The Cenci: A Tragedy in Five Acts

Preface

A MANUSCRIPT was communicated to me during my travels in Italy, which was copied from the archives of the Cenci Palace at Rome, and contains a detailed account of the horrors which ended in the extinction of one of the noblest and richest families of that city during the Pontificate of Clement VIII, in the year 1599. The story is, that an old man having spent his life in debauchery and wickedness, conceived at length an implacable hatred towards his children; which showed itself towards one daughter under the form of an incestuous passion, aggravated by every circumstance of cruelty and violence. This daughter, after long and vain attempts to escape from what she considered a perpetual contamination both of body and mind, at length plotted with her mother-in-law and brother to murder their common tyrant. The young maiden, who was urged to this tremendous deed by an impulse which overpowered its horror, was evidently a most gentle and amiable being, a creature formed to adorn and be admired, and thus violently thwarted from her nature by the necessity of circumstance and opinion. The deed was quickly discovered, and, in spite of the most earnest prayers made to the Pope by the highest persons in Rome, the criminals were put to death. The old man had during his life repeatedly bought his pardon from the Pope for capital crimes of the most enormous and unspeakable kind, at the price of a hundred thousand crowns; the death therefore of his victims can scarcely be accounted for by the love of justice. The Pope, among other motives for severity, probably felt that whoever killed the Count Cenci
deprived his treasury of a certain and copious source of revenue. 1 Such a story, if told so as to present to the reader all the feelings of those who once acted it, their hopes and fears, their confidences and misgivings, their various interests, passions, and opinions, acting upon and with each other, yet all conspiring to one tremendous end, would be as a light to make apparent some of the most dark and secret caverns of the human heart. 1

On my arrival at Rome I found that the story of the Cenci was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest; and that the feelings of the company never failed to incline to a romantic pity for the wrongs, and a passionate exculpation of the horrible deed to which they urged her, who has been mingled two centuries with the common dust. All ranks of people knew the outlines of this history, and participated in the overwhelming interest which it seems to have the magic of exciting in the human heart. I had a copy of Guido’s picture of Beatrice which is preserved in the Colonna Palace, and my servant instantly recognized it as the portrait of La Cenci. 2

This national and universal interest which the story produces and has produced for two centuries and among all ranks of people in a great City, where the imagination is kept for ever active and awake, first suggested to me the conception of its fitness for a dramatic purpose. In fact it is a tragedy which has already received, from its capacity of awakening and sustaining the sympathy of men, approbation, and success. Nothing remained as I imagined, but to clothe it to the apprehensions of my countrymen in such language and action as would bring it home to their hearts. The deepest and the sublimest tragic compositions, King Lear and the two plays in which the tale of Oedipus is told, were stories which already existed in tradition, as matters of popular belief and interest, before Shakespeare and
Sophocles made them familiar to the sympathy of all succeeding generations of mankind. 3

