

Myr. The wretch was overthrown, but rescued to Triumph, perhaps, o'er one who vanquish'd him In fight, as he had spared him in his peril; And by that heedless pity risk'd a crown.

Bal. Hark!
Myr. You are right: some steps approach, but

Enter Soldiers, bearing in SALEMENES wounded, with a broken Javelin in his Side: they seat him upon one of the Couches which furnish the Apartment.

Myr. Oh, Jove!
Bal. Then all is over.
Sal. That is false.

Hew down the slave who says so, if a soldier.

Myr. Spare him—he's none: a mere court butterfly,

That flutters in the pageant of a monarch.

Sal. Let him live on, then.
Myr. So wilt thou, I trust.

Sal. I fain would live this hour out, and the event, But doubt it. Wherefore did ye bear me here?

Sol. By the king's order. When the javelin struck you,

You fell and fainted: 't was his strict command To bear you to this hall.

Sal. 'T was not ill done: For seeming slain in that cold dizzy trance, The sight might shake our soldiers—but—'t is vain, I feel it ebbing!

Myr. Let me see the wound; I am not quite skilless: in my native land 'T is part of our instruction. War being constant, We are nerved to look on such things.¹

Sol. Best extract The javelin.

Myr. Hold! no, no, it cannot be.

Sal. I am sped, then!

Myr. With the blood that fast must follow The extracted weapon, I do fear thy life.

Sal. And I not death. Where was the king when you

Convey'd me from the spot where I was stricken?

Sol. Upon the same ground, and encouraging With voice and gesture the dispirited troops Who had seen you fall, and and falter'd back.

Sal. Whom heard ye Named next to the command?

Sol. I did not hear.

Sal. Fly, then, and tell him, 't was my last request That Zames take my post until the junction, So hoped for, yet delay'd, of Ofratanes, Satrap of Susa. Leave me here: our troops Are not so numerous as to spare your absence.

Sol. But prince—

Sal. Hence, I say! Here's a courtier and A woman, the best chamber company. As you would not permit me to expire Upon the field, I'll have no idle soldiers About my sick couch. Hence! and do my bidding!

Myr. Gallant and glorious spirit! must the earth So soon resign thee?
Sal. Gentle Myrrha, 'tis

The end I would have chosen, had I saved The monarch or the monarchy by this; As 't is, I have not outlived them.

¹ ["We are used to such inflictions."—MS.]

Myr. You wax pale.
Sal. Your hand; this broken weapon but prolongs My pangs, without sustaining life enough To make me useful: I would draw it forth, And my life with it, could I but hear how The fight goes.

Enter SARDANAPALUS and Soldiers.

Sar. My best brother!

Sal. And the battle

Is lost?

Sar. (despondingly). You see me here.

Sal. I'd rather see you thus!

[He draws out the weapon from the wound, and dies.]

Sar. And thus I will be seen; unless the succour, The last frail reed of our beleagu'rd hopes, Arrive with Ofratanes.

Myr. Did you not Receive a token from your dying brother, Appointing Zames chief?

Sar. I did.

Myr. Where's Zames?

Sar. Dead.

Myr. And Altada?

Sar. Dying.

Myr. Pania? Sfero?

Sar. Pania yet lives; but Sfero's fled, or captive. I am alone.

Myr. And is all lost?

Sar. Our walls, Though thinly mann'd, may still hold out against Their present force, or aught save treachery: But i' the field—

Myr. I thought 't was the intent Of Salemenes not to risk a sally

'Till ye were strengthen'd by the expected succours.

Sar. I over-ruled him.

Myr. Well, the fault 's a brave one.

Sar. But fatal. Oh, my brother! I would give These realms, of which thou wert the ornament, The sword and shield, the sole-redeeming honour, To call back—But I will not weep for thee;

Thou shalt be mourn'd for as thou wouldst be mourn'd. It grieves me most that thou couldst quit this life

Believing that I could survive what thou Hast died for—our long royalty of race.

If I redeem it, I will give thee blood Of thousands, tears of millions, for atonement,

(The tears of all the good are thine already). If not, we meet again soon,—if the spirit

Within us lives beyond:—thou readest mine, And dost me justice now. Let me once clasp

That yet warm hand, and fold that throbbles heart

[Embraces the body.]
To this which beats so bitterly. Now, bear The body hence.

Soldier. Where?

Sar. To my proper chamber. Place it beneath my canopy, as though

The king lay there: when this is done, we will Speak further of the rites due to such ashes.

