

A show-monster about the streets of Prague,
In chains, as just now stood that noble prince :
And then to me no mercy had been shown,
For when the conquered lion is once dungeoned
Who lets him forth again, or dares to give
An old lion sugar-cakes of mild reprieve ?
Not to thine ear alone I make confession,
But to all here, as, by experience,
I know how the great basement of all power
Is frankness, and a true tongue to the world ;
And how intriguing secrecy is proof
Of fear and weakness, and a hollow state.
Conrad, I owe thee much.

Conrad. To kiss that hand,
My Emperor, is ample recompense
For a mere act of duty.

Otho. Thou art wrong ;
For what can any man on earth do more ?
We will make trial of your house's welcome,
My bright Auranthe !

Conrad. How is Friedburg honoured !

Enter ETHELBERT *and six Monks.*

Ethelbert. The benison of heaven on your head,
Imperial Otho !

Otho. Who stays me ? Speak ! Quick !

Ethelbert. Pause but one moment, mighty conqueror !
Upon the threshold of this house of joy.

Otho. Pray, do not prose, good Ethelbert, but speak
What is your purpose.

Ethelbert. The restoration of some captive maids,
Devoted to Heaven's pious ministries,
Who driven forth from their religious cells
And kept in thralldom by our enemy,
When late this province was a lawless spoil,

Still weep amid the wild Hungarian camp,
Though hemmed around by thy victorious arms.

Otho. Demand the holy sisterhood in our name
From Gersa's tents. Farewell, old Ethelbert.

Ethelbert. The saints will bless you for this pious care.

Otho. Daughter, your hand; Ludolph's would fit it best

Conrad. Ho! let the music sound!

[*Music.* *ETHELBERT* raises his hands, as in benediction of *OTHO*. *Exeunt severally.* The scene closes on them.

SCENE III.—*The Country, with the Castle in the distance.*

Enter LUDOLPH and SIGIFRED.

Ludolph. You have my secret; let it not be breathed.

Sigifred. Still give me leave to wonder that the Prince
Ludolph and the swift Arab are the same;
Still to rejoice that 'twas a German arm
Death doing in a turbaned masquerade.

Ludolph. The Emperor must not know it, Sigifred.

Sigifred. I prythee, why? What happier hour of time
Could thy pleased star point down upon from heaven
With silver index, bidding thee make peace?

Ludolph. Still it must not be known, good Sigifred;
The star may point oblique.

Sigifred. If Otho knew
His son to be that unknown Mussulman
After whose spurring heels he sent me forth,
With one of his well-pleased Olympian oaths,
The charters of man's greatness, at this hour
He would be watching round the castle walls,
And, like an anxious warder, strain his sight
For the first glimpse of such a son returned—
Ludolph!—that blast of the Hungarians,

That Saracenic meteor of the fight,
That silent fury, whose fell scymitar
Kept danger all aloof from Otho's head,
And left him space for wonder.

Ludolph. Say no more.
Not as a swordsman would I pardon claim,
But as a son. The bronzed centurion,
Long toiled in foreign wars, and whose high deeds
Are shaded in a forest of tall spears,
Known only to his troop, hath greater plea
Of favour with my sire than I can have.

Sigifred. My lord, forgive me that I cannot see
How this proud temper with clear reason squares.
What made you then, with such an anxious love,
Hover around that life, whose bitter days
You vext with bad revolt? Was 't opium,
Or the mad-fumèd wine? Nay, do not frown,
I rather would grieve with you than upbraid.

Ludolph. I do believe you. No, 'twas not to make
A father his son's debtor, or to heal
His deep heart-sickness for a rebel child.
'Twas done in memory of my boyish days,
Poor cancel for his kindness to my youth,
For all his calming of my childish griefs,
And all his smiles upon my merriment.
No, not a thousand foughten fields could sponge
Those days paternal from my memory,
Though now upon my head he heaps disgrace.

Sigifred. My Prince, you think too harshly—

Ludolph. Can I so?
Hath he not galled my spirit to the quick?
And with a sullen rigour obstinate.
Poured out a phial of wrath upon my faults.
Hunted me as the Tartar does the boar,
Driven me to the very edge o' the world,
And almost put a price upon my head?

Sigifred. Remember how he spared the rebel lords.

Ludolph. Yes, yes, I know he hath a noble nature
That cannot trample on the fallen. But his
Is not the only proud heart in his realm.
He hath wronged me, and I have done him wrong;
He hath loved me, and I have shown him kindness;
We should be almost equal.

Sigifred. Yet for all this,
I would you had appeared among those lords,
And ta'en his favour.

Ludolph. Ha! Till now I thought
My friend had held poor Ludolph's honour dear.
What! Would you have me sue before his throne
And kiss, the courtier's missal, its silk steps?
Or hug the golden housings of his steed,
Amid a camp whose steelèd swarms I dared
But yesterday? and, at the trumpet sound,
Bow, like some unknown mercenary's flag,
And lick the soilèd grass? No, no, my friend,
I would not, I, be pardoned in the heap,
And bless indemnity with all that scum,—
Those men I mean, who on my shoulders propped
Their weak rebellion, winning me with lies,
And pitying forsooth my many wrongs;
Poor self-deceivèd wretches, who must think
Each one himself a king in embryo,
Because some dozen vassals cried, My lord!
Cowards, who never knew their little hearts
Till flurried danger held the mirror up,
And then they owned themselves without a blush,
Curling, like spaniels, round my father's feet.
Such things deserted me and are forgiven,
While I, least guilty, am an outcast still,—
And will be, for I love such fair disgrace.

Sigifred. I know the clear truth; so would Otho
see,

For he is just and noble. Fain would I
Be pleader for you—

Ludolph. He'll hear none of it ;
You know his temper, hot, proud, obstinate ;
Endanger not yourself so uselessly.
I will encounter this thwart spleen myself,
To-day at the Duke Conrad's, where he keeps
His crowded state after the victory.
There will I be, a most unwelcome guest,
And parley with him, as a son should do
Who doubly loathes a father's tyranny ;
Tell him how feeble is that tyranny ;
How the relationship of father and son
Is no more valued than a silken leash
Where lions tug adverse, if love grow not
From interchanged love through many years.
Ay, and those turreted Franconian walls,
Like to a jealous casket, hold my pearl—
My fair Auranthe ! Yes, I will be there.

Sigifred. Be not so rash ; wait till his wrath shall pass,
Until his royal spirit softly ebbs,
Self-influenced ; then, in his morning dreams
He will forgive thee, and awake in grief
To have not thy good-morrow.

Ludolph. Yes, to-day
I must be there, while her young pulses beat
Among the new-plumed minions of war.
Have you seen her of late ? No ? Auranthe,
Franconia's fair sister, 'tis I mean.
She should be paler for my troublous days—
And there it is—my father's iron lips
Have sworn divorcement 'twixt me and my right.

Sigifred (aside). Auranthe ! I had hoped this whim
had passed.

Ludolph. And, Sigifred, with all his love of justice,
When will he take that grandchild in his arms,

That, by my love I swear, shall soon be his?
 This reconciliation is impossible,
 For see—but who are these?

Sigifred. They are messengers
 From our great emperor; to you, I doubt not,
 For couriers are abroad to seek you out.

Enter THEODORE and GONFRID.

Theodore. Seeing so many vigilant eyes explore
 The province to invite your highness back
 To your high dignities, we are too happy.

Gonfrid. We have no eloquence to colour justly
 The emperor's anxious wishes.

Ludolph. Go. I follow you.

[*Exeunt THEODORE and GONFRID.*

I play the prude: it is but venturing—
 Why should he be so earnest? Come, my friend,
 Let us to Friedburg castle.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*An Ante-chamber in the Castle.*

Enter LUDOLPH and SIGIFRED.

Ludolph. No more advices, no more cautioning;
 I leave it all to fate—to any thing!
 I cannot square my conduct to time, place,
 Or circumstance; to me 'tis all a mist!

Sigifred. I say no more.

Ludolph. It seems I am to wait
 Here in the ante-room;—that may be a trifle.
 You see now how I dance attendance here,
 Without that tyrant temper, you so blame,

Snapping the rein. You have medicined me
With good advices ; and I here remain,
In this most honourable ante-room,
Your patient scholar.

Sigifred. Do not wrong me, Prince.
By heavens, I'd rather kiss Duke Conrad's slipper,
When in the morning he doth yawn with pride,
Than see you humbled but a half-degree !
Truth is, the Emperor would fain dismiss
The nobles ere he sees you.

Enter GONFRID, from the Council-room.

Ludolph. Well, sir ! what ?

Gonfrid. Great honour to the Prince ! The Emperor,
Hearing that his brave son had re-appeared,
Instant dismissed the Council from his sight,
As Jove fans off the clouds. Even now they pass.
[*Exit.*

[*Enter the Nobles from the Council-room. They cross
the stage, bowing with respect to LUDOLPH, he
frowning on them. CONRAD follows. Exeunt.*

Ludolph. Not the discoloured poisons of a fen,
Which he who breathes feels warning of his death,
Could taste so nauseous to the bodily sense,
As these prodigious sycophants disgust
The soul's fine palate.

Conrad. Princely Ludolph, hail !
Welcome, thou younger sceptre to the realm !
Strength to thy virgin crownnet's golden buds,
That they, against the winter of thy sire,
May burst, and swell, and flourish round thy brows,
Maturing to a weighty diadem !
Yet be that hour far off ? and may he live,
Who waits for thee, as the chapped earth for rain.

Set my life's star ! I have lived long enough,
 Since under my glad roof, propitiously,
 Father and son each other repossess.

Ludolph. Fine wording, Duke ! but words could
 never yet

Forestall the fates ; have you not learnt that yet ?
 Let me look well : your features are the same ;
 Your gait the same : your hair of the same shade ;
 As one I knew some passèd weeks ago,
 Who sung far different notes into mine ears.
 I have mine own particular comments on 't ;
 You have your own, perhaps.

Conrad. My gracious Prince,
 All men may err. In truth I was deceived
 In your great father's nature, as you were.
 Had I known that of him I have since known,
 And what you soon will learn, I would have turned
 My sword to my own throat, rather than held
 Its threatening edge against a good King's quiet :
 Or with one word fevered you, gentle Prince,
 Who seemed to me, as rugged times then went,
 Indeed too much oppressed. May I be bold
 To tell the Emperor you will haste to him ?

Ludolph. Your Dukedom's privilege will grant so
 much. [Exit CONRAD.]

He's very close to Otho,—a tight leech !
 Your hand—I go. Ha ! here the thunder comes
 Sullen against the wind ! If in two angry brows
 My safety lies, then Sigifred, I'm safe.

Enter OTHO and CONRAD.

Otho. Will you make Titan play the lackey-page
 To chattering pigmies ? I would have you know
 That such neglect of our high Majesty
 Annuls all feel of kindred. What is son,—
 Or friend,—or brother,—or all ties of blood,—

When the whole kingdom, centred in ourself,
Is rudely slighted? Who am I to wait?
By Peter's chair! I have upon my tongue
A word to fright the proudest spirit here!—
Death!—and slow tortures to the hardy fool
Who dares take such large charter from our smiles!
Conrad, we would be private. Sigifred,
Off! And none pass this way on pain of death!

[*Exeunt* CONRAD and SIGIFRED.]

Ludolph. This was but half expected, my good sire,
Yet I am grieved at it, to the full height,
As though my hopes of favour had been whole.

Otho. How you indulge yourself! What can you
hope for?

Ludolph. Nothing, my liege; I have to hope for
nothing.

I come to greet you as a loving son,
And then depart, if I may be so free,
Seeing that blood of yours in my warm veins
Has not yet mitigated into milk.

Otho. What would you, sir?

Ludolph. A lenient banishment.
So please you, let me unmolested pass
This Conrad's gates to the wide air again.
I want no more. A rebel wants no more.

Otho. And shall I let a rebel loose again
To muster kites and eagles 'gainst my head?
No, obstinate boy, you shall be kept caged up,
Served with harsh food, with scum for Sunday drink.

Ludolph. Indeed!

