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DAVID AND BATHSHUA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

AD ASTRA
SONGS AND LYRICS

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

A DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

BY

CHARLES WHITWORTH WYNNE

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To
G. F. T.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

DAVID, *afterwards King of Israel and Judah.*

THE LITTLE PRINCE, *his son.*

AHITOPHEL, *his chief counsellor.*

JOAB, *captain of his host.*

URIAH, *husband of Bathshua, and officer of David.*

NATHAN, *the prophet.*

ABIATHAR, *the high priest.*

First Elder of Judah.

ABISHAL, } *Officers of David.*
ASAHEL, }

A Prisoner.

A Reveller.

An Amalekite.

A Ziphite.

High Priests, Priests, Levites, Princes, Rulers and
Elders of the Tribes, Captains, Officers,
Soldiers, Warders, Revellers, Attendants, etc.

SAUL, *the first King of Israel.*

JONATHAN, *his son.*

ABNER, *captain of Saul's host.*

PHALTIEL, *afterwards husband of Michal.*

A Jester.

Lords, Officers and Soldiers in attendance upon
Saul.

ACHISH, *King of Gath.*

An Officer of his Guard.

Lords and Ladies of the Philistines.

MICHAL, *daughter of Saul and wife of David.*

MERAB, *Saul's eldest daughter.*

BATHSHUA, *grand-daughter of Ahitophel and later the
wife of Uriah.*

ZOE, *Nurse to Bathshua.*

An old Witch.

Ladies, Maids, Small Girls, Attendants, etc.

SCENE : *Palestine.*

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

ACT I

SCENE I.—*Forest near Hebron.*

Enter a number of young girls, garlanded with flowers; some carrying timbrels, others small harps; Bathshua conspicuous. After some light movements, they dance and sing:

I

How lovely the Spring is,
How fragrant the flowers!
How sweet is the morning
After fresh showers!
Glad are our hearts and gay,
Brighter than buds of May
In Eden bowers.

II

Sweet is the matin song
Of lark and linnet,
Primrose and daffodil
Pastorall'd in it.

I

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Free are we, and without care,
Scattering sunbeams everywhere
Each joyous minute.

Bath. You scatter your notes as lightly as the sunbeams:
'Twas a rain of larks' music. Excellent!

Small Girls (clinging to Bathshua). Our holiday: how
shall we spend it, Bathshua?

Bath. How can we spend it better than in such wise —
Singing and dancing? The forest's full of song,
And dancing is the true accompaniment
To hearts at ease. Here is the sward for tender
feet,

A carpet woven of needles of the pine;
And there are tufted hillocks of smooth grass,
Where we may sit and rest. Come girls, and foot it!
But those who'd idly talk of senseless love
May go elsewhere.

First Maid. Why, Bathshua, of love?
Have we nought else to talk about but love?

Sec. Maid. And is love senseless? this is some newer
sense in Bathshua!

Bath. What do all maids desire?
But I would have you know 'tis waste of breath,
And want of sense to speak of it.

Several. Of love?

Bath. Yes, what is love to us?

Sec. Maid. A thing to dream of,
And find more pleasant every time you dream it.

All. But if we never dream?

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Sec. Maid. Why then you miss it;
And missing it, miss what is best worth having.

All. O come, sweet dreams, and tell us what is love!

Bath. O why is all the world so full of love?

Enter old witch, unobserved.

Old Witch. Aye, aye, the world is very full of love,
But still more full of sorrow! 'Tis a sad world:
I' faith a sorry world, a woeful world!
Woe's me, woe's me!

Bath. Tell us your grief, poor mother;
We have the wish to mend it.

Old Witch. Child, I have none:
At least not such as other mortals have;
But none the less I thank thee, pretty one;
Thy voice was kindly; and 't did warm my heart
To see that precious pearl within thine eye.

Love and Sorrow, Sorrow and Love—
Alas the day that thou wert born!
For thou, dear heart, shalt live to prove
The Rose of Life hath many a thorn.

So beautiful thou art! and to think that thou
Must drink of the cup of life's bitterness
To the dregs; yet, to know what 'tis to love:
That, that is something! bitterer were life
To a woman—without that knowledge.

Bath. Truly,
Mother, thy kindness is most questionable:

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Why breakest thou upon our play with notes
Of such ill omen ?

Old Witch. I follow, follow,
Up and down the world, round and round the
world,

For words of mystic meaning flood my brain,
And I must be deliver'd ere my doom;
For I have felt within me these late hours
A power that urges me, that hath urged me on,—
Just such a force as the great crater feels
Before it belches forth its smoke and spume,—
(*Taking Bathshua's hand*) I stand upon the threshold
of all Time:

Hist! child,—quick words, and image forth my
vision!—

I see thee seated on a golden throne
In the golden gates of morning, and round thy brow
A crown of beaten gold, and thro' thy hair,
Shot with the splendour of the northern lights,
A flaming aureole, and in thy hand
The sceptre of a queen . . .

For art thou not the loveliest of the land,
And loved of him the noblest in the land ?
A thousand hearts give thee their benison,
For charity and grace around thee flow,
Like mists inhaling sunlight; thou shalt be loved,
Aye, more than ever woman yet was loved,
By him who is the very prince of love;
And thro' thy children shalt thou be beloved,
For thou shalt mother him the pride of men,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

In wisdom greatest of the sons of men,¹
And thro' that son's remoter sons bequeath
Unto the world the crowning gift of Peace—
Of Charity that is above the law,
Of Faith unconquerable, Hope supreme;
And last a Saviour² Who shall free thy sex
From bonds of slavery and sensual sin,
Making the weak fit help-mate for the strong;
And adding to the glory of the woman
The tender joy of true maternity,
Till perfect motherhood become the basic law
Of life, and all men shape their lives thereby.

Bath. The old dame turns my head: what would she say?
Is this not blasphemy against the Law?
And I—what virtue lies in me to do
All this, a simple and unwitting maid?

Old Witch. And simpler for the fact thou art a maid;
But Time will show, and when thine hour shall fall,
Fear not to take the sceptre to thine hand,
Dread not the majesty of that dread throne:
Follow, follow, follow, follow,
Follow, altho' thy heart seem hollow,
Follow thy lord, follow thy lord,
Follow him at his beck or word,
Leave thy past to the roaring wind,
Leave thy kith, and leave thy kind.

[*Vanishes.*

¹ Solomon.

² Bathshua, as the mother of Solomon, was the direct ancestress of our Lord.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Bath. What mystery, and what perplexity
Hath she unroll'd!

Sec. Maid. How now, sweet Bathshua,
What of thy senseless love? If love shall bring
thee

A crown, and jewels, and the prince of love,
Thou'lt surely never say love hath no sense?

Bath. Idle thy talk as that poor wizen'd dame's:
Come, girls, to our play and forget her!

First Maid. Our Bathshua a Queen! let's crown her
all,

And do obeisance to her majesty.

All (bowing). Your Majesty's most liege and humble
servants.

Bath. Go to, you fools, nor mock me any more,
I've had enough of queening it for the nonce;
I were as like to clown it, as to queen it.

Voice (without bodily presence).

Much greater wonders hath this old world seen
Than that a pretty maid should die a queen;
For all that hath been is, and all that is hath been.

[*They all scatter frightened.*]

SCENE II.—*The same. Another part of the forest.*

Enter David and Jonathan.

Fon. The king will alter: do not take his moods
So much in earnest, his spirit frets him sore.
It is more pain of body than a disposition
To do thee harm.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

David. Murder has come from less—
But that I saw the madness in his eye,
The colour mount his cheek, ere he could poise
His javelin, my body now were pinn'd
Against his palace wall, and you the loser
Of one who loves you better than the world,
Tho' all were put into the scale against you.

Fon. Your love I reckon more than all the world,
And daily do I wonder more and more
That one of so high soul, of so pure mind as David,
Should give his faith to such an one as I,
Who fashion'd in a less ethereal mould,
Am all unworthy.

David. No more, sweet Jonathan,
Nature has bound our souls in such sure bonds
Of amity, that neither death, nor that
Which is more strong than death—eternal love—
Can e'er divorce them: not even that sweet love,
We dream of, you and I—
The meeting between heavenly opposites,
That draw together like long sunder'd stars,
To flood the night with their converging joy;
'That unity of minds, diversely strung,
Resolving to one harmony; that spirit love,
Which doth fulfil the life of man and woman,
Which, unfulfill'd, leaves each a barren waste.

Fon. Thou sayest true, my friend,
For death is but the exchange for happier fields,
Where we may free the love that's stifled here. . . .
Never woman, David, shall steal my heart from thee,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Not tho' she met my soul's supremest need,
For there is not within the heart of woman
Such love as thine.

David. Thy troth makes large amends
For all the enmity of all thine house,
And here, in breathing it, I feel again
The sinews of my strength, and vigour to confront
Mine adversary in the day of trial.
Praise be to God, for giving me a friend
As brave and loyal as thou!

Fon. David, thy hand;
And vow to me, before thy God and mine,
That, hap what may, no doubt shall come between
us,
And that for this same love thou bearest me
Thou wilt not wreak thy vengeance upon Saul,
Or on Saul's house, deeply as he hath wrong'd
Thy loyal heart, grievous as is the offence
He hath committed against thy person. For
I know thou shalt be king, and in that day
May thy true friend find favour in thy sight,
That peace may be between my seed and thine
For aye.

David. Jonathan, I love thee as my soul,
And could I war against thee, or thy father?
He is the king, and truly God's anointed,
And, if I find no favour in his sight,
Surely the fault's with me, not with thy father?
But would I knew my fault; for, if there be
A flaw within my loyalty, I'd rather,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Friend and brother, that thou shouldst take and
slay me. [*Presenting his sword to Jonathan.*
Silently draw this blade across my throat,
That my vile blood may out, and that the traitorous
trunk

May shrink and shrivel to its swift decay.
But, if there be not,—and oh, my friend thou know'st
My conscience is most clear towards the king!—
Why should he use me thus? Can nothing turn
Thy father's heart? For, verily, there lies
But one short step betwixt me and the grave.
For since the day the blatant mob call'd out
My young achievements, won in Jehovah's name,
And overdid their part, as is their wont,
Proclaiming me the ten times greater lord
By reason of my conquests, he hath not miss'd
Occasion to undo me: now he seeks
By violence, and anon by strategy,
To rid me of my life; and, whether by his hand,
Or waging war against his enemies,
What matters it the way by which I go?
Evil he sees in all my thoughts towards him;
I may not live, and hope to serve the king.

Fon. Nay, friend, I think thou dost mistake his purpose,
Tho', when his mood is on, thou must avoid him;
At such times e'en his dearest should beware
How they approach his person. But of this
I am most sure, he would not plot against
Thy life to take it, unless he gave me,
His first counsellor, some hint of his design;

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

And I, thy friend, would warn thee ere the peril
Came too nigh.

David. Then thou shalt put it to the test:
Or whether he would kill, or reinstate me.
For to-morrow is the feast of the new moon,
And I should sit at meat with him, but will not,
Giving by thee the excuse that I have gone
To Bethlehem, at the bidding of my kin,
To hold with them the yearly sacrifice.
And if the king shall take my absence well,
Then shalt thou know I may return in peace;
But if he take it badly, then shalt thou send
Me word; for, without doubt, his heart is set
On my destruction.

Fon. Thus will I apprise thee:
Keep thou in hiding by the Stone of Ezel,
And on the second day, about this hour,
I will pass by the mound, and shoot three arrows;
And if I say unto the lad that's with me,
“*Behold the arrows are on this side: run,
Fetch them,*” then come thou forth, for there is
peace:
But if I say, “*The arrows are beyond thee*”:
Then go thy way, I may not see thy face.

David (taking Jonathan's hand). Thro' life, thro' death,
and thro' eternity,
Thine!

[*Exeunt*

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

SCENE III.—*Gibeah. A room in Saul's palace.*

Enter Merab and Michal.

Mich. I have not seen our brother in such anger
As when he rose from table yestereve,
His tunic torn, our father's spear infixéd;
Narrowly he miss'd the spilling of his blood,
To pledge his loyalty to David. My brave,
Brave Jonathan! My ever-dearer brother!
Thou stand'st between the two—in deadly peril!
Alas, that thy noble pleading was in vain,
Thy zeal and thy devotion for thy friend
Of no avail!

Merab. Nor will they ever help him :
Jonathan had best side with his father,
'Twere tact to do so.

Mich. Thou wouldst stand by and see injustice done?

Merab. If that I could not stem the tide of wrong.

Mich. Such tact must stand for cowardice ! most tact,
I think, does so. Who fears to speak the truth,
Is generally accredited with tact,
Or takes it to himself as blesséd balm,
To heal the stings of slow-awakening pride.

Merab. I have no pride towards the king my father.

Mich. And I have so much pride towards him, that I
Cannot endure to see him wrong himself,
As every time his rage o'ermasters him.
Thou wouldst impel him to the giddy brink—
The tottering heights where sanity grows dim,—
By silent acquiescence in the wrong ;

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

For, to agree with a man when he is mad,
But speeds him to his doom.

Merab. Not to agree
Might bring, I think, a speedier doom upon him!