[Exeunt Soldiers with the body of SALEMENES.]

Enter PANIA.

Sar. Well, Pania! have you placed the guards, and issued

The orders fix'd on?

Pan. Sire, I have obey'd.
Sar. And do the soldiers keep their hearts up?

Pan. Sire?

Sar. I'm answer'd! When a king asks twice, and has

A question as an answer to his question, It is a portent. What! they are dishearten'd?

Pan. The death of Salemenes, and the shouts Of the exulting rebels on his fall,

Have made them—

Sar. Rage—not droop—it should have been. We'll find the means to rouse them.

Pan. Such a loss

Might sadden even a victory.

Sar. Alas!

Who can so feel it as I feel? but yet, [and we Though coop'd within these walls, they are strong, Have those without will break their way through hosts,

To make their sovereign's dwelling what it was— A palace; not a prison, nor a fortress.

Enter an Officer, hastily.

Sar. Thy face seems ominous. Speak!

Offi. I dare not.

Sar. Dare not?

While millions dare revolt with sword in hand!

That's strange. I pray thee break that loyal silence Which loathes to shock its sovereign; we can hear

Worse than thou hast to tell.

Pan. Proceed, thou hearest.

Offi. The wall which skirted near the river's brink Is thrown down by the sudden inundation

Of the Euphrates, which now rolling, swoln From the enormous mountains where it rises,

By the late rains of that tempestuous region, O'erflows its banks, and hath destroyed the bulwark.

Pan. That's a black augury! it has been said

For ages, "That the city ne'er should yield

To man, until the river grew its foe."

Sar. I can forgive the omen, not the ravage.

How much is swept down of the wall?

Offi. About

Some twenty stadii.¹

Sar. And all this is left

Pervious to the assailants?

Offi. For the present

The river's fury must impede the assault;

But when he shrinks into his wonted channel,

And may be cross'd by the accustom'd barks,

The palace is their own.

Sar. That shall be never.

Though men, and gods, and elements, and omens, Have risen up 'gainst one who ne'er provoked them,

My fathers' house shall never be a cave

For wolves to horde and howl in.

Pan. With your sanction,

I will proceed to the spot, and take such measures

For the assurance of the vacant space

As time and means permit.

Sar. About it straight;

And bring me back, as speedily as full

And fair investigation may permit,

¹ About two miles and a half.

² ["Complexions, climes, eras, and intellects."—MS.]

³ ["Athenæus makes these treasures amount to a thousand myriads of talents of gold, and ten times as many talents of silver, which is a sum that exceeds all credibility. A man is

Report of the true state of this irruption Of waters. [Exeunt PANIA and the Officer.]

Myr. Thus the very waves rise up Against you.

Sar. They are not my subjects, girl, And may be pardon'd, since they can't be punish'd.

Myr. I joy to see this portent shakes you not.

Sar. I am past the fear of portents: they can tell me Nothing I have not told myself since midnight:

Despair anticipates such things.

Myr. Despair!
Sar. No; not despair precisely. When we know

All that can come, and how to meet it, our Resolves, if firm, may merit a more noble

Word than this is to give it utterance. But what are words to us? we have well nigh done

With them and all things.

Myr. Save one deed—the last And greatest to all mortals; crowning act

Of all that was—or is—or is to be— The only thing common to all mankind,

So different in their births, tongues, sexes, natures, Hues, features, climes, times, feelings, intellects,²

Without one point of union save in this, To which we tend, for which we're born, and thread

The labyrinth of mystery, call'd life. [cheerful]

Sar. Our clew being well nigh wound out, let's be They who have nothing more to fear may well

Indulge a smile at that which once appall'd; As children at discover'd bugbears.

Re-enter PANIA.

Pan. 'T is As was reported: I have order'd there

A double guard, withdrawing from the wall Where it was strongest the required addition

To watch the breach occasion'd by the waters.

Sar. You have done your duty faithfully, and as My worthy Pania! further ties between us

Draw near a close. I pray you take this key: [Gives a key.]

It opens to a secret chamber, placed Behind the couch in my own chamber. (Now

Press'd by a nobler weight than e'er it bore— Though a long line of sovereigns have lain down

Along its golden frame—as bearing for A time what late was Salemenes.) Search

The secret covert to which this will lead you; 'Tis full of treasure³; take it for yourself

And your companions: there's enough to load ye Though ye be many.⁴ Let the slaves be freed, too;

And all the inmates of the palace, of Whatever sex, now quit it in an hour. [pleasure,

Thence launch the regal barks, once form'd for And now to serve for safety, and embark.

