

SACRIFICE

or

The Daughter of the Sun

by

W. W. STRICKLAND



មេកាព វាបពេភ្និ
 វិមេកា ភ្និស័វមេ

To His Majesty the King of Siam
with the Author's best wishes:

"Our vessels now ascended: and our actors,
As I foretold you, with all spirit and
Are melted into air: with the main
And, like the bascules in the great
The cloud capped tower, the gorges of the
The column of mists, the great plain
You, all that is in heaven, which descends
And like the misty talents of the
The air is now behind the great
As dream the moon on a low hill
Is founded with a heap: The Tomb best."

W. H. Sturtevant Dictionary of
Astronomical Society

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Se non è vero, è ben trovato.

(Italian Proverb)

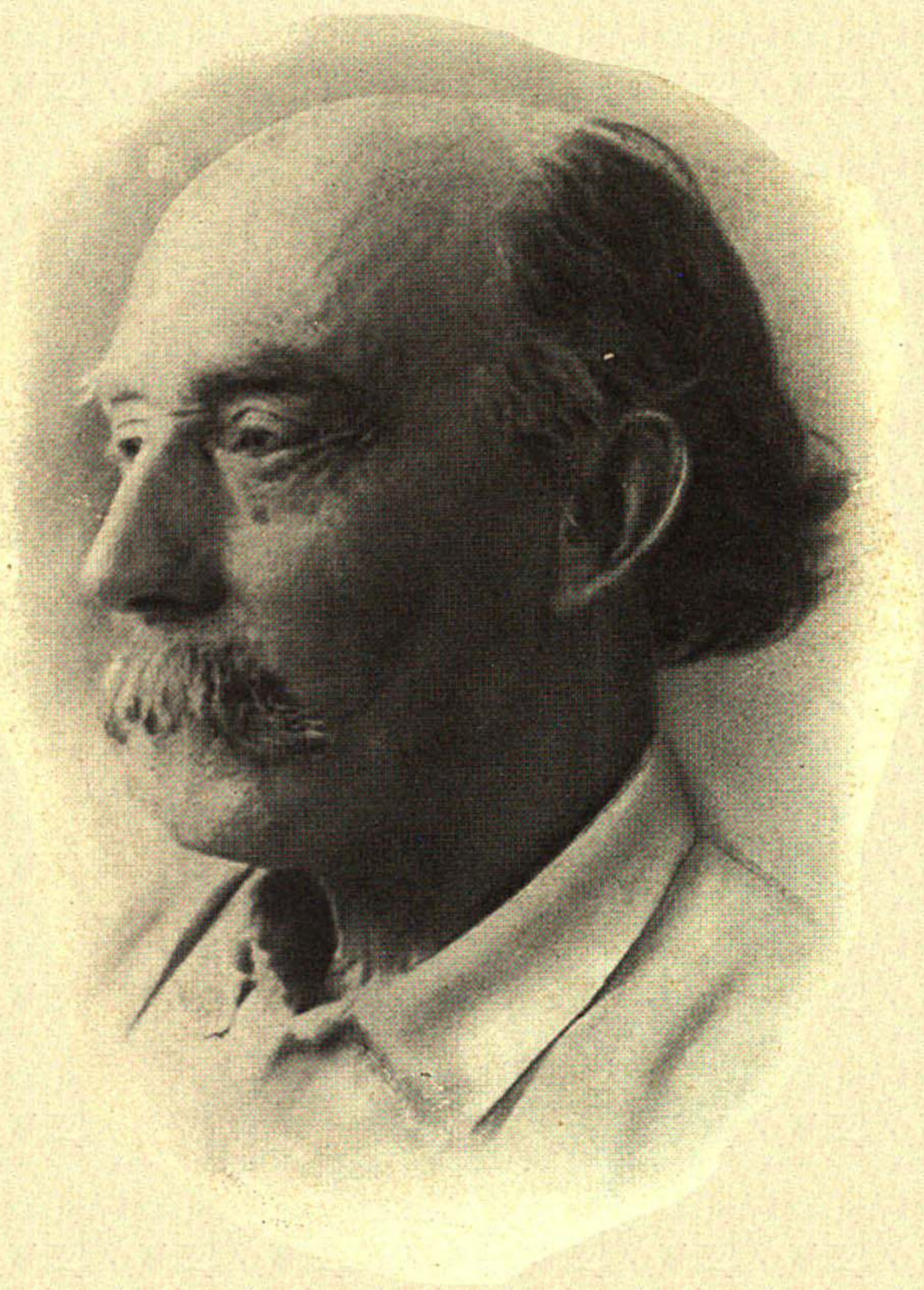
*Without shedding of blood there is no remission
of sin.*

(St. Paul)

*The Son of God goes forth to war
A kingly crown to gain,
His blood-red banner streams afar—
Who follows in his train?*

*Who best can drink his cup of woe
Triumphant over pain,
Who patient bears his cross below—
He follows in his train.*

(Bishop Heber's Hymns)



Walter William Strickland
phot. 1010

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or

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*A Prehistoric Arctic Tragi-Comedy
for Stage and Cinematograph*

by

W. W. STRICKLAND

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Dedicated
to
the late Balgangadhar Tilak
distinguished author of
The Arctic Home of the Vedas

Out of deference to the susceptibilities of the British Empire and its attendant leeches the conclusion of the original Preface in the first edition more in conformity with truth than flattering to British vanity has been omitted.

The design on the cover-page which reproduces the ancient fresco, however, depicting the primitive human sacrifice in its most revolting form, may perhaps be regarded as a not inadequate substitute for the mutilated passage it replaces.

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Time and Period of action indefinite

Scene: The North Pole



DRAMATIC PERSONS

IMMORTALS.—The Daughter of the Sun and Cloud Maidens.

MODERNS.—Egos the bear. Cook. Peary. A nigger boy.

Two Eskimos. A donkey, dogs, and sledge, etc.

ANCIENTS.

1. Mongol-Malays:—

The King Truth's Messenger or Wai-Na-Ming.

Queen Myrtleberry, his wife.

Princess Flower of Love, his daughter.

Lee-Hsien-Ho, his nephew.

Yellow-robed Ministers of Day (primitive Buddhists of an earlier incarnation).

Pages, courtiers, attendants, troops.

2. Negroid-Aryans:—

The King, God's Wrath.

Chief of the Army "Sword of the Lord".

The Prime Minister.

The King's Physician.

The Chief Priest, Hand of Glory.

Orthodox black-robed Priests of Night.

The College of Astrologers and Reforming Priests.

Prosthenos, Head of the Reforming Priests.

Aræus, his younger brother.

Aræus' slave boy.

An officiating Priest.

The first Meriah.

Understrappers, torturers, etc.

Aryo-Negroid populace, relic and charm sellers, etc.

Otsa and Ukko, two common youths, aged 16 and 18 years respectively.

A humble Believer.

A mystical Believer.

A philosophical Believer.

Coryphees. Ephebi, Minions, Hetæræ, etc., of the Meriah's Court of Love. Choir boys. Workmen. Soldiers. Courtiers, etc.

INTRODUCTION

SCENE I

A Pole pointing to the Pole Star, in a vast circle of snow and ice-floes. It is night. The stars circle round the Pole. Aurora borealis effects. Gradually the sun rises and circles round the horizon pallid among the other orbs. It grows lighter.

EGOS THE BEAR (*a heap of white curled round the base of the Pole, stirs, sits on his haunches and wakes up rubbing his eyes*). The same old story, over and over again. How hungry I am. And those bones and shreds of silk always whet my appetite the more at the mere sight of them. If the God of Luck would only bring another one. But Providence only works decennially at the ofttest. And all the seals have abandoned this forlorn hub of the Universe. Better go to sleep again. No, I suppose I must vamp up something idyllic, to greet the rising sun. Ah! I know what! *He takes the skull and two shanks, juggles with them and sings at the same time:—*

Shank up and now a skull,
Shank down and now a skull,
Shank up and now a skull,
Shank down and now a skull.

Such is the wheel of life—to this reduced
That revelled once around the Pole as gay
As seals and dolphins down in Baffin's Bay,
But here with sun and moon und stars on spires
Of living gold involved, through caverned fires
Auroral, charmèd grots that yawned in skies
Of curtained flame on coral-girdled strand

By tufted palms they wove their saraband,
Now 'tis no place to revel in, this frozen disk of leper-
stricken land.

*Continues to juggle with the bones, singing "Shank
up, etc."*

But then the skull was padded, and the shank
Full bloodied, and with blanc-becs budding passions
Could juggle then, as now, in newer fashions,
Our undines: ninety spirals rose and sank
The Lord of Life, o'er gilded revels dank
With Soma juice, and left a tropic night
As balmy as the long resplendent day
They revelled through, till with the purpling light
Those waves of ecstasy, too, ebbed away,
But listen here upon this gelid bank
Of frozen death, here where nor paw nor fin
Save mine e'er thrids the maze of floes that spin
For ever round this life-deserted waste
Yes, hark! again! I must explore this mystery——

(Climbs the Pole)

Two spots of gloom seem crawling through the gloom
From the far-off horizon to their doom.

Better await what shall be and resume

My dormant state. *(Descends and coils himself round
the Pole as before.)*

*Far away to the right is heard "John Brown's Body";
it grows louder: Cook's sledge and those of the two
Eskimos approach slowly from the horizon: they arrive,
descend from their sledges, Cook stands between the two
natives, raises one hand to heaven, and applies the thumb
of the other to the tip of his nose extending the four
remaining fingers.*

COOK. Thanks, praise, and honour to the heavenly
powers—here we are at last—at the North Pole—
Bunkum! How many thousands—nay, tens of thousands
of years must have elapsed, since the foot of man trod
these ice-bound regions, abandoned for so many years

to death and desolation. Yet here where now a frozen ocean can hardly be said to roll, but only toss and moan fretfully under its icy fetters, was once perhaps a tropic land teeming with life and beauty. The aurora, here, it may be, even upon this very spot, once lit up magic scenes of love and mirth, of war, of blood-stained triumph, of hideous religious rites, and superstitious sacrifices, the slowly breaking dawn of the long Polar day woke the same passions that still divide the world and make it half a heaven, and half a hell, only that then the year itself, halved into one long summer's day and one long winter's night the Svatohvid or Cerny bog and Bily bog of the ancient Slav peoples of the Polar world, remirrored the good and evil, the sorry orgy of alternate joy and misery, of liberty and slavery, of love and hate, the crude dualism that our boasted civilization, with all its vaunted science, has never been able to rise above. However, here we are at the North Pole or anywhere else. Bunkum! My head's in a whirl and naturally the North Pole, too, goes spinning round very fast, at any rate here at this meeting place of all the longitudes, terrestrial longbows as they may be called, where the latitudes merge into the mystic number 9, the branches of the tree of good and evil in the primitive Polar garden of Eden, Old Glory of the stars and stripes will certainly not be out of place. Run it up, you fellows! (*The Eskimos do so without disturbing EGOS THE BEAR.*)

They are accommodating fellows, and I'll clear off their train-oil and Hollands in the meantime. (*Sits down and empties the Eskimos' spirit flask and train-oil tins. Sings*):—

“Bunkum! Bunkum! Hallelujah!

As his soul goes marching along.”

Far away to the left, as if in reply to it, is heard “Yankee Doodle”, sung very much out of tune. Only

gradually the words become audible. A black spot appears upon the horizon. As it approaches it is seen to be PEARY. He is riding the extreme posterior extremity of a donkey, and is muffled up in skins. He wears a helmet and auto goggles. The helmet is adorned with a pair of cow horns from which a large placard is suspended across his shoulders on which is printed:

PEAR'S SOAP ALONE IS GENUINE.
ITS USE IS WORLD WIDE.

Captain Peary telegraphs: I have used your soap at the North Pole and found it excellent. Though there were 53° below zero centigrade, and not a drop of water to be had anywhere, it produced a perfect lather. I shaved off a stiff beard with it in two minutes and a half. Signed, *Captain C. W. Peary*, official discoverer of the North Pole.

Behind the donkey runs a nigger boy: he is prodding it with a goad and singing to the tune of Yankee Doodle or any other:

*"Farewell, farewell to thee, scarab's own daughter!
So murmured a Peary beneath the blue sea,
No pearl ever gloomed in its shell in the water
So dusky and foul as thy spirit in thee!"*

PEARY (*suspiciously*). What's that you're singing behind my back, you young blackguard. If I could turn round in these togs which I can't—they're frozen too tight besides—I'd thrash and wallop you into a thousand jelly-fishes. What do you mean by hinting that I'm a scarab's daughter, you young spider-monkey!

BOY. Because, most gracious lord and master, the scarab takes a piece of mire and rolls it into a globe like our earth; and is not master the scarab's own daughter, when he goes about all over the surface of it, even to these desolate solitudes of ice and snow?

PEARY (*still suspiciously*). Humph! a very lame explanation. Just take care. How, for example, dare you call my soul dusky and foul, when it is limpid and luminous as the sun at midday?

BOY (*to himself*). I said "smoky a soul" but the cold has deafened him. (*To Peary*) Oh, generosity! Oh! bright star of heaven! but I called it a pearl of great price: for are not smoky pearls the most valuable?

PEARY. I'll smoke you, you smoked haddock.

BOY (*to himself*). Smoke me indeed. I'll smoke him and moke him too directly, the brutal bullying foul-mouthed nigger-fresser.

PEARY. What are you muttering to yourself, young smudge? And again what do you mean by calling my spirit dusky and foul? Is it a nigger too?

BOY. A high compliment, my lord, lurks in those phrases. For are you not for ever dinning into our ears, that your western civilization is the only real civilization—and is it not all smut and smoke? You fly with the wind over land and sea—like the firehag of the steppes—in whirlwinds of smut and filth. Your motors and motor cars are worse still; your manufacturing towns, huge slums of dirt, crime, and brutality worst of all.

PEARY. Well, you need'nt sneer, young whipper-snapper, you and yours have never produced any civilization at all.

BOY. No! By the Egyptian. We've done without it.

PEARY. By my leathery grandfather! I'll give it you, young eel-skin. I won't hear our Christian civilization—the only one the world has ever seen worth speaking of—reviled by a young eel-skin. Come here, I'll tan some religion, flog some reverence into you. I'll thrash and lather you into porpoise-hide bootlaces, young blasphemer! (*Tries to get off the donkey but being frozen tight to it, cannot.*)

BOY. Now I'll moke the—— (to Peary) Master is all goodness and condescension to a poor nigger boy! (*Prods the donkey violently with the goad. Peary is flung off. The boy throws down the goad, runs over the ice and disappears beyond the line of the horizon. The donkey is turned into a block of ice.*)

PEARY (*picking himself up and catching sight of Cook*). By all my chilblains! Somebody is here before me. And blow me if it is'nt that blanky piece of bleached cauliflower! I thought I and the Missus had frozen all competition out of him, on our last Polar trip in the Sarah Jane. By all the walrusses of the Polar seas! It is the same. The very samest of the samest same. I must get rid of him. Let me reflect. (*Facing Cook pompously*) How dare you, lying shadow of a man, how dare you trespass on my property—my North Pole—of which I have long been the officially appointed discoverer. Were you but the merest shadow of a shadow I'd prosecute you for trespassing on my—on Government property. But let me tell you that after all you are not even the shadow of a shadow, you have in fact no objective reality at all. These high Polar latitudes affect the brain—and you are merely a hallucination of my own.

COOK. Long bows and latitudes! They're all the same. If I am but a hallucination of your brain, may it not also be a hallucination of the same brain, that you have reached the Pole at all? And for that matter, have I not as much right to say that you are a hallucination of my brain, as you to say that I am of yours?

PEARY. But if you are a mere hallucination of my brain, how dare you insinuate that I am not at the North Pole?

COOK. But if you are merely a hallucination of my brain, how dare you pretend to doubt that I am there as well?

THE TWO ESKIMOS (*coming up to Cook and wringing their hands*). Oh! most gracious and lovingest of masters and mankind! We can stand 100 degrees below zero but not metaphysics! Life is sweet even to us poor Eskimos. We leave your dogs and sledges. May we meet again in Heaven. (*They move slowly off in their sledges, weeping tears in the form of hailstones. These falling on the ground enlarge to the size of duck's eggs and then explode in puffs of steam.*)

PEARY (*stamping with his foot*). I tell you again you are a mere hallucination of my brain. Avaunt! vain spectre!

COOK. I tell you your brain is far too addled even to hatch a hallucination out of it.

PEARY. But the more addled a person's brain, the more real his hallucination is to him.

COOK. So, then, I am real to you after all.

PEARY (*with sour precision*). Yes, a real hallucination.

COOK. But who ever heard of a real hallucination. It is a contradiction in terms.

PEARY. That's just what I have been saying, all along. You are a mere contradiction in terms and have no objective reality.

COOK. But if my objective non-entity is the result of your addle-headedness, must not for the same reason, your idea that this is the North Pole, be to you at least an equally real hallucination, and equally a contradiction in terms and therefore also possess no objective reality?

PEARY (*angrily*). Come, shut up this casuistry and hair-splitting. You are a hallucination of my brain. That's the long and short of it. And I have a right to do what I like with you. Come clear out of this. (*Cook does not speak.*)

PEARY (*with growing indignation*). Come, clear out, I tell you. Trot . . . Trab, trab — off with you. Evade.

Tramp! Unofficial vagabound. Foot-pad. Hallucination! Idea faker! (*Cook does not move.*)

PEARY (*seizing the fallen goad and running Cook through with it*). There: now pretend that you are not a mere hallucination of my brain. (*Cook falls and dies, his blood stains the snow. His body turns into a number of Florence flasks. They stagger on to their necks, then rise into the air like miniature balloons and there explode. The noise causes the dogs with the sledge to run off and disappear beyond the horizon.*)

PEARY. At any rate he won't interfere any more with my monopoly of this great discovery. True, any other spot in the Arctic circle would have done just as well. But how the mischief am I to get back again?

(EGOS THE BEAR *sniffs the blood in his sleep and wakes up; he sidles round the North Pole; pointing with converging paws at the horns on Peary's head.*)

EGOS. Takoot! Takoot! Coui! Coui! What a hornerable piece of Billingsgate to be fumbling about my North Pole! Well, after all there is an all-wise, all-seeing Providence—a decennial, *if not a decent one at any rate*—there is something beyond our mere gross appetites and base material perceptions. Yes, after all Providence has been very good to me. Shall I disdain his gracious loving kindness? Shall I repay his divine benevolence with sour ingratitude? (*Comes still nearer to PEARY sniffing him.*)

PEARY (*seeing EGOS THE BEAR, throwing up his hands and as if fascinated*). Oh! Stars and Stripes! Oh! Glory never to be realized! Oh! leathery grandfather! I come.

EGOS. Yes, down my red-lane. (*Seizes PEARY, tears him to pieces, and devours him.*)

EGOS (*seats himself, flaps his stomach with his forepaws and begins smiling a tender sort of smile. First it is*

a very little thing. Then it grows bigger and bigger). There must have been something very stimulating about this last one. I feel a glow of warmth and enthusiasm diffusing itself through all my interior, just as in the happy times when I used to feast upon drunken Lapps. They have become very rare nowadays. It is a sort of diffusive expansiveness as though I were smirking and simpering away into a kind of eternal ubiquity. After all it is the most natural thing in the world after a good dinner, so simple, so very simple. But somehow I cannot keep the thread of my reasoning which is curious, a certain incoherence seems to be stealing over me. What was I thinking of? Ah! limited liability companies—but that was not the real thing. What I really meant to say was:

“He rode a red-charger o’er cream-coloured dunes.

And ate up six comets and forty-nine moons.”

Still that is only merely exoteric. It is not the real thing: the core of everything. The real thing is that my individuality is diminishing and my universality is becoming greater. Ah! now I have it. Yes! what I really meant to say was: Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Takoot! Takoot!

While EGOS has been speaking his body has been gradually expanding, until it covers the whole of the Polar landscape. As he utters the last words, the grin into which his mouth has expanded cuts both sides of the horizon. As it does so, the rift widens, from all sides the ice-floes begin to flake off and break to pieces repeating the sound Takoot! Takoot! in myriadfold echoes. The sun whirls, descending rapidly, round the sky, hardly grazes the horizon and disappears: the aurora shoots forth on all sides up to the zenith in floods of blue, green, and crimson light, in every form of dazzling magnificence. Under the play of light, the falling drops and fragments of ice from the melting icebergs, appear like showers of living rubies, sapphires, and emeralds. Then the sea

whirls and rushes away, a vast devouring flood in all directions. Then a dense mist arises and conceals the contours of everything. Gradually the auroral display subsides and there is darkness for a few minutes. Then the mist turns pink, pinker, bright rosy red, and gradually whirls away as if under the influence of its own centrifugal force.—As it clears off the scene is perceived to have completely transformed itself. Instead of the Pole, a Damara pine towers heavenward, all around a subtropic vegetation of bananas, palm-lilies, tree-ferns, slender palms, Norfolk island pines, and araucarias raise their massive crowns and tapering networks of foliage high into the air. Large rodents, marsupials, elephants, rhinoceroses, antelopes, and other tropical wild animals are seen moving among the stems and large leaves of the forest of endogens and gymnosperms.—The sun blazes in full splendour among the boles of the trees, a few degrees above the horizon, with a brilliant midday effulgence.

SCENE II

All in dumb show. A rustling is heard in the Damara pine. Then a sloth descends: by its gestures it displays great anxiety. Shifting hither and thither, first to one side and then to the other: then it places one ear to the ground at one side and listens, then the other ear to the ground at the other side and again listens. Then it rises on its hind legs and leans against the trunk of the Damara pine. By wild cries of alarm and frantic gestures it warns the wild beasts of some coming danger and urges them to take to flight. The wild animals do not neglect the warning, but fly across the stage and disappear in all directions. The sloth then climbs the Damara pine and again betakes itself to slumber. Now the crackling of a footstep is heard to the right, and a young Malay of statuesque beauty naked but for a bright-coloured loin-cloth appears on the scene. He approaches the Damara

pine and worships it. He listens. Footsteps are heard approaching from the left. Then he conceals himself behind the Damara pine. Presently footsteps approaching from the left are heard, and another handsome but duskier savage of a Negro-Aryan type enters. He carries a spear tipped with a rude flint spear-head. He is naked except for a narrow loin-cloth passed between his legs and fastened in front and behind to a cord carried round his loins. He peers about, walking cautiously round the Damara tree. The Malay avoids him by doing the same. Then he changes his direction and they meet, confronting one another in front of the pine-tree. In dumb show each exhibits his surprise and indignation at the presence of the other. Both become more and more animated in their gestures and at length begin to fight. The sloth descends from the Damara tree. They stand amazed and disconcerted and for a while desist from attacking one another. The sloth attempts by gestures to pacify them. He partially succeeds. In the meantime the footsteps of many new-comers are heard approaching. Hosts of Malay savages of both sexes, with their children now swarm in from the right, similar to the first Malay in their dress, arms, and general appearance. Hosts of Aryo-Negroid savages, similar to the first one appear in like manner from the left, and gesticulate violently against the Malays who do the same. At length the two races begin to fight. The fight continues for some time, numbers fall on both sides, and their blood reddens the ground. While this has been going on the sun has been circling round nearer and nearer to the horizon. At length it disappears and the wild tremors of the aurora borealis light up the combatants who still continue their work of mutual extermination. At length, even the flames and streamers of the aurora die away and almost total darkness covers the scene. The scud of the flying feet of the survivors is heard dying away in the distance, and their dusky figures scarce visible in the starlight are seen disappearing

amongst the palms and araucarias of the tropical forest landscape. There is silence for a moment save for the rustling of the wild beasts who have approached stealthily and upon the final disappearance of the surviving combatants crawl upon the scene and are dimly perceived devouring the bodies of the dead. The crunching of the bones and the lapping of the blood are also heard. Then the beasts of prey steal off. Dead silence prevails everywhere and a dense white mist rises and covers everything.

SCENE III

First appearance of the DAUGHTER OF THE SUN. She explains the foregoing occurrences and also the significance of the impending scenical change.

On one side wreaths of white, on the other of lurid cloud form out of the mist. As the music of the chorale is played, first piano then crescendo, the clouds transform themselves into cloud maidens, dusky to the left, fair to the right of the spectator.

CHORUS (*right*). Ever in the light,
Ever in the might
Of the boundless waves of ether,
Through the azure vaults of heaven,
Through the gates of pearl and gold.

CHORUS (*left*). Ever in the gloom,
Ever in the womb
Of the typhoon and the thunder
Where the rainbow spans the moonrise,
Where the lightning rends the fold.

CHORUS (*full*). Do we print our mirth and madness
As we blend or drift asunder
O'er the flower-bespangled valley,
O'er the crater's gorge, or dally
By the sunlit alp, or rally
Round the charnel and the tomb.

The CHIEF OF THE CLOUD MAIDENS *recites*:—

Oh! thou who present art our joy and death,
For in thy presence we dissolve and die
And far away our yearning and desire
For still we pant for that ecstatic fire
Which present is our doom.—Oh! come again,
Fair Daughter of the Sun! for e'en to-day
In this dull end-all of a dying world
Where form and things organic are the last
Faint pulse of life, whose footprints star the way
Of progress to the ice-bound goal of all,
Eternal nothingness—that has no end,
Thou dost reveal thyself in Arctic lands
Or seated on some outcrop ice-veneered
Of rock Plutonic, or beside the wave,
Or where, before the summer dawns, the marsh
Thrills emerald—dost reveal thyself to those
Whose being, attuned to this magnetic world
That circles round the Pole, divines the forms
Of things unfocussed by the living lens:
And if to these it is reserved that they
Embracing thee enkindle to thy flame
Of ardent passion, all their life becomes
A roseate dream, the fairest bride is theirs,
Their flocks and herds increase and multiply,
Their tents are full of children and of dogs.
No ice-floe breaks beneath their feet, the seals
Crowd to their spear, and all the winter through
The pinch of hunger gnaws not at their gate:
But if inactive to thy magic warmth
Self-centred they but freeze in thine embrace
Thy light-embodied form unweaves, they stare
Aghast in chilly wonder to behold
Their flocks of rein-deer far away transformed
To blocks of ice, wide-scattered on the waste,
And if they wed at all their wives are shrews,
Their children imps, misfortune dogs their lives,

In desperation, they betake themselves
To magic arts and sacrificial rites,
And gloomy rituals, hoping thus to win
In other worlds, perchance, the crown of bliss
Their selfish pride has robbed them of in this:
Thus disillusioned—who believe themselves
Above delusion—sourly through their lives
They creep to death, regretting to the last
Life's ebbing tides, still hoping against hope
To feel it blossom even at the close.
But ah! She comes! I feel the inmost threads
Of being unweave, sense flickers to its end
And thought and consciousness and self dissolve.
Being's chain is broken: dawns, unfold again
The rose of nothingness beyond all dawns,
Beyond all ecstasies of time and space!

Towards the close of the speech, the voice of the speaker grows fainter, and the forms of the cloud maidens also gradually resume the appearance of wreaths of white and dusky clouds. At the same time the circular space between the two hemicircles is filled and glows with intense warm yellow sunlight which as the last contours of the cloud wreath dissolve away embodies itself in the form of the DAUGHTER OF THE SUN. Her body encircled by gauzy drapery is of golden sunlight: her locks of flowing gold, round her head is a rainbow crown, she holds a spindle of amber and spins a skein of gold. She advances and recites the Prologue.

PROLOGUE

1. Matter and light are dependent existences:
Matter eliminate, light is impossible:
Life is an echo of light in a universe
Forged of unrest and illusion.

Gather all matter, enkindle a hecatomb
Till it expand a vast Titan embracing all,
Life is impossible, light is impossible
Lost in a vast conflagration.

Light is impossible: when not an eye or brain
There can evolve to behold it and ether it-
Self is ablaze, nor one arrowy pulse of light
Thrills through its flaming abysses.

Life is impossible: only a universe
Sifted in orb ablaze, planet and interspace
This chill as ice, for no matter enkindles it,
That with its ocean and atmosphere

Cooled by their littleness, harbour the lamp of life,
Flickering only along the thin edge of a
Limit of heat of an infinite subtlety,
Worn by the friction of ages.

Just as a Thermopyle's current electrical
Wakeneth only if linking a tropic o-
asis and ice-floe, an ocean's hot eye and the
Frost of its sunless abysses.

Such as I am ye are all: but ephemeral
Motes of a sunbeam: a glistening pellicle
Casing a planet embracing it all, the red
Rain of its life and illusions:

Rainbow illusions, the web and the woof of its
Motion organic, and, filmier, fleetinger,
Fonder illusion, the brain's phosphorescences,
Flickering over its marshland.

2. Only where its equatorial belt embraces tropic ocean
Sweltering jungle, earth in rank profusion pours a
teeming life,

There the sunlight moulds to its own pulses of
symmetric motion
Forms organic, beast or human—and their close
perpetual strife
Strengthens nerve and muscle, harmonizes form and
colour, blends
Individual and surrounding, and the sunlight's art
extends.
Tropic lands are, too, the forges where their vulcans
now as then
Forge the fairest, the most various and the future
forms of men.
For 'tis there the forms of life exuberant burst forth,
creations
Straight from life's own source—the sunlight; North-
land's are but adaptations
Shorn and whittled down to brave its death, expunged
degenerations
Only thus grotesqued and garbled, fit to bear its
harsh privations
Stunted, twisted, like the storm-swept olive on bare
cliffs enrooted
Gnarled in thought and form and feeling, such are
Northland's tribes embruted
These to Southland, thus distorted, and its equatorial
bands,
Crowding eager and voracious to devour the fertile
lands,
Only court a worse damnation, to its climes and suns
unsuited
And the sunlight, what dull Northland froze, unplastic
doubly brands.
Whale and walrus are the forecast of creation's last
chill links
When the warmth of earth shall vanish and its sun
of being sinks

Northern ethic, northern fashion are degenerate forms
the same

Evolution through privation—pinched and starved
—a dying flame!

