Polyeucte

by Pierre Corneille

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Title: Polyeucte

Author: Pierre Corneille

Translator: Thomas Constable

Release date: April 4, 2006 [eBook #2543] Most recently updated: January 31, 2013

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2543

Credits: Produced by Dagny; Emma Dudding; John Bickers; David Widger

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Contents

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

POLYEUCTE

ACT I—POLYEUCTE. NEARCHUS

ACT II—SEVERUS. FABIAN

ACT III—PAULINE

ACT IV—POLYEUCTE. CLEON. THREE OTHER GUARDS

ACT V—FELIX. ALBIN. CLEON

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Pierre Corneille was born in Rouen in 1606, the son of an official; was educated by the Jesuits, and practised unsuccessfully as a lawyer. His dramatic career began with the comedy of "Melite," but it was by his "Medee" that he first proved his tragic genius. "The Cid" appeared in 1636, and a series of masterpieces followed—"Horace," "Cinna," "Polyeucte," "Le Menteur." After a failure in "Pertharite" he retired from the stage, deeply hurt by the disapproval of his audience. Six years later he resumed play writing with "OEdipe" and continued till 1674, producing in all some thirty plays. Though he earned a great reputation, he was poorly paid; and a proud and sensitive nature laid him open to considerable suffering. He died in 1684.

The works of Corneille represent most fully the ideal of French so-called "classical" tragedy. The laws to which this type of tragedy sought to conform were not so much truth to nature as the principles which the critics had derived from a somewhat inadequate interpretation of Aristotle and of the practise of the Greek tragedians. These principles concentrated the interest of the play upon a single central situation, in order to emphasize which, subordinate characters and complicating under-plots

were avoided as much as possible. There was little or no action upon the stage, and the events of the plot were narrated by messengers, or by the main characters in conversation with confidantes. Further, the "dramatic unities" of time and place, as well as of action, were held to be binding.

One result of these rules was to give an extraordinary importance to the speeches; and it is in the eloquence of these, in the grandeur and dignity of the versification, and in the lofty moral elevation of the characters, that Corneille excels. All of these qualities are admirably exemplified in "Polyeucte"; and in the conduct of the leading personages one may perceive the most persistent trait of this dramatist's treatment of heroic character—the conquest of the passions by the reason and the will. "Among the masterpieces of Corneille," says Paul de Saint-Victor, "'Polyeucte' is assuredly the greatest; and nothing in all his dramas equals the extraordinary beauty of the character of 'Pauline.'"

POLYEUCTE

CHARACTERS

FELIX, Governor of Armenia. POLYEUCTE, an Armenian noble, son-in-law to FELIX. SEVERUS, a Roman Knight, favourite of the Emperor Decius. NEARCHUS, an Armenian noble, friend to Polyeucte. PAULINE, daughter to Felix, wife to Polyeucte. STRATONICE, companion to Pauline. ALBIN, friend to FELIX. FABIAN, servant to Severus. CLEON, friend to FELIX. Three Guards.

The Scene is at Melitena, capital of Armenia. The action takes place in the Palace of Felix.

ACT I—POLYEUCTE. NEARCHUS

NEARCHUS. Shall woman's dream of terror hurl the dart? Oh, feeble weapon

'gainst so great a heart! Must courage proved a thousand times in arms Bow to a peril forged by vain alarms? POLY. I know that dreams are born to fade away, And melt in air before the light of day; I know that misty vapours of the night Dissolve and fly before the morning bright. The dream is naught—but the dear dreamer—all! She has my soul, Nearchus, fast in thrall; Who holds the marriage torch—august, divine, Bids me to her sweet voice my will resign. She fears my death—tho' baseless this her fright, Pauline is wrung with fear—by day—by night; My road to duty hampered by her fears, How can I go when all undried her tears? Her terror I disown—and all alarms, Yet pity holds me in her loving arms: No bolts or bars imprison,—yet her sighs My fetters are—my conquerors, her eyes! Say, kind Nearchus, is the cause you press Such as to make me deaf to her distress? The bonds I slacken I would not unloose Nothing I yield—yet grant a timely truce. NEAR. How grant you know not what? Are you assured Of constancy?—as one who has endured? God claims your soul for Him!—Now! Now! To-day! The fruit to-morrow yields—oh, who shall say? Our God is just, but do His grace and power Descend on recreants with equal shower? On darkened souls His flame of light He turns, Yet flame neglected soon but faintly burns, And dying embers fade to ashes cold If we the heart His spirit wooes withhold. Great Heaven retains the fire no longer sought, While ashes turn to dust, and dust to naught. His holy baptism He bids thee seek, Neglect the call, and the desire grows weak. Ah! whilst from woman's breast thou heedst the sighs, The flame first flickers, then, untended—dies! POLY. You know me ill,—'tis mine, that holy fire, Fed, not extinguished, by unslaked desire Her tears—I view them with a lover's eye; And yet your Christ is mine—a Christian I! The healing, cleansing flood o'er me shall flow, I would efface the stain from birth I owe; I would be pure—my sealed eyes would see! The birthright Adam lost restored to me This, this, the unfading crown! For this I yearn, For that exhaustless fount I thirst, I burn. Then, since my heart is true, Nearchus, say— Shall I not grant to pity this delay? NEAR. So doth the ghostly foe our souls abuse, And all beyond his force

he gains by ruse; He hates the purpose fast he cannot foil,— Then he retreats—retreats but to recoil! In endless barricade obstruction piles, To-day 'tis tears impede, to-morrow—smiles! And this poor dream—his coinage of the night Gives place to other lures, all falsely bright: All tricks he knows and uses—threats and prayers Attacks in parley—as the Parthian dares. In chain unheeded weakest link must fail, So fortress yet unwon he'll mount and scale. O break his bonds! Let feeble woman weep! The heart that God has touched 'tis God must keep! Who looks behind to dally with his choice When Heaven demands—obeys another voice! POLY. Who loves thy Christ—say, must he love no other? NEAR. He may—he must! 'Tis Christ says, "Love thy brother," Yet on the altar of the Heavenly King No rival place, no alien incense fling! Through Him—by Him—for Him—all goodness know! 'Tis from the source alone each stream must flow. To please Him, wife, and wealth, and rank, and state Must be forsaken—strait the heavenly gate. Poor silly sheep! afar you err and stray From Him who is The Life, The Truth, The Way! My grief chokes utterance! I see your fate, As round the fold the hungry wolves of hate Closer and fiercer rage: from sword and flame One shelter for His flock—one only Name! The Cross alone our victor over fears, Not this thy strength,—thy plea—a woman's tears! POLY. I know thy heart! It is mine own—the tear My pity drops hath ne'er a taint of fear! Who dreads not torture, yet—to give relief To her he loves, perforce must ease her grief! If Heaven should claim my life, my death, my all, Then Heaven will give the strength to heed the call. The shepherd guides me surely to the fold, There, safe with Him, 'tis He will make me bold! NEAR. Be bold! O come! POLY. Yes, let thy faith be mine! There—at his feet—do I my life resign If but Pauline—my love—would give consent! Else heaven were hell, and home but banishment! NEAR. Come!—to return. Thrice welcome to her sight, To see thee safe will double her delight: As the pierced cloud unveils a brighter sun, So is her joy enhanced—thy glory won! O come, they wait! POLY. Appease her fear! Ah, this Alone will give her rest—her lover bliss. She comes! NEAR. Then fly! POLY. I

cannot! NEAR. To deny would yield thine enemy the victory! He loves to kill, and knows his deadliest dart Finds friend within the fort—thy traitor heart! Enter Pauline and Stratonice POLY. I needs must go, Pauline! My love, good-bye! I go but to return—for thine am I! PAUL. Oh, why this haste to leave a loving wife? Doth honour call?—or fear'st thou for thy life? POLY. For more, a thousandfold! PAUL. Great Gods above! POLY. Thou hast my heart! Let this content thy love! PAUL. You love and yet you leave me. What am I? Not mine to solve the dreary mystery! POLY. I love thee more than self—than life—than fame But—— PAUL. There is something that thou dar'st not name. Oh, on my knees I supplicate, I pray, Remove my darkness!—turn my night to day! POLY. Oh, dreams are naught! PAUL. Yet, when they tell of thee, I needs must listen, for I love! Ah, me! POLY. Take courage, dear one, 'tis but for an hour, Thy love must draw me back, for love hath power O'er all in earth and heaven. My soul's delight, I can no more! My only safety—flight! (Exeunt Polyeucte and Nearchus.) PAUL. Yes, go, despise my prayer—my agony; Go, ruthless—meet thy fate—forewarned by me; Chase thy pursuer, herald thine own doom; Go, kiss the murderer's hand, and hail the tomb! Ah, Stratonice! for our boasted power As sovereigns o'er man's heart! Poor regents of an hour! Faint, helpless, moonbeam—light was all I gave, The sun breaks forth—his queen becomes his slave! Wooed? Yes; as other queens I held my court Won—but to lose my crown, and be the sport Of proud, absorbing and imperious man! STRAT. Ah, man does what he wills—we, what we can; He loves thee, lady! PAUL. Love should mate with trusts; He leaves me! STRAT. Lady, 'tis because he must! He loves thee with a love will never die, Then, if he leave thee, reason not the why: Give him thy trust! Oh, thou shalt have reward, For thee he hides the secret! Let him guard Thy life beloved—in fullest liberty. The wife who wholly trusts alone is free! One heart for thee and him—one purpose sure, Yet this heart beats to dare—and to endure. The wife's true heart must o'er the peril sigh Which meets his heart moved but to purpose high; Thy pain his pain, but not his terror thine: He is Armenian, thou of

