



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.



TAYLOR
INSTITUTION
LIBRARY
OXFORD
VOLTAIRE ROOM

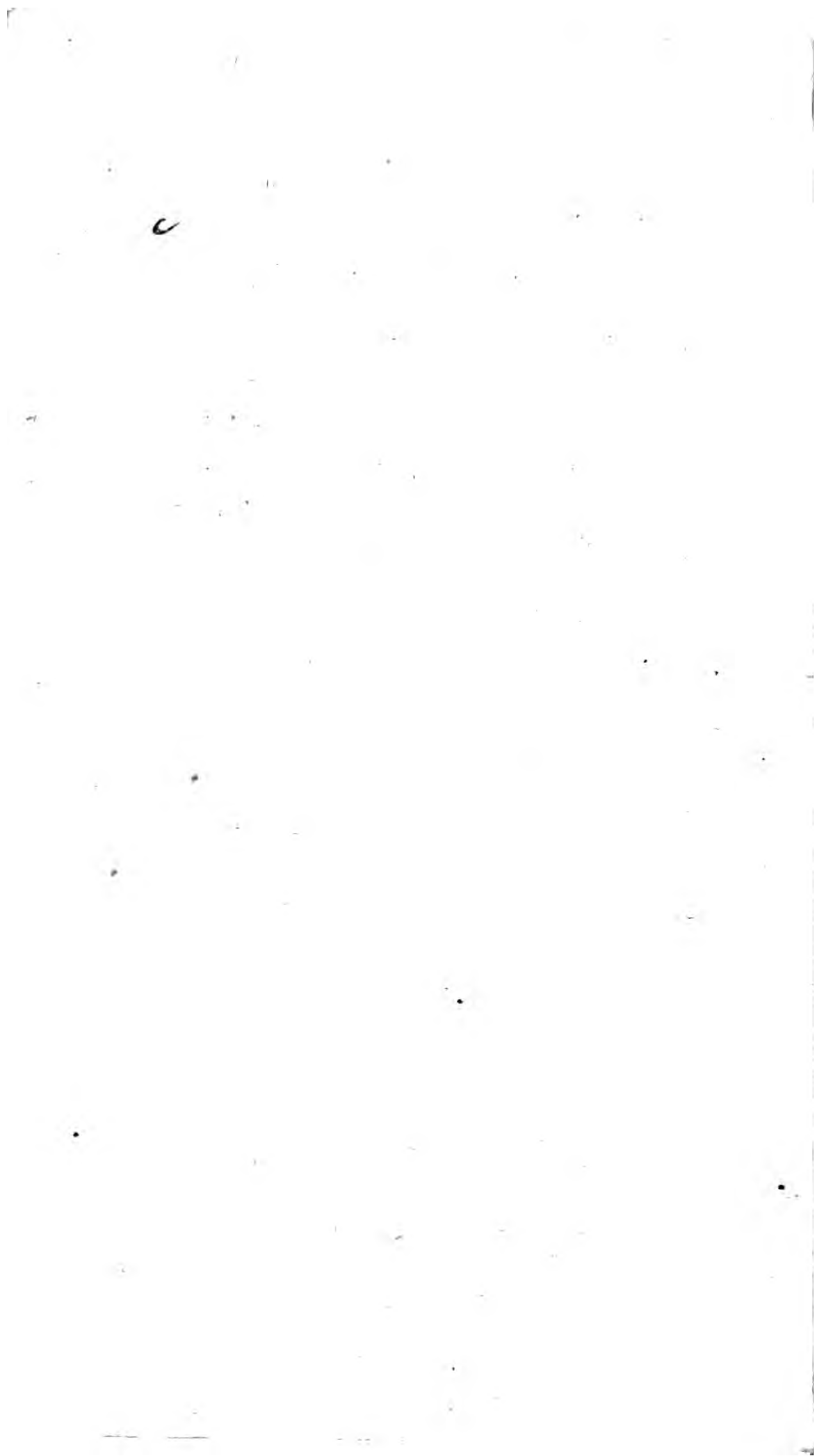


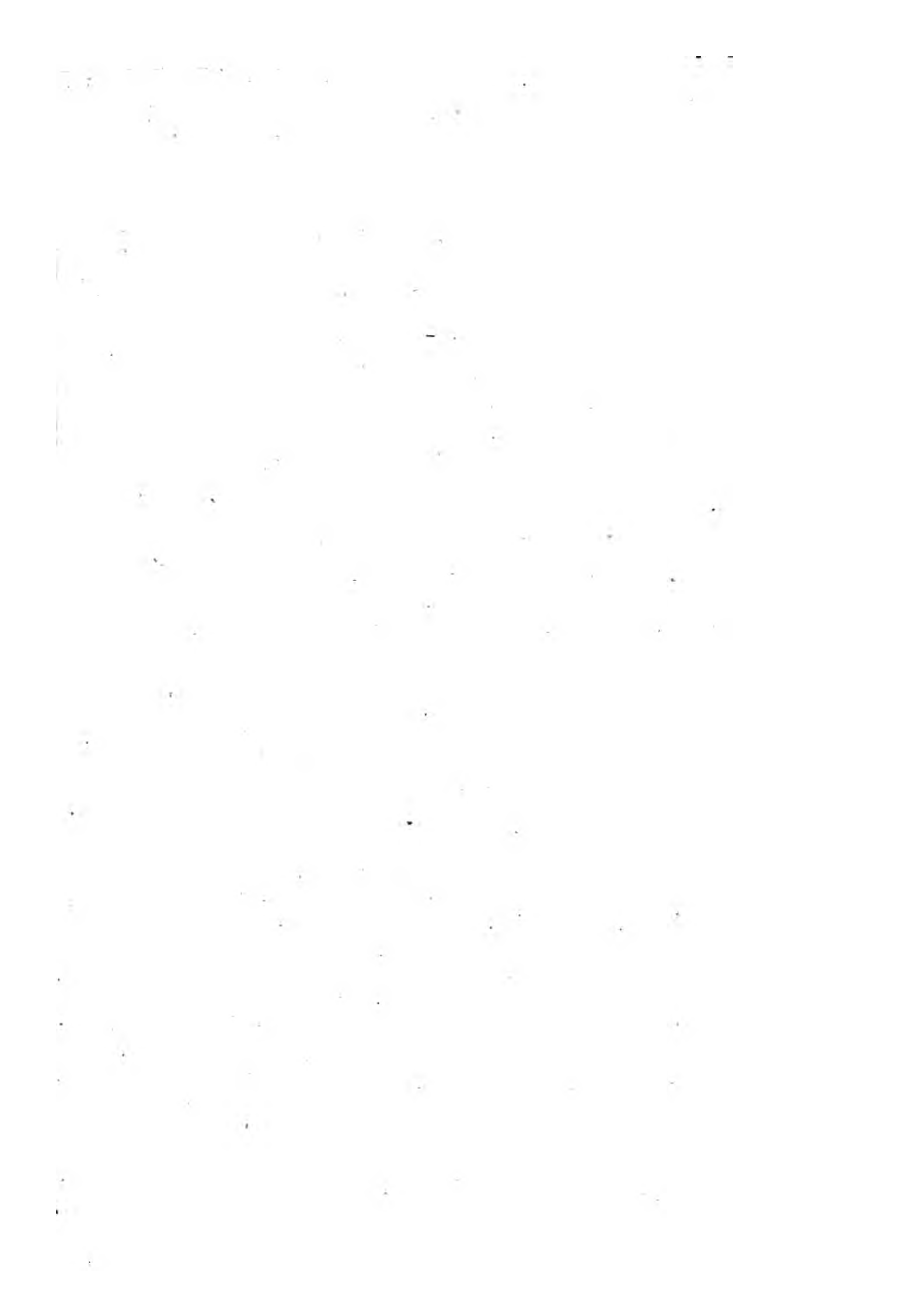
Theodore Besterman gift

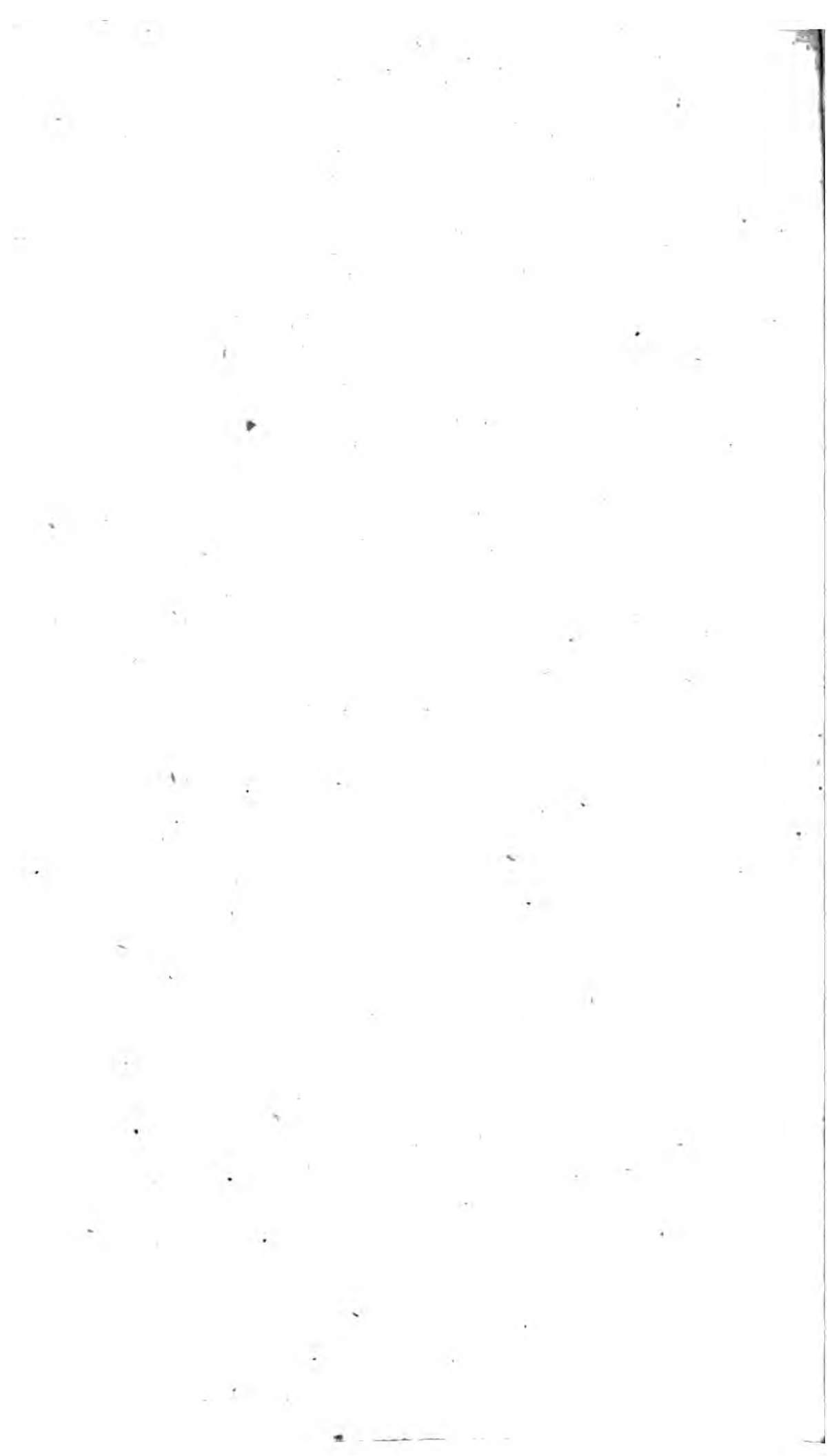
~~VI.E1761~~

59 A.15











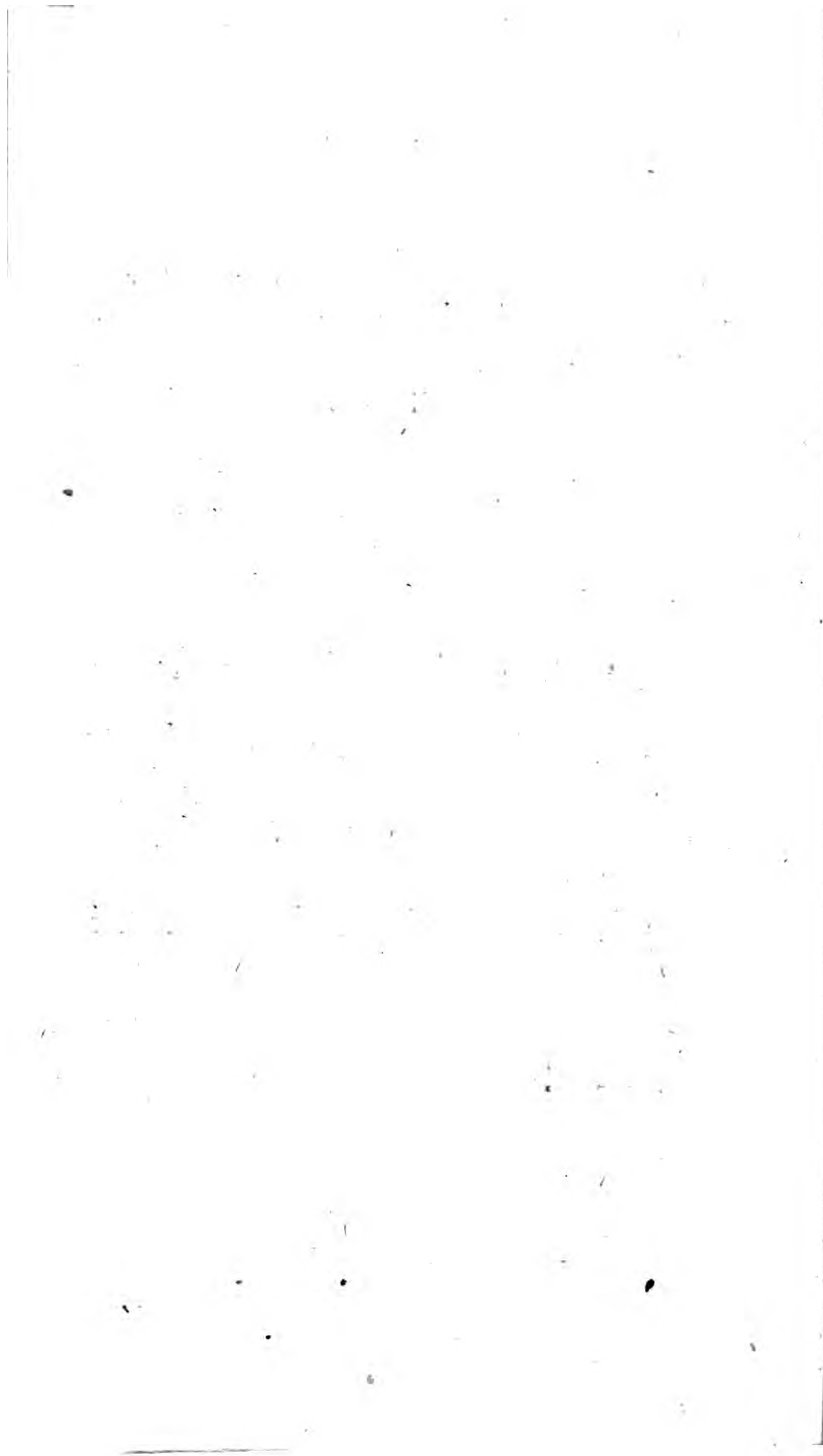
THE
WORKS
OF
VOLTAIRE.

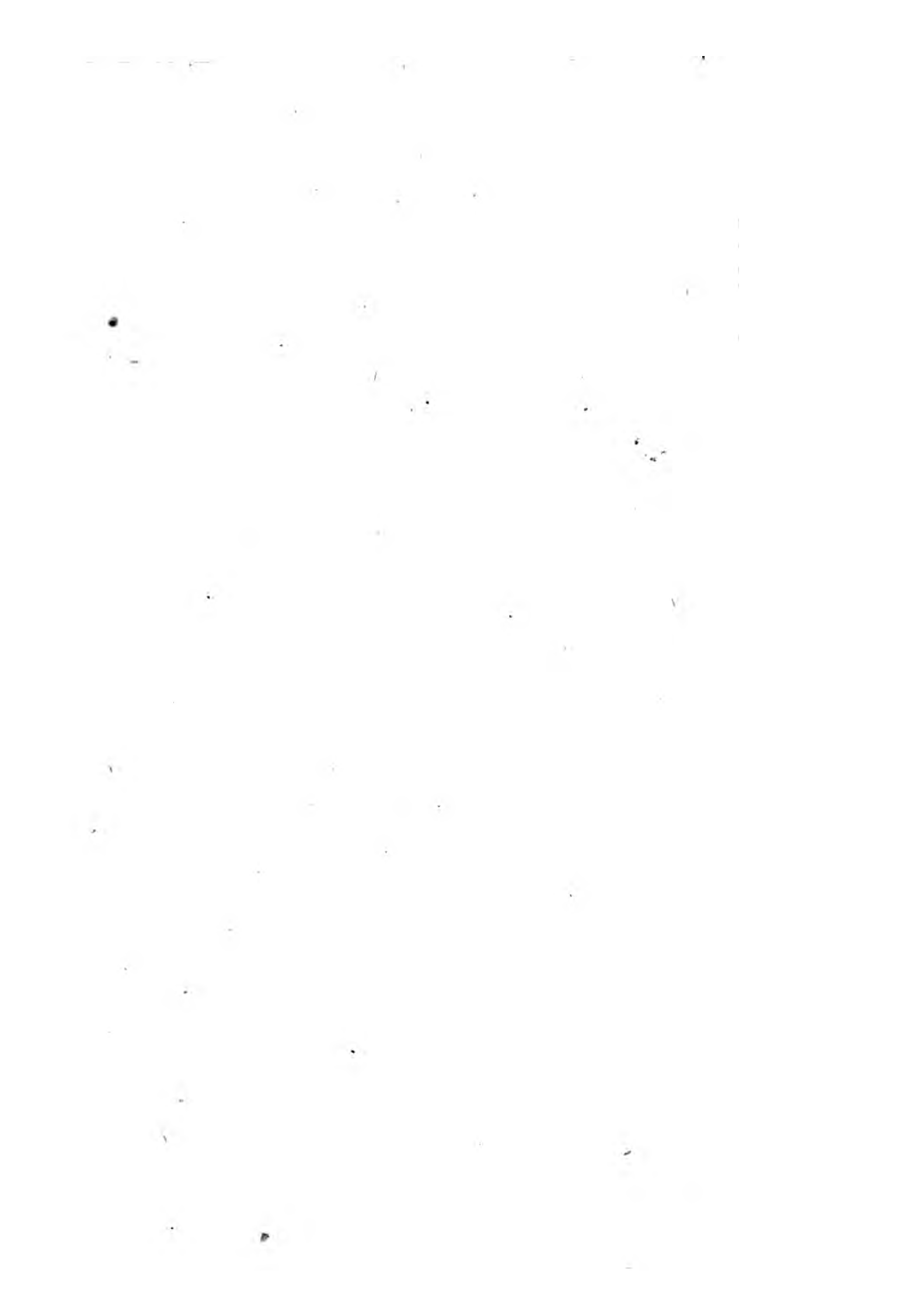
VOL. XV.

Being VOL. IV. of his

DRAMATIC WORKS.









MEROPE.

THE
DRAMATIC WORKS

OF

Mr. DE VOLTAIRE.

Translated by the Rev. Mr. FRANCKLIN.

VOL. IV.



L O N D O N :

Printed for J. NEWBERRY, R. BALDWIN, S. CROWDER
and Co. J. COOTE, T. DAVIES, W. JOHNSTON,
R. FRANCKLIN, and G. KEARSLEY.

M.DCC.LXII.

.....

C B

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

... This VOLUME contains

MEROPE. A Tragedy.

PREFACE to NANINE. A Comedy.

NANINE. A Comedy.

The BABBLER. A Comedy.

AN EPISTLE DEDICATORY to Mr. FALKNER, an
English Merchant, since Ambassador at Constanti-
nople.

A Second LETTER to Mr. FALKNER, then Am-
bassador at *Constantinople.*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEROPE, Widow of Cresphontes, King of Messene.

ÆGISTHUS, Son of Merope.

POLIPHONTES, Tyrant of Messene.

NARBAS, an old Man.

EURICLES, Favourite of Merope.

ERÓX, Favourite of Poliphontes.

ISMENIA, Confidant of Merope.

SCENE at MESSENE, in the Palace of Merope.

MEROPE.

M E R O P E.

A

T R A G E D Y.

ACT I. SCENE I.

ISMENIA, MEROPE.

ISMENIA.

LET not, great queen, thy soul for ever dwell
 On images of horror and despair ;
 The storm is past, and brighter days succeed :
 Long hast thou tasted heav'ns severest wrath,
 Enjoy its bounties now : the gods, thou see'st,
 Have bless'd our land with victory and peace ;
 And proud Messene, after fifteen years
 Of foul division and intestine wars,
 Now from her ruins lifts her tow'ring front,
 Superior to misfortune : now no more
 Shalt thou behold her angry chiefs support
 Their jarring int'rests, and in guilt alone
 United, spread destruction, blood, and slaughter,

O'er half thy kingdom, and dispute the throne
 Of good Cresphontes : but the ministers
 Of heav'n, the guardians of our sacred laws,
 The rulers, and the people, soon shall meet,
 Free in their choice, to fix the pow'r supreme :
 If virtue gives the diadem, 'tis thine :
 Thine by irrevocable right : to thee,
 The widow of Cresphontes, from our kings
 Descended, must devolve Messene's throne :
 Thou, whom misfortunes and firm constancy
 Have made but more illustrious, and more dear ;
 Thou, to whom ev'ry heart in secret ty'd —

M E R O P E.

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

I S M E N I A.

Despair not, madam : slaves
 Have been dispatch'd on every side ; the paths
 Of Elis all are open to their search :
 Doubtless the object of your fears is plac'd
 In faithful hands, who will restore to you
 Their sacred trust.

M E R O P E.

Immortal gods ! who see
 My bitter griefs, will ye restore my son ?
 Is my Ægisthus living ? have you sav'd

My

My wretched infant? O preserve him still,
 And shield him from the cruel murth'rer's hand!
 He is your son, the pure the spotless blood
 Of your Alcides. Will you not protect
 The dear dear image of the best of men,
 The best of kings, whose ashes I adore.

ISMENIA.

But wherefore must this tender passion turn
 Thy soul aside from ev'ry other purpose?

MEROPE.

I am a mother: can'st thou wonder yet?

ISMENIA.

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

MEROPE.

Not seen him, my Ismenia?
 O he is always present to my heart,
 Time has no pow'r to loose such bonds as these;
 His danger still awakens all my fears,
 And doubles my affection: once I've heard
 From Narbas, and but once these four years past,
 And that alas! but made me more unhappy.

Ægiffthus, then he told me, well deserves
 A better fate; he's worthy of his mother,
 And of the gods, his great progenitors;
 Expos'd to ev'ry ill, his virtue braves,
 And will surmount them: hope for ev'ry thing
 From him, but be aware of Poliphontes.

ISMENIA.

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

MEROPE.

That empire is my son's:
 Perdition on the cruel step-mother,
 The lover of herself, the savage heart,
 That cou'd enjoy the pleasures of a throne,
 And disinherit her own blood! O no: Ismenia,
 If my Ægiffthus lives not, what is empire,
 Or what is life to me! I shou'd renounce them.
 I shou'd have dy'd when my unhappy lord
 Was basely slain, by men and gods betray'd.
 O perfidy! O guilt! O! fatal day!
 O death! for ever present to my fight!
 Methinks ev'n now I hear the dismal shrieks,
 I hear them cry, ' O save the king, his wife,
 His sons:' I see the walls all stain'd with blood,
 The flaming palace, helpless women crush'd

Beneath

Beneath the smoking ruins, fear and tumult
 On ev'ry side, arms, torches, death, and horror :
 Then, roll'd in dust, and bathing in his blood,
 Cresphontes press'd me to his arms, uprais'd
 His dying eyes, and took his last farewell ;
 Whilst his two hapless babes, the tender fruits
 Of our first love, thrown on the bleeding bosom
 Of their dead father, lifted up the hands
 Of innocence, and begg'd me to protect them
 Against the barbrous murderers : Ægisthus
 Alone escap'd : some god defended him.
 O thou who did'st protect his infancy
 Watch o'er and guard him, bring him to my eyes ;
 O let him from inglorious solitude
 Rise to the rank of his great ancestors !
 I've borne his absence long, and groan'd in chains
 These fifteen years : now let Ægisthus reign
 Instead of Merope : for all my pains
 And sorrows past, be that the great reward.

S C E N E II.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, EURICLES.

MEROPE.

Well ! what of Narbas, and my son ?

B 3

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

Confus'd

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

MEROPE.

Narbas is no more,
 And all is lost.

ISMENIA.

Whate'er thy fears suggest
 Thou still believ'st ; and yet who knows but now,
 Ev'n whilst we speak, the happy Narbas comes
 To crown thy wishes, and restore thy son.

EURICLES.

Perhaps his love, temper'd with fair discretion,
 Which long conceal'd Ægisthus from the eyes
 Of men, may hide his purpos'd journey from thee :
 He dreads the murth'ers hand, and still protects him
 From those who slew Cresphontes : we must strive
 By artful methods to elude the rage
 That cannot be oppos'd : I have secur'd
 Their passage hither, and have plac'd some friends
 Of most approved valour, whose sharp eyes
 Will look abroad, and safe conduct them to thee.

MEROPE

MEROPE.

I've plac'd my surest confidence in thee.

EURICLES.

But what alas! can all my watchfulness
 And faithful cares avail thee, when the people
 Already meet to rob thee of thy right,
 And place another on Messene's throne?
 Injustice triumphs, and the shameless croud,
 In proud contempt of sacred laws, incline
 To Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

Am I fall'n so low;
 And shall my son return to be a slave?
 To see a subject rais'd to the high rank
 Of his great ancestors, the blood of Jove
 Debas'd, degraded, forc'd to own a master.
 Have I no friend, no kind protector left?
 Ungrateful subjects! have you no regard,
 No rev'rence for the mem'ry of Cresphontes?
 Have you so soon forgot his glorious deeds,
 His goodness to you?

EURICLES.

Still his name is dear,
 Still they regret him, still they weep his fate,

And pity thine : but pow'r intimidates,
And makes them dread the wrath of Poliphontes.

M E R O P E.

Thus, by my people still oppress'd, I see
Justice give way to faction, int'rest still,
The arbiter of fate, sells needy virtue
To pow'rful guilt ; the weak must to the strong
For ever yield : but let us hence, and strive
To fire once more their coward hearts to rage
And fierce resentment, for the injur'd blood
Of Hercules : excite the people's love ;
Flatter their hopes ; O tell 'em, Euricles,
Their master is return'd.

E U R I C L E S.

