ITHIN a lovely valley, watered well
With flowery streams, the July feast befell
And there within the Chief-priest's fair abode
They cast aside their trouble's heavy load,
Scarce made aweary by the sultry day.
The earth no longer laboured; shaded lay
The sweet-breathed kine; across the sunny vale,
From hill to hill, the wandering rook did sail,
Lazily croaking, midst his dreams of spring.
Nor more awake the pink-foot dove did cling
Unto the beech-bough, murmuring now and then.
All rested but the restless sons of men
And the great sun that wrought this happiness,
And all the vale with fruitful hopes did bless.
So in a marble chamber bright with flowers,
The old men feasted through the fresher hours,
And at the hottest time of all the day
When now the sun was on his downward way,
Sat listening to a tale an elder told,
New to his fathers while they yet did hold.
The cities of some far-off Grecian isle,
Though in the heavens the cloud of force and guile
Was gathering dark that sent them o'er the sea
To win new lands for their posterity.

The Son of Croesus:
The Classical Tale for July

Narrative:
In Morris's version of this tale from Herodotus, King Croesus seeks to avert the predicted death of Atys, his only son. Atys's closest friend Adrastus, who is haunted by an earlier incident in which he accidentally killed his own brother, also tries to protect Atys by serving as his bodyguard, but wounds him fatally in a hunting accident. Croesus quietly forgives Adrastus as the unwilling instrument of an inevitable fate, but the inconsiderate bodyguard immolates himself on his friend's pyre, and his ashes are joined with Atys in a funeral urn decorated with portrayals of their deaths.

Source:
In Morris's source, the first book of Herodotus's History (paragraphs 34–45), the death of Adrastus ("He who does not run away") is a small incident in the much longer career of his father, a ruthless conqueror who spurs Solon's reminder that no man can be called fortunate while he lives. Herodotus's Adrastus accompanies Atys on the hunt at Croesus's command, and his suicide is motivated by pain at his disgrace and misfortune, not grief. Morris also adds Adrastus's dramatic self-immolation on his beloved friend's funeral pyre, and the final immixture of their ashes in the urn.

Critical Remarks:
Morris's radical revisions of his source transformed Herodotus's simple exemplum on the evils of pride into a moderately complex memorialization of male friendship and
parental love. The result is the only classical tale in which heterosexual love plays little or no role, and the only one which might be described as an unrelieved tragedy ("The Death of Paris," the classical tale for September, is a near-rival in gloom, but it is lightened somewhat by Paris's final affirmation of Helen). Like "The Love of Alcestis," the classical tale for June, this is a tale in which memories of love and devotion provide tenuous but enduring consolation for the arbitrary blows of fate.

See Bellas, 119-119; Boos, 96-99; Calhoun, 172-73; Oberg, 30, 58, 62.

Manuscripts:

An early draft (entitled "The Story of Adrastus") is in Fitzwilliam Library EP25, and the fair copy for publication in Huntington Library MS 6418. Revisions of the early draft are small stylistic improvements.

THE SON OF CROESUS.

The Argument.

CROESUS, KING OF LYDIA, DREAMED THAT HE SAW HIS SON SLAIN BY AN IRON WEAPON, AND THOUGH BY EVERY MEANS HE STROVE TO AVERT THIS DOOM FROM HIM, YET THUS IT HAPPENED, FOR HIS SON WAS SLAIN BY THE HAND OF THE MAN WHO SEEMED LEAST OF ALL LIKELY TO DO THE DEED.

OF CROESUS tells my tale, a king of gold
In Lydia,1 ere the Mede fell on the land,
A man made mighty by great heaps of gold,
Feared for the myriads strong of heart and hand
That 'neath his banners wrought out his command,
And though his latter ending happed on ill,
Yet first of every joy he had his fill.

Two sons he had, and one was dumb from birth;
The other one, that Atys had to name,
Grew up a fair youth, and of might and worth,
And well it seemed the race wherefrom he came
From him should never get reproach or shame:
But yet no stroke he struck before his death,
In no war-shout he spent his latest breath.

