Mary Stuart

by Friedrich Schiller

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MARY STUART.

A TRAGEDY.

By Friedrich Schiller

NOTE: The translation of MARY STUART is that by the late Joseph Mellish, who appears to have been on terms of intimate friendship with Schiller. His version was made from the prompter's copy, before the play was published, and, like Coleridge's Wallenstein, contains many passages not found in the printed edition. These are distinguished by brackets. On the other hand, Mr. Mellish omitted many passages which now form part of the printed drama, all of which are now added. The translation, as a whole, stands out from similar works of the time (1800) in almost as marked a degree as Coleridge's Wallenstein, and some passages exhibit powers of a high order; a few, however, especially in the earlier scenes, seemed capable of improvement, and these have been revised, but, in deference to the translator, with a sparing hand.

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

ELIZABETH, Queen of England. MARY STUART, Queen of Scots, a Prisoner in England. ROBERT DUDLEY, Earl of Leicester. GEORGE TALBOT, Earl of Shrewsbury. WILLIAM CECIL, Lord Burleigh, Lord High Treasurer. EARL OF KENT. SIR WILLIAM DAVISON, Secretary of State. SIR AMIAS PAULET, Keeper of MARY. SIR EDWARD MORTIMER, his Nephew. COUNT L'AUBESPINE, the French Ambassador. O'KELLY, Mortimer's Friend. COUNT BELLIEVRE, Envoy Extraordinary from France. SIR DRUE DRURY, another Keeper of MARY. SIR ANDREW MELVIL, her House Steward. BURGOYNE, her Physician. HANNAH KENNEDY, her Nurse. MARGARET CURL, her Attendant. Sheriff of the County. Officer of the Guard. French and English Lords. Soldiers. Servants of State belonging to ELIZABETH. Servants and Female Attendants of the Queen of Scots.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A common apartment in the Castle of Fotheringay. HANNAH KENNEDY, contending violently with PAULET, who is about to break open a closet; DRURY with an iron crown. KENNEDY. How now, sir? what fresh outrage have we here?

Back from that cabinet! PAULET. Whence came the jewel? I know 'twas from an upper chamber thrown; And you would bribe the gardener with your trinkets. A curse on woman's wiles! In spite of all My strict precaution and my active search, Still treasures here, still costly gems concealed! And doubtless there are more where this lay hid. [Advancing towards the cabinet. KENNEDY. Intruder, back! here lie my lady's secrets. PAULET. Exactly what I seek. [Drawing forth papers. KENNEDY. Mere trifling papers; The amusements only of an idle pen, To cheat the dreary tedium of a dungeon. PAULET. In idle hours the evil mind is busy. KENNEDY. Those writings are in French. PAULET. So much the worse! That tongue betokens England's enemy. KENNEDY. Sketches of letters to the Queen of England. PAULET. I'll be their bearer. Ha! what glitters here? [He touches a secret spring, and draws out jewels from a private drawer. A royal diadem enriched with stones, And studded with the fleur-de-lis of France. [He hands it to his assistant. Here, take it, Drury; lay it with the rest. [Exit DRURY. [And ye have found the means to hide from us Such costly things, and screen them, until now, From our inquiring eyes?] KENNEDY. Oh, insolent And tyrant power, to which we must submit. PAULET. She can work ill as long as she hath treasures; For all things turn to weapons in her hands. KENNEDY (supplicating). Oh, sir! be merciful; deprive us not Of the last jewel that adorns our life! 'Tis my poor lady's only joy to view This symbol of her former majesty; Your hands long since have robbed us of the rest. PAULET. 'Tis in safe custody; in proper time 'Twill be restored to you with scrupulous care. KENNEDY. Who that beholds these naked walls could say That majesty dwelt here? Where is the throne? Where the imperial canopy of state? Must she not set her tender foot, still used To softest treading, on the rugged ground? With common pewter, which the lowliest dame Would scorn, they furnish forth her homely table. PAULET. Thus did she treat her spouse at Stirling once; And pledged, the while, her paramour in gold. KENNEDY. Even the mirror's trifling aid withheld. PAULET. The contemplation of her own vain image Incites to hope, and prompts to

daring deeds. KENNEDY. Books are denied her to divert her mind. PAULET. The Bible still is left to mend her heart. KENNEDY. Even of her very lute she is deprived! PAULET. Because she tuned it to her wanton airs. KENNEDY. Is this a fate for her, the gentle born, Who in her very cradle was a queen? Who, reared in Catherine's luxurious court, Enjoyed the fulness of each earthly pleasure? Was't not enough to rob her of her power, Must ye then envy her its paltry tinsel? A noble heart in time resigns itself To great calamities with fortitude; But yet it cuts one to the soul to part At once with all life's little outward trappings! PAULET. These are the things that turn the human heart To vanity, which should collect itself In penitence; for a lewd, vicious life, Want and abasement are the only penance. KENNEDY. If youthful blood has led her into error, With her own heart and God she must account: There is no judge in England over her. PAULET. She shall have judgment where she hath transgressed. KENNEDY. Her narrow bonds restrain her from transgression. PAULET. And yet she found the means to stretch her arm Into the world, from out these narrow bonds, And, with the torch of civil war, inflame This realm against our queen (whom God preserve). And arm assassin bands. Did she not rouse From out these walls the malefactor Parry, And Babington, to the detested crime Of regicide? And did this iron grate Prevent her from decoying to her toils The virtuous heart of Norfolk? Saw we not The first, best head in all this island fall A sacrifice for her upon the block? [The noble house of Howard fell with him.] And did this sad example terrify These mad adventurers, whose rival zeal Plunges for her into this deep abyss? The bloody scaffold bends beneath the weight Of her new daily victims; and we ne'er Shall see an end till she herself, of all The guiltiest, be offered up upon it. Oh! curses on the day when England took This Helen to its hospitable arms. KENNEDY. Did England then receive her hospitably? Oh, hapless queen! who, since that fatal day When first she set her foot within this realm, And, as a suppliant—a fugitive— Came to implore protection from her sister, Has been condemned, despite the law of nations, And royal privilege, to weep away The

fairest years of youth in prison walls. And now, when she hath suffered everything Which in imprisonment is hard and bitter, Is like a felon summoned to the bar, Foully accused, and though herself a queen, Constrained to plead for honor and for life. PAULET. She came amongst us as a murderess, Chased by her very subjects from a throne Which she had oft by vilest deeds disgraced. Sworn against England's welfare came she hither, To call the times of bloody Mary back, Betray our church to Romish tyranny, And sell our dear-bought liberties to France. Say, why disdained she to subscribe the treaty Of Edinborough—to resign her claim To England's crown—and with one single word, Traced by her pen, throw wide her prison gates? No:—she had rather live in vile confinement, And see herself ill-treated, than renounce The empty honors of her barren title. Why acts she thus? Because she trusts to wiles, And treacherous arts of base conspiracy; And, hourly plotting schemes of mischief, hopes To conquer, from her prison, all this isle. KENNEDY. You mock us, sir, and edge your cruelty With words of bitter scorn:—that she should form Such projects; she, who's here immured alive, To whom no sound of comfort, not a voice Of friendship comes from her beloved home; Who hath so long no human face beheld, Save her stern gaoler's unrelenting brows; Till now, of late, in your uncourteous cousin She sees a second keeper, and beholds Fresh bolts and bars against her multiplied. PAULET. No iron-grate is proof against her wiles. How do I know these bars are not filed through? How that this floor, these walls, that seem so strong Without, may not be hollow from within, And let in felon treachery when I sleep? Accursed office, that's intrusted to me, To guard this cunning mother of all ill! Fear scares me from my sleep; and in the night I, like a troubled spirit, roam and try The strength of every bolt, and put to proof Each guard's fidelity:—I see, with fear, The dawning of each morn, which may confirm My apprehensions:—yet, thank God, there's hope That all my fears will soon be at an end; For rather would I at the gates of hell Stand sentinel, and guard the devilish host Of damned souls, than this deceitful queen. KENNEDY. Here comes the queen.

PAULET. Christ's image in her hand. Pride, and all worldly lusts within her heart.

SCENE II.

The same. Enter MARY, veiled, a crucifix in her hand. KENNEDY (hastening toward her). O gracious queen! they tread us under foot; No end of tyranny and base oppression; Each coming day heaps fresh indignities, New sufferings on thy royal head. MARY. Be calm— Say, what has happened? KENNEDY. See! thy cabinet Is forced—thy papers—and thy only treasure, Which with such pains we had secured, the last Poor remnant of thy bridal ornaments From France, is in his hands—naught now remains Of royal state—thou art indeed bereft! MARY. Compose yourself, my Hannah! and believe me, 'Tis not these baubles that can make a queen— Basely indeed they may behave to us, But they cannot debase us. I have learned To use myself to many a change in England; I can support this too. Sir, you have taken By force what I this very day designed To have delivered to you. There's a letter Amongst these papers for my royal sister Of England. Pledge me, sir, your word of honor, To give it to her majesty's own hands, And not to the deceitful care of Burleigh. PAULET. I shall consider what is best to do. MARY. Sir, you shall know its import. In this letter I beg a favor, a great favor of her,— That she herself will give me audience,—she Whom I have never seen. I have been summoned Before a court of men, whom I can ne'er Acknowledge as my peers—of men to whom My heart denies its confidence. The queen Is of my family, my rank, my sex; To her alone—a sister, queen, and woman— Can I unfold my heart. PAULET. Too oft, my lady, Have you intrusted both your fate and honor To men less worthy your esteem than these. MARY. I, in the letter, beg another favor, And surely naught but inhumanity Can here reject my prayer. These many years Have I, in prison, missed the church's comfort, The blessings of the sacraments—and she Who robs me of my freedom and my crown, Who seeks my very life, can never wish To shut the gates of

heaven upon my soul. PAULET. Whene'er you wish, the dean shall wait upon you. MARY (interrupting him sharply). Talk to me not of deans. I ask the aid Of one of my own church—a Catholic priest. PAULET. [That is against the published laws of England. MARY. The laws of England are no rule for me. I am not England's subject; I have ne'er Consented to its laws, and will not bow Before their cruel and despotic sway. If 'tis your will, to the unheard-of rigor Which I have borne, to add this new oppression, I must submit to what your power ordains; Yet will I raise my voice in loud complaints.] I also wish a public notary, And secretaries, to prepare my will— My sorrows and my prison's wretchedness Prey on my life—my days, I fear, are numbered— I feel that I am near the gates of death. PAULET. These serious contemplations well become you. MARY. And know I then that some too ready hand May not abridge this tedious work of sorrow? I would indite my will and make disposal Of what belongs to me. PAULET. This liberty May be allowed to you, for England's queen Will not enrich herself by plundering you. MARY. I have been parted from my faithful women, And from my servants; tell me, where are they? What is their fate? I can indeed dispense At present with their service, but my heart Will feel rejoiced to know these faithful ones Are not exposed to suffering and to want! PAULET. Your servants have been cared for; [and again You shall behold whate'er is taken from you And all shall be restored in proper season.] [Going. MARY. And will you leave my presence thus again, And not relieve my fearful, anxious heart From the fell torments of uncertainty? Thanks to the vigilance of your hateful spies, I am divided from the world; no voice Can reach me through these prison-walls; my fate Lies in the hands of those who wish my ruin. A month of dread suspense is passed already Since when the forty high commissioners Surprised me in this castle, and erected, With most unseemly haste, their dread tribunal; They forced me, stunned, amazed, and unprepared, Without an advocate, from memory, Before their unexampled court, to answer Their weighty charges, artfully arranged. They came like ghosts,—like ghosts they disappeared, And since that day all mouths

are closed to me. In vain I seek to construe from your looks Which hath prevailed—my cause's innocence And my friends' zeal—or my foes' cursed counsel. Oh, break this silence! let me know the worst; What have I still to fear, and what to hope. PAULET. Close your accounts with heaven. MARY. From heaven I hope For mercy, sir; and from my earthly judges I hope, and still expect, the strictest justice. PAULET. Justice, depend upon it, will be done you. MARY. Is the suit ended, sir? PAULET. I cannot tell. MARY. Am I condemned? PAULET. I cannot answer, lady. MARY. [Sir, a good work fears not the light of day. PAULET. The day will shine upon it, doubt it not.] MARY. Despatch is here the fashion. Is it meant The murderer shall surprise me, like the judges? PAULET. Still entertain that thought and he will find you Better prepared to meet your fate than they did. MARY (after a pause). Sir, nothing can surprise me which a court Inspired by Burleigh's hate and Hatton's zeal, Howe'er unjust, may venture to pronounce: But I have yet to learn how far the queen Will dare in execution of the sentence. PAULET. The sovereigns of England have no fear But for their conscience and their parliament. What justice hath decreed her fearless hand Will execute before the assembled world.

SCENE III.

The same. MORTIMER enters, and without paying attention to the QUEEN, addresses PAULET. MORTIMER. Uncle, you're sought for. [He retires in the same manner. The QUEEN remarks it, and turns towards PAULET, who is about to follow him. MARY. Sir, one favor more If you have aught to say to me—from you I can bear much—I reverence your gray hairs; But cannot bear that young man's insolence; Spare me in future his unmannered rudeness. PAULET. I prize him most for that which makes you hate him He is not, truly, one of those poor fools Who melt before a woman's treacherous tears. He has seen much—has been to Rheims and Paris, And brings us back his true old English heart. Lady, your cunning arts are

lost on him. [Exit.

SCENE IV.

MARY, KENNEDY. KENNEDY. And dare the ruffian venture to your face Such language! Oh, 'tis hard—'tis past endurance. MARY (lost in reflection). In the fair moments of our former splendor We lent to flatterers a too willing ear;— It is but just, good Hannah, we should now Be forced to hear the bitter voice of censure. KENNEDY. So downcast, so depressed, my dearest lady! You, who before so gay, so full of hope, Were used to comfort me in my distress; More gracious were the task to check your mirth Than chide your heavy sadness. MARY. Well I know him— It is the bleeding Darnley's royal shade, Rising in anger from his darksome grave And never will he make his peace with me Until the measures of my woes be full. KENNEDY. What thoughts are these— MARY. Thou may'st forget it, Hannah; But I've a faithful memory—'tis this day Another wretched anniversary Of that regretted, that unhappy deed— Which I must celebrate with fast and penance. KENNEDY. Dismiss at length in peace this evil spirit. The penitence of many a heavy year, Of many a suffering, has atoned the deed; The church, which holds the key of absolution, Pardons the crime, and heaven itself's appeased. MARY. This long-atoned crime arises fresh And bleeding from its lightly-covered grave; My husband's restless spirit seeks revenge; No sacred bell can exorcise, no host In priestly hands dismiss it to his tomb. KENNEDY. You did not murder him; 'twas done by others. MARY. But it was known to me; I suffered it, And lured him with my smiles to death's embrace. KENNEDY. Your youth extenuates your guilt. You were Of tender years. MARY. So tender, yet I drew This heavy guilt upon my youthful head. KENNEDY. You were provoked by direst injuries, And by the rude presumption of the man, Whom out of darkness, like the hand of heaven, Your love drew forth, and raised above all others. Whom through your bridal chamber you

conducted Up to your throne, and with your lovely self, And your hereditary crown, distinguished [Your work was his existence, and your grace Bedewed him like the gentle rains of heaven.] Could he forget that his so splendid lot Was the creation of your generous love? Yet did he, worthless as he was, forget it. With base suspicions, and with brutal manners, He wearied your affections, and became An object to you of deserved disgust: The illusion, which till now had overcast Your judgment, vanished; angrily you fled His foul embrace, and gave him up to scorn. And did he seek again to win your love? Your favor? Did he e'er implore your pardon? Or fall in deep repentance at your feet? No; the base wretch defied you; he, who was Your bounty's creature, wished to play your king, [And strove, through fear, to force your inclination.] Before your eyes he had your favorite singer, Poor Rizzio, murdered; you did but avenge With blood the bloody deed—— MARY. And bloodily, I fear, too soon 'twill be avenged on me: You seek to comfort me, and you condemn me. KENNEDY. You were, when you consented to this deed, No more yourself; belonged not to yourself; The madness of a frantic love possessed you, And bound you to a terrible seducer, The wretched Bothwell. That despotic man Ruled you with shameful, overbearing will, And with his philters and his hellish arts Inflamed your passions. MARY. All the arts he used Were man's superior strength and woman's weakness. KENNEDY. No, no, I say. The most pernicious spirits Of hell he must have summoned to his aid, To cast this mist before your waking senses. Your ear no more was open to the voice Of friendly warning, and your eyes were shut To decency; soft female bashfulness Deserted you; those cheeks, which were before The seat of virtuous, blushing modesty, Glowed with the flames of unrestrained desire. You cast away the veil of secrecy, And the flagitious daring of the man O'ercame your natural coyness: you exposed Your shame, unblushingly, to public gaze: You let the murderer, whom the people followed With curses, through the streets of Edinburgh, Before you bear the royal sword of Scotland In triumph. You begirt your parliament With armed bands; and by this shameless farce, There, in the

very temple of great justice, You forced the judges of the land to clear The murderer of his guilt. You went still further— O God! MARY. Conclude—nay, pause not—say for this I gave my hand in marriage at the altar. KENNEDY. O let an everlasting silence veil That dreadful deed: the heart revolts at it. A crime to stain the darkest criminal! Yet you are no such lost one, that I know. I nursed your youth myself—your heart is framed For tender softness: 'tis alive to shame, And all your fault is thoughtless levity. Yes, I repeat it, there are evil spirits, Who sudden fix in man's unguarded breast Their fatal residence, and there delight To act their dev'lish deeds; then hurry back Unto their native hell, and leave behind Remorse and horror in the poisoned bosom. Since this misdeed, which blackens thus your life, You have done nothing ill; your conduct has Been pure; myself can witness your amendment. Take courage, then; with your own heart make peace. Whatever cause you have for penitence, You are not guilty here. Nor England's queen, Nor England's parliament can be your judge. Here might oppresses you: you may present Yourself before this self-created court With all the fortitude of innocence. MARY. I hear a step. KENNEDY. It is the nephew—In.

SCENE V.

The same. Enter MORTIMER, approaching cautiously. MORTIMER (to KENNEDY). Step to the door, and keep a careful watch, I have important business with the queen. MARY (with dignity). I charge thee, Hannah, go not hence—remain. MORTIMER. Fear not, my gracious lady—learn to know me. [He gives her a card. MARY (She examines it, and starts back astonished). Heavens! What is this? MORTIMER (to KENNEDY). Retire, good Kennedy; See that my uncle comes not unawares. MARY (to KENNEDY, who hesitates, and looks at the QUEEN inquiringly). Go in; do as he bids you. [KENNEDY retires with signs of wonder.

SCENE VI.

MARY, MORTIMER. MARY. From my uncle In France—the worthy Cardinal of Lorrain? [She reads. "Confide in Mortimer, who brings you this; You have no truer, firmer friend in England." [Looking at him with astonishment. Can I believe it? Is there no delusion To cheat my senses? Do I find a friend So near, when I conceived myself abandoned By the whole world? And find that friend in you, The nephew of my gaoler, whom I thought My most inveterate enemy? MORTIMER (kneeling). Oh, pardon, My gracious liege, for the detested mask, Which it has cost me pain enough to wear; Yet through such means alone have I the power To see you, and to bring you help and rescue. MARY. Arise, sir; you astonish me; I cannot So suddenly emerge from the abyss Of wretchedness to hope: let me conceive This happiness, that I may credit it. MORTIMER. Our time is brief: each moment I expect My uncle, whom a hated man attends; Hear, then, before his terrible commission Surprises you, how heaven prepares your rescue. MARY. You come in token of its wondrous power. MORTIMER. Allow me of myself to speak. MARY. Say on. MORTIMER. I scarce, my liege, had numbered twenty years, Trained in the path of strictest discipline And nursed in deadliest hate to papacy, When led by irresistible desire For foreign travel, I resolved to leave My country and its puritanic faith Far, far behind me: soon with rapid speed I flew through France, and bent my eager course On to the plains of far-famed Italy. 'Twas then the time of the great jubilee: And crowds of palmers filled the public roads; Each image was adorned with garlands; 'twas As if all human-kind were wandering forth In pilgrimage towards the heavenly kingdom. The tide of the believing multitude Bore me too onward, with resistless force, Into the streets of Rome. What was my wonder, As the magnificence of stately columns Rushed on my sight! the vast triumphal arches, The Colosseum's grandeur, with amazement Struck my admiring senses; the sublime Creative spirit held my soul a prisoner In the fair world of wonders it had framed. I ne'er had felt

the power of art till now. The church that reared me hates the charms of sense; It tolerates no image, it adores But the unseen, the incorporeal word. What were my feelings, then, as I approached The threshold of the churches, and within, Heard heavenly music floating in the air: While from the walls and high-wrought roofs there streamed Crowds of celestial forms in endless train— When the Most High, Most Glorious pervaded My captivated sense in real presence! And when I saw the great and godlike visions, The Salutation, the Nativity, The Holy Mother, and the Trinity's Descent, the luminous transfiguration And last the holy pontiff, clad in all The glory of his office, bless the people! Oh! what is all the pomp of gold and jewels With which the kings of earth adorn themselves! He is alone surrounded by the Godhead; His mansion is in truth an heavenly kingdom, For not of earthly moulding are these forms! MARY. O spare me, sir! No further. Spread no more Life's verdant carpet out before my eyes, Remember I am wretched, and a prisoner. MORTIMER. I was a prisoner, too, my queen; but swift My prison-gates flew open, when at once My spirit felt its liberty, and hailed The smiling dawn of life. I learned to burst Each narrow prejudice of education, To crown my brow with never-fading wreaths, And mix my joy with the rejoicing crowd. Full many noble Scots, who saw my zeal, Encouraged me, and with the gallant French They kindly led me to your princely uncle, The Cardinal of Guise. Oh, what a man! How firm, how clear, how manly, and how great! Born to control the human mind at will! The very model of a royal priest; A ruler of the church without an equal! MARY. You've seen him then,—the much loved, honored man, Who was the guardian of my tender years! Oh, speak of him! Does he remember me? Does fortune favor him? And prospers still His life? And does he still majestic stand, A very rock and pillar of the church? MORTIMER. The holy man descended from his height, And deigned to teach me the important creed Of the true church, and dissipate my doubts. He showed me how the glimmering light of reason Serves but to lead us to eternal error: That what the heart is called on to believe The eye must see: that he who rules the church Must needs be

visible; and that the spirit Of truth inspired the councils of the fathers. How vanished then the fond imaginings And weak conceptions of my childish soul Before his conquering judgment, and the soft Persuasion of his tongue! So I returned Back to the bosom of the holy church, And at his feet abjured my heresies. MARY. Then of those happy thousands you are one, Whom he, with his celestial eloquence, Like the immortal preacher of the mount, Has turned and led to everlasting joy! MORTIMER. The duties of his office called him soon To France, and I was sent by him to Rheims, Where, by the Jesuits' anxious labor, priests Are trained to preach our holy faith in England. There, 'mongst the Scots, I found the noble Morgan, And your true Lesley, Ross's learned bishop, Who pass in France their joyless days of exile. I joined with heartfelt zeal these worthy men, And fortified my faith. As I one day Roamed through the bishop's dwelling, I was struck With a fair female portrait; it was full Of touching wond'rous charms; with magic might It moved my inmost soul, and there I stood Speechless, and overmastered by my feelings. "Well," cried the bishop, "may you linger thus In deep emotion near this lovely face! For the most beautiful of womankind, Is also matchless in calamity. She is a prisoner for our holy faith, And in your native land, alas! she suffers." [MARY is in great agitation. He pauses. MARY. Excellent man! All is not lost, indeed, While such a friend remains in my misfortunes! MORTIMER. Then he began, with moving eloquence, To paint the sufferings of your martyrdom; He showed me then your lofty pedigree, And your descent from Tudor's royal house. He proved to me that you alone have right To reign in England, not this upstart queen, The base-born fruit of an adult'rous bed, Whom Henry's self rejected as a bastard. [He from my eyes removed delusion's mist, And taught me to lament you as a victim, To honor you as my true queen, whom I, Deceived, like thousands of my noble fellows, Had ever hated as my country's foe.] I would not trust his evidence alone; I questioned learned doctors; I consulted The most authentic books of heraldry; And every man of knowledge whom I asked Confirmed to me your claim's validity. And now I know that your undoubted right

