CHARLES KINGSLEY

THE SAINT'S TRAGEDY

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Содержание

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PREFACE BY THE REV. F. D. MAURICE, M.A. (1848)

The writer of this play does not differ with his countrymen generally, as to the nature and requirements of a Drama. He has learnt from our Great Masters that it should exhibit human beings engaged in some earnest struggle, certain outward aspects of which may possibly be a spectacle for the amusement of idlers, but which in itself is for the study and the sympathy of those who are struggling themselves. A Drama, he feels, should not aim at the inculcation of any definite maxim; the moral of it lies in the action and the character. It must be drawn out of them by the heart and experience of the reader, not forced upon him by the author. The men and women whom he presents are not to be his spokesmen; they are to utter themselves freely in such language, grave or mirthful, as best expresses what they feel and what they are. The age to which they belong is not to be contemplated as if it were apart from us; neither is it to be measured by our rules; to be held up as a model; to be condemned for its strangeness. The passions which worked in it must be those which are working in

ourselves. To the same eternal laws and principles are we, and it, amenable. By beholding these a poet is to raise himself, and may hope to raise his readers, above antiquarian tastes and modern conventions. The unity of the play cannot be conferred upon it by any artificial arrangements; it must depend upon the relation of the different persons and events to the central subject. No nice adjustments of success and failure to right and wrong must constitute its poetical justice; the conscience of the readers must be satisfied in some deeper way than this, that there is an order in the universe, and that the poet has perceived and asserted it.

Long before these principles were reduced into formal canons of orthodoxy, even while they encountered the strong opposition of critics, they were unconsciously recognised by Englishmen as sound and national. Yet I question whether a clergyman writing in conformity with them might not have incurred censure in former times, and may not incur it now. The privilege of expressing his own thoughts, sufferings, sympathies, in any form of verse is easily conceded to him; if he liked to use a dialogue instead of a monologue, for the purpose of enforcing a duty, or illustrating a doctrine, no one would find fault with him; if he produced an actual Drama for the purpose of defending or denouncing a particular character, or period, or system of opinions, the compliments of one party might console him for the abuse or contempt of another.

But it seems to be supposed that he is bound to keep in view one or other of these ends: to divest himself of his own

individuality that he may enter into the working of other spirits; to lay aside the authority which pronounces one opinion, or one habit of mind, to be right and another wrong, that he may exhibit them in their actual strife; to deal with questions, not in an abstract shape, but mixed up with the affections, passions, relations of human creatures, is a course which must lead him, it is thought, into a great forgetfulness of his office, and of all that is involved in it.

No one can have less interest than I have in claiming poetical privileges for the clergy; and no one, I believe, is more thoroughly convinced that the standard which society prescribes for us, and to which we ordinarily conform ourselves, instead of being too severe and lofty, is far too secular and grovelling. But I apprehend the limitations of this kind which are imposed upon us are themselves exceedingly secular, betokening an entire misconception of the nature of our work, proceeding from maxims and habits which tend to make it utterly insignificant and abortive. If a man confines himself to the utterance of his own experiences, those experiences are likely to become every day more narrow and less real. If he confines himself to the defence of certain propositions, he is sure gradually to lose all sense of the connection between those propositions and his own life, or the life of man. In either case he becomes utterly ineffectual as a teacher. Those whose education and character are different from his own, whose processes of mind have therefore been different, are utterly unintelligible to him.

Even a cordial desire for sympathy is not able to break through the prickly hedge of habits, notions, and technicalities which separates them. Oftentimes the desire itself is extinguished in those who ought to cherish it most, by the fear of meeting with something portentous or dangerous. Nor can he defend a dogma better than he communes with men; for he knows not that which attacks it. He supposes it to be a set of book arguments, whereas it is something lying very deep in the heart of the disputant, into which he has never penetrated.

Hence there is a general complaint that we 'are ignorant of the thoughts and feelings of our contemporaries'; most attribute this to a fear of looking below the surface, lest we should find hollowness within; many like to have it so, because they have thus an excuse for despising us. But surely such an ignorance is more inexcusable in us, than in the priests of any nation: we, less than any, are kept from the sun and air; our discipline is less than any contrived merely to make us acquainted with the commonplaces of divinity. We are enabled, nay, obliged, from our youth upwards, to mix with people of our own age, who are destined for all occupations and modes of life; to share in their studies, their enjoyments, their perplexities, their temptations.

Experience, often so dearly bought, is surely not meant to be thrown away: whether it has been obtained without the sacrifice of that which is most precious, or whether the lost blessing has been restored twofold, and good is understood, not only as the opposite of evil, but as the deliverance from it, we cannot be

meant to forget all that we have been learning. The teachers of other nations may reasonably mock us, as having less of direct book-lore than themselves; they should not be able to say, that we are without the compensation of knowing a little more of living creatures.

A clergyman, it seems to me, should be better able than other men to cast aside that which is merely accidental, either in his own character, or in the character of the age to which he belongs, and to apprehend that which is essential and eternal.

His acceptance of fixed creeds, which belong as much to one generation as another, and which have survived amid all changes and convulsions, should raise him especially above the temptation to exalt the fashion of his own time, or of any past one; above the affectation of the obsolete, above slavery to the present, and above that strange mixture of both which some display, who weep because the beautiful visions of the Past are departed, and admire themselves for being able to weep over them—and dispense with them. His reverence for the Bible should make him feel that we most realise our own personality when we most connect it with that of our fellow-men; that acts are not to be contemplated apart from the actor; that more of what is acceptable to the God of Truth may come forth in men striving with infinite confusion, and often uttering words like the east-wind, than in those who can discourse calmly and eloquently about a righteousness and mercy, which they know only by hearsay. The belief which a minister of God has in the eternity of

the distinction between right and wrong should especially dispose him to recognise that distinction apart from mere circumstance and opinion. The confidence which he must have that the life of each man, and the life of this world, is a drama, in which a perfectly Good and True Being is unveiling His own purposes, and carrying on a conflict with evil, which must issue in complete victory, should make him eager to discover in every portion of history, in every biography, a divine 'Morality' and 'Mystery'—a morality, though it deals with no abstract personages—a mystery, though the subject of it be the doings of the most secular men.

The subject of this Play is certainly a dangerous one, it suggests questions which are deeply interesting at the present time. It involves the whole character and spirit of the Middle Ages. A person who had not an enthusiastic admiration for the character of Elizabeth would not be worthy to speak of her; it seems to me, that he would be still less worthy, if he did not admire far more fervently that ideal of the female character which God has established, and not man—which she imperfectly realised—which often exhibited itself in her in spite of her own more confused, though apparently more lofty, ideal; which may be manifested more simply, and therefore more perfectly, in the England of the nineteenth century, than in the Germany of the thirteenth. To enter into the meaning of self-sacrifice—to sympathise with any one who aims at it—not to be misled by counterfeits of it—not to be unjust to the truth which may be mixed with those counterfeits—is a difficult task, but a necessary

one for any one who takes this work in hand. How far our author has attained these ends, others must decide. I am sure that he will not have failed from forgetting them. He has, I believe, faithfully studied all the documents of the period within his reach, making little use of modern narratives; he has meditated upon the past in its connection with the present; has never allowed his reading to become dry by disconnecting it with what he has seen and felt, or made his partial experiences a measure for the acts which they help him to understand. He has entered upon his work at least in a true and faithful spirit, not regarding it as an amusement for leisure hours, but as something to be done seriously, if done at all; as if he was as much 'under the Great Taskmaster's eye' in this as in any other duty of his calling. In certain passages and scenes he seemed to me to have been a little too bold for the taste and temper of this age. But having written them deliberately, from a conviction that morality is in peril from fastidiousness, and that it is not safe to look at questions which are really agitating people's hearts merely from the outside—he has, and I believe rightly, retained what I should from cowardice have wished him to exclude. I have no doubt, that any one who wins a victory over the fear of opinion, and especially over the opinion of the religious world, strengthens his own moral character, and acquires a greater fitness for his high service.

