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Translator: [William F. Fleming](#)

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CONTENTS	
	PAGE
MÉROPE: DRAMATIS PERSONÆ	3
DEDICATORY LETTER	5
LETTER TO THE AUTHOR	20
ANSWER BY THE AUTHOR	26
ACT I	29
OLYMPIA: DRAMATIS PERSONÆ	100
SCENE I	101
THE ORPHAN OF CHINA: DRAMATIS PERSONÆ	174
DEDICATION	175
ACT I	181
BRUTUS: DRAMATIS PERSONÆ	238
ACT I	239

Table Of Contents

[The Works of Voltaire: the Dramatic Works of Voltaire Vol. Viii— Part I](#)

[MÉrope](#)

[Dramatis PersonÆ.](#)

[A Letter to the Marquis Scipio Maffei, Author of the Italian Mérope, and Many Other Celebrated Performances.](#)

[A Letter From M. De La Lindelle to M. De Voltaire.](#)

[The Answer of M. De Voltaire to M. De La Lindelle.](#)

[Act I.](#)

[Act II.](#)

[Act III.](#)

[Act IV.](#)

[Act V.](#)

[Olympia](#)

[Act I.](#)

[Act II.](#)

[Act III.](#)

[Act IV.](#)

[Act V.](#)

[The Orphan of China](#)

[Dramatis PersonÆ.](#)

[To the Most Noble Duke of Richelieu, Marshal and Peer of France, First Gentleman of the Chamber to His Majesty, Governor of Languedoc, and Member of the Academy of Sciences.](#)

[Act I.](#)

[Act II.](#)

[Act III.](#)

[Act IV.](#)

[Act V.](#)

[Brutus](#)

[Dramatis PersonÆ.](#)

[Act I.](#)

[Act II.](#)

[Act III.](#)

[Act IV.](#)

[Act V.](#)

[The Dramatic Works of Voltaire Vol. Viii— Part Ii](#)

[Mahomet.](#)

[To His Majesty the King of Prussia.](#)

[A Letter From M. De Voltaire to Pope Benedict XIV.](#)

[The Answer of Pope Benedict XIV. To M. De Voltaire. Benedictus P. P. Dilecto Filio Salutem & Apostolicam Benedictionem.](#)

[A Letter of Thanks From M. De Voltaire to the Pope.](#)

[Dramatis PersonÆ.](#)

[Act I.](#)

[Act Ii](#)

[Act III.](#)

[Act IV.](#)

[Act V.](#)

[Amelia](#)

[Dramatis PersonÆ.](#)

[Act I.](#)

[Act II.](#)

[Act III.](#)

[Act IV.](#)

[Act V.](#)

[Œdipus](#)

[Dramatis PersonÆ.](#)

[Act I.](#)

[Act II.](#)

[Act III.](#)

[Act IV.](#)

[Act V.](#)

[Mariamne](#)

[Dramatis PersonÆ.](#)

[Act I.](#)

[Act II.](#)

[Act III.](#)

[Act IV.](#)

[Act V.](#)

[Socrates](#)

[Dramatis PersonÆ.](#)

[Act I.](#)

[Act II.](#)

[Act III.](#)

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

The WORKS Of VOLTAIRE

*“Between two servants of Humanity, who appeared eighteen hundred years apart, there is a mysterious relation. * * * * Let us say it with a sentiment of profound respect: JESUS WEPT: VOLTAIRE SMILED. Of that divine tear and of that human smile is composed the sweetness of the present civilization.”*

VICTOR HUGO.



THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF VOLTAIRE Vol. VIII—Part I

MÉROPE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Mérope, Widow of Cresphontes, King of Messene.

Ægisthus, Son of Mérope.

Poliphontes, Tyrant of Messene.

Narbas, an old Man.

Euricles, Favorite of Mérope.

Erox, Favorite of Poliphontes.

Ismenia, Confidante of Mérope.

Scene at Messene, in the Palace of Mérope.

“Mérope,” produced in 1743, is the greatest of Voltaire’s tragedies and a perfect literary performance. Frederick the Great amused himself by turning it into the libretto of an opera. Its success was great and the author was called before the curtain, an honor until then unknown in France. The interest of the following correspondence justifies its length.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

A Letter To The Marquis Scipio Maffei, Author Of The Italian Mérope, And Many Other Celebrated Performances.

Sir:

The Greeks and Romans, to whom modern Italy, as well as all other nations, are indebted for almost everything, dedicated their works, without the ridiculous form of compliments, to their friends, who were masters of the art: by this claim I take the liberty of addressing to you the French "*Mérope*."

The Italians, who have been the restorers of almost all the fine arts, and the inventors of many, were the first, who, under the auspices of Leo X., revived tragedy; and you, sir, are the first who, in this age, when the Sophoclean art became enervated by love-intrigues, often foreign to the subject, and so often debased by idle buffooneries, that reflected dishonor on the taste of your ingenious countrymen, you, sir, were the first who had courage and genius enough to hazard a tragedy without gallantry, a tragedy worthy of Athens in its glory; wherein the maternal affection constitutes the whole intrigue, and the most tender interest arises from the purest virtue. France prides herself in her "*Athalie*"; it is indeed the masterpiece of our stage, perhaps of poetry itself: of all the pieces that are exhibited among us, it is the only one where love is not introduced: but at the same time we must allow, that it is supported by the pomp of religion, and that majesty of eloquence which appears in the prophets. You had not that resource, and yet you have so contrived, as to furnish out five acts, which it is so extremely difficult to fill up without episodes. I must own, your subject appeared to me much more interesting and tragical than that of "*Athalie*"; and even if our admirable Racine had worked up his masterpiece with more art, more poetry, and more sublimity than he has, yours, I am satisfied, would have drawn more tears from the audience.

The preceptor of Alexander—kings ought always to have such preceptors—the great Aristotle, that extensive genius, so just, and so deeply versed in all the learning of those times, Aristotle, in his art of poetry, has declared that the meeting of *Mérope* and her son was the most interesting circumstance of the whole Grecian theatre. This stroke was, in his opinion, infinitely superior to all the rest. Plutarch tells us, that the Greeks, who, of all the people in the world, had the quickest feeling, trembled with fear, lest the old man who was to stop the arm of *Mérope*, should not come in time enough. That piece, which was played in his time, and a few fragments of which are still extant, appeared to him the most affecting of all the tragedies of Euripides; but it was not the choice of his subject alone to which that poet owed his success, though in every species of the drama, a happy choice is, no doubt, of the greatest service.

France has seen several "*Méropes*," but none of them ever succeeded: the authors perhaps overloaded this simple subject with foreign ornaments: it was the naked "*Venus*" of Praxiteles which they wanted to cover with tinsel. It requires a great deal of time to teach men that everything which is great should be simple and natural. In

1641, when the French flag began to flourish, and even to raise itself above that of Greece, by the genius of P. Corneille, Cardinal Richelieu, who ambitiously sought for glory of every kind, and who had just then built a magnificent hall, for theatrical representations, in the Palais Royal, of which he had himself furnished the design, had a "*Mérope*" played there under the name of "*Telephonte*"; the plot of it is generally believed to have been entirely his own. There are about a hundred verses in it, supposed to be written by him; the rest was by Colletet, Bois-Roberts, Desmarests, and Chapelain; but all the power of Cardinal Richelieu could not impart to those writers that genius which they never possessed: his own was not indeed adapted to the stage, though he had a good taste; so that all he could do, or that could be expected from him, was to patronize and encourage the great Corneille.

Mr. Gilbert, resident of the celebrated Queen Christina, in 1643, gave us his "*Mérope*," which is at present as little known as the other. La Chapelle, of the French academy, author of a tragedy called "*Cléopatre*," which was played with some success, gave us another "*Mérope*" in 1683, and took care to insert a love episode: he complains withal in his preface, that the critics reproached him with too great a degree of the marvellous; but he was mistaken, it was not the marvellous that sank his performance, but in reality the want of genius, added to the coldness and insipidity of his versification; this is the great point, the capital fault, that condemns so many poems to oblivion.

The art of eloquence in verse is of all arts the most difficult and the most uncommon: there are a thousand geniuses to be found who can plan a work, and put it into verse after the common manner; but to treat it like a true poet, is a talent which is seldom bestowed on above two or three men on the face of the whole earth.

In December, 1701, M. de la Grange played his "*Amasis*," which is nothing more than the subject of "*Mérope*" under another name. Gallantry has its share in this performance likewise; and there is more of the marvellous in it than even in La Chapelle's: but it is more interesting, conducted with more art and genius, and written with more warmth and power; notwithstanding which, it met with no great success;

Et habent sua fata libelli.

Since that, however, it has been revived with great applause; and is one of those few pieces which generally give pleasure in the representation.

Before and after "*Amasis*" we have had several tragedies on subjects very nearly resembling this, wherein a mother is going to avenge the death of her son on the son himself, and discovers him just at the instant when she was about to kill him. We frequently saw on our stage that striking but rarely probable situation, wherein a person comes with a poniard in his hand ready to destroy his enemy, and another arrives at the same instant, and snatches it from him. This incident recommended, at least for a time, the "*Camma*" of Thomas Corneille.

But amongst all the tragedies on this subject, which I have here enumerated, there is not one of them but is filled with some episode of love, or rather gallantry; for

everything must give way to the reigning taste. But you must not believe, sir, that this unhappy custom of loading our tragedies with ridiculous love-intrigues was owing to Racine; a crime, which, in Italy, I know he is generally reproached with: on the contrary, he did everything in his power to reform the public taste in this particular: the passion of love is never brought in by him as a mere episode; it is the foundation or ground-plot of all his pieces, and forms the principal interest: it is certainly of all the passions the most truly theatrical, the most fruitful in sentiments, and admits of the greatest variety: it ought, therefore, no doubt, to be the soul of a dramatic performance, or entirely to be banished from it: if love is not tragical, it is insipid; and when it is tragical, it should reign alone; it was never made for a second place. It was Rotrou, or rather we must own, the great Corneille himself, who, in his creation of the stage, at the same time disfigured and disgraced it, by those ridiculous intrigues, bespoken, as it were, and made on purpose, those affairs of gallantry, which not being true passions, were unworthy of the stage; if you would know the reason why Corneille's tragedies are so seldom played, the reason is plain enough: it is because, in his "*Otho*."

"*Otho* makes a compliment to his mistress more like a man of wit than a real lover: he follows step by step the effort of his memory, which it is much more easy to admire than to believe. *Camille* herself seemed to be of his opinion; she would have liked much better a discourse less studied.—Tell me then, when *Otho* made love to *Camille*, was he contented, or was she kind?"

It is because in, "*Pompey*," *Cleopatra*—a useless character—says that *Cæsar* "sighs for her," and in a plaintive style calls himself "her captive, even in the field of victory."

It is because *Cæsar* asks *Antony* if he has seen this "adorable queen": to which *Antony* replies, "Yes, my lord, I have seen her, she is incomparable."

It is because, in "*Sertorius*," old *Sertorius* falls in love, not only because he likes the lady, but with a political view, and cries out: "I love: but it suits my age so ill to be in love, that I even conceal it from the fair one who has charmed me, as I know that the deep and yellow wrinkles on my forehead can have no great power in captivating the senses."

It is because, in "*Ædipus*," *Theseus* begins by saying to *Dirce*, "Whatever dreadful havoc the plague may make here, absence to true lovers is far more dreadful."

In a word, it is because such love as this will never make us shed tears; and when that passion does not affect us, it must be quite insipid.

I have said no more here, sir, than what all good judges, and men of taste, say to one another every day; what you have often heard at my house; in short, what everybody thinks, but none dare to publish: you know well enough the nature of mankind: half the world write in opposition to their own opinions, for fear of shocking received prejudices and vulgar errors. With regard to myself, who have never mixed any political reserve with my sentiments on literature, I speak the truth boldly, and will

add, that I respect Corneille more, and have a higher opinion of the real merit of this great father of the stage, than those who praise him indiscriminately, and are blind to all his faults.

A "*Mérope*" was exhibited at London in 1731: who would have thought a love-intrigue could ever have been thought of at that time? But ever since the reign of Charles II. love has taken possession of the English stage; though there is not a nation upon earth by whom that passion is so ill painted; but the intrigue so absurdly brought in, and so badly treated, is the least fault of the English "*Mérope*." The young *Egisthus*, delivered out of prison by a maid of honor, who is in love with him, is brought before the queen, who presents him with a bowl of poison, and a dagger, and speaks thus to him: "If you don't swallow the poison, this dagger shall put an end to your mistress' life." The young man drinks the poison, and is carried off in the agonies of death: he comes back in the fifth act coldly to inform *Mérope* that he is her son, and that he has slain the tyrant. *Mérope* asks him how this miracle was performed: to which he replies, that a friend of the maid of honor had put poppy-water, instead of poison, into the cup. "I was only asleep," says he, "when they thought me dead; I learned, when I awaked, that I was your son, and immediately killed the tyrant." Thus ends the tragedy; no doubt but it met with a bad reception: but is it not strange that it should ever have been represented? Is it not a proof that the English stage is not yet refined? It seems as if the same cause that deprives the English of any excellency in, or genius for, music and painting, takes from them also all perfection in tragedy. This island, which has produced the finest philosophers in the world, is not equally productive of the fine arts; and if the English do not seriously apply themselves to the study of those precepts which were given them by their excellent countrymen, Addison and Pope, they will never come near to other nations in point of taste and literature.

But whilst the subject of "*Mérope*" has been thus disgraced and disfigured in one part of Europe, it has met with better fate in Italy, where it has for a long time been treated in the true taste of the ancients. In this sixteenth century, which will be famous throughout all ages, the Count de Torelli gave us his "*Mérope*" with choruses. If in La Chapelle's tragedy we find all the faults of the French stage, such as useless intrigues, episodes, and a romantic air; and in the English author the highest degree of indecency, barbarism, and absurdity; we likewise meet in the Italian with all the faults of the Greek theatre, such as the want of action, and declamation. You, sir, have avoided all the rocks which they split upon; you, who have done honor to your country, by complete models of more than one kind, you have given us in your "*Mérope*" an example of a tragedy that is at once both simple and interesting.

The moment I read it I was struck with it; my love to my own country has never shut my eyes against the merit of foreigners. On the other hand, the more regard I have for it, the more I endeavor to enrich it, by the addition of treasures that are not of its own growth. The desire which I had of translating your "*Mérope*," was increased by the honor of a personal acquaintance with you at Paris, in the year 1733. By loving the author, I became still more enamored with his work; but when I sat down to it, I found it was impossible to bring it on the French stage. We are grown excessively delicate: like the Sybarites of old, we are so immersed in luxury, that we cannot bear that rustic

simplicity, and that description of a country life, which you have imitated from the Greek theatre. I am afraid our audiences would not suffer young *Ægisthus* to make a present of his ring to the man that stops him. I could not have ventured to seize upon a hero, and take him for a robber; though, at the same time, the circumstances he is in authorize the mistake. Our manners, which probably admit of many things which yours do not, would not permit us to represent the tyrant, the murderer of *Mérope's* husband and children, pretending, after fifteen years, to be in love with her; nor could I even have dared to make the queen say to him, "Why did not you talk to me of love before, when the bloom of youth was yet on my face?" Conversations of this kind are natural; but our pit, which at some times is so indulgent, and at others so nice and delicate, would think them perhaps too familiar, and might even discover coquetry, where, in reality, there might be nothing but what was just and proper. Our stage would by no means have suffered *Mérope* to bind her son to a pillar, nor to run after him with a javelin, and an axe in her hand, nor have permitted the young man to run away from her twice, and beg his life of the tyrant: much less could we have suffered the confidante of *Mérope* to have persuaded *Ægisthus* to go to sleep on the stage, merely to give the queen an opportunity of coming there to assassinate him: not but all this is natural: but you must pardon us for expecting that nature should always be presented to us with some strokes of art; strokes that are extremely different at Paris from those which we meet with at Verona.

To give you a proper idea of the different taste and judgment of polite and cultivated nations, with regard to the same arts, permit me here to quote a few passages from your own celebrated performance, which seem dictated by pure nature. The person who stops young *Cresphontes*, and takes the ring from him, says:

*Or dunque in tuo paese i servi
Han di coteste gemme? un bel pacse
Sia questo tuo, nel nostro una tal gemma
Ad un dito real non sconverebbe.*

I will take the liberty to translate this into blank verse, in which your tragedy is written, as I have not time at present to work it into rhyme.

Have slaves such precious jewels where thou livest?
Sure 'tis a noble country; for, with us,
Such rings might well adorn a royal hand.

The tyrant's confidant tells him, when speaking of the queen, who refuses, after twenty years, to marry the known murderer of her family:

*La donna, come sai, ricusa e brama
Women, we know, refuse when most they love.*

The queen's waiting-woman answers the tyrant, who presses her to use her influence in his favor, thus:

—dissimulato in vano

*Soffre di febre assalto; alquanti giorni
Donare e forza a rinfrancar suoi spiriti.
The queen, sir has a fever, 'tis in vain
To hide it, and her spirits are oppressed;
She must have time to recollect them*

In your fourth act, old *Polydore* asks one of *Mérope*'s courtiers who he is? To which he replies, "I am *Eurises*, the son of *Nicander*." *Polydore* then, speaking of *Nicander*, talks in the style of Homer's *Nestor*.

—*Egli cra humano
Eliberal, quando appariva, tutti
Faceangli honor; io mi ricordo ancora
Di quanto ei festeggio con bella pompa
Le sue nozze con Silvia, ch'era figlia
D'Olimpia e di Glicon fratel d'Ipparcho.
Ju dunque sir quel fanciullin che in corte
Silvia condur solea quasi per pompa;
Parmi' l'altir hieri: O quanto siete presti,
Quanto voi v'affrettate, O giovinetti,
A farvi adulti ed a gridar tacendo
Che noi diam loco!*
The most humane, most generous of mankind,
Where'er he went, respected and beloved:
O I remember well the feast he gave
When to his Sylvia wedded, the fair daughter
Of Glycon, brother of the brave Hipparchus,
And chaste Olympia: and art thou that infant
Whom Sylvia to the court so often brought
And fondled in her arms? alas! methinks
It was but yesterday: how quickly youth
Shoots up, and tells us we must quit the scene!

In another place the same old man, being invited to the ceremony of the queen's marriage, says:

—*Oh curioso
Punto io non son, passo stagione. Assai
Veduti ho sacrificii; io mi ricordo
Di quello ancora quando il re Cresphonte
Incomincio a regnar. Quella fu pompa.
Ora piu non si fanno a questi tempi
Di cotai sacrificii. Piu di cento
Fur le beste sivenate i sacerdoti
Risplendean tutti, ed ove ti volgessi
Altro non si vedea che argento ed oro.
My time is past, and curiosity
Is now no more: already I have seen*

Enough of nuptial rites, enough of pomp
And sacrifice: I still remember well
The great solemnity, when King Cresphontes
Began his reign: O 'twas a noble sight!
We cannot boast of such in these our days:
A hundred beasts were offered up, the priests
In all their splendor shone, and naught was seen
But gold and silver.—

All these strokes are natural, all agreeable to the characters and manners represented: such familiar dialogues would, no doubt, have been well received at Athens; but Paris and our pit expect a simplicity of another kind. We may, perhaps, even boast of a more refined taste than Athens itself, where, though the principal city of all Greece, it does not appear to me that they ever represented any theatrical pieces except on the four solemn festivals; whereas at Paris there is always more than one every day in the year. At Athens the number of citizens was computed at only ten thousand, and Paris has nearly eight hundred thousand inhabitants; among whom, I suppose, we may reckon thirty thousand judges of dramatic performances, who really do pass their judgments almost every day of their lives.

In your tragedy you took the liberty to translate that elegant and simple comparison from Virgil.

*Qualis populea maerens Philomela sub umbra
Amisos queritur faetus.*

But if I were to take the same in mine, they would say it was fitter for an epic poem: such a rigid master have we to please in what we call the public:

*Nescis, heu! nescis nostra fastidia Romae:
Et pueri nasum Rhinocerontis habent.*

The English have a custom of finishing almost all their acts with a simile; but we expect that, in a tragedy, the hero should talk, and not the poet. Our audience is of opinion that in an important crisis of affairs, in a council, in a violent passion, or a pressing danger, princes and ministers should never make poetical comparisons.

How could I ever venture to make the under characters talk together for a long time? With you those conversations serve to prepare interesting scenes between the principal actors: they are like the avenues to a fine palace: but our spectators are for coming into it at once. We must therefore comply with the national taste, which is, perhaps, grown more difficult, from having been cloyed, as it were, with such a variety of fine performances: and yet among these recitals, which our excessive severity condemns, how many beauties do I regret the loss of! How does simple nature delight me, though beneath a form that appears strange to us!

I have here, sir, given you some of those reasons which prevailed on me not to follow what I so much admired. I was obliged, not without regret, to write a new “*Mérope*”;

I have done it in a different manner, but I am far from thinking that I have therefore done it better. I look upon myself, with regard to you, as a traveller to whom an eastern monarch had made a present of some very rich stuffs: the king would certainly permit this traveller to wear them according to the fashion of his own country.

My “*Mérope*” was finished in the beginning of the year 1736, pretty nearly as it now stands; studies of another kind prevented me from bringing it on the stage: but what weighed most with me was, the hazard which I ran in producing it, after several successful pieces on almost the same subject, though under different names. At length, however, I ventured to produce it, and the public gave me a convincing proof that they could condescend to see the same matter worked up in a different manner. That happened to our stage which we see every day in a gallery of pictures, where there are many of them on exactly the same subject. The judges are pleased by the observation of these different manners, and everyone marks down and enjoys, according to his own taste, the character of every painter. This is a kind of happy concurrence, which, at the same time that it contributes towards the perfection of the Art, gives the public a better insight into it. If the French “*Mérope*” has met with the same success as the Italian, it is to you, sir, I am indebted for it; to that simplicity in your performance which I have taken for my model, and which I was always an admirer of. Though I walked in a different path, you were always my guide. I could have wished, after the examples of the Italians and English, to employ the happy facility of blank verse, and have often called to mind this passage of “*Rucellai*”:

*Tu sai purche l' imagine della voce
Che risponde da i sassi, dove l' echo alberga.
Sempre nemica fu del nostro regno,
E fu inventrice delle prime rime.*

But I am satisfied, as I have long since declared, that such an attempt would never succeed in France, and it would be rather a mark of weakness than good sense, to endeavor to shake off a yoke which so many authors have borne, whose works will last as long as the nation itself. Our poetry has none of those liberties which yours has; and this is perhaps one of the reasons why the Italians got the start of us, by three or four centuries, in this most difficult and most delightful art.

As I have endeavored to imitate you in tragedy, I should be glad to follow your example in other branches of literature, for which you are so eminently distinguished: I could wish to form my taste by yours in the science of history; I do not mean the empty, barren knowledge of dates and facts, that only informs us at what period of time a man died, who perhaps was a useless or a pernicious member of society; the science of lexicography, that loads the memory without improving the mind; I mean that history of the human heart which teaches us men and manners, which leads us from error to error, and from prejudice to prejudice, into the effects of the various passions and affections that agitate mankind: which shows us all the evils that ignorance, or knowledge misapplied, has produced in the world; and which, above all, gives us a clue to the progress of the arts, and follows them through the dangers of so many contending powers, and the ruin of so many empires.

It is this which makes history delightful; and it becomes still more so to me, by the place which you will possess amongst those who have pleased and instructed mankind. It will raise the emulation of posterity, to hear that your country has bestowed on you the most signal honors, that Verona has raised a statue, with this inscription, "*To the Marquis Scipio Maffei in his lifetime*"—an inscription as beautiful in its kind as that at Montpellier to Louis XIV. *after his death*.

Deign, sir, to accept, with the respects of your fellow-citizens, those of a stranger, who esteems and honors you as much as if he had been born at Verona.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

A Letter From M. De La Lindelle To M. De Voltaire.

Sir:

You had the politeness to dedicate your tragedy of "*Mérope*" to M. Maffei, and have served the cause of literature both in Italy and France, by pointing out, from the perfect knowledge which you have of the theatre, the different rules and conduct of the Italian and French stages. The partial attachment which you have to everything that comes from Italy, added to your particular regard for M. Maffei, would not permit you to censure the real faults of that excellent writer; but as I have myself nothing in view but truth, and the advancement of the arts, I shall not be afraid to speak the sentiments of the judicious public, and which I am satisfied must be yours also.

The Abbé Desfontaines had already remarked some palpable errors in the "*Mérope*" of M. Maffei; but, according to his usual manner, with more rudeness than justice, he has mingled a few good criticisms with many bad ones. This satirist, so universally decried, had neither knowledge enough of the Italian tongue, nor taste enough to form an equitable judgment.

This, then, is the opinion of the most judicious amongst those literati whom I have consulted, both in France and on the other side of the Alps. "*Mérope*" appears to every one of them, past dispute, the most interesting and truly tragic subject that was ever brought on the stage, infinitely beyond that of "*Athalie*"; because *Athalie* does not want to assassinate the young king, but is deceived by the High-Priest, who seeks revenge on her for her former crimes: whereas in *Mérope* we see a mother, who, in avenging her son, is on the point of murdering that very son himself, her only desire, and her only hope: the interest of "*Mérope*" therefore affects us in a very different manner from that of "*Athalie*": but it seems as if M. Maffei was satisfied with what the subject naturally suggested to him, without making use of any theatrical art in the conduct of it.

1. The scenes in many places are not linked together, and the stage is left void; a fault which, in the present age, is looked upon as unpardonable, even in the lowest class of dramatic writers.
2. The actors frequently come in and go out without reason; a fault no less considerable.
3. There is no probability, no dignity, no decorum, no art in the dialogue: in the very first scene we see a tyrant reasoning in the calmest manner with *Mérope*, whose husband and children he had murdered, and making love to her: this would have been hissed at Paris, even by the poorest judges.

4. While the tyrant is thus ridiculously making love to the old queen, word is brought that they have found a young man who had committed murder; but it does not appear through the whole course of the play who it was he had killed: he pretends it was a thief, who wanted to steal his clothes. How low, little and poor is this! It would not be borne in a farce at a country fair.

5. The captain of the guard, provost, or whatever you call him, examines the murderer, who has a fine ring upon his finger: this scene is quite low comedy, and the style is agreeable to it, and worthy of the scene.

6. The mother immediately supposes that the robber, who was killed, is her son. It is pardonable, no doubt, in a mother to fear everything; but a queen who is a mother should have required better proofs.

7. In the midst of all these fears, the tyrant *Poliphontes* reasons with *Mérope's* waiting-woman about his pretended passion. These cold and indecent scenes, which are only brought in to fill up the act, would never be suffered on a regular stage. You have only, sir, modestly taken notice of one of these scenes, where *Mérope's* woman desires the tyrant not to hasten the nuptials; because, she says, her mistress has "an attack of a fever": but I, sir, will boldly aver, in the name of all the critics, that such a conversation, and such an answer, are only fit for *Harlequin's* theatre.

8. I will add, moreover, that when the queen, imagining her son to be dead, tells us she longs to pull the heart out of the murderer's breast, and tear it with her teeth, she talks more like a cannibal than an afflicted mother; and that decency should be preserved in everything.

9. *Ægisthus*, who was brought in as a robber, and who had said that he had himself been attacked, is taken for a thief a second time, and carried before the queen, in spite of the king, who notwithstanding undertakes to defend him. The queen binds him to a pillar, is going to kill him with a dart; but before she throws it, asks him some questions. *Ægisthus* tells her, that his father is an old man, upon which the queen immediately relents. Is not this an excellent reason for changing her mind, and imagining that *Ægisthus* might be her own son? a most indisputable mark to be sure: is it so very extraordinary that a young man should have an old father? Maffei has added this absurdity, this deficiency of art and genius, to another even more ridiculous, which he had made in his first edition. *Ægisthus* says to the queen, "O *Polydore*, my father." This *Polydore* was the very man to whom *Mérope* had entrusted the care of *Ægisthus*. At hearing the name of *Polydore*, the queen could no longer doubt that *Ægisthus* was her son: thus the piece was entirely at an end. This error was removed; but removed, we see, only to make room for a greater.

10. While the queen is thus ridiculously, and without any reason, in suspense, occasioned by the mention of an old man, the tyrant comes in, and takes *Ægisthus* under his protection. The young man, who should have been represented as a hero, thanks the king for his life, with a base and mean submission that is disgusting, and entirely degrades the character of *Ægisthus*.

11. At length *Mérope* and the tyrant are left together: *Mérope* exhausts her resentment in reproaches without end. Nothing can be more cold and lifeless than these scenes, full of declamation, that have no plot, interest, or contrasted passion in them; they are schoolboy scenes: everything in a play, that is without action, is useless.

12. There is so little art in this piece that the author is always forced to employ confidants to fill up the stage. The fourth act begins with another cold and useless scene between the tyrant and the queen's waiting-woman, who, a little afterwards, lights, we know not how, on young *Ægisthus*, and persuades him to rest himself in the porch, merely to give the queen a fair opportunity of despatching him when he falls asleep; which he does according to promise. An excellent plot this! and then the queen comes a second time, with an axe in her hand, in order to kill the young man, who is gone to sleep for that purpose. This circumstance, twice repeated, is surely the height of barrenness, as the young man's sleep is the height of ridicule. M. Maffei thinks there is genius and variety in this repetition, because the queen comes in the first time with a dart, and the second with an axe. What a strange effect of fancy!

13. At last old *Polydore* comes in *apropos*, and prevents the queen from striking the blow. One would naturally imagine that this happy instant must produce a thousand affecting incidents between the mother and son; but we meet with nothing of this kind: *Ægisthus* flies off, and sees no more of his mother: he has not so much as one scene with her. This betrays a want of genius that is insupportable. *Mérope* asks the old man what recompense he demands; and the old fool begs her to make him young again. In this manner the queen employs her time, which doubtless she should have spent in running after her son: all this is low, ill-placed, and ridiculous to the last degree.

14. In the course of this piece the tyrant is always for espousing *Mérope*; and, to compass his end, he bids her agents tell her, that he will murder all her servants, if she does not consent to give him her hand. What a ridiculous idea, and how extravagant a tyrant! Could not M. Maffei have found out a more specious pretext to save the honor of a queen, who had meanness enough to marry the murderer of her whole family?

15. Another childish college trick: the tyrant says to his confidant, "I know the art of reigning; I'll put the bold and rebellious to death; give the reins to all kinds of vice; invite my subjects to commit the most atrocious crimes, and pardon the most guilty; expose the good to the fury of the wicked." Did ever man pronounce such vile stuff? This declamation of a regent of sixteen, does it not give us a fine idea of a man who knows how to govern? Racine was condemned for having made *Mathan*—in his "*Athalie*"—say too much against himself; and yet *Mathan* talks reasonably: but here it is to the last degree absurd to pretend, that throwing everything into confusion is the art of ruling well; it is rather the art of dethroning himself. One cannot read anything so ridiculous without laughing at it. M. Maffei is a strange politician.

In a word, sir, this work of Maffei is a fine subject, but a very bad performance. Everybody at Paris agrees that it would not go through one representation; and the sensible men in Italy have a very poor opinion of it. It is in vain the author has taken so much pains in his travels, to engage the worst writers he could pick up to translate

his tragedy: it was much easier for him to pay a translator, than to make his piece a good one.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

The Answer Of M. De Voltaire To M. De La Lindelle.

Sir:

The letter which you did me the honor to write to me entitles you to the name of "Hypercritic," which was given to the famous Scaliger; you are truly a most redoubtable adversary; if you treat M. Maffei in this manner, what am I to expect from you? I acknowledge that, in many points, you have too much reason on your side. You have taken a great deal of pains to rake together a heap of brambles and briars; but why would you not enjoy the pleasure of gathering a few flowers? There are certainly many in M. Maffei; and which, I dare affirm, will flourish forever. Such are the scenes between the mother and son, and the narration of the catastrophe. I can't help thinking that these strokes are affecting and pathetic. You say, the subject alone makes all the beauty; but was it not the same subject in other authors who have treated *Mérope*? Why, with the same assistance, had they not the same success? Does not this single argument prove, that M. Maffei owes as much to his genius as to his subject?

To be plain with you, I think M. Maffei has shown more art than myself, in the manner by which he has contrived to make *Mérope* think that her son is the murderer of her son. I could not bring myself to make use of the ring as he did; because, after the royal ring that Boilieu laughs at in his satires, this circumstance would always appear too trifling on our stage. We must conform to the fashions of our own age and nation; and, for the same reason, we ought not lightly to condemn those of foreigners.

Neither M. Maffei nor I have sufficiently explained the motives that should so strongly incline *Poliphontes* to espouse the queen. This is, perhaps, a fault inherent in the subject; but I must own I think this fault very inconsiderable, when the circumstances it produces are so interesting. The grand point is to affect and draw tears from the spectators. Tears were shed both at Verona and at Paris. This is the best answer that can be made to the critics. It is impossible to be perfect; but how meritorious is it to move an audience, in spite of all our imperfections! Most certain it is, that in Italy many things are passed over, which would not be pardoned in France: first, because taste, decorum, and the stage itself, are not the same in both; secondly, because the Italians, having no city where they represent dramatic pieces every day, cannot possibly be so used to things of this kind as ourselves. *Opera*, that splendid monster, has driven *Melpomene* from among them; and there are so many of the *Castrati* there, that no room is left for *Roscus* and *Æsopus*: but if ever the Italians should have a regular theatre, I believe they would soon get beyond us: their stages are more extensive, their language more tractable, their blank verses easier to be made, their nation possessed of more sensibility; but they want encouragement, peace, and plenty.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT I.

SCENE I.

ismenia, mérope.

ISMENIA.

Let not, great queen, thy soul forever dwell
On images of horror and despair;
The storm is past, and brighter days succeed:
Long hast thou tasted heaven's severest wrath,
Enjoy its bounties now: the gods, thou seest,
Have blessed our land with victory and peace;
And proud Messene, after fifteen years
Of foul division and intestine wars,
Now from her ruins lifts her towering front,
Superior to misfortune: now no more
Shalt thou behold her angry chiefs support
Their jarring interests, and in guilt alone
United, spread destruction, blood and slaughter,
O'er half thy kingdom, and dispute the throne
Of good Cresphontes: but the ministers
Of heaven, the guardians of our sacred laws,
The rulers, and the people, soon shall meet,
Free in their choice, to fix the power supreme:
If virtue gives the diadem, 'tis thine:
Thine by irrevocable right: to thee,
The widow of Cresphontes, from our kings
Descended, must devolve Messene's throne:
Thou, whom misfortunes and firm constancy
Have made but more illustrious, and more dear;
Thou, to whom every heart in secret tied—

MÉROPE.

No news of Narbas! shall I never see
My child again?

ISMENIA.

Despair not, madam: slaves
Have been despatched on every side; the paths
Of Elis all are open to their search:
Doubtless the object of your fears is placed

In faithful hands, who will restore to you
Their sacred trust.

MÉROPE.

Immortal gods! who see
My bitter griefs, will ye restore my son?
Is my Ægisthus living? have you saved
My wretched infant? O preserve him still,
And shield him from the cruel murderer's hand!
He is your son, the pure, the spotless blood
Of your Alcides. Will you not protect
The dear, dear image of the best of men,
The best of kings, whose ashes I adore?

ISMENIA.

But wherefore must this tender passion turn
Thy soul aside from every other purpose?

MÉROPE.

I am a mother: canst thou wonder yet?

ISMENIA.

A mother's fondness should not thus efface
The duty of a queen, your character,
And noble rank; though in his infant years
You loved this son, yet little have you seen
Or known of him.

MÉROPE.

Not seen him, my Ismenia?
O he is always present to my heart,
Time has no power to loose such bonds as these;
His danger still awakens all my fears,
And doubles my affection: once I've heard
From Narbas, and but once these four years past,
And that alas! but made me more unhappy.
“Ægisthus,” then he told me, “well deserves
A better fate; he's worthy of his mother.
And of the gods, his great progenitors:
Exposed to every ill, his virtue braves,
And will surmount them: hope for everything
From him, but be aware of Poliphontes.”

ISMENIA.

Prevent him then, and take the reins of empire
In your own hands.

MÉROPE.

That empire is my son's:
Perdition on the cruel step-mother,
The lover of herself, the savage heart,
That could enjoy the pleasures of a throne,
And disinherit her own blood! O no: Ismenia,
If my Ægisthus lives not, what is empire.
Or what is life to me! I should renounce them.
I should have died when my unhappy lord
Was basely slain, by men and gods betrayed.
O perfidy! O guilt! O fatal day!
O death! forever present to my sight!
Methinks even now I hear the dismal shrieks,
I hear them cry, "O save the king, his wife,
His sons;" I see the walls all stained with blood,
The flaming palace, helpless women crushed
Beneath the smoking ruins, fear and tumult
On every side, arms, torches, death, and horror:
Then, rolled in dust, and bathing in his blood,
Cresphontes pressed me to his arms, upraised
His dying eyes, and took his last farewell;
Whilst his two hapless babes, the tender fruits
Of our first love, thrown on the bleeding bosom
Of their dead father, lifted up the hands
Of innocence, and begged me to protect them
Against the barbarous murderers: Ægisthus
Alone escaped: some god defended him.
O thou who didst protect his infancy
Watch o'er and guard him, bring him to my eyes;
O let him from inglorious solitude
Rise to the rank of his great ancestors!
I've borne his absence long, and groaned in chains
These fifteen years: now let Ægisthus reign
Instead of Mérope: for all my pains
And sorrows past, be that the great reward.

SCENE II.

mérope, ismenia, euricles.

MÉROPE.

Well! what of Narbas, and my son?

EURICLES.

Confused
I stand before thee; all our cares are vain;
We've searched the banks of Peneus, and the fields
Of fair Olympia, even to the walls
Of proud Salmoneus, but no Narbas there
Is to be found or heard of, not a trace
Remaining of him.

MÉROPE.

Narbas is no more,
And all is lost.

ISMENIA.

Whatever thy fears suggest
Thou still believest; and yet who knows but now,
Even whilst we speak, the happy Narbas comes
To crown thy wishes, and restore thy son.

EURICLES.

Perhaps his love, tempered with fair discretion,
Which long concealed Ægisthus from the eyes
Of men, may hide his purposed journey from thee:
He dreads the murderer's hand, and still protects him
From those who slew Cresphontes: we must strive
By artful methods to elude the rage
That cannot be opposed: I have secured
Their passage hither, and have placed some friends
Of most approved valor, whose sharp eyes
Will look abroad, and safe conduct them to thee.

MÉROPE.

I've placed my surest confidence in thee.

EURICLES.

But what alas! can all my watchfulness
And faithful cares avail thee, when the people

Already meet to rob thee of thy right,
And place another on Messene's throne?
Injustice triumphs, and the shameless crowd,
In proud contempt of sacred laws, incline
To Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

Am I fallen so low:
And shall my son return to be a slave?
To see a subject raised to the high rank
Of his great ancestors, the blood of Jove
Debased, degraded, forced to own a master.
Have I no friend, no kind protector left?
Ungrateful subjects! have you no regard,
No reverence for the memory of Cresphontes?
Have you so soon forgot his glorious deeds,
His goodness to you?

EURICLES.

Still his name is dear,
Still they regret him, still they weep his fate,
And pity thine: but power intimidates,
And makes them dread the wrath of Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

Thus, by my people still oppressed, I see
Justice give way to faction, interest still,
The arbiter of fate, sells needy virtue
To powerful guilt; the weak must to the strong
Forever yield: but let us hence, and strive
To fire once more their coward hearts to rage
And fierce resentment, for the injured blood
Of Hercules: excite the people's love;
Flatter their hopes; O tell them, Euricles,
Their master is returned.

EURICLES.

I've said too much
Already; Poliphontes is alarmed:
He dreads your son; he dreads your very tears:
Restless ambition, that holds nothing dear
Or sacred but itself, has filled his soul
With bitterness and pride: because he drove
The ruffian slaves from Pylos and Amphrysa,

And saved Messene from a band of robbers,
He claims it as his conquest: for himself
Alone he acts, and would enslave us all:
He looks towards the crown, and to attain it
Would throw down every fence, break every law,
Spill any blood that shall oppose him: they
Who killed thy husband were not more revengeful,
More bloody, than the cruel Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

I am entangled in some fatal snare
On every side, danger and guilt surround me:
This Poliphontes, this ambitious subject,
Whose crimes—

EURICLES.

He's here: you must dissemble.

SCENE III.

mérope, poliphontes, erox.

POLIPHONTES.

Madam,
At length I come to lay my heart before you:
I've served the state, and my successful toils
Have opened me a passage to the throne:
The assembled chiefs awhile suspend their choice,
But soon must fix it, or on Mérope,
Or Poliphontes: the unhappy feuds
That laid Messene waste, and filled the land
With blood and slaughter, all are buried now
In peaceful harmony, and we alone
Remain to part the fair inheritance.
We should support each other's mutual claim;
Our common interest, and our common foes,
Love for our country, reason, duty, all
Conspire to join us, all unite to say
The warrior who avenged thy husband, he
Who saved thy kingdom, may aspire to thee.
I know these hoary locks, and wrinkled brow,
Have little charms to please a youthful fair one.
Thou'rt in the bloom of spring, and mayest despise
The winter of my days; but statesmen heed not

Such fond objections: let the royal wreath
Hide these gray hairs, a sceptre and a queen
Will recompense my toils: nor think me rash,
Or vain, you are the daughter of a king,
I know you are, but your Messene wants
A master now; therefore remember, madam,
If you would keep your right, you must—divide it.

MÉROPE.

Heaven, that afflicts me with its bitterest woes,
Prepared me not for this, this cruel insult:
How darest thou ask it? wert thou not the subject
Of great Cresphontes? thinkest thou I will e'er
Betray the memory of my dearest lord,
To share with thee his son's inheritance,
Trust to thy hands his kingdom and his mother?
Thinkest thou the royal wreath was made to bind
A soldier's brows?

POLIPHONTES.

That soldier has a right
To rule the kingdom which his arm defended.
What was the first that bore the name of king,
But a successful soldier? he who serves
His country well requires not ancestry
To make him noble: the inglorious blood,
Which I received from him who gave me life,
I shed already in my country's cause,
It flowed for thee; and, spite of thy proud scorn,
I must at least be equal to the kings
I have subdued: but, to be brief with you,
The throne will soon be mine, and Mérope
May share it with me, if her pride will deign
To accept it: I've a powerful party, madam.

MÉROPE.

A party! wretch, to trample on our laws:
Is there a party which thou darest support
Against the king's, against the royal race?
Is this thy faith, thy solemn vows, thy oath,
Sworn to Cresphontes, and to me; the love,
The honor due to his illustrious shade,
His wretched widow, and his hapless son;
The gods he sprang from, and the throne they gave?

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis doubtful whether yet your son survives;
But grant that, from the mansions of the dead,
He should return, and in the face of heaven
Demand his throne, believe me when I say
He would demand in vain; Messene wants
A master worthy of her, one well proved,
A king who could defend her: he alone
Should wield the sceptre who can best avenge
His country's cause: Ægisthus is a child,
Yet unexperienced in the ways of men,
And therefore little will his birth avail him;
Naught hath he done for us, and naught deserved:
He cannot purchase at so cheap a rate
Messene's throne, the right of power supreme
Defends no more the gift of nature, here
From son to son; it is the price of toil,
Of labor, and of blood; 'tis virtue's meed,
Which I shall claim: have you so soon forgot
The savage sons of Pylos and Amphrysa,
Those lawless plunderers? Think on your Cresphontes,
And your defenceless children whom they slew:
Who saved your country then? Who stopped their fury?
Who put your foes to flight, and chased them hence?
Did not this arm avenge that murdered lord
Whom yet you weep? these, madam, are my rights,
The rights of valor: this is all my rank,
This all my title, and let heaven decide it.
If thy Ægisthus comes, by me perhaps
He may be taught to live, by me to reign:
Then shall he see how Poliphontes guides
The reins of empire. I esteem the blood
Of great Alcides, but I fear it not;
I look beyond Alcides' race, and fain
Would imitate the god from whom he sprung:
I would defend the mother, serve the son;
Be an example to him, and a father.

MÉROPE.

O, sir, no more of your affected cares;
Your generous offers, meant but to insult
My hapless son; if you would wish to tread
In great Alcides' steps, reserve the crown
For his descendant: know, that demi-god
Was the avenger of wronged innocence;
No ravisher, no tyrant; take thou care,

And with his valor imitate his justice;
Protect the guiltless, and defend your king,
Else shalt thou prove a worthless successor.
If thou wouldst gain the mother, seek the son;
Go, bring him to me; bring your master here,
And then perhaps I may descend to you:
But I will never be the vile accomplice,
Or the reward, of guilt like thine.

SCENE IV.

poliphontes, erox.

EROX.

My lord,
Did you expect to move her? Does the throne
Depend on her capricious will? Must she
Conduct you to it?

POLIPHONTES.

'Twixt that throne and me,
Erox, I see a dreadful precipice
I must o'erleap, or perish: Mérope
Expects Ægisthus; and the fickle crowd,
If he returns, perhaps may bend towards him.
In vain his father's and his brothers' blood,
Have opened wide my passage to the throne;
In vain hath fortune cast her friendly veil
O'er all my crimes; in vain have I oppressed
The blood of kings, whilst the deluded people
Adored me as their friend, if yet there lives
A hateful offspring of Alcides' race:
If this lamented son should e'er again
Behold Messene, fifteen years of toil
At once are lost, and all my hopes o'erthrown;
All the fond prejudice of birth and blood
Will soon revive the memory of Cresphontes,
A hundred kings for his proud ancestors,
The boasted honor of a race divine,
A mother's tears, her sorrows, her despair,
All will conspire to shake my feeble power:
Ægisthus is a foe I must subdue:
I would have crushed the serpent in his shell,
But that the diligent and subtle Narbas
Conveyed him hence, e'er since that time concealed

In some far distant land, he hath escaped
My narrowest search, and baffled all my care:
I stopped his couriers, broke the intelligence
'Twixt him and Mérope; but fortune oft
Deserts us: from the silence of oblivion
Sometimes a secret may spring forth; and heaven,
By slow and solemn steps, may bring down vengeance.

EROX.

Depend, undaunted, on thy prosperous fate;
Prudence, thy guardian god, shall still protect thee:
Thy orders are obeyed; the soldiers watch
Each avenue of Elis and Messene:
If Narbas brings Ægisthus here, they both
Must die.

POLIPHONTES.

But say, canst thou depend on those
Whom thou hast placed to intercept them?

EROX.

Yes:
None of them know whose blood is to be shed,
Or the king's name whom they must sacrifice.
Narbas is painted to them as a traitor,
A guilty vagabond, that seeks some place
Of refuge; and the other, as a slave,
A murderer, to be yielded up to justice.

POLIPHONTES.

It must be so: this crime and I have done;
And yet, when I have rid me of the son,
I must possess the mother: 'twill be useful:
I shall not then be branded with the name
Of a usurper; she will bring with her
A noble portion in the people's love:
I know their hearts are not inclined to me;
With fears dejected, or inflamed with hope,
Still in extremes, the giddy multitude
Tumultuous rove, and interest only binds them,
That makes them mine. Erox, thy fate depends
On my success; thou art my best support:
Go, and unite them; bribe the sordid wretch
With gold to serve me, let the subtle courtier

Expect my favors; raise the coward soul,
Inspire the valiant, and caress the bold;
Persuade and promise, threaten and implore:
Thus far this sword hath brought me on my way;
But what by courage was begun, by art
We must complete; that many-headed monster,
The people, must be soothed by flattery's power:
I'm feared already, but I would be loved.

End of the First Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

mérope, euricles, ismenia.

MÉROPE.

Hast thou heard nothing of my dear Ægisthus?
No news from Elis' frontiers? O, too well
I know the cause of this ill-boding silence!

EURICLES.

In all our search we have discovered naught,
Save a young stranger, reeking with the blood
Of one whom he had murdered: we have chained,
And brought him hither.

MÉROPE.

Ha! a murderer,
A stranger too! Whom, thinkest thou, he has slain?
My blood runs cold.

EURICLES.

The mere effect of love
And tenderness: each little circumstance
Alarms a soul like thine, that ever dwells
On one sad object; 'tis the voice of nature,
And will be heard; but let not this disturb thee,
A common accident: our borders long
Have been infested with these ruffian slaves,
The baneful fruit of our intestine broils;
Justice hath lost her power; our husbandmen
Call on the gods for vengeance, and lament
The blood of half their fellow-citizens,
Slain by each other's hand: but, be composed,
These terrors are not thine.

MÉROPE.

Who is this stranger?
Answer me, tell me.

EURICLES.

Some poor nameless wretch,
Such he appears; brought up to infamy,
To guilt, and sorrow.

MÉROPE.

Well, no matter who,
Or what he is; let him be brought before me.
Important truths are often brought to light
By meanest instruments. Perhaps my soul
Is too much moved; pity a woman's weakness,
Pity a mother, who has all to fear,
And nothing to neglect: let him appear;
I'll see, and question him.

EURICLES.

Your orders, madam,
Shall be obeyed.
[To Ismenia.]
Tell them to bring him here,
Before the queen.

MÉROPE.

I know my cares are vain;
But grief overpowers, and hurries me to act
Perhaps imprudent; but you know I've cause
For my despair; they have dethroned my son,
And would insult the mother: Poliphontes
Hath taken advantage of my helpless state,
And dared to offer me his hand.

EURICLES.

Thy woes
Are greater even than thou thinkest they are.
I know this marriage would debase thy honor,
And yet I see it must be so; thy fate
Hath bound thee to it by the cruel tie
Of dire necessity: I know it wears
A dreadful aspect, yet perchance may prove
The only means of placing on the throne
Its rightful master, so the assembled chiefs
And soldiers think; they with—

MÉROPE.

My son would ne'er
Consent to that: no: poverty and exile,
With all their pains, were far less dreadful to him
Than these base nuptials.

EURICLES.

If to assert his rights
Alone sufficed to seat him on the throne,
Doubtless his pride would spurn the shameful bond:
But if his soul is by misfortune taught
To know itself, if prudence guides his steps,
If his own interest, if his friends' advice,
And above all, necessity, the first
Of human laws, have any influence o'er him,
He would perceive, that his unhappy mother
Could not bestow on him a dearer mark
Of her affection.

MÉROPE.

Ha! what sayest thou?

EURICLES.

Truth,
Unwelcome truth, which nothing but my zeal,
And your misfortunes, should have wrested from me.

MÉROPE.

Wouldst thou persuade me then, that interest e'er
Can get the better of my fixed aversion
For Poliphontes, you who painted him
In blackest colors to me?

EURICLES.

I described him
Even as he is, most dangerous and bold;
I know his rashness, and I know his power;
Naught can resist him, he's without an heir.
Remember that: you say, you love Ægisthus.

MÉROPE.

I do; and 'tis that love which makes the tyrant
Still more detested: wherefore talkest thou thus
Of marriage and of empire? speak to me
Of my dear son; and tell me if he lives;
Inform me, Euricles.

EURICLES.

Behold the stranger
Whom you desired to question; see, he comes.

SCENE II.

mérope, euricles, ægisthus *in chains*, ismenia, *Guards*.

ÆGISTHUS.

[At the bottom of the stage. To Ismenia.
Is that the great unfortunate, the queen,
Whose glory and whose sorrows reached even me
Amidst the desert wild where I was hid?

ISMENIA.

'Tis she.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou great creator of mankind!
Thou, who didst form those matchless charms, look down
And guard thy image: virtue on a throne
Is sure the first and fairest work of heaven.

MÉROPE.

Is that the murderer? Can such features hide
A cruel heart? Come near, unhappy youth,
Be not alarmed, but answer me; whose blood
Is on thy hands?

ÆGISTHUS.

O, queen, forgive me; fear,
Respect, and grief, bind up my trembling lips.
[Turning to Euricles.

I cannot speak; her presence shakes my soul
With terror and amazement.

MÉROPE.

Tell me whom
Thy arm has slain.

ÆGISTHUS.

Some bold presumptuous youth,
Whom fate condemned to fall the wretched victim
Of his own rashness.

MÉROPE.

Ha! a youth! my blood
Runs cold within me: didst thou know him?

ÆGISTHUS.

No:
Messene's walls, her fields, and citizens,
Are new to me.

MÉROPE.

And did this unknown youth
Attack thee then? 'twas in thy own defence?

ÆGISTHUS.

Heaven is my witness, I am innocent.
Just on the borders of Pamisus, where
A temple stands, sacred to Hercules,
Thy great progenitor, I offered up
To the avenger of wronged innocence
My humble prayers for thee; I had no victims,
No precious gifts to lay before him; all
I had to give him, was a spotless heart,
And simple vows, the poor man's hecatomb:
It seemed as if the god received my homage
With kind affection, for I felt my heart
By more than common resolution fired:
Two men, both armed, and both unknown, surprised me;
One in the bloom of youth, the other sunk
Into the vale of years: "What brings thee here?"

They cried, “and wherefore for Alcides’ race
Art thou a suppliant?” At this word they raised
The dagger to my breast: but heaven preserved me.
Pierced o’er with wounds, the youngest of them fell
Dead at my feet; the other basely fled,
Like an assassin: knowing not what blood
I might have shed, and doubtful of my fate,
I threw the bloody corpse into the sea,
And fled; your soldiers stopped me; at the name
Of Mérope, I yielded up my arms,
And they have brought me hither.

EURICLES.

Why these tears,
My royal mistress?

MÉROPE.

Shall I own it to thee?
I melted with compassion, as he told
His melancholy tale; I know not why,
But my heart sympathized with his distress:
It cannot be, I blush to think it, yet
Methought I traced the features of Cresphontes:
Cruel remembrance! wherefore am I mocked
With such deceitful images as these,
Such fond delusions?

EURICLES.

Do not then embrace
Such vain suspicions, he’s not that barbarian,
That vile impostor, which we thought him.

MÉROPE.

No:
Heaven hath imprinted on his open front
The marks of candor, and of honesty.
Where wert thou born?

ægisthus.

In Elis.

MÉROPE.

Ha! in Elis!
In Elis! sayst thou? Knowst thou aught of Narbas,
Or of Ægisthus? Never hath that name
Yet reached thine ear? What rank, condition, friends,
Who was thy father?

ÆGISTHUS.

Polycletes, madam,
A poor old man: to Narbas, or Ægisthus,
Of whom thou speakest, I am a stranger.

MÉROPE.

Gods!
Why mock ye thus a poor unhappy mortal?
A little dawn of hope just gleamed upon me,
And now my eyes are plunged in deepest night:
Say, what rank did thy parents hold in Greece?

ÆGISTHUS.

If virtue made nobility, old Sirris
And Polycletes, from whose blood I sprang,
Are not to be despised: their lot indeed
Was humble, but their exemplary virtues
Made even poverty respectable:
Clothed in his rustic garb, my honest father
Obeys the laws, does all the good he can,
And only fears the gods.

MÉROPE.

[*Aside.*
How strangely he affects me! every word
Has some new charm:
[*Turning to Ægisthus.*
But wherefore left you then
The good old man? It must be dreadful to him
To lose a son like thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

A fond desire
Of glory led me hither: I had heard

Of your Messene's troubles, and your own:
Oft had I heard of the illustrious queen,
Whose virtues merited a better fate;
The sad recital moved my soul; ashamed
To spend at Elis my inglorious days,
I longed to brave the terrors of the field
Beneath thy banners: this was my design,
And this alone: an idle thirst of fame
Misled my steps, and in their helpless age
Persuaded me to leave my wretched parents:
'Tis my first fault, and I have suffered for it:
Heaven hath avenged their cause, and I am fallen
Into a fatal snare.

MÉROPE.

'Tis plain he is not,
Cannot be guilty; falsehood never dwells
With such ingenuous, sweet simplicity:
Heaven has conducted here this hapless youth,
And I will stretch the hand of mercy to him:
It is enough for me he is a man,
And most unfortunate; my son perhaps
Even now laments his more distressful fate:
O he recalls Ægisthus to my thoughts:
Their age the same; perhaps Ægisthus now
Wanders like him from clime to clime, unknown,
Unpitied, suffers all the bitter woes
And cruel scorn that waits on penury:
Misery like this will bend the firmest soul,
And wither all its virtues: lot severe
For a king's offspring, and the blood of gods!
O if at least—

SCENE III.

mérope, ægisthus, euricles, ismenia.

ISMENIA.

Hark! madam, heard you not
Their loud tumultuous cries? You know not what—

MÉROPE.

Whence are thy fears?

ISMENIA.

'Tis Poliphontes' triumph:
The wavering people flatter his ambition,
And give their voices for him; he is chosen
Messene's king: 'tis done.

ÆGISTHUS.

I thought the gods
Had on the throne of her great ancestors
Placed Mérope: O heaven! the greater still
Our rank on earth, the more have we to fear:
A poor abandoned exile, like myself,
Is less to be lamented than a queen:
But we have all our sorrows.
[Ægisthus is led off.]

EURICLES.

[To Mérope.]

I foretold it:
You were to blame to scorn his proffered hand,
And brave his power.

MÉROPE.

I see the precipice
That opens wide its horrid gulf before me;
But men and gods deceived me; I expected
Justice from both, and both refused to grant it.

EURICLES.

I will assemble yet our little force
Of trusty friends, to anchor our poor bark,
And save it from the fury of the storm;
To shield thee from the insults of a tyrant,
And the mad rage of an ungrateful people.

SCENE IV.

mérope, ismenia.

ISMENIA.

'Tis not the people's fault; they love you still,
And would preserve the honor of your crown:
They wish to see you joined to Poliphontes,
That from your hand he then might seem to hold
The sovereign power.

MÉROPE.

They give me to a tyrant,
Betray Ægisthus, and enslave his mother.

ISMENIA.

They call you to the throne of your forefathers:
Obey their voice; it is the voice of heaven.

MÉROPE.

And wouldst thou have me purchase empty honors
With infamy and shame?

SCENE V.

mérope, euricles, ismenia.

EURICLES.

O queen, I tremble
To stand before thee: now prepare thy heart
For the most dreadful stroke; call forth thy courage
To bear the news.

MÉROPE.

I have no courage left,
'Tis worn out by misfortune; but no matter.
Proceed, inform me.

EURICLES.

All is past; and fate—
I can no more.

MÉROPE.

Go on: my son—

EURICLES.

He's dead:
It is too true: the dreadful news hath shocked
Your friends, and froze their active zeal.

MÉROPE.

My son,
Ægisthus, dead!

ISMENIA.

O gods!

EURICLES.

Some base assassins
Had in his passage laid the snares of death;
The horrid crime is done.

MÉROPE.

O hateful day!
Why shines the sun on such a wretch as I?
He's lost; he's gone: what cruel hand destroyed him!
Who shed his blood, the last of my sad race?

EURICLES.

It was that stranger, that abandoned slave,
Whose persecuted virtue you admired,
For whom such pity rose in your kind breast;
Even he whom you protected.

MÉROPE.

Can it be!
Was he that monster?

EURICLES.

We have certain proofs,

And have discovered two of his companions,
Who, lurking here, were still in search of Narbas,
Who had escaped them: he who slew Ægisthus
Had taken from your son these precious spoils,
[*The armor is shown at a distance at the farther end of the stage.*
The armor which old Narbas bore from hence.
The traitor, that he might not be discovered,
Had thrown aside these bloody witnesses.

MÉROPE.

What hast thou told me? O these trembling hands
Did on Cresphontes put that very armor
When first he went to battle. Ye dear relics,
O to what hands were ye delivered! monster,
To seize this sacred armor.

EURICLES.

'Tis the same
Ægisthus did bring hither.

MÉROPE.

Now behold it
Stained with his blood! but in Alcides' temple
Did they not see a poor old man?

EURICLES.

'Twas Narbas:
So Poliphontes owns.

MÉROPE.

O dreadful truth!
The villain, to conceal his crime, hath cast
His body to the waves, and buried him
In the rude ocean: O I see it all,
All my sad fate: O my unhappy son!

EURICLES.

Would you not have the traitor brought before you,
And questioned here?

SCENE VI.

mérope, euricles, ismenia, erox, *Guards*.

EROX.

Permit me in the name
Of Poliphontes, my rejected master.
Perhaps rejected but because unknown,
To offer you, in this distressful hour,
His best assistance: he already knows
Ægisthus is no more, and bears a part
In your misfortunes.

MÉROPE.

That I know he does,
A joyful part, and reaps the fruits of them,
The throne of my Cresphontes, and Ægisthus.

EROX.

That throne he wishes but to share with you,
And throw his sceptre at thy feet; the crown
He hopes will make him worthy of thy hand:
But to my hands the murderer must be given,
For sacred is the power of punishment,
'Tis a king's duty; he alone must wield
The sword of justice, the throne's best support,
That to his people and to you he owes;
Midst hymen rites the murderer's blood shall flow,
A great sacrifice.

MÉROPE.

My hand alone
Shall strike the fatal blow: though Poliphontes
Reigns o'er Messene, he must leave to me
The work of vengeance: let him keep my kingdom,
But yield to me the right of punishment:
On that condition, and on that alone,
I will be his: go, and prepare the rites:
This hand, fresh bleeding from the traitor's bosom,
Shall at the altar join with Poliphontes

EROX.

Doubtless, the king, whose sympathetic heart
Feels for your woes, will readily consent.

SCENE VII.

mérope, euricles, ismenia.

MÉROPE.

O Euricles, this vile detested marriage.
Whate'er I promised, ne'er will come to pass:
This arm shall pierce the savage murderer's breast,
And instant turn the dagger to my own.

EURICLES.

O! madam, let me by the gods conjure you—

MÉROPE.

They have oppressed me sorely; I have been
Too long the object of their wrath divine:
They have deprived me of my dearest child,
And at their altars shall I ask a husband?
Shall I conduct a stranger to the throne
Of my forefathers? Wouldst thou have me join
The hymeneal to the funeral torch?
Shall Mérope still raise her weeping eyes
To heaven, that shines no more on my Ægisthus?
Shall she wear out her melancholy days
Beneath a hateful tyrant, and expect
In tears and anguish an old age of sorrow?
When all is lost, and not even hope remains,
To live is shameful, and to die, our duty.

End of the Second Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

NARBAS.

O grief! O horror! O the weight of age!
The youthful hero's warm imprudent ardor
Was not to be restrained; his courage burst
The inglorious chains of vile obscurity,
And he is lost to me, perhaps forever.
How shall I dare to see my royal mistress!
Unhappy Narbas! hither art thou come
Without Ægisthus; Poliphontes reigns,
That subtle, proud artificer of fraud,
That savage murderer, who pursued us still
From clime to clime, and laid the snares of death
On every side, fixed on the sacred throne,
Which by his crimes so oft he hath profaned,
The proud usurper sits, and smiles secure:
Hide me, ye gods, from his all-piercing eye,
And save Ægisthus from the tyrant's sword:
O guide me, heaven, to his unhappy mother,
And let me perish at her feet! Once more
I see the palace, where the best of kings
Was basely slain, and his defenceless child
Saved in these arms; and after fifteen years
Shall I return to fill a mother's heart
With anguish? Who will lead me to the queen?
No friend appears to guide me: but behold,
Near yonder tomb I see a weeping crowd,
And hear their loud laments! Within these walls
Forever dwells some persecuting god.

SCENE II.

narbas, ismenia.

[At the farther end of the stage several of the queen's attendants, near the tomb of Cresphontes.]

ISMENIA.

What bold intruder presses thus unknown
To the queen's presence, and disturbs the peace

Of her retirement? comes he from the tyrant,
A spy upon our griefs, to count the tears
Of the afflicted?

NARBAS.

Whosoe'er thou art,
Excuse the boldness of a poor old man;
Forgive the intrusion; I would see the queen,
Perhaps may serve her.

ISMENIA.

What a time is this
Which thou hast chosen to interrupt her griefs!
Respect a mother's bitter sorrows; hence,
Unhappy stranger, nor offend her sight.

NARBAS.

O, in the name of the avenging gods,
Have pity on my age, my misfortunes:
I am no stranger here: O, if you serve
And love the queen, forgive the tears that long
Have flowed for her, and trust a heart that feels
For Mérope as deeply as thy own.
What tomb is that where you so late did join
Your griefs?

ISMENIA.

The tomb of an illustrious hero,
A wretched father, and a hapless king,
The tomb of great Cresphontes.

NARBAS.

[*Going towards the tomb* My loved master!
Ye honored ashes!

ISMENIA.

But Cresphontes' wife
Is more to be lamented still.

NARBAS.

What worse
Could happen to her?

ISMENIA.

A most dreadful stroke;
Her son is slain.

NARBAS.

Her son! Ægisthus! gods!
And is Ægisthus dead?

ISMENIA.

All know it here
Too well

NARBAS.

Her son?

ISMENIA.

A barbarous assassin
Did slay him at Messene's gates.

NARBAS.

O death,
I did foretell thee: horror and despair!
Is the queen sure, and art thou not deceived?

ISMENIA.

O 'tis too plain; we have undoubted proofs;
It must be so: he is no more.

NARBAS.

Is this
The fruit of all my care?

ISMENIA.

The wretched queen,
Abandoned to despair, will scarce survive him:
She lived but for her child, and now the ties
Are loosed that bound her to this hated life:
But, ere she dies, with her own hand she waits
To pierce the murderer's heart, and be revenged;
Ev'n at Cresphontes' tomb his blood shall flow.
Soon will the victim, by the king's permission,
Be hither brought, to perish at her feet:
But Mérope is lost in grief, and therefore
Would wish to be alone: you must retire.

NARBAS.

If it be so, why should I seek the queen?
I will but visit yonder tomb, and die.

SCENE III.

ISMENIA.

[*Alone.*
This old man seems most worthy: how he wept!
Whilst the unfeeling slaves around us seem,
Like their proud master, but to mock our sorrows:
What interest could he have? yet tranquil pity
Doth seldom shed so many tears; methought
He mourned the lost Ægisthus like a father:
He must be sought—but here's a dreadful sight.

SCENE IV.

mérope, ismenia, euricles, ægisthusin chains, Guards, Sacrificers.

MÉROPE.

[*Near the tomb.*
Bring forth that horrid victim to my sight;
I must invent some new unheard of torment,
That may be equal to his crime; alas!
Not to my grief, that were impossible.

ÆGISTHUS.

Dear have I bought thy momentary kindness,

Guardians of innocence, protect me now!

EURICLES.

Before the traitor suffers, let him name
His vile accomplices.

MÉROPE.

[Coming forward.
He must; he shall:
Say, monster, what induced thee to a crime
So horrible to nature! How had I
E'er injured thee?

ÆGISTHUS.

Now bear me witness, gods,
You who avenge the perjuries of men,
If e'er my lips knew fraud or base imposture;
I told thee naught but simple truth: thy heart,
Fierce as it was, relented at my tale,
And you stretched forth a kind, protecting hand;
So soon is justice weary of her talk?
Unwitting I have shed some precious blood:
Whose was it, tell me, what new interest sways thee?

MÉROPE.

What interest? barbarian!

ÆGISTHUS.

O'er her cheek
A deadly paleness spreads: it wounds my soul
To see her thus. O I would spill my blood
A thousand times to save her.

MÉROPE.

Subtle villain!
How artfully dissembled is that grief!
He kills me, and yet seems to weep my fate.
[She falls back into the arms of Ismenia.

EURICLES.

Madam, avenge yourself, avenge the laws,
The cause of nature, and the blood of kings.

ÆGISTHUS.

Is this the royal justice of a court?
Ye praise and flatter first, and then condemn me.
Why did I leave my peaceful solitude!
O good old man, what will thy sorrows be,
And thou, unhappy mother, whose dear voice
So oft foretold—

MÉROPE.

Barbarian, and hast thou
A mother? I had been a mother yet
But for thy rage, thou hast destroyed my son.

ÆGISTHUS.

If I am thus unhappy, if he was
Indeed thy son, I ought to suffer for it;
But though my hand was guilty, yet my heart
Was innocent: heaven knows I would have given
This day my life to save or his or thine.

MÉROPE.

Didst thou take this armor from him?

ÆGISTHUS.

No:
It is my own.

MÉROPE.

What sayest thou?

ÆGISTHUS.

Yes; I swear
By thee, by him, by all thy ancestors,
My father gave to me that precious gift.

MÉROPE.

Thy father! where? in Elis: how he moves me!
What was his name? speak, answer.

ÆGISTHUS.

Polycletes:
I've told thee so already.

MÉROPE.

O thou rivest
My heart: what foolish pity stopped my vengeance?
It is too much: assist me, friends, bring here
The monster, the perfidious—
[Lifting up the dagger.]
O ye manes
Of my dear son, this bloody arm—

NARBAS.

[Entering on a sudden.]
O gods!
What wouldst thou do?

MÉROPE.

Who calls?

NARBAS.

Stop: stop—alas!
If I but name his mother, he's undone.

MÉROPE.

Die, traitor.

NARBAS.

Stop.

ÆGISTHUS.

[Turning towards Narbas.]
My father!

MÉROPE.

Ha! his father!

ÆGISTHUS.

[To Narbas.
What do I see? and whither wert thou going?
Camest thou to be a witness of my death?

NARBAS.

O, madam, go no further: Euricles,
Remove the victim, let me speak to thee.

EURICLES.

[Takes away Ægisthus, and shuts up the lower part of the scene.
O heaven!

MÉROPE.

[Coming forward.
Thou makest me tremble: I was going
To avenge my son.

NARBAS.

[Kneeling down.
To sacrifice—Ægisthus.

MÉROPE.

Ægisthus! ha!

NARBAS.

'Twas he, whom thy rash arm
Had well nigh slain; believe me, 'twas Ægisthus.

MÉROPE.

And lives he then?

NARBAS.

'Tis he, it is your son.

MÉROPE.

[Fainting in the arms of Ismenia.]
I die!

ISMENIA.

Good heaven!

NARBAS.

[To Ismenia.]
Recall her fleeting spirit;
This sudden transport of tumultuous joy,
Mixed with anxiety and tender fears,
May quite o'erpower her.

MÉROPE.

[Coming to herself.]
Narbas, is it you?
Or do I dream? is it my son? where is he?
Let him come hither.

NARBAS.

No: refrain your love,
Restrain your tenderness.
[To Ismenia.]
O keep the secret;
The safety of the queen, and of Ægisthus,
Depend on that.

MÉROPE.

Alas! and must fresh danger
Embitter my new joys? O dear Ægisthus,
What cruel god still keeps thee from thy mother?
Was he restored but to afflict me more?

NARBAS.

You knew him not, and would have slain your son:
If his arrival here be once discovered,
And you acknowledge him, he's lost forever.
Dissemble, therefore, for thou knowest that guilt
Reigns in Messene: thou art watched; be cautious.

SCENE V.

mérope, euricles, narbas, ismenia.

EURICLES.

'Tis the king's order, madam, that we seize—

MÉROPE.

Whom?

EURICLES.

The young stranger, whom thou had'st condemned
To death.

MÉROPE.

[With transport.
That stranger is my child, my son:
They would destroy him, Narbas, let us fly—

NARBAS.

No: stay.

MÉROPE.

It is my son; they'll have him from me,
My dear Ægisthus: why is this?

EURICLES.

The king
Would question him before he dies.

MÉROPE.

Indeed!
And knows he then I am his mother?

EURICLES.

No:
'Tis yet a secret to them all.

MÉROPE.

We'll fly
To Poliphontes, and implore his aid.

NARBAS.

Fear Poliphontes, and implore the gods.

EURICLES.

Howe'er Ægisthus may alarm the tyrant,
Thy promised nuptials make his pardon sure:
Bound to each other in eternal bonds,
Thy son will soon be his; though jealousy
May now subsist, it must be lost in love
When he's your husband.

NARBAS.

He your husband, gods!
I'm thunderstruck.

MÉROPE.

I will no longer bear
Such anguish, let me hence.

NARBAS.

Thou shalt not go:
Unhappy mother! thou shalt ne'er submit
To these detested nuptials.

EURICLES.

She is forced
To wed him, that she may avenge Cresphontes.

NARBAS.

He was his murderer.

MÉROPE.

He! that traitor!

NARBAS.

Yes:
By Poliphontes thy Ægisthus fell,
His father, and his brothers: I beheld
The tyrant weltering in Cresphontes' blood.

MÉROPE.

O gods!

NARBAS.

I saw him glorying in his crimes;
Saw him admit the foe, and through the palace
Spread fire and slaughter; yet appeared to those
Who knew him not, the avenger of that king
Whom he had slain: I pierced the savage crowd,
And in my feeble arms upraised your son,
And bore him thence; the pitying gods protected
His helpless innocence: these fifteen years,
From place to place I led him, changed my name
To Polycletes, hid him from the foe,
And now at last it seems have brought him hither,
To see a tyrant on Messene's throne,
And Mérope the wife of Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

Thy tale has harrowed up my soul.

EURICLES.

He comes:
'Tis Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

Is it possible?
Away, good Narbas, hide thee from his rage.

NARBAS.

Now, if Ægisthus e'er was dear to thee,
Dissemble with the tyrant.

EURICLES.

We must hide
This secret in the bottom of our hearts,
A word may ruin all.

MÉROPE.

[*To Euricles.*
Go thou and guard
That precious treasure well.

EURICLES.

O doubt it not.

MÉROPE.

My hopes depend on thee: he is my son
Remember, and thy king.—The monster comes.

SCENE VI.

mérope, poliphontes, erox, ismenia, *Attendants.*

POLIPHONTES.

The altar is prepared, the throne awaits you,
Our interests soon will with our hearts be joined:
As king, and husband, 'tis my duty now
Both to defend and to avenge you, madam:
Two of the traitors I have seized already,
Who shall repay the murder with their blood:
But, spite of all my care, the tardy vengeance
Hath seconded but ill my purposes:
You told me you would wish yourself to slay
The murderer, and I gave him to your justice.

MÉROPE.

O that I might be my own great avenger!

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis a king's duty, and shall be my care.

MÉROPE.

Thine, saidst thou?

POLIPHONTES.

Wherefore is the sacrifice
Delayed? dost thou no longer love thy son?

MÉROPE.

May all his foes meet with their due reward!
But if this murderer has accomplices,
By him perhaps I may hereafter learn
Who killed my dear Cresphontes: they who slew
The father would forever persecute
The mother and the son: O if I e'er—

POLIPHONTES.

I too could wish to be informed of that,
And therefore I have taken him to my care.

MÉROPE.

To thine?

POLIPHONTES.

Yes, madam, and I hope to draw
The secret from him.

MÉROPE.

But you must not keep
This murderer: I must have him; nay, you promised,
You know you did—
[*Aside.*
O cruel fate! my son!
What art thou doomed to?
[*To Poliphontes.*
Pity me, my lord!

POLIPHONTES.

Whence is this sudden transport? he shall die.

MÉROPE.

Who? he?

POLIPHONTES.

His death shall satisfy thy soul.

MÉROPE.

Ay: but I want to see, to speak to him.

POLIPHONTES.

These starts of passion, and these sudden transports
Of rage and tenderness, that face of horror,
Might give me cause perhaps of just suspicion;
And, to be plain with you, some strange disgust,
Some groundless fears, some new alarm, hath raised
This tempest in your soul; what have you heard
From that old man who went so lately hence?
Why doth he shun me? what am I to think?
Who is he?

MÉROPE.

O my lord! so lately crowned
Do fears and jealousies already wait
Around your throne?

POLIPHONTES.

Why wilt not thou partake it?
Then should I bid adieu to all my fears:
The altar waits, prepared for Mérope
And Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

Thou hast gained the throne,
The gods have given it thee, and now thou wantest
Cresphontes' wife to make his kingdom sure.
This crime alone—

ISMENIA.

O stop—

MÉROPE.

My lord, forgive me;
I am a wretched mother; I have lost
My all; the gods, the cruel gods have robbed me
Of every bliss: O give me, give me back
The murderer of my son!

POLIPHONTES.

This hand shall shed
The traitor's blood: come, madam, follow me.

MÉROPE.

O gracious heaven! in pity to my woes,
Preserve a mother, and conceal her weakness!

End of the Third Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

poliphontes, erox.

POLIPHONTES.

I almost thought she had discovered something
Touching her husband's murder, for she frowned
Indignant on me; but I want her hand,
And not her heart; the crowd will have it so;
We must not disoblige them; by this marriage
I shall secure them both: I look on her
But as a slave that's useful to my purpose,
Chained to my chariot wheels to grace my triumph,
And little heed her hatred or her love.
But thou hast talked to this young murderer,
What thinkest thou of him?

EROX.

He's immovable,
Simple in speech, but of undaunted courage,
He braves his fate: I little thought to find
In one of his low birth a soul so great;
I own, my lord, I cannot but admire him.

POLIPHONTES.

Who is he?

EROX.

That I know not; but most certain
He is not one of those whom we employed
To watch for Narbas.

POLIPHONTES.

Art thou sure of that?
The leader of that band I have myself
Despatched, and prudent buried in his blood
The dangerous secret; but this young unknown
Alarms me: is it certain he destroyed

Ægisthus? has propitious fate, that still
Prevented all my wishes, been thus kind?