To England's throne has been your only wrong, This realm is justly yours by heritage, In which you innocently pine as prisoner. MARY. Oh, this unhappy right!—'tis this alone Which is the source of all my sufferings. MORTIMER. Just at this time the tidings reached my ears Of your removal from old Talbot's charge, And your committal to my uncle's care. It seemed to me that this disposal marked The wond'rous, outstretched hand of favoring heaven; It seemed to be a loud decree of fate, That it had chosen me to rescue you. My friends concur with me; the cardinal Bestows on me his counsel and his blessing, And tutors me in the hard task of feigning. The plan in haste digested, I commenced My journey homewards, and ten days ago On England's shores I landed. Oh, my queen. [He pauses. I saw then, not your picture, but yourself— Oh, what a treasure do these walls enclose! No prison this, but the abode of gods, More splendid far than England's royal court. Happy, thrice happy he, whose envied lot Permits to breathe the selfsame air with you! It is a prudent policy in her To bury you so deep! All England's youth Would rise at once in general mutiny, And not a sword lie quiet in its sheath: Rebellion would uprear its giant head, Through all this peaceful isle, if Britons once Beheld their captive queen. MARY. 'Twere well with her, If every Briton saw her with your eyes! MORTIMER. Were each, like me, a witness of your wrongs, Your meekness, and the noble fortitude With which you suffer these indignities— Would you not then emerge from all these trials Like a true queen? Your prison's infamy, Hath it despoiled your beauty of its charms? You are deprived of all that graces life, Yet round you life and light eternal beam. Ne'er on this threshold can I set my foot, That my poor heart with anguish is not torn, Nor ravished with delight at gazing on you. Yet fearfully the fatal time draws near, And danger hourly growing presses on. I can delay no longer—can no more Conceal the dreadful news. MARY. My sentence then! It is pronounced? Speak freely—I can bear it. MORTIMER. It is pronounced! The two-and-forty judges Have given the verdict, "guilty"; and the Houses Of Lords and Commons, with the citizens Of London, eagerly and urgently Demand the execution

of the sentence:— The queen alone still craftily delays, That she may be constrained to yield, but not From feelings of humanity or mercy. MARY (collected). Sir, I am not surprised, nor terrified. I have been long prepared for such a message. Too well I know my judges. After all Their cruel treatment I can well conceive They dare not now restore my liberty. I know their aim: they mean to keep me here In everlasting bondage, and to bury, In the sepulchral darkness of my prison, My vengeance with me, and my rightful claims. MORTIMER. Oh, no, my gracious queen;—they stop not there: Oppression will not be content to do Its work by halves:—as long as e'en you live, Distrust and fear will haunt the English queen. No dungeon can inter you deep enough; Your death alone can make her throne secure. MARY. Will she then dare, regardless of the shame, Lay my crowned head upon the fatal block? MORTIMER. She will most surely dare it, doubt it not. MARY. And can she thus roll in the very dust Her own, and every monarch's majesty? MORTIMER. She thinks on nothing now but present danger, Nor looks to that which is so far removed. MARY. And fears she not the dread revenge of France? MORTIMER. With France she makes an everlasting peace; And gives to Anjou's duke her throne and hand. MARY. Will not the King of Spain rise up in arms? MORTIMER. She fears not a collected world in arms? If with her people she remains at peace. MARY. Were this a spectacle for British eyes? MORTIMER. This land, my queen, has, in these latter days, Seen many a royal woman from the throne Descend and mount the scaffold:—her own mother And Catherine Howard trod this fatal path; And was not Lady Grey a crowned head? MARY (after a pause). No, Mortimer, vain fears have blinded you; 'Tis but the honest care of your true heart, Which conjures up these empty apprehensions. It is not, sir, the scaffold that I fear: There are so many still and secret means By which her majesty of England may Set all my claims to rest. Oh, trust me, ere An executioner is found for me, Assassins will be hired to do their work. 'Tis that which makes me tremble, Mortimer: I never lift the goblet to my lips Without an inward shuddering, lest the draught May have been mingled by my

sister's love. MORTIMER. No:—neither open or disguised murder Shall e'er prevail against you:—fear no more; All is prepared;—twelve nobles of the land Are my confederates, and have pledged to-day, Upon the sacrament, their faith to free you, With dauntless arm, from this captivity. Count Aubespine, the French ambassador, Knows of our plot, and offers his assistance: 'Tis in his palace that we hold our meetings. NARY. You make me tremble, sir, but not for joy! An evil boding penetrates my heart. Know you, then, what you risk? Are you not scared By Babington and Tichburn's bloody heads, Set up as warnings upon London's bridge? Nor by the ruin of those many victims Who have, in such attempts, found certain death, And only made my chains the heavier? Fly hence, deluded, most unhappy youth! Fly, if there yet be time for you, before That crafty spy, Lord Burleigh, track your schemes, And mix his traitors in your secret plots. Fly hence:—as yet, success hath never smiled On Mary Stuart's champions.

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MORTIMER. I am not scared By Babington and Tichburn's bloody heads Set up as warnings upon London's bridge; Nor by the ruin of those many victims Who have, in such attempts, found certain death: They also found therein immortal honor, And death, in rescuing you, is dearest bliss. MARY. It is in vain: nor force nor guile can save me:— My enemies are watchful, and the power Is in their hands. It is not Paulet only And his dependent host; all England guards My prison gates: Elizabeth's free will Alone can open them. MORTIMER. Expect not that. MARY. One man alone on earth can open them. MORTIMER. Oh, let me know his name! MARY. Lord Leicester. MORTIMER. He! [Starts back in wonder. The Earl of Leicester! Your most bloody foe, The favorite of Elizabeth! through him—— MARY. If I am to be saved at all, 'twill be Through him, and him alone. Go to him, sir; Freely confide in him: and, as a proof You come from me, present this paper to him. [She takes a paper from her bosom; MORTIMER draws back, and hesitates to take it. It doth contain my portrait:—take it, sir; I've borne it long about me; but your uncle's

Close watchfulness has cut me off from all Communication with him;—you were sent By my good angel. [He takes it. MORTIMER. Oh, my queen! Explain This mystery. MARY. Lord Leicester will resolve it. Confide in him, and he'll confide in you. Who comes? KENNEDY (entering hastily). 'Tis Paulet; and he brings with him A nobleman from court. MORTIMER. It is Lord Burleigh. Collect yourself, my queen, and strive to hear The news he brings with equanimity. [He retires through a side door, and KENNEDY follows him.

SCENE VII.

Enter LORD BURLEIGH, and PAULET. PAULET (to MARY). You wished to-day assurance of your fate; My Lord of Burleigh brings it to you now; Hear it with resignation, as beseems you. MARY. I hope with dignity, as it becomes My innocence, and my exalted station. BURLEIGH. I come deputed from the court of justice. MARY. Lord Burleigh lends that court his willing tongue, Which was already guided by his spirit. PAULET. You speak as if no stranger to the sentence. MARY. Lord Burleigh brings it; therefore do I know it. PAULET. [It would become you better, Lady Stuart, To listen less to hatred. MARY. I but name My enemy: I said not that I hate him.] But to the matter, sir. BURLEIGH. You have acknowledged The jurisdiction of the two-and-forty. MARY. My lord, excuse me, if I am obliged So soon to interrupt you. I acknowledged, Say you, the competence of the commission? I never have acknowledged it, my lord; How could I so? I could not give away My own prerogative, the intrusted rights Of my own people, the inheritance Of my own son, and every monarch's honor [The very laws of England say I could not.] It is enacted by the English laws That every one who stands arraigned of crime Shall plead before a jury of his equals: Who is my equal in this high commission? Kings only are my peers. BURLEIGH. But yet you heard The points of accusation, answered them Before the court—— MARY. 'Tis true, I was

deceived By Hatton's crafty counsel:—he advised me, For my own honor, and in confidence In my good cause, and my most strong defence, To listen to the points of accusation, And prove their falsehoods. This, my lord, I did From personal respect for the lords' names, Not their usurped charge, which I disclaim. BURLEIGH. Acknowledge you the court, or not, that is Only a point of mere formality, Which cannot here arrest the course of justice. You breathe the air of England; you enjoy The law's protection, and its benefits; You therefore are its subject. MARY. Sir, I breathe The air within an English prison walls: Is that to live in England; to enjoy Protection from its laws? I scarcely know And never have I pledged my faith to keep them. I am no member of this realm; I am An independent, and a foreign queen. BURLEIGH. And do you think that the mere name of queen Can serve you as a charter to foment In other countries, with impunity, This bloody discord? Where would be the state's Security, if the stern sword of justice Could not as freely smite the guilty brow Of the imperial stranger as the beggar's? MARY. I do not wish to be exempt from judgment, It is the judges only I disclaim. BURLEIGH. The judges? How now, madam? Are they then Base wretches, snatched at hazard from the crowd? Vile wranglers that make sale of truth and justice; Oppression's willing hirelings, and its tools? Are they not all the foremost of this land, Too independent to be else than honest, And too exalted not to soar above The fear of kings, or base servility? Are they not those who rule a generous people In liberty and justice; men, whose names I need but mention to dispel each doubt, Each mean suspicion which is raised against them? Stands not the reverend primate at their head, The pious shepherd of his faithful people, The learned Talbot, keeper of the seals, And Howard, who commands our conquering fleets? Say, then, could England's sovereign do more Than, out of all the monarchy, elect The very noblest, and appoint them judges In this great suit? And were it probable That party hatred could corrupt one heart; Can forty chosen men unite to speak A sentence just as passion gives command? MARY (after a short pause). I am struck dumb by that tongue's

eloquence, Which ever was so ominous to me. And how shall I, a weak, untutored woman, Cope with so subtle, learned an orator? Yes truly; were these lords as you describe them, I must be mute; my cause were lost indeed, Beyond all hope, if they pronounce me guilty. But, sir, these names, which you are pleased to praise, These very men, whose weight you think will crush me, I see performing in the history Of these dominions very different parts: I see this high nobility of England, This grave majestic senate of the realm, Like to an eastern monarch's vilest slaves, Flatter my uncle Henry's sultan fancies: I see this noble, reverend House of Lords, Venal alike with the corrupted Commons, Make statutes and annul them, ratify A marriage and dissolve it, as the voice Of power commands: to-day it disinherits, And brands the royal daughters of the realm With the vile name of bastards, and to-morrow Crowns them as queens, and leads them to the throne. I see them in four reigns, with pliant conscience, Four times abjure their faith; renounce the pope With Henry, yet retain the old belief; Reform themselves with Edward; hear the mass Again with Mary; with Elizabeth, Who governs now, reform themselves again. BURLEIGH. You say you are not versed in England's laws, You seem well read, methinks, in her disasters. MARY. And these men are my judges? [As LORD BURLEIGH seems to wish to speak. My lord treasurer, Towards you I will be just, be you but just To me. 'Tis said that you consult with zeal The good of England, and of England's queen; Are honest, watchful, indefatigable; I will believe it. Not your private ends, Your sovereign and your country's weal alone, Inspire your counsels and direct your deeds. Therefore, my noble lord, you should the more Distrust your heart; should see that you mistake not The welfare of the government for justice. I do not doubt, besides yourself, there are Among my judges many upright men: But they are Protestants, are eager all For England's quiet, and they sit in judgment On me, the Queen of Scotland, and the papist. It is an ancient saying, that the Scots And England to each other are unjust; And hence the rightful custom that a Scot Against an Englishman, or Englishman Against a Scot, cannot be heard in judgment. Necessity prescribed this cautious law;

Deep policy oft lies in ancient customs: My lord, we must respect them. Nature cast Into the ocean these two fiery nations Upon this plank, and she divided it Unequally, and bade them fight for it. The narrow bed of Tweed alone divides These daring spirits; often hath the blood Of the contending parties dyed its waves. Threatening, and sword in hand, these thousand years, From both its banks they watch their rival's motions, Most vigilant and true confederates, With every enemy of the neighbor state. No foe oppresses England, but the Scot Becomes his firm ally; no civil war Inflames the towns of Scotland, but the English Add fuel to the fire: this raging hate Will never be extinguished till, at last, One parliament in concord shall unite them, One common sceptre rule throughout the isle. BURLEIGH. And from a Stuart, then, should England hope This happiness? MARY. Oh! why should I deny it? Yes, I confess, I cherished the fond hope; I thought myself the happy instrument To join in freedom, 'neath the olive's shade, Two generous realms in lasting happiness! I little thought I should become the victim Of their old hate, their long-lived jealousy; And the sad flames of that unhappy strife, I hoped at last to smother, and forever: And, as my ancestor, great Richmond, joined The rival roses after bloody contest, To join in peace the Scotch and English crowns. BURLEIGH. An evil way you took to this good end, To set the realm on fire, and through the flames Of civil war to strive to mount the throne. MARY. I wished not that:—I wished it not, by Heaven! When did I strive at that? Where are your proofs? BURLEIGH. I came not hither to dispute; your cause Is no more subject to a war of words. The great majority of forty voices Hath found that you have contravened the law Last year enacted, and have now incurred Its penalty. [Producing the verdict. MARY. Upon this statute, then, My lord, is built the verdict of my judges? BURLEIGH (reading). Last year it was enacted, "If a plot Henceforth should rise in England, in the name Or for the benefit of any claimant To England's crown, that justice should be done On such pretender, and the guilty party Be prosecuted unto death." Now, since It has been proved—— MARY. Lord Burleigh, I can well Imagine that a law expressly aimed At me, and

framed to compass my destruction May to my prejudice be used. Oh! Woe To the unhappy victim, when the tongue That frames the law shall execute the sentence. Can you deny it, sir, that this same statute Was made for my destruction, and naught else? BURLEIGH. It should have acted as a warning to you: By your imprudence it became a snare. You saw the precipice which yawned before you; Yet, truly warned, you plunged into the deep. With Babington, the traitor, and his bands Of murderous companions, were you leagued. You knew of all, and from your prison led Their treasonous plottings with a deep-laid plan. MARY. When did I that, my lord? Let them produce The documents. BURLEIGH. You have already seen them They were before the court, presented to you. MARY. Mere copies written by another hand; Show me the proof that they were dictated By me, that they proceeded from my lips, And in those very terms in which you read them. BURLEIGH. Before his execution, Babington Confessed they were the same which he received. MARY. Why was he in his lifetime not produced Before my face? Why was he then despatched So quickly that he could not be confronted With her whom he accused? BURLEIGH. Besides, my lady, Your secretaries, Curl and Nau, declare On oath, they are the very selfsame letters Which from your lips they faithfully transcribed. MARY. And on my menials' testimony, then, I am condemned; upon the word of those Who have betrayed me, me, their rightful queen! Who in that very moment, when they came As witnesses against me, broke their faith! BURLEIGH. You said yourself, you held your countryman To be an upright, conscientious man. MARY. I thought him such; but 'tis the hour of danger Alone, which tries the virtue of a man. [He ever was an honest man, but weak In understanding; and his subtle comrade, Whose faith, observe, I never answered for, Might easily seduce him to write down More than he should;] the rack may have compelled him To say and to confess more than he knew. He hoped to save himself by this false witness, And thought it could not injure me—a queen. BURLEIGH. The oath he swore was free and unconstrained. MARY. But not before my face! How now, my lord? The witnesses you name are

still alive; Let them appear against me face to face, And there repeat what they have testified. Why am I then denied that privilege, That right which e'en the murderer enjoys? I know from Talbot's mouth, my former keeper, That in this reign a statute has been passed Which orders that the plaintiff be confronted With the defendant; is it so, good Paulet? I e'er have known you as an honest man; Now prove it to me; tell me, on your conscience, If such a law exist or not in England? PAULET. Madam, there does: that is the law in England. I must declare the truth. MARY. Well, then, my lord, If I am treated by the law of England So hardly, when that law oppresses me, Say, why avoid this selfsame country's law, When 'tis for my advantage? Answer me; Why was not Babington confronted with me? Why not my servants, who are both alive? BURLEIGH. Be not so hasty, lady; 'tis not only Your plot with Babington—— MARY. 'Tis that alone Which arms the law against me; that alone From which I'm called upon to clear myself. Stick to the point, my lord; evade it not. BURLEIGH. It has been proved that you have corresponded With the ambassador of Spain, Mendoza—— MARY. Stick to the point, my lord. BURLEIGH. That you have formed Conspiracies to overturn the fixed Religion of the realm; that you have called Into this kingdom foreign powers, and roused All kings in Europe to a war with England. MARY. And were it so, my lord—though I deny it— But e'en suppose it were so: I am kept Imprisoned here against all laws of nations. I came not into England sword in hand; I came a suppliant; and at the hands Of my imperial kinswoman I claimed The sacred rights of hospitality, When power seized upon me, and prepared To rivet fetters where I hoped protection. Say, is my conscience bound, then, to this realm? What are the duties that I owe to England? I should but exercise a sacred right, Derived from sad necessity, if I Warred with these bonds, encountered might with might, Roused and incited every state in Europe For my protection to unite in arms. Whatever in a rightful war is just And loyal, 'tis my right to exercise: Murder alone, the secret, bloody deed, My conscience and my pride alike forbid. Murder would stain me, would dishonor me: Dishonor me, my lord, but

not condemn me, Nor subject me to England's courts of law: For 'tis not justice, but mere violence, Which is the question 'tween myself and England. BURLEIGH (significantly). Talk not, my lady, of the dreadful right Of power: 'tis seldom on the prisoner's side. MARY. I am the weak, she is the mighty one: 'Tis well, my lord; let her, then, use her power; Let her destroy me; let me bleed, that she May live secure; but let her, then, confess That she hath exercised her power alone, And not contaminate the name of justice. Let her not borrow from the laws the sword To rid her of her hated enemy; Let her not clothe in this religious garb The bloody daring of licentious might; Let not these juggling tricks deceive the world. [Returning the sentence. Though she may murder me, she cannot judge me: Let her no longer strive to join the fruits Of vice with virtue's fair and angel show; But let her dare to seem the thing she is. [Exit.

SCENE VIII.

BURLEIGH, PAULET. BURLEIGH. She scorns us, she defies us! will defy us, Even at the scaffold's foot. This haughty heart Is not to be subdued. Say, did the sentence Surprise her? Did you see her shed one tear, Or even change her color? She disdains To make appeal to our compassion. Well She knows the wavering mind of England's queen. Our apprehensions make her bold. PAULET. My lord, Take the pretext away which buoys it up, And you shall see this proud defiance fail That very moment. I must say, my lord, Irregularities have been allowed In these proceedings; Babington and Ballard Should have been brought, with her two secretaries, Before her, face to face. BURLEIGH. No, Paulet, no. That was not to be risked; her influence Upon the human heart is too supreme; Too strong the female empire of her tears. Her secretary, Curl, if brought before her, And called upon to speak the weighty word On which her life depends, would straight shrink back And fearfully revoke his own confession. PAULET. Then England's enemies will fill the world

With evil rumors; and the formal pomp Of these proceedings to the minds of all Will only signalize an act of outrage. BURLEIGH. That is the greatest torment of our queen, [That she can never 'scape the blame. Oh God!] Had but this lovely mischief died before She set her faithless foot on English ground. PAULET. Amen, say I! BURLEIGH. Had sickness but consumed her! PAULET. England had been secured from such misfortune. BURLEIGH. And yet, if she had died in nature's course, The world would still have called us murderers. PAULET. 'Tis true, the world will think, despite of us, Whate'er it list. BURLEIGH. Yet could it not be proved? And it would make less noise.

