

Croesus, Prophecy, Misfortune

[Croesus was a king of Lydia in Asia minor who had expanded his empire to great lengths, making alliances with some Greek states. He had great respect for the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, because previously he had sent a number of oracles test questions and it was he only one that had had the right answer. Solon was a lawgiver in Athens, whose reforms were respected long after his death. It is possible that Solon and Croesus actually met, but it's hard to know where one could find and corroboration for this story that we would consider valid.]

On the death of Alyattes, Croesus, his son, who was thirty-five years old, succeeded to the throne. Of the Greek cities, Ephesus was the first that he attacked. The Ephesians, when he laid siege to the place, made an offering of their city to Diana, by stretching a rope from the town wall to the temple of the goddess, which was distant from the ancient city, then besieged by Croesus, a space of seven furlongs. They were, as I said, the first Greeks whom he attacked. Afterwards, on some pretext or other, he made war in turn upon every Ionian and Aeolian state, bringing forward, where he could, a substantial ground of complaint; where such failed him, advancing some poor excuse. ...Croesus afterwards, in the course of many years, brought under his sway almost all the nations to the west of the Halys. ...

What Does Solon Know Anyway?

When all these conquests had been added to the Lydian empire, and the prosperity of Sardis was now at its height, one after another, all the sages of Greece living at the time came there, and among them **Solon**, the Athenian. He was on his travels, having left Athens to be absent ten years, under the pretence of wishing to see the world, but really to avoid being forced to repeal any of the laws which, at the request of the Athenians, he had made for them. ...

Croesus received him as his guest, and lodged him in the royal palace. On the third or fourth day after, he told his servants to conduct Solon over his treasures, and show him all their greatness and magnificence. When he had seen them all, and, so far as time allowed, inspected them, Croesus addressed this question to him. "Stranger of Athens, we have heard much of your wisdom and of your travels through many lands, from love of knowledge and a wish to see the world. I am curious therefore to inquire of you, whom, of all the men that you have seen, you deem the most happy?"

He asked because he thought he was the happiest of mortals. But Solon answered him without flattery, according to his true sentiments, "Tellus of Athens, sire." Full of astonishment at what he heard, Croesus demanded sharply, "And why do you think Tellus happiest?" To which the other replied, "First, because his country was flourishing in his days, and he himself had sons both beautiful and good, and he lived to see children born to each of them, and these children all grew up; and further because, after a life spent in what our people look upon as comfort, his end was very glorious. In a battle between the Athenians and their neighbours near Eleusis, he came to the assistance of his countrymen, routed the foe, and died upon the field most gallantly. The Athenians gave him a public funeral on the spot where he fell, and paid him the highest honours."

So Solon admonish Croesus by the example of Tellus, enumerating the many aspects of his happiness. When he had ended, Croesus inquired a second time, who after Tellus seemed the happiest, expecting that at any rate, he would be given the second place. "Cleobis and Biton," Solon answered; "they were of Argive race; their fortune was enough for their wants, and they were besides endowed with so much bodily strength that they had both gained prizes at the Games. Also this tale is told of them:- There was a great festival in honour of the goddess Hera at

Argos, to which their mother had to be taken in a cart. The oxen did not come home from the field in time: so the youths, fearful of being too late, put the yoke on their own necks, and themselves drew the cart in which their mother rode. They pulled the cart about ten miles, and stopped before the temple.

"This deed of theirs was witnessed by the whole assembly of worshippers, and then their life closed in the best possible way. In this too, God showed clearly, how much better a thing for man death is than life. For the Argive men, who stood around the cart, extolled the vast strength of the youths; and the Argive women extolled the mother who was blessed with such a pair of sons; and the mother herself, overjoyed at the deed and at the praises it had won, standing straight before the image, besought the goddess to bestow on Cleobis and Biton, the sons who had so mightily honoured her, the highest blessing mortals can attain. Her prayer ended, they offered sacrifice and partook of the holy banquet, after which the two youths fell asleep in the temple. They never woke, but so passed from the earth. The Argives, looking on them as among the best of men, caused statues of them to be made, which they gave to the shrine at Delphi.

