



***WALTER SAVAGE
LANDOR***

***IMAGINARY
CONVERSATIONS
AND POEMS:
A SELECTION***

Walter Savage Landor

Imaginary Conversations and Poems: A Selection

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MARCELLUS AND HANNIBAL

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Hannibal. Could a Numidian horseman ride no faster? Marcellus! oh! Marcellus! He moves not—he is dead. Did he not stir his fingers? Stand wide, soldiers—wide, forty paces; give him air; bring water; halt! Gather those broad leaves, and all the rest, growing under the brushwood; unbrace his armour. Loose the helmet first—his breast rises. I fancied his

eyes were fixed on me—they have rolled back again. Who presumed to touch my shoulder? This horse? It was surely the horse of Marcellus! Let no man mount him. Ha! ha! the Romans, too, sink into luxury: here is gold about the charger.

Gaulish Chieftain. Execrable thief! The golden chain of our king under a beast's grinders! The vengeance of the gods hath overtaken the impure——

Hannibal. We will talk about vengeance when we have entered Rome, and about purity among the priests, if they will hear us. Sound for the surgeon. That arrow may be extracted from the side, deep as it is. The conqueror of Syracuse lies before me. Send a vessel off to Carthage. Say Hannibal is at the gates of Rome. Marcellus, who stood alone between us, fallen. Brave man! I would rejoice and cannot. How awfully serene a countenance! Such as we hear are in the islands of the Blessed. And how glorious a form and stature! Such too was theirs! They also once lay thus upon the earth wet with their blood—few other enter there. And what plain armour!

Gaulish Chieftain. My party slew him; indeed, I think I slew him myself. I claim the chain: it belongs to my king; the glory of Gaul requires it. Never will she endure to see another take it.

Hannibal. My friend, the glory of Marcellus did not require him to wear it. When he suspended the arms of your brave king in the temple, he thought such a trinket unworthy of himself and of Jupiter. The shield he battered down, the breast-plate he pierced with his sword—these he showed to

the people and to the gods; hardly his wife and little children saw this, ere his horse wore it.

Gaulish Chieftain. Hear me; O Hannibal!

Hannibal. What! when Marcellus lies before me? when his life may perhaps be recalled? when I may lead him in triumph to Carthage? when Italy, Sicily, Greece, Asia, wait to obey me? Content thee! I will give thee mine own bridle, worth ten such.

Gaulish Chieftain. For myself?

Hannibal. For thyself.

Gaulish Chieftain. And these rubies and emeralds, and that scarlet——?

Hannibal. Yes, yes.

Gaulish Chieftain. O glorious Hannibal! unconquerable hero! O my happy country! to have such an ally and defender. I swear eternal gratitude—yes, gratitude, love, devotion, beyond eternity.

Hannibal. In all treaties we fix the time: I could hardly ask a longer. Go back to thy station. I would see what the surgeon is about, and hear what he thinks. The life of Marcellus! the triumph of Hannibal! what else has the world in it? Only Rome and Carthage: these follow.

Marcellus. I must die then? The gods be praised! The commander of a Roman army is no captive.

Hannibal. [*To the Surgeon.*] Could not he bear a sea voyage? Extract the arrow.

Surgeon. He expires that moment.

Marcellus. It pains me: extract it.

Hannibal. Marcellus, I see no expression of pain on your countenance, and never will I consent to hasten the death

of an enemy in my power. Since your recovery is hopeless, you say truly you are no captive.

[*To the Surgeon.*] Is there nothing, man, that can assuage the mortal pain? for, suppress the signs of it as he may, he must feel it. Is there nothing to alleviate and allay it?

Marcellus. Hannibal, give me thy hand—thou hast found it and brought it me, compassion.

[*To the Surgeon.*] Go, friend; others want thy aid; several fell around me.

Hannibal. Recommend to your country, O Marcellus, while time permits it, reconciliation and peace with me, informing the Senate of my superiority in force, and the impossibility of resistance. The tablet is ready: let me take off this ring—try to write, to sign it, at least. Oh, what satisfaction I feel at seeing you able to rest upon the elbow, and even to smile!

