

The Captives

John Gay

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John Gay

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The Captives. A Tragedy. As it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-lane, By His Majesty's Servants

Splendidè mendax, & in omne Virgo
Nobilis ævum.

Hor.

TO HER ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCESS.

PROLOGUE: Spoken by Mr. WILKS.

*I wish some author, careless of renown,
Would without formal prologue risque the town.
For what is told you by this useless ditty?
Only that tragedy should move your pity:
That when you see theatric heroes shown,
Their virtues you should strive to make your own.
What gain we by this solemn way of teaching?*

The Captives

*Our precepts mend your lives no more than preaching.
Since then our Bard declines this beaten path;
What if we lash'd the criticks into wrath?
Poets should ne'er be drones; mean, harmless things;
But guard, like bees, their labours by their stings.
That mortal sure must all ambition smother,
Who dares not hurt one man to please another.
What, sink a joke! That's but a meer pretence:
He shows most wit who gives the most offence.*

*But still our squeamish author satyr loaths,
As children, physick; or as women, oaths.
He knows he's at the bar, and must submit;
For ev'ry man is born a judge of wit.
How can you err? Plays are like paintings try'd,
You first enquire the hand, and then decide:
Yet judge him not before the curtain draws,
Lest a fair hearing should reverse the cause.*

EPILOGUE: Spoken by Mrs. OLDFIELD.

*Shall authors teaze the town with tragick passion,
When we've more modern moral things in fashion?
Let poets quite exhaust the Muse's treasure;
Sure Masquerades must give more feeling pleasure,
Where we meet finer sense and better measure;
The marry'd Dame, whose business must be done,
Puts on the holy vestments of a Nun;
And brings her unprolifick spouse a son.
Coquettes, with whom no lover could succeed,
Here pay off all arrears, and love in deed:
Ev'n conscious Prudes are so sincere and free,
They ask each man they meet do you know me?
Do not our Operas unbend the mind,
Where ev'ry soul's to ecstasie refin'd?
Entranc'd with sound sits each seraphic Toast.
All Ladies love the play that moves the most.
Ev'n in this house I've known some tender fair,
Touch'd with meer sense alone, confess a tear.
But the soft voice of an Italian weather,
Makes them all languish three whole hours together.
And where's the wonder? Plays, like Mass, are sung,
(Religious Drama)! in an unknown tongue.*

*Will Poets ne'er consider what they cost us?
What tragedy can take, like Doctor Faustus?
Two stages in this moral show excell,
To frighten vicious youth with scenes of hell;
Yet both these Faustuses can warn but few.*

The Captives

*For what's a Conj'rer's fate to me or you?
Yet there are wives who think heav'n worth their care,
But first they kindly send their spouses there.
When you my lover's last distress behold,
Does not each husband's thrilling blood run cold?
Some heroes only dye. Ours finds a wife.
What's harder than captivity for life?
Yet Men, ne'er warn'd, still court their own undoing:
Who, for that circle, would but venture ruin?*

Dramatis Personæ.

MEN.

Phraortes, Mr. *Wilks*.

Sophernes, Mr. *Booth*.

Hydarnes, Mr. *Mills*.

Araxes, Mr. *Williams*.

Orbasius, Mr. *Bridgewater*.

Magi.

Conspirators.

WOMEN.

Astarbe, Mrs. *Porter*.

Captive, Mrs. *Oldfield*.

Doraspe, Mrs. *Campbell*.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

The PALACE.

Hydarnes. Conspirators.

1st Conspirator.

Is night near spent? *2d Consp.*

'Tis yet the dead of night;

And not a glimm'ring ray behind yon hills

Fore-runs the morning's dawn. *1st Consp.*

Thus far w'are safe. *2d Consp.*

Silence and Sleep throughout the Palace reign. *1st Consp.*

Success is now secure. *2d Consp.*

Are all assembled? *1st Consp.*

Our number's not compleat. *2d Consp.*

What, not yet come!

Those two were over-zealous. It looks ill. *1st Consp.*

Why fear ye? I'm their pledge. I know them brave.

ACT I.

The Captives

They'll soon be with us and partake our glory. *Hyd.*
What mean these murmurs? *Ist Consp.*
If mistrust divide us,
Our enterprize is foil'd, and we are lost. *Hyd.*
My vengeful heart pants for the glorious deed,
And my thirst quickens for *Phraortes'* blood.
Why stops the lazy night? O morning, rise;
Call up the drowsy Priests to the day's task;
The King to day the holy hill ascends,
And prostrate falls before the rising sun. *Ist Consp.*
The sun shall rise, but rise to him no more.
For as he passes from the royal chamber
This strikes him home. *2d Consp.*
Let each man give him death.
We cannot be too sure. *Hyd.*
Revenge is mine.
By him my father fell, by him my brothers;
They fail'd, they perish'd in the great design:
Success and vengeance are reserv'd for me.
My father led the *Median* hosts to battle,
And all the hosts of *Media* sung his triumphs. *Ist Consp.*
The people's hearts were his. *Hyd.*
The people saw
His royal virtues. He, to please his country,
Grasp'd at the sceptre which *Phraortes* holds.
For this he suffer'd ignominious death:
His house was raz'd; my brave, unhappy brothers
Fell in his ruin; I alone escap'd;
In banishment I've sigh'd whole years away,
Unknown, forgot. But now, even in his glory,
Now, while he leads the *Persian* Princes captive,
And overflows whole nations with his armies,
I'll stab him to the heart. *2d Consp.*
What sound was that? *Ist Consp.*
Lights pass a-cross the rooms, and hasty steps
Move to the King's apartment. Sleep is fled,

And all the palace lives; *Phraortes* wakes. *2d Consp.*
Hush! hark again! *Ist Consp.*
The ecchoes of the night
Catch ev'ry whisper. *2d Consp.*
Some have overheard us. *Ist Consp.*
It must be so. The guards have took th'alarm.
Our Lives, (what's worse) our enterprize is lost! *2d Consp.*
Retreat, my friends; let us reserve ourselves
For some more prosp'rous hour. *Hyd.*
You raise up phantoms,
Then start at them your selves. Some sickly qualm
Has wak'd the King too soon. Hence spring your fears,
Hence grows this mean surprize. Are these your boasts?

The Captives

Danger but whets the edge of resolution,
And at each noise I grasp my dagger faster.
Is every thing dispos'd to give th'alarm
Among the *Persian* captives? Hope of freedom
Will arm them on our side. *1st Consp.*
Were the blow struck,
The rest would follow. *Hyd.*
See a gleam of light
Darts from the King's apartment. Man your hearts,
Be firm, be ready. Let not trembling fear
Misguide your aim; let ev'ry wound be mortal. *1st Consp.*
This way and that way danger presses near us.
Where shall we fly? The tread of nimble feet
Hurries from room to room, and all the palace
Swarms as at noon. *2d Consp.*
Let us consult our safety. *1st Consp.*
To stay and to be taken is despair;
And what's despair? but poor, mean cowardice.
By timely caution heroes are preserv'd
For glorious enterprize, and mighty kingdoms
Are levell'd with the dust.
Hyd.
Withdraw your selves.
Be still, and listen. These will best inform us
If still it may be done; or if the blow
Must be deferr'd. But hush, they come upon us.

SCENE II.

Orbasius, Araxes at one door, two Magi at the other, servants with lights. Hydarnes and Conspirators listning.

Ara.
Whence come ye, rev'rend Fathers; why these looks
Of terror and amaze? why gaze ye back
As if the strides of Death stalk'd close behind you? *1st Mag.*
The King ev'n at this solemn hour of Night
Sent privately to call us to his presence.
Ye Gods preserve him! *Ara.*
Why this wild confusion?
In ev'ry passing face I read suspicion,
[People crossing the Stage.]

And haggard fear. Has sickness seiz'd the King,
And groans he with the latest pang of death?
Speak forth your terrors. *2d Mag.*
May *Phraortes* live! *Orba.*
Tell us the cause. If violence or treachery,
Our duty bids us interpose our lives
Between the King and death. O Heav'n, defend him! *1st Mag.*
The King, disturb'd by visionary dreams,

The Captives

Bad the most learn'd Magicians stand before him.
We stood before the King; and the King trembled
While he declar'd his dream; and thus I spoke.
'O may the great *Phraortes* live for ever!
'Avert the dire presages of the dream!
'This night the Gods have warn'd thee to beware
'Of deep-laid treasons, ripe for execution;
'Assassination lurks within the palace,
'And murder grasps the dagger for the blow.

'If the King trust his steps beyond his chamber
'I see him bleed! I hear his dying groan!
'Obey the voice of Heav'n. *2d Mag.*
The King is wise;
And therefore to the will of Heav'n assented;
Nor will he trust his life, a nation's safety,
From out the royal chamber. See the dawn
Breaks in the East, and calls us to devotion.
It is not Man; but 'tis the Gods he fears.

Ex. Magi.

SCENE III.

Orbasius. Araxes. [Conspirators apart.]

Hyd.

Let's quit the palace while retreat is safe.
The deed must be deferr'd. Revenge, be calm.
This day is his, to-morrow shall be ours.

[Ex. Conspirators on one side. Enter guards on the other.]

Orba.

See that each centinel is on strict watch.
Let all the Guards be doubled; bar the gates,
That not a man pass forth without observance.

[Ex. a party of Soldiers.]

Go you; and with the utmost vigilance
Search ev'ry room; for treason lyes in wait.

[Ex. a party of Soldiers.]

Ara.

Divide your selves this instant o'er the palace.
Think *Media* is in danger; and remember
That he who takes a traitor, saves the King.

[Exeunt Soldiers.]

Orba.

Whence can these dangers threaten? *Ara.*
From the *Persians*.
Captivity's a yoke that galls the shoulders
Of new-made slaves, and makes them bold and resty.
He that is born in chains may tamely bear them;

The Captives

But he that once has breath'd the air of freedom,
Knows life is nothing when depriv'd of that.
Our lord the King has made a people slaves,
And ev'ry slave is virtuously rebellious.

I fear the *Persian* Prince. *Orba*.
You injure him.
I know him, have convers'd with him whole days,
And ev'ry day I stronger grew in virtue.
Load not th'unhappy with unjust suspicion;
Adversity ne'er shakes the heart of honour:
He who is found a villian, in distress,
Was never virtuous. *Ara*.
Who suspects his virtue?
'Tis not dishonest to demand our right;
And freedom is the property of man. *Orba*.
That glorious day when *Persia* was subdu'd,
Sophernes fought amidst a host of foes,
Disdaining to survive his country's fate.
When the whole torrent of the war rush'd on,
Phraortes interpos'd his shield, and sav'd him.
And canst thou think this brave, this gen'rous Prince
Would stab the man to whom he owes his life? *Ara*.
Whoever is, must feel himself, a slave.
And 'tis worth struggling to shake off his chains. *Orba*.
But gratitude has cool'd his soul to patience.
Ingratitude's a crime the *Persians* hate;
Their laws are wise, and punish it with death.

SCENE IV.

Guards with Sophernes. Orbasius. Araxes.

Ara.
Behold, *Orbasius*; have I wrong'd your friend?
Behold a slave oblig'd by gratitude
To wear his chains with patience! This is he
Phraortes honours with his royal favours!
This is the man that I accus'd unjustly!
Soldiers, advance, and bring the prisoner near us. *Soph*.
Why am I thus insulted? why this force?
If 'tis a crime to be unfortunate
I well deserve this usage. *Ara*.
'Tis our duty.