When Solon had thus assigned these youths the second place, Croesus broke in angrily, "What, stranger of Athens, is my happiness, then, so utterly denied by you, that you don't even put me on a level with private men?"

"Croesus," replied the other, "you're asking a question concerning the condition of man, from someone who knows that the power above us is full of jealousy, and fond of troubling our lot. A long life lets you witness much, and experience much yourself, that you wouldn't choose. Seventy years I regard as the limit of the life of man. In these seventy years are contained, without reckoning intercalary months, twenty-five thousand and two hundred days. Add an intercalary month to every other year, that the seasons may come round at the right time, and there will be, besides the seventy years, thirty-five such months, making an addition of one thousand and fifty days. The whole number of the days contained in the seventy years will thus be twenty-six thousand two hundred and fifty, and every one but will produce events unlike the rest.

"So: man is wholly accident. For yourself, Croesus, I see that you are wonderfully rich, and the lord of many nations; but with respect to your question, I have no answer to give, until I hear you've ended your life happily. For assuredly he who possesses great store of riches is no nearer happiness than he who has what suffices for his daily needs, unless he is lucky, so he can continue in the enjoyment of all his good things to the end of life. For many of the wealthiest men have been unfavoured by fortune, and many whose means were moderate have had excellent luck.

"Wealthy men excel lucky men in only two respects; lucky men excell the wealthy in many. The wealthy man is better able to content his desires, and to bear up against a sudden buffet of calamity. The lucky has less ability to withstand these evils (from which, however, his good luck keeps him clear), but he enjoys all these following blessings: he is healthy, a stranger to disease, free from misfortune, happy in his children, and good-lloking. If he also ends his life well, he is truly the man you're looking for, the man who may rightly be called happy.

"Call him, however, until he dies, not happy but fortunate. Scarcely, indeed, can any man unite all these advantages: as there is no country which contains within it all that it needs, but each, while it possesses some things, lacks others, and the best country is that which contains the most; so no single human being is complete in every respect- something is always lacking. He who unites the greatest number of advantages, and retaining them to the day of his death, then dies peaceably, that man alone, sire, is, in my judgment, entitled to bear the name of 'happy.' But in every matter we must mark well the end: for often God gives men a gleam of happiness, and then plunges them into ruin."

Such was the speech which Solon addressed to Croesus, a speech which brought him neither largess nor honour. The king saw him depart with much indifference, since he thought

that a man must be an arrant fool who made no account of present good, but told men to always wait and mark the end.

Bad Dreams and Iron Weapons

After Solon had gone away a dreadful vengeance, sent by God, came upon Croesus, to punish him, it is likely, for thinking he was the happiest of men. First he had a dream in the night, which revealed to him the actual evils that were about to befall him in the person of his son. For Croesus had two sons, one blasted by a natural defect, being deaf and dumb; the other, distinguished far above all his companions in every pursuit. His name was Atys. It was this son about whom he had a dream that he would die by the blow of an iron weapon. When he woke, greatly alarmed at the dream, he instantly made his son take a wife, and while previously the youth had commanded the Lydian forces in the field, Croesus now would not even let him accompany them. He removed all the spears, javelins, and weapons out of the male apartments, and laid them in heaps in the women's part of the palace, fearing that one of the weapons that hung against the wall might fall and strike him.

As it happened, while he was making arrangements for the wedding, there came to Sardis a man who had incurred miasma. He was a Phrygian, and belonged to the family of the king. Presenting himself at the palace of Croesus, he asked to be purified according to the customs of the country. Now the Lydian method of purifying is very nearly the same as the Greek. Croesus granted the request, and went through all the customary rites, after which he asked the suppliant his birth and country: "Who are you, stranger, and from what part of Phrygia did you flee to take refuge at my hearth? And what man or what woman, have you slain?" "Oh! king," replied the Phrygian, "I am the son of Gordias, son of Midas. I am named Adrastus. The man I unintentionally slew was my own brother. For this my father drove me from the land, and I lost everything. Then fled I here to you." "You are the offspring," Croesus rejoined, "of a house friendly to mine, and you have come to friends. You will lack nothing as long as you live in my dominions. Bear your misfortune as easily as you can, so things will go well for you." From then on, Adrastus lived in the palace of the king.