The river's broad and swoln, and uncommanded (More potent than a king) by these besiegers.

Fly! and be happy!

Pan. Under your protection! So you accompany your faithful guard.

Sar. No, Pania! that must not be; get thee hence, And leave me to my fate.

lost if he attempts to sum up the whole value; which induces me to believe, that Athenæus must have very much exaggerated; however, we may be assured, from his account, that the treasures were immensely great."—ROLLIN.]

⁴ ["Ye will find the crevice To which the key fits, with a little care."—MS.]

Pan. 'Tis the first time
I ever disobey'd: but now—

Sar. So all men
Dare beard me now, and Insolence within
Apes Treason from without. Question no further;
'Tis my command, my last command. Wilt thou
Oppose it? *thou!*

Pan. But yet—not yet.

Sar. Well, then,
Swear that you will obey when I shall give
The signal.

Pan. With a heavy but true heart,
I promise.

Sar. 'Tis enough. Now order here
Faggots, pine-nuts, and wither'd leaves, and such
Things as catch fire and blaze with one sole spark;
Bring cedar, too, and precious drugs, and spices,
And mighty planks, to nourish a tall pile;
Bring frankincense and myrrh, too, for it is
For a great sacrifice I build the pyre!
And heap them round yon throne.

Pan. My lord!

Sar. I have said it,
And you have sworn.

Pan. And could keep my faith
Without a vow. [*Exit PANIA.*]

Myr. What mean you?

Sar. You shall know
Anon—what the whole earth shall ne'er forget.

PANIA, returning with a Herald.

Pan. My king, in going forth upon my duty,
This herald has been brought before me, craving
An audience.

Sar. Let him speak.

Her. The King Arbaces—

Sar. What, crown'd already?—But, proceed.

Her. Beleses,
The anointed high-priest—

Sar. Of what god, or demon?
With new kings rise new altars. But, proceed:
You are sent to prate your master's will, and not
Reply to mine.

Her. And Satrap Ofratanes—

Sar. Why, he is ours.

Her. (*showing a ring*). Be sure that he is now
In the camp of the conquerors: behold
His signet ring.

Sar. 'Tis his. A worthy triad!
Poor Salemenes! thou hast died in time
To see one treachery the less: this man
Was thy true friend and my most trusted subject.
Proceed.

Her. They offer thee thy life, and freedom
Of choice to single out a residence
In any of the further provinces,
Guarded and watch'd, but not confined in person,
Where thou shalt pass thy days in peace; but on
Condition that the three young princes are
Given up as hostages.

Sar. (*ironically*). The generous victors!

Her. I wait the answer.

Sar. Answer, slave! How long
Have slaves decided on the doom of kings?

Her. Since they were free.

Sar. Mouthpiece of mutiny!
Thou at the least shall learn the penalty
Of treason, though its proxy only. Pania!

Let his head be thrown from our walls within
The rebels' lines, his carcass down the river.
Away with him!

[*PANIA and the Guards seizing him.*]

Pan. I never yet obey'd
Your orders with more pleasure than the present.
Hence with him, soldiers! do not soil this hall
Of royalty with treasonable gore;
Put him to rest without.

Her. A single word:
My office, king, is sacred.

Sar. And what's mine?
That thou shouldst come and dare to ask of me
To lay it down?

Her. I but obey'd my orders,
At the same peril if refused, as now
Incurr'd by my obedience.

Sar. So there are
New monarchs of an hour's growth as despotic
As sovereigns swathed in purple, and enthroned
From birth to manhood!

Her. My life waits your breath.
Yours (I speak humbly)—but it may be—yours
May also be in danger scarce less imminent:
Would it then suit the last hours of a line
Such as is that of Nimrod, to destroy
A peaceful herald, unarm'd, in his office;
And violate not only all that man
Holds sacred between man and man—but that
More holy tie which links us with the gods? [*act*]

Sar. He's right.—Let him go free.—My life's last
Shall not be one of wrath. Here, fellow, take
[*Gives him a golden cup from a table near.*]

This golden goblet, let it hold your wine,
And think of me; or melt it into ingots,
And think of nothing but their weight and value.

Her. I thank you doubly for my life, and this
Most gorgeous gift, which renders it more precious.
But must I bear no answer?