PAULET. Why, let it make What noise it may. It is not clamorous blame, 'Tis righteous censure only which can wound. BURLEIGH. We know that holy justice cannot 'scape The voice of censure; and the public cry Is ever on the side of the unhappy: Envy pursues the laurelled conqueror; The sword of justice, which adorns the man, Is hateful in a woman's hand; the world Will give no credit to a woman's justice If woman be the victim. Vain that we, The judges, spoke what conscience dictated; She has the royal privilege of mercy; She must exert it: 'twere not to be borne, Should she let justice take its full career. PAULET. And therefore—— BURLEIGH. Therefore should she live? Oh, no, She must not live; it must not be. 'Tis this, Even this, my friend, which so disturbs the queen, And scares all slumber from her couch; I read Her soul's distracting contest in her eyes: She fears to speak her wishes, yet her looks, Her silent looks, significantly ask, "Is there not one amongst my many servants To save me from this sad alternative? Either to tremble in eternal fear Upon my throne, or else to sacrifice A queen of my own kindred on the block?" PAULET. 'Tis even so; nor can it be avoided—— BURLEIGH. Well might it be avoided, thinks the queen, If she had only more attentive servants. PAULET. How more attentive? BURLEIGH. Such as could interpret A silent mandate. PAULET. What? A silent mandate! BURLEIGH. Who, when a poisonous adder is delivered Into their hands, would keep the treacherous charge As if it were a

sacred, precious jewel? PAULET. A precious jewel is the queen's good name And spotless reputation: good my lord, One cannot guard it with sufficient care. BURLEIGH. When out of Shrewsbury's hands the Queen of Scots Was trusted to Sir Amias Paulet's care, The meaning was—— PAULET. I hope to God, my lord, The meaning was to give the weightiest charge Into the purest hands; my lord, my lord! By heaven I had disdained this bailiff's office Had I not thought the service claimed the care Of the best man that England's realm can boast. Let me not think I am indebted for it To anything but my unblemished name. BURLEIGH. Spread the report she wastes; grows sicker still And sicker; and expires at last in peace; Thus will she perish in the world's remembrance, And your good name is pure. PAULET. But not my conscience. BURLEIGH. Though you refuse us, sir, your own assistance, You will not sure prevent another's hand. PAULET. No murderer's foot shall e'er approach her threshold Whilst she's protected by my household gods. Her life's a sacred trust; to me the head Of Queen Elizabeth is not more sacred. Ye are the judges; judge, and break the staff; And when 'tis time then let the carpenter With axe and saw appear to build the scaffold. My castle's portals shall be open to him, The sheriff and the executioners: Till then she is intrusted to my care; And be assured I will fulfil my trust, She shall nor do nor suffer what's unjust. [Exeunt.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

London, a Hall in the Palace of Westminster. The EARL OF KENT and SIR WILLIAM DAVISON meeting. DAVISON. Is that my Lord of Kent? So soon returned? Is then the tourney, the carousal over? KENT. How now? Were you not present at the tilt? DAVISON. My office kept me here. KENT. Believe me, sir, You've lost the fairest show which ever state Devised, or graceful dignity

performed: For beauty's virgin fortress was presented As by desire invested; the Earl-Marshal, The Lord-High Admiral, and ten other knights Belonging to the queen defended it, And France's cavaliers led the attack. A herald marched before the gallant troop, And summoned, in a madrigal, the fortress; And from the walls the chancellor replied; And then the artillery was played, and nosegays Breathing delicious fragrance were discharged From neat field-pieces; but in vain, the storm Was valiantly resisted, and desire Was forced, unwillingly, to raise the siege. DAVISON. A sign of evil-boding, good my lord, For the French Suitors. KENT. Why, you know that this Was but in sport; when the attack's in earnest The fortress will, no doubt, capitulate. DAVISON. Ha! think you so? I never can believe it. KENT. The hardest article of all is now Adjusted and acceded to by France; The Duke of Anjou is content to hold His holy worship in a private chapel; And openly he promises to honor And to protect the realm's established faith. Had ye but heard the people's joyful shouts Where'er the tidings spread, for it has been The country's constant fear the queen might die Without immediate issue of her body; And England bear again the Romish chains If Mary Stuart should ascend the throne. DAVISON. This fear appears superfluous; she goes Into the bridal chamber; Mary Stuart Enters the gates of death. KENT. The queen approaches.

SCENE II.

Enter ELIZABETH, led in by LEICESTER, COUNT AUBESPINE, BELLIEVRE, LORDS SHREWSBURY and BURLEIGH, with other French and English gentlemen. ELIZABETH (to AUBESPINE). Count, I am sorry for these noblemen Whose gallant zeal hath brought them over sea To visit these our shores, that they, with us, Must miss the splendor of St. Germain's court. Such pompous festivals of godlike state I cannot furnish as the royal court Of France. A sober and contented people, Which crowd around me with a thousand blessings Whene'er in public I

present myself: This is the spectacle which I can show, And not without some pride, to foreign eyes. The splendor of the noble dames who bloom In Catherine's beauteous garden would, I know, Eclipse myself, and my more modest merits. AUBESPINE. The court of England has one lady only To show the wondering foreigner; but all That charms our hearts in the accomplished sex Is seen united in her single person. BELLIEVRE. Great majesty of England, suffer us To take our leave, and to our royal master, The Duke of Anjou, bring the happy news. The hot impatience of his heart would not Permit him to remain at Paris; he At Amiens awaits the joyful tidings; And thence to Calais reach his posts to bring With winged swiftness to his tranced ear The sweet consent which, still we humbly hope, Your royal lips will graciously pronounce. ELIZABETH. Press me no further now, Count Bellievre. It is not now a time, I must repeat, To kindle here the joyful marriage torch. The heavens lower black and heavy o'er this land; And weeds of mourning would become me better Than the magnificence of bridal robes. A fatal blow is aimed against my heart; A blow which threatens to oppress my house. BELLIEVRE. We only ask your majesty to promise Your royal hand when brighter days shall come. ELIZABETH. Monarchs are but the slaves of their condition; They dare not hear the dictates of their hearts; My wish was ever to remain unmarried, And I had placed my greatest pride in this, That men hereafter on my tomb might read, "Here rests the virgin queen." But my good subjects Are not content that this should be: they think, E'en now they often think upon the time When I shall be no more. 'Tis not enough That blessings now are showered upon this land; They ask a sacrifice for future welfare, And I must offer up my liberty, My virgin liberty, my greatest good, To satisfy my people. Thus they'd force A lord and master on me. 'Tis by this I see that I am nothing but a woman In their regard; and yet methought that I Had governed like a man, and like a king. Well wot I that it is not serving God To quit the laws of nature; and that those Who here have ruled before me merit praise, That they have oped the cloister gates, and given Thousands of victims of ill-taught

devotion Back to the duties of humanity. But yet a queen who hath not spent her days In fruitless, idle contemplation; who, Without murmur, indefatigably Performs the hardest of all duties; she Should be exempted from that natural law Which doth ordain one half of human kind Shall ever be subservient to the other. AUBESPINE. Great queen, you have upon your throne done honor To every virtue; nothing now remains But to the sex, whose greatest boast you are To be the leading star, and give the great Example of its most consistent duties. 'Tis true, the man exists not who deserves That you to him should sacrifice your freedom; Yet if a hero's soul, descent, and rank, And manly beauty can make mortal man Deserving of this honor—— ELIZABETH. Without doubt, My lord ambassador, a marriage union With France's royal son would do me honor; Yes, I acknowledge it without disguise, If it must be, if I cannot prevent it, If I must yield unto my people's prayers, And much I fear they will o'erpower me, I do not know in Europe any prince To whom with less reluctance I would yield My greatest treasure, my dear liberty. Let this confession satisfy your master. BELLIEVRE. It gives the fairest hope, and yet it gives Nothing but hope; my master wishes more. ELIZABETH. What wishes he? [She takes a ring from her finger, and thoughtfully examines it. In this a queen has not One privilege above all other women. This common token marks one common duty, One common servitude; the ring denotes Marriage, and 'tis of rings a chain is formed. Convey this present to his highness; 'tis As yet no chain, it binds me not as yet, But out of it may grow a link to bind me. BELLIEVRE (kneeling). This present, in his name, upon my knees, I do receive, great queen, and press the kiss Of homage on the hand of her who is Henceforth my princess. ELIZABETH (to the EARL OF LEICESTER, whom she, during the last speeches, had continually regarded). By your leave, my lord. [She takes the blue ribbon from his neck [1], and invests Bellievre with it. Invest his highness with this ornament, As I invest you with it, and receive you Into the duties of my gallant order. And, "Honi soit qui mal y pense." Thus perish All jealousy between our several realms, And let the bond of confidence

unite Henceforth, the crowns of Britain and of France. BELLIEVRE. Most sovereign queen, this is a day of joy; Oh that it could be so for all, and no Afflicted heart within this island mourn. See! mercy beams upon thy radiant brow; Let the reflection of its cheering light Fall on a wretched princess, who concerns Britain and France alike. ELIZABETH. No further, count! Let us not mix two inconsistent things; If France be truly anxious for my hand, It must partake my interests, and renounce Alliance with my foes. AUBESPINE. In thine own eyes Would she not seem to act unworthily, If in this joyous treaty she forgot This hapless queen, the widow of her king; In whose behalf her honor and her faith Are bound to plead for grace. ELIZABETH. Thus urged, I know To rate this intercession at its worth; France has discharged her duties as a friend, I will fulfil my own as England's queen. [She bows to the French ambassadors, who, with the other gentlemen, retire respectfully.

[Till the time of Charles the First, the Knights of the Garter wore the blue ribbon with the George about their necks, as they still do the collars, on great days.—TRANSLATOR.]

SCENE III.

Enter BURLEIGH, LEICESTER, and TALBOT. The QUEEN takes her seat. BURLEIGH. Illustrious sovereign, thou crown'st to-day The fervent wishes of thy people; now We can rejoice in the propitious days Which thou bestowest upon us; and we look No more with fear and trembling towards the time Which, charged with storms, futurity presented. Now, but one only care disturbs this land; It is a sacrifice which every voice Demands; Oh! grant but this and England's peace Will be established now and evermore. ELIZABETH. What wish they still, my lord? Speak. BURLEIGH. They demand The Stuart's head. If to thy people thou Wouldst now secure the precious boon of freedom, And the fair light of truth so dearly won, Then

she must die; if we are not to live In endless terror for thy precious life The enemy must fall; for well thou know'st That all thy Britons are not true alike; Romish idolatry has still its friends In secret, in this island, who foment The hatred of our enemies. Their hearts All turn toward this Stuart; they are leagued With the two plotting brothers of Lorrain, The foes inveterate of thy house and name. 'Gainst thee this raging faction hath declared A war of desolation, which they wage With the deceitful instruments of hell. At Rheims, the cardinal archbishop's see, There is the arsenal from which they dart These lightnings; there the school of regicide; Thence, in a thousand shapes disguised, are sent Their secret missionaries to this isle; Their bold and daring zealots; for from thence Have we not seen the third assassin come? And inexhausted is the direful breed Of secret enemies in this abyss. While in her castle sits at Fotheringay, The Ate 1 of this everlasting war, Who, with the torch of love, spreads flames around; For her who sheds delusive hopes on all, Youth dedicates itself to certain death; To set her free is the pretence—the aim Is to establish her upon the throne. For this accursed House of Guise denies Thy sacred right; and in their mouths thou art A robber of the throne, whom chance has crowned. By them this thoughtless woman was deluded, Proudly to style herself the Queen of England; No peace can be with her, and with her house; [Their hatred is too bloody, and their crimes Too great;] thou must resolve to strike, or suffer— Her life is death to thee, her death thy life. ELIZABETH. My lord, you bear a melancholy office; I know the purity which guides your zeal, The solid wisdom which informs your speech; And yet I hate this wisdom, when it calls For blood, I hate it in my inmost soul. Think of a milder counsel—Good my Lord Of Shrewsbury, we crave your judgment here. TALBOT. [Desire you but to know, most gracious queen, What is for your advantage, I can add Nothing to what my lord high-treasurer Has urged; then, for your welfare, let the sentence Be now confirmed—this much is proved already: There is no surer method to avert The danger from your head and from the state. Should you in this reject our true advice,

You can dismiss your council. We are placed Here as your counsellors, but to consult The welfare of this land, and with our knowledge And our experience we are bound to serve you! But in what's good and just, most gracious queen, You have no need of counsellors, your conscience Knows it full well, and it is written there. Nay, it were overstepping our commission If we attempted to instruct you in it. ELIZABETH. Yet speak, my worthy Lord of Shrewsbury, 'Tis not our understanding fails alone, Our heart too feels it wants some sage advice.] TALBOT. Well did you praise the upright zeal which fires Lord Burleigh's loyal breast; my bosom, too, Although my tongue be not so eloquent, Beats with no weaker, no less faithful pulse. Long may you live, my queen, to be the joy Of your delighted people, to prolong Peace and its envied blessings in this realm. Ne'er hath this isle beheld such happy days Since it was governed by its native kings. Oh, let it never buy its happiness With its good name; at least, may Talbot's eyes Be closed in death e'er this shall come to pass. ELIZABETH. Forbid it, heaven, that our good name be stained! TALBOT. Then must you find some other way than this To save thy kingdom, for the sentence passed Of death against the Stuart is unjust. You cannot upon her pronounce a sentence Who is not subject to you. ELIZABETH. Then, it seems, My council and my parliament have erred; Each bench of justice in the land is wrong, Which did with one accord admit this right. TALBOT (after a pause). The proof of justice lies not in the voice Of numbers; England's not the world, nor is Thy parliament the focus, which collects The vast opinion of the human race. This present England is no more the future Than 'tis the past; as inclination changes, Thus ever ebbs and flows the unstable tide Of public judgment. Say not, then, that thou Must act as stern necessity compels, That thou must yield to the importunate Petitions of thy people; every hour Thou canst experience that thy will is free. Make trial, and declare thou hatest blood, And that thou wilt protect thy sister's life; Show those who wish to give thee other counsels, That here thy royal anger is not feigned, And thou shalt see how stern necessity Can vanish, and what once was titled justice

Into injustice be converted: thou Thyself must pass the sentence, thou alone Trust not to this unsteady, trembling reed, But hear the gracious dictates of thy heart. God hath not planted rigor in the frame Of woman; and the founders of this realm, Who to the female hand have not denied The reins of government, intend by this To show that mercy, not severity, Is the best virtue to adorn a crown. ELIZABETH. Lord Shrewsbury is a fervent advocate For mine and England's enemy; I must Prefer those counsellors who wish my welfare. TALBOT. Her advocates have an invidious task! None will, by speaking in her favor, dare To meet thy anger: stiffer, then, an old And faithful counsellor (whom naught on earth Can tempt on the grave's brink) to exercise The pious duty of humanity. It never shall be said that, in thy council, Passion and interest could find a tongue, While mercy's pleading voice alone was mute, All circumstances have conspired against her; Thou ne'er hast seen her face, and nothing speaks Within thy breast for one that's stranger to thee. I do not take the part of her misdeeds; They say 'twas she who planned her husband's murder: 'Tis true that she espoused his murderer. A grievous crime, no doubt; but then it happened In darksome days of trouble and dismay, In the stern agony of civil war, When she, a woman, helpless and hemmed in By a rude crowd of rebel vassals, sought Protection in a powerful chieftain's arms. God knows what arts were used to overcome her! For woman is a weak and fragile thing. ELIZABETH. Woman's not weak; there are heroic souls Among the sex; and, in my presence, sir, I do forbid to speak of woman's weakness. TALBOT. Misfortune was for thee a rigid school; Thou wast not stationed on the sunny side Of life; thou sawest no throne, from far, before thee; The grave was gaping for thee at thy feet. At Woodstock, and in London's gloomy tower, 'Twas there the gracious father of this land Taught thee to know thy duty, by misfortune. No flatterer sought thee there: there learned thy soul, Far from the noisy world and its distractions, To commune with itself, to think apart, And estimate the real goods of life. No God protected this poor sufferer: Transplanted in her early youth to France, The court of levity and thoughtless joys,

There, in the round of constant dissipation, She never heard the earnest voice of truth; She was deluded by the glare of vice, And driven onward by the stream of ruin. Hers was the vain possession of a face, And she outshone all others of her sex As far in beauty, as in noble birth. ELIZABETH. Collect yourself, my Lord of Shrewsbury; Bethink you we are met in solemn council. Those charms must surely be without compare, Which can engender, in an elder's blood, Such fire. My Lord of Leicester, you alone Are silent; does the subject which has made Him eloquent, deprive you of your speech? LEICESTER. Amazement ties my tongue, my queen, to think That they should fill thy soul with such alarms, And that the idle tales, which, in the streets, Of London, terrify the people's ears, Should reach the enlightened circle of thy council, And gravely occupy our statesmen's minds. Astonishment possesses me, I own, To think this lackland Queen of Scotland, she Who could not save her own poor throne, the jest Of her own vassals, and her country's refuse, [Who in her fairest days of freedom, was But thy despised puppet,] should become At once thy terror when a prisoner. What, in Heaven's name, can make her formidable? That she lays claim to England? that the Guises Will not acknowledge thee as queen? [Did then Thy people's loyal fealty await These Guises' approbation?] Can these Guises, With their objections, ever shake the right Which birth hath given thee; which, with one consent, The votes of parliament have ratified? And is not she, by Henry's will, passed o'er In silence? Is it probable that England, As yet so blessed in the new light's enjoyment, Should throw itself into this papist's arms? From thee, the sovereign it adores, desert To Darnley's murderess? What will they then, These restless men, who even in thy lifetime Torment thee with a successor; who cannot Dispose of thee in marriage soon enough To rescue church and state from fancied peril? Stand'st thou not blooming there in youthful prime While each step leads her towards the expecting tomb? By Heavens, I hope thou wilt full many a year Walk o'er the Stuart's grave, and ne'er become Thyself the instrument of her sad end. BURLEIGH. Lord Leicester hath not always held this

tone. LEICESTER. 'Tis true, I in the court of justice gave My verdict for her death; here, in the council, I may consistently speak otherwise Here, right is not the question, but advantage. Is this a time to fear her power, when France, Her only succor, has abandoned her? When thou preparest with thy hand to bless The royal son of France, when the fair hope Of a new, glorious stem of sovereigns Begins again to blossom in this land? Why hasten then her death? She's dead already. Contempt and scorn are death to her; take heed Lest ill-timed pity call her into life. 'Tis therefore my advice to leave the sentence, By which her life is forfeit, in full force. Let her live on; but let her live beneath The headsman's axe, and, from the very hour One arm is lifted for her, let it fall. ELIZABETH (rises). My lords, I now have heard your several thoughts, And give my ardent thanks for this your zeal. With God's assistance, who the hearts of kings Illumines, I will weigh your arguments, And choose what best my judgment shall approve. [To BURLEIGH. [Lord Burleigh's honest fears, I know it well, Are but the offspring of his faithful care; But yet, Lord Leicester has most truly said, There is no need of haste; our enemy Hath lost already her most dangerous sting— The mighty arm of France: the fear that she Might quickly be the victim of their zeal Will curb the blind impatience of her friends.]

1 The picture of Ate, the goddess of mischief, we are acquainted with from Homer, II. v. 91, 130. I. 501. She is a daughter of Jupiter, and eager to prejudice every one, even the immortal gods. She counteracted Jupiter himself, on which account he seized her by her beautiful hair, and hurled her from heaven to the earth, where she now, striding over the heads of men, excites them to evil in order to involve them in calamity.—HERDER. Shakspeare has, in Julius Caesar, made a fine use of this image:— "And Caesar's spirit ranging for revenge with Ate by his side, come hot from hell, Shall in these confines, with a monarch's voice, Cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war." I need not point out to the reader the beautiful propriety of introducing the evil spirit on this occasion.—TRANSLATOR.

SCENE IV.

Enter SIR AMIAS PAULET and MORTIMER. ELIZABETH. There's Sir Amias Paulet; noble sir, What tidings bring you? PAULET. Gracious sovereign, My nephew, who but lately is returned From foreign travel, kneels before thy feet, And offers thee his first and earliest homage, Grant him thy royal grace, and let him grow And flourish in the sunshine of thy favor. MORTIMER (kneeling on one knee). Long live my royal mistress! Happiness And glory from a crown to grace her brows! ELIZABETH. Arise, sir knight; and welcome here in England; You've made, I hear, the tour, have been in France And Rome, and tarried, too, some time at Rheims: Tell me what plots our enemies are hatching? MORTIMER. May God confound them all! And may the darts Which they shall aim against my sovereign, Recoiling, strike their own perfidious breasts! ELIZABETH. Did you see Morgan, and the wily Bishop Of Ross?

MORTIMER. I saw, my queen, all Scottish exiles Who forge at Rheims their plots against this realm. I stole into their confidence in hopes To learn some hint of their conspiracies. PAULET. Private despatches they intrusted to him, In cyphers, for the Queen of Scots, which he, With loyal hand, hath given up to us. ELIZABETH. Say, what are then their latest plans of treason? MORTIMER. It struck them all as 'twere a thunderbolt, That France should leave them, and with England close This firm alliance; now they turn their hopes Towards Spain—— ELIZABETH. This, Walsingham hath written us. MORTIMER. Besides, a bull, which from the Vatican Pope Sixtus lately levelled at thy throne, Arrived at Rheims, as I was leaving it; With the next ship we may expect it here. LEICESTER. England no more is frightened by such arms. BURLEIGH. They're always dangerous in bigots' hands. ELIZABETH (looking steadfastly at MORTIMER). Your enemies have said that you frequented The schools at Rheims, and have abjured your faith. MORTIMER. So I pretended, that I must confess; Such was my anxious wish to serve my queen.

ELIZABETH (to PAULET, who presents papers to her). What have you there? PAULET. 'Tis from the Queen of Scots. 'Tis a petition, and to thee addressed. BURLEIGH (hastily catching at it). Give me the paper. PAULET (giving it to the QUEEN). By your leave, my lord High-treasurer; the lady ordered me To bring it to her majesty's own hands. She says I am her enemy; I am The enemy of her offences only, And that which is consistent with my duty I will, and readily, oblige her in. [The QUEEN takes the letter: as she reads it MORTIMER and LEICESTER speak some words in private. BURLEIGH (to PAULET). What may the purport of the letter be? Idle complaints, from which one ought to screen The queen's too tender heart. PAULET. What it contains She did not hide from me; she asks a boon; She begs to be admitted to the grace Of speaking with the queen. BURLEIGH. It cannot be. TALBOT. Why not? Her supplication's not unjust. BURLEIGH. For her, the base encourager of murder; Her, who hath thirsted for our sovereign's blood, The privilege to see the royal presence Is forfeited: a faithful counsellor Can never give this treacherous advice. TALBOT. And if the queen is gracious, sir, are you The man to hinder pity's soft emotions? BURLEIGH. She is condemned to death; her head is laid Beneath the axe, and it would ill become The queen to see a death-devoted head. The sentence cannot have its execution If the queen's majesty approaches her, For pardon still attends the royal presence, As sickness flies the health-dispensing hand. ELIZABETH (having read the letter, dries her tears). Oh, what is man! What is the bliss of earth! To what extremities is she reduced Who with such proud and splendid hopes began! Who, called to sit on the most ancient throne Of Christendom, misled by vain ambition, Hoped with a triple crown to deck her brows! How is her language altered, since the time When she assumed the arms of England's crown, And by the flatterers of her court was styled Sole monarch of the two Britannic isles! Forgive me, lords, my heart is cleft in twain, Anguish possesses me, and my soul bleeds To think that earthly goods are so unstable, And that the dreadful fate which rules mankind Should threaten mine own house, and

scowl so near me. TALBOT. Oh, queen! the God of mercy hath informed Your heart; Oh! hearken to this heavenly guidance. Most grievously, indeed, hath she atoned. Her grievous crime, and it is time that now, At last, her heavy penance have an end. Stretch forth your hand to raise this abject queen, And, like the luminous vision of an angel, Descend into her gaol's sepulchral night. BURLEIGH. Be steadfast, mighty queen; let no emotion Of seeming laudable humanity Mislead thee; take not from thyself the power Of acting as necessity commands. Thou canst not pardon her, thou canst not save her: Then heap not on thyself the odious blame, That thou, with cruel and contemptuous triumph, Didst glut thyself with gazing on thy victim. LEICESTER. Let us, my lords, remain within our bounds; The queen is wise, and doth not need our counsels To lead her to the most becoming choice. This meeting of the queens hath naught in common With the proceedings of the court of justice. The law of England, not the monarch's will, Condemns the Queen of Scotland, and 'twere worthy Of the great soul of Queen Elizabeth, To follow the soft dictates of her heart, Though justice swerves not from its rigid path. ELIZABETH. Retire, my lords. We shall, perhaps, find means To reconcile the tender claims of pity With what necessity imposes on us. And now retire. [The LORDS retire; she calls SIR EDWARD MORTIMER back. Sir Edward Mortimer!