Roman line. We, of Armenia, mock thy dreams to scorn, For they are born of night, as truth of morn; While Romans hold that dreams are heaven-sent, And spring from Jove for man's admonishment. PAUL. Though this thy faith—if thou my dream shouldst hear— My grief must needs be thine, thy fear my fear, And, that the horror thou may'st fully prove, Know that I—his dear wife—did once another love! Nay, start not, shrink not, 'tis no tale of shame, For though in other years the heavenly flame Descended, kindled, scorched—it left me pure With courage to resign—with strength to endure. He touched my heart, but never stained the soul That gained this hardest conquest—self-control. At Rome—where I was born—a soldier's eye Marked this poor face, from which must Polyeucte fly; Severus was his name:—Ah! memory May spare love linked with death a tear, a sigh! STRAT. Say, is it he who, at the risk of life, Saved Decius from his foes and endless strife? Who, dying, dealt to Persia stroke of death, And shouted 'Victory!' with his latest breath? His whitening bones, amid the nameless brave, Lie still unfound, unknown, without a grave; Unburied lies his dust amid the slain, While Decius rears an empty urn in vain! PAUL. Alas! 'tis he; all Rome attests his worth, Hide not his memory, kindly Mother Earth! 'Tis but his memory that I adore The past is past—and I can say no more. All gifts save one had he—yes, Fortune held her hand, And I, as Fortune's slave, obeyed my sire's command. STRAT. Ah! I must wish that love the day had won! PAUL. Which duty lost—then had I been undone; Though duty gave, yet duty healed, my pain; Yet say not that my love was weak or vain! Our tears fell fast, yet ne'er bore our distress The fatal fruit of strife and bitterness. Then, then, I left my hero, hope and Rome, And, far from him, I found another home; While he, in his despair, sought sure relief In death, the only end to life's long grief! You know the rest:—you know that Polyeucte's eye Was caught,—his fancy pleased; his wife am I. Once more by counsel of my father led, To Armenia's greatest noble am I wed; Ambition, prudence, policy his guide Yet only duty made Pauline his bride; Love might have bound me to Severus' heart, Had duty not enforced a sterner part. Yes,

let these fears attest, all trembling for his life, That I am his for aye—his faithful, loving wife. STRAT. Thy new love true and tender as the old:— But this thy dream? No more thy tale withhold! PAUL. Last night I saw Severus: but his eye With anger blazed; his port was proud and high, No suppliant he—no feeble, formless shade, With dim, averted eye; no sword had made My hero lifeless ghost. Nor wound, nor scar Marked death his only conqueror in war. Nor spoil of death, nor memory's child was he, His mien triumphant, full of majesty! So might victorious Caesar near his home To claim the key to every heart in Rome! He spoke: in nameless awe I heard his voice,— 'Give love, that is my due, to him—thy choice,— But know, oh faithless one, ere day expires, All vain these tears for him thy heart desires!' Anon a Christian band (an impious horde), With shameful cross in hand, attest his word; They vouch Severus' truth—and, to complete My doom, hurl Polyeucte beneath his feet! I cried, 'O father, timely succour bear!' He heard, he came, my grief was now despair! He drew his dagger—plunged it in the breast Of him, my husband, late his honoured guest! Relief came but from agony supreme— I shrieked—I writhed—I woke—it was a dream! And yet my dream is true! STRAT. 'Tis true your dream is sad, But now you are awake, 'tis but a dream you had! For horror's prey in darkness of the night Is but our reason's sport in morning light. How can you dread a shade? How a fond father fear, Who as a son regards the man you hold so dear? To phantom of the night no credence yield; For him and you he chose thy strength and shield. PAUL. You say his words: at all my fears he smiles, But I must dread these Christians and their wiles! I dread their vengeance, wreaked upon my lord, For Christian blood my father has outpoured! STRAT. Their sect is impious, mad, absurd and vain, Their rites repulsive, as their cult profane. Deride their altar, their weak frenzy ban, Yet do they war with gods and not with man! Relentless wills our law that they must die: Their joy—endurance; death—their ecstasy; Judged—by decree, the foes of human race, Meekly their heads they bow—to court disgrace! PAUL. My father comes—oh, peace! (Enter Felix and Albin) FELIX. Nay, peace is

flown! Thy dream begets dull fears, till now unknown; In part this dream is true, and for the rest—— PAUL. By what new fear, say, is thy heart opprest? FELIX. Severus lives! PAUL. Ah! this no cause for fear! FELIX. At Decius' court, he, held in honour dear, Risked life to save his Emperor from his foes, 'Tis to his saviour Decius honour shows! PAUL. Thus fickle Fortune bows her head to fate, And pays the honour due, though all too late! FELIX. He comes! Is near—— PAUL. The gods—— FELIX. Do all things well. PAUL. My dream fulfilled! But how? O father, tell! FELIX. Let Albin speak, who saw him face to face With tribe of courtiers; all to him give place; Unscathed in battle, all extol his fame, Unstained, undimmed, his glory, life and name! ALBIN. You know the issue of that glorious fight: The crowning glory his—who, in despite Of danger sore to life and liberty, Became a slave to set his Emperor free: Rome gave her honours to Severus' shade, Whilst he, her ransomer, in a dungeon stayed. His death they mourned above ten thousand slain, While Persia held him—yes, their tears were vain, But not in vain his noble sacrifice! The king released him: Rome grudged not the price; No Persian bribe could tempt him from his home. When Decius cried—'Fight once again for Rome!' Again he fights—he leads—all others hope resign; But from despair's deep breast he plucks a star benign, This—hope's fair fruit, contentment, plenty, ease, Brings joy from grief, to crown a lasting peace. The Emperor holds him as his dearest friend, And doth Severus to Armenia send— To offer up to Mars, and mighty Jove, 'Mid feast and sacrifice, his thanks and love. FELIX. Ah, Fortune, turn thy wheel, else I misfortune meet! ALBIN. This news I learn'd from one of great Severus' suite: Thence, swiftly here, the tale to tell I sped. FELIX. He who once vainly wooed, hopes now to wed. The sacrifice, the offering, all are feigned, All but the suit, which lightly I disdained. PAUL. Yes, this may be, for ah! he loved me well! FELIX. What room for hope? Such wrath is child of hell. Before his righteous ire I shrink, I cower; Revenge I dread—and vengeance linked with power Unnerves me quite. PAUL. Fear not, his soul is great. FELIX. Thy comfort, oh my daughter,

comes too late. The thought to crush me down, to turn my heart to stone, This, that I prized not worth for worth's dear sake alone! Too well, Pauline, thou hast thy sire obeyed; Thy heart was fond, but duty love betrayed. How surely thy revolt had safety won! 'Tis thine obedience leaves us all undone. In thee, in thee alone, one hope remains, Love held him fast, relax not thou love's chains. O Love, my sometime foe, forgive, be mine ally, And let the dart that slew now bring the remedy! PAUL. Forbid it, Heaven! One good yet mine,—my will, The dart that wounded has the power to kill. One lesson woman learns—her feebleness; Shame is the only grief without redress. The traitor heart shall still a prisoner be; For freedom were disgrace to thee and me! I will not see him! FELIX. But one word! Be kind! PAUL. I will not, for I love!—and love is blind. Before his kingly eye my soul to unveil Were shame and failure: and I will not fail: I will not see him! FELIX. One word more—'Obey!' Wouldst thou thy father and his weal betray? PAUL. I yield! Come woe!—come shame!—come every ill! My father thou!—and I thy daughter still! FELIX. I know thee pure. PAUL. And pure I will remain, But, crushed and bruised, the flower no guilt shall stain. I fear the combat that I may not fly, Hard-won the fight, and dear the victory. Here, love, my curse! Here, dearest friend, my foe! Yet will I arm me! Father, I would go To steel my heart—all weapons to embrace! FELIX. I too will go, the conqueror's march to grace! Restore thy strength, ere yet it be too late, And know that in thy hands thou hold'st our fate! PAUL. Go, broken heart, to probe thy wound; cut deep and do not spare! Herself—the crowning sacrifice—the victim shall prepare!

ACT II—SEVERUS. FABIAN

SEV. Let Felix bow to Jove and incense pour, I seek a dearer shrine, for I adore Nor Jove, nor Mars, nor Fortune—but Pauline. This fruit now ripening late my hand would glean: You know, my friend, the god who wings my way, You know the only

goddess I obey: What reck the gods on high our sacrifice and prayer? An earthly worship mine, sole refuge from despair! FABIAN. Ah! You may see her—— SEV. Blessed be thy tongue! O magic word, that turns my grief to song! Yet, if she now forget each fair, fond vow? She loved me once,—but does she love me now? On that sweet face shall I but trouble see Who hope for love undimmed, for ecstasy? Great Decius gives her hand, but if her heart Be mine no more—than let vain hope depart! This mandate binds her father only; she Shall give no captive hand—her heart is free: No promise wrung, no king's command be mine to claim, Her love the boon I crave; all else an empty name! FABIAN. Yes,—you may—see her—see her—this you may— SEV. Thy speech is halting—odious thy delay! She loves no more? I grope! O give me light! FABIAN. O see her not, for painful were the sight! In Rome each matron's kind! In Rome all maids are fair! Let lips meet other lips—seek for caresses there! No stately Claudia will refuse—no Julia proud disdain; A hero captures every heart, from Antioch to Spain! SEV. To wed a queen—an empress—were only loss and shame; One heart for me—Pauline's! One boast—that dearest name! Her love was virgin gold! O ne'er shall baser metal ring From mine, who live her name to bless! her peerless praise to sing! O, words are naught, till that I see her face, Then doubly naught till I my love embrace. In every war my hope was placed in death, Her name upon my lips at every breath: My rank, my fame, now hers and hers alone, What is not hers, hers only—I disown! FABIAN. Once more, oh see her not, 'twere for thy peace! SEV. Thy meaning, knave, or let this babble cease! Say, was she cold? My love! My only life! FABIAN. No—but—my lord—— SEV. Say on! FABIAN. Another's wife! SEV. (Reels.) Help!—No, I will not blench—ah, say you lie! If this be true!—ye gods—can I be I? FABIAN. No, thou art changed. Where is thy courage fled? SEV. I know not, Fabian. Lost! Gone! Vanished! Dead! I thought my strength was oak—'tis but a reed! Pauline is wed, then am I lost indeed! Hope hid beyond the cloud, yet still fond hope was there: But now all hope is dead, lives only black despair! Pauline another's wife? FABIAN.

