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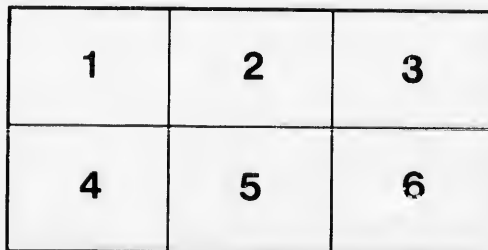
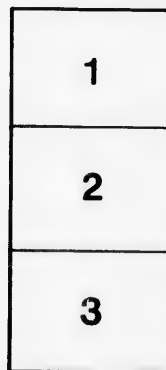
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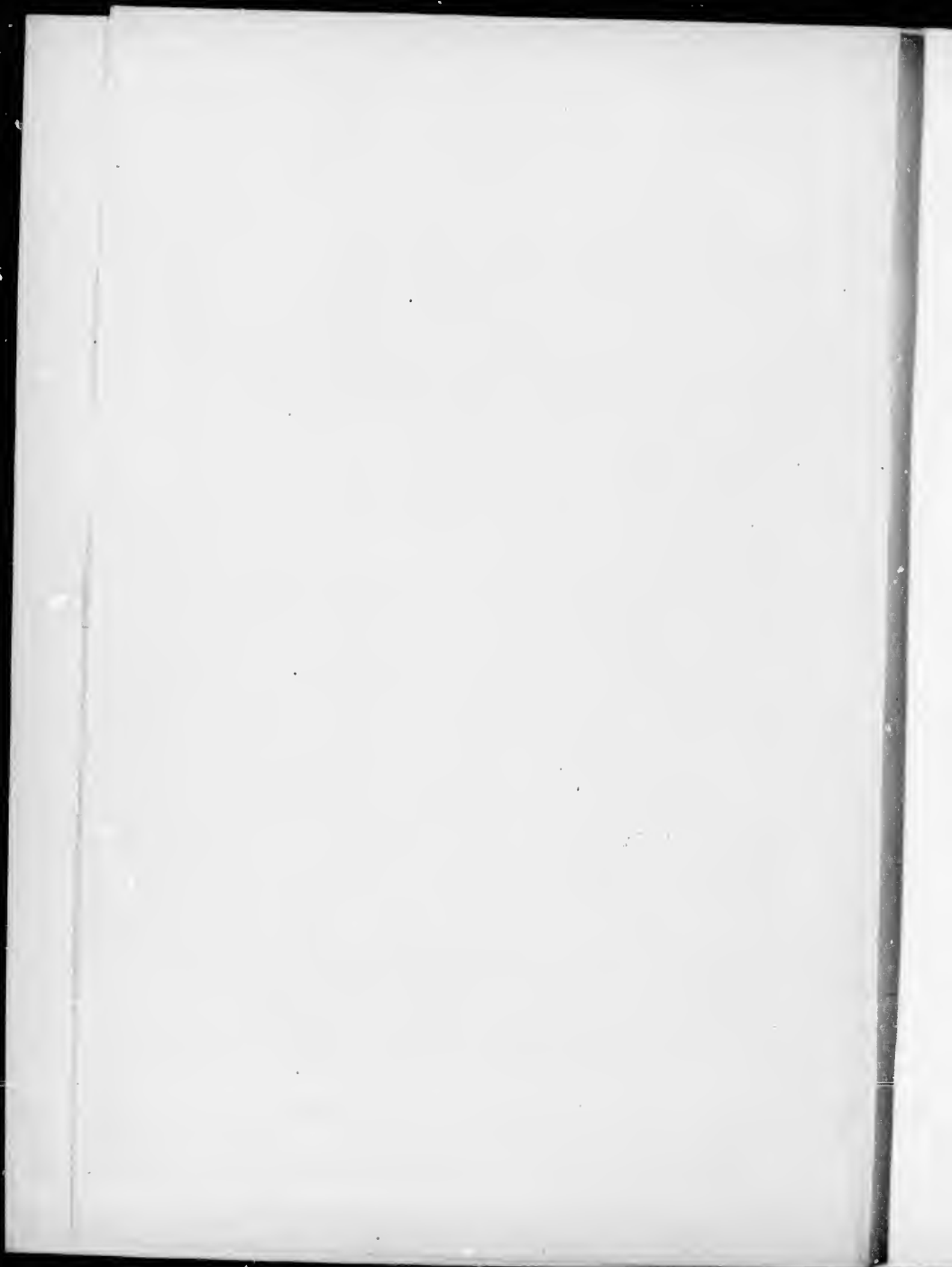
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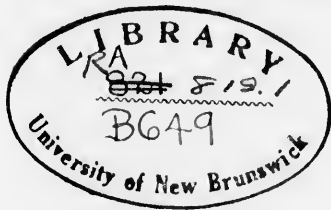
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*Elizabeth Anne Odell*  
T H E C L A : *from*  
A Drama. *The Author.*

17295

BY  
HENRY BLISS.



WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,  
14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;  
AND  
20, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.

1866.

LONDON :  
PRINTED BY C. ROWORTH AND SONS,  
BELL YARD, TEMPLE BAR.

## PROLOGUE.

---

Once more ye forked hills, ye fabled nine,  
And glades and fountains, still in verse divine,  
A votary comes, where others reap, to glean,  
And fill his hand with blossoms else unseen,  
And twine once more a garland for your cell,  
And hymn thanksgiving and a last farewell.  
This task alone remains. My space is spanned ;  
And time has touched my forehead with his brand ;  
And life's illusions, summer birds, have fled :  
First, youth and love their pinions heavenward spread ;  
Then passed the flowers of theatre and feast ;  
Ambition faded next, and laughter ceased ;  
And now health threatens flight, and with it, worse !  
The charm of beauty's power, and charm of verse.

Peace to the rest ! But how from thee to part,  
Spirit of song, whose shrine is in my heart ?



Thou, who hast cheered a life's laborious years,  
My joys ennobled, chased away my tears,  
My passions purified, my tastes refined,  
And raised my morals, and enlarged my mind.  
As oft beneath sea-beaten cliffs we met,  
To eye the west when summer's sun was set,  
And vivid clouds were varying hue and shape,  
And ocean glowed as tinted of the grape :  
Or met at morn in by-paths on the down,  
Ere toil with smoke o'ercanopied the town :  
Or met in midnight volumes all thine own,  
Or the thronged playhouse, still with thee alone.  
Thee, heaven-descended on the noonday's wings,  
Each valley welcomed, thee the woods and springs,  
Thee the bleak headlands, thee the glassy brine  
Exulting hailed, and mixed their voice with thine—  
Soft winds and conscious skies returned the call,  
And the whole world's great presence throbb'd  
through all.

In which ere merged I pass away from time,  
Be still propitious, and inspire the rhyme,

PROLOGUE.

v

That fain would catch some concords of the blest  
In hope's new song, whose echoes woke the west,  
When, fraught with tidings told by tongues that  
burned,

Strangers of Rome from Pentecost returned,  
Heralds of peace—how beautiful their feet  
On Alba's mountain and the Appian street!  
Where Zion's angel met the muse of Greece,  
And joined in anthems never more to cease.

Bear me back thither, and recall the time  
False gods gan tremble, and a voice sublime  
Preached to the world "The promised star has shined:  
"The gates of heaven are free to all mankind.  
"Peace and goodwill salute you from above:  
"Be pure and live for ever—God is love."  
What answered Rome? How mused the matron  
grave?

What said the sage? the senator? the slave?  
When seed was sown o'er earth, and hidden teemed  
To change earth's aspect, while her children dreamed.

As twilight dawns on objects half defined,  
Thick fancies throng the vistas of my mind :  
Scenes from the shade emerge, with legends rife,  
And characters, as statues, start to life :  
Their histories transpire, their fates impend,  
Their passions kindle, principles contend,  
Arms glisten, voices plead for right or wrong—  
And lo ! a mystery and a myth in song.



THECLA:

A Drama.

PERSONS.

---

NERO.

HELIUS.

GALBA.

SENECA.

STATILIA.

THECLA.

A DWARF.

CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS. CHORUS OF PAGANS.

SOLDIERS, PRETORIAN, AND LEGIONARY.

POPULACE. SLAVES.

# THECLA.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

STATILIA. THECLA.

STATILIA.

Hence !

THECLA.

I am innocent !

STATILIA.

The quicker hence !

This palace has no place for innocence  
But prison, or a tomb.

THECLA.

'Tis all I want.

B

*J*

THECLA.

STATILIA.

Worse waits thee.

THECLA.

I am wretched.

STATILIA.

Wretch, avaunt !

There's misery here enough without thee. Fly !

THECLA.

Pity me ! Spare me ! Hear a suppliant's cry !  
Thou, whose regards are hailed as morning's birth,  
Consort of Cæsar, arbitress of earth,  
In whom all nature's gifts and fortune's shine,  
Oh harden not your heart to wrongs like mine.  
Wrongs—what has fortune fairer than the might  
Or nature nobler than the will to right ?

STATILIA.

Wrongs, and a slave ?

THECLA.

Nor therefore wronged the less.

ACT I. SCENE I.

3

STATILIA.

Even so? Alas! What wrongs can I redress?

THECLA.

If the fair fane those shapely shafts surround,  
If one bright column with acanthus crowned  
Some riot would deface or rite profane,  
Could the mute stones for rescue plead in vain?

STATILIA.

A poor bird fluttering toward the serpent's fangs.

THECLA.

Its spires infold me, and its gorge o'erhangs.  
And this beast preys on soul and body both.  
Woe for the spirit, pure awhile and loath,  
But closed in corporal ties it dares not sever,  
Till by the carrion's taint corrupt for ever.

STATILIA.

(This heart attests it! What can tears avail?)  
Who are you then, or whose?

THECLA.

A slave, for sale.

B 2



Blest be the babe exposed for wolves to meet,  
Or thieves to maim and beg with through the street ;  
Brute sense and sleep engross the sufferer's breath,  
Ignorant of better things till taught by death.  
But me cast out on Alexandria's shore,  
Me Rabbi Midian rescued, homeward bore,  
Mixed with his own, taught, cherished, till in fine  
His kin, his country and his God were mine.  
But Egypt's hated them, and envied him.  
A furious rabble tore him limb from limb.  
His house was sacked and fired, his household fled,  
And half-starved daughters bartered me for bread.  
An eunuch bought me and embarked for Rome,  
With children kidnapped from a Nubian home.  
Of manners courtly, nor of mien uncouth,  
This monger trades in human flesh and youth ;  
Gold is his idol ; and my tears and prayers  
Are heeded as a steel-trap heeds a hare's :  
He bought me for my form, with purpose fell  
Me for my form, my luckless form, to sell.  
If e'er you wearied of this world of tears,  
And sighed to pierce the planetary spheres—

## ACT I. SCENE I.

5

STATILIA.

Cease, miserable maid ! nor prate of woe,  
Whose aspect and approach is all you know.  
Come hither, learn what woman has to bear !  
In sorrow's presence stand, and listen there !  
To splendour born, in luxury I rose :  
My grandsire, the last friend Augustus chose,  
Triumphed o'er Africa, was consul twice,  
And Rome and earth long vaunted his advice.  
My modest father shunned official rods,  
And served the muse, my mother all the gods.  
Such parents pledged betimes my marriage vows ;  
Vestinus wooed and, consul, was my spouse.  
And our's seemed bliss no fate could interrupt.  
Ere the moon waned, one evening, as we supped,  
Arms and a tramp of troops alarmed our board :  
The doors burst open, snitten with a sword :  
Through trembling slaves an officer drew nigh,  
And cried " Vestinus, Cæsar bids you die,  
Ere midnight die, by any means you please,  
But I must watch them, and this leech may ease."  
Vestinus answered " Speed, while choice remains,  
Let your leech speed and open all my veins :

And when to Cæsar you report what past,  
 Give him my service and my thanks—my last.”  
 Would gods and men had sentenced me that hour  
 To share my husband’s fate, or lent the power !  
 But foes refused it and no friend could give,  
 For Cæsar’s orders came “The wife must live.”  
 What thence ensued till I was next a bride  
 Let Lethe drown and Stygian darkness hide !  
 But, veiled in purple, following song and torch,  
 With all ill omens welcomed at the porch,  
 By spectres beckoned from the door to flee,  
 Hither I came, his wife who widowed me.

THECLA.

Let me depart !

STATILIA.

Remain ! Whate’er my crime  
 ’Tis punished, witness and be warned in time !  
 Brief was my dream of majesty and power,  
 As autumn’s morn whose sunshine turns to shower,  
 As wine’s inebriate wit till reason wakes,  
 Or a child’s passion for the toy he breaks.

Ere the vogue varied for our nuptial hymn,  
Ere the bride's garland on my brow was dim,  
Though slight the change in Nero's manners spied,  
'Twas imaged in his slaves and magnified ;  
Sneers glimmered, and anon the phrase was free  
That the wife's ornaments sufficed for me.  
Thence to my opening eyes and wakening soul  
What dread, dread secrets gan this roof unroll !  
The porch is fair, with revels sculptured round,  
With golden capitals the shafts are crowned ;  
Bright arabesques embower saloon and hall ;  
Groves, cloisters, fountains, art has peopled all :  
But mid the graven groups and pictured fables,  
The crystal wine cups and the ivory tables,  
Monsters more horrible than hell's emerge,  
And fiercer fiends than furies stretch the scourge.  
The fate they threaten and the guilt they blame  
Would sear your heart, as vellum at the flame.  
To Cæsar's house ere beauty flee for life,  
Or innocence ask aid of Cæsar's wife—  
Leap from the cliff and claim a sea-nymph's care !  
Tempt Rome's arena when the wolf is there !

When winter howls tempt Tivoli's abyss,  
To death and hell tempt any way but this !

## THECLA.

Woe ! for thy port grows terrible and grand,  
As the dread Sphinx o'er shadows Egypt's sand.  
And I, frail swimmer, struggling to escape  
From torrent Nile, where river-dragons gape,  
Meet on the marge a lion from the wold.  
Yet hear, still hear ! My tale is half untold.  
Last night, with haughty step and followers four,  
A Roman, cloaked and hooded, darked our door.  
With brow far beetling o'er a serpent's eye,  
His glance passed other forms of bondage by,  
And singled mine — methought he would devour.  
I swooned. On waking, all had left the bower ;  
But horror staid behind, and urged my flight.  
I sallied to the street ere morn was bright :  
Pursued and nigh o'erta'en, with desperate pace  
I pierced the palace-gate, and baulked the chase.  
Yet still that jutty forehead, snaky glare,  
And swinish neck seem here, seem everywhere.

ACT I. SCENE I.

9

STATILIA.

Fly ! 'tis the satyr's hoof, the centaur's shape,  
The faun, half-deity half-beast : escape !  
Rome's household Pan pursues thee with a mesh,  
And Egypt's dog is clamorous for thy flesh.  
Fly ! My worst visions are fulfilled to-day.  
From Rome, from Italy, from earth away !  
Out ! to thy master's mart of vice and lust,  
Or course the streets till trampled there to dust !

THECLA.

Ah ! why so wroth ? What reason have I given ?

STATILIA.

Enough to rive thy heart, as mine is riven.

THECLA.

To heal them both, have pity on my life !

STATILIA.

Durst palter ? Out ! Am I not Caesar's wife ?  
Whose power and spirit still so far are mine,  
That slaves within need nothing but my sign,

To bind and bear thee to the torturer's cell  
Arched under earth, and wall thee in a well,  
Of hands and feet bereft, of nose and lips,  
Ears cropped, and eyes immersed in such eclipse  
The paramour, whose folly thought thee fair,  
Would doubt what animal were grovelling there.

THECLA.

Now save me, God ! the only God that saves !  
I sink, I faint—

STATILIA.

Slaves ! Hither, hither, slaves !

SCENE II.

HELIUS. STATILIA. THECLA. SLAVES.

STATILIA.

(Helius!)

SLAVES.

Command!

STATILIA.

That beggar is dismissed.

Conduct her to the street.

SLAVES.

Depart!

HELIUS.

Desist!



STATILIA.

(My dreams!)

HELIUS.

Conduct her to the imperial bowers!

Calm your deportment, pray, and pardon ours,

Statilia! Rome has oracles divine;

But in all else your pleasure shall be mine.

STATILIA.

(Vestinus!)

HELIUS.

(Send a leech! Let delicate hands

Restore and robe her!) Please you, your commands?

STATILIA.

(Great gods!)

HELIUS.

To cheer you and delight us all,

Deign grace awhile to-day the judgment hall.

There's a grand oyer: Cæsar to preside:

And the Jew, Paul of Tarsus, will be tried.

ACT I. SCENE II.

13

STATILIA.

Paul!

HELIUS.

Galba brings him; cohorts guard the lists;  
Half Rome attends; and Seneca assists.

STATILIA.

You spoke?

HELIUS.

Of something might beguile your lot,  
So you deigned listen.

STATILIA.

I detain you not.

HELIUS.

Thanks! I rejoin the imperial retinue;  
To serve you better there. Adieu!

STATILIA.

Adieu!

## SCENE III.

## STATILIA.

Nero ! how vainly hood and cloak disguise  
Thy swinish neck, pent brow and serpent's eyes.  
And Helius of those followers four was one.  
They bought the slave ; and hither she has run,  
To fill the pitfall which she thought to flee,  
And, whom she would propitiate, outrage me.  
I merit all. If any sense or care  
Can reach the dead for aught survivors bear,  
Vestinus, let these tears, these tortures claim  
Thy pardon ? no ! but pity, for my shame.

## SCENE IV.

STATILIA. SENECA.

STATILIA.

Who comes now? Seneca? Oh, come in time!  
Tell me, sweet sage, some remedy for crime?  
Is there no ransom can redeem the past?  
No school can cure remorse? Is death the last?  
Was this world made to shudder at and scoff?  
Was chance its author? Is its end far off?  
Tell me! but not in phrases trite and vain,  
That courage conquers care, and patience pain.  
Nor mock my misery with "The door is wide!  
Cheerless depart, or cheerily abide!"  
Words that, like drugs the impostor vends, may cure  
Imagined ills, but not what I endure.  
This Rome, this earth is smitten with a blight:  
Each phase grows hideous, and I loathe the light.

