

2 Henry IV

3.1

Enter King Henry in his nightgown, with a page

KING HENRY *(giving letters)*

Go call the Earls of Surrey and of Warwick.
But ere they come, bid them o'er-read these letters
And well consider of them. Make good speed.

Exit page

How many thousand of my poorest subjects
Are at this hour asleep? O sleep, O gentle sleep, 5
Nature's soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down
And steep my senses in forgetfulness?
Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee, 10
And hushed with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber,
Than in the perfumed chambers of the great,
Under the canopies of costly state,
And lulled with sound of sweetest melody?
O thou dull god, why li'st thou with the vile 15
In loathsome beds, and leav'st the kingly couch
A watch-case, or a common 'larum-bell?
Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge, 20
And in the visitation of the winds,
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them
With deafing clamour in the slippery clouds,
That, with the hurly, death itself awakes? 25
Canst thou, O partial sleep, give thy repose
To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude,
And in the calmest and most stillest night,
With all appliances and means to boot,
Deny it to a king? Then happy low, lie down. 30
Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.

Enter the Earls of Warwick and Surrey

WARWICK

Many good morrows to your majesty!

KING HENRY
Is it good morrow, lords?

WARWICK 'Tis one o'clock, and past.

KING HENRY
Why then, good morrow to you all, my lords.
Have you read o'er the letter that I sent you? 35

WARWICK We have, my liege.

KING HENRY
Then you perceive the body of our kingdom,
How foul it is, what rank diseases grow,
And with what danger near the heart of it.

WARWICK
It is but as a body yet distempered, 40
Which to his former strength may be restored
With good advice and little medicine.
My lord Northumberland will soon be cooled.

KING HENRY
O God, that one might read the book of fate,
And see the revolution of the times 45
Make mountains level, and the continent,
Weary of solid firmness, melt itself
Into the sea; and other times to see
The beachy girdle of the ocean
Too wide for Neptune's hips; how chance's mocks 50
And changes fill the cup of alteration
With divers liquors! 'Tis not ten years gone
Since Richard and Northumberland, great friends,
Did feast together; and in two year after
Were they at wars. It is but eight years since 55
This Percy was the man nearest my soul,
Who like a brother toiled in my affairs,
And laid his love and life under my foot,
Yea, for my sake, even to the eyes of Richard
Gave him defiance. But which of you was by±± 60
(*To Warwick*) You, cousin Neville, as I may
remember±±
When Richard, with his eye brimful of tears,
Then checked and rated by Northumberland,
Did speak these words, now proved a prophecy?±±

`Northumberland, thou ladder by the which 65
My cousin Bolingbroke ascends my throne'±±
Though then, God knows, I had no such intent,
But that necessity so bowed the state
That I and greatness were compelled to kiss±±
'The time shall come'±±thus did he follow it±± 70
'The time will come that foul sin, gathering head,
Shall break into corruption'; so went on,
Foretelling this same time's condition,
And the division of our amity.

WARWICK

There is a history in all men's lives 75
Figuring the natures of the times deceased;
The which observed, a man may prophesy,
With a near aim, of the main chance of things
As yet not come to life, who in their seeds
And weak beginnings lie intresureÁd. 80
Such things become the hatch and brood of time;
And by the necessary form of this
King Richard might create a perfect guess
That great Northumberland, then false to him,
Would of that seed grow to a greater falseness, 85
Which should not find a ground to root upon
Unless on you.

KING HENRY Are these things then necessities?
Then let us meet them like necessities;
And that same word even now cries out on us.
They say the Bishop and Northumberland 90
Are fifty thousand strong.

WARWICK It cannot be, my lord.
Rumour doth double, like the voice and echo,
The numbers of the feared. Please it your grace
To go to bed? Upon my soul, my lord,
The powers that you already have sent forth 95
Shall bring this prize in very easily.
To comfort you the more, I have received
A certain instance that Glyndwŷr is dead.
Your majesty hath been this fortnight ill,
And these unseasoned hours perforce must add 100
Unto your sickness.

KING HENRY I will take your counsel.
And were these inward wars once out of hand,
We would, dear lords, unto the Holy Land.
Exeunt