

**CONJECTURES AND RESEARCHES  
CONCERNING THE LOVE,  
MADNESS, AND IMPRISONMENT  
OF TORQUATO TASSO, VOL. I**

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Conjectures and researches concerning the love, madness, and imprisonment of Torquato Tasso,  
Vol. I by Richard Henry Wilde

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**RICHARD HENRY WILDE**

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ANDY WAIN  
CLUB  
YEARLY

## CHAPTER I.

THERE is scarcely any poet whose life excites a more profound and melancholy interest than that of TORQUATO TASSO.

His short and brilliant career of glory captivates the imagination, while the heart is deeply affected by his subsequent misfortunes. Greater fame, and greater misery, have seldom been the lot of man, and a few brief years sufficed for each extreme.

An exile even in his boyhood, the proscription and confiscation suffered by his father deprived him of home and patrimony. Honor and love, and the favor of princes, and enthusiastic praise, dazzled his youth. Envy, malice, and treachery—tedious imprisonment and imputed madness—insult, poverty, and persecution, clouded his manhood. The evening of his days was saddened by a troubled spirit, want, sickness, bitter memories, and deluded hopes; and when at length a transient gleam of sun-

shine fell upon his prospects, DEATH substituted the IMMORTAL for the LAUREL crown.

Mystery adds its fascination to his story. The causes of his imprisonment are hidden in obscurity : it is still disputed whether he was insane or not.

A rumor of daring love was common in his age, and has come down to ours ; but it is contradicted by the most industrious, and in some respects the most accurate, though perhaps the least candid, of his biographers.

Still, unquestioned facts enough remain to rouse our curiosity. Courtly intrigues—a friend's treachery—intercepted letters—false keys—a quarrel and a combat, are universally admitted. The origin of this strife—the secrets revealed—the contents of the papers so unjustifiably examined, have exercised and often baffled literary ingenuity, which, still untired, because unsatisfied, returns to its task with fresh ardor. Some connection between the misfortunes of the poet, and the strange occurrences faintly whispered by his contemporaries, or obscurely hinted by himself, is naturally suspected ; and the severity of his punishment, if punishment it was, implies, one would suppose, no ordinary



crime. We can hardly persuade ourselves that a custody so rigorous was intended merely for the cure of a mental malady, and the works he composed during its continuance are scarcely reconcilable with madness; yet it is difficult to read his letters and believe him always sane.

The tyranny of ALPHONSO, indeed, is ill disguised even by his most earnest apologist; but of the poet's own defence we have merely a mutilated copy. Few points of literary history, therefore, are more interesting, or more obscure, than the LOVE, the MADNESS, and the IMPRISONMENT of TASSO.

Various conjectures respecting them have been offered; none, perhaps, entirely satisfactory. The value of those which follow will depend on their probability, and that, again, on the number of incidents collected and compared, and the candor and sagacity employed in their collation. To draw, as far as possible, from his own writings, whatever light they may afford concerning the most doubtful events of his life, is the object of this essay.

The mode of pursuing such researches is familiar to every one. Truth is discovered by

a close analysis of circumstantial evidence, and doubt remains only where a sufficient knowledge of minute facts, or sufficient skill and patience in comparing them, is wanting.

This species of investigation was first successfully applied to TASSO by GINGUENÉ; but, in a literary history, the space allotted to one poet is necessarily too narrow for the full development of those results which may be expected from this system of inquiry.

ROSINI pursued the same track, and to him we are indebted for the discovery of TASSO'S early passion for LAURA PEPERARA, and the adduction of new and strong presumptive evidence of his subsequent attachment to the Princess LEONORA of ESTE. ROSINI'S essay, however, is not free from errors, as might be readily demonstrated, were it not more agreeable to acknowledge its general merit. For, after all, profiting by his labors, it will be far easier to avoid his faults, than it would have been to make the least of his discoveries, unassisted by his industry.\*

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\* Free use has been made of the learned professor's essay in the following pages, and a general confession of numerous obligations to it is adopted, to save the reader the annoyance of

Of TASSO's professed biographers, MANSO, his friend and contemporary, wrote with general candor, enthusiasm, credulity, and carelessness. Yet there are instances where either he himself, or his publisher, has been betrayed into falsehood by the servility of fear. SERASSI, far more exact in his details, can hardly be acquitted of occasional dissimulation. The spirit of system, and a peculiar theory, have been as fatal to BLACK, as devotion to the HOUSE of ESTE was to the Abate, whom he closely followed; and of the rest little more need be said, than that they

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frequent references. Indeed a mere translation of ROSINI was originally intended, and in some places nothing more has been performed. But, material differences of opinion occurring in the progress of his task, it became impossible to follow the text without repeating what the writer did not believe. Notes contradicting it would have tended to provoke a controversy he most earnestly desires to avoid, and thus, as the easier and less invidious duty, he was induced to remodel and rewrite, and, at last, greatly enlarge the work.

In saying this, it is not intended to detract, in the slightest degree, from the just value of ROSINI's essay. On the contrary, it is freely admitted, that he cleared the way for his successors, whose researches, but for his, would have been more difficult, perhaps impossible. If they acquire more minute, and more correct knowledge of the subject, it is only because, by availing themselves of his experience, they find leisure to explore and describe what he merely guessed at or discovered.