I've said too much
Already ; Poliphontes is alarm'd :
He dreads your son ; he dreads your very tears :
Restless ambition, that holds nothing dear
Or sacred but itself, has fill'd his soul
With bitterness and pride : because he drove
The ruffian slaves from Pylos and Amphrysa,
And sav'd Messene from a band of robbers,
He claims it as his conquest : for himself
Alone he acts, and wou'd enslave us all :
He looks towards the crown, and to attain it

Wou d

Wou'd throw down ev'ry fence, break every law,
 Spill any blood that shall oppose him : they
 Who kill'd thy husband were not more revengeful,
 More bloody, than the cruel Poliphontes.

M E R O P E.

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

E U R I C L E S.

He's here : you must dissemble.

S C E N E III.

M E R O P E. P O L I P H O N T E S, E R O X.

P O L I P H O N T E S.

Madam,

At length I come to lay my heart before you :
 I've serv'd the state, and my successful toils
 Have open'd me a passage to the throne :
 Th' assembled chiefs a while suspend their choice,
 But soon must fix it, or on Merope,
 Or Poliphontes : the unhappy fueds
 That laid Messene waste, and fill'd the land
 With blood and slaughter, all are bury'd now
 In peaceful harmony, and we alone
 Remain to part the fair inheritance.

We shou'd support each other's mutual claim ;
 Our common int'rest, and our common foes,
 Love for our country, reason, duty, all
 Conspire to join us, all unite to say
 The warrior, who reveng'd thy husband, he
 Who fav'd thy kingdom, may aspire to thee.
 I know these hoary locks, and wrinkled brow,
 Have little charms to please a youthful fair one.
 Thou'rt in the bloom of spring, and may'st despise
 The winter of my days ; but statesmen heed not
 Such fond objections : let the royal wreath
 Hide these grey hairs, a sceptre and a queen
 Will recompense my toils : nor think me rash,
 Or vain, you are the daughter of a king,
 I know you are, but your Messene wants
 A master now ; therefore remember, madam,
 If you wou'd keep your right, you must — divide it.

M E R O P E.

Heav'n, that afflicts me with its bitt'rest woes,
 Prepar'd me not for this, this cruel insult :
 How dar'st thou ask it ? wert thou not the subject
 Of great Cresphontes ? think'st thou I will e'er
 Betray the mem'ry of my dearest lord,
 To share with thee his son's inheritance,
 Trust to thy hands his kingdom and his mother ?

Think'st

Think'st thou the royal wreath was made to bind
A soldier's brows ?

POLIPHONTES.

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

MEROPE.

A party ! wretch, to trample on our laws :
Is there a party which thou dar'st support
Against the king's, against the royal race ?
Is this thy faith, thy solemn vows, thy oath,
Sworn to Cresphontes, and to me ; the love,
The honour due to his illustrious shade,

His wretched widow, and his hapless son ;
The gods he sprang from, and the throne they gave ?

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis doubtful whether yet your son survives ;
But grant that, from the mansions of the dead,
He shou'd return, and in the face of heav'n
Demand his throne, believe me when I say
He wou'd demand in vain ; Messene wants
A master worthy of her, one well prov'd,
A king who cou'd defend her : he alone
Shou'd wield the sceptre who can best revenge
His country's cause : Ægiffthus is a child,
Yet unexperienc'd in the ways of men,
And therefore little will his birth avail him ;
Nought hath he done for us, and nought deserv'd :
He cannot purchase at so cheap a rate
Messene's throne, the right of pow'r supreme
Descends no more, the gift of nature, here
From son to son ; it is the price of toil,
Of labour, and of blood ; 'tis virtue's meed,
Which I shall claim : have you so soon forgot
The savage sons of Pylos and Amphrysa,
Those lawless plund'ers ? think on your Cresphontes,
And your defenceless children, whom they slew :
Who sav'd your country then ? who stopp'd their fury ?

Who

Who put your foes to flight, and chased them hence?
 Did not this arm revenge that murther'd lord
 Whom yet you weep? these, madam, are my rights,
 The rights of valour: this is all my rank,
 This all my title, and let heav'n decide it.
 If thy Ægisthus comes, by me perhaps
 He may be taught to live, by me to reign:
 Then shall he see how Poliphontes guides
 The reins of empire. I esteem the blood
 Of great Alcides, but I fear it not;
 I look beyond Alcides' race, and fain
 Wou'd imitate the god from whom he sprung:
 I wou'd defend the mother, serve the son;
 Be an example to him, and a father.

M E R O P E.

O, fir, no more of your affected cares;
 Your gen'rous offers, meant but to insult
 My hapless son; if you wou'd wish to tread
 In great Alcides' steps, reserve the crown
 For his descendant: know, that demi-god
 Was the avenger of wrong'd innocence;
 No ravisher, no tyrant; take thou care,
 And with his valour imitate his justice;
 Protect the guiltless, and defend your king,
 Else shalt thou prove a worthless successor.

If

If thou wou'dst gain the mother, seek the son;
 Go, bring him to me; bring your master here,
 And then perhaps I may descend to you:
 But I will never be the vile accomplice,
 Or the reward of guilt like thine.

S C E N E IV.

POLIPHONTES, EROX.

EROX.

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

POLIPHONTES.

'Twixt that throne and me,
 Erox, I see a dreadful precipice
 I must o'erleap, or perish: Merope
 Expects Ægisthus; and the fickle croud,
 If he returns, perhaps may bend towards him.
 In vain his father's and his brother's blood,
 Have open'd wide my passage to the throne;
 In vain hath fortune cast her friendly veil
 O'er all my crimes; in vain have I oppress'd
 The blood of kings, whilst the deluded people
 Ador'd me as their friend, if yet there lives

A hateful offspring of Alcides' race :
 If this lamented son shou'd e'er again
 Behold Messene, fifteen years of toil
 At once are lost, and all my hopes o'erthrown ;
 All the fond prejudice of birth and blood
 Will soon revive, the mem'ry of Cresphontes,
 A hundred kings for his proud ancestors,
 The boasted honour of a race divine,
 A mother's tears, her sorrows, her despair,
 All will conspire to shake my feeble pow'r:
 Ægisthus is a foe I must subdue :
 I wou'd have crush'd the serpent in his shell,
 But that the diligent and subtle Narbas
 Convey'd him hence, e'er since that time conceal'd
 In some far distant land, he hath escap'd
 My narrowest search, and baffled all my care :
 I stopp'd his couriers, broke th' intelligence
 'Twixt him and Merope; but fortune oft
 Deferts us : from the silence of oblivion
 Sometimes a secret may spring forth ; and heav'n,
 By slow and solemn steps, may bring down vengeance.

E R O X.

Depend, undaunted, on thy prosp'rous fate;
 Prudence, thy guardian god, shall still protect thee :
 Thy orders are obey'd ; the soldiers watch

Each

Each avenue to Elis and Messene:
 If Narbas brings Ægisthus here, they both
 Must die.

POLIPHONTES.

But say, can'st thou depend on those
 Whom thou hast plac'd to intercept them?

EROX.

Yes:

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

POLIPHONTES.

It must be so: this crime, and I have done;
 And yet, when I have rid me of the son,
 I must possess the mother: 'twill be useful:
 I shall not then be branded with the name
 Of an usurper; she will bring with her
 A noble portion in the people's love:
 I know their hearts are not inclin'd to me;
 With fears dejected, or inflam'd with hope,
 Still in extremes, the giddy multitude
 Tumultuous rove, and int'rest only binds them,

That

That makes them mine. Erox, thy fate depends
On my success; thou art my best support:
Go, and unite them; bribe the fordid wretch
With gold to serve me, let the subtle courtier
Expect my favours; raise the coward soul,
Inspire the valiant, and caress the bold;
Persuade and promise, threaten and implore:
Thus far this sword hath brought me on my way;
But what by courage was begun, by art
We must complete; that many headed monster,
The people, must be sooth'd by flatt'ry's pow'r:
I'm fear'd already, but I wou'd be lov'd.

END of the FIRST ACT.

ACT II. SCENE I.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

MEROPE.

HAST thou heard nothing of my dear
Ægisthus?

No news from Elis' frontiers? O, too well
I know the cause of this ill-boding silence!

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

In all our search we have discover'd nought,
 Save a young stranger, reeking with the blood
 Of one whom he had murder'd : we have chain'd,
 And brought him hither.

MEROPE.

Ha ! a murderer,
 A stranger too ! whom, think'st thou, he has slain ?
 My blood runs cold.

EURICLES.

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

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

Who is this stranger?

Answer me, tell me.

EURICLES.

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

MEROPE.

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

EURICLES.

Your orders, madam,
Shall be obey'd.

[To Ismenia.

Tell 'em to bring him here,
Before the queen.

MEROPE.

I know my cares are vain;
But grief o'erpow'rs, and hurries me to acts

Perhaps

Perhaps imprudent; but you know I've cause
 For my despair; they have dethron'd my son,
 And wou'd insult the mother: Poliphontes
 Hath ta'en advantage of my helpless state,
 And dar'd to offer me his hand.

EURICLES.

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

MEROPE.

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

EURICLES.

If t' assert his rights
 Alone, suffic'd to seat him on the throne,
 Doubtless his pride wou'd spurn the shameful bond:
 But

But if his soul is by misfortune taught
 To know itself, if prudence guides his steps,
 If his own int'rest, if his friends advice,
 And above all, necessity, the first
 Of human laws, have any influence o'er him,
 He wou'd perceive, that his unhappy mother
 Cou'd not bestow on him a dearer mark
 Of her affection.

MEROPE.

Ha! what say'st thou?

EURICLES.

Truth,

Unwelcome truth, which nothing but my zeal,
 And your misfortunes, shoul'd have wrested from me.

MEROPE.

Wou'dst thou persuade me then, that int'rest e'er
 Can get the better of my fix'd aversion
 For Poliphontes, you who painted him
 In blackest colours to me?

EURICLES.

I describ'd him

Ev'n as he is, most dangerous and bold;
 I know his rashness, and I know his pow'r;
 Nought can resist him, he's without an heir.
 Remember that: you say, you love Ægisthus.

MERO-

MEROPE.

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

EURICLES.

Behold the ftranger
 Whom you defir'd to question; fee, he comes.

S C E N E II.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ÆGISTHUS in chains,
 ISMENIA, Guards.

ÆGISTHUS, at the bottom of the ftage. [To Ifmenia.
 Is that the great unfortunate, the queen,
 Whofe glory and whofe forrors reach'd ev'n me
 Amidft the defert wild where I was hid?

ISMENIA.

'Tis fhe.

ÆGISTHUS.

'Thou great creator of mankind!
 Thou, who didft form thofe matchlefs charms, look
 down
 And guard thy image: virtue on a throne
 Is fure the firft and faireft work of heav'n.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

Is that the murth'rer? Can such features hide
A cruel heart? Come near, unhappy youth,
Be not alarm'd, but answer me; whose blood
Is on thy hands?

ÆGISTHUS.

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

[Turning to Euricles,

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

MEROPE.

Tell me whom
Thy arm has slain.

ÆGISTHUS.

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

MEROPE.

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

ÆGISTHUS.

Messene's walls, her fields, and citizens,
Are new to me.

No:

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

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

ÆGISTHUS.

Heav'n is my witness, I am innocent.
Just on the borders of Pamifus, where
A temple stands, sacred to Hercules,
Thy great progenitor, I offer'd up
To the avenger of wrong'd innocence
My humble prayers for thee ; I had no victims,
No precious gifts to lay before him ; all
I had to give him, was a spotless heart,
And simple vows, the poor man's hecatomb :
It seem'd as if the god receiv'd my homage
With kind affection, for I felt my heart
By more than common resolution fir'd :
Two men, both arm'd, and both unknown, surpris'd
me ;

One in the bloom of youth, the other sunk
Into the vale of years : what brings thee here ?
They cry'd, and wherefore for Alcides' race
Art thou a suppliant ? At this word they rais'd
The dagger to my breast ; but heav'n preserv'd me.
Pierc'd o'er with wounds, the youngest of them fell
Dead at my feet ; the other basely fled

Like

Like an affassin : knowing not what blood
 I might have shed, and doubtful of my fate,
 I threw the bloody corpse into the sea,
 And fled ; your soldiers stopp'd me ; at the name
 Of Merope, I yeilded up my arms,
 And they have brought me hither.

EURICLES.

Why these tears,
 My royal mistress ?

MEROPE.

Shall I own it to thee ?

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

EURICLES.

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

MEROPE.

No :

Heav'n hath imprinted on his open front

The marks of candour, and of honesty.

Where wert thou born ?

ÆGISTHUS.

In Elis.

MEROPE.

Ha ! in Elis !

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

ÆGISTHUS.

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

MEROPE.

Gods !

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

ÆGISTHUS.

If virtue made nobility, old Sirris
And Polycletes, from whose blood I sprang,
Are not to be despis'd : their lot indeed
Was humble, but their exemplary virtues
Made even poverty respectable :

Cloth'd

Cloth'd in his rustic garb, my honest father
 Obeys the laws, does all the good he can,
 And only fears the gods.

MEROPE.

[Aside.

How strangely he affects me ! ev'ry word
 Has some new charm :

[Turning to Ægisthus.

But wherefore left you then
 The good old man ? It must be dreadful to him
 To lose a son like thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

A fond desire
 Of glory led me hither : I had heard
 Of your Messene's troubles, and your own :
 Oft had I heard of the illustrious queen,
 Whose virtues merited a better fate ;
 The sad recital mov'd my soul ; ashamed
 To spend at Elis my inglorious days,
 I long'd to brave the terrors of the field
 Beneath thy banners : this was my design,
 And this alone : an idle thirst of fame
 Misled my steps, and in their helpless age
 Persuaded me to leave my wretched parents :
 'Tis my first fault, and I have suffer'd for it :
 Heav'n hath aveng'd their cause, and I am fall'n
 Into a fatal snare.

C 2

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

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

S C E N E III.

MEROPE, ÆGISTHUS, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

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

MEROPE.

Whence are thy fears ?

ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

'Tis Poliphontes' triumph :

The wav'ring people flatter his ambition,
 And give their voices for him ; he is chos'n
 Messene's king : 'tis done.

ÆGISTHUS.

I thought the gods
 Had on the throne of her great Ancestors
 Plac'd Merope : O heav'n ! the greater still
 Our rank on earth, the more have we to fear :
 A poor abandon'd exile, like myself,
 Is less to be lamented than a queen :
 But we have all our sorrows.

[Ægisthus is led off.]

EURICLES. [To Merope.]

I foretold it :

You were to blame to scorn his proffer'd hand,
 And brave his pow'r.

MEROPE.

I see the precipice
 That opens wide its horrid gulph before me ;
 But men and gods deceiv'd me ; I expected
 Justice from both, and both refus'd to grant it.

EURICLES.

I will assemble yet our little force
 Of trusty friends, to anchor our poor bark,

And save it from the fury of the storm ;
 To shield thee from the insults of a tyrant,
 And the mad rage of an ungrateful people.

S C E N E IV.

MEROPE, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

'Tis not the people's fault ; they love you still,
 And wou'd preserve the honour of your crown :
 They wish to see you join'd to Poliphontes,
 That from your hand he then might seem to hold
 The sov'reign pow'r.

MEROPE.

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

ISMENIA.

They call you to the throne of your fore fathers :
 Obey their voice ; it is the voice of heav'n.

MEROPE.

And wou'dst thou have me purchase empty honours
 With infamy and shame ?

S C E N E V.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

EURICLES.

O queen, I tremble
 To stand before thee : now prepare thy heart

For

For the most dreadful stroke ; call forth thy courage
To bear the news.

MEROPE.

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

EURICLES.

All is past ; and fate——

I can no more.

MEROPE.

Go on : my son——

EURICLES.

He's dead :

It is too true : the dreadful news hath shock'd
Your friends, and froze their active zeal.

MEROPE.

My son,

Ægisthus, dead !

ISMENIA.

O gods !

EURICLES.

Some base assassins

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

MEROPE.

O hateful day!

Why shines the sun on such a wretch as me?

He's lost; he's gone: what cruel hand destroy'd him!

Who shed his blood, the last of my sad race?

EURICLES.

It was that stranger, that abandon'd slave,
 Whose persecuted virtue you admir'd,
 For whom such pity rose in your kind breast;
 Ev'n he whom you protected.

MEROPE.

Can it be!

Was he that monster?

EURICLES.

We have certain proofs,
 And have discover'd two of his companions,
 Who, lurking here, were still in search of Narbas,
 Who had escap'd them: he who slew Ægisthus
 Had taken from your son these precious spoils,
 [The armour is shewn at a distance at the further end of the stage.
 The armour which old Narbas bore from hence.
 The traitor, that he might not be discover'd,
 Had thrown aside these bloody witnessess.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

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

EURICLES.

'Tis the same
 Ægisthus did bring hither.

MEROPE.

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

EURICLES.

'Twas Narbas:
 So Poliphontes owns.

MEROPE.

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

EURICLES.

Wou'd you not have the traitor brought before you,
 And question'd here?

S C E N E VI.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA, EROX, guards.

EROX.

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

MEROPE.

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

EROX.

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

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

My hand alone

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

EROX.

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

S C E N E VI.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

MEROPE.

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

EROX.

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

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

They have oppress'd me sorely ; I have been
 Too long the object of their wrath divine :
 They have depriv'd me of my dearest child,
 And at their altars shall I ask a husband ?
 Shall I conduct a stranger to the throne
 Of my forefathers ? woud'st thou have me join
 The Hymeneal to the fun'ral torch ?
 Shall Merope still raise her weeping eyes
 To heav'n, that shines no more on my Ægisthus ?
 Shall she wear out her melancholy days
 Beneath a hateful tyrant, and expect
 In tears and anguish an old age of sorrow ?
 When all is lost, and not ev'n hope remains,
 To live, is shameful, and to die, our duty.

END of the SECOND ACT.

A C T III. S C E N E I.

NARBAS.

O grief ! O horror ! O the weight of age !
 The youthful hero's warm imprudent ardor
 Was not to be restrain'd ; his courage burst
 Th' inglorious chains of vile obscurity,

And

And he is lost to me, perhaps for ever.
How shall I dare to see my royal mistress !
Unhappy Narbas ! hither art thou come
Without Ægisthus ; Poliphontes reigns,
That subtle proud artificer of fraud,
That savage murth'rer, who pursued us still
From clime to clime, and laid the snares of death
On ev'ry side, fix'd on the sacred throne,
Which by his crimes so oft he hath profan'd,
The proud usurper sits, and smiles secure :
Hide me, ye gods, from his all-piercing eye,
And save Ægisthus from the tyrant's sword :
O guide me, heav'n, to his unhappy mother,
And let me perish at her feet ! once more
I see the palace, where the best of kings
Was basely slain, and his defenceless child
Sav'd in these arms ; and after fifteen years
Shall I return to fill a mother's heart
With anguish ? who will lead me to the queen ?
No friend appears to guide me : but behold,
Near yonder tomb I see a weeping croud,
And hear their loud laments ! within these walls
For ever dwells some persecuting god.

S C E N E.

M E R O P E.
S C E N E II.

NARBAS, ISMENIA, at the further end of the stage
several of the queen's attendants, near the tomb of Cresphontes.

ISMENIA.

What bold intruder presses thus unknown
To the queen's presence, and disturbs the peace
Of her retirement? comes he from the tyrant
A spy upon our griefs, to count the tears
Of the afflicted?

NARBAS.

Who soe'er thou art,
Excuse the boldness of a poor old man;
Forgive th' intrusion; I wou'd see the queen,
Perhaps may serve her.

ISMENIA.

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

NARBAS.

O, in the name of the avenging gods,
Have pity on my age, my misfortunes:
I am no stranger here: O, if you serve
And love the queen, forgive the tears that long
Have flow'd for her, and trust a heart that feels
For Merope as deeply as thy own.

What

What tomb is that where you so late did join
Your griefs?

ISMENIA.

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

NARBAS. [Going towards the tomb.

My lov'd master!

Ye honour'd ashes!

ISMENIA.

But Cresphontes' wife
Is more to be lamented still.

NARBAS.

What worse

Cou'd happen to her?

ISMENIA.

A most dreadful stroke;
Her son is slain.

NARBAS.

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

ISMENIA.

All know it here
Too well.

NARBAS.

Her son?

ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

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

NARBAS.

O death,
I did foretel thee : horror and despair !
Is the queen sure, and art thou not deceiv'd ?

ISMENIA.

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

NARBAS.

Is this
The fruit of all my care ?

ISMENIA.

The wretched queen,
Abandon'd to despair, will scarce survive him :
She liv'd but for her child, and now the ties
Are loos'd that bound her to this hated life :
But, e'er she dies, with her own hand she waits
To pierce the murth'rer's heart, and be reveng'd ;
Ev'n at Cresphontes' tomb his blood shall flow.
Soon will the victim, by the king's permission,
Be hither brought, to perish at her feet :
But Merope is lost in grief, and therefore
Wou'd wish to be alone : you must retire.

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

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

S C E N E III.

ISMENIA.

[Alone.

This old man seems most worthy: how he wept!
Whilst the unfeeling slaves around us seem,
Like their proud master, but to mock our sorrows:
What int'rest cou'd he have? yet tranquil pity
Doth seldom shed so many tears; methought
He mourn'd the lost Ægisthus like a father:
He must be fought — but here's a dreadful fight.

S C E N E IV.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, EURICLES, ÆGISTHUS in chains,
guards, sacrificers.

MEROPE.

[Near the tomb.

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

ÆGISTHUS.

Dear have I bought thy momentary kindness,
Guardians of innocence, protect me now!

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

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

MEROPE. [Coming forward.

He must; he shall:

Say, monster, what induc'd thee to a crime
So horrible to nature! how had I
E'er injur'd thee?

ÆGISTHUS.

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

MEROPE.

What interest? barbarian!

ÆGISTHUS.

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

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

Subtle villain !

How artfully dissembled is that grief !

He kills me, and yet seems to weep my fate.

[She falls back into the arms of Ismenia.

EURICLES.

Madam, revenge yourself, revenge the laws,

The cause of nature, and the blood of kings.

ÆGISTHUS.

Is this the royal justice of a court ?

Ye praise and flatter first, and then condemn me.

Why did I leave my peaceful solitude !

O good old man, what will thy sorrows be,

And thou, unhappy mother, whose dear voice

So oft foretold ———

MEROPE.

Barbarian, and hast thou

A mother ? I had been a mother yet

But for thy rage, thou hast destroy'd my son.

ÆGISTHUS.

If I am thus unhappy, if he was

Indeed thy son, I ought to suffer for it ;

But though my hand was guilty, yet my heart

Was innocent : heav'n knows I wou'd have giv'n

This day my life to save or his or thine.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

Did'st thou take this armour from him?

ÆGISTHUS.

No:

It is my own.

MEROPE.

What say'st thou?

ÆGISTHUS.

Yes; I swear

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

MEROPE.

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

ÆGISTHUS.

Polycletes:

I've told thee so already.

MEROPE.

O thou riv'ft

My heart: what foolish pity stopp'd my vengeance?
It is too much: assist me, friends, bring here
The monster, the perfidious ——

[Lifting up the dagger.]

O ye manes

Of my dear son, this bloody arm ——

N A R B A S.

NARBAS. [Entering on a sudden.

O gods!

What woud'ft thou do?

MEROPE.

Who calls?

NARBAS.

Stop: stop — alas!

If I but name his mother, he's undone

MEROPE.

Die, traitor.

NARBAS.

Stop.

ÆGISTHUS. [Turning towards Narbas.

My father!

MEROPE.

Ha! his father!

ÆGISTHUS. [To Narbas.

What do I fee? and whither wert thou going?

Cam'ft thou to be a witness of my death?

NARBAS.

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

EURICLES.

[Takes away Ægithus, and shuts up the lower part of the scene.]

O heav'n!

MEROPE.

MEROPE. [Coming forward.

Thou mak'st me tremble; I was going
T'avenge my son.

NARBAS. [Kneeling down.

To sacrifice — Ægisthus.

MEROPE.

Ægisthus! ha!

NARBAS.

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

MEROPE.

And lives he then?

NARBAS.

'Tis he, it is your son.

MEROPE, [Fainting away in the arms of Ismenia.
I die!

ISMENIA.

Good heav'n!

NARBAS. [To Ismenia.

Recall her fleeting spirits;
This sudden transport of tumultuous joy,
Mix'd with anxiety and tender fears,
May quite o'erpow'r her.

MEROPE. [Coming to herself.

Narbas, is it you?

Or do I dream? is it my son? where is he?

Let him come hither.

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

No: refrain your love,
Refrain your tendernefs.

[To Ifmenia.

O keep the feeret;
The fafety of the queen, and of Ægifthus,
Depend on that.

MEROPE.

Alas! and muft fresh danger
Embitter my new joys? O dear Ægifthus,
What cruel god ftill keeps thee from thy mother?
Was he reftor'd but to afflict me more?

NARBAS.

You knew him not, and wou'd have flain your fon:
If his arrival here be once discover'd,
And you acknowledge him, he's loft for ever.
Diffemble therefore, for thou know'ft that guilt
Reigns in Meffene: thou art watch'd; be cautious.

S C E N E V.

MEROPE, EURICLES, NARBAS, ISMENIA.

EURICLES.

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

MEROPE.

Whom?

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

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

MEROPE, [With transport.

That stranger is my child, my son :
They wou'd destroy him, Narbas, let us fly —

NARBAS.

No: stay.

MEROPE.

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

EURICLES.

The king
Wou'd question him before he dies.

MEROPE.

Indeed !

And knows he then I am his mother ?

EURICLES.

No:

'Tis yet a secret to them all.

MEROPE.

W'ell fly

To Poliphontes, and implore his aid.

NARBAS.

Fear Poliphontes, and implore the gods.

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

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

NARBAS.

He your husband, gods !
 I'm thunder struck.

MEROPE.

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

NARBAS.

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

EURICLES.

She is forc'd
 To wed him, that she may revenge Cresphontes.

NARBAS.

He was his murth'rer.

MEROPE.

He ! that traitor !

NARBAS.

By Poliphontes thy Ægisthus fell,

Yes :

VOL. IV.

D

His

His father, and his brothers: I beheld
The tyrant welt'ring in Cresphontes' blood.

MEROPE.

O gods!

NARBAS.

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

MEROPE.

Thy tale has harrow'd up my soul.

EURICLES.

He comes:

'Tis Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

Is it possible?

Away, good Narbas, hide thee from his rage.

NARBAS.

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

EURICLES.

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

MEROPE. [To Euricles.

Go thou and guard
That precious treasure well.

EURICLES.

O doubt it not.

MEROPE.

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

S C E N E VI.

MEROPE, POLIPHONTES, EROX, ISMENIA, Attendants.

POLIPHONTES.

The altar is prepar'd, the throne awaits you,
Our int'rests soon will with our hearts be join'd:

As king, and husband, 'tis my duty now
 Both to defend and to revenge you, madam :
 Two of the traitors I have seiz'd already,
 Who shall repay the murther with their blood :
 But, spite of all my care, thy tardy vengeance
 Hath seconded but ill my purposes :
 You told me you wou'd wish yourself to slay
 The murthr'er, and I gave him to your justice.

MEROPE.

O that I might be my own great avenger !

POLIPHONTES.

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

MEROPE.

Thine, said'st thou ?

POLIPHONTES.

Wherefore is the sacrifice
 Delay'd ? dost thou no longer love thy son ?

