

THE MISFORTUNES OF ARTHUR

by
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THE NAMES OF THE SPEAKERS

GORLOIS, Duke of Cornwall's Ghost.

GUENEVERA, the Queen.

FRONIA, a Lady of her train.

ANGHARAD, Sister to the Queen.

MORDRED, the Usurper.

CONAN, a faithful Councillor
Nuntius of Arthur's landing.

The Herald from Arthur.

GAWIN, King of Albany.

GILLA, a British Earl.

GILLAMOR, King of Ireland.

CHELDRICH, Duke of Saxony.

The Lord of the Picts

ARTHUR, King of Great Britain.

CADOR, Duke of Cornwall.

HOEL, King of Little Britain.

The Herald from Mordred.

ASCHILLUS, King of Denmark.

The King of Norway.

A number of Soldiers.

Nuntius of the last battle.

GILDAS, a nobleman of Britian.

CHORUS

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

GORLOIS

Since thus through channels black of Limbo lake
And deep infernal flood of Stygian pool,
The ghastly Charon's boat transported back
Thy ghost from Pluto's pits and glooming shade
To former light, once lost by dest'ny's doom,
Where proud Pendragon, broil'd with shameful lust,
Despoil'd thee erst of wife, of land and life,
Now, Gorlois, work thy wish, cast here thy gall:
Glut on revenge! thy wrath abhors delays.
What though (besides Pendragon's poisoned end)
The vile reproach he wrought thee by thy ppeer,
Through deep increase of crimes alike is plagu'd;
And that the shame thou suffered'st for his lusts,
Reboundeth back and stifleth in his stock,
Yet is not mischief's measure all fulfill'd,
Nor wreak sufficient wrought. Thy murdered corpse
And dukedom reft for heavier vengeance cries.
Come, therefore, blooms of settled mischief's root:
Come, each thing else what fury can invent,
Wreak all at once! infect the air with plagues,
Till bad to worse, till worse to worse be turn'd!
Let mischiefs know no mean, nor plagues an end!
Let th'offspring's sin exceed the former stock!
Let none have time to hate his former fault,
But still with fresh supply let punish'd crime
Increase, till time it make a complete sin!
Go to: some fact, which no age shall allow
Nor yet conceal--some fact must needs be dur'd,
That for the horror great and outrage fell
Thereof may well beseem Pendragon's brood.
And first, while Arthur's navies homeward float,
Triumphantly bedeck'd with Roman spoils,
Let Guenevera express what frantic moods
Distract a wife, when wronging wedlock's rights,
Both fond and fell, she loves and loathes at once.

(MORE)

GORLOIS (cont'd)

Let deep despair pursue till, loathing life,
Her hateful head in cowl and cloister lurk.
Let traitorous Mordred keep his sire from shore;
Let Britain rest a prey for foreign powers;
Let sword and fire, still fed with mutual strife,
Turn all the kings to ghosts: let civil wars
And discord swell, till all the realm be torn!
Even in that soil whereof myself was Duke,
Where first my spouse Igerna brake her vow,
Where this ungracious offspring was begot:
In Cornwall--there let Mordred's death declare,
Let Arthur's fatal wound bewray, the wrong,
The murder vile, the rape of wife and weal,
Wherewith their sire incens'd both Gods and man.
Thus, thus Pendragon's seed, so sown and reap'd,
Thus cursed imps, ill-born and worse consum'd,
Shall render just revenge for parents' crimes,
And penance do, t' assuage my swelling wrath.
The whiles, O Cassiopoea, gem-bright sign,
Most sacred sight and sweet celestial star,
This climate's joy, plac'd in imperial throne,
With fragrant olive-branch portending peace;
And whosoe'er besides, ye heavenly powers,
(Her stately train with influence divine,
And mild aspect all prone to Britain's good)
Forsee what present plagues do threat this isle,
Prevent not this my wreak. For you there rests
A happier age, a thousand years to come;
An age for peace, religion, wealth, and ease,
When all the world shall wonder at your bliss:
That, that is yours! Leave this to Gorlois' ghost.
And see where comes one engine of my hate,
With mood and manners fit for my revenge.

(Exit)

SCENE 2

GUENEVERA

And dares he after nine years' space return,
And see her face, whom he so long disdain'd?
Was I then chose and wedded for his stale,
To look and gape for his retireless sails,
Puff'd back and fluttering spread to every wind?
O wrong, content with no revenge, seek out
Undared plagues: teach Mordred how to rage:
Attempt some bloody, dreadful, irksome fact,
And such as Mordred would were rather his.
Why stayest? It must be done! let bridle go:
Frame out some trap beyond all vulgar guile,
Beyond Medea's wiles: attempt some fact,
That any wight unwieldy of herself,
That any spouse unfaithful to her pheer,

(MORE)

GUENEVERA (cont'd)

Durst e'er attempt in most despair of weal.
Spare no revenge, b' it poison, knife, or fire!

FRONIA

Good madam, temper these outrageous moods,
And let not will usurp, where wit should rule.

GUENEVERA

The wrath that breatheth blood doth loath to lurk:
What reason most witholds, rage wrings perforce.
I am disdain'd: so will I not be long.
That very hour that he shall first arrive,
Shall be the last that shall afford him life.
Though neither seas, nor lands, nor wars abroad
Sufficed for thy foil, yet shalt thou find
Far worse at home--thy deep-displeased spouse.
Whate'er thou hast subdu'd in all thy stay
This hand shall now subdue; then stay thy fill.
What's this? my mind recoils and irks these threats:
Anger delays, my grief gins to assuage,
My fury faints, and sacred wedlock's faith
Presents itself. Why shunn'st thou fearful wrath?
Add coals afresh: preserve me to this venge,
At least exile thyself to realms unknown,
And steal his wealth to help thy banish'd state;
For flight is best. O base and heartless fear!
Theft? Exile? Flight? all these may fortune send
Unsought; but thee beseems more high revenge.
Come, spiteful fiends, come, heaps of furies fell,
Not one by one, but all at once! my breast
Raves not enough: it likes me to be fill'd
With greater monsters yet. My heart doth throb,
My liver boils: somewhat my mind portends,
Uncertain what, but whatsoever, it's huge.
So it exceed, be what it will, it's well.
Omit no plague, and none will be enough:
Wrong cannot be reveng'd but by excess.

FRONIA

O, spare this heat! you yield too much to rage:
Y'are too unjust. Is there no mean in wrong?

GUENEVERA

Wrong claims a mean, when first you offer wrong:
The mean is vain when wrong is in revenge.
Great harms cannot be hid: the grief is small,
That can receive advice, or rule itself.

FRONIA

Hatred conceal'd doth often hap to hurt,
Burt once profess'd, it oft'ner fails revenge.
How better tho' wert to repress your ire:
A lady's best revenge is to forgive.

(MORE)

FRONIA (cont'd)

What mean is in your hate? how much soe'er
You can invent or dare, so much you hate.

GUENEVERA

And would you know what mean there is in hate?
Call love to mind, and see what mean is there!
My love, redoubled love, and constant faith
Engaged unto Mordred works so deep,
That both my heart and marrow quite be burnt,
And sinews dried with force of wontless flames.
Desire to joy him still torments my mind:
Fear of his want doth add a double grief.
Lo, here the love that stirs this meaningless hate!

FRONIA

Eschew it far: such love impugns the laws.

GUENEVERA

Unlawful love doth like, when lawful loathes.

FRONIA

And is your love of husband quite extinct?

GUENEVERA

The greater flame must needs delay the less:
Besides, his sore revenge I greatly fear.

FRONIA

How can you then attempt a fresh offence?

GUENEVERA

Who can appoint a stint to her offence?

FRONIA

But here the greatness of the fact should move.

GUENEVERA

The greater it, the fitter for my grief.

FRONIA

To kill your spouse?

GUENEVERA

A stranger and a foe.

FRONIA

Your liege and king.

GUENEVERA

He wants both realm and crown.

FRONIA

Nature affords not to your sex such strength.

GUENEVERA

Love, anguish, wrath, will soon afford enough.

FRONIA

What rage is this?

GUENEVERA

Such as himself shall rue.

FRONIA

Whom Gods do press enough, will you annoy?

GUENEVERA

Whom Gods do press, they bend; whom man annoys,
He breaks.

FRONIA

Your grief is more than his deserts.
Each fault requires an equal hate: be not severe,
Where crimes be light. As you have felt, so grieve.

GUENEVERA

And seems it light to want him nine year space?
Then to be spoil'd of one I hold more dear?
Think all too much, b' it ne'er so just, that feeds
Continual grief: the lasting woe is worst.

FRONIA

Yet let your highness shun these desperate moods:
Cast off this rage and fell-disposed mind.
Put not shame quite to flight: have some regard
Both of your sex and future fame of life.
Use no such cruel thoughts, as far exceed
A manly mind, much more a woman's heart.

GUENEVERA

Well, shame is not so quite exil'd, but that
I can and will respect your sage advice.
Your counsel I accept: give leave a while,
Till fiery wrath may slake, and rage relent.

Exit FRONIA.

SCENE 3

GUENEVERA

The love, that for his rage will not be rul'd,
Must be restrain'd: fame shall receive no foil.
Let Arthur live; whereof to make him sure
Myself will die, and so prevent his harms.
Why stayest thou thus amaz'd, O slothful wrath?
Mischief is meant; despatch it on thyself.

ANGHARAT

Her breast, not yet appeas'd from former rage,
Hath chang'd her wrath which, wanting means to work
Another's woe (for such is fury's wont),
Seeks out his own, and raves upon itself.
Assuage (alas) that over fervent ire:
Through too much anger you offend too much.
Thereby the rather you deserve to live
For seeming worthy in yourself to die.

GUENEVERA

Death is decreed; what kind of death, I doubt:
Whether to drown or stifle up this breath,
Or forcing blood to die with dint of knife.
All hope of prosperous hap is gone. My fame,
My faith, my spouse--no good is left unlost!
Myself am left: there's left both seas and lands,
And sword, and fire and chains, and choice of harms.
O gnawing, easeless grief! who now can heal
My maimed mind? It must be heal'd by death.

ANGHARAT

No mischief must be done while I be by;
Or, if there must, there must be more than one.
If death it be you seek, I seek it too;
Alone you may not die, with me you may.

GUENEVERA

They that will drive th' unwilling to their death,
Or frustrate death in those that fain would die,
Offend alike. They spoil, that bootless spare.

ANGHARAT

But will my tears and mournings move you nought?

GUENEVERA

Then it is best to die when friends do mourn.

ANGHARAT

Each-where is death! the fates have well ordain'd,
That each man may bereave himself of life,
But none of death: death is so sure a doom,
A thousand ways do guide us to our graves.
Who then can ever come too late to that,
Whence, when he is come, he never can return?
Or what avails to hasten on our ends,
And long for that which destinies have sworn!
Look back in time: too late is to repent,
When furious rage hath once cut off the choice.

GUENEVERA

Death is an end of pain, no pain itself.
Is 'it meet a plague for such excessive wrong.

(MORE)

GUENEVERA (cont'd)

Should be so short? Should one stroke answer all?

(Soliloquizes)

And would'st thou die? well, that contents the laws:
What, then, for Arthur's ire? What for thy fame,
Which thou hast stain'd? What for thy stock thou sham'st?
Not death nor life alone can give a full
Revenge: join both in one--die and yet live.
Where pain may not be oft, let it be long.
Seek out some lingering death, whereby thy corpse
May neither touch the dead nor joy the quick.
Die, but no common death: pass nature's bounds.

ANGHARAT

Set complaints aside, despair yields no relief;
The more you search a wound the more it stings.

GUENEVERA

When guilty minds torment themselves, they heal,
Whiles wounds be cur'd, grief is a salve for grief.

