

*Fanny Kemble
to her mother*

FRANCIS THE FIRST.

4

AN HISTORICAL DRAMA.

BY FRANCES ANN KEMBLE.

THIRD EDITION.

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TO
MY DEAR MOTHER,
THIS,
MY FIRST PUBLICATION,
IS
AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.



FRANCIS THE FIRST, *King of France.*

CHARLES OF BOURBON, } *Princes of the Blood.*
CHARLES OF ALENÇON, }

HENRI D'ALBRET, *King of Navarre.*

CHABANNES, } *old Generals.*
VENDÔME, }

LAVAL, }
LAUTREC, } *French Nobles.*
BONNIVET, }
VARENNES, }

CLEMENT MAROT, *a Poet.*

TRIBOULET, *the King's Jester.*

GONZALES, *a Monk.*

PESCARA, *a Spanish General.*

LEYVA, *Governor of Pavia.*

Nobles, Pages, Guards, Herald, Soldiers, &c.

WOMEN.

LOUISA OF SAVOY, *the King's Mother.*

MARGARET OF VALOIS, *her Daughter.*

FRANÇOISE DE FOIX, *Lautrec's Sister.*

FLORISE, *her Attendant.*

Ladies of the Court.

The scene lies in Paris, at Court, during the two First Acts and part of the Third ; during the Fourth and part of the Third, in the Chateau de Foix ; and the whole of the Fifth Act passes under the walls of Pavia, in Italy.

FRANCIS THE FIRST.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—A COURT OF THE LOUVRE.

Enter VENDÔME and CHABANNES, meeting the Duke of ALENÇON.

VENDÔME.

Good morrow to my lord of Alençon !

ALENÇON.

Good morrow, noble sir. My lord Chabannes,
You are right welcome back to court again :
I pray you, Vendôme, is the King return'd
From tennis yet ?

VENDÔME.

My lord, as I pass'd through
The gallery, I saw the royal train
Dismount, and now the King holds private converse
With the Queen's confessor : a moment since,
I saw them both enter the Queen's apartment,
In very earnest and impassion'd talk ;
And, as I think, the duke de Bourbon's name
Full many a time escaped their anxious lips.

CHABANNES.

The Queen's confessor!—what! old Father Jérôme?

ALENÇON.

Oh no! old Father Jérôme, rest his soul,
Is dead. This man (between ourselves I speak it),
To me, seems rather a mysterious minister,
And secret instrument, than a confessor.

VENDÔME.

Strange to say, he is a Spaniard,
And, stranger yet, he hath not been at court
But a brief space, which renders his estate
(Being so trusted by the Queen) a riddle,
Whereat we guess in vain. She is not wont
To doff her wariness on slight acquaintance;
Yet is this monk for ever with her; holding
In full possession her most secret counsels.

CHABANNES.

To me, my lords, who newly am returned
To court, all this seems passing strange indeed:
With greater wonder though, Vendôme, I learn
De Bourbon is recall'd from Italy.

ALENÇON.

'Tis not the absent only are amazed,
You do but share the wonder of the town;
All note the strange event, none know the cause:
And we have yet to learn what fault or folly—

VENDÔME.

Your pardon, sir, but 'tis not very like
That the young hero, who at Marignan
Did deeds of war and wisdom so combine,

That nothing short a kingdom could reward
His merit, now should fail in either point.

ALENÇON.

This problem, sir,
Surpasses my poor wit ; and all I know
Is, that the duke is coming home again ;
And that an eager expectation runs
Before his path, to see how he will bear
This sudden mandate, and how be received
At court.

CHABANNES.

Look, here comes one in haste, methinks,
That should be my old friend and comrade
Triboulet.

Enter TRIBOULET.

TRIBOULET.

Gentles, beseech ye leave me passing room ;
Most worshipful sir, I am right glad to see you !

CHABANNES.

That is a joy reciprocal.
Good fool, how hast thou fared, since last we parted ?

TRIBOULET.

Indifferent well, my lord ; I thank ye, though very
indifferent ; but still as well as may be considering tides
and times, and things as they were, and things as they
are, and sundry other things—heigh ho !

CHABANNES.

What ! melancholy, eh ! poor fellow ?

TRIBOULET.

Oh! sir, very melancholy. I should think I was dying in right earnest, an it were not—

ALENÇON.

That he eats like a pig, and sleeps like a dormouse.

TRIBOULET.

Sir, your comparisons are very beastly, and that's the best that can be said of them.

ALENÇON.

The best is bad, and far from civil, then.

TRIBOULET.

The farther from civil, the nearer to your speech.

CHABANNES.

There, never anger thee at truth, good fool:—
But tell me where that foul fiend Melancholy
Hath driven the damask of thy rosy cheeks?

VENDÔME.

Marry, it needs no search into his nose :
Which juts from out the main land of his face,
Like some peak'd promontory, on whose verge
The beacon light its warning blaze advances.

ALENÇON.

Well, but what makes thee sad?

TRIBOULET.

E'en that which makes you glad.

ALENÇON.

And what is that, sir Fool?

TRIBOULET.

The Lord High Constable's return, sir Duke.

[D'ALENÇON turns on his heel, and walks up
the stage with VENDÔME.]

CHABANNES.

My lord of Alençon, you have your answer—
And why doth that affect thee?

TRIBOULET.

Why, sir, thus :
The Duke de Bourbon is a worthy gentleman,
Fine fighter, wise statesman, and great fool—

CHABANNES.

How now, sir Triboulet, a fool!—a man who gives
His blood—

TRIBOULET.

To the earth.

CHABANNES.

And his counsel—

TRIBOULET.

To the air.

CHABANNES.

For his country—

TRIBOULET.

No, for that (*snaps his fingers*); why how ye stare, is
it not so?—And doth not the event prove that he *was* a
fool?

CHABANNES (*aside*).

O wisdom! thou hast kissed the lips of idiots,
And gemm'd the motley with thy precious pearls!

[ALENÇON and VENDÔME appear to be observing
some one in the distance—they come forward.]

ALENÇON.

Oh yes, 'tis he! now, by this living light,
There is no nauseous reptile crawls the earth
That I so loathe as this same Bonnivét!

CHABANNES.

Is that De Bonnivet, that plumed thing !
So sparkling and so brave in his attire,
Who treads disdainfully the upholding earth ?

TRIBOULET.

Oh, that he hath done long on all his upholders.

CHABANNES.

Is that the brother of King Francis' tutor,
Whom I remember well a page at court ?

ALENÇON.

Sir, he is now the King's prime minister.

CHABANNES.

Sir !—tut—impossible !

TRIBOULET.

He means the Queen's prime minister.

VENDÔME.

Why, aye, that's something nearer to the mark.

*Enter DE BONNIVET—he bows haughtily to them—they
return his salute in the same manner.*

TRIBOULET (*staring in his face*).

He hath a very bright eye, and a very high brow, and
very handsome teeth—(*While he says this, DE BONNIVET
threateningly obliges him to retreat step by step, until he
gets behind VENDÔME, when he adds*)—By reason of all
which, no woman need miscarry that looks at him.

DE BONNIVET.

(*Aiming a blow at TRIBOULET with his glove*).

Hold thy fool's tongue !

TRIBOULET.

(Showing himself from behind ALENÇON.)

That we may listen to thine? Now, for aught I know, thou mayst be the most learned of the two, seeing thy brother was a pedagogue.

[DE BONNIVET *draws his sword, and rushes upon* TRIBOULET; VENDÔME *and* CHABANNES *hold him back.* D'ALENÇON *places himself before* TRIBOULET.

VENDÔME.

For manhood, sir, put up your sword: he knows not what he says.

CHABANNES.

He is a fool! an idiot!

TRIBOULET.

The King's fool, sir, the King's fool, and no idiot!

BONNIVET.

King's fool or not, he shall not fool 't with me,
Or, by the Lord! I'll make him find his brains.—

TRIBOULET.

Sir, if you knock them out, I bequeath them to you;
you're poor in such commodities.

BONNIVET.

Unhand me, lords!—

Enter MARGARET DE VALOIS, *followed by* CLEMENT.

MARGARET.

How now, what coil is here! My lords, I thought not
To meet foul discord in such company.

Gentlemen, if a lady's voice hath power
To win your hands from their ungentle purpose,

Pray you, put up your swords. Why so, I thank ye.
And now, what, may I ask, in this assembly
Was cause of such affray?

TRIBOULET.

My wit, sweet mistress.

CLEMENT.

Then drew thy wit more points than e'er it utter'd.

MARGARET.

Truly such origin doth honour to your quarrel.
And if whole nations fought for ten long years
For no more cause than a light woman's love,
We well may pardon, nay approve, four heroes
Who fall to fighting on a jester's words.

ALENÇON.

Madam, *your* words are sharp, and came they not
From lips, where soft sweet smiles have made their home,
They would, indeed, be terrible: but now,
We even bless reproachful oracles
That breathe from such a shrine.

TRIBOULET (*aside to him*).

Oh, excellent!

Where didst thou con that dainty speech, I pray thee?

[ALENÇON *pushes him angrily away*, MARGARET *bows to VENDÔME, and extends her hand to CHABANNES*.]

MARGARET.

Most worthy sir, you're welcome back again
To our fair court.

CHABANNES.

Lady, can you rejoice

To see grey hairs come bowing in your train?
Doth spring cry welcome to the hoary winter?

MARGARET.

Oh, sir, your winter so hath crown'd itself
With bays and laurels—glorious evergreens,
Still smiling in the sunshine of fair fame,
That 'tis but like a second, longer spring,
Born of the growth of years destin'd to flourish
As bright and fresh for ever.—Who is that,
Standing behind my Lord of Alençon?
I pray you, sir, come forth into the light,
Unless the shame of your encounter—

BONNIVET (*kneeling to kiss her hand*).

It was not shame, but the broad dazzling sun,
That shone so fully in my sight, fair lady,
That I was fain to shade my eyes.

MARGARET.

Indeed!

You said the same last night, if you remember,
After the sun had set.

BONNIVET.

Oh, when
Do those bright orbs, his rivals, cease to shed
Such floods of light?—when will those beaming eyes
Grant respite, which the sunset gives us not?

CLEMENT (*aside to Triboulet*).

He understands the business, doth he not?

MARGARET.

These eyes, I trust, are far less powerful—
Their sphere is bounded, happily for you;

And if their light be so insufferable,
It hath a narrow compass, you may find
Relief from such a radiance easily.

TRIBOULET (*aside to CLEMENT*).

I'faith, and she understands it, too,—see how she waves
him off.

MARGARET.

Chabannes,
Will not the tourney that my brother holds
To-day, in honour of the Duke's return,
Be favour'd by your presence ?

CHABANNES.

Gracious Madam,
We all intend, as I believe, to be there :
I to look on, and criticise as age
Ever will do, drawing comparisons,
'Twixt that which is, and that which hath been once.

MARGARET.

Envious comparisons ! say, are they not ?
Surely the world alters not every day,
That those, who play'd their parts but some score years
Gone by, should cry out, ' How the times are alter'd ! '—
I do appeal to thy philosophy ;
Say, is it so, Chabannes ?

CHABANNES.

In sober truth, then, in philosophy,
Since thus your Grace commands, I do believe
That at our feet the tide of time flows on
In strong and rapid course ; nor is one current
Or rippling eddy liker to the rest,

Than is one age unto its predecessor :
Men still are men, the stream is still a stream,
Through every change of changeful tide and time ;
And 'tis, I fear, only our partial eye
That lends a brighter sunbeam to the wave
On which we launch'd our own advent'rous bark.

MARGARET.

Oh fair confession ! thou'rt but half a soldier—

CHABANNES.

But half a soldier, and no more, fair madam.

TRIBOULET.

Listen : one quarter of a good soldier is valour, the second quarter prudence, and the remaining half (the biggest half by far) wrong-headedness :—now, lacking the latter half, thou art, as the princess saith, but half a soldier.

MARGARET.

Why so ; I am content my meaning thus
Should be interpreted, although 'twas not
My thought. Come thou with me, sir Fool,
I've business for thee in the Banquet-hall :
You, gentlemen, farewell, until the tourney ;
'Till then, all good attend you, and I pray
Keep the king's peace, an it be possible.

[*Exeunt* MARGARET, CLEMENT, and TRIBOULET *on one side ; the rest on the other.*]

SCENE II.—THE QUEEN MOTHER'S APARTMENT.

(*The QUEEN enters precipitately.*)

QUEEN.

So—I am glad Gonzalès is not here ;
I would not even he should see me thus.—
Now out upon this beating heart, these temples,
'That throb and burn so ; and this crimson glow
That rushes o'er my brow : now, by this light,
I had not dream'd so much weak womanhood
Still slumber'd in my breast!—I must remember me.—
Mother of France, and well nigh Queen of it,
I'll even bear my love as royally,
As I have borne my pow'r :—the time is near,
Oh very near, when he will kneel again
Before my feet ;—the conqueror to the conquer'd !—
I am asham'd of this ill timed relapse,—
This soft unnerving pow'r which thus enthrals me.

(*Enter GONZALES.*)

Thou art right welcome, by my word, Gonzalès !
Where be those parchments ?

GONZALES.

Noble madam, here.

QUEEN.

Hast thou drawn out the plan of the possessions ?

GONZALES.

So please your grace, I have :—Pardon me, madam,
I fear you are not well ; your cheek is pale,
And your lip quivers—is your highness ill ?

QUEEN.

Hush ! 'twas a trumpet, was it not ?—and now—
Surely it is the tramp of horses' hoofs
That beat the ground thus hurriedly and loud ;—
I pray thee, father, throw the casement wide—
The air is stifling.

GONZALES.

I do entreat your highness to be seated ;
I never saw you thus o'ercome before :
You tremble, madam.

QUEEN (*rising*).

Do I so, indeed ?
I thank thee for that word—it hath reviv'd me :
I'm very well—I do not tremble now ;—
By heav'n I never heard that word before :
It hath a wondrous virtue ! Pray thee, father,
What think the people of Bourbon's return ?

GONZALES.

Madam, the summer clouds
That flit across the heav'ns are not more various,
More strange, and different in shape and colour,
Than are th' opinions born from his recall.

QUEEN.

But thou—but thou—
Accustom'd as thou art to thread the mazes
Of dark intriguing policy—how think'st *thou* ?

GONZALES.

Accustom'd, as your highness should have said,
To read the will and wisdom of your eyes,
And watch, for your commands, each meaning look,

If I might say it, madam—I should think
That much indeed lay in this mystery ;
For your eye speaks strange things.

QUEEN.

How sayest thou—
This hand is passing fair, is't not, Gonzalès ?

GONZALES.

Madam !—'tis not for me to estimate
The hand that kings have priz'd above their kingdom.

QUEEN.

Psha ! fool ! Oh, rather say the hand that held
The sovereign rule over their kingdoms. Now,
Mark me attentively. This woman's hand,
That but this moment trembled with alarm,—
This fair, frail hand, hath firmly held the reins
Of this vast empire for full many a year :
This hand hath given peace and war to Europe,—
This hand hath plac'd my son upon his throne,—
This hand hath held him there,—this hand it was
That sign'd the warrant for Bourbon's recall.

GONZALES.

Amazement !

QUEEN.

Ay ! this woman's hand, led by a woman's heart.
Now hear me, thou ; for to thy secrecy
I will confide what none, save only thou,
Have known—*must* know. Note well the latter word !
It is because I love the duke de Bourbon
With the strong love of such a soul as mine,
That I have called him from his government,

To lift him to the dizziest height of pow'r
This hand can grant, or kingdom can confer.

GONZALES (*aside*).

Perdition on her ! this will ruin all !
(*Aloud*)—And will you tell him of your love ?

QUEEN.

I will.

Nay, answer not,—I have resolved on it,—
Thou wouldst but waste thy words, and anger me.
I never yet knew friend or minister,
But they were ever readier to advise
Than act.

GONZALES.

Now, madam, by the holy mass,
You shall not find it so. I've not forgot
My fame and honours were bestowed by you ;
And rather take them back,—nay, life itself,—
Than taunt me with unwillingness to serve you.

QUEEN.

Why, so ! I did but jest. In sooth, Gonzalès,
I know thou art as good, in a bad way,
As any faithful son of the Holy Church
Need be.

GONZALES.

But does the King—

QUEEN.

Out, bungler ! out !
The King was very dutiful, and well
Believ'd what I so strenuously assur'd.
I told him that the duke de Bourbon's power
Was growing strongly in the Milanese ;

Urged his return ; and show'd him how, when distant,
The high ambition of the Bourbon's mind
Was far less check'd than here, beneath the shadow
Of the throne, and so he was recalled—

(*Trumpets without—shouts of “ DE BOURBON !”*)

And now he is arriv'd—hark how the trumpets
Bray themselves hoarse with sounding welcome to him !
Oh, could I join my voice to yonder cry,
By heav'ns I think its tones would rend the welkin
With repetition of the hero's name,
Who 's dearer far to me than life or fame.

[*Exit.*]

GONZALES.

In love with Bourbon ! by this living light,
My mission here is well nigh bootless, then.
Now might I back to Spain, since Charles' objects
Are all defeated by this woman's passion,
Were there not yet another task, the dearest,
The labour that is life—mine own revenge !
Till I have reached that goal, my foot shall never
Tread its own soil ; or, freed from its disguise,—
This noiseless sandal of slow-gaited priesthood,—
Resume its manly garb. Oh, very long
Is the accomplishment ; but it is sure,—
Sure as the night that curtains up each day,—
Sure as that death which is the end of life.
Lie still, thou thirsty spirit, that within
Call'st for the blood that *shall* allay thy craving !
Down, down with thee, until the hour be come
When I can fling this monkish treachery by,
Rush on my prey, and let my soul's hot flame

Lick up his blood, and quench it in his life !
Time, and the all-enduring soul that never
Shrinks from the trial, be my speed ! and nought
My hope, my spur, my instrument, my end,
Save hate—eternal hate—immeasurable hate !

[*Exit.*

SCENE III.—THE PRINCESS MARGARET'S CHAMBER.

(*Enter MARGARET and TRIBOULET.*)

MARGARET.

It is the hour of tourney. Triboulet,
Go thou unto the Queen, and tell her grace,
That, if it please her, I'll attend her thither.

[*Exit TRIBOULET.*

He is returned ! he will be there ! and yet
Though meeting, after long eventful absence,—
We shall not in our meeting be half blest :
A dizzy, whirling throng will be around us,
'Mid whose loud jar the still small voice of love,
Whose accents breathe their soft enchantment best
In whisper'd sighs, or but half-whisper'd words,
Will die unheard. Oh that we thus should meet !
But, then, there is love's eye to flash his thought
Into a language, whose rich eloquence
Beggars all voice ; our eyes at least may meet,
And change, like messengers, the loving freight
That either heart sends forth.

Enter CLEMENT MARÔT.

CLEMENT.

So please you, madam,
The Queen hath bid me say that she will not
Grace with her sight the tournament to-day ;
And as I came from her apartment hither,
I met the King, who bade me bear you word
He cannot yet unto the lists, but you,
And your fair train, had best ride quickly there,
And let the tilt commence ; he will not tarry,
But join ye ere the first three blows be struck.

[*Exit CLEMENT.*

MARGARET.

'Tis well, I will obey—'Tis very strange
How much I fear my mother should perceive
De Bourbon's love for me—I know not why—
I dare not tell it her ;—she is a fearful spirit,
And stands so proudly over all her sex,
She surely ne'er hath known what 'tis to love.

