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The Henriade

Voltaire

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The Henriade. Canto the First.

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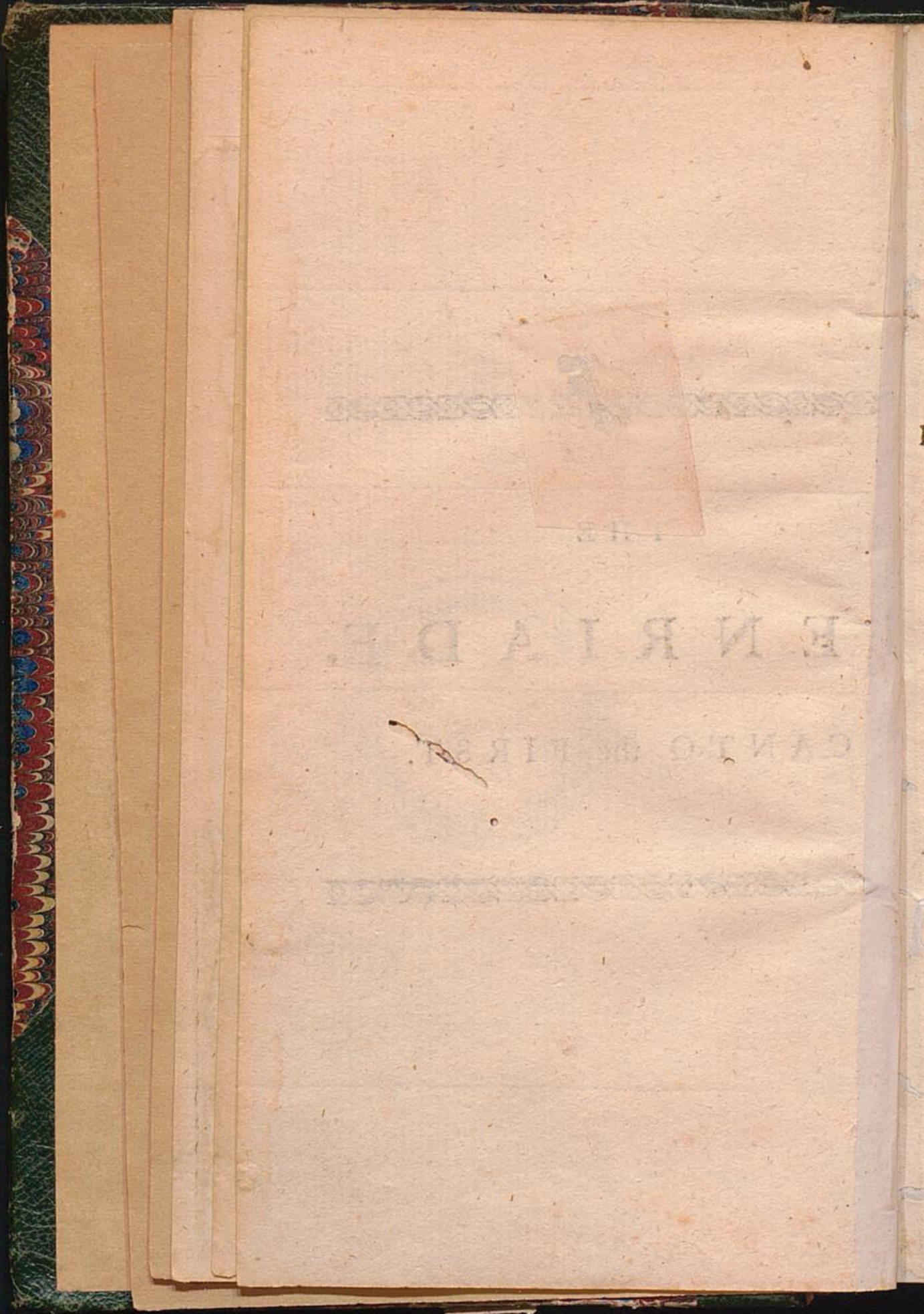


T H E

H E N R I A D E .