EROX.

Mérope's tears, her sorrow, and despair,
Are the best proofs; but all I see confirms
Thy happiness, and fortune hath done more
Than all our cares.

POLIPHONTES.

Fortune doth often reach
What wisdom cannot: but I know too well
My danger, and the number of my foes,
To leave that fortune to decide my fate:
Whoe'er this stranger be, he must not live,
His death shall purchase me this haughty queen,
And make the crown sit firmer on my head.
The people then, subjected to my power,
Will think at last their prince is dead, and know
That I avenged him: but, inform me, who
Is this old man that shuns me thus? there seems
Some mystery in his conduct; Mérope,
Thou tellest me, would have slain the murderer,
But that this old man did prevent her; what
Could move him to it?

EROX.

He's the young man's father,
And came to implore his pardon.

POLIPHONTES.

Ha! his pardon!
I'll see, and talk with him; but he avoids me,
And therefore I suspect him; but I'll know
This secret: what could be the queen's strange purpose,
In thus deferring what so ardently
She seemed to wish for? all her rage was changed
To tenderest pity: through her griefs methought
A ray of joy broke forth.

EROX.

What is her joy,

Her pity, or her vengeance, now to thee?

POLIPHONTES.

It doth concern me nearly; I have cause
For many fears; but she approaches:—bring
That stranger to me.

SCENE II.

poliphontes, erox, ægisthus, euricles, mérope, ismenia, *Guards*.

MÉROPE.

Fulfil your word, sir, and avenge me; give
The victim to my hands, and mine alone.

POLIPHONTES.

You see I mean to keep it: he's before you:
Revenge yourself, and shed the traitor's blood;
Then, madam, with your leave, we'll to the altar.

MÉROPE.

O gods!

ÆGISTHUS.

[*To Poliphontes.*

Am I then to be made the purchase
Of the queen's favor? my poor life indeed
Is but of little moment, and I die
Contented; but I am a stranger here,
A helpless, innocent, unhappy stranger;
If heaven has made thee king, thou shouldst protect me:
I've slain a man, 'twas in my own defence;
The queen demands my life; she is a mother,
Therefore I pity her, and bless the hand
Raised to destroy me: I accuse none here
But thee, thou tyrant.

POLIPHONTES.

Hence, abandoned villain;
Darest thou insult—

MÉROPE.

O pardon his rash youth,
Brought up in solitude, and far removed
From courts, he knows not the respect that's due
To majesty.

POLIPHONTES.

Amazing! justified
By you!

MÉROPE.

By me, my lord?

POLIPHONTES.

Yes, madam, you.
Is this the murderer of your son?

MÉROPE.

My child,
My son, the last of a long line of kings,
Beneath a vile assassin's hand—

ISMENIA.

O heaven!
What wouldst thou do?

POLIPHONTES.

Thine eyes are fixed upon him
With tenderness and joy; thy tears too flow,
Though thou wouldst hide them from me.

MÉROPE.

No: 'tis false:
I would not, cannot hide them: well thou knowest
I've too much cause to weep.

POLIPHONTES.

Dry up your tears;

He dies this moment: soldiers, do your office.

MÉROPE.

[Coming forward.
O spare him, spare him.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ha! she pities me.

POLIPHONTES.

Despatch him.

MÉROPE.

O he is—

POLIPHONTES.

Strike.

MÉROPE.

Stay, barbarian,
He is—my son.

ÆGISTHUS.

Am I thy son?

MÉROPE.

[Embracing him.
Thou art:
And heaven, that snatched thee from this wretched bosom,
Which now too late hath opened my longing eyes,
Restores thee to a weeping mother's arms
But to destroy us both.

ÆGISTHUS.

What miracle
Is this, ye gods?

POLIPHONTES.

A vile imposture: thou
His mother? thou, who didst demand his death?

ÆGISTHUS.

O if I die the son of Mérope
I die contented, and absolve my fate.

MÉROPE.

I am thy mother, and my love of thee
Betrayed us both; we are undone, Ægisthus;
Yes, Poliphontes, the important secret
At length is thine; before thee stands my son,
Cresphontes' heir; thy master, and thy king;
The offspring of the gods, thy captive now;
I have deceived thee, and I glory in it;
'Twas for my child: but nature has no power
O'er tyrants' hearts, that still rejoice in blood:
I tell thee, 'tis my son, 'tis my Ægisthus.

POLIPHONTES.

Ha! can it be?

ÆGISTHUS.

It is; it must be so;
Her tears confirm it: yes, I am the son
Of Mérope, my heart assures me of it:
And, hadst thou not disarmed me, with this hand
I would chastise thee, traitor.

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis too much;
I'll bear no more: away with him.

MÉROPE.

[Falling on her knees.
Behold
Thus low on earth the wretched Mérope
Falls at your feet, and bathes them with her tears:
Doth not this humble posture speak my griefs,

And say I am a mother? O I tremble
When I look back on the dire precipice
I have escaped, the murder of my son;
Still I lament the involuntary crime
Didst thou not say thou wouldst protect his youth,
And be a father to him? and yet now
Thou wouldst destroy him: O have pity on him:
Some guilty hand bereaved him of a father;
O save the son, defend the royal race,
The seed of gods: defenceless and alone
He stands before thee: trample not on him,
Who is unable to resist thy power;
Let him but live, and I am satisfied;
Save but my child, and all shall be forgotten:
O he would make me happy even in woe;
My husband and my children all would live
Once more in my Ægisthus: O behold,
His royal ancestors with me implore thee
To spare the noble youth, and save thy king.

ÆGISTHUS.

Rise, madam, rise, or I shall never believe
Cresphontes was my father; 'tis beneath
His queen, beneath the mother of Ægisthus
To supplicate a tyrant; my fierce heart
Will never stoop so low: undaunted long
I braved the meanness of my former fortune,
Nor am I dazzled by the splendid lustre
Of these new honors; but I feel myself
Of royal blood, and know I am thy son.
Great Hercules, like me, began his days
In misery and sorrow; but the gods
Conducted him to immortality,
Because, like me, he rose superior to them:
To me his blood descends; O let me add
His courage, and his virtues; let me die
Worthy of thee; be that my heritage!
Cease then thy prayers, nor thus disgrace the blood
Of those immortal powers from whom I sprang.

POLIPHONTES.

[*To Mérope.*
Trust me, I bear a part in your misfortunes,
Feel for your griefs, and pity your distress;
I love his courage, and esteem his virtue;
He seems well worthy of the royal birth

Which he assumes; but truths of such importance
Demand more ample proofs; I take him therefore
Beneath my care, and, if he is thy son,
I shall adopt him mine.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou, thou adopt me?

MÉROPE.

Alas! my child!

POLIPHONTES.

His fate depends on thee:
It is not long since, to secure his death.
Thou didst consent to marry Poliphontes;
Now thou wouldst save him, shall not love do more
Than vengeance?

MÉROPE.

Ha! barbarian!

POLIPHONTES.

Madam, know
His life, or death, depends on thy resolve:
I know your love, your tenderness, too well,
To think you will expose to my just wrath
So dear an object by a harsh refusal.

MÉROPE.

My lord, at least let me be free, and deign—

POLIPHONTES.

He is your son, or he's a traitor, madam;
I must be yours before I can protect him,
Or be revenged on both; a word from you
Decides his fate, or punishment, or pardon;
Or as his mother I shall look upon you
As his accomplice; therefore make your choice:
I will receive your answer at the temple
Before the attesting gods.

[To the soldiers.

Guard well your prisoner:

Come, follow me:

[Turning to Mérope.

I shall expect you, madam;

Be quick in your resolve; confirm his birth

By giving me your hand; your answer only

Saves or condemns him; and as you determine

He is my victim, madam, or—my son.

MÉROPE.

O grant me but the pleasure to behold him;

Restore him to my love, to my despair.

POLIPHONTES.

You'll see him at the temple.

ÆGISTHUS.

[As the guards are carrying him off.

O great queen,

I dare not call thee by the sacred name

Of mother, do not, I beseech thee, aught

Unworthy of thyself, or of Ægisthus;

For, if I am thy son, thy son shall die

As a king ought.

SCENE III.

MÉROPE.

[Alone.

Ye cruel spoilers, why

Will you thus tear him from me? O he's gone,

I've lost him now forever; wherefore, heaven,

Didst thou restore him to a mother's vows,

Or why preserve him in a foreign land,

To fall at last a wretched sacrifice,

A victim to the murderer of his father?

O save him, hide him in the desert's gloom;

Direct his steps, and shield him from the tyrant!

SCENE IV.

mérope, narbas, euricles.

MÉROPE.

O Narbas, knowest thou the unhappy fate
To which I am doomed?

NARBAS.

Well I know the king
Must die; I know Ægisthus is in chains.

MÉROPE.

And I destroyed him.

NARBAS.

You?

MÉROPE.

Discovered all:
But thinkest thou, Narbas, ever mother yet
Could see a child, as I did, and be silent?
But it is past: and now I must repair
My weakness with my crimes.

NARBAS.

What crimes?

SCENE V.

mérope, narbas, euricles, ismenia.

ISMENIA.

O madam,
Now call forth all the vigor of your soul,
The hour of trial comes: the fickle crowd,
Still fond of novelty, with ardent zeal,
Press forward to behold the expected nuptials;
Each circumstance conspires to serve the tyrant:
Already the bribed priest has made his god
Declare for Poliphontes: "He received
Your vows, Messene was a witness to them,
And heaven will see the contract is fulfilled:"
Thus spoke the holy seer; the people answered

With acclamations loud, and songs of joy;
They little know the grief that wrings thy heart;
But thank the gods for these detested nuptials,
And bless the tyrant for his cruelty.

MÉROPE.

And are my sorrows made the public joy?

NARBAS.

O these are dreadful means to save thy son.

MÉROPE.

They are indeed: thou shudderest at the thought:
It is a crime.

NARBAS.

But to destroy thy child
Were still more horrible.

MÉROPE.

Away: despair
Has given me courage, and restored my virtue:
Let's to the temple; there I'll show the people
My dear Ægisthus; 'twixt myself and the altar
Will place my son; the gods will see him there;
They will defend him, for from them he sprang:
Too long already persecuting heaven
Hath scourged his helpless innocence; and now
It will avenge him: O I will set forth
His savage murderer in the blackest colors,
Till vengeance shall inspire each honest heart
With tenfold rage: now dread a mother's cries,
Ye cruel tyrants, for they will be heard:
They come; alas! I tremble yet, despair
And horror seize me: hark, they call, my son
Is dying: see the cruel murderer plants
A dagger in his breast: a moment more
And he is lost: ye savage ministers
[Turning to the sacrificers.
Of the base tyrant, you must drag the victim
Up to the altar; can you, must you do it?
O vengeance, duty, tenderness, and love,

And thou great nature, what will ye ordain,
What will ye do with an unhappy queen,
Abandoned to despair?

End of the Fourth Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT V.

SCENE I.

ægisthus, narbas, euricles.

NARBAS.

Our fate is yet uncertain, whilst the tyrant
Still keeps us in the palace; all my fears
Are for Ægisthus: O my king, my son,
Let me still call thee by that tender name,
O live, disarm the tyrant's rage, preserve
A life so dear, so precious to Messene,
So valued by thy faithful Narbas!

EURICLES.

Think
On the poor queen, who, for thy sake alone
A humble suppliant, sprinkles with her tears
The tyrant's murderous hand.

ÆGISTHUS.

I'm scarce awakened
From my long dream, I seem as one new-born;
A wandering stranger in a world unknown;
New thoughts inspire, new day breaks in upon me;
The son of Mérope, and great Cresphontes;
And yet his murderer triumphs; he commands,
And I obey; the blood of Hercules
A captive and in chains!

NARBAS.

O would to heaven
The grandson of Alcides still remained
Unknown in Elis!

ÆGISTHUS.

Is it not most strange,
Young as I am, that I should know already,
By sad experience, every human woe?

Horror and shame, and banishment, and death,
Since my first dawn of life, have pressed upon me:
A persecuted wretch I wandered long
From clime to clime, hid in the desert's gloom,
I languished there in vile obscurity:
Yet, bear me witness, heaven, midst all my woes
Nor murmured nor complained: though proud ambition
Devoured my soul, I learned the humble virtues
That suited best my hard and low condition:
Still I respected, still obeyed thee, Narbas,
And loved thee as a father; nor would e'er
Have wished to find another, but high heaven
Would change my fate to make me but more wretched:
I am Cresphontes' son, yet can't avenge him;
I've found a mother, and a tyrant now
Will snatch her from me; soon she must be his:
O I could curse the hour that gave me birth,
And the kind succor which thy goodness lent me:
O why didst thou hold back the uplifted hand
Of a mistaken mother? But for thee
I had fulfilled my fate, and all my woes
Had ended with my life.

NARBAS.

We are undone,
The tyrant comes.

SCENE II.

poliphontes, ægisthus, narbas, euricles, *Guards*.

POLIPHONTES.

[*To Narbas and the rest.*
Retire: and thou, rash youth,
Whose tender years demand my pity, list,
And mark me well; for the last time I come
To give thee here thy choice of life or death,
Thy present and thy future happiness,
Thy very being hangs upon my will:
I can advance thee to the highest rank,
Or shut thee in a dungeon, kill or save thee:
Removed from courts, and bred in solitude,
Thou art not fit to govern; let me guide
In wisdom's ways thy inexperienced youth;
Assume not in thy humble state a pride

Which thou mistakest for virtue: if thy birth
Be mean and lowly, bend to thy condition;
If happier fate hath given thee to descend
From royal blood, and thou wert born a prince,
Make thyself worthy of thy noble rank,
And learn of me to rule: the queen, thou seest,
Has set thee an example; she obeys,
And meets me at the temple; follow her,
Tread in my steps, attend us to the altar,
And swear eternal homage to thy king,
To Poliphontes: if thou fearest the gods,
Call them to witness thy obedience; haste,
The gates of glory open to receive,
And not to enter may be fatal to thee:
Determine therefore now, and answer me.

ÆGISTHUS.

How can I answer when thou hast disarmed me?
Thy words, I own, astonish and confound;
But give me back that weapon which thy fears
Have wrested from me; give me my good sword,
And I will answer as I ought; will show thee,
Perfidious as thou art, which is the slave,
And which the master, whether Poliphontes
Was born to rule o'er princes, or Ægisthus
To scourge oppressors.

POLIPHONTES.

Impotence and rashness!
My kind indulgence makes thee insolent:
Thou thinkest I'll not demean myself so far
To punish an unknown rebellious slave;
But mercy, thus abused, will change to wrath:
I give thee but a moment to determine,
And shall expect thee at the altar; there
To die or to obey: guards, bring him to me:
Narbas, to you and Euricles I leave
The haughty rebel; you shall answer for him:
I know your hatred of me, and I know
Your weakness, too, but trust to your experience,
You will advise him for the best; meantime
Remember, whether he's the son of Narbas
Or Mérope, he must obey, or die.

SCENE III.

ægisthus, narbas, euricles.

ÆGISTHUS.

I'll listen to no counsel but the voice
Of vengeance; O inspire me, Hercules,
O from thy seat of endless bliss look down
On thy Ægisthus, animate his soul,
And guide his footsteps! Poliphontes calls,
I will attend him; let us to the altar.

NARBAS.

Wilt thou then die?

EURICLES.

We must not follow thee:
Let us collect our few remaining friends,
And strive—

ÆGISTHUS.

Away: another time my soul
Would listen to your kind advice, for well
I know ye love me; but no counsellors
Must now be heard save all-directing heaven
And my own heart: the irresolute alone
Is swayed by others, but the blood of heroes
Will guide itself: away, the die is cast.
What do I see? O gracious heaven! my mother!

SCENE IV.

mérope, ægisthus, narbas, euricles, *Attendants*.

MÉROPE.

Once more, Ægisthus, by the tyrant's order,
We meet together; he has sent me to thee:
Think not that, after these detested nuptials,
I mean to live; but for thy sake, my son,
I have submitted to this shameful bondage:
For thee alone I fear; for thee I bear
This load of infamy: O live, Ægisthus,

Let me entreat thee, live; ere thou canst rule
Thou must obey, and servitude must open
The path to vengeance; thou contemnest my weakness,
I know thou dost; but O the more I love
The more I fear. O my dear child—

ÆGISTHUS.

Be bold,
And follow me.

MÉROPE.

Alas! what wouldst thou do?
Why, ye just gods, why was he made too virtuous?

ÆGISTHUS.

Seest thou my father's tomb? dost thou not hear
His voice? art thou a mother and a queen?
O if thou art, come on.

MÉROPE.

Methinks some god
Inspires thy soul, and raises thee above
The race of mortals: now I see the blood
Of great Alcides flows through every vein,
And animates Ægisthus: O my son,
Give me a portion of thy noble fire,
And raise this drooping heart!

ÆGISTHUS.

Hast thou no friends
Within this fatal temple?

MÉROPE.

Once I had
A crowd of followers when I was a queen,
But now their virtue sinks beneath the weight
Of my misfortunes, and they bend their necks
To this new yoke: they hate the tyrant, yet
Have crowned him; love their queen, and yet desert her.

ÆGISTHUS.

By all art thou abandoned; at the altar
Waits Poliphontes for thee?

MÉROPE.

Yes.

ÆGISTHUS.

His soldiers,
Do they attend him?

MÉROPE.

No: he is surrounded
By that ungrateful faithless crowd that once
Encircled Mérope, by them upled
To the altar, I will force for thee alone
A passage.

ÆGISTHUS.

And alone I'll follow thee:
There shall I meet my ancestors divine;
The gods who punish murderers will be there.

MÉROPE.

Alas! these fifteen years they have contemned thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

They did it but to try me.

MÉROPE.

What's thy purpose?

ÆGISTHUS.

No matter what; let us begone: farewell
My mournful friends, at least ye soon shall know
The son of Mérope deserved your care.
[*To Narbas, embracing him.*]
Narbas, believe me, thou shalt never blush

To own me for thy son.

SCENE V.

NARBAS.

What means Ægisthus?
Alas! my cares are fruitless all and vain:
I hoped the sure slow-moving hand of time
Would justify the ways of heaven, and place
The wronged Ægisthus on Messene's throne;
But guilt still triumphs, and my hopes are vanished;
His courage will destroy him; death awaits
His disobedience.
[A noise within.]

EURICLES.

Hark! they shout.

NARBAS.

Alas!
It is the fatal signal.

EURICLES.

Let us listen.

NARBAS.

I tremble.

EURICLES.

Doubtless, at the very moment
When Poliphontes was to wed the queen,
She has dissolved the shameful bonds by death,
For so her rage had purposed.

NARBAS.

Then Ægisthus
Must perish too, she should have lived for him.

EURICLES.

The noise increases, like the rolling thunder
Onward it comes, and every moment grows
More dreadful.

NARBAS.

Hark! I hear on every side
The trumpets sound, the groans of dying men,
And clash of swords; they force the palace.

EURICLES.

See
Yon bloody squadron; look, it is dispersed;
They fly.

NARBAS.

Perhaps to serve the tyrant's cause.

EURICLES.

Far as my eyes can reach I see them still
Engaged in fight.

NARBAS.

Whose blood will there be shed?
Surely I heard the name of Mérope,
And of Ægisthus.

EURICLES.

Thanks to heaven, the ways
Are open, I will hence, and know my fate.
[He goes out.]

NARBAS.

I'll follow thee, but not with equal steps,
For I am old and feeble: O ye gods!
Restore my strength, give to this nerveless arm
Its former vigor; let me save my king,
Or yield up the poor remnant of my days,
And die in his defence.

SCENE VI.

narbas, ismenia.

[A crowd of people.]

NARBAS.

Who's there? Ismenia?
Bloody and pale! O horrid spectacle!
Art thou indeed Ismenia?

ISMENIA.

O my voice,
My breath is lost; let me recover them,
And I will tell thee all.

NARBAS.

My son—
The queen—do they yet live?

ISMENIA.

I'm scarce myself;
Half dead with fear; the crowd has borne me hither.

NARBAS.

How does Ægisthus?

ISMENIA.

O he is indeed
The son of gods; a stroke so terrible,
So noble! never did the unconquered courage
Of great Alcides with a deed so bold
Astonish mortals.

NARBAS.

O my son, my king,
The work of my own hands, the gallant hero!

ISMENIA.

Crowned with fresh flowers the victim was prepared,
And Hymen's torches round the altar blazed,
When Poliphontes, wrapped in gloomy silence,
Stretched forth his eager hand; the priest pronounced
The solemn words; amidst her weeping maids
Stood fixed in grief the wretched Mérope;
Slow she advanced, and trembling in these arms,
Instead of Hymen, called on death; the people
Were silent all; when from the holy threshold,
A more than mortal form, a youthful hero
Stepped forth, and sudden darted to the altar;
It was Ægisthus; there undaunted seized
The axe that for the holy festival
Had been prepared; then with the lightning's speed
He ran, and felled the tyrant; "Die," he cried,
"Usurper, die; now take your victim, gods."
Erox, the monster's vile accomplice, saw
His master weltering in his blood, upraised
His hand for vengeance; but Ægisthus smote
The slave, and laid him at the tyrant's feet:
Meantime, recovered, Poliphontes rose
And fought; I saw Ægisthus wounded; saw
The fierce encounter: the guards ran to part them;
When Mérope, such power has mighty love,
Pierced through opposing multitudes, and cried,
"Stop, ye inhuman murderers, 'tis my son,
'Tis my Ægisthus, turn your rage on me,
And plant your daggers in the breast of her
Who bore him, of his mother, and your queen:"
Her shrieks alarmed the crowd, and a firm band
Of faithful friends secured her from the rage
Of the rude soldiers; then might you behold
The broken altars, and the sacred ruins:
On every side, confusion, war, and slaughter
Triumphant reigned; brothers on brothers rose,
Children were butchered in their mothers' arms,
Friends murdered friends, the dying and the dead
Together lay, and o'er their bodies trampled
The flying crowd; with groans the temple rung.
Amidst the uproar of contending legions
I lost Ægisthus and the queen, and fled:
In vain I asked each passing stranger whither
They bent their way; their answers but increased
My terrors; still they cry, he falls, he's dead,
He conquers; all is darkness and confusion:
I ran, I flew, and by the timely aid

Of these kind friends have reached this place of safety:
But still I know not whether yet the queen
And great Ægisthus are preserved; my heart
Is full of terrors.

NARBAS.

Thou great arbiter
Of all that's mortal, providence divine,
Complete thy glorious work, protect the good,
Support the innocent, reward the wretched,
Preserve my son, and I shall die in peace!
Ha! midst you crowd do I behold the queen?

SCENE VII.

mérope, ismenia, narbas, *People, Soldiers.*

[At the farther part of the stage is exposed the corpse of Poliphontes, covered with a bloody robe.]

MÉROPE.

Priests, warriors, friends, my fellow-citizens,
Attend, and hear me in the name of heaven.
Once more I swear, Ægisthus is your king,
The scourge of guilt, the avenger of his father,
And yonder bleeding corpse, a hated monster,
The foe of gods and men, who slew my husband,
My dear Cresphontes, and his helpless children,
Oppressed Messene, and usurped my kingdom,
Yet dared to offer me his savage hand,
Still reeking with the blood of half my race.
[Meeting Ægisthus, who enters with the axe in his hand.]
But here behold Messene's royal heir,
My only hope, your queen's illustrious son,
Who conquered Poliphontes: see, my friends,
This good old man,
[Pointing to Narbas.]
Who saved him from the tyrant,
And brought him here: the gods have done the rest.

NARBAS.

I call those gods to witness, 'tis your king;
He fought for them, and they protected him.

ÆGISTHUS.

O hear a mother pleading for her son,
And know me for your king! I have avenged
A father, I have conquered but for you.

MÉROPE.

If still ye doubt, look on his glorious wounds:
Who, but the great descendant of Alcides,
Could save Messene thus, and scourge a tyrant?
He will support his subjects, and avenge
An injured people: hark! the voice of heaven
Confirms your choice, and speaks to you in thunder;
It cries aloud, “Ægisthus is my son.”

SCENE VIII.

mérope, ægisthus, ismenia, narbas, euricles, *People*.

EURICLES.

O madam, show yourself to the pleased people,
The king’s return has fixed their wavering minds,
And every heart is ours: the impatient crowd
Sheds tears of joy, and blesses your noble son:
Forever will they hold this glorious day
In sweet remembrance; ardently they long
To see their youthful sovereign, to behold
His faithful Narbas, and adore their queen:
The name of Poliphontes is detested;
Thine and the king’s the praise of every tongue.
O haste, enjoy thy victory and thy fame;
Enjoy a nobler prize, thy people’s love.

ÆGISTHUS.

To heaven ascribe the glory, not to me;
Thence comes our happiness, and thence our virtue:
While Mérope survives, I will not mount
Messene’s throne, my joy shall be to place
A mother there; and thou, my dearest Narbas,
Shall be my friend, my guide, my father still.

End of the Fifth and Last Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

OLYMPIA

ACT I.

SCENE I.

CASSANDER, SOSTHENES.

CASSANDER.

—Yet it is too soon.
When I possess the crown, your faithful eyes
Shall be the witnesses of all my deeds.
Stay in this porch, the priestesses to-day
Present Olympia to the powers divine:
This day in secret she must expiate,
Sins which are even to herself unknown.
This day a better life I shall begin.
O! dear Olympia, may you never know
The heinous crime that's hardly yet effaced,
To whom your birth you owe, what blood I've shed.

SOSTHENES.

Can then my lord, a girl in infancy.
Stolen on Euphrates' banks, and by your sire
Condemned to slavery, in your royal breast
Raise such a conflict?—

CASSANDER.

—Sosthenes, respect
A slave to whom the world should homage pay:
The wrongs of fate I labor to repair.
My father had his reasons to conceal
The noble blood to which she owed her birth.
What do I say? O cruel memory!
He set her down amongst the victims doomed
To bleed, that he might unmolested reign.
Although in cruelty and carnage bred
I pitied her, and turned my father's heart;
I who the mother stabbed, the daughter saved,
My frenzy and my crime she never knew.
Olympia, may thy error ever last,
Though as a benefactor thou dost love

Cassander, quickly he would have thy hate
Wert thou to know what blood his hands have shed.

SOSTHENES.

I don't into those secrets strive to pry.
Of your true interest I speak alone.
Of all the several monarchs who pretend
To Alexander's throne, Antigones,
And he alone, is to your cause a friend.

CASSANDER.

His friendship I have always held most dear.
I will to him be faithful—

SOSTHENES.

—He to you
Equal fidelity and friendship owes,
But since we've seen him enter first these walls,
His heart by secret jealousy seems filled,
And from your love he seems to be estranged.

CASSANDER.

What matters it? Oh, ever honored shades
Of Alexander and Statira—Dust
Of a famed hero, of a demi-god,
By my remorse you are enough avenged.
Olympia from their shades appeased obtain
The peace for which my heart so long has sighed;
Let your bright virtues all my fears dispel,
Be my defence and heaven propitiate;
But to this porch, just opened ere the day,
I see Antigones the king advance.

SCENE II.

cassander, sosthenes, antigones, hermas.

ANTIGONES.

[To Hermas behind.]
I must this secret know, it importunes me.
Even in his heart I'll read what he conceals.
Depart, but be at hand—

CASSANDER.

When scarce the sun
Darts his first rays, what cause can bring you here?

ANTIGONES.

Your interests, Cassander, since the gods
By penitence you have propitious made,
The earth between us we must strive to share.
No more war's horrors Ephesus dismay;
Your secret mysteries which awe inspire
Have banished discord and calamities.
Monarchs' contentions are awhile composed,
But this repose is short, and soon our climes
By flames and by the sword will be laid waste;
The sword's not sheathed nor flames extinguished yet.
Antipater's no more, your courage, cares,
His undertaking doubtless will complete,
The brave Antipater had never borne
To see Seleucus and the Lagides,
And treacherous Antiochus, insult
The tomb of Alexander, boldly seize
His conquests and his great successors brave.

CASSANDER.

Would to the gods that Alexander could
From heaven's height this daring man behold;
Would he were still alive—

ANTIGONES.

Your words surprise;
Can you then Alexander's loss regret?
What can to such a strange remorse give rise!
Of Alexander's death you're innocent.

CASSANDER.

Alas! I caused his death—

ANTIGONES.

—He justly fell.
That victim loudly all the Grecians claimed.
Long was the world of his ambition tired.

The poison that he drank from Athens came,
Perdiccas cast it in the sparkling bowl;
The bowl your father put into your hand,
But never intimated the design.
You then were young, you at the banquet served,
The banquet where the haughty tyrant died.

CASSANDER.

The impious parricide excuse no more.

ANTIGONES.

Can you then abjectly thus deify
The murderer of Clitus, whose fell rage
Destroyed Parmenio, and who, madly vain,
Dishonoring his mother durst aspire
To be a god, and adoration claimed?
'Tis he deserves the name of parricide;
And when at Babylon we cut him off,
When fate o'ertook him in the poisoned bowl,
We mortals and the gods at once revenged.

CASSANDER.

Although he had his faults, you still must own
He was a hero and our lawful king.

ANTIGONES.

A hero!—

CASSANDER.

—Doubtless he deserves the name.

ANTIGONES.

It was our valor, 'twas our arms, our blood,
To which the ungrateful wretch his conquests owed.

CASSANDER.

Ye tutelary gods!
Who could be more ungrateful than our sires?
All to that rank exalted strove to rise.
But wherefore were his wife and children slain?

Who can relate the horrors of that day?

ANTIGONES.

This late repentance fills me with surprise.
Jealous and quite suspicious of his friends
He had become a Persian, and espoused
A daughter of Darius; we were slaves.
Do you then wish that, furious for revenge,
Statira had his subjects roused to arms,
And to his shade had sacrificed us all?
She armed them all, Antipater himself
That day with difficulty escaped her rage.
A father's life you saved—

CASSANDER.

—'Tis true, but still
This hand the wife of Alexander slew.

ANTIGONES.

It is the fate of combats, our success
Should not be followed by regret and tears.

CASSANDER.

After the fatal stroke I wept I own,
And, stained with that august but hapless blood,
Astonished at myself and mad with grief
For what my father forced me to commit,
I long have groaned in secret—

ANTIGONES.

—But declare
Wherefore to-day you feel these pangs of grief.
A friend should to a friend his heart disclose,
You still dissemble—

CASSANDER.

Friend, what can I say?
Depend upon it there's a time the heart
To virtue's paths by instinct's force returns;
And when the memory of former guilt
With terror harrows up the frightened soul—

ANTIGONES.

Of murders expiated think no more,
But let us to our interests still attend.
If your soul must be ruffled by remorse,
Repent that you've abandoned Asia's plains
To insolent Antiochus's sway.
May my brave warriors and your valiant Greeks
Again with terror shake Euphrates' shores:
Of all these upstart kings, elate with pride,
Not one is worthy of the name, not one
Like us has served Darius' conqueror.
Our chiefs are all cut off—

CASSANDER.

—Perhaps the gods
Have sacrificed them to their monarch's shade.

ANTIGONES.

We who still live should labor to restore
The few who have survived the general wreck.
The victor dying, to the worthiest left
His host, who saves it is the man he meant.
My fortune and your own at once secure,
The strongest all men must the worthiest own.
The fallen powers of Greece let's raise again:
Let discord from our councils be removed,
Lest to these tyrants we should fall a prey;
They were not born to vie with men like us.
Say, will you second me?—

CASSANDER.

—My friend, I swear
I'm ready to assert our common cause.
Unworthy hands have Asia's sceptre seized,
Nile and the Euphrates both are tyrannized;
I'll fight for you, for Greece and for myself.

ANTIGONES.

Interest your promise dictates; both I trust,
But much more in your friendship I confide,
That secret tie by which we both are bound.
But of your friendship I require a proof:
Do not refuse it.

CASSANDER.

By your doubt I'm wronged.
If what you ask is in my power, your will
I as a sacred order shall obey.

ANTIGONES.

Perhaps you will consider with surprise
The trifle which in friendship's name I ask;
'Tis but a slave—.

CASSANDER.

—All mine you may command,
They're prostrate at your feet, choose which you will.

ANTIGONES.

A foreign damsel, suffer me to ask,
In Babylon made captive by your sire.
She's yours by lot, I claim her as the prize
Of labors which for you I've undergone.
Your father used her hardly I am told,
But in my court she'll meet with due respect.
Her name's Olympia—

CASSANDER.

Olympia!

ANTIGONES.

That's the fair one's name.

CASSANDER.

How unexpectedly he wounds my heart!
Must I resign Olympia?

ANTIGONES.

Hear me, friend,
I hope I shall Cassander grateful find;
In trifles a refusal may offend,
And sure you do not mean to injure me.

CASSANDER.

No, you shall soon the youthful slave behold:
You shall yourself decide if 'twould be fit
That I should give her up at your request:
To this shrine none profane can find access.
Under the inspection of the powers divine,
Olympia 'midst the priestesses remains.
The gates will open at the proper time
Within this porch, to which access is free;
My coming wait, and all complaint suspend.
New mysteries may strike you with surprise;
You quickly may determine whether kings
Can to Olympia now have any claim.
[*He enters the temple again, and Sosthenes goes out.*]

SCENE III.

antigones and hermas in the porch.

HERMAS.

My lord, you move my wonder, whilst alarms
Disturb all Asia, and a hundred kings
For power supreme in fields of blood contend;
When fortune Alexander's wide domains
Prepares amongst the valiant to divide.
Whilst greatly you to sovereign sway lay claim,
Can a slave be the object of your wish?

ANTIGONES.

Your wonder's just; but reasons, which to none
I dare disclose, to this pursuit excite.
Perhaps this slave may of importance prove
To Asia's kings; to all men who aspire;
To him who in his bosom bears a heart
Which nobly aims at Alexander's throne.
Strangest conjectures long my soul has framed
Upon the slave's adventures, and her name.
I sought for information; oft my eyes
Have gazed upon her from these ramparts' height.
The time and place to which she owes her birth,
The great respect which even a master shows her,
Cassander's sorrow and obscure discourse,
With fresh suspicions have my soul inspired;
The mystery dark, I think, I can see through.

HERMAS.

He loves her, I am told; and, with the care
Of a kind father, educates her youth.

ANTIGONES.

We'll know the truth, but see, the temple opens
And shows the sacred altar deck'd with flowers.
The priestesses are ranged on either side;
The high priest sits within the sacred shrine,
Cassander and Olympia now advance.

SCENE IV.

The three doors of the temple are opened. The inside of the temple is discovered. The priests advance slowly on one side, and the priestesses on the other. They are all clothed in white raiment, with blue girdles, the ends of which touch the ground. Cassander and Olympia lay their hands on the altar. Antigones and Hermas stand in the porch.

CASSANDER.

Oh God of kings and gods, eternal mind
Who in these sacred mysteries stand revealed;
Who dost the wicked punish, and the just
Support, with whom remorse atones for crimes:
Great God confirm the vows which here I make.
Olympia, heavenly fair! those vows receive;
To you my throne, my life I dedicate.
A love as pure, as holy as the fire
Of Vesta, which ne'er dies, I promise here,
To heaven devoted, priestesses august,
Receive the vows and promises I make;
Bear them in clouds of incense to the throne
Of listening gods, and may they still avert
The punishment that's due to crimes like mine.

OLYMPIA.

Protect, O gods! in whom I put my trust,
The master who supplied a father's care;
Let my kind lover and my husband still
Be dear to you, and worthy of your care.
My heart is to you known, his rank, his crown
Are the least gifts which on me he bestows:
'Tis yours to answer for my ardent flame,

Who here bear witness to its purity.
May I from him to please you learn, and may
Your justice doom me to the infernal shades,
If faithless to your laws I e'er forget
My former state, and what I owe to him.

CASSANDER.

Let's to the shrine return, where bliss invites.
The solemn pomp you priestesses prepare,
The pomp from which my happiness I date;
Sanctify both my passion and my life,
I've at the temple seen the gods, in her
I see them; may they hate me if I am false.
Antigones, you hear what I have said,
Sufficient answer have I now returned?
Acknowledge now that you should cease to claim
Cassander's slave; know even my throne itself,
And all my grandeur, are below her worth.
Whatever friendship may unite our hearts,
You cannot such a sacrifice expect.
[They enter the temple again, and the doors are shut.]

SCENE V.

antigones, hermas.

ANTIGONES.

I doubt no more, I have discovered all.
He braved me, but his ruin is at hand.
He's ardent and impetuous, and prone
Sometimes to serve the gods, sometimes offend;
The world has many characters like his,
Made up of passion and religious zeal.
With headlong passion, tenderness they mix,
They oft repent, and all things undertake.
He says he weds a slave, ah, never think
That love could make him so debase himself.
That slave is of a race himself respects,
His secret machinations I surmise.
He thinks in virtue of Olympia's rights
He one day may become supreme of kings.
Had love alone been master of his breast,
He had not from me kept it thus concealed.
His friendship weak, you'll quickly see give place
To rancor and inveterate enmity.

HERMAS.

Perhaps to his infatuated heart,
Designs too deep for lovers you ascribe;
Our actions oft, even in our great concerns,
Are but effects which from our passions spring.
Their power tyrannic, we in vain disguise,
The weak is oft a politician deemed;
Cassander's not the first king who has stooped
To love a slave, and raise her to his bed.
Heroes have often, by their flames subdued,
Yielded to women, whilst they monarchs braved.

ANTIGONES.

What you have said is just, you reason right,
But all I see, suspicion has confirmed.
Shall I avow the truth? Olympia's charms
Have jealousy excited in my soul:
My secret sentiments too plain you see.
Perhaps love mingles with these great concerns.
More than I thought, their marriage grieves my soul.
Cassander's not the only man that's weak.

HERMAS.

But he relied upon you. Can then kings
Never be to the laws of friendship true?
Nor your alliance, nor your fellowship
In arms, the dangers which you both have shared,
Nor oaths redoubled, nor united cares,
Can save you from the woes that discord brings.
Is then true friendship banished from the earth?

ANTIGONES.

I know to friendship Greece has temples raised,
To interest none, though interest's there adored.
At once with love and with ambition blind
Cassander hides from me Olympia's birth.
Cassander views me with a jealous eye:
He's in the right; perhaps this very day
The object of his wishes will be mine.
*[The initiated, the priests and the priestesses pass over the stage in
procession, with garlands of flowers in their hands.]*

HERMAS.

He has received her hand, the sacred shrine
Already sees their nuptial pomp prepared:
The initiated, followed by the priests,
With garlands in their hands, attend in crowds,
Over the rites love's sacred power presides.

ANTIGONES.

His conquest may be ravished from him soon:
I shall on your fidelity rely.
Gods, laws, and people, will for me declare.
Let us a moment fly these odious pomps,
And take the measures my designs require;
Let us pollute this sanctuary o'er,
Not with the blood of bulls, but human gore.

End of the first Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

The three doors of the temple are opened. Though this scene and many others, are supposed to pass in the innermost part of the temple, as theatres are not built in a manner favorable to the voice, the performers are obliged to advance forward towards the porch, but the three doors of the temple are open, to show that they are supposed to be in the temple.

the hierophants, the priests, and the priestesses.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

What in these sacred days, this shrine august,
When God consoles the just, and sins forgives,
Shall one of all the priestesses presume
To interrupt the rites, and disobey?
Must Arzane from duty be exempt?

ONE OF THE PRIESTESSES.

Arzane bent on silence in retreat,
Bathes with her tears the statues of the gods;
She hides herself, my lord, from every eye;
A prey to grief, and weakened by her woes,
And wishes death may end her misery.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Her woes we pity, but she must obey;
Let her a moment at the rites attend.
Since she has lain concealed in her retreat,
First on this day her presence is required.
Bid her approach, the sacred will of heaven
[The inferior priestess goes in quest of Arzane.]
Calls to the altar, and won't brook delay.
Adorned by her with wreaths of gayest flowers,
Olympia must before the gods be led.
Initiated in our sacred rites,
Cassander must be purified by her;
Our mysteries soon must be complete, and all
The orders of the gods must be obeyed;
They never vary, are forever fixed,
Nor like the changeful laws of humankind.

SCENE II.

the hierophants, the priests and priestesses, statira.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

[To Statira.

You must not duty's sacred call neglect,
Nor your most holy ministry decline.
Since in this blest asylum first you made
The vow, which never more can be recalled;
Upon this day first by the gods you're chosen
Their laws to Asia's victors to declare.
Be worthy of the god you represent.

STATIRA.

[Covered with a veil which does not conceal her features.]

Oh heavens, why after fifteen years that here,
Within deep solitudes and silent walls,
Remote from mankind, fate has buried me;
Why do you force me from obscurity?
Why do you bring me to the light and woe?

[To the Hierophants.

My lord, when to this temple I repaired,
'Twas but to weep, and die in secret here.
You know that was my purpose—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—Other laws

The will of heaven prescribes you on this day,
And since at nuptials now you first preside,
Your name, your rank no longer must be hid.
You must declare them—

STATIRA.

—Sir, what matter these?

The blood of beggars and the blood of kings,
Are they not equal in the sight of heaven?
By heaven we're better known than by ourselves,
Great names might formerly have dazzled me;
They're all forgotten in the silent tomb,
Let them be ever blotted from my mind.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Vain glory and ambition we renounce.
In this point we're agreed, but still the gods
Exact a full confession of the truth.
Say all, you shudder—

STATIRA.

—So you will yourself.
[To the Priests and Priestesses.]
You, who on heaven's high majesty attend,
Who share my fate, whose lives are passed in prayer,
Religiously my secret ever keep.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

We swear it solemnly.

STATIRA.

—Ere I proceed,
Say, is Cassander, that blood-thirsty man,
Admitted to your sacred mysteries?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Madam, he is—

STATIRA.

—Are then his crimes atoned?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Of mercy every mortal stands in need.
If innocence alone could heaven approach,
Who in this temple would the gods adore?
All human virtue from repentance springs.
Such is the eternal order of the gods.
Mortals are guilty, but heaven pardons all.

STATIRA.

If you then knew the barbarous, horrid deeds
Which make him sue for grace and vengeance dread,
If you knew that by him his master fell,

A master dear to heaven, and if you knew
What blood he shed within these flaming walls,
When even in dying Alexander's eyes,
He gored the bosom of his weeping queen,
And threw her dying on her husband's corpse,
You'll still be more surprised when I've revealed
Secrets as yet unknown to human kind.
That wife who once on glory's summit sat,
Whose memory bleeding Persia honors still,
Darius' daughter, Alexander's wife,
She's here before you, ask her nothing more.
[*The priests and priestesses lift up their hands and bend their bodies.*]

THE HIEROPHANTS.

What have I heard, you gods whom crimes offend,
How do you strike your images on earth?
Statira in this temple, give me leave
Respect profoundest—

STATIRA.

—Rise, thou reverend priest,
No longer am I mistress of the world,
Only respect the anguish of my mind.
In me of human greatness see the fate.
What my sire found the moment of his death,
I found in Babylon when drenched in blood
Darius, king of kings of throne deprived,
A fugitive in deserts, quite forlorn,
By his own treacherous followers was slain,
A stranger, wretched outcast of the earth,
Consoled his misery in his dying hour,
See you that woman to my court a stranger.
[*Showing the inferior priestess.*
Her hand, her hand alone preserved my life.
'Twas she that brought me from the slaughtered heap
Where my base friends had left me to expire;
She is of Ephesus; my steps she led
To this asylum on my realm's confines.
I saw my spoils by numerous plunderers torn,
The field strewed o'er with dying and the dead,
All Alexander's soldiers raised to kings,
And public robberies called great exploits.
The world I hated and its various woes;
I left it, and lived here interred alive.
I own I mourn a daughter much beloved,
Torn from me whilst I weltered in my gore.

This stranger here is all my family.
My husband, daughter, and Darius lost,
Heaven's my resource alone—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—Be heaven your prop.
From the throne which you lost to heaven you rise,
God's temple is your court, be happy there.
Your grandeur though august was dangerous,
The throne was terrible, forget it quite
And look upon it with a pitying eye.

STATIRA.

This temple, sir, sometimes has calmed my griefs,
But you may well conceive how much I'm shocked
At seeing by Cassander the same gods
Implored whom I've invoked against his head.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

This, I acknowledge, needs must give you pain:
But our law speaks to you and must be heard.
You have embraced it.—

STATIRA.

—Could I ever think
It would so horrid an injunction lay?
The torch of my sad days grows pale and dim,
And these last moments which high heaven bestows
What purpose serve they?—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—You'll perhaps forgive,
You have yourself traced out your great career.
Proceed in it and never look behind.
Shades when unbound from cumbrous, fleshly chains,
Taste lasting rest, and are from passion free.
A new day gives them light, a cloudless day;
They live for heaven, their lot is like to ours.
Soon on our hearts a blest retreat bestows
Oblivion of our enemies and griefs.

STATIRA.

I'm priestess now, 'tis true, though once a queen,
My duty's harsh, oh! with my weakness bear.
What must I do?—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—Olympia on her knees
Will soon appear before you, then 'tis yours
To bless the marriage of the illustrious pair.

STATIRA.

I'll reconcile her to a life of woe,
That is the lot of mortals.—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—The incense,
The water for ablution, and the gifts
Offered up to the gods, your royal hands
Shall bear, and at their sacred shrine present.

STATIRA.

For whom should I present them, wretch—must then
My life be filled with horror to its close?
In my retreat I thought to 'scape from woe,
Oh fruitless hope! woe everywhere abounds:
Let me obey the law which I have made.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Farewell, I both lament you and admire.
Behold, she comes.
[Exit.]

SCENE III.

statira and olympia.

STATIRA.

[The stage shakes.]
Dark and awful cells,
You shake, a horrid murmur strikes my ear:

The temple quakes, must nature then be moved
When she appears, must all my senses fail,
And the same trouble and confusion feel?

OLYMPIA.

[*Terrified.*
Ah madam!

STATIRA.

Young, tender victim to the nuptial law,
Approach. These frightful omens crime denote,
Such charms as yours for virtue's self seem made.

OLYMPIA.

My sinking courage, oh just gods support!
Oh you, the confidant of their decrees,
Deign to direct my innocence and youth.
I claim your care, my terror dissipate.

STATIRA.

Alas, mine yours exceeds, embrace me, daughter,
Do you then know your husband's history,
Or do you know your country or your birth?

OLYMPIA.

Of humble birth, I never did expect
My present rank, to which I have no right.
Cassander, madam's king, he deigned in Greece
To educate me at his father's court.
Since I've been near his person, I have seen
In him the greatest of all human kind.
The husband's dear, the master is revered;
Thus have I all my sentiments made known.

STATIRA.

How easily a youthful heart's deceived!
How much I love your candid innocence!
Cassander, then, has taken charge of you.
Do you not from some king derive your birth?

OLYMPIA.

Can none love virtue or obey its laws,
But such as from a kingly race descend?

STATIRA.

I think not so, guilt dwells too near the throne.

OLYMPIA.

I was a slave, no more.—

STATIRA.

—I'm much surprised
Upon your front august, and in your eyes,
In every noble feature of your face
We read the virtues of a royal mind.
Could you be then a slave?

OLYMPIA.

—Antipater
Seized on my infancy by chance of war.
All to his son I owe.—

STATIRA.

—Your first days thus
Have felt misfortunes, which at length have ceased;
My woes have been as lasting as my life.
Say where and when you were by fate involved
In ills which brought you to captivity?

OLYMPIA.

I'm told a king, the world's victorious lord
Was slain, and rivals for his empire strove;
That whilst it was by fierce contentions torn,
In Babylon Cassander saved my life,
When it was threatened by the murderous blade.

STATIRA.

In days made sad by Alexander's death,
Were you then captive of Antipater,

And did you by Cassander's favors live?

OLYMPIA.

I never could learn more. Misfortunes past
Felicity has banished from my thought.

STATIRA.

Captive at Babylon; eternal powers
Do you then make of mortals' woes your sport?
The time, the place, her age, have in my soul
At once roused joy, grief, tenderness, and dread.
Am I not then deceived? Upon her face
My valiant husband's image is impressed.

OLYMPIA.

What say you?—

STATIRA.

—Heavens! such looks the hero cast,
When mild and from the bloody field retired!
He raised my family, which scarce had escaped
The insatiate fury of the murderous blade!
When he raised all my fallen family
To their first rank, and when his hand touched mine!
Illusion dear! enchanting hope! but vain.
Can it be possible! List, princess, list,
Pity the agitation of my soul!
Have you no memory of a mother left!

OLYMPIA.

Those who have had it in their power to tell
Of the transactions of my infancy,
Informed me that I, in those days of slaughter,
Was even, when in my cradle, made a slave.
A mother's fondness ne'er to me was known.
I know not who I am, from whom I'm sprung.
Alas, you sigh, you weep; my trickling tears
I mix with yours, and in them I find charms.
With faint embrace your languid arms clasp me;
Your organs fail; you strive to speak, in vain.
Speak to me.—

STATIRA.

My utterance fails, I sink, I'm overwhelmed;
The trouble which I feel will end my days.

SCENE IV.

statira, olympia, the hierophants.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Priestess of heaven, and queen of human race,
Say what new change has happened in your fate?
What must we do? What art thou now to hear?

STATIRA.

Misfortunes, but I'm now prepared for all.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

The greatest good is ever dashed with grief;
No bliss is pure. Antigones's rage,
The troops, the citizens that rise in arms,
The general voice, by ardent zeal inspired,
All these things prove the object you behold,
Like you long buried in obscurity.
The object which your hands should to Cassander
This day have given, Olympia—

STATIRA.

—What means this!

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Is daughter of the late victorious king.

STATIRA.

[Running to embrace Olympia.]
My torn heart had told me this before.
My child! my daughter! dear, but fatal names;
Do I then press you in a close embrace,
When by your marriage thus you wound my soul!

OLYMPIA.

Does then to be my mother make you grieve?

STATIRA.

No, I thank heaven, whose anger long I felt,
Nature pleads loudly, joy pours on my soul;
But heaven deprives me of the promised bliss.
You are to wed Cassander.—

OLYMPIA.

If from you
Olympia is descended, if the love
A parent bears a child inspires your heart,
Cassander surely never could offend.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

You are descended from her, doubt it not;
Cassander owns and will attest the truth.
With him united, may you both find means
To make two hostile races live in peace.

OLYMPIA.

Is he your foe then, am I so accursed?

STATIRA.

The villain poisoned your victorious sire;
He plunged his dagger in your mother's breast,
Even in her breast whose hapless womb first bore you;
He plunged the steel which oft had princes pierced:
Even to this temple he pursues my steps;
The gods he braves, pretending to appease:
He tears you from your weeping mother's arms,
And can you ask me why I hate this man?

OLYMPIA.

Does then the conqueror's family survive?
Are you his widow; is he then my sire?
Have I my mother's assassin espoused?
Am I become an object of your wrath,
And is this marriage then a horrid crime?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Hope in the gods—

OLYMPIA.

Ah, if their ruthless hate
To my soul's wishes can no hopes afford;
Opening my eyes a pit they opened before me.
Knowing myself too well I know my fate.
My great misfortune is to know my birth,
Before the altar where you joined our hands
I should have fallen, and at your feet expired.

SCENE V.

statira, olympia, the hierophants,*and a priest.*

THE PRIEST.

The temple's threatened, all our mysteries
Quickly will be profaned by impious hands;
The two contending kings dispute the right
There to command where gods alone should sway.
Groans heard within these vaults foreboded this,
In sign of this the ground shook under us.
The gods denounce some change to mortal man,
The earth offends them; they must be appeased.
The furious people whom fell discord fires
Run headlong to this temple's sacred porch;
Two rival factions Ephesus divide.
Like other nations we shall be at strife;
Morals, peace, sanctity, shall all give way;
Kings shall prevail and we shall have a Lord.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Ah may they bear from Ephesus their crimes,
And leave one place of refuge to the earth:
Oh royal mother sprung from royal race,
Olympia, shall I say Cassander's wife?
Before these altars you'll protection find.
To daring kings I shall present myself.
I know how much respect is due to crowns,
But more by far is due to Heaven that gives them.
Let them keep fair with Heaven if they would reign:
We have not arms or soldiers, it is true,

Our power we only from our laws derive.
God's my support, his temple's my defence,
Should tyranny once dare to make approach.
My bloody corpse awhile shall bar its way.
[The Hierophants go out with the inferior priest.]

SCENE VI.

statira, olympia.

STATIRA.

Oh fate! oh God of altars and of thrones!
Oppose Cassander, shield Antigones
I must, my daughter, in my close of life
Aid only from my enemies expect,
And look for vengeance in my misery
From the usurpers of your father's throne;
From my own subjects who with jealous rage
Contend for states of which I was possessed!
They're now my masters; once they were my slaves.
Oh noble race of Cyrus the renowned,
How from thy ancient glory art thou fallen!
So vain is greatness, thou art known no more.

OLYMPIA.

Mother, I follow you, in this sad day
Render me worthy of your glorious name;
To do my duty's all I hope for now.

STATIRA.

Sprung from a king who over kings has reigned,
Do that and equal glory thou hast gained.

End of the Second Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

(The Temple is shut.)

cassander, sosthenes.

CASSANDER.

[Within the porch.

The truth prevails, no more can I suppress
The fatal secret by my sire concealed:
Forced to the public voice at length to yield
To a king's daughter I have justice done;
Should I then longer injure royal blood
By cruel silence keeping it concealed?
Already I've incurred enough of guilt.

SOSTHENES.

A jealous rival of Olympia's name
Avails himself intent upon your ruin;
The people he excites, the town's alarmed.
Antigones religious zeal contemns,
And yet has blown its fire to tenfold rage.
'Tis thought a shocking crime in you to wed
The daughter, you who had the mother slain.

CASSANDER.

Ye gods, the keen reproaches of my heart
Torture me more than all the Ephesians say.
The hearts of all the citizens I've calmed,
Yet still my own is by the furies torn
Victim of love and of my cruelty.
I would have had her all things owe to me,
Not know a fate replete with horrors dire.
Her sire's dominions to her I restored.
Transmitted from Antipater to me.
Blest in the favors on my love conferred,
I was to calm tranquillity restored,
I had repaired all wrongs, and justice done.
My heart indeed was conscious of no crime;
I killed Statira by the chance of war,

Even whilst I strove to save a father's life.
'Twas in the heat of slaughter and of rage
When duty to excess my valor drove;
'Twas in the blindness which a sable cloud
Of horror shed upon my darkened eyes;
I shuddered to think on it e'er I felt
The fatal passion which enslaved my soul,
I thought myself acquitted in the sight
Of God and of the world, not in my own.
Nor in Olympia's, that's what racks my soul:
Despair lies that way: she must either choose
To seal my pardon or to pierce my heart,
This heart that burns with love's consuming fire.

SOSTHENES.

'Tis said, Olympia to this temple brought
Can here retract the faith which she has sworn.

CASSANDER.

I know it, Sosthenes, and if this law
Should be abused by her my soul adores,
Woe to my rival and the temple too;
Though I am here a model of true zeal,
The temple I'd a scene of vengeance make.
But let me banish far this terror vain;
I am beloved, her heart was ever mine;
The god of love shall undertake my cause:
To her upon the wings of love I fly.

SCENE II.

cassander, sosthenes, the hierophants.

[Coming out of the Temple.]

CASSANDER.

Interpreter of heaven and minister
Of clemency, I in this solemn day
Have from your temple banished war's alarms:
I have not fought against Antigones.
Days to peace consecrated I revered;
That peace to my distracted soul restore.
My rites are numerous, I'll defend them all;
Let us conclude this marriage. But first say

What does the daughter of the conqueror?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

My lord, Olympia duties now fulfils,
Duties most sacred, to her heart most dear.

CASSANDER.

Mine shares them. Where's the priestess whose kind hand
Is to present the bride and bless our loves?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

She'll bring her quickly, may such glorious ties
Not end in the destruction of you both.

CASSANDER.

Alas! upon this very day the woes
I long groaned under seemed to have an end.
For the first time a moment of repose
Seemed to becalm the troubles of my soul

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Perhaps Olympia's woe surpasses yours.

CASSANDER.

What do you say? can she have aught to fear?

THE HIEROPHANTES.

[*Going.*

Too soon you'll know it—

CASSANDER.

Stay, explain yourself.
Do you espouse Antigones's cause?

THE HIEROPHANTES.

Forbid it, Heaven, that I should pass the bounds
Which to my zeal my duty has prescribed.

The din of factions, the intrigues of courts,
The passions that distract the human soul
Have never troubled our obscure retreats;
We lift pure hands unto the God we serve.
Contests of kings too much to discord prone
We learn but with intention to compose:
And of their greatness we should never hear
Did they not often need our friendly prayers.
I go, my lord, to invoke the immortal gods
For you, Olympia, and for many more.

CASSANDER.

Olympia!

THE HIEROPHANTES.

This moment to the temple she returns.
Try if she still will own you for her lord.
I leave you.
[He goes out, and the temple opens.]

SCENE III.

cassander, sosthenes, statira, olympia.

CASSANDER.

By heaven she trembles! and I quake all o'er;
You cast upon the ground your streaming eyes!
You turn aside that face where nature's hand
With the most strong expression traced at once
The noblest and the tenderest of souls!

OLYMPIA.

[Throwing herself into her mother's arms.]
Ah cruel man! ah madam!

CASSANDER.

Speak, explain
This agitation. Wherefore do you fly me?
Whose arms do you run into? What means this?
Why must my anxious soul be thus alarmed?
Who is't attends and bathes you with her tears?

STATIRA.

[Unveiling and turning towards Cassander.
Hast thou forgot me?—

CASSANDER.

—At that voice, those looks
My blood runs cold. Where am I? What means this?

STATIRA.

That thou'rt a villain—

CASSANDER.

Is Statira here?

STATIRA.

Behold, thou wretch, the widow of thy lord,
Olympia's mother.—

CASSANDER.

Oh you bolts of Jove,
Against my guilty head point all your rage.

STATIRA.

Thou shouldst have sooner for destruction prayed,
Eternal enemy of me and mine,
If 'twas the will of heaven that both my throne
And husband to thy rage should owe their fall,
If amidst carnage, in that day of crimes
Thy cowardice and cruelty was such,
That thou couldst pierce a woman's breast, and plunge
Her body in the flood of gore she shed,
Leave me what of that hapless blood remains.
Must you be ever fatal to my peace?
Tear not my daughter from my heart, my arms,
Deprive me not of her whom heaven restores,
Respect the place of refuge which I've chosen,
That from earth's tyrants I might live retired.
Monster to crimes inured, cease, cease at length
In sacred tombs to persecute the dead.

CASSANDER.

Less dread the voice of thunder would inspire;
I dare not prostrate kiss the ground before you;
I own I am made unworthy by my crimes,
If in excuse war's horrors I should urge,
If I should say I was imposed upon
When the illustrious hero was cut off;
That I to serve my sire took arms against you,
I should not pacify your angry soul.
You'll no excuse admit, though I might say
I saved your daughter whom my soul adores;
That at your feet I lay my crown and realms.
All makes against me, no defence you'll hear,
Soon to my wretched life I'll put an end,
A life whose punishment outweighs its guilt,
If your own child, spite of herself and me,
Did not attach me to detested life.
Your daughter I brought up with tender care,
And to her friends' and father's place supplied;
She has my every wish, my heart; the gods
Perhaps have made us in this temple meet,
That we by Hymen's sacred ties might change,
The horrors of our destiny to bliss.

STATIRA.

Heavens! what a match. Could you the villain wed
Who slew your sire, and would have murdered me?

OLYMPIA.

No, no, extinguished ever be the torch,
The guilty torch of nuptials so accursed:
Blot from my heart the shocking memory
Of those dire bands which were to join our hands.
My soul prefers, you'll wonder at the choice,
Your ashes to the sceptre he bestows.
I must not hesitate; in your kind arms,
Let me forget his love, and all his crimes.
Your daughter loving him partook his guilt.
Forgive me, my dire sacrifice accept:
Think not his villainies involve my heart,
But keep me, keep me ever from his sight.

STATIRA.

Thou showest a spirit worthy of thy race,

These sentiments revive my drooping soul.
Eternal gods, could you have then decreed
That with these hands I should Olympia give
To the most barbarous of the human race?
Can you exact it of me? Such a deed
The priestess and the mother both disclaim.
You pitied me, it was not your design
That I so dire a duty should perform
Villain, no more the altar and the throne
Insult, the walls of Babylon you stained
With this heart's blood, but I would rather see
That blood shed now by such a parricide,
Than see my foe, my subject—see Cassander
Presume audaciously to proffer love
To Alexander's daughter, and to mine.

CASSANDER.

Still with more rigor I condemn myself;
But then I love, to frantic love give way.
Olympia's mine; who was her sire I know;
Like him I am a king, I have the right,
I have the power, in fine, Olympia's mine.
Her fate and mine are not to be disjoined.
Neither her fears nor you, the gods, my crimes,
Nor aught shall break a tie so sanctified;
The gods did not my penitence reject.
When they united us they pardoned all.
But if you'd rob me of my charming bride,
Whose hand I have received and plighted faith,
This blood you first must shed, pluck out this heart
Which beats for her alone, which you detest.
No privilege your altars shall protect,
Who murdered now shall sacrilege commit.
I'll from this temple, from your very arms,
From the unpitying gods bear off my wife.
I seek for death, 'tis my desire, my wish.
But I'll the husband of Olympia die.
In spite of you I'll carry to the grave
The tenderest love, and most illustrious name,
And grief for an involuntary crime,
Which will the manes of her sire appease.
[Exit Cassander with Sosthenes.]

SCENE IV.

statira, olympia.

STATIRA.

What horrid blasphemies have reached my ear?
Daughter, how dearly for thy life I pay!
The horrors which I feel you suffer, too,
My grief I in your eyes conspicuous read;
Our hearts still sympathize. Your kind embraces
And deep-fetched sighs console my wounded soul;
Because you share my griefs, I feel them less;
In you I find a shelter from the storm.
I brave my fate since you possess a heart
Worthy of Alexander and of me.

OLYMPIA.

Heaven knows my heart was ne'er by nature formed
To copy after yours, to be inspired
By such high sentiments, such swelling virtues.
O widow of famed Alexander, sprung
From famed Darius, wherefore being torn
From thy maternal arms, was I brought up
By this Cassander, thy most mortal foe?
Why on Olympia did your assassin
Unasked new favors every day confer?
Why did he not with cruel hand oppress me?
Too dangerous favors! why was I beloved?
Heavens, who do I behold in this retreat!
[Antigones advances.]

SCENE V.

statira, olympia, antigones.

ANTIGONES.

—Retire not queen.
You see a king by Alexander taught.
His widow I respect and will defend.
You from that altar's foot again might rise
To the high rank which you possessed before;
Replace your daughter there, and vengeance take
Of that proud ravisher who injures both.
Your story's known, and every heart is yours;
All men are weary of those tyrants' yoke,
Who at your husband's death the empire seized.
Your name this revolution will support;
As your defender will you own me here?

STATIRA.

Yes, if 'tis pity that directs your heart,
And if this friendly offer is sincere.

ANTIGONES.

I will not suffer an audacious youth
To gain a double right to Cyrus' throne,
When of your virtuous daughter's hand possessed.
He is unworthy, and I cannot doubt
But you will never grant him your consent.
I have not to the priest explained myself:
Though I came hither as a worshipper,
Who to the gods for clemency applies,
I come before you with fierce vengeance armed.
The widow of the conqueror may forget
Her greatness, but the honor of her race
She never can forget or overlook.

STATIRA.

I'm weary both of life and of the throne;
One's taken from me, the other near an end.
If from an impious ravisher you snatch
The only comfort heaven has left my woe:
If you protect her and avenge her sire,
I'll own you as my tutelary god.
Oh! sir, whilst on life's utmost verge I stand,
Preserve my daughter from the dangerous crime
Of marrying him whose bloody malice strove
Her hapless mother to deprive of life.

ANTIGONES.

Say worthy offspring of the conqueror,
Dost thou accept the offer which I make?

OLYMPIA.

Cassander I should hate.—

ANTIGONES.

—You then must grant
The prize, the noble prize I come to ask.
Against my all I will assert your cause,

Since I deserve you be my recompense.
'Tis this I ask, all other prize I scorn,
Such worth should never be Cassander's lot;
Speak: the unequalled glory I will owe
To this right arm, the queen, and to yourself.

STATIRA.

Decide.—

OLYMPIA.

—My scattered spirits let me first
Awhile recover. Scarce my eyes are opened,
Trembling and terrified from slavery,
I to this temple's hallowed cells retire,
Sprung from Statira and a demi-god;
A mother in this shrine august I find
Divested of her name, her rank, her all,
And hardly from a dream of death awakened.
I as a benefactor wed the man
Whose dagger had my mother's bosom gored.
While thus disasters compass me about,
Your arm you offer to avenge my cause.
What answer can I make? . . . At such a time
[Embracing her mother.
'Tis here that my first duties are required.
Judge if the torch of Hymen's e'er was made
To yield its light amidst this gloom of woe:
See in one day how I'm with ills o'erwhelmed,
And think not I can listen now to love.

STATIRA.

I'll answer for her, heaven decrees her to you.
Perhaps in former times the majesty—
Or call it pride—of my imperial throne,
My daughter to a subject had denied,
But you deserve her since you would defend,
'Twas you that Alexander meant his heir.
He named the worthiest, you the worthiest prove.
His throne you have a right to, who support.
May the unceasing favor of the gods
Second you, may their power to empire raise.
Both Alexander and his queen interred
He in his tomb, and I within these walls,
Will see you on our throne without regret:
And may henceforth the fates, grown less severe,

Oppose for you that strange fatality,
Which oft has overwhelmed that throne in blood.

ANTIGONES.

It shall be raised by fair Olympia's hand.
To Asia's people show yourself and her.
Quit this asylum. All things I'll prepare
Your husband to avenge, and fill his place.
[Exit Antigones.]

SCENE VI.

statira, olympia.

STATIRA.

By your means, daughter, I the barrier break
That keeps me distant from all human kind;
Again I enter this degenerate world
My husband to avenge, and break thy chains.
New strength the gods will to a mother give,
And soon thou shalt be set at liberty.
Help me to keep my word, by a new oath
Help me to wipe away the former's guilt.

OLYMPIA.

Alas!

STATIRA.

You groan!

OLYMPIA.

Must then this fatal day
Twice light up Hymen's inauspicious torch?

STATIRA.

What dost thou say?

OLYMPIA.

—Permit me, this first time,
My thoughts to utter with a trembling voice.

So much I love thee, mother, I would shed
The blood which from thee I derive, if so
The gods would, by new added years, protract
Thy life, or render it completely blessed.

STATIRA.

Dearest Olympia!

OLYMPIA.

Shall I tell those gods
I ask no throne except this calm retreat?
In it you'll see me lead my life resigned
And look with scorn on crowns forgot by you.
Thinkest thou my father, in the silent tomb,
Desires his foe should perish by our hands?
Amidst the horrors of the fight, let kings
Destroy each other, and avenge his death:
But we, the victims of so many ills,
Shall we, with feeble hands, assist their rage?
Shall we a fruitless murder undertake?
Tears are our portion, crimes for them were made.

STATIRA.

Our portion tears! For whom thus dost thou weep?
Is Alexander's daughter by the gods
Restored me? Heavens, is it her whose voice I hear!

OLYMPIA.

Mother!

STATIRA.

Ye angry gods!

OLYMPIA.

Cassander! . . .

STATIRA.

Explain yourself, my soul is shocked to hear you.

OLYMPIA.

I cannot speak—

STATIRA.

—You wound me to the heart.
End this anxiety, I charge thee, speak.

OLYMPIA.

Madam, too well I see I give you pain,
But whom I love I never will deceive.
Although forever I am resolved to shun
My guilty husband, I must love him still.

STATIRA.

Oh words accursed! ah, daughter since you love
This cruel husband, you will never fly him.
Thus Alexander you betray and me!
Ye gods, I saw my sire and husband die:
My daughter from me torn, your cruel will
Restores to make me perish by her fault.

OLYMPIA.

Thus prostrate falling—

STATIRA.

—Daughter ever dear,
But cruel and unnatural—

OLYMPIA.

Alas!
Oppressed with woe I bathe your knees with tears.
Mother forgive me.—

STATIRA.

—So I will and die.

OLYMPIA.

Be calm and hear me—

STATIRA.

—What have you to say?

OLYMPIA.

I swear by heaven, by my own name, by you,
By nature, I the punishment will bear
Of my own guilt. This hand to-day should shed
My blood ere I'd consent to be his wife.
You know my heart, I've told you that I love;
By this confession and my weakness judge
If my heart's yours, if love for you prevails
Over that love which has subdued my senses.
Consider not my sex or tender age,
Courage from my great parents I derive.
I might offend them, I cannot betray;
You'll know Olympia, when you see her die.

STATIRA.

Dear, but inhuman daughter, can you die,
And yet not hate the assassin of your sire!

OLYMPIA.

Tear out my heart, examine it, you'll find,
Though dear, my husband reigned not there like you.
The blood which animates it then you'll know;
Your daughter sacrifice.—

STATIRA.

—I know your heart.
I pity you, my child, and don't condemn.
Your courage and your duty give me hope,
I pity even the love that injures me.
You tear my heart, yet you affect it too.
Console your mother whilst you cause her death.
Alas! I am wretched, but you're not to blame.

OLYMPIA.

Which bears, oh heavens, of woe the greatest weight!
Which has most reason, to complain, of fate!

End of the third Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

antigones, hermas.

[In the porch.

HERMAS.

You warned me well; the holy place profaned,
Will soon of strife and slaughter be the scene.
Your soldiers guard our passage near the shrine,
Cassander mad with love, with grief, and rage,
Daring the gods whom he before invoked,
Advances towards you by another path.
The signal's given, but in this enterprise
The people doubt whose cause they should espouse.
[Going out.

ANTIGONES.

I'll soon unite them.

SCENE II.

antigones, hermas, cassander, sosthenes.

CASSANDER.

[Stopping Antigones.

—Stay unworthy friend,
False ally, and detested enemy,
How durst thou claim what heaven bestows on me?

ANTIGONES.

I do—should that in thee excite surprise?
The conqueror's daughter has sufficient right
To make the sons of Asia rise in arms,
And haughty tyrants tremble on their thrones.
Her portion's Babylon, but she may claim
The empire's wide extent in right of birth.
I, to possess them both, aspire, and know

Thy tears, thy expiations and thy grief,
The piercing eyes of nations cannot blind.
Think not Olympia's love still prone to doubt,
If thou art guilty of her father's death.
In her opinion you are now condemned.
Your heart, enslaved and tyrannized by love,
Seduced Olympia, and you hid her birth.
You thought to bury in oblivion's night
The fatal secret which to me is known.
Her love you owe to baseness and deceit.
But time at length her eyes has opened, and now
Cassander his pretensions must forego.
What, were thy hopes presumptuous? Didst thou think
By her right, to become the king of kings? . . .
By arms I may defend Statira's cause,
But would you our alliance still preserve?
In your new kingdom would you reign in peace,
Regain my friendship, on my arm depend?

CASSANDER.

Proceed.—

ANTIGONES.

Olympia yield, and we are friends:
For you I'll spill my blood; if you refuse
I'll henceforth be the greatest of your foes.
Maturely weigh your interests, and choose.

CASSANDER.

My choice is easy, and I hither came
To make to you an offer that may please.
You know nor law nor pity, nor remorse;
Friendship to violate, to you is sport.
The gods I feared, you heavenly justice mock;
The fruit of all your crimes you now enjoy;
You shall not long.—

ANTIGONES.

—What mean these swelling words?

CASSANDER.

If your fierce soul of virtue is not void,

Let us not to our soldiers have recourse
Our rage to second, and our anger serve.
Our people should not in our quarrels bleed,
They should not in our contests be involved.
You, if you're bold enough, alone should brave
My courage, and my single arm oppose:
I was not to the commerce of the gods
Admitted in their sight to slay my friend;
'Tis an unheard-of crime prepared by you:
Come, we were born to act this bloody part.
Come on, decide both of my fate and yours,
Pour out your blood, or glut yourself with mine.



ANTIGONES.

With joy the combat I accept; be sure
Olympia weds the man by whom thou art slain.
[*They draw.*]

SCENE III.

The Hierophants come precipitately from the temple with the priests and the initiated, who, with a multitude of the populace, part Cassander and Antigones, and disarm them.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Hold your audacious hands, you men profane!
Respect our god, respect his sacred rites!
Haste, priests and people, part these barbarous men:
Banish fierce discord from this sacred shrine.
Your crimes atone—swords quickly disappear—
Ye gods grant pardon—monarchs heaven obey.

CASSANDER.

To you and heaven I yield.—

ANTIGONES.

—I still persist,
I call to witness Alexander's shade,
I call to witness the avenging gods,
That whilst I live, Olympia, my beloved,
Ne'er shall be folded in my rival's arms.
The impious match on Ephesus would bring
Shame, and make Asia's sons with horror shrink.

CASSANDER.

It would, no doubt, had it been made by you.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

With spirit calmer, and with heart less fierce.
Yield to the law obedience and respect.
All men it binds, by all should be fulfilled.
The poor man's hut, the haughty monarch's throne,
Alike subjected hear the voice of law;
The weak she aids, transgressors she restrains,
And her power sets the blameless victim free.
Whene'er a husband of whatever rank
Has chanced the parents of his wife to slay,
Though he be by our mysteries purified,
By Vesta's fire, and by her healthful stream,
And by repentance more essential still,
His wife that day may new engagements form.
She may, without offence, except she choose
To imitate the gods and pardon him.
As still Statira lives, you well may think
That she will of her daughter's fate dispose.
A mother's woes, a mother's rights respect;
The law of nations, and the character
Which nature gives, and nothing can efface.
Her voice august Olympia must obey.
All your attempts are vain since you must wait,
The widow's and her daughter's final will.
[Exit with his followers.]

ANTIGONES.

I to these terms subscribe, she's surely mine.
[Exit Antigones with Hermas.]

SCENE IV.

cassander, sosthenes.

[In the porch.]

CASSANDER.

You shall not find her treacherous, cruel man.
Let us remove her from this fatal shrine,
And disappoint this daring villain's hopes,
He laughs at my remorse, insults my grief,
And would with calm serenity and joy
Concealed, destroy my peace and tear my heart.

SOSTHENES.

Statira he seduces, sir, the deed
He justifies by laws he violates,
And by the gods his impious soul contemns.

CASSANDER.

Let's take her from the gods whom I have served,
Those cruel gods by whom I am betrayed.
I'd gladly die, the thunderer's stroke I'd bless;
But that my wife should in this fatal day
Pass from Cassander's to his rival's hand:
Ere that I bear, this temple shall be laid
In ashes, oh ye gods, you pardoned me!
My soul grown calm with blessed tranquillity,
Gave itself up to that delusive hope,
Ye gods, you snatch Olympia from my arms,
Thus do you pardon expiated crimes?

SOSTHENES.

You have not lost the fair; her tender heart
To you obedient and devoted still
Cannot so soon the man she loved forget;
Changes so quick are to the heart unknown.
By loving you she breaks not nature's law;
The wounds which you in fight at random dealt
Have, I will grant you, shed most precious blood!
The gods permitted that calamity.
You are not guilty of her father's death.
Your tears have for her mother's blood atoned;

Her woes are past, your favors present still.

CASSANDER.

The anguish of my soul you sooth in vain:
Statira's blood and Alexander's ghost
Cry from the ground and fill my soul with dread
She is their daughter, and may justly hate
Her hapless husband with relentless rage;
Olympia hates me, she whom I prefer
To Cyrus' throne, to all the thrones on earth.
Those expiations, secret mysteries
By kings neglected, sought with care by me,
She was their object, and my guilty soul
Approached the gods her presence to enjoy.

SOSTHENES.

[Seeing Olympia.
Alas! behold her to her griefs a prey,
She clasps the altar, bathes it with her tears.

CASSANDER.

'Tis time to take her from this shrine by force:
Go, lose no time, but everything prepare.
[Exit Sosthenes.

cassander, olympia.

OLYMPIA.

[Reclined upon the altar without seeing Cassander.
How my heart rises in my throbbing breast!
How in despair 'tis plunged! how self-condemned!
[Seeing Cassander.
What do I see?—

CASSANDER.

Your husband plunged in woe.

OLYMPIA.

Cassander, to that name no more pretend,
That you should be my husband's not in fate.

CASSANDER.

I own myself unworthy of such bliss.
I know the crimes which cruel destiny
For both our ruin made my hand commit.
Thinking to expiate I've their measure filled.
My presence hurts you and my love insults.
Howe'er, vouchsafe to answer: has my aid
From war and from destruction saved your youth?

OLYMPIA.

Why did you save it?—

CASSANDER.

Even in infancy
Was not your innocence by me revered?
Did I not idolize you?—

OLYMPIA.

That's my grief.

CASSANDER.

After acknowledging the purest flame,
Free in your choice and mistress of yourself,
Did you not in the presence of the gods
Before this shrine receive my solemn vows?

OLYMPIA.

It is too true. May pitying Heaven avert
The punishment I have thereby incurred

CASSANDER.