This story of the Cenci is indeed eminently fearful and monstrous: any thing like a dry exhibition of it on the stage would be insupportable. The person who would treat such a subject must increase the ideal, and diminish the actual horror of the events, so that the pleasure which arises from the poetry which exists in these tempestuous sufferings and crimes may mitigate the pain of the contemplation of the moral deformity from which they spring. There must also be nothing attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose. The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge, every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well: but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them. Undoubtedly, no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character: the few whom such an exhibition would have interested, could never have been sufficiently interested for a dramatic purpose, from the want of finding sympathy in their interest among the mass who surround them. It is in the restless and anatomising casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs, and their revenge, that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered, consists. 4
I have endeavoured as nearly as possible to represent the characters as they probably were, and have sought to avoid the error of making them actuated by my own conceptions of right or wrong, false or true: thus under a thin veil converting names and actions of the sixteenth century into cold impersonations of my own mind. They are represented as Catholics, and as Catholics deeply tinged with religion. To a Protestant apprehension there will appear something unnatural in the earnest and perpetual sentiment of the relations between God and men which pervade the tragedy of the Cenci. It will especially be startled at the combination of an undoubting persuasion of the truth of the popular religion with a cool and determined perseverance in enormous guilt. But religion in Italy is not, as in Protestant countries, a cloak to be worn on particular days; or a passport which those who do not wish to be railed at carry with them to exhibit; or a gloomy passion for penetrating the impenetrable mysteries of our being, which terrifies its possessor at the darkness of the abyss to the brink of which it has conducted him. Religion coexists, as it were, in the mind of an Italian Catholic, with a faith in that of which all men have the most certain knowledge. It is interwoven with the whole fabric of life. It is adoration, faith, submission, penitence, blind admiration; not a rule for moral conduct. It has no necessary connection with any one virtue. The most atrocious villain may be rigidly devout, and without any shock to established faith, confess himself to be so. Religion pervades intensely the whole frame of society, and is according to the temper of the mind which it inhabits, a passion, a persuasion, an excuse, a refuge; never a check. Cenci himself built a chapel in the court of his Palace, and dedicated it to St. Thomas the Apostle, and established masses for the peace of his soul. Thus in the first scene of the fourth act Lucretia’s design in exposing herself to the consequences of an expostulation with Cenci after having administered the opiate, was to induce him by
a feigned tale to confess himself before death; this being esteemed by Catholics as essential to salvation; and she only relinquishes her purpose when she perceives that her perseverance would expose Beatrice to new outrages. 5

I have avoided with great care in writing this play the introduction of what is commonly called mere poetry, and I imagine there will scarcely be found a detached simile or a single isolated description, unless Beatrice’s description of the chasm appointed for her father’s murder should be judged to be of that nature. 2 6

In a dramatic composition the imagery and the passion should interpenetrate one another, the former being reserved simply for the full development and illustration of the latter. Imagination is as the immortal God which should assume flesh for the redemption of mortal passion. It is thus that the most remote and the most familiar imagery may alike be fit for dramatic purposes when employed in the illustration of strong feeling, which raises what is low, and levels to the apprehension that which is lofty, casting over all the shadow of its own greatness. In other respects, I have written more carelessly; that is, without an overfastidious and learned choice of words. In this respect I entirely agree with those modern critics who assert that in order to move men to true sympathy we must use the familiar language of men, and that our great ancestors the ancient English poets are the writers, a study of whom might incite us to do that for our own age which they have done for theirs. But it must be the real language of men in general, and not that of any particular class to whose society the writer happens to belong. So much for what I have attempted; I need not be assured that success is a very different matter; particularly for one whose attention has but newly been awakened to the study of dramatic literature. 7

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I endeavoured whilst at Rome to observe such monuments of this story as might be accessible to a stranger. The portrait of Beatrice at the Colonna Palace is admirable as a work of art; it was taken by Guido during her confinement in prison. But it is most interesting as a just representation of one of the loveliest specimens of the workmanship of Nature. There is a fixed and pale composure upon the features; she seems sad and stricken down in spirit, yet the despair thus expressed is lightened by the patience of gentleness. Her head is bound with folds of white drapery from which the yellow strings of her golden hair escape, and fall about her neck. The moulding of her face is exquisitely delicate; the eyebrows are distinct and arched; the lips have that permanent meaning of imagination and sensibility which suffering has not repressed and which it seems as if death scarcely could extinguish. Her forehead is large and clear; her eyes which we are told were remarkable for their vivacity, are swollen with weeping and lustreless, but beautifully tender and serene. In the whole mien there is a simplicity and dignity which united with her exquisite loveliness and deep sorrow are inexpressibly pathetic. Beatrice Cenci appears to have been one of those rare persons in whom energy and gentleness dwell together without destroying one another: her nature was simple and profound. The crimes and miseries in which she was an actor and a sufferer are as the mask and the mantle in which circumstances clothed her for her impersonation on the scene of the world. 8