ANGHARAT

Grief is no just esteemer of our deeds.
What so hath yet been done, proceeds from chance.

GUENEVERA

The mind and not the chance doth make th' unchaste.

ANGHARAT

Then is your fault from fate; you rest excus'd.
None can be deemed faulty for her fate.

GUENEVERA

No fate, but manners fail, when we offend.
Impute mishaps to fates, to manners faults.

ANGHARAT

Love is an error that may blind the best.

GUENEVERA

A mighty error oft hath seem'd a sin.
My death is vowed, and death must needs take place.
But such a death as stands with just remorse:
Death to the world and to her slippery joys:
A full divorce from all this courtly pomp,
Where daily penance, done for each offence,
May render due revenge for every wrong.
Which to accomplish, pray my dearest friends,
That they forthwith, attir'd in saddest guise,
Conduct me to the cloister next hereby,
There to profess, and to renounce the world.

ANGHARAT

Alas! what change were that! from kingly roofs
To cloistered cells--to live and die at once!

(MORE)

ANGHARAT (cont'd)

To want your stately troops, your friends and kin,
To shun the shows and sights of stately court;
To see in sort alive your country's death.
Yea, whatsoe'er even death itself withdraws
From any else, that life withdraws from you.
Yet since your highness is so fully bent,
I will obey: the whiles assuage your grief.

(Exit)

SCENE 4

MORDRED

The hour, which erst I always feared most
The certain ruin of my desperate state,
Is happened now! why turn'st thou (mind) thy back?
Why at the first assault dost thou recoil?
Trust to 't, the angry heavens contrive some spite,
And dreadful doom t' augment thy cursed hap.
Oppose to each revenge thy guilty head,
And shun no pain, nor plague fit for thy fact.
What shouldst thou fear, that see'st not what to hope?
No danger's left before: all's at thy back.
He safely stands, that stands beyond his harms.
Thine (death) is all that east and west can see:
For thee we live, our coming is not long:
Spare us but whiles we may prepare our graves.
Though thou wert slow, we hasten of ourselves.
The hour that gave did also take our lives:
No sooner men than mortal were we born.
I see mine end draws on, I feel my plagues.

GUENEVERA

No plague for one ill-born to die as ill.

MORDRED

O Queen! my sweet associate in this plunge
And desperate plight, behold, the time is come,
That either justifies our former faults,
Or shortly sets us free from every fear.

GUENEVERA

My fear is past, and wedlock love hath won.
Retire we thither yet, whence first we ought
Not to have stirr'd. Call back chaste faith again.
The way that leads to good is ne'er too late:
Who so repents is guiltless of his crimes.

MORDRED

What means this course? Is Arthur's wedlock safe,
Or can he love, that hath just cause to hate?
That nothing else were to be fear'd:
Is most apparent, that he hates at home,
Whate'er he be whose fancy strays abroad.

(MORE)

MORDRED (cont'd)

Think, then, our love is not unknown to him,
Whereof what patience can be safely hop'd?
Nor love nor sovereignty can bear a peer.

GUENEVERA

Why dost thou still stir up my flames delay'd?
His strays and errors must not move my mind:
A law for private men binds not the king.
What, that I ought not to condemn my liege,
Nor can, thus guilty to mine own offence!
Where both have done amiss, both will relent:
He will forgive that needs must be forgiven.

MORDRED

A likely thing, your faults must make you friends;
What sets you both at odds must join you both.
Think well, he casts already for revenge,
And how to plague us both. I know his law;
A judge severe to us, mild to himself.
What then avails you to return too late,
When you have passed too far? You feed vain hopes.

GUENEVERA

The further past, the more this fault is yours.
It served your turn t' usurp your father's crown:
His is the crime, whom crime stands most in stead.

MORDRED

They that conspire in faults offend alike:
Crime makes them equal, whom it jointly stains.
If for my sake you then pertook my guilt,
You cannot guiltless seem: the crime was joint.

GUENEVERA

Well should she seem most guiltless unto thee,
Whate'er she be, that's guilty for thy sake.
The remnant of that sober mind, which thou
Had'st heretofore ne'er vanquish'd, yet resists.
Suppress, for shame, that impious mouth so taught,
And so much skill'd t' abuse the wedded bed.
Look back to former fates: Troy still had stood,
Had not her prince made light of wedlock's lore.
The vice that threw down Troy doth threat thy throne.
Take heed: there Mordred stands, whence Paris fell.

(Exit)

CONAN

Since that your highness knows for certain truth,
What power your sire prepares to claim his right.
It nearly now concerns you to resolve
In humblest sort to reconcile yourself
Gainst his return.

MORDRED

Will war?

CONAN

That lies in chance.

MORDRED

I have as great a share in chance as he.

CONAN

His ways be blind that maketh chance his guide.

MORDRED

Whose refuge lies in chance, what dares he not?

CONAN

Wars were a crime far worse than all the rest.

MORDRED

The safest passage is from bad to worse.

CONAN

That were to pass too far and put no mean.

MORDRED

He is a fool that puts a mean in crimes.

CONAN

But sword and fire would cause a common wound.

MORDRED

So sword and fire will often sear the sore.

CONAN

Extremest cures must not be used first.

MORDRED

In desperate times the headlong way is best.

CONAN

Y' have many foes.

MORDRED

No more than faithful friends.

CONAN

Trust t' it, their faith will faint, where fortune fails.
Where many men pretend a love to one,
Whose power may do what good or harm he will,
'Tis hard to say which be his faithful friends.
Dame Flattery flitteth oft: she loves and hates
With time, a present friend, an absent foe.

MORDRED

But yet I'll hope the best.

CONAN

Even then you fear.
The worst: fears follow hopes, as fumes do flames.
Mischief is sometimes safe, but ne'er secure.
The wrongful sceptre 's held with trembling hand.

MORDRED

Whose rule wants right, his safety's in his sword;
For sword and sceptre comes to kings at once.

CONAN

The kingliest point is to affect but right.

MORDRED

Weak is the sceptre's hold that seeks but right.
The care whereof hath danger'd many crowns.
As much as water differeth from the fire,
So much man's profit jars from what is just.
A free recourse to wrong doth oft secure
The doubtful seat, and plucks down many a foe.
The sword must seldom cease: a sovereign's hand
Is scanty safe, but whiles it smites. Let him
Usurp no crown that likes a guiltless life:
Aspiring power and justice seld agree.
He always fears that shames to offer wrong.

CONAN

What son would use such wrong against his sire?

MORDRED

Come, son, come, sire, I first prefer myself;
And since a wrong must be, then it excels
When 'tis to gain a crown. I hate a peer:
I loathe, I irk, I do detest a head.
B' it nature, be it reason, be it pride,
I love to rule! my mind, nor with, nor by,
Nor after any claims, but chief and first!

CONAN

But think what fame and grievous bruits would run
Of such disloyal and unjust attempts.

MORDRED

Fame goes not with our ghosts: the senseless soul,
Once gone, neglects what vulgar bruit reports.
She is both light and vain.

CONAN

She noteth, though.

MORDRED

She feareth states.

CONAN

She carpeth, ne'ertheless.

MORDRED

She's soon suppress'd.

CONAN

As soon she springs again.
Tongues are untam'd and fame is envy's dog,
That absent barks, and present fawns as fast.
It fearing dares, and yet hath never done,
But dures: though death redeem us all from foes
Besides, yet death redeems us not from tongues.

MORDRED

Ere Arthur land, the sea shall blush with blood,
And all the strands with smoking slaughters reek.
Now (Mars) protect me in my first attempt!
If Mordred scape, this realm shall want no wars.

Exeunt.

CHORUS

1

See here the drifts of Gorlois, Cornish Duke,
And deep desire to shake his sovereign's throne.
How foul his fall, how bitter his rebuke,
Whiles wife, and weal, and life, and all be gone!
He now in hell tormented wants that good.
Lo, lo, the end of traitorous bones and blood!

2

Pendragon broil'd with flames of filthy fires,
By Merlin's mists enjoy'd Igera's bed:
Next spoiled Gorlois, doubling his desires;
Then was himself through force of poison sped.
Who sows in sin, in sin shall reap his pain:
The doom is sworn: death guerdons death again.

3

Whiles Arthur wars abroad and reaps renown,
Guenevera prefers his son's desire;
And traitorous Mordred still usurps the crown,
Affording fuel to her quenchless fire,
But death's too good, and life too sweet for these,
That wanting both should taste of neither's ease.

4

In Rome the gaping gulf would not decrease,
(MORE)

CHORUS (cont'd)

Till Curtius corse had closed her yearning jaws:
In Thebes the rot and murrain would not cease,
Till Laius brood had paid for breach of laws:
In Britain wars and discord will not stent,
Till Uther's line and offspring quite be spent.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

NUNTIUS

Lo, here at length the stately type of Troy,
And Britain land the promis'd seat of Brute,
Deck'd with so many spoils of conquered kings!
Hail, native soil, these nine years' space unseen!
To thee hath long-renowned Rome at last
Held up her hands, bereft of former pomp.
But first, inflam'd with wonted valour's heat,
Amidst our sorest siege and thickest broils
She stoutly fought, and fiercely waged wars.
Tiberius courage gave, upbraiding oft
The Roman force, their wonted luck, and long
Retained rule by wars throughout the world.
What shame it were since such achieved spoils,
And conquests gain'd both far and wide, to want
Of courage then, when most it should be mov'd!
How Britons erst paid tribute for their peace,
But now rebel and dare them at their doors.
For what was France but theirs? Herewith incens'd,
They fiercely rav'd, and bent their force afresh.
Which Arthur spying, cried with thundering voice;
Fie (Britons) fie! what hath bewitch'd you thus?
So many nations foil'd, must Romans foil?
What sloth is this? Have you forgot to war,
Which ne'er knew hour of peace? turn to your foes,
Where you may bathe in blood and fight your fill.
Let courage work! what can he not that dares?
Thus he, (the) puissant guide in doubtful wars,
Asham'd to shun his foes, inflam'd his friends.
Then yielding to his stately steed the reins,
He furious drives the Roman troops about:
He plies each place, lest fates mought alter ought,
Pursuing hap, and urging each success.
He yields in nought, but instantly persists,
In all attempts, wherein whatso withstands
His wish, he joys to work away by wrack;

(MORE)

NUNTIUS (cont'd)

And matching death to death, no passage seeks
But what destruction works with blade or blood.
He scorns the yielded way; he fiercely raves
To break and bruise the ranks in thickest throngs,
All headlong bent and prone to present spoil.
The foes enforc'd withstand; but much dismay'd
They senseless fight, while millions lose their lives.
At length Tiberius, pierc'd with point of spear,
Doth bleeding fall, engor'd with deadly wound.
Hereat the rest recoil and headlong fly,
Each man to save himself. The battle quails,
And Britons win unto their most renown.
Then Arthur took Tiberius' breathless corse,
And sent it to the Senators at Rome,
With charge to say: This is the tribute due
Which Arthur ought: as time hereafter serves;
He'll pay the like again, the while he rests
Your debtor thus. But O! this sweet success,
Pursu'd with greater harms, turn'd soon to sour.
For lo, when foreign soils and seas were past
With safe return, and that the king should land,
Who but his only son (O outrage rare)
With hugy host withstood him on the shore!
There were prepar'd the foreign aids from far:
There were the borrowed powers of divers kings;
There were our parents, brethren, sons and kin,
Their wrath, their ire; there, Mordred, was thy rage.
Where erst we sought abroad for foes to foil,
Behold, our Fates had sent us foes unsought.
When foreign realms supplanted want supply,
O blessed home, that hath such boon in store!
But let this part of Arthur's prowess lurk,
Nor let it e'er appear by my report,
What monstrous mischiefs rage in civil wars,
O, rather let due tears and wailing want!
Let all in silence sink what hence ensu'd.
What best deserveth mention here is this:
That Mordred vanquish'd trusted to his flight,
That Arthur eachwhere victor is return'd.
And lo, where Mordred comes with heavy head:
He wields no slender weight that wields a crown.