I had your heart, Olympia.—

OLYMPIA.

Do not add
To my distress by such a keen reproach.
My youth 'twas easy for you to seduce;
My ignorance and weakness you deceived:
Your guilt's by this enhanced, fly hence. To hear

Your conversation is in me a crime.

CASSANDER.

Beware how you a greater crime commit
In listening to a treacherous villain's vows.
If for Antigones—

OLYMPIA.

Cease, wretched man,
My soul rejects his vows as well as yours.
Since I was once deluded and this hand
Was joined to thine stained with my parents' blood,
No mortal to my heart shall e'er lay claim:
Marriage, the world, and life alike I hate.
Since now my soul is mistress of her choice,
I without hesitation choose these tombs
Which hide my mother, for my last retreat;
I this asylum choose whose God alone
My heart by thee deceived shall now possess.
These altars I embrace, all thrones detest,
All Asia's thrones, but far above the rest
That which by proud Antigones is filled.
See me no more, go, let me mourn alone
That promised love which now I must abhor.

CASSANDER.

If then your heart my rival's love rejects,
You can't deprive me of a ray of hope;
And when your virtue a new husband shuns,
I think a favor is conferred on me.
Although I with your parents' blood am stained,
My soul, my being must depend on you;
Wife ever dear, whose virtues turned aside
The thunders aimed at my devoted head,
Still o'er my soul maintained a sovereign sway
And should your mother's rigor have disarmed.

OLYMPIA.

My mother! can your tongue pronounce her name!
Ah, if repentance, pity or soft love
Have any influence upon your heart,
Fly from the places she inhabits, fly
The altars I embrace.—

CASSANDER.

No, without you
I cannot go, you must my steps attend.
[He takes her by the hand.]
Come, dearest wife.—

OLYMPIA.

[Pulling back her hand.]
Then like my mother treat me,
This bosom, to its duty faithful, pierce:
A surer dagger plunge in this sad heart,
To shed my blood that cruel hand was formed.
Strike here.—

CASSANDER.

Your vengeance carries you too far.
My cruelty and violence were less.
Heaven pardons man, you how to punish know:
But your ingratitude exceeds all bounds
When thus a benefactor feels your hate.

OLYMPIA.

Have you not by your deeds incurred my hate?
Cassander, had thy fierce, thy bloody hand,
Which with the murderous steel my mother gored,
Stabbed me alone and shed no other blood,
I could have pardoned thee and loved thee still.
Fly, cruel man, fate wills that we should part.

CASSANDER.

No, destiny itself can't separate
Our fates, did you Cassander more detest;
Had you even married me to pierce my heart,
You must my steps attend; 'tis fate's decree.
Let me still love you as a punishment:
I swear by you it never will have end:
Punish, detest your husband, don't forsake.

SCENE VI.

cassander, olympia, sosthenes.

SOSTHENES.

Appear, or soon Antigones prevails:
The gate he blocks, your warriors he harangues,
Your friends assembled near the sacred shrine
He strives to gain, and their fidelity
Seems to be shaken by his daring words:
He on Olympia calls, and on her sire;
Tremble both for your love and for your life;
Come.—

CASSANDER.

Is it thus you sacrifice me then
To a detested rival? I in quest
Of death will go, since you my death desire.

OLYMPIA.

Alas! Olympia cannot wish thy death.
Live distant from her.—

CASSANDER.

Without thee the light
Of heaven is odious to my eyes, and life
An object full of horror; if I escape
Death's rage, I to this temple will return
And force thee hence, or with the vital drops
That warm my heart the sacred pavement stain.
[Exit with Sosthenes.]

SCENE VII.

OLYMPIA.

[Alone.]

Ah, wretch! 'tis he that causes my alarms!
Wherefore, Cassander, should I weep for you?
Is it so hard our duty to perform?
The blood from whence I sprung shall o'er my mind
Rule with despotic sway. By nature's voice
I'll be directed, by her power I swear
To sacrifice my sentiments to you.
Far different oaths I at this altar made,
Gods, you received them, and your clemency

Approved the passion which inspired my soul.
My state your power has changed, then change my heart,
Give me a virtue suited to my woe.
Pity a soul by ruthless passion torn,
Which must its nature or its faith forego.
Whilst yet obscure, I lived in perfect bliss,
The world forgetting in captivity;
Both to my parents and myself unknown.
Ruin to my illustrious name I owe,
At least I'll strive to merit it. Cassander
I must forsake, must fly thee; can I hate?
How little power has woman o'er her heart!
Weeping, I tear the wound that rankles there,
And whilst my hand, with trembling, seeks the dart,
I plunge it deeper, make the wound more wide.

SCENE VIII.

olympia, the hierophants, *Attendants*.

OLYMPIA.

Pontiff, where go you? Oh! protect the weak:
You tremble, and your eyes with tears o'erflow.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

I grieve, unhappy Princess! at your lot.

OLYMPIA.

Since I am forlorn, afford me then thy aid.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

With resignation to their heavenly will
Expect protection from the gods alone.

OLYMPIA.

Alas! what words are these!—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—O daughter dear!
The widow of great Alexander.—

OLYMPIA.

—Gods!
Has aught befallen my mother? quickly speak.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

All's lost, both kings roused up to furious rage,
Trampling on law, and armed against the gods,
Within this temple's consecrated porch,
Their troops spurred on to murder and to rage.
Blood flowed on every side, with sword in hand,
To you Cassander cut himself a path.
I marched against him, having no defence
But laws neglected and offended gods.
Your mother in despair his fury met—
She thought him master of the shrine and you.
Tired of such horrors, tired of such black deeds,
She seized the knife with which we victims slay,
And plunged it in those loins wherein you found
The source of life and of calamity.

OLYMPIA.

I die! Support me—is she yet alive?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Cassander's with her, he laments her fate,
And even presumes to offer her relief,
To second those whose virtuous hands assist her.
He raves, himself he blames, throws down his arms,
Her feet embraces, bathes them with his tears.
Hearing his cries, her dying eyes she opes,
And looks upon him as a monster fierce
Come to deprive her of life's poor remains,
By the same hand which she had escaped before;
She makes an effort weak to raise herself,
Then falls again and gasps for her last breath:
Cassander and the light she hates alike,
Then opening with regret her half-closed eyes,
Go, says she to me, hapless minister
Of a sad shrine profaned with human gore,
Console Olympia, she her mother loves,
Tell her it is my pleasure that she wed
Antigones, he will avenge my death.

OLYMPIA.

I'll go and near her die; now hear me gods,
Accompany my steps and close my eyes.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Intrepid courage to your ills oppose.

OLYMPIA.

Perhaps I soon may show to proud mankind,
That courage may inspire the female mind.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT V.

SCENE I.

antigones, hermas.

HERMAS.

[In the porch.

Vengeance is vain, compassion now should speak,
A hapless rival is not worth your hate.
Fly from this dire abode; Olympia, sir,
Is lost both to Cassander and yourself.

ANTIGONES.

Is then Statira dead?—

HERMAS.

—Cassander's fate
Has made him fatal to the conqueror's race.
Statira sinking with a load of woe,
Expires with horror in her daughter's arms.
Tender Olympia stretched upon the corpse,
Seems scarcely to retain the breath of life.
The priests and priestesses dissolved in tears,
Increase their griefs by mixing them with hers.
With cries and groans the temple's vaults resound,
A funeral pile's prepared, and all the pomp
With which man's vanity adorns the dead.
'Tis said Olympia in this solitude
Will dwell where once her mother lived retired;
And that renouncing marriage and the world,
She'll dedicate to heaven her future life,
And that she'll in eternal silence weep
Her family, her mother, and her birth.

ANTIGONES.

No, no, her duty's law she must obey,
My right to her admits of no dispute.
Statira gives her to me, and her will
When at the point of death's a law divine.
Frantic Cassander and his fatal love

Statira's daughter must with horror fill.

HERMAS.

Sir, can you think it?

ANTIGONES.

She herself declares
That her sad heart disclaims this barbarous man.
Should he persist in his audacious love.
He shall with life for his presumption pay.

HERMAS.

Would you mix blood with tears, and with the flames
Of the sad pile where burns the royal corpse?
Your awe-struck soldiers will with horror start
From such an object, they'll not follow you.

ANTIGONES.

No, I will not disturb the funeral rites;
This I have sworn; Cassander will revere them,
Awhile Olympia shall my rage suspend,
But when the funeral's o'er I'll give it scope.
[The temple opens.]

SCENE II.

antigones, hermas, the hierophants, the priests.

[Advancing slowly] olympia *[in mourning, and supported by the priestesses.]*

HERMAS.

Olympia scarce alive, is this way led.
I see the pontiff of the sacred shrine,
Who following bathes her tracks with floods of tears.
The priestesses support her in their arms.

ANTIGONES.

I own these objects in the hardest heart
Would raise emotion. Madam, give me leave
[To Olympia]
To mix with yours my sorrows, and to swear

That I'll avenge the wrongs you have sustained.
The wretch by whom you twice a mother lost,
A hope presumptuous madly entertains,
But know his punishment is not far off.
To your afflictions add not trembling fear:
But all his rash attempts defy secure.

OLYMPIA.

Ah! speak not now of vengeance and of blood,
Statira's dead, I'm dead to human kind.

ANTIGONES.

Her loss I mourn, and I pity you,
Her sacred will I justly might allege,
Dear to my hopes, and by yourself revered;
But I know what is in this juncture due,
Both to her shade, her daughter, and your grief.
Madam, consult yourself, her will obey.
[Exit with Hermas.]

SCENE III.

olympia, the hierophants, priests, priestesses.

OLYMPIA.

You who alone compassionate my woes,
Priest of a God of mildness and of peace,
Can I not forever dedicate my woe
To this sad shrine bathed with my mother's tears?
Sure, sir, you cannot have so hard a heart
To shut this place of refuge from my grief?
'Tis all that's claimed by one of royal race,
Do not refuse this poor inheritance.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

I mourn your fate, but how can I assist you?
Your mother dying has your husband named
You yourself heard her her last will declare,
Whilst with our hands we closed her dying eyes.
And if you will not her commands obey,
Cassander still may claim you as his right.

OLYMPIA.

'Tis true, I to my dying mother swore
Ne'er to receive Cassander's bloody hand,
My oath I'll keep.—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—You freedom still enjoy,
The gods alone can of your hand dispose.
Things soon will change; you now, Olympia, may
Determine and dispose your future life.
Indeed it fits not that the self-same day
Should light the funeral pile and hymen's torch.
Such marriage would be shocking, but a word
Suffices, and that word I want to hear.
In this extremity your heart should know
What to your royal race is justly due.

OLYMPIA.

Sir, I have told you any nuptial tie
Is hateful to my heart, and should be to yours.
A mother's injured shade I'll not betray:
A husband I forsake, that should suffice.
Both from the throne and marriage let me fly.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Antigones or else Cassander choose.
Those armed rivals, jealous as they're proud,
Are forced by your decision to abide.
You with a word confusion may prevent,
And slaughter which would quickly rage again;
Were not men filled with reverence and respect
By all that funeral pomp, that pile, those altars,
Those duties, and those honors which awhile
To serious contemplation souls dispose.
Piety lasts not long amongst the great;
Their rage I hardly could awhile suspend;
To-morrow blood will Ephesus o'erflow.
Princess, decide, and all will be appeased:
The people ever to the law adhere.
When you have spoken they'll support your choice;
If not, with sword in hand within this shrine,
Cassander will your plighted faith require;
What he possessed he has a right to claim,
Though with just horror he inspires your soul.

OLYMPIA.

Enough, your apprehensions I conceive,
My soul shall never to complaint give way:
To fate I yield, you all its rigor know.
My choice already in my heart is made:
I have resolved.—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—Then shall Antigones
Be happy, and your plighted faith receive?

OLYMPIA.

Howe'er that be, this juncture, Sir, ill suits
With such engagements; you yourself must own
The fatal day on which a mother died,
Should quite engross a daughter's every thought. . .
Must you not bear her to the funeral pile?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

'Tis ours that mournful duty to perform:
All that remains of her an urn shall hold;
Her ashes to deposit be your care.

OLYMPIA.

Alas! her guilty daughter caused her death,
Something that daughter owes her injured shade.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

All things I'll now prepare.—

OLYMPIA.

—Say, do your laws
Permit me to behold her on the pile?
May I approach the funeral pomp, and shed
Tears on her body while the flames ascend?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

It is your duty, we partake your grief.
You've naught to dread, those armed rivals now

Will not presume your sorrows to disturb.
Present perfumes, your veils and locks of hair,
And a libation, offering sad, but pure.
[The priestesses lay these offerings on the altar.]

OLYMPIA.

[To the Hierophants.]

This is the only favor I require.
[To the inferior priestess.]
You who attended her in this abode
Of death, and shared the horrors of her fate,
Return and give me notice when the fire
Is ready to consume those loved remains:
Since 'tis permitted, let my last farewell
Her manes satisfy.—

PRIESTESS.

I shall obey.
[Exit.]

OLYMPIA.

[To the Hierophants.]
Go, holy priest, the sacred pile erect,
Prepare the wreaths of cypress and the urn:
Bid the two rivals to the pile repair,
I in their presence will explain myself
Before my mother's corpse, and in the sight
Of holy priestesses, who to my woes
And to my promises can witness bear,
My sentiments, my choice shall be declared;
You must approve them, though perhaps you'll grieve.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

You still are mistress of your destiny:
This day expired, your freedom will be o'er.
[Exit with the priests.]

SCENE IV.

OLYMPIA.

[At the front of the stage, the priestesses in a semi-circle at the bottom.]

OLYMPIA.

Oh thou who to my shame dost still enslave
My heart, which has deliberately made choice;
Who o'er Statira dead dost triumph still,
O'er Alexander and their hapless race!
O'er earth and heaven against thee both conspired.
Reign, hapless lover, o'er my tortured sense:
If you still love me, which I scarce can wish,
Your fatal victory will cost you dear.

SCENE V.

olympia, cassander, the priestesses.

CASSANDER.

Your wishes to fulfil, I hither come;
This fatal pile shall with my blood be stained.
Accept my death; the only hope I've left
Is that your pity, not you vengeance, asks it.

OLYMPIA.

Cassander!

CASSANDER.

Dearest wife!

OLYMPIA.

Ah, cruel man!

CASSANDER.

No pardon for this criminal remains,
The hapless slave of cruel destiny;
To be a parricide was still my fate:
Still I am thy husband: Spite of all my crimes,
My soul Olympia idolizes still.
Although you hate me, Hymen's rites respect:
You have no tie on earth except to me:
'Tis death alone can separate our fates;
I must, in dying, see you and adore.
[He throws himself at her feet.]
Wreak vengeance on my guilty head, my crimes

Severely punish, but forsake me not.
Hymen's more sacred are than nature's ties.

OLYMPIA.

Rise, rise, the funeral rites profane no more,
No more profane the ashes of the dead.
Whilst on the dreadful pile the flames consume
My mother's body, don't pollute the gifts
Which here I at the funeral pile present:
Do not approach, but at a distance hear me.

SCENE VI.

olympia, cassander, antigones and the priestesses.

ANTIGONES.

Your virtue cannot still decline a choice:
Her will Statira at her death explained:
This day of terror filled my soul with awe,
And I the dead respected; else this arm,
This vengeful arm had plunged the shrine in blood:
And, in obedience to your orders, now
I come as to my rival's judge and mine:
From apprehensions free, pronounce our doom.
I hope you will a just distinction make
Between the man by whom your mother bled,
And him who strove her murder to avenge.
Nature has sacred rites; Statira, placed
By Alexander, looks on you from heaven.
Within this darksome shrine you're buried now,
But heaven and earth attentive mark your deeds:
Between us two Olympia must decide.

OLYMPIA.

I shall, but you must treat me with respect.
You see these preparations and these gifts,
Which to the infernal gods I must present;
And you, like furious rivals, choose this time,
Midst tombs, to talk of marriage and of love!
You soldiers of the potent king, my sire,
Who, by his death, are kings become yourselves,
If I am dear to you, I charge you swear
You'll not oppose my duties or my choice.

CASSANDER.

I swear it solemnly, and you shall find
That I respect you as I scorn that traitor.

ANTIGONES.

I swear it too, for sure I am, your heart
Must from my barbarous rival shocked recoil.
Declare yourself.—

OLYMPIA.

Think then what e'er befalls,
That Alexander's present, that he hears us.

ANTIGONES.

Decide before him.—

CASSANDER.

—I your pleasure wait.

OLYMPIA.

Then know the heart which thus you persecute,
And judge what resolution I should take.
Whatever choice I make, must fatal prove;
The grief that racks my soul too well you know,
Know likewise that I have deserved it all.
My parents I betrayed, who might have known
I caused the death of her who gave me birth:
I found a mother in this dire abode,
I quickly lost her, in these arms she died.
To her sad daughter, dying thus she spoke,
“Marry Antigones, I die content.”
Then she was seized with agonies, and I
Her death to hasten, her desire opposed.

ANTIGONES.

Thus do you brave me and insult my love,
Your mother injure, nature's laws betray.

OLYMPIA.

Her shade I injure not, nor injure you;
I justice do to all and to myself. . . .
Cassander, first to you my faith I gave:
Think you the gods our union could approve?
Decide this point yourself: you know your crimes,
I will not now reproach you with your guilt.
Repair it when you can.—

CASSANDER.

—I can't appease you!
I can't assuage the horror I inspire,
My heart you soon shall know: your promise keep.
[The temple opens, and the pile is seen in flames.]

SCENE The Last. †

olympia, cassander, antigones, the hierophants, priests, priestesses.

the inferior priestess.

Princess, 'tis time.—

OLYMPIA.

[To Cassander.]

Behold you flaming pile.
Now mourn, Cassander, your unhappy fate.
Those royal ashes and that pile remark;
Remember Alexander and my chains!
Behold his widow! Tell me how to act.

CASSANDER.

Exterminate me.—

OLYMPIA.

—You pronounce your doom. . . .
To mine bear witness. Oh thou sacred shade,
[She mounts the steps before the altar, which is near the funeral pile. The priestesses present her the offerings.]
Shade of my mother! I this duty pay
To thee, who justly may be still incensed;

Perhaps these gifts your manes may appease,
They may prove worthy of my sire and you.
[To Cassandra.
Thou husband of Olympia, who by fate
Wert ne'er intended for her; who preserved
My life, by whom I both my parents lost;
Thou who so loved me, and for whom my soul
Felt all the weakness of a tender love;
Thou thinkest my guilty passion from my breast
Is banished; know that I adore thee still,
And will upon myself that guilt revenge.
Oh ever-honored ashes of Statira,
The body of Olympia now receive!
[She stabs herself, and throws herself into the pile.
All present cry out,
Oh heavens!

CASSANDER.

[Running to the pile.
Olympia!

PRIESTS.

Heavens!

ANTIGONES.

[Running also to the pile.
Oh, frenzy strange!

CASSANDER.

She's now no more, our efforts all are vain.
[Returning to the porch.
Gods, are you satisfied? My hands accursed,
A royal pair have of their lives deprived.
Still dost thou envy me, Antigones?
Canst thou, unmoved, this shocking death behold,
And thinkest thou still Cassander's fate is blessed?
If my felicity provokes thy rage,
Share it, this dagger take and do like me.
[Stabs himself.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Oh, holy shrine! Just, but vindictive gods,

In courts profane were e'er such horrors seen!

ANTIGONES.

Thus Alexander and his family,
Successors, assassins, are all destroyed!
Gods! since the world must ever feel your rage,
Why into being did you mortals call?
What were Statira's or Olympia's crimes?
To what am I reserved in future times!

End of Fifth and last Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

THE ORPHAN OF CHINA

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Genghis Khan, Emperor of the Tartars.

OCTAR, }
OSMAN, } Officers under Genghis Khan.

Zamti, a learned Mandarin.

Idame, wife of Zamti.

Asseli, friend to Idame.

Etan, friend to Zamti.

SCENE a Mandarin's palace near the court, in the city of Cambalu, now called Pekin.

This piece was produced in Paris, 1755, when the author was in exile.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

To The Most Noble Duke Of Richelieu, Marshal And Peer Of France, First Gentleman Of The Chamber To His Majesty, Governor Of Languedoc, And Member Of The Academy Of Sciences.

My Lord, I would have presented you with a piece of fine marble; but, instead of it, can only offer you a few Chinese figures. This little performance is not indeed worthy of your acceptance; there is no hero in this piece, who has united all parties in his favor, and rendered himself universally agreeable, by the force of superior talents, or supported a falling kingdom, or made the noble attempt to overthrow an English colony with four cannons only. I know better than anybody else the insignificance of my own works; but everything may be forgiven to an attachment of forty years' standing. The world, indeed, will say, that, retired as I am to the foot of the Alps, covered with eternal snows, and where I ought to be nothing but a philosopher, I had still vanity enough to let it be known, that France's brightest ornament on the banks of the Seine has not forgotten me. I have consulted my own heart alone, which has always guided me, inspired every word, and directed every action. You know it has sometimes deceived me; but not after such long and convincing proofs. If this tragedy should survive its author, permit it to inform posterity, that he who wrote it was honored with your friendship; that your uncle laid the foundation of the fine arts in France, and that you supported them in their decline.

I took the first hint of this tragedy some time since from reading the "Orphan of Tchao," a Chinese tragedy, translated by Father Bremare, an account of which is given in Du Halde's history. This piece was written in the fourteenth century, and under the dynasty of Genghis Khan; an additional proof, that the Tartar conquerors did not change the manners of the conquered nation; on the other hand, they protected and encouraged all the arts established in China, and adopted their laws: an extraordinary instance of the natural superiority which reason and genius have over blind force and barbarism. Twice have the Tartars acted in this manner; for when they had once more subdued this great empire, the beginning of last century, they submitted a second time to the wisdom of the conquered, and the two nations formed but one people, governed by the most ancient laws in the world; a most remarkable event, the illustration of which was the principal end of this performance.

The Chinese tragedy, which they call "The Orphan," was taken out of an immense collection of the theatrical performances of that nation, which has cultivated this art for about three thousand years before it was invented by the Greeks, the art of making living portraits of the actions of men, establishing schools of morality, and teaching virtue in dialogue and representation. For a long time dramatic poetry was held in esteem only in that vast country of China, separated from and unknown to the rest of the world, and in the city of Athens. Rome was unacquainted with it till above four hundred years afterwards. If you look for it among the Persians, or Indians, who pass for an inventive people, you will not find it there; it has never yet reached them. Asia

was contented with the fables of Palpay and Lokman, which contain all their morality, and have instructed by their allegories every age and nation.

One would have imagined, that from making animals speak, there was but one step to make men speak also, to introduce them on the stage, and to form the dramatic art; and yet this ingenious people never thought of it: from whence we may infer, that the Chinese, Greeks, and Romans are the only ancient nations, who were acquainted with the true spirit of society. Nothing indeed renders men more sociable, polishes their manners, or improves their reason more than the assembling them together for the mutual enjoyment of intellectual pleasure. Scarce had Peter the Great polished Russia before theatres were established there. The more Germany improves, the more of our dramatic representations has it adopted. Those few places where they were not received in the last age are never ranked amongst the civilized countries.

The “Orphan of Tchao” is a valuable monument of antiquity, and gives us more insight into the manners of China than all the histories which ever were, or ever will be written of that vast empire. ’Tis true, indeed, it is extremely barbarous, when compared with the excellent performances of our times; but, notwithstanding, is a masterpiece, when placed in competition with the pieces written by our authors in the fourteenth century. Our “Troubadours,” “Bazoche,” the company of “Children Without Care,” and “The Foolish Mother,” all of them fall short of the Chinese author. It is remarkable also, that this piece is written in the language of the Mandarins, which has never changed, whilst we can scarce understand the language that was spoken in the time of Louis XII. and Charles VIII.

One can only compare the “Orphan of Tchao” to the English and Spanish tragedies of the sixteenth century, which still please beyond sea, and on the other side of the Pyrenees. The action lasts five and twenty years, as in some of the monstrous farces of Shakespeare and Lope de Vega, which are called tragedies, though they are nothing but a heap of incredible stories. The enemy of the house of Tchao wants to destroy the head of it; and for that purpose lets loose on him a great dog, whom he imagines endowed with the power of discovering guilt by instinct, as James Aimar amongst us was said to have found out thieves by his wand: at last he forges an order from the emperor, and sends his enemy Tchao a rope, a dagger, and some poison. Tchao sings, according to the custom of his country, and very deliberately cuts his own throat, in consequence of that obedience, which every man owes to the divine right of the emperor of China. The persecutor puts to death three hundred persons of the family of Tchao. The prince’s widow is brought to bed of the orphan. The infant is saved from the rage of the tyrant, who had exterminated the whole family, and would have destroyed the only remaining branch of it: the tyrant orders all the children in all the towns round about to be destroyed, in hopes that the orphan might perish amongst the rest in the general slaughter.

We fancy we are reading the *Arabian Night’s Entertainment* put into scenes; and yet, in spite of all these marvellous and improbable things, it is extremely interesting: though there is such a multiplicity of events, all is clear and simple; a merit which must recommend it to every age and nation, and which is greatly wanting in our modern performances. The Chinese piece is indeed very deficient with regard to all

other beauties: there is no unity of time or action, no picture of the manners; no sentiment, eloquence, reason or passion in it; and yet, as I said before, the work is superior to anything we could produce in former ages.

How comes it to pass, that the Chinese, who in the fourteenth century, and a long time before, could boast of better dramatic performances than any European nation, still remain, as it were, in the infancy of this art, while we, in process of time, and by dint of pains and assiduity, have been able to produce about a dozen pieces, which, if they are not absolutely perfect, are at least much above anything the rest of the world could ever pretend to of this kind. The Chinese, as well as the rest of the Asiatics, have stopped at the first elements of poetry, eloquence, natural philosophy, astronomy, and painting; all practised by them so long before they were known to us. They began in everything much sooner than us, but made no progress afterwards; like the ancient Egyptians, who first taught the Greeks, and became at last so ignorant, as not even to be capable of receiving instruction from them.

These people, whom we take so much pains and go so far to visit; from whom, with the utmost difficulty, we have obtained permission to carry the riches of Europe, and to instruct them, do not to this day know how much we are their superiors; they are not even far enough advanced in knowledge to venture to imitate us, and don't so much as know whether we have any history or not.

The celebrated Metastasio has made choice of pretty nearly the same subject as myself for one of his dramatic poems, an orphan escaped from the destruction of his family, and has drawn his plot from a dynasty nine hundred years before our era.

The Chinese tragedy of the "Orphan of Tchao" differs in many respects; and I have chosen one that is not much like either of them, except in the name, as I have confined my plan to the grand epoch of Genghis Khan. I have endeavored to describe the manners of the Tartars and Chinese: the most interesting events are nothing when they do not paint the manners; and this painting, which is one of the greatest secrets of the art, is no more than an idle amusement, when it does not tend to inspire notions of honor and virtue.

I will venture to say, that from the "*Henriade*" to the publication of "*Zaire*," and this tragedy, be it good or bad, such is the principle by which I have always been governed; and that in my history of the age of Louis XIV., I have celebrated both my king and country, without flattery to either. In labors of this kind I have spent above forty years of my life. But observe the following words of a Chinese author, translated into Spanish by the famous Navarrete.

"When you compose any work, show it only to your friends; dread the public, and your brother writers; for they will play false with you, abuse everything you do, and impute to you what you never did: calumny with her hundred trumpets, will sound them all to your destruction; whilst truth, who is dumb, shall remain with you. The celebrated Ming was accused of hating Tien and Li, and the Emperor Vang: when the old man died, they found amongst his papers a panegyric on Vang, a hymn to Tien, another to Li, etc."

Voltaire.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT I.

SCENE I.

idame, asseli.

IDAME.

O Asseli, amidst this scene of horror,
Whilst desolation rages through the land,
And the proud Tartar threatens instant ruin
To this devoted palace, must thy friend
Experience new calamities?

ASSELI.

Alas!
We all partake the general ruin; all
Must with the public sorrows mix our own:
Who doth not tremble for a father's life,
A husband's, son's, or brother's? even within
These sacred walls, where dwells the holy band,
The ministers of heaven, the interpreters
Of China's laws, with helpless infancy,
And feeble age; even here we are not safe:
Who knows how far the cruel conqueror
May urge his triumphs, whilst the thunder breaks
On every side, and soon may burst upon us?

IDAME.

Who is this great destroyer, this dire scourge
Of Catai's sinking empire?

ASSELI.

He is called
The king of kings, the fiery Genghis Khan,
Who lays the fertile fields of Asia waste,
And makes it but a monument of ruin:
Already Octar, his successful chief,
Has stormed the palace; this once powerful empire,
The mistress of the world, is bathed in blood!

IDAME.

Knowest thou, my friend, that this destructive tyrant,
Whom now we tremble at, who proudly thus
Treads on the necks of kings, is yet no more
Than a wild Scythian soldier; bred to arms
And practised in the trade of blood; who long
Had wandered o'er the neighboring deserts, there
Formed a rude band of lawless rioters,
And fought his way to glory; now successful,
And now oppressed, at length by fortune led
Hither he came for refuge: Asseli,
I think thou must remember him, his name
Was Temugin.

ASSELL.

Ha! he who once addressed
His vows to thee! thy angry father then
Rejected him with scorn; though now his name
Is grown so terrible.

IDAME.

It is the same:
Methought even then I saw the rising dawn
Of future glory: I remember well,
Even when he came a beggar to the palace,
And craved protection, he behaved like one
Born to command: he loved me; and I own
My foolish heart had well nigh listened to him:
Perhaps it soothed the woman's vanity
To hold this lion in my toils; perhaps
I hoped in time to soften his rude soul,
And bend his savage fierceness to the ways
Of social life: he might have served the state
Which now he would destroy: our proud refusal
Incensed the hero, fatal may it prove
To this unhappy kingdom: well thou knowest
Our pride and jealousy: the ancient laws
Of this imperial city; our religion,
Our interest and our glory, all forbid
Alliance with the nations: for myself,
The noble Zamti merited my love,
And heaven hath joined me to him by the ties
Of holy marriage: who would e'er have thought
This poor despised abandoned Scythian thus
Should triumph over us? I refused his hand;

I am a wife and mother; how that thought
Alarms me! he is fiery and revengeful;
A Scythian never pardons: cruel fate!
And will this valiant nation tamely yield
Its neck to slavery, and be led like sheep
To slaughter?

ASSELI.

'Tis reported the Koreans
Have raised an army, but we know not yet
If it be true.

IDAME.

This sad uncertainty
But doubles our distress: heaven only knows
What we must suffer, if the emperor
Has found a place of refuge, if the queen
Is fallen beneath the tyrant's power, if yet
They live; alas! the last surviving pledge
Of their unhappy nuptials, the dear infant
Entrusted to our care! I tremble for him.
Perhaps my Zamti's sacred character
And holy office may subdue the hearts
Of these proud conquerors; savage as they are,
And thirsting for the blood of half mankind,
They yet believe there is a power above
That rules o'er all; nature in every breast
Hath wisely stamped the image of its God:
I talk of hope, but have a thousand fears
That wring my heart.

SCENE II.

idame, zamti, asseli.

ASSELI.

O my unhappy lord,
Speak, what must be our fate? is it determined?
What hast thou seen?

ZAMTI.

I tremble to repeat it:
We are undone: our empire is no more;

A prey to robbers: what hath it availed us
That we have trod in the fair paths of virtue?
Long time secure within the arms of peace
We shone illustrious in the rolls of time,
And gave a bright example to mankind:
From us the world received its laws; but vain
Is human worth when lawless power prevails:
I saw the northern hive rush in upon us,
And force their passage through a sea of blood;
Where'er they passed they spread destruction round them:
At length they seized the palace, where the best
Of sovereigns and of men, with calm composure
And resignation yielded to his fate:
The wretched queen lay fainting in his arms:
Those of their numerous sons, whom lusty manhood
Had sent to battle, were already slain:
The rest, who naught could give him but their tears,
Hung at his knees and wept; by secret paths
I found an entrance to the palace; there
Did I behold the cruel tyrants bind
In ignominious chains the conquered king,
His children, and his wife

IDAME.

Unhappy monarch!
O what a change is this! relentless heaven!

ZAMTI.

The wretched captive turned his eyes towards me,
And in the sacred language, to the Tartar
And to the multitude unknown, cried out,
“Preserve my last and only hope—my son.”
From my full heart I promised, swore to act
As he directed me, then fled to thee.
Whether the tyrants, busied in their search
Of plunder, thought not of me, or the symbol
Which here I wear of the divinity
Struck their rude souls with reverential awe,
Or whether heaven in kind compassion meant
To save my precious charge, and cast a cloud
O'er their deluded eyes, I know not what
Drew their attention, but they let me pass.

IDAME.

We yet may save him, he shall go with me,

And with my son; old Etan shall conduct us:
In some lone wood, or solitary cave,
We may conceal him till the search is past:
Thank heaven they have not reached us yet.

ZAMTI.

Alas!
No place is sacred, no asylum's left
For the dear royal infant: I expect
The brave Koreans, but they'll come too late:
But let us seize the favorable hour,
And lodge our precious pledge in safety.

SCENE III.

zamti, idame, asseli, etan.

ZAMTI.

Etan,
Thou seemest disordered: what's the news?

IDAME.

My lord,
We must away; the Scythian has prevailed,
And all is lost.

ETAN.

You are observed, and flight
Is now impossible: a guard is placed
Around us: all obey the conqueror,
And tremble at his power: the emperor's loss
Fills every heart with terror.

ZAMTI.

Is he dead?

IDAME.

O heaven!

ETAN.

It was indeed a dreadful sight:
Himself, his queen, his children, butchered all;
A race divine, respected, loved, adored;
Their headless trunks exposed to the derision
Of their proud conqueror, whilst their trembling subjects
Submissive bend beneath the yoke, nor dare
To shed a tear o'er those whom long they loved.
At length our haughty lord, grown tired of conquest,
And satiated with blood, proclaimed to all
The terms of life, eternal slavery.
This northern tyrant, whom the wrath of heaven
Hath sent for our destruction, once contemned
And spurned at by our court, returns to glut
His vengeance on us: these wild sons of rapine,
Who live in tents, in chariots, and in fields,
Will never brook confinement 'midst the walls
Of this close city: they detest our arts,
Our customs, and our laws; and therefore mean
To change them all; to make this splendid seat
Of empire one vast desert, like their own.

IDAME.

I know the conqueror comes to sate his vengeance
On this unhappy kingdom: whilst I lived
Unnoticed and obscure, I might have hope
Of safety; but that hope is now no more:
The night is past that hid me from the eye
Of persecution, and I must be wretched.
Thrice happy those, who to a tyrant master
Are still unknown.

ZAMTI.

Who knows but gracious heaven
May interpose and save the royal infant:
'Tis our first duty to preserve the charge
Committed to our care, and guard him well.
What comes this Tartar for?

IDAME.

O heaven! defend us,

SCENE IV.

OCTAR.

Hear, slaves; and let your answer be—obedience:
An infant yet remains, of royal race,
Amongst you: in the conqueror's name I here
Command you to deliver him—to me.
I shall expect him here: begone; delay
Were dangerous: bring him instantly, or know,
Destruction waits on all, but first on you.
The day's far spent; ere night he must be found:
Remember, and obey.

SCENE V.

zamti, idame.

IDAME.

O dreadful message!
For what are we reserved? Alas! my lord,
Ne'er till this day of blood did crimes like this
Affright my soul: you answer not, but send
Your fruitless sighs to heaven. Sweet innocent,
Must we then give thee up a sacrifice
To brutal rage?

ZAMTI.

I've promised, sworn to save him.

IDAME.

What can thy oaths, thy promises avail?
Thou canst not keep them; every hope is lost.

ZAMTI.

And wouldst thou have me sacrifice the son
Of my loved sovereign?

IDAME.

O I cannot bear
To think of it; my eyes are bathed in tears.
O were I not a mother, would kind heaven

But grant me now to shorten my sad days,
Then would I say to Zamti, come, my lord,
We'll die together; all is lost to us,
And we will perish with our country.

ZAMTI.

Who
That sees the wretched fate of Cathay's kings
Would wish to live? what is this phantom death,
That thus appalls mankind? the wretch's hope,
The villain's terror, and the brave man's scorn:
Without reluctance, and without regret,
The wise expect and meet him as a friend.

IDAME.

What secret purpose labors in your breast?
Your cheek is pale, your eyes are filled with tears;
My sympathizing heart feels all your sorrows,
And would relieve them; what have you resolved?

ZAMTI.

To keep my oath; therefore away, and watch
The royal infant: I shall follow you.

IDAME.

Alas! a woman's tears can ne'er defend him.

SCENE VI.

zamti, etan.

ZAMTI.

Vain is your care, your kind compassion vain,
For he must die; the nation's weal demands it.
Think rather how thou mayest preserve thy country.

ZAMTI.

Yes, I will make the dreadful sacrifice.
Etan, I know thou holdest this empire dear;
Yes, thou adorest the God of heaven and earth,
As worshipped by our ancestors; that God

Our bonzes know not, and our tyrants scorn.

ETAN.

In him I trust, on him alone rely
For my own comfort, and my country's safety.

ZAMTI.

Swear then by him, and his all-ruling power,
That thou wilt bury in eternal silence
The solemn secret that I mean to pour
Into thy faithful bosom: swear, thy hand
Shall still be ready to perform whate'er
Thy duty and thy God by me command.

ETAN.

I swear; and may the miseries that have fallen
On this unhappy kingdom light on me,
If ever I am false in word or deed!

ZAMTI.

I cannot now recede: then mark me, Etan.

ETAN.

Alas! thou weepest: amidst the general ruin
Can there be cause for added grief?

ZAMTI.

The doom
Is past, my friend, and cannot be reversed.

ETAN.

I know it cannot; but a stranger's son—

ZAMTI.

A stranger! he, my king!

ETAN.

When I remember

He is our emperor's child, I shudder at it:
What's to be done?

ZAMTI.

My path thou seest, is here
Prescribed, and every action noted down
By our new tyrants; thou mayest act with freedom,
Because unknown and unobserved: thou knowest
The orphan's place of refuge: for a time
We may conceal him 'midst the secret tombs
Of our great ancestors; then shelter him
Beneath Korea's chief; he will protect
The royal infant: leave the rest to me.

ETAN.

And how will you appear without him, how
Appease the conqueror?

ZAMTI.

I have wherewithal
To glut his vengeance.

ETAN.

You, my lord?

ZAMTI.

O nature!
O cruel duty!

ETAN.

How—

ZAMTI.

I have a son,
An only child, now in his cradle—go
And seize him.

ETAN.

Ha! your son!

ZAMTI.

To save—my king.
Away, and let him—but I can no more.

ETAN.

Alas! my lord, what a command is this!
I never can obey it.

ZAMTI.

Think on Zamti;
Think on his love, his weakness, his misfortunes,
Thy duty, and—thy oath.

ETAN.

'Twas rash and vain:
Thou didst extort it from me: I admire
Thy generous purpose; but if as a friend
I might be heard—

ZAMTI.

No more; I've heard too much
Already: what is all that thou couldst say
To what a father feels? When nature's silenced,
Friendship should urge no longer.

ETAN.

I obey.

ZAMTI.

Leave me for pity's sake.

SCENE VIII.

ZAMTI.

[*Alone.*
Is nature silent?
O wretched father! still thou hearest that voice
So fatal and so dear: O drown it, heaven,
In sweet oblivion; do not let my wife

And her dear babe distract this heart; O heal
My wounded heart: but man is far too weak
To conquer nature: let thy aid divine
Support me, and assist my feeble virtue!

End of the First Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

ZAMTI.

[Alone.

This tardy Etan, wherefore comes he not
To tell me—what I dread to hear? perhaps
Ere this the dreadful sacrifice is past:
I had not power to offer it myself.
O my dear child, how shall I ask my friend
The horrid question, how conceal my grief?

SCENE II.

zamti, etan.

ZAMTI.

I see 'tis done; I know it by thy tears;
They speak too plainly.

ETAN.

Thy unhappy son—

ZAMTI.

No more of that: speak of our empire's hope,
The royal infant; is he safe?

ETAN.

He is:
Within the tombs of his great ancestors.
Concealed from every eye; to you he owes
A life begun in misery, perhaps
A fatal gift.

ZAMTI.

It is enough, he lives.
O you, to whom I pay this cruel duty,

Forgive a father's tears.

ETAN.

Alas! my lord,
You must not give away to sorrow here:
'Tis dangerous even to weep.

ZAMTI.

And whither, Etan,
Must I transport my griefs? how bear the cries,
The bitter anguish, the despair, the rage,
The execrations of a frantic mother?
May we not yet deceive her for a time?

ETAN.

We seized him in her absence, and I flew
To guard the orphan king.

ZAMTI.

A while, my friend,
We might impose on her credulity.
Couldst thou not say we had delivered up
The royal orphan, and concealed her son
In safety? Truth is often most destructive,
And still we love it, though it makes us wretched.
Come, Etan, let us home—O heaven! she's here!
Observe her, what despair and terror dwell
On her pale cheek!

SCENE III.

zamti, idame.

IDAME.

Barbarian, can it be?
Could Zamti e'er command it? could he offer
The dreadful sacrifice? I'll not believe it:
Thou couldst not be more cruel than the laws
Of our proud conquerors, or the Tartar's sword.
Alas! thou weapest.

ZAMTI.

Thou too must weep with Zamti.
But thou must join with him to save thy king.

IDAME.

What! sacrifice my child!

ZAMTI.

It must be so:
Thou wert a subject ere thou wert a mother.

IDAME.

Has nature then lost all her influence o'er
A father's heart?

ZAMTI.

She has too much; but ne'er
Shall thwart my duty.

IDAME.

'Tis a barbarous virtue,
And I abhor it: I have seen, like thee,
Our empire lost, and wept our sovereign's fate;
But why pour forth an infant's guiltless blood,
Yet undemanded; why revere as gods
Your sleeping kings, that moulder in the tomb?
Hath Zamti sworn to them that he would kill
His darling child? alas! the rich and poor,
The monarch and the slave, are equal all
By nature; all alike to sorrow born,
Each has his share; and in the general wreck,
All duty bids us is—to save our own.
O had I fallen into the snare, and staid
A moment longer with the royal orphan,
My child had fallen into the cruel hands
Of ruffians; but I would have perished with him.
Nature and love recalled me, and I snatched
My lovely infant from the ravishers,
Preserved the son and mother; saved even thee,
Thou barbarous father.

ZAMTI.

Doth my son then live?

IDAME.

He doth; and thou shouldst bend to gracious heaven
For goodness thus unmerited: repent,
And be a father.

ZAMTI.

O almighty power,
Forgive the joy that, spite of all my firmness,
Thus mingles with my tears: alas! my love,
Vain are our hopes of happiness, and vain
Thy fond endeavors to prolong the life
Of our dear infant; these inhuman tyrants
Will force him from us; he must yield to fate.

IDAME.

But hear me, dearest Zamti.

ZAMTI.

He must die.

IDAME.

Barbarian, stay, and tremble at the rage
Of an afflicted desperate mother.

ZAMTI.

I
Shall do my duty, you may give up yours,
And sacrifice your husband to the foe:
This is a day of blood; let Zamti join
His murdered king, and perish with his country.

IDAME.

What is your country, what your king to me?
The name of subject is not half so sacred
As husband or as father. Love and nature
Are heaven's first great unalterable laws,

And cannot be reversed: the rest are all
From mortal man, and may be changed at pleasure.
Would I could save the royal heir, but not
By the much dearer blood of Zamti's son!
Pity a wretched mother; on my knees
I beg thee, cruel Zamti: O remember
For whom I slighted this proud conqueror,
This mighty warrior; was it not for thee?
And wilt thou not protect my son, not hear
The voice of nature pleading for thy child?

ZAMTI.

It is too much: thou dost abuse the power
Which love has given thee o'er thy Zamti's heart:
Couldst thou but see—

IDAME.

I own, my lord, I feel
A mother's weakness, and a mother's sorrows;
Yet may I boast a heart as firm as thine;
Away, and lead me on to death: I'm ready
To perish for my son.

ZAMTI.

I know thy virtues.

SCENE IV.

zamti, idame, octar.

Guards.

OCTAR.

Where are these traitors? why are my commands
Thus disobeyed? what have ye done with him,
The orphan prince? guards, bring him to our presence,
The emperor approaches; let him see
The victim at his feet: you, soldiers, watch
These rebels.

ZAMTI.

I obey, my lord, the orphan

Shall be delivered up.

IDAME.

'Tis false; he shall not:
I'll sooner lose my life than part with him.

OCTAR.

Guards, take this woman hence: the emperor comes.

SCENE V.

genghis, octar, osman.

Guards.

GENGHIS.

At length, my friends, 'tis time to sheathe the sword,
And let the vanquished breathe; I've spread destruction
And terror through the land, but I will give
The nation peace: the royal infant's death
Shall satisfy my wrath; with him shall rot
The seeds of foul rebellion; all the plots,
Feuds and divisions, fears and jealousies,
That whilst the phantom of a royal heir
Subsists, must disunite us, he alone
Of all the hated race remains, and he
Shall follow them: henceforth we will not raze
Their boasted works, their monuments of art,
Their sacred laws; for sacred they esteem
The musty rolls, which superstition taught
Their ancestors to worship: be it so,
The error may be useful, it employs
The people, and may make them more obedient.

[To Octar.

Octar, to thee I shall commit the power,
To bear my standard to the western world.

[To another officer.

Rule thou in conquered India, and interpret
Thy sovereign's great decrees; from Samarcand
To Tanais' borders, I shall send my sons.
Away—stay, Octar.

SCENE VI.

genghis, octar.

GENGHIS.

Couldst thou e'er have thought
Fortune would raise me to this height of glory?
That I should reign supreme, and triumph here,
Even in this palace, where disgraced and wretched
I sought in vain for refuge, and was treated
With insolence and scorn: the proud possessors
Of this unconquered empire then disdained
A Scythian, and a haughty fair refused
That hand which now directs the fate of millions.

OCTAR.

Amidst this scene of glory, how, my lord,
Can thoughts like these disturb you?

GENGHIS.

Still the wrongs
I suffered in adversity oppress me:
I own the weakness of my foolish heart,
And hoped to find that happiness in love,
Which glory, wealth, and empire, cannot give.
It hurts my pride to think how I was spurned
By that contemptuous woman; she shall know,
At least, and see the object of her scorn.
To have her mourn the honors that she lost
In losing Genghis will be some revenge.

OCTAR.

The shouts of victory, and the voice of fame,
Have been so long familiar to my ears,
That I have little relish for the plaints
Of whining love.

GENGHIS.

Nor has thy friend indulged
That fatal passion since her proud refusal:
I own the fair Idame won my heart,
By charms unknown before: our barren deserts

Could never produce a face like hers, a mind
So formed to please; her every motion fired
My captive soul, but her imprudent scorn
Restored my freedom; nobler objects claim
A monarch's care; I'll think no more of her,
Let her repent at leisure of her pride.
Octar, I charge thee, talk not of Idame.

OCTAR.

You have, indeed, affairs of greater moment
That call for your attention.

GENGHIS.

Then farewell
To love, and all its follies.

SCENE VII.

genghis, octar, osman.

OSMAN.

O my lord,
The victim was prepared, the guard was ranged
On every side, when (wonderful to tell!)
A strange event perplexed us all.—A woman
Of frantic mien, with wild dishevelled hair,
And bathed in tears, rushed in upon us; “stop,”
Aloud she cried, “inhuman ruffians, stop,
It is my son, you've been deceived; 'tis not
The emperor's child, but mine:” her eyes, her voice,
Her fury, her despair, her every gesture,
Was nature's language all, and spoke the mother:
When lo! her husband came, with downcast eyes
And gloomy aspect; sullenly he cried,
“This is the royal orphan, this the blood,
Which you demanded, take it:” as he spake,
Fast flowed his tears. The wretched matron, pale
And motionless awhile, as struck with death,
Fell prostrate; then, long as her faltering voice
Could utter the imperfect sound, cried out,
“Give me my son:” her sorrows were sincere,
Never was grief more bitter, doubts arose
Amongst us, and I came to know your orders.

GENGHIS.

If 'tis the work of art, I will explore
The mystery soon, and woe to the deceivers:
Think they to cast a veil before my eyes,
And mock their sovereign? let them if they dare.

OCTAR.

My lord, this woman never can deceive us;
The emperor's son was placed beneath her care;
A master's child might easily attract
The faithful servant's love, and danger make
The charge more precious still; the ties of nature
Are not more strong than those of fantasy:
But we shall soon unravel it.

GENGHIS.

Who is
This woman?

OCTAR.

Wife of a proud Mandarin:
One of those lettered sages who defy
The power of kings; a numerous band! but now,
Thank heaven, reduced by thy victorious arms
To slavery: Zamti is the traitor's name
Who watches o'er the victim.

GENGHIS.

Go, my Octar,
Interrogate this guilty pair, and learn,
If possible, the truth: let all our guards
Be ready at their posts: they talk, it seems,
Of a surprise that the Koreans mean
To march against us on the river's bank:
An army hath been seen: we soon shall know
What bold adventurers are so fond of death,
To court destruction from the sons of war,
And force them to depopulate the world.

End of the Second Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

genghis, octar, osman.

Attendants.

GENGHIS.

What say the captives, is the fraud discovered,
And vengeance taken on these vile impostors?
Have they delivered up the orphan prince
To Octar?

OSMAN.

Prayers, and threats, and torments, all
Are vain: the undaunted Zamti still persists
In his first answer: on his open brows
Are engraved the marks of truth: the mournful fair one,
Whose grief but adds new lustre to her charms,
With tears incessant and heart-rending sighs,
Moves every heart: spite of ourselves we wept
Her wretched fate: ne'er did my eyes behold
A sweeter mourner: she entreats to see
And speak with you; the conqueror of kings,
She hopes, will hear the wretched, and in wrath
Remember mercy; that he will protect
A guiltless child, and show mankind his goodness
Is like his power, unlimited. 'Twas thus,
My lord, she spoke of you, and I have promised
She shall have audience.

GENGHIS.

[To one of the attendants.
Bid her enter now,
We shall unravel this deep mystery;
But let her not imagine a few sighs,
And bidden tears, can e'er impose on me:
I have experienced all these female arts,
But I defy them now: let her be careful,
Her life depends on her sincerity.

OSMAN.

My lord, she comes.

GENGHIS.

What do I see? O heaven!
It cannot be Idame, sure my senses—

SCENE II.

genghis, idame, octar, osman.

Guards.

IDAME.

My lord, I came not to solicit pardon,
My forfeit life is yours, I ask not for it:
Why should I wish for years of added woe?
But spare a guiltless infant.

GENGHIS.

Rise, Idame,
Fate conquers all, it has deceived us both.
If heaven hath raised a poor inhabitant
Of Scythia, once the object of your scorn,
To power, and splendor, you have naught to fear:
The emperor never will avenge the wrongs
Of Temugin; but public good demands
The royal victim; 'tis a sacrifice
Which must be made: for your own son, myself
Will be his guard: I promise to protect him.

IDAME.

Then I am happy.

GENGHIS.

But inform me, madam,
What is this fraud, this mystery between you?
For I must know it all.

IDAME.

O spare the wretched.

GENGHIS.

Have I not cause to hate this Zamti?

IDAME.

You,
My lord?

GENGHIS.

I've said too much.

IDAME.

Restore my child,
You've promised it.

GENGHIS.

His pardon must depend
On you alone: you know I have been injured,
My favors scorned, my orders disobeyed:
Who is this Zamti, this respected lord,
This husband? in that name alone comprised
Is every guilt: what charms has he to boast
Who braves me thus?

IDAME.

He was my only comfort,
My joy, my happiness, the best of men;
He served his God, his country, and his king.

GENGHIS.

How long, Idame, have you been united?

IDAME.

Ever since the fatal time, when wayward fortune
Espoused thy cause, and gave a tyrant power
To scourge mankind.

GENGHIS.

I understand you, madam,
E'er since the time you mean, when I was scorned
By a proud beauty, when this country first
Deserved the chains which it was doomed to wear.

SCENE III.

genghis, octar, osman.

[On one side of the stage.

idame, and zamti.

[On the other, Guards.

GENGHIS.

What sayest thou, slave? hast thou delivered up
The emperor's son?

ZAMTI.

I have, my lord, 'tis done:
I have fulfilled my duty.

GENGHIS.

Well thou knowest
Nor fraud, nor insolence escape my vengeance:
If thou hast dared to hide him from my wrath,
He must be found, his death shall follow thine.
[To the guards.
Seize and destroy that infant.

ZAMTI.

Wretched father!

IDAME.

Stay, cruel tyrant, stay, is this your pity,
Is this your promise?

GENGHIS.

I have been deceived;
Explain the mystery, madam, or he dies.

IDAME.

I'll tell thee all; and if it be a crime
To follow nature, and obey her laws,
If still thy cruel spirit thirsts for blood,
Let all your anger light on me, but spare
The noble Zamti: to our mutual care
The emperor entrusted his dear son:
Thou knowest too well what scenes of horrid slaughter
Followed thy cruel victory, and marked
Thy steps with blood; that might have satisfied
A less inhuman conqueror: when thy slaves
Demanded our last hope, the royal heir,
My generous Zamti, faithful to his king,
To duty gave up all, and sacrificed
His son, nor listened to the powerful voice
Of nature; I admired that patriot firmness
I had not strength to imitate: alas!
I am a mother, how could I consent
To my child's death? my terrors, my despair,
My rage, my anguish, all too plainly spoke
What Zamti strove to hide: behold, my lord,
The wretched father, he deserves your pity:
So does my guiltless infant: punish me,
And me alone: forgive me, dearest Zamti,
Forgive a mother's tenderness, forgive
A wife that loves thee and would save thy son.

ZAMTI.

I have forgiven thee, and, thank heaven, my king,
The royal infant's safe.

GENGHIS.

'Tis false; begone,
And find him, traitor, or thou diest; atone
For thy past crimes.

ZAMTI.

The crime were to obey
A tyrant, but my royal master's voice

Cries from the tomb, and bids me tell thee, Genghis,
Thou art my conqueror, but not my king:
Were Zamti born thy subject, he had been
Most faithful to thee: I have sacrificed
My son, and thinkest thou I can fear to die?

GENGHIS.

[To the guard.
Away with him.

IDAME.

O stay.

GENGHIS.

I'll hear no more.

IDAME.

I have deserved thy anger, I alone
Should feel thy vengeance: thou hast slain my king,
And now my husband and my child must fall
By thy destructive hand: inhuman tyrant,
When will thy wrath be satisfied?

GENGHIS.

Away:
Follow thy guilty husband: darest thou plead
For mercy, thou reproach me?

IDAME.

Then all hope
Is lost.

GENGHIS.

If ever I think of clemency,
It must not be till ample reparation
Is made for all my wrongs: you understand me.

SCENE IV.

genghis, octar.

GENGHIS.

What means this fluttering heart, and wherefore thus
Steals from my breast the involuntary sigh?
Some power divine protects her: O my Octar,
What secret charms have innocence and beauty,
That proud authority should thus submit
To own their influence? I have lost myself
And want a friend; O lend me thy kind counsel.

OCTAR.

Since I must speak, I'll speak with freedom; know then
This dangerous branch of a detested race
Must be cut off, or we are not secure
In our new conquest; victory's best guard
Is rigor; by severity alone
Your power can be established. Time, my lord,
Will bring back order and tranquillity;
The people by degrees forget their wrongs,
Or pardon them: you then may reign in peace.

GENGHIS.

And can it be Idame, that proud beauty,
Given to another, to my mortal foe!

OCTAR.

She merits not your pity, but your hate;
I cannot, must not think you ever loved her;
'Twas but a short and momentary flame,
That sparkled and expired; her cruel scorn,
Her proud refusal, and the hand of time,
Have quite extinguished it; she is no more
To Genghis now than the ignoble wife,
Of an abandoned traitor.

GENGHIS.

He shall die;
A slave! a rival!

OCTAR.

Wherefore lives he yet?
Strike, and revenge thyself.

GENGHIS.

I know not why,
But my fond heart still trembles at the thought
Of injuring her: subdued by beauty's tears
I dare not hurt a rival and a slave;
Even in the husband I respect the wife:
Is love indeed so great a conqueror,
And must I grace his triumphs?

OCTAR.

All I know,
And all I wish for, is to follow thee,
The rattling chariot, and the sounding bow,
The fiery coursers, and the din of arms:
These are my passions, these the joys of Octar:
I am a stranger to the sighs of love,
And think them far beneath the royal soul
Of Genghis; they debase a character
So great as thine.

GENGHIS.

I know my power, I know
That I could make her mine: but what avails
The fairest form without the conquered heart?
Where is the joy to press within our arms
A trembling slave? to see her beauteous eyes
Forever bathed in tears, and her full heart
Oppressed with sorrow? 'tis a barbarous triumph:
The savage herd, that through the forest roam,
Enjoy more peace, and boast a purer love:
The fair Idame has some secret power
That charms me more than victory and empire:
I thought I could have driven her from my heart,
But she returns, and triumphs.

SCENE V.

genghis, octar, osman.

GENGHIS.

Well: what says she?

OSMAN.

That she will perish with her husband rather
Than tell the place where, hid from every eye,
The orphan lies concealed; the tender husband
Supports her in his arms; with added courage
Inspires her soul, and teaches her to die.
They wish to be united in the grave;
The people throng around, and every eye
Is wet with tears, lamenting their sad fate.

GENGHIS.

And does Idame talk of death from me?
Fly, Osman, fly, tell her I hold her life
As sacred as my own: away.

SCENE VI.

genghis, octar.

OCTAR.

This infant,
Concerning him, my lord—what's to be done?

GENGHIS.

Nothing.

OCTAR.

You gave commands he should be torn
Even from Idame's bosom.

GENGHIS.

We must think
Of that hereafter.

OCTAR.

What if they should hide—

GENGHIS.

He cannot escape us.

OCTAR.

Still they may deceive you.

GENGHIS.

Idame is incapable of fraud.

OCTAR.

And would you then preserve the royal race?

GENGHIS.

I would preserve Idame; for the rest
'Tis equal all, dispose it as thou wilt.
Go, bring her hither—stay—my Octar—try
If thou canst soften this rebellious slave,
This Zamti, and persuade him to obey me.
We will not heed this infant; he shall make me
A nobler sacrifice.

OCTAR.

Who, he, my lord?

GENGHIS.

Ay, he.

OCTAR.

What hopest thou?

GENGHIS.

To subdue Idame,
To see her, to adore her, to be loved
By that ungrateful fair one; or to take
My full revenge, to punish her, and die.

End of the Third Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

GENGHIS.

[A troop of Tartar soldiers.

Are these my promised joys? is this the fruit
Of all my labors? where's the liberty,
The rest I hoped for? I but feel the weight
Without the joys of power: I want Idame,
And, instead of her, a crowd of busy slaves
Are ever thronging round me.

[To his attendants.

Hence, away,
And guard the city walls; these proud Koreans
May think to find us unprepared; already,
It seems, they have proclaimed their orphan king;
But I'll be duped no longer; he shall die.
I am distracted with a thousand cares,
Dangers, and plots, and foes on every side;
Intruding rivals, and a wayward people,
Oppress me: when I was a poor unknown
I was more happy.

SCENE II.

octar, genghis.

GENGHIS.

Well, my friend, you've seen
This proud presumptuous Mandarin: what says he?

OCTAR.

He is inflexible; nor threats alarm
Nor promises allure him; still he talks
Of duty and of virtue, as if we
Were vanquished slaves, and he the conqueror.
I blush to think how we demeaned ourselves,
By talking to a wretch, whom by a word
We might destroy: let the ungrateful pair
Perish together; mutual is their crime,
And mutual be their punishment.

GENGHIS.

'Tis strange,
That sentiments like these, to us unknown,
Should rise in mortal breasts: without a groan,
A murmur, or complaint, a father breaks
The ties of nature, and would sacrifice
His child to please the manes of his sovereign,
And the fond wife would die to save her lord.
The more I see, the more must I admire
This wondrous people, great in arts and arms,
In learning and in manners great; their kings
On wisdom's basis founded all their power;
They gave the nations law, by virtue reigned,
And governed without conquest; naught hath heaven
Bestowed on us but force; our only art
Is cruel war; our business to destroy.
What have I gained by all my victories,
By all my guilty laurels stained with blood?
The tears, the sighs, the curses of mankind.
Perhaps, my friend, there is a nobler fame,
And worthier of our search: my heart in secret
Is jealous of their virtues; I would wish,
All conqueror as I am, to imitate
The vanquished.

OCTAR.

Can you then admire their weakness?
What are their boasted arts, the puny offspring
Of luxury and vice, that cannot save them
From slavery and death? the strong and brave
Are born to rule, the feeble to obey:
Labor and courage conquer all; but you
Tamely submit, a voluntary slave:
And must the brave companions of your toil
Behold their honor stained, their glory lost,
Their king dependent on a woman's smile?
Their honest hearts with indignation glow;
By me they speak, by me reproach thee, Genghis:
Excuse a friend, a fellow soldier, grown
Old in thy service; one who cannot bear
This amorous sickness of the soul, and longs
To guide thy footsteps to the paths of glory.

GENGHIS.

Go, fetch Idame.

OCTAR.

What, my lord—

GENGHIS.

Obey:
Nor dare to murmur; 'tis a subject's part
To reverence even the weakness of his master.

SCENE III.

GENGHIS.

[Alone.
'Tis not in mortals to resist their fate;
She must be mine; what's victory without her?
I have made thousands wretched, and am now
Myself unhappy: 'midst the venal crowd
Of slaves that court my favor, is there one
That can relieve the anguish of my soul,
Or fill my heart with real bliss? I wanted
Some happy error, some delusive joy,
To mitigate the sorrows of a king,
And lessen the oppressive weight of empire;
But Octar, who should heal, hath probed my wounds
Too deeply; I have none but monsters round me,
Blood-thirsty slaves, unfeeling, merciless,
And cruel, disciplined to blood and slaughter:
O for a few soft hours of gentle love
To brighten this dark scene! they shall not judge,
Shall not arraign the conduct of their king:
Where is Idame?—ha! she comes.

SCENE IV.

genghis, idame.

IDAME.

My lord,
'Tis cruel to insult a friendless woman,
And add fresh weight to her calamities.

GENGHIS.

Be not alarmed; your husband yet may live;

My vengeance is suspended for a while,
And for thy sake I will be merciful:
Perhaps it was decreed by heaven Idame
Should be reserved to captivate her master,
To bend the stubborn fierceness of his nature,
And soften his rude heart: you understand me;
My laws permit divorce: embrace the offer,
And make the sovereign of the world your own.
I know you love me not, but think what joys
Surround a throne; think how thy country's good,
Her welfare, and her happiness depend
On thy resolve: I know it moves thy wonder
To see a haughty conqueror at thy feet:
Forget my power, forget my cruelty,
Weigh your own interest well, and speak my fate.

IDAME.

I am indeed surprised, and so perhaps
Will Genghis be when I shall answer him:
There was a time, my lord, you well remember,
When he who holds the subject world in awe,
This terror of the nations, was no more
Than a poor soldier, friendless and unknown;
He offered me the pure unspotted heart
Of Temugin, and I with pleasure then
Would have received it.

GENGHIS.

Ha! couldst thou have loved me?

IDAME.

Perhaps I might; but those to whom I owe
My first obedience doomed me to another:
Thou knowest the power of parents o'er their children;
They are the image of that God we serve,
And next to them should be obeyed: this empire
Was founded on paternal right, on justice,
Honor, and public faith, and holy marriage;
And if it be the sacred will of heaven
That it must fall a sacrifice to thee,
And thy successful crimes, the enlivening spirit
That long supported it shall never perish:
Your fate has changed; Idame's never can.

GENGHIS.

Couldst thou have loved me then?

IDAME.

I could, my lord,
And therefore never must hereafter think
On Genghis; I am bound in sacred bonds
To Zamti; nay, I'll tell thee more; I love him,
Prefer him to the splendor of a throne,
And all the honors thou canst lavish on me:
Think not it soothes my vanity to spurn
A conqueror, all I wish is to fulfil
My duty, and do justice to myself:
Bestow your favors on some grateful heart,
Worthier than mine, that will with joy receive them:
May I implore you to conceal from Zamti
These proffered terms? 'twould wound his soul to think
My truth to him had ever thus been questioned.

GENGHIS.

He knows what I expect, and will obey
If he desires to live.

IDAME.

He never will:
Though cruel torments should extort from him
A feigned submission, my firm constancy
Would soon recall him to the paths of duty,
Of honor, truth, and virtue.

GENGHIS.

Can it be,
When this ungenerous husband would have given
Thy son to death?

IDAME.

He did: he loved his country:
It was a noble crime, and I forgive him:
He acted like a hero, and Idame
Like the fond mother: even if I had hated
I would not have been false to him.

GENGHIS.

Amazing!
Resistance but inflames my passion for thee,
And the more injured, I but love thee more:
Yet know, I have a soul that's capable
Of rage as well as tenderness.

IDAME.

I know
Thou art the master here, and life or death
Depend on thee: but tremble at the laws.

GENGHIS.

The laws! they are no more, or in my will
Alone are to be found; your laws already
Have been too fatal to me; they prevented
That happy union which my soul desired,
And bound thee to another; but they are void,
And stand dissolved by my superior power:
Obey me, madam, I have given my orders,
And I expect your husband should deliver
Into my hands the emperor and Idame:
Remember, Zamti's life depends on you:
Let prudence teach you to disarm the wrath
Of an offended king, who, blushing, owns
His foolish fondness for a worthless woman.

SCENE V.

idame, asseli.

IDAME.

Thou seest my wretched fate; the tyrant leaves me
The cruel choice of infamy or death.
O, Zamti, I must yield thee to thy fate.

ASSELI.

Rather exert the power which beauty gives thee
O'er the proud Scythian, you have found the art
To please him.

IDAME.

Would I had not! that, alas!
But makes me more unhappy.

ASSELL.

You alone
Might soften all the rigor of our fate;
For you already his relenting soul
Withheld its fierceness; you subdued his rage;
Zamti still lives, his rival, and his foe:
This bloody conqueror stands in awe of thee,
And dare not hurt him: here he first beheld
Thy lovely form, here paid his guiltless vows.

IDAME.

No more: it were a crime to think of them.

SCENE VI.

zamti, idame, asseli.

IDAME.

Zamti! what brought thee hither? what kind power
Hath thus restored thee to my arms?

ZAMTI.

The tyrant
Hath given me this short respite; by his orders
I came to seek thee.

IDAME.

Hast thou heard, my Zamti,
The shameful terms proposed to save thy life,
And the dear Orphan's?

ZAMTI.

Mine's not worth thy care:
What is the loss of one unhappy being
Amidst the general ruin? O Idame,
Remember my first duty is to save

My king; whate'er we boast, whate'er we love,
To him we owe it all, except our honor,
That only good which we can call our own.
I have concealed the Orphan 'midst the tombs
Of his great ancestors, unless we soon
Fly to relieve him, he must perish there.
Korea's generous prince in vain expects him:
Etan, our faithful servant, is in chains;
Thou art our only hope; preserve the life
Of thy dear infant, and thy husband's honor.

IDAME.

What wouldst thou have me do?

ZAMTI.

Forget me, live
But for thy country, give up all to that,
And that alone; heaven points out the fair path
Of glory to thee, and a husband's death,
For Zamti soon must die, shall leave thee free
To act as best may serve the common cause:
Enslave the Tartar, make him all thy own;
And yet to leave thee to that proud usurper
Will make the pangs of death more bitter to me:
It is a dreadful sacrifice, but duty
Spreads sweet content o'er all that she inspires:
Idame, be a mother to thy king,
And reign; remember, 'tis my last command,
Preserve thy sovereign, and be happy.

IDAME.

Stay,
Thou knowest me not: thinkest thou I'll ever purchase
Those shameful honors with my Zamti's blood?
O thou art doubly guilty; love and nature
Cry out against thee! barbarous to thy son,
And still more cruel to thy wife. O Zamti,
Heaven points us out a nobler way to death.
The tyrant, whether from contempt or love
I know not, leaves me at full liberty;
I am not watched, or guarded here; I know
Each secret path and avenue that leads
To the dark tombs where thou hast hid the king;
Thither I'll fly, and to Korea's chief
Bear the rich prize, the nation's only hope,

The royal infant, as a gift from heaven:
I know 'twill be in vain, and we must die;
But we shall die with glory; we shall leave
Behind us names that, worthy of remembrance,
shall shine forever in the rolls of time.
Now, Zamti, have I followed thy example?

ZAMTI.

Thou gracious God, who hast inspired, support her!
I blush, my love, at thy superior virtue;
Heaven grant thee power to save thy king and country!

End of the Fourth Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT V.

SCENE I.

idame, asseli.

ASSELI.

All then is lost; twice in one fatal day
Have I beheld thee made a slave: alas!
What could a helpless woman unsupported
Against a mighty conqueror?

IDAME.

I have done
What duty bade me, carried in my arms
The royal infant; for a while his presence
Inspired our troops, but Genghis came, and death
Followed his steps, the savage herd prevailed,
And bore down all before them; I was made
Once more a captive.

ASSELI.

Zamti then must perish,
And share his master's fate.

IDAME.

They both must die:
Perhaps some cruel torments, worse than death,
Already are prepared; my son perhaps
Must follow them: to triumph o'er my grief,
And aggravate my sorrows, the proud tyrant
Called me before him: how his looks appalled
My shrinking soul, when thrice he lifted up
His bloody hand against the wretched infants!
Trembling I stepped between, and at his feet
Fell prostrate; rudely then he pushed me from him,
And turned aside; the savage guards around
Seemed waiting for his orders to despatch me.

ASSELI.

He cannot, dare not do it: still, thou seest,
Zamti is spared, the orphan king still lives;
Let but Idame sue to him for pardon,
And all will be forgiven.

IDAME.

O no; his love
Is turned to rage; he smiled at my distress,
Laughed at my tears, and vowed eternal hatred.

ASSELI.

And yet you may subdue him; the fierce lion
Roars in the toils, and bites his chain; he would not
Thus talk of hatred if he did not love.

IDAME.

Whether he loves or hates, 'tis time to end
This wretched being.

ASSELI.

What have you resolved?

IDAME.

When heaven hath poured out all its wrath upon us,
And filled up the sad measure of our woes,
It gives us courage to support our griefs,
And suits our strength to our calamities:
I feel new force, new vigor in my heart,
'Midst all my sorrows; henceforth I defy
The tyrant, and am mistress of my fate.

ASSELI.

But can you leave your child, the dear loved object
Of all your hopes and fears?

IDAME.

There Asseli,
You pierce my heart: O dreadful sacrifice!

I have done all to save him: the usurper
Will not descend so low as to destroy
A helpless infant; for his mother's sake,
Whom once he loved, perhaps may spare my child;
That pleasing hope at least will soothe my soul
In the dark hour of death: he will relent
When I am gone, nor carry his fierce wrath
Beyond the grave, to persecute my son.

SCENE II.

idame, asseli, octar.

OCTAR.

Madam, you must attend the emperor.
[*To the guards.*
Guard you these infants; watch the door, that none
May pass this way.
[*To Asseli.*
You, madam, may retire.

IDAME.

The emperor send for me?—but I obey.
Could I have seen my Zamti first! perhaps
It is a vain request: does pity never
Dwell in a Tartar's breast? might I implore
Your friendship to assist me?

OCTAR.

No: when once
The royal word is passed, to offer counsel
Is little less than treason: you had kings
Indeed of old who gave up all their rights,
And let their subjects rule; but manners change
With times; we listen not to idle prayers,
Nor yield to woman's tears; by arms alone
We rule the subject world: therefore obey,
And wait the emperor's commands.

SCENE III.

IDAME.

[*Alone.*

Thou God
Of the afflicted, who beholdest my wrongs,
Support me now, inspire me with a portion
Of my dear Zamti's courage.

SCENE IV.

genghis khan, idame.

GENGHIS.

Genghis comes
Once more to humble thy proud soul; to show thee
Thy foul ingratitude, thy base return
For all my kindness to thee; yet thou knowest not
How guilty thou hast been; thou knowest not yet
Thy danger, nor the anguish of my soul;
Thou whom I loved and whom I ought to hate,
To punish, to destroy.

IDAME.

Then punish me,
And me alone; 'tis all I ask of Genghis:
Finish a life of misery, satiate here
Thy thirst of blood: Idame hath been faithful,
That is a crime thou never canst forgive:
Strike then, and be revenged.

GENGHIS.

Thou knowest I cannot;
Thou knowest I am more wretched than thyself;
But I'm resolved: the Orphan, and thy son,
Are in my power: for Zamti, he has long
Deserved to die; the rebel braves my wrath,
And yet I spare him; if you wish his life
You must forget him; death will break the chain
That binds you; then I might with justice seize
And make you mine; but know, this proud barbarian,
This Scythian tyrant, whom you treat with scorn,
Is not unworthy of Idame's love:
Abjure your marriage, and I'll raise your child
To equal rank and splendor with my own:
The orphan shall be safe, your husband spared;
Their lives, their welfare, and their happiness,
The happiness of Genghis, all depend

On thee, Idame; for I love thee still:
But think not I will bear thy cruel insults,
Thy tyrant scorn, and all the pride of beauty:
My soul, thou knowest, is violent; take heed,
Provoke it not, lest vengeance fall upon thee.
Speak the decisive word that must determine
The fate of Genghis, and his empire; say,
Or must I love or hate Idame?

IDAME.

Neither:
Your hatred were unjust, your love most guilty,
And most unworthy of us both: I ask
Your justice; I demand it; 'tis a debt
Which a king owes to all: if you have lost,
I would restore it to you, and, in secret,
I know your conscience justifies Idame.

GENGHIS.

Then hatred is your choice; 'tis well; henceforth
Expect the vengeance of an injured monarch:
Your prince, your husband, and your son shall pay
For proud Idame's scorn, and with their blood
Atone for her ingratitude: their doom
Was sealed by thee, thou art their murderer.

IDAME.

Barbarous, inhuman Genghis.

GENGHIS.

So I am,
Thanks to thy kind regard! you might have had
A tender love, but you chose a master
Proud, merciless, and savage, one whose hatred
Is equal to thy own.

IDAME.

He is my king;
As such I reverence him: this single boon,
Low on my knees entreat.

GENGHIS.

Idame, rise;
Speak, I attend: perhaps some kinder thoughts—

IDAME.

Might Zamti be permitted for a while
To visit me in secret?

GENGHIS.

What?

IDAME.

My lord,
But for a moment, 'tis my last request;
Perhaps it may be better for us both.

GENGHIS.

'Tis strange: but be it so: perhaps the slave,
Taught by calamity, that best of masters,
No longer will desire the fatal honor
Of being rival to a conqueror:
On you his fate depends; divorce, or death:
Give him the choice.
[*To Octar.*
Watch here.
[*To the guards.*
Guards, follow me:
Still am I wavering, still unhappy; still
Is Genghis doomed to be the slave of love.
[*Exit.*

IDAME.

[*Alone.*
Once more Idame lives; methinks I feel
New strength and vigor shoot through every vein:
Now, Genghis, I defy thee!

SCENE V.

zamti, idame.

IDAME.

O my Zamti,
Dearer to me than all those conquerors,
Whom servile mortals flatter into gods;
My other deity, to whom in vain
I never sue: alas, my love, too well
Thou knowest our fate; the dreadful hour is come.

ZAMTI.

I know it is.

IDAME.

In vain thy patriot care
Strove to preserve the orphan king.

ZAMTI.

That hope
Is lost; we'll think no more on it: thou hast done
Thy every duty, and I die content.

IDAME.

What will become of our dear child? forgive
A mother, Zamti; I have shown some courage,
And therefore thou wilt pardon me.

ZAMTI.

The kings
Of Cathay are no more; the nobles held
In ignominious chains; they most deserve
Our pity, who are still condemned to live.

IDAME.

O they have doomed thee to a shameful death.

ZAMTI.

'Tis what I've long expected.

IDAME.

Hear me then;
Is there no path to death but from the palace?
Bulls bleed at the altar; criminals are dragged
To punishment; but generous minds are masters
Of their own fate: why meet it from the hands
Of Genghis? were we born dependent thus
On others' wills? no; let us imitate
Our bolder neighbors, live with ease, and die
When life grows burdensome: wrongs unrevenged
To them are insupportable, and death
More welcome far than infamy: they wait not
For a proud tyrant's nod, but meet their fate:
We've taught these islanders some useful arts,
And wherefore deign we not to learn from them
Some necessary virtues?—let us die.

ZAMTI.

Yes: I approve thy noble resolution,
And think, extremity of sorrow mocks
The power of laws; but wretched slaves, disarmed
As we are, and bowed down beneath our tyrants,
Must wait the blow.

IDAME.

[Drawing out a poniard.
Strike, Zamti, and be free.

ZAMTI.

O heaven!

IDAME.

