

Charles the First

Mary Russell Mitford

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Charles the First

An Historical Tragedy in Five Acts

Mary Russell Mitford

London
John Duncombe and Co.
10, Middle Row, Holborn
1834

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To
MR. SERJEANT TALFOURD,
Of many Kind and Honoured Friends
The Kindest and the most Honoured
This Tragedy
Is Respectfully and Affectionately
Inscribed
by
The Author

Dramatis Personae.

Charles the First
Duke of Gloucester

King of England
his Son, a boy of seven years old

Mr. Abbott
Master Norman

Charles the First

<i>Lord Fairfax</i>	<i>General of the Parliamentary Army</i>	Mr. Selby
<i>Lord Salisbury</i> <i>Lord Say</i> <i>Sir Harry Vane</i>	<i>Commissioners sent by the Parliament to treat with the King</i>	Mr. T. Lee Mr. Mildenhall Mr. Debar
<i>Lord President Bradshaw</i> <i>Oliver Cromwell</i> <i>Ireton</i> <i>Harrison</i> <i>Downes</i> <i>Marten</i> <i>Tichburne</i>	<i>Judges appointed by the Commons to try the King</i>	Mr. Green Mr. Cathcart Mr. J. Webster Mr. Doyne Mr. Bender Mr. Forrester Mr. G. Williams
<i>Cook</i> <i>Pride</i> <i>Hacker</i> <i>Sir Thomas Herbert</i> <i>Hammond</i>	<i>Solicitor to the Commons</i> <i>An Officer in the Parliamentary Army</i> <i>Colonel of the Guard</i> <i>A Gentleman attending on the King</i> <i>Governor of the Isle of Wight</i>	Mr. Chalk Mr. Addison Mr. Thomas Mr. Doyne Mr. Fleming Mr. Chippendale Mr. Kerridge
<i>Centinel</i> <i>Servant</i> <i>Bishop, Commissioners, Judges, Officers, Soldiers, &c., &c.</i> <i>Henrietta Maria</i> <i>Princess Elizabeth</i>	<i>belonging to Cromwell</i> <i>Queen of England</i> <i>a girl of 12</i>	Mr. Mrs. Fisher Miss Josephine
<i>Lady Fairfax</i>		Miss Somerville

[The Scene is in London, except during the latter part of the First Act, when it is laid in the Isle of Wight.]

PROLOGUE. *Written and Spoken by Mr. Serle.*

The world's historic glories and the fate
Of kings, and, loftier far, the stern debate
Of passions; greater still, the ocean tide
Of thoughts and principles; events that ride
Upon that mighty flood; lights of the past
That dial—shadows on the future cast,
These Tragedy, wise, solemn, stern, portrays
In the Greek verse sublime, in Shakespeare's native lays.
Oh, English Harry! did the battle—field
Of Agincourt so proud a trophy yield

Charles the First

As the high heart, the generous thought which he
Hath shrin'd thee in for all eternity?

Man and the truth are our proud Muse's theme:
No witchcraft vision, no light fairy dream
Calls up the spirit of Charles, and bids it pass
As a dim shadow o'er the magic glass;
Even as he was he is, sealing with blood
The right divine of kings; she, whom he wooed
In his few hours of joy and mirth, is here,
And weeps their sufferings in no fancied tear,
A thing whose beauty is fragility,
Wrestling with iron-handed destiny:
And, as though Destiny himself, exprest
In some dark human form, had come to wrest
Sceptres and powers and love and lives from men,
Here, all-controlling, Cromwell stands again.

And can these mighty scenes with trembling hand
Be painted? or in colours such as stand
One moment in the rainbow, soft and fair?
Can curious words these awful themes declare?
No: firm the hand and bold must be the pen
That wields the passions of those fearful men
Whose bold hypocrisy dar'd Heaven and Hell:
Even as they spoke, their speech the Muse shall tell;
Poor pigmy fear this story must disgrace,
The Titan warrings of a giant race.

Charles the First

Act I

Scene 1

[An Apartment in Whitehall. Enter Ireton , Harrison, and Pride, to Downes and Marten .]

Downes.

Welcome to London, Ireton! dearly welcome
To fair Whitehall! Harrison! Pride! Where loiters
The valiant General?

Ireton.

He alighted with us
Three hours ago.

Marten.

What, three hours here, and still
In harness! Know ye not your coat of mail
Is out of date? Go, doff your armour quick,
Provide ye civil suits, grave civil suits,
Sad reverend civil suits.

Pride.

What mean'st thou?

Dow.

Seek
Meaning of Harry Marten! Tush! Where tarries
The pious Cromwell?

Ire.

He is busied still
Disposing the tired soldiery.

Mar.

Disbanding
Will be his business soon. The lubbard people,
And the smug citizens, are grown weary
Of this rough war. Ye must learn gentler trades
If ye would thrive. Peace is the cry, my masters;
Peace and the King!

Dow.

The Newport treaty speeds;
So far is sure.

Harrison.

But we bring victory
To the good cause. Cromwell hath passed careering
From hold to hold, sweeping as with a besom
The foul malignants from the land. The North
Is ours from sea to sea.

Dow.

'Tis a brave leader;
But peace is ever the best victory.

[Enter Cromwell.]

Mar.

Charles the First

In good time comes the General. Valiant Cromwell
Thy praise was on our lips.

Cromwell.

Not mine! not mine!
Praise to the Lord of Hosts, whose mighty shield
Bucklered us in the battle, whose right arm
Strengthened us when we smote! Praise to the Lord!
For his poor instruments, the meanest soldier
Doth his great duty; we no more. My masters,
Have ye no news astir? News, the prime staple
Of yonder tattling city?

Mar.

Aye; the worst
Is that the Commons grow from day to day
More doubtful of the army, more possessed
By canting presbyters.

Ire.

Name not the Commons,
A jealous crew, whose envious hate descends
'Twixt every pause of fear on us their loathed
Despised defenders. Were there but one head
To the whole army, they would turn to truth
An elder tyrant's wish, and chop it off.
Despots who prate of liberty!—

Har.

Worse! worse!
A godless yet intolerent crew, who rear
O'er the down-fallen Church that blacker idol
A conscience-fettering Presbytery.

Crom.

Sir,
They shall be quelled. Power, howsoever called,
Is still the subtlest snare the Tempter weaves
For man's frail sinful soul. Save me from power!
Grant me to follow still, a lowly soldier
In the great cause! The Commons shall be quelled.
What other news?

Dow.

The best is that the King
And the Commissioners draw near a godly
And salutary peace. The King hath bent
His will in a wise humbleness; and now—

Crom.

I joy to hear thee say so. What! the Lord
Hath turned his heart, and he hath yielded up
His haughty prelates, his ill councillors,
The popish mummery of his chapel?

Dow.

Nay,
Not yet; but he hath promised.

Crom.

Promised! Oh
The King hath promised!

Mar.

Well?

Crom.

And ye believe?

Dow.

Would'st have us doubters?

Crom.

In good sooth, not I!

Believe who can! yet ere ye set him free
Look to the stuffing of his saddle, search
The waste leaves of his prayer-book, lest ye find
Some vow to Henrietta, some shrewd protest,
Some antedated scroll to throw the shadow
Of a plain lie before his words. Search! search!
It is a prudent King, that casts about him
To rid him of his enemies. Search, I say.

Dow.

Why, Cromwell, thou art bitter.

Crom.

Heaven forefend!

I liked Charles Stuart well. I am of the fools
Whom Habit counts amidst her slaves; that love,
For old acquaintance sake, each long-known pest
And close familiar evil. I liked him well;
The better that his proud disgraceful speech
Seemed to my plain and downright simpleness
As honest as mine own. Ye all remember
What friends we were at Holmby. Harrison
And e'en my loving kinsman deemed I waxed
Faint in the cause. But rightly it is written
In the one Holy Book, Put not thy trust
In Princes.

Ire.

Yet is he in Carisbooke
A present danger. Round yon prison isle
Lurk spies and plots and treasons. Every breeze
Comes pregnant with quick rumours; every ear
Is bent to listen; every eye is turned
On those grey walls.

Crom.

I grant ye. But astir,
Free as the breeze to traverse sea and land,
Creep in our councils, sweep across our camps,
Were the King harmless then? Yet thou art right;
He's dangerous in Carisbrooke.

Har.

Dismiss him;
Send him abroad unkinged; or drive him forth
As Amaziah.

Crom. [Aside]

Ha! And they slew him!

Mar.

What, send him to seek succour in each court,
From papal Rome to savage Muscovy,
Till he shall burst on us in triumph, heading
Europe's great armament.

Ire.

Wert thou a soldier,
And in this cause, thou would'st cry Welcome, Marten,
To such an armament.

Har.

With His great help.

Crom.

Aye, with His help and in this cause, if union
Dwelt in the land. But this is idle talk.
The King is dangerous; dangerous on the throne,
Dangerous in prison, dangerous abroad,
At home and everywhere. Yet this is idle.
We must abide the Commons' treaty.

Har.

Wherefore
Lifts not the army the strong hand of power
Over these stiff-necked rulers? Put them down.
Tread out the firebrands.

Ire.

Rather move the Commons
To bring the King to trial.

Crom.

Who said that?

Mar.

'Twas bravely spoken.

Crom.

Who said that?

Dow.

The words
Sounded like treason.

Crom.

Sir, had we met here
To compass such intent, the very thought
Had been a treason. But the words fell straight
Midst our unconscious hearts, unprompted, quick,
Startling even him who spake them,—like the fire
That lit the Burning Bush. A sign from Heaven!
Direct from Heaven! A comfortable light
To our benighted spirits! As I wrestled
In prayer this morning, when I would have cried
For mercy on Charles Stuart, my parched tongue
Clave to my mouth. A token from on high!
A star lit up to guide us!

Mar.

Yet the Commons
Will scarcely echo this rapt strain. The King
Hath friends amongst us.

Har.

Fear not. He who sent
This impulse on his servants will know how
To turn all hearts.

Dow.

Ye will not slay the King?

Crom.

Life hangs not on our lips. Yet surely, Sir,
I hope to spare him. Friends, we must not sleep
Over such stirring business. Downes, go thou
For Bradshaw, that resolved and learned and wise
And godly law-man. Thou art like to find him
At the Guildhall. Say we would speak with him.

[Exit Downes.]

Harrison!—Downes went forth as one who loves not
His errand—Lacks he zeal? 'Tis a brave soldier,
And yet—Follow him, Marten; and return
With Bradshaw hither. We shall need thy counsel.
Delay not.—

[Exit Marten.]

Harrison! thou truest soldier
Of the good cause, to thee we trust the charge
Of guarding our great prisoner. Make thee ready
For a swift journey. I'll confer with thee
Alone afore thou goest.

Har.

Should I not see
The General?

Crom.

Wherefore? Hence.

[Exit Harrison.]

[To Pride]

Nay, Colonel, go not!
I'd speak with thee, good Colonel. Rest thee, son,
I'd speak with this good Colonel.

Pri.

I attend
Your Excellency's pleasure.

[During the next few speeches Cromwell walks up and down the stage, now speaking to himself, now looking at the weather, now asking questions, without attending to the answers, evidently absorbed in thought.]

Charles the First

Crom.

Aye, the light
Mercurial Harry Marten said but sooth;
They are unripe for this great charge. It shall be—
And yet—What is the hour?

Pri.

Upon the stroke
Of one.

Ire.

He listens not. Look how he searches
The weather with unseeing eyes.

Crom.

'Tis stormy.

Pri.

Nay a bright day.

Ire.

He hears not.

Crom.

Sweep them off,
And the whole game is ours! But—Which way blows
The wind?

Pride.

Right from the south.

Crom.

It must be, shall be.
Ireton, I gave thee yesterday a scroll
Of the malignants in the Commons—Hark ye!
The Commons, our great masters! If Charles Stuart
Have friends in England, he will find them there
'Mid those self-seekers.

Pri.

Wherefore not arraign
The King before the Council?

Crom.

