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Three Ways of Looking at Cain and Abel
Thomas Sphrantzes

Alexander Adams
Alfred de Breanski
Luke Gilfedder

NESTING IN THE OAK OF ENGLISH LITERATURE



Fall, Leaves, Fall

Emily Brontë

Fall, leaves, fall; die, flowers, away;
Lengthen night and shorten day;
Every leaf speaks bliss to me
Fluttering from the autumn tree.
I shall smile when wreaths of snow
Blossom where the rose should grow;
I shall sing when night's decay
Ushers in a drearier day.

When You Are Old

William Butler Yeats

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

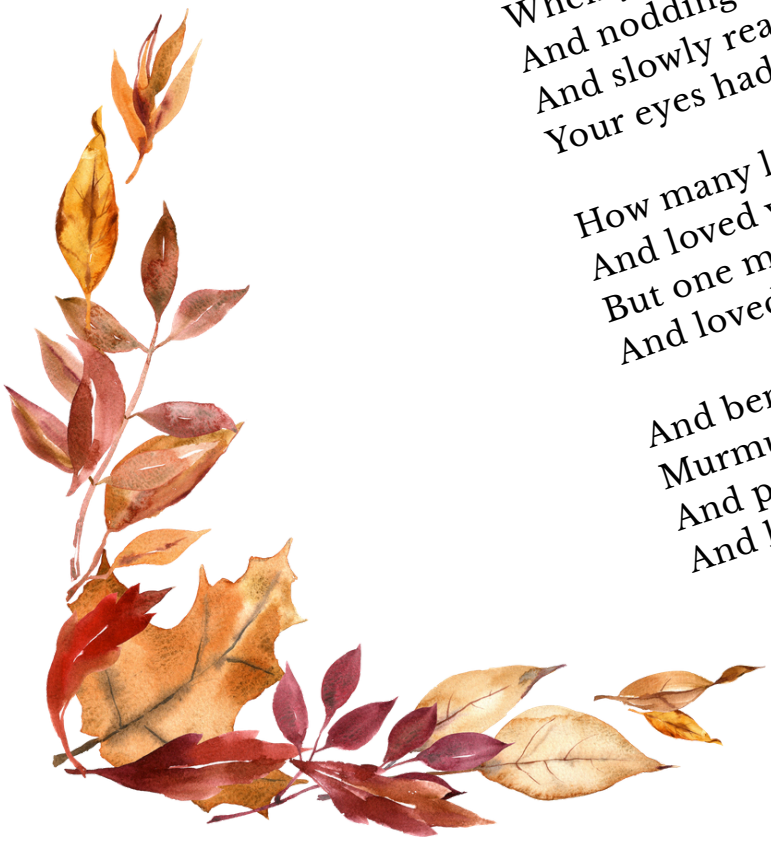


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Cover: Cain slaying Abel
Peter Paul Rubens

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From great names like Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Anthony Trollope, to writers of the future like Nathan CJ Hood, Luke Gilfedder, and ND Wallace Swan, the Corncrake sets before you the imaginative, vital, and beautiful soul of the English literary and aesthetic tradition.

By reading this magazine, you are contributing to the preservation of our rich literary and artistic heritage, acquainting yourself with the beauties of the English language and the stories passed onto us by our forebears.

You are also supporting contemporary and independent artists and authors who are engaging with the stories and artworks of the past to create new tales and paintings for our time.

Happy Reading!

shieldmaiden

Editor-in-Chief

> Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape?... If we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can!
> JRR Tolkien

Three Ways of Looking at Cain and Abel

By Thomas Sphrantzes



Cain and Abel by Titian

The story of Cain and Abel is one of the most enduringly popular subjects in Western drama. It appears in all four extant cycles of medieval English mystery plays, and in the French and Cornish cycles; the Renaissance humanists wrote neo-Latin tragedies about it; interludes appeared in Spain and Italy, and with the Enlightenment came full-length stage plays and even an opera. The Romantic movement brought a rash of English-language closet dramas that persisted into the 20th century. Even today, directors such as Darren Aronofsky and Robert Eggers draw inspiration from the story of the first fratricide.

But although the narrative kernel has persisted unchanged for thousands of years, its framing has not. Early portrayals of the story focused solely on Cain's badness and Abel's goodness. Cain was a crude, boorish man; God rejected his offering because it was lazy and stingy, and Cain's envy that God accepted Abel's was what led him to murder his brother. Abel, on the other hand, was upright and selfless, urging Cain to do better because he wanted God to bless him all the more.

During the Enlightenment, when the concept of sin went out of vogue, the story was reframed. Cain was no longer a mean person; he was impulsive but good-hearted, and only killed Abel because he momentarily lost his temper. Even this minor transgression had to result from demonic influence to tally with the idea that all people are fundamentally good. Abel became a sacrificial prig, anxious to follow the rules and die trying.

Then came the Nietzschean "transvaluation of all values" (or rather its reversal), the open rejection of traditional Christian morality and the embrace of its opposite—pride, self-reliance, and technological transhumanism. Cain became the Promethean hero who gifted humanity with self-determination, and Abel the obstinate bootlicker who wanted to stagnate in Eden. The first murder was an inevitable bump in the road to progress, or even a righteous act of cultural eugenics.

We in the English-speaking world are fortunate to possess three noteworthy plays that each represent one of the stages in this narrative evolution. The medieval mystery play "The Sacrificing of Abel" portrays the old idea that Cain was bad and Abel good; "Cain, a Mystery," by Lord Byron, represents the Enlightenment understanding; and "Cain, a Drama," by George Cabot Lodge, very forcefully argues for the modern, transvalued approach.

About the Texts

"The Sacrificing of Abel" (Latin Mactacio Abel) is a mystery play, the oldest form of drama in postclassical Western Europe. The mystery plays were short dramatizations of biblical events, staged once a year in pageants where as many as forty-eight plays would be presented, telling the whole story of church history from the Creation to the Last Judgment. "The Sacrificing of Abel" comes from the Wakefield (or Towneley) Cycle, named for its original place of performance. It was probably written during the fifteenth century.

Mystery plays are often full of low humor, and "The Sacrificing of Abel" is no exception. Much of the play concerns a scurrilous quarrel between Cain and his servant-boy, Pikeharness. The play is also comically anachronistic: Cain complains about his parish priest's greed, and Pikeharness fears reprisal from the Medieval authorities for Abel's murder. But the play's chief strength is the astonishing directness with which its characters express their opinions and desires.

"Cain, a Mystery" is one of Lord Byron's half-dozen closet dramas, written when he was traveling in Italy in 1821. Because of its length, only the third act is presented here. In the first act, Cain had been introduced sulking over the unfair prospect of death, blaming his parents for causing the Fall and scouting his other family members for not sharing his feelings. In the second act, Cain had encountered Lucifer, who had shown him an afterlife full of extinct animals and pre-human civilizations to stoke his resentment of God. The third act opens just after Cain has returned from his journey with Lucifer.

Byron claimed that his play was inspired by the medieval mystery plays, but its characters' sarcastic wit and introspective angst owe much to Goethe's Faust. A similarly unmedieval sense of decorum led Byron to put God's words to Cain into the mouth of an angel, though the angel's late appearance to vindicate a righteous, relative-murdered character resembles the deus ex machina of Artemis in Euripides's Hippolytus. Further Classical influence appears in Cain's remarks on the cypress tree, which the Romans associated with death.

"Cain, a Drama," published in 1904, is the first of two closet dramas by George Cabot Lodge. Son of the U.S. senator Henry Cabot Lodge and scion of the wealthy and powerful Lodge family, George lived in Massachusetts around the turn of the twentieth century. He spent much of his life assisting in his family's political projects, dying in 1909 at the age of thirty-five before truly coming into his own.

Once again, because of the play's length, only the second of its three acts is presented here. In the first act, Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel had debated metaphysics and theodicy, with Abel taking Adam's side and Cain taking Eve's. In the third act, Cain will convince Eve that he was morally obligated to kill Abel and then enter into self-imposed exile.

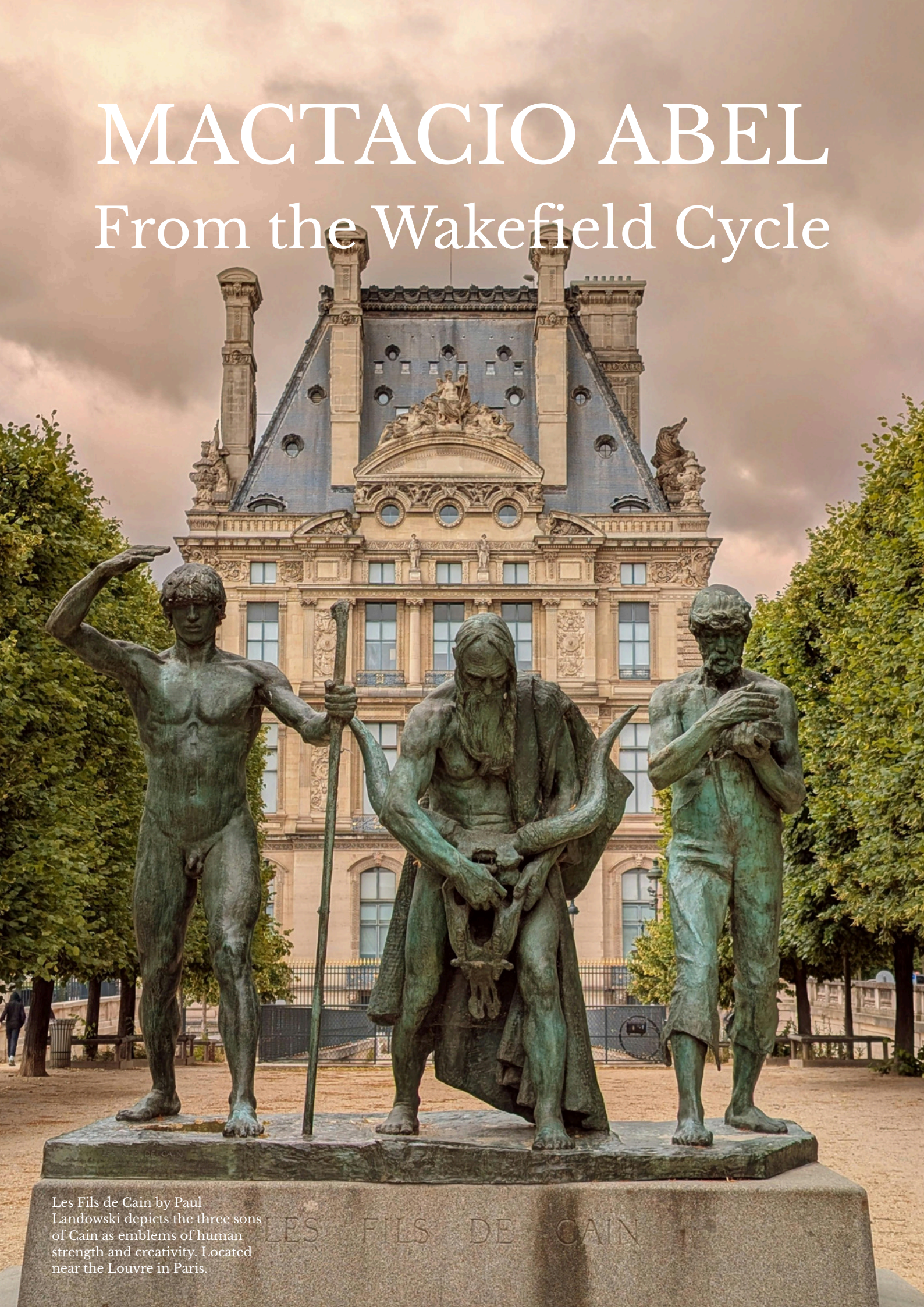
Based on his surviving works, Lodge's own views align closely with his portrayal of Cain's. The play, in which discussion far exceeds action, is an apologia for radical transhumanism. Cain is long-winded and insistent, justifying his actions like a demagogue, while Abel objects unpersuasively and appears as a small-minded fanatic. But Cain's earnest reams of argument blaming the victim of his crime for forcing his hand and Abel's stunned failure to reply to his murderer's satisfaction are both chillingly realistic.



Cain and His Race Cursed By God by Antoine Étex

MACTACIO ABEL

From the Wakefield Cycle



Les Fils de Cain by Paul Landowski depicts the three sons of Cain as emblems of human strength and creativity. Located near the Louvre in Paris.

BOY. All hayll, all hayll, both blithe and glad,
For here com I, a mery lad!
Be peasse youre dyn, my master bad,
Or els the dwill you spede.
Wote ye not I com before?
Bot who that janglis any more,
He must blaw my blak hoill bore
Both behynd and before
Till his tethe blede.
Felows, here I you forbede
To make nother nose ne cry;
Whoso is so hardy to do that dede,
The dwill hang hym up to dry.
Gedlyngys, I am a fulle grete wat.
A good yoman my master hat;
Full well ye all hym ken.
Begyn he with you for to stryfe,
Certys, then mon ye never thryfe.
Bot I trow bi God on life
Som of you ar his men.
Bot let youre lippis cover youre ten,
Harlottys everichon;
For if my master com, welcom hym then.
Farewell, for I am gone.
[Exit BOY. Enter CAIN, ploughing.]
CAIN. Io furth, Greynhorne, and war oute, Gryme!
Drawes on, God gif you ill to tyme.
Ye stand as ye were fallen in swyme!
What, will ye no forther, mare?
War, let me se how Down will draw.
Yit, shrew, yit pull on a thraw.
What, it semys for me ye stand none aw.
I say, Donnyng, go fare!
Aha! God gif thee soro and care.
Lo, now hard she what I saide?
Now, yit art thou the warst mare
In plogh that ever I haide.
How, Pikeharnes, how! com heder, belife.
[Enter BOY.]
BOY. I fend, Godys forbot, that ever thou thrife.
CAIN. What, boy, shal I both hold and drife?
Heris thou not how I cry?
BOY. Say, Mall and Stott, will ye not go?
Lemyng, Morell, Whitehorne, io!
Now will ye not se how thay hy?
CAIN. Gog gif thee sorow, boy.
Want of mete it gars.
BOY. Thare provand, syr, forthi
I lay behynd thare ars,
And tyes them fast bi the nekys
With many stanys in thare hekys.
CAIN. That shall bi thi fals chekys!
BOY. And have agane as right!
CAIN. I am thi master; wilt thou fight?
BOY. Yai, with the same mesure and weght
That I boro will I qwite.
CAIN. Wé, now nothyng bot call on tyte
That we had ployde this land.
Harrer, Morell! io furth, hyte!
And let the plogh stand.
[Enter ABEL.]
ABEL. God, as he both may and can,
Spede thee, brother, and thi man.
CAIN. Com kis myne ars! Me list not ban,
As welcom standys ther oute.
Thou shuld have bide til thou were cald.
Com nar, and other drife or hald,
And kys the dwillis toute.
Go grese thi shepe under the toute
For that is thee moste lefe.
ABEL. Broder, ther is none here aboute
That wold thee any grefe.
Bot, leif brother, here my sawe:
It is the custom of oure law
All that wyrk as the wise
Shall worship God with sacrifice.
Oure fader us bad, oure fader us kend,
That oure tend shuld be brend.
Com furth, brothere, and let us gang
To worship God; we dwell full lang.
Gif we hym parte of oure fee,
Corne or catall wheder it be.
And therfor, brother, let us weynd
And first clens us from the feynd
Or we make sacrifice;
Then blis withoutten end
Get we for oure servyce
Of hym that is oure saulis leche.
CAIN. How! let furth youre geyse, the fox will preche.
How long wilt thou me appech
With thi sermonyng?
Hold thi tong, yit I say,
Even ther the good wife strokid the hay,
Or sit downe in the dwill way
With thi vayn carpyng.
Shuld I leife my plogh and all thyng
And go with thee to make offeryng?
Nay, thou fyndys me not so mad.
Go to the dwill and say I bad.
What gifys God thee to rose hym so?
Me gifys he noght bot soro and wo.
ABEL. Caym, leife this vayn carpyng,
For God giffys thee all thi lifyng.
CAIN. Yit boroed I never a farthyng
Of hym; here my hand.
ABEL. Brother, as elders have us kend
First shuld we tend with oure hend
And to his lofyng sithen be brend.
CAIN. My farthyng is in the preest hand
Syn last tyme I offyrd.
ABEL. Leif brother, let us be walkand;
I wold oure tend were profyrd.
CAIN. Wé! wherof shuld I tend, leif brothere?
For I am ich yere wars then othere.
Here my trouth, it is none othere:
My wynnyngys ar bot meyn;
No wonder if that I be leyn.
Full long till hym I may me meyn,
For bi hym that me dere boght
I traw that he will leyn me noght.
ABEL. Yis, all the good thou has in wone
Of Godys grace is bot a lone.
CAIN. Lenys he me? As come thrift apon thee so,
For he has ever yit beyn my fo.
For had he my freynd beyn
Othergatys it had beyn seyn.
When all mens corn was fayre in feld
Then was myne not worth a neld.
When I shuld saw and wantyd seyde
And of corn had full grete neyde,
Then gaf he me none of his;
No more will I gif hym of this.
Hardely hold me to blame
Bot if I serve hym of the same.
ABEL. Leif brother, say not so,
Bot let us furth togeder go.
Good brother, let us weynd sone;
No longer here I rede we hone.
CAIN. Yei, yei, thou jangyls waste.
The dwill me spede if I have hast
As long as I may lif
To dele my good or gif,
Ather to God or yit to man,
Of any good that ever I wan.
For had I giffen away my goode,
Then myght I go with a ryffen hood,
And it is better hold that I have
Then go from doore to doore and crave.
ABEL. Brother, com furth in Godys name.
I am full ferd that we get blame;
Hy we fast that we were thore.
CAIN. Wé, ryn on in the dwills nayme before.
Wemay, man, I hold thee mad.
Wenys thou now that I list gad
To gif away my warldys aght?
The dwill hym spede that me so taght.
What nede had I my travell to lose,
To were my shoyn and ryfe my hose?
ABEL. Dere brother, hit were grete wonder
That I and thou shuld go in sonder.
Then wold oure fader have grete ferly.
Ar we not brether thou and I?

CAIN. No, bot cry on, cry whyls thee thynk good.
Here my trowth: I hold thee woode.
Wheder that he be blithe or wroth
To dele my good is me full lothe.
I have gone oft on softer wise
Ther I trowed som prow wold rise
Bot well I se go must I nede;
Now weynd before, ill myght thou spede,
Syn that we shall algatys go.
ABEL. Leif brother, whi sais thou so?
Bot go we furth both togeder.
Blissid be God we have fare weder.
CAIN. Lay downe thi trussell apon this hill.
ABEL. Forsoth, broder, so I will.
Gog of heven take it to good.
CAIN. Thou shall tend first, if thou were wood.
ABEL. God that shope both erth and heven,
I pray to thee thou here my steven
And take in thank, if thi will be,
The tend that I offre here to thee,
For I gif it in good entent
To thee my lord, that all has sent.
I bren it now with stedfast thoght
In worship of hym that all has wroght.
CAIN. Ryse, let me now, syn thou has done.
Lord of heven, thou here my boyne,
And over Godys forbot be to thee
Thank or thew to kun me.
For as browke I thise two shankys,
It is full sore, myne unthankys,
The teynd that I here gif to thee
Of corn or thyng that newys me.
Bot now begyn will I then,
Syn I must nede my tend to bren.
Oone shefe, oone, and this makys two,
Bot nawder of thise may I forgo.
Two, two, now this is thre;
Yei, this also shall leif with me,
For I will chose and best have—
This hold I thrift—of all this thrafe.
Wemo, wemo! foure, lo, here.
Better greved me no this yere.
At yere tyme, I sew fayre corn,
Yit was it sich when it was shorne.
Thystyls and brerys, yei, grete plenté,
And all kyn wedys that myght be.
Foure shefys, foure; lo, this makys fyfe.
Deyll! I fast thus long or I thrife.
Fyfe and sex, now this is sevyn,
this gettys never God of heven.
Nor none of thise foure at my myght
Shall never com in Godys sight.
Sevyn, sevyn, now this is aght.
ABEL. Cam, brother, thou art not God betaght.
CAIN. Wé, therfor is it that I say
For I will not deyle my good away.
Bot had I gyffen hym this to teynd
Then wold thou say he were my freynd,
Bot I thynk not, bi my hode,
To departe so lightly fro my goode.
Wé! aght, aght, and neyn, and ten is this.
Wé, this may we best mys.
Gif hym that that ligys thore;
It goyse agans myn hart full sore.
ABEL. Cam, teynd right of all bedeyn.
CAIN. Wé, lo! twelve, fyfteyn, sexteyn.
ABEL. Caym, thou tendys wrang and of the warst.
CAIN. Wé, com nar and hide myne een.
In the wenyand, wist ye now at last!
Or els will thou that I wynk?
Then shall I doy no wrong, me thynk.
Let me se now how it is.
Lo, yit I hold me paide.
I teyndyd wonder well, bi ges,
And so even I laide.
ABEL. Came, of God me thynke thou has no drede.
CAIN. Now and he get more, the dwill me spede,
As mych as oone reepe!
For that cam hym full light chepe,
Not as mekill grete ne small
As he myght wipe his ars withall.
For that and this that lyys here
Have cost me full dere.
Or it was shorne and broght in stak
Had I many a wery bak.
Therfor aske me no more of this,
For I have giffen that my will is.
ABEL. Cam, I rede thou tend right
For drede of hym that sittys on hight.
CAIN. How that I tend, rek thee never a deill,
Bot tend thi skabbid shepe wele.
For if thou to my teynd tent take
It bese the wars for thi sake.
Thou wold I gaf hym this shefe or this sheyfe?
Na, nawder of thise two wil I leife.
Bot take this, now has he two.
And for my saull now mot it go.
Bot it gos sore agans my will
And shal he like full ill.
ABEL. Cam, I reyde thou so teynd
That God of heven be thi freynd.
CAIN. My freynd? Na, not bot if he will.
I did hym never yit bot skill.
If he be never so my fo,
I am avisid gif hym no mo.
Bot chaunge thi conscience as I do myn.
Yit teynd thou not thi mesel swyne.
ABEL. If thou teynd right, thou mon it fynde.
CAIN. Yei, kys the dwills ars behynde!
The dwill hang thee bi the nek!
How that I teynd never thou rek.
Will thou not yit hold thi peasse?
Of this janglyng I reyde thou seasse
And, teynd I well or tend I ill,
Bere thee even and speke bot skill.
Bot now, syn thou has teyndid thyne,
Now will I set fyr on myne.
Wé! out, haro! help to blaw!
It will not bren for me, I traw,
Puf! this smoke dos me mych shame.
Now bren, in the dwillys name!
A, what dwill of hell is it?
Almost had myne breth beyn dit.
Had I blawen oone blast more,
I had beyn choked right thore!
It stank like the dwill in hell,
That longer ther myght I not dwell.
ABEL. Cam, this is not worth oone leke;
Thy tend shuld bren withoutten smeke.
CAIN. Com kys the dwill right in the ars!
For thee it brens bot the wars.
I wold that it were in thi throte—
Fyr and shefe and ich a sprote.
[GOD appears above.]
GOD. Cam, whi art thou so rebell
Agans thi brother Abell?
Thar thou nowther flyte ne chyde.
If thou tend right, thou gettys thi mede,
And be thou sekir, if thou teynd fals,
Thou bese alowed therafter als.
[Exit GOD.]
CAIN. Whi, who is that hob over the wall?
Wé, who was that that piped so small?
Com, go we hens for perels all;
God is out of hys wit!
Com furth, Abell, and let us weynd;
Me thynk that God is not my freynd.
On land then will I flyt.
ABEL. A, Caym, brother that is ill done.
CAIN. No, bot go we hens sone
And, if I may, I shall be
Ther as God shall not me see.
ABEL. Dere brother, I will fayre
On feld ther oure bestys ar,
To looke if thay be holgh or full.
CAIN. Na, na, abide; we have a craw to pull.
Hark, speke with me or thou go;
What, wenys thou to skape so?
Wé, na! I aght thee a fowll dispyte
And now is tyme that I hit qwite.
ABEL. Brother, whi art thou so to me in ire?
CAIN. Wé, theyf, whi brend thi tend so shyre?

