

sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms : in the aberrations of his reason we discover a mighty, irregular power of reasoning, immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind. What have looks, or tones, to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of the *heavens themselves*, when, in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children, he reminds that 'they themselves are old'? What gesture shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or the eye to do with such things?

"But the play is beyond all art, as the tamperings with it show : it is too hard and stony ; it must have love-scenes, and a happy ending. It is not enough that Cordelia is a daughter ; she must shine as a lover too. Tate has put his hook in the nostrils of this Leviathan, for Garrick and his fellows, the showmen of the scene, to draw the mighty beast about more easily. A happy ending ! — as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through, — the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after, if he could sustain this world's burden after, why all this pudder and preparation, — why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy? As if the childish pleasure of getting his gilt robes and sceptre again could tempt him to act over again his misused station, — as if, at his years and with his experience, any thing was left but to die."

THE TRAGEDY OF KING LEAR.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

LEAR, King of Britain.	A Doctor.
KING OF FRANCE.	A Fool.
DUKE OF BURGUNDY.	OSWALD, Steward to Goneril.
DUKE OF ALBANY.	An Officer employed by Edmund.
DUKE OF CORNWALL.	A Gentleman, attendant on Cordelia.
EARL OF KENT.	A Herald.
EARL OF GLOSTER.	Servants to Cornwall.
EDGAR, Son to Gloster.	
EDMUND, Bastard Son to Gloster.	GONERIL, } Daughters to Lear.
CURAN, a Courtier.	REGAN, }
An old Man, Tenant to Gloster.	CORDELIA, }
	Knights attending on the King, Officers, Messengers, Soldiers, and Attendants. SCENE, <i>Britain</i> .

ACT I.

SCENE I. — *A Room of State in LEAR'S Palace.*

Enter KENT, GLOSTER, and EDMUND.

Kent. I thought the King had more affected¹ the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

Glos. It did always seem so to us : but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he values most ; for equalities are so weigh'd, that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety.²

¹ To *affect* a thing is to be *inclined* to it, to have an *affection* for it.

² *Moiety* properly means *half*, but was used for any part or portion. So Hotspur calls his *third* of the kingdom a *moiety*. — *Curiosity* is *scrupulous*

Kent. Is not this your son, my lord?

Glos. His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge: I have so often blush'd to acknowledge him, that now I am brazed to't. Do you smell a fault?

Kent. I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper.³

Glos. But I have, sir, a son by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is no dearer in my account. — Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?

Edm. No, my lord.

Glos. My Lord of Kent: remember him hereafter as my honourable friend.

Edm. My services to your lordship.

Kent. I must love you, and sue to know you better.

Edm. Sir, I shall study deserving.

Glos. He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again.⁴ — [*Sennet within.*] The King is coming.

exactness. — *Equalities* means the equality of the portions. — This speech goes far to interpret Lear's subsequent action, as it shows that the division of the kingdom has already been concluded, and the several portions allotted, and so infers the trial of professions to be a sort of pet device with the old King, a thing that has no purpose but to gratify a childish whim. The opening thus forecasts Lear's madness.

³ Here, as usual in Shakespeare, *proper* is *handsome* or *fine-looking*.

⁴ As Edmund's villainy is a leading force in the dramatic action, an intimation of the causes which have been at work preparing him for crime is judiciously given here in the outset of the play. From his father's loose way of speaking about him and to him we naturally gather that certain malign influences have all along been perverting his character and poisoning his springs of action. — Gloster's meaning in this last speech clearly is, that he has kept Edmund *away from home* nine years, and intends sending him away again, in order to avoid the shame of his presence, or because he has "so often blush'd to acknowledge him." We may suppose Edmund's absence to have been spent in travelling abroad, or in pursuing his studies, or in some kind of foreign service. And this accounts for his not being acquainted with Kent.

Enter LEAR, ALBANY, CORNWALL, GONERIL, REGAN, CORDELIA, and Attendants.

Lear. Attend the Lords of France and Burgundy, Gloster.

Glos. I shall,⁵ my liege. [*Exeunt* GLOSTER and EDMUND.]

Lear. Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.⁶ — Give me the map there. — Know that we've divided In three our kingdom: and 'tis our fast intent To shake all cares and business from our age; Conferring them on younger strengths, while we Unburden'd crawl toward death. — Our son of Cornwall, And you, our no less loving son of Albany, We have this hour a constant will⁷ to publish Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife May be prevented now.⁸ The Princes, France and Burgundy, Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love, Long in our Court have made their amorous sojourn, And here are to be answer'd. — Tell me, my daughters, — Since now we will divest us both of rule, Interest of territory, cares of State, — Which of you shall we say doth love us most? That we our largest bounty may extend Where nature doth with merit challenge.⁹ — Goneril, Our eldest-born, speak first.