Marcellus. Within an hour or less, with how severe a brow would Minos say to me, ‘Marcellus, is this thy writing?’

Rome loses one man: she hath lost many such, and she still hath many left.

Hannibal. Afraid as you are of falsehood, say you this? I confess in shame the ferocity of my countrymen. Unfortunately, too, the nearer posts are occupied by Gauls, infinitely more cruel. The Numidians are so in revenge: the Gauls both in revenge and in sport. My presence is required at a distance, and I apprehend the barbarity of one or other, learning, as they must do, your refusal to execute my wishes for the common good, and feeling that by this refusal you deprive them of their country, after so long an absence.

Marcellus. Hannibal, thou art not dying.

Hannibal. What then? What mean you?

Marcellus. That thou mayest, and very justly, have many things yet to apprehend: I can have none. The barbarity of thy soldiers is nothing to me: mine would not dare be cruel. Hannibal is forced to be absent; and his authority goes away with his horse. On this turf lies defaced the semblance of a general; but Marcellus is yet the regulator of his army. Dost thou abdicate a power conferred on thee by thy nation? Or wouldst thou acknowledge it to have become, by thy own sole fault, less plenary than thy adversary's?

I have spoken too much: let me rest; this mantle oppresses me.

Hannibal. I placed my mantle on your head when the helmet was first removed, and while you were lying in the sun. Let me fold it under, and then replace the ring.

Marcellus. Take it, Hannibal. It was given me by a poor woman who flew to me at Syracuse, and who covered it with her hair, torn off in desperation that she had no other gift to offer. Little thought I that her gift and her words should be mine. How suddenly may the most powerful be in the situation of the most helpless! Let that ring and the mantle under my head be the exchange of guests at parting. The time may come, Hannibal, when thou (and the gods alone know whether as conqueror or conquered) mayest sit under the roof of my children, and in either case it shall serve thee. In thy adverse fortune, they will remember on whose pillow their father breathed his last; in thy prosperity (Heaven grant it may shine upon thee in some other country!) it will rejoice thee to protect them. We feel ourselves the most exempt from affliction when we relieve

it, although we are then the most conscious that it may befall us.

There is one thing here which is not at the disposal of either.

Hannibal. What?

Marcellus. This body.

Hannibal. Whither would you be lifted? Men are ready.

Marcellus. I meant not so. My strength is failing. I seem to hear rather what is within than what is without. My sight and my other senses are in confusion. I would have said—this body, when a few bubbles of air shall have left it, is no more worthy of thy notice than of mine; but thy glory will not let thee refuse it to the piety of my family.

Hannibal. You would ask something else. I perceive an inquietude not visible till now.

Marcellus. Duty and Death make us think of home sometimes.

Hannibal. Thitherward the thoughts of the conqueror and of the conquered fly together.

Marcellus. Hast thou any prisoners from my escort?

Hannibal. A few dying lie about—and let them lie—they are Tuscans. The remainder I saw at a distance, flying, and but one brave man among them—he appeared a Roman—a youth who turned back, though wounded. They surrounded and dragged him away, spurring his horse with their swords. These Etrurians measure their courage carefully, and tack it well together before they put it on, but throw it off again with lordly ease.

Marcellus, why think about them? or does aught else disquiet your thoughts?

Marcellus. I have suppressed it long enough. My son—my beloved son!

Hannibal. Where is he? Can it be? Was he with you?

Marcellus. He would have shared my fate—and has not. Gods of my country! beneficent throughout life to me, in death surpassingly beneficent: I render you, for the last time, thanks.

QUEEN ELIZABETH AND CECIL

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Elizabeth. I advise thee again, churlish Cecil, how that our Edmund Spenser, whom thou callest most uncourteously a whining whelp, hath good and solid reason for his complaint. God's blood! shall the lady that tieth my garter and shuffles the smock over my head, or the lord that steadieth my chair's back while I eat, or the other that looketh to my buck-hounds lest they be mangy, be holden by me in higher esteem and estate than he who hath placed me among the bravest of past times, and will as safely and surely set me down among the loveliest in the future?

Cecil. Your Highness must remember he carouseth fully for such deserts: fifty pounds a year of unclipped moneys, and a butt of canary wine; not to mention three thousand acres in Ireland, worth fairly another fifty and another butt, in seasonable and quiet years.

