

*Annals.*

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MISCELLANIES;

CHIEFLY  
ACADEMIC.

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Shakespeare - Richard II.

## PREAMBLE TO SHAKESPEAR'S RICHARD II.

When I attempted to read aloud Shakespear's *Richard II.*, a lady declared it was unfair to expect hearers to know the history of that juncture so familiarly, as to be able to listen intelligently. She claimed from me a preface. In obedience I compiled the following, but found it impossible to reconcile Shakespear's details concerning the quarrels of the two Earls with the history as I read it, and with probability. A slight incongruity thus remains.

SCENE I.—*A chamber in the Castle of Plassy, in Essex.*

THOMAS WOODSTOCK, DUKE OF GLOUCESTER, *seventh son of*  
EDWARD III. *converses with his* DUCHESS.

DUCHESS. My lord! why sad and anxious is thy face?

DUKE. How can I not be sad, my dearest one!  
When dark disaster scowls upon the land  
From strife within and enemies without?

DUCHESS. Strife is, methinks, our English element. 5  
Never, sithence my birth, a year went by,  
But brought us glories of devouring war  
Or scare of treason and alarms at home,  
So much we women know. The common lot  
Is woe and wailing. Why recurrerth aye 10  
Misery of peasants? This I fain would learn.

DUKE. My love! to sound the bottom of our woes  
Is hard. Complex the story, long to tell,  
And trying to thy patience. Ask me not.  
When shall I finish, once if I begin? 15

DUCHESS. Nay, grudge me not instruction. Woman-kind  
Wonder, while weeping, and desire to know  
The primal fountain of our public wrongs.  
Count on my patience, and refuse me not.

DUKE. If this thou claim of me, I yield. But where, 20  
Where to begin? and how compress the tale?  
Henry the Second, first Plantagenet,  
A lion-hearted prince, restor'd to peace  
This mangled country. Countless robbers he—  
Bishops and Barons or banditti stout,— 25

- Discastled, sending wide with royal pow'r  
 His law-dispensing judges to the weak,  
 Himself severely scanning their decrees.  
 Legitimate his rule, fruitful and grand.  
 His baser son, Richard of tiger-heart, 80  
 Reckless of England, followed. Elder he  
 Than John, my ancestor of ill renown ;  
 Else haply John less wrongfully had dealt.  
 But pass we these and come to nearer times.  
 John's grandson was king Edward first of name, 85  
 Edward, the peasant's father : yet, alack !  
 From Edward we inherit war and hate,  
 Bloodshed and fire, a cruel legacy.
- DUCHESS.** To mighty Edward, conqueror of Wales,  
 Suzerain of Scotland, can such blame attach ? 40
- DUKE.** As told by men in Rome, king Romulus  
 Of yore with many a gallant carried off  
 For bridal Sabine maidens unbespoke.  
 Such wives, methinks, were hard to pacify.
- DUCHESS.** How does this tale reprove king Edward's deeds ? 45
- DUKE.** Hatred, not love, ensues, to force, which hard  
 And ruthless driveth. Kings desire the love  
 And loyalty of peoples. Kindly deeds  
 From dogs and horses win sure gratitude,  
 Nor less are human hearts by goodness won. 50  
 Wisely did Edward wish that Scotland, Wales,  
 And England should in common rule be knit.  
 To England strength and glory would accrue ;  
 More solid guerdon to the smaller folk.  
 Greater to Scots were English rank, than aught 55  
 Yielded by Scots to us in countergift.  
 Our ampler wealth to them much weal would lend.  
 These Scots, when doubtful whom to count their king,  
 Themselves took Edward as their arbiter ;  
 Such vantage had he ! League of amity 60  
 Ere long had blent two peoples into one.  
 As for the Welshmen, prince Llewellyn's bride  
 Was Edward's cousin, whom in fervent youth  
 This foreiner with constant love desir'd.  
 When friendly dealings would have drawn amain 65  
 Scotland and Wales to nestle in our hearts,  
 Edward, with foot of iron trampling flat  
 Both nations, planted in them deadly hate

