

Elene

Cynewulf

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Elene

Cynewulf

translated by Charles W. Kennedy

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I.

In the circle of years, in the span of time, two hundred and three and thirty winters were numbered for the world, since the all-wielding God, the Glory of kings, the Light of the righteous, was born in the image of man on earth. That was the sixth year of the sway of Constantine, since he, a battle-lord, was exalted to be king in the land of the dwellers of Rome. And he was a valiant bearer of the shield, protector of peoples, showing mildness to men; and the kingdom of that prince prospered under heaven. He was a just king, the battle-warden of men; and God established glory and might upon him, that through all the earth he became a solace to many men, an avenger of nations, when he lifted his weapon against the foe.

Battle was brought against him, the thunder of war; the hordes of the Huns and the Hrethgoths assembled a host; fierce-hearted the Franks went forth, the people of Hugas. They were warsome men, harnessed for battle. Spears shone and wreathen mail; with shout and ringing shield they flew their battle flags. Then were the heroes assembled, openly gathered together and the throng of folk fared forth. The wolf of the weald chanted his song of battle, hid not his war-runes; the dewy-feathered eagle screamed as he followed the foe. Straight through the cities that mighty battle-throng hastened away to war, in hosts as many as the King of the Huns might summon to the fray, of warriors round about. That horde went out, with chosen bands confirmed their forces till in a strange land on the Danube's rim, stark of heart, those spearmen tarried nigh to the water's surging, with the noise of multitude. For they would fain subdue the kingdom of the dwellers of Rome and waste it with their numbers.

Then was the coming of the Huns known unto the dwellers of the cities; and Caesar bade most speedily, with flight of arrows, to muster unto battle against these fearsome foemen, to lead men out to strife under the heavens.

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Soon were the warriors, cunning in victory, the men of Rome, all harnessed with their weapons for the combat, though they had lesser band unto the battle than rode round about the strong-handed King of Huns. Then shields resounded; war-wood rang; with a mighty throng, a host, the king went out to battle; over them the raven shrilled his note, dusky and greedy of carnage. The troop was all astir; hornbearers leaped, heralds shouted, horses trod the earth. The army gathered promptly for the fray. Then was the king adread, smitten of terror, as he surveyed those foreign hordes, the host of the Huns and Hrethgoths, that at the Roman kingdom's end, on the edge of the water, gathered their force, a countless throng. Heart-sorrow smote the Roman ruler; of his kingdom had he little hope, for his dearth of men. Too little strength of warriors, of trusty fighting men, had he to battle against that over-might of stalwart spoilers. Then camped the army, earls about their prince, nigh unto the flowing stream for the time of the coming night, after they learned the journey of their foes. And unto Caesar himself in his slumber, as he slept among his train, strong in triumph, a vision was shown. Unto him it seemed a radiant warrior came, in the image of a man, gleaming and bright of hue, more fair than he had seen early or late under the heavens. He started up from slumber and donned his helmet crested with the boar. And straightway the herald, beauteous messenger, of glory, spake unto him and named him by name, and the shadow of night vanished away.

"O Constantine, the King of angels, Wielder of fates, Lord of hosts, bids proffer thee a compact. Be not thou adread though foreign hordes threaten terror against thee and heavy war. But look thou unto heaven, unto the Warden of glory; there shalt thou find support, the token of triumph."

Swift was he unto the bidding of that holy angel, unbound his inmost heart and gazed on high, as the herald bade him, the faithful weaver of peace. He beheld the radiant Tree of glory above the dome of clouds, bright with gems, adorned with gold; its jewels gleamed. The shining cross was written round about with characters of radiance and light: "In this sign shalt thou overwhelm the foe in bitter need, and stay the loathsome host."

Then the light vanished away, together with the holy herald journeyed up on high unto the company of the pure. But the king, the Prince of men, was the blither and knew the less of sorrow in his soul by that fair vision.

II.

Then Constantine, shelter of princes and giver of treasure to men, war-lord of legions, glorious king, bade shape a like symbol speedily, even as he beheld the beacon, revealed to him in the heavens, the cross of Christ. He bade at break of day, at early dawn, to wake the warriors and the weapon storm, to raise the battle standard and carry on before him that holy tree, into the throng of foes to bear God's beacon.

Trumpets sang aloud before the hosts, the raven had joy of the work; the dewy feathered eagle scanned the march, the strife of savage men; the wolf, comrade of the wood, lifted up his howl. The terror of battle was come.

Then was a breaking of shields and grinding of warriors, hard hand-swing and melting of squadrons, when first they met the arrow-storm. With strong hand the cruel foe dealt forth a shower of darts and spears, their battle-adders, over the yellow shield into the host of the hated. But stout of heart they strode, pressed on as occasion offered, burst through the hedge of shields, drove home the sword and ruthless hastened on. Then was the ensign lifted up, the battle sign before the troops; they sang a song of triumph. Golden helms and lances gleamed over the battle-plain. The pagan peoples perished, without quarter sank in death. And straight they fled away, this Hunnish folk, as the king of the dwellers of Rome, urging the strife, bade that holy tree be lifted up. The heroes were scattered afar. Some the battle took; some held their lives hardly on the army's march; some half quick, half dead, fled away into fastnesses, sheltered themselves behind the stony cliffs, held the land round about the Danube; and some were drowned in the flowing stream, at the end of life.