SCENE V.

ELIZABETH, MORTIMER. ELIZABETH (having measured him for some time with her eyes in silence). You've shown a spirit of adventurous courage And self-possession, far beyond your years. He who has timely learnt to play so well The difficult dissembler's needful task Becomes a perfect man before his time, And shortens his probationary years. Fate calls you to a lofty scene of action; I prophesy it, and can, happily For you, fulfil, myself, my own prediction. MORTIMER. Illustrious mistress, what I am, and all I can accomplish, is devoted to you.

ELIZABETH. You've made acquaintance with the foes of England. Their hate against me is implacable; Their fell designs are inexhaustible. As yet, indeed, Almighty Providence Hath shielded me; but on my brows the crown Forever trembles, while she lives who fans Their bigot-zeal, and animates their hopes. MORTIMER. She lives no more, as soon as you command it. ELIZABETH. Oh, sir! I thought I saw my labors end, And I am come no further than at first, I wished to let the laws of England act, And keep my own hands pure from blood's defilement. The sentence is pronounced—what gain I by it? It must be executed, Mortimer, And I must authorize the execution. The blame will ever light on me, I must Avow it, nor can save appearances. That is the worst—— MORTIMER. But can appearances Disturb your conscience where the cause is just? ELIZABETH. You are unpractised in the world, sir knight; What we appear, is subject to the judgment Of all mankind, and what we are, of no man. No one will be convinced that I am right: I must take care that my connivance in Her death be wrapped in everlasting doubt. In deeds of such uncertain double visage Safety lies only in obscurity. Those measures are the worst that stand avowed; What's not abandoned, is not wholly lost. MORTIMER (seeking to learn her meaning). Then it perhaps were best—— ELIZABETH (quick). Ay, surely 'twere The best; Oh, sir, my better angel speaks Through you;—go on then, worthy sir, conclude You are in earnest, you examine deep, Have quite a different spirit from your uncle. MORTIMER (surprised). Have you imparted then your wishes to him? ELIZABETH. I am sorry that I have. MORTIMER. Excuse his age, The old man is grown scrupulous; such bold Adventures ask the enterprising heart Of youth—— ELIZABETH. And may I venture then on you—— MORTIMER. My hand I'll lend thee; save then as thou canst Thy reputation—— ELIZABETH. Yes, sir; if you could But waken me some morning with this news "Maria Stuart, your bloodthirsty foe, Breathed yesternight her last"—— MORTIMER. Depend on me. ELIZABETH. When shall my head lie calmly down to sleep? MORTIMER. The next new moon will terminate thy fears.

ELIZABETH. And be the selfsame happy day the dawn Of your preferment—so God speed you, sir; And be not hurt, if, chance, my thankfulness Should wear the mask of darkness. Silence is The happy suitor's god. The closest bonds, The dearest, are the works of secrecy. [Exit.

SCENE VI.

MORTIMER (alone). Go, false, deceitful queen! As thou deludest The world, e'en so I cozen thee; 'tis right, Thus to betray thee; 'tis a worthy deed. Look I then like a murderer? Hast thou read Upon my brow such base dexterity? Trust only to my arm, and keep thine own Concealed—assume the pious outward show Of mercy 'fore the world, while reckoning In secret on my murderous aid; and thus By gaining time we shall insure her rescue. Thou wilt exalt me!—show'st me from afar The costly recompense: but even were Thyself the prize, and all thy woman's favor, What art thou, poor one, and what canst thou proffer? I scorn ambition's avaricious strife, With her alone is all the charm of life, O'er her, in rounds of endless glory, hover Spirits with grace, and youth eternal blessed, Celestial joy is throned upon her breast. Thou hast but earthly, mortal goods to offer— That sovereign good, for which all else be slighted, When heart in heart, delighting and delighted; Together flow in sweet forgetfulness;— Ne'er didst thou woman's fairest crown possess, Ne'er hast thou with thy hand a lover's heart requited. I must attend Lord Leicester, and deliver Her letter to him—'tis a hateful charge— I have no confidence in this court puppet— I can effect her rescue, I alone; Be danger, honor, and the prize my own. [As he is going, PAULET meets him.

SCENE VII.

MORTIMER, PAULET. PAULET. What said the queen to you? MORTIMER. 'Twas nothing, sir; Nothing of consequence—— PAULET (looking at him

earnestly). Hear, Mortimer! It is a false and slippery ground on which You tread. The grace of princes is alluring, Youth loves ambition—let not yours betray you. MORTIMER. Was it not yourself that brought me to the court? PAULET. Oh, would to God I had not done as much! The honor of our house was never reaped In courts—stand fast, my nephew—purchase not Too dear, nor stain your conscience with a crime. MORTIMER. What are these fears? What are you dreaming of? PAULET. How high soever the queen may pledge herself To raise you, trust not her alluring words. [The spirit of the world's a lying spirit, And vice is a deceitful, treacherous friend.] She will deny you, if you listen to her; And, to preserve her own good name, will punish The bloody deed, which she herself enjoined. MORTIMER. The bloody deed!—— PAULET. Away, dissimulation!— I know the deed the queen proposed to you. She hopes that your ambitious youth will prove More docile than my rigid age. But say, Have you then pledged your promise, have you? MORTIMER. Uncle! PAULET. If you have done so, I abandon you, And lay my curse upon you—— LEICESTER (entering). Worthy sir! I with your nephew wish a word. The queen Is graciously inclined to him; she wills That to his custody the Scottish queen Be with full powers intrusted. She relies On his fidelity. PAULET. Relies!—'tis well—— LEICESTER. What say you, sir? PAULET. Her majesty relies On him; and I, my noble lord, rely Upon myself, and my two open eyes. [Exit.

SCENE VIII.

LEICESTER, MORTIMER. LEICESTER (surprised). What ailed the knight? MORTIMER. My lord, I cannot tell What angers him: the confidence, perhaps, The queen so suddenly confers on me. LEICESTER. Are you deserving then of confidence? MORTIMER. This would I ask of you, my Lord of Leicester. LEICESTER. You said you wished to speak with me in private. MORTIMER. Assure me first that I may safely venture. LEICESTER. Who gives me an assurance

on your side? Let not my want of confidence offend you; I see you, sir, exhibit at this court Two different aspects; one of them must be A borrowed one; but which of them is real? MORTIMER. The selfsame doubts I have concerning you. LEICESTER. Which, then, shall pave the way to confidence? MORTIMER. He, who by doing it, is least in danger. LEICESTER. Well, that are you—— MORTIMER. No, you; the evidence Of such a weighty, powerful peer as you Can overwhelm my voice. My accusation Is weak against your rank and influence. LEICESTER. Sir, you mistake. In everything but this I'm powerful here; but in this tender point Which I am called upon to trust you with, I am the weakest man of all the court, The poorest testimony can undo me. MORTIMER. If the all-powerful Earl of Leicester deign To stoop so low to meet me, and to make Such a confession to me, I may venture To think a little better of myself, And lead the way in magnanimity. LEICESTER. Lead you the way of confidence, I'll follow. MORTIMER (producing suddenly the letter). Here is a letter from the Queen of Scotland. LEICESTER (alarmed, catches hastily at the letter). Speak softly, sir! what see I? Oh, it is Her picture! [Kisses and examines it with speechless joy—a pause. MORTIMER (who has watched him closely the whole tine). Now, my lord, I can believe you. LEICESTER (having hastily run through the letter). You know the purport of this letter, sir. MORTIMER. Not I. LEICESTER. Indeed! She surely hath informed you. MORTIMER. Nothing hath she informed me of. She said You would explain this riddle to me—'tis To me a riddle, that the Earl of Leicester, The far-famed favorite of Elizabeth, The open, bitter enemy of Mary, And one of those who spoke her mortal sentence, Should be the man from whom the queen expects Deliverance from her woes; and yet it must be; Your eyes express too plainly what your heart Feels for the hapless lady. LEICESTER. Tell me, Sir, First, how it comes that you should take so warm An interest in her fate; and what it was Gained you her confidence? MORTIMER. My lord, I can, And in few words, explain this mystery. I lately have at Rome abjured my creed, And stand in correspondence with the

Guises. A letter from the cardinal archbishop Was my credential with the Queen of Scots. LEICESTER. I am acquainted, sir, with your conversion; 'Twas that which waked my confidence towards you. [Each remnant of distrust be henceforth banished;] Your hand, sir, pardon me these idle doubts, I cannot use too much precaution here. Knowing how Walsingham and Burleigh hate me, And, watching me, in secret spread their snares; You might have been their instrument, their creature To lure me to their toils. MORTIMER. How poor a part So great a nobleman is forced to play At court! My lord, I pity you. LEICESTER. With joy I rest upon the faithful breast of friendship, Where I can ease me of this long constraint. You seem surprised, sir, that my heart is turned So suddenly towards the captive queen. In truth, I never hated her; the times Have forced me to be her enemy. She was, as you well know, my destined bride, Long since, ere she bestowed her hand on Darnley, While yet the beams of glory round her smiled, Coldly I then refused the proffered boon. Now in confinement, at the gates of death, I claim her at the hazard of my life. MORTIMER. True magnanimity, my lord. LEICESTER. The state Of circumstances since that time is changed. Ambition made me all insensible To youth and beauty. Mary's hand I held Too insignificant for me; I hoped To be the husband of the Queen of England. MORTIMER. It is well known she gave you preference Before all others. LEICESTER. So, indeed, it seemed. Now, after ten lost years of tedious courtship And hateful self-constraint—oh, sir, my heart Must ease itself of this long agony. They call me happy! Did they only know What the chains are, for which they envy me! When I had sacrificed ten bitter years To the proud idol of her vanity; Submitted with a slave's humility To every change of her despotic fancies The plaything of each little wayward whim. At times by seeming tenderness caressed, As oft repulsed with proud and cold disdain; Alike tormented by her grace and rigor: Watched like a prisoner by the Argus eyes Of jealousy; examined like a schoolboy, And railed at like a servant. Oh, no tongue Can paint this hell. MORTIMER. My lord, I feel for you. LEICESTER. To lose, and at the very goal,

the prize Another comes to rob me of the fruits Of my so anxious wooing. I must lose To her young blooming husband all those rights Of which I was so long in full possession; And I must from the stage descend, where I So long have played the most distinguished part. 'Tis not her hand alone this envious stranger Threatens, he'd rob me of her favor too; She is a woman, and he formed to please. MORTIMER. He is the son of Catherine. He has learnt In a good school the arts of flattery. LEICESTER. Thus fall my hopes; I strove to seize a plank To bear me in this shipwreck of my fortunes, And my eye turned itself towards the hope Of former days once more; then Mary's image Within me was renewed, and youth and beauty Once more asserted all their former rights. No more 'twas cold ambition; 'twas my heart Which now compared, and with regret I felt The value of the jewel I had lost. With horror I beheld her in the depths. Of misery, cast down by my transgression; Then waked the hope in me that I might still Deliver and possess her; I contrived To send her, through a faithful hand, the news Of my conversion to her interests; And in this letter which you brought me, she Assures me that she pardons me, and offers Herself as guerdon if I rescue her. MORTIMER. But you attempted nothing for her rescue. You let her be condemned without a word: You gave, yourself, your verdict for her death; A miracle must happen, and the light Of truth must move me, me, her keeper's nephew, And heaven must in the Vatican at Rome Prepare for her an unexpected succour, Else had she never found the way to you. LEICESTER. Oh, sir, it has tormented me enough! About this time it was that they removed her From Talbot's castle, and delivered her Up to your uncle's stricter custody. Each way to her was shut. I was obliged Before the world to persecute her still; But do not think that I would patiently Have seen her led to death. No, Sir; I hoped, And still I hope, to ward off all extremes, Till I can find some certain means to save her. MORTIMER. These are already found: my Lord of Leicester; Your generous confidence in me deserves A like return. I will deliver her. That is my object here; my dispositions Are made already, and your powerful aid Assures us of success in

our attempt. LEICESTER. What say you? You alarm me! How? You would—— MORTIMER. I'll open forcibly her prison-gates; I have confederates, and all is ready. LEICESTER. You have confederates, accomplices? Alas! In what rash enterprise would you Engage me? And these friends, know they my secret? MORTIMER. Fear not; our plan was laid without your help, Without your help it would have been accomplished, Had she not signified her resolution To owe her liberty to you alone. LEICESTER. And can you, then, with certainty assure me That in your plot my name has not been mentioned? MORTIMER. You may depend upon it. How, my lord, So scrupulous when help is offered you? You wish to rescue Mary, and possess her; You find confederates; sudden, unexpected, The readiest means fall, as it were from Heaven, Yet you show more perplexity than joy. LEICESTER. We must avoid all violence; it is Too dangerous an enterprise. MORTIMER. Delay Is also dangerous. LEICESTER. I tell you, Sir, 'Tis not to be attempted—— MORTIMER. My lord, Too hazardous for you, who would possess her; But we, who only wish to rescue her, We are more bold. LEICESTER. Young man, you are too hasty In such a thorny, dangerous attempt. MORTIMER. And you too scrupulous in honor's cause. LEICESTER. I see the trammels that are spread around us. MORTIMER. And I feel courage to break through them all. LEICESTER. Foolhardiness and madness, is this courage? MORTIMER. This prudence is not bravery, my lord. LEICESTER. You surely wish to end like Babington. MORTIMER. You not to imitate great Norfolk's virtue. LEICESTER. Norfolk ne'er won the bride he wooed so fondly. MORTIMER. But yet he proved how truly he deserved her. LEICESTER. If we are ruined, she must fall with us. MORTIMER. If we risk nothing, she will ne'er be rescued. LEICESTER. You will not weigh the matter, will not hear; With blind and hasty rashness you destroy The plans which I so happily had framed. MORTIMER. And what were then the plans which you had framed? What have you done then to deliver her? And how, if I were miscreant enough To murder her, as was proposed to me This moment by Elizabeth,

and which She looks upon as certain; only name The measures you have taken to protect her? LEICESTER. Did the queen give you, then, this bloody order? MORTIMER. She was deceived in me, as Mary is in you. LEICESTER. And have you promised it? Say, have you? MORTIMER. That she might not engage another's hand, I offered mine. LEICESTER. Well done, sir; that was right; This gives us leisure, for she rests secure Upon your bloody service, and the sentence Is unfulfilled the while, and we gain time. MORTIMER (angrily). No, we are losing time. LEICESTER. The queen depends On you, and will the readier make a show Of mercy; and I may prevail on her To give an audience to her adversary; And by this stratagem we tie her hands Yes! I will make the attempt, strain every nerve. MORTIMER. And what is gained by this? When she discovers That I am cheating her, that Mary lives; Are we not where we were? She never will Be free; the mildest doom which can await her At best is but perpetual confinement. A daring deed must one day end the matter; Why will you not with such a deed begin? The power is in your hands, would you but rouse The might of your dependents round about Your many castles, 'twere an host; and still Has Mary many secret friends. The Howards And Percies' noble houses, though their chiefs Be fallen, are rich in heroes; they but wait For the example of some potent lord. Away with feigning—act an open part, And, like a loyal knight, protect your fair; Fight a good fight for her! You know you are Lord of the person of the Queen of England, Whene'er you will: invite her to your castle, Oft hath she thither followed you—then show That you're a man; then speak as master; keep her Confined till she release the Queen of Scots. LEICESTER. I am astonished—I am terrified! Where would your giddy madness hurry you? Are you acquainted with this country? Know you The deeps and shallows of this court? With what A potent spell this female sceptre binds And rules men's spirits round her? 'Tis in vain You seek the heroic energy which once Was active in this land! it is subdued, A woman holds it under lock and key, And every spring of courage is relaxed. Follow my counsel—venture nothing rashly. Some one

approaches-go—— MORTIMER. And Mary hopes— Shall I return to her with empty comfort? LEICESTER. Bear her my vows of everlasting love. MORTIMER. Bear them yourself! I offered my assistance As her deliverer, not your messenger. [Exit.

SCENE IX.

ELIZABETH, LEICESTER. ELIZABETH. Say, who was here? I heard the sound of voices. LEICESTER (turning quickly and perplexed round on hearing the QUEEN). It was young Mortimer—— ELIZABETH. How now, my lord: Why so confused? LEICESTER (collecting himself). Your presence is the cause. Ne'er did I see thy beauty so resplendent, My sight is dazzled by thy heavenly charms. Oh! ELIZABETH. Whence this sigh? LEICESTER. Have I no reason, then, To sigh? When I behold you in your glory, I feel anew, with pain unspeakable, The loss which threatens me. ELIZABETH. What loss, my lord? LEICESTER. Your heart; your own inestimable self Soon will you feel yourself within the arms Of your young ardent husband, highly blessed; He will possess your heart without a rival. He is of royal blood, that am not I. Yet, spite of all the world can say, there lives not One on this globe who with such fervent zeal Adores you as the man who loses you. Anjou hath never seen you, can but love Your glory and the splendor of your reign; But I love you, and were you born of all The peasant maids the poorest, I the first Of kings, I would descend to your condition, And lay my crown and sceptre at your feet! ELIZABETH. Oh, pity me, my Dudley; do not blame me; I cannot ask my heart. Oh, that had chosen Far otherwise! Ah, how I envy others Who can exalt the object of their love! But I am not so blest: 'tis not my fortune To place upon the brows of him, the dearest Of men to me, the royal crown of England. The Queen of Scotland was allowed to make Her hand the token of her inclination; She hath had every freedom, and hath drunk, Even to the very dregs, the cup of joy.

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LEICESTER. And now she drinks the bitter cup of sorrow. ELIZABETH. She never did respect the world's opinion; Life was to her a sport; she never courted The yoke to which I bowed my willing neck. And yet, methinks, I had as just a claim As she to please myself and taste the joys Of life: but I preferred the rigid duties Which royalty imposed on me; yet she, She was the favorite of all the men Because she only strove to be a woman; And youth and age became alike her suitors. Thus are the men voluptuaries all! The willing slaves of levity and pleasure; Value that least which claims their reverence. And did not even Talbot, though gray-headed, Grow young again when speaking of her charms? LEICESTER. Forgive him, for he was her keeper once, And she has fooled him with her cunning wiles. ELIZABETH. And is it really true that she's so fair? So often have I been obliged to hear The praises of this wonder—it were well If I could learn on what I might depend: Pictures are flattering, and description lies; I will trust nothing but my own conviction. Why gaze you at me thus? LEICESTER. I placed in thought You and Maria Stuart side by side. Yes! I confess I oft have felt a wish, If it could be but secretly contrived, To see you placed beside the Scottish queen, Then would you feel, and not till then, the full Enjoyment of your triumph: she deserves To be thus humbled; she deserves to see, With her own eyes, and envy's glance is keen, Herself surpassed, to feel herself o'ermatched, As much by thee in form and princely grace As in each virtue that adorns the sex. ELIZABETH. In years she has the advantage—— LEICESTER. Has she so? I never should have thought it. But her griefs, Her sufferings, indeed! 'tis possible Have brought down age upon her ere her time. Yes, and 'twould mortify her more to see thee As bride—she hath already turned her back On each fair hope of life, and she would see thee Advancing towards the open arms of joy. See thee as bride of France's royal son, She who hath always plumed herself so high On her connection with the house of France, And still depends upon its mighty aid. ELIZABETH (with a careless air). I'm teazed to grant this interview. LEICESTER.