- Descending immanent from sire to son.—  
 Who wastes good chance mars weal of after men : 70  
 Do I too dolefully this error wail ?
- DUCHESS.** In truth I know that Scottish border-raids  
 Spread shrieks and ruin over half the North.  
 Our stores and cattle bait them, and the speed  
 Of nags and cars light-laden balks our might. 75
- DUKE.** Ay ! to my grandsire, Edward's hapless son,  
 His sire bequeath'd a fatal Scottish war,—  
 Fatal at last, e'en to his throne and life ;—  
 Surge of an outraged nation, which perchance  
 His father yet alive had fail'd to stem, 80  
 When Bruce the flag of martyr'd Wallace rear'd.
- DUCHESS.** What ? How ? I alway heard, the awful fate  
 Of wretched Edward came as meed of Spite  
 And Envy glow'ring on his favourites ;  
 Not from the Scots and by his father's fault. 85
- DUKE.** Rightly thou judgest : hate of favourites  
 Fir'd up our English peerage. Who can bear  
 Strangers, in field and chamber intimate  
 With puissant king ? These whisper in his ear  
 Glozing and jesting, slanderous perhaps, 90  
 While high they stalk, by royal favour rais'd ;  
 A Gascon made our Regent and our Chief,  
 Rich by our wealth, bright in our royal gems,  
 By fraud bestow'd from heirlooms of the Crown !—  
 The barons' fierce revenge I mildly blame. 95  
 Yet weak had been their jealousy and ire,  
 To tear my grandsire from his father's throne,  
 Had not the realm collective felt dismay,  
 Annoy and sick disgust, when Edward, foil'd  
 By Scottish prowess, desolation brought 100  
 On us,—himself in costly pomp and ease  
 Too softly lapp'd,—evading task of war.  
 But woe betides a country, if its weal  
 Hang on a prince in sunny joyance rear'd.
- DUCHESS.** True ! I have heard : seldom is toilsome prince 105  
 Sire to a toilsome sagely-ruling son.  
 Pleasure and ease, not work of State, is sweet.
- DUKE.** Nay, sweeter far, by days and nights of toil  
 To earn the blessings of the multitude,  
 Than aught beside which Rank and Wealth can give.  
 But to my topic nearer must I drive,—

Our present dangers, tangled miseries.  
 Foemen without and strife within, I said,  
 Beset us sorely. Nought is here obscure.  
 Against us France and Scotland mostly stand. 115  
 Scotland is alway fierce, and nigh to strike :  
 Grim was the carnage, late, at Otterburn.  
 Ireland, but now insurgent, boils with rage,  
 Nor crouches sweetly under forein Lords ;  
 Freedom they prize, as we do. Praise to souls 120  
 Who freedom love ! If sport of war we crave,  
 (And what beside in Ireland shall we get ?)  
 With equal weapons meet them, hand to hand,  
 Not with swift arrow from the coward bow.  
 Did Dick of Clare, or Henry, noble heart, 125  
 Take barren rock and widely spreading bog  
 With churls half-naked, brood of penury,  
 For cultur'd vales and cities gorg'd with store ?  
 Rebellion soon will call to carnage new  
 And costly armament of ships and cars, 180  
 Horses and gear and victual for a host.  
 To crush wild freedom, brings to chiefs renown,  
 Pelf to purveyors ; to the many, bale.  
 For archers thirty thousand borne by sea  
 Vast was the tale of public moneys wrung 135  
 From shires and cities and from thrifty poor.  
 On villains peel'd new fleece is loath to sprout.  
 The royal purse,—pit bottomless, I trow,—  
 Swallows more treasure than the land can yield.  
 When war from Scotland, France and Wales is slack,  
 For Ireland English blood must needs be shed.

But now I grieve to whisper words to thee  
 Which from a son may seem undutiful.  
 For fifty years my glorious father reigned,  
 Crown'd on the throne in boyhood. Forty years 145  
 Did war triumphant fulminate his name,  
 Fruitless in substance. For,—his realm he left  
 Weaker and poorer, rack'd with discontent.  
 His heir apparent, noblest of his sons,  
 Was made the scourge of France ; then from Navarre  
 By hardship and by fever sank in death,—  
 My brother dear, fair flow'r of chivalry.  
 My sire was nephew to a king of France :

France was his friend : why should it be his foe  
 And each on other dire disaster fling ? 155  
 Oh England ! too complacent to thy kings  
 Who torrents shed of unoffending blood,  
 In sad complicity of guilt we stand  
 And Murder draw upon our proper heads.  
 If God forgive us, God will first impose 160  
 Fit penalty for riot merciless.