Now Croesus,2 lying on his bed anight,
Dreamed that he saw this dear son laid alow,
And folk lamenting he was slain outright,

1Lydia ... Mede: Lydia was a kingdom in Asia Minor, conquered by the
And that some iron thing had dealt the blow;  
By whose hand guided he could nowise know,  
Or if in peace by traitors it were done,  
Or in some open war not yet begun.

Three times* one night this vision broke his sleep,  
So that at last he rose up from his bed,  
That he might ponder how he best might keep  
The threatened danger from so dear a head;  
And, since he now was old enough to wed,  
The King sent men to search the lands around,  
Until some matchless maiden should be found;

That in her arms this Atys might forget*  
The praise of men, and fame of history,  
Whereby full many a field has been made wet  
With blood of men, and many a deep green sea  
Been reddened therewithal, and yet shall be;  
That her sweet voice might drown the people's praise,  
Her eyes make bright the uneventful days.

So when at last a wonder they had brought,  
From some sweet land down by the ocean's rim,  
Than whom no fairer could by man be thought,  
And ancient dames, scanning her limb by limb,  
Had said that she was fair enough for him,  
To her was Atys married with much show,  
And looked to dwell with her in bliss enow.

And in meantime afield he never went,  
Either to hunting or the frontier war,  
No dart was cast, nor any engine* bent

Medes and Persians in 548 B.C.  
2Croesus: The last Lydian king (562-548), Croesus was proverbial for the wealth and power of his reign.  
3three times: Herodotus mentions only one dream.  
4That in her arms . . . : No mention is made of Atys's wife in Morris's source,

Anigh him, and the Lydian men afar  
Must rein their steeds,* and the bright blossoms mar  
If they have any lust of tourney now;  
And in far meadows must they bend the bow.

And also through the palace everywhere  
The swords and spears were taken from the wall  
That long with honour had been hanging there,  
And from the golden pillars of the hall;  
Lest by mishance some sacred blade should fall,  
And in its falling bring revenge at last  
For many a fatal battle overpast.

And every day King Croesus wrought with care  
To save his dear son from that threatened end,  
And many a beast he offered up with prayer  
Unto the gods, and much of wealth did spend,  
That they so prayed might yet perchance defend  
That life, until at least that he were dead,  
With earth laid heavy on his unseeing head.

But in the midst even of the wedding feast  
There came a man, who by the golden hall  
Sat down upon the steps, and man or beast  
He heeded not, but there against the wall  
He leaned his head, speaking no word at all,  
Till, with his son and son's wife, came the King,  
And then unto his gown the man did cling.

What man art thou, the King said to him then,  
That in such guise thou prarest on thy knee?  
Hast thou some fell' foe here among my men?  
Or hast thou done an ill deed unto me?  

except to assert that her assigned role was to keep him at home.  
Sengine: battering ram or siege-device.  
6the Lydian men afar must rein their steeds: Herodotus (Bk. I, 74-80) characterizes the Lydians as skillful mounted warriors (A. P. M. W.).
The Classical Tale for July

Or hast thy wife been carried over sea?
Or hast thou on this day great need of gold?
Or say, why else thou now art grown so bold.

O King, he said, I ask no gold to-day,
And though indeed thy greatness drew me here,
No wrong have I that thou couldst wipe away;
And nought of mine the pirate folk did bear
Across the sea; none of thy folk I fear:
But all the gods are now mine enemies,
Therefore I kneel before thee on my knees.

For as with mine own brother on a day
Within the running place at home I played,
Unwittingly I smote him such-a-way
That dead upon the green grass he was laid;
Half-dead myself I fled away dismayed,
Wherefore I pray thee help me in my need,
And purify my soul of this sad deed.

If of my name and country thou wouldst know,
In Phrygia yet my father is a king,
Gordius, the son of Midas, rich enow
In corn and cattle, golden cup and ring;
And mine own name before I did this thing
Was called Adrastus, whom, in street and hall,
The slayer of his brother men now call.