Strike here, my Zamti, this weak arm
Perhaps might err; thy firmer hand will best
Direct the fatal stroke; now sacrifice
A faithful wife, and let her husband fall
Beside her: yes, my love, we'll die together;
With jealous eye the tyrant shall behold us
Expiring in each other's arms.

ZAMTI.

Thank heaven!
Thy virtue never fails; this is the last
The dearest mark of my Idame's love;
Receive my last farewell; give me the dagger:
Now turn aside.

IDAME.

There, take it.
[Gives him the dagger.]
Kill me first;
Thou tremblest.

ZAMTI.

O I cannot.

IDAME.

Strike, my lord.

ZAMTI.

I shudder at the thought.

IDAME.

O cruel Zamti,
Strike here, and then—

ZAMTI.

I will—now follow me.
[Attempts to stab himself]

IDAME.

[Laying hold of his arm]
You must not—here, my lord—

SCENE VI.

genghis, octar, idame, zamti.

Guards.

GENGHIS.

O heaven! disarm him.
[*Guards disarm him.*
What would ye do?

IDAME.

We would have freed ourselves
From misery and thee.

ZAMTI.

Thou wilt not envy us
The privilege to die.

GENGHIS.

Indeed I will:
O power supreme, thou witness of my wrongs
And of my weakness, thou who hast subdued
So many kings for me, shall I at last
Be worthy of thy goodness?—Zamti, thou
Still triumphest o'er me; she whom I adored,
Thy wife, had rather die by thy loved hand
Than live with Genghis: but ye both shall learn
To bear my yoke, perhaps yet more.

IDAME.

What sayest thou?

ZAMTI.

For what new scene of inhumanity
Are we reserved?

IDAME.

Why is our fate concealed?

GENGHIS.

Be not impatient; ye shall know it soon.
Ye've done me ample justice, be it mine
Now to return it: I admire you both;
You have subdued me, and I blush to sit

On Cathay's throne, whilst there are souls like yours
So much above me; vainly have I tried
By glorious deeds to build myself a name
Among the nations; you have humbled me,
And I would equal you: I did not know
That mortals could be masters of themselves;
That greatest glory I have learned from you:
I am not what I was; to you I owe
The wondrous change; I come to reunite,
To save, and to protect you: watch, Idame,
Your prince's tender years; to thee I give
The precious charge, by right of conquest mine;
Hereafter I will be a father to him:
At length you may confide in Genghis; once
I was a conqueror, now I am a king.

[*To Zamti.*

Zamti, be thou our law's interpreter,
And make the world as good and pure as thou art;
Teach reason, justice, and morality,
And let the conquered rule the conquerors;
Let wisdom reign, and still direct our valor;
Let prudence triumph over strength; her king
Will set the example, and your conqueror
Henceforth shall be obedient to your law.

IDAME.

What do I hear?

ZAMTI.

Thou art indeed our king,
And we shall bless thy sway.

IDAME.

What could inspire
This great design, and work this change?

GENGHIS.

Thy virtues.

End of the Fifth and Last Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

BRUTUS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

JUNIUS BRUTUS, }
VALERIUS PUBLICOLA. } Consuls.

Titus, Son of Brutus.

Tullia, Daughter of Tarquin.

Alcina, Confidante of Tullia.

Aruns, Ambassador from Porsenna.

Messala, Friend of Titus.

Proculus, A military Tribune.

Albinus, Confidant of Aruns.

Senators. Lictors.

SCENE Rome.

This tragedy was produced in 1730. It marks Voltaire's spirit of daring in treating a subject from which Shakespeare shrank as, perhaps, too painful for representation. When revived during the Revolution it was enthusiastically applauded.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT I.

SCENE I.

BRUTUS. THE SENATE.

The scene represents part of the house appointed for the consuls on the Tarpeian mount: at a distance is seen the temple of the capitol. The senators are assembled between the temple and the house, before the altar of Mars: the two consuls, Brutus and Valerius Publicola preside; the senators ranged in a semicircle, behind them the lictors with their fasces.

BRUTUS.

At length, my noble friends, Rome's honored senate,
The scourge of tyrants, you who own no kings
But Numa's gods, your virtues, and your laws,
Our foe begins to know us: this proud Tuscan,
The fierce Porsenna, Tarquin's boasted friend,
Pleased to protect a tyrant like himself;
He who o'er Tiber's banks hath spread his hosts,
And borne his head so loftily, now speaks
In lowlier terms, respects the senate's power,
And dreads the sons of freedom and of Rome:
This day he comes, by his ambassador,
To treat of peace, and Aruns, sent by him,
Demands an audience: he attends even now
Your orders in the temple: you'll determine
Or to refuse or to admit him to us.

VALERIUS PUBLICOLA.

Whate'er his errand be, let him be sent
Back to his king; imperial Rome should never
Treat with her foes till she has conquered them:
Thy valiant son, the avenger of his country,
Has twice repulsed Etruria's haughty monarch,
And much we owe to his victorious arm:
But this is not enough; Rome, still besieged,
Sees with a jealous eye the tyrant's friends:
Let Tarquin yield to our decrees; the laws
Doomed him to exile; let him leave the realm,
And purge the state of royal villainy;
Perhaps we then may listen to his prayers.
But this new embassy, it seems, has caught

Your easy faith: can you not see that Tarquin,
Who could not conquer, thinks he may deceive you.
I never loved these king's ambassadors,
The worst of foes beneath the mask of friendship;
Who only bear an honorable title,
And come to cheat us with impunity;
Armed with state-cunning, or elate with pride,
Commissioned to insult us, or betray.
Listen not, Rome, to their deluding tongues;
Stranger to art, thy business is, to fight;
Conquer the foes that murmur at thy glory,
Punish the pride of kings, or fall thyself;
Such be thy treaties.

BRUTUS.

Rome already knows
How much I prize her safety and her freedom;
The same my spirit, and the same my purpose,
I differ in opinion from Valerius;
And must confess, this first great homage paid
The citizens of Rome, to me is grateful.
I would accustom the despotic power
Of princes on an easy level first
To treat with our renowned commonweal,
Till heaven shall crown our arms with victory,
And make them subjects; then, Publicola,
As such we'll use them: meantime, Aruns comes,
Doubtless to mark the state of Rome, to count
Her treasures, and observe her growing power,
And therefore would I have him be admitted;
Would have him know us fully: a king's slave
Shall look on men; the novelty may please him:
Let him at leisure cast his eyes o'er Rome,
Let him behold her in your patriot breasts,
You are her best defence; let him revere
The God who calls us hither; let him see
The senate, hear and tremble.

VALERIUS PUBLICOLA.

I submit;
[*The senators rise and come forward to give their votes.*]
The general voice is yours: Rome and her Brutus
Must be obeyed: for me, I disapprove it:
Lictors, attend, and introduce him to us:
Never may Rome repent of this!
[*To Brutus.*]

On thee
Our eyes are fixed; on Brutus, who first broke
Our chains; let freedom use a father's voice,
And speak by thee.

SCENE II.

the senate, aruns, albinus.

Attendants.

[Aruns enters, preceded by two lictors, with Albinus, his friend; he passes by the consuls and senate, salutes them, and sits down on a seat prepared for him towards the front of the stage.]

ARUNS.

With pleasure I behold
This great assembly, Rome's illustrious senate,
And her sage consuls, famed for truth and justice,
Which ne'er till now suffered reproach or blame:
I know your deeds, and I admire your virtues;
Unlike the wild licentious multitude,
The vulgar crowd, whom party rage or joins
Or disunites, who love and hate by turns,
They know not why, taught in one changeful hour
To boast or beg, to rail or to obey;
Whose rashness—

BRUTUS.

Stop, and learn with more respect
To treat the citizens of Rome; for know,
It is the senate's glory and her praise
To represent that brave and virtuous people
Whom thou hast thus reviled: for ourselves,
Let us not hear the voice of flattery;
It is the poison of Etrurian courts,
But ne'er has tainted yet a Roman senate.
On with thy message.

ARUNS.

Little doth the pride
Of Rome affect me; but I own I feel
For her misfortunes, and would plead her cause
With filial love: you see the gathering storm
Hangs o'er your heads, and threatens sure destruction:

In vain hath Titus striven to save his country;
With pity I behold that noble youth,
Whose ardent courage labors to support
Expiring Rome, and make her fall more glorious:
His victories cost you dear; they thin your ramparts,
And weaken your small force: no longer then
Refuse a peace so needful to your safety.
The senate bears a father's love to Rome,
So does Porsenna to the hapless kings
Whom you oppress: but tell me, you who judge
Depending monarchs, you who thus determine
The rights of all mankind, was it not here,
Even at these altars, at this capitol,
You called the gods to witness your allegiance,
And bound your faith to your acknowledged king,
To Tarquin? Say, what power has broken the tie?
Who snatched the diadem from Tarquin's head?
Who can acquit you of your oaths?

BRUTUS.

Himself:
Talk not of ties dissolved by guilt, of gods
Whom he renounced, or rights which he has lost;
We paid him homage, bound ourselves by oath,
Oaths of obedience, not of slavery:
But since thou bidst us call to our remembrance,
The senate making vows for Tarquin's health,
And kneeling at his feet, remember thou,
That on this sacred spot, this altar here,
Before the same attesting gods, that Tarquin
Swore to be just; such was the mutual bond
Of prince and people, and he gave us back
The oath we made, when he forgot his own:
Since to Rome's laws no more he pays obedience,
Rome is no longer subject to his power,
And Tarquin is the rebel, not his people.

ARUNS.

But, grant it true, that power unlimited,
And absolute dominion, had misled
The unhappy monarch from the paths of duty,
Is there a man from human error free?
Is there a king without some human weakness?
Or if there were, have you a right to punish,
You, who were born his subjects; you, whose duty
Is to obey? The son doth never arm

Against the sire, but with averted eyes
Laments his errors, and reveres him still:
And not less sacred are the rights of kings;
They are our fathers, and the gods alone
Their judges: if in anger heaven sometimes
Doth send them down, why would you therefore call
For heavier chains, and judgments more severe?
Why violate the laws you would defend,
And only change your empire to destroy it?
Taught by misfortune, best of monitors,
Tarquin henceforth, more worthy of his throne,
Will be more wise and just; the legal bonds
Of king and people now may be confirmed
By happiest union; public liberty
Shall flourish then beneath the awful shade
Of regal power.

BRUTUS.

Aruns, 'tis now too late:
Each nation has its laws, by nature given,
Or changed by choice: Etruria, born to serve,
Hath ever been the slave of kings or priests;
Loves to obey, and, happy in her chains,
Would bind them on the necks of all mankind.
Greece boasts her freedom; soft Ionia bends
Beneath a shameful bondage; Rome had once
Her kings, but they were never absolute:
Her first great citizen was Romulus,
With him his people shared the weight of empire;
Numa was governed by the laws he made;
Rome fell at last indeed beneath herself,
When from Etruria she received her kings,
Or from Porsenna; tyranny and vice
From your corrupted courts flowed in upon us.
Forgive us, gods, the crime of sparing Tarquin
So many years! at length his murderous hands,
Dyed with our blood, have broke the shameful chain
Of our long slavery, and the Roman people
Have through misfortune found the road to virtue:
Tarquin restores the rights by Tarquin lost,
And by his crimes has fixed the public safety:
We've taught the Etruscans how to shake off tyrants,
And hope they'll profit by the fair example.
[The consuls descend towards the altar, and the senate rises.]
O Mars, thou god of battles, and of Rome!
Thou who dost guard these sacred walls, and fight
For thy own people, on thy altar here

Deign to accept our solemn oaths, for me
And for the senate, for thy worthy sons:
If in Rome's bosom there be found a traitor,
Who weeps for banished kings, and seeks once more
To be a slave, in torments shall he die;
His guilty ashes, scattered to the winds,
Shall leave behind a more detested name,
Even than those tyrant kings which Rome abhors.

ARUNS.

[Stepping towards the altar.
And on this altar, which you thus profane,
I call that god to witness, in the name
Of him whom you oppress, the injured Tarquin,
And great Porsenna, his avenger, here
I swear eternal war with you, O Romans!
And your posterity—
[The senators are going off towards the capitol.
A moment stop
Ere you depart, O senators! and hear
What I have more to offer: Tarquin's daughter,
Must she too fall a sacrifice to Rome?
With ignomious fetters will ye bind
Her royal hands, to triumph o'er her father,
Whose treasures you detain? Ungenerous victors!
As if the right of conquest gave them to you:
Where are his riches? was it for the spoil
You robbed him of his throne? let Brutus speak,
And own the plunder.

BRUTUS.

Little dost thou know
Of Rome, her manners, and her noble nature;
But learn, mistaken man, her great protectors,
The friends of truth and justice, are grown old
In honest poverty; above the pride
Of wealth, which they disdain; it is their boast
To conquer kings, who love such tinsel greatness.
Take back your gold, it is beneath our notice;
And for the hateful tyrant's hapless daughter,
Though I abhor the wretched race, yet know
The senate has consigned her to my care:
She hath not tasted here the baneful cup
Of flattery, that sweet poison of a court,
Or viewed the pomp and dangerous luxury
Of Tarquin's palace: little did her youth

Profit by them; but all that to her age
And sex was due, all her misfortunes claimed,
She hath received: let her return this day
To Tarquin; Brutus yields her back with joy:
Naught should the tyrant have within these walls
But Rome's fixed hatred, and the wrath of heaven:
You have a day to carry off your treasures,
That must suffice: meantime, the sacred rights
Of hospitality await thee here;
Beneath my roof thou mayest remain in safety:
The senate thus by me decrees: bear thou
Our answer to Porsenna, and then tell
Proud Tarquin, you have seen a Roman senate.
[Turning to the senators.]
Let us, my friends, adorn the capitol
With laurel wreaths, that round the brows of Titus
Have spread their noble shade; the arrows too,
And bloody ensigns, his victorious hand
Hath wrested from the Etruscans: ever thus,
From age to age, may the successful race
Of Brutus still defend their much loved country:
Thus, O ye gods, may you protect us ever;
Guide the son's arm, and bless the father's councils!

SCENE III.

aruns, albinus.

[Supposed to have retired from the hall of audience into an apartment of Brutus' house.]

ARUNS.

Didst thou observe the fierce unbending spirit
Of this proud senate, which believes itself
Invincible? and so perhaps it might be,
Were Rome at leisure to confirm her sons
In valor and in wisdom: liberty,
That liberty, my friend, which all adore,
And I admire, though I would wrest it from them,
Inspires the heart of man with nobler courage
Than nature gives, and warmth almost divine.
Beneath the Tarquin's yoke, a slavish court
Enfeebled their corrupted hearts, and spoiled
Their active valor; whilst their tyrant kings,
Busied in conquering their own subjects, left
Our happier Etruscans in the arms of peace;
But if the senate should awake their virtues,

If Rome is free, Italia soon must fall:
These lions, whom their keepers made so gentle,
Will find their strength again, and rush upon us;
Let us then stop this rapid stream of woes,
Even at its source, and free a sinking world
From slavery; let us bind these haughty Romans
Even with the chains which they would throw on us,
And all mankind.—But will Messala come,
May I expect him here? and will he dare—

ALBINUS.

My Lord, he will attend you; every minute
We look for him; and Titus is our friend.

ARUNS.

Have you conferred; may I depend on him?

ALBINUS.

Messala, if I err not, means to change
His own estate, rather than that of Rome;
As firm and fearless as if honor guided,
And patriot love inspired him; ever secret,
And master of himself; no passions move
No rage disturbs him; in his height of zeal
Calm and unruffled.

ARUNS.

Such he seemed to me
When first I saw him at the court of Tarquin;
His letters since—but, see, he comes.

SCENE IV.

aruns, messala, albinus.

ARUNS.

Messala,
Thou generous friend of an unhappy master,
Will neither Tarquin's nor Porsenna's gold
Shake the firm faith of these rough senators?
Will neither fear, nor hope, nor pleasure bend
Their stubborn hearts? These fierce patrician chiefs.

That judge mankind, are they without or vice
Or passion? is there aught that's mortal in them?

MESSALA.

Their boasts are mighty, but their false pretence
To justice, and the fierce austerity
Of their proud hearts, are nothing but the thirst
Of empire; their pride treads on diadems;
Yet whilst they break one chain, they forge another.
These great avengers of our liberty,
Armed to defend it, are its worst oppressors:
Beneath the name of patrons they assume
The part of monarchs; Rome but changed her fetters,
And for one king hath found a hundred tyrants.

ARUNS.

Is there amongst your citizens a man
Honest enough to hate such shameful bondage?

MESSALA.

Few, very few, yet feel their miseries:
Their spirits, still elate with this new change,
Are mad with joy: the meanest wretch among them,
Because he helped to pull down monarchy,
Assumes its pride, and thinks himself a king:
But I've already told you I have friends,
Who with reluctance bend to this new yoke;
Who look with scorn on a deluded people,
And stem the torrent with unshaken firmness;
Good men and true, whose hands and hearts were made
To change the state of kingdoms, or destroy them.

ARUNS.

What may I hope from these brave Romans? say,
Will they serve Tarquin?

MESSALA.

They'll do anything;
Their lives are thine; but think not, like blind vassals,
They will obey a base ungrateful master:
They boast no wild enthusiastic zeal,
To fall the victims of despotic power,

Or madly rush on death to save a tyrant,
Who will not know them. Tarquin promises
Most nobly, but when he shall be their master,
Perhaps he then may fear, perhaps forget them.
I know the great too well: in their misfortunes
No friends so warm; but in prosperity,
Ungrateful oft, they change to bitterest foes:
We are the servile tools of their ambition;
When useless, thrown aside with proud disdain,
Or broke without remorse when we grow dangerous.
Our friends expect conditions shall be made;
On certain terms you may depend upon them:
They only ask a brave and worthy leader
To please their fickle taste; a man well known,
And well respected; one who may have power
To force the king to keep his plighted faith
If we succeed; and if we fail, endued
With manly courage to avenge our cause.

ARUNS.

You wrote me word the haughty Titus—

MESSALA.

Titus
Is Rome's support, the son of Brutus; yet—

ARUNS.

How does he brook the senate's base reward
For all his services? he saved the city,
And merited the consulship, which they,
I find, refuse him.

MESSALA.

And he murmurs at it.
I know his proud and fiery soul is full
Of the base injury: for his noble deeds,
Naught has he gained but a vain empty triumph;
A fleeting shadow of unreal bliss:
I am no stranger to his throbbing heart,
And strength of passion; in the paths of glory
So lately entered, 'twere an easy task
To turn his steps aside; for fiery youth
Is easily betrayed: and yet what bars
To our design! a consul, and a father;

His hate of kings; Rome pleading for her safety;
The dread of shame, and all his triumphs past.
But I have stole into his heart, and know
The secret poison that inflames his soul:
He sighs for Tullia.

ARUNS.

Ha! for Tullia?

MESSALA.

Yes:
Scarce could I draw the secret from his breast;
He blushed himself at the discovery,
Ashamed to own his love; for midst the tumult
Of jarring passions, still his zeal prevails
For liberty.

ARUNS.

Thus on a single heart,
And its unequal movements, must depend,
Spite of myself, the fate of Rome: but hence,
Albinus, and prepare for Tarquin's tent.
[Turning to Messala.
We'll to the princess: I have gained some knowledge,
By long experience, of the human heart:
I'll try to read her soul; perhaps her hands
May weave a net to catch this Roman senate.

End of the First Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

The scene represents an apartment in the palace of the consuls.

titus, messala.

MESSALA.

No: 'tis unkind; it hurts my tender friendship:
He who but half unveils his secrets, tells
Too little or too much: dost thou suspect me?

TITUS.

Do not reproach me; my whole heart is thine.

MESSALA.

Thou who so lately didst with me detest
The rigorous senate, and pour forth thy plaints
In anguish; thou who on this faithful bosom
Didst shed so many tears, couldst thou conceal
Griefs far more bitter, the keen pangs of love?
How could ambition quench the rising flame,
And blot out every tender sentiment?
Dost thou detest the hateful senate more
Than thou lovest Tullia?

TITUS.

O! I love with transport,
And hate with fury; ever in extreme;
It is the native weakness of my soul,
Which much I strive to conquer, but in vain.

MESSALA.

But why thus rashly tear thy bleeding wounds?
Why weep thy injuries, yet disguise thy love?

TITUS.

Spite of those injuries, spite of all my wrongs,

Have I not shed my blood for this proud senate?
Thou knowest I have, and didst partake my glory;
With joy I told thee of my fair success;
It showed, methought, a nobleness of soul
To fight for the ungrateful, and I felt
The pride of conscious virtue: the misfortunes
We have o'ercome with pleasure we impart,
But few are anxious to reveal their shame.

MESSALA.

Where is the shame, the folly, or disgrace:
And what should Titus blush at?

TITUS.

At myself:
At my fond foolish passion, that o'erpowers
My duty.

MESSALA.

Are ambition then, and love,
Passions unworthy of a noble mind?

TITUS.

Ambition, love, resentment, all possess
The soul of Titus, and by turns inflame it:
These consul kings despise my youth; deny me
My valor's due reward, the price of blood
Shed in their cause: then, midst my sorrows, seize
All I hold dear, and snatch my Tullia from me.
Alas! I had no hope, and yet my heart
Grows jealous now: the fire, long pent within,
Bursts forth with inextinguishable rage.
I thought it had been o'er; she parted from me,
And I had almost gained the victory
O'er my rebellious passion: but my race
Of glory now is run, and heaven has fixed
Its period here: Gods! that the son of Brutus,
The foe of kings, should ever be the slave
Of Tarquin's race! nay, the ungrateful fair
Scorns to accept my conquered heart: I'm slighted;
Disdained on every side, and shame o'erwhelms me.

MESSALA.

May I with freedom speak to thee?

TITUS.

Thou mayest;
Thou knowest I ever have revered thy prudence;
Speak therefore, tell me all my faults, Messala.

MESSALA.

No: I approve thy love, and thy resentment:
Shall Titus authorize this tyrant senate,
These sons of arrogance? if thou must blush,
Blush for thy patience, Titus, not thy love.
Are these the poor rewards of all thy valor,
Thy constancy, and truth? a hopeless lover.
A weak and powerless citizen of Rome,
A poor state-victim, by the senate braved,
And scorned by Tullia: sure a heart like thine
Might find the means to be revenged on both.

TITUS.

Why wilt thou flatter my despairing soul?
Thinkest thou I ever could subdue her hate,
Or shake her virtue? 'tis impossible:
Thou seest the fatal barriers to our love,
Which duty and our fathers place between us:
But must she go?

MESSALA.

This day, my lord.

TITUS.

Indeed!
But I will not complain: for heaven is just
To her deservings; she was born to reign.

MESSALA.

Heaven had perhaps reserved a fairer empire
For beauteous Tullia, but for this proud senate,
But for this cruel war, nay but for Titus:

Forgive me, sir, you know the inheritance
She might have claimed; her brother dead, the throne
Of Rome had been her portion—but I've gone
Too far—and yet, if with my life, O Titus,
I could have served thee, if my blood—

TITUS.

No more:
My duty calls, and that shall be obeyed:
Man may be free, if he resolves to be so:
I own, the dangerous passion for a time
O'erpowered my reason; but a soldier's heart
Braves every danger: love owes all his power
To our own weakness.

MESSALA.

The ambassador
From Etruria is here: this honor, Sir—

TITUS.

O fatal honor! what would he with me?
He comes to snatch my Tullia from my sight;
Comes to complete the measure of my woes.

SCENE II.

titus. aruns.

ARUNS.

After my long and fruitless toils to serve
The state of Rome, and her ungrateful senate,
Permit me here to pay the homage due
To generous courage, and transcendent virtue;
Permit me to admire the gallant hero
Who saved his country on the brink of ruin:
Alas! thou hast deserved a fairer meed,
A cause more noble, and another foe;
Thy valor merited a better fate:
Kings would rejoice, and such I know there are,
To trust their empire with an arm like thine,
Who would not dread the virtues they admire,
Like jealous Rome and her proud senate: O!
I cannot bear to see the noble Titus

Serving these haughty tyrants; who, the more
You have obliged them, hate you more: to them
Your merit's a reproach; mean vulgar souls,
Born to obey, they lift the oppressive hand
Against their great deliverer, and usurp
Their sovereign's rights; from thee they should receive
Those orders which they give.

TITUS.

I thank you, Sir,
For all your cares, your kind regard for Titus,
And guess the cause: your subtle policy
Would wind me to your secret purposes,
And arm my rage against the commonweal;
But think not to impose thus on my frankness;
My heart is open, and abhors design:
The senate have misused me, and I hate them,
I ought to hate them; but I'll serve them still:
When Rome engages in the common cause,
No private quarrels taint the patriot breast;
Superior then to party strife, we rush
United on against the general foe:
Such are my thoughts, and such they ever will be;
Thou knowest me now: or call it virtue in me,
Or call it partial fondness, what you please,
But, born a Roman, I will die for Rome,
And love this hard unjust suspicious senate,
More than the pomp and splendor of a court
Beneath a master, for I am the son
Of Brutus, and have graved upon my heart
The love of freedom, and the hate of kings.

ARUNS.

But does not Titus soothe his flattered heart
With fancied bliss, and visionary charms?
I too, my lord, though born within the sway
Of regal power, am fond of liberty;
You languish for her, yet enjoy her not.
Is there on earth, with all your boasted freedom,
Aught more despotic than a commonweal?
Your laws are tyrants; and their barbarous rigor
Deaf to the voice of merit, to applause,
To family, and fame, throws down distinction;
The senate grind you, and the people scorn;
You must affright them, or they will enslave you:
A citizen of Rome is ever jealous

Or insolent; he is your equal still,
Or still your foe, because inferior to you:
He cannot bear the lustre of high fortune;
Looks with an eye severe on every action;
In all the service you have done him, sees
Naught but the injury you have power to do;
And for the blood which you have shed for him,
You'll be repaid at last with—banishment.
A court, I own's a dangerous element,
And has its storms, but not so frequent; smooth
Its current glides, its surface more serene:
That boasted native of another soil,
Fair liberty, here sheds her sweetest flowers:
A king can love, can recompense your service,
And mingles happiness with glory; there
Cherished beneath the shade of royal favor,
Long mayest thou flourish, only serve a master,
And be thyself the lord of all beside:
The vulgar, ever to their sovereign's will
Obedient, still respect and honor those
Whom he protects, nay love his very faults:
We never tremble at a haughty senate,
Or her harsh laws: O! would that, born as thou art,
To shine with equal lustre in a court
Or in a camp, thou wouldst but taste the charms
Of Tarquin's goodness! for he loved thee, Titus,
And would have shared his fortunes with thee; then
Had the proud senate, prostrate at thy feet—

TITUS.

I've seen the court of Tarquin, and despise it:
I know I might have cringed for his protection,
Been his first slave, and tyrannized beneath him;
But, thanks to heaven, I am not fallen so low:
I would be great, but not by meanness rise
To grandeur: no, it never was my fate
To serve: I'll conquer kings, do thou obey them.

ARUNS.

I must approve thy constancy; but think,
My lord, how Tarquin, in thy infant years,
Guided thy tender youth: he oft remembers
The pleasing office, and but yesterday,
Lamenting his lost son, and sad misfortunes,
"Titus," said he, "was once my best support,
He loved us all, and he alone deserved

My kingdom and my daughter.”

TITUS.

Ha! his daughter!
Ye gods! my Tullia! O unhappy vows!

ARUNS.

Even now I carry her to Tarquin; him
Whom thou hast thus deserted, far from thee,
And from her country, soon must Tullia go;
Liguria's king accepts of her in marriage:
Meantime thou, Titus, must obey the senate,
Oppress her father, and destroy his kingdom:
And may these vaulted roofs, these towers in flame,
And this proud capitol in ashes laid,
Like funeral torches, shine before your people,
To light the Roman senate to its grave.
Or serve to grace our happy Tullia's nuptials!

SCENE III.

titus, messala.

TITUS.

Messala, in what anguish hath he left me!
Would Tarquin then have given her to my arms!
O cruel fate! and might I thus—O no,
Deceitful minister! thou camest to search
My foolish heart; alas! he saw too well,
Read in my eyes the dear destructive passion,
He knows my weakness, and returns to Tarquin
To smile at Titus, and insult his love:
And might I then have wedded her, possessed
That lovely maid, and spent a life of bliss
Within her arms, had heaven allotted me
So fair a fate! O I am doubly wretched.

MESSALA.

Thou mightest be happy; Aruns would assist thee,
Trust me, he would, and second thy warm wishes.

TITUS.

No: I must bid adieu to my fond hopes;
Rome calls me to the capitol; the people
Who raised triumphal arches to my glory,
And love me for my labors past, expect me,
To take with them the inviolable oath,
The solemn pledge of sacred liberty.

MESSALA.

Go then, and serve your tyrants.

TITUS.

I will serve them;
It is my duty, and I must fulfil it.

MESSALA.

And yet you sigh.

TITUS.

'Tis a hard victory.

MESSALA.

And bought too dearly.

TITUS.

Therefore 'tis more glorious.
Messala, do not leave me in affliction.
[Exit Titus.]

MESSALA.

I'll follow him, to sharpen his resentment,
And strike the envenomed dagger to his heart.

SCENE IV.

brutus, messala.

BRUTUS.

Messala, stop; I'd speak with you.

MESSALA.

With me?

BRUTUS.

With you. A deadly poison late hath spread
Its secret venom o'er my house: my son,
Tiberius, is with jealous rage inflamed
Against his brother; it appears too plain;
Whilst Titus burns with most unjust resentment
Against the senate: the ambassador,
That shrewd Etruscan, has observed their weakness,
And doubtless profits by it: he has talked
To both: I dread the tongues of subtle statesmen,
Grown old in the chicanery of a court:
To-morrow he returns: a day's too much
To give a traitor, and oftentimes is fatal:
Go thou, Messala, tell him he must hence
This day: I'll have it so.

MESSALA.

'Tis prudent, Sir,
And I obey you.

BRUTUS.

But this is not all:
My son, the noble Titus, loves thee well;
I know the power that sacred friendship hath
O'er minds like his; a stranger to distrust
Or diffidence, he yields his artless soul
To thy experience; and the more his heart
Relies on thee, the more may I expect,
That, able as thou art to guide his steps,
Thou wilt not turn them from the paths of virtue,
Or take advantage of his easy youth
To taint his guiltless heart with fond ambition.

MESSALA.

That was even now the subject of our converse;

He strives to imitate his godlike sire;
Rome's safety is the object of his care:
Blindly he loves his country, and his father.

BRUTUS.

And so he ought; but above all, the laws;
To them he should be still a faithful slave;
Who breaks the laws, can never love his country.

MESSALA.

We know his patriot zeal, and both have seen it.

BRUTUS.

He did his duty.

MESSALA.

Rome had done hers too,
If she had honored more so good a son.

BRUTUS.

Messala, no: it suited not his age
To take the consulship; he had not even
The voice of Brutus: trust me, the success
Of his ambition would have soon corrupted
His noble mind, and the rewards of virtue
Had then become hereditary: soon
Should we have seen the base unworthy son
Of a brave father claim superior rank,
Unmerited, in sloth and luxury,
As our last Tarquin but too plainly proved.
How very seldom they deserve a crown
Who're born to wear it! O! preserve us, heaven,
From such destructive vile abuse of power,
The nurse of folly, and the grave of virtue!
If thou indeed dost love my son, (and much
I hope thou dost) show him a fairer path
To glory; root out from his heart the pride
Of false ambition: he who serves the state
Is amply recompensed: the son of Brutus
Should shine a bright example to the world
Of every virtue: he is Rome's support,
As such I look upon him; and the more

He has already done to serve his country,
The more I shall require of him hereafter.
Know then by what I wish the love I bear him,
Temper the heat of youth; to flatter Titus
Were death to him, and injury to Rome.

MESSALA.

My lord, I am content to follow Titus,
To imitate his valor, not instruct him:
I have but little influence o'er your son;
But, if he deigns to listen to my counsels,
Rome soon will see how much he loves her glory.

BRUTUS.

Go then, be careful not to soothe his errors;
For I hate tyrants much, but flatterers more.
[Exit Brutus.]

SCENE V.

MESSALA.

[Alone.]
There's not a tyrant more detestable,
More cruel than thy own relentless soul;
But I shall tread perhaps beneath my feet
The pride of all thy false insulting virtue:
Yes, thou Colossus, raised thus high above us
By a vile crowd, the thunder is prepared,
Soon shall it fall, and crush thee into ruin.

End of the Second Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

aruns, albinus, messala.

ARUNS.

[A letter in his hand.]

At length, my friend, a dawn of fair success
Breaks in upon us; thou hast served me nobly,
And all is well: this letter, my Albinus,
Decides the fate of Tarquin, and of Rome.
But, tell me, have you fixed the important hour?
Have you watched closely the Quirinal gate?
If our conspirators to-night should fail
To yield the ramparts up, will your assault
Be ready? Is the king well satisfied,
Thinkest thou, Albinus, we shall bring him back
To Rome subjected, or to Rome in blood?

ALBINUS.

My lord, by midnight all will be prepared;
Tarquin already reaps the promised harvest;
From you, once more, receives the diadem,
And owns himself indebted more to Aruns
Than to Porsenna.

ARUNS.

Or the envious gods,
Foes to our hapless sovereign, must destroy
Our fair design, well worthy of their aid;
Or by to-morrow's dawn rebellious Rome
Shall own a master; Rome perhaps in ashes,
Or bathing in her blood. But better is it
A king should rule o'er an unhappy people,
Who are obedient, than in plenty's lap,
O'er a proud nation, who are still perverse
And obstinate, because they are too happy.
Albinus, I attend the Princess here
In secret—Stay, Messala.

SCENE II.

aruns, messala.

ARUNS.

Touching Titus,
What has thou done? couldst thou prevail on him
To serve the cause of Tarquin? couldst thou bind
His haughty soul?

MESSALA.

No: I presumed too far;
He is inflexible: he loves his country,
And has too much of Brutus in him; murmurs
Against the senate, but still dotes on Tullia:
Pride and ambition, love and jealousy,
Opened, I thought, a passage to his soul,
And gave my arts some promise of success;
But, strange infatuation! liberty
Prevailed o'er all: his love is desperate,
Yet Rome is stronger even than love: in vain
I strove, by slow degrees, to efface the horror
Which Rome had taught his foolish heart to feel
Even at the name of king; in vain opposed
His rooted prejudice; the very mention
Of Tarquin fired his soul; he would not hear me,
But broke off the discourse: I must have gone
Too far, had I persisted.

ARUNS.

Then, Messala,
There are no hopes of him.

MESSALA.

Much less reluctant
I found his brother; one of Brutus' sons,
At least is ours.

ARUNS.

Already hast thou gained
Tiberius? by what lucky art, Messala—

MESSALA.

His own ambition did it all: long time,
With jealous eye, hath he beheld the honors
Heaped on his brother, that eclipse his own;
The wreath of laurel, and the pomp of triumph,
The waving ensigns, with the people's love,
And Brutus' fondness, lavished all on Titus,
Like deepest injuries, sunk into his soul,
And helped to fill the poisoned cup of envy;
Whilst Titus, void of malice or revenge,
Too much superior to be jealous of him,
Stretched forth his hand from his triumphal car,
As if he wished to give his brother part
Of all his glories: I embraced, with joy,
The lucky minute; pointed out the paths
Of glory; promised, in the name of Tarquin,
All the fair honors Rome could give, the throne
Alone excepted: I perceived him stagger,
And saw him bend, by slow degrees, before me:
He's yours, my lord, and longs to speak with you

ARUNS.

Will he deliver the Quirinal gate,
Messala?

MESSALA.

Titus is commander there,
And he alone can give it us: already
His virtues have been fatal to our purpose;
He is the guardian deity of Rome:
The attack is dangerous: without his support
Success were doubtful, with it all is certain.

ARUNS.

If he solicited the consulship,
Thinkest thou he would refuse the sovereign power
The sure reversion of a throne with Tullia?

MESSALA.

'Twere an affront to his exalted virtue
To offer him a throne.

ARUNS.

And Tullia with it?

MESSALA.

O he adores her; and even loves her more,
Because he strives to hate; detests the father,
And rages for the daughter; dreads to speak,
Yet mourns in silence; seeks her everywhere,
Yet shuns her presence, and drinks up his tears
In secret anguish: all the rage of love
Possesses him; sometimes in storms like these
A lucky moment turns the wavering mind.
Titus, I know, is turbulent and bold;
And, if we gain him, may, perhaps, go further
Even than we wish: who knows but fierce ambition
May yet rekindle by the torch of love!
His heart would glow with pleasure, to behold
The trembling senate prostrate at his feet.
Yet, let me not deceive you with the hopes,
That Titus ever will be ours; once more,
However, I shall try his stubborn virtue.

ARUNS.

If still he loves, I shall depend on him:
One look of Tullia's, one sweet word from her,
Will soften his reluctant heart much more,
Than all the arts of Aruns or Messala:
For, O, believe me, we must hope for naught
From men, but through their weakness and their follies:
Titus and Tullia must promote our cause;
The one's ambition, and the other's love:
These, these, my friend, are the conspirators
That best will serve the king: from them I hope
Much more than from myself.
[Exit Messala.]

SCENE III.

tullia, aruns, algina.

ARUNS.

This letter, Madam,
With orders to deliver it to your hands,

I have received from Tarquin.

TULLIA.

Gracious heaven!

Preserve my father, and reverse his fate!

[She reads.

“The throne of Rome may from its ashes rise,

And he who was the conqueror of his king

Be his restorer: Titus is a hero,

He must defend that sceptre which I wish

To share with him. Remember, O my Tullia,

That Tarquin gave thee life; remember too,

My fate depends on thee; thou mayest refuse

Liguria’s king: if Titus be thy choice,

He’s mine; receive him for thy husband.”

Ha!

Read I aright! Titus! impossible!

Could Tarquin, could my father, still unmoved

In all his sorrows, thus at last relent?

How could he know, or whence—

[Turning to Messala.

Alas, my lord,

’Tis but to search the secrets of my heart

You try me thus: pity a wretched princess,

Nor spread your snares for helpless youth like mine.

ARUNS.

Madam, I only mean to obey your father,

And serve his honored daughter; for your secrets,

In me it were presumption to remove

The sacred veil which you have drawn before them;

My duty only bids me say, that heaven

By you determines to restore our empire.

TULLIA.

And is it possible, that Tullia thus

Should be the friend of Tarquin, and the wife

Of Titus?

ARUNS.

Doubt it not: that noble hero

Already burns to serve the royal race:

His generous heart abhors the savage fierceness

Of this new commonweal; his pride was hurt

By their refusal of his just demand:
The work's half done, and thou must finish it.
I have not looked into his heart; but sure,
If he knows Tullia well, he must adore her:
Who could behold, unmoved, a diadem
By thee presented, and with thee adorned?
Speak to him then, for thou alone hast power
To triumph o'er this enemy of kings:
No longer let the senate boast of Titus,
Their best support, the guardian god of Rome;
But be it Tullia's glory to possess
The great defender of her father's cause,
And crush his foes to ruin.

SCENE IV.

tullia, algina.

TULLIA.

Gracious heaven!
How much I owe to thy propitious goodness!
My tears have moved thee: all is changed; and now
Thy justice, smiling on my passion, gives
New strength and freedom to the glorious flame.
Fly, my Algina, bring him hither: gods!
Does he avoid me still, or knows he not
His happiness? But stay, perhaps my hopes
Are but delusions all: does Titus hate
The senate thus? alas! and must I owe
That to resentment which is due to love?

ALGINA.

I know the senate have offended him;
That he's ambitious; that he burns for Tullia.

TULLIA.

Then he'll do all to serve me: fly, Algina,
Away, begone.
[Exit Algina.]
And yet this sudden change
Alarms me: O! what anguish racks my heart!
Now, love, do thou assist and guide my virtue!
My fame, my duty, reason, all command it
And shall my father owe his crown to me,

Shall Tullia be the chain to bind their friendship;
And all Rome's happiness depend on mine?
O, when shall I impart to thee, my Titus,
The wondrous change we little thought to see,
When shall I hear thy vows, and give thee mine,
Without a pain, a sorrow, or a fear?
My woes are past; now, Rome, I can forgive thee;
If Titus leaves thee, Rome, thou art a slave:
If he is mine, proud senate, thou art no more:
He loves me; tremble therefore, and obey.

SCENE V.

titus, tullia.

TITUS.

May I believe it? wilt thou deign once more
To look on this abhorred Roman, long
The object of thy hatred, and thy foe?

TULLIA.

The face of things, my lord, is strangely altered;
Fate now permits me—but first tell me, Titus,
Has Tullia still an interest in thy heart?

TITUS.

Alas! thou canst not doubt thy fatal power;
Thou knowest my love, my guilt, and my despair;
And holdest a cruel empire o'er a life
Which I detest; exhaust your rage upon me;
My fate is in your hands.

TULLIA.

Know, mine depends
On thee.

TITUS.

On Titus? never can this trembling heart
Believe it: am I then no longer hated?
Speak on, my Tullia: O, what flattering hope
Thus in a moment lifts me to the height
Of mortal bliss?

TULLIA.

[Giving him the letter.
Read this, and make thyself,
Thy Tullia, and her father happy—Now
May I not hope—but wherefore that stern brow
And frowning aspect? gods!

TITUS.

Of all mankind
Titus is sure the most accursed: blind fate,
Bent on my ruin, showed me happiness,
Then snatched it from me: to complete my woes,
It doomed me to adore, and to destroy thee:
I love thee, and have lost thee now forever.

TULLIA.

How, Titus!

TITUS.

Yes; this fatal hour condemns me
To shame and horror: to betray or Rome
Or Tullia: all that's left to my sad choice
Is guilt, or misery.

TULLIA.

What sayest thou, Titus?
When with this hand I offer thee a throne;
Now when thou knowest my heart, for no longer
Will I conceal my virtuous passion for thee;
When duty yields a sanction to our love;
Alas! I thought this happy day would prove
The fairest of my life, and yet the moment
When first my fearful heart, without a blush,
Might own its passion, is the first that calls
For my repentance. Darest thou talk to me
Of guilt and misery? Know, thus to serve
Ungrateful men against their lawful prince,
To scorn my proffered bounties, and oppress me,
These are my miseries, Titus, these thy crimes.
Mistaken youth, weigh in the even balance
What Rome refused, and what she offers thee:
Or deal forth laws, or meanly stoop to obey them:
Be governed by a rabble, or a king;

By Rome, or me: direct him right, ye gods!

TITUS.

[Giving her back the letter.
My choice is made.

TULLIA.

And fearest thou to avow it?
Be bold, and speak at once; deserve my pardon,
Or merit my revenge: what's thy resolve?

TITUS.

'Tis to be worthy of thee, of myself,
And of my country; to be just, and faithful;
'Tis to adore and imitate thy virtues;
It is to lose, O Tullia, yet deserve thee.

TULLIA.

Forever then—

TITUS.

Forgive me, dearest Tullia;
Pity my weakness, and forget my love:
Pity a heart foe to itself, a heart
A thousand times more wretched now than even
When thou didst hate me: O! I cannot leave,
I cannot follow thee; I cannot live
Or with thee or without thee; but will die
Rather than see thee given to another.

TULLIA.

My heart's still thine, and I forgive thee, Titus.

TITUS.

If thou dost love me, Tullia, be a Roman;
Be more than queen, and love the commonweal:
Bring with thee patriot zeal, the love of Rome,
And of her sacred laws, be that thy dowry:
Henceforth let Brutus be thy father, Rome
Thy mother, and her loved avenger, Titus,

Thy husband: thus shall Romans yield the palm
Of glory to an Etruscan maid, and owe
Their freedom to the daughter of a king.

TULLIA.

And wouldst thou wish me to betray—

TITUS.

My soul,
Urged to despair, hath lost itself: O no!
Treason is horrible in every shape,
And most unworthy of thee: well I know
A father's rights; his power is absolute,
And must not be disputed: well I know
That Titus loves thee, that he is distracted.

TULLIA.

Thou knowest what duty is, hear then the voice
Of Tullia's father.

TITUS.

And forget my own!
Forget my country!

TULLIA.

Canst thou call it thine
Without thy Tullia?

TITUS.

We are foes by nature;
The laws have laid a cruel duty on us.

TULLIA.

Titus and Tullia foes! how could that word
E'er pass thy lips!

TITUS.

Thou knowest my heart belies them.

TULLIA.

Dare then to serve, and if thou lovest, revenge me.

SCENE VI.

brutus, aruns, titus, tullia, messala, albinus, proculus, lictors.

BRUTUS.

[Addressing himself to Tullia.

Madam, the time is come for your departure;
Whilst public tumults shook the commonweal,
And the wild tempest howled around us, Rome
Could not restore you to your household gods:
Tarquin himself, in that disastrous hour,
Too busy in the ruin of his people
To think on Tullia, ne'er demanded thee.
Forgive me if I call thus to remembrance
Thy sorrows past: I robbed thee of a father,
And meet it is I prove a father to thee:
Go, princess, and may justice ever guard
The throne which heaven hath called thee to possess!
If thou dost hope obedience from thy subjects,
Obey the laws, and tremble for thyself,
When thou considerest all a sovereign's duty:
And if the fatal powers of flattery e'er
Should from thy heart unloose the sacred bonds
Of justice, think on Rome; remember Tarquin:
Let his example be the instructive lesson
To future kings, and make the world more happy.
Aruns, the senate gives her to thy care;
A father and a husband at your hands
Expect her. Proculus attends you hence,
Far as the sacred gate.

TITUS.

[Apart.

Despair, and horror!

I will not suffer it—permit me, sir,

[Advancing towards Aruns.

[Brutus and Tullia with their Attendants go out, leaving Aruns and Messala.

Gods! I shall die of grief and shame: but soft,

Aruns, I'd speak with you.

ARUNS.

My lord, the time
Is short; I follow Brutus, and the princess;
Remember, I can put off her departure
But for an hour, and after that, my lord,
'Twill be too late to talk with me; within
We may confer on Tullia's fate, perhaps
On yours.
[Exit.

SCENE VII.

titus, messala.

O cruel destiny! to join
And then divide us! Were we made, alas!
But to be foes! My friend, I beg thee stop
The tide of grief and rage.

MESSALA.

I weep to see
So many virtues and so many charms
Rewarded thus: a heart like hers deserved
To have been thine, and thine alone.

TITUS.

O no!
Titus and Tullia ne'er shall be united.

MESSALA.

Wherefore, my lord? what idle scruples rise
To thwart your wishes?

TITUS.

The ungenerous laws
She has imposed upon me: cruel maid!
Must I then serve the tyrants I have conquered,
Must I betray the people I had saved?
Shall love, whose power I had so long defied,
At last subdue me thus? Shall I expose
My father to these proud despotic lords!
And such a father, such a fair example

To all mankind, the guardian of his country,
Whom long I followed in the paths of honor,
And might perhaps even one day have excelled;
Shall Titus fall from such exalted virtue
To infamy and vice? detested thought!

MESSALA.

Thou art a Roman, rise to nobler views,
And be a king; heaven offers thee a throne:
Empire and love, and glory, and revenge
Await thee: this proud consul, this support
Of falling Rome, this idol of the people,
If fortune had not crowned him with success,
If Titus had not conquered for his father,
Had been a rebel: thou hast gained the name
Of conqueror, now assume a nobler title;
Now be thy country's friend, and give her peace.
Restore the happy days, when, blessed with freedom,
Not unrestrained by power, our ancestors
Weighed in the even scale, and balanced well
The prince's honors and the people's right:
Rome's hate of kings is not immortal; soon
Would it be changed to love if Titus reigned:
For monarchy, so oft admired, so oft
Detested by us, is the best or worst
Of human governments: A tyrant king
Will make it dreadful, and a good, divine.

TITUS.

Messala, dost thou know me? Dost thou know
I hold thee for a traitor, and myself
Almost as guilty for conversing with thee?

MESSALA.

Know thou, the honor thou contemnest shall soon
Be wrested from thee, and another hand
Perform thy office.

TITUS.

Ha! another! who?

MESSALA.

Thy brother.

TITUS.

Ay! my brother.

MESSALA.

He has given
His faith to Tarquin.

TITUS.

Could Tiberius e'er
Betray his country?

MESSALA.

He will serve his king,
And be a friend to Rome: in spite of thee,
Tarquin will give his daughter to the man
Who shall with warmest zeal defend her father.

TITUS.

Perfidious wretch! thou hast misled my steps.
And left me hanging o'er the precipice;
Left me the dreadful choice or to accuse
My brother, or partake his guilt; but know,
Sooner thy blood—

MESSALA.

My life is in thy power,
Take it this moment; I deserve to die
For striving to oblige you: shed the blood
Of friend, of mistress, and of brother; lay
The breathless victims all before the senate,
And for thy virtues ask the consulship:
Or let me hence, and tell them all I know,
Accuse my fellow-traitors, and myself
Begin the sacrifice.

TITUS.

Messala, stop,
Or dread my desperate rage.

SCENE VIII.

titus, messala, albinus.

ALBINUS.

The ambassador
Would see you now, my lord; he's with the princess.

TITUS.

Yes, I will fly to Tullia: O ye gods
Of Rome, ye guardians of my much-loved country!
Pierce this corrupted, this ungrateful heart:
Had Titus never loved, he had been virtuous:
And must I fall a sacrifice to thee,
Detested senate! let us hence.
[Turning to Messala.
Thou seest,
Messala, this proud capitol replete
With monuments of Titus' faith.

MESSALA.

'Tis filled
By a proud senate.

TITUS.

Ay: I know it well:
But hark! I hear the voice of angry heaven,
It speaks to me in thunder, and cries, stop,
Ungrateful Titus, thou betrayest thy country:
No, Rome, no, Brutus, I am still thy son:
O'er Titus' head the sun of glory still
Hath shed his brightest rays; he never yet
Disgraced his noble blood: your victim, gods,
Is spotless yet; and if this fatal day
Shall doom me to involuntary crimes,
If I must yield to fate, let Titus die
Whilst he is innocent, and save his country.

End of the Third Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

titus, aruns, messala.

TITUS.

Urge me no more: I've heard too much already:
Shame and despair surround me, but begone,
I am resolved: go, leave me to my sorrows,
And to my virtue: reason pleads in vain,
But Tullia's tears are eloquent indeed:
One look from her will more unman my soul
Than all your tyrant's threats: but never more
Will I behold her; let her go: O heaven!

ARUNS.

I stayed but to oblige you, sir, beyond
The time which you so earnestly requested,
And which we scarce could gain.

TITUS.

Did I request it?

ARUNS.

You did, my lord, and I in secret hoped
A fairer fate would crown your loves; but now
'Tis past; we must not think on't.

TITUS.

Cruel Aruns!
Thou hast beheld my shame, and my disgrace,
Thou hast seen Titus for a moment doubtful:
Thou artful witness of my folly, hence!
And tell thy royal masters all my weakness;
Tell the proud tyrants, that their conqueror,
The son of Brutus, wept before thy face;
But tell them too, that, spite of all my tears,
Spite of thy eloquence, and Tullia's charms,
I yet am free, a conqueror o'er myself:

That, still a Roman, I will never yield
To Tarquin's blood, but swear eternal war
Against the race of her whom I adore.

ARUNS.

Titus, I pity and excuse thy grief;
And, far from wishing to oppress thy heart
With added sorrows, mix my sighs with thine;
Only remember, thou hast killed thy Tullia
Farewell, my lord.

MESSALA.

O heaven!

SCENE II.

titus, messala.

TITUS.

She must not go:
On peril of my life I'll keep her here.

MESSALA.

You would not—

TITUS.

No: I'll not betray my country:
Rome may divide her from me, but she never
Can disunite our fate; I live, and breathe
For Tullia only, and for her will die.
Messala, haste, have pity on my woes,
Gather our troops, assemble all our friends.
Spite of the senate I will stop her; say
She must remain a hostage here at Rome;
I'll do it, Messala.

MESSALA.

To what desperate means
Doth passion urge you? What will it avail
To make this fond avowal of your love?

TITUS.

Go to the senate, and appeal to them,
Try if thou canst not soften the proud hearts
Of these imperious kings. Messala, tell them
The interest of Brutus, of the state—
Alas! I rave, 'tis idle, and all in vain.

MESSALA.

I see you're hurt, my lord, and I will serve you.
I go—

TITUS.

I'll see her: speak to her, Messala,
She passes by this way, and I will take
My last farewell of her.

MESSALA.

You shall.

TITUS.

'Tis she
Now I am lost indeed.

SCENE III.

titus, messala, tullia, algina.

ALGINA.

Madam, they wait.

TULLIA.

Pity my hard, my cruel fate, Algina;
This base ungrateful man still wounds my heart;
And Brutus, like a vengeful god, appears
To torture us: love, fear and grief, at once
Distract my soul: let us begone.

TITUS.

O no!

Stay, Tullia, deign at least—

TULLIA.

Barbarian, hence!
Thinkest thou with soothing words—

TITUS.

Alas! my Tullia,
I only know in this disastrous hour
What duty bids me do, not what I would:
Reason no longer holds her empire here,
For thou hast torn her from me, and usurpest
The power supreme o'er this distracted mind:
Reign, tyrant, stretch thy cruel power; command
Thy vassal; bid thy Titus rush on guilt;
Dictate his crimes, and make him wretched; No;
Sooner than Titus shall betray his country,
Give up his friends, his fellow citizens,
Those whom his valor saved to fire and slaughter,
Sooner than leave his father to the sword
Of Tarquin, know, proud woman—

TULLIA.

Shield me, heaven!
Thou pleadest the cause of nature, and her voice
Is dear to me as to thyself: thou, Titus,
Taughtest me long since to tremble for a father;
Brutus is mine; our blood united flows:
Canst thou require a fairer pledge than love
And truth have given thee: if I stay with thee,
I am his daughter, and his hostage here.
Canst thou yet doubt? thinkest thou in secret Brutus
Would not rejoice to see thee on a throne?
He hath not placed indeed a diadem
On his own brows, but is he not a king
Beneath another name? and one year's reign
Perhaps may bring—but these are fruitless reasons.
If thou no longer lovest me—one word more,
Farewell: I leave, and I adore thee, Titus:
Thou weepest, thou tremblest; yet a little time
Is left for thee. Speak, tell me, cruel man,
What more canst thou desire?

TITUS.

Thy hatred; that
Alone remains to make me truly wretched.

TULLIA.

It is too much to bear thy causeless plaints;
To hear thee talk of fancied injuries,
With idle dreams of visionary ties:
Take back thy love, take back thy faithless vows,
Worse than thy base refusal: I despise them.
Think not I mean to search in Italy
The fatal grandeur which I sacrificed
To Titus' love, and in another's arms
Lament the weakness which I felt for thee;
My fate's determined: learn, proud Roman, thou
Whose savage virtue rises but to oppress
A helpless woman, coward, when I ask
Thy aid, and only valiant to destroy me,
Fickle and wavering in thy faith, of me
Learn to fulfill thy vows; thou shalt behold
A Woman, in thy eyes however contemned,
However despised, unshaken in her purpose,
And by her firmness see how much she loved thee.
Titus, beneath these walls, the reverend seat
Of my great ancestors, which thou defendest
Against their rightful lord; this fatal spot
Where thou hast dared to insult and to betray me;
Where first thy faithless vows deceived me; there,
Even there, by all the gods who store up vengeance
For perjured men, I swear to thee, O Titus,
This arm, more just than thine, and more resolved,
Shall punish soon my fond credulity,
And wash out all my injuries in my blood:
I go—

TITUS.

No, Tullia, hear and then condemn me;
You shall be satisfied; I fly to please you,
Yet shudder at it: I am still more wretched,
Because my guilty soul has no excuse,
No poor delusion left. I have not even
The joy of self-deceit to soothe my sorrows:
No, thou hast conquered, not betrayed me, Tullia;
I loathe the fatal passion which I feel,
And rush on vice, yet know and honor virtue.

Hate me, avoid me, leave a guilty wretch
Who dies for love, yet hates himself for loving;
Nor fears to mix his future fate with thine,
Midst crimes, and horrors, perjury, and death.

TULLIA.

You know too well your influence o'er my heart;
Mock my fond passion, and insult my love;
Yes, Titus, 'tis for thee alone I live,
For thee would die: yet, spite of all my love,
And all my weakness, death were far more welcome
Than the reluctant hand of cruel Titus,
Who is ashamed to serve his royal master,
And blushes to accept a kingdom from me.
The dreadful hour of separation comes,
Think on it, Titus, and remember well
That Tullia loves, and offers thee a throne.
The ambassador expects me; fare thee well,
Deliberate and determine: an hour hence
Again thou shalt behold me with my father:
When I return to these detested walls
Know, Titus, I'll return a queen, or perish.

TITUS.

Thou shalt not die: I go—

TULLIA.

Stop, Titus, stop;
If thou shouldst follow me, thy life's in danger,
Thou'lt be suspected; therefore stay: farewell;
Resolve to be my murderer, or my husband.

SCENE IV.

TITUS.

[*Alone.*
O Tullia, thou hast conquered, Rome's enslaved:
Return to rule o'er her, and o'er my life,
Devoted to thee: haste, I fly to crown thee,
Or perish in the attempt: the worst of crimes
Were to abandon thee. Now, where's Messala?
My headstrong passion hath at length worn out
His patient friendship; mistress, Romans, friends,

All in one fatal day, hath Titus lost.

SCENE V.

titus, messala.

TITUS.

O my Messala, help me in my love,
And my revenge: away; haste, follow me.

MESSALA.

Command, and I obey: my troops are ready
At the Quirinal mount to give us up
The gates, and all my gallant friends have sworn
To acknowledge Titus as the rightful heir
Of Tarquin: lose no time; propitious night
Already offers her kind shade to veil
Our great design.

TITUS.

The hour approaches: Tullia
Will count each minute: Tarquin, after all,
Had my first oaths: away, the die is cast.
[The lower part of the stage opens and discovers Brutus.]
What do I see; my father!

SCENE VI.

brutus, titus, messala, lictors.

BRUTUS.

Titus, haste,
Rome is in danger; thou art all our hope:
Secret instructions have been given the senate
That Rome will be attacked at dead of night,
And I have gained for my beloved Titus
The first command, in this extremity
Of public danger. Arm thyself, my son,
And fly, a second time, to save thy country;
Hazard thy life once more in the great cause
Of liberty; or victory or death
Must crown thy days, and I shall envy thee.

TITUS.

O heaven!

BRUTUS.

My son!

TITUS.

To other hands commit
The senate's favors, and the fate of Rome.

MESSALA.

What strange disorder has possessed his soul!

BRUTUS.

Dost thou refuse the proffered glory?

TITUS.

I!
Shall I, my lord—

BRUTUS.

Ha! doth thy heart still burn
With proud resentment of thy fancied wrongs?
Is this a time, my son, for fond caprice?
Can he who saved his country be unhappy?
Immortal honor! will not that suffice
Without the consulship? The laws, thou knowest,
Refused it, Titus, to thy youth alone,
Not to thy merit: think no more of that:
Go; I have placed thee in the post of honor;
Let tyrants only feel thy indignation;
Give Rome thy life; ask nothing in return,
But be a hero; be yet more, my son,
A Roman: I am hastening to the end
Of my short journey; thy victorious hands
Must close my eyes; supported by thy virtues,
My name shall never die; I shall revive
And live once more in Titus: but perhaps
It is decreed that I must follow thee;
Old age is weak; but I will see thee conquer,

Or perish with thee, Rome's avenger still,
Free, and without a master.

TITUS.

O Messala!

SCENE VII.

brutus, valerius, titus, messala.

VALERIUS.

My lord, let all retire.

BRUTUS.

[*To Titus.*
Run, fly, my son—

VALERIUS.

Rome is betrayed.

BRUTUS.

What do I hear?

VALERIUS.

There's treason;
We're sold, my lord, the author's yet unknown;
But Tarquin's name is echoed through our streets,
And worthless Romans talk of yielding to him.

BRUTUS.

Ha! would the citizens of Rome be slaves!

VALERIUS.

Yes: the perfidious traitors fled from me;
I've sent in quest of them: much I suspect
Menas and Lælius, the base partisans
Of tyranny and kings, the secret foes
Of Rome, and ever glad to disunite
The senate and the people: if I err not,

Protected by Messala, who himself,
But for his friendship with the noble Titus,
I almost think, has joined them.

BRUTUS.

We'll observe
Their steps with caution; more cannot be done:
The liberty and laws which we defend
Forbid that rigor which I fear is needful;
But to detain a Roman on suspicions
Were to resemble those usurping tyrants
Whom we would punish: let us to the people,
Awake the fearful, give the virtuous praise,
Astonish the perfidious: let the fathers
Of Rome and liberty revive the warmth
Of Roman courage: who will not be bold
When we appear? O rather give us death,
Ye gods! than slavery: let the senate follow.

SCENE VIII.

brutus, valerius, proculus.

PROCLUSUS.

A slave, my lord, desires a private audience.

BRUTUS.

At this late hour of night!

PROCLUSUS.

He brings you news,
He says, of highest import.

BRUTUS.

Ha! perhaps
Rome's safety may depend on it: away.
[*To Proculus.*]
A moment's loss might hazard all—go thou
And seek my son: let the Quirinal gate
Be his first care: and may the world confess,
When they behold his glorious deeds, the race
Of Brutus was decreed to conquer kings.

End of the Fourth Act.



[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT V.

SCENE I.

brutus, senators, proculus, lictors. vindex (*a Slave*).

BRUTUS.

A little more and Tarquin, armed with vengeance,
This night had rushed upon us; Rome had fallen,
And freedom sunk beneath the tyrant's power:
This subtle statesman, this ambassador,
Had opened wide the fatal precipice:
Would you believe it, even the sons of Rome
United to betray her: false Messala
Urged on their furious zeal, and sold his country
To this perfidious Aruns; but kind heaven,
Still watchful o'er the fate of Rome, preserved us.
[*Pointing to Vindex.*

This slave o'erheard it all; his faithful counsels
Awaked my fears, and filled my aged breast
With double vigor: I had scized Messala,
And hoped by tortures to have wrested from him
The names of his associates; but, behold,
Surrounded by my lictors, on a sudden
He from his bosom drew a poniard forth,
Designed no doubt for other purposes,
And cried, if you would know Messala's secrets,
Look for them here, within this bleeding breast;
He who has courage to conspire against you,
Can keep the counsel which he gives, and die:
Then, as tumultuously they gathered round him,
Pierced his false heart, and like a Roman died,
Though he had lived unworthy of the name.
Already Aruns was beyond the walls
Of Rome; our guards pursued him to the camp,
Stopped him with Tullia, and ere long will bring
The traitor here, when heaven, I trust, will soon
Unravel all their dark and deadly purpose.
Valerius will detect them: but remember
Friends, Romans, countrymen, I charge you all,
When ye shall know the names of these vile slaves,
These parricides, nor pardon nor indulgence
Be shown to friends, to brothers, nay to children;
Think on their crimes alone, preserve your faith,

For liberty and Rome demand their blood,
And he who pardons guilt like theirs, partakes it.
[To the slave.
Thou, whose blind destiny and lowly birth
Made thee a slave, who shouldst have been a Roman;
Thou, by whose generous aid the senate lives,
And Rome is safe, receive that liberty
Thou hast bestowed; henceforth let nobler thoughts
Inspire thy soul; be equal to my sons,
The dread of tyrants, the delight of Rome.
But whence this tumult? Hark!

PROCLUSUS.

The ambassador
Is seized, my lord, and they have brought him hither.

BRUTUS.

How will he dare—

SCENE II.

brutus, senators, aruns, lictors.

ARUNS.

How long, insulting Romans,
Will you thus violate the sacred rights
Of all mankind? How long by faction led
Thus in their ministers dishonor kings?
Your lictors have with insolence detained me:
Is it my master you thus treat with scorn,
Or Aruns? Know, my rank respectable
In every nation—

BRUTUS.

The more sacred that,
More guilty thou: talk not of titles here.

ARUNS.

A king's ambassador—

BRUTUS.

Thou art not one:
Thou are a traitor, with a noble name,
Emboldened by impunity: for know
That, true ambassadors interpret laws,
But never break them; serve their king, but ne'er
Dishonor him: with them reposed in safety
Lie the firm ties of faith 'twixt man and man;
And of their holy ministry the fruit
Is grateful peace: they are the sacred bonds
That knit the sovereigns of the earth together;
And, as the friends of all, by all revered.
Ask thy own heart if thou art such; thou dar'st not:
But if thy master bade thee learn our laws,
Our virtues, and our treasures, we will teach thee
Now what Rome is, and what a Roman senate:
Will teach thee that this people still respects
The law of nations, which thou hast dishonored:
The only punishment inflicted on thee,
Shall be to see thy vile associates bleed,
And tell thy king their folly and their fate.
When thou returnest, be sure inform thy friends
Of Rome's resentment, and thy own disgrace:
Lictors, away with him.

SCENE III.

brutus, valerius, proculus, senators.

Well, my Valerius,
They're seized, I hope, at least you know the traitors:
Ha! wherefore is that melancholy gloom
Spread o'er thy face, presaging greater ills?
Thou tremblest too.

VALERIUS.

Remember thou art Brutus.

BRUTUS.

Explain thyself.

VALERIUS.

I dare not speak it: take

[Gives him the tablets.

These tablets, read, and know the guilty.

BRUTUS.

Ha!

My eyes deceive me; sure it cannot be!

O heavy hour! and most unhappy father!

My son! Tiberius! pardon me, my friends,

Unlooked for misery! Have you seized the traitor?

VALERIUS.

My lord, with two of the conspirators,

He stood on his defence, and rather chose

To die than yield himself a prisoner: close

By them he fell all covered o'er with wounds:

But O there still remains a tale more dreadful

For thee, for Rome, and for us all.

BRUTUS.

What is it?

VALERIUS.

Once more, my lord, look on that fatal scroll

Which Proculus had wrested from Messala.

BRUTUS.

I tremble, but I will go on: ha! Titus!

[He sinks into the arms of Proculus.

VALERIUS.

Disarmed I found him, wandering in despair

And horror, as if conscious of a crime

Which he abhorred.

BRUTUS.

Return, ye conscript fathers,

Straight to the senate; Brutus hath no place

Amongst you now: go, pass your judgment on him,

Exterminate the guilty race of Brutus;

Punish the father in the blood of him

Who was my child: I shall not follow you,
Or to suspend or mitigate the wrath
Of injured Rome.

SCENE IV.

BRUTUS.

[Alone.]

Great gods! to your decrees
I yield submissive, to the great avengers
Of Rome, and of her laws: by you inspired
I reared the structure of fair liberty
On justice and on truth; and will you now
O'erthrow it? will you arm my children's hands
Against your own work? Was it not woe enough
That fierce Tiberius, blind with furious zeal,
Should serve the tyrant, and betray his country?
But that my Titus too, the joy of Rome,
Who, full of honor, but this very day
Enjoyed a triumph for his victories,
Crowned in the capitol by Brutus' hand,
Titus, the hope of my declining years,
The darling of mankind, that Titus—gods!

SCENE V.

brutus, valerius, lictors, attendants.

VALERIUS.

My lord, the senate has decreed, yourself
Should pass the sentence on your guilty son.

BRUTUS.

Myself!

VALERIUS.

It must be so.

BRUTUS.

Touching the rest,
Say, what have they determined?

VALERIUS.

All condemned
To death; even now perhaps they are no more.

BRUTUS.

And has the senate left to my disposal
The life of Titus?

VALERIUS.

They esteem this honor
Due to thy virtues.

BRUTUS.

O my country!

VALERIUS.

What
Must I return in answer to the senate?

BRUTUS.

That Brutus knows the value of a favor
He sought not, but shall study to deserve.
But could my son without resistance yield?
Could he—forgive my doubts, but Titus ever
Was Rome's best guard, and still I feel I love him.

VALERIUS.

Tullia, my lord—

BRUTUS.

Well, what of her?

VALERIUS.

Confirmed
Our just suspicions.

BRUTUS.

How!

VALERIUS.

Soon as she saw,
In her return, the dreadful preparation
Of torture for the offenders, at our feet
She fell, and soon in agonies expired;
The last poor victim of the hated race
Of tyrants: doubtless 'twas for her, my lord,
Rome was betrayed: I feel a father's grief,
And weep for Brutus; but in her last moments
This way she turned her eyes, and called on Titus.

BRUTUS.

Just gods!

VALERIUS.

Thou art his judge, perform thy office,
Or strike, or spare; acquit him, or condemn;
Rome will approve what Brutus shall determine.

BRUTUS.

Lictors, bring Titus hither.

VALERIUS.

I retire,
And trust thy virtue; my astonished soul
Admires and pities thee: I go to tell
The senate, naught can equal Brutus' grief
But Brutus' firmness.

SCENE VI.

brutus, proculus.

BRUTUS.

No: the more I think,
The less can I believe my son could e'er
Conspire with traitors to betray his country:

No: he loved Rome too well; too well he loved
His father: sure we cannot thus forget
Our duty and ourselves in one short day:
I cannot think my son was guilty still.

PROCLUSUS.

'Twas all conducted by Messala; he
Perhaps designed to shelter his own crimes
Beneath the name of Titus; his accusers
Envy his glory, and would fain obscure it.

BRUTUS.

O! would to heaven it were so!

PROCLUSUS.

He's thy son,
Thy only hope; and innocent or guilty,
The senate has to thee resigned his fate:
His life is safe whilst in the hands of Brutus;
Thou wilt preserve a great man for his country;
Thou art a father.

BRUTUS.

No: I am Rome's consul.

SCENE VII.

brutus, proculus, titus.

[At the farther end of the stage, guarded by Lictors.]

PROCLUSUS.

He comes.

TITUS.

[Advancing.]

'Tis Brutus: O distressful sight!
Open, thou earth, beneath my trembling steps!
My lord, permit a son—

BRUTUS.

Rash boy, forbear:
I was the father of two children once,
And loved them both; but one is lost: what sayest thou?
Speak, Titus, have I yet a son?

TITUS.

O no:
Thou hast not.

BRUTUS.

Answer then thy judge, thou shame
To Brutus; say, didst thou betray thy country,
Give up thy father to a tyrant's power,
And break thy solemn vows? Didst thou resolve
To do this, Titus?

TITUS.

I resolved on nothing.
Filled with a deadly poison that possessed
My frantic mind, I did not know myself,
Nor do I yet; and my distempered soul,
In its wild rage, was for a moment guilty;
That moment clothed me with eternal shame,
And made me false to what I loved, my country:
'Tis past; and anguish and remorse succeed
To avenge their wrongs, and scourge me for the crime.
Pronounce my sentence: Rome, that looks upon thee,
Wants an example, and demands my life:
By my deserved fate she may deter
Those of her sons, if any such there be,
Who might be tempted to a crime like mine.
In death at least thus shall I serve my country;
Thus shall my blood, which never till this hour
Was stained with guilt, still flow for liberty.

BRUTUS.

Unnatural mixture! perfidy and courage;
Such horrid crimes with such exalted virtue!
With all thy dear-bought laurels on thy brow,
What power malignant could inspire thee thus
With vile inconstancy?

TITUS.

The thirst of vengeance,
Ambition, hatred, madness; all united—

BRUTUS.

Go on, unhappy youth.

TITUS.

One error more,
And worse than all the rest; one cruel flame;
That fired my guilt, and still perhaps augments it,
Completed my destruction: to confess it
Is double shame, to Rome of little service,
And most unworthy of us both: I own it:
But I have reached the summit of my guilt,
And of my sorrows too: end with my life
My crimes, and my despair, my shame and thine.
[Kneeling.

But if in battle I have ever traced
Thy glorious steps; if I have followed thee,
And served my country; if remorse and anguish
Already have o'erpaid my crimes; O deign
Within thy arms once more to hold a wretch
Abandoned and forlorn: O say, at least,
“My son, thy father hates thee not”: that word
Alone my fame and virtue shall restore,
And save my memory from the brand of shame.
The world will say, when Titus died, a look
From you relieved him from his load of grief,
And made him full amends for all his sorrows;
Spite of his guilt, that still esteemed by thee,
He bore thy blessing with him to the grave.

BRUTUS.

O Rome! his pangs oppress me: O my country!
Proculus, see they lead my son to death.
Rise, wretched Titus, thou wert once the hope
Of my old age, my best support; embrace
Thy father who condemned thee; 'twas his duty.
Were he not Brutus, he had pardoned thee;
Believe my tears that trickle down thy cheeks
Whilst I am speaking to thee: O my Titus,
Let nobler courage than thy father shows
Support thee in thy death; my son, farewell:

Let no unmanly tears disgrace thy fall,
But be a Roman still, and let thy country,
That knows thy worth, admire while she destroys thee.

TITUS.

Farewell: I go to death; in that at least
Titus once more shall emulate his father.

SCENE VIII.

brutus, proculus.

PROCLUSUS.

My lord, the senate, with sincerest grief,
And shuddering at the dreadful stroke—

BRUTUS.

No more:
Ye know not Brutus who condole with him
At such a time: Rome only is my care;
I feel but for my country: we must guard
Against more danger: they're in arms again:
Away: let Rome in this disastrous hour
Supply the place of him whom I have lost
For her, and let me finish my sad days,
As Titus should have done, in Rome's defence.

SCENE The LAST.

brutus, proculus, a senator.

SENATOR.

My lord—

BRUTUS.

My son is dead?

SENATOR.

'Tis so: these eyes—

BRUTUS.

Thank heaven! Rome's free; and I am satisfied.

End.



Endnotes

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF VOLTAIRE Vol. VIII—Part II

MAHOMET.

This powerful work was read by Voltaire to Frederick of Prussia in 1740, to the king's great delight. The following correspondence has peculiar interest. In his "Life of Voltaire" James Parton says: "The great lesson of the play is that the founders of false religions at once despise and practise upon the docile credulity of men. When I remember that this powerful exhibition of executive force triumphing over credulity and weakness was vividly stamped upon the susceptible brain of Frederick by Voltaire's impassioned declamation, at the very time he was revolving his Silesian project, I am inclined to the conjecture that it may have been the deciding influence upon the king's mind." The play was withdrawn after the fourth representation, under pressure of Church authorities who professed to see in it a "bloody satire against the Christian religion." This letter preserves the original characteristics.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

TO HIS MAJESTY

THE KING OF PRUSSIA.

Rotterdam, January 20, 1742.

Sir:

I am at present, like the pilgrims of Mecca, turning their eyes perpetually towards that city after leaving it, as I do mine towards the court of Prussia. My heart, deeply penetrated with the sense of your majesty's goodness, knows no grief but that which arises from my incapacity of being always with you. I have taken the liberty to send your majesty a fresh copy of "Mahomet," the sketch of which you have seen some time ago. This is a tribute which I pay to the lover of arts, the sensible critic, and above all, to the philosopher much more than to the sovereign. Your majesty knows by what motive I was inspired in the composition of that work. The love of mankind, and the hatred of fanaticism, two virtues that adorn your throne, guided my pen: I have ever been of opinion, that tragedy should correct, as well as move the heart. Of what consequence or importance to mankind are the passions or misfortunes of any of the heroes of antiquity, if they do not convey some instruction to us? It is universally acknowledged, that the comedy of "Tartuffe," a piece hitherto unequalled, did a great deal of good in the world, by showing hypocrisy in its proper light; and why therefore should we not endeavor in a tragedy to expose that species of imposture which sets to work the hypocrisy of some, and the madness of others? Why may we not go back to the histories of those ancient ruffians, the illustrious founders of superstition and fanaticism, who first carried the sword to the altar to sacrifice all those who refused to embrace their doctrines?

They who tell us that these days of wickedness are past, that we shall never see any more Barcochebas, Mahomets, Johns of Leyden, etc., and that the flames of religious war are totally extinguished, in my opinion, pay too high a compliment to human nature. The same poison still subsists, though it does not appear so openly—some symptoms of this plague break out from time to time—enough to infect the earth: have not we in our own age seen the prophets of Cévennes killing in the name of God those of their sect, who were not sufficiently pliant to their purposes?

The action I have described is terrible; I do not know whether horror was ever carried farther on any stage. A young man born with virtuous inclinations, seduced by fanaticism, assassinates an old man who loves him; and whilst he imagines he is serving God, is, without knowing it, guilty of parricide: the murder is committed by the order of an impostor, who promises him a reward, which proves to be incest. This, I acknowledge, is full of horror; but your majesty is thoroughly sensible, that tragedy should not consist merely of love, jealousy, and marriage: even our histories abound in actions much more horrible than that which I have invented. *Seid* does not know that the person whom he assassinates is his father, and when he has committed the

crime, feels the deepest remorse for it; but *Mézeray* tells us, that at *Milan* a father killed his son with his own hand on account of religion, and was not in the least sorry for it. The story of the two brothers *Diaz* is well known; one of them was at *Rome* and the other in *Germany*, in the beginning of the commotions raised by *Luther*: *Bartholomew Diaz*, hearing that his brother embraced the opinion of *Luther* at Frankfort, left *Rome* on purpose to assassinate him, and accordingly did so. *Herrera*, a Spanish author, tells us, that *Bartholomew Diaz* ran a great hazard in doing this, but nothing intimidates a man of honor guided by honesty. *Herrera*, we see, brought up in that holy religion which is an enemy to cruelty, a religion which teaches long-suffering and not revenge, was persuaded that honesty might make a man an assassin and a parricide: ought we not to rise up on all sides against such infernal maxims? These put the poniard into the hand of that monster who deprived France of *Henry the Great*: these placed the picture of *James Clement* on the altar, and his name amongst the saints: these took away the life of *William*, prince of Orange, founder of the liberty and prosperity of his country. *Salcede* shot at and wounded him in the forehead with a pistol; and *Strada* tells us, that *Salcede* would not dare to undertake that enterprise till he had purified his soul by confession at the feet of a Dominican, and fortified it by the holy sacrament. *Herrera* has something more horrible, and more ridiculous concerning it. "He stood firm," says he, "after the example of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and His saints." Balthasar Girard, who afterwards took away the life of that great man, behaved in the same manner as *Salcede*.