Mich. Thou art cavilling, my sweet sister; this
Is no time to cavil.

Merab (*shrugging her shoulders*). Perhaps, may be:

Enter Saul, Lords, Ladies and Attendants.

Saul. And has that fool, thy brother, cool'd his anger,
His too perfervid friendship for that adder
That's ever in our path, sliming our palace walks,
Choosing the undergrowth in which to thrive,
And striking at us in the dark thro' our sons?
Most noble friendship! that would side with those
The enemies of his house: most loyal friendship!
That doth prefer the stranger to the brother,
Setting aside the natural ties of blood,
And building on the ruin of his clan
A sweet-tongued friendship, an open-hearted friend-
ship,—

Indeed a friendship such as women share,
Secretive and hush'd: not like true-hearted men,
That need not words to make their feelings known.
A damnéd, villainous, unholy friendship!
I tell thee, Merab, nor my throne, nor person,
Will ever be secure, while this same viper crawls:
This bosom friend of our sweet Jonathan;
This oil'd and curléd darling of the nation;
This underling, this upstart, this——

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Merab. Dear father, that thou say'st is but too true,
I would I could think otherwise; but, alas,
David was ever traitor at the core—
Traitor to man and woman! And his heart,
Since that thy javelin fail'd a second time,
Hath crystallized to black and icy hate.
Henceforth thy life——

Mich. Hush, Merab, stay thy speech!
Thou wilt repent thee of these hasty words;
Spiteful they well might seem, but that the motive¹
For such virulence seems lacking.
David plotting against the king? 'tis monstrous!
'Tis infamous that such a lie should live,
Even for the brief space that gave it birth!
And thou, my father, shame on thy noble mind
That could conceive, and coin such wickedness!
Thy tongue that could so palter with the truth!
David in league with Jonathan! Aye, if to league
Be but to set up bands of staunchest steel
Around their loyalty to thee, to daily vie
In loving fealty and true heart-service,
Which shall commend him first to thy affection,
Then David is in league with Jonathan!
But, whether David were more worthy Jonathan,
Or Jonathan of David, I know not—
This I know,
There is not one more brave than Jonathan;
And could the friend of Jonathan take on
Such foul and scaly attributes, or disport,

¹ David had preferred Michal to Merab.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Like some low dinosaur of the world's first dawn,
In slimy shallow or reptilian pool,
I would not let my love for either plead.
But I can answer Merab word for word,
There is not one more loyal of heart and soul
Than Jonathan—unless that one be David,
My dear, dear husband.

Merab. Ha, ha, ha, thy husband!
I thought thy husband was a feather bolster,
An image stuck with goat's hair!

Mich. My sister
Hath, indeed, a pleasant wit.

Saul. Enough: (*to Michal*) And you,
Who taught you to call shame upon my speech—
You, who have call'd down shame on your marriage
bed?

But she, who mocks her father and her husband,
God will most surely punish her.

Mich. My noble father doth forget himself:
I did it but to save his life.

Saul. But yesterday
It was to save your own: lie upon lie:
Deceive your sire as you've deceived your husband!

Mich. I grieve to think I could so do to either;
But if, from harsh necessity, I wrought
Some slight deception on my lord the king,
It was to save—Saul from himself, David from Saul.
Your calmer judgment will approve my action,
For you must in your heart I know forgive me,
As well I know your true heart will excuse me.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Saul. Child, get you hence, ere you exhaust my patience.
As you have made your bed so must you lie;
David's your choice : look no more to your father,
Henceforth you have none.

Mich. My father, O my father !
[*Exit sobbing.*]

Merab. Take care she prove not now the greater
rebel !

A woman injured is far more to be fear'd
Than twenty men; men know not how to hate,
Their hates disperse like mists before the sun;
But woman, when she hates, hates once for all,
Hates with a fury that no force may quell,
Hates with a hate for ever at white heat
Till it burn on to vengeance, or consume
The vessel that can hold such bateless fire:
Michal is now the fiercer enemy.

Saul. My Merab, canst thou speak so of thy sister ?

Merab. Of twenty sisters, if they proved as false.

Saul. False ! hath she proved false to thee ?

Merab. Nay, father;
But plots she not against thy life and throne,
And am not I thy daughter, and most loyal ?

Saul. Yea, more my daughter than thy sister's friend,
More loyal may be than loving !

Merab. Traitors I hate.

Saul. Nay, say not so; it doth embrace so many:
And such a fund of hate may sear thy bosom.
It is not good for human hearts to hate,
However bruised: there is no healing in it —

DAVID AND BATHSHUA^b

Bear with the injury and it will heal,
Bear with the injurer and he'll repent.

Merab. But, father, thou dost hate as well as I.

Saul. Nay, child, I do get angry it is true,
But hate is anger that hath petrified.
I never yet could hate beyond a day,
But on the morrow do I hate my hate,
And fling it from me as a thing accurst.

Merab. I cannot hate, and unhate, in that fashion.

Saul. Then hadst thou better never hate at all,
For she who hates,— ponder it well, my Merab,—
Hates her ownself more than her enemy,
Else would she be more careful of her hate,
Not spill it 'gainst herself: for God is just,
And doth reward us for our love or hate
According to the use we make of either.

Merab. Then the reward of David must be great,
For is not his whole heart an arméd camp
Of treason and rebellion? [*Saul frowns.*]

Saul. Fetch me my jester, for my soul grows sad.

Enter Fester.

Saul. Come, Fool, if thou art worth thy place, declare it:
Disperse these heavy mists that are closing in,
That threaten to engulf me in their night.

Fest. What would my lord, that I should make him
merry?

Saul. Nay, Fool, but that thou shouldst make me less
sad.

Fest. A merry task that well might prove a sad one.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Saul. Nay, an it will, if that thou gib'st me more.

Fest. (to ladies).

Come all you fair ones then of light and healing,
And you shall guess, — what should need no re-
vealing, —

A simple riddle of a great disaster :
How true love stole a march on his old master.

Ladies (excitedly). A riddle! and all about love!

Fest. Here's for you then:

What is there that should rid King Saul of sorrow,
Yet is no good for sport,
That ne'er a one of you is like to borrow
That's lived a month at court?

First Lady. A husband.

Fest. Nay :

That were a very likely thing to borrow.

Second Lady. But some of us have husbands, and have no
need to borrow!

Fest. Why then you have the greater need to borrow.

Several. How so ?

Fest.

When your good man goes a-roving,
And you've not enough of loving,
What must you do, but borrow, borrow, borrow ?

Third Lady. And some of us are still unhusbanded.

Fest. Now that's very sad: your case is less complex;
For, not having one of your own, you are very like
To borrow some one else's.

Third Lady.

Impudent rogue!

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Fest. Nay, but all women are alike: not having a husband, they do desire one above all things; no sooner is their whim gratified, their peering and impelling curiosity assuaged, than they quickly find he is not all their eye painted him, their mind conceived; then must they go worrying to find a remedy, and the remedy is always — another husband, someone else's for preference!

Oh, isn't it strange
We'd all of us range,
Six out of every seven;
And a bit of a change
To another grange
Is all on the way to heaven.

Sec. Lady. Man's heaven—woman: a pretty heaven that!

Fest. Indeed a pretty heaven!

[*Chucking her under the chin.*]

Sec. Lady. Go on, Fool, with your riddle.

Fest. List then whilst I repeat it. [Repeats riddle.]

First Lady. I know: a lover!

Fest. Well, well, I thought you would come as near by your first guess as possible: if you cannot have a husband, try a lover! But how should a lover rid King Saul of sorrow?

First Lady. By his antics.

Fest. Ah, cruel, and from you that are the cause of them! But granted the antics, how can you maintain that a lover is no good for sport? most women

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

seem to find sport in their lovers, and certés the lover affordeth excellent sport to the onlooker: with his ogling it, his coaxing it, his squeezing it, not to say his accommodating it upon his knee. Then there are the moonlight walks: with heads joined, hands joined, hearts joined (*mimicking the appearance of lovers as seen from behind in a country lane*). I' faith I often wonder how they ever come apart again, they seem so truly and delightfully one! And surely to such the world seems but a vast pleasure-garden, where they may wander at will, quite oblivious of all save their own sweeting. Happy lovers! happy lovers! Indeed I should not mind fooling it so once in a way myself.

Sec. Lady. Thou wouldst make a better fool in love than out of love.

Fest. Ah, love's a wonderful quickener! Surely you must have had much practice in the art?

Sec. Lady. I will quicken thee in a minute, so thou be not quick to solve thy riddle. [*Strikes him.*]

Fest. You have me by the quick; I cry you mercy. I'll rid me of my riddle, so you rid me of your riddling. (*To First Lady*) Pretty chuck, you came so near by your second guess that you deserve a prize—a consolation prize (*offering to kiss her*). 'Tis not a lover, my dear, but a very particular substitute for a lover: one that sets great store by his head-gear, what with his oiling it, and perfuming it. (*To attendant*) Bring in the scented answer to my riddle.

[*Exit attendant.*]

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Re-enter attendant, bearing the teraphim that Michal had substituted for David.

Fest. Take care, now, of his larded davidical locks.

All. The teraphim! The teraphim!

Severally. A wise fool! A witty fool! A wondrous-clever fool!

Saul. Nay, Fool, but now you jest too near myself.

[Hurles his javelin at the jester.]

Fest. But, Master, what I did I did to serve you.

Saul. Then serve me now by going!

[Fester makes as though to take away the image.]

(In a voice of thunder) No, not the image. *[Exit jester.]*

Saul (rushing on the image and overthrowing it).

O glad am I that I may vent my rage

On this poor senseless mask, and not on her.

For Michal, if I had thee now, I'd kill thee.

(Drawing his hand over his brow) Oh, am I mad?

Or am I only blinded with my passion?

O God, where am I? Give me this man alive,

That I may tear him piecemeal limb from limb.

(To lords and ladies) Out of my way! For I could
mow you down,

Like single blades before the advancing storm,

Without respect of sex. *[Exeunt all except Saul.]*

(In a calmer voice) Now Samuel

Is gone from me, whom have I on whom to lean?

For these wild bursts must wreck my brain—even as

They rack my body. . . . Samuel! O Samuel!

Why didst thou leave me in my hour of trial?

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Why for one sin, one little sin forsake me—
One little sin that led me on to others,
Stung by the punishment for my first offence?
Hadst thou stood by me then I might have turn'd,
Hadst thou kept tryst with me I had not sinn'd!
I saw the seventh day in before I yielded,
Worn out at last by the mob's fierce entreaty,—
The enemy were even at our gates,
The Philistines were at the gates of Gilgal—
And surely did I think thou wouldst not come,
Or I had waited, waited patiently,
Until the setting of the seventh day's sun,
Ere I had disobey'd thy high behest,
And fann'd the flame of sacrifice to God.
But how didst thou rebuke my slight offence?
Thou turn'dst my fault to treason against God,
And didst revoke my kingship! Aye, much more—
Thou didst decree the downfall of my house.
O injustice! My worst of sins did never
Merit this: surely God hath forgiven!
And thou, my guide, my earthly councillor,
Art thou still stubborn? Lies there no way to
peace?
Is Saul for ever damn'd? The face of his soul
Held up to him as in a threefold mirror,
In which he sees all his defects of nature,
Without thy cold indifference to remind him.
Have I not striven to expiate my sin,
A thousand acts against two small misdeeds?
Will nothing move thee, immalleable priest?

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

(*Penitentially*) O Samuel, my friend: forgive, forget,
Come back to me again that I may live,
That I may feel once more God's Holy Spirit
Replenishing the springs of life within me,
Directing all the purpose of my soul—
Ah, no: it cannot be! that day is past!
Samuel hath sworn he will not come again:
He hath anointed David my successor.
That is enough! O my sons, O my sons,
If it were not for you, King Saul could bear it.
But Saul is damn'd! Damn'd in his house and
kingdom—
Then Saul I fear is damn'd eternally,
For Saul now bids defiance to Jehovah,
Spits at his temple, tramples on his priests,
Persecutes his people: and this same David
Let me but once lay hands on him, but once!
Saul shall be ten times damn'd ere he is done.
Now Saul is damn'd, Saul hath no soul to lose:
Now Saul is damn'd, he's free to unmask Hell.

Enter messenger.

Mess. My lord, we have news of the Prince: he hath
fled

To Achish.

Saul. Good, good: it is very good. (*To messenger*) Go!

[*Exit messenger.*

It is excellent: I can bribe Achish.

[*Exit.*

ACT II

SCENE I.—*Gath. A Banqueting Hall in the Palace.*

*King Achish with Lords and Ladies of the Philistines
seated at meat. Noise heard without.*

King Ach. Who is it thus disturbs our noontide feast?
What noise is this? Who stirs up all this tumult?
[*Exit attendant.*
(*Noise and shuffling continue.*) Have we not discord
enough i' the state,
But we must have it served upon us here?
What ruffian breaks upon us with such laughter,
It rings thro' vault and ceiling, beam and rafter?