Sar. Yes,—I ask
An hour's truce to consider.

Her. But an hour's?
Sar. An hour's: if at the expiration of
That time your masters hear no further from me,
They are to deem that I reject their terms,
And act befittingly.

Her. I shall not fail
To be a faithful legate of your pleasure.

Sar. And hark! a word more.

Her. I shall not forget it,
Whate'er it be.

Sar. Commend me to Beleses;
And tell him, ere a year expire, I summon
Him hence to meet me.

Her. Where?

Sar. At Babylon.
At least from thence he will depart to meet me.

Her. I shall obey you to the letter. [*Exit Herald.*]

Sar. Pania!—
Now, my good Pania!—quick! with what I order'd.

Pan. My lord,—the soldiers are already charged.
And, see! they enter.

[*Soldiers enter, and form a Pile about the Throne, &c.*]

Sar. Higher, my good soldiers,
And thicker yet; and see that the foundation
Be such as will not speedily exhaust
Its own too subtle flame; nor yet be quench'd

With aught officious aid would bring to quell it.
Let the throne form the core of it; I would not
Leave that, save fraught with fire unquenchable,
To the new comers. Frame the whole as if
'T were to enkindle the strong tower of our
Inveterate enemies. Now it bears an aspect!
How say you, Pania, will this pile suffice
For a king's obsequies?

Pan. Ay, for a kingdom's.

I understand you, now.

Sar. And blame me?

Pan. No—

Let me but fire the pile, and share it with you.

Myr. That duty's mine.

Pan. A woman's!

Myr. 'Tis the soldier's
Part to die for his sovereign, and why not
The woman's with her lover?

Pan. 'Tis most strange!

Myr. But not so rare, my Pania, as thou think'st it.
In the mean time, live thou.—Farewell! the pile
Is ready.

Pan. I should shame to leave my sovereign
With but a single female to partake
His death.

Sar. Too many far have heralded
Me to the dust, already. Get thee hence;
Enrich thee.

Pan. And live wretched!

Sar. Think upon
Thy vow:—'tis sacred and irrevocable.

Pan. Since it is so, farewell.

Sar. Search well my chamber,
Feel no remorse at bearing off the gold;
Remember, what you leave you leave the slaves
Who slew me: and when you have borne away
All safe off to your boats, blow one long blast
Upon the trumpet as you quit the palace.
The river's brink is too remote, its stream
Too loud at present to permit the echo
To reach distinctly from its banks. Then fly,—
And as you sail, turn back; but still keep on
Your way along the Euphrates: if you reach
The land of Paphlagonia, where the queen
Is safe with my three sons in Cotta's court,
Say what you saw at parting, and request
That she remember what I said at one
Parting more mournful still.

Pan. That royal hand!
Let me then once more press it to my lips;
And these poor soldiers who throng round you, and
Would fain die with you!

[*The Soldiers and PANIA throng round him, kissing his hand and the hem of his robe.*]

Sar. My best! my last friends!
Let's not unman each other—part at once:
All farewells should be sudden, when for ever,
Else they make an eternity of moments,
And clog the last sad sands of life with tears.
Hence, and be happy: trust me, I am not
Now to be pitied; or far more for what
Is past than present;—for the future, 'tis
In the hands of the deities, if such
There be: I shall know soon. Farewell—Farewell.

[*Exit PANIA and Soldiers.*]

Myr. These men were honest: it is comfort still
That our last looks should be on loving faces.

Sar. And lovely ones, my beautiful!—but hear me!

If at this moment,—for we now are on
The brink,—thou feel'st an inward shrinking from
This leap through flame into the future, say it:
I shall not love thee less; nay, perhaps more,
For yielding to thy nature: and there's time
Yet for thee to escape hence.