3. Of lower forms of life the series started
In tropic lands that form and grace imparted
And long ago when human life in teeming
Abundance welled where tropic suns were gleaming,
The same befell, as various tribes contended
Grew shapelier 'neath the light, divided, blended.
But two main streams of human life descended
In evolution's course: the orang-outang
With rounded brow and brown of body swang
Through sun-swept glades and ever eastward drifted:
With these the small-nosed tribes Malayan hang
Imparented: but forests, heavenward lifted,
Of deepest gloom, where night her reign imposed,
O'er Afric inlands, other forms enclosed,
The beetle-browed gorilla there secluded,
Black as the shadows of his woodland, brooded
And Aryo-Negroid tribes as swarthy, nosed
And oval skulled, his kindred, roved and warred,
And offspring sacrificed to gods abhorred,
Roasting their infants in their brazen hells,
The maws of idol-gods and flaming Baals.
4. Till hotter round that fiery zone the springs
Now circle yearly: each new season brings
A fierier void than those their ravenous Baals
Engulphed their infants in: the Scorpion stings
All space aloft: the parching solstice flails
Ensanguined fields, the russet harvest quails
Before the flaming whirlwind, through the vine's
Shred leafage all the red-hot desert hails:
All life is palsied: vegetation pines;
The cactus flames a torch; the rosined tines

Of fir and cypress blaze to ink-blue skies
And fierier than the stars the foliage shines,
And northward still the conflagration flies,
The ice-cap bursts in volleying echoes, rise
The tropic forest's gloomy cupolas
Lianaed walls, and palm-wove canopies.
Then to that northern world, now tropic, roll
From blasted glebe and desiccated shoal,
The equatorial people's rallying waves
Centripetal about a sweltering Pole
Surging impetuous there tremendous raves
Their racial warfare, till on countless graves
Mongol and Aryo-Negroid, built, appear
Of reason's sons, and superstition's slaves
Two rival States, in opposition sheer
And sharp divided, that on godly fear
And sacrificial horror founded, this
Framed but of homely love and pity's tear.
More strident grew with years th' antithesis
'Twixt sacramental hate and modest bliss.
As bloodier grew the murderous rites of those
And milder the domestic life of these:
Until to shield their State from reason's foes,
The bloodstained Negroid fanatics, arose
A mighty wall with mantling cornice-crowned
Guarding the lotus land's divine repose
Of murderous hate and barbarous rites the bound.

5. My task is ended: of the bloodstained past
Do light and ether records hold, aghast
At that dead palimpsest, that lifeless wings
On light's vibrations through all space and things,
Like the concentric eddies where a stone
On some still lake by angry hand is thrown.

These by my magic art I here evoke:
Time's curtain's lifted, as his phantom spoke
Rolls backward, and before your late-born eyes

Is bodied forth the primal sacrifice.
Time with his countless æons breaks and flies;
Once more the Meriah revels, bleeds, and dies;
Once more the dark-robed priests their hymns intone
In gorier triumph—but how like your own!
And for your benefit once more repeat
Their long lost action's tragi-comic suite.
Farewell! Life's light-wove tissues disentwine
And only space and nothingness are mine!

*The DAUGHTER OF THE SUN vanishes: the golden
background of heaven melts away and reveals the first
scene of the prehistoric action.*

ACT I

THE FIRST MERIAH SACRIFICE

SCENE I

The MERIAH is discovered garlanded with roses and robed. He is a thick-set, statuesque, handsome, and beardless youth of about 22 years of age. His robes are purple and he wears a golden crown. Round him is a bevy of odalisques, courtesans, pages, and youths, exhibiting every form of dusky but seductive beauty. There are tables loaded with fruits and delicacies and finely chased vases full of every sort of wine. The space is listed round behind the throne of the Meriah and at the sides and hung with wreaths of flowers chiefly red and white. Behind the lists is seen the dense and gloomy foliage of the tropical forest. It is about nine o'clock of the day when the sun reaches the highest point in the arctic heaven. In fact midsummer or midday.

MERIAH:—

Our revels draw toward their destined end,
And soon this body, lulled these many months,
In softest ecstasies of love's delights,
That thrilled to every touch of blended forms,
And knew no limits to its trance of joy,
Nor any forms of union left untried,
Must doff the crown of roses for the thorns,
The sceptre for the hyssop and the goad,
And scourged and bleeding toil the ninety rounds
Of the long spiral that so many mocked
And spat upon, have watered with their tears,
To the dark platform and the shadowy fane

Where at a single blow this head must fall,
By the black priest of darkness stricken off.
Who putting on the cristed one—my fell
Shall swagger down in glory, masked in blood,
Dancing lasciviously before the bier
That bears my carcass, which must furnish forth
The holy mass, the sacrificial feast,
Ate solemnly by all our noblest ones:
And so redeem the sun from night's dread womb
And bribe the dragon of abysmal gloom
To set him free and send him back to us
When the six months of darkness have run out.

A GANYMEDE:—

Oh! kingly youth, let's revel to the last!

MERIAH:—

All is but dust and mockery. Death must come
Whether in youth's gay sunshine or old age:
'Tis but a moment past when either ends.
Ha! then let's parody my fate to be
In one jest more, with flowers and blood bedight
And axe and maiden's neck. Ho! Ganymede,
My most lascivious, loosest, lankiest love,
Stand forth and take this golden axe—aye thus:
Ye others bring the block: you now go round
Amongst our sirens, thus and thus again.
Lo! There the axe-head turns to her I choose.
The roundest-limbed, with swelling hips and breasts
And fullest lips, that oft have drained my life
Quick! hale her to our judgment seat. Prepare:
Bend down the buxom neck. Wed the full breast
Close to the block and with thy golden axe
Chop off the dainty head of crisp short curls,
That I may glory in the spouting blood
And link myself with death before I die.
Ha! ha! ha! ha! Now things go merrily.

By means of a play of mirrors the Ganymede in appearance strikes off the head of the stooping girl and the

blood appears to spout forth. In reality it issues from the golden axe-head, which is hollow. The MERIAH flings himself upon the girl and they roll together in the throes of love, while the others shower garlands and roses upon them. After the orgy they rise to their feet and the girl lifts a golden vase of wine above her head.

GIRL (*singing in a kind of recitative; the others then join in chorus*):—

Fill the cup and lift it high; red the wine and clear
'Tis the Meriah's blood we quaff—death the 'guerdon
dear.

Raise the shout and loudly laugh, 'tis his sun of life
we quaff,

Let the ribald jest run round, like a satyr ivy-crowned,
Like the sins that wanton round through the fulsome
year.

GIRLS (*in chorus*):—

Sound the music loud and strong, let the whirling dance
Let the wild lascivious song, opium-like entrance
Heart and brain, 'tis not for long, soon the red blood-
thirsty throng

Shall the victim hoot and wrong, armed with barb and
lance.

The orgy continues with increasing frenzy accompanied by a wild macabre music in crescendo, which develops into a saraband, this gradually dies away in fainter and fainter minor strains. As it does so the face of the MERIAH grows stiff and cadaverous. He rises and speaks as if in a trance.

MERIAH:—

The thirst of life my soul forsaking,
Come, endless sleep that has no waking:
If endless sleep be not awaking.

The rafters fall, earth, sea, and air are quaking,
The night of nights, the death of deaths is breaking,
The endless night of nights, that has no waking.

The year and a day is past, is past,
And the moon of revels; the last, the last
Sweet, saddest day, and I gaze aghast
Into its empty goblet, vast
As the year's abyss, and the winter's pall.

A GIRL:—

They are coming to take thee. I hear the call
Of the droning horn, and the trumpets brawl.

MERIAH:—

Think of my stumbling agonies
Under the goad and the scourge, the roar
Of drum and tom-tom to drown my cries,
And the crown of thorns, and the breaking eyes
And the tears of blood and the feet footsore
In the death-trance procession. Oh! once more
The rose-crowned chalice, and one kiss more.

(They carouse again, but briefly.)

GIRLS:—

Hark! hark! They come. The bridegroom's at the door,
Thy bridegroom death. Adieu! sweet revelries.
Thine hour is come, the hour of sacrifice.

Enter the Priests of Night. HAND OF GLORY is at the head of them. They are dressed in long black robes, much like English clergymen, and wear a head-gear something like the polos of the modern Greek church. They are accompanied by a number of strapping dark Aryo-Negroid youths, dressed in red loin clothes and each carrying a heavy scourge, with lashes of raw plaited hide.

HAND OF GLORY *(in a tone of mocking feigned reverence bowing himself before the Meriah):—*

Most Gracious Majesty, we come to rase
Your sacred head of these unseemly gauds,
That crown of gold and roses, silken robes,
And necklaces of flowers engarlanding
Your gracious presence, whose bright sanctity

Has little need of such vile earthly gauds
Being destined to celestial happiness.

He rises, claps his hands, and changes his tone, addressing the torturers.

Ho! Strapping youths, go! Strip him to the skin.
They seize the Meriah and tear off his royal finery with cruel and brutal violence.

HAND OF GLORY:—

Here! Take this crown of thorns to heaven him with!
UNDERSTRAPPERS (*mockingly, as they plant the crown of thorns upon his head*):—

We crown him! Crown him! Crown him!
Crown him Lord of all!

HAND OF GLORY:—

These rags will serve in place of royal robes,
His silks and samets for a covering
To hide his sacred nakedness—this reed
Place in his hand, the sceptre of his power.

(Looks round)

But where are all his laughing courtesans
And boyish minions, like the butterflies
At even, or the fire-flies at the dawn
Has all the kittle cattle vanished
And left him in his hour of agony
Stript naked and alone? It so appears.
Then forward, lads: close round your gracious king
And be not churls and niggards with the lash,
First to the altar of the night and day god!

They troop out: the torturers surrounding the MERIAH goading, lashing, and spitting upon him. The priests bring up the rear singing solemn hymns.

SCENE II

Before the Cerny bog and Bily bog or Janus of the prehistoric Polar world. Crowds of all ages and sexes are grouped around it, eagerly awaiting the coming of

the MERIAH. It is a rude idol with two heads three-quarters back to back. That facing to the left is of rough black porphyry. A large red tongue lolls from the coarse mouth, the lap is hollowed to receive the victim's blood. That facing to the right is yellow, round, and with round staring eyes to imitate the sun. It is well forward in a clearing surrounded by palms, bananas, and semi-tropical forest-trees.

UKKO (*a youth of 18 going behind another and placing his hands on his eyes*):—

Guess who it is that clasps you from behind.

OTSA (*a boy of 16*):—

Ukko! 'tis you. I know by your hand's smell.
What rapture! In a moment he'll be here,
And he's a sleek and comely youth this time,
This Meriah full of blood and lusty life
After his royal year and love's full cup.
Last time I nearly fainted with delight
To see the trembling victim forced to kneel,
And then the understrappers girdled red,
Raise the sharp lash of thick rawhide, and flail him.
And oh! his screams, commingling with the thuds
Of the rawhide, and what a river ran
Red as their loin cloths, down the cringing vale
Of his sleek supple spine. Oh! I'm beside myself
To think that in a minute he'll be here
And all the joy again. Hark! There he comes,
Pity the rite comes only once a year.

UKKO:—

But do you know what? They, th' astrologers,
In fact my brother is an acolyte,
Within the sacred precincts of their college,
Predict a special danger to the sun
In this year's winter-night; and to appease
The dragon of the abyss, and bribe the orb,
That is our life and being, safe once more

From his destructive clutches, they declare
Another Meriah must be sacrificed
Just as the apple of the Tree of Life
Falls from the crystal vault of heaven, or else
No second sun will rise again to gild
Our fields with corn, but endless night will quench
The breath of life in all that lives and breathes.

OTSÄ:—

Just three months hence. Oh! I am mad with joy
And expectation. But who for three months' revel
Will dedicate his youth and virile hopes?
Such scanty pittance e'en a slave would scorn.

UKKO:—

The Lord of Love, that doth preserve our State,
Propitious to such signal piety
Will not desert his people, but inspire
Some youth of blameless life to offer self
And earthly hopes, in altruistic faith,
Upon the altar of the nation's good
Our God himself the victim will provide.

The Priests of Night enter in a compact body; then surrounded by the understrappers, the MERIAH; a crowd of people, chiefly half-naked boys and youths throng behind. They sing mockingly:—

Oh! happy band of pilgrims
As onward we do tread,
With him who is our captain,
With him who is our head.

The priests and understrappers force the Meriah to kneel before the idol, goading and torturing him. He screams with agony and raises his hands and eyes to heaven in vain imploring pity. The understrappers strip off his rags and begin to flog him mercilessly.

UKKO. Look now they're forcing him to kneel. What screams!

OTSÄ. See how the lashes flash! How the dark blood spurts out!

MERIAH (*groaning with agony*). Oh! I cannot bear it!
I cannot bear it!

UKKO. I feel as though I were all wolf inside!

BOTH BOYS. Hurrah! I'm mad with joy. There, now, it's coming! How slab and thick and red, like some dark snake.

HAND OF GLORY, *the high priest, approaches, stoops, places his hand above the buttocks of the victim, in the hollow of the back to catch the streaming blood, takes it to the idol and pours it into the receptacle for the purpose, at the same time smearing the tongue and mouth of the black head of the idol with some of it.*

HAND OF GLORY:—

Oh! Mighty Lord of gloom, that each half year
Holds in thy lap the apple of the sun,
On whom alone our Tree of Life depends
To burgeon forth with each returning spring,
Accept the blood we offer, Lord, as first fruits,
And earnest of the greater sacrifice
But now to be completed there aloft.
Be pitiful, and let the sun return
These nine moons hence, as has been heretofore,
That still our human life may, too, run round
Its wonted circle, and still furnish forth
The sacrificial blood that is thy due.

(To the understrappers)

Now hale him to the cristing place to be
There cristed with the sacrificial horns
That symbolize at once the horned moon
Which is our hope and comfort in the night,
And the two rays of the departing sun.

The understrappers drag the MERIAH from the altar, and goad him forward. He goes a few paces, staggers and then falls.

PEOPLE:—

An evil omen! and this year of all
The years, when such grave dangers are foretold
As gathering round our sun of life, the while
He sojourns in the gloomy halls of death
A thousand maledictions! Torture him!
And let his blood anneal the coming danger
So only may we counteract this woe.

ONE OF THE CROWD:—

Here is a fish-hook. Drive it through his navel.
That will avert the omen.

AN UNDERSTRAPPER:—

Give it here.

He takes the fish-hook and drives it deep into the Meriah's navel. The Meriah's shrieks of agony rend the skies.

THE TWO BOYS:—

What shrieks! What joy! What madness! Oh! I know
Not what I am, such rapture thrills my body!

HAND OF GLORY:—

Away with him! Off to the cristing place!

The Meriah procession of priests and red-girded youths go out. Some of the people follow chanting:—

Oh! happy band of pilgrims
As onward we do tread,
With him who is our captain,
With him who is our head.

Others of the people remain. Pedlars move about among the latter. One has images of the Meriah made of linseed compacted with blood, some about three feet in height, others smaller. Another has sacred wafers stamped with his head. A third is offering for sale handkerchiefs with his face miraculously stamped upon them.

1st PEDLAR. Come buy, good people. Here are Meriahs for you! Made of linseed compacted with children's blood. Warranted to bring good luck. Married couples, put one near your bed and you'll have handsome twins. Farmers, set one up in your fields to guarantee a double crop of good ripe corn.

2nd PEDLAR. These handkerchiefs were sprinkled with the blood of last year's Meriah, and miraculously his face has stamped itself upon the web. Come, buy, they're sovereign against colds.

3rd PEDLAR. These wafers, also with his imaged head of holy meal kneaded in his life's blood are indispensable for all who yearn for love's delights and would avoid love's risks. Come buy! Come buy!

Ukko lingers by the pedlar. The younger boy tugs his robe.

OTSA:—

Come Ukko, leave these memories of the past
Or we shall miss the present's realler joy,
The climax of the sacrifice. Come! Come!

(They go out. The scene changes.)

SCENE III

The Cristing—The Hill of Agony—The Sacrifice

In great part in dumb show

The Meriah is seen being dragged before an altar which is adorned with the skulls of men, aurochs, and other animals. HAND OF GLORY is seen in the act of removing the crown of thorns from the Meriah's head. He then binds on in place of it a pair of cow's horns, in reality made of cardboard.

HAND OF GLORY:—

So is our gay young Meriah cristed finely
And ready for his gory sacrifice.

(To the understrappers)

And you, brave youths, assist him up the hill's
Slow winding spirals, with lash and goad
And let his blood go splash! splash! all the way
And drip! drip! drip! Here is the axe, good priest,
(To officiating priest)

As sharp and bright as God's own stars in heaven,
Take it and may one blow bring luck to all,
And send you down tripudiating masked
In the red reeking hide, that still my hand
Delights to paddle with, unflayed, alive.

(Paddles with his hand about the Meriah's neck.)

So, forward all! and may the rite prevail
With God, our God of Love, to whom all hail!
And may His Grace the Lord of Hell constrain
To spare our sun and send him back again,
Saved by this mystic rite of death and pain.

HAND OF GLORY *and the priests chant sacred hymns in chorus, while the Meriah is seen winding up the ninety spirals of the artificial mound or sacred hill on the top of which is a temple open on three sides with a wall at the back of it. One of the understrappers marches first with the axe. Then follows the sacrificial priest. After him the Meriah with an understrapper on each side goading and mocking him. Two other understrappers bring up the rear carrying a stretcher.*

The temple is a wooden structure, backed by a wall in masonry. It is little more than a lean-to-roof, supported at the two outer corners by two wooden pillars. The one to the left represents the Cerny—that to the right the Bily bog. On the wall, below a cornice, are ranged, in various stages of decomposition, the heads of previous Meriahs. Facing the entrance to the temple (the gap

between the two pillars) stands a black stone altar with a black pillar about six feet high, rising from the middle of it. The black pillar springs from a round saucer like base, and is braced at equal intervals by six carved belts or girdles of the same black stone in strong relief. The carving consists of a rude fleur-de-lys pattern. In front of the altar is a block. The procession enters the temple. The two understrappers with the stretcher place it upon four low supports to the right so that it forms a table. The understrapper with the axe comes forward and presents it to the sacrificing priest, and then all seize the Meriah, and after a violent struggle, force him to kneel and hold down his head upon the block. The priest then strikes the head off with the axe. The understrappers remove the block, take the body to the table and proceed to flay off the skin. In the meantime the priest takes the head in his hands and advancing to the front of the temple holds it above his head, just as the officiating priest holds the pyx in the elevation of the host. Distant shouts of exultation are heard from the crowds of worshippers below. The priest then returns to the altar, places the head in front of the pillar and bows himself three times before it, in the manner of Catholic priests. He then suspends the head by the hook prepared for it, in its place with the other Meriah heads below the cornice on the wall behind the altar. After that he goes to a cupboard to the left of the altar, takes out the sacrificial mask and puts it on. It is slightly crested and obscenely grotesque not unlike the Sicilian Gorgon's head on the metopes from the temple of Selinum. By this time the understrappers have flayed the body of the Meriah. The priest approaches the table and the understrappers fit the gory and reeking hide on to him, fastening by means of thongs his hands inside the hands of the hide, and his feet inside the feet. As they do so, they exclaim continually: "Now art thou clothed upon with a more exceeding weight of glory." The priest so bedizened now

advances outside the temple, spreads out his arms in the form of a cross and exclaims in a loud voice:—

Behold the sacrifice complete! Ho! all ye people! So put ye on the Lord Meriah, the cristed one, in your hearts, so make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. For without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

The priest making obscene gestures, and dancing lasciviously, now descends the sacrificial hill, followed by the understrappers, bearing the flayed carcass of the Meriah on the stretcher. The fifth brings up the rear, holding the gory axe breast-high. From below rise the tones of the sacrificial hymn, entoned by the vast multitude of worshippers in a frenzy of fanatical enthusiasm. The understrappers approach the cristing altar and place the stretcher with the carcass of the Meriah upon it. As they do so the multitude changes the hymn it is singing and bursts forth with:—

All glory, laud, and honour
To thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Make sweet Hosannahs ring.

As they do so, HAND OF GLORY, in full canonicals, followed by a procession of priests and choir boys swinging censers, enters. They are all also singing "All glory, laud, and honour, etc." The people join in obstreperously.

HAND OF GLORY and the other priests and acolytes range themselves behind the altar, on which lies the flayed carcass of the Meriah. There is a solemn silence. Then HAND OF GLORY raises his hand to heaven and exclaims:—

So is our holy sacrifice complete,
The sacrifice coeval with our earth
And earth's foundations. May the blood now shed

By God's divine permission, yet again
Be the atonement of His people's sins
And may His grace redeem as heretofore
The world, and rescue from the powers of hell
The sun that is the source of all that lives.
And when the twice three moondays have been spent
Where demon powers prevail in night's dread womb
May he refreshed, in triumph rise again
Our sun of life, with healing on his wings.

(To the understrappers who are standing in front of the altar):—

Boys, do your duty, deftly quartering
The sacred body of our Lord, that each
Of the four royal chiefs, who symbolize
Earth, air, fire, water—the four elements—
May have his portion, this with holy herbs
In holy water seethed, each solemnly,
Receiving in himself, a sacrament
Of love and mystery, shall fortify
And render stable earth, air, fire, and water,
In brief our universe and save the world,
From the anarchic demons of the night.

(Stooping over the now quartered carcass and tearing out the heart):—

This heart, that was the Meriah's lamp of life,
Sun of his soul, and flower of ecstasy,
I take and offer to our Lord the King,
Himself the symbol of the sun in heaven,
Who eating it, shall by the threefold chain
Of golden sacrifice, and prayer and praise,
Circle the Sun-God in his night of fear,
And lift him back into his throne in heaven.
Go, take the portions to the four great houses,
That so the sacrifice may be complete.

The understrappers go out severally, each bearing a quarter of the body. HAND OF GLORY places the heart

in a golden chalice. To the people, raising his left hand in papal benediction and holding the cup with the heart in it in his right:—

Now and for ever may God's blessing rest
Upon His chosen people; may His grace
Protect you through the coming night, the sun
Of peace and knowledge fill your hearts with joy
Until the sun of heaven shall rise again
And bring new life and happiness to men.
Gloria in excelsis, Lord; Amen.

HAND OF GLORY goes out first, holding the chalice with the heart in it and bowing reverentially over it. Then follow the other priests and choir boys singing:—

All glory, laud, and honour
To thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Make sweet Hosannahs ring.

When all the procession has filed out, the officiating priest still in his mask and the Meriah's skin and now completely intoxicated, staggers to the back of the altar, on which the liver lights and intestines of the victim remain and exclaims in a drunken voice:—

Now that the chieftains, ranged behind plate table,
dish, tankard, and trough fall
To, ye good folk, as custom from time immemorial
wills, the offal
Dispute, and compensate with broken jaws, your starv-
ing maws—such rations
Have always been your lot, good folk, in civilized well-
governed nations:
The jackal gets the scraps, his lord, the lion, gets the
lion's portion.
I, the poor people's priest, select my mite with modesty
and caution.

He begins shovelling the guts into his mouth with both hands. The people protest: forge upon the priest, buffet him, and one another. Boys with bladders attached and sticks beat him about the head. After an indescribable orgy all disperse, carrying away each some fragment of the offal.

The scene is left deserted.

SCENE IV

The Reforming Priests

Enter PROSTHENOS and the other Reforming Priests

PROSTHENOS:—

Their orgies now are over and the sun
Looks down indifferent on scenes of blood
And human entrails mingled with the slime
That were he God or human had dissolved
His inmost core to seas of tears and rage
And swamped this orb of monsters, not of men:
But placid over scenes of love or hate
He shines and recks not aught of human wrong or right.

PRIEST:—

And all to sate the dragon-god of night——

PROSTHENOS:—

Which has no real existence being but
The light's negation: if in the long gloom
Of winter night the aurora dies away
Or in some cave's recess we round a corner
Bearing a taper in our hand, we leave
The night behind and take the day with us:
So is it with the sun, that leaves the night
With us and takes the day along with her
That radiates from her orb as bright and clear
As that she brought to us, oft as she dips

Below th' horizon to the nether world.
Foolish, infatuated are our folk!

A PRIEST:—

They will not see, because they do not will
To see and were it proved as clearly to them
As that death follows life, and night the day
They would arise and rend the sage who proved it
Because they love the loathsome obscene rite
That sates their lust of war and sacrifice:
Nay, 'tis the core and source of war and strife
This hateful creed of blood and sacrifice,
And fratricidal wars will ever rage
So long as we are cannibals, not men,
With priests to flay us for our upper ten.

A PRIEST:—

Who are, alas! the cream and essence of
Our common folk, our race, our inmost selves:
In vain we shear one ravenous head away,
When twenty spring, where one had gorged before.

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

It is a skein that has nor head nor tail:
Our own vile shadow that we cannot fly from.

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

The hosts of armed men the king demands
As body-guard and for the endless wars
To feed his vanity with new domains
And freemen broken to the tyrant's yoke
Eat out the vitals of our starving folk:
And this the priests promote, for hunger feeds
The thirst for blood, and makes the sacrifice
More popular, and fills the priestly fobs,
And so the game of blood runs on and on,
I see no exit from this vicious circle.

PROSTHENOS:—

Nor I. Oh! what a state for those who know
And feel. All, all must train as murderers,

Or rot in dungeons. Nay, the madness now
Has overstopped itself. For any priest
Who dare denounce this monstrous state of things,
These murder bands, these chiefs of blood and hate,
Is straight arrested, at the king's behest,
Clapped into dungeons, roasted, flayed alive,
And some say eaten at their princely orgies.

A PRIEST:—

And yet they say that those beyond the wall
The fair-skinned people with the jet-black hair
Have no such filthy usages as ours,
Nor war nor sacrifice, but live in peace
Among themselves and those akin to them,
Domestic love is all their hope and joy,
And if they worship anything, adore
The plough and sun as who matures their grain.

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

Oh! happy people! Would they were our lords!

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

Alas! that we are outlawed and 'tis death
For one of us to pass their barriers:
And yet I cannot wonder if they ban us
Loathing us as more deadly than the plague.

PROSTHENOS:—

Strange stories can I tell you of them, for
'Tis said their heads are better formed than ours
And more symmetrical and so their brains
Respond more truly to external things.
Here at the Pole, to which, as we ourselves,
They migrated in ages long ago
When the Equator grew too hot for life,
At least for human life, and drove us hither:
They say there is a force they call mageist
To which this people's consciousness responds
More perfectly than our more brutish minds,
So that they feel our earth, the which we deem

Immovable, revolving, while the sun
They say is fixed, just as to one who runs
The trees revolve, although he knows they stand
And that he moves; as for the sun's decline
Below th' horizon and return in spring
They say it is because the disk our earth
Sways up and down, just as when storms prevail
A boat at sea whose gunwale kicks the stars
A moment and then, swinging downward, bares
What it eclipsed but now, and so for ever.

A PRIEST:—

Why are the constellations not eclipsed
That graze th' horizon if this thing be true?

PROSTHENOS:—

Because they are much farther than the sun
Just as to one who runs, the distant hills
Remain, the adjacent forest whirls behind him.

SAME PRIEST:—

It may be so: but then the sacrifice
And prayers are madness and mere waste of breath.

PROSTHENOS:—

And are forbidden there beyond the wall
Where all concur to make the best of life.
Not mortify it in expectancy
Of its recurrence when we are no more;
The madness that has vitiated all
Our social state, that whets the murderous knife
Of sacrifice, and feasts more bestial-styled
Holy communions, agapes, holy orgies
And crowns self-sacrifice to other fiends
Hight fatherlands, devourers of their sons.
New forms of Baal, fierier than the ones
That hissed along the old Phœnician main
Oft as the living flesh of infants stuck
Viscid and black upon their brazen valves,
Or wailed a moment in their ravenous womb's

And maw's and entrail's flaming gulphs of fire.
Before a fierier Baal drove us thence.

A PRIEST:—

You know the speech of those beyond the wall?

PROSTHENOS:—

Yes: for before the wall was built, before
Its builders banned us from all intercourse,
The founders of our family were linked
In wedlock with the noblest of their tribe
And still possess on fans of palm inscribed
Much of their ancient lore, for they devised
Symbols to shew the eye the sound of words,
And these I can decipher, for indeed
Amongst ourselves we often used their speech.

SAME PRIEST:—

Go, Prothenos, for none so well as you,
If what you say be true, may venture it,
Go, scale the wall, and, risking life, betake
Yourself unto the presence of their king
And crave full knowledge of their higher lore,
Ours to refute, and quench these loathsome rites,
And crave co-operation of their sages.

PROSTHENOS:—

But it is death for one of us to venture
Upon the sacred soil beyond the wall.

SAME PRIEST:—

The danger so incurred, for such an end
By one in part of their own blood, should blunt
The edge of their resentment, should extort
Aid for a cause that is indeed their own.

PROSTHENOS:—

But how to scale the wall and unobserved?

SAME PRIEST:—

Some leagues away the virgin forest stands
Itself a wall of verdure: there 'twere easy.

PROSTHENOS:—

'Tis not so hard to scale it: but to return
That's the dilemma—for the other side
Is concave, crowned with eaves and cornices,
Who once lets go and drops is in a trap.

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

These are pretexts you do not wish to go.

A YOUNGER PRIEST:—

If I but knew their speech, I'd venture it.

PROSTHENOS:—

I do not wish to risk my life, and well
You know the why; not that I fear to do
And would not risk it, were our cause assured
To profit: but the odds are all against it.
And I must live to guard my younger brother
Left to my charge, when we were orphaned both

1st PRIEST:—

Ah! yes, I had forgot; forgive me, Prosthénos.

PROSTHENOS:—

Oh! dearer than my life, is he to me,
Son, lover, brother, more than all in one.
And dear is life for love of him, besides
He is the last frail scion of our house,
Which with him perishes and falling leaves
No other nobler one in all the land.

1st PRIEST:—

Well may you wish to dedicate your life
To see him safely wedded, and secure
Your family's continuance, let alone
All other motives, but, all set aside,
No wonder if you love him most of all
With passionate devotion for himself
And would preserve your life to cherish his,
For all acknowledge him the loveliest,
Fullest of promise both of heart and head
And dearest of our youth of noble birth,
All fix our hopes upon him for the future.

PROSTHENOS:—

Nor is my love all personal: bethink you!
The king is childless: by his many years
Of reckless vice and cruelty reduced
To impotence, and, when he dies the people
Elect some noble youth in place of him.
Is not my love and my ambition, friends,
The surest bulwark of our cause? With him
The nation's head, our influence would prevail
To quench the hideous relics of the past,
These cannibal rites—and throne the sun of truth
Where bloodstained superstition rules to-day.

A PRIEST:—

If we can win him ours, but people say
He clings with passion to the ancient creed.

PROSTHENOS:—

Oh! That will go with youth. Youth ever clings
Unto a golden past that never was,
Gilding its crime and error with the glow
Of his own nascent glories.