*Enter David, torn, dishevelled, mud-bespattered, yet shaking
with laughter, followed by the King's guards.*

David. Oh, 'ts a jolly life
The king's son-in-law's!
High in his favour,
On's best behaviour;
Next moment down at heels,
Swift from Saul's path he steals,
Like the bright adder.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

King Ach. (to attendants). See'st thou not the man is mad?

First Lady. A strange madness!—

David. Why should a king's son-in-law
Escape by a window,
Unless for a wifely whim?
Substituted teraphim¹
Is the most they'll get of him!
Michal, O Michal,
Who'd wed a king's daughter!

Officer of the Guard. This is he of whom the people sang:
"Saul hath slain his thousands, David his tens of thousands."

David (drawing his sword). The sword of Goliath: it is
a good sword—
To him that can wield it!

King Ach. Disarm him.

David. So!

[*The guards draw back before the long swing of David's sword.*]

'Tis not for use upon my friends, but upon
The enemies of Achish, good my lord.

[*Hands over sword.*]

In my youth I slew a lion,
Pluck'd him by the beard:
Never, till I loved a woman,
Was I yet afraid.

¹ Although a plural word, it is used in the singular number in 1 Sam. xix. 13.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

(*To Achish*) What think you, king, are all fair women false ?

Or are they only false who think them fair ?

King Ach. There is more rhyme than reason in this man.

Sec. Lady. And yet he reasons well, and out of rhyme.

David. Yea; out of rhyme I reason,
And yet my reason is not out of rhyme:
I would I had no reason for my rhyme,
Or rhyme for such poor reason!

King Ach. In this man is a spirit of divinity:
Whence comes he ?

Officer. My lord, we came upon him
Hotly press'd by his own countrymen, who,
When they saw our guard, fell back, and one of them
Cried out, " He is a murderer: seize him! "
But he, between the takings of his breath,
Gave them the lie, adding, " Ye are from Saul,
Who is no friend of Achish: let Achish judge
Between us." Then did they offer silver
For his person, but we, fearing the king,
Refused the loathly bribe, and brought him hither.

King Ach. Ye acted circumspectly, my good friends;
But could ye not have kept him till to-morrow ?—
See ye not our meats are cooling ?

Officer. My lord,
We could not hold him: half famish'd tho' he be,
He hath an iron hand, and thews like adamant.

King Ach. Such strength comes but of madness.

Officer. Most like, my lord,
For when the fit o'ertook him, he did tear

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

All things that came within his fearful reach,
Rolling his eyes, and raking out his beard
In such a frothing frenzy, that no man
Durst come nigh him.

King Ach. It is evident, then,
The merit of his bringing rests with himself.

Officer. If it so please my lord, the king.

King Ach. It is well:

The man who is an enemy of Saul's,
Must in some measure be a friend of ours.
Give him safe conduct to the border: if
He means injury, he had best commit it
Upon the Israelite, not on ourself.
He hath a spirit: 'twere most unholy
To detain him! Return his sword. (*To David*) God
speed you!

David. Thanks, noble friend, I will some day requite
Thy kindness: I shall not soon forget it.

[*Exeunt guards and David.*]

King Ach. (To Courtiers). Now, having settled our affairs
of state,

Let us do justice to the viands that wait.

SCENE II.—*Mountainous country in the wilderness of Engedi. In the background limestone caves. In the foreground groups of soldiers, Abner, and other Captains.*

Enter King Saul (stepping out of one of the caves).

King Saul. Abner, methinks this mountain search is
vain.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

No man, however sorely press'd, would choose
These sun-baked slopes, this wild and arid desert,
For his concealment; and canst persuade me
A crafty freebooter of this bandit tribe
Would let himself be taken unawares
Within these narrow wadys?

Abner. Nay, my lord;
Still cunning oft defeats itself, and these same caves
Might well afford both shelter and concealment
To one hard press'd: our quarry hath not had
Much time to breathe since first we got upon him.
My counsel is we seal them (*pointing to the caves*)
with all speed,
Setting a guard both to the North and South,
Then at our leisure we may search them thro'.

King Saul. Nay, man, 'tis waste of time. Let's to
Hachilah:

There in the forest we shall run him down.

Abner. My lord, spare but the time for this one search;
And afterwards—to Hachilah.

King Saul. Afterwards,
Thou'lt still be crying afterwards!

Abner. My lord,
I humbly—

King Saul. Confusion take thy humbleness!
Humble thyself by swift obedience: set
All our force in motion. [*They move off slowly.*]

*Enter David (from the cave) attended by Foab, Abishai,
and other Captains.*

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

David. My lord, the king!

King Saul. David! do I indeed behold my son?

David. My lord, thou dost behold a loyal subject:
One who, tho' sorely tried, is yet most true;
One who this moment might have ta'en thy life,
But who doth, even from his heart, regret
This trespass (*holding up a piece of Saul's robe*), tho'
cut with seemly reverence,
As token of a faith that could not falter
Towards the person of the Lord's anointed.
(*Bowing low*) Wherefore, O king, dost thou come
out against

My life? Hath David treasonable thoughts?
Thou knowst he hath not! Doth David seek thy hurt?
If so, the occasion hath but slipp'd his grasp.
Why, then, shouldst thou believe in my dishonour,
Accepting what mine enemies have said,
And drawing thence hasty and rash conclusions,
That should prejudice me traitor, all unheard?
What wrong could I commit against my lord?
Evil proceedeth but from evil men,
And those, who think evil, encompass evil;
But every thought of mine towards the king
Is, as my hand this day, clean and unsullied.
The Lord judge between me and thee! the Lord
Avenge me of thee; but my hand shall never
Be against thee.

King Saul. David, my son, my son,
How sweet it is to hear thy voice again,
E'en tho' thou speakest to my own confusion!

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Saul stands abash'd before thy greater soul—
Saul, who doth own no master but Jehovah,
Humbles himself and his high pride to thee.
How have I wrong'd thee, son, this many a day;
And, ah, how nobly hast thou me requited!
There is not one more loyal to me than thou,
Not one in all my kingdom!
For who would so have spared his adversary?
May the Great God reward thee for thy zeal,
Thy dutiful devotion! Aye, and He
Will reward thee, for now I know that thou
Shalt surely reign, and that my throne will pass—
Pass altogether from the House of Saul.
Thou shalt be father to a line of kings,
Prouder than any that have walk'd this earth,
Greater than any since the dawn of Time;
Thou art the herald of a world-wide hope,
In thee the Sun of Israel shall not set,
But flame on the hills for ever! . . . Come near
That I may lean upon thee as of old.

[*Embracing David.*]

Few are there now on whom my age may lean,
And, if that few were fewer, it were well!
(*Taking his hand*) Swear to me, David—
Thou wilt not cut my seed from off the earth,
Nor yet efface my name in Israel:
So shall thy justice be temper'd with mercy,
And the people of God rejoice in thy law.

David. Not for thy sake, O king, but Jonathan's,
Shall I incline to mercy. Without his love,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

His steadfastness thro' all these bitter trials,
I could not so have borne them: for his sake
I must look tenderly upon Saul's House,
I could not in my heart do otherwise.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.—*On the foreshore of the Great Sea.*

Enter Bathshua.

Bath. How good it is to come here from the hills!
How exquisite the deep blue of the ocean!
O heart, my heart, how dost thou surge and swell!
And you, my feet, how pulsing to be off!
Off fast before the wind! (*Drawing in a long breath.*)
I cannot breathe
Enough of the sweet air! O happiness
To be again free with the winds of heaven,
And not within the narrow haunts of men!
Men! Why they are not fit to walk God's earth!
They have not eyes to see the beautiful,
Nor have they souls to feel what women feel!
Love have they never dreamt of—all save one:
He only hath a clean heart and high purpose,
David my heart's true idol, and its king!
How lovely wert thou as thou strod'st along,
Leading thy stalwarts to the tent of Saul,
Heading thy captains and thy men of war,
Thy face all flush'd with battle, thy eager eyes
Clear as the noonday sun, and thy whole soul
Emblazon'd on thy god-like countenance!

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

I would give all the world for one long kiss
Of thy sweet mouth, and yet, unless God wills,
I may not even touch thy hand—I, who
Am but a simple maid of Benjamin. (*Sighs deeply.*)

Enter old Nurse (panting, and out of breath).

Nurse. Bathshua,

Stay thee, sweet child! thy poor, old nurse has not
The strength to follow, and scarce, I think, the
breath.

Bath. I'm sorry, nurse, I meant not to outrun thee:
This air strikes brisk, and hard it is to hold
One's spirits in check!

Nurse. Yes, my love, I know it;
I would have raced thee thirty summers back,
I was most light upon my feet. My poor,
Dear father used to say, "Zoë is fleeter
Than the roe."

Bath. Come, nurse, art sure thou speak'st
the truth—
The exact truth?

Nurse. Why, child, look at this instep,
[Showing her foot.

Knowst thou not that a high arch is ever
The sign of a swift runner?

Bath. And mine (*raising her skirts*) is
Higher still: thou wouldst not, then, have outrun me!

Nurse. Certés thou are more nimble with thy tongue!

Bath. But with my feet?

Nurse. Ah, that's another matter.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Bath. Thou'lt not concede the victory! Dear heart,
Let's move along. The day is failing fast.
Already is the sun 'neath the horizon,
And we must make towards home. What lovely
shells! [Picks up one.

I did not know the sea had such fine jewels.

Nurse. Fine jewels! Why they're only common shells.
Wait till thou see'st the jewels at the court—
Diamonds and rubies, sapphires and emeralds,
Onyx and—Why, child, thou art not listening.

Bath. Indeed, I am. [Picks up another shell.

There are no jewels at the court like these,
None half so fine, nor of so great variety;
Look but at the tinting of this shell. Hath
The diamond of the court so many hues,
Or such transparency? the beaming ruby
A countenance like this? there's no comparison!
Here are the very waters of the sea,
Roll'd into flesh of iridescent pearl.

Nurse. Iridescent nonsense, child!

Bath. Ah, nurse, it is not so. Alas, how few
Can look upon a lowly thing, and find
It lovely—the lovelier for its lowliness!
And yet, such's the common eye, it would proclaim
This (*holding up shell*) mean and insignificant beside
Some tawdry jewel of the court, deep-delv'd
From its mother earth, with but a borrow'd bright-
ness.

My first of men would not have so disdain'd it.

Nurse. Who is this paragon of thine?

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Bath.

Ah, nurse,

That is my secret:

One that can look into the starry heavens,
And trace God's finger there, or on the mountains, . .
And mark amid their monumental calm
The immeasurable strength of their Creator;
Or just as simply, for his faith is large,
In the bright colouring of an autumn leaf
Attest the Great Artificer amid
The russets, and the yellows, and the browns.

Nurse. Indeed, these be great virtues! but myself
Had just as lief prefer a man more stolid,
Who look'd to *me* for beauty, not to the stars
Nor to the dulling glory of the leaf.

Bath. To me for beauty!—

I have not pride enough to think of that—
Yet still that beldam's words, "I see thee seated
On a golden throne, in the golden gates
Of morning, and in thy hand the sceptre
Of a queen."

Nurse. Thou art a queen already—
A Queen of Beauty! and what has any queen
To boast of but her beauty? it was for that
That she became a queen, and, when she loses it,
She loses half her empery!

Bath. (*rapturously*). O Love,
Could I be worthy of so great a lord?
He only can give voice to all my thoughts:
Could I not add some radiance to his?
For I would so encompass him with love,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Saul. And so wouldst thou look, Abner,
If thou hadst won a kingdom with thy prowess,
And saw it slowly, slowly slipping from thee,
As steadily as sinks yon western orb.
The night is coming up, and I must die,
Pass, and leave all I have to other hands,
And those most hateful to me!
Jehovah cares not for my dimming sight,
My shatter'd hopes of kingship! (*In a stronger voice.*)

What boots it

That I look'd death in the face a thousand times,
If that my victories serve to disinherit
My own true sons? David is not my blood—

Abner. Nor shall he reign, whilst one of thy royal house
Yet lives: so help me God!

Saul. I know thee, trusty friend, but I have sworn it.

Merab. Under misapprehension. David has trick'd thee—

He knew much better than to lay his hand
Upon the person of the Lord's anointed,
With Abner and three thousand men near by,
Himself scarce able to command five hundred.
Thou mayst be sure he weigh'd the odds of battle,
Ere he had made a virtue of his fear,
And staked his all upon thy clemency.
His ready wit stood him for double gain—
Renewal of his life, and of Saul's favour,
For every moment's doubt did more imperil
One in so close a strait. He wisely chose
The lesser of two evils, and threw himself
Upon thy royal heart.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Saul. I never look'd at it, my child, in that light;
But now I think on it, 'tis very true:
I was a fool to be so moved by words,
Trick'd by the trick of a seeming great affection!
(*Turning to Merab*) Hadst thou been born a boy
my throne were safe;
My days had then gone down with swift decline
Unto the peaceful grave, but, when I look
On these (*pointing to his sons*), I am wrung to the
heart: I do

Despair for Israel! Sons have I none:
Thine eye is now sole bulwark to my state.

Fon. And ministers but to a state diseased.

Saul. Silence, thou fool!

Fon. And greater fool being wise.

Saul. David will take the crown from off thy head.