Yes, Polyeucte is her lord. He came, he saw, he conquered thine adored. SEV. Her choice is not unworthy—his a name Illustrious, from a line of kings he came Cold comfort for a wound no cure can heal! My cause is lost,—foredoomed without appeal! Malignant Jove, to drag me back to-day! Relentless Fate, to quench hope's dawning ray! Take back your gifts! One boon alone I crave, That only boon to none denied—the grave. Yet would I see her, breathe one last good-bye, Would hear once more that voice before I die! My latest breath would still my homage pay, That memory mine, when lost to realms of day. FABIAN. Yet think, my lord— SEV. Oh, I have thought of all; What worser ill can dull despair befall? She will not see me? FABIAN. Yes, my lord, but— SEV. Cease! FABIAN. 'Twill but enhance the grief I would appease. SEV. For hopeless ill, good friend, I seek no cure. Who welcomes death can life's short pain endure! FABIAN. O lost indeed, if round her fatal light you hover!— The lover, losing all, speaks hardly like a lover! While passion still is lord—the passion-swept is slave— From this last bitterness would I Severus save! SEV. That word, my friend, unsay; tho' grief this bosom tear, The hand that wounds I kiss—love vanquishes despair; Fate only, not Pauline, the foe that I accuse, No plighted faith she breaks who did this hand refuse. Duty—her father—Fate—these willed, she but obeyed; Not hers the woe, the strife that envious Ate made! Untimely, Fortune's shower must drown me, not revive; Too lavish and too late her fatal gifts arrive. The golden apple falls, the gold is turned to dross: When Fate at Fortune mocks, all gain is only loss! FABIAN. Yes, I will go to tell her thou hast drained To the last drop the cup that Fate ordained. She knows thee hero, but she feared that pain Might prove thee also man—by passion slain. She feared Despair, who gains the victory O'er other men, might e'en thy master be! SEV. Peace! Peace! She comes! FABIAN. To thine own self be true! SEV. Nay! True to her! Shall I her life undo? She loves the Armenian! Enter Pauline PAUL. Yes, that debt I pay, Hard—wrung, acquitted,—his my love alway! Who has my hand, he holds—shall hold—my heart! Truth is my guide,—let sophistry depart! Had Fate been kind, then

had Pauline been thine, Heart, faith and duty, linked with bliss divine. In vain had fickle Fortune barred the way, Want had been wealth with thee, my guide, my stay, And poverty had fallen from the wings Of soaring love, who mocks the wealth of kings! Not mine to choose, for he—my father's choice— Must needs be mine; yes, when I heard his voice, Duty must echo be: if thou couldst cast Before my feet an emperor's crown,—a past By worth and glory lit—beloved, adored— Yet at my father's word, 'Not this thy lord; Take one despised—nay, loathed—to share thy bed,'— Him, and not thee, beloved, would I wed. Duty, obedience, must have been the part Of me, who own their sway, e'en with a broken heart! SEV. O happy thou! O easy remedy! One poor faint sigh cures love's infirmity! Thy heart thy tool, o'er every passion queen, Beyond all change and chance thou sit'st serene! In easy flow can pass thy love new-born From cold indifference to colder scorn; Such resolution is the equal mate Of god or monster, love, aversion, hate. This fine-spun adamant Ithuriel's spear Could never pierce: for other stuff is here! (Points to himself.) No faint 'Alas!' no swift-repented sigh Can heal the cureless wound from which I die. Sure, reason finds that love his easy prey With Lethe aye at hand to point the way; With ordered fires like thine, I too could smother A heart in leash, find solace in another. Too fair, too dear—from whom the Fates me sever! Thou hast no heart to give—thou lov'dst me never! PAUL. Too plain, Severus, I my torture show,— Tho' flame leap up no more, the embers glow; Far other speech and voice, and mien were mine, Could I forget that once thou call'dst me thine! Tho' reason rules, yes, gains the mastery No queen benignant, but a tyrant she! Oh, if I conquer—if the strife I gain, Yet memory for aye is linked with pain! I feel the charm that binds me still to thee; If duty great, yet great thy worth to me: I see thee still the same, who waked the fire Which waked in me ineffable desire. Begirt by crown of everlasting fame Thou art more glorious—yet art still the same. I know thy valour's worth,—well hast thou justified That bounding hope of mine, though fruitage was denied, Yet this same fate which did our union ban Hath made me, fated—wed another man. Let

Duty still be queen! Yea, let her break The heart she pierces, yet can never shake. The virtue, once thy pride in days gone by Doth that same worth now merit blasphemy? Bewail her bitter fruit—but praised be The rights that triumph over thee and me! SEV. Forgive, Pauline, forgive; ah! grief hath made me blind To all but grief's excess, and fortune most unkind. Forgive that I mistook—nay, treated as a crime Thy constancy of soul, unequalled and sublime; In pity for my life forlorn, my peace denied, Ah! show thyself less fair,—one least perfection hide! Let some alloy be seen, some saving weakness left, Take pity on a heart of thee and Heaven bereft! One faintest flaw reveal, to give my soul relief! Else, how to bear the love that only mates with grief? PAUL. Alas! the rents in armour donned and proved Too well my fight proclaim; yes, I have loved; The traitor sigh, the tear unbid, attest The combat fierce—the warrior sore distrest. Say, who can stanch these wounds, that armour mend? Thou who hast pierced, thou, thou alone defend! Ah, if thou honourest my victory Depart, that thou may'st still defender be! So dry the tears that, to my shame, still flow— So quench the fire would work my overthrow! Yes, go, my only friend, with me combine To end my torture, for thy pain is mine! SEV. This last poor drop of comfort may not be? PAUL. The cup is poisoned both for me and thee! SEV. The flower is gone—I cherish but the root! PAUL. Untimely blossom bears a fated fruit! SEV. My grief be mine! Let memory remain! PAUL. That grief might hope beget, so leave a stain! SEV. Not mine to stain what Heaven hath made so pure! For me one offering left: 'tis this: Endure! Thy glory shall be mine, my load I bear, So, spotless, thou thy peerless crown shalt wear! Farewell, my love, farewell; I go to prove my faith, To bless, to save thy life, so will I mate with death! If prostrate from the blow, there yet remains of life Enough to summon death, and end the piteous strife! PAUL. My grief, too deep for voice, shall silent be, There, in my chamber, will I pray for thee! When thou art gone, great Heaven shall hear my cry; Grief's fruit for thee be hope—death—immortality! SEV. Now with my loss alone let Fate contented be. May Heaven shower bliss and peace on Polyeucte and thee! PAUL.

Stern Fate obeyed, end, Death, his agony, And Jove receive my hero—to the sky! SEV. Thou wast my heaven! PAUL. My father I obeyed— SEV. O victim pure, obedient, undismayed! Pauline—too fair—too dear—I can no more! PAUL. So must I say—depart—where I adore! (Exit Severus.) STRAT. Yes, it is hard—most sad—behold my tears! But now, at least, there is no cause for fears: Thy dream is but a dream—is naught, is vain; Severus pardons. Gone that cause for pain! PAUL. Oh, if from pity start thy easy tear, Add not that other woe—forgotten fear! Ah! let me breathe, some respite give from trouble, Those fears, half-dead, thou dost revive, redouble! STRAT. What dost thou dread? PAUL. Heaven—hell—earth—empty air! All, all is food for dread to my despair, As thou unveil'st, begirt in lurid light, The pallid ghost that slew me in the night! STRAT. Severus he by name, yet noble in his heart! PAUL. Ah, Polyeucte bathed in blood! Depart! depart! STRAT. For Polyeucte's welfare did Severus pray! PAUL. Yes, yes, his heart is great; be that my stay! Yet, tho' his truth, his faith, well-proved be, Most baleful is his presence here to me; Yea, tho' he would all ill for me undo Yet he hath power, he loves—he came to woo. (Enter Polyeucte and Nearchus.) POLY. The source of tears is dry, oh, weep no more, Thy grief lay down, thy fearful heart restore! Let night's dark dream with superstition die, The dream is past, for here in life am I! PAUL. The day is young, and oh, the day is long,— And half the dream is true, and Fate is strong; Severus have I seen, who thought him dead! POLY. I know it! Let no tear for this be shed! Secure with thee am I! Tho' great the knight, Thy father will command to do me right; The general is a man of honour,—he Would ne'er that honour dim by treachery! He comes in amity, our friend, our guest; To greet his worth and valour now my quest. PAUL. Radiant he came, who left me hopeless, sad, But he will come no more,—this grace I had. POLY. What? Thinkest thou that I can jealous be? PAUL. An outrage this on him, on thee, on me! He came in peace, who all my peace hath marred. Who would run safely, every step must guard; The wife who danger courts but courts her fall My husband, aid me!—I would tell thee all! His worth, his

charm, do my weak hearth enflame A traitor here! And he is aye the same! If I should gaze, and long—'gainst virtue, honour, sense, The citadel I yield, and mine my own defence! I know my virtues sure, and fair my fame, But struggle is defeat,—and combat shame! POLY. Oh, true thy shield, thy victory is won, He only who has lost thee is undone; His noble grief the cost of all my bliss, Ah, Cleopatra's pearl was naught to this! The more my faults I see, the more thy truth I learn, The more do I admire—— (Enter Cleon.) CLEON. My lord, the altars burn With holy fire. The victim they prepare; On thee alone they wait, our rites to share. POLY. Go, we do follow thee! PAUL. I cannot go; Severus flies my sight; to him I owe My absence—not, alas! to him alone! Go thou, and oh, remember he is great; In his sole hands Severus holds thy fate! POLY. A foe so great, so noble, is a friend, Oh, not from him the lance that Heaven will send! Exeunt Pauline, Stratonice and Cleon. NEAR. Where go'st thou? POLY. To the temple is the call. NEAR. What! Wouldst thou mingle in their heathen brawl? Thou art a Christian, and canst thou forget? POLY. Canst thou, who fore mine eyes the cross didst set? NEAR. Not mine their gods! POLY. He calls me! I must go! NEAR. I fly their altars! POLY. I would overthrow! Not mine to fly a worship I disown, By me Jehovah, King of kings, be known! Not mine to tremble as I kiss the rod! I conquer by the Cross, I fight for God! Thou wouldst abstain! For me another course From Heaven the call, and Heaven will give the force! What! Yield to evil! His Cross on my brow! His freemen we! O fight, Nearchus, now! For us our Lord was scourged, pierced, tortured, slain! For us He bled! Say, has He died in vain? NEAR. Let timely moderation temper zeal! POLY. His—His alone am I! His woe my weal! NEAR. In love with death? POLY. For Him I love I die! He died for me! So death is victory! NEAR. Thy flesh is weak! POLY. Yet He will make me bold! NEAR. And if thou waver? POLY. He will me uphold! NEAR. To tempt the Lord thy God were an offence. POLY. He is my shield—hence! cursed tempter, hence! NEAR. In time of need the faith must be confessed. POLY. The offering grudged is sacrifice

