

BLUE BEARD

OR Fatal Curiosity

SEMI-BURLESQUED

By PETER the FRIAR



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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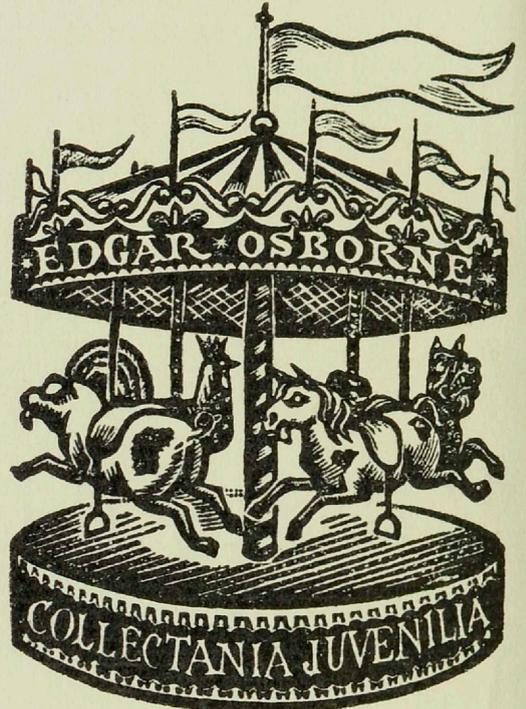