(Exit)

SCENE 2

MORDRED

And hath he won? Be strands and shores possessed?
Is Mordred foil'd? the realm is yet unwon,
And Mordred lives, reserv'd for Arthur's death!
Well, 'twas my first conflict: I knew not yet
What wars requir'd: but now my sword is flesh'd,
And taught to gore and bathe in hottest blood.
Then think not, Arthur, that the crown is won!

(MORE)

MORDRED (cont'd)

Thy first success may rue our next assault;
Even at our next encounter (hap when 'twill)
I vow by heaven, by earth, by hell, by all,
That either thou or I, or both shall die!

CONAN

Nought should be rashly vow'd against your sire.

MORDRED

Whose breast is free from rage may soon b' advised.

CONAN

The best redress from rage is to relent.

MORDRED

'Tis better for a king to kill his foes.

CONAN

So that the subjects also judge them foes.

MORDRED

The subjects must not judge their king's decrees.

CONAN

The subjects' force is great.

MORDRED

Greater the king's.

CONAN

The more you may, the more you ought to fear.

MORDRED

He is a fool that feareth what he may.

CONAN

Not what you may, but what you ought, is just.

MORDRED

He that amongst so many so unjust
Seeks to be just, seeks peril to himself.

CONAN

A greater peril comes by breach of laws.

MORDRED

The laws do licence as the sovereign lists.

CONAN

Least ought he list, whom laws do licence most.

MORDRED

Imperial power abhors to be restrain'd.

CONAN

As much do meaner grooms to be compell'd.

MORDRED

The fates have heav'd and rais'd my force on high.

CONAN

The gentler should you press those that are low.

MORDRED

I would be fear'd.

CONAN

The cause why subjects hate.

MORDRED

A kingdom's kept by fear.

CONAN

And lost by hate.
He fears as man(y) himself whom many fear.

MORDRED

The timorous subject dares attempt no change.

CONAN

What dares not desperate dread?

MORDRED

What? torture, threats.

CONAN

O spare! 'twere safer to be lov'd.

MORDRED

As safe to be obey'd.

CONAN

Whiles you command but well.

MORDRED

Where rulers dare command but what is well,
Pow'r is but prayer, commandment but request.

CONAN

If pow'r be join'd with right, men must obey.

MORDRED

My will must go for right.

CONAN

If they assent.

MORDRED

My sword shall force assent.

CONAN

No, gods forbid!

MORDRED

What! shall I stand, whiles Arthur sheds my blood?
And must I yield my neck unto the axe?
Whom fates constrain, let him forego his bliss;
But he that needless yields unto his bane,
When he may shun, doth well deserve to lose
The good he cannot use. Who would sustain
A baser life, that may maintain the best?
We cannot part the crown: a regal throne
Is not for two: the sceptre fits but one.
But whether is the fitter of us two,
That must our swords discern, and shortly shall.

CONAN

How much were you to be renowned more,
If casting off these ruinous attempts,
You would take care how to supply the loss,
Which former wars and foreign broils have wrought;
How to deserve the people's hearts with peace,
With quiet rest and deep-desired ease:
Not to increase the rage that long hath reign'd,
Nor to destroy the realm you seek to rule.
Your father rear'd it up, you pluck it down.
You lose your country, whiles you win it thus:
To make it yours, you strive to make it none.
Where kings impose too much, the commons grudge;
Good-will withdraws; assent becomes but slow.

MORDRED

Must I to gain renown incur my plague,
Or hoping praise sustain an exile's life?
Must I for country's ease disease myself,
Or for their love despise my own estate?
No. 'Tis my hap that Britain serves my turn;
That fear of me doth make the subjects crouch;
That what they grudge they do constrained yield.
If their assents be slow, my wrath is swift:
When favour fails to bend, let fury break.
If they be yet to learn, let terror teach,
What kings may do, what subjects ought to bear.
Then is a kingdom at a wished stay,
When what soever the sovereign wills or nills,
Men be compell'd as well to praise as bear,
And subjects' wills enforc'd against their wills.

CONAN

But whoso seeks true praise and just renown,
Would rather seek their praising hearts than tongues.

MORDRED

True praise may happen to the basest groom;
A forced praise to none but to a prince.
I wish that most, that subjects most repine.

CONAN

But yet where wars do threaten your estate,
There needeth friends to fortify your crown.

MORDRED

Each crown is made of that attractive mould,
That of itself it draws a full defence.

CONAN

That is a just and no usurped crown;
And better were an exile's life, than thus
Disloyally to wrong your sire and liege.
Think not that impious crimes can prosper long:
A time they 'scape, in time they be repaid.

MORDRED

The hugest crimes bring best success to some.

CONAN

Those some be rare.

MORDRED

Why may not I be rare?

CONAN

It was their hap.

MORDRED

It is my hope.

CONAN

But hope may miss, where hap doth hurl.

MORDRED

So hap may hit, where hope doth aim.

CONAN

But hap is last, and rules the stern.

MORDRED

So hope is first, and hoists the sail.

CONAN

Yet fear; the first and last do seld agree.

MORDRED

Nay, dare; the first and last have many means.
But cease at length; your speech molests me much.
My mind is fix'd: give Mordred leave to do
What Conan neither can allow nor like.

CONAN

But lo, an Herald sent from Arthur's host.
Gods grant his message may portend our good.

SCENE 3

HERALD

Your sire, O Prince, considering what distress
The realm sustains by both your mutual wars,
Hath sent your brother Gawin, Alban king,
To treat of truce, and to imparle of peace.

MORDRED

Speak, brother: what commandment sends our sire?
What message do you bring? My life or death?

GAWIN

A message far unmeet, most needful tho'.
The sire commands not where the son rebels:
His love descends too deep to wish your death.

MORDRED

And mine ascends too high to wish his life.

GAWIN

Yet thus he off'reth. Though your faults be great
And most disloyal, to his deep abuse,
Yet yield yourself, he'll be as prone to grace,
As you to ruth--an uncle, sire, and liege.
And fitter were your due submission done,
Than wrongful wars to reave his right and realm.

MORDRED

It is my fault that he doth want his right:
It is his own to vex the realm with wars.

GAWIN

It is his right that he attempts to seek:
It is your wrong that driveth him thereto.

MORDRED

'Tis his insatiate mind, that is not so content,
Which hath so many kingdoms more besides.

GAWIN

The more you ought to tremble at his pow'r.

MORDRED

The greater is my conquest, if I win.

GAWIN

The more your foil, if you should hap to lose:
For Arthur's fame and valour's such, as you
Should rather imitate, or at the least
Envy, if hope of better fancies fail'd:
For whereas envy reigns, though it repines,
Yet doth it fear a greater than itself.

MORDRED

He that envies the valour of his foe,
Detects a want of valour in himself.
He fondly fights that fights with such a foe,
Where 'twere a shame to lose, no praise to win;
But with a famous foe succeed what will,
To win is great renown, to lose less foil.
His conquests, were they more, dismay me not:
That oft'ner they have been, the more they threat:
No danger can be thought both safe and oft;
And who hath oft'ner waged wars than he?
Escapes secure him not: he owes the price:
Whom chance hath often miss'd, chance hits at length;
Or if that chance have furthered his success,
So may she mine, for chance hath made me king.

GAWIN

As chance hath made you king, so chance may change.
Provide for peace: that's it the highest peers,
No state except, even conquerers, ought to seek.
Remember Arthur's strength, his conquests late,
His fiery mind, his high-aspiring heart.
Mark then the odds: he expert, you untried;
He ripe, you green. Yield you, whiles yet you may;
He will not yield: he wins his peace with wars.

MORDRED

If chance may change, his chance was last to win;
The likelier now to lose. His haughty heart
And mind I know: I feel mine own no less.
As for his strength and skill, I leave to hap:
Where many meet, it lies not all in one.
What though he vanquish'd have the Roman troops,
That boots him not: himself is vanquish'd here.
Then weigh your words again: if conquerors ought
To seek for peace, the conquered must perforce.
But he'll not yield; he'll purchase peace with wars.
Well, yield that will; I neither will nor can.
Come peace, come wars, choose him; my danger's his,
His safety mine: our states do stand alike.
If peace be good, as good for him as me;
If wars be good, as good for me as him.

GAWIN

What cursed wars (alas) were those, wherein
Both son and sire should so oppose themselves!
Him whom you now, unhappy man, pursue,
If you should win, yourself would first bewail.
Give him his crown: to keep it peril breeds.

MORDRED

The crown I'll keep myself, ensue what will.
Death must be once; how soon, I least respect.
He best provides that can beware in time,
Not why nor when, but whence and where he falls.
What fool, to live a year or twain in rest,
Would lose the state and honour of a crown?

GAWIN

Consider then your father's grief and want,
Whom you bereave of kingdom, realm, and crown.

MORDRED

Trust me, a huge and mighty kingdom 'tis
To bear the want of kingdom, realm, and crown.

GAWIN

A common want, which works each worlding's woe:
That many have too much, but none enough.
It were his praise could he be so content,
Which makes you guilty of the greater wrong.
Wherefore think on the doubtful state of wars.
Where Mars hath sway, he keeps no certain course:
Sometimes she lets the weaker to prevail,
Sometimes the stronger troops: hope, fear, and rage
With eyeless lot rules all uncertain good,
Most certain harms be his assured haps.
No luck can last; now here, now there it lights:
No state alike, chance blindly snatcheth all,
And fortune maketh guilty whom she lists.

MORDRED

Since therefore fear and hope, and hap in wars,
Be all obscure, till their success be seen,
Your speech doth rather drive me on to try,
And trust them all, mine only refuge now.

GAWIN

And fear you not so strange and uncouth wars?

MORDRED

No, were they wars that grew from out the ground!

GAWIN

Nor yet your sire so huge, yourself so small?

MORDRED

The smallest axe may fell the hugest oak.

GAWIN

Nor that, in felling him, yourself may fall?

MORDRED

He falleth well, that falling fells his foe.

GAWIN

Nor common chance, whereto each man is thrall?

MORDRED

Small manhood were to turn my back to chance.

GAWIN

Nor that, if chance afflict, kings brook it not?

MORDRED

I bear no breast so unprepar'd for harms.
Even that I hold the kingliest point of all,
To brook afflictions well; and by how much
The more his state and tottering empire sags,
To fix so much the faster foot on ground.
No fear but doth forejudge, and many fall
Into their fate, whiles they do fear their fate.
Where courage quails, the fear exceeds the harm:
Yea, worse than war itself is fear of war.

GAWIN

War seemeth sweet to such as have not tried;
But wisdom wills we should forecast the worse.
The end allows the act: that plot is wise,
That knows his means, and least relies on chance.
Eschew the course where error lurks; there grows
But grief where pain is spent, no hope to speed.
Strive not above your strength; for where your force
Is overmatch'd with your attempts, it faints,
And fruitless leaves what bootless it began.

MORDRED

All things are rul'd in constant course: no fate
But is foreset: the first day leads the last.
No wisdom then, but difference in conceit,
Which works in many men as many minds.
You love the mean, and follow virtue's race:
I like the top, and aim at greater bliss.
You rest content: my mind aspires to more.
In brief, you fear, I hope; you doubt, I dare.
Since, then, the sagest counsels are but strifes,
Where equal wits may wrest each side alike,
Let counsel go: my purpose must proceed.
Each likes his course, mine own doth like me best.

