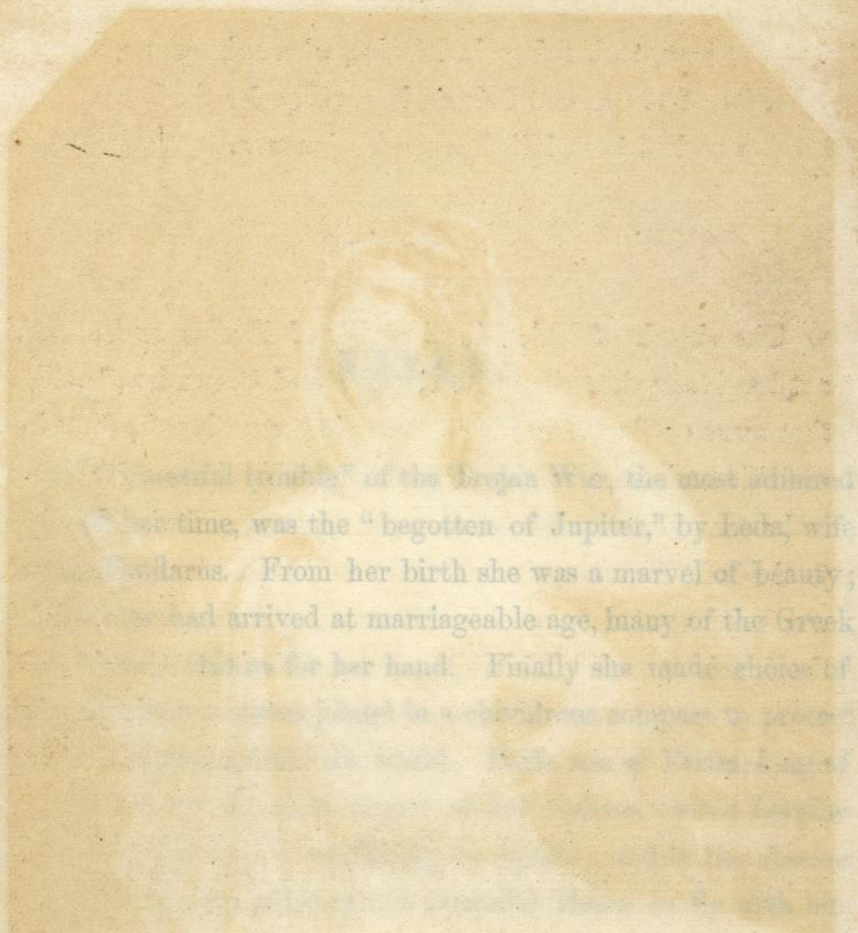




*Helen.*

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA. ACT 3. SC. 1.

New York: Appleton & Co. 346, & 348, Broadway.



...of the Trojan War, the most admired  
 ...time, was the "begotten of Jupiter," by Leda, wife  
 ...of Zeus. From her birth she was a marvel of beauty;  
 ...had arrived at marriageable age, many of the Greek  
 ...for her hand. Finally she made choice of  
 ...Paris, a prince of Troy, and was carried to his  
 ...city. Her presence there was the cause of the  
 ...war between the Greeks and the Trojans.





## HELEN.

THIS "beautiful trouble" of the Trojan War, the most admired woman of her time, was the "begotten of Jupiter," by Leda, wife of King Tyndarus. From her birth she was a marvel of beauty; and when she had arrived at marriageable age, many of the Greek princes became suitors for her hand. Finally she made choice of Menelaus, and the others joined in a chivalrous compact to protect his marital rights against the world. Paris, son of Priam, king of Troy, smitten by the mere report of her charms, visited Lacedæmon on the pretext of sacrificing to Apollo; and in the absence of Menelaus, he prevailed on the beautiful Helen to fly with him to Troy.