⁵ *Shall* where we should use *will*. The two were very often used indiscriminately in the Poet's time. The Bible has many instances.

⁶ Lear's "darker purpose" is probably that of surprising his daughters into a rivalry of affection. This he has hitherto *kept dark* about; though his scheme of dividing the kingdom was known, at least in the Court.

⁷ "Constant will" is *fixed* or *determined* will; the same as "fast intent."

⁸ "That future strife may be prevented by what we now do."

⁹ Mr. Joseph Crosby's explanation of this is clearly the right one. *Nature* is put for *natural affection*, and *with merit* is used as an adverbial phrase: "That I may extend my largest bounty where natural affection justly, or *meritoriously*, challenges it"; that is, *claims it as due*.

Gon. Sir,

I love you more than words can wield the matter;¹⁰
 Dearer than eye-sight, space, and liberty;
 Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;
 No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
 As much as child e'er loved, or father found;
 A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable:
 Beyond all manner of so much I love you.¹¹

Cord. [*Aside.*] What shall Cordelia do? Love, and be silent.

Lear. Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
 With shadowy forests and with champains rich'd,¹²
 With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
 We make thee lady:¹³ to thine and Albany's issue
 Be this perpetual. — What says our second daughter,
 Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall? Speak.

Reg. Sir,
 I'm made of that self¹⁴ metal as my sister,
 And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
 I find she names my very deed of love;
 Only she comes too short, — that I profess¹⁵
 Myself an enemy to all other joys,
 Which the most precious square of sense¹⁶ possesses;

¹⁰ "My love is a matter so weighty that words cannot express or sustain it."

¹¹ Beyond all assignable quantity. "I love you so much, that there is no possibility of telling how much."

¹² Rich'd for enriched. — Champains are plains; hence fertile.

¹³ The lord of a thing is, strictly speaking, the owner of it. And lady is here used as the counterpart of lord in this sense. So that to make one the lady of a thing is to make her the owner or possessor of it.

¹⁴ The Poet often uses self with the sense of self-same.

¹⁵ "She comes short of me in this, that I profess," &c.

¹⁶ By square of sense I understand fulness of sensibility or capacity of joy. So that the meaning seems to be, "Which the finest susceptibility of happi-

And find I am alone felicitate¹⁷
 In your dear Highness' love.

Cord. [*Aside.*] Then poor Cordelia!
 And yet, not so; since, I am sure, my love's
 More richer¹⁸ than my tongue.

Lear. To thee and thine hereditary ever
 Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom;
 No less in space, validity,¹⁹ and pleasure,
 Than that conferr'd on Goneril. — Now, our joy,
 Although our last, not least; to whose young love
 The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
 Strive to be interest'd;²⁰ what can you say, to draw
 A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

Cord. Nothing, my lord.

Lear. Nothing!

Cord. Nothing.

Lear. Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.

Cord. Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
 My heart into my mouth:²¹ I love your Majesty
 According to my bond;²² nor more nor less.

ness is capable of." Some have stumbled at the word *square* here. But why not "*square* of sense" as well as *circle of the senses*? which would be a very intelligible expression.

¹⁷ Felicitate, a shortened form of *felicitated*, is *fortunate* or *made happy*. The Poet has many preterites so shortened; as *consecrate*, *suffocate*, &c.

¹⁸ Double comparatives, like *more richer*, also double superlatives, like *most unkindest*, also double negatives, like *nor is not*, were very common in Shakespeare's time.

¹⁹ Validity for *value* or *worth*. Repeatedly so.

²⁰ To *interest* and to *interesse* are not, perhaps, different spellings of the same verb, but two distinct words, though of the same import; the one being derived from the Latin, the other from the French *interessé*.

²¹ We have the same thought well expressed in *The Maid's Tragedy* of Beaumont and Fletcher, i. 1: "My mouth is much too narrow for my heart."

²² Bond was used of any thing that binds or obliges; that is, *duty*.

Lear. How, how, Cordelia ! mend your speech a little,
Lest it may mar your fortunes.

Cord. Good my lord,²³
You have begot me, bred me, loved me : I
Return those duties back as²⁴ are right fit ;
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty :
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.

Lear. But goes thy heart with this?

Cord. Ay, good my lord.

Lear. So young, and so untender?

Cord. So young, my lord, and true.

Lear. Let it be so ; thy truth, then, be thy dower :
For, by the sacred radiance of the Sun,
The mysteries of Hecate, and the night ;
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom²⁵ we do exist, and cease to be ;
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee, from this, for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation²⁶ messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom

²³ We should say " My good lord." The Poet abounds in such inversions. So " dear my mother," " sweet my sister," " gentle my brother," &c.

²⁴ *As* is here a relative pronoun, referring to *those duties*; *which* or *that*. The word was used very loosely in the Poet's time.