(MORE)

MORDRED (cont'd)

Wherefore, ere Arthur breathe or gather strength,
Assault we him, lest he assault us first.
He either must destroy, or be destroy'd:
The mischief's in the midst; catch he that can.

GAWIN

But will no reason rule that desperate mind?

MORDRED

A fickle mind that every reason rules!
I rest resolv'd, and to my sire say thus:--
If here he stay but three days to an end,
And not forthwith discharge his band and host,
'Tis Mordred's oath, assure himself to die.
But if he find his courage so to serve,
As for to stand to his defence with force,
In Cornwall, if he dare, I'll try it out.

GAWIN

O strange contempt! like as the craggy rock
Resists the streams and flings the waltering waves
Aloof, so he rejects and scorns my words.
(Exit)

SCENE 4

MORDRED

Lo, where (as they decreed) my faithful friends
Have kept their time. Be all your powers repair'd?

GILLA

They be, and all with ardent minds: to Mars
They cry for wars, and longing for th' alarm,
Even now they wish t' encounter with their foes.

MORDRED

What could be wish'd for more? puissant king,
For your great help and valiant Irish force,
If I obtain the conquest in these wars,
Whereas my father claims a tribute due
Out of your realm; I here renounce it quite:
And if assistance need in doubtful times,
I will not fail to aid you with the like.

GILLA

It doth suffice me to discharge my realm,
Or at the least to wreak me on my foes.
I rather like to live your friend and peer,
Than rest in Arthur's homage and disgrace.

MORDRED

Right noble duke, through whom the Saxons vow
Their lives with mine, for my defence in wars,
(MORE)

MORDRED (cont'd)

If we prevail and may subdue our foes,
I will, in lieu of your so high deserts,
Give you and yours all British lands that lie
Between the flood of Humber and the Scots:
Besides as much in Kent as Horsa and
Hengistus had, when Vortigern was king.

CHELDRICHUS

Your gracious proffers I accept with thanks;
Not for the gain, but for the good desire
I have henceforth to be your subject here
May thereby take effect; which I esteem
More than the rule I bear in Saxon soil.

MORDRED

Renowned lord, for your right hardy Picts
And chosen warriors to maintain my cause,
If our attempts receive a good success,
The Alban crown I give to you and yours.

DUX PICTORUM

Your highness' bounty in so high degree,
Were cause enough to move me to my best:
But sure yourself, without regard of meed,
Should find both me and mine at your command.

MORDRED

Lord Gilla, if my hope may take success,
And that I be thereby undoubted king,
The Cornish dukedom I allot to you.

GILLA

My liege, to further your desir'd attempts,
I joyfully shall spend my dearest blood:
The rather that I found the king your sire
So heavy lord to me and all my stock.

MORDRED

Since then our rest is on 't, and we agreed,
To war it out, what resteth now but blows?
Drive dest'nies on with swords, Mars frames the means!
Henceforth what Mordred may, now lies in you.
Ere long, if Mars ensue with good success,
Look, whatso'er it be that Arthur claims
By right or wrong, or conquests gain'd with blood
In Britain or abroad, is mine to give:--
To show, I would have said: I cannot give
What every hand must give unto itself.
Whereof who lists to purchase any share,
Now let him seek and win it with his sword:
The fates have laid it open in the field.
What stars (O heavens) or poles, or powers divine,
Do grant so great rewards for those that win!
Since then our common good, and each man's care
(MORE)

MORDRED (cont'd)

Requires our joint assistance in these toils,
Shall we not hazard our extremest hap,
And rather spend our fates, than spare our foes?
The cause I care for most is chiefly yours:
This hand and heart shall make mine own secure,
That man shall see me foiled by myself,
Whate'er he be, that sees my foe unfoil'd
Fear not the field, because of Mordred's faults,
Nor shrink one jot the more for Arthur's right.
Full safely fortune guideth many a guilt,
And fates have none but wretches whom they wrench.
Wherefore make speed to cheer your soldiers' hearts.
That to their fires ye yet may add more flames.
The side that seeks to win in civil wars
Mus not content itself with wonted heat.

Exeunt omnes proeter MORDRED and CONAN.

CONAN

Would God your highness had been more advised,
Ere too much will had drawn your wits too far!
Then had no wars endanger'd you nor yours,
Nor Mordred's cause required foreign care.
(Exit)

MORDRED

A troubled head: my mind revolts to fear,
And bears my body back. I inwards feel my fall:
My thoughts misgive me much. Down, terror! I
Perceive mine end, and desperate though I must
Despise despair, and somewhat hopeless hope,
The more I doubt the more I dare: by fear
I find the fact is fittest for my frame.
What though I be a ruin to the realm,
And fall myself therewith? no better end:
His last mishaps do make a man secure.
Such was King Priam's end who, when he died,
Clos'd and wrapp'd up his kingdom in his death.
A solemn pomp, and fit for Mordred's mind,
To be a grave and tomb to all his realm.
(Exit)

CHORUS

1

Ye princely peers, extoll'd to seats of state,
Seek not the fair that soon will turn to foul:
Oft is the fall of high and hovering fate,
And rare the room which time doth not control.
The safest seat is not on highest hill,
Where winds and storms and thunders thump their ill:
Far safer were to follow sound advice,
Than for such pride to pay so dear a price.

(MORE)

CHORUS (cont'd)

2

The mounting mind that climbs the haughty cliffs,
And soaring seeks the tip of lofty type,
Intoxicates the brain with giddy drifts,
Then rolls and reels and falls at length plum-ripe.
Lo, heaving high is of so small forecast,
To totter first, and tumble down at last.
Yet Pegasus still rears himself on high,
And coltishly doth kick the clouds in sky.

3

Who saw the grief engraven in a crown,
Or knew the bad and bane, whereto it 's bound,
Would never stick to throw and fling it down,
Nor once vouchsafe to heave it from the ground.
Such is the sweet of this ambitious power,
No sooner had, than turns oftsoons to sour,
Achiev'd with envy, exercis'd with hate,
Guarded with fear, supported with debate.

4

O restless race of high-aspiring head!
O worthless rule both pitied and envied!
How many millions to their loss you lead,
With love and lure of kingdoms' bliss untried!
So things untasted cause a quenchless thirst,
Which, were they known, would be refused first:
Yea, oft we see, yet seeing cannot shun
The fact we find as fondly dar'd as done.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

SCENE 1

ARTHUR

Is this the welcome that my realm prepares?
Be these the thanks I win for all my wars?
Thus to forbid me land? to slay my friends?
To make their blood distain my country shores?
My son (belike), lest that our force should faint
For want of wars, prepar'd us wars himself.
He thought (perhaps) it mought impair our fame,
If none rebell'd, whose foil might praise our power.
Is this the fruit of Mordred's forward youth
And tender age, discreet beyond his years?
O false and guileful life! O crafty world!
How cunningly convey'st thou fraud unseen!
Th' ambitious seemeth meek, the wanton chaste;
Disguised vice for virtue vaunts itself.
Thus (Arthur), thus hath fortune play'd her part,
Blind for thy weal, clear-sighted for thy woe.
Thy kingdom's gone, thy sphere affords no faith:
Thy son rebels: of all thy wonted pomp
No jot is left, and fortune hides her face.
No place is left for prosperous plight: mishaps
Have room and ways to run and walk at will.
Lo (Cador) both our states, your daughter's trust,
My son's respect, our hopes repos'd in both!

CADOR

The time, O puissant Prince, permits not now
To moan our wrongs, or search each several sore.
Since Arthur thus hath ransack'd all abroad,
What marvel is 't, if Mordred rave at home?
When far and near your wars had worn the world,
What wars were left for him but civil wars?
All which requires revenge with sword and fire,
And to pursue your foes with present force.
In just attempts Mars gives a rightful doom.

ARTHUR

Nay, rather (Cadon) let them run their race,
And leave the heavens revengers of my wrong.
Since Britain's prosperous state is thus debas'd
In servile sort to Mordred's cursed pride,
Let me be thrall, and lead a private life:
None can refuse the yoke his country bears.
But as for wars, in sooth, my flesh abhors
To bid the battle to my proper blood.
Great is the love which nature doth inforce
From kin to kin, but most from sire to son.

HOWELL

The noble neck disdains the servile yoke:
Where rule hath pleas'd, subjection seemeth strange.
A king ought always to prefer his realm
Before the love he bears to kin or son.
Your realm destroy'd is ne'er restor'd again,
But time may send you kin and sons enough.

ARTHUR

How hard it is to rule th' aspring mind,
And what a kingly point it seems to those,
Whose lordly hands the stately sceptre sways,
Still to pursue the drift they first decreed,
My wonted mind and kingdom lets me know.
Think not but, if you drive this hazard on,
He desperate will resolve to win or die:
Whereof who knows which were the greater guilt,
The sire to slay the son, or son the sire?

CADOR

If bloody Mars do so extremely sway,
That either son or sire must needs be slain,
Give law the choice: let him die that deserves.
Each impotent affection notes a want.
No worse a vice than lenity in kings;
Remiss indulgence soon undoes a realm.
He teacheth how to sin that winks at sins,
And bids offend that suffereth an offence.
The only hope of leave increaseth crimes,
And he that pardoneth one, embold'neth all
To break the laws. Each patience fostereth wrong.
But vice severely punish'd faints at foot,
And creeps no further off than where it falls.
One sour example will prevent more vice
Than all the best persuasions in the world.
Rough rigour looks out right, and still prevails:
Smooth mildness looks too many ways to thrive.
Wherefore, since Mordred's crimes have wrong'd the laws
In so extreme a sort, as is too strange;
Let right and justice rule with rigour's aid,
And work his wrack at length, although too late;

(MORE)

CADOR (cont'd)

That damning laws, so damned by the laws,
He may receive his deep deserved doom.
So let it fare with all that dare the like:
Let sword, let fire, let torments be their end.
Severity upholds both realm and rule.

ARTHUR

Ah too severe! far from a father's mind.
Compassion is as fit for kings as wrath.
Laws must not low'r; rule oft admitteth ruth.
So hate, as if there were yet cause to love:
Take not their lives as foes which may be friends.
To spoil my son were to despoil myself:
Oft, whiles we seek our foes, we seek our foils.
Let's rather seek how to allure his mind
With good deserts: deserts may win the worst.

HOWELL

Where Cato first had saved a thief from death,
And after was himself condemn'd to die,
When else not one would execute the doom,
Who but the thief did undertake the task?
If too much bounty work so bad effects
In thankless friends, what for a ruthless foe?
Let laws have still their course: the ill dispos'd
Grudge at their lives to whom they owe too much.

ARTHUR

But yet where men with reconciled minds
Renew their love with recontinued grace,
Atonement frames them friends of former foes,
And makes the moods of swelling wrath to 'suage.
No faster friendship than that grows from grief,
When melting minds with mutual ruth relent.
How close the severed skin unites again,
When salves have smoothly heal'd the former hurts!

CADOR

I never yet saw heart so smoothly heal'd,
But that the scar bewray'd the former wound:
Yea, where the salve did soonest close the skin,
The sore was oft'ner covered up than cur'd:
Which festering deep and fill'd within, at last
With sudden breach grew greater than at first.
What then for minds which have revenging moods,
And ne'er forget the cross they forced bear?
Whereto if reconcilement come, it makes
The t' one secure, while t' other works his will.
Atonement seld defeats, but oft defers
Revenge: beware a reconciled foe.

ARTHUR

Well, what avails to linger in this life,
Which fortune but reserves for greater grief?

(MORE)

ARTHUR (cont'd)

This breath draws on but matter of mishap:
Death only frees the guiltless from annoys.
Who so hath felt the force of greedy fates,
And 'dur'd the last decree of grisly death,
Shall never yield his captive arms to chains,
Nor drawn in triumph deck the victor's pomp.

