

JEPHTHAH

1899

TO

GERALD KELLY

POET AND PAINTER,

I DEDICATE THIS TRAGEDY.

CAMBRIDGE, "November," 1898.

JEPHTHAH

"Let my lamp, at midnight hour,
Be seen in some high lonely Tower,
Where I may oft outwatch the Bear,
With thrice-great Hermes, or unspear
The spirit of Plato, to unfold
What Worlds, or what vast Regions hold
The immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in the fleshy nook;
And of those Daemons that are found
In fire, air, flood, or under ground,
Whose power hath a true consent
With Planet, or with Element.
Some time let Gorgeous Tragedy
In Sceptr'd Pall come sweeping by."
--"Il Penseroso."

GR: Tau-alpha-delta-epsilon nu-epsilon-nu
epsilon-tau-alpha-iota-rho-alpha-iota-sigma

Tau-alpha-iota-sigma epsilon-mu-alpha-iota-sigma-iota
tau-epsilon-rho-pi-nu-alpha kappa-alpha-lambda-omega-sigma
alpha-epsilon-iota-sigma-omega.

--SAPPHO.

"It need not appear strange unto you that this Book is not at all
like unto so many others which I have, and which are
composed in a lofty and subtle style."

-- "The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage."

PRELIMINARY INVOCATION.

TO A. C. S.

IN the blind hour of madness, in its might,
When the red star of tyranny was highest;
When baleful watchfires scared the witless night,
And kings mocked Freedom, as she wept: "Thou diest!" {64A}
When priestcraft snarled at Thought: "I crush thee quite!"
Then rose the splendid song of thee, "Thou liest!"
Out of the darkness, in the death of hope,
Thy white star flamed in Europe's horoscope.

The coffin-nails were driven home: the curse
Of mockery's blessing flung the dust upon her:
The horses of Destruction dragged the hearse
Over besmirched roads of Truth and Honour:
The obscene God spat on the universe:
The sods of Destiny were spattered on her: --
Then rose thy spirit through the shaken skies:
"Child of the Dawn, I say to thee, arise!"

Through the ancestral shame and feudal gloom,
Through mediaeval blackness rung thy paean:

Let there be light! -- the desecrated tomb
Gaped as thy fury smote the Galilean.
Let there be light! and there was light: the womb
Of Earth resounded, and the empyrean
Roared: and the thunder of the seas averred
The presence of thy recreating word.

The stone rolls back: the charioted night,
Stricken, swings backwards on her broken pinions:
Faith sickens, drunken tyranny reels, the spite
Of monarchs, ruinous of their chained dominions: {64B}
The splendid forehead, crowned with Love and Light,
Flames in the starry air: the fallen minions
Drop like lost souls through horrid emptinesses
To their own black unfathomable abysses!

Now Freedom, flower and star and wind and wave
And spirit of the unimagined fire,
Begotten on the dishonourable grave
Of fallen tyranny, may seek her sire
In the pure soul of Man, her lips may have
In the pure waters of her soul's desire,
Truth: and deep eyes behold thine eyes as deep,
Fresh lips kiss thine that kissed her soul from sleep.

See Italy, the eagle of all time,
Triumphant, from her coffin's leaden prison,
Soar into freedom, seek the heights sublime
Of self-reliance, from those depths new-risen,
Stirred by the passion of thy mighty rhyme:
Eagle, and phoenix: shrill, sharp flames bedizen
The burning citadle, where crested Man
Leaps sword in hand upon the Vatican.

Those dire words spoken, that thine hammer beat,

Of fire and steel and music, wrath god-worded,

Consuming with immeasurable heat
The sties and kennels of priest and king, that girded
The loins of many peoples, till the seat
Of Hell was shaken to its deep, and herded
Hosts of the tyrant trembled, faltered, fled,
When none pursued but curses of men dead: --

See, from the Calvary of the Son of Man, <<1>>
Where all the hopes of France were trodden under;
See, from the crucifixion of Sedan
Thy thought the lightning, and thy word the thunder!
See her supreme, kingly, republican,
New France arisen, with her heart in sunder --
Yet throned in Heaven on ever-burning wheels,
Freedom resurgent, sealed with seven seals. {65A}

<<1. Napoleon III.>>

The seal of Reason, made impregnable:
The seal of Truth, immeasurably splendid:
The seal of Brotherhood, man's miracle:
The seal of Peace, and Wisdom heaven-descended:
The seal of Bitterness, cast down to Hell:
The seal of Love, secure, not-to-be-rended:
The seventh seal, Equality: that, broken,
God sets His thunder and earthquake for a token.

Now if on France the iron clangours close,
Corruption's desperate hand, and lurking treason, <<1>>
Or alien craft, <<2>> or menace of strange blows
Wrought of her own sons, <<3>> in this bitter season:
Lift up thy voice, breathe fury on her foes,
Smite bigots yet again, and call on Reason,
Reason that must awake, and sternly grip

The unhooded serpent of dictatorship!<<4>>

<<1. Ultramontanism.>>

<<2. Dreyfusardism.>>

<<3. Militarism.>>

<<4. At the time this poem was written, French patriots looked with a distrustful eye on General de Gallifet.>>

Or, if thou have laid aside the starry brand,
And scourge, whose knots with their foul blood are rotten
Whom thou didst smite; if thine unweary hand
Sicken of slaughter; if thy soul have gotten
Its throne in so sublime a fatherland,
Above these miscreants and misbegotten;
If even already thy spirit have found peace,
Among the thronged immortal secrecies;

If with the soul of Aeschylus thy soul
Talk, and with Sappho's if thy music mingle;
If with the spirit infinite and whole
Of Shakespeare thou commune; if thy brows tingle
With Dante's kiss; If Milton's thunders roll
Amid the skies; if thou, supreme and single,
Be made as Shelley or as Hugo now,
And all their laurels mingle on thy brow --

Then (as Elijah, when the whirling fire
Caught him) stoop not thy spiritual splendour,
And sacred-seeking eyes to our desire,
But mould one memory yet, divinely tender, {65B}
Of earth, and leave thy mantle, and thy lyre,
A double portion of thy spirit to render,
That yet the banner may fling out on high,
And yet the lyre teach freemen how to die!

Master, the night is falling yet again.
I hear dim trappings of unholy forces:
I see the assembly of the foully slain:

The scent of murder steams: riderless horses
Gallop across the earth, and seek the inane:
The sun and moon are shaken in their courses:
The kings are gathered, and the vultures fall
Screaming, to hold their ghastly festival.

Master, the sons of Freedom are but few --
Yea, but as strong as the storm-smitten sea,
Their forehead consecrated with the dew,
Their heart made mighty: let all my voice decree,
My spirit lift their standard: clear and true
Bid my trump sound, "Let all the earth be free!"
With thine own strength and melody made strong,
And filled with fire and light of thine own song.

Only a boy's wild songs, a boy's desire,
I bring with reverent hands. The task is ended --
The twilight draws on me: the sacred fire
Sleeps: I have sheathed my sword, my bow unbended:
So for one hour I lay aside the lyre,
And come, alone, unholpen, unbefriended,
As streams get water of the sun-smit sea,
Seeking my ocean and my sun in thee.

Yea, with thy whirling clouds of fiery light
Involve my music, gyring fuller and faster!
Yea, to my sword lend majesty and might
To dominate all tumult and disaster,
That even my song may pierce the iron night,
Invoking dawn in thy great name, O Master!
Till to the stainless heaven of the soul
Even my chariot-wheels on thunder roll.

And so, most sacred soul, most reverend head,
The silence of deep midnight shall be bound,
And with the mighty concourse of the dead

That live, that contemplate, my place be found, {66A}
Even mine, through all the seasons that are shed
Like leaves upon the darkness, where the sound
Of all high song through calm eternity
Shall beat and boom, thine own maternal sea.

For in the formless world, so swift a fire
Shall burn, that fire shall not be comprehended:
So deep a music roll, that our desire
Shall hear no sound; shall beam a light so splendid
That darkness shall be infinite; the lyre
Fashioned of truth, strung with men's heart-strings blended,
Shall sound as silence: and all souls be still
In wisdom's high communion with will.

JEPHTHAH

"A TRAGEDY."

"O Jephthah! judge of Israel!" -- HAMLET.

"CHARACTERS"

JEPHTHAH

ADULAH, "his Daughter."

JARED, "A Gileadite, cousin to" Jephthah.

A Prophet of the Lord.

ELEAZAR, "Chief of the Elders of Israel."

AHINOAM, "an aged Priest."

First Messenger.

Second Messenger.
First Herald.
Second Herald.
Soldiers of Jephthah.
Soldiers of Israel.