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

Strange it is

Whether the gods be monsters, cannibals,
Or jovial rakes, of every vice compact,
Or dreary victims, wailing from their trees,
Bels, Meriahs, leeks, fish, bread and wine, or stones,
Or sun and moon and stars, or deadmen's bones,
Or runes, or swords, or riff-raff—all become
Promoted and the saviours of the hearth,
Paladins of domestic life and love
And purity: we train our virtues round them
Like ivy round a dungeon, and who dare
Denounce the racks and gallows there within
Are straight impugned, as traitors to the hearth,
As moral perverts, enemies of God,
And light and truth, and banished, brained, or burnt

In honour of the dungeon God of Wrath
And given him to devour.

PROSTHENOS:—

And stranger still,
Our best and wisest—poets, artists, sages,
Champion these ogres of the past, that ages
To come will demonstrate the brain-sick scum
Of primal savages: while loose-lived sinners
Perceive the rising light and follow it,
And honouring themselves, discredit it.

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

See, Prosthénos, your brother comes this way
Threading the mazy forest with his bow
And spear and arrows, following him a boy
In beauty only second to himself,
But duskier—doubtless one of your young slaves.

PROSTHENOS:—

I sent him to the chase—nay, ordered it
To keep him from the Meriah sacrifice
That works disaster in a heart inclined,
Without it, to religious ecstasy.

A PRIEST:—

The bag seems light.

PROSTHENOS:—

I fear he has misspent
His time, mooning about, the graceless sinner
In a brown study, instead of shooting us a dinner.

*Enter ARÆUS, he wears sandals, a red cap of liberty
and a panther-skin girded round his loins, he is about
18 or 19 years of age. He is followed by the slave boy
naked except for a loin cloth.*

PROSTHENOS:—

So, my Aræus, have you brought us then
No victim from the forest that we, too,
May duly celebrate the festival?

ARÆUS:—

I could not shoot aright, my mind distraught
Dwelt ever on the mighty sacrifice,
That is the glory of our race and culture
Which you forbade I should attend to-day.

PROSTHENOS:—

There in the forest where the mighty palms
And araucarias stand immoveable
As heaven itself: self-sown in ages past,
Long ere our race had wandered to these lands
There where eternal Nature holds the world
In perfect equipoise, and year by year
The forest generations rise and fall
As surely as the tides that beat our shores,
And reck not aught of these grim rites of ours
But all is peace and harmony and power:
Had you no better theme than that to think of?

ARÆUS:—

You ever speak contemptuously of that
Which is the coping and foundation-stone
Both of our State and all that makes us men.

A PRIEST (*to* PROSTHENOS):—

Handle him gently, or, best, let it be
Nor stir just now the sick fanaticism
That rages in him, lashed to fever-heat
By the associations of to-day.

PROSTHENOS:—

Nay, rather, now's the time to strike, methinks,
And show to him the vileness of this crime
'Gainst Nature, human justice, and high Heaven.
Here where the ghastly relics of the orgy
Still stain yon altar, still defile fair earth.

PRIEST:—

Let me conjure you.

PROSTHENOS:—

Nay, I'll say my say
And have it out with him. Trust me, he'll hear reason.

PRIEST (*to himself*):—

A dread foreboding fills my heart with fear.

PROSTHENOS (*to his brother*):—

Aræus, lo, yon altar stained with blood
And human entrails: lo! the reeking earth!
Do not your own repudiate this crime
And pity drown your eyes and heart—if not
Think you that such UN-NATURE can reveal
Heaven's will or reach the golden heart of things?

ARÆUS:—

Nay, but I do feel pity, that is just
The merit of the sacrifice, it quickens
Pity and love to see the Meriah die
That we may live, and that the blessed sun
May yet return untarnished from the tomb
With love and life and healing on his wings.

PROSTHENOS:—

What proof have you that Nature needs this crime
Against itself and Heaven—that it approves?
Long, long, before the world begat our race
Suns rose and set upon brute beasts and plants
That knew not of it, never practised it.

ARÆUS:—

So then, you deem the sacrifice superfluous
A crime?

PROSTHENOS:—

I say: show me the use of it.

ARÆUS:—

Propitiations——

PROSTHENOS:—

Oh! these propitiations!

ARÆUS:—

—of demon powers . . . of night . . .

PROSTHENOS:—

As if the night
Had any force and substance in itself
And were not mere negation—nothingness
Created by the absence of the light,
Which leaves us with the sun when that declines.
Had we not better far win back the sun
By deeds of daylight, love, and purity,
Than curry favour with some Lord of Hell,
Glutting an empty figment of the mind
Born of its cruel lusts, by bloody murder?

ARÆUS:—

Oh! Blasphemy! to call the holy rite
Murder; besides, you see but half the truth.
As he descends the orb of light grows pale
In autumn, palest at his winter setting
And scarcely flickers through his winter tomb
But for the Meriah's sacrifice 'twere quenched
Else, why does not one glimmer reach us thence?

PROSTHENOS:—

'Tis palest at its setting just because
Most of its rays are lost to us beyond
The rim of earth.

ARÆUS:—

Oh! 'tis sheer blasphemy
With reason's chilly steel to whittle down
These mysteries of heaven to commonplace.
The heart, intuitive, perceives the truth
In touch with Nature's heart and still revolts.

PROSTHENOS:—

A precious fount of love, these melting hearts
That gloat o'er all this Meriah shambles work.

ARÆUS:—

That is but dross and scum—the face of things.

PROSTHENOS:—

The surface bodies forth the inner blight.

ARÆUS:—

Nay, brother, well you know the Meriah bled
Ay, from the first foundation of the world
Or rather was that same. Earth ne'er had been
At all, save for this mystic sacrifice,
And now would fade away and quite collapse,
That once, abolished, like a spinner's web
That dewy autumn moons dissolve to dew.

PROSTHENOS:—

Pride, pride, Aræus, human pride that feigns
Itself the centre and support of all
But is but as a helpless bubble tossed
Upon the ebb and flow of space and time.

ARÆUS:—

How can you say such things, or so traduce
The sacrifice, that is the heart of all
Our social life, our State, our Government,
Our ties of home, our hope in life and death;
It is the Meriah's noble act of love,
'Tis his sublime self-sacrifice, that nerves
Our soldiers, when they fight and bravely die
To keep the jewel of our State intact.
The purity of home, the thousand small
Acts of renunciation, that alone
Make social life a possibility,
All, all we owe them to the Meriah.
Ask your own heart, my brother, that will tame
The pride of erring reason, that will teach
How baseless, how sophistical its dreams
And bring you back to be a child once more.

PROSTHENOS:—

I've put away these childish things, that spell
Murder and cannibalism, once for all.

ARÆUS:—

Oh! Prosthénos, my brother, you were once
A child yourself, one mother taught us both,
At one fond knee we lisped our prayers to Heaven.
How can you see unmoved a little child
Kneeling beside its mother, trained to clasp
Its little hands in prayer to God, and blend
The Meriah's holy name with that of God,
Lisping its prayers for grace to him and craving
A blessing for itself—its father—mother
And never blush at your apostasy.

PROSTHENOS:—

Itself, of course, comes first.

ARÆUS:—

Apostate sneerer!

PROSTHENOS:—

Listen, Aræus, well you know, or if
You know not, hear it now from me, the Meriah
Slain from the first foundation of the world
Is but an idle legend forged by priests.
For scarce a century ago the Meriah
Was burnt alive upon the market-place,
Then torn to pieces, by the common herd:
And eaten steaming. Do you approve such horrors?

ARÆUS:—

Rude times have ruder rites: our most refined
And polished age, has polished the rude stone
Into a perfect gem.

PROSTHENOS:—

We draw the line.

In fact, at lopping heads and flaying skins off
And bloody quarterings for noble lords,
And wholesale butcheries, named glorious wars.

ARÆUS:—

How can there be remission of our sins
Unless the blood of innocence be shed:

That is a law of Nature and of God:
Gladly I'd give my life to save the people
Just as our soldiers die to save the State.

A PRIEST (*to PROSTHENOS*):—

Dont let him harp upon that string, divert
His mind, or woe betide you, Prostheno!

2nd PRIEST (*to another one*):—

What are those shadows lurking mid the palms?

THE OTHER PRIEST:—

Some holy spies, may be, I do not trust them.

ARÆUS (*with increasing religious mania*):—

Oh! What a world it were, if all were priests,
All Meriahs, sacrificing for the good of all
All sacrificed—Ah! then the blessed sun
Would hang for ever in a golden heaven,
No dragon of the night could pull it down,
A crimson veil investing all the earth
Would intercept the dragon's gloomy power!

PROSTHENOS:—

But with our race all sacrificed methinks

'Twould little matter where the sun were couched.

ARÆUS (*not heeding him*):—

First love, then death or rather love in death
And death in love, oh! what a glorious end!
The people's victim and the people's good:
A strange and sensuous rapture fills my being
At thought of it: the death-blow thrills my soul.
The scourging and the flaying seem divine,
And being quartered for the lords' repast
Fills me with mystic passion and desire,
Oh! If the chain of circumstance demand
Or now or in the future, for our State
Some special victim, lo! I dedicate
My self, my flesh and blood, so, Prostheno,
So dying, may I save thy soul, too, steeped
In heresy's black night and win you back
Once more to God and Heaven.

PROSTHENOS (*wringing his hands*):—

What have I done!

Hear reason, best-beloved of my soul,
This idiot fancy, that the Meriah
While being roasted on the market-place
Felt an ecstatic joy as though he lay
Stretched on a bed of roses, was devised
By lying priests, in part to mitigate
The horror that their monstrous sacrifice
Inspired in all the wisest of the land,
And exculpate themselves, and partly, too,
To lure fresh victims to the fatal pyre.

ARÆUS:—

How can that be when in mine inmost self
I feel the certainty that sacrifice
Is heaven on earth, the torture and the shame
A fount of yet more exquisite desire?

(Raising his hands to heaven)

Oh! let me die to set the people free!

(To his brother)

And save your soul from hell and purgatory!

A PRIEST:—

Lo! Hand of Glory comes. What can he want?

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

He has been spying on us, and now comes
To reap the harvest of his subtle hopes.
We are undone. Oh! Prosthénos, I fear
Something I dare not utter, nor you hear!

Enter HAND OF GLORY at the head of the other orthodox priests, followed by the understrappers, girded with red loin cloths, now soiled and stained from the sacrifice of the previous Meriah.

HAND OF GLORY (*advancing with menace. To the reforming priests*):—

Ye rebel priests! I have you in my net
And you shall dance to any tune I pipe,

You and your head, this atheist Prothenos,
You all are traitors to our Lord the King,
Your lives are forfeited by right divine,
Attempt to fly. I call the officers.
Not only are you guilty of high treason
But heretics who spread false doctrines, this
I now can demonstrate; you say the sun
Sinks to her winter rest, because the disk
Of earth rocks up and downward like a boat—
And that the stars are not eclipsed, because
They are remote, but who is not aware
That objects far and near, stars, trees, and rocks
Are all alike shut out of sight whene'er
The gunwale of some tempest-driven bark
Sways up and down and kicks the pole of heaven.
How do you answer?

PROSTHENOS:—

That what I say is true! the earth revolves
And not the sun.

HAND OF GLORY:—

Most obstinate blasphemers!
No wonder when such spawn and rant and lie
If the creator threaten death to all.
Can you not see: our Lord the sun declines
And sinks beneath the lap of earth, because
His vital powers themselves decline, that sped
His heavenly splendours round the crystal sphere
And that his fall is just the consequence
Of this decline of life and force that scarce
Suffice to stay him in his heavenly round
This being the very cause of his decline.

ARÆUS:—

Lo! brother, how the higher reason kills
Your blatant sophistries and puts you down:
One breath of Heaven—your fine-spun arguments

All fall away to nothingness: oh! bow
Your pride of erring reason to the truth.

HAND OF GLORY:—

'Tis just for this the Meriah sacrifice
Is indispensable: first to replenish
His waning life, and next to sate the thirst
Of blood in those who wait him down below.
Hell's brood remorseless in the womb of night:
His bitterest enemies: in all times and places
The sacrifice is indispensable
And of all years this year is perilous
Beyond all others in the coil of things
For Him and us, whose life on His depends:
So say the Lords of the Nine Houses, they
Who scrutinize Heaven's mysteries—the sages
Versed in the mathematic-lore that links
The motion of the planets and the stars
With human destinies, and rise and fall
Of nations and dominions on this earth
That is the centre of all space and time
Being girdled round with dispensations
And powers angelic, golden chains of prayer
And praise, and sacraments of love divine
Linking our being with God's throne in heaven.
Unceasingly through the yet golden hours
I pray the Lord of Heaven to spare his people
And raise some noble youth to save the State.
But three months hence, alas! 'twill be too late!

PROSTHENOS:—

Nay, take us all, revive the hideous rites
Of past excess, and burn us all alive
Upon the market-place to save your sun,
Your gods, your gold, your world, your souls: our souls,
Ourselves we yield a willing sacrifice.

HAND OF GLORY:—

Our Lord of Love is merciful, he craves
No holocaust: but one noble youth who gave

His life a willing sacrifice might save
Our world, our race and e'en your sinful souls
Redeem from that eternal torment that
Surely awaits them in the life to come.

ARÆUS (*coming forward*):—

It is my destiny: I hear within me
The voice of God that calls me to himself:
Oh! willingly my virgin life I yield
To save thy soul, my brother, and to shield
Our State from that which threatens——

HAND OF GLORY:—

Nobly said.

It is the Lord of Love inspiring thee,
To save His sheep. Oh! gracious youth, come hither!
Long as our race shall flourish on this earth
Thy memory shall be hallowed, and thy birth
Be the one jewelled feast day of the year.

PROSTHENOS:—

Oh! Spare him, cruel priest, oh! spare the one
Sole jewel of my life, our house, our hope's
If death of innocence redeem, then surely
Its life should doubly ransom, if the night's
Grim monsters claim propitiations—take

(touching his own)

This body and through all the three long months
Rack, flay, and torture, all your fiends of hell
Invoke to link to every hour that crawls
A more infernal torment than the last.

HAND OF GLORY:—

He shall be arbiter himself. Aræus,
Choose as the God within dictates. Yourself
Or these. If you lay down your virgin youth
To save the State and these poor fanatics
And traitors from the fate that should be theirs
The three months' orgy shall be raised to such
A trance of love and rapture as was ne'er

So much as dreamt of in the pallid year
Of other Meriah's surfeits, all the realm
We'll ransack for new forms of love and joy
From end to end, a single hour so spent,
So full of aching bliss, shall flash a year
Engarlanded with stars of paradise,
Each day a century, each hour an æon
And in consideration of your birth
And lineage, and the year of love curtailed
We will forgo the scourging and the cringing,
As though it were your marriage, you shall go
Jewel- and flower-encircled, incense-wreathed,
To strains of heavenly music, and an axe
Of gold shall be the golden bridge that links,
Not severs earth's brief transient paradise,
Links it with one eternal in the skies.
But if you shun to yield your comely youth
Your brother and the rebel priests must wail
The three months through on beds of agony
And such excruciating woes, that pale
Were hell's eternity of fiery torments
To what they then shall taste; a thousand deaths
Shall flail their quivering limbs, a hill of fire
Shall lead to deaths more terrible, the last,
Protracted and intensified by all
That art and science can devise, be no
Release from torment, but a vestibule
To hell's more dread abyss of woes, that howl
From age to age through all eternity.
What is your answer? Nay, take time, decide
After deliberation: not in haste.

ARÆUS:—

This is my answer, my decision this:
Freely, inflexibly I vow myself,
Body and soul to Heaven. Body and soul,
Dispose of me: do with me what you will.

He crosses over to where HAND OF GLORY and the orthodox priests are standing. The understrappers close round him in a circle and press against him.

Oh! foretaste of Elysium! Oh! despair!
Joy, rapture, agony—and death how fair!

HAND OF GLORY:—

Now saucy priests, apostate, reprobate,
Now howl your griefs to heaven, now rend your hair,
Ye impotent traducers of our faith,
Perverters of the truth, perverted spawn
Of darkness and perdition, perjurers,
Blasphemers, madmen, rebels, scheme cabal,
Plot treason in dark caves, I fear you not,
I have the people with me, whatsoe'er
You vent of ravin 'gainst our holy faith
Recoils upon yourselves, go! free as air,
Our people be your dungeon, bolts, and bars,
Thumb-screws and manacles, I need them not
Against such abject impotence that crawls
Discredited by high and low alike.
But, harkee! wolves, if any raise a hand
Against himself—and, Prostheno, to you
This warning most applies, for 'tis your hand,
Your gentle hand, I destine by and by,
To wield the blade that wings him to the skies,
His three months' rapture shall be turned to gall,
And torture such as should be yours appal
His nights and days, the gloomy cristing place,
The scourging at the altar and the hill
Of agony, all, all shall be his doom,
A thousandfold more dire than e'er before
That now I do excuse him. Get you gone
Or tarry here to cry your plaints to heaven,
And comfort one another's vain despair.
To me it is indifferent, I have
A hostage here, to keep you well to heel.

And think not that I spare your currish hides
Out of compassion, not to you, it is
Out of compassion to the State I spare you
To grasp a daintier quarry, this sleek victim.
Such as the crisis of the hour demands.
My brand-new sapiences excuse your slave.

(Bows mockingly)

Come lovely youth, I must present you now
Before the king who shall initiate
The three months' prelude of ecstatic joy,
Quintessence of what waits you next in heaven
Well won by one brief thrill of easy death.
Once more, good day, good priests, your humble servant.

HAND OF GLORY *and the orthodox priests go out.*
The understrappers with ARÆUS in the middle of them
bring up the rear.

PROSTHENOS *(clasping his hands in anguish):—*

Aræus! Oh! Aræus, oh! my brother!
How have the fiends of darkness made thee theirs
And charmed thee to perdition, open-eyed.
Now let the sun expand o'er all the sky,
In seas of fire and parch the breath of heaven,
And shrivel up the wretched race of men
And Nature in one flaming holocaust.
Or night spread out her wings and blind the day
That she behold no more such infamies.
Ah! me, what wild and whirling words are mine,
This is the deepest tragedy of things
And human life, that there's no consonance
Between the world about us and ourselves,
The sun beams down in smiles on seas of blood
And earthquake spares not love and innocence.
Nay e'en our very selves are not our own,
In vain I pray for tears of fire to quench
The sight of these blind horrors, veins of ice
To paralyse the hand, foredoomed to wield
The fratricidal axe of sacrifice:

The pulses of our life throb on the same
Or yet more vigorous, from the wrongs we suffer
The choking sobs of serfdom do but whet
The half-starved wretch's appetite and salt
His sordid pittance with his tears, we are
But dust that eddies where the chariot-wheel
Of heartless Nature carves an emptier groove—
Aræus, oh! Aræus, oh! my brother.
But yet not unavenged this last excess
Of infamy against all sacred things
Of human life, shall rear its serpent head
But cling a coil of death to all our race!
Down to the end of time I prophesy
That if in days to come it wax to power
Throughout the world and blight the sunset lands,
This stamp and brand of blood indelible
Shall be its heirloom, its religion death,
Its arts and science be but murder's tools
To range its hateful broods in murderous hosts
Of myriadfold destruction, brother trained
To butcher brother, in a shambles co-
Extensive with the realms their ravin wastes,
Until a last some nobler form of men,
Uniting, blast these whited sepulchres,
Hurling them to perdition, or themselves
By mutual carnage purge the sickening earth.

A PRIEST:—

Stay, Prothenos: and list to reason's voice,
Our manlier faith holds passion and despair
In just contempt: pale rhetoric's periods
Accomplish nothing: victory may we
By well-concerted action yet achieve
To act in harmony is to believe.

PROSTHENOS:—

How can we act—bound hand and foot: to move
A finger, is to doom him prematurely
And turn to torture his brief span of heaven.

A PRIEST:—

Well, let him suffer if the present ill
Remit the direr future.

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

Prosthenos,
I grasp the clue: aye, just this night of woe
Reveals the star of hope that garish day
Had to our eager eyes so long eclipsed.

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

Speak out your counsel plainly, not in coils
Of unsubstantial phrase involving it.

PRIEST:—

Hark to my counsel then. What I but now
Advised, I do reiterate with now
Redoubled emphasis: invincible
He'll now appeal to those beyond the wall;
There is his only hope to save his brother
Nor will he, surely, this time shun a risk
He would elude before, for what is now
Bound up with it, his brother's safety
Which did before discounsel it. Bethink you
The very danger that now threatens him,
His, and his house, related as they are.
To all most noble there beyond the wall,
Will be his surest shield against their anger
And arm him with compassion: for their creed
Is based on kinship and good fellowship
Nay, 'tis the thing itself: respect to age
And parentage, fraternal love and friendship
And loyalty—these are their creed, their life
And sum of being, how can they then betray
Their very flesh and blood, and with it all
They deem most sacred and inviolable:
Will they not surely, pardoning you, impose
A limit to the ravin of these fiends

And fanatics, who rend and desecrate
All that their higher faith holds most divine?

PROSTHENOS:—

'Tis but a slender hope indeed.

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

But may let in the flood-gates of the dawn.

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

If 'tis the only hope one silken strand

Oft bears the cord of salvage to the shipwreck.

PROSTHENOS:—

Aræus, oh! Aræus, oh! My brother!

A PRIEST:—

No more of vain laments. You, Prosthénos,

Come to my house and all you other priests

There to mature our scheme and further its

Most prompt accomplishment. Come all away.

SCENE V

The Palace of the King. The KING is discovered on his throne. He is robed in crimson and surrounded by hosts of odalisques, pages, and notables. On a table by the throne stands the sacred chalice with the heart of the last Meriah in it.

Chorus of ODALISQUES and PAGES:—

Raise the cup. The feast is over

All the previous hope and madness

All the sadness, all the gladness,

All the rapture and despair:

After vintage-crowned October

Comes November sad and sober

Fading woods and weeping skies—

So to-day's too brief carousals,

Love and death's enforced espousals

And the bloodstained sacrifice—

Sleep in memory's argent lumber
Room where things forgotten slumber
And the moon-struck orb encumber
Where repose all things that were.

KING:—

With each new solstice of the flaming half
Of our bipartite year, another strand
Of mine enfeebled life-force ravel out
That only in the Meriah sacrifice
Finds a brief respite to its sure decay:
Thank God! the College of Astrologers,
A pack of pious rascals like the rest,
Have itching palms and gold-engulphing maws,
Receptive as the sun-devouring winter's.
So while the priest-rid people, fed with lies
Consent to sweat me all their hard-earned pelf
To stuff my parasites and myrmidons,
The jovial dogs of war and sacrifice,
Blood, plunder, famine gaily trot their rounds.
But this intercalated Meriah feast
To prop my ebbing autumn sun, will crave
A mint of money from impoverished coffers
Both to provide the ceremony and
Preliminary orgy of the Meriah
And conscience money, more unconscionably,
With every new demand upon their conscience
Demanded by these astrologic sharks
To square their conscienceless but costly scruples,
And after all what hope is there to find
A youth so simple as to sell his youth
For three poor fading months of revelry?

(Enter a messenger in haste.)

Who comes so hastily? Detain him. What
The news or ill or good he brings, inquire.

MESSENGER:—

Good news, almighty king! The Meriah
For the autumnal sacrifice is found.

KING:—

And who's the greenfinch they so promptly limed?

MESSENGER:—

Of all our youth, the most sublimely chaste
And beautiful, ambitious, whispered once
Amongst the folk, and dangerous to the State
And your Most Gracious Majesty, the brother
Of that rebellious and heretical
Reformer as he styles himself, the priest
Called Prostheno; his brother named Aræus
It is who by some whim fanatical
Or vanity fantastical ensnared,
Now Hand of Glory brings, as use demands,
First to present before your Majesty,
Then to your royal clemency to consign him
To mould him by the wonted discipline
A fitting sacrifice to hell and heaven.

KING:—

That shall be my most welcome charge, the joys
Of the three months shall compensate for what
They lose in length by their intensity.

MESSENGER:—

Hark! They are at the door.

Enter HAND OF GLORY and the priests, conducting ARÆUS surrounded by the understrappers. The latter range themselves round him and all the most beautiful odalisques and pages in a second circle round the understrappers.

HAND OF GLORY:—

Behold the Lamb of God. The noble youth
Whom to preserve our realm the God of Love
That doth protect it, has miraculously
Inspired to offer up his spotless youth
And gracious life—Aræus, noblest-born
Of all our people. Great, indeed, must be
The crisis of the years, that doth demand

So great a sacrifice, to ransom from
The winter's most terrific womb the sun
And throne him, still untarnished in high heaven.

KING:—

The Mighty God I represent on earth
Will not be e'er forgetful of his champion:
The sunlight of his grace shall, for all time
Immortalize the splendour of thy name.
Kneel down, Aræus!

ARÆUS *kneels.* The KING *places a circlet of gold upon his head.*

So crowned in glory enter the three months
Of heaven on earth, that preludes that above,
With indescribable delights of which
'T will be my care to fill the chalice full.

The KING holds up the golden chalice with the previous Meriah's heart in it, and intones the following chorus, the others little by little joining in:—

Fill the cup and lift it high!
Red the wine and clear
'Tis the Meriah's blood we quaff,
Death the guerdon dear.
Sound the music loud and strong:
Life and love are but a song;
Grasp the fruit, 'tis not for long,
Love is but an empty jest:
Passion's heart alone is blest;
Sound the music loud and clear:
Life and love are but a bier,
So of charnels have no fear:
But let ribald jest run round
Like a satyr ivy-crowned,
Like a spangled serpent wound
Through the circling year.

End of Act I

ACT II
THE COURT OF THE MONGOL KING

SCENE I

A state apartment. Groups of servitors, pages, etc. are arranging the chair of state, dusting the apartment, and so forth. They are dressed pretty much in the Chinese style. Three handsome pages forward on the stage, with their pigtails tied together sing as follows:—

“When the eyebrow meets the eyelash, ’tis no time for
gay betrothing,
Rheumy age and rosy girlhood not in love unite but
loathing”,
So the boys sang in the courtyard, but the chieftain old
and hoary
Panted for the lissome springtide, and the songs of love
and glory
As the doting winter welters in the lusty spring’s em-
braces,
Kissed to death by nymph and naiad, he would dally
with the graces,
And he wedded and his Princess bare him girls and
boys in numbers—
Joyful were his hours of waking, tranquil and pro-
found his slumbers.
None the less about the courtyard mocking sing the
horse-boys “Tarry,
When the eyelash meets the eyebrow, greybeard, ’tis
too late to marry.”

A SERVITOR. What are you singing there you rascals?
Come and help to arrange the apartment for His
Majesty.

ANOTHER. See how gracefully the peacock's feather waves above the chair of state, like some fair flower of the rainbow: like a third eye of divine illumination from the celestial world to inspire our rulers with heavenly wisdom.

A SERVITOR. Place the other chairs in order. Clear away the litter. Strew rose-leaves on the floor.

A PAGE. There is always this trouble about the Princess at the year's midday.

ANOTHER PAGE. Let the king do like the kings in the legends and proclaim: "Who ever can cure and solace my daughter may have her."

ANOTHER PAGE. Let him have her, and the cure and solace will soon follow.

AN USHER. Monkey! Impudent, plank-faced one! speak respectfully of the Princess.

ANOTHER. May the eye of divine grace illuminate our rulers and the sages to find a remedy for the heartaches of the Princess, sweet Flower of Love, daughter of our Most Gracious Queen Myrtleberry and the darling of all her people.

A PAGE. No duck ever laid egg so perfectly symmetrical as the perfect oval of her face. Cow and olive unite in vain to compose so heavenly smooth a complexion.

ANOTHER. The exquisite upward curve of her eyes resembles myrtle-leaves stained with henna.

ANOTHER YOUNG PAGE. Her eyebrows are delicately pencilled like the crest of the pewit, or the antennæ of the night moth.

A THIRD. Every happiness should be hers, yet just at midsummer when all living Nature bursts into joy and singing, she alone melts away in tears and lamentations and anguish of spirit. It is very strange.

ANOTHER. Some say that her most gentle and sensitive nature is insensibly affected by the loathsome human sacrifice of the outer barbarians.

1st PAGE. But every precaution has been taken to keep her ignorant of the dire atrocity.

2nd PAGE. Yet even if the discords of their ribald hymns and insane orgies be deadened to the outer ear, to the ear of inward hearing the vibrations of their madness may yet penetrate.

3rd PAGE. That may well be. How can anything worthy of the name of civilization prosper, with such abominations at its back door?

ANOTHER. It would be a fitting pretext to gather our armed men, and put a stop once for all to their disgusting sacrificial cannibalisms.

ANOTHER. What! Sacrifice our people to save theirs. That would be aping the brutal sacrifice itself.

ANOTHER. Look, the King, with the yellow-robed ones and the wise men enter. May their wisdom excogitate some remedy.

The KING enters and seats himself. The learned men do the same. The religious ones dressed in yellow silken robes stand in a group to the right of the throne.

KING WAI-NA-MING OR TRUTH'S MESSENGER. Happy is the land that has no history. Ours is such a one. Our progress consists of agricultural improvement and in the physical, intellectual, and moral development and increase of our population, by bettering their material state and their moral intellectual education. With no sudden shocks, wars, revolution, or catastrophes, our peaceful progress advances like a broad and smoothly flowing river or like an inland sea, enlarging its bounds in all directions:

Disdain here cannot enter

And no abiding place has here:

The culprit, spared by mercy's law repents,

Error is washed away in pity's tear

And justice rules by love and not by fear.

Only one cloud mars the azure of our summer Eden: our beloved daughter's increasing melancholy, which every solstice aggravates. This year the hysteric affection has seized her worst of all. All yesterday, she lay entranced, unconscious or hyperconscious, a fount of tears, piteous to behold, taking no nourishment of any kind. I have summoned you again, my pundits and my ministers of the sun, to excogitate some remedy for her unhappy condition.

A PUNDIT. Perhaps the Most Gracious Princess Flower of Love cherishes some secret and hopeless affection. In that case, if it be for some healthy and comely youth, whatever his social position, let him be given her as a husband and the Princess will recover.

KING. She is my only child and heiress to my throne. But were he the lowest groom he should be my son-in-law, if that would bring her happiness. But she has been brought up exclusively among her maidens. This cannot be the source of her distress. Besides it recurs with every summer solstice and then subsides.

2nd PUNDIT. Whatever may be the cause of it, I hold the best remedy to be a husband and if her virgin fancy be free and untrammelled, she may readily accept some spouse chosen for her by a loving father, conscious that his mature wisdom is contriving solely for her welfare.