unblessed. NEAR. Seek thou the death thine own self-will prepares! POLY. A crown I seek, which every martyr shares! NEAR. A life of duty well that crown can win. POLY. The purest life on earth is stained with sin. Why yield to time and chance what death assures? Death but the gate of life that aye endures. If I be His—let me be His alone! The faith that soars shall full fruition own; Who trusts, yet fears and doubts, his faith is dead! NEAR. Not death the Christian's prayer, but daily bread. Live to protect the flock, so sore oppressed. POLY. Example be their friend, most sure, most blessed! NEAR. Thou woo'st thy death! POLY. Is this poor life so dear? NEAR. Ah, I must own my heart is slave to fear. The rack! The cross! I might my Lord disown! POLY. From Him our help, our strength, from Him alone! Who fears denial does at heart deny; Who doubts the power of faith makes faith a lie! NEAR. Who leans upon a reed shall find distress. POLY. His staff will guide, support my feebleness. Thou wert my staff, to show the Truth, the Way, Must I now urge thee to the realms of day? Thou fearest death? NEAR. The Christ once feared to die! POLY. Yet drained the bitter cup of agony! The way that thou hast shown—that way He trod; His way be ours to lead man's soul to God— For heathen shrine—to rear His altar fair,— The deathless hope alone can kill despair! Thou said'st: 'If Him thou wilt for pattern take, Then leave wife, wealth, home, all for His dear sake!' Alas, that love of thine, now weak and poor, Glows yet within my breast—and shall endure; Ah, must the dawn of this my perfect day Find thy full light beclouded, dimmed, astray? NEAR. Baptismal waters yet bedew thy brow; The grace that once was mine, that grace hast thou. No worldly thought has checked the flow, no guilty act has stained; Thy wings are strong, while mine are weak; thy love is fresh, ungeigned,— To these, thy heights, I cannot soar, held down by sense and sin, How can I storm the citadel?—the traitor lurks within! Forsake me not, my God! Thy spirit pour! Oh, make me true to Him whom I adore! With Thee I rise,—the flesh, the world, defy, Thou, who hast died for me, for Thee I die! Yes, I will go! With heaven-born zeal I burn, I will be free,—all Satan's lures I spurn; Death,

torture, outrage, these will I embrace, To nerve my heart and arm, Heaven grant me grace! POLY. On eagle wings of faith and hope ascend! I hail my master—recognise my friend; The old faith wanes,—we light her funeral pyre, Her ashes fall before our holy fire; Come, trample under foot the gods that men have wrought; The rotten, helpless staff is broke, is gone—is naught. Their darkness felt they own, but let them see the light! Their gods of stone, of clay, but vampires of the night! Their dust shall turn to dust,—shall moulder with the sod, Ours for His name to fight:—the issue is with God. NEAR. The cause is just, is true—O coward heart, be still! I lived to doubt His word—I die to do His Will!

ACT III—PAULINE

PAUL. Cares—clouded and confused—oppress, obscure In changeful forms, my eye, my heart, my mind: My soul finds room for every guest save one; Fair hope has flown,—no star can pierce my night: Each tyrant rages 'gainst opposing foe In deadly fight—yet brings to light no friend: In travail sore hope comes not to the birth— Fear hydra-headed terror still begets;— All fancies grim I see, and straight embrace, At hope I clutch, who still eludes my grasp; Her rainbow hues adored are but a frame That serve by contrast to make fear more dark. Severus haunts me—oh, I know his love, Yet hopeless love must mate with jealousy,— While Polyeucte, who has won what he has lost, Can meet no rival with an equal eye. The fruit of rivalry is ever hate And envy; both must still engender strife: One sees that rival hand has grasped his prize, The other yearns for prize himself has missed. Weak reason naught, when headlong passion reigns, For valour seeks a sword, and love—revenge. One fears to see the prize he gained impaired, The other would that wrested prize regain; While patience, duty, conscience, vail their heads 'Fore obstinate defence and fierce attack. Such steeds no charioteer controls—for they Mistake both curb and reign for maddening whip. Ah! what a base, unworthy fear is

mine! How ill I read these fair, these noble souls, Whose virtue must all common snares o'erleap! Their gold unstained by dross or mean alloy! As generous foes so will they—must they meet! Yet are they rivals—this the thought that kills! Not even here—at home—is Polyeucte safe, The eagle wings of Rome reach over all. Oh, if my father bow to Roman might, If he repent the choice that he hath made,— At this one thought hope's flame leaps up to die! Or—if new-born—dies ere she see the light. Hope but deceived,—my fear alone I trust, Heaven grant such confidence be false—be vain! (Enter Stratonice.) Nay, let me know the worst! What, girl!—no word? The rites are o'er? What hast thou seen—what heard? They met in amity?—In peace they part? STRAT. Alas! Alas! PAUL. Nay, soothe my aching heart! I would have comfort,—but this face of woe— A quarrel? STRAT. Polyeucte—Nearchus—go— The Christians— PAUL. What of them? STRAT. Ah, how to speak— PAUL. They on my father would their vengeance wreak? STRAT. Oh, fear whate'er thou wilt—that fear too small! PAUL. The Christians rise? STRAT. Oh, would that this were all! Thy dream, Pauline, is true; Polyeucte is—— PAUL. Dead? STRAT. Ah, no, he lives—yet every hope is fled; That courage once so high, that noble name Sunk in the mire of everlasting shame! He lives,—who once was lovely in thy sight— As monster foul—his every breath a blight; The foe of Heaven, of Jove, of all our race, His kisses poison, and his love—disgrace! Wretch, coward, miscreant, steeped in infamy, O worse than every name!—a Christian he! PAUL. Nay, that one word's enough! There needed not abuse. STRAT. My words fit well their guilt;—with evil make no truce. PAUL. If he be Nazarene—he must an outcast be! But insult to my lord is insult unto me! STRAT. Think only that he hails the Cross, the badge of shame. PAUL. My plighted faith, my troth, my duty still the same! STRAT. When twined about thy breast, the hideous serpent slay! Who mocks the Gods on high will his own wife betray! PAUL. If he be false, yet I will still be true, The ties that bind me I will ne'er undo: Let fate—Severus—passion—all combine Against him!—I am his, and he is mine.

Yes, mine to guide, lead, win, forgive, and save! I seek his honour tho' he court the grave. Let Polyeucte be Christ's slave!—For woe, for weal, He is my lord; the bond I owe I seal; I fear my father,—all his vengeance, dread. STRAT. Fierce burns his rage o'er that devoted head; Yet embers of old love still faintly glow, And through his wrath some weak compassion show; 'Gainst Polyeucte biting words alone he speaks But on Nearchus fullest vengeance wreaks! PAUL. Nearchus lured him on? STRAT. The tempter he; Such friendship leads to death, or infamy. Oh, cursed friend, who, in dear love's despite, Has torn him from thine arms—his neophyte! He dragged him to the front;—baptized, annealed— He fights for Christ!—The secret is revealed. PAUL. Which I would know—and straightway had thy blame! STRAT. Ah! I foresaw not this—their deed of shame! PAUL. Ere dull despair o'ermaster all my fears, Oh, let me gauge the worth of woman's tears! For, if the daughter lose, the wife may gain,— Or Felix may relent, if Polyeucte mock my pain; If both are adamant unto my prayer, Then—then alone—take counsel from despair! How passed the temple sacrifice? Hide naught, my friend, tell all! STRAT. The horror and the sacrilege must I, perforce, recall? To say the words, to think the thoughts, seems blasphemy and shame; Yet will I tell their infamy,—their deed without a name. To silence hushed, the people knelt, and turned them to the East; Then impious Polyeucte and his friend mock sacrifice and priest. They every holy name invoked jeer with unbridled tongue, To laughter vile the incense rose—'tis thus our hymn was sung; Both loud and deep the murmurs rang, and Felix' face grew pale, Then Polyeucte mad defiance hurls, while all the people quail. 'Vain are your gods of wood and stone!' his voice was stern and high— 'Vain every rite, prayer, sacrifice' so ran his blasphemy. 'Your Jupiter is parricide, adulterer, demon, knave, 'He cannot listen to your cry, not his to bless or save. 'One God—Jehovah—rules alone, supreme o'er earth and heaven, 'And ye are His—yes, only His—to Him your prayers be given! 'He is our source, our life, our end,—no other god adore, 'To Him alone all prayer is due, then serve Him evermore! 'Who kneels before a meaner

shrine, by devil's power enticed, 'Denies his Maker and his King, denies the Saviour Christ. 'He is our source, our guide, our end, our prophet, priest and king; 'Twas He that nerved Severus' arm,—His praise let Decius sing. 'Jehovah rules the battle-field ye call the field of Mars, 'He only grants a glorious peace, 'tis He guides all our wars. 'He casts the mighty from his seat, He doth the proud abase,— 'They only peace and blessing know who love and seek His face. 'His sword alone is strong to strike, His shield our only guard. 'He will His bleeding saints avenge, He is their sure reward. 'In vain to Jove and feeble Mars your full libations pour— 'Oh, kneel before the might ye spurn, the God ye mock—adore!' Then Polyeucte the shrine o'erthrows, the holy vessels breaks, Nor wrath of Jove, nor Felix' ire, his fatal purpose shakes. Foredoomed by Fate, the Furies' prey—they rush, they rend, they tear, The vessels all to fragments fly—all prone the offerings fair; And on the front of awful Jove they set their impious feet, And order fair to chaos turn, and thus their work complete. Our hallowed mysteries disturbed, our temple dear profaned, Mad flight and tumult dire let loose, proclaim a God disdained. Thus pallid fear broods over all, presaging wrath to come, While Felix—but I mark his step!—'tis he shall speak the doom. PAUL. How threatening, how dark his mien! How lightning-fraught his eye! Where wrath and grief, revenge and pain, do strive for mastery! (Enter Felix.) FELIX. O insolence undreamed!—Before my very eyes!—Before the people's gaze! It is too much!—he dies! PAUL. O father!—on my knees! (Kneels.) Unsay that word! FELIX. Nearchus' doom I speak,—not his, thy lord. Though all unworthy he to be my son, Yet still he bears the name that he hath won; Nor crime of his nor wrath of mine shall ever move Thy father's heart to hate the man thou crown'st with love! PAUL. Ne'er vainly have I sued for pity from my sire! FELIX. And yet meet food were he for righteous ire! To recount an act so fell my feeble words too weak, But thou has heard the tale my lips refuse to speak From her, thy maiden; she hath told thee all. PAUL. Nearchus goaded—planned—and he shall fall! FELIX. So taught by torture of his vilest friend, Shall Polyeucte mark of guilt

