

**TRUE TO  
THE CORE**

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True to the Core by Angiolo Robson Slous

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**ANGIOLO ROBSON SLOUS**

**TRUE TO  
THE CORE**



TRUE TO THE CORE.

A Story of the Armada.

THE T. P. COOKE PRIZE DRAMA, 1866.

BY

ANGIOLO ROBSON SLOUS, *Sloous*

AUTHOR OF

"THE TEMPLAR," "HAMILTON OF BOTHWELLHAUGH," "LIGHT AND SHADOW,"  
ETC. ETC.

"The subject of my story is the Dawn of England's glory,  
When her stripling Navy smote with mortal stroke the giant Spain,  
And her laudsmen, true and ready, show'd a front both bold and steady,  
A front whose'er a foeman comes they'll surely show again."—OLD SEA BOYS.

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LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1866.

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TO THE  
MASTER, WARDENS, AND COUNCIL  
OF THE  
ROYAL DRAMATIC COLLEGE,  
AND  
EVERY WELL-WISHER TO THAT EXCELLENT INSTITUTION,  
THIS DRAMA  
Is Respectfully Dedicated  
BY  
ITS AUTHOR.

## P R E F A C E .

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ALTHOUGH familiar to the theatrical world, it is, perhaps, not generally known that the late accomplished actor, Mr. T. P. Cooke, bequeathed a sum of money to the Royal Dramatic College, the interest of which, at certain intervals, was, in the form of a prize, to be given to the Author of the best original Nautical or National Drama, the awardment of such prize being regulated by the conditions which usually govern a public competition. The prize was £100, and the successful candidate was required, by the stipulations of Mr. Cooke's will, to surrender to the Dramatic College all right and control over the future of his drama, the Master and Council of the said College possessing the exclusive right of determining at what theatre the piece in question should be performed, and also appropriating all profits that might arise to the benefit of the excellent Institution over which they preside.

In a pecuniary sense, the reward was certainly not a tempting one, and the conditions linked with it of a somewhat stringent and irritating nature. But there is always something animating in a contest. Besides, it was of course imperative that the pieces sent in should be original. The plot and incidents could not be filched from continental dramatists, and this (to me at least) imparted an additional zest for trying a fall in an arena from which the plunder of Parisian theatres was to be rigidly excluded. For these reasons, in a rash hour, I was tempted to become a candidate for the T. P. Cooke Prize, though not, I confess, without sundry warnings to abandon my intention.

Most of us, I believe, possess amongst our circle of friends one whose peculiarity it is to see everything through the medium of a very gloomy atmosphere. I, at any rate, am blessed with one of these unpleasant, but useful Mentors, who thus, with almost cheerful alacrity, at once pointed out "a Rock ahead:"—"Should you fail, and no doubt you *will* fail, you will be annoyed; should you succeed, you will only create enemies. And your subject! The Spanish Armada! Why, the very name suggests the *Crisis*, and of course a *Saver*." This was not exhilarating, but I knew that critics and success would be sure to come without any suggestion; and notwithstanding the awful shapes of Tiburina and Whiskermados conjured up to fright me from my purpose, I refused to be alarmed. But my cheerful friend hadn't done with me. His rocks began to multiply, like Falstaff's men in buckram, with terrible rapidity. "Nautical! why, your sailors can't appear in

blue jackets and white trousers, because they didn't wear 'em. You mustn't speak of the Union Jack, because our ships didn't carry it. You can't allude to Greenwich Hospital, because it wasn't built; and who, I should like to know, is to sing 'Rule Britannia,' when the man who composed it wasn't born?" This was the way my friend raked me fore and aft. But I let him fire all his guns, and persisted with sullen obstinacy in sticking to my ship. I could not see why, because a man of brilliant genius had selected it as a vehicle for satirizing the turgid bombast of his time, so glorious an epoch in our nation's history should never be approached in a more serious spirit—an epoch too, I presumed to think, so memorable in the annals of our Navy—our infant Navy! For, compared with its present stupendous growth—it was then but a mere baby. A very vigorous baby I'll allow, an infant Hercules if you will, ready to strangle the serpents that came to assail him in his cradle—but still an infant. But though small, our Ships, our Captains were great. Drake, Raleigh, Hawkins, Frobisher, Effingham—these, at least, were no babes to deal with, as Philip II., of blessed memory, found afterwards to his cost: true sons of the Scandinavian Sea-Kings who hung their shields over their galleys, sides, worthy progenitors of the men who sustained the glory of our flag at the Nile and Trafalgar. Thank Heaven, there are enough of us still left in this island, even in these degenerate days, when the hideous system prevails of turning everything, however graceful or elevating, into a ghastly kind of mockery\*—that hateful practice of taking the fair statue from its niche, merely