By chance, at this very same time there was a huge monster of a boar in the Mysian Olympus, which often went out from this mountain country, and ravaged the fields of the Mysians. Often the Mysians had collected to hunt it, but instead of doing him any harm, they always came out with some loss to themselves. At length they sent ambassadors to Croesus, who delivered their message to him: "Oh! king, a terrible monster of a boar has appeared in our parts, and destroys all our labor in the fields. We do our best to take him, but can't. Now we beg you to let your son come back with us, with some companions and hunting dogs, to rid our country of the boar."

But Croesus remembered his dream, and answered, "Say no more of my son going with you; that won't happen. He just married, and is busy enough with that. I will give you a picked band of Lydians, and all my huntsmen and hounds; and I'll instruct them to use all zeal in helping you."

The Mysians were content with this reply; but the king's son, hearing their request, came insuddenly. When Croesus refused to let him go with them, he said to his father:

"Formerly, my father, you thought it noblest and most suitable for me to take part in wars and hunting-parties, and win myself glory in them; but now you keep me away from both, although you have never seen either cowardice or lack of spirit in me. How am I going to look as I walk to the forum or return from it? What must the citizens, what must my young bride think of me? What sort of man will she think her husband is? Either let me go to the chase of this boar, or give me a reason why it is best for me not to."

Then Croesus answered, "My son, it is not because I have seen either cowardice or anything else which has displeased me in you, that I keep you back; but because a vision I had in a dream, warned me that you were doomed to die young, pierced by an iron weapon. It was this which first led me to hasten your wedding, and now it keeps me from sending you on this enterprise. I want to keep watch over thee, in hopes that I can cheat fate during my own lifetime. For you are the one and only son that I possess; the other, whose hearing is destroyed, I regard as nothing."

"Ah! father," returned the youth, "I don't blame you for keeping watch over me after a dream so terrible; but if you're wrong, if you're not interpreting the dream correctly, I have to show you where you're wrong. The dream foretold that I'd die by an iron weapon. But what hands does a boar have to strike with? What iron weapon does he wield? Yet this is what you fear for me. If the dream had said that I would die pierced by a tusk, then you should keep me away; but it said a weapon. We aren't fighting men, but a wild animal. So please let me go with them."

"There you have me, my son," said Croesus, "your interpretation is better than mine. I yield to it, and change my mind, and consent to let you go."

[Here's where I ran out of time, and the archaisms begin. Herodotus didn't write in archaisms, but in a rapid and readable style. Pretend.]

Then the king sent for Adrastus, the Phrygian, and said to him, "Adrastus, when thou wert smitten with the rod of affliction- no reproach, my friend- I purified thee, and have taken thee to live with me in my palace, and have been at every charge. Now, therefore, it behoves thee to requite the good offices which thou hast received at my hands by consenting to go with my son on this hunting party, and to watch over him, if perchance you should be attacked upon the road by some band of daring robbers. Even apart from this, it were right for thee to go where thou mayest make thyself famous by noble deeds. They are the heritage of thy family, and thou too art so stalwart and strong."

Adrastus answered, "Except for thy request, Oh! king, I would rather have kept away from this hunt; for methinks it ill beseems a man under a misfortune such as mine to consort with his happier compeers; and besides, I have no heart to it. On many grounds I had stayed behind; but, as thou urgest it, and I am bound to please thee (for truly it does behove me to requite thy good offices), I am content to do as thou wishest. For thy son, whom thou givest into my charge, be sure thou shalt receive him back safe and sound, so far as depends upon a guardian's carefulness."

Thus assured, Croesus let them depart, accompanied by a band of picked youths, and well provided with dogs of chase. When they reached Olympus, they scattered in quest of the animal; he was soon found, and the hunters, drawing round him in a circle, hurled their weapons at him. Then the stranger, the man who had been purified of blood, whose name was Adrastus, he also hurled his spear at the boar, but missed his aim, and struck Atys. Thus was the son of Croesus slain by the point of an iron weapon, and the warning of the vision was fulfilled. Then one ran to Sardis to bear the tidings to the king, and he came and informed him of the combat and of the fate that had befallen his son.