C A N T O the F I R S T .





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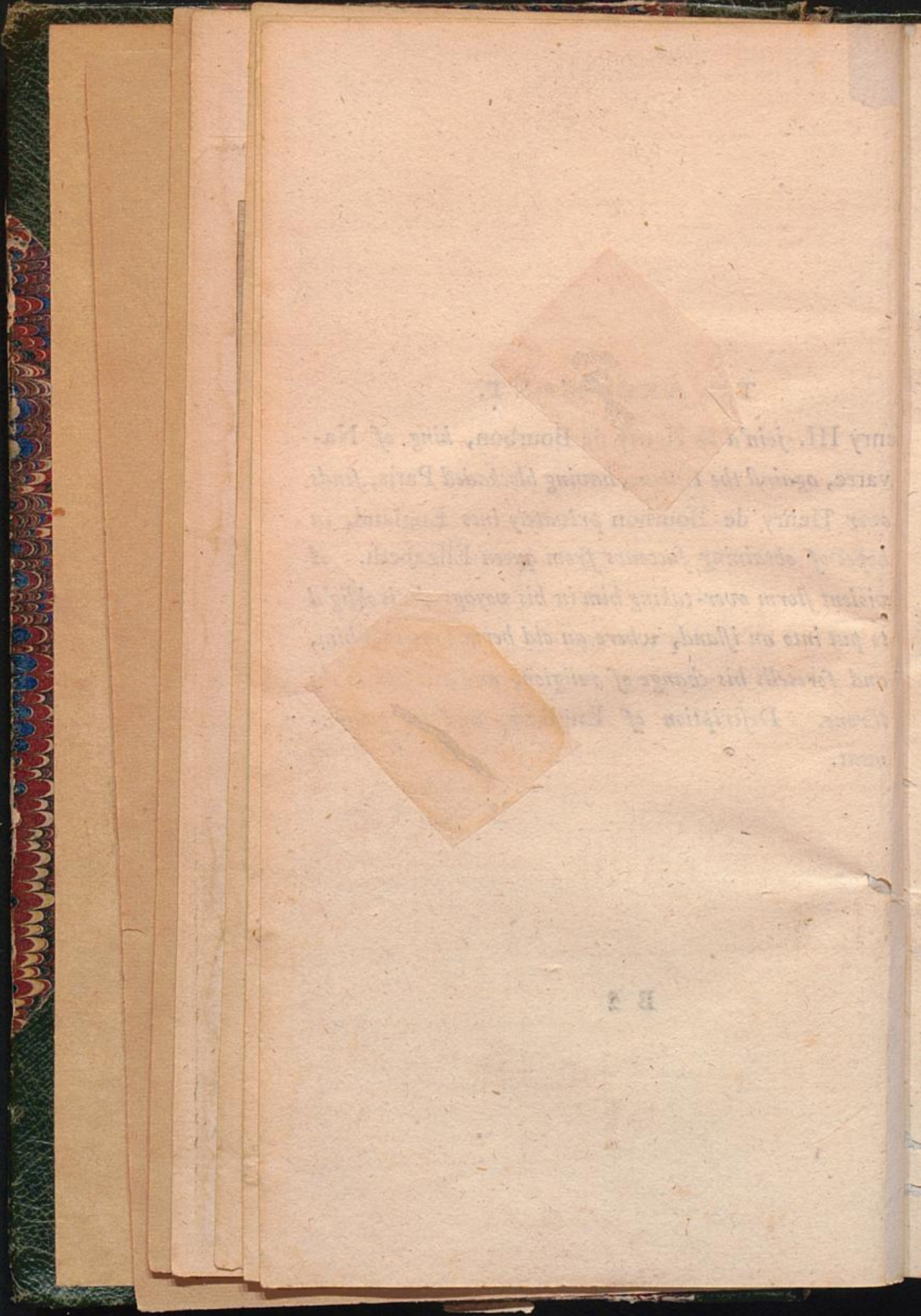
ENRI A D E

CANTO DE RIR

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THE ARGUMENT.