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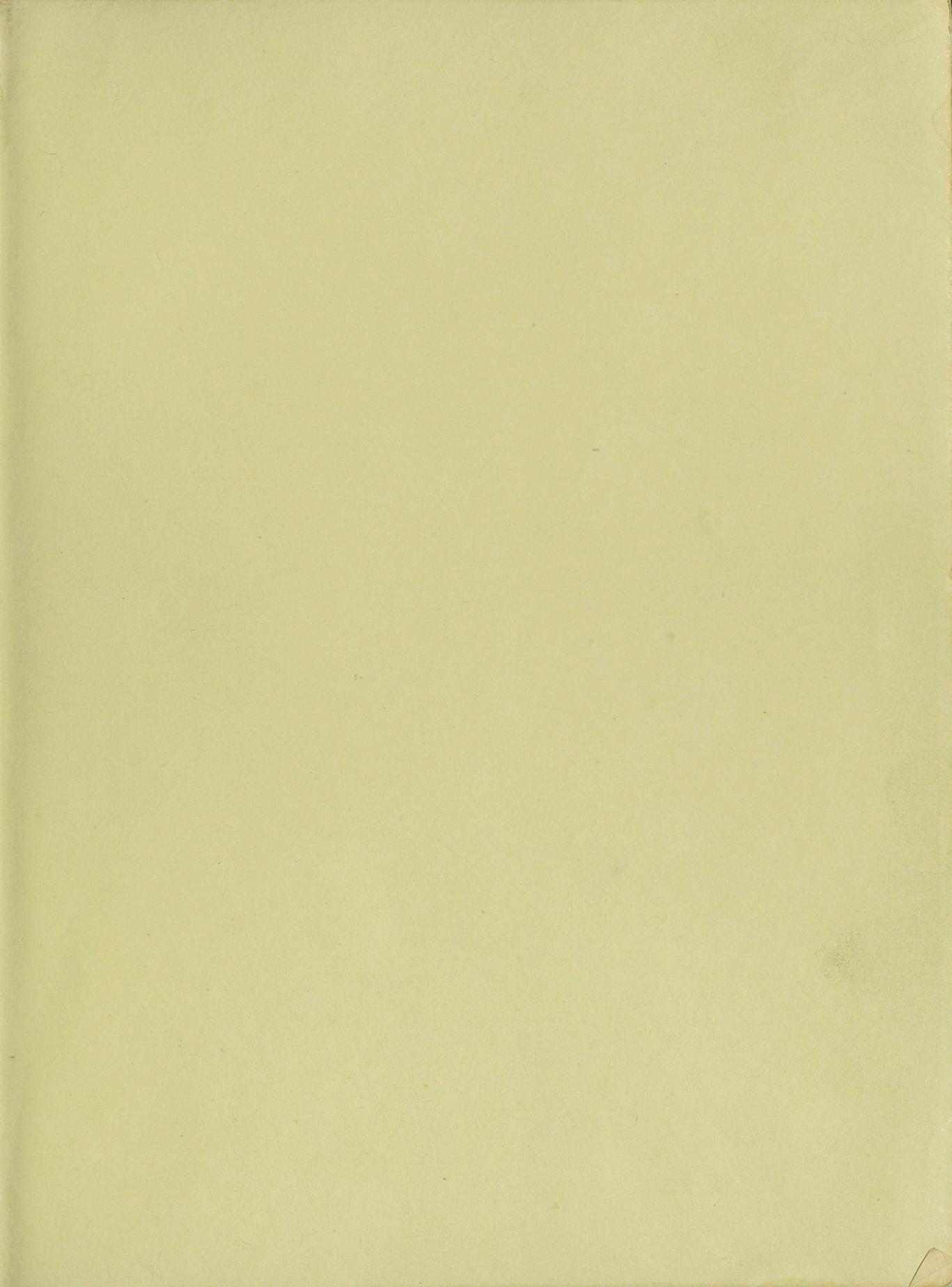
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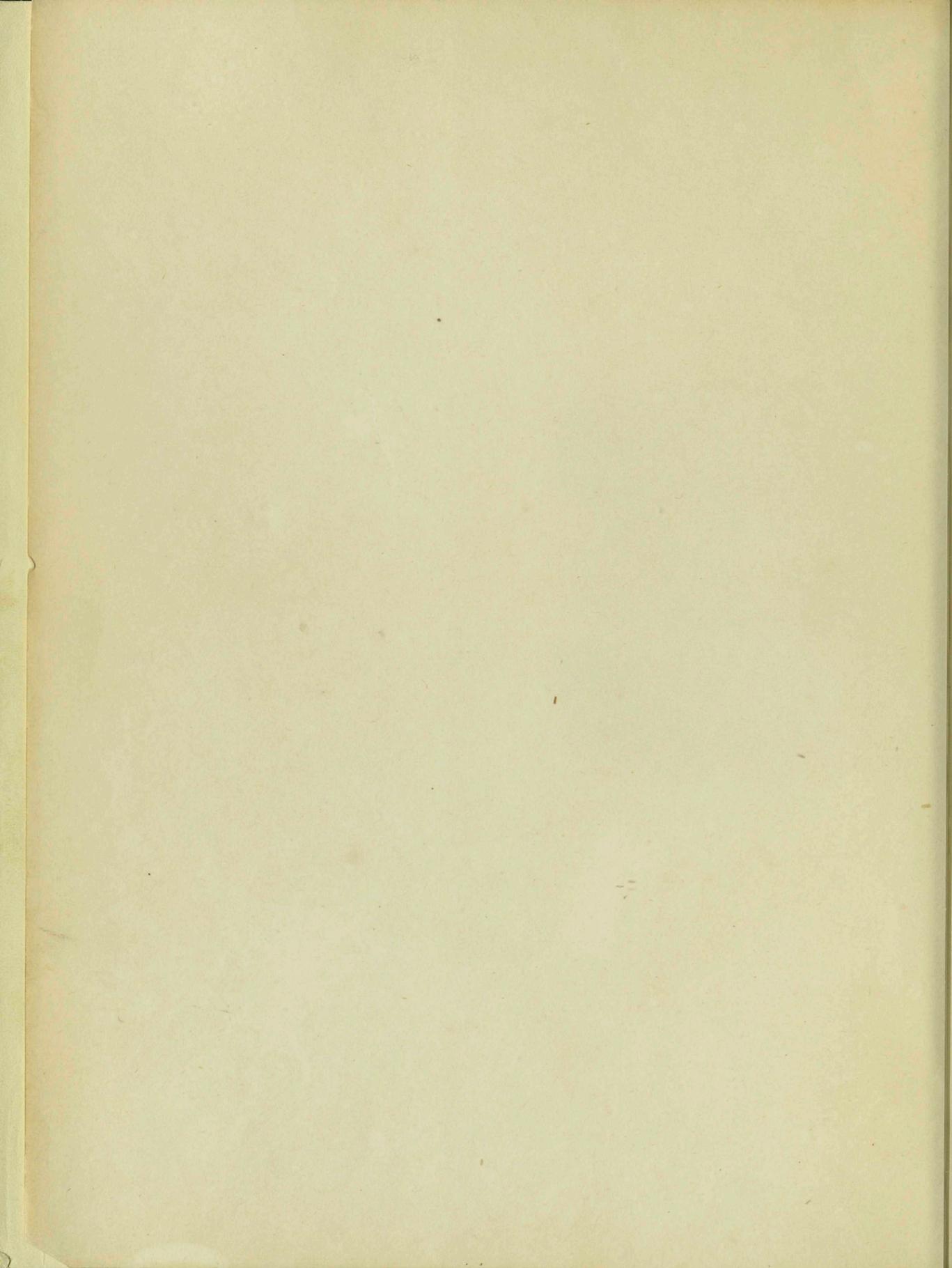
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DEDICATION TO MISS CORNER.

