

Sar. Not quite; but let it pass.
We've clear'd the palace——

Sal. And I trust the city.
Our numbers gather; and I've order'd onward
A cloud of Parthians, hitherto reserved,
All fresh and fiery, to be pour'd upon them
In their retreat, which soon will be a flight.

Sar. It is already, or at least they march'd
Faster than I could follow with my Bactrians,
Who spared no speed. I am spent: give me a seat.

Sal. There stands the throne, sire.

Sar. 'Tis no place to rest on,
For mind nor body: let me have a couch,

[*They place a seat.*]
A peasant's stool, I care not what: so—now
I breathe more freely.

Sal. This great hour has proved
The brightest and most glorious of your life.

Sar. And the most tiresome. Where's my cup-
bearer?

Bring me some water.

Sal. (smiling). 'Tis the first time he
Ever had such an order: even I,
Your most austere of counsellors, would now
Suggest a purpler beverage.

Sar. Blood—doubtless.
But there's enough of that shed; as for wine,
I have learn'd to-night the price of the pure element:
Thrice have I drank of it, and thrice renew'd,
With greater strength than the grape ever gave me,
My charge upon the rebels. Where's the soldier
Who gave me water in his helmet?

One of the Guards. Slain, sire!
An arrow pierced his brain, while, scattering
The last drops from his helm, he stood in act
To place it on his brows.

Sar. Slain! unrewarded!
And slain to serve my thirst: that's hard, poor slave!
Had he but lived, I would have gorged him with
Gold: all the gold of earth could ne'er repay
The pleasure of that draught; for I was parch'd
As I am now. [*They bring water—he drinks.*]

I live again—from henceforth
The goblet I reserve for hours of love,
But war on water.

Sal. And that bandage, sire,
Which girds your arm?

Sar. A scratch from brave Beleses.

Myr. Oh! he is wounded!

Sar. Not too much of that;
And yet it feels a little stiff and painful,
Now I am cooler.

Myr. You have bound it with——
Sar. The fillet of my diadem: the first time
That ornament was ever aught to me,
Save an incumbrance.

Myr. (to the Attendants). Summon speedily
A leech of the most skilful: pray, retire:
I will unbind your wound and tend it.

Sar. Do so,
For now it throbs sufficiently: but what
Know'st thou of wounds? yet wherefore do I ask?
Know'st thou, my brother, where I lighted on
This minion?

¹ [The rebels are at length repulsed. The king re-enters wounded, and retires to rest, after a short and very characteristic conversation between Salemenes and Myrrha, in which the two kindred spirits show their mutual understanding of each other, and the loyal warrior, postponing all the

Sal. Herding with the other females,
Like frighten'd antelopes.

Sar. No: like the dam
Of the young lion, femininely raging,
(And femininely meaneth furiously,
Because all passions in excess are female,)
Against the hunter flying with her cub,
She urged on with her voice and gesture, and
Her floating hair and flashing eyes, the soldiers,
In the pursuit.

Sal. Indeed!

Sar. You see, this night
Made warriors of more than me. I paused
To look upon her, and her kindled cheek;
Her large black eyes, that flash'd through her long hair
As it stream'd o'er her; her blue veins that rose
Along her most transparent brow; her nostril
Dilated from its symmetry; her lips
Apart; her voice that clove through all the din,
As a lute's pierce through the cymbal's clash,
Jarr'd but not drown'd by the loud brattling; her
Waved arms, more dazzling with their own born
whiteness

Than the steel her hand held, which she caught up
From a dead soldier's grasp;—all these things made
Her seem unto the troops a propheticess
Of victory, or Victory herself,
Come down to hail us hers.

Sal. (aside). This is too much.
Again the love-fit's on him, and all's lost,
Unless we turn his thoughts.

(*Aloud.*) But pray thee, sire,
Think of your wound—you said even now 't was
painful.

Sar. That's true, too; but I must not think of it.
Sal. I have look'd to all things needful, and will now
Receive reports of progress made in such
Orders as I had given, and then return
To hear your further pleasure.

Sar. Be it so.

Sal. (in retiring). Myrrha!

Myr. Prince!

Sal. You have shown a soul to-night,
Which, were he not my sister's lord——But now
I have no time; thou lovest the king?

Myr. I love

Sardanapalus.

Sal. But wouldst have him king still?

Myr. I would not have him less than what he
should be.

Sal. Well then, to have him king, and yours, and all
He should, or should not be; to have him *live*,
Let him not sink back into luxury.

You have more power upon his spirit than
Wisdom within these walls, or fierce rebellion
Raging without: look well that he relapse not.

Myr. There needed not the voice of Salemenes
To urge me on to this: I will not fail.

All that a woman's weakness can——

Sal. Is power
Omnipotent o'er such a heart as his:
Exert it wisely. [*Exit SALEMENES.*]

Sar. Myrrha! what, at whispers
With my stern brother? I shall soon be jealous. ¹

selfish domestic feelings which led him to dislike the fair Ionian, exhorts her to use her utmost power to keep her lover from relaxing into luxury. The transient effect which their whispers produce on Sardanapalus is well imagined.—
BISHOP HEBER.]

Myr. (smiling). You have cause, sire; for on the
earth there breathes not

A man more worthy of a woman's love—
A soldier's trust—a subject's reverence—
A king's esteem—the whole world's admiration!

