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The Tragedy of Saul

FIRST KING OF ISRAEL

BY

LEWIS A. STORRS



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The Tragedy of Saul

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THE TRAGEDY OF SAUL

PERSONS

SAUL, King of Israel.

SAMUEL, Judge of Israel.

DAVID, A Captain in Saul's Army and aspirant for the throne.

JONATHAN, A Son of Saul.

ABNER, General of Saul's Army.

ABISHAI, AHIMELECH } Supporters of David.

ADRIEL, A Sheikh in treaty with Saul.

DOEG, An Edomite of Saul's Court.

AHIMANETZ, An Officer of Saul's Army.

BEZER, An Officer of Saul's Court.

MALACHI, A Man of Judah.

IRA, A Man of Issachar.

ARMORBEARER to Saul.

A PRIEST.

MICHAL, Daughter of Saul.

TAMAR, Servant of Michal.

WITCH OF EN-DOR, A Necromancer.

Officers, Soldiers, Aides, Herald, Women, Musicians, Israelites.

THE TRAGEDY OF SAUL

ACT I.

Scene 1. Near Mizpeh.

First Israelite, Second Israelite.

First Israelite.

How think you of the state of Israel?

Second Israelite.

'Tis most unmerciful.
Philistia, firmèd on the littoral
Of the Great Sea, in Gaza, Ashkelon,
Doth burst our crumbling borders on the west
And sits in citadel on Gibeah.
On east the fearful Moabite lies wait
And giant Amalek. So circumscript
Are grown our liberties that we are like
To perish in the bulge of heathen flood.

First Israelite.

Had we another Moses to scourge in
The tribes to common purpose and one front

Against the enemy, we should possess
The way of Egypt, and bad Dagon's host
Drive back into the sea from which they spawned.

SECOND ISRAELITE.

How shall a sacerdotal man, a seer
And judge schooled in the law, give Israel peace?
We need a king of regal name and state.
What think you of the son of Kish? But now
I heard he gropes toward the throne, has seen
The holy man of Mizpeh and thence comes
With strange report, so that the mockers say,
Is Saul among the prophets?

FIRST ISRAELITE.

I, indeed,
Have heard the news but take no heed of it.
Shall we bow down to twelfth-born Benjamin?
Let Judah whelp a king to Israel;
Against the lion none will dare rebel.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE 2. At Mizpeh.

MALACHI, a man of Judah; IRA, a man of Issachar.

MALACHI.

Peace to the son of Imri.

IRA.

To thee peace.

MALACHI.

Thou comest a long journey to the sacrifices.

IRA.

A long journey, true, and the country is turbulent.

MALACHI.

I believe it is very turbulent.

IRA.

What said great Moses when he led our fathers forth from fatty Egypt to the wilderness? that we should have a land of milk and honey: and there were sundry prophecies of our repose in this land of delectable promise. How then?

MALACHI.

The land is fertile.

IRA.

Yes, of many things. What is it that our cattle have swelling udders if we must milk them with the sword? What worth are mellow

fields if the pillager must reap them? Three hundred fifty and six years we have been in the land, and Jacob is a motley nation, of jarring and dismembered parts.

MALACHI.

'Tis said there is a ceremony toward to-day will mend our state.

IRA.

'Tis said —— 'tis true 'tis said: 'twere better when 'tis said 'tis done.

MALACHI.

How look the northern tribes at the affair?

IRA.

But coldly. We would have a king indeed,
But not from fierce, unmannered Benjamin.
A king of parts, who wears an eminence
Of valor, pedigree or common love
That shall compel us to his willing rule.

MALACHI.

Why, such an one is Saul. His person makes
Most brave compare against our puny race.

When he shall lead against the Ammonite
Who now impinges on our eastern front
He'll prove his princely strain effulgently,
As full a king as Nahash.

IRA.

Hush! the Seer.

[*Enter Samuel, Herald and People.*

HERALD.

By tribes and by your families, assemble!

SAMUEL.

Ho, men of Israel, hear!
Since childhood till the age you see in me
I have been in your witness. I have judged
The body of your law, intinerant
In Gilgal, Mizpeh, Bethel, and have been
The archon of your theocratic state.
Say now, have I done wrong to any man,
Weighed justice 'gainst a bribe, your chattels tithed,
Or made oppression sit upon your necks?

PEOPLE.

Thou hast been just and merciful.

SAI .UEL.

Yet unaggrieved you strain against my yoke,
Would cast me in the by-ways of old age,
And with a sounding name infatuate
Will have a king.

PEOPLE.

A king, show us the king.

SAMUEL.

What shibboleth is in a mouthing word?
What conjure that spells freemen with its taste?
Can guttural acclaim mask from your sense
The thing that is —— a king! A master that
Will bruise you with his heel, will draft your sons
To make noblesse of his drone-fatting court
And will distrain your substance to shore up
His pinnacled estate —— such is a king!

PEOPLE.

The ceremony tardies with these words.

SAMUEL.

Since Adam in that garden orient
Broke fealty to his Maker, 'tis decreed
That his posterity should not know good
But by the taste of evil. Make the lot.

HERALD.

It falls to Benjamin.

PEOPLE.

And of him, who?

HERALD.

To Saul, the son of Kish. Let him be brought.

[*Enter Saul, attended.*

SAMUEL.

Behold your king, who by divinest rite
And holy oil is here elect to be
Your sovereign and vice-gerent of the Lord.

PEOPLE.

God save the king!

MALACHI.

What think you, Imri's son,
Now that the matter's done, of its event?
This Saul, does not he measure with my words?
Compelling majesty sits on him, bold
Against base argument: his blocky neck,
Like Bashan bull's, is pillared in the thwart
Of his broad trunk: as on Libanus spires
The cedar from its feebler forest folk,
So Saul, and is embodiment of king.

IRA.

And shall this blob of girth rule over me?
Prerogative of what doth boost him up
Above us all, his peers, and dub him lord?
A cubit of gross flesh? Fie! by such test
We had been vassal to the Canaanites.
Can sacred oil and ritual of words
Purge to the soul and transubstantiate
Its essence to a thing it was not? Then——
Then of the alchemy that's done in him,
Refining his dross part from the sublime,
Let us have voucher to our proving sense
And patent of this Saul imperial.
My suffrage waits this miracle. Till then——
Till bursts the masking chrysalis of king,
My spirit is as free as any man's
To say, I will, I won't, and to enjoy
Its natural conceits. Only itself
Its proper liberties can harness in
And give the bridle to its own elect.
Volition is the bit of loyalty.

MALACHI.

To such lose hitch abandoned, I dare say
The chariot of state would run away.

Scene 3. Israelite camp.

Saul, Abner, Soldiers of the Guard.

Abner.

How does the glad morning find my lord and king?

Saul.

Most wretchedly well.

Abner.

Your majesty doth appose opposing words. Not even fiat sealed can match such unmatched language into sense. It is a jest.

Saul.

It is a state of kings, who are complex
Of such a dual being that at once
Themselves can be the antipodes of things
And can in their own persons juxtapose
The poles of thought. No man's more well than I,
Nor takes his ration with more appetite.
Were somewhat less the burden of my years
And this, my royal dignity, I might
Go out to the outrageous pig who wagers us,

Not hopeless of success. Look, how I'm thewed!
Am I not still the army's paragon?
No ague's in me and no weather rheum.
Oh, I am well, well, well——and wretched ill.
The something that is lodged within my core,
The quick, elusive element of Saul
Is in such tension with my lusty flesh
That I do fear 'twill make divorcement thence,
Or that, dissolving through my blood, 'twill fill
Me with its humors. How's the army's state?

ABNER.

Not badly, yet not well.

SAUL.

Why, you, too, play with paradoxes now.

ABNER.

The army's like a horse broad in the wind,
Straight-posted 'neath the withers and high-flanked,
Yet of no mettle; so his ass's head
Is chuck with frights and shies at all alarms.
The army hath all organs but a heart.

SAUL.

Chop off their feet and they'll grow heart o'er night,
The timid hare that cannot run will fight.

ABNER.

I think 'tis so, for in the skirmishings
With which our front is daily exercised,
Advantage hath not leaned to either side.
Yet dare I not the general battle make,
So cowed our men are by wild, senseless fears
And by the champion who, panoplied,
Stalks daily in our vision, insolent.

SAUL.

Is there no man in Israel who dares
To pit his paltry life against this brute?
To hazard glory on a stroke, or sink
Inconsequential to the dust he is?
Hath Jacob only daughters? Let them then
Go grind for the Philistines. To your posts.

[*Exeunt Abner and soldiers.*

I'm thirty years a king. 'Tis a long time
To feed on a confection that's so sweet.
Yet I'm not glutted with its taste, but still
Each morsel's sweeter than the one before.
'Tis long, I said? Aye, yes, for many men
Have made their span and gone, in thirty years.
The bondman counting to the jubilee,
The lover warming to a maid, to them

'Tis ages long. But in the calendar
Of us who pause the chasing sprite of power
'Tis but the zenith segment of a day.
And then the dark. The dropping sun
Sets in Philistia —— and day is done.

[*Enter a Captain of the Guard*

CAPTAIN.

Your Majesty! a lad would speak with you.

SAUL.

A lad? and of what favor?

CAPTAIN.

Not o'er large.

SAUL.

His name?

CAPTAIN.

I know not.

SAUL.

Well, his business then?

CAPTAIN.

'Tis such as one must mention with broad smiles.
He would defy that giant one of Gath
Who vexes us.

SAUL.

I'll see him; bid him in.

[*Exit Captain.*

—— Away forebodings and be Saul again!
These devil thoughts that in my vacant hours
Come stealing on me, loot me of my se*x*.
My crown that I can touch, my tempered sword
With which I've cleft poor bodies from their souls,
This host who hold their lives upon my nod,
Are they but figments, dreams? False devils' crew,
Back, back into the crannies of the night!
Saul orders and you flee.

[*Enter David and soldiers.*

How lad! what news?

DAVID.

Thy servant is from Bethlehem arrived,
The son of Jesse who despatched me here
To greet my brethren. Coming then, I heard
That one uncircumcised doth bark 'gainst us,
Defying undefied. Him would I meet
In battle wager, if my lord approve.

SAUL.

Why, thou'd be but a mouthful for his maw.

DAVID.

My king, your servant kept his father's sheep,
And when a lion from the wilderness
Came hungrily, I seized him by the beard
And slew him. There's a hardihood in me
Beyond what seems.