MADAM,

As a fellow-labourer in a vineyard you have so eminently adorned, to you I venture to dedicate the following little drama.

Being in the habit of versifying Charades and little Comedies for entertainment of the youth of my own circle, I had promised for next Christmas Holidays to prepare versions of "Beauty and the Beast" and "Cinderella," with other favourite stories. Judge of my surprise when last week, at a railway station, I found that I had been forestalled, not only in these two tales, but in another which had not occurred to me, precisely after the manner I had adopted, and my purpose effected in a style far superior to any I could have hoped to accomplish.

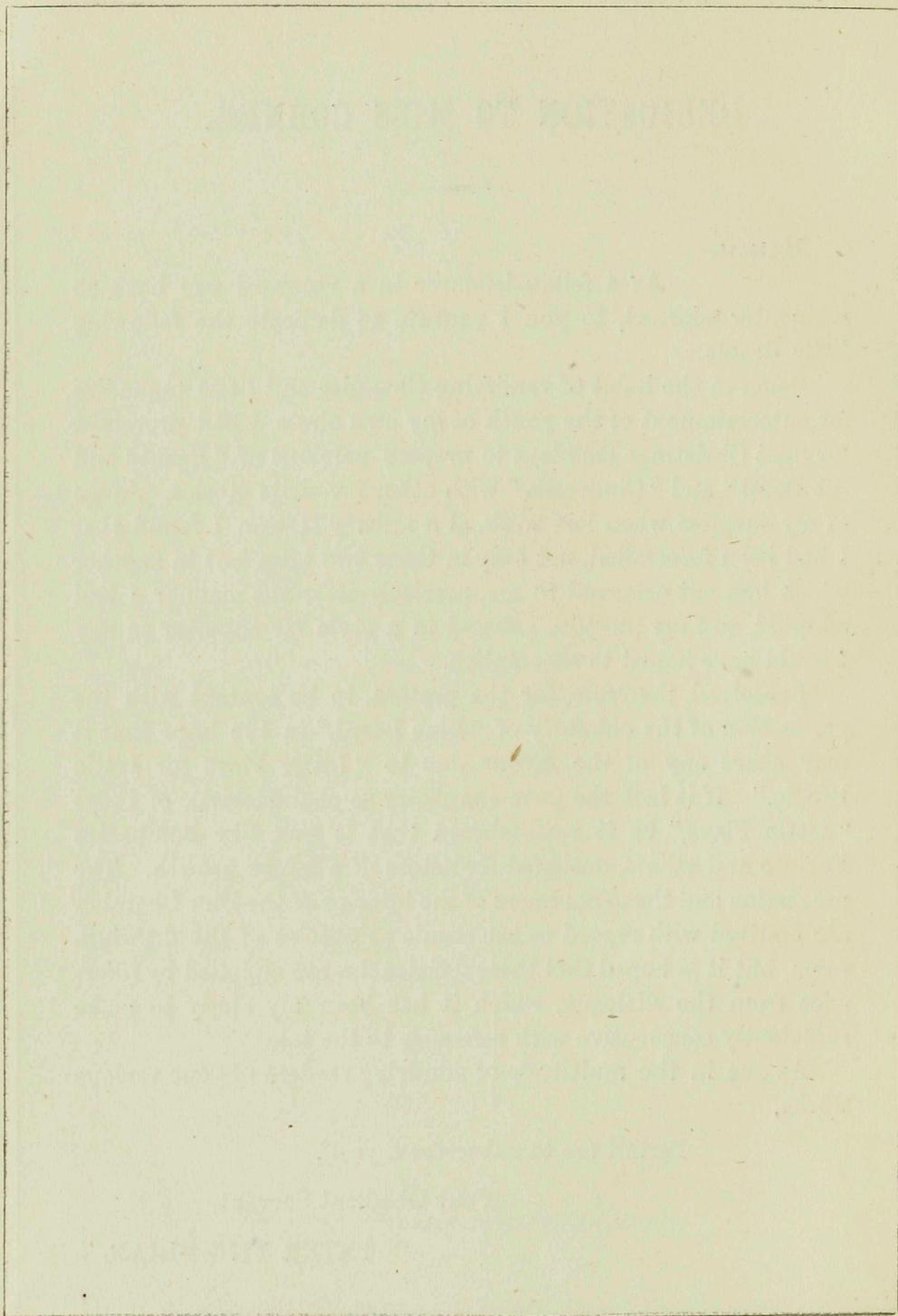
I resolved, therefore, for the present, to be content with the production of the old story of "Blue Beard," in the hope that it may share any of the favour due to "Little Plays for Little People." If it lack the pure simplicity so characteristic of those "Little Plays," be it remembered that it was, like Bombastes Furioso and others, designed for actors of a larger growth. The procession and the *dénouement* of the interior of the Blue Chamber are omitted with regard to the scenic exigencies of the drawing-room, but it is hoped that these deficiencies are supplied by inference from the dialogue, which it has been my study to make sufficiently consecutive with reference to the tale.