Elizabeth. The moneys are not enough to sustain a pair of grooms and a pair of palfreys, and more wine hath been drunken in my presence at a feast. The moneys are given to such men, that they may not incline nor be obligated to any

vile or lowly occupation; and the canary, that they may entertain such promising wits as court their company and converse; and that in such manner there may be alway in our land a succession of these heirs unto fame. He hath written, not indeed with his wonted fancifulness, nor in learned and majestical language, but in homely and rustic wise, some verses which have moved me, and haply the more inasmuch as they demonstrate to me that his genius hath been dampened by his adversities. Read them.

Cecil.

How much is lost when neither heart nor eye
Rosewinged Desire or fabling Hope deceives;
When boyhood with quick throb hath ceased to spy
The dubious apple in the yellow leaves;

When, rising from the turf where youth reposed,
We find but deserts in the far-sought shore;
When the huge book of Faery-land lies closed,
And those strong brazen clasps will yield no more.

Elizabeth. The said Edmund hath also furnished unto the weaver at Arras, John Blanquieres, on my account, a description for some of his cunningest wenches to work at, supplied by mine own self, indeed, as far as the subject-matter goes, but set forth by him with figures and fancies, and daintily enough bedecked. I could have wished he had thereunto joined a fair comparison between Dian—no matter—he might perhaps have fared the better for it; but poets' wits—God help them!—when did they ever sit close

about them? Read the poesy, not over-rich, and concluding very awkwardly and meanly.

Cecil.

Where forms the lotus, with its level leaves
And solid blossoms, many floating isles,
What heavenly radiance swift descending cleaves
The darksome wave! Unwonted beauty smiles

On its pure bosom, on each bright-eyed flower,
On every nymph, and twenty sate around,
Lo! 'twas Diana—from the sultry hour
Hither she fled, nor fear'd she sight or sound.

Unhappy youth, whom thirst and quiver-reeds
Drew to these haunts, whom awe forbade to fly!
Three faithful dogs before him rais'd their heads,
And watched and wonder'd at that fixèd eye.

Forth sprang his favourite—with her arrow-hand
Too late the goddess hid what hand may hide,
Of every nymph and every reed complain'd,
And dashed upon the bank the waters wide.

On the prone head and sandal'd feet they flew—
Lo! slender hoofs and branching horns appear!
The last marr'd voice not e'en the favourite knew,
But bay'd and fasten'd on the upbraiding deer.

Far be, chaste goddess, far from me and mine
The stream that tempts thee in the summer noon!
Alas, that vengeance dwells with charms divine——

Elizabeth. Pshaw! give me the paper: I forewarned thee how it ended—pitifully, pitifully.

Cecil. I cannot think otherwise than that the undertaker of the aforecited poesy hath chosen your Highness; for I have seen painted—I know not where, but I think no farther off than Putney—the identically same Dian, with full as many nymphs, as he calls them, and more dogs. So small a matter as a page of poesy shall never stir my choler nor twitch my purse-string.

Elizabeth. I have read in Plinius and Mela of a runlet near Dodona, which kindled by approximation an unlighted torch, and extinguished a lighted one. Now, Cecil, I desire no such a jetty to be celebrated as the decoration of my court: in simpler words, which your gravity may more easily understand, I would not from the fountain of honour give lustre to the dull and ignorant, deadening and leaving in its tomb the lamp of literature and genius. I ardently wish my reign to be remembered: if my actions were different from what they are, I should as ardently wish it to be forgotten. Those are the worst of suicides, who voluntarily and propensely stab or suffocate their fame, when God hath commanded them to stand on high for an example. We call him parricide who destroys the author of his existence: tell me, what shall we call him who casts forth to the dogs and birds of prey its most faithful propagator and most firm support? Mark me, I do not speak of that existence which the proudest must close in a ditch—the narrowest, too, of ditches and the soonest filled and fouled, and whereunto a pinch of ratsbane or a poppy-head may bend him; but of that which reposes on our own good deeds, carefully picked

up, skilfully put together, and decorously laid out for us by another's kind understanding: I speak of an existence such as no father is author of, or provides for. The parent gives us few days and sorrowful; the poet, many and glorious: the one (supposing him discreet and kindly) best reproveth our faults; the other best remunerates our virtues.