I have remarked, that all those who voluntarily committed such crimes were young men like *Seid*. *Balthasar Girard* was about twenty years old, and the four Spaniards who had bound themselves by oath with him to kill the prince, were of the same age. The monster who killed *Henry III.*, was but four-and-twenty, and *Poltrot*, who assassinated the great *Duke of Guise* only twenty-five: this is the age of seduction and madness. In England I was once a witness to how far the power of fanaticism could work on a weak and youthful imagination: a boy of sixteen, whose name was *Shepherd*, engaged to assassinate King *George I.*, your majesty's grandfather by the mother's side. What could prompt him to such madness? the only reason to be assigned was, that *Shepherd* was not of the same religion with the king. They took pity on his youth, offered him his pardon, and for a long time endeavored to bring him to repentance; but he always persisted in saying, it was better to obey God than man; and if they let him go, the first use he made of his liberty should be to kill the king: so that they were obliged at last to execute him as a monster, whom they despaired of bringing to any sense of reason.

I will venture to affirm that all who have seen anything of mankind must have remarked how easily nature is sometimes sacrificed to superstition: how many fathers have detested and disinherited their children! how many brothers have persecuted brothers on this destructive principle! I have myself seen instances of it in more than one family.

If superstition does not always signalize itself in those glaring crimes which history transmits to us, in society it does every day all the mischief it possibly can: disunites friends, separates kindred and relations, destroys the wise and worthy by the hands of fools and enthusiasts: it does not indeed every day poison a *Socrates*, but it banishes

Descartes from a city which ought to be the asylum of liberty, and gives *Jurieu*, who acted the part of a prophet, credit enough to impoverish the wise philosopher *Bayle*: it banished the successor of the great *Leibnitz*, and deprives a noble assembly of young men that crowded to his lectures, of pleasure and improvement: and to re-establish him heaven must raise up amongst us a royal philosopher, that true miracle which is so rarely to be seen. In vain does human reason advance towards perfection, by means of that philosophy which of late has made so great a progress in Europe: in vain do you, most noble prince, both inspire and practise this humane philosophy: whilst in the same age wherein reason raises her throne on one side, the most absurd fanaticism adorns her altars on the other.

It may perhaps be objected to me, that, out of my too abundant zeal, I have made *Mahomet* in this tragedy guilty of a crime which in reality he was not capable of committing. The count de *Boulainvilliers*, some time since, wrote the life of this prophet, whom he endeavored to represent as a great man, appointed by Providence to punish the Christian world, and change the face of at least one-half of the globe. Mr. Sale likewise, who has given us an excellent translation of the Koran into English, would persuade us to look upon *Mahomet* as a *Numa* or a *Theseus*. I will readily acknowledge, that we ought to respect him, if born a legitimate prince, or called to government by the voice of the people, he had instituted useful and peaceful laws like *Numa*, or like *Theseus* defended his countrymen: but for a driver of camels to stir up a faction in his village; to associate himself with a set of wretched Koreish, and persuade them that he had an interview with the angel *Gabriel*; to boast that he was carried up to heaven, and there received part of that unintelligible book which contradicts common sense in every page; that in order to procure respect for this ridiculous performance he should carry fire and sword into his country, murder fathers, and ravish their daughters, and after all give those whom he conquered the choice of his religion or death; this is surely what no man will pretend to vindicate, unless he was born a Turk, and superstition had totally extinguished in him the light of nature.

Mahomet, I know, did not actually commit that particular crime which is the subject of this tragedy: history only informs us, that he took away the wife of *Seid*, one of his followers, and persecuted *Abusophan*, whom I call *Zopir*; but what is not that man capable of, who, in the name of God, makes war against his country? It was not my design merely to represent a real fact, but real manners and characters, to make men think as they naturally must in their circumstances; but above all it was my intention to show the horrid schemes which villainy can invent, and fanaticism put in practice. *Mahomet* is here no more than *Tartuffe* in arms.

Upon the whole I shall think myself amply rewarded for my labor, if any one of those weak mortals, who are ever ready to receive the impressions of a madness foreign to their nature, should learn from this piece to guard themselves against such fatal delusions; if, after being shocked at the dreadful consequences of *Seid's* obedience, he should say to himself, why must I blindly follow the blind who cry out to me, hate, persecute all who are rash enough not to be of the same opinion with ourselves, even in things and matters we do not understand? what infinite service would it be to mankind to eradicate such false sentiments! A spirit of indulgence would make us all

brothers; a spirit of persecution can create nothing but monsters. This I know is your majesty's opinion: to live with such a prince, and such a philosopher, would be my greatest happiness; my sincere attachment can only be equalled by my regret; but if other duties draw me away, they can never blot out the respect I owe to a prince, who talks and thinks like a man, who despises that specious gravity which is always a cover for meanness and ignorance: a prince who converses with freedom, because he is not afraid of being known; who is still eager to be instructed, and at the same time capable himself of instructing the most learned and the most sagacious.

I shall, whilst I have life, remain with the most profound respect, and deepest sense of gratitude, your majesty's,

Voltaire.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

A Letter From M. De Voltaire To Pope Benedict XIV.

Most Blessed Father—

Your holiness will pardon the liberty taken by one of the lowest of the faithful, though a zealous admirer of virtue, of submitting to the head of the true religion this performance, written in opposition to the founder of a false and barbarous sect. To whom could I with more propriety inscribe a satire on the cruelty and errors of a false prophet, than to the vicar and representative of a God of truth and mercy? Your holiness will therefore give me leave to lay at your feet both the piece and the author of it, and humbly to request your protection of the one, and your benediction upon the other; in hopes of which, with the profoundest reverence, I kiss your sacred feet.

Paris, August 17, 1745.

Voltaire.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

The Answer Of Pope Benedict XIV. To M. De Voltaire.

***Benedictus P. P. Dilecto Filio Salutem & Apostolicam
Benedictionem.***

This day sevensnight I was favored with your excellent tragedy of *Mahomet*, which I have read with great pleasure: Cardinal Passionei has likewise presented me with your fine poem of *Fontenoy*. Signor Leprotti this day repeated to me your distich made on my retreat. Yesterday morning Cardinal *Valenti* gave me your letter of the 17th of *August*. Many are the obligations which you have conferred on me, for which I am greatly indebted to you, for all and every one of them; and I assure you that I have the highest esteem for your merit, which is so universally acknowledged.

The distich has been published at Rome, and objected to by one of the *literati*, who, in a public conversation, affirmed that there was a mistake in it with regard to the word *hic*, which is made short, whereas it ought to be always long. To which I replied, that it may be either long or short; Virgil having made it short in this verse,

Solus hic inflexit sensus, animumque labantem.

And long in another,

Hic finis Priami fatorum, hic exitus illum.

The answer I think was pretty full and convincing, considering that I have not looked into Virgil these fifty years. The cause, however, is properly yours; to your honor and sincerity, therefore, of which I have the highest opinion, I shall leave it to be defended against your opposers and mine, and here give you my apostolical benediction. *Datum Romæ apud sanctam Mariam majorem die 19 Sept. Pontificatus nostri anno sexto.*

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

A Letter Of Thanks From M. De Voltaire To The Pope.

The features of your excellency are not better expressed on the medal you were so kind as to send me, than are the features of your mind in the letter which you honored me with: permit me to lay at your feet my sincerest acknowledgments: in points of literature, as well as in matters of more importance, your infallibility is not to be disputed: your excellency is much better versed in the *Latin* tongue than the *Frenchman* whom you condescended to correct: I am indeed astonished how you could so readily appeal to *Virgil*: the popes were always ranked amongst the most learned sovereigns, but amongst them I believe there never was one in whom so much learning and taste united.

Agnosco rerum dominos, gentemque togatam.

If the Frenchman who found fault with the word *hic* had known as much of *Virgil* as your excellency, he might have recollected a verse where *hic* is both long and short.

Hic vir hic est tibi quem promitti sæpius audis.

I cannot help considering this verse as a happy presage of the favors conferred on me by your excellency. Thus might Rome cry out when Benedict XIV. was raised to the papacy: with the utmost respect and gratitude I kiss your sacred feet, etc.

Voltaire.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Mahomet.

Zopir, Sheik of Mecca.

OMAR, { General and second in command to Mahomet.
SEID, }
PALMIRA, } Slaves to Mahomet.

Phanor, Senator of Mecca.

Company of Meccans.

Company of Mussulmans.

Scene, Mecca.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT I.

SCENE I.

zopir, phanor.

ZOPIR.

Thinkest thou thy friend will ever bend the knee
To this proud hypocrite; shall I fall down
And worship, I who banished him from Mecca?
No: punish me, just heaven, as I deserve,
If e'er this hand, the friend of innocence
And freedom, stoop to cherish foul rebellion,
Or aid imposture to deceive mankind!

PHANOR.

Thy zeal is noble, and becomes the chief
Of Ishmael's sacred senate, but may prove
Destructive to the cause it means to serve:
Thy ardor cannot check the rapid power
Of Mahomet, and but provokes his vengeance:
There was a time when you might safely draw
The sword of justice, to defend the rights
Of Mecca, and prevent the flames of war
From spreading o'er the land; then Mahomet
Was but a bold and factious citizen,
But now he is a conqueror, and a king;
Mecca's impostor at Medina shines
A holy prophet; nations bend before him,
And learn to worship crimes which we abhor.
Even here, a band of wild enthusiasts, drunk
With furious zeal, support his fond delusions,
His idle tales, and fancied miracles:
These spread sedition through the gaping throng,
Invite his forces, and believe a God
Inspires and renders him invincible.
The lovers of their country think with you,
But wisest counsels are not always followed;
False zeal, and fear, and love of novelty
Alarm the crowd; already half our city
Is left unpeopled; Mecca cries aloud
To thee her father, and demands a peace.

ZOPIR.

Peace with a traitor! coward nation, what
Can you expect but slavery from a tyrant!
Go, bend your supple knees, and prostrate fall
Before the idol whose oppressive hand
Shall crush you all: for me, I hate the traitor;
This heart's too deeply wounded to forgive:
The savage murderer robbed me of a wife
And two dear children: nor is his resentment
Less fierce than mine; I forced his camp, pursued
The coward to his tent, and slew his son:
The torch of hatred is lit up between us,
And time can never extinguish it.

PHANOR.

I hope
It never will; yet thou shouldst hide the flame,
And sacrifice thy griefs to public good:
What if he lay this noble city waste,
Will that avenge thee, will that serve thy cause?
Thou hast lost all, son, brother, daughter, wife.
Mecca alone remains to give thee comfort,
Do not lose that, do not destroy thy country.

ZOPIR.

Kingdoms are lost by cowardice alone.

PHANOR.

As oft perhaps by obstinate resistance.

ZOPIR.

Then let us perish, if it be our fate.

PHANOR.

When thou art almost in the harbor, thus
To brave the storm is false and fatal courage:
Kind heaven, thou seest, points out to thee the means
To soften this proud tyrant; fair Palmira,
Thy beautiful captive, brought up in the camp
Of this destructive conqueror, was sent
By gracious heaven, the messenger of peace,

Thy guardian angel, to appease the wrath
Of Mahomet; already by his herald
He has demanded her.

ZOPIR.

And wouldst thou have me
Give up so fair a prize to this barbarian?
What! whilst the tyrant spreads destruction round him,
Unpeoples kingdoms, and destroys mankind,
Shall beauty's charms be sacrificed to bribe
A madman's frenzy? I should envy him
That lovely fair one more than all his glory;
Not that I feel the stings of wild desire,
Or, in the evening of my days, indulge,
Old as I am, a shameless passion for her;
But, whether objects born like her to please,
Spite of ourselves, demand our tenderest pity,
Or that perhaps a childless father hopes
To find in her another daughter, why
I know not, but for that unhappy maid
Still am I anxious; be it weakness in me,
Or reason's powerful voice, I cannot bear
To see her in the hands of Mahomet;
Would I could mould her to my wishes, form
Her willing mind, and make her hate the tyrant
As I do! She has sent to speak with me
Here in the sacred porch—and lo! she comes:
On her fair cheek the blush of modesty
And candor speaks the virtues of her heart.

SCENE II.

zopir, palmira.

ZOPIR.

Hail, lovely maid! the chance of cruel war
Hath made thee Zopir's captive, but thou art not
Amongst barbarians; all with me revere
Palmira's virtues, and lament her fate,
Whilst youth with innocence and beauty plead
Thy cause; whatever thou askest in Zopir's power,
Thou shalt not ask in vain: my life declines
Towards its period, and if my last hours
Can give Palmira joy, I shall esteem them
The best, the happiest I have ever known.

PALMIRA.

These two months past, my lord, your prisoner here,
Scarce have I felt the yoke of slavery;
Your generous hand, still raised to soothe affliction,
Hath wiped the tears of sorrow from my eyes,
And softened all the rigor of my fate:
Forgive me, if emboldened by your goodness
I ask for more, and centre every hope
Of future happiness on you alone;
Forgive me, if to Mahomet's request
I join Palmira's, and implore that freedom
He hath already asked: O listen to him,
And let me say, that after heaven and him
I am indebted most to generous Zopir.

ZOPIR.

Has then oppression such enticing charms
That thou shouldst wish and beg to be the slave
Of Mahomet, to hear the clash of arms,
With him to live in deserts, and in caves,
And wander o'er his ever shifting country?

PALMIRA.

Where'er the mind with ease and pleasure dwells,
There is our home, and there our native country:
He formed my soul; to Mahomet I owe
The kind instruction of my earlier years;
Taught by the happy partners of his bed,
Who still adoring and adored by him
Send up their prayers to heaven for his dear safety,
I lived in peace and joy! for ne'er did woe
Pollute that seat of bliss till the sad hour
Of my misfortune, when wide-wasting war
Rushed in upon us and enslaved Palmira:
Pity, my lord, a heart oppressed with grief,
That sighs for objects far, far distant from her.

ZOPIR.

I understand you, madam; you expect
The tyrant's hand, and hope to share his throne.

PALMIRA.

I honor him, my lord; my trembling soul

Looks up to Mahomet with holy fear
As to a god; but never did this heart
E'er cherish the vain hope that he would deign
To wed Palmira: No: such splendor ill
Would suit my humble state.

ZOPIR.

Whoe'er thou art,
He was not born, I trust, to be thy husband,
No, nor thy master; much I err, or thou
Springest from a race designed by heaven to check
This haughty Arab, and give laws to him
Who thus assumes the majesty of kings.

PALMIRA.

Alas! we know not what it is to boast
Of birth or fortune; from our infant years
Without or parents, friends, or country, doomed
To slavery; here resigned to our hard fate,
Strangers to all but to that God we serve,
We live content in humble poverty.

ZOPIR.

And can ye be content? and are ye strangers,
Without a father, and without a home?
I am a childless, poor, forlorn, old man;
You might have been the comfort of my age:
To form a plan of future happiness
For you, had softened my own wretchedness,
And made me some amends for all my wrongs:
But you abhor my country and my law.

PALMIRA.

I am not mistress of myself, and how
Can I be thine? I pity thy misfortunes,
And bless thee for thy goodness to Palmira;
But Mahomet has been a father to me.

ZOPIR.

A father! ye just gods! the vile impostor!

PALMIRA.

Can he deserve that name, the holy prophet,
The great ambassador of heaven, sent down
To interpret its high will?

ZOPIR.

Deluded mortals!
How blind ye are, to follow this proud madman,
This happy robber, whom my justice spared,
And raise him from the scaffold to a throne!

PALMIRA.

My lord, I shudder at your imprecations;
Though I am bound by honor and the ties
Of gratitude to love thee for thy bounties,
This blasphemy against my kind protector
Cancels the bond, and fills my soul with horror.
O superstition, how thy savage power
Deprives at once the best and tenderest hearts
Of their humanity!

ZOPIR.

Alas! Palmira,
Spite of myself, I feel for thy misfortunes,
Pity thy weakness, and lament thy fate.

PALMIRA.

You will not grant me then—

ZOPIR.

I cannot yield thee
To him who has deceived thy easy heart,
To a base tyrant; No: thou art a treasure
Too precious to be parted with, and makest
This hypocrite but more detested.

SCENE III.

zopir, palmira, phanor.

ZOPIR.

Phanor,
What wouldst thou?

PHANOR.

At the city gate that leads
To Moad's fertile plain, the valiant Omar
Is just arrived.

ZOPIR.

Indeed; the tyrant's friend,
The fierce, vindictive Omar, his new convert,
Who had so long opposed him, and still fought
For us!

PHANOR.

Perhaps he yet may serve his country,
Already he hath offered terms of peace;
Our chiefs have parleyed with him, he demands
An hostage, and I hear they've granted him
The noble Seid.

PALMIRA.

Seid? gracious heaven!

PHANOR.

Behold! my lord, he comes.

ZOPIR.

Ha! Omar here!
There's no retreating now, he must be heard;
Palmira, you may leave us.—O ye gods
Of my forefathers, you who have protected
The sons of Ishmael these three thousand years,
And thou, O Sun, with all those sacred lights
That glitter round us, witness to my truth,
Aid and support me in the glorious conflict
With proud iniquity!

SCENE IV.

zopir, omar, phanor, *Attendants*.

ZOPIR.

At length, it seems,
Omar returns, after a three years' absence,
To visit that loved country which his hand
So long defended, and his honest heart
Has now betrayed: deserter of our gods,
Deserter of our laws, how darest thou thus
Approach these sacred walls to persecute
And to oppress; a public robber's slave;
What is thy errand? wherefore comest thou hither?

OMAR.

To pardon thee: by me our holy prophet,
In pity to thy age, thy well-known valor,
And past misfortunes, offers thee his hand:
Omar is come to bring thee terms of peace.

ZOPIR.

And shall a factious rebel offer peace
Who should have sued for pardon? gracious gods!
Will ye permit him to usurp your power,
And suffer Mahomet to rule mankind?
Dost thou not blush, vile minion as thou art,
To serve a traitor? hast thou not beheld him
Friendless and poor, an humble citizen,
And ranking with the meanest of the throng?
How little then in fortune or in fame!

OMAR.

Thus low and grovelling souls like thine pretend
To judge of merit, whilst in fortune's scale
Ye weigh the worth of men: proud, empty being,
Dost thou not know that the poor worm which crawls
Low on the earth, and the imperial eagle
That soars to heaven, in the all-seeing eye
Of their eternal Maker are the same,
And shrink to nothing? men are equal all;
From virtue only true distinction springs,
And not from birth: there are exalted spirits

Who claim respect and honor from themselves
And not their ancestors: these, these, my lord,
Are heaven's peculiar care, and such is he
Whom I obey, and who alone deserves
To be a master; all mankind like me
Shall one day fall before the conqueror's feet,
And future ages follow my example.

ZOPIR.

Omar, I know thee well; thy artful hand
In vain hath drawn the visionary portrait;
Thou mayest deceive the multitude, but know,
What Mecca worships Zopir can despise:
Be honest then, and with the impartial eye
Of reason look on Mahomet; behold him
But as a mortal, and consider well
By what base arts the vile impostor rose,
A camel-driver, a poor abject slave,
Who first deceived a fond, believing woman,
And now supported by an idle dream
Draws in the weak and credulous multitude:
Condemned to exile, I chastised the rebel
Too lightly, and his insolence returns
With double force to punish my indulgence.
He fled with Fatima from cave to cave,
And suffered chains, contempt and banishment;
Meantime the fury which he called divine
Spread like a subtle poison through the crowd;
Medina was infected: Omar then,
To reason's voice attentive, would have stopped
The impetuous torrent; he had courage then
And virtue to attack the proud usurper,
Though now he crouches to him like a slave.
If thy proud master be indeed a prophet,
How didst thou dare to punish him? or why,
If an impostor, wilt thou dare to serve him?

OMAR.

I punished him because I knew him not;
But now, the veil of ignorance removed,
I see him as he is; behold him born
To change the astonished world, and rule mankind:
When I beheld him rise in awful pomp,
Intrepid, eloquent, by all admired,
By all adored; beheld him speak and act,
Punish and pardon like a god, I lent

My little aid, and joined the conqueror.
Altars, thou knowest, and thrones were our reward;
Once I was blind, like thee, but, thanks to heaven!
My eyes are opened now; would, Zopir, thine
Were open, too! let me entreat thee, change,
As I have done; no longer boast thy zeal
And cruel hatred, nor blaspheme our God,
But fall submissive at the hero's feet
Whom thou hast injured; kiss the hand that bears
The angry lightning, lest it fall upon thee.
Omar is now the second of mankind;
A place of honor yet remains for thee,
If prudent thou wilt yield, and own a master:
What we have been thou knowest, and what we are:
The multitude are ever weak and blind,
Made for our use, born but to serve the great,
But to admire, believe us, and obey:
Reign then with us, partake the feast of grandeur,
No longer deign to imitate the crowd,
But henceforth make them tremble.

ZOPIR.

Tremble thou,
And Mahomet, with all thy hateful train:
Thinkest thou that Mecca's faithful chief will fall
At an impostor's feet, and crown a rebel?
I am no stranger to his specious worth;
His courage and his conduct have my praise;
Were he but virtuous I like thee should love him;
But as he is I hate the tyrant: hence,
Nor talk to me of his deceitful mercy,
His clemency and goodness; all his aim
Is cruelty and vengeance: with this hand
I slew his darling son; I banished him:
My hatred is inflexible, and so
Is Mahomet's resentment: if he e'er
Re-enters Mecca, he must cut his way
Through Zopir's blood, for he is deeply stained
With crimes that justice never can forgive.

OMAR.

To show thee Mahomet is merciful,
That he can pardon though thou canst not, here
I offer thee the third of all our spoils
Which we have taken from tributary kings;
Name your conditions, and the terms of peace;

Set your own terms on fair Palmira; take
Our treasures, and be happy.

ZOPIR.

Thinkest thou Zopir
Will basely sell his honor and his country,
Will blast his name with infamy for wealth,
The foul reward of guilt, or that Palmira
Will ever own a tyrant for her master?
She is too virtuous e'er to be the slave
Of Mahomet, nor will I suffer her
To fall a sacrifice to base impostors
Who would subvert the laws, and undermine
The safety and the virtue of mankind.

OMAR.

Implacably severe; thou talkest to Omar
As if he were a criminal, and thou
His judge; but henceforth I would have thee act
A better part, and treat me as a friend,
As the ambassador of Mahomet,
A conqueror and a king.

ZOPIR.

A king! who made,
Who crowned him?

OMAR.

Victory: respect his glory,
And tremble at his power: amidst his conquests
The hero offers peace; our swords are still
Unsheathed, and woe to this rebellious city
If she submits not: think what blood must flow,
The blood of half our fellow-citizens;
Consider, Zopir, Mahomet is here,
And even now requests to speak with thee.

ZOPIR.

Ha! Mahomet!

OMAR.

Yes, he conjures thee.

ZOPIR.

Traitor!
Were I the sole despotic ruler here
He should be answered soon—by chastisement.

OMAR.

I pity, Zopir, thy pretended virtue;
But since the senate insolently claim
Divided empire with thee, to the senate
Let us begone; Omar will meet thee there.

ZOPIR.

I'll follow thee: we then shall see who best
Can plead his cause: I will defend my gods,
My country, and her laws; thy impious voice
Shall bellow for thy vengeful deity,
Thy persecuting god, and his false prophet.
[Turning to Phanor.
Haste, Phanor, and with me repulse the traitor;
Who spares a villain is a villain:—come,
Let us, my friend, unite to crush his pride,
Subvert his wily purposes, destroy him,
Or perish in the attempt: If Mecca listens
To Zopir's councils, I shall free my country
From a proud tyrant's power, and save mankind.

End of the First Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT II

SCENE I.

seid, palmira.

PALMIRA.

Welcome, my Seid, do I see thee here
Once more in safety? what propitious god
Conducted thee? at length Palmira's woes
Shall have an end, and we may yet be happy.

SEID.

Thou sweetest charmer, balm of every woe,
Dear object of my wishes and my tears,
O since that day of blood when flushed with conquest
The fierce barbarian snatched thee from my arms,
When midst a heap of slaughtered friends I lay
Expiring on the ground, and called on death,
But called in vain, to end my hated being,
What have I suffered for my dear Palmira!
How have I cursed the tardy hours that long
Withheld my vengeance! my distracted soul's
Impatience thirsted for the bloody field,
That with these hands I might lay waste this seat
Of slavery, where Palmira mourned so long
In sad captivity; but thanks to heaven!
Our holy prophet, whose deep purposes
Are far beyond the ken of human wisdom,
Hath hither sent his chosen servant Omar;
I flew to meet him, they required a hostage;
I gave my faith, and they received it; firm
In my resolve to live or die for thee.

PALMIRA.

Seid, the very moment ere thou camest
To calm my fears, and save me from despair,
Was I entreating the proud ravisher;
Thou knowest, I cried, the only good on earth
I prized is left behind, restore it to me:
Then clasped his knees, fell at the tyrant's feet,
And bathed them with my tears, but all in vain:

How his unkind refusal shocked my soul!
My eyes grew dim, and motionless I stood
As one deprived of life; no succor nigh,
No ray of hope was left, when Seid came
To ease my troubled heart, and bring me comfort.

SEID.

Who could behold unmoved Palmira's woes?

PALMIRA.

The cruel Zopir; not insensible
He seemed to my misfortunes, yet at last
Unkindly told me, I must never hope
To leave these walls, for naught should tear me from him.

SEID.

'Tis false; for Mahomet, my royal master,
With the victorious Omar, and forgive me,
If to these noble friends I proudly add
The name of Seid, these shall set thee free,
Dry up thy tears, and make Palmira happy:
The God of Mahomet, our great protector,
That God whose sacred standard I have borne;
He who destroyed Medina's haughty ramparts
Shall lay rebellious Mecca at our feet;
Omar is here, and the glad people look
With eyes of friendship on him; in the name
Of Mahomet he comes, and meditates
Some noble purpose.

PALMIRA.

Mahomet indeed
Might free us, and unite two hearts long since
Devoted to his cause; but he, alas!
Is far removed, and we abandoned captives.

SCENE II.

palmira, seid, omar.

OMAR.

Despair not; heaven perhaps may yet reward you,

For Mahomet and liberty are nigh.

SEID.

Is he then come?

PALMIRA.

Our friend and father?

OMAR.

Yes.

I met the council, and by Mahomet
Inspired, addressed them thus: "Within these walls,
Even here," I cried, "the favorite of heaven,
Our holy prophet, first drew breath; the great,
The mighty conqueror, the support of kings;
And will ye not permit him but to rank
As friend and fellow-citizen? he comes not
To ruin or enslave, but to protect,
To teach you and to save, to fix his power,
And hold dominion o'er the conquered heart."
I spoke; the hoary sages smiled applause,
And all inclined to favor us; but Zopir,
Still resolute and still inflexible,
Declared, the people should be called together,
And give their general voice: the people met,
Again I spoke, addressed the citizens,
Exhorted, threatened, practised every art
To win their favor, and at length prevailed;
The gates are opened to great Mahomet,
Who after fifteen years of cruel exile
Returns to bless once more his native land;
With him the gallant Ali, brave Hercides,
And Ammon the invincible, besides
A numerous train of chosen followers:
The people throng around him; some with looks
Of hatred, some with smiles of cordial love;
Some bless the hero, and some curse the tyrant:
Some threaten and blaspheme, whilst others fall
Beneath his feet, embrace and worship him;
Meantime the names of God, of peace, and freedom,
Are echoed through the all-believing crowd;
Whilst Zopir's dying party bellows forth
In idle threats its impotent revenge:
Amidst their cries, unruffled and serene,
In triumph walks the god-like Mahomet,

Bearing the olive in his hand; already
Peace is proclaimed, and see! the conqueror comes.

SCENE III.

mahomet, omar, hercides, seid, palmira, *Attendants*.

MAHOMET.

My friends, and fellow-laborers, valiant Ali,
Morad, and Ammon, and Hercides, hence
To your great work, and in my name instruct
The people, lead them to the paths of truth,
Promise and threaten; let my God alone
Be worshipped, and let those who will not love
Be taught to fear him.—Seid, art thou here?

SEID.

My ever-honored father, and my king,
Led by that power divine who guided thee
To Mecca's walls, preventing your commands
I came, prepared to live or die with thee.

MAHOMET.

You should have waited for my orders; he
Who goes beyond his duty knows it not;
I am heaven's minister, and thou art mine;
Learn then of me to serve and to obey.

PALMIRA.

Forgive, my lord, a youth's impatient ardor:
Brought up together from our infant years,
The same our fortunes, and our thoughts the same:
Alas! my life has been a life of sorrow;
Long have I languished in captivity,
Far from my friends, from Seid, and from thee;
And now at last, when I beheld a ray
Of comfort shining on me, thy unkindness
Blasts my fair hopes, and darkens all the scene.

MAHOMET.

Palmira, 'tis enough: I know thy virtues;
Let naught disturb thee: spite of all my cares,

Glory, and empire, and the weight of war,
I will remember thee; Palmira still
Lives in my heart, and shares it with mankind:
Seid shall join our troops; thou, gentle maid,
Mayest serve thy God in peace: fear naught but Zopir.

SCENE IV.

mahomet, omar.

MAHOMET.

Brave Omar, stay, for in thy faithful bosom
Will I repose the secrets of my soul:
The lingering progress of a doubtful siege
May stop our rapid course; we must not give
These weak deluded mortals too much time
To pry into our actions; prejudice
Rules o'er the vulgar with despotic sway.
Thou knowest there is a tale which I have spread
And they believe, that universal empire
Awaits the prophet, who to Mecca's walls
Shall lead his conquering bands, and bring her peace.
'Tis mine to mark the errors of mankind,
And to avail me of them; but whilst thus
I try each art to soothe this fickle people,
What thinks my friend of Seid and Palmira?

OMAR.

I think most nobly of them, that amidst
Those few staunch followers who own no God,
No faith but thine, who love thee as their father,
Their friend, and benefactor, none obey
Or serve thee with an humbler, better mind;
They are most faithful.

MAHOMET.

Omar, thou art deceived;
They are my worst of foes, they love each other.

OMAR.

And can you blame their tenderness?

MAHOMET.

My friend,
I'll tell thee all my weakness.

OMAR.

How, my lord!

MAHOMET.

Thou knowest the reigning passion of my soul;
Whilst proud ambition and the cares of empire
Weighed heavy on me, Mahomet's hard life
Has been a conflict with opposing Nature,
Whom I have vanquished by austerity,
And self-denial; have banished from me
That baleful poison which unnerves mankind,
Which only serves to fire them into madness,
And brutal follies; on the burning sand
Or desert rocks I brave the inclement sky,
And bear the seasons' rough vicissitude:
Love is my only solace, the dear object
Of all my toils, the idol I adore,
The god of Mahomet, the powerful rival
Of my ambition: know, midst all my queens,
Palmira reigns sole mistress of my heart:
Think then what pangs of jealousy thy friend
Must feel when she expressed her fatal passion
For Seid.

OMAR.

But thou art revenged.

MAHOMET.

Judge thou
If soon I ought not to take vengeance on them:
That thou mayest hate my rival more, I'll tell thee
Who Seid and Palmira are—the children
Of him whom I abhor, my deadliest foe.

OMAR.

Ha! Zopir!

MAHOMET.

Is their father: fifteen years
Are past since brave Hercides to my care
Gave up their infant years; they know not yet
Or who or what they are; I brought them up
Together; I indulged their lawless passion,
And added fuel to the guilty flame.
Methinks it is as if the hand of heaven
Had meant in them to centre every crime.
But I must—Ha! their father comes this way,
His eyes are full of bitterness and wrath
Against me—now be vigilant, my Omar,
Hercides must be careful to possess
This most important pass; return, and tell me
Whether 'tis most expedient to declare
Against him, or retreat: away.

SCENE V.

zopir, mahomet.

ZOPIR.

Hard fate!
Unhappy Zopir! thus compelled to meet
My worst of foes, the foe of all mankind!

MAHOMET.

Since 'tis the will of heaven that Mahomet
And Zopir should at length unite, approach
Without a blush, and fearless tell thy tale.

ZOPIR.

I blush for thee alone, whose baneful arts
Have drawn thy country to the brink of ruin;
Who in the bosom of fair peace wouldst wage
Intestine war, loosen the sacred bonds
Of friendship, and destroy our happiness;
Beneath the veil of proffered terms thou meanest
But to betray, whilst discord stalks before thee:
Thou vile assemblage of hypocrisy
And insolence, abhorred tyrant! thus
Do the chosen ministers of heaven dispense
Its sacred blessings, and announce their God?

MAHOMET.

Wert thou not Zopir, I would answer thee
As thou deservest, in thunder, by the voice
Of that offended Being thou deridest:
Armed with the hallowed Koran I would teach thee
To tremble and obey in humble silence:
And with the subject world to kneel before me;
But I will talk to thee without disguise,
As man to man should speak, and friend to friend:
I have ambition, Zopir; where's the man
Who has it not? but never citizen,
Or chief, or priest, or king projected aught
So noble as the plan of Mahomet;
In acts or arms hath every nation shone
Superior in its turn; Arabia now
Steps forth; that generous people, long unknown
And unrespected, saw her glories sunk,
Her honors lost; but, lo! the hour is come
When she shall rise to victory and renown;
The world lies desolate from pole to pole;
India's slaves, and bleeding Persia mourns
Her slaughtered sons; whilst Egypt hangs the head
Dejected; from the walls of Constantine
Splendor is fled; the Roman Empire torn
By discord, sees its scattered members spread
On every side inglorious;—let us raise
Arabia on the ruins of mankind:
The blind and tottering universe demands
Another worship, and another God.
Crete had her Minos, Egypt her Osiris,
To Asia Zoroaster gave his laws,
And Numa was in Italy adored:
O'er savage nations where nor monarchs ruled
Nor manners softened, nor religion taught,
Hath many a sage his fruitless maxims spread;
Beneath a nobler yoke I mean to bend
The prostrate world, and change their feeble laws,
Abolish their false worship, pull down
Their powerless gods, and on my purer faith
Found universal empire: say not, Zopir,
That Mahomet betrays his country, no:
I mean but to destroy its weak supports,
And, banishing idolatry, unite it
Beneath one king, one prophet, and one God;
I shall subdue it but to make it glorious.

ZOPIR.

Is this thy purpose then, and darest thou thus
Avow it? canst thou change the hearts of men,
And make them think like thee? are war and slaughter
The harbingers of wisdom and of peace;
Can he who ravages instruct mankind?
If in the night of ignorance and error
We long have wandered, must thy dreadful torch
Enlighten us? What right hast thou to empire?

MAHOMET.

That right which firm, exalted spirits claim
O'er vulgar minds.

ZOPIR.

Thus every bold impostor
May forge new fetters, and enslave mankind:
He has a right, it seems, to cheat the world
If he can do it with an air of grandeur.

MAHOMET.

I know your people well; I know they want
A leader; my religion, true or false,
Is needful to them: what have all your gods
And all your idols done? what laurels grow
Beneath their altars? your low, grovelling sect
Debases man, unnerves his active soul,
And makes it heavy, phlegmatic, and mean;
Whilst mine exalts it, gives it strength and courage:
My law forms heroes.

ZOPIR.

Rather call them robbers:
Away; nor bring thy hateful lessons here;
Go to the school of tyrants, boast thy frauds
To lost Medina, where thou reignest supreme,
Where blinded bigots bend beneath thy power,
And thou beholdest thy equals at thy feet.

MAHOMET.

My equals! Mahomet has none; long since

I passed them all; Medina is my own,
And Mecca trembles at me; if thou holdest
Thy safety dear, receive the peace I offer.

ZOPIR.

Thou talkest of peace, but 'tis not in thy heart;
I'm not to be deceived.

MAHOMET.

I would not have thee;
The weak deceive, the powerful command:
To-morrow I shall force thee to submit;
To-day, observe, I would have been thy friend.

ZOPIR.

Can we be friends? can Mahomet and Zopir
E'er be united? say, what god shall work
A miracle like that?

MAHOMET.

I'll tell thee one,
A powerful God, one that is always heard,
By me he speaks to thee.

ZOPIR.

Who is it? name him.

MAHOMET.

Interest, thy own dear interest.

ZOPIR.

Sooner heaven
And hell shall be united; interest
May be the god of Mahomet, but mine
Is—justice: what shall join them to each other?
Where is the cement that must bind our friendship?
Is it that son I slew, or the warm blood
Of Zopir's house which thou has shed?

MAHOMET.

It is
Thy blood, thy son's—for now I will unveil
A secret to thee, known to none but me:
Thou weepest thy children dead; they both are—living.

ZOPIR.

What sayest thou? living? unexpected bliss!
My children living?

MAHOMET.

Yes; and both—my prisoners.

ZOPIR.

My children slaves to thee? impossible!

MAHOMET.

My bounty nourished them.

ZOPIR.

And couldst thou spare
A child of Zopir's?

MAHOMET.

For their father's faults
I would not punish them.

ZOPIR.

But tell me, say,
For what are they reserved?

MAHOMET.

Their life or death
Depend on me: speak but the word, and thou
Art master of their fate.

ZOPIR.

O name the price
And thou shalt have it; must I give my blood,
Or must I bear their chains, and be the slave
Of Mahomet?

MAHOMET.

I ask not either of thee:
Lend me thy aid but to subdue the world;
Surrender Mecca to me, and give up
Your temple, bid the astonished people read
My sacred Koran; be thou my vassal,
And fall before me, then will I restore
Thy son, perhaps hereafter may reward thee
With honors, and contract a closer tie
With Zopir.

ZOPIR.

Mahomet, thou seest in me
A tender father: after fifteen years
Of cruel absence, to behold my children,
To die in their embraces, were the first
And fairest blessings that my soul could wish for;
But if to thee I must betray my country,
Or sacrifice my children, know, proud tyrant,
The choice is made already—fare thee well.

MAHOMET.

Inexorable dotard! but henceforth
I will be more implacable, more cruel
Even than thyself.

SCENE VI.

mahomet, omar.

OMAR.

And so indeed thou must be,
Or all is lost: already I have bought
Their secret counsels: Mahomet, to-morrow
The truce expires, and Zopir reassumes
His power; thy life's in danger: half the senate

Are leagued against thee: those who dare not fight
May hire the dark assassin to destroy thee;
May screen their guilt beneath the mask of justice,
And call the murder legal punishment.

MAHOMET.

First they shall feel my vengeance: persecution,
Thou knowest, has ever been my best support.
Zopir must die.

OMAR.

'Tis well resolved: his fate
Will teach the rest obedience: lose no time.

MAHOMET.

Yet, spite of my resentment, I must hide
The murderous hand that deals the blow, to 'scape
Suspicion's watchful eye, and not incense
The multitude.

OMAR.

They are not worth our care.

MAHOMET.

And yet they must be pleased: I want an arm
That will strike boldly.

OMAR.

Seid is the man;
I'll answer for him.

MAHOMET.

Seid?

OMAR.

Ay: the best,
The fittest instrument to serve our purpose:
As Zopir's hostage he may find occasion
To speak with him, and soon avenge his master.

Thy other favorites are too wise, too prudent
For such a dangerous enterprise; old age
Takes off the bandage of credulity
From mortal eyes; but the young, simple heart,
The willing slave to its own fond opinions,
And void of guile, will act as we direct it:
Youth is the proper period for delusion.
Seid, thou knowest, is superstitious, bold,
And violent, but easy to be led;
Like a tame lion, to his keeper's voice
Obedient.

MAHOMET.

What! the brother of Palmira?

OMAR.

Ay; Seid, the fierce son of thy proud foe,
The incestuous rival of great Mahomet,
His master's rival.

MAHOMET.

I detest him, Omar,
Abhor his very name; my murdered son
Cries out for vengeance on him; but thou knowest
The object of my love, and whence she sprung:
Thou seest I am oppressed on every side;
I would have altars, victims, and a throne;
I would have Zopir's blood, and Seid's too:
I must consult my interest, my revenge,
My honor, and my love, that fatal passion,
Which, spite of my resentment, holds this heart
In shameful chains: I must consult religion,
All powerful motive, and necessity
That throws a veil o'er every crime: away.

End of the Second Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

seid, palmira.

PALMIRA.

O Seid, keep me not in dread suspense,
What is this secret sacrifice? what blood
Hath heaven demanded?

SEID.

The eternal power
Deigns to accept my service, calls on me
To execute its purposes divine;
To him this heart's devoted, and for him
This arm shall rise in vengeance; I am bound
To Omar and to Mahomet, have sworn
To perish in the glorious cause of heaven:
My next and dearest care shall be Palmira.

PALMIRA.

Why was not I a witness to thy oath?
Had I been with thee, I had been less wretched;
But doubts distract me: Omar talks of treason,
Of blood that soon must flow; the senate's rage,
And Zopir's dark intrigues: the flames of war
Once more are kindled, and the sword is drawn
Heaven only knows when to be sheathed again:
So says our prophet, he who cannot lie,
Cannot deceive us: O I fear for Seid,
Fear all from Zopir.

SEID.

Can he have a heart
So base and so perfidious? but this morning,
When as a hostage I appeared before him,
I thought him noble, generous, and humane;
Some power invincible in secret worked,
And won me to him; whether the respect
Due to his name, or specious form external

Concealed the blackness of his heart I know not;
Whether thy presence filled my raptured soul
With joy that drove out every painful sense,
And would not let me think of aught but thee:
Whate'er the cause, methought I was most happy
When nearest him: that he should thus seduce
My easy heart makes me detest him more;
And yet how hard it is to look on those
With eyes of hatred whom we wish to love!

PALMIRA.

By every bond hath heaven united us,
And Seid and Palmira are the same:
Were I not bound to thee, and to that faith
Which Mahomet inspires, I too had pleaded
The cause of Zopir; but religion, love,
And nature, all forbid it.

SEID.

Think no more
Of vain remorse, but listen to the voice
Of heaven, the God we serve will be propitious:
Our holy prophet who protects his children
Will bless our faithful love: for thy dear sake
I hazard all. Farewell.

SCENE II.

PALMIRA.

[Alone.]
Some dark presage
Of future misery hangs o'er me still:
That love which made my happiness, this day,
So often wished for, is a day of horror:
What is this dreadful oath, this solemn compact
Which Seid talks of? I've a thousand fears
Upon me when I think of Zopir: oft
As I invoke great Mahomet, I feel
A secret dread, and tremble as I worship:
O save me, heaven! fearful I obey,
And blind I follow: O direct my steps
Arigh, and deign to wash my tears away!

SCENE III.

mahomet, palmira.

PALMIRA.

Propitious heaven hath heard my prayers; he comes,
The prophet comes. O gracious Mahomet,
My Seid—

MAHOMET.

What of him? thou seemest disturbed;
What should Palmira fear when I am with her!

PALMIRA.

Have I not cause when Mahomet himself
Seems touched with grief?

MAHOMET.

Perhaps it is for thee:
Darest thou, imprudent maid, avow a passion
Ere I approved it: is the heart I formed
Turned rebel to its master, to my laws
Unfaithful? O ingratitude!

PALMIRA.

My lord,
Behold me at your feet, and pity me:
Didst thou not once propitious smile upon us,
And give thy sanction to our growing love?
Thou knowest the virtuous passion that unites us
Is but a chain that binds us more to thee.

MAHOMET.

The bonds that folly and imprudence knit
Are dangerous; guilt doth sometimes follow close
The steps of innocence: our hearts deceive us,
And love, with all his store of dear delights,
May cost us tears, and dip his shafts in blood.

PALMIRA.

Nor would I murmur if it flowed for Seid.

MAHOMET.

Are you indeed so fond?

PALMIRA.

E'er since the day
When good Hercides to thy sacred power
Consigned us both, unconquerable instinct,
Still growing with our years, united us
In tender friendship; 'twas the work of heaven
That guides our every action, and o'errules
The fate of mortals; so thy doctrines teach:
God cannot change, nor gracious heaven condemn
That love itself inspired: what once was right
Is always so; canst thou then blame Palmira?

MAHOMET.

I can, and must; nay, thou wilt tremble more
When I reveal the horrid secret to thee.
Attend, rash maid, and let me teach thy soul
What to avoid, and what to follow: listen
To me alone.

PALMIRA.

To thee alone Palmira
Will listen ever, the obedient slave
Of Mahomet; this heart can never lose
Its veneration for thy sacred name.

MAHOMET.

That veneration in excess may lead
To foul ingratitude.

PALMIRA.

When I forget
Thy goodness, then may Seid punish me!

MAHOMET.

Seid!

PALMIRA.

O why, my lord, that cruel frown,
And look severe?

MAHOMET.

Be not alarmed; I meant
But to explore the secrets of thy heart,
And try if thou wert worthy to be saved:
Be confident, and rest on my protection;
On your obedience will depend your fate;
If ye expect a blessing at my hands,
Be careful to deserve it, and whate'er
The will of heaven determines touching Seid,
Be thou his guide, direct him in the paths
Of duty, and religion; let him keep
His promise, and be worthy of Palmira.

PALMIRA.

O he will keep it; doubt him not, my lord,
I'll answer for his heart as for my own;
Seid adores thee, worships Mahomet
More than he loves Palmira; thou art all
To him, his friend, his father, and his king:
I'll fly, and urge him to his duty.

SCENE IV.

MAHOMET.

[Alone.

Well:
Spite of myself I must, it seems, be made
A confidant; the simple girl betrayed
Her guilty flame, and innocently plunged
The dagger in my heart: unhappy race!
Father and children, all my foes, all doomed
To make me wretched! but ye soon shall prove
That dreadful is my hatred—and my love.

SCENE V.

mahomet, omar.

OMAR.

At length the hour is come, to seize Palmira,
To conquer Mecca, and to punish Zopir;
His death alone can prop our feeble cause,
And humble these proud citizens: brave Seid
Can best avenge thee; he has free access
To Zopir: yonder gloomy passage leads
To his abode; there the rebellious chief
His idle vows and flattering incense pours
Before his fancied deities; there Seid,
Full of the law divine by thee inspired,
Shall sacrifice the traitor to the God
Of Mahomet.

MAHOMET.

He shall: that youth was born
For crimes of deepest dye: he shall be first
My useful slave, my instrument, and then
The victim of my rage; it must be so:
My safety, my resentment, and my love,
My holy faith, and the decrees of fate
Irrevocable, all require it of me:
But thinkest thou, Omar, he hath all the warmth
Of wild fanaticism?

OMAR.

I know he has,
And suits our purpose well; Palmira, too,
Will urge him on; religion, love, resentment
Will blind his headstrong youth, and hurry him
To madness.

MAHOMET.

Hast thou bound him by an oath?

OMAR.

O yes; in all the gloomy pomp of rites
Nocturnal, oaths, and altars, we have fixed

His superstitious soul, placed in his hand
The sacred sword, and fired him with the rage
Of fierce enthusiasm—but behold him.

SCENE VI.

mahomet, omar, seid.

MAHOMET.

Child
Of heaven, decreed to execute the laws
Of an offended God, now hear by me
His sacred will: thou must avenge his cause.

SEID.

O thou, to whom my soul devoted bends
In humblest adoration, king, and prophet,
Sovereign, acknowledged by the voice of heaven,
O'er prostrate nations—I am wholly thine:
But O enlighten my dark mind! O say,
How can weak man avenge his God?

MAHOMET.

Oft-times
Doth he make use of feeble hands like thine
To punish impious mortals, and assert
His power divine.

SEID.

Will he, whose perfect image
Is seen in Mahomet, thus condescend
To honor Seid?

MAHOMET.

Do as he ordains;
That is the highest honor man can boast,
Blindly to execute his great decree:
Be thankful for the choice, and strike the blow:
The angel of destruction shall assist,
The God of armies shall protect thee.

SEID.

Speak;
What tyrant must be slain? what blood must flow?

MAHOMET.

The murderer's blood whom Mahomet abhors,
Who persecutes our faith, and spurns our God,
Who slew my son; the worst of all my foes,
The cruel Zopir.

SEID.

Ha! must Zopir fall?

MAHOMET.

And dost thou pause? presumptuous youth! 'tis impious
But to deliberate: far from Mahomet
Be all who for themselves shall dare to judge
Audacious; those who reason are not oft
Prone to believe; thy part is to obey.
Have I not told thee what the will of heaven
Determines? if it be decreed that Mecca,
Spite of her crimes and base idolatry,
Shall be the promised temple, the chosen seat
Of empire, where I am appointed king,
And pontiff, knowest thou why our Mecca boasts
These honors? knowest thou holy Abram here
Was born, that here his sacred ashes rest?
He who, obedient to the voice of God,
Stifled the cries of nature, and gave up
His darling child: the same all-powerful Being
Requires of thee a sacrifice; to thee
He calls for blood; and darest thou hesitate
When God commands? hence, vile idolater,
Unworthy Mussulman, away, and seek
Another master; go, and love Palmira;
But thou despisest her, and bravest the wrath
Of angry heaven; away, forsake thy lord,
And serve his deadliest foes.

SEID.

It is the voice
Of God that speaks in Mahomet:—command,
And I obey.

MAHOMET.

Strike, then, and by the blood
Of Zopir merit life eternal.—Omar,
Attend and watch him well.

SCENE VII.

SEID.

[*Alone.*
To sacrifice
A poor, defenceless, weak old man!—no matter:
How many victims at the altar fall
As helpless! yet their blood in grateful streams
Rises to heaven: God hath appointed me;
Seid hath sworn, and Seid shall perform
His sacred promise:—O assist me now,
Illustrious spirits, you who have destroyed
The tyrants of the earth, O join your rage
To mine, O guide this trembling hand, and thou
Exterminating angel who defendest
The cause of Mahomet, inspire this heart
With all thy fierceness!—ha! what do I see?

SCENE VIII.

zopir, seid.

ZOPIR.

Seid, thou seemest disturbed; unhappy youth!
Why art thou ranked amongst my foes? my heart
Feels for thy woes, and trembles at thy danger;
Horrors on horrors crowd on every side;
My house may be a shelter from the storm.
Accept it, thou art welcome, for thy life
Is dear to Zopir.

SEID.

Gracious heaven! wilt thou
Protect me thus? will Zopir guard his foe?
What do I hear! O duty, conscience, virtue!
O Mahomet, this rives my heart.

ZOPIR.

Perhaps
Thou art surprised to find that I can pity
An enemy, and wish for Seid's welfare;
I am a man like thee; that tie alone
Demands at least a sympathetic tear
For innocence afflicted: gracious gods,
Drive from this earth those base and savage men,
Who shed with joy their fellow-creatures' blood.

SEID.

O glorious sentiments! and can there be
Such virtue in an infidel?

ZOPIR.

Thou knowest
But little of that virtue, thus to stand
Astonished at it! O mistaken youth,
In what a maze of errors art thou lost!
Bound by a tyrant's savage laws, thou thinkest
Virtue resides in Mussulmans alone;
Thy master rules thee with a rod of iron,
And shackles thy free soul in shameful bonds;
Zopir thou hatest, alas! thou knowest him not:
I pardon thee because thou art the slave
Of Mahomet; but how canst thou believe
A God who teaches hatred, and delights
In discord?

SEID.

O I never can obey him!
I know, and feel I cannot hate thee, Zopir.

ZOPIR.

Alas! the more I talk to him, the more
He gains upon me; his ingenuous look,
His youth, his candor, all conspire to charm me;
How could a follower of this vile impostor
Thus win my heart! who gave thee birth? what art thou?

SEID.

A wretched orphan; all I have on earth
Is a kind master, whom I never yet
Have disobeyed; howe'er my love for thee
May tempt me to betray him.

ZOPIR.

Knowest thou not
Thy parents then?

SEID.

His camp was the first object
My eyes beheld; his temple is my country;
I know no other; and amidst the crowd
Of yearly tributes to our holy prophet,
None e'er was treated with more tenderness
Than Seid was.

ZOPIR.

I love his gratitude:
Thy kind return for benefits received
Merits my praise:—O why did heaven employ
The hand of Mahomet in such an office?
He was thy father, and Palmira's, too;
Why dost thou sigh? why dost thou tremble thus?
Why turn thee from me? sure some dreadful thought
Hangs on thy mind.

SEID.

It must be so: the times
Are full of terror.

ZOPIR.

If thou feelest remorse
Thy heart is guiltless; murder is abroad,
Let me preserve thy life.

SEID.

O gracious heaven!
And can I have a thought of taking thine?

Palmira! O my oath! O God of vengeance!

ZOPIR.

For the last time remember I entreat thee
To follow me; away, thy fate depends
Upon this moment.

SCENE IX.

zopir, seid, omar.

OMAR.

[Entering hastily.
Traitor, Mahomet
Expects thee.

SEID.

O I know not where or what
I am; destruction, ruin and despair
On every side await me: whither now
Shall wretched Seid fly?

OMAR.

To him whom God
Hath chosen, thy injured king, and master.

SEID.

Yes:
And there abjure the dreadful oath I made.

SCENE X.

ZOPIR.

[Alone.
The desperate youth is gone—I know not why,
But my heart beats for his distress; his looks,
His pity, his remorse, his every action
Affect me deeply: I must follow him.

SCENE XI.

zopir, phanor.

PHANOR.

This letter, sir, was by an Arab given
In secret to me.

ZOPIR.

From Hercides! gods,
What do I read? will heaven in tenderest pity
At length repay me for a life of sorrows?
Hercides begs to see me—he who snatched
From this fond bosom my two helpless children;
They yet are living, so this paper tells me,
Slaves to the tyrant—Seid and Palmira
Are orphans both, and know not whence they sprang,
Perhaps my children—O delusive hope,
Why wilt thou flatter me? it cannot be;
Fain would I credit thee, thou sweet deceiver:
I fly to meet and to embrace my children;
Yes; I will see Hercides: let him come
At midnight to me, to this holy altar,
Where I so often have invoked the gods,
At last, perhaps, propitious to my vows:
O ye immortal powers, restore my children,
Give back to virtue's paths two generous hearts
Corrupted by an impious, vile usurper!
If Seid and Palmira are not mine,
If such is my hard fate, I will adopt
The noble pair, and be their father still.

End of the Third Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

mahomet, omar.

OMAR.

My lord, our secret is discovered; Seid
Has told Hercides; we are on the verge
Of ruin, yet I know he will obey.

MAHOMET.

Revealed it, sayest thou?

OMAR.

Yes: Hercides loves him
With tenderness.

MAHOMET.

Indeed! What said he to it?

OMAR.

He stood aghast and seemed to pity Zopir.

MAHOMET.

He's weak, and therefore not to be entrusted;
Fools ever will be traitors; but no matter,
Let him take heed; a method may be found
To rid us of such dangerous witnesses:
Say, Omar, have my orders been obeyed?

OMAR.

They have, my lord.

MAHOMET.

'Tis well: remember, Omar,
In one important hour or Mahomet

Or Zopir is no more; if Zopir dies,
The credulous people will adore that God
Who thus declared for me, and saved his prophet:
Be this our first great object; that once done,
Take care of Seid; art thou sure the poison
Will do its office?

OMAR.

Fear it not, my lord.

MAHOMET.

O we must work in secret, the dark shades
Of death must hide our purpose—while we shed
Old Zopir's blood, be sure you keep Palmira
In deepest ignorance; she must not know
The secret of her birth: her bliss and mine
Depend upon it; well thou knowest, my triumphs
From error's fruitful source incessant flow:
The ties of blood, and all their boasted power
Are mere delusions: what are nature's bonds?
Nothing but habit, the mere force of custom:
Palmira knows no duty but obedience
To me; I am her lord, her king, her father,
Perhaps may add the name of husband to them:
Her little heart will beat with proud ambition
To captivate her master—but the hour
Approaches that must rid me of my foe,
The hated Zopir: Seid is prepared—
And see, he comes: let us retire.

OMAR.

Observe
His wild demeanor; rage and fierce resentment
Possess his soul.

SCENE II.

mahomet, omar,retired to one side of the stage;seidat the farther end.

SEID.

This dreadful duty then
Must be fulfilled.

MAHOMET.

[To Omar.

Let us begone, in search
Of other means to make our power secure.
[Exit with Omar.

SEID.

[Alone.

I could not answer: one reproachful word
From Mahomet sufficed: I stood abashed,
But not convinced: if heaven requires it of me,
I must obey; but it will cost me dear.

SCENE III.

seid, palmira.

SEID.

Palmira, art thou here? what fatal cause
Hath led thee to this seat of horror?

PALMIRA.

Fear
And love directed me to find thee, Seid,
To ask thee what dread sacrifice thou meanest
To offer here; do heaven and Mahomet
Demand it of thee, must it be? O speak.

SEID.

Palmira, thou commandest my every thought
And every action; all depend on thee:
Direct them as thou wilt, inform my soul,
And guide my hand: be thou my guardian god,
Explain the will of heaven which yet I know not;
Why am I chosen to be its instrument
Of vengeance? are the prophet's dread commands
Irrevocable?

PALMIRA.

Seid, we must yield in silence,
Nor dare to question his decrees; he hears
Our secret sighs, nor are our sorrows hid
From Mahomet's all-seeing eye: to doubt
Is profanation of the deity.
His God is God alone; he could not else
Be thus victorious, thus invincible.

SEID.

He must be Seid's God who is Palmira's:
Yet cannot my astonished soul conceive
A being, tender, merciful, and kind,
Commanding murder; then again I think
To doubt is guilt: the priest without remorse
Destroys the victim: by the voice of heaven
I know that Zopir was condemned, I know
That Seid was predestined to support
The law divine: so Mahomet ordained,
And I obey him; fired with holy zeal
I go to slay the enemy of God;
And yet methinks another deity
Draws back my arm, and bids me spare the victim:
Religion lost her power when I beheld
The wretched Zopir; duty urged in vain
Her cruel plea, exhorting me to murder;
With joy I listened to the plaintive voice
Of soft humanity: but Mahomet—
How awful! how majestic! who can bear
His wrath? his frowns reproached my shameful weakness;
Religion is a dreadful power: alas!
Palmira, I am lost in doubts and fears,
Discordant passions tear this feeble heart:
I must be impious, must desert my faith,
Or be a murderer: Seid was not formed
For an assassin; but 'tis heaven's command,
And I have promised to avenge its cause:
The tears of grief and rage united flow,
Contending duties raise a storm within,
And thou alone, Palmira, must appease it;
Fix my uncertain heart, and give it peace:
Alas! without this dreadful sacrifice,
The tie that binds us is forever broke;
This only can secure thee.

PALMIRA.

Am I then
The price of blood, of Zopir's blood?

SEID.

So heaven
And Mahomet decree.

PALMIRA.

Love ne'er was meant
To make us cruel, barbarous, and inhuman.

SEID.

To Zopir's murderer, and to him alone,
Palmira must be given.

PALMIRA.

O hard condition!

SEID.

But 'tis the will of Mahomet and heaven.

PALMIRA.

Alas!

SEID.

Thou knowest the dreadful curse that waits
On disobedience—everlasting pain.

PALMIRA.

If thou must be the instrument of vengeance,
If at thy hands the blood which thou hast promised
Shall be required—

SEID.

What's to be done?

PALMIRA.

I tremble
To think of it—yet—

SEID.

It must be so then: thou
Hast fixed his doom; Palmira has consented.

PALMIRA.

Did I consent?

SEID.

Thou didst.

PALMIRA.

Detested thought!
What have I said?

SEID.

By thee the voice of heaven
Speaks its last dread command, and I obey:
Yon fatal altar is the chosen seat
Of Zopir's worship, there he bends the knee
To his false gods; retire, my sweet Palmira.

PALMIRA.

I cannot leave thee.

SEID.

Thou must not be witness
To such a deed of horror: these, Palmira,
Are dreadful moments: fly to yonder grove,
Thou wilt be near the prophet there: away.

PALMIRA.

Zopir must die then?

SEID.

Yes: this fatal hand
Must drag him to the earth, there murder him,
And bathe yon ruined altar in his blood.

PALMIRA.

Die by thy hand! I shudder at the thought:
But see! he comes; just heaven!
[The farther part of the stage opens, and discovers an altar.]

SCENE IV.

seid, palmira,*on one side*;zopir,*standing near the altar.*

ZOPIR.

Ye guardian gods
Of Mecca, threatened by an impious sect
Of vile impostors, now assert your power,
And let your Zopir's prayers, perhaps the last
He e'er shall make, be heard! the feeble bonds
Of our short peace are broken, and fierce war
Vindictive rages; O if ye support
The cause of this usurper—

SEID.

[Aside to Palmira.]

Hear, Palmira,
How he blasphemes!

ZOPIR.

May death be Zopir's lot!
I wish for naught on earth but to behold,
In my last hour, and to embrace my children,
To die in their loved arms, if yet they live,
If they are here, for something whispers me
That I shall see them still.

PALMIRA.

[Aside to Seid.]

His children, said he?

ZOPIR.

O I should die with pleasure at the sight:
Watch over and protect them, ye kind gods,
O let them think like me, but not like me
Be wretched!

SEID.

See! he prays to his false gods:
This is the time to end him.
[Draws his sword.]

PALMIRA.

Do not, Seid.

SEID.

To serve my God, to please and merit thee,
This sword, devoted to the cause of heaven,
Is drawn, and shall destroy its deadliest foe:
Yon dreary walk invites me to the deed,
Methinks the path is bloody, wandering ghosts
Glide through the shade, and beckon me away.

PALMIRA.

What sayest thou, Seid?

SEID.

Ministers of death,
I follow you; conduct me to the altar,
And guide my trembling hand!

PALMIRA.

It must not be;
'Tis horrible: O stop, my Seid.

SEID.

No:
The hour is come, and see! the altar shakes.

PALMIRA.

'Tis heaven's assent, and we must doubt no more.

SEID.

Means it to urge me on, or to restrain?
Our prophet will reproach me for this weakness:
Palmira!

PALMIRA.

Well!

SEID.

Address thyself to heaven:
I go to do the deed.
[He goes behind the altar where Zopir is retired.]

PALMIRA.

[Alone.]

O dreadful moment!
What do I feel within! my blood runs cold:
And yet if heaven demands the sacrifice,
Am I to judge, to ask, or to complain?
Where is the heart that knows itself, that knows
Its innocence or guilt? We must obey:
But hark! methought I heard the plaintive voice
Of death; the deed is done—alas! my Seid.

SEID.

[Returns looking wildly around.]

What voice was that? where am I? where's Palmira?
I cannot see Palmira; O she's gone,
She's lost forever.

PALMIRA.

Art thou blind to her
Who only lives for thee?

SEID.

Where are we?

PALMIRA.

Speak,
My Seid, is the dreadful sacrifice
Performed, and thy sad promise all fulfilled?

SEID.

What sayest thou?

PALMIRA.

Zopir? is he dead?

SEID.

Who? Zopir?

PALMIRA.

Good heaven, preserve his senses!—come, my Seid,
Let us be gone.

SEID.

How will these tottering limbs
Support me!—I recover—is it you,
Palmira?

PALMIRA.

Yes: what hast thou done?

SEID.

Obeded
The voice of heaven, seized with this desperate hand
His silver hairs, and dragged him to the earth:
'Twas thy command: O God! thou couldst not bid me
Commit a crime! trembling and pale a while
I stood aghast, then drew this sacred sword,
And plunged it in his bosom: what a look
Of tenderness and love the poor old man

Cast on his murderer! a scene so mournful
Ne'er did these eyes behold: my heart retains
And will forever keep the sad idea:
Would I were dead like him!

PALMIRA.

Let us repair
To Mahomet, the prophet will protect us;
Here you're in danger; follow me.

SEID.

I cannot:
Palmira, pity me.

PALMIRA.

What mournful thought
Can thus depress thee?

SEID.

O if thou hadst seen
His tender looks, when from his bleeding side
He drew the fatal weapon forth, and cried:
"Dear Seid, poor unhappy Seid!" Oh,
That voice, those looks, and Zopir at my feet
Weltering in blood, are still before my eyes:
What have we done?

PALMIRA.

I tremble for thy life:
O in the name of all the sacred ties
That bind us, fly, and save thyself.

SEID.

Away,
And leave me: why did thy ill-fated love
Command this dreadful sacrifice, Palmira?
Without thy cruel order heaven itself
Had never been obeyed.

PALMIRA.

Unkind reproach!
Couldst thou but know what thy Palmira suffers
How wouldst thou pity her!

SEID.

What dreadful object
Is that before us?
[Zopir rises up slowly from behind the altar, and leans upon it.]

PALMIRA.

'Tis the murdered Zopir;
Bloody and pale he drags his mangled limbs
Towards us.

SEID.

Wilt thou go to him?

PALMIRA.

I must;
For pity and remorse distract my soul,
And draw me to him.

ZOPIR.

[Comes forward leaning on Palmira.]

Gentle maid, support me!
[He sits down.]
Ungrateful Seid, thou hast slain me; now
Thou weapest; alas! too late.

SCENE V.

zopir, seid, palmira, phanor.

PHANOR.

O dreadful sight!
What's here?

ZOPIR.

I wish I could have seen my friend
Hercides—Phanor, art thou there?—behold
My murderer.
[*Points to Seid.*]

PHANOR.

O guilt! accursed deed!
Unhappy Seid, look upon—thy father.

SEID.

Who?

PALMIRA.

He?

SEID.

My father?

ZOPIR.

Gracious heaven!

PHANOR.

Hercides
In his last moments took me in his arms,
And weeping cried: “If there be time, O haste
Prevent a parricide, and stop the arm
Of Seid;” in my breast the tyrant lodged
The dreadful secret; now I suffer for it,
And die by Mahomet’s detested hand:
Haste, Phanor, fly, inform the hapless Zopir,
That Seid and Palmira are—his children.

SEID.

Palmira!

PALMIRA.

Thou my brother?

ZOPIR.

O ye gods!
O nature, thou hast not deceived me then,
When thou didst plead for them! unhappy Seid,
What could have urged thee to so foul a deed?

SEID.

[Kneeling.]
My gratitude, my duty, my religion,
All that mankind hold sacred, urged me on
To do the worst of actions:—give me back
That fatal weapon.

PALMIRA.

[Laying hold of Seid's arm.]
Plunge it in my breast;
I was the cause of my dear father's murder;
And incest is the price of parricide:

SEID.

Strike both: heaven hath not punishment enough
For crimes like ours.

ZOPIR.

[Embracing them.]
Let me embrace my children:
The gods have poured into my cup of sorrow
A draught of sweetest happiness: I die,
Contented, and resign me to my fate:
But you must live, my children; you, my Seid,
And you, Palmira, by the sacred name
Of nature, by thy dying father's blood,
Fast flowing from the wound which thou hast made,
Let me entreat you, live; revenge yourselves,
Avenge the injured Zopir, but preserve
Your gracious lives; the great, the important hour
Approaches, that must change the mournful scene:
The offended people, ere to-morrow's dawn,
Will rise in arms and punish the usurper;
My blood will add fresh fuel to their rage;
Let us await the issue.

SEID.

O I fly
To sacrifice the monster, to take vengeance
For a dear father's life, or lose my own.

SCENE VI.

zopir, seid, palmira, omar, *Attendants*.

OMAR.

Guards, seize the murderer; Mahomet is come
To punish guilt, and execute the laws.

ZOPIR.

What do I hear?

SEID.

Did Mahomet command thee
To punish Seid?

PALMIRA.

Execrable tyrant!
Was not the murder done by thy command?

OMAR.

'Twas not commanded.

SEID.

Well have I deserved
This just reward of my credulity.

OMAR.

Soldiers, obey.

PALMIRA.

O stop, ye shall not—

OMAR.

Madam,
If Seid's life is dear to you, submit
With patience, lest the prophet's anger fall
Like thunder on your head; if you obey,
Great Mahomet is able to protect you:
Guards, lead her to the king.

PALMIRA.

O take me, death,
From this sad scene of never-ending woe!
[Seid and Palmira are carried off.]

ZOPIR.

[To Phanor.]
They're gone, they're lost: O most unhappy father,
The wound which Seid gave is not so deep,
So painful as this parting.

PHANOR.

See, my lord,
The day appears, and the armed multitudes
Press onward to defend the cause of Zopir.

ZOPIR.

Support me, Phanor: yet thy friend may live
To punish this vile hypocrite; at least
In death may serve my dear—my cruel—children.

End of the Fourth Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT V.

SCENE I.

mahomet, omar, *Guards at a distance.*

OMAR.

Zopir's approaching death alarms the people,
We have endeavored to appease their clamors,
And disavowed all knowledge of the deed;
To some, we called it the avenging hand
Of heaven that favors thus its prophet's cause:
With others, we lament his fall, and boast
Thy awful justice that will soon avenge it.
The crowd attentive listen to thy praise,
And all the danger of the storm is o'er;
If aught remains of busy faction's rage
It is but as the tossing of the waves
After the tempest, when the vault of heaven
Is placid and serene.

MAHOMET.

Be it our care
To keep it so: where are my valiant bands?

OMAR.

All ready; Osman in the dead of night
By secret paths conducted them to Mecca.

MAHOMET.

'Tis strange that men must either be deceived
Or forced into obedience: Seid knows not
It is a father's blood that he has shed?

OMAR.

Who could inform him of it? he alone
Who knew the secret is no more; Hercides
Is gone, and Seid soon shall follow him;
For know, he has already drunk the poison;
His crime was punished ere it was committed:

Even whilst he dragged his father to the altar
Death lurked within his veins; he cannot live:
Palmira, too, is safe; she may be useful:
I've given her hopes of Seid's pardon: that
May win her to our cause; she dare not murmur,
Besides, her heart is flexible and soft,
Formed to obey, to worship Mahomet,
And make him soon the happiest of mankind:
Trembling and pale, behold! they bring her to thee.

MAHOMET.

Collect my forces, Omar, and return.

SCENE II.

mahomet, palmira, *Guards*.

PALMIRA.

O heaven! where am I? gracious God!

MAHOMET.

Palmira,
Be not alarmed; already I have fixed
Thy fate and Mecca's: know, the great event
That fills thy soul with horror is a mystery
'Twixt heaven and me that's not to be revealed:
But thou art free, and happy: think no more
Of Seid, nor lament him; leave to me
The fate of men; be thankful for thy own:
Thou knowest that Mahomet hath loved thee long,
That I have ever been a father to thee;
Perhaps a nobler fate, and fairer title
May grace thee still, if thou deservest it; therefore
Blot from thy memory the name of Seid,
And let thy soul aspire to greater blessings
Than it could dare to hope for; let thy heart
Be my last noblest victory, and join
The conquered world to own me for its master.

PALMIRA.

What joys, what blessings, or what happiness
Can I expect from thee, thou vile impostor?
Thou bloody savage! This alone was wanting,

This cruel insult to complete my woes:
Eternal Father, look upon this king,
This holy prophet, this all-powerful god
Whom I adored: thou monster, to betray
Two guiltless hearts into the crying sin
Of parricide; thou infamous seducer
Of my unguarded youth, how darest thou think,
Stained as thou art with my dear father's blood,
To gain Palmira's heart? but know, proud tyrant,
Thou art not yet invincible: the veil
Is off that hid thee, and the hand of vengeance
Upraised to scourge thy guilt: dost thou not hear
The maddening multitude already armed
In the defence of injured innocence?
From death's dark shades my murdered father comes
To lead them on: O that these feeble hands
Could tear thee piece-meal, thee and all thy train!
Would I could see them weltering in their blood;
See Mecca, and Medina, Asia, all
Combined against thee! that the credulous world
Would shake off thy vile chains, and thy religion
Become the jest and scorn of all mankind
To after ages! may that hell, whose threats
Thou hast so often denounced 'gainst all who dared
To doubt thy false divinity, now open
Her fiery gates, and be thy just reward!
These are the thanks I owe thee for thy bounties,
And these the prayers I made for Mahomet.

MAHOMET.

I see I am betrayed; but be it so:
Whoe'er thou art, learn henceforth to obey;
For know, my heart—

SCENE III.

mahomet, palmira, omar, ali, *Attendants*.

OMAR.

The secret is revealed;
Hercides told it in his dying moments:
The people all enraged have forced the prison:
They're up in arms, and bearing on their shoulders
The bloody corpse of their unhappy chief,
Lament his fate, and cry aloud for vengeance:

All is confusion: Seid at their head
Excites them to rebellion, and cries out,
“I am a parricide;” with rage and grief
He seems distracted; with one voice the crowd
Unite to curse the prophet and his God:
Even those who promised to admit our forces
Within the walls of Mecca, have conspired
With them to raise their desperate arms against thee;
And naught is heard but cries of death and vengeance.

PALMIRA.

Just heaven pursue him, and defend the cause
Of innocence!

MAHOMET.

[*To Omar.*
Well, what have we to fear?

OMAR.

Omar, my lord, with your few faithful friends,
Despising danger, are prepared to brave
The furious storm, and perish at your feet.

MAHOMET.

Alone I will defend you all; come near:
Behold, and say I act like Mahomet.

SCENE IV.

mahomet, omar, and his Party one side, seid, and the People on the other. palmirain the middle.

SEID.

Avenge my father, seize the traitor.

MAHOMET.

People,
Born to obey me, listen to your master.

SEID.

Hear not the monster; follow me:
[He comes forward a little, and then staggers.]
O heaven!
What sudden darkness spreads o'er my dim eyes?
Now strike, my friends—O I am dying.

MAHOMET.

Ha!
Then all is well.

PALMIRA.

My brother, canst thou shed
No blood but Zopir's?

SEID.

Yes: come on—I cannot;
Some god unnerves me.
[He faints.]

MAHOMET.

Hence let every foe
Of Mahomet be taught to fear and tremble:
Know, ye proud infidels, this hand alone
Hath power to crush you all, to me the God
Of nature delegates his sovereign power:
Acknowledge then his prophet, and his laws,
'Twixt Mahomet and Seid let that God
Decide the contest, which of us forever
Is guilty, now, this moment let him perish!

PALMIRA.

My brother—Seid—can this monster boast
Such power? the people stand astonished at him,
And tremble at his voice; and wilt thou yield
To Mahomet?

SEID.

[Supported by his attendants.]
Alas! the hand of heaven

Is on me, and the involuntary crime
Is too severely punished: O Palmira,
In vain was Seid virtuous: O if heaven
Chastises thus our errors, what must crimes
Like thine expect, detested Mahomet?
What cause hast thou to tremble—O I die;
Receive me, gracious heaven, and spare Palmira.
[Dics.

PALMIRA.

'Tis not, ye people, 'tis not angry heaven
Pursues my Seid. No: he's poisoned—

MAHOMET.

[Interrupting her, and addressing himself to the people.

Learn
From Seid's fate, ye unbelievers, how
To reverence Mahomet whom heaven defends;
Nature and death, ye see, have heard my voice,
And this pale corpse hath witnessed their obedience;
The sword of fate hangs o'er your heads, beware
It fall not on you: thus will I reward
All impious rebels, all vile infidels,
And punish every word and thought against me.
If I withhold my rage, and let you live,
Remember, traitors, that you owe your beings
To my indulgence; hasten to the temple.
Prostrate yourselves before the throne of grace,
And deprecate the wrath of Mahomet.
[The people retire.

PALMIRA.

O stay, and hear me, people—the barbarian
Poisoned my brother—monster, raised by crimes
To empire thus, and deified by guilt,
Thou murderer of Palmira's hapless race,
Complete thy work, and take my wretched life:
O my dear brother, let me follow thee!
[She seizes her brother's sword and stabs herself.

MAHOMET.

Seize, and prevent her—

PALMIRA.

'Tis too late; I die:
And dying hope a God more just than thine
Has yet in store a state of happiness
For injured innocence: let Mahomet
Reign here in peace: this world was made for tyrants.
[Dies.

MAHOMET.

She's gone; she's lost; the only dear reward
I wished to keep of all my crimes: in vain
I fought, and conquered; Mahomet is wretched
Without Palmira: Conscience, now I feel thee,
And feel that thou canst rive the guilty heart.
O thou eternal God, whom I have made
The instrument of ill, whom I have wronged,
Braved, and blasphemed; O thou whom yet I fear,
Behold me self-condemned, behold me wretched,
Even whilst the world adores me: vain was all
My boasted power: I have deceived mankind;
But how shall I impose on my own heart?
A murdered father, and two guiltless children
Must be avenged: come, ye unhappy victims,
And end me quickly!—Omar, we must strive
To hide this shameful weakness, save my glory,
And let me reign o'er a deluded world:
For Mahomet depends on fraud alone,
And to be worshipped never must be known.