Friend, said the King, have thou no fear of me;
For though, indeed, I am right happy now,
Yet well I know this may not always be,

76fer: fierce, ruthless.
80running-place: the Greek "stadium," or exercise grounds.
9thave thou no fear of me: An ironic prophecy. According to Herodotus,
9Croesus was later captured and condemned to death by Cyrus, King of Persia.
9At the stake, however, Croesus repented of his pride and ostentation, and the
9gods sent a miraculous rain to quench the fire. Duly impressed by this mark of

The Son of Croesus

And I may chance some day to kneel full low,
And to some happy man mine head to bow
With prayers to do a greater thing than this;
Dwell thou with us, and win again thy bliss.

For in this city men in sport and play
Forget the trouble that the gods have sent;
Who therewithal send wine, and many a may;
As fair as she for whom the Trojan went;
And many a dear delight besides have lent,
Which whoso is well loved of them shall keep
Till in forgetful death he falls asleep.

Therefore to-morrow shall those rites be done
That kindred blood demands that thou hast shed,
That if the mouth of thine own mother's son
Did hap to curse thee ere he was quite dead,
The curse may lie the lighter on thine head,
Because the flower-crowned head of many a beast
Has fallen voiceless in our glorious feast.

Then did Adrastus rise and thank the King,
And the next day when yet low was the sun,
The sacrifice, and every other thing
That unto these dread rites belonged, was done;
And there Adrastus dwelt, hated of none,
And loved of many, and the King loved him,
For brave and wise he was and strong of limb.

But chiefly amongst all did Arys love
The luckless stranger, whose fair tales of war
The Lydian's heart abundantly did move,
And much they talked of wandering out afar
Some day, to lands where many marvels are,
divine favor, Cyrus freed Croesus and made him a trusted adviser.
10may: maiden.
11the . . . went: Helen of Troy's kidnapping allegedly precipitated the Trojan
With still the Phrygian through all things to be
The leader unto all felicity.

Now at this time folk came unto the King
Who on a forest's borders dwelling were,
Wherein there roamed full many a dangerous thing,
As wolf and wild bull, lion and brown bear;
But chiefly in that forest was the lair
Of a great boar that no man could withstand,
And many a woe he wrought upon the land.

Since long ago that men in Calydon\(^2\)
Held chase, no beast like him had once been seen.
He ruined vineyards lying in the sun,
And after his harvesting the men must glean
What he had left; right glad they had not been,
Among the tall stalks of the ripening wheat,
The fell destroyer's fatal tusks to meet.

For often would the lonely man entrapped,
In vain from his dire fury strive to hide
In some thick hedge; and other times it hapned
Some careless stranger by his place would ride,
And the tusks smote his fallen horse's side,
And what help then to such a wretch could come
With sword he could not draw, and far from home?

Or else girls, sent their water-jars to fill,
Would come back pale, too terrified to cry,
Because they had but seen him from the hill;
Or else again, with side rent wretchedly,
Some hapless damsel midst the brake\(^3\) would lie.

War.

12\(men\ldots\) Calydon: Angry that the Calydonians neglected her worship, Diana
sent a huge boar to destroy their crops. A band of famous warriors that included
Atalanta and Meleager later dispatched the boar, but Meleager, like Arys the
subject of a strange death-prophecy, was killed just after the hunt.

Shortly to say, there neither man nor maid
Was safe afield whether they wrought or played.

Therefore were come these dwellers by the wood
To pray the King brave men to them to send,
That they might live; and if he deemed it good
That Ays with the other knights should wend,\(^4\)
They thought their grief the easier should have end;
For both by gods and men they knew him loved,
And easily by hope of glory moved.