Nature stands shocked : the gods forsake mankind :  
Chaos returns, of morals and of mind.  
All right and wrong as erring stars are whirled,  
And undistinguished mist involves the world.  
Would I were marble in a mountain lapt,  
Rock, never axe could reach, nor art adapt  
To bear the burthen of an Emperor's dome,  
The woes of earth, and wickedness of Rome !

## SENECA.

What access now have crime and fortune shown,  
To give complaint this vehemence of tone,  
Statilia, need I ask ? we live in times  
When all things turn on fortune's power and crime's.  
Nor is the moment meet for deep discourse  
Of means to baffle crime's and fortune's force ;  
Nor are such means in sooth a moment's task.  
Ask fruit in season, your's is what you ask :  
With summer's sweets bid winter soothe your mouth,  
Bid the North yield pomegranates like the South ;  
These too are yours, but after time and toil,  
To sow seed, cleanse and renovate the soil,

ACT I. SCENE IV.

17

Guard bud and blossom in a glassy bower,  
Invite the sunbeam, counterfeit the shower,  
Till when full orbs in orange-tawny shine—  
Then enter, eat, and bless the powers divine!

STATILIA.

Bid me despair.

SENECA.

Learn rather how to hope.  
Events show man what should have been his scope.

STATILIA.

Too late. Three destinies, with gifts divine,  
Came to my birth, two friendly, one malign:  
"Be fair!" "And wise!" cried either friendly fate;  
"Too early fair!" the unfriendly, "wise too late!"

SENECA.

Still, better late than never. Hear the leech!  
His art may palliate what no cure can reach:  
Hear, too, what counsel friendship can impart,  
And tell the events that desolate your heart.

D

Events we cannot change, but can discuss,  
And mitigate the change they make in us.

## STATILIA.

In vain! The future is too well forecast,  
The present hated: but the past, the past!  
Revoke, reverse it! wash away offence,  
Bring back my peace, restore mine innocence!  
Stoic, your spirit cannot e'en divine  
What aches and gnaws incessantly in mine.  
Oh Earth and Heaven! how long is this to last?

## SENECA.

The gods themselves are powerless o'er the past.

## STATILIA.

Then I deny their godhead and contemn:  
Nor more will worship deities like them.  
Let them go revel in their starry homes;  
And leave this world to Caesar's care and Rome's.  
Why should they witness wrong they ne'er redress?  
Why claim regard of men they fail to bless?

ACT I. SCENE IV.

19

SENECA.

Statilia, stay! You wrong your own good sense,  
To blame the gods or doubt their providence.  
Oh! blest with all that womanhood can win,  
Ask of the worlds without you and within,  
How were they called from nothingness and night?  
What made, what governs all those realms of light  
Within man's mind, and all in heaven's expanse?

STATILIA.

What governs them, what made them? Change and  
    chance.  
Ye atoms! what's impossible or strange  
To chances infinite and endless change?  
And where was providence ere man had birth?  
Where, when all worlds were subjected to earth,  
All earth to Rome, and Rome to Caesar's nod?  
These walls bear witness chance alone is god,  
What else could make them seem of sacred stone,  
Or tolerate all they hide, or all they own?  
For know! not Tiber's torrent, nor the Rhine's,  
Nor all the streams of Alps and Apennines,



Nor all the cataracts that heaven can rain,  
Nor the whole deluge of the indignant main  
Could wash this palace clean of blood and sin.

CHRISTIANS *without.*

Peace to this palace! Peace to all within!

STATILIA.

What's that? Who dares apostrophise these halls  
As heaven ne'er hailed? Whose followers are they?

SENECA.

Paul's.

STATILIA.

Paul's! What has Paul to do with peace or strife?  
He comes in bonds to answer here for life?

SENECA.

But his are bonds that set his followers free;  
His, words that stir, as tempests stir the sea.

---

SCENE V.

GALBA. STATILIA. SENECA.

GALBA.

Halt! Guard the prisoner there! No trumpet's sign  
Till Spain arrive, nor orders thence but mine!  
But when Spain enters, tell it to the sun!  
Let the full choir of clarions peal as one!  
Statilia, Rome's example, Cæsar's bride,  
And Seneca, his empire's light and guide,  
Know ye what fates were yesterday fulfilled?  
Know ye whose death the best of princes willed?

Whose?

STATILIA.

GALBA.

Thrasea's.

STATILIA.

Thrasea gone?

GALBA.

Dismissed from earth,  
For crime, desecred where others saw but worth.

Rome shudders mute ; the temples are in tears ;  
And virtue seems extinct—as faction fears.

SENECA.

No sage for death or life was more prepared.

STATILIA.

But his last moments, know you how they fare ?

GALBA.

On Anio's banks by moonlight, friends among,  
The soul's immortal hope inspired his tongue ;  
When, as he closed his heaven-directed speech,  
The tribune came with soldiers and a leech,  
And Caesar's order instantly to die,  
Without adieu, or change of tone or eye,  
He seized the leech's lancet, homeward drove,  
And cried "To Jove, the liberator Jove !  
Lo, my last thanks and last libation given.  
Look, if of omen ill, avert it Heaven !  
But look, young man ! the times in which you live  
Most need of all examples this I give."

ACT I. SCENE V.

23

SENECA.

Who would have guessed his guilt? We live to learn.

GALBA.

'Twas guilt no eye but Caesar's could discern.

STATILIA.

Guilt?

SENECA.

Patience!

GALBA.

Prudence!

STATILIA.

Guilt?

SENECA.

No more about it!

STATILIA.

Whate'er his guilt—

SENECA.

'Twere dangerous now to doubt it.

GALBA.

'Twere impious too. What providence ordains  
The world accepts, and man no more arraigns.  
Only—

STATILIA.

Well?

GALBA.

Pardon me!

STATILIA.

What is't you dread?

GALBA.

Nothing.

STATILIA.

Say on!

SENECA.

Has not enough been said?

STATILIA.

Too much to hesitate here. Am I so weak?  
What is't you mean?

GALBA.

This only—

SENECA.

Galba?

STATILIA.

Speak!

GALBA.

Why this—Who next? If you are quite secure,  
Am I too old? is Seneca too pure?

STATILIA.

I have heard hints might every heart appal—  
But walls have ears.

SENECA.

Say nothing! we know all.

But when, when therefore have I entered here  
 With face less blithe, or purpose less sincere,  
 To dare or suffer as the gods devised,  
 Howe'er their earthly instrument were prized.

GALBA.

The gods my guardians are the sole he hears,  
 E'en his own pride, credulity and fears :  
 His pride, that holds my age beneath disdain ;  
 His fears of Gaul, his foolish faith in Spain :  
 Whence legions, trained by me, are summoned home ;  
 Already one at Ostia moves on Rome.

STATILIA.

Say on ! The ornaments of Caesar's wife  
 Are all my portion and I loathe the life ;  
 Yet dread divorcee ; nor could survive my rank.  
 What is't you meditate ? Be friends, be frank !

GALBA.

Business !

STATILIA.

What?

GALBA.

Duty!

STATILIA.

Must I then despair?

GALBA.

Locusta—

STATILIA.

Witch! what of her?

GALBA.

Death—

SENECA.

Forbear!



And Helius ?

STATILIA.

More—

GALBA.

STATILIA.

To slaughter with the swine !

But harm not Cæsar—

GALBA.

Cæsar's life is mine.

Fear not—

SENECA.

What words ! If woman guard them well,  
Know, Galba, duty might drive man to tell.

GALBA.

What have I said ? what Cæsar would explore ?  
Who tells so little will be racked for more.  
But Seneca is sage, Statilia wronged ;  
And neither knows how Cæsar's ears are thronged.

There, nothing stints my influence ; yet its growth  
 Has scarce sufficed till now to save you both :  
 There, nothing turns on innocence or crime ;  
 No, the sole question there for all is time.  
 Disgrace o'erhangs the sage, divorce the wife,  
 And death the prefect, who protects his life.  
 But had I sought it, think you I should ask  
 His wife and tutor to partake the task ?  
 Though both expected, for their evening's dole,  
 The leech's lancet or the poisoner's bowl.  
 Adieu !

## SENECA.

Stay, Galba ! smitten steel intones,  
 Rocks echo ; is my spirit steel or stone's ?  
 And stay, so please, Statilia ! Looks have speech,  
 And yours need answer ; trust the truths I teach.  
 Here if a maniac raged, or monster reigned,  
 Whom no wrong sated, and no right restrained,  
 Even I would arm, war with him and strike home,  
 To liberate all, or one at least, in Rome :  
 Worn as I am with three-score years and ten,  
 I would strike home, to rescue gods and men.

But hope still lingers : Caesar reasons still.  
He for all worth wants nothing but the will.  
His speech can please ; he cultivates the arts,  
Loves letters, courts the muse, has taste and parts.  
His first five years redeemed an empire lost :  
Bad counsels came ; worse followed ; frost on frost.  
Yet patience ! frosts when most intense give way.  
Extreme of darkness heralds dawn of day.  
Heaven broods o'er earth ; guilt cannot long prevail :  
Good words may yet reclaim him. Should they fail,  
Ere arms are moved, the consequence forecast !  
Who next ? and what ? This Caesar is our last.  
Five have you followed : and if one foretold  
You should taste empire, taste he said, not hold.  
Your grandsire tasted it, but brief the zest,  
When his blade pierced the last dictator's breast.  
Who shall give Rome a master, who the globe ?  
Doubtless your gifts might grace the imperial robe ;  
But should slaves govern when your eye grows dim,  
What's gained by substituting you for him ?  
Expect events ! He conquers who endures.  
Time mitigates the woe that nothing cures.

Statilia, come with me to Caesar's bower.  
 Patience and peace are ever in our power.  
 Pardon prolongs and kindness sweetens life ;  
 But anger comes of anger, strife of strife.  
 E'en earth reflects each aspect heaven renews ;  
 Flowers for the sunshine, verdure for the dews,  
 Blackness for blight ; and when a tempest scowls,  
 The wild wood answers wroth, and ocean howls.  
 Galba, consult your own philosophy,  
 As I must mine. Statilia, come with me !  
 And learn to welcome woes we cannot shun ;  
 And welcome wrongs by other people done.

STATILIA.

Cold comfort —

SENECA.

Comfort knows no better source.  
 But come, hear Paul's defence, hear Paul's discourse !  
 'Tis a dread dogma ; 'tis, he says, divine.  
 Haply his word may serve you more than mine ;  
 Through Rome o'er Greece from Palestine it peals :  
 Come, let us prove the mystery Paul reveals.

## SCENE VI.

GALBA.

Fairest of women, best of men, depart !  
Hence I hold counsels only with my heart.  
None can betray the secret none partake.  
Expect events ? I will—the events I make.  
Let women wail, philosophers endure,  
And statesmen doubt till destiny be sure ;  
I'm old to palter with or rail at wrong,  
Or bear it longer—I have borne too long.  
Go, sheep to shambles ! Paul forsooth can tell ?  
I would have saved them : fate forbids. Farewell !  
Who next ? Here comes their slaughterman and mine.  
Hail, the august ! Hail, Caesar, the divine !

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## SCENE VII.

NERO. HELIUS. A DWARF. GALBA.  
PRETORIANS.

NERO.

Helius, what pride! but hate can love—what grace!  
What beauty! Dian's heart, and Hebe's face.  
Thanks, Helius, thanks! Statilia's half prepared.  
You courts are Thecla's. Nothing must be spared;  
Gems, mirrors, robes, all woman wants, to cheer her.  
See to it, Dwarf! To business, Helius! Nearer!  
(Locusta?)

HELIUS.

Brewed, she says, and proof—

NERO.

Good asp!

Quick work, and clean?

HELIUS.

A shudder and a gasp.  
No groan, distortion, spottiness or smell.

F

NERO.

Locusta vaunts. I'll see her in the cell.  
Proof must be proved. Send thither Piso's slave—

HELIUS.

Chiron?

NERO.

Aye, Chiron. This affair is grave.  
There's one name yet the question has to wrench.  
What thirst succeeds Locusta's cup may quench.

HELIUS.

Cæsar! I credit all Natalis told:  
I'll add that name, if Chiron still withhold.)

NERO.

I know all, Galba. Spare yourself the pain!  
This morn a legion disembarked from Spain.  
Ere night their eagles stoop in Rome—for prey.  
My voice seems hoarse and scarce in tune to day.  
I feel no taste for letters or the lyre.  
Centurion, hither! What, they still conspire?

ACT I. SCENE VII.

35

Though Julius sank when Caius Cassius thrust,  
Cassius Longinus guards the assassin's bust :  
Speed to his house, centurion, speed and say  
'Tis my good pleasure he leave Rome this day—  
Life, when he likes : a will discreetly traced  
Might claim respect, and recompense his haste.  
So, Plautus flies? I'll have his head brought back.  
And Sylla hides? Set bloodhounds on his track!  
I'll thin the senate of these ominous names.  
A truce to cares of state! How went the games?

HELIUS.

Of good gladiators, some two hundred pair,  
Each slew his fellow.

NERO.

Would I had been there!  
My Istrians? Speak!

HELIUS.

All perished in the net.

NERO.

Bloodthirsty Rome! I forfeit every bet?

F 2



HELIUS.

Your Threx despatched his twentieth—

NERO.

Worthy wight!

I'll feast the cut-throat and his school to night.

CHRISTIANS *without.*

Lift up your hearts!

NERO.

Slaves?

HELIUS.

Christians.

NERO.

Fiends! They thrill

Man's soul with horror. Hark!

CHRISTIANS *without.*

Thou shalt not kill!

NERO.

What is't they mean?

HELIUS.

For Paul to Cæsar's bar

They come, as waves pursuing Cynthia's star:

Nor come unchecked. As rocks confronting waves,  
Flamens and augurs stand with copes and staves ;  
High-mitred priests are there from every fane,  
There, vestal maids in white with purple train :  
Greece from her schools with shell and clarion comes,  
And Isis quires, and Mithra smites the drums.

PAGANS *without.*

Paul to the lions !

GALBA.

Cohorts wait your nod.

NERO.

Paul shall have justice—witness man and god !  
Though Jewry's wells be bitter depths to sound—  
Yet Pilate plumb'd them—Pilate should be found.

HELIUS.

Ah, Caesar, Pilate has left life—

NERO.

Ingrate !

Without my orders ! What has been his fate ?

## HELIUS.

A cloud from Jewry followed him to Rome,  
And darkened daily on his heart at home :  
Food palled, sleep fled him, every voice amazed.  
Pale, faint and lean on vacaney he gazed :  
And, carried to the sea-side, paced the beach,  
With gibbering lips or incoherent speech ;  
What he had penned, still muttering, he had penned ;  
And still protesting he was Cæsar's friend ;  
Oft would he answer " Art thou then a king ?"  
And wash his hands incessantly and wring :  
And rave o'er all the clamours of the flood—  
" On you and yours be then that innocent blood !"  
Till, in his chamber locked—who burst it told—  
They found him hanging, purple-faced and cold.

## NERO.

Thus flesh survives the spirit, spirit reason ;  
And thus strange superstition turns to treason.  
These conjurers lack both loyalty and truth.  
Come, Galba ! Follow, Dwarf ! This faith forsooth—

Let faith inspire that tongueless mouth with speech,  
And I'll believe whatever Paul may preach.  
Poor Mute, my household thou shalt hence o'ersee.  
Continue true, and wear this dirk for me!  
And let it pierce whoever has the heart  
To threaten or insult thee. Come, depart!  
For time is life, and empire claims my time:  
And love has labours paramount to crime.  
Paul must have audience, but despatch the task:  
Diviner cares within my presence ask.  
(Oh goddess mother! whither am I driven?  
Must I still spurn each consort thou hast given,  
Till a mere bond-maid share the world with me,  
Or I forego e'en life for her and thee!)

## SCENE VIII.

## CHORUS OF PAGANS.

## STROPHE.

Goddess mother, from the portals  
Of the starry courts above,  
Charm of mortals and immortals,  
Welcome, all-creative love !  
At thine aspect azure ocean  
Smiles, and smooths each wavy motion :  
Winds are hushed to mute devotion ;  
Earth puts forth her flowers :  
Vapours whiten, colours brighten,  
O'er the heavenly bowers.

## ANTISTROPHE.

Soon as spring unveils its beauties,  
To the genial zephyr's sigh,  
First to celebrate thy duties  
Birds with music fill the sky.

ACT I. SCENE VIII.

41

Cattle next, with bow'd and bellow,  
Spurn the pasture pied with yellow,  
Stem the torrent to their fellow ;  
Air-born, sea-born swarms,  
Haps of mountain, forest, fountain,  
All obey thy charms.

EPODE.

But in dust when men were grovelling under super-  
stition's ban,  
Who her head with scowls distorted thrust from heaven  
and threatened man,  
'Twas a Greek first dared confront her, dared lift up  
his eye and soul,  
Dared interrogate the phantom, and disown divine  
control.  
Fearing neither fame of godhead, nor the murmurs of  
the thunder,  
Which but urged him upward, onward ; bursting  
nature's bars asunder,

Forth beyond the flaming walls that gird the universe's  
zone,

Forth he fared through all the regions of the infinite  
unknown.

Whence victorious back he brought us knowledge  
what to fear and hope,

What are fortune's limits, what is nature's law, and  
reason's scope.

Wherefore in her turn religion prostrate under foot is  
trod ;

Death is vanquished, and the victory has exalted man  
to god.



## ACT II.

## SCENE I.

NERO. SENECA. HELIUS. DWARF.

NERO.

What power has palsied you, and outraged us?  
Who is it, man or god, discourses thus?  
Arraigns our morals, reprobates our creeds,  
Explores our hearts, our reason supersedes,  
Discomfits death, reanimates the tomb,  
And threatens earth with fire, and man with doom!  
And none of you could answer, none convict,  
Or smite the mouth you dared not contradict?  
All tongue-tied stood, with face and soul submissive,  
To hear—what words! what manner of man is this!  
Who, armed with more than empire's axe and rods,  
Bids Rome renounce her faith, and heaven its gods!  
Where am I? for he bared my breast, he clove;  
He seemed to wrest the thunderbolt from Jove,



Regenerate heaven, and, why should I dissemble,  
 This hierophant, this reasoner made me tremble.  
 What counsel must I take? what vengeance wreak?  
 What do, what think? Speak, Seneca! Helius, speak!