Ther myne did bot smoked
Right as it wold us both have choked.
ABEL. Godys will, I trow it were,
That myn brened so clere;
If thyne smoked, am I to wite?
CAIN. Wé, yei, that shal thou sore abite!
With cheke bon, or that I blyn,
Shal I thee and thi life twyn.
[CAIN kills ABEL.]
So lig down ther and take thi rest;
Thus shall shrewes be chastysed best.
ABEL. Veniance! veniance, Lord, I cry!
For I am slayn and not gilty.
CAIN. Yei, ly ther, old shrew! ly ther, ly!
And if any of you thynk I did amys,
I shal it amend wars then it is,
That all men may it se.
Well wars then it is
Right so shall it be.
Bot now, syn he is broght on slepe,
Into som hole fayn wold I crepe.
For ferd I qwake and can no rede,
For be I taken I be bot dede.
Here will I lig thise fourty dayes.
And I shrew hym that me fyrst rayse.
[GOD appears above.]
GOD. Caym! Caym!
CAIN. Who is that that callis me?
I am yonder may thou not se?
GOD. Caym, where is thi brother Abell?
CAIN. What, askys thou me? I trow at hell.
At hell I trow he be—
Whoso were ther then myght he se—
Or somwhere fallen on slepyng.
When was he in my kepyng?
GOD. Caym, Caym! thou was wode.
The voyce of thi brotherys blode
That thou has slayn on fals wise
From erth to heven venyance cryse,
And for thou has broght thi brother downe,
Here I gif thee my malison.
CAIN. Yei, dele aboute thee, for I will none,
Or take it thee when I am gone.
Syn I have done so mekill syn
That I may not thi mercy wyn,
And thou thus dos me from thi grace,
I shall hyde me fro thi face.
And where so any man may fynd me
Let hym slo me hardely,
And where so any man may me meyte,
Ayther bi sty or yit bi strete.
And hardely, when I am dede,
Bery me in Gudeboure at the quarell hede,
For may I pas this place in quarte.
Bi all men set I not a fart!
GOD. Nay, Caym, it bese not so;
I will that no man other slo.
For he that sloys thee, yong or old,
It shall be punyshid sevenfold.
[Exit GOD.]
CAIN. No force, I wote wheder I shall.
In hell, I wote, mon be my stall.
It is no boyte mercy to crave
For, if I do, I mon none have.
Bot this cors I wold were hid,
For som man myght com at ungayn.
“Fle fals shrew” wold he bid,
And weyn I had my brother slayn.
Bot were Pikeharnes my knafe here,
We shuld bery hym both in fere.
How, Pykeharnes, scapethryft! how Pikeharnes, how!
BOY. Master, master.
CAIN. Harstow, boy, ther is a podyng in the pot.
Take thee that, boy, tak thee that!
BOY. I shrew thi ball under thi hode
If thou were my syre of flesh and blode.
All the day to ryn and trott,
And ever amang thou strykeand,
Thus am I comen bofettys to fott.
CAIN. Peas, man, I did it bot to use my hand.
Bot harke, boy, I have a counsell to thee to say:
I slogh my brother this same day;
I pray thee, good boy, and thou may,
To ryn away with the bayn.
BOY. Wé, out apon thee, thefe!
Has thou thi brother slayn?
CAIN. Peasse, man, for Godys payn.
I saide it for a skaunce.
BOY. Yey, bot for ferde of grevance
Here I thee forsake.
We mon have a mekill myschaunce
And the bayles us take.
CAIN. A, syr, I cry you mercy! Seasse,
And I shall make you a releasse.
BOY. What, wilt thou cry my peasse
Thrughout this land?
CAIN. Yey, that I gif God a vow, belife.
BOY. How will thou do, long or thou thrife?
CAIN. Stand up, my good boy, belife.
And thaym peasse, both man and wife.
And whoso will do after me
Full slape of thrift then shal he be.
Bot thou must be my good boy,
And cry oyes, oyes, oy!
BOY. Browes, browes to thi boy.
CAIN. I commaund you in the kyngys nayme—
BOY. And in my masteres, fals Cayme.
CAIN. That no man at thame fynd fawt ne blame—
BOY. Yey, cold rost is at my masteres hame.
CAIN. Nowther with hym nor with his knafe—
BOY. What, I hope my master rafe.
CAIN. For thay ar trew full manyfold—
BOY. My master suppys no coyle bot cold.
CAIN. The kyng wrytys you untill.
BOY. Yit ete I never half my fill.
CAIN. The kyng will that thay be safe—
BOY. Yey, a draght of drynke fayne wold I hayfe.
CAIN. At thare awne will let tham wafe.
BOY. My stomak is redy to receyfe.
CAIN. Loke no man say to theym on nor other—
BOY. This same is he that slo his brother.
CAIN. Byd every man thaym luf and lowt—
BOY. Yey, ill spon weft ay comes foule out.
CAIN. Long or thou get thi hoyse, and thou go thus aboute!
Byd every man theym pleasse to pay—
BOY. Yey, gif Don, thyne hors, a wisp of hay.
CAIN. Wé, com downe in twenty dwill way!
The dwill I thee betake.
For bot it were Abell my brothere
Yit knew I never thi make.
BOY. Now, old and yong, or that ye weynd,
The same blissyng withoutten end
All sam then shall ye have
That God of heven my master has giffen.
Browke it well whils that ye liffen;
He vowche it full well safe.
CAIN. Com downe yit in the dwillys way,
And angre me no more.
And take yond plogh, I say,
And weynd thee furth fast before,
And I shall if I may
Tech thee another lore.
I warn thee lad, for ay,
Fro now furth evermore
That thou greve me noght.
For bi Codys sydys, if thou do
I shall hang thee apon this plo
With this rope, lo, lad! lo,
By hym that me dere boght.
Now, fayre well, felows all,
For I must nedys weynd,
And to the dwill be thrall,
Warld withoutten end.
Ordand ther is my stall
With Sathanas the feynd,
Ever ill myght hym befall,
That theder me commend
This tyde.
Fare well les, and fare well more,
For now and evermore!
I will go me to hyde.

CAIN, A MYSTERY
By Lord Byron

Eve in the paradise, spinning with her two children Cain and Abel,
an ancient gothic mural in the public Kirkerup Church in Denmark



ACT III.
Scene I.—The Earth, near Eden, as in Act I.
[Enter Cain and Adah.
Adah. Hush! tread softly, Cain!
Cain. I will—but wherefore?
Adah. Our little Enoch sleeps upon yon bed
Of leaves, beneath the cypress.
Cain. Cypress! 'tis
A gloomy tree, which looks as if it mourned
O'er what it shadows; wherefore didst thou choose it
For our child's canopy?
Adah. Because its branches
Shut out the sun like night, and therefore seemed
Fitting to shadow slumber.
Cain. Aye, the last—
And longest; but no matter—lead me to him.
[They go up to the child.
How lovely he appears! his little cheeks,
In their pure incarnation, vying with
The rose leaves strewn beneath them.
Adah. And his lips, too,
How beautifully parted! No; you shall not
Kiss him, at least not now: he will awake soon—
His hour of mid-day rest is nearly over;
But it were pity to disturb him till
'Tis closed.
Cain. You have said well; I will contain
My heart till then. He smiles, and sleeps!—sleep on,
And smile, thou little, young inheritor
Of a world scarce less young: sleep on, and smile!
Thine are the hours and days when both are cheering
And innocent! thou hast not plucked the fruit—
Thou know'st not thou art naked! Must the time
Come thou shalt be amerced for sins unknown,
Which were not thine nor mine? But now sleep on!
His cheeks are reddening into deeper smiles,
And shining lids are trembling o'er his long
Lashes, dark as the cypress which waves o'er them;
Half open, from beneath them the clear blue
Laughs out, although in slumber. He must dream—
Of what? Of Paradise!—Aye! dream of it,
My disinherited boy! 'Tis but a dream;
For never more thyself, thy sons, nor fathers,
Shall walk in that forbidden place of joy!
Adah. Dear Cain! Nay, do not whisper o'er our son
Such melancholy yearnings o'er the past:
Why wilt thou always mourn for Paradise?
Can we not make another?
Cain. Where?
Adah. Here, or
Where'er thou wilt: where'er thou art, I feel not
The want of this so much regretted Eden.
Have I not thee—our boy—our sire, and brother,
And Zillah—our sweet sister, and our Eve,
To whom we owe so much besides our birth?
Cain. Yes—Death, too, is amongst the debts we owe her.
Adah. Cain! that proud Spirit, who withdrew thee hence,
Hath saddened thine still deeper. I had hoped
The promised wonders which thou hast beheld,
Visions, thou say'st, of past and present worlds,
Would have composed thy mind into the calm
Of a contented knowledge; but I see
Thy guide hath done thee evil: still I thank him,
And can forgive him all, that he so soon
Hath given thee back to us.
Cain. So soon?
Adah. 'Tis scarcely
Two hours since ye departed: two long hours
To me, but only hours upon the sun.
Cain. And yet I have approached that sun, and seen
Worlds which he once shone on, and never more
Shall light; and worlds he never lit: methought
Years had rolled o'er my absence.
Adah. Hardly hours.
Cain. The mind then hath capacity of time,
And measures it by that which it beholds,
Pleasing or painful; little or almighty.
I had beheld the immemorial works
Of endless beings; skirred extinguished worlds;
And, gazing on eternity, methought
I had borrowed more by a few drops of ages
From its immensity: but now I feel
My littleness again. Well said the Spirit,
That I was nothing!
Adah. Wherefore said he so?
Jehovah said not that.
Cain. No: he contents him
With making us the nothing which we are;
And after flattering dust with glimpses of
Eden and Immortality, resolves
It back to dust again—for what?
Adah. Thou know'st—
Even for our parents' error.
Cain. What is that
To us? they sinned, then let them die!
Adah. Thou hast not spoken well, nor is that thought
Thy own, but of the Spirit who was with thee.
Would I could die for them, so they might live!
Cain. Why, so say I—provided that one victim
Might satiate the Insatiable of life,
And that our little rosy sleeper there
Might never taste of death nor human sorrow,
Nor hand it down to those who spring from him.
Adah. How know we that some such atonement one day
May not redeem our race?
Cain. By sacrificing
The harmless for the guilty? what atonement
Were there? why, we are innocent: what have we
Done, that we must be victims for a deed
Before our birth, or need have victims to
Atone for this mysterious, nameless sin—
If it be such a sin to seek for knowledge?
Adah. Alas! thou sinnest now, my Cain: thy words
Sound impious in mine ears.
Cain. Then leave me!
Adah. Never,
Though thy God left thee.
Cain. Say, what have we here?
Adah. Two altars, which our brother Abel made
During thine absence, whereupon to offer
A sacrifice to God on thy return.
Cain. And how knew he, that I would be so ready
With the burnt offerings, which he daily brings
With a meek brow, whose base humility
Shows more of fear than worship—as a bribe
To the Creator?
Adah. Surely, 'tis well done.
Cain. One altar may suffice; I have no offering.
Adah. The fruits of the earth, the early, beautiful,
Blossom and bud—and bloom of flowers and fruits—
These are a goodly offering to the Lord,
Given with a gentle and a contrite spirit.
Cain. I have toiled, and tilled, and sweaten in the sun,
According to the curse:—must I do more?
For what should I be gentle? for a war
With all the elements ere they will yield
The bread we eat? For what must I be grateful?
For being dust, and grovelling in the dust,
Till I return to dust? If I am nothing—
For nothing shall I be an hypocrite,
And seem well-pleased with pain? For what should I
Be contrite? for my father's sin, already
Expiate with what we all have undergone,
And to be more than expiated by
The ages prophesied, upon our seed.
Little deems our young blooming sleeper, there,
The germs of an eternal misery
To myriads is within him! better 'twere
I snatched him in his sleep, and dashed him 'gainst
The rocks, than let him live to——
Adah. Oh, my God!
Touch not the child—my child! thy child! Oh, Cain!
Cain. Fear not! for all the stars, and all the power
Which sways them, I would not accost yon infant
With ruder greeting than a father's kiss.
Adah. Then, why so awful in thy speech?
Cain. I said,
'Twere better that he ceased to live, than give
Life to so much of sorrow as he must
Endure, and, harder still, bequeath; but since
That saying jars you, let us only say—
'Twere better that he never had been born.

Adah. Oh, do not say so! Where were then the joys,
The mother's joys of watching, nourishing,
And loving him? Soft! he awakes. Sweet Enoch!
[She goes to the child.
Oh, Cain! look on him; see how full of life,
Of strength, of bloom, of beauty, and of joy—
How like to me—how like to thee, when gentle—
For then we are all alike; is't not so, Cain?
Mother, and sire, and son, our features are
Reflected in each other; as they are
In the clear waters, when they are gentle, and
When thou art gentle. Love us, then, my Cain!
And love thyself for our sakes, for we love thee.
Look! how he laughs and stretches out his arms,
And opens wide his blue eyes upon thine,
To hail his father; while his little form
Flutters as winged with joy. Talk not of pain!
The childless cherubs well might envy thee
The pleasures of a parent! Bless him, Cain!
As yet he hath no words to thank thee, but
His heart will, and thine own too.
Cain. Bless thee, boy!
If that a mortal blessing may avail thee,
To save thee from the Serpent's curse!
Adah. It shall.
Surely a father's blessing may avert
A reptile's subtlety.
Cain. Of that I doubt;
But bless him ne'er the less.
Adah. Our brother comes.
Cain. Thy brother Abel.
[Enter Abel.
Abel. Welcome, Cain! My brother,
The peace of God be on thee!
Cain. Abel, hail!
Abel. Our sister tells me that thou hast been wandering,
In high communion with a Spirit, far
Beyond our wonted range. Was he of those
We have seen and spoken with, like to our father?
Cain. No.
Abel. Why then commune with him? he may be
A foe to the Most High.
Cain. And friend to man.
Has the Most High been so—if so you term him?
Abel. Term him! your words are strange to-day, my brother.
My sister Adah, leave us for awhile—
We mean to sacrifice.
Adah. Farewell, my Cain;
But first embrace thy son. May his soft spirit,
And Abel's pious ministry, recall thee
To peace and holiness!
[Exit Adah, with her child.
Abel. Where hast thou been?
Cain. I know not.
Abel. Nor what thou hast seen?
Cain. The dead—
The Immortal—the Unbounded—the Omnipotent—
The overpowering mysteries of space—
The innumerable worlds that were and are—
A whirlwind of such overwhelming things,
Suns, moons, and earths, upon their loud-voiced spheres
Singing in thunder round me, as have made me
Unfit for mortal converse: leave me, Abel.
Abel. Thine eyes are flashing with unnatural light—
Thy cheek is flushed with an unnatural hue—
Thy words are fraught with an unnatural sound—
What may this mean?
Cain. It means—I pray thee, leave me.
Abel. Not till we have prayed and sacrificed together.
Cain. Abel, I pray thee, sacrifice alone—
Jehovah loves thee well.
Abel. Both well, I hope.
Cain. But thee the better: I care not for that;
Thou art fitter for his worship than I am;
Revere him, then—but let it be alone—
At least, without me.
Abel. Brother, I should ill
Deserve the name of our great father's son,
If, as my elder, I revered thee not,
And in the worship of our God, called not
On thee to join me, and precede me in
Our priesthood—'tis thy place.
Cain. But I have ne'er
Asserted it.
Abel. The more my grief; I pray thee
To do so now: thy soul seems labouring in
Some strong delusion; it will calm thee.
Cain. No;
Nothing can calm me more. Calm! say I? Never
Knew I what calm was in the soul, although
I have seen the elements stilled. My Abel, leave me!
Or let me leave thee to thy pious purpose.
Abel. Neither; we must perform our task together.
Spurn me not.
Cain. If it must be so——well, then,
What shall I do?
Abel. Choose one of those two altars.
Cain. Choose for me: they to me are so much turf
And stone.
Abel. Choose thou!
Cain. I have chosen.
Abel. 'Tis the highest,
And suits thee, as the elder. Now prepare
Thine offerings.
Cain. Where are thine?
Abel. Behold them here—
The firstlings of the flock, and fat thereof—
A shepherd's humble offering.
Cain. I have no flocks;
I am a tiller of the ground, and must
Yield what it yieldeth to my toil—its fruit:
[He gathers fruits.
Behold them in their various bloom and ripeness.
[They dress their altars, and kindle aflame upon them.
Abel. My brother, as the elder, offer first
Thy prayer and thanksgiving with sacrifice.
Cain. No—I am new to this; lead thou the way,
And I will follow—as I may.
Abel (kneeling). Oh, God!
Who made us, and who breathed the breath of life
Within our nostrils, who hath blessed us,
And spared, despite our father's sin, to make
His children all lost, as they might have been,
Had not thy justice been so tempered with
The mercy which is thy delight, as to
Accord a pardon like a Paradise,
Compared with our great crimes:—Sole Lord of light!
Of good, and glory, and eternity!
Without whom all were evil, and with whom
Nothing can err, except to some good end
Of thine omnipotent benevolence!
Inscrutable, but still to be fulfilled!
Accept from out thy humble first of shepherds'
First of the first-born flocks—an offering,
In itself nothing—as what offering can be
Aught unto thee?—but yet accept it for
The thanksgiving of him who spreads it in
The face of thy high heaven—bowing his own
Even to the dust, of which he is—in honour
Of thee, and of thy name, for evermore!
Cain (standing erect during this speech).
Spirit whate'er or whosoe'er thou art,
Omnipotent, it may be—and, if good,
Shown in the exemption of thy deeds from evil;
Jehovah upon earth! and God in heaven!
And it may be with other names, because
Thine attributes seem many, as thy works:—
If thou must be propitiated with prayers,
Take them! If thou must be induced with altars,
And softened with a sacrifice, receive them;
Two beings here erect them unto thee.
If thou lov'st blood, the shepherd's shrine, which smokes
On my right hand, hath shed it for thy service
In the first of his flock, whose limbs now reek
In sanguinary incense to thy skies;
Or, if the sweet and blooming fruits of earth,
And milder seasons, which the unstained turf
I spread them on now offers in the face
Of the broad sun which ripened them, may seem
Good to thee—inasmuch as they have not
Suffered in limb or life—and rather form
A sample of thy works, than supplication

To look on ours! If a shrine without victim,And altar without gore, may win thy favour,
Look on it! and for him who dresseth it,
He is—such as thou mad'st him; and seeks nothing
Which must be won by kneeling: if he's evil
Strike him! thou art omnipotent, and may'st—
For what can he oppose? If he be good,
Strike him, or spare him, as thou wilt! since all
Rests upon thee; and Good and Evil seem
To have no power themselves, save in thy will—
And whether that be good or ill I know not,
Not being omnipotent, nor fit to judge
Omnipotence—but merely to endure
Its mandate; which thus far I have endured.
[The fire upon the altar of Abel kindles into a column of the brightest flame, and ascends to heaven; while a whirlwind throws down the altar of Cain, and scatters the fruits abroad upon the earth.
Abel (kneeling). Oh, brother, pray! Jehovah's wroth with thee.
Cain. Why so?
Abel. Thy fruits are scattered on the earth.
Cain. From earth they came, to earth let them return;
Their seed will bear fresh fruit there ere the summer:
Thy burnt flesh-offering prospers better; see
How Heaven licks up the flames, when thick with blood!
Abel. Think not upon my offering's acceptance,
But make another of thine own—before
It is too late.
Cain. I will build no more altars,
Nor suffer any——
Abel (rising). Cain! what meanest thou?
Cain. To cast down yon vile flatterer of the clouds,
The smoky harbinger of thy dull prayers—
Thine altar, with its blood of lambs and kids,
Which fed on milk, to be destroyed in blood.
Abel (opposing him).
Thou shalt not:—add not impious works to impious
Words! let that altar stand—'tis hallowed now
By the immortal pleasure of Jehovah,
In his acceptance of the victims.
Cain. His!
His pleasure! what was his high pleasure in
The fumes of scorching flesh and smoking blood,
To the pain of the bleating mothers, which
Still yearn for their dead offspring? or the pangs
Of the sad ignorant victims underneath
Thy pious knife? Give way! this bloody record
Shall not stand in the sun, to shame creation!
Abel. Brother, give back! thou shalt not touch my altar
With violence: if that thou wilt adopt it,
To try another sacrifice, 'tis thine.
Cain. Another sacrifice! Give way, or else
That sacrifice may be——
Abel. What mean'st thou?
Cain. Give—
Give way!—thy God loves blood!—then look to it:—
Give way, ere he hath more!
Abel. In his great name,
I stand between thee and the shrine which hath
Had his acceptance.
Cain. If thou lov'st thyself,
Stand back till I have strewed this turf along
Its native soil:—else——
Abel (opposing him). I love God far more
Than life.
Cain (striking him with a brand, on the temples, which he snatches from the altar). Then take thy life unto thy God,
Since he loves lives.
Abel (falls). What hast thou done—my brother?
Cain. Brother!
Abel. Oh, God! receive thy servant! and
Forgive his slayer, for he knew not what
He did—Cain, give me—give me thy hand; and tell
Poor Zillah—
Cain (after a moment's stupefaction).
My hand! 'tis all red, and with——
What?
[A long pause.—Looking slowly round.
Where am I? alone! Where's Abel? where
Cain? Can it be that I am he? My brother,
Awake!—why liest thou so long on the green earth?
Tis not the hour of slumber:—why so pale?
What hast thou!—thou wert full of life this morn!
Abel! I pray thee, mock me not! I smote
Too fiercely, but not fatally. Ah, why
Wouldst thou oppose me? This is mockery;
And only done to daunt me:—'twas a blow—
And but a blow. Stir—stir—nay, only stir!
Why, so—that's well!—thou breathest! breathe upon me!
Oh God! Oh God!
Abel (very faintly). What's he who speaks of God?
Cain. Thy murderer.
Abel. Then may God forgive him! Cain,
Comfort poor Zillah:—she has but one brother
Now.
[Abel dies.
Cain. And I none!—Who makes me brotherless?
His eyes are open! then he is not dead!
Death is like sleep; and sleep shuts down our lids.
His lips, too, are apart; why then he breathes;
And yet I feel it not.—His heart!—his heart!—
Let me see, doth it beat? methinks——No!—no!
This is a vision, else I am become
The native of another and worse world.
The earth swims round me:—what is this?—'tis wet;
[Puts his hand to his brow, and then looks at it.
And yet there are no dews! 'Tis blood—my blood—
My brother's and my own! and shed by me!
Then what have I further to do with life,
Since I have taken life from my own flesh?
But he can not be dead!—Is silence death?
No; he will wake; then let me watch by him.
Life cannot be so slight, as to be quenched
Thus quickly!—he hath spoken to me since—
What shall I say to him?—My brother!—No:
He will not answer to that name; for brethren
Smite not each other. Yet—yet—speak to me.
Oh! for a word more of that gentle voice,
That I may bear to hear my own again!
[Enter Zillah.
Zillah. I heard a heavy sound; what can it be?
'Tis Cain; and watching by my husband. What
Dost thou there, brother? Doth he sleep? Oh, Heaven!
What means this paleness, and yon stream?—No, no!
It is not blood; for who would shed his blood?
Abel! what's this?—who hath done this? He moves not;
He breathes not: and his hands drop down from mine
With stony lifelessness! Ah! cruel Cain!
Why camest thou not in time to save him from
This violence? Whatever hath assailed him,
Thou wert the stronger, and shouldst have stepped in
Between him and aggression! Father!—Eve!—
Adah!—come hither! Death is in the world!
[Exit Zillah, calling on her Parents, etc.
Cain (solus) And who hath brought him there?—I—who abhor
The name of Death so deeply, that the thought
Empoisoned all my life, before I knew
His aspect—I have led him here, and given
My brother to his cold and still embrace,
As if he would not have asserted his
Inexorable claim without my aid.
I am awake at last—a dreary dream
Had maddened me;—but he shall ne'er awake!
[Enter Adam, Eve, Adah, and Zillah.
Adam. A voice of woe from Zillah brings me here—
What do I see?—'Tis true!—My son!—my son!
Woman, behold the Serpent's work, and thine! [To Eve.
Eve. Oh! speak not of it now: the Serpent's fangs
Are in my heart! My best beloved, Abel!
Jehovah! this is punishment beyond
A mother's sin, to take him from me!
Adam. Who,
Or what hath done this deed?—speak, Cain, since thou
Wert present; was it some more hostile angel,
Who walks not with Jehovah? or some wild
Brute of the forest?
Eve. Ah! a livid light
Breaks through, as from a thunder-cloud! yon brand
Massy and bloody! snatched from off the altar,
And black with smoke, and red with——
Adam. Speak, my son!
Speak, and assure us, wretched as we are,

