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Voltaire

London, 1762

The Henriade. Canto the Third.

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T H E

H E N R I A D E .

C A N T O the T H I R D .



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CANTO the THIRD.

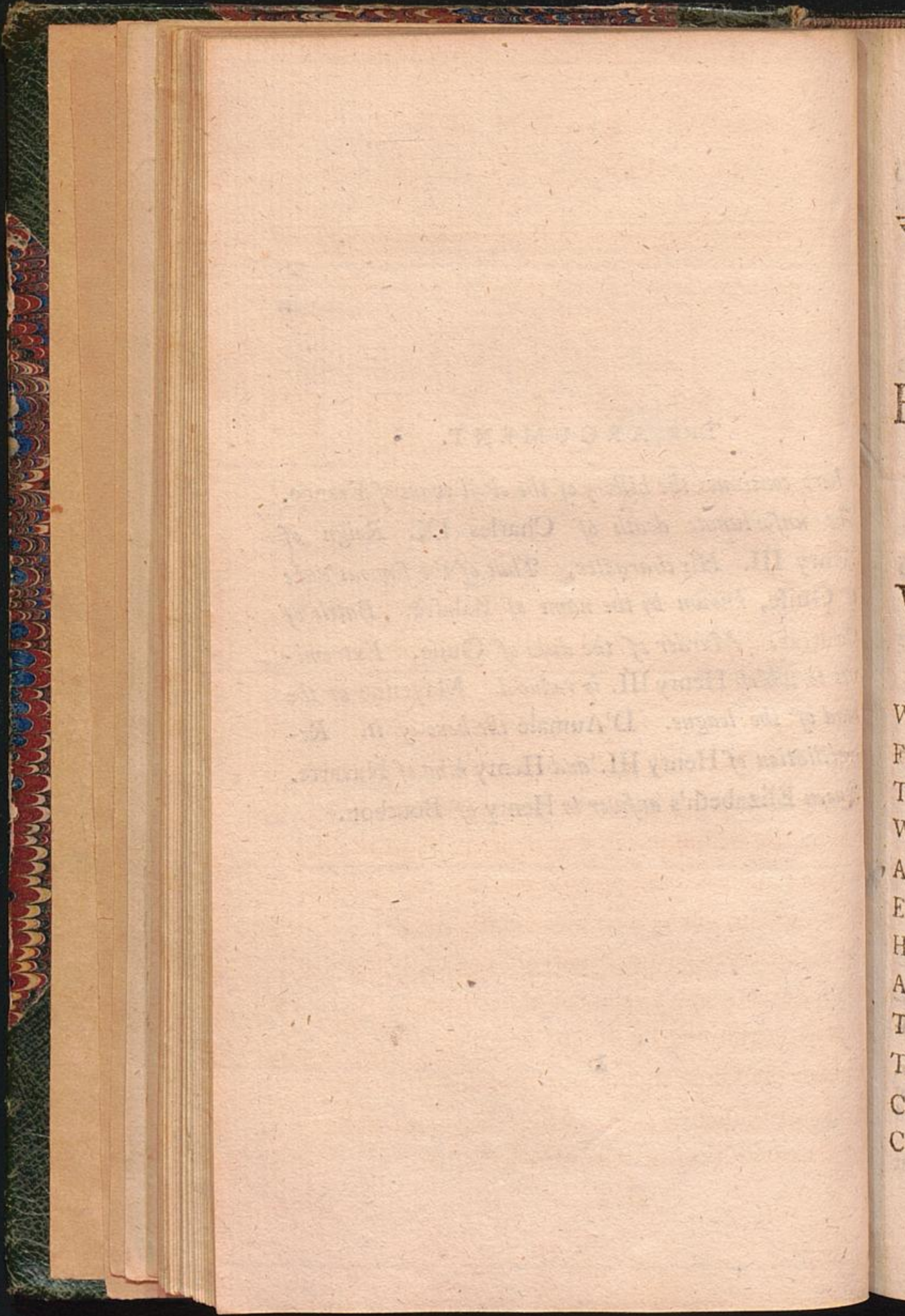


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THE ARGUMENT.

The hero continues the history of the civil wars of France. The unfortunate death of Charles IX. Reign of Henry III. His character. That of the famous duke of Guise, known by the name of Balafre. Battle of Coutras. Murder of the duke of Guise. Extremities to which Henry III. is reduc'd. Mayenne at the head of the league. D'Aumale the hero of it. Reconciliation of Henry III. and Henry king of Navarre. Queen Elizabeth's answer to Henry of Bourbon.