As one in the multitude of admiring readers of your various works,

Permit me to subscribe myself,

Your Obedient Servant,

PETER THE FRIAR.



Characters.



BLUE BEARD, PRINCE OF KUTEMOVAH. *A high Despot
of low notions.*

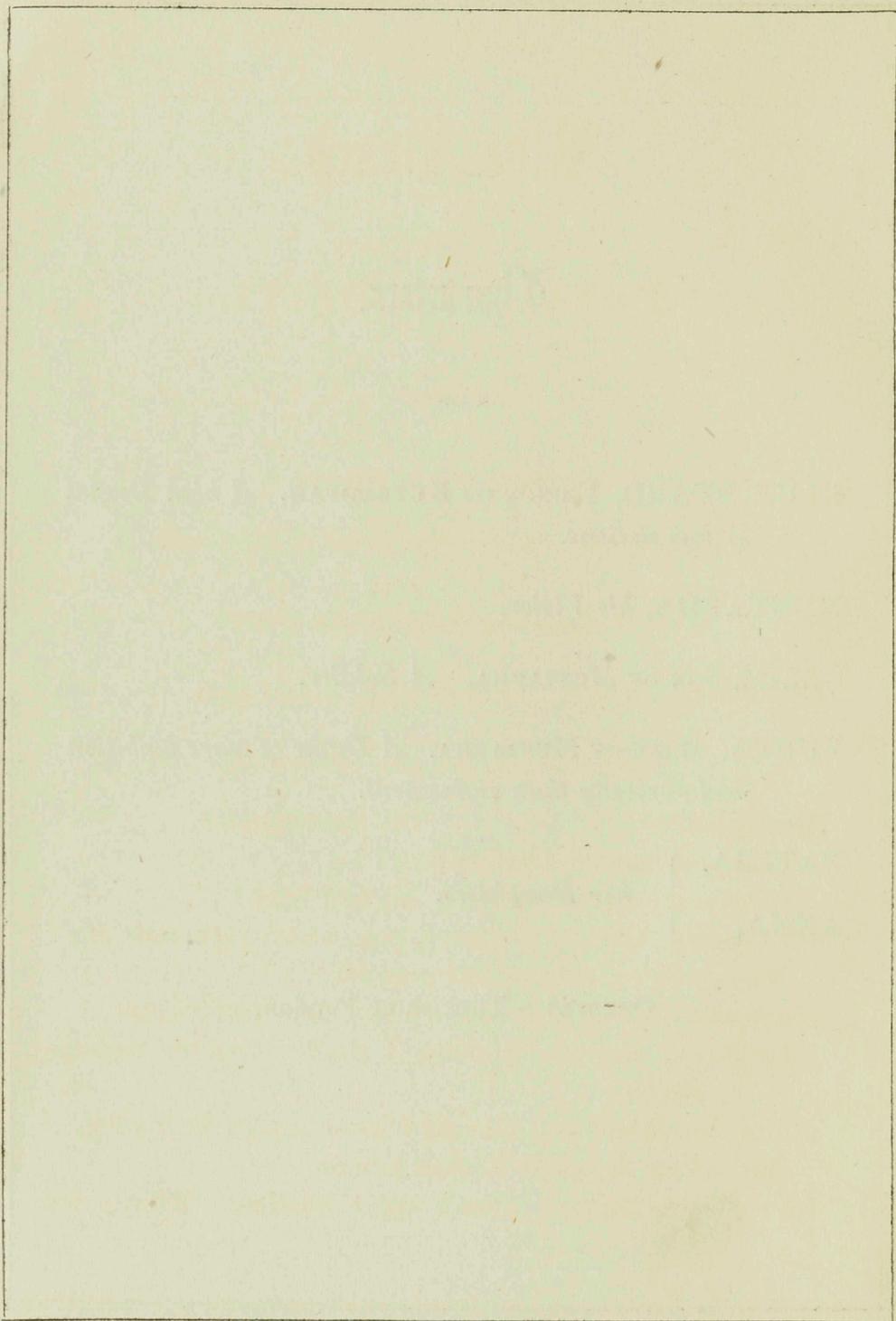
MUSTAPHA, *his Vizier.*

SELIM, SON OF MUSTAPHA. *A Soldier.*

BUSTA, WIFE OF MUSTAPHA. *A Dame of more ambition
and curiosity than refinement.*

FATIMA, }
ANNA, } *her Daughters.*

DRESSES — Turkish or Persian.



Blue Beard ;
OR,
FATAL CURIOSITY.

SCENE THE FIRST.

BLUE BEARD *in an Apartment of his Castle.*

A Knocking heard at the door.

Blue Beard. Who's there without ? Come in.

Enter MUSTAPHA, and prostrating.

