

**LAYS OF SOUTH
AFRICA ON TOPICS
PRINCIPALLY MODERN**

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Lays of South Africa on topics principally modern by Stafford Cruikshanks

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STAFFORD CRUIKSHANKS

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BY
STAFFORD CRUIKSHANKS.

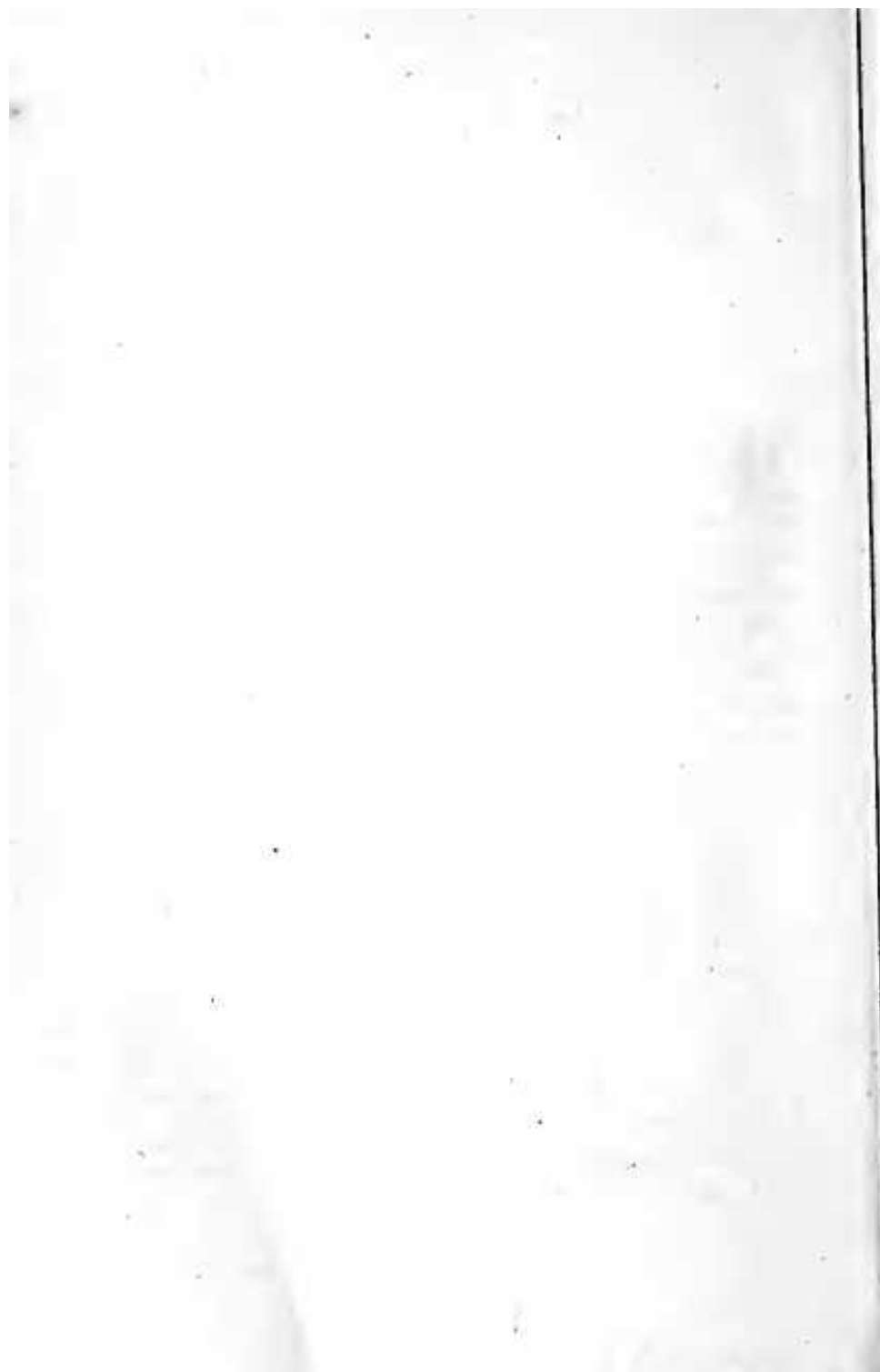
Author of "Predestination," "Tales," &c.