HOWELL

What mean these words? Is Arthur forc'd to fear?
Is this the fruit of your continual wars,
Even from the first remembrance of your youth?

ARTHUR

My youth (I grant) and prime of budding years,
Puff'd up with pride and fond desire of praise,
Foreweening nought what perils might ensue,
Adventured all and raught to will the reins:
But now this age requires a sager course,
and will, advis'd by harms, to wisdom yields.
Those swelling spirits, the self-same cause, which first
Set them on gog, even fortune's favours quail'd,
And now mine oft'nest scapes do scare me most.
I fear the trap whereat I oft have tripp'd:
Experience tells me plain that chance is frail,
And oft the better past, the worse to come.

CADOR

Resist these doubts: 'tis ill to yield to harms.
'Tis safest then to dare, when most you fear.

ARTHUR

As safe sometimes to fear, when most we dare:
A causeless courage gives repentance place.

HOWELL

If fortune fawn.

ARTHUR

Each way on me she frowns:
For win I, lose I, both procure my grief.

CADOR

Put case you win, what grief?

ARTHUR

Admit I do, what joy?

CADOR

Then may you rule.

ARTHUR

When I may die.

To rule is much.	CADOR
Small, if we covet nought.	ARTHUR
Who covets not a crown?	CADOR
He that discerns the sword aloft.	ARTHUR
That hangeth fast.	CADOR
But by a hair.	ARTHUR
Right holds it up.	CADOR
Wrong pulls it down.	ARTHUR
The Commons help the king.	CADOR
They sometimes hurt.	ARTHUR
At least the Peers.	CADOR
Seld, if allegiance want.	ARTHUR
Yet sovereignty.	CADOR
Not if subjection fail.	ARTHUR
Doubt not: the realm is yours.	CADOR
'Twas mine 'till now.	ARTHUR
And shall be still.	CADOR
If Mordred list.	ARTHUR

CADOR

'Twere well your crown were won.

ARTHUR

Perhaps 'tis better lost.

HOWELL

The name of rule should move a princely mind.

ARTHUR

Trust me, bad things have often glorious names.

HOWELL

The greatest good that fortune can afford.

ARTHUR

A dangerous good, that wisdom would eschew.

HOWELL

Yet weigh the hearsay of the old renown.
And fame, the wonderer fo the former age,
Which still extols the facts of worthiest wights,
Preferring no deserts before your deeds.
Even she exhorts you to this new attempt,
Which left untried your winnings be but loss.

ARTHUR

Small credit will be given of matters past
To Fame, the flatterer of the former age.
Were all believ'd which antique bruit imports,
Yet wisdom weighs the peril join'd to praise.
Rare is the fame (mark well all ages gone)
Which hath not hurt the house it most enhanc'd.
Besides, fame's but a blast that sounds awhile,
And quickly stints, and then is quite forgot.
Look, whatso'er our virtues have achiev'd,
The chaos vast and greedy time devours.
To-day all Europe rings with Arthur's praise:
'Twill be as hush'd as if I ne'er had been.
What boots it then to venture life or limb
For that which needs ere long we leave or lose?

CADOR

Can blind affection so much blear the wise,
Or love of graceless son so witch the sire,
That what concerns the honour of a prince,
With country's good and subject's just request,
Should lightly be contemned by a king?
When Lucius sent but for his tribute due,
You went with thirteen kings to root him out.
Have Romans, for requiring but their own,
Abode your nine years' brunts? Shall Mordred 'scape,
That wrong'd you thus in honour, queen, and realm?

(MORE)

CADOR (cont'd)

Were this no cause to stir a king to wrath,
Yet should your conquests, late achiev'd 'gainst Rome,
Inflame your mind with thirst of full revenge.

ARTHUR

Indeed, continual wars have chaf'd our minds,
And good success hath bred impatient moods.
Rome puffs us up, and makes us too--too fierce.
There, Britons, there we stand, whence Rome did fall.
Thou, Lucius, mak'st me proud, thou heav'st my mind:
But what? shall I esteem a crown ought else
Than as a gorgeous crest of easeless helm,
Or as some brittle mould of glorious pomp,
Or glittering glass which, while it shines, it breaks?
All this a sudden chance may dash, and not
Perhaps with thirteen kings, or in nine years:
All may not find so slow and ling'ring fates.
What that my country cries for due remorse,
And some relief for long-sustained toils?
By seas and lands I daily wrought her wrack,
And spareless spent her life on every foe.
Each where my soldiers perish'd, whilst I won:
Throughout the world my conquest was their spoil.
A fair reward for all their deaths, for all
Their wars abroad, to give them civil wars!
What boots it then, reserv'd from foreign foils,
To die at home? what end of ruthless rage?
At least let age and nature, worn to nought,
Provide at length their graves with wished groans.
Pity their hoary hairs, their feeble fists,
Their withered limbs, their strengths consum'd in camp!
Must they still end their lives amongst the blades?
Rests there no other fate, whilst Arthur reigns?
What deem you me? A fury fed with blood,
Or some Cyclopiian, born and bred for brawls?
Think on the mind that Arthur bears to peace:
Can Arthur please you nowhere but in wars?
Be witness, heavens, how far 'tis from my mind
Therewith to spoil or sack my native soil.
I cannot yield; it brooks not in my breast
To seek her ruin whom I erst have rul'd,
What relics now soe'er both civil broils
And foreign wars have left, let those remain:
Th 'are few enough, and Britons fall too fast.

SCENE 2

HOWELL

(aside)

Lo, here an herald sent from Mordred's camp:
A froward message, if I read aright.
We mought not stir his wrath; perhaps this may:
(MORE)

HOWELL (cont'd)

Persuasions cannot move a Briton's mood,
And yet none sooner stung with present wrong.

HERALD

Hail, peerless prince! whiles fortune would, our king,
Though now bereft of crown and former rule.
Vouchsafe me leave my message to impart,
No jot enforc'd, but as your son affords.
If here you stay but three days to an end,
And not forthwith discharge your bands and host,
'Tis Mordred's oath: assure yourself to die.
But if you find your courage so to serve,
As for to stand to your defence with force,
In Cornwall (if you dare) he'll try it out.

ARTHUR

Is this the choice my son doth send his sire?
And must I die, or try it, if I dare?
To die were ill, thus to be dar'd is worse.
Display my standard forth! let trump and drum
Call soldiers near to hear their sovereign's hest.

SCENE 3

ARTHUR

O friends, and fellows of my weariest toils,
Which have borne out with me so many brunts,
And desperate storms of wars and brainsick Mars!
Lo now the hundreth month, wherein we win!
Hath all the blood we spent in foreign coasts,
The wounds and deaths, and winters bode abroad,
Deserved thus to be disgraced at home?
All Britain rings of wars: no town nor field
But swarms with armed troops: the mustering trains
Stop up the streets: no less a tumult's rais'd,
Than when Hengistus fell, and Horsa, fierce
With treacherous truce, did overrun the realm.
Each corner threateneth death: both far and near
Is Arthur vex'd. What, if my force had fail'd
And standard fall'n, and ensigns all been torn,
And Roman troops pursu'd me at the heels,
With luckless wars assay'd in foreign soils?
Now that our fortune heaves us up thus high,
And heavens themselves renew our old renown,
Must we be dar'd? Nay, let that princcock come,
That knows not yet himself, nor Arthur's force;
That ne'er yet waged wars; that 's yet to learn
To give the charge: yea, let that princcock come,
With sudden soldiers pamper'd up in peace,
And gowned troops and wantons worn with ease;
With sluggish Saxons' crew and Irish kerns,
And Scottish aid, and false redshanked Picts,
Whose slaughters yet must teach their former foil.

(MORE)

ARTHUR (cont'd)

They shall perceive with sorrow, ere they part,
 When all their toils be told, that nothing works
 So great a waste and ruin in this age,
 As do my wars. O Mordred, blessed son!
 No doubt these market-mates, so highly hir'd,
 Must be the stay of thy usurped state.
 And lest my head, inclining now to years,
 Should joy the rest, which yet it never reap'd,
 The traitor Gilla, train'd in treacherous jars,
 Is chief in arms to reave me of my realm.
 What corner (ah), for all my wars, shall shroud
 My bloodless age? what seat for due deserts?
 What town or field for ancient soldiers' rest?
 What house? what roof? what walls for wearied limbs?
 Stretch out again, stretch out your conquering hands!
 Still we must use the force so often us'd.
 To those that will pursue a wrong with wreak
 He giveth all, that once denies the right.
 Thou soil, which erst Diana did ordain
 The certain seat and bow'r of wand'ring Brute:
 Thou realm, which aye I reverence as my saint,
 Thou stately Britain, th' ancient type of Troy,
 Bear with my forced wrongs! I am not he,
 That willing would impeach thy peace with wars!
 Lo, here both far and wide I conqueror stand:
 Arthur, each where thine own, thy liege, thy king.
 Condemn not mine attempts; he, only he,
 Is sole in fault that makes me thus thy foe.
 Here I renounce all leagues and treats of truce:
 Thou, fortune, henceforth art my guard and guide!
 Hence, peace! on wars run fates: let Mars be judge;
 I erst did trust to right, but now to rage.
 Go, tell the boy that Arthur fears no brags:
 In vain he seeks to brave it with his sire.
 I come (Mordred), I come, but to thy pain.
 Yea, tell the boy his angry father comes
 To teach a novice both to die and dare.

HERALD exit.

HOWELL

If we without offence (O greatest guide
 Of British name) may pour our just complaints,
 We most mislike that your too mild a mood
 Hath thus withheld our hands and swords from strokes.
 For what? were we behind in any help?
 Or without cause did you misdoubt our force,
 Or truth so often tried with good success?
 Go to: conduct your army to the field;
 Place man to man, oppose us to our foes:
 As much we need to work, as with your weal.

CADOR

Seems it so sour to win by civil wars?
Were it to gore with pike my father's breast;
Were it to rive and cleave my brother's head;
Were it to tear peacemeal my dearest child,
I would enforce my grudging hands to help.
I cannot term that place my native soil,
Whereto your trumpets send their warlike sounds.
If case requir'd to batter down the tow'rs
Of any town that Arthur would destroy,
Yea, were 't of Britain's self, which most I reed,
Her bulwarks, fortress, rampiers, walls and fence,
These arms should rear the rams to run them down.
Wherefore, ye princes, and the rest, my mates,
If what I have averr'd in all your names,
Be likewise such as stands to your content,
Let all your yeas avow my premise true.

SOLDIERS

Yea, yea, &c.

ASCHILLUS

Wherein, renowned king, myself or mine,
My life, my kingdom, and all Denmark's pow'r,
May serve your turn: account them all your own.

KING OF NORWAY

And whatsoe'er my force, or Norway aid,
May help in your attempts, I vow it here.

GAWIN

As heretofore I always serv'd your hest.
So let this day be judge of Gawin's trust.
Either my brother Mordred dies the death
By mine assault, or I at least by his.

ARTHUR

Since thus (my faithful mates) with vows alike
And equal love to Arthur's cause you join
In common care to wreak my private wrongs,
Life up your ensigns efts, stretch out your strengths;
Pursue your fates; perform your hopes to Mars.
Lo, here the last and outmost work for blades!
This is the time that all our valour craves:
This time by due desert restores again
Our goods, our lands, our lives, our weal and all.
This time declares by fates whose cause is best;
This, this condemns the vanquish'd side of guilt.
Wherefore, if for my sake you scorn yourselves,
And spare no sword nor fire in my defence,
Then, whiles my censure justifies your cause,
Fight, fight amain, and clear your blades from crime:
The judge once chang'd, no wars are free from guilt.