the certain end, When of the frenzied race he sees the goal, The dread of torture shall subdue his soul! Who mocked the thought of death, when death he views, Will choose an easier mate—and rightly choose. That shadowy guest, that doth his soul entice, Once master, glues all ardour into ice, And that proud heart, which never meekness knew, When face to face with Death—will learn to sue! PAUL. What! Thinkest thou his soul can ever blench? FELIX. Death's mighty flood must every furnace quench! PAUL. It might! It may!—I know such things can be! A Polyeucte changed—debased—forsworn I see! O, changeful Fortune! changeless Polyeucte move, And grant a boon denied by father's love! FELIX. My love too plain—myself too weakly kind, Let him repent and he shall pardon find; Nearchus' sin is his,—and yet the grace He shall not win, thy Polyeucte may embrace! My duty—to a father's love betrayed Hath of thy sire a fond accomplice made; A healing balm I bring for all thy fears, I look for thanks, and lo—thou giv'st me tears! PAUL. I give no thanks—no cause for thanks I find; I know the Christian temper—know their mind, They can blaspheme, but ah, they cannot lie! They know not how to yield—but they can die! FELIX. As bird in hand, he holds his pardon still. PAUL. The bird escapes, when 'tis the owner's will. FELIX. He death escapes—if so he do elect. PAUL. He death embraces—as doth all his sect. Is't thus a father pleads for his own son? FELIX. Who wills his death is by himself undone. PAUL. He cannot see! FELIX. Because he chooses night. Who loves the darkness hateth still the light. PAUL. O, by the Gods— FELIX. Nay, daughter, save thy breath; Spurned—outraged—'tis the Gods demand his death. PAUL. They hear our prayers— FELIX. Nay, then let Polyeucte pray! PAUL. Since Decius gives thee power,—that word unsay! FELIX. He gives me power, Pauline, to do his will Against his foes—'gainst all who work him ill. PAUL. Is Polyeucte his foe? FELIX. All Christians rebels are. PAUL. Thy son shall plead more loud than policy or war. For mine is thine; O father, save thine own— FELIX. The son who is a traitor I disown! For treason is a crime without redress, 'Gainst which all else sinks into nothingness. PAUL. Too great thy rigour!

FELIX. Yet more great his guilt. PAUL. Too true my dream! Must his dear blood be spilt? With Polyeucte, I too—thy child—shall fall! FELIX. The Gods—the Emperor—rule over all. PAUL. O hear our dying supplication—hear! FELIX. Not Jove alone, but Decius I fear:— But why anticipate a doom so sad? Shall this—his blindness—make thy Polyeucte mad? Fresh Christian zeal remains not always new, The sight of death compels a saner view. PAUL. O, if thou lov'st him still, all hope forsake! In one day can he two conversions make? Not this the Christians' mould: they never change; His heart is fixed—past power of man to estrange. This is no poison quaffed all unawares, What martyrs do and dare—that Polyeucte dares; He saw the lure by which he was enticed, He thinks the universe well lost for Christ. I know the breed; I know their courage high, They love the cross,—so, for the cross, they die. We see two stakes of wood, the felon's shame, They see a halo round one matchless Name. To powers of earth, and hell, and torture blind, In death, for Him they love, they rapture find. They joy in agony,—our gain their loss, To die for Christ they count the world but dross: Our rack their crown, our pain their highest pleasure, And in the world's contempt they find their treasure. Their cherished heritage is—martyrdom! FELIX. Let then this heir into his kingdom come! No more!— PAUL. O father! (Enter Albin.) FELIX. Albin, is it done? ALBIN. It is,—Nearchus' frantic race is run! FELIX. And with what eye saw Polyeucte the sight? ALBIN. With envious eye,—as one who sees a light That lures him, moth-like, to devouring flame. His heart is fixed, his mind is still the same. PAUL. 'Tis as I said—oh, father, yet once more If thou hast ever loved me,—I implore! Let filial duty and obedience plead For his dear life! To my last prayer give heed! FELIX. Too much thou lovest an unworthy lord! PAUL. Thou gavest him my hand, 'twas at thy word I gave both love and duty; what I give I take not back; oh, Polyeucte must live! For his dear sake I quenched another flame Most pure. Is he my lord alone in name? O, by my blind and swift obedience paid To thy command—be thy hard words unsaid! I gave thee all a daughter had to give, Grant, father, this one

prayer—Let Polyeucte live! By thy stern power, which now I only fear, Make thou that power benignant, honoured, dear! Thou gav'st that gift unsought,—that gift restore! I claim it at the giver's hand once more! FELIX. Importunate! Although my heart is soft, It is not wax,—and these entreaties oft Repeated waste thy breath, and vex mine ear, For man is deaf to what he will not hear. I am the master! This let all men know, And if thou force that note thou'lt find 'tis so. Prepare to see thy cursed Christian fool, Do thou caress when I have scourged the mule,— Go! vex no more a loving father's ear, From Polyeucte's self win what thou hold'st so dear. PAUL. In pity!—— FELIX. Leave me, leave me here alone!— Say more—my goaded heart will turn to stone; Vex me no more—I will not be denied! Go, save thy madman from his suicide! (Exit Pauline.) How met Nearchus death? ALBIN. The fiend abhorred He hailed,—embraced: 'For Christ!' his latest word; No sigh, no tear,—he passed without amaze Adown the narrow vale with upward gaze. FELIX. And he—his friend? ALBIN. Is, as I said, unmoved He looks on death but as a friend beloved, He clasped the scaffold as a guide most sure, And, in his prison, he can still endure. FELIX. Oh, wretched that I am! ALBIN. All pity thee. FELIX. With reason greater than they know. Ah, me! Thought surges upon thought, and has its will, Care, gnawing upon care, my soul must kill; Love—hate—fear—pain: I am of each the prey, I grope for light, but never find the day! Oh, what I suffer thou canst not conceive, Each passion rages, but can ne'er relieve; For I have noble thoughts that die still-born, And I have thoughts so base my soul I scorn. I love the foolish wretch who is my son, I hate the folly which hath all undone; I mourn his death,—yet, if I Polyeucte save, I see of all my hopes the cruel grave! 'Gainst Gods and Emperor too sore the strife, For my renown I fear,—fear for my life. I must myself undo to save my son, For, should I spare him, then am I undone! ALBIN. Decius a father is, and must excuse A father's love—oh, he will not refuse! FELIX. His edict is most clear:—'All Christians are my foes.' The higher be their rank the more the evil grows. If birth and state be high, their crime shows more notorious, If he who shield

be great, his fall the more inglorious; And if I give Nearchus to the flame Yet stoop to shield my own—thrice damned my name! ALBIN. If by thy fiat he cannot escape the grave, Implore of Decius' grace the life thou canst not save. FELIX. So would Severus work my ruin quite— I fear his power, his wrath,—for might is right— If crime with punishment I do not mate. How high soe'er, worth what it may, I fear his hate, For he is man, and feels as man, and I Once spurned his suit with base indignity. Yes, he at Decius' ear would work may woe, He loves Pauline, thus Polyeucte is his foe: All weapons possible to love and war, And those who let them rust but laggards are. I fear—and fear doth give our vision scope— E'en now he cherisheth a tender hope; He sees his rival prostrate in the dust, So, as a man he hopes—because he must. Can dark despair to love and hope give place To save the guilty from deserved disgrace? And were his worth so matchless, so divine, As to forbear all ill to me and mine Still I must own the base, the coward hope, 'Gainst which my strength is all too weak to cope, That hope whose phoenix ashes yet enthrall The wretch who rises but once more to fall; Ambition is my master, iron Fate, I feel, obey, adore thee, while I hate! Polyeucte was once my guard, my pride, my shield, Yet can I, by Severus, weapons wield, Should he my daughter wed, more tried, more true: What wills Severus—that will Decius do. Upheld by him, e'en Fortune I defy And yet I shrink!—for them, thrice base were I! ALBIN. Perish the word! It ne'er was made for thee, But wilt thou deal just meed to treachery? FELIX. I go to Polyeucte's cell,—though my poor breath Should there be spent in vain to avert his death; Then, then my fated child her strength shall try. ALBIN. What wilt thou do if both he still defy? FELIX. O, press me not in agony so great! To thee alone I turn—resistless Fate!

ACT IV—POLYEUCTE. CLEON. THREE OTHER GUARDS

POLY. What is thy will? CLEON. Pauline would see my lord. POLY. Ah, how my heart quails at that single word! Thee, Felix, I o'ercame within my cell, Laughed at thy threats if death and torture fell; Yet hast thou still one arm to rouse my fears, The rest I scorn, but dread thy daughter's tears! One only talisman remains; great God, 'tis mine, Sufficient for my every need His strength divine! O thou, dear saint, thy scars all healed, white-robed, in glory crowned, Plead that I too may victory win, thou who hast victory found! Nearchus, who hast clasped in Heaven that dear, that pierced hand, Plead that thy friend, who wrestles here, may safely by thee stand! Ye Guards, one last kind service, I would ask, Well may ye grant it, 'tis an easy task: I do not seek deliverance from these thralls, (Looks at his chains.) I do not care to scale my prison walls, But, since three warriors armed can surely guard One fettered man in safest watch and ward, Go one, and beg of great Severus' grace That he would deign to meet me face to face; To him would I a secret now impart, Which much concerns his joy and peace of heart. CLEON. On willing foot, my lord, do I obey. POLY. Severus must this kindly service pay; Ah, lose no time, time now has fleetest wings. CLEON. Full soon to thee thy prayer Severus brings. (Exit Cleon. Guardsmen retire to background.) POLY. The fount is pure, yet bitter waters flow, Sin taints—men poison what was made all fair. They will not choose immortal streams: they go To seek for pleasure—but find only care: Their pleasure wed to strife—ah, death the gate of life,— Christ's servants, none but they His crown shall wear! So pain Is gain: Count not the cost! The world well lost, His Heaven to share! O Pleasure, think not that I sigh for thee, Thy charms, that once enslaved, no more delight; In Christ's dear name I bid the tempter flee, His foes are mine,—unlovely in my sight. The mighty from their seat He hurls beneath His feet, His fan is in His hand, His vengeful sword is bright. Their crown Cast down. All hopes most dear They cherish here Shall end in night. O Decius! Tiger! Pitiless! Athirst With quenchless rage, for blood of Christ's redeemed— Armenia shall arise, by thee accursed, On her at last has Light of Asia beamed, And our Deliverer from the holy