But the band of the brave rejoiced, and until the evening from the dawn of day, they pursued after those foreign hordes; ash-spears flew, their battle-adders. And the numbers of the loathed shield-men were lessened. From

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that spot but little of the Hunnish army ever returned again home. Thus was it seen that the Almighty King had sped the hand of Constantine in that day's work, glorious honour, a kingdom under the clouds, by the tree of the cross. Then the helm of hosts departed unto his home again, exultant in spoil, honoured in battle, now that the fight was won. The king strong in battle, a shelter for warriors, went with a throng of thanes to seek his cities, to deck his shield with gems. Straight the warden of war-men summoned the wisest to council, whoso had learned craft of wisdom in olden writings, and held all the rede of mortal men in the thoughts of their hearts. Strong in victory, the elder of the folk began to ask through all the ample host, if there of old or young any man might truly say to him or tell in speech, what god it was, giver of bounty, "whose beacon this might be, which so brightly was shown to me, most shining of symbols, and which shielded my people and sped my fortune in the fight against my foes, and gave me glory through that beauteous tree." And none might give him answer; none knew to speak aright of that victor-tree. But the wisest spake before that countless throng, that it was a token of the King of heaven, thereof could be no doubting. When they learned that, whoso had been instructed in baptism, they were light of heart, they had joy of soul, though they were few of number, that they might proclaim before Caesar the grace of the gospel, how that the Helm of spirits, the Splendour of kings, exalted in the glory of the Trinity, was born; how that the very Son of God, before the multitudes was hung upon the tree, in bitter pangs, and how He ransomed mortal men, spirits sad of soul, from the thraldom of fiends, and granted them grace, by that same symbol which had been revealed unto his gaze, a token of triumph against the onrush of nations; and how that on the third day the Glory of men, the Lord of all human kind, arose from death, from out the grave, and ascended into heaven. Thus, wise in spiritual mysteries, they spake unto the victorious king according as they had been taught by Silvester.

And the prince received baptism at their hands, and from that time forth walked in the will of his Lord during the days of his life.

III.

Then was the giver of treasure well pleased, the king hardened to war, and a new gladness was come upon his soul; unto him the Warden of heaven's realm was become the greatest of comforts and the highest of hopes. He began eagerly in spiritual grace to fulfil the law of the Lord by day and night; in very sooth this treasure giver of men, famed with the ashen spear, nimble in war, applied himself unto the service of God. And the prince, the protector of peoples, bold in battle and swift with the spear, found through teachers of lore, in the Books of God, the spot where the Wielder of the heavens had been lifted up in jealous hatred upon the holy tree, amid the tumult of the throng, what time that olden foe misled with cunning lies the people, seduced the Jewish race, till that they crucified the Lord of hosts, even God himself. Wherefore in abasement shall they suffer curse forever and forever. And the praise of Christ was in the soul of the emperor, and he was steadfastly minded of the radiant cross and bade his mother fare through all the ways of earth, with a multitude of folk, unto the Jewish land, with a band of warriors eagerly seek out where the holy rood of glory, the cross of the noble king, was buried in the earth. Nor was Elene slow unto this journey, nor despised the word of her giver of joy, her son; but swift was the woman to the willing voyage as the helm of hosts had bidden her, the lord of mailed men. Most speedily a band of earls began to hasten down unto the deep water. Along the sea's margin stood harnessed ocean-steeds, fettered sea-stallions floating on the sound. Then was the lady's journey easy to be known, when she sought out the tossing floods with all her train. There stood many a goodly man on the ocean's rim. Now and again they hastened over the border-paths, one troop behind another; they loaded those stallions of the waves with battle-sarks, with shield and lance and fighting men in burnies, with man and maid.

Then they let their high-flanked coursers of the deep drive foaming over the sea-beast's home. Oft in the ocean tumult the ship's side felt the swinging blows of the billows; the sea roared. Never before or since did I hear that queen led fairer band over the watery ways, on the ocean-stream. Then might he have seen, whoso beheld that journey, sea-ships plunge through the billowy paths, and scud under bellying sails, steeds of the ocean stride. and wave-ships skim. Blithe were the winsome-hearted warriors; the queen had joy of the journey. And when the

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ring-stemmed ships glided unto their haven in the Grecian land, over the ocean floods, they left their vessels, much tossed of the tides, their old sea-homes, fast at anchor to await upon the waves the destiny of the band, when the battle-queen with her force of warriors might seek them out again over the eastern ways. There might be seen upon an earl woven burnie and proven sword, excellent battle-dress, many a visored helm and fair boar-crest. There were warriors of the ashen spear, fighting men about their victor-queen, ready to take their warsome way.

Those stalwart men of battle, heralds of Caesar, heroes of war harnessed in armour, fared onward gladsomely into the Grecian land, and there was seen among that army-host full many a treasure gem in setting of gold, the gift of their lord. And in her heart, eager in soul, the blessed Elene was steadfastly heedful of her prince's will, that over the battle plains with proven band of wielders of the linden shield, with troop of spearmen, she should seek the Jewish land. And so it fell that in a little space of time that myriad host of men, those war-famed earls, those warriors able with the ashen spear, came unto Jerusalem within the city, in mighty train round about their noble queen.

IV.

Then the queen bade muster all the wisest of the city dwellers, far and wide throughout Judea, every one of men, to come unto a council, whoso most deeply knew to read aright the mysteries of God. Soon from the wide ways was come together no little band, men who had knowledge to expound aright the law of Moses. And the number of these men was three thousand, culled for learning. Then began that lovely lady to speak unto the Hebrew men:

"Full well I know, through the prophet's mystic words in the Books of God, that ye in former days were loved of the King of glory, dear unto God, and eager in deed. Alas! of this wisdom all unwisely in wrath did ye reject Him, what time ye cursed Him who, by His glorious might, thought to redeem you from curse, from burning torment, and heavy need of thralldom. Filthily ye spat upon His face, who fashioned again the light of your eyes, healing again from blindness, by His princely spittle, and from unclean spirits of devils often set you free. Him did ye doom to death who from death itself awakened many in the host of men, yea, of your very kin, unto their former life. Thus in your blind hearts did ye darken truth with lies, light with shadow, honour with enmity, and in the thoughts of your minds wove a wrong. For ye doomed that radiant Power and followed after error with darkened judgment unto this very day. Now go forth with speed and choose out men well versed in wisdom, with craft of word, who in knowledge have your law foremost before all things in their noble hearts, that they may speak to me in sooth, contrive an answer for every question that I may ask of them."

