

Jephthah

By Aleister Crowley

“O Jephthah! judge of Israel!”—HAMLET.

TO

GERALD KELLY,

POET AND PAINTER,

I dedicate

THIS TRAGEDY.

Cambridge,
November, 1898.

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

Eleagar. 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 mouth
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
Blaspheame our sanctuaries inviolate,
And rob us of our dearest. Woe on woe,
The overwhelming summit of a wave
Too black, too concentrate, too impious,
And culminating in a double death,
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
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?

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.

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,
And our uttermost desire
Must abase, with rent attire,
Souls and bodies to His throne,
Where above the starry choir
Stands the jasper, where alone
Palest 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 minaret and spire

Broken, burst, and overthrown,
Dusty, and defiled, and dun,
Palled with smoke of fruitless altars
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.

For 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.
For 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 palaces, 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,
Nor avoid 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,
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
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.
And so the city was the spoil of them,
And all our women-folk are slain or violate,
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 hither. Shall we rather flee?

ELEAZAR.

I stand here manly, and will die a man.

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 not 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 hither 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,

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 thronéd in their banners, and 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,
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,

And 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, and then to close
The wounds of all the land, and bid 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, -
And storm and wind had no more might at all,
And death and pestilence forgotten were,
And angels came to holy men that call,
And gracious spirits thronged the happy air;
When God was very gracious to all folk,
And lifted from us the Philistian yoke,
And all the iron power of Edom broke,
And all the Earth was fair!
Now, seeing that we are sinners, wilt not thou
Relent thy hateful brow,
And bend on us a forehead full of peace,
And bid thine anger cease,
And speak sweet words most comfortable, and lose
The bitter memory of the wrong long dead
And be the lord and prince we gladly choose
And crown the mercy of thy royal head,
And be 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!

JEPHTHAH.

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.

JEPHTHAH.

Swear by the Name unspoken that the truth
Flashes between the lips that tremble thus!
Ye love me not; ye 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.

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,
And the spears flash on high, and each shield
Gleams bright like the fury of lords
Through the steam of the well-foughten field,
And 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,
And his hand is hardy of might
And heavy as dead desire;

And the sword of the Lord and of Jephthah shall build our dead
women a pyre.

The people were 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.

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 their 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
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, and sleep to-night.
I will send messages to their dread lord
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.]

Enter a Herald.

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!
And young men fatherless! And 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 th' accurséd Baalim, and time
To gather fugitives, and make them men,
And straggling herdsmen for our armament,
We send thee, 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
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 freedom on her fiery wings
Flies over camps and tented kings,
And bears a sword avenging us,
And turns her face to Israel thus.
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.

For its sides are a million of paces;
Its centre is Death as he stands
Pale-horsed, where the iciest places
Chill blood in the furious hands.
He stands like a spectre, and urges
The horsemen in thunderous surges
On columns where blood not asperges
The splashing of struggling bands.

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 with widowing swords,
And the roar of contention of chords
Rolls back from the heart of the war.

But Victory lights on the banner
Of Israel like to a bird;
It flaps in the air, and Hosanna!

Flings up to the sky for a word!
Long streams of light horsemen are flashing
Through fields where the tempest was lashing,
Through the pools of the battle-blood splashing,
Long swords to the rout of the herd.

For 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,
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
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.

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 slay 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
With trampling charger dimly urging him
Toward our conclave? 'Tis our messenger.

Re-enter Herald.

Sir, you ride well. I pray your 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
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.]

Enter Second Herald.

But now, sir, go to this rebellious king
And say to him: Thus Jephthah, judge of Israel,
With gentle words answers thy greediness:
Israel took not thy land, nor that of Moab:
But, coming out of Egypt, through the sea

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 his 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 our 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,
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 deafer 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 th' accuser. So, depart!

CHORUS OF ELDERS.

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,
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;
For the darkness is pregnant with being,
As earth that is glad of the rain,
And the eyes that are silent and seeing
Are free of the trammels of pain.
Like light through the portals they 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;
 For its petals are beauty and passion,
 For its stem the foundation of earth,
 For bloom the incarnadine fashion
 Of blessings that roar into birth;
 And the gates that roll back on their hinges
 The soul of the sage may discern,
 Till the water 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 intensens
 The note that its fire may not find.
 For here in the tumult and labour
 And blindness of cowering man,
 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 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 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.]

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 bid me faint
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
Of holiest desires
Into I know not what a cradle, made
Of subtle-shapéd shade,
And arms most perdurable. 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.

[Morning dawns.

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.

CHORUS OF SOLDIERS.

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

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 breaks
Upon his forehead calm and cold
And other dawns more deep and wise
Burn awful in his holy eyes.

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 shine
Above their excellence divine.

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.

JEPHTHAH.

Highest of Highest, most Concealed of all,
Most Holy Ancient One, Unnameable,
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.]

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 th' unquiet wind,
Nor trembles in the pillared echo-places,
And windy corridors of pathless snow.
But let us wait, expecting victory.
No fugitive returns, nor 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 of 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
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, and 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
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 war, whose life
Groans from the prison that shall crush it out.

CHORUS OF ELDERS.

Be thou most blessed of the Lord for ever!

But what shall he that hath delivered us
Have for his guerdon when he comes in triumph?
A milk-white ass shall bear him through the city,
And wreaths of roses be instead of dust,
And dancing girls, and feet of maidens most,
Shall strike a measure of delight, and boys
With bright unsullied curls shall minister
Before him all the days of life God grants,
And all his platters shall be made of gold,
And jewels beyond price shall stud them all.
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 pæan?