Sir, we need
The Commons' name. I would not that our just
And righteous cause lacked any form of law
To startle tender consciences. I have thought
Afore of this. Didst never see the thrasher
Winnow the chaff from the full grain? Good Colonel,
Thyself shalt play the husbandman to cleanse
This sample of foul corn. Take yonder scroll,
And with a troop of horse, go post thyself
Beside the Commons' door, and seize each man
Whose name stains that white parchment. Treat all well,
But let none enter.

Pri.

And my warrant?

Crom.

Sir,

My word. If any question, say the General—

Pri.

Lord Fairfax?

Crom.

Aye, the good Lord General
Shall hear of thy good service. Fear it not.
Myself shall tell him. Thy good service, dearer
Than half a dozen battles; better worth
And richlier guerdoned. Haste! Lord Grey of Groby
Will aid thee to detect the knaves. Away!
Full many a goodly manor shall change masters
To-morrow 'fore the sequestrators.

[Exit Pride.]

Ire.

So!

That work will be well done.

Crom.

I loathe myself
That I employ the mercenary tool;
But we are in our great aims justified,
Our high and holy purpose. Saints and prophets
Have used uncleanly instruments. Good son,
Keep between Fairfax and these men. The weak
Wife-ridden faintling would demur and dally,
And pause at every step, and then draw back,
Unapt for good or ill. He must know nought.

[Re-enter Harrison and Pride.]

What make ye here again?

Pri.

Dost thou not hear?

A mutiny amongst the soldiers.

Har.

Nay,

But half a score malignants, who would fain
Stir up the soldiery.

Crom.

And they?

Har.

They listen,

But move not.

Crom.

Seize the traitors. Shoot them dead;
If any murmur, still them too. Let death
Follow offence as closely as the sound
Of the harquebuss the flash. Art thou not gone?
What stops thee?

Har.

Be more merciful.

Charles the First

Crom.

Why this
Is mercy. If thou saw'st one, match in hand
Approach a mine hollowed beneath some rich
And populous town, would'st strike him down at once,
Or wait till he had fired the train.

Har.

At once!
At once!

Crom.

Well?—Go thou too, fair son! away!
I'll follow on the instant. Look I find
The guilty quiet.

[Exeunt Harrison and Ireton.]

We have been too easy
And fostered malcontents. Yet this swift vengeance
Will strike a wholesome terror, and the echo
May reach to higher miscreants. Good Colonel,
Thou loiterest overlong. Go, block the door
And let none pass. Be sure thou let none pass.
I must to yon poor traitors. Let none pass.

[Exeunt.]

Scene 2

[An Apartment in Carisbrooke Castle. The King and Herbert.]

King.

Herbert!

Herbert.

My liege.

King.

Put up my book. I wait
The grave Commissioners, and to be seen
Poring o'er Shakespeare's page—Oh heinous sin!
Inexpiable deadly sin!

Herb.

Your Grace
Speaks cheerily.

King.

Why I have fed my thoughts
On the sweet woodland tale, the lovely tale
Of Ardenne Forest, till the peaceful end,
The gentle comfortable end, hath bathed
My very heart in sunshine. We are here
Banished as the old Duke, and friends come round,
And foes relent, and calm Forgiveness hangs,
An Angel, in the air, to drop her balm
On all our wounds. I thank thee, royal spirit,

Charles the First

Thrice princely poet, from whose lightest scene
Kings may draw comfort. Take yon sprig of bay
And lay between the leaves. I marvel much
Where loiter the Commissioners.

Herb.

Your Grace
Hath vanquished them so often that they creep
Fearfully to the field—a beaten foe.

King.

Nay, we are near agreed. I have granted more
Than they durst think for. They set forth to day
Bearing my answer to the Commons. Look
To see a sudden peace. Many will deem
I have yielded overmuch; but I keep quick
The roots of kingly power, albeit the boughs
Be shrewdly lopt. And then to see again
My wife, my children, to reward my poor
And faithful servants, to walk free, to reign!
Look to see sudden peace.

Herb.

Heaven speed the day!
Yet, Sire,—forgive my fear!—would thou hadst ta'en
The proffered means of safety, had escaped
This Island prison!

King.

What! when I had pledged
My word, my royal word! Fie! fie! good Herbert;
Better, if danger were, a thousand fold
Perish even here than forfeit that great bond
Of honour, a King's word. Fie! fie! Yet sooth
Thou mean'st me kindly, Herbert. Ha! the Sea,
That day and night hath chased so angrily,
Breaking around us with so wild a coil,
An elemental warder, smiles again,
Merrily dancing in the cold keen light
Of the bright wintery Sun. We shall have boats
From England.

Herb.

One hath landed, Sire.

King.

And they
May bear my message without pause. Who comes?

[Enter Hammond.]

Ham.

May't please you, Sire, the high Commissioners
Crave audience of your Majesty.

King.

Admit them.

Charles the First

[Enter Lord Salisbury, Lord Say, Sir Harry Vane, and other Commissioners, some of them Ministers.]

See, Vane hath lost his frown! We shall have peace.
Good morrow my good Lord of Salisbury!
Lord Say, Sir Harry Vane, and gentles all,
A fair good morrow. The sun smiles at last
Upon our meeting.

Say.

Sunshine after storm;
A happy omen, Sire, a type of peace.

Salis.

Yet clouds are gathering.

Say.

Tush! the noon-day sun
Will overcome them.

Vane.

Cease this heathenish talk
Of omens. Hath your grace prepared your answer
To the proposals of the Commons?

King.

Reach
Yon paper Herbert. Set ye forth to-day?

Vane.

With the next tide.

King.

So speed ye wind and wave,
And send ye swiftly hence, and swiftlier back
Blest messengers of peace, winged like the dove
That bore the olive token. Take my answer,
A frank compliance with each article
Save twain, save only twain.

Say.

And they—I pray thee
Be wholly gracious, Sire! Peril not thus
Your country's weal, your freedom, and your crown,
By timeless reservation.

King.

I have yielded
Power and prerogative, and state and wealth,
For my dear country. All that was mine own,
All that was mine to give, I freely gave;
That I withhold is of the conscience. Look
On these white hairs, and think if one so signed,
Marked for the grave, may for the vain respect
Of crowns or kingdoms offer up his friends
Or his old worship. Mark me: I'll not yield
A man of that devoted seven, nor bate
A word of my accustomed prayer, to save
My limbs from cankering fetters, or win back
That velvet prison, a throne. No more of this.

Charles the First

Bear ye the treaty, Sirs; and use but half
That goodly gift of eloquence for me
That ye to me have shown, and be but heard
With half the grace, and we shall meet full soon
Subject and King, in peace, in blessed peace.—

[Harrison heard without.]

Whoso asks entrance with so wild a din?
Give him admittance quickly.

Vane.

Yet, my liege,
For these seven cavaliers—

King.

No more! no more!
Thou hast my answer.—By the iron tread
A soldier.

[Enter Harrison.]

Salis.

Harrison! What brings thee hither?

Har.

A sad and solemn message to your prisoner.

King.

Speak out thy tidings. Speak thine errand, Sir.
I am strong-hearted—Sovran privilege
Of them that tower so high!—Strong as yon eagle
That nests among the cliffs. I have borne loads
That would have sunk a meaner man in gulphs
Of deep despair. Thine errand. Stop! Who sent thee?

Har.

The Commons.

King.

Now thine errand.

Har.

To demand
The body of Charles Stuart, sometime King
Of England—

King.

Sometime King?

Har.

Whom I attach
Of treason.

King.

Treason and the King! Off, Sir!
I warn thee touch me not. Some natures feel
A shuddering loathing at cold-blooded worms,
Snakes, aspicks, vipers, toads—my flesh doth creep
And shiver if the reptile man approach
Too closely. Show thy warrant.

Har.

Charles the First

Look you, Sir,
The warrant be obeyed.

Vane.

Dost thou not see
[to Salisbury]
The master hand of Cromwell in this deed?

[to Harrison]

Where is the General?

Har.

Come victorious home—
Know'st thou not that?—to lend his pious aid
To our great work.

Salis.

But thou art from the Commons,
Not from the Council,—sure thou saidst the Commons?
And they were earnest for the treaty.

Har.

Aye,
But in that goodly field grew tares, rank tares,
Which have been weeded out: stiff presbyters,
Bitter malignants, and those sons of wrath
Who falter in the better path—dead boughs
Upon a noble tree. Some fifty horse
Swept off the rubbish.

Say.

But the men are safe?

Har.

Even as thyself.—Now, sir, hast thou enough
Studied yon parchment?

King.

Treason! to arraign
A crowned King of treason! I am here
Treating with these same Commons on the faith,
The general faith of nations. I appeal
To ye, my foes; to thee, my gaoler. What!
Stand ye all mute? high lords and learned lawmen,
And reverend ministers? Ye had glib tongues
For subtle argument, and treasonous craft,
And cobweb sophistry. Have ye no word
For faith, for honour? not one word? Shame! shame!

Vane.

We are the Commons' servants, and must needs
Obey their mandates.

Say.

Yet with grief of heart—

Har.

Silence;

King.

Aye, silence! Sir, I thank thee yet
That sparest me that sharpest injury
A traitor's pity. For that gentle deed

Charles the First

I yield me gently to thy hands. Lead on
Where'er thou wilt; I follow.

Har.

Straight to London.
To bide thy trial.

King.

What! will they dare that?
Doth not the very thought, the very word
Appal the rebels? Trial! When we meet
Confronted in that regal Hall, the King
And his revolted subjects, whoso then
Shall be the Judge? The King. Whoso make inquest,
Whoso condemn, and whoso fling a pardon,
A scornful pardon on your heads? The King,
The King, I tell ye, Sirs. Come on! I pant
To meet these Judges. For ye, solemn mockers,
Grave men of peace, deceivers or deceived,
Sincere or false boots little, fare ye well!
Yet give me yon vain treaty—Now, by Heaven
I shame to have communed with ye!—This slight paper,
That shivers at a touch, is tough and firm
Mated with such as ye. Bear to the Commons,
Your masters, yon torn fragments, fitting type
Of their divided factions!—fitting type
Of ye, men of a broken faith! Farewell!
I wait thy pleasure, Sir.

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

Charles the First

Act II

Scene I

[The Painted Chamber. A table at which are seated Commissioners, Lawyers, &c.; a gothic window behind the table, through which objects that pass may be seen. Bradshaw, Fairfax, Ireton, Downes, Cook, Marten, Tichburn, &c. Fairfax comes forward, followed by Bradshaw, Ireton, and Downes.]

Fairfax.

Soon as the day be fixed, apprise me, Sirs;
The halberdiers shall wait ye.

Bradshaw.

Good my lord
Thou wilt not leave us? When did Fairfax fly
A post of danger? and his honoured name
Stands foremost in our roll.

Fair.

Sir, I am sworn
The soldier of the Commons, and as soldier
Obey them loyally. All that ye need
For state or for defence in this sad pageant
Our camp shall furnish. Save their General,
You may command the army. For this trial
I like it not. I am no gownsman. Sirs,
The halberdiers shall wait ye.

[Exit Fairfax.]

Mar.

What a nice
And peevish conscience Fairfax bears! Will send
Arms, horses, men, to escort the prisoner, line
The Court, defend the judges, guard the scaffold—
If so our wisdom wills—yet hold himself
Content and harmless, so his single voice
Swell not the general doom.

Dow.

Yet 'tis a wise
And noble gentleman.

Brad.

Tush! a good sword—blade,
Keen in the field, but at the council dull
And heavy as the scabbard.

[Enter Cromwell].

Lo! where comes
One whose bright spirit knows no dimness. Cromwell!

Crom.

Hear ye the news my masters? Harrison,

That bold and zealous soldier of our Israel,
Is here.

Brad.

Where is the King?

Crom.

The King of Kings
Delivers him unto us. Harrison
Awaits his landing. We must be prepared
For instant trial. Glad am I and proud
To greet with looks so firm and resolute
This full and frequent council.