If it was a heavy blow to the father to learn that his child was dead, it yet more strongly affected him to think that the very man whom he himself once purified had done the deed. In the violence of his grief he called aloud on Jupiter Catharsius to be a witness of what he had suffered at the stranger's hands. Afterwards he invoked the same god as Jupiter Ephistius and Hetaereus- using the one term because he had unwittingly harboured in his house the man who had now slain his son; and the other, because the stranger, who had been sent as his child's guardian, had turned out his most cruel enemy.

Presently the Lydians arrived, bearing the body of the youth, and behind them followed the homicide. He took his stand in front of the corse, and, stretching forth his hands to Croesus, delivered himself into his power with earnest entreaties that he would sacrifice him upon the body of his son- "his former misfortune was burthen enough; now that he had added to it a second, and had brought ruin on the man who purified him, he could not bear to live." Then Croesus, when he heard these words, was moved with pity towards Adrastus, notwithstanding the bitterness of his own calamity; and so he answered,

"Enough, my friend; I have all the revenge that I require, since thou givest sentence of death against thyself. But in sooth it is not thou who hast injured me, except so far as thou hast unwittingly dealt the blow. Some god is the author of my misfortune, and I was forewarned of it a long time ago." Croesus after this buried the body of his son, with such honours as befitted the occasion. Adrastus, son of Gordias, son of Midas, the destroyer of his brother in time past, the destroyer now of his purifier, regarding himself as the most unfortunate wretch whom he had ever known, so soon as all was quiet about the place, slew himself upon the tomb. Croesus, bereft of his son, gave himself up to mourning for two full years.

Croesus Tests the Oracles

At the end of this time the grief of Croesus was interrupted by intelligence from abroad. He learnt that Cyrus, the son of Cambyses, had destroyed the empire of Astyages, the son of Cyaxares; and that the Persians were becoming daily more powerful. This led him to consider with himself whether it were possible to check the growing power of that people before it came to a head. With this design he resolved to make instant trial of the several oracles in Greece, and of the one in Libya. So he sent his messengers in different directions, some to Delphi, some to Abae in Phocis, and some to Dodona; others to the oracle of Amphiaraus; others to that of Trophonius; others, again, to Branchidae in Milesia. These were the Greek oracles which he consulted. To Libya he sent another embassy, to consult the oracle of Ammon. These messengers were sent to test the knowledge of the oracles, that, if they were found really to return true answers, he might send a second time, and inquire if he ought to attack the Persians.

The messengers who were despatched to make trial of the oracles were given the following instructions: they were to keep count of the days from the time of their leaving Sardis, and, reckoning from that date, on the hundredth day they were to consult the oracles, and to inquire of them what Croesus the son of Alyattes, king of Lydia, was doing at that moment. The answers given them were to be taken down in writing, and brought back to him. None of the replies remain on record except that of the oracle at Delphi. There, the moment that the Lydians entered the sanctuary, and before they put their questions, the Pythoness thus answered them in hexameter verse:-

I can count the sands, and I can measure the ocean;
I have ears for the silent, and know what the dumb man meaneth;
Lo! on my sense there striketh the smell of a shell-covered
tortoise,
Boiling now on a fire, with the flesh of a lamb, in a cauldron-
Brass is the vessel below, and brass the cover above it.

These words the Lydians wrote down at the mouth of the Pythoness as she prophesied, and then set off on their return to Sardis. When all the messengers had come back with the answers which they had received, Croesus undid the rolls, and read what was written in each. Only one approved

itself to him, that of the Delphic oracle. This he had no sooner heard than he instantly made an act of adoration, and accepted it as true, declaring that the Delphic was the only really oracular shrine, the only one that had discovered in what way he was in fact employed. For on the departure of his messengers he had set himself to think what was most impossible for any one to conceive of his doing, and then, waiting till the day agreed on came, he acted as he had determined. He took a tortoise and a lamb, and cutting them in pieces with his own hands, boiled them both together in a brazen cauldron, covered over with a lid which was also of brass.

[At this point Croesus gives a huge, incredibly valuable collection of gifts to the oracle at Delphi]

Should I go to war with Persia?