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,
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 timbrels, 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,
And skies and seas from blackest night
Unfurled, twin sapphires set with gold,
And 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

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? Harken 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,
And 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.

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 move.
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.

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,
 And 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 are withdrawn.

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 Chorus of 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 home-coming?
For our cheeks tingle with th' 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
Those villains that once cast him out 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. Thy word's a lie,
That if I keep my silence, I do good
To her, the milk-white virgin sacrifice,
And only smite the bloody father down!
A lie, I say! A lie! Yet—dare I speak,
Those eyes upon me, torturing my soul
And threatening revenge? His 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. My servant now!

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 pæan deep and vast.
Jephthah!

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!
Elohim!

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!
Elohim!

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,
Elohim!

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.
O 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
But 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.]

Enter Jephthah and Soldiers.

JEPHTHAH.

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.

JEPHTHAH.

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!

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!
Fate the cruel and obscene,
Fate that snaps us unprepared,
We, who else had dared
Every mountain cold and keen,
Cleft and stricken in between
By the joy our bosoms shared;
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 hearts together drooping,
Flowers the ocean bears.
All the garb that gladness wears
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 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 hornéd 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,
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 that cull
Myriad blossoms beautiful;
Never cheeks that dimple over
At the perfume of the clover,
With the laughing summer seas
Of the smile of hearts at ease;
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 spring 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-dashed foreheads fair
Shall salute the idle air;
Never feet shall 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 to the ocean brim
In the magic moon that rose
Through the archipelagos,
When the Grecian woods were wet

With our dewy songs, that set
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 to 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 unblameable, 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.
[Exeunt Adulah and Maidens.]

CHORUS.

Toward the mountains and the night
The fairest of all Israel 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-illuminated 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!

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.]

THE END.

A NOTE ON "JEPHTHAH."

A SHORT explanation of the scheme of theology adopted in this play appears necessary. The Hebrews of the period had formulated the idea of Deity as manifesting from the fundamental conception of NEGATIVE EXISTENCE: The *אין* Ain, negativity, unfolded; the *אין סוף*, Ain Soph, the limitless, and thence derived the *אין סוף אור* Ain Soph Aur, the limitless light. This limitless ocean of negative light concentrates a centre *כתר* Kether, the Crown, and this is our first positive manifestation of Deity, or, as the Hebrews technically call it, an emanation or *ספירה* Sefhira. Of these Sephiroth there are ten, each emanating from the last, and successively male or female toward the next below or above. These are: 1, the Kether; 2, *חכמה*, Chokmah, Wisdom; 3, *בינה*, Binah, Understanding, often symbolized as the great Sea; 4, *חסד*, Chesed, Mercy (or *גדולה* Gedulah, Magnificence); 5, *גבורה*, Geburah, Strength; 6, *תפארת* Tiphereth, Beauty; 7, *נצח* Netzach, Victory; 8, *הוד*, Hod Splendour; 9, *יסוד*, Jesod, the Foundation; and 10, *מלכות*, Malkuth, the Kingdom.

In the Tetragram *יהוה* translated in our Bible "Jehovah" or "the Lord," the last nine Sephiroth are summed up. The first also contains the idea of existence, the Divine Name connected with this Sefhira being *אהיה*, Eheieh, Existence. Below this world of Atziluth or of God is that of Briah or Thrones; to this world belong the Archangels; still lower that of Yetzirah or Formation; to this world ten orders of angels are attributed; and lastly, the world of Assiah, or of action (the material world). The further development of these facts, their connection with the numerical system, the parts of the soul, and many other interesting details may be studied in the seventy-two volumes of the written Qabalah, though, perhaps (a word to the wise is enough), truth lies hidden deeper yet in the ten volumes of that Qabalah which is unwritten, and which is only granted to those who by previous incarnations have fitted themselves for so sublime a knowledge. The brief sketch above will, however, make clear the Oath of the people and the Prayer of Jephthah, among other phrases which may seem at first sight less unintelligible to ordinary analysis.

That I have made Jephthah a Magician is also in accordance with tradition. Great captains were always great priests, in the secret Qabalistical sense. The priests themselves, then as to-day, were foolish old men trained to bolster up the externals of religion. The real rulers, then as to-day, were not, officially, priests; the sceptre was wielded by those who, swathed in thick darkness, and enthroned on their own thunderclouds, looked with the eye of gods upon this earth, and carried out the designs of God with tranquil power. I have depicted such a Servant of God stepping down from his throne at the precise moment when his presence was required, and the tragedy represented in the play stands for the impotent spite of the Evil One, venting itself in personal malice.

In short, I have ventured (I trust that in so doing the human pathos of the story has lost nothing, even from the merely legendary point of view), behind the veil of man's blindness, and the inexorable Ate, to hint at the cloudy conflict of the mysterious forces that rule beyond our vision or our comprehension; and if, at the end, I have dared to lift that veil, and to put in the mouths of uninitiates words appreciative of those glorious destinies that overrule the cruelties of fate, let me find my excuse in that love for, and faith in, "the holy spirit of man," which itself may do so much toward the final

regeneration of humanity, and the uniting of man once more with that God of whom Porphyry has written, "We are but a little part of Him."