The Cenci Palace is of great extent; and though in part modernized, there yet remains a vast and gloomy pile of feudal architecture in the same state as during the dreadful scenes which are the subject of this tragedy. The Palace is situated in an obscure corner of Rome, near the quarter of the Jews, and from the upper windows you see the immense ruins of Mount Palatine half hidden under their profuse overgrowth of trees. There is a
court in one part of the Palace (perhaps that in which Cenci built the Chapel to St. Thomas), supported by granite columns and adorned with antique friezes of fine workmanship, and built up, according to the ancient Italian fashion, with balcony over balcony of open-work. One of the gates of the Palace formed of immense stones and leading through a passage, dark and lofty and opening into gloomy subterranean chambers, struck me particularly. 9

Of the Castle of Petrella, I could obtain no further information than that which is to be found in the manuscript. 10

Note 1. The Papal Government formerly took the most extraordinary precautions against the publicity of facts which offer so tragical a demonstration of its own wickedness and weakness; so that the communication of the MS. had become, until very lately, a matter of some difficulty.

Note 2. An idea in this speech was suggested by a most sublime passage in “El Purgatorio de San Patricio” of Calderon; the only plagiarism which I have intentionally committed in the whole piece.

Act I Scene I

An Apartment In The Cenci Palace.

Enter COUNT CENCI, and CARDINAL CAMILLO

Camillo

THAT matter of the murder is hushed up
If you consent to yield his Holiness
Your fief that lies beyond the Pincian gate.— 5
It needed all my interest in the conclave
To bend him to this point: he said that you
Bought perilous impunity with your gold;
That crimes like yours if once or twice compounded
Enriched the Church, and respited from hell 10
An erring soul which might repent and live:—
But that the glory and the interest
Of the high throne he fills, little consist
With making it a daily mart of guilt
As manifold and hideous as the deeds 15
Which you scarce hide from men’s revolted eyes.
Cenci. The third of my possessions—let it go!
Ay, I once heard the nephew of the Pope
Had sent his architect to view the ground,
Meaning to build a villa on my vines 20

The next time I compounded with his uncle:

I little thought he should outwit me so!

Henceforth no witness—not the lamp—shall see

That which the vassal threatened to divulge

Whose throat is choked with dust for his reward. 25

The deed he saw could not have rated higher

Than his most worthless life:—it angers me!

Respited me from Hell!—So may the Devil

Respite their souls from Heaven. No doubt Pope Clement,

And his most charitable nephews, pray 30

That the Apostle Peter and the saints

Will grant for their sake that I long enjoy

Strength, wealth, and pride, and lust, and length of days

Wherein to act the deeds which are the stewards

Of their revenue.—But much yet remains 35
To which they show no title.

Camillo. Oh, Count Cenci!

So much that thou mightst honourably live
And reconcile thyself with thine own heart
And with thy God, and with the offended world. 40

How hideously look deeds of lust and blood
Thro’ those snow white and venerable hairs!—
Your children should be sitting round you now,
But that you fear to read upon their looks
The shame and misery you have written there. 45

Where is your wife? Where is your gentle daughter?
Methinks her sweet looks, which make all things else
Beauteous and glad, might kill the fiend within you.
Why is she barred from all society
But her own strange and uncomplaining wrongs? 50

Talk with me, Count,—you know I mean you well.
I stood beside your dark and fiery youth

Watching its bold and bad career, as men

Watch meteors, but it vanished not—I marked

Your desperate and remorseless manhood; now 55

Do I behold you in dishonoured age

Charged with a thousand unrepented crimes.

Yet I have ever hoped you would amend,

And in that hope have saved your life three times.

Cenci. For which Aldobrandino owes you now 60

My fief beyond the Pincian-Cardinal,

One thing, I pray you, recollect henceforth,

And so we shall converse with less restraint.

A man you knew spoke of my wife and daughter—

He was accustomed to frequent my house; 65

So the next day his wife and daughter came

And asked if I had seen him; and I smiled:
I think they never saw him any more.

Camillo. Thou execrable man, beware!—

Cenci. Of thee? 70

Nay this is idle:—We should know each other.