That we are not more miserable still.
Adah. Speak, Cain! and say it was not thou!
Eve. It was!
I see it now—he hangs his guilty head,
And covers his ferocious eye with hands
Incarnadine!
Adah. Mother, thou dost him wrong—
Cain! clear thee from this horrible accusal,
Which grief wrings from our parent.
Eve. Hear, Jehovah!
May the eternal Serpent's curse be on him!
For he was fitter for his seed than ours.
May all his days be desolate! May——
Adah. Hold!
Curse him not, mother, for he is thy son—
Curse him not, mother, for he is my brother,
And my betrothed.
Eve. He hath left thee no brother—
Zillah no husband—me no son! for thus
I curse him from my sight for evermore!
All bonds I break between us, as he broke
That of his nature, in yon——Oh Death! Death!
Why didst thou not take me, who first incurred thee?
Why dost thou not so now?
Adam. Eve! let not this,
Thy natural grief, lead to impiety!
A heavy doom was long forespoken to us;
And now that it begins, let it be borne
In such sort as may show our God, that we
Are faithful servants to his holy will.
Eve. (pointing to Cain).
His will! the will of yon Incarnate Spirit
Of Death, whom I have brought upon the earth
To strew it with the dead. May all the curses
Of life be on him! and his agonies
Drive him forth o'er the wilderness, like us
From Eden, till his children do by him
As he did by his brother! May the swords
And wings of fiery Cherubim pursue him
By day and night—snakes spring up in his path—
Earth's fruits be ashes in his mouth—the leaves
On which he lays his head to sleep be strewed
With scorpions! May his dreams be of his victim!
His waking a continual dread of Death!
May the clear rivers turn to blood as he
Stoops down to stain them with his raging lip!
May every element shun or change to him!
May he live in the pangs which others die with!
And Death itself wax something worse than Death
To him who first acquainted him with man!
Hence, fratricide! henceforth that word is Cain,
Through all the coming myriads of mankind,
Who shall abhor thee, though thou wert their sire!
May the grass wither from thy feet! the woods
Deny thee shelter! earth a home! the dust
A grave! the sun his light! and heaven her God!
[Exit Eve.
Adam. Cain! get thee forth: we dwell no more together.
Depart! and leave the dead to me—I am
Henceforth alone—we never must meet more.
Adah. Oh, part not with him thus, my father: do not
Add thy deep curse to Eve's upon his head!
Adam. I curse him not: his spirit be his curse.
Come, Zillah!
Zillah. I must watch my husband's corse.
Adam. We will return again, when he is gone
Who hath provided for us this dread office.
Come, Zillah!
Zillah. Yet one kiss on yon pale clay,
And those lips once so warm—my heart! my heart!
[Exeunt Adam and Zillah weeping.
Adah. Cain! thou hast heard, we must go forth. I am ready,
So shall our children be. I will bear Enoch,
And you his sister. Ere the sun declines
Let us depart, nor walk the wilderness
Under the cloud of night.—Nay, speak to me.
To me—thine own.
Cain. Leave me!
Adah. Why, all have left thee.
Cain. And wherefore lingerest thou? Dost thou not fear
To dwell with one who hath done this?
Adah. I fear
Nothing except to leave thee, much as I
Shrink from the deed which leaves thee brotherless.
I must not speak of this—it is between thee
And the great God.
A Voice from within exclaims. Cain! Cain!
Adah. Hear'st thou that voice?
The Voice within. Cain! Cain!
Adah. It soundeth like an angel's tone.
Enter the Angel of the Lord.
Angel. Where is thy brother Abel?
Cain. Am I then
My brother's keeper?
Angel. Cain! what hast thou done?
The voice of thy slain brother's blood cries out,
Even from the ground, unto the Lord!—Now art thou
Cursed from the earth, which opened late her mouth
To drink thy brother's blood from thy rash hand.
Henceforth, when thou shalt till the ground, it shall not
Yield thee her strength; a fugitive shalt thou
Be from this day, and vagabond on earth!
Adah. This punishment is more than he can bear.
Behold thou drivest him from the face of earth,
And from the face of God shall he be hid.
A fugitive and vagabond on earth,
'Twill come to pass, that whoso findeth him
Shall slay him.
Cain. Would they could! but who are they
Shall slay me? Where are these on the lone earth
As yet unpeopled?
Angel. Thou hast slain thy brother,
And who shall warrant thee against thy son?
Adah. Angel of Light! be merciful, nor say
That this poor aching breast now nourishes
A murderer in my boy, and of his father.
Angel. Then he would but be what his father is.
Did not the milk of Eve give nutriment
To him thou now seest so besmeared with blood?
The fratricide might well engender parricides.—
But it shall not be so—the Lord thy God
And mine commandeth me to set his seal
On Cain, so that he may go forth in safety.
Who slayeth Cain, a sevenfold vengeance shall
Be taken on his head. Come hither!
Cain. What
Wouldst thou with me?
Angel. To mark upon thy brow
Exemption from such deeds as thou hast done.
Cain. No, let me die!
Angel. It must not be.
[The Angel sets the mark on Cain's brow.
Cain. It burns
My brow, but nought to that which is within it!
Is there more? let me meet it as I may.
Angel. Stern hast thou been and stubborn from the womb,
As the ground thou must henceforth till; but he
Thou slew'st was gentle as the flocks he tended.
Cain. After the fall too soon was I begotten;
Ere yet my mother's mind subsided from
The Serpent, and my sire still mourned for Eden.
That which I am, I am; I did not seek
For life, nor did I make myself; but could I
With my own death redeem him from the dust—
And why not so? let him return to day,
And I lie ghastly! so shall be restored
By God the life to him he loved; and taken
From me a being I ne'er loved to bear.
Angel. Who shall heal murder? what is done, is done;
Go forth! fulfil thy days! and be thy deeds
Unlike the last!
[The Angel disappears.
Adah. He's gone, let us go forth;
I hear our little Enoch cry within
Our bower.
Cain. Ah! little knows he what he weeps for!
And I who have shed blood cannot shed tears!
But the four rivers would not cleanse my soul.
Think'st thou my boy will bear to look on me?
Adah. If I thought that he would not, I would——
Cain (interrupting her). No,
No more of threats: we have had too many of them:

Go to our children—I will follow thee.
Adah. I will not leave thee lonely with the dead—
Let us depart together.
Cain. Oh! thou dead
And everlasting witness! whose unsinking
Blood darkens earth and heaven! what thou now art
I know not! but if thou seest what I am,
I think thou wilt forgive him, whom his God
Can ne'er forgive, nor his own soul.—Farewell!
I must not, dare not touch what I have made thee.
I, who sprung from the same womb with thee, drained
The same breast, clasped thee often to my own,
In fondness brotherly and boyish, I
Can never meet thee more, nor even dare
To do that for thee, which thou shouldst have done
For me—compose thy limbs into their grave—
The first grave yet dug for mortality.
But who hath dug that grave? Oh, earth! Oh, earth!
For all the fruits thou hast rendered to me, I
Give thee back this.—Now for the wilderness!
[Adah stoops down and kisses the body of Abel.
Adah. A dreary, and an early doom, my brother,
Has been thy lot! Of all who mourn for thee,
I alone must not weep. My office is
Henceforth to dry up tears, and not to shed them;
But yet of all who mourn, none mourn like me,
Not only for thyself, but him who slew thee.
Now, Cain! I will divide thy burden with thee.
Cain. Eastward from Eden will we take our way;
'Tis the most desolate, and suits my steps.
Adah. Lead! thou shalt be my guide, and may our God
Be thine! Now let us carry forth our children.
Cain. And he who lieth there was childless! I
Have dried the fountain of a gentle race,
Which might have graced his recent marriage couch,
And might have tempered this stern blood of mine,
Uniting with our children Abel's offspring!
O Abel!
Adah. Peace be with him!
Cain. But with me!——
[Exeunt.

Caïn venant de tuer son frère Abel (Cain, after having murdered his brother Abel) Henri Vidal

CAIN, A DRAMA

By George Cabot Lodge



Panel of the Door of Paradise - Cain and Abel. Golden bronze door in Florence Baptistery. Italy

ACT II.

A broad level of naked rock at the extreme summit of a high mountain. No vegetation nor any sign of life whatever. At the back the mountain falls away in a sheer precipice. In the immense distance below and beyond stretches a vast panorama of forest, field and stream, warm and tranquil thro' the golden haze of late afternoon. In the foreground is a low platform of stone about twenty feet square with three broad stone steps leading up to it. On the platform stands a sort of sacrificial stone or table of offerings. The splendid light of the low sun inundates the summit of the mountain and lies, windless and warm, across the altar.

Time: late afternoon of the same day which dawned in Act I.

CAIN enters by a path ascending from the valley. He bears in his hands fruit, grain, and two small jars containing oil and wine. He places his burden on the ground near the raised platform, and, seating himself on a boulder, surveys the immense prospect spread beneath him.

CAIN. I am gone sky-ward to the uttermost—
Tacit and distant as life's thought of death
Earth lies beneath me patterned with sheer hills,
Deserts and forest-marches, flashing streams
And sea-scapes vast beyond the power of vision.
Its charted levels, whelmed beneath the dumb
Cycles and tides of lucent sapphire, seem
A sea-floor tufted with gigantic weeds,
Virgin of tumult or the tread and travel
Of restless feet; yet fruitful streams, I know,
Go seaward voiced with endless melody,
Twilight is plaintive with the cries of birds,
Dim forests murmur soft as sleep, and all
The myriads of life are musical!
No whisper lifts,—the light is deep and dumb.
As one sequestered in the tower of thought
I stand aloof from restless strife and sound,
Withdrawn beyond the fellowship of life.—
Solitude, silence and tranquillity,
Immensity of elemental things,—
Haply in you at last the soul finds room,
And liberty and light haply in you!
It may be,—aging with the passionate seasons
On earth's maternal breast,—that life becomes
Too much a lyric enterprise, too wrought
With dreams and great desires and deep surmise,
Too dazed with motion and magnificence.—
There, in the press and pride and longing of life,
Haply the captive soul is leashed and lulled;—
Yet whiles, even in the ruck of the swift hours,
Sentient of twilights and infinities!—
But here is refuge: silence, unperturbed,
Broods on these battlements of lifeless stone
Reared like an isle from life's tempestuous sea.
Regioned in light and loneliness, the soul
May, in the all-reflecting glass of truth,
Confront with eyes insatiable of light
The revelations of eternity.—
Here might at last divinely be fulfilled
All spiritual indications to the soul
From rapt communion with the silent stars,
That still by night their endless vigil keep
On the vague frontiers of infinity.
Here might the thought of time, the thought of death,
The wonder and desire of deathless things
Yield to the soul their last significance.—
Here might the mystery of God be solved!—

He pauses, staring before him over the immense prospect where the light deepens.

I know at last all shall be lived, endured—
All shall at last find mansions in the soul;—
And then—then shall the soul be satisfied?
O restless voyager, where is thy rest?
Is there a haven for thine enterprise,
A goal for thine adventure and a term
For thine infinity?—Imagination,
Daring the intervals of pathless gloom
From star to star of thought, falls broken-winged!—
Yet are the days of life occasional
Of truth's divine discovery,—and soul
Shall at the last accept no less than truth!

A pause. CAIN gazes before him, lost in thought. Then, ascending from below, the voice of Abel is heard singing.

The voice of ABEL. Lord God, my light, my hope, my faith,
Craftsman of earth and sea and sky,
What power but Thine can justify
The ways of life, the pangs of death?
Resistless God! before Thy face
My spirit bows, I feel Thy will!
My heart is meek—O Lord, fulfill
My life with Thine exhaustless grace!
I put no trust in strength or youth,
Or power, or thought, or mighty deeds;
I ask of life no more than needs;
I know but this—Thy will is Truth!
Thy creature needs Thy love and light,
Thy servant bows before Thy rod;—
O guide my steps, Eternal God,
And make me perfect in Thy sight!

ABEL, bearing in his arms a lamb, enters and appears face to face with CAIN.

CAIN. —Abel—Abel—

ABEL. Cain—

CAIN. Abel—alone—
So far—

ABEL. My feet have striven to this sheer height
Led by the luminous spirit of piety;
I bear the innocent firstling of my flocks
Here to God's altar as a thanksgiving
Of all my heart for his beneficence!
My mood perchance is thine: creation stirs
To new conception; earth's reviving green
Moves the meek heart to praise the Lord of Life
With songs and seasonable sacrifice.

CAIN. Thy mood is alien to my thoughts of God
And all my visions of human destiny.
I bring no tribute—

ABEL. Nay!—a eucharist!
Is it not very spacious and most fair
This parcel of God's potent handiwork
Held by the sons of man in heritage?
Is it not generous of all pleasantness
And fruitful for the hunger of life's days?
Then, to the Heavenly Artisan who severed
Darkness from light, shaped systems from the void,
Wafted the breath of life thro' lifeless clay,—
How else to Him can man glance heavenward
Save with mild eyes of adoration? How
Climb to his footstool save in grateful praise?

CAIN. God knows no gratitude of mine shall fail
Where such is due. God knows when face to face
I meet my creditor, no debt he proves
Shall wait for payment. Now, till then, I stand
Fettered by no more than my bounds of thought,
Slave to such fears and passions as obscure
Soul's truth and chill the headlong heart of faith,—
Yet, in conception, strong, supreme, and free!

ABEL. Why has this violence of self, this stern
Defiance diseased thy soul with doubt and pride?
The days of life bring one by one their treasure
Of simple toil and simple happiness—
Desires, right deeds, endurance, joy and pain,—
With over all the shelter of God's wise will!
Forego thy search: God is a mystery.—
Now, while the last light lingers heavenward,
Let me fulfill my sacrifice: my soul
Lies on God's breast,—my trust is all in Him.

ABEL ascends the steps to the raised platform, still carrying the lamb in his arms. He sets the lamb down and heaps some fuel on the sacrificial stone. Then he stands before it facing the deep light of sunset.

CAIN, to himself as he watches Abel:
His face is young and tranquil as a child's:
All seems surpassing well with him,—his eyes
Shine with calm rapture, innocent of thought.
Meek trust, simplicity and tenderness—
I must believe his soul is satisfied,—
Filled with a crust!—and I who starve, who starve!—
O tireless voyager! O soul of me!
Captain, my soul!—shall we not better rest?

See, where a mansion in the House of Life
Waits our repentance, and a candle burns
Still thro' the casement—yea, tho' faint and far,
The firelight of contentment lures us back!—
Shall we not better pause, return,—forget
Our desperate quest beyond the heedless stars?
Shall we not better live forevermore
Passionless by the threshold, lulled in sleep,
Like children sheltered in the Father-house?
ABEL. —The golden sandals of reluctant day
Climb the broad shoulders of the heavenward hills.
Earth fills with darkness like a shallow bowl
And sleep weighs down the weary lids of life.
O peace of God, vigil of God's great love,
I feel you now, in vast serenity,
Brood like a benediction on the world!
CAIN, still to himself:
—No more the ecstasy and the pangs of thought,
No more the tempest's threat, the perilous plunge
And shoreless vision of blind uncharted seas
Where soul must wander years and lives and æons
Seeking the undiscoverable truth!—
Captain, my soul,—shall we not better rest?
ABEL strikes fire and lights the fuel upon the altar. He throws on the flames myrrh and frankincense; a dense smoke arises. Then he raises the lamb in his arms and at the same moment draws a knife from his belt.
ABEL. Being whose thoughts are destiny: whose power
Chains the rebellious, tames the passionate;
Whose justice spares the suppliant soul and damns
The soul of pride,—Almighty God, to Thee
Ascend my pæan and prayer and thanksgiving!
Father of Life, accept thy creature; Lord,
Master, receive thy faithful servant Abel!
I ask with contrite heart and will subdued
The dispensation of thy charity!
Suffer this fire and incense may be blessed;
This living sacrifice be sanctified
With thine acceptance!
ABEL cuts the throat of the lamb and lets the warm blood pour out on the sacrificial stone.
I beseech Thee guard
My frailty, fill my heart with thy desire,
Fashion my will to thine intention, take
Temptation from me of my mortal strength,
And pride of thought,—my hope is all in Thee!
ABEL falls on his knees beside the altar and remains lost in rapture. CAIN springs to his feet.
CAIN. Shine! Shine! passionate light of Liberty!
Blow! outward winds; lift the wide wings of thought
Reckless and blind against the night! and you,
Monotonous thunder of the shoreless seas,
Sound thro' long vistas to the sleepless soul!
Rouse, heart benumbed, the lethargy is passed!
Spirit dismayed, the spell is shattered, wake!
Athlete of Freedom, rend the silken fetters
That well-nigh bound thy nerveless sinews fast!
O Heart, how near we stooped to infamy!—
Now and forever the supreme choice is made,
The die is cast! Never shall I behold,
Turning a backward glance from truth's endeavour,
The firelight of content, the lamp of fear
Flickering behind the clouded panes of thought,
The guarded threshold of the House of Sleep!
Forward I set my steadfast eyes! Haste! haste!
Captain, my soul! we shall return no more!
Cut the last strands of weakness and despair
That bound our vessel to the shores of safety!
I hear the singing of all the spacious seas
Of truth's supreme adventure and at last
Take the deep vistas with a homeless eye!
CAIN advances rapidly, seizes the grain, wine, and oil which he had deposited on the ground, and mounts the steps to the platform. There he pauses a moment, looking down upon ABEL, who is still on his knees in a sort of quiet ecstasy.
Man! and so abject! yet my heart is love—
So young he seems, so tender like a child!
Abel!
ABEL. Who calls me?
CAIN. Rise! for I am Cain,
First of the Sons of Man!
ABEL. O rouse me not!
God's peace enfolds me—
CAIN. Rise!
ABEL. What is thy will?
ABEL rises to his feet still a little dazed by the rapture of his meditations.
CAIN. Knowest thou me?
ABEL. Why are thine eyes so strange?
CAIN. Knowest thou me?
ABEL. Thou art my brother Cain—
CAIN. First of the sons of man!
ABEL. What is thy will?
CAIN. Abel, as we are men, I love thee!
ABEL. Cain,
As God is Love, I love thee.
CAIN. All my will
Is thy redemption—
ABEL. My redemption?
CAIN. Man!
I will redeem thee from thine abject state,
Strike the vile fetters from thy fearful feet,
And set thee in the path of liberty!
ABEL. Liberty?—
CAIN. I have lifted the large light,
Near to destruction; it shall shine as fire
Flashing by night, and there where nothing was
Save darkness where imagined spectres stalked,
Visions of God and man's divinity,
Grown to perfection thro' ascending lives,
Shall smite thy breathless soul with wonder!—
ABEL. Cain!
CAIN. Liberty!—See!—God stands before thee now
Real and majestic! Thou shalt understand
How much thy cowardice has wronged him; Man,
Thou hast defiled his name! Thy prayers invoke
Some wrathful demon, not the Soul of Light!
Repent thy prayers, thy prayers were blasphemy!
ABEL. Cain!
CAIN. Hear me—
ABEL. Blasphemy?
CAIN. God is not Lord
Of slaves nor tyrant pleased with abject fears,
Paeans and sacrifice: God sheds his grace
And shares his fellowship for men, not slaves!
Men who are sinewed with sublime resolve,
Whom perfect faith has made insatiable,
Whose eyes pursue, star over star, the last
Outpost of knowledge in the skies of thought!
Pilgrims of pathless lands, whom neither walls
Nor slumber nor the arms of love can hold;
Mariners who depart on shoreless seas
Avid of new horizons in the vast
Unknown!—O men, homeless and lonely men,
For you, for you the fellowship of God!
ABEL. Thine is the blasphemy! Beware! The Lord
Hath said, "Vengeance is mine!"
CAIN. Thy words are wild.—
Vengeance? why vengeance? Shall I dare to fear
The Truth?—O man! are we not torch-bearers?
ABEL. Beware! we are but men and God is God!
CAIN. What then? Divinity is here, not there!
O Soul, God is not otherwise than thou.
And thou art God, O soul, spirit divine!
Words that defile nor body nor soul of me
Defile not God! He is what I shall be,
I am what he has been! Hours, days, years,
Centuries, cycles, æons,—I shall pass
At last to where he waits and longs for me!
CAIN strides to the altar and pours on the failing fire his oil and wine. At once the fire flames brightly and a dense column of smoke mounts straight into the windless air. Then CAIN scatters his grain upon the altar. Meanwhile ABEL, dazed and scared, shrinks farther and farther away toward the steps.
CAIN. To You, Spirit Divine! O Soul of Life,
Denizen of this tenement! O God,
Captain of life's adventure, Self and Soul,
Immortal Master of this mortal house!—
To You, for moments of eternity;
To You, for Truth's sublime discoveries;
To You, for revelations still to come,
Visions unseen, unknown infinities,—