O Sire, they said, thou know'st how Hercules
Was not content to wait till folk asked aid,
But sought the pests among their guarded trees;\(^5\)
Thou know'st what name the Theban Cadmus\(^6\) made,
And how the bull of Marathon was laid
Dead on the fallows of the Athenian land,\(^7\)
And how folk worshipped Atalanta's hand.\(^8\)

Fair would thy son's name look upon the roll
Wherein such noble deeds as this are told;
And great delight shall surely fill thy soul,
Thinking upon his deeds when thou art old,
And thy brave heart is waxen\(^9\) faint and cold:

(Metamorphoses VIII, 260-546)
13\(brake\): a thicket of ferns.
14\(wend\): go, proceed.
15\(Hercules\ldots\) trees: In his sixth labor, Hercules used a noisemaker to flush the
murderous Symplegades birds from their impenetrable refuge in a grove of trees,
and shot them. (Apollodorus 2.6)
16\(Theban Cadmus\): After Cadmus, the first settler of Boeotia, killed a dragon
that had guarded a spring, he sowed the ground with the dragon's teeth, and an
army of fully equipped soldiers sprang forth.
17\(bull\ldots\) land: Poseidon created the bull of Marathon as a sacrificial victim,
and when Minos decided to keep it, Poseidon permitted it to rape Minos's wife
and sire the Minotaur. Hercules captured and later released the bull, and the
Athenian hero Theseus finally killed it. (Apollodorus, 2.7 and 3.6)
18\(Atalanta's hand\): Atalanta was the first hunter to wound the Calydonian boar.
19\(waxen\): grown.
The Classical Tale for July

Dost thou not know, O King, how men will strive
That they, when dead, still in their sons may live?

He shuddered as they spoke, because he thought,
Most certainly a winning tale is this
To draw him from the net where he is caught,
For hearts of men grow weary of all bliss;
Nor is he one to be content with his,
If he should hear the trumpet-blast of fame
And far-off people calling on his name.

Good friends, he said, go, get ye back again,
And doubt not I will send you men to slay
This pest ye fear: yet shall your prayer be vain
If ye with any other speak to-day;
And for my son, with me he needs must stay,
For mighty cares oppress the Lydian land.
Fear not, for ye shall have a noble band.

And with that promise must they be content,
And so departed, having feasted well.
And yet some god or other ere they went,
If they were silent, this their tale must tell
To more than one man; therefore it befell,
That at the last Prince Atys knew the thing,
And came with angry eyes unto the King.

Father, he said, since when am I grown vile?
Since when am I grown helpless of my hands?
Or else what folk, with words enwrought with guile,
Thine ears have poisoned; that when far-off lands
My fame might fill, by thy most strange commands
I needs must stay within this slothful home,
Whereunto would God that I had never come?

What wilt thou take mine honour quite away?
Wouldst thou, that, as with her I just have wed

The Son of Croesus

I sit among thy folk at end of day,
She should be ever turning round her head
To watch some man for war apparellèd,
Because he wears a sword that he may use,
Which grace to me thou ever wilt refuse?

Or dost thou think, when thou hast run thy race
And thou art gone, and in thy stead I reign,
The people will do honour to my place,
Or that the lords leal men will still remain,
If yet my father's sword be sharp in vain?
If on the wall his armour still hang up,
While for a spear I hold a drinking-cup?

O Son! quoth Croesus, well I know thee brave,
And worthy of high deeds of chivalry;
Therefore the more thy dear life would I save,
Which now is threatened by the gods on high;
Three times one night I dreamed I saw thee die,
Slain by some deadly iron-pointed thing,
While weeping lords stood round thee in a ring.

Then loud laughed Atys, and he said again:
Father, and did this ugly dream tell thee
What day it was on which I should be slain?
As may the gods grant I may one day be,
And not from sickness die right wretchedly,
Groaning with pain, my lords about my bed
Wishing to God that I were fairly dead;

But slain in battle, as the Lydian kings
Have died ere now, in some great victory,
While all about the Lydian shouting rings
Death to the beaten foemen as they fly.
What death but this, O father! should I die?
But if my life by iron shall be done,
What steel to-day shall glitter in the sun?
Yea, father, if to thee it seemeth good
To keep me from the bright steel-bearing throng,
Let me be brave at least within the wood;
For surely, if thy dream be true, no wrong
Can hap to me from this beast's tushes strong:
Unless perchance the beast is grown so wise,
He haunts the forest clad in Lydian guise. 20

Then Croesus said: O Son, I love thee so,
That thou shalt do thy will upon this tide:
But since unto this hunting thou must go,
A trusty friend along with thee shall ride, 21
Who not for anything shall leave thy side.
I think, indeed, he loves thee well enow
To thrust his heart 'twixt thee and any blow.