Brad.

Yet you met
A great one who forsakes us.

Crom.

The Lord General?
Why on the battle-day such loss might cause
An hour's perplexity. Now—Hark ye Sirs!
Passing awhile Lord Fairfax' door I saw
The Queen.

Ire.

In England! Didst thou see her face?

Crom.

No. But I knew her by the wanton curls,
The mincing delicate step of pride, the gait
Erect and lofty. 'Twas herself, I say,
Vain Jezabel!

Dow.

At Fairfax' gate! Alas!
Poor lady!

Crom. [Aside]

Ha! And must we watch thee too?
No word of this good Sirs.

[Going to the table]

Why master Cook
What needs this long indictment? Seems to me
Thou dost mistake our cause. The crime is not
A trivial larceny, where some poor thief
Is fenced and hemmed in by a form of words
In tedious repetition, endless links
Of the strong chain of law, lest at some loophole
The paltry wretch escape. We try a King,
In the stern name of Justice. Fling aside
These cumbering subtleties, this maze of words,
And in brief homely phrase, such as the soldier
May con over his watchfire, or the milk-maid
Wonderingly murmur as she tends her kine,
Or the young boy trace in his first huge scroll,
Or younger girl sew in her sampler, say

Charles the First

That we arraign Charles Stuart King of England
For warring on his people. Let this deed
Be clear and open as beseems the men
On whom the Lord hath set his seal. Besides
That will let loose thy stream of eloquence
Ice-bound by this cold freezing plea. What says
Our learned President?

Brad.

Thou art right. Thou art right.
Our fair intent needs not a veil. Be sure
He shall have noble trial and speedy, such
As may beseem a King.

Dow.

What is his bearing?

Crom.

Resolved and confident. Lately at Windsor
Eating a Spanish melon of choice flavour,
He bade his servant Herbert send the seeds
To be sowed straight at Hampton.

Mar.

Many men
Plant acorns for their successors; this King sets
A gourd.

Crom.

The Prophet's gourd. We are all mortal.
Sow but a grain of mustard, the green thing
Which soonest springs from death to life, and thou
Shalt wither ere the leaflets shoot.

Ire.

The King
Deems that ye dare not try him.

Brad.

Dare not! Cromwell
How soon dost think—

Crom.

Was't not the plash of oars?

Brad.

Cromwell!

Ire.

He hears thee not. His sense rejects
All sound save that for which with such intense
And passionate zeal he listens. See his cheek
Quivers with expectation. Its old hue
Of ruddy brown is gone.

Crom.

Hark! Hark! my masters!
He is come! He is come! We are about to do
A deed which shall draw on us questioning eyes
From the astonished nations. Men shall gaze

Charles the First

Afear'd and wondering on this spot of earth,
As on a comet in the Heavens, fatal
To kings of old. Start ye? Why at the first
I started, as a man who in a dream
Sees indistinct and terrible grim forms
Of death and danger float before his glazed
And wondering eyes; but then as one who wakes
The inspiring light fell on me, and I saw
The guiding hand of Providence visibly
Beckoning to the great combat. We are His soldiers
Following the Cloud by day, the Fire by night:—
And shall we not be constant? We are arrayed
Against the stiff combined embodied spirits
Of prelacy and tyranny:—Shall we not
Be bold?

[The King, Herbert, Harrison, &c. pass the window.]

See! See! he passes! So shall pass
The oppressor from the earth. His very shadow
The very traces of his foot are gone,
And the English ground is free, the English air
Free, free!—All praise be to His mighty name!
This is the crowning work.

[The Scene closes.]

Scene 2

[A Gallery leading to the King's Prison. The Queen, Lady Fairfax, a Centinel.]

Lady Fairfax.

Another guard! The pass-word that hath served us
Through court, and gate, and hall, will fail us here;
This is the immediate prison of the King.
Say, Royal Madam, had we best accost
Yon centinel?

Queen.

The prison of the King!
And I have lived to hear those words that pierce
My heart like daggers spoken familiarly
As she would say good day or fare ye well!
The prison of the King! England hath been
His prison—but this one leads—My Lady Fairfax
Command him to admit us.

Lady F.

He draws nigh.

Centinel.

Fair mistresses how won ye here? This gallery

Charles the First

Leads to the prisoner's chambers.

Lady F.

We would see him.

Admit us.

Cent.

Be ye frenetic? know ye not

That, save the Lords Commissioners none dare

Approach the prisoner?

Queen.

Say the King.

Cent.

Who art thou

That speak'st with such command?

Lady F.

Know'st thou not *me*?

Thy General's wife.

Cent.

I am of Cromwell's soldiers,

And own no woman's rule.

Queen.

Admit us, slave!

I am the Queen, thy Queen, the Queen of England!

Make way.

Cent.

Stand back I say.

Queen.

I am a wife

Seeking her husband in his prison. Soldier,

If thou have a man's heart!

Lady F.

Here's money for thee—

Admit her.

Cent.

I have fought in twenty fields

A veteran of the cause. Put up your gold.

And, madam, please you home!

Queen.

Here is my home,—

My husband's prison gate. I'll live here, die here,

Here will I watch without as he within,

Till death, the great deliverer comes to free

The captives. This shall be my grave. Charles! Charles!

Lady F.

Peace! Peace!

Queen.

I thought I heard him. Charles! my Charles!

My King! My Husband!

Cent.

There are many chambers

Between thee and the King. I prythee hence!

Lady F.

Madam, take patience.

Queen.

Charles! He must be dead
Already that he answers not.

[*Enter Cromwell.*]

Crom.

What means
This clamorous din of female tongues so near
The prison of the King? The Lady Fairfax!

Queen.

Cromwell!

Crom.

The Queen!

Queen.

Cromwell I hated thee,
Yet open yonder door, and I'll pray for thee
All my life long. Yon churlish centinel—

Crom.

Did but his duty. Lead her to her husband.

Queen.

Be quick! Be quick!

Crom.

The word is Naseby.

Queen.

On!

Be quick. Be quick!

[*Exeunt Queen and Centinel*]

Crom.

Now my good Lady Fairfax,
Right well beseemeth christian charity
To succour them that suffer; howsoe'er
Midst strict professors it may breed some marvel
That one so famed for rigid sanctity,
The gravest matron of the land should herd
With yonder woman.

Lady F.

With the Queen?

Crom.

A papist;
A rank Idolater; a mumming masquer;
A troller of lewd songs; a wanton dancer;
A vain upholder of that strength of Satan
The playhouse. They that be so eminent
As thou will find maligners; 'tis the curse
Of our poor fallen nature. Be not seen
Hovering about these walls. I speak in love
Of the Lord General.

Lady F.

Charles the First

The Lord General,
And many a godly minister, and I,
Weak woman though I be, mourn that these walls
Should come between the King and people. Peace
Had been a holier bond.

Crom.

Peace! that our General
The good Lord Fairfax, Captain of the guard,
Should tend the popish ladies to their mass;—
A high promotion! Peace! that every dungeon
May swarm with pious ministers;—forget they
Their old oppressions? Peace! that the grave matron
The Lady Fairfax may with troubled thoughts
Sit witness of lewd revels; mock and scorn
Of the light dames of the chamber, and the lordlings
Their gallants;—popinjays who scoff and jeer
At the staid solemn port, the decent coif,
The modest kerchief. I have heard such jeers
When yon gay Queen hath laughed.

Lady F.

Laughed! Hath she dared!
Vain minion!

Crom.

And to see thee with her! Thou
That shouldst have been a Jael in this land,
A Deborah, a Judith!

Lady F.

Nay, we live
Under a milder law. Whate'er their crimes
Urge not this bloody trial.

Crom.

Whoso saith
That the trial shall be bloody? He who reads
All hearts, He only knows how my soul yearns
Toward yonder pair. I seek them now, a friend,
With friendly proffers. As we reach thy coach
I'll tell thee more. Come, madam!

[Exeunt.]

Scene 3

[The King's Apartments. The King and Herbert.]

King.

Herbert!

Her.

An' please your Majesty.

King.

Go seek
The General.

Her.

Fairfax?

King.

Cromwell! Cromwell! say
The King commands his presence.

[Exit Herbert.]

To fore—run him,
To plunge at once into this stormy sea
Of griefs, to summon my great foe, to front
The obdurate Commons, the fanatic army,
Even the mock judges, they who dare to reign
Over a King, to breast them all! Then trial,
Or peace! Death or the crown! Rest comes with either
To me and England, comfortable rest,
After my many wanderings.

[Enter the Queen].

Henrietta!

My wife, my Queen, is't thou? Is't not a dream?
For I have dreamed so, and awakened—Heaven
Shield me from such a waking! Is't a truth?

Queen.

Do not my tears give answer? Did that vision
Rain drops of joy like these?

King.

To see thee here
Is to be young and free again, again
A bridegroom and a King.

Queen.

Ever my King!

King.

I have heard nothing like that voice of hope
Since we were parted.

Queen.

Wherefore dost thou pause?
Why gaze on me so mournfully?

King.

Alas!
Thou art pale, my Henrietta, very pale,
And this dear hand that was so round and fair
Is thin and wan—Oh very wan!

Queen.

'Twas pining
For thee that made it so. Think on the cause,
And thou'lt not mourn its beauty.

King.

And this grief,
Will kill her! Joined to any other man
She might have lived on in her loveliness

Charles the First

For half an age. She's mine, and she will die.
Oh this is a sad meeting! I have longed
Have prayed to see thee—now—Would thou wast safe
In France again, my dear one!

Queen.

Say not so.
I bring thee comfort, safety. Holland, France,
Are firmly with thee; save the army, all
This rebel England is thine own; and e'en
Amid the army some the greatest, some
That call themselves thy judges. 'Tis the turn
Of fate; the reflux of the tide.

King.

Forget not
That I am a prisoner, sweet—one; a foredoomed
Discrowned prisoner. As erewhile I passed
Sadly along, a soldier in his mood
Spat on me: none rebuked him; none cried shame;
None cleft the coward to the earth.

Queen.

Oh traitors!
Oh sacrilegious rebels! Let my lips
Wipe off that scorn. My Charles, thou shalt resume
Thy state, shalt sit enthroned, a judge, a King,
Even in the solemn Hall, the lofty seat
Of their predestined treason. For thy life
It is assured—Lord Broghill and a band
Of faithful Cavaliers—But thou shalt reign.

King.

Dost thou remember Cromwell? Ere thou quitted'st
England he was most like the delving worm
Hypocrisy; that slough is cast, and now
His strong and shining wings soar high in air
As proud ambition. First demand of him
What King shall reign.

Queen.

He is my trust.

King.

Hast seen him?

Queen.

He sent me to thee now.

King.

Ha, wherefore! But I've learned to trust in nought
Save Heaven. Since thou art here I am content
To live and reign, but all in honour. I'll
Renounce no creed, resign no friend, abandon
No right or liberty of this abused
Misguided people; no nor bate one jot
Of the old prerogative, *my* privilege,
The right divine of Kings. Death were to me
As welcome as his pleasant evening rest

Charles the First

To the poor way-worn traveller;—And yet
I fain would live for thee—Cheer up, fair wife!—
Would live for love and thee. Hast seen thy children?

Queen.

Not yet. They say Elizabeth, whose face
Even when a little child resembled thine,
To wonder, hath pined after thee, and fed
Her love by thinking on thee, till she hath stolen
Unconsciously thy mien and tone and words
Of patient pensiveness; a dignity
Of youthful sorrow, beautiful and sad.

King.

Poor child! poor child! a woeful heritage!
When I have gazed on the sweet seriousness
Of her young beauty, I have pictured her
In the bright May of life, a Queenly bride,
Standing afore the altar with that look
Regal and calm, and pure as the azure skies
Of Paradise ere tears were born. Now—

[Enter Cromwell.]

Cromwell!

Crom.

Did'st thou desire my presence?

King.

I sent for thee
To bear my message to thy comrades.

Crom.