Fon. Then will he crown my head with greater glory,
For such a friend hath no man; and I joy
To think that he will some day reign in Israel,
And that my service shall bestead him: perchance
As captain of his host, his generalissimo.
But if he shall assign some lesser place,
Then will I serve him just as loyally,
So that I serve him, matters it not where!

Saul. If David chooseth captains such as thou,
He is not like to reign so long in Israel.
What says my Michal?

Mich. Father, take back that taunt,
For I am heart and soul with Jonathan,
And truer son than David Saul hath none.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Saul. (to Abner). David appears to have more friends than I,

And fashion'd from these loins;

I have bred these children but to poison me

With their envenom'd, fulsome praise of David.

(To Michal) Almost had I forgot thy base, thy gross Ingratitude, thou child of the rebellious woman!

And now thou must add impudence to deceit.

I'll teach thee manners ere thou go'st to bed:

(To Phaltiel) Phaltiel, you long desired my daughter's hand:

If that she still doth please you, she is yours;

Take her, with all her manifold sweet vices,

And cherish her, but see you keep her far

From this same David.

Phalt. My day has come at last.

Mich. Would God it were my last!

[Exit Michal sobbing, Phaltiel follows her.]

Enter Attendant.

Attend. My lord, some men of Judah beg an audience.

Saul. Bid them attend.

Enter Ziphites (they prostrate themselves).

What would you, men of Judah?

First Ziph. My lord, we bring you news of him you sought

But lately thro' the wilderness of Ziph,

And drove past tarn and quarry: he is now

In hiding in the forest of Hachilah.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Saul. Enough. (*To Abner*) Abner, call all my men together,
And we will see if we may snare him there;
This time I shall not spare him! [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE V.—*The Hill of Hachilah. Night. Saul and his men asleep in their encampment. David and Abishai seen dimly groping their way amid the slumbering host.*

Abish. (*in a low voice*). My lord, here lies the king wrapt in deep slumber,
God hath deliver'd him into thy hands!
(*Raising his spear*) Let me strike home; he shall not stir again.

David (*staying his arm*). Nay, Abishai, I cannot hold him guiltless,

Who would so use the Lord's anointed! God
In His own time and way will punish him:
He will avenge me on mine adversary.

Take now the cruse that stands beside his pillow.

[*David himself uproots Saul's spear.*]

These tokens will suffice. We must away:
Faint glimmerings shoot up from the underworld,
And dawn is near.

[*As they move off the dawn broadens, and several of the sleeping soldiers awake. David and Abishai are next seen on the other side of a ravine, from which David hails Abner.*]

David. Abner, thou valiant chief, why sleepest thou?
Are day dreams pleasanter than duty? Abner!
Abner!

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

To his own hurt: and those, my slanderers,
Dare not to speak the thing that they affirm,
Except as slanderers behind my back,
For they are many who would do me wrong.
How long, O king, how long must I endure it?
For if my punishment is of the Lord,
May He accept my offering, and forgive
My trespass; but if of man, avenge me
On him, O God! and that right speedily,
For my soul is nigh to death.

Saul. David, my son,
I have sinn'd, sinn'd grievously against thee:
I have believed things which I knew were false,
Believed, because I wish'd to so believe,
Believed, because I hoped to find thee evil.
But now I know thou art my trusted son,
That guile or wickedness are not of thee,
But an exceeding goodness and great mercy.
Return, and I will no more seek thy life.
Come back to me, my son, for I have err'd——

David (raising his hand). 'Tis common! men oftener take
their friends for foes,

Than recognise a foeman in a friend.
Let now the king send one of his young men,
To fetch his spear and cruse, and may the Lord
Render to each his righteousness: for as
Thy soul was this day precious in my sight,
So may the soul of David find redemption,
Even in the eyes of the Great Judge of all.

Saul. Blesséd be thou, blesséd be thou my son!

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

For as in the beginning thou didst prevail,
So to the end shalt thou be still victorious.
Thou wilt do great things, for God is with thee.

[Exeunt.]

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*Ziglag. At the entrance of the city.*

Enter David, High Priest, Captains and Officers.

David. What news of Saul? Is there no messenger?
When last we heard the king was hastening north
To expel the invading host encamp'd at Shunem,
And with him all the might of Israel.
The prize—the lovely vale of Esdraëlon,
The key to the trade and commerce of the north,
The highway to the south: Philistia's Lords
Have long set wistful eyes upon this pass,
And now with all the force they can command,
With lines of glittering chariots, horse and foot,
They do await Saul's battle, firm and composed.
If he engage them in the open plain
Israel is lost: valour will not avail
Against the savage onset of their horse,
The roar and rattle of their flaming cars
That like a whirlwind sweep the floor of earth,
And leave but wrack and ruin in their path.
Whatever men Saul might to these oppose,
The heathen scythes would cut and mow them
down,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

And shock them in close sheaves upon the morrow.
But, back'd by their own inhospitable hills,
The Tribes may prove a more than equal match
For all Philistia's craft and skill in war,
And given a leader . . . but, alas, they have none !
For Saul is headstrong, rash, impetuous,
And Jonathan too easily o'er-borne
In council, tho' strenuous in action :
Abner a shuttle-cock between these two.
My mind forebodeth ill—

Enter Messenger.

Mess. News, news, my lord, news !
[*Prostrating himself.*

The armies of Israel are scatter'd : Saul
And his sons are slain.

David. How knowst thou this ?

Mess. My lord,

When the king saw the battle was against him
And that his sons were slain, himself sore-stricken,
He call'd to him that bore his shield to slay him.
But he,—whether from love or fear, I know not,—
Forebore, and whilst I waited, Saul raised himself
Upon his arm, even upon the pivot
Of his thigh, and cried aloud, “if there be
Any near, or friend or foe, let him draw nigh
And ease me of my mortal agony.”
Then, seeing the dreadful nature of his wounds,
And out of pity for a dying man,
I did for him the office of a friend.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

And scarcely had the last breath left his body,
When that proud man, who had stood by unmoved,
Immovable!—his erstwhile armour-bearer,—
Stepping astride the massy, sinuous trunk,
Fell heavily on the point of his own sword,
Refusing to outlive his royal master.

David. And Jonathan, how fared he thro' the battle?

Mess. He was the first to fall, tho' not before
A dozen wounds had bit thro' hose and doublet:
He fought as one who reck'd not of his life,
Exposed himself most freely, and where he swept
The battle seem'd to ope and widen out
Beneath his sword, so breathless was his ire.
And when at last they bore him from the field,
Fainting from loss of blood, he made as tho',
Between returning pangs of consciousness,
He would have spoke, but as often did his lips
Refuse their office, mutely articulate,
Until upon one long and labour'd sigh,
He breath'd thy name and died.

David (overcome). O, my brother,
Dearer than life wert thou!

(*To Messenger*) What is thy name?

Mess. I am a stranger, an Amalekite;
And hither have I brought Saul's crown and bracelet,
Stript from his person. [*Presenting them.*]

David (in anger). Base slave, settest thou these
As the price of a king slain? and dar'st thou
To face me with the tokens of thy guilt
Warm in thine hand? thou art, indeed, a stranger!

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Craftily hast thou spoken and with colour,
But,—that all men may know 'tis no light thing
To lay fell hands upon a heaven-crown'd king,—
I do deliver thee now to instant death.
Thou stand'st adjudged by thine own traitorous
breath.

(*To Officer*) Go near and fall upon him.

[*Officer strikes him down.*]

(*To High Priest*) Make this a day of solemn
supplication :

A day of prayer and fasting. To-morrow
We must to Hebron, to reunite the Tribes.

[*David then takes his tunic in both hands and
rends it ; next, turning to the people, he
intones :*]

Saul, Saul is dead. Saul and Jonathan—
The heroes of war are no more :
O Israel, where are now thy hosts,
Scatter'd and strewn upon Mount Gilboa ?
Wail with the sound of loud lamentation,
For Saul is dead,

The bravest of the brave lies slain.

[*The people take up the refrain, and chant it
after him as they retire.*]

[*Exeunt.*]

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

SCENE II.—*Hebron. An open space.*

A full muster of the Tribe of Judah.

*Enter David, Captains, Officers, Elders, and Chief Men
of the Tribe.*

First Eld. Most valiant prince, most venerable councilors,

And you thick-sinew'd sons of mighty Judah !
If to the privilege of age be added
Devotion to the people and the law,
Then to none must I yield priority,
Who can look down upon the oldest here
As still a child in knowledge. For amongst you
Who is there that remembers that awful night
When the first messenger arrived from Aphek,
And the old man Eli fell backward from his seat,
On hearing that the Ark of God was taken,
And that his sons were slain; when thirty thousand
Of our countrymen chose death before defeat,
And when the westering sun threw back the glare
Of Shiloh, that dear city of our rest,
Rising in fire and flare and flame to God?
Those scenes were burnt into my boyish brain,
And thro' the long years of manhood I beheld
The heathen tyranny, the alien yoke,
The iron heel of pagan persecution:
Our young men taken but for menial tasks,
Our maidens oft defiled without redress,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

The nation stripp'd to the bare means of sustenance;
Even the blunt tools of husbandry snatch'd
From our hands at nightfall, to be hammer'd
On anvils no longer ours, by hands not ours,
Lest we, incited by the glowing forge,
And mindful of our multitudinous wrongs,
Might shape them into implements of war.
Year after year we ate the bread of servitude,
Salted with bitter tears, until Jehovah,
Hearkening at length to the long voice of prayer,
Sent Samuel to our succour. . . .
Under that princely judge, that noble law-giver,
Israel regain'd her strength, and the Great God
Directing all her councils, she went forth
Fear'd and respected as of yore. Happy
Had she retain'd that governance divine!
But Pride, that erst o'erthrew, again constrain'd her,
Until she begg'd in tears an earthly ruler—
One that should be the glory of her strength,
The symbol of her manhood. God gave her
Then her wish
And in that ruler is she now abased,
Her glory lies with his on Mount Gilboa!
And yet our first of rulers was a king
Fashion'd to the height and measure of our hearts,
With many fair, endearing qualities.
But he is dead; and, with his dauntless sons,
Is past our cognizance: he is gone from us,
And we must choose betimes one in his place,
For we are brought to no uncertain pass.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

First, then, your choice must be for a tried leader,
To guide you down the perilous paths of war;
Next for a righteous judge and prudent ruler;
And last,—tho' highest attribute of all,—
One on whom Jehovah's favour rests, for
Unless the Lord doth lead, vain is the setting forth.
One man alone unites these qualities:
The son of Jesse,—I do submit him
To you with all confidence,—whom Samuel
Did appoint even in the life of Saul.

[*Vociferous applause.*]

Foab. Compatriots of Judah! you have all heard
The speech that flow'd like honey from the lips
Of our august and honour'd countryman.
To that I can add little, but that little
I am prepared to back with my good sword.
Blunt am I of speech, but my weapon's edge
Hath never been left to rust from like disuse,
And with that I shall be happy to make good
My liege's claim to the chieftainship of Judah.
Nor do I think there is who will dispute
His right, or who disputing it, can hold
His ground for a day. I am for King David,
And those with me will follow him to the death.

(*Raising his sword*) Long live King David!

Tribesmen (with loud acclaim). King David! King David!

[*The partisans of Foab shouting, "Foab and
David! Foab and David!"*]

Ahitophel (as President of the Council).

I understand the people are resolved

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

To have the son of Jesse for their king.
Nevertheless, it is most right, seemly,
And befitting, that we proceed on lines
Of precedent, that nothing may be lacking
To confirm our purpose, or prejudice
The king's election. Wherefore, men of Judah,
I put it to you, one and severally:
Will ye the son of Jesse for your king?
And ye shall answer me by a show of swords.

[*The tribesmen flourish their swords and shout,*
"King David! King David!"

Ahit. Will ye swear fealty to King David?

Tribesmen (together).

We will.

Ahit. Let the son of Jesse stand forth before
The people!

[*David steps forward amid shouts of
loud acclamation.*

Ahit. Most dread and potent prince, art thou prepared
To take the solemn vows of kingship? to rule
Well and nobly, according to the best
That thy heart knoweth, submitting thy will
At all times unto Jehovah? to strive
Not for thine own but for thy people's good,
Diligent and faithful to the great charge
Entrusted to thee? Wilt thou keep alive
The true religion? Wilt thou respect the law,
Altho' thou art above the law, guarding it
As the true fountain of the nation's life?
Wilt thou redeem thy word wherever given,
That men may know there is a king in Judah?

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Wilt thou abide by these ?

David. All these will I observe, justly and rightly,
According to the best that in me is;
And hereby make my solemn attestation—
To uphold the law, and make my people's will
My own.

Ahit. Then David, son of Jesse, I declare thee,
By grace of God, the chosen of this people:
I commit thee to the hands of the High Priest,
That as thou first receivedst the holy oil
From Samuel, God's true servant, so thou shalt,
Even at the hands of his successor,
Be 'stablished and confirm'd in royalty.
The Lord prosper thee now and ever!

All the People.

Amen!