Whether Poetry is again to revive among us, or whether the power is to be wholly stifled by our accurate notions about the laws and conditions under which it is to be exercised, is a question

upon which there is room for great differences of opinion. Judging from the past, I should suppose that till Poetry becomes less self-conscious, less self-concentrated, more *dramatical* in spirit, if not in form, it will not have the qualities which can powerfully affect Englishmen. Not only were the Poets of our most national age dramatists, but there seems an evident dramatical tendency in those who wrote what we are wont to call narrative, or epic, poems. Take away the dramatic faculty from Chaucer, and the *Canterbury Tales* become indeed, what they have been most untruly called, mere versions of French or Italian Fables. Milton may have been right in changing the form of the *Paradise Lost*,—we are bound to believe that he was right; for what appeal can there be against his genius? But he could not destroy the essentially dramatic character of a work which sets forth the battle between good and evil, and the Will of Man at once the Theatre and the Prize of the conflict. Is it not true, that there is in the very substance of the English mind, that which naturally predisposes us to sympathy with the Drama, and this though we are perhaps the most untheatrical of all people? The love of action, the impatience of abstraction, the equity which leads us to desire that every one may have a fair hearing, the reserve which had rather detect personal experience than have it announced—tendencies all easily perverted to evil, often leading to results the most contradictory, yet capable of the noblest cultivation—seem to explain the fact, that writers of this kind should have flourished so greatly among us, and that

scarcely any others should permanently interest us.

These remarks do not concern poetical literature alone, or chiefly. Those habits of mind, of which I have spoken, ought to make us the best *historians*. If Germany has a right to claim the whole realm of the abstract, if Frenchmen understand the framework of society better than we do, there is in the national dramas of Shakespeare an historical secret, which neither the philosophy of the one nor the acute observation of the other can discover. Yet these dramas are almost the only satisfactory expression of that historical faculty which I believe is latent in us. The zeal of our factions, a result of our national activity, has made earnest history dishonest: our English justice has fled to indifferent and sceptical writers for the impartiality which it sought in vain elsewhere. This resource has failed,—the indifferentism of Hume could not secure him against his Scotch prejudices, or against gross unfairness when anything disagreeably positive and vehement came in his way. Moreover, a practical people demand movement and life, not mere judging and balancing. For a time there was a reaction in favour of party history, but it could not last long; already we are glad to seek in Ranke or Michelet that which seems denied us at home. Much, no doubt, may be gained from such sources; but I am convinced that *this* is not the produce which we are meant generally to import; for this we may trust to well-directed native industry.

The time is, I hope, at hand, when those who are most in earnest will feel that therefore they are most bound to be just—when they

will confess the exceeding wickedness of the desire to distort or suppress a fact, or misrepresent a character—when they will ask as solemnly to be delivered from the temptation to this, as to any crime which is punished by law.

The clergy ought especially to lead the way in this reformation. They have erred grievously in perverting history to their own purposes. What was a sin in others was in them a blasphemy, because they professed to acknowledge God as the Ruler of the world, and hereby they showed that they valued their own conclusions above the facts which reveal His order. They owe, therefore, a great *amende* to their country, and they should consider seriously how they can make it most effectually. I look upon this Play as an effort in this direction, which I trust may be followed by many more. On this ground alone, even if its poetical worth was less than I believe it is, I should, as a clergyman, be thankful for its publication.

F. D. M.

INTRODUCTION

The story which I have here put into a dramatic form is one familiar to Romanists, and perfectly and circumstantially authenticated. Abridged versions of it, carefully softened and sentimentalised, may be read in any Romish collection of Lives of the Saints. An enlarged edition has been published in France, I believe by Count Montalembert, and translated, with illustrations, by an English gentleman, which admits certain miraculous legends, of later date, and, like other prodigies, worthless to the student of human character. From consulting this work I have hitherto abstained, in order that I might draw my facts and opinions, entire and unbiassed, from the original Biography of Elizabeth, by Dietrich of Appold, her contemporary, as given entire by Canisius.

Dietrich was born in Thuringia, near the scene of Elizabeth's labours, a few years before her death; had conversed with those who had seen her, and calls to witness 'God and the elect angels,' that he had inserted nothing but what he had either understood from religious and veracious persons, or read in approved writings, viz. '*The Book of the Sayings of Elizabeth's Four Ladies* (*Guta*, *Isentrudis*, *and two others*)'; '*The Letter which Conrad of Marpurg*, *her Director*, *wrote to Pope Gregory the Ninth*' (these two documents still exist); '*The Sermon of Otto*' (*de Ordine Prædic*), which begins thus: '*Mulierem fortem*.'

'Not satisfied with these,' he 'visited monasteries, castles, and towns, interrogated the most aged and veracious persons, and wrote letters, seeking for completeness and truth in all things;' and thus composed his biography, from which that in Surius (*Acta Sanctorum*), Jacobus de Voragine, Alban Butler, and all others which I have seen, are copied with a very few additions and many prudent omissions.

Wishing to adhere strictly to historical truth, I have followed the received account, not only in the incidents, but often in the language which it attributes to its various characters; and have given in the Notes all necessary references to the biography in Canisius's collection. My part has therefore been merely to show how the conduct of my heroine was not only possible, but to a certain degree necessary, for a character of earnestness and piety such as hers, working under the influences of the Middle Age.

In deducing fairly, from the phenomena of her life, the character of Elizabeth, she necessarily became a type of two great mental struggles of the Middle Age; first, of that between Scriptural or unconscious, and Popish or conscious, purity: in a word, between innocence and prudery; next, of the struggle between healthy human affection, and the Manichean contempt with which a celibate clergy would have all men regard the names of husband, wife, and parent. To exhibit this latter falsehood in its miserable consequences, when received into a heart of insight and determination sufficient to follow out all belief to its ultimate practice, is the main object of my Poem. That a most

degrading and agonising contradiction on these points must have existed in the mind of Elizabeth, and of all who with similar characters shall have found themselves under similar influences, is a necessity that must be evident to all who know anything of the deeper affections of men. In the idea of a married Romish saint, these miseries should follow logically from the Romish view of human relations. In Elizabeth's case their existence is proved equally logically from the acknowledged facts of her conduct.

I may here observe, that if I have in no case made her allude to the Virgin Mary, and exhibited the sense of infinite duty and loyalty to Christ alone, as the mainspring of all her noblest deeds, it is merely in accordance with Dietrich's biography. The omission of all Mariolatry is remarkable. My business is to copy that omission, as I should in the opposite case have copied the introduction of Virgin-worship into the original tale. The business of those who make Mary, to women especially, the complete substitute for the Saviour—I had almost said, for all Three Persons of the Trinity—is to explain, if they can, her non-appearance in this case.

Lewis, again, I have drawn as I found him, possessed of all virtues but those of action; in knowledge, in moral courage, in spiritual attainment, infinitely inferior to his wife, and depending on her to be taught to pray; giving her higher faculties nothing to rest on in himself, and leaving the noblest offices of a husband to be supplied by a spiritual director. He thus becomes a type of the husbands of the Middle Age, and of the woman-worship

of chivalry. Woman-worship, 'the honour due to the weaker vessel,' is indeed of God, and woe to the nation and to the man in whom it dies. But in the Middle Age, this feeling had no religious root, by which it could connect itself rationally, either with actual wedlock or with the noble yearnings of men's spirits, and it therefore could not but die down into a semi-sensual dream of female-saint-worship, or fantastic idolatry of mere physical beauty, leaving the women themselves an easy prey to the intellectual allurements of the more educated and subtle priesthood.

In Conrad's case, again, I have fancied that I discover in the various notices of his life a noble nature warped and blinded by its unnatural exclusions from those family ties through which we first discern or describe God and our relations to Him, and forced to concentrate his whole faculties in the service, not so much of a God of Truth as of a Catholic system. In his character will be found, I hope, some implicit apology for the failings of such truly great men as Dunstan, Becket, and Dominic, and of many more whom, if we hate, we shall never understand, while we shall be but too likely, in our own way, to copy them.