Then with rue and sorrow of heart, smitten of fear, these earls skilled of the law drew aside a little space, eagerly sought out wisdom of word, that they might give answer unto the queen whatsoever things she might seek of them whether of good or evil. Then in that multitude they found one thousand men, wise of heart; full well they knew of olden deeds among the Jews. And in a band they thronged about the spot, where bode in splendour on a kingly throne the kinswoman of Caesar, a brilliant battle-queen all graced with gold. And Elene lifted up her voice and spake before the earls:

"Hear now, O men of knowledge, holy runes, word and wisdom. Lo!

ye have known the lore of the prophets, how that the Lord of life, the Wielder of might, should be born in the image of a child. Of Him Moses sang and spake this word, the Warden of Israel: 'Unto you shall a Child be born in mystery, sublime of might, nor shall His mother conceive by love of man.' Of him King David, aged counsellor, father of Solomon and lord of war-men, sang a noble hymn and spake this word: 'I have beheld aforetime the God of beginnings, the Victor-Lord. Upon my right hand was He, in my sight, the Wielder of might, the Shepherd of glory. Never will I turn away mine eyes from Him forever.' So also Isaiah, the prophet, spake concerning you before men, pondering deeply in the spirit of the Lord: 'I raised up offspring and begat sons, unto

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whom I granted blessedness, holy comfort at heart; but they scorned me and had me in hatred, nor was there wit of wisdom among them, nor any forethought. Yea, the weary herds which man each day beateth and driveth on, do know their Benefactor, nor any whit in vengeance of their wrongs have hatred of their friend, who granteth them fodder. But me the folk of Israel would not acknowledge, though I wrought many a marvel before them in the days of my life on earth.

V.

"Lo! we have gleaned it from the holy books that God, the Lord, gave bright renown to you, fulness of might; and unto Moses spake how ye should hearken unto heaven's King and keep His counsels. Soon did it irk you and ye strove against the Righteous One, disdained the radiant Shaper of the world, the Lord of lords, and followed after error against the will of God. Now fare ye quickly forth, find yet again whatsoever men by craft of wisdom may best have knowledge of the ancient writings, your code of law, that with roomy heart they may give me answer."

Then those high-hearted men, sorrowful of soul, went forth in company as the queen had charged them; and they found five hundred men exceeding wise, culled of their own people, who had most craft of learning in remembrance, wisdom in heart. And after a little space these wardens of the city were mustered again unto the hall. And the lady gazed upon them every one and spake:

"Oft have ye wrought vain deeds, ye wretched exiles, slighted the sacred writings, your fathers' counsels, but never more than now that ye disdained the healing of your blindness and strove against the truth that in Bethlehem was born the Child of God, the one-begotten King, the Prince of princes. And though ye knew the law, the word of the prophets, yet would ye not acknowledge the truth, ye workers of sin."

And of one mind they all made answer:

"Lo, we have learned the Hebraic law, which in days of old our fathers knew, at the ark of the covenant of God, nor know we well wherefore thus heavily, O Lady, thou art become wrathful against us.

The sin we know not which we have sinned in this folk-land, nor the wrong that ever we wrought against thee."

Then Elene lifted up her voice and openly addressed the earls; before the host the lady spake aloud:

"Do ye now go swiftly forth, search out apart what men among you have greatest might of wisdom and craft of mind, that without fraud they may confidently make known to me each thing whatsoever I may seek of them."

Then they went forth from the council as the queen, mighty over cities, had given bidding, and sorrowful in soul pondered eagerly, sought out with cunning thought what sin it was which they had accomplished against Caesar, among that folk, for which the queen rebuked them. Before the earls there spake a councillor exceeding wise, crafty of word, whose name was Judas:

"Full well I ween that she will ask of that tree of triumph, whereon all free of fault suffered the Wielder of peoples, the very Son of God, whom our fathers hung in hatred, unstained of sin, upon the lofty cross in olden days that was a fearsome thought! Now is there heavy need that firmly we fix our hearts not to avow that death, nor where the holy rood was hidden after the battle-storm, lest that the ancient writings of wisdom be put away and our father's counsels forsaken. No long time shall the race and worship of Israel have power upon the earth if this be known. In this same wise in days of old my father's father, shrewd in counsel, able in victory, who was called Zaccheus, spake unto my father ... his son, turned him from the things of the world and spake this word:

"If ever it befall thee in the days of thy life that thou hear men sagely question of the holy rood, rouse up dispute

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about that victor-tree whereon the King of truth was hung, Warden of heaven's realm and Prince of peace, then do thou quickly speak, my beloved son, ere death carry thee away; never shall the Hebrew people, wise of heart, have dominion or wield it over men; but the realm and the glory shall flourish of those ... who, fulfilled of joy, forever shall honour and adore the crucified King.'

VI.

"And stoutly I made answer unto my father, the aged counsellor:

'How could it befall in earth's domain that our fathers seized upon the Holy One, with wrathful hearts, unto His death, if then they wist that He was Christ indeed, King of the heavens, very Son of God, Redeemer of Souls?' Then to me mine elder gave answer, wise of heart my father spake: 'Take thought, my son, of the high power of God, the Saviour's name. It may not be uttered by any mortal, nor may any man on the paths of earth spy it out. Never did I seek after those counsels which this people followed, but ever I held asunder from their sin, nor wrought a shame upon my spirit. Often and eagerly I roused up strife against that wrong, when learned scribes sat round about in council, and sought in heart how they might crucify the Son of God, the Helm of men, the Lord of every creature, of angels and of mortal men, the noblest Prince. Yet might these vain and miscreant men in no wise work His death, as they had hope, beset Him sore with bitter pangs, though for some little space of time He rendered up His spirit on the cross, the Victor Son of God.

Then was the Lord of heaven lifted up from off the tree, the Glory of glories; three nights' time He bode within the grave, in thralldom of darkness, and on the third day the Light of light arose to life and showed Himself unto His thanes, true Prince of Victory, in splendour shining. And after a space of time thy brother received the bath of baptism, bright belief; for that he loved the Lord, Stephen was stoned with stones. Yet did he not render again evil for evil, but patient under his affliction plead for his olden foes, made supplication of the King of Glory that He charge it not to their chastisement, this woeful deed, that they in jealous hatred reft of life one free of fault, unstained of sin, at the prompting of Saul, who in cruel malice had doomed to death and destruction many of the folk of Christ. But the Lord had mercy upon him so that he became a comfort unto many peoples, when the Lord of creation gave him a new name; and henceforth he was called St. Paul, nor was any other of the teachers of the law ever better than he, of man or maid begotten in the world, even though he bade that Stephen be slain with stones upon the mount.