SAUL.

Go to my arsenal;
What's there is at your order, man you well.
Ho, guards! attend this man, I hold him dear.

DAVID.

Your Majesty!

SAUL.

What then?

DAVID.

I am a youth
Unexercised in implements of war.
What virtue's in them to another man,
In me would be defect. My only craft
I learned untutored on the feeding hills
Where I, with limbs unhindered, led my flock.

SAUL.

And so?

DAVID.

And so I'll buckle with this man.

SAUL.

The matter lies with you, and fare you well.

[*Exeunt David and soldiers.*

And if—'tis a wild chance—yet if you win,
A danger that's without will come within,
And thrice more imminent will threat my throne
Than that Philistine. Go, sling out your stone:
'Twill couple with your fate but not with mine.
The sun descends: another sun will shine.

[*A pause.*

Hark! what's this murmur, soughing like the sea,
Or like the wind among the forest tops?
The camp, agape with rumor of what's on,
Jerks out its breath with doubting aspirates
Which it with ready lingual will inflect
To match what's done. Ho, ho, my shepherd boy!
This hour you stride the world, footing the poles
Of fame and failure, and with single play
Will cast for which is yours. Ugh! that's the itch,
That there's a balance in your joust of fate,

The winning or the loss superlative,
And either case yourself ripped from the crowd,
A moment's name, though stenched with ribaldry.
And I have laid two hazards where was one,
By David or Goliath I'm undone.
And yet, and yet—let me pluck back my heart
That starts at each new terror with a smart.
Tut, stripling moriturus, tut, I say!
You louse to make Philistine holiday!
You ghost in imminence, of hope forlorn,
Here I exorcise you. Whiff and begone!

[*Another pause.*

What mean these shouts? The battle's on?
The rout?
So perish Saul! (*grasps his sword.*) And yet—
nay, nay; I'll not
So unaccounting go to my account,
But gore the first who offers me his breast,
And with his spirit fly unto the shades.

[*Enter a Captain.*

CAPTAIN.

Oh, king!

SAUL.

Still king? the news?

CAPTAIN.

The ruddy lad—

SAUL.

Is buzzards' meat.

CAPTAIN.

He's laid a carrion feast
Will gorge the vultures to the spewing point.
Goliath's dead.

SAUL.

I wish we'd served him worse.

CAPTAIN.

How worse?

SAUL.

Why, let him live, you fool.
Suppose an ague'd twinged his hulking frame,
As like enough it would, or other ill,
And writhed him with great groanings. From such case
He is delivered and with quick despatch
Is slid into beatitude.

CAPTAIN.

My lord,
'Twas thought this consummation was your wish.

SAUL.

Have I said otherwise, thou chucklehead?
Must know a king can pity where he slays.
There's business for thee, go.

CAPTAIN.

My lord, adieu.

[*Exit.*

SAUL.

Poor giant! In that nether land you've made,
Some day —— if days are reckoned where all's dark—
I, too, arriving, shall strike hands with you
And tell how kindly I was so unkind.
But lest you should be lonesome while I stay,
I'll send you the Philistines' souls to-day.

[*Exit.*

SCENE 4. The royal house at Gibeah.

FIRST OFFICER, SECOND OFFICER.

FIRST OFFICER.

I hear there is to be distribution of office to-day to him who slew the Goliath.

SECOND OFFICER.

So it is reported.

FIRST OFFICER.

Is it said how it will go?

SECOND OFFICER.

No more than that the king's not too well affectioned toward him.

FIRST OFFICER.

Why that is well. If every upstart who does some sounding thing in the public audience is to be posted over us who have served hard commissions in the trade of war, 'twill come that the army will be the boosting place of adventurers who will play dice with fate, staking nothing against chance of great reward.

SECOND OFFICER.

Here comes the king; we shall know more anon.

[*Enter King, Abner, Jonathan*

SAUL.

Ho, generals! I thank you for your pains
To be so promptly here at my command.

FIRST OFFICER.

'Tis but our duty, which we hold most dear.

SAUL.

I much rely on you. Our purpose here
Is by our royal warrant to affirm
To David that which he deserves of us.
What is the measure of his service? Speak.

FIRST OFFICER.

As much as great Saul likes, there is no gauge.
A king withholds and gives of his free purse;
No man may bargain with him for a price
Since all are wholly conscript to his will.
So what is given is royal overplus.

SAUL.

My general, you never were a king.

FIRST OFFICER.

Nor would be.

SAUL.

Pray God keep you in that mind.
Now with approval of my counsellors
I nominate to have a thousand men,
David, the son of Jesse. Is it well?

SECOND OFFICER.

The king does always well.

SAUL.

Let it be sealed.

[*Shouts without. A procession passes before the door of women, singing.*]

WOMEN.

Saul hath slain his thousands
And David his ten thousands.

ABNER.

They celebrate your victory, O king.

SECOND OFFICER.

Of such great deeds the very rocks must sing.

SAUL.

I see no music in their cracking throats.
That song has hailed me all my homeward march
Till, beggared of all sense when it began,
It stales by repetition to disgust.

FIRST OFFICER.

In truth it is a dull, ill-mannered song.

SAUL.

There is a gnawing air in Philisty
That's turned my stomach rodent, till all hours
It clamors to be fed. Ho, sluggard cooks!
Set on the feast or I shall starve away.
My generals will eat with me to-day?

FIRST AND SECOND OFFICERS.

The king commands us.

SAUL.

Good, then you shall stay.
Kind Abner, we our pleasure must set by
To lend thee to thy duties for this time
Or thou shouldst be our dearest guest at board.

[*Exit Abner.*

Dear Jonathan, of our full state the heir,
Sit by our hand, as thou art near our heart.
Let music be the condiment of food.

[*Enter musicians.*

'Tis done. And now eat large, as soldiers should.

FIRST OFFICER.

How music is familiar of the soul
And wiles it through the gamut of its moods,
From high to base, from grave to piping gay!

That thrumming fool who, in the battle wage,
Sang murder in my heart and brave despair,
Can make my taps leak like a love-lost maid's
When he descanteth with a solemn theme.

JONATHAN.

Why, so thou art a man and not a brute
Which can discern no episode of sounds.

SAUL.

What is the soul, this flitty element
Which is so willy-nilly played with?

JONATHAN.

That

The king must answer or unanswered be.

SAUL.

Is not itself an harmony, which breathes
While I'm atune unto the universe?
So, when a chord strikes in the world, the soul
Through all its octaves, with a quick response,
Sings unison. There was a soul named Saul
Who once was set unto this melody,
Felt joy, ambition, love as he was touched,
And rang in choral with the stars of fate.

But now, some string which he's no wit to find
Has been let down and he is out of pitch.
The Saul who rounded in the sneering tribes
To his authority, that sometime Saul
Is dumb, is dead as Rameses.

JONATHAN.

My lord,
The harper is without whose gentle art
Is wont to charm this melancholy off.

SAUL.

Let him come in; I'll test his art again:
And may my devils enter into him!

[*Enter David with harp.*

So merry, fool? Why I was merry once;
But no friend had the grace to kill me then
And send me to Elysium. Now's too late:
I am out-aged to enter with the blest,
But with old men and kings and all such damned
Shall fester in the weary, dreary pit.
I would be kinder to thee, lad. [*Hurls his spear.*
See, now!
Would Saul have missed his aim like that?

[*Hurls another.*

Again!
The fates are turned to you, I fight in vain.

JONATHAN.

Good father, see how long the shadows grow.
Cast off the fretting vestment of the state
And with the king of day go to thy couch.

SAUL.

May I like him, rise on the morrow bright.
My generals, and all my guests, good night.

[*Exeunt all but Saul and Jonathan.*

My son.

JONATHAN.

My sire.

SAUL.

Last night I dreamed of thee.

JONATHAN.

I would for thy own peace thou loved me less.

SAUL.

Would'st thou be king?

JONATHAN.

Nay, but the king's dear son.

SAUL.

Thou wishest what thou hast. Were all so wise
There'd be less heartache in this poor old world.
Wast thou in bed last night?

JONATHAN.

Aye, sir.

SAUL.

And slept?

JONATHAN.

As tight as any tick.

SAUL.

Yet at the hour
When night stands balancing the day, thou came,
All panoplied and stood beside my bed;
Thy sword was held at hilt, as in defense;
By every line of cognizance 'twast thou.
And I, upstarting, did address thee, "Son,
What urgency is here? Does murder wake?
Or dark rebellion paramour with night?"
Thou answered not, but moved a pace away,
Then ripped thy weapon round with fearful swath,
As if a foe affronted, where was void.

And now, most strange, thy blade broke with a
snap,
As it had met an armor, where was none.
Therewith thou vanished back into the night.
Can spirits, which no substance are, can they
Parade in all the frummery of sense?
For it was thou, 'twas very thou, my son.

JONATHAN.

Think not of it, for I've not stalked the night.
Sleep now, and I'll not visit you again.

SAUL.

I'll walk yet in the gloam awhile. Good night.

[*Exit Jonathan.*

There was an oak in Gibeah of Saul.
Some accident of nature set its seed
Into a silt-filled dip of fallow ground:
The rains in gentle courses flowed it round;
The fat land loved it and gave it her suck.
Fared so, it grew o'ertopping, brawned, and broad
And all its little fellows bowed, "My lord."
Was it a praise to grow when fixed so snug
Upon the very teat of almony?
Then were it merit in the stones to fall,

The wind-dashed waves to beat, the stars to whirl,
And nature to move by a law decreed.
Its height was measured in its corn; each leaf,
Right numbered, lobed, and in its order posed,
To the Great Thought that overrules the world
Was certified to be before it was.
What then is future and what past, but that
The eyes of mortals only see behind?
Nay, there's no has-been nor to-be, but all
Is present and etern. I grew a king,
My dam lay with my fate and from her womb
Belched forth a crown inchoate on my brow,
Which I must wear—till when? Thou pole-fixed
star,
Divine to me my morrows, what they are!

[*Enter Michal.*

MICHAL.

The king walks late.

SAUL.

And so sweet Michal doth.
How is my puss?

MICHAL.

How is the king? My soul
So echoes unto yours that if you say

"'Tis well," I answer "Well." But if you say—
Oh, I do fear that if you glower so.

SAUL.

Fear nothing, child, there is no health in fear,
But it will leach the ruby from thy cheek.
Were there a medicine in those thine eyes,
The state should not go sodden.

