

STRAFFORD: A TRAGEDY

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649448524

Strafford: A Tragedy by Robert Browning

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ROBERT BROWNING

**STRAFFORD:
A TRAGEDY**

140 1111111111, 20, 204.

270111

STRAFFORD:

A TRAGEDY.

BY ROBERT BROWNING.

WITH NOTES AND PREFACE BY

EMILY H. HICKEY,

AUTHOR OF "A SCULPTOR, AND OTHER POEMS."

AND AN INTRODUCTION BY

SAMUEL R. GARDINER, LL.D.,

PROFESSOR OF MODERN HISTORY, KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

LONDON:

GEORGE BELL AND SONS, YORK STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

1884.

CHISWICK PRESS:—G. WHITTINGHAM AND CO., TOOKS COURT,
CHANCERY LANE.

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

It was in 1835 that Mr. Browning was introduced to Macready the tragedian, and it was out of this acquaintance that the production of "Strafford" came. Macready saw in "Paracelsus" the work of a true tragic poet, and suggested that Browning should write a play for him. Macready wrote in his journal in 1836: "Browning said that I had *hit him* by my performance of *Othello*, and I told him I hoped I should make the blood come. It would, indeed, be some recompense for the miseries, the humiliations, the heart-sickening disgusts which I have endured in my profession if, by its exercise I had awakened a spirit of poetry whose influence would elevate, ennoble, and adorn our degraded drama. May it be!"

A little later, Macready said to Mr. Browning, "Write a play, Browning, and keep me from going to America!" Mr. Browning replied, "Shall it be historical and English? What do you say to a drama on Strafford?"

In March, 1837, the play was put in rehearsal, and produced at Covent Garden Theatre on the 1st of May. To quote Mr. Edmund Gosse's account in "The Century" for Dec., 1881, from which I have taken the above details:—

"It is time now to deny a statement that has been repeated *ad nauseam* in every notice that professes to give an account of Mr. Browning's career. Whatever is said or not said, it is always remarked that his plays have 'failed'

on the stage. In point of fact, the three plays which he has brought out have all succeeded, and have owed it to fortuitous circumstances that their tenure on the boards has been comparatively short. 'Strafford' was produced when the finances of Covent Garden Theatre were at their lowest ebb, and nothing was done to give dignity or splendour to the performance. 'Not a rag for the new tragedy,' said Mr. Osbaldiston. The *King* was taken by Mr. Dale, who was stone-deaf, and who acted so badly that, as one of the critics said, it was a pity that the pit did not rise as one man and push him off the stage. All sorts of alterations were made in the text; where the poet spoke of 'grave grey eyes,' the manager corrected it in rehearsal to 'black eyes.' But at last Macready appeared, in the second scene of the second act, in more than his wonted majesty, crossing and recrossing the stage like one of Vandyke's courtly personages come to life again, and Miss Helen Faucit threw such tenderness and passion into the part of *Lady Carlisle* as surpassed all that she had previously displayed of histrionic power. Under these circumstances, and in spite of the dull acting of Vandenhoff, who played *Pym* without any care or interest, the play was well received on the first night, and on the second night was applauded with enthusiasm by a crowded house. There was every expectation that the tragedy would have no less favourable a 'run' than 'Ion' had enjoyed, but after five nights, Vandenhoff suddenly withdrew, and though Elton volunteered to take his place, the financial condition of the theatre, in spite of the undiminished popularity of the piece, put an end to its representation."

When the play was rehearsing, Mr. Browning gave Macready a *lilt* which he had composed for the children's song in Act V. His object was just to give the children a thing children would croon; but the two little professed singers, Master and Miss Walker, preferred something that should exhibit their powers more effectually, and a regular *song*

was substituted, scarcely, it will be thought, to the improvement of the play. By kind permission I print the original music.

Andante.



O bell'an-dars, Per barca in mare, Ver-so la se-ra, Di prima-

slentando e diminuendo.



ve-ra, O bell'an-da-ra, O bell'an-da - - ro.

