

Sardanapalus:

A TRAGEDY.¹

TO
THE ILLUSTRIOUS GOETHE

A STRANGER PRESUMES TO OFFER THE HOMAGE
OF A LITERARY VASSAL TO HIS LIEGE LORD, THE FIRST OF EXISTING WRITERS,
WHO HAS CREATED THE LITERATURE OF HIS OWN COUNTRY,
AND ILLUSTRATED THAT OF EUROPE.

THE UNWORTHY PRODUCTION WHICH THE AUTHOR VENTURES TO INSCRIBE TO HIM
IS ENTITLED
SARDANAPALUS.²

PREFACE.

In publishing the following Tragedies³ I have only to repeat, that they were not composed with the most remote view to the stage. On the attempt made by the managers in a former instance, the public opinion has been already expressed. With regard to my own private feelings, as it seems that they are to stand for nothing, I shall say nothing.

For the historical foundation of the following compositions the reader is referred to the Notes. The Author has in one instance attempted to preserve, and in the other to approach, the "unities;" conceiving that with any very distant departure from them, there may be poetry, but can be no drama.

¹ [On the original MS. Lord Byron has written:—"Mem. Ravenna, May 27, 1821.—I began this drama on the 13th of January, 1821; and continued the two first acts very slowly, and by intervals. The three last acts were written since the 13th of May, 1821 (this present month); that is to say, in a fortnight." The following are extracts from Lord Byron's diary and letters:—

"January 13, 1821. Sketched the outline and Dram. Pers. of an intended tragedy of Sardanapalus, which I have for some time meditated. Took the names from Diodorus Siculus, (I know the history of Sardanapalus, and have known it since I was twelve years old,) and read over a passage in the ninth volume of Mitford's Greece, where he rather vindicates the memory of this last of the Assyrians. Carried Teresa the Italian translation of Grillparzer's Sappho. She quarrelled with me, because I said that love was *not* the *loftiest* theme for a tragedy; and, having the advantage of her native language, and natural female eloquence, she overcame my fewer arguments. I believe she was right. I must put more love into 'Sardanapalus' than I intended."

"May 25. I have completed four acts. I have made Sardanapalus brave, (though voluptuous, as history represents him,) and also as amiable as my poor powers could render him. I have strictly preserved all the unities hitherto, and mean to continue them in the fifth, if possible; but *not* for the stage."

"May 30. By this post I send you the tragedy. You will remark that the unities are all strictly preserved. The scene passes in the same hall always: the time, a summer's night, about nine hours or less; though it begins before sunset, and ends after sunrise. It is not for the stage, any more than the other was intended for it; and I shall take better care this time that they don't get hold on't."

"July 14. I trust that 'Sardanapalus' will not be mistaken for a political play; which was so far from my intention, that I thought of nothing but Asiatic history. My object

He is aware of the unpopularity of this notion in present English literature; but it is not a system of his own, being merely an opinion, which, not very long ago, was the law of literature throughout the world, and is still so in the more civilised parts of it. But "nous avons changé tout cela," and are reaping the advantages of the change. The writer is far from conceiving that any thing he can adduce by personal precept or example can at all approach his regular, or even irregular predecessors; he is merely giving a reason why he preferred the more regular formation of a structure, however feeble, to an entire abandonment of all rules whatsoever. Where he has failed, the failure is in the architect,—and not in the art.⁴

has been to dramatise, like the Greeks (a *modest* phrase), striking passages of history and mythology. You will find all this very *unlike* Shakspeare; and so much the better in one sense, for I look upon him to be the worst of models, though the most extraordinary of writers. It has been my object to be as simple and severe as Alfieri, and I have broken down the poetry as nearly as I could to common language. The hardship is that, in these times, one can neither speak of kings nor queens without suspicion of politics or personalities. I intended neither."

"July 22. Print away, and publish. I think they must own that I have more styles than one. 'Sardanapalus' is, however, almost a comic character; but, for that matter, so is Richard the Third. Mind the *unities*, which are my great object of research. I am glad Gifford likes it: as for the million, you see I have carefully consulted any thing but the taste of the day for extravagant 'coups de théâtre.' Sardanapalus was published in December, 1821, and was received with very great approbation."

² ["Well knowing myself and my labours, in my old age, I could not but reflect with gratitude and diffidence on the expressions contained in this dedication, nor interpret them but as the generous tribute of a superior genius, no less original in the choice than inexhaustible in the materials of his subjects."—GOETHE.]

³ ["Sardanapalus" originally appeared in the same volume with "The Two Foscari."]

⁴ ["In this preface," says Mr. Jeffrey] "Lord Byron renews his protest against looking upon any of his plays as having been composed 'with the most remote view to the stage;' and, at the same time, testifies in behalf of the unities, as essential to the existence of the drama—according to what 'was still lately, the law of literature throughout the world, and is still so in the more civilised parts of it.' We do not think these opinions very consistent; and we think that

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.¹

MEN.

SARDANAPALUS, *King of Nineveh and Assyria, &c.*
ARBACES, *the Mede who aspired to the Throne.*
BELESES, *a Chaldean and Soothsayer.*
SALEMENES, *the King's Brother-in-law.*
ALTADA, *an Assyrian Officer of the Palace.*
PANIA.
ZAMES.
SFERO.
BALEA.

WOMEN.

ZARINA, *the Queen.*
MYRRHA, *an Ionian female Slave, and the Favourite of SARDANAPALUS.*
Women composing the Harem of SARDANAPALUS, Guards, Attendants, Chaldean Priests, Medes, &c. &c.

Scene—a Hall in the Royal Palace of Nineveh.

neither of them could possibly find favour with a person whose genius had a truly dramatic character. We should as soon expect an orator to compose a speech altogether unfit to be spoken. A drama is not merely a dialogue, but *an action*; and necessarily supposes that something is to pass before the eyes of assembled spectators. Whatever is peculiar to its written part, should derive its peculiarity from this consideration. Its style should be an accompaniment to action, and should be calculated to excite the emotions, and keep alive the attention, of gazing multitudes. If an author does not bear this continually in his mind, and does not write in the ideal presence of an eager and diversified assemblage, he may be a poet perhaps, but assuredly he will never be a dramatist. If Lord Byron really does not wish to impregnate his elaborate scenes with the living part of the drama—if he has no hankering after stage-effect—if he is not haunted with the visible presentment of the persons he has created—if, in setting down a vehement invective, he does not fancy the tone in which Mr. Keen would deliver it, and anticipate the long applauses of the pit, then he may be sure that neither his feelings nor his genius are in unison with the stage at all. Why, then, should he affect the form, without the power of tragedy? Didactic reasoning and eloquent description will not compensate, in a play, for a dearth of dramatic spirit and invention: and, besides, sterling sense and poetry, as such, ought to stand by themselves, without the unmeaning mockery of a *dramatis personæ*. As to Lord Byron pretending to set up the unities at this time of day, as 'the law of literature throughout the world,' it is mere caprice and contradiction. He, if ever man was, is *a law to himself*—'a chartered libertine';—and now, when he is tired of this unbridled license, he wants to do penance within the unities! English dramatic poetry soars above the unities, just as the imagination does. The only pretence for insisting on them is, that we suppose the stage itself to be, actually and really, the very spot on which a given action is performed; and, if so, this space cannot be removed to another. But the supposition is manifestly quite contrary to truth and experience."—*Edin. Rev.* vol. xxxvi.

