

(Enter HILDEBRAND, HILARION, CYRIL and FLORIAN.)

- 5 GAMA. So this is Castle Hildebrand? Well, well!  
 Dame Rumour whispered that the place was grand;  
 She told me that your taste was exquisite,  
 Superb, unparalleled!
- HILD. (*gratified*). Oh, really, King!
- 10 GAMA. But she's a liar! Why, how old you've grown!  
 Is this Hilarion? Why, you've changed too –  
 You were a singularly handsome child!  
 (*To FLOR.*) Are you a courtier? Come, then, ply your trade,  
 Tell me some lies. How do you like your king?  
 Vile rumour says he's all but imbecile.  
 Now, that's not true?
- 15 FLOR. My lord, we love our king.  
 His wise remarks are valued by his court  
 As precious stones.
- GAMA. And for the self-same cause.  
 Like precious stones, his sensible remarks  
 20 Derive their value from their scarcity!  
 Come now, be honest, tell the truth for once!  
 Tell it of me. Come, come, I'll harm you not.  
 This leg is crooked – this foot is ill-designed –  
 This shoulder wears a hump! Come, out with it!  
 25 Look, here's my face! Now, am I not the worst  
 Of Nature's blunders?
- CYR. Nature never errs.  
 To those who know the workings of your mind,  
 Your face and figure, sir, suggest a book  
 30 Appropriately bound.
- GAMA. (*enraged*). Why, harkye, sir,  
 How dare you bandy words with me?
- CYR. No need  
 To bandy aught that appertains to you.
- 35 GAMA. (*furiously*). Do you permit this, King?
- HILD. We are in doubt  
 Whether to treat you as an honoured guest,  
 Or as a traitor knave who plights his word  
 And breaks it.
- 40 GAMA. (*quickly*). If the casting vote's with me,  
 I give it for the former!
- HILD. We shall see.  
 By the terms of our contract, signed and sealed,  
 You're bound to bring the Princess here to-day:  
 45 Why is she not with you?