Henry III. join'd by Henry de Bourbon, king of Navarre, against the League, having blockaded Paris, sends over Henry de Bourbon privately into England, in hopes of obtaining succours from queen Elizabeth. A violent storm over-taking him in his voyage, he is oblig'd to put into an island, where an old hermit receives him, and foretells his change of religion, and accession to the throne. Description of England, and its government.



THE
HENRIADE.
CANTO the FIRST.

* THE chief renown'd, who rul'd in France, I
sing,
By right of conquest, and of birth, a king;
In various suff'rings resolute, and brave,
Faction he quell'd: he conquer'd, and forgave.
Subdued the dangerous League, and † factious Mayne, §
And curb'd the head-strong arrogance of Spain.

* *The chief renown'd,*] Henry IV. of France, son of Anthony king of Navarre, who descended in a direct line from Robert Count de Clermont, youngest son of Lewis IX. or St. Lewis king of France. The posterity of his eldest son *Philip the Bold*, failing in Henry III. king of France, three hundred years after the death of St. Lewis, Henry of Bourbon became heir to the crown, as descended from the above-mentioned Count de Clermont, who married Beatrix, daughter of Agnes de Bourbon, heir of Arhemband, lord of Bourbon in the middle of the XIIIth century.

† Charles duke de Mayne, Brother of Henry duke de Guise, who form'd the League, a faction in France; who, under pretence of danger of the church, made head against Henry III. king of France, and, after his death, against Henry of Bourbon, who gain'd great advantages over the Spaniards in confederacy with the League.

He taught those realms he conquer'd to obey,
And made his subjects happy by his sway.

O heaven-born truth, descend, celestial muse,
Thy power, thy brightness in my verse infuse.
May kings attentive hear thy voice divine
To teach the monarchs o' mankind is thine.
'Tis thine to war-enkind'ling realms to shew
What dire effects from curst divisions flow.
Relate the troubles of preceding times;
The people's suff'ring's, and the prince's crimes.
And O! if fable may her succours lend,
And with thy voice her softer accents blend;
If on thy light her shades sweet graces shed,
If her fair hand e'er deck'd thy sacred head,
Let her with me thro' all thy limits rove,
Not to conceal thy beauties, but improve.

* Valois then govern'd the distracted land,
Loose flow'd the reins of empire in his hand:
Rights were confounded, laws neglected bore
No force, alas! for Valois reign'd no more.
No more the prince for deeds of war renown'd,
Whom as her son victorious conquest own'd;

* *Valois then govern'd,*] Henry III. king of France, one of the principal heroes of this poem, is always called Valois, the name of the royal branch to which he belong'd.

THE HENRIADE. 7

Whose arms thro' Europe spread disorder'd fear,
 Whose loyal subjects shed the pious tear, 30
 When the bleak north proclaim'd him truly great,
 And laid her crowns, and scepters at his feet.
 Those rays of glory, erst in battle won,
 Sunk into night, and vanish'd from the throne.
 There sat the monarch on the lap of ease, 35
 Reclining fondly in the arms of peace.
 Too weak to bear in each lethargic hour,
 The regal diadem, and weight of pow'r.
 Voluptuous youths usurp'd the sole command,
 And reign'd, in truth, the sov'reigns of the land. 40
 Pleas'd in their soft luxurious prince to find
 Corrupted morals, and a female mind.
 Meantime the Guises rose at fortune's call:
 And built their schemes of greatness on his fall.
 Thence sprung the League, which prov'd the fatal
 source. 45
 Of num'rous ills, and baffled all his force.
 The servile crowd, with vain chimæras fed,
 Too blindly follow'd where the tyrants led.
 Now from the Louvre see the monarch fly,
 No faithful friend, no kind protection nigh; 50

B 4 All

8 THE HENRIADE.

All had been lost, but warlike* Bourbon came,
 Whose gen'rous soul was fraught with virtue's flame.
 'Twas his the royal sacrifice to save,
 And teach once more the monarch to be brave.
 The kings to Paris with their troops advance,
 The eyes of Europe all are fix'd on France.
 Rome takes th' alarm, her fears the Spaniards share,
 And wait with dread the issue of the war.