Myr. Shall I light
One of the torches which lie heap'd beneath
The ever-burning lamp that burns without,
Before Baal's shrine, in the adjoining hall?
Sar. Do so. Is that thy answer?
Myr. Thou shalt see.
[*Exit MYRRHA.*]

Sar. (*solus*). She's firm. My fathers! whom I will
It may be, purified by death from some [rejoin,
Of the gross stains of too material being,
I would not leave your ancient first abode
To the defilement of usurping bondmen;
If I have not kept your inheritance
As ye bequeath'd it, this bright part of it,
Your treasure, your abode, your sacred relics
Of arms, and records, monuments, and spoils,
In which they would have revell'd, I bear with me
To you in that absorbing element,
Which most personifies the soul as leaving
The least of matter unconsumed before
Its fiery workings:—and the light of this
Most royal of funereal pyres shall be
Not a mere pillar form'd of cloud and flame,
A beacon in the horizon for a day,
And then a mount of ashes, but a light
To lesson ages, rebel nations, and
Voluptuous princes. Time shall quench full many
A people's records, and a hero's acts;
Sweep empire after empire, like this first
Of empires, into nothing; but even then
Shall spare this deed of mine, and hold it up
A problem few dare imitate, and none
Despise—but, it may be, avoid the life
Which led to such a consummation.

MYRRHA returns with a lighted Torch in one Hand, and a Cup in the other.

Myr. Lo!
I've lit the lamp which lights us to the stars.

Sar. And the cup?

Myr. 'Tis my country's custom to
Make a libation to the gods.

Sar. And mine
To make libations amongst men. I've not
Forgot the custom; and although alone,
Will drain one draught in memory of many
A joyous banquet past.

[*SARDANAPALUS takes the cup, and after drinking and tinkling the reversed cup, as a drop falls, exclaims—*

And this libation
Is for the excellent Beleses.

Myr. Why
Dwells thy mind rather upon that man's name
Than on his mate's in villany?

Sar. The one
Is a mere soldier, a mere tool, a kind
Of human sword in a friend's hand; the other
Is master-mover of his warlike puppet:
But I dismiss them from my mind.—Yet pause,
My Myrrha! dost thou truly follow me,
Freely and fearlessly?

Myr. And dost thou think
A Greek girl dare not do for love, that which
An Indian widow braves for custom? ¹

Sar. Then
We but await the signal.

Myr. It is long
In sounding.

Sar. Now, farewell; one last embrace.
Myr. Embrace, but *not* the last; there is one more.
Sar. True, the commingling fire will mix our
ashes.

Myr. And pure as is my love to thee, shall they,
Purged from the dross of earth, and earthly passion,
Mix pale with thine. A single thought yet irks me.

Sar. Say it.

Myr. It is that no kind hand will gather
The dust of both into one urn.

Sar. The better:
Rather let them be borne abroad upon
The winds of heaven, and scatter'd into air,
Than be polluted more by human hands
Of slaves and traitors. In this blazing palace,
And its enormous walls of reeking ruin,
We leave a nobler monument than Egypt
Hath piled in her brick mountains, o'er dead kings,²
Or *kine*, for none know whether those proud piles

¹ ["And what is there
An Indian widow dares for custom, which
A Greek girl dare not do for love?" — MS.]

² [These lines are in bad taste enough, from the jingle between *kings* and *kine*, down to the absurdity of believing that Sardanapalus at such a moment would be likely to discuss a point of antiquarian curiosity. But they involve also an anachronism, inasmuch as, whatever date be assigned to the erection of the earlier pyramids, there can be no reason for apprehending that, at the fall of Nineveh, and while the kingdom and hierarchy of Egypt subsisted in their full splendour, the destination of those immense fabrics could have been a matter of doubt to any who might inquire concerning them. Herodotus, three hundred years later, may have been misinformed of these points; but, when Sardanapalus lived, the erection of pyramids must, in all probability, have not been still of unfrequent occurrence, and the nature of their contents no subject of mistake or mystery. — HEBER.]

³ [Here an anonymous critic suspects Lord Byron of having read old Fuller, who says, in his quaint way, "the pyramids, dotting with age, have forgotten the names of their founders."]

⁴ [In "Sardanapalus" Lord Byron has been far more fortunate than in the "Doge of Venice," inasmuch as his subject is one eminently adapted not only to tragedy in general, but to that peculiar kind of tragedy which Lord Byron is anxious to recommend. The history of the last of the Assyrian kings is at once sufficiently well known to awaken that previous interest which belongs to illustrious names and early associations; and sufficiently remote and obscure to admit of any modification of incident or character which a poet may find convenient. All that we know of Nineveh and its sovereigns is majestic, indistinct, and mysterious. We read of an extensive and civilised monarchy erected in the ages immediately succeeding the deluge, and existing in full might and majesty while the shores of Greece and Italy were unoccupied, except by roving savages. We read of an empire whose influence extended from Samarcand to Troy, and from the mountains of Judah to those of Caucasus, subverted, after a continuance of thirteen hundred years, and a dynasty of thirty generations, in an almost incredibly short space of time, less by the revolt of two provinces than by the anger of Heaven and the predicted fury of natural and inanimate agents. And the influence which both the conquests and the misfortunes of Assyria appear to have exerted over the fates of the people for whom, of all others in ancient history, our strongest feelings are (from religious motives) interested, throws a sort of sacred pomp over the greatness and the crimes of the descendants of Nimrod, and a reverence which no other equally remote portion of profane history is likely to obtain with us. At the same time, all which we know is so brief, so general, and so disjointed, that we have few of those preconceived notions of the persons and facts represented which in classical dramas, if servilely followed, destroy the interest, and if rashly departed from offend the prejudices, of the reader or the auditor. An outline is given of the most majestic kind; but it is an outline only, which the poet may fill

