account of the principles upon which the text has been edited, the reader is respectfully referred to Appendix II.

Of the many books that have aided me more or less in my work, a list of the more important will be found in Appendix I. Among the commentators I probably owe most to the veteran Düntzer, whose researches will always be indispensable to the editor of Goethe, even if his opinions occasionally are not so. Next to that of Düntzer, the commentaries of Strehlke and of Kern have been most serviceable to me. All particular indebtedness to these or to other writers I aim to acknowledge wherever it occurs.

For information given or assistance rendered me in connection with my work, my thanks are due to Dr. Bernhard Suphan, Director of the Goethe-Archives at Weimar, and to Professors Karl Weinhold of Breslau, and E. L. Walter of the University of Michigan.

CALVIN THOMAS.

ANN ARBOR, August 28, 1888.

INTRODUCTION.

I.

GENERAL CHARACTER OF GOETHE'S TORQUATO TASSO.

IN Eckermann's "Conversations with Goethe," under date of May 6, 1827, we read as follows :

"The conversation turned upon Tasso, and the question arose, what idea Goethe had sought to embody in the drama. 'Idea,' said Goethe, 'I could hardly tell. I had the life of Tasso, and I had my own life, and putting together these two singular figures with their peculiarities, I obtained my Tasso. To him, by way of prosaic contrast, I opposed Antonio, for whom I also had models. As for the rest, the general situation* was the same in Weimar as in Ferrara; and I can truly say of my delineation, that it is *bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.*'"

These words contain, indeed, no information that could not have been obtained from other sources, and we cannot even be sure that Goethe ever used the exact expressions here ascribed to him. Nevertheless, if we may assume only

* The exact language of Eckermann is, at this point: „Die witteren Hof-, Lebens- und Liebesverhältnisse waren übrigens in Weimar wie in Ferrara.“

that Eckermann reports correctly the general sense of the language employed by Goethe, the passage quoted still remains highly interesting, and may very properly serve as a starting-point for the following introductory study; for we are here told in clear terms and on the highest authority how the play of *Tasso*, in its most general aspects, ought to be regarded.

In the first place, it will be noticed, the poet cautions us against supposing that the work was written in the interest of some abstract ethical doctrine; he declares that he could hardly tell what his "idea" was. This does not mean that the play is entirely devoid of ethical significance, but only that the didactic or philosophical element in it is incidental, and is not the center about which and for the sake of which the whole was built up. The poet's admonition being duly borne in mind, the ethical import of the drama will still be, within limits, a proper object of interest.

In the second place, we are given to understand that this play, made by a blending of things Italian with things German, stands in a peculiarly intimate relation to its author's life. The manner of this blending and the nature of this relation it will be the main purpose of the following pages to trace out; first, however, one or two general remarks will be in place. Goethe's *Tasso* rests broadly upon the life of the actual Tasso, and so may be called in some sense a historical drama. Innumerable historical details are made use of by Goethe in one way and another,

and even the most trifling touches in his portraiture can often be traced back to hints found in his reading. Nevertheless, the facts of history are treated by him with a very free hand, and are everywhere adapted to his own purposes. Attention is paid to what is called local color, but little or no effort is made to depict the characters of the Duke of Ferrara and his courtiers as they actually were. The action is based mainly upon veritable occurrences, but the chronology and the causal connection of these occurrences were for the most part quite different in fact from what they are in the play. Goethe's catastrophe is based upon what he himself very well knew to be a highly dubious myth. The scene is laid in Italy in the latter part of the sixteenth century; but the characters really belong to no particular land and no particular epoch. They are not even of Weimar as Goethe actually knew it. It is indeed true, and is of the very essence of the play, that it reflects its author's inner experiences, and to some extent also the circumstances and even the personages by which he was surrounded during his earlier years at Weimar; but we must not understand "reflection" in this case to imply faithful reproduction as in a mirror. Ferrara is not Weimar in disguise, nor is Tasso Goethe; that is to say, Tasso is not wholly Goethe, and still less is he the whole of Goethe. A similar statement would hold also for the other characters: there is not one of them that is a portrait from life, and there is also not one of them that does not owe more or less to "models" in Weimar.