If you are innocent, let justice clear you.
Orbasius, to your charge I leave the Prince;
Mean while I'll search the palace. On this instant
Perhaps the safety of the King depends.
Come, soldiers, there are others to be taken,

The Captives

Mine be that care. I'll bring them face to face,
When each man conscious of the other's crime
Shall in his guilty look confess his own.
Guard him with strictness, as you prize your life.
[Exeunt Araxes and some Guards.]

SCENE V.

Orbasius. Sophernes.

Orba.

Keep off a while, and leave us to our selves.

[Guards retire to the back part of the stage.]

I own, I think this rash suspicion wrongs you;
For murder is the mean revenge of cowards,
And you are brave. *Soph.*
By whom am I accus'd?
Let him stand forth. Of murder, murder say you?
Bear I the marks of an abandon'd wretch?
How little man can search the heart of man! *Orba.*
Our Priests are train'd up spies by education,
They pry into the secrets of the state,
And then by way of prophecy reveal them;
'Tis by such artifice they govern Kings.
The last night's rumour of conspiracy
Form'd the King's dream, and from that very rumour
They venture to speak out, what we but whisper'd.
'Twas they that call'd us to this early watch,
'Twas they inform'd us that assassination
Lies hid, ev'n now, within the palace walls.
And we but execute the King's command
In seizing all we find. *Soph.*
It is your duty,
And I submit. You cannot be too watchful

To guard the life of such a worthy prince.
I saw his prowess in the rage of battel,
I found his mercy in the flush of conquest.
Do not I share his palace, though a captive?
What can set limits to his gen'rous soul,
Or close his lib'ral hand? Am I a viper
To sting the man that warms me in his bosom? *Orba.*
Why is power given into the hands of Kings,
But to distinguish virtue and protect it?
If then *Phraortes* loves and honours you,
Why seek you thus to nourish your misfortunes
With midnight walks and pensive solitude? *Soph.*
To lose the pomp and glories of a crown,
Is not a circumstance so soon forgot!

The Captives

But I have humbled me to this affliction.
To lead the flower of *Persia* forth to battel
And meet with overthrow and foul defeat,
Is no such trifle in a soldier's breast!
But I submit; for 'tis the will of Heaven.
To see a father bleed amidst the carnage,
Must touch the heart of filial piety.
Why was his lot not mine? His fall was glorious.
To see my brave, but now unhappy people
Bow down their necks in shameful servitude,
Is not a spectacle of slight compassion.
All these calamities I have subdu'd.
But my dear wife! *Cylene! Orba.*
Still there's hope.
Can you support the load of real ills,
And sink beneath imaginary sorrows?
Perhaps she still may live. *Soph.*
Had I that hope,
'Twou'd banish from my heart all other cares.
Perhaps she still may live! no: 'tis impossible.
When storms of arrows clatter'd on our shields,
Love arm'd her breast, and where I led she follow'd;
Then Vict'ry broke our ranks, and like a torrent

Bore my *Cylene* from my sight for ever.
But say, she did survive that fatal day;
Was she not then the spoil of some rude soldier,
Whose blood was riotous and hot with conquest?
Who can gaze on her beauty and resist it!
Methinks I see her now, ev'n now before me,
The hand of Lust is tangled in her hair
And drags her to his arms:
I see her snatch the dagger from his grasp
And resolutely plunge it in her bosom. *Orba.*
Yet think she may have found a milder fate.
All soldiers are not of that savage temper;
May she not chance to be some brave man's captive?
And Valour ever lov'd to shield Distress. *Soph.*
Can I think thus? I cannot be so happy. *Orba.*
Is still the King a stranger to this sorrow
That day and night lies rankling in your breast? *Soph.*
A grateful heart is all I've left to pay him.
Phraortes is as liberal as Heaven,
And daily pours new benefits upon me.
Last night he led me to the royal garden,
(His talk all bent to soften my misfortunes)
Like a fond friend he grew inquisitive,
And drew the story from me. *Orba.*
All his heart
Is turn'd to your relief. What further happen'd? *Soph.*
The King was mov'd, and strait sent forth commands

The Captives

That all the female captives of his triumph
Should stand before his presence. Thus (says he)
Unhappy Prince, I may retrieve your peace,
And give *Cylene* to your arms again.
O source of light! O Sun, whose piercing eye
Views all below on earth, in sea or air;
Who at one glance can comprehend the globe,
Who ev'ry where art present, point me out
Where my *Cylene* mourns her bitter bondage.

If she yet live! *Orba*.
Why will you fear the worst?
Why seek you to anticipate misfortune?
The King commands. Obedience on swift wing
Flies through his whole dominions to redress you;
From hence you soon will learn what chance befell her.
'Tis soon enough to feel our adverse fortune
When there's no room for hope. This last distress
I know must move the King to tend'rest pity. *Soph*.
He dwelt on ev'ry little circumstance,
And as I talk'd, he sigh'd. *Orba*.
It reach'd his heart.
A tale of love is fuel to a lover.
Phraortes dotes with such excess of fondness,
All his pursuits are lost in that of love.
Astarbe suffers him to hold the sceptre,
But she directs his hand which way to point.
The King's decrees were firm and absolute,
Not the whole earth's confederate powers could shake 'em;
But now a frown, a smile from fair *Astarbe*
Renders them light as air. *Soph*.
If you have lov'd,
You cannot think this strange. *Orba*.
Yet this same woman,
To whom the King has given up all himself,
Can scarce prevail upon her haughty temper
To show dissembled love. She loves his power,
She loves his treasures; but she loaths his person:
Thus ev'ry day he buys dissimulation.
Whene'er a woman knows you in her power,
She never fails to use it. *Soph*.
That's a sure proof
Of cold indifference and fixt dislike.
In love both parties have the power to govern,
But neither claims it. Love is all compliance.
Astarbe seem'd to me of gentlest manners,

A tender softness languish'd in her eyes,
Her voice, her words bespoke an easy temper.
I thought I scarce had ever seen till then
Such beauty and humility together. *Orba*.

SCENE V.

The Captives

How beauty can mis-lead and cheat our reason!
The Queen knows all the ways to use her charms
In their full force, and *Media* feels their power.
Whoever dares dispute her hourly will,
Wakens a busy fury in her bosom.
Sure, never love exerted greater sway;
For her he breaks through all the regal customs,
For she is not confin'd like former Queens,
But with controuling power enjoys full freedom.
I am to blame, to talk upon this subject. *Soph.*
My innocence had made me quite forget
That I'm your prisoner. Load me with distresses,
They better suit my state. I've lost my kingdom,
A palace ill befits me. I'm a captive,
And captives should wear chains. My fellow soldiers
Now pine in dungeons, and are gall'd with irons,
And I the cause of all! Why live I thus
Amidst the pomp and honours of a court?
Why breathe I morn and ev'n in fragrant bowers?
Why am I suffer'd to behold the day?
For I am lost to ev'ry sense of pleasure.
Give me a dungeon, give me chains and darkness;
Nor courts, nor fragrant bowers, nor air, nor daylight
Give me one glimpse of joy O lost *Cylene!* *Orba.*
Misfortunes are the common lot of man,
And each man has his share of diff'rent kinds:
He who has learnt to bear them best is happiest.
But see *Araxes* comes with guards and prisoners.

SCENE VI.

Orbasius. Sophernes. Araxes Hydarnes. Conspirators, with guards.

Arax.

Behold your leader. Where are now your hopes
[To the Conspirators.]

Of murd'ring Kings and over-turning nations?
See with what stedfast eyes they gaze upon him,
As thinking him the man that has betray'd them.
Angry Suspicion frowns on ev'ry brow,
They know their guilt, and each mistrusts the other.
We seiz'd them in th'attempt to make escape,
All arm'd, all desperate, all of them unknown,
And ev'ry one is obstinately dumb.
[To Orbas.]

I charge you, speak. Know you that prisoner there?
Ay, view him well. Confess, and merit grace.
What, not a word! Will you accept of life?

The Captives

[To Hyd.

Speak, and 'tis granted. Tortures shall compel you.
Will you, or you, or you, or any of you?
What, all resolv'd on death! Bring forth the chains.

[Exit Soldier.

Orba.

Be not too rash, nor treat the Prince too roughly.
He may be innocent. *Arax.*
You are too partial.
I know my duty. Justice treats alike
Those who alike offend, without regard
To dignity or office. Bring the chains.

[Enter Soldiers with chains.

Orba.

This over-zeal perhaps may give offence,
The Prince is treated like no common slave.
Phraortes strives to lessen his affliction,
Nor would he add a sigh to his distresses:
Astarbe too will talk to him whole hours
With all the tender manners of her sex,

To shorten the long tedious days of bondage.
I'll be his guard. My life shall answer for him. *Ara.*
My life must answer for him. He's my charge,
And this is not a time for courtesy.
Are you still resolute and bent on death?

[To the Conspirators.

Once more I offer mercy. When the torture
Cracks all your sinews and disjoins your bones,
And death grins on you arm'd with all his terrors,
'Twill loose your stubborn tongue. Know ye this man? *Hyd.*
We know him not; nor why we wear these chains.
We ask no mercy, but appeal to justice.
Now you know all we know: lead to our dungeons.

[Ex. Hyd. and Conspirators guarded.

Orba.

How have you wrong'd the Prince! these shameful irons
Should not disgrace the hands of innocence.
Let's set him free. *Ara.*
This is all artifice,
To let their leader scape. Guards, take him hence,
And let him be confin'd till further orders. *Soph.*
Who shall plead for me in a foreign land!
My words will find no faith; for I'm a stranger:
And who holds friendship with adversity?
So Fate may do its worst. I'm tir'd of life.

[Exit guarded.

The Captives

SCENE VII.

Araxes. Orbasius.

Ara.

I've done my duty, and I've done no more.
Why wear you that concern upon your brow?
It misbecomes you in this time of joy.

Strait let us to the King, and learn his pleasure.
Justice is ours, but mercy's lodg'd in him. *Orba.*
I never can believe the Prince so vile
To mix with common murderers and assassins.
I think him virtuous, and I share his sufferings.
All generous souls must strong reluctance find,
In heaping sorrows on th'afflicted mind.

[Exeunt.]

End of the First Act.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

The Queen's Apartment.

Astarbe.

How expectation can prolong an hour,
And make it seem a day! a tedious day!
What not yet come! the wonted hour is past.
In vain I turn my eye from walk to walk,
Sophernes is not there. Here, every morn
I watch his pensive steps along the garden,
And gaze and wish till I am lost in love!
What not yet come! But hark! methinks I hear
The sound of feet! How my heart pants and flutters!
No. 'Twas the wind that shook yon cypress boughs.
Where are my views of wealth, of power, of State?

[Rises.]

They're blotted from my mind. I've lost ambition.
O love, thou hast me all. My dreams, my thoughts,
My every wish is center'd in *Sophernes*.
Hence, Shame, thou rigid tyrant of our sex,
I throw thee off and I'll avow my passion. *Doraspe.*
I can bear to think no longer.

[Sits again.]

SCENE II.

Doraspe. Astarbe.

Dor.

Why sits the Queen thus overcast with thought?

Is Majesty all plac'd in outward pomp?

Is it a Queen, to have superior cares?

And to excell in sorrows and distresses?

'Tis in your power to have superior pleasures,

And feel your self a Queen. *Ast.*

This mighty empire

I know I do command, and him that rules it.

That was a pleasure once, but now 'tis past!

To you alone I have disclos'd my heart.