east Shall dash the cup from thy Belshazzar feast! Secure, And pure, Christ's saints shall reign, And, purged by pain, For aye endure! Let Felix sacrifice me to thine ire, Yea, let my rival captivate the soul Of her who now with Decius doth conspire To chain immortal hope to earthly goal; Let earth-bound men pursue the world's desire, Sense charms not him who doth to Heaven aspire! Hail pain! Disdain All Earthly love, To seek above A holier fire! Oh, Love that passeth knowledge be my stay, And fire my heart to beat alone for thee! Sun of my soul?—oh, flash one purest ray In that last hour supreme—to comfort me, So life's brief night shall merge in endless day! Come, Death! Last breath Shall praise thy name, The same, the same, For aye! For aye! O heavenly fire, most pure, embracing all, Come, shield me from Pauline, else must I fall! I see her, but no more as once I saw— I am encased in armour without flaw: To eyes that gaze alone on heavenly light, Naught else is pure, or dear, or fair, or bright! (Enter Pauline) With what intent, Pauline, hast thou come here? Have I a friend to aid, or foe to fear? Is it Christ's soldier that thou com'st to greet? Or wouldst thou sink my triumph in defeat? If thou wouldst bid me spurn the debt I owe, Not Decius, but Pauline, my deadliest foe! PAUL. All, save thyself, to thee, my love, are friends: Love but thyself, love me,—thy torment ends. Alone thou seal'st thy doom, alone wouldst shed That blood by all Armenia honoured. Yes, thou art saved, if thou for mercy plead; Demand thy death, and thou are lost indeed. Think of the worth of this self-hated life, And think in pity of Pauline,—thy wife! Think of the people that their prince adores, Think of the honours Felix on thee pours! Oh, I am nothing, nothing unto thee, But, husband, think how dear thou art to me! Think how the path of glory on thee opes, Thou dearest lodestar of a nation's hopes! Shall blood of kings be but the headsman's sport? Is life a toy wherewith thy death to court? POLY. I think of more than this; I know what thou wouldst say. Our life is ours to use, and we that debt must pay. What life is this men love? An idle, empty dream, Where nothing can endure,—where all things only seem. Death ends their every joy which fickle Fortune leaves, They gain a royal throne to learn how

pomp deceives; They gather wealth that men may envy their estate, They clear a path by blood, so envy turns to hate. Such vast ambition mine as Caesar never knew, Death bounds it not, for death is but its servant true. Peace that the world ne'er gave, and cannot take away, That peace, Pauline, is mine, mine wholly, mine for aye! Nor time, nor fate, nor chance, nor cruel war, Can touch this peace, or this my kingdom mar. Is this poor life—the creature of a day For endless peace too great a price to pay? PAUL. 'Out on these Christian dreams!' my reason cries; Whene'er they speak of truth, they utter lies. Thou say'st: 'To win such prize my life is naught!' But is thy life thine own? How was it bought? Our life an heirloom to our country due; What gave thee birth, demands thy service too? Pay, then thy debt to her who has the right! POLY. Ah, for my country I would gladly fight! I know the glory of a hero's name, I feel the thrill,—I recognise the claim. My life I owe to whom I owe my sword— But most to Him who gave it—to the Lord! Oh, if to die for fatherland be sweet, To die for Him—my God—what word is meet? PAUL. Which God? POLY. Hush! hush! Pauline; the God who hears And answers prayers,—gives hopes, assuages fears. Thy gods are deaf and senseless, maimed and weak, Tongues, mouths they have, and yet they cannot speak. The Christians' God alone is mine,—is thine, Jehovah only rules—supreme—divine! PAUL. Adore Him in thy heart, but say no word! POLY. What! Can I call Jove and Jehovah—Lord? PAUL. One moment feign. Ah, let Severus go! Let but my father all his kindness show! POLY. Another Father mine! His love most dear Removes me from a world begirt with fear. For life's stern race too weak, too frail am I, So, by kind death, He gives me Victory. Pure from the holy font—(His mercies never fail!) He brings His barque to port, when it hath scarce set sail. Couldst thou but understand how poor this earth, Couldst thou but grasp how great this second birth! And yet, why speak of treasure rare concealed From one to whom light is yet unrevealed? PAUL. O cruel! I can strangle pain no more! Is this the fruit of all thy heavenly lore? They say thy Christ His enemies did bless, Thou addest insult to my deep distress. How is my soul so

dark—which was so fair?— Thou call'dst me 'lovely'—'dear'—'beyond compare!'— Of my bereavement have I said no word, I stilled my grief that I might soothe my lord! They say that love has wings, and all they say is true, For all thy love has flown; yet can I ne'er undo The vows I made, the troth I plighted binds me still! Thou fain wouldst quit thy wife, and thou shalt have thy will. Oh, but to leave my side with rapture, ecstasy, No jealous Christ can will: why grudge me one poor sigh? This joy, this transport fierce, endeavour to conceal. I do not share thy creed, but I, at least, can feel! Why gloat o'er heavenly gain, crowns, palms, I know not what— Where Polyeucte is blest, but where Pauline is not? Soul, body, spirit, I am thy true wife, to own That I am but a bar to happiness unknown! POLY. Alas! PAUL. O! that 'Alas!'—so faint, so tame! Yet, if repentant from thy heart it came, 'Twould waken hope, still brief, and banish fears: I wait the birth of thy reluctant tears. POLY. These tears I shed! O, might the Spirit pour Through them the light, the light that I adore— Then were my only grief all swept away, For thou wouldst join me in the realms of day! Else Heaven itself would have its bitterness, Should I look down to witness thy distress! O God, who lov'st the dust on which Thy breath Hath stamped Thine image true—save her from death! The only death that kills, and let my love From Heaven woo her to the realms above! Lord, hear my call! My inmost heart now see, Who lives a Christian life must Christian be! Her nature god-like, stamped from print divine; She must be sealed Thine own, yes, only Thine! Say, must she burn, condemned to depths of hell?— Thy Will be done—Who doest all things well! PAUL. O wretch, what words are these? Thou dost desire—— POLY. To snatch thee from a never-ending fire. PAUL. Or else? POLY. O God, I trust to Thy control, Who when we think not, canst illume the soul! The when—the how—is His—here am I dumb,— I wait—I wait—That blessed hour will come! PAUL. Oh, leave illusions! Love me! POLY. Thee I love Far more than self, but less than God above! PAUL. For love's dear sake, ah, listen to my prayer! POLY. For love's dear sake—await the answer there! PAUL. To leave me here is naught! Thou wouldst

seduce my soul! POLY. Heaven is scarce Heaven for me, if thou reach not the goal. PAUL. O fancy-fooled! POLY. Nay, led by heavenly light! PAUL. Thy faith is blindness! POLY. Faith is more than sight! PAUL. Ah, death, strange rival to a wife's pure love! POLY. This world our rival with the joys above! PAUL. Go, monster! woo thy death! Thou lov'dst me never! POLY. Go, seek the world! and yet I love thee ever! PAUL. Yes, I will go—if absence bring relief— (Enter Severus, Fabian and Guards) Who comes to invade, ah, not to cure my grief? Severus! Who could guess that thou wouldst show Revenge unworthy o'er a prostrate foe? POLY. Unworthy thee the thought, Pauline, for I Severus called, and he hath heard my cry. My importunity he will excuse, My prayer I know that he will not refuse. Severus—this—the treasure that was mine To thy most tender care I now resign: To thee, as noblest man that I have known;— Since earthly ties and joys I must disown. The gift is worthy thee,—I know thy worth Is great, but she no equal hath on earth. My life, the bar,—my death the link shall be,— Oh, grudge me not my dear brief ecstasy! Oh, ease the heart that once was hers,—and guide Her doubting footsteps to the Crucified! This my last benison! All else is poor! Await the promised light! Believe! Endure! But words are vain! (Polyeucte signs to Guards to conduct him back to prison. Exeunt Polyeucte and Guards.) SEV. Most vain! No word have I Such blindness must amaze! must stupefy! Nay, this is frenzy! I cannot conceive A mind so strange! Mine ears cannot believe That one who loved thee—yet, who would not love A face that must the great immortals move?— Blessed by thy heart!—Thy sweetest lips to taste!— Then leave, refuse, spurn—yield with clamorous haste, To yield a girl so dear—so pure—so fair! And of that gift to make thy rival heir— This beggars madness! Or the Christian bliss Beyond man's soul to grasp! To spurn thy kiss!— We treasure barter for a just exchange, But to buy pain for thee! Pauline, 'tis strange! Not thus, ye Gods! Severus had been blind To perfect bliss—had Fortune been more kind The only heaven for me is in thine eyes, These are my kings, these my divinities! To me—for thee—were death with torture dear;