²⁵ The relatives *who* and *which* were used indiscriminate'y.

²⁶ Probably meaning his *children*; perhaps simply his *kind*.

Be as well neighbour'd, pitied, and relieved,
As thou my sometime²⁷ daughter.

Kent. Good my liege, —

Lear. Peace, Kent !

Come not between the dragon and his wrath :
I loved her most, and thought to set my rest
On her kind nursery : hence, and avoid my sight !²⁸
So be my grave my peace, as here I give
Her father's heart from her ! — Call France : who stirs?
Call Burgundy. — Cornwall and Albany,
With my two daughters' dowers digest this third :
Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her.
I do invest you jointly with my power,
Pre-eminence, and all the large effects
That troop with majesty. Ourselves, by monthly course,
With reservation of an hundred knights
By you to be sustain'd, shall our abode
Make with you by due turns. Only we still retain
The name, and all th' additions to a king ;²⁹
The sway, revénue, execution of the rest,
Belovèd sons, be yours : which to confirm,
This coronet part between you. [*Giving the crown.*]

Kent. Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honour'd as my King,
Loved as my father, as my master follow'd,
As my great patron thought on in my prayers, —

Lear. The bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft.

²⁷ *Sometime*, here, is *former* or *formerly*. See *Hamlet*, page 48, note 12.

²⁸ As Kent has said nothing to provoke this snappish order, we are probably to suppose that Lear, knowing his man, anticipates a bold remonstrance from him, and, in his excited mood, flares up at the thought of such a thing. So he says to him a little after, " Out of my sight."

²⁹ All the *titles* or *marks of honour* pertaining to *royalty*.

Kent. Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
The region of my heart : be Kent unmannerly,
When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak,
When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour's
bound,

When majesty falls to folly. Reverse thy doom ;
And in thy best consideration check
This hideous rashness : answer my life my judgment,³⁰
Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least ;
Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound
Reverbs³¹ no hollowness.

Lear. Kent, on thy life, no more.

Kent. My life I never held but as a pawn
To wage against thine enemies ;³² nor fear to lose it,
Thy safety being the motive.

Lear. Out of my sight !

Kent. See better, Lear ; and let me still remain
The true blank of thine eye.³³

Lear. Now, by Apollo, —

Kent. Now, by Apollo, King,
Thou swear'st thy gods in vain.

Lear. [*Grasping his sword.*] O vassal, miscreant !

Alb. } Dear sir, forbear.
Corn. }

³⁰ "Let my life be answerable for my judgment," or, "I will stake my life on the truth of what I say."

³¹ *Reverbs* for *reverberates*; probably a word of the Poet's own coining. Here it has the sense of *report* or *proclaim*.

³² To *wage* is to *wager*, to *stake* or *hazard*. So that Kent's meaning is, "I never held my life but as a thing to be impawned or put in pledge against your enemies"

³³ The *blank* is the *mark* at which men shoot. "See better," says Kent "and let me be the mark to direct your sight, that you err not."

Kent. Do ;

Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow
Upon the foul disease.³⁴ Revoke thy gift ;
Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat,
I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

Lear. Hear me, recreant !

On thine allegiance hear me !
Since thou hast sought to make us break our vow, —
Which we durst never yet, — and with strain'd pride
To come between our sentence and our power, —
Which nor our nature nor our place can bear, —
Our potency made good, take thy reward.³⁵
Five days we do allot thee, for provision
To shield thee from diseases³⁶ of the world ;
And, on the sixth, to turn thy hated back
Upon our kingdom : if, on the tenth day following,
Thy banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,
The moment is thy death. Away ! by Jupiter,
This shall not be revoked.

Kent. Fare thee well, King : since thus thou wilt appear,
Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here. —

[*To* CORD.] The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid
That justly think'st, and hast most rightly said ! —

[*To* REG. and GON.] And your large speeches may your
deeds approve,³⁷

That good effects may spring from words of love. —

Thus Kent, O Princes ! bids you all adieu ;

He'll shape his old course in a country new. [*Exit.*]

³⁴ Kill the doctor, and pay the disease. Here we begin to taste that electric energy of expression which marks this drama.

³⁵ That is, "Take thy reward in or by a demonstration of our power."

³⁶ *Disease* in its old sense of *discomfort* or what causes uneasiness.

³⁷ *Approve* in the sense of *make good*, or *prove true*. Often so.

Re-enter GLOSTER, with FRANCE, BURGUNDY, and Attendants.

Glos. Here's France and Burgundy, my noble lord.

Lear. My Lord of Burgundy,

We first address toward you, who with this King Hath rivall'd for our daughter: what, in the least, Will you require in present dower with her, Or cease your quest³⁸ of love?

Burg. Most royal Majesty,
I crave no more than hath your Highness offer'd,
Nor will you tender less.