## HELIUS.

Shall I (since here experience seems o'ercome,  
 And wisdom doubts, and eloquence is dumb)—  
 I answer whence this babbler is, and who,  
 And what an outraged prince should think and do?  
 Impostors, rife in every place and time,  
 Thrived never more than now in Jewry's clime.  
 For Solyma, like Rome, has long aspired  
 To rule mankind, but different means required:  
 Arms and the laws are Rome's imperial rod;  
 But Zion claims to commune with a god;  
 Reveals his rites, interprets his command,  
 And oft proclaims his kingdom is at hand.  
 And dupes have welcomed every advent named,  
 And victims perished for the crown they claimed;  
 Till now enthusiasts change the hope they cherished,  
 And crown in heaven the last of them that perished:

And pledge his realm in wine-cups, with a seem  
Of spiritual empire and the life to come.  
Hence, schooled in Tarsus to some smattering small  
Of Grecian lore and morals, Paul, or Saul,  
Has learned to scorn his country's laws in vain ;  
Her poets and her seers have turned his brain.  
And stored with Hebrew scraps and Attic crumbs,  
From synagogue and porch, to Rome he comes ;  
To chase our deities from fame and shrine,  
And vend his feverish visions for divine.  
But empire is usurped when crowns are given,  
Or kingdoms claimed, of whether earth or heaven.  
What should you do ? Do right ! assert the laws,  
Avenge the gods and govern men. Nor pause—  
Return at once to Cæsar's judgment-hall,  
Resume the ivory chair, and sentence Paul !  
Exseind this ulcer ; cauterize the spot !  
Let ruin quench the flame, if blood can not !  
Bid fools resume the worship they forsook ;  
Or in the arena burn them and their book !  
Lest words like Paul's the universe subvert ;  
Lest every form of god be spurned as dirt ;

Lest crime's fell cross usurp dominion's sign,  
Surmount our temples, and be deemed divine.

## NERO.

Bold measures, Helius! and the best I ken.  
Still, past success scarce warrants them for men  
Whose multitude is much, whose madness more,  
Whom power might scorn, and pity will deplore.  
But history writes while we deliberate thus.  
All Rome, all earth, methinks, o'erwatches us.  
For future ages, for the world's repute  
We counsel—Why is Seneca so mute?

## SENECA.

Cæsar, such cause had needed further time,  
Were this my first of counsels so sublime;  
But I, since Paul here sojourned, oft have heard  
And pondered much the mysteries of his word;  
Pondered, with pangs of travail sore bested,  
To these conclusions, born of doubt and dread,  
One great Supreme, howe'er adored or named,  
Nature or God, is everywhere proclaimed;

By whom all worlds, all atoms were arranged :  
He reigns forever, and shall reign unchanged.  
All else succumbs to time. The hills are riven,  
Seas rise, sands deepen from the desert driven ;  
Earth's aspect alters as its seasons pass,  
And men and men's opinions fade as grass.  
E'en those dread myths, by which, since earth began,  
The great first-cause has been revealed to man,  
Religions change : old oracles are dumb ;  
Rites, temples and the gods to time succumb.  
Whate'er our sires revered has lost belief ;  
Whate'er Greece served, save one eternal chief.  
And, as a night-watch to the orient looks,  
Rome turns to Egypt's rites and Jewry's books ;  
Tired of a sensual creed, and craving still  
To question heaven, and scan its author's will.  
Whether man's mind, by nature's primal scheme,  
As blows rebound, recoils from each extreme :  
And, if in arms no age has our's surpast,  
Are not Rome's vices now the worst and last ?  
Or whether, when earth's wickedness o'erflows,  
Earth's architect once more deigns interpose,

To renovate his work, supply defects,  
And give his laws the sanction man expects.  
This intervention, due to truth and worth,  
This long lost intercourse of heaven with earth ;  
Which still the guilty conscience doubts to shun,  
Which mercy vouches for a world undone,  
Which hope has long foretold, and faith believed :  
This, Paul asseverates, is at last achieved.  
Strange news! Is Paul insane? Good taste, good  
    sense,  
Logic and lore still grace his eloquence :  
Where Hebrew myths Greek morals have enshrined,  
And angels hymn what Plato half divined ;  
As two broad rivers, separate many a mile,  
Both heaven-descended, join and roll the Nile.  
Is Paul sincere? For what is it he feigns?  
Death, death's the issue, which he pleads in chains—  
Pleads, with a zeal no falsehood could inspire,  
Aye, pleads with lips of light and tongue of fire.  
Can reason doubt a God? can power resist?  
If heaven has spoken, list, oh Caesar, list !

ACT II. SCENE I.

49

NERO.

Aye. Different climes may different rites install.

SENECA.

Our sires adopted some, and revered all.

NERO.

Was ever city stormed, till priests for Rome  
Evoked the gods, and promised here a home?

SENECA.

And what if Magnus vowed in Jewry thus,  
For Salem's fane, a nobler one with us?

HELIUS.

Rome has had gods of Egypt, gods of Greece,  
For here Pan, Jove and Isis reign in peace:  
Will Salem's deity divide the throne?  
Methinks Paul preaches one Supreme alone.

SENECA.

Hear further! What are Isis, Jove and Pan  
But attributes or myths devised by man?

HELIUS.

The power our gods possess the emperor shares ;  
This world is Caesar's, all beside is theirs :  
Will Salem's god respect the emperor's worth ?  
Or preaches Paul heaven's kingdom come to earth ?

NERO.

He does.

SENECA.

Hear further !

NERO.

Have I time to day ?  
Cares and the hours will never own my sway.  
Master of earth am I to be their thrall,  
And yield some fraction of my life to Paul ?  
Let who will hear him, and believe who can !  
My tastes and pleasures trace a different plan.  
Go, Seneca ! your counsel has its need ;  
Remand the prisoner, whose excuse you plead !  
Say 'tis my pleasure, and the doom I give,  
That Paul at present rest in bonds, and live.

ACT II. SCENE I.

51

Free to receive whoever may draw near—  
So Galba guard him, all who like may hear.

SENECA.

Great thanks! I go to announce it and o'ersee.  
Such grace will charm your household, bond and free.



## SCENE II.

NERO. HELIUS. DWARF.

NERO.

He fails : he dotes : fits follow that disease.

HELIUS.

Meanwhile he makes his own what measures please,  
Yours what offend ; parades his wealth and fame ;  
And wants of empire nothing but the name.  
His cant and rhetoric mystify mankind :  
Your talents are ignored, your tastes maligned,  
Your feats of art, your scenic palms deprest,  
Traduced your gifts of driving six abreast.  
Listless he hears the edicts you rehearse,  
And scarce commends your voice, or reads your verse.

NERO.

His own forsooth absorbs his whole applause.  
But, worse than all, he serves Statilia's cause.

He loved her father, loved her former spouse,  
Thinks to hold me for ever in her vows ;  
And Rome would ring with diatribes on lust,  
Should I prove generous enough or just  
To appreciate women by their natural worth,  
And raise a bond-maid o'er the queens of earth.

HELIUS.

First silence him.

NERO.

But how ? (unless by bane ?)

HELIUS.

His gold in Piso's plot fills every vein.

NERO.

A mine we two must presently explore,  
Aye, every vein, of whether gold or gore.  
But wait my pleasure there, and work it here.  
Go, bring, bring down love's goddess from her sphere !  
My soul rekindles with a zeal divine  
To install her charms, and worship at their shrine.

## SCENE III.

THECLA. NERO.

NERO.

Fair creature, if that name bescem thy birth,  
Oh fairest form of heaven's revealed to earth,  
Lo, Cæsar kneels to accept thee from the skies,  
And greet the radiance of those sun-bright eyes,  
Deem me not destitute of truth and sense,  
Nor let attempts to please thee give offence :  
My thoughts o'erflow and fluctuate in my speech,  
As waves with Venus buoyant flood the beach.  
Pale not, nor shudder ! You come here to reign,  
As safe and pure as Dian in her fane :  
Whose votary kindles, as his censer breathes,  
To clasp the form his sacrifice inwreathes,  
Oh lovelier than the bud of April blows,  
Than Persia's fruit of downy gold and rose,  
Than nut-brown corn that rustles for the scythe,  
Than song and dance where bacchanals are blithe,

ACT II. SCENE III.

55

Than clouds that glisten to the rainbow's gleam,  
Or zephyr's dalliance with the moonlit stream.  
Why, how you tremble as an aspen shade,  
A startled fawn, or filly foal dismayed !  
Lift up those eyelids that eclipse the morn,  
And deign regard a suitor none should scorn.  
One look, one pitying glance is all I crave.  
An emperor asks you.

THECLA.

Am not I a slave ?

NERO.

No, by this ring - accept it—you are free !  
'Tis I'm the slave, till you enfranchise me.  
Enfranchise not ! command is all I ask—  
But in your presence let me ply my task !  
To follow you and fan in summer's heat ;  
When you repose, to couch me at your feet ;  
Assure you with my sword, when wrong alarms ;  
When walking wearies, bear you in my arms ;  
And when you muse or slumber, bend above you,  
And ask no guerdon but to gaze and love you.

THECLA.

Phrases !

NERO.

The heart's ! believe, or prove their truth !

Have we not both affection, health and youth ?  
Am I not Cæsar ? Need I more than nod,  
To give you all a woman asks her god ?  
Robes, gems, each luxury of art and ease,  
Parks, graven groups by terraces and trees,  
Villas where sport and taste delight to dwell,  
And ivory boards, and beds of tortoise shell :  
All earth can yield your happiness to fill,  
And nothing wanting but your own good will.  
Accept the garland while the fragrance lives ;  
And taste the golden fruit the season gives !  
An emperor is your suitor, Rome your dower ;  
Enjoy your worth, and bid him to your bower !  
Beauty and youth were made for love and pleasure ;  
And fortune crowns them here with every treasure.  
All creatures pair ; no kind had else increased.  
Heaven's own example tempts us to the feast,

ACT II. SCENE III.

57

Which nature celebrates, the gods provide,  
And fate exacts, for Cæsar and his bride.

THECLA.

Your bride ?

NERO.

Had ever monarch bride so meet ?  
Rome's empire and the world's is at your feet.

THECLA.

Another claims that rank, with more pretence.  
Grant me one favour ?

NERO.

Name it !

THECLA.

Let me hence.

NERO.

Stay, stay ! Statilia's doomed : this day we sever.  
She's banished : she's divorced.

THECLA.

For me ? No. Never.

NERO.

Her destiny was sealed ere yours was known.  
My heart is vacant, vacant house and throne.  
Accept them ! I conjure, who could control—

THECLA.

This vessel—haply : but my heart, my soul ?

NERO.

'Tis that I covet : 'tis for that I strive :  
'Tis with your own sweet spirit I would wive.  
Yet let the casket guard the gem within,  
The shrine its idol ; both be mine to win !  
Beauty of form and spirit must combine ;  
Heart, reason, passion, person, all be mine.

ACT II. SCENE III.

59

THECLA.

(Folly! Where am I? Midian! Heaven forbid!  
Yet might I not do good—as Esther did?  
Rabbi! thy law should sway the Roman's rod,  
And Thecla serve thy people, serve thy God.)

NERO.

You hesitate—You're mine.

THECLA.

Avaunt, away!  
Give me a little space, to think and pray.  
Respect my freedom, and indulge my fears.  
I need reflection, solitude and tears:  
Need commune here with One no eye can see—  
Leave me with Him! if I indeed am free?

NERO.

Yes—while my letters of divorce are sealed.  
All Romans claim this right; shall Caesar yield?



## SCENE IV.

THECLA.

Oh Thou, who bringest day from darkness still,  
Food from the furrow, and from rock the rill,  
And makest frost and tempest cleanse the air,  
And kings obey thy bidding—hear my prayer !

## SCENE V.

STATILIA. THECLA. SLAVES.

STATILIA.

The web is spun : the spider waits her prey.  
Oh could I drive a butterfly that way !  
Shame to the vengeance I in vain control !  
Locusta's secret has transformed my soul ;  
As gold did hers. Another on her knees ?  
The whole house labours with this dire disease.  
These walls, these vaults are smitten with a change ;  
And each face fills with something new and strange.  
Fair maid, and richer than an idol gemmed !  
Art thou too waiting to hear Paul condemned ?  
(My rival's face ! and fair enough, I own,  
To excuse an emperor's fault, could wives condone.  
Ha ! The same shape Locusta's mirror gave !  
I'll break that charm betimes.) How now, fair slave !  
I thought thee comely when we last had words ;  
Thou'rt comelier thus. Fine feathers make fine birds.

THECLA.

Alas ! these gauds become my station ill,  
 And suit my woe as little as my will :  
 Yet might I prize them more as others treasure,  
 Could such things serve to lessen your displeasure.

STATILIA.

Pshaw ! If you value aught beyond their price,  
 And still would shun the abyss of shame and vice,  
 You gates a moment own my slaves' control,  
 Fly for your life, your innocence, your soul !

THECLA.

Whither ?

STATILIA.

No matter—fly ! The porch is free—  
 Go, and leave misery, death and sin with me.  
 The moment presses—Speed !

THECLA.

I would—

STATILIA.

Away !

Idiot—

ACT II. SCENE V.

63

THECLA.

I would—I will. But this array—

STATILIA.

Lo, your last chance. You hesitate, you doubt?  
You're lost. Remain!

THECLA.

What hope have I without?

STATILIA.

Stay then, and welcome to despair within!  
Stay, and share with me misery, death and sin!  
'Tis all I have, but ample, for amends  
Of past offence: and let us now be friends.  
We know each other now too well for strife.  
Come, Cæsar's miss, shake hands with Cæsar's wife!  
Neither need grudge what each of us endures.  
Respect my portion, and be blest with yours!

THECLA.

That blessing I disclaim, that portion spurn:  
Aye, though fate's beam be trembling on the turn.

Of those three gifts you proffer for my pains,  
I challenge death and misery.

STATILIA.

(Sin remains.)

THECLA.

But what has changed, or what disguised you thus ?  
To deign o'erstep the bound that separates us ?  
To promise friendship, and your hand outstretch  
To me, a sometime slave, and still a wretch ?  
Glad would I trim my galley to the breeze,  
Yet marvel much what magic smooths the seas.

STATILIA.

Magic ? Aye. Strange, strange magic has foreshown  
E'en that my fate blends, Thecla, with your own.  
Listen ! This labyrinth has secret cells,  
Where a bright daughter of the dog-star dwells.  
Her's are alembics, planetary powers,  
And waxen shapes that dwindle as she lours :  
Where round exotic plants a cloister sweeps ;  
A wolf, once human, watches there and weeps ;

There, white with age, a raven talks alone,  
And a toad gibbers, found in cloven stone.  
Walled in a dome, that darkens noon to night,  
She sits aloof and diademed with light ;  
Before her feet a brazen cauldron, brimmed  
With limped silver : there the fates are limed.  
There, whoso dares explore them, and descends,  
And, asked who sent him, answers "Caesar sends,"  
The tripod takes. She medicates his eyes,  
And waves her wand in ares a rainbow dyes.  
The vault knolls thrice : the cauldron seeths and  
    steams.  
He bends above : it settles, and it beams.  
And in the wondrous mirror forms are seen,  
First scant and dim, then perfect and serene ;  
Till, like events in dramas or a dream,  
    Throgs through the street, or gullies down a stream,  
Life's future fates in images appear,  
Scene after scene, and year succeeding year.  
Till dense, at last, a vapour clouds the track ;  
The cauldron seeths again, and all is black.

THECLA.

THECLA.

You've seen?

THECLA.

First—

THECLA.

Well?

STATILIA.

Your figure—thus bedight.

An island next : mine image on the height.  
 An old man came ; earth trembled as he spake :  
 The mountain burned, and, sinking, left a lake :  
 From whose clear bosom rose a white-robed band  
 Of youths and maids that ancient led to land.  
 The fanes grew silent ; altars flamed no more ;  
 Idol and shrine fell prostrate to the floor :  
 Till men-at-arms enclosed the choir, and drove  
 To meet their doom, or sacrifice to Jove.  
 The prator came : fire kindles at his scroll,  
 And lions in their cages chafe and howl :

ACT II. SCENE V.

67

And I am there, and seemingly devout,  
For rites I ridicule, and gods I doubt.  
Clouds close—disperse: and I am there in chains,  
White-robed, and ready for the self-same pains.  
I sink. Your figure reappears. I soar—  
Again the mirror clouds—and cleared no more.

THECLA.

You name things scarce conceivable by me.  
Who sees must credit—

STATILIA.

Go yourself and see!  
Northward three courts, three eastward thread, and  
pass  
Down the dim gallery to a door of brass.  
Knock thrice! It opens. In! It shuts and rings.  
Asked what has brought you, answer "Caesar brings,  
"To explore the future and consult with fate."  
Then learn in time what others learn too late!



68

THECLA.

I fear.

THECLA.

STATILIA.

Have confidence—

THECLA.

A plant divine,  
But slow of growth, in such a soul as mine.

STATILIA.

Go!

THECLA.

I dare not.

STATILIA.

Your safety is my care.

I pray you—

THECLA.

Pardon!

STATILIA.

I entreat.

THECLA.

Forbear!

ACT II. SCENE V.

69

STATILIA.

I order.

THECLA.

Order ?

STATILIA.

Aye, and can compel.

Slaves ! take this bondmaid to Locusta's cell !

THECLA.

Nay—that exceeds your measure and your men's.

What ! force ? Help, Cæsar ! Save me, citizens !

I'm bond no longer. By this ring ! I'm free.

Lo, Cæsar's gift ! Who dares lay hand on me ?

Aye, crouch and tremble, lest my cry reach him,

Whose wrath might make this cost you life or limb.

And know, proud woman, who it is you spurn !

There's something of the fates you've yet to learn.

You mean me harm. You menaced me this morning.

With oh what needs no magic for my warning.

Nor needs your soul be imaged more to see it ;

Nor what my future, could your hate decree it.

## THECLA.

STATILIA.

Have I not cause to menace you and hate ?  
 Unmasked you enter here, unwelcomed wait,  
 And add your wrongs and wretchedness to ours :  
 Till, like the hedgehog in the serpent's bowers,  
 Prayed to depart, you bristle and resist.  
 And now, adorned in all your lust could list,  
 You tempt my husband to forego his troth ;  
 You hear proposals that degrade us both :  
 You steal his signet to deceive his men,  
 And call yourself a Roman citizen—  
 'Tis false. You chicken-hearted slaves, obey !  
 My word's your warrant : seize her, and away !  
 Despatch, and there's my purse, divide the pelf !  
 Refuse, I'll nail you to the cross myself.