[*David kneels to the High Priest, who
anoints his head with oil.*]

H. Priest. Rise up, King David, blesséd of the Lord.
This day hath He appointed thee to rule,
And be the guardian of His people Judah.
Firm in the faith, and valiant for the right,
Go forth, nor fear the issue of that battle
That thou must ever wage against thyself:
For mask'd within lurks man's worst enemy—
The stubborn will, the oft-unguarded heart,
The ear that lulls its votary to sleep
Upon the giddy heights of crown'd ambition,
These are the foes most perilous to princes!
Therefore take heed, and place thy kingly heart
In His most holy keeping.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

My prayer shall rise for thee both night and day,
The prayer of all thy people shall uphold thee,
God bless, and guard, and guide thee to His rest.

David. Most gentle potentate, and priest of God,
And you dread lieges of the tribe of Judah!
The dignity that you have call'd me to,
Together with your loud acclaim as king,
O'erwhelm me. Too sudden, too unexpected,
Has the call to Duty come! Did I not
Feel the stern necessity of the times,
And your compelling trust, I could not stem
This sovereign grief, that bears so heavily
Upon my soul, for him who was to me
Far more than brother; with whom, and for whom,
United in one common bond of love,
I had hoped in after times to rule this land.
For Samuel took me in my youth aside,
And told me I should reign, but i' my dreams I said—
With Jonathan: we two shall reign together—
God hath disposed it otherwise, and all
Must bow to His high ruling! *Men* are we,
And, tho' the loss of those we love unman us
For days or weeks—for weeks, aye even years,
Must brace our hearts, and put our trust in Him.
For consider—
Saul brought upon himself his own destruction,
For jealousy and hate grew in his heart
Like noisome weeds, until his nobler self
Lay choked and smother'd: then straightway putting
off

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

The kingly nature, he abused his trust,
Fell foul of all true feeling, fled his soul,
And so by devious shifts came to his doom.
Yet lay not at his door our great defeat,
For the just God will not let one man's sin
Carry so far, or for one grievous fault
Afflict so many. We must look within,
For the offence is even in our hearts—
We have denied our Maker, set up idols
Of selfwill, and follow'd our own pleasure,
Even to the bloody steep of Mount Gilboa!

[*Murmurs of applause.*

And so we pay the reckoning, even with the loss
Of those, the bravest of our friends; aye, worse—
The stinging, vile disgrace of routed men,
And all the nameless horrors bred of war.
For nations have to learn humility
By such dire chastening. Let us return to God,
And that which we in our poor wisdom deem
Irreparable loss, may be the means hereafter
Of strengthening us in fibre and in soul.

[*He is interrupted by loud shouts of*
"Long live King David!"

(*Pointing skywards*) High in the heavens
Our star of destiny is set! Follow we it,
Or leave we it to another? . . . And now,
Thanks be to God, these mountain fastnesses
Have saved our tribe: Judah alone remains
Unbroken, undivided, unavenged!

[*Tumultuous applause.*

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Then let her be the centre of our strength,
Until the might of Israel gather round her,
And we, the invaded, become in turn the invaders,
Driving our ancient enemies before us,
And setting up one God, and that Jehovah,
From the great river even unto the great sea.

[*Wild enthusiasm.*

(*To Abishai*) Throw out our standard, Abishai,
And let the fiery summons speed forthwith
From tribe to tribe, until remotest Dan
Have heard our battle cry, and Asher know
We will not let the heathen sit in peace
Upon his spoils.

(*To Asahel*) My speedy Asahel,
Bear to the men of Jabesh Gilead greeting,
And tell them we would have them near our person,
With quick preferment unto each, according
To his quality: for that they did inter
Saul's body, were faithful to the fallen,
Such men are beyond all price.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.—*The Hill of Zion. Dawn.*

Enter Bathshua.

Bath. Dawn! the still, gray dawn, and in the fitful
East

The tender presage of another day:

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

A day so big with promise! One after one
The starry sentinels have changed their guard,
Their furthest pickets withdrawn. Silently,
To short occasional flutings from small birds,
The morn arrays herself. . . . Soon will the sun
Gild roof and dome and minaret with fire,
And hasten on the hour of our rejoicing.
This was no night for sleep! but to receive
From the sweet, tender stars a spiritual grace,
A holy benediction, that shall prepare
The soul for this high festival, for to-day
The Ark of the Covenant returns, to be
The glory of this hill for evermore.
From Ephratah in the south even to the steeps
Of woody Lebanon the tribes have heard,
And all the land shall break in song. To-day
I shall set eyes upon the king: think, to-day!
God grant me a full sight of his full face,
That by it I may live another year,
And learn to endure in silence. O my father,
Why didst thou force this hateful marriage on me!
What have I in common with this Hittite?
My nature revolts against his nature,
My body against his body! I had
Much rather be trodden beneath his feet
Than take his kiss, and now I must submit
To him in all things: O my God, I cannot!
Give me but one further day's respite—one day
For pity! To-morrow I may nerve myself
To meet his amorous clutch: to-morrow

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

I shall be stronger, more content. . . . To-day!
[*A smile breaking over her face.*]

Let me not sully it by remembering *him!*
O my prince, my king,
To-day is thine with every thought of it!
Thro' the long watches of this silent night
Our prayers have risen together; even now
The same glad beams are springing in thy heart
As mine. O, one in soul and spirit, come!
Lead me to the sure haven of thy rest.

[*Music heard in the distance.*]

Hark! like the sound of a distant sea, or
The beat and thud of the surf on some lonely
shore,

Comes the tramp of men: hark! for I hear
The shriller-sounding pipes, faintly and far,
And the tinkling clash of cymbal and castanet, . . .
And now the voices of the multitude,
Pealing and swelling thro' the vale of Hinnom.
Hush, hold, my heart; break not for sudden joy!
With hidden music must thou now be mute.

[*Bathshua retires.*]

[*The voices grow louder as the dawn broadens,
and the procession is seen slowly winding its
way up the Hill of Zion, until it comes into
position before the gates of the citadel.*]

ORDER OF PROCESSION.

Mighty warriors (*blowing silver trumpets*).
The two High Priests (*in their ceremonial robes*).

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Seven Trumpets.

The Ark (*borne on staves by Levites*).

King David.

Priests and Levites.

Princes and Rulers of Judah and Benjamin.

Princes and Rulers of the more northerly tribes.

*As the Ark comes into full view of the citadel,
the Priests and Levites take up the
following chant :*

*“ Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered :
Let them also that hate Him flee before Him.*

*“ Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest,
Thou, and the Ark of Thy strength.*

*“ Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness ;
And let Thy saints shout for joy.*

*“ For the Lord hath chosen Zion ;
He hath desired it for His habitation.”*

High Priest (standing before the ramparts).

*“ Lift up your heads, O ye gates ;
Be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors :
That the King of Glory may come in.”*

The Warder of the citadel (from the ramparts).

“ Who is this King of Glory ? ”

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

High Priest.

“ *Jehovah, strong and mighty;
Jehovah, mighty in battle.*”

*The gates are thrown open, and the procession
enters, the Levitical choirs chanting:*

“ *Lift up your heads, O ye gates,
Be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors ;
And the King of Glory shall come in.
Who is this King of Glory ?
The Lord of Hosts,
He is the King of Glory.*”

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.—*Before the Palace.*

*Enter from one side, King David and his officers, returning
from placing the Ark on Zion ; and, from the other,
Michal and her attendants.*

David. Comest thou out, dear wife, as Miriam came,
With timbrels and great rejoicing, after
That fateful passage thro' the dread Red Sea,
What time the waters of the embattled deep
Stood for a wall against our enemies ?
Or, like that peerless maid, Jephthah's fair daughter,
With the proud light of victory in her eyes,
And unrestrained joy upon her cheeks,
To greet her sire's return ? For, verily,
God hath been gracious unto me this day,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Who of His infinite goodness hath vouchsafed
This great and joyous privilege, this happy lot
Of bearing to its rest the sacred Ark.
There in the midst of Zion is it set,
Like a jewel amongst the hills ! to be
For evermore the glory of this people,
The loadstar of our race.

Mich. When thou hast finish'd,
I, too, have somewhat I would say to thee.

David. What ! dost thou mock me, Michal ? This—thy
welcome ?

Mich. Thou didst behave like a fool before the people,
And dost expect a welcome, a royal welcome ?
Whom shall we welcome then—the King, the Priest,
or

The Baalite ? for like a giddy goatherd
Didst thou dance before the Ark, making thyself
Vile in the sight of all who saw thee: thou
Didst shame me this day to my handmaidens,
Thou didst pollute the robes of the High Priest,
Thou didst desecrate this great day of festival,
And, for a king, thou didst conduct thyself
In most unkingly fashion. Despicable
Thou wert, indeed ! and now, thou wishest welcome ?
Truly we welcome thee, David the bibulous !

David. Silence!
Profane no more thy lips with such foul speech,
Thy heart with such sad jesting. Woman ! thou'st
dishonour'd
Thyself unto all time, dishonouring

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Thy husband—nay more, thou hast dishonour'd God!
Of Him shalt thou ask forgiveness: for me,
I can but grieve to think that one whose head
Hath lain so close to my heart, could so belie
My love for her. Get thee far from my sight.
Barren as is thy heart, e'en so shall be thy womb!
Yet know, before thou goest, that of these
Same handmaidens shall I be held in honour,
For my dancing was before the Lord Most High—
Yea, I will make myself ten times more vile,
If so I may pay homage to Jehovah.
Alas, that the blood of Saul must out—even
In thee!

Mich. Shame me no more.

The king has done with me: long live the king!

[*Exeunt all except David.*]

David. Such's the wife that I have loved! she can no
more

Reciprocate this heart than the cold moon.
And yet, I have believed myself supremely
Blest in her affections. Beyond the flesh
She hath no wider range of possibilities.
Sometimes, methinks, a handclasp might suffice
For more than she can give, for in the touch
Of kindred souls is peace and satisfaction.
I have loved often as men love, but never
As I deem that I could love, were I united
To one, my spiritual counterpart,
Who could unlock this heart with a golden
key,—

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

The key of love: a smile, a touch, or a tear,—
Till it o'erflow'd with rubies. Only to-day,
As the Ark of the Covenant ascended
The sacred hill—that hour long hoped and pray'd
for!—

I caught for a moment the eyes of a face
In the crowd, and my heart stood suddenly still,
And then beat high, with a rapturous beat
That clamour'd above the din of the cymbals
That led the choir: it seem'd like a recognition!
Somebody understood that mood at least,
And a mist came over my eyes, and I dreamt,
As we pass'd, that I had been face to face
With an infinite bliss, and the thirst of
My soul was suaged. Those eyes! those dear, dark
eyes

Are haunting me still: pray God I may find
Them at last! but of that I am sure, as I
Am of the grace, and the joy, and the light,
And the fulness, and favour, of this day
In a million years.

[*Exit.*

SCENE V.—*The Gardens of the Palace illuminated.*

Enter group of Revellers.

First Rev. The king hath done us, as a king should—
right royally! I have had such a supper, as should

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

sleep me into the new moon, if I am able to recognise the slim wench, when she appears. Why, for such wine as this (*drinks*), it were a sin not to see the old lady, — young lady, begging her pardon, — double: dub her with the honours of a matron, and look over her sleekness, her slimness, her slender horn; she's a saucy one too! changing her smiles every month, just like the rest of her sex — fickle, false, and flirtatious. (*Catching sight of one of the girls mocking him*) O thou little, cozening trickster! the more I see of thee —

First Maid. O fie! who are you asking to see more of?

First Rev. Well, let me think, who was I asking to see more of? Ah, I remember, I was squililocising with the moon.

First Maid (laughing). Fancy squililo — What do you call it? — squililo-cising with the moon.

First Rev. Soquililocising, wench, soquililocising.

First Maid. Soliloquising, you old stupid!

First Rev. That's just what I said: squi-squililocising.

First Maid. I should try and sneeze it out next time.

First Rev. As if I couldn't pronounce a five-legged word after a few cups!

First Maid. Five-footed you mean, precious.

[*Patting him on the cheek.*]

First Rev. Well, a leg's a foot, isn't it?

First Maid. I don't know what's a foot; but all legs are not a foot, you know!

First Rev. You know more than I do: you are too deep for me, wench.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

First Maid. Come away, then, lest you drown yourself in the bottle.

[*Drags him after her.*

[*Exeunt Maid and Reveller.*

Sec. Rev. Come, Simon, thou wert going to give us the King's dance.

Simon. Ay, it was a fine step 'a taught us. 'A knows how to fling his legs about, does the King! I think, after another cup (*drinks*), I might hit the step.

Sec. Rev. Thou art as like to hit the step with thy head as with thy feet, if thou goest on drinking.

Simon. 'Tis necessary to put one's head into one's feet to dance well: thou wouldst never make a good dancer, for thou hast not brains enough.

Sec. Rev. I have enough to make thee dance anyway.

[*Strikes him.*

Simon. That 's not brains, that 's coercion, that is—force, without brains.

Sec. Rev. Thou art too forceful with thy brains. Thou hadst better remove that force into thy feet, or——

[*Threatening him.*

[*Simon thereupon commences a wild dance, flourishing his wine cup in his right hand, and mimicking the king's performance before the Ark. In the midst of the dance Uriah enters.*

Uriah. What folly is this? Is this how you repay

Our royal master's hospitality?