As to my character for what men call crime

Seeing I please my senses as I list,

And vindicate that right with force or guile

It is a public matter, and I care not 75

If I discuss it with you. I may speak

Alike to you and my own conscious heart—

For you give out that you have half reformed me,

Therefore strong vanity will keep you silent

If fear should not; both will, I do not doubt. 80

All men delight in sensual luxury,

All men enjoy revenge; and most exult

Over the tortures they can never feel—
Flattering their secret peace with others’ pain.

But I delight in nothing else. I love 85

The sight of agony, and the sense of joy,

When this shall be another’s, and that mine.

And I have no remorse and little fear,

Which are, I think, the checks of other men.

This mood has grown upon me, until now 90

Any design my captious fancy makes

The picture of its wish, and it forms none

But such as men like you would start to know,

Is as my natural food and rest debarred

Until it be accomplished. 95

Camillo. Art thou not

Most miserable?

Cenci. Why, miserable?—

No.—I am what your theologians call
Hardened;—which they must be in impudence, 100

So to revile a man’s peculiar taste.

True, I was happier than I am, while yet

Manhood remained to act the thing I thought;

While lust was sweeter than revenge; and now

Invention palls:—Ay, we must all grow old— 105

And but that there yet remains a deed to act

Whose horror might make sharp an appetite

Duller than mine—I’d do—I know not what.

When I was young I thought of nothing else

But pleasure; and I fed on honey sweets: 110

Men, by St. Thomas! cannot live like bees,

And I grew tired:—yet, till I killed a foe,

And heard his groans, and heard his children’s groans,

Knew I not what delight was else on earth,

Which now delights me little. I the rather 115
Look on such pangs as terror ill conceals,
The dry fixed eyeball; the pale quivering lip,
Which tell me that the spirit weeps within
Tears bitterer than the bloody sweat of Christ.
I rarely kill the body, which preserves, 120
Like a strong prison, the soul within my power,
Wherein I feed it with the breath of fear
For hourly pain.

Camillo. Hell’s most abandoned fiend
Did never, in the drunkenness of guilt, 125
Speak to his heart as now you speak to me;
I thank my God that I believe you not.

Enter ANDREA

Andrea. My Lord, a gentleman from Salamanca
Would speak with you. 130

Cenci. Bid him attend me in the grand saloon. [Exit ANDREA.
Camillo. Farewell; and I will pray
Almighty God that thy false, impious words
Tempt not his spirit to abandon thee. [Exit CAMILLO.
Cenci. The third of my possessions! I must use 135
Close husbandry, or gold, the old man’s sword,
Falls from my withered hand. But yesterday
There came an order from the Pope to make
Fourfold provision for my cursed sons;
Whom I had sent from Rome to Salamanca, 140
Hoping some accident might cut them off;
And meaning if I could to starve them there.
I pray thee, God, send some quick death upon them!
Bernardo and my wife could not be worse
If dead and damned:—then, as to Beatrice— 145
(Looking around him suspiciously.)
I think they cannot hear me at the door;
What if they should? And yet I need not speak
Though the heart triumphs with itself in words.
O, thou most silent air, that shalt not hear 150
What now I think! Thou, pavement, which I tread
Towards her chamber,—let your echoes talk
Of my imperious step scorning surprise,
But not of my intent!—Andrea!

Enter ANDREA

155

Andrea. My lord?

Cenci. Bid Beatrice attend me in her chamber
This evening:—no, at midnight and alone. [Exeunt.]

Scene II

A Garden in the Cenci Palace.