Mustapha. Oh, sovereign sir,
I am your most devoted minister !—

Have not I served you long and faithfully ?

Blue Beard. Well, if you have, you needn't pipe your eye.

Why come ye whining like a mendicant ?

Mustapha. To beg a favour, which I hope you'll grant.

Blue Beard. Say on ; perhaps I shall. (*Aside*) Perhaps
I sha'n't.

Mustapha. Dread sir ! take all I have—aye, take my life,
But not my daughter Fatima to wife.

Blue Beard. Holloa ! what's up, I wonder ? What's the
row ?

Who says I want to marry her ?

Mustapha.

Just now

I found her gazing on a precious gem
 And costly trinkets—how came she by them ?
 I asked her, and, without reserve or shyness,
 She owned she had received them from your highness—
 Nay, that she hoped for many more beside.
 Oh, she's bewitched ! She simpered when I cried,
 And then confessed she meant to be your bride.

Blue Beard. Did she, by jingo ! Well, I don't object ;
 And why should you ?

Mustapha.

Oh, sir ! with due respect,

Your first wife—caught a very sudden cold,—
 And—pardon me, if I appear too bold—
 In three short years three more—you still survive.

[*BLUE BEARD rises in perturbation.*

Alas ! that Fatima should make up five !

Blue Beard. Thou troublest me ! I'm busy—go—begone !
 Mind your own business, and leave mine alone.
 Stay !—you seem short of work, if thus you bore one,—
 Write me out fifty chapters of the Koran ;
 Then make out ten death-warrants for those reivers,
 Seven Bashi-Bashouks—three Frank unbelievers :
 I'll quickly put an end to their bravado !
 Mind that my head-cook has the bastinado.
 Nay, stare not ; have him basted as I tell ye,—
 Aye, till his feet are pulped into a jelly.
 Let not my Fatima denounce me cruel,—
 The rascal put no sugar in my gruel,

Or spice or brandy in his watery swizzle.
 Now for the present cut your lucky—mizzle ;
 And if you'll take advice, to save your breath,
 Don't come to talk to me of sudden death.
 Commend me to my Fatima—my charmer :
 Tell her I love her far too well to harm her.

[MUSTAPHA *retreats timidly.*

Hark ye—you had better mind what *you* are at !
 Be off!—you comprehend me ?

Mustapha.

Verbum sat.

[*Exit* MUSTAPHA.

Blue Beard. Soh! she shall find out what she has to dread—
 By curiosity she'll be misled ;
 I'll win her hand—and then cut off her head !

Curtain falls.]

[*Exit* BLUE BEARD.

~~~~~

SCENE THE SECOND.

*Either al-fresco or in* MUSTAPHA'S *Dwelling.*

BUSTA, FATIMA, ANNA. FATIMA *dressed gaily.*

*Busta.* Pooh! don't tell me—who cares what people say?  
*Fatima (to ANNA, who weeps).* Dear sister, don't take on so  
 —don't, I pray !

They only envy me because he's rich.

*Busta.* Ah, he's a prince, and he behaves as sich !

*Anna.* Alas ! had you nine lives, you'd want a score —  
How many have been victimised ?

*Busta.* But four.

*Anna.* First fell dark Zara—then the bright Zuzu,  
Then gentle Adela, and then Lulu !

*Fatima.* One was consumptive — one fell in the moat —  
The others —

*Busta.* Had affections of the throat.

*Anna.* Oh, how I tremble for your wretched fate !

If only half be true that folks relate  
Of that blue tyrant and his horrid beard.

*Busta.* If she don't funk, why need you be afeard ?  
Cheer up, my gals ! you'll find it mighty fine  
To sup off silver, and off gold to dine.  
I only wish such chance had e'er been mine.

*Fatima.* Dear Anna ! you must candidly confess  
The worthy gentleman has taste in dress.  
'Twas he who sent this darling of a shawl,  
My robes, continuations, shoes, and all : —  
What matter if his beard be black or blue ?  
At any rate, it needn't trouble you.

*Anna.* Well, if your mind's made up, 'tis useless talking.

*Busta.* Come on, we've lots of shopping : let's be walking.

(*To Anna*) You must be smart.

*Anna.* I care not how I'm drest,

But I will try of bad to make the best.

*Busta.* What a rare turban will I set my head in!

How I love preparation for a wedding!

*Curtain falls.*]

[*Exeunt.*

~~~~~

SCENE THE THIRD.

MUSTAPHA, seated at home, sings the couplet.

Mustapha. "'Tis a very fine thing to be father-in-law
To a very magnificent three-tailed Bashaw."

Soliloquizing.]

Thus many years ago, as I've heard say,
'Twas sung at Covent Garden in a play,
But somehow I've forgotten all about
The Story—how the Comedy turned out.
Not that it matters much what people act,
'Tis fashionable to forget the fact.