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T H E
H E N R I A D E.

C A N T O the T H I R D.

W H E N many a day (for thus the fates ordain'd)
With blackest deeds of murder had been
stain'd;

When each assassin cruel, and abhorr'd,
Fatigu'd with crimes, had sheath'd his glutt'd sword;
Those crimes at length the factious crowd alarm'd 5
Whom zeal had blinded, and their sov'reign arm'd.

As rage subsided, melting pity mov'd
Each friend to virtue who his country lov'd;
Her plaintive voice awaken'd softer cares,
And Charles himself relented at her tears. 10

That early culture, by ill fate design'd
To blast the fairer blossoms of his mind,
Conscience subdued;—her whisp'ring voice alone
Can shake with terror the securest throne.

Not all his mother's principles cou'd frame 15
 A heart like her's, insensible of shame.
 Severe remorse his anxious soul dismay'd,
 His strength was wasted, and his youth decay'd.
 Heav'n mark'd him out in vengeance for his crimes
 A dread example to succeeding times. 20
 *Myself was present at his latest breath,
 And still I shudder at that scene of death,
 When, in return for tides of Gallic blood,
 Each bursting vein pour'd forth the crimson flood.
 Thus fell lamented in his early prime 25
 A youthful monarch bred to ev'ry crime,
 From whose repentance we had hop'd to gain
 The balmy blessings of a milder reign.
 Soon as he died, with speed advancing forth
 From the bleak bosom of the wintry north 30
 Great Valois came, like some bright orient star,
 To claim his birth-right in these realms of war.
 On him † Polonia had bestow'd her throne,
 Deem'd by each province worthy of the crown.

* He never enjoyed his health after the affair of St. Bartholomew, and died about two years afterwards, May 30, 1574, cover'd with his own blood, which gush'd out from ev'ry pore.

† The reputation he had acquired at Jarnac and Montcontour, supported by French coin, had gained him the election as king of Poland in the year 1573. He succeeded Sigismund II. the last prince of the race of the Jagellons.

T H E H E N R I A D E. 53

15 Great are the dangers of too bright a name, 35

E'en Valois sunk beneath the weight of fame :

Tho' in his cause each danger I defy,

Cou'd toil for ever, and with transport die,

Yet, heav'n-born truth, this tongue thy accents loves,

20 And only praises what the heart approves. 40

Soon was the race of all his greatness run ;

As morning vapours fly before the sun.

Of't have I mark'd these changes, often seen,

Heroes, and kings become the weakest men :

25 Have seen the laurell'd prince in battle brave 45

Wear the soft chain, and live a courtier's slave.

This fact by long experience have I known,

Seeds of true courage in the mind are sown.

Valois was form'd by heav'ns peculiar care

30 For martial prowess, and the deeds of war : 50

Yet was too weak the rod of pow'r to wield,

Tho' great in arms, and steady in the field.

Detested minions shew'd their artful skill,

And reign'd supreme the sov'reigns of his will.

His voice but dictated their own decrees ; 55

Whilst they, indulging in voluptuous ease,

Drank of each joy which luxury supplies,

And scorn'd to listen to a nation's cries.

Unmov'd beheld afflicted France lament
 Her strength exhausted, and her treasures spent. 60
 Beneath their yoke whilst Valois tamely bow'd,
 And new oppressions from new taxes flow'd,
 Lo * Guise appears! ambition spurs him on,
 All eyes are fix'd upon this rising sun.
 His deeds of war, the glory of his race, 65
 His manly beauty, and attractive grace;
 But more than all, that happy, pleasing art,
 Which wins our love, and steals upon the heart,
 Subdued e'en those whom virtue faintly warms,
 And gain'd their wishes by resistless charms. 70
 None e'er like him cou'd lead the mind astray,
 Or rule the passions with more sov'reign sway.
 None e'er conceal'd from busy, curious eyes,
 Their dark intentions in so fair disguise.
 Tho' proud ambition kindled in his soul, 75
 His cooler judgement cou'd that pride controul.
 To gain the crowd, and win deserv'd esteem,
 Detested levies were his daily theme.
 Oft' have they heard his flatt'ring tongue declare
 The public sorrows were his only care. 80

* Henry of Guise; surnamed Balafre: born in the year 1550,
 of Francis de Guise, and Ann d'Est. He executed the grand
 project of the league formed by his uncle, the Cardinal of Lor-
 rain, and begun by Francis his father.