KING. That would be according to my inmost desires, but I do not wish to force her will. Her cousin, the ever sprightly and most respectable Lee-Hsien-Ho, loves her with that placid affection which is the surest guarantee of a comfortable existence. When engaging children clustered round the amiable and highly respected couple, that would be the bulwark of the throne and of her happiness. *(To a servitor)* Call Her Royal Highness Flower of Love, and her revered mother, the Queen Myrtleberry. *(Exit servitor.)*

The THREE PAGES *sing*:—

Like a sea, the light untrammelled
Through all worlds and interspaces
Whence and whither who can fathom
Like a flood tempestuous races,
Gorgeous over wildernesses,
In the forest's mute recesses
To a silvery thread it dwindles.

A PUNDIT. That is well enough in poetry: but in the prose of life, the ocean of diffusive human benevolence is fed by the runlets of domestic affection.

ANOTHER. Most sound doctrine. The poet of the future must sound the glories of pap and feeding-bottle.

Enter with usher the QUEEN *conducting* Princess FLOWER OF LOVE.

KING. My Queen and consort, we have summoned you and our beloved daughter to take counsel for the latter's welfare. We have conferred with our wise pundits and deem a speedy marriage the best remedy for these hysteric ills.

QUEEN MYRTLEBERRY. And who is to personate it? Who is to be the mustard poultice?

KING. Spare your sarcasm, sharer of our heart and throne. If our beloved daughter's heart be not engaged elsewhere, our highly promising nephew Lee-Hsien-Ho would be a most fitting husband. Do you approve, my daughter?

FLOWER OF LOVE (*faintly*). What my father wills is law.

KING. No, my darling. It is for your happiness alone. I desire it. I wish to awaken your dead will to joy and happiness: not to impose mine. If you prefer, follow the custom of our people, place a candle in your window at even, and choose the moth you fancy most.

FLOWER OF LOVE (*listlessly*). What my father decides, is best of all.

QUEEN. You see her will, her very desire to live are in complete abeyance. Is the crushed flower revived by trampling it yet further in the mire?

KING. That is sacred truth. But what to do? Tell us, my beloved daughter, what is it you feel? What is it makes you so unhappy?

FLOWER OF LOVE. It is difficult to describe what I feel. It is not bodily suffering. It is as though everything in consciousness became jangled and out of tune, as though my whole mental and spiritual being were one jarring discord. Then the internal trouble involves even external nature. All its splendours then seem but skin-deep. Disgust supervenes where joy had been before, and I lie spell-bound in a trance of intensifying moroseness and discordancy that involve the very sources of being, as when one's teeth are set on edge, only intenser, universal.

ONE PUNDIT (*to another*). It is the loathsome rite of the outer barbarians, that in subtle penetration devastates her whole being.

ANOTHER (*to the KING*). Would that your Majesty, would suppress the nuisance once for all. It would be a mercy to the disgusting savages themselves.

KING. That I will never do. I will not sacrifice our people to reform theirs. And what right have we to meddle with them or to right by force rites however wrong and detestable? Here it is death for any of them to enter. That is all we can justly insist upon. But, my beloved daughter (*to FLOWER OF LOVE*), do you not love your cousin, Lee-Hsien-Ho? And is not this nervous suffering gradually becoming less acute? It is now a week since the revolting ceremony. On previous occasions the attack subsided after a few days.

QUEEN. This time, on the contrary, it has gone on increasing and shows no signs of abating.

KING. My beloved daughter, try and divert your thoughts. To please your old father. Speak a little with your good cousin, Lee-Hsien-Ho. Let me have him summoned. You have grown up together like brother and sister. When you feel how deeply he loves his foster-sister, perhaps you will be able to forget these extraneous sorrows.

FLOWER OF LOVE. I know that my father only orders it for my welfare. I will try and submit myself to his will. (*Bursts into tears.*)

QUEEN. Try and command your feelings, darling. You make us all unhappy.

KING (*to usher*). Usher, go and summon Lee-Hsien-Ho. (*Exit usher.*)

The THREE PAGES *sing*:—

The surface of all things is lovely and fair,

The surface alone:

Within is a charnel of horror and care,

Nature's heart is a stone:

The forest a shambles of dread and despair,

In its framework of bone

The body a cesspool encloses; how rare

Is the gem and the flower of beauty that robe,

Like a sunbeam, the darkness and filth of the globe.

Ah! Only where matter and consciousness cease

And existence is spent, there is beauty and peace.

Re-enter usher with LEE-HSIEN-HO. The latter is a handsome, perfectly smooth-faced youth, well and carefully dressed, with a broad, finely plaited, jet-black pigtail wound round his head.

KING. My dear nephew, I have summoned you to take part in a family council. In the natural course of events, when my time comes, to you should fall the

position that is now mine. I should designate you as my heir and the people would no doubt ratify my choice and elect you as my successor. For the present, however, we may neglect those contingences. It is something nearer to my heart that has summoned you here to-day.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Most gracious uncle and sovereign! Ever like all your subjects, I have experienced at your hands nothing but love and justice. If, pray Heaven, in a remote future, I am entrusted with carrying out what you, oh! uncle, have so well commenced I shall be content. It has been my one hope's expectation. It is for this that I have dedicated with single-hearted devotion my whole life to the study of the wisdom of our ancient sages to the affairs of State. It has been the dream of my whole life, if Heaven so willed, to carry out your wise designs, not, however, as a slavish imitator but supplementing and revising, what you have left faulty and imperfect.

KING. I am pleased with your frankness, son of my heart, and that you have not shaped your speech to the new forms of idle flattery. But now other causes have summoned you hither—your cousin's, my only daughter's sad state of health. You have grown up as brother and sister and must also feel for her.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. How can it be otherwise? Without parents or brother and sister myself, who else is nearer to me than she?

KING. She is in fact to you like an only sister?

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Have we not grown up together side by side? How can she be otherwise?

KING. But—with all these your ambitious hopes, has nothing else ever occurred to you?

LEE-HSIEN-HO. What should occur to me, when all my thoughts have been devoted to preparing myself for the place I seemed destined to by Heaven?

KING. You say you love your cousin. If ill were to befall her, would you not feel sorry?

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Truly, I should feel sorry. But what mishap threatens her? These crises are but transient.

KING. No: this time her sufferings have been much greater than before. Hitherto they have subsided after the summer solstice; this time, on the contrary, every day aggravates them. She neither eats nor sleeps. If this go on, we tremble for her life.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. I had heard nothing of all this. Though her absence surprised, almost piqued me.

KING. Suppose she were to die.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. That cannot be. So young, so vigorous.

KING. What would be your feelings if I were to tell you that unless—— unless—— something happens—we must prepare for the worst.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. I cannot believe it. I cannot imagine life without her.

KING. And suppose a renunciation on your part could save her life, could you make it?

LEE-HSIEN-HO. I half divine your meaning. Oh! My king and guardian, have I ever experienced anything but love and kindness at your hands? But, oh! the renunciation is a sharp one. Give me time—give me time—that I may school myself to make it a willing one. But let me know more exactly, what you desire of me.

KING. Bethink you first, my nephew. Have you any right to renounce that for which you have prepared yourself with so much toil and study? Is not your first duty to the State? Is not the welfare of the people the supreme law which should dictate your conduct? If such be your feelings I renounce my claim on your devotion, and you will remain the person indicated as my successor.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Oh! when I hear them from without, instead of from the recesses of my own too biased consciousness, I feel that these are but the sophistical arguments of one with a thirst for power, who would justify it at any cost. My first duty is to my king and guardian. Let me hear my fate in plain words.

KING. Briefly then—our wise men would advise me that the only hope of saving your cousin, is an early marriage, completely removed from all the excitements of court life and royal dignity. A natural healthy life in woods and fields: one of happiness, peace, and insignificance. Could you share it with her?

LEE-HSIEN-HO (*after a pause*). If it be the will of Heaven be it so. My golden dream of power for noble ends has vanished like the sunrise. If only the renunciation bring peace and happiness, my happiness should be complete as well. It was but egotism in me, perhaps, to presume that I was the one person destined to shower benefits on the State. There are plenty of other hearts and heads as good or better than mine.

KING (*to his daughter*). See, my daughter, how dearly your cousin prizes your health and welfare. How readily he submits himself to my desire for your sake. Can you not also trust that what I have contrived is the best and for your truest welfare?

FLOWER OF LOVE. I do not wish to be the cause of his renouncing what is his proper position for my sake.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. It is no renunciation, dear one. It only seemed to be so at the first moment.

KING. And dearest, believe me: I do not wish to force your will. Take time to consider—till the sunset of the year or the next solstice. If then you still refuse I will give way to your objections.

FLOWER OF LOVE. I will obey you, oh! my father, but I know that it will be all in vain. (*Weeps.*)

Noise outside: cries of "Away with him! To the judge! To the hangman with him! Lynch the outer barbarian! How dare he violate our sacred land!"

KING. What is the tumult outside? If it be one of the outer barbarians that has ventured within our sacred precincts, let him be brought hither and I will decide what his fate is to be. (*Exeunt usher and guards.*) Strange that it should happen just at this particular moment.

FLOWER OF LOVE. Listen, the tumult grows wilder and more confused. But now all in a moment it is hushed.

KING. Our guards have reached the spot and imposed order and silence. They must have been quite close to the palace gates.

FLOWER OF LOVE. Something tells me that my fate is somehow bound up with this event. The usual feeling of oppression, agony, and apprehension has quite passed away.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Lo! They come.

Enter guards and ushers bringing in PROSTHENOS in his priestly robes. His hands are bound.

KING. Loose his hands (*They do so*) that he may speak freely in defence of himself, if he have any to make, and call some one who can interpret his barbarous jargon.

PROSTHENOS. It is unnecessary, your Majesty. I speak the language of your State.

KING. This is strange, indeed. You know our law and that it is death for one of you outer barbarians to pass our boundaries—for a priest of your bloodstained rites, it is doubly death, and yet you venture alone, unarmed, in the garb of your hateful calling? What motive can you allege that we suspend our laws in your favour?

PROSTHENOS. The humanity that inspires them, when the atrocities of our degraded cult are not in question.

KING. You speak in riddles, be plain.

COUNSELLOR. But first let him explain how he came by a knowledge of our language. He speaks it correctly though the forms be somewhat archaic.

KING. Yes, thus, perhaps, we may find the clue to the mystery. Tell us, then, how came you by a knowledge of our speech?

PROSTHENOS (*presenting documents*). These books and documents in your language are heirlooms in our family jealously preserved and handed down from the remote days before intercourse was interdicted between our nation and your Majesty's. Then as the documents themselves demonstrate, our most ancient family intermarried with your Majesty's and we still have retained the use of your language in our family.

KING. Doubly guilty are you then in having lapsed from our humane ideals, to become a butcher in your loathsome sacrificial horrors. And how can you prove to me that the documents do indeed relate to yourself and have not been forged or stolen?

FLOWER OF LOVE. My father, you are unduly suspicious. His looks speak in his favour. And why should he risk his life here with stolen documents? For what end?

KING. Come to the point. What object have you in risking your life in our country?

PROSTHENOS. To save my brother's.

FLOWER OF LOVE. And how is his endangered?

PROSTHENOS. Know, great King and most lovely Princess, we are not all adherents of the brutal creed of sacrificial cannibalism. I am the head of a party of reforming priests, who desire the abolition of these relics of a past, when cannibalism and religion were

one and the same thing. Thus we have incurred the inveterate hatred of the orthodox party of sacrificial cannibals.

KING. And what has that to do with us?

PROSTHENOS. This year the astrologers, suborned by our king, who, rendered impotent by long years of orgiastic lust and cruelty, has increasing need of fresh horrors to give a fillip to his waning vitality—the astrologers, I say, have pronounced that unless a second Meriah victim be immolated within these three months, the sun will set in its winter night to rise no more.

KING. But what has the sun and these barbarous rites to do with one another?

PROSTHENOS. The ancient belief was, the pretext for them and half-belief still is, to save the sun from his winter prison in the underworld. Only if the sacrifice sate the thirst for blood of the demons who hold him in their power down below, it is pretended, can he be liberated from his winter prison. And the breaking health of our king is feigned mystically to shadow forth the waning power of the sun itself. But the real root of all these superstitions and sophistries is the incorrigible thirst of blood of our barbarous half-educated people.

KING. But your brother——?

PROSTHENOS. Oh! Great King and Lord! He was the one sole object of all my life and hope. The heart of my heart, the soul of my soul, the loveliest, the most gifted of all our noble youth. The hope of all our reforming sect, of all the light and leading of our people was centred in him. The noble ambition of me, of all of us had been to crown him king—for the title is elective, the king being childless—on the death of the present monarch, and inaugurate by his means a purer form of religion based on morality and simplicity of life, in harmony with Nature, after the abolition of the

present cannibal fanaticism. But now—— (*wrings his hands*).

KING. And what should hinder it?

PROSTHENOS. Alas! Just after the last horrid sacrifice, on the very spot where the steaming remains still defiled the human shambles, when I and the other reforming priests were endeavouring to make him realize the loathsomeness of it all—for youth, and often the purest, most inspired youth, ever clings to the discipline of the past and the romantic enchantment that fancy and association weave around custom and ancient ceremony—just then the high priest, Hand of Glory, with his throng of orthodox bloodhounds of the cannibal rite, surprised us—Hand of Glory threatened us with death and torture as traitors to the king and so played upon the exalted fantasy of my brother—his fears for our fate if he refused—and a religious ecstasy, ever latent in him—that——

FLOWER OF LOVE. Oh! I see it all! Poor, poor boy! My heart bleeds for him! His noblest emotions have been played upon! What horror!

PROSTHENOS. That very day, presented by Hand of Glory, the monarch crowned his sacrificial substitute with the golden chaplet of sacrificial royalty, and is now preparing for his victim a sensual three months' orgy of fourfold intensity to compensate for its unwonted briefness and so drug him into indifference to the last act of the official tragedy. To ruin the soul first and then the body, that is the very essence of our orthodox sacrificial creed. And once the sirens and hetæræ of the priestly shambles have him in their opium trance of sensual rapture—good-bye all hope! Who can approach him! Who can save him from himself?

KING (*with growing interest*). Can you not rouse the people?

PROSTHENOS. They are all on the side of lust and savagery—and he is a hostage in their hands. They threaten him with three months' torture instead of bliss—always on the pretext of a religious necessity—if I, his brother, refuse to wield the sacrificial knife.

KING. Oh! horrible! Most horrible! Fratricide, war, and incest. Yes, that is the essence of your loathsome Meriah creed.

FLOWER OF LOVE (*flinging herself on her knees before the KING*). Father! Father! Save him! Save him!! I cannot bear this horror—the awful paroxysm is coming upon me—the awful sense of innermost, universal discord, tearing soul and life to pieces, but of which somehow all my life is part and parcel.

FLOWER OF LOVE *falls backward in a swoon: her body grows rigid and manifests all the symptoms of a cataleptic trance.—The yellow-robed ones come forward.*

CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED. Courtiers and officers of State, let all retire, save the three pages, Lee-Hsien-Ho, the stranger, and her father and mother. Deaden the garish daylight. Then let all retire and let music sound.

The state room is partially darkened, the courtiers, officers, servants, and others retire, while a low weird music strikes up and the PAGES sing as follows:—

Broken flower, repose! and trance, thy dew
Steep her eyelids in. Nirvana's calm
Sweet impersonality infuse:
Soft non-entity, thy roseate balm

Shed around her! Scarcely heaves the breast
And the filmy eyes are lost in tears,
Something lightens in their fixt unrest
Like a vision of primeval years,

And it falls upon us, too, a peace
That undoes the light and sound of things
With a prescience of supreme release,
Far beyond the sunlight's fretting wings.

QUEEN. Hush! Hush! (*The music dies away.*) And see! See! What peace and tranquillity is kindling in her eyes. She stirs. But I—— What is this? I am spell-bound!

The QUEEN stands rigid, as if entranced, looking in the direction her daughter's eyes are turned. The others do the same.

FLOWER OF LOVE (*half raises herself—extends her arms as if to clasp something, speaking in a trance, ecstatically*). Oh! Lord of my love and life and soul! Before all nights and days and suns and moons and time! Self of my self! Being of my being! Heart of my heart! Husband—lover! Before all worlds! My one sole life!

KING. Look! Look!

PROSTHENOS. What miracle! My brother! Oh! Piteous spectacle!

Falls on his knees and clasps his hands in agony. In the air, opposite the entranced virgin, is seen the vision of Aræus, flower-crowned, surrounded by a troupe of half-naked houris, hetærae, etc. The figure of the youth stands out palpable, in clear and strong relief. The figures of the nymphs and minions are duskily seen: their outlines are half indistinguishable. All remain spell-bound, except Lee-Hsien-Ho.

LEE-HSIEN-HO:—

This is the sunset of my waning hopes,
The blight that leaves the blossom's chalice fruitless,
The very winter of my tree of life:
My golden dream of power for noble ends

With which I woke this morning, like the lark
In cheerful diapason, is no more
Killed by this day's event of subtle power.
And now its pallid substitute, the hope
Of sweet domestic bliss, and progeny
To crown old age with Nature's afterglow
Has vanished, too, behind the wreck of that
Which gave it substance. I remain of all
By subtle arts of pilfering fate deprived.
All, all is gone. She wakes to other dreams,
Who was to be my consort: larger schemes
Of welfare for the people, that outstep
The limits of our State, embrace her round:
Her maiden fancy—so perchance foredoomed
Clairvoyant centres round a loftier hope
And I—a barren tree—I stand alone,
Stript of my leaves by wintry winds where not
One love-note pipes among the verglas twigs
That tingle chill as bells in frosty domes.
Ah! me, my dreams of love and power, where are ye?
Renunciation's frosty bride alone
Beckons me through the long strange coil of time
In convolutions cold and purposeless,
To that vague nothingness men hold divine.
So be it: the way that leads to calm repose
Beyond the verge of being and form and life
I place my hopes upon, if hope there be.
So be it: wearers of the yellow robe,
I come to you: bear with me if my tears
Are not yet dried to dull indifference
For that which might have been. Oh! bitter truth
Of fourfold emptiness! Oh! fourfold way
Of thought and speech and action flawless. Law
Of goodness perfected, of mercy, truth
Compassion universal, be my refuge!
And from the corpse of human bliss arise
Nirvana's mystic rose where all life dies.

CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED:—

Vain is the struggle against destiny—
With us, oh! brother, share the homeless life,
The life and death of the Good Law be thine:
Life to all good, death to all ill in thee
Beyond all lives and deaths that curse us here.

The THREE PAGES *sing*:—

All is lost and all is won, fair brother!
Now the homeless, wandering life is thine,
Now the bread of charity shall smother
Earth's ambitious dreams that flashed divine.

Fling the jewelled casket far, and crush
Emerald and carbuncle in the mire,
Lonely wanderer now, the dewdrop brush
In the forest glade from tangled briar.

All mankind, all Nature kindred now
Be to thee of all deprived, and all
Now possessing having naught at all:
With the snow and sunlight on thy brow

For a crown go forth, with all at one,
Night embracing for thy bride: and gloom
Shall unfold her lotus petals, sun
Flame to thee black chaos and the tomb.

As the three pages sing, FLOWER OF LOVE's eyes close and she sinks into a sleep of tranquil and rapturous repose. At the same time, the vision slowly disappears as the priests of the yellow robe, with LEE-HSIEN-HO in their midst, file out of the apartment and the curtain falls.

SCENE II

Another apartment in the Palace of the Mongol King. The KING, the QUEEN, FLOWER OF LOVE, PROSTHENOS, PUNDIT, and CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED ONES discovered seated by a table, with samovar and teacups on it.

KING. The researches of the keeper of our royal archives have been perfectly satisfactory and verified your statements, Prostheno, in every particular. Letters replying to corresponding ones among the documents presented by you, have been found as well as genealogies and other ancient writings that prove close consanguinity between our family and yours in the far past, may they augur a renewal in the near future, under brighter auspices. (FLOWER OF LOVE kneels before her father and kisses his hand.) But how is it to be realized—this noble dream of the federation of our respective peoples not under one sceptre but thus united, and by a fusion of ideas sufficient to diffuse our purer and humaner principles among your more retrograde ones—this noble dream of independence and unity, freedom and harmony crowned by the re-union of our two families? How to extricate your brother from the black magic, whose coils of deadly fascination hold him spell-bound, infiltrate death, and mould him to yearn himself with insane infatuation for the hideous shambles-work of his own immolation?

PUNDIT. Haste and violence will achieve nothing.

KING. Worse than nothing. And yet without prompt action we lose him irrevocably. Every hour that passes, strengthens the fatal influences so subtly prepared, so securely relied upon for his ruin. To save your brother, Prostheno, and indeed my daughter, whose very life seems now bound up with his, I would have sent my troops to crush these barbarous rites; resistance is im-

possible against such superior forces as are at our command, but alas! we should but reap barren, blood-stained laurels, avenging a crime instead of averting it.

QUEEN. Nothing can be accomplished unless the youth's own will be first freed from the lurid enchantments of these sirens and courtesans and of their necromantic creed. Free his will from the spell of lust and morbid superstition—hideous amalgam of death and ribaldry—and then we may hope to act effectively, but not till then.

CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED. Yes: true love can alone save him from the honied poison and the lascivious toils of the sirens and lemures who lure him to his fate to gloat in ecstatic orgy over the decapitation, the spouting blood, the flayed and bleeding carcass.

FLOWER OF LOVE (*to her father*). Let me go to him—— Let Prosthénos take me with him. I fear nothing. If die we must let us die together.

KING. That were sheer madness and would spoil everything. The game is too noble a one to risk all by rash, premature, and ill-considered action. Besides, my child, how do you know that your presence would be agreeable to him? That he would not prefer his present comrades and companions? That your virtuous beauty and innocence would have power all at once to conquer their subtle arts and fascinations?

CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED. The vision of the other day, convinces me that secret affinity does indeed exist between the young couple—but the sentiment may still be dormant in him, smothered beneath the husks and refuse of outer form, he and his lewd company still delight to wallow in. How are we to assure ourselves that it is there and then fan it into a purifying fire and a beacon of hope and salvation?

PROSTHENOS. I have it. What is the one efficient link capable of deviating the fatal series of events that

lead to torture, death, and sacrifice and of inaugurating the sequence that leads to happiness, triumph, and victory? Her portrait.

CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED. An excellent idea and by good fortune, we have a charming likeness of the Princess.

KING. I never heard of this.

QUEEN. I assented to her portrait being taken by a gifted member of the order.

CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED. It hangs in the vihara, at once the cause and effect of love and loyalty in all of us. Shall I fetch it?

KING. By all means bring it here at once.

Exit CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED.

PROSTHENOS. I will place the portrait while he is sleeping opposite his couch, that when he awakes the unexpected vision may meet his sight with the first rays of the eastern¹ sun; as the one wakens him to material life, may the other kindle in him the light of hope and spiritual life and drive away for ever the lurid ministers of death and superstition.

KING. What will be your next step?

PROSTHENOS. I will return and if our stratagem has been successful, flee with him by the same way, I first entered into your Majesty's realm.

KING. How can you succeed in this without the almost certain risk of discovery? By then the life of the city will have awakened: you cannot escape observation.

¹ It must be remembered that the Arctic Aryans, probably in those days closer in form to the present negroes, had previously been an equatorial people who were driven to the Pole in torrid (?) times and had carried with them thither the ideas of east and west which at the Pole would be without significance.

Besides the minions and sirens of his transient shambles-state will have returned and hold him spell-bound or, at any rate, under the Argus eyes of a jealous and murderous observation. What I advise is this. Supposing our device succeed, let him dissimulate his changed sentiments, and dally with his train of dissolute companions, as though still enthralled by their enchantments, until the next period of repose. In the meantime our troops shall prepare a subway under the great wall, that at present still divides the two States, the ground is friable, the tunnel can be excavated within the next period of the sun's revolution, and offer a secure means of flight to him and you. Besides, if this our first attempt fail it may prove a precious resource in the event of future complications.

PUNDIT. Our Monarch's counsels are ever full of wisdom and perspicacity. Let rapidity and precision ensure their full accomplishment. And see! here comes the Chief of the Yellow-Robed ones, with the portrait of the Princess.

Enter CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED *with the picture.*

CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED. Here is the portrait but the paint is yet still scarce dry, and the covering may only be removed when the picture is placed in situ.

KING. So then, Prothenos, away on your fraternal mission of love and hope. The sleeping hour is at hand. The day is cloudy and threatens rain. Everything is favourable to our enterprise. I go to impart our orders to the troops. (*All go out.*)

SCENE III

Same as Act I, Scene I.—ARÆUS with the hetærae, minions, odalisques, etc.

A GIRL. What is the matter with you? You have no spirit. You avoid our revels.

ARÆUS. I am tired.

A BOY. You are a milksop. Come along with us to the other boys and girls. They are waiting for us outside yonder.

ARÆUS. Go and leave me in peace. I am tired and want to be alone.

ANOTHER YOUTH. A nice sort of Meriah indeed. By the flayer's knife! This will bring misfortune to the State.

ANOTHER GIRL. You are a bad, naughty boy.

ANOTHER YOUTH. If you will not link yourself with our revelries, we'll speak to the king about you.

ANOTHER GIRL. Yes, and they already know something of your lackadaisical behaviour at the palace.

ANOTHER. Leave His High and Mightiness to his virgin meditations. Such as we are not fit to tie his sandals nor break in upon his chaste slumbers.

ANOTHER YOUTH. Come along, boys and girls, all of you, and leave him to his sulks. (*All troop out.*)

ARÆUS (*flinging himself upon the couch*). Oh! How sick I am of all their mummeries! The first wild throb of self-sacrifice, when I offered myself to Hand of Glory to do what he liked with me, where is it now? Its brief delusive joy has quite evaporated. Instead of it only a short strip of lane, ugly, miry, and monotonous, separates this from a yet more sordid resting-place, littered with the skulls of men and cattle. Sleep drown for a brief moment, the foretaste of your direr and swift approaching counterpart. (*The curtain falls and rises again after a brief pause.*)

SCENE IV

The curtain rises again. ARÆUS is discovered asleep. He is as in the previous scene girded with a leopard-skin and his naked body garlanded with flowers. His hunting knife and a whip are lying beside him on the couch.

Enter PROSTHENOS with the portrait covered.

PROSTHENOS:—

How deep his slumber yet, how light his breathing,
Light as the ripple of a summer ocean's
Unfathomed depths. Oh! beauty yet unmarred
Or convalescent from the first assault
Of passion's storm, fiends, feasters on all ill
Who subtly do conspire in mad cyclones
Of lust and anguish, horror and despair,
Mystic infatuation's feigned delights,
And phantom-joys of pain and sacrifice,
To roll his wave where harpies glut the caves
Of death and woe, where sirens crest the reef,
Where blood and corpses cleave the tangled foam
And yawn abysses hopeless, past release;
Unspoiled is yet the nectar of his mouth
The sunlight of his smile's sweet innocence,
Nor yet debauch has rent the mouth awry
Nor carved her cynic ripples round his lip
Nor frayed the plastic smoothness of his cheek;
Oh! May this antidote I bring with me
Yet exorcize hell's magic potion's power
Before it work and canker cankering dole
Before it fester in the brain's eclipse.
Son, brother, lover, hope's last resting-place!
Think one good thought of me even in your dreams,
Linking my memory with your better soul,
And may this vision's human sunlight blend
With that of Nature to the wished for end.

(Places the portrait and withdraws the veil.)

He smiles in slumber: have the coral lips
Breathing an inspiration through the veils
Of sight, immortalized some formless dream
Of paradise within his slumbering soul
To prescience of its foretaste here on earth?
Oh! be it so, and this device succeed
Sole clue of salvage in our direst need!

He goes out. AEÆUS stirs, stretches himself, and slowly awakes.

ARÆUS (*at first not perceiving the picture*):—

Where have I been? What am I? What a gorge
Of winding labyrinths beneath the graves
Of throbbing night I've stifled in, whose orbs
Of gross material rapture clove and grew
Such very self, as fancy pants in vain
To realize on earth: oh! heavenly hells
Of shameless lust! perdition's agonies
To sublimates of bliss solidified!
What sordid hostelries, what mouldy cribs,
Where things scare human moaned, whose leprous limbs
I linked myself withal, in obscene coils
Of apprehension, twinned to frantic joy,
Sweeter then cleanly love's too chill delight,
I've revelled through! What monstrous slums englobed
In leaden death and confined catacombs,
Vice's quintessence, crime's whole being in one
I've ransacked through and through; made
 soul's sole home
Aye, soul of soul: whole æons re-emerged,
Soaked in intensest infamies that seemed
Portions of earthly life, lived through perchance
In madhouses, clean-wiped and blotted out
Of conscious memory, but there in swoons
To flesh and blood of nightmare recomposed.
Anon, unindividualized, a flight
Of discord half, and half thick cloying lust

Cleft, swallow-like, dim skies of rolling death—
A never ending stream of winnowing wings—
Then hung arrested where a harvest moon
Mellowed corruption to ecstatic trance
Despair and then——

For all at once though struggling nerves and will
Battled and wrought against it, something snapt
Or dawned, or warmth or light suffusing all
And what had been, that heaven of hell once mine
Stricken by barbs of mad regret, slunk off,
Through echoing vistas drawn and far-off grotts
Of tinkling night, expired—and was no more.
Then peace—a peace all unsolicited—
Nay, combated and fought against—it lapsed
It ringed me round, obscured and made me naught
In freedom's blest impersonality.

So I awoke (*Pauses—then seeing the picture*):

But ah! What means it all?

That dream of heaven, in sleep importunate
And an unwelcome guest, there counterfeit
On yonder canvas—by some miracle
Transmuted there—to human form reduced
Sublimed to heavenly loveliness—oh! there
It wakes, it lives, it breathes—there 'tis my heaven
And heavenly welcome! But how comes it, then,
That dreamland's beatific vision here,
Confronts me radiant where the sunlight glints
Modelled to human form, or more divine,
My truest self externalized and halved
To realler unity, and heaven on earth!
How came it there? Who set it there? Can't be
Some new device of my lascivious court
To drench my soul in yet more fiendish joys,
Some preparation for live innocence
Prefigured there, to be besmirched, debauched,
In yet more sodden orgies than the world
Of cloying madness that I dreamt but now.