MEROPE.

May all his foes meet with their due reward !
 But if this murth'rer has accomplices,
 By him perhaps I may hereafter learn
 Who kill'd my dear Cresphontes : they who slew
 The father wou'd for ever persecute
 The mother and the son : O if I e'er —

POLI-

POLIPHONTES.

I too cou'd wish to be inform'd of that,
And therefore I have ta'en him to my care.

MEROPE.

To thine?

POLIPHONTES.

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

MEROPE.

But you must not keep
This murth'rer : I must have him ; nay, you promis'd,
You know you did —

[Aside.

O cruel fate ! my son !
What art thou doom'd to ?

[To Poliphontes.

Pity me, my lord !

POLIPHONTES.

Whence is this sudden transport ? he shall die.

MEROPE.

Who ? he ?

POLIPHONTES.

His death shall satisfy thy soul.

MEROPE.

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

POLIPHONTES.

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

MEROPE.

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

POLIPHONTES.

Why wilt not thou partake it ?
 Then shou'd I bid adieu to all my fears :
 The altar waits, prepar'd for Merope
 And Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

Thou hast gain'd the throne,
 The gods have giv'n it thee, and now thou want'st
 Cresphontes' wife to make his kingdom sure.
 This crime alone ———

ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

O stop ——

MEROPE.

Mylord, forgive me;

I am a wretched mother; I have lost
 My all; the gods, the cruel gods have robb'd me
 Of ev'ry blifs: O give me, give me back
 The murth'rer of my fon!

POLIPHONTES.

This hand shall shed
 The traitors blood: come, madam, follow me.

MEROPE.

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

END of the THIRD ACT.

A C T IV. S C E N E I.

POLIPHONTES, EROX.

POLIPHONTES.

I ALMOST thought she had discover'd something
 Touching her husband's murther, for she frown'd
 Indignant on me; but I want her hand,

D 4

And

And not her heart ; the croud will have it so ;
 We must not disoblige them ; by this marriage
 I shall secure them both : I look on her
 But as a slave that's useful to my purpose,
 Chain'd to my chariot wheels to grace my triumph,
 And little heed her hatred or her love.
 But thou hast talk'd to this young murtherer,
 What think'st thou of him ?

EROX.

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

POLIPHONTES.

Who is he ?

EROX.

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

POLIPHONTES.

Art thou sure of that ?

The leader of that band I have myself
 Dispatch'd, and prudent bury'd in his blood
 The dang'rous secret ; but this young unknown

Alarms

Alarms me : is it certain he destroy'd
 Ægisthus? has propitious fate, that still
 Prevented all my wishes, been thus kind?

EROX.

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

POLIPHONTES.

Fortune doth often reach
 What wisdom cannot: but I know too well
 My danger, and the number of my foes,
 To leave that fortune to decide my fate:—
 Whoe'er this stranger be, he must not live,
 His death shall purchase me this haughty queen,
 And make the crown sit firmer on my head,
 The people then, subjected to my pow'r,
 Will think at least their prince is dead, and know
 That I reveng'd him: but, inform me, who
 Is this old man that shuns me thus? there seems
 Some myst'ry in his conduct; Merope,
 Thou tell'st me, wou'd have slain the murtherer,
 But that this old man did prevent her; what
 Cou'd move him to it?

D 5

EROX.

EROX.

He's the young man's father,
And came t'implore his pardon.

POLIPHONTES.

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

EROX.

What is her joy,
Her pity, or her vengeance, now to thee?

POLIPHONTES.

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

S C E N E

S C E N E II.

POLIPHONTES, EROX, ÆGISTHUS, EURICLES,
MEROPE, ISMENIA, Guards.

MEROPE.

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

POLIPHONTES.

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

MEROPE.

O gods !

ÆGISTHUS. [To Poliphontes.

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

P O L I -

POLIPHONTES.

Hence, abandon'd villain;
Dar'ft thou insult —

MEROPE.

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

POLIPHONTES.

Amazing! justify'd
By you!

MEROPE.

By me, my lord?

POLIPHONTES.

Yes, madam, you.

Is this the murth'rer of your son?

MEROPE.

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

ISMENIA.

O heav'n!

What woud'ft thou do?

POLIPHONTES.

Thy eyes are fix'd upon him
With tendernefs and joy; thy tears too flow,
Though thou woud'ft hide them from me.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

No: 'tis false:

I wou'd not, cannot hide them: well thou know'st
I've too much cause to weep.

POLIPHONTES.

Dry up your tears;

He dies this moment: soldiers, do your office.

MEROPE.

[Coming forward.

O spare him, spare him.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ha! the pity's me.

POLIPHONTES.

Dispatch him.

MEROPE.

O he is ——

POLIPHONTES.

Strike.

MEROPE.

Stay, barbarian,

He is — my son.

ÆGISTHUS.

Am I thy son?

MEROPE.

[Embracing him.

Thou art:

And heav'n, that snatch'd thee from this wretched bo-
som,

Which

Which now too late hath open'd my longing eyes,
Restores thee to a weeping mother's arms
But to destroy us both.

ÆGISTHUS.

What miracle

Is this, ye gods?

POLIPHONTES.

A vile imposture: thou

His mother? thou, who did'st demand his death?

ÆGISTHUS.

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

MEROPE.

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

POLIPHONTES.

Ha! can it be?

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

It is ; it must be so ;

Her tears confirm it : yes, I am the son
 Of Merope, my heart assures me of it :
 And, had'st thou not disarm'd me, with this hand
 I wou'd chastise thee, traitor.

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis too much ;

I'll bear no more : away with him.

MEROPE. [Falling on her knees.
 Behold

Thus low on earth the wretched Merope
 Falls at your feet, and bathes them with her tears :
 Doth not this humble posture speak my griefs,
 And say I am a mother? O I tremble
 When I look back on the dire precipice
 I have escap'd, the murder of my son ;
 Still I lament th' involuntary crime.
 Did'st thou not say thou wou'd'st protect his youth,
 And be a father to him? and yet now
 Thou wou'd'st destroy him : O have pity on him :
 Some guilty hand bereav'd him of a father ;
 O save the son, defend the royal race,
 The seed of gods : defenceless and alone
 He stands before thee : trample not on him,
 Who is unable to resist thy pow'r ;

Let

Let him but live, and I am satisfy'd ;
 Save but my child, and all shall be forgotten :
 O he wou'd make me happy ev'n in woe ;
 My husband and my children all wou'd live
 Once more in my Ægisthus : O behold
 His royal ancestors with me implore thee
 To spare the noble youth, and save thy king.

ÆGISTHUS.

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

Cease

Cease then thy pray'rs, nor thus disgrace the blood
Of those immortal pow'rs from whom I sprang.

POLIPHONTES. [To Merope.

Trust me, I bear a part in your misfortunes,
Feel for your griefs, and pity your distress;
I love his courage, and esteem his virtue;
He seems well worthy of the royal birth
Which he assumes; but truths of such importance
Demand more ample proofs; I take him therefore
Beneath my care, and, if he is thy son,
I shall adopt him mine.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou, thou adopt me?

MEROPE.

Alas! my child!

POLIPHONTES.

His fate depends on thee:

It is not long since, to secure his death,
Thou did'st consent to marry Poliphontes;
Now thou woud'st save him, shall not love do more
Than vengeance?

MEROPE.

Ha! barbarian!

POLI-

POLIPHONTES.

Madam, know

His life, or death, depends on thy resolve :
 I know your love, your tendernefs, too well,
 To think you will expofe to my juft wrath
 So dear an object by a harfh refusal.

MEROPE.

My lord, at leaft let him be free, and deign —

POLIPHONTES.

He is your fon, or he's a traitor, madam ;
 I muft be your's before I can protect him,
 Or be reveng'd on both ; a word from you
 Decides his fate, or punifhment, or pardon ;
 Or as his mother I fhall look upon you
 Or his accomplice ; therefore make your choice :
 I will receive your answer at the temple
 Before th'attefting gods.

[To the foldiers.

Guard well your pris'ner :

Come, follow me :

[Turning to Merope.

I fhall expect you, madam ;
 Be quick in your refolve ; confirm his birth
 By giving me your hand ; your answer only
 Saves or condemns him ; and as you determine
 He is my victim, madam, or — my fon.

M E R O P E.

MEROPE.

O grant me but the pleasure to behold him;
Restore him to my love, to my despair.

POLIPHONTES.

You'll see him at the temple.

ÆGISTHUS. [As the guards are carrying him off.

O great queen,

I dare not call thee by the sacred name
Of mother, do not, I beseech thee, aught
Unworthy of thyself, or of Ægisthus;
For, if I am thy son, thy son shall die
As a king ought.

S C E N E III.

MEROPE. [Alone,

Ye cruel spoilers, why
Will you thus tear him from me? O he's gone,
I've lost him now for ever; wherefore, heav'n,
Didst thou restore him to a mother's vows,
Or why preserve him in a foreign land,
To fall at last a wretched sacrifice,
A victim to the murth'rer of his father?
O save him, hide him in the desert's gloom;
Direct his steps, and shield him from the tyrant!

S C E N E

S C E N E IV.

MEROPE, NARBAS, EURICLES.

MEROPE.

O Narbas, know'st thou the unhappy fate
Which I am doom'd to ?

NARBAS.

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

MEROPE.

And I destroy'd him.

NARBAS.

You ?

MEROPE.

Discover'd all :

But think'st thou, Narbas, ever mother yet
Cou'd see a child, as I did, and be silent ?
But it is past : and now I must repair
My weakness with my crimes.

NARBAS.

What crimes ?

S C E N E V.

MEROPE, NARBAS, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

Now call forth all the vigour of your soul,

O madam,

The

The hour of trial comes : the fickle croud,
 Still fond of novelty, with ardent zeal,
 Press forward to behold th'expected nuptials ;
 Each circumstance conspires to serve the tyrant :
 Already the bribed priest has made his god
 Declare for Poliphontes : he receiv'd.
 Your vows, Messene was a witness to them,
 And heav'n will see the contract is fulfill'd :
 Thus spoke the holy seer ; the people answer'd
 With acclamations loud, and songs of joy ;
 They little know the grief that wrings thy heart ;
 But thank the gods for these detested nuptials,
 And bless the tyrant for his cruelty.

M E R O P E.

And are my sorrows made the public joy ?

N A R B A S.

O these are dreadful means to save thy son.

M E R O P E.

They are indeed : thou shudder'st at the thought :
 It is a crime.

N A R B A S.

But to destroy thy child
 Were still more horrible.

M E R O P E.

Away : despair
 Has giv'n me courage, and restor'd my virtue :

Let's

Let's to the temple ; there I'll shew the people
 My dear Ægiffhus ; 'twixt myself and th'altar
 Will place my son ; the gods will see him there ;
 They will defend him, for from them he sprang :
 Too long already persecuting heav'n
 Hath scourg'd his helpless innocence ; and now
 It will avenge him : O I will set forth
 His savage murth'rer in the blackest colours,
 Till vengeance shall inspire each honest heart
 With tenfold rage : now dread a mother's cries,
 Ye cruel tyrants, for they will be heard :
 They come ; alas ! I tremble yet, despair
 And horror seize me : hark, they call, my son
 Is dying : see the cruel murth'rer plants
 A dagger in his breast : a moment more
 And he is lost : ye savage ministers

[Turning to the sacrificers.]

Of the base tyrant, you must drag the victim
 Up to the altar ; can you, must you do it ?
 O vengeance, duty, tenderness, and love,
 And thou great nature, what will ye ordain,
 What will ye do with an unhappy queen,
 Abandon'd to despair ?

END of the FOURTH ACT.

A C T

A C T V. S C E N E I.

ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES.

NARBAS.

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

EURICLES.

Think

On the poor queen, who, for thy sake alone
 An humble suppliant, sprinkles with her tears
 The tyrant's murth'rous hand.

ÆGISTHUS.

I'm scarce awaken'd

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

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

O wou'd to heav'n

The grandson of Alcides still remain'd

Unknown in Elis!

ÆGISTHUS.

Is it not most strange,

Young as I am, that I shou'd know already,

By sad experience, ev'ry human woe?

Horror and shame, and banishment, and death,

Since my first dawn of life, have press'd upon me:

A persecuted wretch I wander'd long

From clime to clime, hid in the desert's gloom,

I languish'd there in vile obscurity:

Yet, bear me witness heav'n, mid'st all my woes,

Nor murmur'd nor complain'd: tho' proud ambition

Devour'd my soul, I learn'd the humble virtues

That suited best my hard and low condition:

Still I respect'd, still obey'd thee, Narbas,

And lov'd thee as a father; nor wou'd e'er

Have wish'd to find another, but high heav'n

Wou'd change my fate to make me but more wretched:

I am Cresphontes' son, yet can't revenge him;

I've found a mother, and a tyrant now

Will snatch her from me; soon she must be his:

O I cou'd curse the hour that gave me birth,

And the kind succour which thy goodness lent me:

O why didst thou hold back th'uplifted hand
Of a mistaken mother? But for thee
I had fulfill'd my fate, and all my woes
Had ended with my life.

NARBAS.

We are undone,
The tyrant comes.

S C E N E II.

POLIPHONTES, ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES,
Guards.

POLIPHONTES.

[To Narbas and the rest.

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

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

ÆGISTHUS.

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

POLIPHONTES.

Impotence and rashness !

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

S C E N E III.

ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES.

ÆGISTHUS.

I'll listen to no counsel but the voice
 Of vengeance ; O inspire me, Hercules,
 O from thy seats of endless bliss look down
 On thy Ægisthus, animate his soul,

E 2

And

And guide his footsteps ! Poliphontes calls,
I will attend him ; let us to the altar.

NARBAS.

Wilt thou then die ?

EURICLES.

We must not follow thee :

Let us collect our few remaining friends,
And strive ———

ÆGISTHUS.

Away : another time my soul

Wou'd listen to your kind advice, for well

I know ye love me ; but no counsellors

Must now be heard save all-directing heav'n

And my own heart : th' irresolute alone

Is sway'd by others, but the blood of heroes

Will guide itself : away, the die is cast.

What do I see ? O gracious heav'n ! my mother !

S C E N E. IV.

MEROPE, ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES,
Attendants.

MEROPE.

Once more, Ægisthus, by the tyrant's order,

We meet together ; he has sent me to thee :

Think not that, after these detested nuptials,

I mean to live ; but for thy sake, my son,

I have submitted to this shameful bondage :
 For thee alone I fear ; for thee I bear
 This load of infamy : O live, Ægisthus,
 Let me intreat thee, live ; e'er thou can'st rule
 Thou must obey, and servitude must open
 The path to vengeance ; thou contemn'st my weak-
 nefs,
 I know thou dost ; but O the more I love
 The more I fear. O my dear child —

ÆGISTHUS.

Be bold,

And follow me.

MEROPE.

Alas ! what woud'st thou do ?

Why, ye just gods, why was he made too virtuous ?

ÆGISTHUS.

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

MEROPE.

Methinks some god
 Inspires thy soul, and raises the above
 The race of mortals : now I see the blood
 Of great Alcides flows thro' ev'ry vein,
 And animates Ægisthus : O my son,

Give me a portion of thy noble fire,
And raise this drooping heart !

ÆGISTHUS.

Haft thou no friends
Within this fatal temple ?

MEROPE.

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

ÆGISTHUS.

By all art thou abandon'd ; at the altar
Waits Poliphontes for thee ?

MEROPE.

Yes.

ÆGISTHUS.

His foldiers,

Do they attend him ?

MEROPE.

No : he is surrounded
By that ungrateful faithlefs croud that once
Encircled Merope, by them upled
To th' altar I will force for thee alone
A paffage.

ÆGISTHUS.

M E R O P E. 81

ÆGISTHUS.

And alone I'll follow thee :

There shall I meet my ancestors divine :

The gods who punish murth'ers will be there.

MEROPE.

Alas ! these fifteen years they have contemn'd thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

They did it but to try me.

MEROPE.

What's thy purpose ?

ÆGISTHUS.

No matter what ; let us begone : farewell

My mournful friends, at least ye soon shall know

The son of Merope deserv'd your care.

[To Narbas, embracing him.

Narbas, believe me, thou shalt never blush

To own me for thy son.

S C E N E V.

NARBAS.

What means Ægisthus ?

Alas ! my cares are fruitless all and vain :

I hoped the sure slow-moving hand of time

Wou'd justify the ways of heav'n, and place

The wrong'd Ægisthus on Messene's throne;
 But guilt still triumphs, and my hopes are vanish'd;
 His courage will destroy him; death awaits
 His disobedience.

EURICLES.

[A noise within.

Hark! they shout.

NARBAS.

Alas!

It is the fatal signal.

EURICLES.

Let us listen.

NARBAS.

I tremble.

EURICLES.

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

NARBAS.

Then Ægisthus
 Must perish too, she shou'd have liv'd for him.

EURICLES.

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

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

Hark ! I hear on ev'ry side
The trumpets found, the groans of dying men,
And clash of swords ; they force the palace.

EURICLES.

See
Yon bloody squadron ; look, it is dispers'd ;
They fly.

NARBAS.

Perhaps to serve the tyrant's cause.

EURICLES.

Far as my eyes can reach I see them still
Engag'd in fight.

NARBAS.

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

EURICLES.

Thanks to heav'n, the ways
Are open, I will hence, and know my fate.

[He goes out.]

NARBAS.

I'll follow thee, but not with equal steps,
For I am old and feeble : O ye gods !
Restore my strength, give to this nerveless arm
Its former vigor ; let me save my king,

Or yield up the poor remnant of my days,
And die in his defence.

S C E N E VI.

NARBAS, ISMENIA. [A croud of people.

NARBAS.

Who's there? Ismenia?

Bloody and pale! O horrid spectacle!

Art thou indeed Ismenia?

ISMENIA.

O my voice,

My breath is lost; let me recover them,

And I will tell thee all.

NARBAS.

My son —

The queen — do they yet live?

ISMENIA.

I'm scarce myself;

Half dead with fear; the croud have borne me hither.

NARBAS.

How does Ægisthus?

ISMENIA.

O he is indeed

The son of gods; a stroke so terrible,

So noble! never did th' unconquer'd courage

Of

Of great Alcides with a deed so bold
Astonish mortals.

NARBAS.

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

ISMENIA.

Crown'd with fresh flow'rs the victim was prepar'd,
And Hymen's torches round the altar blaz'd,
When Poliphontes, wrapp'd in gloomy silence,
Stretch forth his eager hand; the priest pronounc'd
The solemn words; amidst her weeping maids
Stood fix'd in grief the wretched Merope;
Slow she advanc'd, and trembling in these arms,
Instead of Hymen, call'd on death; the people
Were silent all; when from the holy threshold,
A more than mortal form, a youthful hero
Stepp'd forth, and sudden darted to the altar;
It was Ægisthus; there undaunted seiz'd
The axe that for the holy festival
Had been prepar'd; then with the light'ning's speed
He ran, and fell'd the tyrant; die, he cry'd,
Usurper dye; now take your victim, gods,
Erox, the monster's vile accomplice, saw
His master welt'ring in his blood, uprais'd
His hand for vengeance; but Ægisthus smote

The

The slave, and laid him at the tyrant's feet :
 Mean time, recover'd, Poliphontes rose
 And fought ; I saw Ægisthus wounded ; saw
 The fierce encounter : the guards ran to part them ;
 When Merope, such pow'r has mighty love,
 Pierc'd thro' opposing multitudes, and cry'd,
 Stop, ye inhuman murth'ers, 'tis my son,
 'Tis my Ægisthus, turn your rage on me,
 And plant your daggers in the breast of her
 Who bore him, of his mother, and your queen :
 Her shrieks alarm'd the croud, and a firm band
 Of faithful friends secur'd her from the rage
 Of the rude soldiers ; then might you behold
 The broken altars, and the sacred ruins :
 On ev'ry side, confusion, war, and slaughter
 Triumphant reign'd ; brothers on brothers rose,
 Children were butcher'd in their mother arms,
 Friends murder'd friends, the dying and the dead
 Together lay, and o'er their bodies trampled
 The flying croud ; with groans the temple rung.
 Amidst the uproar of contending legions
 I lost Ægisthus and the queen, and fled :
 In vain I ask'd each passing stranger whither
 They bent their way ; their answers but increase
 My terrors ; still they cry, he falls, he's dead,

He

He conquers; all is darkness and confusion:
 I ran, I flew, and by the timely aid
 Of these kind friends have reach'd this place of safety:
 But still I know not whether yet the queen
 And great Ægiffthus are preserv'd; my heart
 Is full of terrors.

N A R B A S.

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

S C E N E VII.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, NARBAS, people, soldiers.

[At the further part of the stage is expos'd the Corpse of
 Poliphontes, cover'd with a bloody robe]

M E R O P E.

Priests, warriors, friends, my fellow-citizens,
 Attend, and hear me in the name of heav'n.
 Once more I swear, Ægiffthus is your king,
 The scourge of guilt, th'avenger of his father,
 And yonder bleeding corpse, a hated monster,
 The foe of gods and men, who slew my husband,
 My dear Cresphontes, and his helpless children,
 Oppress'd

Oppress'd Messene, and usurp'd my kingdom,
 Yet dar'd to offer me his savage hand,
 Still reeking with the blood of half my race.

[Meeting Ægisthus, who enters with the axe in his hand.

But here behold Messene's royal heir,
 My only hope, your queen's illustrious son,
 Who conquer'd Poliphontes : see, my friends,
 This good old man,

[Pointing to Narbas.

Who sav'd him from the tyrant,
 And brought him here : the gods have done the rest.

N A R B A S.

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

Æ G I S T H U S.

O hear a mother pleading for her son,
 And know me for your king ! I have reveng'd
 A father, I have conquer'd but for you.

M E R O P E.

If still ye doubt, look on his glorious wounds :
 Who, but the great descendant of Alcides,
 Cou'd save Messene thus, and scourge a tyrant ?
 He will support his subjects, and revenge

An

An injur'd people : hark ! the voice of heav'n
 Confirms your choice, and speaks to you in thunder ;
 It cries aloud, Ægisthus is my son.

S C E N E VIII.

MEROPE, ÆGISTHUS, ISMENIA, NARBAS,
 EURICLES, people.

EURICLES.

O madam, shew yourself to the pleas'd people,
 The king's return has fix'd their wav'ring minds,
 And ev'ry heart is ours : th'impatient croud
 Shed tears of joy, and bless your noble son :
 For ever will they hold this glorious day
 In sweet remembrance ; ardently they long
 To see their youthful sov'reign, to behold
 His faithful Narbas, and adore their queen :
 The name of Poliphontes is detested ;
 Thine and the king's the praise of ev'ry tongue.
 O haste, enjoy thy vict'ry and thy fame ;
 Enjoy a nobler prize, thy people's love.

ÆGISTHUS.

To heav'n ascribe the glory, not to me ;
 Thence comes our happiness, and thence our virtue :
 Whilst Merope survives, I will not mount

Messene's

Messene's throne, my joy shall be to place
A mother there; and thou, my dearest Narbas,
Shall be my friend, my guide, my father still.

END of the FIFTH and LAST ACT.



N A N I N E

A

C O M E D Y.

In three Acts.



1870
1871
1872
1873
1874
1875
1876
1877
1878
1879
1880
1881
1882
1883
1884
1885
1886
1887
1888
1889
1890
1891
1892
1893
1894
1895
1896
1897
1898
1899
1900

P R E F A C E.

THIS trifle was exhibited in the summer, 1749, at Paris, amongst a number of entertainments, which every year constantly produces in that city: in the still more numerous croud of pamphlets, which the town is over-run with, there appear'd at this time one extremely well worthy of notice, an ingenious and learned dissertation, by a member of the academy of Rochelle, on a question which seems for some years past to have divided the literary world, namely, whether we ought to write *serious comedies*? the author declares vehemently against this new species of the drama, to which, I am afraid, the little comedy of *Nanine* belongs: he condemns, and with reason, every thing that carries with it the air of a *city tragedy*: in reality, what can be more ridiculous, than a tragic plot carry'd on by low and vulgar characters? it is demeaning the buskin, and confounding tragedy and, comedy

comedy, by a kind of bastard species, a monster, that cou'd only owe its birth to an incapacity of succeeding either in one or the other: this judicious writer blames, above all, those romantic forc'd intrigues which are to draw tears from the spectators, and which we call, by way of ridicule, the *crying comedy*: but into what species of comedy ought such intrigues to be admitted? wou'd they not be look'd upon as essential and unpardonable faults in any performance whatsoever? He concludes by observing, that if, in a comedy, pity may sometimes go so far as to melt into tears, they shou'd be shed by love alone: he cannot certainly mean by this the passion of love as it is represented in our best tragedies, furious, barbarous, destructive, attended with guilt and remorse; but love gentle and tender, which alone is fit for comedy.

This reflection naturally produces another, which I shall submit to the judgment of the learned; *viz.* that amongst us tragedy has begun by appropriating to itself the language of comedy; we may observe, that love, in many of those performances where terror and pity shou'd be the chief springs, is treated as it ought to be treated in comedy. Gallantry, declarations of love, coquetry, archness and familiarity, are all to be met with amongst the heroes and heroines of Greece and Rome,

Rome, with which our tragedies abound: so that, in effect, the natural and tender love in our comedies is not stol'n from the tragic muse; it is not *Thalia* who has committed a theft upon *Melpomene*, but, on the other hand, *Melpomene*, who for a long time has worn the buskins of *Thalia*.

If we cast our eyes on the first tragedies that had such amazing success in the time of Cardinal *Richelieu*, the *Sophonisba* of *Mairet*, *Mariamne*, *Tyrannic Love*, and *Alcyone*, we shall remark that love, in every one of them, talks in a stile quite familiar, and sometimes extremely low; no less ridiculous than the pompous tone and emphasis of their heroism: this is perhaps the reason why, at that time, we had not one tolerable comedy, because the the tragic scene had stole away all its rights and privileges: it is even probable, that this determin'd *Moliere* seldom to bestow upon his lovers any strong lively and interesting passion for each other: tragedy, he perceiv'd, had anticipated him in this particular.

From the time when the *Sophonisba* of *Mairet* appear'd, which was our first regular tragedy, we began to consider the declarations of love from our heroes, and the artful and coquetish replies of our heroines, together with strong pictures of love and gallantry, as things

things essentially necessary to the tragic scene: there are writings of those times still extant which quote the following verses, spoken by *Maffiniffa* after the battle of Cirte, not without great Eulogiums on their extraordinary merit.

By mutual flames I find my flame approv'd,
 And love the more, the more I am belov'd;
 Sighs grow by sighs, and wishes wishes form,
 As waves by waves are lash'd into a storm;
 When two fond hearts indulgent Hymen chains,
 Alike shou'd be their pleasures and their pains.

The custom of talking thus about love corrupted even some of our best writers; even those, whose manly and sublime geniuses were made to restore tragedy to its ancient splendor, cou'd not escape the contagion: in some of our finest pieces we meet with, “* *an unhappy face, that subdued the courage of a Roman knight.*” The lover says to his mistress, “† *Adieu, thou too virtuous, and too charming object.*” To which the

* ————— un malheureux visage,
 Qui d'un Chevalier Romain captura le courage.
 † Adieu, trop vertueux objet, & trop charmant.