Have at you then, you drunken vagabonds!

[*Strikes them.*

Hell-spawn! Gutter-loafers! Breeders of mischief!

Ill-visaged, foul, and utterly contemptible!

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Were it not that the times are mutinous,
I'd have you at the rack, you scurvy knaves!
(*Scattering them*) Away! and sleep the fumes from
out your heads,
And think that you have got a cheap dismissal.

[*Excunt Revellers.*

Uriah. Thus are our finer actions oft translated
By meaner minds, and all our nobler uses
Turn'd awry. What boots it, then, to think nobly,
If the thinking bring such pain? Have I not striven,
In service of a like nobility,
To wean my wife from fanciful dreams of love
To love's reality? Have not I spared
Her pink and tender flesh from the abrasion
Of my manhood, whilst the fierce blood surged back
Upon my brain in overwhelming spate?
And why?
For is she not my true and lawful wife?
And am I not entitled, as of right,
To take her, and use her to mine own ends?
But could I hope to win her love that way?
No, ten thousand piteous, painful, curséd noes!
I have given all to win that pearl her heart,
That precious jewel set in a sea so blue,
It ravisheth my sense to think of it.
Bah!
I will surround her with yet further proofs
Of my devotion, cut from my body
If needs be—the solder'd scars of courage—
Such deeds as make men covetous! and if

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

She give me not full love for love, then must
I strangle her, or stifle in my love.

[*Clutching his throat. Exit.*]

Enter Bathshua and Nurse.

Bath. Oh, nurse, this married life grows still more bitter,
And never seem'd it bitterer than to-day.
I feel that I must kill myself outright,
If he demand from me his perfect right—
This body: so far I have escapéd that!
But, oh, each day his breath grows hotter, and
I fear him: oh, how I fear him!

Nurse. Nay, child,
Talk not so wildly; he may be summon'd
To the wars: a thousand chances lie betwixt
You—and to-morrow! To-night you can claim
Fatigue, to-morrow——

Bath. Ah, I remember!
There 's whisper of invasion: the Philistines
Our ancient foes are up, taking advantage
Of the king's absorbing piety. Perhaps——
(*catching sight of Uriah advancing towards them*)
Nay, nurse, I cannot.

Nurse. Nerve yourself to meet him, child;
It may be the last time you will need to.

Bathshua (*putting her hand to her heart*). My God, how
it hurts!

Nurse. Be brave.

Enter Uriah.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Uriah. What, Bathshua!
And I have search'd for you for this half hour.
[*Takes her hand.*]

Hast heard the news?

Bath. Nay, I have heard nothing.

Uriah. The Gibborim
Are call'd out, and to-morrow we leave for Gath.
They say the king accompanies the army.
But, whether he does or not, it will go hard
With them. The ever-watchful Joab was
Apprised of this, almost before their thought
Had ripen'd into action, and so we march
As men girt on with victory! I shall
Gain honours, Bathshua, or leave my body
Where heaves the highest pyramid of the slain.
The honours are for you, my child, my queen;
But if it should please God that I should fall,
Then deem my death but a part of my devotion,
For I died to win your love, so long denied me!

Bath. You are a brave man.

Uriah. All men are brave in love:
I could be braver for one little word;
Tell me that I shall win to love at last.
[*She lifts her face to his to be kissed.*
Silence, perhaps, speaks most! (*reverently kissing it*).
I shall return. [*She shudders.*
You feel the cold: (*drawing her cloak about her*)
the night is treacherous.

Bath. Ah, not more treacherous than I!

Uriah. My love, I know how hard it is for you,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

To bear with one so rough as I—much less
To love him: ah, but I could be tender,
Bathshua!

Bath. I know it, Uriah: therefore
Do I say that I am treacherous. You
Deserve much better: I am not worthy
Of you.

Uriah. Ah, no: you are too good, too holy!
I could wish you were less saint—more womanly.
[*Trumpet heard.*
Duty and Death, Honour and Victory!
Hark! . . . It is my country that calls for me!
I must away: bid me God speed.

Bath. God speed, Uriah.

Uriah. Child, kiss me on my lips, that if I die
I may send back your kiss with my last breath,
Loyal I shall be to you—even to death.
[*She raises her lips to his to be kissed.*
Ah God, one more: so sweet, so pure, so true!
[*Breaking away from her.*

God keep you, Bathshua!

Bath. And you, Uriah!
[*Excunt.*

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*A Room in the Palace.*

King David rising as from sleep.

Enter Ahitophel (bearing a cup of wine).

Ahit. I trust I did not break upon your sleep.

David. I did but doze, Ahitophel, I cannot
Sleep. The face I saw in the procession
Haunts me ever!

Ahit. If the king could but describe
The face?

David. Ah, that were difficult, my friend :
Poet as I am, I could not hope to fashion
Out of mere words her perfect semblance; yet,
Peradventure my poor speech might help thee
To a knowledge of her, I will recount
All that a momentary glance might seize
Of her exceeding beauty. First then : her hair,
Wound like a diadem of rare device,
Was wreath'd in glittering coils about her head
Showing the perfect oval of her face,
From which there shone two eyes, bright as the ocean
When the moonlight hath steel'd the waters and
They shimmer like silver, and on the marge

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Two tiny isles of bliss— her perfect ears ;
A forehead round, yet smooth and womanly,
And spaced about with finely pencill'd brows;
A mouth that arch'd to sweetness—the lower lip
Hung like a clustering peach warm i' the sun,
Yet ripe with delicious fulness ! the whole
Converging to the downiest dimpled chin
That the soft kiss of love e'er lighted on.
I tell thee, man, that every sense grew faint
At sight of workmanship so exquisite :
And now the thought of her doth drive me mad,
For fear fruition may not crown my joy.

[*Strolling towards the window and drawing
back the curtain.*

Ahit. (*aside*). It well describes her.

David. Didst speak ?

Ahit. No, my lord.

My lord's description somewhat overshot her ?

David. In no way (*appearing engrossed*). Whose house
is that, Ahitophel,

That lies buttress'd against my palace wall,
Whose fair rose-garden this window overlooks ?

Ahit. It doth belong, my lord, to Uriah,
The Hittite, who lately hath espoused
The daughter of my son Eliam.

David. Is she
Beautiful ?

Ahit. She is reported so, my lord,
Altho' for me it is scarce fitting to
Pronounce upon her looks.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

David. Hath he . . . a great
Affection for her ?

Ahit. (aside). A most strange question!
(*To the King*) They say he dotes on her : worships
the ground

She treads upon : cannot contain himself
An hour out of her sight : follows her glance
Like a hungry wolf: is jealous without cause—

David. In fact, he is her lover! [*King leaves the window.*]

Ahit. Assuredly,
For is he not her husband ?

David. The window
From which thou survey'st the world, Ahitophel,
Is surely narrow !

Ahit. My lord, there are things
In the world that one would rather not see :
At such times *a narrow window* promotes
The happiness of all within the house.

David. I shall remember that, Ahitophel
It may well suit me that thy view should be
So limited: I had always thought thee
Too observant!—that thy window was ever
Open to the broad faults of the world. But,
Concerning this same relative of thine,
Canst bring her to me, for I am desirous
To put her beauty to the test ? I have
Been sad too long, disconsolate I might say:
Perhaps this lady——

Ahit. My lord, O king, I trust
You do but jest.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

David. Provoke me not, old fool, too far!
Is not the honour of a king worth more
Than all the ransom'd beauty of the world?

Ahit. With deep misgiving do I now obey you.

David. Obey, that is sufficient.

Ahit. (aside). A king's honour!

[*Exit Ahitophel chuckling to himself.*]

A king's honour! A king's honour!

David (taking up the cup and returning to the window).

What miracle of grace! Look how she holds herself!

Her vesture falling round her like soft clouds
Reveals a fleckless heaven of unsunn'd bliss!
See now she turns!—her bosom's broad expanse
Glow to the light, and all her snowy waist
Lies bare!

O what a covert for close-lidded sleep!
What browsing pastures lie between her breasts!
And what ambrosial shelter 'neath her hair!
Her potency enthralles me: I must possess!
Possess her, whilst this ruddy riot lasts,
And youth's mad fever burns along my veins.
(*Holding up cup*) Drown, Virtue, drown! Thou art
but a jaded hag,

I'll hug thy heart no more! Give me free love—
The love that comes like this in purple flashes!
Full of new life, and hope (*drinks*), and manly
vigour,

Not cloy'd with dull satiety and custom,
But burning, breathless, pulsing to its goal!

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

(*Cautiously*) But soft! there is much need for circumspection—

Is she not a wife? I must walk warily
To make possession sure. Some women are won
By assault, but most by undermining—
The gradual encroachment day by day,
Until the much-prized stronghold yields at last
To man's persistence, imperceptibly—
The city captured e'er they know 'tis threaten'd!
If it be true—this royal woman mine;
O wine of Love! I drink thee to the lees.

[*Drains cup.*]

Re-enter Ahitophel (leading Bathshua closely veiled).

David (to Ahit.). Leave us, good friend. [*Ahitophel hesitates.*]

Didst thou not hear me? leave us!

Ahit. My lord, you compromise my daughter's honour.

David. Thy grand-daughter's!

Ahit. Be it so, my lord.

David. Ah well,

Ahitophel, we like not forcéd sweets:
The daughter of Eliam has a voice,
And she shall answer thee. If 'tis her wish,
Reluctantly we shall release her. (*To Bath.*) Speak,
'Thou hast nothing to fear!

Bath. Thine handmaid hath
No wish but to obey my lord, the king.

Ahit. Child,
Thou know'st not what a net thou draw'st about thee:
Consider well thine answer!

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Bath. I have consider'd thro' long nights and days :
There is none like the king, none!
Whatever hap may come to me from him,
I will endure it gladly.

David. Art thou content ?

Ahit. I needs must be.

David. Then, if thou lov'st thy daughter,
See that none come upon us unawares ;
Thy head shall answer for the slightest breath,
Aspersing her fair fame. [*Exit Ahitophel.*]

(*The king draws closer to Bathshua.*)

Bath. What would my lord ?

David. First, that thou shouldst unveil.
[*As she unveils the king recognises his
lady of the procession.*]

My God!

Bath. Hath the light pierc'd thee also ?

David. Aye,
The shaft of God hath sped : thou and I . . . have met,
Nothing will ever be the same again.
I have look'd for thee thro' the years, I beheld
Thee once for a second. . . . And now our lips
Have spoken ! Nothing more is to be known—
Only this (*taking her hand*) : I love thee!

Bath. So fast, my lord, O king ! And I—have I
No voice ? Think ! I am the wife of another,
As brave and fearless as thou, perhaps
As loving ! Why, thou dost not even know
My name ?

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

David. Thy name! There is no single word
That could describe thee! No group of words;
for thou

Art faultless ; whilst words are never without flaw,
Being at the best but halt and lame interpreters.

Thy name—I'll think upon't! Dream sweetly,
[*Drawing her closer.*

Between kiss and kiss, what best becomes thee!

For, of the flowers, I would make question,—

Whether the lily or the rose, the jasmine

Or the hyacinth doth most resemble thee ;

And, of the stars,—

Those precious, glistening jewels of the sky!—

Whether the violet-tinted amethyst,

Or the bright and iridescent opal,

Is match for those dark eyes ; or, for a symbol

Of thy heart,—whether the blood-red ruby, or

The purple jacinth (*gazing into her eyes*) breathes a
deeper passion.

Thy name! why should we wait for that? we were
named

Before we were born, we were born for this—

To meet, to cling, to kiss.

[*Strives to embrace her ; she struggles
with him and then yields.*

Bath. Ah God! I cannot resist thee. I know

Thou art my fate : I know that apart from thee

I have no desire to live.

[*Putting her arms round his neck,
and looking into his eyes.*

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

But thou—canst thou

Be true?

David. Truthfully; till this minute I could not;
Where that will-o'-the-wisp—a woman's luring
smile—

Led on to love! But now—

Bath. Yes, yes; but now?

David. Now, my beloved, I know that the truth (*stroking
her forehead*)

Is more beautiful, and loving beauty,
I do most earnestly desire to be true.
Never, until this hour, have I believed
That love could last—survive the kiss of passion:
Love for one only I have laugh'd to scorn!
But now all things seem changed, and most of all
myself—

From the first moment when our glances met,
When I first saw those eyes, within the crowd,
Glint fire of recognition, soul to soul,
I knew what 'twas to love! . . .

For art thou not my own, my very own,
Born to me from the commencement of all time,
And are we not the complement of each other?
Art thou, indeed, not she for whom I have sigh'd
Thro' the dim and shadowy years, mocking
At love that came not? (*folding her in his arms*)

Breathe it upon my lips,
If *our* love hath not grown to fuller stature
Thro' these passionate years of waiting. So (*kisses
her*).