[*Exit.*

SCENE IV.—THE LISTS.

Enter LAUTREC and LAVAL, meeting.

LAUTREC.

Well met, by this glad light, Laval ! Will not
The Queen attend this tournament to day ?

LAVAL.

No, sir, she's closeted with that grim holiness !

LAUTREC.

That Spanish monk !

LAVAL.

That walking mystery !
That man, to my mind, hath a villainous look.
I never met his eyes but they were glaring
Like some hyæna's, or the devil's own ;
And when I've spoken to him, I have seen
His lip, which as you know is e'er purs'd up
Into an humble simper of devotion,
Grow pale as death, and quiver, and instead
Of that same *sneaking* smile, it wore a sneer
That look'd like ghastly and convulsive agony.
Once, I remember me, the Queen had sent
By me some mission to this confessor ;—
By chance, the Princess Margaret, by whose side
He stood, let fall a jewel from her finger ;
Both stoop'd, and as we did, our hands encountered—
He started back as though a serpent stung him ;—
By'r Lady, but I would not be the man
To wrong that surly monk : it is not strange,
That when I gaze on him it seems as though
I knew him, and had seen him oft before.

LAUTREC.

Nay, in thy dreams it must have been, Laval ;
But leave this theme, and tell me what it is
Thou wouldst with me ?

LAVAL.

This is no fitting place
To speak what I would say at greater length ;

But love prompts me, once more, to urge my suit—
My unanswer'd suit.

LAUTREC.

Once more I tell thee, then,
My sister shall be thine, I have said it—
Alençon !

Enter ALENÇON.

LAVAL.

Thou'st tarried long at tennis.

ALENÇON.

Why, the King
Still loiter'd on with racket in his hand ;
And Bonnivet vaunting their mutual prowess.

LAUTREC.

'Tis much past noon.

ALENÇON.

He will be here anon.
For as I rode, I pass'd him with his train,
The gath'ring crowd thronging and clamouring
Around him, stunning him with benedictions,
And stifling him with love and fumes of garlick !
He, with the air he knows so well to don,
With cap in hand, and his thick chestnut hair
Fann'd from his forehead, bowing to his saddle,
Smiling and nodding, cursing at them too
For hindering his progress—while his eye,
His eagle eye, well vers'd in such discernment,
Rov'd through the crowd ; and ever lighted, where
Some pretty ancle, clad in woollen hose,
Peep'd from beneath a short round petticoat,

Or where some wealthy burgher's buxom dame,
Deck'd out in all her high-day splendour, stood
Shewing her gossips the gold chain, which lay
Cradled upon a bosom, whiter far
Than the pure lawn that kerchieft it.
But how is not the joust begun?—his Majesty—

LAUTREC.

Nay, it began when first his order reach'd us ;
Already hath one combat been decided
'Twixt Jouy and de Varennes ; and the latter,
Proving the conqueror, in yonder tent
Now rests him for awhile : he will come forth
When next the trumpets sound. Wilt thou, Laval,
Try fortune in the lists ?

LAVAL.

Oh, not to-day,—
Not before her, beneath whose eyes defeat
Were worse than death,—no, not to-day.

LAUTREC.

Nay, then, De Varennes shall not loiter there
Longer in proud expectance of a rival,—
I will encounter him. Herald ! what ho !
There is my gauntlet—bear to Count de Varennes
A fair defiance ! Bid my page lead round
My charger, let your trumpets sound a blast,
And raise the escutcheon of our ancient house
Before the tent.

[Exit into the Lists. Shouts and acclamations
without, and trumpets.

Enter FRANCIS, CHABANNES, VENDÔME, BONNIVET, CLEMENT MARÔT, TRIBOULET, and Courtiers.

OMNES.

Long live the King ! Long live great Francis !

FRANCIS.

Now are we heartily ashamed to think
That we have robb'd our excellent good people
Of any portion of the day's rejoicing !—
We fear we're somewhat past th' appointed time.

TRIBOULET.

An hour or so, not more.

FRANCIS.

Curse on that ceaseless clock—thy tongue !

TRIBOULET.

It goes right, though, for once.

FRANCIS.

If we have caus'd the joust to be retarded,
Which we sent word should not be so, we trust
Our faithful subjects will forgive th' offence
In favour of the cause—their own dear interests
Having withheld us in deep council from
Their well-beloved presence, which to us
Is like the sunshine of a summer's day ;—
We were detained by weighty matters.

TRIBOULET.

Ay,

A tennis-ball, was't not ? There, never frown,
I'll spare thee—I'll be silent.

FRANCIS.

On with the combats !

Chabannes, 'tis long since such a joust has been
Honour'd by your good presence.

CHABANNES.

True, my liege ;
Since I left France, though, many a time and oft
We've run a charge against Colonna's knights,
Had not disgrac'd the fair eyes that look down
Upon this bloodless mimicry of war. [Shouts.

But, see ! the gates unclose—Lautrec is conqueror

[Shouts and trumpets. FRANÇOISE DE FOIX
rises, and leans forward with every mark of
intense interest.

FRANCIS.

De Bonnavet, who is yon lady ? look—

In front of the Princess's balcony ?

Is she not passing fair ?

BONNIVET.

Indeed, my liege,

She's very fair. I do not know her, though.

(To LAVAL.) Who is yon lady, leaning forth, Laval ?

LAVAL.

Count Lautrec's sister.

FRANCIS.

Had a limner's hand

Traced such a heavenly brow, and such a lip,

I would have sworn the knave had dreamt it all

In some fair vision of some fairer world.

See how she stands, all shrined in loveliness ;

Her white hands clasped ; her clust'ring locks thrown back

From her high forehead ; and in those bright eyes

Tears ! radiant emanations ! drops of light !

That fall from those surpassing orbs as though
The starry eyes of heav'n wept silver dew.
(*To LAVAL.*) Is yonder lady married, sir?

LAVAL.

My liege,
Not yet; but still her hand is bound in promise—
She is affianced.

FRANCIS.

And to whom?

LAVAL.

To me, sire.

FRANCIS.

Indeed!

(*Aside to BONNIVET.*)

Methinks I was too passionate in my praise,

Eh? Bonnivet—and yet how fair she is!

(*Trumpets and shouts.*)

Enter LAUTREC and DE VARENNES from the Lists.

BONNIVET.

The time is well nigh spent,
And yet no stir of arms in token yet
Of any other knight, whose envious prowess
Disputes the prize which Lautrec else may claim.

FRANCIS.

Let him not claim it, though, for 'tis not his;
And, by this light, *shall* not be his, while I
Can strike one blow for it. Behold, Count Lautrec,
Another combatant awaits thee, here!—
Another bids thee halt on triumph's threshold,
And strive once more for victory. What, ho!
Unfurl our royal standard to the wind,

And let our fleur-de-lys, that oft have shadow'd
The bloody battle-field, bloom o'er the tourney.

LAUTREC.

The King ! I yield !

FRANCIS.

Not so, sir, if you please ;
We'd shew that we can run a lance as well
As any other gentleman : come on !

[*Exeunt LAUTREC and the KING.*

FRANÇOISE.

How bravely does war's plumed majesty
Become him, as he vaults upon his steed !
His crimson crest waving upon the air
Like Victory's ruddy favours ! on they go—
Now quakes the earth beneath their chargers' hoofs,
That whirl around, taking their vantage space ;
Now each fierce steed bends on his haunches down,
Ready to rush his headlong course ; each knight
Springs from his seat, and rising in the stirrups,
Directs his rested lance ; on, on, they go,
Flashing and thund'ring ! Ah ! the King's unhorsed.
(*Shouts within the Lists—' Long live the King !'*)

BONNIVET.

Madam, your loyal fears outran your eyes,
Count Lautrec fell, but he received no hurt :
The King is conqueror !

TRIBOULET.

Ay, so I thought :
Fortune's a true courtier.

CLEMENT.

Now out on thee, unmannerly——

TRIBOULET.

I meant to say courtiers are——

LAVAL.

How now, jackanapes?

TRIBOULET.

Well, well, what I meant to say is, that I never yet saw the King worsted in a fight.

BONNIVET.

Surely not because——

TRIBOULET.

Umph! because broken pates are better than broken fortunes, and ye know it full well!

(*Shouts and trumpets.*)

[*Enter FRANCIS, followed by LAUTREC, Herald, Pages, and Esquires: MARGARET, FRANÇOISE, and Ladies, descend and advance; the KING kneels to MARGARET, who throws a gold chain round his neck.*]

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—AN APARTMENT OF THE PRINCESS
MARGARET'S.

Enter DE BOURBON, *followed by* MARGARET.

BOURBON.

A plague upon their tournaments, I say !

MARGARET.

Nay then, De Bourbon, by my woman's word,
This must not be ; oh, say it shall not be !
Say, thou wilt rein this hot, impatient mood,
For thy sake——no, for mine, for mine I meant :
Are we not twined together in our love ?
What wonder then, if, speaking of myself,
Thy name was on my lips ?—for my sake, Bourbon.

BOURBON.

If thou wilt bid me journey to the moon
Upon a moth's wing, or wilt send me forth,
Belted and spurred, to fight some score of devils,—
Or worse, wilt bid me with some twenty men
Turn out Colonna from the Milanese,
Say so ; and by this light I'll *do* it too !
But, to submit to *this*,—to bear all this,—
To let a woman tear my laurels off,—
And trample them,—Hell ! when I think on it !
Pshaw ! never fix those dangerous eyes on me,
And clasp thy hands—I say—

MARGARET.

She is my mother !

BOURBON.

I'faith I've often doubted of that truth ;
Thou art not like her, for the which thank heaven !

MARGARET.

I *can* be like her though, my lord, in this :—

Not to endure the licence of your tongue.

If headlong passion urge you, sir, beyond

The bounds of prudence, look that you control it,

Nor vent bold thoughts in bolder words to me ;

Else you may chance to find—

BOURBON.

She *is* thy mother ?

Nay, smooth that brow, thou art too like the Queen ;

And in those soft blue eyes, whose orbs reflect

Heaven's light with heaven's own purity, let not

The stormy gleam of anger e'er flash forth !

I had thought, Margaret, that love forgot

All ranks and all distinctions ?

MARGARET.

Ay, so it doth.

All ties, the world, its wealth, its fame, or fortune,

Can twine ; but never those of nature, Bourbon.

So mine can give up all, save the first bond

My heart e'er knew,—the love of those who gave

Life, and the power to love ;—those early links

Lie wreathed like close-knit fibres round my heart,

Never to sever thence till my heart break.

BOURBON.

Lo! at thy feet I sue for pardon, sweet !

By thine own purity, thou virgin lily !
Thou flower of France ! forgive the word that broke
Too hastily from my rash lips ; which thus,
Having offended, will do penance now
Upon this marble shrine, my lady-love.

(Kisses her hand.)

MARGARET.

A goodly penitent ! Nay, never kneel,
And look so pitiful ;—there, I forgive thee.
But, Bourbon, by the faith of our sworn love,
I do implore thee to bear with my mother.

BOURBON.

Pshaw !—

MARGARET.

Why, look now, there's your brow dark and contracted ;—
I see the passion flashing in your eyes ;
You will *not* think of me, and bear with her ?

BOURBON.

If I could think of thee, and not see her,—
Or think of thee, and not hear her, why, then—
Well, patience, and kind thoughts of thee befriend me !
And I will do my best to second them.

MARGARET.

Go you to meet my mother now ?

BOURBON.

This hour
Love stole from duty to bestow on thee ;
And now I must attend upon the Queen.

MARGARET.

See you observe my lesson.

BOURBON.

Fear me not ;

Oh ! I'll be wonderfully calm and patient.

MARGARET.

(*Aside.*)—Methinks I'll try thee. (*Aloud.*)—How if she
should ask

Some question of your late left government ?

I see you're very calm already ! How

If she should speak of a fit successor ?

Most patient ! Lautrec now, or Bonnivet ?

BOURBON.

Confusion light upon them ! Bonnivet ?

And Lautrec ? beardless boys ! whose maiden swords

Have not yet blush'd with one red drop of blood ;

Whose only march hath been a midnight measure,

Whose only field hath been a midnight masque ;

Is it for these, and their advancement, I

Have watch'd, have toil'd, have fought, have bled, have
conquer'd ;

Rush'd over fields strewed with the dead and dying,

Swam streams that ran all curdled with the blood

Of friend and foe, stood in the bristling breach,

And in the hour of death and desolation

Won never fading victories for France ?

Shall the Queen's minions—by this living light—

MARGARET.

Oh, patient gentleman ! how calm he is !

Now in those flaming eyes, and scornful lips,

I read how well my lesson profits thee.

Thou shalt not to the Queen in this hot mood.

BOURBON.

I'faith I must ; the storm is over now ;
And having burst, why, I shall be the calmer.
Farewell, sweet monitress ! I'll not forget.

MARGARET.

Oh, but I fear—

BOURBON.

Fear not—she is thy mother !

[*Exeunt severally.*

SCENE II.—AN APARTMENT OF THE QUEEN
MOTHER'S.

The QUEEN is discovered writing.—Enter GONZALES.

GONZALES.

So please your highness, the Duke de Bourbon
Attends your grace.

QUEEN.

Give him admittance straight. [*Exit GONZALES.*

Now then to try the mettle of his soul,
And tempt him with the glitter of a crown.

Enter BOURBON.

BOURBON.

Madam, I humbly kiss your highness's hands.

QUEEN.

I thank you, sir ; and though last night's blithe close
Was hardly rest to one o'ermarch'd before,
I trust you are recover'd from the weariness
Of your long journey.

BOURBON (*aside*).

Pray heaven, she go no further with that theme!

(*Aloud.*) I thank your grace, but owing to the speed

Enjoined by those who penn'd my—my recall—

My journey was a short one.—

QUEEN.

Did ye not rest at Chantelle?

BOURBON.

Ay, good madam.

QUEEN.

Short as you hold your march, my lord, and lightly

As you think fit to speak of it, I trow

It was swift riding to reach Paris yesterday.

BOURBON (*aside*).

Hell!—how she hangs upon the cursed subject.

(*Aloud.*) To me both time and road seem short, indeed,

From a proud kingdom back to a poor dukedom.

QUEEN.

My lord, there is much bitterness in that!

BOURBON.

Bitterness! madam—oh, I do not doubt

There were high, weighty reasons warranted

My being thus recalled from Italy:

And those same weighty reasons will, no doubt,

Point out a fit successor to me also.

QUEEN.

There is much bitterness in *that*, my lord;—

Your mind is apt to start at fancied wrongs,

And makes a shadow where no substance is.

BOURBON.

Your grace will pardon me; but hitherto

We have not seen such payment given to service ;
Can governments be wrested from a man
Unheard,—nay, unaccused, without a cause ?

QUEEN.

No, sir, they cannot—but might not the cause
Have been your future profit and advancement,
Instead of your disgrace ?

BOURBON.

Oh ! we all know
The government of our Italian states
Must henceforth be a post for beardless soldiers,
Lacking wit wherewithal to win their honours,
Or courtiers lacking valour to deserve them.

QUEEN.

I see the bent and mark of this discourse ;
And though, be well assured, no other man
That breathes had thus far ventured in his speech,—
Your daring I have borne with patiently.

BOURBON.

Borne with me ! Borne with me, forsooth !—

QUEEN.

Ay, sir,
Borne with you : further still,—for in that sorrow
Hath fallen on your mind too bitterly,
And well nigh chang'd its bright and polish'd metal
With its corrosive touch,—I've pitied you.

BOURBON.

Wrong'd ! borne with ! pitied ! By our Lady, madam—
This is too much.

QUEEN.

Oh, sir, the King's advisers—

BOURBON.

The King should hearken less to false advice,
And more to honest service, madam.

QUEEN.

(*Aside*)—Ha!

Now is the bridle thrown upon the steed ;
That word, that one unguarded word, shall make
My victory, or thy perdition sure !

(*Aloud*)—I pass you that, my lord, you are too hot—

And now that I have curb'd all proud respects

In kind indulgence of your hasty spleen,

Hear me : what if (I will repeat the question),

'Stead of ingratitude or envy, motives

With which you seem full well contented,

Being the spring of this your swift return,

Your quick preferment, and increase of glory

Had been alone consulted ?

BOURBON.

How so, madam ?

QUEEN.

Ever too rash in your belief, my lord,

You run before the truth—you've followers,

Eager and zealous partisans you have ;

Think you it is impossible some friend

May haply have contriv'd this prompt recall,

To bring you nearer to a court, where you

May find paths unexplor'd as yet, in which

Ambition might discover such a prize,

As were worth winning ?

BOURBON.

I would have you know

De Bourbon storms, and does not steal his honours
And though your highness thinks I am ambitious,
(And rightly thinks) I am not *so* ambitious
Ever to beg rewards that I can win,—
No man shall call me debtor to his tongue.

QUEEN (*rising*).

'Tis proudly spoken; nobly too—but what,
What if a woman's hand were to bestow
Upon the Duke de Bourbon such high honours,
To raise him to such state, that grasping man,
E'en in his wildest thoughts of mad ambition,
Ne'er dreamt of a more glorious pinnacle?

BOURBON.

I'd kiss the lady's hand, an she were fair.
But if this world fill'd up the universe,—
If it could gather all the light that lives
In ev'ry other star or sun, or world;
If kings could be my subjects, and that I
Could call such pow'r and such a world my own,
I would not take it from a woman's hand.
Fame is my mistress, madam, and my sword
The only friend I ever wooed her with.
I hate all honours smelling of the distaff,
And, by this light, would as lief wear a spindle
Hung round my neck, as thank a lady's hand
For any favour greater than a kiss.—

QUEEN.

And how, if such a woman loved you,—how
If, while she crown'd your proud ambition, she
Could crown her own ungovernable passion,
And felt that all this earth possess'd, and she

Could give, were all too little for your love ?
Oh good, my lord ! there may be such a woman.

BOURBON (*aside*).

Amazement ! can it be, sweet Margaret—
That she has read our love ?—impossible !—and yet—
That lip ne'er wore so sweet a smile !—it is,
That look is pardon and acceptance ! (*aloud*)—speak.

(*He falls at the QUEEN's feet.*)

Madam, in pity speak but one word more,—
Who is that woman ?

QUEEN (*throwing off her veil*).

I am that woman !

BOURBON (*starting up*).

You, by the holy mass ! I scorn your proffers ;—
Is there no crimson blush to tell of fame
And shrinking womanhood ! Oh shame ! shame ! shame !

(*The QUEEN remains clasping her hands to her temples, while DE BOURBON walks hastily up and down : after a long pause the QUEEN speaks.*)

QUEEN.

What ho ! Marlon ! St. Evreux !

Enter two Gentlemen.

Summon my confessor ! (*Exeunt*)—And now, my lord,
I know not how your memory serves you ;
Mine fails not *me*—If I remember well,
You made some mention of the King but now—
No matter—we will speak of that anon.—

Enter GONZALES.

Sir, we have business with this holy father ;
You may retire.

BOURBON.

Confusion!

QUEEN.

Are we obeyed?

BOURBON (*aside*).

Oh Margaret!—for thee! for thy dear sake!

[*Rushes out. The QUEEN sinks into a chair.*]

QUEEN.

Refus'd and scorn'd! Infamy!—the word chokes me!—
How now! why stand'st thou gazing at me thus?—

GONZALES.

