

CLAUDIA

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Claudia by Mrs. Frederick Prideaux

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MRS. FREDERICK PRIDEAUX

CLAUDIA

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BY

MRS. FREDERICK PRIDEAUX.

"It is old and plain."

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ADAMS

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CLAUDIA.

PART I.

12 The unrelenting summer sun of Rome
Poured from the zenith,—not a line of shade
Edged the white streets,—when Brân, a British prince,
The son of Llyr, the sire of Caradoc,
Sat wrapped in sadness at Narcissus' gate :
Narcissus, freedman and chief favourite
Of Claudius Cæsar.

For when Llyr, the king
Of the fierce tribe that held the Cymric coast
North of the tawny channel which receives
The rivers of the west, had passed away,
His son, the patient, many-thoughted Brân,

Searching his spirit, could not find the skill
To rule their turbulence in times of war.
Though brave like all his sires, the noble prince
Was minded otherwise. He could not bear
The trumpets of ambition : they were drowned
By a still voice which drew him from the midst
Of evil men, to stand above the world
And wait the dawning of a better day.
Wherefore, withdrawing from the sovereignty,
He left it in the hands of Caradoc,
His younger son ; the elder prince had fallen
In Llyr's last battle with the Roman power,
Led on by Anlus Plantius. For himself,
He passed, a willing exile, from the court
Of grey Trefrân ; and crossed the tawny sea,
The Summer-country, and the Deep-valled Land ;
And paused not, save for needful rest and food,
Till in the centre of the granite horn
That pierces far into the unknown seas
He found the solitude his soul desired
And grew alive again.

But Caradoc,

Whose giant heart sent out a pulse which throbbed
On to the farthest limits of his away,

Aroused the fierce Silures, and reknit
The old alliance with the North and West,
Till as one man the Cymric sovereignties
Rose on the rash invaders of the world,
And thrust them eastward from the Sabren's brink,
And for nine glorious years with desperate arms
Held them at bay. But as stern winter treads
Close on the heels of autumn, flushed and full,
So did disaster follow victory.
Ere the ninth year had closed, Ostorius,—
Whose firmer hand now led the alien powers, —
While Plantius in ovation entered Rome,—
Vanquished the dwindled forces of the king,
Who, trusting in a traitress, was betrayed,
And sent a trophy to imperial Rome.
A splendid gem set round with precious stones,
His queen, his brothers, and his only child.
Then all the pageant-loving city thronged
About his steps, eager to feast their eyes
Upon this marvellous barbarian,
Who for a half-score of astonished years
Defied the arms that had defied the world.
And now the vast procession wound along
The shouting streets to where, without the walls,

The sun flashed hotly on the glittering arms
Of the prætorian bands that lined the fields,
And clustered thickly round the imperial thrones
Of Agrippina and of Claudius.
First came the followers of the captive king,
Dejected and ashamed ; and with them, borne
On polished cars, the trophies of his wars :
Rich golden torques and amber necklaces
Won in a hundred fights. Then as these passed,
The noisy rapture, rending all the air,
Swept on from street to street, but followed still
By awe-struck murmurs : for behind the cars
The royal captives dragged their weary limbs,
Heavy with gilded chains : and last of all,
With eye unquenched and an unfettered air
That mocked his bonds, came Caradoc the king.
Now when they reached the throne of Claudius
All but the king debased themselves to kneel
In shameful supplication for their lives.
But as for him, he stood erect and spoke
Kingly and soldierly, as speaks a man
Unto his fellow : lifting all the while
His hand in fitting cadence to his words
As easily as if the ponderous chain