MICHAL.

So, perhaps
I have a pharmacy will lighten it.

SAUL.

Nay, chuck, 'twill only lighten, as I fear,
When it unloads the house of Saul. Go now
And think no more of what I've said. I wear
The name of what I have been. Thou, sweet rose,
By nature's stamp art halled imperial.
Reign out thy blooming hour, and seed, and die.
Now to thy bed, or thou'lt unsceptered lie.

MICHAL.

My father, there's a philter of our sex
Can sometimes physic off these stagnant ills

When grosser drugs but harry up the state
And leave the fester without purge. You fear
The son of Jesse. Have I guessed?

SAUL.

You have.

MICHAL.

Then by the test of my clairvoyance proved
In diagnose of thy disease, mayhap
You'll trust me to prescribe its cure. The way
That leads to eminence lies foul with falls.
Thy darts but prick ambition to safe jump
Where, cozened, it might stumble. Rather, then,
Sow soft seduction in th' adventurer's path
That shall flick off his gaze from its sole fix;
Yoke on him thy fast loves. So if he gulf,
Thou, conscience-free, art rid of him. But if,
Despite, he shall arrive the bastioned top,
Thou shalt be parcener of what he wins.
The sun in Virgo sits. The Heavens spell
The horoscope of Saul. And now, farewell.

[*Exit.*

SAUL.

'Tis a wise chuck; her wit outpaces mine.
The sun is in the virgin; well, what on't

But that his amour scorches up the earth?
And yet——I have a daughter who's a maid
And apple of desire. Ah, Merab mine!
Should I pawn thee into this checkered game
And by thy rape save my chief piece from mate?
'Tis a last move. However, it shall fall,
Thou wilt remain a vestige stock of Saul.

[*Exit.*

ACT II.

Scene 1. On roof of Saul's house in Gibeah.

Michal.

I love my father—which, of course, I should.
I love him once as sire and twice as king;
And so, by thrice affectioned loyalty,
I'm liege to him and to his stable throne.
But if—for there is ever that bad chance,
He should o'ertopple from his royal nub—
As pray he don't! yet there's the ugly if—
Why, so I'll love him still right filially.
But 'twill not peg him to his top again,
Nor sweet his bitter raze from dynasty,
To drag me down into his general wrack.
I'm so conform to my high edifice,
I'd fit but sorry in some vulgar niche.
Live Saul! if live he can. And if he's termed,
Live David! But live Michal eitherwise.
I've meddled to mend up the state of things
And been lurched over by my own advice.
Well, it's a common hap perverse, that some
Shall wear success which others' wit did win.

But I'm not dead yet, Merab dear. Perchance
There'll be a back-lurch will right up this mess.
Ho, Tamar!

[*Enter Tamar.*

TAMAR.

Here, sweet princess.

MICHAL.

Adriel
Has audience this evening with the king.

TAMAR.

My lady, he but now comes from the king.

MICHAL.

So soon? How looked he?

TAMAR.

Something grave, methought.

MICHAL.

Most excellent! there's appetite in him
For more than he's been fed with. There's a hope
To bait these grave and hungry fools. It's those
Who're fatted with success of their desires
Who sullen at advisement. Go to him,
Say I have business near concerns him. Say
I wait him here.

TAMAR.

My lady, I obey.

[*Exit.*

MICHAL.

Poor popinjay of power, fantastic sheikh!
I love you not, but I shall seem to love,
To make your fortunes mine, to crowd them on
With all my little wit political.
For which good turn I'll quit you of all thanks.
If I can move you on the checking square
And sell you 'gainst that piece impediment
Which balks my game, why then, old camel-
prince,
The devil take you! Hark, I sniff your steps.
Now let slow music play, so shall we see
How you will puppet it.

[*Enter Adriel.*

Good evening, sir.

ADRIEL.

Sweet queen, my salutation is to you
Whose eyes, like mimic stars delectable,
Witch off the ghosts of night. You sent for me?

MICHAL.

Aye, I've a word to speak in your sole ear
May be of import to us both. Art thou
In mood to listen?

ADRIEL.

Speak, my ears are pricked.

MICHAL.

Thou courtest something to the king.

ADRIEL.

And he
Has made thee partner of his counsels?

MICHAL.

No;
But I've a cypher with the elfin folk
Who traffic in king's secrets and things whist
In bed chambers and in the dark-fouled holes
Where men do hide to pigment their bad thoughts.
Them summoning at the accustomed hour,
I heard how thou had suit unto the king
Which he indifferent heard.

ADRIEL.

Bright star of Saul,
Instruct me to clairvoyance of such sort
And I will give thee pay munificent.

MICHAL.

Hadst thou all Araby to buy this sense
'Twould be base barter, being what thou art.
'Tis only woman who, as recompense
For her low sex, can conjure with the sprites,
As only she would entertainment find
In what is done 'twixt sheets. But this delays
The business we are here to speak upon.

ADRIEL.

Your pardon, pray. For some years I have had
A league of friendship with your father, Saul,
The which I've journeyed hither to renew
With ceremony, and if possible
To add some strength to it, which increase he,
Disdaining the advantage of my pact,
Demurs to.

MICHAL.

'Twas his stomach answered thee,
For thou approached him at the lean, sour hour
When he's not fed. There's more diplomacy
In dinners than in drawling argument.
A dumpling round and seasoned to the taste
May oft decide the grave affairs of state.
I have a certain favor with the king

Who in his stresses sometimes summons me
To wheedle off, with silly art, his care,
Or clarify the murk of vexed affairs.
I'll ply him with thy cause as I have chance,
Speak large of thy importance and declare
Thou'lt article thy full demand or none.
The while I'll not seem thy ambassador,
But with hap phrases, as "I think," "I hear,"
I'll keep the business quick within his heart
Where incubated 'twill in ripe time hatch,
When thou canst thy desired convention make
And sponsor it with rites effectual.
My sister shall be hostage to thy bed
Of the observance of the things agreed.

ADRIEL.

Thy sister? Is it not let out that she
Is trothed unto this captain of renown
Who scales advancement with great leaps?

MICHAL.

What then?

Till priest interlocute and bed confirm
She is negotiable where it shall seem
Expedient. 'Tis the prerogative

And burden of us born of royal get
To be the merchandise of civic needs
And pledge of signatories' promises.
You love my sister?

ADRIEL.

As the solstice sun
Enamours with the Sharon rose, so I
Grow hot to Merab, jewel of my soul.

MICHAL.

Forswear no more, for I am satisfied
Thou hast a right accommodating love.
Efface thyself till thou shalt hear from me.

ADRIEL.

Sweet princess, I entrust my case to thee.

MICHAL.

From now forget that thou hast speech. Good night.

[*Exit Adriel.*

Now, my old dolt, if I can trump your fate,
You, lone arrived, shall go in duplicate,
Indentured to this unredeeming Saul,
A bride and bother tucked on you withal.

Well, it grows crowded on this dizzy top,
Kings generate so fast that some must drop,
And we are pushed by an unlineal man:
In such case he must save himself who can.

[*Exit.*

SCENE 2. A wood near Gibeah.

MICHAL.

The play drags on. The four prologuing acts
Have marshalled up the elements of plot
To such taught tension with themselves, that if
There's virtue in my tetragrammaton,
They shall combine in fifth climacteric;
The base and task of which compounding is
The hero: if he do his pretty role
As I have writ him for it, there's no doubt
About the riff-raff who fill up the stage.
He's coming; I will practise on his sort,
See if his temper which he's proved so hard
Against the brunt of men and iron-forged war
Will flux in woman's fire. Now gods, attend.
To be all blind, and yet to be all eyes,
To seem so simple, and to be so wise,

To coo at mating time and caw at nest,
Why that's to be a woman—at her best.
And that is Michal.

[*Enter David, walking slowly.*

Oh!

DAVID.

Am I a wolf,
That you scream "oh!" and frighten at my sight?
I unawares have vexed your solitude
And mean no threat against your treasure.

MICHAL.

Sir,
I do beseech your pardon. That brave name
Which you have knightly won, is your safe pledge
Against dishonor. It was the surprise
Of your most sudden apparition to my sense,
Made my heart jump and break this little oh.

DAVID.

You bandy me.

MICHAL.

With truth and your due praise.

DAVID.

The truth that praises me is traitorous.
You are a branch of Saul and cannot be
Unkind unto the stock on which you grow.

MICHAL.

I am a seed fixed by my proper roots,
And can divide the elements of things,
Discern the foul from fair and liquidate
The flush and ooze of our too muddy state.

DAVID.

So much deserves an honorarium.
But if you dare declare that good is good
And call the dirty rubbish by its name——

MICHAL.

What then?

DAVID.

Why then you are a puling, daft,
Impolitic and common-branded fool.
Such folk do not advance, but in the mire
Of verities sink to oblivion.

MICHAL.

Then I am sloughed; for I will never truce
With sycophants. But you're in minor tune.

DAVID.

Well, there are players of another sort
Will pipe to you. As I came to this wood
I met them going gaily up the hill.

MICHAL.

To play my sister's prothalamium.

DAVID.

And line their gizzards with king's provender
Which they'll digest into rare melody.
Ugh! how they'll fret the air when they let out
Their hold of porridge jig-steps and a quart
Or two of dancing, nuptial-beaded wine!

MICHAL.

They'll not jig up Goliath, do you think?
He fertiles too much ground in Philisty
To get compact again.

DAVID.

He's maggot-sure;
But from him stinks this stale philosophy:
A king's faith is as long as his distress.
His promises which do not come to term
While he's in fidget are uncurrent stuff

That would not be a beggar's alms. You know
By ceremony of most public banns
Your sister was affianced unto me.
And mine, could I recarnate that old hulk
Who lies so large and sleepy, yes, mine, mine
She should be.

MICHAL.

Is it, then, just loss of her
That makes you put this sad demeanor on?
Or loss of her concomitants?

DAVID.

Of both.
She was the chiefest jewel in Saul's crown;
Her eyes were like two pools unplummeted,
Which mimicked back all things that looked in them,
Deep, dark, confounding, devil-Satan's eyes.

MICHAL.

Oh, foolishness, her eyes are bleary, sir.

DAVID.

Her cheeks——

MICHAL.

Bosh with her cheeks!

DAVID.

Are kisses' food.
Her hair, with spiced arome, plaits nets of love.
Her laughter—there's a spring in Bethlehem
That only ripples with such melody.
Her fashion's queenly, by her all she's fair.