Lear. Right-noble Burgundy,
When she was dear to us, we did hold her so;
But now her price is fall'n. Sir, there she stands:
If aught within that little seeming substance,
Or all of it, with our displeasure pieced,³⁹
And nothing more, may fitly like your Grace,
She's there, and she is yours.

Burg. I know no answer.

Lear. Will you, with those infirmities she owes,⁴⁰
Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,
Dower'd with our curse, and stranger'd with our oath,
Take her, or leave her?

Burg. Pardon me, royal sir;
Election makes not up on such conditions.

Lear. Then leave her, sir; for, by the power that made me,

³⁸ A *quest* is a *seeking* or *pursuit*: the expedition in which a knight was engaged is often so named in *The Faerie Queene*.

³⁹ With our displeasure *added to it*; as in the common phrase of *piecing out* a thing.—*Like*, in the next line, was continually used where we should use *please*. *It likes me* is, in old language, the same as *I like it*.

⁴⁰ *Owes* and *owns* are but different forms of the same word.

I tell you all her wealth.—For you, great King,
I would not from your love make such a stray,
To match⁴¹ you where I hate; therefore beseech you
T' avert your liking a more worthier way
Than on a wretch whom Nature is ashamed
Almost t' acknowledge hers.

France. This is most strange,
That she, who even but now was your best object,
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,
The best, the dearest, should in this trice of time
Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle
So many folds of favour! Sure, her offence
Must be of such unnatural degree,
That monsters it, or your fore-vouch'd affection
Fall'n into taint:⁴² which to believe of her,
Must be a faith that reason without miracle
Could never plant in me.

Cord. I yet beseech your Majesty,
(If for I want⁴³ that glib and oily art,
To speak and purpose not; since what I well intend,
I'll do't before I speak,) that you make known
It is no vicious blot, murder,⁴⁴ or foulness,

⁴¹ "Such a stray, *as* to match." So again in the next speech: "So monstrous, *as* to dismantle." The Poet omits *as* in such cases, when the verse is against it.

⁴² "*Must be fall'n*" is the meaning. *Taint* for *attaint* or *attainder*. "The affection which you before professed must have fallen under reproach or impeachment as fickle or false."—"Of such unnatural degree, *that monsters it*," is of such unnatural degree *as to be monstrous*, or *prove her a monster*.

⁴³ That is, "If *it be because* I want," or "If *you are doing this because* I want." The use of *for* in the sense of *because* is very frequent.

⁴⁴ *Murder* seems a strange word to be used here; but perhaps Cordelia purposely uses it out of place, as a glance at the hyperbolic absurdity of denouncing her as "a wretch whom Nature is ashamed to acknowledge."

No unchaste action, or dishonour'd step,
That hath deprived me of your grace and favour ;
But even the want of that for which I'm richer, —
A still-soliciting eye,⁴⁵ and such a tongue
As I am glad I have not, though not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking.

Lear. Better thou
Hadst not been born than not t' have pleased me better.

France. Is it but this, — a tardiness in nature
Which often leaves the history unspoke
That it intends to do? — My Lord of Burgundy,
What say you to the lady? Love's not love
When it is mingled with regards⁴⁶ that stand
Aloof from the entire point. Will you have her?
She is herself a dowry.

Burg. Royal Lear,
Give but that portion which yourself proposed,
And here I take Cordelia by the hand,
Duchess of Burgundy.

Lear. Nothing : I have sworn ; I am firm.

Burg. I'm sorry, then, you have so lost a father,
That you must lose a husband.

Cord. Peace be with Burgundy !
Since that respects of fortune are his love,
I shall not be his wife.

France. Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor ,

⁴⁵ "A *soliciting eye*" here means a *greedy, self-seeking, covetous eye*. The Poet often has *still* in the sense of *ever* or *continually*. — The preceding line will hardly bear a grammatical analysis, but the sense is plain enough. "The want of that for which" means, simply, "that want for which," or, if you please, "the want of that for the want of which."

⁴⁶ *Regards* for *considerations* or *inducements*. The same with *respects* in the fourth speech after. So the latter word is commonly used by the Poet.

Most choice, forsaken ; and most loved, despised ;
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon :
Be't lawful, I take up what's cast away. —
Gods, gods ! 'tis strange that from their cold'st neglect
My love should kindle to inflamed respect. —
Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to my chance,
Is Queen of us, of ours, and our fair France :
Not all the Dukes of waterish⁴⁷ Burgundy
Shall buy this únprized precious maid of me. —
Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind :
Thou lovest here, a better where to find.

Lear. Thou hast her, France : let her be thine ; for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
That face of hers again. — Therefore be gone
Without our grace, our love, our benison.⁴⁸ —
Come, noble Burgundy.

[*Flourish.* *Exeunt* LEAR, BURGUNDY, CORNWALL,
ALBANY, GLOSTER, and Attendants.