The reader may be pleased to compare the above with the following passage from Dr. Johnson:—

"Whether Shakspeare knew the unities, and rejected them by design, or deviated from them by happy ignorance, it is, I think, impossible to decide and useless to inquire. We may reasonably suppose, that when he rose to notice, he did not want the counsels and admonitions of scholars and critics; and that he at last deliberately persisted in a practice which he might have begun by chance. As nothing is essential to the fable but unity of action, and as the unities of time and place arise evidently from false assumptions, and, by circumscribing the extent of the drama, lessen its variety, I cannot think it much to be lamented that they were not known by him, or not observed: nor, if such another poet could arise, should I very vehemently reproach him, that his first act passed at Venice, and his next in Cyprus. Such violations of rules merely positive become the comprehensive genius of Shakspeare, and such censures are suitable to the minute and slender criticism of Voltaire:—

—'Non usque adeo permiscuit imis
Longus summa dies, ut non, si voce Metelli
Serventur leges, malint a Cæsare tolli.'

Sardanapalus.²

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A Hall in the Palace.

Salemene (solus). HE hath wrong'd his queen, but still he is her lord;

He hath wrong'd my sister, still he is my brother;
He hath wrong'd his people, still he is their sovereign,
And I must be his friend as well as subject:
He must not perish thus. I will not see
The blood of Nimrod and Semiramis
Sink in the earth, and thirteen hundred years
Of empire ending like a shepherd's tale;
He must be roused. In his effeminate heart
There is a careless courage which corruption
Has not all quench'd, and latent energies,
Repress'd by circumstance, but not destroy'd—

Yet, when I speak thus slightly of dramatic rules, I cannot but recollect how much wit and learning may be produced against me; before such authorities I am afraid to stand, not that I think the present question one of those that are to be decided by mere authority, but because it is to be suspected, that these precepts have not been so easily received, but for far better reasons than I have yet been able to find. The result of my inquiries, in which it would be ludicrous to boast of impartiality, is, that the unities of time and place are not essential to a just drama; that though they may sometimes conduce to pleasure, they are always to be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction; and that a play written with nice observation of critical rules, is to be contemplated as an elaborate curiosity, as the product of superfluous and ostentatious art, by which is shown rather what is possible than what is necessary. He that without diminution of any other excellence shall preserve all the unities unbroken, deserves the like applause with the architect, who shall display all the orders of architecture in a citadel, without any deduction from its strength: but the principal beauty of a citadel is to exclude the enemy; and the greatest graces of a play are to copy nature and instruct life."—*Preface to Shakspeare.*]

¹ In this tragedy it has been my intention to follow the account of Diodorus Siculus; reducing it, however, to such dramatic regularity as I best could, and trying to approach the unities. I therefore suppose the rebellion to explode and succeed in one day by a sudden conspiracy, instead of the long war of the history.

² [Sardanapalus is, beyond all doubt, a work of great beauty and power; and though the heroine has many traits in common with the Medoras and Gulnares of Lord Byron's undramatic poetry, the hero must be allowed to be a new character in his hands. He has, indeed, the scorn of war, and glory, and priestcraft, and regular morality, which distinguishes the rest of his lordship's favourites; but he has no misanthropy, and very little pride—and may be regarded, on the whole, as one of the most truly good-humoured, amiable, and respectable voluptuaries to whom we have ever been presented. In this conception of his character, the author has very wisely followed nature and fancy rather than history. His Sardanapalus is not an effeminate, worn-out debauchee, with shattered nerves and exhausted senses, the slave of indolence and vicious habits; but a sanguine votary of pleasure, a princely epicure, indulging, revelling in boundless luxury while he can, but with a soul so inured to voluptuousness, so saturated with delights, that pain and danger, when they come uncalled for, give him neither concern nor dread; and he goes forth from the banquet to the battle, as to a dance or measure, attired by the Graces, and with youth, joy, and love for his guides. He dallies with Bellona as bridegroom—for his sport and pastime; and the spear or fan, the shield or shining mirror, become his hands equally well. He enjoys life, in short, and triumphs in Jeath: and whether in prosperous or adverse circumstances, his soul smiles out superior to evil.—JEFFREY.]

The Sardanapalus of Lord Byron is pretty nearly such a person as the Sardanapalus of history may be supposed to have been. Young, thoughtless, spoiled by flattery and unbounded self-indulgence, but with a temper naturally amiable, and abilities of a superior order, he affects to undervalue the

Steep'd, but not drown'd, in deep voluptuousness.
If born a peasant, he had been a man
To have reach'd an empire; to an empire born,
He will bequeath none; nothing but a name,
Which his sons will not prize in heritage: —
Yet, not all lost, even yet he may redeem
His sloth and shame, by only being that
Which he should be, as easily as the thing
He should not be and is. Were it less toil
To sway his nations than consume his life?
To head an army than to rule a harem?
He sweats in palling pleasures, dulls his soul,¹
And saps his goodly strength, in toils which yield
not
Health like the chase, nor glory like the war —
He must be roused. Alas! there is no sound
[*Sound of soft music heard from within.*]
To rouse him short of thunder. Hark! the lute,
The lyre, the timbrel; the lascivious tinklings
Of lulling instruments, the softening voices
Of women, and of beings less than women,
Must chime in to the echo of his revel,
While the great king of all we know of earth
Lolls crown'd with roses, and his diadem
Lies negligently by to be caught up
By the first manly hand which dares to snatch it.
Lo, where they come! already I perceive
The reeking odours of the perfumed trains,
And see the bright gems of the glittering girls,²
At once his chorus and his council, flash
Along the gallery, and amidst the damsels,
As femininely garb'd, and scarce less female,
The grandson of Semiramis, the man-queen. —
He comes! Shall I await him? yes, and front him,
And tell him what all good men tell each other,
Speaking of him and his. They come, the slaves,
Led by the monarch subject to his slaves.³

sanguinary renown of his ancestors as an excuse for inattention to the most necessary duties of his rank; and flatters himself, while he is indulging his own sloth, that he is making his people happy. Yet, even in his fondness for pleasure, there lurks a love of contradiction. Of the whole picture, selfishness is the prevailing feature—selfishness admirably drawn indeed; apologised for by every palliating circumstance of education and habit, and clothed in the brightest colours of which it is susceptible from youth, talents, and placability. But it is selfishness still; and we should have been tempted to quarrel with the art which made vice and frivolity thus amiable, if Lord Byron had not at the same time pointed out with much skill the bitterness and weariness of spirit which inevitably wait on such a character; and if he had not given a fine contrast to the picture in the accompanying portraits of Salemenes and of Myrrha. — BISHOP HEBER.]