Sir,
I wait thy pleasure. I would welcome thee
Unto this goodly city—

King.

Doth the gaoler
Welcome his prisoner? I am Charles Stuart,
And thou—Now shame on this rebellious blood!
I thought that it was disciplined and schooled
Into proud patience. Let me not appear
Discourteous—Sir, the King is bounden to thee!
Now hear mine errand.

Queen.

Tush, hear me!

Crom.

The Queen!

Queen.

Fie! doff this strangeness, when it was thyself
That sent me hither! Cast aside the smooth
Obedient looks which hide thy thoughts. Be plain
And honest, Cromwell.

Crom.

I have ever been so.

Queen.

Open in speech and heart, even as myself,
When I, thy Queen, hold out the hand of peace
And amity, and bid thee say what title
The King shall give to his great General.

Crom.

None.

Thou bad'st me answer plainly.

Queen.

Yet thou wast
Ambitious once.

Crom.

Grant that I were,—as well
I trust I had more grace,—but say I were so,
Think'st thou not there be homely names which sound
As sweetly in men's ears? which shall outlive
A thousand titles in that book of fame,
History? All praise be to the Lord I am not
Ambitious.

Queen.

Choose thine office. Keep the name
Thy sword hath rendered famous. Be Lord Vicar;
Be Captain of the Guard; forbid this suit—
Thou can'st an if thou wilt—be Charles's friend
And second man in the kingdom.

Crom.

Second! Speak'st thou
These tempting words to me? I nor preside
O'er court or Parliament; I am not, Madam,
Lord General of the army. Seek those great ones.
My place is in the ranks. Would'st thou make me
The second in the kingdom? Seek those great ones.
The second!

Queen.

Thou, and well thou know'st it, Cromwell,
Art the main prop of this rebellion! General,
Lord President, what are they but thy tools,
Thy puppets, moved by thy directing will
As chessmen by the skilful player. 'Tis thou
That art the master—spirit of the time,
Idol of people and of army, leader
Of the fanatic Commons, judge, sole judge
Of this unrighteous cause.

Crom.

And she would make me
The second man of the kingdom! Thou but troublest
Thyself and me.

Queen.

Yet hear me but one word.

Crom.

Charles the First

No more of bribes!—thou bad'st me to speak plainly:
Thou hast been bred in courts and deemest them
Omnipotent o'er all. But I eschew
The Mammon of unrighteousness. I warn ye
Ye shall learn faith in one man's honesty
Before ye die.

Queen.

Never in thine! At Holmby
We trusted—Fool again—"Twas not in fear;
I dread thee not. Thou dar'st not try the King.
The very word stands as a double guard,
A triple armour, a bright shield before him;
A sacred halo plays around the head
Anointed and endiademed, a dim
Mysterious glory. Who may dare to call
For justice on a King? Who dare to touch
The crowned and lofty head?

Crom.

Was it at Hardwick,
Or Fotheringay,—fie on my dull brain—
That the fair Queen of Scots, the popish woman,
The beautiful, his grandame died?

Queen.

A Queen,
A vain and envious woman, yet a Queen,
Condemned Queen Mary. Ye are subjects, rebels,
Ye dare not try your King; all else ye may do;
All else ye have done; fought, imprisoned, chased,
Aye, tracked and hunted, like that pious Henry,
The last of the red-rose, whom visiting
Helpless in prison, his arch enemy
The fiendish Richard slew;—even as perchance—

Crom.

Shame on thy slanderous tongue! There lies my sword.
Did'st take me for a murderer? Harken, Madam;
When thou shalt speak again of Henry's death,
Remember 'twas the restless shrew of Anjou
That drove her gentle husband to his end.

King.

Take up the sword; and, wife, I prythee peace!
I yet am King enough to end these brawls.
Take up thy sword! Albeit my breast be bare,
And I unarmed before him, he'll not strike.
That were an honest murder. There be ways
Still and darker; there be men whose craft
Can doom with other tongues, with other hands
Can slay. I know thee, Sir.

Crom.

I would not slay
A sinner unprepared.

King.

Go to! I know thee.
Say to the Parliament that I demand
A conference Lords and Commons.

Crom.

Sir, the Commons
Will grant no conference. Thou must address thee
To the High Court of Justice, to thy judges.

King.

Oh vain and shallow treason! Have ye not
The King's High Court, the judges of the land?
I own no other. Yet if they—

Crom.

Expect.
Nothing of them but justice. I came to thee,
As to a brother, in pure charity,
In meek and Christian love, when these sharp taunts
Arose betwixt us. Still I fain would save thee.
Resign the crown.

King.

Never.

Crom.

Oh vanity
Of man's proud heart! cling to that sinful toy
A sound, an echo, a dim shadow, weakening
As the true substance flies—cling to that word,
And cast away thy life!

King.

Hold Henrietta!
What! Dost thou ask me for so poor a boon
As life to change fair honour? I've a son,
A gallant princely boy—would'st have me yield
The old ancestral crown, his heritage,
For the small privilege to crawl awhile
On this vile earth, mated with fouler worms
Than they that sleep below? Would'st have me sell
My Kingdom for a little breath?

Crom.

Thy Kingdom!
Thou hast not a stronghold left.

King.

I have one here.
Thou know'st my answer.

Queen.

Yet if there be danger—

King.

Peace, dearest, peace! Is the day fixed?

Crom.

The day,
The very hour, is set. At noon tomorrow,
Heaven permitting—

King.

Charles the First

The decrees of Heaven
Be oft to man's dark mind inscrutable:
The lightning flame hath fired the straw-thatched roof
Of harmless cottagers, hath rent the spire
Of consecrated temples, hath struck down
Even the dumb innocent oak that never lied
Never rebelled, never blasphemed. A veil
Hangs before Heaven's high purpose. Yet when man
Slays man, albeit no King, a reckoning comes
A deep and awful reckoning. I'll abide
The trial.

Crom.

At thy peril.

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

Charles the First

Act III

Scene 1

[Westminster Hall fitted up for the King's Trial. Bradshaw, seated as President; Cromwell, Ireton, Harrison, Downes, Marten, Tichburne, and other Judges on benches; Cook and other Lawyers, Clerks, &c., at a table; a chair of State for the King on one side; the Queen, veiled, and other Ladies in a Gallery behind; the whole stage filled with Guards Spectators, &c., &c.]

Brad.

Hath every name been called? And every Judge
Appeared at the high summons?

Clerk.

Good my Lord,
Each one hath answered.

Ire. [to Cromwell]

The Lord General
Is wanting still.

Crom.

The better.

Ire.

How?

Crom.

Fair son

We have enow of work—Doth not you cry
Announce the prisoner?—enow of work
For one brief day without him.—Downes sit here
Beside me man.—We lack not waverers;
Men whose long doubts would hold from rosy dawn
To the slow lighting of the evening star
In the clear Heaven of June. Of such as they
One were too many. How say'st thou good Downes?

Dow.

Even as thou say'st.

Crom.

Yet 'tis a valiant General,
A godly and a valiant. Ha! the prisoner!

[Enter the King, attended by Herbert and other Servants, Hacker and guards.]

[The Soldiers &c. as the King walks to his chair cry "Justice! Justice!"]

Crier.

Peace! silence in the court!

Brad.

Ye shall have justice.
My Lords Commissioners, whilst I stood pausing
How fitliest to disclose our mighty plea,

Charles the First

Dallying with phrase and form, yon eager cry
Shot like an arrow to the mark, laying bare
The very core of our intent. Sirs, we
Are met to render justice, met to judge
In such a cause as scarce the lucent sun
That smiles upon us from his throne hath seen
Since light was born. We sit to judge a King
Arraigned by his own people; to make inquest
Into the innocent blood which hath been spilled
Like water; into crime and tyranny,
Treason and murder. Look that we be pure
My brethren! that we cast from out our hearts
All blinding passions: Fear that blinks and trembles
At shadows ere they come; Pride that walks dazzled
In the light of her vainglory; feeble Pity
Whose sight is quenched in tears; and grim Revenge
Her fierce eyes sealed with gore. Look that we chase
Each frail affection, each fond hidden sin,
Each meaner virtue from our hearts, and cling
To Justice, only Justice. Now for thee
Charles Stuart King of England: Thou art here
To render compt of awful crimes, of treason
Conspiracy and murder. Answer!

Cook.

First
May it please you hear the charge?

King.

Stop! Who are ye
That dare to question me?

Brad.

Thy Judges.

King.

Say
My subjects. I am a King whom none may judge
On earth. Who sent ye here?

Brad.

The Commons.

King.

What!

Be there no traitors, no conspirators
No murderers save Kings, that they dare call
Stern justice down from Heaven? Sir I fling back
The charge upon their heads, the guilt, the shame,
The eternal infamy,—on them who sowed
The tares of hate in fields of love; who armed
Brother 'gainst brother, breaking the sweet peace
Of country innocence, the holy ties
Of nature breaking, making war accurst
As that Egyptian plague the worst and last
When the First-born were slain. I have no answer
For them or ye. I know ye not.

Charles the First

Brad.

Be warned;
Plead to the accusation.

King.

I will die
A thousand deaths, rather than by my breath
Give life to this new court against the laws
And liberties of England.

Brad.

Sir we know
Your love of liberty and England. Call
The witnesses. Be they in court?

Cook.

They wait
Without.

Brad.

Send for them quickly. Once again
King wilt thou plead?

King.

Thou hast my answer, never.

[A pause of a few moments during which the head of the King's staff on which he was leaning falls and rolls across the stage.]

Mar. [to Ireton]

What fell? The breathless silence of this vast
And crowded court gives to each common sound
A startling clearness. What hath fallen?

Ire.

The head
Of the King's staff. See how it spins and bounds
Along the floor, as hurrying to forsake
The royal wretch its master. Now it stops
At Cromwell's feet—direct at Cromwell's feet.

Crom.

The toy is broken.

Har.

What is the device?
Some vain Idolatrous image?

Crom.

No, a crown;
A gilded crown, a hollow glittering crown,
Shaped by some quaint and cunning goldsmith. Look
On what a reed he leans, who props himself
On such a bauble.

Dow.

It rolled straight to thee;—

If thou wast superstitious—

Crom.

Pass the toy

On to the prisoner! he hath faith in omens—

I—fling him back his gewgaw!

Brad.

Master Cook

We wait too long.

Cook.

My Lord the witnesses—

Brad.

Call any man. Within our bleeding land

There lives not one so blest in ignorance

As not to know this treason. None so high

But the storm overtopped him; none so low

But the wind stooped to root him up. Call any man

The Judge upon the bench, the Halberdier

That guards the door.

Cook.

Oliver Cromwell!

Crom.

Aye?

Cook.

No need to swear him. He hath ta'en already

The Judges' oath.

Crom.

The Judges' oath, not this.

Omit no form of guardian law, remember

The life of man hangs on our lips.

King.

Smooth traitor!

[Cromwell is Sworn.]

Cook.

Lieutenant General Cromwell, wast thou present

In the great fight of Naseby?

Crom.

Was I present!

Why I think ye know that. I was.

Cook.

Didst see

The prisoner in the battle?

Crom.

Many times.

He led his army, in a better cause

I should have said right gallantly. I saw him

First in the onset, last in the retreat.

That justice let me pay the King.

Brad.

Raised he
His banner 'gainst his people? Didst thou see
The royal standard in the field?

Crom.

My Lord
It rose full in the centre of their host
Floating upon the heavy air.

Cook.

The arms
Of England?

Crom.

Aye, the very lion shield
That waved at Cressi and at Azincourt
Triumphant. None may better know than I,
For it so pleased the Ruler of the Field,
The Almighty King of Battles, that my arm
Struck down the standard-bearer and restored
The English lion to the lion hearts
Of England.

Cook.

Please you, Sir, retire. Now summon—

King.

Call not another. What I have done boldly,
In the face of day and of the nation, that,
Nothing repenting, nothing derogating
From the King's high prerogative, as boldly
As freely I avow—to you—to all men.
I own ye not as Judges. Ye have power
As pirates or land robbers o'er the wretch
Entrapped within their den, a power to mock
Your victim with a form of trial, to dress
Plain murder in a mask of law. As Judges
I know ye not.