Our present Richard, grandson of my sire,  
 Reign'd, like to him, in boyhood ; but anon  
 Brave against minor king, did Charles of France  
 Burn our sea-ports, and waste the Isle of Wight, 165  
 Small vengeance for our wild enormities.  
 Spain join'd with France : the Scots swoop'd down  
 with joy :

Losses and effort strain'd our English nerves.  
 Taxation crush'd our people : next, behold !  
 From Kent to furthest mark of Yorkshire flam'd 170

A peasants' war portentous, angry, fierce ;  
 Yet plunder it forbad for private greed.  
 That danger Richard bravely pacified  
 Granting, by royal guarantee precise 175  
 And charter'd documents, the churls' demands,  
 Not overcharg'd, in sooth ! Their bands dispersed,  
 Harmless at once, nor longer breathing ire.  
 Youth should be generous ; the royal pledge  
 Most sacred : kings should aid the weaker herd.  
 In princely honor princely strength resides. 180

Yet did our Richard break his plighted troth,  
 Bondage for freedom gave ; for amnesty,  
 Ruthless, he hundreds toss'd to savage death,  
 Sad omen showing of his after-reign :  
 But of the bondage haply he repents. 185

With Scotland and with France unceasing war  
 Draining our coffers, slaughtering our men,  
 Burnt deep resentment in the vulgar heart.  
 Chiefly through me its cry to Richard came ;  
 Far other tales to him were musical 190  
 From false self-seeking glozing courtiers,  
 Who taught that kings must no control endure.  
 When past his twentieth year, at Nottingham  
 With buxom\* judges closeted, he fram'd

\* *German* beugam (flexible).

- A code of maxims trampling charters down 195  
 And rights, to make him despot over all.  
 This forc'd us into arms, to save the State.  
 Thou knowest, I, as England's Constable,  
 Was bound a leader's post to occupy,  
 And champion stand for rights of Parliament, 200  
 There, without battle, truce we made and peace.  
 Nay, battle had we, with De Vere alone,  
 Who raised an army, but was quickly crush'd,  
 And gladly into Ireland made escape.  
 No love the king now bears me, nor forgets 205  
 My curbing of his young expenditure,—  
 Thoughtless profusion, sowing discontent,  
 Too racy seed of new insurgency.  
 Baffled and driv'n to bay, a king is hard  
 To bind by parchment. Richard now from France 210  
 Hath won a child-princess to be his bride,  
 A child but eight years old. Encourag'd thus,  
 In counsel with a French Ambassador,  
 By threat to sheriffs or by lawyer's craft  
 A Parliament he gathers right submiss, 215  
 Who (so 'tis said) will make his will its law.  
 A thousand archers feeds he at his call:  
 Some higher set their tale; that matters not.  
 I may, my love! his earliest victim be.
- DUCHESS. May Heav'n forbend! withdraw that dreadful thought.  
 DUKE. Calmly survey the tumults of the past.  
 William the Norman was a robber-chief.  
 The kings who follow'd, rul'd by might alone,  
 Till Henry came, our first Plantagenet,  
 Warmly accepted by the nation's heart. 225  
 Yet no Plantagenet hath well endur'd  
 Restraint of Council or High Parliament.  
 Had we not arms in hand, no parchment deeds  
 Or Coronation-oath might much avail.—  
 In squandering money every king delights 230  
 For banquet, pageant, tournament or war,  
 And claims, o'er churl and yeoman, earl and prince,  
 Of lands and honor to be arbiter.  
 Scarce would my father loyal deem a man  
 Who higher valued Peace than cruel War, 235  
 Or brook a Parliament which trammel'd him.  
 But our good Simon hath united well