"So, my beloved, mayest thou perceive how the Ruler of all hath compassion upon us, though many times we work evil against Him and wounds of sin, if we do penance for our baleful deeds and cease again from sin. Thenceforward I and my beloved father believed in sooth ...

that the God of glory and the Guide of life, suffered grievous anguish for the heavy need of mortal men. Wherefore I admonish thee, my dearest son, by secret precept, that thou render not reviling words, nor hate, nor blasphemy, nor sullen strife, against the Child of God. So shalt thou merit that eternal life, fairest reward of victory, granted thee in heaven.

Thus did my father in the olden days counsel me, still a lad ungrown, and sage of speech imparted words of wisdom. His name was Simon.' Now ye know full well what it seemeth best that ye make known, if this queen question of the rood; now ye know my mind and the thoughts of my heart."

Then the wisest in that throng of men spake unto him:

"Never have we heard any other man among this people, no other thane save thee alone, divulge in such wise of so secret things. Do as it seemeth good to thee, O wise in ancient learning, if thou be questioned in the host of men. He hath need of wisdom, of wary word and clever counsels, whoso may give answer to that noble lady

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before this gathered host."

VII.

Then words grew many; men pondered either side, some this, some that, and mused and meditated. And there came a band of thanes unto that council throng; criers called aloud, heralds of Caesar: "The queen biddeth you, O men, unto the royal hall, that ye proclaim aright your council judgment. And there is need of wisdom when ye are met together, high rede of heart." And they were ready, sad of soul, those elders of the people, as they were bidden by that hard command, and went unto the court to prove the power of craft.

Then the lady spake unto the Hebrew men and questioned them, who were weary of heart, concerning the ancient writings, how prophets sang aforetime in the world, holy of heart, of the Son of God; and where the Prince had suffered, the very Son of God, for the love of souls. But they were stark, harder than stones; nor would they tell that mystery aright, nor make answer unto her of what she asked, but with wrath of heart steadfastly they made strife against each word wherewith she questioned them, and said that never before or since, in the days of their life, had they heard a whit of such a thing. And Elene lifted up her voice and spake to them in wrath: "I say unto you in sooth, nor shall it ever be a lie in the days of life, that if ye continue longer in these falsehoods, a fire shall seize upon you on the mountain, hottest of singeing fires, and the hurtling flame shall feed upon your bodies, that for you this falsehood shall be turned to bitter death. Nor may ye prove the word which long time with your lies ye veil in a shroud of sin, nor may ye cover up the deed nor mask its secret might."

Then did they think to die, they had dread of the fire and the ending of life, and they named one of their own stock, skilled of counsel, whose name was Judas, and him they rendered up unto the queen, and spake him wondrous wise. "He may reveal thee truth, unveil the mystery of fate, the code of law from the beginning even unto the end, according as thou dost question him. For he is of noble kin on earth, wise of word—craft, a prophet's son, and he hath courage in counsel. It is his quality that he hath wise rejoinders and craft of heart. And he shall make known to thee before this host of men, in ample might, the gift of wisdom even as thy soul craveth."

Then she let each man go unto his own place in peace and held only Judas alone as hostage; and she bade him that he discover rightly unto her concerning the holy rood, which long lay hidden. And Elene called him aside and had speech of him in secret, that glorious queen: "Two fates are prepared for thee, or life or death, as may be dearer unto thee to choose. Wherefore do thou straight reveal which thou wilt have to be thy lot." And Judas spake unto her he might not turn away that sorrow neither avert the anger of the queen, for he was in her power:

"How may it be with that man, who in waste places, weary and meatless, thrall'd of hunger, treadeth the moor land; and unto his gaze appeareth a loaf and a stone, both together, hard and soft, that he taketh the stone to stay his hunger and heedeth not the loaf, turneth unto dearth and forsaketh plenty, despiseth the better when he hath the bounty of both?"

VIII.

And unto him the blessed Elene gave answer freely before men:

"If thou in the kingdom of heaven wilt have a dwelling—place with angels and life on earth, the guerdon of victory, say unto me straightway where the holy rood of the King of glory hideth beneath the ground, which ye, for the sin of that death, for a space of time have hidden away from men."

Then Judas spake and his soul was sad, his heart burned within him; yea, on either hand was woe, whether in mind he thus gave over hope of the kingdom of heaven and this present realm under the clouds, or whether he discovered unto her the cross.

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"How may I find that which chanced so long ago in the circle of winters, for two hundred or more in number have flitted by in the passing of time? I may not reckon the account nor know the number.

Many a good and prudent man who went before us hath vanished away, many a man of judgment. I was born long after in my youth, in later days a stripling lad; and that which I know not I may not know, nor come upon it in my heart, which befell so long ago."

And Elene gave answer unto him: "How doth it chance among this people that ye have such store of legend in remembrance, of all heroic deeds even as the Trojans waged them in their war? Farther away in the circle of years was that famous strife of olden time than this sublime event. Full well do ye know to reckon swiftly the number of all those done to death in slaughter, the tale of spearmen slain, fallen beneath their shields. Ye have set down in your writings the graves under the rocky cliff, the place and the count of winters."

Judas spake, smitten of sorrow: "For need, my lady, are we greatly mindful of that battle-work, and we have set down in our writings the shock of war and the bearing of nations, but never by the mouth of any man have we heard this spoken, save in this present here."

And now to him the noble queen gave answer: "Overmuch dost thou resist the truth and justice regarding the rood of life, thou who aforetime, by a little space, didst speak truth of that victor-tree unto thine own people and now thou turnest unto a lie."