But to renounce thee! PAUL. Nay, I must not hear! Thy words bring back the dear, the bygone days, When I, a maid, might listen to thy praise: Severus, thou must know my inmost heart; I hear the knell bids Polyeucte depart. He dies,—the victim of thine Emperor's laws, And thou, though innocent, art yet the cause. Oh, if thy soul, to thy desires a slave, See hope emerging from my husband's grave Then will I wed with pain—despair embrace,— But wed Severus? Never! 'Twere disgrace! To light fresh torch from that pale, flickering fire— Oh, bliss too monstrous! Thrice abhorred desire! Back, hope! Back, happiness! The mate for me When Polyeucte leaves my side—is Constancy! Were this my will, were this, ye Gods, my fate— To shame would memory turn, as love must yield to hate! But generous art thou—most generous be! His pardon will my father grant to thee. He fears thee: more, if Polyeucte's life he take, For thee he slays him—yes, 'tis for thy sake. Christ died for man—let pagan virtue dim His fame: plead for thy foe! so rival him! No easy boon I ask, there needs a soul most rare; But when the fight is fierce—then is the victory fair. To help a man to be what thou wouldst be Is triumph that belongs alone to thee! Let this suffice thee: she, whom thou hast loved, She, who by thy great love was not unmoved, Of thee, and of no other dares to crave That thou, Severus, shouldst my husband save! Farewell! of this thy labour gauge the scope: If thou art less than I yet dare to hope, Then tell me not! all else Pauline can bear! (Exit Pauline.) SEV. Where am I, Fabian? Has the crack of doom Turned heaven to hell? made life a living tomb? Nearer and dearer ever—but to go! The prize within my grasp must I o'erthrow? This—Fortune's brimming cup, with poison filled, She bids me drain;—so new-born hope is killed. Before I proffer aught, I am refused; Thus sad, amazed, ashamed, in doubt, abused, I see the ghost I laid, to life revive, The more seductive still the more I strive. Ah! must a woman, sunk in deep despair, Teach me that shame is base, and honour fair? And while I madly shriek, 'O love, be kind!' Pauline, death-stricken, keeps an equal mind! O generous, but stern! Must these dear eyes, Because I love them, o'er love tyrannise? 'Tis not enough to lose thee, I must

give My aid—to make my faithless rival live! 'Tis not enough: his death I would not plan, But I must save him! bless where I would ban! FABIAN. Ah, let the whole crew light one funeral pyre; Yes, let the daughter perish with her sire! This curs'd Armenian is one hornet's nest— Crush all, then sail for Rome, ah! this were best! She loves thee not. What canst thou hope to gain? SEV. A glory that shall triumph over pain; 'Tis hers, and, by the Gods, it shall be mine! Nor God nor fiend can sully such a shrine! FABIAN. Speak low, for Jove has bolts, and Hell has ears! The dangers of this course arouse my fears. What? Decius implore a Nazarene to save! 'Tis death that hath thy heart; thou woo'st a grave. His rage against the sect thou knowest well, His power unbridled—his revenge is fell. To plead for Christians is a task too great, For man or God: thou rushest on thy fate. SEV. Yes, such advice, I know, is much approved, Yet not thus can Severus' soul be moved. To Fate unequal—equal to myself— In duty's path I go. For power and pelf I never swerve where honour leads the way; Come weal, come woe, her call I must obey. Let fate depress an all unequal scale, Let Clothe hold her distaff—I'll not fail! Yet one more word—this to thy private ear— The fables that thou dost of Christians hear Are fables only, coined, I know not why, Distorted are they seen in Decius' eye. They practice the black art,—so all men say. I sought to learn the laws that they obey, And to discover what the secret guilt The which to expiate their blood is spilt. Yet priests of Cybele dark rites pursue At Rome—untrammelled—this is nothing new: To thousand gods men build, unchecked, their fanes, The Christians' God alone our state disdains. Each foul Egyptian beast his temple rears, Caligula a god to Roman ears— Tiberius is enshrined—a Nero deified— To Christ—to Christ alone—a temple is denied! Such metamorphoses confuse the mind As gods in cats, and saints in fiends we find; As Ruler absolute Jehovah stands, Alone o'er heaven and earth and hell commands, While pagan gods each 'gainst the other strive, And ne'er one queen is found o'er all the hive, Now—(strike me dead, Jove's tarrying thunderbolt!) So many masters must provoke revolt. And ah! where Christians live—there life is

pure, Vice dies untended, virtues all endure. We give these men to rack, and cord, and flame, While they forgive us—in their Pardoner's name. They no sedition raise, they ne'er rebel, Rome makes them soldiers, and they serve her well. They rage in battle, faithful ward they keep, They fight like lions, but they die like sheep. They serve the State: Rome's servant must defend Those who to might of Rome such succour lend. Pauline, I will obey, whate'er befall; The man who loseth honour loseth all.

ACT V—FELIX. ALBIN. CLEON

FELIX. Caught in Severus' net thy Felix see! He hates and holds me—oh, the misery! ALBIN. I see a generous man, who cries, 'Forgive, Let Pauline smile once more—let Polyeucte live!' FELIX. His soul thou canst not read—tho' noble heart he feigns. The father he abhors,—the daughter he disdains! What Polyeucte won he sought: his suit denied, Severus sues no more,—I know his pride. His words, his prayers, his threats for Polyeucte plead, His tongue says, 'Listen, or be lost indeed!' Unskilled the fowler who his snare reveals: If at the bait I snatch—my doom is sealed: Too plain, too coarse, this web for any fly— Shall I this spider hail in my fatuity? His wrath is wrath arranged, his generous fire is nursed, That I, at Decius' hand, may meet the doom accurst, If I should pardon grant—that grace my crime would be, For he the spoil would reap of my credulity. No simpleton am I, each promise to believe, Words—oaths—are but the tools wherewith all men deceive; Too oft escaped am I to be so lightly caught; I know that words are wind. I know that wind is naught. The trapper shall be trapped,—the biter shall be bit, Unravelled is the web that he, poor fool, hath knit! ALBIN. Jove! What a plague to thee is this mistrust! FELIX. Nay, those at court must fence; their weapons never rust, If once thou yield the clue to thread the maze, The sequence is most plain—the man betrayed betrays; Severus, and his gifts, alike I fear! If Polyeucte still to reason close

his ear, Severus' love is hate—his peace is strife— First law of nature this, 'Preserve thy life!' ALBIN. Ah, let Pauline at least thy grace obtain! FELIX. If Decius grace withhold, my pardon vain! And—far from saving this rebellious son— Behold us all alike entrapped, undone! ALBIN. Severus' promise—— FELIX. He can never keep! For Decius' rage and hatred never sleep: If for that sect abhorred Severus plead, He trebles loss—so are we lost indeed! One only way is ours,—that way I try: (To Guards) Bring Polyeucte and if he still defy, Self-doomed, insensate, this my proffered grace, He shall the death he wooes forthwith embrace! ALBIN. Ah, this is stern! FELIX. 'Tis stern, 'tis just—as fate; When justice drags a halting foot, too late, She is not justice—for the vengeful mob (Whose hearts for Polyeucte ne'er cease to throb), Usurps her place, and, spurning curb and rein, The felon crowns, and all our work is vain. My sceptre trembles, and all insecure Totters my crown,—a prey for every boor. Then, swift, Severus hears the welcome news, The jaundiced mind of Decius to abuse. Shall I, the rabble's lord, obey the rabble's will? ALBIN. Who ill in all around foresees,—but doubles ill. Each prop thou hast is but a sword to pierce; If Polyeucte hold their heart, the people fierce Will gather fiercer courage from despair. FELIX. Death settles all; they'll find no helper there, And if—without a head—the body should rebel, Convulsive throes I mock, and nerveless fury quell. Whate'er ensues the Emperor must approve, I shall have done my part, and win his love. Here comes the man (Enter Polyeucte and Soldiers) I still must try to save; If he repent—'tis well! If not—the grave! (To Polyeucte) Is life still hateful? Doth death still allure? Is earth still naught? Do heavenly joys endure? Doth Christ still counsel thee to hate thy wife;— To sheathe thy sword,—to cast away thy life? POLY. I never hated life, or wooed a grave, To life I am a servant—not a slave. Here service free I give upon this earth below,— For higher service changed when to His Home I go. Eternal life is this: to tread the path He trod; To Him your body yield! Then trust your soul to God! FELIX. Yes, trust to an abyss of depth unknown! POLY. No, trust to Holy Cross! That Cross my own! FELIX. The steep ascent, my

son, I too would climb, Yes, I would Christian be,—but—give me time,— By Jove! I'll tread thy path! This my desire. Else at thy hand the judge may me require! POLY. Nay, laugh not, Felix! He thy Judge will be, No refuge there for impious blasphemy! Nor kings nor clowns can 'scape His righteous ire, His slaughtered Saints of thee will He require! FELIX. I'll slay no more;—by Hercules I swear! So I a Christian crown perchance may wear; I will protect the flock! POLY. Nay, rather be A goad, a scourge, for their felicity! Let suffering purify each Christian soul, Cross, rack, and flame but lead them to their goal; What here they lose—in Heaven an hundredfold they find. Be cruel,—persecute!—and so alone be kind! My words thou canst not read; thine eyes are blinded here, Wait the unveiling There! Then understand and fear! FELIX. Nay, nay, in truth I would a Christian be! POLY. In thy hard heart alone a bar I see. FELIX (whispering). This Roman knight—— POLY (aloud). Severus, thou wouldst say. FELIX. Once let him sail, I will no more delay, For this I anger feign;—let him depart! POLY. 'Tis thus thou wouldst reveal a Christian heart? To idols dumb—to Pagans blind, thy sugared poison bear, Christ's servants quaff another cup, sure refuge from despair. FELIX. What is this deadly draught that thou wouldst drain? I'll drink thy wine.—Till then, from death refrain! POLY. To swine no more my holy pearls I cast, Faith,—faith—not reason, shall see light at last; Soon—when I see my God—yes, face to face, I will implore that Felix may find grace. FELIX. O dearest son, thy loss were death to me! POLY. This loss can be repaired—the remedy Find in Severus; he will take my place; By Decius honoured he will not disgrace Thy house: my death will an advantage win For thee, for her, for me.—The work begin! FELIX. Such my reward! Yes, insult is the child Of injury. The grace I grant, reviled, Shall turn to swift revenge. The gods defied May do their will and speed the suicide! POLY. I thought the gods were dead, but they revive With human passion; Felix, do not strive Against thy nature; lay aside thy ruth; Who loves a lie can never follow truth. FELIX. I humoured madness, but the mood is o'er, I am myself again; I did implore,— 'Twas vain; the dark abyss that