THECLA.

Help, Caesar! save me!

STATILIA.

Muffle up that din !  
 Knock thrice—say Caesar sent—and thrust her in.

SCENE VI.

NERO. HELIUS. DWARF. STATILIA. THECLA.  
SLAVES.

NERO.

What's here! Ah, wretches, you shall writhe for this.

THECLA.

Save me!

NERO.

Be calm. Your slaves, Statilia?

STATILIA.

Yes.

THECLA.

Save me from that dread woman—

NERO.

While I live.

Who gave these orders?

STATILIA.

Who but I could give?

NERO.

Since when was that prerogative your dower ?  
 What ! in my very house, usurp my power ?  
 What, to my face ! heard majesty by force ?  
 Traitress ! Take there your letters of divorce.

STATILIA.

Ah ! penned forsooth already since the offence ?

HELIUS.

Return the keys ! take what is yours, and hence !  
 The marriage contract thus, mid thus we sever,  
 And fling its fragments to the winds for ever.

STATILIA.

Cæsar—

HELIUS.

Be prudent !

STATILIA.

Sycophant, be dumb !

I must have utterance, come white'er may come.

Badge of a burthen borne by none with ease,  
My predecessors twain or me, these keys  
I hurl to her, my successor, selected  
To fill the place ere I was well ejected.  
Oh worthiest choice, no doubt, that mart of lust  
And haunt of vice could offer power august !  
One, whose high merit needed but be seen—  
A wench, from Egypt disembarked yestreen !  
Whose birth let gods adopt, for men ignore :  
An outcast, found on Alexandria's shore,  
Spawn of some crocodile in Egypt's waters,  
Reared by a beggar, bartered by his daughters,  
Bought by a monger, and with Nubiins shipped,  
And sent to Rome, for market, to be stripped.

## NERO.

Slaves ! are there tortures you would have me spare ?  
Arrest that woman ! still her, bind her, bear  
Through three courts northward, eastward three ex-  
plore.

Down the dim gallery, to a brazen door,  
Knock thrice, thrust in your burthen, say I sent 'em

## STATILIA.

August! divine! have mercy! hear! relent!  
Forgive, forgive me prostrate at your feet—  
Fair Thecla, deign for pity, deign entreat!  
Bleed me to death! starve! strangle! any fate,  
By any way, except that brazen gate!  
You loved me once; I thought so, and you swore:  
And I adored you, aye, as none adore;  
I could have knelt and worshipped where you trod.  
Be great, be generous, like yourself, my god!  
A little longer life! Forget, forgive!  
Divorce me, banish! only let me live—  
To hide my hated head in some far isle,  
Some Lybian crypt, some cave—a little while;  
Where never mortal would inquire my home,  
Nor echo thence disquiet you in Rome;  
Nor bird nor breeze small whisper I am there,  
And nothing earthly know, but pain and care.  
All else be yours, to hold, with years prolonged,  
And her, whom I so wickedly have wronged:  
Till nameless stones my sepulchre inernst,  
And all my crimes and sorrows merge in dust.

THECLA.

Methinks her prayer would turn an arrow's flight,  
And soothe the north-wind of a winter's night.  
Shall human hearts prove harder to incline  
Than storm or steel? Not Caesar's heart, nor mine.  
Indulge them both! Be gracious to repentance!  
Hear her, hear me, and mitigate that sentence!

NERO.

Command!

THECLA.

Divorced and banished let her flee,  
And shun whate'er the pitfall dug for me.

NERO.

Even so. An isle precipitous and tall  
Above the Ægean lifts its cloudlike wall,  
Where Patmos offers, all you need or crave,  
In life a prison and in death a grave.  
Set forth to-morrow for your sea-beat cell!  
Till then avoid my presence! and farewell!



STATILIA.

Farewell! Forget me soon! You will, with ease.  
 I have tried hard to serve you, hard to please.  
 In vain! Yet suffer me this last endeavour  
 Once more to warn you, ere we part for ever.  
 Beware of whom you trust, and whom disdain!  
 Beware, still more, the prisoner you mchain!  
 No mortal's voice so menaces these walls,  
 No Titan's e'er so menaced heaven, as Paul's.  
 Let sages doubt, and soldiers scorn alarm,  
 But what fools follow multitudes may arm.

CHRISTIANS *without.*

Glad tidings!

STATILIA.

Crush them!

CHRISTIANS *without.*

Blessed are the pure.  
 The world shall pass away; the word endure.

STATILIA.

Silence that song, or, Cæsar, join the choir !

Quench, or become as fuel to the fire !

Rome has grown great by rites our fathers cherished.

Respect the gods ! I slighted them, and perished.

---

## SCENE VII.

NERO. THECLA. HELIUS. DWARF.

CHRISTIANS *without.*

O'er hills and seas, to prisous and to graves,  
'Tis morn that beams : wake, citizens and slaves !

NERO.

This hand is free. Accept it, with my heart !  
Rome, empire, all is yours—

THECLA.

Let her depart.

NERO.

Thanks, thanks ! To-morrow shall proclaim our vows ;  
And Rome and earth confess you Cæsar's spouse.

CHRISTIANS *without.*

Ho! homicide and lust, 'tis morn that beams!  
Your sins will find you out—

THECLA.

Hark!

NERO.

Christian dreams!

THECLA.

What throngs are gathering to hear Paul discourse!  
Methinks one thing she prophesied has force.  
Let me assist. If Paul his faith forego,  
And seek his God's and country's overthrow;  
My cries for justice shall like her's be swift,  
And claim his sentence, as my bridal gift.  
The apostate Jew shall perish as accurst;  
Let stones o'erwhelm him! I will hurl the first.  
But e'er we punish let us prove the offence—

THECLA.

NERO.

Hear you and judge ! But, Helius, we must hence—  
To explore the fates. Farewell awhile !

THECLA.

Farewell !

HELIUS.

(The slave's already in Loensta's cell.)

NERO.

How loud on lust old Rhetoric will harangue !

HELIUS.

May Chiron's test spare all of us the pang.

---

## SCENE VIII.

## CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS.

## STROPHE.

Ho! To the waters, all who thirst!  
 The stream unsold, unstinted flows:  
 From eastern hills the fountain burst,  
 Hills, that have sources heaven bestowed—  
 Oh weary of a world of woes,  
 It's barbarous sons and sensual daughters,  
 Ye, who have purer hearts than those,  
 Ho, hither to the waters!

## ANTISTROPHE.

Whoe'er has known affection's blight,  
 Affliction's sting, misfortune's scourge,  
 Hope, like a meteor of the night,  
 And wealth unstable as the surge,  
 The couch disease and anguish urge,  
 The breast whose burthen is a mountain,  
 The breast no human rite can purge,  
 Ho! hither to the fountain!



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## EPODE.

Can we longer sit contented in the kennel, in the  
gloom,

Poring o'er our graves, nor asking what exists beyond  
the tomb ?

Can we longer trust the fables, which our very slaves  
deride,

Deities effete, and morals based on selfishness and  
pride ?

Morals no religion sanctions, morals every vice  
defies,

And examples—pass in silence, pass them with averted  
eyes !

Can we use our wondrous reason nor examine whence  
its birth ?

Not of me, the deep makes answer, not of me, re-  
echoes earth.

Can we gaze at heaven nor wonder who upholds the  
fabric still ?

Can we find him out nor worship, worship and not ask  
his will,

Learn his will and not obey it, disobey nor weep the  
sin ?

Oh ! to wash from us for ever tears without and stains  
within !

Or still cleave we to the kennel, beasts that perish,  
weeds that wither ?

To the waters ! to the fountain ! bondmen, freemen,  
hither, hither !



## ACT III.

## SCENE I.

SENECA.

Slaves listen, women weep, the poor are pleased :  
He charms the oppressed, the afflicted and diseased.  
What school can heal the heart remorse has riven ?  
What sage give guilt the hope to be forgiven ?  
What surer rule of life could morals preach  
Than heaven's own will revealed in writ and speech ?  
What nobler type has godhead than the Son  
Who loved and suffered for a world undone ?  
Yet here are dogmas reason must reject ?  
Reason has bounds : hear further and reflect !  
I shall find leisure when I steal from Rome,  
And make some woodland solitude my home ;  
Some island in a lake whose waters sleep,  
Some greensward's terrace half-way up the steep,

That looks o'er meadows flecked with flocks at rest,  
Where Bætis glides and Corduba is blest.  
What need I more than books and tablets there,  
A straw-strown couch and philosophic fare,  
To enjoy and rule the kingdom of my mind ;  
Explore its treasures, cull their best, and bind  
In phrases quaint, as silver sets a gem,  
For men to praise, or, if they will, contemn.  
Thought, only thought can pain the soul or please ;  
And my soul's peace depends on thoughts like these.  
Why waste life's remnant here in toil and care ?  
I scarce sustain what others press to share.  
Riches but tempt the foe to follow faster ;  
They, like Actæon's dogs, devour their master.  
Obscurity and ease are all I need.  
These let me challenge, and from Rome recede :  
Like some old courser, first in many a test,  
But now turned out to pasture and to rest.  
Long have I braved the perils of this court,  
The poisoner's craft, and slanderer's false report ;  
No duty shunned, no labour spared : in vain !  
The more, since Burrhus, stricken down by bane,

His face averted, when the prince inquired,  
And answering "All is well with me!" expired.  
Want follows waste: the treasury stands agape.  
My wealth pursues me: fame betrays. Escape!  
"How?" cried the mouse: the granary's chink replied  
"E'en poor and empty as you passed inside."  
The hunted castor mutilates itself.  
Cæsar wants money, and I scorn the pelf.  
Oh freedom, long desired and oft contrived—  
He comes! the time to attempt it has arrived.

## SCENE II.

NERO. SENECA. DWARF.

NERO.

Dear kind old man, my friend and tutor sage,  
I grieve to find you pale beyond your age.  
You suffer, you are ill. Repose you here!  
And mine own taster shall bring wine to cheer—  
Choice Massie, of all ailments cure alone;  
The true nepenthe Helen learned of Thone;  
Whence soul and body both imbibe relief,  
And long oblivion comes to pain and grief.

SENECA.

Cæsar, my ills are more than Massie cures,  
Or Helen's cup, or any power but your's,  
Have I not served, within this golden gate,  
Your studies fourteen years, your counsels eight?  
And been so whelmed with honour and with treasure,  
Nothing seemed wanting to my bliss but measure.

Imperial use gives here examples just.  
Your own great-grandfather, the first August,  
Dismissed Agrippa to a Lesbian home,  
Dismissed Mecænas to repose in Rome ;  
Both comrades, this in war and that in peace,  
And both well pensioned ere they sought release.  
But what pretext for bounty could be made  
Of me, save books and studies in the shade ?  
And these, when called to educate your youth,  
Were thus o'erhonoured and o'erpaid in sooth.  
Yet have you added wealth and place, so high,  
My mind oft questions who and where am I ?  
Of rank equestrian, and provincial birth,  
What makes this upstart with the first of earth ?  
Where now those wishes pure content fulfils ?  
Forsooth in gardens and suburban vills,  
In adding tower to tower and lea to lea,  
And sending gold for usury o'er the sea.  
My fortune's sole excuse was Cæsar's pleasure.  
But have not both of us surpassed the measure  
Of all a prince should grant or subject share ?  
More would move envy : not for you to bear ;

Such human griefs fall far beneath your state ;  
Me they o'erwhelm : release me from their weight !  
As age in war or travel claims support,  
An old man, wearied with the cares of court,  
Whose slightest charge exceeds his strength and health,  
Cries out beneath the burthen of his wealth.  
H!elp! and let others take the charge and risk ;  
And add at once my fortune to the fisc !  
Think not I sink to poverty or need :  
Impediments and pomps are all I ee.de.  
Books shall reclaim the moments wealth demands,  
And my mind's culture supersede my land's.  
You follow fortune still, with flag unfurled,  
And strength to wield the empire of the world !  
But age requires and service claims relief :  
Nor dims that claim the lustre of a chief,  
Whose friends thus prove so paramount to place  
That, raised with honour, they can fall with grace.

NERO.

To answer promptly so profound a speech  
Had needed talent far beyond my reach ;

N



But to foresee, or, failing to foresee,  
Deal with the unforeseen, was learned of thee.  
True, my great-grandsire gave Agrippa rest,  
And gave Mæcenas, both with age opprest ;  
Yet neither stript of what their toil had gained,  
In camps and battles, where his youth was trained.  
My earlier years lacked only books and lore ;  
Or doubtless you in arms had served me more.  
Still services like yours through life avail ;  
While towers and treasures, my rewards, may fail.  
Great as you deem them, greater have been known  
For meed of merit far beneath your own :  
I name not libertines or sons of earth ;  
But 'tis not always wealth is false to worth.  
What, green in age, and equal to the pains  
And palms of office, now your pupil reigns,  
Retire, ere Galba goes, though consul thrice ?  
Shall Claudius then seem worthier your advice ?  
Nay, tarry still, and give my youth support,  
And guide my manhood, and adorn my court !  
Lest you seem banished from the place you shunned,  
And rest of what you modestly refund.

Ah! seek no praise that calumny may claim,  
Nor on a friend's discredit found your fame!  
Is your wealth more than many a miser sums?  
Embrace!

SENECA.

Thanks, Cæsar!

NERO.

'Tis my taster comes.  
'Tis my choice Massic. Dwarf, fill up, fill up!  
And, Seneca, come drain the crystal cup!  
Lo, the last pledge of Rome's imperial host.  
This he gives those who merit it the most.  
'Twill chase fatigue, as mist before the sun,  
And soothe all anguish, as no sleep has done.  
Drink!

SENECA.

Not for mine existence.

NERO.

I beseech—

N 2

SENECA.

Cæsar himself pays homage to his leech ;  
And mine forbids all beverage of the grape.

NERO.

(Bring Helius, Dwarf!) (The sophist will escape.)  
What, deny age its medicinal wine ?  
I doubt your leech's skill—(consult with mine !)

---

## SCENE III.

HELIUS. NERO. SENECA. · DWARF.

NERO.

Helius!

HELIUS.

Ah! Cæsar!

NERO.

Wherefore this alarm?

HELIUS.

First let me separate you from him and harm.

NERO.

Helius?

HELIUS.

The mystery's solved of Piso's plot—  
'Twas he, 'twas Seneca—

## THECLA.

NERO.

Great gods ! 'Twas not.  
Who dares defame him ?

HELIUS.

Every thing has proof.  
The intrigue is all unravelled, web and woof.  
Locusta's mill has sifted flour and bran.  
Piso was but a pageant—there's the man !  
'Twas Seneca should take the imperial robe ;  
That stoicism forsooth might rule the globe.

NERO.

That's like their cant.

HELIUS.

Philosophers are kings.

NERO.

My friend and tutor sage, you hear these things ?

SENECA.

As a man hears, whom innocence protects,  
And no event surprises, none dejects,  
For none can harm : my conscience none can touch.

NERO.

That's well.

HELIUS.

Have you no more for answer ?

SENECA.

Much.

But, Helius, first I ask the accuser's name.

HELIUS.

Chiron.

SENECA.

What Chiron ? Piso's slave ?

HELIUS.

The same.

SENECA.

Cæsar, confront us!

HELIUS.

You defy the dead.

SENECA.

Ah!

HELIUS.

His last words heaped curses on your head.

SENECA.

I never gave him cause.

HELIUS.

Then why so moved?

SENECA.

Lest Cæsar think your false assertions proved—  
For you're the accuser now. Come, state at large  
What have I done, what plotted—what's the charge?

HELIUS.

Piso was mask, to wear and cast aside  
For your sake, yours: so Chiron said, and died.

SENECA.

What further?

HELIUS.

Further? Death prevented more.

SENECA.

What! e'en that curse? which why should Chiron pour?  
My name beguiled him not: or had he said it,  
I never knew it then, nor now can credit.  
If Piso mixed me with his mad endeavour,  
I never sanctioned, never knew it, never.

NERO.

Heliuss, in sooth some proof of that is lacked.

HELIUS.

But add the fact Natalis told—

NERO.

What fact?



HELIUS.

Piso sent some, unconscious of his treason,  
To Seneca when ill, and asked the reason  
No visits were returned—

NERO.

Is that true?

SENECA.

Yes.

HELIUS.

What was your answer?

SENECA.

Well, what was it?

HELIUS.

This.

'Twere best awhile to cease such interchange:  
But your own welfare hung on his—

NERO.

That's strange!

You hear that?

SENECA.

I bethink me now, I used  
Ill health for plea why visits were refused;  
But had no motive, and can none divine,  
For prizing Piso's welfare more than mine:  
And none knows better than the emperor knows  
How my lips loathe such compliments as those.  
But when was Chiron questioned? who was there?  
Who heard his words? who registered?

NERO.

Forbear!

I pray you both, forbear! My heart is racked,  
With shafts no trick of rhetoric can extract.  
Piso had youth, ancestral fame and pride,  
To prompt and palliate that for which he died;  
But here's a pedant, old and out of health,  
A man I raised from poverty to wealth,

This.

ge:

From nothingness to honours none transcend ;  
 Made him my tutor, counsellor and friend :  
 This man conspires to assassinate conspires  
 To tear me piccemeal, by a mob he hires,  
 Or hurl me o'er the precipice to hell ;  
 That he, forsooth, may totter where I fell.  
 As if the Galbas, Othos, and the flower  
 Of Rome's high stems to Corduba would cower ;  
 And camps and navies serve for rhetoric tools,  
 And earth an emperor seek in Grecian schools.

SENECA.

One moment hear me—

NERO.

'Twas by friends he cherished,  
 By foes he pardoned, the first Cæsar perished.  
 I shun that error ; nor shall you repeat  
 What Brutus dared ; though Tullius praised the feat.

SENECA.

But hear—

NERO.

Already I have heard you both,  
His charge, and your denial. Add your oath!  
Helius add his! and what's the sum for trial?  
Oath against oath, his charge and your denial.

SENECA.

Cæsar, hear reason—

NERO.