Otho. And chains too heavy for your life:
I'll choose a gaoler whose swart monstrous face
Shall be a hell to look upon, and she——

Ludolph. Ha!

Otho. Shall be your fair Auranthe.

Ludolph. Amaze! Amaze!

Otho. To-day you marry her.

Ludolph. This is a sharp jest !

Otho. No. None at all. When have I said a lie ?

Ludolph. If I sleep not, I am a waking wretch.

Otho. Not a word more. Let me embrace my child.

Ludolph. I dare not. 'Twould pollute so good a father !

O heavy crime !—that your son's blinded eyes
Could not see all his parent's love aright,
As now I see it ! Be not kind to me—
Punish me not with favour.

Otho. Are you sure,
Ludolph, you have no saving plea in store ?

Ludolph. My father, none !

Otho. Then you astonish me.

Ludolph. No, I have no plea. Disobedience,
Rebellion, obstinacy, blasphemy,
Are all my counsellors. If they can make
My crooked deeds show good and plausible,
Then grant me loving pardon, but not else,
Good gods ! not else, in any way, my liege !

Otho. You are a most perplexing, noble boy.

Ludolph. You not less a perplexing noble father.

Otho. Well, you shall have free passport through the
gates.

Farewell !

Ludolph. Farewell ! and by these tears believe,
And still remember, I repent in pain
All my misdeeds !

Otho. Ludolph, I will ! I will !
But, Ludolph, ere you go, I would inquire
If you, in all your wandering, ever met
A certain Arab haunting in these parts.

Ludolph. No, my good lord, I cannot say I did.

Otho. Make not your father blind before his time ;
Nor let these arms paternal hunger more

For an embrace, to dull the appetite
Of my great love for thee, my supreme child !
Come close, and let me breathe into thine ear.
I knew you through disguise. You are the Arab !
You can't deny it. [*Embracing him.*]

Ludolph. Happiest of days !

Otho. We'll make it so.

Ludolph. 'Steal of one fatted calf
Ten hecatombs shall bellow out their last,
Smote 'twixt the horns by the death-stunning mace
Of Mars, and all the soldiery shall feast
Nobly as Nimrod's masons, when the towers
Of Ninevah new kissed the parted clouds!

Otho. Large as a God speak out, where all is thine.

Ludolph. Ay, father, but the fire in my sad breast
Is quenched with inward tears ! I must rejoice
For you, whose wings so shadow over me
In tender victory, but for myself
I still must mourn. The fair Auranthe mine !
Too great a boon ! I pr'ythee let me ask
What more than I know of could so have changed
Your purpose touching her ?

Otho. At a word, this:
In no deed did you give me more offence
Than your rejection of Erminia.

To my appalling, I saw too good proof
Of your keen-eyed suspicion,—she is naught.

Ludolph. You are convinced?

Otho. Ay, spite of her sweet looks.
O that my brother's daughter should so fall !
Her fame has passed into the grosser lips
Of soldiers in their cups.

Ludolph. 'Tis very sad.

Otho. No more of her. Auranthe—Ludolph, come!
This marriage be the bond of endless peace!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*The entrance of GERSA's Tent in the Hungarian Camp.*

Enter ERMINIA.

Erminia. Where—where—where shall I find a messenger?
A trusty soul—a good man, in the camp?
Shall I go myself? Monstrous wickedness!
O cursed Conrad! devilish Auranthe!
Here is proof palpable as the bright sun!
O for a voice to reach the Emperor's ears!
[*Shouts in the Camp.*

Enter an HUNGARIAN CAPTAIN.

Captain. Fair prisoner, you hear these joyous shouts?
The King—aye, now our King—but still your slave,
Young Gersa, from a short captivity
Has just returned. He bids me say, bright dame,
That even the homage of his rangèd chiefs
Cures not his keen impatience to behold
Such beauty once again. What ails you, lady?

Erminia. Say, is not that a German, yonder? There!

Captain. Methinks by his stout bearing he should be;
Yes—it is Albert; a brave German Knight,
And much in the Emperor's favour.

Erminia. I would fain
Inquire of friends and kinsfolk,—how they fared
In these rough times. Brave soldier, as you pass
To royal Gersa with my humble thanks,
Will you send yonder knight to me?

Captain. I will. [*Exit.*

Erminia. Yes, he was ever known to be a man
Frank, open, generous; Albert I may trust.
O proof! proof! proof! Albert's an honest man;
Not Ethelbert the monk, if he were here,
Would I hold more trustworthy. Now——

Enter ALBERT.

Albert. Good gods!
Lady Erminia! are you prisoner
In this beleagured camp? or are you here
Of your own will? You pleased to send for me.
By Venus, 'tis a pity I knew not
Your plight before, and, by her son, I swear
To do you every service you can ask.
What would the fairest——?

Erminia. Albert, will you swear?

Albert. I have. Well?

Erminia. Albert you have fame to lose.
If men, in court and camp, lie not outright,
You should be, from a thousand, chosen forth
To do an honest deed. Shall I confide——?

Albert. Aye, anything to me, fair creature. Do;
Dictate my task. Sweet woman,——

Erminia. Truce with that.
You understand me not; and, in your speech,
I see how far the slander is abroad.

Without proof could you think me innocent?

Albert. Lady, I should rejoice to know you so.

Erminia. If you have any pity for a maid
Suffering a daily death from evil tongues;
Any compassion for that Emperor's niece
Who, for your bright sword and clear honesty,
Lifted you from the crowd of common men
Into the lap of honour,—save me, knight!

Albert. How? Make it clear, if it be possible,
I, by the banner of Saint Maurice, swear
To right you.

Erminia. Possible!—Easy. O my heart!
This letter's not so soiled but you may read it;—
Possible! There—that letter! Read—read it.

[*Gives him a letter.*]

ALBERT (*reading.*)

"TO THE DUKE CONRAD,—Forget the threat you made at parting and I will forget to send the Emperor letters and papers of yours I have become possessed of. His life is no trifle to me; his death you shall find none to yourself."

(*Speaks to himself.*) 'Tis me—my life that's pleaded for!

(*Reads.*)

"He, for his own sake, will be dumb as the grave. Erminia has my shame fixed upon her, sure as a wen. We are safe.

AURANTHE."

A she-devil! A dragon! I her imp!
Fire of hell! Auranthe—lewd demon!
Where got you this? Where? when?

Erminia. I found it in the tent, among some spoils
Which, being noble, fell to Gersa's lot.

Come in, and see.

[*They go in and return.*]

Albert.

Villainy! Villainy!

Conrad's sword, his corslet and his helm,
And his letter. Caitiff, he shall feel——

Erminia. I see you are thunderstruck. Haste, haste away!

Albert. O I am tortured by this villainy.

Erminia. You needs must be. Carry it swift to Otho;
Tell him, moreover, I am prisoner
Here in this camp, where all the sisterhood,
Forced from their quiet cells, are parcelled out
For slaves among these Huns. Away! Away!

Albert. I am gone.

Erminia. Swift be your steed! Within this hour
The Emperor will see it.

Albert.

Ere I sleep:

That I can swear.

[*Hurries out.*]

Gersa (without). Brave captains! thanks. Enough
Of loyal homage now!

Enter GERSA.

Erminia.

Hail, royal Hun!

Gersa. What means this, fair one? Why in such alarm?

Who was it hurried by me so distract?
It seemed you were in deep discourse together:
Your doctrine has not been so harsh to him
As to my poor deserts. Come, come, be plain.
I am no jealous fool to kill you both,
Or, for such trifles, rob th' adorned world
Of such a beauteous vestal.

Erminia. I grieve, my lord,
To hear you condescend to ribald-phrase.

Gersa. This is too much! Hearken, my lady pure!

Erminia. Silence! and hear the magic of a name—
Erminia! I am she,—the Emperor's niece!
Praised be the heavens, I now dare own myself!

Gersa. Erminia! Indeed! I've heard of her.
Pr'ythee, fair lady, what chance brought you here?

Erminia. Ask your own soldiers.

Gersa. And you dare own your name.
For loveliness you may—and for the rest
My vein is not censorious.

Erminia. Alas! poor me!
'Tis false indeed.

Gersa. Indeed you are too fair:
The swan, soft leaning on her fledgy breast,
When to the stream she launches, looks not back
With such a tender grace; nor are her wings
So white as your soul is, if that but be
Twin picture to your face. Erminia!
To-day, for the first day, I am a king,
Yet would I give my unworn crown away
To know you spotless.

Erminia. Trust me one day more,
Generously, without more certain guarantee
Than this poor face you deign to praise so much;
After that, say and do whate'er you please.
If I have any knowledge of you, sir,
I think, nay I am sure, you will grieve much

To hear my story. O, be gentle to me,
For I am sick and faint with many wrongs,
Tired out and weary-worn with contumelies.

Gersa. Poor lady!

Enter ETHELBERT.

Erminia. Gentle Prince, 'tis false indeed.
Good morrow, holy father! I have had
Your prayers, though I looked for you in vain.

Ethelbert. Blessings upon you, daughter! Sure you look
Too cheerful for these foul pernicious days.
Young man, you heard this virgin say 'twas false,—
'Tis false I say. What! can you not employ
Your temper elsewhere, 'mong these burly tents,
But you must taunt this dove, for she hath lost
The Eagle Otho to beat off assault?
Fie! fie! But I will be her guard myself;
I' the Emperor's name. I here demand
Herself, and all her sisterhood. She false!

Gersa. Peace! peace, old man! I cannot think she is.

Ethelbert. Whom I have known from her first infancy.
Baptized her in the bosom of the Church,
Watched her as anxious husbandmen the grain,
From the first shoot till the unripe mid-May,
Then to the tender ear of her June days,
Which, lifting sweet abroad its timid green,
Is blighted by the touch of calumny!
You cannot credit such a monstrous tale?

Gersa. I cannot. Take her. Fair Erminia,
I follow you to Friedburg,—is 't not so?

Erminia. Aye, so we purpose.

Ethelbert. Daughter, do you so?
How's this? I marvel! Yet you look not mad.

Erminia. I have good news to tell you, Ethelbert.

Gersa. Ho! ho, there! Guards!
Your blessing, father! Sweet Erminia,

Believe me, I am well nigh sure—

Erminia.

Farewell !

Short time will show.

[*Enter Chiefs.*

Yes, father Ethelbert,

I have news precious as we pass along.

Ethelbert. Dear daughter, you shall guide me.

Erminia.

To no ill.

Gersa. Command an escort to the Friedburg lines.

[*Exeunt Chiefs.*

Pray let me lead. Fair lady, forget not

Gersa, how he believed you innocent.

I follow you to Friedburg with all speed.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*The Country.*

Enter ALBERT.

Albert. O THAT the earth were empty, as when Cain
Had no perplexity to hide his head !
Or that the sword of some brave enemy
Had put a sudden stop to my hot breath,
And hurled me down the illimitable gulf
Of times past, unremembered ! Better so
Than thus fast-limed in a cursèd snare,—
The white limbs of a wanton. This the end
Of an aspiring life ! My boyhood past
In feud with wolves and bears, when no eye saw
The solitary warfare, fought for love
Of honour 'mid the growling wilderness ;
My sturdier youth, maturing to the sword,
Won by the syren-trumpets, and the ring

Of shields upon the pavement, when bright-mailed
 Henry the Fowler passed the streets of Prague.
 Was't to this end I louted and became
 The menial of Mars, and held a spear,
 Swayed by command, as corn is by the wind?
 Is it for this, I now am lifted up
 By Europe's thronèd Emperor, to see
 My honour be my executioner,—
 My love of fame, my prided honesty,
 Put to the torture for confessional?
 Then the damned crime of blurting to the world
 A woman's secret!—though a fiend she be,
 Too tender of my ignominious life;
 But then to wrong the generous Emperor
 In such a searching point, were to give up
 My soul for foot-ball at hell's holiday!
 I must confess,—and cut my throat,—to-day?
 To-morrow? Ho! some wine!

Enter SIGIFRED.

Sigifred. A fine humour——

Albert. Who goes there? Count Sigifred? Ha! ha!