It cannot be. Their sordid hempen souls
 Ne'er kindled such a vision of delight
 That shines beyond the orbit of their night.
 That shines, ah! me, on me in vain, too late
 Only to gild the horror of a fate
 No more self-sacrifice but emptiness,
 Of idiot pride and self-delusion's dust.
 Ah! now I see, I know: this nightmare night
 Revealed the inward of lewd beauty's shews,
 Her minions and her unsexed mountebanks,
 False counterfeits of Nature's beauty true,
 Her inmost shrine beyond all forms divine,
 To my true self. Alas! too late! too late!
 She brands me there, self-murderer, self-ensnared,
 Self-doomed to knacker's yard and flayer's shear,
 Quarterings and butcherings and gluttonies
 Tricked out in litanies conventional,
 By fulsome priests and murder's wolfish maw—
 Duty, self-sacrifice, god-fearingness
 Mysteries, dispensations, and the like—
 Oh! Prothenos, my brother, had I then
 But listened to the wisdom of thy love
 And not the ravenous throats of priesthood's packs!
 But now it is too late. And hark! they come,
 The loathsome rabble of Circean styes,
 The kennel's garbage and the gutter's toys
 To flog my jaded appetite and choke
 My rising gorge in nauseous crapulence.
 Where can I turn for aid or whither fly?
*The sounds of flute and music and the tramp of feet
 grow nearer, mingled with the song:—*
 So let the ribald jest run round
 Blythe as a satyr ivy-crowned;
 Passion our Lord is, earthly love
 Not hell below, not heaven above;
 Sound ye the music low and clear,
 Love be our charnel, life our bier—

The throng of minions: Sakis bearing wine vessels, dancers, etc. advance at the back of the scene half-naked, crowned with roses and garlanded with flowers. They stop short and halt in bewildered amazement, and exclaim one after another:—

FIRST:—

What a sour, what a supercilious air!

SECOND:—

What a scowl! la! what a gesture! What a stare!

THIRD:—

Ho! ho! ho! ha! ha! ha! hee! hee! hee!

Far above such sorry mountebanks as we

What has turned young master squeamish, hee hee! hee!

FOURTH:—

The picture! 'tis the picture! Treachery!

Some treachery is brewing here—or where?

Who has painted, who has brought and put it there?

FIFTH:—

Ha! ha! ha! ho! ho! ho! hee! hee! hee!

Of a Meriah to rebel who ever heard?

SIXTH:—

We'll clip your sprouting wings, you gutter bird,

You shall wallow; you shall grovel in the mire,

Of all the foulest coils of gross desire:

Till the headsman's axe cut short your fount of tears,

And turn you to a jet of vintage: shears

Flay off the supple velvet of your hide

Laying bare the reeking pomegranate inside.

We'll teach you to resume your proper trade

And blunt your truculence, you sleek young blade!

And couple you with every loosest jade!

Quick! Seize him! drab him down to every vice

And you others filch the picture in a trice.

Some of the revellers seize the picture and hurry away with it: others, preparing to forge upon ARÆUS, exclaim one after another as before.

SEVENTH:—

He was always like a milksop at its prayers.

EIGHTH:—

With his superfine aristocratic airs.

NINTH:—

The other was a trump, a low-born cove.

TENTH:—

But game to plunge in head and ears for love.

ELEVENTH:—

And wallow in his bath of death and lust.

TWELFTH:—

But we'll knuckle this, too, down to what it must.

ARÆUS:—

The cloying swoon of passion comes again
Drowning all will and vigour to react:
As when a house and all its base collapse.
This time I'll not succumb, nor abdicate
My virile force. Down languors, nerveless trance!
Sick compromise, and servile compliance

(seizing the dogwhip)

Off, stinking ulcers! festering sepulchres,
Incestous charnels! cesspools! carrion! garbage,
Off to your carrion king, your carrion priests!
Betray! traduce! impeach! Contrive new deaths.
New torments to excruciate flesh and nerves!
Off to your altars and conventicles! Split drum and
pshaw!

Vomit your superstitions! Void your rites!
Out of my sight! Ye cankers, scorpions, blights!
I fear ye not! One stronghold ye'll ne'er storm:
The night that saves from all your ribald nights.

ARÆUS seizes the dogwhip, and as if possessed with superhuman power drives the Circeans off the stage: they fly panic-stricken in all directions. He then returns and sinks upon the couch exhausted.

A MINION peeping and venturing a few steps upon the scene, to the side, with mocking grimaces and mumping gestures.

MINION:—

Ha! my fine gentleman, we've got you now.

SECOND:—

The king shall be informed of this, post-haste.

THIRD:—

I'd not be in your skin next midday sun.

FOURTH:—

We'll have him flayed alive: what roaring fun!

FIFTH:—

I almost feel it ripping off his bones. (*Pulls up the skin over his own stomach.*)

SIXTH (*with gestures as though devouring with gusto*).

Dainty young master, would'nt not change flesh with the likes of us commonwise. But we'll taste it all the same morsel-, gorge-, and stomachwise.

ARÆUS falls upon his tormentors with the dogwhip. They disappear: this time definitely. He takes up the hunting knife and advances to the middle of the stage.

ARÆUS:—

Now all is finished: now my little life
Has rounded to its close. Oh! childhood's hours
How far and yet how near ye seem to be.
Seen through the vistas of twice nine bright days
Of summer and as many wintry glooms
Oh! well-remembered moment that yet lurks
A flame in conscious memory, as the first,
When the red disk was halved, and like a star

Or the last chord of some sweet harmony,
It thrilled a moment and was seen no more
For half a year of darkness. Oh! ye moons,
Moonrising, moonlights, masked in fiery blood
Oft as auroral arcs their spiry shafts
Tossed to the zenith, or mid spangled skies
Of diamond, where a silvery crescent joined,
Glinting through dusky palm-groves glimmering nights,
The moon set.

But yet the sun of life arose again
After long darkness in its wintry grave
To life and light and happiness once more.
Mine when it sets beneath its night of gore
From this cleft heart's aurora, never more!
But so—so only—is our bloodhound creed,
Balked of its quarry, left to howl dismay
To all the winds of heaven, in mad despair
At Nature's apprehended ruin: freed
So only, by my own red-handed deed,
Forestalling theirs, I steal their hope away
With my protracted agony—then bleed,
My joyous heart and body! Fall unflayed
Unoutraged in their reeking shambles-shrine,
Saved by this hand, and this fair glittering blade.
So do I strike me free! Oh! kindly knife
And death, sole refuge of a ruined life!

He raises the knife to stab himself. PROSTHENOS
rushes forward and holds back his arm.

PROSTHENOS. Aræus, what is this? What has hap-
pened? Where is the picture?

ARÆUS. Prosthenos, you here? Then it was you
brought it. What does it all mean? I understand
nothing.

PROSTHENOS. It was a last hope to save you from
yourself and your infatuation. But your impetuosity
has foiled our well-devised scheme for your rescue.

ARÆUS. The picture maddened me. It showed me, like a flash of dazzling lightning, above an earthquake-stricken and convulsing world, what I had given my life for, what I was—what I was to be—fool, dupe, carrion: then when the suborned contagions, architects of my ruin, returned with all their death-entrancing harmonies and voluptuous languors to lull me to perdition, I broke their bonds—covered them with my execrations—drove them out like swine.

PROSTHENOS. Our very success has been the dilapidation of our well-devised scheme.

ARÆUS. Now I am doomed to torture, a protracted death of agony, torments unspeakable, horrors without a name. Oh! why did you hold back my hand. Repair the wrong. Here is the means. (*Proffers the knife.*)

PROSTHENOS. Hear, son of my soul, life of my life, all is not lost. All may yet be well. Have courage, have constancy, if need be, to bear even bondage, torture, imminent death: you know not what has happened.

ARÆUS. Tell me, but be brief. I dread every minute lest they return with priest and torturers to hale me before the king.

PROSTHENOS. Brother! Best-beloved of my heart! Be sure I will not survive you. But we have powerful allies. Forces irresistible to save you, if we can employ them with effect and circumspection.

ARÆUS. Where? who? you cannot mean—

PROSTHENOS. The Mongol King. When all seemed lost I—

ARÆUS. You risked almost certain death for me. Oh! Prosthenos!

PROSTHENOS. The risk was nothing. The moment was propitious. They were taking counsel about a strange malady of the Princess, the king's only daughter.

ARÆUS. Then the picture was hers!

PROSTHENOS. Yes. As I say they were in deep distress about her health—prostrated every period of the Meriah sacrifice, by a strange mysterious nervous malady.

ARÆUS. Oh! lovely dream of goodness and compassion! with what agony of a lost paradise you torture me!

PROSTHENOS. Say not so, Aræus. The story of your infatuation and your peril aroused her sympathies to deeper tenderness and participation, with every fresh revelation of fiendish cruelty.

ARÆUS. Oh! divine angel of mercy and pity!

PROSTHENOS. Till when I related how our fiendish rites decreed that I must be your executioner, on pain of your being afflicted with every form of excruciating torments, her gentle spirit could bear it no longer, her eyes bled tears—she fainted.

ARÆUS. Oh! ministering spirit of Nature's inmost love and tenderness!

PROSTHENOS. And then a strange thing happened. Her body stiffened in a cataleptic trance and I and all present, we also remained paralysed, spell-bound. Then all at once a heavenly smile bathed her features, and she stretched out her hands in an ecstasy of passionate love and tenderness to a vision of yourself, that grew palpable to all of us, in the space opposite to where she lay entranced. Then she fell back in tranquil slumber and the vision vanished. When she awoke all trace of her illness had vanished too. Only that henceforth she vows her life to be bound up with yours, and that your death will be hers as well.

ARÆUS. And the king——

PROSTHENOS. I produced clear proof of the kinship of our ancient house with his and——

ARÆUS. I see it all! Oh! what a paradise on earth might have been mine—now lost! lost! lost!

PROSTHENOS. No “might have beens”. “Is to be” say rather. All is not lost where wisdom and power are conjoined and the will to use them. Now your life is as dear to the king as to me, for it is his only daughter’s. Had you restrained yourself—had I not been detained from returning sooner—you were to be invited to continue to feign acquiescence with your present lot, pursuing your revels with your lascivious courtiers of the Court of Love until the next sleeping hour, when I was to have consigned you to safety beyond the wall.

ARÆUS. But now I shall be flung into some hideous dungeon and sacrificed in haste at the next southern sun. Tortured, flayed alive! Oh! horror, you know not, Prosthénos, what shocking fate is in store for me.

PROSTHENOS. Bear up against all with constancy, my darling. Resist the worst, though I must leave you to resist alone: when the agony is no more endurable death supervenes—as it comes sooner or later to all. ’Tis cowardice and unreason to prevent death by death.

ARÆUS. But, however, can you save me? I am a hostage in their hands. Now all the city knows of what has happened, and will be against me. Now escape is impossible. Bring force to save me and it is my death-warrant. Oh! let us die together.

PROSTHENOS. How can I betray my, our benefactor, and break his heart? For your death seals his daughter’s. What shameful gratitude for all their noble sympathy! No, I must leave you that I may save myself, in order to save you and thus save her life as well. Forgive me for this seeming cowardly desertion, Aræus.

ARÆUS. Brother, you are right. I will brace myself to bear all and to the uttermost.

PROSTHENOS. Brave boy, it shall not be in vain. You shall live yet to earthly bliss and paradise. We shall not be doomed to wreak an empty vengeance on your murderers.

ARÆUS. Kiss me, brother. (*They embrace.*)

PROSTHENOS:—

And now farewell. It is no long leave taking.
The midnight of our hearts shall soon be breaking.

SCENE V

In the Palace of the Aryan King. His PHYSICIAN,
PRIME MINISTER, *and* HAND OF GLORY.

PRIME MINISTER. How is His Majesty? Though but his Prime Minister, I am now virtually king. He shuns all official duties.

PHYSICIAN. My science registers with every day a rapid decline of the king's vital powers. He will not bear up until the setting of the summer day three moons hence.

HAND OF GLORY. He must. His death now would convulse the State. The danger to the sun, too, think of that.

PHYSICIAN. And you believe that ancient legend?

PRIME MINISTER. Anyhow the people do. And one thing is sure: with the king's decease the sun of our emoluments would set to rise no more. What do we not contrive to net providing army and body-guard?

HAND OF GLORY. So long as a due and sufficient portion of it is devoted to the maintenance of our holy religion and to religious ceremonies, the arrangement is a just and convenient one.

PRIME MINISTER. Then there are the tributary States, whose freedom he has crushed by the brigandage of his gluttoned troops—and 'tis we who suck the lemons dry.

HAND OF GLORY. The people get some of the pickings as well by ruining the industries of the native States, and then forcing their own shoddy upon them at double its real value. That alone induces them to bear the heavy taxes of the State to fatten your well-primed myrmidons. But they are beginning to understand that two and two make four. If Prothenos and his reforming priests get them book-learning, schooling, and common-sense, our game's up.

PHYSICIAN. Yes, every day revolt spreads even among the common people. The intellectual classes are theirs already.

HAND OF GLORY. If I had my way, the apostate fry should be roasted whole alive on the market-place and devoured there. That would be two corpses in one coffin. Rebellion's death pyre and the people who ate it doubly enslaved to our orgies and bloodthirst, which claim them for ever fawning under tables for scraps of roast flung to them from our surfeit.

PRIME MINISTER. The mongrel, kennel filth! But with no more blood to squeeze out of the tributary States, and no more neighbours weak enough, to hector out of their freedom, knock up and knuckle under, till kneaded pliant enough for us to develop along the same suction-line of progress, the people will begin to see that honesty and free barter amongst all alike, without kings, are the best policy and fill their own pockets. Then they will join the tributary States in the efforts of the latter to make themselves free of our dissanguinating incubus, the army and body-guard ever awake to protect His Sacred Majesty from his

faithful subjects, while their paunches wane as taxes mount.

HAND OF GLORY. We must cow them with terror of an avenging God and their duty to religion and the State: scare them blind by a dread of hell, exemplified before their very eyes, by its worst torments upon the ungodly and disobedient in this life.

PRIME MINISTER. Yes, that is true wisdom. Religion is the true saviour of society and the handmaid of enlightened policy.

PHYSICIAN. Aye: and now mark me. The king is cut to the heart, sickened and angered by the languor and growing indifference of the Meriah to his Court of Love that His Majesty has selected with so much care and zeal. His gloomy self-centred superstitious mind augurs therefrom disaster to himself, ruin to the State, the extinction of the sun itself as a consequence of his own decline. You say we need punishments, terrible examples to cow the people. Exactly so: and I have excogitated a means to that end and to save the kings' life at the same time.

PRIME MINISTER. What is your proposal? Let us hear it.

PHYSICIAN. To save the king's ebbing vitality, there is but one remedy—that he drain the living life-blood from the heart of some vigorous healthy youth.

PRIME MINISTER. Whose?

PHYSICIAN. Why not this testy, dainty, fastidious spoilt and pampered Meriah's? Let him be sacrificed according to my new system after the sun has completed her next two rounds, before the Svatoovid god below the sacred hill, and the king there drink his life-blood from the heart in presence of the people.

HAND OF GLORY. That would at once be a glorious development of the Blessed Sacrifice and a revival of

the true ages of Faith. But, alas! it cannot be. Though I hate Prothenos and his disloyal and intriguing sect with God's own wrath, religion must keep her plighted word. Besides Aræus has always been a fervent orthodox believer and then——

PRIME MINISTER. I know what you are thinking of. The people are beginning to look askance at the self-sacrifice of the most popular and best-beloved youth of our upper class. 'Tis whispered that you, high priest, have bewitched him by magical arts, compacts with the powers and what not: and that his immolation will increase, not lessen the peril to the sun himself.

PHYSICIAN. Then better set him free and procure a substitute. Doubtless that sleek young slave of his would sacrifice his life to save his master's.

HAND OF GLORY. No, that cannot be either. He, Aræus, is the Gordian knot of their conspiracy. Cut it and the spider's web of their schemes and plots collapses at once and for ever. But hark! the king approaches.

A shuffling of feet is heard from the king's bedchamber: supported between two handsome ephēbi he totters to the throne and seats himself. The two ephēbi squat one on each side of it.

KING:—

My eyes grow dim, a greenness fills my vision.
The spectre of that blood my pulses lack,
Hovering for ever in the tainted air.
Give me the chalice of the blood-red wine.

One of the ephēbi proffers the chalice, the KING drinks with shaky hand. Some of the wine runs down his beard.

PHYSICIAN (*to the Minister*):—

You see he's well-nigh finished, even now.

KING:—

No heart is in the chalice, nor in me.
Give me the wine-cup of the wrath of God.
The vintage of young veins and childhood's rose.

PHYSICIAN:—

The king's most inmost instinct knows its need.

KING:—

Spring will revive when springtide blossoms bleed.
Hands the empty chalice to the other ephebus who takes it and stands uncertain whether or not to obey the bidding of the king.

PRIME MINISTER:—

Go to the pinfold. Slay some goat or kid.
(The ephebus goes out.)

KING:—

Blood, blood, blood, blood.
(A pause.)

HAND OF GLORY:—

Hush! what is that. What hurrying feet approach?
It is the Meriah's court. Something has happened.
Enter hetærae, minions, odalisques, etc. with the picture veiled.

CHORUS:—

The Meriah has gone mad: repudiates
Our revels, and discharging obloquies
Upon us all, with scourge and knotted thong
Has whipped us from his presence, raging spleen
Choking his gorge. He thrashed us forth like dogs
Naming us swine and nameless filth of sewers.

MINISTER:—

What had you done to so provoke his ire!

CHORUS:—

Naught but our usual offices. Believe me,
Some plot is brewing to pervert his mind

And filch him from his duty to the gods.
We found this picture by him, placed no doubt
To wean him from our sports, a maiden face
Of sunlight—fair complexion, ebon-framed,
This was the yeast that puffed his heady wrath
To spout against us.

MINISTER:—

Show it us, unveil it.

They turn back the veil. There is nothing but a black canvas.

The veil and picture were disposed like the leaves of a book—attached at the top, and the sunlight rendered sticky the resinous surface of the picture, which thus became attached to the veil and was lifted along with it.

It is uncertain whether this was a deliberate device of the yellow-robed ones or a pure coincidence.

The superstitious Children of the Night assumed at once that it was miraculous and so never dreamt of investigating the cause of it.

HAND OF GLORY:—

But there is nothing here.

PRIME MINISTER:—

You come to jest and mock authority. Beware!

CHORUS:—

There was a picture when we saw it first
As we described it: that I vow and swear.

PRIME MINISTER: —

What has become of it?

LEADER:—

I cannot say.

PHYSICIAN:—

There is some magic here.

HAND OF GLORY:—

Best have it burnt.

Go, fetch a lamp. (*Exit ephebus.*) Make speed: at any rate.

He has rebelled against the discipline,
The holy discipline of love and death
Prepared him by the royal clemency
With so much unction and solicitude,
And doubtless would evade his plighted oath
And will if any means of flight be found.

Now I repudiate him, now withdraw
All scruple, all compassion, all protection,
Now let the traitor and apostate bleed

A thousand deaths of tenfold agony
Ere twice the sun has winged his course in heaven.

Re-enter ephebus with a lighted lamp. HAND OF GLORY takes it and fires the picture with it. The picture flames up and is speedily consumed.

So perish all the enemies of God
And of the Meriah mystery—heretics
And misbelievers. Now I do applaud
All that the king's physician may devise
Of torture and new forms of lingering death
To infuse young life in kingship, cow sedition
And scare the mob back to its ancient faith.

(To the minions, etc.)

Go some of you, summon the understrappers
Conduct them to the Meriah, have him bound,
And let them flog him naked through the streets,
To show the people we disdain their pity,
And are not moved one hair's breadth from our purpose
By scheming turbulence and disaffection.

Go, scourge him hither, scourge him here at once.

(Some of the minions, etc., go out.)

PRIME MINISTER:—

It is the province of the civil power
To give such orders, you usurp our right

Dealing out death and punishment, exceed
The limits of your spiritual sphere,
And mine our prestige and authority.

HAND OF GLORY:—

I am the arm and mouthpiece of a power
Above all kings and kingship's minions.
The God of love and hate, of wrath and justice,
The God of war that wields the thunderbolt
And blasts the doubter—far above the dust
Of mouldy charter, state and precedent
Of which you build a tottering house of cards
And power that is no power. He rides the storm,
Breathes in the tempest, scatters plague and famine
War, ravin, ruin, earthquake, flood, eclipse,
Death, justice, desperation, storm, and blight
Mocking your apish mockery of his might.

PRIME MINISTER:—

Still we cannot approve this usurpation.

HAND OF GLORY:—

Approve or not approve, we have the people
With us. So long as slack apostasy
Defrauds their ravin, they're a religious rock
Of adamant. We can send you howling, too,
Along the Meriah's flaming paths of woe.

(Exit.)

PHYSICIAN:—

This is the saviour of society
And handmaid of enlightened policy!

PRIME MINISTER:—

Yes, but alas! we still must humour him.
So long as ignorance and superstition
Still weld the mob to be his citadel,
The Lords of truth and might shall not prevail
Against his gates of hell, with whose fell valves
He foils the heavenly powers that strive in vain

Against those bloodstained portals. Well, let it be,
He clips our wings of truth and love and hope,
But flogs our lust and basest appetites
Into oblivion of the heavenlier vision.
He gives us night and he will serve our time.
Better conform ourselves to that and thus
Enjoy his vileness, if we cannot crown
Our virtue. Earth smells sweet; we crouch secure,
The comfortable footstool of his venom,
Snapping the sodden crumbs he flings us there.

PHYSICIAN:—

Somewhat ignoble counsel, eh?

MINISTER:—

Believe me,
The only practical and possible. But look!
His victim comes; now shall we see his milk
Of loving kindness, his God of mercy, charity,
His devilish pity, tears of crocodile,
His hypocritical compassion, all
Brewing and seething in their hell-broth cauldron.

*Re-enter HAND OF GLORY at the head of the minions,
etc., together with the understrappers. The rawhide
lashes of the latter are dripping blood. In the midst of
them is ARÆUS: a rag is girded round his loins, his back
is torn and bleeding.*

HAND OF GLORY:—

See! I've retrieved our penitent. Unruly
And peccant wills must be chastised by fear
For their own welfare in the world to come.
Let none impute as inhumanity
The temporal suffering we inflict to foil
The everlasting torment in hell's womb
Must be his certain fate if not forestalled
By agonies less sharp on this world's stage.
Come, have you aught to say against our mercy

That rips you here to save your soul in heaven?
If so, speak, rebel churl, pert renegade!

(ARÆUS *says nothing.*)

Mute eel, deaf adder, you shall hiss and writhe
In millionfold contortions by and by;
Meanwhile, mine understrappers, flog a voice
If that may be, into the lock-jaw fangs
Of this defiant cur.

*The understrappers scourge ARÆUS who bears in
silence.*

Ha! how the rawhide licks
And curls and flickers round his supple flanks
And cringing buttocks! What? Mum still, young pup!
E'er two sun's rounds, we'll strap you on a block
And peel you musical! Your yelling screams
Shall vocalize the sagging blade that rips
'Twixt flexuous hide and muscle, those shall rip
The curdling breeze and from the fleeting cloud
Shake bloody showers, and match the trickling dews
That sop your quivering rawness. Enough! his stub-
born throat

Is parched with treason's ulcers and in vain
We preface his impending torments now
With these mild preludes. Off! Away with him!
Down to the lowest dungeon, where the ground
Is rank and sodden with impurities:
There let him dream his coming nuptials, wrists
Wedded to iron bracelets straitly linked
To staples in the wall by galling chains:
There one of you amuse his solitude
Till one of us descend there to recite
His doom and sentence. Off! away with him.

*The understrappers, minions, hetærae, etc. go out with
ARÆUS. Re-enter ephebus with the chalice full of blood.*

EPHEBUS:—

Here is the chalice of the wrath of God!
Take it, oh! father of our people, take

The brimming beaker! See! the bubbling gore
Above the rim leaps like a living foam
That spumed but now along its living sluice
Earnest of ruddier orgies soon to be.

KING (*drinking with trembling hand*):—

You put me off with blood of sheep and goats,
Blood, blood, blood, blood, I want the blood of boys,
And girls, of youths and maidens: oh! for shame!
To stint your King and Sire, of what's his due.

HAND OF GLORY (*who has been writing at a table, and confabulating with the PRIME MINISTER and PHYSICIAN, approaches the KING*):—

You shall not be defrauded, Mighty Lord,
Here is the charter of your blood-feast, sign
This sanction of amendment in the rites
Of sacrifice, this sentence that decrees
Excruciating death to him, to you
His life-blood, to your vessels' empty holds
Transhipped by surgeon's art, and you shall taste
Such bloody bliss of renovated being
As never yet the sacrificial art
Had dared imagine, since the dawn of things.

HAND OF GLORY *presents a parchment, the KING signs mechanically, then his head falls on his breast.*

HAND OF GLORY (*to the ephebi*):—

This day's emotions have exhausted him.
Take him away. And may repose engraft
Strength to rehearse the part that he's to play
In the tremendous sacrifice we plan.

UNDERSTRAPPER:—

Hark! there are footsteps. Some one knocks outside.
'Tis Hand of Glory come to read your sentence
Wake up, Aræus.

(ARÆUS *is silent.*)

VOICE (*from outside*):—

Ho! there, inside. Quick! open: let us in.

UNDERSTRAPPER (*opening, to himself*):—

We must let in the priesthood everywhere.

*Enter HAND OF GLORY and another understrapper
who holds a piece of red chalk in his hand.)*

HAND OF GLORY:—

Listen, Aræus, we have come to read
The sentence which the king has signed and sealed:
When twice the sun has run her course in heaven
You shall be flayed alive, but inch by inch,
So that the knife prise off your buxom hide
With strident slowness: first the point shall stripe
A line from nape to buttock—understrapper!
Mark it at once in red along his spine—

*The understrapper turns ARÆUS upon his stomach
and does so.*

Then down the thighs within the calves that so
His feet and toes be skinned, the skin reversed
Up to the fork: then
He shall be gelded first, then disembowelled
And then the vaulted bone-work of his breast
Be cleft in twain, his heart torn out, but left
Intact its arteries, that so the king,
In second childhood, may suck dry that teat
Of gory milk, and so renew the life
That swift old age, else dooms to wormy death.
His skin shall be preserved and stuffed to warn
All future Meriahs not to play at treason,
Apostate, nor defy the laws of Heaven.

Two rounds of sunlight still are yours, Aræus,
To prelibate the raptures that await you
Two sun-rounds hence. Nothing can save you now.
So chew the cud of bitterest introspection
And count the stealthy footsteps of the hours
That bring your swift perdition. Perish all,
So perish all the enemies of God
And of his cristed one! Come! let's be going.
And leave him here to moan, and whine and wail
Over his coming chastisement, and fate:
Nor let the sentimental reprobate
Our loving kindness, chide, nor deem it hate:
To save him from hell's torments we chastise,
Let weck-kneed fools denounce our cruelties,
Cruelty's oft true mercy in disguise!
Come, let's away.

HAND OF GLORY *and his companion understrapper*
go out.

End of Act II

ACT III

THE SECOND MERIAH SACRIFICE

SCENE I

Vestibule of the king's sleeping apartment. HAND OF GLORY, PHYSICIAN, and two understrappers are discovered. They are arranging a dummy on a sloping board in proximity to the vacant armchair of the king. The dummy represents the victim in the Meriah sacrifice, according to the new and more elaborate dispositions and ceremonial proposed to be introduced.

PHYSICIAN. The king is so overcome by senile impatience, that I have contrived this arrangement to satisfy his querulous importunities, by giving him a foretaste of the coming sacrifice. Moreover when it takes place according to the newly adopted system, unless he rehearse his part previously, I fear some exhibition of doting excess and weakness, so intemperate is his craving for the moment when in public he is to drain the heart's blood of the living victim.

HAND OF GLORY. You act wisely. Rumours have got about of what is going to happen. The mob is ever conservative. Our new, refined, and exquisite development of the Blessed Sacrifice is openly discussed and many disapprove of it, not understanding the higher forms of religious evolution. The crowd is ever thus. Progress and equality are ever looked askance at by the vulgar. But this perjurer, this pervert, this apostate, this traitor to his king and his religion, shall not escape the awful but just punishment of his crimes. I swear by the hand of the Almighty!

PHYSICIAN. You will see directly how the mechanism works and how impressive will be the majestic and imposing horror of the impending reality. (*To the understrappers*) Take out the false heart and vessels and fill the internal reservoir with wine by means of the funnel there. Pass the tube of the funnel into the aorta at the top of the heart, and so pour in the wine.

(The attendants follow his instructions.)

HAND OF GLORY. Would it were the guilty wretch himself we had to deal with here in private. We could then intensify his anguish by suspense, raise his hopes of escape by subtle promises of mercy and liberation, only to fling him into deeper hells of foreboding and despair by breaking them, protract and intensify his sufferings a hundredfold, pare him by inches, decorticate him by hair's breadths, excruciate brain, nerve, and muscle, by the highest resources of modern law and modern science.

PHYSICIAN. Is not true science after all the handmaid and sister of true religion? With the eye of scientific faith I foresee a time, in the progress of our divine race, when all shall be compelled to be sacrificed and sacrificers, when all the people shall be compelled to train as destroyers and destroyed, under the pain of confiscation of their goods, imprisonment, and loss of civic rights, when whole holocausts of mangled corpses, whole rivers and lakes of blood shall perpetually propitiate the Blessed God of War and Carnage, when all the sky shall rain human blood, all lands drink of it, all seas be tinged with it. Ah! that we might live to see that day! (*To assistants*) But I perceive that the reservoir is already full and is beginning to regurgitate. Detach the funnel, replace the heart in the riven breast of the artificial victim (*The attendants do so.*) and one of you go and announce to His Sacred Majesty, that everything is prepared for his rehearsal of the sacrifice.

Exit one of the assistants by the door into the king's sleeping room.

HAND OF GLORY. The king will be dead-drunk.

PHYSICIAN. So much the better. I have mixed a strong infusion of hashish with the blood of the grape. His raptures will be indescribable.

HAND OF GLORY. Oh! if it were only the real living victim, that was to suffer now. But see, here comes the king.

The KING enters escorted by the two epebi who conduct him to the chair.

PHYSICIAN. Your Majesty be seated.

The KING seats himself.

KING:—

I am the wine-cup of the wrath of God.

Decant me full of blood, blood, blood, blood, blood.

PHYSICIAN:—

Approach the dummy to His Majesty.

So! make haste.

KING (*querulously*):—

Do you not see I am an empty wine-pot?

And wine-pots without wine are naught.