Heroine replies, adieu “ * *thou too unhappy and too perfect lover.*” Cleopatra tells us, that a princess, “ † *who loves her reputation, if she owns her love, is sure to be belov'd.*” And that Cæsar “ † *sighs, and in a plaintive tone acknowledges himself her captive, even in the field of victory :*” adding, that *she alone must be cruel, and make Cæsar unhappy.* To which her confidante replies, “ § *I wou'd venture to swear that your charms boast a power which they will never make use of.*”

In all those pieces of the same author, which were written after his *Death of Pompey*, we are sorry to find the passion of love always treated in this familiar manner ; but, without taking the unnecessary trouble of producing more examples of these glaring absurdities, let us only consider some of the best verses which the author of *Cinna* has brought on the stage as maxims of

* Adieu, trop malheureux, & trop parfait amant.

† ————— aimant sa renommee
En avouant qu'elle aime est sure d'être aimée.

‡ ———— trace des soupirs, & du'n stile p'aintif,
Dans son champ de victoire il sedit son captif.

§ T'oserois bien jurer que vos charmans appas
Se vantent d'un pouvoir dont ils n'useront pas.

I have here given the original of these few short quotations, that the reader may see the full force, both of the absurdity, and of Mr. *Voltaire's* ridicule of it.

gallantry.

gallantry. “ *There are certain secret ties, and sympathetic feelings, by whose soft affinity souls are link’d together, attach’d to, and struck by each other by I know not what charm, which it is impossible to account for.*”

Wou’d one ever conceive that these sentiments, which are certainly highly comic, came out of the mouth of a princess of *Parthia*, who goes to her lover to ask her mother’s life? In such a dreadful crisis, who wou’d talk of the *sympathetic feelings by whose soft affinity souls are link’d together*? Wou’d *Sophocles* ever have produced such madrigals? do not all these amorous sentiments belong to comedy only?

That great writer, who has carry’d the harmony of verse to such a point of perfection, he who made love speak a language at once so noble and so pathetic, has, notwithstanding, brought into his tragedies several scenes which *Boileau* thought much more proper for the elevated stile of *Terence’s* comedies, than suitable to the dignity of the great rival of *Euripides*, who is even sometimes superior to him. One might quote above an hundred verses in this taste; not but that this familiar simplicity has its beauties, and may serve by way of preparation for the pathetic; but if these strokes of simplicity belong even to the tragic muse, with still more reason do they suit high comedy: this is the exact

act point where tragedy descends, and comedy raises itself; where the two arts meet, as it were, and touch each other: here their several limits are confounded: and if *Orestes* and *Hermione* are permitted to say,

‘ O do not wish for the fate of *Pyrrhus*, I should
 ‘ hate you too much—you wou’d love me still more :
 ‘ O that you wou’d look on me in another manner !
 ‘ you wish to love me, and yet I cannot please you :
 ‘ you wou’d love me, madam, by wishing me to hate
 ‘ —for, in short, he hates you ; his heart is other-
 ‘ wise engaged ; he has no longer——

‘ Who told you, my lord, that he despises me ? do
 ‘ you think the sight of me inspires contempt ?’

If these heroes, I say, express themselves in this familiar manner, with how much greater reason shou’d we admire the *Misanthrope* speaking thus with vehemence to his mistress ?

“ Rather blush you, for so you ought, I have too
 “ sure testimony of your falsehood—it was not in vain
 “ that my love was alarm’d, but think not I will tamely
 “ bear the injury without being reveng’d—’tis a trea-
 “ son, a perfidy which cannot be too severely punished ;
 “ yes, I will give a loose to my resentment, I am no
 “ longer master of myself, passion intirely possesses
 VOL. IV. F “ me :

'me: mortally wounded as I am by you, my senses
 "are no longer under the government of reason."

Certainly, if all the *Misanthrope* was in this taste, it wou'd no longer be a comedy; and if *Orestes* and *Hermione* talk'd throughout in the manner they do in the lines above quoted, it wou'd be no tragedy: but after these two very different species met thus together, they fall back each into their proper sphere; one resumes the pleasant stile, and the other the sublime.

Comedy therefore, I repeat it once more, may be impassion'd, may be in transport, or in tears, provided at the same time that it makes the good and virtuous smile: but if it was intirely destitute of the *vis comica*, if, from beginning to end, it had nothing in it but the serious and melancholy, it wou'd then be a species of writing very faulty, and very disagreeable. It must be acknowledg'd, that there is no small difficulty in making the spectators pass insensibly from tears to laughter, and yet this transition, hard as it is to manage in a comedy, is not the less natural. We have already remark'd in another place, that nothing is more common than accidents that afflict the mind, some certain circumstances of which may, notwithstanding, excite at least a momentary mirth and gayety: thus, unhappily for us, is human
 nature

nature framed. *Homer* represents even his gods laughing at *Vulcan's* awkwardness, whilst they are deciding the fate of the whole universe. *Hector* smiles at the fears of his son *Astyanax*, whilst *Andromache* is shedding tears. We often see, that even amidst the horror of battles, conflagrations, and all the disasters that mortals are subject to, a good thing, luckily hit off, will raise a laugh, even in the bosom of terror and pity. In the battle of *Spires*, a regiment was forbid to give quarter, a german officer begg'd his life of one of ours, who answer'd him thus : “ *Sir, ask anything in the world else, but as to your life, I can't possibly grant it.*” This dry and whimsical answer pass'd from one to another, and every body laugh'd in the midst of slaughter and destruction ; why therefore shou'd not laughter follow the most serious and affecting scenes in a comedy ? don't we sympathise with *Alcmena's* distress, and yet laugh with *Sofia* ? how ridiculous it is to dispute against experience ! if those who still contest this matter love rhyme better than reason, let them take the following verses.

O'er this strange world still reigns the tyrant love,
 And all by turns his powerful influence prove ;
 Sometimes a mighty empire he o'erthrows,
 Now soars in lofty verse, now creeps in prose :

Sometimes in tragic garb his passion mourns,
 Sometimes the humbler comic muse adorns :
 Fire in his eyes, and arrows in his hand,
 He spreads or pains or pleasures thro' the land :
 In plaintive elegy his carols sweet
 Now sings, now jocund laughs at *Sylvia's* feet :
 For ever varying, and for ever new,
 From *serious Maro* down to gay *Chaulieu* :
 Bound by no laws, and to no verse confin'd,
 He rules o'er every state, and ev'ry mind,
 The universal idol of mankind.



N A N I N E.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

The Count d'OLBAN, a nobleman retir'd into the country.

The Baroness de l'ORME, a relation of the Count's, a haughty imperious woman, of a bad temper, and disagreeable to live with.

The Marchioness d'OLBAN, mother of the Count.

NANINE, a young girl, brought up in the Count's house.

PHILIP HOMBERT, a peasant in the neighbourhood.

BLAISE, the gardener.

GERMON, } Servants
MARIN, }

SCENE, the Count d'OLBAN's country seat.

NANINE.

* N A N I N E.

A

C O M E D Y.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The Count d'OLBAN, the Baroness de l'ORME.

BARONESS.

IN short, my lord, it is time to come to an explanation with regard to this affair; we are no children, therefore let us talk freely: you have been a widower for these two years past, and I a widow about as long: the law-suit in which we were unfortunately engag'd,

* This Comedy is call'd in the French *Nanine, ou le préjugé vainca Nanine, or Prejudice overcome*. It is written, as we are told in the title page, in verses of ten syllables. The absurdity of Comedies in rhyme I have already remark'd. The original begins thus:

Il faut parler, il faut, Monsieur le *Comte*,
 Vous expliquer nettement sur mon *Compte*.

The reader cannot but observe, what villainous rhimes *Comte* and *Compte* are, and perhaps will more readily forgive my reducing this comedy into plain prose.

and which gave us both so much uneasiness, is at an end; and all our animosities, I hope, now bury'd with those who were the causes of them.

COUNT.

I am glad on't; for law-suits were always my aversion.

BARONESS.

And am not I as hateful as a law-suit?

COUNT.

You madam?

BARONESS.

Yes, I, sir: for these two years past we have liv'd together, with freedom, as relations and friends; the ties of blood, taste, and interest, seem to unite us, and to point out a more intimate connection.

COUNT.

Interest, madam? make use of some better term, I beseech you.

BARONESS.

That, sir, I cannot; but with grief I find, your inconstant heart no longer considers me in any other light than as your relation.

COUNT.

I do not wear the appearance, madam, of a trifler.

BARONESS.

You wear the appearance, sir, of a perjurd villain.

COUNT.

COUNT.

[Aside.

Ha! what's this?

BARONESS.

Yes, sir: you know the suit my husband began against you, to recover my estate, was, by agreement, to have been terminated by a marriage; a marriage you told me, of choice; you were engag'd to me, you know you are; and he who defers the execution of his promise seldom means to perform it.

COUNT.

You know, I wait for my mother's consent.

BARONESS.

A doting old woman: well, sir, and what then?

COUNT.

I love and respect her yet.

BARONESS.

But I do not, sir. Come, come, these are idle frivolous excuses for your unpardonable falsehood: you wait not for her, or for any body; perfidious, ungrateful man!

COUNT.

Who told you so, madam, and whence all this violence of passion? who told you so? whence comes your information, madam?

F 5

BARONESS.

BARONESS.

Who told me? yourself, yourself. Your words, your manner, your air, your whole behaviour, put on on purpose to affront me: it shocks me to see it: act in another manner, or find some better excuses for your conduct: can you think me blind to the shameful unworthy passion that directs you, a passion for the lowest meanest object? you have deceiv'd me, sir, basely deceiv'd me.

COUNT.

'Tis false, I cannot deceive; dissimulation is no part of my character. I own to you, there was a time when you were agreeable to me, I admir'd you, and flatter'd myself that I shou'd have found in you a treasure to make amends for that which heaven had depriv'd me of; I hoped in this sweet asylum to have tasted the fruits of a peaceful and happy union: but you have found out the means to destroy your own power. Love, as I told you long since, has two quivers, one fill'd with darts, tipp'd with the purest flame, which inspires the soul with tender feelings, refines our taste, and sentiments, enlivens our affection, and enhances our pleasures: the other is full of cruel arrows, that wound our hearts with quarrels, jealousy, and suspicion, bring on coldness and indifference, and remove
the

the warmth of passion to make room for disgust and satiety: these, madam, are the darts which you have drawn forth, against us both, and yet you expect that I shou'd love.

BARONESS.

There, indeed, I own myself in the wrong: I ought not to expect it: it is not in your power: but you are false, and now wou'd reproach me for it, and I must suffer your insults, your fine similies and illustrations: but pray, sir, what is it I have done to lose this mighty treasure? what have you to find fault with?

COUNT.

Your temper, your humours, madam: beauty pleases the eye alone, softness and complacency charm the soul.

BARONESS.

And have not you your humours too, sir?

COUNT.

Doubtless, madam; and, for that very reason, wou'd have an indulgent wife; one whose sweet complying goodness wou'd bend a little to my frailties, and condescend to reconcile me to myself, to heal my wounds without burning them, to correct without assuming, to govern without being a tyrant, to insinuate herself by degrees into my heart, as the light
of

of a fine day opens gradually on the weak and delicate eye: he who feels the yoke that is put on him will always murmur at it; and tyrannic love is a deity whom I abjure: I wou'd be a lover, but not a slave: your pride, madam, wou'd make me contemptible: I have faults, I own I have; but heaven made woman to correct the leaven of our souls, to soften our afflictions, sweeten our bad humours, sooth our passions, and make us better and happier beings: this was what they were design'd for; and, for my part, I wou'd prefer ugliness and affability to beauty with pride and arrogance.

BARONESS.

Excellently well moralis'd, indeed; and so when you insult, abuse, and betray me, I in return, with mean complacency, must forgive the shameful extravagance of your passion; and your assum'd air of grandeur and magnanimity must be a sufficient excuse to me for all the baseness of your heart.

COUNT.

How, madam?

BARONESS.

Yes, sir: I know you: it is the young Nanine who has done me this injury; a child, a servant, a field beggar, whom my foolish tenderness nourish'd and supported;

ported ; whom your fond easy mother, touch'd with false pity, took up out of the bosom of penury and sorrow. O you blush, sir, do you ?

COUNT.

I, madam ? I wish her well.

BARONESS.

You love her, sir : I know you do.

COUNT.

Well, madam, and if I did love her, know, I wou'd openly avow it.

BARONESS.

Nay, I believe you are capable of it.

COUNT.

I am so.

BARONESS.

And wou'd you break thus through all the bounds of decency, degrade your rank, demean your birth, and, plung'd as you are in shame and infamy, laugh at and defy all honour ?

COUNT.

Call it prejudice : whatever you, or the world may think, madam, I never mistake vanity for honour and glory : you love pomp and splendor, and place
grandeur

grandeur and nobility in a coat of arms: I look for it in the heart. The man of worth, who has modesty with courage, and the woman who has sense and spirit, tho' without fortune, rank, or title, are, in my eyes, the first of human kind.

BARONESS.

But sure they ought to have some rank and condition in life. Wou'd you treat a low born scholar, or an honest man of the meanest birth, because he had a little virtue, in the same manner, and with the same respect, as you wou'd a lord?

COUNT.

The virtuous shou'd always have the preference.

BARONESS.

This extravagant humility is insupportable: do we owe nothing then to our rank?

COUNT.

Yes: to be honest.

BARONESS.

My noble blood wou'd aspire to a higher character.

COUNT.

That is a high one, which defies the vulgar.

BARO-

BARONESS.

Thus you degrade all quality.

COUNT.

No : thus I do honour to humanity.

BARONESS.

Ridiculous ! what then becomes of the world ? what is fashion ?

COUNT.

Fashion, madam, is despis'd by wisdom : I will obey its ridiculous commands in my dress perhaps, but not in my sentiments : No : it becomes a man to act like a man, to preserve to himself his own taste and his own thoughts : am I ridiculously to ask of others what I am to seek, or to avoid, to praise, or condemn ? must the world decide my fate ? surely I have my reason, and that shou'd be my guide : apes were made for imitation only, but man shou'd act from his own heart.

BARONESS.

Why, this to be sure is freedom of sentiment, and talking like a philosopher. Go then, thou noble and sublime soul, go, and fall in love with village damsels, be the happy rival of ploughmen and hedgers : go, and support the honour of your race.

COUNT.

Goo ! heaven ! what must I do ? How am I to act ?

S C E N E

S C E N E II.

The COUNT, the BARONESS, BLAISE.

COUNT.

Well, fir, what do you want ?

BLAISE.

Your poor gardener, fir, humbly befeeches your honour ———

COUNT.

My honour ! well, Blaise, and what wou'd'st thou have of my honour ?

BLAISE.

An please your honour, I wou'd fain—be marry'd and ———

COUNT.

With all my heart, Blaise, you have my consent ; I like your design, and will affift you : I love folks shou'd marry. Well, and thy spouse elect, Blaise, what ! is she ? handsome ?

BLAISE.

O yes, fir, a delicate little morsel.

BARONESS.

And does she like you, Blaise ?

BLAISE.

O yes.

COUNT.

COUNT.

Well, and her name is ?

BLAISE.

Yes, 'tis——

COUNT.

What ?

BLAISE.

The pretty Nanine.

COUNT.

Nanine ?

BARONESS.

Well, very well indeed ! I approve of the match extremely.

COUNT.

[Aside.

O heav'n ! how am I sunk ! it cannot, must not be.

BLAISE.

I's sure, maister will like it.

COUNT.

What ! did you say she lov'd you, rascal ?

BLAISE.

I beg pardon, fir, I——

COUNT.

Did she tell you that she lov'd you, fir ?

BLAISE.

BLAISE.

Why, no, sir, not absolutely, sir; not directly; but she seem'd to have a little sort of a sneaking kindness for me too: a hundred times has she said to me in the prettiest, softest, most familiar tone, 'help me, my dear friend, Blaise, to make a fine nosegay for my lord, that best of masters;' then wou'd she make the nosegay with such a pretty air, and look so thoughtful, and so absent, and so confus'd, and so———O it was plain enough.

COUNT.

[Aside.

Away, Blaise, get thee gone———O! and am I agreeable to her then?

BLAISE.

Nay, master, now don't put off this little affair of mine.

COUNT.

Ha!

BLAISE.

You shall see how this little spot of land will thrive under our hands soon: why won't you answer me, sir? You say nothing.

COUNT.

[Aside.

O! my heart is too full; I must retire———madam, your servant.

S C E N E

S C E N E III.

The BARONESS, BLAISE.

BARONESS. [To herself.

He loves her to distraction, that I'm positive of: by what charms, by what happy address, cou'd she thus steal his heart from me? Nanine! good heav'n! what a choice! what madness! Nanine! no! I shall burst with disappointment.

BLAISE.

What did you say, madam, about Nanine?

BARONESS. [To herself.

Insolent creature!

BLAISE.

Is not Nanine a charming girl?

BARONESS.

No.

BLAISE.

Well, I say no more; but do, speak for me, speak for poor Blaise.

BARONESS.

What a dreadful stroke is this!

BLAISE.

I have a little money, madam, a few crowns: my father left me three good acres of land, and they shall be
hers;

hers; money, and land, every thing I have, body and soul, Blaife and all.

BARONESS.

Believe me, Blaife, I wish you as well as you can wish yourself, and shou'd be glad to serve you: I shou'd be glad to see you marry'd this very night: nay, what's more, I'll give her a portion.

BLAISE.

O good dear baroness! how I do love you! is it possible you can make me so happy?

BARONESS.

Alas! Blaife, I am afraid I cannot; we shall never succeed.

BLAISE.

O but you must, madam.

BARONESS.

I wish to God she was your wife: wait for my orders.

BLAISE.

And must I wait? not long I hope.

BARONESS.

Be gone.

BLAISE.

Servant, madam: I shall have her, I shall have her.

S C E N E

S C E N E IV.

The BARONESS. [Alone.

What a strange adventure! cou'd I have receiv'd a more cruel injury? a more shameful affront? the Count d' Olban rivall'd by a gardener — here, boy, [*she calls out to her servant*] fetch Nanine to me: since I am so unhappy, I must examine her: where cou'd she have learn'd this art of flattery? who taught her to gain hearts, and to preserve them, to light up a strong and a lasting flame? where? doubtless, in her eyes, in plain and simple nature: but this shameful and unworthy passion of his is still a secret; it has not dared as yet to appear openly. D' Olban, I see, has his scruples about it: so much the worse; if he had none, I might still have hopes; but he has all the symptoms of true love: O! here she comes, the sight of her hurts me; nature is most unjust, to bestow so much beauty on such a creature; 'tis an affront to nobility: come this way, madam.

S C E N E V.

The BARONESS, NANINE.

NANINE.

Madam.



BARONESS.

And yet, after all, she is not so very handsome; those great black eyes of her's express nothing; but if they have said, I love; ay, there's the danger: but I must—come this way, child.

NANINE.

I come, madam, as is my duty.

BARONESS.

Yes: but you make me wait a little for you; pry-thee, child, step on: how awkwardly she is made! what a mein there is! he was never made for such a creature as thee.

NANINE.

'Tis very true, madam: I assure you, I have often blush'd in secret when I look'd on these fine clothes: but they were your first present to me, the effect of that goodness which I shall ever acknowledge, and of that generous care with which you were pleas'd to honour me: you took a pride in dressing me: O, madam, remember how often you have protected me: believe me, madam, I am still the same: why shou'd you wish to humble a submissive heart, which can never forget itself?

BARONESS.

Bring that couch nearer to me — O I am distracted: whence come you? what have you been about?

NANINE.

NANINE.

Reading, madam.

BARONESS.

Reading what?

NANINE.

An English book that was given me.

BARONESS.

What's the subject of it?

NANINE.

'Tis extremely interesting : the author wou'd have us believe that we are all brethren, all born equal, and on a level with each other ; but 'tis an idle chimera, I can't reconcile myself to his doctrine.

BARONESS.

[Aside.

She will soon, I suppose—what vanity ! [To Nanine] bring me my standish, and pen and ink.

NANINE.

Yes, madam.

BARONESS.

No ; stay : give me something to drink.

NANINE.

What, madam ?

BARONESS.

Nothing : it's no matter : take my fan. — go and fetch my gloves—or — stay — it does not signify, you need

need not: come hither: take you care, I desire, never to think yourself handsome.

NANINE.

That, madam, is a lesson you have so often taught me, that if I had so much vanity, and self-love had such influence over my foolish heart, you wou'd soon have cured me of it.

BARONESS. [Aside.

Where can she have learn'd all this? how I hate her! beauty and wit together! 'tis intolerable — hark'ee, child, you know the tendernefs I had for you in your infancy.

NANINE.

Yes, madam, and I hope my youth will be honour'd with equal goodness from you.

BARONESS.

Be careful then to deserve it: it is my intention now, this very day, nay this very hour, to fix and establish your happiness; judge then whether I love you.

NANINE.

To fix my happiness?

BARONESS.

Yes: I will give you a portion: the husband I design for you is well-made, and every way worthy of you; a proper match for you in every particular, and
the

the only one that at present cou'd suit you : you ought to thank me for the choice : in a word, 'tis Blaife the gardener.

NANINE.

Blaife, madam ?

BARONESS.

Yes : why that simpering ? do you hesitate a moment to consent ? my offers, madam, I wou'd have you to know, are commands ; obey, or expect my resentment.

NANINE.

But, madam —

BARONESS.

Let me have no *buts*, they offend me : a pretty thing indeed, for your impertinence to refuse a husband at my hands ! that simple heart of yours is swell'd to a fine degree of vanity : but your boldness is a little premature, and your triumph will be of short duration : you take advantage of the capricious fortune of one lucky day, but shall soon see what will be the event. Thou ungrateful little wretch, hast thou the insolence to please ? you understand me, madam, but I'll bring you back to that nothingness from whence you came, and you shall lament your folly and your pride : I'll shut you up for the rest of your life in a convent.

NANINE.

On my knees I thank you, madam; do, shut me up, my fate will be too mild: yes, madam, of all the benefits you have ever bestow'd on me, this, which you call a punishment, I shall esteem the greatest favour: shut me up for ever in a cloister, there I will thank you for your goodness, and bless my dear master: there I shall learn to calm those cruel fears, those dreadful alarms, those worst of evils, those passions that are far more dangerous to me even than your resentment, which fills me with terror and astonishment: O madam, by that anger, I entreat you, deliver me, save me, save me, if possible, from myself; this moment I am ready to go.

BARONESS.

What do I hear? can it be? are you in earnest, Nanine, or mean you to deceive me?

NANINE.

No: indeed I do not. O do me this charming, this divine favour; my heart stands too much in need of it.

BARONESS.

[With transport.

Rise then, and let me embrace you. O happy hour! my dear Nanine, my friend, I'll go this instant and prepare your sweet retreat; O 'tis a charming thing to live in a convent!

NANINE.

NANINE.

'Tis at least a shelter from the world, and all its cares.

BARONESS.

O, my dear, 'tis a delightful situation.

NANINE.

Do you think so, madam?

BARONESS.

This world is a hateful place—jealous —

NANINE.

[Sighing.

'Tis so indeed.

BARONESS.

Foolish, wicked, vain, deceitful, inconstant, and ungrateful: O 'tis a horrid place.

NANINE.

Yes, I see it wou'd be fatal to me, I ought to flee from it.

BARONESS.

You ought indeed: a good convent is the best haven of security: Now, my good lord, I think, I shall be beforehand with you.

NANINE.

Did you say any thing about my master, madam?

G 2 BARONESS.

BARONESS.

O Nanine, I love thee even to madness: this moment I wou'd, if possible, lock thee up never to come out again: but to night it is too late, we must wait till morning. Hark'ee, child, come to me at midnight to my apartment, and we will set off secretly for the convent: be ready by five at furthest.

S C E N E VI.

NANINE.

[Alone.

How distressful is my condition! what trouble and uneasiness do I feel! and what various passions rise in my soul! to leave so good, so amiable a master, perhaps to offend him by it: and yet, if I had stay'd, this excess of his goodness might have brought on worse calamities, and put his whole family in confusion. The baroness seems apprehensive he has a particular regard for me: but his heart cou'd never stoop so low; I must not, dare not think of it: and my lady seems desperately angry about it: am I hated then, and shou'd I be afraid of being belov'd? O but myself, myself I have most reason to fear, and my foolish heart, that beats so at the thought of him. What will become of me? taken out of my humble state, my notions now are too refined and too exalted: it is a misfortune, nay,
and

and it is a fault too, to have a mind above one's condition. I must go: I know it will kill me: but no matter.

S C E N E. VII.

The COUNT, NANINE, a servant.

COUNT.

Stay at that door there somebody, d'ye hear? bring chairs here, quick, make haste. [*He bows to Nanine, who makes him a low courtesy.*] Come, sit down.

NANINE.

Who, I sir?

COUNT.

Yes: I will have it so: I mean to pay you, Nanine, that respect which your conduct, your beauty, and merit deserve: shines the diamond with less lustre, or is it less valuable, because found in a desert? What's the matter? your eyes seem bath'd in tears: O I see it but too plain; our angry baroness, jealous of your charms, has been venting her ill humours on you, and left my poor girl weeping.

NANINE.

No, sir, no: her goodness, I assure you, to me was never greater than at present; but every thing here softens and affects me.

G 3

COUNT.

COUNT.

I'm glad to hear it ; I was afraid it was some of her malice.

NANINE.

Why so, fir ?

COUNT.

O my dear girl, jealousy reigns in every breast : every man is jealous when he is in love, and every woman even before she is so. A young and beautiful girl, who at the same time is good-natured and sincere, is sure to displease her whole sex : men are more just, and we endeavour as well as we can to revenge ourselves on you for your jealousy : but, with regard to Nanine, I only do her justice, I love that heart which is void of artifice ; I admire the display of those extraordinary talents which you have so finely cultivated ; and I am both surpris'd and charm'd at the ingenuous simplicity of your manners.

NANINE.

O, fir, my merit is small indeed ; but I have seen you, have heard and been instructed by you : you have rais'd me too high above my humble birth : I owe you but too much : from you only I have learn'd to think.

COUNT.

O Nanine, wit and good-sense are not to be taught.

NANINE

NAININE.

I think too much, I fear, for one in my station : my fortune design'd me for the lowest rank in life.

COUNT.

Your virtues have plac'd you in the highest : but tell me ingenuously, what effect had that English book I lent you ?

NAININE.

Not convinc'd me at all, sir : I am more than ever of opinion, that there are hearts so noble and so generous, that all others must appear mean and vile when put in comparison with them.

COUNT.

True, Nanine, and you are yourself a proof of it : but permit me to raise you for the future to a rank and station here less unworthy of you.

NAININE.

My condition, sir, is already too high, and too desirable for me.

COUNT.

No, Nanine, that cannot be : henceforward I shall consider you as one of the family ; my mother is coming, she will look on you as her daughter ; my

esteem, and her tender friendship, will put you on a different footing, and place you in a better rank than you have hitherto held under a proud and imperious woman.

NANINE.

[*Afide.*

She only taught me my duty, fir — and a hard one it is to fulfil.