\* The true province of satire is surely to select for the object of its attack that which is in itself ridiculous. Is that the case with our modern writers of burlesques? No. Shakespeare, Scott, Byron, are all seized by these funny gentlemen, and smatted over with their dirty fingers. Even the touching, glorious legend of "Virginia" has not escaped their profaning hands being not very long ago distorted into a vile and monstrous shape. Did Henry Fielding, in his matchless burlesque of "Tom Thomb," seek to degrade the grand? or Sheridan, in his terrible "Critic," aim his shafts at the beautiful? No; it was the inflated nonsense mouthed so often by the tragic heroes and heroines of former days at which these great writers shot the burning arrows of their wit, and well did they hit their mark. But what are the chief features of our present burlesques? The works of great men profaned; young and talented actresses thrust continually into male attire; blue-bearded, hoarse-voiced men disporting themselves in woman's garb; and our noble English tongue word-tortured (shade of Thomas Hood! I believe it is called punning), mangled, broken on the wheel, for the delectation of audiences nine-tenths of whom have never read the originals thus trailed through the mire for their amusement. This is the dainty fare flung night after night to the British public, and on which, alas! the British public seems to batten with uncommon relish. It will be said this is the public taste; if so, shame on those who pervert and prostitute their talents by pandering to it. Better an honest crust earned by a stout birch-broom, that at least cleanses a public crossing, than turtle and ortolans supplied by gratifying an unclean craving for the desecration of all that should command our esteem or veneration.



to debase and defile it, even as the reptile sometimes drags its filthy slime over the marble shaped by the genius of the sculptor into a thing of beauty;—there are still, I say, those who can feel their blood throb with quickened pulse as they read of that memorable July night when, in the immortal verse of our great historic poet, "the fiery herald flew" from hill to hill to warn England of that awful Crescent, seven miles from horn to horn, looming off the Lizard Point. Ay, what a night must that have been! Recollect our assailant was then the mightiest empire in the world. Our countrymen knew their invaders came to stamp out the very life from the heart of England; and remember, also, the horrors perpetrated in Flanders did not appeal to our forefathers, as to us, through the haze of centuries. The miserable fugitives from that unhappy land were dwellers here. The shrieks of the victims must have seemed to ring in their ears, and the flames of burning Flemish villages to redden the lattice-panes of our English homesteads. There was not an Englishman along our threatened coast of Devon who clasped to his breast that night wife, daughter, sister, whose heart must not have turned sick at what might be the fate of those dear ones on the morrow—not a mother who watched her sleeping baby in its cot, who knew not too well that a few hours might see her darling tossed on the gory pikes of the Spanish soldiery. But our Sea-Kings were on the waters, while—

"Our landmen, true and ready, showed a front both bold and steady:  
A front whene'er a foeman comes, they'll surely show again."

Such is the theme (too long, I venture to think, neglected by far abler pens than my own) I have endeavoured to illustrate in dramatic action. Doubtless it was a perilous experiment to choose such a subject. Doubly perilous, it appeared to me, was the enterprise of Messrs. Shepherd and Creswick in inaugurating their season by the production of a drama, the chief interest of which was necessarily of an historic nature. Severe ordeal I expected, but not, I frankly confess, the ordeal I have passed. Disguising a heavy heart, I endeavoured to do my best to aid the praiseworthy efforts made by the lessees of the New Surrey Theatre to give my piece every advantage in their power. Yet to me their very lavish outlay on costumes and extensive scenery was saddening rather than pleasurable. To what avail, I said to myself, this careful attention to authorities? Why this care to make the Hidalgo of the Spanish ship look as if he stepped from the canvas of a Velasquez, or a Murillo? Of what use the attention bestowed upon the barbaric magnificence of his Peruvian cup-bearers? Why try and realize the bold Drake and his companions, their doublets dolled for that famous bowling-match, not to be suspended—no, not even for the approach of the Invincible Armada? In vain did I see the skill and labour,