PHYSICIAN:—

Quick, Priest.

Here is the sacrificial knife. With it

Make as you clove the dummy's breast. Tear out

The heart and proffer it to His Majesty.

KING:—

You stint the chalice of the wrath of God.

Do you not see I'm made of pure crown-glass

Transparent as an otter.

PHYSICIAN. He's quite mad. Quick! Humour him.

HAND OF GLORY *begins to cleave the dummy's breast with the knife, takes out the heart and on bended knee presents it to the KING.*

PHYSICIAN:—

Suck at the apex, please your Majesty.

KING:—

Now am I once again a little child.

The KING applies his mouth to the heart and sucks.

PHYSICIAN:—

See how his face contracts, and what a flame
Demonic leaps from sunken sockets;—brows
All corrugate, condensed to living clouds
Brood o'er a blood-feast such as thundersmoke
Of future war shall burst above when all—
Town, village, homestead—howls and flames and streams
Blood down the slope and to the firmament.

HAND OF GLORY:—

See! he is sated, like a new-born babe.

Glued to its mother's breast.

The KING withdraws his lips from the heart and slobbers.

PHYSICIAN (*to attendants*):—

Take him away.

The attendants carry away the KING to his sleeping room.

HAND OF GLORY:—

If we could sacrifice Aræus so
In here, just think what we could do to him.

A stifled cry is heard from the KING'S bedroom; an EPHEBUS rushes out.

EPHEBUS:—

The King has fainted. (*To Physician*) Quick, Sir, you,
come in!

See to His Majesty: his lips are livid.

HAND OF GLORY:—

He must not die.

PHYSICIAN:—

I'll do my best for him.

Exit PHYSICIAN *with* EPHEBUS *into the king's bed-chamber.*

HAND OF GLORY. Sharp crises require sharp remedies. If I could work this one to bring the physician to my way of thinking and have Aræus sacrificed here at once. What torture could we not inflict upon him! After all our age is becoming too civilized for public sacrifices. Moreover for the spectacle of suffering to purify the mind and make for pity, love, and righteousness, it must act upon the trained religious conscience. Under closed doors, the sacrifice will be equally efficacious and also a means of edification—our own. Then, too, as a purifying religious discipline it will be far more efficacious, because in presence of a select few refined spectators, their yearning pity over the victim's agony will aggravate it, whereas the crowd at a public sacrifice dulls the suffering by stimulating to bear heroically. But here comes the physician. (*Re-enter* PHYSICIAN.) How is it with the King?

PHYSICIAN. The king is very weak. His heart scarce beats spasmodically. I fear he is going.

HAND OF GLORY. He must not. At this critical moment what would become of us? Can nothing save him?

PHYSICIAN. Only to drain the living heart's blood of a real victim, as he did but now in effigy.

HAND OF GLORY. We must risk something to save his life. Let me have Aræus brought at once.

PHYSICIAN. But the people——

HAND OF GLORY. We can give out that the sacrifice has been postponed, because he is unwell. Once the thing has been done—the people will quiet down again.

PHYSICIAN. It is our only hope of saving the king's life. If you will take the responsibility, I will bear my part. (*To one of the understrappers*) Place the slanting table in position (*To the other*) and you go and fetch some strong thongs of rawhide to strap down the victim firmly in his place.

HAND OF GLORY (*to understrapper who is about to go out*). One moment: wait: Here is the key of the dungeon. Fetch the leather thongs and bring Aræus along with them.

PHYSICIAN. In the meantime, I must see to the king.
(*Exit into the sleeping room.*)

HAND OF GLORY (*to the understrapper, who is waiting uncertain*). Why do you not go? (*Understrapper still hesitates.*) The thing must be done. And think what ravishment! In another minute we shall see the vile apostate writhing in agony. Hear his wild shrieks of despair, as you rend his living flesh off. But ha! who? what is that?

PRIME MINISTER (*entering in haste*). What is the meaning of all this? What has happened? I overheard your orders. You are plotting some foul play against the Meriah.

HAND OF GLORY. The king has had a fit. To expedite the sacrifice and let him drink the victim's living heart's blood, is the only chance to save his life.

PRIME MINISTER. But I have come in haste, to warn you that this newfangled sacrifice as you have devised it cannot be. The people are in uproar. Both the reformers and the orthodox old-fashioned party will have none of it. Both insist upon the promises to the Meriah being maintained. Even the common people are stirred at last, and the reformers add fuel to the flame. His cruel scourging through the streets and at the last audience have aroused compassion and in-

dignation. His constant silent fortitude, gentleness, and resignation have moved even the understrappers to pity and remorse.

HAND OF GLORY. But if the king die, what will become of us? And if this be the only way of 'saving the king's life?

PRIME MINISTER. And if it is the certain loss of ours? I shall have it proclaimed to-morrow that the sacrifice has been postponed, to be carried out as agreed upon in the mitigated orthodox fashion. (*To understrapper*) Give me the key. (*Understrapper does so.*) Henceforth, cruel priest, dungeon keys shall remain in the hands of the secular power, God's priesthood has abused them long enough.

HAND OF GLORY (*half to himself*). God's curse upon him! He has robbed me of my supreme joy. (*To MINISTER*) But if the king is dying, if the living heart's blood of some healthy youth can alone save him!

PRIME MINISTER. Find some substitute. There is the Meriah's young slave boy. He will do as well. But I must away at once, and endeavour to calm the rising fury of the people. (*Exit PRIME MINISTER.*)

HAND OF GLORY (*alone*):—

I must consent in seeming. But the pervert!
He shall not thus escape me. Something's brewing
'Midst the reforming priests—some scheme of rescue
To be unmasked at the last moment: some
Device connected with the picture, brought
And vowed a picture, but, uncovered blank.
What it may be I know not: but I'll go
To the astrologers—the ones that know
And with them plot some more tremendous woe:
'Tis but to leap more surely, I recoil,
My well-schemed plan of vengeance none shall foil.

SCENE II

The college of the astrologers. The ASTROLOGERS are discovered seated in a semicircle.

1st ASTROLOGER. What must we think of this development of the Blessed Sacrifice?

5th ASTROLOGER. It has set the people in an uproar. If we sanction it there will be a revolution.

6th ASTROLOGER. And yet it is but a refinement and an evolution of the primeval one. As now, so in the primitive ritual of this most holy mystery, the heart of the Meriah was torn out by the high priest, and presented to the king in the golden chalice.

2nd ASTROLOGER. Yes, and it is a sacred mystery of the remotest antiquity, aye, coeval with the foundation of the world itself, and this is proved by the fact that even outer barbarians who have lost touch with our blessed revelation, still retain a faint memory of the sacred rite in their capital punishment. The very word capital itself indicates that it is the head—the very centre of man's unruly will and blind and erring reason—ever enemies to humble faith and submission to divine authority—that must be struck or strangled off. Among the outer barbarians, the head is then elevated by the executioner, and finally fixed above the chief gate of the city, just as in the Blessed Sacrifice the cristed head of the Meriah is first elevated and then fastened to the wall of the temple of sacrifice, and, in some countries the criminal's heart is also still torn out of his breast and presented to the chief magistrate.

6th ASTROLOGER. So that the ritual is a refinement, a purification, a perfecting of what has been from the very foundation of the world.

3rd ASTROLOGER. Moreover the health of the king demands it, and think what would happen, were the

king to die at this critical conjuncture of the constellations!

5th ASTROLOGER. Other kings have died, and the universe has not collapsed, nor the sun risen an hour later, in consequence of their death.

6th ASTROLOGER. It is treason and blasphemy to reason in this matter. It is universally recognized by tradition and revealed religion, that the king's life and that of the sun in heaven are mutually dependent upon one another.

4th ASTROLOGER. Yes, and for a very simple reason. All truly royal families are descended from the sun or moon, or from both.

3rd ASTROLOGER. There are, indeed, some kings so sacred and whose lives are so bound up with that of the sun in heaven that they must be kept in cages, hung from the ceiling. These are called parrot kings. Others have to be carried about in sacred litters, for if one of their feet were to touch the ground for a moment, the whole world would fly to pieces like a squirting gourd.

6th ASTROLOGER. We are surrounded on all sides by stupendous mysteries, both written and unwritten in and outside us.

5th ASTROLOGER. And yet the Mongol king is said to walk about like anybody else, and nothing happens.

3rd ASTROLOGER. Then he is of mongrel race and no true king.

1st ASTROLOGER. The sacred college of astrologers approves of the innovation, or it does not? Let those who approve hold up their hands.

All hold up their hands except the fifth Astrologer.

1st ASTROLOGER. The innovation is approved: and we give it the sanction of our authority.

3rd ASTROLOGER. It is well done. There is a rebellious spirit abroad among the people. It is even whispered that if the sacrifice be carried out as usual, the dissentient priests will endeavour to provoke a demonstration and save the Meriah.

6th ASTROLOGER. Oh! horrible!

4th ASTROLOGER. Yes, there was something about a picture, foisted no one knows how, into the presence of the Meriah, by that arch-imposter, his brother—the ring-leader of the rebel sect.

6th ASTROLOGER. The new, more exquisite arrangement of the sacrifice will foil their designs, strike terror into the hearts of the misguided people and the traitors who have corrupted them, and nip treason in the bud.

3rd ASTROLOGER. It is high time. The warning will be a salutary one.

2nd ASTROLOGER. Hark! There is some one knocking outside.

1st ASTROLOGER (*raising his voice*). Let him enter. (*Enter HAND OF GLORY.*) What has given our humble college of astrologers the privilege of a visit from the illustrious high priest of the sacred mysteries?

HAND OF GLORY. Alas! No good tidings bring me hither. The Prime Minister who now wields the sceptre of the impotent king, fearful of the reactionary spirit of our people, has prohibited the new development of the sacred rite, postponed the sacrifice for another sun's round and insists upon its performance, according to the ancient rite, with those mitigations promised to the present Meriah in consideration of his high birth and the abbreviated revels.

5th ASTROLOGER. Doubtless the Prime Minister knows the temper of the people better than you, my brethren, and is acting in accordance with the highest reason.

HAND OF GLORY. But you know nothing then of what this Meriah has been guilty? How he has rejected the sacred revels, outraged the sacred revellers, become the soul and centre of heresy and apostasy, a pervert from, a mocker of, our blest religion, a cynical despiser of the faith of his childhood, a traitor to his king and country, to throne and altar? Shall such a one be permitted to pass away unscourged, untortured, garlanded with flowers, tripudiating up the sacred hill as a happy bridegroom?

5th ASTROLOGER. But if the people are against us——?

HAND OF GLORY. They must be terrified into submission: scared along the one narrow pathway of their soul's salvation.

1st ASTROLOGER. Listen, high priest. I have not allowed myself to remain wholly uninformed in these matters. The apostate priests are decided to stake all on a hazardous venture to save the life of their leader's brother. They have brought over to their purpose some vile woman of the lower orders to personate the sacrificing priest. I shudder at this awful sacrilege. Who it may be, all my efforts to discover have been in vain. You may remember that Prostheno, under threat of torture to his brother the Meriah, if he refused, has been ordered to become the sacrificer, he has demanded as a condition, that he be permitted to perform the ceremony from the first masked, and the request has been favourably received by the Prime Minister, who himself fears lest his unmasked presence, as the sacrificer of his brother, should excite the compassion of the mob already undisciplined and prone to rebellious excess—and provoke an outburst.

HAND OF GLORY. And so we must eat humble pie and succumb and pander to the morbid sentimentalism of a vile mob.

1st ASTROLOGER. Listen to what I have devised to confound their wickedness and treachery. This woman is doubtless some low-born insignificant person, for who else would risk herself in so desperate an adventure. When half-way up the sacred hill, they will order her to throw off her mask and priestly robes, proclaim the Meriah king and trust to the enthusiasm of the crowd to crown their treasonable purpose with success.

3rd ASTROLOGER. And considering the temper of the people at the present time, it is not unlikely that they may succeed.

1st ASTROLOGER. Let us then circumvent their designs by sanctioning them.

HAND OF GLORY. What do you propose to do, I do not follow you.

1st ASTROLOGER. The apostate priests well know the present temper of the people. Any concession to them and their own feelings in the matter of the sacrifice will not arouse their suspicion. They will view them as dictated by exigencies of the situation, as concessions wrung from policy by the force of disorder.

HAND OF GLORY. Then we are to yield our sacred prerogative in everything.

1st ASTROLOGER. Yes, to achieve a yet more tremendous vengeance, punishment, and sacrifice.

HAND OF GLORY. I do not understand you.

1st ASTROLOGER. Listen. We give them licence that they may confound and destroy themselves. Can we gain over the commander-in-chief to our side?

HAND OF GLORY. He is ours already. He has ever been a devoted adherent of the Blessed Sacrifice and regrets the good old times of its more stringent application.

1st ASTROLOGER. And the army?

HAND OF GLORY. Is disciplined to the core, reflecting, like the facets of a multiplying mirror, the spirit of its commander.

1st ASTROLOGER. Let him be summoned immediately. (*To one of the astrologers*) Go, seek him out and bring him hither at once. (*Exit ASTROLOGER.*) These reprobates shall be hoist with their own petard. Instead of the usual licence given to the troops during the Meriah sacrifice, they shall be held in readiness. At the decisive moment, part of them shall scale the hill, and seize the Meriah and his Light of Love, the remainder the rebel and apostate priests. The latter shall be roasted alive on the market-place and devoured by the people, the other two after being flayed alive and submitted to the most exquisite torture shall have their hearts taken out of their breasts, the vessels being left attached, and given to the king to drain their living heart's blood in presence of the people according to the new and more scientific reorganization of the sacrifice. Thus we repristinate the most tremendous elements of the ancient rite, while at the same time developing its gory and emblematic symbolism in accordance with the requirements of the king's physician, and of modern science, drowning once for all the whole insubordinate and revolutionary movement in an orgy of blood and fire.

HAND OF GLORY. It is a happy inspiration. And here comes the commander-in-chief, the keystone of our arch. (*Re-enter ASTROLOGER with the COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF.*)

1st ASTROLOGER. Welcome, illustrious chief of the brave and illustrious defenders of our country.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. I come with alacrity: your messenger has partly informed me of your object in summoning me. Can you doubt but that the army and its chief will shed their last drop of blood in defence

of our holy religion and the Blessed Sacrifice? Is it not the electrical smell of the blood at the fulfilment of the sacred mystery that braces up the nerves of our brave soldiers, and gives them that stamina which render them incomparable and invincible? And is it not their valour that has enriched us with the wealth of the tributary States? See how all things work together for good to them that believe! But every development that renders the Blessed Sacrifice more efficient, more thorough and complete renders our glorious army more efficient, more thorough and complete as well, and I look forward to a day—if the sacrifice be made weekly and adorned with a richer, more gory splendour of scientifically evolved detail in manifold development, when we may be yet strong enough to impose our one true and sole perfect religion even upon the degraded heathen beyond the wall.

1st ASTROLOGER. We are at a turning-point in our history. May the coming majestic event be epoch-making, consolidating for ever our loyalty to the monarchy, our country, and our most ancient and holy religion of love and sacrifice. For the present let us go within to elaborate the details of our concerted action that its effect be overwhelming and irresistible.
(All go out.)

SCENE III

Council room in the Palace of the Mongol King

KING, QUEEN, FLOWER OF LOVE, *yellow-robed priests with LEE-HSIEN-HO among them. Afterwards another of the reforming priests.*

KING. My beloved daughter, hear your old father when he implores you to renounce this most insane and fool-hardy determination. Our prospect of saving the

Meriah is reduced to all but a forlorn hope. Let a substitute be sent to undertake the risk.

FLOWER OF LOVE. My father, how can you propose such a thing. Then the substitute will deserve his love, not I. And if he die I shall not survive him. Therefore let me be in my proper place by his side in the hour of peril, and if both die we must, let us at least die together.

KING. But it is not death alone, darling, but torture, outrage, horrible, unspeakable that you wish to face: you know not what you ask. Think of it, ponder it, you do not, you cannot realize what you wish to do.

FLOWER OF LOVE. I shall be with him. I shall share his sufferings.

QUEEN. No, royal lord and husband. To that extremity he and she need never come. Here is a sure and certain remedy. Take it, my daughter. (*Presents FLOWER OF LOVE with a jewelled dagger.*)

KING. What, my queen, do you, can you approve and sanction that she who is your own flesh and blood expose herself to this shocking risk?

QUEEN. If we may not vie with you men, in art, in science, in genius, at least in one thing we are your equals—have equal rights—are men—no women, in courage, fortitude, devotion. Give her her right.

PROSTHENOS. My brother's silent courage and fortitude have won the hearts even of his torturers, at the very worst, they will not allow him and your daughter to fall alive into the hands of these monsters of religious cruelty. Moreover, now, too, the people are thoroughly aroused.

FLOWER OF LOVE. My father, how can you turn against us and desert us, now in our hour of extremity? How constrain us to shrink from an ordeal, the goal of

which you so approved, but now. Is the end less sublime because the danger is a little greater? To unite two hostile people in mutual love, freedom, and confidence? To root out a barbarous and iniquitous superstition, which degrades its dupes below wolves and tigers, shames our common humanity, and renders war eternal, being indeed the inmost core and essence of it? To spread among them the knowledge of our peaceful and humaner discipline, to teach them how to love mercy without the need of stimulating it by the sight of an offering, a sacrifice, artificially created? To give them the light of truth, tolerance, justice, and humanity—is that not a cause to die for? And if the horrors of their sacrificial creed survive, nothing can save your daughter. I shall wither away and perish slowly and miserably, poisoned by the exhalations of their blighting superstition war and carnage. If I die——

KING. I and your mother shall not survive you, dearest!

FLOWER OF LOVE. Then if we die, we die in a noble, aye, the noblest of causes, in that of peace, reason, humanity, and justice. Oh! why should youth and age fear the negation of what is but at best a shifting dream of passion and despair. To happiness, despair because of its brief ending. To misery, the very thing itself. Youth dreams a golden vision of the future, but knows at heart that it is but a deceitful mirage of fond hope, age has learnt the joyless satiety of the past and knows that the future can only be a weary and diminished repetition of its fleeting and vain delights. Of such a world is all our bustling personality composed. Our consciousness, our reason, our emotion. If this be life! Oh! give me rather the death of nothingness—the sweet repose of peace and light, or rather, let that be: I be no more.

QUEEN. My king and husband, this act of heroism is her right: we cannot justly defraud her of it.

KING. 'Tis certain death.

PROSTHENOS. Your Majesty, our people are deeply roused at last. Believe me, it is no forlorn hope that we rely upon.

FLOWER OF LOVE. Granted that we die, there is nothing lost. My cousin will take your place and carry on your policy. Nay, perhaps, by peaceful means, revenge our deaths, by bringing about that for which we died. (LEE-HSIEN-HO bows his head.) Ah! father, not only justice to me, but to him as well, demands I be allowed to undertake this risk—so if we pass away, the wrong we did him—his renunciation—is cancelled and his just rights restored.

KING (*to the yellow-robed ones*). What, oh! ministers of light, does your wisdom teach in this matter? Must we yield to her entreaties!

CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED. No one has a right to oppose her will in this. Only by the sunlight of our own good deeds can we melt the prison bars of ignorance, of night and day, of fear and hope in which we live, only work out our own salvation, only be lamps unto ourselves, and if the lamp expire in the windy conflict, oh! blest extinction of all ill! Divine disintegration! Refuse her: you sentence her to a living death. Consent: yourself and she may yet enjoy years of noble activity, peace, and happiness. (*The PRIESTS and LEE-HSIEN-HO go out.*)

KING. If I do consent, it is with a foreboding and heavy heart. But, hark! I hear footsteps outside.

PROSTHENOS. It will be him of our party who promised to bring news of what is happening beyond the wall.

Enter an officer with one of the reforming priests.

PROSTHENOS. What news do you bring? Good or ill? say quickly. My brother is still alive?

THE REFORMING PRIEST. He is still alive. And it is good news I bring. Revulsion against the madness of the king is invading high and low alike. Now it is beginning to be said Aræus in his cruel dungeon, symbolizes the sun in his winter prison-house, and Wrath of God the demons who threaten him with destruction. There are whispers, too, of horrible unlawful rites practised in the palace.

KING. But whatever the people say and feel, self-interest will keep the official and religious world faithful to throne and altar, prompting any crime.

THE REFORMING PRIEST. Even among these are beginning to be heard a few dissentient voices, for they are beginning to fear the people more than royalty and to seek any pretext to throw it over and curry favour with the coming conqueror, aye, so strong is the resentment against this bastard innovation, that the Prime Minister has insisted upon its abandonment, provided you, oh! Prosthénos, will play the part of sacrificing priest and then the sacrifice will take place according to the mitigated arrangement promised and agreed upon.

PROSTHENOS. And masked?

THE REFORMING PRIEST. That also has been conceded. They fear the effect upon the people of a brother openly compelled to sacrifice a brother. Even the skin is not to be flayed off. They are in a dilemma and on the verge of a revolution will agree to anything to save their own.

PROSTHENOS. It is also in our favour, that according to immemorial usage, until the completion of the sacrifice in the temple of the hill of agony, the sacrificing priest is expressly forbidden to speak a word.

KING. I fear some treachery in their too easy acquiescence.

QUEEN. Husband, couple a previous project with the present one. Let us pass the wall by the subterranean gallery with a strong body of troops. The savage people will all be concentrated about the horrid spectacle. The distance is not far and we can surprise them.

PROSTHENOS. Yes, and the sacrificial procession moves but slowly up the hill of agony. Trusty members of our party shall be disposed at intervals between the city and the tunnel's mouth, with hand drums to signal every stage of the proceedings. Thus the arrival of your Majesty and the troops can be timed to synchronize more or less exactly with the arrival of the victim half-way up the hill of agony, the throwing off of the disguise and our popular and revolutionary demonstration.

KING. But if our coming turn popular sentiment the other way?

PROSTHENOS. Even then they will be powerless.

QUEEN. It is our best and dearest hope, and we shall not be compelled to lie here idle in torturing suspense and inaction.

KING. There you are right, sharer of our heart and throne. We will do our utmost. Everything shall be prepared to crown, if possible, this our last hope, successful reality. But what is it this priest was saying of fresh atrocities? (*To PROSTHENOS*) Ask him.

PROSTHENOS (*to REFORMING PRIEST*). You were about to mention particulars of atrocities and deeds committed in the palace.

THE REFORMING PRIEST. The voices are widely diffused. Your brother's handsome slave boy is

missing. Muffled shrieks as of some one undergoing excruciating tortures have been heard issuing from the palace. Some say that the king's physician has devised a way by which the king can drink the victim's heart's blood from the heart, while the victim is still alive. Others that he has been or is being devoured piecemeal, crude alive.

PROSTHENOS. Most horrible!

THE REFORMING PRIEST. One thing is certain. Search has been made everywhere and the unhappy boy cannot be found.

KING. Henceforth all nations, worlds, and universes, hear my words, a ban be set on every form of sacrificial superstition. All who believe or feign to believe in it, are matriculated liars, thieves, and assassins. Down, down with them for ever. Down with the blood-sucking sacrificial vampires in every land they usurp to exploit and devour. Let every hand be against them, let every act of violence against them be crowned sacred and divine amongst all peoples whom their devilish ravin devastates and despoils. Let everything be lawful against them but one thing—by word, act, or deed, to trust, believe, or sanction, anything they do, declare or think, plot, devise, or accomplish in or against any race or people in all worlds or universes! Such is humanity's sole security against this universal cancer!

PROSTHENOS:—

Oh! words of inspiration, noblest king!
I bow to honour thee and them and wing
Their purpose by my feignèd recantation
And promise of submission to the tyrant
Deception of deceit is lawful game
And treachery 'gainst treachery the same.

KING. Be it so. But first we must arrange how and when my daughter is to be consigned to your charge.

How our troops are to be disposed on issuing from the tunnel and other matters. Let all of us go together and arrange these details on the spot with care and accuracy. (*All go out.*)

SCENE IV

The place before the altar of the Cerny bog and Bily bog or arctic Janus god. Exactly behind the idol, opposite the point of the horizon, just facing the dividing line between the two faces of the image is a slender spire so arranged that when the sun has accomplished half a round from the mean point of its spring risings (i. e. the point just opposite the dividing line) its shadow falls exactly upon the said dividing line. The shadow has nearly reached this its midday position. A temple servitor is cleaning off the dried and clotted blood left from the last sacrifice. By the side of the idol is a stretcher, flat and roughly shaped like a human body. Thongs of rawhide are attached to the extremities of the four limbs. A certain number of common people and citizens of the middle class are loitering about in expectation.

Among them are THE HUMBLE, THE MYSTICAL, and THE PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEVER. Later UKKO and OTSA and a HERALD.

A COMMON PERSON. Look, they are cleaning the blood from the sacred image. We shall see them perform this new Meriah sacrifice directly.

ANOTHER. It is a good thing to have it done so near. Then we can be sure it will be carried out properly according to the programme.

THE MYSTICAL BELIEVER (*flightly*). You are materially-minded fellows. Everything is symbolical. The writhing, the flowing blood are mere figments, bodily elements—no more.

THE HUMBLE BELIEVER. But the agonized screams of the victim teach us the worthlessness of flesh and matter. Washing ourselves in the blood, our souls become pure and white as—— as—— (*in loss for a simile*) well, as anything that is bleached.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEVER (*in an important tone of voice*). I look at things from a philosophical point of view. All is God, when the victim writhes and screams in agony he only thinks he writhes and screams. The flayer's knife, the flayer himself, his rapture as at each stroke the victim and the victim's fell quiver, weep, and coil in agony—are God; the holy hymns of triumph our dear boys chant at the celebration of the mystery—all are God. Both the singer and the song are God.

THE MYSTICAL BELIEVER (*in a screwed-up tone of voice*). And yet far away, within and within, like the tiniest grain of mustard-seed, like the diamond in its setting, the inmost eternal soul remains, untouched, uncontaminated by all the writhing agony—of the tortured, mutilated body, aye, or by its previous shrieks of weltering joy and triumph in the delicious orgies of its wildest Meriah lusts. Night turns to day, the golden setting of the diamond is frayed away at last. The mustard-seed bursts its black exterior pellicle, but its inner core of life goes on for ever, the star shines untarnished by the daylight, the diamond glows for ever with the intensity of its own internal and external lustre, and thus we realize that the torture and the pain are nothing but the highest gain. The Blessed Sacrifice teaches us that these exterior husks of matter, pain suffering, are nothing, and that God and our immortal souls are all in all.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEVER. To the deist who sees God in everything, the Blessed Sacrifice is indeed a divine privilege, a perpetual revelation, edification, and sanctification.

THE HUMBLE BELIEVER. To the humble believer how it sweetens his hard lot, dignifies his toil, opens before his eyes a glimpse of paradise!

THE MYSTICAL BELIEVER. But there have been disquieting rumours abroad, it is said that the Blessed Sacrifice in its new richer and more manifold development of divine suffering is to be postponed, or even some say is not to take place at all.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEVER. Will our wretched time-serving government rob us of this necessary means of grace, edification, and advancement along the road of our religious evolution? Are we to be cheated out of the flesh and blood of sacrifice, the manna, the divine nectar of our souls? I will not, I cannot believe it. These noisy demagogues, the apostate priests, spread their ruinous calumnies against our king, our priesthood and our State, hoping thereby to make them a reality. They cannot brook the strong meat of truth and revelation. But the gates of hell shall not prevail. The sweet manna of our souls shall not be denied the faithful flock of Meriah. Listen: footsteps are approaching.

Enter UKKO and OTSA: the former following the latter, and embracing him round the neck.

OTSA. Flay me alive! by God! Ukko! they can't be so wicked as to put it off. There are people gathered together. The blessed image is being washed and cleaned.

UKKO. And look! look! Otsa. Do you see what? Do you see that stretcher with the rawhide thongs? Then it's really going to happen. That's what they will strap the victim to, to flay him alive on it.

OTSA. Oh! Ukko! Ukko! I dont know what I am or where I am. Think, when they strap him down and they run the knife along his writhing spine, like a girl

shelling peas and the skin goes tr! tr! like floss-silk when it's being torn. Oh! Ukko! think what we shall be like in another minute!

UKKO. I feel as though tiny ripples of unspeakable delight were running under my own skin in all directions. When will it come! I cannot endure this rapture of suspense.

OTSA. Listen, Ukko. It's really coming at last, the procession. I hear the trumpets. (*Faint blast of trumpets.*)

UKKO. But how few and faint. Oh! what can have happened. Are we to be lifted up to paradise only to be flung the deeper into the hell of disillusion and despair?

OTSA (*in an agonized voice*). Oh! Ukko! I cannot bear the thought: what does it mean?

Enter HERALD and a trumpeter.

HERALD (*pushing UKKO and OTSA to one side*). Get out of the way, you two young blackguards.

THE MYSTICAL BELIEVER. My worst fears are realized.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEVER. It is a religious fraud. It is sheer dishonesty.

THE HUMBLE BELIEVER. It is blasphemy. It is blank atheism. Oh! for the ages of faith, the good old times again!

OTSA *and* UKKO. It is nothing but a bloody swindle. Damn it, Ukko! Life soon won't be worth living in this finicking, sentimental black-hole of a country. It's no use waiting here any longer. Come along! Let's get roaring drunk and go and see a pig killed at the public slaughter-house.

The two boys go out. HERALD and trumpeters advance to the middle of the stage. The trumpeters

trumpet three times. Then the HERALD puts on a large pair of tin-rimmed spectacles and reads from a scroll the proclamation, keeping his eyes constantly fixed upon the document the whole time.

HERALD. Hear ye! good people all. In deference to the sentiments of a part of his most loyal and faithful subjects, moved also by that divine clemency which is one of the most conspicuous traits of his Royal Bounty, His Most Gracious Majesty has cancelled the new ordinances for the Blessed Sacrifice, forbids their application and renounces in his divine abnegation the benefits they would have brought to his present precarious state of health. (*While he is reading the HUMBLE, MYSTICAL, and PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEVERS pulling longer and wider faces expressive of disgust and indignation one after the other gingerly steal away and the rest of the people follow them in the same manner.*) With divine magnanimity he applies to the ribald blasphemer of our holy religion, this vile pervert and apostate Meriah, the sublime doctrine of the forgiveness of injuries. The ceremony will take place a sun round hence according to the customary ritual mitigated in harmony with the previous proclamation. Hear me! Hear me! Hear me! (*The HERALD looks up*)— But all the people have gone away! So I may as well go too. (*Exit.*)

SCENE V

Scene a Temple

In the wall to the background is a veiled recess. The wearers of the yellow robe with LEE-HSIEN-HO are seated in a semicircle.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. How the princess has transformed herself! From a state of nervous impotence and melan-

choly she has risen to the heights of the sublimest heroism.