Sar. Praise him, but not so warmly. I must not
Hear those sweet lips grow eloquent in aught
That throws me into shade: yet you speak truth.

Myr. And now retire, to have your wound look'd to.
Pray, lean on me.

Sar. Yes, love! but not from pain.
[*Exeunt omnes.*]

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

SARDANAPALUS discovered sleeping upon a Couch,
and occasionally disturbed in his Slumbers, with
MYRRHA watching.

Myr. (sola, gazing). I have stolen upon his rest,
if rest it be,

Which thus convulses slumber: shall I wake him?
No, he seems calmer. Oh, thou God of Quiet!
Whose reign is o'er seal'd eyelids and soft dreams,
Or deep, deep sleep, so as to be unfathom'd,
Look like thy brother, Death—so still—so stirless—

For then we are happiest, as it may be, we
Are happiest of all within the realm
Of thy stern, silent, and unawakening twin.
Again he moves—again the play of pain
Shoots o'er his features, as the sudden gust
Crisps the reluctant lake that lay so calm ¹

Beneath the mountain shadow; or the blast
Ruffles the autumn leaves, that drooping cling
Faintly and motionless to their loved boughs.
I must awake him—yet not yet: who knows
From what I rouse him? It seems pain; but if
I quicken him to heavier pain? The fever

Of this tumultuous night, the grief too of
His wound, though slight, may cause all this, and shake
Me more to see than him to suffer. No:
Let Nature use her own maternal means,—
And I await to second, not disturb her. ²

Sar. (awakening). Not so—although ye multiplied
the stars,
And gave them to me as a realm to share

¹ ["Crisps the unswelling wave," &c.—MS.]

² [The fourth Act opens with Myrrha watching over the slumbers of Sardanapalus. He awakens and tells a horrid dream, which we do not much admire, except that part of it which describes the form of his warlike ancestress Semiramis, with whom, and the rest of his regal predecessors, he had fancied himself at a ghostly banquet.—HEBER.]

³ [The general tone of Myrrha's character (in perfect consistency with the manners of her age and nation, and with her own elevated but pure and feminine spirit,) is that of a devout worshipper of her country's gods. She reproves, with dignity, the impious flattery of the Assyrian courtiers and the libertine scoffs of the king. She does not forget, while preparing for death, that libation which was the latest and most solemn act of Grecian piety; and she, more particularly, expresses her belief in a future state of existence. Yet this very Myrrha, when Sardanapalus is agitated by his evil dream, and by the natural doubt as to what worse visions death may bring, is made to console him, in the strain of his own Epicurean philosophy, with the doctrine that death is really nothing, except

"Unto the timid who anticipate

That which may never be;"

and with the insinuation that all which remains of "the dead is the dust we tread upon." We do not wish to ask, we do not

From you and with you! I would not so purchase
The empire of eternity. Hence—hence—
Old hunter of the earliest brutes! and ye,
Who hunted fellow-creatures as if brutes!
Once bloody mortals—and now bloodier idols,
If your priests lie not! And thou, ghastly beldame!
Dripping with dusky gore, and trampling on
The carcasses of Inde—away! away!
Where am I? Where the spectres? Where——
No—that

Is no false phantom: I should know it 'midst
All that the dead dare gloomily raise up
From their black gulf to daunt the living. Myrrha!

Myr. Alas! thou art pale, and on thy brow the drops
Gather like night-dew. My beloved, hush—
Calm thee. Thy speech seems of another world,
And thou art lord of this. Be of good cheer;
All will go well.

Sar. Thy hand—so—'t is thy hand;
'Tis flesh; grasp—clasp—yet closer, till I feel
Myself that which I was.

Myr. At least know me
For what I am, and ever must be—thine.

Sar. I know it now. I know this life again.
Ah, Myrrha! I have been where we shall be.

Myr. My lord!

Sar. I've been i' the grave—where
worms are lords,

And kings are——But I did not deem it so;
I thought 't was nothing.

Myr. So it is; except
Unto the timid, who anticipate
That which may never be. ³

Sar. Oh, Myrrha! if
Sleep shows such things, what may not death disclose?

Myr. I know no evil death can show, which life
Has not already shown to those who live
Embodied longest. If there be indeed
A shore where mind survives, 't will be as mind,
All unincorporate: or if there flits

A shadow of this cumbrous clog of clay,
Which stalks, methinks, between our souls and heaven,
And fetters us to earth—at least the phantom,
Whate'er it have to fear, will not fear death.

Sar. I fear it not; but I have felt—have seen—
A legion of the dead.

Myr. And so have I.
The dust we tread upon was once alive,

like to conjecture, whose sentiments these are, but they are certainly not the sentiments of an ancient Grecian heroine. They are not the sentiments which Myrrha might have learned from the heroes of her native land, or from the poems whence those heroes derived their heroism, their contempt of death, "and their love of virtue." Myrrha would rather have told her lover of those happy islands where the benevolent and the brave reposed after the toils of their mortal existence; of that venerable society of departed warriors and sages, to which, if he renounced his sloth and lived for his people and for glory, he might yet expect admission. She would have told him of that joy with which his warlike ancestors would move along their meads of asphodel, when the news reached them of their descendant's prowess; she would have anticipated those songs which denied that "Harmodius was dead," however he might be removed from the sphere of mortality; which told her countrymen of the "roses and the golden-fruited bowers, where, beneath the light of a lower sun, departed warriors reined their shadowy cars, or struck their harps amid altars steaming with frankincense."—(Hom. Odys. l. 539. Callistratus ap. Athenaeum, l. xv. Pindar. Fragm. Heyne, vol. iii. p. 31.) Such were the doctrines which naturally led men to a contempt for life and a thirst for glory: but the opposite opinions were the doubts of a later day; and of those sophists under whose influence Greece soon ceased to be free, or valiant, or virtuous.—HEBER.]