France. Bid farewell to your sisters.

Cord. Ye jewels of our father, with wash'd eyes
Cordelia leaves you : I know you what you are ;
And, like a sister, am most loth to call
Your faults as they are named. Love well our father :
To your professèd⁴⁹ bosoms I commit him ;
But yet, alas, stood I within his grace,
I would prefer him to a better place.
So, farewell to you both.

⁴⁷ *Waterish* is here used with a dash of contempt. Burgundy, a level, well-watered country, was famous for its pastures and dairy-produce.

⁴⁸ The Poet uses *benison* for *blessing*, when he wants a trisyllable.

⁴⁹ *Professèd* for *professing* ; the passive form with the active sense. So in *Paradise Lost*, i., 486 : "Likening his Maker to the grazèd ox."

Gon. Prescribe not us our duties.

Reg. Let your study

Be to content your lord, who hath received you
At fortune's alms. You have obedience scanted,
And well are worth the want that you have wanted.⁵⁰

Cord. Time shall unfold what plighted⁵¹ cunning hides :
Who cover faults, at last shame them derides.
Well may you prosper !

France. Come, my fair Cordelia.

[*Exeunt* FRANCE and CORDELIA.]

Gon. Sister, it is not a little I have to say of what most
nearly appertains to us both. I think our father will hence
to-night.

Reg. That's most certain, and with you ; next month
with us.

Gon. You see how full of changes his age is ; the obser-
vation we have made of it hath not been little : he always
loved our sister most ; and with what poor judgment he hath
now cast her off appears too grossly.

Reg. 'Tis the infirmity of his age : yet he hath ever but
slenderly known himself.

Gon. The best and soundest of his time hath been but
rash ; then must we look to receive from his age, not alone
the imperfections of long-engrafted condition,⁵² but there-
withal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years
bring with them.

Reg. Such unconstant starts are we like to have from him
as this of Kent's banishment.

⁵⁰ "You well deserve to want that in which you have been wanting."

⁵¹ *Plight*, *pleat*, and *plait* are but different forms of the same word, all
meaning to *fold*, *complicate*, and so *make dark*.

⁵² *Temper*, or *disposition*, set and confirmed by long habit.

Gon. There is further compliment of leave-taking between
France and him. Pray you, let us hit together :⁵³ if our
father carry authority with such dispositions as he bears, this
last surrender of his will but offend us.

Reg. We shall further think of it.

Gon. We must do something, and i' the heat.⁵⁴

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. — *A Hall in GLOSTER'S Castle.*

Enter EDMUND, with a Letter.

Edm. Thou, Nature, art my goddess ; to thy law
My services are bound.¹ Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,²
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
Lag of a brother? Why bastard? wherefore base?
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,

⁵³ "Let us *agree* or *unite* in the same plan or course of action." — The
meaning of what follows probably is, "If the King continue in the same
rash, headstrong, and inconstant temper as he has just shown in snatching
back his authority the moment his will is crossed, we shall be the worse off
for his surrender of the kingdom to us."

⁵⁴ So in the common phrase, "Strike while the iron's hot."

¹ In this speech of Edmund you see, as soon as a man cannot reconcile
himself to reason, how his conscience flies off by way of appeal to Nature,
who is sure upon such occasions never to find fault ; and also how shame
sharpens a predisposition in the heart to evil. — COLERIDGE.

² To "stand in the plague of custom" is, in Edmund's sense, to lie under
the ban of conventional disability. — "The curiosity of nations" is the
moral strictness of civil institutions ; especially the law of marriage, and the
exclusion of bastards from the rights of inheritance. — To *deprive* was some-
times used for to *cut off*, to *disinherit*. *Exheredo* is rendered by this word
in the old dictionaries.

As honest madam's issue?³ Well, then,
 Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land:
 Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
 As to th' legitimate: fine word,—*legitimate!*
 Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed,
 And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
 Shall top th' legitimate.⁴ I grow; I prosper:—
 Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

Enter GLOSTER.

Glos. Kent banish'd thus! and France in choler parted!⁵
 And the King gone to-night! subscribed his power!
 Confined to exhibition! All this done
 Upon the gad!⁶—Edmund, how now! what news?

Edm. So please your lordship, none.

[*Putting up the letter.*]

Glos. Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?

Edm. I know no news, my lord.

Glos. What paper were you reading?

Edm. Nothing, my lord.

³ From the first drawing-up of the curtain, Edmund has stood before us in the united strength and beauty of earliest manhood. Our eyes have been questioning him. Gifted as he is with high advantages of person, and further endowed by Nature with a powerful intellect and a strong and energetic will, even without any concurrence of circumstances and accident pride will necessarily be the sin that most easily besets him. But Edmund is also the known and acknowledged son of the princely Gloster; he therefore has both the germ of pride, and the conditions best fitted to evolve and ripen it into a predominant feeling.—COLERIDGE.