You have gifts of speech,  
And rhetoric arts, beyond a soldier's reach;  
And can prepare, or haply now recite  
Most eloquent tropes, to puzzle wrong and right.  
Out on such rubbish! Let me read your breast.  
Come, give both truth and loyalty a test.  
Answer me this! Had Cæsar been destroyed—

SENECA.

Such omens Heaven avert, and you avoid!

NERO.

Bleneh not at that. Have courage, and tell truth.  
By all you still profess, and taught my youth !  
Had Piso done whatever he designed,  
And offered you the empire of mankind ;  
Say, aye or no ! if nothing bad withstood,  
Would you have ta'en that offer ?

SENECA.

Aye, I would.

NERO.

You've all things ready to leave life, no doubt ?

SENECA.

No more than man should never be without.

NERO.

Then home ! and die ! A sentence mercy leavens,  
Or you should learn what 'tis to die, by heavens !

SENECA.

Thanks, Cæsar.

NERO.

Hie, good Helius! take my leech—  
Give him till sunset—ever in your reach.  
(His will needs now no codicil.) Farewell,  
Ingrate and traitor! Prosper you in hell!

SENECA.

Cæsar!

NERO.

Be silent! More reproach I spare:  
Nor more will heed your cant, nor hear your prayer.

---

## SCENE IV.

SENECA. HELIUS.

HELIUS.

I too, here charged unwillingly to wait,  
And hence conduct you to the verge of fate,  
I, misconceived your foe, would words refrain,  
And spare your exit all superfluous pain.  
Only bethink you of the appointed hour ;  
And live, while living, as in Caesar's power.

SENECA.

Helius my foe? From enmity exempt  
Towards all, for him I feel not e'en contempt.  
But life's last day has duties to fulfil.  
Remain you must, behave as e'en you will :  
Yet learn one lesson, if your heart incline,  
If else, your conduct must not influence mine.  
Oh my sweet wife! Philosopher, be firm!  
Know, blest of heaven, all blessings have their term.

The moment needs not tenderness but force.  
Prove you can practise what you could discourse!  
Arm her with courage for the last adieu,  
And not to impede your going, nor pursue.  
But here again comes misery, blind as night;  
That knows not good from evil, wrong from right.

---



## SCENE V.

STATILIA. HELIUS. SENECA.

STATILIA.

Oh, best of friends, and bitterest of foes,  
Hear, Seneca and Helius, hear my woes!  
Divorce and banishment! By all above,  
For no offence towards Caesar, but my love.  
His doom to-day to-morrow must enforce.  
Oh, doom of misery! exile and divorce!  
Nay, Seneca, such ills have no relief.  
Philosophy itself should share my grief.  
But hear, ye furies! hear in hell's abyss,  
'Tis Helius, Helius I've to thank for this.

HELIUS.

You wrong me much—

STATILIA.

Accursed be thy brain!

As scathed a tree-top withers on the plain,

With feet as rooted, let thy limbs disown  
Their office, and thy tongue forget its tone!  
Sleep fly thy bed, and appetite thy board!  
Thy heart with stings in every pulse be stored!  
Thine eyes see only phantoms night shall rear,  
And nothing but my curses pierce thine ear!  
'Till from thy bones their sinews burst alive,  
And worms devour thee long ere death arrive.

## SENECA.

Wave after wave thus menaces the rocks;  
The shipwreck trembles, but the headland mocks:  
And spray and foam, from billows heavenward tost,  
Return to ocean, or in air are lost.  
Subdue this storm! resume your self-control!  
Is not all sting of suffering in the soul?  
Can the soul feel but what attention seizes?  
Which can not habit guide as reason pleases?  
Like some fair house, well-furnished, make your mind;  
With courts and bowers for every use assigned;  
Bowers for the bath, for exercise, for sleep,  
Bowers for refection, bowers for books: but keep

No cell neglected, no unguarded gate,  
 Nor den of horrors keep for spleen or hate !  
 Who knocks so loud there ? "Lictors !" What about ?  
 " Exile, death, torture !" Do it then without !  
 While here my soul resumes its work within :  
 Your's needs no notice more, nor more shall win.  
 Why, strip these bugbears of their pomp and suit,  
 Our groundless fears and people's false repute ;  
 Bring exile and divorce to weight and seal ;  
 Add, if you will, death's terrors to the tale ;  
 Exile, divorce and death, in all their force,  
 What are they ? E'en death, exile and divorce.  
 No more ? All else is added by our fears.  
 Anxiety and grief, like sobs and tears,  
 Spring from ourselves. A child can these suppress :  
 Methinks adults should master those no less.

STATILIA.

You reason, but I suffer.

SENECA.

Reason still !

And learn that suffering half depends on will.

## STATILIA.

The rack, untried, is scanned with curious eyes,  
But how unlike the wretch's whom it tries.  
And shipwreck, seen from shore, is borne with ease ;  
And fire, that wraps a city, seen from seas ;  
But mingle with the flames, or waves among,  
And where's the hero's look, or sage's tongue ?  
I too braved fortune, till I felt her force :  
And were you banished, could you so discourse ?

## SENECA.

If not, what follows, but a fool-born jest ?  
All sciences and arts disown that test.  
Virtue disdain's extrinsic means to please ;  
And stakes on no man's courage truths like these—  
Truths, fixed as stars eternal and sublime,  
To guide and charm the wandering sons of time ;  
Who all may ken them, but though none discern,  
They beam no less sublime, no less eterne.

## STATILIA.

Blest sage ! whose reasoning is the warbler's flight  
That heavenward pours its numbers lost in light.

Fain would I follow to the gates of day,  
But ah! my earth-born passions cleave to clay.

## SENECA.

Enlist the noblest on your side and truth's!  
Let conscious worth, your beauty's and your youth's,  
Let pride, resentment, anger join their force,  
To welcome banishment, defy divorce,  
Descend, if needed, down to death's abyss,  
And make events all stepping-stones to bliss.  
Great fires find fuel in whate'er they reach;  
And tides, that fail to flood, embrace the beach.  
Princes in vain may brandish rods and axe,  
And doom to exile, doom to death and racks:  
What hurt has mind, immortal mind, from these?  
E'en nothing more than each man's mind may please.  
Nay, these, like larums, rally virtue's force,  
And happiness thence gains a new resource.  
In the mind's choice all good and evil rest;  
The mind, still free, unbounded, undepressed,  
Unmixed with matter, and untouched by time,  
The mind no evil knows but vice and crime.

Yet rise, my soul, and higher wing thy worth,  
Beyond night's shadow, and the morning's birth,  
To him, who made and governs all that is.  
Was this vast world, this universe of his  
Framed but to serve man's miserable desires?  
No, let me perish when its cause requires.  
I only breathe his pleasure to fulfil ;  
I know events must indicate his will ;  
If these deny me here abode, or breath,  
Then welcome banishment, and welcome death !  
Yet here my dwelling while he deigns assign,  
With some small share in ministries divine,  
Here let me serve, with gratitude and pride,  
And work as one to providence allied :  
Wherewith if being-here no more consist,  
I can not, ought not, would not more exist.  
Death's pang is nothing—

STATILIA.

No. But what succeeds?

SENECA.

E'en what the weal of all things wills and needs.

Accept whatever this requires! you must:  
Inanimate nature, and unconscious dust;  
Or modes of being, new, and happier far,  
Through galaxies of worlds, from star to star—

STATILIA.

Who says so—who?

SENECA.

Alas!

STATILIA.

Who told you this?

What voice from heaven, what phantom from the abyss  
Has given you, man! the mission you embrace,  
To preach a godhead of such power and grace?  
Who told you he would earth's extinction heed:  
Or that my misery may not prove his need?  
Then worship him who will, but can I love?  
This world for me! away with worlds above!  
Let heaven forbid divorce, revoke my fate,  
Or save from exile to an isle I hate!

If nature want the will, or want the power—  
 Thanks for your counsels! but was this their hour?  
 In grief, those theories are seenie songs.  
 Leave me, I pray, to misery and my wrongs!  
 Too base and gross for philosophic lore.  
 Leave me, my wrongs and misery to deplore!  
 And keep for yours those sentiments divine!  
 And better may they serve your stead than mine:  
 And better answer what you think their end,  
 When you so suffer—which may fate forefend.

## HELIUS.

Well, Seneca, day wears; and work remains;  
 And little thanks here recompense your pains.  
 'Twere loan, no usury tempts, or pledge redeems,  
 Methinks, to invest more wisdom here, on themes,  
 Which few men credit, fewer make their guides,  
 No woman understands, and this derides.

## SENECA.

We part, on different paths, perhaps for ever:  
 Make duty's still your preference and endeavour!



And still success your footsteps shall pursue,  
As still it follows mine. Adieu!

STATILIA.

Adieu!

SCENE VI.

STATILIA. HELIUS.

STATILIA.

High flown and ominous, as evening's rack!  
And Helius sneer and dictate? Ha! come back!  
Ho! you, who used to tremble at my breath—  
Accursed minister of doom and death,  
What's now your business with the best of Rome?

HELIUS.

Next nothing.

STATILIA.

Whither wend you with him?

HELIUS.

Home.

THECLA.

STATILIA.

Condemned?

HELIUS.

He is.

STATILIA.

To banishment?

HELIUS.

To die.

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## SCENE VII.

STATILIA.

Ah, what a witless, worthless wretch am I!  
And thus the hero to his tomb descends,  
Nor owns a sorrow till he soothe a friend's :  
While I reproached, insulted him, methinks,  
And mixed with bitterness the dregs he drinks.  
Ah, shameless woman ! Follow ? 'Tis too late.  
There closes, crash on crash, the brazen gate,  
Which death, divorce and banishment invest,  
Oh fast and hard, as Nero's brazen breast !  
That gate divides me from the noblest sage,  
That ever graced an impious clime and age ;  
Last of my father's friends, and sole of all,  
That either mourned my rise, or mourns my fall.  
Adieu ! The stoic's stern philosophy  
Ne'er shone so pure and brilliant as in thee,  
Great moralist ! whose wisdom, lore and worth  
Were guides to Rome, and ornaments to earth ;

Teaching mankind to ensure their own repose,  
To work out happiness from wrongs and woes,  
To conquer anger, tolerate contempt,  
Live, though in chains, from servitude exempt,  
Esteem good conscience more than e'en good health,  
And alms and gifts the only use of wealth.  
So, Seneca must die ; as Thrasea died.  
Star after star extinguished, guide on guide !  
Oh, what a drear and desolate world is this !  
A shoreless sea, a fathomless abyss,  
And heaven, as marble, arched o'er all in night—

*THECLA without.*

Come, dayspring from on high ! immortal light !

*STATILIA.*

Vain vows ! What answer have the gods to give ?  
Despair and perish !

*THECLA without.*

I believe ! I live !

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SCENE VIII.

THECLA. STATILIA.

STATILIA.

Thecla!

THECLA.

Heaven opens, as a dome, above!

STATILIA.

(She raves.)

THECLA.

The rushing storm—the radiant dove—

STATILIA.

(She has heard Paul. His fury fills her breast:  
And hope returns to mine. Wait, wait the rest!)

## THECLA.

The cloud rolls westward, folded as a robe.  
A many-coloured rainbow vaults the globe.  
Land of my fathers, peace be in thy bowers!  
Lo, the waste freshens, and a fountain towers!  
Its healing streams to thine, Damascus, roll;  
And Abana and Pharpar cleanse the soul.  
Bleak Tabor blossoms; hymns from Hermon rise;  
And Lebanon's broad cedars greet the skies.

## STATILIA.

(Ye gods! this Christian Jewess plight her troth  
As Cæsar's consort? Rome would rend them both.)

## THECLA.

In wilds, beyond the mountains of the morn,  
Mid rock and sand, a desert lone and lorn,  
Where but the scorpion breeds or serpent bides,  
Behold! with bursting hoof, and heaving sides,  
With bloodshot eye, and tongue consumed of thirst,  
Guiltless himself, for others' guilt accurst,

Feeble in bleat, with look to heaven npeast  
The mystic scape-goat sinks, and sighs his last.

## STATILIA.

(Fond fool, pursue your superstitious dreams!  
But I already hear the tiger's screams,  
Whose yellow teeth shall tear you stripped for him,  
And round the arena scatter limb from limb.)

## THECLA.

What more could hope demand, or wit devise?  
Rise, slaves and captives! lazars, lepers rise!  
As rivers pour, lo! innocence is given,  
And sorrow, shame and sin aspire to heaven.  
How proud, how selfish have I been, how vain!  
What insolence of grandeur turned my brain!  
Off, off, vile gewgaws of a worthless world!  
This tire, these rubied rings, these bracelets pearly,  
These spotted wasps, these adders sting my head.  
How can I wear what others want for bread?  
Take, take them, and divide to those that need!  
Go, clothe the naked, bid the famished feed!



STATILIA.

(My jewels! Who would prize what she contemns?  
 But thus the dunghill bird appreciates gems:  
 Thus, Cæsar's gifts the beggar. Fates revoke  
 Both exile and divorce. 'Tis time I spoke.)  
 Once more I cross the progress of your pride,  
 Welcome, I ween, as ghost to homicide—

THECLA.

Crowned with a star, let Bethlehem lift her voice!  
 Far isles shall answer, and the floods rejoice.  
 Speak, Salem, speak! thy tidings are from heaven;  
 Speak, and be echoed from these mountains seven!

STATILIA.

(Forsooth, ye muses, cease your choirs, and learn  
 Of Jewry's harp!) Will Thecla deign discern?

THECLA.

Trouble me not! my sins shall be forgiven.  
 These hands, these feet are pierced; this heart is  
 riven.

Statilia? Woe mine eyes, with visions thronged,  
To o'erlook, sad sight, the woman I have wronged!  
Forgive, forgive me! I was vain and young,  
Friendless, and ignorant of a flatterer's tongue:  
And fondly thought to rule a vacant breast,  
Rebuild a temple, make a people blest,  
Till heaven the winnower sent, with fan and sieve,  
To separate wheat and chaff—Forgive, forgive!  
The place you claim, and merit, I resign.  
It never was, nor should, nor shall be mine.  
Return, return to Caesar's house and heart!  
From both forever be it mine to part!  
For some far wood, some isle beyond the wave,  
Some outeast's cottage, some barbarian's cave;  
Wherever want and woe their couch conceal,  
There be it mine to minister and kneel:  
There no extreme shall find my service loath,  
To soothe all suffering, soul's and body's both.  
Your wrongs are great? but great amends are these.  
Accept them! Pray! Forgive me, on my knees!  
Be not too proud! Accept these great amends,  
Or dictate more, and let us part as friends.

## STAFILIA.

Friends! You repent, and think to be forgiven?  
You, who have beggared me, divorced and driven  
To exile on a rock that ocean hems,  
While here you strew the pavement with my gems:  
And now, when doltish dreams of heaven and hell,  
And feats the conjurer wrought, or conjured tell,  
Have roused your credulous hopes or craven fears,  
Prostrate to me you proffer prayers and tears?  
Pardon, of course, to penitence belongs,  
And these amends compensate all my wrongs?  
Oh fool, and liberal of another's dower!  
The amends you offer are beyond your power.  
Know, great occasions hinge on pivots small;  
A gate one moment proves the next a wall.  
I warned you once, the portal might be passed;  
I warned you twice—that offer was your last.  
Yes, Paul may preach offences are commuted,  
And vouch the cures in Galilee reputed;  
But nature's laws hold unrelenting sway:  
Whoe'er incurs their penalty must pay.  
Can premises their just conclusion shun?  
Can crimes their consequence? What's done is done:

What can not be undone must have its meeds,  
 And shed its influence o'er whate'er succeeds.  
 Though great your charms of beauty and discourse,  
 Is Caesar's heart so subject to their force,  
 'Twill reconcile him to a wife once hated,  
 Or wean from him a wench, ere lust be sated ?  
 The task exceeds your intellect and nerve.  
 Potent to wrong me, impotent to serve,  
 Learn better who it is with whom you mix !  
 And let me shun him, though to cross the Styx.  
 Thither the only friend, who could have striven  
 To mitigate my doom, e'en now is driven ;  
 Lest haply he should check the hopes you cherish ;  
 And, the last Roman, Seneca must perish.

## THECLA.

What ! Seneca doomed, whom Paul esteemed so well ?  
 Their words made concords, sweet as horn and shell.  
 Each seemed the seraph of a separate sphere,  
 For different parts, in one great purpose here.  
 Proud dame, your lips have arrows sharp and fierce,  
 But all I offer is a heart to pierce.

To Cæsar ! come !—I pray you, I implore—  
Speed ! I can serve you, reconcile, restore.  
Trust me ! in vain you execrate and spurn :  
To serve and save you be my sole return.  
Let my last efforts serve an injured wife,  
And save a Christian's soul, or sage's life !

## STATILIA.

For others, prove your power ! for me, adieu !  
When Cæsar wants me, he must seek, and sue.

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## SCENE IX.

STATILIA.

Go! tinsel insect, of a reptile born,  
Your little day of sunshine clouds at morn.  
Go, reft of sting, pursue your song and flight!  
Go, look for honey-dew where snares invite,  
And think you charm each creature you annoy,  
Till seized for sport and tortured by a boy.  
Yet Syria's goddess made this prince her thrall:  
Devotion rules the vulgar, great and small.  
Man's cradle was the east; and thence has pest,  
Poison, and power pursued him to the west;  
Thence clouds of locusts drive on winds that wither,  
And thence religions, old and new, come hither.  
Nature now dotes: and what if Rome embrace  
The slavish virtues of that conquered race?  
Forgot the Olympian company of Jove,  
Forgot the powers that people stream and grove;

Fair Dian's train, and memory's fairer choir ;  
All that beam beauty, all that breathe desire ;  
Forgot, for what ? mean rites, a wildering creed,  
Laws none can keep, and letters few can read,  
Vain hopes, low-lived examples, recreant fears,  
And a lone god that menaces the spheres.  
Rome, Rome, adieu ! No isle in ocean lost,  
No mountain's cavern, wood of Thracian frost,  
Or ccell in Lybian sand, but offers home  
To me less loathed than Cæsar's house in Rome.  
Ye golden halls, ye tortoise-shell arcades,  
Towers, graven gates, and leafy colonnades,  
Farewell ! To me your future aspect looms,  
Frightful as ruin's, hateful as the tomb's.  
To me disgrace, war', insult, all the ills  
Divorce invites, and banishment fulfils,  
Were, to the pleasures Cæsar's house respires,  
As health's own bed to fever's or to fire's.  
Let me leave Rome ere evening dark the fen.  
Hail, and farewell, great mother of great men !  
Whose trophies witness, and whose tombs repeat,  
Thy worth exhausted, and thy womb effete,

Thy liberties extinct, thy conquests o'er,  
Thine arts degenerate, and thy mind still more.  
Though high o'erlooking earth and ocean, still,  
Barren and bald thou standest on the hill,  
An oak of leafless top and inly rotten,  
Or pillar piled for uses long forgotten.  
Lo! superstitions drear, malign and vile,  
Arabia's refuse, and the scum of Nile,  
Myths void of grace, and godheads void of form,  
Rise from corruption, as an insect swarm :  
To darken heaven, waste earth, and people hell.  
Ah, once great mother of great men, farewell !