And again Judas had speech of her, and said that he spake in trouble and great doubt, and thought to suffer grievous ill. And straight Caesar's kinsmaid spake unto him:

"Lo! we have heard it, by the holy Books made known to man, that the noble Child of the King, the Spirit-son of God, was hanged on Calvary. Now, ere bitter death pluck thee away for thy sins, thou shalt fully uncloak thy wisdom, even as the writings say, regarding that space of ground, where the spot Calvary may be, that I may cleanse it, according to the will of Christ, to be an help to men, that the holy God, the mighty King, the glorious Lord of hosts, the Comforter of souls, may fulfil my craving and the thought of my heart."

But Judas made steadfast answer unto her: "Neither do I know the place nor the field nor the affair a whit." And Elene spake with wrathful heart: "I swear by the Creator's Son, the crucified God, that thou shalt die of hunger before thine own people except thou leave these lies and clearly set forth truth." And she bade her company lead him away and thrust him, still alive, in his guilt, into a dry pit nor did her slaves delay and there, bereft of blessings, he abode in sorrow in that gloomy place for the space of seven nights, thrall of hunger and covered with bonds, and on the seventh day his strength was gone, and weary and anhungered, abased in woe, he began to wail aloud.

"I entreat you by the God of heaven, that ye let me forth from this place of torment, who am vanquished by my craving need. Gladly will I disclose the holy rood now that I may not longer hide it for my hunger.

Too cruel is this thralldom, harsh this heavy need, too grievous this affliction in the dole of days. Longer I may not endure, nor be secret of the tree of life. Aforetime I was filled with folly, and now myself avow too late the truth."

IX.

And when the queen, who wielded it over warriors, perceived the bearing of the man, forthwith she bade them loose him from his bondage, from thralling durance, from out his narrow pit. Most speedily they did her will, heedfully drew him from his dungeon even as the queen had bidden. Stout of heart they strode unto that place upon the mount where the Lord was crucified aforetime upon the cross, the Warden of heaven's realm, the Child

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of God; yet brought full low by hunger he knew not clearly where the holy rood, by the Devil's art, bode in its resting place, buried under the earth, pent in its grave, long veiled from men.

And after a time with strange authority he lifted up his voice and spake in Hebrew:

"O Saviour Lord, Thou who hast dominion of doom, who in the strength of Thy glory didst fashion heaven and earth and the tossing waves, the wide bosom of the sea and all creation; Thou who with Thine hands didst mete out all the compass of the earth and sky above; Thou Thyself dost sit, the Wielder of victories, above the noble order of the angels; and round about Thee on the ethereal air, robed with light, flit the mighty angel hosts. The spirits of men may not mount upward in the body from the ways of earth, with that radiant throng, heralds of glory.

These didst Thou shape and didst elect them to Thy service, holy, of heavenly essence. And of that order six are called unto eternal joy; with six pinions of feathers are they set about and graced, they shine in splendour. And four are there that ever in flight before the face of the eternal judge observe most beauteous service, without ceasing sing in glory with silver voice the praise of heaven's King, loveliest of strains, hymning with clear voices these words their name is called Cherubim 'Holy is the holy God of archangels, the Lord of hosts.

Heaven and earth are full of His glory and all His high-majesty set round with splendour.' And two are there among them, a victor-race, whom man nameth with the name Seraphim. They must needs hold in holiness the plain of Paradise, the tree of life, with sword of flame. Sharp-edged the blade, stippled with wondrous signs, shaketh and changeth colour, in their steadfast grasp. For Thou, Lord God, dost wield the world for ever, and Thou didst cast out from the upper skies the shameful scathers, workers of sin, heedless of heart. And that weary crew must needs sink into the dark dwellings of Hell, into a death of torment. There in the surging flame they needs must undergo the pangs of death, girt round about with darkness, in the dragon's clutch. For Thy dominion he disdained, wherefore in grievous curse, foulest of the foul, an outlaw, he shall endure and suffer servitude. And there the Prince of sin may not despise Thy word but he is fast in throes of torment, and fettered in anguish. And if it be Thy will, O Lord of angels, that He reign, who hung upon the cross, and by Mary was born upon earth in the likeness of a child, the Prince of angels and were He not Thy Son, unstained of sin, He had not wrought so many wondrous truths in the kingdom of earth in the allotted days, nor hadst Thou waked Him thus gloriously from death before mankind, O Lord of nations, were He not Thy Son in glory by the radiant Maid now, O Father of angels, reveal Thy beacon unto us. And even as Thou didst incline Thine ear unto the prayer of Moses, that holy man, when Thou, O God of might, didst show to him at that holy tide the bones of Joseph under the steep hill, so now, O Lord of hosts, if it be Thy will, I do entreat Thee by that noble man that Thou, O Shaper of souls, lay open unto me that golden treasure that long was hid from man. Do Thou, O Lord of life, let rise from the winsome plain, under the compass of the sky, a wavering smoke. So shall I better trust in Thee, the more steadfastly stablish my fervent hope, my heart, upon the crucified Christ, that He is in very sooth the Saviour of souls, Eternal and Almighty, the King of Israel, ever without beginning, and without an end, reigning over the eternal dwellings of glory in heaven above."

X.

Then, like smoke from that place, there rose a mist beneath the heavens, and the heart of the man was lifted up, and, wise and blessed, he clapped his hands towards the skies. Prudent of thought Judas spake:

"Now in my stubborn heart have I beheld that Thou art indeed the Healer of the world. Unto Thee, O Lord of hosts, reigning in glory, be eternal thanks, that Thou in Thy majesty hast disclosed to me, weary of soul and sinful, the secrets of Fate. Now, O Son of God, do I entreat Thee, Thou Giver of joy to men, knowing full well that Thou wast manifested and begotten the Glory of all kings, that Thou be not longer mindful of my sins, O Lord, which all too often I have sinned against Thee. Let me, O God of might, be numbered with the number of

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Thy kingdom, have part with holy men, and dwell in that radiant city where my brother is, magnified in glory, for that Stephen held covenant with Thee, though he was stoned with stones. He hath the reward of battle, unending bliss; and the wonders that he wrought are written in the books of the Writings." Then, full fain of heart, with steadfast strength he began to delve for the tree of glory in the earth under its covering of turf, until after a space of twenty feet he found three crosses, concealed, under the shelving cliff, hid in a prison of darkness; there he discovered them together in their gloomy grave, strewn with sand, even as the impious race of Jews had wrapped them o'er with earth in olden days.