Be for their monarch, or their ox-god Apis:
So much for monuments that have forgotten
Their very record! ³

Myr. Then farewell, thou earth!
And loveliest spot of earth! farewell, Ionia!
Be thou still free and beautiful, and far
Aloof from desolation! My last prayer
Was for thee, my last thoughts, save *one*, were of thee!
Sar. And that?

Myr. Is yours.
[*The trumpet of PANIA sounds without.*

Sar. Hark!
Myr. Now!
Sar. Adieu, Assyria!
I loved thee well, my own, my fathers' land,
And better as my country than my kingdom.
I sated thee with peace and joys; and this
Is my reward! and now I owe thee nothing,
Not even a grave. [He mounts the pile.

Myr. Art thou ready?
Sar. As the torch in thy grasp. [MYRRHA fires the pile.

Myr. 'Tis fired! I come.
[As MYRRHA springs forward to throw herself
into the flames, the Curtain falls. ⁴

up at pleasure; and in ascribing, as Lord Byron has done for the sake of his favourite unities, the destruction of the Assyrian empire to the treason of one night, instead of the war of several years, he has neither shocked our better knowledge, nor incurred any conspicuous improbability. . . . Still, however, the development of Sardanapalus's character is incidental only to the plot of Lord Byron's drama, and though the unities have confined his picture within far narrower limits than he might otherwise have thought advisable, the character is admirably sketched; nor is there any one of the portraits of this great master which gives us a more favourable opinion of his talents, his force of conception, his delicacy and vigour of touch, or the richness and harmony of his colouring. He had, indeed, no unfavourable groundwork, even in the few hints supplied by the ancient historians, as to the conduct and history of the last and most unfortunate of the line of Belus. Though accused (whether truly or falsely), by his triumphant enemies, of the most revolting vices, and an effeminacy even beyond what might be expected from the last dregs of Asiatic despotism, we find Sardanapalus, when roused by the approach of danger, conducting his armies with a courage, a skill, and, for some time at least, with a success not inferior to those of his most warlike ancestors. We find him retaining to the last the fidelity of his most trusted servants, his nearest kindred, and no small proportion of his hardiest subjects. We see him providing for the safety of his wife, his children, and his capital city, with all the calmness and prudence of an experienced captain. We see him at length subdued, not by man, but by Heaven and the elements, and seeking his death with a mixture of heroism and ferocity which little accords with our notions of a weak or utterly degraded character. And even the strange story, variously told, and without further explanation scarcely intelligible, which represents him as building (or fortifying) two cities in a single day, and then deforming his exploits with an indecent image and inscription, would seem to imply a mixture of energy with his folly not impossible, perhaps, to the madness of absolute power, and which may lead us to impute his fall less to weakness than to an injudicious and ostentatious contempt of the opinions and prejudices of mankind. Such a character, — luxurious, energetic, misanthropical, — affords, beyond a doubt, no common advantages to the work of poetic delineation; and it is precisely the character which Lord Byron most delights to draw, and which he has succeeded best in drawing. — HEBER.

I remember Lord Byron's mentioning, that the story of Sardanapalus had been working in his brain for seven years before he commenced it. — TRELAWNEY.

The following is an extract from *The Life of Dr. Parr*: — "In the course of the evening the Doctor cried out — 'Have you read Sardanapalus?' — 'Yes, Sir?' — 'Right; and you could n't sleep a wink after it?' — 'No.' — 'Right, right — now don't say a word more about it to-night.' The memory of that fine poem seemed to act like a spell of horrible fascination upon him."

The Two Foscari:

AN HISTORICAL TRAGEDY.¹

The father softens, but the governor's resolved. — CRITIC.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEN.