On modest worth he lavish'd all his store,
 Or cloth'd the naked, or enrich'd the poor.
 Oft' wou'd his alms prevent the starting tear,
 And tell that Guise, and charity were near.
 All arts were tried which cunning might afford, 85
 To court the nobles whom his soul abhorr'd,
 Alike to virtue, as to vice inclin'd,
 Or love, or endless hatred rul'd his mind.
 He brav'd all dangers which on arms await,
 No chief more bold, none more oppress'd the state. 90
 When time at length had made his influence strong,
 And fix'd the passions of the giddy throng;
 Stripp'd of disguise unmask'd the traitor shone,
 Defied his sov'reign, and attack'd the throne.
 Within our walls the fatal league began, 95
 And next thro' France the dire contagion ran.
 Nurs'd by all ranks the hideous monster stood,
 Pregnant with woes, and rioting in blood.
 Two monarchs rul'd o'er Gallia's hapless land:
 This shar'd alone the shadow of command; 100
 That wide diffus'd fierce wars destructive flame,
 Master of all things save the royal name.
 Valois awak'd the threat'ning danger sees,
 And quits the slumbers of lethargic ease.

But still to ease, and indolence a prey, 105
 His eyes are dazzled by the blaze of day.
 Tho' o'er his head the stormy thunders rowl,
 Nor storms, nor thunders rouze his sluggish soul.
 Sweet to his taste the streams of pleasure flow,
 And sleep conceals the precipice below. 110
 Myself remain'd, the next succeeding heir,
 To save the monarch, or his ruin share :
 Eager I flew his weakness to supply ;
 Firmly resolv'd to conquer, or to die.
 But Guise, alas ! that sly, dissembling fiend, 115
 By craft depriv'd him of his truest friend.
 That old pretence thro' all revolving time,
 Divine religion, veil'd the horrid crime.
 The busy crowd fictitious virtue warm'd,
 With zeal inspir'd them, and with fury arm'd. 120
 Before their eyes in lively tints he drew,
 That ancient worship which their fathers knew.
 From new-born sects declar'd what ills had flow'd,
 And painted Bourbon as a foe to God.
 Thro' all your climes, forbid it heav'n ! he said, 125
 His tenets flourish, and his errors spread.
 Yon walls, that cast a sacred horror round,
 Will soon be sunk, and levell'd with the ground.

Soon

105 Soon will you see unhallow'd temples rise,
And point their airy summits to the skies. 130

So lov'd by Bourbon, so ador'd has been
The curst example of Britannia's queen.
Scarce had he spoke, when lo! the public fear
110 Was swiftly wafted to the royal ear.

Nay more, the leaguers issue Rome's decree, 135
And curse the monarch that unites with me.

Now was this arm prepar'd to strike the blow,
Pour forth it's strength, and thunder on the foe;
115 When Valois, won by subtle, dark intrigue,
Fix'd on my ruin, and obey'd the league. 140

Unnumber'd soldiers arm'd in dread array
Fill'd ev'ry plain, and spoke the king's dismay.
With grief I saw such jealousy disclos'd,
20 Bewail'd his weakness, and his pow'r oppos'd.
A thousand states were lavish of supplies, 145 }
Each passing hour beheld new armies rise, }
Led on by fierce Joyeuse, and well instructed Guise. }

Guise, form'd alike for prudence as for war,
25 Dispers'd my friends, and baffl'd all their care.
Still undismay'd, such strength my valour boasts, 150
I press'd thro' myriads of embattl'd hosts.
Thro' all the field I fought the proud Joyeuse; —
But stay—the rest Eliza will excuse.

More of that chief 'twere needless to relate,
 You've heard his end, and fame has spread his fate. 155

“ Not so, — the queen with eagerness replied,

“ Well hast thou spoke with modesty thy guide ;

“ But deign to tell me what I wish to hear,

“ Such themes are worthy of Eliza's ear :

“ Joyeuse his fall in vivid colours draw ; 160

“ Go on, and paint thy conquest at Coutras.”

Touch'd with these words the hero sunk his head ;

An honest blush his manly check o'erspread.