(MORE)

ARTHUR (cont'd)

The better cause gives us the greater hope
Of prosperous wars; wherein, if once I hap
To spy the wonted signs, that never fail'd
Their guide— your threatening looks, your fiery eyes,
And bustling bodies prest to present spoil,
The field is won! Even then, methinks, I see
The wonted wastes and scattered heads of foes,
The Irish carcass kick'd, and Picts oppress'd,
And Saxons slain to swim in streams of blood.
I quake with hope. I can assure you all,
We never had a greater match in hand.
March on! Delay no fates, whilst fortune fawns;
The greatest praise of war consists in speed.

Exeunt Reges et Cohors.

SCENE 4

CADOR

Since thus (victorious king) your peers allies,
Your lords, and all your powers be ready prest,
For good, for bad, for whatsoe'er shall hap,
To spend both limb and life in your defence,
Cast off all doubts and rest yourself on Mars:
A hopeless fear forbids a happy fate.

ARTHUR

In sooth (good Cador), so our fortune fares,
As needs we must return to wonted force.
To wars we must; but such unhappy wars,
As leave no hope for right or wrong to 'scape.
Myself forsees the fate; it cannot fall
Without our dearest blood: much may the mind
Of pensive sire presage, whose son so sins.
All truth, all trust, all blood, all bands be broke!
The seeds are sown that spring to future spoil.
My son, my nephew, yea, each side myself,
Nearer than all (woe's me), too near, my foe!
Well, 'tis my plague for life so lewdly led.
The price of guilt is still a heavier guilt;
For were it light, that ev'n by birth myself
Was bad, I made my sister bad: nay, were
That also light, I have begot as bad,
Yea, worse, an heir assign'd to all our sins.
Such was his birth: what base, what vulgar vice,
Could once be look'd for of so noble blood?
The deeper guilt descends, the more it roots:
The younger imps effect the huger crimes.

Exeunt.

CHORUS

1

When many men assent to civil wars
 And yield a suffrage to enforce the fates,
 No man bethinks him of his own mishap,
 But turns that luck unto another's share.
 Whereas if fear did first forewarn each foil,
 Such love to fight would breed no Briton's bane.
 And better were still to preserve our peace,
 Than thus to vent for peace through waging wars.
 What folly to forego such certain haps,
 And in their stead to feed uncertain hopes!
 Such hopes as oft have puff'd up many a realm,
 Till cross-success hath press'd it down as deep:
 Whiles blind affection, fetch'd from private cause,
 Misguiding wit hath mask'd in wisdom's veil,
 Pretending what in purpose it abhorr'd.

2

Peace hath three foes encamped in our breasts;
 Ambition, wrath and envy, which subdu'd,
 We should not fail to find eternal peace.
 'Tis in our power to joy it all at will,
 And few there be, but if they will, they may:
 But yet even those, who like the name of peace,
 Through fond desire repine at peace itself,
 Between the hope whereof and it itself
 A thousand things may fall, that further wars.
 The very speech sometimes and treats of truce
 Is slash'd and cut asunder with the sword.
 Nor seld the name of peace doth edge our minds,
 And sharpeneth on our fury, till we fight;
 So that the mention made of love and rest
 Is oft a whetstone to our hate and rage.

3

Lo, here the end that kingly pomp imparts:
 The quiet rest that princely palace plights!
 Care upon care, and every day anew
 Fresh rising tempest tires the tossed minds.
 Who strives to stand in pomp of princely port,
 On giddy top and culm of slippery court,
 Finds oft a heavy fate; whiles too much known
 To all, he falls unknown unto himself.
 Let whoso else that list affect the name,
 But let me seem a potentate to none:
 My slender bark shall creep anenst the shore,
 And shun the winds that sweep the waltering waves.
 Proud fortune overslips the safest roads,
 And seeks amidst the surging seas those keels,
 Whose lofty tops and tacklings touch the clouds.

(MORE)

CHORUS (cont'd)

4

O base, yet happy boors! O gifts of gods
Scant yet perceiv'd! when powd' red ermine robes
With secret sighs, mistrusting their extremes,
In baleful breast forecast their foultring fates,
And stir, and strive, and storm, and all in vain;
Behold the peasant poor with tattered coat,
Whose eyes a meaner fortune feeds with sleep,
How safe and sound the careless snudge doth snore.
Low-roofed lurks the house of slender hap,
Costless, not gay without, scant clean within;
Yet safe, and oft'ner shrouds the hoary hairs,
Than haughty turrets, rear'd with curious art,
To harbour heads that wield the golden crest.
With endless cark in glorious courts and towns,
The troubled hopes and trembling fears do dwell.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

SCENE 1

GILDAS

Lord Conan, though I know how hard a thing
It is for minds train'd up in princely thrones,
To hear of ought against their humour's course,
Yet, sithence who forbiddeth not offence,
If well he may, is cause of such offence,
I could have wish'd (and blame me not, my lord)
Your place and countenance both with son and sire
Had more prevail'd on either side, than thus
T' have left a crown in danger for a crown
Through civil wars, our country's wonted woe:
Whereby the kingdom's wound, still fest'ring deep,
Sucks up the mischievous humour to the heart.
The staggering state of Britain's troubled brains,
Headsick and sore encumbered in her crown,
With giddy steps runs on a headlong race.
Whereto this tempest tends, or where this storm
Will break, who knows? but gods avert the worst!

CONAN

Now surely (Gildas) as my duty stood
Indifferent for the best to son and sire,
So (I protest), since these occasions grew,
That in the depth of my desire to please,
I more esteem'd what honest faith requir'd
In matters meet for their estates and place,
Than how to feed each fond affection, prone
To bad effects, whence their disgrace mought grow.
And as for Mordred's desperate and disloyal plots,
They had been none, or fewer at the least,
Had I prevail'd, which Arthur knows right well.
But even as counters go sometimes for one,
Sometimes for thousands more, sometimes for none:
So men in greatest countenance with their king
Can work by fit persuasion sometimes much;
But sometimes less, and sometimes nought at all.

GILDAS

Well, we that have not spent our time in wars,
But bent our course at peace and country's weal,
May rather now expect what strange event
And chance ensues of these so rare attempts,
Than enter to discourse upon their cause,
And err as wide in words, as they in deeds.

CONAN

And lo, to satisfy your wish therein,
Where comes a soldier sweating from the camp.

SCENE 2

UNCIUS

Thou echo shrill, that haunt'st the hollow hills,
Leave off, that wont to snatch the latter word.
Howl on a whole discourse of our distress:
Clip off no clause; sound out a perfect sense.

GILDAS

What fresh mishap (alas), what new annoy
Removes our pensive minds from wonted woes,
And yet requires a new lamenting mood,
Declare! we joy to handle all our harms:
Our many griefs have taught us still to mourn.

NUNCIUS

But (ah) my tongue denies my speech his aid:
Great force doth drive it forth; a greater keeps
It in. I rue, surpris'd with wontless woes.

CONAN

Speak on what grief soe'er our fates afford.

NUNCIUS

Small griefs can speak, the great astonish'd stand.

GILDAS

What greater sin could hap, than what be pass'd?
What mischiefs could be meant, more than were wrought?

NUNCIUS

And think you there's to be an end to sins?
No; crime proceeds: those made but one degree.
What mischiefs erst were done, term sacred deeds:
Call nothing sin but what hath since ensu'd.
A greater grief requires your tears. Behold
These fresh annoys: your last mishaps be stale.

CONAN

Tell on (my friend): suspend our minds no more.
Hath Arthur lost? hath Mordred won the field?

NUNCIUS

O, nothing less! would, gods, it were but so!
Arthur hath won, but we have lost the field.
The field? Nay, all the realm and Britain's bounds.

GILDAS

How so? If Arthur won, what could we lose?
You speak in clouds, and cast perplexed words.
Unfold at large, and sort their sorrows out.

NUNCIUS

Then list awhile: this instant shall unwrap
Those acts, those wars, those hard events, that all
The future age shall ever have cause to curse--
Now that the time drew on, when both the camps
Should meet in Cornwall fields, th' appointed place.
The reckless troops, whom fates forbad to live
Till noon or night, did storm and rave for wars.
They swarm'd about their guides, and clust'ring call'd
For signs to fight; and fierce with uproars fell,
They onwards hal'd the lasting hours of death.
A direful frenzy rose: each man his own
And public fates all heedless headlong flung.
On Mordred's side were sixty thousand men;
Some borrowed powers, some Britons bred at home.
The Saxons, Irish, Normans, Picts and Scots
Were first in place: the Britons followed last.
On Arthur's side there were as many more:
Islandians, Goths, Norwegians, Albans, Danes,
Were foreign aids which Arthur brought from France;
A trusty troop and tried at many a trench.
That now the day was come, wherein our state
For aye should fall, whenceforth might men inquire
What Britain was, these wars thus near bewray'd.
Nor could the heavens no longer hide these harms,
But by prodigious signs portend our plagues.
For lo, ere both the camps encountering cop'd,
The skies and poles opposed themselves with storms:
Both east and west with tempests dark were dimm'd,
And showers of hail and rain outrageous pour'd.
The heavens were rent, each side the lightnings flash'd,
And clouds with hideous claps did thundering roar.
The armies, all aghast, did senseless stand,
Mistrusting much both force, and foes, and fates;
'Twas hard to say which of the two appall'd
Them most, the monstrous air or too much fear.
When Arthur spied his soldiers thus amaz'd,
And hope extinct, and deadly dread drawn on:
My mates (quoth he) the gods do scour the skies,

(MORE)

NUNCIUS (cont'd)

The fates contend to work some strange event,
 And fortune seeks by storms in heavens and earth,
 What pageants she may play for my behoof:
 Of whom she knows she then deserves not well,
 When (ling'ring ought) she comes not at the first.
 Thus said, rejoicing at his dauntless mind,
 They all reviv'd, and former fear recoil'd,
 By that the light of Titan's troubled beams
 Had piercing scattered down the drooping fogs,
 And greeted both the camps with mutual view.
 Their choler swells, whiles fell-disposed minds
 Bounce in their breasts, and stir uncertain storms.
 Then paleness wan and stern, with cheerless change,
 Possessing bleak their lips and bloodless cheeks,
 With troublous trembling, shows their death is near.
 When Mordred saw the danger thus approach'd,
 And boist'rous throngs of warriors threat'ning blood,
 His instant ruin gave a nod at fates,
 And mind, though prone to Mars, yet daunted paus'd.
 The heart which promis'd erst a sure success,
 Now throbs in doubts, nor can his own attempts
 Afford him fear, nor Arthur's yield him hope.
 This passion lasts not long: he soon recalls
 His ancient guise, and wonted rage returns.
 He loathes delays, and scorch'd with sceptre's lust,
 The time and place, wherein he oft had wish'd
 To hazard all upon extremest chance,
 He offer'd spies, and spied pursues with speed.
 Then both the armies met with equal might,
 This stirr'd with wrath, that with desire to rule,
 And equal prowess was a spur to both.
 The Irish king whirl'd out a poisoned dart,
 That lighting pierced deep in Howell's brains,
 A peerless prince and near of Arthur's blood.
 Hereat the air with uproar loud resounds,
 Which efts on mountains rough rebounding rears.
 The trumpets hoarse their trembling tunes do tear,
 And thund'ring drums their dreadful larums ring.
 The standards broad are blown and ensigns spread,
 And every nation bends his wonted wars.
 Some near their foes, some further off do wound,
 With dart or sword, or shaft, or pike, or spear;
 The weapons hide the heavens; a night compos'd
 Of warlike engines overshades the field.
 From every side these fatal signs are sent,
 And boist'rous bangs with thumping thwacks fall thick.
 Had both these camps been of usurping kings,
 Had every man thereof a Mordred been,
 No fiercelier had they fought for all their crowns.
 The murders meaningless wax'd, no art in fight,
 Nor way to ward nor try each other's skill.
 But thence the blade, and hence the blood ensues.

