

**ORION, AN EPIC
POEM, IN
THREE BOOKS**

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Orion, an Epic Poem, in Three Books by R. H. Horne

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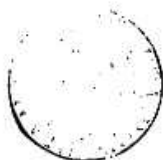
O R I O N

AN EPIC POEM

IN THREE BOOKS

By R. H. HORNE,

AUTHOR OF
THE TRAGEDIES OF 'COSMO DE' MEDICI,' 'GREGORY VII.'
'THE DEATH OF MARLOWE,' THE MYSTERY PLAY OF 'JUDAS ISCARIOT,'
'BALLAD ROMANCES,' ETC.



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BRIEF COMMENTARY.

EVERY Preface, or introductory commentary, has a certain number of readers, who may be described as the natural friends of Prefaces, or their natural enemies. Let me hope to mitigate the animosity of the latter (being one of the number myself) by informing them, that, although this Poem has passed through six editions in England, and several more in foreign countries, the present Commentary—a portion of which was, in a manner, forced from me in Australia, some sixteen years ago—is the only one that has been written for it,—that the remarks will be as concise as possible,—and that, in my own opinion, there really is no

great need that anybody should read them. They are offered, however, in deference to the judgment of others.

The poem of 'Orion' was intended to work out a special design, applicable to all times, by means of antique or classical imagery and associations; and this design, with the hero and the several characters who appear on the scene, as well as the general structure and distribution of the action, were long considered before a line was written. A sort of cartoon of the whole was then made, and submitted to my friend Dr. Leonhard Schmitz, long since recognised as one of the most learned men of the day, and equally possessed of a profound philosophical spirit. To his kind and thoughtful revision I have great pleasure in acknowledging my obligations.

Orion, the hero of my fable, is meant to present a type of the struggle of man with him-

self, *i. e.* the contest between the intellect and the senses, when powerful energies are equally balanced. *Orion* is man standing naked before Heaven and Destiny, resolved to work as a really free agent to the utmost pitch of his powers for the good of his race. He is a truly practical believer in his gods, and in his own conscience; a child with the strength of a giant; innocently wise; with a heart expanding towards the largeness and warmth of Nature, and a spirit unconsciously aspiring to the stars. He is a dreamer of noble dreams, and a hunter of grand shadows (in accordance with the ancient symbolic mythos), all tending to healthy thought, or to practical action and structure. He is the type of a Worker and a Builder for his fellow-men. He presents the picture (well or ill painted, the author cannot certainly know) of a great and simple nature, struggling to develop all its loftiest energies—determined to

be, and to do, to obtain knowledge, and to use it—to live up to its faculties—feeling and acting nobly and powerfully for the service of the world, and seeking its own reward and happiness in the consciousness of a well-worked life, and the possession of a perfect sympathy enshrined in some lovely object.*

With regard to this intense sympathy with some lovely object of personal passion and affection, a witty authoress once said to me,—‘But why should it require three goddesses to perfect one giant?’ The question, though put playfully, is too profound to be answered in the

* On the first appearance of this poem, two young poets, who have since become eminent in various ways (Edmund Ollier and George Meredith), wrote to me their several views of the design and character of *Orion*, each of which was far better said than the above, and in less than half the space. I am ashamed to say that I cannot recollect their words, or they would have stood in the place of mine.

same vein. It may be briefly said, however, that the three great phases of the ordeal of the passion of love, which most strong natures pass through, are fairly portrayed in the story of 'Orion.' He might have been represented as finding perfection at the outset; but since the lot of humanity is seldom (if ever) so fortunate, it seemed best that he should pass through the several gradations of disappointment and suffering, in order to arrive at the highest refinements of sympathy and happiness. If the happiness was short-lived, and met with destruction at the selfish hands of a limited nature (an imperfect sympathy), who resented the bliss it was itself incapable of attaining or conferring, that also is the type of a melancholy truth. The law of progress forbids man to rest in happiness: in his misery he will not, cannot rest; but this law generally cuts short the work of a man, not merely when he has done his best,