Chorus of Elders of Israel.
Maidens of Israel.

SCENE: -- "An Open Place before Mizpeh. In the midst an
Altar."

TIME: -- "The duration of the play is from noon of the first day
to dawn
of the third."

JEPHTHAH.

"Eleazar. Prophet. Chorus."

CHORUS.

NOW is our sin requited of the Lord.
For, scorning Jephthah for an harlot's son,
We cast him forth from us, and said: Begone,
Thou shalt not enter in with us; thy throat {66B}
Shall thirst for our inheritance in vain;
Thou hast no lot nor part in Gilead.
And now, he gathers to himself vain men,
Violent folk, and breakers of the law,
And holds aloof in rocky deserts, where
The land, accurst of God, is barren still
Of any herb, or flower, or any tree,
And has no shelter, nor sweet watersprings,
Save where a lonely cave is hollow, and where

A meagre fountain sucks the sand. Our folk
Are naked of his counsel and defence
Against the tribe of Ammon, and stand aghast;
Our feeble arms sway doubtfully long swords,
And spears are flung half-heartedly; and he
With warlike garrison and stronger arms

Who might have helped us, laughs, and violence
Threatens the white flower of our homes: our wives,
Daughters, and sons are as a prey to them,
And where the children of the Ammonites
Throng not swift hoofs for murder, Jephthah's men
Blaspheme our sanctuaries inviolate,
And rob us of our dearest. Woe on woe
Hangs imminent to crush the slender sides
And battered bulwarks of our state. O thou
Whose hoary locks and sightless eyes compel
Our pity and our reverence, and whose mouth
Foams with the presence of some nearer god
Insatiate of thy body frail, give tongue,
If tongue may so far master deity
As give his fury speech, or shape thy words
From the blind auguries of madness.

PROPHET.

Ha!

The rose has washed its petals, and the blood
Pours through its burning centre from my heart.
The fire consumes the light; and rosy flame
Leaps through the veins of blue, and tinges them
With such a purple as incarnadines {67A}
The western sky when storms are amorous
And lie upon the breast of toiling ocean,
Such billows to beget as earth devours
In ravening whirlpool gulphs. My veins are full,

Throbbing with fire more potent than all wine,
All sting of fleshly pangs and pleasures. Oh!
The god is fast upon my back; he rides
My spirit like a stallion; for I hate
The awful thong his hand is heavy with.

ELEAZAR.

Speak, for the god compels, and we behold.

PROPHET.

A harlot shall be mother of Israel.

CHORUS.

He speaks of her who sighed for Gilead.

PROPHET.

A maiden shall be slain for many men.

CHORUS.

A doubtful word, and who shall fathom it?

PROPHET.

Thy help is from the hills and desert lands.

CHORUS.

Our help is from the hills: we know the Lord.

PROPHET.

Death rides most violently against the sun.

CHORUS.

And who shall bridle him, or turn his way?
For Fate alone of gods, inflexible,
And careless of men's deeds, is firm in heaven.

PROPHET.

I see a sword whose hilt is to thy hand.

CHORUS.

But which of us shall wield the shining blade? {67B}

PROPHET.

I see a dove departing to the hills

CHORUS.

I pray it bring an olive-branch to us.

PROPHET.

The god has overcome me; I am silent.

CHORUS.

He lies as one lies dead; none wakens him.
Nor life nor death must touch him now: beware!

ELEAZAR.

Beware now, all ye old wise men, of this.
For high things spoken and unjustly heard,
Or heard and turned aside, are fruitless words,
Or bear a blossom evil and abhorred,
Lest God be mocked. Consider well of this.

CHORUS.

A sword, a sword, to smite our foes withal!

ELEAZAR.

A help shall come from desert lands to us.

CHORUS.

Toward what end? For present help is much,
But uttermost destruction more, for we
Have no strong hope in any hand of man:
God is our refuge and our tower of strength.
In him if any man abide -- But if
He put his faith in horsemen, or the sword,
The sword he trusted shall be for an end.

ELEAZAR.

But evils fall like rain upon the land.

CHORUS.

Let us not call the hail to give us peace.

ELEAZAR.

Nor on the sun, lest he too eat us up. {68A}

CHORUS.

The heart of a man as the sea
Beats hither and thither to find
Ease for the limbs long free,
Light for the stormy mind,
A way for the soul to flee,
A charm for the lips to bind;

And the struggle is keen as the strife to be,
And the heart is tossed by the thankless wind.

ELEAZAR.

Nay, for a man's sure purpose is of God.

CHORUS.

The large pale limbs of the earth are tanned
With the sun and the sea and the yellow sand;
And the face of earth is dark with love
Of the lords of hell and the spirits above
That move in the foggy air of night,
And the spirit of God, most like a dove,
Hovers, and lingers, and wings his flight,
Spurned and rejected and lost to sight;
But we desire him, a holy bird,
And we turn eyes to the hollow hills;
For God is strong, and His iron word
Mocks at the gods of the woods and rills.

For our God is as a fire
That consumeth every one
That is underneath the sun.

We, for uttermost desire,
Must abase, with rent attire,
Souls and bodies to His throne,
Where above the starry choir
Stands the jasper, where alone
Vivid seraphim respire
Perfumes of a precious stone,
Where beneath His feet the dire
World of shells is pashed with mire,
And the evil spirits' ire
Steams and fumes within the zone

Girt with manaret and spire
Broken, burst, and overthrown,
Dusty, and defiled, and dun,
Palled with smoke of fruitless altars {68B}
Cast beneath the ocean now,
Ruined symbols, changed psalters,
Where no lip no longer falters,
And the priest's deep brow
Pales not, flushes not for passion,
Clouds not with concealed thought,
And the worshipper's eye, wrought
To the stars in subtle fashion,
By no magic is distraught.

Ay! our hope is in His holy
Places, and our prayers ascend
Fervent, and may sunder slowly
The blue darkness at the end.
For we know not where to send
For a sword to cleanse the land,
For a sharp two-edged brand,
All our homesteads to defend.
Now amid the desert sand
Lives an outcast of our race,

Strong, immutable, and grand,
And his mighty hand
Grips a mighty mace.
He would shatter, did we call,
Sons of Ammon one and all,
Did we fear not lest his eye
Turn back covetous to try
For our pleasancess, to rule
Where the far blue Syrian sky
Stretches, where the clouds as wool
Mark the white Arabian border,
To become a tyrant king

Where his sword came conquering.
Out of chaos rises order
On her wide unwearying wing,
But the desolate marauder
Never over us shall swing
Such a sceptre as should bring
Sorrow to one home of ours.
Better bear the heavy hours
Under God's avenging breath,
Better brave the horrid powers,
Better taste the foreign death,
Humbling all our pride before
God's most holy throne, abasing
Every man's strong soul, and facing
All the heathen Ammon bore
On the angry shore, {69A}
Trusting to the mercy rare
Of Jehovah, than to bare
Hearts and bosoms to a friend
Who high truth and faith may swear,
And betray us at the end
To his robber bands.
So we clasp our humble hands,

Praying God to lift His sword
From our bleeding state, that stands
Tottering to its fall.
Though we call not Jephthah back
To repel the harsh attack,
Nor his followers call,
Hear thou, O Most High, give ear
To our pitiful complaint:
Under woes of war we faint.
Pity, Lord of Hosts, our fear!
Hear, Most High, oh, hear!

"Enter" Messenger.

MESSENGER.

My lords, take heed now, prayer is good to save
While yet the foemen are far off; but now
They howl and clamour at our very gates.

ELEAZAR.

Blaspheme not God, but tell thy woeful news.

CHORUS.

I fear me for the sorrow that he speaks.

MESSENGER.

The tribe of Ephraim went forth to fight
Armed, and with bows, and turned them back to-day.
For in the South a cloud of many men,
And desert horsemen fiery as the sun,

Swarmed on the plains, a crescent from the hills
That girdle Mahanaim: and behold!
Our men were hemmed before the city gates,
The elders having fortified them: so
They fled about the city, and the horsemen,
Dashing, destroyed them as the wind that sweeps {69B}
Sere leaves before its fury: then the city
With arrows darkened all the air; and luck
Smote down some few pursuing; but their captain
Riding his horse against the gate, drove in
His spear, and cried to them that followed him:
Who plucks my spear out shall be chief of all
That ply the short spear: and who breaks the gate
Shall lead my horsemen into Mizpeh: then,

Rushing, their spearmen battered in the gate
And overpowered the youths and aged men,
That put up trembling spears, and drew slack bows,
And flung weak stones that struck for laughter's sake.
So now the city is the spoil of them,
And all our women-folk are slain or violatè,
And all our young men murderously slain,
And children spitted on their coward spears.