To You this invocation and to You
This ecstasy and solemn sacrifice!
CAIN stands, transported with rapture, his face lifted and flushed with the firelight. Suddenly darkness falls, thunder peals, there comes a violent gust of wind, and the column of smoke from CAIN'S sacrifice is bent and blown straight back in his face. He recoils a step.
The Voice of GOD. Rejected!
ABEL shrieks and stumbles backward down the steps of the platform. At the bottom he falls on his knees and bows his head to the ground.
ABEL. Grace!—Forgiveness!—Mercy!—Mercy!
CAIN. Give me breath!—I am stunned!—
The Voice of GOD. Rejected!
ABEL. God! O God!
My God!—be merciful! be merciful!
CAIN. Who cries "Rejected!"?
ABEL. God!
The Voice of GOD. Rejected!
CAIN. Speak!—
Answer!—Who dares reject the soul of Cain?
I am the Son of Man—who dares reject me?
ABEL. Cain—Cain!
CAIN. Who dares reject me?
The Voice of GOD. I am God!—
Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?
If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?
And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door!
Immediately the wind falls, the sudden darkness lifts, disclosing ABEL prostrate on the ground at the foot of the steps leading to the platform, and CAIN standing, erect and menacing, by the sacrificial stone. Below, the immense panorama of the earth is covered with the shadows of early night. The fire on the altar is extinguished and the scene is illumined only by the last dark flush of sunset which still lingers on the summit of the mountain. The deep violet of the skies is spangled with ripe stars. The silence and the stillness are unbroken.
CAIN. God's voice!—Rejected!—Cain, the Son of Man,
Rejected!—Man, rejected and man's soul
Utterly lost from God's acceptance!—Then—
Hope whored with Fancy and begot a—dream!
So was my soul deceived!—Rejected!—Hear me,
Infinite, voiceless, elemental airs,
Pathless, inviolable firmament!
Hear me, ethereal solitudes, untrod
Save by the bare and soundless feet of light!
Hear me, O cosmic fellowship of stars,
Stainless as children's eyes; majestic suns
And far-flung systems of coherent orbs!
Hear me, O sun, creative lord of light!
Hear me, O moon, mistress of chaunting tides!
Hear me, dead snows of desolate mountain-peaks,
Robing the tragic shapes of cliff and crag!
Hear me, resistless sea and fruitful earth,
Theatre of life and death!—O earth and sea
Of graves and resurrections, toil and sleep!—
Hear me, O Heart, O passionate Heart of Life!—
Hear me, Immortal Heart! And hear me, you,
All in whose veins the pulse of life abounds!
And you, Abel! Abel!—O Son of Man,
Hear me! Hear me! Hear me!—now and forever
I make you witness to this monstrous deed—
God has rejected Cain, the Son of Man!
ABEL. God of stern justice and resistless wrath!
CAIN. Justice?—No justice moves this fierce revenge!
ABEL. God's will is justice!—Desperate rebel, yield!
Hast thou not suffered of all thy sinful pride?
Shall not the power of God constrain thy heart?
Measure thy peril,—be contrite or despair!
CAIN. Never! I will not yield nor yet despair!
Must we despair?—Respond, rejected Soul!—
Faith cheated, love deceived, fond hopes betrayed,
By God denied—must we despair? Respond!
Where's justice?—light?—refuge?—Thought reels! The rod
Strikes fire from flint—beneath the blows of wrath
Fierce doubts and perilous questions leap like sparks,
Flashing within me! Reckless Soul, respond!
Who is the God who dares reject me? Who
Art thou, Spirit Divine?
ABEL. Repent! Repent!
Lest worse befall thee!
CAIN. God rejects me!—Now,
As one who falls in fight and then at dawn
Wakes on the stricken field as life returns
Spent and delirious from the peril of death,
And so, nerved with faint hope, numbers his wounds,—
So I, from fear and dire amazement roused,
Question my peril and count my injuries:
How have I suffered? Where have I suffered?—Speak!
Body and soul seem scatheless—life remains—
Where are my wounds?—I feel them not! My strength
Is whole! Where are my wounds? Where are my wounds?—
I swear, I swear nothing is lost!—All's well!
Captain, my soul, despair is not for thee!
Thou shalt behold the seals of darkness lift,
Weather the wrathful tempest and at last,
Resolute, onward, headlong, dazed and scarred,
Reel thro' the gates of Truth's enormous dawn!
ABEL. Madman! Beware!—Thy hope is weaved of dreams;
Damnable dreams to cheat the will of God;
Pitiful dreams, proud dreams, fantastic lies!—
CAIN. Abel!
ABEL. Repent!—if still repentance serves,
Repent!—the mercy of God is infinite
To all who bring his favoured sacrifice—
A contrite, humble and obedient heart!
CAIN. Truth, not forgiveness, I demand of God,
Justice, not mercy, love, not charity!—
I was not fashioned to bewail my sins,
I was not born for safe obedience!—
I bring not peace among you but a sword!
ABEL. Cain—for thy life's sake, Cain, repent!
CAIN. No more!—
Silence!—Ask me no more!—I feel at last
The breath of light, frail and portentous!—Wake!
It dawns, rejected Soul!—The secret yields!
I have been stunned! And now—Light!—Now, suddenly
Shadows shall fade, veils lift—I shall discover
One of the meanings!—Now—at last, at last,
I understand!—Creation—Paradise—
The immortal fruit—Mother, thy gorgeous deed!—
O revelations! O discoveries!
Measureless light at last! The truth at last!
Enlightenment!—All's well! The sacred fire
Of liberty still burns!—Man is redeemed!
ABEL. Lost! Lost! Utterly lost, body and soul!
Accursed! Accursed!
CAIN. Now God's dominion ends!—
ABEL. Accursed! Accursed!
CAIN. Now man's abasement ends!
For now the power and wrath and terrour of God
Fade like false phantoms in the light,—the light!
God is dethroned and man resumes the crown,
Regains the sceptre of divinity!
ABEL. Pitiful madman!—
CAIN. Peace!—despair and fear
Are ghosts that haunt the night of ignorance;
Dwellers in darkness of the immense unknown;
Phantoms that lurk where thought's horizons blurr,
Where the vague shores of knowledge quake to feel
Tumult and thunder of the seas beyond!
ABEL. Merciful God, pity him—he is mad!
Pity and spare him!
CAIN. Peace!—God's power is lost!
The ghastly tyranny of fear no more
Shall bind the spirit of man in servitude!
How can our faith be less than perfect now?
All that awaits us shall be well, as all
That is and has been is surpassing well!
Measure thy scope and grasp thy heritage,
Captain, my Soul!—Perchance not God alone
Shall fade and vanish as the large light expands.
It may be, haply, that at last in thine
Infinite waking life itself shall prove
A passionate dream and death a tranquil sleep!
ABEL. Silence, distracted soul!—Can God condone
When I condemn thee as I must? Thou sayest
Such frantic words of peril and deadly sin
As no conception of my brain can grasp
Nor all my love forgive!—
CAIN. O man, rejoice!
Now thou shalt understand—at last, at last,

All shall be clear and stedfast in thy soul.
Purge from thy brain the sickness of strange fears:
My cause is pregnant of new liberties:
Hear me in peace and be my justicer.—
How I have thought ineffably of God
And stretched the vistas of all my hopes to him,
God knows and thy remembrance certifies.
Much I believed that Truth's immortal seed,
Lost or unfruitful in the soul of man,
Was, in the spirit of God, by love and light,
Brought to its perfect flower—infinity.
God was to me a star of quenchless rays
Guiding my soul thro' time from life to life,
Training my vision to glimpse eternity!—
God was to me the breast where all may weep,
The eyes where all may find the immortal light,
The hand that all may clasp, the heart of hearts,
The spirit of passionate faith and liberty,—
The tenant of the heavenly father-house,
Waiting with arms of welcome wide for all!—
Such were my visions, such were my thoughts of God—
Yet God rejects me! See! the monstrous deed
Aches for interpretation. What is God,
God who rejects so pure an ecstasy?
Witness!—the crucial secret must be solved!
Spirit finds answer—thou shalt hear and learn,
Partner in man's inheritance with man.
God who rejects me and betrays my hope;
God who denies me and deceives my faith,
Cheats my desire and scorns my exalted love;
God, who with peace and pleasure and loveliness,
Fashioned the marvellous gardens of Paradise,
Sating man's senses to debauch his soul;
God, whose despair,—when Eve, with sacred thirst,
Gathered and shared the fruit whereof all men
Must eat who seek the soul's enlightenment,—
Drew from his lips the cry: "Behold the man
Is even as God, knowing both good and evil!"
God, who in passion and fear and frenzy smote
Man's disobedience and his dignity;
God, who would hold the heart enslaved with fear,
Stifle the sacred fire with ignorance,
Leash the proud soul with duty and content,
Obedience and remorseful cowardice,—
God is not liberty but law, not love
But mercy, not redemption but despair;
Not joy but lethargy and meek content,
Not grief's robust acknowledgement of wrong
But abject lamentation and remorse,
Not justice but forgiveness or revenge,
Not strength but safety, not the change of growth,
Fluid unrest of free development,
But rules and customs and establishments,
Limits and lies—the servitude of man!
So even is God and God's significance!
But Lo! at last man wakes and stands and strives!
Liberty!—Light!—Thy deed was not in vain,
Mother! Thy womb has not engendered slaves!

ABEL, still on his knees, has listened to CAIN with steadily growing terrour. By this time his fear and amazement, his conviction of Cain's utter lunacy, have become, as it were, a shield which neither the shafts of persuasion nor reason nor truth can penetrate. He is, in a word, panic-stricken. Staring at CAIN, he backs away from him on his knees.

ABEL, almost in a whisper: Blasphemy!

CAIN. By the breast that gave thee suck,
Abel, my brother, I adjure thee rise!
Rise and rejoice! I bring thee liberty;
For truth is liberty and nought but truth!
Never again thy knees shall cringe; thy heart
Never again shall feel the fear of God!
Body and Soul are real and perfect—rise!

ABEL, as before: Blasphemy!

CAIN. Lo! men are we—Gods in germ!
The earth is real, stedfast beneath our feet,
The spacious vision of light is in our eyes,
And over us the dark void is fathomless.
Under the skies' pavilion, gemmed with stars,
On earth's exhaustless breast the flesh can feel
The chill and challenge and mystic hush of dawn,
The careless largess of the luminous days,
The vast of night, the fragrant shadows of sleep,
The task, the triumph, the constant truth of life,
And death's eventual tranquillity!—
Yea, even when flesh dissolves in final change
Still may it feel the growth of flowers and still
Serve the insatiable desire of life!
While Soul with passionless and immortal eyes,
Sleepless and strained to glimpse eternity,
Thro' endless time, ascending avatars,
Keeps way and vista to the throne of God
And thence beyond to new infinities!—
Finding no goal it shall not reach and pass
And no supremacy it may not share!
Rise! rise!—Ours is the choice, be ours the will!
Body and soul we cannot be denied!

ABEL, as before: So spake the serpent in the golden glades,
So spake the Demon in the ears of Eve—
Blasphemy!—

To CAIN

Ask me no more! I'll hear no more!

CAIN. Abel!—

ABEL. Be still, lest God should strike thee dumb!

CAIN. Abel!—

ABEL. Silence! No more! My heart is sick,
My brain withers!—O God!—Delirious fool,
Dost thou not know that should my soul forget
The fear, the power, the sovereignty of God,
Then would the mercy of God, the might of God
Shelter and guide and comfort me no more?

CAIN. Abel!—art thou so blind, so abject? Man,
Truth is thy guide, thy light is liberty!
What need of shelter where no harm impends?
What need of comfort where no fears assail?
Safety alone is perilous and fear
Only is fearful!

ABEL. —So was Eve destroyed!

CAIN. It cannot be thou art so pitiable—
It cannot be!

ABEL. —So was perfection lost!

CAIN. It cannot be!—Wake from thy trance! the flood
Of light shall whelm thee suddenly; Truth shall rise,
Strange as a distant land-fall made at dawn,
Pure and transcendent in thy darkened ken!
Where's the disaster, where's the ruinous loss,
The peril thy scared imagination fears?
Speak!

ABEL. Art thou mad? If God's protection fails
Where is security and rest and peace?
Lacking God's grace what more is left for man
Than misery, want, alarm, and loneliness?
Always the outcast from the favour of God
Must feel the agony of a ceaseless dread
Of life and death consume his happiness.
I shudder in the mere thought!

CAIN. It cannot be!
Turn from thy cowardice and childish fears!—
For whosoever will save his life shall lose it;
But whosoever shall lose his life for truth
And liberty, the same shall save his life!
What shall it profit thee if thy life is gained
And all the splendour of all the world beside
If soul is lost? What shall it profit thee
To live sheltered in comfort and content,
If thou must yield the soul's inheritance
To alien government and forego thy crown,
Forfeit thy power and pawn thy liberty?
Nothing without can harm or comfort thee;
Peril and joy come only from within!
Thine is the venture!—seek and thou shalt find,
Clasped in the soul's horizons, life and death,
Divinity and power and destiny;
For in thyself superb attainment lies,
Fair in the paths of hope, the range of faith!
Thou art the way, thou art the wayfarer,
Thou art the guide, the goal, the pilgrimage!
Seeking and finding in itself alone,
Thy soul must bear the labour and tears of life,
And feel the passion and gain the glory of love,
And find the eternal thought, the perfect faith,
The courage of truth's unconquerable hope!
All that we know to-day is ours to-day,

And all unknown to-morrow shall be ours!
ABEL. Better that I should leave thee! I can bear
No more! My brain shudders to hear thee speak,
As God shakes in his wrath, knowing thy soul!
Better that I should leave thee—veil on veil,
Darkness is fallen between us utterly:
Now are we strangers who were joined in love!
Better that I should leave thee!—Go thy ways;
Gather the harvest that thy sins have sown!—
I can endure no more!
CAIN. A heart so tame,
A brain so chilled with fear, such vile disgrace,
Sorts with the bastard of a soulless slave,
Not with an offspring from the womb of Eve!—
O man!—Abel!—
ABEL. I'll hear no more—
He turns away.
CAIN. The truth
Shines like a watch-fire and thou wilt not see;
Sounds like a clarion and thou wilt not hear!
Why art thou deaf and blind?
ABEL. I'll stay no more!—
He takes a step as tho' to depart.
CAIN. What, must I teach at last these lips of mine
Kissed by thy lips so oft, to call thee slave,
Coward and traitor?—Child of Eve's rebellion,
Abel, art thou a man?—
ABEL, turning upon him fiercely: A man I am,
Of God's creation and the child of God!
Much have I heard thy madness rave and rant,
Long have I borne thy blasphemies,—but now,
Better that I should leave thee!
He turns resolutely to depart.
CAIN. Abel! Abel!
Abel!—Thou wearest the semblance of a man,—
The speech, the form, the function!—Leave me?—Thou?—
Knowest thou me?—I am thy brother, Cain!
How canst thou leave me?—Paradise was lost
That we might live and reap the harvest of life!
How canst thou leave me while the selfsame blood
Throbs in our hearts and thrills our limbs with strength?
Are we not men together, you and I?—
Are we not men?—
ABEL. As God is God!—Farewell!
Again ABEL takes a step to depart.
CAIN. Abel!
ABEL pursues his way without turning or answering CAIN'S desperate cry.
CAIN. Must I believe? In bitter truth
Art thou so vile, so abject?—Then, farewell!
Leave me! my heart is sick to know thy shame!
Leave me!—my soul abhors thine infamy!
Leave me!
CAIN covers his face with his hands.
ABEL. Farewell!
ABEL moves away. CAIN takes his hands from his eyes and stands, stirless, watching him depart. His face is haggard.
CAIN. Weep, for a soul is lost!
Weep, for a heart betrays its human trust!
Weep, for a traitor's shame! The Son of Man,
Who, in the days to come, shall haply be
Himself a Father of Men, has turned from truth!
Suddenly CAIN'S face changes as a new thought takes possession of him.
Himself a father—then—
CAIN, transfigured, overwhelmed by his thought, leaps forward and seizes ABEL violently by the arm.
Thou canst not go!
Thou canst not go! Thy soul must see the truth—
Or—
His speech stops suddenly. His eyes stare as tho' confronting a dreadful prospect.
ABEL. Cain!—Release me!
CAIN. Nay, thou canst not go!
This hour is more momentous than I dreamed!
Man, I forgot that not thy paltry fate
Nor mine alone must find decision now!
Man, what of thy children, what of them?
Thou shalt be sire of daughters and strong sons,
Passionate men and women!—Abel! Abel!
Turn to the ways of light lest they shall be
Beggared of all but servitude and shame!
ABEL. Madman! Release me!—Let me pass!
CAIN. Be still,
Coward, be still! The scales of judgment bear
A freight more precious than all thy dreams have guessed!
Fool! dost thou think that were 't thyself alone
Standing in jeopardy, I should not now
Watch thy desertion in a silent scorn,
Choked with the horrour of thy great cowardice?
Yea, and how gladly! were my heart assured,
Losing thee, to forget my love for thee!—
Man, how I loved thee!—but no more of this—
Heart breaks, yet life constrains our service still,
And mine is still to say—Thou canst not go!
ABEL. If reason is still existent in thy brain,
Give me the cause of this extremity!
CAIN. The cause is grave beyond thy power of thought
And holds dominion both for thee and me,
Who share the selfsame trust and equally
Safeguard the sacred heritage of life.
We are not merely men but more than men
Since we are pregnant of futurity.
We are not measured by the fretful years
That span our being, since we store the seed
Of myriad generations yet unborn.
We are the start of young humanities!
We are the spring and freshet of mighty streams,
That thro' the reach of the unending years,
As thro' vast fields where darkness wars with dawn,
Shall keep their fruitful and resistless way!
We have within us such an utterance
As once proclaimed shall peal forevermore,
Echoed and multiplied from age to age,
Down thro' the endless labyrinth of time!
We are the scabbard of a sword of flame,
We are the wardens of the House of Life,
We are the guardians of a sacred fire,
We are the gates of Dawn,—the First of Men!
Such is the cause!—for this we shall not yield
The torch of freedom to the winds of fear,
Nor blight the burgeon from the seed of truth
With frost of lies or dust of ignorance!
Nay, we must shield the torch and guard the flower;
We must be perfect in our sacred trust;
We must preserve, in strength and faith and love,
Our whole inheritance that all may share!—
Not for the safety of a mean content,
Not in the terrour of a wrathful God,
Shall we renounce the treasure and the task,
Or sell the birthright of the Sons of Man!
ABEL. Thy cause compels not me! I know full well
There shall be shelter upon the breast of God
Thro' all of time, for all the Sons of Men
Who live obedient to His perfect will!
CAIN. There shall be chains for slaves and whips for curs,—
But we!—Are we not men?—express and whole
In all the power and faculty of being?
Are we not deathless souls?—
ABEL. Release me!
CAIN. Never!
Never shall I release thee till my hand
Shatters the shuttered windows of thy soul,
And shows thee, tawdry in the great light of truth,
This tinsel majesty, this powerless ghost,
This mouthing masque thy fears have hailed as God!
ABEL. Devil!—Release me!
CAIN. Abel—
ABEL. No, by Heaven,
I will not pander to thy lunacy!
CAIN. Abel, compel me not! I am a man
Driven by desperate emergencies!
Never, I swear, shalt thou betray thy trust!
Nay, thou must here fulfill thy sacred charge,
Shatter thy bondage, cleanse thy soul of lies,
Nor evermore, diseased with cowardice,
Go forth to life!—
CAIN is suddenly silent. His eyes are caught by the knife which ABEL had used to sacrifice the lamb and which now lies on the platform where he let it fall. CAIN stares at it in a kind of horrible fascination. ABEL, startled by the sudden break in CAIN'S speech, glances up at his face and then follows his eyes. ABEL sees the

knife; he sees CAIN'S expression. At once his face is transfigured with terrour. Silently and desperately he struggles to escape. CAIN holds him without removing his eyes from the knife.

ABEL. O God, protect me! God,
My God, protect me! O my God!—

CAIN. Be still!—

He turns to ABEL and cries out in a terrible voice.

Abel!

ABEL. O God!—

CAIN, as before: Abel!

ABEL. Merciful God,
As I have served Thee in humility,
Guard and protect me!

CAIN, as before: Abel!

Changing to a tone of desperate entreaty.

Not for thee,
For me 't is fit to make beseeching prayers!—
Pity me! Spare me! Man, be true to men!
Spare me this deed!—Spare me!—I cannot choose!

ABEL. Save me, Almighty God! Transcendent God,
Save me, thy servant, Abel!

CAIN. Must it be?—
O generations of my seed unborn,
Children of my conception, Sons of Man!
Now for your sakes I tear my heart in twain,
Ravage the confines of my life and hurl
Down from my shattered heavens the light of joy!
Yours is this sacrifice,—for you, for you,
For your salvation, for the Soul of Man!—
Abel—I love thee with a perfect love!

ABEL. Devil! Release me!—O my God! My God!—

CAIN. So young he is!—So young!—O bleeding heart!
Man can do nothing more for man than this!

He puts forth his hand swiftly and grasps the knife. He shudders.

How can I do this deed?

ABEL. Almighty God,
Thy slave implores thee!—Save me! Save me!—

CAIN drives the knife deep into ABEL'S heart.

Cain!

The knife drops from CAIN'S hand. He stares at the body of ABEL. His face is haggard.

CAIN. He is dead!—
I have killed the man I loved, my brother, Abel!

Instantly the scene is plunged in total darkness. A tremendous storm rages. Thro' the thunder of the elements is heard the voice of GOD, pealing like a bell.

The voice of GOD. Cain! Cain! Where is Abel thy brother?
Cain! Cain! Where is Abel thy brother?
Cain! Cain! Where is Abel thy brother?

A flash of lightning reveals CAIN still standing on the platform with ABEL'S body in his arms, heedless of the elements.

Santiago Rebull - The Death of Abel

Featured Art:
Alfred de Breanski

Alfred de Breanski (1852–1928) was a British painter. His "Constablesque" landscapes of England, Scotland and Wales are particularly noted. Some of his works were exhibited at the Royal Academy. He had a brother, Gustave de Breanski, and a son Alfred de Breanski Jr., who were also painters.



The Herds O'Aberdeen



River Foyers at Abertarff



Burnham Beeches, Autumn

Loch Katrine





October in the Highlands

September, 1874





White Spirit

Alexander Adams

White Spirit *by artist-author Alexander Adams is a novel set in an art school in the 1990s. In it, a student called "A." finds himself surrounded by ambitious and competitive young artists. As they struggle to find their identities and navigate the pitfalls of contemporary art, we see them develop.*

In this first extract, Susannah explains her art to tutors Richard and Kirsty in the presence of fellow students.

Susannah ran her fingernails along the inside seam of her trouser leg. She sat next to her paintings, facing a semi-circle of students and Richard and Kirsty. The three paintings on the wall by her were landscapes: a garden view, a scene of fields, a lane bordered by hedges and trees. All were detailed and naturalistic in colour and technique.

"Well, I don't see it that way," Susannah said.

"You don't think that the parameters of landscape art have changed at all over the last 50 years?" asked Ali, eyebrows raised.