End of the Fifth and Last Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

AMELIA

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

The Duke of Foix.

Amelia.

Vamir, Brother to the Duke of Foix.

Lisois.

Thais, Confidante of Amelia.

Emar, Friend of Vamir.

SCENE, the Palace of the Duke of Foix.

This tragedy is founded on historical truth. A duke of Brittany, in the year 1387, commanded the lord of Bavalan to assassinate the constable of Clisson: Bavalan, the day after, told the duke it was done: the duke becoming sensible of the horror of his crime, and apprehensive of the fatal consequences of it, abandoned himself to the most violent despair: Bavalan, after giving him time to repent, at length told him that he had loved him well enough to disobey his orders, etc.

The action is transported to another age and country for particular reasons.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT I.

SCENE I.

amelia, lisois.

LISOIS.

Permit a soldier, in this seat of war,
To steal a moment from the battle's rage,
And greet the fair Amelia; to the king
Thy noble heart is bound, I know, by ties
Of dearest friendship; long and faithfully
Hath Lisois served the valiant duke of Foix
Who holds thee here a prisoner: well I know
The violence of his passion for Amelia,
Foresee the dreadful consequence, and come,
With all the warmth of friendship, to advise
And to consult, to lay my heart before thee
Perhaps 'tis not unworthy of thy notice.

AMELIA.

The seal of truth is ever on thy lips,
I know thy firm integrity; whate'er
Thou sayest, I shall believe.

LISOIS.

Know then, though long
I've served the duke with most unwearied zeal,
Through years of peril, and unnumbered toils,
Yet could I ne'er approve the fatal league
That bound him to the Moor, and took from France
The noblest of her princes; in these days
Of public discord, I have ranged myself
Beneath no banners but what honor raised,
And followed but the dictates of my heart:
Not that, the slave of prejudice, my soul
Is blind to all the errors of a friend;
With grief I see the duke's impatient warmth,
The impetuous ardor of his boiling youth,
I cannot shut my eyes against his follies:
Ofttimes the torrent which I strive to stop
Mocks my weak power, and throws down all before it;

But he has virtues that will recompense
His worst of faults: if we must follow none
But perfect princes, whose unbiassed hearts
Are free from every vice, and every weakness,
Whom shall we serve? I love the duke; and yet
'Tis with regret I draw the hostile sword
'Gainst France: I wish he could be reconciled.

AMELIA.

If that could e'er be done, thy influence best
Might reunite them: if he loves his glory,
Sure this misguided prince will listen to thee.
How fatal has his error been!

LISOIS.

In vain
I've tried to bend his haughty spirit; oft
Have I with harsh unwelcome truths attacked him,
And sorely pierced his heart: but thou alone
Canst bring him to his duty, and his king:
That was my errand here: there was a time
When on the fair Amelia I had placed
My hopes of bliss; without abasement then
I thought you might have listened to my vows;
But heaven reserved thee for a nobler fate.
Whilst I was absent, by the cruel Moors
Thou wert enslaved; the happy conqueror came,
The gallant Foix, and saved thee from their rage;
His was the glory, his be the reward:
His claims are strong, his youth, his rank, and power,
His fame, and services, all plead for him;
Amelia's justice and her gratitude
Must bind her to him: I have no pretence,
And therefore I am silent; but if merit
Could make thee mine, I would dispute the prize
Even with the sons of kings, nor yield Amelia
To any but to him: he is my master,
My leader, and my friend; he loves me well:
I am not a half proud, half virtuous lover,
But what I still would litigate with power,
I give to friendship; nay, I can do more,
I can subdue the weakness of my heart,
And plead a rival's cause; point out the path
Of glory to thee, show thee what is due
To that illustrious hero who preserved thee,
By whom thou livest: I can behold unmoved,

And with unenvying eye, thy charms bestowed
On him who best deserves them: take my heart
Between you, and accept my honest service,
This arm shall fight for both; I sacrifice
My passions to your interest: friendship bids me,
And I obey; my country too commands:
Remember, if the prince is yours, he soon
Will be the king's.

AMELIA.

Thy virtues, noble youth,
Astonish me; thou givest the admiring world
A rare example; canst thou be sincere?
And sure thou art so, thus to conquer love,
And give up all to friendship! all who know
Must wonder at thee: thou hast served thy master.
And canst not be an enemy to mine:
A heart so generous sure must think with me:
'Tis not in souls like thine to hate their king.
Shall I then ask one favor at thy hands?

LISOIS.

Amelia's orders shall be ever sacred:
Command, and I obey.

AMELIA.

Thy generous counsel
Hath urged me to accept a noble rank
I looked not for, and offered by a prince:
The choice, I own, does honor to Amelia,
When I reflect, that, long before he told
His love, he saved my liberty and life;
Foe to his sovereign, though the rebel Moor
Hath drawn him from his duty and allegiance,
Yet he has poured so many favors on me,
I cannot bear to hurt him, though, in spite
Of all his goodness, and my gratitude,
I must refuse him: his unhappy passion
Afflicts me; 'tis distressful to my heart,
For all his kindness thus to make him wretched.
Fain would I spare myself the ungrateful task
Of saying that I must not hear his vows:
It is not for my feeble voice to tell
A prince his duty; 'twere a dangerous power,
And I am far from wishing to enjoy it;

Who can direct him better than thyself?
Alas! my lord, 'tis not a time for love;
The royal army at our gates, and naught
But war and slaughter all around us: blood
On every side! himself against my master,
Against his brother, now in arms; all these
Are powerful reasons: O my lord, in you
Is all my hope; forgive me; O complete
The generous work, restore me to my king;
Let him do that, 'tis all I ask; but add
This effort more to what thou'st done already:
Thou hast the strongest influence o'er his heart,
A firm and manly soul, a friend like thee,
Respected and beloved, will make the voice
Of duty heard, his counsels will be laws.

LISOIS.

Alas! those counsels will have little weight
Against the passions that possess his soul;
His fiery temper gives me too much cause
To fear him: he's inclined to jealousy,
And if he hears I had a thought of thee,
'Twill drive his soul to madness, and perhaps
Undo us all: he must be soothed by art;
Leave him to me, and try to reconcile
Your jarring interests; weigh his offers well.
Henceforth I'll think no more of love and thee,
But get me to the field, the soldier's duty
Shall there engross me: if thou lovest thy country,
If France be dear to thee, restore her hero,
And she will bless thee for the deed: farewell.

SCENE II.

amelia, thais.

AMELIA.

Restore him, said he? what! at the dear price
Of all my happiness! it cannot be;
'Twere infamous and base, the worst of crimes.

THAIS.

But wherefore is the prince thus hateful to you?
Why in these days of discord, war, and tumult,

Whilst faction reigns, and of our royal race
Brother 'gainst brother arms, and every hour
Brings new afflictions, wherefore should Amelia,
Whose gentler stars for other purposes
Had formed her soul, to love and to be loved,
Why should Amelia, with such sentiments
Of scorn and hatred, meet a hero's vows
Who had avenged her cause? The prince, thou knowest,
Amongst his ancestors can boast the blood
Of our first kings, and is himself a lord
Of rich domains, and wide-extended power.
He loves you, offers you his hand: can rank
And title, objects that are envied still
By all mankind, pursued with eagerness,
And gained with rapture, can these only fill
Thy heart with sorrow, and thy eyes with tears?

AMELIA.

Because he saved me once, has he a right
Now to oppress me? Must Amelia fall
A victim to his fatal aid? I know
I'm much indebted to him, would I were not!

THAIS.

Nay, that's ungrateful.

AMELIA.

Thou shalt know my heart,
My miseries, my duty, and my fate:
I will no longer keep the secret from thee,
'Twere cruel to distrust thee; when thou knowest
My story, thou mayst justify thy friend.
I must not listen to the prince's vows,
For know, my heart is given to his brother.

THAIS.

Ha! to the noble Vamir!

AMELIA.

Yes, my friend:
With mutual oaths we sealed our mutual faith,
And at Leucate I expected him,

There to confirm it at the holy altar,
When by the cruel Moors that rushed upon us
I was surprised, and made a captive; then
The prince, to these unconquered savages
In firm alliance bound, appeared, and saved me;
There's my distress: the life another saved
Must be devoted to the faithful Vamir.

THAIS.

But why then thus conceal thy passion? why
Nourish a hopeless flame thou shouldst extinguish?
He would respect this sacred tie, and check
His fruitless passion.

AMELIA.

O I must not tell him:
The brothers, to complete my sorrows, armed
Against each other, have taken different parties
In this destructive war; the faithful Vamir
Fights for his king. Thou knowest the violence
Of his proud rival: all I can oppose
To his fierce rage is melancholy silence;
Even yet he knows not that in happier times
The gallant Vamir had engaged my heart:
To tell it him would fire his jealous soul,
And only make Amelia more unhappy.
'Tis time to quit this fatal place, the king
With pleasure will receive me: let us hence.
The prisoners, Thais, from these walls even now
Are breaking forth, and meditate their flight:
They will conduct us: I defy all danger,
Will hazard all for freedom and repose.

THAIS.

Behold the duke.

AMELIA.

I cannot speak to him,
The starting tear would soon betray me: what
Would I not give forever to avoid him!

SCENE III.

duke of foix, lisois, thais.

DUKE.

[To Thais.

Avoid me! fly me! Thais, stay: thou knowest
My sorrows, knowest I love her to distraction;
My life depends on her: but let her not
Abuse her power, and drive me to despair:
I hate her cold respect, her poor return
Of gratitude to all my warmth of passion:
Delay is cruel, 'tis the worst refusal;
'Tis an affront my heart will ne'er forgive:
In vain she boasts to me her loyal zeal,
Her fond attachment to her royal master,
'Tis time that all should yield to love and me:
Here let her find her country and her king;
To me she owes her honor, and her life;
And I owe all to her, I owe my love:
United as we are by every claim,
We must not part, the altar is prepared,
She shall be mine; go, tell her all is ready.

SCENE IV.

the duke, lisois.

LISOIS.

My lord, remember that our kingdom's safety
Depends on this decisive day.

DUKE.

I know it
And am resolved to conquer or to die
Amelia's husband.

LISOIS.

But the foe advances,
And soon will be upon us.

DUKE.

Let him come,
I mean to fight him; thinkest thou I'm a coward?
Thinkest thou the tyrant love shall e'er extinguish
My noble thirst of glory? though she hates,
She shall admire me still: she boasts indeed
Her sovereign empire o'er my captive heart,
But shall not blast my virtue and my fame.
No: thy reproaches are unjust; my friend
Was too severe; condemn me not unjustly,
Love ne'er unnerves the gallant sons of France:
Even from the bosom of success and joy,
Fearless they fly to arms, and rush on death:
And I too will die worthy of Amelia.

LISOIS.

Say rather, worthy of thyself: I think
To-day of nothing but the public welfare;
I talk of battles, and thou speakest of love.
My lord, I've seen the army of the foe:
Vamir, so fame reports, is armed against us:
From us, I know, he hath long since withdrawn
His valiant troops. I know him not, but hear
He's of a noble nature: if his soul,
Inspired by duty, and by glory warmed,
Still feels the tender tie that linked your hearts
In earlier years, he may assist us now,
And be the means of making wished-for peace.
My cares—

DUKE.

Away: I would not be obliged
Thus to a brother: shall I sue for peace,
And ask forgiveness? yet it hurts my soul
To think that Vamir is my foe: I still
Remember our past friendship, and the love
I bore him once; but since he will oppose me,
Since he's no longer ours, why let him go,
And serve his king.

LISOIS.

Thy fiery temper braves
Too far the patience of an easy monarch.

DUKE.

A monarch! the mere phantom of a king,
Unworthy of his race, a royal slave,
In golden chains, and seated on a throne
Subjected to a petty officer:
I'm not afraid of Pepin, their arch-tyrant;
I hate a subject that would frighten me,
And I despise a king who can't command:
If he permits a rebel to usurp
The sovereign power, I'll still support my own:
This heart's too proud to bend beneath the laws
Of these new upstarts who oppress their king:
Clovis, my royal ancestor, ne'er taught
His sons to cringe beneath a haughty master.
At least these faithful Arabs will avenge me;
If I must feel a tyrant, let him be
A stranger.

LISOIS.

You detest these governors,
But they have saved our empire, which your friends,
The Arabs, but for them had overthrown:
I tremble at this new alliance: Spain
Before you stands a terrible example:
These savage plunderers, these new tyrants dig
Our graves with our own hands. 'Twere better far
To yield with prudence.

DUKE.

What, fall down and sue
For mercy!

LISOIS.

Your true interest long forgotten—

DUKE.

Revenge is my first interest.

LISOIS.

Love and anger
Too long have ruled the bosom of my friend.

DUKE.

I know they have, but cannot conquer nature.

LISOIS.

You may, you ought; nay, I'll not flatter you,
But even though I condemn, I'll follow thee;
'Tis a friend's duty to point out the faults
Of him he loves; to counsel, to exhort,
To save him from the dangerous precipice:
This I have done for thee, but thou wilt fall,
And I must perish with thee.

DUKE.

O my friend,
What hast thou said?

LISOIS.

But what I ought to say:
And would to heaven that thou hadst listened to me!
What dost thou purpose?

DUKE.

When my ardent hopes
Shall be fulfilled, when the ungrateful maid
Shall give sweet peace to my distracted mind,
Then will I hear the counsels of my friend.
What can I purpose now, or what design,
Till I have seen the tyrant who must guide
My future fate? let her determine for me,
Let her save me, and I will save my country.

End of the First Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

THE DUKE OF FOIX.

[Alone.

She cannot sure again refuse to see me,
And urge me to despair! she dare not do it:
Fool that I am to give her thus the power;
How weak is my proud heart to yield itself
A voluntary slave! go, throw thyself,
Mean as thou art, beneath the tyrant's feet;
Go, make thy life dependent on a word,
A look, a smile, from proud Amelia; pass
From love to fury, and from tears to rage;
'Tis the last time I e'er will speak to her.
I go—

SCENE II.

the duke, amelia and thais *advancing from the upper end of the stage.*

AMELIA.

There's hope, my Thais; yet I tremble.
Would Vamir hazard this bold enterprise?
'Tis full of danger; ha! what do I see?
[Advancing towards the Duke.

DUKE.

Amelia, what hath this way led thy steps
I know not, but thy eyes too plainly tell me
That I was not the object of their search:
What! still turn from me, still insult the heart
That dotes upon thee! cruel tyrant, thus
To blast the laurels planted on my brow:
O if Amelia's hand had placed them there
They might have flourished, but she has forgot
Her plighted faith, and broke her flattering promise.

AMELIA.

Thou never hadst my faith, I never gave

Thee promise, gratitude is all I owe thee.

DUKE.

Did I not offer thee my hand?

AMELIA.

Thou didst:
It was an honor which I could not merit,
And which I never sought, but I received it
With due respect; you thought, no doubt, a rank
So glorious must have dazzled poor Amelia.
At length, my lord, 'tis time to undeceive you;
I do it with regret, because I know
It will offend you, but I must be plain:
In short, my lord, I love my king too well
To think of wedding with his foe: thy blood,
I know, is noble; mine is spotless yet,
Nor will be stained with foul disloyalty,
And I inherit from my ancestors
The fixed abhorrence of my country's foes:
Nor will I e'er acknowledge for a master
The friend of tyrants, be he e'er so great:
Such is my firm resolve; perhaps, my lord,
It may seem harsh, but you obliged me to it.

DUKE.

This is a language, madam, which I own
I looked not for; I never could have thought
That angry heaven, to make me doubly wretched,
Would choose Amelia for its instrument
Of vengeance: you have studied long in secret
The arts of black ingratitude, of scorn
And insult, and now open all your heart.
I was a stranger to this patriot zeal,
This most heroic ardor for thy country,
This fetch of policy; but tell me, madam,
Whom have you here but this insulted lover,
The injured Foix, to succor and support you?
Thou hast reproached me with my new alliance,
Those faithful friends on whom I here rely
For all my safety, and for all my power:
Without their aid thou hadst been still a captive;
To them you owed your liberty and life,
And am I thus rewarded?

AMELIA.

You prolonged
My wretched days; but are they therefore yours,
And may I not dispose them as I please?
Did you preserve me but to make me wretched,
To be a tyrant o'er the life you saved?

DUKE.

Ungrateful woman, thou deservest the name
Of tyrant most, for now I read thy soul,
See through the thin disguise, behold too plainly
My own dishonor, and thy treacherous falsehood:
I know thou lovest another, but whoe'er
He be that thus hath robbed me of thy heart,
Fear thou my love, and tremble at my rage;
For, if he be on earth, I'll find the traitor,
And tear him from thee: if amidst its horrors
My soul could feel one momentary joy,
'Twould be to make thee wretched.

AMELIA.

No: my lord,
Indeed it would not; reason will forbid it:
Thy soul's too noble to oppress with woe
A life which thou hadst saved; but if thy heart
Should ever stoop so low, thy virtues still,
Thy goodness in my memory shall live,
And only thy unkindness be forgotten.
I pity, and forgive thee; thou wilt blush
Hereafter at the thought of injuring me;
Spite of thy threats, my soul is yet unmoved,
Nor dreads thy anger, nor defies thy power.

DUKE.

Forgive the transports of a mind disturbed,
The rage of love embittered by despair;
Lisois, I find, holds secret conference with you,
Abets you falsehood, and defends your conduct;
Leans to the royal party, and combines
In vain with you to make a convert of me:
It seems I'm to be governed by your will,
And not my own: your converse is the same,
The same your purpose; but why use these arms
Against me? to persuade my easy heart,

Why must Amelia seek a stranger's aid?
A word will win me, if 'tis spoke by love.

AMELIA.

My heart, I own, hath opened to thy friend
Its hopes and fears, but he hath done much more
Than he had promised: pity then my tears,
Pity my sorrows, be thyself again;
Subdue a passion which Amelia must not,
Cannot return: accept my gratitude,
'Tis all I have to give thee.

DUKE.

Lisois, then,
And he alone, enjoys thy confidence,
Thy friendship, more perhaps; I see it now.

AMELIA.

You may perhaps hereafter, but at present
You have no right, sir, to control my thoughts,
My actions, or my words; no right to blame me,
Or to complain: I sought thy friend's assistance,
And he has given it me; I wish, my lord,
That you would learn to act and think like him.

SCENE III.

THE DUKE.

[*Alone.*
'Tis well: this base, ungrateful, perjured woman,
Without a blush, confesses all her falsehood;
The mystery is unfolded now: one friend,
One only friend, I had, and he destroys me.
Friendship! vain phantom, unsubstantial shade,
So often sought for, and so seldom found,
Thou ever hadst some wholesome draught to pour
Into my cup of sorrow; but at last
Thou, too, like love, hast cruelly deceived me!
For the reward of all my errors past
I have but this, that no allurements now,
No flattering pleasures, henceforth shall betray me;
For from this hour I will be fond—of nothing.
But lo! the traitor comes with cruel hand

To tear my wounds, and make them bleed afresh.

SCENE IV.

the duke, lisois.

LISOIS.

My lord, I come obedient to thy orders:
But why that frown, those eyes of discontent
That scowl upon me? has thy soul, long time
The sport of passion, weighed in reason's scale
Thy interest, and thy happiness?

DUKE.

It has.

LISOIS.

And what was the result?

DUKE.

My eyes are opened
To falsehood and deceit; I've learned to find
A rival and a traitor in my friend.

LISOIS.

How's that!

DUKE.

It is enough.

LISOIS.

Too much, my lord:
Who is the traitor?

DUKE.

Canst thou ask me who?
Who but thyself was privy to the wrongs
I have received, who else must answer for them?
I know, Amelia hath conversed with thee

Here, in the palace; when I mentioned thee
She trembled: this affected silence speaks
Your guilt more plainly, and I know not which
Most to abhor, Amelia, or—my friend.

LISOIS.

Canst thou yet listen to that friend?

DUKE.

I can.

LISOIS.

Thinkest thou I still am anxious for my fame?
Dost thou esteem, and canst thou yet believe me?

DUKE.

I will: for till this hour I thought thee virtuous,
And held thee for my friend.

LISOIS.

Those noble titles
Have hitherto conducted me through life;
But wherefore justify myself to thee?
Thou’st not deserved it: know, Amelia’s charms
Long since had touched my heart, before thy hand
Had set her free, and saved her precious life,
But by the ties of gratitude she’s thine;
Thou hast deserved her by thy services:
For me, I’m more the soldier than the soft
And tender lover; I despise the art
Of base seduction, fit for courts alone,
And flattery’s smooth perfidiousness; my soul
Is made of firmer stuff: I talked indeed
Of marriage to her; and that sacred tie,
Knit by esteem and fair equality
Of fortune and condition, might have made her
More happy far than rank and titles could,
That stand upon a dangerous precipice:
But yesternight, you know, I visited
Your ramparts, when your jealous soul alarmed
Discovered all its passion; I observed it:
To-day I saw the object of your grief,

Your loved Amelia, and beheld her charms
With eyes of cold indifference: o'er myself
I gained an easy conquest: I did more,
Pleaded for thee, for an ungrateful friend,
And urged a passion which I can't approve;
Recalled the memory of thy bounties past,
Thy glory and thy rank, acknowledged faults
I knew you had, and numbered all your virtues;
All this against myself I did for thee;
For my friend's happiness gave up my own:
And if the sacrifice is still imperfect,
Show me the rival that still dares to oppose thee,
And I will stake my life to do thee justice.

DUKE.

My friend, thou soarest above me; I am fallen,
Abashed, confounded: who could see Amelia
And not adore her? but to conquer thus
Thy passion! O thou never couldst have loved her.

LISOIS.

I did: but love, like other passions, acts
With different force on different minds.

DUKE.

I love
Too well, my friend, and cannot imitate
The virtue I admire: my foolish heart—

LISOIS.

I ask not for thy praises, but thy love;
And if thou thinkest that I have merited
Aught at thy hands, O do but serve thyself,
Thy happiness is Lisois' best reward.
Thou seest with what determined hate thy brother
Pursues the Moor, I dread the consequence:
The people groan beneath this foreign yoke,
Soon, I foresee, the empire will unite
Their scattered powers, new enemies still rise
Against us, the pure blood of Clovis still
Is worshipped by the crowd, and soon or late
The branches of this sacred tree, that long
Have bent beneath the storm, again shall rise,
Spring with fresh verdure, and overshadow the land.

Placed by thy rank and fortunes near the throne,
Long time thou wert thy king and country's friend;
But in the days of public discord, fate
Attached thee to another cause; perhaps
New interests now may call for new connections,
And what united may dissolve the tie;
The power of these despotic governors
May be restrained, and weakened by thy hand—

DUKE.

I wish it were so; thinkest thou then Amelia
Would listen to me? if I should embrace
The royal party, might she still be mine?

LISOIS.

I am a stranger to Amelia's heart;
But what are her designs, her views to thee?
Must love alone decide the nation's fate?
In Touraine's field, when gallant Clovis fought,
And, o'er the haughty conquerors of Rome
Victorious, stopped the bloody Arian's hand,
That dealt destruction round us, did he save
His country, thinkest thou, but to please a mistress?
This arm against a rival is prepared
To serve my friend, but I would serve him more,
Would cure him of this fond, destructive passion;
This love deceives us, we're too fearful of him;
We wound ourselves, and lay the blame on him;
The coward's tyrant, and the hero's slave;
He may be conquered; Lisois has subdued him,
And shall he triumph o'er the blood of kings
Who never yet submitted to a foe?
Awake, my friend, and be our great example
In every virtue.

DUKE.

Yes, I will do all,
All for Amelia; she must yield at last.
Her laws, her king, her master, shall be mine:
I have no will but her, and in her eyes
Will read my duty, and my fate: possessed
Of the dear treasure, will be reconciled
To every foe. O how my heart enjoys
The pleasing hope! I had no cause to fear,
I have no rival; if thou art not loved,

I can have none: who in this court would dare
To cast one look towards Amelia? now
Her vain pretexts are vanished; reason, glory,
My interest, and my birth, the sacred right
Of my great ancestors, all, all unite
To bind the nuptial chain, and make me happy.
Henceforth I am the king's, and will support him
So virtue bids, and beauty has commanded.
On this blest day will I confirm the oaths
I made to love: away, my friend, I leave
My interest and my fortunes to thy care.

LISOIS.

Permit me, then, my lord, to seek the king:
I could have wished that this important change
Were to the hero, not the lover due;
But be it as it may, the effect's too glorious
To blame the cause: I triumph in thy weakness,
And bless for once the lucky power of love.

SCENE V.

the duke, lisois, an officer.

OFFICER.

My lord, the foe advances; we expect
A fierce assault, and wait your orders; time
Is precious.

DUKE.

Cruel fate! to counteract
My noble purpose! then farewell to peace,
And welcome, victory! I'll deserve Amelia:
I heed not these rash fools: of all the foes
I have to conquer, there's but one to fear,
And that's—Amelia.

End of the Second Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

duke of foix, lisois.

DUKE.

The day is ours; thanks to thy friendly hand
That guided my rash youth; thy noble soul,
In peace or war, is my best counsellor.

LISOIS.

The glorious fire that animates thy heart
Must always conquer, when 'tis checked by prudence,
As here it was: preserve this happy virtue,
'Twill make thee happy, and 'twill make thee great;
The coward is restless, but the hero calm.

DUKE.

How is the lover? can he ever taste
Of sweet tranquillity? But say, my friend,
This unknown chief, that mounted on our ramparts,
And with his single arm so long suspended
The doubtful victory: I grow jealous of him:
Where is he? what became of him?

LISOIS.

Surrounded
By slaughtered friends, alone long time he stood,
And braved opposing legions; but what most
Surprised us, when at length he had escaped
From every danger, wondrous to relate!
He yielded up himself a prisoner to us;
Conceals his rank and name, accuses heaven,
And begs for instant death. One friend alone
Attends him, and partakes his sorrows.

DUKE.

Lisois,
Who can this bold, this fearless soldier be?

He wore his beaver down: some secret charm
O'erpowered my trembling soul when I opposed him.
Whether this fatal passion that enslaves me
Hath spread its weakness o'er each faculty,
And left the soft impression on my soul,
Or that my bleeding country's voice alarmed
This conscious heart, and silently reproached me.

LISOIS.

As for the weakness of thy soul, advice
I know were vain, but sure thy country's voice
May still be heard; now is the time to show
The greatness of thy soul, and give us peace.
Fortune, that smiled on us to-day, perhaps
May frown to-morrow, and thy pride be forced
To sue for pardon to a haughty foe.
Since thou art happy, and Amelia's thine,
Now rest thy glory on the common cause,
This brave unknown may forward our designs;
Let us improve the lucky moment.

DUKE.

Yes,
My friend, I will do all to serve Amelia,
Her cause is mine: I must prepare the minds
Of my brave followers for the change; to thee,
And to thy happy counsels, every bliss,
Glory and peace, and hymeneal joys,
To thee I owe, to friendship and to love.

SCENE II.

lisois, vamir and emarat *the farther end of the stage.*

LISOIS.

It is the noble prisoner, and his friend,
If I mistake not: this way they advance;
He seems o'erwhelmed with deep despair.

VAMIR.

O heaven!
Where am I? whither dost thou lead me?

LISOIS.

Stranger,
Whoe'er thou art, be comforted; thy fate
Hath thrown thee into noble hands: thou'lt find
A generous master, who can see desert
Even in a foe: may I not ask thy name?

VAMIR.

I am a poor abandoned wretch, the sport
Of fortune, one whose least affliction is
To be a captive, and from every eye
Would wish to hide the story of my fate:
It is enough to be supremely wretched,
Without this cruel witness of my woe:
Too soon my name and sorrows will be known.

LISOIS.

Respect is due to misery like thine;
I will not urge thee further, but retire:
Perhaps even here thy soul may find relief
In generous treatment, and a milder fate.

SCENE III.

vamir, emar.

VAMIR.

A milder fate! I must not hope for it:
O I have lived too long.

EMAR.

Thank heaven, my lord,
That we are fallen amongst such noble foes,
And shall not groan beneath a stranger's power.

VAMIR.

No yoke sometimes so galling as a brother's.

EMAR.

But you were bred together, and the ties

Of tenderest friendship linked your hearts.

VAMIR.

They did:
But O the friendship of our early years
Soon takes its flight: he loved me once, and still
This heart retains a brother's kindness for him:
I cannot hate him, though he conquered me.

EMAR.

He knows not yet how great a captive comes
To grace his triumph; knows not that a brother
Is in his power, whom vengeance had inspired.

VAMIR.

No: Emar, never did a thought of vengeance
Enter my heart; a different passion swayed
The soul of Vamir: can it be, just heaven!
Or is it but the lying voice of fame,
That my Amelia's false, that she has broke
Her solemn vows? for whom, too? added guilt
To her, and double sorrow to thy friend!
The sacred laws of nature, and the ties
Of tender love, all broken, all betrayed!
Unjust, inhuman brother!

EMAR.

Knows he then
How dear a treasure he hath robbed thee of
In thy Amelia? did not Vamir say
That he was still a stranger to thy love?

VAMIR.

But she is not: she knows what solemn ties,
What strict engagements, bound us to each other:
That at the altar, ere we had confirmed
Our mutual vows, the barbarous Moor rushed in,
And tore her from me; the base ravishers
Escaped my vengeance, and my happier brother
Enjoys the precious treasure Vamir lost
Ungrateful woman! came I here, my friend,
But to reproach her? what will it avail?

She will not listen to my fond complaint:
But to my royal master I have lived
A faithful servant, and to false Amelia,
And faithful will I die: when she shall know
How well I loved her, she may shed a tear,
And in a brother's arms lament my fate.

EMAR.

Repress thy sorrows; see, the duke approaches.

VAMIR.

Be still, my heart.

SCENE IV.

duke of foix, vamir, emar.

DUKE.

This mystery alarms me:
But I must see this noble captive: ha!
He turns aside with horror.

VAMIR.

Hateful life!
Must I support thee still? must I again
Behold the faithless wretch?

DUKE.

What do I hear?

VAMIR.

Dost thou not know me?

DUKE.

Ha! my brother! Vamir!

VAMIR.

Alas! too sure I am that wretched brother,
Thy vanquished foe, a poor abandoned captive.

DUKE.

Thou art my brother still, and I forgive thee;
But 'tis most strange, and most unnatural:
Could the king find no instrument but thee
To execute his vengeance on my head?
What had I done to Vamir?

VAMIR.

Made his life
Unhappy: would that thou hadst taken it from me!

DUKE.

Dreadful effects of civil strife!

VAMIR.

More dreadful
Are the deep wounds that pierce the heart of Vamir.

DUKE.

Against another foe I might have shown
A soldier's courage, but I pity thee.

VAMIR.

Pity thyself, the wretch who has betrayed
His country, and deceived the king that loved him;
A traitor, and unworthy of thy race.

DUKE.

Brand me not, Vamir, with opprobrious name
Of traitor, lest I should forget myself,
And spurn thee for the insult: no, my brother,
I'm not that base, ungrateful wretch thou thinkest me;
Thou seest me ready to restore fair peace,
And heal the wounds of my divided country.

VAMIR.

Thou heal our wounds! thou—

DUKE.

Yes: the day that seemed
So fatal to thy peace shall quench the flames
Of public discord, and unite us all.

VAMIR.

O 'tis a day of sorrow.

DUKE.

Of delight
And joy, the day that crowns my wishes—

VAMIR.

How!

DUKE.

Yes, Vamir, all is changed, and I am happy.

VAMIR.

It may be so: I heard indeed thy heart
These three months past has been the slave of love;
And if report say true, most violent
And fierce thy passion.

DUKE.

Thou hast heard aright;
I love her even to madness: thou art come
In happy hour to make our bliss complete.
Yes: I will lay my friends, my foes, my every claim,
Revenge and glory, all beneath her feet.
Go, tell her two unhappy brothers, long
[*To his attendants.*
By adverse fate to different interests bound,
Wait but a look from her to be united.
[*To Vamir.*
Blame not my passion, Vamir, when thou seest
The lovely object, soon thou wilt approve it.

VAMIR.

[Aside.

And does she love thee? cruel thought!

DUKE.

At least
She ought: one obstacle alone remained,
And that shall be removed.

VAMIR.

[Aside.

Inhuman brother!
Knowest thou what led me to this fatal place,
And meanest thou to insult me?

DUKE.

Let us bury
In deep oblivion every thought of discord;
Behold, the fair Amelia comes.

SCENE V.

duke of foix, vamir, amelia.

AMELIA.

O heaven!
What do I see? I die.

DUKE.

Amelia, listen,
And mark how happiness ariseth oft
From our misfortunes; this day I have conquered,
And this day found a brother; thou, my Vamir,
Shalt be a witness to the power of love.
What nor Amelia's prayers, nor her reproaches,
My generous friend, my country, and my king,
Long time in vain solicited, her charms
At length have won: to them I yield submissive.
Amelia, whilst I was thy sovereign's foe,
Thou wouldst not listen to my vows: henceforth
I have no laws, no friends, no king, but thine:

So love commands, and love shall be obeyed.
Vamir, thou'rt free: be thou the messenger
Of welcome tidings to the court: away,
And tell the king I hasten to present
His fair ally, the conqueror who subdued
A rebel's heart, and of a dangerous foe
Hath made a faithful subject; changed by her,
And her alone.

VAMIR.

[*Aside.*

'Tis as I wished: my fate
Will soon be known: speak, and pronounce our doom.

DUKE.

Amelia, speak, art thou not satisfied
With my submission? Is it not enough
To see a conqueror thus humbly kneel
Before thee? Can my life alone content
Thy cruel heart? take it, ungrateful woman!
I wished but to preserve it for thy sake;
For thee alone I lived, for thee will die.

AMELIA.

I am astonished, and my faltering voice
Will scarce give utterance to my words—my lord,
If thy great soul laments thy country's fate,
And feels for her distress, thy generous care
Must spring from nobler motives than the wish
To serve Amelia; thou hast heard the voice
Of powerful nature: what hath love to do
Where only honor hath a right to dictate?

DUKE.

'Tis thy own work, Amelia, all thy own:
O'er every interest, every passion, love
Superior reigns; reproach me, cover me
With shame, no matter: I must force thy heart;
Come to the altar.

VAMIR.

Darest thou—

AMELIA.

No, my lord;
I'd sooner die: my life's at thy command,
But not my heart: there is a fatal bar
Between us, and I never can be thine.

DUKE.

'Tis well, ungrateful—dost thou hear her, Vamir?
But I'll be calm: I'll not complain of thee,
I see thee now: the soft persuasive arts
That call our passions forth, the flattering hope
That's given but to betray, the subtle poison
Spread o'er our hearts, deceitful all and vain,
No longer shall seduce my easy faith,
The eye of reason hath detected them,
And the same art that bound hath set me free:
I will not blush before thee, Vamir: no,
I will not be despised: but let me see
This hidden rival, bring him here before me,
And I will yield him up the worthless prize;
For know, I have contempt enough for both
To wish you were united; that alone
Should be your punishment.

AMELIA.

Perhaps, my lord,
'Twere fittest for Amelia to retire
In silence, but I hold my honor dear,
And must defend it: I have been accused
Before thy brother, and must answer thee.
Know, then, I'm destined to another's arms;
I own my love, my tender passion for him;
Amelia were unworthy of his heart,
Had she e'er given a distant hope to thee:
But thou wouldst seize my faith and liberty,
As if they were by right of conquest thine.
I owed thee much, but injuries like these,
My lord, discharge the debt of gratitude,
And cancel all: I saw, and pitied long
The violence of thy fruitless passion for me;
Do not then make me hate thee: I rejected
Thy proffered vows, but never scorned thy love:
I wished for thy esteem, and gave thee mine.

DUKE.

Perfidious woman! naught hast thou deserved
But my resentment, which thou soon shalt know
Is equal to my love: thou waitedst then
For Vamir to be witness of my shame!
I should have thought he was himself the traitor,
If—but he ne'er beheld thy fatal charms,
My happier brother never knew Amelia.
Who is this rival? let me know his name,
But think not I will tamely yield to him.
No: I deceived thee there, but cannot long
Dissemble; I will drag thee to the altar,
There, as he dies in torment, shall he see
Our hands united; I will dip in blood
The torch of Hymen: well I know that princes
Have been despised for mean and vulgar slaves,
But I shall find him.

VAMIR.

Why shouldst thou suppose
This rival so contemptible?

DUKE.

And why
Shouldst thou excuse him? Didst thou never know her?
'Tis dreadful to conceive it. If thou didst,
Now, traitor, tremble.

VAMIR.

Vamir tremble? No:
Too long already I have borne in silence
Thy cruel insults; know me now, barbarian,
Know a despair that's equal to thy own:
Strike here; behold thy brother, and thy rival.

DUKE.

Thou, Vamir, thou?

VAMIR.

Yes: for these two years past
We've been united in the strictest bonds

Of tender love; the only good on earth
I wished to keep, thy cruel hand hath strove
To ravish from me, made my life unhappy:
Judge of my miseries by thy own: we both
Are jealous, both were born the slaves of passion:
Hatred and love, resentment, and despair,
Possess our souls, and all in the extreme:
Thou wert my rival, therefore I opposed thee:
Furious and blind, I ran, I flew to save
The object of my love; not all thy power
Restrained me, nor my weakness, time nor place,
Not even thy noble courage; love prevailed
O'er friendship, and the ties of blood: be thou
Cruel like me, like me unnatural.
Whilst I have life, thou never canst enjoy
Thy conquest, never canst possess Amelia:
Strike, then, and punish, shed thy brother's blood;
But when thou draggest her with thee to the altar,
Remember, she's thy sister, and my wife.

DUKE.

Guards, seize the traitor, take him from my sight.

AMELIA.

Stay, cruel prince; art thou inflexible,
Deaf to the voice of nature? O, my lord!

VAMIR.

Sue not for me, Amelia, Vamir's fate
Is to be envied: he most claims your pity
Who hath betrayed his king, and injured thee:
I am revenged, the victory is mine;
For thou art hated here, and I'm beloved.

AMELIA.

[Kneeling to the Duke.]
O dearest prince, my lord, see at your feet—

DUKE.

Away with him: rise, madam, for thy tears
And fruitless prayers to save a traitor's life
But pour fresh poison o'er my wounded heart

That bleeds for thee; but I will die, Amelia,
Not unrevenged: when thou shalt feel my rage
Accuse thyself; the work is all thy own.

AMELIA.

I cannot leave thee: O my lord, yet hear—

DUKE.

If I must hear thee, speak, go on.

SCENE VI.

the duke, vamin, amelia, lisois.

LISOIS.

My lord,
The people are in arms; at Vamin's name
They rose tumultuous, and on every side
Disorder reigns; the affrighted soldiers leave
Their colors, and in wild confusion fly:
Meantime the foe unites his scattered powers,
And rushes on us.

DUKE.

Go, ungrateful woman!
Thou hast not long to glory in thy crimes;
Follow her—
[To one of her attendants.
I must to the factious crowd
And show myself: thou, Lisois, guard this traitor.

SCENE VII.

vamin, lisois.

LISOIS.

Art thou a traitor? couldst thou thus disgrace
Thy noble blood, to violate the laws
Of nature? could a prince so far forget
His duty and himself?

VAMIR.

I never did:
The people's just: my brother is a rebel,
And has betrayed his master.

LISOIS.

Hear me, Vamir;
My soul desires no greater happiness
Than to unite you: long have I beheld
With deep regret my bleeding country's woes,
Our fields laid waste, and nature sacrificed
To discord and revenge; the haughty Moor,
Raised on our ruins, menacing the state,
Which we have weakened by our own divisions.
O if thou bearest a heart that's truly noble,
And worthy of thy race, now save thy country;
Exert thy power to reconcile the king,
Soften thy brother, and put out the flames
Of civil war.

VAMIR.

Impossible! thy cares
Are fruitless all and vain: if naught but discord,
Revenge and hatred, led me to the field,
Had glory and ambition fired my breast,
Thou mightest have hoped indeed to reunite us;
But there's a bar more fatal still behind.

LISOIS.

What could it be! O tell me, Vamir.

VAMIR.

Love:
Love that has filled this breast with savage fury,
And made my brother cruel and inhuman.

LISOIS.

Good heaven! that vain caprice should thus destroy
The noblest purposes! Almighty love,
Canst thou reverse the laws of nature, fill
With unrelenting hate the jealous hearts

Of fondest brothers, and in every clime
By private passions work the public ruin?
Vamir, I feel for both, but long have served
Thy brother; I must hence, and second him
Against thy factious friends: the strife is dreadful,
And much I fear will have a bloody end;
But I must fly to succor him: farewell;
Thou art my prisoner, but I leave thee here;
Give me thy word, that shall suffice.

VAMIR.

I do.

LISOIS.

Would I could knit you in the bonds of peace!
But much more to be feared than all thy foes
And far more fatal, is the tyrant, love.

End of the Third Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

vamir, amelia, emar.

AMELIA.

O Vamir, how the hand of heaven hath marked
My life with sad variety of woe!
The chance of war, that tore me from thy arms.
Once more hath joined us; but, alas! we meet
On mournful terms, meet but to part; my Vamir,
Didst thou not say it must be so?

VAMIR.

It must:
Thou seest me chained by honor's laws beneath
A rival's power: my sacred word is given:
Vamir may die, but must not follow thee.

AMELIA.

Thou who hast dared to fight, art thou afraid
To flee from him?

VAMIR.

I am: my honor binds me:
Take thou advantage of the general tumult,
Which favors thy retreat: a guard attends
To aid thy flight; heaven will protect thy virtues;
Hope for the best.

AMELIA.

What can Amelia hope,
When thou art from her?

VAMIR.

'Tis but for a day.

AMELIA.

O but that day will be an age to me.
Grant, heaven! my tears and terrors may be vain.
The Moor, I know, thirsts for my Vamir's blood;
Thinkest thou thy brother will not give it him?
He loves with fury, and he hates with rancor;
His hatred, like his love, is in extreme:
He is thy rival, and the Moor's ally.
I tremble for thee.

VAMIR.

He would never dare—

AMELIA.

O his impetuous passion knows no bounds!

VAMIR.

He must be taught to know them soon; the king
Comes to avenge us; half his force already
Throngs to the royal standard; if thou lovest me,
Fly, my Amelia, from the impending storm,
From dreadful slaughter, and the din of arms,
And all the terrors of a bloody field;
But, above all, avoid my furious rival,
Whose jealous love despised, will turn to rage;
Avoid an insult Vamir must avenge,
Or perish in the attempt: my dear Amelia,
Hope of my life, the only good on earth
I have to boast, do not expose thyself
To needless dangers, but retire in safety.

AMELIA.

Why wilt thou hazard then thy precious life,
And stay without Amelia?

VAMIR.

When thou art safe,
I shall not fear my brother; soon perhaps
Vamir may prove his best support: to-day
I am his prisoner, but perchance to-morrow
May be his patron, and persuade the king

To spare a rebel: to protect my rival
Were noble triumph. Haste, Amelia, leave
This seat of danger.

AMELIA.

Wheresoever fate
Shall cast my hapless lot, I'll carry with me
My hatred and my love; 'midst every danger,
In the wild desert, or the gloomy dungeon,
In exile, or in chains, in death itself,
Still shall I think of, still adore my Vamir:
But O I cannot bear to live without thee!

VAMIR.

It is too much: thy griefs unman my soul.
What noise was that? O thou hast staid too long!

SCENE II.

amelia, v Amir, duke of foix, *Guards*.

DUKE.

I hear his voice; 'tis he: stay, villain, thou
Who hast betrayed me.

VAMIR.

I betrayed thee not.
Now satiate thy revenge, and take my life;
Lose not a moment, for the hand of heaven
Is raised against thee: tremble, slave, thy king
Approaches: thou hast conquered none but Vamir:
Thy master comes, take heed.

DUKE.

He may avenge,
But cannot save thee; for thy blood—

AMELIA.

O no,
Amelia's guilty: let Amelia die,
And not my Vamir: I deceived thy guards,

And bartered with them to assist my flight
From hated slavery, and a tyrant's power:
Punish my crimes, but, O respect a brother,
Respect thyself, thy own unblemished fame!
He ne'er betrayed, but loves and would have served thee,
Even when thy rage had doomed him to destruction.
What crime has he committed? none, my lord,
None but the crime of loving his Amelia.

DUKE.

The more thou pleadest for him, the more his guilt:
Thou art his murderer: thou, whose fatal charms
Have poisoned all our happiness, and armed
Our hands against each other, may the blood
Of both fall on thee! now thou weapest; thy tears
No longer shall deceive me: I must die,
But Vamir first shall perish. Yet I love thee,
Even yet thou mayest escape the fatal blow:
Accept my hand, attend me to the altar,
And seal his pardon there.

AMELIA.

Who, I, my lord?

DUKE.

It is enough.

AMELIA.

Shall I be false to Vamir?

DUKE.

Stop—answer me.

AMELIA.

I cannot.

DUKE.

Let him die.

VAMIR.

Amelia, never let his threats o'ercome
Thy noble faith, but love me well enough
To see me perish: leave me to my fate;
Now I shall fall triumphant: shouldst thou yield,
Vamir must die by his Amelia's hand.

DUKE.

Guards, drag the traitor to the tower: away.

SCENE III.

duke, amelia.

AMELIA.

And wilt thou make this horrid sacrifice?
Pollute thee with the blood of innocence?
Thou wilt not!

DUKE.

Yes: to hate thee, and to die,
Is all I wish; to see thee more unhappy,
More wretched than myself, to shed the blood
That's dearest to thee, and to make thy days
As full of woe as was that fatal hour
Which hath destroyed us all. Away, and leave me;
The sight of thee distracts me.

SCENE IV.

duke, amelia, lisois.

AMELIA.

From thy justice,
And, that alone, I can expect relief.
Help me to soften this obdurate heart:
Assist me, Lisois.

DUKE.

If thou listenest to her,
Thou art not my friend.

AMELIA.

I call just heaven to witness.

DUKE.

Hence from my sight: I loathe thee.

AMELIA.

Tyrant, go,
For I abhor thee; spite of all thy rage,
I thought a woman might at least command
Some cold respect: but love, that softens all,
Hath lost its tender influence o'er thy heart:
I leave thee to thy rage; go, sacrifice
Thy victims, amidst thy crimes be sure thou count
Amelia's death, and with it count thy own,
For vengeance comes, and in thy punishment
Unites us all; inglorious shalt thou perish,
And unlamented. Die, inhuman savage;
And may that hatred, that contempt of thee,
Which now I feel, pursue thy memory,
And after ages execrate thy name!

SCENE V.

duke of foix, lisois.

DUKE.

Yes, cruel prophet, I expect the doom
Pronounced by thee, that discord's fatal hand
Shall seize on all, and join us in the tomb.

LISOIS.

Rage has o'erpowered him, and his senses fail.

DUKE.

What says my friend? am I to suffer shame
And insult thus; and shall my haughty rival
Bear off the false, perfidious, dear Amelia?
Wilt thou bear this, or waitest thou till the traitor
Shall raise a powerful faction to enslave me?

LISOIS.

Too well I see, my lord, the royal party
Hath spread sedition through the multitude,
And shook their faith.

DUKE.

Vamir lights up the flame:
He has betrayed us all.

LISOIS.

I never meant
To palliate Vamir's crimes, for much I dread
The fatal consequence; already France
Is armed against us. If the people seek
Their safety in rebellion, all is lost,
Danger's on every side.

DUKE.

What's to be done?

LISOIS.

Prevent it; rage and love must be subdued;
Then may we conquer all. We must be firm
And resolute; avoid, or brave the storm,
Do as thou wilt, my hand is ready still
To aid my friend. This morning thou hadst thoughts
Of treating with the king: if thou commandest,
I'll go, my lord, even now, and sue for peace;
Or if we try the fortune of the day,
The faithful Lisois shall attend thee still:
There, if thou fallest, thy friend shall not survive thee.

DUKE.

Alone I will descend into the grave:
Live thou, to serve my cause, and to avenge me.
My hour is come, I must fulfil my fate:
Who wishes but for death, is sure to find it;
But mine should come with all his terrors round him;
I must have vengeance; and whene'er I fall,
Will drag my rival with me to the tomb.

LISOIS.

What horrid thoughts are these!

DUKE.

In yonder tower
He is confined: 'tis under thy command,
And thou didst promise, that whene'er—

LISOIS.

Of whom
Speakest thou, my lord? a brother?

DUKE.

No: a traitor,
My worst of foes, a rival who abhors me;
One who has robbed me of my dearest treasure:
The Moor demands his head, and I have promised
To give it him.

LISOIS.

Ha! promised to shake off
The bonds of nature and humanity!

DUKE.

Long since they had proscribed him.

LISOIS.

And to them,
Thou yieldest his life?

DUKE.

Not to their vengeance only,
But to my own, which shall be satisfied.
What is the Moor to me, or what my country?

LISOIS.

To love then you would make the sacrifice,
And I must be the executioner.

DUKE.

No: I expect not so much justice from thee;
I am a wretch, abandoned and forlorn,
Betrayed by love, deserted by my friend;
But there are those who yet will keep their promise;
Others, perhaps, may serve me, nor allege
Such poor excuses for ingratitude.

LISOIS.

[After a long silence.]

I am resolved; and be it guilt or justice,
Ne'er shalt thou say that Lisois hath betrayed thee:
Thou art unhappy: Vamir is a traitor.
It is enough; I love thee, and consent:
There is a time for desperate extremes,
When duties the most sacred must give way
To hard necessity: at such an hour
I cannot suffer thee to try the faith
Of any heart but mine: success alone
Must prove my friendship: soon shalt thou determine
Whether thy Lisois loved thee, and was faithful.

DUKE.

Once more in sorrow I behold a friend;
Deserted by the world, in thee I find
My only refuge: thou wilt not permit
A haughty rival to insult my rage,
To trample on my ashes, and enjoy
My kingdom in the arms of my Amelia.

LISOIS.

I will not; but in recompense for this,
I must demand another sacrifice.

DUKE.

What is it? speak.

LISOIS.

I cannot bear the Moor,
Our insolent protector; cannot bear
To see him lord it o'er thy noble subjects.

I would not serve a tyrant, nor submit
To shameful slavery for a poor support
We do not want; 'tis in our power at least
To die without him: leave to me, my lord,
The conduct of this day, perhaps my service
May claim it of thee: Lisois and the Moor
Would ne'er agree: I must command alone,
To the last hour.

DUKE.

Thou shalt: I'll give thee all
Thou canst desire, let but Amelia feel
Despair like mine, and weep in tears of blood
Her treacherous lover: let me hear her groans
In my last moments to delight my soul;
And for the rest, 'tis equal all: to thee
I trust my glory; go, dispose, command,
Prepare thee for the field. I hope not now
For victory, nor for honorable death;
For what is honor to a heart like mine,
Sunk in despair! O be the sad remembrance
Of a false mistress, and a cruel rival,
Buried with me in everlasting silence!

LISOIS.

Eternal night, if possible, should hide
Such dreadful deeds: would death had closed our eyes
Before this day of horrors; but I go
To keep my word, and save my friend. Farewell.

End of the Fourth Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT V.

SCENE I.

duke of foix, an officer.

DUKE.

Perpetual misery! am I doomed to see
Nothing but faction, treason, and revolt?
Where are the rebels, do they mutiny?

OFFICER.

At sight of you, my lord, the crowd dispersed.

DUKE.

On every side I am oppressed by Vamir;
All hearts are his; my miseries are complete;
But what hath Lisois done?

OFFICER.

His watchful courage
Defends our ramparts 'gainst the foe.

DUKE.

That soldier
You brought to me in secret, has he done
What I commanded?

OFFICER.

Yes, my lord: ere now
He's at the tower.

DUKE.

'Tis well: a common arm
Will do it best, and execute my vengeance
Without remorse: Lisois' uncertain heart
Was not to be depended on; methought
He looked with too much coolness on my rage;

We seldom try to mitigate a grief,
Which we contemn: to other hands I'll trust
My great revenge.—Go thou, and fetch my standard,
Let it be brought upon the ramparts to me:
New dangers press, and for the field again
We must prepare: let the same zeal inspire thee,
And the same courage, imitate thy master,
And learn of him—to die,

[Exit Officer.

Ere this 'tis done.

A base, ungrateful woman dips my hands
In brother's blood, and leads me to the tomb:
A guilty murderer, ha! what means my heart?
I've nourished vengeance long; and shall I not
Enjoy it now? I tremble: and a voice,
Solemn and sad, cries from my inmost soul,
Stop, Foix, he is thy brother, hapless prince,
Call back the murderer: Vamir was thy friend.
O sweet remembrance of our infant years,
When in the days of innocence our hearts
Spoke nature's language, and imparted free
Our mutual wishes! O how oft has Vamir
Partook my griefs, and with a brother's hand,
Wiped off the falling tears! and shall I now
Destroy him? O thou fatal passion, where,
Where hast thou led me? sure I was not born
This savage, this barbarian: Vamir yet
Was guilty; Vamir robbed me of my life,
In my Amelia: still I am unjust;
He loved; was that a crime to merit death?
Alas! nor time, nor war, nor absence, cooled
Their faithful passion; still their guiltless flame
In purest lustre shone, before my heart
Was poisoned by the cruel draught of love:
But Vamir braves my wrath, and is my foe;
Deceives me, hates me; yet he is my brother.
He should have lived, he was beloved, and happy,
And only I should perish: I will die
But as I lived, with honor. Pity melts me,
Nature determines, and I will forgive him.
'Tis time—

SCENE II.

duke of foix, an officer.

DUKE.

Prevent a parricide: away,
Haste to the tower, reverse my orders: go.
And let my brother—

OFFICER.

O my lord—

DUKE.

What sayest thou!
Run, fly, obey me.

OFFICER.

Near the gate this moment
I saw a body covered o'er with blood,
Carried in secret forth by Lisois' orders,
And much I fear—

DUKE.

O heaven! my brother's dead
And I yet live: earth hath not swallowed me,
Nor lightning blasted: a base murderer,
Foe to his country, an unnatural brother,
How love has changed me! what a load of guilt
Have I to answer for! the veil's removed;
And now, alas! I know myself too well;
I cannot be more guilty: O my brother!
I feel I loved thee, yet I slew thee, Vamir.

OFFICER.

Amelia comes, my lord, and begs to speak
In private with you.

DUKE.

O I must not see her!
Not for the world: I cannot bear it: no,
She will avenge the murder in my blood:
But let her come: I tremble to behold her.

SCENE III.

duke of foix, amelia, thais.

AMELIA.

My lord, you have prevailed: and since that hatred
(How can I call it by another name?)
Which hath so long pursued me, now requires
A brother's blood, or his Amelia's hand,
Take it: the choice is made, and I am thine:
Remember, I'm the purchase of thy guilt:
Loosen his chains, and set my Vamir free,
That I no more may tremble for his life,
And I will give thee all, yield up my hopes
Of happiness with him, and follow thee,
Even to the altar; there the hand that gives
My faith away shall punish all my weakness.
Know, at the temple, where thy bridal vows—
But thou desirest my hand, and that alone
I have to give thee: ha! thou art silent: say,
Is Vamir, is thy brother freed already?

DUKE.

My brother!

AMELIA.

Gracious heaven!—remove my fears,
Thy eyes are bathed in tears.

DUKE.

Thou askest his life

AMELIA.

What do I hear? didst thou not promise me—

DUKE.

It is too late.

AMELIA.

Too late! O Vamir!

DUKE.

Yes,
It is indeed; would it were not, Amelia;
The cruel Lisois has obeyed my orders
Too faithfully: O live, to punish me;
Pierce this inhuman, this unnatural heart,
That loved thee but too well: I killed my brother,
But for thy sake: revenge on me the crimes
Which but for thee I never had committed.

AMELIA.

[Falling into the arms of Thais.
Vamir is dead, barbarian!

DUKE.

And thy hand
Shall shed the murderer's blood.

AMELIA.

[Fainting.
And is he gone?
My Vamir—

DUKE.

Thy reproaches—

AMELIA.

Spare me, spare me,
I'll not reproach thee; take thy sorrows hence,
And thy repentance: let me but embrace him,
And die.

DUKE.

Amelia, thou hast too much cause
To grieve, but O for pity take this life
That's hateful to me; but I've not deserved
To perish by thy hand; but thou shalt guide—

SCENE IV.

duke, amelia, lisois.

LISOIS.

What would thy rashness do?

DUKE.

[*They disarm him.*
An act of justice:
Punish myself.

AMELIA.

Wert thou his vile accomplice?

DUKE.

Thou minister of guilt, thou hast obeyed me.

LISOIS.

I promised you, my lord, and I have done
But what I ought.

DUKE.

Thy stubborn virtue oft
Hath checked my follies, and opposed my weakness;
But when I bade thee be a murderer,
And kill my brother, then thou wert obedient.

LISOIS.

When I refused but now to execute
The bloody office, didst thou not employ
Another hand?

DUKE.

Love, powerful love, that chained
My reason down, and swayed my foolish heart,
Love pleads for me; but thou whose wisdom calms
Each rising passion, whose unaltered soul,
Firm and unshaken, I so oft have feared,

So oft respected, that thou, thus unmoved,
Shouldst suffer such a deed of horror; O
'Tis terrible!

LISOIS.

Since sorrow and repentance,
Virtue's best monitors, have pierced thy soul
With just remorse: since, spite of all thy rashness,
To save a brother's blood thou gladly now
Wouldst give thy own; ye both shall find a friend.
Keep thou thy penitence.
[*To the Duke.*
Dry up thy tears.
[*To Amelia.*
This is a day of triumph. Prince, come forth:
Embrace thy brother.
[*The Scene opens, and discovers Vamir.*

AMELIA.

O my Vamir!

DUKE.

Ha!
My brother!

AMELIA.

Gracious heaven!

DUKE.

Can it be?
vamir,*advancing to the front.*
Again I see, again embrace my brother.

DUKE.

O thy forgiveness makes my crime still greater.

AMELIA.

O noble Lisois, thou hast given me life.

DUKE.

Life to us all.

LISOIS.

A base assassin raised
His arm against Vamir, but I felled the traitor,
And laid him breathless at my feet, then feigned
That I had shed thy brother's blood: I knew
Thou wouldst repent, and wish the deed undone.

DUKE.

This was a service I can ne'er reward
But by endeavoring to be worthy of it:
My crime sits heavy on me, and my eyes,
Fixed on the earth, dare not look up to Vamir,
And to the wronged Amelia.

VAMIR.

We would both
Have served thee with our royal master; both
Are still devoted to thee. What, my brother,
Is thy design? O speak!

DUKE.

To do you justice:
To expiate, by the greatest punishment,
The greatest crime that love and fierce resentment
Could e'er commit: long I adored Amelia;
Even when I gave her Vamir up to death,
I loved Amelia: I adore her still,
Nay, more than ever, yet I yield her to thee,
And sacrifice my heart to make you blest.
Take her, be happy, and forgive thy brother.

VAMIR.

Behold me at thy feet, with gratitude
Warm as thy bounty, as thy love sincere.

AMELIA.

Permit me to embrace thy knees with Vamir,

Accept our tenderest friendship, for thy goodness
Has amply paid for all my sufferings past.

DUKE.

No more of this, it doubles my misfortunes,
And shows me but what happiness I've lost:
But I will learn from you to follow virtue,
My heart is yours: I'm now indeed thy brother,
By thy example I will love my country.
Let us away, and to the king relate
My crimes, my sorrows, and thy happiness:
Let Vamir's zeal and Vamir's truth be mine,
Faithful to France, to friendship, and to thee;
Foix shall deserve your pardon and your praise;
Ye shall forget his follies and his crimes,
And henceforth know him only by his virtues.

End of the Fifth and Last Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ŒDIPUS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Œdipus, King of Thebes.

Jocaste, Queen of Thebes.

Philoctetes, Prince of Eubæa.

High Priest.

Araspes, Confidant of Œdipus.

Ægina, Confidante of Jocaste.

Dimas, Friend of Philoctetes.

Phorbas, an old Man of Thebes.

Icarus, an old Man of Corinth.

Chorus of Thebans.

SCENE Thebes.

[Œdipus was written when M. de Voltaire was but nineteen years of age. It was played for the first time in 1718, and ran five-and-forty nights. Du Frêsné, a celebrated actor, and of the same age with the author, played the part of Œdipus; and Madame Desmarêts, a famous actress, did Jocaste, and soon after quitted the stage. In this edition, the part of Philoctetes is restored, and stands exactly as it was in the first representation.]

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT I.

SCENE I.

philoctetes, dimas.

DIMAS.

Is it my friend, my Philoctetes? Whence
And wherefore comest thou to distempered Thebes
In search of death, to brave the wrath of heaven?
For, know, the gods on this devoted land
Wreak their full vengeance: mortals dare not tread
The guilty soil, to death and horror long
Consigned, and from the living world cut off:
Away, begone!

PHILOCTETES.

It suits a wretch like me:
Leave me, my friend, to my unhappy fate;
And only tell me, if the wrath divine
Hath, in its rapid progress, spared the queen.

DIMAS.

Jocaste lives; but round her throne still spreads
The dire contagion; every fatal moment
Deprives her of some faithful subject: death
Steals closer by degrees, and seems to threat
Her sacred life. But heaven, we trust, will soon
Withdraw its vengeful arm: such scenes of blood
Will sure appease its rage.

PHILOCTETES.

What horrid crime
Could bring down so severe a punishment?

DIMAS.

Since the king's death—

PHILOCTETES.

The king! ha! Laius—

DIMAS.

Died
Some four years since.

PHILOCTETES.

Ha! Laius dead! indeed!
What sweet seducing hope awakes my soul?
Jocaste! will the gods at length be kind?
May Philoctetes still be thine? But say,
Dimas, how fell the king?

DIMAS.

'Tis four years since
For the last time towards Bœotia, led
By fate, you came; scarce had you bent your way
To Asia, e'er the unhappy Laius fell
By some base hand.

PHILOCTETES.

Assassinated, sayest thou?

DIMAS.

This was the cause, the source of all our ills,
The ruin of this wretched country: shocked
At the sad stroke, we wept the general loss,
When lo! the minister of wrath divine,
(Fatal to innocence, and favoring long
Unpunished guilt) a dreadful monster came,
(O Philoctetes, would thou hadst been here!)
And ravaged all our borders, horrid form!
Made for destruction by avenging heaven,
With human voice, an eagle, woman, lion,
Unnatural mixture! rage with cunning joined
United to destroy us: naught remained
To save but this alone; in phrase obscure
The monster had proposed to affrighted Thebes
A strange enigma, which who could unfold
Should save his country; if he failed, must die.

Reluctant we obeyed the hard decree.
Instant the general voice aloud proclaimed
The kingdom his reward, who, by the gods
Inspired, should first unveil the mystery.
The aged and the wise, by hope misled,
With fruitless science braved the monster's rage;
Vain knowledge all! all tried and trying fell,
Till Œdipus, the heir to Corinth's throne,
Endowed with wisdom far above his years,
Fearless, and led by fortune, came, beheld,
Unfolded all, and took the great reward;
Lives still, and reigns o'er Thebes; but reigns, alas!
O'er dying subjects, and a desert land.
Vainly we hoped to see the wayward fates
Chained to his throne, and yielding to the hand
Of Œdipus, our great deliverer.
A little time the gods propitious smiled,
And blessed us with a gleam of transient peace;
But barrenness and famine soon destroyed
Our airy hopes: ills heaped on ills succeed,
A dreadful plague unpeoples half the realms
Of sickly Thebes, snatching the poor remains
Just escaped from famine and the grave: high heaven
Hath thus ordained, and such our hapless fate.
But say, illustrious hero, whom the gods
Have long approved, say, wherefore hast thou left
The paths of glory, and the smiles of fortune,
To seek the regions of affliction here?

PHILOCTETES.

I come to join my sorrows and my tears,
For know the world with me hath lost its best
And noblest friend: ne'er shall these eyes behold
The offspring of the gods, like them unconquered,
Earth's best support, the guardian deity
Of innocence oppressed: I mourn a friend,
The world a father.

DIMAS.

Is Alcides dead?

PHILOCTETES.

These hands performed the melancholy office,
Laid on his funeral pile the first of men;
The all-conquering arrows, those dear dreadful gifts

The son of Jove bequeathed me, have I brought,
With his cold ashes, here, where I will raise
A tomb and altars to my valued friend.
O! had he lived! had but indulgent heaven,
In pity to mankind, prolonged his days,
Far from Jocaste I had still remained;
And, though I might have cherished still my vain
And hopeless passion, had not wandered here,
Or left Alcides for a woman's love.

DIMAS.

Oft have I pitied thy unhappy flame,
Caught in thy earliest youth, increasing still
And growing with thy growth: Jocaste, forced
By a hard father to a hateful bed,
Unwillingly partook the throne of Laius.
Alas! what tears those fatal nuptials cost,
What sorrows have they brought on wretched Thebes!
How have I oft admired thy noble soul,
Worthy of empire! conqueror o'er thyself:
There first the hero shone, repressed his passion,
And the first tyrant he subdued was love.

PHILOCTETES.

There we must fly to conquer; I confess it:
Long time I strove, I felt my weakness long;
At length resolved to shun the fatal place,
I took a last farewell of my Jocaste.
The world then trembled at Alcides' name,
And on his valor did suspend their fate;
I joined the god-like man, partook his toils,
Marched by his side, and twined his laurel wreath
Round my own brows: then my enlightened soul
Against the passions armed, and rose superior.
A great man's friendship is the gift of heaven.
In him I read my duty and my fate;
I bound myself to virtue and to him:
My valor strengthened, and my heart improved,
Not hardened, I became like my Alcides.
What had I been without him! a king's son,
A common prince, the slave of every passion,
Which Hercules hath taught me to subdue.

DIMAS.

Now then unmoved thou canst behold Jocaste,

And her new husband.

PHILOCTETES.

Ha! another husband!
Saidst thou, another?

DIMAS.

Ædipus hath joined
To hers his future fate

PHILOCTETES.

He is too happy;
But he is worthy: he who saved a kingdom
Alone can merit her, and heaven is just.

DIMAS.

He comes, and with him his assembled people;
Lo! the high-priest attends: this way they bend,
To deprecate the wrath of angry heaven.

PHILOCTETES.

It melts my soul; I weep for their misfortunes.
O Hercules, from thy eternal seat
Look down on thy afflicted country! hear
Thy fellow citizens! O hear thy friend,
Who joins his prayers, and be their guardian god!

SCENE II.

high priest, chorus.

FIRST PERSON OF THE CHORUS.

Ye blasting powers, who waste this wretched empire,
And breathe contagion, death, and horrors round us,
O quicken your slow wrath, be kind at last,
And urge our lingering fate.

SECOND PERSON OF THE CHORUS.

Strike, strike, ye gods,
Your victims are prepared; ye mountains, fall!

Crush us, ye heavens! O death, deliver us,
And we shall thank you for the boon.

HIGH PRIEST.

No more:
Cease your loud complaints, the wretch's poor resource;
Yield to the power supreme, who means to try
His people by affliction; with a word
He can destroy, and with a word can save:
He knows that death is here; the cries of Thebes
Have reached his throne. Behold! the king approaches,
And heaven by me declares its will divine;
The fates will soon to Œdipus unveil
Their mysteries all, and happier days succeed.

SCENE III.

œdipus, jocaste, high priest, ægina, dimas, araspes, chorus.

ŒDIPUS.

O ye, who to this hallowed temple bring
The mournful offering of your tears: O what,
What shall I say to my afflicted people?
Would I could turn the wrath of angry heaven
Against myself, and quench the deadly flame?
But O! in universal ills like these,
Kings are but men, and only can partake
The common danger. Say, thou minister
Of the just gods, say, do they still refuse
To hear the voice of misery; still relentless
Will they behold us perish, are they deaf
And silent still?

HIGH PRIEST.

King, people, listen all:
This night did I behold the flame of heaven
Descending on our altars; to my eyes
The ghastly shade of Laius then appeared,
Indignant frowned upon me, and thus spoke
In fearful accents, terrible to hear:
“The death of Laius is still unrevenged,
The murderer lives in Thebes, and doth infect
The wholesome air with his malignant breath;
He must be known, he must be punished,

And on his fate depends the people's safety.”

ŒDIPUS.

Justly ye suffer, Thebans, for this crime;
Laius was once your loved and honored king,
And your neglect hath from his manes drawn
This vengeance on you. Such is oft the fate
Of the best sovereigns; whilst they live, respect
Waits on their laws, their justice is admired,
And they like gods are served, like gods adored;
But after death they sink into oblivion.
No longer then your flattering incense burns:
The servile mind of wretched man still bends
To interest; and when virtue is departed,
'Tis soon forgotten: therefore doth the blood
Of murdered Laius now cry out against you,
And sues for vengeance to offended heaven.
To sprinkle on his tomb the murderer's blood
Will better far than slaughtered hecatombs
Appease his spirit: be it all our care
To seek the guilty wretch. Can none remember
Aught touching this sad deed? Amidst your signs
And wonders, could no footsteps e'er be traced
Of this unpunished crime? They always told me
It was a Theban, who against his prince
Uplifted his rebellious hand. For me [*To Jocaste*.
Who from thy hands received the crown, two years
After the death of Laius did I mount
The throne of Thebes, and never since that hour
Would I recall the subject of thy tears,
But in respectful silence waited still;
Still have thy dangers busied all my soul,
Nor left me time to think on aught but thee.

JOCASTE.

When fate, which had reserved me for thy arms,
Deprived me of my late unhappy lord,
Who, journeying o'er his kingdom's frontiers, fell
By base assassins, Phorbas then alone
Attended him, his loved and valued friend;
To whom the king, relying on his wisdom,
Entrusted half his power: he brought to Thebes
The mangled corpse: himself half dead with wounds,
And bathed in blood, fell at Jocaste's feet;
“Villains unknown,” he cried, “have slain the king;
These eyes beheld it: I was dying too,

But heaven hath restored me to prolong
A wretched life." He said no more. My soul
Distracted saw the melancholy truth
Was still concealed; and therefore heaven perhaps
Concealed the murderer too; perhaps accomplished
Its own eternal will, and made us guilty,
That it might punish. Soon the sphinx appeared,
And laid our country waste: then hapless Thebes,
Attentive to her safety, could not think
On Laius' fate, whilst trembling for her own.

ŒDIPUS.

Where is that faithful Phorbas? lives he still?

JOCASTE.

Alas! his zeal and service ill repaid,
Too powerful to be loved, the jealous state
His secret foe, nobles and people joined
To punish him for past felicity.
The multitude accused him, even demanded
Of me his death: sore pressed on every side,
I knew not how to pardon or condemn,
But to a neighboring castle I conveyed him,
And hid the guiltless victim from their rage.
There four long winters hath the poor old man,
To future favorites a sad example,
Without a murmur or complaint remained,
And hopes from innocence alone release.

ŒDIPUS.

It is enough, Jocaste. Fly, begone,
[*To his servants.*]
Open the prison, bring him hither straight,
We will examine him before you all;
Laius and Thebes shall be avenged together:
Yes, we will hear and judge, will sound the depth
Of this strange mystery. Ye gods of Thebes,
Who hear our prayers, and know the murderer, now
Reveal, and punish; and thou, Sun, withhold
From his dark eyes thy blessed light! proscribed,
Abandoned, let him wander o'er the earth
A wretched miscreant, by his sons abhorred,
And to his mother horrible! deprived
Of burial, let his body be the prey
Of hungry vultures!

HIGH PRIEST.

In these execrations
We all unite.

ŒDIPUS.

Gods! let the guilty suffer,
And they alone! or if the high decrees
Of your eternal justice leave to me
His punishment, at least indulgent grant,
Where you command, the power to obey;
If you pursue the guilty, O complete
The glorious work, and make the victim known!
[To the people.
Return, my people, to the temple; there
Once more entreat the gods: perhaps your prayers
May from their heavenly mansions draw them down
To dwell among us: if they loved the king,
They will avenge his death, and kind to him
Who errs unknowing, will direct this arm
For justice raised, and teach me where to strike.

The End of the First Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

jocaste, ægina, araspes, chorus.

ARASPES.

Believe me, 'tis too true, my royal mistress,
Your dying people, with one common voice,
Accuse the hapless Philoctetes: fate
Hath sent him back to save this wretched kingdom.

JOCASTE.

What do I hear, ye powers?

ÆGINA.

'Tis wonderful.

JOCASTE.

Who? Philoctetes?

ARASPES.

Yes, it must be he:
To whom can we impute it but to him?
When last at Thebes, he seemed to meditate
A deed like this; for much he hated Laius:
From Œdipus his traitorous purpose scarce
Could he conceal; for soon unwary youth
Betrays itself: soon through the thin disguise
Of ill dissembled loyalty, we saw
The rancor of his heart. I know not what
Provoked him, but too warm and open, ever
The slave of passion, he would kindle oft
At the king's name, and often pour forth threats
Of vengeance: for some time he left the kingdom,
But fate soon brought the restless wanderer back;
And at that fatal time, which heaven distinguished
By the detested shocking parricide,
He was at Thebes: e'er since that dreadful hour,
Suspicion justly falls on Philoctetes:

But the high name which he had gained in war,
His boasted title of earth's great avenger,
And his heroic deeds, have stopped the tongue
Of clamor, and suspended yet the stroke
Of our resentment. Now the time is come
When Thebes shall think no more of vain respect;
His glory and his conquests plead no more;
The hearts of an oppressed people groan;
The gods require his blood, and must be heard.

CHORUS.

O queen! have pity on a wretched people,
Who love and honor thee, revere the gods,
And follow their example; yield up to us
Their victim, and present our vows to heaven;
For heaven will hear them, if they come from thee.

JOCASTE.

O! if my life can mitigate its wrath,
I give it freely; take the sacrifice;
Accept my blood; but O! demand no more.
Thebans, be gone.

SCENE II.

jocaste, ægina.

ÆGINA.

How I lament thy fate!

JOCASTE.

Alas! I envy those whom death has freed
From all their cares: but what remains for me,
What pain and torment to a virtuous heart!

ÆGINA.

'Tis terrible indeed: the clamorous people,
Warmed with false zeal, will cry aloud for vengeance,
And soon demand their victim. I forbear
To accuse him; but if he at last should prove
The murderer of thy unhappy lord,
How it must shock thy soul!

JOCASTE.

Impossible!
Such guilt and baseness never dwelt in him.
O my Ægina! since our bonds of love
Were disunited, naught has pierced my heart
Like this suspicion: this alone was wanting
To make Jocaste most completely wretched:
But I'll not bear to hear him thus accused;
I loved him, and he must be innocent.

ÆGINA.

That constant love—

JOCASTE.

Nay, think not that my heart
Still nourishes a guilty passion for him;
I conquered that long since; yet, dear Ægina,
Howe'er the soul may act which virtue guides,
Its secret motions, nature's children, still
Must force their way: they will not be subdued,
But in the folds and windings of the heart,
Lurk still, and rush upon us; hid in fires
We thought extinguished, from their ashes rise:
In the hard conflict, rigid virtue may
Resist the passions, but can ne'er destroy them.

ÆGINA.

How just, and yet how noble is thy grief!
Such sentiments!—

JOCASTE.

Jocaste is most wretched;
Thou knowest my miseries, and thou knowest my heart,
Ægina: twice hath Hymen lit his torch
For me, and twice hath changed my slavery,
For such it was; the only man I loved,
Torn from my arms. Forgive me, ye just gods,
The sad remembrance of a conquered passion.
Ægina, thou wert witness of our loves,
Those ties, alas! dissolved as soon as made:
Then Œdipus, my sovereign, sought and gained me,
Spite of myself. I took the diadem,
Begirt with sorrows. To forget the past

Became my duty then; and I obeyed.
Thou knowest I stifled every tender thought
Of my first love, disguised an aching heart,
Drank up my tears, and even from myself
Strove to conceal my griefs.

ÆGINA.

How could you venture
The dangerous trial of a second marriage?

JOCASTE.

Alas!

ÆGINA.

Will you forgive me? shall I speak?

JOCASTE.

Thou mayest.

ÆGINA.

The king, the conqueror subdued thee:
You gave your hand as a reward to him
Who saved your country.

JOCASTE.

Gracious gods!

ÆGINA.

Was he
Happier than Laius? Was your Philoctetes
Forgotten then, or did they share your heart?

JOCASTE.

Thebes, by a cruel monster then laid waste,
Had promised its deliverer my hand;
The conqueror of the sphinx was worthy of me.

ÆGINA.

You loved him then?

JOCASTE.