¹ ["He sweats in dreary, dulled effeminacy." — MS.]

² ["And see the gewgaws of the glittering girls." — MS.]

³ [Salemenes is the direct opposite to selfishness; and the character, though slightly sketched, displays little less ability than that of Sardanapalus. He is a stern, loyal, plain-spoken soldier and subject; clear-sighted, just and honourable in his ultimate views, though not more punctilious about the means of obtaining them than might be expected from a respectable satrap of ancient Nineveh, or a respectable vizier of the modern Turkish empire. To his king, in spite of personal neglect and family injuries, he is, throughout, pertinaciously attached and punctiliously faithful. To the king's rebels he is inclined to be severe, bloody, and even treacherous; an imperfection, however, in his character, to want which would, in his situation, be almost unnatural, and which is skillfully introduced as a contrast to the instinctive perception of virtue and honour which flashes out from the indolence of his master. Of the satrap, however, the faults as well as the virtues are alike the offspring of disinterested loyalty and patriotism. It is for his country and king that he is patient of injury; for them he is valiant; for them cruel. He has no ambition of personal power, no thirst of individual fame. In battle and in victory, "Assyria!" is his only war-cry. When he sends off

SCENE II.

Enter SARDANAPALUS effeminately dressed, his Head crowned with Flowers, and his Robe negligently flowing, attended by a Train of Women and young Slaves.

Sar. (speaking to some of his attendants). Let the pavilion over the Euphrates
Be garlanded, and lit, and furnish'd forth
For an especial banquet; at the hour
Of midnight we will sup there: see nought wanting,
And bid the galley be prepared. There is
A cooling breeze which crisps the broad clear river:
We will embark anon. Fair nymphs, who deign
To share the soft hours of Sardanapalus,
We'll meet again in that the sweetest hour,
When we shall gather like the stars above us,
And you will form a heaven as bright as theirs;
Till then, let each be mistress of her time,
And thou, my own Ionian Myrrha⁴, choose,
Wilt thou along with them or me?

Myr. My lord — My lord —
Sar. My lord, my life! why answerest thou so coldly?

It is the curse of kings to be so answer'd. [thou
Rule thy own hours, thou rulest mine — say, wouldst
Accompany our guests, or charm away
The moments from me?

Myr. The king's choice is mine.⁵
Sar. I pray thee say not so: my chiefest joy

Is to contribute to thine every wish.
I do not dare to breathe my own desire,
Lest it should clash with thine; for thou art still
Too prompt to sacrifice thy thoughts for others.⁶

Myr. I would remain: I have no happiness
Save in beholding thine; yet —

Sar. Yet! what yet?

the queen and princes, he is less anxious for his nephews and sister than for the preservation of the line of Nimrod; and, in his last moments, it is the supposed flight of his sovereign which alone distresses and overcomes him. — HEBER.]

⁴ "The Ionian name had been still more comprehensive, having included the Achæians and the Boeotians, who, together with those to whom it was afterwards confined, would make nearly the whole of the Greek nation; and among the orientals it was always the general name for the Greeks." — MITFORD'S *Greece*, vol. i. p. 199.

⁵ [The chief charm and vivifying angel of the piece is Myrrha, the Greek slave of Sardanapalus—a beautiful, heroic, devoted, and ethereal being—in love with the generous and infatuated monarch—ashamed of loving a barbarian—and using all her influence over him to ennoble as well as to adorn his existence, and to arm him against the terrors of his close. Her voluptuousness is that of the heart—her heroism of the affections. If the part she takes in the dialogue be sometimes too subdued and submissive for the lofty daring of her character, it is still such as might become a Greek slave—a lovely Ionian girl, in whom the love of liberty and the scorn of death were tempered by the consciousness of what she regarded as a degrading passion, and an inward sense of fitness and decorum with reference to her condition. — JEFFREY.]

⁶ [Myrrha is a female Salemenes, in whom, with admirable skill, attachment to the individual Sardanapalus is substituted for the gallant soldier's loyalty to the descendant of kings; and whose energy of expostulation, no less than the natural high tone of her talents, her courage, and her Grecian pride, is softened into a subdued and winning tenderness by the constant and painful recollection of her abasement as a slave in the royal harem; and still more by the lowliness of perfect womanly love in the presence of and towards the object of her passion. No character can be drawn more natural than hers; few ever have been drawn more touching and amiable. Of course she is not, nor could be, a Jewish or a Christian heroine; but she is a model of Grecian piety and nobility of spirit, and she is one whom a purer faith would have raised to the level of a Rebecca or a Miriam. — HEBER.]

Thy own sweet will shall be the only barrier
Which ever rises betwixt thee and me.

Myr. I think the present is the wonted hour

Of council; it were better I retire,

Sal. (comes forward and says). The Ionian slave
says well: let her retire.

Sar. Who answers? How now, brother?

Sal. The queen's brother,
And your most faithful vassal, royal lord.

Sar. (addressing his train). As I have said, let all
dispose their hours

Till midnight, when again we pray your presence.

[*The court retiring.*
(To MYRRHA¹, who is going) Myrrha! I thought
thou wouldst remain.

Myr. Great king,

Thou didst not say so.

Sar. But thou lookedst it:

I know each glance of those Ionic eyes,²

Which said thou wouldst not leave me.

Myr. Sire! your brother —

Sal. His consort's brother, minion of Ionia!

How darest thou name me and not blush?

Sar. Not blush!

Thou hast no more eyes than heart to make her
crimson

Like to the dying day on Caucasus,
Where sunset tints the snow with rosy shadows,
And then reproach her with thine own cold blindness,
Which will not see it. What, in tears, my Myrrha?

Sal. Let them flow on; she weeps for more than
one,

And is herself the cause of bitterer tears.

Sar. Cursed be he who caused those tears to flow!

Sal. Curse not thyself—millions do that already.

Sar. Thou dost forget thee: make me not re-
member

I am a monarch.

Sal. Would thou couldst!

Myr. My sovereign,

I pray, and thou, too, prince, permit my absence.

Sar. Since it must be so, and this churl has
check'd

Thy gentle spirit, go; but recollect

That we must forthwith meet: I had rather lose
An empire than thy presence. [*Exit MYRRHA.*

Sal. It may be,

Thou wilt lose both, and both for ever!

Sar. Brother,

I can at least command myself, who listen

To language such as this: yet urge me not

Beyond my easy nature.

Sal. 'Tis beyond

That easy, far too easy, idle nature,

Which I would urge thee. O that I could rouse thee!

Though 'twere against myself.

Sar. By the god Baal!

The man would make me tyrant.

Sal. So thou art.