Walter of Varila, a more fictitious character, represents the 'healthy animalism' of the Teutonic mind, with its mixture of deep earnestness and hearty merriment. His dislike of priestly sentimentalities is no anachronism. Even in his day, a noble lay-religion, founded on faith in the divine and universal symbolism of humanity and nature, was gradually arising, and venting itself,

from time to time, as I conceive, through many most unsuspected channels, through chivalry, through the minne-singers, through the lay inventors, or rather importers, of pointed architecture, through the German school of painting, through the politics of the free towns, till it attained complete freedom in Luther and his associate reformers.

For my fantastic quotations of Scripture, if they shall be deemed irreverent, I can only say, that they were the fashion of the time, from prince to peasant—that there is scarcely one of them with which I have not actually met in the writings of the period—that those writings abound with misuse of Scripture, far more coarse, arbitrary, and ridiculous, than any which I have dared to insert—that I had no right to omit so radical a characteristic of the Middle Age.

For the more coarse and homely passages with which the drama is interspersed, I must make the same apology. I put them there because they were there—because the Middle Age was, in the gross, a coarse, barbarous, and profligate age—because it was necessary, in order to bring out fairly the beauty of the central character, to show 'the crooked and perverse generation' in which she was 'a child of God without rebuke.' It was, in fact, the very ferocity and foulness of the time which, by a natural revulsion, called forth at the same time the Apostolic holiness and the Manichean asceticism of the Mediæval Saints. The world was so bad that, to be Saints at all, they were compelled to go out of the world. It was necessary, moreover, in depicting

the poor man's patroness, to show the material on which she worked; and those who know the poor, know also that we can no more judge truly of their characters in the presence of their benefactors, than we can tell by seeing clay in the potter's hands what it was in its native pit. These scenes have, therefore, been laid principally in Elizabeth's absence, in order to preserve their only use and meaning.

So rough and common a life-picture of the Middle Age will, I am afraid, whether faithful or not, be far from acceptable to those who take their notions of that period principally from such exquisite dreams as the fictions of Fouqué, and of certain moderns whose graceful minds, like some enchanted well,

> In whose calm depths the pure and beautiful
> Alone are mirrored,

are, on account of their very sweetness and simplicity, singularly unfitted to convey any true likeness of the coarse and stormy Middle Age. I have been already accused, by others than Romanists, of profaning this whole subject—*i.e.* of telling the whole truth, pleasant or not, about it. But really, time enough has been lost in ignorant abuse of that period, and time enough also, lately, in blind adoration of it. When shall we learn to see it as it was?—the dawning manhood of Europe—rich with all the tenderness, the simplicity, the enthusiasm of youth—but also darkened, alas! with its full share of youth's precipitance and

extravagance, fierce passions and blind self-will—its virtues and its vices colossal, and, for that very reason, always haunted by the twin-imp of the colossal—the caricatured.

Lastly, the many miraculous stories which the biographer of Elizabeth relates of her, I had no right, for the sake of truth, to interweave in the plot, while it was necessary to indicate at least their existence. I have, therefore, put such of them as seemed least absurd into the mouth of Conrad, to whom, in fact, they owe their original publication, and have done so, as I hope, not without a just ethical purpose.

Such was my idea: of the inconsistencies and short-comings of this its realisation, no one can ever be so painfully sensible as I am already myself. If, however, this book shall cause one Englishman honestly to ask himself, 'I, as a Protestant, have been accustomed to assert the purity and dignity of the offices of husband, wife, and parent. Have I ever examined the grounds of my own assertion? Do I believe them to be as callings from God, spiritual, sacramental, divine, eternal? Or am I at heart regarding and using them, like the Papist, merely as heaven's indulgences to the infirmities of fallen man?'—then will my book have done its work.

If, again, it shall deter one young man from the example of those miserable dilettanti, who in books and sermons are whimpering meagre second-hand praises of celibacy—depreciating as carnal and degrading those family ties to which they owe their own existence, and in the enjoyment of which they

themselves all the while unblushingly indulge—insulting thus their own wives and mothers—nibbling ignorantly at the very root of that household purity which constitutes the distinctive superiority of Protestant over Popish nations—again my book will have done its work.

If, lastly, it shall awaken one pious Protestant to recognise, in some, at least, of the Saints of the Middle Age, beings not only of the same passions, but of the same Lord, the same faith, the same baptism, as themselves, *Protestants*, not the less deep and true, because utterly unconscious and practical—mighty witnesses against the two antichrists of their age—the tyranny of feudal caste, and the phantoms which Popery substitutes for the living Christ—then also will my little book indeed have done its work. C. K.

1848.

CHARACTERS

Elizabeth, *daughter of the King of Hungary*,

Lewis, *Landgrave of Thuringia*, *betrothed to her in childhood.*

Henry, *brother of Lewis.*

Walter *of Varila*, }

Rudolf *the Cupbearer*, }

Leutolf of *Erlstetten*, }

Hartwig *of Erba*, } *Vassals of Lewis.*

Count Hugo, }

Count of Saym, etc. }

Conrad *of Marpurg*, *a Monk*, *the Pope's Commissioner for the suppression of heresy.*

Gerard, *his Chaplain.*

Bishop of Bamberg, *uncle of Elizabeth*, *etc. etc.*

Sophia, *Dowager Landgravine.*

Agnes, *her daughter*, *sister of Lewis.*

Isentrudis, *Elizabeth's nurse.*

Guta, *her favourite maiden.*

Etc. etc. etc

The Scene lies principally in Eisenach, and the Wartburg; changing afterwards to Bamberg, and finally to Marpurg.

PROEM

(EPIMETHEUS)

I

Wake again, Teutonic Father-ages,
  Speak again, beloved primæval creeds;
Flash ancestral spirit from your pages,
  Wake the greedy age to noble deeds.

II

Tell us, how of old our saintly mothers
  Schooled themselves by vigil, fast, and prayer,
Learnt to love as Jesus loved before them,
  While they bore the cross which poor men bear.

III

Tell us how our stout crusading fathers
Fought and died for God, and not for gold;
Let their love, their faith, their boyish daring,
Distance-mellowed, gild the days of old.

IV

Tell us how the sexless workers, thronging,
Angel-tended, round the convent doors,
Wrought to Christian faith and holy order
Savage hearts alike and barren moors.

V

Ye who built the churches where we worship,
Ye who framed the laws by which we move,
Fathers, long belied, and long forsaken,
Oh! forgive the children of your love!

(PROMETHEUS)

I

Speak! but ask us not to be as ye were!
   All but God is changing day by day.
He who breathes on man the plastic spirit
   Bids us mould ourselves its robe of clay.

II

Old anarchic floods of revolution,
   Drowning ill and good alike in night,
Sink, and bare the wrecks of ancient labour,
   Fossil-teeming, to the searching light.

III

There will we find laws, which shall interpret,

Through the simpler past, existing life;
Delving up from mines and fairy caverns
Charmed blades, to cut the age's strife.

IV

What though fogs may stream from draining waters?
We will till the clays to mellow loam;
Wake the graveyard of our fathers' spirits;
Clothe its crumbling mounds with blade and bloom.

V

Old decays but foster new creations;
Bones and ashes feed the golden corn;
Fresh elixirs wander every moment,
Down the veins through which the live past feeds its child, the live unborn.

ACT I

SCENE I. A.D. 1220

The Doorway of a closed Chapel in the Wartburg. Elizabeth sitting on the Steps.

Eliz. Baby Jesus, who dost lie
Far above that stormy sky,
In Thy mother's pure caress,
Stoop and save the motherless.

Happy birds! whom Jesus leaves
Underneath His sheltering eaves;
There they go to play and sleep,
May not I go in to weep?

All without is mean and small,
All within is vast and tall;
All without is harsh and shrill,
All within is hushed and still.

Jesus, let me enter in,
Wrap me safe from noise and sin.
Let me list the angels' songs,
See the picture of Thy wrongs;

Let me kiss Thy wounded feet,
Drink Thine incense, faint and sweet,
While the clear bells call Thee down
From Thine everlasting throne.

