

Felicia Hemans (1793-1835)

2 *The Kaiser's Feast*

Louis, Emperor of Germany, having put his brother, the Palsgrave Rodolphus, under the ban of the empire, in the twelfth century, that unfortunate prince fled to England, where he died in neglect and poverty. "After his decease, his mother, Matilda, privately invited his children to return to Germany; and, by her mediation, during a season of festivity, when Louis kept wassail in the castle of Heidelberg, the family of his brother presented themselves before him in the garb of suppliants, imploring pity and forgiveness. To this appeal the victor softened." — *Miss Benger's Memoirs of the Queen of Bohemia.*

The Kaiser feasted in his hall —
The red wine mantled high;
Banners were trembling on the wall,
To the peals of minstrelsy:
And many a gleam and sparkle came 5
From the armour hung around,
As it caught the glance of the torch's flame,
Or the hearth with pine-boughs crown'd.

Why fell there silence on the chord
Beneath the harper's hand? 10
And suddenly, from that rich board,
Why rose the wassail band?
The strings were hush'd — the knights made way
For the queenly mother's tread,
As up the hall, in dark array, 15
Two fair-hair'd boys she led.

She led them e'en to the Kaiser's place,
And still before him stood;
Till, with strange wonder, o'er his face
Flush'd the proud warrior blood: 20
And "Speak, my mother! speak!" he cried
"Wherefore this mourning vest?
And the clinging children by thy side,
In weeds of sadness drest?"

"Well may a mourning vest be mine, 25

And theirs, my son, my son!
Look on the features of thy line
In each fair little one!
Though grief awhile within their eyes
Hath tamed the dancing glee, 30
Yet there thine own quick spirit lies —
Thy brother's children see!

“And where is he, thy brother, where?
He in thy home that grew,
And smiling, with his sunny hair, 35
Ever to greet thee flew?
How would his arms thy neck entwine,
His fond lips press thy brow!
My son! oh, call these orphans thine —
Thou hast no brother now! 40

“What! from their gentle eyes doth naught
Speak of thy childhood's hours,
And smite thee with a tender thought
Of thy dead father's towers?
Kind was thy boyish heart and true, 45
When rear'd together there,
Through the old woods like fawns ye flew —
Where is thy brother — where?

“Well didst thou love him then, and he
Still at thy side was seen! 50
How is it that such things can be
As though they ne'er had been?
Evil was this world's breath, which came
Between the good and brave!
Now must the tears of grief and shame 55
Be offer'd to the grave.

“And let them, let them there be pour'd:
Though all unfelt below —
Thine own wrung heart, to love restored,
Shall soften as they flow. 60
Oh! death is mighty to make peace;
Now bid his work be done!

So many an inward strife shall cease —
Take, take these babes, my son!"

His eye was dimm'd — the strong man shook 65
With feelings long suppress'd;
Up in his arms the boys he took,
And strain'd them to his breast.
And a shout from all in the royal hall
Burst forth to hail the sight; 70
And eyes were wet 'midst the brave that met
At the Kaiser's feast that night.

(From *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Felicia Hemans*.
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