Think 'st thou there is no tyranny but that

Of blood and chains? The despotism of vice—

The weakness and the wickedness of luxury—

The negligence—the apathy—the evils

Of sensual sloth—produce ten thousand tyrants,

Whose delegated cruelty surpasses

¹ [In the original draught, "*Byblis*."]]

The worst acts of one energetic master,
However harsh and hard in his own bearing.
The false and fond examples of thy lusts
Corrupt no less than they oppress, and sap
In the same moment all thy pageant power
And those who should sustain it; so that whether
A foreign foe invade, or civil broil
Distract within, both will alike prove fatal:
The first thy subjects have no heart to conquer;
The last they rather would assist than vanquish.

Sar. Why, what makes thee the mouth-piece of
the people?

Sal. Forgiveness of the queen, my sister's wrongs;
A natural love unto my infant nephews;

Faith to the king, a faith he may need shortly,
In more than words; respect for Nimrod's line;
Also, another thing thou knowest not.

Sar. What's that?
Sal. To thee an unknown word.

Sar. Yet speak it;
I love to learn.

Sal. Virtue.
Sar. Not know the word!

Never was word yet rung so in my ears—
Worse than the rabble's shout, or splitting trumpet:

I've heard thy sister talk of nothing else. [*vice.*
Sal. To change the irksome theme, then, hear of
Sar. From whom?

Sal. Even from the winds, if thou couldst listen
Unto the echoes of the nation's voice.

Sar. Come, I'm indulgent, as thou knowest, pa-
tient, [*thee?*

As thou hast often proved—speak out, what moves
Sal. Thy peril.

Sar. Say on.
Sal. Thus, then: all the nations,

For they are many, whom thy father left
In heritage, are loud in wrath against thee.

Sar. 'Gainst me! What would the slaves?
Sal. A king.

Sar. And what
Am I then?

Sal. In their eyes a nothing; but
In mine a man who might be something still.

Sar. The railing drunkards! why, what would
they have?

Have they not peace and plenty?
Sal. Of the first

More than is glorious; of the last, far less
Than the king reck's of.

Sar. Whose then is the crime,
But the false satraps, who provide no better?

Sal. And somewhat in the monarch who ne'er looks
Beyond his palace walls, or if he stirs

Beyond them, 't is but to some mountain palace,
Till summer heats wear down. O glorious Baal!

Who built up this vast empire, and wert made
A god, or at the least shonest like a god

Through the long centuries of thy renown,
This, thy presumed descendant, ne'er beheld

As king the kingdoms thou didst leave as hero,
Won with thy blood, and toil, and time, and peril!

For what? to furnish impostors for a revel,
Or multiplied extortions for a minion.

Sar. I understand thee—thou wouldst have me go

² ["I know each glance of those deep Greek-sould eyes." — MS.]

Forth as a conqueror. By all the stars
Which the Chaldeans read! the restless slaves!
Deserve that I should curse them with their wishes,
And lead them forth to glory.

Sal. Wherefore not?
Semiramis—a woman only—led
These our Assyrians to the solar shores
Of Ganges.

Sar. 'Tis most true. And how return'd?
Sal. Why, like a man—a hero; baffled, but
Not vanquish'd. With but twenty guards, she made
Good her retreat to Bactria.

Sar. And how many
Left she behind in India to the vultures?

Sal. Our annals say not.

Sar. Then I will say for them—
That she had better woven within her palace
Some twenty garments, than with twenty guards
Have fled to Bactria, leaving to the ravens,
And wolves, and men—the fiercer of the three,
Her myriads of fond subjects. Is this glory?
Then let me live in ignominy ever.

Sal. All warlike spirits have not the same fate.
Semiramis, the glorious parent of
A hundred kings, although she fail'd in India,
Brought Persia, Media, Bactria, to the realm
Which she once sway'd—and thou might'st sway.

Sar. I sway them—
She but subdued them.

Sal. It may be ere long
That they will need her sword more than your
sceptre.

Sar. There was a certain Bacchus, was there not?
I've heard my Greek girls speak of such—they say
He was a god, that is, a Grecian god,
An idol foreign to Assyria's worship,
Who conquer'd this same golden realm of Ind
Thou prat'st of, where Semiramis was vanquish'd.

Sal. I have heard of such a man; and thou per-
ceiv'st
That he is deem'd a god for what he did.

Sar. And in his godship I will honour him—
Not much as man. What, ho! my cupbearer!

Sal. What means the king?

Sar. To worship your new god
And ancient conqueror. Some wine, I say.

Enter Cupbearer.

Sar. (*addressing the Cupbearer*). Bring me the
golden goblet thick with gems,
Which bears the name of Nimrod's chalice. Hence,
Fill full, and bear it quickly. [*Exit Cupbearer.*]

Sal. Is this moment
A fitting one for the resumption of
Thy yet unslept-off revels?

Re-enter Cupbearer, with wine.

Sar. (*taking the cup from him*). Noble kinsman,
If these barbarian Greeks of the far shores
And skirts of these our realms lie not, this Bacchus
Conquer'd the whole of India, did he not?

Sal. He did, and thence was deem'd a deity.²

Sar. Not so:—of all his conquests a few columns,

¹ [—"I have a mind
To curse the restless slaves with their own wishes."—MS.]

² ["He did, and thence was deem'd a god in story."—MS.]

³ [In many parts of this play, it strikes me that Lord Byron

Which may be his, and might be mine, if I
Thought them worth purchase and conveyance, are
The landmarks of the seas of gore he shed,
The realms he wasted, and the hearts he broke.

But here, here in this goblet is his title
To immortality—the immortal grape
From which he first express'd the soul, and gave
To gladden that of man, as some atonement
For the victorious mischiefs he had done.
Had it not been for this, he would have been
A mortal still in name as in his grave;

And, like my ancestor Semiramis,
A sort of semi-glorious human monster.

Here's that which defied him—let it now
Humanise thee; my surly, chiding brother,
Pledge me to the Greek god!

Sal. For all thy realms
I would not so blaspheme our country's creed.

Sar. That is to say, thou thinkest him a hero,
That he shed blood by oceans; and no god,
Because he turn'd a fruit to an enchantment,
Which cheers the sad, revives the old, inspires
The young, makes weariness forget his toil,
And fear her danger; opens a new world [thee
When this, the present, palls. Well, then I pledge
And him as a true man, who did his utmost
In good or evil to surprise mankind. [*Drinks.*]

Sal. Wilt thou resume a revel at this hour?

Sar. And if I did, 'twere better than a trophy,
Being bought without a tear. But that is not
My present purpose: since thou wilt not pledge me,
Continue what thou pleasest.
(*To the Cupbearer.*) Boy, retire.

[*Exit Cupbearer.*]
Sal. I would but have recall'd thee from thy dream:
Better by me awaken'd than rebellion.

Sar. Who should rebel? or why? what cause?
pretext?

I am the lawful king, descended from
A race of kings who knew no predecessors.
What have I done to thee, or to the people,
That thou shouldst rail, or they rise up against me?