A page of poesy is a little matter: be it so; but of a truth I do tell thee, Cecil, it shall master full many a bold heart that the Spaniard cannot trouble; it shall win to it full many a proud and flighty one that even chivalry and manly comeliness cannot touch. I may shake titles and dignities by the dozen from my breakfast-board; but I may not save those upon whose heads I shake them from rottenness and oblivion. This year they and their sovereign dwell together; next year, they and their beagle. Both have names, but names perishable. The keeper of my privy seal is an earl: what then? the keeper of my poultry-yard is a Caesar. In honest truth, a name given to a man is no better than a skin given to him: what is not natively his own falls off and comes to nothing.

I desire in future to hear no contempt of penmen, unless a depraved use of the pen shall have so cramped them as to incapacitate them for the sword and for the council chamber. If Alexander was the Great, what was Aristoteles who made him so, and taught him every art and science he knew, except three—those of drinking, of blaspheming, and of murdering his bosom friends? Come along: I will bring thee back again nearer home. Thou mightest toss and tumble in thy bed many nights, and never eke out the substance of a stanza; but Edmund, if perchance I should

call upon him for his counsel, would give me as wholesome and prudent as any of you. We should indemnify such men for the injustice we do unto them in not calling them about us, and for the mortification they must suffer at seeing their inferiors set before them. Edmund is grave and gentle: he complains of fortune, not of Elizabeth; of courts, not of Cecil. I am resolved—so help me, God!—he shall have no further cause for his repining. Go, convey unto him those twelve silver spoons, with the apostles on them, gloriously gilded; and deliver into his hand these twelve large golden pieces, sufficing for the yearly maintenance of another horse and groom. Beside which, set open before him with due reverence this Bible, wherein he may read the mercies of God toward those who waited in patience for His blessing; and this pair of crimson silk hose, which thou knowest I have worn only thirteen months, taking heed that the heel-piece be put into good and sufficient restoration, at my sole charges, by the Italian woman nigh the pollard elm at Charing Cross.

EPICTETUS AND SENECA

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Seneca. Epictetus, I desired your master, Epaphroditus, to send you hither, having been much pleased with his report of your conduct, and much surprised at the ingenuity of your writings.

Epictetus. Then I am afraid, my friend——

Seneca. *My friend!* are these the expressions—Well, let it pass. Philosophers must bear bravely. The people expect it.

Epictetus. Are philosophers, then, only philosophers for the people; and, instead of instructing them, must they play tricks before them? Give me rather the gravity of dancing dogs. Their motions are for the rabble; their reverential eyes and pendant paws are under the pressure of awe at a master; but they are dogs, and not below their destinies.

Seneca. Epictetus! I will give you three talents to let me take that sentiment for my own.

Epictetus. I would give thee twenty, if I had them, to make it thine.

Seneca. You mean, by lending it the graces of my language?

Epictetus. I mean, by lending it to thy conduct. And now let me console and comfort thee, under the calamity I brought on thee by calling thee *my friend*. If thou art not my friend, why send for me? Enemy I can have none: being a slave, Fortune has now done with me.

Seneca. Continue, then, your former observations. What were you saying?

Epictetus. That which thou interruptedst.

Seneca. What was it?

Epictetus. I should have remarked that, if thou foundest ingenuity in my writings, thou must have discovered in them some deviation from the plain, homely truths of Zeno and Cleanthes.

Seneca. We all swerve a little from them.

Epictetus. In practice too?

Seneca. Yes, even in practice, I am afraid.

Epictetus. Often?

Seneca. Too often.

Epictetus. Strange! I have been attentive, and yet have remarked but one difference among you great personages at Rome.

Seneca. What difference fell under your observation?

Epictetus. Crates and Zeno and Cleanthes taught us that our desires were to be subdued by philosophy alone. In this city, their acute and inventive scholars take us aside, and show us that there is not only one way, but two.

Seneca. Two ways?