yawns for thee May hold thee now, tomb to thy constancy. The hope I cherished—fondled—now is flown Severus will be king, and I o'erthrown;— Shall I the gods by incense pacify? Or by thy death? for thou, at last, must die! POLY. Incense might but incense; I cannot tell: (Enter Pauline) Pauline! PAUL. That word broke from thee like a knell; Who seeks my doom to-day? Thou—or my sire? Who fires the brand? Who lights the funeral pyre? My father should, by nature, be my friend, And lover's heart to love an ear should lend. Who here is mine ally, and who my foe? Who has a heart to feel?—this would I know. FELIX. Nay, to thy lord appeal. (Pauline turns to Polyeucte) POLY. Severus wed! PAUL. Ah, this is outrage! Rather strike me dead! POLY. Oh, dearer than myself to me thy weal! My love would never wound, it seeks to heal. I see thee wrestle with thy deep distress Alone—unless Severus bring redress; His merit, that once gained thy maiden heart, Hath still that worth when I from thee must part, Once loved—and loving still—his honour grows. PAUL. Thy wife's true heart another treatment owes: O base reproach! For this I crushed for thee My former love: that I disdained might be? This my reward for dearest victory won,— I did that love undo—to be myself undone! Resolve, faith, abnegation, all were vain, For thy return is outrage heaped on pain. Oh, sunk in tomb of shame, most vile, most mean, Come back to life—to honour—to Pauline! (Holds out her arms.) To learn from her that loyalty and faith Religion are:—and all beside but death! Once more Alcestis wrestles with the tomb, Arise, arise from thy enthralling doom! And if my invocation feeble be, Regard the tears—the sighs,—shed—breathed for thee! Love is too weak a word—I thee adore! POLY. Once have I said—yet now I say once more— 'Live with Severus, or—with Polyeucte die!' Thy tears are mine, and thy pure constancy I share: But—I am soldier of the Cross! Take up thine own, and count all gain but loss! Pauline—no more! (To FELIX.) Thy slumbering wrath rewake! Thy fates and furies wait! Their vengeance slake! PAUL. His life is saved! These fetters all undo!— For justice never yet a madman slew; And he is mad,—but, father, thou art sane, And thou, his

father, must his friend remain. A father cannot less than father be, Oh, be to him what thou hast been to me! But cast upon thy child a kinder eye,— Slay him?—Then know that I am doomed to die! But even if justly done to death were he, The sentence wrong that, with him, slayeth me. For double death would double wrong present, And slay the guilty with the innocent. 'Twas thou didst link us closely hand in hand, 'To live in bliss together' thy command. Oh, shall the will that both our lives did bless Doom both these lives to death—to nothingness? When lips are sealed to lips, and heart to heart, 'Tis tyranny, not law, such love to part. Oh, not a tyrant, but a father be, Forgive,—give back—restore my love to me! FELIX. Dear child, thy father is thy father still, Nothing hath parted us, and nothing will. My heart is tender, and it beats for thee: Against this madman let us joined be. O wretched man, hast thou no eyes to see, no heart to feel? Thy guilt, thy crime, I would efface, thy pardon I would seal, For thee my daughter cannot die—say, must she die with thee? A victim to the only sin which ne'er can pardoned be. O sight most strange! Here at thy knees as suppliant I sue! (Felix kneels.) The evil that thyself hast wrought—that ill thyself undo! POLY. Arise, old man, from knees unused to bend, Or to another ear petition send! This artifice befits nor me nor thee, To beg of one twice threatened!—Mockery! First, by thy hand Nearchus felt the flame, Then love, forsooth, thy plea—(profaned name!) The path of Christian neophyte hast thou trod, And, in God's name, hast mocked Almighty God! Earth, heaven, and hell in turn have been thy tool, And him thou hast traduced thou wouldst befool! Go,—bully-flatterer—liar!—Every part Thou playest, while delay doth break my heart! Enough of dallying! While thou dost dissolve Thy feeble soul in doubt, hear my resolve: The God who made me—Him will I adore; He holds my plighted faith,—and evermore He works salvation for his ransomed race— Who gave His Son to death that we might life embrace; And this—Christ's sacrifice—continued day by day, The Christ reveals and pleads—The Life—The Truth—The Way! No more His mysteries to self-stopped ears Will I disclose—(he heedeth not nor hears.)

(Pointing to Felix.) Pray then to these thy gods of wood and stone, To gods who every deed of crime enthrone, Who boast their malice, and their foul incest, Vaunt theft and murder—all that we detest. This, their example,—Pagan—follow thou! To Pluto bend, to Aphrodite bow! For this I broke their altars, rased their shrine,— Yea, for those crimes that thou dost call divine! And what I did, that would I do once more Before Severus—Decius,—nay, before The eyes of all men;—so would I proclaim One God alone adored,—one Holiest Name! FELIX. At last my bounties yield to wrath most stern, most just. Die! or the gods adore! POLY. A Christian I! FELIX. Thou must Adore the gods I say! Adore, or die! POLY. I am a Christian. FELIX. This is thy reply? Ye Guards, do my behest—prepare the knife! PAUL. Where goes he? FELIX. To his death! POLY. Ah, no to life! (To Pauline.) Remember me! Farewell, Pauline, farewell! PAUL. Nay, I will follow thee—to heaven or hell! FELIX. Begone! For all our ills this one redress! (Exeunt Pauline, Polyeucte and Guards.) (Enter Albin) O task ungrateful to my gentle mind! Well did he say, 'Be cruel to be kind!' The people I defy, ah, let them rage! Severus may in war of words engage. Yes, I have saved myself—I mean the State, To wilful man there comes relentless fate; My conscience pure of all reproach,—for I Have lied and stormed to shake his constancy. To give his hot young blood due time to cool I played the coward—nay, I played the fool! Why did he thus assail the gods and me With insult, and with horrid blasphemy? But interest helped me, and resentment too. Else had I found my duty hard to do! ALBIN. Soon mayst thou this thy dear-bought victory rue, For thou hast done what thou canst ne'er undo! Unworthy deed for Roman knight! ah, me! (Aside.) I would that I could add, 'unworthy thee!' FELIX. Manlius and Brutus both a son have slain, And neither did thereby his glory stain; The part that is diseased—that part we bleed, So is the State from knaves and caitiffs freed. ALBIN. Revenge and pressing peril thee unman, Else—couldst thou bless a deed all men must ban? When she, thy widowed daughter, comes—the air Of heaven will echo to her deep despair! FELIX. Thou dost remind me she with

Polyeucte went— I know not with what mind, with what intent: But her despair awakes my fond alarm, Go, Albin, go, and guard my child from harm! She might the execution of the law Impede: I would not that his death she saw. Try to console her—Go! what dost thou fear? (Enter Pauline) ALBIN. I need not go, for ah—Pauline is here! PAUL. Tyrant, why leave thy butchery half done? Come, slay thy daughter, thou hast slain thy son! For, hear!—His villainy—or worth—is mine! Why stay thy hand while I my neck incline? Thy sword in me shall find a kindred food, I too am new baptized, baptized in blood! These drops that fell from off the murderous knife, Have made the martyr's widow a true wife. I see!—I feel!—I know! My darkest night Is o'er—to break in purest heavenly light. I too, at last, am Christ's: that word says all, Those hands were pierced for me—I hear His call: Death—lovely death—thy beckoning hand I hail! Oh, help my passage, or thy schemes may fail! Dread Decius! Fear Severus! Fear thy fall! Oh, speed me to my lord—my love—my all! My husband calls me to his happier land— See!—there Nearchus at his side doth stand! Lead me to these—the gods by thee confest, Some shrines spared Polyeucte, I will break the rest! There, there the gods thou fearest I will brave, Oh, bare thy knife!—no other gift I crave. Thou hast my master been: another Lord Claims my obedience now; yes, raise thy sword! Revolt is holy when for Christ we fight,— My day has dawned, the day that knows no night! Once more I cry—'Christ only has my heart!' Thy bliss and mine secure! Let me depart! Keep thou thy kingdom! Safe its treasure hold! My kingdom there—with Christ—within the fold! (Enter Severus) SEV. Unnatural sire, whose craft leads to the grave, The slaves of fear themselves alone enslave. Yes, Polyeucte is slain, and slain by thee,— A sacrifice to greed and treachery. I offered rescue from the opening tomb, Base doubts enthralled thee, didst seal his doom; I prayed, I threatened, thou wouldst not believe, Deceiver thou, so must all men deceive. Thou thoughtst me coward, liar—thou shalt see All oaths Severus swears fulfilled shall be. Poor moth! I might have saved thee—nay, I planned to save, Thy perfidy the torch that marks thee for

the grave. Drench earth in blood,—for Jove pour forth malignant zeal, The strokes that thou hast dealt redoubled shalt thou feel! I go: the storm shall break o'er this devoted land, From Jove the bolt?—maybe—but I direct his hand. FELIX. Why lags that hand? A willing victim I, I choose to suffer for my perfidy; My doubts, my fears unworthy, all I own, I have offended—let my death atone. Take thou my honours, their poor lustre thine, I kneel before another, nobler shrine. The Power that moved me, groping through the night Of wrong and darkness, wafts me to The Light! I slew thee, Polyeucte, but thy pardoning hand Shall guide thy murderer to the better land! He prays for me, and by his sacrifice, New-born upon his ashes I arise. (To Pauline.) Raised by his death from out the grave of sin, Thou tread'st the path thy father shall begin; By me his martyr-crown, as all my bliss By him. His Christ is mine, and I am his; O, blessed Christian vengeance! All my loss Is turned to gain by the redeeming Cross! Now, Pauline, am I thine, a Christian I, That Death gives life by which alike we die! (To Severus.) Then slay us both! Behold a willing prey! PAUL. (To Felix.) Yes, mine for ever now! Hail, glorious day, That sees earth's loss transformed to endless gain! FELIX. The gain, the glory, Christ's! By Him we reign. SEV. Now am I dumb, some miracle is here; Their courage and their faith must I revere; We slay them; yet, like Cadmus' seed, new-born They sprout afresh, and laugh our scythe to scorn. We give them cord and flame, they torture hail; Friends fail them, but themselves they never fail. We mow them down, fresh nurslings to unbare, What moves the seed lies hid, but it is there. They bless the world, though by the world accurst, Their shield am I—let Decius do his worst. I yet may own their power, though now my will That each to his own gods be faithful still, Let each still search for truth, and truth adore. (To Felix). A Christian thou? Then fear my wrath no more, Thy sect I cherish; this their awful cult Severus will protect, but ne'er insult. Keep thou thy power from Roman sword secure, So long as loyalty with faith endure; I swear it: ay, the Emperor shall learn The guiltless from the traitor to discern; His persecution baseless as his fear. FELIX. Severus—thou who hast the

hearing ear,— Freeman of Rome—God's Spirit grant thee grace To be Christ's Freeman, and behold His face: To these—Christ's martyrs—earth's last rites be given, Earth, guard their ashes as a trust for Heaven! Earth hides their dust. When envious time is o'er, That dust shall wake to life for evermore!

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