I wait your highness' pleasure.—(*Aside*) So, all is well—
A crown hath fail'd to tempt him—as I see
In yonder lady's eyes.

QUEEN.

Oh sweet revenge!
Thou art my only hope, my only dower,
And I will make thee worthy of a Queen.
Proud noble, I will weave thee such a web,—
I will so spoil and trample on thy pride,
That thou shalt wish the woman's distaff were
Ten thousand lances rather than itself.
Ha! waiting still, sir Priest! Well, as thou seest
Our venture hath been somewhat baulk'd,—'tis not
Each arrow reaches swift and true the aim,—
Love having fail'd, we'll try the best expedient,
That offers next,—what sayst thou to revenge?
'Tis not so soft, but then 'tis very sure;
Say, shall we wring this haughty soul a little?

Tame this proud spirit, curb this untrain'd charger ?
We will not weigh too heavily, nor grind
Too hard, but, having bow'd him to the earth,
Leave the pursuit to others—carrion birds,
Who stoop, but not until the falcon's gorg'd
Upon the prey he leaves to their base talons.

GONZALES.

It rests but with your grace to point the means.

QUEEN.

Where be the plans of those possessions
Of Bourbon's house?—see that thou find them straight :
His mother was my kinswoman, and I
Could aptly once trace characters like those
She used to write—enough—Guienne—Auvergne—
And all Provence that lies beneath his claim,—
That claim disprov'd, of right belong to me.—
The path is clear, do thou fetch me those parchments.

[Exit GONZALES.]

Not dearer to my heart will be the day
When first the crown of France deck'd my son's forehead,
Than that when I can compass thy perdition, —
When I can strip the halo of thy fame
From off thy brow, seize on the wide domains,
That make thy hated house akin to empire,
And give thy name to deathless infamy.

[Exit.]

SCENE III.—A GALLERY IN THE PALACE.

Enter FRANÇOISE DE FOIX and LAUTREC.

LAUTREC.

Nay, nay, my pretty sister, be not sad !
And that thou better mayst endure this parting,
I'll give thee hope, shall make thee think of nought
Save my return—what sayst thou to a husband ?—
One fear'd in battle-field, and no less full
Of courtesy, and other noble virtues,
Than high in birth, and rank, and fortune ;—eh ?

FRANÇOISE.

I could be well content that such a man
Had sought a meeter bride. Oh there be many
Maidens, of nobler parentage than mine,
Who would receive so brave a gentleman
With more of joy than I.

LAUTREC.

Why, my sweet sister !
This is a strange unnatural coldness hangs
Upon thy brow, and in thy measur'd speech.
I know not much of maiden state and pride,
But, by the mass ! thy words seem less in coyness
Than in indifference.

FRANÇOISE.

Oh say in love,
In true and tender love to thee, my brother :
Trust me, I'm not ambitious ; and would rather
Live ever by thy side unwooed, unwon,—

With nought to think or live for, but for thee,—
On whom, since earliest infancy, my heart
Hath spent its hopes and fears, its love and pride.
Oh do not give me to another ; do not,
Dear Lautrec, send me from thee, and at once
Sever the ties of sweet and holy love
That live between us !

LAUTREC.

To the man, whom best
On earth I value, I resign thee, Françoise ;
My word was plighted to thy glad consent,
And unless thou wilt break the faith I gave,
And cancel thus one of my fondest hopes,
Thou wilt be his.

FRANÇOISE.

I thank him for the honour
He doth our house, and my unworthy hand ;
I thank thee, too, in that thy love hath made
So proud a choice for me. Oh, do not think
That, by one word, I will unknit the friendship
Of so long years. Where'er it seemeth thee
Best to bestow me, there will I endeavour
Humbly to bend my heart's untried affections,—
There love, if it be possible,—at least
There willingly obey.

LAUTREC.

Then, dearest love,
If that, indeed, this offer please thee well,
Think on it as the fondest wish I have,
And look to see me come from Italy,
Bringing thee home a bridegroom, proudly crown'd

With war's victorious wreaths ; and who shall woo
The better, that he previously hath won
Fortune's hard favours, who, if I guess right,
Is coyer e'en than thou, my pretty sister.
Farewell awhile, I go to meet Laval. [Exit.

FRANÇOISE.

Farewell ! Oh, heav'n be prais'd that thou art blind
To that which, could thine unsuspecting heart
Once dream, would blast and wither it for ever.
I must not dwell on this sad theme ; and though
I have read rightly in those dangerous eyes
Which gaz'd so passionately on me, I
Must e'en forget love's first and fondest lesson,
And write another in my lone heart's core.
What though the King—oh, very full of danger
Is solitude like this—and dangerous
These thoughts that flock around me, melting down
Each sterner purpose. By thy trusting love,
My brother ! by thy hopes, that all in me
Centre their warmth and energy, I swear,
That while one throb of strength remains, I'll bear
This torture patiently, and in my heart
Lock love and misery until life depart. [Exit.

SCENE IV.—AN ANTEROOM IN THE PALACE.

Enter, at opposite sides, the KING and CLEMENT.

FRANCIS.

The very man I seek!—well met, Clément ;
I have a boon to ask of thee.

CLEMENT.

My liege,
Speak but your will, it is my law.

FRANCIS.

I thank thee.
But first answer me this—didst thou not mark,
This morning at the tournament, a lady
Who sat beside my sister ?

CLEMENT.

That did all
Who were there—'twas the young Countess de Foix,
Lautrec's fair sister.

FRANCIS.

Ay, the very same.
Dost know her, good Clément ?

CLEMENT.

My liege, I do ;
And e'en will say, that her surpassing beauty
Surpasseth not her wit, which is, indeed,
So perfect, and withal so gentle, too,
That her fair form is but a priceless casket,
Wherein lie precious treasures.

FRANCIS.

By my fay,
The lady's praise falls freely from thy tongue,
Indeed, Clément ! Methinks she must be perfect,
Else art thou very mad !

CLEMENT.

My gracious liege !

FRANCIS.

Come, come, Sieur Clément, thou dost love the lady !

CLEMENT.

All saints defend me from it! as I see
Your grace would hold such love insanity.

FRANCIS.

Hast known her long?

CLEMENT.

Ay, long enough, my lord,
To have o'ercome that sudden love which springs
To life from the first glance of beauteous eyes.

FRANCIS.

Do thou mine errand then, and bear to her
This letter and this ring; but see thou name not
Whence they are sent; be silent, and be swift,
And to my chamber bring me her reply.—
How, now! I thought thee gone; why dost thou stop,
And turn your letter o'er and o'er, and look
So sad and doubting?

CLEMENT.

May it please your grace,
I had a sister once—my thoughts were of
This lady's brother.

FRANCIS.

Well, sir! what of him?

CLEMENT.

I pray you, pardon me, my noble lord,
But if——

FRANCIS.

I will arrest the treason hanging
Upon thy lip; for, by my knightly word,
Yon scroll is such as any gentleman
Might bear to any lady.

CLEMENT.

For that word

I thank your majesty with all my heart ;—

I'll bear your message trustily.

FRANCIS.

And quickly ;

And meet me in my chamber with thine answer.

Good speed—farewell !—be swift ! I wait for thee.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE V.—COUNCIL CHAMBER.

Under a Canopy is placed the Throne ; on either side a vacant seat. Seats are placed on either side of a long table.

Enter the QUEEN-MOTHER.

QUEEN.

What, dazzled and ensnar'd, ere the black eyes

That blinded can have flash'd three glances on him !

The last that should have won his yielding heart, too !

She hath a brother, young and proud,—ambitious,

Or else he comes not of the haughty stock

Whose name he bears. Ambitious ! ay, and if

This black-eyed girl have the De Foix' high blood

Within her veins, she'll forward his ambition.

I fear this government of Italy

No longer lies at my disposal now.

I would that blindness had put out the beauty

That lies in every woman's eyes !—I would

A foul deformity alone had been
The portion of all women, ere this thing
Had come to pass!—Beset on ev'ry side,—
Hemm'd in,—and forced to guard—e'en more than life—
My pow'r ; and let revenge meantime go sleep :
No matter ! in the storm the pilot's skill
Shows best.—The King approaches to the council.

(Flourish of trumpets.)

*Enter the KING and all the Court, ALENÇON, BONNIVET,
VENDÔME, CHABANNES, LAUTREC, LAVAL, &c.*

FRANCIS.

The Duke de Bourbon's absence we might deem
Strange and uncourteous ; but we'll rather hope
That some event of unforeseen importance
Hath stood between his duty and ourselves :
Time wears—

*[The KING leads his Mother to the throne—
ALENÇON seats himself on the left of it ; the
rest of the Nobles place themselves according
to their rank.]*

On to the business of the day.

QUEEN.

Sire, will it not seem also strange in us,
And all uncourteous, if we should discuss
This matter, ere the first prince of the blood
Be here to give his voice in this decision ?

Enter BOURBON.

Said I not so ? We know my lord of Bourbon
Is ever at the post where duty points.

*[BOURBON seats himself on the right of the
throne.]*

FRANCIS.

Cousin of Bourbon, you are welcome here.

BOURBON.

I thank your majesty who bids me so,
And crave th' assembly's pardon : on my way
A man withheld me, unto whom I owed
Some gratitude.

FRANCIS.

Indeed ! his name, I pray ?
He that hath served those whom we love, serves us.
I prithee, coz, what was't thou ow'dst to him ?
I'll be his debtor too.

BOURBON.

Your majesty
(As we have seen in battle oft) holds life
At too unworthy price : unto that man,
I owed my life at Marignan.

FRANCIS.

Indeed !

QUEEN.

Shall we not to the point—our time grows short ?

FRANCIS.

Ay, marry ; thus, then, noble lords, it is :—
But now a messenger from Italy
Hath reach'd our court, with tidings from Milan,—
Prosper Colonna is in arms again ;
And Charles of Spain hath sent his swarthy bands
To ravage the fair tributary states
Our fathers won of yore, and ever deem'd
The brightest flower of foreign growth that wreath'd
Their coronet : now, in this urgency,

We lack some trusty arm to wield our brand
In the defence of Italy. Already,
Two have been named to us—De Bonnivet,
And Lautrec.

QUEEN (*aside to BOURBON*).

Bourbon, you look wondrous pale ;
I fear me you are ill.

BOURBON (*aside*).

Oh gracious madam !
Fear's pallid tint must live within your eye,
And lend whate'er you look on its own hue.

FRANCIS.

Stand forth, Count Lautrec ; for De Bonnivet,
Methinks, his youth may follow yet the wars
Before he lead them on ; how says our mother ?

QUEEN.

How should she say when that the royal choice
Lights on such valour ? how but well ? but you,
My lord of Bourbon, we would have your voice ;
Does silence, disapproving, seal your lips ?
Or takes your wisdom no exception here ?

BOURBON.

None, madam ; and the only wish I have
Is, that you ever had been served in Italy,
As I foresee Count Lautrec's arm will serve you.

LAUTREC.

My liege ! beseech you, hold ; and you, my lords !—
The honour now conferr'd sits blushing
On my unworthy brow : oh ! not on me
Bestow a prize, which years of bloody service,
And hairs bleach'd in your camps, alone should wear.

FRANCIS.

Now, by my fay, Lautrec, thy speech but shows
As brave and gallant soldier's speech should show,
Shrinking from praise and guerdon duly won :
With our own royal hand we'll buckle on
The sword, that in thy grasp must be the bulwark
And lode-star of our host. Approach !

QUEEN.

Not so.

Your pardon, sir ; but it hath ever been
The pride and privilege of woman's hand
To arm the valour that she loves so well :
We would not, for your crown's best jewel, bate
One jot of our accustom'd state to-day :
Count Lautrec, we will arm thee, at our feet :
Take thou the brand which wins thy country's wars,—
Thy monarch's trust, and thy fair lady's favour.
Why, how now !—how is this !—my lord of Bourbon !
If we mistake not, 'tis the sword of office
Which graces still your baldrick ;—with your leave,
We'll borrow it of you.

BOURBON (*starting up*).

Ay, madam ! 'tis the sword
You buckled on with your own hand, the day
You sent me forth to conquer in your cause ;
And there it is !—(*breaks the sword*)—take it—and with
it all
Th' allegiance that I owe to France ! ay, take it ;
And with it, take the hope I breathe o'er it :
That so, before Colonna's host, your arms
Lie crush'd and sullied with dishonour's stain ;

So, reft in sunder by contending factions,
Be your Italian provinces ; so torn
By discord and dissension this vast empire ;
So broken and disjoin'd your subjects' loves ;
So fallen your son's ambition, and your pride !

QUEEN (*rising*).

What ho ! a guard within there ! Charles of Bourbon,
I do arrest thee, traitor to the crown !

Enter Guard.

Away with yonder wide-mouth'd thunderer !
We'll try if gyves and strait confinement cannot
Check this high eloquence, and cool the brain
Which harbours such unmanner'd hopes.

[BOURBON is forced out.

Dream ye, my lords ! that thus with open ears,
And gaping mouths and eyes, ye sit and drink
This curbless torrent of rebellious madness !
And you, sir ! are you slumbering on your throne !
Or has all majesty fled from the earth,
That women must start up, and in your council
Speak, think, and act for ye ; and, lest your vassals,
The very dirt beneath your feet, rise up
And cast ye off, must women, too, defend ye ?
For shame, my lords ! all, all of ye, for shame !—
Off, off with sword and sceptre, for there is
No loyalty in subjects ; and in kings,
No king-like terror to enforce their rights.

FRANCIS.

Our mother speaks warmly in the cause :
Though we must own we hold it somewhat shame,
That we forestall'd her not in her just wrath ;

But verily, surprise had chain'd up motion ;
And hand and eye, and tongue, alike were bound
In wonder, at yon rebel noble's daring.
Now unto thee once more we turn, Count Lautrec,—
To-morrow's sun must find you on your march :
Already hath Colonna dared too much,
'Tis time we check his hopes of future progress,
And rescue back our torn Italian states.
Well speed ye all ! and victory be with you !
Farewell ; be faithful, and heav'n send ye back
With no more danger than may serve to be
The plea for praise and honourable guerdon.
Mother, thy hand ! we'll speak awhile with thee.

[*Exeunt all but LAUTREC and LAVAL.*]

LAUTREC.

I cry thy mercy, friend ! but I'm so maz'd,
So thunderstruck, so lost in wonderment !—
Bourbon arrested ! Bourbon prisoner !
And, by the Queen !

LAVAL.

I shall not soon forget
That woman's look, and voice.

LAUTREC.

Come, come, Laval,
Let us shake off this dream that haunts us thus ;
The Queen's a woman, who, upon emergency,
Can don the devil,—which of them cannot ?
'Tis time we think of our departure ;—hark !
Footsteps !—

LAVAL.

Ay, light, though hurried—'tis thy sister—

Enter FRANÇOISE.

LAVAL.

Lady, you're welcome as the joyous sun,
And gentle summer airs, that, after storms,
Come wafting all the sweets of fallen blossoms
Through the thick foliage; whose green arms shake off,
In gratitude, their showers of diamond drops,
And bow to the reviving freshness.

FRANÇOISE.

Oh, my dear brother, have I found thee here?
Here will I lock my arms, and rest for ever.

LAUTREC.

My dearest love! what means this passionate grief;
These straining arms and gushing tears? for shame!
Look up and smile; for honour crowns our house.
Dost know that I am governor of Milan?

FRANÇOISE.

They told me so; but oh! they told me, too,
That ere to-night be come, thou wilt go hence;
And the anticipated grief let forth
The torrent of my tears to sweep away
All thoughts of thy promotion. Is it so—
Dost thou, indeed, forsake me?

LAUTREC.

Maiden, no;
'Tis true we march for Italy to-night;
'Tis true that this embrace must be the last
For many a day. But for forsaking thee!
I leave thee with the Princess Margaret;
I leave thee here at court,—nay, silly girl—

LAVAL.

Oh, peace !

Prithee upbraid her not : see where she stands,
Bow'd with the weight of mourning loveliness :
Canst thou, with sharp reproving words, wound one
Who gems the lustre of thy new made honours,
With such rare drops of love !

LAUTREC.

My gentle sister !

FRANÇOISE.

Oh, Lautrec ! blame me not ; we twain have been
E'en from our birth together and alone ;
Two healthful scions, of a goodly stock,
Whose other shoots have wither'd all—we've grown,
Still side by side ; I like some fragile aspen—
And thou a sturdy oak, 'neath whose broad shelter
I rear'd my head : then frown not, that the wind
Doth weigh the trembling aspen to the earth,
While the stout oak scarce owns the powerless breeze.

LAUTREC.

Oh, churl ! to say one unkind word to thee ;
Look up, sweet sister ; smile once more on me,
That I may carry hence one gleam of sunshine :
Come, dearest, come ; unlock thy hands, Laval !
Take her, in pity, from my arms : for sense
Is well nigh drown'd in sorrow.

FRANÇOISE.

Yet one word ;
I do beseech thee, leave me not at court ;
But let me back to our old castle walls—
Let me not stay at court !

LAUTREC.

E'en as thou wilt:

But, dearest love, methinks such solitude

Will make of grief a custom; whilst at court—

No matter; use thine own discretion; do

E'en as it seemeth unto thee most fitting.

Once more, farewell! Laval, thou'lt follow?

[*Exit* LAUTREC.]

LAVAL.

Ay.

But ere I go, perchance for ever, lady,

Unto the land, whose dismal tales of battles,

Where thousands strew'd the earth, have christen'd it

The Frenchman's grave; I'd speak of such a theme

As chimes with this sad hour, more fitly than

Its name gives promise. There's a love, which, born

In early days, lives on through silent years,

Nor ever shines, but in the hour of sorrow,

When it shows brightest—like the trembling light

Of a pale sunbeam, breaking o'er the face

Of the wild waters in their hour of warfare.

Thus much forgive! and trust, in such an hour,

I had not said e'en this, but for the hope

That when the voice of victory is heard

From the far Tuscan valleys, in its swell

Should mournful dirges mingle for the dead,

And I be one of those who are at rest,

You may chance recollect this word, and say,

That day, upon the bloody field, there fell

One who had lov'd thee long, and lov'd thee well.

FRANÇOISE.

Beseech you, speak not thus : we soon, I trust,
Shall meet again—till then, farewell, and prosper ;
And if you love me,—which I will not doubt,
Sith your sad looks bear witness to your truth,—
This do for me—never forsake my brother !
And for my brother's sake, since you and he
Are but one soul, be mindful of yourself.

[*Exit* LAVAL.]

Defenceless, and alone ! ay, go thou forth,
For hope sits sunnily upon thy brow,
My brother ! but, to me, this parting seems
Full of ill-omen'd dread, woe's sure forerunner.
I could have told thee how seduction's arts,
E'en 'neath the bulwark of thy fond protection,
Have striven to o'erthrow my virtue—ay,
That letter and that ring—they were the king's.
Oh ! let me quickly from this fatal court,
Beneath whose smiling surface chasms lie yawning,
To gulph alike th' unwary and the wise.
I'll bid farewell to the Princess Margaret,
And then take shelter in my ancient home ;
There brood on my vain love, till grief become
Love's substitute—till foolish hope be dead,
And heav'n shall grant me patience in its stead.

[*Exit.*]

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—THE ROYAL CHAMBER.

FRANCIS *discovered.*

FRANCIS.

By Jupiter! he must have made an errand
Unto th' antipodes, or this new world,
Which, it should seem, our grandsire Adam's will
Did leave to Charles of Spain, else doth he wear
Dull lead for Mercury's air-cutting pinions.