Epictetus. They whisper in our ear, 'These two ways are philosophy and enjoyment: the wiser man will take the readier, or, not finding it, the alternative.' Thou reddenest.

Seneca. Monstrous degeneracy.

Epictetus. What magnificent rings! I did not notice them until thou liftedst up thy hands to heaven, in detestation of such effeminacy and impudence.

Seneca. The rings are not amiss; my rank rivets them upon my fingers: I am forced to wear them. Our emperor gave me one, Epaphroditus another, Tigellinus the third. I cannot lay them aside a single day, for fear of offending the gods, and those whom they love the most worthily.

Epictetus. Although they make thee stretch out thy fingers, like the arms and legs of one of us slaves upon a cross.

Seneca. Oh, horrible! Find some other resemblance.

Epictetus. The extremities of a fig-leaf.

Seneca. Ignoble!

Epictetus. The claws of a toad, trodden on or stoned.

Seneca. You have great need, Epictetus, of an instructor in eloquence and rhetoric: you want topics, and tropes, and

figures.

Epictetus. I have no room for them. They make such a buzz in the house, a man's own wife cannot understand what he says to her.

Seneca. Let us reason a little upon style. I would set you right, and remove from before you the prejudices of a somewhat rustic education. We may adorn the simplicity of the wisest.

Epictetus. Thou canst not adorn simplicity. What is naked or defective is susceptible of decoration: what is decorated is simplicity no longer. Thou mayest give another thing in exchange for it; but if thou wert master of it, thou wouldst preserve it inviolate. It is no wonder that we mortals, little able as we are to see truth, should be less able to express it.

Seneca. You have formed at present no idea of style.

Epictetus. I never think about it. First, I consider whether what I am about to say is true; then, whether I can say it with brevity, in such a manner as that others shall see it as clearly as I do in the light of truth; for, if they survey it as an ingenuity, my desire is ungratified, my duty unfulfilled. I go not with those who dance round the image of Truth, less out of honour to her than to display their agility and address.

Seneca. We must attract the attention of readers by novelty, and force, and grandeur of expression.

Epictetus. We must. Nothing is so grand as truth, nothing so forcible, nothing so novel.

Seneca. Sonorous sentences are wanted to awaken the lethargy of indolence.

Epictetus. Awaken it to what? Here lies the question; and a weighty one it is. If thou awakenest men where they can

see nothing and do no work, it is better to let them rest: but will not they, thinkest thou, look up at a rainbow, unless they are called to it by a clap of thunder?

Seneca. Your early youth, Epictetus, has been, I will not say neglected, but cultivated with rude instruments and unskilful hands.

Epictetus. I thank God for it. Those rude instruments have left the turf lying yet toward the sun; and those unskilful hands have plucked out the docks.

Seneca. We hope and believe that we have attained a vein of eloquence, brighter and more varied than has been hitherto laid open to the world.

Epictetus. Than any in the Greek?

Seneca. We trust so.

Epictetus. Than your Cicero's?

Seneca. If the declaration may be made without an offence to modesty. Surely, you cannot estimate or value the eloquence of that noble pleader?

Epictetus. Imperfectly, not being born in Italy; and the noble pleader is a much less man with me than the noble philosopher. I regret that, having farms and villas, he would not keep his distance from the pumping up of foul words against thieves, cut-throats, and other rogues; and that he lied, sweated, and thumped his head and thighs, in behalf of those who were no better.

Seneca. Senators must have clients, and must protect them.

Epictetus. Innocent or guilty?

Seneca. Doubtless.

Epictetus. If I regret what is and might not be, I may regret more what both is and must be. However, it is an amiable thing, and no small merit in the wealthy, even to trifle and play at their leisure hours with philosophy. It cannot be expected that such a personage should espouse her, or should recommend her as an inseparable mate to his heir.

Seneca. I would.

Epictetus. Yes, Seneca, but thou hast no son to make the match for; and thy recommendation, I suspect, would be given him before he could consummate the marriage. Every man wishes his sons to be philosophers while they are young; but takes especial care, as they grow older, to teach them its insufficiency and unfitness for their intercourse with mankind. The paternal voice says: 'You must not be particular; you are about to have a profession to live by; follow those who have thriven the best in it.' Now, among these, whatever be the profession, canst thou point out to me one single philosopher?