COUNT.

What duty? yours, Nanine, is only to please, and that you always perform; wou'd I cou'd do so too! but you shou'd be more at your ease, and appear with more splendor; you are not yet in your proper sphere.

NANINE.

I am indeed quite out of it, and it is that which makes me unhappy; 'tis my misfortune, perhaps an irreparable one. [*Rising*] O my lord, my master, remove, I beseech you, from me all these vanities: I am confus'd, overwhelm'd with your excess of goodness; let me live unknown and unenvy'd; heav'n form'd me for obscurity, and humility has nothing in it that to me is grating or disagreeable: leave me to my retreat; what shou'd I do in the world, what shou'd I wish to see there, after the admiration of your virtues?

COUNT.

COUNT. [To himself.

It is too much, I can resist no longer.

You remain in obscurity? you?

[To Nanine.

NANINE.

Whatever I may do, permit me to ask one favour of you.

COUNT.

What is it? speak.

NANINE.

For some time past you have loaded me with presents.

COUNT.

Pardon me, Nanine, I acted but as a tender father, who lov'd his child: I have not the art to set off my presents by flattery, I aim not at gallantry, and only desire to be just: fortune had done you wrong, and I meant to revenge the injury: but nature, in recompence for it, lavish'd all her bounties on you, and her I strove to imitate.

NANINE.

You have done a great deal too much; but I flatter myself I may be permitted, without being thought ungrateful, to dispose of those noble presents, which I shall ever hold dear because they came from you.

G 5

COUNT.

COUNT.

You mean to affront me, sure.

S C E N E VIII.

The COUNT, NANINE, GERMON.

GERMON.

My lady wants you ; she waits.

COUNT.

Let her wait then : what ! can't I speak a moment to you without being interrupted ?

NANINE.

It gives me pain to leave you ; but you know, sir, she was my mistress.

COUNT.

No : I know it not, nor ever will.

NANINE.

She has still a power over me.

COUNT.

No such thing : she shall have none—you sigh, Nanine, there's something at the bottom of that heart ; what's the matter ?

NANINE.

NANINE.

I am sorry to leave you fir—but I must—O heaven
now all is over.

[She goes out.

S C E N E IX.

The COUNT, GERMON.

COUNT. [To himself.

She wept as she left me; for a long time she has
groan'd beneath the tyrannical caprice of this peevish
baroness, who insults her: and by what right, or what
authority? but 'tis an abuse which I will never suffer:
this world is nothing but a lottery of wealth, titles,
dignities, rights, and privileges, barter'd for without
legal claim, and scatter'd without distinction — here,
you,—

GERMON.

My lord.

COUNT.

To morrow morning lay this purse of a hundred
louis-dor's upon her toilette; be sure you don't fail;
you must then go and see after her servants below,
they'll wait there.

GERMON.

The baroness shall certainly have them on her
toilette according to your orders.

COUNT

COUNT.

Blockhead, they're not for her: for Nanine, I tell you.

GERMON.

O very well, sir, I beg pardon.

COUNT.

Be gone, leave me. [*Germon goes out.*] This tenderness of mine can never be a weakness in me: true, I idolise her; but my heart was not touch'd by her beauty only, her character is to the last degree amiable: I admire her soul; but then her low condition—it is too high; were she lower, I shou'd love her yet more: but can I marry her? doubtless I may; can one pay too dear for being happy? shall I fear the censure of an idle world, and let pride deprive me of all I wish for? but then custom——a cruel tyrant: nature has a prior right, and shou'd be obey'd: and so I am Blaise's rival too; and why not? Blaise is a man; he loves her, and he is in the right of it: she can be but in the possession of one, though the desire of all: gardeners may sigh for her, and so might kings: my happiness will justify my choice.

END of the FIRST ACT.

A C T

ACT II. SCENE I.

The COUNT, MARIN.

COUNT. [To himself.

WELL: this night is a whole year to me: not once have I closed my eyes-lids: every body is asleep but me; Nanine sleeps in peace, a sweet repose refreshes her charms, whilst I wander from place to place, and can find no rest: I sit down to write, but can't: then strive to read, but all in vain; I don't know the words before me whilst I am looking on them, nor can my mind retain a single idea: methinks, in every page, I see the name of Nanine imprinted by some hand divine——hola! whose there? all asleep? Germon, Marin.

Coming, sir. MARIN. [Behind the scenes.

COUNT.
You idle rascals, make haste, it's broad day-light; come, come.

MARIN.
Lard, sir, what spirit has rais'd you up so early this morning?

COUNT.
Love. MARIN.

MARIN.

O ho! my lady will let none of us sleep long in this house; what did you want, sir?

COUNT.

Why, Marin, I must have, let me see, by to-morrow at furthest, six new horses, a new equipage, a clever chamber-maid, notable, and careful, a valet-de-chambre, and two footmen, young, and well-made, and no libertines; some diamonds, some very fine buckles, some gold trinkets, and some new stuffs; therefore be gone, ride post to Paris this instant, never mind killing a few horses.

MARIN.

O ho, I see how it is; you are caught; my lady baroness is to be our mistress to day, I suppose; you are going to be marry'd to her at last?

COUNT.

Whatever my intention is, go you about your business; fly, and make haste back.

MARIN.

I'm gone, sir.

S C E N E

SCENE II.

The COUNT, GERMON.

COUNT. [To himself.

And shall I then enjoy the sweet pleasure of honouring, of making happy the dear object of my love? The baroness, I know, will be in a rage: with all my heart, let her rave as long as she will; I despise her, and the world, and its opinion; and am afraid of nobody: I will never be the slave of prejudice, it is an enemy whom we ought to subdue, those who make a rational mind more virtuous, and those only are respectable: but hark! what noise is that in the court? a chariot sure: it ~~must~~ be so; yet who cou'd come at this time in the morning? my mother perhaps. Germon ———

GERMON.

Sir.

COUNT.

What is that?

GERMON.

A chariot, sir.

COUNT.

Who's is it? any body coming here?

GERMON.

No, sir, they're going.

COUNT.

COUNT.

Going? who? where?

GERMON.

The baroness, sir, going out immediately.

COUNT.

O with all my heart, let her go for ever if she pleases!

GERMON.

Nanine and she are this minute setting out.

COUNT.

O heav'n! what sayst thou? Nanine?

GERMON.

So the maid says, sir.

COUNT.

How is this?

GERMON.

My lady, sir, is going with her this morning, to put her into a neighbouring convent.

COUNT.

Away: fly: let us begone: but what am I about? I am too warm to talk to them: no matter, I'll go; I ought—but stop, that must not be, I shou'd at once discover all my passion: no—go, Germon, stop them, let every thing be fast; bring Nanine to me, or answer it with your life. [*Germon goes out.*] So they
wou'd

wou'd have carry'd her off! what a dreadful stroke! ungrateful, cruel, unjust woman! how have I deserv'd this! what have I done! I only lov'd, and adored her; but never declar'd my passion; never endeavour'd to force her inclinations, or to alarm her fearful innocence: why shou'd she fly from me? the more I think on it, the more I am astonish'd.

S C E N E III.

The COUNT, NANINE.

COUNT.

My sweet girl, is it you? what, run away from me? answer me, explain this myst'ry to me: terrify'd, I suppose, with the baroness's threats, you were willing to escape; and that tender regard which I have long had for your virtues, I know, has quickned her resentment: you cou'd not sure yourself have thought of leaving me, of depriving this place of its fairest ornament: last night, when I saw you in tears, tell me, Nanine, had you any intention of this? answer me, tell me, why wou'd you have wish'd to leave me?

NANINE.

Behold me on my knees, and trembling before you

COUNT.

[Raising her up.

Rise, Nanine, and tell me—I tremble more myself.

NANINE.

NANINE.

My lady, fir——

COUNT.

Well—what of her?

NANINE.

That lady, fir, whom I honour and esteem, did not, I assure you, force me to the convent.

COUNT.

And cou'd it then be your own choice? O misery!

NANINE.

It was, I own it was: I entreated her to restrain my wand'ring thoughts—she wanted to have marry'd me.

COUNT.

Indeed? to whom?

NANINE.

To your gardener.

COUNT.

O the worthy choice!

NANINE.

I, fir, was aſham'd, and to the laſt degree unhappy: I who in vain endeavour to ſtiſle ſentiments far above my condition, I whom your bounty had rais'd too high, muſt now be puniſh'd by the loſs of that goodneſs which I never deſerv'd.

COUNT.

COUNT.

You punish yourself, Nanine, and for what?

NANINE.

For having dared to raise the resentment of your relation, sir, who was once my mistress; I know, sir, I am disagreeable to her; the very sight of me disgusts her: she has reason indeed, for when I was near her, I was guilty of a weakness which I shall ever feel; it grows upon me every hour: but I wou'd have torn it from my breast; I would have humbled, by the austerities of a convent, this proud heart, exalted by your goodness, and revenged on it the involuntary crime: but the bitterest grief I felt, was my fear of offending you.

COUNT. [Turning from her, and walking about.

What sentiments! what a noble and ingenuous mind! Can she be prejudic'd in my favour? was she afraid of loving me? O exalted virtue!

NANINE.

If I have offended you, I beg a thousand pardons; but permit me, sir, in some deep retreat to hide my sorrows, and to reflect in secret on my own duty, and your goodness to me.

COUNT.

C O U N T.

No more of that: now, observe me, the baroness is your friend, and out of her generosity has provided you with a servant, a rustic, a boor, for your husband. I know of one who will at least be less unworthy of you: in birth and fortune far superior to Blaise; young, honest, and well provided for: a man, I assure you, of sense and reflection; his character very different from those of the present age: if I am not much mistaken, he'll make you an excellent husband: is not this better than a convent?

N A N I N E.

No: sir, I own to you, this new favour which you wou'd bestow on me has nothing in it that can give me any real satisfaction: you know my grateful heart, read there my real sentiments, and see why I wish to retreat from the world: a gardener, or the monarch of the whole world, who shou'd offer marriage to me, wou'd be equally displeasing.

C O U N T.

You have determin'd me: and now, Nanine, know the man for whom I have design'd you: you already esteem him: he is yours; he adores you: that husband is—myself. I see, you are troubled and surpriz'd: but speak to me; my life depends on you: O recollect yourself, you are strangely agitated.

N A N I N E.

NANINE.

What do I hear? can it be?

COUNT.

It is no more than you deserve.

NANINE.

In love with me? O do not think, do not imagine I will ever dare to claim my conquest: no, sir, never will I suffer you to descend thus low for me: such marriages, believe me, sir, are always unhappy: taste goes off, and repentance alone remains. No, I will call your ancestors to witness —— alas! sir, think not on me: you took pity on my youth: this heart, which you have form'd, which is your own work, wou'd be unworthy of your care, if it cou'd accept from you this noblest present. No, sir, I owe you at least this refusal: my heart shall sacrifice itself for your sake.

COUNT.

No more: for I am resolv'd, and you shall be my wife. Did you not this moment assure me you wou'd refuse every other man, tho' he were a prince?

NANINE.

I did, and repent not of the resolution.

COUNT.

Do you haet me then?

NANINE.

NANINE.

Shou'd I have fled from, shou'd I have avoided, shou'd I have fear'd, if I had hated you?

COUNT.

It is enough, and I am fix'd.

NANINE.

What then have you determin'd on?

COUNT.

Our marriage.

NANINE.

Think, fir.

COUNT.

I have thought of every thing.

NANINE.

And foreseen too?

COUNT.

I have.

NANINE.

If you love me, believe me, fir——

COUNT.

I do believe—that I have resolv'd on the only means to make myself happy.

NANINE.

But you forget——

COUNT.

COUNT.

I have forgot nothing : every thing is order'd, and every thing shall be ready.

NANINE.

What! in spite of all I say, will your obstinate passion——

COUNT.

Yes, spite of thee, my impatient love must urge the happy moment. I will quit thee for a minute, that henceforth we may never part: adieu, my dear Nanine.

S C E N E IV.

NANINE.

[Alone.

Good heaven! do I dream? or am I indeed arriv'd at the summit of earthly happiness? 'tis not the honour, great as it is, 'tis not the splendor that dazzles me: no: I despise it all: but to wed the most generous of men, the dear object of all my fearful wishes, him whom I was so much afraid of loving, him whom I adore, yet I love him too much to wish he shou'd demean himself for my sake: but it is impossible to avoid it; I cannot now escape him: what can I do? heaven, I trust, will direct me, and support my weakness, perhaps even — but I'll write to him — and yet how to begin, and what to say — what a surprize! I will

will write immediately, before I enter into this solemn engagement.

S C E N E V.

NANINE, BLAISE.

BLAISE.

O there she is : well, my little maid, my lady has spoke to you in my favour, has not she ? ha ? she writes on, and takes no notice of me.

NANINE.

[Writing on.

O Blaise, good morrow to you.

BLAISE.

Good morrow is but a cold compliment.

NANINE.

[Writing.

Every word I write doubles my distress, and my whole letter is full of doubts and uneasiness.

BLAISE.

How she writes off hand ! O she's a great genius ; and a monstrous wit : I wish I was a wit too, then I'd tell her ——

NANINE.

Well, sir.

BLAISE.

Lack-a-day, she's so clever, I'm afraid to speak : I shall never be able to break my mind to her — yet I was hot upon't, and came here o'purpose, that I did.

NANINE.

NANINE.

Dear Blaise, you must do me a piece of service.

BLAISE.

Marry, two, and you will.

NANINE.

I shall trust to your discretion, to your good heart, Blaise; nay, I do you but justice.

BLAISE.

O no ceremony; for look you, ma'am, Blaise is ready to serve you, and there's an end of it. Come, come, make no secret.

NANINE.

You often go to the neighbouring village, to Remival, the right hand of the road.

BLAISE.

Yes, yes.

NANINE.

Cou'd you find one Philip Hombert for me there?

BLAISE.

Philip Hombert? I know nothing of him: what sort of a man is he?

NANINE.

He came there, I believe, but yesterday evening; do you enquire him out, and give him immediately this money, and this letter.

BLAISE.

O money is it?

NANINE.

And at the same time deliver him this packet: go on horse-back, that you may return the sooner: away, make haste, and be assur'd I'll remember you for it.

BLAISE.

I wou'd go for you to the world's end — this Philip Hombert is a happy rogue: the purse is full: all ready Rhino. What, is it a debt?

NANINE.

Yes: and well-prov'd: nothing can be more sacred, therefore take care of it: hark'ee, Blaise, Hombert may not be known in the village, perhaps he is not yet return'd: if you can't give the letter into his own hands, bring it me back again: my dear friend, remember that.

BLAISE.

My dear friend!

NANINE.

I shall depend upon you.

BLAISE.

Her dear friend! O lud!

NANINE.

NANINE.

I rely intirely upon you, and expect every thing from your fidelity.

S C E N E VI.

The BARONESS, BLAISE.

BLAISE.

What a message! and where the deuce cou'd this money come from? it wou'd have been of service to me in house-keeping: but she has a friendship for me, and that's better than money, so away we go.

[As he is puting the money and letter into his pocket, he meets the baroness, and runs full against her.

BARONESS.

How now, booby? a little more and you'd broke my head.

BLAISE.

I beg your pardon, madam.

BARONESS.

Where are you going? have you heard any thing of Nanine? what is she about? is the count in a violent passion? what have you got there, a letter?

BLAISE.

O that's a secret: poise on her!

BARONESS.

Let me look at it.

BLAISE.

Nanine will be angry.

BARONESS.

Nanine! cou'd she write, and send it by you? give it me this minute, or I'll break off your match immediately; give it me, I say.

BLAISE.

[Laughing.

He! he!

BARONESS.

What do you laugh at?

BLAISE.

[Still laughing.

Ah! ah!

BARONESS.

I must know the contents of this; — [*Breaks open the letter*] if I am not mistaken, they concern me nearly.

BLAISE.

[Laughing.

Ah! ah! ah! how she is nick'd now! she has got nothing there but a scrap of paper: but I shall keep the money, and carry it to Philip Hombert: yes, yes, must obey my mistress. Servant, ma'am.

S C E N E

S C E N E VII.

The BARONESS alone.

Now let's see what we have got. [*Reads.*] "Both
 " my joy and tenderness are unspeakable, as is my
 " happiness also: what a moment was this for you to
 " come in! when I cannot see or hear you, cannot
 " throw myself into your arms: but, I conjure you,
 " take these packets, and accept the contents of
 " them. Know, I have been offer'd a most noble
 " and truly enviable condition in life, such as I might
 " well be dazzled with the prospect of: but there is
 " nothing which I wou'd not sacrifice to the only one
 " upon earth whom my heart ought to love." Very
 fine indeed! upon my word, Mrs. Nanine, an ex-
 cellent stile: how prettily she writes! the innocent
 orphan: her passion speaks most eloquently: a rare
 billet this! O, thou fly jade: thus you deceiv'd poor
 Blaife, and thus depriv'd me of my lover: this going
 into a convent, I find, was all a feint, a pretence;
 and the count's money, it seems, is for Philip Hom-
 bert: thou little coquette! but I am glad on't: the
 count's perfidiousness to me deserv'd this return: I
 thought indeed Nanine's heart was as mean as her
 birth, and now I am satisfy'd of it.

S C E N E VIII.

The COUNT, BARONESS.

BARONESS.

But here comes the philosopher, the sentimental count d'Olban, the wise lover, the man above prejudice: your servant, noble count, approach and laugh, my dear lover, at the most ridiculous circumstance: do you know Philip Hombert, of Remival? but, to be sure, you can't be a stranger to your — rival.

COUNT.

What is all this, pray?

BARONESS.

This billet perhaps will inform you: this Hombert must be a handsome lad.

COUNT.

You are too late, madam, now with your schemes; my resolution once made, I am not to be shaken: be satisfy'd, madam, with the shameful trick you wanted to play me this morning.

BARONESS.

You'll find this new one a worse, I believe: there, read: [*Gives him the letter*] you'll like it vastly: you
know

know the hand, and you know the virtue of the dear nymph that has subdued you : [*Whilst he is reading it he seems confounded, grows pale, and angry*] well, sir, what think you of the stile? — he sees nothing, says nothing, hears nothing: poor man! but he deserves it.

COUNT.

Did I read aright? it cannot be. I am astonish'd, thunder-struck; ungrateful sex! perfidious creature!

BARONESS. [Aside.

I know his temper well; naturally violent, quick and resolute: he'll do something immediately.

SCENE IX.

The COUNT, BARONESS, GERMON.

GERMON.

Yonder comes madam Olban: she's in the avenue already.

BARONESS.

Is the old woman return'd?

GERMON.

Sir, sir, my lady, your mother, is coming.

BARONESS.

His anger has taken away his hearing: the letter operates finely.

H. 4.

GER-

SCENE. X.

The COUNT, BARONESS.

BARONESS.

Now, the day is ours : I give you joy, fir, of your return to reason : now, fir, is not it true as I told you, the low-bred always retain something of their former condition, and persons of family alone have hearts truly noble ? Blood, fir, let me tell you, does every thing, and meanness of birth will inspire Nanine with sentiments you never suspected her of.

COUNT.

That I don't believe : but come, we'll talk no more about it, but endeavour to make amends for past errors : every man has his follies, at some part of his life ; we all go wrong ; and he is least to blame who repents the soonest.

BARONESS.

'Tis well observ'd.

COUNT.

Never mention her to me again : be silent on that head, I entreat you.

BARONESS.

Most willingly.

H 5

COUNT.

COUNT.

I beg this subject of our dispute may be intirely forgot.

BARONESS.

But will you remember then your former vows?

COUNT.

Well, well, I understand you, I will.

BARONESS.

And quickly too, or you will not repair the injury: our marriage so shamefully deferr'd is an affront —

COUNT.

That shall be made amends for; but, madam, we must have —

BARONESS.

Have what? we must have a lawyer.

COUNT.

You know, madam, that — I waited for my mother.

BARONESS.

And here she comes.

SCENE

S C E N E XI.

The MARCHIONESS D'OLBAN, the COUNT, BARONESS.

COUNT. [To his mother.

Madam, I shou'd have — [*Aside*] O, Philip Hombert! [*To his mother*] but you have prevented me: my respect, and tenderness — [*Aside*] with that air of innocence too! perfidious wretch!

MARCHIONESS.

Why, you rave, child; I heard indeed, as I pass'd thro' Paris, that your head was a little touch'd, and I find there was some truth in it; how long has this misfortune —

COUNT.

Good heaven! how confused I am!

MARCHIONESS.

Does it feize you often?

COUNT.

It never will again, madam.

MARCHIONESS.

I should be glad to speak with you alone. [*Turns to the baroness and makes her a formal courtesy*] Good morrow, madam.

BARO--

BARONESS.

[Aside.

The old fool? [*Turning to the Marchioness*] Madam, I leave you the pleasure of entertaining the count at your leisure, and retire.

[She goes out.

S C E N E XII.

The MARCHIONESS, the COUNT.

MARCHIONESS.

[Talking very fast, and in the manner of a little prating old woman.]

Well, sir, and so you intend to make the baroness my daughter-in-law: 'twas this, to tell you the truth, that brought me here so soon: she's a peevish, impertinent, proud, opinionated creature, and one who never had the least regard for me: last year, when I sup'd with the marchioness Agard, she said before all the company, I was a babbler. Lord forbid I shou'd ever sup there again: a babbler! besides I know, between you and me, she is not so rich; and that, let me tell you, son, is a great point, and we ought to be well inform'd about it: they tell me that the chateau d'orme did but half of it belong to her husband, and that the other half was disputed by a long law-suit, that is not finish'd to this day: that I had from your grand--papa, and he always told truth:

ay,

ay, he was a man; there are few such now a'days: there is nothing now at Paris but a set of half-men, vain, foolish, impertinent coxbombs, talking upon ev'ry subject, and laughing at times past. O, their eternal clack distracts me, prating about new kitchens, and new fashions: we hear of nothing now but bankrupts, and distress, and ruin: the wiyes, in short, are licentious, and the husbands simpletons: every thing grows worse and worse.

COUNT. [Reading the letter over again.

Who cou'd have thought it? this is a desperate stroke indeed. Well, Germon?

S C E N E XIII.

The MARCHIONESS, the COUNT, GERMON.

GERMON.

Here's your lawyer, sir.

COUNT.

O! let him wait.

GERMON.

And here's the paper, sir, she sent you.

COUNT.

[Reading.

Give it me — well, let me see: she loves me, she says here, and refuses me out of — respect. Faithless woman!

woman! thou hast not told me the true reason of that refusal.

MARCHIONESS.

My son's head is certainly turn'd: 'tis the baroness's doing: love has taken away his senses.

COUNT. [To Germon.

Is Nanine gone! shall I be rid of her?

GERMON.

Alas! sir, she has already put on her old rustic garb with the greatest modesty, and never murmur'd or complain'd.

COUNT.

Very likely so.

GERMON.

She bore her misfortune with the utmost tranquility, whilst every body about her were in tears.

COUNT.

With tranquility, say'st thou?

MARCHIONESS.

Who are you talking about?

GERMON.

O madam, poor Nanine, she is going to be driven away, and every body laments the loss of her.

M A R-

MARCHIONESS.

To be driven away? how is this? I don't understand it: what! my little Nanine go! call her back again: my charming orphan! what has she done, pray? why, Nanine was my present to you. O I remember, at ten years of age she delighted every body that saw her: our baroness took her, and I said then she wou'd be ill-used; I knew it wou'd be so: but you never mind what I say, you will do every thing of your own head: but let me tell you, turning Nanine out of doors thus is a very bad action.

COUNT.

Alone, on foot, without money, without assistance!

GERMON.

O, sir, I forgot to tell you: an old man ask'd after you below, and says he wants to speak to you on an affair of importance, which he can communicate to none but yourself: he wants to throw himself at your feet.

COUNT.

In my present unhappy situation of mind, am I fit to converse with any body?

M A R-

MARCHIONESS.

Thou art uneasy enough, I believe, child, and so am I too, to drive away poor Nanine, and make up a marriage which you knew wou'd be disagreeable to me: come, it was not a wise thing; in three months time you will be weary of one another: I'll tell you what happen'd exactly like this to my cousin the marquis of Marmure: his wife was as sower as verjuice, tho', by the by, yours is worse; when they marry'd, they thought they lov'd one another, and in two months after they were parted. My lady went to live with her gallant, a foolish, sharking, extravagant fop; and my lord took a vile, tricking, ridiculus coquette! fine suppers, country houses, horses, cloaths, a rascally steward, new trinkets, bought upon trust, lawyers, contracts, interest-money, all together soon ruin'd them, and in two years both went together to the hospital. O, and now I think of it, I remember another story, more tragical, and more extraordinary than the other, it was of a——

COUNT.

My dear mother, we must go in to dinner: come—
cou'd I ever have suspected such infidelity!

M A R-

MARCHIONESS.

'Tis really dreadful : but I'll tell it you all at table :
in proper time and place, son, it may be of great use
to you. Away.

END of the SECOND ACT.

ACT III. SCENE I.

NANINE, cloath'd as a country girl, GERMON.

GERMON.

WE are all in tears at the thoughts of losing
you.

NANINE.

It is time to go : I've staid too long already.

GERMON.

But you wont leave us for ever, I hope, and in this
drefs too ?

NANINE.

Obscurity was my first condition.

GERMON.

What a change ! and only from this morning : to
suffer is nothing, but to be degraded is terrible.

NANINE.

NANINE.

No, no, there are a thousand times worse misfortunes.

GERMON.

I admire your patience, and humility : surely my master must have been ill advis'd : our baroness has certainly abus'd her power : she must have done you this injury, the count cou'd never have the heart.

GERMON.

I am indebted to him for every thing ; and, if he thinks fit to banish me, I must submit ; his favours are his own, and he has a right to recall them.

GERMON.

Who wou'd ever have expected such a change ? what do you intend to do with yourself ?

NANINE.

To retire, and repent.

GERMON.

How we shall all detest the baroness !

NANINE.

They have made me miserable, but I forgive them.

GERMON.

But what shall I tell my master from you when you are gone ?

NANINE.

NANINE.

Tell him, I thank him for restoring me to my former condition : tell him that, for ever sensible of his goodness, I shall forget nothing but his—cruelty.

GERMON.

You melt my very soul ; I cou'd leave this house immediately to go along with you wherever you went : but Blaise is before hand with us all : he will go and live with you, and we are all ready to follow him.

NANINE.

No, Germon, that I'm sure you are not. O Germon, to be driven out in this manner, — and by whom ?

GERMON.

The devil is certainly at the bottom of this business : you are leaving us, and my master is going to be marry'd.

NANINE.

Marry'd, sayst thou ? indeed ? nay, then let us be gone : O he was too dangerous for me——farewell.

GERMON.

Well ! after all, my master must have a cruel heart, to banish so sweet a creature : she seems a most amiable girl, but in this world one shou'd swear to nothing.

S C E N E

S C E N E II.

The COUNT, GERMON.

COUNT.

Well, is she gone at last ?

GERMON.

Yes, sir, 'tis done.

COUNT.

I'm glad on't.

GERMON.

Then, sir, you have a heart of iron.

COUNT.

Did Philip Hombert meet and give her his hand ?