CHORUS.

How heavy is thy hand upon us, Lord!

MESSENGER.

Nor stayed they there; but, firing Mahanaim,
Sweep toward Mizpeh like a locust-cloud.

ELEAZAR.

Get thee to horse and carry me this message:

The Elders unto Jephthah, greeting: Help!
No single cry beyond that Help! Be gone!
["Exit" Messenger.

CHORUS.

I fear me our necessity is sure.
But they come thither. Shall we rather flee?

ELEAZAR.

I stand here manly, and will die a man. {70A}

CHORUS.

For cowardice not pleases God, nor fear.
Shall we not take up weapons? Or shall he
Rather defend us with His Holy Arm
We nor presuming in our arrogance
To come with cunning, and defend ourselves?

ELEAZAR.

Nay, but God smites with sharpness of our swords.

CHORUS.

The sword is made sharp in our hands, but the point He shall
guide;
We grasp the tough ash of the spear, but His hand is beside;
We drive in a cloud at the foe, but His chariots ride
Before us to sunder the spears.

We trust in His arms, and His prowess shall fledge our song's
wing;

Our triumph we give to His glory, our spoil to the King;
Our battles He fights as we fight them, our victories bring
For His temple a tribute of tears.

"Enter" JEPHTHAH "amid his Soldiers, with
many young men of Israel."

JEPHTHAH.

Yea, for a man's sword should not turn again
To his own bosom, and the sword of fear
Smites not in vain the heart of cowardice.
But who hath called me thither to what end?

ELEAZAR.

For these, and for the sake of Israel.

JEPHTHAH.

And who are these? And who are Israel?

CHORUS.

Turn not thy face from us in wrath, for we
Are thine own father's children, and his loins
With double fervour gat a double flower;
And we indeed were born of drudging wives, {70B}
Pale spouses whom his heart despised, but thou
Wast of a fairer face and brighter eyes,
And limbs more amorous assuaged thy sire;
And fuller blood of his is tingling thus
Now in thy veins indignant at our sin.
But thou art strong and we are weak indeed,
Nor can we bear the burden, nor sustain

The fury of the Children of the East
That ride against us, and bright victory
Is throned in their banners, while on ours
Perches the hideous nightbird of defeat.
Mourn, mourn and cry; bow down unto the dust
O Israel, and O Gilead, for your son
Comes with unpitying eyes and lips compressed
To watch the desecration of thy shrine,
Jehovah, and the ruin of our hearth.

JEPHTHAH.

I am your outcast brother. At my birth
My father did not smile, nor she who bore
These limbs dishonourable did not smile,
Nor did my kisses soothe a mother's woe.
Because my thews grown strong were impotent

To reign or be a captain any more,
Though I might serve the children who had grown
Less godlike from his loins who made me god.
So when the day was ripe, my brethren turned
And gnashed upon me, mocking, with their teeth:
Thou art the son of a strange woman, thou!
Begone from honest folk! -- and I in wrath
Smote once or twice with naked hand, and slew
Two gibing cowards, and went forth an outcast,
And gathered faithful servitors, and ruled
Mightiest in the desert, and was lord
Of all the marches where my spear might throw
Its ominous shadow between night and noon.
Yet always I considered my revenge, {71A}
And purposed, seeking out those kin of mine,
To make them as those kings that Gideon slew
Hard by the bloody waters of a brook.
And now ye call me to your help, forsooth!

CHORUS.

Let no ill memory of an ancient wrong,
Most mighty, edge thy sword
Against the prayer of this repentant song.
Dire sorrow of the Lord
Consumes our vital breath, and smites us down,
And desecrates the crown.
For we have sinned against thee, and our souls
Scathe and devour as coals,
And God is wroth because of thee, to break
The spirit of our pride, our lips to make
Reverent toward thee, as of men ashamed.
And now we pray thee for our children's sake,
And thine own pity's sake, to come untamed,
And furiously to ride against our foes,
To be our leader, till one sanguine rose

Spread from thy standard awful leaves of blood,
And thy swords pour their long insatiate flood
Through ranks of many dead! then, then to close
The wounds of all the land, and bit it bud
And blossom; as when two-and-thirty men,
The sons of Jair, on milk-white asses rode,
And judged us righteously, and each abode
Safe in the shadow of his vine; as when
The peace of Joshua lay upon the land,
And God turned not away His piteous eyes,
Nor smote us with the fury of His hand,
Nor clouded over His mysterious skies.
Then storm and wind had no more might at all,
And death and pestilence forgotten were;
Then angels came to holy men that call,
And gracious spirits thronged the happy air;
Then God was very gracious to all folk;

He lifted from us the Philistian yoke,
And all the iron of power of Edom broke: -- {71B}
Ah! all the Earth was fair!
Now, seeing that we are sinners, wilt not thou
Relent thy hateful brow,
Bend down on us a forehead full of peace,
Bidding thine anger cease,
Speaking sweet words most comfortable. O lose
The bitter memory of the wrong long dead!
O be the lord and prince we gladly choose
And crown the mercy of thy royal head!
Be thou the chief, and rule upon thy kin,
And be not wroth for sin.
For surely in the dusty days and years
There is a little river flowing still
That brings forgetfulness of woes and fears
And drinks up all the memory of ill.
Wherefore our tribute to thy feet we bring;
Conquer our foes, and reign our king!

JEPH'THAH.

Ye have no king but God; see ye to that!

ELEAZAR.

Behold, these people are as children, hiding
Thoughts beautiful and true in profuse words,
Not meaning all the lofty flight that fancy
And the strong urgement of a tune discover.
Be thou our judge, as Joshua long ago.

JEPH'THAH.

Swear by the Name unspoken that the truth

Flashes between the lips that tremble thus!
Ye love me not; yet fear me; ye might thrust
 Some petty obstacle before my hands
When I would grasp your promise, and betray
Your faith for fear of me. I read thy thoughts,
Old man; I trust no word of thine; but these
 Full-hearted mourners, them will I believe
 Upon their oath most solemn and secure.
But take thou warning now! I shall not spare
Grey hairs or faltering limbs for treachery. {72A}

ELEAZAR.

Lift up your hands, all people of this land,
And swear with me this oath my lips pronounce:
 By Wisdom, father of the world, we swear;
 By Understanding, mother of the sea,
By Strength and Mercy, that support the throne,
 By Beauty, Splendour, Victory, we swear,
And by the strong foundations, and the Kingdom,

Flower of all kingdoms, and by the holy Crown
Concealed with all concealments, highest of all,
 We swear to be true men to thee and thine.

JEPHTHAH.

I thank you, people. Let the younger men
Gather their swords and spears, and pass before
 This spear I strike into the earth, that so
 I see how many fight for Israel.

CHORUS.

The young men are girded with swords;
The spears flash on high, and each shield

Gleams bright like the fury of lords
Through the steam of the well-foughten field.
The children of Ammon are broken, their princes and warriors
yield,

The captain is chosen for fight;
The light of his eye is as fire,
His hand is hardy of might
And heavy as dead desire;
The sword of the Lord and of Jephthah shall build our dead
women a pyre.

The people are sad for his wrath;
The elders were bowed with despair,
And death was the piteous path;
With ashes we covered our hair;
The voice of the singer was dumb, the voice of the triumph of
prayer.
{72B}

But God had pity upon us,

Our evil and fallen way;
His mercy was mighty on us;
His lips are as rosy as day
Broken out of the sea at the sunrise, as fragrant as flowers in
May.

Our sin was great in His sight:
We chased from our gates our brother,
We shamed his father's might,
We spat on the grave of his mother,
We laughed in his face and mocked, looking slyly one to
another.

But God beheld, and His hand

Was heavy to bring us grief;
He brought down fire on the land,
And withered us root and leaf
Until we were utterly broken, lost men, without a chief.

But whom we scorned we have set
A leader and judge over all;
His wrong he may not forget,
But he pitieth men that call
From the heart that is broken with fear and the noise of funeral.

JEPHTHAH.

Are all these ready for the hearth and altars
To perish suddenly upon the field,
Pavilioned with the little tents at noon,
And ere the nightfall tented with the dead,
And every hollow made a sepulchre,
And every hill a vantage ground whereon
Hard-breathing fighting men get scanty sleep,
Till the dawn lift his eyebrows, and the day
Renew the battle? Will ye follow me

Through slippery ways of blood to Ephraim
To beat with sturdy swords unwearying
Our foemen to their Ammon, and to grapple
With red death clutching at the throat of us,
With famine and with pestilence, at last
To reach a barren vengeance, and perchance
An hundred of your thousands to return {27A}
Victors -- so best God speed us -- and for worst
Death round our cities horrible and vast,
And rape and murder mocking at our ghosts?