And wretched. But proceed : what hast thou seen ?
Speak it, 't will lighten thy dimm'd mind.

Sar. Methought —

Myr. Yet pause, thou art tired—in pain—exhausted ; all

Which can impair both strength and spirit : seek
Rather to sleep again.

Sar. Not now — I would not
Dream ; though I know it now to be a dream
What I have dreamt : — and canst thou bear to
hear it ?

Myr. I can bear all things, dreams of life or death,
Which I participate with you, in semblance
Or full reality.

Sar. And this look'd real,
I tell you : after that these eyes were open,
I saw them in their flight—for then they fled.

Myr. Say on.

Sar. I saw, that is, I dream'd myself
Here—here—even where we are, guests as we were,
Myself a host that deem'd himself but guest,
Willing to equal all in social freedom ;
But, on my right hand and my left, instead
Of thee and Zames, and our custom'd meeting,
Was ranged on my left hand a haughty, dark,
And deadly face—I could not recognise it,
Yet I had seen it, though I knew not where :
The features were a giant's, and the eye
Was still, yet lighted ; his long locks curl'd down
On his vast bust, whence a huge quiver rose
With shaft-heads feather'd from the eagle's wing,¹
That peep'd up bristling through his serpent hair.
I invited him to fill the cup which stood
Between us, but he answer'd not—I fill'd it—
He took it not, but stared upon me, till
I trembled at the fix'd glare of his eye :
I frown'd upon him as a king should frown—
He frown'd not in his turn, but look'd upon me
With the same aspect, which appall'd me more,
Because it changed not : and I turn'd for refuge
To milder guests, and sought them on the right,
Where thou wert wont to be. But —

[*He pauses.*
Myr. What instead ?

Sar. In thy own chair—thy own place in the
banquet—

I sought thy sweet face in the circle—but
Instead—a grey-hair'd, wither'd, bloody-eyed,
And bloody-handed, ghastly, ghostly thing,
Female in garb, and crown'd upon the brow,
Furrow'd with years, yet sneering with the passion
Of vengeance, leering too with that of lust,
Sate : — my veins curld.

Myr. Is this all ?

Sar. Upon
Her right hand—her lank, bird-like, right hand—
stood

A goblet, bubbling o'er with blood ; and on
Her left, another, fill'd with—what I saw not,
But turn'd from it and her. But all along
The table sate a range of crowned wretches,
Of various aspects, but of one expression.

Myr. And felt you not this a mere vision ?

Sar. No :
It was so palpable, I could have touch'd them.
I turn'd from one face to another, in

¹ ["With arrows peeping through his falling hair."—MS.]

The hope to find at last one which I knew
Ere I saw theirs : but no—all turn'd upon me,
And stared, but neither ate nor drank, but stared,
Till I grew stone, as they seem'd half to be,
Yet breathing stone, for I felt life in them,
And life in me : there was a horrid kind
Of sympathy between us, as if they
Had lost a part of death to come to me,
And I the half of life to sit by them.
We were in an existence all apart
From heaven or earth—And rather let me see
Death all than such a being !

Myr. And the end ?

Sar. At last I sate, marble, as they, when rose
The hunter and the crone ; and smiling on me—
Yes, the enlarged but noble aspect of
The hunter smiled upon me—I should say,
His lips, for his eyes moved not—and the woman's
Thin lips relaxed to something like a smile.
Both rose, and the crown'd figures on each hand
Rose also, as if aping their chief shades—
Mere mimics even in death—but I sate still :
A desperate courage crept through every limb,
And at the last I fear'd them not, but laugh'd
Full in their phantom faces. But then—then
The hunter laid his hand on mine : I took it,
And grasp'd it—but it melted from my own ;
While he too vanish'd, and left nothing but
The memory of a hero, for he look'd so.

Myr. And was : the ancestor of heroes, too,
And thine no less.

Sar. Ay, Myrrha, but the woman,
The female who remain'd, she flew upon me,
And burnt my lips up with her noisome kisses ;
And, flinging down the goblets on each hand,
Methought their poisons flow'd around us, till
Each form'd a hideous river. Still she clung ;
The other phantoms, like a row of statues,
Stood dull as in our temples, but she still
Embraced me, while I shrunk from her, as if,
In lieu of her remote descendant, I
Had been the son who slew her for her incest.
Then—then—a chaos of all loathsome things
Throng'd thick and shapeless : I was dead, yet
feeling—

Buried, and raised again—consumed by worms,
Purged by the flames, and wither'd in the air !
I can fix nothing further of my thoughts,
Save that I long'd for thee, and sought for thee,
In all these agonies,—and woke and found thee

Myr. So shalt thou find me ever at thy side,
Here and hereafter, if the last may be.
But think not of these things—the mere creations
Of late events, acting upon a frame
Unused to toil, yet over-wrought by toil
Such as might try the sternest.

Sar. I am better.
Now that I see thee once more, what was seen
Seems nothing.

Enter SALEMENES.

Sal. Is the king so soon awake ?