GERMON.

What Philip Hombert, sir ? alas ! sir, poor Nanine went off without a creature to give her his hand ; she wou'd not even accept of mine.

COUNT.

And where is she gone ?

GERMON.

That I know not ; most probably to her friends.

COUNT.

Ay, at Remival, I suppose.

GERMON.

GERMON.

Yes, I believe she went that road.

COUNT.

Go, Germon, immediately, and conduct her to that convent where the baroness was going this morning, I'll lodge her in that safe retreat : these hundred louis d'or's will secure her reception ; carry them to her, but take care she does not know they come from me : tell her 'tis a present from my mother : upon no account mention my name to her.

GERMON.

Very well, sir, I shall obey your orders.

[He goes towards the door.]

COUNT.

Germon, you saw her as she went off?

GERMON.

I did, sir.

COUNT.

Did she seem dejected ? did she weep ?

GERMON.

She behav'd still better, sir ; a few tears dropp'd from her, but she strove as much as she cou'd to repress them.

COUNT.

COUNT.

Did she let fall any thing that betray'd her sentiments? did you remark —

GERMON.

What, sir?

COUNT.

Did she say any thing of me?

GERMON.

Yes, sir; a great deal.

COUNT.

Tell me, then, rascal, what did she say?

GERMON.

That you were her master, her best and kindest benefactor; that she shall forget every thing — but your cruelty.

COUNT.

Away — be sure you take care she never returns;
[*Germon going out*] and hark'ee, Germon.

GERMON.

Sir.

COUNT.

One word more: remember, if, by chance, as you are conducting her, one Philip Hombert shou'd follow you, that you treat him in a proper manner.

GER-

GERMON.

O, sir, I'll use him most politely, and treat him with a good drubbing, that you may depend on: I'll do the business honestly, I warrant you: young Hombert, you say?

COUNT.

The same.

GERMON.

Very well: I have not the honour to know him, but the first man I see will I trim most heartily, and afterwards make him tell me his name. [*He goes to wards the door and comes back.*] This young Hombert, I'll lay my life, is some lover of her's, a beau, a prig, I suppose, the cock of the village. Let me alone to deal with him.

COUNT.

Do as I bid you, and immediately.

GERMON.

I thought there was some lover in the case — and Blaise too puts in his claim, I suppose. Ay: they always love their equals better than their masters.

COUNT.

Be gone, I tell you.

S C E N E

S C E N E III.

The COUNT.

[Alone.

He's in the right, and has hit on the true cause of my unhappiness, but I shall myself be the punisher of my own folly. I must now marry the baroness; it is determin'd, and I can't avoid it: 'tis dreadful; but I have deserv'd it: 'twill at least be a convenient match: she's not very tractable indeed, but every man may rule, if he has a mind to it; and he who has resolution may, at any time, be master in his own house.

S C E N E IV.

The COUNT, BARONESS, MARCHIONESSE.

MARCHIONESSE..

Well, son, you are going to marry this lady here?

COUNT.

Yes, madam.

MARCHIONESSE.

This night she is to be your wife and my daughter-in-law?

BARONESS.

If you approve of it, madam; I suppose I shall have your consent.

MARCHIONESSE.

Why, I must give it, I think: but to-morrow I shall take my leave of you.

COUNT.

COUNT.

Your leave, madam, why so?

MARCHIONESS.

I shall take my Nanine with me: since you have thought fit to turn her out of doors, I shall take her under my protection: I have a match in my eye for her: I propose marrying her to the young chief justice, nephew to the attorney-general, Jean Roc Souci; he whose father met with that comical adventure at Corbeil; you must have heard of him: yes, I will take care of this poor child, I'm determin'd: she is a jewel, and deserves to be well set. I'll marry her off immediately. Your servant.

COUNT.

My dear mother, don't be in a passion: leave me to manage my own affairs, and let Nanine go into a convent.

BARONESS.

Indeed, madam, you may believe us, such a girl as Nanine is not fit to go into a family.

MARCHIONESS.

Ha! why, what's the matter?

BARONESS.

O a little affair only.

MARCHIONESS.

But pray —

VOL. IV.

I

BARO-

BARONESS.

O nothing at all.

MARCHIONES.

Nothing! a great deal, I'm afraid: I understand you mighty well: some little indiscretion I suppose: nothing more likely, for to be sure she's very handsome: Ay, ay, we are all frail; we tempt, and are tempted; the heart has its weakness: young girls are always a little coquettish: but come, it is not so bad as you make it; tell me fairly, what my poor child has done?

COUNT.

I tell you, madam?

MARCHIONESS.

You seem, after all, at the bottom to have some regard for the girl, and perhaps you may ——

S C E N E V.

The COUNT, MARCHIONESS, BARONESS.

MARIN. [Booted.

MARIN.

I've done it, sir; it's all agreed for.

MARCHIONESS.

What's agreed for?

BARONESS.

Ay, what, sir, what?

MARIN.

MARIN.

Why, sir, I've done as you order'd me, spoke to the tradesmen, and you'll have your equipage to-morrow.

BARONESS.

What equipage?

MARIN.

Every thing, madam, that your future spouse had order'd; six fine horses, and a charming berlin; I'm sure your ladyship will like it; it's very fine; the pannels all varnish'd by Martin: the diamonds too are brilliant, and well-chosen; and the new stuffs quite in taste.—O nothing comes up to 'em.

BARONESS. [To the count.

And had you order'd all this?

COUNT.

I had — [*Aside*] but for whom!

MARIN.

Every thing will come to-morrow morning in the coach, and will be ready for your wedding in the evening: O there's nothing like Paris for getting every thing at a minute's warning, if you have but money. As I came back, I call'd on the lawyer; he's just by, finishing your affair.

BARONESS.

It has hung a long time in suspense.

MARCHIONESS.

[*Afide.*

I wish it wou'd hang these forty years.

MARIN.

In the hall I met a poor old man, sighing and in tears ; he has waited a long time, he says, and begs to speak to you.

BARONESS.

An impertinent fellow ! let him go about his business : he has chose a wrong time to trouble us now.

MARCHIONESS.

Why, so, madam ? have a little consideration : son, let me tell you, it's very wrong to repulse poor people in this manner ; I have told you over and over, when you was a child, you ought to treat them with indulgence ; hear what they have to say ; be courteous, and affable to 'em : are not they men as well as yourself : we don't know perhaps who we affront, and may repent our hardness of heart : the proud never prosper. [*To Marin*] Go, see for that old man.

MARIN.

I will ma'am [*He goes out.*]

COUNT.

COUNT.

Forgive me, madam, my respects are always due to you, and I am ready to see this man, in spite of my present embarrassment.

S C E N E. VI.

The COUNT, MARCHIONESS, BARONESS, a PEASANT.

MARCHIONESS. [To the Peasant.

Come, come, speak, don't be afraid.

PEASANT.

O, my lord, for heaven's sake hear me; permit me to fall at your feet, and to give you back——

COUNT.

Rise, friend; I'll not be knelt to; do not imagine me capable of such pride: you seem to be an honest man, do you want employment in my family? who are you?

MARCHIONESS.

Cheer up, man.

PEASANT.

Alas! sir, I am the father of—Nanine.

COUNT.

You?

BARONESS.

Your daughter's a slut.

PEASANT.

This, sir, is what I fear'd : this is the cruel stroke that has wounded my poor heart : I thought indeed so much money cou'd not fairly belong to one in her condition : we little folks soon lose our integrity when we come among the great.

BARONESS.

There he's right enough : but still he's a deceiver, for Nanine is not his daughter, she was an orphan.

PEASANT.

It is too true, she was so : I left her with her poor relations in her infant years, having lost her mother, with all my fortune ; oblig'd by necessity, I went to serve abroad ; and as I wou'd not have her pass for the daughter of a soldier, forbad her ever to mention my name.

MARCHIONESS.

Why so ? for my part, I respect a soldier : we stand in need of them sometimes.

COUNT.

What is there shameful in the profession ?

PEASANT.

It meets indeed with less honour than it deserves.

ACT

COUNT.

COUNT.

The prejudice against them is inexcusable. I own, I esteem an honest soldier, who hazards his life in the defence of his king and country, much more than an important self sufficient scoundrel, whose knavish industry sucks up the blood of his fellow subjects.

MARCHIONESS.

You must have been in a great many battles: let me have an account of them all; I long to hear it.

PEASANT.

In my present unhappy condition you must excuse me: let it suffice to inform you, that I receiv'd a thousand promises of advancement; but, without friends, how was it possible to rise? thrown amongst the common croud, all I cou'd do was to distinguish myself, and honour my only reward.

MARCHIONESS.

You were then well born?

BARONESS.

Fye: how can you think so! well born indeed?

PEASANT.

No, madam: but I was born of honest parents, and merited—a better daughter.

MARCHIONESS.

Cou'd you have had a better ?

COUNT.

Well ! go on,

MARCHIONESS.

A better than Nanine ?

COUNT.

Prithee, go on.

PEASANT.

My daughter, I understood, was brought up here, and treated in the kindest manner ; I thought myself happy, and bless'd heaven for your goodness, and paternal care of her ; I came to the neighbouring village, full of hopes and fears ; I own I trembled for her dangerous youth ; and, by this lady's intimation, find I had but too much reason ; it has shock'd me to the soul ; but I thought a hundred louis d'or's, besides diamonds, was a treasure too great to be fairly come by : she cou'd never be mistress of them, but at the expence of her innocence : the bare suspicion makes me shudder ; if it be so, I shall die with grief and shame : but I came as soon as possible, to give 'em you back again : they are your's, therefore, I beseech you, take 'em : if my daughter is to blame, punish me, but don't ruin her.

M A R-

MARCHIONESS.

O my dear son, I cannot bear this; it overpowers me.

BARONESS.

What is all this? a dream? a trick?

COUNT.

O! what have I done?

PEASANT. [Taking out the purse
and the letter.

Here, sir, take 'em.

COUNT.

I take 'em! no: they were given to her, and she has made a noble use of them: was it to you then the message was deliver'd? who brought it?

PEASANT.

Your gardener, sir, in whom Nanine ventur'd to confide.

COUNT.

Was it directed to you?

PEASANT.

It was, I own it, sir.

COUNT.

O grief, O tenderness! what excess of virtue in them both! but now your name!—O I am lost, distracted.

MARCHIONESS.

Ay, your name. What mystery is this?

PEASANT.

Philip Hombert de Gatine.

COUNT.

O my father!

BARONESS.

What does he say?

COUNT.

How day breaks in upon me! I have done wrong, and I must make amends for it: O if you knew how culpable I have been! I have injur'd the sublimest virtue. [*He steps aside, and speaks to one of his servants.*] away: fly.

BARONESS.

What is all this emotion for?

COUNT.

My coach immediately.

MARCHIONESS.

Now, madam, you must be her protectress: when we have done such an injury, we shou'd blush at nothing so much as an imperfect repentance; my son often has his whims, which people are too apt to mistake for unpardonable follies; but at bottom he has a generous soul, and is naturally good; I can do what I
please

please with him: you, my daughter-in-law, are not so well-dispos'd.

BARONESS.

I shall grow out of all patience: how confus'd and thoughtful he looks! what strange scheme now is he meditating upon? well, sir, what do you intend to do?

MARCHIONESS.

Ay, for Nanine?

BARONESS.

Make her a handsome present, and satisfy her.

MARCHIONESS.

That will be the least we can do.

BARONESS.

But as to seeing her that I never will: she shall not come nigh the castle: do you hear me?

COUNT.

Yes, I hear you.

MARCHIONESS.

[Aside.

What a heart of stone!

BARONESS.

Don't give my suspicions cause to break out, sir. Ha! you hesitate.

COUNT. [After a pause of sometime.

No, madam, I am resolv'd.

BARO-

BARONESS.

'That respect at least is owing to me ; nay, to both of us.

MARCHIONESS.

And can you be so cruel, son ?

BARONESS.

What step do you propose to take ?

COUNT.

'Tis taken already : you know my heart, madam, and the frankness of it : I must be plain with you : I had promis'd you my hand ; but the design of our marriage was only to put an end to a tedious low-suit between us, which I will now do immediately, by willingly resigning to you all those rights and pretensions which were the foundation of it : even the interest shall be your's ; I give up every thing, take, and enjoy it : if since we cannot be man and wife, let us at least live as friends and relations : let every thing that gave mutual uneasiness be forgot : there is no reason why, because we can't love, we shou'd hate each other.

BARONESS.

Your falsehood is what I expected : but I renounce your presents, and yourself : yes, traitor, I see now who you mean to live with, and how low your passion
sinks

sinks you: go, and be a slave to her, I leave you to your unworthy choice.

[She goes out.]

S C E N E VII.

The COUNT, MARCHIONESS, PHILIP HOMBERT.

COUNT.

No, madam, 'tis not unworthy, my soul is not blinded by an idle passion: that virtue which it is my duty to reward ought to melt, but cannot debase me: what they call meanness in this old man constitutes his merit, and makes him truly noble: if I wou'd be so, I must pay the price of it: where souls are thus ennobled by themselves, and distinguish'd by superior characters, we shou'd pass over common rules: their birth, low as it is, when attended with such virtues, will make my family but more illustrious.

MARCHIONESS.

What are you talking about?

S C E N E VIII.

The COUNT, MARCHIONESS, NANINE.

PHILIP HOMBERT.

COUNT.

[To his mother.]

Look at her, and guess.

MAR-

MARCHIONESS. [To Nanine.

My dearest child, come to my arms: but she is strangely clothed, and yet how handsome she looks, and modest too!

NANINE.

[Pays her respects to the Marchioness, and then runs to her father.

O nature demands my first acknowledgments, my dear father!

PHILIP HOMBERT.

O heaven! my daughter! O sir, you have made me amends for forty years afflictions.

COUNT.

Ay, but how must I repair the injury I have done to such exalted virtue! to come back in this dress, how mean it is, but she adorns it; Nanine does honour to every thing: speak, my Nanine, can your goodness pardon the affront?

NANINE.

Can you, sir, doubt my forgiveness of it? I never thought, after all your bounty to me, you cou'd injure me.

COUNT.

If you have indeed forgot the wrong I did you, give me a proof of it: once more, and only once, I take upon me to command you; but this once you must swear --- to obey me,

PHILIP

PHILIP HOMBERT.

I am sure she owes it to you, and her gratitude —

NANINE. [To her father.

He need not doubt, sir, of my obedience.

COUNT.

I shall depend upon it: let me tell you then, that all your duty is not yet paid: I have seen you on your knees to my mother, and to your own father; one thing still remains for you, and that is, now, before them, to embrace—your husband.

NANINE.

Who? I?

MARCHIONESS.

Are you in earnest? can it be?

PHILIP HOMBERT.

O my child!

COUNT. [To his mother.

By your permission, madam.

MARCHIONESS.

My dear child, the family will be in a strange uproar about it.

COUNT.

O when they see Nanine, they must approve.

PHILIP



PHILIP HOMBERT.

What a stroke of fortune ! O, sir, I never thought you cou'd descend thus low.

COUNT.

You promis'd to obey, and I must have it so.

MARCHIONEſS.

My fon.

COUNT.

My happiness, madam, depends on this important moment : interest alone, we know, has made a thousand marriages ; we have seen the wisest men consult fortune and character only : her character is irreproachable ; and as to fortune, she wants it not : justice and inclination shall do what avarice has so often done before : let me, then, madam, have your consent, and finish all.

NANINE.

No, madam, you must not consent ; indeed you must not ; oppose his passion, oppose mine : let me intreat you, do : love has blinded him, do you, madam, remove the veil : let me live far from him, and at a distance only adore his virtues : you know my condition ; you see my father : can I, ought I, ever to wish to call you mother ?

M A R-

MARCHIONESS.

Yes ; you can, you ought : it is enough : I can hold out no longer : this last generosity has entirely subdued me : it tells me how much I ought to love : it is as singular, as extraordinary, as Nanine herself.

NANINE.

Then, madam, I obey ; my heart can no longer resist the power of love.

MARCHIONESS.

Let this happy day be the worthy recompense of virtue, * but let it not be made a precedent.

END of the THIRD and last ACT.

— que ce jour

Soit des vertus la digne recompense

Mais sans tirer jamais à consequence.

The last line is intirely superfluous, and seems indeed to overthrow the tendency of the whole piece, which wou'd certainly have ended better with the first ; but the author wanted a versè to answer the other, and was resolv'd to throw it in, however absurdly.

1870
The first of the year
was a very successful one
and the business was
very good.

The second of the year
was also a very successful
one and the business was
very good.

The third of the year
was also a very successful
one and the business was
very good.

The fourth of the year
was also a very successful
one and the business was
very good.

The fifth of the year
was also a very successful
one and the business was
very good.

The sixth of the year
was also a very successful
one and the business was
very good.



THE
B A B B L E R.
A
C O M E D Y.

Represented in August, 1756.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

EUPHEMIA.

DAMIS.

HORTENSIA.

TRASIMON.

CLITANDER.

NERINE.

PASQUIN.

Several Footmen belonging to Damis.

THE
* B A B B L E R.
A
C O M E D Y.

ACT I. SCENE I.

EUPHEMIA, DIMAS.

EUPHEMIA.

DON'T imagine, my dear, that, by what I'm going to say, I mean to exercise the authority of a mother, always ready as you know I am, to listen in my turn to your reasons when I think them good ;

* This comedy is called in the original L'INDISCRET, literally translated, THE INDISCREET, but our language does not admit of the adjective without the substantive; and the *Indiscreet Man* wou'd sound almost as bad: I have therefore taken the liberty to substitute another title, which perhaps may convey a more complete idea of the principal character, than the vague term of an *indiscreet man*, which may be applied to follies of a different kind from that which the author meant to ridicule in the following piece.

my

my intention is not to lay my commands on you, but to give you my advice ; it is my heart which speaks to you, and that experience I have had in the world makes me foresee evils which I wou'd endeavour to prevent : you have been at court, I think, not above two months ; believe me, 'tis a dangerous situation : the perfidious group of courtiers always look upon a new comer with an eye of malevolence, and soon find out all his imperfections : from the first moment, they condemn him, without pity or remorse ; and, which is still worse, their judgment is irrevocable : be guarded against their malice : on the first step we take in life, the rest of it must in a great measure depend : if you once make yourself ridiculous, the world will think you always so : the impresson will remain : it is in vain, as you advance in years, to change your conduct, and assume a more serious behaviour : you will suffer a long time from old prejudices : even if we do grow better, we are still suspected ; and I have often known men pay dearly in their old age for the errors of their youth : have a little regard therefore to the world, and remember you ought to live now more for that than for yourself.

D A M I S.

DAMIS.

Now cannot I possibly conceive what all this long preamble tends to.

EUPHEMIA.

I see it appears to you both absurd and unnecessary : you despise those things which may be of the greatest consequence to you ; one day or other perhaps you may believe me, when it will be too late : to be plain with you, you are indiscreet : my too long indulgence pass'd over this fault in your infancy, in your riper years I dread the effects of it : you are not without abilities, a good understanding, and a good heart ; but, believe me, in a world so full of injustice, virtue will not make amends for vice ; our faults are censur'd on every occasion, and perhaps the worst we can be guilty of is indiscretion : at court, my dear, the most necessary art is not to talk well, but to know how to hold one's tongue : this is not the place where society enjoys itself in the freedom of easy conversation ; here they generally talk without saying any thing, and the most tiresome babblers have the best success : I have been long acquainted with the court, and bad enough it is : but whilst we live there, we ought to conform to it. With regard to the women, you shou'd be remarkably cautious ; talk but seldom
of

of them, and still less of yourself; pretend to be ignorant of all they do, and all they say; conceal your opinion, and disguise your sentiments; but, above all, be master of your secrets: he who tells those of another will always be esteem'd a villain; and he who tells his own, be assur'd, will, here at least, be look'd on as a fool. What have you to object to this?

D A M I S.

Nothing: I am intirely of your opinion: I abominate the character of a tattler: that is not my foible, I assure you: so far from being guilty of the vice you seem to reproach me with, I now fairly confess to you, madam, that I have a long time conceal'd a thing from you which I ought to have told you of; but in life, you know, one must sometimes dissemble. I love, and am belov'd, by a most charming widow, young, rich, and handsome, as prudent as she is amiable; in a word, it is Hortensia: judge, madam, yourself of my happiness; judge, if it were known, how miserable it wou'd make all our courtiers, who are fighting for her: we have conceal'd our mutual passion from every one of them: this engagement has been made now for these two whole days past, and you knew nothing of it.

E U P H E-

EUPHEMIA.

But I have been at Paris all that time.

DAMIS.

O, madam, never was man so happy in his choice: the more you approve of it, the more satisfaction shall I feel, and the more pleasure in my pursuit of her.

EUPHEMIA.

I am sure, Damis, the confidence you repose in me, is a mark of your friendship, and not of your imprudence.

DAMIS.

I hope you never doubted that.

EUPHEMIA.

But seriously, Damis, you shou'd reflect on the prospect of happiness before you: Hortensia, I know, has charms, but, besides that, she is the best match that cou'd have offer'd itself in all France.

DAMIS.

I know she is.

EUPHEMIA.

She is intirely her own mistress, and can choose for herself.

DAMIS.

So much the better.

EUPHEMIA.

You must take care how you manage her, mark her inclinations, and flatter them.

DAMIS.

O, I can do better: I know how to please her.

EUPHEMIA.

Well said, Damis: but remember, she's not fond of noise and bustle; no blustering or flashy airs will be agreeable to her: she may, like other women, have her foibles, but even in love-matters she'll always act with discretion: above all, let me advise you, not to shew off in public with her, nor appear at court together, as if on purpose to be stared at, and become the topic of the day: secret and mystery is all her taste.

DAMIS.

And yet the affair must be known at last.

EUPHEMIA.

But, pray, what lucky accident introduc'd you to her? she never admits young men to her toilette; but, like a prudent woman, carefully avoids the croud of wild sparks that are perpetually after her.

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

To tell you the truth, I have never been at her house yet: but I have ogled her a long time, and, thank heaven, with success: at first she sent back my letters unopen'd, but soon after read them, and now writes to me again: for near two days past I have had strong hopes, and, in a word, intend this very night to have a *tête à tête* with her.

EUPHEMIA.

Well: I think I'll go and see her too: the mother of a lover who is well-receiv'd, cannot, I imagine, but be agreeable to her. I may contrive to speak of you, and prevail on her to hasten the match, on which I shall tell her your happiness depends: get her consent, and make her your's as soon as you can; I'll do my best to assist you: but speak of it to nobody else, I charge you.

DAMIS.

No, madam: never was mother more tender and affectionate, or friendship more sincere; and to please her shall, for the future, be my first ambition.

EUPHEMIA.

All that I desire of you is, to be happy.

SCENE II.

DAMIS alone.

My mother's right: address and cunning are absolutely necessary in this world; there is no succeeding without them. I am resolv'd to dissemble with the whole court, except ten or a dozen friends, whom I may talk freely with: but first, by way of trial of my prudence, let me tell my secrets to myself a little, and consider, now nobody's by, what fortune has bestow'd upon me. I hate vanity, but there's no harm in knowing one's self, and doing ourselves justice: I have some wit, am agreeable, well receiv'd at court, and thought, I believe, by some, to be admitted to the king's private hours: then, I am certainly very handsome, can dance, sing, drink, and dissemble with the best of 'em: made a colonel at thirteen, I have reason to hope for a staff at thirty; happy in what I have, and with a good prospect before me; I'll keep Julia, and marry Hortensia; when I have possess'd her charms, I'll be guilty every day of a thousand infidelities, but all with prudence and oeconomy, and without ever being suspected as a rambler: in six months time I shall make away with half her fortune, and
enjoy

enjoy all the court by turns, without her knowing any thing of the matter.

SCENE III.

DAMIS, TRASIMON.

DAMIS.

Good morrow, governor.

TRASIMON.

[Aside.

Hang him for coming across me.

DAMIS.

My dear governor, let me embrace thee.

TRASIMON.

Excuse me, fir, but I really ——

DAMIS.

Positively I will: come, come——

TRASIMON.

Well, what, what do you want?

DAMIS.

Nay, don't frown so, man, pry'thee unbend a little: I am the happiest of mortals.

TRASIMON.

I came to tell you, fir ——

K 3

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

O, by heavens, you kill me with that hard frozen face of yours.

TRASIMON.

I can't help it, sir, nor can I smile at present, for, let me tell you, you have got a bad affair upon your hands.

DAMIS.

Not so very bad, sure.

TRASIMON.

Erminia and Valere exclaim violently against you: you have spoke of them, it seems, too lightly, and old lord Horace too desir'd me to tell you —

DAMIS.

O, a mighty matter indeed to be uneasy about! Horace an old lord? an old fool, a proud coxcomb, puffed up with notions of false honour, low enough at court, he puts on an air of importance in the city, and is as ignorant as he wou'd fain seem knowing: as for madam Erminia, it's pretty well known I had her, and left her abruptly, an ill natur'd busy-body; I believe you know a little of her lover, my friend, Valere; did you ever remember such a starch'd, affected, strain'd, left-handed understanding? O, by
the

the by, I was told yesterday in confidence, that his huge elder brother, that important creature, is well-receiv'd by Clarice, and the fat countess is bursting with spleen and disappointment. Well but, my old commandant, how go your love affairs?

TRASIMON.

You know I don't trouble myself much about the sex.

DAMIS.

That's not my case; for I do, and i'faith, both in court and city, they keep me pretty well employ'd: but listen, whilst I intrust you with a secret, on which the happiness of my life depends.

TRASIMON.

Can I serve you in it?

DAMIS.

No: not in the least.

TRASIMON.

Then pray tell me nothing about it.

DAMIS.

O but the rights of friendship——

TRASIMON.

'Tis that very friendship which makes me shrink from the weight of a secret which is entrusted to me,

not out of real regard, but from mere folly and weakness, which any body else might keep as well as myself; which is generally attended with a thousand suspicions, and may chance to give us both a great deal of uneasiness, me for knowing, and you for saying more than we ought.

DAMIS.

Say what you will about it, captain, I must let you have the pleasure of reading this billet-doux, which this very day——

TRASIMON.

What a strange humour——

DAMIS.

You'll say it's written with a great deal of tenderness.

TRASIMON.

Well, if you insist upon it——

DAMIS.

'Tis dictated by love itself: you'll see how fond she is of me: 'tis the hand that wrote it which makes it so valuable: but you shall see it: zounds, I've lost it; positively I can't find it—hola, la Fleur, la Brie.

S C E N E

SCENE IV.

DAMIS, TRASIMON, Several Footmen.

FOOTMAN.

Did you call, fir?

DAMIS.

Step immediately into the gallery, and bring me all the letters I receiv'd this morning: go to the old duke, and—O here it is, the blundering rascals had put it there by mistake. [*To the footmen*] you may go. Now, you shall see it; mind now, I beg you'll attend.

SCENE V.

DAMIS, TRASIMON, CLITANDER, PASQUIN.

CLITANDER, with a letter in his hand, speaking to Pasquin.

Stay you, Pasquin, in this garden all day; be sure you mark every thing that passes; observe Hortensia well; and bring me an account of every step she takes: I shall know then——

SCENE VI.