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Bath. (breaking away). Thy mouth! thy mouth! it hath
undone me: nay, for

I was undone, as thou hast said, of old time;
From the first moment that I saw thy face
I knew I loved thee; but long, long before that
I loved the beautiful spirit of the king—
The soul of David! Thou hast taught me, beloved,
To love all that I love: thro' thy dear eyes
Have I look'd out upon the world, and found
It wonderful:

And now thou wouldst fall off from thy great self,
And do this evil upon thine handmaid,
Since what am I to resist thee? . . . For my husband,
That fiery Hittite who was forced upon me,—
I care not. For myself, what should I care,
Loving thee—loving thee far, far beyond all fear?
But, for the soul of David,—O, my lord, pause!
Thou wilt think differently to-morrow.

David (seizing her). To-morrow shall never come, and
thou and I

Be *as we are now* to one another!

Thou shalt be my wife, I swear it! Nor Heaven
nor Hell

Shall keep thee from me! Thou shalt not deny
me!

This step shall be irrevocable for both!

Bath. O David, David! (*sinking in his arms*)

The stars are going out: I faint: I fail (*swoons*).

[*The King carries her to an inner room.*

[*Exit King and Bathshua.*

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Enter Ahitophel.

Ahit. (*turning over the cup*). To the dregs! So he hath taken the bait.

Henceforth he is my servant: not I his.
Well, well, power is always a pleasant thing,
Especially when one exercises it
Over one's former master! I have much
To repay: he shall have it in his own coin.
Now that he hath his finger in the pocket
Of my treasure, I must have mine in his:
Pure gold, doubtless, he'll find it,—he's lucky!—
No mixture of a baser metal there,
'Tis all his own to use it as he likes,
No counterfeit presentment! and the first,
I' faith, will bear his superscription—after that
No man durst vouch, save he that had the making,
And he not on his oath! But I must draw
The noose yet tighter, or he'll escape me—
Monarchs, like men, have oft a slippery way
Of finding scapegoats for their own misdeeds.
This I must prevent! He must e'en answer
For his own sins, not *I* for him: so here's
To stir up a mutiny, or at least
A show of one!

[Exit Ahitophel.]

Re-enter David.

David. My God, what have I done! a hound-like thing!
A thing that calls out "Shame!" from the four walls:

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Shame on my manhood, shame on my sense of right,
Shame on the honour of the woman that bores me,
Shame on the honour of the woman I love,
Shame on all womankind—no reverence there!
Her trust and faith in me alike misplaced,
I am a thing too foul to think upon!
And what have I gain'd? say, rather, what have I
lost!

For the spirit's loss outweighs the body's gain,
Shaking the tender scales of love and honour
With clangorous overpoise. What satisfaction,
Now that my passion hath fulfill'd itself?
Only the blacken'd embers of desire—
Two charr'd and wasted lives!

[Sinks on a seat with his head between his hands.]

SCENE II.—*The same. David reading.*

Enter Ahitophel.

Ahit. My lord,

The palace is in a state of ferment:
As thou didst feast thine eyes on a dumb show,
Even so did the servants of Uriah
Upon a living one—thou wert o'erlook'd,
Even as thou thyself didst overlook.
And now there's mischief i' the wind! Moreover,
She did leave thy presence in full flood of tears,
And hath, in spite of many sweet remonstrances,
Refus'd all fellowship. Such's the way of women:

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

They weep at that which they enjoy the most;
They love to chew the cud of their own thoughts,
And ruminatè in tears.

David. Proceed more tersely,
We want not the philosophy of love,
But facts—plain facts, Ahitophel!

Ahit. The tongue of slander,
At all times lolling forth in the fresh air,
To taint the breeze with its infectious breath,
Grown surfeited on such a rich repast,
And dropping venom from its neighbouring fangs,
Hath pierc'd the triple armour of thy throne,
And craves a victim.

[*Murmurs of disaffection are heard without.*

Hark, the serpent hisses!
Now must we supply the thing with food, or
Perish.

David. Perish, then, thou and thy cowardice!
What care I for the rabble! call out the guards!
But, first, secure her safety: haste thee now!
Convey her by the subway to the palace.

[*Exit Ahitophel.*

So soon upon my pleasure! comes it so soon!
The illusion first, and then the disenchantment;
The brief delight, and then the bitter pain;
The dream of bliss, and then the rude awakening;
For all the joys we aim at are but shadows—
Our life an unsubstantial, airy pageant,
Our destination to believe it real,
And our sad doom to people it with phantoms!

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

[*The disturbance increases.*]

So this, then, is the penalty of Greatness!
One step beyond the boundaries of prudence,—
And who, indeed, in love is always prudent?—
And the whole hell-swarm is fast upon me,
As thick as wolves and ravening for their prey.
Hypocrites!
I'll show them their own faces in the glass:
Not one of them but had done as I have done,
Given the all-hallow'd opportunity!
For who, of men, is free from this same taint,
The subjectivity to womankind,—
A glance, a smile, and their doom's already spun.
Away then fear! I'll brazen it to the last.

Re-enter Ahitophel.

Ahit. My lord, the guards scarce hold their own! The
people

Are mad with rage: we must devise some means
To quiet them. (*Aside*) It works almost too well.

David. Hast thou secured her?

Ahit. She is even now
Upon her way, in the hands o' the secret guard,
Who will use every means to effect her safety.

David. Until I hear her footfall in the palace,
Talk not to me of safety!

[*Shouts become momentarily more menacing.*]

Let them rave!

To Ahit.) Fulfil thy mission, and that speedily,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Or, by God! (*rising in wrath*) I'll fling thy corpse
out to the mob.

'Tis thou shalt quiet them!

Ahit. (*aside*). He's almost in my power: I can endure it.
[*Exit Ahitophel.*]

David. The dog! 'Tis a slant eye: I like it not.
But treachery will out, and so will he,
If I can fasten it on him. Participators
In crimes like this are safer out of the way:
I'll have no witness of my guilt; I'll not
Commit that folly!

Re-enter Ahitophel.

Ahit. My lord, she is without
And but awaits your pleasure.

David. Admit her.
[*Ahitophel ushers in Bathshua: as she
enters, the King walks towards her
and takes her by both hands.*]

Now can I breathe! Whilst thou wert threaten'd,
A torturing terror held me. Now I am free,
To think, to act; to act, to greatly dare,
To venture all, if needs be, for thy sake!
Now am I ten times myself! (*To Ahit.*) Have you
a plan,
Most crafty councillor, that shall convince
The mob of our much-injured innocence?

Bath. (*smiling happily*). Arch-hypocrite! Arch-deceiver!

Ahit. A plan. The time for planning is gone by:

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

The proof might seem a little less convincing
Than the remedy!

David. What remedy hast thou then?

Ahit. Thou hast but one: 'tis set forth there.

[*Hands him scroll.*]

David (reading aloud). To Joab, captain of the king's forces before Rabbah: "*Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.*"

So thou
Wouldst remedy one ill, by setting up
Another?

Ahit. The usual course—in nature.

David. The worsen evil counteract the lesser?

Ahit. Say rather,

The lesser evil counteract the greater:
It surely were a less calamity
That one should perish, than that this whole realm
Should be subvert with mutiny?

David. Convincing

To a mind like thine, but I want further proof.

[*A noise as of crashing timber: the porch of the palace is wrecked, and some of the trellis-work flung into the apartment, followed by a hail of sticks and stones. Some of the guard are driven in, but recover themselves.*]

Ahit. (pointing to debris). Thou hast it—in abundance!

Doth my lord
Remember the Mosaic law, and the death

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

That follows those taken in adultery?
Her blood will soon bespatter thy palace walls,
Unless——

Bath. (entreatingly). Spare not me, my lord! my life is
thine;

I should not fear to die—if at thy hands.
My body then would satisfy these wolves.

(*Ecstatically*) I have lived: I have loved: it is enough.

David (holding her fast). No, not to die—to live! to live
and love,

And grow more fond with every fleeting hour;
New vistas of delight are opening up

Thro' these same lurid and portentous skies—

(*Pointing skywards*) See, see, the blue: how it ex-
pands for us!

There, somewhere, shall we reach our isles of bliss,
And sun our souls by the violet-tinted sea.

To die! why, child, we have but begun to live!

To live—and oh, the difference in living!

[*Another ugly rush is made, but is
overcome by the guard.*]

Ahit. My lord, my lord, this is no time for love!

David. What then, old gray-beard, fear'st thou for thy
skin?

All times are happy, if we count them so;
And death is nothing when the heart is light:
A broken sunbeam—that is all!

(*To Bathshua*) Fear not,
I have won thro' more dangers and distress
Than any that the murmurous multitude

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Can hastily contrive for my undoing.
I shall o'ercome them.

[*Bathshua nestles to him fearlessly.*

Ahit. Thou must take action then,

Or let the occasion slip.

David (indicating scroll). How will this help us ?

Ahit. Thus: I will give out that a grave reverse
Hath befallen our arms before Rabbah,
And that Uriah is amongst the slain:
That will take the sting——

David. They'll not believe it,
No messenger hath approach'd the city.

Ahit. My lord, one came this morning: him have I
Held up with all his news unpromulgate.

David. That messenger hath a tongue!

Ahit. Fear not that:
Him also will I curtail of speech, after
He hath served our purpose.

David. Thou art a devil,
Ahitophel—a very prince of devils!

Ahit. My lord is a good judge—of devils. (*Presenting
scroll*) Will

My lord sign ?

Bath. (*snatching it from Ahit.*) Not his life! Ah, no—
not that!

David (seizing her by the wrists and looking into her eyes).

He stands between us! Our love's at stake!

[*Undoes her fingers and takes scroll from her:
she gazes wildly about her, and then falls.*

Seven years elapse between Acts IV. and V.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*Jerusalem: Hall of Audience in King David's Palace. Hour, twilight. Bathshua lulling her little son to sleep.*

Bath. (singing).

Darkness steals o'er hill and valley,
In the heavens one pale star shines,
Whilst the nightjar's murmurous music
Breathes the magic of the pines.
Sleep: sleep: in happy slumbers blest,
For silence broods upon a world at rest.

Enter King David.

David. How is my little son?

Bath. (raising her arm in warning). Hush-sh-sh!

[*The King goes towards them and gazes fondly at the child.*

Bath. (in a low voice). He has been somewhat petulant
of late,

And will not sleep unless I send him off.

His nurse can carry him in.

David. Nay, let me take

That office for this once: I will not wake him.

Bath. He was so wishful to sit up, and see

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

The stars come out; but this warm eve hath been
Too much for him. He is a little poet,
David, just pushing out small shoots of knowledge.
Some day you will be proud of him.

David. Proud of him!

I *am* proud of him! Never was father
Prouder of his son, than I am of this one.
I tell you, wife, I am so proud of him
That, if it should please God to take him from me,—
[*Stooping over him and kissing his forehead.*]

Bath. Why speak so alarmingly? He is firm
And well-knit for his years: why should you then
Be anxious?

David. Are we not always anxious
About those we love? Is it not thro' these
That God doth plague us?
I never knew what 'twas to love a child
Till I loved this one. Look how boisterously
He doth reciprocate my love for him!
He is a bit of my own passionate self:
Young as he is, he understands his father;
And is he not our child—our firstborn?
[*Taking her hand and kissing it.*]

Bath. He is

The dearest pledge that ever yet was given
In love (*warmly embracing David*).

David. (*offering to lift the child*). Shall I?

Bath. Nay, love, let him sleep on:
I like to keep you both beside me thus (*seating David
beside her*):

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

My two most precious, dearest, earthly ties.

David. Dear wife (*taking her hands in his and smoothing them affectionately*).

Thou hast been all in the world to me of late.
Without thy sympathy and love I could not
Have endured. Thou knowest what I have
suffer'd—

What we together suffer'd . . .

God knows: but He will not redeem my soul:
Thro' all these years I have not heard His voice,
Neither in the quiet of the noontide,
Nor when the North Wind,
Stealing into my chamber from the fields
Of starry space, strikes the chords of my harp,
Awakening the silent strings to tremulous life . . .

. . . Often it sang me to sleep
To the murmur of wind music; oftener
It spoke to my soul of God, and the night
Was hallow'd, and the day came all too soon.

[David rises.]

But those beloved communings are past,
I am as one given over to the dead,
A spirit restless in the land of shadows.
Bathshua, will He never forgive? Art thou
More just than God, for thou hast forgiven? Ah,
no!

It cannot be: for He whom I have loved
Is above all a just and jealous God—
An ever-present, ever-loving Father,
Whose watchful eyes are over all the world,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Seeing all things, shaping all things, sustaining all things;

Of mercy infinite, and of love so vast
That all our boundaries of love must stretch,
And break, ere they embrace its fulness. There-
fore,

In death alone may we know all His love
For us, and comprehend His goodness. Such
Is the God whom I have loved. Such was not
The God our fathers taught us to revere—
The stern and implacable God of the wilderness,
The God of Sinai, of the thunder and the
storm! . . .

(With palms uplifted) O voice of God, speaking
within and around me,

Only to know Thou speakest is enough!

Speak! speak! for thy servant listeneth, O Lord.

*[Falling into a half-kneeling posture,
he commences to sob bitterly.]*

Bath. *(putting her hand on his head)*. My husband! God
will reveal Himself to thee,

If thou be patient but for a little:

He knows thy sorrow.