Sigifred. What, man, do you mistake the hollow sky
 For a thronged tavern, and these stubbed trees
 For old serge hangings,—me, your humble friend,
 For a poor waiter? Why, man, how you stare!
 What Gipsies have you been carousing with?
 No, no more wine; methinks you've had enough.

Albert. You well may laugh and banter. What a fool
 An injury may make of a staid man!
 You shall know all anon.

Sigifred. Some tavern brawl?

Albert. 'Twas with some people out of common reach;
 Revenge is difficult.

Sigifred. I am your friend;
 We meet again to-day, and can confer

Upon it. For the present I'm in haste.

Albert. Whither?

Sigifred. To fetch King Gersa to the feast.
The Emperor on this marriage is so hot,
Pray heaven it end not in apoplexy!
The very porters, as I passed the doors,
Heard his loud laugh, and answered in full choir.
I marvel, Albert, you delay so long
From these bright revelries; go, show yourself,
You may be made a duke.

Albert.

Ay, very like.

Pray, what day has his Highness fixed upon?

Sigifred. For what?

Albert. The marriage. What else can I mean?

Sigifred. To-day. O, I forgot, you could not know;
The news is scarce a minute old with me.

Albert. Married to-day! To-day! You did not say so?

Sigifred. Now, while I speak to you, their comely heads
Are bowed before the mitre.

Albert.

O! monstrous!

Sigifred. What is this?

Albert. Nothing, Sigifred. Farewell!

We'll meet upon our subject. Farewell, Count!

[*Exit.*

Sigifred. To this clear-headed Albert? He brain-turned!
'Tis as portentous as a meteor.

[*Exit.*

SCENE II.—*An Apartment in the Castle.*

*Enter, as from the Marriage, OTHO, LUDOLPH, AURANTHE,
CONRAD, Nobles, Knights, Ladies, &c. Music.*

Otho. Now, Ludolph! Now, Auranthe! Daughter fair!
What can I find to grace your nuptial day
More than my love, and these wide realms in fee!

Ludolph. I have too much.

Auranthe.

And I, my liege, by far.

Ludolph. Auranthe ! I have ! O, my bride, my love !
 Not all the gaze upon us can restrain
 My eyes, too long poor exiles from thy face,
 From adoration, and my foolish tongue
 From uttering soft responses to the love
 I see in thy mute beauty beaming forth !
 Fair creature, bless me with a single word !
 All mine !

Auranthe. Spare, spare me, my lord ; I swoon else.

Ludolph. Soft beauty ! by to-morrow I should die,
 Wert thou not mine. [*They talk apart.*]

1st Lady. How deep she has bewitched him !

1st Knight. Ask you for her recipe for love philtres.

2nd Lady. They hold the Emperor in admiration.

Otho. If ever king was happy that am I !
 What are the cities 'yond the Alps to me,
 The provinces about the Danube's mouth,
 The promise of fair sail beyond the Rhone ;
 Or routing out of Hyperborean hordes,
 To these fair children, stars of a new age ?
 Unless perchance I might rejoice to win
 This little ball of earth, and chuck it them
 To play with !

Auranthe. Nay, my lord, I do not know——

Ludolph. Let me not famish.

Otho (to Conrad). Good Franconia,
 You heard what oath I swear, as the sun rose,
 That unless Heaven would send me back my son,
 My Arab,—no soft music should enrich
 The cool wine, kissed off with a soldier's smack ;
 Now all my empire, bartered for one feast,
 Seems poverty.

Conrad. Upon the neighbour plain
 The heralds have prepared a royal lists ;
 Your knights, found war-proof in the bloody field,
 Speed to the game.

Otho. Well, Ludolph, what say you?

Ludolph. My lord!

Otho. A tourney?

Conrad. Or, if 't please you best——

Ludolph. I want no more!

1st Lady. He soars!

2nd Lady. Past all reason.

Ludolph. Though heaven's choir
Should in a vast circumference descend
And sing for my delight, I'd stop my ears!
Though bright Apollo's car stood burning here,
And he put out an arm to bid me mount,
His touch an immortality, not I!
This earth, this palace, this room, Auranthe!

Otho. This is a little painful; just too much,
Conrad, if he flames longer in this wise
I shall believe in wizard-woven loves
And old romances; but I'll break the spell.
Ludolph!

Conrad. He'll be calm, anon.

Ludolph. You called?

Yes, yes, yes, I offend. You must forgive me;
Not being quite recovered from the stun
Of your large bounties. A tourney, is it not?

[*A senet heard faintly.*]

Conrad. The trumpets reach us.

Ethelbert (without). On your peril, sirs,
Detain us!

1st Voice (without). Let not the abbot pass.

2nd Voice (without). No!

On your lives!

1st Voice (without). Holy father, you must not.

Ethelbert (without). Otho!

Otho. Who calls on Otho?

Ethelbert (without). Ethelbert!

Otho. Let him come in.

Enter ETHELBERT *leading in* ERMINIA.

Thou cursed abbot, why
Hast brought pollution to our holy rites?

Hast thou no fear of hangman, or the faggot?

Ludolph. What portent—what strange prodigy is this?

Conrad. Away!

Ethelbert. You, Duke?

Erminia. Albert has surely failed me!

Look at the Emperor's brow upon me bent!

Ethelbert. A sad delay!

Conrad. Away, thou guilty thing!

Ethelbert. You again, Duke? Justice, most noble
Otho!

You—go to your sister there, and plot again,
A quick plot, swift as thought to save your heads;
For lo! the toils are spread around your den,
The world is all agape to see dragged forth
Two ugly monsters.

Ludolph. What means he, my lord?

Conrad. I cannot guess.

Ethelbert. Best ask your lady sister
Whether the riddle puzzles her beyond
The power of utterance.

Conrad. Foul barbarian, cease;
The Princess faints!

Ludolph. Stab him! O, sweetest wife!

[*Attendants bear off* AURANTHE.]

Erminia Alas!

Ethelbert. Your wife?

Ludolph. Ay, Satan! does that yerk ye?

Ethelbert. Wife! so soon!

Ludolph. Ay, wife! Oh, impudence!
Thou bitter mischief! Venomous bad priest!
How dar'st thou lift those beetle brows at me—
Me—the prince Ludolph, in this presence here,

Upon my marriage-day, and scandalize
My joys with such opprobrious surprise?
Wife! Why dost linger on that syllable,
As if it were some demon's name pronounced
To summon harmful lightning, and make yawn
The sleepy thunder? Hast no sense of fear?
No ounce of man in thy mortality?
Tremble! for, at my nod, the sharpened axe
Will make thy bold tongue quiver to the roots,
Those grey lids wink, and thou not know it, monk!

Ethelbert. O, poor deceived Prince! I pity thee!
Great Otho! I claim justice——

Ludolph. Thou shalt have 't!
Thine arms from forth a pulpit of hot fire
Shall sprawl distracted? O that that dull cowl
Were some most sensitive portion of thy life,
That I might give it to my hounds to tear!
Thy girdle some fine zealous-pained nerve
To girth my saddle! And those devil's beads
Each one a life, that I might every day
Crush one with Vulcan's hammer!

Otho. Peace, my son;
You far outstrip my spleen in this affair.
Let us be calm, and hear the abbot's plea
For this intrusion.

Ludolph. I am silent, sire.

Otho. Conrad, see all depart not wanted here.

[*Exeunt Knights, Ladies, &c.*]

Ludolph, be calm. Ethelbert, peace awhile.
This mystery demands an audience
Of a just judge, and that will Otho be.

Ludolph. Why has he time to breathe another word?

Otho. Ludolph, old Ethelbert, be sure, comes not
To beard us for no cause; he's not the man
To cry himself up an ambassador
Without credentials.

Ludolph. I'll chain up myself.

Otho. Old abbot, stand here forth. Lady Erminia,
Sit. And now, abbot! what have you to say?
Our ear is open. First we here denounce
Hard penalties against thee, if 't be found
The cause for which you have disturbed us here,
Making our bright hours muddy, be a thing
Of little moment.

Ethelbert. See this innocent!

Otho! thou father of the people called,
Is her life nothing? Her fair honour nothing?
Her tears from matins until even-song
Nothing? Her burst heart nothing? Emperor!
Is this your gentle niece—the simplest flower
Of the world's herbal—this fair lily blanched
Still with the dews of piety, this meek lady
Here sitting like an angel newly-shent,
Who veils its snowy wings and grows all pale,—
Is she nothing?

Otho. What more to the purpose, abbot?

Ludolph. Whither is he winding?

Conrad. No clue yet!

Ethelbert. You have heard, my liege, and so, no
doubt, all here,

Foul, poisonous, malignant whisperings;
Nay open speech, rude mockery grown common,
Against the spotless nature and clear fame
Of the princess Erminia, your niece.
I have intruded here thus suddenly,
Because I hold those base weeds, with tight hand,
Which now disfigure her fair growing stem,
Waiting but for your sign to pull them up
By the dark roots, and leave her palpable,
To all men's sight, a lady innocent.
The ignominy of that whispered tale
About a midnight gallant seen to climb

A window to her chamber neighboured near,
I will from her turn off, and put the load
On the right shoulders; on that wretch's head,
Who, by close stratagems, did save herself,
Chiefly by shifting to this lady's room
A rope-ladder for false witness.

Ludolph. Most atrocious!

Otho. Ethelbert, proceed.

Ethelbert. With sad lips I shall:
For, in the healing of one wound, I fear
To make a greater. His young highness here
To-day was married.

Ludolph. Good.

Ethelbert. Would it were good!
Yet why do I delay to spread abroad
The names of those two vipers, from whose jaw
A deadly breath went forth to taint and blast
This guileless lady?

Otho. Abbot, speak their names.

Ethelbert. A minute first. It cannot be—but may
I ask, great judge, if you to-day have put
A letter by unread?

Otho. Does 't end in this?

Conrad. Out with their names!

Ethelbert. Bold sinner, say you so?

Ludolph. Out, hideous monk!

Otho. Confess, or by the wheel——

Ethelbert. My evidence cannot be far away;
And, though it never come, be on my head
The crime of passing an attainst upon
The slanderers of this virgin——

Ludolph. Speak aloud!

Ethelbert. Auranthe, and her brother there!

Conrad. Amaze!

Ludolph. Throw them from the windows!

Otho. Do what you will!

Ludolph. What shall I do with them?
 Something of quick dispatch, for should she hear,
 My soft Auranthe, her sweet mercy would
 Prevail against my fury. Damned priest!
 What swift death wilt thou die? As to the lady
 I touch her not.

Ethelbert. Illustrious Otho, stay!
 An ample store of misery thou hast;
 Choke not the granary of thy noble mind
 With more bad bitter grain, too difficult
 A cud for the repentance of a man
 Grey-growing. To thee only I appeal,
 Not to thy noble son, whose yeasting youth
 Will clear itself, and crystal turn again.
 A young man's heart, by Heaven's blessing, is
 A wide world, where a thousand new-born hopes
 Empurple fresh the melancholy blood:
 But an old man's is narrow, tenantless
 Of hopes, and stuffed with many memories,
 Which being pleasant, ease the heavy pulse—
 Painful, clog up and stagnate. Weigh this matter
 Even as a miser balances his coin;
 And, in the name of mercy, give command
 That your Knight Albert be brought here before you.
 He will expound this riddle; he will show
 A noon-day proof of bad Auranthe's guilt.

Otho. Let Albert straight be summoned.

[*Exit one of the Nobles.*

Ludolph. Impossible!
 I cannot doubt—I will not—no—to doubt
 Is to be ashes!—withered up to death!

Otho. My gentle Ludolph, harbour not a fear;
 You do yourself much wrong.

Ludolph. O, wretched dolt!
 Now, when my foot is almost on thy neck,
 Wilt thou infuriate me? Proof! Thou fool!

Why wilt thou tease impossibility
 With such a thick-skulled persevering suit?
 Fanatic obstinacy! Prodigy!
 Monster of folly! Ghost of a turned brain!
 You puzzle me,—you haunt me, when I dream
 Of you my brain will split! Bold sorcerer!
 Juggler! May I come near you? On my soul
 I know not whether to pity, curse, or laugh.