Sal. Of what thou hast done to me, I speak not.

Sar. But
Thou think'st that I have wrong'd the queen: is 't
not so?

Sal. Think! Thou hast wrong'd her!³

Sar. Patience, prince, and hear me.

She has all power and splendour of her station,
Respect, the tutelage of Assyria's heirs,
The homage and the appanage of sovereignty.
I married her as monarchs wed—for state,
And loved her as most husbands love their wives.
If she or thou supposedst I could link me
Like a Chaldean peasant to his mate,
Ye knew nor me, nor monarchs, nor mankind.

Sal. I pray thee, change the theme: my blood
disdains

Complaint, and Salemenes' sister seeks not
Reluctant love even from Assyria's lord!
Nor would she deign to accept divided passion
With foreign strumpets and Ionian slaves.
The queen is silent.

has more in his eye the case of a sinful Christian that has
but one wife, and a sly business or so which she and her kin
do not approve of, than a bearded Oriental, like Sardanapalus,
with three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines.—
Hogg.]

Sar. And why not her brother?

Sal. I only echo thee the voice of empires,
Which he who long neglects not long will govern.

Sar. The ungrateful and ungracious slaves! they
murmur

Because I have not shed their blood, nor led them
To dry in the desert's dust by myriads,
Or whiten with their bones the banks of Ganges;
Nor decimated them with savage laws,
Nor sweated them to build up pyramids,
Or Babylonian walls.

Sal. Yet these are trophies
More worthy of a people and their prince
Than songs, and lutes, and feasts, and concubines,
And lavish'd treasures, and contemned virtues.

Sar. Or for my trophies I have founded cities:
There's Tarsus and Anchialus, both built
In one day—what could that blood-loving beldame,
My martial grandam, chaste Semiramis,
Do more, except destroy them?

Sal. 'Tis most true;
I own thy merit in those founded cities,
Built for a whim, recorded with a verse
Which shames both them and thee to coming ages.

Sar. Shame me! by Baal, the cities, though well
built,

Are not more goodly than the verse! Say what
Thou wilt 'gainst me, my mode of life or rule,
But nothing 'gainst the truth of that brief record.

Why, those few lines contain the history
Of all things human: hear—"Sardanapalus,
The king, and son of Anacyndaraxes,
In one day built Anchialus and Tarsus.
Eat, drink, and love; the rest's not worth a fillip."¹

Sal. A worthy moral, and a wise inscription,
For a king to put up before his subjects!

Sar. Oh, thou wouldst have me doubtless set up
edicts—

"Obey the king—contribute to his treasure—
Recruit his phalanx—spill your blood at bidding—
Fall down and worship, or get up and toll."
Or thus—"Sardanapalus on this spot
Slew fifty thousand of his enemies.

These are their sepulchres, and this his trophy."

I leave such things to conquerors; enough

For me, if I can make my subjects feel

The weight of human misery less, and glide

Ungroaning to the tomb: I take no license

Which I deny to them. We all are men.

Sal. Thy sires have been revered as gods—

Sar. In dust
And death, where they are neither gods nor men.

¹ "For this expedition he took only a small chosen body
of the phalanx, but all his light troops. In the first day's
march he reached Anchialus, a town said to have been founded
by the king of Assyria, Sardanapalus. The fortifications, in
their magnitude and extent, still in Arrian's time, bore the
character of greatness, which the Assyrians appear singularly
to have affected in works of the kind. A monument repre-
senting Sardanapalus was found there, warranted by an in-
scription in Assyrian characters, of course in the old Assyrian
language, which the Greeks, whether well or ill, interpreted
thus: 'Sardanapalus, son of Anacyndaraxes, in one day
founded Anchialus and Tarsus. Eat, drink, play: all other
human joys are not worth a fillip.' Supposing this version
nearly exact (for Arrian says it was not quite so), whether
the purpose has not been to invite to civil order a people
disposed to turbulence, rather than to recommend immoderate
luxury, may perhaps reasonably be questioned. What,
indeed, could be the object of a king of Assyria in founding
such towns in a country so distant from his capital, and so
divided from it by an immense extent of sandy deserts and
lofty mountains, and, still more, how the inhabitants could be

Talk not of such to me! the worms are gods;
At least they banqueted upon your gods,
And died for lack of farther nutriment.
Those gods were merely men: look to their issue—
I feel a thousand mortal things about me,
But nothing godlike,—unless it may be
The thing which you condemn, a disposition
To love and to be merciful, to pardon
The follies of my species, and (that's human)
To be indulgent to my own.

Sal. Alas!
The doom of Nineveh is seal'd.—Woe—woe
To the unrival'd city!

Sar. What dost dread?
Sal. Thou art guarded by thy foes: in a few hours
The tempest may break out which overwhelms thee,
And thine and mine; and in another day
What is shall be the past of Belus' race.

Sar. What must we dread?
Sal. Ambitious treachery,
Which has environ'd thee with snares; but yet
There is resource: empower me with thy signet
To quell the machinations, and I lay
The heads of thy chief foes before thy feet.

Sar. The heads—how many?
Sal. Must I stay to number
When even thine own's in peril? Let me go;
Give me thy signet—trust me with the rest.

Sar. I will trust no man with unlimited lives.
When we take those from others, we nor know
What we have taken, nor the thing we give.

Sal. Wouldst thou not take their lives who seek
for thine?

Sar. That's a hard question—But I answer, Yes.
Cannot the thing be done without? Who are they
Whom thou suspectest?—Let them be arrested.

Sal. I would thou wouldst not ask me; the next
moment

Will send my answer through thy babbling troop
Of paramours, and thence fly o'er the palace,
Even to the city, and so baffle all.—
Trust me.

Sar. Thou knowest I have done so ever;
Take thou the signet. [*Gives the signet.*]

Sal. I have one more request.—
Sar. Name it.

Sal. That thou this night forbear the banquet
In the pavilion over the Euphrates.

Sar. Forbear the banquet! Not for all the plotters
That ever shook a kingdom! Let them come,
And do their worst: I shall not blench for them;
Nor rise the sooner; nor forbear the goblet;

at once in circumstances to abandon themselves to the intem-
perate joys which their prince has been supposed to have re-
commended, is not obvious: but it may deserve observation
that, in that line of coast, the southern of Lesser Asia, ruins
of cities, evidently of an age after Alexander, yet barely named
in history, at this day astonish the adventurous traveller by
their magnificence and elegance. Amid the desolation which,
under a singularly barbarian government, has for so many
centuries been daily spreading in the finest countries of the
globe, whether more from soil and climate, or from opportu-
nities for commerce, extraordinary means must have been
found for communities to flourish there; whence it may seem
that the measures of Sardanapalus were directed by juster
views than have been commonly ascribed to him: but that
monarch having been the last of a dynasty, ended by a revolu-
tion, obloquy on his memory would follow of course from
the policy of his successors and their partisans. The incon-
sistency of traditions concerning Sardanapalus is striking in
Diodorus's account of him."—MITFORD'S *Greece*, vol. x.
p. 311.