David. Nay, love, it is no use:

I have not paid the price of sin—bloodguiltiness

Is on my soul, and He will not redeem it.

Unless—ah, no, I dare not think of that!

Bath. Of what?

David. Too well I know my punishment. Is it

Not ever before me? A life for a life—

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

'Tis thy life or the child's—my son, my little son,
Or thee!—Ah, no, I will not give thee up,
Not while these hands can follow thee to the tomb!

[*Indicating self-murder.*]

I will cheat God at least of that despair,
For in that moment when thou diest, I die.

Bath. My life is of less value than the child's:
Thou canst get other wives—more beautiful,
More pleasing; but not another son like *this*.

David. Thy life is my life: thy death my death. But I
Would die before thee, for thou dost not love
As I love thee!

Bath. (*caressingly*). Foolish one,
Dost think I do not love thee unto death?—
What were the world to me without thy love?
But thou—thou judgest God, even before
He hath judged thee. Who knows, if these same
fears

Be not the children of distemper'd dreams,
And that to-morrow's sun will not disperse them,
As lightly as the vapoury mists of morning!

David. He hath already judged me:
His silence is my judgment! the more awful
In that I cannot pray as I was wont.

O wife,
Thou canst not know how desolate I am!
Leave us awhile, I would beseech God for him,
For him, for thee, but most of all for myself,
If He may take this heavy burden from me.

[*Exit Bathshua.*]

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

David kneels at the couch where his son is sleeping, and, leaning lightly over his body, utters the following prayer:—

*“Have mercy upon me, O God, according
to Thy loving kindness:*

*“Hide Thy face from my sins,
And blot out all mine iniquities.*

*“For I acknowledge my transgressions:
And my sin is ever before me.*

*“Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in Thy sight.*

*“Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me.*

*“Cast me not away from Thy presence;
And take not Thy Holy Spirit from me!”*

SCENE II.—*The Same.*

King David, sitting in judgment. Bathshua seated on his right: his left hand resting on the shoulders of his little son. Lords and councillors in attendance. A prisoner is brought forward, bound hand and foot, and thrown upon his knees before the King.

David. What is the charge?

Ahit. One of plotting against your royal life.

David. What evidence have you of this?

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Ahit. The testimony of this woman, supported by
Most damning, gross particulars. Moreover,
The fellow doth not deny the accusation.

David (to prisoner). Know you the serious nature of the
charge

That is preferr'd against you ?

Pris. I do, my lord.

David. And that, if proven, your life is forfeit ?

Pris. I am content—to die.

David. Have you nothing
To urge in your defence ?

Pris. Nothing, my lord.

David (aside). And yet, methinks, he looks not like a
traitor.

(*To the Prince*) Dost think that man would take thy
father's life ?

[*The little prince steps down from the throne, and,
placing a hand on either shoulder of the prisoner,
looks him with childlike frankness in the face.*]

Prince. No, father, he is a good man; I am sure
He is a good man.

(*Going over to the woman and looking up into her face.*)
Are you a good woman ?

Woman. Child, what a foolish question! Of course I am:
Why shouldst thou think I am not ?

Prince. I don't like you.

Woman (laughing uneasily). A child's whim! (*Viciously*)
And who appointed thee my judge ?

David. No one hath judged thee—unless it be thyself.
But I am very much of the same mind

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

As my small son. (*To officer*) Release him.

[*Prisoner is unbound.*]

(*To prisoner*) Now wilt tell me
Why thou refusedst to defend thyself
On this grave count?

Pris. My Lord, to have done so,
Would have been to call the woman I once loved
A liar: the knowledge of her treachery
Was heart-break enough and to spare. Why death,
'Tis a paltry thing, an easy remedy!
But hapless, hopeless, ever-hungering love
Is a burden that bites deeper every year!
And if I now defend myself, it is because
The little prince, thy son, hath won my heart:
God bless him!—his frank blue eyes have probed
the wound,
And drawn the deadly poison from my hurt.
Might I but serve him, I would serve him well.
I am no traitor, King!

David. Needest thou not
To declare it: thy face hath spoken for thee.
And, for we never know 'mid the stress of life
When requisition may be made upon
The loyalty of our subjects, we do appoint thee
The keeper and custodian of our son.

*Prince (running up and putting his hand into that of the
prisoner's).* I am so glad! I am so glad!

David (to woman). For thee,
Thou thing cloth'd on in the flesh of woman,
No punishment could suffice for thy deserts:

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

(*To guards*) Take her, and shut her from the light
of day.

[*Exit guard with woman.*]

Enter Officer.

Off. My lord, the prophet Nathan is without,
And begs an audience.

David. Bid him enter.

Nathan enters and does obeisance.

David. Seer of the living God, uprising! thy message?

Nath. My lord, O King!

I ask for judgment. It hath ever been
The privilege of the sacred college,
Whose mouthpiece and messenger I am this day,
To bring to the knowledge of our lord the King,—
The noble head of our theocracy,—
Cases of grievous wrong, that his reproof
May carry thro' the land, and be a warning
To evil doers. The facts I shall relate,
Grave as they did appear unto my Order,
Immured in lives of holy meditation,
Will, we are convinced, strike an echoing chord
Of indignation in the heart of the King,
And set for a mark and seal upon all time
His justice and his judgment.

David. Nathan, speak on.

Nath. There were two men, dwellers in one city:
The one rich, the other poor. And the rich man
had

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Of flocks and herds, of wine, and oil, and treasure,
Exceeding great abundance.
But the poor man, when all his wealth was told,
Had little that he might call his own, save
One ewe lamb that he had bought and cherish'd,
That grew up together with his children,
And that was to him more as a daughter,
Eating of his own morsel and drinking
From his own cup. . . . And there came a traveller
To him that had such plenitude of riches,
And ask'd of him a stranger's entertainment.
But he, who had been bless'd with such increase,
Loath to diminish by a single head
His own vast droves of sheep or fallow kine,
Pass'd quickly by; and hastily took and slew
The poor man's one ewe lamb, and set it dress'd
Before the wayfarer.

*David (rising in indignation). The man that hath done
This thing shall surely die.*

Nathan (pointing at David). Thou art the man!

*[The King falls back upon his seat, crushed; his left
hand supporting his head, his right clutching at
the arm of the throne, and he remains in this
attitude, whilst Nathan pronounces sentence.*

*" Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee
king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the
hand of Saul;*

*" And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's
wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of*

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

“ Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

“ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised Me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.

“ Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour.

“ For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.”

David. I have sinn'd against the Lord.

Nathan (raising his arm).

The Lord also

Hath put away thy sin: for He hath heard

The voice of thy supplication, and knoweth

The sorrow and contrition of thy heart.

Therefore, and for this, hath He spared thy soul:

But, because thou hast given great occasion

To the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme,

The son that hath been born to thee—the child

*Of thy adulterous commerce (*pointing at the Prince*).*

he shall

Most surely die.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

[*Bathshua puts her hands silently into those of the King. As he realises the full force of the blow, the King's head falls on his breast.*

David (in a broken voice). It is enough: my cup is full.
Prince (seeking the King's face). Father!

SCENE III.—*A Room in the Palace.*

The little prince laid out for burial. Bathshua prostrate beside the body.

Bath. (in abandonment of grief). My son, my little son;
give me him back;
O God, give me him back!

Enter David (from an inner room with the signs of mourning still upon him).

David. The child is dead:
Put away thy grief for it is barren;
Whilst he yet lived there was hope, and I besought
God for him; now that he is dead, he is beyond
The aid of our prayers—he is with God; leave him.
We shall go to him, he will not return to us.

Bath. (despairingly). My son, my son!
(*With tearful entreaty*) O leave me with my sorrow:
I cannot put it away so lightly.

David. So thy trust in God is not complete! Rise, wife,
For thou canst not add one tittle to his comfort:
He is at peace.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Bath. Let me but look on him a little longer,
He was so fair!

David. Think of him as he was!
Now that the spirit hath fled, it is but clay
Thou worshippest.

Bath. It is all that remains
To us—all save a memory! and soon
This dear, cold body will have pass'd from sight.

David. 'Tis better so, for thou wilt grieve the less.
Come (*trying to lead her away*).

Bath. Not while these eyes may look on him, these
hands

Still tend him, these ears await his whispers;

For see he sleeps, he sleeps so peacefully!

One could be almost certain that he breathes,

So surely doth the blanchéd coverlet heave!

It cannot be that death hath claim'd him yet,

He was so beautiful, so lovable!

Ah, but he is mine!—mine more than ever now!

Too soon they will take him from me! O my lord,

I am a woman and a mother— [Breaks down.

David. True:

Thou art a woman, and canst find relief

In tears—men find them unavailing. (*Laying his
hand upon her head*) Weep on:

Somewhere, unseen, thy child is gathering up

The priceless, precious jewels that are falling,

Like star on star in the ocean, and his eyes

Are moist with unshed tears, as the angels' are. . . .

Never doubt, love, but that the day will come

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

When thou wilt look on this heart-searching sorrow
But as a landmark in God's love for thee!

Bath. Thy heart, O my King (*kissing the King's hand*) is
perfect: would I had

But a tithe of thy assurance! then might I

Uplift the front and forehead of my grief,

Strive to forget, and build life up anew.

I can but walk in the ways that I have known,

For I am but a weak and all-too-loving woman,

And do depend most utterly upon

Thine all-sustaining faith. Thank God for thee!

David. Thank God *for our love for one another!*

That will uphold us now that he is gone:

[*Smoothing the child's brow.*

So when the storm at last hath spent itself,

And thou canst look thro' these same winnowing
cloudrifts

To the clear and open spaces of the sky,

Come, and place thy hand in mine; and we will

Fare forth again together, the closelier knit

Because of this deep sacrament of love.

[*Kisses the forehead of the dead child
and withdraws.*

Bathshua prays over the dead child:—

Father of life, of light, of love,

In Whose vast arms the world endures,

Pour down Thy blessing from above —

The peace that faith alone secures.

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

O let the waters flow again —
The fountain of my grief upspring!
For all life's sands are parch'd with pain,
And desolate the heart I bring!

Remove, O Lord, the sense of guilt,
The bitter memories amass'd.
Thou canst give sevenfold, if Thou wilt,
The treasure that seem'd unsurpass'd!

But of all treasures — this, the most—
O keep me first in David's heart!
For without him my life is lost:
Let not his joy in me depart.

And with his love, dear God, restore
The spirit that hath left this clay:
Into another vessel pour
The life, the light, that was our day!

Enter Nathan.

Nath. (approaching Bathshua unobserved, and touching her upon the shoulder). Comfort thee, Bathshua!

The Lord hath heard thy prayer, and thou shalt have

Yet another son, fashion'd like unto this:

And he shall be belovéd of the Lord,

The hope and joy of thy declining years.

And thou shalt call his name "Solomon," for

The peace, which was withholden in our time,

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Shall last throughout his reign: to him 'tis given
To build a sanctuary to the Lord Most High—
Even the temple which King David plann'd,
And had in mind to execute, but to whom
It is inhibited to lay one stone
Upon another, because of his great sin,
And for the innocent blood that hath been shed.
Yet, so high-minded is our lord the King,
He will come thro' this trial, if I mistake not,
Greater in soul and purpose, for he will
Strengthen the hands of his more honour'd son,
And thus prepare the way for that vast tabernacle—
To David the conception and design,
To Solomon the honour and the glory! . . .
As for thee, O Queen, thou hast been blest as wife,
And still more blesséd shalt thou be as mother,—
Thro' thee shall spring a line of mighty kings,
And mightiest He that is the lowliest born! . . .
What solace and support thy heart can give
Thy husband will have need of, for 'tis written—
King David's reign shall set in clouds and gloom.

[*Exit Nathan.*]

Bath. (sorrowfully). It is the voice of the Lord that hath
spoken!

I am content.

[*Re-enter David, having put off the signs of
mourning. As he approaches, Bathshua
runs to meet him and flings both arms
around his neck.*]

DAVID AND BATHSHUA

Bath. My king, my lord!

No sorrow can endure whilst I have you—
You are all my joy, my earthly happiness!
Unspeakable as was my love for him,
It is no measure of my love for you,
For he was but a fragment of yourself,
You were the source from whence that blessing
sprung.

Lavish your love upon me then once more,
And let the whisper of another life
Make music thro' the channels of my heart,
And run in tender rivulets full of hope,
On, on, to the vast ocean of our being . . .
For God hath promised me another son,
And thro' our love shall David's line continue.

David. Hath Nathan, then, been to thee?

Bath. He hath, my lord,
And this sad heart doth sing aloud for joy,
For truly God hath forgiven.

David (lifting up his hands in prayer). He hath heard
Thy prayer, O my soul! the years of thy travail
Are at an end. (*Then embracing Bathshua*)

And thou, O queenly heart!
As thou'st endured thro' all my years of anguish,
So shalt thou be partaker of my joy—
This blessed joy of reunion under God.
And His hands shall guide us, His peace enfold us
Until we know Him as He truly is.

[*Curtain.*]

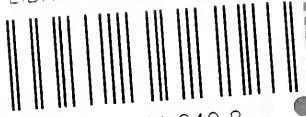
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