DAMIS, TRASIMON, CLITANDER.

DAMIS.

O here comes the marquis: good morrow, marquis.

CLITANDER. [A letter in his hand.
Morrow to you.

DAMIS.

Why, what's the matter with you to-day, with that long melancholy face? what the deuce ails you all? every creature I see looks gloomy and dismal to-day, I think; but I suppose——

CLITANDER. [Aside.

I have but too much reason.

DAMIS.

What are you muttering about?

CLITANDER. [In a low voice.

What a poor unhappy creature I am!

DAMIS.

Come, to give you both a little spirit, suppose I read you this little billet of mine, ha, marquis?

CLITANDER. [Aside, looking at
the letter.

What letter? can it be? surely 'tis from Hortensia: cruel creature!

DAMIS. [To Clitander.

'Tis a letter wou'd make a rival hang himself.

CLITANDER.

You are indeed a happy man, if you are belov'd.

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

That I most assuredly am; but you shall hear; your city ladies don't write in this stile: observe her. [*He reads*] "At length I yield to the passion which has
 " taken possession of my heart; I wou'd have con-
 " ceal'd it, but 'tis impossible: why shou'd I not write
 " what my eyes, no doubt, have a thousand times in-
 " form'd you of? yes, my dearest Damis, I own I
 " love you; the more perhaps because my heart, fear-
 " ful of your youth, and fearful of itself, for a long
 " time resisted my inclination, and told me I ought
 " not to love you. After the confession of such a
 " weakness, ought I not for ever to reproach myself
 " for it? but the more frankly I avow my tenderness
 " for you, with the more care you ought to conceal it."

TRASIMON.

You take care, I see, to obey the lady's commands most punctually: a mighty discreet lover, to be sure!

CLITANDER.

Happy is that man who receives such letters, and never shews them.

DAMIS.

Well, what do you think of it? is not it——

TRA-

TRASIMON.

Very strong indeed.

CLITANDER.

Charming.

DAMIS.

And the writer a thousand times more so. O if you did but know her name! but in this wicked world we must have a little discretion.

TRASIMON

Well, we don't desire you to tell us.

CLITANDER.

You and I Damis love one another very well, but prudence ———

TRASIMON.

So far from desiring you to acquaint us with particulars, that ———

DAMIS.

Come, come, I love you both too well to dissemble with you: I know, you think, and the whole court has proclaim'd it, that I have no affair here with any body but Julia.

CLITANDER.

Nay, they have it from yourself; but as to us, we don't believe a word of it.

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

To be sure, there was something between us, and the affair went on tolerably well till now: we lov'd one another, and then we parted, and then we met again; all the world knows that.

CLITANDER.

The world, I assure you, knows nothing at all about it.

DAMIS.

You think I'm very fond of her still, but you're mistaken; upon honour I am not.

TRASIMON.

'Tis nothing to me, whether you are or are not.

DAMIS.

Julia is handsome, that she is; but then she's fickle: the other, O the other is the very thing.

CLITANDER.

Well, and this charming woman——

DAMIS.

Come, I see you will know, and I must tell you: my dear friend, look at this picture, only look at it: did you ever see two such eyes? the most charming, most adorable creature; painted by Mace; that you
know

know is saying every thing; you know the features, dont you?

CLITANDER..

O heav'n ! 'tis Hortensia.

DAMIS.

You seem surpriz'd.

TRASIMON.

You forget, fir, that Hortensia is my cousin, that she is tender of her honour, and a declaration of this kind——

DAMIS.

O give her up, give her up, man; why, I have six cousins; you shall have 'em all: make up to 'em, ogle 'em, deceive 'em, desert 'em, print their love-letters, with all my heart, it will give me no uneasiness: we shou'd have enough to do indeed to be out of humour with one another, to vindicate the honour of our cousins: it's very well here, if every one can answer for themselves.

TRASIMON.

But Hortensia, fir——

DAMIS.

Is the woman I adore; and I tell you again, fir, she loves me, and me only; and to make you more angry, I intend to marry her.

C L I-

CLITANDER. [Aside.

Cou'd I have been more cruelly injur'd ?

DAMIS.

Our wedding will be no secret, but you shan't be there—cousin.

TRASIMON.

A cousin, sir, may have some power over her, and that you shall know soon. Your servant, sir.

SCENE VII.

DAMIS, CLITANDER.

DAMIS.

How I detest that fellow ! the ridiculous pedant, with his affected airs of romantic virtue ; a tedious, heavy, tiresome brute ! you seem to be mighty curious about that picture, and examine it closely.

CLITANDER. [Aside.

I must be master of myself, and dissemble.

DAMIS.

You may observe perhaps, one of the brilliants is missing at the corner there : I was a long chace yesterday, and there was such jostling and pushing one another ; you must know I had four pictures loose in my pocket, and this unfortunately met with a mischance ;
the

the case broke, and a brilliant dropp'd out: as you go to town to-morrow, you may call at Frénaye's, he's dear, but clever in his way: I wish you'd chuse a diamond at his shop, as if it was for yourself; for, between you and me, I owe him a few pounds: here, take the picture, but don't shew it to any body. Your servant.

CLITANDER.

[Aside.

Where am I?

DAMIS.

Well, God be wi'you, Marquis, I shall depend upon you. Take care, be discreet now.

CLITANDER.

[Aside.

Can he possibly do it?

DAMIS.

[Returning.

I love a discreet friend: you shall be my confidant: I'll tell you all my secrets. Is it possible for a man to be happy, to possess every thing his heart can wish for, and not tell it to another? where's the joy of keeping our insipid pleasures to ourselves? one may as well have no friends as not trust 'em, and happiness uncommunicated is no happiness at all: I have shewn you a letter, and a picture, but that's not all.

CLITANDER.

Why, what else have you?

DAMIS.

Do you know that this very night I am to meet her.

CLITANDER. [Aside.

O dreadful! horrible!

DAMIS.

To night, Clitander, before the ball is over, alone and unsuspected, I am to meet her by appointment in this garden.

CLITANDER. [Aside.

O I am lost, undone: this last cruel stroke —

DAMIS.

Is not that charming, my friend? dost not rejoice with me, boy?

CLITANDER.

And will Hortensia meet you?

DAMIS.

Most certainly; just at dusk I expect her; but the declining sun already gives me notice of my approaching happiness: I must be gone. I'll go to your lodgings, I think, and dress: let me see, I must have two pounds of powder for my hair, and some of the most exquisite perfume; then will I return in triumph, and finish the
affair.

affair immediately. Do you, in the mean time, prowl about here, that you may have some share in the happiness of your friend ; I shall leave you here as my deputy, to keep off impertinent rivals.

S C E N E VIII.

CLITANDER.

Alone.

How hard a task it was to conceal my grief and my resentment ! after a whole year of sincerest passion, when Hortensia's heart, weary'd of resistance, began at length to soften and relent, for Damis thus to come and change her in an instant ! one fortunate moment has done what my long and faithful services in vain solicited : nay, she even prevented his wishes, gave this young coxcomb that picture which I had so much better deserv'd : she writes to him too ! O that letter wou'd have kill'd me with extacy : and then, to make my misery compleat, she has writ to me this morning, never to see her more : this hair-brain'd fellow has got hold of her heart, and will carry her off in triumph : O Hortensia, how cruelly hast thou deceiv'd me !

S C E N E

SCENE IX.

CLITANDER, PASQUIN.

CLITANDER.

So, Pasquin, I have found out my rival.

PASQUIN.

Indeed, sir? so much the worse.

CLITANDER.

Yes: she's in love with that blockhead, Damis.

PASQUIN.

Who told you so?

CLITANDER.

Himself: the proud coxcomb boasted to me of the treasure he had stolen from me. Here, Pasquin, look at this picture; out of mere vanity he has left it in my hands, only that he may triumph the more. O Hortensia, who cou'd ever have believ'd that Damis would supplant Clitander!

PASQUIN.

Damis is a good pretty fellow.

CLITANDER. [Collaring him.

Ha! rascal, an impertinent young fool, that——

PASQUIN.

PASQUIN.

Very true, fir, and perhaps — but, for heaven's sake, don't strangle me, fir: between you and I, fir, he's nothing but a babbler, a prig:—

CLITANDER.

Be he what he will, she prefers him to me, Pasquin; therefore now is the time to exert thy usual skill, and serve me: Hortensia and my rival are to meet this night in the garden, by appointment; find out some method, if possible, to prevent it.

PASQUIN.

But, fir.—

CLITANDER.

Thy brain, I know, is fertile; take money as much as thou wilt: for heaven's sake disappoint my rival: whilst he is tricking out his insignificant person, we may rob him of the happy moment: since he is a fool, let us take the advantage of his folly, and by some means or other keep him away from this place.

PASQUIN.

And this you think mighty easy to be done; why, fir, I wou'd sooner engage to stop the course of a river, a stag upon a heath, or a bird in the air, a mad poet repeating his own verses, a litigious woman that has a suit in chancery, a parson hunting after a benefice, a high-

high-wind, a tempest, or thunder and lightning, than a young coxcomb going to a rendezvous with his mistress.

CLITANDER.

And will you then abandon me to despair?

PASQUIN.

Stay: a thought is just come into my head: let me see, Hortensia and Damis have never seen me?

CLITANDER.

Never.

PASQUIN.

You have got her picture?

CLITANDER.

I have.

PASQUIN.

Good: and you have got a letter that she wrote you.

CLITANDER.

Ay, and a cruel one it is.

PASQUIN.

Her ladyship's orders I think to you, never to visit her again.

CLITANDER.

It is so.

PASQUIN.

The letter is without a direction I think?

CLITANDER.

It is, rascal, and what of that?

PASQUIN.

PASQUIN.

Give me the picture and the letter immediately; give them me, I say.

CLITANDER.

Shall I give a picture into other hands that was entrusted to my care?

PASQUIN.

Come, come, no ceremony: a pretty scruple indeed? give 'em me.

CLITANDER.

Well, but, Pasquin —

PASQUIN.

Leave every thing to me, and rely on my discretion.

CLITANDER.

You want to —

PASQUIN.

Away, away: here comes Hortensia.

SCENE X.

HORTENSIA, NERINE.

HORTENSIA,

What you say, Nerine, is very true, Clitander is a worthy man; I know the warmth of his passion for me, and the sincerity of it: he is sober, sensible, constant, and discreet: I ought to esteem him, and so I do;

do ; but Damis is my taste : I find, by the struggles of my own heart, that love is not always the reward of virtue ; we are always won by an agreeable outside ; and for one who is captivated by the perfections of the soul, a thousand are caught by the eye ; I blush at my own inconstancy : but Damis comes no more here, I assure you.

NERINE.

What a strange humour this is ! how resolute you are !

HORTENSIA.

No : I ought not to be there first, and positively I will not.

NERINE.

Are you afraid of the first meeting ?

HORTENSIA.

To tell you the truth, Damis takes up all my thoughts : this very day I have had a visit from his mother, who has greatly increas'd my prejudices in favour of her son : I see she is extremely eager for the match, and presses it in the warmest manner : but I want to see the man himself in private, and sound his real sentiments.

NERINE.

You have no doubt of his regard for you ?

H O R-

HORTENSIA.

None: I believe, nay I know he loves me; but I want to hear him tell me so a thousand and a thousand times over: I want to see if he deserves my love, to know his temper, his character, and his heart: I wou'd not yield blindly to inclination, but judge of him, if I cou'd, without passion or prejudice.

SCENE XI.

HORTENSIA, NERINE, PASQUIN.

PASQUIN.

Madam, my master Damis has sent me here to acquaint you privately—

HORTENSIA.

Is not he coming himself?

PASQUIN.

No, madam.

NERINE.

The little villain!

HORTENSIA.

Not come to me?

PASQUIN.

No, madam: but, as in point of honour he thinks himself oblig'd, he has sent you back this portrait.

HORTENSIA.

My picture!

PASQUIN.

PASQUIN.

Please to take it, madam.

HORTENSIA.

Am I awake?

PASQUIN.

Pray, ma'am, make haste, for I am really in a hurry: I have two more pictures to carry back for my master, and two to receive: and so, madam, till we meet again, I am your most obsequious —

HORTENSIA.

Perfidious wretch! I shall die with grief.

PASQUIN.

He desir'd me moreover, madam, to inform you, that you need not ogle him any more, and that for the future he shou'd be glad if you wou'd find out some other dupe to laugh at besides himself.

S C E N E XII.

HORTENSIA, NERINE, DAMIS, PASQUIN.

DAMIS. [At the further end of the stage.

Here I am to meet the dear object of my wishes.

PASQUIN.

Ha! Damis! then I am caught; but I'll take courage however, and proceed: [*he runs up to Damis and takes him aside.*] I belong, sir, to lady Hortensia,

and have the honour to be employed on her little affairs; I have, sir, here a billet-doux for you.

HORTENSIA.

What a change is here! what a reward for my tender passion!

DAMIS.

[Reads.

Let me see, ha! how's this? "You deserve my regard, I know the esteem that is due to your virtues, but I cannot love you." Was ever such abominable perfidy? this is what I little expected indeed; but it shall be known; the public shall be acquainted with it: it shall be no secret at court, I can assure her.

HORTENSIA. [At the other part of the stage.

Could he carry his infamous perfidy so far as this?

DAMIS.

There, madam, you see what value I set on your correspondence.

[*He tears the letter.*

PASQUIN. [Running up to Hortensia.

O madam, I blush for his behaviour: you saw him tear the latter, which you condescended to write to the ungrateful man.

HORTENSIA.

He has sent back my picture: perish, thou wretched image of my ineffectual charms!

[*She throws down the picture.*

PASQUIN.

PASQUIN. [Coming back to *Damis*.

* There, sir, you see how she treats you; she has thrown away your picture, and broke it in pieces.

DAMIS.

There are some ladies in the world who receive the original in a very different manner, I can assure her.

HORTENSIA.

O, Nerine, what a regard I had for this ungrateful man! Tell me, fellow, [*Speaking to Pasquin, and giving him money.*] for whose sake is it I am thus deserted? to what happy object am I sacrific'd?

PASQUIN.

O, madam, to five or six beauties, whom he pretends to be in love with, though he cares as little for them as for yourself; but your most dangerous rival is the fair Julia.

* Pasquin's scheme of deceiving them both by the letter and picture is well imagin'd: but the execution of it very awkwardly and inartificially conducted: his running backwards and forwards from one to the other, the lover and his mistress being both on the stage together, whilst the deceit is carry'd on against them, together with the absurdity of leaving them together afterwards without coming to an eclaircissement, are all circumstances to the last degree absurd and improbable. Voltaire's comedies, tho' they have some merit, are not excellent, and this is one of the poorest of them.

DAMIS. [Coming up to Pasquin.

Here, take this ring, and now, tell me honestly, on what impertinent court fool your sweet mistress has fix'd her affections.

PASQUIN.

No one, sir, deserves her so well as yourself; but, to tell you the truth, there is a certain young abbé who ogles her perpetually; not to mention that I frequently help her cousin Trasimon over the garden-wall of an evening.

DAMIS.

I'm glad on't: this is excellent news; I'll put it into a ballad.

HORTENSIA.

The worst of it is, Nerine, that to make me still more unhappy, this affair will make a noise in the world, and I shall be horribly expos'd: come, let us be gone, I will retire, and hide my tears.

PASQUIN. [To Hortensia.

You have no more commands for me, madam? [To Damis.] Can I be of any further service to you, sir? Heaven preserve you both!

A C T

SCENE XIII.

HORTENSIA, DAMIS, NERINE.

HORTENSIA. [Returning,

Why do I stay in this place?

DAMIS.

I ought to be dancing at the ball now.

HORTENSIA.

He seems thoughtful, but 'tis not on my account.

DAMIS.

I am mistaken, or she looks this way; I'll e'en
make up to her.

HORTENSIA.

I'll avoid him.

DAMIS.

O, stay, Hortensia, can you fly me, can you avoid
me? cruel perfidious woman!

HORTENSIA.

Ungrateful man, leave me to myself, and let me try
to hate you.

DAMIS.

That, madam, will be an easy task, thanks to your
infidelity.

HORTENSIA.

'Tis what I ought to do: 'tis but my duty now, thanks to your injustice.

DAMIS.

And are we met at last, Hortensia, but to quarrel?

HORTENSIA.

How can Damis talk thus, and at the same time affront me, and love another! O, Julia, Julia!

DAMIS.

After your writing me such a letter, madam —

HORTENSIA.

After your sending back my picture, sir —

DAMIS.

Cou'd I send back your picture? cruel woman!

HORTENSIA.

Cou'd I ever write a line to you that was not full of love and tenderness? perfidious man!

DAMIS.

Madam, I will consent to leave the court, to give up the posts I enjoy, and all my hopes of future preferment, to be despis'd, and condemn'd by the whole world, if ever I sent you back the picture, the precious treasure which love entrusted to my care.

HOR-

HORTENSIA.

And may I never be lov'd by the dear charmer of my soul, if I ever sent you that letter! but here, here, ungrateful man, is the picture your insolence return'd me, the reward of tender friendship, which you despis'd: 'tis here, and can you ——

DAMIS.

Ha! here comes Clitander.

SCENE XIV.

HORTENSIA, DAMIS, CLITANDER, NERINE, PASQUIN.

DAMIS.

My dear marquis, come here; where are you going? He, madam, will unravel all.

HORTENSIA.

Clitander? why, what does he know of the matter?

DAMIS.

Don't be alarm'd, madam, he is my friend, to whom I have open'd my whole heart: he is my confidant, let him be your's too: you must, indeed you must.

HORTENSIA.

Let us be gone this moment, Nerine: O, heav'n! what a ridiculous creature!

L 4

SCENE

SCENE XV.

DAMIS, CLITANDER, PASQUIN.

DAMIS.

O, marquis, I am the most unhappy of men ; let me speak to you ; I must follow her : observe me. [*To Hortensia.*] Stay, Hortensia ; nay, then I must after her.

SCENE XVI.

CLITANDER, PASQUIN:

CLITANDER.

I don't know what to think of it, Pasquin ; I understood, by what you told me, that they had quarrel'd.

PASQUIN.

I thought so too : I'm sure I play'd my part : most certainly they have cause to hate one another ; but, for aught I know, a minute's time may reconcile them again.

CLITANDER.

Let us observe which way they turn.

PASQUIN.

Hortensia seems as if she was going to her own house.

CLITANDER.

Damis follows her close: by his being behind, however, it looks as if she shunn'd him.

PASQUIN.

She flies but slowly, and the lover pursues.

CLITANDER.

She turns her head back, and Damis talks to her, but to no purpose.

PASQUIN.

I fancy not, but Damis stops her often.

CLITANDER.

He kneels to her, but she treats him with contempt.

PASQUIN.

O, but observe, now she looks tenderly upon him: if so, you're undone.

CLITANDER.

She is gone into her own house, and has dismiss'd him: joy and fear, hope and despair, at once surround me; I can't imagine how it will end.

SCENE XVII.

CLITANDER, DAMIS, PASQUIN.

DAMIS.

O, my dear marquis, I'm glad you're here; for heaven's sake, inform me, what can be the meaning that Hortensia forbids my coming nigh her? how happens it that the picture, which I trusted to you, is now in her hands? answer me.

CLITANDER.

You amaze and confound me.

DAMIS.

[To Pasquin.

As for you, fir rascal there, the servant of Hortensia, at least the pretended one, I'll make an end of you this moment.

PASQUIN.

[To Clitander.

Protect me, fir.

CLITANDER.

[To Damis.

Well, fir——

DAMIS.

'Tis in vain——

CLITANDER.

Spare this poor fellow, let me intreat you, do.

DAMIS.

What interest have you in him?

CL I-

CLITANDER.

I beg it of you, and seriously.

DAMIS.

Out of regard to you, I will withhold my resentment; but tell me, scoundrel, the whole black contrivance.

PASQUIN.

O, sir, 'tis a most mysterious affair; but I'll let you into some surprizing secrets, if you'll promise not to reveal 'em.

DAMIS.

I'll promise nothing, and insist on knowing all.

PASQUIN.

You shall, sir, but Hortensia is coming this way, and will overhear us. [*To Clitander.*] Come, sir, let us to the masquerade, and there I'll tell you every thing.

SCENE XVIII.

TRASIMON, NERINE, HORTENSIA, in a domino, with a masque in her hand.

TRASIMON.

Take my word for it, Hortensia, this young coxcomb will cover us with shame and ignominy, to shew your letters and your picture about in this public manner:

ner: 'tis intolerable: I saw them myself; but I'll punish the scoundrel as he deserves.

HORTENSIA. [To Nerine.

Is Julia then so beautiful in his eyes? do you think he's really in love with her?

TRASIMON.

No matter whether he is or no: but, if he dishonours you, it concerns me nearly; I know a relation's duty, and will perform it.

HORTENSIA. [To Nerine.

Do you imagine he is engag'd to Julia? give me your opinion.

NERINE.

One may know that easily enough from himself.

HORTENSIA.

O, Nerine, he was excessively indiscreet; I ought to hate, yet perhaps still love him. O, how he wept, and swore he lov'd, that he ador'd me, and that he wou'd conceal our mutual passion!

TRASIMON.

There, I'm sure, he promis'd more than he will perform.

HOR-

HORTENSIA.

For the last time, however, I mean to try him : he's gone to the masquerade, there I shall be sure to find him : you must dissemble, Nerine : go and tell him that Julia expects him here with impatience : this masque at least will hide my blushes : the faithless man will take me for Julia : I shall know what he thinks of her, and of myself : on this meeting will depend my choice or my contempt of him. [*To Trasimon.*] You must not be far off : endeavour, if you can, to keep Clitander near you : wait for me here, or hereabouts, and I will call you when there is occasion.

SCENE XIX.

HORTENSIA alone, in a domino, with a masque in her hand.

At length it is time to fix my wavering affections ; under the cover of this masque, and the name of Julia, I shall know whether his indiscretion was owing to excess of love, or vanity ; whether I ought to pardon, or to detest him : but here he comes.

SCENE

SCENE XX.

HORTENSIA, masqued, DAMIS.

DAMIS. [Not seeing Hortensia.

This seems to be the favourite spot for ladies to make their assignations in: well, I'll follow the fashion: fashion, in France, determines every thing, regulates precedency, honour, good-breeding, merit, wit, and pleasure.

HORTENSIA.

[Aside.

The coxcomb!

DAMIS.

If this affair of mine cou'd but be known, in two year's time the whole court wou'd run mad for love of me: a good setting out here is every thing: then *Ægle*, and *Doris*, and—O there's no counting them, such a groupe, such a sweet prospect! O the pretty creatures——

HORTENSIA.

[Aside.

Light vain man!

DAMIS.

O *Julia*, is it you? I know you in spite of that envious mask: my heart cannot be mistaken; come, come, my dear *Julia*, take off that cruel veil that hides thy beauties from me; do not, in pity do not, conceal those sweet looks, those tender smiles, that were meant

to

to reward that love which they inspir'd; thou art the only woman upon earth whom I adore.

HORTENSIA.

Let me tell you, Damis, you are a stranger to my humour and disposition; I shou'd despise a heart that never felt for any woman but myself; I like my lovers shou'd be more fashionable; that twenty young flirts shou'd be hunting after him; that his passion for me shou'd draw him away from a hundred contending beauties; I must have some noble sacrifice offer'd up to me, or I'll never accept of his services: a lover less esteem'd wou'd be of no value, I shou'd despise him.

DAMIS.

I can make you easy on that head, my dear; I have made some pretty good conquests, and perhaps as expeditiously as most men: I believe I can boast of tolerable success that way: many a fine woman has run after me; another man wou'd be vain upon it: I cou'd reckon up a few of your nice ladies who are not over coy to me.

HORTENSIA.

Well, but who, who are they?

DAMIS.

Only give the word, my Julia, and I begin the sacrifice: there is, first, the little Isabel; secondly, the
lively

lively smart Erminia; then there's Clarice, Ægle
Doris——

HORTENSIA.

Poor pitiful offerings, I cou'd have a hundred such every day; these will never do: they are lov'd, and turn'd off again twenty times in a week: let me have some respectable names, women of character, such as I may triumph over without a blush: if you cou'd reckon amongst your captives, one, who, before she saw the incomparable Damis, was invulnerable, one who in all actions paid the strict regard to decency and decorum, some modest prudent fair, who never felt a weakness but for you, that wou'd be the woman.

DAMIS. [Sitting down by her.

Now then, observe me: I have a mistress who exactly resembles in every feature the picture you have drawn: but you wou'd not have me be so indiscreet as to ——

HORTENSIA.

Not for the world.

DAMIS.

If I was imprudent enough to tell her name, I shou'd call her——Hortensia. Why do you startle at it? I think not of her whilst my Julia's here: she is nei-
ther

ther young nor handsome when you are by: besides, there is a certain young Abbé who is very familiar with her; and, between you and I, her cousin Trasimon is too apt to come to her in an evening over the garden wall.

HORTENSIA. [Aside.

To join calumny thus to his infidelity, execrable villain! but I must dissemble: pray, Damis, on what footing are you with Hortensia? does she love you?

DAMIS.

O to distraction, that's the truth of it.

HORTENSIA. [Aside.

Impudence and falsehood to the highest degree!

DAMIS.

'Tis even so, I assure you, I wou'd not tell you a lye for the world.

HOETENSIA. [Aside.

The villain!

DAMIS.

But what signifies thinking about her? we did not meet here to talk of Hortensia: come, let us rather——

HORTENSIA.

I can never believe Hortensia wou'd ever have given herself up so totally to you.

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

I tell you, I have it under her own hand.

HORTENSIA.

I don't believe a word of it.

DAMIS.

'Tis insulting me to doubt it.

HORTENSIA.

Let me see it then.

DAMIS.

You injure me, madam : there, read, perhaps you know her hand.

[Gives her the letter.

HORTENSIA. [Unmasking.

I do, villain, and know your treachery : at length I have in some measure atoned for my folly, and have luckily recover'd both the picture and the letter, which I had ventur'd to trust in such unworthy hands : 'tis done : now Trasimon, and Clitander, appear.

S C E N E XXI.

HORTENSIA, DAMIS, TRASIMON, CLITANDER.

HORTENSIA. [To Clitander.

If I have not yet offended you beyond a possibility of pardon ; if you can still love Hortensia, my hand, my fortune, and my life are your's.

C L I.

CLITANDER.

O Hortensia, behold at your feet a despairing lover,
who receives your kind offer with joy, and transport.