"If the landscape hasn't changed, then no."

Tim shook his head.

Ali said, "But the landscape has changed enormously over the post-war period."

"I know it has. I go out into the landscape around my village every week. I notice that. I didn't say that all landscape has remained the same. I meant that these views I've painted haven't changed a great deal. I talked to my grandfather and showed him these paintings and he says they are pretty much the way he remembers the views from fifty years ago."

Tim said, "But by painting these things unchanged, you are making a political point."

"What political point?"

"It's a conservative position. It's culturally conservative."

"I don't see that."

"The selection of images is conservative and your aesthetic is conservative," said Ali.

Alyssa leaned forward, with a hand raised.

"Would you say your art has a nostalgic component?"

"I suppose so."

Susannah brushed her trouser leg and then returned to running her fingernails along the seam.

"Is it not critical in any way?" asked Tim.

"No."

Ali added, "Then that is in itself a politically provocative agenda."

Susannah chewed her lip and did not reply.

"Is it ironic?"

"No."

Richard cleared his throat.

"I'm rather intrigued by your choices and the way you're selected your motifs. You seem to have used the bucolic idyll as your starting point. Ironic or genuine, I think your work falls within that group which toys with the English pastoral. Palmer through Woods to the Ruralists."

"I guess so. I painted the views I liked. Unconsciously, there may be some other aspects."

She shrugged one shoulder.

"There's always a subconscious element," said Alyssa, which elicited some nods.

"I'm not critical of your attitude," said Richard. He was leaning back, fingers knitted together on his stomach. His cap today was moss green.

"Clearly, you did enjoy painting them and I think that comes across in the work. You've met your ostensible aim in this series. I think we can call them a series. I'm just not sure that you've fully considered the reception that this series would get. Reception is an important part of the work and becoming a fully rounded artist means predicting and – to a certain extent – controlling the audience's reaction and interpretation of the work. That's part of the purpose of these group tutorials."

She did not reply.

"I don't think you've failed per se but I think if you intended us to read them in the way you painted them – as bucolic views of typical pastoral scenes – and enjoy the pictures on a neutral level then you've not quite hit the mark. Well, as far as this audience is concerned."

Silence.

"You could say that you've succeeded on a technical level – admirably so – but failed on a conceptual level."

Tim said, "Can't you see that the selection of your subjects and the style are as much part of works as the views themselves? Perhaps those choices are more important than the imagery itself."

A nodding of heads.

"I don't know how applicable those views are to the way I work." Susannah looked at the canvases. "I didn't paint these pictures to defy Post-Modernist critical theory. I painted them because I love these views and I love painting this way."

"But is that enough?" asked Ali.

More nodding of heads.

"Apparently not," said Susannah, expressionless.

Tim leaned forward.

"You can't just make Post-Modernism disappear by refusing to engage with it."

A murmur of agreement.

"I'm not attacking it. I'm not ignoring it. I'm just doing something different. You don't accuse me of ignoring nuclear physics or income equality or global warming or Baroque architecture because I don't include that in my paintings. Why should I be trying to attach something that doesn't interest me?"

"That's not an answer," said Kirsty. Her leather jacket creaked as she adjusted position.

Susannah sighed.

"Then I don't have an answer."

She was staring at the floor. When she spoke again after a pause her voice was uneven. She spoke without looking at anyone.

"I don't know. Everyone here talks about diversity but when they see something they don't like or that doesn't fit in with what they expect, then they don't seem so keen on diversity anymore. People seem hostile."

"Traditional artists and institutions have been very hostile to progressive art," said Tim.

"Yes, but your art isn't in the minority anymore. Open the newspapers or art magazines or go to the Tate Gallery and it's all Modern and Post-Modern art. I don't know if it is the majority of art produced today but it's all over the art world. There's no serious college that supports making art the way I make it. You can't even get taught it. It isn't fair to make out that you're an oppressed minority. From what I can see, the oppression is going the other way."

Murmurs of disagreement. Susannah shot a glance around the semi-circle of people then lowered her gaze. She swallowed hard and spoke looking at the floor.

"I don't think diversity really means diversity."

Her hands were clasped together, whites of the knuckles showing.

"I think diversity means the sort of art you should like, not the sort of art you actually like. That's not diversity."

When the tutorial ended, Susannah packed away her paintings without meeting anyone's eyes. A. stood nearby. He opened his mouth to speak then closed it. Susannah left without speaking.

Alan and Lucas were talking.

"What did you think?" Lucas asked A.

"I agreed with her."

"Why didn't you say that?" asked Alan.

"Because with the sort of work I make, if I agreed with her then I'd just be seen as a traditionalist."

"If you are a traditionalist, why don't you say so?"

A. shrugged.

"I don't feel like a traditionalist. I don't think I am."

"How is your art not traditional?" asked Alan.

A. shrugged again.

"You know what that tutorial reminded me of?" A. asked them. "In China and Cambodia they had these Communist meetings and all the villagers would stand up and denounce other villagers. And those denounced villagers would stand up and admit that they weren't true comrades. Even if they hadn't done anything wrong, they had to invent failings. They said that they hid grain or committed sabotage or engaged in counter-revolutionary behaviour and the worse things they said and more they humiliated themselves the more people would applaud them."

Alan made a face and lit a Marlboro.

"And the best part was that the commissars didn't really say anything. They just gave permission for the mob to denounce the weakest member."

"That's a bit harsh," said Lucas, frowning.

"What did anyone get out of that tutorial? They don't think she should paint landscapes. And? What else? I don't know. You don't know. No one knows. There wasn't a single piece of useful advice given."

Lucas put his hands in his pockets.

"Tim had some good arguments."

"Tim?" A. looked round the partition and spoke in a quick quiet

voice. “Tim is the biggest hypocrite of all. He paints absolutely realistic paintings almost identical in style to Susannah’s but he adds a few words over the top and talks about meta-narrative structure and he’s a shining example of avant-garde art and Susannah is viewed as a country bumpkin painting amateur-watercolour-society landscapes.”

Alan ground something under his heel and Lucas shook his head.

A. said, “If she had said, they’re ironic parodies of landscape art, people would have loved them.”

“I don’t agree,” said Alan. “Anyway, why didn’t you say any of this in the tutorial?”

“You saw what happened to her. No one was listening to her. No one takes her seriously because she doesn’t play the game. No one here thinks her art is valid. Why would anyone listen to me?”

“You want to be part of the herd.”

“Yes. I’m a coward. Richard and Kirsty have to mark my work and I want to keep my head down.”

A. picked up his bag and turned to go.

“But the next time I see Susannah, I’m going to apologise.”

A. left and Alan and Lucas looked at each other. Alan rolled his eyes.

The following week Richard announced to the group that Susannah had chosen to leave the course.

In these scenes A. first makes some reinterpretations of the classical landscapes of Poussin and some weeks later has a tutorial about his pictures.

A. stretched two canvases on stretchers 140 centimetres high by 200 centimetres wide. On one canvas he began a copy in black, white and grey oil paint of Poussin’s Landscape with the Ashes of Phocion. On the other he did a colour version. The colour was in bright hues, simplified, in flat sections. Over that he applied black lines to define the area of colour and to add some shading.

He made two large charcoal drawings of the landscape. One had painted white forms replacing some of the buildings in the original design. Pinned to a partition was a newsprint proof of the Poussin landscape lithograph, which turned brown over the months.

****

Calvin came into the studio. He was a man in his sixties, with grey hair and a moustache.

“A.?”

“Hi, Calvin. Thank you for coming.”

Calvin shook his hand and stepped back to look at the two oil paintings. On the wall were photocopies of ballpoint drawings, the etchings and the lithograph. Calvin did not say anything for a while then he sat next to A.

“Poussin, isn’t it?”

“Yes. The landscape in the Walker Art Gallery.”

“I thought I recognised it. So, what are you getting at here?”

Calvin’s accent was Yorkshire.

“I wanted to break it down, to see how it was made. You know, Poussin is a very schematic and orderly sort of painter. He used to compose with figurines in a toy theatre. He would have the landscapes in bands so that he could arrange the layout. You can see that in his landscapes. I wanted to capture that artificiality.”

“To what end?”

“Pardon?”

“To what end? Why were you doing it?”

“Ah. Well…”

A. gestured to the pictures.

“To gain knowledge.”

“Clearly, But what did you plan to do with this knowledge? Paint your own landscapes?”

“No. It was sort of…”

“In the prints, it looks like the copying was a point of departure for mark-making. And when I look at this bright painting, it feels parodic.”

“I didn’t intend it that way.”

“Well, it’s what you’ve got, isn’t it? A bit Lichtenstein, a bit Warhol. Very graphic and reductive. A touch of Jeremy Pine.”

“Yes. I was thinking of inviting Jeremy Pine to give me a personal tutorial. You know, because his work is sort of close to this.”

Calvin thought then said, “I wouldn’t do that.”

“Oh. Okay.”

They sat in silence for a while.

“I wanted to simplify the shapes.”

“You’ve done that.”

“I wanted to give myself an apprenticeship.”

“To what end?”

“To become a better painter.”

“Yes, but the apprenticeships in Poussin’s day were to produce painters of landscapes and mythological scenes and Biblical works. I take it you don’t intend to become a Seventeenth Century painter of altarpieces.”

“Well, no, but…”

“But what? Apprenticeships develop for a reason and they fall out of favour for a reason. Acting like you live 400 years ago isn’t very good preparation for painting pictures today.”

Calvin glanced at A.

“I don’t think you want to be a classical painter, spending all your time grinding your own paints and doing historical research into the right type of Roman shields for a battle scene do you?”

“No.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-one.”

“When I was twenty-one, I wanted to paint new stuff. I wanted to shake the world up a bit. I painted miners and rail workers. Kitchen-sink stuff, you know. Things from life; recording life. The painting I was doing then wasn’t that good – pretty awful actually – but was mine. You see?”

“I think so. You think this painting isn’t really mine and that my approach isn’t really mine. You think it’s an imitation.”

“I think you’ve said it better than I could.”

Calvin crossed his arms and cocked his head.

“The colour painting is rather more Pop than Poussin. Whether or not you’re sincere, what people are seeing and taking from your painting is that making a parody of a classical painting. I get the impression that wasn’t your aim.”

“No, it wasn’t.”

“Then you’ve got a problem here. Do you see?”

“Yes.”

Another pause.

“That aside, I like the colours. They’re quite punchy. It’s got that stained-glass-window appearance, which has its appeal.”

A. said nothing. His hands were clasped between his knees.

“You’ve done something you didn’t intend and sometimes that’s useful. You can work with it. It leads you and the viewer into new areas. It seems to me that you haven’t really thought through this group before you started. I think you’ve only realised what you’ve done now. If you had a clearer sense of what you wanted or a more personal subject then surprising yourself can help. I don’t think it helps here. If you use a Pop Art style on a classical landscape then it’s always likely to come out as parody or satire.”

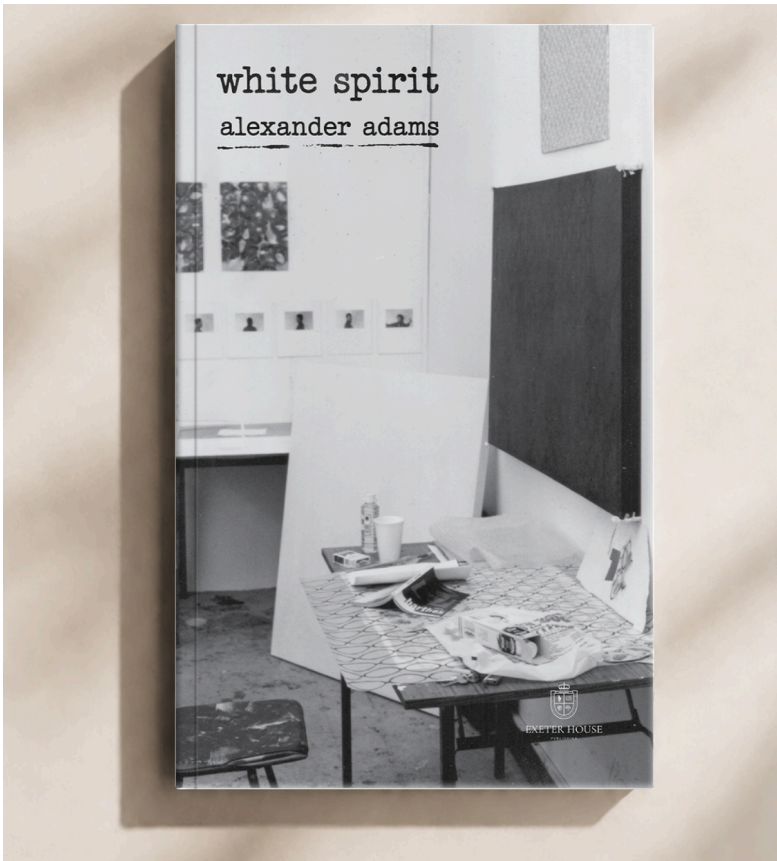
“That seems clear now.”

“So what does this make you think?”

“It makes me think I’m going to have problems in my assessment,” A. said. He sat back and chewed his lip.

“I think you might be right about that.”

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Roses of Shadow

Chapter X: Dark Ambiguities Within

Luke Gilfedder



The monk at prayer by Edouard Manet

Luke Gilfedder is a writer from Manchester. He has worked as a playwright with scripts produced at The Royal Exchange Manchester, the Lyric Hammersmith, and in London's West End. He has recently completed a PhD on the life and work of modernist writer Wyndham Lewis.

His fiction has been published in the Decadent Serpent and The Brazen Head magazines and he regularly contributes essays on The Miskatonian and the Lewisletter journal.

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Whenever the rain fell, the peat bogs swelled within Father Quintus. He felt not only the weight of his hundred-and-eight winters, but those of his ancestors too: the locksmen of the River Mersey, and yet farther back, within the sea mists of his blood memory, the lough-shore boys of Lake Corrib.

He hobbled along the path that wound through the Abbey's orchards, following a The sun rose over Hungary like a smoking lamp, casting long shadows from pine-clad hill to castle wall. Thick mist rose from the brooks and streams which marbled the Pannonian plain, stretching into long belts beside the encircling hills and through the trees and hamlets.

A rock stood in the highland ravine of the Bakony range, a border guard to no man's land. A black wooden cross reigned crookedly over the precipice, rotting and aged by tempests. A soldier lay flat below it, where, a sniper-shot removed across the plain, he could see the ruin of the Abbey on its lonely mount: discrowned, beaten by the storms, but regal still. The soldier took a drag of his cigarette, listening to the eagle's shrill cry above, and the purling of the falls far below. No one, he dimly felt, is so aware of the tranquillity of nature as a soldier resting between one action and the next.

His cigarette smoke died in the thin air as he nestled his eye closer against the scope. The camp that encircled the foot of the Abbey had woken early, preparing, no doubt, for the winter storm. Solitary figures were already chopping firewood, picking sloes, or turning the horses out along the banks of the Danube. Very straight columns of pink smoke stood above the huddled tents, rising languidly from the early campfires. It was difficult to believe any harm could come from a day of such beginnings. From the Abbey came the sound of the Lauds bell, drifting across the plain. The Artillery of the Church, the soldier thought, grunted, reslung his rifle, and headed lower into the valley.

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The tolling bells aroused Miro as the crow of the cock aroused Saint Peter. He rolled over in pink sheets and, through the ragged curtains of the leaded window, saw golden clouds massed on the mountains like some new range of aerial peaks. The day had just dawned, apparently, which in Hungary at this season must mean it was a little after seven o'clock. He stiffened and stretched his legs, looking thoughtfully at his toes, then at his numb arm, numb beneath Leila's naked body: so slim and so straight and so blonde. His every sense and sinew rejuvenated, his nose still burning from the scent of her hair, like incense. In this light, at least, her ambered paleness gave her the vaguely virginal air of an early Tuscan painting. Like an unwelcome bird, the voice of Father Quintus swept into his mind: "There is no alternative to creation except the second rate, Miro." Well, tell that to last night, Miro thought, looping a curl of Leila's hair about his finger. Her face smiled in half-sleep at his side. Yes, he saw then what Father Quintus had missed: the dark, narrow path through the flesh to holiness. To travel it was, of course, the privilege of few. A privilege he, the poor gipsy boy, knew. And which the great, the almighty, the sanctified, the blessed and lame Father Quintus Roseblade did not.

He rose, naked and lithe as a whip, and crossed to the window, which opened onto a small balcony. He stared at the vista, pressing himself against the railing, gazing toward the far hills and the crooked silhouette of a black cross shrouded in mist. The light today was a different colour, Miro thought. It came through the mist with a different reflective spectrum, as if strained through a gauze. Looking closer, he noticed the speck of an eagle circling high above the cross. A bird of God, his Father said, and so must not be killed. So it was with tsars, emperors… and princes.

Miro fingered the copper crucifix dangling from his neck, tilting it so its metal caught the rays of the dawn sun. Such light was a classical thing, but not reassuring in the manner of the elder painters and their misty mornings. It was not just the proximity of Alexei. He could sense the distant agitation of the armies on the morning air, like the balmy pressure of a closing storm. East, west, Gog, Magog… He let the crucifix fall cold against his chest. All those things he had allowed himself to dream of last night: escaping the Abbey, fleeing across the Rhine, the wooing of Leila by candleshine, the Strasbourg snow falling softly like fluffy shaving foam over the half-timbered roofs. Red wine, smoking Baeckeoffe, following in Goethe's footsteps to the University… No. Never. Not a chance. Not in this world. Besides, he did not like universities anyway. For they occupy themselves with politics. Politics is death.

Politics. What a knell-like sound that word had, and how ghastly it mingled with the peals that rang from the bell tower overhead. The word stirred memories of his parents, of the farm, of the makeshift crosses in the wind-strewn furrows. Just some other forgotten battleground now, a patch of scorched forest left behind in the war's final offensive. He glanced back at Leila, snugly asleep, clutching the pink sheets up to her chin like a little girl. She cannot understand what death is, he thought. She does not think of death, because she does not want to die. I think of death because I do not want to die.

He threw on his tunic, slipped the knife into the folds, and strapped on his belt. From his pouch, he removed a holodisk he had stolen from the library and inserted it into the desktop terminal. A fly-through battle map of Europe resolved into a night shot of the glowering Kremlin: arc-lit to make a pool of blood in the panoramic darkness. A young Prince Alexei emerged on the balcony, amid spotlights and military bustle, resplendent in his Attila jacket, descanting on why he, as leader of the Holy Rus, had accepted the mission to lead an apocalyptic resistance against the desacralised kingdoms of the West. His uncle Herrut, the man who had presumably scripted this speech, stood by his side, stroking his pointed beard and doing a fair imitation of Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible.

Miro's fingers tightened around the knife, and he glanced back at the mountains. Herrut, he thought, is indeed a terrible man. The most terrible. And I do not like terrible men. Yet Quintus said I must not harm them. I must not harm them. For they are eagles. They prevent small birds from living, yes, and therefore I must guard against them. Yet I should not want their death. I am to love them because God has given them life, and he alone has the right to let them live. It is not for me to be their judge—not even for Quintus—but for God…

"W…what's that? What's going on?" murmured Leila with sleepy seriousness. Miro snapped out of his brooding, switched off the console and turned to face her.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to wake you. It's nothing to worry about. Just an old news report."

"Whose voice was that?"

"Why, do you recognise it?"

"Yes." She rubbed her eyes. "It sounded just like Alexei."

"Alexei?" A tight smile crossed Miro's mouth. "It was Prince Alexei speaking. Oh, sorry, you don't mean the Prince, do you? You mean that boy in the infirmary?"

She lifted her eyes, looked at Miro vaguely, and dropped them again.

"He isn't a boy, Miro. He's older than you. But I could have sworn that was him speaking just then. I thought I was dreaming…"

"Maybe it was him."

"What do you mean?" She looked at Miro steadily for a long moment. "The Prince died in a plane crash. Everyone knows that."

"Unless…"

"Unless?" Her voice had a dry, serious sound for once. "Miro, that's not possible—" But doubt crept in, and her face seemed to fall into soft shadow.

"Just suppose," Miro said, seating himself on the bed. "Just suppose that your patient is Prince Alexei? It could be. He's lost his memory. He doesn't know who he is."

"Father Quintus would know. He brought him here. He would never bring such danger into the Abbey. It'd be like inviting a tiger into a sheepfold."

"Father Quintus works in mysterious ways."

"Yes, but he would never lie to me."

"All priests are liars."

She returned his stare serenely, but her voice carried whiplash as she said: "Miro, don't ever speak of the abbot like that."

He smiled, stroking her hair back from her face. "Of course. I'm sorry." Sliding his fingers through her hair, he drew her closer. "Let's forget about it. Just for this morning."

He took her hand in his, but she returned his pressure half-heartedly. "No. Later. I have to go."

"Back to the infirmary?" Miro frowned. "Back to Alexei?"

"Yes. Father Quintus says he shouldn't be left alone too long."

"And what," Miro asked, "are you doing to him exactly down there?"

"Oh," Leila let the vowel drop and shrugged vaguely. "Drugs and things. Tests and so on. And Alexei talks to me a lot."

"I see," said Miro warily. "And what does he talk to you about?"

"Love. The meaning of love. His lessons with the monks."

"Christ," said Miro, "what in God's name is the point of that? Talking about love doesn't seem much of a treatment for

amnesia.

You're not teaching him about love, are you? Does he ever try to kiss you?"

She lifted her head and looked at Miro as a statue in the park might do if you asked it if it rained sometimes, or if the wind blew on it ever.

"Oh, Miro. You're so silly."

Miro smiled at that, but his voice changed when he said, "Do you really have no idea who he is?"

"No. But it's odd; I feel I can trust him, I suppose. Though I never feel completely at ease with him." She fumbled amid her clothes on the floor for her watch. "I really must go... If I leave him too long he'll come looking for me."

She drew a dressing-gown towards her and sprang from the bed, naked and erect for just as long as it takes an arrow to pass, and then she was covered. In the twinkling of an eye, the gown enveloped her.

"I could come with you," Miro ventured as she crossed to the bathroom. "We could visit Alexei together." She glanced back at him, her lips parting to smile, only to realise he wasn't joking. His face held something of the expression she thought the young bull often wears as he takes the first few steps into the glare of the arena. She said slowly, "Miro, I can't; he'll get terribly jealous if he knew we'd been together. And the monks found out—"

"Oh, come on. They wouldn't know anything."

"Let me think about it. While I put my make-up on."

"Ah, let's get going. You can't improve on nature."

She had no time for this incongruous gallantry; still, she smiled at him. She was quite conscious, suddenly, of a desire to pit Alexei's magic against Miro's. Miro was just a poor gipsy boy, a prodigy, yes, but a poor boy nonetheless. And Alexei, if he really was the Prince...

"Give me five minutes."

She closed the bathroom door, and Miro returned to the window. I will tell Alexei the truth, Miro thought. Of who he is. Yes, in telling the truth, I will destroy all the evil that he has done. I will prevent him from doing more evil.

He stared towards the black cross on the distant hill, thinking: Alexei is a boy, not like Herrut, but he too is an eagle. Eagles must not prevent the small birds from carrying on with their lives, and therefore must be given things to eat that will destroy their predatory intentions. The idea took the shape of a single word in his mind. Sacrifice. Yes. Sacrifice. The irony. It would hurt Quintus. But only he would understand.