At thy door-step low I bend,
Who have neither kin nor friend;
Let me here a shelter find,
Shield the shorn lamb from the wind.

Jesu, Lord, my heart will break:
Save me for Thy great love's sake!

[*Enter* Isentrudis.]

Isen. Aha! I had missed my little bird from the nest,
And judged that she was here. What's this? fie, tears?

Eliz. Go! you despise me like the rest.

Isen. Despise you?
What's here? King Andrew's child? St. John's sworn maid?
Who dares despise you? Out upon these Saxons!
They sang another note when I was younger,
When from the rich East came my queenly pearl,
Lapt on this fluttering heart, while mighty heroes
Rode by her side, and far behind us stretched
The barbs and sumpter mules, a royal train,

Laden with silks and furs, and priceless gems,
Wedges of gold, and furniture of silver,
Fit for my princess.

Eliz. Hush now, I've heard all, nurse,
A thousand times.

Isen. Oh, how their hungry mouths
Did water at the booty! Such a prize,
Since the three Kings came wandering into Cöln,
They ne'er saw, nor their fathers;—well they knew it!
Oh, how they fawned on us! 'Great Isentrudis!'
'Sweet babe!' The Landgravine did thank her saints
As if you, or your silks, had fallen from heaven;
And now she wears your furs, and calls us gipsies.
Come tell your nurse your griefs; we'll weep together,
Strangers in this strange land.

Eliz. I am most friendless.
The Landgravine and Agnes—you may see them
Begrudge the food I eat, and call me friend
Of knaves and serving-maids; the burly knights
Freeze me with cold blue eyes: no saucy page
But points and whispers, 'There goes our pet nun;
Would but her saintship leave her gold behind,
We'd give herself her furlough.' Save me! save me!
All here are ghastly dreams; dead masks of stone,
And you and I, and Guta, only live:
Your eyes alone have souls. I shall go mad!

Oh that they would but leave me all alone
To teach poor girls, and work within my chamber,
With mine own thoughts, and all the gentle angels
Which glance about my dreams at morning-tide!
Then I should be as happy as the birds
Which sing at my bower window. Once I longed
To be beloved,—now would they but forget me!
Most vile I must be, or they could not hate me!

Isen. They are of this world, thou art not, poor child,
Therefore they hate thee, as they did thy betters.

Eliz. But, Lewis, nurse?

Isen. He, child? he is thy knight;
Espoused from childhood: thou hast a claim upon him.
One that thou'lt need, alas!—though, I remember—
'Tis fifteen years agone—when in one cradle
We laid two fair babes for a marriage token;
And when your lips met, then you smiled, and twined
Your little limbs together.—Pray the Saints
That token stand!—He calls thee love and sister,
And brings thee gew-gaws from the wars: that's much!
At least he's thine if thou love him.

Eliz. If I love him?
What is this love? Why, is he not my brother
And I his sister? Till these weary wars,
The one of us without the other never

Did weep or laugh: what is't should change us now?
You shake your head and smile.

Isen. Go to; the chafe
Comes not by wearing chains, but feeling them.

Eliz. Alas! here comes a knight across the court;
Oh, hide me, nurse! What's here? this door is fast.

Isen. Nay, 'tis a friend: he brought my princess hither,
Walter of Varila; I feared him once—
He used to mock our state, and say, good wine
Should want no bush, and that the cage was gay,
But that the bird must sing before he praised it.
Yet he's a kind heart, while his bitter tongue
Awes these court popinjays at times to manners.
He will smile sadly too, when he meets my maiden;
And once he said, he was your liegeman sworn,
Since my lost mistress, weeping, to his charge
Trusted the babe she saw no more.—God help us!

Eliz. How did my mother die, nurse?

Isen. She died, my child.

Eliz. But how? Why turn away?
Too long I've guessed at some dread mystery
I may not hear: and in my restless dreams,
Night after night, sweeps by a frantic rout

Of grinning fiends, fierce horses, bodiless hands,
Which clutch at one to whom my spirit yearns
As to a mother. There's some fearful tie
Between me and that spirit-world, which God
Brands with his terrors on my troubled mind.
Speak! tell me, nurse! is she in heaven or hell?

Isen. God knows, my child: there are masses for her soul
Each day in every Zingar minster sung.

Eliz. But was she holy?—Died she in the Lord?

Isen [weeps]. O God! my child! And if I told thee all,
How couldst thou mend it?

Eliz. Mend it? O my Saviour!
I'd die a saint!
Win heaven for her by prayers, and build great minsters,
Chantries, and hospitals for her; wipe out
By mighty deeds our race's guilt and shame—
But thus, poor witless orphan! [Weeps.]

[Count Walter enters.]

Wal. Ah! my princess! accept your liegeman's knee;
Down, down, rheumatic flesh!

Eliz. Ah! Count Walter! you are too tall to kneel to little girls.

Wal. What? shall two hundredweight of hypocrisy bow down to his four-inch wooden saint, and the same weight of honesty not worship his four-foot live one? And I have a jest for you, shall make my small queen merry and wise.

Isen. You shall jest long before she's merry.

Wal. Ah! dowers and dowagers again! The money—root of all evil.

What comes here? [A Page enters.]

A long-winged grasshopper, all gold, green, and gauze? How these young pea-chicks must needs ape the grown peacock's frippery! Prithee, now, how many such butterflies as you suck here together on the thistle-head of royalty?

Page. Some twelve gentlemen of us, Sir—apostles of the blind archer, Love—owning no divinity but almighty beauty—no faith, no hope, no charity, but those which are kindled at her eyes.

Wal. Saints! what's all this?

Page. Ah, Sir! none but countrymen swear by the saints nowadays: no oaths but allegorical ones, Sir, at the high table; as thus,—'By the sleeve of beauty, Madam;' or again, 'By Love his martyrdoms, Sir Count;' or to a potentate, 'As Jove's imperial mercy shall hear my vows, High Mightiness.'

Wal. Where did the evil one set you on finding all this heathenry?

Page. Oh, we are all barristers of Love's court, Sir; we have Ovid's gay science conned, Sir, *ad unguentum*, as they say, out of the French book.

Wal. So? There are those come from Rome then will whip you and Ovid out with the same rod which the dandies of Provence felt lately to their sorrow. Oh, what blinkards are we gentlemen, to train any dumb beasts more carefully than we do Christians! that a man shall keep his dog-breakers, and his horse-breakers, and his hawk-breakers, and never hire him a boy-breaker or two! that we should live without a qualm at dangling such a flock of mimicking parroquets at our heels a while, and then, when they are well infected, well perfumed with the wind of our vices, dropping them off, as tadpoles do their tails, joint by joint into the mud! to strain at such gnats as an ill-mouthed colt or a riotous puppy, and swallow that camel of camels, a page!

Page. Do you call me a camel, Sir?

Wal. What's your business?

Page. My errand is to the Princess here.

Eliz. To me?

Page. Yes; the Landgravine expects you at high mass; so go in, and mind you clean yourself; for every one is not as fond as you of beggars' brats, and what their clothes leave behind them.

Isen [strikes him]. Monkey! To whom are you speaking?

Eliz. Oh, peace, peace, peace! I'll go with him.

Page. Then be quick, my music-master's waiting. Corpo di Bacco! as if our elders did not teach us to whom we ought to be rude! [Ex. Eliz. and Page.]

Isen. See here, Sir Saxon, how this pearl of price
Is faring in your hands! The peerless image,
To whom this court is but the tawdry frame,—
The speck of light amid its murky baseness,—
The salt which keeps it all from rotting,—cast
To be the common fool,—the laughing stock
For every beardless knave to whet his wit on!
Tar-blooded Germans!—Here's another of them.

[A young Knight enters.]

Knight. Heigh! Count! What? learning to sing psalms? They are waiting
For you in the manage-school, to give your judgment

On that new Norman mare.

Wal. Tell them I'm busy.

Knight. Busy? St. Martin! Knitting stockings, eh?
To clothe the poor withal? Is that your business?
I passed that canting baby on the stairs;
Would heaven that she had tripped, and broke her goose-neck,
And left us heirs *de facto.* So, farewell. [Exit.]