Enter CLEMENT.

Why, how now, slow foot! art thou lame, I prithee?
Hath she the ring,—hath she perused the letter,—
What does she,—says she,—answers she? Be quick,
Man; thy reply. Come, come, the devil speed thee.

CLEMENT.

My liege! I found the lady beaming all
With smiles of hope her brother should be chosen:
Then to her hand deliver'd I your scroll.

FRANCIS.

Ha!

CLEMENT.

The which she, with a doubting look, did open ;
And, for a moment, her fix'd eye did seem
To drink the characters, but not the sense
Of your epistle : like some traveller,
Who, lacking understanding, passes o'er
Wide tracts and foreign countries, yet brings back
No fruit of his own observation : thus
Stood the fair lady, till her eye was fain
Begin the scroll again ; and then, as though
That moment comprehension woke in her,
The blood forsook her cheeks ; and straight, asham'd
Of its unnatural desertion, drew
A crimson veil over her marble brows.

FRANCIS.

I would I'd borne the scroll myself, thy words
Image her forth so fair !

CLEMENT.

Do they, indeed ?
Then sorrow seize my tongue ! for, look you, sir,
I will not speak of your own fame or honour,
Nor of your word to me : king's words, I find,
Are drafts on our credulity, not pledges
Of their own truth. You have been often pleas'd
To shower your royal favours on my head ;
And fruitful honours from your kindly will
Have rais'd me far beyond my fondest hopes ;
But had I known such service was to be
The nearest way my gratitude might take

To solve the debt, I'd e'en have given back
All that I hold of you : and, now, not e'en
Your crown and kingdom could requite to me
The cutting sense of shame that I endur'd
When on me fell the sad reproachful glance
Which told me how I stood in the esteem
Of yonder lady. Let me tell you, sir,
You've borrow'd for a moment what whole years
Cannot bestow—an honourable name !
Now fare you well ; I've sorrow at my heart,
To think your majesty hath reckon'd thus
Upon my nature. I was poor before,
Therefore I can be poor again without
Regret, so I lose not mine own esteem.

FRANCIS.

Skip me thy spleen, and onward with thy tale.
What said the lady then ?

CLEMENT.

With trembling hands
She folded up your scroll ; and more in sorrow,
As I believe, than anger, letting fall
Unheeded from her hand the sparkling jewel,
She left me.

FRANCIS.

Thou, I warrant, sore abash'd,
And durst not urge her further. Excellent !
Oh, ye are precious wooers, all of ye !
I marvel how ye ever ope your lips
Unto, or look upon that fearful thing,
A lovely woman.

CLEMENT.

And I marvel, sir,
At those who do not feel the majesty,—
By heav'n ! I'd almost said the holiness,—
That circles round a fair and virtuous woman
There is a gentle purity that breathes
In such a one, mingled with chaste respect,
And modest pride of her own excellence,—
A shrinking nature, that is so adverse
To aught unseemly, that I could as soon
Forget the sacred love I owe to heav'n,
As dare, with impure thoughts, to taint the air
Inhal'd by such a being : than whom, my liege,
Heaven cannot look on anything more holy,
Or earth be proud of anything more fair. *[Exit.]*

FRANCIS.

Good ! 'tis his god stirs in him now, I trow ;
The poet is inspir'd, and doubtless, too,
With his own muse ; whose heavenly perfections,
He fain would think belong to Eve's frail daughters.
Well : I will find occasions for myself—
With my own ardent love I'll take the field,
And woo this pretty saint until she yield. *[Exit.]*

SCENE II.—A SMALL APARTMENT IN THE LOUVRE.

Enter GONZALES, with papers in his hand.

GONZALES.

BOURBON arrested! oh sweet mistress Fortune,
Who rails at thee, doth wrong thee, on my soul!
Thy blindness steads me well; for thou hast thrown,
All time, and place, and opportunity,
To boot into my path—these documents,
That, but this moment, seem'd foul witnesses
To my suspicious fears, must now become
The charts of my new born, though late dead purpose.
(*Reading*) So! now I know my task, how far I may
Promise with truth; and how far with false promises
Garnish my snare—I'll straight unto the Queen,
And strive to win access to Bourbon's prison;
It shall fare ill, if I cannot outwit
Even this lynx-eyed woman.

Enter the QUEEN.

QUEEN.

Save you, father!
Throw by those papers now, and hearken to me:
De Bourbon is arrested; 'tis of that
I came to speak—you must straight to his prison.

GONZALES (*aside*).

I cannot, for my life, remember me

That ever I made bargain with the devil ;
Yet do all things fall out so strangely well
For me, and for my purpose, as though fate
Serv'd an apprenticeship unto my will.

QUEEN.

How now, what counsel hold you with yourself ?

GONZALES.

Debate of marvel, only, please your grace ;
Is then the Duke so near his verge of life,
That he hath need of spiritual aid,
T' improve this brief and waning tenure ?

QUEEN.

Good !

Oh excellent ! I laugh ; yet, by my fay,
This whin'd quotation from thy monkish part
Hath lent a clue to my unfixed purpose,
Which had not yet resolv'd by what pretext
Thou might'st unto his prison with best seeming.
Most reverend sir, and holy confessor !
Get thee unto the prison of this lord ;
There, see thou do exhort him unto death ;—
And, mark me—for all warriors hold acquaintance
With the grim monarch : when he rides abroad
The battle-skirts, they crown him with proud crests ;
In human blood dye they his purple robes ;
They place a flashing sword in his right hand,
And call him Glory !—therefore be thou sure
To speak of nought but scaffolds rob'd in black ;
Grim executioners, and the vile mob
Staring, and jeering ; 'neath whose clouted shoes,

Unhonour'd, shall the noble stream of life
That flows thro' his proud veins soak in the earth.

GONZALES.

Madam, I will.

QUEEN.

Then, when thou hast o'ercome
The haughty spirit, mould it to thy will,
And tutor him so well, that presently
Bid them strike off his chains; and to the palace
Lead him in secret: above all, be sure
To lard thy speech, but chiefly at the first,
With sober strains of fitting holiness,
Quote me the saints, the fathers,—bring the church
With all its lumber, into active service.
Briefly, dissemble well—But pshaw! I prate!
I had forgot again—thou art a priest:
Tarry not, and conduct thy prisoner
Unto my chamber, where I wait for thee. *[Exit.*

GONZALES.

Dissemble well! witness, deep hell, how well
I have, and will dissemble! Now, then, to seek
De Bourbon's prison; by my holidame!
Lady, you'll wait till doomsday ere he come.
He shall be free within this hour—and yet—
But ere I pour my proffer in his ear,
I'll work upon his hot and violent nature,
And make him sure, ere I attempt to win him.
But come, time tarries not—sweet Fortune! prithee
Still let me woo thee, till I have achiev'd
The task another's proud ambition sets me;

Then frown or smile, I care not ; for thou hast
No power to stem the headlong tide of will
That bears me onward to my own revenge.

SCENE III.—A PRISON.

BOURBON and MARGARET *discovered*.

BOURBON.

Lady, you speak in vain.

MARGARET.

I do beseech thee !

Oh Bourbon ! Bourbon ! 'twas but yesterday
That thou didst vow eternal love to me ;
Now, hither have I wended to your prison,
And, spite of maiden pride and fearfulness,
Held parley with thy guards to win my way.
I've moved their iron natures with my tears ;
Which seem'd as they would melt the very stones
Whereon they fell so fast. I do implore thee,
Speak to me, Bourbon !—but a word—one word !
I never bowed my knee to aught of earth,
Ere this ; but I have ever seen around me,
Others who knelt, and worshipp'd princes' favours :
From them, or rather from my love, I learn
The humble seeming of a suppliant ;—
Upon my bended knees, I do implore thee,—
Look not, or speak not, if thou so hast sworn,—
But take the freedom that my gold hath bought thee :
Away ! nor let these eyes behold thy death !

BOURBON.

You are deceiv'd, lady, they will not dare
To take my life.

MARGARET.

'Tis thou that art deceived !
What ! talk'st thou of not daring ;—dost thou see
Yon sun that flames above the earth ? I tell thee,
That if my mother had but bent her will
To win that sun, she would accomplish it.

BOURBON.

My life is little worth to any now,
Nor have I any, who shall after me
Inherit my proud name.

MARGARET.

Hold, there, my lord !—
Posterity, to whom great men and their
Fair names belong, is your inheritor.
Your country, from whose kings your house had birth,
Claims of you, sir, your high and spotless name !—
Fame craves it of you ; for when there be none
Bearing the blood of mighty men, to bear
Their virtues also,—Fame emblazons them
Upon her flag, which o'er the world she waves,
Persuading others to like glorious deeds.
Oh ! will you die upon a public scaffold ?
Beneath the hands o' th' executioner !
Shall the vile rabble bait you to your death !
Shall they applaud and make your fate a tale
For taverns, and the busy city streets ?
And in the wide hereafter,—for the which
All warriors hope to live,—shall your proud name

Be bandied to and fro by foul tradition,—
Branded and curst, as rebel's name should be ?

BOURBON.

No ! light that curse on those who made me such,—
Who stole my well-earn'd honours from my brow,
And gave such guerdon to whole years of service !
Light the foul curse of black ingratitude,—
Of shame and bitter sorrow,—and the sharp
Reproving voice of after times and men,—
Upon the heartless boy, who knew not how
To prize his subject's love ! A tenfold curse
Light on that royal harlot—

MARGARET.

Oh ! no more—

BOURBON.

Nay, maiden, 'tis in vain ! for thou shalt hear me !
Drink to the dregs the knowledge thou hast forced,
And dare upbraid me, even with a look :
Had I but loved thy mother more—thee less,
I might this hour have stood upon a throne !
Ay, start ! I tell thee, that the Queen thy mother
Hath loved—doth love me with the fierce desires
Of her unbridled nature ; she hath thrown
Her crown, her kingdom, and herself before me ;
And but I loved thee more than all the world,
I might have wed Louisa of Savoy !
Now stare, and shudder,—freeze thyself to marble ;—
Now say where best the meed of shame is due,—
Now look upon these prison walls,—these chains,—
And bid me rein my anger !

MARGARET.

Oh, be silent !

For you have rent in twain the sacred'st veil

That ever hung upon the eyes of innocence.

(GONZALES *without.*)

GONZALES.

God bless the inmates of this prison-house !

BOURBON.

Who calls without ?

Enter GONZALES.

MARGARET.

The pulse of life stands still

Within my veins, and horror hath o'ercome

My strength ! Oh ! holy father, to thy care

Do I commend this wayward man.

[*Exit* MARGARET.]

BOURBON.

How, now ?

A priest ! what means this most unwelcome visit ?

GONZALES.

Who questions thus a son o' the holy church

In tones so rude ?

BOURBON.

One who has known

Much of the church,—more of her worthy sons ;

Therefore, sir monk, be brief—thy business here ?

GONZALES.

Look on these walls, whose stern time-stained brows

Frown like relentless justice on their inmates.

Listen !—that voice is Echo's dull reply

Unto the rattling of your chains, my lord :—
What *should* a priest do here ?

BOURBON.

Ay, what, indeed !—
Unless you come to soften down these stones
With your discourse, and teach the tedious echo
A newer lesson : trust me, that is all
Your presence, father, will accomplish here.

GONZALES.

Oh sinful man ! and is thy heart so hard,
That I might easier move thy prison stones ?
Know, then, my mission—death is near at hand !
The warrant hath gone forth—the seal is set ;
Thou art already numbered with those
Who leave their names to lasting infamy,
And their remains to be trod under foot
Of the base rabble.

BOURBON.

Hark thee, in thine ear :—
Shall I hear when I'm dead what men say of me ?
Or will my body blench and quiver 'neath
The stamp of one foot rather than another ?
Go to—go to ! I have fought battles, father,
Where death and I have met in full close contact,
And parted, knowing we should meet again ;
Therefore, come when he may, we've look'd upon
Each other far too narrowly, for me
To fear the hour when we shall so be join'd,
That all eternity shall never sunder us.
Go prate to others about skulls and graves ;
Thou never didst in heat of combat stand,

Or know what good acquaintance soldiers have
With the pale scarecrow—Death !

GONZALES (*aside*).

Ah, think'st thou so ?
And thou didst never lie wrapp'd round so long
With death's cold arms, upon the gory field,
As I have lain. (*Aloud*)—Hear me, thou hard of heart !
They who go forth to battle are led on
With sprightly trumpets and shrill clam'rous clarions ;
The drum doth roll its double notes along,
Echoing the horses' tramp ; and the sweet fife
Runs through the yielding air in dulcet measure,
That makes the heart leap in its case of steel !
Thou, shalt be knell'd unto thy death by bells,
Pond'rous and brazen-tongued, whose sullen toll
Shall cleave thine aching brain, and on thy soul
Fall with a leaden weight : the muffled drum
Shall mutter round thy path like distant thunder :
Stead of the war-cry, and wild battle-roar,—
That swells upon the tide of victory,
And seems unto the conqueror's eager ear
Triumphant harmony of glorious discords !—
There shall be voices cry foul shame on thee !
And the infuriate populace shall clamour
To heav'n for lightnings on thy rebel head !

BOURBON.

Monks love not bells, which call them up to pray'rs
I'the dead noon o' night, when they would snore
Rather than watch : but, father, I care not,
E'en if the ugliest sound I e'er did hear—
Thy raven-voice—croak curses o'er my grave.

GONZALES.

What! death and shame! alike you heed them not!
Then, Mercy, use thy soft, persuasive arts,
And melt this stubborn spirit! Be it known
To you, my lord, the Queen hath sent me hither.

BOURBON.

Then get thee hence again, foul, pand'ring priest!
By heav'n! I knew that cowl did cover o'er
Some filthy secret, that the day dared not
To pry into. I know your holy church,
Together with its brood of sandall'd fiends!
Ambition is your God; and all the off'ring
Ye bring him, are your vile compliances
With the bad wills of vicious men in power,
Whose monstrous passions ye do nurse and cherish,
That from the evil harvest which they yield,
A plenteous gleanings may reward your toils.
Out, thou unholy thing!

GONZALES.

Hold, madman! hear me!
If for thy fame, if for thy warm heart's blood
Thou wilt not hear me, listen in the name
Of France thy country.—

BOURBON.

Tempter, get thee gone!
I have no land, I have no home,—no country,—
I am a traitor, cast from out the arms
Of my ungrateful country! I disown it!
Wither'd be all its glories, and its pride!
May it become the slave of foreign power!
May foreign princes grind its thankless children!

And make all those, who are such fools, as yet
To spill their blood for it, or for its cause,
Dig it like dogs ! and when they die, like dogs,
Rot on its surface, and make fat the soil,
Whose produce shall be seiz'd by foreign hands !

GONZALES (*aside*).

Now, then, to burst the last frail thread that checks
His headlong course,—another step, and then
He topples o'er the brink !—he's won—he's ours.—
(*Aloud*)—You beat the air with idle words ; no man
Doth know how deep his country's love lies grain'd
In his heart's core, until the hour of trial !
Fierce though you hurl your curse upon the land,
Whose monarchs cast ye from its bosom ; yet,
Let but one blast of war come echoing
From where the Ebro and the Douro roll ;
Let but the Pyrenees reflect the gleam
Of twenty of Spain's lances, and your sword
Shall leap from out its scabbard to your hand !

BOURBON.

Ay, priest it shall ! eternal heaven, it shall !
And its far flash shall lighten o'er the land,
The leading star of Spain's victorious host !
But flaming, like some dire portentous comet,
I' th' eyes of France, and her proud governors !
Oh, vengeance ! 'tis for thee I value life :
Be merciful, my fate, nor cut me off,
Ere I have wreak'd my fell desire, and made
Infamy glorious, and dishonour fame !
But, if my wayward destiny hath will'd
That I should here be butcher'd shamefully,

By the immortal soul, that is man's portion,
His hope, and his inheritance, I swear,
That on the day Spain overflows its bounds,
And rolls the tide of war upon these plains,
My spirit on the battle's edge shall ride;
And louder than death's music, and the roar
Of combat, shall my voice be heard to shout,
On—on—to victory and carnage.

GONZALES.

Now,
That day is come, ay, and that very hour;
Now shout your war-cry; now unsheath your sword!
I'll join the din, and make these tottering walls
Tremble and nod to hear our fierce defiance!
Nay, never start, and look upon my cowl—
You love not priests, De Bourbon, more than I.
Off! vile denial of my manhood's pride!
Off, off to hell! where thou wast first invented,—
Now once again I stand and breathe a knight.
Nay, stay not gazing thus: it is Garcia,
Whose name hath reach'd thee long ere now, I trow;
Whom thou hast met in deadly fight full oft,
When France and Spain join'd in the battle-field!
Beyond the Pyrenean boundary
That guards thy land, are forty thousand men:
Their unfurl'd pennons flout fair France's sun,
And wanton in the breezes of her sky:
Impatient halt they there; their foaming steeds,
Pawing the huge and rock-built barrier,
That bars their further course: they wait for thee;
For thee whom France hath injur'd and cast off;

For thee, whose blood it pays with shameful chains,
More shameful death ; for thee, whom Charles of Spain
Summons to head his host, and lead them on

(Gives him a parchment.)

To conquest and to glory !

BOURBON.

To revenge !

What tells he here of lands, and honours ! Pshaw !

I've had my fill of such. Revenge ! Revenge !

That is the boon my unslaked anger craves,

That is the bribe that wins me to thy cause,

And that shall be my battle cry ! Ha ! ha !

Why, how we dream ! why look, Garcia ; canst thou

With mumbled priestcraft file away these chains,

Or must I bear them into Spain with me,

That Charles may learn what guerdon valour wins

This side the Pyrenees ?

GONZALES.

It shall not need—

What ho ! but hold—together with this garb,

Methinks I have thrown off my prudence !

(Resumes the Monk's dress.)

BOURBON.

What !

Wilt thou to Spain with me in frock and cowl,

That men shall say De Bourbon is turn'd driveller,

And rides to war in company with monks ?

GONZALES.

Listen.—The Queen for her own purposes

Confided to my hand her signet-ring,

Bidding me strike your fetters off, and lead you

By secret passes to her private chamber :
But being free, so use thy freedom, that
Before the morning's dawn all search be fruitless.—
What, ho ! within.

Enter Gaoler.

Behold this signet-ring !—
Strike off those chains, and get thee gone.

[Exit Gaoler.]

And now
Follow.—How now,—dost doubt me, Bourbon ?

BOURBON.

Ay,
First for thy habit's sake ; and next, because
Thou rather, in a craven priest's disguise,
Tariest in danger in a foreign court,
Than seek'st that danger in thy country's wars.

GONZALES.

Thou art unarm'd : there is my dagger ; 'tis
The only weapon that I bear, lest fate
Should play me false : take it, and use it, too,
If in the dark and lonely path I lead thee,
Thou mark'st me halt, or turn, or make a sign
Of treachery !—and now, tell me, dost know
John Count Laval ?

BOURBON.

What ! Lautrec's loving friend—
Who journeys now to Italy with him ?

GONZALES.

How ! gone to Italy ! he surely went
But a short space from Paris, to conduct
Count Lautrec on his way.

BOURBON.

I tell thee, no !
He's bound for Italy, along with him.

GONZALES.