Enter ALBERT and the Nobleman.

Here, Albert, this old phantom wants a proof!
 Give him his proof! A camel's load of proofs!

Otho. Albert, I speak to you as to a man
 Whose words once uttered pass like current gold;
 And therefore fit to calmly put a close
 To this brief tempest. Do you stand possessed
 Of any proof against the honourableness
 Of Lady Auranthe, our new-spoused daughter?

Albert. You chill me with astonishment. How's this?
 My liege, what proof should I have 'gainst a fame
 Impossible of slur? [OTHO rises.

Erminia. O, wickedness!

Ethelbert. Deluded monarch, 'tis a cruel lie.

Otho. Peace, rebel-priest!

Conrad. Insult beyond credence!

Erminia. Almost a dream!

Ludolph. We have awaked from!

A foolish dream that from my brow hath wrung

A wrathful dew. O, folly! why did I

So act the lion with this silly gnat?

Let them depart. Lady Erminia!

I ever grieved for you, as who did not?

But now you have, with such a brazen front,

So most maliciously, so madly, striven

To dazzle the soft moon, when tenderest clouds

Should be unlooped around to curtain her,

I leave you to the desert of the world
 Almost with pleasure. Let them be set free
 For me ! I take no personal revenge
 More than against a nightmare, which a man
 Forgets in the new dawn. [Exit LUDOLPH.

Otho. Still in extremes ! No, they must not be loose.

Ethelbert. Albert, I must suspect thee of a crime
 So fiendish——

Otho. Fear'st thou not my fury, monk ?
 Conrad, be they in your safe custody
 Till we determine some fit punishment.
 It is so mad a deed, I must reflect
 And question them in private ; for perhaps,
 By patient scrutiny, we may discover
 Whether they merit death, or should be placed
 In care of the physicians.

[Exeunt OTHO and Nobles, ALBERT following.

Conrad. My guards, ho !

Erminia. Albert, wilt thou follow there ?
 Wilt thou creep dastardly behind his back,
 And shrink away from a weak woman's eye ?
 Turn, thou court-Janus ! thou forget'st thyself ;
 Here is the duke, waiting with open arms

Enter Guards.

To thank thee ; here congratulate each other ;
 Wring hands ; embrace ; and swear how lucky 'twas
 That I, by happy chance, hit the right man
 Of all the world to trust in.

Albert. Trust ! to me !

Conrad (aside). He is the sole one in this mystery.

Erminia. Well, I give up, and save my prayers for
 Heaven !

You, who could do this deed, would ne'er relent,
 Though, at my words, the hollow prison-vaults
 Would groan for pity.

Conrad. Manacle them both !

Ethelbert. I know it—it must be—I see it all !
Albert, thou art the minion !

Erminia. Ah ! too plain—

Conrad. Silence ! Gag up their mouth ! I cannot bear
More of this brawling. That the Emperor
Had placed you in some other custody !

Bring them away. [*Exeunt all but ALBERT.*

Albert. Though my name perish from the book of
honour,

Almost before the recent ink is dry,
And be no more remembered after death
Than any drummer's in the muster-roll !
Yet shall I season high my sudden fall
With triumph o'er that evil-witted duke !
He shall feel what it is to have the hand
Of a man drowning, on his hateful throat.

Enter GERSA and SIGIFRED.

Gersa. What discord is at ferment in this house ?

Sigifred. We are without conjecture ; not a soul
We met could answer any certainty.

Gersa. Young Ludolph, like a fiery arrow, shot
By us.

Sigifred. The Emperor, with crossed arms, in thought.

Gersa. In one room music, in another sadness,
Perplexity everywhere !

Albert. A trifle more !
Follow ; your presences will much avail
To tune our jarred spirits. I'll explain.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—AURANTHE'S *Apartment*.AURANTHE and CONRAD *discovered*.

Conrad. Well, well, I know what ugly jeopardy
We are caged in ; you need not pester that
Into my ears. Pr'ythee, let me be spared
A foolish tongue, that I may bethink me
Of remedies with some deliberation.
You cannot doubt but 'tis in Albert's power
To crush or save us ?

Auranthe. No, I cannot doubt.
He has, assure yourself, by some strange means,
My secret ; which I ever hid from him,
Knowing his mawkish honesty.

Conrad. Cursed slave !

Auranthe. Ay, I could almost curse him now myself.
Wretched impediment ! Evil genius !
A glue upon my wings, that cannot spread,
When they should span the provinces ! A snake,
A scorpion, sprawling on the first gold step,
Conducting to the throne high canopied.

Conrad. You would not hear my counsel, when his life
Might have been trodden out, all sure and hushed ;
Now the dull animal forsooth must be
Intreated, managed ! When can you contrive
The interview he demands ?

Auranthe. As speedily
It must be done as my bribed woman can
Unseen conduct him to me ; but I fear
'Twill be impossible, while the broad day
Comes through the panes with persecuting glare.
Methinks, if 't now were night I could intrigue

With darkness, bring the stars to second me,
And settle all this trouble.

Conrad. Nonsense! Child!
See him immediately; why not now?

Auranthe. Do you forget that even the senseless door-posts
Are on the watch and gape through all the house?
How many whisperers there are about,
Hungry for evidence to ruin me.—
Men I have spurned, and women I have taunted?
Besides, the foolish prince sends, minute whiles,
His pages—so they tell me—to inquire
After my health, entreating, if I please,
To see me.

Conrad. Well, suppose this Albert here;
What is your power with him?

Auranthe. He should be
My echo, my taught parrot! but I fear
He will be cur enough to bark at me;
Have his own say; read me some silly creed
'Bout shame and pity.

Conrad. What will you do then?

Auranthe. What I shall do, I know not: what I would
Cannot be done; for see, this chamber-floor
Will not yield to the pick-axe and the spade,—
Here is no quiet depth of hollow ground.

Conrad. Sister, you have grown sensible and wise,
Seconding, ere I speak it, what is now,
I hope, resolved between us.

Auranthe. Say, what is 't?

Conrad. You need not be his sexton, too: a man
May carry that with him shall make him die
Elsewhere,—give that to him; pretend the while
You will to-morrow succumb to his wishes,
Be what they may, and send him from the Castle
On some fool's errand; let his latest groan
Frighten the wolves!

Auranthe. Alas ! he must not die !

Conrad. Would you were both hearsed up in stifling
lead !

Detested——

Auranthe. Conrad, hold ! I would not bear
The little thunder of your fretful tongue,
Tho' I alone were taken in these toils,
And you could free me ; but remember, sir,
You live alone in my security :
So keep your wits at work, for your own sake,
Not mine, and be more mannerly.

Conrad. Thou wasp !
If my domains were emptied of these folk,
And I had thee to starve——

Auranthe. O, marvellous !
But, Conrad, now be gone ; the host is looked for ;
Cringe to the Emperor, entertain the lords,
And, do ye mind, above all things, proclaim
My sickness, with a brother's saddened eye,
Condoling with Prince Ludolph. In fit time
Return to me.

Conrad. I leave you to your thoughts.

[*Exit.*

Auranthe (sola). Down, down, proud temper ! down,
Auranthe's pride !

Why do I anger him when I should kneel ?
Conrad ! Albert ! help ! help ! What can I do ?
O, wretched woman ! lost, wrecked, swallowed up,
Accursèd, blasted ! O, thou golden Crown,
Orbing along the serene firmament
Of a wide empire, like a glowing moon ;
And thou, bright sceptre ! lustrous in my eyes
There—as the fabled fair Hesperian tree,
Bearing a fruit more precious ! graceful thing,
Delicate, godlike, magic ! must I leave
Thee to melt in the visionary air,

Ere, by one grasp, this common hand is made
Imperial? I do not know the time
When I have wept for sorrow; but methinks
I could now sit upon the ground, and shed
Tears, tears of misery. O, the heavy day!
How shall I bear my life till Albert comes?
Ludolph! Erminia! Proofs! O heavy day!
Bring me some mourning weeds, that I may 'tire
Myself as fits one wailing her own death:
Cut off these curls, and brand this lily hand,
And throw these jewels from my loathing sight,—
Fetch me a missal, and a string of beads,—
A cup of bittered water, and a crust,—
I will confess, O, holy Abbot!—How!
What is this? Auranthe! thou fool, dolt,
Whimpering idiot! up! up! and quell!
I am safe! Coward! why am I in fear?
Albert! he cannot stickle, chew the cud
In such a fine extreme,—impossible!
Who knocks?

[Goes to the door, listens, and opens it.]

Enter ALBERT.

Albert, I have been waiting for you here
With such an aching heart, such swooning throbs
On my poor brain, such cruel, cruel sorrow,
That I should claim your pity! Art not well?

Albert. Yes, lady, well.

Auranthe. You look not so, alas!
But pale, as if you brought some heavy news.

Allert. You know full well what makes me look
so pale.

Auranthe. No! Do I? Surely I am still to learn
Some horror; all I know, this present, is
I am near hustled to a dangerous gulf,
Which you can save me from,—and therefore safe,

So trusting in thy love ; that should not make
Thee pale, my Albert.

Albert. It doth make me freeze.

Auranthe. Why should it, love ?

Albert. You should not ask me that,
But make your own heart monitor, and save
Me the great pain of telling. You must know.

Auranthe. Something has vext you, Albert. There
are times

When simplest things put on a sombre cast ;
A melancholy mood will haunt a man,
Until most easy matters take the shape
Of unachievable tasks ; small rivulets
Then seem impassable.

Albert. Do not cheat yourself
With hope that gloss of words or suppliant action,
Or tears, or ravings, or self-threatened death,
Can alter my resolve.

Auranthe. You make me tremble ;
Not so much at your threats, as at your voice,
Untuned, and harsh, and barren of all love.

Albert. You suffocate me ! Stop this devil's parley,
And listen to me ; know me once for all.

Auranthe. I thought I did. Alas ! I am deceived.

Albert. You are not deceived. You took me for
A man detesting all inhuman crime ;
And therefore kept from me your demon's plot
Against Erminia. Silent ? Be so still ;
For ever ! Speak no more ; but hear my words,
Thy fate. Your safety I have bought to-day
By blazoning a lie, which in the dawn
I'll expiate with truth.

Auranthe. O cruel traitor !

Albert. For I would not set eyes upon thy shame ;
I would not see thee dragged to death by the hair,
Penanced, and taunted on a scaffolding !

To-night, upon the skirts of the blind wood
That blackens northward of these horrid towers,
I wait for you with horses. Choose your fate.
Farewell !

Auranthe. Albert, you jest ; I'm sure you must.
You, an ambitious Soldier ! I, a Queen,
One who could say,—Here, rule these Provinces !
Take tribute from these cities for thyself !
Empty these armouries, these treasuries,
Muster thy warlike thousands at a nod !
Go ! conquer Italy !

Albert. Auranthe, you have made
The whole world chaff to me. Your doom is fixed.

Auranthe. Out, villain ! dastard !

Albert. Look there to the door !
Who is it ?

Auranthe. Conrad, traitor !

Albert. Let him in.

Enter CONRAD.

Do not affect amazement, hypocrite,
At seeing me in this chamber.

Conrad. Auranthe ?

Albert. Talk not with eyes, but speak your curses out
Against me, who would sooner crush and grind
A brace of toads, than league with them t' oppress
An innocent lady, gull an Emperor,
More generous to me than autumn sun
To ripening harvests.

Auranthe. No more insult, sir !

Albert. Ay, clutch your scabbard ; but, for prudence
sake,

Draw not the sword ; 'twould make an uproar, Duke,
You would not hear the end of. At nightfall
Your lady sister, if I guess aright,
Will leave this busy castle. You had best

Take farewell too of worldly vanities.

Conrad. Vassal !

Albert. To-morrow, when the Emperor sends
For loving Conrad, see you fawn on him.

Good even !

Auranthe. You'll be seen !

Albert. See the coast clear then.

Auranthe (as he goes). Remorseless Albert !

Cruel, cruel wretch !

[*She lets him out.*]

Conrad. So we must lick the dust ?

Auranthe.

I follow him.

Conrad. How ? Where ? The plan of your escape ?