The messengers who had the charge of conveying these treasures to the shrines, received instructions to ask the oracles whether Croesus should go to war with the Persians and if so, whether he should strengthen himself by the forces of an ally. Accordingly, when they had reached their destinations and presented the gifts, they proceeded to consult the oracles in the following terms:- "Croesus, of Lydia and other countries, believing that these are the only real oracles in all the world, has sent you such presents as your discoveries deserved, and now inquires of you whether he shall go to war with the Persians, and if so, whether he shall strengthen himself by the forces of a confederate." Both the oracles agreed in the tenor of their reply, which was in each case a prophecy that **if Croesus attacked the Persians, he would destroy a mighty empire**, and a recommendation to him to look and see who were the most powerful of the Greeks, and to make alliance with them.

At the receipt of these oracular replies Croesus was overjoyed, and feeling sure now that he would destroy the empire of the Persians, he sent once more to Pytho, and presented to the Delphians, the number of whom he had ascertained, two gold staters apiece. In return for this the Delphians granted to Croesus and the Lydians the privilege of precedency in consulting the oracle, exemption from all charges, the most honourable seat at the festivals, and the perpetual right of becoming at pleasure citizens of their town.

[Croesus then gets another prophecy that assures him that he will only rule when a mule is on the Persian throne. Being unable to recognize ambiguity or think metaphorically, and presumably still thinking he's the most fortunate man in the world, Croesus proceeds to expand his empire by attacking places aligned with or contested by the Persians (whose king was Cyrus). He met with a number of major setbacks.]

Croesus laid the blame of his ill success on the number of his troops, which fell very short of the enemy; and as on the next day Cyrus did not repeat the attack, he set off on his return to Sardis, intending to collect his allies and renew the contest in the spring. ... While Croesus was still in this mind, all the suburbs of Sardis were found to swarm with snakes, on the appearance of which the horses left feeding in the pasture-grounds, and flocked to the suburbs to eat them. The king, who witnessed the unusual sight, regarded it very rightly as a prodigy. He therefore instantly sent messengers to the soothsayers of Telmessus, to consult them upon the matter, His messengers reached the city, and obtained from the Telmessians an explanation of what the prodigy portended, but fate did not allow them to inform their lord; for ere they entered Sardis on their return, Croesus was a prisoner. What the Telmessians had declared was that Croesus must look for the entry of an army of foreign invaders into his country, and that when they came they would subdue the native inhabitants; since the snake, said they, is a child of earth, and the horse a warrior and a foreigner. Croesus was already a prisoner when the Telmessians thus

answered his inquiry, but they had no knowledge of what was taking place at Sardis, or of the fate of the monarch.

Um, Maybe Shouldn't Have

[While he waits for the results of the omen-interpreters, Croesus finds that, instead of beseiging far-away potential subject cities, his own capital city, Sardis, is surrounded and beseiged by the Persians, with his Greek allies unable to come to his rescue.]

The following is the way in which Sardis was taken. On the fourteenth day of the siege Cyrus bade some horsemen ride about his lines, and make proclamation to the whole army that he would give a reward to the man who should first mount the wall. After this he made an assault, but without success. His troops retired, but a certain Mardian, Hyroeades by name, resolved to approach the citadel and attempt it at a place where no guards were ever set. On this side the rock was so precipitous, and the citadel (as it seemed) so impregnable, that no fear was entertained of its being carried in this place. Hyroeades, however, having the day before observed a Lydian soldier descend the rock after a helmet that had rolled down from the top, and having seen him pick it up and carry it back, thought over what he had witnessed, and formed his plan. He climbed the rock himself, and other Persians followed in his track, until a large number had mounted to the top. Thus was Sardis taken, and given up entirely to pillage.

With respect to Croesus himself, this is what befell him at the taking of the town. He had a son, of whom I made mention above, a worthy youth, whose only defect was that he was deaf and dumb. In the days of his prosperity Croesus had done the utmost that he could for him, and among other plans which he had devised, had sent to Delphi to consult the oracle on his behalf. The answer which he had received from the Pythoness ran thus:-

Lydian, wide-ruling monarch, thou wondrous simple Croesus,
Wish not ever to hear in thy palace the voice thou hast prayed for
Uttering intelligent sounds. Far better thy son should be silent!
Ah! woe worth the day when thine ear shall first list to his accents.