Then the foul fiend hath mingled in my plot,
And marr'd it too ! my life's sole aim and purpose !
Didst thou but know what damned injuries,
What foul, unknighly shame and obloquy,
His sire—whose name is wormwood to my mouth—
Did heap upon our house—didst thou but know—
No matter—get thee gone—I tarry here.
And if three lingering years, ay, three times three,
Must pass ere I obtain what three short days
Had well nigh given me, e'en be it so—
Life is revenge ! revenge is life ! Follow ;
And, though we never meet again, when thou
Shalt hear of the most fearful deed of daring,
Of the most horrible and bloody tale,
That ever graced a beldame's midnight legend,
Or froze her gaping list'ners, think of me
And my revenge ! Now, Bourbon, heaven speed thee !

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE IV.—THE ROYAL APARTMENT.

FRANCIS *seated*: two Gentlemen attending.

Enter the QUEEN.

QUEEN.

Hear you these tidings, son ?—Milan is lost !
A messenger, who rode the live-long night,

Hath brought the news, and faints for weariness.
Prosper Colonna hath dissolv'd our host
Like icicles i'the sun's beams : and Count Lautrec,
Madden'd with his defeat and shame, fled from it
The night Colonna entered Milan.

FRANCIS (*starting up*).

Coward !

But he shall answer dearly for his flight
And for fair Milan's loss. Say they not whither
He fled to ?

QUEEN.

Oh, he doubtless is conceal'd
In some dark corner of the Milanese,
Where heaven can scarcely look upon his shame.

[*Shouts without.*

FRANCIS.

What din without ?

QUEEN.

It is the people, who
Throng round the palace gates, with gaping mouths,
To hear the confirmation of the tidings.

FRANCIS.

There's some commotion, for their ceaseless shouts
Shake our imperial dwelling to its base. [*Shouts without.*

Enter a Messenger.

How now ! what more ?

MESSENGER.

So please you, my dread liege,
News are this hour arriv'd that the Count Lautrec,
Passing disguis'd from Italy towards Paris,
Hath been arrested by stout Lord St. Pol :

Who, in his castle, holds him a strait pris'ner
Until your royal pleasure be made known,
Whether he there sojourn in longer durance,
Or be sent hither to abide his trial.

FRANCIS.

Confess'd he the betraying of our Milan?

MESSENGER.

He holds an unmov'd silence on the point,
Still craving of your majesty a hearing,
And, after that, stern and impartial justice.

FRANCIS.

And, by the soul of Charlemagne, we swear
He shall have justice, such as he demands.

[Exit Messenger.]

His deeds, upon the swift wings of the wind,
Have reach'd the high tribunal of our throne,
And, ere himself arrive, have there condemn'd him.
But, for the well-remember'd services
Done by his sire to France and to our house,
As a dear mercy's boon, we leave him life.
Mother, how is't with thee? thou art drown'd in thought.

QUEEN.

Can it be otherwise, when wave o'er wave
Of fortune's adverse tide comes whelming us
With most resistless ruin? Hast thou heard,
Or did this loss of Milan stop thine ears
With its ill-fated din,—Bourbon's escap'd?

FRANCIS.

Bourbon escap'd! then fortune loves Colonna!
For, if he once set foot in Italy,
Our injur'd subject and our haughty foe

Shall prove an overmatch for France himself !
How fell this evil chance ?

QUEEN.

Another time

Shall fit us better for long argument :

We tell of his escape, while he improves it.

Deeds, and not words, suit best this exigency ;

Our task is vigilant and swift pursuit. [Exit.

FRANCIS.

My task is vigilant though slow pursuit ;

I have small care for even this event,

Which seems as though it shook my very throne :

One thought alone hath room within my breast—

How I may win this maid, whose fearful charms

Have deem'd themselves secure in absence only :

Forgetting how fond mem'ry, young love's shadow,

Laughs at such hope. I'll win her, though the stars

Link hands, and make a fiery rampart round her :

Though she be ice, steel, rock, or adamant,

Or anything that is more hard and stubborn.

Love, lend me aid, this vict'ry must be thine ;

Win thou this peerless vot'ry to thy shrine ! [Exit.

SCENE V. — AN APARTMENT IN THE CHATEAU-
DE-FOIX.

FRANÇOISE *discovered seated.*

Enter FLORISE.

FLORISE.

How fare you, madam ?

FRANÇOISE.

Well, Florise. Why, girl,—
Why dost thou gaze on me ? Do hollow cheeks
And tear-stain'd eyes belie me ?

FLORISE.

Lady, no ;
But something in your voice and in your look,—
Something that is all sorrow's, only hers,—
Is grafted on the roses of your cheek,
And burns in the sad lustre of your eye.
Pardon me, sweet my mistress ! but, indeed,
Since your return from court,—

[*A horn is heard without.*

FRANÇOISE.

Hark ! from without
A horn is winded : hasten, prating girl,
And fetch me tidings of this sudden summons !

[*Exit FLORISE.*

I tremble ! yet I scarce know wherefore—how
If it should be my brother ?—heaven forefend !
He brings with him Laval, my promis'd husband !
Oh ! grief hath wedded me for ever more ;
Our bridal vow was all made up of sighs,
And tears have seal'd it !

Re-enter FLORISE.

FLORISE.

Please you, madam, one,
A messenger from court, hath just arriv'd
With this despatch.

[*Exit FLORISE.*

FRANÇOISE.

From court?—oh give it me!
Hold! should it be the King! pshaw, trembling fool!
I long, yet fear to look upon it—thus (*breaks the seal*)
Evil or good come of it, I will read—
(*Reads*)—‘ This, from my most doleful prison-house,—
‘ If half the love thou oft hast sworn to me,
‘ But half be true, read, and deliver me!
‘ This I indite in such a darksome cell
‘ As fancy shrinks from,—where the blessed light
‘ And genial air do never visit me,—
‘ Where chains bow down my limbs to the damp earth,
‘ And darkness compasseth me like a veil;—
‘ I do beseech thee, by the tender love
‘ That I have borne thee from thine infancy,—
‘ I do beseech thee, by all strongest ties
‘ Of kin, and of compassion,—let me not
‘ Lie like a curs’d and a forgotten thing,
‘ Thrust down beneath the earth;—let not the blood
‘ That bounds in youth’s swift current through my veins
‘ Be chill’d by dungeon dews before its time;
‘ Or thicken’d by the weight of galling fetters!’
Oh misery! my brother,—my dear brother!
(*Reads*)—‘ If this doth move the spirit of thy love,
‘ Hie thee to court, and there, at the King’s feet,
‘ Kneel and implore my pardon;—do not fear
‘ To let thy tears plead for me,—to thy prayers
‘ Do I commit my fate; and on thy lips,
‘ Whose moving eloquence must touch his soul,
‘ Hang all my hopes!—Sweet sister, think upon me!’
What, back to court!—what, sue at the King’s feet!

Oh, God ! but just escap'd from the wild wave,
Must I plunge headlong back again ! My brain
Is dizzy with the flocking ills that gather
All numberless and indistinct around me.
Alas ! poor scroll ; how his hand shook in tracing
Thy sad appeal ! Oh my unhappy brother !
Why didst thou not at price of my own blood
Rate thy deliverance ! but with heart still throbbing
With most unnerving and resistless love,
Shall I encounter the King's eyes, and feel
That winning is but loss ; and life, and liberty,
Given to thee, the warrants of my ruin ?
(*Reads*)—‘ I do beseech thee, by the tender love
‘ That I have borne thee from thine infancy ! ’——
I can no more ! thou shalt be rescued ! yet—

Enter FLORISE.

FLORISE.

Madam, the messenger awaits your answer.

FRANÇOISE.

Oh maiden, read ! my brother is in prison ;
His fond arms that so oft have clasp'd around me,
Strait bound with gyves :—oh heaven ! my dear, dear
brother.

FLORISE.

Why, madam, how now ? are ye lost in grief ?
Are tears his ransom ?—Up ; for shame ! for shame !
You must to court, and straight procure his pardon.
Nay, never wring your hands ; they say the King
Is gentle-hearted, and did ne'er refuse
Bright eyes, whose pray'rs were tearful rosaries,
Told with devotion at his royal feet.

FRANÇOISE.

Kind heaven be with me ! I will do this deed.
Oh, Lautrec ! there is sorrow at my heart,
Heavy and boding !—Florise, is't not strange—
I fear—alas ! alas ! I am undone !

FLORISE.

Why this is madness ! and your brother lies,
Meantime, in darkness, and deep silence—winging
In fancy hither,—hoping, with the hope
That is but intense agony—so deep,
That hope which anchors on so frail a stay !
Now, at this hour, he calls imploringly ;
His fetter'd arms are stretch'd abroad to you.—

FRANÇOISE.

No more ! no more ! I will this hour away ;—
Nay, come not with me ; ere the night be fallen,
I shall return, successful and most blest ;
Or thou wilt hear, that at th' obdurate feet
Of him, whom I am sent to supplicate,
I pour'd my life in prayers for my dear brother.

[Exeunt severally.]

SCENE VI.—A ROOM IN THE PALACE.

Enter FRANCIS and BONNIVET.

FRANCIS.

No tidings of De Bourbon ; search is vain.
The storm is gath'ring, and 'tis time we spread
Due shelter over us. De Bonnivet !
How say'st thou ? here be more despatches—see

Young John de Laval hath supplied the place
Of this same Lautrec, and Colonna's host
Reeling with victory, which thought to trample
The last poor remnant of our broken troops,
Has been repuls'd by him, and overthrown.
Yet fear I much, this vantage will be lost
For lack of power to keep or to improve it.

BONNIVET.

The messenger brought word, that Count Laval
Had, in that very fray, been so sore wounded,
That long he lay upon the field of death,
As he'd ta'en there his everlasting rest.

Enter a Gentleman.

FRANCIS.

In this despatch—How now?

GENTLEMAN.

So please your grace,
One stands without, and earnestly entreats
To see your majesty.

FRANCIS.

Hath he no name?

GENTLEMAN.

My liege, it is a woman; but her veil
So curtains all her form, that even eyes
Which knew, and oft had gaz'd on her, might guess
In vain.

FRANCIS.

A woman, and a suppliant!
Let her have entrance.

BONNIVET.

At some other time

Your majesty, perhaps, will deign t' inform me
Further concerning Italy.

FRANCIS.

Ay, ay,
At some more fitting time. [Exit BONNIVET.]

Enter FRANÇOISE.

FRANÇOISE (*aside*).

Oh, heav'n! be merciful!
My eyes are dim, and icy fear doth send
My blood all shuddering back upon my heart.

FRANCIS.

Close veil'd, indeed: mysterious visitant!
Whom curious thought doth strive to look upon,
Despite the cloud that now enshrines you; pardon,
If failing in its hope, the eager eye
Doth light on ev'ry point, that, unconceal'd,
'Tells of the secret it so fain would pierce:
That heav'nly gait, whose slow majestic motion
Discloses all the bearing of command;
That noiseless foot, that falling on the earth,
Wakes not an echo; leaves not e'en a print—
So jealous seeming of its favours; and
This small white hand, I might deem born of marble,
But for the throbbing life that trembles in it:—
Why, how is this? 'tis cold as marble's self;
And by your drooping form!—this is too much—
Youth breathes around you; beauty is youth's kin:
I must withdraw this envious veil—

FRANÇOISE.

Hold, sir!
Your highness need but speak to be obey'd;
Thus then—(*unveils*)—

FRANCIS.

Amazement ! oh, thou peerless light !
Why thus deny thy radiance, and enfold,
Like the coy moon, thy charms in envious clouds ?

FRANÇOISE.

Such clouds best suit, whose sun is set for ever ;
And veils should curtain o'er those eyes, whose light
Is all put out with tears : oh, good my liege !
I come a suitor to your pard'ning mercy.

FRANCIS (*aside*).

Sue on, so thou do after hear my suit.

FRANÇOISE.

My brother ! Out, alas !—your brow grows dark,
And threat'ningly doth fright my scarce-breath'd pray'r
Back to its hold of silence.

FRANCIS.

Lady, aye,
Your brother hath offended 'gainst the state,
And must abide the state's most lawful vengeance ;
Nor canst thou in thy sorrow even say
Such sentence is unjust.

FRANÇOISE.

I do, I do ;
Oh, vengeance ! what hast thou to do with justice ?
Most merciful, and most vindictive, who
Hath call'd ye sisters ; who hath made ye kin ?
My liege, my liege, if you do take such vengeance
Upon my brother's fault, yourself do sin,
By calling your's that which is heaven's alone :
But if 'tis justice that hath sentenc'd him,

Hear me ; for he, unheard, hath been condemn'd,
Against all justice, without any mercy.

FRANCIS.

Maiden, thou plead'st in vain.

FRANÇOISE.

Oh, say not so :

Oh, merciful, my lord ! you are a soldier ;
You have won war's red favours in the field,
And victory hath been your handmaiden :
Oh ! think, if you were thrust away for ever
From fame and glory, warrior's light and air ;
And left to feel time's creeping fingers chill
Your blood ; and from fame's blazonry efface
Your youthful deeds, which, like a faithless promise,
Bloom'd fair, but bore no after-fruit—

FRANCIS.

Away !

Thou speak'st of that no woman ever knew.
Thy prayer is cold : hast thou no nearer theme,
Which, having felt thyself, thou may'st address
More movingly unto my heart ?

FRANÇOISE.

None, none,
But what that heart itself might whisper you.
Where is the Princess Margaret ? my liege !
As she loves you, so have I lov'd my brother :
Oh, think how she would be o'ercome with woe,
Were you in hopeless dungeon pent ? Oh, think !
If iron-handed power had so decreed
That you should never clasp her, or behold
Her face again !—

FRANCIS.

Farewell, fair maid, thy suit
Is bootless all—perchance—but no, 'tis vain :
Yet had'st thou pleaded more, and not so coldly—

FRANÇOISE.

Oh, good my liege ! turn not away from me !
See, on the earth I kneel ; by these swift tears
That witness my affliction ; by each throb
Of my sad heart ; by all you love !—

FRANCIS.

Ah, tempter !
Say rather by these orient pearls, whose price
Would bribe the very soul of justice ; say,
By these luxuriant tresses, which have thrown
Eternal chains around my heart—

(FRANÇOISE *starts up*.)

Nay, start not ;
If thou, so soon, art weary of beseeching,
Hearken to me, and I will frame a suit
Which thou must hear. (*Kneels*) By the resistless love
Thou hast inspir'd me with !—by thy perfections,—
Thy matchless beauty !—Nay, it is in vain,
Thou shalt not free thyself, till thou hast heard ;
Thou shalt not free thy brother, till—

FRANÇOISE.

Unhand me !
Sir, as you are a man—

Enter the QUEEN.

QUEEN.

Oh, excellent !

FRANCIS (*starts up*).

Confusion seize yon woman's watchfulness !

QUEEN.

I fear me I have marr'd a wise discourse ;
Which, if I read aright, yon lady's looks
Was argued most persuasively ; fair madam,
My son hath had the happiness already
To welcome you to court ; 'twould seem remiss
In me to be so backward, were it not
That ignorance of your return hath robb'd
Me of joy's better half—anticipation ;
Which, as it seems, you have been pleas'd to grant
His Majesty : what, not one little word !
Nay, then, your conference is doubtless ended ;
If so—I have some business with the King—

(*She waives FRANÇOISE off.*)

FRANCIS.

Then, madam, you must let that bus'ness rest ;
For, look you, I have matters, which, though long
I've ponder'd o'er them, I've reserv'd till now,
Unto your private ear.—How many years
Longer am I to live in tutelage ?
When will it please your wisdom to resign
The office, which, self-arrogated, seems
Daily to grow beyond that wisdom's compass,
Though strain'd unto its utmost ? Hark you, madam !
'Tis time you lay aside the glittering bauble,
Which, hourly, in your hands grows more respectless ;—
I speak of power,—I'm weary of these visions ;
In which, you've nurs'd and pamper'd your ambition
Until it dreams its dream is true :—how long
Am I to wear the yoke, which ev'ry day
Grows heavier, but less firm ?—if longer yet,

Take this good counsel—lighten it, or else
'Twill break and crush you : nay, ne'er gaze on me
With that fix'd haughty stare ; I do not sleep—
'Tis you that dream—full time you were awaken'd.

QUEEN.

What, thankless boy ! whose greatness is the work
Of my own hands ;—this, to your mother, sir ?

FRANCIS.

I am your King, madam,—your King,—your King ! ——
Ay, start and boil with passion, and turn pale
With rage, whose powerless effort wakes but scorn :
Who made you Queen of France ? my father's wife
Was Duchess of Savoy and Angoulême :
These, are your only titles,—and the rest,
A boon, which courtesy hath lent, not given,
Unto the mother of the King of France ;—
And, for the boast you make, of having made me
All that I am, 'tis false ; my open right,
Strong in its truth, and in the world's approval,
Both call'd me to the throne, and held me there.
'Tis you who shine from a reflected light ;—
'Tis you, whose greatest honour is my crown ;—
'Tis you, who owe me, and my royal state,
All that you have of state and of observance.
Think on it well ; henceforth you'll find it so ;
And, as you value the faint shade of power
Which clings to you, beware how it is used.
Curb your unbounded pride and haughty spirit ;
Which, brooking no control itself, would make
Slaves of all else that breathe ; and, mark me well,
Slacken your leading strings or ere they break. [Exit.

QUEEN.

The hour is come at last,—so long foreseen,—
So long averted by my anxious efforts,
My o'ergrown power is toppling from its base,—
And, like a ruin'd tower, whose huge supporters
At length decay, it nods unto its ruin.
I am undone ! But, if I needs must fall,
No rising foot shall tread upon my neck,
And say I pav'd the way for its ascension.
Proud spirit ! thou who in the darkest hours
Of danger and defeat hast steaded me,—
Thou dauntless, uncontroll'd, and daring soul !
Who hast but seen in all the world a throne,—
In all mankind, thine instruments ; rejoice !
I'll do a deed, which, prospering, shall place me
At once upon the summit of my hopes,—
Beyond all power of future storm or wreck ;
Or, if I fail, my fall shall be like his,
That wond'rous mighty man, who overthrew
The whole Philistian host,—when revelry
Was turn'd to mourning,—and the pond'rous ruin,
That he drew down on his own head, o'erwhelm'd
The power of Gath, when Gaza shook for fear.

Enter GONZALES.

Come hither, sirrah, now the day is done,—
And night, with swarthy hands, is sowing stars
In yonder sky : De Bourbon is escap'd :
Thy days are forfeit ; but thy life is now
More needful to my present purposes,
Than was thy purpos'd death, t' appease my rage.
Thou'rt free !—I've need of thee ; live and obey.

GONZALES (*aside*).

Revenge! I clutch thee still, since still I live.

(*Aloud*) Madam, obedience ever was my life's
Sole study and attainment.

QUEEN.

Hark thee, father!

I have a deed for thee, which may, perhaps,
For a short moment, freeze thy startled blood;
And fright thy firmly-seated heart, to beat
Hurried and trembling summons in thy breast;—
Didst ever look upon the dead?

GONZALES.

Ay, madam,—
Full oft; and in each calm or frightful guise
Death comes in,—on the bloody battle-field;
When with each gush of black and curdling life
A curse was uttered,—when the pray'rs I've pour'd,
Have been all drown'd with din of clashing arms;
And shrieks, and shouts, and loud artillery,
That shook the slipp'ry earth, all drunk with gore;
I've seen it, swoll'n with subtle poison, black
And staring with concentrate agony;
When ev'ry vein hath started from its bed,
And wreath'd like knotted snakes, around the brows
That, frantic, dash'd themselves in tortures down
Upon the earth. I've seen life float away
On the faint sound of a far tolling bell;
Leaving its late warm tenement as fair,
As though 'twere th' incorruptible that lay
Before me; and all earthly taint had vanish'd
With the departed spirit.

