

These ravings rather of a maniac mind,—
Speak quick, and end my wonder.

Hatach. Great queen, forgive the humblest of thy
slaves,

By whom the pangs of death were far less feared,
Than angry word or darkening frown of thine.

I have but told the message of my king
Brought hither by his servants, who now wait
In anxious hope an audience to obtain
Of thee, their queen, touching their lord's behest.

Vashti. Most strange! Most wonderful!
I comprehend it not! I dream, methinks!
Go, Hatach, summon quick the chamberlains,
And I will meet them in the mirrored hall,
Where the bright fountain with its lulling sound
May cool my fevered blood. [Exit Hatach.]

Unto the banquet hall, he said,
Ye gods, forbid it! shame and pride forbid!
A woman's shame! a woman's queenly pride!
A queen, said I? Ay; yes, by right of birth,
Of high, unmixed descent,—for the same tide,
The rich and crimson tide of royal blood,
Which warmed the heart of Cyrus, my great sire,
Flows also through my veins, a taintless stream,
Pure as its fount,—and never shall his shade,
Where high enthroned in glorious heaven it sits,
Stooping to gaze from his abode of bliss
On the low scenes of earth, have cause to mourn
That Vashti was his daughter. [Exit Queen.]

SCENE III.—*A marble hall, lined with mirrors.—A fountain playing in the centre.—Vashti reclining on a pile of cushions,—behind her stand two female attendants.—Harbona and Zethar enter, conducted by Hatach, and prostrate themselves before the queen.*

Vashti. Rise, lords! your homage vain I ask not
now,—
But wait impatient, while you brief disclose
The message which you bring; for rumor strange
Has falsified, fain would I so believe,
Its purport to my ear.