High on the walls inhuman Discord stood,
 Eager for slaughter, and athirst for blood;
 Thro' all the city rag'd, nor rag'd in vain,
 But drove to arms the hostile League, and Mayne
 Thro' church, and state the deadly poison spread,
 And call'd the proud Iberia to her aid.
 This savage monster scenes of horror loves,
 And plagues the vot'ries whom her soul approves.
 She racks, and galls the slaves her chains confin'd,
 And riots in the torments of mankind.
 Westward of Paris, where the winding Seine
 Adorns each meadow with eternal green,
 Where oft' the Graces, and the Muses play,
 The troops of Valois shon in dread array.

* *Bourbon*] Henry IV. is call'd indifferently throughout the poem either Bourbon, or Henry. He was born at Pau in Béarn le 13 December 1553.

THE HENRIADE. 9

There, whom religion sway'd by diff'rent laws
 Revenge united in their sov'reign's cause.
 A thousand chiefs stood forth at Bourbon's word, 75
 Love join'd their hearts, and valour drew the sword.
 With joy they follow'd the bright paths of fame,
 But one their leader, and their church the same.

Immortal* Louis eyed him from above
 With all the fondness of parental love : 80
 Virtues he saw which Gallia's king might grace,
 And future glories worthy of his race.
 Charm'd with his courage, yet he griev'd to find
 Such weak discernment in so brave a mind :
 Would gladly guide him to the throne of truth, 85
 And wish'd to check the errors of his youth.
 But valiant Henry gain'd the regal crown,
 And rose by measures to himself unknown.
 Louis was present from his blest abode
 To lead the youthful hero in his road. 90
 Full oft' unseen the kind assistance came,
 That toils, and dangers might augment his fame.

Oft' had our walls beheld with martial rage
 In doubtful war th'embattl'd ranks engage.

* *Immortal Louis*] St. Louis, the ninth of that name, king of France, from whom the Bourbon branch was descended.

The plains were desolate, and carnage spread
 From shore to shore her mountains of the dead,
 When Valois thus address'd the chief with sighs,
 And tears of sorrow streaming from his eyes.

See to what height thy monarchs ills are grown,
 There read the faithful portrait of thy own. 100
 With equal hate the factious Leaguers join
 To strike at Bourbon's glory, and at mine.
 Seditious Paris, with a proud disdain,
 Rejects the present, and the future reign.
 The ties of blood, the laws, each gen'rous care 105
 That fills thy soul, proclaims thee lawful heir.
 Great are thy virtues, and, I blush to own,
 For this would Paris drive thee from the throne.
 Nay more, to shew that heav'n approves the deed,
 Religion heaps her curses on thy head. 110
 Rome without armies distant nations awes,
 Spain hurls her thunder, and asserts her cause.
 Friends, subjects, kindred, in this evil day,
 Or basely fly, or proudly disobey.
 Rich is the harvest of Iberia's gains, 115
 Who pours her legions on my desert plains.
 Perchance, the succours of a foreign force
 May stop th' impending danger in it's course.

Britannia's

95 Britannia's queen may lend the friendly aid,
And mutual terror may our foes invade. 120

What, tho' eternal jealousy, and pride
Oppose our int'rest, and our hearts divide.
When life's severest ills have been endur'd,
My glory blasted, and my fame obscur'd ;
00 When vile affronts have made my honor poor, 125
My subjects, and my country are no more.

Who comes these proud insulters to controul
Is most my friend, and dearest to my soul.
No common, listless agent will I trust,
Be thou my envoy in a cause so just. 130

4 On thee my fortune in the war depends,
Thy merit only can procure me friends

Thus Valois spoke, and Bourbon heard with grief
The new designs, and counsels of the chief.
His great, and gen'rous mind disdain'd to yield 135
Thus to divide the glory of the field.