Nor crown me with a single rose the less;
Nor lose one joyous hour. — I fear them not.

Sal. But thou wouldst arm thee, wouldst thou not,
if needful?

Sar. Perhaps. I have the goodliest armour, and
A sword of such a temper; and a bow
And javelin, which might furnish Nimrod forth:
A little heavy, but yet not unwieldy.
And now I think on't, 'tis long since I've used them,
Even in the chase. Hast ever seen them, brother?

Sal. Is this a time for such fantastic trifling? —
If need be, wilt thou wear them?

Sar. Will I not?
Oh! if it must be so, and these rash slaves
Will not be ruled with less, I'll use the sword
Till they shall wish it turn'd into a distaff.

Sal. They say thy sceptre's turn'd to that already.

Sar. That's false! but let them say so: the old
Greeks,

Of whom our captives often sing, related
The same of their chief hero, Hercules,
Because he loved a Lydian queen: thou seest
The populace of all the nations seize
Each calumny they can to sink their sovereigns.

Sal. They did not speak thus of thy fathers.

Sar. No:
They dared not. They were kept to toil and combat;
And never changed their chains but for their armour:
Now they have peace and pastime, and the license
To revel and to rail; it irks me not.
I would not give the smile of one fair girl
For all the popular breath that e'er divided
A name from nothing. What are the rank tongues
Of this vile herd, grown insolent with feeding,
That I should prize their noisy praise, or dread
Their noisome clamour?

Sal. You have said they are men;
As such their hearts are something.

Sar. So my dogs' are;¹
And better, as more faithful: — but, proceed;
Thou hast my signet: — since they are tumultuous,
Let them be temper'd, yet not roughly, till
Necessity enforce it. I hate all pain,
Given or received; we have enough within us,
The meanest vassal as the loftiest monarch,
Not to add to each other's natural burthen
Of mortal misery, but rather lessen,
By mild reciprocal alleviation,
The fatal penalties imposed on life:
But this they know not, or they will not know.
I have, by Baal! done all I could to soothe them:
I made no wars, I added no new imposts,
I interfered not with their civic lives,
I let them pass their days as best might suit them,
Passing my own as suited me.

Sal. Thou stopp'st
Short of the duties of a king; and therefore
They say thou art unfit to be a monarch.

Sar. They lie. — Unhappily, I am unfit
To be aught save a monarch; else for me,
The meanest Mede might be the king instead.

Sal. There is one Mede, at least, who seeks to be so.

Sar. What mean'st thou? — 'tis thy secret; thou
desirest

¹ [See MISCELLANIES, "Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog."]

² [The epicurean philosophy of Sardanapalus gives him a

Few questions, and I'm not of curious nature.
Take the fit steps; and, since necessity
Requires, I sanction and support thee. Ne'er
Was man who more desired to rule in peace
The peaceful only: if they rouse me, better
They had conjured up stern Nimrod from his ashes,
"The mighty hunter." I will turn these realms
To one wide desert chase of brutes, who were,
But would no more, by their own choice, be human.
What they have found me, they belie; that which
They yet may find me — shall defy their wish
To speak it worse; and let them thank themselves.

Sal. Then thou at last canst feel?

Sar. Feel! who feels not
Ingratitude?

Sal. I will not pause to answer
With words, but deeds. Keep thou awake that energy
Which sleeps at times, but is not dead within thee,
And thou may'st yet be glorious in thy reign,
As powerful in thy realm. Farewell!

[Exit SALEMENES.
Farewell!

Sar. (solus).
He's gone; and on his finger bears my signet,
Which is to him a sceptre. He is stern
As I am heedless; and the slaves deserve
To feel a master. What may be the danger
I know not: — he hath found it, let him quell it.
Must I consume my life — this little life —
In guarding against all may make it less?²
It is not worth so much! It were to die
Before my hour, to live in dread of death,
Tracing revolt; suspecting all about me,
Because they are near; and all who are remote,
Because they are far. But if it should be so —
If they should sweep me off from earth and empire,
Why, what is earth or empire of the earth?
I have loved, and lived, and multiplied my image;
To die is no less natural than those —
Acts of this clay! 'Tis true I have not shed
Blood as I might have done, in oceans, till
My name became the synonyme of death —
A terror and a trophy. But for this
I feel no penitence; my life is love:
If I must shed blood, it shall be by force.
Till now, no drop from an Assyrian vein
Hath flow'd for me, nor hath the smallest coin
Of Nineveh's vast treasures e'er been lavish'd
On objects which could cost her sons a tear:
If then they hate me, 'tis because I hate not;
If they rebel, 'tis because I oppress not.
Oh, men! ye must be ruled with scythes, not sceptres,
And mow'd down like the grass, else all we reap
Is rank abundance, and a rotten harvest
Of discontents infecting the fair soil,
Making a desert of fertility. —
I'll think no more. — Within there, ho!

Enter an ATTENDANT.

Sar. Slave, tell
The Ionian Myrrha we would crave her presence.
Attend. King, she is here.

MYRRHA enters.

Sar. (apart to Attendant). Away!

fine opportunity, in his conferences with his stern and confidential adviser, Salemenes, to contrast his own imputed and fatal vices of ease and love of pleasure with the boasted virtues of his predecessors, war and conquest. — JEFFREY.]

(Addressing MYRRHA.) Beautiful being!
Thou dost almost anticipate my heart;
It throbb'd for thee, and here thou comest: let me
Deem that some unknown influence, some sweet
oracle,

Communicates between us, though unseen,
In absence, and attracts us to each other.

Myr. There doth.

Sar. I know there doth, but not its name:
What is it?

Myr. In my native land a God,
And in my heart a feeling like a God's,
Exalted; yet I own 'tis only mortal;
For what I feel is humble, and yet happy —
That is, it would be happy; but —

[MYRRHA pauses.

There comes

Sar. For ever something between us and what
We deem our happiness: let me remove
The barrier which that hesitating accent
Proclaims to thine, and mine is seal'd.

Myr. My lord! —
Sar. My lord — my king — sire — sovereign! thus
it is —

For ever thus, address'd with awe. I ne'er
Can see a smile, unless in some broad banquet's
Intoxicating glare, when the buffoons
Have gorged themselves up to equality,
Or I have quaff'd me down to their abasement.
Myrrha, I can hear all these things, these names,
Lord — king — sire — monarch — nay, time was, I
prized them;

That is, I suffer'd them — from slaves and nobles;
But when they falter from the lips I love,
The lips which have been press'd to mine, a chill
Comes o'er my heart, a cold sense of the falsehood
Of this my station, which represses feeling
In those for whom I have felt most, and makes me
Wish that I could lay down the dull tiara,
And share a cottage on the Caucasus
With thee, and wear no crowns but those of flowers.

Myr. Would that we could!

