

Gerusalemme Liberata

(“Jerusalem Delivered”)

by Torquato Tasso

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FIRST BOOK

THE ARGUMENT.

God sends his angel to Tortosa down,
Godfrey unites the Christian Peers and Knights;
And all the Lords and Princes of renown
Choose him their Duke, to rule the wares and fights.
He mustereth all his host, whose number known,
He sends them to the fort that Sion hights;
The aged tyrant Juda's land that guides,
In fear and trouble, to resist provides.

I

The sacred armies, and the godly knight,
That the great sepulchre of Christ did free,
I sing; much wrought his valor and foresight,
And in that glorious war much suffered he;
In vain 'gainst him did Hell oppose her might,
In vain the Turks and Morians armed be:
His soldiers wild, to brawls and mutinies prest,
Reduced he to peace, so Heaven him blest.

II

O heavenly Muse, that not with fading bays
Deckest thy brow by the Heliconian spring,
But sittest crowned with stars' immortal rays
In Heaven, where legions of bright angels sing;
Inspire life in my wit, my thoughts upraise,
My verse ennoble, and forgive the thing,

If fictions light I mix with truth divine,
And fill these lines with other praise than thine.

III

Thither thou know'st the world is best inclined
Where luring Parnass most his sweet imparts,
And truth conveyed in verse of gentle kind
To read perhaps will move the dullest hearts:
So we, if children young diseased we find,
Anoint with sweets the vessel's foremost parts
To make them taste the potions sharp we give;
They drink deceived, and so deceived, they live.

IV

Ye noble Princes, that protect and save
The Pilgrim Muses, and their ship defend
From rock of Ignorance and Error's wave,
Your gracious eyes upon this labor bend:
To you these tales of love and conquest brave
I dedicate, to you this work I send:
My Muse hereafter shall perhaps unfold
Your fights, your battles, and your combats bold.

V

For if the Christian Princes ever strive
To win fair Greece out of the tyrants' hands,
And those usurping Ismaelites deprive
Of woful Thrace, which now captived stands,
You must from realms and seas the Turks forth drive,
As Godfrey chased them from Juda's lands,
And in this legend, all that glorious deed,
Read, whilst you arm you; arm you, whilst you read.

VI

Six years were run since first in martial guise
The Christian Lords warraid the eastern land;
Nice by assault, and Antioch by surprise,
Both fair, both rich, both won, both conquered stand,
And this defended they in noblest wise
'Gainst Persian knights and many a valiant band;
Tortosa won, lest winter might them shend,
They drew to holds, and coming spring attend.

VII

The sullen season now was come and gone,
That forced them late cease from their noble war,
When God Almighty form his lofty throne,
Set in those parts of Heaven that purest are
(As far above the clear stars every one,
As it is hence up to the highest star),
Looked down, and all at once this world beheld,
Each land, each city, country, town and field.

VIII

All things he viewed, at last in Syria stayed
Upon the Christian Lords his gracious eye,
That wondrous look wherewith he oft surveyed
Men's secret thoughts that most concealed lie
He cast on puissant Godfrey, that assayed
To drive the Turks from Sion's bulwarks high,
And, full of zeal and faith, esteemed light
All worldly honor, empire, treasure, might:

IX

In Baldwin next he spied another thought,

Whom spirits proud to vain ambition move:
Tancred he saw his life's joy set at naught,
So woe-begone was he with pains of love:
Boemond the conquered folk of Antioch brought,
The gentle yoke of Christian rule to prove:
He taught them laws, statutes and customs new,
Arts, crafts, obedience, and religion true;

X

And with such care his busy work he plied,
That to naught else his acting thoughts he bent:
In young Rinaldo fierce desires he spied,
And noble heart of rest impatient;
To wealth or sovereign power he naught applied
His wits, but all to virtue excellent;
Patterns and rules of skill, and courage bold,
He took from Guelpho, and his fathers old.