There was a time when conquest met his arm,
And all those honours which the brave can charm :
When strong in pow'r, unaided by intrigue,
5 Himself, with* Condé, quell'd the trembling League. 140

* Condé] Henry, prince of Condé. He was the hopes of the Protestant party : and died at Saint-Jean d'Angeley, aged 35 years, in 1685.

Yet

Yet, in obedience to the king's command,
 He left his laurels, and withdrew his hand.
 The troops, amaz'd, with restless ardor burn,
 Their fate, their fortune waits on his return.
 The absent hero still preserv'd his fame,
 The guilty city shudder'd at his name:
 Each moment thought the mighty warrior near,
 With death, and desolation in his rear.

He thro' the plains of Neustria bends his way,
 Attended only by his friend *Mornay.
 Mornay, too good to flatter, or deceive,
 The cause of error too averse to leave.
 By zeal, and prudence studious to advance
 Alike the int'rest of his church and France.
 The courtier's censor, but at court below'd,
 Rome's great foe, and by Rome approv'd.

Between two rocks, which hoary ocean laves,
 And beats with all the fury of his waves,
 The port of Dieppe meets the hero's eyes,
 And crowds of eager mariners supplies.

* *Morna*] Duplessis Mornay; the bravest, and most virtuous person belonging to the Protestant party. When Henry IV chang'd his religion, Mornay reproach'd him in the severest manner, and retir'd from court. He was called the pope of the Huguenots.

Their hands prepare the vessels for the main,
 Those sov'reign rulers of the azure plain.
 The stormy Boreas, fast-enchain'd in air,
 Leaves the smooth sea to softer Zephyr's care. 164
 14. Their anchor weigh'd, they swiftly quit the strand,
 And soon descry Britannia's happy land.

When lo! the day's bright star is hid in clouds,
 And gath'ring whirlwinds whistle thro' the shrouds.
 Heav'n gives her thunder, waves on waves arise,
 15. And floods of lightning burst from all the skies. 170
 Death mounts the storm, and foaming billows shew
 The king of terrors to the sailors view.

Nor death, nor dangers Bourbon's soul annoy,
 His country's sorrows all his cares employ;
 15. For her he casts the longing look behind. 175
 The storm accuses, and condemns the wind.

Less gen'rous warmth the Roman's breast inspir'd,
 By love of conquest, and ambition fir'd,
 When, launching boldly from Epirus' coast,
 By angry seas, and furious surges tost, 180

16. He dar'd his mightier fortune to oppose
 To all the pow'r of Neptune, and his foes:
 Firm, and convinc'd that no impending doom
 Could snatch it's monarch from the world, and Rome.

'Twas

'Twas then that being, infinitely wise,
 At whose high will all empires fall, or rise,
 Who gave this world it's fair, and beauteous form,
 Who calms the ocean, and directs the storm,
 On Gallia's hero look'd with pity down
 From the bright radiance of his saphire throne.
 The waves, obedient to his dread command,
 Convey'd the vessel to the neighbouring land.
 Guided by heav'n, secure the hero stood
 Where Jersey's isle emerges from the flood.

Near to the shore there lay a calm retreat,
 By shades defended from the solar heat.
 A rock, that hid the fury of the seas,
 Forbid the entrance of each ruder breeze.
 By nature's hand adorn'd, a mossy grot
 Improv'd the beauties of this rural spot.
 An holy hermit, train'd in wisdom's ways,
 There spent the quiet evening of his days.
 Lost to the world, and all it's trifling shew,
 His only study was himself to know.
 O'er ev'ry fault his pensive mind woud rove,
 Which pleasure dictates, or which springs from love,
 The flow'ry meadows, and the silver streams
 Had rais'd his soul to more enlighten'd themes.

Each passion quell'd in this retir'd abode,
His ardent wish was union with his God. 210

Wisdom before him spread her ample page,
And heav'n protect'd his declining age.
She pour'd her purest blessings on his head,
And taught him Fate's mysterious book to read.

