

**LYTERIA: A
DRAMATIC POEM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649641116

Lyteria: A Dramatic Poem by Josiah Phillips Quincy

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Cover @ 2017

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JOSIAH PHILLIPS QUINCY

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SECOND EDITION.

BOSTON:
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.

MDCCLV.

PREFACE.

THERE is a beautiful thought somewhere expressed by Jean Paul Richter, that, to the Unseen Spirit, each age of the world appears far more noble than in the record it leaves behind. History and tradition tell us, chiefly, of the self-sacrifice of *men*; while another class of heroic d eds — those wrought by woman in her social relations, and consequently unsustained by present applause, or the hope of future fame — are unchronicled.

The purpose of the following poem is to exhibit feminine devotion, put to the highest possible proof; thereby to suggest how often the greatest achievements of man result from domestic promptings, given through personal suffering, that the world suspects as little as it could understand.

The liberties taken with the tradition of the Curtian leap, in its present dramatic form, are excused by precedents too common and well

known to be quoted. The noxious exhalations of the gulf (which have actually attended similar fissures) must be supposed, in order to create a necessity sufficiently strong for so great a sacrifice.

An approach has been made to the unities of time and place. The incidents of each act are given in a single scene, and the period of action is less than three days.

In attempting this most difficult form of composition,— a dramatic poem of artistic construction, elevated sentiment, and forcible diction,— a strong sense was entertained of the many requirements, and consequent possibilities of failure, attending its execution. It was, also, not forgotten that such a production, even when good, is to the taste of comparatively few, and can seldom meet the success of general popularity.

Several lines, purposely incomplete, will be found throughout the poem. Indebtedness is acknowledged to the novel *Zanoni*, for the suggestion of one or two passages in the first act.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

LUCIUS GREGORIUS — *Consul.*

DABLIUS — *High Priest in the Temple of Jupiter.*

MARCUS CURTIUS — *A noble Roman.*

AULUS AND PROTHUS — *Priests of Jupiter.*

PUBLIUS — *Friend to Curtius.*

LYTHERIA — *Daughter to Dablius.*

SCENE — *Rome.*

ACT I.

*Apartment in the Temple of Jupiter — Arch at Centre — Doors
seen through the Arch. Dælius discovered. Enter Aulus.*

DÆLIUS.

THE length'ning shadows tell the hour of prayer
Will soon revisit us. Is all prepared
For evening sacrifice? — our altars heaped
With choicest fruits that frugal Earth provides,
To pay her children's labor? — For this night,
That finds our city bathed in quietness
So perfect, asks a bloodless offering.

AULUS.

All is prepared. Each shrine is decked for service; —
Yet I had thought, upon these festivals,
When men have clamored the high praise of Jove,
For hours in his temple, 't was our custom

To leave unsaid the private ritual,
 Which days of quiet pay the setting sun.
 Thine age demands a season of repose,
 After the tedious rites of sacrifice
 But now concluded.

DÆLIUS.

The eternal Powers,
 By whom we are created, fed, and blessed,
 May justly claim each moment they bestow.
 The longest life of man is all too short
 To utter his thanksgiving for that word
 Which called him out of nothing, and bestowed
 Capacity to taste celestial joys,
 That, sometime, in this tenement of flesh,
 Shadow the great hereafter of our hope.
 No, Aulus! while this frame (unbent by time)
 Can serve before the altar, be assured
 That each awakening morn and closing eve
 Shall find me prostrate to adore the Gods, —
 Whose blessings showered upon my latter years,
 Are concentrate in one rich gift — My Child.