"Ready?" Leila said, re-emerging from the bathroom in her nurse's habit.

"Ready," Miro replied, "Let's go meet Alexei."

To be continued...



HE RESOLVES TO SAY NO MORE

Thomas Hardy

O my soul, keep the rest unknown!
It is too like a sound of moan
When the charnel-eyed
Pale Horse has nighed:
Yea, none shall gather what I hide!

Why load men's minds with more to bear
That bear already ails to spare?
From now alway
Till my last day
What I discern I will not say.

Let Time roll backward if it will;
(Magians who drive the midnight quill
With brain aglow
Can see it so,)
What I have learnt no man shall know.

And if my vision range beyond
The blinkered sight of souls in bond,
— By truth made free —
I'll let all be,
And show to no man what I see.

The Wind in the Willows

By Kenneth Grahame



X THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF TOAD

THE front door of the hollow tree faced eastwards, so Toad was called at an early hour; partly by the bright sunlight streaming in on him, partly by the exceeding coldness of his toes, which made him dream that he was at home in bed in his own handsome room with the Tudor window, on a cold winter's night, and his bedclothes had got up, grumbling and protesting they couldn't stand the cold any longer, and had run downstairs to the kitchen fire to warm themselves; and he had followed, on bare feet, along miles and miles of icy stone-paved passages, arguing and beseeching them to be reasonable. He would probably have been aroused much earlier, had he not slept for some weeks on straw over stone flags, and almost forgotten the friendly feeling of thick blankets pulled well up round the chin.

Sitting up, he rubbed his eyes first and his complaining toes next, wondered for a moment where he was, looking round for familiar stone wall and little barred window; then, with a leap of the heart, remembered everything—his escape, his flight, his pursuit; remembered, first and best thing of all, that he was free! Free! The word and the thought alone were worth fifty blankets. He was warm from end to end as he thought of the jolly world outside, waiting eagerly for him to make his triumphal entrance, ready to serve him and play up to him, anxious to help him and to keep him company, as it always had been in days of old before misfortune fell upon him. He shook himself and combed the dry leaves out of his hair with his fingers; and, his toilet complete, marched forth into the comfortable morning sun, cold but confident, hungry but hopeful, all nervous terrors of yesterday dispelled by rest and sleep and frank and heartening sunshine.

He had the world all to himself, that early summer morning. The dewy woodland, as he threaded it, was solitary and still: the green fields that succeeded the trees were his own to do as he liked with; the road itself, when he reached it, in that loneliness that was everywhere, seemed, like a stray dog, to be looking anxiously for company. Toad, however, was looking for something that could talk, and tell him clearly which way he ought to go. It is all very well, when you have a light heart, and a clear conscience, and money in your pocket, and nobody scouring the country for you to drag you off to prison again, to follow where the road beckons and points, not caring whither. The practical Toad cared very much indeed, and he could have kicked the road for its helpless silence when every minute was of importance to him.

The reserved rustic road was presently joined by a shy little brother in the shape of a canal, which took its hand and ambled along by its side in perfect confidence, but with the same tongue-tied, uncommunicative attitude towards strangers. "Bother them!" said Toad to himself. "But, anyhow, one thing's clear. They must both be coming from somewhere, and going to somewhere. You can't get over that, Toad, my boy!" So he marched on patiently by the water's edge.

Round a bend in the canal came plodding a solitary horse, stooping forward as if in anxious thought. From rope traces attached to his collar stretched a long line, taut, but dipping with his stride, the further part of it dripping pearly drops. Toad let the horse pass, and stood waiting for what the fates were sending him.

With a pleasant swirl of quiet water at its blunt bow the barge slid up alongside of him, its gaily painted gunwale level with the towing-path, its sole occupant a big stout woman wearing a linen sun-bonnet, one brawny arm laid along the tiller.

"A nice morning, ma'am!" she remarked to Toad, as she drew up level with him.

"I dare say it is, ma'am!" responded Toad politely, as he walked along the tow-path abreast of her. "I dare it is a nice morning to them that's not in sore trouble, like what I am. Here's my married daughter, she sends off to me post-haste to come to her at once; so off I comes, not knowing what may be happening or going to happen, but fearing the worst, as you will understand, ma'am, if you're a mother, too. And I've left my business to look after itself—I'm in the washing and laundering line, you must know, ma'am—and I've left my young children to look after themselves, and a more mischievous and troublesome set of young imps doesn't exist, ma'am; and I've lost all my money, and lost my way, and as for what may be happening to my married daughter, why, I don't like to think of it, ma'am!"

"Where might your married daughter be living, ma'am?" asked the barge-woman.

"She lives near to the river, ma'am," replied Toad. "Close to a fine house called Toad Hall, that's somewheres hereabouts in these parts. Perhaps you may have heard of it."

"Toad Hall? Why, I'm going that way myself," replied the barge-woman. "This canal joins the river some miles further on, a little above Toad Hall; and then it's an easy walk. You come along in the barge with me, and I'll give you a lift."

She steered the barge close to the bank, and Toad, with many humble and grateful acknowledgments, stepped lightly on board and sat down with great satisfaction. "Toad's luck again!" thought he. "I always come out on top!"

"So you're in the washing business, ma'am?" said the barge-woman politely, as they glided along. "And a very good business you've got too, I dare say, if I'm not making too free in saying so."

"Finest business in the whole country," said Toad airily. "All the gentry come to me—wouldn't go to any one else if they were paid, they know me so well. You see, I understand my work thoroughly, and attend to it all myself. Washing, ironing, clear-starching, making up gents' fine shirts for evening wear—everything's done under my own eye!"

"But surely you don't do all that work yourself, ma'am?" asked the barge-woman respectfully.

"O, I have girls," said Toad lightly: "twenty girls or thereabouts, always at work. But you know what girls are, ma'am! Nasty little hussies, that's what I call 'em!"

"So do I, too," said the barge-woman with great heartiness. "But I dare say you set yours to rights, the idle trollops! And are you very fond of washing?"

"I love it," said Toad. "I simply dote on it. Never so happy as when I've got both arms in the wash-tub. But, then, it comes so easy to me! No trouble at all! A real pleasure, I assure you, ma'am!"

"What a bit of luck, meeting you!" observed the barge-woman, thoughtfully. "A regular piece of good fortune for both of us!"

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Toad, nervously.

"Well, look at me, now," replied the barge-woman. "I like washing, too, just the same as you do; and for that matter, whether I like it or not I have got to do all my own, naturally, moving about as I do. Now my husband, he's such a fellow for shirking his work and leaving the barge to me, that never a moment do I get for seeing to my own affairs. By rights he ought to be here now, either steering or attending to the horse, though luckily the horse has sense enough to attend to himself. Instead of which, he's gone off with the dog, to see if they can't pick up a rabbit for dinner somewhere. Says he'll catch me up at the next lock. Well, that's as may be—I don't trust him, once he gets off with that dog, who's worse than he is. But meantime, how am I to get on with my washing?"

"O, never mind about the washing," said Toad, not liking the subject. "Try and fix your mind on that rabbit. A nice fat young rabbit, I'll be bound. Got any onions?"

"I can't fix my mind on anything but my washing," said the barge-woman, "and I wonder you can be talking of rabbits, with such a joyful prospect before you. There's a heap of things of mine that you'll find in a corner of the cabin. If you'll just take one or two of the most necessary sort—I won't venture to describe them to a lady like you, but you'll recognise them at a glance—and put them through the wash-tub as we go along, why, it'll be a pleasure to you, as you rightly say, and a real help to me. You'll find a tub handy, and soap, and a kettle on the stove, and a bucket to haul up water from the canal with. Then I shall know you're enjoying yourself, instead of sitting here idle, looking at the scenery and yawning your head off."

"Here, you let me steer!" said Toad, now thoroughly frightened, "and then you can get on with your washing your own way. I might spoil your things, or not do 'em as you like. I'm more used to gentlemen's things myself. It's my special line."

"Let you steer?" replied the barge-woman, laughing. "It takes some practice to steer a barge properly. Besides, it's dull work, and I want you to be happy. No, you shall do the washing you are so fond of, and I'll stick to the steering that I understand. Don't try and deprive me of the pleasure of giving you a treat!"

Toad was fairly cornered. He looked for escape this way and that, saw that he was too far from the bank for a flying leap, and sullenly resigned himself to his fate. "If it comes to that," he thought in desperation, "I suppose any fool can wash!"

He fetched tub, soap, and other necessaries from the cabin, selected a few garments at random, tried to recollect what he had seen in casual glances through laundry windows, and set to.

A long half-hour passed, and every minute of it saw Toad getting crosser and crosser. Nothing that he could do to the things seemed to please them or do them good. He tried coaxing, he tried slapping, he tried punching; they smiled back at him out of the tub unconverted, happy in their original sin. Once or twice he

looked nervously over his shoulder at the barge-woman, but she appeared to be gazing out in front of her, absorbed in her steering. His back ached badly, and he noticed with dismay that his paws were beginning to get all crinkly. Now Toad was very proud of his paws. He muttered under his breath words that should never pass the lips of either washerwomen or Toads; and lost the soap, for the fiftieth time.

A burst of laughter made him straighten himself and look round. The barge-woman was leaning back and laughing unrestrainedly, till the tears ran down her cheeks.

"I've been watching you all the time," she gasped. "I thought you must be a humbug all along, from the conceited way you talked. Pretty washerwoman you are! Never washed so much as a dish-clout in your life, I'll lay!"

Toad's temper which had been simmering viciously for some time, now fairly boiled over, and he lost all control of himself. "You common, low, fat barge-woman!" he shouted; "don't you dare to talk to your betters like that! Washerwoman indeed! I would have you to know that I am a Toad, a very well-known, respected, distinguished Toad! I may be under a bit of a cloud at present, but I will not be laughed at by a barge-woman!"
The woman moved nearer to him and peered under his bonnet keenly and closely. "Why, so you are!" she cried. "Well, I never! A horrid, nasty, crawly Toad! And in my nice clean barge, too! Now that is a thing that I will not have."

She relinquished the tiller for a moment. One big mottled arm shot out and caught Toad by a fore-leg, while the other-gripped him fast by a hind-leg. Then the world turned suddenly upside down, the barge seemed to flit lightly across the sky, the wind whistled in his ears, and Toad found himself flying through the air, revolving rapidly as he went.

The water, when he eventually reached it with a loud splash, proved quite cold enough for his taste, though its chill was not sufficient to quell his proud spirit, or slake the heat of his furious temper. He rose to the surface spluttering, and when he had wiped the duck-weed out of his eyes the first thing he saw was the fat barge-woman looking back at him over the stern of the retreating barge and laughing; and he vowed, as he coughed and choked, to be even with her.

He struck out for the shore, but the cotton gown greatly impeded his efforts, and when at length he touched land he found it hard to climb up the steep bank unassisted. He had to take a minute or two's rest to recover his breath; then, gathering his wet skirts well over his arms, he started to run after the barge as fast as his legs would carry him, wild with indignation, thirsting for revenge.

The barge-woman was still laughing when he drew up level with her. "Put yourself through your mangle, washerwoman," she called out, "and iron your face and crimp it, and you'll pass for quite a decent-looking Toad!"

Toad never paused to reply. Solid revenge was what he wanted, not cheap, windy, verbal triumphs, though he had a thing or two in his mind that he would have liked to say. He saw what he wanted ahead of him. Running swiftly on he overtook the horse, unfastened the towrope and cast off, jumped lightly on the horse's back, and urged it to a gallop by kicking it vigorously in the sides. He steered for the open country, abandoning the tow-path, and swinging his steed down a rutty lane. Once he looked back, and saw that the barge had run aground on the other side of the canal, and the barge-woman was gesticulating wildly and shouting, "Stop, stop, stop!" "I've heard that song before," said Toad, laughing, as he continued to spur his steed onward in its wild career.

The barge-horse was not capable of any very sustained effort, and its gallop soon subsided into a trot, and its trot into an easy walk; but Toad was quite contented with this, knowing that he, at any rate, was moving, and the barge was not. He had quite recovered his temper, now that he had done something he thought really clever; and he was satisfied to jog along quietly in the sun, steering his horse along by-ways and bridle-paths, and trying to forget how very long it was since he had had a square meal, till the canal had been left very far behind him.

He had travelled some miles, his horse and he, and he was feeling drowsy in the hot sunshine, when the horse stopped, lowered his head, and began to nibble the grass; and Toad, waking up, just saved himself from falling off by an effort. He looked about him and found he was on a wide common, dotted with patches of gorse and bramble as far as he could see. Near him stood a dingy gipsy caravan, and beside it a man was sitting on a bucket turned upside down, very busy smoking and staring into the wide world. A fire of sticks was burning near by, and over the fire hung an iron pot, and out of that pot came forth bubblings and gurglings, and a vague suggestive steaminess. Also smells—warm, rich, and varied smells—that twined and twisted and wreathed themselves at last into one complete, voluptuous, perfect smell that seemed like the very soul of Nature taking form and appearing to her children, a true Goddess, a mother of solace and comfort. Toad now knew well that he had not been really hungry before. What he had felt earlier in the day had been a mere trifling qualm. This was the real thing at last, and no mistake; and it would have to be dealt with speedily, too, or there would be trouble for somebody or something. He looked the gipsy over carefully, wondering vaguely whether it would be easier to fight him or cajole him. So there he sat, and sniffed and sniffed, and looked at the gipsy; and the gipsy sat and smoked, and looked at him.

Presently the gipsy took his pipe out of his mouth and remarked in a careless way, "Want to sell that there horse of yours?"

Toad was completely taken aback. He did not know that gipsies were very fond of horse-dealing, and never missed an opportunity, and he had not reflected that caravans were always on the move and took a deal of drawing. It had not occurred to him to turn the horse into cash, but the gipsy's suggestion seemed to smooth the way towards the two things he wanted so badly—ready money, and a solid breakfast.

"What?" he said, "me sell this beautiful young horse of mine? O, no; it's out of the question. Who's going to take the washing home to my customers every week? Besides, I'm too fond of him, and he simply dotes on me."

"Try and love a donkey," suggested the gipsy. "Some people do."

"You don't seem to see," continued Toad, "that this fine horse of mine is a cut above you altogether. He's a blood horse, he is, partly; not the part you see, of course—another part. And he's been a Prize Hackney, too, in his time—that was the time before you knew him, but you can still tell it on him at a glance, if you understand anything about horses. No, it's not to be thought of for a moment. All the same, how much might you be disposed to offer me for this beautiful young horse of mine?"

The gipsy looked the horse over, and then he looked Toad over with equal care, and looked at the horse again. "Shillin' a leg," he said briefly, and turned away, continuing to smoke and try to stare the wide world out of countenance.

"A shilling a leg?" cried Toad. "If you please, I must take a little time to work that out, and see just what it comes to."

He climbed down off his horse, and left it to graze, and sat down by the gipsy, and did sums on his fingers, and at last he said, "A shilling a leg? Why, that comes to exactly four shillings, and no more. O, no; I could not think of accepting four shillings for this beautiful young horse of mine."

"Well," said the gipsy, "I'll tell you what I will do. I'll make it five shillings, and that's three-and-sixpence more than the animal's worth. And that's my last word."

Then Toad sat and pondered long and deeply. For he was hungry and quite penniless, and still some way—he knew not how far—from home, and enemies might still be looking for him. To one in such a situation, five shillings may very well appear a large sum of money. On the other hand, it did not seem very much to get for a horse. But then, again, the horse hadn't cost him anything; so whatever he got was all clear profit. At last he said firmly, "Look here, gipsy! I tell you what we will do; and this is my last word. You shall hand me over six shillings and sixpence, cash down; and further, in addition thereto, you shall give me as much breakfast as I can possibly eat, at one sitting of course, out of that iron pot of yours that keeps sending forth such delicious and exciting smells. In return, I will make over to you my spirited young horse, with all the beautiful harness and trappings that are on him, freely thrown in. If that's not good enough for you, say so, and I'll be getting on. I know a man near here who's wanted this horse of mine for years."

The gipsy grumbled frightfully, and declared if he did a few more deals of that sort he'd be ruined. But in the end he lugged a dirty canvas bag out of the depths of his trouser pocket, and counted out six shillings and sixpence into Toad's paw. Then he disappeared into the caravan for an instant, and returned with a large iron plate and a knife, fork, and spoon. He tilted up the pot, and a glorious stream of hot rich stew gurgled into the plate. It was, indeed, the most beautiful stew in the world, being made of partridges, and pheasants, and chickens, and hares, and rabbits, and pea-hens, and guinea-fowls, and one or two other things. Toad took the plate on his lap, almost crying, and stuffed, and stuffed, and stuffed, and kept asking for more, and the gipsy

never grudged it him. He thought that he had never eaten so good a breakfast in all his life.

When Toad had taken as much stew on board as he thought he could possibly hold, he got up and said good-bye to the gipsy, and took an affectionate farewell of the horse; and the gipsy, who knew the riverside well, gave him directions which way to go, and he set forth on his travels again in the best possible spirits. He was, indeed, a very different Toad from the animal of an hour ago. The sun was shining brightly, his wet clothes were quite dry again, he had money in his pocket once more, he was nearing home and friends and safety, and, most and best of all, he had had a substantial meal, hot and nourishing, and felt big, and strong, and careless, and self-confident.

As he tramped along gaily, he thought of his adventures and escapes, and how when things seemed at their worst he had always managed to find a way out; and his pride and conceit began to swell within him. "Ho, ho!" he said to himself as he marched along with his chin in the air, "what a clever Toad I am! There is surely no animal equal to me for cleverness in the whole world! My enemies shut me up in prison, encircled by sentries, watched night and day by warders; I walk out through them all, by sheer ability coupled with courage. They pursue me with engines, and policemen, and revolvers; I snap my fingers at them, and vanish, laughing, into space. I am, unfortunately, thrown into a canal by a woman fat of body and very evil-minded. What of it? I swim ashore, I seize her horse, I ride off in triumph, and I sell the horse for a whole pocketful of money and an excellent breakfast! Ho, ho! I am The Toad, the handsome, the popular, the successful Toad!" He got so puffed up with conceit that he made up a song as he walked in praise of himself, and sang it at the top of his voice, though there was no one to hear it but him. It was perhaps the most conceited song that any animal ever composed.

"The world has held great Heroes,
As history-books have showed;
But never a name to go down to fame
Compared with that of Toad!

"The clever men at Oxford
Know all that there is to be knowed.
But they none of them know one half as much
As intelligent Mr. Toad!

"The animals sat in the Ark and cried,
Their tears in torrents flowed.
Who was it said, 'There's land ahead?'
Encouraging Mr. Toad!

"The army all saluted
As they marched along the road.
Was it the King? Or Kitchener?
No. It was Mr. Toad.

"The Queen and her Ladies-in-waiting
Sat at the window and sewed.
She cried, 'Look! who's that handsome man?'
They answered, 'Mr. Toad.'"

There was a great deal more of the same sort, but too dreadfully conceited to be written down. These are some of the milder verses.

He sang as he walked, and he walked as he sang, and got more inflated every minute. But his pride was shortly to have a severe fall.

After some miles of country lanes he reached the high road, and as he turned into it and glanced along its white length, he saw approaching him a speck that turned into a dot and then into a blob, and then into something very familiar; and a double note of warning, only too well known, fell on his delighted ear.

"This is something like!" said the excited Toad. "This is real life again, this is once more the great world from which I have been missed so long! I will hail them, my brothers of the wheel, and pitch them a yarn, of the sort that has been so successful hitherto; and they will give me a lift, of course, and then I will talk to them some more; and, perhaps, with luck, it may even end in my driving up to Toad Hall in a motor-car! That will be one in the eye for Badger!"

He stepped confidently out into the road to hail the motor-car, which came along at an easy pace, slowing down as it neared the lane; when suddenly he became very pale, his heart turned to water, his knees shook and yielded under him, and he doubled up and collapsed with a sickening pain in his interior. And well he might, the unhappy animal; for the approaching car was the very one he had stolen out of the yard of the Red Lion Hotel on that fatal day when all his troubles began! And the people in it were the very same people he had sat and watched at luncheon in the coffee-room!

He sank down in a shabby, miserable heap in the road, murmuring to himself in his despair, "It's all up! It's all over now! Chains and policemen again! Prison again! Dry bread and water again! O, what a fool I have been! What did I want to go strutting about the country for, singing conceited songs, and hailing people in broad day on the high road, instead of hiding till nightfall and slipping home quietly by back ways! O hapless Toad! O ill-fated animal!"

The terrible motor-car drew slowly nearer and nearer, till at last he heard it stop just short of him. Two gentlemen got out and walked round the trembling heap of crumpled misery lying in the road, and one of them said, "O dear! this is very sad! Here is a poor old thing—a washerwoman apparently—who has fainted in the road! Perhaps she is overcome by the heat, poor creature; or possibly she has not had any food to-day. Let us lift her into the car and take her to the nearest village, where doubtless she has friends."

They tenderly lifted Toad into the motor-car and propped him up with soft cushions, and proceeded on their way.
When Toad heard them talk in so kind and sympathetic a way, and knew that he was not recognised, his courage began to revive, and he cautiously opened first one eye and then the other.

"Look!" said one of the gentlemen, "she is better already. The fresh air is doing her good. How do you feel now, ma'am?"

"Thank you kindly, Sir," said Toad in a feeble voice, "I'm feeling a great deal better!" "That's right," said the gentleman. "Now keep quite still, and, above all, don't try to talk."

"I won't," said Toad. "I was only thinking, if I might sit on the front seat there, beside the driver, where I could get the fresh air full in my face, I should soon be all right again."

"What a very sensible woman!" said the gentleman. "Of course you shall." So they carefully helped Toad into the front seat beside the driver, and on they went again.

Toad was almost himself again by now. He sat up, looked about him, and tried to beat down the tremors, the yearnings, the old cravings that rose up and beset him and took possession of him entirely.

"It is fate!" he said to himself. "Why strive? why struggle?" and he turned to the driver at his side.

"Please, Sir," he said, "I wish you would kindly let me try and drive the car for a little. I've been watching you carefully, and it looks so easy and so interesting, and I should like to be able to tell my friends that once I had driven a motor-car!"
The driver laughed at the proposal, so heartily that the gentleman inquired what the matter was. When he heard, he said, to Toad's delight, "Bravo, ma'am! I like your spirit. Let her have a try, and look after her. She won't do any harm."

Toad eagerly scrambled into the seat vacated by the driver, took the steering-wheel in his hands, listened with affected humility to the instructions given him, and set the car in motion, but very slowly and carefully at first, for he was determined to be prudent.

The gentlemen behind clapped their hands and applauded, and Toad heard them saying, "How well she does it! Fancy a washerwoman driving a car as well as that, the first time!"

Toad went a little faster; then faster still, and faster.
He heard the gentlemen call out warningly, "Be careful, washerwoman!" And this annoyed him, and he began to lose his head.