Brad.

Enough that you confess
The treason—

King.

Stop! Sir, I appeal to them
Whence you derive your power.

Brad.

The people? King
Thou seest them here in us.

King.

Oh that my voice
Could reach my loyal people! That the winds
Could waft the echoes of this groined roof
So that each corner of the land might hear,
From the fair Southern vallies to the hills
Of my own native North, from the bleak shores
Of the great ocean to the channeled West,
Their rightful Monarch's cry. Then should ye hear

From the universal nation, town and plain,
Forest and village, the stern awful shout
Of just deliverance, mighty and prolonged,
Deafening the earth and piercing Heaven, and smiting
Each guilty conscience with such fear as waits
On the great Judgment-Day. The wish is vain—
Ah! vainer than a dream! I and my people
Are over-mastered. Yet, Sir, I demand
A conference with these masters. Tell the Commons
The King would speak with them.

Brad.

We have no power
To stay the trial.

Dow.

Nay, good my Lord, perchance
The King would yield such reason as might move
The Commons to renew the treaty. Best
Confer with them.

Crom. [to Downes]

Art mad?

Dow.

'Tis ye are mad
That urge with a remorseless haste this work
Of savage butchery onward. I was mad
That joined ye.

Crom.

This is sudden.

Dow.

He's our King.

Crom.

Our King! Have we not faced him in the field
A thousand times? Our King! Downes, hath the Lord
Forsaken thee? Why I have seen thyself
Hewing through mailed battalia, till thy sword
And thy good arm were dyed in gore, to reach
Yon man. Didst mean to save him? Listen, Sir,
I am thy friend. 'Tis said,—I lend no ear
To slanderers, but this tale was forced upon me—
'Tis said that one whose grave and honoured name
Sorts ill with midnight treachery, was seen
Stealing from the Queen's lodging!—I'm thy friend,
Thy fast friend! We oft see in this bad world
The shadow Envy crawling stealthily
Behind fair Virtue;—I hold all for false
Unless thou prove it true;—I am thy friend!—
But if the sequestrators heard this tale—
Thou hast broad lands. *[Aloud]* Why do ye pause?

Cook.

My high
And honouring task to plead at this great bar
For lawful liberty, for suffering conscience,

Charles the First

For the old guardians of our rights the Commons,
Against the lawless fiend Prerogative,
The persecuting Church, the tyrant King,
Were needless now and vain. The haughty prisoner
Denies your jurisdiction. I call on ye
For instant judgment.

Brad.

Sir, for the last time
I ask thee, wilt thou plead?

King.

Have I not answered?

Cook.

Your judgment, good my Lords!

Brad.

All ye who deem
Charles Stuart guilty, rise!

[The Judges all stand up.]

King.

What all!

Brad.

Not one
Is wanting. Clerk, record him guilty.

Cook.

Now

The sentence!

Queen. [from the Gallery]

Traitors, hold!

Crom. [To Ireton]

Heard'st thou a scream?

Ire.

'Tis the malignant wife of Fairfax.

Crom.

No!

A greater far than she.

Queen.

Hold, murderers!

Crom. [aloud]

Lead

Yon railing woman from her seat. My Lord,
Please you proceed.

Queen. [rushing to the King]

Traitors, here is my seat—

I am the Queen;—here is my place, my state,

My Lord and Sovereign,—here at thy feet.

I claim it with a prouder humbler heart,

A lowlier duty, a more loyal love,

Than when the false and glittering diadem

Encircled first my brow, a queenly bride.

Put me not from thee! scorn me not! I am

Thy wife.

King.

Oh true and faithful wife! Yet leave me,
Lest the strong armour of my soul, her patience,
Be melted by thy tears. Oh go! go! go!
This is no place for thee.

Queen.

Why thou art here!
Who shall divide us?

Ire.

Force her from him, Guards;
Remove her.

King.

Tremble ye who come so near
As but to touch her garments. Cowards! Slaves!
Though the King's power be gone, yet the man's strength
Remains unwithered. She's my wife; my all.

Crom.

None thinks to harm the Lady. Good my Lord,
The hour wears fast with these slight toys.

Queen.

I come
To aid ye, not impede. If in this land
To wear the lineal crown, maintain the laws,
Uphold the insulted Church, be crimes, then I
Am guilty, guiltier than your King. 'Twas I
That urged the war—ye know he loved me;—I
That prompted his bold councils; edged and whetted
His great resolves; spurred his high courage on
Against ye, rebels! I that armed my knight
And sent him forth to battle. Mine the crime;—
Be mine the punishment! Deliver him,
And lead me to the block. Pause ye? My blood
Is royal too. Within my veins the rich
Commingle stream of princely Medici
And regal Bourbon flows: 'Twill mount as high,
Twill stain your axe as red, 'twill feed as full
Your hate of Kings.

Crom.

Madam, we wage no war
On women.

Queen.

I have warred on ye, and now—
Take heed how ye release me! He is gentle
Patient and kind; he can forgive. But I
Shall roam a frantic widow through the world,
Counting each day for lost that hath not gained
An enemy to England, a revenger
Of this foul murder.

Har.

Woman, peace! The sentence!

Queen.

Your sentence, bloody judges! As ye deal

Charles the First

With your anointed King the red right arm
Of Heaven shall avenge him: here on earth
By clinging fear and black remorse, and death
Unnatural ghastly death, and then the fire,
The eternal fire, where panting murderers gasp
And cannot die, that deepest Hell which holds
The Regicide.

Brad.

Peace! I have overlong
Forgotten my great office. Hence! or force
Shall rid us of thy frenzy. Know'st thou not
That curses light upon the curser's head,
As surely as the cloud which the sun drains
From the salt sea returns into the wave
In stormy gusts or plashing showers? Remove her.

Queen.

Oh mercy! mercy! I'll not curse; I'll be
As gentle as a babe. Ye cannot doom him
Whilst I stand by. Even the hard headsman veils
His victim's eyes before he strikes, afeared
Lest his heart fail. And could ye, being men
Not fiends, abide a wife's keen agony
Whilst—I'll not leave thee Charles! I'll never leave thee

King.

This is the love stronger than life, the love
Of woman. Henrietta, listen. Loose
Thy arms from round my neck; here is no axe;
This is no scaffold. We shall meet anon
Untouched, unharmed; I shall return to thee
Safe, safe,—shall bide with thee. Listen my dear one,
Thy husband prays, thy King commands thee, Go!
Go! Lead her gently, very gently.

[Exit the Queen led.]

Now

I am ready. Speak your doom, and quickly.

Brad.

Death.

Thou art adjudged to die. Sirs, do ye all
Accord in this just sentence?

[The Judges all stand up.]

King.

I am ready.

To a grey head, aching with royal cares,
The block is a kind pillow. Yet once more—

Brad.

Silence. The Sentence is pronounced; the time
Is past. Conduct him from the Court.

King.

Not hear me!

Me your anointed King! Look ye what justice
A meaner man may hope for.

Crom.

Why refuse
His death—speech to a prisoner? Whoso knoweth
What weight hangs on his soul. Speak on and fear not.

King.

Fear! Let the guilty fear. Feel if my pulse
Flutter? Look if my cheek be faded? Harken
If my calm breathing be not regular,
Even as an infant's who hath dropt asleep
Upon its mother's breast? As I lift up
This Sword, miscalled of Justice, my clear voice
Hoarsens nor falters not. See, I can smile
As thinking on the axe, I draw the bright
Keen edge across my hand. Fear! Would ye ask
What weight is on my soul, I tell ye none
Save that I yielded once to your decree,
And slew my Faithfullest. Oh Strafford! Strafford!
This is a retribution!

Brad.

Better weep
Thy sins than one just holy act.

King.

For ye
My subject—judges I could weep; for thee
Beloved and lovely country. Thou wilt groan
Under the tyrant Many till some bold
And crafty soldier, one who in the field
Is brave as the roused lion, at the Council
Watchful and gentle as the couchant pard,
The lovely spotted pard, what time she stoops
To spring upon her prey; one who puts on,
To win each several soul, his several sin,
A stern fanatic, a smooth hypocrite,
A fierce republican, a coarse buffoon,
Always a great bad man; till he shall come,
And climb the vacant throne, and fix him there,
A more than King. Cromwell, if such thou know'st
Tell him the rack would prove an easier couch
Than he shall find that throne; tell him the crown
On an Usurper's brow will scorch and burn,
As though the diamonded and ermined round
Were framed of glowing steel.

Crom.

Hath His dread wrath
Smitten thee with frenzy?

King.

Tell him, for thou know'st him,
That Doubt and Discord like fell harpies wait
Around the Usurper's board. By night, by day,
Beneath the palace roof, beneath that roof
More fair, the summer sky, fear shall appal

Charles the First

And danger threaten, and all natural loves
Wither and die; till on his dying bed,
Old fore his time, the wretched traitor lies
Heartbroken. Then, for well thou know'st him, Cromwell,
Bid him to think on me, and how I fell
Hewn in my strength and prime, like a proud oak,
The tallest of the forest, that but shivers
His glorious top and dies. Oh! thou shalt envy,
In thy long agony, my fall, that shakes
A kingdom but not me.

Crom.

He is possessed!—
My good Lord President, the day wears on—
Possessed of a fierce Devil!

Brad.

Lead him forth.

King.

Why so. Ye are warned. On to my prison, Sirs!
On to my prison!

[Soldiers &c. cry "On to Execution!" "Justice and Execution!"]

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

Act IV

Scene 1

[An Apartment in Cromwell's House. Cromwell alone.]

Crom.

So, my lord Broghill! We are shrewdly rid
Of one bold plotter. Now to strike at once,
Ere fresh conspiracies—

[Enter Ireton.]

What mak'st thou here,
Fair son?

Ire.

The Lords Commissioners refuse
To sign the warrant. He'll escape us yet.

Crom.

Refuse! What all?

Ire.

No; Harrison and Bradshaw,
And Marten, still hold firm.

Crom.

Too few! too few!
Aye, he'll escape. They'll treat. What say the traitors?

Ire.

The most keep stubborn silence. Harrison
Is hoarse with railing.

Crom.

Overhot! But that's
A fault may pass for virtue. Overcold's,
Your modish sin. Weakness or treachery!
Peters or Judases! They'll treat. They'll treat.
Where lies thy regiment?

Ire.

At Westminster.
One glance of their bright swords, one stirring note
Of their war-trumpet, and these dastard Judges—
I'll seek them instantly.

Crom.

Son, thou mistak'st.
Foul shame it were here in a Christian land
To govern by brute force—How many hast thou?

Ire.

A thousand horse.

Crom.

Or turn their very guards

Charles the First

Against the Judges—Be they trusty?

Ire.

Sir,

I'll answer for them as myself.

Crom.

Nay, go not.

No force, good Son! No force!

[Enter a Servant.]

What wouldst thou? Speak.

Servant.

The Colonel Harrison sends me to crave

Your Excellency's presence.

Crom.

Aye! I come.

Didst meet thy fellow Robert, and the gallant

Whom thou saw'st here this morning?

Serv.

Sir, they passed me

At speed.

Crom.

I come. No force, good son. Remember

This is a Christian land. We must keep pure

The Judgment seat. No force.

[Exit Ireton.]

At speed! Ere now

They have crost the Thames at Kew. We are quit of one

Bold Cavalier.—What said the Colonel?

Serv.

Prayed

Your instant presence, and between his teeth

Muttered "Faint craven souls!"

Crom.

Fie! Fie! to speak

Irreverently of such great ones. Faint

And craven souls! Follow my son; thou'lt find him

Heading his valiant horse. Bid him be still

Till I send to him—still as night. And now

For ye wise Judges!

[Exeunt.]

Scene 2

[The Painted Chamber. Bradshaw, Harrison, Cook, Downes, Tichburne, Marten, and other Judges.]