Sar. Yes, brother, and I would I had not slept ;
For all the predecessors of our line
Rose up, methought, to drag me down to them.
My father was amongst them, too ; but he,
I know not why, kept from me, leaving me
Between the hunter-founder of our race,

And her, the homicide and husband-killer,
Whom you call glorious.

Sal. So I term you also,
Now you have shown a spirit like to hers.
By day-break I propose that we set forth,
And charge once more the rebel crew, who still
Keep gathering head, repulsed, but not quite quell'd.

Sar. How wears the night ?

Sal. There yet remains some hours
Of darkness : use them for your further rest.

Sar. No, not to-night, if 'tis not gone : methought
I pass'd hours in that vision.

Myr. Scarcely one ;

I watch'd by you : it was a heavy hour,
But an hour only.

Sar. Let us then hold council ;
To-morrow we set forth.

Sal. But ere that time,
I had a grace to seek.

Sar. 'Tis granted.

Sal. Hear it
Ere you reply too readily ; and 'tis
For your ear only.

Myr. Prince, I take my leave.

[*Exit MYRRHA.*]

Sal. That slave deserves her freedom.

Sar. Freedom only !
That slave deserves to share a throne.

Sal. Your patience—

'Tis not yet vacant, and 'tis of its partner
I come to speak with you.

Sar. How ! of the queen ?

Sal. Even so. I judged it fitting for their safety,
That, ere the dawn, she sets forth with her children
For Paphlagonia, where our kinsman Cotta
Governs ; and there at all events secure
My nephews and your sons their lives, and with them
Their just pretensions to the crown in case—

Sar. I perish—as is probable : well thought—
Let them set forth with a sure escort.

Sal. That

Is all provided, and the galley ready
To drop down the Euphrates ! ; but ere they
Depart, will you not see—

Sar. My sons ? It may

Unman my heart, and the poor boys will weep ;
And what can I reply to comfort them,
Save with some hollow hopes, and ill-worn smiles ?
You know I cannot feign.

Sal. But you can feel ;

At least, I trust so : in a word, the queen
Requests to see you ere you part—for ever.

Sar. Unto what end ? what purpose ? I will grant
Aught—all that she can ask—but such a meeting.

Sal. You know, or ought to know, enough of women,
Since you have studied them so steadily,
That what they ask in aught that touches on
The heart, is dearer to their feelings or
Their fancy, than the whole external world.
I think as you do of my sister's wish ;
But 't was her wish—she is my sister—you
Her husband—will you grant it ?

Sar. 'T will be useless :
But let her come.

¹ [We hardly know why Lord Byron, who has not in other respects shown a slavish deference for Diodorus Siculus, should thus follow him in the manifest geographical blunder of placing Nineveh on the Euphrates instead of the Tigris, in opposition not only to the uniform tradition of the East, but to the express assertions of Herodotus, Pliny, and Ptolemy.—HEBER.]

Sal. I go. [*Exit SALEMENES.*]

Sar. We have lived asunder
Too long to meet again—and now to meet !
Have I not cares enow, and pangs enow,
To bear alone, that we must mingle sorrows,
Who have ceas'd to mingle love ?

Re-enter SALEMENES and ZARINA.

Sal. My sister ! Courage :
Shame not our blood with trembling, but remember
From whence we sprung. The queen is present, sire.

Zar. I pray thee, brother, leave me.
Sal. Since you ask it.
[*Exit SALEMENES.*]

Zar. Alone with him ! How many a year has pass'd,
Though we are still so young, since we have met,
Which I have worn in widowhood of heart.
He loved me not : yet he seems little changed—
Changed to me only—would the change were
mutual !

He speaks not—scarce regards me—not a word—
Nor look—yet he was soft of voice and aspect,
Indifferent, not austere. My lord !

Sar. Zarina !

Zar. No, not Zarina—do not say Zarina.
That tone—that word—annihilate long years,
And things which make them longer.

Sar. 'Tis too late
To think of these past dreams. Let's not reproach—
That is, reproach me not—for the last time—

Zar. And first. I ne'er reproach'd you.

Sar. 'Tis most true ;
And that reproof comes heavier on my heart
Than—But our hearts are not in our own power.

Zar. Nor hands ; but I gave both.

Sar. Your brother said
It was your will to see me, ere you went
From Nineveh with—(*He hesitates.*)

Zar. Our children : it is true.
I wish'd to thank you that you have not divided
My heart from all that's left it now to love—
Those who are yours and mine, who look like you,
And look upon me as you look'd upon me
Once—But they have not changed.

Sar. Nor ever will.
I fain would have them dutiful.

Zar. I cherish
Those infants, not alone from the blind love
Of a fond mother, but as a fond woman.

They are now the only tie between us.

Sar. Deem not
I have not done you justice : rather make them
Resemble your own line, than their own sire.

I trust them with you—to you : fit them for
A throne, or, if that be denied—You have heard
Of this night's tumults ?

Zar. I had half forgotten,
And could have welcomed any grief, save yours,
Which gave me to behold your face again.

Sar. The throne—I say it not in fear—but 'tis
In peril ; they perhaps may never mount it !
But let them not for this lose sight of it.

I will dare all things to bequeath it them ;
But if I fail, then they must win it back

in opposition not only to the uniform tradition of the East,
but to the express assertions of Herodotus, Pliny, and Ptolemy.—HEBER.]