Pausing a while, the tale he thus led on,

Yet wish'd the glory any but his own. 165

Of all, who Valois cou'd by flatt'ry move,

Who nurs'd his weakness, and enjoy'd his love ;

Joyeuse illustrious best deserv'd to share

The fairest sunshine of his royal care.

If to his years the stern decree of fate 170

Had fix'd some period of a longer date,

In noble exploits had his virtue shone,

And Guise's greatness not excell'd his own.

But vice o'er virtue gain'd superior force,

Court was his cradle, luxury his nurse : 175

Yet dar'd the am'rous chieftain to oppose

Unskilful valour to experienc'd foes.

From

From pleasure's downy lap the courtiers came
 To guard his person, and to share his fame.

In gay attire each gallant youth was drest; 180

Some cypher glitter'd on each martial vest.

Some dear distinction, such as lovers wear,

To tell the fondness of the yielding fair.

The costly sapphire, or the diamonds rays,

O'er their rich armour shed the vivid blaze. 185

Thus deck'd by folly, thus elate and vain,

These troops of Venus issued to the plain.

Swift march'd their ranks, as tumult led the way,

Unwisely brave, and impotently gay.

In Bourbon's camp, disdain'g empty shew, 190

Far other scenes were open'd to the view :

An army, silent as the dead of night,

Display'd it's forces well inur'd to fight ;

Men gray in arms, and disciplin'd to blood,

Who bravely suffer'd for their country's good. 195

The only graces, that employ'd their care,

Were sword's well pointed, and the dress of war.

Like them array'd, and steady to my trust,

I led the squadrons cover'd o'er with dust.

Like them ten thousand deaths I dar'd to face, 200

Distinguish'd only by my rank, and place.

These

These eyes beheld the brilliant foe o'erthrown,
 Expiring legions, and the field our own.
 Deep in their breasts I plung'd the fatal spear,
 And wish'd some Spanish bosom had been there. 205
 Still shall my tongue their honest praises tell;
 Firm in his post each youthful courtier fell,
 And bravely struggl'd to his latest breath
 Amid'st the terrors of surrounding death.
 Our silken sons of pleasure, and of ease, 210
 Preserve their valour in the mid'st of peace.
 Call'd forth to war, they bravely scorn to yield,
 Servile at court, but heroes in the field.
 Joyeuse, alas! I tried, in vain, to save;
 None heard the orders which my mercy gave. 215
 Too soon I saw him sunk to endless night,
 Sustain'd by kind associates in the fight,
 A pale, and breathless corse, all ghastly to the fight. }
 Thus some fair stem, whose opening flow'rs display
 Their fragrant bosoms to the dawn of day, 220
 Which decks the early scene, and fresh appears
 With zephyrs kisses, and Aurora's tears,
 Too soon decays, on nature's lap reclin'd,
 Crop't by the scythe, or scatter'd by the wind.
 But why should memory recall to view 225
 Those horrid triumphs to oblivion due?

Conquests

Conquests so gain'd for ever cease to charm,
 Whilst Gallic blood still blushes on my arm.
 Those beams of grandeur with false lustre shone,
 And tears bedew the laurels which I won. 230
 Unhappy Valois! that ill fated day
 Showr'd down on thee dishonour, and dismay.
 Paris grew proud, the league's submission less,
 And Guise's glory doubled thy distress.
 Vimori's plains saw Guise the sword unsheath, 235
 Germania suffer'd for Joyeuse's death.
 Auneau beheld my army of allies
 Yield to his pow'r, defeated by surprize.
 Thro' Paris streets he march'd with haughty air,
 Array'd in laurels, and the pride of war. 240
 E'en Valois tamely to his insults bow'd,
 And serv'd this idol of the gazing crowd.
 Shame will at length the coolest courage warm,
 And give new vigor to the weakest arm.
 Such vile affronts made Valois less incline 245
 To offer incense at so mean a shrine.
 Too late he tried his greatness to restore,
 And reign the monarch he had liv'd before.
 Now deem'd a tyrant by the factious crew,
 Nor loyal fear, nor love his subjects knew. 250
 All