She asks it As a favor; grant it as a punishment. For though you should conduct her to the block, Yet would it less torment her than to see Herself extinguished by your beauty's splendor. Thus can you murder her as she hath wished To murder you. When she beholds your beauty, Guarded by modesty, and beaming bright, In the clear glory of unspotted fame (Which she with thoughtless levity discarded), Exalted by the splendor of the crown, And blooming now with tender bridal graces— Then is the hour of her destruction come. Yes—when I now behold you—you were never, No, never were you so prepared to seal The triumph of your beauty. As but now You entered the apartment, I was dazzled As by a glorious vision from on high. Could you but now, now as you are, appear Before her, you could find no better moment. ELIZABETH. Now? no, not now; no, Leicester; this must be Maturely weighed—I must with Burleigh—— LEICESTER. Burleigh! To him you are but sovereign, and as such Alone he seeks your welfare; but your rights, Derived from womanhood, this tender point Must be decided by your own tribunal, Not by the statesman; yet e'en policy Demands that you should see her, and allure By such a generous deed the public voice. You can hereafter act as it may please you, To rid you of the hateful enemy. ELIZABETH. But would it then become me to behold My kinswoman in infamy and want? They say she is not royally attended; Would not the sight of her distress reproach me? LEICESTER. You need not cross her threshold; hear my counsel. A fortunate conjuncture favors it. The hunt you mean to honor with your presence Is in the neighborhood of Fotheringay; Permission may be given to Lady Stuart To take the air; you meet her in the park, As if by accident; it must not seem To have been planned, and should you not incline, You need not speak to her. ELIZABETH. If I am foolish, Be yours the fault, not mine. I would not care To-day to cross your wishes; for to-day I've grieved you more than all my other subjects. [Tenderly. Let it then be your fancy. Leicester, hence You see the free obsequiousness of love. Which suffers that which it cannot approve. [LEICESTER prostrates himself before her, and the curtain falls.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

In a park. In the foreground trees; in the background a distant prospect. MARY advances, running from behind the trees. HANNAH KENNEDY follows slowly. KENNEDY. You hasten on as if endowed with wings; I cannot follow you so swiftly; wait. MARY. Freedom returns! Oh let me enjoy it. Let me be childish; be thou childish with me. Freedom invites me! Oh, let me employ it Skimming with winged step light o'er the lea; Have I escaped from this mansion of mourning? Holds me no more the sad dungeon of care? Let me, with joy and with eagerness burning, Drink in the free, the celestial air. KENNEDY. Oh, my dear lady! but a very little Is your sad gaol extended; you behold not The wall that shuts us in; these plaited tufts Of trees hide from your sight the hated object. MARY. Thanks to these friendly trees, that hide from me My prison walls, and flatter my illusion! Happy I now may deem myself, and free; Why wake me from my dream's so sweet confusion? The extended vault of heaven around me lies, Free and unfettered range my wandering eyes O'er space's vast, immeasurable sea! From where yon misty mountains rise on high I can my empire's boundaries explore; And those light clouds which, steering southwards, fly, Seek the mild clime of France's genial shore. Fast fleeting clouds! ye meteors that fly; Could I but with you sail through the sky! Tenderly greet the dear land of my youth! Here I am captive! oppressed by my foes, No other than you may carry my woes. Free through the ether your pathway is seen, Ye own not the power of this tyrant queen. KENNEDY. Alas! dear lady! You're beside yourself, This long-lost, long-sought freedom makes you rave. MARY. Yonder's a fisher returning to his home; Poor though it be, would he lend me his wherry, Quick to congenial shores would I ferry. Spare is his trade, and labor's his doom; Rich would I freight his vessel with treasure; Such a draught should be his as he never had seen;

Wealth should he find in his nets without measure, Would he but rescue a poor captive queen. KENNEDY. Fond, fruitless wishes! See you not from far How we are followed by observing spies? A dismal, barbarous prohibition scares Each sympathetic being from our path. MARY. No, gentle Hannah! Trust me, not in vain My prison gates are opened. This small grace Is harbinger of greater happiness. No! I mistake not; 'tis the active hand Of love to which I owe this kind indulgence. I recognize in this the mighty arm Of Leicester. They will by degrees expand My prison; will accustom me, through small, To greater liberty, until at last I shall behold the face of him whose hand Will dash my fetters off, and that forever. KENNEDY. Oh, my dear queen! I cannot reconcile These contradictions. 'Twas but yesterday That they announced your death, and all at once, To-day, you have such liberty. Their chains Are also loosed, as I have oft been told, Whom everlasting liberty awaits. [Hunting horns at a distance. MARY. Hear'st then the bugle, so blithely resounding? Hear'st thou its echoes through wood and through plain? Oh, might I now, on my nimble steed bounding, Join with the jocund, the frolicsome train. [Hunting horns again heard. Again! Oh, this sad and this pleasing remembrance! These are the sounds which, so sprightly and clear, Oft, when with music the hounds and the horn So cheerfully welcomed the break of the morn, On the heaths of the Highlands delighted my ear.

SCENE II.

Enter PAULET. PAULET. Well, have I acted right at last, my lady? Do I for once, at least, deserve your thanks? MARY. How! Do I owe this favor, sir, to you? PAULET. Why not to me? I visited the court, And gave the queen your letter. MARY. Did you give it? In very truth did you deliver it? And is this freedom which I now enjoy The happy consequence? PAULET (significantly). Nor that alone; Prepare yourself to see a greater still. MARY. A greater still! What do you mean by

that? PAULET. You heard the bugle-horns? MARY (starting back with foreboding apprehension). You frighten me. PAULET. The queen is hunting in the neighborhood—— MARY. What! PAULET. In a few moments she'll appear before you. KENNEDY (hastening towards MARY, and about to fall). How fare you, dearest lady? You grow pale. PAULET. How? Is't not well? Was it not then your prayer? 'Tis granted now, before it was expected; You who had ever such a ready speech, Now summon all your powers of eloquence, The important time to use them now is come. MARY. Oh, why was I not told of this before? Now I am not prepared for it—not now What, as the greatest favor, I besought, Seems to me now most fearful; Hannah, come, Lead me into the house, till I collect My spirits. PAULET. Stay; you must await her here. Yes! I believe you may be well alarmed To stand before your judge.

SCENE III.

Enter the EARL OF SHREWSBURY. MARY. 'Tis not for that, O God! Far other thoughts possess me now. Oh, worthy Shrewsbury! You come as though You were an angel sent to me from heaven. I cannot, will not see her. Save me, save me From the detested sight! SHREWSBURY. Your majesty, Command yourself, and summon all your courage, 'Tis the decisive moment of your fate. MARY. For years I've waited, and prepared myself. For this I've studied, weighed, and written down Each word within the tablet of my memory That was to touch and move her to compassion. Forgotten suddenly, effaced is all, And nothing lives within me at this moment But the fierce, burning feeling of my wrongs. My heart is turned to direst hate against her; All gentle thoughts, all sweet forgiving words, Are gone, and round me stand with grisly mien, The fiends of hell, and shake their snaky locks! SHREWSBURY. Command your wild, rebellious blood;—constrain The bitterness which fills your heart. No good Ensues when hatred is opposed to hate. How much

soe'er the inward struggle cost You must submit to stern necessity, The power is in her hand, be therefore humble. MARY. To her? I never can. SHREWSBURY. But pray, submit. Speak with respect, with calmness! Strive to move Her magnanimity; insist not now Upon your rights, not now—'tis not the season. MARY. Ah! woe is me! I've prayed for my destruction, And, as a curse to me, my prayer is heard. We never should have seen each other—never! Oh, this can never, never come to good. Rather in love could fire and water meet, The timid lamb embrace the roaring tiger! I have been hurt too grievously; she hath Too grievously oppressed me;—no atonement Can make us friends! SHREWSBURY. First see her, face to face: Did I not see how she was moved at reading Your letter? How her eyes were drowned in tears? No—she is not unfeeling; only place More confidence in her. It was for this That I came on before her, to entreat you To be collected—to admonish you—— MARY (seizing his hand). Oh, Talbot! you have ever been my friend, Had I but stayed beneath your kindly care! They have, indeed, misused me, Shrewsbury. SHREWSBURY. Let all be now forgot, and only think How to receive her with submissiveness. MARY. Is Burleigh with her, too, my evil genius? SHREWSBURY. No one attends her but the Earl of Leicester. MARY. Lord Leicester? SHREWSBURY. Fear not him; it is not he Who wishes your destruction;—'twas his work That here the queen hath granted you this meeting. MARY. Ah! well I knew it. SHREWSBURY. What? PAULET. The queen approaches. [They all draw aside; MARY alone remains, leaning on KENNEDY.

SCENE IV.

The same, ELIZABETH, EARL OF LEICESTER, and Retinue. ELIZABETH (to LEICESTER). What seat is that, my lord? LEICESTER. 'Tis Fotheringay. ELIZABETH (to SHREWSBURY). My lord, send back our retinue to London; The people crowd too eager in the roads, We'll seek a refuge in this quiet park.

[TALBOT sends the train away. She looks steadfastly at MARY, as she speaks further with PAULET. My honest people love me overmuch. These signs of joy are quite idolatrous. Thus should a God be honored, not a mortal. MARY (who the whole time had leaned, almost fainting, on KENNEDY, rises now, and her eyes meet the steady, piercing look of ELIZABETH; she shudders and throws herself again upon KENNEDY'S bosom). O God! from out these features speaks no heart. ELIZABETH. What lady's that? [A general, embarrassed silence. LEICESTER. You are at Fotheringay, My liege! ELIZABETH (as if surprised, casting an angry look at LEICESTER). Who hath done this, my Lord of Leicester? LEICESTER. 'Tis past, my queen;—and now that heaven hath led Your footsteps hither, be magnanimous; And let sweet pity be triumphant now.

SHREWSBURY. Oh, royal mistress! yield to our entreaties; Oh, cast your eyes on this unhappy one Who stands dissolved in anguish. [MARY collects herself, and begins to advance towards ELIZABETH, stops shuddering at half way: her action expresses the most violent internal struggle. ELIZABETH. How, my lords! Which of you then announced to me a prisoner Bowed down by woe? I see a haughty one By no means humbled by calamity. MARY. Well, be it so:—to this will I submit. Farewell high thought, and pride of noble mind! I will forget my dignity, and all My sufferings; I will fall before her feet Who hath reduced me to this wretchedness. [She turns towards the QUEEN. The voice of heaven decides for you, my sister. Your happy brows are now with triumph crowned, I bless the Power Divine which thus hath raised you. But in your turn be merciful, my sister; [She kneels. Let me not lie before you thus disgraced; Stretch forth your hand, your royal hand, to raise Your sister from the depths of her distress. ELIZABETH (stepping back). You are where it becomes you, Lady Stuart; And thankfully I prize my God's protection, Who hath not suffered me to kneel a suppliant Thus at your feet, as you now kneel at mine. MARY (with increasing energy of feeling). Think on all earthly things, vicissitudes. Oh! there are gods who punish haughty pride: Respect them, honor them, the

dreadful ones Who thus before thy feet have humbled me! Before these strangers' eyes dishonor not Yourself in me: profane not, nor disgrace The royal blood of Tudor. In my veins It flows as pure a stream as in your own. Oh, for God's pity, stand not so estranged And inaccessible, like some tall cliff, Which the poor shipwrecked mariner in vain Struggles to seize, and labors to embrace. My all, my life, my fortune now depends Upon the influence of my words and tears; That I may touch your heart, oh, set mine free. If you regard me with those icy looks My shuddering heart contracts itself, the stream Of tears is dried, and frigid horror chains The words of supplication in my bosom! ELIZABETH (cold and severe). What would you say to me, my Lady Stuart? You wished to speak with me; and I, forgetting The queen, and all the wrongs I have sustained, Fulfil the pious duty of the sister, And grant the boon you wished for of my presence. Yet I, in yielding to the generous feelings Of magnanimity, expose myself To rightful censure, that I stoop so low. For well you know you would have had me murdered. MARY. Oh! how shall I begin? Oh, how shall I So artfully arrange my cautious words That they may touch, yet not offend your heart? Strengthen my words, O Heaven! and take from them Whate'er might wound. Alas! I cannot speak In my own cause without impeaching you, And that most heavily, I wish not so; You have not as you ought behaved to me: I am a queen, like you: yet you have held me Confined in prison. As a suppliant I came to you, yet you in me insulted The pious use of hospitality; Slighting in me the holy law of nations, Immured me in a dungeon—tore from me My friends and servants; to unseemly want I was exposed, and hurried to the bar Of a disgraceful, insolent tribunal. No more of this;—in everlasting silence Be buried all the cruelties I suffered! See—I will throw the blame of all on fate, 'Twere not your fault, no more than it was mine. An evil spirit rose from the abyss, To kindle in our hearts the flame of hate, By which our tender youth had been divided. It grew with us, and bad, designing men Fanned with their ready breath the fatal fire: Frantics, enthusiasts, with sword and dagger Armed the uncalled-for hand! This is

the curse Of kings, that they, divided, tear the world In pieces with their hatred, and let loose The raging furies of all hellish strife! No foreign tongue is now between us, sister, [Approaching her confidently, and with a flattering tone. Now stand we face to face; now, sister, speak: Name but my crime, I'll fully satisfy you,— Alas! had you vouchsafed to hear me then, When I so earnest sought to meet your eye, It never would have come to this, nor would, Here in this mournful place, have happened now This so distressful, this so mournful meeting. ELIZABETH. My better stars preserved me. I was warned, And laid not to my breast the poisonous adder! Accuse not fate! your own deceitful heart It was, the wild ambition of your house As yet no enmities had passed between us, When your imperious uncle, the proud priest, Whose shameless hand grasps at all crowns, attacked me With unprovoked hostility, and taught You, but too docile, to assume my arms, To vest yourself with my imperial title, And meet me in the lists in mortal strife: What arms employed he not to storm my throne? The curses of the priests, the people's sword, The dreadful weapons of religious frenzy;— Even here in my own kingdom's peaceful haunts He fanned the flames of civil insurrection; But God is with me, and the haughty priest Has not maintained the field. The blow was aimed Full at my head, but yours it is which falls! MARY. I'm in the hand of heaven. You never will Exert so cruelly the power it gives you. ELIZABETH. Who shall prevent me? Say, did not your uncle Set all the kings of Europe the example, How to conclude a peace with those they hate. Be mine the school of Saint Bartholomew; What's kindred then to me, or nation's laws? The church can break the bands of every duty; It consecrates the regicide, the traitor; I only practise what your priests have taught! Say then, what surety can be offered me, Should I magnanimously loose your bonds? Say, with what lock can I secure your faith, Which by Saint Peter's keys cannot be opened? Force is my only surety; no alliance Can be concluded with a race of vipers. MARY. Oh! this is but your wretched, dark suspicion! For you have constantly regarded me But as a stranger, and an enemy. Had you declared me heir to your dominions, As is

my right, then gratitude and love In me had fixed, for you, a faithful friend And kinswoman. ELIZABETH. Your friendship is abroad, Your house is papacy, the monk your brother. Name you my successor! The treacherous snare! That in my life you might seduce my people; And, like a sly Armida, in your net Entangle all our noble English youth; That all might turn to the new rising sun, And I—— MARY. O sister, rule your realm in peace; I give up every claim to these domains— Alas! the pinions of my soul are lamed; Greatness entices me no more: your point Is gained; I am but Mary's shadow now— My noble spirit is at last broke down By long captivity:—you've done your worst On me; you have destroyed me in my bloom! Now, end your work, my sister;—speak at length The word, which to pronounce has brought you hither; For I will ne'er believe that you are come, To mock unfeelingly your hapless victim. Pronounce this word;—say, "Mary, you are free: You have already felt my power,—learn now To honor too my generosity." Say this, and I will take my life, will take My freedom, as a present from your hands. One word makes all undone;—I wait for it;— Oh, let it not be needlessly delayed. Woe to you if you end not with this word! For should you not, like some divinity, Dispensing noble blessings, quit me now, Then, sister, not for all this island's wealth, For all the realms encircled by the deep, Would I exchange my present lot for yours. ELIZABETH. And you confess at last that you are conquered: Are all your schemes run out? No more assassins Now on the road? Will no adventurer Attempt again for you the sad achievement? Yes, madam, it is over:—you'll seduce No mortal more. The world has other cares;— None is ambitious of the dangerous honor Of being your fourth husband—you destroy Your wooers like your husbands. MARY (starting angrily). Sister, sister!— Grant me forbearance, all ye powers of heaven! ELIZABETH (regards her long with a look of proud contempt). Those then, my Lord of Leicester, are the charms Which no man with impunity can view, Near which no woman dare to stand? In sooth, this honor has been cheaply gained; She who to all is common, may with ease Become the common object of applause.

MARY. This is too much! ELIZABETH (laughing insultingly). You show us now, indeed, Your real face; till now 'twas but the mask. MARY (burning with rage, yet dignified and noble). My sins were human, and the faults of youth: Superior force misled me. I have never Denied or sought to hide it: I despised All false appearance, as became a queen. The worst of me is known, and I can say, That I am better than the fame I bear. Woe to you! when, in time to come, the world Shall draw the robe of honor from your deeds, With which thy arch-hypocrisy has veiled The raging flames of lawless, secret lust. Virtue was not your portion from your mother; Well know we what it was which brought the head Of Anna Boleyn to the fatal block. SHREWSBURY (stepping between both QUEENS). Oh! Heaven! Alas, and must it come to this! Is this the moderation, the submission, My lady?—— MARY. Moderation! I've supported What human nature can support: farewell, Lamb-hearted resignation, passive patience, Fly to thy native heaven; burst at length Thy bonds, come forward from thy dreary cave, In all thy fury, long suppressed rancor! And thou, who to the angered basilisk Impart'st the murderous glance, oh, arm my tongue With poisoned darts! SHREWSBURY. She is beside herself! Exasperated, mad! My liege, forgive her. [ELIZABETH, speechless with anger, casts enraged looks at MARY. LEICESTER (in the most violent agitation; he seeks to lead ELIZABETH away). Attend not to her rage! Away, away, From this disastrous place! MARY (raising her voice). A bastard soils, Profanes the English throne! The generous Britons Are cheated by a juggler, [whose whole figure Is false and painted, heart as well as face!] If right prevailed, you now would in the dust Before me lie, for I'm your rightful monarch! [ELIZABETH hastily quits the stage; the lords follow her in the greatest consternation.

SCENE V.

MARY, KENNEDY. KENNEDY. What have you done? She has gone hence in

wrath All hope is over now! MARY (still quite beside herself). Gone hence in wrath! She carries death within her heart! I know it. [Falling on KENNEDY'S bosom. Now I am happy, Hannah! and at last, After whole years of sorrow and abasement, One moment of victorious revenge A weight falls off my heart, a weight of mountains; I plunged the steel in my oppressor's breast! KENNEDY. Unhappy lady! Frenzy overcomes you. Yes, you have wounded your inveterate foe; 'Tis she who wields the lightning, she is queen, You have insulted her before her minion. MARY. I have abased her before Leicester's eyes; He saw it, he was witness of my triumph. How did I hurl her from her haughty height, He saw it, and his presence strengthened me.

SCENE VI.

Enter MORTIMER. KENNEDY. Oh, Sir! What an occurrence! MORTIMER. I heard all— [Gives the nurse a sign to repair to her post, and draws nearer; his whole appearance expresses the utmost violence of passion. Thine is the palm;—thou trod'st her to the dust!— Thou wast the queen, she was the malefactor;— I am transported with thy noble courage;— Yes! I adore thee; like a Deity, My sense is dazzled by thy heavenly beams. MARY (with vivacity and expectation). You spoke with Leicester, gave my letter to him. My present, too?—oh, speak, sir. MORTIMER (beholding her with glowing looks). How thy noble, Thy royal indignation shone, and cast A glory round thy beauty; yes, by heavens, Thou art the fairest woman upon earth! MARY. Sir, satisfy, I beg you, my impatience; What says his lordship? Say, sir, may I hope? MORTIMER. Who?—he?—he is a wretch, a very coward, Hope naught from him; despise him, and forget him! MARY. What say you? MORTIMER. He deliver, and possess you! Why let him dare it:—he!—he must with me In mortal contest first deserve the prize! MARY. You gave him not my letter? Then, indeed My hopes are lost! MORTIMER. The coward loves his life.

Whoe'er would rescue you, and call you his, Must boldly dare affront e'en death itself! MARY. Will he do nothing for me? MORTIMER. Speak not of him. What can he do? What need have we of him? I will release you; I alone. MARY. Alas! What power have you? MORTIMER. Deceive yourself no more; Think not your case is now as formerly; The moment that the queen thus quitted you, And that your interview had ta'en this turn, All hope was lost, each way of mercy shut. Now deeds must speak, now boldness must decide, To compass all must all be hazarded; You must be free before the morning break. MARY. What say you, sir—to-night?—impossible! MORTIMER. Hear what has been resolved:—I led my friends Into a private chapel, where a priest Heard our confession, and, for every sin We had committed, gave us absolution; He gave us absolution too, beforehand, For every crime we might commit in future; He gave us too the final sacrament, And we are ready for the final journey. MARY. Oh, what an awful, dreadful preparation! MORTIMER. We scale, this very night, the castle's walls; The keys are in my power; the guards we murder! Then from thy chamber bear thee forcibly. Each living soul must die beneath our hands, That none remain who might disclose the deed. MARY. And Drury, Paulet, my two keepers, they Would sooner spill their dearest drop of blood. MORTIMER. They fall the very first beneath my steel. MARY. What, sir! Your uncle? How! Your second father! MORTIMER. Must perish by my hand—I murder him! MARY. Oh, bloody outrage! MORTIMER. We have been absolved Beforehand; I may perpetrate the worst; I can, I will do so! MARY. Oh, dreadful, dreadful! MORTIMER. And should I be obliged to kill the queen, I've sworn upon the host, it must be done! MARY. No, Mortimer; ere so much blood for me—— MORTIMER. What is the life of all compared to thee, And to my love? The bond which holds the world Together may be loosed, a second deluge Come rolling on, and swallow all creation! Henceforth I value nothing; ere I quit My hold on thee, may earth and time be ended! MARY (retiring) Heavens! Sir, what language, and what looks! They scare, They frighten me! MORTIMER (with

unsteady looks, expressive of great madness). Life's but a moment—death Is but a moment too. Why! let them drag me To Tyburn, let them tear me limb from limb, With red-hot pincers—— [Violently approaching her with extended arms. If I clasp but thee Within my arms, thou fervently beloved! MARY. Madman, avaunt! MORTIMER. To rest upon this bosom, To press upon this passion-breathing mouth—— MARY. Leave me, for God's sake, sir; let me go in—— MORTIMER. He is a madman who neglects to clasp His bliss in folds that never may be loosed, When Heaven has kindly given it to his arms. I will deliver you, and though it cost A thousand lives, I do it; but I swear, As God's in Heaven I will possess you too! MARY. Oh! will no God, no angel shelter me? Dread destiny! thou throwest me, in thy wrath, From one tremendous terror to the other! Was I then born to waken naught but frenzy? Do hate and love conspire alike to fright me! MORTIMER. Yes, glowing as their hatred is my love; They would behead thee, they would wound this neck, So dazzling white, with the disgraceful axe! Oh! offer to the living god of joy What thou must sacrifice to bloody hate! Inspire thy happy lover with those charms Which are no more thine own. Those golden locks Are forfeit to the dismal powers of death, Oh! use them to entwine thy slave forever! MARY. Alas! alas! what language must I hear! My woe, my sufferings should be sacred to you, Although my royal brows are so no more. MORTIMER. The crown is fallen from thy brows, thou hast No more of earthly majesty. Make trial, Raise thy imperial voice, see if a friend, If a deliverer will rise to save you. Thy moving form alone remains, the high, The godlike influence of thy heavenly beauty; This bids me venture all, this arms my hand With might, and drives me tow'rd the headsman's axe. MARY. Oh! who will save me from his raging madness? MORTIMER. Service that's bold demands a bold reward. Why shed their blood the daring? Is not life Life's highest good? And he a madman who Casts life away? First will I take my rest, Upon the breast that glows with love's own fire! [He presses her violently to his bosom. MARY. Oh, must I call for help against the man Who would deliver me! MORTIMER. Thou'rt not

unfeeling, The world ne'er censured thee for frigid rigor; The fervent prayer of love can touch thy heart. Thou mad'st the minstrel Rizzio blest, and gavest Thyself a willing prey to Bothwell's arms. MARY. Presumptuous man! MORTIMER. He was indeed thy tyrant, Thou trembled'st at his rudeness, whilst thou loved'st him; Well, then—if only terror can obtain thee— By the infernal gods! MARY. Away—you're mad! MORTIMER. I'll teach thee then before me, too, to tremble. KENNEDY (entering suddenly). They're coming—they approach—the park is filled With men in arms. MORTIMER (starting and catching at his sword). I will defend you-I—— MARY. O Hannah! save me, save me from his hands. Where shall I find, poor sufferer, an asylum? Oh! to what saint shall I address my prayers? Here force assails me, and within is murder! [She flies towards the house, KENNEDY follows her.