Enter BEATRICE and ORSINO, as in conversation

Beatrice. Pervert not truth,
Orsino. You remember where we held
That conversation;—nay, we see the spot 5
Even from this cypress;—two long years are past
Since, on an April midnight, underneath
The moonlight ruins of mount Palatine,
I did confess to you my secret mind.
Orsino. You said you loved me then. 10
Beatrice. You are a Priest,
Speak to me not of love.
Orsino. I may obtain
The dispensation of the Pope to marry.
Because I am a Priest do you believe 15
Your image, as the hunter some struck deer,
Follows me not whether I wake or sleep?
Beatrice. As I have said, speak to me not of love:
Had you a dispensation I have not;
Nor will I leave this home of misery 20
Whilst my poor Bernard, and that gentle lady
To whom I owe life, and these virtuous thoughts,
Must suffer what I still have strength to share.
Alas, Orsino! All the love that once
I felt for you, is turned to bitter pain. 25
Ours was a youthful contract, which you first
Broke, by assuming vows no Pope will loose.
And thus I love you still, but holily,
Even as a sister or a spirit might;
And so I swear a cold fidelity. 30
And it is well perhaps we shall not marry.
You have a sly, equivocating vein
That suits me not.—Ah, wretched that I am!
Where shall I turn? Even now you look on me
As you were not my friend, and as if you 35
Discovered that I thought so, with false smiles
Making my true suspicion seem your wrong.
Ah no! forgive me; sorrow makes me seem
Sterner than else my nature might have been;
I have a weight of melancholy thoughts, 40
And they forbode,—but what can they forbode
Worse than I now endure?
Orsino. All will be well.
Is the petition yet prepared? You know
My zeal for all you wish, sweet Beatrice; 45
Doubt not but I will use my utmost skill
So that the Pope attend to your complaint.
Beatrice. Your zeal for all I wish;—Ah me, you are cold!
Your utmost skill … speak but one word … (aside) Alas!
Weak and deserted creature that I am, 50
Here I stand bickering with my only friend! [To ORSINO.
This night my father gives a sumptuous feast,
Orsino; he has heard some happy news
From Salamanca, from my brothers there,
And with this outward show of love he mocks 55
His inward hate. ’Tis bold hypocrisy,
For he would gladlier celebrate their deaths,
Which I have heard him pray for on his knees:
Great God! that such a father should be mine!
But there is mighty preparation made, 60
And all our kin, the Cenci, will be there,
And all the chief nobility of Rome.
And he has bidden me and my pale Mother
Attire ourselves in festival array.
Poor lady! She expects some happy change 65
In his dark spirit from this act; I none.
At supper I will give you the petition:
Till when—farewell.

Orsino. Farewell. (Exit BEATRICE.) I know the Pope
Will ne’er absolve me from my priestly vow 70
But by absolving me from the revenue
Of many a wealthy see; and, Beatrice,
I think to win thee at an easier rate.

Nor shall he read her eloquent petition:

He might bestow her on some poor relation 75
Of his sixth cousin, as he did her sister,
And I should be debarred from all access.

Then as to what she suffers from her father,
In all this there is much exaggeration:—
Old men are testy and will have their way; 80
A man my stab his enemy, or his vassal,
And live a free life as to wine and women,
And with a peevish temper may return
To a dull home, and rate his wife and children;
Daughters and wives call this foul tyranny. 85
I shall be well content if on my conscience
There rest no heavier sin than what they suffer
From the devices of my love—A net
From which she shall escape not. Yet I fear
Her subtle mind, her awe-inspiring gaze, 90
Whose beams anatomise me nerve by nerve
And lay me bare, and make me blush to see
My hidden thoughts.—Ah, no! A friendless girl
Who clings to me, as to her only hope:—
I were a fool, not less than if a panther 95
Were panic-stricken by the antelope’s eye,
If she escape me. [Exit.]

Scene III

A Magnificent Hall in the Cenci Palace. A Banquet.
Enter CENCI, LUCRETIA, BEATRICE, ORSINO, CAMILLO, NOBLES

Cenci. Welcome, my friends and kinsmen; welcome ye,

Princes and Cardinals, pillars of the church,

Whose presence honours our festivity. 5

I have too long lived like an anchorite,

And in my absence from your merry meetings

An evil word is gone abroad of me;

But I do hope that you, my noble friends,

When you have shared the entertainment here, 10

And heard the pious cause for which ’tis given,

And we have pledged a health or two together,

Will think me flesh and blood as well as you;

Sinful indeed, for Adam made all so,

But tender-hearted, meek and pitiful. 15

First Guest. In truth, My Lord, you seem too light of heart,
Too sprightly and companionable a man,
To act the deeds that rumour pins on you.
(To his companion.) I never saw such blithe and open cheer
In any eye! 20

Second Guest. Some most desired event,
In which we all demand a common joy,
Has brought us hither; let us hear it, Count.

