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 978-1-107-48688-1 - King Arthur or the British Worthy: A
 Dramatick Opera
 John Dryden
 Excerpt
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KING ARTHUR

OR

THE BRITISH WORTHY

ACT I. SCENE I.

Enter Conon, Aurelius, Albanact.

Con. Then this is the deciding Day, to fix
Great Britain's Scepter in great *Arthur's* Hand.

Aur. Or put it in the bold Invaders gripe.
Arthur and *Oswald*, and their different Fates,
 Are weighing now within the Scales of
 Heaven.

Con. In Ten fet Battels have we driven back
 These Heathen Saxons, and regain'd our
 Earth.

As Earth recovers from an Ebbing Tide,
 Her half-drown'd Face, and lifts it o'er the
 Waves.

From *Severn's* Banks, even to this *Barren-Down*,
 Our foremost Men have preft their fainty
 Rear,

And not one Saxon Face has been beheld;
 But all their Backs, and Shoulders have
 been stuck

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KING ARTHUR

With foul dishonest Wounds: Now here,
 indeed,
 Because they have no further Ground they
 stand.

Aur. Well have we chose a Happy day,
 for Fight;
 For every Man, in course of time, has
 found

Some days are lucky, some unfortunate.

Alb. But why this day more lucky than
 the rest?

Con. Because this day
 Is Sacred to the Patron of our Isle;
 A Christian, and a Souldier's Annual Feast.

Alb. Oh, now I understand you, This is
 St. *George of Cappadocia's* Day.
 Well, it may be so, but Faith I was Ignorant;
 we Souldiers

Seldom examine the Rubrick; and now and
 then a Saint may

Happen to slip by us; But if he be a Gentle-
 man Saint, he will

Forgive us.

Con. *Oswald*, undoubtedly, will Fight it
 bravely.

Aur. And it behoves him well, 'tis his
 last Stake. [To Alb.

But what manner of Man is this *Oswald*?
 Have ye ever seen him?

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ACT I. SCENE I

3

Alb. Ne'er but once; and that was to my
Coft too; I follow'd him too clofe;
And to fay Truth, fomewhat Uncivilly,
upon a Rout;
But he turn'd upon me, as quick and as
round, as a chaf'd Boar;
And gave me two Licks acrofs the Face,
to put me
In mind of my Chriftianity.

Con. I know him well; he's free and open
Hearted.

Aur. His Countries Character: That Speaks
a German.

Con. Revengeful, rugged, violently brave;
and once resolv'd, is never to be
mov'd.

Alb. Yes, he's a valiant Dog, Pox on him.

Con. This was the Character he then
maintain'd,

When in my Court he fought my Daughter's
Love:

My Fair, Blind, *Emmeline*.

Alb. I cannot blame him for Courting the
Heirefs of *Cornwal*:

All Heireffes are Beautiful; and as Blind as
she is, he would have had
No Blind Bargain of her.

Aur. For that Defeat in Love, he rais'd
this War.

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KING ARTHUR

For Royal *Arthur* Reign'd within her Heart,
 E'er *Ofwald* mov'd his Sute.

Con. Ay, now *Aurelius*, you have Nam'd
 a Man;

One, whom besides the Homage that I owe,
 As *Cornwal*'s Duke, to his Imperial Crown,
 I wou'd have chofen out, from all Mankind,
 To be my Sovereign Lord.

Aur. His worth divides him from the croud
 of Kings;

So Born, without Defert to be fo Born;
 Men, fet aloft, to be the Scourge of Heaven;
 And with long Arms, to lash the Under-
 World.

Con. *Arthur* is all that's Excellent in *Ofwald*;
 And void of all his Faults: In Battel brave;
 But still Serene in all the Stormy War,
 Like Heaven above the Clouds; and after
 Fight,

As Merciful and Kind, to vanquisht Foes,
 As a forgiving God; but fee, he's here,
 And Praife is Dumb before him.

*Enter King Arthur, Reading a Letter,
 with Attendants.*

Arthur } Go on, Auspicious Prince, the
Reading. } Stars are kind:
 Unfold thy Banners to the willing Wind;
 While I, with Airy Legions, help thy Arms:

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ACT I. SCENE I

5

Confronting Art with Art, and Charms
 with Charms.

So *Merlin* writes; nor can we doubt
 th' event, [To Con.
 With Heav'n and you to Friends; Oh Noble
Conon,
 You taught my tender Hands the Trade of
 War;

And now again you Helm your Hoary Head,
 And under double weight of Age and Arms,
 Assert your Country's Freedom, and my
 Crown.

Con. No more, my Son.

Arth. Most happy in that Name!
 Your *Emmeline*, to *Oswald's* Vows refus'd,
 You made my plighted Bride:
 Your Charming Daughter, who like Love,
 Born Blind,
 Un-aiming hits, with surest Archery,
 And Innocently kills.

Con. Remember, Son,
 You are a General, other Wars require you.
 For see the *Saxon* Grofs begins to move.

Arth. Their Infantry Embattel'd, square
 and clofe,
 March firmly on, to fill the middle space:
 Cover'd by their advancing Cavalry.
 By Heav'n, 'tis Beauteous Horrour:
 The Noble *Oswald* has provok'd my Envy.

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Enter Emmeline, led by Matilda.