True to their vow, the Grecian princes held a solemn council, and resolved to make war against the Trojans; but first they sent an embassy to Priam's court, demanding the restoration of Helen. This refused, war was declared at once, and the Grecian forces surrounded the walled city of Troy. The tedious siege lasted ten years; Paris having been killed in the ninth year, Helen married another of Priam's sons; and when Troy fell, she betrayed her husband into the hands of the conquerors, to procure the favor of Menelaus.



A few years later, Menelaus, who had received again his unworthy wife, died; and Helen, driven from his court by his illegitimate sons, took refuge in Rhodes, where she was put to death by order of the queen, Polyxo, in revenge for the loss of her husband, who had been killed in the Trojan war.

The sketch of Helen, in the play of *Troilus and Cressida*, is not less incomplete than that of "the mad Cassandra;" still, from that mere outline of her history the inference is safe, that she was as fickle and false as she was incomparably fair—a faithless wife, and a treacherous mistress—a woman who could abandon herself to the most frivolous pleasures while the best blood of two nations was being wasted for the glory of possessing her person. Diomed, the Grecian general, who fell so easy a victim to Cressida of infamous memory, is scarcely one from whom to expect impressive lessons in morality; but his appreciation of Helen is nevertheless just:

*Par.* And tell me, noble Diomed—faith, tell me true,  
Even in the soul of sound good-fellowship—  
Who, in your thoughts, merits fair Helen best—  
Myself or Menelaus?

*Dio.* Both alike:  
He merits well to have her, that doth seek her  
(Not making any scruple of her soilure,)  
With such a hell of pain, and world of charge;  
And you as well to keep her, that defend her  
(Not palating the taste of her dishonor,)  
With such a costly loss of wealth and friends:

\* \* \* \* \*

*Par.* You are too bitter to your countrywoman.

*Dio.* She's bitter to her country: Hear me, Paris.—  
For every false drop in her bawdy veins  
A Grecian's life hath sunk; for every scruple

Of her contaminated carrion weight,  
A Trojan hath been slain; since she could speak,  
She hath not given so many good words breath  
As for her Greeks and Trojans suffer'd death.

But this

Mortal Venus, the heart-blood of beauty, love's invisible soul,

seems to have cast the spell of her abominable charms over her Trojan defenders; Paris, indeed, "speaks like one besotted on his sweet delights:"

Sir, I propose not merely to myself  
The pleasures such a beauty brings with it;  
But I would have the soil of her fair rape  
Wip'd off, in honorable keeping her.  
What treason were it to the ransack'd queen,  
Disgrace to your great worths, and shame to me,  
Now to deliver her possession up,  
On terms of base compulsion? Can it be,  
That so degenerate a strain as this  
Should once set footing in your generous bosoms?  
There's not the meanest spirit on our party,  
Without a heart to dare, or sword to draw,  
When Helen is defended; nor none so noble,  
Whose life were ill-bestow'd, or death unfam'd,  
Where Helen is the subject: then, I say,  
Well may we fight for her whom, we know well,  
The world's large spaces cannot parallel.

But the simple-minded, brave, honorable Troilus is scarcely less enthusiastic when there is question among the assembled sages of Troy whether or not to restore Helen to her husband:

\* \* \* \* \*  
He brought a Grecian queen, whose youth and freshness  
Wrinkles Apollo's, and makes pale the morning.



\* \* \* \* \*

Is she worth keeping? why, she is a pearl,  
Whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships,  
And turn'd crown'd kings to merchants.  
If you'll avouch 'twas wisdom Paris went,  
(As you must needs, for you all cry'd—*Go, go!*)  
If you'll confess he brought home noble prize,  
(As you must needs, for you all clapp'd your hands,  
And cry'd—*Inestimable!*) why do you now  
The issue of your proper wisdoms rate,  
And do a deed that fortune never did—  
Beggard the estimation which you priz'd  
Richer than sea and land? \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \*

She is a theme of honor and renown,  
A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds,  
Whose present courage may beat down our foes,  
And fame, in time to come, canonize us.