It seems, at all events, I have no voice
In these grand nuptials, and I must rejoice,
And hold myself right happy, if I will,
To have a son-in-law with power to kill.

Enter BUSTA from the left.

Busta. Good gracious, Mustapha! bless us and save us!
 When will you find out how we should behave us?
 Not dressed by this time! pray what can you mean
 By sitting thus in that old gaberdine
 Upon your daughter's wedding-day? 'Tis shocking!
 Don't rub your leg, but go and change your stocking;
 Put on your scarlet tunic, and, for one day,
 Look brisk, and fancy it is Easter Sunday:—
 'Tis in the left top drawer of the front attic.

[MUSTAPHA rises wearily.]

Well I must help you if you are so rheumatic.

Curtain falls.]

[*Exeunt to the right.*

~~~~~

SCENE THE FOURTH.—*A Garden.*

FATIMA *sola.*

*Fatima.* How my heart trembles! It is very true,  
 I need not fear because his beard is blue,  
 But he is a despot of a high degree,  
 Makes light of life,—and may make light of me!  
 And oh! if any trifling act or word  
 Can rouse his fury and evoke his sword—

Alas! can I expect my tongue to check  
His wrathful ire, or save my little neck?  
But I'm betrothed—'tis too late to retreat,  
Some bitter will arise with every sweet;  
And sweet, indeed, to me will be the power  
Of wealth, to soothe affliction in its hour  
Of want and wretchedness; perchance to plead  
For some poor captive in the time of need.  
Here comes my lord.

*Enter BLUE BEARD.*

*Blue Beard.* Hail! idol of my soul!  
Light of my eyes! enchantress of my whole  
Existence!—how I love to gaze upon  
Those peerless charms, deserving of a throne,  
And think it heaven to call them all mine own.  
'Tis too much happiness!

*Fatima.* Oh, sir! you flatter.

*Blue Beard.* Nay, I'm in downright earnest. What's the  
matter?

You seem at least as much in grief as love.  
Has any one upset my precious dove?  
Name him or her, and ere you've time to ask it,  
Their heads shall be before you in a basket.

*Fatima.* Oh, murder! don't talk so, my blood runs chilly  
To hear you name such horrors!

*Blue Beard.* Don't be silly ;  
 You soon will set less value upon life,  
 And more upon the justice of the knife.  
 It quells officious meddlers in a trice,  
 And, if they are bumptious, axes their advice.

*Fatima.* Can you thus joke on death ?

*Blue Beard.* 'Tis heads and tails.

*Fatima.* Pr'ythee forbear, before my firmness fails ;

It makes me ill, I wish it would make you sick (*archly*).

*Blue Beard.* That's well, my lassie — smile. I hear the  
 music.

[*Blue Beard's March, music softly behind.*

A grand procession will without await  
 Your gracious presence ; all the lords of state  
 Attend the ceremonies. Gods deny men  
 Unless they are duly heralded by High men.  
 A milk-white elephant will bear your howdah,  
 With golden trappings — hark ! the strain grows louder ;  
 Lean upon your adorer. Come, my sweet,  
 We must go forth to join them in the street.

*Fatima.* The fair are ever conquered by the brave,

I am your own, your very humble slave ;

Be it your care that future ages tell

I loved not rashly — you will use me well ?

[*Retiring with him, pleadingly.*

*Curtain falls.*]

[*Exeunt to the left.*

## SCENE THE FIFTH.

*Apartment in BLUE BEARD'S Castle.*

BLUE BEARD *and* FATIMA.

*Blue Beard.* My dear, some business in the city calls  
Me forth this morning. Stay within the walls,  
Leave not the castle; should your friends arrive,  
Say I will soon return — we dine at five.  
I need not to repeat that which you know  
I told you but a little while ago  
Of the Blue Chamber.

*Fatima.* I have not forgot;  
I'll not go near it.

*Blue Beard.* You had better not!  
Good-bye! (*Aside*) I'm sorry for her, I confess,  
'Tis time I had another, nevertheless. [*Exit to the left.*]

FATIMA, *after two or three turns, sings.*

“I'd be a butterfly born in a bower,  
Where roses, and lilies, and violets meet,  
Roaming about from flower to flower,  
And sipping everything that is pretty and sweet.  
I'd never languish for wealth or for power,  
I'd never sigh to see slaves at my feet;  
I'd be a butterfly born in a bower,  
Sipping everything that is pretty and sweet.”

*Enter* BUSTA.

*Busta.* It does me good to hear that cheery song,  
You seem as happy as the day is long.

*Fatima.* Dear mother !

*Busta.* Yes, the honeymoon is over,  
So I am come to see you here in clover.

*Fatima.* Thrice welcome ! let me hope you are come to stay ?