Auranthe.

He waits

For me with horses by the forest-side,
Northward.

Conrad. Good, good ! he dies. You go, say you ?

Auranthe. Perforce.

Conrad. Be speedy, darkness ! Till that comes,
Fiends keep you company !

[*Exit.*]

Auranthe.

And you ! and you !

And all men ! Vanish !

[*Retires to an inner Apartment.*]

SCENE II.—*An Apartment in the Castle.*

Enter LUDOLPH and Page.

Page. Still very sick, my lord ; but now I went,
And there her women, in a mournful throng,
Stood in the passage whispering ; if any
Moved 'twas with careful steps, and hushed as death.
They bade me stop.

Ludolph.

Good fellow, once again
Make soft inquiry ; pr'ythee, be not stayed
By any hindrance, but with gentlest force
Break through her weeping servants, till thou com'st

E'en to her chamber-door, and there, fair boy,—
If with thy mother's milk thou hast sucked in
Any divine eloquence,—woo her ears
With plaints for me, more tender than the voice
Of dying Echo, echoed.

Page.

Kindest master!

To know thee sad thus, will unloose my tongue
In mournful syllables. Let but my words reach
Her ears, and she shall take them coupled with
Moans from my heart, and sighs not counterfeit.
May I speed better!

[*Exit Page.*

Ludolph (solus). Auranthe! My life!
Long have I loved thee, yet till now not loved:
Remembering, as I do, hard-hearted times
When I had heard e'en of thy death perhaps,
And—thoughtless!—suffered thee to pass alone
Into Elysium!—now I follow thee,
A substance or a shadow, wheresoe'er
Thou ledest me—whether thy white feet press,
With pleasant weight, the amorous-aching earth,
Or thro' the air thou pioneerest me,
A shade! Yet sadly I predestinate!
O, unbenignest Love, why wilt thou let
Darkness steal out upon the sleepy world
So wearily, as if Night's chariot wheels
Were clogged in some thick cloud? O, changeful Love,
Let not her steeds with drowsy-footed pace
Pass the high stars, before sweet embassy
Comes from the pillowed beauty of that fair
Completion of all-delicate Nature's wit!
Pout her faint lips anew with rubious health;
And, with thine infant fingers, lift the fringe
Of her sick eye-lids; that those eyes may glow
With wooing light upon me ere the morn
Peers with disrelish, grey, barren, and cold!

Enter GERSA and Courtiers.

Otho calls me his Lion,—should I blush
To be so tamed? so——

Gersa. Do me the courtesy,
Gentlemen, to pass on.

1st Knight. We are your servants.

[Exeunt Courtiers.]

Ludolph. It seems then, sir, you have found out the
man

You would confer with ;—me?

Gersa. If I break not
Too much upon your thoughtful mood, I will
Claim a brief while your patience.

Ludolph. For what cause
Soe'er, I shall be honoured

Gersa. I not less.

Ludolph. What may it be? No trifle can take place
Of such deliberate prologue, serious 'haviour.
But, be it what it may, I cannot fail
To listen with no common interest ;
For though so new your presence is to me,
I have a soldier's friendship for your fame.
Please you explain.

Gersa. As thus :—for, pardon me,
I cannot, in plain terms, grossly assault
A noble nature ; and would faintly sketch
What your quick apprehension will fill up ;
So finely I esteem you.

Ludolph. I attend.

Gersa. Your generous father, most illustrious Otho,
Sits in the banquet-room among his chiefs ;
His wine is bitter, for you are not there ;
His eyes are fixed still on the open doors,
And ev'ry passer in he frowns upon,
Seeing no Ludolph comes.

Ludolph.

I do neglect.

Gersa. And for your absence may I guess the cause?

Ludolph. Stay there! No—guess? More princely you must be

Than to make guesses at me. 'Tis enough.
I'm sorry I can hear no more.

Gersa.

And I

As grieved to force it on you so abrupt;
Yet, one day, you must know a grief, whose sting
Will sharpen more the longer 'tis concealed.

Ludolph. Say it at once, sir! Dead—dead?—is she dead?

Gersa. Mine is a cruel task: she is not dead,
And would, for your sake, she were innocent.

Ludolph. Hungarian! Thou amazest me beyond
All scope of thought, convuldest my heart's blood
To deadly churning! Gersa, you are young,
As I am; let me observe you, face to face:
Not grey-browed like the poisonous Ethelbert,
No rumèd eyes, no furrowing of age,
No wrinkles, where all vices nestle in
Like crannied vermin,—no! but fresh, and young,
And hopeful featured. Ha! by heaven, you weep!
Tears, human tears! Do you repent you then
Of a cursed torturer's office? Why shouldst join—
Tell me,—the league of devils? Confess—confess—
The lie!

Gersa. Lie!—but begone all ceremonious points
Of honour battailous! I could not turn
My wrath against thee for the orbèd world.

Ludolph. Your wrath, weak boy? Tremble at mine,
unless

Retraction follow close upon the heels
Of that late 'stounding insult! Why has my sword
Not done already a sheer judgment on thee?
Despair, or eat thy words! Why, thou wast nigh

Whimpering away my reason ! Hark ye, sir,
 It is no secret, that Erminia,
 Erminia, sir, was hidden in your tent,—
 O, blessed asylum ! Comfortable home !
 Begone ! I pity thee ; thou art a gull,
 Erminia's last new puppet !

Gersa.

Furious fire !

Thou mak'st me boil as hot as thou canst flame !
 And in thy teeth I give thee back the lie !
 Thou liest ! Thou, Auranthe's fool ! A wittol !

Ludolph. Look ; look at this bright sword ;
 There is no part of it, to the very hilt,
 But shall indulge itself about thine heart !
 Draw ! but remember thou must cower thy plumes,
 As yesterday the Arab made thee stoop.

Gersa. Patience ! Not here ; I would not spill thy
 blood

Here, underneath this roof where Otho breathes,—
 Thy father,—almost mine.

Ludolph.

O, faltering coward !

Enter PAGE.

Stay, stay ; here is one I have half a word with.
 Well ? What ails thee, child ?

Page.

My lord !

Ludolph.

What wouldst say ?

Page. They are fled !

Ludolph.

They ! Who ?

Page.

When anxiously

I hastened back, your grieving messenger,
 I found the stairs all dark, the lamps extinct,
 And not a foot or whisper to be heard.
 I thought her dead, and on the lowest step
 Sat listening ; when presently came by
 Two muffled up,—one sighing heavily,
 The other cursing low, whose voice I knew
 For the Duke Conrad's. Close I followed them

Thro' the dark ways they chose to the open air,
And, as I followed, heard my lady speak.

Ludolph. Thy life answers the truth !

Page. The chamber's empty !

Ludolph. As I will be of mercy ! So, at last,
This nail is in my temples !

Gersa. Be calm in this.

Ludolph. I am.

Gersa. And Albert, too, has disappeared ;
Ere I met you, I sought him everywhere ;
You would not hearken.

Ludolph. Which way went they, boy ?

Gersa. I'll hunt with you.

Ludolph. No, no, no. My senses are
Still whole. I have survived. My arm is strong—
My appetite sharp—for revenge ! I'll no sharer
In my feast ; my injury is all my own,
And so is my revenge, my lawful chattels !
Terrier, ferret them out ! Burn—burn the witch !
Trace me their footsteps ! Away !

[*Exeunt.*

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*A part of the Forest.*

Enter CONRAD and AURANTHE.

Auranthe. Go no further ; not a step more. Thou art
A master-plague in the midst of miseries.
Go,—I fear thee ! I tremble, every limb,
Who never shook before. There's moody death
In thy resolvèd looks ! Yes, I could kneel
To pray thee far away ! Conrad, go ! go !—

There! yonder, underneath the boughs I see
Our horses!

Conrad. Ay, and the man.

Auranthe.

Yes, he is there!

Go, go,—no blood! no blood!—go, gentle Conrad!

Conrad. Farewell!

Auranthe. Farewell! For this Heaven pardon you!

[*Exit AURANTHE.*

Conrad. If he survive one hour, then may I die
In unimagined tortures, or breathe through
A long life in the foulest sink o' the world!
He dies! 'Tis well she do not advertise
The caitiff of the cold steel at his back. [*Exit CONRAD.*

Enter LUDOLPH and Page.

Ludolph. Missed the way, boy? Say not that on your
peril!

Page. Indeed, indeed, I cannot trace them further.

Ludolph. Must I stop here? Here solitary die
Stifled beneath the thick oppressive shade
Of these dull boughs—this even of dark thickets—
Silent,—without revenge?—pshaw! bitter end,—
A bitter death—a suffocating death,—
A gnawing—silent—deadly, quiet death!
Escaped?—fled?—vanished? melted into air?
She's gone! I cannot clutch her! no revenge!
A muffled death, ensnared in horrid silence!
Sucked to my grave amid a dreamy calm!
O, where is that illustrious noise of war,
To smother up this sound of labouring breath,
This rustle of the trees!

[*AURANTHE shrieks at a distance.*

Page.

My lord, a noise!

This way—hark!

Ludolph.

Yes, yes! A hope! A music!

A glorious clamour! How I live again! [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*Another part of the Forest.*

Enter ALBERT (wounded).

Albert. Oh! for enough life to support me on
To Otho's feet!

Enter LUDOLPH.

Ludolph. Thrice villainous, stay there!
Tell me where that detested woman is,
Or this is through thee!

Albert. My good Prince, with me
The sword has done its worst; not without worst
Done to another,—Conrad has it home!
I see you know it all!

Ludolph. Where is his sister?

Enter AURANTHE.

Auranthe. Albert!

Ludolph. Ha! There! there! He is the paramour!—
There—hug him—dying! O, thou innocence,
Shrine him and comfort him at his last gasp;
Kiss down his eyelids! Was he not thy love?
Wilt thou forsake him at his latest hour?
Keep fearful and aloof from his last gaze,
His most uneasy moments, when cold death
Stands with the door ajar to let him in?

Albert. O that that door with hollow slam would close
Upon me sudden! for I cannot meet,
In all the unknown chambers of the dead,
Such horrors!

Ludolph. Auranthe! what can he mean?
What horrors? Is it not a joyous time?
Am I not married to a paragon
“Of personal beauty and untainted soul?”
A blushing fair-eyed purity? A sylph,
Whose snowy timid hand has never sinned

Beyond a flower plucked, white as itself?
 Albert, you do insult my bride—your mistress—
 To talk of horrors on our wedding-night!

Albert. Alas! poor Prince, I would you knew my
 heart!

'Tis not so guilty——

Ludolph. Hear! he pleads not guilty!
 You are not? or, if so, what matters it?
 You have escaped me, free as the dusk air,
 Hid in the forest, safe from my revenge;
 I cannot catch you! You should laugh at me,
 Poor cheated Ludolph! Make the forest hiss
 With jeers at me! You tremble—faint at once,
 You will come to again. O cockatrice,
 I have you! Whither wander those fair eyes
 To entice the devil to your help, that he
 May change you to a spider, so to crawl
 Into some cranny to escape my wrath?

Albert. Sometimes the counsel of a dying man
 Doth operate quietly when his breath is gone:
 Disjoin those hands—part—part—do not destroy
 Each other—forget her!—Our miseries
 Are equal shared, and mercy is——

Ludolph. A boon
 When one can compass it. Auranthe, try
 Your oratory; your breath is not so hitched
 Ay, stare for help! [ALBERT *dies.*

There goes a spotted soul
 Howling in vain along the hollow night!
 Hear him! He calls you—sweet Auranthe, come!

Auranthe. Kill me!

Ludolph. No! What? Upon our marriage night?
 The earth would shudder at so foul a deed!
 A fair bride! A sweet bride! An innocent bride
 No! we must revel it, as 'tis in use
 In times of delicate brilliant ceremony:

Come, let me lead you to our halls again !
 Nay, linger not ; make no resistance, sweet ;—
 Will you ? Ah, wretch, thou canst not, for I have
 The strength of twenty lions 'gainst a lamb !
 Now—one adieu for Albert ! Come away ! [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—*An inner Court of the Castle.*

Enter SIGIFRED, GONFRID, and THEODORE, meeting.