I know you faithful. *Dor.*

What avails my service?

Can I redress you? can I calm your mind? *Ast.*

Thou know'st, *Doraspe*, amidst all this power,

That I'm a slave, the very worst of slaves.

The yoke of bondage, and the dungeon's horrors

Are easy suff'rings, if compar'd with mine.

I am confin'd to dwell with one I hate,

Confin'd for life to suffer nauseous love,

Like a poor mercenary prostitute.

His fondness is my torture. *Dor.*

Love is a pleasure for inferior minds.

Your lot is rais'd above that vulgar passion.

Ambition is the pleasure of the great,

That fills the heart, and leaves no room for love.

Think you're a Queen, enjoy your pomp, your power,

Love is the paradise of simple shepherds.

You hold a sceptre. *Ast.*

O insipid greatness!

She who has never lov'd, has never liv'd.

All other views are artificial pleasures

For sluggish minds incapable of love.

My soul is form'd for this sublimer passion:

My heart is temper'd for the real joy;

I sigh, I pant, I burn, I'm sick of love!

Yes, *Media*, I renounce thy purple honours.

[Rises.]

Farewell the pomp, the pageantry of state,

Farewell ambition, and the lust of empire;

I've now no passion, no desire but love.

O may my eyes have power! I ask no more.

Where stays *Sophernes*? Were he now before me,

My tongue should own what oft my eyes have spoke,

The Captives

For love has humbled pride. Why this intrusion?
Who call'd you here a witness to my frailties?
Away and leave me. *Dor.*
I obey my Queen. *Ast.*
Doraspe, stay. Excuse this start of passion,
My mind is torn with wishes, doubts and fears;
I had forgot myself. Should fortune frown,
And tear the diadem from off my brow,
Couldst thou be follower of my adverse fortune?
I think thou couldst. *Dor.*
If I might give that proof,
Without your sufferings, I could wish the tryal;
So firm I know my heart. *Ast.*
Life, like the seasons,
Is intermix'd with sun–shine days and tempests.
Prosperity has many thousand friends;
They swarm around us in our summer hours,
But vanish in the storm. *Dor.*
What means my Queen,
To wound her faithful servant with suspicion? *Ast.*
Whene'er my mind is vex'd and torn with troubles,
In thee I always find the balm of counsell:
And can I then mistrust thee? No, *Doraspe*,
Suspicion ne'er with–held a thought from thee,
Thou know'st the close recesses of my heart:
And now, ev'n now I fly to thee for comfort. *Dor.*
How my soul longs to learn the Queen's commands! *Ast.*
When conquest over–power'd my father's legions,

We were made captives of the war together;
Phraortes saw me, rais'd me to his throne,
Heav'n knows with what reluctance I consented!
For my heart loath'd him. But O curs'd ambition!
I gave my self a victim to his love,
To be a Queen, the outside of a Queen.
I then was, what I'm now, a wretch at heart!
Whene'er I was condemn'd to hours of dalliance,
All *Media's* gems lay glitt'ring at my feet,
To buy a smile, and bribe me to compliance.
But what's ambition, glory, riches, empire?
The wish of misers, and old doating courtiers;
My heart is fill'd with love. Go, my *Doraspe*,
Enquire the cause that has detain'd *Sophernes*
From his accustom'd walk. I'm fix'd, determin'd,
To give up all for love. A life of love.
With what impatience shall I wait thy coming! *Dor.*
Happy *Sophernes*! *Ast.*
If you chance to meet him,
Talk of me to him, watch his words, his eyes;
Let all you say be turn'd to wake desire;
Prepare him for the happy interview,

SCENE II.

The Captives

For my heart bursts, and I must tell it all.
To what an abject state am I reduc'd?
To proffer love! Was beauty given for this?
Yes. 'Tis more gen'rous; and I'll freely give
What kneeling monarchs had implor'd in vain. *Dor.*
This well rewards him for an empire lost.

[Exit.]

SCENE III.

Astarbe.

Have I not caught the eyes of wondring nations,
While warm desire has glow'd on ev'ry cheek,
Ev'n when I wore the pride of majesty?
When opportunity awakes desire,

Can he then gaze, insensible of beauty?
When ardent wishes speak in ev'ry glance,
When love and shame by turns in their full force,
Now pale, now red, possess my guilty cheek,
When heaving breasts, and sighs, and kindling blushes
Give the most strong assurance of consent
In the convincing eloquence of love;
Will he then want a proof that's less sincere?
And must I speak? O love, direct my lips,
And give me courage in that hour of shame!

SCENE IV.

Astarbe. Doraspe.

Dor.

May the Queen never know a moment's sorrow,
Nor let my words offend! the Prince *Sophernes*,
Leagu'd with a crew of daring desperate men,
Had meditated to destroy *Phraortes*,
And let loose war and rapine o'er the land.
But Heav'n has made their machinations vain;
And they now groan in dungeons. *Ast.*
Then I'm wretched,
And ev'ry pleasing view of life is lost.
Was it confirm'd? or was it only rumour? *Dor.*
Araxes said *Sophernes* was his prisoner.
My haste would not allow me further question:
And this is all I learnt. *Ast.*
Have I not power?
I have. Why then, I'll give *Sophernes* freedom,
I'll give him life. I think you nam'd *Araxes*;

SCENE III.

The Captives

That man to me owes all his growth of fortune;
And if I judge him right, he's very grateful.
Tell him the Queen admits him to her presence.

[Ex. Dor.]

O Heaven! I thank thee for this blest occasion.
Did ever proof of fondness equal mine?

And so sure so strong a proof must find return.
With what excess of transport shall I go
To lead him forth from heavy chains and darkness
To liberty and love! But see, *Araxes*.

SCENE V.

Astarbe. Doraspe. Araxes.

Ara.

All health attend the mighty Queen of *Media*. *Ast.*

I'm told, *Araxes*, that the *Persian* Prince
Hath join'd in horrid league, and hath conspir'd
The murder of my lord and king *Phraortes*.
Speak forth; say, what thou know'st. *Ara.*

The hand of heaven

Protects the King; and all the black design
Is shown in open daylight. The foul traitor
Is taken in the snares of death he laid.

Sophernes is my charge. O base ingratitude,
That he, whom the King honour'd next himself,
That he, whom the King's mercy spar'd in battle,
Should mix with vile assassins! Justice longs
To punish the vast crime. *Ast.*

Owens he the guilt? *Ara.*

No. With the calmest face of innocence,
With looks known only to hypocrisy,
He solemnly deny'd it. *Ast.*

Is he confin'd? *Ara.*

Yes, with the strictest guard and heaviest irons.
The prison joining to the Queen's apartment
Lodges the horrid crew in sep'rate dungeons.
To-day the King will mount the judgment-seat,
And death shall be their portion. *Ast.*

Is *Sophernes*

Stubborn and sullen? made he no confession?
I often have convers'd with that vile man,
That hypocrite, whose talk was always honest.
How have I been deceiv'd! Yet, ere his sentence,

With secrecy I fain once more would see him. *Ara.*
I'm happy to obey my Queen's commands,

The Captives

His prison lies so close to these apartments,
That unobserv'd I can conduct him hither. *Ast.*
I know thee faithfull, and such ready zeal
Shall always find reward. *Ara.*
The Queen is gracious.

SCENE VI.

Astarbe. Doraspe.

Ast.

Now my design is ripe for execution.
Then let *Doraspe* well consult her heart,
If she will share with me all change of fortune. *Dor.*
Doubt not your faithfull servant. I'm prepar'd.
I know, however heinous is his crime,
Your intercession always must prevail.
His gratitude will kindle into love,
And in possession every wish be lost. *Ast.*
How little thou hast div'd into my thoughts!
My purposes are otherways determin'd.
I'll shake off bondage, and abandon empire;
For him disrobe my self of majesty;
Then to my native *Parthia* will I fly
With all my soul holds dear my guide *Sophernes*. *Dor.*
Let me not find my gracious Queen's displeasure
If I dissent, and offer other counsel.
Why will you quit your crown? why fly from *Media*?
Does jealousy restrain your liberty?
Your love, your empire, both are in your power. *Ast.*
Mine's not the common passion of our sex,
Which ev'ry day we can command at pleasure,
And shift and vary as occasion offers.
My love is real and unchangeable,
Controuls my heart, and governs absolute.

My eyes, words, actions, are no more my own:
My ev'ry thought's *Sophernes*. Other women,
Who have the power to practise little arts
To cheat a husband, and delude his fondness,
Ne'er knew the burning passion that I feel.
Those are the trifling wanton airs of women,
All vanity, and only love in name.
No. She who loves, must give up all her self;
She ne'er can be content with a stol'n minute,
Then pass whole days and nights with him she hates.
Advise no further for I am determin'd. *Dor.*
Araxes, with the *Persian Prince*! *Ast.*
Retire.

SCENE VII.

Astarbe. Araxes. Sophernes.

It is not meet, while in the royal presence,
That he should wear these irons. Take them off.

[Ara. takes off the Chains.]

Now leave me; and without attend my pleasure.

SCENE VIII.

Astarbe. Sophernes.

Be not surpriz'd that I have call'd you hither,
Most noble Prince, in this your hour of trouble;
For I ev'n bear a part in your misfortunes.
Who's your accuser? whence those shameful chains? *Soph.*
I'm charg'd with crimes of the most heinous nature.
If 'tis Heav'n's will to try me with afflictions,
I will not, like a dastard, sink beneath them,
But resolutely strive to stem the torrent.
Not the dark dungeon, nor the sharpest torture
Can ruffle the sweet calm of innocence.
My chains are grievous, but my conscience free.

Ast.

I long have mark'd your virtues and admir'd them.
Against a resolute and steady mind
The tempest of affliction beats in vain.
When we behold the hero's manly patience
We feel his suff'rings, and my tears have own'd
That what you bore with courage touch'd my heart.
And when compassion once has reach'd the mind,
It spurs us on to charity and kindness.
Instruct me then which way to cure your sorrows. *Soph.*
The Queen is gracious and delights in mercy. *Ast.*
I speak with the sincerity of friendship.
Friendship is free and open, and requires not
Such distant homage and respectful duty.
Forget that I'm a Queen: I have forgot it;
And all my thoughts are fixt on thy relief.
Draw near me then, and as from friend to friend,
Let us discharge our hearts of all their cares. *Soph.*
How beautiful a virtue is compassion!
It gives new grace to every charm of woman!
When lovely features hide a tender soul,
She looks, she speaks, all harmony divine. *Ast.*
Tell me, *Sophernes*, does not slav'ry's yoke

The Captives

Gall more and more through ev'ry pace of life?
I am a slave, like you. And though a Queen
Possess of all the richest gems of *Media*,
I know no pleasure; this distasteful thought
Imbitters all my hours; the royal bed
Is loathsome, and a stranger to delight.
I'm made the drudge to serve another's pleasure.
O when shall I be free! take, take your empire,
And give me peace and liberty again. *Soph.*
The strokes of fortune must be born with patience. *Ast.*
But I have lost all patience. Give me counsel,
Give me thy friendship, and assist a wretch

Who thirsts and pants for freedom. *Soph.*
Who seeks succour
From one whose hands are bound in double irons?
I am a slave, and captive of the war,
Accus'd of treason and ingratitude,
And must from hence go back to chains and darkness,
But had I power, such beauty might command it. *Ast.*
But I have power, and all my power is thine,
If I had arm'd my self with resolution
To quit the pompous load of majesty,
To fly far off from this detested empire,
To seek repose within my native land,
Wouldst thou then be companion of my flight,
And share in my distresses and my fortune? *Soph.*
The Queen intends to try a wretched man
Whether he'd break all hospitable laws,
The strictest oaths and ties of gratitude,
To sacrifice his honour to such beauty
That can command all hearts. *Ast.*
Tell me directly,
Wouldst thou accept of freedom on these terms? *Soph.*
How shall I answer? *Ast.*
Is thy heart of ice?
Or are my features so contemptible
That thou disdain'st to fix thy eyes upon me?
Can you receive this offer with such coldness?
I make it from my heart; my warm heart speaks:
Distrust me not. What, not a word! no answer! *Soph.*
O may the Queen excuse her prostrate servant,
And urge no more a trial too severe. *Ast.*
What means *Sophernes*? Why this abject posture?
'Tis I should kneel; 'tis I that want compassion.
[Gives him her hand.]