Bravely—and, won, wear it wisely, not as I
Have wasted down my royalty.

Zar. They ne'er
Shall know from me of aught but what may honour
Their father's memory.

Sar. Rather let them hear
The truth from you than from a trampling world.
If they be in adversity, they'll learn
Too soon the scorn of crowds for crownless princes,
And find that all their father's sins are theirs.
My boys!—I could have borne it were I childless.

Zar. Oh! do not say so—do not poison all
My peace left, by unwishing that thou wert
A father. If thou conquerest, they shall reign,
And honour him who saved the realm for them,
So little cared for as his own; and if—

Sar. 'Tis lost, all earth will cry out, thank your
father!

And they will swell the echo with a curse.

Zar. That they shall never do; but rather honour
The name of him, who, dying like a king,
In his last hours did more for his own memory
Than many monarchs in a length of days,
Which date the flight of time, but make no annals.

Sar. Our annals draw perchance unto their close;
But at the least, whate'er the past, their end
Shall be like their beginning—memorable.

Zar. Yet, be not rash—be careful of your life,
Live but for those who love.

Sar. And who are they?
A slave, who loves from passion—I'll not say
Ambition—she has seen thrones shake, and loves;
A few friends who have revell'd till we are
As one, for they are nothing if I fall;
A brother I have injured—children whom
I have neglected, and a spouse—

Zar. Who loves.

Sar. And pardons?
Zar. I have never thought of this,
And cannot pardon till I have condemn'd.

Sar. My wife!
Zar. Now blessings on thee for that word!
I never thought to hear it more—from thee.

Sar. Oh! thou wilt hear it from my subjects. Yes—
These slaves, whom I have nurtured, pamper'd, fed,
And swoln with peace, and gorged with plenty, till
They reign themselves—all monarchs in their
mansions—

Now swarm forth in rebellion, and demand
His death, who made their lives a jubilee;
While the few upon whom I have no claim
Are faithful! This is true, yet monstrous.

Zar. 'Tis
Perhaps too natural; for benefits
Turn poison in bad minds.

Sar. And good ones make
Good out of evil. Happier than the bee,
Which hives not but from wholesome flowers.

Zar. Then reap
The honey, nor inquire whence 'tis derived.
Be satisfied—you are not all abandon'd.

¹ [“We are not sure, whether there is not a considerable violation of costume in the sense of degradation with which Myrrha seems to regard her situation in the harem, no less than in the resentment of Salemenes, and the remorse of Sardanapalus on the score of his infidelity to Zarina. Little as we know of the domestic habits of Assyria, we have reason to conclude, from the habits of contemporary nations, and from the manners of the East in every age, that polygamy

Sar. My life insures me that. How long, bethink
you,

Were not I yet a king, should I be mortal;
That is, where mortals *are*, not where they must be?
Zar. I know not. But yet live for my—that is,
Your children's sake!

Sar. My gentle, wrong'd Zarina!
I am the very slave of circumstance
And impulse—borne away with every breath!
Misplaced upon the throne—misplaced in life.
I know not what I could have been, but feel
I am not what I should be—let it end.
But take this with thee: if I was not form'd
To prize a love like thine, a mind like thine,
Nor dote even on thy beauty—as I've doted
On lesser charms, for no cause save that such
Devotion was a duty, and I hated

All that look'd like a chain for me or others
(This even rebellion must avouch); yet hear
These words, perhaps among my last—that none
E'er valued more thy virtues, though he knew not
To profit by them—as the miner lights
Upon a vein of virgin ore, discovering
That which avails him nothing: he hath found it,
But 'tis not his—but some superior's, who
Placed him to dig, but not divide the wealth
Which sparkles at his feet; nor dare he lift
Nor poise it, but must grovel on, upturning
The sullen earth.

Zar. Oh! if thou hast at length
Discover'd that my love is worth esteem,
I ask no more—but let us hence together,
And I—let me say *we*—shall yet be happy.
Assyria is not all the earth—we'll find
A world out of our own—and be more bless'd
Than I have ever been, or thou, with all
An empire to indulge thee.

Enter SALEMENES.

Sal. I must part ye—
The moments, which must not be lost, are passing.

Zar. Inhuman brother! wilt thou thus weigh out
Instants so high and blest?

Sal. Blest!

Zar. He hath been
So gentle with me, that I cannot think
Of quitting.

Sal. So—this feminine farewell
Ends as such partings end, in *no* departure.
I thought as much, and yielded against all
My better bodings. But it must not be.

Zar. Not be?

Sal. Remain, and perish—

Zar. With my husband—

Sal. And children.

Zar. Alas!

Sal. Hear me, sister, like

My sister:—all's prepared to make your safety

Certain, and of the boys too, our last hopes;

'Tis not a single question of mere feeling,

Though that were much—but 'tis a point of state:

was neither accounted a crime in itself, nor as a measure of which the principal wife was justified in complaining. And even in Greece, in those times when Myrrha's character must have been formed,—to be a captive, and subject to the captor's pleasure, was accounted a misfortune indeed, but could hardly be regarded as an infamy. But where is the critic who would object to an inaccuracy which has given occasion to such sentiments and such poetry?—HEBER.]

The rebels would do more to seize upon
The offspring of their sovereign, and so crush—

Zar. Ah! do not name it.

Sal. Well, then, mark me: when
They are safe beyond the Median's grasp, the rebels
Have miss'd their chief aim—the extinction of
The line of Nimrod. Though the present king
Fall, his sons live for victory and vengeance.