⁴ To *top* is to *rise above*, to *surpass*. A very frequent usage.

⁵ *Parted* for *departed*. Also a frequent usage.

⁶ "*Subscribed his power*," is *yielded* or *given up* his power; as when we say a man has signed away his wealth, his freedom, or his rights.—"*Confined to exhibition*" is *limited to an allowance*. So in Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*: "Thou art a younger brother, and hast nothing but thy bare

Glos. No? What needed, then, that terrible⁷ dispatch of it into your pocket? the quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself. Let's see: come; if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles.

Edm. I beseech you, sir, pardon me: it is a letter from my brother, that I have not all o'er-read; and, for so much as I have perused, I find it not fit for your o'er-looking.

Glos. Give me the letter, sir.

Edm. I shall offend, either to detain or give it. The contents, as in part I understand them, are to blame.

Glos. Let's see, let's see.

Edm. I hope, for my brother's justification, he wrote this but as an essay or taste of my virtue.

Glos. [Reads.] *This policy and reverence of age⁸ makes the world bitter to the best of our times; keeps our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish them. I begin to find an idle and fond⁹ bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny; who sways, not as it hath power, but as it is suffer'd. Come to me, that of this I may speak more. If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should enjoy half his revenue for ever, and live the beloved of your brother,* EDGAR.

Hum—conspiracy!—*Sleep till I waked him, you should enjoy half his revenue,*—My son Edgar! Had he a hand

exhibition." The word is still so used in the English Universities.—*Upon the gad* is *in haste*; the same as *upon the spur*. A *gad* was a sharp-pointed piece of steel, used in driving oxen; hence *goaded*.

⁷ *Terrible* because done as if *from terror*.

⁸ That is, this policy, or custom, of *reverencing* age. The idea is, that the honouring of fathers and mothers is an old superstition, which smart boys ought to cast off, knock their fathers on the head, and so have a good time while they are young. We have a like expression in scene 4: "This milky gentleness and course of yours." See *Hamlet*, page 50, note 22.

⁹ Here, as commonly in Shakespeare, *fond* is *foolish*.

to write this? a heart and brain to breed it in?—When came this to you? who brought it?

Edm. It was not brought me, my lord; there's the cunning of it: I found it thrown in at the casement of my closet.

Glos. You know the character to be your brother's?

Edm. If the matter were good, my lord, I durst swear it were his; but, in respect of that, I would fain think it were not.

Glos. It is his.

Edm. It is his hand, my lord; but I hope his heart is not in the contents.

Glos. Hath he never before sounded you in this business?

Edm. Never, my lord: but I have often heard him maintain it to be fit, that, sons at perfect age, and fathers declining, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue.

Glos. O, villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter! Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested,¹⁰ brutish villain! worse than brutish!—Go, sirrah, seek him; I'll apprehend him. Abominable villain! Where is he?

Edm. I do not well know, my lord. If it shall please you to suspend your indignation against my brother till you can derive from him better testimony of his intent, you shall run a certain course; where,¹¹ if you violently proceed against him, mistaking his purpose, it would make a great gap in your own honour, and shake in pieces the heart of his obedience. I dare pawn down my life for him, that he

¹⁰ *Detested* for *detestable*. The Poet so uses a good many words ending in *ed*. See *King Richard the Second*, page 79, note 35.

¹¹ *Where* and *whereas* were used indiscriminately.—Here, "a certain course," is a *safe* or *sure* course.

hath writ this to feel my affection to your Honour, and to no other pretence¹² of danger.

Glos. Think you so?

Edm. If your Honour judge it meet, I will place you where you shall hear us confer of this, and by an auricular assurance have your satisfaction; and that without any further delay than this very evening.

Glos. He cannot be such a monster—

Edm. Nor is not, sure.

Glos.—to his father, that so tenderly and entirely loves him.—Heaven and Earth!—Edmund, seek him out; wind me into him,¹³ I pray you: frame the business after your own wisdom. I would unstate myself to be in a due resolution.¹⁴

Edm. I will seek him, sir, presently; convey¹⁵ the business as I shall find means, and acquaint you withal.

Glos. These late eclipses in the Sun and Moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects:¹⁶ love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond crack'd 'twixt son and father. This villain of

¹² *Pretence* was very often used for *intention* or *purpose*. See the fourth scene of this Act, note 8. Also *Macbeth*, page 93, note 52.

¹³ *Me* is here *expletive*.—*Wind into him* is the same as our phrase "worm yourself into him"; that is, find out his hidden purpose.

¹⁴ "I would give my whole estate, all that I possess, to be *satisfied* or *assured* in the matter." The Poet often has *resolve* in the sense of *assure* or *inform*.