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## SCENE X.

## CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS.

## STROPHE.

Will the heathen for ever so rage?

Will these lords of the land and the main,  
And the statesmen and wits, that enlighten their age,  
Still imagine a counsel so vain?

All the princes and rulers arose with one mind,  
And the senates assembled and spoke—  
Break asunder his bands, give his words to the wind!

Let us shake from our shoulders the yoke.  
But, enthroned in the splendours of anon,  
Where the light of the universe springs,  
He shall laugh the philosopher's wisdom to scorn,  
And rebuke the devices of kings.

## ANTISTROPHE.

There's a voice from the zenith, and voice  
From the rivers and mountains replies—  
Let the wilderness waken, the desert rejoice,  
And the vales with an anthem arise!

An highway shall be there, an highway for the blest,  
Which the lion and dragon forego,  
Where the ransomed may worship, the wayfarer rest,  
And the impotent bound as a roe.  
There's a wail from the deep ; there's a cry  
From the bottomless darkness beneath ;  
There's a hiss from the serpent that never can die ;  
There's a weeping and gnashing of teeth.

## EPODE.

Yet I paused to see the wicked prosper still in lust  
and pride,  
Robed in red, with golden foreheads, and a tongue  
that heaven defied,  
Blossoming as blooms the heather, swelling as a tide  
intense—  
Had I vainly cleansed my heart, and washed my hands  
in innocence ?  
Here my feet had nearly faltered, here were shades  
beset with snares ;  
Till the word's celestial radiance rose upon my path  
and theirs.

Lo, they stand on slippery places, o'er a fathomless  
abyss,

Giddy with their height, and madly daucing towards  
the precipice.

Where, where are they? Oh how abject! Oh how  
terrible their fall!

'Twas a dream: the world awakes; and heaven alone  
is over all.



## ACT IV.

## SCENE I.

NERO.

Avaunt, ascetic bacchanals, avaunt !  
These walls are weary of your funeral chaunt !  
Woe the fanatic that inspires your vows !  
His stormy tongue, his cloud compelling brows  
Still haunt my senses, as, when sleep has fled,  
Pale scowls of punished traitors haunt my bed.  
But Jewry dogs him ; Thecla comes to doom ;  
And Rome shall welcome him where beasts entomb ;  
And out for ever shall this trash be trod,  
In blood and dirt, his gospel and his god.  
Aye, for ere this old Seneca is free  
Among the dead, and Rome belongs to me—  
Whom nothing now divine or human thralls.  
Gods ! shall I change a pedant's yoke for Paul's ?

Spaniards are coming : Galba drivels still —  
Speed hither, gallants, and here work my will !  
Which camp and forum else would fain deride,  
Nor own in Jewry's maid an emperor's bride.  
The pampered slaves shall lick the dust she treads ;  
And all earth worship whom its master weds.  
No prince before me knew what power confers.  
My voice is Rome's : my will, my welfare hers :  
Whatever lust can prompt, or fancy raise,  
'Tis mine to dictate, and the world's to praise.  
Why, what's this life ? The moment present here.  
All else is memory, or but hope and fear.  
The future has not come ; the past has flown :  
The present's all we lose, and all we own.  
Alas ! even so, is empire worth the cost ?  
No pause—no peace—still struggle or be lost !  
Suspect—espy—discover—doom—destroy !  
Till when ? That old man loved me well a boy.  
Why stept he still between me and mine aim ?  
The shaft once sped, an archer's not to blame.  
Sooner or later old men must decease.  
How Helius loiters ! Will he bring me peace ?

Chase the grim shapes that nightly throng my room ;  
Or still my mother's shrieking "Smite the womb" ?  
In vain have gods been bribed from fane to fane ;  
From court to court armed sentinels in vain :  
Not all Loensta's arts can lay that scream,  
Nor all these conjurers vaunt, and dupes esteem :  
Wine has no opiate, intellect no force  
To cease that cry, when midnight wakes remorse.  
'Tis done. 'Twas fated. Children mourn the past ;  
The future, fools expect, and knaves forecast ;  
Men seize the present. Here at least we are ;  
The whence and whither never needs a care.

## SCENE II.

GALBA. NERO. DWARF.

NERO.

What tempest agitates the cedar now?  
What mist with menace wraps the mountain's brow?  
Has Vindex risen from the dead in Gaul?  
Or Spain rebelled, or Rome run mad for Paul?  
An old man's tears, like thaws in winter, course:  
If I can stay the current, state the source!

GALBA.

My heart is riven. Rome shudders with a cry  
That Cæsar's doom sends Seneca to die.

NERO.

For treason, Galba! fouler ne'er was known.  
Piso's whole plot for Seneca was sown.  
The stalk shows first, the blossom bides its hour—  
But could I smite the stem and spare the flower?

Unless to own all past discoveries vain,  
And all the accomplices unjustly slain.

GALBA.

When Cæsar dooms I dare not doubt the reason :  
But I dare claim compassion e'en for treason,  
In Cæsar's friend ; whose precepts formed his mind,  
Adorn his empire, and might mend mankind.  
At seventy years, can I have long to mourn,  
Philosophy extinct, and lore forlorn ?  
But you, on empire's height, in manhood's flower,  
Entering a long career of fame and power,  
You need, to witness and applaud your course,  
Oh more than arts confer, or arms enforce.  
Of all your virtues mercy yields to none :  
Its use but wants occasions : here is one.  
Revoke that doom ! I dare not say forgive,  
But mitigate the sentence : let him live !  
Your glory's monument, your mercy's shrine—  
Which ages hence shall hallow as divine,  
And history cite, to exemplify your worth,  
While letters last, or virtue lives on earth.

T



NERO.

The advice you offer?

GALBA.

And the prayer I plead.

Accept it, as a god! accept, and speed!

Lest death prevent you. Cancel that decree,

And call back Seneca to life and me!

For Cæsar's sake, for Rome's—

NERO.

I will. I yield.

Centurion, fly! My sentence is repealed.

GALBA.

Make me your messenger!

NERO.

Good Galba, fly!

You counsel wisely. What a wretch am I!

Speed! That stern sentence is revoked. Be fast!

Had you been here, it never would have past.

ACT IV. SCENE II.

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Go, rescue him from death, and me from worse,  
The hasty doom one vainly would reverse.  
Instead of death, be banishment his meed!  
And let him choose what island—Galba, speed!  
(On a fool's errand. Helius waits without.  
He who gains time, gains everything no doubt.)

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## SCENE III.

HELIUS. NERO. DWARF.

NERO.

Well! what mischance makes Helius come so cowed?  
Against my doles are antidotes allowed?  
Against my sentence lies appeal? To whom?  
Or dares death doubt to execute my doom?

HELIUS.

Be Cæsar's mandates all as well fulfilled,  
And all his foes as Seneca is stilled!  
Him have I left, exhaust of blood and breath,  
In charge of Cæsar's favourite lictor, death.

NERO.

Well said! But how did Sophistry behave?  
Tell by what steps he tottered to his grave?  
The play's last scenes are those that most engage;  
And life grows sweeter as foes leave the stage.

HELIUS.

Hence to his house we hastened: on the road,  
Who passed, were greeted in his usual mode.  
Our entrance at the porch his wife discerned,  
And came forth, cheering "But you have returned!"  
Then, seeing me, pursued with faltering face—  
"The gods remunerate Cæsar for his grace!"  
"To work his will and theirs"—he calmly said—  
"I hither have returned, as hence I sped;  
"And bring, the work to witness or fulfil,  
"This soldier's duty, and that surgeon's skill:  
"Your fortitude is all there needs beside.  
"Think who you are, whose daughter, and whose bride!  
"Think in whose reign our destinies are cast,  
"And in whose presence we now speak our last."  
Then kissed her silent till, in vain suppress,  
A shriek of anguish pierced her surging breast—  
When the whole household wept aloud and wailed.  
He strove to soothe them, and ere long prevailed.  
Then sat, and bade his codicils be brought:  
Which I forbade his altering—

NERO.

As you ought.

## HELIUS.

Whereon he, turning to his household, cried—  
“ Since I may leave no legacy beside,  
“ Accept the example I have given and give,  
“ And, as you see me perish, learn to live !  
“ For now 'tis time these elements dissever,  
“ And part, the human and divine, for ever :  
“ Rendering to earth whate'er of earth was given,  
“ While I, the soul, restore myself to heaven.  
“ Whence reason came, as radiance from the sun,  
“ To illumine this body, for a work now done.  
“ And, from the teeming womb, when time ordains,  
“ As struggles forth the babe, with throes and pains ;  
“ As spreads its wings the chrysalis for flight ;  
“ As morn lifts up its eyelids on the height ;  
“ So yearns my spirit toward its second birth,  
“ And bids the flesh farewell—farewell to earth !  
“ And hail ! the eterne, the beautiful above,  
“ The boundless world of wisdom, worth and love.”  
With this he bared his arms, and called t<sup>e</sup> speech,  
And stretched them forward. Veins were pierced in  
each.

His wife, dissuaded still, now lanced her own :  
And her red blood already stained the stone,  
When, as your orders came, her wounds were closed,  
Nor dares she since leave life, howe'er disposed.  
Blood soon ceased flowing from the old man's veins :  
Cramps followed : and he craved the bowl that banes,  
Which, brought and emptied, answered ill its part,  
To reach through vacant arteries head or heart.  
Straight " To the bath ! " he faltered. Whither sped,  
He took up water, sprinkled it, and said—  
" To god, the saviour ! " Then sank down beneath.  
Where he soon ceased to struggle, and to breathe.

## NERO.

The dotard might have died with less parade.  
Whate'er his suffering, 'twas the choice he made.  
Life at his years, methinks, were little worth :  
I gave him seventy : 'twas enough. Henceforth  
I live and govern for my own behoof,  
And fear no more philosophy's reproof.  
Nor will I tolerate Paul's. The world shall know  
What empire means. You've one thing yet to show—

HELIUS.

Ten twelfths to Cæsar : one to several friends :  
And one his wife—

NERO.

Well, well! but that depends.  
Now let his name for ever be forgot!

HELIUS.

Perish his memory!

---

## SCENE IV.

THECLA. HELIUS. NERO. DWARF.

THECLA.

Seneca is not?

HELIUS.

No more!

NERO.

What now? Why kneel you to the skies,  
With gibbering lips, and hands uplift and eyes?  
Save to thank heaven: for never death befel  
For me timed better, nor for you so well.  
Sweet nymph! our marriage gods and men speed on,  
Of two, that dared oppose it, one has gone;  
The other waits your pleasure; yours is mine.  
Which, forum, camp and senate may malign;  
But once let Galba trumpet Spain arrived,  
And earth shall worship where its lord has wived.



But what strange mystery in that face appears!  
 Is gratitude best shown by sighs and tears?  
 Sunshine and shower in summer's cloud combine—  
 Oh more than ever lovely, more divine!

THECLA.

(In peace! A holy and a wholesome thought.  
 Ah, gleams of morn, that mountain-tops have caught!  
 Spirit to spirit, dust to dust, we sever:  
 Who made and governs all things, reigns for ever.)

NERO.

Thecla, look on me, goddess of my soul!  
 The hour draws nigh, and swift, ye moments, roll!  
 When Cæsar's love no longer need be hidden.  
 Our marriage shall be—

THECLA.

Never! 'Tis forbidden.  
 Statilia is your wife. If beauty, grace,  
 Talent and truth could vindicate that place,  
 No worthier wife e'er charmed an emperor's heart.  
 Restore her! love her! I, 'tis I depart.

ACT IV. SCENE IV.

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NERO.

What's this?

THECLA.

Farewell!

NERO.

Stay, Thecla, stay! return!

The world is at your feet—

THECLA.

A world I spurn.

NERO.

Accept earth's empire, and its master's love!

THECLA.

Heaven's kingdom comes: my master reigns above.

NERO.

Your words are foolishness—

THECLA.

Your offers dross.

NERO.

I wield the sceptre—

THECLA.

And I wear the cross.

NERO.

Ha! Paul has lived too long. Dear Thecla, stay!

An age of pleasure waits us.

THECLA.

Hence! away!

My heart is changed: my soul transformed: farewell!

A gulf divides us, fathomless as hell.

Go, follow phantoms, and be mocked by dreams;

Go, look for dayspring, where a bonfire gleams!

I know a path to rise by, as the dove,

To where bright spheres of innocence and love,

That wept the downfall of a world forlorn,  
Hymn earth's return, and welcome back to morn.  
Ho! foul of heart, and hands of bloodshed full,  
Your soot shall be us snow, your crimson wool.  
Wash, or seek refuge under earth and sea,  
For One is coming, whom the hills shall flee.  
A voice precedes: it echoes in these walls:  
Hear and confess, 'tis Heaven's, and heard in Paul's.

NERO.

By all our gods—

TIECLA.

All vanities and lies!

NERO.

That man shall perish—

TIECLA.

He shall live!

NERO.

He dies!

THECLA.

Death shall not touch him, nor your menace move.

NERO.

That time shall try—

THECLA.

Eternity shall prove.

NERO.

Time and the sword—

THECLA.

Eternity and grace—

Where neither death has force, nor Caesar place.

NERO.

But death and Caesar here have place and force.

THECLA.

The soul is free: you cannot quell discourse.  
And Paul's already peals from zone to zone—  
Woe! if its fame heap curses on your own.

Beware! The echoes of that voice sublime  
Shall pierce through darkness, like the shafts of time,  
Through silence, like the sun's; from breast to breast;  
As waters wear the rock, as vines invest;  
To grace and gladden earth's remotest spot,  
When Rome is ruins, and your name forgot.  
Beware you wrong him, or conspire to harm!  
A wiser watches with a mightier arm.  
Listen, and learn of him to reign and live,  
And win a worthier crown than Rome can give,  
An empire greater than from pole to pole—  
Right reason's rule, the kingdom of the soul;  
The contrite heart, where peace preserves its throne,  
That peace you oft invoke, but ne'er have known.  
Lo! one good angel lingers o'er you still,  
For the last time to cry "Thou shalt not kill!"  
Repent, ere yet the accepted time be o'er!  
Recall Statilia—

NERO.

Never name her more!

## THECLA.

I never will. The accepted time is past :  
The one good angel gone, that lingered last.  
Why should I loiter still, or longer strive ?  
Me waters wait to bury and revive,  
In purity and peace ; from thee to sever,  
And leave, in ah what company for ever !  
Mine eyes are opened. Woe ! the palace swarms  
With furies, fiends, and blood-bespotted forms :  
High in the midst a matron smites her womb,  
And chides the pale-faced people of the tomb ;  
Who throng the cloisters, throng the porch, in troops,  
As wolves gape round the buffalo that droops.  
Away ! let none resist me, none recall !  
My master summons ! From the world ! To Paul !

CHRISTIANS *without.*

Angels have charge to rend the prisoner's chain,  
And waves to wall a pathway through the main.

---

SCENE V.

HELIUS. NERO. DWARF.

NERO.

Paul to the lions!

HELIUS.

Caesar?

NERO.

Speed!

HELIUS.

'Tis sped—

But Paul's a Roman—

NERO.

Bring me then his head!



As you prize yours. Send orders, instant send!  
 Insanity or nonsense, this must end.  
 Bring his head hither, that mine eyes may feast!

CHRISTIANS *without.*

Man's blood shall be required of man and beast.

NERO.

Christians? Pursue her! I will not be balked:  
 Though never muse so sang, or syren talked.  
 Pursue! but wreath your fetters still with flowers,  
 And lure or bear her to Europa's bowers—  
 No—to the bower where Capricorn careers:  
 There let her rage exhaust itself in tears!  
 This purity, with which she plumes her pride,  
 Must first be humbled. I have means untried.

CHRISTIANS *without.*

In their own craft He takes the crafty still:  
 And makes men's anger magnify His will—

NERO.

Silence those sots!

HELIUS.

The headsman grinds his blade.  
Your enemies lie, as Paul shall soon be laid!

CHRISTIANS *without*.

Vengeance is His, who can and will repay.  
Beware the pitfall—

NERO.

Ha! what's that they say?  
Loeusta hints of mists inhaled. that steep  
Each sense awhile in half-delirious sleep,  
Prostrate in impotence to strive with force,  
But conscious still for pleasure keen and coarse.

CHRISTIANS *without*.

Brief as a breath the sinner's joys are o'er—  
Fruit, fair without, but ashes at the core—

Remorse succeeds—a shadow none can fly—  
 And death's pale horse, and hell's—

NERO.

They rave. They lie.

CHRISTIANS *without.*

Their fire still kindles : still their worm corrodes—

NERO.

Your's be that omen, and the fate it bodes !

CHRISTIANS *without.*

Their smoke of torment towers for evermore—

NERO.

Will no sword smite those maniacs from my door ?  
 Dwarf, bring Locusta, ere my bath be ta'en—  
 And, Helius, speed thereafter news from Spain.

---

## SCENE VI.

NERO. DWARF.

NERO.

(Good servants both! as trustworthy as clever!  
And silent, both! One must be so for ever.)

DWARF.

Cæsar—

NERO.

Who spoke?

DWARF.

Beware—

NERO.

Who said that? Thou?

Ha! Dwarf! Has dumbness then been feigned till  
now?

Or have these Christians driven a demon thence?

Or gods sent thither one for Rome's defence?

Speak! If thou canst—

THECLA.

DWARF.

Beware!

NERO.

Of what? Of whom?

Speak, speak!

DWARF.

Beware my demon and my doom!

NERO.

What's that? Say on!

DWARF.