SCENE VII.

MORTIMER, PAULET, and DRURY rush in in the greatest consternation. Attendants hasten over the stage. PAULET. Shut all the portals—draw the bridges up. MORTIMER. What is the matter, uncle? PAULET. Where is the murderess? Down with her, down into the darkest dungeon! MORTIMER. What is the matter? What has passed? PAULET. The queen! Accursed hand! Infernal machination! MORTIMER. The queen! What queen? PAULET. What queen! The Queen of England; She has been murdered on the road to London. [Hastens into the house.

SCENE VIII.

MORTIMER, soon after O'KELLY. MORTIMER (after a pause). Am I then mad? Came not one running by But now, and cried aloud, the queen is murdered! No, no! I did but dream. A feverish fancy Paints that upon my mind as true and real, Which but existed in my frantic thoughts. Who's there? It is O'Kelly. So dismayed! O'KELLY (rushing in). Flee, Mortimer, oh! flee—for all is lost! MORTIMER. What

then is lost? O'KELLY. Stand not on question. Think On speedy flight. MORTIMER. What has occurred? O'KELLY. Sauvage, That madman, struck the blow. MORTIMER. It is then true! O'KELLY. True, true—oh! save yourself. MORTIMER (exultingly). The queen is murdered— And Mary shall ascend the English throne! O'KELLY. Is murdered! Who said that? MORTIMER. Yourself. O'KELLY. She lives, And I, and you, and all of us are lost. MORTIMER. She lives! O'KELLY. The blow was badly aimed, her cloak Received it. Shrewsbury disarmed the murderer. MORTIMER. She lives! O'KELLY. She lives to whelm us all in ruin; Come, they surround the park already; come. MORTIMER. Who did this frantic deed? O'KELLY. It was the monk From Toulon, whom you saw immersed in thought, As in the chapel the pope's bull was read, Which poured anathemas upon the queen. He wished to take the nearest, shortest way, To free, with one bold stroke, the church of God, And gain the crown of martyrdom: he trusted His purpose only to the priest, and struck The fatal blow upon the road to London. MORTIMER (after a long silence). Alas! a fierce, destructive fate pursues thee, Unhappy one! Yes—now thy death is fixed; Thy very angel has prepared thy fall! O'KELLY. Say, whither will you take your flight? I go To hide me in the forests of the north. MORTIMER. Fly thither, and may God attend your flight; I will remain, and still attempt to save My love; if not, my bed shall be upon her grave. [Exeunt at different sides.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—Antechamber.

COUNT AUBESPINE, the EARLS Of KENT and LEICESTER. AUBESPINE. How fares her majesty? My lords, you see me Still stunned, and quite beside myself for terror! How happened it? How was it possible That in the midst of this most loyal people—— LEICESTER. The deed was not attempted by the people. The

assassin was a subject of your king, A Frenchman. AUBESPINE. Sure a lunatic. LEICESTER. A papist, Count Aubespine!

SCENE II.

Enter BURLEIGH, in conversation with DAVISON. BURLEIGH. Sir; let the death-warrant Be instantly made out, and pass the seal; Then let it be presented to the queen; Her majesty must sign it. Hasten, sir, We have no time to lose. DAVISON. It shall be done. [Exit. AUBESPINE. My lord high-treasurer, my faithful heart Shares in the just rejoicings of the realm. Praised be almighty Heaven, who hath averted Assassination from our much-loved queen! BURLEIGH. Praised be His name, who thus hath turned to scorn The malice of our foes! AUBESPINE. May heaven confound The perpetrator of this cursed deed! BURLEIGH. Its perpetrator and its base contriver! AUBESPINE. Please you, my lord, to bring me to the queen, That I may lay the warm congratulations Of my imperial master at her feet. BURLEIGH. There is no need of this. AUBESPINE (officiously). My Lord of Burleigh, I know my duty. BURLEIGH. Sir, your duty is To quit, and that without delay, this kingdom. AUBESPINE (stepping back with surprise). What! How is this? BURLEIGH. The sacred character Of an ambassador to-day protects you, But not to-morrow. AUBESPINE. What's my crime? BURLEIGH. Should I Once name it, there were then no pardon for it. AUBESPINE. I hope, my lord, my charge's privilege—— BURLEIGH. Screens not a traitor. LEICESTER and KENT. Traitor! How? AUBESPINE. My Lord, Consider well—— BURLEIGH. Your passport was discovered In the assassin's pocket. KENT. Righteous heaven! AUBESPINE. Sir, many passports are subscribed by me; I cannot know the secret thoughts of men. BURLEIGH. He in your house confessed, and was absolved. AUBESPINE. My house is open—— BURLEIGH. To our enemies. AUBESPINE. I claim a strict inquiry. BURLEIGH. Tremble at it. AUBESPINE. My monarch in my person is

insulted, He will annul the marriage contract. BURLEIGH. That My royal mistress has annulled already; England will not unite herself with France. My Lord of Kent, I give to you the charge To see Count Aubespine embarked in safety. The furious populace has stormed his palace, Where a whole arsenal of arms was found; Should he be found, they'll tear him limb from limb, Conceal him till the fury is abated—You answer for his life. AUBESPINE. I go—I leave This kingdom where they sport with public treaties And trample on the laws of nations. Yet My monarch, be assured, will vent his rage In direst vengeance! BURLEIGH. Let him seek it here. [Exeunt KENT and AUBESPINE.

SCENE III.

LEICESTER, BURLEIGH. LEICESTER. And thus you loose yourself the knot of union Which you officiously, uncalled for, bound! You have deserved but little of your country, My lord; this trouble was superfluous. BURLEIGH. My aim was good, though fate declared against it; Happy is he who has so fair a conscience! LEICESTER. Well know we the mysterious mien of Burleigh When he is on the hunt for deeds of treason. Now you are in your element, my lord; A monstrous outrage has been just committed, And darkness veils as yet its perpetrators: Now will a court of inquisition rise; Each word, each look be weighed; men's very thoughts Be summoned to the bar. You are, my lord, The mighty man, the Atlas of the state, All England's weight lies upon your shoulders. BURLEIGH. In you, my lord, I recognize my master; For such a victory as your eloquence Has gained I cannot boast. LEICESTER. What means your lordship? BURLEIGH. You were the man who knew, behind my back, To lure the queen to Fotheringay Castle. LEICESTER. Behind your back! When did I fear to act Before your face? BURLEIGH. You led her majesty? Oh, no—you led her not—it was the queen Who was so gracious as to lead you thither. LEICESTER. What mean you, my lord, by

that? BURLEIGH. The noble part You forced the queen to play! The glorious triumph Which you prepared for her! Too gracious princess! So shamelessly, so wantonly to mock Thy unsuspecting goodness, to betray thee So pitiless to thy exulting foe! This, then, is the magnanimity, the grace Which suddenly possessed you in the council! The Stuart is for this so despicable, So weak an enemy, that it would scarce Be worth the pains to stain us with her blood. A specious plan! and sharply pointed too; 'Tis only pity this sharp point is broken. LEICESTER. Unworthy wretch! this instant follow me, And answer at the throne this insolence. BURLEIGH. You'll find me there, my lord; and look you well That there your eloquence desert you not. [Exit.

SCENE IV.

LEICESTER alone, then MORTIMER. LEICESTER. I am detected! All my plot's disclosed! How has my evil genius tracked my steps! Alas! if he has proofs, if she should learn That I have held a secret correspondence With her worst enemy; how criminal Shall I appear to her! How false will then My counsel seem, and all the fatal pains I took to lure the queen to Fotheringay! I've shamefully betrayed, I have exposed her To her detested enemy's revilings! Oh! never, never can she pardon that. All will appear as if premeditated. The bitter turn of this sad interview, The triumph and the tauntings of her rival; Yes, e'en the murderous hand which had prepared A bloody, monstrous, unexpected fate; All, all will be ascribed to my suggestions! I see no rescue! nowhere—ha! Who comes? [MORTIMER enters in the most violent uneasiness, and looks with apprehension round him. MORTIMER. Lord Leicester! Is it you! Are we alone? LEICESTER. Ill-fated wretch, away! What seek you here? MORTIMER. They are upon our track—upon yours, too; Be vigilant! LEICESTER. Away, away! MORTIMER. They know That private conferences have been held At Aubespine's—— LEICESTER. What's that to me?

MORTIMER. They know, too, That the assassin—— LEICESTER. That is your affair— Audacious wretch! to dare to mix my name In your detested outrage: go; defend Your bloody deeds yourself! MORTIMER. But only hear me. LEICESTER (violently enraged). Down, down to hell! Why cling you at my heels Like an infernal spirit! I disclaim you; I know you not; I make no common cause With murderers! MORTIMER. You will not hear me, then! I came to warn you; you too are detected. LEICESTER. How! What? MORTIMER. Lord Burleigh went to Fotheringay Just as the luckless deed had been attempted; Searched with strict scrutiny the queen's apartments, And found there—— LEICESTER. What? MORTIMER. A letter which the queen Had just addressed to you—— LEICESTER. Unhappy woman! MORTIMER. In which she calls on you to keep your word, Renews the promise of her hand, and mentions The picture which she sent you. LEICESTER. Death and hell! MORTIMER. Lord Burleigh has the letter. LEICESTER. I am lost! [During the following speech of MORTIMER, LEICESTER goes up and down as in despair. MORTIMER. Improve the moment; be beforehand with him, And save yourself—save her! An oath can clear Your fame; contrive excuses to avert The worst. I am disarmed, can do no more; My comrades are dispersed—to pieces fallen Our whole confederacy. For Scotland I To rally such new friends as there I may. 'Tis now your turn, my lord; try what your weight, What bold assurance can effect. LEICESTER (stops suddenly as if resolved). I will. [Goes to the door, opens it, and calls. Who waits without? Guards! seize this wretched traitor! [To the officer, who comes in with soldiers. And guard him closely! A most dreadful plot Is brought to light—I'll to her majesty. MORTIMER (stands for a time petrified with wonder; collects himself soon, and follows LEICESTER with his looks expressive of the most sovereign contempt). Infamous wretch! But I deserve it all. Who told me then to trust this practised villain? Now o'er my head he strides, and on my fall He builds the bridge of safety! be it so; Go, save thyself—my lips are sealed forever; I will not join even thee in my

destruction; I would not own thee, no, not even in death; Life is the faithless villain's only good! [To the officer of the guard, who steps forward to seize him. What wilt thou, slave of tyranny, with me? I laugh to scorn thy threatenings; I am free. [Drawing a dagger. OFFICER. He's armed; rush in and wrest his weapon from him. [They rush upon him, he defends himself. MORTIMER (raising his voice). And in this latest moment shall my heart Expand itself in freedom, and my tongue Shall break this long constraint. Curse and destruction Light on you all who have betrayed your faith, Your God, and your true sovereign! Who, alike To earthly Mary false as to the heavenly, Have sold your duties to this bastard queen! OFFICER. Hear you these blasphemies? Rush forward—seize him. MORTIMER. Beloved queen! I could not set thee free; Yet take a lesson from me how to die. Mary, thou holy one, O! pray for me! And take me to thy heavenly home on high. [Stabs himself, and falls into the arms of the guard.

SCENE V.

The apartment of the Queen. ELIZABETH, with a letter in her hand, BURLEIGH. ELIZABETH. To lure me thither! trifle with me thus! The traitor! Thus to lead me, as in triumph, Into the presence of his paramour! Oh, Burleigh! ne'er was woman so deceived. BURLEIGH. I cannot yet conceive what potent means, What magic he exerted, to surprise My queen's accustomed prudence. ELIZABETH. Oh, I die For shame! How must he laugh to scorn my weakness! I thought to humble her, and was myself The object of her bitter scorn. BURLEIGH. By this You see how faithfully I counselled you. ELIZABETH. Oh, I am sorely punished, that I turned My ear from your wise counsels; yet I thought I might confide in him. Who could suspect Beneath the vows of faithfullest devotion A deadly snare? In whom can I confide When he deceives me? He, whom I have made The greatest of the great, and ever set The nearest to my heart, and in this court Allowed to play the master and the king.

BURLEIGH. Yet in that very moment he betrayed you, Betrayed you to this wily Queen of Scots. ELIZABETH. Oh, she shall pay me for it with her life! Is the death-warrant ready? BURLEIGH. 'Tis prepared As you commanded. ELIZABETH. She shall surely die— He shall behold her fall, and fall himself! I've driven him from my heart. No longer love, Revenge alone is there: and high as once He stood, so low and shameful be his fall! A monument of my severity, As once the proud example of my weakness. Conduct him to the Tower; let a commission Of peers be named to try him. He shall feel In its full weight the rigor of the law. BURLEIGH. But he will seek thy presence; he will clear—— ELIZABETH. How can he clear himself? Does not the letter Convict him. Oh, his crimes are manifest! BURLEIGH. But thou art mild and gracious! His appearance, His powerful presence—— ELIZABETH. I will never see him; No never, never more. Are orders given Not to admit him should he come? BURLEIGH. 'Tis done. PAGE (entering). The Earl of Leicester! ELIZABETH. The presumptuous man! I will not see him. Tell him that I will not. PAGE. I am afraid to bring my lord this message, Nor would he credit it. ELIZABETH. And I have raised him So high that my own servants tremble more At him than me! BURLEIGH (to the PAGE). The queen forbids his presence. [The PAGE retires slowly. ELIZABETH (after a pause). Yet, if it still were possible? If he Could clear himself? Might it not be a snare Laid by the cunning one, to sever me From my best friends—the ever-treacherous harlot! She might have writ the letter, but to raise Poisonous suspicion in my heart, to ruin The man she hates. BURLEIGH. Yet, gracious queen, consider.

SCENE VI.

LEICESTER (bursts open the door with violence, and enters with an imperious air). LEICESTER. Fain would I see the shameless man who dares Forbid me the apartments of my queen! ELIZABETH (avoiding his sight). Audacious slave!

LEICESTER. To turn me from the door! If for a Burleigh she be visible, She must be so to me! BURLEIGH. My lord, you are Too bold, without permission to intrude. LEICESTER. My lord, you are too arrogant, to take The lead in these apartments. What! Permission! I know of none who stands so high at court As to permit my doings, or refuse them. [Humbly approaching ELIZABETH. 'Tis from my sovereign's lips alone that I—— ELIZABETH (without looking at him). Out of my sight, deceitful, worthless traitor! LEICESTER. 'Tis not my gracious queen I hear, but Burleigh, My enemy, in these ungentle words. To my imperial mistress I appeal; Thou hast lent him thine ear; I ask the like. ELIZABETH. Speak, shameless wretch! Increase your crime—deny it. LEICESTER. Dismiss this troublesome intruder first. Withdraw, my lord; it is not of your office To play the third man here: between the queen And me there is no need of witnesses. Retire—— ELIZABETH (to BURLEIGH). Remain, my lord; 'tis my command.

LEICESTER. What has a third to do 'twixt thee and me? I have to clear myself before my queen, My worshipped queen; I will maintain the rights Which thou hast given me; these rights are sacred, And I insist upon it, that my lord Retire. ELIZABETH. This haughty tone befits you well. LEICESTER. It well befits me; am not I the man, The happy man, to whom thy gracious favor Has given the highest station? this exalts me Above this Burleigh, and above them all. Thy heart imparted me this rank, and what Thy favor gave, by heavens I will maintain At my life's hazard. Let him go, it needs Two moments only to exculpate me. ELIZABETH. Think not, with cunning words, to hide the truth. LEICESTER. That fear from him, so voluble of speech: But what I say is to the heart addressed; And I will justify what I have dared To do, confiding in thy generous favor, Before thy heart alone. I recognize No other jurisdiction. ELIZABETH. Base deceiver 'Tis this, e'en this, which above all condemns you. My lord, produce the letter. [To BURLEIGH. BURLEIGH. Here it is. LEICESTER (running over the letter without losing his presence of mind). 'Tis Mary Stuart's hand—— ELIZABETH. Read and be dumb!

LEICESTER (having read it quietly). Appearance is against me, yet I hope I shall not by appearances be judged. ELIZABETH. Can you deny your secret correspondence With Mary?—that she sent and you received Her picture, that you gave her hopes of rescue? LEICESTER. It were an easy matter, if I felt That I were guilty of a crime, to challenge The testimony of my enemy: Yet bold is my good conscience. I confess That she hath said the truth. ELIZABETH. Well then, thou wretch! BURLEIGH. His own words sentence him—— ELIZABETH. Out of my sight! Away! Conduct the traitor to the Tower! LEICESTER. I am no traitor; it was wrong, I own, To make a secret of this step to thee; Yet pure was my intention, it was done To search into her plots and to confound them. ELIZABETH. Vain subterfuge! BURLEIGH. And do you think, my lord—— LEICESTER. I've played a dangerous game, I know it well, And none but Leicester dare be bold enough To risk it at this court. The world must know How I detest this Stuart, and the rank Which here I hold; my monarch's confidence, With which she honors me, must sure suffice To overturn all doubt of my intentions. Well may the man thy favor above all Distinguishes pursue a daring course To do his duty! BURLEIGH. If the course was good, Wherefore conceal it? LEICESTER. You are used, my lord, To prate before you act; the very chime Of your own deeds. This is your manner, lord; But mine is first to act, and then to speak. BURLEIGH. Yes, now you speak because you must. LEICESTER (measuring him proudly and disdainfully with his eyes). And you Boast of a wonderful, a mighty action, That you have saved the queen, have snatched away The mask from treachery; all is known to you; You think, forsooth, that nothing can escape Your penetrating eyes. Poor, idle boaster! In spite of all your cunning, Mary Stuart Was free to-day, had I not hindered it. BURLEIGH. How? You? LEICESTER. Yes, I, my lord; the queen confided In Mortimer; she opened to the youth Her inmost soul! Yes, she went further still; She gave him, too, a secret, bloody charge, Which Paulet had before refused with horror. Say, is it so, or not? [The QUEEN and BURLEIGH look at one another with astonishment. BURLEIGH.

Whence know ye this? LEICESTER. Nay, is it not a fact? Now answer me. And where, my lord, where were your thousand eyes, Not to discover Mortimer was false? That he, the Guise's tool, and Mary's creature, A raging papist, daring fanatic, Was come to free the Stuart, and to murder The Queen of England! ELIZABETH (with the utmost astonishment). How! This Mortimer! LEICESTER. 'Twas he through whom our correspondence passed. This plot it was which introduced me to him. This very day she was to have been torn From her confinement; he, this very moment, Disclosed his plan to me: I took him prisoner, And gave him to the guard, when in despair To see his work o'erturned, himself unmasked, He slew himself! ELIZABETH. Oh, I indeed have been Deceived beyond example, Mortimer! BURLEIGH. This happened then but now? Since last we parted? LEICESTER. For my own sake, I must lament the deed; That he was thus cut off. His testimony, Were he alive, had fully cleared my fame, And freed me from suspicion; 'twas for this That I surrendered him to open justice. I thought to choose the most impartial course To verify and fix my innocence Before the world. BURLEIGH. He killed himself, you say Is't so? Or did you kill him? LEICESTER. Vile suspicion! Hear but the guard who seized him. [He goes to the door, and calls. Ho! who waits? [Enter the officer of the guard. Sir, tell the queen how Mortimer expired. OFFICER. I was on duty in the palace porch, When suddenly my lord threw wide the door, And ordered me to take the knight in charge, Denouncing him a traitor: upon this He grew enraged, and with most bitter curses Against our sovereign and our holy faith, He drew a dagger, and before the guards Could hinder his intention, plunged the steel Into his heart, and fell a lifeless corpse. LEICESTER. 'Tis well; you may withdraw. Her majesty Has heard enough. [The officer withdraws. ELIZABETH. Oh, what a deep abyss Of monstrous deeds? LEICESTER. Who was it, then, my queen, Who saved you? Was it Burleigh? Did he know The dangers which surrounded you? Did he Avert them from your head? Your faithful Leicester Was your good angel. BURLEIGH. This same Mortimer Died most conveniently for you, my lord.

ELIZABETH. What I should say I know not. I believe you, And I believe you not. I think you guilty, And yet I think you not. A curse on her Who caused me all this anguish. LEICESTER. She must die; I now myself consent unto her death. I formerly advised you to suspend The sentence, till some arm should rise anew On her behalf; the case has happened now, And I demand her instant execution. BURLEIGH. You give this counsel? You? LEICESTER. Howe'er it wound My feelings to be forced to this extreme, Yet now I see most clearly, now I feel That the queen's welfare asks this bloody victim. 'Tis my proposal, therefore, that the writ Be drawn at once to fix the execution. BURLEIGH (to the QUEEN). Since, then, his lordship shows such earnest zeal, Such loyalty, 'twere well were he appointed To see the execution of the sentence. LEICESTER. Who? I? BURLEIGH. Yes, you; you surely ne'er could find A better means to shake off the suspicion Which rests upon you still, than to command Her, whom 'tis said you love, to be beheaded. ELIZABETH (looking steadfastly at LEICESTER). My lord advises well. So be it, then. LEICESTER. It were but fit that my exalted rank Should free me from so mournful a commission, Which would indeed, in every sense, become A Burleigh better than the Earl of Leicester. The man who stands so near the royal person Should have no knowledge of such fatal scenes: But yet to prove my zeal, to satisfy My queen, I waive my charge's privilege, And take upon myself this hateful duty. ELIZABETH. Lord Burleigh shall partake this duty with you. [To BURLEIGH. So be the warrant instantly prepared. [BURLEIGH withdraws; a tumult heard without.

SCENE VII.

The QUEEN, the EARL OF KENT. ELIZABETH. How now, my Lord of Kent? What uproar's this I hear without? KENT. My queen, it is thy people, Who, round the palace ranged, impatiently Demand to see their sovereign. ELIZABETH. What's their wish? KENT. A panic terror has already spread Through London, that thy life

has been attempted; That murderers commissioned from the pope Beset thee; that the Catholics have sworn To rescue from her prison Mary Stuart, And to proclaim her queen. Thy loyal people Believe it, and are mad; her head alone Can quiet them; this day must be her last. ELIZABETH. How! Will they force me, then? KENT. They are resolved——

SCENE VIII.