Ha! Now my Beauteous *Emmeline* appears,
 Anew, but Oh, a fofter Flame, inspires me:
 Even Rage and Vengeance, slumber at
 her fight.

Con. Hafte your Farewel; I'll chear my
 Troops, and wait ye. [*Exit Conon.*]

Em. Oh Father, Father, I am fure you're
 here;

Because I fee your Voice.

Arth. No, thou miftak'ft thy hearing for
 thy fight;

He's gone, my *Emmeline*;

And I but ftay to gaze on thofe fair Eyes,
 Which cannot view the Conqueft they
 have made.

Oh Star-like Night, dark only to thy felf,
 But full of Glory, as thofe Lamps of Heav'n
 That fee not when they shine.

Em. What is this Heav'n, and Stars, and
 Night, and Day,

To which you thus compare my Eyes and me?
 I underftand you, when you fay you love:
 For, when my Father clafps my Hand in his,
 That's cold, and I can feel it hard and
 wrinckl'd;

But when you grasp it, then I figh and pant,
 And something fmarts, and tickles at my
 Heart.

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ACT I. SCENE I

7

Arth. Oh Artless Love! where the Soul
moves the Tongue,
And only Nature speaks what Nature thinks!
Had she but Eyes!

Em. Just now you said I had:
I see 'em, I have two.

Arth. But neither see.

Em. I'm sure they hear you then:
What can your Eyes do more?

[*Arth.* They view your Beauties.

Em. Do not I see You have a Face like
mine,
Two Hands, and two round, pretty, rising
Breasts,
That heave like mine.

Arth. But you describe a Woman.
Nor is it sight, but touching with your Hands.

Em. Then 'tis my Hand that sees, and that's
all one:

For is not seeing, touching with your Eyes?

Arth. No, for I see at distance, where I
touch not.

Em. If you can see so far, and yet not touch,
I fear you see my Naked Legs and Feet
Quite through my Cloaths; pray do not see
so well.

Arth. Fear not, sweet Innocence;]
I view the lovely Features of your Face;
Your Lips Carnation, your dark shaded
Eye-brows,

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8

KING ARTHUR

Black Eyes, and Snow-white Forehead; all
 the Colours

That make your Beauty, and produce my Love.

Em. Nay, then, you do not love on equal
 terms:

I love you dearly, without all these helps:
 I cannot see your Lips Carnation,
 Your shaded Eye-brows, nor your Milk-
 white Eyes.

Arth. You still mistake.

Em. Indeed I thought you had a Nose
 and Eyes,

And such a Face as mine; have not Men Faces?

Arth. Oh, none like yours, so excellently fair.

Em. Then would I had no Face; for I
 would be

Just such a one as you.

Arth. Alas, 'tis vain to instruct your
 Innocence,

You have no Notion of Light or Colours.

[*Trumpet sounds within.*]

Em. Why, is not that a Trumpet?

Arth. Yes.

Em. I knew it.

And I can tell you how the sound on't looks.
 It looks as if it had an angry fighting Face.

Arth. 'Tis now indeed a sharp unpleasant
 sound,

Because it calls me hence, from her I love,

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ACT I. SCENE I

9

To meet Ten thousand Foes.

Em. How does so many Men e'er come
 to meet?

This Devil Trumpet vexes 'em, and then
 They feel about, for one anothers Faces;
 And so they meet, and kill.

Arth. I'll tell ye all, when we have gain'd
 the Field;
 One kifs of your fair Hand, the pledge of
 Conquest,
 And so a short farewell.

*[Kisses her Hand, and Exit with
 Aurel. Alb. and Attendants.]*

Em. My Heart, and Vows, go with him to
 the Fight:
 May every Foe be that, which they call blind,
 And none of all their Swords have Eyes to
 find him.

But lead me nearer to the Trumpet's Face;
 For that brave Sound upholds my fainting
 Heart;
 And while I hear, methinks I fight my part.
[Exit, led by Matilda.]

Enter Ofwald and Ofmond.

*The Scene represents a place of Heathen Worship;
 The three Saxon Gods, Woden, Thor, and
 Freya placed on Pedestals. An Altar.*

Ofmo. 'Tis time to hasten our mysterious Rites;

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10

KING ARTHUR

Because your Army waits you.

[Ofwald *making three Bows before
the three Images.*

Ofwa. Thor, Freya, Woden, all ye Saxon
Powers,

Hear and revenge my Father *Hengist's* Death.

Ofmo. Father of Gods and Men, great
Woden, hear.

Mount thy hot Courfer, drive amidst thy Foes;
Lift high thy thund'ring Arm, let every blow
Dash out a mis-believing Briton's Brains.

Ofwa. Father of Gods and Men, great
Woden hear;

Give Conquest to thy Saxon Race, and me.

Ofmo. Thor, Freya, Woden, hear, and spell
your Saxons,

With Sacred Runick Rhimes, from Death
in Battel.

Edge their bright Swords, and blunt the
Britons Darts.

No more, Great Prince, for see my trusty Fiend,
Who all the Night has wing'd the dusky Air.

[*Grimbald, a fierce earthy Spirit arises.*

What News, my *Grimbald*?

Grim. I have plaid my part;

For I have Steel'd the Fools that are to die;
Six Fools, so prodigal of Life and Soul,
That, for their Country, they devote their
Lives