1st Knight. Was ever such a night ?

Sigifred. What horrors more ?

Things unbelieved one hour, so strange they are,
 The next hour stamps with credit.

1st Knight. Your last news ?

Gonfrid. After the page's story of the death
 Of Albert and Duke Conrad ?

Sigifred. And the return
 Of Ludolph with the Princess.

Gonfrid. No more, save
 Prince Gersa's freeing Abbot Ethelbert,
 And the sweet lady, fair Erminia,
 From prison.

1st Knight. Where are they now ? Hast yet heard ?

Gonfrid. With the sad Emperor they are closeted ;
 I saw the three pass slowly up the stairs,
 The lady weeping, the old abbot cowed.

Sigifred. What next ?

1st Knight. I hate to think on 't.

Gonfrid. 'Tis with fate.

1st Knight. One while these proud towers are hushed as death.

Gonfrid. The next our poor Prince fills the arched rooms
 With ghastly ravings.

Sigifred. I do fear his brain.

Gonfrid. I will see more. Bear you so stout a heart ?

[*Exeunt into the Castle.*]

SCENE IV.—*A Cabinet, opening towards a Terrace.*

OTHO, ERMINIA, ETHELBERT, and a Physician, discovered.

Otho. O, my poor boy! My son! My son! My Ludolph!
Have ye no comfort for me, ye physicians
Of the weak body and soul?

Ethelbert. 'Tis not in medicine,
Either of heaven or earth, to cure, unless
Fit time be chosen to administer.

Otho. A kind forbearance, holy abbot. Come,
Erminia; here, sit by me, gentle girl;
Give me thy hand; hast thou forgiven me?

Erminia. Would I were with the saints to pray for you!

Otho. Why will ye keep me from my darling child?

Physician. Forgive me, but he must not see thy face.

Otho. Is then a father's countenance a Gorgon?
Hath it not comfort in it? Would it not
Console my poor boy, cheer him, heal his spirits?
Let me embrace him; let me speak to him;
I will! Who hinders me? Who's Emperor?

Physician. You may not, Sire; 'twould overwhelm
him quite,
He is so full of grief and passionate wrath;
Too heavy a sigh would kill him, or do worse.
He must be saved by fine contrivances;
And, most especially, we must keep clear
Out of his sight a father whom he loves;
His heart is full, it can contain no more,
And do its ruddy office.

Ethelbert. Sage advice;
We must endeavour how to ease and slacken
The tight-wound energies of his despair,
Not make them tenser.

Otho. Enough! I hear, I hear.
Yet you were about to advise more,—I listen.

Ethelbert. This learned doctor will agree with me,
That not in the smallest point should he be thwarted,
Or gainsaid by one word ; his very motions,
Nods, becks, and hints, should be obeyed with care,
Even on the moment ; so his troubled mind
May cure itself.

Physician. There are no other means.

Otho. Open the door ; let's hear if all is quiet.

Physician. Beseech you, Sire, forbear.

Erminia. Do, do.

Otho. I command !

Open it straight ;—hush !—quiet !—my lost boy !
My miserable child !

Ludolph (indistinctly without). Fill, fill my goblet,—
here's a health !

Erminia. O, close the door !

Otho. Let, let me hear his voice ; this cannot last ;
And fain would I catch up his dying words,
Though my own knell they be ! This cannot last !
O let me catch his voice—for lo ! I hear
A whisper in this silence that he's dead !
It is so ! Gersa ?

Enter GERSA.

Physician. Say, how fares the Prince ?

Gersa. More calm ; his features are less wild and flushed ;
Once he complained of weariness.

Physician. Indeed !

'Tis good,—'tis good ; let him but fall asleep,
That saves him.

Otho. Gersa, watch him like a child ;
Ward him from harm,—and bring me better news !

Physician. Humour him to the height. I fear to go ;
For should he catch a glimpse of my dull garb,
It might affright him, fill him with suspicion
That we believe him sick, which must not be.

Gersa. I will invent what soothing means I can.

[*Exit* GERSA.]

Physician. This should cheer up your Highness ;
weariness

Is a good symptom, and most favourable ;
It gives me pleasant hopes. Please you, walk forth
Upon the terrace ; the refreshing air
Will blow one half of your sad doubts away. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE V.—*A Banqueting Hall, brilliantly illuminated, and set forth with all costly magnificence, with Supper-tables laden with Services of Gold and Silver. A door in the back scene, guarded by two Soldiers. Lords, Ladies, Knights, Gentlemen, &c., whispering sadly, and ranging themselves ; part entering and part discovered.*

1st Knight. Grievously are we tantalised, one and all ;
Swayed here and there, commanded to and fro,
As though we were the shadows of a sleep,
And linked to a dreaming fancy. What do we hear ?

Gonfrid. I am no seer ; you know we must obey
The Prince from A to Z, though it should be
To set the place in flames. I pray, hast heard
Where the most wicked Princess is ?

1st Knight. There, sir,
In the next room ; have you remarked those two
Stout soldiers posted at the door ?

Gonfrid. For what ?

[*They whisper.*]

1st Lady. How ghast a train !

2nd Lady. Sure this should be some splendid burial.

1st Lady. What fearful whispering ! See, see,—Gersa
there !

Enter GERSA.

Gersa. Put on your brightest looks ; smile if you can ;

Behave as all were happy ; keep your eyes
From the least watch upon him ; if he speaks
To any one, answer, collectedly,
Without surprise, his questions, howe'er strange.
Do this to the utmost,—though, alas ! with me
The remedy grows hopeless ! Here he comes,—
Observe what I have said,—show no surprise.

Enter LUDOLPH, followed by SIGIFRED and PAGE.

Ludolph. A splendid company ! rare beauties here !
I should have Orphean lips, and Plato's fancy,
Amphion's utterance, tonèd with his lyre,
Or the deep key of Jove's sonorous mouth,
To give fit salutation. Methought I heard,
As I came in, some whispers,—what of that ?
'Tis natural men should whisper ; at the kiss
Of Psyche given by Love, there was a buzz
Among the gods !—and silence is as natural.
These draperies are fine, and being a mortal,
I should desire no better ; yet, in truth,
There must be some superior costliness,
Some wider-domèd high magnificence !
I would have, as a mortal I may not,
Hangings of heaven's clouds, purple and gold,
Slung from the spheres ; gauzes of silver mist,
Looped up with cords of twisted wreathèd light,
And tasselled round with weeping meteors !
These pendent lamps and chandeliers are bright
As earthly fires from dull dross can be cleansed ;
Yet could my eyes drink up intenser beams
Undazzled ;—this is darkness,—when I close
These lids, I see far fiercer brilliances,—
Skies full of splendid moons, and shooting stars,
And spouting exhalations, diamond fires,
And panting fountains quivering with deep glows.
Yes—this is dark—is it not dark ?

Sigifrea. My lord,
'Tis late ; the lights of festival are ever
Quenched in the morn.

Ludolph. 'Tis not to-morrow then ?

Sigifred. 'Tis early dawn.

Gersa. Indeed full time we slept ;
Say you so, Prince ?

Ludolph. I say I quarrelled with you ;
We did not tilt each other,—that's a blessing,—
Good gods ! no innocent blood upon my head !

Sigifred. Retire, Gersa !

Ludolph. There should be three more here :
For two of them, they stay away perhaps,
Being gloomy-minded, haters of fair revels,—
They know their own thoughts best.

As for the third,
Deep blue eyes, semi-shaded in white lids,
Finished with lashes fine for more soft shade,
Completed by her twin-arched ebon-brows ;
White temples, of exactest elegance,
Of even mould, felicitous and smooth ;
Cheeks fashioned tenderly on either side,
So perfect, so divine, that our poor eyes
Are dazzled with the sweet proportioning,
And wonder that 'tis so,—the magic chance !
Her nostrils, small, fragrant, fairy-delicate ;
Her lips—I swear no human bones e'er wore
So taking a disguise ;—you shall behold her !
We'll have her presently ; ay, you shall see her,
And wonder at her, friends, she is so fair ;
She is the world's chief jewel, and, by heaven !
She's mine by right of marriage !—she is mine !
Patience, good people, in fit time I send
A summoner,—she will obey my call,
Being a wife most mild and dutiful.
First I would hear what music is prepared

To herald and receive her ; let me hear !

Sigifred. Bid the musicians soothe him tenderly.

[*A soft strain of Music.*

Ludolph. Ye have none better ? No, I am content ;
'Tis a rich sobbing melody, with reliefs
Full and majestic ; it is well enough,
And will be sweeter, when ye see her pace
Sweeping into this presence, glistened o'er
With emptied caskets, and her train upheld
By ladies habited in robes of lawn,
Sprinkled with golden crescents, others bright
In silks, with spangles showered, and bowed to
By Duchesses and pearlèd Margravines !
Sad ! that the fairest creature of the earth—
I pray you mind me not—'tis sad, I say,
That the extremest beauty of the world
Should so entrench herself away from me,
Behind a barrier of engendered guilt !

2nd Lady. Ah ! what a moan !

1st Knight. Most piteous indeed !

Ludolph. She shall be brought before this company,
And then—then—

1st Lady. He muses.

Gersa. O, Fortune ! where will this end ?

Sigifred. I guess his purpose ! Indeed he must not
have

That pestilence brought in,—that cannot be,
There we must stop him.

Gersa. I am lost ! Hush, hush !
He is about to rave again.

Ludolph. A barrier of guilt ! I was the fool,
She was the cheater ! Who's the cheater now,
And who the fool ? The entrapped, the caged fool,
The bird-limed raven ? She shall croak to death
Secure ! Methinks I have her in my fist,
To crush her with my heel ! Wait, wait ! I marvel

My father keeps away. Good friend—ah ! Sigifred ?
Do bring him to me,—and Erminia,
I fain would see before I sleep—and Ethelbert
That he may bless me, as I know he will,
Though I have cursed him.

Sigifred. Rather suffer me
To lead you to them.

Ludolph. No, excuse me,—no !
The day is not quite done. Go, bring them hither.
[*Exit SIGIFRED.*]

Certes, a father's smile should, like sunlight,
Slant on my sheavèd harvest of ripe bliss.
Besides, I thirst to pledge my lovely bride
In a deep goblet ; let me see—what wine ?
The strong Iberian juice, or mellow Greek ?
Or pale Calabrian ? Or the Tuscan grape ?
Or of old Ætna's pulpy wine-presses,
Black stained with the fat vintage, as it were
The purple slaughter house, where Bacchus' self
Pricked his own swollen veins ! Where is my page ?

Page. Here, here !

Ludolph. Be ready to obey me ; anon thou shalt
Bear a soft message for me ; for the hour
Draws near when I must make a winding up
Of bridal mysteries—a fine-spun vengeance !
Carve it on my tomb, that, when I rest beneath,
Men shall confess, this Prince was gulled and cheated,
But from the ashes of disgrace he rose
More than a fiery dragon, and did burn
His ignominy up in purging fires !
Did I not send, sir, but a moment past,
For my father ?

Gersa. You did.

Ludolph. Perhaps 'twould be
Much better he came not.

Gersa. He enters now !

Enter OTHO, ERMINIA, ETHELBERT, SIGIFRED, *and* Physician.

Ludolph. Oh ! thou good man, against whose sacred
head

I was a mad conspirator, chiefly too
For the sake of my fair newly wedded wife,
Now to be punished !—do not look so sad !
Those charitable eyes will thaw my heart,
Those tears will wash away a just resolve,
A verdict ten times sworn ! Awake—awake—
Put on a judge's brow, and use a tongue
Made iron-stern by habit ! Thou shalt see
A deed to be applauded, 'scribed in gold !
Join a loud voice to mine, and so denounce
What I alone will execute !

Otho. Dear son,
What is it ? By your father's love, I sue
That it be nothing merciless !

Ludolph. To that demon ?
Not so ! No ! She is in temple-stall,
Being garnished for the sacrifice, and I,
The Priest of Justice, will immolate her
Upon the altar of wrath ! She stings me through !—
Even as the worm doth feed upon the nut,
So she, a scorpion, preys upon my brain !
I feel her gnawing here ! Let her but vanish,
Then, father, I will lead your legions forth,
Compact in steelèd squares and spearèd files,
And bid our trumpets speak a fell rebuke
To nations drownd in peace !