QUEEN.

Father, hold !

Return to th' other—to that second death,

Most fearful in its ghastly agony.

Come nearer to me ; didst thou ever—nay,

Put back thy cowl—I fain would see thy face :

So—diddst thou ever—thou look'st very pale—

Art fear'd ?

GONZALES.

Who, I ? Your highness surely jests !

QUEEN.

Did ever thine own hand—thou understand'st me.

GONZALES.

I 'gin to understand you, madam ; aye,

It has been red with blood, with reeking life.

QUEEN.

Father ! so steep that hand for me once more,

And, by my soul I swear, I will reward thee

With the cardinal's hat when next Rome's princes meet.

GONZALES.

The cardinal's hat ! go on, I pray you, madam,

I know but half my task.

QUEEN.

True, father, true,

I had forgot : and now methinks I feel

Lighten'd of a huge burden, now thou know'st

My settled purpose.—Listen ! there is one,

Whose envious beauty doth pluck down my pow'r,

Day after day, with more audacious hand—

That woman !

GONZALES.

Ha! a woman!

QUEEN.

Well, how now!

Blood is but blood, and life no more than life,

Be 't cradled in however fair a form!

Dost shrink, thou vaunting caitiff, from the test

Thine own avowal drew upon thee? Mark me!

If, ere two suns have risen and have set,

Françoise de Foix—

GONZALES.

How?

QUEEN.

The young Lautrec's sister,

Count Laval's bride.

GONZALES.

What! John de Laval's bride!

Hell! what a flash of light bursts in on me!

Revenge! revenge! thou art mine own at last!

QUEEN.

Why dost thou start, and look so wide and wild,

And clench thy hands?

GONZALES.

So please your grace—O pardon me!—

'Twas pity—sorrow—I—Oh! how has she

Provoked your dreadful wrath, that such a doom

Should cut her young days off thus suddenly?

QUEEN.

Content thee, that it falls not on thy head,

And do my bidding, as thou valuest

That head of thine. I tell thee she must die;

By subtle poison, or by sudden knife,
I care not—so those eyes be closed for ever.
Look, priest ! thou 'rt free ; but if, in two more days,
The grave hide not that woman from my hate,
She shall not die the less : and, by high heav'n !
Be thou i' th' farthest corner of the earth,
Thou shalt be dragg'd from thence ; and drop by drop,
Shall thy base blood assuage my full revenge !
Think on it, and resolve—and so farewell !

[*Exit.*

GONZALES.

Rejoice, my soul ! thy far-off goal is won !
His bride,—all that he most doth love and live for,—
His heart's best hope,—she shall be foul corruption
When next his eager arms are spread to clasp her !
I'll do this deed, ere I go mad for joy :
And when her husband shall mourn over her
In blight and bitterness, I'll drink his tears ;
And when his voice shall call upon his bride,
I'll answer him with taunts and scorning gibes,
And torture him to madness : and, at length,
When he shall deem some persecuting fiend
Hath 'scaped from hell to curse and ruin him,
I'll rend the veil, that for so long hath shrouded me,
And, bursting on him from my long disguise,
Reveal the hand that hath o'ershadow'd him
With such a deadly and eternal hate !

[*Exit.*

SCENE VII.—A GALLERY IN THE PALACE.

Enter TRIBOULET, followed by FRANÇOISE DE FOIX.

FRANÇOISE.

Hold, hold ! I do beseech thee, ere my brain
Whirl with this agony ;—show me the letter.

TRIBOULET.

Nay, but you did refuse it some time gone ;
I'll to the King, and give it back again.

FRANÇOISE.

Perchance 'tis of my brother !—oh ! for mercy,
Give it me now ; I do repent me—give it !

TRIBOULET.

Give it ?—no, take it ; give it back again !
Which way doth the wind blow ?

FRANÇOISE.

I shall go mad
With this most dread suspense ! Oh ! if that letter
Tell of my brother's fate, as chance it doth !
Give it me once again or ere I die !

TRIBOULET.

Listen : I'll read it thee.

FRANÇOISE.

Oh ! no, no, no !
(*Aside*)—For if the King doth plead his love in it—
No, tear, but do not open it, good fool !

TRIBOULET.

I cannot read unless I open it. Listen : (*reads*)
' If thou do not follow his footsteps, who shall bring thee
' this, not only shall thy brother's liberty, but e'en his life'—

FRANÇOISE.

Oh gracious heav'n! it is impossible!
His life! his precious days! Give me that scroll.

(She reads, and faints.)

TRIBOULET.

Let me spell o'er this letter; for the lady, she'll be the better for a little rest. *(Reads.)*—'If thou do not follow
'his footsteps, who shall bring thee this.'—Marry, that means my footsteps; and whither tend my footsteps?—Even to the King's chamber. What, shall her brother die, unless she meet the King alone at this dead hour of night? I would I had lost the letter! my back and the whip had been acquainted of a surety; but that were better than—poor maiden! By my wisdom, then, I will not lead her to the King! I'll run away, and then, if I be questioned, I can swear she fell into a swoon by the way, and could not come!

(Going, FRANÇOISE revives.)

FRANÇOISE.

Oh, no—not death! mercy! oh, mercy! spare him!
Where am I! have I slept!—oh, heav'n be praised,
Here's one will be my guide! Good Triboulet,
If thou have aught of reason, lend it me.

TRIBOULET.

Alack! poor thing, how wide she talks!—she's come
To borrow wisdom of a fool! Poor lady!

FRANÇOISE.

Nay, gaze not on me, for dear charity!
But lead, and I will follow to the King,—
Fall on my knees—once more implore his mercy!—
I do beseech thee—Life is on our haste!

TRIBOULET.

How say you, pretty lady—life, and no more?

FRANÇOISE.

Oh! I shall go distraught with this delay.

See, to thine eyes I will address my speech,—

For what thou look'st on that thou understand'st.

TRIBOULET.

Ay, marry, and more, as I think, than either of us look on, do I understand.

FRANÇOISE.

These jewels are of a surpassing value,—

Take them, and lead me to the king.

TRIBOULET.

What, at this hour?

FRANÇOISE.

If not, my brother dies.

TRIBOULET.

Alone?

FRANÇOISE.

The night grows pale, and the stars seem

To melt away, before the burning breath

Of fiery morn. If thou art born of woman,—

If thou hast but one drop of natural blood

That folly hath not frozen,—I beseech thee

Lead to the king, whiles I have strength to follow!

TRIBOULET.

Then heaven be with thee, lady! for I can no more.
Follow! and may I in this hour have been a greater fool
than ere I was before. [*Exeunt.*

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I. — AN APARTMENT IN THE CHATEAU-DE-FOIX.

FRANÇOISE *is discovered sitting, pale and motionless, by a table*—FLORISE *is kneeling by her.*

FRANÇOISE.

How heavily the sun hangs in the clouds,—
The day will ne'er be done.

FLORISE.

Oh, lady, thou hast sat
And watch'd the western clouds, day after day,
Grow crimson with the sun's farewell, and said,
Each day, the night will never come : yet night
Hath come at last, and so it will again.

FRANÇOISE.

Will it, indeed ! will the night come at last,
And hide that burning sun, and shade my eyes,
Which ache with this red light—will darkness come
At last ?

FLORISE.

Sweet madam, yes ; and sleep will come :
Nay, shake not mournfully your head at me,—
Your eyes are heavy ; sleep is brooding in them.

FRANÇOISE.

Hot tears have lain in them, and made them heavy ;
But sleep—oh, no ! no, no ! they will not close :

I have a gnawing pain, here, at my heart :
Guilt, thou liest heavy, and art hard to bear.

FLORISE.

What say you, madam, guilt !

FRANÇOISE.

Who dare say so !

(*Starting up*) 'Twas pity,—mercy,—'twas not guilt ! and
though

The world's fierce scorn shall call it infamy,

I say 'twas not ! Speak,—speak,—dost thou ? Oh !
answer me !

Say, was it infamy ?

FLORISE.

Dear lady, you are ill !

Some strange distemper fevers thus your brain.

Come, madam, suffer me at least to bind

These tresses that have fallen o'er your brow,

Making your temples throb with added weight :

Let me bind up these golden locks that hang

Dishevell'd thus upon your neck.

FRANÇOISE.

Out, viper !

Nor twine, nor braid, again shall ever bind

These locks ! Oh ! rather tear them off, and cast them

Upon the common earth, and trample them,—

Heap dust and ashes on them,—tear them thus,

And thus, and thus ! Oh, Florise, I am mad !

Distracted !—out alas ! alas ! poor head !

Thou achest for thy pillow in the grave,—

Thy darksome couch,—thy dreamless, quiet bed !

FLORISE.

These frantic passions do destroy themselves
With their excess, and well it is they do so :
But, madam, now the tempest is o'erlaid,
And you are calmer, better, as I trust,
Let me entreat you send for that same monk
I told you of this morn : he is a leech,
Learned in theory, and of wondrous skill
To heal all maladies of soul or body.

FRANÇOISE.

Of soul—of soul—ay, so they'd have us think :
Dost thou believe that the hard coin we pour
Into their outstretch'd hands, indeed, buys pardon
For all, or any sin, we may commit ?
Dost thou believe forgiveness may be had
Thus easy cheap, for crimes as black in hue
As—as—

FLORISE.

As what ? I know no sin whatever
The church's minister may not remit :
As—what were you about to say ?

FRANÇOISE.

Come hither ;
Think'st thou a heap of gold as high as Etna
Could cover from the piercing eye of heaven
So foul a crime as—as—adultery ?
Why dost thou stare thus strangely at my words,
And answerest not ?

FLORISE.

I do believe, indeed,
Not all the treasury of the wide world,

Not all the wealth hid in the womb of ocean,
Can ransom sin—nothing but deep repentance—
Austere and lengthened penance—frequent tears.

FRANÇOISE.

'Tis false ! I know it—these do nought avail :
To move relentless heav'n it must be brib'd.
And yet—go, call thy priest ; I'll speak with him.
I will cast off the burthen of my shame,
Or ere it press me down into the grave ! [Exit.

FLORISE.

Alas, poor flow'r, the canker's in thy core !

Enter GONZALES.

Good morrow to my reverend confessor !

GONZALES.

Good morrow, maiden ;
Where's thy lady, Florise ?

FLORISE.

This moment, as I think, gone to her chamber.

GONZALES.

To sleep, perchance !

FLORISE.

Oh, father, would she could !

But there's a sleepless sorrow at her heart,—
She hath not clos'd her eyes for many a night.

GONZALES.

Her brother, Lautrec, for the loss of Milan,
Was lately thrust in prison.

FLORISE.

Even so :

And at that very time a messenger
Arriv'd with news of that most dire mischance,

Which quite o'ercame my mistress' drooping heart :
She often read a scroll Count Lautrec sent her,
And wept, and read it o'er and o'er again ;
And then, as though determin'd by its arguments,
She sought the king, to move him to forgiveness :
Short space elapsed ere home she came again,
Thus broken-hearted, and, as I do think,
Bow'd to the grave by some o'ermastering sorrow.

GONZALES.

'Tis a strange tale : but tell me now, Florise,
Where's her young lord, John de Laval ? methought
It was agreed on with her brother, who
Disposes of his sister's hand and fortune,
That, soon as this Italian war permitted,
Laval should hasten back again to France,
And claim the lady Françoise as his bride.
Was it not so ?

FLORISE.

Ay ; and I've sometimes thought
That the Count's absence was my lady's grief.
I fear this last campaign hath ended him,
And that he'll ne'er come back to wed his bride,
Who mourns his loss, and fades a virgin widow.
Out on my prating tongue ! I had forgot—
The lady Françoise straight would speak with you.

GONZALES.

With me—with me ! What, Florise, dost thou think
That she hath aught she would confess ?—no matter ;
Tell her I'll wait upon her instantly. [Exit FLORISE.
Strange ! passing strange ! I guess at it in vain.
Lautrec forgiv'n, and herself broken-hearted !

This simple maid knows nothing—can the king !
'Tis sure he lov'd her—oh, that it were so !
Oh, that his passion had forestall'd my vengeance !
That love in him had done the deed my hate
Most covets !—An I had not worn so long
This monkish garb, and all uncourtly seeming,
Methinks for such an end I could have done
All that disuse hath made unnatural
And strange to me : acted the fool again ;
Conn'd o'er youth's love tale ; sued, implor'd, intreated,
And won her, but that I might give her back
Defil'd unto Laval!—would it were so !
I'll to her straight, and from her wring confession
By such keen torture, as designless looks
And careless words inflict on secret guilt. [Exit.

SCENE II. — AN INNER COURT IN THE CHATEAU-
DE-FOIX.

Enter FRANCIS, wrapped in a cloak, and FLORISE.

FLORISE.

Then be it even as you will, sir stranger,
Since you bring joyful tidings to my lady,
Good heart ! who sorely stands in need of such.
At sunset meet me here, when I will bring you
Where you shall see and speak with her, fair sir

FRANCIS.

At sunset I'll not fail : farewell, fair maiden !

[Exit FLORISE.

They tell me she is sunk in sorrow,
Lest a consuming grief destroy her beauty ;
Therefore, in this disguise, leave I the court,
To follow and to claim her ; for though o'erthrown,
If shame and woe have follow'd her defeat,
I hold myself no lawful conqueror ;
But one whose love, like the fierce eastern wind,
Hath wither'd that it hung upon. But, pshaw !
'Tis idle all ; if that her hand be promis'd,
It is not bound ; and, were it so, kings' wills
Melt compacts into air. She must be mine—
Mine only—mine for ever ! and, for Laval,
Another and a wealthier bride, I trow,
Shall well repay him for the one I've stol'n. [Exit.]

Enter GONZALES.

GONZALES.

'Tis true, by heav'n ! 'tis as my hope presag'd,—
Her lips avow'd it. Oh ! then there is torture
Far worse than death in store for thee, Laval.

Enter a Page.

PAGE.

Save you. From court a letter, reverend sir.

GONZALES.

Give it, and get thee gone. [Exit Page.]

'Tis from the queen !

Further injunctions to be sudden, doubtless—so :

(Opens the letter, and reads.)

‘ That which thou hast in hand, quickly dispatch ; else
‘ opportunity will play thee false. Laval is now in
‘ France, and by to-morrow will have reached Chateau-

'de-Foix ; therefore, if it is not done, do it so soon as
'thou shalt have received this letter.—LOUISA.'

To-morrow ! how ! why that should be to-day :

To-day—to-day—ah ! say you so, indeed :

He could not come at a more welcome hour.

[*Horns without.*

Hark ! even now the horn proclaims my triumph !

The gates swing wide, the outer court-yard rings

With neighing steeds and jingling spurs, and steps

Whose haste doth tell of hot, impatient love :

He stands upon the threshold of his home

Reeling with joy. Now, now,—

Enter LAVAL and attendants.

Hail, noble sir !

LAVAL.

I joy to see thee, yet I cannot now

E'en stay to say as much. Where is my love ?

GONZALES.

The lady Françoise, sir, is in her chamber.

[*LAVAL is going.*

I pray you tarry, good my lord, I've much

To say to you.

LAVAL.

Ay, so have I to her :

Another time, another time, good father.

GONZALES.

No time so fitting as the present, sir.

LAVAL.

'Sdeath ! would'st thou have me listen, and not hear ?

Look on thee, and not see thee ? stand aside !

Till ears and eyes have had their fill of her,
I'm blind, and deaf, and well nigh mad.

GONZALES.

My lord,
What I would say will bear no tarrying.

LAVAL.

A plague on thee! come with me, then, and thus—
While I do gaze on her I'll hear thy tale.

GONZALES.

What I've to say you'd rather hear alone.

LAVAL.

I tell thee, no, thou most vexatious priest!
That which I hear shall she hear too; my heart,
And all it owes or wishes, is her own;
Knowledge, hopes, fears, desires—all, all are hers.

GONZALES.

Then be it so—follow unto her chamber!

LAVAL.

Follow! I could not follow the swift wind!
Thou dost not love, sir priest; follow thyself!

GONZALES.

E'en as you will I do: lead on, my lord! [Exeunt.]

SCENE III. — AN APARTMENT IN THE CHATEAU-
DE-FOIX.

Enter FRANCIS and FLORISE.

FRANCIS.

I tell thee, ere she see the Count Laval,
I must inform her of mine errand.

FLORISE.

Well—

I had forgot, in all this sudden joy :

But see, behind the tapestry, here, you may

Wait for, and speak with her.

FRANCIS.

I thank thee, maiden.

FLORISE.

Farewell, and good success attend you, sir.

[*Exit FLORISE. FRANCIS conceals himself behind the tapestry.*]

Enter FRANÇOISE.

FRANÇOISE.

Now, ye paternal halls, that frown on me,

Down, down, and hide me in your ruins—ha !

(*As LAVAL and GONZALES enter, FRANÇOISE shrieks.*)

LAVAL.

My bride !—my beautiful !—

GONZALES.

Stand back, young sir !

LAVAL.

Who dares extend his arms 'twixt those whom love

Hath bound ? whom holy wedlock shall, ere long.

GONZALES.

The stern decree of the most holy church,

Whose garb I bear ; and whose authority

I interpose between you ; until I

Interpret to your ears the fearful shriek

That greeted you, upon your entrance here :

Look on that lady, Count Laval,—who stands

Pale as a virgin rose, whose early bloom
Hath not been gaz'd on yet by the hot sun ;
And fair—

LAVAL.

Oh, how unutterably fair !

GONZALES.

Seems not that shrinking flower the soul of all
That is most pure, as well as beautiful ?

LAVAL.

Peace, thou vain babbler ! Is it unto me
That thou art prating ?—unto me, who have
Worshipp'd her, with a wild idolatry,
Liker to madness than to love ?

GONZALES.

Indeed !

Say, then, if such a show of chastity
Ere sat on lips that have been hot with passion ?
Or such a pale cold hue did ever rest
On cheeks, where burning kisses have call'd up
The crimson blood, in blushes all as warm ?
Look on her yet ; and say, if ever form
Show'd half so like a breathing piece of marble.
Off with thy specious seeming, thou deceiver !
And don a look that better suits thy state.
Oh, well-dissembled sin ! say, was it thus,
Shrinking, and pale, thou stood'st, when the King's arms
Did clasp thee, and his hot lip sear'd from thine
Their oath to wed thy brother's friend ?—

LAVAL.

Damnation

Alight upon thee, thou audacious monk !

The blight thou breath'st recoil on thine own head;
It hath no power to touch the spotless fame
Of one, from whom thy cursed calumnies
Fly like rebounding shafts ;—Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !
The king ! a merry tale forsooth !

GONZALES.

Then we
Will laugh at it, ha ! ha !—why, what care I ?
We will be merry ; since thou art content
To laugh and be a—

LAVAL.

Françoise—I—I pray thee
Speak to me,—smile—speak,—look on me, I say—
What, tears ! what, wring thine hands ! what, pale as
death !—
And not one word—not one !

FRANÇOISE.

(*To GONZALES*) Oh deadly fiend !
Thou hast but hasten'd that which was foredoom'd.
(*To LAVAL*) My lord, ere I make answer to this charge,
I have a boon to crave of you—my brother—

LAVAL.