Thou art unpractis'd in the ways of women,
To judge that I could trifle on this subject.
Think how severe a conflict I have conquer'd,
To over-rule ev'n nature and my sex,

The Captives

Think what confusion rises in my face
To ask what (to be ask'd) would kindle blushes
In ev'ry modest cheek! where's shame? where's pride?
Sophernes has subdu'd them. Women, I own,
Are vers'd in little frauds, and sly dissemblings:
But can we rule the motions of the blood?
These eyes, this pulse these tremblings this confusion
Make truth conspicuous, and disclose the soul.
Think not I fly with man for his protection;
For only you I could renounce a kingdom,
For you, ev'n in the wild and barren desert
Forget I was a Queen; ev'n then more happy
Than seated on a throne. Say, wilt thou chuse
Or liberty, and life, and poor *Astarbe*,
Or dungeons, chains, and ignominious death! *Soph.*
O how I struggle in the snares of beauty!
Those eyes could warm pale elders to desire,
I feel them at my heart; the fever rages,
And if I gaze again how shall I answer! *Ast.*
How is my pride brought low! how vilely treated!
The worst of scorn is cold deliberation. *Soph.*
Cylene may be found. What, take me from her!
How can I go and leave my hopes for ever?
Can I renounce my love, my faith, my all?
Who can resist those eyes? I go I'm lost!
Cylene holds me back, and curbs desire.

[*Aside.*

Ast.
Resolve and answer me. For soon as night
Favours our flight I'll gather up my treasures.
Prepare thee then, lest death should intercept thee,
And murder all my quiet. *Soph.*
If in her sight
I've favour found, the Queen will hear me speak.
How can my heart refuse her? how obey her?
Can I deny such generous clemency?

Join'd with all beauties ever found in woman?
Yet think on my unhappy circumstance.
I've giv'n my word, the strictest tye of honour,
Never to pass beyond my bounds prescrib'd;
And shall I break my faith? Who holds society
With one who's branded with that infamy?
Did not *Phraortes* in the heat of battle
Stay the keen sword that o'er me menac'd death?
Do not I share his palace, and his friendship?
Does he not strive by daily curtesies
To banish all the bitter cares of bondage?
And shall I seise and tear his tendrest heart—string?
Shall I conspire to rob him of all peace?

SCENE VII.

The Captives

For on the Queen hangs ev'ry earthly joy,
His ev'ry pleasure is compriz'd in you!
What virtue can resist such strong temptation?
O raise not thus a tempest in my bosom!
What shall I do? my soul abhors ingratitude.
Should I consent, you must detest and loath me,
And I should well deserve those chains and death. *Ast.*
Is this thy best return for proffer'd love?
Such coldness, such indifference, such contempt!
Rise, all ye Furies, from th'inferral regions,
And prompt me to some great, some glorious vengeance!
Vengeance is in my power, and I'll enjoy it.
But majesty perhaps might awe his passion,
And fear forbid him to reveal his wishes.
That could not be. I heard, I saw him scorn me;
All his disdainful words his eyes confirm'd.
Ungrateful man! Hence, traitor, from my sight.
Revenge be ready. Slighted love invokes thee.
Of all the injuries that rack the soul,
Mine is most exquisite! Hence, to thy dungeon.
Araxes!

SCENE VIII.

Astarbe. Sophernes. Araxes.

Take the villain from my presence,
His crimes are black as hell. I'll turn away,
Lest my heart melt and cool into compassion.
His sight offends me. Bind his irons fast.

[Ara. puts on his Irons.]

So: lead him hence; and let *Doraspe* know
The Queen permits her entrance.

SCENE IX.

Astarbe. Doraspe.

Dor.

What's the Queen's pleasure? See your servant ready.
Why are your eyes thus fixt upon the ground?
Why that deep sigh? and why these trembling lips?
This sudden paleness, and these starts of frenzy?
You're sick at heart. *Ast.*
Yes; I will be reveng'd. *Dor.*
Lift up your eyes, and know me. 'Tis *Doraspe*. *Ast.*
Look on me, tell me, is my beauty blighted?
And shrunk at once into deformity?

SCENE VIII.

The Captives

Slighted! despis'd! my charms all set at nought!
Yes. I will be reveng'd. O my *Doraspe*,
I've met with foul contempt, and cold disdain:
And shall the wretch who gave me guilt and shame,
The wretch who's conscious of my infamy,
Out-live that crime? he must not, nay, he shall not. *Dor.*
Let reason mitigate and quell this fever;
The safest, surest, is the cool revenge.
Rash anger, like the hasty scorpion's fury,
Torments and wounds it self.

Ast.

It is in vain.

The torrent rushes on; it swells, ferments,
And strongly bears away all opposition.
What means that hurry in the antichamber?
What are those crowds? *Dor.*
The King intends to mount the judgment-seat,
And the conspirators now wait their sentence. *Ast.*
Go tell *Araxes* (if with privacy
He could conduct him) I would see their chief;
The desp'rate instrument of this bold scheme;
This instant; ere he stands before the Presence.

SCENE X.

Astarbe.

Revenge, I thank thee for this ready thought
Death now shall reach *Sophernes*, shamefull death;
Thus will I satiate love. His death alone
Can raze him from my heart, and give me peace.

SCENE XI.

Araxes conducts in Hydarnes, and retires.

Astarbe. Hydarnes.

The King is gracious, and delights in mercy;
And know that free confession merits life:
I'll intercede. Know you the Prince *Sophernes*?
You are unhappy men betray'd to ruin:
And will ye suffer for another's crime?
Speak of him, as ye ought; 'twas he betray'd you. *Hyd.*
If racks and tortures cannot tear confession
From innocence, shall woman's flattery do it?
No; my heart's firm, and I can smile on death.
Ast.

SCENE X.

The Captives

Think not to hide what is already known.
'Tis to *Sophernes* that you owe those chains,
We've fathom'd his designs, they're all laid open;
We know him turbulent and enterprizing.
By the foul murder of my lord the King,
He meant to set his captive nation free.
Unfold this truth, and I'll insure thy pardon. *Hyd.*
What! lead a hateful life of ignominy!
And live the bane of all society!
Shun'd like a pestilence, a curst informer;
Yet since the fate of kingdoms may depend
On what I speak; truth shall direct my lips.
The Queen has offer'd grace. I know the terms. *Ast.*
By the King's life, I swear.

SCENE XII.

Astarbe. Hydarnes. Araxes.
Ara.
Excuse this entrance,
The pris'ner must attend. *Ast.*
I'm satisfy'd.
This man seems open, and may be of service.

SCENE XIII.

Astarbe.

How my heart bleeds thus to pursue revenge
Against the man I love! But me he scorns;
And from my beauty turns his head away
With saucy arrogance and proud contempt.
I could forgive him ev'ry other crime,
Ev'n the base murder of my dearest friend;
But slighted love no woman can forgive.
For thro' our life we feel the bitter smart,
And guilt and shame lye festring at the heart.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

A Room of State with a Throne.

Hydarnes. Conspirators. Orbasius. Guards.
1st Con.

SCENE XII.

The Captives

The information of those two vile cowards,
Who mingled with us brave and active spirits,
Hath giv'n us death. Let those mean creatures live,
They're fitter for the world. *2d Con.*

Lead us to death. *Hyd.*

Death is pronounc'd on you, on me, on all.
Would I could take your guilt upon my self,
So to preserve some virtue in the world.
But those informers have deny'd me that;
We all must perish, and fall unreveng'd.
But since I cannot take your crimes upon me;
I'll live, and execute our great design,
And thus revenge your deaths. *1st Con.*

Could this be done! *Hyd.*

It can. *1st Con.*

You flatter us. *Hyd.*

I say, I'll do it.

Soon as the King returns to sign our sentence,
Only confirm the words which I shall speak,
And I'll revenge you soon, and soon be with you.

[Talks to them apart.]

Orba.

The guilty perish; innocence is freed.
Suspicion has not cast the smallest stain
Upon the virtuous *Persian*. Those accusers,
Who have condemn'd their fellows, know him not.
Of all the pleasures that a monarch tastes,

Sure mercy is most sweet! 'Tis heav'nly pleasure
To take the galling chains from off the hands
Of injur'd innocence! That privilege
O'er-ballances the cares that load a crown.

SCENE II.

Phraortes seats himself on the Throne. Magi. Orbasius. Araxes. Sophernes. Hydarnes. Guards and Attendants.

Ara.

Make room; The *Persian* Prince attends his sentence. *Phra.*
Most noble Prince, I grieve that you were injur'd.
When foul conspiracy molests a state
The ear of Kings is open to suspicion,
And we grow jealous of our bosom friends,
When calumny would blast a virtuous man,
And justice has made clear his innocence;
It only throws a brighter lustre on him,
And serves to make his virtues more conspicuous.
Approach the throne; and let the King's embrace
Make some attonement for your shameful bonds.
I feel your suff'rings, and my heart grows fonder.

The Captives

Now bring the pris'ners to receive their sentence.
Justice cries loud for vengeance on your crimes.
Say, have ye ought to plead to ward the blow,
Ere I enroll your names among the dead? *Hyd.*
That I design'd to bath these hands in blood,
Even in thy blood, O King, I dare confess,
And glory in th'attempt. I know thy power;
I know that death with all his dreadful, tortures
Stands ready at thy nod. Give then the signal,
For I unmov'd can face the ghastly terror.
How is thy wisdom foil'd! Prepare to follow.
Think not with us our enterprize is lost.

A King shall bleed to pacifie our ghosts.
Come, lead to death. Spend all thy wrath on us.
The raging tyger bites the shaft that wounds him,
And spares the man who threw it. I have done. *Phra.*
These are the starts and ravings of despair.
Think'st thou by threats to force me into mercy? *Hyd.*
I grow impatient; lead me to my fate. *Phra.*
Know you that I have life within my power? *Hyd.*
I know the utmost of thy power is death. *Mag.*
Ye Gods avert his words, and save the King! *Phra.*
What said he? Speak again. *Hyd.*
Death is my choice. *Phra.*
I will be satisfy'd. *Hyd.*
I've said too much. *Phra.*
Say more, or torture shall extort it from you. *Hyd.*
Let torture do its worst. You dare not try it. *Mag.*
If memory can recal the solemn speech,
These were his very words,
A King shall bleed to pacifie our ghosts.
The raging tyger bites the shaft that wounds him,
But spares the man who threw it. Was it thus? *Hyd.*
Now let your wisdom fathom this deep secret.
I answer no more questions. *Phra.*
Reverend fathers,
What may these words portend? Expound the mystery. *Mag.*
Thy sacred life, O King, is still in danger.
While justice pours down vengeance on these wretches,
These mean subservient instruments of mischief,
Their leader scapes, and lives for future crimes. *Hyd.*
Go on.
Mag.
The words imply no more. *Hyd.*
'Tis well.
All's safe. I'm ready. Why is death delay'd? *Phra.*
Thus speaks the voice of Mercy from my lips.
Th'irrevocable sentence is not sign'd,
And still there's room for hope. Attend, and live.
By this bright sceptre, by the throne of *Media,*

SCENE II.

