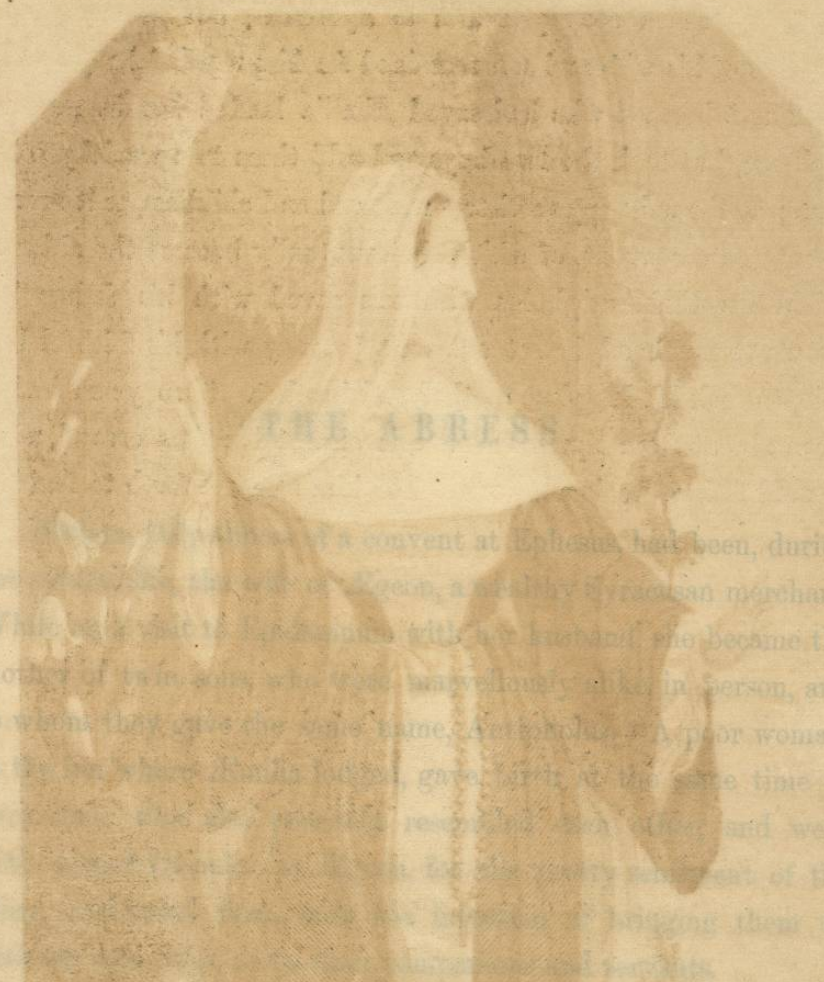




The Abbess.

COMEDY OF ERRORS, ACT 3, SC. 1.

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THE ABBESS

...of a convent at Ephesus had been, during
...a wealthy Egean merchant.
While she was married with her husband she became the
mother of twin sons who were wonderfully alike in person, and
to whom they gave the same name, even making a poor woman,
in the way where she had lived, gave birth at the same time to
...and were
...for the very management of the
...of bringing them up
...and servants.

...a terrible storm
...the ship in which they had taken passage;
the sailors abandoned her in the house and left Egeon and his
helpless family to their fate. In this extremity the poor gentle-
man bound his wife, and one Amphiclus with his accompanying
brother, to a mast, and secured himself with the other two children
in the same manner—so that when the vessel sank the spars still
...them.

...from her husband by the violence of the
...Egeon was picked up



THE ABBESS.

ÆMILIA, lady-abbess of a convent at Ephesus, had been, during her secular life, the wife of Ægeon, a wealthy Syracusan merchant. While on a visit to Epidamnum with her husband, she became the mother of twin sons, who were marvellously alike in person, and to whom they gave the same name, Antipholus. A poor woman, in the inn where Æmilia lodged, gave birth at the same time to twin sons, who also precisely resembled each other, and were both named Dromio; so Ægeon, for the pretty sentiment of the thing, purchased them, with the intention of bringing them up with his own boys, to be their companions and servants.

On their way home with the four little ones, a terrific storm threatened to destroy the ship in which they had taken passage; the sailors abandoned her, in the boats, and left Ægeon and his helpless family to their fate. In this extremity the poor gentleman bound his wife, and one Antipholus with his accompanying Dromio, to a mast, and secured himself with the other two children in the same manner—so that when the vessel sank the spars still kept them afloat.

Æmilia was separated from her husband by the violence of the sea, but was rescued by some fishermen. Ægeon was picked up

by a ship which conveyed him to Syracuse; but for many a day the fate of his wife and son remained for him a painful mystery.

The fishermen who had saved Æmilia landed her in safety at Ephesus, but took the two boys, and sold them to a wealthy nobleman; so the unhappy mother—widowed and childless, as it seemed—entered a convent, of which she eventually became the abbess.

When the Antipholus who was saved with his father had grown to manhood, he set out on a journey with his faithful Dromio, to seek his long-lost mother and brother. Two years had he been absent from Syracuse on this almost hopeless errand, when his old father, fearing he would lose him also, set forth to find him and urge him to return.