All Paris arms, sedition spreads the flame,
 And headstrong mutiny asserts her claim.
 Encircling troops raise high the hostile mound,
 Besiege his palace, and his guards surround.
 Guise undisturb'd, amidst the raging storm, 255
 Gave it a milder, or severer form :
 Rul'd the mad tumult of rebellious spleen,
 And guided, as he pleas'd, the great machine.
 All had been lost ; and Valois doom'd to die
 By one command, one glance of Guise's eye ; 260
 But, when each arm was ready for the blow,
 Compassion sooth'd the fierceness of the foe ;
 Enough were deem'd the terrors of the fight,
 And meek-eyed pity gave the pow'r of flight.
 Guise greatly err'd, such subjects all things dare, 265
 Their king must perish, or themselves despair.
 This day confirm'd, and strengthen'd in his schemes,
 He saw that all was fatal but extremes :
 Himself must mount the scaffold, or the throne,
 The lord of all things, or the lord of none. 270
 Thro' Gallia's realms ador'd, from conquest vain,
 Aided by Rome, and seconded by Spain ;
 Pregnant with hope, and absolute in pow'r,
 He thought those iron ages to restore,

When

When erst our kings in mould'ring cloisters liv'd, 275
 In early infancy of crowns depriv'd.

In hallow'd shades they wept the hours away,
 Whilst tyrants govern'd with oppressive sway.
 Valois, indignant at so high a crime,
 Delay'd his vengeance to some better time. 280

Our states at Blois were summon'd to appear,
 And fame, no doubt, has told you what they were.
 In barren streams from 'oratory's tongue
 Smooth flow'd the tide of eloquence along; 284
 Laws were propos'd whose pow'r none e'er perceiv'd,
 And ills lamented which none e'er reliev'd.

Guise in the mid'st, with high imperious pride,
 Was vainly seated by his sov'reign's side.
 Sure of success, he saw around the throne,
 Or thought he saw, no subjects but his own. 290
 These sons of infamy, this venal band
 Was ready to bestow the dear command,
 When Valois pow'r was destin'd to appear,
 And burst the chains of mercy and of fear.
 Each day his rival studied to attain 295
 The mean, the odious triumphs of disdain;
 Nor deem'd that ever such a prince cou'd shew
 Those stern resolves which strike th' assassin's blow.

Fate

Fate o'er his eyes with envious hand had spread
Her thickest veil's impenetrable shade. 300

The hour arriv'd when Guise was doom'd to bear
That lot of nature which all mortals share.

Disgrac'd with wounds before the royal eye

The mighty victim was condemn'd to die.

All pale, and cover'd by the crimson tide, 305

This sun descended in his native pride.

The parting soul, by thirst of glory fir'd,

In life's last moments to the throne aspir'd.

* Thus fell the pow'rful chief, assemblage rare

Of foulest vices, and perfections fair. 310

With other conduct, than to kings belongs,

Did Valois suffer, and revenge his wrongs.

Soon did the dire report thro' Paris spread,

That heav'n was injur'd, and that Guise was dead.

The young, the old with unavailing sighs 315

Display'd their grief, and join'd their plaintive cries.

The softer sex invok'd the pow'rs above,

And clasp'd his statues in the arms of love.

All Paris thought her father, and her God

Call'd loud for vengeance, and inspir'd to blood. 320

* He was assassinated in the king's antichamber at Blois, on Friday the 23d of December, 1588.

Amid'ft the reft, the brave and valiant Mayne
Sought not their zealous fury to refrain :

But more by int'reft, than refentment mov'd,
The flame augmented, and their zeal approv'd.

Mayne, under Guife inur'd to wars alarms,
Was nurs'd in battle, and train'd up to arms: 325

His brother's equal in each dark intrigue,
And now the lord, and glory of the league.

Thus highly rais'd, thus eminently great;
He griev'd no longer for his brother's fate: 330

But better pleas'd to govern, than obey,
Forgot the lofs, and wip'd his tears away.

Mayne, with a foul to gen'rous deeds inclin'd,
A ftatesman's cunning, and a hero's mind,
By fubtle arts unnumber'd followers draws 335

To yield him homage, and to ferve his laws.

Skilful e'en good from evil to produce,
Full well he knows their talents, and their ufe.

Tho' brighter fplendors dazzl'd all our eyes,
Not greater dangers ever rofe from Guife. 340

To young Aumale, and this more prudent guide,
The leaguers owe their courage, and their pride.

Aumale, the *great invincible* by name,

Is high exalted in the lifts of fame.

Thro'

Thro' all their ranks he spreads ambition's fires, 345
 Presumptuous valour, and his own desires.
 Unshaken in their cause the league protects,
 And bravely executes what Mayne directs.