How wildly thine eye rolls ; thy hand is cold
As death, my fairest love.

FRANÇOISE.

Beseech you, sir,
Unclasp your arm ;—where is my brother ?

LAVAL.

Lautrec ?—

In Italy ; ere now is well and happy.

FRANÇOISE.

Thanks, gentle heaven ! all is not bitterness,
In this most bitter hour. My Lord Laval,
To you my faith was plighted, by my brother ;
That faith I ratified by mine own vow.—

LAVAL.

The oath was register'd in highest heaven.
Thou'rt mine !—

FRANÇOISE.

To all eternity, Laval,
If blood cannot efface that damning bond ;
(Snatches his dagger and stabs herself.)
'Tis cancell'd, I've struck home—my dear, dear brother.
[Dies.]

GONZALES *(aside.)*

It works, it works !

LAVAL.

Oh horrible !—she's dead !

(FRANCIS rushes from his concealment at the word.)

FRANCIS.

Dead !

(LAVAL draws his sword, and turns upon the KING, who draws to defend himself.)

LAVAL.

Ha ! what fiend hath sent thee here ?

Down ! down to hell with thee, thou damn'd seducer !

Enter QUEEN, followed by Attendants.

QUEEN.

Secure that madman !

(Part of the Attendants surround and disarm LAVAL.)

QUEEN (*aside to GONZALES*).

Bravely done, indeed !
I shall remember.—(*aloud*)—How now, wayward boy ?
How is't I find thee here in private broils,
Whilst proud rebellion triumphs o'er the land ?
Bourbon's in France again ! and strong Marseilles
Beleaguer'd round by Spanish soldiery.
These tidings brought young Henry of Navarre,
Whom Bourbon, and Colonna, joining arms,
Have stripp'd and spoil'd of his paternal crown.

FRANCIS.

Peace, mother, prithee peace ; look here ! look here !
Here is a sight, that hath more sorrow in it,
Than loss of kingdoms, empires, or the world !
There lies the fairest lily of the land,
Untimely broken from its stem, to wither !

(*Going towards the body.*)

LAVAL (*breaks from Attendants*).

Stand back, King Francis ! lay not e'en a finger
On this poor wreck, that death hath sanctified !
This soulless frame of what was once my love !
Oh ! thou pale flower, that in death's icy grasp
Dost lie, making the dissolution that we dread
Look fair ;—farewell ! for ever, and for ever !
Thou should'st have been the glad crown of my youth,
Maturer life's fruitful and fond companion,—
Dreary old age's shelter.

GONZALES.

Tears, my Lord ?

LAVAL.

Ay, tears, thou busy mischief; get thee hence!
Away! who sent for thee?—who bade thee pour
The venom of thy tongue into my wounds?
What seek'st thou here?

GONZALES.

To see thee weep, Laval!
And I am satisfied! Look on me, boy!
Dost know Garcia—first scion of a house
Whose kindred shoots by thine were all cut down?

LAVAL.

For dead I left thee on Marignan plain!
Art thou from thence arisen! or from hell!
To wreak such ruin on me?

GONZALES.

They die not
Who have the work I had on hand unfinish'd;
The spirit would not from its fleshly house,
In which thy sword so many outlets made,
Ere it had seen its fell revenge fulfill'd.

LAVAL.

Revenge!—for what?—wherefore dost thou pursue me?

GONZALES.

Look on thy bride! look on that faded thing,
That e'en the tears thy manhood showers so fast,
And bravely, cannot wake to life again!
I call all nature to bear witness here;—
As fair a flower once grew within my home,
As young, as lovely, and as dearly lov'd.—
I had a sister once, a gentle maid—
The only daughter of my father's house,

Round whom our ruder loves did all entwine,
As round the dearest treasure that we own'd.
She was the centre of our souls' affections ;—
She was the bud, that underneath our strong
And sheltering arms, spread over her, did blow.
So grew this fair, fair girl, till envious fate
Brought on the hour when she was withered.
Thy father, sir—now mark !—for 'tis the point
And moral of my tale—thy father, then,
Was, by my sire, in war ta'en prisoner ;—
Wounded almost to death, he brought him home,—
Shelter'd him,—cherish'd him,—and, with a care,
Most like a brother's, watch'd his bed of sickness,
Till ruddy health, once more through all his veins,
Sent life's warm stream in strong returning tide.
How think ye he repaid my father's love ?
From her dear home he lur'd my sister forth,
And, having robb'd her of her treasur'd honour,
Cast her away, defil'd,—despoil'd,—forsaken !—
The daughter of a high and ancient line !—
The child of so much love !—she died !—she died !—
Upon the threshold of that home, from which
My father spurn'd her !—over whose pale corse
I swore to hunt, through life, her ravisher ;
Nor ever from my bloodhound track desist,
Till due and deep atonement had been made—
Honour for honour given—blood for blood.

LAVAL.

These were my father's injuries,—not mine,
Remorseless fiend !

GONZALES.

Thy father died in battle ;
And as his lands, and titles, at his death,
Devolv'd on thee, on thee devolv'd the treasure
Of my dear hate ;—I have had such revenge !
Such horrible revenge !—thy life, thy honour,
Were all too little ;—I have had thy tears !
I've wrung a woman's sorrow from thine eyes,
And drunk each bitter drop of agony,
As heav'nly nectar, worthy of the gods !
Kings, the earth's mightiest potentates, have been
My tools and instruments : you, haughty madam,
And your ambition,—yonder headstrong boy,
And his mad love,—all, all beneath my feet,
All slaves unto my will and deadly purpose.

QUEEN.

Such glorious triumphs should be short-lived :—ho !
Lead out that man to instant death.

GONZALES.

Without confession, madam, shall I go ?
Shall not the world know on what services
Louisa of Savoy bestows such guerdon ?

QUEEN.

Am I obey'd ! away with him !

FRANCIS.

Your pardon :—

If he have aught to speak before he dies,
Let him unfold ; it is our pleasure so !

GONZALES.

You did not deal so hardly with the soul
Of Bourbon, when you sent me to his cell,

Love's frock'd and hooded messenger, I trow.—
But let that pass.—King Francis, mark we well:—
I was, by yonder lady, made the bearer
Of am'rous overtures unto De Bourbon,
Which he with scorn flung back; else trust me, sir,
You had not stood so safely on your throne
As now you stand. 'Twas I who set him free:
Empower'd by Charles of Spain to buy his arm
At any cost: so much for Bourbon! Now,
Look on the prostrate form of this fair creature!
Why, how now, madam, do you blench and start?
You're somewhat pale! fie, fie! what matters it—
'*Blood is but blood, and life no more than life,*
'*Be 't cradled in however fair a form.*'
Is't not well done! ha! well and suddenly?
Are you not satisfied?

QUEEN.

Thou lying devil!

GONZALES:

Dar'st thou deny the part thou hast in this?

QUEEN.

Dar'st thou to me? Ay, reptile!

GONZALES.

Here! look here!—(*shows her letter.*)

QUEEN.

Ha!

GONZALES.

Hast thou found thy master spirit, Queen!
Our wits have grappled hard for many a day.
What! mute at last? or hast some quaint device?

I

QUEEN.

No ! hell has conquer'd me !

FRANCIS.

Give me that scroll—hast thou said all, Garcia ?

GONZALES.

Ay, all !—Fair madam, fare ye well awhile ;
And for my death, I thank you from my soul.
For after the rich cup I've drain'd this hour,
The rest were tasteless, stale, and wearisome.
Life had no aim, or joy, or end, save vengeance—
Vengeance is satisfied, so farewell life !

[Exit, guarded.]

FRANCIS (*reads the letter*).

Oh, mother ! guilt hath taken from thy lips
All proud repelling answer. Give me that ring,—
Strip me that diadem from off thy brows,—
And bid a long farewell to vanity !
For in a holy nunnery immured,
Thou shalt have leisure to make peace with heav'n,
And mourn i' the shade of solitude thy errors.
It is our sov'reign pleasure. (*To the body.*)—And for
thee,
Thou lovely dust, all pomp and circumstance
That can gild death shall wait thee to thy grave :
Thou shalt lie with the royal and the proud ;
And marble, by the dext'rous chisel taught,
Shall learn to mourn thy hapless fortunes.

LAVAL.

No !

Ye shall not bear her to your receptacles ;
Nor raise a monument, for busy eyes

To stare upon : no hand, in future days,
Shall point to her last home ; no voice shall cry
There lies King Francis' paramour !' In life,
Thou didst despoil me of her ; but in death,
She's mine ! I that did love her so,
Will give her that, my love doth tell me best
Fits with her fate—an honourable grave :
She shall among my ancestral tombs repose,
Without an epitaph, except my tears.

FRANCIS.

Then now for war, oh ! ill to end, I fear,
Usher'd with such dark deeds and fell disasters

[*Exeunt FRANCIS, followed by the QUEEN and
Attendants on one side, and LAVAL, with the
others, bearing the body.*]

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—A WIDE ENCAMPMENT.

Alarums.

Enter BOURBON, PESCARA, and Troops.

BOURBON.

Command them halt, and draw their lines along
The forest skirts.

PESCARA.

Perez, how goes the hour?

FIRST SOLDIER.

By our march, an 't please you, I should guess it late
In the afternoon.

BOURBON.

Ay, see the sun, that gorgeous conqueror,
Upon the western gate of heav'n doth halt.

PESCARA.

A conqu'ror call you him, Bourbon?

BOURBON.

Ay, marry.

Hath he not ridden forth, as though to battle,
Armed with ten thousand darts of living flame?
Hath he not, in his journey 'thwart the sky
Encounter'd and o'ercome each gloomy cloud,
Each fog, or noisome vapour, that i' th' air
Hover'd, like foul rebellion, to put out
His glorious light; and having conquer'd them,

Hath he not forced them don his livery,—
The amber glow,—that all he looks on wears ?
And now, behold, he stands on the last verge
Of his career, and looks back o'er his path,
Mark'd with a ruddy hue, how like a conqueror !
Now sinks he in that glowing mass of light,
Which he hath fired ; and look, Pescara, yonder
Comes on the night, who draws her sable veil
Over the whole ; and this bright pageantry,
This gorgeous sunset, and this glorious sun,
Shall be forgotten in to-morrow's dawning !
So comes in death, and so oblivion falls
Over the mighty of the earth ! How far
Is it to the beleaguer'd Pavia ?

PESCARA.

By

The open road, some twelve hours' weary march ;
But here is one, a sturdy labourer,
Who, in his hard vocation toiling, hath
Discover'd paths, through these wide woodlands, which,
Before the dawn, would bring us into sight
Of Pavia, and King Francis' host.

BOURBON.

'Tis well :

That path we choose ; and trust to bring, at once,
Daylight and death into his camp. Do thou,
Pescara, bid them form, and march again ;
Speak to them cheeringly and cheerily ;
Give them good hope, by showing them thine own,
And tell them we must march another night :
Yet but one more, and that, to-morrow, all

Shall rest in the glad arms of victory,

[*Exeunt PESCARA and soldiers.*]

Or sleep in those of death—a most rare slumber!
And one for which I long right wearily!
For I am sorely burthen'd, and the sleep
Of ev'ry night hath no more power on me
To quicken or refresh my numbed senses.
A very dream hath been my life to me!
Full of fair disappointments and mischances
Dress'd in fantastic trappings by my hopes.
The fairest parted first. Oh, Margaret!
Thou star! that all alone, in this thick darkness,
Still shin'st upon my troubled destinies
With an eternal constancy; to thee
How often veers my soul! But 'tis no more,
With the fond looks of hope, but with the gaze
Of one to whom despair is grown familiar;
And who, in death, still fixes his strain'd eye
On what he hop'd, and sicken'd, and then died for!
What quick and incoherent footsteps beat
The ground? Why, this should seem some distraught
wretch

Reft of his reason!—what! it cannot be!

Count Lautrec!

Enter, precipitately, LAUTREC, with a letter in his hand.

LAUTREC.

Hear me, oh thou injured man;
And, by thine injuries, be mov'd to aid me!

BOURBON.

Lautrec in Italy! in our encampment!

A suitor to the man who was o'erthrown,
To make a step to raise him into greatness !

LAUTREC.

Oh read, read here ! He that did ruin thee—
That rais'd me but to cast me down again—
That lustful tyrant, Francis of Valois,
Hath brought dishonour on our ancient house !
I thank the gods she did not long outlive
Such deadly shame !

BOURBON (*reads the letter*).

The fair Françoise, alas !

LAUTREC.

More, more than this—Laval, my childhood's brother—
He who in years, in arms, in love, and honour,
Did so resemble me, that nature seem'd
To have intended, from our birth, our friendship—
Is dead, by the slow hand of his despair,
Which, ever since my sister's fatal end,
Had seiz'd upon him ; dead by lingering pain,
Slow but consuming fever, and that hopelessness
Of the sad heart which is the surest end
Life hath. But, here, he hath bequeath'd to me
Such an inheritance as mocks all price—
His vengeance ! Oh, thou shalt be satisfied,
Departed friend ! and when, from thine abode,
Thou seest my keen sword glit'ring o'er the head
Of him, thy murderer—when his life's blood,
Spilt on the earth, shall reek to heav'n, remember
I struck the blow—'tis I that did avenge thee !

BOURBON.

That I do sorrow for thee, Lautrec, credit me ;

For I have lov'd—but that mine aid in this
Can aught avail thee, I discover not.

LAUTREC.

Desire doth sharpen my perception, Bourbon,
And shapes all circumstances to its purposes.
Grant me but forty—nay, but twenty men ;
And let me join my arm unto thy host,
Whose ev'ry weapon shall, ere day dawn, point
At the foul tyrant—mine alone must strike.
What, cautious grown, and doubtful art, on sudden !
Thou who didst never, to the weightiest matter,
Lend e'en a moment's thinking space, dost now
Ponder on such a suit as this, forsooth !

BOURBON.

Fair sir, Care and her sister, Thought, have been
Companions of my dreary days and nights
Of late, and they have left their cautious traces.
I should be loth to tell, since last we parted,
How sorrow hath, in envy of my youth,
Sown age's silver tokens on my head,
And furrow'd o'er my brow. But I have thought,
E'en in this moment's space, enough to tell thee
I cannot grant thy suit. Men's hearts have cool'd,
Lautrec, since I was driven forth from France ;
And now their busy tongues begin to scan,
With a misprising censure, my revenge.
My fame—my last, best-guarded treasure—is
Melting beneath the fiery touch of slander :
And, when men speak of Bourbon, it is now,
Bourbon the traitor—the revolted Bourbon—
But let that pass !—'tis undeserv'd ; and, therefore,

Again I say it, let it pass ! But yet
There is, among the scornful eyes, that look
Upon my venturous career, one eye,
That, like the guarding gaze of Providence,
Keeps me from all offence. Therefore, if I
Do make my army a retreat and welcome
For rebels,—for so injur'd men are deem'd,—
To one, moreover, who hath sworn to plunge
His sword, up to the hilt, in the king's heart,—
I shall do sorrow to the one I love,
And therein merit all the rest do say.

LAUTREC.

Thou art become too wise, De Bourbon ; I
Am all too eager for revenge to think.
Farewell : and if thou wouldst not the king's life
Be perill'd, see that he and I meet not. [*Exit.*

Enter PESCARA.

PESCARA.

I've done my mission, and successfully.
I've given them new hearts and freshen'd courage ;
Already stand they eager to depart,
Their lances glittering in this crimson light,
And all the banners spreading their huge wings,
As though they meant to fly upon the gale
That flutters laughing round them. Come, De Bourbon,
They only halt for you ; do but appear,
And they shall be tenfold invigorate
With the dear sight of him they love so well !

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—KING FRANCIS' TENT BEFORE THE
WALLS OF PAVIA.

*Night—a lamp burning: on one couch HENRY of
Navarre sleeping, on the other, FRANCIS.*

FRANCIS (*in his sleep*).

Down! down! help ho! the traitor's stabb'd me!—help!

(*Wakes*) What all alone! and night!—an idle dream!

(*Rising*) Yet sure methought we did together fight,

Bourbon and I; and ever as I struck him,

Laval did come between us—but 'tis nought.

A very phantasy, born of my thoughts,

Which have been straining on to-morrow's issue.

(*To NAVARRE*)—How well thou sleep'st, thou disinherited King!

Thou hast no dream of empire or dominion;

Thine being lost, no longer are a care.

And all th' event to-morrow brings to thee,

Is life, or death, a paltry stake at best!

Ta'en by itself, and without added value

Of crown, or kingdom, fame, or name to lose.

Sleep on,—youth's healthful current keeps its course

Within thy veins; and thy unwrinkled brow

Shows like the glassy wave, when sunset smiles on it.

Oh, would that I were eas'd of power too!—

Then might I rest, perchance, as thou dost now.

(*He walks to the end of the tent, and draws
back the curtains at the entrance of it; which,
being opened, discover the camp by moonlight,
the Tesino, and distant walls of Pavia.*)

How many are there, sleeping on yon field,
Who shall to-morrow lay them down for ever.
How many heads, whose dreams are all of conquest,
Lie pillow'd on their graves.—Where shall they be
After the dawn, awaken'd by our trumpets,
Has drawn away night's curtain? Then shall come
War's horrid din,—then shall these slumberers,
All drench'd in gore, all gash'd, and mangled, roll
Together in the thirsty dust; and some
Shall pray to heaven for mercy, and for years
Of future life,—and some shall yell for pain,
And curse the hour that they were born, and cry
For water to allay their dying drought.
There shall the proud lie writhing, in the herd
Of common soldiers; there the brave shall lie,
Bleeding beside the coward;—there, perchance,
I shall be stretch'd, stark, ere the evening fall—
A fearful thought!—Now through the silent air,
And the dark night, might Fancy dream she saw
Death stalking in the midst of yonder field,
Marking the prey that shall be his to-morrow.
Why, how is this?—my blood chills in my veins!
A shadow passes over me!—shall I?—
Oh conscience! lie thou still; it is thy hand
That strikes so cold upon my sense, and turns
The rapid current of my blood athwart,
With these slow shiv'ring fears.—I'll wake D'Albret;
For now already through the twilight breaks
The dappled hue of morn, chasing away
Night's shadows, and these gloomy phantasies.
There is a freshness in the earl air,

That quickens ev'ry faculty, and makes
A keen enjoyment of existence only.
Now falls the grey veil from fair Nature's face,
And streaks of light shoot through the amber sky.
What ho ! awake, D'Albret ! the day hath dawn'd,
And the young morning, clad in saffron robes
Of glorious light, opens heav'n's eastern gate,
And bids the sun good morrow.—(*Trumpet*)—Hark ! the
trumpet,

Clear, as the lark's shrill matin note, doth sound
Through the blue vault,—the hum of multitudes
Rises in the still air,—the clash of steel,—
The tramp of trained feet doth beat the ground,
In even measure,—steeds neigh long and loud,—
And voices of command, whoop and halloo,
Ring through the tented lines ;—arouse thee ! slumb'rer !
The day is broke,—the camp is all awake,—
Shake off this sleep, and fit thyself for—

Enter TRIBOULET at the back.

TRIBOULET.

Death, master ! I've ended thy period with a rare grace
for thee !

FRANCIS.

Thou here ? I deem'd thee safe in Paris.

TRIBOULET.

Thou deemedst wrong, then ; for I am sound before
Pavia.

FRANCIS.

When cam'st thou hither ?