XI

Thus when the Lord discovered had, and seen
The hidden secrets of each worthy's breast,
Out of the hierarchies of angels sheen
The gentle Gabriel called he from the rest,
'Twixt God and souls of men that righteous been
Ambassador is he, forever blest,
The just commands of Heaven's Eternal King,
'Twixt skies and earth, he up and down doth bring.

XII

To whom the Lord thus spake: "Godfredo find,
And in my name ask him, why doth he rest?
Why be his arms to ease and peace resigned?"

Why frees he not Jerusalem distrest?
His peers to counsel call, each baser mind
Let him stir up; for, chieftain of the rest
I choose him here, the earth shall him allow,
His fellows late shall be his subjects now.”

XIII

This said, the angel swift himself prepared
To execute the charge imposed aright,
In form of airy members fair imbared,
His spirits pure were subject to our sight,
Like to a man in show and shape he fared,
But full of heavenly majesty and might,
A stripling seemed he thrive five winters old,
And radiant beams adorned his locks of gold.

XIV

Of silver wings he took a shining pair,
Fringed with gold, unwearied, nimble, swift;
With these he parts the winds, the clouds, the air,
And over seas and earth himself doth lift,
Thus clad he cut the spheres and circles fair,
And the pure skies with sacred feathers clift;
On Libanon at first his foot he set,
And shook his wings with rory May dews wet.

XV

Then to Tortosa's confines swiftly sped
The sacred messenger, with headlong flight;
Above the eastern wave appeared red
The rising sun, yet scanty half in sight;
Godfrey e'en then his morn-devotions said,

As was his custom, when with Titan bright
Appeared the angel in his shape divine,
Whose glory far obscured Phoebus' shine.

XVI

“Godfrey,” quoth he, “behold the season fit
To war, for which thou waited hast so long,
Now serves the time, if thou o’erslip not it,
To free Jerusalem from thrall and wrong:
Thou with thy Lords in council quickly sit;
Comfort the feeble, and confirm the strong,
The Lord of Hosts their general doth make thee,
And for their chieftain they shall gladly take thee.

XVII

“I, messenger from everlasting Jove,
In his great name thus his behests do tell;
Oh, what sure hope of conquest ought thee move,
What zeal, what love should in thy bosom dwell!”
This said, he vanished to those seats above,
In height and clearness which the rest excel,
Down fell the Duke, his joints dissolved asunder,
Blind with the light, and stricken dead with wonder.

XVIII

But when recovered, he considered more,
The man, his manner, and his message said;
If erst he wished, now he longed sore
To end that war, whereof he Lord was made;
Nor swelled his breast with uncouth pride therefore,
That Heaven on him above this charge had laid,

But, for his great Creator would the same,
His will increased: so fire augmenteth flame.

XIX

The captains called forthwith from every tent,
Unto the rendezvous he them invites;
Letter on letter, post on post he sent,
Entreatance fair with counsel he unites,
All, what a noble courage could augment,
The sleeping spark of valor what incites,
He used, that all their thoughts to honor raised,
Some praised, some paid, some counselled, all pleased.

XX

The captains, soldiers, all, save Boemond, came,
And pitched their tents, some in the fields without,
Some of green boughs their slender cabins frame,
Some lodged were Tortosa's streets about,
Of all the host the chief of worth and name
Assembled been, a senate grave and stout;
Then Godfrey, after silence kept a space,
Lift up his voice, and spake with princely grace:

XXI

“Warriors, whom God himself elected hath
His worship true in Sion to restore,
And still preserved from danger, harm and scath,
By many a sea and many an unknown shore,
You have subjected lately to his faith
Some provinces rebellious long before:
And after conquests great, have in the same
Erected trophies to his cross and name.

XXII

“But not for this our homes we first forsook,
And from our native soil have marched so far:
Nor us to dangerous seas have we betook,
Exposed to hazard of so far sought war,
Of glory vain to gain an idle smook,
And lands possess that wild and barbarous are:
That for our conquests were too mean a prey,
To shed our bloods, to work our souls’ decay.