The Captives

By yon great light that rules the rolling year,
If you lay ope the depth of this foul treason,
And point me out that undetected villain,
I swear, to grant you life and liberty.
Speak now, or death shall seal your lips for ever. *Hyd.*
The royal words is giv'n, and I accept it.
The King shall live, and all his foes shall perish.
Danger stands near the throne. How blind is Justice!
The *Persian Prince!* *Phra.*
Sophernes! *Hyd.*
He's a traitor.
'Twas he that put the dagger in my hand.
So. Now I have betray'd. O love of life!
Where was my resolution? I'm a coward;
And cowards can endure a life of shame. *Phra.*
Sophernes! Let strong proof confirm your charge,
I must have proof. *Hyd.*
Call in my fellow-prisoners. *Soph.*
What can set bounds to man's impiety,
And where is virtue safe? Accus'd thus falsely,
With all the strongest circumstance of guilt,
By one I know not! Heav'n has then determin'd
That I must fall. Shall man contest with *Jove?*
'Tis all in vain. The will of Fate be done. *Hyd.*
Those who accus'd us, brib'd with *Persian* gold,
Conceal'd the author of our enterprize.

SCENE III.

The Aforesaid and Conspirators.

Know ye that man? *Ist Consp.*
Would he had been unknown. *Hyd.*
The King has trac'd our mischief to the source.
Who was it prompted you to this attempt?
Had ye not views to set a nation free?
And to restore him to his crown and kingdom? *Ist Consp.*
By him we fell, 'tis just that he fall with us. *2d Consp.*
So, now one ruin has involv'd us all. *Phra.*
Death is the lot of those that thirst for blood.
Conduct them hence. This hour prepare to suffer.

SCENE IV.

Phraortes. Magi. Orbasius. Araxes. Sophernes. Hydarnes. Guards and Attendants.

Ungrateful Prince! *Soph.*
Since 'tis the will of Heaven

The Captives

To load me with calamities and shame,
Since the most searching eye cannot discern
The heart of man; O where shall I find justice!
I am a stranger, in adversity,
Bereft of wealth and power, without a friend. *Phra.*
Hence, base dissembler. Take him from my presence.
When hypocrites are stript of Virtue's plumes,
Vice then appears most hideous and deform'd.
Back to thy dungeon, to remorse and death. *Soph.*
Vain are excuse and solemn protestation;
How shall my words prevail, and truth appear,

When there's a crowd of witnesses against me!
The Guilty perish with remorse and horror,
But innocence ne'er feels the sting of death.
Death is a blessing to adversity;
Anxiety, calamity and sorrow,
And all the daily fretting cares of life
Are shook from off our shoulders; and we rest.

SCENE V.

Phraortes. Magi. Orbasius. Araxes. Hydarnes. Guards and Attendants.

Hyd.
Safety now guards the throne, and *Media's* happy. *Phra.*
I ratifie my word, and give you life,
I give you liberty; but on conditions.
Those I shall send you soon, and then you're free.
O Sun, I thank thee; thy all-seeing eye
Has trac'd the villain through his secret ways,
And now the hand of Justice is upon him. *Ara.*
Media rejoice. *All.*
May the King live for ever! *Phra.*
Proclaim a festival for seven days space;
Let the Court shine in all its pomp and lustre;
Let all our streets resound with shouts of joy;
Let Musick's care-dispelling voice be heard;
The sumptuous banquet and the flowing goblet
Shall warm the cheek, and fill the heart with gladness.
For *Media's* foes are put to shame and death.
Astarbe shall sit sovereign of the feast,
That Queen of beauty shall direct our pleasures.
I'll to her bower. I would have no attendance.

SCENE VI.

Araxes. Doraspe.
Dor.

The Captives

Inform me, what has past? *Ara*.
The Queen's conjectures
The King has now confirm'd. The *Persian* Prince,
That hypocrite is known, and prov'd a traitor,
And leader of that crew of vile assassins.
But see the Queen. The King is gone to seek her.
Excuse my haste; for Duty calls me hence.

SCENE VII.

Doraspe. Astarbe.

Astar.

'Twas downright arrogance. I saw his scorn.
A Lover reads the thought of every look,
And needs no comment or interpreter.
What woman can forgive that worst of insults?
Not ev'n the most deform'd of all our sex
Can bear contempt. And shall I pardon it?
To pardon it, is to insult myself,
And own that I deserve it. [*aside*.] Know you ought
Of what the King in judgment has determin'd? *Dor*.
Sophernes was accus'd. *Astar*.
Was he found guilty? *Dor*.
Yes, prov'd a traitor. *Astar*.
Then I'm satisfy'd. *Dor*.
How one affliction crouds upon another,
To punish this ungrateful man! *Astar*.
What mean you? *Dor*.
It is confirm'd among the captive women
(Who now attend to pass before the presence)
His wife was slain in battle. *Astar*.
Would he were dead!

Yet were he dead, would he dye in my thoughts?
Talk to me, speak; leave me not to reflection.
[To Doraspe.

Yet what will talk avail? I've lost attention.
Were her words soft and soothing as the lyre,
Or strong and sprightly as th'enlivening trumpet,
I could hear nought but conscience. Would he were dead!
You shall not leave me. *Dor*.
See the King returns.

SCENE VIII.

Phraortes. Astarbe.

Phra.

The Captives

Welcome, my Queen; how my heart springs to meet thee!
Each day, each hour thy beauty grows upon me,
Ev'n while I gaze some undiscover'd charm
Opens it self, and wounds my heart anew.
Rejoyce, *Astarbe*; *Media* is deliver'd:
The gathering storm that threaten'd desolation
Is over-blown, and all is now serene.
Then let us give our future days to pleasure;
My ev'ry pleasure is compris'd in thee. *Astar*.
Be firm in justice, nor give way to mercy,
'Tis the mind's frailty, and the nurse of crimes.
Punish. And root out treason from the land. *Phra*.
Sophernes was their chief. *Astar*.
Ungrateful villain! *Phra*.
How he deceiv'd me! *Astar*.
Your too easy nature
Must always harbour mischiefs in your empire.
Does he still live? *Phra*.
His death is fix'd and sign'd. *Astar*.
Each hour he lives your people doubt your justice.
Would you deter the populace from crimes,

Let punishment be sudden. That's true mercy. *Phra*.
He never shall behold another Sun.
But why should cares of state intrude upon us? *Astar*.
Why this reproof? In what have I deserv'd it?
All my concern was for the peace of *Media*,
And for your safety. I have said too much. *Phra*.
What has *Astarbe* ask'd that I refus'd?
Thy beauty has all power. Who waits without?
Go; let the Captives be dismiss'd the palace,
[Speaks at the door.

The King resigns his privilege of choice.
Should the selected beauties of the world
[To Astarbe.

In full temptation stand before my presence,
Still would my heart and eye be fixt on thee.
Thy charms would (like the Sun's all-powerful rays)
Make all those little stars of beauty fade.
Why that dejected look? that thoughtful sigh?
In what have I offended? If to love,
Be to offend; *Phraortes* is most wretched.

SCENE IX.

Phraortes. Astarbe. Araxes.
Ara.

The Captives

I spoke the King's commands; when from the crowd
One of the Captives rose, and humbly pray'd
Admission to the throne. *Phra.*

I hear no suits. *Ara.*

She wish'd to speak a matter of importance. *Phra.*

Dismiss them all. Let us retire, my Queen. *Astar.*

Araxes, stay.

[Araxes going out.]

Phra.

What is *Astarbe's* pleasure?

Astar.

This matter should be search'd. The fate of Empires

Turns often on the slightest information;

And were my counsell worthy to be heard,

I would admit her. *Phra.*

Let her be admitted.

[Exit Araxes.]

[Phraortes seats Astarbe on the throne, then places himself by her. The Guards enter, and range themselves on each side.]

SCENE X.

Phraortes. Astarbe. Captive. Doraspe. Araxes. Attendants.

Phra.

Arise, fair maid; and let thy suit be heard. *Cap.*

The King has done his prostrate servant justice.

[Kneeling.]

Thus low I pay my thanks to Heaven and you. *Phra.*

Rise from that humble posture, and speak forth. *Cap.*

The *Persian* Prince, to whom we owe our bondage,

[Rises.]

'Tis said, is doom'd to death for horrid treachery. *Phra.*

He well deserves it. If you fall before me,

To melt me into mercy with your tears,

Woman, your tears are frustrate. Take her hence. *Cap.*

I speak for mercy! No. I sue for tortures.

With rapture I could gaze upon his sufferings,

Enjoy his agonies and dying groans,

And then this hand could stab him to the heart. *Phra.*

Whence rose this furious spirit of revenge?

Cap.

By brutal violence he slew my husband.

Excuse my tears. Love calls them from my eyes;

With him I lost all joy, all peace and comfort. *Phra.*

What mov'd *Sophernes* to the barbarous deed? *Cap.*

My husband was distinguish'd in his armies;

The Captives

With him I always shar'd the toils of war,
The tedious marches, and the scorching suns,
For Love makes all fatigue seem light and easy.
Sophernes saw me, sigh'd, and spoke his passion.
I spurn'd his offers, and despis'd his suit.
He still persisted, and my virtue strengthen'd:
'Till on a day, inflam'd with loose desire,
He sent my Lord upon some feign'd command;
I in his tent sate waiting his return,
Then suddenly the ravisher rush'd in.

[Weeps.

Phra.

Go on. *Cap.*

He seiz'd me, tore me, dragg'd me to his Arms;
In vain I struggled; by resistance weaken'd,
I lost all strength, and so he spoil'd my Honour.
O shame! O brutal force!

[Weeps.

Phra.

Unhappy woman!

Proceed. *Cap.*

Just in the moment of my shame
My husband enter'd. Strait the villain left me,
And desperate by the stings of guilt and terror,
He stabb'd him to the heart.

[Weeps.

Phra.

Most monstrous villain!

His life's a series of the blackest crimes. *Cap.*

I in the hurry of the murder fled,
And 'scap'd the tyrant's power. Alone, disguis'd,
I've past away my restless hours in sorrow.
Revenge was all my wish, and all my comfort,
For that I watch'd him through long weary marches,
And Revenge gave me strength and resolution.
Why fell he not by me? His crime requir'd it.
Vengeance o'ertakes him for another guilt,
And I have lost revenge. O may he feel
The pain and horror due to both his crimes.

Phra.

His death is sign'd. *Cap.*

That is his due for treachery. *Phra.*

What would Revenge have more? Th'offender's blood

Allays its strongest thirst. *Cap.*

Most gracious King,

[Kneels.

Hear an unhappy woman's just petition,
And may my prayer find favour and acceptance!
Grant me to see him in his latest gasp;
Let my appearance strike him with confusion,

SCENE X.