Otho. To-morrow, son,
Be your word law ; forget to-day——

Ludolph. I will,
When I have finished it ! Now,—now, I'm pight,
Tight-footed for the deed !

Erminia. Alas ! Alas !

Ludolph. What angel's voice is that? Erminia.
Ah! gentlest creature, whose sweet innocence
Was almost murdered; I am penitent.
Wilt thou forgive me? And thou, holy man,
Good Ethelbert, shall I die in peace with you?

Erminia. Die, my lord?

Ludolph. I feel it possible.

Otho. Physician?

Physician. I fear he is past my skill.

Otho. Not so!

Ludolph. I see it—I see it—I have been wandering!
Half mad—not right here—I forget my purpose.
Bestir—bestir—Auranthe! Ha! ha! ha!
Youngster! page! go bid them drag her to me!
Obey! This shall finish it! [*Draws a dagger.*

Otho. Oh, my son! my son!

Sigifred. This must not be—stop there!

Ludolph. Am I obeyed?

A little talk with her—no harm—haste! haste!

[*Exit PAGE.*

Set her before me—never fear I can strike.

Several voices. My lord! My lord!

Gersa. Good Prince!

Ludolph. Why do ye trouble me? out—out—away!
There she is! take that! and that! no, no,
That's not well done—where is she?

[*The Doors open. Enter PAGE. Several Women are
seen grouped about AURANTHE in the inner Room.*

Page. Alas! My lord, my lord! they cannot move
her!

Her arms are stiff—her fingers clenched and cold.

Ludolph. She's dead!

[*Stagger and falls into their arms.*

Ethelbert. Take away the dagger.

Gersa.

Softly ; so !

Otho. Thank God for that !

Sigifred.

It could not harm him now.

Gersa. No !—brief be his anguish !

Ludolph. She's gone ! I am content. Nobles, good
night !

We are all weary—faint—set ope the doors—

I will to bed ! To-morrow——

[*Dies.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

KING STEPHEN.

A DRAMATIC FRAGMENT.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Field of Battle.*

Alarum. Enter King STEPHEN, KNIGHTS, and
Soldiers.

Stephen. If shame can on a soldier's vein-swoll'n front
Spread deeper crimson than the battle's toil,
Blush in your casing helmets ! for see, see !
Yonder my chivalry, my pride of war,
Wrenched with an iron hand from firm array,
Are routed loose about the plashy meads,
Of honour forfeit. O that my known voice
Could reach your dastard ears, and fright you more !
Fly, cowards, fly ! Gloucester is at your backs !
Throw your slack bridles o'er the flurried manes,
Ply well the rowel with faint trembling heels,
Scampering to death at last !

1st Knight. The enemy
Bears his flaunt standard close upon their rear.

2nd Knight. Sure of a bloody prey, seeing the fens
Will swamp them girth-deep.

Stephen. Over head and ears.
No matter ! 'Tis a gallant enemy ;
How like a comet he goes streaming on.
But we must plague him in the flank,—hey, friends ?
We are well breathed—follow !

Enter Earl BALDWIN and Soldiers, as defeated.

Stephen. De Redvers!
What is the monstrous bugbear that can fright
Baldwin?

Baldwin. No scarecrow, but the fortunate star
Of boisterous Chester, whose fell truncheon now
Points level to the goal of victory.
This way he comes, and if you would maintain
Your person unaffronted by vile odds,
Take horse, my Lord.

Stephen. And which way spur for life?
Now I thank heaven I am in the toils,
That soldiers may bear witness how my arm
Can burst the meshes. Not the eagle more
Loves to beat up against a tyrannous blast,
Than I to meet the torrent of my foes.
This is a brag—be 't so,—but if I fall,
Carve it upon my 'scutcheoned sepulchre.
On, fellow soldiers! Earl of Redvers, back!
Not twenty Earls of Chester shall brow-beat
The diadem. [*Exeunt. Alarum.*

SCENE II.—*Another part of the Field.*

*Trumpets sounding a Victory. Enter GLOUCESTER, KNIGHTS
and Forces.*

Gloucester. Now may we lift our bruised visors up
And take the flattering freshness of the air,
While the wild din of battle dies away
Into times past, yet to be echoed sure
In the silent pages of our chroniclers.

1st Knight. Will Stephen's death be marked there my
good Lord,
Or that we give him lodging in yon towers?

Gloucester. Fain would I know the great usurper's fate.

Enter two CAPTAINS severally.

1st Captain. My Lord !

2nd Captain. Most noble Earl !

1st Captain. The King——

2nd Captain. The Empress greets——

Gloucester. What of the King ?

1st Captain. He sole and lone maintains
A hopeless bustle 'mid our swarming arms,
And with a nimble savageness attacks,
Escapes, makes fiercer onset, then anew
Eludes death, giving death to most that dare
Trespass within the circuit of his sword !
He must by this have fallen. Baldwin is taken ;
And for the Duke of Bretagne, like a stag
He flies, for the Welsh beagles to hunt down.
God save the Empress !

Gloucester. Now our dreaded Queen :
What message from her Highness ?

2nd Captain. Royal Maud
From the thronged towers of Lincoln hath looked down.
Like Pallas from the walls of Ilion,
And seen her enemies havocked at her feet,
She greets most noble Gloucester from her heart,
Intreating him, his captains, and brave knights,
To grace a banquet. The high city gates
Are envious which shall see your triumph pass ;
The streets are full of music.

Enter 2ND KNIGHT.

Gloucester. Whence come you ?

2nd Knight. From Stephen, my good Prince—Stephen !
Stephen !

Gloucester. Why do you make such echoing of his name ?

2nd Knight. Because I think, my lord, he is no man,
But a fierce demon, 'nointed safe from wounds,

And misbaptizèd with a Christian name.

Gloucester. A mighty soldier!—Does he still hold out?

2nd Knight. He shames our victory. His valour still
Keeps elbow-room amid our eager swords,
And holds our bladed falchions all aloof.
His gleaming battle-axe, being slaughter-sick,
Smote on the morion of a Flemish knight,
Broke short in his hand; upon the which he flung
The heft away with such a vengeful force
It paunched the Earl of Chester's horse, who then
Spleen-hearted came in full career at him.

Gloucester. Did no one take him at a vantage then?

2nd Knight. Three then with tiger leap upon him flew,
Whom with his sword swift drawn and nimbly held,
He stung away again, and stood to breathe,
Smiling. Anon upon him rushed once more
A throng of foes, and in this renewed strife,
My sword met his and snapped off at the hilt.

Gloucester. Come, lead me to this man—and let us move
In silence, not insulting his sad doom
With clamorous trumpets. To the Empress bear
My salutation as befits the time.

[*Exeunt GLOUCESTER and Forces.*]

SCENE III.—*The Field of Battle.* *Enter STEPHEN unharmed.*

Stephen. Another sword! And what if I could seize
One from Bellona's gleaming armoury,
Or choose the fairest of her sheavèd spears!
Where are my enemies? Here, close at hand,
Here come the testy brood. O, for a sword!
I'm faint—a biting sword! A noble sword!
A hedge-stake—or a ponderous stone to hurl
With brawny vengeance, like the labourer Cain.
Come on! Farewell my kingdom, and all hail
Thou superb, plumed, and helmeted renown!

All hail ! I would not truck this brilliant day
To rule in Pylos with a Nestor's beard—
Come on !

Enter DE KAIMS and KNIGHTS.

De Kaims. Is 't madness, or a hunger after death,
That makes thee thus unarmed throw taunts at us
Yield, Stephen, or my sword's point dips in
The gloomy current of a traitor's heart.

Stephen. Do it, De Kaims, I will not budge an inch.

De Kaims. Yes, of thy madness thou shalt take the
meed.

Stephen. Darest thou ?

De Kaims. How, dare, against a man disarmed ?

Stephen. What weapons has the lion but himself ?
Come not near me, De Kaims, for by the price
Of all the glory I have won this day,
Being a king, I will not yield alive
To any but the second man of the realm,
Robert of Gloucester.

De Kaims. Thou shalt vail to me.

Stephen. Shall I, when I have sworn against it, sir ?
Thou think'st it brave to take a breathing king,
That, on a court-day bowed to haughty Maud.
The awèd presence-chamber may be bold
To whisper, There's the man who took alive
Stephen—me—prisoner. Certes, De Kaims,
The ambition is a noble one.

De Kaims. 'Tis true.
And, Stephen, I must compass it.

Stephen. No, no,
Do not tempt me to throttle you on the gorge,
Or with my gauntlet crush your hollow breast,
Just when your knighthood is grown ripe and full
For lordship.

A Soldier. Is an honest yeoman's spear

Of no use at a need? Take that.

Stephen.

Ah, dastard!

De Kaims. What, you are vulnerable! my prisoner!

Stephen. No, not yet. I disclaim it, and demand
Death as a sovereign right unto a king
Who 'sdains to yield to any but his peer,
If not in title, yet in noble deeds,
The Earl of Gloucester. Stab to the hilt, De Kaims,
For I will never by mean hands be led
From this so famous field. Do you hear! Be quick!

[*Trumpets. Enter the Earl of CHESTER and
Knights.*

SCENE IV.—*A Presence Chamber. Queen MAUD in a Chair of
State the Earls of GLOUCESTER and CHESTER, Lords, Attendants.*

Maud. Gloucester, no more. I will behold that Boulogne :
Set him before me. Not for the poor sake
Of regal pomp and a vain-glorious hour,
As thou with wary speech, yet near enough,
Hast hinted.

Gloucester. Faithful counsel have I given ;
If wary, for your Highness' benefit.

Maud. The Heavens forbid that I should not think so,
For by thy valour have I won this realm
Which by thy wisdom I will ever keep.
To sage advisers let me ever bend
A meek attentive ear, so that they treat
Of the wide kingdom's rule and government,
Not trenching on our actions personal.
Advised, not schooled, I would be ; and henceforth
Spoken to in clear, plain, and open terms,
Not side-ways sermoned at.

Gloucester. Then, in plain terms,
Once more for the fallen king—

Maud. Your pardon, brother,

I would no more of that ; for, as I said,
'Tis not for worldly pomp I wish to see
The rebel, but as dooming judge to give
A sentence something worthy of his guilt.

Gloucester. If't must be so, I'll bring him to your presence.
[*Exit GLOUCESTER.*

Maud. A meaner summoner might do as well.
My Lord of Chester, is 't true what I hear
Of Stephen of Boulogne, our prisoner,
That he, as a fit penance for his crimes,
Eats wholesome, sweet, and palatable food
Off Gloucester's golden dishes—drinks pure wine,
Lodges soft?

Chester. More than that, my gracious Queen.
Has angered me. The noble Earl, methinks,
Full soldier as he is, and without peer
In counsel, dreams too much among his books.
It may read well, but sure 'tis out of date
To play the Alexander with Darius.

Maud. Truth! I think so. By Heavens, it shall not last!

Chester. It would amaze your Highness now to mark
How Gloucester overstrains his courtesy
To that crime-loving rebel, that Boulogne——

Maud. That ingrate!

Chester. For whose vast ingratitude
To our late sovereign lord, your noble sire,
The generous Earl condoles in his mishaps,
And with a sort of lackeying friendliness
Talks off the mighty frowning from his brow,
Woos him to hold a duet in a smile,
Or, if it please him, play an hour at chess——

Maud. A perjured slave!

Chester. And for his perjury,
Gloucester has fit rewards—nay, I believe,
He sets his bustling household's wits at work
For flatteries to ease this Stephen's hours,

And make a heaven of his purgatory ;
Adorning bondage with the pleasant gloss
Of feasts and music, and all idle shows
Of indoor pageantry ; while syren whispers,
Predestined for his ear, 'scape as half-checked
From lips the courtliest and the rubiest
Of all the realm, admiring of his deeds.

Maud. A frost upon his summer !

Chester. A queen's nod
Can make his June December. Here he comes.