both of the scenic artist and machinist, expended upon efforts which were to give reality to the Spanish galleon-of-war, and the isolated grandeur of the Eddystone Rock. I was not reassured. Alas! where was the funny man, *nay, men!* (for I was informed that two of these comic personages were imperatively demanded by a transpontine audience.) Where was the heroine in white, with her hair down? Where was the double hornpipe, the broad-sword combat; and, above all, where was the little child to pick up the weapon when struck from the hand of its gallant defender, and reinstate it in his grasp? I knew too well where they were *not*, and nerved myself to abide the consequences of these sins of omission. For it is not a pleasant thing, Mesdames et Messieurs of "Westward Ho," to be—you know what I mean—even in that *terra incognita* in which the very graceful and commodious New Surrey Theatre is located. A variety of circumstances—amongst which was, perhaps, a very natural curiosity to see what stuff the Prize Drama was made of—drew together an audience which literally crammed the house on the opening night of the season to the ceiling. It was certainly not a reassuring sight that over-crowded and, of course, somewhat turbulent pit—that vast, seething, surging gallery, so Amphitheatre-like in aspect, so suggestive of a cruel populace, ready at any moment to demand the immolation of its victim. It is unnecessary to enter into any account of the result of that night's trial; suffice it to say, that the managers received their well-earned *meed* of reward for all their efforts in the genuine and hearty applause of their auditory, while the author experienced the agreeable surprise of finding himself called for, but not as a victim. I think I am justified in saying that the verdict of the public press (with two notable exceptions) was confirmatory of the verdict of the public. The knowledge that success to the Prize Drama may, in some considerable degree, benefit the interests of the Royal Dramatic College, might possibly have had a generous influence in swaying that verdict towards a favourable conclusion. Be that as it may, there *were*, as I have said, two critics (one of them belonging to a most influential journal), who suffered no such weakness to dilute the acrimony of their venom. One of these gentlemen, whose notice was as short as it was savage, and from every line of which oozed forth malice and crass ignorance in most impartial proportions, has, I have reason to believe, some connexion with one of those great music halls which exercise so beneficent an influence over the minds and morals of the rising generation. It may possibly explain his enmity to the interests of a regular theatre. So eager was this writer to find fault, that it seemed offensive, in his eyes, for the mariners of the days of Elizabeth to wear doublet and hose. This might be excused. It is true a public censor of other men's works should be expected to be tolerably educated, but a deliberate, malignant falsehood admits of no palliation. This gentle-

man (I suppose I must use the conventional phrase) insinuated that I had plagiarized a character from Mr. Watts Phillips's "Huguenot Captain." Now, it so happens, and my asperser must have well known the fact, the candidates for the T. P. Cooke Prize were compelled not only to send in their pieces, but that the prize was awarded months before the "Huguenot Captain" was produced! This needs no further remark. Of my other and far more important censor, I will only borrow one of the phrases used by himself, and assure him that I fully recognise how well he did "his little utmost" to destroy me in an article which affords a remarkable example of how ingeniously a dramatic critic and *writer* can try to crush a brother author, yet keep on tolerable terms with a manager.\* If either of these gentlemen, or both, should feel inclined to appropriate the Caps I have flung them, by all means let them put on the headgear. I may possibly meet them at an annual dinner of the Dramatic Authors' Society, or even, perchance, in the Stranger's Room of the Garrick Club; if so, nothing will afford me greater pleasure than the opportunity of expressing my deepest sympathy for the keen disappointment which both, I know, have experienced in having failed to injure the interests of an institution founded for the benefit of the old and the helpless of the dramatic profession, by their very abortive attempt to extinguish the first result of the wishes of one who was not only a great actor, but, what is better, a good man.

I have now a far more pleasing task before me. It is briefly but earnestly to thank all who have been associated with the production of the T. P. Cooke Prize Drama. If I abstain from particularizing the especial merits of some who have lent me their aid, it is because I know the public have already recognised them. Still, I cannot conclude without rendering my hearty acknowledgments to Mr. Creswick, not only for the courteous manner in which he endeavoured to meet my wishes and carry out most of my suggestions, but for the manly vigour and tender pathos with which he embodied the character of Martin Truegold—an impersonation principally conducive to a success which, I sincerely trust, will be commensurate with the liberal and enterprising spirit shown both by Mr. Shephard and himself.

\* An author has no right to expect exemption from criticism, but the notice in question was not a criticism—it was simply one long continuous sneer. For example; an English pilot devotes himself, his new-made bride, and some eight hundred of his country's foes to destruction, rather than open the way to a Spanish squadron into the port of Plymouth. This act is commented on after this fashion:—"Martin does his little utmost to foil the schemes of Philip of Spain." *Et uno disco omnes*—I give it as a sample of the way the critic did his little utmost, and the very sneaking mode in which the delegates of Great Jove sometimes use his thunder.