1st BROTHER. May she issue unscathed from this terrible ordeal. It is indeed a terrible one, who can tell what traps and pitfalls the treachery of sacrificial fanaticism has in store for her?

2nd BROTHER. The enterprise is a heroic one; but what sort of Karma can we ascribe to such an act? It defies my reckoning.

3rd BROTHER. Well said, brother. Is it meritorious, demeritorious, or indifferent Karma?

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Certainly not demeritorious.

1st BROTHER. Nor yet indifferent Karma, for it leads not to the extinction of suffering and of birth and rebirth. Besides it is the outcome of the attachments.

2nd BROTHER. So, then, it is meritorious Karma and of the second grade.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. How can such heroism be less noble than demeritorious, or indifferent Karma?

2nd BROTHER. Because it leads not to extinction of suffering.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. What then is indifferent Karma?

1st BROTHER. Reflection, wisdom, a spirit of maternal love, sunny benevolence, and ecstasy embracing all animate creation.

3rd BROTHER. And is the objective study of the universe, that science based on reason and passionlessness, which demonstrates to us the fundamental secrets of the good law, with renewed certainty from different points of view, is not that also the highest that is indifferent Karma?

1st BROTHER. It is, brother.

3rd BROTHER. But look at the outer barbarians. What benefits has it brought to them or to others? To their neighbours it has brought but servitude, injustice, and ruin; to themselves, themselves transformed to hosts of military locusts devouring themselves.

1st BROTHER. No, brother, that is but the results of science perverted by re-embodied demeritorious Karma to its own self-destruction, that, at worst, in extinguishing itself leads to the extinction of suffering. Therefore the Karma of passionless research is good.

2nd BROTHER. And, again, brother, there is alleviation of suffering, the bettering of social and individual life. That is the application of science by re-embodied meritorious Karma to its own salvation. Therefore the Karma of passionless research is good.

3rd BROTHER. Moreover the Karma of passionless research establishes the four great truths, and the doctrine of anicca and anatta.

4th BROTHER. Yes, the transformations of matter have neither end nor beginning, nor the illusive soul of man a trace of permanency. And that truth has science inculcated. Therefore the Karma of passionless research is good.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. But the Princess—sister of my love that was—Princess of my heart's most reverent admiration that is, have you, O priests, have we no powers to defend her from the shameful dangers, that surround, that threaten, that perhaps await her and that she has challenged with such supreme heroism?

6th BROTHER. Should one interfere, if we had the power?

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Is that your way of passionless indifference? If so, I reject it. Oh! that the fates had not been so adverse! Ah! that she might have been my bride!

5th BROTHER. So! brother, your own anguished cravings refute themselves. All desire ends in suffering.

6th BROTHER. And listen, brother. If the great peace come upon her and her beloved: if the tangled skein of being be unravelled out and only blissful nothingness remain—then it is well with her and him. Even the outer barbarians have said in their wiser past: "Those that the gods love die early."

LEE-HSIEN-HO. But the good law forbids suicide.

6th BROTHER. In extreme cases it may be permissible: again, remember, if the great peace come upon her and him, you will become the ruler of our people—and able peacefully to extend the influence of the good law a hundredfold, and thus greatly diminish the realm of suffering old age and death. Have you the right, then, even were it possible, to shield the Princess's life by risking yours and to risk the loss of a sphere of much greater usefulness by so defending her?

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Let me but know how I may lessen the danger that threatens her life by risking mine.

6th BROTHER. This is insubordination, brother, and intolerance of the higher reason.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. But if she succeed, the good law will diffuse itself, beyond our State, even amongst the outer barbarians that need it most. And would not that be a fine thing? Is it not as the sunshine to the shadow, compared to the petty question whether I rule here among our people or some one else?

6th BROTHER. And who might that be when she, the King and Queen, the Princess, and yourself had all passed away?

1st BROTHER. Listen, Bhikkus and followers of the good law. There is a way, a way of risk and peril, but not of certain death. Be all of us lamps unto our-

selves. It is for him—for him alone, to decide whether it is for him to take it.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Oh! let me hear it.

1st BROTHER. First all of you, be advised of this. If he cease and Nirvana come, where he had been, the Princess and his rival, her lover, will certainly be saved. If he remain alive, the Princess and her lover may still succeed and thus overthrow safe and sound the powers of darkness they have confronted. Or lastly his renunciation and the risk he has incurred to save the Princess and her lover may be all in vain, but then dissolution will not have power upon his earthly compositions, he will return again to form part of the wheel of existence and reign in the place of the present King and Queen.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. So then, the risk is at the very highest but as one to two, and in every case it is gain. If I live and they as well, a double crown of glory to the Sangha, and to myself a more than double field of influence and power. If they live and I die, the same to the Sangha, and the reflected honour of my cessation in a worthy cause. If they pass away and I remain, a crown of glory to the Sangha and myself, and a more transcendent field of influence and power among our own people, born of my dutiful attempt to save their present rulers. But how can I coldly reckon up the pros and cons as in some accountant's ledger, when the life-long goodness and justice of my lord and sovereign claim willing loyalty and impose a joyful and welcome renunciation to save his—their—lives and hopes. And when the Princess finds a further reason for incurring risk, aye, glories in the prospect of her death, as the means of redressing a fancied wrong against myself, how can I not reciprocate her generosity, desiring to risk my poor life in her good cause as well?

1st BROTHER. Chosen is the better way. The sophistries of Mara, the deceitful and evil one, have no power here. Love and reason prepare the path to saintship or Nirvana.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Tell me then, oh! good and noble elder, what is the risk, I may incur to save their's?

1st BROTHER. Hear, oh! Lee-Hsien-Ho! Hear, ye Ministers and Bhikkus of the good law. Years ago, in early youth, I came to a fair meadow by a swiftly flowing river. And all at once, the fire of lust was quenched in me and I thought to myself: truly delightful is this spot, enchanting this grove of trees, and this silvery river flows by, easy of approach and refreshing, truly here is everything necessary for a youth of good family, desirous of the strenuous life. And there I settled down. Oh! Bhikkus—— And being, oh! Bhikkus, myself subject to birth, I perceived the wretchedness of what is subject to birth, and craving the incomparable security of a Nirvana free from birth I attained the incomparable security of a Nirvana free from birth. So may our brother here attain the incomparable security of a Nirvana free from birth, but as the predispositions are different in all and each of us, so, oh! Bhikkus is the way different for all and each of us, to attain the incomparable security of a Nirvana free from birth.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. But it is not the attainment of Nirvana but the safety of the Princess that is here in question.

1st BROTHER. Know, young brother, and ye ministers and Bhikkus of the good law! a mighty stair of nine steps of whitest marble leads through the vestibule of Nature's unimagined vastitude upward to the incomparable security of a Nirvana free from birth, and rising to the ninth trance of the cessation of sensation and perception, the subject and sub-objective forms of fleeting life we call a human being, are more closely

interwoven with the unimagined vastitude of Nature's vestibule, and tremble like a dewdrop on the verge of the incomparable security of a Nirvana free from birth. In that condition, the finer constituents of being partly resolve themselves into a power we call "mageist" capable to some slight extent of acting at a distance upon simular human aggregations of the five constituents. Hence the legends of the wraiths of dying persons, seen at a distance by intimate friends and relations. And herein, oh! youthful brother! lies your power of shielding by the power of "mageist" the Princess and her lover from the danger that threatens them.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. But how may I thus protect them?

1st BROTHER. The form of the protection only the future can disclose.

6th BROTHER. But he has scarcely begun his noviciate. May he all at once mount to the ninth and loftiest step of the marble staircase?

1st BROTHER. Truly there is a risk, but not an inordinate one. His life has been pure and blameless. The fire of lust is extinguished in him, the attachments pervert him not.

6th BROTHER. But he has not yet reached the fourth step of the marble staircase.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Be it so, now I will essay the highest.

6th BROTHER. A slight kick of the balance and the way of no returning is entered on from there. When the wild fury of the sacrificial barbarians surges like yeasty waves of a famished sea around their victims, rises higher and higher, and licks their feet with tongues of lambent fire, how can the tension of human elements in that rarefied atmosphere of the ninth trance resist the shock or retain their mutual coherency? Even

the recoil—the hard-won victory itself will prove their dissolution.

LEE-HSIEN-HO. Then let it be so.

5th BROTHER. But how can such a danger be involved in attainment of the ninth step, when death is impossible during the trance of cessation?

6th BROTHER. Because the shock may cause awaking with subsequent death as its consequence.

3rd BROTHER. Yes, and did not the Blessed One rise to the ninth step, then descend to the second one, rise again to the fourth, and so enter Nirvana?

5th BROTHER. It is as you have said.

1st BROTHER (*to* LEE-HSIEN-HO). Are you prepared to try the doubtful way?

LEE-HSIEN-HO. It is my bridal bed of hopes last dawn.

1st BROTHER. Go then, and our best and purest thoughts escort you.

The curtain across the recess is withdrawn by invisible hands.

LEE-HSIEN-HO:—

Oh! Love divine! give place to light eternal,
And light to night's unvisioned harmonies
Beyond all spheres of being, or thought supernal
There where Nirvana wakes and all life dies!

LEE-HSIEN-HO *enters the recess and the curtain conceals him. An invisible choir chants the following ode:—*

ODE

Strophe A.—

Oh! where does the cataract thunder no more and the
dust of its spray

Pass away.

And the hard haughty lips of its granite abyss turn
to dust,

And decay.

And the dust of the spray and the stone turn to wind

And a flame—

And the flame be put out by the wind, and the wind
die away

As the name

Of the greatest of earth is expunged in the endless
procession of things?

Strophe B.—

Oh! where can no foothold be found, for water and
earth for the wind and the fire?

No billow of atmosphere well to support them on
winnowing wings,

Beyond the oasis of thought, and the feverish breath
of desire?

Where doth cease the long and profitless discourse of
babbling time?

And the sharp, short pangs of bliss to nothingness
sublime?

Coarse rusticity's dull goad be laid

And the courtier's finer, subtler, more cruel blade

Pare no more his foe's lean anguish to a shade

Where doth praise and blame, and form and name

Padded cheeks, and night's more close embrace of face
to face

No more caress,

But turn to endless nothingness?

Antistrophe A.—

Where infinite, radiant, bright, and invisible consciousness

Hides and abides

And the hard, haughty lip of its earth-born disdain
turns do dust

And its pride's

As the last strains of the music of the chorale die away, the curtain is withdrawn by invisible hands: the whole interior of the recess is suffused with a golden amber-coloured light in the centre of which LEE-HSIEN-HO is seen entranced, seated in the usual attitude of the Buddha. Troops of children file past and shower flowers of the yellow kamboya (frangipane) before the feet of the motionless figure. After them the yellow-robed ones file past one by one, each joining the palms of his hands and bowing before the entranced brother. When the last has filed out the curtain before the recess closes of itself and that of the scene also falls.

SCENE VI

A ruined courtyard in the depth of the jungle. Nearly in the middle is a deep-cut trench with turf-cut steps leading down from one end of it. PROSTHENOS and REFORMING PRIESTS discovered.

PROSTHENOS:—

Evil is not all ill that blinds itself
And is its own undoing, inviolate
Crude superstition does this spot reserve
Unto out purpose. Who would venture here
Even in midsummer? This forest night,
These ruined halls, are shunned as haunted ground,
Even the boldest would not dally here,
Among the sheeted ghosts and gibbering shades
Of by-gone crime that craven phantasy
Has peopled it withal. Tradition graves
A curse upon its stones and pallid fear
Itself the ghost it feigns to habit here
Flies at its own dim shadow. Memories
Of crimes committed here, by fear's own child
Bloodstained religion, child and parent both

The heart of superstition, and its fruit,
Have peopled it with death: a living tomb
Shunned by all life: our healthier deeds of day
Shall raise the living here and not the dead
To deeds of life and hope, of earth not heaven's;
Go, one of you: descend the ample stair
That joins our hope in darkness with the day
Beyond it: watch and listen: 'tis the hour—
If any gleam of light or stamp of feet
Quicken the gallery's distant eye—indeed
They should be here anon.

One of the priests descends the steps: a pause.
Hear, see you naught?

PRIEST:—

All is as still as night, and dark as death
Scarcely the cavern's further eye is grey
So heavy hang the clouds and veil the sun.

PROSTHENOS:—

What? see you nothing? hear you nothing then?
I seem to hear a sound of gathering feet
And something like a flashing in the palms.

PRIEST:—

It is the beating of your own sad heart,
The phosphorescence of your own sick brain
That frame without, that which they hope within.
Here there is only darkness and the grave.

ANOTHER PRIEST:—

If they should fail us, at this bitter pinch.

PROSTHENOS:—

They cannot be so false! 'Tis falsehood's self
Even to formulate doubt so unjust,
Against their loyalty. Their one last hope
And ours both centre round one word "to dare"

PROSTHENOS (*kneeling and kissing the QUEEN's hand*):—

Oh! sun of life! Oh! fountain of our hope!
Accept our homage and devoted love,
The deeper that we dared a moment doubt
Its stainless loyalty.

QUEEN:—

Have we delayed too long? is all prepared?

PROSTHENOS:—

All is in readiness: and if suspense
Lengthened the minutes to our beating hearts
And kindled smouldering fear, forgive the doubt
Lest such a dread ordeal as the one
That looms more dread in nearness, had indeed
At the last moment petrified the will
And palsied action. Oh! how few of us
By reason marking out the road, can then
Pursue it step by step, inflexibly
Scorning the precipice nor retrograde,
Embrace the path of flowery compromise
And make it action.

QUEEN:—

To her the recreant path is the abyss,
Is it not so, my daughter?

PRINCESS:—

Love or death,
Or love and death: what else have I to hope?

QUEEN:—

And who can fathom whether love or death
Or love and death alone be best for us
Or love and death as the last vestibule
Of life to endless death the best of all.
Whom the gods love die early. That refrain
Through all the generations of mankind

And all the ebb of Nature's lower lives
Runs on from age to age—a golden clue—
The dying swan of life's self-chanted dirge
—The heart of hearts—the truest truth of things.

PROSTHENOS:—

There is no fear of outrage: only death
Self-given. E'en the basest hirelings, trained
To wallow in the slough of sacrifice
And sate their reeking passions in its gore,
Weep for my brother and will interpose
Resistance long enough to make them one
In self-inflicted freedom from earth's charnel:
That is the very worst that can await them.

PRINCESS:—

Why should I fear? My mother, has there once
Been any film of eyelid quivering dread
A moment seen in me? Is there not all
That's heavenly fair in life or death for us?

QUEEN:—

Flesh of my flesh, and pride of my best pride
I shall not weep for you whate'er befall.

PRINCESS:—

So is it as it should be. But my father?

QUEEN:—

Well that I could persuade him to forgo
This present parting, and take leave at home,
Easing his anguished heart, with homely brine,
Not stain his manly dignity with tears
In others' presence.

PRINCESS:—

Make him still love life,
If death absolve us from its charnel-house:
And let oblivion be the dower his love
And memory do vouchsafe us if we die.

His life is precious for our people's sake
And can be happy in their love and yours.

QUEEN:—

So it shall be. And now let be—what shall be:
Time presses. Prothenos, invest her with
Your priestly robes. No, give them here: so, daughter,
Be clothed in night: and let this masquerade
End as it will, it shall not end amiss
Your hand upon the jewelled hilt, one kiss,
Be prompt to strike, these bridals of the night
Then, come what will, shall still be warm and bright.
Go, with these worthy ones.

PRINCESS:—

Farewell, my mother.

*The PRINCESS and the REFORMING PRIESTS stand
apart.*

QUEEN:—

Oh! not in life is life's true fullness found
That flows and fluctuates in eternal change
And eddies of illusion, of which we
Are but a shadowier illusion, self's
Frail bubbles bursting on a sea of death.
Oh! bloodstained creed of sacrifice! From it
In vain we draw baptismal lymphs and grope
For living water in your living sewers.
Peace from your living wheel of day and night
And life and death, and love and hate and hope
And anguish and despair—contingent all
On one another, correlate and life's
Sole essence—deeming to extort by pain,
Excruciating one another through
All time. A transient hope and sour foretaste
We may acquire thus, by passion forged,
Phantasmal as the vision of your night—
Frail immortality—the bloodless wraith

From ghostlier veins by wars fraternal raised
And sacrificial orgies: but nor truth
Nor liberation from your self-made hell
Of personality that paints itself,
On that which is nor life nor death nor self
Nor thought nor sense, but essence of their naught
Of peace and hope and formless nothingness,
Stamping that hideous in its essence pure,
Feigning a monstrous God of Nature—self
Externalized, to justify self's crimes
By Nature's dripping claws—a God of Death!
Out on all such! on nothingness alone
Be fixed our hope, and on no angry God
Wrought of the foam of life that beats in vain
Upon that adamant of nothingness:
Nor crown a bubble larger than the rest
And emptier than self's emptiness, divine
Because 'tis emptier, and more aglare
With sheen and film of iridescences,
And cringe and fawn to it just because 'tis self,
Blown large upon the surface of our doom!
Not in relation to organic life,
Not as a God creative and of death,
More monstrous than the ape created it
Is th' inorganic fair—but in itself's
Self in abstraction, as the tangled skies
Of moonbeams' nightly jewelled harmonies
That are all motion and distracting life
Project upon the soul, a motionless
And silent dream of nothingness and peace.
Then, oh! my daughter, if life's horror wake
Permission to cut through its tangled skein,
The jewels of the night are in your grasp
In this bejewelled hilt of tangled gems
As lustrous and eternal at its orbs,
And night itself in this dark azure blade
Of steely death runs dripping blood-red dawn

And soon may open paradise where all
Of life and death, and hope and fear are hushed.
In one are Nature's choicest gift to half
Her suffering children, when their crumbling being
Of gauzy wings and thigh-thrummed harmonies—
Life's dwarfed and miniature editions stamped
In gold and arabesque—is frayed to dust.
If all be lost, their's be your marriage-bed,
No lily languishments, but running red—
Laced in imperial purple—love and death,
Nature's best gift to all its suffering breath
Farewell!

*The PRINCESS and some of the REFORMING
PRIESTS go out.*

PROSTHENOS:—

This time our people are in earnest.
Trust me, it is no piteous sacrifice,
But life, the crown of all our noblest hopes, awaits them.

QUEEN:—

Be it as fate decide. Hark! below
The tramp of armed host and measured power
Linked in a league of truth and righteousness,
Clothed in the growing light of mercy, love
And brotherhood, bursts from the storied earth
To brand the bloodstained past and fill the grave
Of superstition with its own black corpse.
Then be the issue of to-day's event
What it may be, or tears or happiness:
Or life to them, or just revenge be ours.

*While the QUEEN is speaking, the KING and the
troops issue from the subterraneous passage and fill the
stage. The KING, QUEEN, and PROSTHENOS silently
join hands and the curtain falls.*

SCENE THE VIIth AND LAST

Same as Scene III. Workmen are placing the stretchers and royal chair of state for the king in the neighbourhood of the idol. Others are planting stakes here and there, surrounding them with faggots and placing a coil of rope by each. While they are preparing for the ceremony, the people gradually assemble.

1st WORKMAN (*arranging one of the stretchers*). Poor young gentleman, they are going to do it to him in spite of all their promises and palaverings.

2nd WORKMAN. And who is the other one for, I should like to know. I don't hold with these newfangled goings on: scientific religion, and what not as they call it.

1st WORKMAN. Nor I either. It is right and proper enough that common fellows be sacrificed. They don't get much pleasure out of life anyhow and it does not much matter to them whether that little be thinned out through a century or taken slab and thick in a year and a day and then they be skinned and eaten by the upper classes afterwards.

2nd WORKMAN. No: poor folk were made for rich folk to eat, ever since time was, all the world over.

1st WORKMAN. And it is in a way a sort of honour. The pomp and splendour of our aristocracy reflect glory on us common people as well. We are so to say magnified by proxy, and can say to ourselves: We, our sweat, our labour create all this pomp and pageantry. That is something to be proud of.

2nd WORKMAN. Yes, but when the upper classes aren't contented with common flesh and blood, and begin to flay and torture and sacrifice and devour one another, I say that isn't as it ought to be and against Nature. And it degrades our nation. It makes us no better than common cannibals.

1st WORKMAN. That is just what I say. And look at all those stakes and faggots, they are putting up all over the place. They give out that it is for a grand illumination. But we know what they really mean.

2nd WORKSMAN. Yes: to roast the reforming priests alive at. It is right enough for the nobles to roast their portions of the Meriah quietly at home. That is quite proper. But to do it in public! On the common market-place! That is scandalous. As though we were not a civilized folk and no better than savages.

1st WORKMAN. It is just a return to barbarism.

2nd WORKMAN. Though they do call it a revival of faith and restoration of all things in the Meriah.

1st WORKMAN. Poor young gentleman! And how all this religious riff-raff, and these superior parties will gloat and revel over his frightful sufferings!

2nd WORKMAN. The old-fashioned, decent sacrifice, always brought back the sun, pat to an hour, but I'm damned if this one will. Like enough it will scare him away altogether.

1st WORKMAN. And a nice mess we shall be in then with nothing to keep our pecker up but moon and stars and northern lights.

2nd WORKMAN. To say nothing of northern livers! But here they come, with their mercy and loving kindness and all the rest of their religious bag of tricks.

Enter amongst others the HUMBLE, the MYSTICAL, and the PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEVER, one after the other, poking and peeping about like gibbons or howling monkeys.

THE HUMBLE BELIEVER (*fussily looking at the stretcher and hurrying up to and addressing the two workmen*).
What! What! What! Then it really is going to happen. Oh! what unction to the soul of a poor and humble believer like myself. What privilege! What edification!

THE MYSTICAL BELIEVER. This day of the restoration of all things, this glorious, eclectic sacrifice, combining the fiery ideal of the past with the most refined and highly developed religio-scientific methods of the present, will burn into memory and be enshrined there for ever, like the whirling cross on which Agni, the holy sacrificial fire, the Agnus Dei is crucified: it will burn into and be pinned down in memory, just as pramantha, the sacred nail, at once creates and pins down upon his whirling bed of torment the victim, who is at once victim, officiating priest and in part that lustrous God himself, the radiant eye of day, to whom his own son Agni is thus at once sacrificed and with whom he is by that very sacrifice re-united and so deified in mystical at-onement.

Oh! Wisest Love that he who smote
In man for man the foe
The double agony in man
For man should undergo.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEVER. When the victim's fell is slowly and exquisitely ripped off, and his shrieks also rend and tear all space, when he is crushed and mutilated like a broken lily, when his palpitating heart is deftly extracted—he still *vivus vidensque*—and presented to our gracious Lord and King, symbol of the blessed sun in heaven, to drain its living and vivifying heart's blood—how our hearts, too, will burn and palpitate, with divine compassion, rapture, and loving kindness—shall we not, in very truth, be also participators in that agony, members of that divine and mystic communion and sacrifice?

1st WORKMAN (*bursting out in an access of ungovernable contemptuous indignation*). Yes, you hypocritical old butcher's boy! You will wallow and gloat and revel in it, like the vulgarest pork-butcher, with his arms elbow-deep in pig's blood. You know how to be in it, you do.

ONE OF THE YOUNG PRIESTS (*in a superior tone after cuffing the workman*). Blasphemous and filthy-minded hog! How dare you compare the noble sentiments of compassion, mercy, and loving kindness which the divine spectacle of the sacrifice inspires in our refined, religious souls, with the bestial passions it arouses in your own. Ah! my brother, let us pray for this poor misguided vulgar spirit that it may be purified in the blood of the lamb—Agni—the sacred fire—and by the coming divine event be awakened through grace to the higher life of religious love and mercy, such as we feel and enjoy them. (*They fall on their knees and begin to mutter prayers.*)

THE HUMBLE BELIEVER. Listen! listen! 'tis coming at last! Oh! in another minute, what ecstatic rapture will be ours!

THE TWO YOUNG PRIESTS (*jumping up*). So then it is really going to happen. Oh! how heavenly! how heavenly! (*They embrace.*)

1st WORKMAN (*to 2nd WORKMAN*). The roaring, ripping fun they're going to have in another minute has made 'em quite forget about saving our poor heathen souls.

THE MYSTICAL BELIEVER. The poor, poor, young fellow. Only think what his sufferings will be! My hearth is filled with divine love and compassion for him—ay, for all suffering creation.

ONE OF THE YOUNG PRIESTS. How elevating the spectacle of suffering is to the true believer in Meriah, to the properly prepared, and well-schooled religious heart.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEVER. Assuring us as it does of the transitoriness of all earthly suffering. But, look! there are some of the reforming priests. They must not be allowed to suspect the distinguished part,

a wisely ordained providence has destined they be privileged to play, in this glorious restoration of the Blessed Sacrifice to all its pristine magnificence.

Enter REFORMING PRIESTS, *discoursing together.*

A REFORMING PRIEST (*to another*). Is it possible that Prothenos has been outwitted and that they can break faith with us. Look at the two stretchers placed between the Janus idol and the royal chair of state. Look at the stakes, with the ropes coiled beside them, and the faggots piled up around them. Are they, perhaps, for us?

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEVER (*to the REFORMING PRIESTS, sleeking and rubbing his hands*). Be under no apprehension, my worthy friends. The word of our priestly authorities is as sure as law: as fixed as adamant: as certain as fate: as incorruptible as gold: as infallible as the word of God himself. Have no fear. Be present as humble spectators of this divine mystery.

THE MYSTICAL BELIEVER. And I trust also as devout participators. As for the stakes and faggots, they are for the grand illumination, to blaze forth as soon as the golden axe, severing the victim's head unites his soul in marriage, as mystic bridegroom, with death and immortality. As for the coils of rope they are for the purpose of attaching lamps to the stakes, also to blaze forth among the leaping flames, that their brilliant effulgence, once kindled, may illuminate the hearts of our people, that they may henceforth shun with horror the dark ways of heresy, dissent, and insubordination.

THE HUMBLE BELIEVER. As for the stretchers, the workmen were just about removing them. But hark! hark! They come. I hear the strains of the blessed sacrificial hymn. Clear the ground! Make away all of you!

Enter HERALDS, OFFICERS, *etc.*

HERALDS. Clear the ground! Give place all of you!
His Majesty and his Meriah are at hand! Make way!

The HERALDS cause the people to retire to the sides and background so that a space is left for the procession in front of the Svatoovid idol. Enter the procession. It chaunts the first two stanzas of the sacrificial hymn.

THE SACRIFICIAL HYMN

Oh! Agni! Lamb of God, the flame
That writhes upon the whirling cross
Oh! mightiest Love! oh! holiest Name!
To us the gain, to thee the loss.

Nor loss alone, but nobler gain.
Thou priest, and victim blent in one,
Is thine, oh! Agni, loss, by pain
Transfigured, wings thee to the sun.

The victim's crackling sinews burst:
His flame of life, within, at one,
With thine, oh! Agni, as at first
Before organic being was spun.

His anguished moans, his breaking eyes,
Uplifted, tearstained, in despair.
Oh! What are these, and what his cries
But phantom echoings, dust, and air!

And when his spouting blood shall flow
A fount to wash our sins away:
Oh! joyous thought to think that so
We ripen to the perfect day.

Safe on his sacramental blood
Our bark shall float to heaven's high shore
As, erst upon Oannes' flood
Was stayed the sacred ark of yore.

Oh! holiest Love! oh! wisest Power!
Oh! Agnus Dei, blood and fire.
Oh! fiery vine! Oh! rainbow shower
Oh! tortured chord of heavenly lyre!

At the conclusion of the two first stanzas of the sacrificial hymn, the two ephebi, physician, Prime Minister and commander-in-chief conduct the KING to his chair of state, HAND OF GLORY in full official robes, with a train of orthodox priests and the choir stands by the Svatoovid idol: all form a circle round ARÆUS and FLOWER OF LOVE, the latter masked and in the robes of Prosthénos. The five understrappers, with a black bier on which is a coffin, and one of them carrying a golden axe, stand more closely round the central couple.

HAND OF GLORY (*advancing to ARÆUS and addressing him with unctuous and slightly mock-reverence and respect*):—

Most lovely stripling, bridegroom of the dawn,
Soon to be paired with all that death contains
Of rapture in its far-off paradise
Beyond the brief, slight pangs that set you free
From this sad vale of tears, our mortal life (*snuffles*)
Oh! wise young man who chose the better part
Not to be stript by inches through the slow
Revolving years of form, youth, passion, all
That render life divine, but yield them up
E'en at their full, in all their glorious prime,
An expiation for thy people's sins,
To save a world from night: Oh! long as suns
Shall rise and set, thy lustrous youth shall shine
More bright than they, shrined in the hearts of all

Set in the golden diadem of all time,
By pious memory and grateful love.
Unmutilated, like the carbuncle
That pours its reeking heart's blood through the gloom
Go forth, Aræus, to thy bridal bed:
For in consideration of thy birth
Thy corpse shall be consigned to kindly earth
In yon dark narrow chamber (*points to the coffin*), not
be doomed

To what is honour to the low-born churl.
See from thy narrow bridal bed I take
Fair flowers to garland thee for Heaven's high nuptials
Of crimson oleander and the white,
To symbolize thy pure young flesh and blood
The bread and wine of Heaven: and on thy head
I place this golden circlet, crowning thee
Our heavenly King and Saviour, to go forth,
Crowned and engarlanded: triumphant pace
The winding way, to thee no irksome road
Of tears and scourgings, but an easy path
Of stepping stones, to deathless heavenly things
Beyond the shining table-lands of heaven,
A brother's loving hand shall dower thee with
In yon high temple of brief pain and death.
I do thee homage in the people's name,
Great King of Peace and death's bright conqueror.

KING (*querulously half to himself half to HAND OF GLORY*):—

What must the Meriah escape, and cristed thus
Triumphant fall oh! treason to your king!
Give me the reeking fell and blood you promised.

HAND OF GLORY (*aside to the KING*):—

Have but a little patience. Majesty,
And you shall gloat and glut yourself on all
And more than all I promised; you shall see
Hides stripped by inches, aye, a pair of them

Paired like the rinds of two ripe pears for you
To suck their sugary nectar: you shall hear
Woes such as hell might envy: draining dry
In alternating ecstacy, the veins
Of man- and maidenhood you shall renew
Your kingship as with war's ripe pomegranate
The masters of all time were ever wont.
See they soar forth: we'll have them soon to fist!