The Captives

Let me awake fresh terrors in his conscience,
And bring my murder'd husband to his view.
Entrust the sword of justice in my hand;
The stroke shall then be sure. *Phra.*
What fortitude
Lies hid beneath that face of softest feature!
The death of his confederates is sign'd,
And he with privacy this very evening
Shall be dispatch'd in prison. Now you're satisfy'd. *Cap.*
O, were that office mine! *Ast.*
For such offence
He cannot feel too much; her suit is just.
Then let me intercede in her behalf;
Grant her request. Give her the fatal signet,
Give her the dagger. Such revenge is virtue. *Phra.*
Take this; your boon is granted. Soon my orders
[Gives her his dagger.]

Shall send you to revenge a husband's murder.
Let her attend without. Draw near, *Araxes.*

SCENE XI.

Phraortes. Astarbe. Doraspe. Araxes. Attendants.

[Phraortes talks aside to Araxes.]

Ast.
What, sue to her! and when I sued disdain me!
How my disgrace grows on me! Let him perish,
And perish by that woman. My resentment
Kindles and burns to take her charge upon me.
Yet still would he relent, I could forgive him. *Dor.*
His wife is dead, on whom his heart was fix'd:
That obstacle's remov'd. *Ast.*
And Death hangs o'er him.
That sight perhaps may shake his resolution.
If I could hope, I would delay his sentence.
I dread his death. What is there to be done?
I'll see him ere he dies. O abject thought!
Yes, I will see him, and renew my offers
In his last moments: For when'er he dies
My mind will ne'er know peace. I will defer it.
I'll sooth the King in his soft hours of love,
When all his strongest purposes are nothing.
When 'tis deferr'd Would I could cease from thought! *Phra.*
Tell her as soon as justice is perform'd,
The King requires her thanks She's wondrous fair!
You know my will; these are my last commands,
Let punctual care and diligence obey me.

[Ex. Araxes.]

SCENE XII.

Phraortes. Astarbe. Doraspe. Attendants.

Go, bid the priests prepare the sacrifice;
This ev'ning shall the fragrance of devotion

Smoak in our temples, and perfume the skies.
Phraortes shall attend the solemn rites,
To pay his grateful thanks in songs of joy.

[Ex. Doraspe and Attendants.]

Astarbe, come. One glance of those bright eyes
Dispells all care, and empires are forgot.
In what is man superior to the brute?
Brutes eat, drink, sleep; like us, have all the senses.
The male and female meet, then coldly part,
Part with indifference, and desire is cloy'd.
In love alone we feel th'immortal part,
And that celestial fire refines the heart.
End of the third Act.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

A Prison.

Hydarnes. Conspirators.

Hyd.

I shall survive but for a little space;
Doubt not my plighted faith, and dye in peace.
What is an hour of life! an hour of torment.
Think then what I shall suffer for your sake,
How I shall long and pant to be among you!
To him who fears not death Revenge is sure,
To him who fears not death Revenge is speedy.
Soon as the chains are struck from off these hands,
I'll dye them purple in the royal blood;
I'll watch all time. The throne shall not secure him,
The solemn temple, ev'n that sacred ground
Shall not protect him from my resolution.
Would it were done; that we might fall together! *Ist Con.*
May all success attend thy glorious purpose!
Thinking upon thy brave undaunted spirit,
I shall forget my pains, and smile in torture,

SCENE XII.

The Captives

Ev'n when the sharpest pang of death is on me. *Hyd.*
Ere you are cold my Ghost shall overtake you,
And bring the welcome news. Impatience racks me. *2d Con.*
We thank our bold revenger, and will dye
Like men that well deserv'd so great a chief. *3d Con.*
Farewell. And when you lift the dagger for the blow
Think on my friendship. *4th Con.*
And on mine, *5th Con.*
And mine *1st Con.*
Think of us all, and give him death for each. *Hyd.*
Farewell, unhappy friends; you're brave and true,

And you entrust one who deserves such friendships.
Your prayers and wishes, shall direct the dagger
Deep in his heart. And when this deed is done
I've done my task of life; and I'll resign it.

SCENE II.

Hydarnes. Conspirators. Araxes. Officers.
Ara.
Time presses on us, and your hour is come.
We must obey our orders. Lead them hence.
Torture and Death expect you. *1st Con.*
Well. Lead on. *Ara.*
'Tis your last moment. *1st Con.*
We're impatient for it. *Ara.*
Stay here till my return. To you, my message
[To Hyd.]

Is of a sweeter sound. 'Tis life, 'tis freedom.
I'll see them to the scaffold; then discharge you.

SCENE III.

Hydarnes.

What's death to that I feel within! 'Tis nothing.
Tortures but tear the flesh, and crush the bones,
But guilt and horror tear my restless soul,
And ev'ry thought's an arrow in my heart.
Sophernes is condemn'd, and I accus'd him.
For what? For means to satiate my revenge,
And that's sufficient. O Revenge, support me!
What, am I grown a coward? Does repentance,
Does vile contrition sink my boasted courage?
Does resolution stagger! Hence, away,
I will not hear thee, dastard, meddling conscience!

The Captives

No. I'll go on, I feel my spirits rise;
My heart grows harder, and I scorn remorse,

That's the poor whining refuge of a Coward.
My friends are now expiring. Hark, their groans
Start me from thought, and summon me to vengeance!
I come, my friends; in that great deed I'll fall.

SCENE IV.

Hydarnes. Araxes.

Ara.

Phraortes sends you life and liberty.
Twelve days are granted you to pass the confines
Of his Domains: to stay beyond that time
Annuls his pardon, and your life is forfeit.
You're now discharg'd. Be grateful for this mercy,
Pray for the peace of *Media*, and repent. *Hyd.*
Media, farewell. With all the wings of speed
I fly thy bounds. Let me forget thy name;
'Twill bring to my remembrance my lost friends.

SCENE V.

Araxes. Sophernes.

Ara.

Come forth, unhappy Prince; excuse my words.
[Unlocks the dungeon.]

'Tis with reluctance that I bring the message.
Your death's at hand, *Soph.*
Death is the only friend
That I have left; thy message is most welcome.
My friend's at hand; O how long I to meet him!
In him is all my hope, in him my refuge,
He shall disburthen me of all misfortune,
He shall wipe off calamity and sorrow,
And give me peace and everlasting rest.
I thank thee for the news.

Ara.

Such unconcern,
Such steady fortitude amidst afflictions
Was never seen till now. *Soph.*
My wife is dead!
And I have no attachment to the world.
What is't to live? And who counts life a blessing?
It is to see Injustice hold the scale,
And weigh with partial hand the deeds of men;

The Captives

It is to see a race of servile flatterers
Worship the author of all mischief, Gold;
To see Oppression rich, and Virtue starving.
Death only closes this distasteful scene. *Ara.*
This scorn of death appears like innocence. *Soph.*
All mortal justice errs. Heav'n knows the heart.
'Tis easy in my circumstance to dye,
For I have no possessions to forgo,
My kingdom is another's. Round my couch
No faithful servants stand with weeping eyes;
No darling children cling around my neck,
And with fond kisses warm my hollow cheek;
No wife, who, (worn, and wearied out with grief)
Faints in my arms. These give the pangs of death;
These make us covet life. But I leave nothing. *Ara.*
What manly resolution! I grieve for you. *Soph.*
At death's approach the guilty conscience trembles,
But I have not those horrors. Hark, he knocks.

[Knocking heard.]

With what impatient joy I come to meet thee! *Ara.*
Farewell, thou most unfortunate of men;
A mind so great, unshaken by distress,
Deserv'd a nobler end. Forgive my duty,
It seems severe, but 'tis the King's command.
The dungeon must confine you. *Soph.*
I submit.

[Locks him in the dungeon.]

SCENE VI.

Araxes. Captive.

Cap.

This letter will instruct you in your duty. *Ara.*
The prisoner shall be given into your hands. *Cap.*
And he shall perish by an injur'd woman.
Thus has the King decreed; so shall he suffer
Both for his treason, and my murder'd lord.
To see me arm'd with such just resolution,
My husband's ghost is pleas'd, and smiles upon me.
Phraortes gave this dagger. This shall end him. *Ara.*
Within that iron gate he mourns in darkness.

[Gives the Keys.]

This will conduct you. 'Tis the King's command,
Soon as the bloody office is perform'd,
That you present your self once more before him. *Cap.*
His will shall be obey'd. *Ara.*

The Captives

He's now your charge. *Cap.*
And soon my charge shall end. Leave me to justice.
How will my sight dismay his guilty soul!
Ev'n while that terror preys upon his heart,
I'll hurl him to the deepest shades below.
But I delay; and justice grows impatient.
I'd be alone. You now have done your duty.

SCENE VII.

Captive. Sophernes.

Cap.

Come forth, *Sophernes*.

[Unlocks the Dungeon.]

Soph.

I will meet thee, Death. *Cap.*

Draw near. *Soph.*

Hark! was it not a woman's voice?

That voice no more is sweet; *Cylene's* dead.

Yes. 'Tis the Queen. Here satiate thy revenge,

My bosom heaves, and longs to meet the dagger.

Why is thy hand so slow? *Cap.*

Look on this face,

[Lifts up her veil.]

Is not thy heart acquainted with these eyes?

And is thy ear a stranger to this voice?

What, not a word! *Soph.*

O dear delusion!

[Faints.]

Cyl.

Wake.

'Tis thy *Cylene* calls, thy lost *Cylene*.

Cannot this bosom warm thee into life?

Cannot this voice recall thy sinking spirits?

Cannot these lips restore thee? O look up;

Thy voice, thy lips, could call me from the dead.

Look up, and give me comfort. *Soph.*

'Tis *Cylene*.

'Tis no delusion. Do I live to see thee?

And must I be torn from thee? cruel thought!

O tyrant Death, now thou hast made me fear thee! *Cyl.*

When will misfortunes leave us? *Soph.*

Death must end them.

'Twas said you fell in battle; from that time

I lost all pleasure, and desire of life. *Cyl.*

In that sad day of our adversity,

When *Persia* was made captive, every eye

The Captives

Wept for the fall of my dear Lord *Sophernes*,
For you they sorrow'd, and forgot their bondage.
I lost my self in heart-consuming grief,
And lest a conqueror's arrogance and pride
Should tempt him to condemn a captive Queen
To his loose hours, industriously I spread
The rumour of my death; and by those means
Have sigh'd away my days obscure, unknown. *Soph.*
How gain'd you this access? and why that dagger? *Cyl.*
This is no time for talk; consult thy safety.
Catch at the present moment, for the next
May throw us back again into despair.

Soph.

What means, my love? No innocence can stand
Against the voice of perjurd calumny. *Cyl.*
This dagger was design'd to murder thee;
And I am sent upon that bloody errand.
This hand that now is thrown about thy neck
Was to have done the deed. O horrid thought!
Unknown, among a train of captive women,
They brought me to the palace: there I learnt
The tale of thy unhappy sufferings,
And how the King had sign'd the fatal sentence.
I fell before the throne, extoll'd his justice;
Then with feign'd tears, and well-dissembled speech
Charg'd thee with violation of my honour,
And murder of a husband. He was mov'd;
Pleas'd with my bold request he heard my prayer,
And for revenge and justice gave me this.

[Shows the dagger.]

But the time flies. I come, my Lord, to save thee.
'Tis by that hope, I live. *Soph.*
That hope is past.
It is impossible. Resentment, power,
And perjury, all work against my life.
O how I fear to dye! for thee, I fear,
To leave thee thus expos'd, a helpless Captive,
In a strange land, and not one friend to chear thee! *Cyl.*
I think thou lov'st me. *Soph.*
Sure thou long hast known it. *Cyl.*
Is there ought that I could deny *Sophernes*?
No. I have try'd my heart! *Soph.*
What mean these doubts?
I never gave you cause. *Cyl.*
Then promise, swear,
That you will not refuse me what I ask;
Thus on her knees *Cylene* begs it of you. *Soph.*
Does this appear like love? speak, and 'tis granted.
Cyl.
I thank thee. Thou hast given me all my wishes,

SCENE VII.