Seneca. Not just now; nor, upon reflection, do I think it feasible.

Epictetus. Thou, indeed, mayest live much to thy ease and satisfaction with philosophy, having (they say) two thousand talents.

Seneca. And a trifle to spare—pressed upon me by that godlike youth, my pupil Nero.

Epictetus. Seneca! where God hath placed a mine, He hath placed the materials of an earthquake.

Seneca. A true philosopher is beyond the reach of Fortune.

Epictetus. The false one thinks himself so. Fortune cares little about philosophers; but she remembers where she hath set a rich man, and she laughs to see the Destinies at his door.

PETER THE GREAT AND ALEXIS

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Peter. And so, after flying from thy father's house, thou hast returned again from Vienna. After this affront in the face of Europe, thou darest to appear before me?

Alexis. My emperor and father! I am brought before your Majesty, not at my own desire.

Peter. I believe it well.

Alexis. I would not anger you.

Peter. What hope hadst thou, rebel, in thy flight to Vienna?

Alexis. The hope of peace and privacy; the hope of security; and, above all things, of never more offending you.

Peter. That hope thou hast accomplished. Thou imaginedst, then, that my brother of Austria would maintain thee at his court—speak!

Alexis. No, sir! I imagined that he would have afforded me a place of refuge.

Peter. Didst thou, then, take money with thee?

Alexis. A few gold pieces.

Peter. How many?

Alexis. About sixty.

Peter. He would have given thee promises for half the money; but the double of it does not purchase a house,

ignorant wretch!

Alexis. I knew as much as that: although my birth did not appear to destine me to purchase a house anywhere; and hitherto your liberality, my father, hath supplied my wants of every kind.

Peter. Not of wisdom, not of duty, not of spirit, not of courage, not of ambition. I have educated thee among my guards and horses, among my drums and trumpets, among my flags and masts. When thou wert a child, and couldst hardly walk, I have taken thee into the arsenal, though children should not enter according to regulations: I have there rolled cannon-balls before thee over iron plates; and I have shown thee bright new arms, bayonets and sabres; and I have pricked the back of my hands until the blood came out in many places; and I have made thee lick it; and I have then done the same to thine. Afterward, from thy tenth year, I have mixed gunpowder in thy grog; I have peppered thy peaches; I have poured bilge-water (with a little good wholesome tar in it) upon thy melons; I have brought out girls to mock thee and cocker thee, and talk like mariners, to make thee braver. Nothing would do. Nay, recollect thee! I have myself led thee forth to the window when fellows were hanged and shot; and I have shown thee every day the halves and quarters of bodies; and I have sent an orderly or chamberlain for the heads; and I have pulled the cap up from over the eyes; and I have made thee, in spite of thee, look steadfastly upon them, incorrigible coward!

And now another word with thee about thy scandalous flight from the palace, in time of quiet, too! To the point! Did my brother of Austria invite thee? Did he, or did he not?

Alexis. May I answer without doing an injury or disservice to his Imperial Majesty?

Peter. Thou mayest. What injury canst thou or any one do, by the tongue, to such as he is?

Alexis. At the moment, no; he did not. Nor indeed can I assert that he at any time invited me; but he said he pitied me.

Peter. About what? hold thy tongue; let that pass. Princes never pity but when they would make traitors: then their hearts grow tenderer than tripe. He pitied thee, kind soul, when he would throw thee at thy father's head; but finding thy father too strong for him, he now commiserates the parent, laments the son's rashness and disobedience, and would not make God angry for the world. At first, however, there must have been some overture on his part; otherwise thou art too shamefaced for intrusion. Come—thou hast never had wit enough to lie—tell me the truth, the whole truth.

Alexis. He said that if ever I wanted an asylum, his court was open to me.

Peter. Open! so is the tavern; but folks pay for what they get there. Open, truly! and didst thou find it so?

Alexis. He received me kindly.

Peter. I see he did.

Alexis. Derision, O my father! is not the fate I merit.

Peter. True, true! it was not intended.

Alexis. Kind father! punish me then as you will.