- Commons and Peers in law-devoted Bond.  
 Dukes may be slain and Earls, yet never more  
 Will English lieges yoke of despot own. 240
- DUCHESS. What is the use of kings ? if aye they strain  
 To rule untrammel'd, why sustain their sway ?
- DUKE. Better one king than twenty petty kings,  
 Each grasping at his neighbour's gear and soil.  
 A king we need, as curb to barons bold, 245  
 A king, invasion from abroad to stem ;  
 A brave and sturdy king, trustee of right,  
 Faithful to oaths and arbiter of peers.  
 A king—protector is to churl and thrall,—  
 Or, *should* be! Loyal I to loyal chief, 250  
 Who in just battle risks his proper life.  
 Edge-tools are dangerous, and so are kings :  
 But life without edge-tools were poor and weak.
- DUCHESS. May not the Holy Church here succour us ?  
 Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots hold a place 255  
 In Parliament, too lofty to despise.  
 To them the vulgar listen reverently.
- DUKE. It may be so : Time soon will much reveal.  
 Cathedrals, Abbeys, splendid to the eye,  
 And Churches manifold, attest the wealth 260  
 And grandeur of our high prelatie Lords ;  
 Yet doubtfully on Freedom's side they stand.
- DUCHESS. Why so ? Methinks, the church is Freedom's aid,  
 Curb on the puissant, champion of the poor.
- DUKE. True ; when it seeks to bridle earls or kings. 265  
 Perhaps the sharp demands on Churchmen's gold  
 Sharp disaffection in the Church may breed :  
 But now it dreads the folk's unclosing eye.  
 My brother, John of Lancaster, upholds  
 Wickliffe, bold-speaking priest of Lutterworth, 270  
 Scholar of Oxford, who in English words  
 Writes clear the sentences of Holy Christ.  
 Our Bishops dread his doctrine, which avers  
 No *idle* Priest hath earned his nourishment,  
 Nor costly robes nor pompous equipage. 275  
 One third of England feed on Wickliffe's lore :  
 A new embroilment this to social life.
- DUCHESS. Thy life is in God's keeping. Rest we there,  
 And save our foolish hearts from sad despair.

SCENE II.—*The market place in Gloucester.*

## CITIZENS talk.

- FIRST CITIZEN. Ah woeful news! tell me in fuller tale. 280
- SECOND. Such tale I cannot give. Only I hear,  
 Thomas of Woodstock, our right faithful Duke,  
 High Constable and Warden of the State,  
 Who was to Calais' prison late convey'd,  
 Now (by what death we know not) lives no more. 285
- THIRD. Too well we know, that princes, once ensconce'd,  
 Seldom come out to light and liberty.
- FIRST. What mischief clapt our Thomas into jail?
- SECOND. No mischief done by him: mischief there was.  
 None can to trusty knowledge here lay claim, 290  
 But what I heard, I tell. The king was pleas'd  
 To visit Plassy.—Forth good Thomas came  
 To greet his royal nephew worthily.  
 But guards upspringing caught him, and amain  
 Over the wave to Calais hurried him. 295  
 All was in secret done. Before no court  
 Of solemn trial was a crime alledg'd.  
 Verdict or sentence of a judge was none.  
 Prince of the blood and Marshal of the realm,  
 From England he was torn by lawless deed 300  
 To forein prison and to deadly doom.  
 So much is certain undisputed fact.  
 When mighty Edward's son such treatment meets,  
 Who now can call himself a *freeman* born?
- THIRD. 'Tis dreadful: oh that horrors ended here. 305  
 Have ye not heard of other victims too?
- SECOND. I have. The king invited to his board  
 The Earl of Warwick. When in peace he came,  
 The prison of Tintagel was his meed.  
 The king did also call to Conference 310  
 The Archbishop's brother, Earl of Arundel.  
 He, scenting treason, sturdily refus'd,  
 Unless his highness oath of safety gave.  
 The oath was given and—instantly profan'd!  
 First, Arundel in Carisbrook was lodg'd, 315  
 Then—to the king's displeasure, *let us say*,  
 Was murder'd by his faithless Parliament.
- FIRST. Yes, yes! the Parliament alone we blame.  
 "With face of deep devotion to the king,  
 It slays his brother in the king's despite, 320