*Busta.* I've brought no clothes ; I'm come but for the day.

*Fatima.* How is my father and my sister Anna ?

*Busta.* I left your father, in his usual manner,  
Asleep ; I set out early with your sister.  
She's here,—in half a minute you'll have kissed her.  
But *I* could not delay to rub *my* shoes,  
I'm so impatient to relate the news.

*Fatima.* News of dear Selim ?

*Busta.* Yes ; he's coming back,  
That is, may be expected in a crack.

*Fatima.* Oh, joy unspeakable ! and safe —and well ?

*Busta.* I'm really not at liberty to tell ;  
Already I am out of breath, almost—  
I only read it in the Morning Post,  
Which has the most authentic information,  
That he was marching homeward to this station.  
But here comes Anna, she knows.

*Enter* ANNA.

- Anna.* How d'ye do,  
Dear Fatima?
- Fatima.* Dear Anna, how are you?
- Anna.* Quite well.
- Fatima.* Oh, I am so rejoiced to find  
Our own dear Selim is not far behind;  
How I do long to see his noble face!
- Busta.* I hope he'll stay here and enjoy the place.  
But where's your lord?
- Fatima.* Gone out to take a ride,  
The very first day he has left my side.  
He charged me, like a good and faithful spouse,  
To stay at home and show you all the house,  
Should you arrive.
- Busta.* That's right, we'll have rare fun!
- Fatima.* I'll show you all the rooms—all—all but one!
- Anna.* And why not all?
- Busta.* All without one exception,  
Or I'd not give a fig for your reception.
- Fatima.* One *I* have never seen, and never will;  
I cannot pass the door without a thrill  
Through all my senses. It was but this morn  
My husband swore, I'd better ne'er been born  
Than try to peep at what is there concealed,  
And never can till Doomsday be revealed.
- Busta.* My patience, here's a mystery! I wonder  
What would become of *me* if I should blunder

Into this chamber ?

*Fatima.* It is locked secure ;

My husband throws no chance away, be sure.

*Anna.* Why talk about it ? we may freely range  
Through the whole palace, with enough of change.

*Busta.* That's very well ; but I have no idea  
Of wife with husband having cause of fear.  
I fancy 'twould kick up a pretty racket  
'Twixt me and Mustapha ; I'd trim his jacket  
If I supposed he knew more than he seemed  
To know, or didn't tell me what he dreamed !

*Fatima.* Nonsense, dear mother ! Anywhere you please  
But to that chamber. I have got the keys  
Of many a fine, magnificent saloon,  
Red, green, or purple, yellow and maroon.

*Busta.* And might I ask, your highness, if you knew  
The colour of this awful chamber ?

*Fatima.* Blue !

*Busta.* So is your husband's beard—the sea, the sky !  
So is my petticoat—'tis all my eye,—  
All fiddlestick, to frighten you, rely.  
But come along ; let's move, dear children, come,  
And if we should see what we shouldn't—mum !

*Curtain falls.]*

*[Exeunt to the right.]*





SCENE THE SIXTH.—*Room in Castle.*

FATIMA and ANNA.

*Fatima.* Oh dear! oh dear! whatever shall I do,  
Where is my mother?

*Anna.* She's but just come to;  
She fainted once more in the hall below,  
Then ran away as fast as she could go.

*Fatima.* Oh, Heaven send me help! Beyond a doubt,  
My lord will kill me if he finds me out.

Oh, that this key should fall of all the bunch!

*Anna.* Gracious! suppose he should be back to lunch?

*Fatima.* Most probably he will; 'tis all no good,

[*Rubs the key.*

No scrubbing will erase the stain of blood:  
The more I scrub, alas, the more it lingers!  
The horrid key keeps twisting in my fingers.  
Just now I thought it uttered quite a shriek,  
And turned about as if it meant to speak.  
But, pray you, hasten into my own room  
And hide, or you perhaps may share my doom.

*Anna.* Oh, I can ne'er recover from my fright!  
I never can forget that fearful sight!  
Already have we paid the penalty  
Ascribed to over curiosity.  
But you must fly, for you can never dwell  
In any house containing such a hell!

*Fatima.* Talk not of flight, the attempt were worse than vain ;  
 Guards all around compel me to remain.  
 Even if my duty did not forge my chain ——  
 But, hush ! his foot is in the gallery — go,  
 For now begins the crisis of my woe !

*Anna.* If I can bring you aid I'll let you know ;  
 I'll from the turret scream out for assistance.

*Fatima.* True, from the turret you may see a distance ;  
 Thence, if you love me, look for sword and spear ——  