A SOLDIER.

Better they taunt our ghosts than us for cowards!
Live through or die, I will have my sword speak plain
To these damned massacring invaders. Say,
My fellows, will ye follow Jephthah? Hail!

SOLDIERS.

We follow Jephthah to the death. All hail!

JEPHTHAH.

Go then, refresh yourselves. Sleep well to-night!
I will send messages to their dread lord
["Enter a Herald."
Demanding his fell purpose, threatening
My present aid to you with men of valour
Chosen of all your tribes, and charging him
As he loves life, and victory, to content
His army with their present brief success,
Lest he pass by the barrier of our suffering,
And find our wrath no broken sword, and find
Despair more terrible than hope. Go now!

A SOLDIER.

We go, my lord, less readily to sleep
Than if you bade us march. No man of us
But stirs a little, I warrant, in his dreams,
And reaches out for sword-hilt. All hail, Jephthah!

SOLDIERS.

Jephthah! a leader, a deliverer. Hail!
["Exeunt Soldiers and Young Men." {73B}

JEPHTHAH.

Hearken, Jehovah, to thy servant now;
Fill Thou my voice with thine own thunders; fill
My swift sharp words with such a lightning-fork
As shall fall venomous upon the host
Of these idolatrous that thus invade
Our fenced cities, these that put to sword
Our helpless. Hear the cry of widowed men!
Of young men fatherless! Of old men reft
Of children! Grant us victory to avenge
Their innocent shed blood, and ruined land.
So, to gain time for prayer and penitence
For grievous trespass of idolatry
Done to the accursed Baalim ("aside") -- and time
To gather fugitives, and make them men,
And straggling herdsmen for our armament! -- ("aloud")
We send the, herald, to the furious king
Who lies with all his power encamped somewhere
Hence southward toward Mahanaim. Say
Unto the king of Ammon: Thus saith Jephthah:
Why hast thou come with bloody hands against us?
Our holy God, that bound the iron sea
With pale frail limits of white sand, and said:

Thus far, and not one billowy step beyond!
Saith unto thee in like commandment: Thou
Who hast destroyed my people from the land
So far, shalt not encroach upon their places
One furlong more, lest quickly I destroy
Thee and thy host from off the earth. Say thus;
Ride for thy life, and bring me speedy word.
["Exit Herald."]

CHORUS.

Not winged forms, nor powers of air,
Nor sundered spirits pale and fair,
Nor glittering sides and scales, did bring
The knowledge of this happy thing {74A}
That is befallen us unaware.

In likeness to the lips that sing
Ring out your frosty peal, and smite
Loud fingers on the harp, and touch
Lutes, and clear psalteries musical,
And all stringed instruments, to indite
A noble song of triumph, such
As men may go to fight withal.
For now a captain brave and strong
Shall break the fury of the thong
Wherewith the sons of Ammon scourge
Our country; and his war shall urge
Long columns of victorious men
To blackest wood and dimmest den,
Wherever fugitive and slave
Shall seek a refuge, find a grave;
And so pursue the shattered legions
Through dusty ways and desert regions
Back to the cities whence they came
With iron, massacre, and flame,
And turn their own devouring blade

On city fired and violate maid,
That Israel conquer, and men know
God is our God against a foe.

For the web of the battle is woven
Of men that are strong as the sea,
When the rocks by its tempest are cloven,
And waves wander wild to the lee;
When ships are in travail forsaken,
And tempest and tumult awaken;

When foam by fresh foam overtaken
Boils sanguine and fervent and free.

The sword is like lightning in battle,
The spear like the light of a star;
It strikes on the shield, and the rattle
Of arrows is hail from afar.

For the ways of the anger of lords
Are bloody and widowing swords,
And the roar of contention of chords
Rolls back from the heart of the war.

The fighters slip down on the dying,
And flying folk stumble on dead,
And the sound of the pitiless crying
Of slaughter is heavy and red, {74B}
The sound of the lust of the slayer
As fierce as a Persian's prayer,
And the sound of the loud harp-player
Like the wind beats to their tread.

A royal triumph is waiting
For the captain of Heaven's choice,
A noise as of eagles mating,
A cry as of men that rejoice.
For victory crowns with garlands

Of fame his valour in far lands,
And suns sing back to the starlands
His praise with a perfect voice.

JEPHTHAH.

Leave prophecy until I come again!

CHORUS.

A prophet told us thou shouldst fight for us
And save thy people from the Ammonites.

JEPHTHAH.

Why look you so? He told you other thing.

CHORUS.

Nay, lord, no saying that we understood.

JEPHTHAH.

Speak thou its purport; I may understand.
For, know you, in the desert where I dwelt
I had strange store of books obscure; books written
Not openly for fools, but inwardly
Toward the heart of wise men. And myself
Studied no little while upon these things,
And, seeking ever solitude, I went
Nightly upon a rock that stood alone
Threatening the sandy wilderness, and prayed
Where many visions came before mine eyes
So strange -- these eyes have started from my head,
And every hair, grown fearful, like a steed
Reared in its frenzy: see, these lips of mine

Have blanched, these nails have bitten through my flesh {75A}
For sundry things I saw -- and these informed
My open spirit by their influence,
And taught mine ears to catch no doubtful sound
Of prophecy, but fix it in my mind,
A lambent liquid fire of poetry
Full of all meaning as the very stars.
Yet of my own life they have never breathed

One chilly word of fear, or one divine
Roseate syllable of hope and joy.
Still less of love. For no sweet life of love
Lies to my hand, but I am bound by Fate
To the strong compulsion of the sword; my lips
Shall fasten on my wife's not much; nor those
Pure lips of innocent girlhood that call me
Father; but my lips must wreath smiles no more,
But set in fearful strength of purpose toward
The blood of enemies, in horrid gouts
And hideous fountains leaping from great gashes,
Rather than that beloved blood that wells
Fervent and red-rose-wise in loving breasts,
And little veins of purple in the arms,
Or cheeks that are already flushed with it,
To crimson them with the intense delight
Of eyes that meet and know the spirit dwells
Beyond their profound depth in sympathy.
Nay, my delight must find some dearest foe,
And cleave his body with a lusty stroke
That sets the blood sharp tingling in my arm.
Yet tell me if perchance I lay aside
One day the harness of cold iron, bind on
The lighter reins of roses deftly twined
By children loving me, to be a harness
To drive me on the road of happiness
To the far goal of heaven. Would to God
It might be so a little ere I die!

CHORUS OF ELDERS.

This doubtful word his fuming lips gave forth;
A maiden shall be slain for many men.
This only of his fury seemed obscure. {75B}

JEPHTHAH.

A maiden shall be slain for many men.
Surely, O people, and men of Israel,
The prophecy is happy to the end.
For see yon moon that creeps inviolate
Against the corner of the mountains so,
Slowly and gracefully to lighten us.
So, ere three nights be gone, the course of heaven
Shall be most monstrously o'erwhelmed for us
Ere sundown, as for Joshua, and the moon,
The maiden moon, be slain that we may see
By the large moveless sun to strike and slay,
More utterly proud Ammon to consume.
This is the omen. Shout for joy, my friends!
But who comes whirling in yon dusty cloud,
His eager charger dimly urging him
Toward our conclave? 'Tis our messenger.

"Re-enter Herald."

Sir, you ride well. I pray hour news be good.

HERALD.

So spake the haughty and rebellious Ammon
Defying your most gentle words with scorn:
Tell Jephthah: Israel took away my land
When they came out of Egypt from the river
Of Ammon unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan.
Wherefore, I pray thee, sheathe thy sword, restore
Peaceably these my lands, and go in peace,
Lest wrath, being kindled, consume thee utterly.

JEPHTHAH.

Let yet another herald stand before me

["Enter Second Herald."]

Fresh, and go thou, swiftest of messengers,
And sleep and eat a little, and to-morrow
Thou shalt have guerdon of thy faithfulness.

["Exit Herald."]

But now, sir, go to this rebellious king {76A}
And say to him: Thus Jephthah, judge of Israel,

With gentle words answers thy greediness:
Israel took not thy land, nor that of Moab:
And over wilderness, to Kadesh came.

Our people sent a message unto Edom
Unto the king thereof, and prayed his grace,
To let them pass through his dominions
And unto Moab: and they answered Nay.

