



Margaret

KING HENRY 6, PART I, ACT 5, SC. 3.

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MARGARET OF ANJOU.

THE eventful history of this celebrated princess, who "excelled all other in beauty and favor, as in wit and policy," constitutes the leading interest of the tedious, three-parted tragedy of *King Henry VI.*, wherein she appears, first as the daughter of Reignier, Duke of Anjou and Count of Provence, and afterwards as Queen Margaret of England, wife of Henry VI.

The action of this play, the legitimacy of which has been disputed and maintained, with equal astuteness, by Shakspearian scholars, is laid amid the turbulent scenes of the York and Lancaster struggle. Part First opens with the death of Henry V., whereupon his youthful son, Henry, ascends the throne under the protectorate of his uncle, the Duke of Gloster; it treats more particularly of the war with France, memorable for the heroism of Joan of Arc. In Part Second, the young king is married to the Princess Margaret of Anjou, who prevails upon her weak-minded husband to assume the reins of government—soon after which the kingdom is embroiled in the civil War of the Roses; while Part Third is occupied with Henry's deposition from the throne, and Margaret's intriguing efforts to reinstate him—concluding with his murder by the Duke of Gloster.

Were the Margaret of Shakspeare—for it is not the Margaret of History of whom we have to speak—invested with any personal claims to our pathetic interest, a more pitiful picture than that afforded by the simple circumstances of her story could scarcely be offered to our sympathetic contemplation. A woman of excellent beauty and accomplishments, of indomitable spirit and unquailing courage, who, having been elevated to the exalted station of England's queen, lives to see her husband treacherously deposed from his throne, and finally murdered—her son having suffered the same fate before her eyes; her enemies in the full enjoyment of their guilty triumph; herself an outcast, so wretched that her life is not thought worth the taking: such a woman would seem to constitute an object of commiseration for the sternest beholder, aside from all individual attributes whatsoever; but Shakspeare has converted pity into detestation, by depicting Margaret as a faithless wife to a husband, noted for his gentle virtues, who idolized her—a ferocious, unrelenting enemy, a woman of petty spite and coarse cruelty.

This Margaret has all the ambition of Lady Macbeth; but, unlike hers, it is essentially vulgar in quality: she prefers to gain her ends by trivial, transparent subtleties, such as the dashing boldness of the thane's wife would have grandly disdained. She has the true Frenchwoman's love of political intrigue, without her proverbial tact; whatever she may achieve by her scheming, she as surely spoils by her maladroit rashness. The only situations in which we are permitted to regard Margaret with even tolerable kindness are these two: where she parts with her lover, Suffolk, who is banished by Henry after the murder of the "good duke Humphrey:"

Q. Mar. Enough, sweet Suffolk: thou torment'st thyself;
And these dread curses—like the sun 'gainst glass,
Or like an overcharged gun—recoil,

And turn the force of them upon thyself.

Suf. You bade me ban, and will you bid me leave?

Now, by the ground that I am banish'd from,

Well could I curse away a winter's night,

Though standing naked on a mountain top,

Where biting cold would never let grass grow,

And think it but a minute spent in sport!

Q. Mar. O, let me entreat thee, cease! Give me thy hand,

That I may dew it with my mournful tears;

Nor let the rain of heaven wet this place,

To wash away my woeful monuments.

O could this kiss be printed in thy hand—

That thou might'st think upon these by the seal,

Through whom a thousand sighs are breathed for thee!

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I will repeal thee—or, be well assured,

Adventure to be banished myself;

And banished I am, if but from thee.

Go! speak not to me; even now begone.—

O, go not yet!—Even thus two friends condemn'd

Embrace, and kiss, and take ten thousand leaves,

Loather a hundred times to part than die.

Yet now farewell; and farewell life with thee!

Suf. Thus is poor Suffolk ten times banished:

Once by the king, and three times thrice by thee.

'Tis not the land I care for, wert thou hence—

A wilderness is populous enough,

So Suffolk had thy heavenly company;

For where thou art, there is the world itself,

With every several pleasure in the world;

And where thou art not, desolation.

I can no more:—Live thou to joy thy life—

Myself no joy in nought, but that thou liv'st.

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Q. Mar. Away! Though parting be a fretful corrosive,

It is applied to a deathful wound.

To France, sweet Suffolk: Let me hear from thee;

For wheresoe'er thou art in this world's globe,

I'll have an Iris that shall find thee out.

—and where she upbraids her husband for having ignobly ceded his son's right of succession for the assurance of a peaceful reign to himself:

Ah, wretched man! 'would I had died a maid,
And never seen thee, never borne thee son,
Seeing thou hast proved so unnatural a father!
Hath he deserved to lose his birthright thus?
Had'st thou but loved him half so well as I—
Or felt that pain which I did for him once—
Or nourish'd him, as I did with my blood—
Thou wouldst have left thy dearest heart-blood there,
Rather than made that savage duke thine heir,
And disinherited thine only son.

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K. Hen. Pardon me, Margaret;—pardon me, sweet son;—
The earl of Warwick, and the duke, enforced me.

Q. Mar. Enforced thee! Art thou king, and wilt be forc'd?
I shame to hear thee speak. Ah, timorous wretch!
Thou hast undone thyself, thy son, and me;
And given unto the house of York such head
As thou shalt reign but by their sufferance.
To entail him and his heirs unto the crown,
What is it but to make thy sepulchre,
And creep into it far before thy time?

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Had I been there, which am a silly woman,
The soldiers should have toss'd me on their pikes,
Before I would have granted to that act.
But thou preferr'st thy life before thine honor;
And, seeing thou dost, I here divorce myself,
Both from thy table, Henry, and thy bed,
Until that act of parliament be repealed,
Whereby my son is disinherited.

Here her indignation is most just, its lofty spirit equally becoming to the mother and the queen.

Henry lives to see her words made good: the Duke of York is to all intents and purposes king, under the title of lord-protector;