When the town was taken, one of the Persians was just going to kill Croesus, not knowing who he was. Croesus saw the man coming, but under the pressure of his affliction, did not care to avoid the blow, not minding whether or no he died beneath the stroke. Then this son of his, who was voiceless, beholding the Persian as he rushed towards Croesus, in the agony of his fear and grief burst into speech, and said, "Man, do not kill Croesus." This was the first time that he had ever spoken a word, but afterwards he retained the power of speech for the remainder of his life.

Thus was Sardis taken by the Persians, and Croesus himself fell into their hands, after having reigned fourteen years, and been besieged in his capital fourteen days; thus too did Croesus fulfill the oracle, which said that he should destroy a mighty empire by destroying his own. Then the Persians who had made Croesus prisoner brought him before Cyrus. Now a vast pile had been raised by his orders, and Croesus, laden with fetters, was placed upon it, and with him twice seven of the sons of the Lydians. I know not whether Cyrus was minded to make an offering of the to some god or other, or whether he had vowed a vow and was performing it, or whether, as may well be, he had heard that Croesus was a holy man, and so wished to see if any of the heavenly powers would appear to save him from being burnt alive. However it might be, Cyrus was thus engaged, and Croesus was already on the pile, when it entered his mind in the depth of his woe that there was a divine warning in the words which had come to him from the lips of Solon, "No one while he lives is happy." When this thought smote him he fetched a long breath, and breaking his deep silence, groaned out aloud, thrice uttering the name of Solon.

Cyrus caught the sounds, and bade the interpreters inquire of Croesus who it was he called on. They drew near and asked him, but he held his peace, and for a long time made no answer to their questionings, until at length, forced to say something, he exclaimed, "One I would give much to see converse with every monarch." Not knowing what he meant by this reply, the interpreters begged him to explain himself; and as they pressed for an answer, and grew to be troublesome, he told them how, a long time before, Solon, an Athenian, had come and seen all his splendour, and made light of it; and how whatever he had said to him had fallen out exactly as he foreshowed, although it was nothing that especially concerned him, but applied to all mankind alike, and most to those who seemed to themselves happy. Meanwhile, as he thus spoke, the pile was lighted, and the outer portion began to blaze.

Then Cyrus, hearing from the interpreters what Croesus had said, relented, bethinking himself that he too was a man, and that it was a fellow-man, and one who had once been as blessed by fortune as himself, that he was burning alive; afraid, moreover, of retribution, and full of the thought that whatever is human is insecure. So he bade them quench the blazing fire as quickly as they could, and take down Croesus and the other Lydians, which they tried to do, but the flames were not to be mastered.

Then, the Lydians say that Croesus, perceiving by the efforts made to quench the fire that Cyrus had relented, and seeing also that all was in vain, and that the men could not get the fire under, called with a loud voice upon the god Apollo, and prayed him, if he ever received at his hands any acceptable gift, to come to his aid, and deliver him from his present danger. As thus with tears he besought the god, suddenly, though up to that time the sky had been clear and the day without a breath of wind, dark clouds gathered, and the storm burst over their heads with rain of such violence, that the flames were speedily extinguished. Cyrus, convinced by this that Croesus was a good man and a favourite of heaven, asked him after he was taken off the pile, "Who it was that had persuaded him to lead an army into his country, and so become his foe rather than continue his friend?" to which Croesus made answer as follows: "What I did, oh! king, was to thy advantage and to my own loss. If there be blame, it rests with the god of the Greeks, who encouraged me to begin the war. No one is so foolish as to prefer war to peace, in which, instead of sons burying their fathers, fathers bury their sons. But the gods willed it so."

Thus did Croesus speak. Cyrus then ordered his fetters to be taken off, and made him sit down near himself, and paid him much respect, looking upon him, as did also the courtiers, with a sort of wonder. Croesus, wrapped in thought, uttered no word. After a while, happening to turn and perceive the Persian soldiers engaged in plundering the town, he said to Cyrus, "May I now tell thee, oh! king, what I have in my mind, or is silence best?" Cyrus bade him speak his mind boldly. Then he put this question: "What is it, oh! Cyrus, which those men yonder are doing so busily?" "Plundering thy city," Cyrus answered, "and carrying off thy riches." "Not my city," rejoined the other, "nor my riches. They are not mine any more. It is thy wealth which they are pillaging."