So Israel abode in Kadesh: then
Passing through all the desert round about
Edom and Moab, pitched their weary tent
Beyond the bank of Ammon; and they sent
Messengers thence to Sihon, Heshbon's king,

The lord of Amorites, and said to him:

I prithee, let us pass to our own place
Through thy dominions: but his crafty mind,
Fearing some treachery, that was not, save
In his ill mind that thought it, did determine

To gather all this people, and to pitch
Tents hostile in the plains before Jahaz.
And there he fought with Israel; but God
Delivered Sihon to our hands, and all

That followed him: whom therefore we destroyed

With many slaughters: so we dispossessed
The envious Amorites, and had their land,
A land whose borders were the Ammon brook
On the one hand, and on the other Jabbok

And Jordan: we, who slew the Amorites.
What hast thou, king of Ammon, here to do?
How thinkst thou to inherit their possessions
That the Lord God hath given us? Go to!
Chemosh your god hath given you your land;
Possess that peaceably; but whomsoever
The Lord or God shall drive before our spears,
His lands we will possess. And thou, O king,
Art thou now better than that bloody Balak
Whose iron hand was upon Moab? He, {76B}
Fought he against us, while three hundred years
We dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and Aroer
And her white cities, and by Ammon's coast?
Why therefore did ye not recover them
Then and not now? I have not sinned against thee:
But thou dost me foul wrong to bring thy sword
And torch of rapine in my pleasant land.
Between the folk of Ammon and the folk
Of Israel this day be God the judge.
["Exit Second Herald."]

ELEAZAR.

Well spoken: but the ear that will not hear
Is deafen than the adder none may charm.

JEPHTHAH.

I know it, and will not await the answer.
But dawn shall see a solemn sacrifice,
And solemn vows, and long swords glittering,
And moving columns that shall shake the earth
With firm and manly stride; and victory
Most like a dove amid the altar-smoke.

CHORUS.

We, passing here the night in prayer, will wait
And with thee offer up propitious doves,
And firstling males of all the flocks of us.

JEPHTHAH.

Not so: but I will have you hence in haste
To gather food and arms and carriages,
That all our soldiers may have sustenance,
And fresher weapons. I alone will spend
The long hours with Jehovah, at His throne,
And wrestle with the accuser. So, depart!

CHORUS.

When the countenance fair of the morning
And the lusty bright limbs of the day
Race far through the west for a warning
Of night that is evil and gray; {77A}
When the light by the southward is dwindled,
And the clouds as for sleep are unfurled,
The moon in the east is rekindled,
The hope of the passionate world.
The stars for a token of glory
Flash fire in the eyes of the night,
And the holy immaculate story
Of Heaven is flushed into light.
For the night has a whisper to wake us,
And the sunset a blossom to kiss,
And the silences secretly take us

To the well of the water that is<<1>>;
For the darkness is pregnant with being,
As earth that is glad of the rain,

And the eyes<<2>> that are silent and seeing
Are free of the trammels of pain.
Like light through the portals they<<3>> bounded,
Their lithe limbs with cruelty curled,
And the noise of their crying resounded
To kindle the death of the world.
For the heaven at sunset is sundered;
Its gates to the sages unclose,
And through waters that foamed and that wondered
There flashes the heart of a rose;
In its petals are beauty and passion,
In its stem the foundation of earth,
Its bloom the incarnadine fashion
Of blessings that roar into birth;
And the gates<<4>> that roll back on their hinges
The soul of the sage may discern,
Till the water<<5>> with crimson that tinges
Beyond them miraculous burn;
And the presence of God to the senses
Is the passion of God in the mind,
As the string of a harp that intenses
The note that its fire may not find.
For here in the tumult and labour
And blindness of cowering man, {77B}
The spirit has God for a neighbour,
And the wheels unreturning that ran
Return to the heart of the roses,
And curl in the new blossom now,
As the holiest fire that encloses
Gray flame<<6>> on the holiest brow.
So midnight with magic reposes,
And slumbers to visions bow.
For the soul of man, being free, shall pass the gates of God,
And the spirit find the Sea by the feet of Him<<7>> untrod,
And the flesh, a lifeless ember, in ashen fear grow cold,

As the lives before remember the perished hours of gold.
["Exeunt all but" JEPHTHAH.

- <<1. This emphatic use of "to be" as a principal verb is very common with Crowley, who thereby wishes to distinguish between the noumenon and the phenomenon.>>
<<2. The eyes of Jehovah: they are 700,000 spirits. See Idra Rabba Qadishah, xxxi.>>
<<3. The eyes.>>
<<4. The gates of Binah -- understanding.>>
<<5. Binah, the great Sea. The colour of crimson is attributed to it by certain Qabalists.>>
<<6. The flame of Chokmah -- wisdom -- which is gray in colour. "Cf." the Hindu Ajna.>>
<<7. Microprosopus, who reacheth not so high as Understanding.>>

JEPHTHAH.

Surely, my God, now I am left alone
Kneeling before Thy throne,
I may grow beautiful, even I, to see
Thy beauty fair and free.
For on the vast expanses of the wold
I hear the feet of gold,
And over all the skies I see a flame
That flickers with Thy Name.
Therefore, because Thou hast hid Thy face, and yet
Given me not to forget
The foaming cloud that shaped itself a rose,
Whose steady passion glows
Within the secretest fortress of my heart,
Because, my God, Thou Art,
And I am chosen of Thee for this folk
To break the foreign yoke,

Therefore, Existence of Existence, hear!
Bend low Thine holy ear,
And make Thyself, unseen, most terrible
To these fierce fiends of hell
That torture holiest ears with false complaint:
Bend down, and bit me faint {78A}
Into the arms of night, to see Thine hosts
March past the holy coasts,
A wall of golden weapons for the land,
And let me touch Thy hand,
And feel Thy presence very near to-night!
I sink as with delight
Through places numberless with fervid fires
Oh holiest desires
Into I know not what a cradle, made
Of subtle-shaped shade,
And arms most perdurable.<<1>> I am lost
In thought beyond all cost --
Nay, but my spirit breaks the slender chain
That held it down. The pain
Of death is past and I am free. Nay, I,
This body, dead, must lie
Till thou come home again, O soaring Soul.
The gates supernal roll!
Flash through them, O white-winged, white-blossom ghost!
Ah, God! for I am lost.
[JEPHTHAH "remains motionless."<<2>>
["Morning dawns."]

<<1. Able to endure "to the end".>>
<<2. The description is of a certain spiritual exercise familiar to
mystics.>>

"Enter" JARED, "Soldiers, Prophet."

SOLDIERS.

Hail, captain! We are ready now for death,
Or victory, if shining wings are fain
To hover over dauntless hearts. Behold
Our ready bands to follow to the fray.

JEPHTHAH.

Welcome! hail ye this happy dawn as one
That shall see freedom smile on us, and peace,
And victory, and new hours of happiness. {78B}

CHORUS OF SOLDIERS.

Out of the waters of the sea
Our father Abraham beheld
The lamp of heaven arise to be
The monarch quenchless and unquelled;
But we on this far Syrian shore
See dawn upon the mountains pour.<<1>>

<<1. Abraham before his migration saw dawn rise over the
Persian Gulf; but to the east of Palestine are mountains.>>

The limit of the snows is bright;
As spears that glitter shine the hills;
The foaming forehead of the light
All air with cloudy fragrance fills;
And, born of desolation blind,
The young sweet summer burns behind.

The Altar of the Lord is set
With salt and fire and fervid wine,
And toward the east the light is let
For shadow for the holiest shrine:

One moment hangs the fire of dawn
Until the sacrament be sworn.

Behold, the priest, our captain, takes
The sacred robes, the crown of gold,
The light of other sunlight<<1>> breaks
Upon his forehead calm and cold;
And other dawns more deep and wise
Burn awful in his holy eyes.

<<1. "i.e." the light of the Divine Presence.>>

A moment, and the fire is low
Upon the black stone of the altar,
The spilt blood eagerly doth glow,
And lightnings lick the light, and falter,
Feeling the vast Shekinah<<1>> shine
Above their excellence divine.

<<1. The presence of God.>>

The Lord is gracious to His own,
And hides with glory as a mist
The sacrifice and smitten stone,
And on the lips His presence kissed
Burn the high vows with ample flame
That He shall swear to by the Name. {79A}

JEPHTHAH.

Highest of Highest, most Concealed of all,
Most Holy Ancient One, Unnamable,
Receive for these Thy servants this our oath
To serve none other gods but Thee alone.
And for my own part who am judge of these

I vow beyond obedience sacrifice,
And for the victory Thou shalt give, I vow
To sacrifice the first of living things
That with due welcome shall divide the doors
Of my house, meeting me, an offering
Burnt before Thee with ceremony meet
To give Thee thanks, nor take ungratefully
This first of favours from the Hand Divine.

SOLDIERS.

A noble vow: and God is glad thereat.

PROPHET.