Meantime, the king, whose pow'r the Germans
 dread,
 To deeds inhuman from his cradle bred; 350
 That tyrant catholick, that artful foe,
 Incens'd at Bourbon, and Eliza too:
 Ambitious Philip, sends his warlike train
 To aid our rivals, and the cause of Mayne,
 Rome, best employ'd in making wars to cease, 355
 Lights discord's torch, and bids her fires increase.
 The same fierce views the christian father owns,
 Points the keen blade, and animates his sons.
 From Europe's either end the torrent falls:
 Uniting sorrows burst upon our walls. 360
 Weak, and defenceless in this evil hour
 Valois relented, and implor'd my pow'r.
 Humane benevolence my soul approves,
 The state commiserates, and Valois loves.
 Impending dangers banish all my ire, 365
 A brother's safety is my sole desire.

With

With honest zeal I labour for his good :
 'Tis duty calls me, and the ties of blood,
 I know the royal dignity my own,
 And vindicate the honors of the crown. 370
 Nor treaty made, nor hostage ask'd I came,
 And told him, courage was his guide to fame.
 On Paris' ramparts bid him cast his eye,
 And there resolve to conquer, or to die.
 These friendly words, thus happily applied, 375
 Thro' all his soul diffus'd a gen'rous pride.
 Manners thus chang'd thus resolutely brave
 The sense of shame, and not example gave.
 The serious lessons, which misfortune brings,
 Are needful often, and of use to kings. 380

Thus Henry spoke with honesty of heart,
 And begg'd for succours on Eliza's part.
 Now from the tow'rs where rebel discord stood,
 Conquest recalls him to her scenes of blood.
 The flow'r of England follows to the plain, 385
 And cleaves the bosom of the azure main.
 Essex commands,—the proud Iberian knows
 That Essex conquers e'en the wisest foes :
 Full little deeming that injurious fate
 Should blast his laurels with her keenest hate. 390

To

To France brave Henry hastens to repair,
Eager to grace the theatre of war.

Go, said the queen, thyself, and virtue please;
My troops attend thee o'er the azure seas.
For thee, not Valois they endure the fight; 395
Thy cares must guard them, and defend their right.

From thy example will they scorn to swerve;
And rather seem to imitate, than serve.

Who now the sword for valiant Bourbon draws
Will learn to triumph in Britannia's cause. 400

Oh! may they pow'r the factious leaguers quell,
And Mayne's allies thy gallant conquests feel!

Spain is too weak thy rebel foes to save,
And Roman thunders never awe the brave.

Go, free mankind, and break the iron chains 405
Where Sixtus governs, or where Philip reigns.

The cruel Philip, artful as his fire
In all that views of int'rest may require,
Tho' less renown'd in war, less great, and brave,
Divisions spreads in order to enslave; 410

Forms in his palace each ambitious scheme,
And boundless triumphs are his darling theme.

Lo! Sixtus, * rais'd from nothing to the throne,
Designs more haughty blushes not to own.

* Pope Sixtus V. who from having been a shepherd's boy rose to the Papal throne.

Mont Alto's shepherd monarchs wou'd o'ercome, 415

And dictate laws in Paris, as at Rome :

Safe in the honours which adorn his brow,

To Philip, and to all mankind a foe :

As serves his cause, or insolent, or meek,

Rival of kings, and tyrant o'er the weak. 420

Thro' ev'ry clime, with faction at their head,

E'en to our court his dark intrigues have spread.

These mighty rulers fear not to defy ;

They both have dar'd Eliza's pow'r to try :

Witness, ye seas ! how Philip fought in vain 425

With English valour, and the stormy main.

These shores beheld the proud Armada lost ;

Yon purple billows bore the floating host.

Rome's pontiff still in quiet silence bears

The loss of conquest, and our greatness fears. 430

Display thy banners in the martial field ;

When Mayne is conquer'd, Rome herself will yield.

Tho' proud when fortune smiles, her own defeat

Lays her submissive at the victor's feet.

Prompt to condemn, and eager to absolve, 435

Her flames, and thunders wait on thy resolve.

Also, the first of the month was a storm, 412

the first of the month was a storm, as it is

in the first of the month, as it is

the first of the month, as it is

the first of the month, as it is

420 the first of the month, as it is

the first of the month, as it is

the first of the month, as it is

the first of the month, as it is

425 the first of the month, as it is

the first of the month, as it is

the first of the month, as it is

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the first of the month, as it is

430 the first of the month, as it is

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435 the first of the month, as it is

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