CONAN

But what! did Mordred's eyes endure this sight?

NUNCIUS

They did; and he himself, the spur of fiends
And Gorgons all, lest any part of his
Scap'd free from guilt, enflam'd their minds to wrath,
And with a valour, more than virtue yields,
He cheer'd them all, and at their back with long
Outreached spear stirr'd up each ling'ring hand.
All fury-like, frounc'd up with frantic frets,
He bids them leave and shun the meaner sort,
He shows the kings and Britain's noblest peers.

GILDAS

He was not now to seek what blood to draw:
He knew what juice refresh'd his fainting crown,
Too much of Arthur's heart. O, had he wist,
How great a vice such virtue was as then,
In civil wars, in rooting up his realm!
O frantic fury, far from valour's praise!

NUNCIUS

There fell Aschillus stout, of Denmark king;
There valiant Gawin, Arthur's nephew dear,
And late by Augel's death made Alban king,
By Mordred's hand hath lost both life and crown.
There Gilla wounded Cador, Cornish duke,
In hope to win the dukedom for his meed.
The Norway king, the Saxon's duke, and Picts,
In woeful sort fell grovelling to the ground.
There prince and peasant both lay hurl'd on heaps:
Mars frown'd on Arthur's mates: the fates wax'd fierce,
And jointly ran this race with Mordred's rage.

CONAN

But with what joy (alas) shall he return,
That thus returns the happier for this field?

NUNCIUS

These odds endure not long, for Mars retires,
And fortune, pleas'd with Arthur's moderate fear,
Returns more full, and friendlier than her wont.
For when he saw the powers of fates oppos'd,
And that the dreadful hour was hastened on,
Perplexed much in mind at length resolves,
That fear is covered best by daring most.
Then forth he pitch'd: the Saxon duke withstood,
Whom with one stroke he headless sent to hell.
Not far from thence he spied the Irish king,
Whose life he took as price of broken truce.
Then Cador forward pres'd, and haply met
The traitor Gilla, worker of these wars,

(MORE)

NUNCIUS (cont'd)

Of whom by death he took his due revenge.
 The remnant then of both the camps concur,
 They Britons all, or most, few foreigners left:
 These wage the wars and hence the deaths ensue:
 Nor t' one nor t' other side that can destroy
 Her foes so fast, as 'tis itself destroyed.
 The brethren broach their blood; the sire, the son's
 The son again would prove by too much wrath,
 That he, whom thus he slew, was not his sire.
 No blood nor kin can 'suage their ireful moods:
 No foreign foe they seek, nor care to find:
 The Briton's blood is sought on every side.
 A vain discourse it were to paint at large
 The several fates and foils of either side;
 To tell what groans and sighs the parting ghosts
 Sent forth; who dying bare the fellest breast;
 Who changed cheer at any Briton's fall;
 Who oft'nest stroke; who best bestow'd his blade;
 Who vent' red most; who stood, who fell, who fail'd.
 Th' effect declares it all: thus far the field.
 Of both these hosts, so huge and main at first,
 There were not left on either side a score,
 For son and sire to win and lose the realm.
 The which when Mordred saw, and that his sire
 'Gainst foes and fates themselves would win the field,
 He sigh'd and 'twixt despair and rage he cried:
 Here (Arthur), here, and hence the conquest comes:
 Whiles Mordred lives, the crown is yet unwon!
 Hereat the prince of prowess, much amaz'd,
 With thrilling tears and count'nance cast on ground,
 Did groaning fetch a deep and earnest sigh.
 Anon, they fierce encountering both concurr'd
 With grisly looks and faces like their fates;
 But dispar minds and inward moods unlike.
 The sire with mind to safeguard both, or t' one;
 The son to spoil the t' one or hazard both.
 No fear nor fellness fail'd on either side:
 The wager lay on both their lives and bloods.
 At length, when Mordred spied his force to faint,
 And felt himself oppress'd with Arthur's strength,
 (O hapless lad, a match unmeet for him)
 He loathes to live in that afflicted state,
 And, valiant with a forced virtue, longs
 To die the death: in which perplexed mind,
 With grening teeth and crabbed looks he cries,
 I cannot win, yet will I not be won.
 What! should we shun our fates, or play with Mars,
 Or thus defraud the wars of both our bloods?
 Whereto do we reserve ourselves, or why
 Be we not sought ere this amongst the dead?
 So many thousands murther'd in our cause,
 Must we survive, and neither win nor lose?
 The fates, that will not smile on either side
 May frown on both. So saying, forth he flings,

(MORE)

NUNCIUS (cont'd)

And desperate runs on point of Arthur's sword!
(A sword, alas, prepar'd for no such use),
Whereon engor'd he glides till, near approach'd,
With dying hand he hews his father's head:
So through his own annoy he 'nnoys his liege,
And gains by death access to daunt his sire.
There Mordred fell, but like a prince he fell;
And as a branch of great Pendragon's graft
His life breathes out: his eyes forsake the sun
And fatal clouds infer a lasting 'clipse.
There Arthur staggering scant sustain'd himself;
There Cador found a deep and deadly wound;
There ceas'd the wars, and there was Britain lost!
There lay the chosen youths of Mars, there lay
The peerless knights, Bellona's bravest train,
There lay the mirrors rare of martial praise,
There lay the hope and branch of Brute suppress'd:
There fortune laid the prime of Britain's pride,
There laid her pomp, all topsy-turvy turn'd.

(Exit)

SCENE 3

GILDAS

Come, cruel griefs, spare not to stretch our strengths,
Whiles baleful breasts invite our thumping fists.
Let every sign that mournful passions work,
Express what piteous plights our minds amaze.
This day supplants what no day can supply;
These hands have wrought those wastes, that never age,
For all the brood of Brute shall e'er repair:
That future men may joy the surer rest,
These wars prevent their birth and nip their spring.
What nations erst the former age subdu'd
With hourly toils to Britain's yoke, this day
Hath set at large, and backwards turn'd the fates.
Henceforth the Kerns may safely tread their bogs;
The Scots may now their inroads old renew,
The Saxons well may vow their former claims,
And Danes without their danger drive us out.
These wars found not th' effect of wonted wars,
Nor doth their weight the like impression work:
There several fates annoy'd but several men;
Here all the realm and people find one fate:
What there did reach but to a soldier's death,
Contains the death of all a nation here.
These blades have given this isle a greater wound
Than time can heal-- the fruit of civil wars:
A kingdom's hand hath gor'd a kingdom's heart.

CONAN

When fame shall blaze these acts in latter years,
And time to come, so many ages hence,

(MORE)

CONAN (cont'd)

Shall efts report our toils and British pains;
Or when perhaps our children's children read
Our woful wars display'd with skilful pen,
They'll think they hear some sounds of future facts,
And not the ruins old of pomp long past;
'Twill move their minds to ruth, and frame afresh
New hopes and fears, and vows, and many a wish,
And Arthur's cause shall still be favour'd most.
He was the joy and hope, and hap, of all,
The realm's defence, the sole delay of fates;
He was our wall and fort: twice thirteen years
His shoulders did the Briton state support.
Whiles yet he reign'd, no foreign foes prevail'd,
Nor once could hope to bind the Briton bounds;
But still both far and near were forc'd to fly;
They thrall to us, we to ourselves were free.
But now, and henceforth aye, adieu that hope,
Adieu that pomp, that freedom, rule and all!
Let Saxons now, let Normans, Danes and Scots
Enjoy our meadows, fields, and pleasant plains!
Come, let us fly to mountains, cliffs, and rocks.
A nation hurt, and ne'er in case to heal!
Henceforth, the weight of fates thus fallen aside,
We rest secure from fear of greater foil:
Our leisure serves to think on former times,
And know what erst we were, who now are thus.

Exeunt.

CHORUS

1

O Britain's prosperous state, were heavenly powers
But half so willing to preseve thy peace,
As they are prone to plague thee for thy wars!
But thus, O gods, yea, thus it likes you still,
When you decree to turn and touse the world,
To make our errors cause of your decrees.
We fretting fume, and burning wax right wood;
We cry for swords and harmful harness crave;
We rashly rave, whiles from our present rage
You frame a cause of long-foredeemed doom.

2

When Britain so desired her own decay,
That even her native brood would root her up,
Seem'd it so huge a work, O heavens, for you
To tumble down and quite subvert her state,
Unless so many nations came in aid?
What thirst of spoil, O fates! In civil wars
Were you afriad to faint for want of blood?
But yet, O wretched state in Britons fond,
What needed they to stoop to Mordred's yoke,
Or fear the man themselves so fearful made?

(MORE)

CHORUS (cont'd)

Had they but link'd like friends in Arthur's bands,
And join'd their force against the foreign foes,
These wars and civil sins had soon surceas'd,
And Mordred, reft of rule, had fear'd his sire.

3

Would gods these wars had drawn no other blood,
Than such as sprang from breasts of foreign foes!
So that the fountain, fed with changeless course,
Had found no nearer vents for dearer juice.
Or if the fates so thirst for British blood,
And long so deeply for our last decay,
O, that the rest were spar'd and safe reserv'd.
Both Saxons, Danes, and Normans most of all!
Hereof, when civil wars have worn us out,
Must Britain stand, a borrow'd blood for Brute.

4

When prosperous haps and long-continuing bliss
Have pass'd the ripeness of their budding growth,
They fall and foulter like the mellow fruit,
Surcharg'd with burden of their own excess:
So fortune, wearied with our often wars,
Is forc'd to faint and leave us to our fates.
If men have minds presaging ought their harms,
If ever heavy heart foreween her woe,
What Briton lives so far remov'd from home,
In any air or pole, or coast abroad,
But that even now, through nature's sole instinct,
He feels the fatal sword imbrue his breast,
Wherewith his native soil for aye is slain!
What hopes and haps lie wasted in these wars!
Who knows the foils he suffered in these fields?

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

SCENE 1

ARTHUR

Come, Cador, as our friendship was most firm
Throughout our age, so now let's link as fast.
Thus did we live in wars, thus let us die
In peace, and arm in arm partake our fates.
Our wounds, our grief, our wish, our hap alike,
Our end so near: all crave each other's help.

CADOR

O king, behold the fruit of all our fame!
Lo, here our pomp, consumed with ourselves:
What all our age with all our wars had won,
Lo, here one day hath lost it all at once!
Well, so it likes the heavens: thus fortune gibes;
She hoisteth up to hurl the deeper down.

FIRST CHORUS

O sacred prince! what sight is this we see?
Why have the fates reserved us to these woes?
Our only hope, the stay of all our realm,
The pillar of our state, thus sore oppress'd!
O, would the gods had favour'd us so much,
That as we lived partakers of your pains,
And likewise joy'd the fruit of your exploits,
So having thus bereft our sovereign's bliss,
They had with more indifferent doom conjoin'd
The subjects' both and sovereign's bane in one!
It now (alas) engendereth double grief,
To rue your want and to bewail our woes.

ARTHUR

Rue not, my Britons, what my rage hath wrought,
But blame your king, that thus hath rent your realm.
My meaningless moods have made the fates thus fell,
And too much anger wrought in me too much:
For had impatient ire endured abuse,

(MORE)

ARTHUR (cont'd)

And yielded where resistance threat'ned spoil,
I mought have lived in foreign coasts unfoil'd,
And six score thousand men had been unmoan'd!
But wrong, incensing wrath to take revenge,
Preferred chance before a better choice.

SECOND CHORUS

'Twas Mordred's wrong and too unjust deserts
That justly mov'd your highness to such wrath:
Your claim requir'd no less than those attempts:
Your cause right good was prais'd and pray'd for most.