I charge you in the name of God, go not!
I see a mischief fallen on your souls
Most bitter. Aye! an evil day is this
If ye go forth with such a sacrifice,
And vows most hideous in their consequence.

SOLDIERS.

It is the prophet of the Lord.

JEPHTHAH.

Possessed
By Baal; scourge him hence; he lies, for God
With powerful proof and many lightnings came
Devouring up the offering at the altar.

PROPHET.

O Jephthah, it is thou on whom it falls,

The sorrow grievous as thy life is dear.

A SOLDIER.

He is the prophet of the Baalim
We have enough of such: in God's name, home!
["Stabbing him." {79B}

PROPHET.

Thy spear shall turn against thyself, alas!
But welcome, death, thou looked-for spouse of mine!
Thy kiss is pleasant as the shaded well
That looks through palm leaves to the quiet sky.
["Dies."

JEPHTHAH.

Thou didst no evil in the slaying him,
For God is a consuming fire; high zeal
Against idolatry lacks not reward.
And now the sun is up: for Israel, march!

JARED.

Good luck be with your spears; and homecoming
Gladden victorious eyes ere set of sun.
["Exeunt" JEPHTHAH "and Soldiers."

"Enter" ELEAZAR, AHINOAM, "Chorus of Elders."

CHORUS.

The sun is past meridian. No sound
Of trampling hoofs assails the unquiet wind,

Nor trembles in the pillared echo-places,
And windy corridors of pathless snow.
But let us wait, expecting victory.

No fugitive returns, no messenger:
They have not shocked together, or perchance
The grim fight rolls its sickening tide along
Homeward or southward, undecided yet;
Or victory made certain but an hour
Lends no such wings to jaded horses as
May bear a jaded rider to our gates.
Wait only, friends, and calm our troubled mind,
Nor stir the languid sails of our desire
With breath or expectation or despair.
Rather give place to those untroubled thoughts
That sit like stars immobile in the sky
To fathom all the desolate winds of ocean,
And draw their secrets from the hidden mines
Whose gold and silver are but wisdom, seeking
Rather things incorruptible above {80A}
Than sordid hopes and fears. But look you, friends,
Where in the sun's eye rolls a speck of cloud
Lesser than the ephemeral gnat may make
Riding for sport upon a little whirl
Of moving breezes, so it glows and rolls,
Caught in the furnace of the sun, opaque
To eyes that seek its depth, but penetrable
By those long filaments of light beyond.
See, the spot darkens, and a horseman spurs
A flagging steed with bloody flanks, and waves
A cloudy sword to heaven -- I am sure
He brings us eagle-winged victory,
And tiding of no battle lost for Israel.
Yes, he grows great before the sun, and stands
Now in his stirrups, and shouts loud, and waves
A blade triumphant. Now the weary horse

Stumbles with thundering strides along the last
Furlong, and greets us with a joyous neigh
As if he understood the Victory.

"Enter Second Messenger."

SECOND MESSENGER.

Rejoice, O Israel, for this day hath seen
Utter destruction overtake, and death
Ride furious over, trampled necks of men
Desperate in vain; hath seen red hell gape wide
To swallow up the heathen. Victory
Swells the red-gleaming torrent of pursuit,
And Israel shakes her lazy flanks at last
A lion famished, and is greedy of death.

CHORUS.

O joyful day! And where is Jephthah now?

MESSENGER.

Faint with the heat of a hard battle fought,
But following hard after with the horse.
For from Aroer even unto Minnith
He smote them with a slaughter most unheard,
And twenty cities saw from trembling walls {80B}
Twice twenty thousand corpses; stragglers few
Call to the rocks and woods, whose dens refuse
Shelter and refuge to the fugitives,
But, in revolt against the natural order,
Gape like the ravening jaws of any beast
To let the furious invaders down
Into the bowels of the earth, and close

Upon those grisly men of way, whose life
Groans from the prison that shall crush it out.

CHORUS.

Be thou most blessed of the Lord for ever!

FIRST ELDER.

But what shall he that hath delivered us
Have for his guerdon when he comes in triumph?

SECOND ELDER.

A milk-white ass shall bear him through the city.

THIRD ELDER.

And wreaths of roses be instead of dust.

FOURTH ELDER.

And dancing girls --

FIFTH ELDER.

And feet of maidens most
Shall strike a measure of delight.

SIXTH ELDER.

And boys
With bright unsullied curls shall minister
Before him all the days of life God grants.

SEVENTH ELDER.

And all his platters shall be made of gold.

EIGHTH ELDER.

And jewels beyond price shall stud them all. {81A}

ELEAZAR.

What sayest thou, O wisest of our race,
Ahinoam, the aged priest of God,
Who weighest out the stars with balances,
And knowest best of men the heart of man?

AHINOAM.

Ye are as children, and nowise your tongues
Speak sense. I never hear your voice but know
Some geese are gabbling. Sing to him perchance!
The voice of old men is a pleasant thing.

CHORUS.

What say ye, brethren? Shall we sing to him
Some sweet low ditty, or the louder paeon?

AHINOAM.

They verily think I speak, not mocking them.

CHORUS.

Who shall uncover such a tongue for wiles,
And pluck his meaning from his subtle words?

AHINOAM.

Who shall speak plain enough for such as these
To understand? Or so debase his thought
As meet their minds, and seem as wisdom's self?

CHORUS.

Leave now thy gibing in the hour of joy,
And lend sweet wisdom to awaiting ears.
Thy voice shall carry it, thy words shall bear
Full fruit to-day. Speak only, it is done.

AHINOAM.

I am grown old, and go not out to wars.
But in the lusty days of youth my face
Turned from the battle and pursuit and spoil
Only to one face dearer than my soul. {81B}
And my wife's eyes were welcome more desired
Than chains of roses, and the song of children,
And swinging palm branches, and milk-white -- elders.

CHORUS.

Fie on thy railing! But his wife is sick,
And cannot leave the borders of her house.

AHINOAM.

But he hath one fair only daughter! Friends,
With maidens bearing trimbrels, and with dances,
Let her go forth and bring her father home.

JARED ["aside"].

Horrible! I must speak and silence this
Monstrous impossible villainy of fate.

CHORUS.

O wise old man, thou speakest cleverly.

AHINOAM.

So do, and praise be given you from God.

ELEAZAR.

God, Who this day has slumbered not, nor slept;
He only keepeth Israel: He is God!

CHORUS.

When God uplifted hands to smite,
And earth from chaos was unrolled;
When skies and seas from blackest night
Unfurled, twin sapphires set with gold;
When tumult of the boisterous deep
Roared from its slow ungainly sleep,
And flocks of heaven were driven to fold;
Then rose the walls of Israel steep,
For in His promise we behold
The sworded Sons of glory leap
Our tribes in peace to keep.

Deep graven in the rocky girth
Of Israel's mountains, in the sky,
In all the waters of the earth,

In all the fiery steeds that ply {82A}
Their champing harness, and excel
The charioteers of heaven and hell,
In all the Names writ secretly
And sacred songs ineffable;
In all the words of power that fly
About the world, this song they spell
He keepeth Israel.

AHINOAM.

Ye praise God of full heart: I would to God
Your minds were somewhat fuller, and could keep
Discretion seated on her ivory throne.
What folly is it they will now be at,
Gray beards, and goatish manners? Hark to them!

CHORUS.

In the brave old days ere men began
To bind young hearts with an iron tether,
Ere love was brief as life, a span,
Ere love was light as life, a feather,
Earth was free as the glad wild weather,
God was father and friend to man.

AHINOAM.

Then when with mildness and much joy our judge
Draw hither, let us send to meet his steps
In sackcloth clad, with ashes on their heads,
His cruel brethren, that he spare their lives.

CHORUS.

In the heart of a conqueror mercy sits
A brighter jewel than vengeance wroken.
Grace is the web that his people knits,
And love is the balm for the hearts nigh broken.
Peace is arisen, a dove for token;
Righteousness, bright as the swallow flits.

JARED ["aside"].

So, in his victory is our disgrace. {82B}

CHORUS.

Fair as the dawn is the maiden wise;
Pale as the poppies by still white water!
Sunlight burns in her pure deep eyes;
Love lights the tresses of Jephthah's daughter.
Kissing rays of the moon have caught her,
Rays of the moon that sleeps and sighs.

JARED ["aside"].

In our disgrace, behold! our vengeance strikes.
I am inspired with so profound a hate --
He shall not triumph: in the very hour
When his o'ermastering forehead tops the sky
I strike him to the earth. I need not more.
Silence -- no more -- and all accomplishes.
Leviathan, how subtle is thy path!

CHORUS.

Not now may the hour of gladness fade,
The wheel of our fate spins bright and beaming.