Cenci. It is indeed a most desired event.

If, when a parent from a parent’s heart 25
Lifts from this earth to the great father of all
A prayer, both when he lays him down to sleep,
And when he rises up from dreaming it;
One supplication, one desire, one hope,
That he would grant a wish for his two sons, 30
Even all that he demands in their regard—
And suddenly beyond his dearest hope,
It is accomplished, he should then rejoice,

And call his friends and kinsmen to a feast,

And task their love to grace his merriment, 35

Then honour me thus far—for I am he.

Beatrice (to Lucretia). Great God! How horrible! Some dreadful ill

Must have befallen my brothers.

Lucretia. Fear not, Child,

He speaks too frankly. 40

Beatrice. Ah! My blood runs cold.

I fear that wicked laughter round his eye,

Which wrinkles up the skin even to the hair.

Cenci. Here are the letters brought from Salamanca;

Beatrice, read them to your mother. God! 45

I thank thee! In one night didst thou perform,

By ways inscrutable, the thing I sought.

My disobedient and rebellious sons
Are dead!—Why, dead!—What means this change of cheer?

You hear me not, I tell you they are dead; 50

And they will need no food or raiment more:

The tapers that did light them the dark way

Are their last cost. The Pope, I think, will not

Expect I should maintain them in their coffins.

Rejoice with me—my heart is wondrous glad. [LUCRETIA sinks, half-fainting; BEATRICE supports her. 55

Beatrice. It is not true!—Dear lady, pray look up.

Had it been true, there is a God in Heaven,

He would not live to boast of such a boon.

Unnatural man, thou knowest that it is false.

Cenci. Ay, as the word of God; whom here I call 60

To witness that I speak the sober truth;—

And whose most favouring Providence was shown

Even in the manner of their deaths. For Rocco
Was kneeling at the mass, with sixteen others,

When the church fell and crushed him to a mummy, 65

The rest escaped unhurt. Cristofano

Was stabbed in error by a jealous man,

Whilst she he loved was sleeping with his rival;

All in the self-same hour of the same night;

Which shows that Heaven has special care of me. 70

I beg those friends who love me, that they mark

The day a feast upon their calendars.

It was the twenty-seventh of December:

Ay, read the letters if you doubt my oath. [The Assembly appears confused; several of the guests rise.

First Guest. Oh, horrible! I will depart— 75

Second Guest. And I.—

Third Guest. No, stay!

I do believe it is some jest; tho’ faith!
’Tis mocking us somewhat too solemnly.
I think his son has married the Infanta, 80
Or found a mine of gold in El Dorado;
’Tis but to season some such news; stay, stay!
I see ’tis only raillery by his smile.

Cenci (filling a bowl of wine, and lifting it up). Oh, thou bright wine whose purple splendour leaps 85
And bubbles gaily in this golden bowl
Under the lamp-light, as my spirits do,
To hear the death of my accursèd sons!
Could I believe thou wert their mingled blood,
Then would I taste thee like a sacrament, 90
And pledge with thee the mighty Devil in Hell,
Who, if a father’s curses, as men say,
Climb with swift wings after their children’s souls,
And drag them from the very throne of Heaven,
Now triumphs in my triumph!—But thou art 95
Superfluous; I have drunken deep of joy,
And I will taste no other wine to-night.
Here, Andrea! Bear the bowl around.
A Guest (rising). Thou wretch!
Will none among this noble company 100
Check the abandoned villain?
Camillo. For God’s sake
Let me dismiss the guests! You are insane,
Some ill will come of this.
Second Guest. Seize, silence him! 105
First Guest. I will!
Third Guest. And I!
Cenci (addressing those who rise with a threatening gesture).
Who moves? Who speaks? (turning to the Company)
’tis nothing,
Enjoy yourselves.—Beware! For my revenge 110

Is as the sealed commission of a king

That kills, and none dare name the murderer. [The Banquet is broken up; several of the Guests are departing.