The Captives

For now thy life is safe; and sav'd by me.
Here, take this veil; this shall secure thy flight,
With this thou shalt deceive the watchful guard.
O blest occasion! fly, my Lord, with speed
I never wish'd to part till now. *Soph.*
What, go and leave thee thus! my heart forbids it.
No. Death is all that I am doom'd to suffer;
But thy distress is more. *Cyl.*
Dispute it not.
Hast thou not sworn? *Soph.*
What never can be done.
Why wilt thou force severer torture on me?
No. Give me death; I chuse the slighter pain.
When I am dead may the just Gods relieve thee. *Cyl.*
Was ever love thus obstinately cruel!
Only thy life can save me; think on that.
[Sophernes fixes his eyes on the ground.]

Like the deaf rock he stands immoveable.
How my fears grow, and chill my shiv'ring heart!
Has then thy stubbornness resolv'd to kill me? *Soph.*
Shall I that was her shield in every danger
Abandon her to the rude hand of power? *Cyl.*
Hear me, my Lord; embrace the happy moment;
This is, perhaps, the last that is allow'd us. *Soph.*
What! give her my distress! *Cyl.*
Look up, and answer.
Have my words lost all int'rest in thy heart?
Hear then my purpose; and I will perform it.
I'll never feel the pang of that sad hour
When thou shalt suffer. No. I'll dye before thee.
How gracious was this Present of the King.
'Tis kind, 'tis merciful, 'twill give me peace,
And show me more compassion than *Sophernes*. *Soph.*
O give me strength, ye Powers, to break my chains,

That I may force the lifted weapon from her!
Spare, spare thy dearer life! I grant thee all.
I will abandon thee to my distresses;
I'll fly this instant; by our loves, I will.
The Gods are kind. O may their mercy save her! *Cyl.*
From thy dear hands I take the galling chains.
Lest danger intercept thee, haste, be gone;
And as thou valu'st mine, secure thy life.
Thou hadst no hope. Who knows but my offence
May find forgiveness! 'tis a crime of love;
And love's a powerful advocate to mercy! *Soph.*
O how I struggle to unloose my heart-strings,
That are so closely knit and twin'd with thine!
Is't possible that we may meet again?
That thought has fill'd my soul with resolution.

SCENE VII.

The Captives

Farewell: may Heav'n support thee, and redress us!

SCENE VIII.

Cylene.

Cyl.

O blessed opportunity, I thank thee.
If for this pious act of love I perish,
Let not *Sophernes* rashly follow me.
Live to revenge me, and the world shall praise thee.
Though all my hours be doom'd to chains and darkness,
The pleasing thought that I have giv'n thee safety,
Will cheer me more than liberty and day-light.
Though I'm condemn'd to suffer shameful death,
Ev'n in that hour I shall forget his terrors,
And knowing that preserv'd thee, dye with pleasure,
But hark! what noise was that? New fears alarm me.
Is he detected? Heaven has more compassion.
Be still, my heart. I go to take his place,
And wait th'event with steady resignation.

[Enters the dungeon.]

SCENE IX.

Araxes. Astarbe.

[Cylene in the Dungeon.]

Astar.

I bring the royal mandate, read your order.
The sentence of *Sophernes* is suspended;
I'd question him in private. Guide me to him. *Ara.*
He's dead. *Astar.*
Sophernes dead! when? how? by whom? *Ara.*
The captive woman by whose hand he fell,
Is gone before the King; just now she parted. *Astar.*
My guilt, my hate, my love, all war within,
And conscience and distraction will betray me

[Aside.]

Ara.

Within that dungeon lyes the breathless body. *Astar.*
Name him no more. Begone; I'd be alone.
You know my pleasure. *Ara.*
I am all Obedience.

The Captives

SCENE X.

Astarbe. Cylene in the dungeon.

Astar.

Who shall appease this tempest of my soul?
'Tis done. He's dead: now it will rage for ever!
Yet why? Hence, conscience. All I did was justice.
Am I the cause? I proffer'd life and love.
The murder was not mine. Why then this horror?
Could a Queen bear such insolence and scorn?
Was I not injur'd? shall I not resent?
He well deserv'd his fate. Ungrateful man!
The bloody spectacle shall please revenge,

And fix eternal hatred in my heart.

[Cylene comes forth.

Hah! speak: what art?
It moves! it comes! where shall I hide me from it?
Nature shrinks back, and shivers at the sight.

[Hides her face.

Cyl.

See at your feet a poor unhappy captive.

[Kneeling.

O may the Queen be gracious to her servant! *Astar.*
Araxes said that he had let you forth,
And by command you went before the King.
Why has he thus deceiv'd me? *Cyl.*
Turn not away,
Bestow one look of pity on a wretch
Who lifts her eyes to you for grace and pardon. *Astar.*
Pardon! for what? you did it by command.
Is it a crime t'obey the voice of justice?
And did not thy own wrongs demand his blood?
What has detain'd thee in that horrid place?
Was it to hear him in the pangs of death,
And taste the pleasure of his dying groan?
Stretch forth thy hands. Where are the crimson stains?
Where lies the reeking sword? Is he yet cold?
'Twas bravely done. Go, haste, before the Throne;
Phraortes shall reward thee for this service. *Cyl.*
When I shall stand before that awful presence,
How shall I stem the torrent of his wrath!
Then let the Queen instill soft mercy in him,
And intercede to spare a wretched wife. *Astar.*
Make known thy crime. *Cyl.*
All my offence is love.
Sophernes is my husband. *Astar.*

The Captives

Hast thou kill'd him? *Cyl.*
No. I dar'd disobey. My love has sav'd him.
With lying speeches I deceiv'd the King,

Accus'd *Sophernes* of imagin'd crimes,
And thus have giv'n him life. My veil conceal'd him,
And brought him forth from death. This is my guilt.
If e'er your heart has felt the tender passion,
You will forgive this just, this pious fraud.
Who would not do the same for him she loves?
Consult thy heart; and Pity will plead for me. *Astar.*
How dar'd you contradict the King's command? *Cyl.*
No power on earth commands the heart but Love,
[Rises.]

And I obey'd my heart. *Astar.*
Thy life is forfeit.
Dar'st thou avow thy crime? *Cyl.*
I glory in it.
If 'tis a crime when innocence is wrong'd
To snatch it from the rage of credulous Power;
If 'tis a crime to succour the distrest;
If 'tis a crime to relieve injur'd virtue;
If 'tis a crime to be a faithful wife;
Those crimes are mine. For I have sav'd my husband. *Astar.*
Is this an answer turn'd to move compassion!
Such insolence is only match'd in him.
Thine is the most consummate pitch of treason.
Who gave thee power? Are traytors at thy mercy?
Let not hope flatter thee. Nor prayers nor tears
Shall turn away the sword of justice from thee.
Rash woman, know, thy life shall pay his ransom. *Cyl.*
Alas! my life is of too little price;
Such as it is, I freely give it for him.
May safety guard his days, and watch his nights!
[Kneeling.]

May ev'ry sun rise happier than the last,
'Till he shall reascend his native throne!
Then think upon *Cylene*. Heaven shall aid thee

To punish *Media* for thy murder'd wife. *Astar.*
Araxes. Seize this bold presumptuous woman.
Your charge beneath her veil is fled from justice,
And she dares own the crime. I fear your duty
Will be suspected. Lead her to the dungeon.
There wait thy fate. *Cyl.*
Ye Gods, preserve *Sophernes*.
[She is lock'd into the dungeon.]

The Captives

SCENE XI.

Astarbe. Araxes.

Astar.

If I had power, this instant she should die. *Ara.*

I fear the King will soften into mercy. *Astar.*

Why that suspicion? *Ara.*

While she spoke before him,

I saw the King with the most fond attention

Hang on her words, and as she spoke he languish'd,

And ev'ry look he gave was love or pity. *Astar.*

She shall not live an hour. Lest with each moment

His passion strengthen, and my power diminish.

Did beauty strike all hearts as well as eyes,

For me the rival world would be in arms;

Beauty's admir'd and prais'd, not always lov'd.

Some eyes are dazled with too strong a lustre,

That gaze with pleasure on a fainter object;

This homely captive then may steal his heart,

And bring disgrace upon me. I'll prevent her.

This hour I'll see her bleed, and thus remove

At once the rival of my throne and love.

End of the Fourth Act.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

A TEMPLE.

Astarbe.

Doraspe knows, and I am in her power.

Araxes was employ'd; he may suspect me.

One crime supports another I must on.

I fear them both. How shall I lose my fear?

Their deaths must end it. But they may be honest.

I'll sift them for my Soul has lost all rest.

But see *Doraspe*.

SCENE II.

Astarbe. *Doraspe*.

Thou sometimes wert known

To miss Devotion's hours. How comes it then

The Captives

Thou'rt now so soon? hast thou ought that concerns me?
Think'st thou *Araxes* honest? I have doubts.
I fear the prisoner 'scap'd by his connivance.
Are my commands obey'd? *Dor.*
'Tis not yet done.
He could not gain admission to the King. *Ast.*
Does he not know a frown of mine can crush him? *Dor.*
I know his heart and hand are wholly yours.
He waits the King's commands.
Ast.
Are mine then nothing?
And want I power to justify the deed?
Why was she not dispatch'd? He knew my pleasure.
My pleasure is his duty. 'Twas I rais'd him;
And dares he now dispute what I ordain?
Tell him, I'll have it done; that I command it.
Thou too art false. Then on her self alone
Astarbe shall depend. Away, thou flatterer.
Go hence, and tremble at the Queen's displeasure.
She shall this instant die. For see *Phraortes.*
Astarbe now has all things at her nod.
Of this day's worship I'll appoint the victim.

SCENE III.

Phraortes. Astarbe. A solemn Procession of Priests.

[The Queen talks apart to Phraortes.]

Phra.
Bid them suspend a while the sacrifice,
The Queen requires a private conference
On matters that concern the state. Withdraw.
[Ex. Priests.]

Now speak, my Queen; I'm ready to obey. *Ast.*
All is not safe. Your state still harbours treason.
Ev'n now I tremble for my Lord the King;
For through the dark the traitor's arrow flies;
And which way will you turn your shield against it? *Phra.*
What means my Queen? *Ast.*
Cast off all clemency;
So shall your throne stand firm to latest time. *Phra.*
And has my danger giv'n *Astarbe* fear?
Where shall I find reward for so much goodness?
I swear by *Jove*, and yon wide sapphire Heaven,
Astarbe's will shall fix the King's decree. *Ast.*
What shall be done to him, whose lying lips
Mis-lead the King from the strait paths of justice?
Phra.