God has fashioned a sun from shade.
Mercy and joy in one tide are streaming.
Fortune is powerless, to all good seeming.
Fate is stricken, and flees afraid.

JARED.

Bring me the sackcloth and the ashes now!

ELEAZAR.

Behold! the crown of all our maiden wreath,
Adulah, white and lissome, with the flames
Of dawn forth blushing through her flower-crowned hair.

CHORUS.

Behold a virgin to the Lord!
Behold a maiden pale as death,
Whose glance is silver as a sword,
And flowers of Kedar fill her breath,
Whose fragrance saturates the sward,
Whose sunny perfume floating saith:
From my ineffable desire is drawn
The awful glory of the golden dawn. {83A}

Behold her bosom bare and bold
Whose billows like the ocean swing!
The painted palaces of gold
Where shell-born maidens laugh and sing
Are mirrored in those breasts that hold
Sweet odours of the sunny spring.
Behold the rising swell of perfect calm
In breezy dells adorable of balm!

Behold the tender rosy feet
Made bare for holiness, that move
Like doves amid the waving wheat,
Or swallows silver in the grove
Where sylph and salamander meet,
And gnome and undine swoon for love!
Her feet that flit upon the windy way
Twin fawns, the daughters of the rosy day.

Behold, the arms of her desire
Wave, weave, and wander in the air,
Vines life-endued by subtle fire

So quick and comely, curving bare.
The white diaphanous attire
Floats like a spirit pale and fair.
The dance is woven of the breeze; the tune
Is like the ocean silvered by the moon.

Behold the maidens following!
O every one is like a flower,
Or like an ewe lamb of the king
That comes from water at the hour
Of even. See, the dancers swing
Their censers; see, their tresses shower
Descending flames, and perfumes teem divine,
And all the air grows one pale fume of wine.

Their songs, their purity, their peace,
Glide slowly in the arms of God;
His lips assume their sanctities,
His eyes perceive the period
Of woven webs of lutes at ease,
And measures by pure maidens trod,
Till, like the smoke of mountains risen at dawn,
The cloud-veils of the Ain<<1>> are withdrawn. {83B}

<<1. The Negative, surrounded by a triple veil in the Theogony of the Qabalists, from which all things spring and to which all shall return. See "Berashith" in a subsequent volume.>>

Pure spirits rise to heaven, the bride.
Pure bodies are as lamps below.
The shining essence, glorified
With fire more cold than fresh-fallen snow,
And influences, white and wide,
Descend, re-gather, kindle, grow,
Till from one virgin bosom flows a river
Of white devotion adamant for ever.

"Enter" ADULAH "and her Maidens."

ADULAH.

Fathers of Israel, we are come to you
With many maidens praising God, for this
The victory of my father. Happy girls!
Whose brothers struck to-day for Israel,
Whose fathers smote the heathen; happiest,
Ye blushing flowers, beyond your younger spring
That bends in you toward summer, faint and fair,
Whose lovers bared their swords to-day; and ye,
O reverend heads, most beautiful for gray,
The comely crown of age, that doth beseem
Your wise sweet beauty, as the ivy wreathes
The rugged glory of the sycamore,
Have ye heard aught of Jephthah's homecoming?
For our cheeks tingle with the expected kiss
Of hardy warriors dear to us, and now
By double kinship rendered doubly dear.
For O! my father comes to gladden me

With those enduring kisses that endow
Heart, hope, and life with gladness. Comes he soon?

ELEAZAR.

Maiden most perfect, daughter of our lord,
And ye, most fairest branches of our tree,
Maidens of Israel, we await you here
That ye, no other, may go forth to meet
The chief victorious. And after you {84A}
Those villains that once cast him our shall forth
In sackcloth to his feet, if haply so
He spare their vagabond and worthless lives.

ADULAH.

Not so, my father. In my father's name
I promise unto all great happiness,
And vengeance clean forgotten in the land;
"Vengeance is mine, Jehovah will repay."
My father shall not frown on any man.

JARED ["aside"].

She is most gracious: I must speak and save.
["Aloud."] Friends! ["Aside".] Stay -- Is this a tempter voice
that
soothes
My conscience? Art thou that Leviathan,
Thou lipless monster, gnashing at my soul
Abominable teeth? Art thou the fiend
Whom I have seen in sleep, and waking served?
O horrible distortion of all truth
That I must serve thee still!
Yet -- dare I speak,

Those eyes upon me, torturing my soul
And threatening revenge? Those fingers gross,
Purple, and horrible, to blister me
With infamous tearing at my throat. O Hell!
Vomit thy monsters forth in myriads
To putrefy this fair green earth with blood,
But make not me the devilish minister
Of such a deed as this! No respite? -- Must?
Irrevocable? I dare not call on God.
Thou, thou wilt serve me if I do this thing?
Oh, if this be a snare thou settest now,
Who hast once already mocked our pact, I swear
By God, I cast thee off. Leviathan!
Accept the bargain. And I seal it -- thus.
["Writing in the air."]

I will keep silence, though they tear my tongue
Blaspheming from my throat. Mr servant now! {84B}

ELEAZAR.

Mingled emotions quickly following
Fear upon fear, and joy and hope at last
Crowning, have maddened Jephthah's kinsman here.
Mark his lips muttering, and his meaningless
Furious gestures, and indignant eyes
Starting, and hard-drawn breath! Him lead away
Tenderly, as beseems the mercy shown
To his repentance by this maiden queen.
The Lord is merciful to them that show
Mercy, and all such as are pure of heart;
Thy crown, Adulah, wears a double flower
Of these fair blossoms wreathed in one device
Of perfect love in perfect maidenhood.

JARED ["recovering himself"].

Nay, but my voice must fill the song of joy
With gratitude, and meet thanksgiving. Me
More than these others it beseems, who love
Less dearly for their innocence than I,
Pardoned of my unpardonable sin.

ADULAH.

The flowers turn westerward; the sun is down
Almost among those clouds that kiss the sea
With heavy lashes drooping over it,
A mother watching her own daughter swoon
To sleep. But look toward the southern sky;
It is my father. Let us go to him,

Maidens, with song and gladness of full hearts.

SEMICHORUS OF MAIDENS I.

The conqueror rides at last
To home, to love;
The victory is past,
The white-wing dove
Sails through the crystal air of eve with a paeon deep and vast.
Jephthah! {85A}

SEMICHORUS OF MAIDENS II.

Forth, maidens, with your hands
White with new lilies!
Forth, maidens, in bright bands,
Virgins whose one sweet will is
To sing the victory of our God in all sky-girdled lands!

Jahveh!

SEMICHORUS I.

With dancing feet, and noise
Of timbrels smitten,
With tears and tender joys,
With songs unwritten,
With music many-mouthed, with robes in snowy equipoise.
Jephthah!

SEMICHORUS II.

With hearts infused of fire,
Eyes clear with many waters,
With lips to air that quire,
We, earth's desirous daughters,
Lift up the song of triumph, sound the lutes of our desire!
Jahveh!

SEMICHORUS I.

With branches strewn before us,
And roses flung
In all the ways, we chorus
With throat and tongue
The glory of our warrior sires whose victor swords restore us
Jephthah!

SEMICHORUS II.

With angels vast and calm
That keep his way,
With streams of holy balm,
The prayers of them that pray,

We go to bring him home and raise to Thee our holy psalm,
Jahveh! {85B}

ELEAZAR.

Go ye, make ready for the happy march.
["Exeunt" ADULAH "and Maidens."
And we too, changing these funereal vestments
Will clothe in moonlike splendour, candid robes
Of priestly purity, our joyous selves.
Of fortunate day! O measured steps of noon,
Quicken, if once ye stayed for Joshua,
To keep sweet music to our hearts. Away!
["Exeunt all but" JARED.

JARED.

I will await, and hide myself away

Behind yon bushes, to behold the plot
Bud to fulfilment. Then, Leviathan,
I am thy master. Mockery of a God
That seest this thing prosper -- Ha! thine Altar!
Let me give thanks, Jehovah! O thou God
That rulest Israel as sheep and slaves,
But over me no ruler; thou proud God
That marshallest these petty thunder-clouds
That blacken over the inane abyss
Buts canst not tame one fierce desire of mine,
Nor satiate my hatred, nor destroy
This power of mine over thy devil-brood,
The hatchment of thine incest, O thou God
Who knowest me, me, mortal me, thy master,
Thy master -- and I laugh at thee, the slave!
Down from Thy throne, impostor, down, down, down
To thine own Hell, immeasurable -

A VOICE.

Strike!

["The storm, gathering to a climax, bursts in a tremendous
flash of
lightning, and" JARED "is killed." {86A}

"Enter" JEPHATHAH "and Soldiers."