MICHAL.

Thou hast not grown a beard, thou countryman,
And hast no sense in these comparisons.

DAVID.

And she, in her own self a dowry rich,
Was wardrobed with rare honors of the state.
Her, what she is, and her investiture,
I made large play to win, and winning, lost.
Is there not then a sequence in my mood?

MICHAL.

He who says lost until the yawning pit
Shall stifle out his quick, contriving mind,
Is not a brave man, but a coward fool.
Hark! let me lay my hand upon your breast.
Is that your heart which beats in there?

DAVID.

It is.

MICHAL.

Art sure?

DAVID.

Quite sure.

MICHAL.

Then prove it. There's no lout
In Israel but has an organ there
That thumps against his ribs as well as thine
And keeps the worms away. But 'tis not heart.
'Tis something sweetens him from carrion,
Dead in all else. The feeble sheep's as much.
To stave corruption off, to grow, to sperm,
To make the common cycle of one's sort,
Is that to live? If you've a man-soul here,
If there is spirit in your red, red blood,
You'll cry loud "No" and rise, up from the brute,
To empyrean of the souls elect.
Is Merab only beautiful? Is she
Sole portioner of all emoluments?

DAVID.

She has one twin.

MICHAL.

Oh many.

DAVID.

Nay, but one.
Such paragons birth not in multiple,
But being doubled fill repletion o'er.
Have you a lover?

MICHAL.

No.

DAVID.

If one you had
He'd be a glass to you, speak of your eyes,
Tell your perfections, and with each new count
Add one delection he'd not seen before.
Here where this quiet pool nests off the brook
Look down and by its proof say if your'e not
The verity of her I have described.

MICHAL.

I thought you were a man of sounding deeds,
Of gruff deport and hot speech of the camp,
Who'd choke to tell this dilly-dally stuff.

DAVID.

I have a tough and weathered bark, but I'm
A man and know a lily from a leek.

MICHAL.

And can call one the other with such grace
They'll be for swapping smells at your cajole.
Look in my eyes. Now, sir, swear they are dull.

DAVID.

Swear fire is cold that burns? Swear out of heaven
The triple spangle of Orion's belt?
I fear perdition of such senseless oaths.

MICHAL.

But have I not a squint?

DAVID.

I cannot tell
What wiles of masquerade you may put on
When suits you. But to squint! Perhaps you could.

MICHAL.

My neck then, and my hair, my cheeks, my poise.
Look well and say they are not beautiful.

DAVID.

I cannot lie so, even to please you.
Our father Jacob——

MICHAL.

Well, what news of him?

DAVID.

He's dead.

MICHAL.

I must believe't, you're such a truthful man.
Rise cypress and blast palm, for Jacob's dead.
While he was on the roof of earth, they say,
He had a rich and rare sagacity.
Mayhap he's had the wit to cheat the worm,
Who has his market in the cellar room.

DAVID.

Old Laban second-bested him at that.
He angled for a fish and caught a fowl,
And did not know its feathers from right scales
When he took bed with it.

MICHAL.

Yet in the end
He was a double winner. But, sir, pray,
What relevancy has he to this glen?
And to our talk of her, and you, and me?

DAVID.

Well, Laban had two daughers.

MICHAL.

So has Saul.

DAVID.

That's relevancy one. And Jacob served
For both.

MICHAL.

What apposition's there?

DAVID.

There's none,
Unless—you are of Rachel's lineage;
Queen of my heart, may I serve Saul for you?

MICHAL.

So quick I've sprung into this regency,
I fear I am a mushroom queen of hearts,
That grow out of my sister's sad decay.

DAVID.

Is love a base, unwholesome, soil-fed thing?
'Tis an elixir all ethereal,
A fire which Merab lit to smouldering
And you have breathed to flame. For her I could
Have unconsuming waited; but you, you
I must enjoy or perish in desire.

Such passion burns the fiber out a man.
And leaves him in the ash.

MICHAL.

Protest no more.
I am a thing of state, to be disposed
Where I the best shall fit necessity.
Had I a love to give—why, if I had,
I'd give it to a man who, first, was brave;
Who, second, had a neat and pretty wit;
And, third,—oh, third, to him whose calves I liked.
I must to Merab's bridal. Sir, good-by.

[*Exit.*

DAVID.

May we go plighting some day, you and I.

[*Exit.*

ACT III.

Scene 1. David's house, near Gibeah.

Michal.

I'm in dilemma with two creditors
Who both demand what I can pay but once.
For faith cannot be halved; 'tis all or none.
I hoped—no, hardly hoped, but wished that I
Could pay my father an annuity
Of my full love, itself in principal
Remaindered to my husband, the right heir,
By me and by himself, of Saul's estate.
But love will not be merchanted that way.
The world is full of quirks, and 'tis more wise
To say, "'Tis so, 'tis sadly, badly so,"
Than say, "It ought to be some otherwise."
There's an essential conflict in the stars
Of David and of Saul; their orbits cross,
And by all computation they'll conjunct;
Which dire event is now in imminence
By my astronomy. What noise is that?

[*Enter David.*

This panting haste speaks mischief What's to do?

DAVID.

Your father's broke with me again; in rage
Swore out my life, hurled at me with his spear
That in the wall crashed singing where I'd been.
He's hot upon my track, his broad-nosed hounds
Will rat me out. I'm lost. Have you no tears?

MICHAL.

I've plenty but no time to shed them now.

DAVID.

Henceforth I shall admire the savage Inds
Who drown their women.

MICHAL.

Love, your speech is dark.
Henceforth? What is henceforth to one condemned?
Who feels the stifle on his breathing-pipe?

DAVID.

There's hell.

MICHAL.

Oh, so I've heard. When you reach there
I'll ply the water cure most suitably.

Just now it's good, sound legs, not sobs, you need.
Then up, pluck heart, and give these pups the slip!
Once you're off straightaway and running free
They'll not have bottom to stay in the chase.
A wise fox makes his burrow with two holes;
He earths by one and outs the other end.
The messengers will come in by the door;
Then while they hawk the warrant of their haste
And sniff the corners to make your arrest,
Out by the window, and when out, away!

DAVID.

But Bezer—he's chief courser of the pack—
Will not he sniff the game is in the clear
Before I've got my head?

MICHAL.

Be sure he'll not.
I'll feed him cheese, and when he gets his nose
The scent will be too cold for following.
I know that hound and how to play with him.

DAVID.

My wife, you are more subtle, deep and wise
Than that old serpent who in Eden yon
Implanted Eve with his bad sophistries.

MICHAL.

List! when you hear him trudging through the door.
Stay not for kissing, but with hot rash plunge,
As one surprisèd in illicit love,
Drop from my chamber window. I, distraught,
Half-dishabilled, as if waked from my bed,
Will parley what such bruit entrance means,
Command him by my station and your rank,
Which both resent his burly impudence.
So much will give you to your second wind.
Next I will let my woman nature out,
Make little screams and ohs and wring my hands,
And clutching here and there, as in distress,
Will let my blushing flesh peek out my clothes,
Quite modestly, in little teasing peeks,
Just big enough to itch him 'neath the skin
And take the soldier out of him. By then
You'll be a league away—away from me.
Oh husband, can I do so much for you?
See, look how black it is across the hills,
Where unstarred night hangs to the limb of earth
Her sable curtain and shakes from its folds
Wild mordant beasts and cruel scapes of men!
Does God look in this Tophet where are done

Such things ungodly? Oh, 'tis better chance
To lot with one king's wrath than 'gainst a horde
Of things malign, each sovereign where it stalks.
Here there are tears at least and sepulchre.
But there—oh, back these foolish, frighting fears!
You are a man and kingly in yourself
Against disaster. 'Twas my little me
Who'll be the lonely relict of your flight
That spoke so doubtingly. 'Tis not, 'tis not
The monstrous shapes that lurk out there I fear,
But those which are—why, those which are like me.
A woman trusts her lover's strength but not
Her lover's heart. Forgive my jealousy;
'Tis Adam-old, 'tis woof of us, and so
'Tis not a fault but virtue of our love.

DAVID.

Sweet Michal, you weave nets to cage me in.
Let me lie in your arms and die. No, no,
I could not die, but my immortal soul,
Slipt through the rips the knives sunk in my flesh,
Would hover scatheless, sipping on your breath.

MICHAL.

I hear the soldiers now. Away, away!
God bless you. One more kiss. Good night.
Good-by.

[*Exit David.*

[*noise below.*]

Yes, yes, old bat I hear thy reveille.
I'd fain have dreamt one blissful moment more;
But I will put my waking garments on
And mask the woman who is warm within.
Now passion pause and masquerade begin.

[*Exit.*

SCENE 2. Saul's house.

SAUL, ABNER, JONATHAN, Officers.

SAUL.

Is't not enough to fall and not be mocked?
I gendered with a woman and by law
My get should be an human. Where's the slip?
The silly rabbits procreate themselves,
The she-wolves whelp their kind unbastarded,
All nature couples to derive itself
But me. To me's reserved this miracle
Of sireing what's unkind. Oh, cruel hate!

Has damned adultery lain in my bed?
Not even that foul leech of honor could
Enwomb abortion so unnatural.

Jonathan.

But father——

Saul.

Put a smother on thy speech,
Thou hairy one; this David's Jacobed thee
Out of thy birthright and my daughter made
Confederate in wage against my throne.
Henceforth let kings who'd last be celibate.
The serpent's in the woman and 'twill bite.
—How has she so balked our authority?
Our royal warrant, this full hour despatched,
Commanded her production at this bar.

An Officer.

My lord, the messengers have just returned;
I'll learn their news.

Saul.

Throw to the dogs their news
And send their baggage in.

[*Exit Officer.*

My heart's turned stone
And stony judgment it can render now.

[*Enter Bezer with Michal.*

What, Bezer, so soon back? I had prepared
To send a tortoise posting after you.

BEZER.

My lord, the man you sent me to arrest——

SAUL.

Grew hungry waiting. I remember now
I've heard the magi, wise in searching, found
That in Chaldæa worms can't catch a fox.
Jump to some news.

BEZER.

The princess, whom I've brought——

SAUL.

The prisoner. Don't oil your music here.

BEZER.

Put hindrance to our entrance, told us lies
That David had been taken ill; the while
Unmannerly she in his bed rigged up
A shaggy, rude, preposterous manikin
At which we gaped and swallowed the gross sham

For honest, she so mocked solicitude
Lest he should waken.

