

**CROESUS, KING OF
LYDIA: A TRAGEDY
IN FIVE ACTS**

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Croesus, King of Lydia: A Tragedy in Five Acts by Alfred Bate Richards

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ALFRED BATE RICHARDS

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IN FIVE ACTS**

CRÆSUS,
KING OF LYDIA;

A Tragedy,
IN FIVE ACTS:

BY
MAJOR RICHARDS.

SECOND EDITION,
REVISED BY THE AUTHOR.

LONDON:
LONGMAN, GREEN, LONGMAN, & ROBERTS.

1861.

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TO HIS FRIEND,

GEORGE B. C. LEVERSON,

ASSOCIATED WITH HIM IN SOME OF THE BEST AND WORTHIEST
UNDERTAKINGS, AS HE DEEMS THEM, OF HIS LIFE,

This Play is Inscribed,

WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF REGARD AND ESTEEM,

BY THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

THE first edition of this Play was published anonymously, in the year 1845, and, in spite of the faults and imperfections with which it abounded, was most favourably received by the critics. This will be seen by the subjoined extracts from the contemporary press.* Although the *Times* objected to the combination of the "Elizabethan and Classical" style with "some leaven of the present day," which "difficult task" it considered the Author to have attempted, yet that journal bestowed on it two notices of considerable length, and its verdict was, on the whole, most flattering. In quoting these critical opinions the Author runs the risk of being charged with vanity; but he ventures to claim the right of recording the praises bestowed on the then anonymous offspring of his imagination, not so much in order to influence later judgment on its merits and demerits, as to bespeak attention and interest, which he is aware are very seldom bestowed upon an unacted Play.

* Of this Play, when published in 1845, the *Times*, in its first notice, said—"The (the Author) has abundance of images at command, and oftentimes much felicity of expression;" and in a second notice spoke of "the beauty of a great portion of the Play," and of "isolated parts of the most refined and beautiful description." After quoting several passages, the *Times* further observed—"The Author's picture of canine life and the story of the lion-hunt are remarkably fine. Landseer might find a good subject in the Prince (Atys), addressing his hounds in the kennel, and lamenting his confinement from sport. There is a delightful quaintness in the whole passage, ending 'wherest the hound emphatic wags his tail.'" After describing the concluding speech of Orestes as "simple, grand, and touching," the *Times* wrote that "no one can deny his (the Author's) claim to great power and poetic feeling." The *Morning Post*, advertng to Orestes, said—"They who pursued it must have marked with admiration the glowing imagination, vigorous language, and manly sentiments which were strewed in careless haste about its page." The *Athenaeum* admitted its "power both of poetic idea and treatment," and the *Dispatch* called it a "magnificent tragedy," adding—"for a magnificent one it really is."

On the Tragedy, as it now stands, the Author confesses himself to have bestowed some care. He pleads now neither youth nor haste, as an excuse for its defects. He may, perhaps, be allowed to state, that, even in its early and imperfect form, it received the warm commendation of the late Mr. Justice Talfourd, who predicted its future success. It has now elicited the favourable appreciation of a few literary friends, who have evinced a strong interest in its re-publication.

And now a word as to the subject and its treatment may not be amiss. After the Play was published, the Author met with a remark of the celebrated German philosophical critic, Schlegel, to the effect that the story of Cræsus was the finest subject he knew of for a drama, and that it was strange no one had attempted it. As for the mixture of the Elizabethan and Classical style, the Author ventures, with great deference to the opinion to which he has alluded as expressed by the critic of the *Times*, to maintain and defend his view. A strictly classical drama has always appeared to him to want soul and passion. Anachronisms are, of course, to be shunned in the treatment of an antique story; but in dealing with the period in which Sophocles wrote, surely it is unnecessary to endeavour to imitate the style of Sophocles. Otherwise, one might as well insist on the female characters being played by male performers, and on the re-establishment of the use of the mask and cothurnus of the ancient votaries of Thespis. Love was not a usual element of the Greek Drama, although the ancients were by no means insensible to that passion; but is there any reason why it should be banished from a Tragedy, whose story is chosen from a classical repertory? It would be as reasonable to do this, as to insist that no painter of a mediæval or classical subject should use a lately invented colour.

The Play is, the Author hopes, sufficiently classical, although not a strictly classical Play in the pedantic sense.

The characters are intended to be human and of any age, such as we can imagine them and as they can be pictured in modern language and conception. Let this effort, then, be considered as a combination of the Elizabethan and Classical style with a modern leaven, and if this condemn it, the Author can only plead that he could not write it in good Greek, or find readers, had he been capable of so doing. With regard to the modern leaven, it is true that Julius Cæsar cannot well be introduced, save in the popular rampant burlesque of the day, speaking of street-railways, nor ought a serious Cleopatra to figure in crinoline, nor Boadicea to preside over a tea-table. But pride, passion, avarice, jealousy, and the extremes of poverty and wealth, have been the characteristics of human life in all ages. As far as we can gather from Herodotus, the reign of Cræsus was distinguished for the most extraordinary accumulation of wealth by the few, and the most abject poverty of the labouring classes. It is stated by that picturesque historian that the game of astragali, a species of dice, was invented by the political economists of that epoch, in order that the lower classes might eat and play on alternate days—a fable, if it be one, of extraordinary significance. The Author does not, therefore, drag the Irish or Indian famine into his Play; the suggestion, if there be any, belongs to the world-history of the human race. The *μίσγας ἄλλοος* which Æschylus denounced was with its retributive effects the characteristic also of Rome—it may yet be that of other countries. If the fatal passion of Paris for Helen were made the subject of a modern classical Elizabethan drama, would the treatment of the story of that celebrated co-respondent of antiquity