Har.

Be ye all smit with palsy? Hang your arms

Dead at your sides, that ye refuse to sign

The Warrant? Be ye turned Idolaters?
Rank worshippers of Baal?

Brad.

They refuse not.

Mar.

They parley, Sir, they dally, they delay.

Cook.

The wiser if they did. 'Twere vantage ground,
The keen axe swinging o'er his head, to treat
With yon great prisoner.

Har.

Treat! Was yonder trial
A mummary, a stage-play, a farce? Oh blind
And stubborn generation!

Dow.

The whole people
Are struck with awe and pity. Each man's cheek
Is pale; each woman's eye is wet; each child
Lifts up its little hands as to implore
Mercy for the poor King.

Har.

Captivity
And bondage will o'ertake them! They fall off
Like the revolted Tribes. Egyptian bondage!

[Enter Cromwell.]

Crom.

Wherefore so loud good Colonel? Sirs, I shame
To have held ye waiting here. A sudden cause,
I pray ye believe it urgent, hindered me.
Where is the warrant? Have ye left a space
For my poor name?

Mar.

Thou wilt find room enow.
There!

Crom.

What unsigned?—Harrison!—He came hither
To crave your signatures.

Har.

I did my message!
But these Philistines—

Crom.

Do ye shame to set
Your names to your own deeds? Did ye not pass
This solemn sentence in the face of day,
Before the arraigned King, the shouting people,
The majesty of Heaven?

Tich.

Thou dost mistake us.

Crom.

I crave your pardon, Sirs. I deemed ye were
The judges, the King's judges, the elect
Of England, chosen by her godly Commons
As wisest, boldest, best. I did mistake ye.

Dow.

Listen, ere thou accuse us.

Mar.

Listen! sign!
And we will listen though your pleaded reason
Outlast Hugh Peters' sermon.

Dow.

Hear me first.

Crom.

Well!

Dow.

We have here Commissioners from Scotland
Praying our mercy on the King.

Crom.

They gave him
Into our hands.

Har.

And they are answered Sir.
Thou know'st that Cromwell singly put them down,
As they had been young babes.

Dow.

The Pensionary—

Crom.

Pshaw!

Dow.

Hath sent pressing missives; Embassies
From every court, are on the seas; and Charles
Proffers great terms.

Crom.

Have we not all?

Cook.

But he
Will give a fair security, a large
And general amnesty. So are we freed
From fear of after-reckoning.

Crom.

Master Cook
No wonder that a lawyer pleads to-day
Against his cause of yesterday—if feed
To the height. But thou art not of us; thy part
Is o'er

Mar.

He will give large securities!
For what?

Dow.

The general safety and our own.

Mar.

Safety, say liberty! Securities.
Marry large promises! An ye will trust
Ye may be Earls and Marquesses, and portion
This pretty islet England as a manor
Amongst ye. Shame ye not to think a bribe
Might win your souls from freedom?

Har.

From the Lord!
Would ye desert His people? sell for gain
His cause?

Crom.

Hush! Hush! none thinketh to forsake
The cause!

Tich.

Let Bradshaw sign. What need more names
Than the Lord President's?

Brad.

I am ready, Sirs,
An ye will follow me. The Instrument
Were else illegal. When ye are prepared,
Speak.

Crom.

My good masters, ye remember me
Of a passage of my boyhood.

[then aside to Bradshaw and Harrison]

Deem me not

A light unmeaning trifler, recollect
How Nathan spake to David. *[then aloud]* Being a child
Nutting with other imps in the old copse
At Hinchinbroke, we saw across a wide
But shallow stream one overhanging hazel.
Whose lissome stalks were weighed by the rich fruitage
Almost into the water. As we stood
Eyeing the tempting boughs, a shining nut
Fell from its socket, dimpling wide around
The dark clear mirror. At that sight one bold
And hardy urchin, with myself, no less
In those young days a daring wight, at once
Plunged in the sparkling rivulet. It rose
Above our ancles, to our knees, half up
Our thighs, and my scared comrade in the midst
Of the stream turned roaring back, and gained the bank
Nutless and wet, amidst the scoffing shouts
Of the small people.

Brad.

And thou?

Crom.

Why I bore
My course right on, and gained the spoil. Sirs, we
Have plunged knee deep in the waters; are midway

Charles the First

The stream: Will ye turn now and leave the fruit
Ungathered, recreants? or hold boldly on
And win the holy prize of freedom? Give me
The warrant. [*signs.*] So! methinks an it were not
Over ambitious, and that's a sin;
My homely name should stand alone to this
Most righteous scroll. Follow who list. I've left
A space for the Lord President.

Brad.

I'll fill it
With an unworthy name.

[*signs.*]

Crom.

Now swell the roll
My masters! Whither goest thou Marten? None
Shall stir till he hath signed. Thou a ripe scholar,
Not write thy name! I can write mine i' the dark,
And oft with my sword-point have traced in air
The viewless characters in the long hour
Before the joy of battle. Shut thine eyes,
And write thy name! Anywhere! See.

[*Marking Marten's cheek with a pen.*]

Nay Marten,

Stand still!—See! See! how fair and clerkly! Yet
This parchment is the smoother.

Mar.

Hold thee sure
I'll pay thee, General.

Tich.

Why he hath marked thee
Like a new ruddled sheep.

Mar.

I'll pay thee.

Crom.

Sign.

Marten.

Willingly; joyfully.

[*signs.*]

Crom.

Why so. Where goes
Our zealous alderman? I deemed to see
His name the first.

Brad.

He fears the City's safety,
Full, as he says, of the King's friends.

Crom.

He fears!
They be bold men who fearlessly do own
Their fears. I dare not. Fear! Sir, didst thou come
By water hither?

Tich.

No.

Crom.

And didst thou meet
No soldiers on thy way?

Tich.

Many. The streets
Are swarming with them.

Crom.

Were they silent?

Tich.

No,
They called aloud for execution.

Crom.

Say,
For justice and for execution. Marry,
My Ironsides know not the new state trick
To separate the words. Well! are not they
A nearer fear? Sign boldly.

[Cromwell, Marten and Downes, advance to the front]

Mar.

They flock fast.

Crom.

'Tis time, for plots are weaving round about us,
Like spider's nets in Autumn. But this morning
I swept one web away. Lord Broghill—

Mar.

What!
Hath he been here?

Dow.

Is he discovered?

Crom.

Sir,
I have a slow-hound's scent to track a traitor.
He's found and he's despatched.

Dow.

How?

Mar.

Where?

Crom.

To Ireland,
With a commission 'gainst the rebels. 'Tis
An honest soldier who deserves to fight
For the good cause. He but mistook his side;
The Queen beguiled him, and the knightly sound
Of loyalty. But 'tis an honest soldier.
He will prove faithful.

Mar.

How didst win him?

Crom.

How?

A word of praise, a thought of fear. How do men
Win traitors? Hark ye Downes! Lord Broghill left
A list of the King's friends amongst us here;—
Grave seeming Roundheads, bold and zealous soldiers,
High officers—I marvel not ye look
Distrustfully—one of renown, a Colonel,
A Judge too! Downes, hast thou signed yonder Warrant?

Mar.

What was the plan?

Crom.

Go sign I say.—The plan!
A sudden rescue, to o'erpower the guard.—
Ha! Ingoldsby

[Seizing one of the Judges and leading him to the table.]

Nay, man, if thou be questioned,
Some dozen years hence, say that I forced thee, swear
Thy wicked kinsman held thy hand.—Aye, now
The blank is nobly filled, and bravely! now
I know ye once again, the pious Judges
The elect and godly of the land!

[A trumpet heard without]

Ha!—Marten,

Haste to my son; bid him disband his force;
The peril is gone by.

[Exit Marten.]

Har.

What peril?

Crom.

Ye

That are assembled here, should lift your voice
In earnest thanks for quick deliverance
From sudden danger. Ye knew nought of this
Great jeopardy, nor need ye know. Give thanks,
And question not. Ye are safe.

Brad.

Art sure of that?

Crom.

Did ye not hear me even now take order
The guard should be dispersed? Question no more.
Ye are so safe, that this slight parchment, Sirs,
May be your shield.

Brad.

The deed is incomplete.
It hath no date.

Crom.

Ah! well reminded! write

The Thirtieth.

Dow.

Tomorrow? that were sudden.

Crom.

Why so we must be. There be plots astir,
And speed is our best safety.—Thou hast signed?
Thy name is here amongst us?—I must haste
To overtake the hour. 'Tis still unsealed.
Add thou my signet, Bradshaw.

[Exit Cromwell.]

Tich.

What intends
The General?

Brad.

Question not of that. A taper!
Your seals, my Lords Commissioners! Your seals!
[The Scene closes.]

Scene 3

[The King's Apartments. Enter the King leading in the Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Gloucester.]

King.

Here we may weep at leisure. Yon fierce ruffian
Will scarce pursue us here. Elizabeth,
I thought I had done with anger, but the soldier
Who gazed on thee awhile, with looks that seemed
To wither thy young beauty, and with words—
My child! my child! And I had not the power
To shield mine own sweet child!

Eliz.

I saw him not;
I heard him not: I could see none but thee;
Could hear no voice but thine.

King.

When I am gone
Who shall protect thee?

Glou.

I shall soon be tall;
And then—

King.

Poor boy! Elizabeth, be thou
A mother to him. Rear him up in peace
And humbleness. Show him how sweet Content
Can smile on dungeon floors; how the mewed lark
Sings in his narrow cage. Plant patience, dear ones,
Deep in your hearts.

[Enter Herbert.]

Herbert, where stays the Queen?
Still on that hopeless quest of hope, though friends
Drop from her fast as leaves in Autumn?

Herb.

Sire,
Her Grace is absent still. But General Cromwell
Craves audience of your Majesty.

King.

Admit him.
Wipe off those tears, Elizabeth. Resume
Thy gentle courage. Thou art a Princess.

[*Enter Cromwell.*]

Sir,
Thou seest me with my children. Doth thine errand
Demand their absence?

Crom.

No. I sent them to thee
In Christian charity. Thou hast not fallen
Amongst the Heathen.

King.

Howsoever sent,
It was a royal boon. My heart hath ached
With the vain agony of longing love
To look upon those blooming cheeks, to kiss
Those red and innocent lips, to hear the sound
Of those dear voices.

Crom.

Sir, 'twas meet they came
That thou might'st see them once again, might'st say—

King.

Farewell!—I can endure the word—a last
Farewell! I have dwelt so long upon the thought,
The sound seems nothing. Ye have signed the sentence?
Fear not to speak Sir.

Crom.

'Tis a grievous duty—

King.

Ye *have* signed. And the day?

Crom.

Tomorrow.

King.

What!
So soon? And yet I thank ye. Speed is mercy.
Ye must away, poor children.

Crom.

Nay, the children
May bide with thee till nightfall.

Charles the First

King.

Take them, Herbert!

Take them.

Children.

Oh! no, no, no!

King.

Dear ones, I go

On a great journey. Bless ye once again,

My children! We must part. Farewell.

Eliz.

Oh father,

Let me go with thee!

King.

Know'st thou whither?

Eliz.

Yes;

To Heaven. Oh take me with thee! I must die;

When the tree falls, the young buds wither. Take me

Along with thee to Heaven! Let us lie

Both in one grave!

King.

Now bless ye! This is death;

This is the bitterness of love.

Crom.

Fair child

Be comforted.

King.

Did'st thou not pat her head?

Crom.

She minded me, all in her innocent tears,

Of one in mine own dwelling.

King.

Thou hast daughters;

Be kind to her.

Crom.

I will.

King.

And the poor boy—

He comes not near the throne. Make not of him

A puppet King.

Crom.

I think not of it.

King.

Take them,

Good Herbert! And my wife—

Crom.

She shall be safe;

Shall home to France unharmed.

King.