They roused up hate against the Son of God, as they had never done had they not given ear unto the counsels of the Prince of sin.

Then was his heart gladdened within him; his soul inspired by that holy rood, his spirit lifted up when he beheld the glorious beacon in the earth. With his hands he grasped the blessed cross of glory, and, with that host, he drew it forth from its grave in the earth. And the far-travellers and they of princely rank journeyed unto the town. Before the knee of Elene, plainly to be seen, these valiant men and proud set the three victor-trees. And the queen had joy of the work in her heart, and questioned them on which cross it was that the Son of God, the Giver of hope to man, was crucified.

"Lo! we have heard it in the holy books clearly set forth that there were twain who suffered with Him; and He Himself was third upon the rood. Then were the skies veiled in darkness in that grievous hour. If thou dost know, say on which cross of these three the Prince of angels, Lord of glory, endured woe."

Nor might Judas, for he wist not well, make known unto her fully of that rood of triumph, whereon the Saviour, the Victor Son of God, was lifted up; and he bade them set up the crosses in the midst of that mighty town with tumult, and tarry there till that the Almighty King should manifest, before the multitude, a marvel regarding the tree of glory. And the triumphant throng, with musing hearts, lifted up a song and sat them down about the three crosses until the ninth hour, when they gained new delight won by glorious deed. For there came a multitude unto that place, no little folk; and they carried nigh at hand, upon a bier, with a throng of men, one dead, a youth whose soul was fled. It was the ninth hour. Then Judas was glad of heart, and he bade them set the dead and soulless man, the body reft of life, upon the ground, and he, proclaimer of justice, wise of heart, musing deeply, lifted up two of the crosses over that house devoted unto death. But it was dead, even as aforetime; the body fast upon its bier; the limbs were chill, girt round about with grievous doom.

Then the third was lifted up in holiness. The body bode till that the rood of the celestial Prince, the cross of heaven's King, true victor-token, was raised above him. Then straight he rose, endowed with spirit, body and soul together. Then was praise fairly offered up by that folk. They glorified the Father and gave reverence unto the very Son of God. His be glory and the everlasting thanks of every creature!

XI.

Then was the marvel which the Lord of hosts, the Guide of life, wrought to the defence of human kind graven upon the hearts of that folk as well should be. But the lying demon, the devil from Hell, the foul fiend musing evil, beat upward through the air and cried aloud:

"Lo! what one of men is this, who in olden strife smiteth my train, prolongeth ancient hate, despoileth my possessions. This is ever-during conflict. Guilty souls may no longer bide within my realms, but now is come an alien soul, whom I thought fast in sin, and he hath reft from me every right and all my treasure. No fair lot is this. The Saviour who was born in Nazareth hath done me many a mischief, many a deed of cruel hate. For when He was grown from childhood He drew unto Himself all my ancient holdings; nor might my portion thrive. His realm is wide throughout the earth; my rede is minished under heaven. No need have I to scorn the cross with mocking

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laughter. Lo! the Redeemer hath barred me in once more within my straitened home, with grievous curse. By Judas aforetime I grew full of hope; now once again am I brought low, empty of good, outcast and friendless, through a second Judas. But by my deeds of evil I know full well to find return again out of the house of hell. I shall rouse up against thee another king and he shall smite thee, and leave thy counsels and follow after my ways, and shall thrust thee into swartest and worst of torturing terrors, that thou, visited of pain, shalt strive with fervour against the crucified King, unto whom aforetime thou didst hearken."

But the wise-hearted Judas, brave man of war, gave answer unto, him, for the Holy Ghost was bestowed upon him in fulness, a flaming love and wisdom springing from warrior's craft; and he spake this word of judgment:

"Thou needest not so sturdily to stir up strife, renew distress, ever heedful of sin, thou lord of death, for that the mighty King, He who hath wakened many from the dead, hath cast thee down into the nether pit, into the gulf of torment, thou worker of evil, reft of honour. Be well assured that in thy folly thou didst renounce the love of God, brightest of beacons, and a beauteous joy, and in the surging fire, compassed about by torment, didst dwell since then, withered of the flame; and there shalt thou forever without an end, perverse of heart, suffer curse and fierce affliction."

And Elene hearkened how the friend and the foe, vile and glorious, sinful and dowered with bliss, urged strife on either hand. She was the gladder when she heard that hellish scather, the Prince of sin, brought low, and wondered at the knowledge of the man that he in so little space of time was grown so full of faith, that he, so unenlightened aforetime, was endowed with so great wisdom. And she gave thanks to God, unto the King of glory, that her will of these two things had come to pass through the Son of God, both in beholding the cross of triumph, and in the faith which she perceived full well was a radiant gift in the heart of that man.

XII.

Then was known throughout that folk-land, the glorious tidings, wide heralded among the people to the grudge of many men who would fain obscure the law of God. It was published through every town, so far as the seas compass them round about, in every city, that the cross of Christ, long buried in the earth, was found again, fairest of triumph-tokens of all those which early or late were lifted up in holiness under the heavens, but a grievous mischance unto the Jews, those men forlorn, bitterest of destinies for that they might not turn it away before the world, this joy of Christian men.

And straight throughout her host of earls the lady bade heralds hasten unto the journey, for they must needs seek out the lord of the dwellers of Rome, over the deep sea-water; unto that hero say this best of blithesome news, that, by the loving kindness of God, the cross of victory was come to light, found within the earth, where long ago it was hid to work a harm to holy men, and to the Christian folk.