The hoary sage, who well our hero knew, 215
Whom God inform'd with science ever true,
Near a clear stream invites the prince to taste
The simple diet of his rural feast.

He oft had fled from vanity, and care,
To humble cottages, and simpler fare. 220

Had bid adieu to courts, and courtly pride,
And laid the pomp of majesty aside.

In plain, and useful converse much was said
Of troubles thro' the ~~empire~~ empire spread.

Mornay unmov'd determin'd to protect 225
With zealous fervor Calvin, and his sect.

Henry, in doubt what precepts to believe,
Petition'd heav'n one ray of light to give.

Error, he said, in all preceding times,

As truth conceal'd, and been the nurse of crimes. 230

Must I then wander, and mistake the road,

Whose only confidence is plac'd in God.

A God, so gracious, sure will lend his aid,
And teach mankind what worship should be paid.

Let us, replied the venerable seer,
God's secret counsels, and designs revere.
Nor rashly think that human errors bring
Their muddy currents from so pure a spring.
Well I remember, when these aged eyes
Beheld this sect in humble weakness rise,
When, as an exile dreading human sight,
It fled for refuge to the shades of night.
By slow degrees the phantom rais'd her head,
And all around her baleful influence shed.
Plac'd on the throne, no pow'r her force confines,
She reigns our tyrant, and o'erturns our shrines.
Far from the court, in this obscure retreat,
With sighs, and tears I weep Religion's fate.
One hope remains to cheer life's dreary vale;
So strange a worship cannot long prevail:
It's new-born glory in our days shall cease,
First sprung from man, and founded in caprice.
Frail, like ourselves, all human works decay;
God sweeps their glory, and their pride away.
Safe, and secure his holy city stands;
Nor dreads the malice of our mortal hands.
In vain the fabric hell, and time invade,
His own right arm the strong foundation laid.

On thee, great Bourbon, will he pour his light,
And chase the mists of error from thy sight. 260

On Valois' throne, with providence thy shield,
Bright wilt thou shine, and all thy fo's shall yield.

Through paths of glory conquest leads thy sword;
'Tis heaven's decree; the highest gave his word.

Yet hope not rashly, in the pride of youth, 265
To enter Paris, uninform'd by truth.

But most of love's bewitching draught beware,
The bravest hearts are conquer'd by the fair.

From that sweet poison guard thy manly soul;
Though passion calls, and pleasure crowns the bowl.

And when, at length, this sage advice pursued, 271
The factious Leaguers, and thyself subdued,

In horrid seige thy bounteous hand shall give
Life to a nation, and it's strength revive;

Then all thy realms in ~~the~~ the sweet of peace, 275
All strife shall vanish, and all discord cease.

Then raise thine eyes to that almighty lord
Whom ~~erst~~ fathers honour'd, and ador'd.

Who most preserves his image, most shall find
That virtue pleases, and that heav'n is kind. 280

Thus spoke the seer, each word new warmth be-
stow'd,

And Henry's soul with secret raptures glow'd.
Those

Those happy days were present to his eyes,
 When God to man descended from the skies;
 When virtue open'd all her sacred springs,
 Pronounc'd her oracles, and govern'd kings.
 With tears he claspt the hermit to his breast,
 And parting sighs his honest grief exprest.
 Far distant scenes creative fancy drew,
 And rising glories dawn'd upon his view.
 Marks of surprize were stamp'd on Mornay's face,
 But heav'n from him withheld her gifts of grace.
 The world in vain bestows the name of wise,
 Where virtue beams, but error's cloud's arise.