IMPROVED EDITION—COMPLETE.

"I hate when Vice can bolt her arguments,
And Virtue has no tongue to check her pride,"
Milton.

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PREFACE.

MY SOUTH AFRICAN LAYS have all been written in South Africa, and are so far, at least, true to their title, as most of them will also be found in other respects. The exceptions will not, perhaps, offend by number or irrelevancy. This I wish to say without claiming any particular acquaintance with the country, or knowledge of it, beyond what is within the reach of any observer not remarkable for dullness. Yet some things in this book may appear new, even to South African readers; many of whom may not know, till informed here, that the "Meteor Scene" was a reality, or that "Bog-na-fin"—of disputed etymology—is a suburb of Grahamstown.

A heartfelt desire shall be accomplished if any good, in the way of instruction or even of amusement, can in this way be imparted to the Reading Public, especially the young, whose approbation has already gone far towards making me indifferent to the dictum of professional fault-finders, to whom literary criticism is pretty much what politics was to CRAIG in "ADAM BEDE"—a thing rather of assumed than actual intuition. Surely, reader, it has often struck you as somewhat anomalous, that while not one in

ten thousand is a poet, almost every man is a critic? Is it worthy of Nature to fancy that she works so irregularly?

From the true critic little, indeed, is to be apprehended. Where he cannot approve, he censures with fairness. If too much in fashion to countenance a living BANIM, or CLARE, or CLARENCE MANGAN, he is also too humane to wish him dead. He can, and doubtless will, in the present instance make some allowance for efforts prosecuted amid the duties of more than one arduous calling, and in the face of difficulties and obstructions not to be recounted here. It may possibly be asked if I desire any comparison with men like those named above; but the enquirer will please divide with me the responsibility of replying. He may himself be a pursuer of knowledge under difficulties, and certainly not the less so, though a rigid investigation should have the effect of proving him inferior to Archimedes—I mean, of course, in success! Every warrior cannot easily conquer an old world, nor every explorer discover a new one.

Still there exists a certain literary exclusiveness. Poetry is not recognised in our midst. Distance must “lend enchantment to the view.” Some would seem to believe that the “count” of poets is made up, and that the “bright roll”—as Keats expresses it—“is in Apollo’s hand.” Others are exclusive in a different way; we have seen what its writer called an “Essay on Three Living Poets,” which essay is proscriptive enough in its very title. But really if criticism of this character be worth anything,

we should have more of it. What, for instance, would our essayist think of a dissertation on "Three Living Physicians," "Three Living Divines," or "Three Living Soldiers?" Should he find such production written to his own exclusion—assuming him to be an Esculapian, an ornament to Holy Orders, or an officer of the line—is there nothing which *his* next critique would have to urge against narrow-mindedness, Fadlaleen intolerance, and so forth? The criticisms of Luke Milbourne may convince us that Dryden was not Virgil; but we know, without any criticism at all, that the reverend critic himself was not Paul, nor yet Augustine.

To mere word-critics, as a body, I must confess as a certain amount of indifference, till I am informed what book, document, or composition is sacred to them; and an equal indifference to censors of another order, who discover that my sentiments on Temperance do not tally with those enunciated in a few camp ditties, penned in earlier life. If they are foes—as some one has said of similar assailants—let them enjoy their triumph; and if friends, they will be glad of my reformation.

A few words on the question of responsibility may be added here. No line or sentence ever finds its way into my publications by dictation or advice. It is all very fine for men to pretend to have written for their own amusement, and published by the solicitation of friends, or to counteract spurious Editions, &c. I, at all events, shall not try to deceive anyone by such-like artifices, which, after

all, cannot deceive so very many! No man writes who is not conscious of abilities of some sort, and quite as vain of them as any *friends* can be. Instances I forbear citing.

For the good cause of Truth, I cannot but feel humiliated in having done so little! To have projected great things may have been among my earlier fancies; but who can recall the past or trust to the future? For the present, kind reader, whether in South Africa or elsewhere, I say Farewell; wishing you all happiness. *Veritas vos in libertatem vindicabit.*

KINGWILLIAMSTOWN, CAPE OF GOOD HOPE,
SOUTH AFRICA, 1881.