The text of this edition has been revised by Mr. Browning. There are a good many changes in the punctuation, and a few verbal alterations. By a printer's error, unfortunately not discovered in time, a comma at the end of line 54, Act I., Scene 1, has been replaced by a period.

I am privileged to print a letter in which Lady Martin most kindly complies with my request that she should write a few lines on the character of Lady Carlisle, which she so beautifully rendered when the play was first produced:—

“ You ask me to write a few words about the character of Lucy Percy, Countess of Carlisle, as drawn by Mr. Browning in his play of ‘Strafford.’ That it is purely imaginary, he has told us himself in his preface. It is, therefore, not to be looked at in relation to any record of what the real Lady Carlisle was. It is drawn so firmly and clearly, that I feel it almost a wrong to my friend, Mr. Browning, to attempt to put my own idea of it into such words as one unaccustomed, like myself, to write on such things, can command. All I can say is, that I think Mr. Browning set himself a very difficult task in drawing a woman, full of love and devotion to a

man who, while he could not help being grateful for such devotion to his interests, and attracted by her charms as a woman, yet was so engrossed by personal and public interests, and the conflict with political adversaries, that he gives little or no sign of a reciprocal affection. There was great danger in working out this idea, and placing Lady Carlisle at a disadvantage;—for little sympathy is shown for a woman who shows her love, and meets only the coldest return. But over this difficulty the poet has, I think, triumphed. Among the other characters, of whom so many are selfish, headstrong, weak, or wayward, she seems to me to stand out in striking colours, such are the clearness of her perceptions, the fearlessness of her courage, the depth and nobleness of her love.

"I was a mere girl, and a novice on the stage, when the play was produced—but I remember well what struck me as the true note of Lady Carlisle's character, and how difficult I felt the task of trying to give it expression. But the soul of nobleness which shines throughout all her words and acts, helped me in a great measure through my anxious ordeal."

The historical Lady Carlisle was the daughter of the ninth Earl of Northumberland. In 1639, she had been for three years a widow. Her husband was James, Lord Hay, created successively Viscount Doncaster and Earl of Carlisle.

For a sketch of this strange woman, see Lodge's "Portraits of Illustrious Personages," &c., vol. v., in Bohn's Library. Sir Tobie Matthews' "character of the most excellent Lady, Lucy, Countess of Carlisle," prefixed to a collection of letters, which Donne edited in 1660, is of sufficient interest to repay a careful perusal. Lodge has an engraving of her portrait by Vandyke. There is a younger portrait of her along with her sister, Dorothy, Countess of Leicester, at Bilton, near Rugby, a relic of the days when Addison lived there.

Waller's *Saccharissa* was her niece.

In annotating this play I have had before me the probable needs of students and the possible needs of teachers. Some time ago, when speaking of this play as a subject for study, a lady said to me, "How can a *modern work* be studied? What is there to say about it?" This remark must have originated in a feeling that etymology and verbal points in general are the things to be considered in teaching English literature, and that where there is little to do in the way of hunting up obsolete words there is little to do in any way. It seems to me that "Strafford," offering much to the more reader, offers greatly more to the student, and that the hours spent over it will not be regretted. I have tried to give help, as far as possible, by *suggestion*, and have therefore frequently used the form of questions, instead of merely appending notes. It has appeared to me that the special beauty of certain passages should not be "sign-posted," but that the post should be left to speak for himself, as far as an annotated edition is concerned.

I would suggest that the play should be read through, twice, if possible, before any use be made of the notes, and that the student should keep steadily in mind the necessity of considering the play *as a whole*.

I shall take it as a kindness if any suggestions be sent to me, with a view to making a second edition, should the work be fortunate enough to reach one, more helpful than the first.

I wish to express my very warm thanks to Mr. Browning for his readily given permission to issue this edition of "Strafford"; for his explanation of three or four passages—I being specially indebted to him for most of the note on y. 2, 40; and for his revision of the text.

I have also to thank Dr. Abbott for some good hints, of which I have duly availed myself. I owe much gratitude to Professor Hales for his careful reading of my notes, and for numerous valuable suggestions, nearly all of which I have endeavoured to carry out.