Wal. A very pretty quarrel! matter enough
To spoil a waggon-load of ash-staves on,
And break a dozen fools' backs across their cantlets.
What's Lewis doing?

Isen. Oh—befooled,—
Bewitched with dogs and horses, like an idiot
Clutching his bauble, while a priceless jewel
Sticks at his miry heels.

Wal. The boy's no fool,—
As good a heart as hers, but somewhat given
To hunt the nearest butterfly, and light
The fire of fancy without hanging o'er it
The porridge-pot of practice. He shall hear or—

Isen. And quickly, for there's treason in the wind.
They'll keep her dower, and send her home with shame

Before the year's out.

Wal. Humph! Some are rogues enough for't.
As it falls out, I ride with him to-day.

Isen. Upon what business?

Wal. Some shaveling has been telling him that there are heretics on his land: Stadings, worshippers of black cats, baby-eaters, and such like. He consulted me; I told him it would be time enough to see to the heretics when all the good Christians had been well looked after. I suppose the novelty of the thing smit him, for now nothing will serve but I must ride with him round half a dozen hamlets, where, with God's help, I will show him a mansty or two, that shall astonish his delicate chivalry.

Isen. Oh, here's your time! Speak to him, noble Walter.
Stun his dull ears with praises of her grace;
Prick his dull heart with shame at his own coldness.
Oh right us, Count.

Wal. I will, I will: go in
And dry your eyes. [Exeunt separately.]

SCENE II

A Landscape in Thuringia. Lewis and Walter riding.

Lewis. So all these lands are mine; these yellow meads—
These village greens, and forest-fretted hills,
With dizzy castles crowned. Mine! Why that word
Is rich in promise, in the action bankrupt.
What faculty of mine, save dream-fed pride,
Can these things fatten? Mass! I had forgot:
I have a right to bark at trespassers.
Rare privilege! While every fowl and bush,
According to its destiny and nature
(Which were they truly mine, my power could alter),
Will live, and grow, and take no thought of me.
Those firs, before whose stealthy-marching ranks
The world-old oaks still dwindle and retreat,
If I could stay their poisoned frown, which cows
The pale shrunk underwood, and nestled seeds
Into an age of sleep, 'twere something: and those men
O'er whom that one word 'ownership' uprears me—
If I could make them lift a finger up
But of their own free will, I'd own my seizin.
But now—when if I sold them, life and limb,
There's not a sow would litter one pig less
Than when men called her mine.—Possession's naught;
A parchment ghost; a word I am ashamed

To claim even here, lest all the forest spirits,
And bees who drain unasked the free-born flowers,
Should mock, and cry, 'Vain man, not thine, but ours.'

Wal. Possession's naught? Possession's beef and ale—
Soft bed, fair wife, gay horse, good steel.—Are they naught?
Possession means to sit astride of the world,
Instead of having it astride of you;
Is that naught? 'Tis the easiest trade of all too;
For he that's fit for nothing else, is fit
To own good land, and on the slowest dolt
His state sits easiest, while his serfs thrive best.

Lewis. How now? What need then of long discipline,
Not to mere feats of arms, but feats of soul;
To courtesies and high self-sacrifice,
To order and obedience, and the grace
Which makes commands, requests, and service, favour?
To faith and prayer, and pure thoughts, ever turned
To that Valhalla, where the virgin saints
And stainless heroes tend the Queen of heaven?
Why these, if I but need, like stalled ox
To chew the grass cut for me?

Wal. Why? Because
I have trained thee for a knight, boy, not a ruler.
All callings want their proper 'prentice time
But this of ruling; it comes by mother-wit;
And if the wit be not exceeding great,

'Tis best the wit be most exceeding small;
And he that holds the reins should let the horse
Range on, feed where he will, live and let live.
Custom and selfishness will keep all steady
For half a life.—Six months before you die
You may begin to think of interfering.

Lewis. Alas! while each day blackens with fresh clouds,
Complaints of ague, fever, crumbling huts,
Of land thrown out to the forest, game and keepers,
Bailiffs and barons, plundering all alike;
Need, greed, stupidity: To clear such ruin
Would task the rich prime of some noble hero—
But can I nothing do?

Wal. Oh! plenty, Sir;
Which no man yet has done or e'er will do.
It rests with you, whether the priest be honoured;
It rests with you, whether the knight be knightly;
It rests with you, whether those fields grow corn;
It rests with you, whether those toiling peasants
Lift to their masters free and loyal eyes,
Or crawl, like jaded hacks, to welcome graves.
It rests with you—and will rest.

Lewis. I'll crowd my court and dais with men of God,
As doth my peerless namesake, King of France.

Wal. Priests, Sir? The Frenchman keeps two counsellors

Worth any drove of priests.

Lewis. And who are they?

Wal. God and his lady-love, [aside] He'll open at that—

Lewis. I could be that man's squire.

Wal [aside] Again run riot—
Now for another cast, [aloud] If you'd sleep sound, Sir,
You'll let priests pray for you, but school you never.

Lewis. Mass! who more fitted?

Wal. None, if you could trust them;
But they are the people's creatures; poor men give them
Their power at the church, and take it back at the ale-house:
Then what's the friar to the starving peasant?
Just what the abbot is to the greedy noble—
A scarecrow to lear wolves. Go ask the church plate,
Safe in knights' cellars, how these priests are feared.
Bruised reeds when you most need them.—No, my Lord;
Copy them, trust them never.

Lewis. Copy? wherein?

Wal. In letting every man
Do what he likes, and only seeing he does it
As you do your work—well. That's the Church secret

For breeding towns, as fast as you breed roe-deer;
Example, but not meddling. See that hollow—
I knew it once all heath, and deep peat-bog—
I drowned a black mare in that self-same spot
Hunting with your good father: Well, he gave
One jovial night, to six poor Erfurt monks—
Six picked-visaged, wan, bird-fingered wights—
All in their rough hair shirts, like hedgehogs starved—
I told them, six weeks' work would break their hearts:
They answered, Christ would help, and Christ's great mother,
And make them strong when weakest: So they settled:
And starved and froze.

Lewis. And dug and built, it seems.

Wal. Faith, that's true. See—as garden walls draw snails,
They have drawn a hamlet round; the slopes are blue,
Knee-deep with flax, the orchard boughs are breaking
With strange outlandish fruits. See those young rogues
Marching to school; no poachers here, Lord Landgrave,—
Too much to be done at home; there's not a village
Of yours, now, thrives like this. By God's good help
These men have made their ownership worth something.
Here comes one of them.

Lewis. I would speak to him—
And learn his secret.—We'll await him here.

[Enter Conrad.]

Con. Peace to you, reverend and war-worn knight,
And you, fair youth, upon whose swarthy lip
Blooms the rich promise of a noble manhood.
Methinks, if simple monks may read your thoughts,
That with no envious or distasteful eyes
Ye watch the labours of God's poor elect.

Wal. Why—we were saying, how you cunning rooks
Pitch as by instinct on the fattest fallows.

Con. For He who feeds the ravens, promiseth
Our bread and water sure, and leads us on
By peaceful streams in pastures green to lie,
Beneath our Shepherd's eye.

Lewis. In such a nook, now,
To nestle from this noisy world—

Con. And drop
The burden of thyself upon the threshold.

Lewis. Think what rich dreams may haunt those lowly roofs!

Con. Rich dreams,—and more; their dreams will find fulfilment—
Their discipline breeds strength—'Tis we alone
Can join the patience of the labouring ox
Unto the eagle's foresight,—not a fancy

Of ours, but grows in time to mighty deeds;
Victories in heavenly warfare: but yours, yours, Sir,
Oh, choke them, choke the panting hopes of youth,
Ere they be born, and wither in slow pains,
Cast by for the next bauble!