Go then, O Son, and if by some short span
Thy life be measured, how shall it harm thee,
If while life last thou art a happy man?
And thou art happy; only unto me
Is trembling left, and infelicity:
The trembling of the man who loves on earth;
But unto thee is hope and present mirth.

Nay, be thou not ashamed, for on this day
I fear not much: thou read'st my dream aright,
No teeth or claws shall take thy life away.
And it may chance, ere thy last glorious fight,
I shall be blinded by the endless night;
And brave Adrastus on this day shall be
Thy safeguard, and shall give good heart to me.

20 He haunts the forest clad in Lydian guise: i. e., unless the boar can take on the form of a human citizen and carry a weapon.
21 A trusty friend along with thee shall ride. . . : The theme of friendship is absent in Herodotus, who gives no indication that Adrastus felt anything beyond gratitude toward Atys.
22 His burning wish I may not well deny. In Herodotus, Adrastus is very reluctant to go, and fears that his bad luck will affect the enterprise (Herodotus,
Nor leave him, whatsoever may betide:
Lo, thou art brave, the son of a great king,
And with thy praises doth this city ring,
Why should I tell thee what a name those gain,
Who dying for their friends, die not in vain?

Then said Adrastus: Now were I grown base
Beyond all words, if I should spare for aught
In guarding him; so sit with smiling face,
And of this matter take no further thought,
Because with my life shall his life be bought,
If ill should hap; and no ill fate it were,
If I should die for what I hold so dear.

Then went Adrastus, and next morn all things
That 'longed unto the hunting were well dight,
And forth they went clad as the sons of kings,
Fair was the morn, as through the sunshine bright
They rode, the Prince half wild with great delight,
The Phrygian smiling on him soberly,
And ever looking round with watchful eye.

So through the city all the rout rode fast,
With many a great black-muzzled yellow hound;
And then the teeming country-side they passed,
Until they came to sour and rugged ground,
And there rode up a little heathy mound,
That overlooked the scrubby woods and low,
That of the beast's lair somewhat they might know.

And there a good man of the country-side
Showed them the places where he mostly lay;
And they descending, through the wood did ride,
And followed on his tracks for half the day.
And at the last they brought him well to bay,
Within an oozy space amidst the wood,

*Histories, trans. de Selincourt, 1972, 56*.
And past and future into one did blend,
As he beheld the fixed eyes of his friend,
That no reproach had in them, and no fear,
For death had seized him ere he thought him near.

Adrastus shrieked, and running up he caught
The falling man, and from his bleeding side
Drew out the dart, and seeing that death had brought
Deliverance to him, he thereby had died;
But ere his hand the luckless steel could guide,
And he the refuge of poor souls could win,
The horror-stricken huntsmen had rushed in.

And these, with blows and cries he heeded nought,
His unresisting hands made haste to bind;
Then of the alder-boughs a bier they wrought,
And laid the corpse thereon, and 'gan to wind
Homeward amidst the tangled wood and blind;
And going slowly, at the eventide,
Some leagues from Sardis23 did that day abide.

Onward next morn the slaughtered man they bore,
With him that slew him, and at end of day
They reached the city, and with mourning sore
Toward the King's palace did they take their way.
He in an open western chamber lay
Feasting, though inwardly his heart did burn
Until that Atys should to him return.

And when those wails first smote upon his ear
He set the wine-cup down, and to his feet
He rose, and bitter all-consuming fear
Swallowed his joy, and nigh he went to meet
That which was coming through the weeping street:
But in the end he thought it good to wait,
And stood there doubting all the ills of fate.

But when at last up to that royal place
Folk brought the thing he once had held so dear,
Still stood the King, staring with ghastly face
As they brought forth Adrastus and the bier,
But spoke at last, slowly without a tear:
O Phrygian man, that I did purify,
Is it through thee that Atys came to die?