SAUL.

(*Aside.*) It is hard to hate
Rascality when it's so deftly done.
The clumsy knaves are punished twice their due,
The masters of bad craft are left to breed.
—Stand forward, Michal. By much evidence
You're charged with being traitor to our throne
Which you should doubly love. Our enemy,
Who would supplant us, you have helped escape
And put contempt upon our royal writ.
Against this heinous crime have you defence?
I put you to your plea.

MICHAL.

Most noble Saul,
I am a woman, without counsellor
Or without art forensic which can draw
A nimbus upon naughtiness. By night
I've been dragged hither by these surly men
To plead my capital offence. My heart—
For women have that silly core within—
Is flustered with the conflict it's been through.
I, thus undone, am haled incriminate

To answer, what? For life? Were that stake all
I'd hilt the dagger here where all's so white
And let my poor soul from its ambient flesh.
What's life when all is gone that sweetens it?
I'd play a die for mine, nor give a care
Which face it fell. But to die infamous!
For that I will defend what I have done
In simple speech that has no praise but truth.
The king is just and he shall judge my cause.
That son of Belial—for I'll spare to name
This one who should be nameless for his shame—
With bold derision, at the edge of night
Burst in my chamber. He'd a hunted look.
So snarls the quarry-coursing, tuskèd wolf
When he's crossed by a lion. With great oath
He leaped upon my throat—see, ye are men,
Where sank his talons in! commanded me
To be accomplice of his bad escape
As I loved life. There is no more to tell
But what you all do know. I did his will.
I'm guilty, and of sentence only ask
That it be speedy.

SAUL.

Ah, thou simple one,
Who in thy zeal our process to obey

Paused not to don thy grave and seemly robes
But came with peeking shoulders which preach out
What pity 'twere to part them from thy neck!

MICHAL.

Why, justice, sir, is blind.

SAUL.

Yes, but not deaf
To these mute advocates. Henceforth I'll have
A chancery of spare and sour old maids
To try my felons feminine. Oh hell!
How that chaste bench will hew out equity!
My council, you have heard the evidence.
What will you do with it? The commonwealth,
Whose solidarity holds you in place,
Stands by the faithful prop of all its parts.
This David has turned traitor to our love,
Eased off the common burden and escaped
By aid of this accused. To this tough much
It is confessed. But to the gravamen
Of her indictment as accessory
She pleads duress. If you, as honest men,
Believe her testimony you must judge

How far it lifts the onus of the fact
That she has done a wrong unto the state.

JONATHAN.

Most noble Saul, and you, grave gentlemen.
None is more loyal to the state than I,
Nor with more reason, being of its pith.
I love my sister, but with lesser love
Than justice. If she's false my greater love
Makes Hagar of my kinship. Hear me then.
The base of crime is moral. It must be
Act overt of a free, contriving will.
Its essence is the malice, not the fact.
Can brutes do murder, treason, rape? Or is
There arson in the lightning? If these be
She's criminal to gibbeting. I've done.

ABNER.

Your Majesty, I am a plain, rough man
Who do not know the niceties of law,
But as I fight I speak. My trade of war
Is aboriginal, it taps our stock
And by its age has an authority
Above these academic after-growths.
Its sole code is empirical. It has
No metaphysics and no sophistries,

No ifs, no buts, no logic and no lore;
But tests its findings in the crucible
Of conflict where the drossy, base alloy
Goes volatile and leaves the proven truth.
In practice then of this my trade I've found
That God has built his universe upon
A law primordial of struggle, which
Extends its sanction over brutes and men,
To neither moral, cogent yet to both.
Eat or be eaten—when you've smelted out
The flub-dub and judicial rhetoric
From the word-matching systems of the world,
That's your unfusible residuum,
Gape at it as you will. Was Michal forced?
Was Michal free? Does Michal lie? What odds?
The question is, Is Michal dangerous?
And by the answer which you all must give,
Then crush her like the viper which she is.
The devil needs a paramour. I've done.

SAUL.

The votes are balanced. Let some other speak.

AN OFFICER.

Let David suffer for what David did,

ANOTHER OFFICER.

Yes, and let her go free.

ANOTHER OFFICER.

So I.

ANOTHER OFFICER.

And I.

SAUL.

She's fair without and swart within,
She's straight as truth and tort as sin,
She's angel, demon, all between.
But always, everywhere she's queen.
And it's a stern matter to chop off royalty. Let her go home and play the devil no more. We'll have an eye to her.

[*Exeunt all but Saul.*

What curse is in this tawdry thing, a crown,
That it can put the blight on nature so?
Make sons unfilial, daughters false, and scorch
The heart out everyone? All, all alone,
Unrooted in one human, clasping love,
I stand, like some poor sere-leaved, sapless shrub,
The buff of every snarling wind that blows,
Safe only in their conflict 'gainst themselves.

'Twill not last long, but while it does I'll flaunt
My dry old shell unto the weather shock,
And to the unruled forces cry in mock:
"I'm king, abate, go hang," Ho there below!
You devils of the world incinerate,
Peep out the ground and parley with a king.
Is there a soul in Sheol, a black soul,
Imago of myself? Is it called Saul?
Oh, that is I; not this who bruits here.
But while my flesh parades in heaven's air
I'm alien to the fellowship of hell
And spirits disembodied, and must dwell
In purgatory, spitted to my throne,
A king of multitudes, a man alone.

[*Exit.*

ACT IV.

Scene I. The cliffs of En-gedi.

David, Abishai.

Abishai.

Last night I chid you—pardon, sir, the word
In one whose love you've proven—when I found
You posted like a vulture on this rock
Which pinnacles in frightful eminence
Above the gorge. Yet you are here again.
You look o'ermuch upon this spreading view
Which mimicks the infernal, and become
By contemplation colored with its gloom.
What cheer is in things hideous? Return
Unto your men who need your heartening.
If you will roam your eyes, look Judah-ward
Where pleasant fields reach out their offerings
To you, their advent king. Shuck off this dream
And cast forebodings to the scuttling night.
The golden day of opportunity
Already, with its dappling harbingers,
Leads in the orient of fortune. Up!
There's matin work before the noonday crown.

DAVID.

Abishai, do you believe in fate?

ABISHAI.

In yours I do, or I should not be here
Where hell crops from its nether bowl and shocks
The vault of heaven. But we have no time
To put the world in creeds. I, sir, believe
In legs for running, swords for fighting, and,
As he can use these, David to be king.
That's short and crisp and lets me sleep at night.

DAVID.

Two rain drops that were twins, each heaven-
wombed,
Fell on Libanus. One—it had no choice—
Went laughing to the west, where it discharged
Into the great blue sea and danced away
To mingle in achievements, ocean-free.
The other, by course long and tortuous,
Fell in this coppery, unbottomed lake
Whose roots flow round the littoral of hell,
The liquor of the damned. By this I see
'Tis but a stone's throw between destinies.
Oh well, I'll go with you and tease the hope

That I have fallen on the ocean slope.
But who comes hither, bounding like a goat
Across the rocks? Haste must have lent him hoofs
Or twenty times he should have slipped and fell
Where falling's death. His rashness tells his name,
Ahimelech, and bad news are his wings.

[*Enter Ahimelech.*

AHIMELECH.

My lord—

DAVID.

My lord of fleas! When you've your wind
Chop out this sick fanfaronade of talk
And tell your errand, which seems overhot.

AHIMELECH.

The king, informed by spies where you are hid,
Is marching hither with three thousand men.
We've seen his van, I have no more to tell.

DAVID.

No more? What you have told is quite enough
To season me with jollity. I think
The king comes not into this wilderness

To slake himself with scenery, nor yet
To tilt against these boulders adamant.
Therefore, my dear Abishai, we'll test
Your creed of legs. There's an agility
That's learnt by hunted things. I'll risk a guess
We play pranks with this royal infantry.
Quick! to my men! I see the army's dust.
Up to the rocks! and fight if fight you must.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE 2. The cliffs of En-gedi.

SAUL, ABNER.

SAUL.

My faithful Abner, what's this thing called age
That slides men out the world?

ABNER.

I know not, sir,
Except what's written by our chroniclers,
That creeping Satan venomed life with it.

SAUL.

His poison which he spewed into our blood,
Was it against the spirit impotent?

Or was it summit of his vile design
That we, decaying in our enginery,
Should suffer no abatement of desire?

ABNER.

The soul, sir, cannot have senility,
Itself immortal.

SAUL.

Can these fires then burn—
Love, anger, hate, ambition—for all time
And not consume to their extinguishment?
That is damnation. Yet it cannot be
That souls will live uneased eternally.
They must, must sleep, so weary. Or they must
Surcease in madness, rollicking and mad.
I'll lay me down awhile. And when kings sleep
Supplanters on their helpless slumbers creep.

ABNER.

I'll post the watch, my lord; drink your full rest.

[*Exit.*

(*Saul sleeps*)

[*Enter David and Abishai*

ABISHAI.

My lord, now prove my three-part creed complete.
Plunge in your sword and David shall be king.

DAVID.

Yes, king and murderer, myself at once
Infractor and defender of the law
Which is most fundamental to my throne.
Such two-stuffed kings are effigies which last
Until some rival pelts them down.

ABISHAI.

My lord,
Is it then murder to take chance of war?
This Saul would slice your head off with more grace
Than he would eat his dinner. But it haps
The turn is yours for slicing. Help me, sir!
If you've no stomach to let out his wind
I'll take a hew at him.

DAVID.

Put up your sword.
See how he lies, his hands crossed on his breast,
The curtains o'er his eyes, and to the world

Hangs out the truce of sleep. Look at his
mould!
For nature spoke on him the name of king,
Imperial though sleeping. If you then
Will hack your blade at this rare handiwork,
Call back the roaming spirit to its post,
Shout to his dozing sense, "Alarm! Defend!"
Then draw and lay at him as man to man.

ABISHAI.

They say he hath much craft at swordsmanship
And is three men for strength. I doubt yourself
Would hardly be his match at quarters, sir.

DAVID.

See how his fingers twitch, and now he groans.
Our talk is filtering into his dreams
And he becomes perturbed. Anon he'll wake.
I'll clip away this fringing skirt of his
As voucher that I'm not his enemy
Though so maligned.

(Cuts off Saul's skirt)

Now to our crevices
And watch the issue of this episode.

[*Exeunt David, Abishai*

(Saul wakes)

SAUL.