Lewis. 'Tis too true!
I dread no toil; toil is the true knight's pastime—
Faith fails, the will intense and fixed, so easy
To thee, cut off from life and love, whose powers
In one close channel must condense their stream:
But I, to whom this life blooms rich and busy,
Whose heart goes out a-Maying all the year
In this new Eden—in my fitful thought
What skill is there, to turn my faith to sight—
To pierce blank Heaven, like some trained falconer
After his game, beyond all human ken?

Wal. And walk into the bog beneath your feet.

Con. And change it to firm land by magic step!
Build there cloud-cleaving spires, beneath whose shade
Great cities rise for vassals; to call forth
From plough and loom the rank unlettered hinds,
And make them saints and heroes—send them forth
To sway with heavenly craft the spirit of princes;
Change nations' destinies, and conquer worlds
With love, more mighty than the sword; what, Count?
Art thou ambitious? practical? we monks

Can teach you somewhat there too.

Lewis. Be it so;
But love you have forsworn; and what were life
Without that chivalry, which bends man's knees
Before God's image and his glory, best
Revealed in woman's beauty?

Con. Ah! poor worldlings!
Little you dream what maddening ecstasies,
What rich ideals haunt, by day and night,
Alone, and in the crowd, even to the death,
The servitors of that celestial court
Where peerless Mary, sun-enthroned, reigns,
In whom all Eden dreams of womanhood,
All grace of form, hue, sound, all beauty strewn
Like pearls unstrung, about this ruined world,
Have their fulfilment and their archetype.
Why hath the rose its scent, the lily grace?
To mirror forth her loveliness, from whom,
Primeval fount of grace, their livery came:
Pattern of Seraphs! only worthy ark
To bear her God athwart the floods of time!

Lewis. Who dare aspire to her? Alas, not I!
To me she is a doctrine, and a picture:—
I cannot live on dreams.

Con. She hath her train:—

There thou may'st choose thy love: If world-wide lore
Shall please thee, and the Cherub's glance of fire,
Let Catharine lift thy soul, and rapt with her
Question the mighty dead, until thou float
Tranced on the ethereal ocean of her spirit.
If pity father passion in thee, hang
Above Eulalia's tortured loveliness;
And for her sake, and in her strength, go forth
To do and suffer greatly. Dost thou long
For some rich heart, as deep in love as weakness,
Whose wild simplicity sweet heaven-born instincts
Alone keep sane?

Lewis. I do, I do. I'd live
And die for each and all the three.

Con. Then go—
Entangled in the Magdalen's tresses lie;
Dream hours before her picture, till thy lips
Dare to approach her feet, and thou shalt start
To find the canvas warm with life, and matter
A moment transubstantiate to heaven.
Wal. Ay, catch his fever, Sir, and learn to take
An indigestion for a troop of angels.
Come, tell him, monk, about your magic gardens,
Where not a stringy head of kale is cut
But breeds a vision or a revelation.

Lewis. Hush, hush, Count! Speak, strange monk, strange

words, and waken
Longings more strange than either.

Con. Then, if proved,
As I dare vouch thee, loyal in thy love,
Even to the Queen herself thy saintlier soul
At length may soar: perchance—Oh, bliss too great
For thought—yet possible!
Receive some token—smile—or hallowing touch
Of that white hand, beneath whose soft caress
The raging world is smoothed, and runs its course
To shadow forth her glory.

Lewis. Thou dost tempt me—
That were a knightly quest.

Con. Ay, here's true love.
Love's heaven, without its hell; the golden fruit
Without the foul husk, which at Adam's fall
Did crust it o'er with filth and selfishness.
I tempt thee heavenward—from yon azure walls
Unearthly beauties beckon—God's own mother
Waits longing for thy choice—

Lewis. Is this a dream?

Wal. Ay, by the Living Lord, who died for you!
Will you be cozened, Sir, by these air-blown fancies,
These male hysterics, by starvation bred

And huge conceit? Cast off God's gift of manhood,
And, like the dog in the adage, drop the true bone
With snapping at the sham one in the water?
What were you born a man for?

Lewis. Ay, I know it:—
I cannot live on dreams. Oh for one friend,
Myself, yet not myself; one not so high
But she could love me, not too pure to pardon
My sloth and meanness! Oh for flesh and blood,
Before whose feet I could adore, yet love!
How easy then were duty! From her lips
To learn my daily task;—in her pure eyes
To see the living type of those heaven-glories
I dare not look on;—let her work her will
Of love and wisdom on these straining hinds;—
To squire a saint around her labour field,
And she and it both mine:—That were possession!

Con. The flesh, fair youth—

Wal. Avaunt, bald snake, avaunt!
We are past your burrow now. Come, come, Lord Landgrave,
Look round, and find your saint.

Lewis. Alas! one such—
One such, I know, who upward from one cradle
Beside me like a sister—No, thank God! no sister!—
Has grown and grown, and with her mellow shade

Has blanched my thornless thoughts to her own hue,
And even now is budding into blossom,
Which never shall bear fruit, but inward still
Resorb its vital nectar, self-contained,
And leave no living copies of its beauty
To after ages. Ah! be less, sweet maid,
Less than thyself! Yet no—my wife thou might'st be,
If less than thus—but not the saint thou art.
What! shall my selfish longings drag thee down
From maid to wife? degrade the soul I worship?
That were a caitiff deed! Oh, misery!
Is wedlock treason to that purity,
Which is the jewel and the soul of wedlock?
Elizabeth! my saint! [Exit Conrad.]

Wal. What, Sir? the Princess?
Ye saints in heaven, I thank you!

Lewis. Oh, who else,
Who else the minutest lineament fulfils
Of this my cherished portrait?

Wal. So—'tis well.
Hear me, my Lord.—You think this dainty princess
Too perfect for you, eh? That's well again;
For that whose price after fruition falls
May well too high be rated ere enjoyed—
In plain words,—if she looks an angel now, you will be

better mated than you expected, when you find her—a woman.

For flesh and blood she is, and that young blood,—whom her childish misusage and your brotherly love; her loneliness and your protection; her springing fancy and (for I may speak to you as a son) your beauty and knightly grace, have so bewitched, and as some say, degraded, that briefly, she loves you, and briefly, better, her few friends fear, than you love her.

Lewis. Loves me! My Count, that word is quickly spoken;
And yet, if it be true, it thrusts me forth
Upon a shoreless sea of untried passion,
From whence is no return.

Wal. By Siegfried's sword,
My words are true, and I came here to say them,
To thee, my son in all but blood.
Mass, I'm no gossip. Why? What ails the boy?

Lewis. Loves me! Henceforth let no man, peering down
Through the dim glittering mine of future years,
Say to himself 'Too much! this cannot be!'
To-day, and custom, wall up our horizon:
Before the hourly miracle of life
Blindfold we stand, and sigh, as though God were not.
I have wandered in the mountains, mist-bewildered,
And now a breeze comes, and the veil is lifted,
And priceless flowers, o'er which I trod unheeding,
Gleam ready for my grasp. She loves me then!

She who to me was as a nightingale
That sings in magic gardens, rock-beleaguered,
To passing angels melancholy music—
Whose dark eyes hung, like far-off evening stars,
Through rosy-cushioned windows coldly shining
Down from the cloud-world of her unknown fancy—
She, for whom holiest touch of holiest knight
Seemed all too gross—who might have been a saint
And companied with angels—thus to pluck
The spotless rose of her own maidenhood
To give it unto me!

Wal. You love her then?

Lewis. Look! if yon solid mountain were all gold,
And each particular tree a band of jewels,
And from its womb the Niebelungen hoard
With elfin wardens called me, 'Leave thy love
And be our Master'—I would turn away—
And know no wealth but her.

Wal. Shall I say this to her?
I am no carrier pigeon, Sir, by breed,
But now, between her friends and persecutors,
My life's a burden.

Lewis. Persecutors! Who?
Alas! I guess it—I had known my mother
Too light for that fair saint,—but who else dare wink

When she is by? My knights?

Wal. To a man, my Lord.

Lewis. Here's chivalry! Well, that's soon brought to bar.
The quarrel's mine; my lance shall clear that stain.