O King, Adrastus said, take now my life,
With whatso torment seemeth good to thee,
As my word went, for I would end this strife,
And underneath the earth lie quietly;
Nor is it my will here alive to be:
For as my brother, so Prince Atys died,
And this unlucky hand some god did guide.

Then as a man constrained, the tale he told
From end to end, nor spared himself one whit:
And as he spoke, the wood did still behold,
The trodden grass, and Atys dead on it;
And many a change o'er the King's face did flit
Of kingly rage, and hatred and despair,
As on the slayer's face he still did stare.

At last he said: Thy death avails me nought,
The gods themselves have done this bitter deed;24
That I was all too happy was their thought,
Therefore thy heart is dead and mine doth bleed,
And I am helpless as a trodden weed:
Thou art but as the handle of the spear,
The caster sits far off from any fear.

23Sardis, the capital of Lydia, on the river Pactolus.
24The gods themselves have done this bitter deed: In Herodotus, Croesus blames "some god" for his son's death, but offers no details. Morris connects the incident in this tale with Croesus's earlier vaunting of his wealth, and Solon's warning that "the Gods are envious of human prosperity" (Herodotus
Yet, if thy hurt they meant, I can do this:
Loose him and let him go in peace from me,
I will not slay the slayer of all my bliss;
Yet go, poor man, for when thy face I see\textsuperscript{25}
I curse the gods for their felicity.
Surely some other slayer they would have found,
If thou hadst long ago been under ground.

Alas, Adrastus! in my inmost heart
I knew the gods would one day do this thing,
But deemed indeed that it would be thy part
To comfort me amidst my sorrowing;
Make haste to go, for I am still a King!
Madness may take me, I have many hands
Who will not spare to do my worst commands.

With that Adrastus' bonds were done away,
And forthwith to the city gates he ran,
And on the road where they had been that day
Rushed through the gathering night; and some lone man
Beheld next day his visage wild and wan,
Peering from out a thicket of the wood
Where he had spilt that well-beloved blood.

And now the day of burial pomp must be,
And to those rites all lords of Lydia came
About the King, and that day, they and he
Cast royal gifts of rich things on the flame;
But while they stood and wept, and called by name
Upon the dead, amidst them came a man
With raiment rent, and haggard face and wan:

Who when the marshals would have thrust him out

\textsuperscript{26}Pallas: Athena.
\textsuperscript{27}O Atys, thus I give to thee...: In Herodotus, Adrastus's motive for suicide is not grief for Atys but guilt for the harm he has unintentionally brought his benefactor and may bring to others.
GENTLE wind had risen midst his tale,
That bore the sweet scents of the fertile vale
In at the open windows; and these men
The burden of their years scarce noted then,
Soothed by the sweet luxurious summer time,
And by the cadence of that ancient rhyme,

Spite of its saddening import; nay, indeed,
Of some such thoughts the Wanderers had need
As that tale gave them: Yea, a man shall be
A wonder for his glorious chivalry,
First in all wisdom, of a prudent mind,
Yet none the less him too his fate shall find,
Unfenced by these, a man 'mongst other men.
Yea, and will Fortune pick out, now and then,
The noblest for the anvil of her blows;
Great names are few, and yet, indeed, who knows
What greater souls have fallen 'neath the stroke
Of careless fate? Purblind are most of folk,
The happy are the masters of the earth,¹
Which ever give small heed to hapless worth;
So goes the world, and this we needs must bear
Like eld and death: yet there were some men there
Who drank in silence to the memory
Of those who failed on earth great men to be,
Though better than the men who won the crown.

BUT when the sun was fairly going down
They left the house, and, following up the stream,
In the low sun saw the kingfisher gleam
'Twixt bank and alder, and the grebe² steal out
From the high sedge, and, in his restless doubt,
Dive down, and rise to see what men were there;
They saw the swallow chase high up in air
The circling gnats; the shaded dusky pool
Broke by the splashing club; the ripple cool,

¹The happy are the masters of the earth . . . : Another expression of Morris's early populism and distrust of authority.
²grebe: a diving bird of the genus Podiceps, characterized by its short body,