- Reckless of royal blood." Such hue of speech  
 Must varnish every tongue of Earl or Duke,  
 Where royalty may listen. Hard the fate,  
 When Statesmen dare not simple truth to speak.  
 But tell me, how do John of Lancaster 825  
 And Edmund Duke of York, behave them now ?  
 Dismal the dirge of murder'd brother's ghost.
- SECOND. Their outward conduct many may observe :  
 What in their hearts is boiling, we may guess.
- FIRST. Tell me, what guessest thou ? since, guess we may.
- SECOND. Not I alone, but others too opine,—  
 Dismay and sad despair, disgust and shame  
 Unspeakable, congeal their noble hearts.  
 To hide resentment and put-on the guise  
 Of meek submission, self-defence enjoins. 835  
 They wait the time of action. Now 'tis night,  
 Yea, midnight ; yet no pow'r the dawn can stay.
- THIRD. Surely the morn in God's fit time will rise,  
 Yet I misdoubt me of the princes' pith.  
 Old Gaunt I deem a feeble broken man 840  
 Outworn by service. Edmund, less unstrung,  
 Is soft and timid. He, to save himself,  
 Will cringe and pamper royal wilfulness.  
 Sterner and bolder stuff is needed here.
- FIRST. We can but wait the issue : God will guide. 845
- Enter a FOURTH CITIZEN, who thus speaks :*
- FOURTH. Know ye, good folk, the work at Coventry,  
 Where I myself was present ?
- SECOND. Freely speak,  
 Good sirrah ! Me thou knowest well, of old.  
 No sneak, no spy, I warrant, loiters here. 850
- FOURTH. Too humble I for ear of tattling spies,  
 Yet bolder speak I unto honest ears.—  
 Five mighty chiefs, some years ago, stood out,  
*Appellant Lords* entitled, bold to scorn  
 The garbled lore at Nottingham proclaim'd. 855  
 Three of these leaders had by royal might  
 Been prostrate laid ; but two remain'd untouch'd,  
 Mowbray, and Bolingbroke good son of Gaunt.  
 Both these the king to bitter exile dooms ;  
 Mowbray for life : six years the other gets. 860
- THIRD. What crime imputes he to these noblemen ?

- FOURTH. No crime : the royal will alone commands.  
 They quarrell'd, and then claim'd to fight : so he  
 Occasion took to play the merciful  
 And banish both :—a plausible device. 365
- SECOND. But canst thou tell us, what their quarrel was ?
- FOURTH. One part of this is doubtful : but to me  
 The other part and chiefer, clear enough.  
 Hearing of royal treacheries, they quail'd,  
 And whisper'd words together. This anon 370  
 Was noticed and reported to the king,  
 Who claim'd to know what words betwixt them past.  
 Such is the common story, true or false.  
 Then, in sore panic, each excus'd himself ;  
 Perhaps unwittingly the other blamed. 375  
 Some say that Bolingbroke denounc'd his friend.  
 Certes, a deadly quarrel hence arose,  
 And Bolingbroke appears as challenger,  
 Each claiming that he dearly loves the king.
- SECOND. Oh what a pack of lies this kinghood breeds ! 380  
 But thou perchance canst further clear the fog.
- FOURTH. Well ! as in war each movement is a lie,  
 Each knows the other false, each plays a game,  
 Masking the true intent, until a stroke,  
 As swoop of eagle, souses on the foe ; 385  
 So here, who best dissembles, fights the best.  
 Haply these dukes to-morrow may be friends ;  
 But hate implacable, suspicion dire,  
 From both the royal perjury hath earned.  
 One who by secret guile entraps a Duke, 390  
 His faithful Uncle, sage Admonitor,  
 And to a forein castle smuggles him  
 For dark destruction, rends all human ties.  
 No truth, no trust can be : no oath avails  
 To stablish for such mortal loyal peace. 395
- FIRST. What augury remains for honest men ?
- FOURTH. God and the People fight against the worse.  
 Not whom we love the more, but whom we hate  
 The less, that combatant will victor prove.

SCENE III.—*The Palace.* KING RICHARD converses with his trusted agents, THE EARL OF WILTSHIRE, BAGOT, and GREEN.