You see me hunched and lame,  
 Of face ill favoured, and a stunted frame;  
 But once I strode, like others, tall and straight,  
 With grace of mien, and confidence of gait;  
 My limbs as beechen boughs, my eyes as stars;  
 The shape and port man images for Mars;  
 And, more, with spirit tameless as the wind;  
 No toils exhausted me, no terms confined;

All nature's powers seemed opening on my soul,  
And heaven's blue heights my element and goal.  
When through the clouds that coming days disclose,  
O'er fancies bright, a brighter phantom rose,  
And all my youth's illusions merged in one.  
An Ethiop's daughter, dazzling as the sun,  
Made me her guest; and, sorceress, made accept  
The cup she drugged. I drained it, and I slept;  
Nor know how long: but found in me awake,  
Oh dreader change than age or death could make!  
I found my stature dwarfed, my back imboss,  
My features shrunk, my fair proportions lost,  
Extinct my voice, extirpated my tongue.  
Yet all half-imag'd what I had been young—  
As mildew'd maize suggests its tassell'd leaves;  
As plate its pattern, battered down by thieves.  
But worse, alas! for now I feel it such,  
I found my tastes and passions changed as much:  
All seeds of former vice o'ergrown, as gorse,  
And all of virtue stifled, save remorse.  
What could I thence, subdued by want and fear,  
But follow her for bread, who sold me here—

The terrible Locusta, now by time  
 Deformed scarce less than I am by her crime.  
 You bought and pitied me abhorred of all,  
 And raised to rule your household and your hall.  
 And I have loved and served you as divine ;  
 And now would save from sufferings more than mine.

NERO.

But whence these accents of unearthly knell?  
 Open thy mouth, impostor! Death and hell!  
 Whence, whence these words?

DWARF.

Shall Cæsar be deceived?  
 The prisoner preached—I heard, and I believed.  
 And, as he crossed to heaven the sacred sign,  
 The shadow of his spirit swept through mine.  
 Prostrate I fell, in tears of penance drowned.  
 He came, with speech how piteous, how profound!  
 Oh could you hear—send for him, great August!  
 Hear, and have faith—he raised me from the dust:

And, instant making all these words mine own,  
Bade me seek Caesar's face, and, found alone,  
Speak, and say this—

NERO.

Thou liest, or thou ravest.

Wretch! thou shalt learn whose reason 'tis thou bravest.  
Paul's feats, forsooth? Locusta's are as clever.  
By Styx! I'll have thee stilled again for ever.  
Down, to her cavern! and be dwarfed and throed,  
E'en till thy soul change bodies with the toad!  
Yet stay! Perhaps thou'lt serve me better thus.  
Hear, Imp! Continue dumb to all but us:  
And watch Locusta! and betray, each eve!  
(There's none I trust. There's nothing I believe.)  
Go, bring the sorceress to my ante-room!  
(I will beware thy demon, and thy doom.)



## SCENE VII.

## CHORUS OF PAGANS.

## STROPHE.

Hence ! with your upstart superstition !

Your rituals, that disfigure Zion's !

Offspring of ignorance and sedition,

In deserts thief and slave partition.

Hence ! you, who promise sin remission,

For faith in Galilee's magician—

The Christians to the lions !

Genial and generous rites are ours,

By nature taught ere fraud had birth ;

Prescriptive gods, primeval powers,

That charm and cherish earth.

## ANTISTROPHE.

Great Jove, around whose starry shrine  
The muses, hours and graces quire ;  
With many a deity benign—  
The lord of light and lore divine,  
The maid whose arts with arms combine,  
The youth who cheers the world with wine,  
The queen of soft desire—

Dian, who speeds the babe unborn,  
And Mars, who balks the warrior's boast,  
And she who binds the golden corn—  
Hail to the heavenly host !

## EPODE.

And if demigods from earth e'er entered you celestial  
dome,  
Thither if from Greece Alcides if a Caesar soared from  
Rome,  
Have not they, man's benefactors, by whose light he  
learned to live,  
They, who gave him laws and morals, which the gods  
forgot to give—

They, who with no power but reason, and no weapon  
but the voice,  
Rescued man from every evil, save of man's own evil  
choice :  
For they taught there's nothing evil, but the vice which  
all may shun,  
And there's nothing good but virtue, virtue, which if  
wished is won.  
From the porticos of Athens, from the Academial  
grove,  
Pealed the strain, in numbers nobler than the spheres  
resound to Jove.  
Sages, hail, ye sons of wisdom, progeny of powers  
divine !  
Every clime and age shall eye you, as they eye the  
planets shine.  
Fools may slight, fanatics slander, plagiarists usurp  
your worth—  
Still your eyes soar above them, still your lights  
irradiate earth.



## ACT V.

## SCENE I.

HELIUS. GALBA.

HELIUS.

My heart nigh failed at Seneca's last hour—  
But Paul's has witnessed more than mortal power.  
Nay—chance might make coincidence as odd :  
And natural causes needed not a god.  
'Tis weary work. These consulships are dear.  
Christians have nerve : shall mine be less ? What's  
here ?  
Ah ! change of sentries ! change of slaves who wait !  
And Galba's brow suppressing change as great !  
Galba ! what is't so separates our souls ?  
One country claims us, and one prince controls.  
When have I wronged, how grieved you ? what's  
amiss ?

THECLA.

GALBA.

Wherefore such questions?

HELIUS.

You have secrets—

GALBA.

Yes.

HELIUS.

I know them—

GALBA.

Keep! or, sycophant, beware!

But death had best assist you—

HELIUS.

Spare me, spare!

My death may publish them, my life shall veil,  
Shall aid—command me! Other means may fail—

GALBA.

You reason, wretch! Be silent then, and breathe!  
For is your's life? Beware! The sword I sheathe  
O'erhangs you still. My toils are closing round,  
And nothing you can move shall burst their bound.  
But Caesar enters. Say I seek amain  
The Threefold gates, where eagles stoop from Spain.

Yes.

## SCENE II.

NERO. HELIUS. PRETORIANS. SLAVES.

NERO.

Galba?

HELIUS.

He hastens to the Threefold gates,  
Where eagles stoop from Spain—

NERO.

For prey that waits.  
But what's this scroll, found yonder on my lyre?  
Statilia's writing? Read! "They still conspire."

HELIUS.

Unknown to me? Who can conspire, who dares?  
Mine eyelids are the light's, mine ears the air's.

NERO.

There's nothing safe. The writer must be traced.  
Arrest and question her! Centurion, haste!  
I passed three heads impaled in the outer court.  
The bald one seemed of dictatorial port—

HELIUS.

Sylla's.

NERO.

The embalmed one?

HELIUS.

Plautus's from Greece.

NERO.

And one still bleeding?

HELIUS.

Paul's.

NERO.

A blest release!



Three enemies the fewer! Prospects clear :  
I see before me a long life's career.  
As one, who climbs the mountain, turns his eyes  
O'er boundless tracts of waters, lands and skies—  
Clouds few and far. By Lusitanian streams  
Otho, that beardless priest of Isis, dreams :  
Vitellius fattens where the Danube runs :  
And Syria binds Vespassian and his sons.  
But what served Sylla the dictator's name ?  
What Plautus lineage of imperial claim ?  
And Paul, thy faith, that nothing could confute,  
And words, that none could answer, all are mute.  
Where now the god, that pardons and redeems ?  
Thy mystic gifts, thy visionary dreams,  
Thy hope of future life, thy fond endeavour  
To chasten earth and heaven? Extinct for ever.  
At length I reign, and feel myself a prince.  
Who dares accuse me now, or can convince ?  
What limit has my power, my wealth what measure,  
Or right and wrong what difference but my pleasure ?  
Then day, begone! and, force, the feast enhance,  
In beauty's bower, where Thecla holds her trance—

## SCENE III.

THECLA. NERO. HELIUS. SLAVES.

THECLA.

Hosannah!

NERO.

Treason!

THECLA.

He has risen! has risen!  
From death to life! to kingdom from a prison!  
I saw—I see him.

NERO.

Ravest thou, or liest?

CHRISTIANS *without.*

From earth to heaven! Hosannah in the highest!

NERO.

Great gods! How broke she from the bridal bowers?  
 Has this house heard a higher voice than ours?  
 Or was I cozened?

THECLA.

Imp of sin and slaughter!  
 Hear, thou, who spillest Christian blood as water!  
 The captive is released, the suffering done,  
 The last good fight fought out, and victory won!  
 The apostle's soul has burst its bond of clay;  
 And towering, as an eagle soars to day,  
 Abandoned prince and people to their sins.  
 The work is o'er; the recompense begins.

NERO.

Who dared release, dared tell her?

THECLA.

Hymns in air  
 Unsealed the bower: I followed forth, was there,  
 And saw the sacrifice. His knees were bowed;  
 His eyes pierced upward through a radiant cloud;

Whence his face kindled with celestial love,  
 And his lips moved in intercourse above—  
 On wings where hovered an angelic host,  
 Heavenward to waft the liberated ghost.  
 The falchion flashed—Skies darkened as it fell:  
 Earth shook: the deep reverberated to hell.  
 And the soul, soaring to its starry home,  
 Waved benediction down on earth and Rome.

NERO.

Madness! For Rome, her safety I foresee,  
 And Thecla's too depends on whom but me?  
 Come, wrongs have recompense, if love abate.  
 Share with me still mine empire and my fate!

THECLA.

My wrongs be nameless—but your fate to share,  
 No beggar could desire, nor brigand dare.  
 And for your empire—

NERO.

What's this rage you wreak?

I bid you cease!

THECLA.

A greater bids me speak.

NERO.

Who's that? Beware! 'Tis Casar chides your tongue.

THECLA.

'Tis Heaven inspires, with peals that must be rung,  
 Woe to the fine, whose mysteries are but vice,  
 Whose gods but fiends, and beasts their sacrifice!  
 Woe to the wisdom, which derides that fane,  
 But founds on pride or pleasure faith as vain!  
 And woe the land, that sanctions wrong for right;  
 Where barbarous nobles think themselves polite,  
 Where man, like merchandise, is bought and sold,  
 Where truth and worth are measured but by gold,  
 Where delicate dames the new-born babe expose,  
 And festal hosts make homicide their shows,  
 Make game of massacre by flame and flood,  
 And mock the victim's tears and martyr's blood.  
 Go! fill the arena, fill, with Christian choirs,  
 And kind the sacrifice, and light the fires,  
 Or loose the lions, from their den, to sup!  
 I too am ready, I, for offering up.  
 But know! the martyr's blood and victim's tears,  
 As seed the forest sows of future years,

Shall rise from earth, overshadow it, and toss  
To heaven their tree-tops : and the cross, the cross,  
Which issued hence to torture and affright,  
And followed through the world your eagle's flight,  
That cross returns, sole sign of peace and worth,  
Sole symbol to conciliate heaven and earth,  
Returns, to beam o'er dome and diadem,  
As beams o'er orient hills the morning's gem.

## NERO.

Meanwhile I govern Rome, and Rome shall reign  
While earth continues—Cease this odious strain,  
To me unwonted, and for man unmeet !  
Tongue never thus foretold but rued the feat.

## THECLA.

A new command, new covenant begins—  
Proud city, hear ! or perish in thy sins !  
Thou, that between the mountain and the flood,  
Here sittest, rich in pillage, red in blood ;  
And givest kings their crowns, and men their laws,  
And challengest in arts the world's applause :



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With theatres and gates encumbering plains,  
And covering hills with palaces and fanes—  
A fire shall hedge thee ; plague on plague shall scourge.  
Lo hordes, as locusts, from the east emerge,  
Hordes from the north, as snows in winter strive,  
Hordes from the south, as dust the deserts drive ;  
And shouts of sea-kings from the west resound,  
“ Down with old Rome ! down with her to the ground ! ”  
Alas, the broken arch, the tottering stone,  
The battered idol, and the shaft o'erthrown !  
When briars shall climb the cornice gold surmounts,  
Wild cattle slake their thirst at marble founts,  
An owl hoot beneath the graven roof,  
Mosaics echo to the satyr's hoof,  
Wolves drag their prey to Cæsar's banquet-room,  
And serpents hiss, sole tenants of his tomb.

## NERO.

Treason or madness ! Take her from my sight !  
I cannot tolerate this, and will requite.  
Are these slaves Cæsar's, that gape here aghast ?  
Can Helius hear ? Arrest her, bind her, cast,

To wait my orders, at the torturer's feet,  
Who tears out tongues, for slanderers to eat.

THECLA.

Oh monster! mixed of cruelty and lust,  
Whose crimes have earned earth's horror and disgust,  
Till e'en these bondmen shrink from thy decree,  
And Helius doubts a stronger speaks by me.  
'Tis thine no more to deal destruction round:  
'Tis thine to tremble—for the trump shall sound—

NERO.

Kill her!

THECLA.

Thou scandal of all future fame,  
Whom no one virtue has redeemed from shame!  
The moment speeds, that sums thy sin's amount,  
And the last trump shall call thee to account—

NERO.

These goppelled cravens disobey my will.  
'Tis mine own blade must silence her, must kill.

A A

What's this? A swordless hilt! A scabbard void!  
Guards! The last Cæsar is betrayed, destroyed!  
Help! Traitress, hands remain to clutch thee fast,  
To rend thee, strangle thee—

THECLA.

The moment's past!  
Hark! How your summons peals from hall to hall—

NERO.

'Tis Galba's clarions!

THECLA.

'Tis the trumpet of Paul.

---

## SCENE IV.

GALBA. NERO. THECLA. HELIUS. DWARF.  
LEGIONARIES. SLAVES.

NERO.

What's this! Where am I! Magic—or a dream?  
On every side spears bristle! daggers gleam!  
What brings you hither? Here what 's't you seek,  
Ere summoned to my presence? Galba, speak!  
What legion?

GALBA.

Spain's.

NERO.

Who brings them hither?

GALBA.

I.

A A 2

NERO.

What means this? Traitor!

GALBA.

Tyrant! You must die!

NERO.

Who said that? Galba? Do I hear or see?  
What! all conspired to assassinate me, me?  
All, even to my hilt without a blade?  
Nay, yet one effort—gods, give ear and aid!  
Brave Spaniards, hither sped in happy hour,  
To reseue Cæsar from pretorian power,  
That makes for mine each edict men bemoan,  
And intercepts each largess else your own—  
Galba's a traitor! 'Tis at Galba's sign  
False Helius desolates your homes and mine.  
Name your own price, and give me Galba's head!  
As much for Helius living, half if dead!  
'Twas for this cause I summoned you to Rome.  
Obey, and make its palaces your home!  
Soldiers, 'tis Cæsar orders you: awake!  
Cæsar, whose arms you bear, whose bread you break,

Caesar here claims fulfilment of your oath ;  
Obey, and save him life and empire both !  
What ! Turn on me the weapons I have given ?  
By hands I nourished shall my heart be riven ?  
Ingrates ! All Galba's soul is in their eyes :  
And Helius lightens there, without disguise.  
The rocks of Spain would sooner heed appeal,  
Those rocks, whose bowels yield but brass and steel.  
What's your demand then, Galba ? What your pleasure ?  
Take any office, province, power or treasure !  
Or, if all else be little for your share,  
Take empire too ! but spare existence, spare !  
All peace, all order rests on Cæsar's fame.  
Spare the last scion of that house and name !  
Send me to build some Syrian fane, for hire ;  
Or earn through Greece my living, by the lyre ;  
Or beg, or serve—is this too much to give ?  
Entomb me in the mines—but let me live !

GALBA.

Nero ! let no such hope delude your brain.  
Your prayers are useless, as your threats were vain :

And your weak wiles, my Spaniards to suborn,  
Turn pity to disgust, and hate to scorn.  
Why should I cite those prodigies of shame,  
At which earth shudders? Why your victims name,  
Worthiest of Rome, whose vengeance I pursue,  
And here invoke their ghosts to claim its due?  
Are not your days all chronicled by crime,  
And traced in blood, to shock succeeding time?  
Earth, that bears all things, spurns you from her shore:  
The all-seeing sun will look on you no more:  
And air, that folds all creatures in its clasp,  
That brooks the tiger's breath, and feeds the asp,  
No more will mingle with your heart's supply,  
But peals to heaven the sentence "Tyrant, die!"  
What! Caesar's name will certes much be missed,  
When, worst that wore it, you no more exist?  
Haply your pride o'errates a race's worth,  
Of whose five princes four were pests to earth:  
Haply, should worthier successors be seen,  
Men may make princes, as the bees their queen:  
And haply, far as name alone injures,  
Caesars may spring from nobler blood than yours—

Whose ancestry has many a blot to pass,  
And whose true name denotes a "beard of brass,"  
Aye, "Beard of brass!" for such, the proverb said,  
Best suited heart of stone, and brain of lead.

NERO.

Are such terms generous?

GALBA.

Such are just and true,  
And here what's generous must attend what's due.

NERO.

Misfortune mitigates reproach, sometimes.

GALBA.

Who dooms a criminal, must name his crimes.

NERO.

What right have you to sentence me to death?

GALBA.

What none but tyrants forfeit, right to breath.



All hands are raised against a beast of prey :  
All arms are lawful when a snake's at bay.  
Yet here, lest empire deem its rank malign'd,  
I, in the name of outraged human kind,  
Before the gods will challenge, and, for them,  
Shall Rome's high senate judge you, and condemn.  
The doom you know—

NERO.

Oh sterner than the storm,  
What frost is harder than old age to warm !  
Have you no pity, or no claim have I ?  
A prince, so fallen like Phaeton from high.  
A prince, so swaddled in the purple robe,  
Ere ruler of himself, to rule the globe ;  
A prince, so tempted, flattered, ill-advised ;  
His life, the while, so scanned, so scrutinized ;  
The bad made worse and everywhere revealed,  
The little good all lessened and concealed :  
Till now, no follower left him, friend to aid,  
Or slave to serve, by gods and men betrayed,  
He stands here, doomed by one he never harmed,  
By one he trusted, doomed and, worse ! disarmed.

GALBA.