I've slept and woke. Why, here's the miracle,
That I, subtracted from my sluggish rind,
Betwixt a wink can flit in carnival
To the outposted stars and, volatile,
Soar through the dome of heaven or deep hell,
Both space and time defying. Yet, despite,
That my e*x*cursive spirit can return
Back from its primal void into my flesh.
Is less this quality of miracle
That thrice ten thousand times I have awaked?
Some day my errant soul will not come back,
How loud they beat the summons. I have slept:
How long? But there's no time in lethy sleep.
Days, hours, months, years, the cycle calendar,
These are not time but scheme of it, wherein
To plot in relevance the things we do.
For time is action, conscious climaxes.
Saul king has lived a thousand times more long
Than Saul the herder. When we wake from sleep
We take up time where we had let it pause.
Ho, Abner; ho, my faithful adjutant!

[*Enter Abner*

ABNER.

The sun has climbed a quadrant of the sky
While you, my lord, have gathered your repose,
And now sits two hours past the noon.

SAUL.

What news?

ABNER.

Of the pretender, none. As to ourselves
The men grow disaffectioned in this wild
And mutter about Jewry.

SAUL.

Snarling dogs,
Who love me for my victuals! If they found
This David they would fly at him as is
Their savage business and bark from the kill,
"Live Saul, and live the treasury of bones!"
But if he wins his hazard for my room
They'll lick his hand as easily as mine,
Their voice as blatant and their guts as lean.

ABNER.

Your Majesty, 'tis part of generalship
To take men at their temper. I advise
That you remove from this outlandish place

To some more bland encampment where the fumes
Of those two ancient cities of the plain
Shall not provoke our nostrils.

SAUL.

Let us go.

ABNER.

Assemble!

[*Enter soldiers*

Form your columns! Forward, march!

[*Enter David, Abishai, Ahimelech, and David's soldiers.*

DAVID.

My father!

SAUL.

Halt! who calls me father here?

ABNER.

The rocks have gendered David.

SAUL.

By my faith,
Enchantment is in this unholy place.
If thou be what thou seemest speak again.

DAVID.

My lord, I am no ghost of man nor worth
This martial demonstration. Will the king
Pursue a dog? a flea?

SAUL.

A traitor, sir!

DAVID.

Were half the world as bad as it's defamed
'Twould stink to heaven. As to my own case,
See this exhibit of my innocence,
Your skirt, which I cut off the while you lay
In sleep unguarded. Judge then if this be
The guise of traitor, when I had my blade
In tierce against your quick, that I forbore
To give you your despatch. Does treason wear
Compunction of that color?

SAUL.

If it do
May all my captains vest themselves in it.
My son, my honest David, let us here
Swear amnesty of our too paltry strife.

DAVID.

'Tis well.

SAUL.

Yet I like not your shabby crew
Marauding on the fringes of our state.
These brawlers, debtors, fugitives of law,
Excreted from the civic government,
Are minatory to our peace. If thou
Wilt wear a fairer face of loyalty,
Disband this riff-raff tagging at your heels.

DAVID.

I've never used my force against the king
And will not.

SAUL.

Ah, my son, this Will's a bawd
Who's chaste by lacking opportunity.
When she is amoured by the Power-to-do
A fig for her virginity. March on!

[*Exeunt Saul, Abner and soldiers.*

DAVID.

Get back into your rocks and sleep to-night
Half-eyed and bolstered on your swords to fight.
This ancient king is weather whimsical:
He now blows west, but with no interval

He may do right about and blast on us.
His faith is gusty. He is dangerous.
[*Exeunt Ahimelech and David's soldiers.*
And if at last I shall be king, what then?
What's there that's worth the weariness to win?

ABISHAI.

There's power, my lord, sweet power. What's weariness,
What's every throe of soul, what's looming death,
If we, before we gasp the world, can drink
Inebriance from that bright chalice? See,
This king who's mocked you, shamed you, and the host
Of his abettors who have slurred your name—
To tramp your foot upon their bowing necks,
To plug their blatant mouths, to retribute
Their gorge of slander back into their throats
And cry, "I'm master, master," oh, that's sweet.

DAVID.

It's bitter-sweet. For love will not be whipped.
To tyrannize, to lay the rod on men,
Makes vassal only of their baser part,
Their minds free to contemn. That is the gall,

That is the mock of mastery. There is
A past writ with my progress, hieroglyphed
With my ascendant to meridian.
My nascit, facit, debet, sociat
Are almanacked where all the world can read
And cry them back to me. So shall my state
Seem to the common conscience less to rest
Upon divine prerogative than on
The swords of my tatterdemalion
By whom I've levered to my vantage point.
Oh, could we birth full purpled in our noon!
Or by some art forget the carking past!

ABISHAI.

We should be gods, my lord.

DAVID.

But we are men.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT V.

Scene 1. Mt. Gilboa, the Israelite camp.

First Officer, Second Officer.

First Officer.

Where do the Philistines come from?

Second Officer.

Where did the lice of the Egyptians come from?
Nature has spasms of fecundity, but how, you know as well as any other man—all being ignorant. The solemn thing is, they're here.

First Officer.

Since I took up the sword I've seen enough Philistines killed to build a mountain of, yet one would say that every corpse had come back twins.

Second Officer.

That's like enough. The surest way to breed a nation is to kill it off. And that's true of heresies as well. Opposition puts a vigor in

its butt which, let alone, would die of sickliness. If the Philistines had not Israel to exercise themselves against they, like a pack of dogs, would fly at one another's throats and eat each other up.

FIRST OFFICER.

Have you seen the king?

SECOND OFFICER.

Not to have converse with him these three days.

FIRST OFFICER.

How seemed he then?

SECOND OFFICER.

Calm; calm as Chinnereth, so that it was dangerous to take ship upon his humor. The moment you blew upon him with the breath of speech he lashed himself to fury, raved against his confines and made mouths to swallow up the navigator who had launched into his lonely peace.

FIRST OFFICER.

What's his ailment?

SECOND OFFICER.

Rex bifidus, it's an old king's malady. Some time the sane and normal king was scratched, and from the wound, unhealing, budded out a king excrescent which has grown to the equation of its stock. If either half of this preposterous double were rift away there'd be a king remaining under whom there'd be some direction of purpose. But with norm and abnorm keeping internecine strife, it's dark for Israel.

FIRST OFFICER.

If one may trust the vulgar astronomy, the king is in his westing too, for his slanting beams warm not the people's love as formerly. There is in the gross populace a sense of when a king's in twelfth hour, and like the trefoil they fold in their adulation until another dayspring.

SECOND OFFICER.

I've noticed something of the sort and trimmed to it. Still it's a dangerous business to prognosticate kings under the horizon before they

get there. There's a refrangent of their last degrees may mar our mathematics, and I've heard of twilight sunstroke in such cases. I'd rather see the sea-snuffer on to-day before I hail the morrow. Who goes there?

[*Enter Doeg.*

DOEG.

A friend.

SECOND OFFICER.

'Tis a time to mistrust friends. Your name?

DOEG.

Doeg; of some repute, I trust, in Israel.

SECOND OFFICER.

Advance. The king's chamberlain has always free passage.

DOEG.

Are you gentlemen studying the stars?

FIRST OFFICER.

Yes, and wondering how soon we'll be sent to dwell on them. There'll be some of us put rid of earth, I take it, before the year's much older.

DOEG.

Have you a craving for immortality?

FIRST OFFICER.

I've never shirked the brunt of an assault. Still I have a lustiness by which I am willing to defer my sublimation. Do you think the king will chance a battle with such disparity of numbers?

DOEG.

I think he'll not bid battle come, but if it comes unbidden he'll not send his excuses. However, he's not garrulous of his plans.

SECOND OFFICER.

I hear he's grown contained of speech.

DOEG.

An hour ago I passed him pacing before his tent, his eyes downcast, and twice I heard a groan rock his great chest, as if his prisoned spirit stretched itself within.

FIRST OFFICER.

There's omen in that. I like not these seisms in a king. And it is said a fish was seen pointing up the Kishon, scaled only to his middle,

his forward parts being those of a man and bearded with hairs.

DOEG.

To the devil with your signs. If I could meet a sprat like that I'd set a net for him without a shiver. Stiffen up your nerves or go home to your women. One man, brave in the single purpose to win, is worth a thousand human shapes irresolute. If Saul fails in the imminent test there'll be no Israel. For what the Philistines leave will devour itself in the fight for the succession, and our enemies, which now we barely hold back on either hand, will roll over us like the Red Sea over the Egyptians. Whet up your blade and promise it one Philistine. I've business; fare you well.

[*Exit*

SECOND OFFICER.

I believe we should serve the king best by letting holes into this Doeg.

FIRST OFFICER.

Undoubtedly; but we would have to hold our noses at the job, he's so rotten within.

SECOND OFFICER.

This battle will be crucial to the fate of Saul. If he fails he will hardly establish his dynasty.

FIRST OFFICER.

Do you think David has the common love?

SECOND OFFICER,

The common love is a small quantity in the making of masters. He has his party of course, but the serious fact is he has a pack of hardy adventurers ready to swoop upon the kingdom. And with the monarchy in suspense, who is going to say, "By what right?"

FIRST OFFICER.

True. Yet we have but five senses, and there are forces paramount which we cannot see or hear, smell, taste or feel. The powers of the air play with our poor parade, delimit the stupendous or press on the ignoble to unhoped victory; men are the dummies of their arbitrage.

SECOND OFFICER.

That's only a haggle concerning a prime cause.
If there be these powers imponderable their militancy in our affairs will wear some name, and if that name be David it will be a comfortable place under his banner. In a time of calm the wind may spring from any quarter. There's no use of guessing how it came, but set your sails to it.

FIRST OFEICER.

I've duty at my post. Good night.

SECOND OFFICER.

Good night.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE 2. The same.

SAUL.