The driver tried to interfere, but he pinned him down in his seat with one elbow, and put on full speed. The rush of air in his face, the hum of the engines, and the light jump of the car beneath him intoxicated his weak brain. "Washerwoman, indeed!" he shouted recklessly. "Ho! ho! I am the Toad, the motor-car snatcher, the prison-breaker, the Toad who always escapes! Sit still, and you shall know what driving really is, for you are in the hands of the famous, the skilful, the entirely fearless Toad!"

With a cry of horror the whole party rose and flung themselves on him. "Seize him!" they cried, "seize the Toad, the wicked animal who stole our motor-car! Bind him, chain him, drag him to the nearest police-station! Down with the desperate and dangerous Toad!"

Alas! they should have thought, they ought to have been more prudent, they should have remembered to stop the motor-car

somehow before playing any pranks of that sort. With a half-turn of the wheel the Toad sent the car crashing through the low hedge that ran along the roadside. One mighty bound, a violent shock, and the wheels of the car were churning up the thick mud of a horse-pond.

Toad found himself flying through the air with the strong upward rush and delicate curve of a swallow. He liked the motion, and was just beginning to wonder whether it would go on until he developed wings and turned into a Toad-bird, when he landed on his back with a thump, in the soft rich grass of a meadow. Sitting up, he could just see the motor-car in the pond, nearly submerged; the gentlemen and the driver, encumbered by their long coats, were floundering helplessly in the water.

He picked himself up rapidly, and set off running across country as hard as he could, scrambling through hedges, jumping ditches, pounding across fields, till he was breathless and weary, and had to settle down into an easy walk. When he had recovered his breath somewhat, and was able to think calmly, he began to giggle, and from giggling he took to laughing, and he laughed till he had to sit down under a hedge. "Ho, ho!" he cried, in ecstasies of self-admiration, "Toad again! Toad, as usual, comes out on the top! Who was it got them to give him a lift? Who managed to get on the front seat for the sake of fresh air? Who persuaded them into letting him see if he could drive? Who landed them all in a horse-pond? Who escaped, flying gaily and unscathed through the air, leaving the narrow-minded, grudging, timid excursionists in the mud where they should rightly be? Why, Toad, of course; clever Toad, great Toad, good Toad!'

Then he burst into song again, and chanted with uplifted voice—

"The motor-car went Poop-poop-poop,
As it raced along the road.
Who was it steered it into a pond?
Ingenious Mr. Toad!
O, how clever I am! How clever, how clever, how very clev—"

A slight noise at a distance behind him made him turn his head and look. O horror! O misery! O despair!

About two fields off, a chauffeur in his leather gaiters and two large rural policemen were visible, running towards him as hard as they could go!

Poor Toad sprang to his feet and pelted away again, his heart in his mouth. "O, my!" he gasped, as he panted along, "what an ass I am! What a conceited and heedless ass! Swaggering again! Shouting and singing songs again! Sitting still and gassing again! O my! O my! O my!"

He glanced back, and saw to his dismay that they were gaining on him. On he ran desperately, but kept looking back, and saw that they still gained steadily. He did his best, but he was a fat animal, and his legs were short, and still they gained. He could hear them close behind him now. Ceasing to heed where he was going, he struggled on blindly and wildly, looking back over his shoulder at the now triumphant enemy, when suddenly the earth failed under his feet, he grasped at the air, and, splash! he found himself head over ears in deep water, rapid water, water that bore him along with a force he could not contend with; and he knew that in his blind panic he had run straight into the river!

He rose to the surface and tried to grasp the reeds and the rushes that grew along the water's edge close under the bank, but the stream was so strong that it tore them out of his hands. "O my!" gasped poor Toad, "if ever I steal a motor-car again! If ever I sing another conceited song"—then down he went, and came up breathless and spluttering. Presently he saw that he was approaching a big dark hole in the bank, just above his head, and as the stream bore him past he reached up with a paw and caught hold of the edge and held on. Then slowly and with difficulty he drew himself up out of the water, till at last he was able to rest his elbows on the edge of the hole. There he remained for some minutes, puffing and panting, for he was quite exhausted.

As he sighed and blew and stared before him into the dark hole, some bright small thing shone and twinkled in its depths, moving towards him. As it approached, a face grew up gradually around it, and it was a familiar face!

Brown and small, with whiskers.

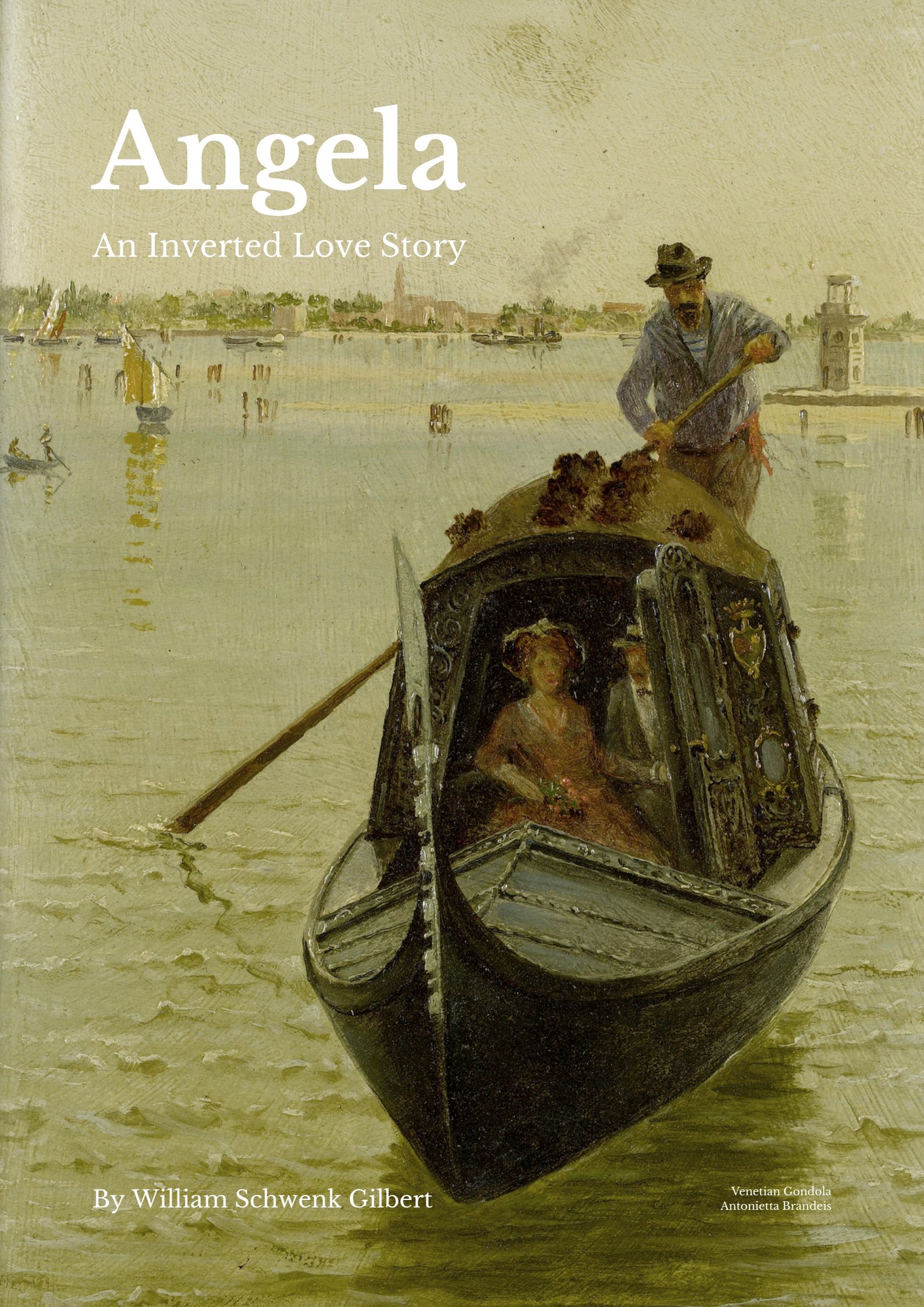
Grave and round, with neat ears and silky hair.

It was the Water Rat!



Angela

An Inverted Love Story



By William Schwenk Gilbert

Venetian Gondola
Antonietta Brandeis

I am a poor paralysed fellow who, for many years past, has been confined to a bed or a sofa. For the last six years I have occupied a small room, giving on to one of the side canals of Venice, and having no one about me but a deaf old woman, who makes my bed and attends to my food; and there I eke out a poor income of about thirty pounds a year by making water-colour drawings of flowers and fruit (they are the cheapest models in Venice), and these I send to a friend in London, who sells them to a dealer for small sums. But, on the whole, I am happy and content.

It is necessary that I should describe the position of my room rather minutely. Its only window is about five feet above the water of the canal, and above it the house projects some six feet, and overhangs the water, the projecting portion being supported by stout piles driven into the bed of the canal. This arrangement has the disadvantage (among others) of so limiting my upward view that I am unable to see more than about ten feet of the height of the house immediately opposite to me, although, by reaching as far out of the window as my infirmity will permit, I can see for a considerable distance up and down the canal, which does not exceed fifteen feet in width. But, although I can see but little of the material house opposite, I can see its reflection upside down in the canal, and I take a good deal of inverted interest in such of its inhabitants as show themselves from time to time (always upside down) on its balconies and at its windows.

When I first occupied my room, about six years ago, my attention was directed to the reflection of a little girl of thirteen or so (as nearly as I could judge), who passed every day on a balcony just above the upward range of my limited field of view. She had a glass of flowers and a crucifix on a little table by her side; and as she sat there, in fine weather, from early morning until dark, working assiduously all the time, I concluded that she earned her living by needle-work. She was certainly an industrious little girl, and, as far as I could judge by her upside-down reflection, neat in her dress and pretty. She had an old mother, an invalid, who, on warm days, would sit on the balcony with her, and it interested me to see the little maid wrap the old lady in shawls, and bring pillows for her chair, and a stool for her feet, and every now and again lay down her work and kiss and fondle the old lady for half a minute, and then take up her work again.

Time went by, and as the little maid grew up, her reflection grew down, and at last she was quite a little woman of, I suppose, sixteen or seventeen. I can only work for a couple of hours or so in the brightest part of the day, so I had plenty of time on my hands in which to watch her movements, and sufficient imagination to weave a little romance about her, and to endow her with a beauty which, to a great extent, I had to take for granted. I saw--or fancied that I could see--that she began to take an interest in _my_ reflection (which, of course, she could see as I could see hers); and one day, when it appeared to me that she was looking right at it--that is to say when her reflection appeared to be looking right at me--I tried the desperate experiment of nodding to her, and to my intense delight her reflection nodded in reply. And so our two reflections became known to one another.

It did not take me very long to fall in love with her, but a long time passed before I could make up my mind to do more than nod to her every morning, when the old woman moved me from my bed to the sofa at the window, and again in the evening, when the little maid left the balcony for that day. One day, however, when I saw her reflection looking at mine, I nodded to her, and threw a flower into the canal. She nodded several times in return, and I saw her direct her mother's attention to the incident. Then every morning I threw a flower into the water for 'good morning', and another in the evening for 'goodnight', and I soon discovered that I had not altogether thrown them in vain, for one day she threw a flower to join mine, and she laughed and clapped her hands when she saw the two flowers join forces and float away together. And then every morning and every evening she threw her flower when I threw mine, and when the two flowers met she clapped her hands, and so did I; but when they were separated, as they sometimes were, owing to one of them having met an obstruction which did not catch the other, she threw up her hands in a pretty affectation of despair, which I tried to imitate but in an English and unsuccessful fashion. And when they were rudely run down by a passing gondola (which happened not unfrequently) she pretended to cry, and I did the same. Then, in pretty pantomime, she would point downwards to the sky to tell me that it was Destiny that had caused the shipwreck of our flowers, and I, in pantomime, not nearly so pretty, would try to convey to her that Destiny would be kinder next time, and that perhaps tomorrow our flowers would be more fortunate--and so the innocent courtship went on. One day she showed me her crucifix and kissed it, and thereupon I took a little silver crucifix that always stood by me, and kissed that, and so she knew that we were one in religion.

One day the little maid did not appear on her balcony, and for several days I saw nothing of her; and although I threw my flowers as usual, no flower came to keep it company. However, after a time, she reappeared, dressed in black, and crying often, and then I knew that the poor child's mother was dead, and, as far as I knew, she was alone in the world. The flowers came no more for many days, nor did she show any sign of recognition, but kept her eyes on her work, except when she placed her handkerchief to them. And opposite to her was the old lady's chair, and I could see that, from time to time, she would lay down her work and gaze at it, and then a flood of tears would come to her relief. But at last one day she roused herself to nod to me, and then her flower came, day by day, and my flower went forth to join it, and with varying fortunes the two flowers sailed away as of yore.

But the darkest day of all to me was when a good-looking young gondolier, standing right end uppermost in his gondola (for I could see _him_ in the flesh), worked his craft alongside the house, and stood talking to her as she sat on the balcony. They seemed to speak as old friends--indeed, as well as I could make out, he held her by the hand during the whole of their interview which lasted quite half an hour.

Eventually he pushed off, and left my heart heavy within me. But I soon took heart of grace, for as soon as he was out of sight, the little maid threw two flowers growing on the same stem--an allegory of which I could make nothing, until it broke upon me that she meant to convey to me that he and she were brother and sister, and that I had no cause to be sad. And thereupon I nodded to her cheerily, and she nodded to me, and laughed aloud, and I laughed in return, and all went on again as before.

Then came a dark and dreary time, for it became necessary that I should undergo treatment that confined me absolutely to my bed for many days, and I worried and fretted to think that the little maid and I should see each other no longer, and worse still, that she would think that I had gone away without even hinting to her that I was going. And I lay awake at night wondering how I could let her know the truth, and fifty plans flitted through my brain, all appearing to be feasible enough at night, but absolutely wild and impracticable in the morning. One day--and it was a bright day indeed for me--the old woman who tended me told me that a gondolier had inquired whether the English signor had gone away or had died; and so I learnt that the little maid had been anxious about me, and that she had sent her brother to inquire, and the brother had no doubt taken to her the reason of my protracted absence from the window.

From that day, and ever after during my three weeks of bed-keeping, a flower was found every morning on the ledge of my window, which was within easy reach of anyone in a boat; and when at last a day came when I could be moved, I took my accustomed place on my sofa at the window, and the little maid saw me, and stood on her head (so to speak) and clapped her hands upside down with a delight that was as eloquent as my right-end-up delight could be. And so the first time the gondolier passed my window I beckoned to him, and he pushed alongside, and told me, with many bright smiles, that he was glad indeed to see me well again. Then I thanked him and his sister for their many kind thoughts about me during my retreat, and I then learnt from him that her name was Angela, and that she was the best and purest maiden in all Venice, and that anyone might think himself happy indeed who could call her sister, but that he was happier even than her brother, for he was to be married to her, and indeed they were to be married the next day.

Thereupon my heart seemed to swell to bursting, and the blood rushed through my veins so that I could hear it and nothing else for a while.

I managed at last to stammer forth some words of awkward congratulation, and he left me, singing merrily, after asking permission to bring his bride to see me on the morrow as they returned from church.

'For', said he, 'my Angela has known you very long--ever since she was a child, and she has often spoken to me of the poor Englishman who was a good Catholic, and who lay all day long for years and years on a sofa at a window, and she had said over and over again how dearly she wished she could speak to him and comfort him; and one day, when you threw a flower into the canal, she asked me whether she might throw another, and I told her yes, for he would understand that it meant sympathy for one

sorely afflicted.'

And so I learned that it was pity, and not love, except indeed such love as is akin to pity, that prompted her to interest herself in my welfare, and there was an end of it all.

For the two flowers that I thought were on one stem were two flowers tied together (but I could not tell that), and they were meant to indicate that she and the gondolier were affianced lovers, and my expressed pleasure at this symbol delighted her, for she took it to mean that I rejoiced in her happiness.

And the next day the gondolier came with a train of other gondoliers, all decked in their holiday garb, and on his gondola sat Angela, happy, and blushing at her happiness. Then he and she entered the house in which I dwelt, and came into my room (and it was strange indeed, after so many years of inversion, to see her with her head above her feet!), and then she wished me happiness and a speedy restoration to good health (which could never be); and I in broken words and with tears in my eyes, gave her the little silver crucifix that had stood by my bed or my table for so many years. And Angela took it reverently, and crossed herself, and kissed it, and so departed with her delighted husband.

And as I heard the song of the gondoliers as they went their way--the song dying away in the distance as the shadows of the sundown closed around me--I felt that they were singing the requiem of the only love that had ever entered my heart.

LAST LOVE-WORD

By Thomas Hardy

(SONG)

THIS is the last; the very, very last !
Anon, and all is dead and dumb,
Only a pale shroud over the past,
That cannot be
Of value small or vast,
Love, then to me !
I can say no more : i have even said too much.
I did not mean that this should come:
I did not know 'twould swell to such—
Nor, perhaps, you—
When that first look and touch,
Love, doomed us two !



Young Goodman Brown

By Nathaniel Hawthorne

A Fair Puritan by E. Percy Moran



YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN came forth at sunset into the street at Salem village; but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife. And Faith, as the wife was aptly named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap while she called to Goodman Brown.

"Dearest heart," whispered she, softly, and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear, "prithee put off your journey until sunrise and sleep in your own bed tonight. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts that she's afeard of herself sometimes. Pray tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year."

"My love and my Faith," replied young Goodman Brown, "of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee. My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must needs be done 'twixt now and sunrise. What, my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married?"

"Then God bless you!" said Faith, with the pink ribbons; "And may you find all well when you come back."

"Amen!" cried Goodman Brown. "Say thy prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk, and no harm will come to thee."

So they parted; and the young man pursued his way until, being about to turn the corner by the meeting-house, he looked back and saw the head of Faith still peeping after him with a melancholy air, in spite of her pink ribbons.

"Poor little Faith!" thought he, for his heart smote him. "What a wretch am I to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too. Methought as she spoke there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done tonight. But no, no; 'twould kill her to think it. Well, she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven."

With this excellent resolve for the future, Goodman Brown felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose. He had taken a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind. It was all as lonely as could be; and there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveler knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead; so that with lonely footsteps he may yet be passing through an unseen multitude.

"There may be a devilish Indian behind every tree," said Goodman Brown to himself; and he glanced fearfully behind him as he added, "What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!"

His head being turned back, he passed a crook of the road, and, looking forward again, beheld the figure of a man, in grave and decent attire, seated at the foot of an old tree. He arose at Goodman Brown's approach and walked onward side by side with him.

"You are late, Goodman Brown," said he. "The clock of the Old South was striking as I came through Boston, and that is full fifteen minutes agone."

"Faith kept me back a while," replied the young man, with a tremor in his voice, caused by the sudden appearance of his companion, though not wholly unexpected.

It was now deep dusk in the forest, and deepest in that part of it where these two were journeying. As nearly as could be discerned, the second traveler was about fifty years old, apparently in the same rank of life as Goodman Brown, and bearing a considerable resemblance to him, though perhaps more in expression than features. Still they might have been taken for father and son. And yet, though the elder person was as simply clad as the younger, and as simple in manner too, he had an indescribable air of one who knew the world, and who would not have felt abashed at the governor's dinner table or in King William's court, were it possible that his affairs should call him thither. But the only thing about him that could be fixed upon as remarkable was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself like a living serpent. This, of course, must have been an ocular deception, assisted by the uncertain light.

"Come, Goodman Brown," cried his fellow-traveler, "this is a dull pace for the beginning of a journey. Take my staff, if you are so soon weary."

"Friend," said the other, exchanging his slow pace for a full stop, "having kept covenant by meeting thee here, it is my purpose now to return whence I came. I have scruples touching the matter thou wot'st of."

"Sayest thou so?" replied he of the serpent, smiling apart. "Let us walk on, nevertheless, reasoning as we go; and if I convince thee not thou shalt turn back. We are but a little way in the forest yet."

"Too far! too far!" exclaimed the goodman, unconsciously resuming his walk. "My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs; and shall I be the first of the name of Brown that ever took this path and kept—"

"Such company, thou wouldst say," observed the elder person, interpreting his pause. "Well said, Goodman Brown! I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans; and that's no trifle to say. I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem; and it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip's War. They were my good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight. I would fain be friends with you for their sake."

"If it be as thou sayest," replied Goodman Brown, "I marvel they never spoke of these matters; or, verily, I marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England. We are a people of prayer, and good works to boot, and abide no such wickedness."

"Wickedness or not," said the traveler with the twisted staff, "I have a very general acquaintance here in New England. The deacons of many a church have drunk the communion wine with me; the selectmen of divers towns make me their chairman; and a majority of the Great and General Court are firm supporters of my interest. The governor and I, too. But these are state secrets."

"Can this be so?" cried Goodman Brown, with a stare of amazement at his undisturbed companion. "Howbeit, I have nothing to do with the governor and council; they have their own ways, and are no rule for a simple husbandman like me. But, were I to go on with thee, how should I meet the eye of that good old man, our minister, at Salem village? Oh, his voice would make me tremble both Sabbath day and lecture day."

Thus far the elder traveler had listened with due gravity; but now burst into a fit of irrepressible mirth, shaking himself so violently that his snakelike staff actually seemed to wriggle in sympathy.

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted he again and again; then composing himself, "Well, go on, Goodman Brown, go on; but, prithee, don't kill me with laughing."

"Well, then, to end the matter at once," said Goodman Brown, considerably nettled, "there is my wife, Faith. It would break her dear little heart; and I'd rather break my own."

"Nay, if that be the case," answered the other, "e'en go thy ways, Goodman Brown. I would not for twenty old women like the one hobbling before us that Faith should come to any harm."

As he spoke he pointed his staff at a female figure on the path, in whom Goodman Brown recognized a very pious and exemplary dame, who had taught him his catechism in youth, and was still his moral and spiritual adviser, jointly with the minister and Deacon Gookin.

"A marvel, truly, that Goody Cloyse should be so far in the wilderness at nightfall," said he. "But with your leave, friend, I shall take a cut through the woods until we have left this Christian woman behind. Being a stranger to you, she might ask whom I was consorting with and whither I was going."

"Be it so," said his fellow-traveler. "Betake you to the woods, and let me keep the path."

Accordingly the young man turned aside, but took care to watch his companion, who advanced softly along the road until he had come within a staff's length of the old dame. She, meanwhile, was making the best of her way, with singular speed for so aged a woman, and mumbling some indistinct words—a prayer, doubtless—as she went. The traveler put forth his staff and touched her withered neck with what seemed the serpent's tail.

"The devil!" screamed the pious old lady.

"Then Goody Cloyse knows her old friend?" observed the traveler, confronting her and leaning on his writhing stick.

"Ah, forsooth, and is it Your Worship indeed?" cried the good dame. "Yea, truly is it, and in the very image of my old gossip, Goodman Brown, the grandfather of the silly fellow that now is. But—would Your Worship believe it?—my broomstick hath strangely disappeared, stolen, as I suspect, by that unhanged witch, Goody Cory, and that, too, when I was all anointed with the juice of smallage, and cinquefoil, and wolf's bane."

“Mingled with fine wheat and the fat of a new-born babe,” said the shape of old Goodman Brown.