I felt some tenderness
For Œdipus; but O! 'twas far from love:
'Twas not, Ægina, that tumultuous passion,
The impetuous offspring of my ravished senses,
Not the fierce flame that burned for Philoctetes;
Who, by his fatal charms, subdued my reason,
And poured love's sweetest poison o'er my heart:
Friendship sincere was all I could bestow
On Œdipus, for much I prized his virtue;
And pleased, beheld him mount the throne of Thebes
Which he had saved; but, whilst I followed him,
Even at the altar, my affrighted soul,
Wherefore I knew not, was most strangely moved,
And I retired with horror to his arms.
To this a dreadful omen did succeed:
Methought, Ægina, in the dead of night,
I saw the gulf of hell yawn wide before me;
When lo! the spirit of my murdered lord,
Bloody and pale, with threatening aspect stood,
And pointed to my son; that son, Ægina,
Which I to Laius bore, and to the gods
Offered, a cruel pious sacrifice.
They beckoned me to follow them, and seemed
To drag me with them to the horrid gloom
Of Tartarus: my troubled soul long kept
The sad idea, and must keep it ever.
Now Philoctetes doubles every woe.

ÆGINA.

I heard a noise that way, and, see he comes.

JOCASTE.

'Tis he; I tremble: but I will avoid him.

SCENE III.

jocaste, philoctetes.

PHILOCTETES.

Do not avoid me, do not fly, Jocaste.
From Philoctetes; turn, and look upon me:
O speak to me, nor fear my jealous tears
Should interrupt the new-born happiness
Of thy late nuptials: think not that I came
To cast reproaches on thee, or with sighs
To win thy lost affection; vulgar arts,
Unworthy of us both! the heart, Jocaste,
That burned for thee, and if I may recall
Thy plighted faith, was once not hateful to thee,
Has learned, from thy example, not to feel
Weakness like that.

JOCASTE.

I must approve thy conduct,
And 'tis but fit I vindicate my own:
I loved thee, Philoctetes; but my fate
Tore me from thee, and gave me to another.
Thou knowest what woes the horrid sphinx, by heaven
Appointed to afflict us, brought on Thebes:
Too well thou knowest that Œdipus—

PHILOCTETES.

Is thine;
I know it, and is worthy of the blessing:
Young as he was, his wisdom saved thy country;
His virtues, his fair deeds, and what still more
Exalted him, Jocaste's love, have ranked
Thy Œdipus among the first of men.
Wherefore did cruel fortune, still resolved
To punish Philoctetes, drive me hence,
To seek vain trophies in a distant land?
O! if the conqueror of the sphinx was doomed
To conquer thee, why was not I at Thebes?
I'd not have labored in the fruitless search
Of idle mysteries, wrapped in words of darkness;
This arm, to conquest long beneath thy smiles
Accustomed, should have drawn the vengeful sword,
And laid the howling monster at thy feet.
But O! a happier arm has wrested from me
That noblest triumph, and deserved Jocaste.

JOCASTE.

Alas! thou knowest not yet what ills await thee.

PHILOCTETES.

Thee and Alcides I have lost already:
Is there aught more to fear?

JOCASTE.

Thou dwellest at Thebes;
The detestation of avenging gods;
The baneful pestilence stalks forth amongst us;
The blood of Laius cries aloud, and heaven
Pursues us still: the murderer must bleed;
He has been sought for; some have dared to say
That he is found, and call him Philoctetes.

PHILOCTETES.

Astonishment! the base suspicion shocks
My soul, and bids my tongue be silent ever
On the opprobrious theme: accused of murder!
Murdering thy husband! thou canst never believe it.

JOCASTE.

O! never! 'twere injurious to thy honor
To combat such imposture, or refute
The vile aspersion; no, thou knowest my heart,
Thou hadst my love, and couldst not do a deed
Unworthy of it. Let them perish all,
These worthless Thebans, who deserve their fate
For thus suspecting thee: but, hence! begone!
Our vows are fruitless: heaven reserves for thee
Superior blessings. Thou wert born to serve
The gods, whose wisdom would not bury here
Virtues like thine, or suffer love to rule
A heart designed for universal sway,
And courage fit to save and bless mankind.
Ill would it suit the follower of Alcides
To lose his moments in the fond concerns,
The little cares of love. Thy hours are due
To the unhappy and the injured: they
Will all thy time and all thy virtue claim.
Already tyrants throng on every side;
Alcides dead, new monsters rise; go, thou,

And give the world another Hercules.
Œdipus comes; permit me to retire;
Not that I fear the weakness of my heart,
But as Jocaste loved thee once, and he
Is now my husband, I should blush before you.

SCENE IV.

œdipus, philoctetes, araspes.

ŒDIPUS.

Sayst thou, Araspes, is he here, the prince,
The noble Philoctetes?

PHILOCTETES.

Yes; 'tis he;
Led by blind fortune to this hapless clime,
Where angry heaven hath made me suffer wrongs
I am not used to bear. I know the crimes
Laid to my charge; but think not that I mean
To justify myself: too well I know thee
To think that Œdipus would ever stoop
To such low mean suspicions: no! thy fame
Is mixed with mine; in the same steps of honor
We trod together. Theseus, Hercules,
And Philoctetes, pointed out to thee
The paths of glory; do not then disgrace
Their names, and taint thy own, by calumny,
But keep their bright examples still before thee.

ŒDIPUS.

All that I wish is but to save my country,
And if I can be useful to mankind,
This is the ambition I would satisfy,
And this the lesson which those heroes taught,
Whom thou hast followed, and whom I admire.
I meant not to accuse thee: had I chose
The people's victim, it had been myself.
I think it but the duty of a king
To perish for his country: 'tis an honor
Too great for common men. Then had I saved
Once more my Thebans, yielded up my life,
And sheltered thine: but 'twas not in my power.
The blood of guilt must flow, thou standest accused.

Defend thyself: if thou art innocent,
None shall rejoice so much as Œdipus;
Nor as a criminal shall then receive thee,
But as my noble friend, as Philoctetes.

PHILOCTETES.

I thought myself, indeed, above suspicion:
From many a base assassin has this arm,
While Jove's dread thunder slept, relieved mankind
Whom we chastise, we seldom imitate.

ŒDIPUS.

I do not think thou wouldst disgrace thy name,
And thy fair martial deeds, by such a crime.
If Laius fell by thee, he fell with honor,
I doubt it not, for I must do thee justice.

PHILOCTETES.

If I had slain him, I had only gained
One added triumph. Kings, indeed, are gods
To their own subjects, but to Hercules,
Or me, they were no more than common men.
I have avenged the wrongs of mighty princes;
And, therefore, little, thou mayest think, should fear
To attack the bravest.

ŒDIPUS.

Heroes, like thyself,
Are equal even to kings, I know they are:
But still remember, prince, whoe'er slew Laius,
His head must answer for the woes of Thebes;
And thou—

PHILOCTETES.

I slew him not; let that suffice.
If I had done the deed, I would have owned,
Nay boasted of it. Hear me, Œdipus,
Though vulgar souls, by vulgar methods, deign
To vindicate their injured honor; kings
And heroes, when they speak, expect, no doubt,
To be believed: perhaps thou dost suspect
I murdered Laius. It becomes not thee,

Of all men, to accuse me: to thy hand
Devolved his sceptre and his queen. Who reaped
The fruits of Laius's death, but Œdipus?
Who took the spoils? Who filled his throne? Not I.
That object never tempted Philoctetes:
Alcides never would accept a crown:
We knew no master, and desired no subjects:
I have made kings, but never wished to be one.
But 'tis beneath me to refute the falsehood,
For innocence is lessened by defence.

ŒDIPUS.

Thy pride offends me, whilst thy virtue charms.
If thou art guiltless, thou hast naught to fear
From justice and the laws; thy innocence
Will shine with double splendor: dwell with us,
And wait the event.

PHILOCTETES.

My honor is concerned,
And therefore I shall stay; nor hence depart
Till I have ample vengeance for the wrongs
Thy base suspicions cast on Philoctetes.

SCENE V.

œdipus, araspes.

ŒDIPUS.

Araspes, I can never think him guilty:
A heart like his, intrepid, brave, and fearless,
Could never stoop to mean disguise; nor thoughts
So noble e'er inspire the timid breast
Of falsehood: no! such baseness is far from him:
I even blushed to accuse him, and condemned
My own injustice: hard and cruel fate
Of royalty! alas! kings cannot read
The hearts of men, and oft on innocence,
Spite of ourselves unjust, inflict the pains
Due to the guilty. How this Phorbias lingers!
In him alone are all my hopes: the gods
Refuse to hear or answer to our vows;
Their silence shows how much they are offended.

ARASPES.

Rely then on thyself: the gods, whose aid
This priest hath promised, do not always dwell
Within their temples; tripods, caves, and cells,
The brazen mouths that pour forth oracles,
Which men had framed, by men may be inspired;
We must not rest our faith on priests alone;
Even in the sanctuary traitors oft
May lurk unseen, exert their pious arts
To enslave mankind, and bid the destinies
Speak or be silent just as they command them.
Search then, and find the truth, examine all;
Phorbas, and Philoctetes, and Jocaste.
Trust to yourself; let our own eyes determine;
Be they our tripods, oracles, and gods.

ŒDIPUS.

Within the temple, thinkest thou, perfidy
Like this can dwell: but if just heaven at last
Should fix our fate, and Œdipus be called
To execute its will, he will receive
The precious trust, the safety of his country,
Nor act unworthy of it. To the gods
Once more I go, and with incessant prayer
Will try to soothe their anger: thou, meantime,
If thou wouldst wish to serve me, hasten onward
The lingering Phorbas; in our hapless state,
I must enquire the truth of gods and men.

The End of the Second Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

jocaste, ægina.

JOCASTE.

Yes, my Ægina, I expect him here;
'Tis the last time these eyes shall e'er behold
The wretched Philoctetes.

ÆGINA.

Thou hast heard,
My royal mistress, to what desperate height
The clamorous people carry their resentment;
Our dying Thebans from his punishment
Expect their safety. Old men, women, children,
United by misfortunes, breathe forth vengeance;
Pronounce him guilty, and cry out that heaven
Demands his blood: canst thou resist the torrent,
Defend, or save him?

JOCASTE.

Yes: I will defend him;
Even though Thebes should lift the murderous hand
Against her queen, beneath her smoking walls
To crush Jocaste, ne'er would I betray
Such injured innocence; but still I fear
The tongue of slander: well thou knowest my heart
Once sighed for Philoctetes; now, Ægina,
Will they not say I sacrifice to him
My fame, my gods, my country, and my husband?
Will they not say Jocaste loves him still?

ÆGINA.

Calm thy vain fears; thy passion had no witness
But me, and never—

JOCASTE.

Thinkest thou that a princess

Can e'er conceal her hatred or her love?
O no! on every side the eager eyes
Of courtiers look upon us: through the veil
Of feigned respect, with subtle treachery
They search our hearts, and trace out every weakness.
Naught can escape their sharp malignant sight;
A little word, a sigh, or glance betrays us;
Our very silence shall be made to speak
Our thoughts; and when their busy artifice,
Spite of ourselves, hath drawn the secret from us,
Then their loud censures cast invidious light
O'er all our actions, and the instructed world
Is quickly taught to echo every weakness.

ÆGINA.

But what hast thou to fear from calumny?
What piercing eye can wound Jocaste's fame?
Who knows thy love, will know thy conquest o'er it;
Will know thy virtue still supported thee.

JOCASTE.

It is that virtue which distresses me;
I look, perhaps, with too severe an eye
On my own weakness, and accuse myself
Unjustly; but the image still remains
Of Philoctetes, engraved within my heart
Too deep for time or virtue to efface it;
And much I doubt, if when I strive to save him.
I act not less from justice than from love:
My pity hath too much of tenderness;
I tremble oft, and oft reproach myself
For my fond care; I could be more his friend,
If he had been less dear to me.

ÆGINA.

But say,
Is it your will that he depart?

JOCASTE.

It is:
And O! if he would listen to Jocaste,
Never return, never behold me more;
Fly from this fatal, this distressful scene,
And save my life and fame. But what detains him?

Why hastes he not? Ægina, fly—

SCENE II.

philoctetes, ægina, jocaste.

JOCASTE.

He's here.
O prince, my soul is on the rack; I blush
To see the man whom duty bids me shun,
Which says I should forget and not betray thee.
Doubtless thou knowest the dreadful fate that hangs
O'er thy devoted head.

PHILOCTETES.

The clamorous people
Demand my life; but they have suffered much,
And therefore, though unjust, I pity them.

JOCASTE.

Yield not thyself a victim to their rage:
Away, begone; as yet thou art thyself
The master of thy fate; but this perhaps
Is the last minute that can give me power
To save thee: far, O fly far from Jocaste;
And, in return for added life, I beg thee
But to forget 'twas I who thus preserved it.

PHILOCTETES.

I could have wished, Jocaste, thou hadst shown
More strength of mind, and less compassion for me;
Preferred with me my honor to my life,
And rather bade me die than meanly quit
My station here: I yet am innocent,
But in obeying thee I should be guilty.
Of all the blessings heaven bestowed upon me,
My honor and my fame alone remain
Untouched. O! do not rob me of a treasure
So precious to me; do not make me thus
Unworthy of Jocaste. I have lived,
Lived to fulfil the fate allotted to me;
Have passed my sacred word to Œdipus,
And whatsoever suspicions he may cherish,

I am a stranger to the breach of honor.

JOCASTE.

O Philoctetes, let me here entreat thee,
By the just gods, by that ill-fated passion,
Which once inspired thy breast, if aught remains
Of tender friendship, if thou still rememberest
How much my happiness on thine depended,
Deign to prolong a glorious life, and days
That should have been united with Jocaste.

PHILOCTETES.

To thee devoted I would have them still
In equal tenor flow, and worthy of thee;
I've lived far from thee, and shall die content,
If thy regard attends me to the tomb
Who knows but heaven may yet refuse to see
This bloody sacrifice; perhaps, in mercy
It guided me to Thebes to save Jocaste;
Shortened my days, perhaps, to lengthen thine.
Happy event! the blood of innocence
May be accepted; mine is not unworthy.

SCENE III.

œdipus, jocaste, philoctetes, ægina, araspes, *with Attendants*.

ŒDIPUS.

Fear not the clamors of an idle crowd,
That rage tumultuous, and demand thy death:
Know, Philoctetes, I have calmed their rage
And will myself, if needful, be thy guard.
I judge not with the hasty multitude,
But wish to see thy innocence appear:
My doubtful mind, uncertain where to fix,
Nor dares or to condemn, or to acquit thee:
Heaven can alone determine all, which hears
My ardent prayer; at length it seems appeased,
And by its priest shall soon point out the victim.
The gods shall soon decide 'twixt Thebes and thee.

PHILOCTETES.

Great is thy love of truth, O king, but know

Justice extreme is height of injury;
We must not always hearken to the voice
Of rigor: honor is the first of laws,
Let us observe it. But thou seest me sunk
Beneath myself, answering the slandrous tongues
Of base defamers, whom I should despise.
O let not Œdipus unite with such
To ruin my fair fame! it is enough
That I deny it; 'tis enough to call
My life before thee. Let Alcides come,
And bring with him the monsters I destroyed,
The tyrants I subdued; let these stand forth
My witnesses, and let my enemies confute them.
But ask your priest whether his gods condemn me;
I'll wait their sentence; not because I fear it,
But to preserve thy persecuted people.

SCENE IV.

œdipus, jocaste, high priest, araspes, philoctetes, ægina, *Attendants*, chorus.

ŒDIPUS.

Will heaven at last indulgent to our prayers
Withdraw its vengeance? By what murderous hand
Was it offended?

PHILOCTETES.

Speak, whose blood must flow
For expiation?

HIGH PRIEST.

Fatal gift of heaven!
Unhappy knowledge! to what dangers oft
Dost thou betray the heart of curious man!
O would that fate, thus open to my view,
Had o'er its secrets drawn the eternal veil
To hide them from my sight!

PHILOCTETES.

What evil bringest thou?

ŒDIPUS.

Comest thou the minister of wrath divine?

PHILOCTETES.

Fear nothing.

ŒDIPUS.

Do the gods demand my life?

HIGH PRIEST.

If thou givest credit to me, ask me not.

ŒDIPUS.

Whatever be the fate which heaven decrees,
The safety of my country is concerned,
And I will know it.

PHILOCTETES.

Speak.

ŒDIPUS.

Have pity on us,
Pity the afflicted, pity—

HIGH PRIEST.

Œdipus
Deserves more, much more, pity than his people.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS.

Œdipus loves them with paternal fondness;
To his we join our prayers. O! hear us thou
Interpreter of heaven; now hear, and save!

SECOND PERSON OF THE CHORUS.

We die, O save us! turn aside the wrath
Of the angry gods; name the perfidious monster!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS.

Name him, and soon the parricide shall die

HIGH PRIEST.

Unhappy men! why will ye press me thus?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS.

Speak but the word, he dies, and we are saved.

HIGH PRIEST.

O! ye will tremble but to hear his name,
When ye shall know what pangs he must endure.
The God, who speaks by me, in pity dooms him
To banishment alone; but dreadful ills
Await the murderer: driven to fell despair
His own rash hand shall to the wrath of heaven
Add woes more deep and heavier punishment:
Even you shall shudder at his fate, and own
Your safety purchased at a rate too dear.

ŒDIPUS.

Obey then.

PHILOCTETES.

Speak.

ŒDIPUS.

Still obstinate!

HIGH PRIEST.

Remember,
If I must speak, that thou didst force me to it.

ŒDIPUS.

Insufferable delay! I'll bear no more.

HIGH PRIEST.

Since thou wilt hear it then, 'tis—

ŒDIPUS.

Ha! speak, who?

HIGH PRIEST.

'Tis—Œdipus.

ŒDIPUS.

I?

HIGH PRIEST.

Thou, unhappy Prince,
Thou art the man.

SECOND PERSON OF THE CHORUS.

Alas! what do I hear!

JOCASTE.

Say, can it be, interpreter of heaven?
[To Œdipus.]
Thou, Œdipus, the murderer of my husband!
To whom Jocaste yielded with herself
The throne of Thebes: the oracle is false;
I know it is; thy virtues must confute it.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS.

O! heaven, whose power decrees the fate of mortals,
O! name another, or to death devote us!

PHILOCTETES.

[Turning to Œdipus.]
Think not I mean to render ill for ill;
Or from this strange reverse of fortune take
A mean advantage, to return the wrongs
I suffered from thy people and from thee:
No, Œdipus, I'll do thee noble justice,

That justice thou deniest to Philoctetes.
Spite of the gods, I think thee innocent,
And here I offer thee my willing hand
Against thy foes: I cannot hesitate
Which I should serve, a pontiff or a king.
'Tis a priest's business, whosoever he be,
By whatsoever deity inspired,
To pray for, not to curse, his royal master.

ŒDIPUS.

Transcendent virtue! execrable traitor!
Here I behold a demi-god, and there
A base impostor: see the glorious privilege
Of altars; thanks to their protecting veil,
With lips profane thou hast abused the power
Given thee by heaven, to arraign thy king;
And yet thou thinkest the sacred ministry
Thou hast disgraced shall withhold my wrath:
Traitor, thou shouldst have perished at the altar
Before those gods whose voice thou hast usurped.

HIGH PRIEST.

My life is in thy hands, and thou art now
The master of my fate: seize then the time
Whilst yet thou art so, for to-day thy doom
Will be pronounced. Tremble, unhappy Prince,
Thy reign is past; a hand unseen suspends
The fatal sword that glitters o'er thy head:
Soon shall thy conscious soul with horror feel
The weight of guilt; soon shalt thou quit the throne,
Where now thou sittest secure, to wander forth
A wretched exile in a distant land;
Of wholesome water and of sacred fire
Deprived, shalt take thy solitary way,
And to the caves and hollow rocks complain.
Where'er thou goest, a vengeful God shall still
Pursue thy steps; still shalt thou call on death,
But call in vain: heaven, that beholds thy fate,
Shall hide itself in darkness from thy sight;
To guilt and sorrow doomed, thou shall regret
Thy life, and wish that thou hadst ne'er been born.

ŒDIPUS.

Thus far I have constrained my wrath, and heard thee.
Priest, if thy blood were worthy of my sword,

Thy life should answer for this insolence:
But hence, begone, nor urge my temper further,
Thou author of abominable falsehood.

HIGH PRIEST.

Thou callest me hypocrite, and base impostor;
Thy father thought not so.

ŒDIPUS.

Who? Polybus?
My father, saidst thou?

HIGH PRIEST.

Thou wilt know too soon
Thy wretched fate: to-day shall give thee birth;
To-day shall give thee death: unhappy man,
Tell me who gave thee birth, or say with whom
Thou livest, beset with sorrows and with crimes
For thee alone reserved. O Corinth! Phocis!
Detested nuptials! impious wretched race,
Too like its parent stem! whose deadly rage
Shall fill the world with horror and amaze.
Farewell.

SCENE V.

œdipus, philoctetes, jocaste.

ŒDIPUS.

His last words fix me to the earth
Immovable; my passion is subsided;
I know not where I am: methinks some god
Descended from above to calm my rage;
Who to his priest imparted power divine,
And by his sacred voice pronounced my ruin.

PHILOCTETES.

If thou hadst naught to oppose but king to king,
I would have fought for Œdipus; but know
That Priests are here more formidable foes,
Because respected, feared and honored more.
Supported by his oracles, the priest

Shall often make his sovereign crouch beneath him;
Whilst his weak people, dragged in holy chains,
Embrace the idol, tread on sacred laws
With pious zeal, and think they honor heaven
When they betray their master and their king,
But above all, when interest, fruitful parent
Of riot and licentiousness, increase
Their impious rage, and back their insolence.

ŒDIPUS.

Alas! thy virtue doubles all my woes,
For great as my misfortunes is thy soul;
Beneath the weight of care that hangs upon me;
Who strives to comfort can but more oppress.
What voice is this which from my inmost soul
Pours forth complaints? What crime have I committed?
Say, vengeful gods, is Œdipus so guilty?

JOCASTE.

Talk not of guilt, my lord, your dying people
Demand a victim; we must save our country;
Delay it not: I was the wife of Laius,
And I alone should perish: let me seek
The wandering spirit of my murdered lord
On the infernal shore, and calm his rage:
Yes, I will go: may the kind gods accept
My life and ask no other sacrifice!
May thy Jocaste save her Œdipus!

ŒDIPUS.

And wouldest thou die! are there not woes enough
Heaped on this head? O cease, my loved Jocaste,
This mournful language, I am sunk already
Too deep in grief without new miseries,
Without thy death to fill my cup of sorrow.
Let us go in: I must clear up a doubt
Too justly formed, I fear: but follow me.

JOCASTE.

How couldst thou ever, my lord—

ŒDIPUS.

No more: come in,
And there confirm my terrors, or remove them.

The End of the Third Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

œdipus, jocaste.

ŒDIPUS.

Jocaste, 'tis in vain: say what thou wilt,
These terrible suspicions haunt me still;
The priest affrights me; I acquit him now,
And even, in secret, am my own accuser.
O! I have asked myself some dreadful questions;
A thousand strange events, which form my mind
Were long effaced, now rush in crowds upon me,
And harrow up my soul; the past obstructs,
The present but confounds me, and the future
Is big with horrid truths; on every side
Guilt waits my footsteps.

JOCASTE.

Will not virtue guard thee?
Art thou not sure that thou art innocent?

ŒDIPUS.

We're oft more guilty than we think we are.

JOCASTE.

Disdain the madness of a talking priest,
Nor thus excuse him with unmanly fears.

ŒDIPUS.

Now in the name of the unhappy king,
And angry heaven, let me entreat thee, say,
When Laius undertook that fatal journey,
Did guards attend him?

JOCASTE.

I've already told thee,
One followed him alone.

ŒDIPUS.

And only one?

JOCASTE.

Superior even to the rank he bore.
He was a king, who, like thyself, disdain'd
All irksome pomp, and never would permit
An idle train of slaves to march before him.
Amidst his happy subjects fearless still,
And still unguarded lived in peace and safety,
And thought his people's love his best defence.

ŒDIPUS.

Thou best of kings, sent by indulgent heaven
To mortals here; thou exemplary greatness!
Could ever Œdipus his barbarous hand
Lift against thee? but if thou canst, Jocaste,
Describe him to me.

JOCASTE.

Since thou wilt recall
The sad remembrance, hear what Laius was:
Spite of the frost which hoary age had spread
O'er his fair temples in declining age,
Which yet was vigorous, his eyes sparkled still
With all the fire of youth, his wrinkled forehead
Beneath, his silver locks attracted awe
And reverence from mankind: if I may dare
To say it, Laius much resembled thee;
With pleasure I behold in Œdipus
His virtues and his features thus united.
What have I said to alarm thee thus?—

ŒDIPUS.

I see
Some strange misfortune will o'ertake me soon;
The priest, I fear, was by the gods inspired,
And but too truly hath foretold my fate:
Could I do this, and was it possible?

JOCASTE.

Are then these holy instruments of heaven
Infallible? Their ministry indeed
Binds them to the altar, they approach the gods,
But they are mortals still; and thinkest thou then
Truth is dependent on the flight of birds?
Thinkest thou, expiring by the sacred knife,
The groaning heifer shall for them alone
Remove the veil of dark futurity?
Or the gay victims, crowned with flowery garlands,
Within their entrails bear the fates of men?
O no! to search for truth by ways like these
Is to usurp the rights of power supreme;
These priests are not what the vile rabble think them,
Their knowledge springs from our credulity.

ŒDIPUS.

Would it were so! for then I might be happy.

JOCASTE.

It is: alas! my griefs bear witness to it.
Once I was partial to them like thyself,
But undeceived at length lament my folly;
Heaven hath chastised me for my easy faith
In dark mysterious lying oracles,
That robbed me of my child; I hate the base
Deluders all; had it not been for them,
My son had still been living.

ŒDIPUS.

Ha! thy son!
How didst thou lose him? By what oracles
Did the gods speak concerning him?

JOCASTE.

I'll tell thee
What from myself I would have gladly hidden.
But 'twas a false one; therefore be not moved.
Thou must have heard I had a son by Laius.
A mother's fond disquietude provoked me
To ask his fate of the great oracle.
Alas! what madness 'tis to wrest from heaven
Those secrets which it kindly would conceal:

But I was a weak woman, and a mother.
Before the priestess' feet I fell submissive,
And thus her answer was; for O, too well
I must remember what but to repeat
Now makes me tremble; but thou wilt forgive me:
"Thy son shall slay his father, sacrilegious,
Incestuous parricide." Shall I go on?

ŒDIPUS.

Well, very well—

JOCASTE.

In short, it then foretold me,
This son, this monster should pollute my bed;
That I, his mother, should embrace my son,
Just recent from the murder of his father.
That thus united by these dreadful ties,
I should bear children to this hapless child.
You seem to be disordered at my story,
And dread perhaps to hear the sad remainder.

ŒDIPUS.

Proceed: what did you with the wretched infant.
Object of wrath divine?

JOCASTE.

Believed the gods;
Piously cruel, sacrificed my child,
And stifled all a mother's tenderness:
In vain the clamors of parental love
Condemned the rigid laws of partial heaven:
Alas! I meant to save the tender victim
From his hard fate that threatened future guilt,
And doomed him to involuntary crimes:
I thought to triumph o'er the oracle,
And in compassion gave him up to death.
Cruel compassion, and destructive too!
Deceitful darkness of a false prediction!
What did I reap from my inhuman care,
Did it prolong my wretched husband's life?
Alas! cut off in full prosperity,
He fell by the unknown hands of base assassins,
Not by his son. Thus were they both torn from me:
I lost my child, and could not save his father.

By my example taught, avoid my errors,
Banish these idle fears, and calm thy soul.

ŒDIPUS.

After the dreadful secret thou hast told me,
It were not fit I should conceal my own:
Hear then my tale; perchance when thou shalt know
The sad relation, which they bear each other,
Thou too wilt tremble: Born the natural heir
To Corinth's throne, from Corinth far removed,
I look with horror on my native land:
One day—that fatal day I well remember,
For O! 'tis ever present to my thoughts,
And dreadful to my soul—my youthful hands,
For the first time their solemn gift prepared
An offering to the gods, when lo! the gates
Throughout the temple on a sudden stood
Self-opened, and the pillars streamed with blood;
The altars shook; a hand invisible
Threw back my offerings, and in thunder thus
A horrid voice addressed me: "Come not here,
Stain not the holy threshold with thy feet,
The gods have from the living cut thee off
Indignant, nor will e'er accept thy gifts;
Go, take thy offerings to the furies, seek
The serpents that stand ready to devour thee;
These are thy gods, begone, and worship them."
While terror seized me at these dreadful words,
Again the voice alarmed me, and foretold
All those sad crimes which heaven to thee denounced
Against thy son; said, I should slay my father,
O gods! and be the husband of my mother.

JOCASTE.

Where am I? what malicious dæmon joined
Our hands, to make us thus supremely wretched?

ŒDIPUS.

Reserve thy tears for something still more dreadful;
Now list and tremble: fearful of myself,
Lest I should e'er fulfil the dire prediction,
Or oppose heaven, I left my native land,
Broke from the arms of a distracted mother,
Wandered from place to place, disguised my birth,
My family, and name, by one kind friend

Attended; yet, in my disastrous journey,
The God who guided my sad footsteps oft
Strengthened my arm, and crowned me with success:
But happier had it been for Œdipus,
If he had fallen with glory in the field,
And by his death prevented all his woes:
I was reserved to be a parricide:
The hand of heaven, so long suspended o'er me,
Hath from my eyes at length removed the veil
Of Ignorance, and now I see it all:
I do remember, in the fields of Phocis
(Nor know I how I could so long forget
The great event) that in a narrow way
I met two warriors in a splendid car:
The path was strait, and we disputed it:
An idle contest for us both; but I
Was young and haughty, from my earliest years
Bred up to pride that flowed in with my blood;
An unknown stranger in a foreign land,
I thought myself upon my father's throne,
And whomso'er I chanced to meet, esteemed
As my own vassals, born but to obey me:
I rushed upon them, and with furious arm
Their rapid coursers stopped in full career;
Hurled from their chariot the intrepid pair.
Forward advanced in rage, and both attacked me:
The combat was not long, for victory soon
Declared for Œdipus. Immortal powers!
Whether from hatred or from love I know not,
But surely on that day ye fought for me.
I saw them both expiring at my feet,
And one of them, I do remember well,
Who seemed in age well-stricken, as he lay
Gasping on the earth, looked earnestly upon me,
Held out his arms, and would have spoke: I saw
The tears flow plenteous from his half-closed eyes:
Methought when I did wound him my shocked soul,
All conqueror as I was—you shake, Jocaste.

JOCASTE.

My lord, see Phorbas comes; this way they lead him.

ŒDIPUS.

'Tis well: my doubts will then be satisfied.

SCENE II.

œdipus, jocaste, phorbas, *Attendants*.

ŒDIPUS.

Come hither, thou unfortunate old man;
The sight of him alarms my conscious soul;
Confused remembrance tortures me; I dread
To look on, or to question him.

PHORBAS.

O queen,
Is this the day appointed for my death;
Hast thou decreed it? Never but to me
Wert thou unjust.

JOCASTE.

Fear not, but hear the king,
And answer him.

PHORBAS.

The king?

JOCASTE.

Thou standest before him.

PHORBAS.

Ye gods! is this the successor of Laius?

ŒDIPUS.

Waste not the time thus idly, but inform me,
Thou wert the only witness of his death,
And wounded, so 'tis said, in his defence.

PHORBAS.

He's dead, and let his ashes rest in peace;
Embitter not my fate, nor thus insult
A faithful subject wounded by thy hand.

ŒDIPUS.

I wound thee? I?

PHORBAS.

Now satiate thy revenge,
And put an end to this unhappy life;
The poor remains of blood which then escaped thee
Now thou mayest shed; and since thou must remember
The fatal place where Laius—

ŒDIPUS.

Spare the rest:
It is enough: I see it now: 'twas I:
Ye gods! my eyes are opened.

JOCASTE.

Can it be?

ŒDIPUS.

And art thou he whom my unhappy rage
Attacked at Daulis in the narrow path?
O yes it is, must be so: in vain myself
Would I deceive, all speaks too plain against me,
I know thee but too well.

PHORBAS.

I saw him fall,
My royal master fall beneath thy hand:
Thou didst the crime, and I have suffered for it:
A prison was my fate, and thine a throne.

ŒDIPUS.

Away: I soon shall do thee ample justice,
Thee and myself; leave then to me the care
Of my own punishment: begone, and save me
At least the painful sight of innocence,
Which I have made unhappy.

SCENE III.

œdipus, jocaste.

ŒDIPUS.

O Jocaste!
For cruel fate forbids me ever more
To call thee by the tender name of wife;
Thou seest my crimes; no longer bound to love;
Strike now, and free thyself from the dread thought
Of being mine.

JOCASTE.

Alas!

ŒDIPUS.

Take, take this sword,
The instrument of my unhappy rage;
Receive, and use it for a noble purpose,
And plunge it in my breast.

JOCASTE.

What wouldst thou do!
O stop thy furious grief, be calm, and live.

ŒDIPUS.

Canst thou have pity on a wretch like me?
No, I must die.

JOCASTE.

Thou must not: hear Jocaste,
O hear her prayers!

ŒDIPUS.

I will not, must not hear thee.
I slew thy husband.

JOCASTE.

And thou gavest me one.

ŒDIPUS.

I did, but 'twas by guilt.

JOCASTE.

Involuntary.

ŒDIPUS.

No matter, still 'twas guilt.

JOCASTE.

O height of woe!

ŒDIPUS.

O fatal nuptials! once such envied bliss!

JOCASTE.

Such be it still, for still thou art my husband.

ŒDIPUS.

O no! I am not; this destructive hand
Hath broke the sacred tie, and deep involved
Thy kingdom in my ruin. O! avoid me,
Fear the vindictive God who still pursues
The wretched Œdipus; I fear myself,
My timid virtue serves but to confound me;
Perhaps my fate may reach even thee, Jocaste;
Pity thyself, pity the hapless victims
That perish daily for my guilt; O strike,
And save thy Œdipus from future crimes.

JOCASTE.

Do not accuse, do not condemn thyself;
Thou art unhappy, but thou art not guilty:
Thou didst not know whose blood thy hand had shed
In Daulis' fatal conflict; when remembrance
Calls forth the melancholy deed, I must
Weep for myself, but should not punish thee.
Live therefore—

ŒDIPUS.

No; it is impossible:
Farewell, Jocaste! whither must I go,
O whither must I drag this hateful being?
What clime accursed, or what disastrous shore
Shall hide my crimes, and bury my despair?
Still must I wander on from clime to clime,
Or rise by murder to another throne?
Shall I to Corinth bend my way, where fate
Hath heavier crimes in store for Œdipus?
O Corinth! ne'er on thy detested borders—

SCENE IV.

œdipus, jocaste, dimas.

DIMAS.

My lord, this moment is arrived a stranger,
He says, from Corinth, and desires admittance.

ŒDIPUS.

I'll go and meet him—fare thee well, Jocaste:
But stop thy tears; no more shalt thou behold
The wretched Œdipus; it is determined:
My reign is past; thou hast no husband now,
I am no more a sovereign, nor Jocaste's.
Oppressed with ills I go, in search of climes,
Where far removed from thee and from my country,
I still may act as shall become a king,
Worthy of thee, and justify the tears
Thou sheddest for Œdipus: farewell! forever.

The End of the Fourth Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT V.

SCENE I.

œdipus, araspes, dimas,*Attendants*.

ŒDIPUS.

Weep not for me, my friends, nor thus regret
Your sovereign's fate: I wish for banishment;
To me 'tis pleasure; for I know 'twill make
My people happy: you must lose your king,
But shall preserve his country. When I first
Came to the throne of Thebes, I served it well;
And, as I mounted, now I shall descend
In glory: honor shall attend my fall:
I leave my country, kingdom, children, all.
Then hear me now, hear my last parting words;
A king you must have; let him be my choice;
Take Philoctetes: he is generous, noble,
Virtuous, and brave; his father was a king,
And he the friend of Hercules; let him
Succeed me: I must hence.—Go, search out Phorbas;
Bid him not fear, but come this moment hither,
I must bequeath him something; he deserves it:
I'll take my farewell as a monarch ought.
Go, bring the stranger to me—stay ye here.

SCENE II.

œdipus, araspes, icarus,*Attendants*.

ŒDIPUS.

Ha! is it thou, my much-loved Icarus!
The faithful guardian of my infant years,
Favorite and friend of Polybus, my father,
What brought thee hither?

ICARUS.

Polybus is dead.

ŒDIPUS.

Alas? my father!

ICARUS.

'Twas what we expected;
For he had filled the measure of his days,
And died in good old age; these eyes beheld it.
Where are ye now, mistaken oracles!
That shook my timid virtue, and foretold
That I should prove a guilty parricide?
My father's dead, ye meant but to deceive me;
These hands are not polluted with his blood:
The slave of error, I have wandered long
In darkness, busied in a fruitless toil,
And to remove imaginary ills,
Have made my life a scene of real woes,
The offspring of my fond credulity.
How deep must be the color of my fate
When miseries like this can bring relief!
Bliss spring from sorrow, and a father's death
Shall be accepted as the gift of heaven!
But I must hence, and to his ashes pay
The tribute due:—ha! silent, and in tears!

ICARUS.

Ought I to speak? O heaven!

ŒDIPUS.

Hast thou aught more
Of ill to tell me?

ICARUS.

For a moment grant me
Your private ear.

ŒDIPUS.

Retire.—[*To the attendants.*
What can this mean?

ICARUS.

Think not of Corinth: thither, if thou goest,
Thy death is certain.

ŒDIPUS.

Who shall banish me
From my own kingdom?

ICARUS.

To the throne of Corinth
Another heir succeeds.

ŒDIPUS.

Ye gods! is this
The last sad stroke which I am born to suffer,
Or will ye still pursue me? Fate, go on
And persecute, thou shalt not conquer me:
Let us away to my rebellious subjects,
I'll go to be their scourge, if not their king,
And find at least an honorable death.
But say, what stranger has usurped my throne?

ICARUS.

He is the son-in-law of Polybus,
Who on his head did place the diadem
In his last moments; the obedient people
Hail their new sovereign.

ŒDIPUS.

Has my father too
Betrayed me, sided with my faithless subjects,
And drove me from my throne?

ICARUS.

He did but justice,
For thou wert not his son.

ŒDIPUS.

Ha! Icarus!

ICARUS.

With terror and regret I must reveal
The dreadful secret, Corinth—

ŒDIPUS.

Not his son!

ICARUS.

Thou art not. Polybus, oppressed by conscience,
Dying declared it; to the royal blood
Of Corinth's kings he yielded up his throne:
I who alone enjoyed his confidence,
And therefore dreaded the new sovereign's power,
Fled to implore thy aid.

ŒDIPUS.

Who am I then,
If not the son of Polybus?

ICARUS.

The gods,
Who trusted to my hands thy infant years,
In shades of darkest night conceal thy birth;
I only know, that soon as born condemned
To death, and on a desert hill exposed,
Thou but for me hadst perished.

ŒDIPUS.

Thus with life
Began my sorrows, a detested object
Even from my cradle, and accursed by all.
Where didst thou light on me?

ICARUS.

On mount Citheron,

ŒDIPUS.

Near Thebes?

ICARUS.

In that deserted place, a Theban,
Who called himself thy father, left thee; there
To perish: some kind God conducted me
That way; I pitied, took thee in my arms,
Revived, and cherished thee: to Corinth then
Carried my little charge, and to the king
Presented thee; who, mark thy wondrous fate!
His child just dead, adopted thee his son,
And by that stroke of policy confirmed
His tottering power: As son of Polybus
Thou wert brought up by him who had preserved thee:
The throne of Corinth never was thy right,
But conscience robbed thee of what chance bestowed.

ŒDIPUS.

Immortal powers, who rule the fate of kings!
Am I thus doomed in one unhappy day
To suffer such variety of woe!
On a frail mortal shall your miracles
Be thus exhausted! But inform me, friend,
This old man, from whose hands you took me, say,
Hast thou beheld him since that fatal hour?

ICARUS.

Never: perhaps he's dead, he who alone
Could tell thee the strange secret of thy birth;
But on my mind his image is engraved
So deeply, I should know him well.

ŒDIPUS.

Alas!
Wretch that I am! why should I wish to find him?
Rather, submissive to the will of heaven
Should I keep close the veil that o'er my eyes
Spreads its benignant shade: too well already
I see my fate; more knowledge would but show
New horrors; and yet, spite of all my woes,
Urged on by fatal curiosity,
I thirst for more: I cannot bear to rest
In sad suspense: to doubt is to be wretched:
I dread the torch that lights me to my ruin:
I fear to know myself, yet cannot long
Remain unknown.

SCENE III.

œdipus, icarus, phorbas.

ŒDIPUS.

Ha! Phorbas! come this way.

ICARUS.

Surprising! sure the more I look, the more—
'Tis he, my lord, it must be he.

PHORBAS.

Forgive me [*To Icarus*
If still that face unknown—

ICARUS.

Dost thou remember?
On mount Citheron—

PHORBAS.

How!

ICARUS.

The child you gave me,
The child to death—

PHORBAS.

What dost thou say? remember,
Remember what?

ICARUS.

Thou hast no cause to fear;
Le not alarmed: thou mayest rejoice, that infant
Was—œdipus.

PHORBAS.

The lightning blast thee, wretch!
What hast thou said?

ICARUS.

Doubt not, my lord, whatever
[*To Œdipus.*
This Theban says, he gave thee to my arms;
Thy fate is known; this old man is thy father.

ŒDIPUS.

What complicated misery! Alas!
[*To Phorbas.*
If thou art indeed my father, will the gods
Ever suffer me to shed thy blood?

PHORBAS.

O no!
For thou art not my son.

ŒDIPUS.

And didst not thou
Expose me in my infancy?

PHORBAS.

My lord,
Permit me to retire, and hide from thee
The dreadful truth.

ŒDIPUS.

No, Phorbas; by the gods
I beg thee, tell me all.

PHORBAS.

Begone, avoid
Thy children, and thy queen.

ŒDIPUS.

Now answer me,
For to resist is vain: that infant, doomed
To death by thee, say, didst thou give it him?
[*Pointing to Icarus.*

PHORBAS.

I did: and would that day had been my last!

ŒDIPUS.

And of what country was that child?

PHORBAS.

Of Thebes.

ŒDIPUS.

And thou art not his father?

PHORBAS.

No: alas!
Sprung from a nobler, but more wretched race—

ŒDIPUS.

Who was he then?

PHORBAS.

My lord, what would you do?
[Throwing himself at the feet of Œdipus.]

ŒDIPUS.

Speak, speak, I say.

PHORBAS.

Jocaste was his mother.

ICARUS.

[Looking at Œdipus.]
Behold the fruit of all my generous care!

PHORBAS.

What have we done?

ŒDIPUS.

I thought it must be so.

ICARUS.

My lord—

ŒDIPUS.

Away, begone, this moment leave me:
The dreadful gifts ye have bestowed on me
Must have their recompense; and ye have cause
To fear my wrath, for ye preserved my life.

SCENE IV.

ŒDIPUS.

At length the dire prediction is fulfilled,
And Œdipus is now, though innocent,
A base, incestuous parricide: O virtue!
Thou fatal empty name; thou who didst guide
My hapless days, thou hadst not power to stop
The current of my fate: alas! I fell
Into the snare by trying to avoid it:
Heaven led me on to guilt, and sunk a pit
Beneath my sliding feet: I was the slave
Of some unknown, some unrelenting power,
That used me for its instrument of vengeance:
These are my crimes, remorseless cruel gods!
Yours was the guilt, and ye have punished me.
Where am I? what dark shade thus from my eyes
Covers the light of heaven? the walls are stained
With blood; the furies shake their torches at me;
The lightnings flash; hell opens her wide gates:
O Laius! O my father! art thou there?
I see the deadly wound these hands had made;
Revenge thee now on this abhorred monster,
A monster who defiled the bed of her
Who bore him: lead me to the dark abode,
That I may strike fresh terror to the hearts
Of guilty beings by my punishment:
Lead on, I'll follow thee.

SCENE V.

œdipus, jocaste, ægina, chorus.

JOCASTE.

O Œdipus,
Dispel my fears, thy dreadful cries alarm me.

ŒDIPUS.

Open, thou earth, and swallow me!

JOCASTE.

Alas!
What sad misfortune moves thee thus?

ŒDIPUS.

My crimes.

JOCASTE.

My lord!—



ŒDIPUS.

Away, Jocaste.

JOCASTE.

Cruel husband!

ŒDIPUS.

O stop! what name is that? am I thy husband?
Do not say husband: we shall hate each other.

JOCASTE.

What sayest thou?

ŒDIPUS.

'Tis enough: I have fulfilled
My horrid fate: know, Laius was my father;
I am thy son.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS.

O guilt!

SECOND PERSON OF THE CHORUS.

O dreadful day!

JOCASTE.

Ægina, drag me from this horrid place!

ÆGINA.

Alas!

JOCASTE.

If thou hast pity on Jocaste,
If without horror thou canst now approach me,
Assist me now, compassionate thy queen!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS.

Ye gods! and is it thus your vengeance ceases?
Take back your cruel gifts, 'twere better far
That we had suffered still.

SCENE VI.

jocaste, ægina, high priest, chorus.

HIGH PRIEST.

Attend, ye people,
And know, a milder sun now beams upon you:
At length the baleful pestilence is fled,

The graves once more are closed, and death hath left us;
The God of heaven and earth declares his goodness
In peals of thunder: hark!
[Thunder and lightning.]

JOCASTE.

What dreadful flashes!
Where am I? heaven! what do I hear! Barbarians—

HIGH PRIEST.

'Tis done: the gods are satisfied: no more
Doth Laius from the tomb cry out for vengeance:
Jocaste, thou mayest live and reign; the blood
Of Œdipus sufficeth.

CHORUS.

Gracious heaven!

JOCASTE.

My son! and must I call him husband too!
Dear dreadful names! is he then dead?

HIGH PRIEST.

He lives,
But from the living and the dead cut off,
Deprived of light: I saw him plunge this sword,
Stained with his father's blood, into his eyes:
This fatal moment has to Thebes restored
Her safety: such are the decrees of heaven:
Which, as it wills, decides the fate of mortals,
All-powerful to save or to destroy.
Its wrath is all exhausted on thy son,
And thou art pardoned.

JOCASTE.

Punish then thyself.
[Stabs herself.]
Jocaste, thus reserved for horrid incest,
Death is the only good remaining for me:
Laius, receive my blood: I follow thee:
I have lived virtuous, and shall die with pleasure.

CHORUS.

Unhappy queen, and sad calamity!

JOCASTE.

Weep only for my son, who still survives.
Priests, and you Thebans, who were once my subjects,
Honor my ashes, and remember ever,
That midst the horrors which oppressed me, still
I could reproach the gods; for heaven alone
Was guilty of the crime, and not Jocaste.

The End of the Fifth and Last Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

MARIAMNE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Varus, a Roman Prætor, Governor of Syria.

Herod, King of Palestine.

Mariamne, Wife of Herod.

Salome, Sister of Herod.

Albinus, Friend to Varus.

MAZAEL, }
IDAMAS, } Herod's Ministers.

Nabal, an old Officer under the Asmonæan Kings.

Eliza, Confidante of Mariamne.

Herod's Guard, Attendants on Varus, Herod, and Mariamne.

SCENE, Jerusalem.

This piece was produced in 1724, the part of *Mariamne* was played by Adrienne Lecouvreur.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT I.

SCENE I.

salome, mazaël.

MAZAEL.

It is enough: the power of Salome,
By all acknowledged, and by all obeyed,
On its firm basis stands immovable:
I fled to Azor, with the lightning's speed,
Even from Samaria's plain to Jordan's spring,
And quick returned: my presence there indeed
Was needful, to cut off the aspiring hopes
Of Israel's moody race: thy brother Herod,
So long detained at Rome, was almost grown
A stranger in his kingdom; and the people,
Ever capricious, turbulent, and bold,
Still to their kings unjust, aloud proclaimed,
That Herod was condemned to slavery
By haughty Rome; and Mariamne, raised
To the high rank of her proud ancestors,
Would from the blood of our high-priests select
A king, to rule o'er conquered Palestine.
With grief I see, she is by all adored;
Her name the dear delight of every tongue;
Israel reveres the race from whence she sprang,
Even to idolatry: her birth, her beauty,
And, above all, her sorrows, melt the hearts
Of the rude rabble, who, thou knowest, detest
And rail at us. They call her their dear sovereign,
And seem to threaten thee with swift destruction.
I saw the fickle multitudes alarmed
With idle tales like these, but soon I taught them
Another lesson; soon I made them tremble:
Told them great Herod, fraught with double power,
And armed with vengeance, would ere long return:
His name alone struck terror to their souls,
They saw their folly then, and wept in silence.

SALOME.

Thou toldest them truth, for Herod comes, and soon
Shall make rebellious Sion bend beneath him.

Antony's favorite is Cæsar's friend;
Fortune attends him, at his chariot wheels
Submissive chained: his subtle policy
Is equal to his courage, and he rises
With added strength and glory from his fall:
The senate crown him.

MAZAEL.

But when Mariamne
Shall see her husband, where will be thy power?
That haughty rival o'er the king had ever
A fatal influence that supplanted thee;
And her proud spirit, still inflexible,
And still revengeful, holds its enmity:
Her safety must depend on thy destruction,
And mutual injuries nourish mutual hate.
Dost thou not dread her all-subduing charms,
Those lordly tyrants o'er the vanquished Herod?
For five years past, ever since their fatal marriage,
Hath his strange passion for her still increased,
By hatred fixed, and nourished by disdain.
Oft have we seen the haughty monarch kneel
Before her feet, her eyes indignant turned
In fury from him, whilst in vain he sued
For softer looks than she would deign to give.
How have we seen him rage, and sigh, and weep,
Abuse, and flatter, threaten and implore!
Mean in his rage, and cruel in his love;
Abroad a hero, and a slave at home:
He punished an ungrateful barbarous race,
And, reeking with the father's blood, adored
The daughter; raised the dagger to her breast,
Guided by thee, then dropped it at her feet.
At Rome indeed, whilst from her sight removed,
The chain was loosened; but 'twill re-unite
When he returns, and shall again behold
The fatal charms which he so long admired:
Those powerful eyes are ever sure to please,
And will resume their empire o'er his heart:
Her foes will soon be humbled, and if she
But gives the nod, must fall a sacrifice
To her resentment. Let us guard against it,
And court that power which we can never destroy:
Respect well-feigned may win her to our purpose.

SALOME.

No: there are better methods to remove
Our fears of Mariamne.

MAZAEL.

Ha! what means?

SALOME.

Perhaps even now she dies.

MAZAEL.

And wilt thou dare
To do a deed so desperate? If the king—

SALOME.

The king assists me in the work of vengeance,
And has consented: Zares is arrived
At Solyma; my instrument of wrath
Waits for his victim: know, the time, the place,
The hand to execute, are ready all:
To-day it must be done.

MAZAEL.

Hast thou then gained
At last the victory? Could the king believe thee?
Spite of his passion, will he yield up all,
And act as thou commandest?

SALOME.

Not so: my power
Is more confined: scarce could I urge to vengeance,
With all my arts, his long-reluctant soul,
But I availed me of his absence from her:
Whilst Herod lived, exposed to all her charms,
Thou knowest I led a life of wretchedness,
Of doubt and fear, uncertain of my fate;
When, by a thousand crooked paths, at last
I found a passage to his heart, and thought
I had secured it, Mariamne came;
And, when he saw her, all was lost again;

My arts all baffled by a single glance:
Yes, the proud queen was mistress of my life,
And might have taken it: had she known the way
To manage well her easy lover's fondness,
Herod had signed the mandate for another,
And not for Mariamne; then the blow
I meant for her had fallen on Salome:
But I have made her pride assist my vengeance,
And I have only now to point the dart,
Which her own hand hath fashioned, to destroy her.
Thou mayest remember well the fatal time
That blasted all our hopes; when, Antony
Subdued. Augustus took the reins of empire,
Each Eastern monarch trembled on his throne:
Amongst the rest my hapless brother feared,
With his protector, he had lost his crown.
Resistance now was vain, and naught remained
But to address the conqueror of the world
In lowliest terms, and ask forgiveness of him.
Call back that dreadful day, when Herod, driven
Even to despair, beheld proud Mariamne
Spurn at his offered love and kind farewell;
Heard her with anguish heap reproaches on him;
Call for a father's and a brother's blood,
Shed by her tyrant husband: Herod flew
To me, and told his griefs; I seized the moment
Propitious to my vengeance, and regained
A sister's power o'er his distressed heart;
Inflamed his rage, and sharpened his despair;
Dipped in fresh poison the envenomed dart
That pierced his soul: then, desperate in his wrath,
Thou heardest him swear to exterminate the race
Of Hebrews, and destroy its poor remains;
Condemn the mother, and cut off her sons
From their inheritance: but soon to rage
Succeeded love; one look from her disarmed
His vengeance. I, with double eagerness,
Pressed his departure, and at length prevailed:
He left her; from that hour I was successful;
My frequent letters kept up his resentment,
And, absent from her, all his rage returned:
He blushed in secret for his weakness past,
And by degrees, as I removed the veil,
His eyes were opened: Zares caught with me
The favorable hour, and painted her
In blackest colors; told him of her power,
Her interest, friends, and the seditious faction,
The partisans of the Asmonæan race.

But I did more, I raised his jealousy;
He trembled for his glory, and his life:
Continual treasons had alarmed his soul,
And left it ever open to suspicion:
Whate'er he fears, still ready to believe,
He is not able to distinguish guilt
From innocence; in short, I fixed his soul,
Guided his hand, and made him sign the mandate.

MAZAEL.

'Twas nobly done: but what will Varus say,
The haughty prætor, will he see unmoved
A deed so daring? he's thy master here,
And, unconfirmed by Rome, thy power is nothing.
From Varus' hand thy brother must receive
His crown; nor can he act as sovereign here
Till the proud prætor shall restore it to him.
Will Varus, thinkest thou, e'er permit a queen,
Left to his care, to fall a sacrifice?
I know the Romans well, they ne'er forgive
Such rude contempt of their authority.
Thou wilt bring down the storm on Herod's head;
Their thunder's always ready; those proud conquerors
Are jealous of their rights, and take, thou knowest,
Peculiar pleasure in the fall of kings.

SALOME.

Fear not for Herod, Cæsar is his friend,
And Varus knows it, therefore will respect him:
Perhaps this Roman means to manage all,
But be it as it may, my aim is vengeance;
I'm on the verge of glory or of shame;
To-morrow, nay, to-day may change the scene:
Who knows if e'er hereafter I shall find
An hour propitious to me, who can tell
If Herod will be steady to his purpose?
I know his weakness, and I must prevent it,
Nor give him time to say, it shall not be.
When it is done, let Varus rage, and Rome
Pour forth her threats, it shall not damp my joys:
The Romans are not here my worst of foes;
No, I have more to fear from Mariamne;
I must subdue her rival powers, or perish:
But Varus comes this way, we must avoid him:
Zares ere now should have been here: I'll hence
And meet him; fare thee well.—If there be need,

My soldiers at the least alarm are ready,
And will defend us.

SCENE II.

varus, albinus, mazael, *Attendants on* varus.

VARUS.

Salome and Mazael—
They seem to shun us; in their eyes I read
Their terrors; guilt hath reason to be fearful,
And dread my presence.—Mazael, stay: go, tell
Thy cruel master his designs are known;
His wicked instrument is now in chains,
And should have met the death he merited,
But my regard for Herod bids me hope
That he will soon behold the snare they laid.
Punish the traitors, and revenge the cause
Of injured virtue: if thou lovest thy king,
If thou regardest his honor or his peace,
Calm his wild rage, embitter not his soul
With vile suspicions, and remember, slave,
Rome is the scourge of villainy; remember
That Varus knows thee; that he's master here,
And that his eyes are open to detect thee
Away: let Mariamne be obeyed,
And treated like a queen; observe her well,
And, if thy life be dear to thee, respect her.

MAZAEL.

My lord—

VARUS.

Begone: you know my last commands;
Reply not, but obey them.

SCENE III.

varus, albinus.

VARUS.

Without thee,
And thy well-timed advice, thou seest, my friend,

The beautiful Mariamne had been lost.

ALBINUS.

Zares' return raised my suspicions of him;
His most officious care to avoid thy presence,
And troubled features, I must own, alarmed me.

VARUS.

How much I owe thee for the important service!
By thee she lives; by thee my heart once more
Shall taste its noble happiness, the best
And fairest treasure of the virtuous mind,
The happiness to succor the oppressed.

ALBINUS.

Such generous cares befit the soul of Varus;
Thy arm was ever stretched to help the wretched;
Still hast thou born Rome's thunder through the world,
And only conquered but to bless mankind;
Would I might say thy pity dictates here,
And not thy love!

VARUS.

Must love then be the cause?
Who would not cherish innocence like hers?
What heart, howe'er indifferent, would not plead
So fair a cause? who would not die to save her?

ALBINUS.

Thus the deceitful passion hides itself
In virtue's garb, and steals into the heart:
Thy hapless flame—

VARUS.

Albinus, I confess it;
The wretched Varus dotes on Mariamne:
Thou seest my naked heart, which fears not thee,
Because thou art my friend: judge then, Albinus,
How must her dangers have alarmed my soul!
Her safety and her welfare are my own;
Death in its ugliest form were welcome to me,

If it could make my Mariamne happy.

ALBINUS.

How altered is the noble heart of Varus!
Love has avenged himself of all thy flights;
No longer do I see the virtuous Roman,
Severe and unimpassioned, 'midst the crowd
Of rival beauties, who solicited
His wandering eyes, regardless of their charms.

VARUS.

To virtue then, thou knowest, and her alone,
I paid my vows: in vain corrupted Rome
Offered her venal beauties to my eyes;
Their pride disgusted, and their arts displeas'd;
False in their vows, and in their vengeance cruel:
I saw their shameless fronts all cover'd o'er
With foul dishonor: vanity, ambition,
Caprice, and folly, bore the name of love;
Such conquests were unworthy of thy friend.
At length the power I had so long contemn'd
Indignant saw me from his Eastern throne,
And soon subdued; it was my fate to rule
O'er Syria's melancholy plains: when heaven
Had to Augustus given the vanquish'd world,
And Herod, midst a crowd of kneeling kings,
Fell at his feet, and sued for his protection,
Hither I came, and fatal to my peace
Was Palestine, for there I first beheld her.
The melancholy theme of every tongue
Was Mariamne's woes; all wept her fate,
Doomed to the arms of an inhuman husband,
Who slew the father of his lovely bride:
Thou knowest what miseries she had suffered since,
Her sorrows only equalled by her virtue:
Truth, ever banished from the courts of kings,
Dwells on her lips, and all the art she knows
Is but the generous care to serve the wretched.
Her duty is her law; her innocence,
Calm and serene, contemns the tyrant's power,
And pardons her oppressor; even solicits
My aid to save the man who would destroy her.
Her virtues, her misfortunes, and her charms
United, are too powerful for my soul;
I love her, my Albinus; but my love
Is not a passion which one day creates,

And in another is forgotten; no:
The heart she has subdued is not the slave
Of loose desire, but by her virtue fired,
Means to revenge but never to betray her.

ALBINUS.

But if the king, my lord, has gained from Rome
Permission to return.

VARUS.

Ay, that I fear:
Alas! myself did move the senate for him.
Perhaps already he returns to empire,
And this abhorred mandate is his own;
The first sad proof of his authority:
It may be fatal to him. Varus' power
May soon be lost, but O! his love remains;
Yes, I will die in Mariamne's cause;
The world shall weep her fate, and I avenge it.

End of the First Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

salome, mazaël.

SALOME.

Thou seest we are ruined; Mariamne triumphs,
And Salome's undone: that lingering Zares,
How tedious was his voyage, as if the sea
Unwillingly transported him! whilst Herod
Flies with the winds to empire and to love:
But sea and land, the elements, the heavens,
All, all conspire with Varus, to destroy me.
Ambition, thou hast plunged me deep in woe;
Why did I listen to thy fatal voice?
I knew his foolish heart would soon relent;
Even now I fear he has revoked the mandate,
And all the harvest of my toil is grief
And danger, that still wait on high condition
Stripped of its power: already fawning crowds
Adore my rival, and insult my fall:
My feeble glories, all eclipsed by her,
Shall shine no more, for this new deity
Must now be worshipped: but this is not all,
My death, I know, must crown the triumph; she
Can never reign whilst Salome survives;
She will not spare a life so fatal to her.
And yet, O shame, O infamous submission!
My pride must stoop to vile dissimulation,
To soothe her vanity with feigned respect,
And give her joy of—Salome's destruction.

MAZAEL.

Despair not, Madam, arms may yet be found
To conquer this proud queen: I ever feared
Her powerful charms, and Herod's weakness for her;
But if I may depend on Zares, still
In the king's bosom dwells determined hate,
And he has sworn that she shall die: the blow
Is but suspended till he comes himself
To execute his vengeance; but, meantime,
Whether his heart be sharpened by resentment,

Or moved by love, it is enough his hand
Once signed the mandate: Mariamne soon
Will swell the tempest, and eternal discord
Shall rankle in their hearts: I know them well:
Soon will she light again the torch of hatred,
Revive his doubts, and work her own destruction:
With new disdain will irritate his soul:
Rely upon herself, and mark her ruin.

SALOME.

O! 'tis uncertain; I can never wait
Such tardy vengeance; I have surer means;
Danger has taught me wisdom: this loud rage,
These violent transports of the impassioned Varus,
If I observe aright, can never flow
From generosity alone, and pity
Is seldom known by marks like these: the queen
Has charms, and Varus may have charms for her.
I know the power of Mariamne's beauty,
Nor envy her the crowd of gazing fools,
Who throw their flattering incense at her feet;
The dangerous happiness may cost her dear:
Whether she listens to the Roman's vows,
Or with the conquest only means to soothe
Her fickle pride, it is enough for me,
If it preserves that power I must not lose
O'er Herod's heart. Take care my faithful spies
Perform their office; let them be rewarded,
And sell me precious secrets.—Ha! she comes,
Must I then see her?

SCENE II.

mariamne, eliza, salome, mazaël, nabal.

SALOME.

Joy to Mariamne:
Herod returns, and Rome this day restores
To me a brother, and to thee a husband.
Thy cruel scorn had raised his just resentment,
Which now subsides, and love has quenched the flame
Which love alone inspired: his triumphs past,
His future glories, all the senate's rights
Reposed in him, the titles he has gained,
All brought to lay at Mariamne's feet,

Proclaim thy happiness: enjoy his heart;
Enjoy his empire; I am pleased to see
Thy virtues thus rewarded; Salome
Shall lend her aid to join your hands together.

MARIAMNE.

I neither looked for, nor desired your friendship:
I know you, madam, and shall do you justice;
I know by what mean arts, and treacherous falsehood,
Your powerless malice has pursued my life.
Perhaps thou thinkest my heart is like thy own,
And therefore tremblest; but thou knowest me not:
Fear nothing, for thy crimes and punishment
Are both beneath my notice: I have seen
Thy base designs, and have forgiven them:
I leave thee to thy conscience, if a heart
Guilty as thine is capable of feeling.

SALOME.

I've not deserved this bitterness and wrath
From Mariamne: to my honest zeal,
My conduct, and my brother, I appeal
From thy suspicions.

MARIAMNE.

I've already told thee,
All is forgotten, I am satisfied,
And I can pardon, though I can't believe thee.

MAZAEL.

Now, by the power supreme, my royal mistress,
Scarce could my pains—

MARIAMNE.

Stop, Mazael, excuse
Is added injury; obey the king,
That is thy duty: sold to my oppressors,
Thou art their instrument; perform thy office,
I shall not stoop to make complaints of thee.
Thou, Salome, mayest hence, and tell the king
[To Salome.]
The secrets of my soul; inflame his heart

Once more with rage; I shall not strive to calm it:
Instruct your creatures to deal forth their slander,
I've left their vile attempts unpunished still;
Content to use no arms against my foes,
But blameless virtue, and a just disdain.

MAZAEL.

What haughtiness!

SALOME.

'Twill meet with its reward:
It is the pride of art to punish folly.

SCENE III.

mariamne, eliza, nabal.

ELIZA.

Why, my loved mistress, would you thus provoke
A foe who burns with ardor to destroy you?
Perhaps the rage of Herod is suspended
But for a time, and yet may burst upon you.
Death was departing, and thou callest him back,
When thou shouldst strive to turn his dart aside:
Thou hast no friend to guard or to defend thee;
Varus, thy kind protector, must obey
The senate's orders, and to distant realms
Convey its high commands: at his request,
And by thy kind assistance, Herod gained
His power, and now the tyrant will return
With double terror: thou hast furnished him
With arms against thyself, and must depend
On this proud master, to be dreaded more
Because he loves, because his passion soured
By thy disdain—

MARIAMNE.

My dear Eliza, fly,
Bring Varus hither: thou art in the right;
I see it all; but I have other cares;
My soul is filled with more important business:
Let Varus come: Nabal, stay thou with me.

SCENE IV.

mariamne, nabal.

MARIAMNE.

Thy virtues, thy experience, and thy zeal
For Mariamne's welfare, have long since
Deserved my confidence: thou knowest my heart,
And all its purposes; the woes I feel,
And those I fear: thou sawest my wretched mother,
Driven to despair, with tears imploring me
To share her flight: her mind, replete with terror,
Sees every moment the impetuous Herod,
Yet reeking with the blood of half her race,
Assassinate her dearest Mariamne.
Still she entreats me, with my helpless children,
To fly his wrath, and leave this hated clime;
The Roman vessels might transport us soon
From Syria's borders to the Italian shore;
From Varus I might hope some kind protection,
And from Augustus; fortune points the way
For my escape, the only path of safety:
And yet, from virtue or from weakness, which
I know not, but my foolish heart recoils
At flying from a husband's arms, and keeps,
Spite of myself, my lingering footsteps here.

NABAL.

Thy fears are groundless; yet I must admire them,
Because they flow from virtue: thy brave heart,
That fears not death, yet trembles at the thought
Even of imaginary guilt: but cease
Your causeless doubts; consider where you are;
Open your eyes, and mark this fatal palace,
Wet with a father's and a brother's blood.
In vain the king denies the horrid deed;
Cæsar in vain absolves him from the crime,
Whilst the whole East pronounce him guilty of it.
Think of thy mother's fears, thy injured sons,
Thy murdered father, the king's cruelty,
Thy sister's hatred, and what scarce my tongue
Can mention without horror, though thy virtue
Regardless smiles, thy death this day determined.
If, undismayed by such a scene of woe,
Thou art resolved to meet and brave thy fate,

O still remember, still defend thy children:
The king hath taken away their hopes of empire,
And well thou knowest what dreadful oracles
Long since alarmed thy fears, when heaven foretold,
That a strange hand should one day join thy sons
To their unhappy father. A wild Arab,
Implacable and pitiless, already
Hath half fulfilled the terrible prediction:
After a deed so horrid, may he not
Accomplish all the rest? From Herod's rage
Nothing is sacred; who can tell but now,
Even now he comes to act his bloody purpose,
And blot out all our Asmonæan race?
'Tis time to guard against him, to prevent
His guilt, and stop his murderous hand; to save
Those tender victims from a tyrant's sword,
And hide them from the sight of such examples.
Within thy palace from my earliest years
Brought up, and by thy ancestors beloved,
Thou seest me ready to partake thy fortunes
Where'er thou goest: away then; break thy chains;
Fly to the justice of a Roman senate;
Implore them to adopt thy injured sons,
And shelter their distress: such innocence
And virtue will astonish great Augustus.
If just and happy is his reign, as fame
Reports, and conquered worlds in rapture bend
The knee before him, if he merits all
The honors he has gained, he must protect thee.

MARIAMNE.

My doubts are vanished, and I yield to thee;
To thy advice, and to a mother's tears;
To my son's danger, to my own hard fate;
Which dooms me yet perhaps to greater ills
Than I have suffered. Go thou to my mother;
When night shall throw her sable mantle o'er
This seat of guilt, let some one give me notice
That all is ready; since it must be done,
I am prepared.

SCENE V.

mariamne, varus, eliza.

VARUS.

I come, great queen, to know
Your last commands; which, as the law of heaven.
Shall be revered: say, must this arm avenge thee?
Speak, and 'tis done: command, and I obey.

MARIAMNE.

Varus, I'm much indebted to thy goodness,
And, but my sorrows plead their own excuse,
Should not be thus importunate; I know
Thou lovest to help the wretched, therefore ask
Thy generous aid: whilst Herod's doubtful fate
Hung in the balance, and he knew not which
Awaited him, a prison or a throne,
I did solicit Varus in his favor;
Spite of his cruelties, against my peace,
Against my interest, I performed my duty.
Now Mariamne for herself implores
Thy kind protection; begs thee to preserve
From most inhuman laws, her hapless sons,
The poor remains of Syria's royal race.
Long since I should have left these guilty walls,
And asked the senate for some safe retreat;
But whilst the sword of war filled half the world
With blood and slaughter, 'twas in vain to seek
For refuge in the scene of wild destruction:
Augustus now hath given the nations peace,
And spread his bounties o'er the face of nature:
After the toils of hateful war, resolved
To make the world, which he had conquered, happy:
He sits supreme o'er tributary kings,
And takes the poor and injured to his care:
Who has so fair a title to his justice,
As my unhappy, my defenceless children?
Brought by their weeping mother from afar
To ask his succor; he will shelter them,
His generous hand will wipe off all our tears.
I shall not ask him to revenge my cause,
Or punish my proud foes; it is enough
If my loved children, formed by his example,
And by his justice taught, true Romans soon,
Shall learn to rule of those who rule mankind.
A mother's comfort, and her children's safety,
Depend on thee: my woes will vanish all
If thou wilt hear me; and thy noble heart
Hath ever been the friend of injured virtue:

To thee I owe my life: assist me now,
Remove me, Varus, from this fatal palace;
Grant my benighted steps a friendly guide
To Sidon's ports, where now thy vessels lie.
Not answer me! what means that look of sorrow?
Why art thou silent? O! too well I see
Thou wilt not hear the voice of wretchedness.

VARUS.

It is not so: I hear, and will obey thee:
My guards shall follow thee to Rome: dispose
Of them, of me; my heart, my life is thine.
Flee from the tyrant, break the fatal tie;
'Tis punishment enough to be forsaken
By Mariamne: never shall he behold thee;
Thanks to his own injustice; and I feel
Too well there cannot be a fate more cruel.
Forgive me, but the thought of losing thee
Hath drawn the fatal secret from my breast;
I own my crime: but, spite of all my weakness,
Know, my respect is equal to my love:
Varus but wishes to protect thy virtue,
But to avenge thy injuries, and die.

MARIAMNE.

I hoped the great preserver of my life
Would prove the guardian of my honor too;
And to his pity only thought I owed
His kind assistance; ne'er did I expect
That he, of all men, should increase my sorrows;
Or that, to crown the woes of Mariamne,
I should be forced to tremble at thy goodness,
And blush for every favor I received:
Yet, think not, Varus, that thy passion, thus
Declared, shall rob thee of my gratitude:
My constant friendship shall be ever thine;
I will forget thy love, but not thy virtues:
Thou hadst my praise and my esteem till now,
But longer converse may deprive thee of it;
For thy sake therefore, Varus, I must leave thee.

SCENE VI.

varus, albinus.

ALBINUS.

I fear you're troubled, sir; your color changes.

VARUS.

Albinus, I must own, my spirits droop;
Pity, my friend, the weakness of a heart
That never loved before: alas! I knew not
How strong my fetters were, but now I feel,
Nor can I break them: with what sweet demeanor,
And lovely softness, did she chide my passion;
Calm and unruffled, how her tranquil prudence
Taught me my duty, and enforced her own;
How I adored her even when she repulsed me!
I've lost all hope, yet love her more than ever:
Gods! for what dreadful trial of my faith
Am I reserved?

ALBINUS.

Wilt thou then aid her flight?

VARUS.

'Tis a sad office.

ALBINUS.

Art thou pleased so well
With her disdain, as thus to make thyself
Unhappy, and promote thy own destruction?
What dost thou purpose?

VARUS.

Can I e'er forsake her?
Can I rebel against her laws? my heart
Were then unworthy of her. Hence my doubts.
'Twas Mariamne spoke, and I obey:
Quick, let her leave the tyrant; let her seek
Augustus; she has cause to fly, and Varus
Has none to murmur or complain; at least
She leaves me the sweet pleasure to reflect,
That I have lived and acted but for her;
Have broke her chains, have saved her precious life:
Nay more: for I will sacrifice my love,

Fly from those dangerous charms that would betray me,
And imitate the virtue I adore.

End of the Second Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

varus, nabal, albinus,*Attendants on*varus.

NABAL.

The king, my lord, the happy Herod, comes
Triumphant, and the Hebrews flock in crowds
To meet him: Salome, alarmed and fearful
Of her declining interest, joins his train
Of fawning courtiers, soothes his pride, and strives
By every art to gain him to her purpose;
The priests attend, and strew their palms before him.
With Herod comes the faithful Idamas,
Deputed by his sovereign to attend
The noble Varus; he will soon be here.
Still hath he proved himself the constant friend
Of Mariamne, and by wholesome counsels
Softened the rage of his impetuous master:
The queen, still wavering and irresolute,
Condemns herself; her rigid virtue fears
To do what danger tells her must be done:
She quits the palace, then returns; meanwhile
Her anxious mother, falling at her feet,
Bathes them in tears, points to her weeping children,
And trembling begs her to depart: she stops,
And doubts, and much I fear will stay too long:
'Tis thou must hasten her; on thee alone
Depends the safety of the noblest being
Heaven e'er gave birth to. O preserve her; save
The race august sprung from a line of kings;
Save Mariamne. Are your guards all ready?
May I inform her of it?

VARUS.

All's prepared:
I gave them orders: she may go this moment.

NABAL.

And wilt thou too permit a faithful servant
To follow his loved mistress?

VARUS.

Go with her,
Wait on her steps, and guard her as thy life:
This hateful place deserves her not: may heaven,
In pity to her sorrows, smile upon her;
Light up a fairer sun to gild her journey,
And bid the waves in smoother currents flow,
Obedient to the sacred charge they bear!
Thou, good old man, mayest follow and attend her;
Thou art too happy, but thou hast deserved it.

SCENE II.

varus, albinus,*Attendants on*varus.

VARUS.

Already Herod comes; the trumpet's sound
Speaks his return; unwelcome sound to me!
I dread his presence: cruel as he is,
Instant his wrath may fall on Mariamne:
Would she had left forever these sad seats
Of guilt and horror! would I might partake
Her flight! but O! the more I love, the more
I must avoid her: 'twere in me a crime
To follow her; and all that Varus can—
But Idamas approaches.

SCENE III.

varus, idamas, albinus,*Attendants on*varus.

IDAMAS.

Ere the king,
My royal master, comes, with gratitude
To pay thy bounties, and receive from thee
The holy sceptre, say, wilt thou permit me?—

VARUS.

No more: your king may spare this idle homage,
These practised arts of visionary friendship
Amongst the great, drawn forth with pompous splendor
But to amuse the gaping multitude
And foreign to the heart: but say, at length

Rome has consented; Herod is your king;
Doth he deserve to reign? Is the queen safe,
And will he spare the blood of innocence.

IDAMAS.

May the just gods, who hate the perjured man,
Open his eyes, now blinded by imposture!
But who shall dive into his secret thoughts,
Or trace the emotions of his troubled soul?
Naught can we draw from him but sullen silence;
Or if perchance the name of Mariamne
Escape his lips, he sighs, and raves: this moment
Gives secret orders, and the next revokes them:
Herod detests the race from whence she sprang,
And hates her more because he loved too well.
Perfidious Zares, by thy order stopped,
And by thy order freed, the artificer
Of calumny and fraud, will serve the cause
Of subtle Salome, whilst Mazaël lends
His secret aid: the jealous Herod listens
To their suggestions; they besiege him closely;
And their officious hatred still keeps truth
At distance from him: this great conqueror,
Who made so many potent monarchs tremble,
This king, whose noble deeds even Rome admired,
Whose name yet fills all Asia with alarms,
In his own house beholds his glories fade:
Torn by suspicions, and o'erwhelmed with grief;
Led by his sister, hated by his wife:
I pity him, and fear for Mariamne.
Say, wilt thou not protect her?

VARUS.

'Tis enough:
Albinus, follow me, the queen's in danger:
Away, for I must save the innocent.

IDAMAS.

Will you not wait then for the king?

VARUS.

I know
I should receive him here: it is my duty,
For so the senate wills: but other cares

Inspire me now, and other interests guide:
'Tis my first duty to protect the wretched.
[Exit Varus.

IDAMAS.

What storms do I foresee? what new distresses
Will soon o'ertake us? Now, O Israel's God,
Change Herod's heart!

SCENE IV.

herod, mazael, idamas, *Attendants on herod.*

HEROD.

Varus avoid me too!
What horrors meet me here on every side!
Good heaven! can Herod inspire naught but hatred
And terror to mankind? Is every heart
Thus shut against me? To myself disgustful,
My people, and my queen; with grief oppressed
I re-ascend my throne, and only come
To see the sorrows my own hand hath made.
O heaven!

MAZAEL.

Be calm, my lord, let me entreat you.

HEROD.