Zar. But could not I remain, alone?

Sal. What! leave
Your children, with two parents and yet orphans—
In a strange land—so young, so distant?

Zar. No—
My heart will break.

Sal. Now you know all—decide.

Sar. Zarina, he hath spoken well, and we
Must yield awhile to this necessity.
Remaining here, you may lose all; departing,
You save the better part of what is left,
To both of us, and to such loyal hearts
As yet beat in these kingdoms.

Sal. The time presses.

Sar. Go, then. If e'er we meet again, perhaps
I may be worthier of you—and, if not,
Remember that my faults, though not atoned for,
Are ended. Yet, I dread thy nature will
Grieve more above the blighted name and ashes
Which once were mightiest in Assyria—than—
But I grow womanish again, and must not;
I must learn sternness now. My sins have all
Been of the softer order—*hide* thy tears—
I do not bid thee *not* to shed them—'t were
Easier to stop Euphrates at its source
Than one tear of a true and tender heart—
But let me not behold them; they unman me
Here when I had re-mann'd myself. My brother,
Lead her away.

Zar. Oh, God! I never shall
Behold him more! [obey'd.]

Sal. (*striving to conduct her*). Nay, sister, I *must* be

Zar. I must remain—away! you shall not hold me.

What, shall he die alone?—I live alone?

Sal. He shall *not die alone*; but lonely you

Have lived for years.

Zar. That's false! I knew *he* lived,
And lived upon his image—let me go!

Sal. (*conducting her off the stage*). Nay, then, I
must use some fraternal force,
Which you will pardon.

Zar. Never. Help me! Oh!

Sardanapalus, wilt thou thus behold me

Torn from thee?

Sal. Nay—then all is lost again,

If that this moment is not gain'd.

Zar. My brain turns—

My eyes fail—where is he? [She faints.]

Sar. (*advancing*). No—set her down—

She's dead—and you have slain her.

Sal. 'Tis the mere

Faintness of o'erwrought passion: in the air

She will recover. Pray, keep back. —[*Aside*.] I must

¹ [This scene has been, by the Edinburgh Reviewers, we know not why, called “useless,” “unnatural,” and “tediously written.” For ourselves, we are not ashamed to own that we have read it with emotion. It is an interview between Sardanapalus and his neglected wife, whom, with her children, he is about to send to a place of safety. Here, too, however, he is represented, with much poetical art and justice of delineation, as, in the midst of his deepest regrets for

Avail myself of this sole moment to
Bear her to where her children are embark'd,
'T the royal galley on the river.

[SALEMENES bears her off.¹

Sar. (*solus*). This, too—
And this too must I suffer—I, who never
Inflicted purposely on human hearts
A voluntary pang! But that is false—
She loved me, and I loved her.—Fatal passion!
Why dost thou not expire *at once* in hearts
Which thou hast lighted up at once? Zarina!
I must pay dearly for the desolation
Now brought upon thee. Had I never loved
But thee, I should have been an unopposed
Monarch of honouring nations. To what gulfs
A single deviation from the track
Of human duties leads even those who claim
The homage of mankind as their born due,
And find it, till they forfeit it themselves!

Enter MYRRA.

Sar. You here! Who call'd you?
Myr. No one—but I heard

Far off a voice of wail and lamentation,

And thought—

Sar. It forms no portion of your duties
To enter here till sought for.

Myr. Though I might,
Perhaps, recall some softer words of yours
(Although they *too were chiding*), which reproved me,
Because I ever dreaded to intrude;
Resisting my own wish and your injunction
To heed no time nor presence, but approach you
Uncall'd for:—I retire.

Sar. Yet stay—being here.
I pray you pardon me: events have sour'd me
Till I wax peevish—heed it not: I shall
Soon be myself again.

Myr. I wait with patience,

What I shall see with pleasure.

Sar. Scarce a moment
Before your entrance in this hall, Zarina,
Queen of Assyria, departed hence.

Myr. Ah!

Sar. Wherefore do you start?

Myr. Did I do so?

Sar. 'T was well you enter'd by another portal,

Else you had met. That pang at least is spared her!

Myr. I know to feel for her.

Sar. That is too much,

And beyond nature—'tis nor mutual,²

Nor possible. You cannot pity her,

Nor she aught but—

Myr. Despise the favourite slave!

Not more than I have ever scorn'd myself.

Sar. Scorn'd! what, to be the envy of your sex,

And lord it o'er the heart of the world's lord?

Myr. Were you the lord of twice ten thousand

worlds—

As you are like to lose the one you sway'd—

I did abase myself as much in being

Zarina, chiefly engrossed with himself and his own sorrows, and inclined, immediately afterwards, to visit on poor Myrrha the painful feelings which his own reproaches of himself have occasioned.—HEBER.]

² [For *mutual*, the MS. in our hands has *natural*; but we are not quite sure that there has been merely a misprint in the foregoing editions.]

Your paramour, as though you were a peasant —
Nay, more, if that the peasant were a Greek.

Sar. You talk it well —

Myr. And truly.

Sar. In the hour
Of man's adversity all things grow daring
Against the falling; but as I am not
Quite fall'n, nor now disposed to bear reproaches,
Perhaps because I merit them too often,
Let us then part while peace is still between us.

Myr. Part!

Sar. Have not all past human beings parted,
And must not all the present one day part?