FRANCIS FOSCARI, *Doge of Venice.*
JACOPO FOSCARI, *Son of the Doge.*
JAMES LOREDANO, *a Patrician.*
MARCO MEMMO, *a Chief of the Forty.*
BARBARIGO, *a Senator.*
Other Senators, the Council of Ten,
Guards, Attendants, &c. &c.

WOMAN,

MARINA, *Wife of young FOSCARI.*

Scene — the Ducal Palace, Venice.

The Two Foscari.²

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A Hall in the Ducal Palace.

Enter LOREDANO³ and BARBARIGO, meeting.

Lor. WHERE is the prisoner?
Bar. Reposing from
The Question.

¹ ["Begun June the 12th, completed July the 9th, Ravenna, 1821. — *Byron.*" — MS.]

² "The *Two Foscari*" was composed at Ravenna, between the 11th of June and the 10th of July, 1821, and published with "Sardanapalus" in the following December. "The Venetian story," writes Lord Byron to Mr. Murray, "is strictly historical. I am much mortified that Gifford don't take to my new dramas. To be sure, they are as opposite to the English drama as one thing can be to another; but I have a notion that, if understood, they will, in time, find favour (though *not* on the stage) with the reader. The simplicity of plot is intentional, and the avoidance of *rant* also, as also the compression of the speeches in the more severe situations. What I seek to show in 'the Foscari's' is the *suppressed* passions rather than the rant of the present day. For that matter — 'Nay, if thou'lt mouth,

I'll rant as well as thou —' would not be difficult, as I think I have shown in my younger productions — *not dramatic* ones, to be sure." — An account of the incidents on which this play is founded, is given in the Appendix. ³

² ["The disadvantage, and, in truth, absurdity, of sacrificing higher objects to a formal adherence to the unities (see *ante*, p. 244.) is strikingly displayed in this drama. The whole interest here turns upon the Younger Foscari having returned from banishment, in defiance of the law and its consequences,

* [See APPENDIX: The Two Foscari, Note A.]

Lor. The hour's past — fix'd yesterday
For the resumption of his trial. — Let us
Rejoin our colleagues in the council, and
Urge his recall.

Bar. Nay, let him profit by
A few brief minutes for his tortured limbs;
He was o'erwrought by the Question yesterday,
And may die under it if now repeated.

Lor. Well?
Bar. I yield not to you in love of justice,
Or hate of the ambitious Foscari,
Father and son, and all their noxious race;
But the poor wretch has suffer'd beyond nature's
Most stoical endurance.

Lor. Without owning
His crime.
Bar. Perhaps without committing any.
But he avow'd the letter to the Duke
Of Milan, and his sufferings half atone for
Such weakness.

Lor. We shall see.
Bar. You, Loredano,
Pursue hereditary hate too far.

Lor. How far?
Bar. To extermination.
Lor. When they are
Extinct, you may say this. — Let's in to council.
Bar. Yet pause — the number of our colleagues
is not

Complete yet; two are wanting ere we can
Proceed.
Lor. And the chief judge, the Doge?

from an unconquerable longing after his own country. Now, the only way to have made this sentiment palatable, the practicable foundation of stupendous sufferings, would have been, to have presented him to the audience, wearing out his heart in exile, and forming his resolution to return, at a distance from his country, or hovering, in excruciating suspense, within sight of its borders. We might then have caught some glimpse of the nature of his motives, and of so extraordinary a character. But as this would have been contrary to one of the unities, we first meet with him led from "the Question," and afterwards taken back to it in the Ducal Palace, or clinging to the dungeon-walls of his native city, and expiring from his dread of leaving them; and therefore feel more wonder than sympathy, when we are told, that these agonising consequences have resulted, not from guilt or disaster, but merely from the intensity of his love for his country. — JEFFREY.]

³ [The character of Loredano is well conceived and truly tragic. The deep and settled principle of hatred which animates him, and which impels him to the commission of the most atrocious cruelties, may seem, at first, unnatural and overstrained. But not only is it historically true; but, when the cause of that hatred (the supposed murder of his father and uncles), and when the atrocious maxims of Italian revenge, and that habitual contempt of all the milder feelings are taken into consideration which constituted the glory of a Venetian patriot, we may conceive how such a principle might be not only avowed but exulted in by a Venetian who regarded the house of Foscari as, at once, the enemies of his family and his country. — HEBER.]