Then the heart of the king was gladdened within him at that fair word, his soul had joy. Nor in that city did it fail of men, in golden raiment, making query of the tidings brought from far. The greatest of comforts in the world was his, a laughing heart, at the gracious news which these warrior-heralds brought him over the eastern ways, how the war men with their victor-queen had made safe journey over the swan-road, unto the Grecian land. And Caesar bade them make ready once again unto the journey with all speed. Nor did the warriors tarry when they heard the answer, the word of their lord. He charged them greet the lady Elene if they, stalwart-hearted heroes famed in war, should endure the ocean waves and make safe voyage unto the holy city.

And eke he charged them that they give her bidding to build a church upon the hillside, a temple of God, that they both might profit thereby; that it might be according to the will of Christ on Calvary, and an help to man, there where the holy rood was come upon, more bright and beauteous than any tree of those the dwellers in the world have known upon the ways of earth.

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And this she wrought, when those well-loved men over the ocean floods brought her many a winning word from out the west. Then the queen bade seek out apart men dowered with skill, whoso knew to work cunningly in stone, to rear a temple unto God on that spot of ground.

And, as the Warden of spirits admonished her from heaven, she charged them grace the cross with gold and gems, with fairest precious stones; set it round about with cunning skill, and fasten it with bolt and bar in a chest of silver. There since that day the cross of life hath rested, best of trees of triumph, not to be broken in its excellence. There it shall ever be a ready succour unto those afflicted of any torment, any sorrow or strife; and by that holy sign they shall soon find help and grace from God.

Likewise, after the appointed time, Judas received the bath of baptism, and, being made pure, was faithful unto Christ, dear to the Warden of life. And belief endured constant in his heart, for the Spirit of comfort abode in the breast of that man, and prompted him unto repentance. He chose the better lot, the bliss of glory, and withstood the worse, the worship of devils; he gave over godlessness, the rites of sin.

And the eternal King, Lord God, Wielder of might, showed mercy upon him.

XIII.

Then was he baptized who oft aforetime despised the light; his heart was roused unto the better life, and turned unto glory. Lo! Fate ordained that thus in the kingdom of the world he should be faithful, dear unto God and acceptable to Christ. And all this was published abroad when Elene charged them that they bring to the holy city, unto the council, Eusebius, Bishop of Rome, wise in the musings of men, to be a stay unto them, and to set Judas in the priesthood in Jerusalem, to be bishop in that city over the peoples, well chosen unto God's temple by the Spirit's grace; and in her wisdom afterward she named him anew and called his name Cyriacus. And the name of the man from this time forth, throughout the cities, was changed unto this better name, "the law of God."

But the heart of Elene was greatly busied in the glorious matter of the nails which pierced the Saviour's feet and hands, wherewith the King of heaven, the mighty Lord, was fastened on the rood. Of them the Christian queen made query, and charged Cyriacus that once again, by spirit's might, he accomplish her will in that deed of wonder, reveal it in his glorious grace; and unto the bishop she spake this word, and fearlessly addressed him:

"Thou didst discover unto me aright, O Shield of warriors, the beauteous cross of heaven's King, on which was hung by heathen hands the Saviour of souls, very Son of God, Redeemer of men. Yet doth desire of the nails of the cross admonish me in heart. I would have thee find them, where they are buried in the earth, deeply entombed and wrapped about with darkness. Ever my heart doth sorrow, waiteth in rue and resteth never, ere that Almighty God, the Lord of Hosts, Redeemer of man in holiness from heaven, accomplish my will unto me by the attaining of these nails. Now in all lowliness, O best of heralds, straightway send thy prayers upward to the radiant heaven unto the Lord of splendour; entreat that Glory of warriors that the Almighty King reveal to thee that treasure in the earth where it lieth buried, hidden, dark to men."

Then the bishop of that folk, with kindled soul, made strong his heart, and gladsomely went forth with much people praising God; and eagerly he bowed down his face on Calvary, hid not his secret thoughts, but cried aloud to God with spirits' might, with all humility, that the Lord of angels, in his new need, might show to him that unknown fact, where in that space of ground most confidently he might ween to find the nails. Then as they gazed, the Father, the Spirit of comfort, showed forth a token in the likeness of fire ascending up where the glorious nails, by secret fraud, after the evil counsels of men, were hidden in the earth.

For there came a swift, flickering flame, brighter than the sun. The folk beheld a marvel revealed unto their sovereign queen, where the nails gleamed in radiance from the darkness out of their narrow tomb under the earth,

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even as stars of heaven or gems of gold. And that people had joy of heart, an exultant throng, and of one mind gave praise to God, though they had lived long time in ways of error, by the devil's evil might turned away from Christ. And thus they spake:

"Now do we behold the victor-token, the wondrous sign of God, that we aforetime withstood with lies. Now is the way of Fate revealed and come to light. Glory be to the God of heaven on high."

And once again the bishop of that folk was made glad of heart, who was inclined unto repentance by the Son of God. Reverently he lifted up the nails and brought them unto his honoured queen. And even as the noble lady bade him, Cyriacus had accomplished all the craving of the woman. And there rose a sound of weeping; hot, welling tears flowed down their faces, no whit for woe the tear drops fell upon the wire-wrought nails.

Full gloriously was the will of the queen fulfilled. With radiant faith she set them on her knee, exultant in her joy, adored the offering that was brought to her to soothe her sorrow. She thanked God, the Lord of triumph, that now indeed she beheld the truth that oft had been prophesied aforetime, even from the beginning of the world, to be a comfort unto men. And she was filled with grace of wisdom, and the holy, heavenly Spirit abode with her, and held ward over her breast and noble heart. Thus the Almighty Victor-Child of God from that time forth did cherish her.

XIV.