Now fare ye well!—

Cromwell come back!—No, bring them not again—

Charles the First

No more of parting—bless them! bless them! See
The girl, the poor poor girl, hath wept away
Her tears, and pants and shivers like a fawn
Dying. Oh! for some gentle face to look on
When she revives, or she will surely die.

Crom.

She shall be cared for.

[Exeunt Herbert and the Children.]

King.

Are they gone? quite gone?
I might have kissed them once again, have charged them
To love each other.—No, 'tis best.

Crom.

Thou bad'st me
Remain. What is thy will?

King.

Be kind to them!
Be very kind to them!

Crom.

Have I not promised?
Was that what thou would'st say?

King.

No. But the love,
The o'ermastering love—that was the death-pang. Cromwell,
Thou wilt be kind to them?

Crom.

Would'st have me swear?

King.

Nay, swear not lest, I doubt. I will believe thee.
And for the human pity thou hast shown,
The touch of natural ruth, I pray thee take
My thanks.

Crom.

I would have saved thee. By this hand,
This sinful hand, I would have saved thee, King,
Had'st thou flung by yon bauble.

King.

There is One
Who reads all hearts, one who pursues all crimes,
From silver-tongued and bland hypocrisy
To treasonous murder. The unspoken thought,
And the loud lie, and the accursing act,
Mount to His throne together. Tempt Him not.
I know thee for the worker of this deed,
And knowing pardon thee:—but tempt not Him!

Crom.

Thy blood be on thy head! I would have saved thee—
Even now the thought stirred in me. Pardon, Lord,
That gazing on the father's agonies,
My heart of flesh waxed faint, and I forgot
Thy glory and Thy cause, the suffering saints,

Charles the First

The tyrant's tyranny, and Thy great word,
Freedom! Thy blood be on thy head.

King.

So be it.

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

Charles the First

Act V

Scene 1

[The King's Bedchamber. The King, starting from his Couch; Herbert asleep.]

King.

Herbert! Is't time to rise? He sleeps. What sounds
Were those that roused me? Hark again! The clang
Of hammers! Yet the watch—light burns; the day
Is still unborn. This is a work of night,
Of deep funereal darkness. Each loud stroke
Rings like a knell, distinct, discordant, shrill,
Gathering, redoubling, echoing round my head,
Smiting me only with its sound amid
The slumbering city, tolling in mine ear—
A passing bell! It is the scaffold. Heaven
Grant me to tread it with as calm a heart
As I bear now. His sleep is troubled. Herbert!
'Twere best to wake him. Herbert! rouse thee, man!

Herb.

Did your Grace call?

King.

Aye; we should be today
Early astir. I've a great business toward,
To exchange the kingly wreath, my crown of thorns,
For an eternal diadem; to die—
And I would go trim as a bridegroom. Give me
Yon ermined cloak. If the crisp nipping frost
Should cause me shiver, there be tongues would call
The wintery chillness Fear. Herbert, my sleep
Hath been as soft and balmy, as young babes
Inherit from their blessed innocence,
Or hardy peasants win with honest toil.
When I awoke thy slumbers were perturbed,
Unquiet.

Herb.

Vexed, my liege, with dreams.

King.

Of what?

Herb.

So please you, Sire, demand not.

King.

Dost thou think

A dream can vex me now? Speak.

Herb.

Thrice I slept,
And thrice I woke, and thrice the self—same vision
Haunted my fancy. Seemed this very room,

Charles the First

This dim and waning taper, this dark couch,
Beneath whose crimson canopy reclined
A form august and stately. The pale ray
Of the watch—light dwelt upon his face, and showed
His paler lineaments, where majesty
And manly beauty, and deep trenching thought,
And Care the wrinkler, all were blended now
Into one calm and holy pensiveness,
Softened by slumber. I stood gazing on him
With weeping love, as one awake; when sudden
A thick and palpable darkness fell around,
A blindness, and dull groans and piercing shrieks
A moment echoed; then they ceased, and light
Burst forth and musick—light such as the flood
Of day—spring at the dawning, rosy, sparkling,
An insupportable brightness—and i'th' midst,
Over the couch, a milk—white dove, which soared
Right upward, cleaving with its train of light
The Heavens like a star. The couch remained
Vacant

King.

Oh that the spirit so may pass!
So rise! Thrice did'st thou say?

Her.

Three times the vision
Passed o'er my fancy.

King.

A thrice—blessed omen!
Herbert, my soul is full of serious joy,
Content and peaceful as the Autumn sun,
When, smiling for awhile on the ripe sheaves
And kissing the brown woods, he bids the world
A calm goodnight. Bear witness that I die
In charity with all men; and take thou,
My kind and faithful servant, follower
Of my evil fortunes, true and tender, take
All that thy master hath to give—his thanks,
His poor but honest thanks. Another King
Shall better pay thee. Weep not. Seek the Bishop;
And if thou meet with that fair constancy,
My mournful Henrietta, strive to turn
Her steps away till—I'm a coward yet,
And fear her, lest she come to plunge my thoughts
In the deep fountain of her sad fond tears,
To win me—Ha! can that impatient foot,
That hurrying hand, which shakes the door—

[Enter the Queen .]

Queen.

My Charles!

King.

Haste to the Bishop.

[Exit Herbert.]

Queen.

Charles!

King.

Already here!

Thou did'st fall trembling in my arms, last night,
Dizzy and faint and spent, as the tired martlet,
Midway her voyage, drops panting on the deck,
And slumbers through the tempest. I kissed off
The tears that hung on those fair eyelids, blessing
Thy speechless weariness, thy weeping love
That sobbed itself to rest. Never did mother
Watching her fevered infant pray for sleep
So calm, so deep, so long, as I besought
Of Heaven for thee when half unconscious, yet
Moaning and plaining like a dove, they bore thee
With gentle force away. And thou art here
Already! wakened into sense and life
And the day's agony.

Queen.

Here! I have been
To Harrison, to Marten, to Lord Fairfax,
To Downes, to Ireton,—even at Bradshaw's feet
I've knelt to day. Sleep now? shall I e'er sleep
Again!

King.

At Bradshaw's feet! Oh perfect love
How can I chide thee? Yet I would thou had'st spared
Thyself and me that scorn.

Queen.

Do Hunters scorn
The shrill cries of the lioness, whose cubs
They've snared, although the Forest—Queen approach
Crouching? Do seamen scorn the forked lightning
Albeit the storm—cloud weep? They strove to soothe;
They spake of pity; one of hope.

King.

Alas!
All thy life long the torturer hope hath been
Thy master!—Yet if she can steal an hour
From grief—whom dost thou trust?

Queen.

Thyself and Heaven
And a relenting woman. Wrap thyself
Close in my cloak—Here! here!—to Lady Fairfax!
She's faithful; she'll conceal thee. Take the cloak;
Waste not a point of time, not whilst the sand
Runs in the glass. Dost fear its shortness? See

Charles the First

How long it is!
On with the cloak. Begone!

King.

And thou?

Queen.

My post is here.

King.

To perish

Queen.

No,

To live to a blest old age with thee in freedom.
Away my Charles, my King! I shall be safe—
And if I were not could I live if thou—
Charles, thou wilt madden me. 'Tis the first boon
I ever craved; and now, by our young loves,
By our commingled griefs, a mighty spell,
Our smiling children and this bleeding land,
Go! I conjure thee, go!

King.

I cannot.

Queen.

King

Begone! or I will speak such truth—and truth
Is a foul treason in this land—will rain
Such curses on them, as shall force them send me
To the scaffold at thy side. Fly!

King.

Dost thou see

Fierce soldiers crowded round, as if to watch
A garrisoned fort, rather than one unarmed
Defenceless man, and think'st thou I could win
A step unchallenged? Nor though to escape
Were easy as to breathe, the vigilant guard
Smitten with sudden blindness, the unnumbered
And stirring swarms of this vast city locked
In charmed sleep, and darkness over all
Blacker than starless night, spectral and dim
As an eclipse at noontide, though the gates
Opened before me, and my feet were swift
As the Antelope's, not then if it but perilled
A single hair of friend or foe would I
Pass o'er the threshold. In my cause too much
Of blood hath fallen. Let mine seal all. I go
To death as to a bridal; thou thyself
In thy young beauty was not welcomer
Than he. Farewell, beloved wife! My chosen!
My dear—one! We have loved as peasants love,
Been fond and true as they. Now fare thee well!
I thank thee, and I bless thee. Pray for me,
My Henrietta.

Queen.

Charles the First

Charles, thou shalt be saved.
Talk not of parting. I'll to Fairfax; he
Gave hope, and hope is life.

King.

Farewell!

Queen.

That word—

I prythee speak it not—withers me, lives
Like a serpent's hiss within mine ear, shouts through
My veins like poison, twines and coils about me
Clinging and killing. 'Tis a sound accurst,
A word of death and doom. Why shouldst thou speak it?
Thou shalt be saved; Fairfax shall save thee. Charles,
Give me a ringlet of thy hair—No, no,—
Not now! not now! Thou shalt not die.

King.

Sweet wife,
Say to my children that my last fond thought—

Queen.

Last! Thou shalt live to tell them of thy thoughts
Longer than they or I to hear thee. Harken
Promise thou wilt await me here! Let none—
They will not dare, they shall not. I but waste
The hour. To Fairfax, the good Fairfax! Charles
Thou shalt not die

[Exit Queen.]

King.

Oh truest fondest woman!
My matchless wife! The pang is mastered now,
I am Death's conqueror. My Faithfullest!
My Fairest! My most dear! I ne'er shall see
Those radiant looks again, or hear the sound
Of thy blithe voice, which was a hope, or feel
The thrilling pressure of thy hand, almost
A language, so the ardent spirit burned
And vibrated within thee! I'll to prayer,
And chase away that image! I'll to prayer,
And pray for thee, sweet wife! I'll to my prayers.

[Exit.]

Scene 2

[The Banqueting-House at Whitehall, glass folding-doors opening to the Scaffold, which is covered with black. The block, axe, &c. visible; Officers and other persons are busy in the back-ground, and Cromwell is also there giving directions. Ireton, Harrison, and Hacker meeting, Cromwell behind.]

Har.

Cromwell!—Good-morrow Ireton! Whither goes
The General?

Ire.

Charles the First

To see that all be ready
For this great deed.

Hack.

He hath the eager step,
The dark light in his eye, the upward look,
The flush upon his cheek, that I've marked in him
When marching to the battle.

Har.

Doth he not lead
To day in a great combat, a most holy
And glorious victory?

Crom. [at the back of the Stage]

Hast thou ta'en order
That soon as the head's off the Abbey bell
Begin to toll?

Officer.

I have.

Crom.

Look that the axe
Be keen, and the hand steady. Let us have
No butchery.

[advancing to the front of the Stage.]

If he die not, we must perish—
That were as nothing! but with us will die
The liberty for which the blood of saints
And martyrs hath been spilt, freedom of act,
Of speech, of will, of faith! Better one grey
Discrowned head should fall, albeit a thought
Before the time, than God's own people groan
In slavery for ever.

Har.

Whoso doubteth
But he shall die?

Crom.

'Tis rumoured, Sirs, amongst
The soldiery, that one of a high place,
Fairfax—But I believe it not. Hast thou
The Warrant Hacker?

Hack.

No.

Ire.

Since when doth Fairfax
Dare to impugn the sentence of a free
And publick court, of England—

Har.

Of the Great
All-Righteous Judge who hath delivered him
Manifestly to us?

Hack.

Will he dare oppose
Army and people? He alone!

Crom.

Be sure
The good Lord—General, howsoe'er some scruple
May trouble him, will play a godly part
In this sad drama.—Aye, I have the Warrant!
It is addressed to thee. Thou must receive
The prisoner, and conduct him hither.

Hack.

Hath
The hour been yet resolved?

Crom.

Not that I hear.

[Enter Fairfax.]

Ha! our great General! Well met my Lord!
We that are laden with this heavy burthen
Lacked your sustaining aid!

Fair.

Cromwell, I too
Am heavy-laden.

Crom.

You look ill at ease;
'Tis this chill air, the nourisher of rheums,
The very frog of frost, that turns men's blood
To water.