Wal. Quarrel with your knights? Cut your own chair-legs off!
They do but sail with the stream. Her passion, Sir,
Broke shell and ran out twittering before yours did,
And unrequited love is mortal sin
With this chaste world. My boy, my boy, I tell you,
The fault lies nearer home.

Lewis. I have played the coward—
And in the sloth of false humility,
Cast by the pearl I dared not to deserve.
How laggard I must seem to her, though she love me;
Playing with hawks and hounds, while she sits weeping!
'Tis not too late.

Wal. Too late, my royal eyas?
You shall strike this deer yourself at gaze ere long—
She has no mind to slip to cover.

Lewis. Come—
We'll back—we'll back; and you shall bear the message;
I am ashamed to speak. Tell her I love her—

That I should need to tell her! Say, my coyness
Was bred of worship, not of coldness.

Wal. Then the serfs
Must wait?

Lewis. Why not? This day to them, too, blessing brings,
Which clears from envious webs their guardian angel's wings.
[Exeunt.]

SCENE III

A Chamber in the Castle. Sophia, Elizabeth, Agnes, Isentrude, etc., *re-entering.*

Soph. What! you will not? You hear, Dame Isentrude,
She will not wear her coronet in the church,
Because, forsooth, the crucifix within
Is crowned with thorns. You hear her.

Eliz. Noble mother!
How could I flaunt this bauble in His face
Who hung there, naked, bleeding, all for me—
I felt it shamelessness to go so gay.

Soph. Felt? What then? Every foolish wench has feelings
In these religious days, and thinks it carnal
To wash her dishes, and obey her parents—
No wonder they ape you, if you ape them—
Go to! I hate this humble-minded pride,
Self-willed submission—to your own pert fancies;
This fog-bred mushroom-spawn of brain-sick wits,
Who make their oddities their test for grace,
And peer about to catch the general eye;
Ah! I have watched you throw your playmates down
To have the pleasure of kneeling for their pardon.
Here's sanctity—to shame your cousin and me—

Spurn rank and proper pride, and decency;—
If God has made you noble, use your rank,
If you but know how. You Landgravine? You mated
With gentle Lewis? Why, belike you'll cowl him,
As that stern prude, your aunt, cowled her poor spouse;
No—one Hedwiga at a time's enough,—
My son shall die no monk.

Isen. Beseech you, Madam,—
Weep not, my darling.

Soph. Tut—I'll speak my mind.
We'll have no saints. Thank heaven, my saintliness
Ne'er troubled my good man, by day or night.
We'll have no saints, I say; far better for you,
And no doubt pleasanter—You know your place—
At least you know your place,—to take to cloisters,
And there sit carding wool, and mumbling Latin,
With sour old maids, and maundering Magdalens,
Proud of your frost-kibed feet, and dirty serge.
There's nothing noble in you, but your blood;
And that one almost doubts. Who art thou, child?

Isen. The daughter, please your highness,
Of Andreas, King of Hungary, your better;
And your son's spouse.

Soph. I had forgotten, truly—
And you, Dame Isentrudis, are her servant,

And mine: come, Agnes, leave the gipsy ladies
To say their prayers, and set the Saints the fashion.

[Sophia and Agnes go out.]

Isen. Proud hussy! Thou shalt set thy foot on her neck yet, darling,
When thou art Landgravine.

Eliz. And when will that be?
No, she speaks truth! I should have been a nun.
These are the wages of my cowardice,—
Too weak to face the world, too weak to leave it!

Guta. I'll take the veil with you.

Eliz. 'Twere but a moment's work,—
To slip into the convent there below,
And be at peace for ever. And you, my nurse?

Isen. I will go with thee, child, where'er thou goest.
But Lewis?

Eliz. Ah! my brother! No, I dare not—
I dare not turn for ever from this hope,
Though it be dwindled to a thread of mist.
Oh that we two could flee and leave this Babel!
Oh if he were but some poor chapel-priest,

In lonely mountain valleys far away;
And I his serving-maid, to work his vestments,
And dress his scrap of food, and see him stand
Before the altar like a rainbowed saint;
To take the blessed wafer from his hand,
Confess my heart to him, and all night long
Pray for him while he slept, or through the lattice
Watch while he read, and see the holy thoughts
Swell in his big deep eyes!—Alas! that dream
Is wilder than the one that's fading even now!
Who's here? [A Page enters.]

Page. The Count of Varila, Madam, begs permission to speak with you.

Eliz. With me? What's this new terror?
Tell him I wait him.

Isen [aside]. Ah! my old heart sinks—
God send us rescue! Here the champion comes.

[Count Walter enters.]

Wal. Most learned, fair, and sanctimonious Princess—
Plague, what comes next? I had something orthodox ready;
'Tis dropped out by the way.—Mass! here's the pith on't.—
Madam, I come a-wooing; and for one
Who is as only worthy of your love,
As you of his; he bids me claim the spousals

Made long ago between you,—and yet leaves
Your fancy free, to grant or pass that claim:
And being that Mercury is not my planet,
He hath advised himself to set herein,
With pen and ink, what seemed good to him,
As passport to this jewelled mirror, pledge
Unworthy of his worship. [Gives a letter and jewel.]

Isen. Nunc Domine dimittis servam tuam!

[Elizabeth looks over the letter and casket, claps her hands and bursts into childish laughter.]

Why here's my Christmas tree come after Lent—
Espousals? pledges? by our childish love?
Pretty words for folks to think of at the wars,—
And pretty presents come of them! Look, Guta!
A crystal clear, and carven on the reverse
The blessed rood. He told me once—one night,
When we did sit in the garden—What was I saying?

Wal. My fairest Princess, as ambassador,
What shall I answer?

Eliz. Tell him—tell him—God!
Have I grown mad, or a child, within the moment?
The earth has lost her gray sad hue, and blazes
With her old life-light; hark! yon wind's a song—
Those clouds are angels' robes.—That fiery west

Is paved with smiling faces.—I am a woman,
And all things bid me love! my dignity
Is thus to cast my virgin pride away;
And find my strength in weakness.—Busy brain!
Thou keep'st pace with my heart; old lore, old fancies,
Buried for years, leap from their tombs, and proffer
Their magic service to my new-born spirit.
I'll go—I am not mistress of myself—
Send for him—bring him to me—he is mine! [Exit.]

Isen. Ah! blessed Saints! how changed upon the moment!
She is grown taller, trust me, and her eye
Flames like a fresh-caught hind's. She that was christened
A brown mouse for her stillness! Good my Lord!
Now shall mine old bones see the grave in peace!

SCENE IV

The Bridal Feast. Elizabeth, Lewis, Sophia, and Company seated at the Dais table. Court Minstrel and Court Fool sitting on the Dais steps.

Min. How gaily smile the heavens,
The light winds whisper gay;
For royal birth and knightly worth
Are knit to one to-day.

Fool [drowning his voice].
So we'll flatter them up, and we'll cocker them up,
Till we turn young brains;
And pamper the brach till we make her a wolf,
And get bit by the legs for our pains.

Monks [chanting without].
A fastu et superbiâ
Domine libera nos.

Min. 'Neath sandal red and samité,
Are knights and ladies set;
The henchmen tall stride through the hall,
The board with wine is wet.

Fool. Oh! merrily growls the starving hind,

At my full skin;
And merrily howl wolf, wind, and owl,
While I lie warm within.

Monks. A luxu et avaritiâ
Domine libera nos.

Min. Hark! from the bridal bower,
Rings out the bridesmaid's song;
"Tis the mystic hour of an untried power,
The bride she tarries long.'

Fool. She's schooling herself and she's steeling herself,
Against the dreary day,
When she'll pine and sigh from her lattice high
For the knight that's far away.

Monks. A carnis illectamentis
Domine libera nos.

Min. Blest maid! fresh roses o'er thee
The careless years shall fling;
While days and nights shall new delights
To sense and fancy bring.

Fool. Satins and silks, and feathers and lace,
Will gild life's pill;
In jewels and gold folks cannot grow old,
Fine ladies will never fall ill.

Monks. A vanitatibus sæculi
Domine libera nos.