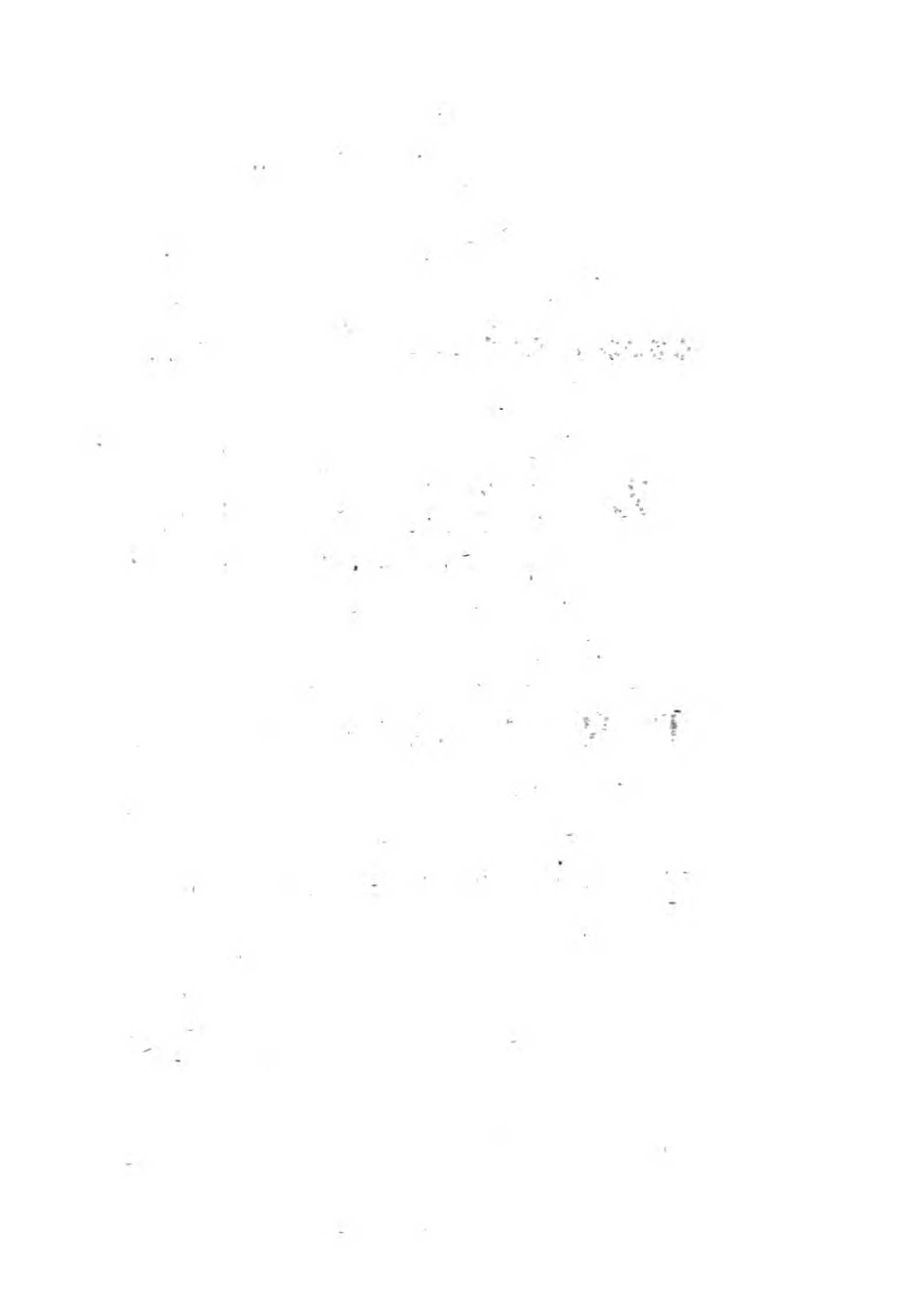
TRASIMON. [To Damis.

Did not I tell you, sir, I shou'd bring her to a right
way of thinking? this marriage, sir, is my making:
now, Damis, fare you well, and henceforth, learn to
dissemble better, or never attempt it more.

DAMIS.

Just heaven! for the future how shall I venture to
speak at all?







Z A R A.

A

T R A G E D Y.





TAYLOR INSTITUTION

UNIVERSITY

25 JUL 1975

OF OXFORD

LIBRARY

A N
EPISTLE DEDICATORY
T O
Mr. FALKNER, an English Merchant,
Since Ambassador at CONSTANTINOPLE,
W I T H
The TRAGEDY of Z A R A.

My dear friend,

YOU are an *Englishman*, and I a native of *France*; but all lovers of the fine arts are fellow-citizens: men of taste and virtue have pretty nearly the same principles in every country, and form one general common-weal: it is no longer therefore matter of astonishment to see a *French* tragedy dedicated to an *Englishman*, or an *Italian*, any more than it wou'd have been, in the days of antiquity, for a citizen of *Ephesus*, or of *Athens*, to address his performance to a *Grecian* of some other city: I lay this tragedy before you therefore as my countryman in literature, and my most intimate friend.

I shall,

I shall, at the same time, have the pleasure of informing my brother *Frenchmen* here in what light traders are look'd upon amongst you, what regard the *English* have for a profession so essential to the welfare of their kingdom, and the honour which they have to represent their country in parliament, in the rank of legislators : Though trade is despised by our *petits-maitres*, who, you know as well as myself, both in *England* and *France*, are the most contemptible species of being that crawl upon the face of the earth.

My further inducement to correspond with an *Englishman*, rather than any other man, on subjects of literature, arises from your happy freedom of thought, which never fails to inspire me with bolder ideas, and more nervous expression. * ‘ Whoever converses with me has, for the time at least, my heart at his disposal ; if his sentiments are lively and animated, he inflames me : if he is strong and nervous, he raises and supports me : the courtier, who is all

* The passages which I have inclos'd between asterisks, and mark'd thus ‘ ’ are, in the original, written in a familiar kind of verses, consisting of eight syllables, which *Mr. Voltaire* is, in most of his letters, fond of intermingling with his prose : the reader will easily perceive that, however agreeable those rhimes might be to a *French* ear, both the subject and stile, in the greater part of them, are of such a nature, as not to admit of an *English* poetical translation.

diffimulation, makes me insensibly as affected and constrain'd in my behaviour as himself; but a bold and fearless spirit gives me sentiment and courage: I catch fire from him, just as young painters, brought up under *le Moine* or *Argiliere*, catch the freedom of their master's pencils, and compose with their spirit: thus *Virgil* admir'd *Homer*, follow'd his steps, and, without being a plagiary from him, became his rival.'

You need not be apprehensive of my sending you, with this piece, a long apology and vindication of it: I might indeed have told you, why I did not make *Zara* more determin'd to embrace christianity before she knew her father; why she keeps the secret from her lover, &c. but those who have any judgment, or any justice, will see my reasons without my pointing them out; and as for those criticks who are predetermin'd not to believe me, it wou'd be lost labour to give them any reasons at all.

All I can boast of is, that the piece is tolerably simple; a perfection, in my opinion, that is not to be despis'd.

• This happy simplicity was one of the distinguishing beauties of learned antiquity: 'tis pity you *Englishmen* don't introduce this novelty on your stage, which

is so fill'd with horror, gibbets, and murthers : put more truth into your dramatic performances, and more noble images : *Addison* has endeavour'd at it : he was the poet of the wise, but he was too stiff : and, in his boasted *Cato*, the two girls are really very insipid characters : imitate from the great *Addison* only what is good ; polish a little the rude manners of your wild muse ; write for all times, and all ages, for fame, and for posterity, and transfuse into your works the simplicity of your manners.'

But I wou'd not have your *English* poets imagine, that I mean to give them *Zara* as a model : I preach simplicity to them, and easy numbers, but I wou'd not be thought to set up for the saint of my own sermon : if *Zara* has met with success, I owe it not so much to the merit of the performance, as to the tenderness of the love scenes, which I was wise enough to execute as well as I possibly cou'd : in this I flatter'd the taste of my audience ; and he is generally sure to succeed, who talks more to the passions of men than to their reason : if we are ever so good christians, we must have a little love besides : and I am satisfy'd the great *Corneille* was much in the right of it, not to confine himself, in his *Polyeacte*, merely to the breaking of the statues of Jupiter

pitier by the new converts : for such is the depravity of human kind, that perhaps

‘ The pious soul of *Polyaeste* wou’d have but little impression on the audience, and even the christian verses he declaims wou’d have been receiv’d with contempt, if it had not been for his wife’s passion for her favourite heathen, who was certainly more worthy of her love than the good devotee her husband.’

Almost the same accident happen’d to *Zara* : all my friends, who frequent the theatre, assur’d me, that if she had been only converted, she wou’d not have been half so interesting : but she was in love with the most perfect religion in the world, and that has made her fortune : I cou’d not however expect to escape censure.

‘ Many an inexorable critick has carp’d at and slash’d me, and many a remorseless jester has pretended that I only filch’d an improbable Romance, which I had not the sense to improve ; that I have lamed and spoil’d the subject ; that the catastrophe is unnatural : they even prognosticated the dreadful hiss with which a disgusted public salutes a miserable poet : but I despis’d their censures, and risk’d my play upon the stage ; the public was more favourable than they expected, or I deserv’d ; instead of hisses, it was receiv’d with shouts : tears flow’d almost from every eye : but

I am not puff'd up with my success, I assure you I am no stranger to all its faults. I know very well it is absolutely indisputable, that before we can make a perfect work, we must sell ourselves to the devil, which was what I did not chuse to do.'

I do not flatter myself that the *English* will do *Zara* the same honour they have done to *Brutus*, a* translation of which has been play'd at *London*: they tell us here, that you have neither devotion enough to be affected by old *Lusignan*, nor tenderness to feel for *Zara*: you love a conspiracy better than an intrigue: upon your stage, they say the word, country, is sure of getting a clap, and so is, love, upon ours; but to say the truth, you have as much love in your tragedies as we have: if you have not the reputation of being tender, it is not that your stage heroes are not in love, but that they seldom express their passion naturally: our lovers talk like lovers; yours like poets.

But if the *French* are your superiors in gallantry, there are many things which, in return, we may borrow of you: to the *English* theatre I am indebted for the liberty which I have taken of bringing the names of our kings and antient families upon the stage: a

* Mr. *Voltaire* was mistaken in this particular, as no translation of his *Brutus* was ever exhibited on the *English* stage.

novelty of this kind may perhaps be the means of introducing amongst us a species of tragedy hitherto unknown, and which we seem to want. Some happy geniusses will, I make no doubt, rise up, who will bring to perfection that idea, of which *Zara* is but a slight sketch : as long as literature meets with protection in *France*, we shall always have writers enough : nature every day forms men of talents and abilities ; we have nothing to do but to encourage and employ them : but if those which distinguish themselves are not supported by some honourable recompence, and by the still more pleasing charm of admiration, all the fine arts must soon perish, even though so many edifices have been rais'd to shelter and protect them : the noble plantation of *Louis XIV.* wou'd die away for want of culture : the public might still have taste, but there wou'd be no eminent masters : the sculptor in his academy wou'd see a number of indifferent pupils about him, but never have the ambition to imitate *Girardon* and *Pujet* : the painter wou'd rest satisfy'd with excelling his cotemporaries, but wou'd never think of rivalling *Poussin* : may the successors of *Louis XIV.* always follow the example of that great monarch, who inspir'd every artist with emulation ! encourag'd at the same time a *Racine* and a *Van-Robais* : he carry'd our com-

merce and our glory to the furthest part of the globe, and extended his bounty to foreigners of all nations, who were astonish'd at the fame and rewards which our court bestow'd upon them: wherever merit appear'd, it found a patron in *Louis XIV.*

Where'er that bounteous star its influence shed,
 Fair merit rais'd her long-declining head;
 His royal hand spread honours, wealth, and fame;
 Then *Viviani*, then *Cassini* came:
Newton refus'd a gift from *France's* throne,
 Or *Newton* too, thou know'st, had been our own:
 These are the deeds that raise our *Gallia's* fame,
 These, *Louis*, will immortalise thy name,
 And truly make thee, what thou wert design'd,
 The universal monarch of mankind.

You have no foundations equal to the munificent donations of our kings; but then your people supplies the want of them: you don't stand in need of royal favour to honour and reward superior talents of every kind. *Steel* and *Vanbrugh* were comedy writers, and at the same time members of parliament: the primacy given to *Dr. Tillotson*, *Newton* honour'd with an important trust, *Prior* made an ambassador, and *Addison* a minister of state, are but the common and ordinary consequences of the regard which you pay to merit,
 and

and to great men: you heap riches on them whilst they live, and erects monuments and statues to them after their death: even your celebrated actresses have places in your churches, near the great poets.

‘ Your *Oldfield*, and her predecessor, *Bracegirdle*, in consideration of their having been so agreeable to the public when in their prime, their course finish’d, were, by the consent of your whole nation, honour’d with a pompous funeral, and their remains carry’d under a velvet pall, and lodg’d in your church with the greatest magnificence: their spirits, no doubt, are still proud of it, and boast of the honour in the shades below: whilst the divine *Moliere*, who was far more worthy of it, cou’d scarce obtain leave to sleep in a church-yard; and the amiable *Le Couvreur*, whose eyes I clos’d, cou’d not even so much as obtain two wax-tapers and a coffin; *Monf. de Laubiniere*, out of charity, carry’d away her corpse by night in a hackney-coach to the banks of the river: do you not even now see the god of love breaking his arrows in a rage, and *Melpomene* in tears, banishing herself from that ungrateful place which *le Couvreur* had so long adorn’d?’

But every thing, in these our days, conspires to reduce *France* to that state of barbarism from which *Louis XIV.* and cardinal *Richlieu* had deliver'd her : a curse on that policy which knows not the value of the fine arts ! the world is peopled with nations as powerful as our own ; how happens it then that we look on them with so little esteem ? for the same reason perhaps that we despise the company of a rich man, whose mind is tasteless and uncultivated : do not imagine that this empire of wit, this glory of being the universal model for mankind, is a trifling distinction, it is the infallible mark of the grandeur of a kingdom : under the greatest princes the arts have always flourish'd, and their decay is often succeeded by that of the state itself : history will supply us with ample proofs of it ; but this wou'd lead me too far out of my subject : I shall finish this letter, which is already too long, with a little performance, which naturally demands a place at the head of this tragedy : an epistle, in verse, to the actress who play'd the part of *Zara* ; I owe her at least this compliment for the manner in which she acquitted herself on that occasion.

‘ For the prophet of *Mecca* never had *Greek* or *Arabian* in his seraglio so beautiful or so genteel : her black eyes, so finely arch'd and full of tenderness,

ness, with her excellent voice, mien and carriage, defended my performance against every auditor that had a mind to be troublesome: but when the reader catches me in his closet, all my honour, I fear, will be lost.'

Adieu, my dear friend, continue to cultivate philosophy and the Belles-letters, without forgetting to send your ships to the *Levant*.

I have the honour to remain, &c.

A
S E C O N D L E T T E R
T O

M R. F A L K N E R,

Then Ambaffador at CONSTANTINOPLE,

From the Second Edition of the Tragedy of ZARA.

My dear friend,

FOR your new dignity of ambaffador only makes our friendship more respectable, and fhall not prevent my making use of a title even more facred than that of minifter ; the name of *Friend* is much above that of, *your Excellency*. I now dedicate to the ambaffador of a great king, and a free nation, what I had before address'd to a plain citizen, and an Englifh merchant : thofe who know how much commerce is refpected in your country, muft know that a tradefman is there fometimes a legislator, a good officer, and a public minifter.

Some ridiculous people, who had fall'n in with the fashion, of paying refpect to nothing but nobility, thought proper to laugh at the novelty of a dedication

to

to a man who had nothing but merit to recommend him: who took the liberty, on a stage sacred to calumny and bad taste, to insult the author of that dedication, and to*reproach the gentleman to whom it was address'd for being a merchant: but we must not, sir, impute to our whole nation an affront so gross and illiberal, that people, ever so uncivilis'd, wou'd have been asham'd to commit. The magistrates of our police, who are constantly employ'd in rectifying abuses of this kind, were, to the last degree, surpris'd at it: but the contempt and ignominy with which the public have branded the acknowledg'd author of this indignity, are, I hope, a fresh proof of *French* politeness: those virtues, which form the character of a whole people, are often contradicted, and, as it were, call'd in question by the vices of an individual: there were some voluptuaries, we know, even at *Lacedæmon*: there have been low and foolish fellows in England; men without taste, or good breeding, at *Athens*; and so there are in *Paris*.

* Mr. Falkner, and some other gentlemen of character, were affronted at the *Theatre Italienne* at Paris, by some injurious reflections thrown out upon them in a contemptible farce exhibited there, which was hiss'd by the audience.

YOU

You will, I hope, forget them, sir, as they are forgotten by the world, and receive this second mark of my respects : they are due to you still more than they were before, as this tragedy has made its appearance at *London*. It has been translated, and acted with so much success, and the author of it spoken of with so much regard and politeness, that I ought to return my public thanks to the whole nation.

I do not know how to acquit my obligations to you by any other means, than acquainting my countrymen here with the particulars of the translation, and representation of *Zara* on the *English* stage.

Mr. *Hill*, a man of letters, and one who seems to understand the theatre better than any *English* author, did me the honour to translate this piece, with the design of introducing something new on your stage, both with regard to the manner of writing tragedies, and of repeating them. I shall speak, by and by, of the representation.

The art of declaiming was for a long time amongst you intirely out of nature ; most of your tragic actors expressed themselves more like poets seized with rapturous enthusiasm, than like men inspired by a real passion. Several of your comedians were even more intolerable, they roared out their verses with

an

an impetuous fury, that was no more like the natural tone, than convulsions and distortions are to an easy and noble carriage. This air of riot and tumult seemed intirely foreign to your nation, which is naturally sober and grave, even to such a degree, as frequently to appear cold and unanimated in the eye of a stranger. Your preachers never indulge themselves in a declamatory tone, and you would laugh at a pleader at the bar, who should work himself up into a passion: the players were the only outrageous set of people in the kingdom. Our actors and actresses also, particularly the latter, were guilty of this for many years. *M. le Couvreur* was the first who broke them of it: thus an *Italian* writer, a man of great sense and parts, speaks of her:

La legiadra Couvreur sola non trotta
 Per quella strade dove i suoi compagni
 Van di galoppo tutti quanti in frotta,
 Se auvien ch'ella pianga, o che si lagni
 Senza quelli urli spaventosi loro
 Ti muove si che in pianger l'accompagni.

The same change which *le Couvreur* effected on our stage, Mrs. *Cibber* brought about on your's, in the part of *Zara*: how astonishing it is, that in every art it
 should

should be so long before we arrive at the simple and the natural !

A novelty that must appear still more extraordinary to a *Frenchman* is, that a gentleman of your country *, a man of rank and fortune, should condescend to play the part of *Osman*. It was an interesting circumstance to see the two principal characters represented, one by a person of condition, and the other by a young actress not above eighteen years of age, who had never repeated a line before in her life. This instance of a gentleman's exercising his talents for declamation, is not singular amongst you ; it is perhaps more surprising that we should wonder at it : we ought certainly to reflect, that every thing in this world depends upon custom and opinion : the court of *France* have danc'd on the stage with the actors of the opera, and we thought there was nothing strange in it, but that the fashion of this kind of entertainment should be discontinued. Why should it be more extraordinary for people to write than to dance in pub-

* This gentleman whom Mr. *Voltaire* calls a man of rank and fortune, and a person of condition, who was so condescending, was nothing more than a nephew of *Aaron Hill's*, who had more passion than genius for the stage, and play'd the part of *Osman* so execrably, that he was hiss'd off, and never, I believe, made his appearance there afterwards.

lic? is there any difference between these two arts, except that the one is as much above the other, as the perfections of the mind are superior to those of the body; I have said it before, and I say so still, none of the polite arts are contemptible; and to be ashamed of talents of any kind, is of all things the most shameful.

I come now to the translation of *Zara*, and the change which has been made amongst you with regard to the drama.

You had a strange custom, which even Mr. *Addison*, the chastest of your writers, adopted, so often does custom get the better of sense and reason; I mean, the ridiculous custom of finishing every act by verses in a different taste from the rest of the piece, which verses usually consisted of a simile. *Phædra*, as she leaves the stage, compares herself to a bitch; *Cato* to a rock, and *Cleopatra* to children that cry themselves asleep. The translator of *Zara* was the first who dared to maintain the rights of nature against a custom so directly opposite to her *. He
proscrib'd

* A person unacquainted with the *English* stage would naturally imagine, from Mr. *Voltaire's* character of *Aaron Hill*, that he was one of the greatest poets we ever had; and yet, in reality, nothing can be more labour'd, stiff, and obscure, than his stile
and

proscrib'd this custom, well knowing that passion should always speak its own language, and that the poet should disappear, to make room for the hero.

Upon this principle he has translated plainly, and without any unnecessary ornaments, all the simple verses of the piece, which must have been entirely spoiled by an endeavour to render them beautiful, such as,

On ne peut desirer ce qu'on ne connoit pas.

J' eusse été pres du Gange esclave des faux dieux
Chretienne dans Paris, Musulmane en ces lieux.

Mais Orosmane m'aime, & j'ai tout oublié

Non, la reconnoissance est un foible retour
Un tribut offensant, trop peu fait pour l'amour.

Je me croirois hai d'etre aimé foiblement.

Je veux avec excés vous aimer & vous plaire

L'art ne'st pas fait pour toi, tu n'en a pas besoin.

L'art le plus innocent tient de la perfidie.

and expression in every one of his pieces, though he was not without taste, and sentiment. But if Mr. *Voltaire* had not been sway'd more by prejudice than judgment, he would not so rashly have condemn'd our theatre, nor placed *Addison* at the head of our *dramatic* writers.

All

All the verses that are in this fine taste of simplicity, are render'd word for word into *English*: they might very easily have been adorn'd, but the translator judg'd in a different manner from several of my countrymen; he liked the verses, and retained therefore all the simplicity of them; the stile indeed ought always to be agreeable to the subject; *Alzira*, *Brutus*, and *Zara*, for example, required three different kinds of versification: if *Berenice* complained of *Titus*, and *Ariadne* of *Theseus*, in the stile of *Cinna*, neither *Berenice* nor *Ariadne* would please or affect us; we can never talk well of love, if we search after any other ornaments but truth and simplicity.

This is not the place to examine whether it be right or wrong, to put so much love into our dramatic performances: I will even allow it to be a fault, but it is a fault which will always be universal; nor do I know what name to give that fault, which is the delight of all mankind: one thing I am satisfy'd of, that the *French* have succeeded better in it than all other nations, antient and modern, put together: love appears on our stage with more decorum, more delicacy, and truth, than we meet with on any other; and the reason is, because of all nations the *French* are best acquainted with society: the perpetual commerce
and

and intercourse of the two sexes, carry'd on with so much vivacity and good breeding, has introduc'd amongst us a politeness unknown to all the world but ourselves.

Society principally depends on the fair sex: all those nations who are so unhappy as to confine their women are unfociable: the austerity of your manners, your political quarrels, and religious wars, that render'd you savage and barbarous, depriv'd you, even down to the age of *Charles II.* of the pleasures of society, even in the bosom of liberty: the poets therefore, neither of your country, nor of any other, knew any thing of the manner in which love ought to be treated.

Good comedy was utterly unknown amongst us till the days of *Moliere*; as was the art of expressing our sentiments with delicacy till those of *Racine*, because society had not attain'd to any degree of perfection before that time: a poet cannot paint in his closet, manners which he has never seen; and wou'd sooner write a hundred odes and epistles than one scene where nature must speak: your *Dryden*, who was in other respects a great genius, put into the mouth of his heroes in love, either high-flown strains of rhetorical flourish, or something indecent, two things equally opposite to tenderness.

If Mr. *Racine* makes *Titus* say,

Depuis cinq ans entiers chaque jour je la vois
Et croi toujours la voir pour la premiere fois.

Your *Dryden* makes *Antony* say,

—————how I lov'd,

Witness ye days and nights, and all ye hours,
That danc'd away with down upon your feet,
As all your businefs were to count my love,
One day past by, and nothing saw but love ;
Another came, and still 'twas only love :
The suns were weary'd out with looking on,
And I untir'd with loving————

It is very difficult to conceive that *Antony* shou'd ever really talk thus to *Cleopatra*. In the same play, *Cleopatra* speaks thus to *Antony* :

Come to me, come my soldier, to my arms,
You've been too long away from my embraces ;
But when I have you fast, and all my own,
With broken murmurs, and with amorous sighs,
I'll say, you were unkind, and punish you,
And mark you red with many an eager kifs.

It is not improbable but that *Cleopatra* might frequently talk thus, but indecencies of this kind are not to be repre-

represented before a respectable audience: some of your countrymen may perhaps say, this is pure nature; but we may tell them in answer, that if it be so, it is that nature which ought carefully to be conceal'd: it shews but little knowledge of human nature, to imagine that we can please the more by presenting these licentious images; on the contrary, it is shutting up the avenues to true pleasure: where every thing is at once discover'd, we are disgusted; there remains no more to look for or desire; and in our pursuit of pleasure we meet with languor and satiety: this is the reason why those, who are truly qualify'd for society, taste pleasures far more exquisite than grosser appetites can have any idea of: the spectators, in this case, are like lovers who are satiated by too quick possession: those ideas which, when brought too close, wou'd make us blush, shou'd be seen as it were thro' a cloud. It is this veil to which, to a right mind, they are indebted for all their charms: there is no pleasure without decorum*. The *French* are certainly better acquainted with this than any other nation upon earth;

* There is no expression in the *English* language which fully comprehends the meaning of the *French* word *Bienféance*, which notwithstanding, unfortunately for a translator, being a favourite phrase, recurs in almost every page: as does also the word *Naiivete*, for which we have no term in all respects correspondent to it.

not because they are *without genius and spirit*, as the unequal and impetuous *Dryden* has ridiculously asserted; but because, ever since the regency of *Anne of Austria*, they have been the most sociable and the most polish'd people in the universe: and this politeness is not an arbitrary thing, like what they call civility, but a law of nature, which they have happily cultivated far beyond any other nation.

The translator of *Zara* has, almost throughout his whole piece, strictly observ'd those decencies of the stage which are common to us both; but there are, at the same time, some places where he has intirely adher'd to antient customs.

For instance, when in the *English* piece *Osman* comes to tell *Zara* that he can no longer love her, she answers him by *rolling upon the ground*: the Sultan is not mov'd at seeing her in this ridiculous posture of despair, and yet the moment after is astonish'd at *Zara's* weeping, and cries out,

Zara, thou weep'st.

He shou'd have said to her before,

Zara, thou roll'st upon the ground.

Insomuch that those three words, *Zara, thou weep'st*, which have so fine an effect on our stage, have none on yours, because they were displac'd: those familiar and
simple

simple expressions derive all their power from the manner in which they are introduc'd. *My lord, you change countenance*, is nothing of itself: but when these words are pronounc'd by *Mithridates*, we shudder at them.

To say nothing but what we ought to say, and that in the manner in which it ought to be said, is a point of perfection which the *French* have come nigher to than the writers, myself excepted, of other countries: on this subject we have, I think, a right to dictate to them: you can teach us perhaps greater and more useful things, we ought to acknowledge it. The *French*, who have wrote against sir *Isaac Newton's* discoveries, with regard to light and colours, are asham'd of it; those who oppose his system of gravitation will soon be still more so.

You ought to submit to our rules of the stage, as we submit to your philosophy: we have made as good experiments on the human heart, as you have in physics: the art of pleasing seems to be the art of *Frenchmen*; the art of thinking is all your own. Happy are those, sir, who, like you, can unite them.

I am, SIR, &c.

END of the FOURTH VOLUME.

74754817