XXIII

“But this the scope was of our former thought,—
Of Sion’s fort to scale the noble wall,
The Christian folk from bondage to have brought,
Wherein, alas, they long have lived thrall,
In Palestine an empire to have wrought,
Where godliness might reign perpetual,
And none be left, that pilgrims might deny
To see Christ’s tomb, and promised vows to pay.

XXIV

“What to this hour successively is done
Was full of peril, to our honor small,
Naught to our first designment, if we shun
The purposed end, or here lie fixed all.
What boots it us there wares to have begun,
Or Europe raised to make proud Asia thrall,
If our beginnings have this ending known,
Not kingdoms raised, but armies overthrown?

XXV

“Not as we list erect we empires new

On frail foundations laid in earthly mould,
Where of our faith and country be but few
Among the thousands stout of Pagans bold,
Where naught behoves us trust to Greece untrue,
And Western aid we far removed behold:
Who buildeth thus, methinks, so buildeth he,
As if his work should his sepulchre be.

XXVI

“Turks, Persians conquered, Antiochia won,
Be glorious acts, and full of glorious praise,
By Heaven’s mere grace, not by our prowess done:
Those conquests were achieved by wondrous ways,
If now from that directed course we run
The God of Battles thus before us lays,
His loving kindness shall we lose, I doubt,
And be a byword to the lands about.

XXVII

“Let not these blessings then sent from above
Abused be, or split in profane wise,
But let the issue correspondent prove
To good beginnings of each enterprise;
The gentle season might our courage move,
Now every passage plain and open lies:
What lets us then the great Jerusalem
With valiant squadrons round about to hem?

XXVIII

“Lords, I protest, and hearken all to it,
Ye times and ages, future, present, past,
Hear all ye blessed in the heavens that sit,

The time for this achievement hasteneth fast:
The longer rest worse will the season fit,
Our sureties shall with doubt be overcast.
If we forswow the siege I well foresee
From Egypt will the Pagans succored be.”

XXIX

This said, the hermit Peter rose and spake,
Who sate in counsel those great Lords among:
“At my request this war was undertake,
In private cell, who erst lived closed long,
What Godfrey wills, of that no question make,
There cast no doubts where truth is plain and strong,
Your acts, I trust, will correspond his speech,
Yet one thing more I would you gladly teach.

XXX

“These strifes, unless I far mistake the thing,
And discords raised oft in disordered sort,
Your disobedience and ill managing
Of actions lost, for want of due support,
Refer I justly to a further spring,
Spring of sedition, strife, oppression, tort,
I mean commanding power to sundry given,
In thought, opinion, worth, estate, uneven.

XXXI

“Where divers Lords divided empire hold,
Where causes be by gifts, not justice tried,
Where offices be falsely bought and sold,
Needs must the lordship there from virtue slide.
Of friendly parts one body then uphold,

Create one head, the rest to rule and guide:
To one the regal power and sceptre give,
That henceforth may your King and Sovereign live.”

XXXII

And therewith stayed his speech. O gracious Muse,
What kindling motions in their breasts do fry?
With grace divine the hermit's talk infuse,
That in their hearts his words may fructify;
By this a virtuous concord they did choose,
And all contentions then began to die;
The Princes with the multitude agree,
That Godfrey ruler of those wars should be.

XXXIII

This power they gave him, by his princely right,
All to command, to judge all, good and ill,
Laws to impose to lands subdued by might,
To maken war both when and where he will,
To hold in due subjection every wight,
Their valors to be guided by his skill;
This done, Report displays her tell-tale wings,
And to each ear the news and tidings brings.

XXXIV

She told the soldiers, who allowed him meet
And well deserving of that sovereign place.
Their first salutes and acclamations sweet
Received he, with love and gentle grace;
After their reverence done with kind regret
Requited was, with mild and cheerful face,

He bids his armies should the following day
On those fair plains their standards proud display.

XXXV

The golden sun rose from the silver wave,
And with his beams enamelled every green,
When up arose each warrior bold and brave,
Glistering in filed steel and armor sheen,
With jolly plumes their crests adorned they have,
And all tofore their chieftain mustered been:
He from a mountain cast his curious sight
On every footman and on every knight.