JEPHATHAH.

A terrible peal of thunder! And the sky
Seems for an hour past to have been in labour
And, safely now delivered, smiles again.
For see, the sun! O happy sunlight hours --
What is this blackened and distorted thing?

A SOLDIER

Some fellow by the altar that kept watch,
Some faithful fellow -- he is gone to God.

JEPHATHAH.

How is't the cattle have been driven home?
I trusted we had found a tender lamb,
A lamb of the first year, unblemished, white,
To greet me, that we do meet sacrifice,
Fulfilling thus my vow, and all our duty.
["A noise of timbrels and singing."
Surely some merriment -- our news hath reached.
Glad news and welcome: God is very good.

"Enter" ADULAH, "running, followed by singing Maidens."

ADULAH.

Father!

JEPHTHAH.

My daughter!

["He suddenly stops, and blanches, understanding."]

Alas my daughter!

["He continues in a dazed, toneless voice.

Thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that
trouble me;

for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go
back

ADULAH.

My father, O my father! {86B}

"Enter" ELEAZAR "and Chorus."

ELEAZAR.

Most welcome, conqueror!

[JEPHTHAH "waves him aside."]

What is this! What is this!

CHORUS.

Speak, Jephthah, speak! What ill has fallen? Speak!

["Silence. After a little the Chorus of Maidens understand, and
break

into wailing. The old men gradually understand and fill the air

with incoherent lamentations. Behind" JEPHTHAH "the
soldiers, with
white lips, have assumed their military formation, and stand at
attention by a visible effort of self-control."

ADULAH.

My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth
Unto the Lord, fulfil the oath to me,
Because the lord hath taken vengeance for thee
Of all thine enemies, the Ammonites.
Let this be done for me, that I may go
Two months upon the mountains, and bewail,
I and my fellows, my virginity!

JEPHTHAH.

Go!

CHORUS OF MAIDENS.

O the time of dule and teen!
O the dove the hawk has snared!
Would to God we had not been,
We, who see our maiden queen,
Love has slain whom hate had spared.
Sorrow for our sister sways
All our maiden bosoms, bared
To the dying vesper rays,
Where the sun below the bays
Of the West is stooping;
All our heats together drooping,
Flowers the ocean bears.
All the garb that gladness wears {87A}
To a rent uncouth attire

Changed with cares;
Happy songs our love had made
Ere the sun had sunk his fire,
In the moonrise fall and fade,
And the dregs of our desire
Fall away to death;
Tears divide our labouring breath
That of our sister -- O our sister!
Moon and sun and stars have kissed her!
She must touch the lips of death,
Touch the lips whose coldness saith:
Thou art clay.

Let us fare away, away
To the ice whose ocean gray
Tumbles on the beach of rock,
Where the wheeling vultures mock
Our distress with horrid cries;
Where the flower relenting dies,
And the sun is sharp to slay;
Where the ivory dome above
Glimmers like the dawn of love
On the weary way;

Where the ibex chant and call
Over tempest's funeral;
Where the horned beast is shrill,
And the eagle hath his will,
And the shadows fall
Sharp and black, till day is passed
Over to the ocean vast;
Where the barren rocks resound
Only to the rending roar
Of the shattering streams that pour
Rocks by ice eternal bound,
Myriad cascades that crowned
Once the far resounding throne

Of the mountain spirits strong,
All the treacherous souls that throng
Desolate abodes of stone,
Barren of all comely things,
Given to the splendid kings,
Gloomy state, and glamour dark,
Swooping jewel-feathered wings,
Eyes translucent with a spark
Of the world of fire, that swings
Gates of adamant below
Lofty minarets of snow.
Thence the towering flames arise, {87B}
Where the flashes white and wise
Find their mortal foe.
Let us thither, caring not
Anything, or any more,
Since the sorrow of our lot
Craves to pass the abysmal door.
Never more for us shall twine
Rosy fingers on the vine.
Never maiden lips shall cull
Myriad blossoms beautiful.
Never cheeks shall dimple over

At the perfume of the clover.
Never bosoms bright and round
Shall be garlanded and bound
With the chain of myrtle, wreathed
By the fingers of the maid
Each has chosen for a mate,
When the west wind lately breathed
Murmurs in the wanton glade
Of the day that dawneth late
In a maiden's horoscope,
Dawning faith and fire and hope
On the sprig that only knew

Flowers and butterflies and dew,
Skies and seas and mountains blue,
On the spring that wot not of
Fruit and falling leaves and love.
Never dew-dasked foreheads fair
Shall salute the idle air.

Never shall we wander deep
Where the fronds of fern, asleep,
Kiss her rosy feet that pass
On the spangled summer grass,
Half awake, and drowse again.
Never more our feet shall stain
Purple with the joyous grape,
Whence there rose a fairy shape
In the fume and must and juice,
Singing lest our eyes escape
All his tunic wried and loose
With the feet that softly trod
In the vat the fairy god.
Never more our eyes shall swim,
Looking for the love of him
In the magic moon that bent
Over maidens moon-content,
When the summer woods were wet

With our dewy songs, that set {88A}
Quivering all seas and snows,
Stars and tender winds that fret
Lily, lily, laughing rose,
Sighing, sighing violet,
Dusky pansy, swaying rush,
And the stream that flows
Singing, ringing softly: Hush!
Listen the the bird that goes
Wooing to the brown mate's bough;
Listen to the breeze that blows

Over cape and valley now
At the silence of the noon,
Or the slumber-hour
Of the white delicious moon
Like a lotus-flower!
Let us sadly, slowly, go
To the silence of the snow!

ADULAH ["embracing" JEPHTHAH].

Whose crystal fastnesses shall echo back
The lamentations of these friends of mine,
But not my tears. For I will fit myself
By solitude and fasting and much prayer
For this most holy ceremony, to be
A perfect, pure, accepted sacrifice.
Only this sorrow -- O father, father, speak!

JEPHTHAH.

Go!

ADULAH.

Most unblamable, we come again.

I would not weep with these; I dare not stay,
Lest I weep louder than them all. Fare well,
My father, O my father! I am passing
Into the night. Remember me as drawn
Into the night toward the golden dawn.<<1>>
["Exeunt" ADULLAH "Maidens." {88B}

<<1. The "Golden Dawn" meant at this time to Crowley all that "Christ" means to an Evangelical, and more. The symbol constantly recurs in this and many other poems, and always in

the sense of a rescuing force.>>

CHORUS.

Toward the mountains and the night
The fruitless flowers of Gilead go;
Toward the hollows weird and white,
Toward the sorrow of the snow;
To desolation black and blind
They move, and leave us death behind.

The Lord is great: the Lord is wise
Within His temple to foresee
With calm impenetrable eyes
The after glory that shall be;
But we, of mortal bodies born,
Laugh lies consoling unto scorn.

The God of Israel is strong;
His mighty arm hath wrought this day
A victory and a triumph-song --
And now He breathes upon His clay,
And we, who were as idols crowned,
Lie dust upon the empty ground.

She goes, our sorrow's sacrifice,
Our lamb, our firstling, frail and white,
With large sweet love-illumined eyes
Into the night, into the night.
The throne of night shall be withdrawn;
So moveth she toward the dawn.

All peoples and all kings that move
By love and sacrifice inspired
In light and holiness and love,

And seek some end of God desired,
Pass, though they seem to sink in night,
To dawns more perdurably bright.

So priest and people join to praise
The secret wisdom of the Lord,
Awaiting the arisen rays
That smite through heaven as a sword;
Remembering He hath surely sworn:
Toward the night, toward the dawn! {89A}

Behold the moon that fails above,
The stars that pale before the sun!
How far, those figures light as love
That laughing to the mountains run!
Behold the flames of hair that leap
Above her forehead mild and deep!

She turns to bless her people still:
So, passes to the golden gate
Where snow burns fragrant on the hill,
Where for her step those fountains wait
Of light and brilliance that shall rise
To greet her beauty lover-wise.

The silver west fades fast, the skies
Are blue and silver overhead;

She stands upon the snow, her eyes
Fixed fast upon the fountain-head
Whence from Eternity is drawn
The awful glory of the dawn!

ELEAZAR.

Let every man depart unto his house.

CHORUS.

He hath made His face as a fire; His wrath as a sword;
He hath smitten our soul's desire; He is the Lord.
He hath given and taken away, hath made us and broken;
He hath made the blue and the gray, the sea for a token;
He hath made to-day and to-morrow; the winter, the spring;
He bringeth us joy out of sorrow; Jehovah is King.
["Exeunt." JEPHTHAH "is left standing with white set face.
Presently tears come into his eyes, and he advances and kneels
at
the altar."]

{89B}