Then eagerly with mystic yearning she began to seek out righteousness, a way to glory. And lo! the Lord of hosts, Father in heaven, Almighty King, did lend her help that in the world the queen might win her will. That prophecy was sung of old by men of wisdom from its beginning, as it then befell in each regard. Then with grace of spirit, eagerly, the queen of that folk sought with careful pains unto what purpose best and most meetly she might devote the nails, to the advantage of mortal men, and what might be the will of God. And she charged them that straightway they bring to her a man of exceeding wisdom, one sage of heart with skill of judgment, who had wise counsel; and she made question of that man what in his heart he deemed it best to do, and dutifully she did according to his prompting. And confidently he spake to her:

"Meet it is, O fairest queen, that thou hold fast in thy heart the word of God, his holy runes, and eagerly accomplish the King's behest, now that God, the Saviour of men, hath granted thee weal of soul, and craft of judgment. Do thou bid these nails be fastened unto the bridle of the noblest king of earth, of castled power, to be a bit unto his steed.

Far-famed throughout the earth to many men shall that bridle be, when by its power he may overwhelm in strife each hostile force, when warring, sworded men battle on either hand, where foe with foe strive for victory. He shall have speed of battle, victory in strife, peace over all, rest after war, who before him reineth this bridle over his charger white, when chosen warriors, famed in fight, bear shield and sword into the storm of spears. And this to any one of men shall be an unvanquished weapon in battle against the woe of war. The prophet, sage of heart, did sing of it, his mind, his mood of wisdom, deep inspired. And he spake this word:

"It shall befall, full widely known, that the king's charger in the press of heroes shall be adorned with bit and bridle-rings. And that symbol shall be called holy unto God, and he shall have valiant heart and battle-glory who reineth that steed."

And quickly Elene brought all this to pass before the earls. She bade adorn the bridle of the prince, ring-giving lord of men, and she sent unto her son in offering this blameless gift over the ocean-stream. Then she mustered together unto the holy city, within the town, whatsoever men she knew to be the best among the Jews of that race of people. And the queen began to teach the band of well-beloved that they cherish steadfastly the love of God,

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peace among themselves and loving-kindness, without sin in the days of their life; and that they do according to the counsels of their teacher, and Christian ways even as Cyriacus, wise in the lore of books, should bid them.

And that bishopric was fairly founded. Oft from afar came unto him the halt, the lame of limb, the feeble, those that limped, smitten of bloody wounds, lepers and blind men, the lowly and the sad of heart, and there they found healing at the bishop's hands and eternal weal.

And Elene bestowed upon him gifts of treasure, when she was made ready unto her journey back to her native land; and she charged all those who worshipped God in that kingdom, both man and maid, that they ever observe with soul and strength, in the thoughts of their hearts, that glorious day whereon the holy rood was found, fairest of all trees which have grown from out the earth with increase of leaves.

Then was the time of spring over and gone save for six nights ere the coming of summer upon the calends of May. May the doors of hell be locked, heaven's gates unbarred, the eternal realm of angels and everlasting joy be opened wide, and may his lot fall with Mary, for every one of men, whoso holdeth in his heart the most lovely feast of the cross under the heaven, which Almighty God, Ruler of all, hath sheltered with his arm. Finit.

XV.

Thus have I spun my, lay with craft of word and wrought it wondrously, aged and nigh unto death by fault of this mouldering house; at times I mused upon it and sifted my thoughts in the dungeon of night. I knew not clearly of that rood aright, ere wisdom in ample power imparted wider counsel in the thought of my heart... I was stained by my deeds of evil, shackled in sin, harried by sorrow, bound with bitterness, compassed about by trouble ere that in majesty the King of might granted me knowledge to console old age, ere that He meted out to me His radiant grace, instilled it in my heart, revealed its glory, made it more ample, loosed my body, undid the bolts of my breast and taught me song-craft, which in the world I have used with will and gladness.

Full often had I pondered on that glorious cross, nor once alone, ere I unriddled all the marvel of that radiant tree. I found the tale of that victor token in books, to make it known in writings in due course of time. But ever until that day was strife, the hero dying beat upon by waves of woe, though he gained treasure in the mead-hall and appled gold. He mourned his woe, doomed to journey hence, endured deep sorrow, that narrow rune, when his horse measured off before him the mile-paths, raced proud of heart, and decked with precious trappings.

Gladsomeness is gone, and all delight; youth is vanished away and olden pride. Once the gleam of youth was ours. But now those days of yore after their appointed space of time have fled, life's winsomeness hath waned even as the waters flow away, the hurrying floods.

Wealth is fleeting for every one of men under the heavens. The loveliness of earth departeth away under the clouds, most like unto a wind when it riseth loud in the ears of men, rangeth the clouds, fareth in fury, and then all suddenly is barred in silence in its narrow prison, constrained by force.

So all this world vanisheth away, and a destroying flame shall seize on all those born therein, when God Himself with his angel-host cometh unto judgment. Then shall everyone of men hear a just doom of his every deed by the mouth of his judge; and he shall give pledge for every vain word spoken aforetime, and all presumptuous thoughts. Then shall the folk be dealt into three parts unto the embrace of flame, every one of men of those who from the beginning have lived upon the spacious earth.

And the righteous shall be uppermost in flame, the band of the blessed, the throng of them that yearn for glory, high-hearted men; so may they suffer lightly, free from woe. He assigneth for them the flame of the fire, as may be gentlest and mildest unto them. But the wicked, sad of heart, soiled of sin, shall be among the middle throng in

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the hot, surging flame, compassed about with smoke. And the third part, the cursed scathing spoilers, the lying foes of man, the impious crew, shall be in the grip of the gledes, in the bosom of the fire, fettered in flame, for their former deeds. Never again from that house of death shall they come unto the remembrance of God, the King of Glory, but these wrathful foes shall be cast out from that battle-wave of flame into the pit of hell. It shall fare in unlike wise with those other twain. For they may see God, the Prince of victory. They shall be seethed and sundered from sin, even as pure gold, that in the fire is cleansed of every blemish, in the furnace flame molten and purged. So shall each one of those men be shorn and freed of every evil, of deep iniquity, by the fire of judgment. Then may they know peace and lasting weal. And the Lord of angels shall be gracious unto them and blithesome, for that they forsook evil, the works of sin, and cried aloud in prayer unto the Son of God. Wherefore now they shall shine in beauty like unto the angels, and enjoy the heritage of the King of Glory forevermore. Amen.