Wretch that I am, what have I done!

MAZAEL.

Ha! weeping!
Shall Herod weep, the great, the illustrious king,
The dread of Parthia, and the friend of Rome,
For wisdom and for valor long renowned!
O! think my lord, of those distinguished honors
Which Antony and victory bestowed;
Think of thy fame, when seen by great Augustus,
He chose thee from a crowd of conquered kings,
And marked thee for his friend: call back the time,
When great Jerusalem, by thee subdued,
Submitted to thy laws: by thee defended,

Once more she shines with all her ancient lustre,
And sees her sovereign crowned with fair success:
Never was king in peace or war more happy.

HEROD.

There is no happiness on earth for me;
Fate points its poisoned arrows at my breast;
And, to complete my woes, I have deserved them.

IDAMAS.

Permit me, sir, the freedom to observe,
Your throne, by fears and jealousies surrounded,
Would stand more firmly on love's nobler basis:
The king who makes his people's happiness
Secures his own; thy soul, thus racked with tortures,
Might trace the poisoned waters to their spring.
O, my lord, suffer not malicious tongues
To wound the peace and honor of thy life;
Nor servile flatterers to estrange the hearts
Of those who long to serve their royal master:
Israel shall then enamored with thy virtues—

HEROD.

And thinkest thou Herod might again be loved?

MAZAEL.

Zares, my lord, still faithful to his charge,
Burns with the same unwearied zeal to serve thee:
He comes from Salome, and begs admittance.

HEROD.

What! both forever persecute me! No!
Let not that monster e'er appear before me;
I've heard too much already: hence, begone,
And leave me to myself: what shall I do
To calm my troubled soul? Stay, Idamas,
And, Mazael, stay.

SCENE V.

herod, mazael, idamas.

HEROD.

Behold this dreadful monarch,
This mighty king, who made the nations tremble;
Who knew so well to conquer and to reign.
To break his chains, and make the world admire
His wisdom and his power: behold him now,
Alas! how little like his former self!

MAZAEL.

All own thy greatness, and adore thy virtues.

IDAMAS.

One heart alone resists, and that perhaps
May still be thine.

HEROD.

No: Herod's a barbarian,
Unworthy of his throne.

IDAMAS.

Thy grief is just,
And if for Mariamne—

HEROD.

Fatal name!
'Tis that condemns me; that reproaches still
My tortured soul with cruelty and weakness.

MAZAEL.

My lord, your goodness but augments her hatred;
She loathes your sight, and flies from your embraces.

HEROD.

I courted hers.

MAZAEL.

Indeed, my lord?

HEROD.

I did:
This sudden change, this grief that hangs upon me,
These shameful tears, do they not all declare
That Herod is returned from Mariamne?
With love and hatred mingled in my soul,
I left the crowd of flatterers in my court,
And flew to her: but what was my reward?
How did we meet! in anger, frowns, and strife:
In her indignant eyes I read my fate,
And my injustice: she scarce deigned to cast
A look upon me; even my tears availed not;
They only served to make her scorn me more.

MAZAEL.

You see, my lord, her soul's implacable,
And never will be softened by indulgence;
It but inflames her pride.

HEROD.

I know she hates me;
But I've deserved it, and I must forgive her:
She has but too much cause from one so guilty.

MAZAEL.

Guilty, my lord? hast thou forgot her flights,
Contempt, and pride, and wrath, and fierce resentment;
Her father's plot, her own designs against thee,
And all her race thy mortal foes? Hircanus
Had oft betrayed thee; the Asmonæan league
Was firmly knit; and by such dangerous powers,
That nothing but a master-stroke could save—

HEROD.

No matter: that Hircanus was her father,
I should have spared him; but I only listened
To proud ambition, and the love of empire:
My cruel policy destroyed her race;
I killed the father, and proscribed his daughter:
I wanted but to hate and to oppress,
And heaven, to punish me, hath made me love her.

IDAMAS.

To feel a passion for a worthy object
Is not a weakness in us, but a virtue,
Worthy of every good which heaven hath given thee;
Esteem thy love amongst its choicest blessings.

HEROD.

What hath my rashness done! ye sacred manes,
Hircanus, Oh!

MAZAEL.

Banish the sad remembrance,
And grant, kind heaven, the queen too may forget it!

HEROD.

Unhappy father! more unhappy husband!
The injuries I have done my Mariamne
Make her more dear: O! if her heart—her faith—
But I have stayed too long: now, Idamas,
I'll make amends for all; go, haste, and tell her,
My soul, obedient to her will, shall lay
My throne, my life, my glory at her feet:
Amongst her sons I'll choose a successor.
She has accused my sister as the cause
Of her misfortunes, henceforth I disclaim her;
A nearer tie demands the sacrifice,
And Salome must yield to Mariamne:
My queen shall rule with power unlimited!

MAZAEL.

My lord, you will not—

HEROD.

Yes: I am resolved:
I know her now; she is the choicest gift
Of bounteous heaven; as such I shall revere her:
What cannot love, the mighty conqueror, do?
To Mariamne I shall owe my virtue.
In savage pomp, and barbarous majesty,
Too long hath Asia seen her sovereign rule
Respected by his people; feared, admired,

Yet hated still; with crowds of worshippers,
But not one friend. My sister, whom long time
This foolish heart believed, hath ne'er consulted
My happiness, my interest, or my fame:
For Salome, more cruel than myself,
And more revengeful, dipped her hands in blood,
And ruled my subjects with a rod of iron:
Whilst Mariamne felt for the unhappy,
Forgot her own distress to pity theirs,
And told me all their sorrows: but 'tis past:
Henceforth I will be just, but not severe;
I'll strive to please her by promoting still
The public weal: Judah shall bless my reign,
For I am changed. From this auspicious hour,
Far from my throne, shall every jealous fear
Be now removed: I will dry up the tears
Of the oppressed, and reign o'er Palestine,
Not as a tyrant, but a citizen;
Gain every heart to merit Mariamne's.
O seek her, tell her how my soul repents;
That my remorse is equal to my rashness.
Run, fly, begone, and instantly return.
What do I see? my sister? hence: O heaven,
Finish the woes of my unhappy life!

SCENE VI.

herod, salome.

SALOME.

Well, sir, you've seen your dear deceitful foe,
And suffered more affronts; I know you have.

HEROD.

Madam, permit me to inform you, this
Is not a time to add to my misfortunes;
I would remove them: my imperious temper
Made me more feared indeed, but more unhappy:
Too long already o'er this house of sorrow
Hath vengeance poured her black and deadly poison:
The queen and you, thus at perpetual variance,
Would be a spring of endless misery; therefore,
My sister, for our mutual happiness,
For thy repose and mine, 'tis best to part;
Immediately, away: it must be so.

SALOME.

What do I hear! O fatal enemy!

HEROD.

A king commands, a brother begs it of thee:
O may he ne'er again be forced to give
One cruel order, ne'er take vengeance more,
Nourish suspicions, or shed guiltless blood!
Thou shalt no longer make my life a burden;
Complain of me, lament thyself, but go.

SALOME.

Alas! my lord, I shall make no complaints;
Since I am doomed to banishment by thee,
It must be just, and fitting that I should be;
For I have ever learned to make thy will
My law: if thou commandest, I must obey;
I never shall resent the injury,
Or call on nature and the ties of blood,
Or to attest, or vindicate my wrongs;
The voice of nature's seldom heard by kings,
The ties of blood are much too weak to bind them:
I will not boast that tender friendship now
Whose zeal offends thee; much less would I call
To thy remembrance all my service past;
One look I see from Mariamne soon
Effaces all: but canst thou ever think
She will forget the attempt upon her life
Which Herod made? thee she must fear: thou therefore
Shouldst dread her more: thou knowest her vows, her thoughts
Are bent against thee, and whose counsels now
Shall stay her vengeance? Where's the faithful heart
Devoted to thee? where's the watchful eye,
Ever awake, to guard the life of Herod?
Who shall unravel all her subtle plots,
Or who restrain her wrath? Dost thou believe,
When thou hast put thy life within her power,
That love will plead for thee? O no! such hate,
Such scorn as hers, such desperate resentment—

HEROD.

Permit me, Salome, at least to doubt,
At least delude me with the flattering hopes
I may regain her heart: in this alone

I wish to be deceived: show some regard,
Some kind compassion for a brother's weakness:
I must believe, thou knowest I've too much reason.
Thy hatred was a barrier to our love:
Thy malice hardened Mariamne's heart,
And, but for thee, I had been less detested.

SALOME.

Couldst thou but know, O! couldst thou but conceive
To what excess—

HEROD.

Sister, I'll hear no more:
Let Mariamne threaten; let her take
This loathesome life, for I am weary of it;
So shall I perish by the hand I love.

SALOME.

It would be cruel to deceive you longer
By guilty silence, or conceal her crimes:
I know the dangerous hazard that I run
By serving you; but I must speak, though death
Were my reward: poor, blind, deluded husband,
Enslaved by love for a vile worthless woman;
Know Mariamne now, and know thy shame:
'Tis not her pride, her hatred, and disdain,
Should make thee loathe her, but that—she is false;
She loves another.

HEROD.

Mariamne love
Another! barbarous sister! to suspect
Her spotless virtue! Is it thus thou meanest
To murder Herod? Are these poisoned darts
The best farewell that thou canst leave thy brother?
To light up discord, shame, and rage, and horror,
In my distracted mind! Could Mariamne—
But thou already hast too oft deceived me;
Too long have I given credit to thy falsehood:
Now heaven has punished my credulity,
But it has ever been my fate to love
Those who abhor me. You are all my foes;
All sworn to persecute the wretched Herod.

SALOME.

Far from thy sight then—

HEROD.

Stir not hence, I charge thee;
Another is beloved? Speak, tell me, who
Must fall a sacrifice to Herod's vengeance?
Pursue thy work, and make my woes complete.

SALOME.

Since I must speak—

HEROD.

Strike here: behold my heart:
Who has dishonored me? Whoe'er he be,
Thou, Salome, perhaps mayest answer for it,
For thou art guilty: thou hast undeceived me:
Now at thy peril speak.

SALOME.

No matter.

HEROD.

Well—

SALOME.

'Tis—

SCENE VII.

herod, salome, mazael.

MAZAEL.

Bear not this indignity, my lord,
The queen is fled, accompanied by Varus.

HEROD.

Varus, and Mariamne! gods! where am I?

MAZAEL.

Varus, my lord, and all his troops have left
The palace, and a secret band is placed
About the walls to favor her retreat;
Your Mariamne will be lost forever.

HEROD.

The charm is broke, and day shines full upon me:
Come, Salome, acknowledge now thy brother,
And know him by his wrath; let us surprise
The infidel: now judge if Herod still
Acts like himself, and like himself revenges.

End of the Third Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

salome, mazaël.

MAZAEL.

Never did fair appearance gild so well
The specious covering of a happy falsehood:
With what dexterity I played on him,
And blended truth with artifice! But why
Art thou dejected? art thou not restored
To Herod's favor? Mariamne lost,
Beyond recovery lost? Thou art avenged;
The king's distracted. I am shocked myself
When I behold the work of my own hands:
Thou too hast seen the horrid spectacle,
The trembling slaves all butchered by his hand.
The queen half-dead, and fainting by their side,
And Herod's arm uplifted as in act
To murder her: the children bathed in tears
Fall at his feet, and offer their own lives
To save their mother's: canst thou wish for more,
Or hast thou aught to fear?

SALOME.

I fear the king,
I fear those fatal charms which he adores;
That arm which oft uplifted falls as oft
Inactive down; that anger which soon kindled
Is soon extinct; which, doubtful still and blind,
Exhausts its feeble powers in sudden transports:
My triumphs, Mazaël, are uncertain still;
Twice has my fate been changed this day, and twice
To hatred love succeeded: if he sees
The queen again, we are undone.

SCENE II.

herod, salome, mazaël, *Guards*.

MAZAEL.

He comes,
And seems disturbed: what horror in his aspect!

SALOME.

Say, Herod, hast thou taken ample vengeance?

MAZAEL.

I hope my royal master will forgive
His faithful servant, who thus dares to speak
Touching the queen: but Varus is her safeguard;
Prevent his dark designs, and save thyself:
The haughty prætor, resolute and bold,
Will make a merit of destroying thee.

HEROD.

Alas! my sister, how have I been treated!
Deceived, betrayed! help me to rail, to curse
This dear ungrateful woman: now my heart
Rests all its hopes on thy assisting friendship:
Thou, Salome, wert made a sacrifice
To my unhappy love for Mariamne;
I numbered thee amongst my worst of foes;
For her unkindness did I punish thee;
But thou hast seen my tenderness betrayed,
And, ere this day is past, we'll be revenged:
Yes, she shall suffer for her fatal power
O'er Herod's heart, that sighed for her alone.
O how have I adored, and how detested,
The faithless Mariamne! and thou, Varus,
Shalt feel my wrath; thou art a Roman, therefore
Thy life is safe; but I can punish thee
In blood more precious, and a dearer self:
Thou shalt behold the object of thy love,
Who has preferred thee to her hated lord,
Thou shalt behold her soon expire in torment
Before thy eyes: dost thou not think Augustus
Will praise my just severity?

SALOME.

No doubt
He will, my lord, and would himself advise it.
On the same altar where his friends adore him,

He sheds the blood of foes: he teaches kings
To rule and to be feared; let Herod mark
And follow his example; thus alone
Thy life can be secure: the queen must stand
Condemned by all, and thou be justified.

MAZAEL.

But make good use of this important moment,
Whilst Varus is yet absent, and his forces
Far from our walls; now seize her, and complete
Thy easy vengeance.

SALOME.

Above all conceal
From Israel's sons thy purpose and thy grief,
And spare thyself the horror of a sight
So dreadful; fly from this unhappy place,
The witness of thy shame, that must recall
A thousand mournful images; O hide
From every eye thy sorrows and thy tears.

HEROD.

No: I must see her; face to face confound her;
Force her to answer; hear her poor excuses:
I'll make her tremble at the approach of death,
And ask that pardon she shall never obtain.

SALOME.

My lord, you will not see her?

HEROD.

Fear me not;
Her doom is fixed: vainly she hopes that love
Will plead her cause; my heart is shut against her:
Those eyes, which once were dangerous to my peace,
Are harmless now; her presence will but raise
My anger, not my love. Guards, bring her hither;
I'll only see, and hear, and punish her.
Sister, I would be private for a moment:
[*To the attendants.*
Send Mariamne here: you may retire.
[*To the guards.*

SCENE III.

HEROD.

[*Alone.*

Art thou resolved to see her then? O Herod,
Canst thou depend on thy own treacherous heart?
Is not her guilt too plain, and have I not
Been basely injured? Why then seek for more?
What profit can this interview afford me?
I know her thoughts already, know she hates me;
Why lives she yet? revenge, thou art too slow!
Unworthy Herod, coward as thou art,
Go, see her, pardon, sigh again, and court
Your haughty tyrant. No: to-night she dies:
I've sworn it; the Asmonæan blood shall flow;
I hate the race, and am abhorred by them.
But see, she comes; heaven! what a mournful sight!

SCENE IV.

mariamne, herod, eliza, *Guards.*

ELIZA.

Rouse up your spirits, madam, 'tis the king.

MARIAMNE.

Where am I; whither do you lead me? O
'Tis death to look upon him.

HEROD.

How my soul
Shudders at sight of her!

MARIAMNE.

Eliza, help,
Support me, I grow faint.

ELIZA.

This way.

MARIAMNE.

What torment.

HEROD.

What shall I say to her? O heaven!

MARIAMNE.

Well, sir,
Your pleasure: wherefore am I ordered here?
Is it to yield thee up the poor remains
Of hated life, destructive to us both?
Take it; strike here; I'll thank thee for the blow;
The only gift I would accept from thee.

HEROD.

Then thou shalt have it: but first speak, defend,
If possible, thy shameful flight, and tell me wherefore,
When Herod's heart to thee alone indulgent,
So oft offended, yet as oft forgave thee,
The partner of my empire and my glory,
What couldst thou purpose by so black a crime?

MARIAMNE.

Is that a question fit for thee to ask?
But 'tis not now a time for vain reproaches;
Yet sure, my lord, if wretched Mariamne,
Far from these walls had sought some kind retreat,
If she for once had dared to violate
A husband's rights, and swerve from her obedience,
Think of my royal ancestors; remember
My sufferings past, my present danger; think
On these, my lord, and blame me if thou darest.

HEROD.

But when thy guilty passion for a traitor,
For Varus—

MARIAMNE.

Stop thy bold licentious tongue:
My life is thine: but do not cover me

With foul dishonor; let me pass at least
Without a blush unspotted to the grave:
Do not forget the sacred tie that bound us,
That joined my honor and my fame with thine,
As such I have preserved them: look on me;
Strike here; thou art welcome: but remember still
I am thy wife; pay some respect to me,
And to thyself.

HEROD.

O! it becomes thee well
To talk of sacred ties which thou hast broken:
Perfidious woman! would not the proud scorn
And hatred thou hast shown alone condemn thee?

MARIAMNE.

Since thou already hast decreed my fate,
What would avail my hatred or my love?
What right hast thou to Mariamne's heart,
Which thou hast filled with sorrow, and despair,
And anguish: thou who, for these five years past,
Hast marked my days with bitterness and woe;
Thou fell destroyer of my guiltless parents.
Where is my murdered father? cruel Herod!
O! if thy rage had sought no blood but mine,
Heaven be my witness, I had loved thee still,
And blessed thee in my latest hour: but O!
Do not pursue me, Herod, after death;
Do not extend my woes beyond the grave,
Preserve my children; do not punish them,
Because they are mine, but act a father's part:
Perhaps hereafter thou wilt know their mother;
Perhaps shalt one day pity, when too late,
The heart, which, never but by thee suspected,
Could not disguise its griefs; the heart which still
Preserved its virtue, and, but for thyself,
Had loved thee, Herod.

HEROD.

Ha! what do I hear!
What charm, what secret power controls my rage,
And steals me from myself? O Mariamne!

MARIAMNE.

O cruel Herod!

HEROD.

O my foolish heart!

MARIAMNE.

For pity's sake behold my wretchedness,
And take this hated life.

HEROD.

My own is thine,
Forever thine; thou art my Mariamne:
Banish thy fears; O thou wert sure to triumph
When I beheld thee; make no more excuses,
Thou art, thou must be innocent: I now
Must tremble in my turn, and ask forgiveness:
Wilt thou not pardon him who pardoned thee?
Were our hearts made but to detest each other,
To persecute ourselves? Let us at once
End all our fears and all our pains together;
Give me thy love, give me thy hand again.

MARIAMNE.

Canst thou desire this hand? O heaven, thou knowest
Herod's is stained with blood.

HEROD.

It is: I slew
Thy father, and my king; but wherefore did it?
To reign with thee: and what was my reward?
Thy hatred; a reward I well deserved:
I have no right to murmur or complain;
Thy father's death, and the injustice done
To thy unhappy children, are the least
Of Herod's guilt; it reached even Mariamne,
And for a moment I detested thee;
Nay more, gave ear to foul suspicions of thee;
'Twill be the height of virtue to forgive me;
The more my crimes, the more thy soul will show
Its greatness: thou hast seen my weakness for thee,

Take heed that thou abuse it not; for love
And rage, thou knowest, by turns possess my soul;
O give it ease; thou turnest aside thine eyes,
Speak, Mariamne—

MARIAMNE.

Such tumultuous transports
Can never spring, I fear, from true repentance:
Art thou sincere, and may I trust thee, Herod?

HEROD.

Thou mayest: what is there which thou canst not do
If thou wilt cease to hate me? 'twas thy scorn
That raised such furious tempests in my soul;
It was the loss of Mariamne's heart
That made me savage, barbarous, and inhuman:
My tears shall wash away the mutual stain
Of both our faults: and here I swear—

SCENE V.

herod, mariamne, eliza, *a Guard.*

GUARD.

My lord,
The people are in arms; they have destroyed
The scaffold raised by Salome's command,
And slain the officers of justice: Varus
Assumes the sovereign power, he comes this way,
And every moment we expect him here.

HEROD.

Ha! can it be! thus at the very instant
When I was falling at thy feet, to raise
Thy minion—

MARIAMNE.

O my lord, can you believe—

HEROD.

Thou seekest my life, and thou shalt have it, traitress;

But I will drag thee with me to the tomb,
Spite of thyself, we there shall be united.
A guard there, seize, and watch her.

SCENE VI.

herod, mariamne, salome, mazael, eliza, *Guards*.

SALOME.

O, my brother,
Venture not forth; for the rebellious Hebrews
Are raised against you, and demand your life,
Repeating still the name of Mariamne:
They come even now to seize and take her from thee.

HEROD.

Away. I'll meet them unappalled: but thou
Shalt answer for this insult: to thy care
I leave her, Salome, guard well thy charge.

MARIAMNE.

I fear not death, but call high heaven to witness—

MAZAEL.

My lord, the Romans are already here.

HEROD.

And must I leave the guilty wretch unpunished?
No: she shall bleed: it must be so: alas!
In my sad state I can determine nothing;
Death would be welcome; I'll away and meet it.

End of the Fourth Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT V.

SCENE I.

mariamne, eliza, *Guards*.

MARIAMNE.

Soldiers, retire, and leave your queen at least
The mournful privilege to weep alone.
[The guards retire to a corner of the stage.]
Just heaven! is this at last my wretched fate?
My noble blood, my title to a throne,
All that could promise years of happiness,
And days of pleasure, turned to deadly poison,
Have filled my cup with bitterness and woe.
O birth! O youth! and thou destructive beauty,
Whose dangerous lustre but enflamed my pride,
Flattering delusion! unsubstantial shade
Of fancied bliss, O how hast thou deceived me!
Beneath my fatal throne forever lurked
Anguish and care, digging the grave that now
Gapes to receive the dying Mariamne.
In Jordan's flood I saw my brother perish,
My father massacred by bloody Herod,
Who now has doomed to death a guiltless wife:
My virtue still remained, and that the tongue
Of slander strives to wound: thou power supreme!
Whose chastisements severe are but the proofs
Of innocence, I ask not for thy aid,
Nor for thy vengeance; my great ancestors
Taught me to look on death unmerited
Without a fear: take then my guiltless blood,
But O! defend my fame: command the tyrant
To spare my memory; let not clamorous falsehood
Insult my ashes: virtue is avenged
When she's respected. But what new alarm,
What dreadful shrieks are these? the palace rings
With loud confusion, and the din of arms:
I am perhaps the cause, they fight for me:
They force the doors: ha! what do I see?

SCENE II.

mariamne, varus, eliza, albinus, *Soldiers*.

VARUS.

Away:
Hence ruffians; you who hold your queen in bondage,
Vile Hebrews, hence:—you, Romans, do your office.
[Herod's guards go off, chained by Varus's soldiers.]
Now, Mariamne, thou art free; thou seest
The tyrant could not bar my entrance here:
Mazael lies bathed in his perfidious blood;
At least my arm hath half avenged the cause
Of injured majesty: haste, Mariamne,
Seize the propitious moment, and secure
A shelter from the storm: let us begone.

MARIAMNE.

My lord, I cannot now accept thy bounty;
After the vile reproach which Herod cast
On my fair fame, I should indeed deserve it,
Were I imprudent to receive the aid
Thou profferest: I have much more cause to dread
Thy kindness now than his barbarity;
'Twould be disgraceful thus to owe my life
To Varus; honor says even this is guilt,
And death alone can expiate my offence.

VARUS.

What wouldst thou do? alas! unhappy princess,
A moment may destroy thee: the time presses;
Still we're in arms, and Herod may succeed:
Dost thou not fear his rage and his despair?

MARIAMNE.

No: I fear naught but shame; and know my duty.

VARUS.

Am I then doomed forever to offend you?
But I will do the work of vengeance for thee,
Spite of thyself; once more I'll to the field;
And, if the tyrant comes across me there,
This arm—

MARIAMNE.

Stop, Varus; I detest a triumph
So dearly bought: know, sir, the life of Herod
Demands my care: his rights—

VARUS.

Are forfeited
By his ingratitude.

MARIAMNE.

The sacred tie—

VARUS.

Is broken.

MARIAMNE.

Duty hath united us.

VARUS.

But guilt divorces; therefore do not stay me,
Revenge thyself, and save so many virtues.

MARIAMNE.

Thou wouldst disgrace them.

VARUS.

He would take thy life.

MARIAMNE.

Yet his is sacred still to Mariamne.

VARUS.

He killed thy father.

MARIAMNE.

Varus, I know well

What Herod did, and what I ought to do.
Patient, I'll wait the fury of the storm,
Nor by his crimes would justify my own.

VARUS.

O noble, brave, unconquerable heart!
Ye gods, how many virtues have conspired
To swell this tyrant's guilt! O Mariamne!
The more thou shalt disclaim my proffered service,
The more am I resolved to disobey thee.
Thy honor disapproves what mine commands;
But naught shall stop me, naught intimidate:
I go to search the tyrant, and repair
The hours I've lost in not avenging thee.

MARIAMNE.

My lord—

SCENE III.

mariamne, eliza, *Guards*.

MARIAMNE.

He's gone, and would not hear me: heaven!
Let not more blood be shed; O spare my subjects;
Pour all thy wrath on me, and spare even Herod!

SCENE IV.

mariamne, eliza, nabal, *Guards*.

MARIAMNE.

O Nabal, art thou here? what hast thou done
With my dear children? where's my mother?

NABAL.

Safe:
The wrath of Herod reaches not to them:
Thou art the only object of his fury,
Which kindles at the hateful name of Varus:
If he is conquered, Mariamne dies.
The barbarous Zares is already sent

With secret orders hither; thou mayest guess
The purport, therefore now exert thy power:
The people love thee; on their loyal zeal
Thou mayest rely; the sight of thee will raise
Their drooping hearts; let them behold thee: fly,
My royal mistress, let us call the priests,
All Judah's sons will rise to guard the race
Of their loved kings: at length the hour is come,
To conquer or to die: let me entreat thee—

MARIAMNE.

True courage lies in knowing how to suffer,
And not in stirring up rebellious crowds
Against their sovereign: I should blush to think,
That, anxious for itself, my fearful heart
Had ever formed a wish for his destruction,
Or raised my hopes of safety on his death:
No: heaven this moment has inspired my breast
With rage less guilty, and a nobler purpose:
Herod suspects me, he shall know me now;
I'll rush into the battle; strive to part
The king and Varus; cast myself before
My husband's feet, and yield him up my life.
I fled this morning from that dreadful vengeance
Which now I search for: banished by his crimes,
His danger has recalled me: honor bids,
And I obey: I go to save his life
Who thirsts for mine.

NABAL.

Alas! to what extremes—

MARIAMNE.

I'm lost: 'tis Herod.

SCENE V.

herod, mariamne, eliza, nabal, idamas, *Guards*.

HEROD.

Did they see each other?
Now, faithless wretch, thou diest.

MARIAMNE.

Do not, my lord,
'Tis the last boon that I shall crave; O do not—

HEROD.

Begone—guards, follow her.
[*Guards carry off Mariamne.*]

NABAL.

Eternal justice!

SCENE VI.

herod, idamas, *Guards.*

HEROD.

Let me not hear her named: perfidious woman!
Well, my brave soldiers, are there yet more foes?

IDAMAS.

The Romans are subdued; the Hebrews bend
Once more submissive to the yoke; and Varus,
Covered with wounds, to thy victorious arm
Gives up the field: O thou hast gained this day
Eternal glory; but the prætor's blood,
Shed by thy hand, will draw on thee the vengeance
Of proud offended Rome: a crime like this—

HEROD.

And now for my revenge on Mariamne.
Unworthy of my love I cast her from me,
And from this moment shall begin to reign.
O! I was blind, that fond destructive passion
Was Herod's only weakness: let her die:
Let me forget her charms, and her remembrance
Be blotted now forever from my soul.
Are all things ready for the execution?

IDAMAS.

They are, my lord.

HEROD.

How quickly they obey me!
Unhappy Herod! must she perish then?
Didst thou say, Idamas, 'twas ready all?

IDAMAS.

The guards have seized her person, and too soon
Thy vengeance will be satisfied.

HEROD.

She courted
Her own destruction, and obliged me to it:
But she is gone: I'll think no more on it: Oh!
I could have lived and died with Mariamne:
To what hast thou compelled me?

SCENE The Last.

herod, idamas, nabal.

HEROD.

Nabal, ha!
Whither so fast? just heaven! and in tears!
How my soul shakes with dreadful apprehension.

NABAL.

My lord—

HEROD.

What wouldst thou say?

NABAL.

My feeble voice
Dies on my trembling lips.

HEROD.

O Mariamne!

NABAL.

Superfluous sorrow!

HEROD.

Ha! 'tis past then, is it?

NABAL.

She is no more.

HEROD.

Ha! dead! great God!

NABAL.

My lord,
Permit me, 'tis a debt I owe to thee,
Due to her memory, to her virtues due,
To show thee what a treasure thou hast lost,
The worth of that dear blood which thou hast shed:
Know, Herod, she was never faithless to thee;
But, even whilst Varus fought for her, refused
His offered hand, slighted his ardent vows,
And hazarded her life to succor thee.

HEROD.

What do I hear? O wretched Herod! Nabal,
What has thou told me?

NABAL.

In that very moment,
Even when her generous heart inspired her last
And noblest act, thy cruel orders came,
And she was led to death: thy barbarous sister
Urged on her fate.

HEROD.

Inhuman Salome;
Why did my justice spare that cruel monster?
What punishments must be reserved for thee!
But let thy blood and mine—Nabal, go on,

And kill me with the melancholy tale.

NABAL.

How shall I speak the rest! the guard, thou knowest,
By thee directed, led her hence: she followed
Without a murmur or reproach of thee;
Without affected pride, or real fear;
On her fair front sat graceful majesty,
Tempered with softness; modest innocence
And heart-felt virtue sparkled in her eyes;
Her sorrows gave new lustre to her charms;
Priests, Hebrews, all, with tears and shrieks besought her:
The soldiers called for death, and wept the fate
Of Mariamne—and of Herod too;
For deep, they cried aloud, would be thy grief,
And horror and remorse attend thee ever.



HEROD.

How every word strikes to my heart!

NABAL.

She felt
For their distress, and as she passed along,
Spake comfort to them. To the fatal scaffold
At length she came; there lifted up her hands,
Loaded with shameful chains, and thus she spake:
“Farewell, unhappy king; Herod, farewell!
Thy dying Mariamne weeps for thee,
And thee alone; may this be thy last act
Of foul injustice! may thy reign henceforth
Be happy! Take my people to thy care;
Protect my children; love and cherish them;
And I shall die content.” She spake, and bent
Her beauteous body to the axe; I saw,
And wept her fall.

HEROD.

Then Mariamne's dead;
And Herod lives: thou dear, and honored shade!
Ye poor remains of all that once was fair
And good, and virtuous, to the silent grave
Soon will I follow thee—Ye shall not stop me,
Perfidious subjects: from my murderous hand,
Why will ye wrest my sword? O Mariamne!
Come now, and be avenged: tear forth this heart
That bleeds for thee. I faint, I die.
[He faints.]

NABAL.

His senses
Are lost; his grief o'erpowers him.

HEROD.

What thick clouds
O'erspread my troubled soul! deep melancholy
Weighs down my senses; why am I abandoned,
Left to my sorrows thus? No sister here;
No Mariamne! How you stand and weep
At distance from me! Dare you not approach me!
All Judah flies before her wretched king.
What have I done? why am I thus abhorred?
Who will relieve me? who will soothe my grief?
Fetch Mariamne to me.

NABAL.

Mariamne,
My lord!

HEROD.

Ay, bring her; for I know the sight
Of her will calm at once my agony:
When Mariamne's with me, my blessed hours
Are all serene, and life glides sweetly on:
Methinks her very name hath healed my woes,
And lessened my affliction: let her come.

NABAL.

My lord—

HEROD.

I'll see her.

NABAL.

Sir, have you forgot
That Mariamne's dead?

HEROD.

What sayest thou?

NABAL.

Grief
Transports him; his mind's hurt; he's not himself.

HEROD.

Ha! Mariamne dead! destructive reason,
Why comest thou now to tell me this sad truth?
Down with these hateful walls, this fatal palace,
Stained with her blood, and let its ruins hide
The accursed place where Mariamne perished!
Is she then dead, and I her murderer!
Punish this parricide, this horrid monster:
Tear him in pieces, you who weep her loss,
My subjects; and thou, heaven, who hast her now,
Send down thy vengeful lightnings, and destroy me.

End of the Fifth and Last Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

SOCRATES

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Socrates.

Anitus. High Priest of Ceres.

Melitus, one of the Judges of Athens.

Xantippe, Wife of Socrates.

Aglæ, a young Athenian Lady, brought up by Socrates.

Sophonimus, a young Athenian Gentleman, brought up by Socrates.

Drixa, Terpander, Acros, Friends of Anitus.

Judges, Disciples of Socrates, and three Pedants, Protected by Anitus.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT I.

SCENE I.

anitus, drixa, terpander, acros.

ANITUS.

My dear confidante, and you my trusty friends, you well know how much money I have put into your pockets this last feast of Ceres: I am now going to be married, and I hope you will all do your respective duties on this great occasion.

DRIXA.

That, my lord, we most certainly shall, provided you give us an opportunity of getting a little more by it.

ANITUS.

I shall want of you, Madam Drixa, two fine Persian carpets; from you, Terpander, I must have two large silver candlesticks; and from you, half a dozen robes.

TERPANDER.

A considerable demand, my lord; but there is nothing which we would not do to merit your holy protection.

ANITUS.

O you will be rewarded for it a hundred fold: 'tis the best means to gain the favor of the gods: give much, and much you shall receive; but above all fail not, I beseech you, to stir up the people against all the rich and great, who are deficient in paying their vows, and presenting their offerings.

ACROS.

On that, my lord, you may depend; it is a duty too sacred ever to be neglected by us.

ANITUS.

'Tis well, my friends; may heaven continue to inspire you with the same just and pious sentiments, and be assured you will prosper; you, your children, and your children's children, to all posterity.

TERPANDER.

You have said it, my lord, and therefore it must be so.

SCENE II.

ANITUS, DRIXA.

ANITUS.

Well, my dear Drixia, I believe you will have no objection to my marrying Aglae; I shall not love you the less, and we may still live together as we used to do.

DRIXA.

O my lord, I am not jealous; as long as trade goes on well, I am contented. While I had the honor of being one of your mistresses, I was a woman of some consequence in Athens: but if you are in love with Aglae, I, in my turn, am as fond of young Sophronimus: and Xantippe, Socrates's wife, has promised that he shall marry me. I shall be always, notwithstanding, as much at your service as ever. I am only vexed that this young fellow has been brought up with that rascal Socrates, and that Aglae is still in his hands. We must take them both out as fast as we can. Xantippe will be glad to get rid of them. The beautiful Sophronimus and the fair Aglae have a sad time of it with the surly Socrates.

ANITUS.

I am in great hopes, my dear, that Melitus and I together shall soon be able to destroy this dangerous fellow, who preaches nothing but virtue and divinity, and has taken the liberty to laugh at some certain adventures that happened at the mysteries of Ceres: but he is Aglae's tutor: her father, Agathon, they tell me, has left her a great fortune: in short, Aglae is a charming girl; I love her, and I will marry her; and as to Socrates, I shall take care of him.

DRIXA.

Do what you please with Socrates, so I can but get my dear Sophronimus: but how could that fool Agathon leave his daughter in the hands of this old flat-nosed Socrates, that intolerable reasoner, who corrupts all our young men, and keeps them away from courtesans and the mysteries?

ANITUS.

Agathon himself was tainted with the same vile principles: he was one of your sober, serious fools, whose manners differed in every respect from ours; a man, in short, of another age, one of our sworn and inveterate enemies, who think they have fulfilled every duty when they worship God, assist man, cultivate friendships, and study

philosophy; one of those ridiculous creatures who insolently deny that the gods prognosticate future events by the liver of an ox; those merciless reasoners, who find fault with priests for sacrificing young girls, or passing a night with them on occasion. These you see, Drixa, are a kind of people not fit to live. As to Socrates, I should have been glad to have him strangled long ago. However, I have agreed to meet him here in the portico, and talk with him about the marriage.

DRIXA.

Here he comes: you do him too much honor: but I must leave you, and talk to Xantippe about my young man.

ANITUS.

The gods conduct you, my dear Drixa; remember to serve them, and don't forget my two fine Persian carpets.

SCENE III.

anitus, socrates.

ANITUS.

Good morning, my dear Socrates, thou favorite of the gods, and wisest of men; methinks every time I see you I am raised above myself; in you I look up with admiration to the dignity of human nature.

SOCRATES.

O my lord, I am a plain simple man, as void of knowledge, and as full of weakness, as any of my fellow-creatures; it is enough for me if you can bear with me.

ANITUS.

Bear with? I admire you, and would it were possible I could resemble you! To convince you of it, and that I may oftener be a witness to your virtues, and improve by your instructions, I am willing to espouse your fair pupil Aglae, whom I find you have the entire disposal of.

SOCRATES.

It is true indeed that her father Agathon, who was my friend, the dearest of all relations, bequeathed to my care, by his last will, this amiable and virtuous orphan.

ANITUS.

With a considerable fortune no doubt, for I hear she is one of the best matches in all Athens.

SOCRATES.

With regard to that I can give you no information; her father, my dearest friend, whose will is ever sacred to me, forbade me to divulge the situation of her affairs in that point.

ANITUS.

This respect and discreet veneration for the last will of your friend are worthy of your noble soul; but it is well enough known that Agathon was rich.

SOCRATES.

He deserved to be so, if riches are a mark of the divine favor.

ANITUS.

They tell me a young coxcomb, named Sophronimus, makes love to her on account of her fortune; but I am persuaded you will not give encouragement to such a fellow, and that Anitus will have no rival.

SOCRATES.

I know in what light I ought to consider a person like you; but it is not for me to thwart the inclinations of Aglae. I would supply the place of a father to her, but I am not her master: she has a right to dispose of her own heart: I look upon restraint in this case as a crime: talk to her: if she hearkens to your proposal, with all my heart, I have no objection.

ANITUS.

I have your wife's consent already; without doubt she is acquainted with Aglae's sentiments, and therefore I look upon the affair as good as concluded.

SOCRATES.

But I never look upon things as done till they are really so.

SCENE IV.

socrates, anitus, aglae.

SOCRATES.

Come hither, Aglae, and determine for yourself. Here is a person of considerable rank, who offers himself to you for a husband: you are at liberty to explain yourself to him: my presence might perhaps be a restraint upon you: whatever choice you make I shall approve: Xantippe will prepare everything for your nuptials.

AGLAE.

Generous Socrates! I am sorry you leave me.

ANITUS.

You seem, charming Aglae, to place great confidence in the good Socrates.

AGLAE.

It is my duty, sir; he has been a father to me; he has educated and instructed me.

ANITUS.

And pray, my dear, as he has instructed you, tell me what is your opinion of Ceres, Cybele, and Venus?

AGLAE.

Of them, sir, I will think just as you please.

ANITUS.

'Tis well said, and you will do as I please, too, then I hope.

AGLAE.

No, sir, that is quite another affair.

ANITUS.

You see, the wise Socrates consents to our marriage, and Xantippe above all things wishes for it. You know my passion for you, and are no stranger to my rank and fortune; my happiness, perhaps your own too, depends on one word, therefore determine.

AGLAE.

I will answer you, sir, with that truth and sincerity which the great man who just now left us taught me never to depart from: I respect your dignity, know but little of your person, and, in a word, can never be yours.

ANITUS.

Never? cruel Aglae, are you not free? you will not then?

AGLAE.

No, sir, I cannot.

ANITUS.

What an affront, what an indignity is this! but 'tis to Socrates I am obliged for it: he dictated your answer, I know he did; he prefers Sophronimus to me, that unworthy rival, that impious—

AGLAE.

Sophronimus is not impious, not unworthy; Socrates has loved him from his infancy; he has been a father to us both. Sophronimus is all beauty and all virtue; I love, and am beloved by him; it is in my power to marry him if I think proper; but I shall no more be his than yours.

ANITUS.

You astonish me: what! own you love Sophronimus?

AGLAE.

Yes, sir, I own it, because it is true.

ANITUS.

And yet when it is in your power to make yourself happy with him, refuse him your hand?

AGLAE.

That, sir, is no less true.

ANITUS.

Then I suppose your fear of displeasing me prevents your engaging with him?

AGLAE.

No such thing, I assure you: for having never wished to please, I have no fear of displeasing you.

ANITUS.

You dread then perhaps the displeasure of the gods, at seeing you prefer a profane wretch, like Sophronimus, to a high-priest?

AGLAE.

Not in the least. I am persuaded it is matter of very little concern to the supreme being, whether I marry you, or not.

ANITUS.

The supreme being! my dear child, you should not talk in this manner; you should say the gods and goddesses: take care, for I see you entertain some very dangerous opinions; but I know too well from whom they came. Learn then that Ceres, whose priest I am, may punish you for thus despising her worship, and her minister.

AGLAE.

I despise neither the one nor the other. I have been told that Ceres presides over the harvest, and I believe it; but she has nothing to do with my marriage.

ANITUS.

She has to do with everything; you know it; but I hope I shall be able to convert you. Are you indeed resolved not to marry Sophronimus?

AGLAE.

Yes; I am resolved, and am very sorry for it.

ANITUS.

I cannot understand a word of all these contradictions: but observe me; I love you, would have made you happy, and advanced you to rank and dignity: be advised, and reject not the offers which kind fortune thus courts you to accept: remember that everything should be sacrificed to our real interest; that youth will pass away, but riches remain: that wealth and honors should be your first concern, and that I speak to you on the part of the gods. I beg you will reflect seriously on what I have said: farewell; my dear girl, I shall pray to Ceres that she would inspire you, and still flatter myself she will touch your heart. Once more adieu, remember, you have promised me never to marry Sophronimus.

AGLAE.

I promised myself, but not you.

[Exit Anitus.

AGLAE.

[Alone.

This man but makes me more unhappy. I know not why it is, but I never see him without shuddering: but here comes Sophronimus: alas! whilst his rival fills my heart with terror, he increases my tenderness and doubles my disquietude.

SCENE V.

aglae, sophronimus.

SOPHRONIMUS.

My dear Aglae, I met Anitus, the priest of Ceres, that worst of men, the sworn enemy of Socrates, just coming from you: your eyes seem bathed in tears.

AGLAE.

Is he the enemy of our benefactor too? then indeed I wonder not at my aversion to him, even before he spoke.

SOPHRONIMUS.

And is he the cause of your tears, my Aglae?

AGLAE.

No, Sophronimus, he can inspire nothing but hatred and disgust: my tears can flow for you alone.

SOPHRONIMUS.

For me? O gods, for me, who would repay them with my blood, for me who adore you, who hope to be beloved by Aglae, who only live for and would die for you? shall I reproach myself with having embittered one moment of your life? Aglae weeps, and Sophronimus is the cause. What have I done? what crime have I committed?

AGLAE.

None, my Sophronimus: you could not do it: 'tis not in your nature. I wept because you merit all my tenderness, because you have it, and because I must renounce you.

SOPHRONIMUS.

What dreadful sentence have you pronounced against me? I cannot believe you: you love me, you said you did, and Aglae can never change. You have promised to be mine, you cannot wish my death.

AGLAE.

No; I would have thee live and be happy: but, alas! I cannot make you so: I hoped I could, but fortune has deceived me. I swear to you, Sophronimus, since I cannot be yours, I never will be another's. I have declared so to Anitus, who courts me, and whom I despise; and here I declare the same to you, with a heart full of grief, tenderness, and love.

SOPHRONIMUS.

Since you love me, I must live; but if you refuse me your hand, it will be death to Sophronimus; therefore, my dearest Aglae, in the name of love, of all your charms, and all your virtues, explain to me this dreadful mystery.

SCENE VI.

socrates, sophronimus, aglae.

SOPHRONIMUS.

O my honored master, my father, and my friend, behold in Sophronimus the most unfortunate of men, though in the presence of the only two beings upon earth who could make me happy: Socrates first taught me wisdom, and from Aglae I learned to love; you consented to our marriage, and this beautiful fair one, who seemed so desirous of it, now refuses me; and whilst she says she loves, plunges a dagger in my heart: she has broke off the match without assigning any cause of her cruel caprice: O Socrates, prevent my misery, or teach me, if possible, how to bear it.

SOCRATES.

Aglae is mistress of herself; her father made me her tutor, but not her tyrant; to see you united would have made me happy: if she has changed her mind I am surprised and sorry for it: but let us hear her reasons; if they are good, we must submit to them.

SOPHRONIMUS.

It is impossible they should.

AGLAE.

To me however they appear so, but you shall hear them. When you first opened my father's will, most noble Socrates, you told me he had left me a sufficient competency; from that moment I resolved to bestow my fortune on the good Sophronimus, who has no support but you, no riches but his virtue: you applauded my resolution. How great was my happiness, in promoting that of him whom you have so long regarded as your own son! full of this pleasing hope I laid open the situation of my heart to Xantippe, who at once undeceived me. She treated me as an idle visionary; showed me the will of my father, who died a beggar, and left me nothing but your friendship to depend on. Awakened from my dream of promised happiness, nothing remained for me but the melancholy reflection that it was no longer in my power to make the fortune of Sophronimus: I would not oppress him with the weight of my misfortunes.

SOPHRONIMUS.

I told you, Socrates, her reasons were poor and insufficient. If she loves me, am I not rich enough? Hitherto, it is true, I have subsisted from your bounty; but there is no employment, however irksome, which I would not undertake, to provide for my dearest Aglae: I ought indeed to make her a sacrifice of my passion, to find out some richer, happier lover for her: but I own my weakness, I cannot do it, there I am indeed unworthy of her; but if she could content herself with my low estate, if she could stoop to my humble condition: but I dare not hope so much; I sink beneath a misfortune which her fortitude is able to bear.

SOCRATES.

My dear children, it was very indiscreet in Xantippe to show you the will; but believe me, Aglae, she deceived you.

AGLAE.

Indeed she has not: I saw it with my own eyes: I know my father's hand too well to have the least doubt of it: but be assured, Socrates, I shall be able to bear poverty as I ought: these hands will support me; if I can but live, it is enough for me, but it is not for Sophronimus.

SOPHRONIMUS.

It is too much, a thousand times too much for me: thou tender, noble soul, worthy of thy illustrious master: a virtuous and laborious poverty is the natural state of man. I

wish I could have offered you a throne, but if you will condescend to live with Sophronimus, our respectable poverty will be superior to the throne of Cræsus.

SOCRATES.

Your generous sentiments at once delight and distress me: I behold with transport those virtues budding forth in your heart, which I myself had sown: never were my hopes better fulfilled than in Aglae and Sophronimus: but once more believe me, Aglae, my wife has misinformed you: you are richer than you think you are: it was not to her, but to me your father entrusted you. May he not have left you a fortune which Xantippe knows nothing of?

AGLAE.

No, Socrates, he says expressly in his will, that he has left me poor.

SOCRATES.

And I tell you that you are deceived, that he has left you a sufficient competency to enable you to live happily with the virtuous Sophronimus, and that I desire therefore you would come, and sign the contract immediately.

SCENE VII.

socrates, xantippe, aglae, sophronimus.

XANTIPPE.

Come, come, child, don't stand amusing yourself there with my husband's visions and nonsense: philosophy to be sure is a mighty pretty thing when folks have nothing else to do: but you are a beggar, child; and must study how to live first, and philosophize afterwards. I have concluded your marriage with Anitus, a worthy priest, and a man of fortune. Come, child, follow me, let me have no delays nor contradiction; I love to be obeyed: quick, quick, my dear, 'tis for your good, therefore let me have none of your reasonings, but follow me.

SOPHRONIMUS.

O heaven! my dear Aglae!

SOCRATES.

Let her talk, and trust to me for your happiness.

XANTIPPE.

Let me talk indeed! I shall talk and do too, I assure you. You are a pretty one to be sure, with your wisdom, your familiar demon, your irony, and all your nonsense that signifies nothing, to trouble yourself about matrimony: you are a good sort of a man, but you really know nothing of the world; happy is it for you that I am able to govern you. Come, Aglae, I must settle you as soon as possible: And you, sir, there, that seem as if you were thunderstruck, I have taken care of you too: Drixia is the woman for you: you will both of you thank me by and by: I shall have done it all in a minute: I am very expeditious: let us lose no time therefore, by rights it should have been all over before this.

SOCRATES.

My children, don't thwart or provoke her, but pay her all kind of deference: we must comply with since we can't mend her: it is the triumph of reason to live well with those who have none.

End of the First Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

socrates, sophronimus.

SOPHRONIMUS.

Divine Socrates, I know not how to believe my own happiness: how can Aglae, whose father died in extreme poverty be possessed of so considerable a fortune?

SOCRATES.

I told you before, she had more than she thought she had: I knew her father's affairs better than herself: let it suffice that you both enjoy a fortune which you deserve: the secrets of the dead should be preserved as religiously as those of the living.

SOPHRONIMUS.

I am only afraid the priest of Ceres, to whom you have preferred Sophronimus, will endeavor to avenge Aglae's refusal upon you: he is a man whom we have reason to dread.

SOCRATES.

What has he to fear who does his duty? I know the malice of my enemies, I know all their calumnies; but when we take care never to offend God, and endeavor to do all the good we can to mankind, then is it that we are afraid of nothing, or whilst we live, or when we die.

SOPHRONIMUS.

I know it well; yet I should die with grief if the happiness you bestowed on me should induce your enemies to put your virtue to the trial.

SCENE II.

socrates, sophronimus, aglae.

AGLAE.

O my benefactor, my father, let me fall at your feet, thou more than man; join me, Sophronimus, in mutual acknowledgments; 'tis he, 'tis Socrates who marries us at his own expense, and gives us best part of his own fortune to support us: but we must not

suffer him, we must not be rich on these conditions; no, if our hearts have any gratitude, let them imitate his generosity.

SOPHRONIMUS.

O Socrates, with her I throw myself at thy feet; like her I am charmed, astonished and confounded at thy goodness; we will not, must not abuse it: look on us as your children, but do not let those children be a burden to their kind parent; thy friendship is fortune sufficient, 'tis all that we desire: you are not rich, and yet you do more than all the great ones of the earth; but were we to accept thy bounties, we should be unworthy of them.

SOCRATES.

Rise, my children, you affect me too deeply: are we not bound to respect the will of the dead? did not your father, Aglae, whom I always considered as part of myself, did he not enjoin me to treat you as my daughter? Had I not done so, I had betrayed the confidence of friendship: I took upon me the performance of his will, and I have executed it: the little I bestow on you would have been useless to my old age, which has not many wants to supply. If it was my duty to obey my friend, it is yours to obey your father. I am that father now, and by that sacred name command you not to make me unhappy by your refusal: but retire, I see Xantippe coming this way; I have reasons for desiring you to avoid her at present.

AGLAE.

Your commands are cruel, but they must be obeyed.

SCENE III.

socrates, xantippe.

XANTIPPE.

A fine piece of work you have made here; upon my word, my dear husband, I must put a stop to your proceedings. Here had I promised Aglae to Anitus the high-priest, a man of interest amongst the great, and Sophronimus to the rich Drixa, who has extensive influence in the whole nation; and you marry your two fools together, and make me break my word to both: not content with this, you must needs give them best part of your fortune too. Twenty thousand drachms! good gods! twenty thousand drachms! are you not ashamed of yourself? at the age of threescore and ten too? Who's to pay your physicians when you are sick? or your lawyers when you have a law-suit? What am I to do, when that villainous wry-necked fellow, Anitus, whom you might have had on your side, if he should join his party to persecute you, as they have done so often already? confusion to all philosophy and philosophers I say, and to my own foolish regard for you! You pretend to direct others, and want leading-strings yourself; always reasoning without a grain of common sense. If you were not one of

the best men in the world, you would be the most ridiculous and the most insupportable: but mind me, you have only one way left, break off this foolish match, and do what your wife bids you.

SOCRATES.

You talk well, my dear Xantippe, and with great moderation; but hear what I have to say in return. I did not propose this marriage myself, but Aglae and Sophronimus love and are worthy of each other. I have already made over everything to you that the laws will allow me, and have given almost all that remained to the daughter of my friend: the little which I keep is enough for me. I have no physician to pay because I live sober; no lawyers because I have neither debts nor reversions: and with regard to that philosophy you reproach me with, it will teach me to bear the malice of Anitus, and your treatment of me; nay, even to love you, in spite of your ill-humor.

[Exit.

SCENE IV.

XANTIPPE.

[Alone.

The old fool! and yet, spite of myself, I can't help esteeming him; for after all, there is something great even in his follies: but his coolness and indifference make me mad. To scold him is but lost labor: for these thirty years past I have been perpetually pecking at him; and when I have tired myself with it, he bids me go on, and I am dumbfounded. Surely there must be something in that soul of his superior to mine.

SCENE V.

xantippe, drixia.

DRIXA.

So, Madam Xantippe, I see you are mistress at home: fie! fie! how mean it is to be governed by a husband! this vile Socrates, to prevent my making a young fellow's fortune; but I'll be revenged.

XANTIPPE.

My dear Madam Drixia, don't be so angry with my husband, I am angry enough with him myself: he's a poor, weak man, I confess; but I verily believe has one of the best hearts in the world; has not the least degree of malice, and does a thousand foolish things without designing, and with so much honesty, that one can't help forgiving him: then indeed he is as obstinate as a mule: I have done nothing but tease and torment him my whole life; nay, I have even beat him sometimes, and yet I have

never been able to mend him, nay, not so much as to put him into a passion. What can I do with him?

DRIXA.

I tell you, I'll be revenged; under yonder portico I perceive his good friend Anitus, and some more of our party: let me alone with him.

XANTIPPE.

My god! I am dreadfully afraid these folks, all together, will do my poor husband some mischief: I must go and tell him of it, for after all one can't help loving him.

SCENE VI.

anitus, drixia, terpander, acros.

DRIXA.

Most noble Anitus, we have all been wronged: you are tricked as well as myself: this vile Socrates has given away three parts of his fortune on purpose to spite you: you must take ample revenge of him.

ANITUS.

I design it: heaven itself requires it of me: this man treats me with contempt, and of course must despise the gods. Already we have had several accusations against him, we must repeat them, you will all assist me: we will put him in danger of his life, then will I offer him my protection, on condition that he resigns Aglae to me, and to you the beautiful Sophronimus: thus we shall all gain our several points: he will be sufficiently punished by the fright we shall put him into: I shall get my mistress, and you your lover.

DRIXA.

Wisdom herself speaks in Anitus: sure some divinity inspires you: but tell us, how are we to proceed?

ANITUS.

This is about the time when the judges go to the tribunal, with Melitus at the head of them.

DRIXA.

That Melitus is a little pedant, a sad fellow, and your enemy.

ANITUS.

He is so; but he is still a greater enemy to Socrates; 'tis a rascally hypocrite who supports the rights of the Areopagus against me: but we always hold together when our mutual interest and business is to destroy these pretended wise men, who want to open the eyes of people on our conduct: hearken, my dear Drixa, you are a devotee.

DRIXA.

Certainly, my lord, I love money, and I love pleasure with all my soul, but in matters of devotion I yield to none.

ANITUS.

Go then immediately, and get together as many bawling enthusiasts as you can, and cry out, impiety! impiety.

TERPANDER.

Is there anything to be got by it? if there is, we are all ready.

ACROS.

Ay, ay, that we are; but what sort of impiety?

ANITUS.

O every kind: however, we had best accuse him at once of not believing in the gods; that's the shortest way.

DRIXA.

O let me alone then.

ANITUS.

You shall be well supported; go, and stir up your friends under the portico: I'll inform meantime some of my news-loving friends of it, who come frequently to dine with me, a parcel of contemptible fellows they are, to be sure, but such as, if properly directed, can do a good deal of mischief on occasion: we must make use of every expedient to promote a good cause: away, my friends, recommend yourselves to Ceres, and be ready to cry out when I give you the signal: 'tis the only way for you to live happy here, and gain heaven hereafter.

SCENE VII.

anitus, graphius, chomus, bertillus.

ANITUS.

Most indefatigable Graphius, profound Chomus, and delicate Bertillus, have you finished those little works as I commanded you against the impious Socrates?

GRAPHIUS.

My lord, I have labored: he'll never hold up his head again.

CHOMUS.

I have proved the fact against him; struck him dumb.

BERTILLUS.

I have only mentioned him in my journal, and it has done for him.

ANITUS.

Graphius, beware, you know I forbade your prolixity: you are naturally tedious, and that may wear out the patience of the court.

GRAPHIUS.

My lord, 'tis all in one leaf: wherein I have proved that the soul is an infused quintessence; that tails were given to animals to drive away flies; that Ceres works miracles; and consequently, that Socrates is an enemy to the state, and ought to be exterminated.

ANITUS.

A most excellent conclusion! remember to carry your accusation to the second judge, who is a complete philosopher. I'll answer for it, you'll soon get rid of your enemy Socrates.

GRAPHIUS.

My lord, I am not his enemy: I am only vexed that he has so great a reputation: all that I do is for the glory of Ceres, and the good of my country.

ANITUS.

Well, well, make haste and be gone: and you, learned Chomus, what have you done?

CHOMUS.

My lord, finding nothing reprehensible in the writings of Socrates. I shall accuse him point-blank of thinking directly opposite to what he says, and shall show the poison he intends to spread in everything he is to say hereafter.

ANITUS.

Wonderful indeed! carry your piece to the fourth judge: he has not common sense, and therefore will understand you perfectly: now for you, Bertillus.

BERTILLUS.

My lord, here is my last journal upon the Chaos. I have proved, by a regular series from the Chaos to the Olympics, that Socrates perverts the youth of Athens.

ANITUS.

Admirable! go you from me to the seventh judge, and tell him I desire he'd take care of Socrates; so; here comes Melitus already, the first of the eleven; there's no necessity of practising any art with him, we know each other too well.

SCENE VIII.

anitus, melitus.

ANITUS.

Mr. Judge, one word with you: this Socrates must be destroyed.

MELITUS.

Indeed, Mr. High Priest, I have long thought so: let us agree in this point; we may quarrel, you know, notwithstanding, about everything else.

ANITUS.

I know we hate each other most cordially: but at the same time we may lay our heads together to govern the commonwealth.

MELITUS.

With all my heart, nobody can overhear us: therefore, to speak freely, I know you are a rogue, and you don't look upon me as a very honest man: I can't hurt you because you are high priest, nor you me because I am first judge; but Socrates may do us both a mischief, by exposing us to the world; our first business, therefore, is to destroy him, and then we may be at leisure to fall upon each other the first opportunity.

ANITUS.

[*Aside.*

'Tis well observed: how I could rejoice now to see this rascally judge upon an altar, his arms hanging on one side and his legs on the other, whilst I with my golden knife was ripping up his guts and consulting his liver at leisure!

MELITUS.

[*Aside.*

Shall I never be able to send this villainous high priest to jail, and make him swallow a pint of hemlock by my command?

ANITUS.

O my friend, here come our noble assistants. I have taken care to prepare the populace.

MELITUS.

Very well, my dear friend, you may depend upon me in this affair, not forgetting old scores.

SCENE IX.

anitus, melitus, some of the Judges of Athens passing along under the portico.

[*Anitus whispers Melitus.*

drixa, terpander, and acros together.

Justice, justice, scandal, impiety, justice, justice, irreligion, impiety, justice!

ANITUS.

What's the matter, my friends, what's your complaint?

DRIXA, TERPANDER, AND ACROS.

Justice! in the name of the people.

MELITUS.

Against whom?

DRIXA, TERPANDER, AND ACROS.

Against Socrates.

MELITUS.

Ha! ha! against Socrates? that fellow has been often accused: what has he done now?

ACROS.

I don't know what.

TERPANDER.

They say he gives money to young girls in marriage.

ACROS.

Ay, he corrupts our youth.

DRIXA.

O he's a wicked wretch: he has offered up no cakes to Ceres; he says there is a great deal of useless gold and silver in the temple.

ACROS.

Ay, and he says the priests of Ceres get drunk sometimes; that's true; he's a wicked wretch indeed.

DRIXA.

He's a heretic; he denies the plurality of gods; he's a deist: he believes only in one God; he's an atheist.

ALL THREE TOGETHER.

Yes; he's a heretic, a deist, and an atheist.

MELITUS.

Dreadful accusations indeed, and all extremely probable: I have heard as much before.

ANITUS.

The state is in danger if we leave such crimes unpunished: Minerva will withdraw her protection from us.

DRIXA.

Ay, that she will, I have heard him laugh at Minerva's owl.

MELITUS.

At Minerva's owl! O heaven! gentlemen, is not it your opinion he ought to be sent to prison immediately?

THE JUDGES.

[All together.

To prison with him, to prison.

MELITUS.

Guards, carry Socrates to prison this instant.

DRIXA.

And afterwards let him be burned without a hearing.

ONE OF THE JUDGES.

No, no; we must hear him; we must not go against the law.

ANITUS.

No, no; that's what the good woman meant: we must hear him, but not let what he says have too much effect on us; you know these philosophers are devilish subtle: 'tis they who have disturbed all those nations which we have endeavored to render peaceable and quiet.

MELITUS.

To prison with him, to prison.

SCENE X.

xantippe, sophronimus, aglae, socrates,*in chains.*

[Entering.

XANTIPPE.

O mercy, mercy, my poor husband is going to prison; aren't you ashamed, Mr. Judges, to treat a man of his years in this manner? What harm could he do? Alas! it is not in his power, he is more fool than knave, God knows; have pity on him, good gentlemen. O my dear, I told you you would draw yourself into some bad affair. This comes of portioning young girls. What an unhappy creature I am!

SOPHRONIMUS.

O my lords, respect his age, respect his virtue; give me his chains! I am ready to yield up my liberty, my life for his.

AGLAE.

Yes; we will go to prison in his stead; we will die for him: do not destroy the noblest, best of men: take us rather for your victims.

MELITUS.

You see how he corrupts our youth.

SOCRATES.

No more, my wife, no more, my children; do not oppose the will of heaven, which speaks by the laws: he who resists the law, is no longer a citizen. God wills that I should be put in bondage; I submit to his divine decree without murmur, or repining. In my own house, in Athens, or in a prison, I am equally free; and whilst I behold in you so much gratitude, and so much friendship, I am happy. What matters it whether Socrates sleeps in his own chamber, or in a prison? Everything is as the supreme will ordains, and my will should submit to it.

MELITUS.

Take away this reasoner.

ANITUS.

Gentlemen, what he says I must own has affected me; the man seems to have a good disposition; I flatter myself I should be able to convert him; let me have a little private conversation with him; please to order his wife and these young folks to retire.

ONE OF THE JUDGES.

Most venerable Anitus, you have our consent to parley with him before he appears at the tribunal.

SCENE XI.

ANITUS, SOCRATES.

ANITUS.

Most virtuous Socrates, my heart bleeds to see you in this condition.

SOCRATES.

And have you a heart?

ANITUS.

I have, and one that feels for you: I am ready to do everything for you.

SOCRATES.

I think you have done enough already.

ANITUS.

Hark ye, Socrates, your situation is worse than you think it is; let me tell you, your life is in danger.

SOCRATES.

That is of very little consequence.

ANITUS.

To your noble soul it may appear so, but it is otherwise in the eyes of all those who, like me, admire your virtue: believe me, however you may be armed by philosophy, it is dreadful to die a death of ignominy: but that is not all: your reputation, which should be dear to you, will be sullied in after ages: the religious of both sexes will laugh at your fall, and insult you: if you are burned, they'll light the pile; if you're strangled, they'll tie the cord; if you're poisoned, they'll pound the hemlock; and not only that, but they'll make your memory execrable to all posterity. Now it is in your own power to prevent all this: I will promise not only to save your life, but even to persuade your judges to say with the oracle, that you are the wisest of men: you have nothing to do but to give me up your young pupil, Aglae, with the portion; you understand me: as to her marriage with Sophronimus, we shall find means to set it aside: thus you will enjoy a peaceful and honorable old age, and the gods and goddesses will bless you.

SOCRATES.

Soldiers, conduct me to prison immediately.

[He is carried off.]

ANITUS.

This fellow is incorrigible; but it's not my fault; I have done my duty, and have nothing to reproach myself with: he must be abandoned as a reprobate, and left to die in his sins.

End of the Second Act.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

the judge seated on the Tribunal, socrates below.

JUDGE.

[To Anitus.

You should not sit here, you are priest of Ceres.

ANITUS.

I am only here for edification.

MELITUS.

Silence there: Socrates, you are accused of being a bad citizen, of corrupting youth, of denying a plurality of gods, of being a heretic, deist, and atheist: answer to the charge.

SOCRATES.

Judges of Athens, I exhort you all to be as good citizens as I have always myself endeavored to be: to shed your blood for your country, as I have done in many a battle: with regard to youth, guide them by your counsels, and, above all, direct them by your example; teach them to love true virtue, and to avoid the miserable philosophy of the schools: the article concerning a plurality of gods is a little more difficult to discuss, but hear what I have to say upon it. Know then, ye judges of Athens, there is but one God.

MELITUS *AND ANOTHER JUDGE.*

O the impious wretch!

SOCRATES.

I say, there is but one God, in his nature infinite, nor can any being partake of his infinity. Turn your eyes towards the celestial globes, to the earth and seas; all correspond together, all are made one for the other: each being is intimately connected with other beings, all formed with one design, by one great architect, one sole master, and preserver: perhaps he hath deigned to create genii, and demons, more powerful and more wise than men; if such exist, they are creatures like you, his first subjects, not gods: but nothing in nature proves to us that they do exist, whilst all nature speaks one God and one father: this God hath no need of Mercury and Iris to deliver his

commands to us: he hath only to will, and that is enough. If by Minerva you understand no more than the wisdom of God; if by Neptune you only mean his immutable laws, which raise or depress the sea, you may still reverence Neptune and Minerva, provided that under these emblems you adore none but the supreme being, and that the people are not deceived by you into false opinions.

Be careful above all not to turn religion into metaphysics, its essence is morality: dispute not, but worship. If our ancestors believed that the supreme God came down into the arms of Alcmena, Danæ, and Semele, and had children by them, our ancestors imagined dangerous and idle fables. 'Tis an insult on the divinity to conceive that he could possibly, in any manner whatsoever, commit with woman the crime which we call adultery. It is a discouragement to the rest of mankind to say that, to be a great man, it is necessary to be produced from the mysterious union of Jupiter and one of our own wives and daughters. Miltiades, Cimon, Themistocles, and Aristides, whom you persecuted, were perhaps much greater than Perseus, Hercules, or Bacchus. The only way to become the children of God, is to endeavor to please him. Deserve therefore that title, by never passing an unjust sentence.

MELITUS.

What insolence! what blasphemy!

ANOTHER JUDGE.

What absurdities! one can't tell what he means.

MELITUS.

Socrates, you are always too fond of argument: answer briefly, and with precision: did you, or did you not, laugh at Minerva's owl?

SOCRATES.

Judges of Athens, take care of your owls; when you propose ridiculous things as objects of belief too many are apt to resolve that they will believe nothing: they have sense enough to find out that your doctrine is absurd, though they have not elevation of mind sufficient to discover the law of truth; they know how to laugh at your little deceits, but not to adore the first of beings, the one incomprehensible, incommunicable being, the eternal, all-just, and all-powerful God.

MELITUS.

O the blasphemer! the monster! he has said too much already: I condemn him to death.

MANY OF THE JUDGES.

And so do we.

ONE OF THE JUDGES.

Several of us are of another opinion; Socrates has spoken wisely; we believe men would be more wise and just if they thought like him: for my part, far from condemning him, I think he ought to be rewarded.

MANY OF THE JUDGES.

We think so too.

MELITUS.

The opinions seem to be divided.

ANITUS.

Gentlemen of the Areopagus, permit me to interrogate him a little. Do you believe, Socrates, that the sun turns round, and that the Areopagus acts by divine right?

SOCRATES.

You have no authority to ask any questions, but I have authority to teach you what you are ignorant of: it is of little importance to society, whether the sun or the earth turns round, but it is of the utmost consequence, whether the men who turn with them be just or unjust: virtue only acts from the right divine, and you and the Areopagus have no rights but those which your country has bestowed on you.

ANITUS.

Illustrious and most equitable judges, let Socrates retire.

[Melitus makes a sign, Socrates is carried out.]

ANITUS.

[Proceeds.]

Most august Areopagus, instituted by heaven, you hear what he says: this dangerous fellow denies that the sun turns round, and that you act by right divine: if these opinions prevail, adieu to magistracy, and adieu to the sun: you are no longer judges appointed by Minerva; you will become accountable for your proceedings; you must no longer determine but according to the laws; and if you once depend on the laws,

you are undone: punish rebellion therefore, revenge earth and heaven: I am going: dread you the anger of the gods if Socrates is permitted to live.

[Anitus goes out, and the Judges demur.]

ONE OF THE JUDGES.

I don't care to quarrel with Anitus; he is a dangerous man to offend. If he troubled himself with the gods only it would not signify.

ANOTHER JUDGE.

[To his brother sitting near him.]

Between you and me, Socrates is in the right; but then he should not be in the right so publicly. I care no more for Ceres and Neptune than he does; but he should not speak out to the whole Areopagus what he ought to have whispered: yet after all, what is there in poisoning a philosopher, especially when he is old and ugly?

ANOTHER JUDGE.

If there be any injustice in condemning Socrates, it is Anitus' business and not mine: I lay it all upon his conscience: besides, it grows late, we lose our time; let us talk no more about it: to death with him.

ANOTHER.

Ay, ay, they say he's a heretic, and an atheist; to death with him.

MELITUS.

Call Socrates.

[He is brought in.]

Blessed be the gods, the plurality of voices is for death; Socrates, the gods by us condemn you to drink hemlock.

SOCRATES.

We are all mortal: nature condemns you also to death in a short time, probably you may meet with a more unhappy end than mine: the distempers which bring on death are much more painful than a cup of hemlock. I thank those amongst my judges who pleaded in favor of innocence; for the rest, they have my pity.

ONE OF THE JUDGES.

[Going out.]

Certainly this man deserved a pension from the state, rather than a cup of poison.

ANOTHER JUDGE.

I think so too; but why would he quarrel with a priest of Ceres?

ANOTHER.

After all, it is best to get rid of a philosopher: those fellows have always a certain fierceness of spirit which should be damped a little.

ANOTHER.

One word with you, gentlemen: would not it be right, whilst our hand is in, to make an end of all the geometricians, who pretend that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones? they are a mighty scandal to the foolish people that read their works.

ANOTHER.

Ay, ay, we'll hang them all the next session; let's go to dinner.

SCENE II.

SOCRATES.

[*Alone.*

I have been long prepared for death; all I fear at present is, that my wife Xantippe will be troubling me in my last moments, and interrupt me in the sweet employment of recollecting my soul, and preparing myself for eternity: I ought to busy myself only in the contemplation of that supreme being, before whom I am soon to appear: but here she comes; I must be resigned to all things.

SCENE III.

socrates, xantippe, *with the Disciples of Socrates.*

XANTIPPE.

Well, my poor man, what have these gentlemen of the law concluded? have they fined you, are you banished, or acquitted? my God! how uneasy have I been about you! pray take care this don't happen a second time.

SOCRATES.

No, my dear, this will not happen a second time, I'll answer for it; give yourself no uneasiness about anything. My dear disciples, my friends, welcome.

CRITO.

[At the head of his disciples.]

You see us, beloved Socrates, no less concerned for you than Xantippe; we have gained permission of the judges to visit you; just heaven! must we behold Socrates in chains! permit us to kiss those bonds which reflect shame on Athens. How could Anitus and his friends reduce you to this condition?

SOCRATES.

Let us think no more of these trifles, my friends, but continue the examination we were making yesterday into the soul's immortality. We observed, I remember, that nothing could be more probable, or at the same time more full of comfort and satisfaction, than this sweet idea; in fact, matter we know changes, but perishes not; why then should the soul perish? can it be that, raised as we are to the knowledge of a God through the veil of this mortal body, we should cease to know him when that veil is removed? no, as we think now, we must always think; thought is the very essence of man; and this being must appear before a just God, who will recompense virtue, punish vice, and pardon weakness and error.

XANTIPPE.

Nobly said: but what does this fellow here with his cup?

[Enter the Jailer, or Executioner of the Eleven, carrying a cup of Hemlock.]

JAILER.

Here Socrates, the senate have sent you this.

XANTIPPE.

Thou vile poisoner of the commonwealth, would you kill my husband before my face? monster, I'll tear you to pieces.

SOCRATES.

My dear friend, I ask your pardon for my wife's rude behavior: she has scolded me all her life; she only treats you as she does her husband; excuse her impertinence: give me the cup.

[He takes the cup.]

ONE OF THE DISCIPLES.

O divine Socrates! why may not we take that poison for you? horrible injustice! shall the guilty thus condemn the innocent, and fools destroy the wise? you go then to death!

SOCRATES.

No, my friends, to life: this is the cup of immortality: it is not this perishable body that has loved and instructed you; it is my soul alone that has lived with you, and that shall love you forever.

[He is going to drink.]

JAILER.

I must take off your fetters first: 'tis always done.

SOCRATES.

Do it then, I beg you.

[He scratches his leg.]

ONE OF THE DISCIPLES.

You smile!

SOCRATES.

I smile at the reflection, that pleasure should arise from pain: thus it is that eternal felicity shall spring from the miseries of this life.

[Drinks the poison.]

CRITO.

Alas! what have you done?

XANTIPPE.

Ay, for a thousand ridiculous discourses of this kind the poor man has lost his life: indeed, my dear, you will break my heart; I could strangle all the judges with my own hands. I did use to scold you indeed, but I always loved you notwithstanding; these polite well-bred gentlemen have put you to death: O my dear, dear husband!

SOCRATES.

Be calm, my good Xantippe; weep not, my friends; it becomes not the disciples of Socrates to shed tears.

CRITO.

How can we avoid it on so dreadful an occasion? this legal murder!

SOCRATES.

Thus it is that men will often behave to the worshippers of one true God, and the enemies of superstition.

CRITO.

And must Socrates be one of those unhappy victims?

SOCRATES.

'Tis noble to be the victim of the deity: I die contented. I wish indeed that, to the satisfaction of seeing you, my friends, I could have added the happiness of embracing Sophronimus and Aglae: I wonder they are not here: they would have made my last moments more welcome.

CRITO.

Alas! they know not that you have already undergone the judges' dreadful sentence: they have been talking to the people, and praising those magistrates who would have acquitted you. Aglae has laid open the guilt of Anitus, and published his shame and dishonor: they perhaps might have saved your life: O dear Socrates, why would you thus precipitate your fate?

SCENE The Last.

aglae, sophronimus.

AGLAE.

[Entering.

Divine Socrates, be not afraid: be comforted, Xantippe: worthy disciples of Socrates, do not weep.

SOPHRONIMUS.

Your enemies are confounded: the people rise in your defence.

AGLAE.

We have been talking to them; we have laid open the intrigues and jealousy of the wicked Anitus: it was my duty to demand justice for his crime, as I was the cause of it.

SOPHRONIMUS.

Anitus hath saved himself by flight from the rage of the people: he and his accomplices are pursued: solemn thanks have been given to those judges who appeared in your favor: the people are now at the gates of the prison, and wait to conduct you home in triumph.

XANTIPPE.

Alas! 'tis lost labor!

ONE OF THE DISCIPLES.

O Socrates, why would you so hastily obey?

AGLAE.

Live, dear Socrates, the benefactor of your country, the model of future ages; O live for the general happiness of mankind!

CRITO.

Ye noble pair, my virtuous friends, it is too late.

XANTIPPE.

You stayed too long.

AGLAE.

Alas! too late? what mean you? just heaven!

SOPHRONIMUS.

Has he then already drunk the fatal draught?

SOCRATES.

Sweet Aglae and dear Sophronimus, the law ordained that I should take the poison: I obeyed the law, unjust as it is, because it oppressed myself alone: had the injustice been done to another, I would have resisted it. I go to death, but the example of

friendship which you give the world, and your nobleness of soul shall never perish: your virtue is greater, much greater, than the guilt of those who accused me. I bless that fate which the world may call misfortune, because it hath set in the fairest light the goodness of your hearts. My dear Xantippe, be happy; and remember, that to be so, you must curb your impetuous temper. My beloved disciples, listen always to the voice of that philosophy which will teach you to despise your persecutors, and pity human weakness: and you, my daughter Aglae, and my son Sophronimus, be always what you now are.

AGLAE.

How wretched are we that we cannot die for you!

SOCRATES.

Your lives are valuable, mine would have been useless: take my tender last farewell; the doors of eternity are opened to receive me.

XANTIPPE.

He was a great man! O I will rouse up the whole nation.

SOPHRONIMUS.

May we raise up temples to Socrates, if ever mortal man deserved it!

CRITO.

At least may his wisdom teach mankind that temples should be raised to God alone!

End of the Third and Last Act.

[†] The Hierophants, the priests and the priestesses, all show their astonishment and consternation.