The chorus strikes up the sacrificial hymn beginning where it left off at the third stanza. ARÆUS and the PRINCESS slowly mount the zigzag road up the hill of agony, followed by the five understrappers, carrying one of them the golden axe, four others the coffin, upon a bier. They have arrived about a third of the way to the summit of the hill as the Chorus completes the last strains of the sacrificial hymn:—

Oh! fiery vine! Oh! rainbow shower
Oh! tortured chord of heavenly lyre!

The PRINCESS halts and causes ARÆUS to halt as well.

PRINCESS (*tearing off the mask*). But see, Aræus, I am no heavenly liar, dished up by art, by poesy and false sentiment to curse a world of fools and dupes, with self-inflicted misery, and needless tears, with self-sought poverty and starvation, and seas of blood, I am no sacrificial brother-priest, forced by tyranny and superstition to drain a brother's life-blood, but a Princess royal-born, heiress, only daughter of the realm beyond the wall, come to free thy State from barbarous ignorance and lust of blood, from the ghastly dreams mis-called religion, duty, and patriotism, the false realities, false religion and evil lives generate. Come to save and live or save and die with thee. Oh! Aræus, oh! More than lover, brother, husband. In effigy I saved thee from the phantom horrors of that nightmare night,

now I come, my living self, to rescue both of us from the deadlier fiends of flesh and blood, their originals incorporate in the daylight—that we may rule and live, or die in bliss together!

ARÆUS. My bride and Princess before all worlds (*kneeling and kissing her hands*).

HAND OF GLORY:—

The Princess of the realm beyond the wall!
If it be so—oh! then—indeed, indeed
I'm caught in my own toils: it cannot be!

THE CHIEF OF THE REFORMING PRIESTS. Oh! people lift up your hearts! Look at this picture and at that! one the sunlight shining on the uplands, the other the poison-breathing miasma of the swamp!

A few of the people raise a cheer, the bulk of them are silent.

THE CHIEF OF THE REFORMING PRIESTS (*continuing*). Which is the true kingship and royalty, tell me that. Yon joyous uplands, bathed in light, summoning to strenuous labour, passion, love, and toil, or yonder dark and gloomy haunts of carnage, war, royal butcheries, and sacrificial religious horror!

While he is speaking HAND OF GLORY gives a sign to the COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. He hurries away and the soldiers all at once appear, part of them massed round the base of the hill of agony: part of them surrounding the reforming priests. They seize the chief of the reforming priests. The people maintain an apathetic silence: there is a pause of general stupor and astonishment.

HAND OF GLORY:—

Ah! Now I see it all. Oh! blind before
Not to divine this traitor Prothenos
And what he schemed withal. To save a brother
Perfidious to the fatherland, his spite

Unpatriotic tops itself and leaves
The name of traitor bare! And promptly now
In full array will his allies be here
To swamp resistance. Ours, the gates unmanned,
The forts deserted, concentrated here
Give them immediate access. Oh! I am caught
In my own toils. How can I yet preserve
My life and status? Shall I bow before
The rising sun, betray the foundering past
And so maintain my power? Alas! alas!
They know too much and my servility
Will gain me naught but crusts and poverty,
If that. Or shall I, patriotic, preach
Resistance to the utmost, staking life
And all upon the cast. I'll see what way
The wind blows with the people. If resistance
Or blind submission best may shield my life,
And choose the safest or least dangerous course.

(Raising his voice)

Ho! All ye people! see the goal to which
Blind unbelief, and doubt and atheism
Conduct their dupes:—first to deny their God
And then themselves, and traitors to themselves
Next, home and country, fame and liberty
To fling to any upstart, in the hope
Of gain and servile favours, prone to all
That men hold basest of self-earned promotion.
Will you be bandied like a flock of sheep
From mount to lowland—sold to foreign shambles
And bartered this and that way for your hides?
Will you be trampled 'neath an alien hoof
Until your throats—the voice of freedom mute
Are vocal only to the clanking heel
And tyrant spur? Then crouch beneath the lash.
Yon new-found sons of day that prelude it

(Pointing to ARÆUS and the PRINCESS)

Be your late adorations, and forget
Your ancient faith of suffering and hopes
Of brighter lives beyond the gates of death,
All piety, all faith, your hearths, your homes,
Domestic love, and old traditions passed
From age to age as heirlooms, handed down
From old good times—the good old age of gold—
Be clean forgot: the Meriah's sacred name
Be wiped from memory: until at last
Upon outlandish reason's pike impaled
A fluttering moth to every varying breeze
You circle round and round, this way and that,
Blind toys of irresponsibility!

ONE OF THE PEOPLE:—

His Reverence speaks out.

ANOTHER:—

And wisely, too,
Better preserve our country's faith intact.
The trodden path is hard, but ever surest.

ANOTHER OF THE PEOPLE:—

But how can we resist? The foreign host
Will swift be here to guard this foreign Princess
Against I know not what of slights and wrongs
Trumped up to justify our subjugation.
That is the way with all these saving claws.

ANOTHER OF THE PEOPLE:—

Show us a sign from Heaven, you, Hand of Glory,
Or you, reforming priests. We'll follow that
That bears the clearest impress of the God!

THE PEOPLE (*exclaim*):—

Well said. Yes! Yes! A sign! from Heaven!

*A ray of sunlight breaks through the clouds, irradiating
the two lovers on the hill of agony.*

ONE OF THE REFORMING PRIESTS (*pointing to it
and to the two lovers*):—

There is the sign from Heaven, the God of day
Sends down to crown them with and may his grace
Illuminate your hearts as them his sunlight.

(The people are silent.)

HAND OF GLORY (*turning to the REFORMING
PRIESTS*):—

Ye juggling cheats! ye godless innovators!
Impostors and apostates, such as this
Be all the miracles your prayers achieve!
Some chance or slight event adroitly seized
And vaunted as miraculous. Go to!
Ye misbelieving traitors, vomit forth
Your reechy prayers to godheads false as they
And let them pelt at heaven's high casement thick
As storm-swept pebbles round the crystal eye
That tops the lighthouse, and then strew the surge:
Or buffet round the central light of all,
As moths around a flame, their own destruction!
Your cadging jowls shall whine no sign from Heaven!
The Majesty Divine, Majestic Lord
Throned o'er the tempest, vocal in the thunder
Our God, Our Father, our Creator armed
With jealous anger, wrathful justice, crowned
With storm and levin, the great God of all
That pens the winds and wings the thunderbolt,
His brawny arm with shattering earthquake fell
To smite and churn the lowering surge to blood,
Heeds not your pygmy twitterings to some God
Of simpering ripplings tense o'er lake and dune.
Go! carp your sign from Heaven! in vain! but I
God's power incarnate in his flesh and blood
Hold in the hollow of my hand—yon host
Of armed men—God's power materialized
By his inworking spirit—for 'tis that
And faith in that—that hurls them forth to rage

Invincible in war against his foes.
In war—in war—and has it come to that—
Well be it so—why should I hesitate—
The moments crowd upon me: I must choose
To forge the last link of the chain of which
Unweeing what a storm I challenged—
I forged the first or else to crawl away
A shattered wing of impotence and shame.
No: I'll confront this bastard arm that vaunts
Its moral power and supersensuous arts
And batter it to dust impalpable
By these indomitable legions, forged
Of sacramental blood and torturing steel.
The sacrifice in all its plenitude
Of reeking horror we will celebrate.
Empanoplied in flames, incased in blood
Of tortured innocence and masked in death
Terrific, staking all upon one throw,
Our troops shall prove invincible, for whom
Worse tortures are reserved if taken alive.
This be our sign from Heaven and earth as well!

(To REFORMING PRIEST)

We'll burn our boats, and you, ye recreant swine!
Shall be the torches to their phantom keels!

(To PRINCESS and ARÆUS)

No phantom blood, but your ripe springtide sap,
Shall red their phantom rollers, treacherous pair!
Who quake there in the sunlight—quick! prepare
The torture traps and sharp your slaying knives,
Ye flaying hands and executioners.

We'll have them on their bed of roses. Up!
Up! soldiers, do your duty! Some of you
Quick! seize the rebel priests and bind them fast
Each to his stake, and pile the flaming death
That sends them screaming, flaxen, to the skies
To howl forgiveness from their God of Love.

(Pointing to ARÆUS and the PRINCESS)

As for yon two dupes and minions of their madness,
These storm the hill and seize ye other troops
And bring them hither: all is now prepared
For their reception as was first devised.
Up! soldiers, do your duty! strike for faith
Throne, altar, hearth, King, God and Fatherland!

THE TWO YOUNG PRIESTS. Oh! what a relief. All
this torturing suspense over! Now the sacrifice will
really begin at last.

They clasp their hands and look heavenward ecstatically; the soldiers hesitate.

HAND OF GLORY:—

Forward! or flunkeys of a foreign king
You shall be branded, slaves, on brow and hand,
Forward and do your duty!

Part of the soldiers now seize the reforming priests, the others storm the hill. The five understrappers face about to confront them. The soldiers are close upon them.

PRINCESS (*drawing her dagger*):—

We are betrayed. This only can prevent
A ghastlier exit. Brief has been our wooing
Beyond all time our night or night's undoing.

ARÆUS (*leaning his head on the left shoulder of the PRINCESS and exposing his breast*):—

Oh! steel-blue flash of night and star-wove past!
Let out the sunset of my heart. At last
Unite us one brief moment. Then disperse
Our being's brief dust through life's vast universe!

The PRINCESS raises the dagger above her head to strike. Her hand remains paralysed in the air. At the same instant the soldiers recoil and also remain paralysed.

HAND OF GLORY:—

Ho! forward! forward! soldiers. What is this?
They, I, we—spell-bound all and rooted stand.

Some witchcraft touch of will-benumbing ice
Freezes all action, charms all movement mute,
Impregnates, masters, magnetizes all
Of space and matter drugged in opiate trance.

CHIEF OF REFORMING PRIESTS (*freeing himself from
the now impotent grip of the soldiers*):—

Behold, thou guilty, pitiless priest of night,
The sign from Heaven that hurls thee to the fiends
The Daughter of the Sun!

THE PEOPLE (*exclaim*):—

A miracle! The Daughter of the Sun!
A miracle! A sign from Heaven indeed!
Hail to our new-born King and Queen, and woe!
To yonder black perdition there below!

*While HAND OF GLORY, the soldiers, ARÆUS, and
the PRINCESS remain spell-bound, the vision of the
Daughter of the Sun gradually embodies itself out of
space behind the two lovers, like a protecting angel. She
stands surrounded by an aureole of golden light, and
robed in white and gold, holding a spindle of gold and
spinning a thread of light; the threads of spun sunlight
form a crown upon her head.*

HAND OF GLORY:—

The game is up before 'twas well begun
And mars me in a moment. Hark! hark! they come.
Hark! hark! I hear the tramp of armed hosts
And clash of spears. Oh! I am three times doomed
To worse than I concerted for these traitors.
What I devised for this pert royal jade
And this new-minted heir she brings him, now
They will requite a hundredfold on me
A hundredfold protracted. I must die.
What die! Not die! Not Hand of Glory die!
It cannot be. What! Hand of Glory die!
Oh! oh! 'tis hard. Without the time besides

To screw my courage up. Where is my knife?
Methinks 'tis here (*Fumbles in his pocket.*) but rusty
hilt and blade

Grow to the sheath and will not be divorced
There: it is out. A ragged saw. Ah! me,
How can I stab my life out with that claw?
But hark! they come. I must. Oh! hideous death
Now all is over. Now I am no more.

He saws his throat spasmodically with the knife and falls bleeding but not dead or dying. As he writhes and moans upon the ground—

ONE OF THE WORKMAN (*kicking him contemptuously*):—

This petticoated courage, gorged with blood,
Had not enough of manhood to strike home,
Where death imposed itself, but grunts and bleeds
Like a stuck sow, drunk with its own sick fear.

2nd WORKMAN:—

Or like a noisome vision of the night
That faintly lingers on in memory
Painting the dawn it can hold back no longer,
'Tis insult to the sex to call it woman.

(Also kicks the priest.)

But hark! what's that? Another hangman's dog
Out of his jerkin of mortality!

COURTIERS:—

Look to the King! he faints! Oh! piteous sight!
(The KING vomits blood and dies.)

A COURTIER:—

He's gone: a blood-vessel has burst within him.

2nd COURTIER:—

The ruddy milk he craved with such wild ire
From youth's blue veins, with that bedraggled life
His own encrusted drainage, scarce maintained

By sluggish eddyings, now he vomits forth
From the encankered cesspool of his soul
That rots below the midriff. God be praised!

Enter the MONGOL KING and PROSTHENOS at the head of the Mongol host.

KING. A power beyond the power of kings and armies has saved them from a treachery beyond our human foresight to reckon and provide against. Welcome to a father's heart, oh! reborn daughter, oh! new-found son of heaven and happiness. Come all of you, oh! newly-won family of sonship and daughterhood!

Grasps the hand of PROSTHENOS. ARÆUS and the PRINCESS who have hitherto remained spell-bound now descend the hill. The DAUGHTER OF THE SUN follows them to the foot of it and remains standing phantomlike behind the altar of the Cerny bog and Bily bog. ARÆUS and the PRINCESS embrace.

ARÆUS. I cannot speak for happiness, nor divine what portents or what subtle chain of causes have freed us from this dreadful incubus of daylight, and daylight's material realities, rescued us from torture and death, and recalled us to life and happiness.

QUEEN. You are rescued. We are united in domestic peace and hope. Let that suffice. Thank the good law whose agents had moral power to break the network of black magic and necromancy, which are but the workings of cruel hearts and evil minds.

PROSTHENOS. There is the arch-artificer. What fate has your Majesty in store for him?

KING. Unhappy wretch! His religion had not even conviction enough to free him by his own quavering right hand. Let him be removed and his wounds attended to. If he survive—and they do not appear serious—let him be consigned to the keepers of moon-struck

spirits—his natural associates, and live as a warning, who could not die as a man.

PROSTHENOS. Mercy and justice are better than the vindictive law of an eye for an eye or the loving kindness of the halter and the lash. May he live to recover and repent.

HAND OF GLORY *is carried out by the five understrappers on the bier.*

PROSTHENOS. And Wrath of God, the King?

KING. Let him be consigned to the narrow bed he had prepared for the spring of youth and happiness.

(Wrath of God is placed in the coffin.)

Courtiers! deign to bear away your royal master. He shall be buried on the morrow, with the honours due to his rank and dignity. What, will none of you come forward to do this last service to your dead monarch? *(None of the courtiers move.)*

ONE OF THE WORKMEN. We can do it for them, your Majesty. Poor folk are accustomed to do dirty work.

They shoulder the coffin and carry it out. The two young priests follow the coffin hanging their heads disconsolately. After them the HUMBLE BELIEVER, the MYSTICAL BELIEVER, and the PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEVER follow, poking and peering about, like gibbons or howling monkeys. They step gingerly lifting their long spindle legs very high. Each one of them holds his long proboscis-like ultra-Aryan nose with the thumb and forefinger of the left hand, and with the right, by the extreme tip of one of the corners, a large pocket-handkerchief. The Philosophical Believer's is red, the Humble Believer's black and the Mystical Believer's green. From time to time they apply the handkerchiefs to their eyes with an arid perfunctory kind of snuffle. When all have trooped out the KING continues speaking.

KING. Soldiers, for the present disarm your comrades of this realm beyond the wall. May national independence, unity, and fraternity henceforth reduce the need of them and you. (*The Aryan soldiers who have remained spell-bound are disarmed.*) And now (*Turning to the people*) hearken, neighbours of this realm beyond the wall, by chance and destiny too long estranged and enemies. We come not as conquerors and enslavers but as liberators. Not to subjugate your State to ours. How could those whose highest aspiration is liberation from all the trammels of sentient existence and personality desire that or deem it an end worth living for? But to free you from the tyranny of your sacrificial superstition—the outcome of cruel natures only half-evolved from animalism. We come to invite you to live side by side with us, linked by the golden bonds of domestic unity, not by any laws of conquest and sovereignty, in independence and mutual fraternity, each developing the sphere assigned to him with labour enriched by scientific zeal and knowledge.

Passion warm our little day
Love and labour, joy and play,
Plenty crown each smiling land,
Love and joy go hand in hand.

(The people approve and applaud.)

KING (*continuing*). But until the root is extirpated for ever, the cancer of which it is the essence, tyranny and superstition will recur in material existence again and again for all eternity—and with them cruelty, war, oppression, poverty, and servitude. The treacherous robber of his neighbour's rights, the enslaver of his neighbour's offspring, will be the glorious conqueror, the heaven-sent hero, ruler, and politician. No real and continuous progress is possible so long as countries and peoples are reckoned but as counters to

be shuffled about, from one royal cutpurse, or one group of bullying brigands to another. But so long as the fiction of a God the Father, who pardons only after devouring his children, of a God the Creator, who operates through the blind laws of Nature eternal cruelties and injustice, of a God of Nature self-writ large there to excuse self's inherent thirst for blood still rules and deforms your heart—no true religion and no real progress are possible. Cast out then this ideal created by a being yourselves—scarcely evolved from apes and tigers—this God—yourselves writ large through Nature—of sacrificial cannibalisms and sacrificial orgies, practised to unite the savage ignorance that imagined it, to the more monstrous phantom imagined there. For so long as religion imposes its artificial scheme of sacrificial-made pity, mercy, and loving kindness to importunate and exasperate mankind, so long are war, misery, murder, sacrifices—the sacrifice of self and others—indispensable to manufacture these its odious virtues and impertinences. Only beyond the light of Love and Nature, faint symbols of a formless nothingness beyond all forms and being, can abiding peace and happiness be imagined. The extinction of self and gods, of pain and suffering, in anticipation of that peace, not the manufacture of mercy, loving kindness, and morbid pity, by the eternal perpetuation of sacrifice, war, torture, poverty, and misery—that be our hope's ideal.

QUEEN. That is the norm of true religion, life, and purity. But hark! I hear the tramp of other feet, half discern the flash of other sunlit robes, half divine their message, half conjecture that they come to reveal to us the source of what alone has proved the barrier to our children's premature and self-sought death. (*Enter the yellow-robed ones.*) What message do you bring us, good or ill?

CHIEF OF THE YELLOW-ROBED ONES:—

Both good and ill as you may take it, lady,
But good or ill, it most concerns your daughter.

QUEEN:—

Then let her hear it.

CHIEF OF THE PRIESTS (*turning to the Princess*):—

Oh! noblest Princess, Queen of our best hopes,
Be thankfulness or tears most consonant
To what we now communicate, I know not.
He that was once thy brother, lover, friend
Perchance the saviour of thy little life,
Is now no more: the cloudy gossamer
That a brief instant stained th' unfathomed blue
Of heaven's expanse, the tangled skein of form
And thought and sentiment is ravelled out
Commingling with the ample fold of day.
Scarcely a moment gleams the afterglow
Above the sunken orb, the dewdrop falls
Into the silent sea, the lotus breaks
The level of its crystal prison-house
The meteor brain has vanished from the sky
The flame is spent, thought, feeling, self, no more
And all is peace and nothingness again.
Hark, from the heart of space, yon kindling sky
The last faint pulse of life's long agony.

From the heart of space, the invisible choir chants with rising and falling intensity the following stanzas. As the chorus proceeds, the personages of the drama and the scene grow fainter and fainter until at the last stanza they melt away altogether in the intense glow of summer sunlight in the centre of which surrounded by an aureole of wavy tongues of light the form of the DAUGHTER OF THE SUN glows forth with fuller, more material consistency. She then advances and recites the Epilogue.

SONG OF THE CHOIR INVISIBLE (*concluding stanzas*):—

Oh! Love divine, as now the world forsaking
Thine earthly image fades, oh! Love, draw near,
When that strange dawn of lifeless life is breaking
Ends the long night of hopeless hope and fear.

No night is there nor shall be dawn nor morrow
In that clear light which is nor night nor day
But the night and dawn of earth's delight and sorrow
Shall for ever and for ever pass away.

Self's mirage fades upon the changeless ocean
One step and lo! it is no longer seen
Its towering heights and silent quivering motion
Are gone nor even know they once had been.

End of Act III

THE EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

Spoken by the Daughter of the Sun

Worship not me, ye nations, nor my sire,
The flaming Lord of day, the Lord of fire
Our godhead springs but from your own decay
One orb's red life glints from another's pyre.

Worship not life, ye creatures of a day,
'Tis but our flaming death transferred to clay
A moment resonant of sweet desire
Touched by our torments as they pass away.

Worship not thought or feeling lifted higher
Than the dim lantern brains where they expire,
They are but day-dreams of a dying day,
They are but echoings of a mouldering lyre.

Worship not matter, ether, firmament
For they to you are nothingness till rent
By the brief rhythmus of our flaming death
And sink to nothingness when we are spent.

Worship not some creator, ruler, blent
With this vain flux of things or, haply, bent
Above it like some sky's abstracted wraith
They are but self-writ large and thought misspent.

They are but the old ignorance, new-writ
That sires can life create, and not transmit
Alone what theirs before to them transmitted
As lamp by lamp and flame by flame is lit.

This old delusion daubed paternal tombs
With blood of first-born slaughtered, and still dooms
The Christian's son-devouring infamy
To execration where its shadow looms.

For that too's but earth-fathers to the sky
Sublimed, then cancelled out to unity
Devouring its own children, once old time
And now the christians' ravenous deity.

Worship not, beauty, form, or harmony
They are but stamped on matter, force, and sky
But reverence their transience that reveals
The nothingness from which they live and die.

But all distorted by the whirling globe
Beyond whose surface we can nothing probe
They are but shadows of a shadow thrown
On thoughts revolving void and matter's robe.

On shadowy nothings cast upon a screen
By others' half-consumed and flickering sheen
Oh! blessed liberation from this womb
Of all that is or was or shall have been!

* * *

So happily obeying, side by side
The kindred people lived. No gory hide
Was needed now to bring the sun to heel
After his kennel of the wintertide

In mutual freedom lived. And garnered meal
Needed no Agni on his torture wheel
To thrill the germ to sprout, nor Meriah head,
Decapitated goat, or gory veal.

And art and learning, joy and science spread:
Where once the struggling Meriah's life was shed
A palace crowned the summit: there the rose
Alone was ravished and the vintage bled.

All things were garnered in divine repose
And superstition's eyes had seemed to close
Their Gorgon orbs for ever, when the fates
Rolled back the tide of sacrificial woes.

For whether earthquake locked the open gates
Through which warm seas had fed those polar States
With tropic life till then or rolling time
Aphelion winters northward relegates

By shifting equinox from skies sublime
I say not: but to that once tropic clime
Sped snow and iceberg; winter's frosty rime
Palsied the jungle and remorseless killed
The palms and araucarias of the prime.

Then superstition once again distilled
Its sophistries from jaws with ravin filled
And howled triumphant: Lo! the curse of God
Upon the godless people is fulfilled.

And so the Aryans drenched anew the sod
With loathlier rites than ever. Victims trod
Their shambles flayed and piecemeal each new moon
And subtler tortures flashed from steel and rod

And deeper drifts the snow-wreath; red with hate
From crown to blasted glebe—a ruddly spate—
The unleashed torrents foam in raging spring
And plague and famine wax, as floods abate.

* * *

Till snow and ice and misery drove them forth
Aryans and Mongols of the primal north
From Arya-Varta, when a glacial age
Swooped down in iceberg on their tropic stage.

Then those that came from eastward, eastward turned
Retracing the long way their sires had learned
And bleached and pallid fled the western hoard
To where they came from and their faith restored,

Black as their hearts, and these to ruffians drilled
In millionfold brutality, fulfilled
The prophecy of Prostheno—*and still*
Viler with each new sun the same fulfil!

* * *

So of the past in its ether-wove chrysalis
Shrined by the light from a time immemorial
Issues the record—a flashing epitome—
Snatched from its ocean abysses.

Lo! to the siege hurry tempest and icicle:
Shrivel in ice the gay fronds, in an aureole
Spread to the sunlight, inert and insensible
Swoons the rank life of the tropics.

Life that in infinite forms, had invincible
Welled, had evolved in a tropical ecstasy,
Now—but a score of eccentric abortions—or
Wallows or welters on ice floes,

Mounts to the cave the thin host of infuriate
Fanatics, howling implacable infamous
Smears the red orgy o'er idol or effigy
Welters in blood and obscenity,

Till the white mantle of death in a crystalline
Splendour erases its antic enormities
And the refrain of its passionate past is hushed
Under a snowdrift of ages.

*The DAUGHTER OF THE SUN vanishes and the scene
changes and represents the gradual chilling of the north*

polar tropic regions during the last of their ice ages: the war and separation of the two races, the renewed horrors of the Aryan Meriah sacrifice, seen in shadowy form. Then the remains of the tropical forests and tropical civilization collapse under the weight of snow and ice: vast icebergs collect, the aurora flashes out in all directions, transforming the falling snow-flakes into showers of metallic spangles of all colours of the rainbow, and finally the scene resumes the form of that of the first one of the introduction, with the Polar bear coiled round the North Pole, and the bones of Peary whitening on the dusty snow-field in front of it.

Begun at Munich, October 1909, completed at Castione Ticinese, April 1911.

Written in Germany, Switzerland, and Italy.

The lyrical part of the Prologue and the Epilogue composed April—Mai 1911.

Darfo, Val Camonica Bresciana.

Walter William Strickland, formerly English Baronet, was born in London in the year 1851. He left England about thirty years ago and has made since then extensive travels in Europe, the Dutch Indies, the Malay Archipelago, New Zealand, Australia, India, Mexico, Japan, China, and other countries, studying the language, the literature, traditions, habits, and customs of the people he lived among. As a result of a laborious study of over ten years of the Slav languages he has translated and published four of Viteslav Halek's best stories, Svatopluk Čech's now classical mock-epic Hanuman, also the whole of Karel Erben's one hundred original folk-lore stories with elaborate comments and diagrams and other translations still in manuscript. It is not possible here to give a complete list of Mr. Strickland's numerous works. Besides being a poet and writer, his collections in conchology and still more most extensive observations on phyllotaxis resulting in a workable explanation have been recognized by eminent scientists.

W. W. STRICKLAND

VISHNU

or

*The Planet Of The Sevenfold
Unity*

*An autobiographical, scientific, and mystical
Romance*

As the title indicates, Vishnu is a biographical, scientific, and mystical romance. Poe, Jules Verne, and W. G. Wells have before and since set the fashion of sending their characters on a visit to some sublunary sphere. It may perhaps be boasted that in Vishnu, the method is subtler and somewhat less improbable than in the works of these distinguished writers. Although discursive in form, the unity of the piece has been preserved and to give a bare summary of the story would mar far more than benefit such vitality as it may possess. The judicious reader will trace the influence of the late George Eliot, though the author did not know her personally, more particularly perhaps of her last novel, Daniel Deronda. To those for whom the insoluble riddles of existence have their attractions, but who find insufficient the solutions of bygone superstitions, not to speak of the atmosphere of mysticism which surrounds the whole conceit, Vishnu will likely enough appeal.

B. Westermann Co., Inc., New York

W. W. STRICKLAND

THREE TRILOGIES

or

Nine Dramas in Prose and Verse

Each trilogy consists of a tragedy, comedy, and satyric drama. Most of the ideas occurred to the author during his travels in Italy and at Taormina in Sicily when that island was in full brigandage and the pastoral and forest beauties of Taormina had not been destroyed by the axe and the modern villa nor its charms by the modern tourists.

The plays, however, were composed during a period of roving life as conchologist in Australia, New Zealand and in Sicily itself. The Shrieking Sisterhood was written at Richmond in England and the first half of Hinemoa during a violent squall in a small steamer about 25 years ago between Nelson and Wellington, New Zealand.

The nine dramas are:

Orpheus and Eurydice The Glorified Thief

The Shrieking Sisterhood

Hinemoa Dido and Æneas Aphrodite

A Slight Misunderstanding

Gosling Gold

St. Romauld's Cell

B. Westermann Co., Inc., New York

W. W. STRICKLAND
EPICUREAN ESSAYS

in Verse and Prose

This volume is a collection of thirty-eight essays in prose and verse ranging over a very wide field. There are sonnets, lovesongs, satirical verse, essays on scientific and philosophical questions, brief "skits", and a complete précis of the whole of the Kalevalá the great Finn Epic in fifty runes. In many of the metrical pieces there is the ring of real poetry.

THE SMUGGLER'S DOG

and other Essays

in Literature and Science

The title-sketch of this volume is a pathetic story of life on the Italo-Swiss frontier, and won the approval of so good a judge as the late Bishop of Durham, Dr. Westcott. The remaining essays are wide in their range in literature, science, religion, and politics, including amongst others "A New Theory about Shakespeare"; a satirical essay: "On Some Moral and Literary Beauties of the British Hymnal", "Food and Morals", "The Limits of Applied Science", "World Empire without War", "The Extinction of Mankind" and a striking sketch entitled "The Convent of the Abruzzi".

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W. W. STRICKLAND

POEMS

in two Volumes

The two volumes of poetry here presented to the public embrace the bulk of literary poetic effort of the author from 1868, when the Prize Poem, William Tyndale, was written down to the Red Sea composed 1928. These collections with those comprised in other volumes containing prose and verse, possess a somewhat greater variety than the conventional flatulence, which is beginning to bring the modern bard into not quite undeserved discredit. Mr. Strickland is also very successful as a translator especially so in Hanuman, a mock-heroic poem by Svatopluk Čech, in which he has preserved the original metres and system of double-rhyming which distinguish the original work. In his preface Mr. Strickland expresses the hope that his work "may at least please those who know what good writing is, and that the striking humour and admirable working out of the original conceit may to some extent counterbalance the inevitable defects of a translation".

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W. W. STRICKLAND

PAN SLAVONIC
FOLK-LORE

translated from Karel Erben
with supplementary Notes, Essays and
Introductions

This volume comprises a translation of Karel Erben's collection of popular Slavonic Fairy Stories. Mr. Strickland has added illustrative diagrams, notes, supplementary essays, and introductions, in which he explains and develops the theory that these fairy stories have been derived from an Arctic annual myth. A similar theory has been adopted by Professor Warren, of Boston University (U. S. A.) and Mr. Balgangadhar Tilak, both learned Vedic scholars, to explain various passages in the Vedas. The theory as to the Slavonic stories was, however, deduced from the stories themselves, before the translator was aware that it had been applied to the Vedas.

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