While thus the sage, enlighten'd from above,
 Spoke to the heart, and tried the prince to move,
 Charm'd with his voice the list'ning winds subside,
 Phœbus break ~~forth~~, and ocean smoothes the tide.
 By him conducted, Bourbon reach'd the shore,
 And prosp'rous gales the chief to Albion bore.
 Soon as he saw the sea-encircled isle,
 It's change of fortune made the hero smile.
 Where once the public evils owed their cause
 To long abuses of the wisest laws,
 Where many a warrior fell of high renown,
 And kings descended from the tott'ring throne,

A virgin queen the regal sceptre sway'd,
 And fate itself her sov'reign pow'r obey'd.
 The wise Eliza, whose directing hand
 Had the great scale of Europe at command; 310
 And rul'd a people that alike disdain
 Or freedom's ease, or slav'ry's iron chain.
 Of ev'ry loss her reign oblivion bred;
 There, flocks unnumber'd graze each flow'ry mead.
 Britannia's vessels rule the azure seas, 315
 Corn fills her plains, and fruitage loads her trees.
 From pole to pole her gallant navies sweep
 The waters of the tributary deep.
 On Thames's banks each flow'r of genius thrives,
 There sports the Muse, and Mars his thunder gives. 320
 Three diff'rent pow'rs at Westminster appear,
 And all admire the ties which join them there.
 Whom int'rest parts, ~~instants~~ together bring,
 The people's deputies, the peers, and king.
 One whole they form, whose terror wide extends 325
 To neighb'ring nations, and their rights defends.
 Thrice happy times, when grateful subjects shew
 That loyal, warm affection which is due!
 But happier still, when freedom's blessings spring
 From the wise conduct of a prudent king. 330
 O when, cried Bourbon, ravish'd at the sight,
 In France shall peace, and glory thus unite?

A

A female hand has clos'd the gates of war,
 Lock on, ye monarchs, and adopt her care.
 Your nations Discord's horrid tide o'erwhelms,
 She lives the blessing of adoring realms.

Now at that spacious city he arrives,
 Where nurs'd by heav'n-born freedom plenty lives.
 Now, mighty William's tow'r before him stood,
 Now, fair Eliza's more august abode.
 Thither he speeds, attended by Mornay,
 His friend, and sole associate in the way.
 True heroes scorn that pageantry, and state,
 Whose glitt'ring honors captivate the great.
 For France he supplicates with humble prayers,
 And native dignity each accent bears.
 From honest frankness all his period's flow,
 The only eloquence that romans know.
 Does Valois send you to the banks of Thame?
 Eliza cries, surpriz'd at Valois' name.
 Are all your dire contentions at an end?
 And you, that bitt'rest enemy, his friend!
 Fame spread your discords, and that fame was true,
 From north, to south, from Ganges, to Peru.
 And does that arm, so dreaded in the fight,
 Protect his honor, and maintain his right!

Distress, replied the chief, our friendship gave,
The chains are broke, and Valois will be brave.

Far happier days he once was doom'd to see, 360

33 Had all his confidence been plac'd in me.

But fears unmanly in his breast arose,

'Twas art, and cowardice that made us foes.

Henceforth, the vanquish'd shall my aid receive,

His wrongs I punish, and his faults forgive. 365

This war so just may raise Britannia's fame,

34 'Tis thine, great queen, to signalize her name.

Let royal mercy spread her downy wings,

And crown thy virtues by defending kings.

The queen, impatient, asks him to relate 370

34 What ruthless evils harass'd Gallia's state.

What springs of action had produc'd a change.

At once so new, so wonderful, and strange.

Full oft' of bloody broils, Eliza said,

Thro' Britain's isle has fame the rumor spread. 375

But who for certainty on fame depends,

~~what~~ night with darkness, truth with falsehood
blends?

From you or Valois' friend, or conqu'ring foe,

35 Those long dissensions I could wish to know.

Yourself was witness, and can best impart 380

What mystic ties have chang'd so brave a heart.

Display

Display your martial deeds, your griefs declare,
No life more worthy of a royal ear.

And must I then, return'd the chief with sighs,
Recall those scenes of horror to my eyes !
O would to heav'n, oblivions endless night
With thickest shades might veil them from my sight
Must Bourbon tell of kindred prince's crimes,
And the fell madness of preceding times ?
I shudder at the thought, but your command,
Respect of pow'r forbids me to withstand.
Others, no doubt, would use refin'd address,
Disguise the truth, and make their errors less :
But I reject an artifice so weak,
And like a soldier, not an envoy speak.