¹⁵ To *convey*, as the word is here used, is to *manage* or *carry through* a thing adroitly, or as by sleight of hand. See *Macbeth*, page 138, note 12.

¹⁶ "Though reason or natural philosophy may make out that these strange events proceed from the regular operation of natural laws, and so have no moral purpose or significance, yet we find them followed by calamities, as in punishment of our sins,

mine comes under the prediction ; there's son against father : the King falls from bias of nature ; there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time : machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves. Find out this villain, Edmund ; it shall lose thee nothing ; do it carefully. — And the noble and true-hearted Kent banish'd ! his offence, honesty ! 'Tis strange.

[Exit.

Edm. This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, — often the surfeit of our own behaviour, — we make guilty of our disasters the Sun, the Moon, and the stars : as if we were villains by necessity ; fools by heavenly compulsion ; knaves, thieves, and treachers,¹⁷ by spherical predominance ; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence ; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting-on.¹⁸ Edgar ! — pat he comes, like the catastrophe of the old comedy :¹⁹ my cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam. —

Enter EDGAR.

O, these eclipses do portend these divisions ! Fa, sol, la, mi.²⁰

¹⁷ *Treachers for traitors.* The word is used by Chaucer and Spenser.

¹⁸ Warburton thinks that the dotages of judicial astrology were meant to be satirized in this speech. Coleridge remarks upon Edmund's philosophizing as follows : " Thus scorn and misanthropy are often the anticipations and mouthpieces of wisdom in the detection of superstitions. Both individuals and nations may be free from such prejudices by being below them, as well as by rising above them."

¹⁹ Perhaps alluding, satirically, to the awkward catastrophies of the old comedies, which were coarsely contrived so as to have the persons enter, pat, just when they were wanted on the stage. — *Cue*, as here used, is *prompt-word* or *hint*. — *Bedlam*, an old corruption of *Bethlehem*, was a well-known hospital for the insane. — *Tom* was a name commonly given to Bedlamites. An instance of it will be seen afterwards in Edgar.

²⁰ " Shakespeare shows by the context that he was well acquainted with

Edg. How now, brother Edmund ! what serious contemplation are you in ?

Edm. I am thinking, brother, of a prediction I read this other day, what should follow these eclipses.

Edg. Do you busy yourself with that ?

Edm. I promise you, the effects he writes of succeed unhappily ;²¹ as of unnaturalness between the child and the parent ; death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient amities ; divisions in State ; menaces and maledictions against king and nobles ; needless diffidences,²² banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breaches, and I know not what.

Edg. How long have you been a sectary astronomical ?²³

Edm. Come, come ; when saw you my father last ?

Edg. The night gone by.

Edm. Spake you with him ?

Edg. Ay, two hours together.

Edm. Parted you in good terms ? Found you no displeasure in him by word or countenance ?

Edg. None at all.

Edm. Bethink yourself wherein you may have offended him ; and at my entreaty forbear his presence till some little

the property of these syllables in solmization, which imply a series of sounds so unnatural that ancient musicians prohibited their use. Edmund, speaking of the eclipses as portents, compares the dislocation of events, the *times being out of joint*, to the unnatural and offensive sounds *fa sol la mi*." So says Dr. Burney. But Mr. Chappell, probably a better authority, assures Mr. W. A. Wright, the Clarendon Editor, that there is no foundation for Burney's remark ; and that " Edmund is merely singing to himself in order not to seem to observe Edgar's approach."

²¹ That is, *turn out badly*. The Poet often uses *success* for *issue* or *consequence*, whether good or bad. The usage was common.

²² *Diffidences* for *distrustings*, ruptures of confidence. An old usage.

²³ " How long have you belonged to the *sect of astronomers* ?" Judicial astrology, as it is called, formerly had its schools and professors.

time hath qualified the heat of his displeasure ; which at this instant so rageth in him, that with the mischief of your person it would scarcely allay.²⁴

Edg. Some villain hath done me wrong.

Edm. That's my fear. I pray you, have a continent²⁵ forbearance till the speed of his rage goes slower ; and, as I say, retire with me to my lodging, from whence I will fitly bring you to hear my lord speak. Pray ye, go ; there's my key : if you do stir abroad, go arm'd.

Edg. Arm'd, brother !

Edm. Brother, I advise you to the best ; I am no honest man, if there be any good meaning towards you : I have told you what I have seen and heard, but faintly ;²⁶ nothing like the image and horror of it : pray you, away.

Edg. Shall I hear from you anon ?

Edm. I do serve you in this business. — [*Exit* EDGAR.
A credulous father ! and a brother noble,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms,
That he suspects none ; on whose foolish honesty
My practices²⁷ ride easy ! I see the business.
Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit :
All with me's meet that I can fashion fit.

[*Exit.*

SCENE III.—*A Room in ALBANY'S Palace.*

Enter GONERIL and OSWALD.

