

STORM AND BATTLE

(FROM *ERBOHTHUS*)

LET us lift up the strength of our hearts in song,
 And our souls to the height of the darkling day.
 If the wind in our eyes blow blood for spray,
 Be the spirit that breathes in us life more strong,
 Though the prow reel round and the helm point wrong,
 And sharp reefs whiten the shoreward way.

For the steersman time sits hidden astern,
 With dark hand plying the rudder of doom,
 And the surf-smoke under it flies like fume
 As the blast shears off and the oar-blades churn
 The foam of our lives that to death return,
 Blown back as they break to the gulping gloom.

What cloud upon heaven is arisen, what shadow,
 what sound,
 From the world beyond earth, from the night
 underground,
 That scatters from wings un beholden the weight of its
 darkness around ?

For the sense of my spirit is broken, and blinded its
eye,

As the soul of a sick man ready to die,
With fear of the hour that is on me, with dread if an
end be not nigh.

O Earth, O Gods of the land, have ye heart now to
see and to hear

What slays with terror mine eyesight and seals
mine ear ?

O fountains of streams everlasting, are all ye not shrunk
up and withered for fear ?

Lo, night is arisen on the noon, and her hounds are
in quest by day,

And the world is fulfilled of the noise of them
crying for their prey,

And the sun's self stricken in heaven, and cast out of
his course as a blind man astray.

From east to west of the south sea-line

Glitters the lightning of spears that shine ;

As a storm-cloud swoln that comes up from the skirts
of the sea,

By the wind for helmsman to shoreward ferried,

So black behind them the live storm serried

Shakes earth with the tramp of its foot, and the terror
to be.

Shall the sea give death whom the land gave birth ?
O Earth, fair mother, O sweet live Earth,
Hide us again in thy womb from the waves of it, help
us or hide.

As a sword is the heart of the God thy brother,
But thine as the heart of a new-made mother,
To deliver thy sons from his ravin, and rage of his
tide.

O strong north wind, the pilot of cloud and rain,
For the gift we gave thee what gift hast thou given
us again ?
O God dark-winged, deep-throated, a terror to forth-
faring ships by night,
What bride-song is this that is blown on the blast
of thy breath ?
A gift but of grief to thy kinsmen, a song but of
death,
For the bride's folk weeping, and woe for her father,
who finds thee against him in fight.

Turn back from us, turn thy battle, take heed of our
cry ;
Let thy dread breath sound, and the waters of war
be dry ;
Let thy strong wrath shatter the strength of our foemen,
the sword of their strength and the shield ;

As vapours in heaven, or as waves or the wrecks of
ships,

So break thou the ranks of their spears with the
breath of thy lips,

Till their corpses have covered and clothed as with
raiment the face of the sword-ploughed field.

O son of the rose-red morning, O God twin-born
with the day,

O wind with the young sun waking, and winged for
the same wide way,

Give up not the house of thy kin to the host thou
hast marshalled from northward for prey.

From the cold of thy cradle in Thrace, from the
mists of the fountains of night,

From the bride-bed of dawn whence day leaps laugh-
ing, on fire for his flight,

Come down with their doom in thine hand on the
ships thou hast brought up against us to fight.

For now not in word but in deed is the harvest of
spears begun,

And its clamour outbellows the thunder, its lightning
outlightens the sun.

From the springs of the morning it thunders and
lightens across and afar

To the wave where the moonset ends and the fall of
the last low star.

With a trampling of drenched red hoofs and an earthquake of men that meet,

Strong war sets hand to the scythe, and the furrows take fire from his feet.

Earth groans from her great rent heart, and the hollows of rocks are afraid,

And the mountains are moved, and the valleys as waves in a storm-wind swayed.

From the roots of the hills to the plain's dim verge and the dark loud shore,

Air shudders with shrill spears crossing, and hurtling of wheels that roar.

As the grinding of teeth in the jaws of a lion that foam as they gnash

Is the shriek of the axles that loosen, the shock of the poles that crash.

The dense manes darken and glitter, the mouths of the mad steeds champ,

Their heads flash blind through the battle, and death's foot rings in their tramp.

For a fourfold host upon earth and in heaven is arrayed for the fight,

Clouds ruining in thunder and armies encountering as clouds in the night.

Mine ears are amazed with the terror of trumpets, with darkness mine eyes,

At the sound of the sea's host charging that deafens the roar of the sky's.

White frontlet is dashed upon frontlet, and horse against
horse reels hurled,
And the gorge of the gulfs of the battle is wide for the
spoil of the world.

And the meadows are cumbered with shipwreck of
chariots that founder on land,
And the horsemen are broken with breach as of
breakers, and scattered as sand.
Through the roar and recoil of the charges that mingle
their cries and confound,
Like fire are the notes of the trumpets that flash
through the darkness of sound.
As the swing of the sea churned yellow that sways
with the wind as it swells
Is the lift and relapse of the wave of the chargers that
clash with their bells;
And the clang of the sharp shrill brass through the
burst of the wave as it shocks
Rings clean as the clear wind's cry through the roar of
the surge on the rocks:
And the heads of the steeds in their headgear of war,
and their corseleted breasts,
Gleam broad as the brows of the billows that brighten
the storm with their crests,
Gleam dread as their bosoms that heave to the ship-
wrecking wind as they rise,

Filled full of the terror and thunder of water, that slays
as it dies.

So dire is the glare of their foreheads, so fearful the fire
of their breath,

And the light of their eyeballs enkindled so bright with
the lightnings of death ;

And the foam of their mouths as the sea's when the
jaws of its gulf are as graves,

And the ridge of their necks as the wind-shaken mane
on the ridges of waves :

And their fetlocks afire as they rear drip thick with a
dewfall of blood

As the lips of the rearing breaker with froth of the
manslaying flood.

And the whole plain reels and resounds as the fields of
the sea by night

When the stroke of the wind falls darkling, and death
is the seafarer's light.

But thou, fair beauty of heaven, dear face of the day
nigh dead,

What horror hath hidden thy glory, what hand hath
muffled thine head ?

O sun, with what song shall we call thee, or ward
off thy wrath by what name,

With what prayer shall we seek to thee, soothe with
what incense, assuage with what gift,

If thy light be such only as lightens to deathward the
seaman adrift

With the fire of his house for a beacon, that foemen
have wasted with flame ?

Arise now, lift up thy light ; give ear to us, put forth
thine hand,

Reach toward us thy torch of deliverance, a lamp for
the night of the land.

Thine eye is the light of the living, no lamp for the
dead ;

O, lift up the light of thine eye on the dark of our
dread.

Who hath blinded thee ? who hath prevailed on thee ?
who hath ensnared ?

Who hath broken thy bow, and the shafts for thy
battle prepared ?

Have they found out a fetter to bind thee, a chain for
thine arm that was bared ?

Be the name of thy conqueror set forth, and the might
of thy master declared.

O God, fair God of the morning, O glory of day,
What ails thee to cast from thy forehead its garland
away ?

To pluck from thy temples their chaplet enwreathed
of the light,

And bind on the brows of thy godhead a frontlet of
night ?

Thou hast loosened the necks of thine horses, and
goaded their flanks with affright,
To the race of a course that we know not on ways that
are hid from our sight.

As a wind through the darkness the wheels of their
chariot are whirled,

And the light of its passage is night on the face of
the world.

And there falls from the wings of thy glory no help
from on high,

But a shadow that smites us with fear and desire of
thine eye.

For our hearts are as reeds that a wind on the water
bows down and goes by,
To behold not thy comfort in heaven that hath left us
untimely to die.