Sar. And dost thou feel this? — Why?
Myr. Then thou wouldst know what thou canst
never know.

Sar. And that is —
Myr. The true value of a heart;
At least, a woman's.

Sar. I have proved a thousand —
A thousand, and a thousand.

Myr. Hearts?

Sar. I think so.
Myr. Not one! the time may come thou may'st.
Sar. It will.

Hear, Myrrha; Salemenes has declared —
Or why or how he hath divin'd it, Belus,
Who founded our great realm, knows more than I —
But Salemenes hath declared my throne
In peril.

Myr. He did well.

Sar. And say'st thou so?
Thou whom he spurn'd so harshly, and now dared¹
Drive from our presence with his savage jeers,
And made thee weep and blush?

¹ [Profane our presence with his savage jeers." — MS.]
² [To speak of "the tragic song" as the favourite pastime
of Greece, two hundred years before Thespis, is an ana-

Myr. I should do both
More frequently, and he did well to call me
Back to my duty. But thou spakest of peril —
Peril to thee —

Sar. Ay, from dark plots and snares
From Medes — and discontented troops and nations.
I know not what — a labyrinth of things —
A maze of mutter'd threats and mysteries:
Thou know'st the man — it is his usual custom.
But he is honest. Come, we'll think no more on't —
But of the midnight festival.

Myr. 'Tis time
To think of aught save festivals. Thou hast not
Spurn'd his sage cautions?

Sar. What? — and dost thou fear?
Myr. Fear! — I'm a Greek, and how should I fear
death?

A slave, and wherefore should I dread my freedom?
Sar. Then wherefore dost thou turn so pale?

Myr. I love.
Sar. And do not I? I love thee far — far more
Than either the brief life or the wide realm,

Which, it may be, are menaced; — yet I blench not.
Myr. That means thou lovest not thyself nor me;
For he who loves another loves himself,
Even for that other's sake. This is too rash:
Kingdoms and lives are not to be so lost. [dared
Sar. Lost! — why, who is the aspiring chief who
Assume to win them?

Myr. Who is he should dread
To try so much? When he who is their ruler
Forgets himself, will they remember him?

Sar. Myrrha!
Myr. Frown not upon me: you have smiled
Too often on me not to make those frowns
Bitterer to bear than any punishment

Which they may augur. — King, I am your subject!
Master, I am your slave! Man, I have loved you! —
Loved you, I know not by what fatal weakness,
Although a Greek, and born a foe to monarchs —
A slave, and hating fetters — an Ionian,
And, therefore, when I love a stranger, more
Degraded by that passion than by chains!
Still I have loved you. If that love were strong
Enough to overcome all former nature,
Shall it not claim the privilege to save you?

Sar. Save me, my beauty! Thou art very fair,
And what I seek of thee is love — not safety.

Myr. And without love where dwells security?
Sar. I speak of woman's love.

Myr. The very first
Of human life must spring from woman's breast,
Your first small words are taught you from her lips,
Your first tears quench'd by her, and your last sighs
Too often breathed out in a woman's hearing,
When men have shrunk from the ignoble care
Of watching the last hour of him who led them.

Sar. My eloquent Ionian! thou speak'st music,
The very chorus of the tragic song²
I have heard thee talk of as the favourite pastime
Of thy far father-land. Nay, weep not — calm thee.

Myr. I weep not. — But I pray thee, do not
speak
About my fathers or their land.

chronism. Nor could Myrrha, at so early a period of her
country's history, have spoken of their national hatred of
kings, or of that which was equally the growth of a later age,
— their contempt for "barbarians." — HEBER.]

Sar. Yet oft
Thou speakest of them.

Myr. True—true: constant thought
Will overflow in words unconsciously;
But when another speaks of Greece, it wounds me.

Sar. Well, then, how wouldst thou save me, as
thou saidst?

Myr. By teaching thee to save thyself, and not
Thyself alone, but these vast realms, from all
The rage of the worst war—the war of brethren;

Sar. Why, child, I loathe all war, and warriors;
I live in peace and pleasure: what can man
Do more?

Myr. Alas! my lord, with common men
There needs too oft the show of war to keep
The substance of sweet peace; and for a king,
'Tis sometimes better to be fear'd than loved.

Sar. And I have never sought but for the last.

Myr. And now art neither.

Sar. Dost thou say so, Myrrha?

Myr. I speak of civic popular love, self-love,
Which means that men are kept in awe and law,
Yet not oppress'd—at least they must not think so;
Or if they think so, deem it necessary,
To ward off worse oppression, their own passions.
A king of feasts, and flowers, and wine, and revel,
And love, and mirth, was never king of glory.

Sar. Glory! what's that?

Myr. Ask of the gods thy fathers.

Sar. They cannot answer; when the priests speak
for them,
'Tis for some small addition to the temple.

Myr. Look to the annals of thine empire's founders.

Sar. They are so blotted o'er with blood, I cannot.
But what wouldst have? the empire has been founded.
I cannot go on multiplying empires.

Myr. Preserve thine own.

Sar. At least, I will enjoy it.
Come, Myrrha, let us go on to the Euphrates:
The hour invites, the galley is prepared,
And the pavilion, deck'd for our return,
In fit adornment for the evening banquet,
Shall blaze with beauty and with light, until
It seems unto the stars which are above us
Itself an opposite star; and we will sit
Crown'd with fresh flowers like —

Myr. Victims.

Sar. No, like sovereigns,
The shepherd kings of patriarchal times,
Who knew no brighter gems than summer wreaths,¹
And none but tearless triumphs. Let us on.

Enter PANIA.

Pan. May the king live for ever!

Sar. Not an hour
Longer than he can love. How my soul hates
This language, which makes life itself a lie,
Flattering dust with eternity.² Well, Pania!
Be brief.

Pan. I am charged by Salemenes to
Reiterate his prayer unto the king,
That for this day, at least, he will not quit
The palace: when the general returns,
He will adduce such reasons as will warrant
His daring, and perhaps obtain the pardon
Of his presumption.

¹ ["Who loved no gems so well as those of nature."—MS.]

Sar. What! am I then coop'd?
Already captive? can I not even breathe
The breath of heaven? Tell prince Salemenes,
Were all Assyria raging round the walls
In mutinous myriads, I would still go forth.

Pan. I must obey, and yet —

Myr. Oh, monarch, listen. —
How many a day and moon thou hast reclined
Within these palace walls in silken dalliance,
And never shown thee to thy people's longing;
Leaving thy subjects' eyes ungratified,
The satraps uncontrol'd, the gods unworshipp'd,
And all things in the anarchy of sloth,
Till all, save evil, slumber'd through the realm!
And wilt thou not now tarry for a day, —
A day which may redeem thee? Wilt thou not
Yield to the few still faithful a few hours,
For them, for thee, for thy past fathers' race,
And for thy sons' inheritance?

Pan. 'Tis true!
From the deep urgency with which the prince
Despatch'd me to your sacred presence, I
Must dare to add my feeble voice to that
Which now has spoken.