The Captives

Media decrees that death shall be his portion. *Ast.*
What is ordain'd for him, who (when the King
Entrusts the royal signet in his hands)
Dares contradict the sacred mandate? *Phra.*
Death. *Ast.*
What shall our laws inflict on that bold miscreant,
Who saves th'offender whom the King condemns? *Phra.*
The fatal sentence falls upon his head. *Ast.*
Let justice then support the throne of *Media*,
Let justice then preserve thy sacred life!
All these offences are that captive woman's,
Who with feign'd tears beg'd pity and revenge.
With lying lips she fell before the throne,
She turn'd the King from the strait paths of justice,
The royal seal was trusted in her hands;
Presumptuously she broke the sacred mandate,
She spar'd whom you condemn'd, and with vile treachery
Hath set *Sophernes* free. So this assassin
Shall kindle new rebellions in your Empire. *Phra.*
These flagrant crimes demand immediate death. *Ast.*
Let it be so. The King is wise and just. *Phra.*
She shall this instant bleed. Audacious woman! *Ast.*
Let her endure the shameful pomp of death,
Expose her through the city's publick street,
So shall your people's shouts extol your justice;
So shall you strike your enemies with fear,
And awe them to subjection. Bring her forth;
Here let her bleed, ev'n on this holy ground,
Before the presence; *Jove* delights in justice,
The righteous sacrifice shall please the Gods.

SCENE IV.

Phraortes. Astarbe. Orbasius. Magi. Attendants.
Phra.
Come from the croud, *Orbasius*; hear and obey.
Haste to the Prison, and bring forth that woman
(Who freed *Sophernes* from the hand of power)
To publick justice. She shall bleed before me.
Let her be led a publick spectacle.
Dispatch. Remember that the King expects you.

SCENE V.

Phraortes. Astarbe. Magi. Attendants.

The shield of Heaven has turn'd Destruction from us;
And Gratitude requires our thanks and praise.

The Captives

Call up the Priests. Begin the sacred rites. *1st Mag.*
Turn all your eyes to yon bright arch of Heaven. *2d Mag.*
When *Jove* in thunder threatens impious men,
May the red lightnings scatter *Media's* foes,
And lay their cities desolate and waste! *1st Mag.*
May the vast globe of inexhausted light,
That rolls its living fires from east to west,
Strow all his paths with fragrant herbs and flowers,
And bless his people with perpetual spring! *2d Mag.*
May the bright lamp of night, the silver moon,
And all the starry myriad that attend her,

Guard and defend his midnight couch from dangers! *1st Mag.*
May everliving springs supply our fountains,
And wind in fertile rivers through the land! *2d Mag.*
Bless him, ye winds, with ever-prosp'rous gales! *1st Mag.*
Pour not your wrath in tempests on his people.
Let your sweet breath chase dearth and pestilence,
And cool our summers with eternal health!

SCENE VI.

Phraortes. Astarbe. Magi. Orbadius. Attendants. *Cylene as led to execution.*

[Orbadius talks apart to the King.]

Phra.

Again we must defer the solemn worship.
Bid the procession move towards the Temple.
And let th'offender stand before the presence.

[To Orb.]

Astar.

Sophernes has expos'd me to this woman;
And while she lives, I live in fear and shame.
Shall she then triumph in a Queen's disgrace?

[Aside.]

Cyl.

Most gracious King, consider my transgression.

[Kneels.]

My life is forfeit; justice has condemn'd me.
I broke th'inviolable laws of *Media*.
Yet let *Phraortes* with impartial scale
Weigh my offence; he'll find my crime was virtue.
Sure Heaven that tries the heart will pardon me.
And Kings, who imitate the Gods in justice,
Should not forsake them in the paths of mercy. *Phra.*
Have not thy lying lips deceiv'd the King?
How shall thy words find faith! They're air, they're nothing! *Cyl.*
O be not rash in judgment! Hear me speak.

The Captives

What mov'd my tongue to practise this deceit?
Was it ambition and the lust of power?
Was it to vex your empire with rebellion?
Was it the meaner views of sordid gain?
Was it to hurt the lowest of your people?
All my offence is faithful love and duty;
Sophernes is my husband, and I sav'd him. *Phra*.
Thy husband! *Astar*.
Hear her not: woman, away.
Remember you have sworn. *Phra*.
Thy husband, say'st thou? *Astar*.
Think on your oath, and spurn dissimulation. *Phra*.
Am I debarr'd the chief delight of Kings?
Have I the power to punish; not to pardon?
But I have sworn. *Cyl*.
If there's no room for mercy
 [Rises.]

My life is well bestow'd. My death is glorious;
I chose it; and repine not at my fate. *Astar*.
Turn from her. Listen not to fraud and guile. *Cyl*.
Think not I shudder at th'approach of death,
That the keen sword which glitters in my eyes
Makes my heart fail, and sinks me to despair.
I fear not for my self; for him I fear.
How will he bear my death? As I could his. *Phra*.
Why have I bound the tender hands of mercy?
 [Musing.]

Astar.
You but delay. The royal oath is sacred. *Cyl*.
Well then. Lead on. His punishment is mine.
Live, live, *Sophernes*, and forget *Cylene*;
Lest grief destroy thy peace, and make thee wretched.
I'm ready. *Phra*.
How shall I pronounce the sentence! *Astar*.
For your oath's sake. *Phra*.
'Tis granted. Let her dye.
But let me first perform my due devotions,

To beg that mercy which I must refuse.
As soon as I have paid my solemn vows,
I'll make the sign. Then let the blow be given.
See all be ready. Now renew the rites.

SCENE VI.

The Aforehead. Hydarnes disguis'd.

Hyd.

The Captives

Thus far I'm undiscover'd. Now's my time.
The King of *Media*'s given into my hands.
And when he leaves his guards to trust the Gods,
Ev'n while he prostrate falls, and lifts his eyes
To the bright God of day, th'all-seeing sun;
This shall dispatch him first, and then *Hydarnes*. *1st Mag.*
Now let the King advance. *Phra.*
O glorious Sun!

[Kneeling.]

[Hydarnes attempting to stab Phraortes, is stab'd by Sophernes disguis'd, who is seiz'd by the Magi.]

What means this consternation in all eyes?
Whence this alarm, and all this wild disorder?
Hah! who lies here thus weltring in his blood,
Gasping for life? what means this horrid murder?
Strike not till I command. *[To the Executioner.]* Who did this deed? *1st Mag.*
Behold the man. What bounty can reward him?
What shall be done for him who sav'd the King? *Phra.*
Say who, and whence thou art? *Soph.*
A wretched man
Who comes to take his sentence on him, death.
Sophernes was condemn'd; 'tis he must suffer.
Spare then that pattern of heroic virtue.
The sentence is not hers; I claim my right.
Sophernes stands before you, and demands it.
[Throws off his disguise.]

Cyl.
O stay not for the signal. Give the blow.
Save him, ye Gods. Why is the stroke delay'd?
The King has sworn. O may my death preserve him! *Phra.*
Suspend her sentence till my further orders.
Who slew this man? what mov'd thee to the murder?
Why hast thou stain'd this holy place with blood? *Soph.*
That villain who lies groveling there before thee,
Had rais'd his arm to take thy life, O King;
And as the point descended, in the moment
I lay'd him low; and Heav'n has done me justice.
If favour shall reward me for this deed,
Spare my *Cylene*, grant her your protection.
I ask not life, for without her 'tis nothing. *Astar.*
Where will this end? How are my schemes destroy'd!
Fear chills my heart, and guilt lies heavy on me.
Leave me not, Hell; desert not now thy cause.
I've gone too far. O blind the eyes of justice!
And sink me not in ruin and perdition.

[Aside.]

Phra.
Know you this bold Assassin? View him well. *Hyd.*
Ay, gaze upon me. *Orba.*

The Captives

Sure I've seen this man. *Soph.*
Among the crowd I mark'd this perjur'd wretch,
Who charg'd me with ingratitude and treason.
With fury in his looks, and hasty strides
He stept before me; strait he rais'd his dagger:
In justice to my self and thee, I smote him. *Astar.*
Where shall I hide me? how my fears distract me!
Who knows the torment of the guilty wretch,
When accusation stares him in the face?
Then all our spirits sink into despair,
And when we want most strength, then most it fails us.

He speaks, and I'm betray'd. Why err'd the dagger!
To bring confusion, shame and death upon me.
Where shall I fly? for conscience will detect me,
'Twill fault on my tongue, and stain my cheek.
O horror! O disgrace! I fly from shame.

[Exit.]

SCENE VIII.

Phraortes. Cyrene. Sophernes. Magi. Orbasius. Araxes. Executioner. Attendants.

Soph.

'Twas I that gave thee death. *Hyd.*

Thou hast done justice. *Phra.*

What sayest thou? speak again. *Hyd.*

He has done justice.

I barb'rously accus'd him of my crimes;

That guilt upbraids me; and I ask forgiveness.

[To Soph.]

Phra.

Whence art thou? why this zealous rage against me? *Hyd.*

I grieve not that I perish'd by his hand;

But that he disappointed my Revenge

I can't forgive him. Had he stay'd 'till then,

Hydarnes had faln greatly. But that's past.

Still I shall wound thee in the tenderest part.

[To Phraortes.]

I faint. O grant me strength to give it utterance!

Draw near, *Araxes*. Speak, inform the King;

Did not you guide me to the Queen's apartment?

You know why I was call'd. Disclose the secret. *Ara.*

What past I know not. *Hyd.*

What you fear to own,

I dare reveal. Hear then a dying man.

The Queen, on promise of my life and pardon,

Prevail'd upon me to accuse this Prince;

I knew him not. Yet to pursue thy life,

The Captives

And gratify revenge, I undertook it. *Phra.*
It is impossible. Advance, my Queen,
And let thy presence strike him with confusion.
Come forth, *Astarbe*. Hah! she's fled, she's guilty!
Haste, bring her back. I will extort confession.
What mov'd her to this perjur'd information?

[Ex. Officers.]

Whence sprung this hate and malice to *Sophernes*?

[To Hydarnes.]

Hyd.

Ask her. I speak the truth, and know no further.
Look on me, Tyrant, and observe my features;
Seest thou not here the lines of brave *Lysammes*?
He by thy power was led to shameful death,
His son now dyes, and never has reveng'd him.

[Dyes.]

SCENE IX.

Phraortes. Astarbe brought in by Officers. Cylene. Sophernes. Magi. Attendants.

Ast.

Bring me before the King. *Phra.*
Perfidious woman!
Look on that wretch, who there lyes pale and cold;
Was he not brought in private to your chamber?
Who gave instructions to accuse *Sophernes*?
Who promis'd life and pardon to *Hydarnes*? *Ast.*
All then is lost. *Astarbe* is betray'd.
But shall I stoop to lead a life of shame?
No. This shall close a scene of long remorse.

[Stabs her self.]

Phra.

Astarbe! hold! *Ast.*
Forgive me! *Phra.*
Her foul treachery
My soul detests. But love will force a tear.

What mov'd her hatred thus against your life? *Soph.*

She was unhappy. Let her be forgot, *Phra.*
Draw near, *Cylene*. May heav'n bless your loves!

[Gives her to Sophernes.]

Cyl.

Shall he then live? My heart o'erflows with joy.
Now life is worth accepting, worth desiring,
Worth ev'ry wish, and ev'ry daily prayer. *Phra.*
By you the royal vestment shall be worn,
And next the King, all honour shall be paid

The Captives

To you who sav'd him.

[To Sophernes.

Soph.

What I did was due.

I've only paid a debt of gratitude;

What would your bounty more? you've giv'n me all.

For in these arms I ev'ry wish possess. *Phra.*

Life is a voyage, and we with pain and labour

Must weather many a storm to reach the port. *Soph.*

Since 'tis not giv'n to mortals to discern

Their real good and ill; let men learn patience:

Let us the toils of adverse fate sustain,

For through that rugged road our hopes we gain.