

**ION; A TRAGEDY
IN FIVE ACTS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649616046

Ion; A Tragedy in Five Acts by Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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SIR THOMAS NOON TALFOURD

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LONDON :

PRINTED BY A. J. VALPY,
RED LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION.

Not Published.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

TO

THE REV. RICHARD VALPY, D. D.,

THIS ATTEMPT AT DRAMATIC COMPOSITION,

AS A SLENDER TOKEN OF GRATITUDE,

FOR BENEFITS WHICH CANNOT BE EXPRESSED IN WORDS,

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY

HIS AFFECTIONATE PUPIL,

T. N. TALFOURD.

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P R E F A C E.

" I left no calling for this idle trade,
No duty broke." POPE.

THE title of this Drama is borrowed from the Tragedy of Euripides, which gave the first hint of the situation in which its hero is introduced--that of a foundling youth educated in a temple, and assisting in its services; but otherwise there is no resemblance between this imperfect sketch and that exquisite picture. It has been written,—not indeed without a view to an ideal stage, which should never be absent from the mind of the humblest aspirant to dramatic composition, but without any hope of rendering it worthy to be acted. If it were regarded as a drama composed for actual representation, I am well aware that not in "matter of form" only, but in "matter of substance," it would be found wanting. The idea of the principal character,—that of a nature essentially pure and disinterested, deriving its strength entirely from goodness and

thought, not overcoming evil by the force of will, but escaping it by an insensibility to its approach—vividly conscious of existence and its pleasures, yet willing to lay them down at the call of duty,—is scarcely capable of being rendered sufficiently striking in itself, or of being subjected to such agitations, as tragedy requires in its heroes. It was farther necessary, in order to involve such a character in circumstances which might excite terror, or grief, or joy, to introduce other machinery than that of passions working naturally within, or events arising from ordinary and probable motives without; as its own elements would not supply the contests of tragic emotion, nor would its sufferings, however accumulated, present a varied or impressive picture. Recourse has therefore been had, not only to the old Grecian notion of Destiny, apart from all moral agencies, and to a prophecy indicating its purport in reference to the individuals involved in its chain, but to the idea of *fascination*, as an engine by which Fate may work its purposes on the innocent mind, and force it into terrible action, most uncongenial to itself, but necessary to the issue. Either perhaps of these aids might have been permitted, if used in accordance with the entire spirit of the piece; but the employment of *both* could not be justified in a drama intended for visual presentation, in which a certain verisimilitude is essential to the faith of the spectator. Whether any groups surrounded with the associations of the Greek mythology, and subjected to the capricious laws of Greek superstition, could be endowed by

genius itself with such present life as to awaken the sympathies of an English audience, may well be doubted; but it cannot be questioned that except by sustaining a stern unity of purpose, and breathing an atmosphere of Grecian sentiment over the whole, so as to render the picture national and coherent in all its traits, the effect must be unsatisfactory and unreal. Conscious of my inability to produce a work thus justified to the imagination by its own completeness and power, I have not attempted it; but have sought, out of mere weakness, for "Fate and metaphysical aid" to "crown withal" the ordinary persons of a romantic play. I have, therefore, asked far too much for a spectator to grant; but the case is different with the reader who does not seek the powerful excitements of the theatre, nor is bound to a continuous attention; and who, for the sake of scattered sentiments or expressions which may please him, may, at least by a latitude of friendly allowance, forgive the incongruities of the machinery by which the story is conducted. This drama may be described as the phantasm of a tragedy,—not a thing of substance mortised into the living rock of humanity,—and therefore incapable of exciting that interest which grows out of human feeling, or of holding that permanent place in the memory, which truth only can retain.

As this attempt at dramatic composition is not submitted to the public, but intended only for the perusal of friends, it may not be deemed an intrusion on their indulgence, if I state, on my own behalf, the circumstances under which it was written,

and the motives which induce me, at this time, to seek for it that partial circulation to which alone it is fitted.

There are few perhaps among those who have written for the press, predominant as that majority now is over the minority of mere readers, who have not, at some season of their lives, contemplated the achievement of a tragedy. The narrow and well-defined limits by which the action of tragedy is circumscribed—the various affections which may live, and wrestle, and suffer within these palpable boundaries—its appeal to the sources of grief common to humanity, on the one hand, and to the most majestic shapings of the imagination on the other, softening and subduing the heart to raise and to ennoble it,—and perhaps, more than all, the vivid presentment of the forms in which the strengths and weaknesses of our nature are embodied, its calamities dignified, and its high destiny vindicated, even in the mortal struggle by which for a season it is vanquished,—may well impress every mind, reaching, however feebly, towards the creative, with a fond desire to imitate the great masters of its “so potent art.” This desire has a powerful ally in the exuberant spirits of youth, when the mind, unchilled by the sad realities of life, searches out for novelty in the forms of sorrow, from which it may afterwards rejoice to escape, and from which it may turn for relief to the flickerings of mirth, and to brief snatches of social pleasure. Perhaps “gorgeous Tragedy” left a deeper impression when she passed “sweeping by” my intellectual vision, than would