Beatrice. I do entreat you, go not, noble guests;

What, although tyranny and impious hate

Stand sheltered by a father’s hoary hair, 115

What, if ’tis he who clothed us in these limbs

Who tortures them, and triumphs? What, if we,

The desolate and the dead, were his own flesh,

His children and his wife, whom he is bound

To love and shelter? Shall we therefore find 120

No refuge in this merciless wide world?

O think what deep wrongs must have blotted out

First love, then reverence in a child’s prone mind,

Till it thus vanquish shame and fear! O think!
I have borne much, and kissed the sacred hand 125
Which crushed us to the earth, and thought its stroke
Was perhaps some paternal chastisement!

Have excused much, doubted; and when no doubt
Remained, have sought by patience, love, and tears

To soften him, and when this could not be 130
I have knelt down through the long sleepless nights
And lifted up to God, the father of all,

Passionate prayers: and when these were not heard

I have still borne,—until I meet you here,

Princes and kinsmen, at this hideous feast 135
Given at my brothers’ deaths. Two yet remain,

His wife remains and I, whom if ye save not,

Ye may soon share such merriment again

As fathers make over their children’s graves.

O Prince Colonna, thou art our near kinsman, 140
Cardinal, thou art the Pope's chamberlain,

Camillo, thou art chief justiciary,

Take us away!

Cenci. (He has been conversing with CAMILLO during the first part of BEATRICE'S speech; he hears the conclusion, and now advances.) I hope my good friends here

Will think of their own daughters—or perhaps 145

Of their own throats—before they lend an ear

To this wild girl.

Beatrice (not noticing the words of Cenci). Dare no one look on me?

None answer? Can one tyrant overbear

The sense of many best and wisest men? 150

Or is it that I sue not in some form

Of scrupulous law, that ye deny my suit?

O God! That I were buried with my brothers!

And that the flowers of this departed spring

Were fading on my grave! And that my father 155
Were celebrating now one feast for all!

Camillo. A bitter wish for one so young and gentle;
Can we do nothing?

Colonna. Nothing that I see.

Count Cenci were a dangerous enemy: 160
Yet I would second any one.

A Cardinal. And I.

Cenci. Retire to your chamber, insolent girl!

Beatrice. Retire thou impious man! Ay, hide thyself
Where never eye can look upon thee more! 165
Wouldst thou have honour and obedience
Who art a torturer? Father, never dream
Though thou must overbear this company,
But ill must come of ill.—Frown not on me!
Haste, hide thyself, lest with avenging looks 170
My brothers’ ghosts should hunt thee from thy seat!
Cover thy face from every living eye,
And start if thou but hear a human step.
Seek out some dark and silent corner, there
Bow thy white head before offended God, 175
And we will kneel around, and fervently
Pray that he pity both ourselves, and thee.
Cenci. My friends, I do lament this insane girl
Has spoilt the mirth of our festivity.
Good night, farewell; I will not make you longer 180
Spectators of our dull domestic quarrels.
Another time.— [Exeunt all but CENCI and BEATRICE.
My brain is swimming round;
Give me a bowl of wine! [To BEATRICE.
Thou painted viper! 185
Beast that thou art! Fair and yet terrible!
I know a charm shall make thee meek and tame,
Now get thee from my sight! [Exit BEATRICE.

Here, Andrea,

Fill up this goblet with Greek wine. I said 190
I would not drink this evening; but I must;
For, strange to say, I feel my spirits fail
With thinking what I have decreed to do.— [Drinking the wine.

Be thou the resolution of quick youth
Within my veins, and manhood’s purpose stern, 195
And age’s firm, cold, subtle villainy;
As if thou wert indeed my children’s blood
Which I did thirst to drink! The charm works well;
It must be done; it shall be done, I swear! [Exit.]