Gon. Did my father strike my gentleman for chiding of his Fool ?

²⁴ *Allay* in the sense of *subside* or *be appeased*. — *Mischief*, here, is much stronger than in our use ; *violence*, perhaps *destruction*.

²⁵ *Continent* in its old sense of *self-restrained* or *subdued*.

²⁶ *Faintly* is *imperfectly*, and qualifies *told*.

²⁷ *Contrivance*, *plot*, *stratagem* are old meanings of *practice*.

Osw. Ay, madam.

Gon. By day and night he wrongs me ; every hour He flashes into one gross crime or other, That sets us all at odds : I'll not endure it : His knights grow riotous, and himself upbraids us On every trifle. When he returns from hunting, I will not speak with him ; say I am sick : If you come slack of former services, You shall do well ; the fault of it I'll answer. [*Horns within.*

Osw. He's coming, madam ; I hear him.

Gon. Put on what weary negligence you please, You and your fellows ; I'd have it come to question : If he distaste it, let him to my sister, Whose mind and mine, I know, in that are one, Not to be over-ruled. Idle old man, That still would manage those authorities That he hath given away ! Now, by my life, Old fools are babes again ; and must be used With checks, when flatteries are seen abused. Remember what I've said.

Osw. Very well, madam.

Gon. And let his knights have colder looks among you : What grows of it, no matter ; advise your fellows so. I would breed from hence occasions, and I shall, That I may speak : I'll write straight to my sister, To hold my very course. Prepare for dinner. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.—*A Hall in the Same.*

Enter KENT,¹ *disguised.*

Kent. If but as well I other accents borrow,

¹ Kent is perhaps the nearest to perfect goodness in all Shakespeare characters. There is an extraordinary charm in his bluntness, which is

That can my speech diffuse,² my good intent
 May carry through itself to that full issue
 For which I razed my likeness. Now, banish'd Kent,
 If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemn'd, —
 So may it come! — thy master, whom thou lovest,
 Shall find thee full of labours.

Horns within. Enter LEAR, Knights, and Attendants.

Lear. Let me not stay a jot for dinner; go get it ready
 [*Exit an Attendant.*] — How now! what art thou?

Kent. A man, sir.

Lear. What dost thou profess? What wouldst thou with us?

Kent. I do profess to be no less than I seem; to serve him truly that will put me in trust; to love him that is honest; to converse with him that is wise, and says little;³ to fear judgment; to fight, when I cannot choose; and to eat no fish.⁴

Lear. What art thou?

that only of a nobleman arising from a contempt of overstrained courtesy, and combined with easy placability where goodness of heart is apparent. His passionate affection for, and fidelity to, Lear act on our feelings in Lear's own favour: virtue itself seems to be in company with him. — COLE-RIDGE.

² To *diffuse* here means to *disguise*, to render *strange*, to *obscure*. The Poet has "*diffused* attire," and "*diffused* song," in much the same sense. Of course Kent is apprehensive that his speech or accents may betray him, and thus defeat the purpose for which he has disguised his person.

³ To *converse* signifies properly to *keep company*, to have *commerce* with. His meaning is, that he chooses for his companions men who are not tatters or talebearers.

⁴ *Eating fish* on the fast-days of the Church, though enjoined by the civil authorities, was odious to the more advanced Protestants as a badge of popery. So in Marston's *Dutch Courtesan*: "I trust I am none of the wicked that eat fish a fridays." This is probably the reason why Kent makes eating no fish a recommendation to employment.

Kent. A very honest-hearted fellow, and as poor as the King.

Lear. If thou be as poor for a subject as he is for a king, thou art poor enough. What wouldst thou?

Kent. Service.

Lear. Who wouldst thou serve?

Kent. You.

Lear. Dost thou know me, fellow?

Kent. No, sir; but you have that in your countenance which I would fain call master.

Lear. What's that?

Kent. Authority.

Lear. What services canst thou do?

Kent. I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious tale in telling it, and deliver a plain message bluntly: that which ordinary men are fit for, I am qualified in; and the best of me is diligence.

Lear. How old art thou?

Kent. Not so young, sir, to love a woman for singing, nor so old to dote on her for any thing: I have years on my back forty-eight.

Lear. Follow me; thou shalt serve me: if I like thee no worse after dinner, I will not part from thee yet. — Dinner, ho, dinner! — Where's my knave?⁵ my Fool? — Go you, and call my Fool hither. — [*Exit an Attendant.*]

Enter OSWALD.

You, you, sirrah, where's my daughter?

Osw. So please you, —

[*Exit*

Lear. What says the fellow there? Call the clotpoll⁶

⁵ *Knave* was a common term of familiar endearment.

⁶ *Clot* is *clod*, and *poll* is *head*; so that *clotpoll* comes to *blockhead*.