Cyrus, struck by what Croesus had said, bade all the court to withdraw, and then asked Croesus what he thought it best for him to do as regarded the plundering. Croesus answered, "Now that the gods have made me thy slave, oh! Cyrus, it seems to me that it is my part, if I see anything to thy advantage, to show it to thee. Thy subjects, the Persians, are a poor people with a proud spirit. If then thou lettest them pillage and possess themselves of great wealth, I will tell thee what thou hast to expect at their hands. The man who gets the most, look to having him rebel against thee. Now then, if my words please thee, do thus, oh! king:- Let some of thy bodyguards be placed as sentinels at each of the city gates, and let them take their booty from the soldiers as they leave the town, and tell them that they do so because the tenths are due to

Jupiter. So wilt thou escape the hatred they would feel if the plunder were taken away from them by force; and they, seeing that what is proposed is just, will do it willingly."

Cyrus was beyond measure pleased with this advice, so excellent did it seem to him. He praised Croesus highly, and gave orders to his bodyguard to do as he had suggested. Then, turning to Croesus, he said, "Oh! Croesus, I see that thou art resolved both in speech and act to show thyself a virtuous prince: ask me, therefore, whatever thou wilt as a gift at this moment." Croesus replied, "Oh! my lord, if thou wilt suffer me to send these fetters to the god of the Greeks, whom I once honoured above all other gods, and ask him if it is his wont to deceive his benefactors- that will be the highest favour thou canst confer on me." Cyrus upon this inquired what charge he had to make against the god. Then Croesus gave him a full account of all his projects, and of the answers of the oracle, and of the offerings which he had sent, on which he dwelt especially, and told him how it was the encouragement given him by the oracle which had led him to make war upon Persia. All this he related, and at the end again besought permission to reproach the god with his behaviour. Cyrus answered with a laugh, "This I readily grant thee, and whatever else thou shalt at any time ask at my hands." Croesus, finding his request allowed, sent certain Lydians to Delphi, enjoining them to lay his fetters upon the threshold of the temple, and ask the god, "If he were not ashamed of having encouraged him, as the destined destroyer of the empire of Cyrus, to begin a war with Persia, of which such were the first-fruits?" As they said this they were to point to the fetters- and further they were to inquire, "If it was the wont of the Greek gods to be ungrateful?"

So What the Hades Happened?

The Lydians went to Delphi and delivered their message, on which the Pythoness is said to have replied- "It is not possible even for a god to escape the decree of destiny. Croesus has been punished for the sin of his fifth ancestor, who, when he was one of the bodyguard of the Heraclides, joined in a woman's fraud, and, slaying his master, wrongfully seized the throne. Apollo was anxious that the fall of Sardis should not happen in the lifetime of Croesus, but he delayed to his son's days; he could not, however, persuade the Fates. All that they were willing to allow he took and gave to Croesus. Let Croesus know that Apollo delayed the taking of Sardis three full years, and that he is thus a prisoner three years later than was his destiny. Moreover it was Apollo who saved him from the burning pile. Nor has Croesus any right to complain with respect to the oracular answer which he received. For when the god told him that, if he attacked the Persians, he would destroy a mighty empire, he ought, if he had been wise, to have sent again and inquired which empire was meant, that of Cyrus or his own; but if he neither understood what was said, nor took the trouble to seek for enlightenment, he has only himself to blame for the result. Besides, he had misunderstood the last answer which had been given him about the mule. Cyrus was that mule. For the parents of Cyrus were of different races, and of different conditions- his mother a Median princess, daughter of King Astyages, and his father a Persian and a subject, who, though so far beneath her in all respects, had married his royal mistress."

Such was the answer of the Pythoness. The Lydians returned to Sardis and communicated it to Croesus, who confessed, on hearing it, that the fault was his, not the god's. Such was the way in which Ionia was first conquered, and so was the empire of Croesus brought to a close.