Myr. Why?

Sar. For your safety, which I will have look'd to,
With a strong escort to your native land;
And such gifts, as, if you had not been all
A queen, shall make your dowry worth a kingdom.

Myr. I pray you talk not thus.

Sar. The queen is gone:
You need not shame to follow. I would fall
Alone — I seek no partners but in pleasure.

Myr. And I no pleasure but in parting not.
You shall not force me from you.

Sar. Think well of it —
It soon may be too late.

Myr. So let it be;
For then you cannot separate me from you.

Sar. And will not; but I thought you wish'd it.

Myr. I!
Sar. You spoke of your abasement.

Myr. And I feel it
Deeply — more deeply than all things but love.

Sar. Then fly from it.

Myr. 'T will not recall the past —
'T will not restore my honour, nor my heart.
No — here I stand or fall. If that you conquer,
I live to joy in your great triumph: should
Your lot be different, I'll not weep, but share it.
You did not doubt me a few hours ago.

Sar. Your courage never — nor your love till now;
And none could make me doubt it save yourself.
Those words —

Myr. Were words. I pray you, let the proofs
Be in the past acts you were pleased to praise
This very night, and in my further bearing,
Beside, wherever you are borne by fate.

Sar. I am content; and, trusting in my cause,
Think we may yet be victors and return
To peace — the only victory I covet.
To me war is no glory — conquest no
Renown. To be forced thus to uphold my right
Sits heavier on my heart than all the wrongs
These men would bow me down with. Never, never
Can I forget this night, even should I live
To add it to the memory of others.
I thought to have made mine inoffensive rule
An era of sweet peace 'midst bloody annals,
A green spot amidst desert centuries,
On which the future would turn back and smile,
And cultivate, or sigh when it could not
Recall Sardanapalus' golden reign.

I thought to have made my realm a paradise,
And every moon an epoch of new pleasures.
I took the rabble's shouts for love — the breath
Of friends for truth — the lips of woman for
My only guerdon — so they are, my Myrrha:

[*He kisses her.*]

Kiss me. Now let them take my realm and life!
They shall have both, but never thee!

Myr. No, never!

Man may despoil his brother man of all
That's great or glittering — kingdoms fall — hosts
yield —

Friends fail — slaves fly — and all betray — and, more
Than all, the most indebted — but a heart [it.
That loves without self-love! 'T is here — now prove

Enter SALEMENES.

Sal. I sought you — How! she here again?

Sar. Return not
Now to reproof: methinks your aspect speaks
Of higher matter than a woman's presence,

Sal. The only woman whom it much imports me
At such a moment now is safe in absence —
The queen's embark'd.

Sar. And well? say that much.

Sal. Yes.

Her transient weakness has pass'd o'er; at least,
It settled into tearless silence: her
Pale face and glittering eye, after a glance
Upon her sleeping children, were still fix'd
Upon the palace towers as the swift galley
Stole down the hurrying stream beneath the star-
light;

But she said nothing.

Sar. Would I felt no more
Than she has said!

Sal. 'T is now too late to feel!
Your feelings cannot cancel a sole pang:
To change them, my advices bring sure tidings

That the rebellious Medes and Chaldees, marshal'd
By their two leaders, are already up
In arms again; and, serriving their ranks,
Prepare to attack: they have apparently
Been join'd by other satraps.

Sar. What! more rebels?
Let us be first, then.

Sal. That were hardly prudent
Now, though it was our first intention. If
By noon to-morrow we are join'd by those
I've sent for by sure messengers, we shall be
In strength enough to venture an attack,
Ay, and pursuit too: but till then, my voice
Is to await the onset.

Sar. I detest
That waiting: though it seems so safe to fight
Behind high walls, and hurl down foes into
Deep fosses, or behold them sprawl on spikes
Strew'd to receive them, still I like it not —
My soul seems lukewarm; but when I set on them,
Though they were piled on mountains, I would have
A pluck at them, or perish in hot blood! —
Let me then charge!

Sal. You talk like a young soldier.

Sar. I am no soldier, but a man: speak not
Of soldiery, I loathe the word, and those
Who pride themselves upon it; but direct me
Where I may pour upon them.

Sal. You must spare
To expose your life too hastily; 't is not
Like mine or any other subject's breath:
The whole war turns upon it — with it; this
Alone creates it, kindles, and may quench it —
Prolong it — end it.

Sar. Then let us end both!

'T were better thus, perhaps, than prolong either;
I'm sick of one, perchance of both.

[*A trumpet sounds without.*]

Sal. Hark!

Sar. Let us
Reply, not listen.

Sal. And your wound!

Sar. 'T is bound —
'T is heal'd — I had forgotten it. Away!

A leech's lancet would have scratch'd me deeper;¹
The slave that gave it might be well ashamed
To have struck so weakly.

Sal. Now, may none this hour
Strike with a better aim!

Sar. Ay, if we conquer;
But if not, they will only leave to me
A task they might have spared their king. Upon
them!

Sal. I am with you.

Sar. Ho, my arms! again, my arms!

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT V.

SCENE I.

The same Hall in the Palace.

MYRRHA and BALEA.