[Sophia descends from the Dais, leading Elizabeth. Ladies follow.]

Sophia [to the Fool]. Silence, you screech-owl.—
Come strew flowers, fair ladies,
And lead into her bower our fairest bride,
The cynosure of love and beauty here,
Who shrines heaven's graces in earth's richest casket.

Eliz. I come, [aside] Here, Guta, take those monks a fee—
Tell them I thank them—bid them pray for me.
I am half mazed with trembling joy within,
And noisy wassail round. 'Tis well, for else
The spectre of my duties and my dangers
Would whelm my heart with terror. Ah! poor self!
Thou took'st this for the term and bourne of troubles—
And now 'tis here, thou findest it the gate
Of new sin-cursed infinities of labour,
Where thou must do, or die!

[aloud] Lead on. I'll follow. [Exeunt.]

Fool. There, now. No fee for the fool; and yet my prescription was as good as those old Jeremies'. But in law, physic, and

divinity, folks had sooner be poisoned in Latin, than saved in the mother-tongue.

ACT II

SCENE I. A.D. 1221-27

Elizabeth's Bower. Night. Lewis sleeping in an Alcove. Elizabeth lying on the Floor in the Foreground.

Eliz. No streak yet in the blank and eyeless east—
More weary hours to ache, and smart, and shiver
On these bare boards, within a step of bliss.
Why peevish? 'Tis mine own will keeps me here—
And yet I hate myself for that same will:
Fightings within and out! How easy 'twere, now,
Just to be like the rest, and let life run—
To use up to the rind what joys God sends us,
Not thus forestall His rod: What! and so lose
The strength which comes by suffering? Well, if grief
Be gain, mine's double—fleeing thus the snare
Of yon luxurious and unnerving down,
And widowed from mine Eden. And why widowed?
Because they tell me, love is of the flesh,
And that's our house-bred foe, the adder in our bosoms,
Which warmed to life, will sting us. They must know—
I do confess mine ignorance, O Lord!
Mine earnest will these painful limbs may prove.
. . . . .

And yet I swore to love him.—So I do
No more than I have sworn. Am I to blame
If God makes wedlock that, which if it be not,
It were a shame for modest lips to speak it,
And silly doves are better mates than we?
And yet our love is Jesus' due,—and all things
Which share with Him divided empery
Are snares and idols—'To love, to cherish, and to obey!'
. . . . .
O deadly riddle! Rent and twofold life!
O cruel troth! To keep thee or to break thee
Alike seems sin! O thou beloved tempter,

[Turning toward the bed.]

Who first didst teach me love, why on thyself
From God divert thy lesson? Wilt provoke Him?
What if mine heavenly Spouse in jealous ire
Should smite mine earthly spouse? Have I two husbands?
The words are horror—yet they are orthodox!

[Rises and goes to the window.]

How many many brows of happy lovers
The fragrant lips of night even now are kissing!
Some wandering hand in hand through arched lanes;
Some listening for loved voices at the lattice;
Some steeped in dainty dreams of untried bliss;
Some nestling soft and deep in well-known arms,

Whose touch makes sleep rich life. The very birds
Within their nests are wooing! So much love!
All seek their mates, or finding, rest in peace;
The earth seems one vast bride-bed. Doth God tempt us?
Is't all a veil to blind our eyes from him?
A fire-fly at the candle. 'Tis love leads him;
Love's light, and light is love: O Eden! Eden!
Eve was a virgin there, they say; God knows.
Must all this be as it had never been?
Is it all a fleeting type of higher love?
Why, if the lesson's pure, is not the teacher
Pure also? Is it my shame to feel no shame?
Am I more clean, the more I scent uncleanness?
Shall base emotions picture Christ's embrace?
Rest, rest, torn heart! Yet where? in earth or heaven?
Still, from out the bright abysses, gleams our Lady's silver footstool,
Still the light-world sleeps beyond her, though the night-clouds fleet below.
Oh that I were walking, far above, upon that dappled pavement,
Heaven's floor, which is the ceiling of the dungeon where we lie.
Ah, what blessed Saints might meet me, on that platform, sliding silent,
Past us in its airy travels, angel-wafted, mystical!
They perhaps might tell me all things, opening up the secret fountains
Which now struggle, dark and turbid, through their dreary

prison clay.
Love! art thou an earth-born streamlet, that thou seek'st the lowest hollows?
Sure some vapours float up from thee, mingling with the highest blue.
Spirit-love in spirit-bodies, melted into one existence—
Joining praises through the ages—Is it all a minstrel's dream?
Alas! he wakes. [Lewis rises.]

Lewis. Ah! faithless beauty,
Is this your promise, that whene'er you prayed
I should be still the partner of your vigils,
And learn from you to pray? Last night I lay dissembling
When she who woke you, took my feet for yours:
Now I shall seize my lawful prize perforce.
Alas! what's this? These shoulders' cushioned ice,
And thin soft flanks, with purple lashes all,
And weeping furrows traced! Ah! precious life-blood!
Who has done this?

Eliz. Forgive! 'twas I—my maidens—

Lewis. O ruthless hags!

Eliz. Not so, not so—They wept
When I did bid them, as I bid thee now
To think of nought but love.

Lewis. Elizabeth!

Speak! I will know the meaning of this madness!

Eliz. Beloved, thou hast heard how godly souls,
In every age, have tamed the rebel flesh
By such sharp lessons. I must tread their paths,
If I would climb the mountains where they rest.
Grief is the gate of bliss—why wedlock—knighthood—
A mother's joy—a hard-earned field of glory—
By tribulation come—so doth God's kingdom.

Lewis. But doleful nights, and self-inflicted tortures—
Are these the love of God? Is He well pleased
With this stern holocaust of health and joy?

Eliz. What! Am I not as gay a lady-love
As ever clipt in arms a noble knight?
Am I not blithe as bird the live-long day?
It pleases me to bear what you call pain,
Therefore to me 'tis pleasure: joy and grief
Are the will's creatures; martyrs kiss the stake—
The moorland colt enjoys the thorny furze—
The dullest boor will seek a fight, and count
His pleasure by his wounds; you must forget, love,
Eve's curse lays suffering, as their natural lot,
On womankind, till custom makes it light.
I know the use of pain: bar not the leech
Because his cure is bitter—'Tis such medicine
Which breeds that paltry strength, that weak devotion,
For which you say you love me.—Ay, which brings

Even when most sharp, a stern and awful joy
As its attendant angel—I'll say no more—
Not even to thee—command, and I'll obey thee.

Lewis. Thou casket of all graces! fourfold wonder
Of wit and beauty, love and wisdom! Canst thou
Beatify the ascetic's savagery
To heavenly prudence? Horror melts to pity,
And pity kindles to adoring shower
Of radiant tears! Thou tender cruelty!
Gay smiling martyrdom! Shall I forbid thee?
Limit thy depth by mine own shallowness?
Thy courage by my weakness? Where thou darest,
I'll shudder and submit. I kneel here spell-bound
Before my bleeding Saviour's living likeness
To worship, not to cavil: I had dreamt of such things,
Dim heard in legends, while my pitiful blood
Tingled through every vein, and wept, and swore
'Twas beautiful, 'twas Christ-like—had I thought
That thou wert such:—

Eliz. You would have loved me still?

Lewis. I have gone mad, I think, at every parting
At mine own terrors for thee. No; I'll learn to glory
In that which makes thee glorious! Noble stains!
I'll call them rose leaves out of paradise
Strewn on the wreathed snows, or rubies dropped
From martyrs' diadems, prints of Jesus' cross

Too truly borne, alas!

Eliz. I think, mine own,
I am forgiven at last?

Lewis. To-night, my sister—
Henceforth I'll clasp thee to my heart so fast
Thou shalt not 'scape unnoticed.

Eliz [laughing] We shall see—
Now I must stop those wise lips with a kiss,
And lead thee back to scenes of simpler bliss.

SCENE II

A Chamber in the Castle. Elizabeth—the Fool Isentrudis—Guta singing.

High among the lonely hills,
While I lay beside my sheep,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.