- RICHARD. Fityly the men who treated us with scorn 400  
 May tremble. Now they learn how vast the odds

- Which sever vassals from a crowned king,  
Right-royal born, anointed, consecrate.
- WILTSHIRE.** Sire! you are lord triumphant. No man now  
Dares to withstand your will. You sit aloft. 405  
The proudest now must yield obedience,  
Though join'd to you in blood; high Regents once.
- RICHARD.** Needful it was, most needful, painful too,  
To teach their arrogance that I am king,  
And not a child to be by them rebuked. 410  
Their gang, insurgent, slew my ministers,  
My faithful Brember and Tresilian,  
Imputing treason! souls to me devote  
Were doubtless traitors to the Parliament.  
Their death it was my duty to avenge: 415  
But now, since all are quelled, with fearless heart  
I hie, my Irish rebels to chastise.
- GREEN.** Your Highness! By your Seneschal inform'd,  
May I his statement and request set forth?
- RICHARD.** Speak shortly: other task awaits us now. 420
- GREEN.** He says, my liege! too few he finds your cooks.  
Three hundred had he, when that Parliament  
Presum'd about your kitchen to inquire.  
More than four hundred has he now; but these  
Suffice not to fulfil their daily task. 425  
Your Highness' household they avail to feed,  
But not (he says) some thousand archers too.
- RICHARD.** Go to! allow as many as he needs.
- WILTSHIRE.** Another topic presses us, my liege!  
Your Highness is resolv'd to make display 430  
Of mighty force, to awe these Irishmen.  
Prudent your counsel and right merciful,—  
Sparing of bloodshed. But, to bear your host,  
Transports we need from Chester and the South.  
Some vessels Wales can give; but not enough, 435  
Across to carry forty\* thousand men:  
Such force of archers did your Highness name.
- RICHARD.** To Chester and the Cinque Ports order send.
- BAGOT.** My liege! your Chief Purveyor for the trip  
Needs sacks not yet computable of flour 440  
And ready cash to buy them; but besides,

\* Charles Knight says that Richard actually displayed 40,000 in Ireland.  
Hard to believe. [I cannot now find the place.]

- Five hundred butchers barely may suffice,  
 If forty thousand archers he must feed  
 By rape of cattle in a land of foes,  
 Where butchers hunters' work and drovers' do. 445  
 Shall I, to save annoy, give orders blank ?
- RICHARD. Yes : and hereafter sharply must thou scan  
 Their charges.—Trouble me no more hereon.  
 To fill the royal purse is now the task  
 Most urgent, and to learn the sums amass'd. 450
- WILTSHIRE. Your Highness then agrees to sign for us  
 Blank parchment, at discretion to be fill'd  
 With sums incumbent on your Treasury ?
- RICHARD. No more of this : what you present I sign.  
 What sums are levied for my purse, I ask. 455
- WILTSHIRE. My liege ! your orders duly we perform'd :  
 To seventeen shires we have the screw applied,  
 With treason charging them ; and gather'd sums,  
 Price of exemption, fat and numerous.—  
 On those whose names were foremost in the band  
 To contravene your Highness, or had store  
 Which *ought* to aid their king, on such we forc'd  
 Subscription of their names to parchments blank,  
 Rich forfeit bearing at your simple will.
- RICHARD. So far is good : what of my own domain ? 465
- BAGOT. Sire ! in the wealthier towns rich men we sought,  
 And hinted that their stores might ease the State.  
 Then, when we thought them terrified enough,  
 We offered mortgage of the royal land  
 In portions moderate, for large advance 470  
 Of gold, or merchants' document secure.  
 As was your Highness' bidding, such our deed.
- RICHARD. 'Tis well : to Ireland shortly must we hie.
- BAGOT. But Sire ! one matter more. A banish'd man  
 Cannot by right inherit English lands. 475  
 If John of Gaunt, now old and weak of health,  
 Happen to die, into thy coffers fall  
 All dues and purtenance of Lancaster.
- RICHARD. Good is the hint : more may we talk of this.  
 Old Lancaster, I trow, is frightened well. 480  
 I must not break with him ; but if he die,  
 His gear may rightly fortify the Crown.