Ægeon had journeyed year after year through distant countries, without discovering a trace of his son, when finally he came to Ephesus, and found that by so doing he had forfeited his life—according to an Ephesian law which forbade a Syracusan to enter the city, on pain of death.

The Antipholus sold by the fisherman had been adopted by the duke of Ephesus, and was living in that city, married to a wealthy lady named Adriana. The other Antipholus, by a happy chance, came to Ephesus in search of his brother, while Ægeon was there under sentence of death; and through a bewildering concatenation of fortuitous circumstances, the whole family were once more united. It is almost unnecessary to add that the duke gladly pardoned the father of his foster-son, and rejoiced with them that rejoiced.

The *Comedy of Errors* turns chiefly on the ludicrous mistakes arising out of the personal resemblance between the two Antipholuses, and the two Dromios.

The Abbess is a woman of sound sense, reliable judgment, and ready knowledge of human nature. As her position—attained through personal merit alone—indicates, she is of grave presence, and held in high esteem for her piety and good works; her character is marked by dignified simplicity, but at the same time evinces capacity for firm, decisive action.

The scene where, having given refuge to the Syracusan Antipholus, whom Adriana pursues with her servants, believing him to be her husband, and mad, the Abbess “betrays” that perplexed lady “to her own reproof,” finely displays the *finesse* so requisite in her calling, and which she possesses in an eminent degree:

Abb. Be quiet, people! Wherefore throng you hither?

Adr. To fetch my poor distracted husband hence:

Let us come in, that we may bind him fast,

And bear him home for his recovery.

* * * * *

Abb. How long hath this possession held the man?

Adr. This week he hath been heavy, sour, sad,

And much, much different from the man he was;

But, till this afternoon, his passion

Ne’er brake into extremity of rage.

Abb. Hath he not lost much wealth by wreck at sea—

Buried some dear friend? Hath not else his eye

Stray’d his affection in unlawful love?—

A sin prevailing much in youthful men,

Who give their eyes the liberty of gazing.

Which of these sorrows is he subject to?

Adr. To none of these, except it be the last—

Namely some love, that drew him oft from home.

Abb. You should for that have reprehended him.

Adr. Why, so I did.

Abb. Ay, but not rough enough.

Adr. As roughly as my modesty would let me.

Abb. Haply, in private.

Adr. And in assemblies too.

Abb. Ay, but not enough.

Adr. It was the copy of our conference :
In bed, he slept not for my urging it ;
At board, he fed not for my urging it ;
Alone, it was the subject of my theme ;
In company, I often glanced it ;
Still did I tell him it was vile and bad.

Abb. And thereof came it that the man was mad ;
The venom clamors of a jealous woman
Poison more deadly than a mad dog's tooth.
It seems his sleeps were hinder'd by thy railing ;
And therefore comes it that his head is light.
Thou say'st his meat was sauc'd with thy upbraidings :
Unquiet meals make ill digestions—
Thereof the raging fire of fever bred ;
And what's a fever but a fit of madness ?
Thou say'st his sports were hinder'd by thy brawls :
Sweet recreation barr'd, what doth ensue
But moody and dull Melancholy,
(Kinsman to grim and comfortless Despair,)
And, at her heels, a huge infectious troop
Of pale distemperatures, and foes to life ?
In food, in sport, and life-preserving rest
To be disturb'd, would mad or man or beast :
The consequence is then, thy jealous fits
Have scar'd thy husband from the use of wits.

An episode of the same adventure shows our lady-abbess invested with her canonical authority :

Adr. * * * * *

Good people, enter, and lay hold on him !

Abb. No, not a creature enters in my house.

Adr. Then let your servants bring my husband forth.

Abb. Neither ; he took this place for sanctuary,

And it shall privilege him from your hands

Till I have brought him to his wits again,

Or lose my labor in assaying it.

Adr. I will attend my husband, be his nurse,

Diet his sickness ; for it is my office,

And will have no attorney but myself ;

And therefore let me have him home with me.

Abb. Be patient ; for I will not let him stir,

Till I have used the approved means I have,

With wholesome syrups, drugs, and holy prayers,

To make of him a formal man again :

It is a branch and parcel of mine oath,

A charitable duty of my order ;

Therefore depart, and leave him here with me.

Adr. I will not hence, and leave my husband here ;

And ill it doth beseem your holiness,

To separate the husband and the wife.

Abb. Be quiet, and depart ; thou shalt not have him.

Yet, at the last, we see that twenty-five years of self-mortification, and contempt of earthly ties, have failed to eradicate the strong affections of *Æmilia*, the wife and the mother. Our sympathy with this *Rachel*, who mourned for her children because she believed they were not, is as cordial as our congratulations on their restoration are sincere ; and to her gracious invitation we reply in the words of the duke—"With all our heart, we'll gossip at this feast :"

Abb. * * * Vouchsafe to take the pains

To go with us into the abbey here,

And hear at large discoursed all our fortunes ;

And all that are assembled in this place,

That by this sympathized one day's error

Have suffer'd wrong, go, keep us company,

And we shall make full satisfaction.—

Twenty-five years have I but gone in travail

Of you, my sons ; nor, till this present hour,

My heavy burdens are delivered :—

The duke, my husband, and my children both,

And you, the calendars of their nativity,

Go to a gossip's feast, and go with me ;

After so long grief, such nativity !