“Ah, Your Worship knows the recipe,” cried the old lady, cackling aloud. “So, as I was saying, being all ready for the meeting, and no horse to ride on, I made up my mind to foot it; for they tell me there is a nice young man to be taken into communion tonight. But now Your Good Worship will lend me your arm, and we shall be there in a twinkling.”

“That can hardly be,” answered her friend. “I may not spare you my arm, Goody Cloyse; but here is my staff, if you will.” So saying, he threw it down at her feet, where, perhaps, it assumed life, being one of the rods which its owner had formerly lent to the Egyptian magi. Of this fact, however, Goodman Brown could not take cognizance. He had cast up his eyes in astonishment, and, looking down again, beheld neither Goody Cloyse nor the serpentine staff, but his fellow-traveler alone, who waited for him as calmly as if nothing had happened.

“That old woman taught me my catechism,” said the young man; and there was a world of meaning in this simple comment. They continued to walk onward, while the elder traveler exhorted his companion to make good speed and persevere in the path, discoursing so aptly that his arguments seemed rather to spring up in the bosom of his auditor than to be suggested by himself. As they went, he plucked a branch of maple to serve for a walking stick, and began to strip it of the twigs and little boughs, which were wet with evening dew. The moment his fingers touched them they became strangely withered and dried up as with a week's sunshine. Thus the pair proceeded, at a good free pace, until suddenly, in a gloomy hollow of the road, Goodman Brown sat himself down on the stump of a tree and refused to go any farther.

“Friend,” said he, stubbornly, “my mind is made up. Not another step will I budge on this errand. What if a wretched old woman do choose to go to the devil when I thought she was going to heaven: is that any reason why I should quit my dear Faith and go after her?”

“You will think better of this by and by,” said his acquaintance, composedly. “Sit here and rest yourself a while; and when you feel like moving again, there is my staff to help you along.” Without more words, he threw his companion the maple stick, and was as speedily out of sight as if he had vanished into the deepening gloom. The young man sat a few moments by the roadside, applauding himself greatly, and thinking with how clear a conscience he should meet the minister in his morning walk, nor shrink from the eye of good old Deacon Gookin. And what calm sleep would be his that very night, which was to have been spent so wickedly, but so purely and sweetly now, in the arms of Faith! Amidst these pleasant and praiseworthy meditations, Goodman Brown heard the tramp of horses along the road, and deemed it advisable to conceal himself within the verge of the forest, conscious of the guilty purpose that had brought him thither, though now so happily turned from it.

On came the hoof tramps and the voices of the riders, two grave old voices, conversing soberly as they drew near. These mingled sounds appeared to pass along the road, within a few yards of the young man's hiding-place; but, owing doubtless to the depth of the gloom at that particular spot, neither the travelers nor their steeds were visible. Though their figures brushed the small boughs by the wayside, it could not be seen that they intercepted, even for a moment, the faint gleam from the strip of bright sky athwart which they must have passed. Goodman Brown alternately crouched and stood on tiptoe, pulling aside the branches and thrusting forth his head as far as he durst without discerning so much as a shadow. It vexed him the more, because he could have sworn, were such a thing possible, that he recognized the voices of the minister and Deacon Gookin, jogging along quietly, as they were wont to do, when bound to some ordination or ecclesiastical council. While yet within hearing, one of the riders stopped to pluck a switch.

“Of the two, Reverend Sir,” said the voice like the deacon's, “I had rather miss an ordination dinner than tonight's meeting. They tell me that some of our community are to be here from Falmouth and beyond, and others from Connecticut and Rhode Island, besides several of the Indian powwows, who, after their fashion, know almost as much deviltry as the best of us. Moreover, there is a goodly young woman to be taken into communion.”

“Mighty well, Deacon Gookin!” replied the solemn old tones of the minister. “Spur up, or we shall be late. Nothing can be done, you know, until I get on the ground.”

The hoofs clattered again; and the voices, talking so strangely in the empty air, passed on through the forest, where no church had ever been gathered or solitary Christian prayed. Whither, then, could these holy men be journeying so deep into the heathen wilderness? Young Goodman Brown caught hold of a tree for support, being ready to sink down on the ground, faint and overburdened with the heavy sickness of his heart. He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a heaven above him. Yet there was the blue arch, and the stars brightening in it.

“With heaven above and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!” cried Goodman Brown.

While he still gazed upward into the deep arch of the firmament and had lifted his hands to pray, a cloud, though no wind was stirring, hurried across the zenith and hid the brightening stars. The blue sky was still visible, except directly overhead, where this black mass of cloud was sweeping swiftly northward. Aloft in the air, as if from the depths of the cloud, came a confused and doubtful sound of voices. Once the listener fancied that he could distinguish the accents of towns-people of his own, men and women, both pious and ungodly, many of whom he had met at the communion table, and had seen others rioting at the tavern. The next moment, so indistinct were the sounds, he doubted whether he had heard aught but the murmur of the old forest, whispering without a wind. Then came a stronger swell of those familiar tones, heard daily in the sunshine at Salem village, but never until now from a cloud of night There was one voice of a young woman, uttering lamentations, yet with an uncertain sorrow, and entreating for some favor, which, perhaps, it would grieve her to obtain; and all the unseen multitude, both saints and sinners, seemed to encourage her onward.

“Faith!” shouted Goodman Brown, in a voice of agony and desperation; and the echoes of the forest mocked him, crying, “Faith! Faith!” as if bewildered wretches were seeking her all through the wilderness.

The cry of grief, rage, and terror was yet piercing the night, when the unhappy husband held his breath for a response. There was a scream, drowned immediately in a louder murmur of voices, fading into far-off laughter, as the dark cloud swept away, leaving the clear and silent sky above Goodman Brown. But something fluttered lightly down through the air and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it, and beheld a pink ribbon.

“My Faith is gone!” cried he, after one stupefied moment. “There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, Devil; for to thee is this world given.”

And, maddened with despair, so that he laughed loud and long, did Goodman Brown grasp his staff and set forth again, at such a rate that he seemed to fly along the forest path rather than to walk or run. The road grew wilder and drearier and more faintly traced, and vanished at length, leaving him in the heart of the dark wilderness, still rushing onward with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil. The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds—the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts, and the yell of Indians; while sometimes the wind tolled like a distant church bell, and sometimes gave a broad roar around the traveler, as if all Nature were laughing him to scorn. But he was himself the chief horror of the scene, and shrank not from its other horrors.

“Ha! ha! ha!” roared Goodman Brown when the wind laughed at him.

“Let us hear which will laugh loudest. Think not to frighten me with your deviltry. Come witch, come wizard, come Indian powwow, come devil himself, and here comes Goodman Brown. You may as well fear him as he fear you.”

In truth, all through the haunted forest there could be nothing more frightful than the figure of Goodman Brown. On he flew among the black pines, brandishing his staff with frenzied gestures, now giving vent to an inspiration of horrid blasphemy, and now shouting forth such laughter as set all the echoes of the forest laughing like demons around him. The fiend in his own shape is less hideous than when he rages in the breast of man. Thus sped the demoniac on his course, until, quivering among the trees, he saw a red light before him, as when the felled trunks and branches of a clearing have been set on fire, and throw up their lurid blaze against the sky, at the hour of midnight. He paused, in a lull of the tempest that had driven him onward, and heard the swell of what seemed a hymn, rolling solemnly from a distance with the weight of many voices. He knew the tune; it was a familiar one in the choir of the village meeting-house. The verse died heavily away, and was lengthened by a chorus, not of human voices, but of all the sounds of the benighted wilderness

pealing in awful harmony together.

Goodman Brown cried out, and his cry was lost to his own ear by its unison with the cry of the desert.

In the interval of silence he stole forward until the light glared full upon his eyes. At one extremity of an open space, hemmed in by the dark wall of the forest, arose a rock, bearing some rude, natural resemblance either to an altar or a pulpit, and surrounded by four blazing pines, their tops aflame, their stems untouched, like candles at an evening meeting. The mass of foliage that had overgrown the summit of the rock was all on fire, blazing high into the night and fitfully illuminating the whole field. Each pendent twig and leafy festoon was in a blaze. As the red light arose and fell, a numerous congregation alternately shone forth, then disappeared in shadow, and again grew, as it were, out of the darkness, peopling the heart of the solitary woods at once.

"A grave and dark-clad company," quoth Goodman Brown.

In truth they were such. Among them, quivering to and fro between gloom and splendor, appeared faces that would be seen next day at the council board of the province, and others which, Sabbath after Sabbath, looked devoutly heavenward, and benignantly over the crowded pews, from the holiest pulpits in the land. Some affirm that the lady of the governor was there. At least there were high dames well known to her, and wives of honored husbands, and widows, a great multitude, and ancient maidens, all of excellent repute, and fair young girls, who trembled lest their mothers should espy them. Either the sudden gleams of light flashing over the obscure field bedazzled Goodman Brown, or he recognized a score of the church members of Salem village famous for their especial sanctity. Good old Deacon Gookin had arrived, and waited at the skirts of that venerable saint, his revered pastor. But, irreverently consorting with these grave, reputable, and pious people, these elders of the church, these chaste dames and dewy virgins, there were men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes. It was strange to see that the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints. Scattered also among their pale-faced enemies were the Indian priests, or powwows, who had often scared their native forest with more hideous incantations than any known to English witchcraft.

"But where is Faith?" thought Goodman Brown; and, as hope came into his heart, he trembled.

Another verse of the hymn arose, a slow and mournful strain, such as the pious love, but joined to words which expressed all that our nature can conceive of sin, and darkly hinted at far more. Unfathomable to mere mortals is the lore of fiends. Verse after verse was sung; and still the chorus of the desert swelled between like the deepest tone of a mighty organ; and with the final peal of that dreadful anthem there came a sound, as if the roaring wind, the rushing streams, the howling beasts, and every other voice of the unconcerted wilderness were mingling and according with the voice of guilty man in homage to the prince of all. The four blazing pines threw up a loftier flame, and obscurely discovered shapes and visages of horror on the smoke wreaths above the impious assembly. At the same moment the fire on the rock shot redly forth and formed a glowing arch above its base, where now appeared a figure. With reverence be it spoken, the figure bore no slight similitude, both in garb and manner, to some grave divine of the New England churches.

"Bring forth the converts!" cried a voice that echoed through the field and rolled into the forest.

At the word, Goodman Brown stepped forth from the shadow of the trees and approached the congregation, with whom he felt a loathful brotherhood by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart. He could have well-nigh sworn that the shape of his own dead father beckoned him to advance, looking downward from a smoke wreath, while a woman, with dim features of despair, threw out her hand to warn him back. Was it his mother? But he had no power to retreat one step, nor to resist, even in thought, when the minister and good old Deacon Gookin seized his arms and led him to the blazing rock. Thither came also the slender form of a veiled female, led between Goody Cloyse, that pious teacher of the catechism, and Martha Carrier, who had received the devil's promise to be queen of hell. A rampant hag was she. And there stood the proselytes beneath the canopy of fire.

"Welcome, my children," said the dark figure, "to the communion of your race. Ye have found thus young your nature and your destiny. My children, look behind you!"

They turned; and flashing forth, as it were, in a sheet of flame, the fiend worshippers were seen; the smile of welcome gleamed darkly on every visage.

"There," resumed the sable form, "are all whom ye have reverenced from youth. Ye deemed them holier than yourselves, and shrank from your own sin, contrasting it with their lives of righteousness and prayerful aspirations heavenward. Yet here are they all in my worshipping assembly. This night it shall be granted you to know their secret deeds: how hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; how many a woman, eager for widows' weeds, has given her husband a drink at bedtime and let him sleep his last sleep in her bosom; how beardless youths have made haste to inherit their fathers' wealth; and how fair damsels —blush not, sweet ones—have dug little graves in the garden, and bidden me, the sole guest to an infant's funeral. By the sympathy of your human hearts for sin ye shall scent out all the places—whether in church, bedchamber, street, field, or forest—where crime has been committed, and shall exult to behold the whole earth one stain of guilt, one mighty blood spot. Far more than this. It shall be yours to penetrate, in every bosom, the deep mystery of sin, the fountain of all wicked arts, and which inexhaustibly supplies more evil impulses than human power—than my power at its utmost—can make manifest in deeds. And now, my children, look upon each other."

They did so; and, by the blaze of the hell-kindled torches, the wretched man beheld his Faith, and the wife her husband, trembling before that unhallowed altar.

"Lo, there ye stand, my children," said the figure, in a deep and solemn tone, almost sad with its despairing awfulness, as if his once angelic nature could yet mourn for our miserable race. "Depending upon one another's hearts, ye had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream. Now are ye undeceived. Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness. Welcome again, my children, to the communion of your race."

"Welcome," repeated the fiend worshippers, in one cry of despair and triumph.

And there they stood, the only pair, as it seemed, who were yet hesitating on the verge of wickedness in this dark world. A basin was hollowed, naturally, in the rock. Did it contain water, reddened by the lurid light? or was it blood? or, perchance, a liquid flame? Herein did the shape of evil dip his hand and prepare to lay the mark of baptism upon their foreheads, that they might be partakers of the mystery of sin, more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than they could now be of their own. The husband cast one look at his pale wife, and Faith at him. What polluted wretches would the next glance show them to each other, shuddering alike at what they disclosed and what they saw!

"Faith! Faith!" cried the husband; "look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one."

Whether Faith obeyed he knew not. Hardly had he spoken when he found himself amid calm night and solitude, listening to a roar of the wind which died heavily away through the forest. He staggered against the rock, and felt it chill and damp; while a hanging twig, that had been all on fire, besprinkled his cheek with the coldest dew.

The next morning young Goodman Brown came slowly into the street of Salem village, staring around him like a bewildered man. The good old minister was taking a walk along the graveyard to get an appetite for breakfast and meditate his sermon, and bestowed a blessing, as he passed, on Goodman Brown. He shrank from the venerable saint as if to avoid an anathema. Old Deacon Gookin was at domestic worship, and the holy words of his prayer were heard through the open window. "What God doth the wizard pray to?" quoth Goodman Brown. Goody Cloyse, that excellent old Christian, stood in the early sunshine at her own lattice, catechizing a little girl who had brought her a pint of morning's milk. Goodman Brown snatched away the child as from the grasp of the fiend himself. Turning the corner by the meeting-house, he spied the head of Faith, with the pink ribbons, gazing anxiously forth, and bursting into such joy at sight of him that she skipped along the street and almost kissed her husband before the whole village. But Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting.

Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?

Be it so if you will; but, alas! It was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become from the night



of that fearful dream. On the Sabbath day, when the congregation were singing a holy Psalm, he could not listen because an anthem of sin rushed loudly upon his ear and drowned all the blessed strain. When the minister spoke from the pulpit with power and fervid eloquence, and, with his hand on the open Bible, of the sacred truths of our religion, and of saint-like lives and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable, then did Goodman Brown turn pale, dreading lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers. Often, waking suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith; and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away. And when he had lived long, and was borne to his grave a hoary corpse, followed by Faith, an aged woman, and children and grandchildren, a goodly procession, besides neighbors not a few, they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone, for his dying hour was gloom.

The Black Cat

By Edgar Allen Poe



FOR the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not -- and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburthen my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified -- have tortured -- have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me, they have presented little but Horror -- to many they will seem less terrible than barroques. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place -- some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and sagacious dog, I need hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature or the intensity of the gratification thus derivable. There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere Man.

I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat.

This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree. In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever serious upon this point -- and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered.

Pluto -- this was the cat's name -- was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.

Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character -- through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance -- had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them. For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. But my disease grew upon me -- for what disease is like Alcohol ! -- and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish -- even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper.

One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket ! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.

When reason returned with the morning -- when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch -- I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed.

In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. I had so much of my old heart left, as to be at first grieved by this evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart -- one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is Law, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul to vex itself -- to offer violence to its own nature -- to do wrong for the wrong's sake only -- that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute. One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree; -- hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart; -- hung it because I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offence; -- hung it because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin -- a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it -- if such a thing were possible -- even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God.

On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire. The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself, made our escape from the conflagration. The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair.

I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect, between the disaster and the atrocity. But I am detailing a chain of facts -- and wish not to leave even a possible link imperfect. On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one exception, had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here, in great measure, resisted the action of the fire -- a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. The words "strange!" "singular!" and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven in bas relief upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic cat. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvellous. There was a rope about the animal's neck.

When I first beheld this apparition -- for I could scarcely regard it as less -- my wonder and my terror were extreme. But at length reflection came to my aid. The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house. Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd -- by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames, and the ammonia from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.

Although I thus readily accounted to my reason, if not altogether to my conscience, for the startling fact just detailed, it did not the less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat; and, during this period, there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse. I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and to look about me, among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented, for another pet of the same species, and of somewhat similar appearance, with which to supply its place.

One night as I sat, half stupified, in a den of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object, reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads of Gin, or of Rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some

minutes, and what now caused me surprise was the fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon. I approached it, and touched it with my hand. It was a black cat -- a very large one -- fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast.

Upon my touching him, he immediately arose, purred loudly, rubbed against my hand, and appeared delighted with my notice. This, then, was the very creature of which I was in search. I at once offered to purchase it of the landlord; but this person made no claim to it -- knew nothing of it -- had never seen it before.

I continued my caresses, and, when I prepared to go home, the animal evinced a disposition to accompany me. I permitted it to do so; occasionally stooping and patting it as I proceeded. When it reached the house it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favorite with my wife.

For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but -- I know not how or why it was -- its evident fondness for myself rather disgusted and annoyed. By slow degrees, these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame, and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty, preventing me from physically abusing it. I did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently ill use it; but gradually -- very gradually -- I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence.

What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast, was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home, that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes. This circumstance, however, only endeared it to my wife, who, as I have already said, possessed, in a high degree, that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures.

With my aversion to this cat, however, its partiality for myself seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps with a pertinacity which it would be difficult to make the reader comprehend. Whenever I sat, it would crouch beneath my chair, or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws in my dress, clamber, in this manner, to my breast. At such times, although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by a memory of my former crime, but chiefly -- let me confess it at once -- by absolute dread of the beast.

This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil -- and yet I should be at a loss how otherwise to define it. I am almost ashamed to own -- yes, even in this felon's cell, I am almost ashamed to own -- that the terror and horror with which the animal inspired me, had been heightened by one of the merest chimæras it would be possible to conceive. My wife had called my attention, more than once, to the character of the mark of white hair, of which I have spoken, and which constituted the sole visible difference between the strange beast and the one I had destroyed. The reader will remember that this mark, although large, had been originally very indefinite; but, by slow degrees -- degrees nearly imperceptible, and which for a long time my Reason struggled to reject as fanciful -- it had, at length, assumed a rigorous distinctness of outline. It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name -- and for this, above all, I loathed, and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster had I dared -- it was now, I say, the image of a hideous -- of a ghastly thing -- of the GALLOWS ! -- oh, mournful and terrible engine of Horror and of Crime -- of Agony and of Death !

And now was I indeed wretched beyond the wretchedness of mere Humanity. And a brute beast -- whose fellow I had contemptuously destroyed -- a brute beast to work out for me -- for me a man, fashioned in the image of the High God -- so much of insufferable wo! Alas! neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of Rest any more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone; and, in the latter, I started, hourly, from dreams of unutterable fear, to find the hot breath of the thing upon my face, and its vast weight -- an incarnate Night-Mare that I had no power to shake off -- incumbent eternally upon my heart !

Beneath the pressure of torments such as these, the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates -- the darkest and most evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things and of all mankind; while, from the sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself, my uncomplaining wife, alas! was the most usual and the most patient of sufferers.

One day she accompanied me, upon some household errand, into the cellar of the old building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot, without a groan.

This hideous murder accomplished, I set myself forthwith, and with entire deliberation, to the task of concealing the body. I knew that I could not remove it from the house, either by day or by night, without the risk of being observed by the neighbors. Many projects entered my mind. At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again, I deliberated about casting it in the well in the yard -- about packing it in a box, as if merchandize, with the usual arrangements, and so getting a porter to take it from the house. Finally I hit upon what I considered a far better expedient than either of these. I determined to wall it up in the cellar -- as the monks of the middle ages are recorded to have walled up their victims.

For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely constructed, and had lately been plastered throughout with a rough plaster, which the dampness of the atmosphere had prevented from hardening. Moreover, in one of the walls was a projection, caused by a false chimney, or fireplace, that had been filled up, and made to resemble the rest of the cellar. I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect any thing suspicious.

And in this calculation I was not deceived. By means of a crow-bar I easily dislodged the bricks, and, having carefully deposited the body against the inner wall, I propped it in that position, while, with little trouble, I re-laid the whole structure as it originally stood. Having procured mortar, sand, and hair, with every possible precaution, I prepared a plaster which could not be distinguished from the old, and with this I very carefully went over the new brick-work. When I had finished, I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. The rubbish on the floor was picked up with the minutest care. I looked around triumphantly, and said to myself -- "Here at least, then, my labor has not been in vain."

My next step was to look for the beast which had been the cause of so much wretchedness; for I had, at length, firmly resolved to put it to death. Had I been able to meet with it, at the moment, there could have been no doubt of its fate; but it appeared that the crafty animal had been alarmed at the violence of my previous anger, and forebore to present itself in my present mood. It is impossible to describe, or to imagine, the deep, the blissful sense of relief which the absence of the detested creature occasioned in my bosom. It did not make its appearance during the night -- and thus for one night at least, since its introduction into the house, I soundly and tranquilly slept; aye, slept even with the burden of murder upon my soul!

The second and the third day passed, and still my tormentor came not. Once again I breathed as a freeman. The monster, in terror, had fled the premises forever! I should behold it no more! My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little. Some few inquiries had been made, but these had been readily answered. Even a search had been instituted -- but of course nothing was to be discovered. I looked upon my future felicity as secured.

Upon the fourth day of the assassination, a party of the police came, very unexpectedly, into the house, and proceeded again to make rigorous investigation of the premises. Secure, however, in the inscrutability of my place of concealment, I felt no embarrassment whatever. The officers bade me accompany them in their search. They left no nook or corner unexplored. At length, for the third or fourth time, they descended into the cellar. I quivered not in a muscle. My heart beat calmly as that of one who slumbers in innocence. I walked the cellar from end to end. I folded my arms upon my bosom, and roamed easily to and fro. The police were thoroughly satisfied and prepared to depart.

The glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained. I burned to say if but one word, by way of triumph, and to render doubly sure their assurance of my guiltlessness.

"Gentlemen," I said at last, as the party ascended the steps, "I delight to have allayed your suspicions. I wish you all health, and a little more courtesy. By the bye, gentlemen, this -- this is a very well constructed house." (In the rabid desire to say something easily, I scarcely knew what I uttered at all.) -- "I may say an excellently well constructed house. These walls -- are you going, gentlemen? -- these walls are solidly put together;" and here, through the mere phrenzy of bravado, I rapped heavily, with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brick-work behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom.

But may God shield and deliver me from the fangs of the Arch-Fiend ! No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb! -- by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman -- a howl -- a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the dammed in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation.

Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. For one instant the party upon the stairs remained motionless, through extremity of terror and of awe. In the next, a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb!





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Love is enough: though the World be a-waning,
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark wonder
And this day draw a veil over all deeds pass'd over,
Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not falter;
The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter
These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.

From Love is Enough by William Morris