Peter. Villain! wouldst thou kiss my hand, too? Art thou ignorant that the Austrian threw thee away from him, with

the same indifference as he would the outermost leaf of a sandy sunburnt lettuce?

Alexis. Alas! I am not ignorant of this.

Peter. He dismissed thee at my order. If I had demanded from him his daughter, to be the bedfellow of a Kalmuc, he would have given her, and praised God.

Alexis. O father! is his baseness my crime?

Peter. No; thine is greater. Thy intention, I know, is to subvert the institutions it has been the labour of my lifetime to establish. Thou hast never rejoiced at my victories.

Alexis. I have rejoiced at your happiness and your safety.

Peter. Liar! coward! traitor! when the Polanders and Swedes fell before me, didst thou from thy soul congratulate me? Didst thou get drunk at home or abroad, or praise the Lord of Hosts and Saint Nicholas? Wert thou not silent and civil and low-spirited?

Alexis. I lamented the irretrievable loss of human life; I lamented that the bravest and noblest were swept away the first; that the gentlest and most domestic were the earliest mourners; that frugality was supplanted by intemperance; that order was succeeded by confusion; and that your Majesty was destroying the glorious plans you alone were capable of devising.

Peter. I destroy them! how? Of what plans art thou speaking?

Alexis. Of civilizing the Muscovites. The Polanders in part were civilized: the Swedes, more than any other nation on the Continent; and so excellently versed were they in military science, and so courageous, that every man you killed cost you seven or eight.

Peter. Thou liest; nor six. And civilized, forsooth? Why, the robes of the metropolitan, him at Upsal, are not worth three ducats, between Jew and Livornese. I have no notion that Poland and Sweden shall be the only countries that produce great princes. What right have they to such as Gustavus and Sobieski? Europe ought to look to this before discontents become general, and the people do to us what we have the privilege of doing to the people. I am wasting my words: there is no arguing with positive fools like thee. So thou wouldst have desired me to let the Poles and Swedes lie still and quiet! Two such powerful nations!

Alexis. For that reason and others I would have gladly seen them rest, until our own people had increased in numbers and prosperity.

Peter. And thus thou disputest my right, before my face, to the exercise of the supreme power.

Alexis. Sir! God forbid!

Peter. God forbid, indeed! What care such villains as thou art what God forbids! He forbids the son to be disobedient to the father; He forbids—He forbids—twenty things. I do not wish, and will not have, a successor who dreams of dead people.

Alexis. My father! I have dreamed of none such.

Peter. Thou hast, and hast talked about them—Scythians, I think, they call 'em. Now, who told thee, Mr. Professor, that the Scythians were a happier people than we are; that they were inoffensive; that they were free; that they wandered with their carts from pasture to pasture, from river to river; that they traded with good faith; that they fought with good courage; that they injured none, invaded none, and feared

none? At this rate I have effected nothing. The great founder of Rome, I heard in Holland, slew his brother for despising the weakness of his walls; and shall the founder of this better place spare a degenerate son, who prefers a vagabond life to a civilized one, a cart to a city, a Scythian to a Muscovite? Have I not shaved my people, and breeched them? Have I not formed them into regular armies, with bands of music and haversacks? Are bows better than cannon? shepherds than dragoons, mare's milk than brandy, raw steaks than broiled? Thine are tenets that strike at the root of politeness and sound government. Every prince in Europe is interested in rooting them out by fire and sword. There is no other way with false doctrines: breath against breath does little.

Alexis. Sire, I never have attempted to disseminate my opinions.

Peter. How couldst thou? the seed would fall only on granite. Those, however, who caught it brought it to me.

Alexis. Never have I undervalued civilization: on the contrary, I regretted whatever impeded it. In my opinion, the evils that have been attributed to it sprang from its imperfections and voids; and no nation has yet acquired it more than very scantily.

Peter. How so? give me thy reasons—thy fancies, rather; for reason thou hast none.

Alexis. When I find the first of men, in rank and genius, hating one another, and becoming slanderers and liars in order to lower and vilify an opponent; when I hear the God of mercy invoked to massacres, and thanked for furthering what He reprobates and condemns—I look back in vain on