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THE CAP AND BELLS : *

OR, THE JEALOUSIES.

A FAERY TALE. UNFINISHED.

I.

IN midmost Ind, beside Hydaspes cool,
There stood, or hovered, tremulous in the air,
A faery city, 'neath the potent rule
Of Emperor Elfinan ; famed ev'rywhere
For love of mortal women, maidens fair,
Whose lips were solid, whose soft hands were made
Of a fit mould and beauty, ripe and rare,
To pamper his slight wooing, warm yet staid :
He loved girls smooth as shades, but hated a mere shade.

II.

This was a crime forbidden by the law ;
And all the priesthood of his city wept,
For ruin and dismay they well foresaw
If impious prince no bound or limit kept,
And faery Zendervester overstept ;

* "This Poem was written subject to future amendments and omissions : it was begun without a plan, and without any prescribed laws for the supernatural machinery."—CHARLES BROWN.

"There are beautiful passages and lines of ineffable sweetness in these minor pieces, and strange outbursts of individual fancy and felicitous expressions in the 'Cap and Bells,' though the general extravagance of the poetry is more suited to an Italian than to an English taste."—JEFFREY, *Letter to LORD HOUGHTON*, Aug. 1848.

They wept, he sinned, and still he would sin on,
 They dreamt of sin, and he sinned while they slept;
 In vain the pulpit thundered at the throne,
 Caricature was vain, and vain the tart lampoon.

III.

Which seeing, his high court of parliament
 Laid a remonstrance at his Highness' feet,
 Praying his royal senses to content
 Themselves with what in faery land was sweet,
 Befitting best that shade with shade should meet:
 Whereat, to calm their fears, he promised soon
 From mortal tempters all to make retreat,—
 Aye, even on the first of the new moon
 An immaterial wife to espouse as heaven's boon.

IV.

Meantime he sent a fluttering embassy
 To Pigmio, of Imaus sovereign,
 To half beg, and half demand, respectfully,
 The hand of his fair daughter Bellanaine;
 An audience had, and speeching done, they gain
 Their point, and bring the weeping bride away;
 Whom, with but one attendant, safely lain
 Upon their wings, they bore in bright array,
 While little harps were touched by many a lyric fay.

V.

As in old pictures tender cherubim
 A child's soul thro' the sapphired canvas bear,
 So, thro' a real heaven, on they swim
 With the sweet princess on her plumaged lair,
 Speed giving to the winds her lustrous hair;
 And so she journeyed, sleeping or awake,
 Save when, for healthful exercise and air
 She chose to *promener à l'aile* or take
 A pigeon's somerset, for sport or change's sake.

VI.

“Dear Princess, do not whisper me so loud,”
 Quoth Coralline, nurse and confidant.
 “Do not you see there, lurking in a cloud,
 Close at your back, that sly old Crafticant?
 He hears a whisper plainer than a rant:
 Dry up your tears, and do not look so blue;
 He’s Elfinan’s great state-spy militant,
 His running, lying, flying footman too,—
 Dear mistress, let him have no handle against you!

VII.

“Show him a mouse’s tail, and he will guess,
 With metaphysic swiftness, at the mouse;
 Show him a garden, and with speed no less
 He’ll surmise sagely of a dwelling-house,
 And plot, in the same minute, how to chouse
 The owner out of it; show him a”—— “Peace!
 Peace! nor contrive thy mistress’ ire to rouse!”
 Returned the Princess, “my tongue shall not cease
 Till from this hated match I get a free release.

VIII.

“Ah, beauteous mortal!” “Hush!” quoth Coralline,
 “Really you must not talk of him, indeed.”
 “You hush!” replied the mistress with a shine
 Of anger in her eyes, enough to breed
 In stouter hearts than nurse’s fear and dread:
 ’Twas not the glance itself made Nursesey flinch,
 But of its threat she took the utmost heed;
 Not liking in her heart an hour-long pinch,
 Or a sharp needle run into her back an inch.

IX.

So she was silenced, and fair Bellanaine,
 Writhing her little body with ennui,

Continued to lament and to complain,
 That Fate, cross-purposing, should let her be
 Ravished away far from her dear countree ;
 That all her feelings should be set at nought,
 In trumping up this match so hastily,
 With lowland blood ; and lowland blood she thought
 Poison, as every staunch true-born Imaian ought.

X.

Sorely she grieved, and wetted three or four
 White Provence rose-leaves with her faery tears,
 But not for this cause ;—alas ! she had more
 Bad reasons for her sorrow, as appears
 In the famed memoirs of a thousand years,
 Written by Crafticant, and published
 By Parpaglion and Co., (those sly compeers
 Who raked up ev'ry fact against the dead,)
 In Scarab Street, Panthea, at the Jubal's Head.

XI.

Where, after a long hypercritic howl
 Against the vicious manners of the age,
 He goes on to expose with heart and soul,
 What vice in this or that year was the rage,
 Backbiting all the world in ev'ry page ;
 With special strictures on the horrid crime,
 (Sectioned and subsectioned with learning sage,)
 Of faeries stooping on their wings sublime
 To kiss a mortal's lips, when such were in their prime.

XII.

Turn to the copious index, you will find
 Somewhere in the column, headed letter B.,
 The name of Bellanaine, if you're not blind ;
 Then pray refer to the text, and you will see
 An article made up of calumny

Against this highland princess, rating her
For giving way, so over fashionably,
To this new-fangled vice, which seems a burr
Stuck in his moral throat, no coughing e'er could stir.

XIII.

There he says plainly that she loved a man !
That she around him fluttered, flirted, toyed,
Before her marriage with great Elfinan ;
That after marriage, too, she never joyed
In husband's company, but still employed
Her wits to 'scape away to Angle-land ;
Where lived the youth, who worried and annoyed
Her tender heart, and its warm ardours fanned
To such a dreadful blaze her side would scorch her hand.

XIV.

But let us leave this idle tittle-tattle
To waiting-maids and bedroom coteries,
Nor till fit time against her fame wage battle.
Poor Elfinan is very ill at ease ;
Let us resume his subject if you please :
For it may comfort and console him much
To rhyme and syllable his miseries ;
Poor Elfinan ! whose cruel fate was such,
He sat and cursed a bride he knew he could not touch.

XV.

Soon as (according to his promises)
The bridal embassy had taken wing,
And vanished, bird-like, o'er the suburb trees,
The Emperor, empierced with the sharp sting
Of love, retired, vexèd and murmuring
Like any drone shut from the fair bee-queen,
Into his cabinet, and there did fling
His limbs upon a sofa, full of spleen,
And damned his House of Commons, in complete chagrin.

XVI.

“I’ll trounce some of the members,” cried the Prince,
“I’ll put a mark against some rebel names,
I’ll make the Opposition-benches wince,
I’ll show them very soon, to all their shames,
What ’tis to smother up a Prince’s flames.
That ministers should join in it, I own,
Surprises me!—they too at these high games!
Am I an Emperor? Do I wear a crown?
Imperial Elfinan, go hang thyself or drown!

XVII.

“I’ll trounce ’em!—there’s the square-cut chancellor,
His son shall never touch that bishopric;
And for the nephew of old Palfior,
I’ll show him that his speeches made me sick,
And give the colonelcy to Phalaric;
The tiptoe marquis, moral and gallant,
Shall lodge in shabby taverns upon tick;
And for the Speaker’s second cousin’s aunt,
She sha’n’t be maid of honour,—by heaven that she sha’n’t!

XVIII.

“I’ll shirk the Duke of A.; I’ll cut his brother;
I’ll give no garter to his eldest son;
I won’t speak to his sister or his mother.
The Viscount B. shall live at cut-and-run;
But how in the world can I contrive to stun
That fellow’s voice, which plagues me worse than any,
That stubborn fool, that impudent state-dun,
Who sets down ev’ry sovereign as a zany,—
That vulgar commoner, Esquire Biancopany?

XIX.

“Monstrous affair! Pshaw! pah! what ugly minx
Will they fetch from Imaus for my bride?

Alas ! my wearied heart within me sinks,
 To think that I must be so near allied
 To a cold dullard fay,—ah, woe betide !
 Ah, fairest of all human loveliness !
 Sweet Bertha ! what crime can it be to glide
 About the fragrant plaitings of thy dress,
 Or kiss thine eyes, or count thy locks, tress after tress ? ”

XX.

So said, one minute’s while his eyes remained
 Half lidded, piteous, languid, innocent ;
 But, in a wink, their splendour they regained,
 Sparkling revenge with amorous fury blent.
 Love thwarted in bad temper oft has vent :
 He rose, he stampt his foot, he rang the bell,
 And ordered some death-warrants to be sent
 For signature :—somewhere the tempest fell,
 As many a poor fellow does not live to tell.

XXI.

“ At the same time, Eban, ”—(this was his page,
 A fay of colour, slave from top to toe,
 Sent as a present, while yet under age,
 From the Viceroy of Zanguebar,—wise, slow
 His speech, his only words were “ Yes, ” and “ No, ”
 But swift of look and foot and wing was he,)—
 “ At the same time, Eban, this instant go
 To Hum the soothsayer, whose name I see
 Among the fresh arrivals in our empery.

XXII.

“ Bring Hum to me. But stay—here, take my ring,
 The pledge of favour, that he not suspect
 Any foul play, or awkward murdering,
 Tho’ I have bowstrung many of his sect ;
 Throw in a hint, that if he should neglect

One hour the next shall see him in my grasp,
And the next after that shall see him necked
Or swallowed by my hunger-starved asp,—
And mention ('tis as well) the torture of the wasp."

XXIII.

These orders given, the Prince, in half a pet,
Let o'er the silk his propping elbow slide,
Caught up his little legs, and, in a fret,
Fell on the sofa on his royal side.
The slave retreated backwards, humble-eyed,
And with a slave-like silence closed the door,
And to old Hum thro' street and alley hied ;
He "knew the city," as we say, of yore,
And for short cuts and turns, was nobody knew more.

XXIV.

It was the time when wholesale dealers close
Their shutters with a moody sense of wealth,
But retail dealers, diligent, let loose
The gas (objected to on score of health),
Conveyed in little soldered pipes by stealth,
And make it flare in many a brilliant form,
That all the powers of darkness it repell'th,
Which to the oil-trade doth great scaith and harm,
And supersedeth quite the use of the glow-worm.

XXV.

Eban, untempted by the pastrycooks,
(Of pastry he got store within the palace,)
With hasty steps, wrapped cloak, and solemn looks,
Incognito upon his errand sallies,
His smelling-bottle ready for the alleys ;
He passed the hurdygurdies with disdain,
Vowing he'd have them sent on board the galleys ;
Just as he made his vow it 'gan to rain,
Therefore he called a coach, and bade it drive amain.

XXVI.

"I'll pull the string," said he, and further said,
"Polluted jarvey! Ah, thou filthy hack!
Whose springs of life are all dried up and dead,
Whose linsey-woolsey lining hangs all slack,
Whose rug is straw, whose wholeness is a crack;
And evermore thy steps go clatter-clitter;
Whose glass once up can never be got back,
Who prov'st, with jolting arguments and bitter,
That 'tis of modern use to travel in a litter.

XXVII.

"Thou inconvenience! thou hungry crop
For all corn! thou snail-creeper to and fro,
Who, while thou goest, ever seem'st to stop,
And fiddle-faddle standest while you go;
I' the morning, freighted with a weight of woe,
Unto some lazar-house thou journeyest,
And in the evening tak'st a double row
Of dowdies, for some dance or party drest,
Besides the goods meanwhile thou movest east and west.

XXVIII.

"By thy ungallant bearing and sad mien,
An inch appears the utmost thou couldst budge;
Yet at the slightest nod, or hint, or sign,
Round to the curb-stone patient dost thou trudge,
Schooled in a beckon, learnèd in a nudge,
A dull-eyed Argus watching for a fare;
Quiet and plodding, thou dost bear no grudge
To whisking tilburies or phaetons rare,
Curricles, or mail-coaches, swift beyond compare."

XXIX.

Philosophizing thus, he pulled the check
And bade the coachman wheel to such a street,