Enter BURLEIGH and DAVISON, with a paper. ELIZABETH. Well, Davison? DAVISON (approaches earnestly). Your orders are obeyed, My queen—— ELIZABETH. What orders, sir? [As she is about to take the paper, she shudders, and starts back. Oh, God! BURLEIGH. Obey Thy people's voice; it is the voice of God. ELIZABETH (irresolute, as if in contest with herself) Oh, my good lord, who will assure me now That what I hear is my whole people's voice, The voice of all the world! Ah! much I fear, That, if I now should listen to the wish Of the wild multitude, a different voice Might soon be heard;—and that the very men, Who now by force oblige me to this step, May, when 'tis taken, heavily condemn me!

SCENE IX.

Enter the EARL OF SHREWSBURY (who enters with great emotion). SHREWSBURY. Hold fast, my queen, they wish to hurry thee; [Seeing DAVISON with the paper. Be firm—or is it then decided?—is it Indeed decided? I behold a paper Of ominous appearance in his hand; Let it not at this moment meet thy eyes, My queen!—— ELIZABETH. Good Shrewsbury! I am constrained—— SHREWSBURY. Who can constrain thee? Thou art Queen of England, Here must thy majesty assert its rights: Command those savage voices to be silent, Who take upon themselves to put constraint Upon thy royal will, to rule thy judgment. Fear only, blind conjecture, moves thy people; Thou art thyself beside thyself; thy wrath

Is grievously provoked: thou art but mortal, And canst not thus ascend the judgment seat. BURLEIGH. Judgment has long been past. It is not now The time to speak but execute the sentence. KENT (who upon SHREWSBURY'S entry had retired, comes back). The tumult gains apace; there are no means To moderate the people. ELIZABETH (to SHREWSBURY). See, my lord, How they press on. SHREWSBURY. I only ask a respite; A single word traced by thy hand decides The peace, the happiness of all thy life! Thou hast for years considered, let not then A moment ruled by passion hurry thee— But a short respite—recollect thyself! Wait for a moment of tranquillity. BURLEIGH (violently). Wait for it—pause—delay—till flames of fire Consume the realm; until the fifth attempt Of murder be successful! God, indeed, Hath thrice delivered thee; thy late escape Was marvellous, and to expect again A miracle would be to tempt thy God! SHREWSBURY. That God, whose potent hand hath thrice preserved thee, Who lent my aged feeble arm its strength To overcome the madman:—he deserves Thy confidence. I will not raise the voice Of justice now, for now is not the time; Thou canst not hear it in this storm of passion. Yet listen but to this! Thou tremblest now Before this living Mary—tremble rather Before the murdered, the beheaded Mary. She will arise, and quit her grave, will range A fiend of discord, an avenging ghost, Around thy realm, and turn thy people's hearts From their allegiance. For as yet the Britons Hate her, because they fear her; but most surely Will they avenge her when she is no more. They will no more behold the enemy Of their belief, they will but see in her The much-lamented issue of their kings A sacrifice to jealousy and hate. Then quickly shalt thou see the sudden change When thou hast done the bloody deed; then go Through London, seek thy people, which till now Around thee swarmed delighted; thou shalt see Another England, and another people; For then no more the godlike dignity Of justice, which subdued thy subjects' hearts, Will beam around thee. Fear, the dread ally Of tyranny, will shuddering march before thee, And make a wilderness in every street— The last, extremest crime thou hast committed.

What head is safe, if the anointed fall? ELIZABETH. Ah! Shrewsbury, you saved my life, you turned The murderous steel aside; why let you not The dagger take its course? then all these broils Would have been ended; then, released from doubt, And free from blame, I should be now at rest In my still, peaceful grave. In very sooth I'm weary of my life, and of my crown. If Heaven decree that one of us two queens Must perish, to secure the other's life— And sure it must be so—why should not I Be she who yields? My people must decide; I give them back the sovereignty they gave. God is my witness that I have not lived For my own sake, but for my people's welfare. If they expect from this false, fawning Stuart, The younger sovereign, more happy days, I will descend with pleasure from the throne, Again repair to Woodstock's quiet bowers, Where once I spent my unambitious youth; Where far removed from all the vanities Of earthly power, I found within myself True majesty. I am not made to rule— A ruler should be made of sterner stuff: My heart is soft and tender. I have governed These many years this kingdom happily, But then I only needed to make happy: Now, comes my first important regal duty, And now I feel how weak a thing I am. BURLEIGH. Now by mine honor, when I hear my queen, My royal liege, speak such unroyal words, I should betray my office, should betray My country, were I longer to be silent. You say you love your people 'bove yourself, Now prove it. Choose not peace for your own heart, And leave your kingdom to the storms of discord. Think on the church. Shall, with this papist queen The ancient superstition be renewed? The monk resume his sway, the Roman legate In pomp march hither; lock our churches up, Dethrone our monarchs? I demand of you The souls of all your subjects—as you now Shall act, they all are saved, or all are lost! Here is no time for mercy;—to promote Your people's welfare is your highest duty. If Shrewsbury has saved your life, then I Will save both you and England—that is more! ELIZABETH. I would be left alone. No consolation, No counsel can be drawn from human aid In this conjecture:—I will lay my doubts Before the Judge of all:—I am resolved To act as He shall teach. Withdraw, my lords. [To DAVISON,

who lays the paper on the table. You, sir, remain in waiting—close at hand. [The lords withdraw, SHREWSBURY alone stands for a few moments before the QUEEN, regards her significantly, then withdraws slowly, and with an expression of the deepest anguish.

SCENE X.

ELIZABETH alone. Oh! servitude of popularity! Disgraceful slavery! How weary am I Of flattering this idol, which my soul Despises in its inmost depth! Oh! when Shall I once more be free upon this throne? I must respect the people's voice, and strive To win the favor of the multitude, And please the fancies of a mob, whom naught But jugglers' tricks delight. O call not him A king who needs must please the world: 'tis he Alone, who in his actions does not heed The fickle approbation of mankind. Have I then practised justice, all my life Shunned each despotic deed; have I done this Only to bind my hands against this first, This necessary act of violence? My own example now condemns myself! Had I but been a tyrant, like my sister, My predecessor, I could fearless then Have shed this royal blood:—but am I now Just by my own free choice? No—I was forced By stern necessity to use this virtue; Necessity, which binds e'en monarch's wills. Surrounded by my foes, my people's love Alone supports me on my envied throne. All Europe's powers confederate to destroy me; The pope's inveterate decree declares me Accursed and excommunicated. France Betrays me with a kiss, and Spain prepares At sea a fierce exterminating war; Thus stand I, in contention with the world, A poor defenceless woman: I must seek To veil the spot in my imperial birth, By which my father cast disgrace upon me: In vain with princely virtues would I hide it; The envious hatred of my enemies Uncovers it, and places Mary Stuart, A threatening fiend, before me evermore! [Walking up and down, with quick and agitated steps. Oh, no! this fear must end. Her head must fall! I will have peace. She is the very fury Of my

existence; a tormenting demon, Which destiny has fastened on my soul. Wherever I had planted me a comfort, A flattering hope, my way was ever crossed By this infernal viper! She has torn My favorite, and my destined bridegroom from me. The hated name of every ill I feel Is Mary Stuart—were but she no more On earth I should be free as mountain air. [Standing still. With what disdain did she look down on me, As if her eye should blast me like the lightning! Poor feeble wretch! I bear far other arms, Their touch is mortal, and thou art no more. [Advancing to the table hastily, and taking the pen. I am a bastard, am I? Hapless wretch, I am but so the while thou liv'st and breath'st. Thy death will make my birth legitimate. The moment I destroy thee is the doubt Destroyed which hangs o'er my imperial right. As soon as England has no other choice, My mother's honor and my birthright triumphs! [She signs with resolution; lets her pen then fall, and steps back with an expression of terror. After a pause she rings.

SCENE XI.

ELIZABETH, DAVISON. ELIZABETH. Where are their lordships? DAVISON. They are gone to quell The tumult of the people. The alarm Was instantly appeased when they beheld The Earl of Shrewsbury. That's he! exclaimed A hundred voices—that's the man—he saved The queen; hear him—the bravest man in England! And now began the gallant Talbot, blamed In gentle words the people's violence, And used such strong, persuasive eloquence, That all were pacified, and silently They slunk away. ELIZABETH. The fickle multitude! Which turns with every wind. Unhappy he Who leans upon this reed! 'Tis well, Sir William; You may retire again—— [As he is going towards the door. And, sir, this paper, Receive it back; I place it in your hands. DAVISON (casts a look upon the paper, and starts back). My gracious queen—thy name! 'tis then decided. ELIZABETH. I had but to subscribe it—I have done so— A paper sure cannot decide—a name Kills not.

DAVISON. Thy name, my queen, beneath this paper Is most decisive—kills—'tis like the lightning, Which blasteth as it flies! This fatal scroll Commands the sheriff and commissioners To take departure straight for Fotheringay, And to the Queen of Scots announce her death, Which must at dawn be put in execution. There is no respite, no discretion here. As soon as I have parted with this writ Her race is run. ELIZABETH. Yes, sir, the Lord has placed This weighty business in your feeble hands; Seek him in prayer to light you with his wisdom; I go—and leave you, sir, to do your duty. [Going. DAVISON. No; leave me not, my queen, till I have heard Your will. The only wisdom that I need Is, word for word, to follow your commands. Say, have you placed this warrant in my hands To see that it be speedily enforced? ELIZABETH. That you must do as your own prudence dictates. DAVISON (interrupting her quickly, and alarmed). Not mine—oh, God forbid! Obedience is My only prudence here. No point must now Be left to be decided by your servant. A small mistake would here be regicide, A monstrous crime, from which my soul recoils. Permit me, in this weighty act, to be Your passive instrument, without a will:— Tell me in plain, undoubted terms your pleasure, What with the bloody mandate I should do.

ELIZABETH. Its name declares its meaning. DAVISON. Do you, then, My liege, command its instant execution? ELIZABETH. I said not that; I tremble but to think it. DAVISON. Shall I retain it, then, 'till further orders? ELIZABETH. At your own risk; you answer the event. DAVISON. I! gracious heavens! Oh, speak, my queen, your pleasure! ELIZABETH. My pleasure is that this unhappy business Be no more mentioned to me; that at last I may be freed from it, and that forever. DAVISON. It costs you but a word—determine then What shall I do with this mysterious scroll? ELIZABETH. I have declared it, plague me, sir, no longer. DAVISON. You have declared it, say you? Oh, my queen, You have said nothing. Please, my gracious mistress, But to remember—— ELIZABETH (stamps on the ground). Insupportable! DAVISON. Oh, be indulgent to me! I have entered Unwittingly, not

many months ago, Upon this office; I know not the language Of courts and kings. I ever have been reared In simple, open wise, a plain blunt man. Be patient with me; nor deny your servant A light to lead him clearly to his duty. [He approaches her in a supplicating posture, she turns her back on him; he stands in despair; then speaks with a tone of resolution. Take, take again this paper—take it back! Within my hands it is a glowing fire. Select not me, my queen; select not me To serve you in this terrible conjecture. ELIZABETH. Go, sir;—fulfil the duty of your office. [Exit.

SCENE XII.

DAVISON, then BURLEIGH. DAVISON. She goes! She leaves me doubting and perplexed With this dread paper! How to act I know not; Should I retain it, should I forward it? [To BURLEIGH, who enters. Oh! I am glad that you are come, my lord, 'Tis you who have preferred me to this charge; Now free me from it, for I undertook it, Unknowing how responsible it made me. Let me then seek again the obscurity In which you found me; this is not my place. BURLEIGH. How now? Take courage, sir! Where is the warrant? The queen was with you. DAVISON. She has quitted me In bitter anger. Oh, advise me, help me, Save me from this fell agony of doubt! My lord, here is the warrant: it is signed! BURLEIGH. Indeed! Oh, give it, give it me! DAVISON. I may not. BURLEIGH. How! DAVISON. She has not yet explained her final will. BURLEIGH. Explained! She has subscribed it;—give it to me. DAVISON. I am to execute it, and I am not. Great heavens! I know not what I am to do! BURLEIGH (urging more violently). It must be now, this moment, executed. The warrant, sir. You're lost if you delay. DAVISON. So am I also if I act too rashly. BURLEIGH. What strange infatuation. Give it me. [Snatches the paper from him, and exit with it. DAVISON. What would you? Hold? You will be my destruction.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

The Scene the same as in the First Act. HANNAH KENNEDY in deep mourning, her eyes still red from weeping, in great but quiet anguish, is employed in sealing letters and parcels. Her sorrow often interrupts her occupation, and she is seen at such intervals to pray in silence. PAULET and DRURY, also in mourning, enter, followed by many servants, who bear golden and silver vessels, mirrors, paintings, and other valuables, and fill the back part of the stage with them. PAULET delivers to the NURSE a box of jewels and a paper, and seems to inform her by signs that it contains the inventory of the effects the QUEEN had brought with her. At the sight of these riches, the anguish of the NURSE is renewed; she sinks into a deep, glowing melancholy, during which DRURY, PAULET, and the servants silently retire. MELVIL enters. KENNEDY (screams aloud as soon as she observes him). Melvil! Is it you? Behold I you again? MELVIL. Yes, faithful Kennedy, we meet once more. KENNEDY. After this long, long, painful separation! MELVIL. A most unhappy, bitter meeting this! KENNEDY. You come—— MELVIL. To take an everlasting leave Of my dear queen—to bid a last farewell! KENNEDY. And now at length, now on the fatal morn Which brings her death, they grant our royal lady The presence of her friends. Oh, worthy sir, I will not question you, how you have fared, Nor tell you all the sufferings we've endured, Since you were torn away from us: alas! There will be time enough for that hereafter. O, Melvil, Melvil, why was it our fate To see the dawn of this unhappy day? MELVIL. Let us not melt each other with our grief. Throughout my whole remaining life, as long As ever it may be, I'll sit and weep; A smile shall never more light up these cheeks, Ne'er will I lay this sable garb aside, But lead henceforth a life of endless mourning. Yet on this last sad day I will be firm; Pledge me your word to moderate your grief; And when the rest of comfort

all bereft, Abandoned to despair, wail round her, we Will lead her with heroic resolution, And be her staff upon the road to death! KENNEDY. Melvil! You are deceived if you suppose The queen has need of our support to meet Her death with firmness. She it is, my friend, Who will exhibit the undaunted heart. Oh! trust me, Mary Stuart will expire As best becomes a heroine and queen! MELVIL. Received she firmly, then, the sad decree Of death?—'tis said that she was not prepared. KENNEDY. She was not; yet they were far other terrors Which made our lady shudder: 'twas not death, But her deliverer, which made her tremble. Freedom was promised us; this very night Had Mortimer engaged to bear us hence: And thus the queen, perplexed 'twixt hope and fear, And doubting still if she should trust her honor And royal person to the adventurous youth, Sat waiting for the morning. On a sudden We hear a boisterous tumult in the castle; Our ears are startled by repeated blows Of many hammers, and we think we hear The approach of our deliverers: hope salutes us, And suddenly and unresisted wakes The sweet desire of life. And now at once The portals are thrown open—it is Paulet, Who comes to tell us—that—the carpenters Erect beneath our feet the murderous scaffold! [She turns aside, overpowered by excessive anguish. MELVIL. O God in Heaven! Oh, tell me then how bore The queen this terrible vicissitude? KENNEDY (after a pause, in which she has somewhat collected herself). Not by degrees can we relinquish life; Quick, sudden, in the twinkling of an eye, The separation must be made, the change From temporal to eternal life; and God Imparted to our mistress at this moment His grace, to cast away each earthly hope, And firm and full of faith to mount the skies. No sign of pallid fear dishonored her; No word of mourning, 'till she heard the tidings Of Leicester's shameful treachery, the sad fate Of the deserving youth, who sacrificed Himself for her; the deep, the bitter anguish Of that old knight, who lost, through her, his last, His only hope; till then she shed no tear— 'Twas then her tears began to flow, 'twas not Her own, but others' woe which wrung them from her. MELVIL. Where is she now? Can you not lead me to her? KENNEDY. She spent

the last remainder of the night In prayer, and from her dearest friends she took Her last farewell in writing: then she wrote Her will 2 with her own hand. She now enjoys A moment of repose, the latest slumber Refreshes her weak spirits. MELVIL. Who attends her? KENNEDY. None but her women and physician Burgoyn: You seem to look around you with surprise; Your eyes appear to ask me what should mean This show of splendor in the house of death. Oh, sir, while yet we lived we suffered want; But at our death plenty returns to us.

SCENE II.

Enter MARGARET CURL. KENNEDY. How, madam, fares the queen? Is she awake? CURL (drying her tears). She is already dressed—she asks for you. KENNEDY. I go:— [To MELVIL, who seems to wish to accompany her. But follow not until the queen Has been prepared to see you. [Exit. CURL. Melvil, sure, The ancient steward? MELVIL. Yes, the same. CURL. Oh, sir, This is a house which needs no steward now! Melvil, you come from London; can you give No tidings of my husband? MELVIL. It is said He will be set at liberty as soon—— CURL. As soon as our dear queen shall be no more. Oh, the unworthy, the disgraceful traitor! He is our lady's murderer—'tis said It was his testimony which condemned him. MELVIL. 'Tis true. CURL. Oh, curse upon him! Be his soul Condemned forever! he has borne false witness. MELVIL. Think, madam, what you say. CURL. I will maintain it With every sacred oath before the court, I will repeat it in his very face; The world shall hear of nothing else. I say That she dies innocent! MELVIL.. God grant it true!

2 The document is now in the British Museum.

SCENE III.

Enter HANNAH KENNEDY. KENNEDY (to CURL). Go, madam, and require a

cup of wine— 'Tis for our lady. MELVIL. Is the queen then sick? KENNEDY. She thinks that she is strong; she is deceived By her heroic courage; she believes She has no need of nourishment; yet still A hard and painful task's allotted her. Her enemies shall not enjoy the triumph; They shall not say that fear hath blanched her cheeks When her fatigues have conquered human weakness. MELVIL. May I approach her? KENNEDY. She will come herself.

SCENE IV.

Enter BURGOYN; two women of the chamber follow him, weeping, and in deep mourning. BURGOYN. Oh, Melvil! MELVIL. Oh, Burgoyn! [They embrace silently. FIRST WOMAN (to the NURSE). She chose to be Alone: she wishes, at this awful moment, For the last time, to commune with her God.

SCENE V.

Enter MARGARET CURL, bearing a golden cup of wine; she places it hastily upon the table, and leans, pale and trembling, against a chair. MELVIL. How, madam! What has frightened you? KENNEDY. Oh God! BURGOYN. Speak, madam! CURL. What, alas! have I beheld! MELVIL. Come to yourself, and say what you have seen! CURL. As I went down the staircase which conducts To the great hall below, a door stood open; I looked into the chamber, and I saw— Oh heaven! MELVIL. What saw you? CURL. All the walls were hung With black; a spacious scaffold, too, o'erspread With sable cloth, was raised above the floor, And in the middle of the scaffold stood A dreadful sable block! upon it lay A naked, polished axe:—the hall was full Of cruel people, crowding round the scaffold Who, with a horrid thirst for human blood, Seemed waiting for the victim! THE WOMEN. Gracious heaven, Protect our queen! MELVIL. Be calm; the queen approaches.

SCENE VI.

Enter MARY in white and sumptuously arrayed, as for a festival: she wears hanging from her neck, on a row of small beads, an Agnus Dei; a rosary hangs from her girdle; she bears a crucifix in her hand, and a diadem of precious stones binds her hair; her large black veil is thrown back. On her entrance all present fall back on both sides with the most violent expressions of anguish. MELVIL falls involuntarily upon his knees. MARY (with quiet majesty, looking round the whole circle). Why these complaints? Why weep ye? Ye should rather Rejoice with me, that now at length the end Of my long woe approaches; that my shackles Fall off, my prison opens, and my soul Delighted mounts on seraph's wings, and seeks The land of everlasting liberty. When I was offered up to the oppression Of my proud enemy, was forced to suffer Ignoble taunts, and insults most unfitting A free and sovereign queen, then was the time To weep for me; but as an earnest friend, Beneficent and healing death approaches. All the indignities which I have suffered On earth are covered by his sable wings. The most degraded criminal's ennobled By his last sufferings, by his final exit; I feel again the crown upon my brows. And dignity possess my swelling soul! [Advancing a few steps. How! Melvil here! My worthy sir, not so; Arise; you rather come in time to see The triumph of your mistress than her death. One comfort, which I never had expected, Is granted me, that after death my name Will not be quite abandoned to my foes; One friend at least, one partner of my faith, Will be my witness in the hour of death. Say, honest Melvil, how you fared the while In this inhospitable, hostile land? For since the time they tore you from my side My fears for you have oft depressed my soul. MELVIL. No other evil galled me but my grief For thee, and that I wanted power to serve thee. MARY. How fares my chamberlain, old Didier? But sure the faithful servant long has slept The sleep of death, for he was full of years. MELVIL. God hath not granted him as yet this grace; He lives to see the grave o'erwhelm thy youth. MARY. Oh! could I but have felt

before my death, The happiness of pressing one descendant Of the dear blood of Stuart to my bosom. But I must suffer in a foreign land, None but my servants to bewail my fate! Sir; to your loyal bosom I commit My latest wishes. Bear then, sir, my blessing To the most Christian king, my royal brother, And the whole royal family of France. I bless the cardinal, my honored uncle, And also Henry Guise, my noble cousin. I bless the holy father, the vicegerent Of Christ on earth, who will, I trust, bless me. I bless the King of Spain, who nobly offered Himself as my deliverer, my avenger. They are remembered in my will: I hope That they will not despise, how poor soe'er They be, the presents of a heart which loves them. [Turning to her servants. I have bequeathed you to my royal brother Of France; he will protect you, he will give you Another country, and a better home; And if my last desire have any weight, Stay not in England; let no haughty Briton Glut his proud heart with your calamities, Nor see those in the dust who once were mine. Swear by this image of our suffering Lord To leave this fatal land when I'm no more. MELVIL (touching the crucifix). I swear obedience in the name of all. MARY. What I, though poor and plundered, still possess, Of which I am allowed to make disposal, Shall be amongst you shared; for I have hope In this at least my will may be fulfilled. And what I wear upon my way to death Is yours—nor envy me on this occasion The pomp of earth upon the road to heaven. [To the ladies of her chamber. To you, my Alice, Gertrude, Rosamund, I leave my pearls, my garments: you are young, And ornament may still delight your hearts. You, Margaret, possess the nearest claims, To you I should be generous: for I leave you The most unhappy woman of them all. That I have not avenged your husband's fault On you I hope my legacy will prove. The worth of gold, my Hannah, charms not thee; Nor the magnificence of precious stones: My memory, I know, will be to thee The dearest jewel; take this handkerchief, I worked it for thee, in the hours of sorrow, With my own hands, and my hot, scalding tears Are woven in the texture:—you will bind My eyes with this, when it is time: this last Sad service I would wish but from my Hannah. KENNEDY. O Melvil! I cannot

support it. MARY. Come, Come all and now receive my last farewell. [She stretches forth her hands; the WOMEN violently weeping, fall successively at her feet, and kiss her outstretched hand. Margaret, farewell—my Alice, fare thee well; Thanks, Burgoyn, for thy honest, faithful service— Thy lips are hot, my Gertrude:—I have been Much hated, yet have been as much beloved. May a deserving husband bless my Gertrude, For this warm, glowing heart is formed for love. Bertha, thy choice is better, thou hadst rather Become the chaste and pious bride of heaven; Oh! haste thee to fulfil thy vows; the goods Of earth are all deceitful; thou may'st learn This lesson from thy queen. No more; farewell, Farewell, farewell, my friends, farewell for ever. [She turns suddenly from them; all but MELVIL retire at different sides.