 May Allah grant my Selim may be near !

*Enter BLUE BEARD.*

*Blue Beard.* How fares my lady?—Wherefore are ye crying?  
 I hope there's nothing very terrifying  
 In my return.—You've surely not been peeping,  
 For, if you have, you have good cause for weeping.

*Fatima.* My gracious lord ——

*Blue Beard.* I'll thank you, if ye please,  
 Without palaver to return my keys.

*Fatima.* I can return them only on my knees.

[*Kneels and gives the keys.*

*Blue Beard.* Ha ! 'tis as I suspected—this dismayed ye ;  
 My friend the Talisman, he hath betrayed ye.

[*Holds up the key.*

But I don't bandy words, I won't upbraid ye ;  
 Arise, and meet your death, for 'tis not far ——  
 It greets you in my trusty scimitar. [*Drawing his sword.*

*Fatima.* And how have I deserved it ?

*Blue Beard.* Ask me how ?

What were you doing with this key just now ?

*Fatima (rising with dignity).* I disobeyed. I scorn to tell a lie.

*Blue Beard.* Then for that disobedience—you die !

[*Menacing her with sword.*

*Fatima.* Oh, mercy, oh ! by all your vows of love,

By your own hopes of mercy from above,

Have pity !

*Blue Beard.* By the Prophet's beard I swear,

I give you but ten minutes for short prayer,

And then for death—for instant death prepare !

Nay, trifle not, I never break *my* word :

I go to quench my thirst, and whet my sword. [Exit.

*Curtain falls, leaving FATIMA swooning.]*

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SCENE THE SEVENTH.

The same Room as the last ; an open door leading to the Turret, through which FATIMA interrogates Sister ANNA : BLUE BEARD supposed to be below or in an adjoining room.

Fatima (rising from her knees). Is any body coming, Sister Ann ?

Anna. Yes — no, no — no one in the shape of man :

A cloud of dust is rising round the steep —

Alas, 'tis nothing but a flock of sheep !

Blue Beard. Fatima, are ye coming ?

Fatima.

Yes: oh, stay

One moment, I've another prayer to say !

(*To ANNA.*) Look out again — again, dear sister, pray ;

Oh ! see you no one ? no help within hail ?

Anna. Yes, there are pennons flaunting in the gale !

Fatima. Oh, wave your handkerchief ! scream, bid them haste !

Blue Beard. Madam, I'll not another moment waste !

Fatima. See you them, sister ?

Anna.

Yes, and hear the drumming.

Fatima. It is the troop — run.

Blue Beard.

Madam, are you coming ?

Anna. 'Tis Selim and his soldiers at the gate !

Fatima. Fly — fly to meet him, ere it be too late.

Blue Beard. Madam, I'll not another moment wait ;

I'll stand no further nonsense, or entreating ;

If you won't come, I'll fetch you.

[*Rushes in with drawn sword, seizing FATIMA by the arm.*

Enter SELIM.

Here's a meeting !

You well may look confounded.

Blue Beard (*aghast, drops his sword*). Beyond measure,

'Tis really such an unexpected pleasure —

Selim. 'Tis now your turn to tremble and to fear. Oh!

Don't you look a pretty sort of hero?

I ask no questions, I've heard all the story,

And come to see my sister in her glory!

Anna. (But just in time.)

Selim. I might have run you through,

But that I don't come here to murder you—

Although I had a precious mind to lick ye;

Pick up your sword—come on—and then I'll stick ye.

[*During this scene* FATIMA *remains leaning upon*
ANNA, *hiding her face.*

[*Great fight,* BLUE BEARD *falls.*

Enter BUSTA *and* MUSTAPHA.

Busta. Bravo, my Selim! Well done, that was prime!

See here we are just in the nick of time.

Selim (to FATIMA). Look up, my love, the tyrant is no more!

Busta. Look up, my dear, he's only spoilt the floor.

Anna. There he lies bleeding where you would have bled.

Mustapha. If *we* had not arrived to save your head;

I may say *we*, for when my wife came running

From the Blue Chamber with a tale too stunning,

Having the office, I set off to tell

Our noble Selim, who hath done so well.

Selim. As not a moment was to have been lost,

With my own troop I straight the country crossed;

Arriving two days sooner than expected,
Too happy —

Fatima. To protect the unprotected.

Busta. Well, if 'twas all my fault, as I must own,
I did my best my error to atone.

'Twas I that roused old Mustapha to fetch
The succour that has rid us of this wretch.

[*Points to the body.*]

Selim. We'll burn the castle.

Anna. Then what shall we do?

Selim. Eat—

Mustapha. Drink!

Anna. And dance!!

Fatima. And sing!!!

Busta and omnes. Till all is *Blue!!!!*

[ANNA, SELIM, FATIMA, BUSTA, BLUE BEARD, MUSTAPHA,
Body of

Curtain falls.