Put down your haughty crest, Benamalek,
And let me lay my arms about your neck,
For I must speak away this load that's pent
Upon my breaking heart and has no vent
Except to you, my noble horse. Of all

Who genuflect and do me pomp, who call
Me king, I have no trusty, only you,
To whom I can unbosom without rue
Of my o'erconfidence, but I must check
The sympathy of words. Benamalek,
The battle's in the front, and you and I
Are going out to fight, perhaps to die,
To die and transmigrate, in mad, wild flight
Beyond the furry clouds, beyond the night,
Beyond thirst, hunger, falsehood, to the land
Of heartsease and ambrosial meadows and—
So, so your pawing, lad! you are half man
Who being fed and warmed, yet by his ban,
Cannot reduce life to the swinish goal
Of hale digestion, but must plague his soul
By ever living forward of his hour
With whiling phantasms and glimpsed hopes of
power.
Curse, curse this striving spirit that in tease
Cries "more" and will not lie at surfeit ease
Like ganders in the sun. Go, browse, my boy,
Until this consummation of our joy.
—Is it so brave to die? For the soul-fire,
Blown to its spume by blast of battle ire,
To leap its body's edge, its relict name

Escutcheoned on the mnemaliths of fame?
The courage is to live, to buff earth's lies,
And unapplauded drudge to blank demise.

[*Enter Doeg.*

There goes that cursed Edomite. Ho, Doeg!
Here.

DOEG.

My lord.

SAUL.

Do you know an holy man when you see him?

DOEG.

Aye, my lord.

SAUL.

How? by his beard?

DOEG.

By his beard, my lord, and by the saintliness that shines in him.

SAUL.

You know the sight of saintliness? So the devil knows light, it makes him squint. But it is as dear to him as holiness to you. Do you know what was the fiend's damnation?

DOEG.

To live in hell, my lord.

SAUL.

Tut! that's not half There are ten million souls in hell, and all less damned than he. What is the twinge that's in his arch estate?

DOEG.

I know not, my lord.

SAUL.

Why, to be king of hell. To wear an unabdicable crown, that is the pink, the sum, the elemental metal of damnation.

DOEG.

Perhaps 'tis so, in hell, my lord.

SAUL.

In hell? Perhaps? Do you think the infernal is a topsy-turvy world? Do you think to prank the ruler before the unsobordinate is only a nether badness?

DOEG.

There are some who would chance the perdition, my lord, within the sunshine.

SAUL.

I have hopes of your soul, Doeg; for you have told a truth. But be careful how you toy with this chap Honesty; he may take a grip on you, and then farewell to all your eminence. Honest men stay in the lees, only the other kind brim the cup.

DOEG.

These are hard words, my lord.

SAUL.

And hit a hard mark. I sometimes wonder if those who have taken novitiate damnation of king in this world may not be eased in the next.

DOEG.

It is not a presumptuous hope, my lord.

SAUL.

Go find a priest and send him hither. I want an apocalypse.

DOEG.

My lord shall be obeyed.

[*Exit*

SAUL.

These hierarchs have lost their craft. Or are they too rebellious to my throne?

[*Enter a priest.*

Are you a holy man?

PRIEST.

I am, oh king.

SAUL.

Go to the Egyptians.

PRIEST.

The Egyptians?

SAUL.

Yes, that they may embalm you. If there's a holy man in Israel he should last to show the ages what fashion he was of.

PRIEST.

I am a priest and of the loins of Levi.

SAUL.

Now your words have the sound of truth. Can you divine from high heaven the fast decrees of the Omnipotent?

PRIEST.

Oh king, I have in other times explored the black abysm of the fates, but now the practice of divinest rites will steal no oracle from the blind dark. The Urim does not illumine, nor night send its vision messengers. There is no conjure in the name of Saul.

SAUL.

Get to your place. [*Exit priest.*

Alone, alone; a public derelict! a leper of the state whose health I was. Oh God, and thou to whom from the profound I raised my prayer hast shut thy heaven against my oratry. Alone? Ha, ha! are there no folk but the supernal, no god of orisons but one? no armies but these surly phalanxes who mutter that I am decayed to rule? Mundus trigeminus, God, the world, and—that place of last resort which counterpoises the grace of heaven. I will ambassador the powers below. Ho for a necromancer! ho for a peaked chin who can incant prophecy from the ground! Abner!

[*Enter Abner.*

ABNER.

My lord.

SAUL.

The night is dark.

ABNER.

The moon is in the middle heaven, my lord, and with her gossamer robe blinds all the envious stars. Say you 'tis dark? My sword! I could see a Philistine to a thousand paces on such a night.

SAUL.

I said 'tis dark, 'tis treason to say otherwise. But treason is a foul smelling plant no longer when all my courtiers wear nosegays of it. What boots the moon if closed are all the windows of the soul? How is there light if there's no light to me?

ABNER.

The king talks in riddles.

SAUL.

For every sweet there is a sour.

ABNER.

I have no doubt.

SAUL.

For every day a night, for every birth a death, for every power beneficent a power malign, for Ormusd Ahriman, for Jehovah Satan; and between these opposites there is eternal and essential strife. I with formal requisite have addressed my cause to the celestial throne, but to no purpose. What then? for there's no middle ground. I will memorialize the powers of darkness. But where's a legate who's accredited below and will bring me answer from the shades?

ABNER.

I'd rather not meddle in these uncanny things, my lord.

SAUL.

You have a kinswoman who trades in magic?

ABNER.

She's eighty summers dried, good sir, and will not vex the world much longer. Pray, let her live her little term in peace.

SAUL.

There you go against the bit. Is she so tinctured through with badness that it will lessen her peace to do me a service? For kings have their necessities as well as another man, and there is to them an exigence of alms which are not weighed in silver.

ABNER.

Sir, you did havoc to the wizards, outlawed them and laid on their art the grievous weight of your authority.

SAUL.

When our officer *ex*ecuted our proscription against the sorcerers who were leeching the people's wits, we winked at his forgetting this old dam. So much was for our love to you, dear Abner. That love's not less to-day.

ABNER.

I thank my lord.

SAUL.

Then lead me to her, Abner. Without an oracle I dare nor trust this imminent fight. I'll clothe myself in a disguise and be you mute of what I am. As a common shekel-doling

man I'll test the virtue of her power. Lead on.

[*Exeunt*

SCENE 3. The cave of the Witch of En-dor.

THE WITCH OF EN-DOR.

WITCH.

Twenty years turned four times round,
All my sisters in the ground,
All my brothers turned to worms,
All my fellows lived their terms,
Half myself decayed and gone,
Toothless, plumpless, stale, forlorn,
Death's my social and I tell
Esoteric things of hell.
Mumble, jumble, one, two, three,
So the dead come up to me.
Jumble, mumble, eight, nine, ten,
So the dead go down again.

Heu! heu! heu! it is cold top o' the ground and Saul is king. I'll take a quaff of liquor, so I will weigh more.

[*Enter Saul and two officers at the mouth of the cave.*

SAUL.

Is this the place, this the curst bowl of earth
Which leaks to Sheol?

FIRST OFFICER.

'Tis the place, my lord.

SAUL.

So leave me.

FIRST OFFICER.

We obey, my lord.

SAUL.

Yet stay ——

FIRST OFFICER.

Your pleasure?

SAUL.

Let me press your hands. Good sirs,
I thank you for your pains. Compose yourselves
Within convenient call. Farewell, farewell.
I'll enter though it blast me. Fare you well.

[*Exeunt officers.*

WITCH.

Black the pot and burn the stubble,
Man is born to trouble, trouble,

As the sparks go up, up, up.
There's a serpent in the cup,
There's a harlot in the wife,
There's a maggot cored in life.

Hoo-oo-oo! the owl has a hooked nose, therefore he's no Egyptian.

SAUL.

Thou foul and blemished strump cadaverous,
Avast your clickings!

WITCH.

Who commands?

SAUL.

A man
Who from the air salubrious descends
Into this crypt of pestilential fumes
To parley with the souls in prison.

WITCH.

Go,
Return back to the roof of earth.

SAUL.

Peace, hag,
I have an errand and cannot return
Unanswered. Hast thou sorcery?

WITCH.

Ho, ho!

And art thou emissary of great Saul
Who's come to hang me in broad spectacle
Before his army?

SAUL.

By my faith, I'm not,
But seek a numen of the under-world
On a proposed adventure. If then thou
Canst raise the speaking spirit whom I name
To my intelligent and proving sight,
Thou shalt not be the poorer for thy pains.

WITCH.

Lentils gathered in the bud
Are the humor of his blood.
From his flesh a nettle grows,
From his heart a ruby rose.
Carmel daisies are his eyes,
Thistles are his beard's disguise.
Cast these herbs in smutty pot,
Brew them bubbling, brew them hot;
Snip of salt to germ the broth,
From the scum a ghost will froth.

Your honest leek hath a rank smell, for it's the
saprophyte of Egyptians and they rot slow in
the ground.

SAUL.

Shut off your scratchy drivel, I've no time
To dally with cheap mumblings and to sniff
The steep of silly herbs. Provoke the dead
Into my audience or else confess
Thou art a lying, artless, thrice-damned hag.

WITCH.

Whom shall I conjure from his sheeted sleep
To corporate effulgence?

SAUL.

Samuel.

WITCH.

He was an holy man and in great age
Went weary to his rest. Disturb him not
Or fear his choler.

SAUL.

Fear thyself my sword,
Thou ancient raisin, or attest thy craft
By sudden answer to my will. Wilt thou
Corrode my nostrils with narcotic fumes,

Benumb my wits and to my glazy eye
Trump up a bastard specter, unavouched
By heaven or hell? Aye, wilt thou trade on me
His gibberish for prophesy? Go hang,
Thou pitted-gizzard!

WITCH.

Yet have patience, sir.
Hush! there comes one from the crowd.
Now I see his trailing shroud.
With deport of seer he glides,
Twain his arms clapt to his sides.
Proud his mien, his poll how white!
He no substance is but light.
Now I see his flaming eyes,
Samuel, arise, arise!
Sir, thou art Saul, the king of Israel.

SAUL.

By that acclaim thou provest thy dark art.
Yet tell me, Mystic, how the vision comes.

WITCH.

I see a god ascending from the earth.

SAUL.

What form has he?

WITCH.

An old man cometh up,
And vestured with a mantle.

[*Enter form of Samuel.*

SAUL.

Samuel!

WITCH.

He halts and with inquiring eyes demands
The purpose of his summons from the vast.
Address him ere he shall dissolve again
Into his natural invisible.
For these incanted reappearances
Are labored, short, and grudging of delay.

SAUL.

Thou prophet, sage, and judge of Israel!
I, suppliant, address thee from the ground.

SAMUEL.

Why hast thou me disturbed to bring me up?

SAUL.

I am in straights of doubt and sore distressed.
Against me the Philistines have brought war

And God has gone from me. No more by dreams
Nor by the mouth of prophets doth he ope
To me my future way, but all is night,
Unbeaconed, formless, undirecting night,
Into which I go stumbling. If then thou
Canst point direction to my guideless way,
If there is pity in necropolis,
Hear, hear me, and illume the sight of Saul.