There I relent. Your hilt was harmless made,  
To save, not you, but others from its blade.  
Dwarf! give him thine—and may the gift impart,  
What for its use seems wanting, nerve and heart.  
Receive that dirk! and with it time and room,  
So courage hold, to anticipate your doom!  
That doom the senate is convened to give.  
Till then we leave you, if you like, to live,  
Walled, but unwitnessed, in this court, alone,  
And master still of one man's life, your own.  
Receive that dirk! and for its use betimes,  
Consult your rank, your conscience and your crimes!  
Think what becomes your present fate, your past,  
A pupil of the sage you slaughtered last,  
Your mother's house, much graced by tyrants four,  
Your sire's, by one tyrannicide much more:  
Think what is due to humankind and Rome,  
And strike, for vengeance and remorse, strike home!  
Be life's last work, an act of justice high,  
To rid earth of a monster—Strike and die!

## SCENE V.

NERO.

There's no escape : these pillars are too vast.  
Pavement and vault conspire to hold me fast.  
Rude blade ! but smoother than that old man's tongue.  
How like a beast's at feeding-time it rung !  
And here he leaves me for a future feast—  
As in the arena I have seen a beast  
Scanning some Christian, seek again its lair,  
And crouching eye him, till stirred up to tear.  
If prince betrayed have still enough control  
To curse his traitors—cursed be Galba's soul !  
Anger and avarice, ye furies twain,  
That haunt old age, devour his heart and brain !  
And thou, that still hast smitten pride to dust,  
Nor spared one Cæsar, save the great August,  
Pursue the name, oh Nemesis divine !  
Give no usurper happier fate than mine !

Mock him, ye guards, that raise him from the mud!  
And, having drained his gold, demand his blood!  
Hangmen o'ertake him, slaves abandon dead,  
And dogs in streets make battle for his head!  
Why did I trust him? Yet what cause to fear  
A childless baldhead in his seventieth year!  
His seventieth year? Did Delphi not divine  
Woes from that year? I counted it as mine.  
To give him honours he could never earn,  
Fool that I was! and this is his return?  
This knife! and what, unless I fall on this?  
What I must fly from, though to hell's abyss.  
Though to meet there a ruthless mother's ghost,  
A sire's, a sister's, and the clamorous host  
Of all sent thither by my bane and blade,  
From homes as desert as mine own is made.  
Hence! horrible shapes! What is it you prepare?  
I never used such tortures—Spare me, spare!  
There's no such thing. 'Tis all a dream. Even so?  
I live—am Cæsar—here's my palace? No.  
Here ruin has arrived, in Galba's shape.  
Here is my prison: hence but one escape;

By this, his gift—Unless yon walls would feel,  
Or guards bring Galba back to mine appeal—  
For what? To fling me at his feet returned,  
Again beg being, and again be spurned?  
No. Sooner die. Die, Cæsar! Must it be?  
Oh! what an artist perishes in me!  
Greece would enthrone me; Egypt half adore:  
Could I reach Phœbus, or the Isthmian shore—  
Or rouse the cohorts? 'Tis my last resource.  
Pretorians, help! Your emperor suffers force!  
The doors unbar--to legionary drums—  
Arms ring. What is it, life or death, that comes?  
Death I could bear, in any form enforced,  
But not the wife I banished and divorced.

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## SCENE VI.

STATILIA. NERO.

STATILIA.

Oh Cæsar, oh my lord, mine emperor still !  
Though all forsake you, and conspire to kill,  
Give me the leave your enemies have given,  
And let a sometime wife, to exile driven,  
Return to comfort this distressful hour,  
And offer all fate places in her power,  
Service and sympathy, my prayers and tears—  
Oh could I add my life's remaining years !  
But take instead, what nothing yet withstands,  
My last advice, and give your last commands.

NERO.

Advise me how I may escape and live.

STATILIA.

Cæsar, not even the gods have that to give.

NERO.

Go, make the gods or Galba more benign.  
 Say I adopt him : empire I resign :  
 I ask but life, in any climate, isle,  
 Mine, prison—life, a little, little while.

STATILIA.

Cæsar, whate'er such prayers could do is done.  
 Isles, prisons, mines have mercy, Galba none.  
 Though dark their caverns, and their doors be hard,  
 His heart is darker, deeper, doubly barred.  
 But why should Cæsar's hope to prayer devolve ?  
 Is life or death a question foes should solve ?  
 Why ask of others ? you have all you need :  
 Or have at least all Galba will concede—  
 So far supreme, though reft of axe and rods,  
 And emperor still, in spite of men and gods.

NERO.

Take it ! have courage, and thrust through my heart !

STATILIA.

Oh spare me that ! 'twere man's not woman's part :

And, Caesar, least beseems your sometime wife.  
Fall on the point, and rid yourself of life!

NERO.

Ye gods! how lost, how destitute am I!  
Will neither friend nor enemy help me die?

STATILIA.

Friends can but mourn what enemies have reft,  
Till ah! how little of yourself is left.  
Where now the emperor's, where the Roman's soul?  
Can senates so strip man of self-control!

NERO.

The senate has convened?

STATILIA.

Their edict passed—

NERO.

My doom?



THECLA.

STATILIA.

Alas !

NERO.

What is't ?

STATILIA.

The worst and last.

NERO.

Death ?

STATILIA.

Death. And more—

NERO.

The mode ?

STATILIA.

It must be told—

NERO.

Tell !

STATILIA.

By the mode our fathers used of old.

NERO.

I know not that : what is't ?

STATILIA.

The last and worst.

'Tis to be stocked, and publicly accursed :

Then scourged through streets, stripped naked to the  
skin,

Hands bound behind, a fork beneath the chin,

And headlong down the mountain hurled to hell—

NERO.

Enough.

POPULACE *without.*

Where is he ?

STATILIA.

Fare you well !

NERO.

Farewell !

C C

## SCENE VII.

GALBA. STATILIA. NERO. HELIUS. DWARE.  
LEGIONARIES. POPULACE.

## POPULACE.

Out with him! Beard of brass! He lives too long!  
Our whips are ready, ready fork and thong.  
Down with the tyrant! Down, his house of gold!  
To death! the way our fathers used of old!

## STATILIA.

Galba, lo! there, in agonies of death,  
Weltering in blood, and gasping still for breath,  
Lies the last Cæsar!

## GALBA.

And the worst of men.  
Never that name be given him again!  
I gaze with horror on a monster's corse,  
Who dared all crimes, and never owned remorse.

Raze out his titles wheresoc'er emblazed!  
 The golden house he lived in shall be razed,  
 His acts annulled, his images reversed,  
 And while remembrance lives his name accursed.  
 Rome is restored! Her citizens are freed!  
 Each to regain each right the laws concede.

LEGIONARIES. POPULACE.

Galba be emperor! Emperor Galba, live!

GALBA.

That power I take not till the senate give.  
 Meanwhile the commonwealth resumes its voice,  
 To inspire imperial lips, if mine the choice.  
 Statilia, seek you hence some other home!  
 And, by my thought, it should not be in Rome—

STATILIA.

Nor, by my wish. A doom has passed on me,  
 And a voice summons from the Ægean sea,  
 To where an isle precipitous and tall  
 O'er the lone waters lifts its cloudlike wall,

And Patmos offers, all I need or crave,  
In life a dwelling, and in death a grave.  
Thither my baek shall set me forth to-morrow,  
There to meet fate in solitude and sorrow.  
Only, one favour! let me first find room,  
For earth's late master, in my father's tomb.  
And, by that speechless Dwarf's o'erflowing eyes,  
There's one yet left would aid those obsequies.

## GALBA.

So please you. Hither, Dwarf! 'Tis told me late,  
Among dread signs preceding Nero's fate,  
Words from your lips forwarned him and conjured—  
How falsely told, none needs be here assured.  
Nor need I now an idler tale refute,  
That 'twas Locusta's magic made you mute,  
And still constrained by Cæsar's side to stay,  
A goblin elf, to watch him for her prey.  
The thought distracts you—But dismiss your fears!  
I comprehend your worth, respect your tears,  
Pity your fate, and will defend your weal.  
Nay, cease attempts to tell me what you feel!

Your looks and manners want not words, be sure!

Is their loss recent? or has man its cure?

As you have borne it, bear, in silence meek!

Nor more embrace my hands, nor strive to speak!

Confide—yes, yes, you wear the cross, I see—

Go, serve Statilia, and confide in me.

HELIUS.

Great Galba—

GALBA.

Helius waits there, faint and wan—

Nor have I words for him, except Begone!

With life—why spared, let men in vain divine,

Long as he shuns the city's sight and mine.

Bring her you rescued from the tyrant's hold!

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## SCENE VIII.

THECLA. GALBA.

CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS. CHORUS OF PAGANS.

LEGIONARIES. POPULACE.

GALBA.

Thecla, your story hitherto is told :  
Henceforth what can we for your earthly bliss ?

THECLA.

Nothing for me ; and for my friends but this !  
Make it not treason to tell truths we feel,  
Nor crime to worship what those truths reveal—  
To pledge our lives to innocence and love,  
Cleanse the heart's thought, and lift to hopes above ;  
Forgiving wrongs, and rendering good for ill.  
For all crimes else, what punishment you will !  
Yet slander not the mysteries we adore—  
And ere you spurn glad tidings deign explore !

GALBA.

All your requests are granted, but the last.  
For that, life's moments are too few and fast.  
Yet, while I rule, opinion shall be free ;  
Let everything or nothing bend the knee !  
The gods, if grieved, may vindicate their cause :  
If careless, careless be like them the laws !  
Now take in turn one small request of mine !  
Beware you outrage what Rome deems divine ;  
Or trench on empire, by decrees it blames,  
Extatic rites, and supernatural claims.

LEGIONARIES.

Emperor ! a donative !

GALBA.

Strike up the drum !

What, what ! For traffic hither have you come ?  
Your tents are pitched beyond the Navian arch !  
I give not bribes but orders—

LEGIONARIES.

Emperor !

GALBA.

March !



(And when you weapons turn on me their ire,  
Be my last order "Strike! if Rome require.")  
Locusta's cavern barred inside, and void?  
She must be found, and with her works destroyed.  
Explore each cell and passage under ground!  
Go, prosecute your search! She must be found.  
We now these fasces to the senate bear,  
Then seek the fauces, and thank the immortals there—  
Whose judgments o'er us, like a storm, have passed,  
And quelled this worst of tyrants and the last,  
By his own hand, its first good work, its sole.  
But, as earth travails while the tempests roll,  
And nurses in its womb the germ of spring,  
So here, while thrones succumb, and ruins ring—  
If I can read such prodigies aright,  
And dare divine the morrow by the night—  
Beneath this wreck of dynasties and powers,  
Rome teems with nobler fate than theirs or ours:  
Silent and secret teems, by due degrees  
To bring forth all that providence may please.  
Then march, march on! and hymn the world's new birth!  
Hymn thanks to all in heaven, and peace to all on earth.

## CHORUS OF PAGANS.

The gods are great, the gods are just.  
Lo, Rome's last tyrant bites the dust,  
And freedom re-asserts its state.  
The gods are just, the gods are great.

## CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS.

Lift up your hearts! There beams above  
A herald star of hope and love:  
The cloud disperses, night departs;  
'Tis day-spring dawns. Lift up your hearts!

## CHORUS OF PAGANS.

Arbitress of kings and nations, born of Venus, born  
to Mars,  
Rome! thy sons, at Galba's summons, gather, as at  
night's the stars.  
To the level of thy fortune lift, lift up the people's  
mind!  
Spare the humble, spurn the haughty, and give laws  
to humankind!

## CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS.

Whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever pure and  
true,  
Generous, lovely, well reputed, if to any praise be  
due,  
Think of them, and practise them, but oh appreciate  
them as dross,  
Rags, that rather shame than clothe you—Nail your  
virtues to the cross.

## THECLA.

By death divided, flesh and soul  
Speed to the sphere of either's birth ;  
The spirit, to the starry pole,  
The body, earth to earth.

Then forth ! and thither bear along  
Yon relics, there awhile to sleep :  
Come forth, come throng, with funeral song,  
Out of the deep !

## CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS.

Out of the deep! we raise our voice  
To him who hears the mourner weep,  
And bids the broken bones rejoice—  
Out of the deep!

## THECLA.

Out of the deep! the lions' den,  
In blood where martyrs lie like sheep—  
Till when, till when? Amen, amen!  
Out of the deep!

## CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS.

Out of the deep! we part with breath  
All to be changed, not all to sleep:  
Where, where, oh death, thy sting? he saith—  
Out of the deep!

## THECLA.

Out of the deep! his word shall roll  
O'er earth as waters o'er the steep;  
From soul to soul, from pole to pole—  
Out of the deep!

## CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS.

Out of the deep! till day shall rise

In flames o'er heaven and earth to sweep,

And seas and skies lift up their cries—

Out of the deep! Out of the deep.



weep,  
-

## EPILOGUE.



My task is finished. Myth and Muse farewell!  
Here ends my tale: the last I had to tell.  
So nature willed, or so my demon wrought.  
Mysterious powers! that fill man's mind with thought—  
Since nothing is by chance—say! what decree  
Brought back such shadows of the past on me?  
And mixed with mine their character and speech,  
And made me e'en live o'er the life of each—  
Till my soul seemed the mirror they surveyed,  
The wax they moulded, and the pipe they played.  
Who brought them hither, and their coming timed  
When woe was me except I wrote and rhymed?  
When thought had sallies nothing could coerce,  
And my lost soul poured forth itself in verse.

Oh then what pageantries of old returned!  
Princes and consuls rose from dust inurned:

High mitred priests arraigned a miscreant maid :  
Proud barons bowed to laws a Tudor swayed :  
And queens, imprisoned this, and that enthroned,  
Vied both in guilt, which one in blood atoned.  
Priests in procession through the minster marched ;  
And knights through gates a barbican o'erarched.

Lo, Rome from ruins re-asserts her reign,  
Recalls her idols, and rebuilds their fane.  
The senate meets ; the Ides of March are there :  
White robes, red-edged, press round the ivory chair :  
Prone Cæsar muffles up his mortal pangs :  
Antonius arms ; and Cicero harangues.  
What words ! What thoughts ! Through every age  
and elime  
Their voice still echoes o'er the gulf of time :  
Pleads the great cause of liberty and worth :  
Dooms their assassin to the scorn of earth :  
And lights the gloom of fate with patriot fire,  
As burns and shines his country's funeral pyre.  
Next, Spain's fair courts and colonnades were seen :  
Where the son's spouse becomes the father's queen.

In vain young lovers vow for aye to part.  
Tiberius half revives in Philip's heart.  
The king detects the passion they suppress.  
To him, the virtue makes the guilt no less.  
In the same dungeon the same death they share :  
Fate happier far than his who doomed them there.

A shout from myriads surging as the flood—  
"All men are free! all equal! Bread or blood!"  
There revolution raves, with song and dance,  
And axe that drips with slaughter. Woe for France!  
Yet no form fails, to law and freedom dear :  
Still legislatures vote, tribunals hear :  
But one man's breath inspires the doom they give.  
Of him all ask how long has each to live.  
Till one fair woman's courage shames their fear :  
Tallien for her dares war with Robespierre.  
Armed with dread words, they battle, life for life :  
France guards the lists, and arbitrates the strife.  
The scales long vibrate. Truth prevails at last.  
Down with the tyrant! Terror's reign has past.  
Dragged to the block he lies between the beams,  
And Paris rings with Robespierre's last screams.



Reform ! Has such for ever been thy part ?  
Is all thy worth the necromancer's art,  
The thief's pretence, the game of knave and dunce,  
Where neither wins ? No. Once, and only once,  
Reform was truth. But heaven was then its source.  
Its advent, whither ? And how sped its course ?  
As sobs the air, ere hurricanes have stirred,  
As the sea quivers, ere that sob is heard,  
The news reached Rome—a whisper, scarce perceived :

A deep, stern rumour ; some who heard believed :  
A psalm, a rite, in catacombs immersed :  
The depths were moved ; the surface seemed as erst.  
Apostles came ; they preached, they wrote the word :  
Basilicas received it ; princes heard—  
The heathen raged ; the persecutor stormed ;  
But earth was changed, and heaven itself transformed.  
Old myths became effete, old rites disdained ;  
Fanes erumbled, idols fled ; the word remained.  
But, bard, beware of mysteries too profound !  
The drama builds not well on hallowed ground.  
Let fiction seek some legendary source,  
To image scenes, and bid events discourse,

How light from Bethlehem rose on Caesar's dome,  
And faith's first martyrs sang their dirge to Rome.

Whence, whence these mandates, nothing could control?  
Why have such phantoms haunted so a soul  
That sought in wayward wilfulness to live,  
And envied nothing fame or power could give;  
Nor cared for censure or for praise of verse  
No praise made better, and no censure worse:  
While self-approval, sole recompense desired,  
Was brief enjoyed, hard earned, nor oft acquired,  
Nor ever stayed misgiving's vain lament  
Of woe mistaken talents, time misspent,  
And luckless labour! Fiend, in fine be stilled!  
Some purpose has been served, some fate fulfilled.

Each atom adds what everything requires:  
Each act moves something, and each thought inspires.  
Warned by past errors, science finds the truth;  
And falls in childhood keep the poise of youth.  
Nothing can perish, matter, force, or thought:  
All, in the infinite work by nature wrought

Have part and place. Each wave on ocean curled  
Drives the vast tide that surges round the world.  
Each monad bears what others have imprest ;  
And who sees all things sees in each the rest.

Yet were those visions but as dreams of night,  
Were their sole mission here thine own delight.  
Why, oh my soul, should gratitude be less ?  
The task they set me needed not success :  
The character they formed inspired content ;  
Gave the great strength to welcome each event ;  
To spurn all vulgar care for place or pelf,  
All vulgar virtue that but seeks itself,  
And found my peace beyond the world's control,  
In the heart's thought, the kingdom of the soul.

Shadows! your mission is fulfilled—and mine.  
Depart, dread spectres! whom a voice divine,  
Man calls the muse, evoked from night, to tell  
Your crimes and wrongs—hence! thither! and fare-  
well!

Let darkness shroud you in its silent den !  
I follow—There to be forgot? Amen.

Oh Thou! who hast awakened me from dust,  
And made such faculties and senses mine,  
To scan thy works, how beauteous, how august,  
And commune with the spirit all enshrine,  
And take some part in providence divine.  
If now my labours touch their destined goal,  
Into thy hands my future I resign,  
Oh Source of all things, Refuge of the whole!  
Vouchsafe to accept the last thanksgiving of my soul.



LONDON:  
PRINTED BY C. ROWORTH AND SONS,  
BELL YARD, TEMPLE BAR.