Myr. (at a window). The day at last has broken.
What a night

Hath usher'd it! How beautiful in heaven!
Though varied with a transitory storm,
More beautiful in that variety!
How hideous upon earth! where peace and hope,
And love and revel, in an hour were trampled
By human passions to a human chaos,
Not yet resolved to separate elements. —
'T is warring still! And can the sun so rise,
So bright, so rolling back the clouds into
Vapours more lovely than the unclouded sky,
With golden pinnacles, and snowy mountains,
And billows purpler than the ocean's, making
In heaven a glorious mockery of the earth,
So like we almost deem it permanent;
So fleeting, we can scarcely call it aught
Beyond a vision, 't is so transiently
Scatter'd along the eternal vault²: and yet

It dwells upon the soul, and soothes the soul,
And blends itself into the soul, until
Sunrise and sunset form the haunted epoch
Of sorrow and of love; which they who mark not,
Know not the realms where those twin geni'³
(Who chasten and who purify our hearts,
So that we would not change their sweet rebukes
For all the boisterous joys that ever shook
The air with clamour), build the palaces
Where their fond votaries repose and breathe
Briefly; — but in that brief cool calm inhale
Enough of heaven to enable them to bear
The rest of common, heavy, human hours,

Sar. What! more rebels?
Let us be first, then.
Sal. That were hardly prudent
Now, though it was our first intention. If
By noon to-morrow we are join'd by those
I've sent for by sure messengers, we shall be
In strength enough to venture an attack,
Ay, and pursuit too: but till then, my voice
Is to await the onset.
Sar. I detest
That waiting: though it seems so safe to fight
Behind high walls, and hurl down foes into
Deep fosses, or behold them sprawl on spikes
Strew'd to receive them, still I like it not —
My soul seems lukewarm; but when I set on them,
Though they were piled on mountains, I would have
A pluck at them, or perish in hot blood! —
Let me then charge!
Sal. You talk like a young soldier.
Sar. I am no soldier, but a man: speak not
Of soldiery, I loathe the word, and those
Who pride themselves upon it; but direct me
Where I may pour upon them.
Sal. You must spare
To expose your life too hastily; 't is not
Like mine or any other subject's breath:
The whole war turns upon it — with it; this
Alone creates it, kindles, and may quench it —
Prolong it — end it.
Sar. Then let us end both!

¹ [“A leech's lancet would have done as much.” — MS.]
² [This description of the sun rolling back the vapours is
apparently imitated from a magnificent scene in the second
book of Wordsworth's *Excursion*: —

— “Round them and above,
Glitter, with dark recesses interposed,
Casement, and cottage-roof, and stems of trees

And dream them through in placid sufferance;
Though seemingly employ'd like all the rest
Of toiling breathers in allotted tasks⁴

Of pain or pleasure, two names for one feeling,
Which our internal, restless agony
Would vary in the sound, although the sense

Escapes our highest efforts to be happy.

Bal. You muse right calmly: and can you so watch
The sunrise which may be our last?

Myr. It is
Therefore that I so watch it, and reproach
Those eyes, which never may behold it more,
For having look'd upon it oft, too oft,
Without the reverence and the rapture due
To that which keeps all earth from being as fragile
As I am in this form. Come, look upon it,
The Chaldee's god, which, when I gaze upon,
I grow almost a convert to your Baal.

Bal. As now he reigns in heaven, so once on earth
He sway'd.

Myr. He sways it now far more, then; never
Had earthly monarch half the power and glory
Which centres in a single ray of his.

Bal. Surely he is a god!

Myr. So we Greeks deem too;
And yet I sometimes think that gorgeous orb
Must rather be the abode of gods than one
Of the immortal sovereigns. Now he breaks
Through all the clouds, and fills my eyes with light
That shuts the world out. I can look no more.

Bal. Hark! heard you not a sound?
Myr. No, 't was mere fancy;
They battle it beyond the wall, and not
As in late midnight conflict in the very
Chambers: the palace has become a fortress
Since that insidious hour; and here, within
The very centre, girded by vast courts
And regal halls of pyramid proportions,
Which must be carried one by one before
They penetrate to where they then arrived,
We are as much shut in even from the sound
Of peril as from glory.

Bal. But they reach'd
Thus far before.

Myr. Yes, by surprise, and were
Beat back by valour: now at once we have
Courage and vigilance to guard us.

Bal. May they
Prosper!

Myr. That is the prayer of many, and
The dread of more: it is an anxious hour;
I strive to keep it from my thoughts. Alas!
How vainly!

Bal. It is said the king's demeanour
In the late action scarcely more appall'd
The rebels than astonish'd his true subjects.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.

Bal. Slew he not Beleses?
I heard the soldiers say he struck him down.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.

Bal. Slew he not Beleses?
I heard the soldiers say he struck him down.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.

Bal. Slew he not Beleses?
I heard the soldiers say he struck him down.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.

Bal. Slew he not Beleses?
I heard the soldiers say he struck him down.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.

Bal. Slew he not Beleses?
I heard the soldiers say he struck him down.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.

Bal. Slew he not Beleses?
I heard the soldiers say he struck him down.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.

Bal. Slew he not Beleses?
I heard the soldiers say he struck him down.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.

Bal. Slew he not Beleses?
I heard the soldiers say he struck him down.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.

Bal. Slew he not Beleses?
I heard the soldiers say he struck him down.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.

Bal. Slew he not Beleses?
I heard the soldiers say he struck him down.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.

Bal. Slew he not Beleses?
I heard the soldiers say he struck him down.

Myr. 'T is easy to astonish or appal
The vulgar mass which moulds a horde of slaves;
But he did bravely.