ARTHUR

I claim'd my crown; the cause of claim was good,
The means to claim it in such sort was bad.
Yea, rather than my realm and native soil
Should wounded fall, thus bruised with these wars,
I should have left both realm and right, and all,
Or dur'd the death ordain'd by Mordred's oath.

CADOR

And yet, so far as Mars could bide a mean,
You hateless sought the safeguard of them all:
Whereto the better cause or badder chance
Did draw, you still inclin'd; preferring oft
The weaker side, sometimes for love, sometimes
For right (as fortune sway'd), your son, yourself.
So pity spar'd what reason sought to spoil,
Till all at length with equal spoil was spent.

THIRD CHORUS

Would gods your mind had felt no such remorse,
And that your foes had no such favour found!
So might your friends have had far friendlier fates,
If rebels for their due deserts had died.
The wicked's death is safety to the just;
To spare the traitors was to spoil the true:
Of force he hurts the good that helps the bad.
In that you sought your country's gain, 'twas well:
In that you shunned not her loss, 'twas hard.
Good is the friend that seeks to do us good,
A mighty friend that doth prevent our harms.

ARTHUR

Well, so it was; it cannot be redress'd;
The greater is my grief that sees it so.
My life (I feel) doth fade, and sorrows flow,
The rather that my name is thus extinct;
In this respect, so Mordred did succeed,
O that myself had fall'n and Mordred liv'd!
That having conquer'd all my foes but him,
I mought have left you him, that conquer'd me.
O heavy, wretched lot! to be the last
That falls! to view the burial of my realm!

(MORE)

ARTHUR (cont'd)

Where each man else hath felt his several fate,
I only pine, oppress'd with all their fates!

FOURTH CHORUS

Although your highness do sustain such grief,
As needs enforceth all your realm to rue,
Yet since such ruth affordeth no relief,
Let due discretion 'suage each cureless sore,
And bear the harms that run without redress.
The loss is ours, that lose so rare a prince:
You only win, that see your foe here foil'd.

*The breathless body of MORDRED in armour, as he
fell, is brought upon the stage.*

ARTHUR

A causeless foe. When wars did call me hence,
He was in years but young, in wit too old.
As virtue shineth most in comeliest wights,
When inward gifts are deck'd with outward grace,
So did his wit and feature feed that hope,
Which falsely train'd me to this woful hap.
His mind transformed thus, I cannot choose
But long to see what change his face sustains.
My blood and kindred, doubled in his birth,
Inspires a mix'd and twice-descending love,
Which drives my dying veins to wish his view.
Unhelm his luckless head, set bare his face,
That face which erst pleas'd me and mine too much.

FIRST CHORUS

See (worthiest king) the hope of all your realm,
Had not his lust to rule prevented all.

ARTHUR

I see (alas) I see (hide, hide again:
O, spare mine eyes!) a witness of my crimes;
A fearful vision of my former guilt;
A dreadful horror of a future doom,
A present gall of mind. O happy they,
Whose spotless lives attain a dreadless death!
And thou, O hapless boy! O spite of fates!
(What mought I term thee-- nephew, son, or both?)
Alas! how happy should we both have been,
If no ambitious thought had vex'd thy head,
Nor thou thus striv'd to reave thy father's rule,
But stay'd thy time, and not forestall'd us both!

CADOR

The hot-spurr'd youth, that forc'd the forward steeds,
Whiles needs he would his father's chariot guide,
Neglecting what his sire had said in charge:
The fires which first he flung about the poles,
Himself at last, most woful wretch, inflam'd.

(MORE)

CADOR (cont'd)

So too much love to hover in the heavens
Made him to pay the price of rash attempts.

ARTHUR

What ruth (ah), rent the woful father's heart,
That saw himself thus made a sonless sire!
Well, since both heavens and hell conspir'd in one
To make our ends a mirror to the world,
Both of incestuous life and wicked birth,
Would gods the fates, that link'd our faults alike,
Had also fram'd our minds of friendlier moulds!
That as our lineage had approach'd too near,
So our affections had not swerv'd too far.
Then mought, I('ve) lived t' enlarge the Britons' praise
In rearing efts the first triumphant Troy,
And after thou, succeeding mine attempts,
Have spent thy courage in a juster cause.
But 'twould not be: ambition grew too great;
We could not join our minds-- our fates we join'd,
And through thy blood a way was made to mine.

SECOND CHORUS

And must we needs (O worthiest peers) forego
By this untimely fate our greatest hope?
That in your ripest years and likeliest time
Your chiefest force should on this sudden fall?

THIRD CHORUS

See, see our idle hopes, our brittle trust,

FOURTH CHORUS

Our vain desires, our over-fickle state
Which, though a while they sail on quiet seas,
Yet sink in surge, ere they arrive to road.
O woful wars! O Mordred's cursed pride,
That thus hath wrought both king and kingdom's woe!

CADOR

Let plaints and mournings pass; set moans apart.
They made much of themselves, yea, too-- too much;
They lov'd to live that, seeing all their realm
Thus topsy-turvy turn, would grudge to die.

ARTHUR

Yea, sure: since thus (O fates) your censure seems,
That free from force of foreign foes, there rests
That Mordred reap the glory of our deaths,
B' it so: drive on your doom, work your decree:
We fearless bide what bane soe'er you bid.
And though our ends, thus hastened to your hests,
Abruptly break the course of great attempts,
Yet go we not inglorious to the ground:
Set wish apart, we have perform'd enough.
The Irish king and nation wild we tam'd;

(MORE)

ARTHUR (cont'd)

The Scots and Picts, and Orcade Isles, we wan;
The Danes and Goths, and Friesland men, with all
The Isles inserted near those seas; and next
The German king and Saxons we subdu'd.
Not France that could prevail against our force,
Nor lastly Rome, that rues her pride suppress'd.
Each foreign power is parcel of our praise:
No titles want to make our foes afraid.
This only now I crave (O fortune! erst
My faithful friend): let it be soon forgot,
Nor long in mind nor mouth, where Arthur fell:
Yea, though I conqueror die, and full of fame,
Yet let my death and parture rest obscure.
No grave I need (O fates!) Nor burial rights,
Nor stately hearse, nor tomb with haughty top;
But let my carcase lurk; yea, let my death
Be aye unknowen, so that in every coast
I still be fear'd, and look'd for every hour.

Exeunt ARTHUR and CADOR.

CHORUS

1

Lo, here the end that fortune sends at last
To him, whom first she heav'd to highest hap!
The flattering look, wherewith he long was led;
The smiling fates, that oft had fed his fame,
The many wars and conquests which he gain'd,
Are dash'd at once: One day infers that foil,
Whereof so many years of yore were free.

2

O willing world to magnify man's state!
O most unwilling to maintain the same!
Of all misfortunes and unhappy fates
Th' unhappiest seems to have been happy once.
'Twas Arthur sole, that never found his joys
Disturb'd with woe, nor woes reliev'd with joy.
In prosperous state all heavenly pow'rs aspir'd;
Now, made a wretch, not one that spares his spoil!

3

Yea, fortune's self in this afflicted case
Exacts a pain for long-continued pomp.
She urgeth now the bliss of wonted weal,
And bears him down wiht weight of former fame.
His praises past be present shame. O tickle trust,
Whiles fortune chops and changeth every chance,
What certain bliss can we enjoy alive,
Unless, whiles yet our bliss endures, we die?

4

Yea, since before his last and utmost gasp
(MORE)

CHORUS (cont'd)

None can be deem'd a happy man or bless'd,
 Who dares commit himself to prosperous fates,
 Whose death prepar'd attends not hard at hand:
 That sithence death must once determine all,
 His life may sooner fly, than fortune flit.

SCENE 2

GORLOIS

Now, Gorlois, 'suage thyself. Pride hath his pay,
 Murther his price, adult'ry his desert,
 Treason his meed, disloyalty his doom,
 Wrong hath his wreak, and guilt his guerdon bears!
 Not one abuse erst offer'd by thy foes,
 But, since most sternly punish'd, is now purg'd.
 Where thou didst fall, ev'n on the self-same soil,
 Pendragon, Arthur, Mordred, and their stock
 Found all their foils: not one hath 'scaped revenge;
 Their line from first to last quite razed out!
 Now rest content, and work no further plagues:
 Let future age be free from Gorlois' ghost:
 Let Britain henceforth bathe in endless weal.
 Let Virgo come from heaven, the glorious star,
 The Zodiac's joy, the planets' chief delight,
 The hope of all the year, the ease of skies,
 The air's relief, the comfort of the earth!
 That virtuous Virgo, born for Britain's bliss;
 That peerless branch of Brute; that sweet remain
 Of Priam's state; that hope of springing Troy,
 Which, time to come and many ages hence,
 Shall of all wars compound eternal peace.
 Let her reduce the golden age again,
 Religion, ease, and wealth of former world.
 Yea, let that Virgo come, and Saturn's reign,
 And years, oft ten times told, expir'd in peace.
 A rule that else no realm shall ever find,
 A rule most rare, unheard, unseen, unread;
 The sole example that the world affords.
 That (Britain), that renown, yea, that is thine.
 B' it so: my wrath is wrought. Ye furies black
 And ugly shapes, that howl in holes beneath:
 Thou Orcus dark, and deep Avernus nook,
 With dukish dens out-gnawn in gulfs below,
 Receive your ghastly charge, Duke Gorlois' ghost!
 Make room! I gladly, thus reveng'd, return!
 And though your pain surpass, I greet them tho!
 He hates each other heaven, that haunteth hell.

Descendit.

END OF ACT FIVE

EPILOGUS

EPILOGUS

See here by this the tickle trust of time:
The false affiance of each mortal force;
The wavering weight of fates: the fickle trace,
That fortune trips; the many mocks of life;
The cheerless change, the easeless brunts and broils,
That man abides, the restless race he runs.
But most of all, see here the peerless pains:
The lasting pangs, the stintless griefs, the tears:
The sighs, the groans, the fears, the hopes, the hates:
The thoughts and cares, that kingly pomp imparts.
What follies, then, bewitch th' ambitious minds,
That thirst for sceptre's pomp, the well of woes!
Whereof (alas!) should wretched man be proud,
Whose first conception is but sin, whose birth
But pain, whose life but toil, and needs must die?
See here the store of great Pendragon's brood,
The t'one quite dead, the t'other hastening on:
As men, the son but green, the sire but ripe,
Yet both forestall'd, ere half their race were run!
As kings, the mightiest monarchs of this age,
Yet both suppressed and vanquished by themselves.
Such is the brittle breath of mortal man,
Whiles human nature works her daily wracks:
Such be the crazed crests of glorious crowns,
Whiles worldly powers like sudden puffs do pass.
And yet for one that goes, another comes;
Some born, some dead: so still the store endures.
So that both fates and common care provide,
That men must needs be born, and some must rule.
Wherefore, ye peers and lordings, lift aloft,
And whosoe'er in thrones that judge your thralls,
Let not your sovereignty heave you too high,
Nor their subjection press them down too low.
It is not pride that can augment your power,
Nor lowly looks that long can keep them safe.
The fates have found a way whereby, ere long,
The proud must leave their hope, the meek their fear.

(MORE)

EPILOGUS (cont'd)

Whoe'er received such favour from above,
That could assure one day unto himself?
Him whom the morning found both stout and strong,
The evening left all grovelling on the ground.
This breath and heat, wherewith man's life is fed,
Is but a flash or flame, that shines a while,
And once extinct is, as it ne'er had been.
Corruption hourly frets the body's frames;
Youth tends to age, and age to death by kind.
Short is the race, prefixed is the end;
Swift is the time, wherein man's life doth run:
But by his deeds t'extend renown and fame,
That only virtue works, which never fades.

CURTAIN