Fair.

No, the grief is here. Regret,
Almost remorse, and doubt and fear of wrong
Press heavily upon me. Is this death
Lawful?

Ire.

His country's sentence, good my Lord,
May be thy warrant.

Fair.

An anointed King!

Har.

A bloody tyrant.

Fair.

Yet a man, whose doom
Lies on our conscience. We might save the King
Even now at the eleventh hour; we two
Hold the nice scales of life and death, and shall not
Fair mercy sway the balance? Dost thou hear me?
Wilt thou not answer? Canst thou doubt our power?

Crom.

No. Man hath always power for ill. I know
We might desert our friends, betray our country,
Abandon our great cause, and sell our souls
To Hell. We might do this, and more; might shroud

Charles the First

These devilish sins in holy names, and call them
Loyalty, Honour, Faith, Repentance—cheats
Which the great Tempter loves!

Fair.

Yet harken, Cromwell!
Bethink thee of thy fame

Crom.

Talk'st thou of fame
To me? I am too mean a man, too lowly,
Too poor in state and name to need abjure
That princely sin, and for my humbleness
I duly render thanks. Were I as thou—
Beware the lust of fame, Lord General,
Of perishable fame, vain breath of man,
Slight bubble, frailer than the ocean foam
Which from her prow the good ship in her course
Scattereth and passeth on regardlessly.
Lord General beware!

Fair.

I am Lord General;
And I alone by mine own voice have power
To stay this deed.

Crom.

Alone?

Fair.

I'll answer it
Before the Council.

Crom.

Ha! alone!—come nearer.

Fair.

What would'st thou of me?

Crom.

Yonder men are firm
And honest in the cause, and brave as steel;
Yet are they zealots, blind and furious zealots!
I would not they should hear us—bloody zealots!

Fair.

Speak, Sir; we waste the hour.

Crom.

I would confess
Relentings like thine own.—They hear us not?

Fair.

I joy to hear thee.

Crom.

Thou art one elect,
A leader in the land, a chosen vessel
And yet of such a mild and gracious mood,
That I, stern as I seem, may doff to thee
This smooth and governed mask of polity,
And shew the struggling heart perplexed and grieved
In all its nakedness. Yes, I have known

Charles the First

The kindly natural love of man to man
His fellow!—the rough soldier's shuddering hate
Of violent death, save in the battle; lastly
A passionate yearning for that sweetest power
Born of fair Mercy.

Fair.

Yet but now thou chidd'st me
And with a lofty scorn for such a weakness.
The change is sudden.

Crom.

Good my Lord, I strove
And wrestled with each pitying thought as born
Of earthly pride and mortal sin. Full oft
We, that are watchers of our wretched selves,
Aiming at higher virtues, trample down
Fair shoots of charity and gentle love
Yet still my breast was troubled. And since thou
Art moved by such relentings—

Fair.

And a promise
Made to my wife

Crom.

A wise and pious lady!

Fair.

Thou wilt then save the King?

Crom.

Sir, we must have
Some higher warrantry than our wild will,
Our treacherous human will, afore we change
The fiat of a nation. Thou art a man
Elect and godly—Harrison!—go seek
The presence of the Lord. Perhaps to thee
A guiding answer, a divine impulsion,
May be vouchsafed. Go with him Harrison!
Seek ye the Lord together.

Fair.

'Tis a wise
And pious counsel.

Crom.

Step apart awhile;
We will await ye here.

[Exeunt Fairfax and Harrison.]

[Cromwell gives the Warrant to Hacker.]

Now! now! be quick!

[Exit Hacker.]

Is the scaffold all prepared? The headsman waiting
With shrouded visage and bare arm? The axe
Whetted? Be ready on the instant. Where

Charles the First

Be guards to line the room, mute wondering faces,
A living tapestry, and men of place
To witness this great deed? A King should fall
Decked with the pageantries of Death, the clouds
That roll around the setting sun.

Ire.

If Fairfax
Return before he come—

Crom.

Dost thou mistrust
Harrison's gift in prayer? The General's safe.
Besides I sent erewhile the Halberdiers
To guard Charles Stuart hither. Hacker 'll meet
His prisoner.

Ire.

But should Fairfax—

Crom.

Wherefore waste
A word on such a waverer!

Ire.

What hath swayed him?

Crom.

His wife! his wife! The Queen hath seen again
That haughty dame, and her fond tears—

Ire.

I marvel
That thou endur'st that popish witch of France
So near.

Crom.

I watch her. He must die! 'Tis borne
Upon my soul as what shall be. The race,
The name shall perish.

Ire.

Aye, the very name
Of King.

Crom.

Of Stuart.

Ire.

And of King.

Crom.

So be it.

Will Bradshaw never come?

[Enter Bradshaw, Cook, Marten, and others.]

Ah welcome! welcome!

Ye are late.

Brad.

Yon living mass is hard to pierce
By men of civil calling. The armed soldiers
Can scanty force a passage for their prisoner.

Crom.

He comes?

Brad.

He's at the gate.

Ire.

What say the people?

Brad.

The most are pale and silent, as a Fear
Hung its dull shadow over them; whilst some
Struck with a sudden pity weep and wonder
What ails them; and a few bold tongues are loud
In execration.

Ire.

And the soldiers?

Mar.

They
Are true to the good cause.

Crom.

The righteous cause!
My friends and comrades ye are come to witness
The mighty consummation. See, the sun
Breaks forth! The Heavens look down upon our work
Smiling! The Lord hath risen!

Ire.

The King!

[Enter the King, Hacker, Herbert, a Bishop, Guards, &c.]

King.

Why pause ye?
Come on.

[Herbert gives the King a letter.]

Herb.

Sire, from thy Son.

King.

My boy! My boy!
No; no; this letter is of life, and I
And life have shaken hands. My kingly boy!
And the fair girl! I thought to have done with this.
But it so clings! Take back the letter, Herbert.
Take it, I say. Forgive me, faithful Herbert,
That last impatient word. Forgive me. Now, Sirs,
What see ye on that platform? I am as one
Bent on a far and perilous voyage, who seeks
To hear what rocks beset his path. What see ye?

Brad.

Only the black-masked headsman.

King.

Aye, he wears

Charles the First

His mask upon his face, an honest mask.
What see ye more?

Brad.

Nought save the living sea
Of human faces, blent into one mass
Of sentient various life: woman and man,
Childhood and infancy, and youth and age,
Commingled with its multitudinous eyes
Upturned in expectation. Aweful gaze!
Who may abide thy power?

King.

I shall look upward.
Why pause we here?

Crom.

Aye, why?

Brad.

May it please thee, Sir,
To rest awhile? Bring wine.

King.

I need it not.
Yes! fill the cup! fill high the sparkling cup!
This is a holiday to loyal breasts,
The King's accession day. Fill high! fill high!
The block, the scaffold, the swift sudden axe,
Have yet a privilege beyond the slow
And painful dying bed, and I may quaff
In my full pride of strength a health to him,
Whom, pass one short half-hour, the funeral knell
Proclaims my successor. Health to my son!
Health to the King of England! Start ye, Sirs,
To hear the word? Health to King Charles, and peace,
To this fair realm! And when that blessed time
Of rightful rule shall come, say that I left
For the bold traitors that condemned, the cowards
Who not opposing murdered me (I have won
So near the Throne of Truth that true words spring
Unbidden from my lips,) say that I left
A pardon, liberal as the air, to all,
A free and royal pardon!—Prythee speed me
On my rough journey.

Crom.

Wherefore crowd ye there?
Make way.

King.

I thank thee, Sir. My good Lord Bishop,
Beware the step.—

[Exeunt King, Herbert, Bishop, and Guards.]

[A pause.]

Crom.

Doth he address the people

Mar.

Not so. He kneels.

Crom.

'Twere fittest. Close the door.

This wintry air is chill, and the Lord President
Is of a feeble body.

[Scream without.]

Brad.

Hush!

Crom.

'Tis one

Who must be stayed.

Brad.

The Queen?

Crom.

Go stop her, Ireton.

[Exit Ireton.]

It were not meet that earthly loves should mingle
With yonder dying prayer. Yes! Still he kneels.
Hacker come hither. If thou see a stir
Amongst the crowd, send for my horse; they're ready;—
Or if, midst these grave men, some feeble heart
Wax faint in the great cause, as such there be;—
Or on the scaffold, if he cling to life
Too fondly;—I'd not send a sinful soul
Before his time to his accompt, good Bradshaw!
But no delay! Is he still kneeling?—Mark me
No idle dalliance Hacker! I must hence,
Lest Fairfax—no weak dalliance! no delay!
The cause, the cause, good Bradshaw!

[Exit and the Scene closes.]

Scene 3

[Another Gallery in Whitehall. Enter Cromwell.]

Crom.

Methought I heard her here.—No!—if she win
To Fairfax!—he must die, as Ahab erst
Or Rehoboam, or as that great heathen
Whom Brutus loved and slew. None ever called
Brutus a murderer! And Charles had trial—
'Twas more than Cæsar had!—free open trial,
If he had pleaded. But the Eternal Wrath

Stiffened him in his pride. It was ordained,
And I but an impassive instrument
In the Almighty hand, an arrow chosen
From out the sheaf. If I should reign hereafter
Men shall not call me bloody.—Hark! the bell!
No—all is hush as midnight.—I shall be
Tenderer of English lives. Have they forgot
To sound the bell? He must be dead.

Queen. [without]

Lord Fairfax!

Crom.

The Queen! the Queen!

[Enter the Queen].

Queen.

They told me he was here—
I see him not,—but I have wept me blind;—
And then that axe, that keen bright edgy axe,
Which flashed across my eyeballs, blinding me
More than a sea of tears.—Here's one!—Oh fly
If thou be man, and bid the headsman stay
His blow for one short hour, one little hour,
Till I have found Lord Fairfax! Thou shalt have
Gold, mines of gold! Oh save him! Save the King!

Crom.

Peace! peace! Have comfort!

Queen.

Comfort! and he dies,
They murder him; the axe falls on his neck;
The blood comes plashing;—Comfort!

[Enter Lady Fairfax .]

Lady F.

Out alas!
I can hear nought of Fairfax, royal Madam!—
Cromwell, the Master-murderer!

Queen.

Oh forgive her!
She knows not what she says. If thou be Cromwell
Thou hast the power to rescue: See I kneel;
I kiss thy feet. Oh save him! Take the crown;
Take all but his dear life! Oh save him, save him!
And I will be thy slave!—I, a born Princess,
I, a crowned Queen, will be thy slave.

Crom.

Arise!

My Lady Fairfax lead this frantic woman

To where her children bide.

Queen.

Thou wilt not make
My children fatherless? Oh mercy! Mercy!
I have a girl, a weeping innocent girl,
That never learnt to smile, and she shall be
Thy handmaid; she shall tend thy daughters. I,
That was so proud, offer my fairest child
To be thy bondwoman.

Crom.

Raise her! Undo
These clasping hands. I marvel, Lady Fairfax,
Thou canst endure to see a creature kneel
To one create.

Lady F.

Out on thee, hypocrite!
Where lags my husband?

Queen.

Save him, save him, Cromwell!

Crom.

Woman arise! Will this long agony
Endure forever?

[Enter Ireton on one side, followed by Fairfax and Harrison on the other.]

Is he dead?

Fair.

What means
This piercing outcry?

Queen.

Fairfax! He is saved!
He is saved!

Ire.

The bell! the Abbey bell! Hark!

Crom.

There
The will of Heaven spake. The King is dead.

Fair.

Look to the Queen. Cromwell, this bloody work
Is thine.

Crom.

This work is mine. For yon sad dame,
She shall away to France. This deed is mine,
And I will answer it. The Commonwealth
Is firmly 'stablished Ireton. Harrison,
The Saints shall rule in Israel. My Lord General,
The army is thine own, and I a soldier,
A lowly follower in the cause. This deed
Is mine.—

END OF THE PLAY