TRIBOULET.

With the last reinforcement : men, there are no more that can come, and fools, there being so many already, I thought thou could'st not take exception at one more of the order.

FRANCIS.

But what wilt thou do here ?

TRIBOULET.

That which thou wilt : fight, I conceive.

FRANCIS.

Go to, with thy lath !

TRIBOULET.

No, with my faulchion, master.

(He draws his faulchion.)

FRANCIS.

Why, my poor fool, what shall they do at court if thou art slain ?

TRIBOULET.

Resolve me this, master,—what shall they do if thou art slain ?

FRANCIS.

Marry, e'en get them another King.

TRIBOULET.

What ! kings in such abundance, and fools so rare,—royalty in such plenty, and folly scarce in the market ! But I'll tell thee ; if I am slain, dear master, do thou console my mourners ; they will be many, doubtless ;—I'll bequeath thee my cap and bells—and let poor Clement write my epitaph.

FRANCIS.

Out weather-brain ! but see, here come the heads

Of our grave council ; get thee gone awhile
 Into the further tent, and tarry there
 Until I send for thee.

[*Exit TRIBOULET.*

I'll have him kept
 Safely throughout the day,—for worlds I would not
 That the poor knave should come to any harm.

(*During this scene HENRY D'ALBRET has
 arisen, buckled on his sword and spurs, &c.*)

*Enter VENDÔME, CHABANNES, DE VARENNES,
 and Pages.*

FRANCIS.

Now, good my lords, your voices, and perchance
 Some short hour hence we'll ask you for your swords ;
 Speak forth, speak freely. (*To a Page*)—Bid a herald
 sound

Summons through all the camp, to all the chiefs
 And leaders of our host, that straightway here
 They do convene to counsel or consult
 How best our conduct may be ordered,
 In this emergency and strait of war.

Despatch, despatch ! we suffer no delay ;

All must be quickly said and done to-day :

Sit, gentle lords,—good cousin D'Albret, sit.

[*They seat themselves. Exeunt Pages.*

Enter CHARLES OF ALENÇON.

ALENÇON.

Sir,

The morning blushes, that she lay asleep,

Pillow'd on the grey clouds, long after you
Had left your couch, in busy thought preparing
To meet the venture of this perilous day.

FRANCIS.

We'll make the noon blush redder yet, good cousin,
If thou and all these nobles here assembled
Are half as willing for the siege as I !—
But, Vendôme, thou art ripper in thy years,
And of a judgment more mature than any,
Than all, that sit in council round us here.
Speak, therefore ; say, shall we attempt th' assault,
And lay this rebel city in the dust ?
Or back to France, there to recruit and raise
Our wearied troops, who, through their weariness,
Find strength to talk of marching home again ?

VENDÔME.

My gracious liege, brief words do best befit
The brief allotment time hath portion'd us :
Therefore, unprefac'd be my say, and short.
Pavia hath not yet given sign of yielding,
Though now a lengthen'd siege hath tried her force ;
Resistance in the city, and without
(At least, so rumour saith) a mighty band,
Marching to aid her worst extremity,
In numbers countless—

FRANCIS.

Ay, so rumour saith,
But rumour's best arithmetic we know ;
Multiplication, Vendôme, is it not ?

D'ALBERT.

I do entreat your Majesty's excuse

For that I break my lord of Vendôme's speech,
In seeming hotness of impatient youth.
But had he said, fresh, full of strength and life,
And courage, such as untried armies feel,
Before grim war hath prick'd a single vein,
Or drain'd one drop of blood, or drank one breath,
Methinks his argument had stronger prov'd.

CHABANNES.

We, good my liege, have pour'd forth crimson floods
Around the walls of Pavia, mingling with
The silver Tesino another stream,
All full of warmth, and but just robb'd of life.

FRANCIS.

Hark ! for methinks, without, we hear the stir
Of hasty footsteps drawing near our tent :
Who comes ?

Enter BONNIVET.

De Bonnivet ! ah, is it thou ?
Welcome, thou King of Tennis ! thou art wanted,
Thou giver of hard blows and unwise counsels :
Here be these lords, advising us to raise
This weary siege, and back to France again.

BONNIVET.

Out on such counsel ! How, sirs, raise the siege
And fly ?

D'ALBRET.

Ay, even so, sir, raise the siege !
I marvel that your eyes serve not thus far,
To see that on a combat hangs the venture
Of life and death, freedom and slavery.
Do you not see 'tis all the foe doth seek ?

What stake is this, where, failing, they lose nought;
And where, if they should win, we must lose all?
This battle will be double victory
To them, for 'tis their only confidence—
'Tis the last effort of their desp'rate hope—
The straining of the nerve before it cracks;
The issue that must crown, or crush, for ever.

ALENÇON.

Besides all this, another point remains—
Men are not fed with words, and well we know,
Would Bourbon give his heart's best blood for it,
He hath no other coin. Thus following
Through lands, laid waste by our victorious arms,
Without a hope of combat, and with fear
Of mutiny among their starving thousands;—
Think ye they will not rue this hasty march?
And curse the hour they quitted Germany,
To hold that rebel Bourbon's cause for food,
And page our heels through Italy for rest.
But, an we wait them here, and give them fight,
And let them weigh the fearful odds that all
Spur them to battle, even to the death,—
Why they may chance, my liège, to find a strength
From out their very weakness, and a hope,
Born in the moment of extreme despair;—
And should we be defeated—

FRANCIS.

Defeated! say'st thou? by my soul, Alençon
Thou speak'st as thou hadst never worn a sword!
Defeated by a set of German clods!
What though the traitor Bourbon lead them on!

K

Methinks ye have forgotten, all of ye,
That in our camp his deeds of arms were learnt.
The masters of his infancy are here,
And though that youthful age hath budded forth
Into most powerful and vigorous manhood,
Here are the men who train'd the haughty spirit,
That having broken through all curb of duty,
Threats its instructors; here the very men,
Who first put weapons in those grasping hands,
That now, forsooth, ye deem invincible.
By heav'ns! ye are bewilder'd all by fear!
Or else your eyes have ta'en some other taint,
That makes ye shake so at this scarecrow, Bourbon.
What though he hath heart, head, and hand, the which
Are merits that I freely own and praise?
Yet hath he not ten thousand hearts and heads,
To move this mass of thick-brain'd, half-train'd savages
Whereat, oh, valiant chevaliers! ye tremble.
Nay, cousin D'Albret, we are poor, indeed,
If in this very presence be not some,
Ay, many, that could match with yonder rebel;
Thyself art proof against thy argu ment.

BONNIVET.

Nor is this all: did not the king of France
Swear by his knighthood's sword, he would exalt
Leyva's head on conquer'd Pavia's walls?
The vow was spoke like thunder in our ears;
The sword flash'd brightly in the king's right hand;
And now shall Pavia triumph in our flight?
And bathe its ramparts in Tesino's flood,
All curdled with the red libations pour'd

By us, as tributes to th' unconquer'd town?
Shall Leyva, that haughty Spaniard, smile,
To think, that with his single bilboa
He held at bay the chivalry of France?
More, more than all, shall Europe, 'neath whose eyes
The fearful hazard of our game we play,
Point to the plains of Italy, and cry,
There was a gallant king and knight forsworn?
There France's lilies swept the dusty field,
Not blushing with the hue of deadly fight,
But pale with shame at this most foul retreat!
Oh shame upon ye, lords!

ALENÇON.

Now, by this light,
I did but urge the measure, that we might
Survive to fight and bleed in France's quarrel
Nor all be slaughter'd here by rebel hands.

FRANCIS.

Cousin D'Albret, thou hast forgot thine own
Immediate cause and quarrel in this fray.
Thy lost inheritance, Navarre, doth lie
Within the compass of to-day's engagement.
If we are conquerors, why then thy crown—

D'ALBRET.

Perish my crown,—and with it all my hopes,—
If that the dear desire of righting me,
Hath made your majesty so long to waver
'Twixt your host's safety, and my interest!
By heav'n! 'ere I behold this fair array,
And all its gallant leaders, perill'd thus,

My crown and kingdom shall remain unclaim'd,
And my good sword be my inheritance!

VENDÔME.

But see, who comes in haste; his tidings seem,—
If one may read them in his dusty trappings,—
Sudden.—

Enter a Messenger.

MESSENGER.

My liege, tidings have reach'd our post,
Within this hour, the city must surrender,
If we attack. The Spaniard Leyva's troops,
Too harshly disciplined by want and weariness,
Have broke all discipline, and will not raise
An arm to save their town.

BONNIVET.

Now, now, my liege!
To horse; and bid the trumpets sound th' assault.

Enter another Messenger.

MESSENGER.

Arm! arm! my liege! the Spaniard is upon us!
De Bourbon and his army are at hand!
Over the westward plains, the clouds of dust
Rise thickly from the vanguard of his host;
From whose dense canopy full oft flash forth
Helmet, and crest, and lance, and pennon bright,
Giving dread promise of the coming fight!

(They all start up.)

FRANCIS.

Up, and away! to horse, to horse, my lords!

'Twill be the battle then, and not th' assault !
Or if our cousin D'Albret be not wearied,
We'll have the battle first, and then the siege.

D'ALBRET.

I pray to heav'n your majesty may find
No rest he seeks not !

FRANCIS.

Nay now, gentle coz,
Thy hand, and ere we part, we'll have thy word,
To meet us in our tent, after the battle ;
Where we will fill a health to our fair ladies,—
Amongst whose number, Victory is not
The most unkind. Now, all unto your posts !
It may so chance we may meet here again ;
But if fate wills it other, farewell all,
Whom one short hour shall cause to stand or fall.

[*Exeunt all but BONNIVET.*

De Bonnivet, do thou draw out thy men
Close by the Tesino, but keep them back ;
Nor let thy bloodhounds slip the leash, till I
Send signal for the onset.

[*Exit BONNIVET. FRANCIS draws his sword.*

Now, all ye powers that rule the tide of war,
Whose voice is in the belching cannon's roar,—
Whose wing is in its flashing light,—who spread
Its smoky canopy along the plain,—
Making death doubly hideous by disguise :
Come ! sit upon my brow ! and be my eyes
The heralds of your sentences to Spain ;
That at each glance the rebel host may read

The terrors waiting on incensed kings.
Now, Bourbon, traitor ! we shall meet once more,
And proud shall be the prize of thy revolt ;
For I'll encounter thee, and sword to sword,
I'll pay thy heavy debt of injuries,
With such a glorious death, that men shall say
Thou wert more honour'd, dying by this hand,
Than hadst thou lived, and conquer'd all the world !

(*Trumpets.*)

Hark ! hark ! they sound the onset ! to the field !
Confusion light on him who first shall yield !

[*Rushes out.*]

SCENE III.—BATTLE-FIELD.

Alarums.—Enter BOURBON *and* PESCARA.

PESCARA.

Oh, what a glorious conflict rages there !
Our breaking of their lines, and swift pursuit,
Have ta'en the breath from off my lips, but more
With joy than weariness.

BOURBON.

Oh, brave, my lions !
Hark ! how they roar ! see how their bristling line
Drives back King Francis and his chevaliers !
Come, come, Pescara, come, my blood's on fire !

PESCARA.

Art sure that Leyva will keep his word,

And sallying from the city, fall upon
Their rear guard?

BOURBON.

I've his oath ; and art thou sure,
That thou didst to the troops enjoin to spare
King Francis' life ?

PESCARA.

Certain : they'd sooner turn
Their swords on thee or me, than upon him.

BOURBON.

Then follow, follow back into the fight !
Follow ! and shout Bourbon ! for Spain and vengeance !

[*Exeunt.*

*Alarums.—Enter, in great disorder, ALENÇON,
CHABANNES, and some troops.*

ALENÇON.

No pow'r on earth can rally them again !
They fly, they fly ! Oh, miserable day !
Where is the king ?

CHABANNES.

Yonder, in the mêlée.
Seest not his white plume, dabbl'd all with gore,
Floating upon the tide of battle ? Hell
Rides on the sulph'rous clouds that shroud the field,
And death riots beneath !

ALENÇON.

Where's Bonnivet ?

CHABANNES.

Cut down, with his whole troop. Th' accursed Spaniard,
Leyva, did, as he rush'd on to the charge,

Open his city gates, which belched forth
Th' enraged and hungry garrison that we
So long have pent within their city walls ;
These fell upon De Bonnivet's small band,
And made such havoc as wild beasts alone,
Or starving savages, should make.

ALÉNÇON.

But, come—
Once more into the field ; and, if all hope
Be lost of rallying our broken host,
Let us, around our gallant king, make stand,
And fight ourselves to death ! [Exeunt.

SCENE IV.—ANOTHER PART OF THE BATTLE-FIELD.

Alarums.—Enter FRANCIS, supported by D'ALBRET and
TRIBOULET ; his sword broken, and his whole dress
very much disordered.

FRANCIS.

Oh, coward traitors, to forsake me thus !
Thrice did I lead them on, and thrice again
That fiend incarnate, Bourbon, routed them.
D'Albret, leave me, and get thee to the brow
Of yonder hill, and look upon the field,
And come and tell me how the battle fares.

[Exit D'ALBRET. FRANCIS seats himself on the ground.

FRANCIS.

So thou didst break thy prison, Triboulet ?

TRIBOULET.

Ay, and I would have broken my neck to have got to you ; but, master mine, you bleed—you are sore wounded.

FRANCIS.

A score of scratches, nothing more, kind friend.
Take off my helmet—so—I thirst, good fool :
I pray thee fetch me, from yon spring, some water,
To lay this fever in my throat.

[TRIBOULET takes the King's helmet, and goes
for water.

Oh, mother !

Ill shall it fare with thee if the day 's lost,
As I do fear it will be.

Re-enter TRIBOULET.

Thank thee, friend.
Pah ! there is blood ! blood ! in the curdled stream !
I cannot, for my life, dip e'en my lip
Into it.

LAUTREC (*without*).

Where, where is the tyrant ?

(*Enters.*)

Ha !

Take this, thou ravisher ! Laval doth send it thee !

[*He rushes on the KING ; TRIBOULET throws himself before him, but is felled by LAUTREC—FRANCIS starts up, and, with his broken sword, defends himself. Enter PESCARA and Spanish troops—HENRI D'ALBRET is brought in prisoner—PESCARA strikes down LAUTREC's sword.*

PESCARA.

Down with thy sword for very shame, Lautrec !
Wouldst strike an unarm'd and a wounded man ?

FRANCIS.

Pescara ! thou hast sav'd a worthless life ;
Worthless to all but him unto whose vengeance
It was most rightly due. Alas, poor fool !
Wounded, I fear, to death !

TRIBOULET.

For thee, master—dear master, 'tis for thee !

FRANCIS.

My crown !—I had forgot—but my heart's thanks,
And all my fallen fortunes may have spar'd me,
To him that shall restore thee !

TRIBOULET.

Oh master mine ! thou canst not buy me a new heart ;
mine is unseam'd, and life hath play'd the truant—for-
give poor Clément, master, for my sake ;—and hark thee
—hark thee in thine ear,—thou hast been called a wise
King hitherto, and I now ratify the sentence ;—hence-
forth thou shalt be wise——

FRANCIS.

Why so ?

TRIBOULET.

Because thy folly is departing, master !—alack, poor
cap and bells !

[Dies.]

FRANCIS.

Curse on these smarting wounds, whose pain doth bring
Unmanly tears !—Pescara, I beseech thee,
Let this kind fellow sleep in honor'd grave !

His head was light ; for it did lack the weight
Of evil thought,—but for his faithful heart,
Oh ! how it sham'd all sense and intellect,
That was so passing excellent without them !

PESCARA.

It shall be look'd to, sir, right heedfully.—
But, sir, you bleed ; there is a convent near
If you can mount——

FRANCIS.

Faith—I feel somewhat faint,—
Lead on, sir, so our haven be not far.—
D'Albret, thine arm ; thou'rt something of a prophet—
Fortune has cheated us of all save patience.

[*Exeunt—Soldiers follow them, bearing the
body of TRIBOULET.*

SCENE THE LAST.—THE INSIDE OF A CHURCH.

Monks in the background, singing the service for the dead.
Enter PESCARA and D'ALBRET, supporting FRANCIS.
Soldiers follow them.

MONKS chaunt.

' De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine.—Domine,
exaudi vocem meam.'

FRANCIS.

Why, this is fit ! Peace, do not break their chaunt !

MONKS chaunt.

' Fiant aures tuæ intendentes in vocem deprecationis
meæ.'

D'ALBRET.

Oh it chimes truly with our dismal fortunes.

MONKS *chaunt*.

‘ Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine : Domine, quis sustinebit.

FRANCIS (*speaking the response*).

‘ Quia apud te propitiatio est et propter legem tuam sustinui te, Domine.’

(*Shouts without*.)

Enter LEYVA and Spanish troops.

LEYVA.

What drowsy dirge is this ? Be we not conquerors ?
Shout a Te Deum for our victory,
And leave these doleful dumps to Frenchmen !

PESCARA.

Leyva, this boist'rous triumph shows not well
Before the fallen——

FRANCIS.

Oh, sir, take no heed,
For I take none of this ;—to be o'ercome
May be the lot of base and brave alike,—
But, to be moderate in conquest makes
A great man greater than his victory.

SOLDIERS.

Come, baldpates, come, a merry psalm !

LEYVA.

Pescara, it is fitting thou should'st talk,
Who hast but march'd some leagues thy lusty troops
Through fruitful lands, levying all plenteousness,
To satisfy their need or their desire :
These wretches have been pent within their walls

With nought to stay their stomachs for three weeks,
Save scraps thy dogs would loathe:—I cannot curb
them—

They're mad with hunger and excess.—

*Enter, shouting, a body of drunken Soldiers; they
seize the ornaments on the Priests, and begin stripping
the altar.*

FRANCIS.

Do ye stand by, and see this sacrilege?

Oh Spanish nobles!—Christian gentlemen!

FRANCIS *snatches a sword from one of the
Soldiers.—Shouts without.*

*Enter BOURBON, followed by Spanish Officers
and Soldiery.*

BOURBON.

(Striking down a soldier at the foot of the altar.)

Down, dog! How now, whence this unholy outrage?

Pescara, Leyva—*(seeing FRANCIS)*—The king!

FRANCIS.

Bourbon!

BOURBON.

Wounded—alone—a prisoner!—Oh, sir!

Had you but hearken'd timely to true counsel,
This ne'er had come to pass—you had not fallen
To this estate—nor Italy been drench'd
With the best blood of your best chivalry.

FRANCIS.

This is a strange encounter for us two,
My lord—full of deep thoughts that need no comment.
That thou wert wrong'd, the world will bear thee witness;
That wrong endur'd hath made thee commit wrong;
The world and all its aftertimes will judge thee:

For my own part, though fate has play'd me false,
I will not wrangle with the lot she throws me,
Nor hold this day the darkest of my life,
Though thou hast won, and I lost all save honour.
(*To PESCARA*)—Sir, take my sword, I am *your* prisoner.

BOURBON (*to an Officer*).

Go, bid our trumpets sound to the recall.
All slaughter, and despoiling of the dead, forbear.
And for our royal prisoners, their fate
Hangs at the mastery of Charles of Spain.—
From us all courtesy their rank doth claim,
And admiration for their noble valour.
Now sheathe your bloody swords, and all prepare
To march to Spain this very hour, that there,
By well-improved victory, we may
Crown the strange tale of this eventful day.

FINIS.

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