SCENE VII.

MARY, MELVIL. MARY (after the others are all gone). I have arranged all temporal concerns, And hope to leave the world in debt to none; Melvil, one thought alone there is which binds My troubled soul, nor suffers it to fly Delighted and at liberty to heaven. MELVIL. Disclose it to me; ease your bosom, trust Your doubts, your sorrows, to your faithful friend. MARY. I see eternity's abyss before me; Soon must I stand before the highest Judge, And have not yet appeased the Holy One. A priest of my religion is denied me, And I disdain to take the sacrament, The holy, heavenly nourishment, from priests Of a false faith; I die in the belief Of my own church, for that alone can save. MELVIL. Compose your heart; the fervent, pious wish Is prized in heaven as high as the performance. The might of tyrants can but bind the hands, The heart's devotion rises free to God, The word is dead—'tis faith which brings to life. MARY. The heart is not sufficient of itself; Our faith must have some earthly pledge to ground Its claim to the high bliss of heaven. For this Our God became incarnate, and enclosed Mysteriously his unseen heavenly grace Within an outward figure of a body. The church it is, the holy one, the high one, Which

rears for us the ladder up to heaven:— 'Tis called the Catholic Apostolic church,— For 'tis but general faith can strengthen faith; Where thousands worship and adore the heat Breaks out in flame, and, borne on eagle wings, The soul mounts upwards to the heaven of heavens. Ah! happy they, who for the glad communion Of pious prayer meet in the house of God! The altar is adorned, the tapers blaze, The bell invites, the incense soars on high; The bishop stands enrobed, he takes the cup, And blessing it declares the solemn mystery, The transformation of the elements; And the believing people fall delighted To worship and adore the present Godhead. Alas! I only am debarred from this; The heavenly benediction pierces not My prison walls: its comfort is denied me. MELVIL. Yes! it can pierce them—put thy trust in Him Who is almighty—in the hand of faith, The withered staff can send forth verdant branches And he who from the rock called living water, He can prepare an altar in this prison, Can change—— [Seizing the cup, which stands upon the table. The earthly contents of this cup Into a substance of celestial grace. MARY. Melvil! Oh, yes, I understand you, Melvil! Here is no priest, no church, no sacrament; But the Redeemer says, "When two or three Are in my name assembled, I am with them," What consecrates the priest? Say, what ordains him To be the Lord's interpreter? a heart Devoid of guile, and a reproachless conduct. Well, then, though unordained, be you my priest; To you will I confide my last confession, And take my absolution from your lips. MELVIL. If then thy heart be with such zeal inflamed, I tell thee that for thine especial comfort, The Lord may work a miracle. Thou say'st Here is no priest, no church, no sacrament— Thou err'st—here is a priest—here is a God; A God descends to thee in real presence. [At these words he uncovers his head, and shows a host in a golden vessel. I am a priest—to hear thy last confession, And to announce to thee the peace of God Upon thy way to death. I have received Upon my head the seven consecrations. I bring thee, from his Holiness, this host, Which, for thy use, himself has deigned to bless. MARY. Is then a heavenly happiness prepared To cheer me on the very verge of death? As an immortal one on golden clouds

Descends, as once the angel from on high, Delivered the apostle from his fetters:— He scorns all bars, he scorns the soldier's sword, He steps undaunted through the bolted portals, And fills the dungeon with his native glory; Thus here the messenger of heaven appears When every earthly champion had deceived me. And you, my servant once, are now the servant Of the Most High, and his immortal Word! As before me your knees were wont to bend, Before you humbled, now I kiss the dust. [She sinks before him on her knees. MELVIL (making over her the sign of the cross). Hear, Mary, Queen of Scotland:—in the name Of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Hast thou examined carefully thy heart, Swearest thou, art thou prepared in thy confession To speak the truth before the God of truth? MARY. Before my God and thee, my heart lies open. MELVIL. What calls thee to the presence of the Highest? MARY. I humbly do acknowledge to have erred Most grievously, I tremble to approach, Sullied with sin, the God of purity. MELVIL. Declare the sin which weighs so heavily Upon thy conscience since thy last confession. MARY. My heart was filled with thoughts of envious hate, And vengeance took possession of my bosom. I hope forgiveness of my sins from God, Yet could I not forgive my enemy. MELVIL. Repentest thou of the sin? Art thou, in sooth, Resolved to leave this world at peace with all? MARY. As surely as I wish the joys of heaven. MELVIL. What other sin hath armed thy heart against thee? MARY. Ah! not alone through hate; through lawless love Have I still more abused the sovereign good. My heart was vainly turned towards the man Who left me in misfortune, who deceived me. MELVIL. Repentest thou of the sin? And hast thou turned Thy heart, from this idolatry, to God? MARY. It was the hardest trial I have passed; This last of earthly bonds is torn asunder. MELVIL. What other sin disturbs thy guilty conscience? MARY. A bloody crime, indeed of ancient date, And long ago confessed; yet with new terrors. It now attacks me, black and grisly steps Across my path, and shuts the gates of heaven: By my connivance fell the king, my husband— I gave my hand and heart to a seducer— By rigid penance I have made

atonement; Yet in my soul the worm is gnawing still. MELVIL. Has then thy heart no other accusation, Which hath not been confessed and washed away? MARY. All you have heard with which my heart is charged. MELVIL. Think on the presence of Omniscience; Think on the punishments with which the church Threatens imperfect and reserved confessions This is the sin to everlasting death, For this is sinning 'gainst his Holy Spirit. MARY. So may eternal grace with victory Crown my last contest, as I wittingly Have nothing hid—— MELVIL. How? Wilt thou then conceal The crime from God for which thou art condemned? Thou tell'st me nothing of the share thou hadst In Babington and Parry's bloody treason: Thou diest for this a temporal death; for this Wilt thou, too, die the everlasting death? MARY. I am prepared to meet eternity; Within the narrow limits of an hour I shall appear before my Judge's throne. But, I repeat it, my confession's ended. MELVIL. Consider well—the heart is a deceiver. Thou hast, perhaps, with sly equivocation, The word avoided, which would make thee guilty Although thy will was party to the crime. Remember, that no juggler's tricks can blind The eye of fire which darts through every breast. MARY. 'Tis true that I have called upon all princes To free me from unworthy chains; yet 'tis As true that, neither by intent or deed, Have I attempted my oppressor's life. MELVIL. Your secretaries then have witnessed falsely. MARY. It is as I have said;—what they have witnessed The Lord will judge. MELVIL. Thou mountest, then, satisfied Of thy own innocence, the fatal scaffold? MARY. God suffers me in mercy to atone, By undeserved death, my youth's transgressions. MELVIL (making over her the sign of the cross). Go, then, and expiate them all by death; Sink a devoted victim on the altar, Thus shall thy blood atone the blood thou'st spilt. From female frailty were derived thy faults, Free from the weakness of mortality, The spotless spirit seeks the blest abodes. Now, then, by the authority which God Hath unto me committed, I absolve thee From all thy sins; be as thy faith thy welfare! [He gives her the host. Receive the body which for thee was offered— [He takes the cup which stands upon the table, consecrates it with silent prayer, then

presents it to her; she hesitates to take it, and makes signs to him to withdraw it. Receive the blood which for thy sins was shed, Receive it; 'tis allowed thee by the pope To exercise in death the highest office Of kings, the holy office of the priesthood. [She takes the cup. And as thou now, in this his earthly body Hast held with God mysterious communion, So may'st thou henceforth, in his realm of joy, Where sin no more exists, nor tears of woe, A fair, transfigured spirit, join thyself Forever with the Godhead, and forever. [He sets down the cup; hearing a noise, he covers his head, and goes to the door; MARY remains in silent devotion on her knees. MELVIL (returning). A painful conflict is in store for thee. Feel'st thou within thee strength enough to smother Each impulse of malignity and hate? MARY. I fear not a relapse. I have to God Devoted both my hatred and my love. MELVIL. Well, then, prepare thee to receive my Lords Of Leicester and of Burleigh. They are here.

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SCENE VIII.

Enter BURLEIGH, LEICESTER, and PAULET. [LEICESTER remains in the background, without raising his eyes; BURLEIGH, who remarks his confusion, steps between him and the QUEEN. BURLEIGH. I come, my Lady Stuart, to receive Your last commands and wishes. MARY. Thanks, my lord. BURLEIGH. It is the pleasure of my royal mistress That nothing reasonable be denied you. MARY. My will, my lord, declares my last desires; I've placed it in the hand of Sir Amias, And humbly beg that it may be fulfilled. PAULET. You may rely on this. MARY. I beg that all My servants unmolested may return To France, or Scotland, as their wishes lead. BURLEIGH. It shall be as you wish. MARY. And since my body Is not to rest in consecrated ground, I pray you suffer this my faithful servant To bear my heart to France, to my relations— Alas! 'twas ever there. BURLEIGH. It shall be

done. What wishes else? MARY. Unto her majesty Of England bear a sister's salutation; Tell her that from the bottom of my heart I pardon her my death; most humbly, too, I crave her to forgive me for the passion With which I spoke to her. May God preserve her And bless her with a long and prosperous reign. BURLEIGH. Say, do you still adhere to your resolve, And still refuse assistance from the dean? MARY. My lord, I've made my peace with God. [To PAULET. Good sir, I have unwittingly caused you much sorrow, Bereft you of your age's only stay. Oh, let me hope you do not hate my name. PAULET (giving her his hand). The Lord be with you! Go your way in peace.

SCENE IX.

HANNAH KENNEDY, and the other women of the QUEEN crowd into the room with marks of horror. The SHERIFF follows them, a white staff in his hand; behind are seen, through the open doors, men under arms. MARY. What ails thee, Hannah? Yes, my hour is come. The sheriff comes to lead me to my fate, And part we must. Farewell! KENNEDY and CURL. We will not leave thee, We will not part from thee. MARY (to MELVIL). You, worthy sir, And my dear, faithful Hannah, shall attend me In my last moments. I am sure, my lord Will not refuse my heart this consolation. BURLEIGH. For this I have no warrant. MARY. How, my lord; Can you deny me, then, this small petition? Respect my sex; who shall attend me else, And yield me the last service? Sure, it never Can be my sister's pleasure that in me My sex should be insulted; that these men With their rude hands should touch my royal person. BURLEIGH. 'Tis ordered that no woman shall ascend The scaffold steps with you. Their tears and moans—— MARY. She shall not weep, my lord; she shall not moan; I answer for my Hannah's resolution; Be merciful; divide me not so soon From my true foster-mother, from my friend. She bore me on her arms into this life; Let her then gently lead me to my death. PAULET (to BURLEIGH). Yield to

her wishes. BURLEIGH. Be it so. MARY. I now Have nothing in this world to wish for more. [She takes the crucifix, and kisses it. My God! My Comforter! My blest Redeemer! As once thy arms were stretched upon the cross, Let them be now extended to receive me! [She turns round to go; at the same moment her eyes fall upon LEICESTER, who, on her going, starts involuntarily, and turns his eyes towards her; at this sight MARY trembles, her knees fail her, she is about to fall, when LEICESTER catches at her, and receives her in his arms; she regards him for some time earnestly, and in silence; he cannot support her looks; at length she speaks. You keep your word, my Lord of Leicester: for You promised me your arm to lead me forth From prison, and you lend it to me now. At length the wished-for day is come, and what Was oft the object of my fondest dreams Is now accomplished: and the Earl of Leicester, The long-expected, the long-wished-for friend, Appears at length in Fotheringay Castle. I see him standing in my prison; all Is ready for the journey; all the gates Stand open, and at length I cross the threshold, Conducted by his hand; and now I leave These dismal walls behind me, and forever. All is fulfilled, and you have saved your honor. [He stands as if annihilated; she continues, with a gentle voice. Yes, Leicester; not for liberty alone I wished to be indebted to your hands. You should have made me bless that liberty. Led by your hand, and happy in your love, I hoped once more to taste the joys of life. Yes; now that I'm prepared from all the world To part, and to become a happy spirit, Whom earthly inclinations tempt no more! Now, Leicester, I may venture to confess Without a blush the frailty I have conquered; Farewell, my lord; and, if you can, be happy! To woo two queens has been your daring aim; You have disdained a tender, loving heart, Betrayed it in the hope to win a proud one: Kneel at the feet of Queen Elizabeth! May your reward not prove your punishment. Farewell; I now have nothing more on earth. [She goes, preceded by the SHERIFF; at her side MELVIL and her nurse; BURLEIGH and PAULET follow; the others, wailing, follow her with their eyes till she disappears; they then retire through the other two doors.

SCENE X.

LEICESTER (remaining alone). Do I live still? Can I still bear to live? Will not this roof fall down and bury me? Yawns no abyss to swallow in its gulf The veriest wretch on earth? What have I lost? Oh, what a pearl have I not cast away! What bliss celestial madly dashed aside! She's gone, a spirit purged from earthly stain, And the despair of hell remains for me! Where is the purpose now with which I came To stifle my heart's voice in callous scorn? To see her head descend upon the block With unaverted and indifferent eyes? How doth her presence wake my slumbering shame? Must she in death surround me with love's toils? Lost, wretched man! No more it suits thee now To melt away in womanly compassion: Love's golden bliss lies not upon thy path, Then arm thy breast in panoply of steel, And henceforth be thy brows of adamant! Wouldst thou not lose the guerdon of thy guilt, Thou must uphold, complete it daringly! Pity be dumb; mine eyes be petrified! I'll see—I will be witness of her fall. [He advances with resolute steps towards the door through which MARY passed; but stops suddenly half way. No! No! The terrors of all hell possess me. I cannot look upon the dreadful deed; I cannot see her die! Hark! What was that? They are already there. Beneath my feet The bloody business is preparing. Hark! I hear their voices. Hence! Away, away From this abode of misery and death! [He attempts to escape by another door; finds it locked, and returns. How! Does some demon chain me to this spot? To hear what I would shudder to behold? That voice—it is the dean's, exhorting her; She interrupts him. Hark—she prays aloud; Her voice is firm—now all is still, quite still! And sobs and women's moans are all I hear. Now, they undress her; they remove the stool; She kneels upon the cushion; lays her head—— [Having spoken these last words, and paused awhile, he is seen with a convulsive motion suddenly to shrink and faint away; a confused hum of voices is heard at the same moment from below, and continues for some time.

SCENE XI.

The Second Chamber in the Fourth Act. ELIZABETH (entering from a side door; her gait and action expressive of the most violent uneasiness). No message yet arrived! What! no one here! Will evening never come! Stands the sun still In its ethereal course? I can no more Remain upon the rack of expectation! Is it accomplished? Is it not? I shudder At both events, and do not dare to ask. My Lord of Leicester comes not,—Burleigh too, Whom I appointed to fulfil the sentence. If they have quitted London then 'tis done, The bolt has left its rest—it cuts the air— It strikes; has struck already: were my realm At stake I could not now arrest its course. Who's there?

SCENE XII.

Enter a PAGE. ELIZABETH. Returned alone? Where are the lords? PAGE. My Lord High-Treasurer and the Earl of Leicester? ELIZABETH. Where are they? PAGE. They are not in London. ELIZABETH. No! Where are they then? PAGE. That no one could inform me; Before the dawn, mysteriously, in haste They quitted London. ELIZABETH (exultingly). I am Queen of England! [Walking up and down in the greatest agitation. Go—call me—no, remain, boy! She is dead; Now have I room upon the earth at last. Why do I shake? Whence comes this aguish dread? My fears are covered by the grave; who dares To say I did it? I have tears enough In store to weep her fall. Are you still here? [To the PAGE. Command my secretary, Davison, To come to me this instant. Let the Earl Of Shrewsbury be summoned. Here he comes. [Exit PAGE.

SCENE XIII.

Enter SHREWSBURY. ELIZABETH. Welcome, my noble lord. What tidings; say

It cannot be a trifle which hath led Your footsteps hither at so late an hour. SHREWSBURY. My liege, the doubts that hung upon my heart, And dutiful concern for your fair fame, Directed me this morning to the Tower, Where Mary's secretaries, Nau and Curl, Are now confined as prisoners, for I wished Once more to put their evidence to proof. On my arrival the lieutenant seemed Embarrassed and perplexed; refused to show me His prisoners; but my threats obtained admittance. God! what a sight was there! With frantic looks, With hair dishevelled, on his pallet lay The Scot like one tormented by a fury. The miserable man no sooner saw me Than at my feet he fell, and there, with screams, Clasping my knees, and writhing like a worm, Implored, conjured me to acquaint him with His sovereign's destiny, for vague reports Had somehow reached the dungeons of the Tower That she had been condemned to suffer death. When I confirmed these tidings, adding, too, That on his evidence she had been doomed,— He started wildly up,—caught by the throat His fellow-prisoner; with the giant strength Of madness tore him to the ground and tried To strangle him. No sooner had we saved The wretch from his fierce grapple than at once He turned his rage against himself and beat His breast with savage fists; then cursed himself And his companions to the depths of hell! His evidence was false; the fatal letters To Babington, which he had sworn were true, He now denounced as forgeries; for he Had set down words the queen had never spoken; The traitor Nau had led him to this treason. Then ran he to the casement, threw it wide With frantic force, and cried into the street So loud that all the people gathered round: I am the man, Queen Mary's secretary, The traitor who accused his mistress falsely; I bore false witness and am cursed forever! ELIZABETH. You said yourself that he had lost his wits; A madman's words prove nothing. SHREWSBURY. Yet this madness Serves in itself to swell the proof. My liege, Let me conjure thee; be not over-hasty; Prithee, give order for a new inquiry! ELIZABETH. I will, my lord, because it is your wish, Not that I can believe my noble peers Have in this case pronounced a hasty judgment. To set your mind at rest the inquiry shall Be straight

renewed. Well that 'tis not too late! Upon the honor of our royal name, No, not the shadow of a doubt shall rest.

SCENE XIV.

Enter DAVISON. ELIZABETH. The sentence, sir, which I but late intrusted Unto your keeping; where is it? DAVISON (in the utmost astonishment). The sentence! ELIZABETH (more urgent). Which yesterday I gave into your charge. DAVISON. Into my charge, my liege! ELIZABETH. The people urged And baited me to sign it. I perforce Was driven to yield obedience to their will. I did so; did so on extreme constraint, And in your hands deposited the paper. To gain time was my purpose; you remember What then I told you. Now, the paper, sir! SHREWSBURY. Restore it, sir, affairs have changed since then, The inquiry must be set on foot anew. DAVISON. Anew! Eternal mercy! ELIZABETH. Why this pause, This hesitation? Where, sir, is the paper? DAVISON. I am undone! Undone! My fate is sealed! ELIZABETH (interrupting him violently). Let me not fancy, sir—— DAVISON. Oh, I am lost! I have it not. ELIZABETH. How? What? SHREWSBURY. Oh, God in heaven! DAVISON. It is in Burleigh's hands—since yesterday. ELIZABETH. Wretch! Is it thus you have obeyed my orders? Did I not lay my strict injunction on you To keep it carefully? DAVISON. No such injunction Was laid on me, my liege. ELIZABETH. Give me the lie? Opprobrious wretch! When did I order you To give the paper into Burleigh's hands? DAVISON. Never expressly in so many words. ELIZABETH. And, paltering villain I dare you then presume To construe, as you list, my words—and lay Your bloody meaning on them? Wo betide you, If evil come of this officious deed! Your life shall answer the event to me. Earl Shrewsbury, you see how my good name Has been abused! SHREWSBURY. I see! Oh, God in heaven! ELIZABETH. What say you? SHREWSBURY. If the knight has dared to act In this, upon his own authority, Without the knowledge of your

majesty, He must be cited to the Court of Peers To answer there for subjecting thy name To the abhorrence of all after time.

SCENE XV.

Enter BURLEIGH. BURLEIGH (bowing his knee before the QUEEN). Long life and glory to my royal mistress, And may all enemies of her dominions End like this Stuart. [SHREWSBURY hides his face. DAVIDSON wrings his hands in despair. ELIZABETH. Speak, my lord; did you From me receive the warrant? BURLEIGH. No, my queen; From Davison. ELIZABETH. And did he in my name Deliver it? BURLEIGH. No, that I cannot say. ELIZABETH. And dared you then to execute the writ Thus hastily, nor wait to know my pleasure? Just was the sentence—we are free from blame Before the world; yet it behooved thee not To intercept our natural clemency. For this, my lord, I banish you my presence; And as this forward will was yours alone Bear you alone the curse of the misdeed! [To DAVISON. For you, sir; who have traitorously o'erstepped The bounds of your commission, and betrayed A sacred pledge intrusted to your care, A more severe tribunal is prepared: Let him be straight conducted to the Tower, And capital arraignments filed against him. My honest Talbot, you alone have proved, 'Mongst all my counsellors, an upright man: You shall henceforward be my guide—my friend. SHREWSBURY. Oh! banish not the truest of your friends; Nor cast those into prison, who for you Have acted; who for you are silent now. But suffer me, great queen, to give the seal, Which, these twelve years, I've borne unworthily, Back to your royal hands, and take my leave. ELIZABETH (surprised). No, Shrewsbury; you surely would not now Desert me? No; not now. SHREWSBURY. Pardon, I am Too old, and this right hand is growing too stiff To set the seal upon your later deeds. ELIZABETH. Will he forsake me, who has saved my life? SHREWSBURY. 'Tis little I have done: I could not save Your nobler part. Live—govern happily! Your rival's dead! Henceforth you've

nothing more To fear—henceforth to nothing pay regard. [Exit. ELIZABETH (to the EARL of KENT, who enters). Send for the Earl of Leicester. KENT. He desires To be excused—he is embarked for France. The Curtain drops.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MARY STUART: A TRAGEDY ***

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