Samuel.

Whereas Jehovah hath deserted thee
And turned thine enemy, deaf to thy suit,
Then wherefore hast thou brought me from my place
To be thy interlocutor before
The high assize of heaven and declare
Its sealed decrees? Thy argument is closed,
Thy last word said in ultimate resort;
Henceforward thy most ritual address,
Impinging against heaven's muniments,
Rebounds unanswered. Thou art Saul accursed.

Saul.

Nay, leave me not, thou august form, but still
Declare to me what's writ above. Speak on!

Samuel.

The Lord hath done as he affirmed by me,
The Lord hath rent the kingdom from thy hand
And given it to David, kith of thee,
Because recalcitrant to his command
Thou didst not do his wrath on Amalek.
The Lord, moreover, will deliver thee
With Israel to the Philistines' hand.
To-morrow thou and those whose sin is that
They hold their taint of origin from thee
Shall vault mortality and be with me.

[*Exit.*

Saul.

Hast thou departed, with no lurk behind,
Back to thy natural umbrageous haunt
Where myriads of disembodied shapes
Sit postured round the architrave of hell,
Unspaced nor space consuming? Hast thou gone?
No, nor canst ever go. Thy figment form,
Dissolving to what minim beyond sight,
Cannot steal off the blighting trail of words
That like the slimy exude of the snail
Declares thy passage. Words immortal are,
They have beginning, but not end and term

Eternity, clipt only at the fore.
The doom that's uttered is half done, grace left
To say our prayers and don the formal robes
In which to make our valedictory.

WITCH.

Oh king, the simulacrum has retired
And all the air is sane again. Arise
From thy unroyal grovel and breast back
The foes substantial which assail you. Feed
Your stomach courage and by good, round fare
Expurge the bile of malade spirits who
Distemper your vacuity. Up! Eat!

SAUL.

Are visions in the liver, thou crude hag,
Or didst thou stew a gall in thy damned pot?
I will not eat. Hello, my officers!

[*Enter two officers.*

FIRST OFFICER.

Your Majesty!

SAUL.

Am I still majesty?
There's something tardy in this poor old world
If that be so. And does the sun shine, too?

First Officer.

It does.

Saul.

Thou liest not?

First Officer.

My oath, I don't.

Saul.

The prodigy of Joshua again!
Are you a bachelor?

First Officer.

I am, my lord.

Saul.

Then marry with this woman.

First Officer.

Please the king,
She's somewhat overripe for grafting with.

Saul.

Tut, tut! what if you quarter age with her?
It would have been unwholesome once, but now
It's smack in tune, the world's all upside down.
If you will marry, for the custom is not yet purged

out of the earth, make sure that your wife is
no virgin and that she is past the age of
child-bearing. So shall you be rid of two
evils, jealousy and undutiful issue. I married
in the lustiness of love and begat hopes.
Beware, sir, of maidens, leastwise until they
round their fifty mark.

SECOND OFFICER.

What ambling words are these, thou ancient
dove?

WITCH.

In truth, sir, I can make no sense of them.

SECOND OFFICER.

What philter of concocted herbs have you
Administered unto the king that he
Is so turmoiled of reason?

WITCH.

None, good sirs,
That he's not better for the taking of
He's in the dumpy doldrums of his fast.
I have a calf, fat on its mother's teat,
Which is to humors of this maudlin sort,
A potent purgative. But he'll not eat.

SECOND OFFICER.

Most excellent, our sovereign, for our love
Ship off this leaden gravity and rise
Up to thy temperate and royal poise
Between the poles of passion. What! Is not
Thy supplication done? and said what's said?
Then break your fast and thick your blood again!

SAUL.

No longer am I debtor to this flesh
But we have quittance struck. Still for your sakes,
Good friends, I'll eat.

FIRST OFFICER.

He'll eat. Let him be served?

[*Exeunt.*

Scene 4. Mount Gilboa.

SAUL, JONATHAN, AHIMANETZ, Saul's Armor-bearer, Aides.

SAUL.

As when a river, swollen by the flood,
Creeps inching up its channel till at top

It bulges over, and with ripping waste
Sweeps up the plain, so these uncircumcised
Crowd up our dike, break holes through its de-
fense
Which we as quick stop up but to delay
The moment epochal when they shall leap
The crest of opposition. Jonathan,
The people love you, jump among them. Set
The brawn of your affection to their help.
Perchance they'll hold this surge back in its bed.
[*Exit Jonathan.*
Perchance! Ho, ho! Is there such thing, per-
chance?
Is there a slip in Heaven's sovreign plans?
Or casualty with Omnipotence?
Have men turned gods to make their destiny?
There is a season when we grow and grow
With no volition, like the waxing moon,
Success with broader lustre rounding us
To our full radiance. Then, will or no,
We shrink and shrink and go out in eclipse.
Perchance! Ho, ho! A lie! Perchance I, Saul,
An atom in the universe, am lord
Of its phantasmagoria! Perchance!
Ahimanetz!

AHIMANETZ.

My lord?

SAUL.

Your eyes are young;
Look over to the battle's confluence
And say what you can see. Come, talk your frowns!

AHIMANETZ.

Our men dispute the ground with valor, sir.

SAUL.

That's in their grain, but which way leans success?

AHIMANETZ.

Sir, these Philistines are no mortal sort
Which can be spitted down to lie, but each
Dismembered sows the ground with sudden crop
Of surgent progeny.

SAUL.

I much admire
Your politic circumlocution, sir.
To spit it out in brief, your meaning is
We're overmatched.

AHIMANETZ.

Why, then, I fear we are.

SAUL.

But here comes one with news.

[*Enter Messenger.*

MESSENGER.

Your Majesty!

SAUL.

Curtail your deference and out with it!

MESSENGER.

The enemy makes vantage everywhere.
Such slaughter's done as must make heaven weep
And with her pluvial tears wash and erade
The red, red stains that sully the fair ground.

SAUL.

The bulbul sat in a bay tree top
And sang a roundelay.
A sorry kite gulped him in spite.
For that's this old world's way.

Thou hast a pretty song, lad, but it is somewhat too frolicsome, too antic in its measures, too merry, oh quite too merry. Sombre it with a little gravity and thou shalt pass for a rare chorister. Hast thou no more of thy tune?

MESSENGER.

This only, let the king make haste to flee.

SAUL.

That's out of pitch.
Now thou art but a common cackling fowl.
Stand by and give advisement when you're asked!

[*Enter a second messenger.*

What, sir?
For I perceive you're loaded with report.

SECOND MESSENGER.

Thy sons Abinadab and Jonathan
And Malchi-shua have been slain.

SAUL.

Why, so
They're in no danger. Did you scurry here
To mumble such inconsequential stuff?
Discourse about the living, as to say:
"I saw a quail run in the bush below,
And hast thou mouth for quail to-day?" or thus:
"I met a maid as I came up the hill,
And she —— perhaps she won't, perhaps she will."
A poxy lad preceded you who said

That some Philistines, rudely casting off
The ceremony with which we forfend
Approach unto our person, sought to force
Themselves into our presence. Of which fact
I had some inkling when a singing barb
Shot with bad friendship clipt me near the heart.
You have no twaddle, have you, of that sort
That's rattling in your noddle unexpressed?

SECOND MESSENGER.

We're overridden by Philistia
And he who runs not while the running's good
Will get his hamstrings cut.

SAUL.

Then get away!

[*Exeunt Ahimanetz, Aides and Messengers*

What, orderly! Did you not hear the word
That's reinforced by double nunciate?
You are a worthy man and have a claim
Upon a salvage of this thing called life.

ARMOR-BEARER.

I heard but, master, give no heed.

SAUL.

No heed!
Have you so fat a wit that you must taste
The iron in your gut before you go?
I swear you it is not worth waiting for.
It hath the bite of mustard thrice extract
To perpuissance. Ugh! the archer's dart
That just now flanged my ribs gives me a twinge
That samples the reality. Go, go!

ARMOR-BEARER.

I will not go except the king precedes.
That is my duty.

SAUL.

Duty? what's that word?
I heard it when a lad, long, long ago,
But it is quite outgrown in these new times.
Your duty! Tush! The thing is obsolete.
Or rather, in our modern criticism,
Is reinterpreted in better taste.
Your duty is to fit with circumstance.
Clean up your virtue when it's popular
And let it tarnish when it's out of vogue.
Keep oaths up to the edge of profit, but

Be always plastic to the changing times.
So shall you be wise, moral and esteemed.
Yet this one thing stamp in your memory:
It's duty's one eternal cardinal
To always save your skin. Now will you go?

ARMOR-BEARER.

No, master, till my going follows yours.

SAUL.

Still obdurate? Then as you'll serve me yet
Be surgeon to my need. I have a wound
Here in this throbbing place that will not heal
Save by a lancet's prick. Whip out your sword
And rip it to this aching fester spot;
Let out the disappointments, griefs, despairs,
And start me on my road to Paradise.

ARMOR-BEARER.

I dare not.

SAUL.

Dare not?

ARMOR-BEARER.

No, nor will not, sir.

SAUL.

You dare not, will not do your king this ease?
It is not murder, nor yet treason, but
A deed of benison, by one short hour
To thus forestall the rank defilement which
These cursed Philistines will enact on me.
Draw and deliver me my quittance!

ARMOR-BEARER.

No.

SAUL.

Then know that by your disobedience
You are not autocrat to make me live.
Hail, ye penumbral host, of shade dilute,
Invsible until death's shadow! Hail!
And you who carry still your flesh, farewell.
My going is abrupt? Forgive it then,
If any be who still bear love for Saul.
For why should I wear welcome to its threads
And the contumely of my underdress
Show through the tatters to a gaping world
When I have here a ribbon of raw steel
Will slip me neatly off? Ho, all! farewell.

[*Falls on his sword and dies.*

ARMOR-BEARER.

So dies the majesty of Israel,
A king in whole, and one who was a man
Until his night, o'erlapping on his day,
Spread twilight on his soul. And I, poor I,
Whose office was to tender him and serve,
What do I yet? the pageantry all gone
In which I played a super part. Off, off
This costume of the stage! The lights are out.
Why flickers yet my taper? Snuff, dull flame!
In life our states were wide; in death the same.

[*Falls on his sword and dies.*

END.