Sar. No, it must not be.

Myr. For the sake of thy realm!

Sar. Away!

Pan. For that
Of all thy faithful subjects, who will rally
Round thee and thine!

Sar. These are mere fantasies;
There is no peril: — 'tis a sullen scheme
Of Salemenes, to approve his zeal,
And show himself more necessary to us. [counsel.]

Myr. By all that's good and glorious take this

Sar. Business to-morrow.

Myr. Ay, or death to-night.

Sar. Why let it come then unexpectedly
'Midst joy and gentleness, and mirth and love;
So let me fall like the pluck'd rose! — far better
Thus than be wither'd.

Myr. Then thou wilt not yield,
Even for the sake of all that ever stirr'd
A monarch into action, to forego
A trifling revel?

Sar. No.

Myr. Then yield for mine;
For my sake!

Sar. Thine, my Myrrha!

Myr. 'Tis the first
Boon which I ever ask'd Assyria's king.

Sar. That's true, and wer't my kingdom, must be
granted.

Well, for thy sake, I yield me. Pania, hence!
Thou hear'st me.

Pan. And obey. [Exit PANIA.]

Sar. I marvel at thee.
What is thy motive, Myrrha, thus to urge me?

Myr. Thy safety; and the certainty that nought
Could urge the prince thy kinsman to require
Thus much from thee, but some impending danger.

Sar. And if I do not dread it, why shouldst thou?

Myr. Because thou dost not fear, I fear for thee.

Sar. To-morrow thou wilt smile at these vain
fancies. [weep.]

Myr. If the worst come, I shall be where none

² ["Wishing eternity to dust."—MS.]

And that is better than the power to smile.
And thou?

Sar. I shall be king, as heretofore.

Myr. Where?

Sar. With Baal, Nimrod, and Semiramis,
Sole in Assyria, or with them elsewhere.
Fate made me what I am—may make me nothing—
But either that or nothing must I be:
I will not live degraded.

Myr. Hadst thou felt
Thus always, none would ever dare degrade thee.

Sar. And who will do so now?

Myr. Dost thou suspect none?

Sar. Suspect! — that's a spy's office. Oh! we lose
Ten thousand precious moments in vain words,
And vainer fears. Within there! — Ye slaves, deck
The hall of Nimrod for the evening revel:
If I must make a prison of our palace,
At least we'll wear our fetters jocosely:
If the Euphrates be forbid us, and
The Summer dwelling on its beautiful border,
Here we are still unmenaced. Ho! within there!

[Exit SARDANAPALUS.]

Myr. (sola). Why do I love this man? My
country's daughters
Love none but heroes. But I have no country!
The slave hath lost all save her bonds. I love him;
And that's the heaviest link of the long chain —
To love whom we esteem not. Be it so:
The hour is coming when he'll need all love,
And find none. To fall from him now were baser
Than to have stabb'd him on his throne when highest
Would have been noble in my country's creed:
I was not made for either. Could I save him,
I should not love him better, but myself;
And I have need of the last, for I have fallen
In my own thoughts, by loving this soft stranger:
And yet methinks I love him more, perceiving
That he is hated of his own barbarians,
The natural foes of all the blood of Greece.
Could I but wake a single thought like those
Which even the Phrygians felt when battling long
'Twixt Ilion and the sea, within his heart,
He would tread down the barbarous crowds, and
triumph.

He loves me, and I love him; the slave loves
Her master, and would free him from his vices.
If not, I have a means of freedom still,
And if I cannot teach him how to reign,
May show him how alone a king can leave
His throne. I must not lose him from my sight.

[Exit.]

ACT II.

SCENE I.

The Portal of the same Hall of the Palace.

Beleses (solus). The sun goes down: methinks he
sets more slowly,

¹ [There are two of Lord Byron's characteristic excellences, which he never leaves behind in his most fantastic expeditions, and which he has accordingly brought into his new domain of classic tragedy. One of these is his intense feeling of the loveliness of woman — his power, not only of picturing individual forms, but of infusing into the very atmosphere which surrounds them the spirit of beauty and of love. A soft roseate light is spread over them, which seems to sink into the soul. The other faculty to which we allude is his

Taking his last look of Assyria's empire.
How red he glares amongst those deepening clouds,
Like the blood he predicts! If not in vain,
Thou sun that sinkest, and ye stars which rise,
I have outwatch'd ye, reading ray by ray
The edicts of your orbs, which make Time tremble
For what he brings the nations, 'tis the furthest
Hour of Assyria's years. And yet how calm!
An earthquake should announce so great a fall —
A summer's sun discloses it. Yon disk,
To the star-read Chaldean, bears upon
Its everlasting page the end of what
Seem'd everlasting; but oh! thou true sun!
The burning oracle of all that live,
As fountain of all life, and symbol of
Him who bestows it, wherefore dost thou limit
Thy lore unto calamity? Why not
Unfold the rise of days more worthy thine
All-glorious burst from ocean? why not dart
A beam of hope athwart the future years,
As of wrath to its days? Hear me! oh, hear me!
I am thy worshipper, thy priest, thy servant —
I have gazed on thee at thy rise and fall,
And bow'd my head beneath thy mid-day beams,
When my eye dared not meet thee. I have watch'd
For thee, and after thee, and pray'd to thee,
And sacrific'd to thee, and read, and fear'd thee,
And ask'd of thee, and thou hast answer'd — but
Only to thus much: while I speak, he sinks —
Is gone — and leaves his beauty, not his knowledge,
To the delighted west, which revels in
Its hues of dying glory. Yet what is
Death, so it be but glorious? 'Tis a sunset;
And mortals may be happy to resemble
The gods but in decay.

Enter ARBACES, by an inner door.

Arb. Beleses, why
So rapt in thy devotions? Dost thou stand
Gazing to trace thy disappearing god
Into some realm of undiscover'd day?
Our business is with night — 'tis come.

Bel. But not
Gone.

Arb. Let it roll on — we are ready.

Bel. Yes.
Would it were over!

Arb. Does the prophet doubt,
To whom the very stars shine victory?
Bel. I do not doubt of victory — but the victor.
Arb. Well, let thy science settle that. Meantime
I have prepared as many glittering spears
As will out-sparkle our allies — your planets.
There is no more to thwart us. The she-king,
That less than woman, is even now upon
The waters with his female mates. The order
Is issued for the feast in the pavilion.
The first cup which he drains will be the last
Quaff'd by the line of Nimrod.

Bel. 'T was a brave one.

comprehensive sympathy with the vastest objects in the material universe. There is scarcely any pure description of individual scenes in all his works; but the noblest allusions to the grandeurs of earth and heaven. He pays "no allegiance but to the elements." The moon, the stars, the ocean, the mountain desert, are endowed by him with new "speech and language," and send to the heart their mighty voices. He can interpret between us and the firmament, or give us all the sentiment of an everlasting solitude. — *Anon.*]