XXXVI

My mind, Time's enemy, Oblivion's foe,
Disposer true of each noteworthy thing,
Oh, let thy virtuous might avail me so,
That I each troop and captain great may sing,
That in this glorious war did famous grow,
Forgot till now by Time's evil handling:
This work, derived from my treasures dear,
Let all times hearken, never age outwear.

XXXVII

The French came foremost battailous and bold,
Late led by Hugo, brother to their King,
From France the isle that rivers four infold
With rolling streams descending from their spring,
But Hugo dead, the lily fair of gold,
Their wonted ensign they tofore them bring,
Under Clotharius great, a captain good,
And hardy knight ysprong of princes' blood.

XXXVIII

A thousand were they in strong armors clad,
Next whom there marched forth another band,
That number, nature, and instruction had,
Like them to fight far off or charge at hand,
All valiant Normans by Lord Robert lad,
The native Duke of that renowned land,
Two bishops next their standards proud upbare,
Called Reverend William, and Good Ademare.

XXXIX

Their jolly notes they chanted loud and clear
On merry mornings at the mass divine,
And horrid helms high on their heads they bear
When their fierce courage they to war incline:
The first four hundred horsemen gathered near
To Orange town, and lands that it confine:
But Ademare the Poggian youth brought out,
In number like, in hard assays as stout.

XL

Baldwin, his ensign fair, did next dispread
Among his Bulloigners of noble fame,
His brother gave him all his troops to lead,
When he commander of the field became;
The Count Carinto did him straight succeed,
Grave in advice, well skilled in Mars his game,
Four hundred brought he, but so many thrice
Led Baldwin, clad in gilden arms of price.

XLI

Guelpho next them the land and place possest,

Whose fortunes good with his great acts agree,
By his Italian sire, fro the house of Est,
Well could he bring his noble pedigree,
A German born with rich possessions blest,
A worthy branch sprung from the Guelphian tree.
'Twixt Rhene and Danubie the land contained
He ruled, where Swaves and Rhetians whilom reigned.

XLII

His mother's heritage was this and right,
To which he added more by conquest got,
From thence approved men of passing might
He brought, that death or danger feared not:
It was their wont in feasts to spend the night,
And pass cold days in baths and houses hot.
Five thousand late, of which now scantly are
The third part left, such is the chance of war.

XLIII

The nation then with crisped locks and fair,
That dwell between the seas and Arden Wood,
Where Mosel streams and Rhene the meadows wear,
A battel soil for grain, for pasture good,
Their islanders with them, who oft repair
Their earthen bulwarks 'gainst the ocean flood,
The flood, elsewhere that ships and barks devours,
But there drowns cities, countries, towns and towers;

XLIV

Both in one troop, and but a thousand all,
Under another Robert fierce they run.
Then the English squadron, soldiers stout and tall,

By William led, their sovereign's younger son,
These archers be, and with them come withal,
A people near the Northern Pole that wone,
Whom Ireland sent from loughs and forests hoar,
Divided far by sea from Europe's shore.

XLV

Tancredi next, nor 'mongst them all was one,
Rinald except, a prince of greater might,
With majesty his noble countenance shone,
High were his thoughts, his heart was bold in fight,
No shameful vice his worth had overgone,
His fault was love, by unadvised sight,
Bred in the dangers of adventurous arms,
And nursed with griefs, with sorrows, woes, and harms.

XLVI

Fame tells, that on that ever-blessed day,
When Christian swords with Persian blood were dyed,
The furious Prince Tancredi from that fray
His coward foes chased through forests wide,
Till tired with the fight, the heat, the way,
He sought some place to rest his wearied side,
And drew him near a silver stream that played
Among wild herbs under the greenwood shade.

XLVII

A Pagan damsel there unwares he met,
In shining steel, all save her visage fair,
Her hair unbound she made a wanton net,
To catch sweet breathing from the cooling air.
On her at gaze his longing looks he set,

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