

Exodus

translated by Charles W. Kennedy

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Lo! far and wide throughout the earth we have heard how the laws of Moses, a wondrous code, proclaim to men reward of heavenly life for all the blessed after death, and lasting gain for every living soul. Let him hear who will!

On him the Lord of hosts, the Righteous King, showed honour in the wilderness, and the Eternal Ruler gave him might to work great wonders. He was beloved of God, a lord of men, a wise and ready leader of the host, a bold folk captain. Affliction came upon the tribe of Pharaoh, the enemy of God, when the Lord of victories entrusted to the bold folk-leader his kinsmen's lives, and gave the sons of Abraham a dwelling and an habitation. Great was his reward! The Lord was gracious unto him and gave him weapon-might against the terror of his foes, wherewith he overcame in battle many a warrior, and the strength of hostile men.

And first the Lord of hosts spake unto him and told him many wonders, how the Triumphant Lord in wisdom wrought the world, and the compass of the earth, and the arching heavens; and told His own name, which the sons of men, wise patriarchs of old, knew not before, though they knew many things. And the Lord honoured the leader of the host, the foe of Pharaoh, and strengthened him with righteous strength on his departure, when, of old, in punishment that mighty host was drenched with death.

Wailing arose at the fall of their princes; their hall-joys were hushed and their treasure was scattered. Fiercely at midnight He smote the oppressors, slaying their firstborn, laying their watchmen low. Wide the destroyer's path, and the way of the fell folk-slayer! The whole land mourned the dead. The host departed. Loud was the voice of their wailing, little their joy! Locked were the hands of the laughter-makers; the multitude had leave to go its way, a wandering folk. The Fiend was robbed, and all the hosts of hell. Heaven's might came upon them; their idols fell. That was a glorious day through all the world when the host went forth! Many a year the vile Egyptians suffered bondage, because they thought for ever to refuse to Moses' kinsmen, if God would let them, their longing for the journey of their heart's desire.

The host was ready. The prince who led them was stalwart and bold.

He passed by many a stronghold with his people, leaders and lands of many hostile men, by narrow, lonely paths and unknown ways, until at last they marched, in armour, against the Ethiopian realm. Their lands were covered with a cloud, their border-homes upon the mountain-slopes. Past these, with many a hindrance, Moses led his people. And two nights after they escaped their foes God bade the noble prince to make encampment about the town of Etham in the marchlands, with all his force, a mighty army, and tumult of the host.

With anxious hearts they hastened on their northward way; they knew that southward lay the Ethiop's land, parched hill-slopes and a race burned brown by the heat of the sun. But Holy God shielded that folk against the fiery heat, stretching a covering over the flaming heavens, and over the burning air a holy veil. A cloud wide-stretching severed earth from heaven, and led the host; burning and heavenly bright the fiery flame was quenched. The warriors marvelled, most joyous of hosts.

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The shelter of the day—shield moved across the heavens; God in His wisdom had covered the course of the sun with a sail, though earth—dwelling men knew not the mast—ropes, nor might behold the yards, nor understand the way in which that greatest of tents was fastened. So He showed honour and glory upon the faithful!

Then was a third encampment to the comfort of the folk. The army all beheld the holy sail, the gleaming marvel of the sky, towering above them. And all that folk, the men of Israel, perceived that there the Lord of hosts was present to measure out a camp. Before them moved two columns in the heavens, fire and cloud, sharing alike the service of the Holy Spirit, the journey of brave—hearted men, by day and night.

And in the dawn, as I have heard, the valiant—hearted blared forth their trumpet—calls, in peals of thunder. And all the host, the band of the brave, arose and made them ready, according as Moses, their glorious leader, gave bidding to God's people. They beheld their guide go forth before them measuring out the path of life. The sail governed their journey, and after it, with joyful hearts, the seamen trod their path through the great waters.

Loud was the tumult of the host. Each evening rose a heavenly beacon, a second wondrous marvel after the setting of the sun, a pillar of flame shining in splendour over the hosts of men. Bright were its shining beams above the warriors; their bucklers gleamed, the shadows vanished away. No secret place could hide the deep night—shadows. Heaven's candle burned. Needs must this new night warden watch above the host, lest in the stormy weather grey heath and desert—terror should overcome their souls with sudden fear. Streaming locks of fire had their guide, and shining beams, menacing the host with flame and terror, and threatening destruction to that people in the waste, except they swiftly hearkened unto Moses. Armour gleamed, and bucklers glistened as the warriors took their steadfast way. And over the troops and high above the host stood the banner, moving as they moved, even unto the stronghold of the sea at the land's end. And there they pitched a camp and rested, for they were weary. Stewards brought the warriors food and strengthened them. And when the trumpet sang they stretched themselves upon the hills, shipmen within their tents. That was the fourth encampment and pause of the shield—men by the Red Sea.

There dread tidings of inland pursuit came unto the army. A great fear fell upon them, and dread of the host. So the exiles abode the coming of the fierce pursuers, who long had crushed those homeless men and wrought them injury and woe. They heeded not the covenant which the ancient king had given aforetime... [some words lost] ...who became the people's heir and had their treasure, and greatly throve. All this the Egyptian race forgot when their wrath was stirred by a quarrel. They wrought great wrong to Moses' kinsmen, broke the covenant, and slew them. Their hearts were filled with faithlessness and rage, the mighty passions of men. They would fain requite the gift of life with evil, that the people of Moses might pay for that day's work in blood, if Mighty God would prosper their destructive journey.

Then the hearts of the earls were hopeless within them as they beheld the shining bands, the hosts of Pharaoh, marching from out the south, uplifting a forest of lances, with banners waving above them, a great host treading the border—paths. Their spears were in array, shields gleamed and trumpets sang; the battle line rolled on. Over dead bodies circling screamed the birds of battle, dewy—feathered, greedy for war, dark carrion—lovers. In hope of food, the wolves, remorseless beasts of slaughter, sang a grim evening—song; dogging the march of the foe, they abode the coming of death; the march warders howled in the midnight.

The doomed soul fled; the host was compassed about.

Now and again the proud thanes of the host measured the mile—paths on their steeds. The prince of men rode forth before the troops, the war—king raised the standard; the battle—warden bound on helm and chin—guard (banners gleamed) in expectation of war, shook his armour, and bade his warlike host, his firm ranked cohorts, go boldly into battle.

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The foe beheld with hostile eyes the coming of the landsmen. About him fearless fighters moved; grey wolves of war went forward to the onslaught thirsting for battle, loyal of heart. He chose the flower of his people for that service, two thousand far-famed heroes of high birth, kings and kinsmen. And each led out his men, and all the warriors that he well could muster in the appointed time. The young men were gathered together, the kings in their pomp. Frequently sounding, the well-known voice of the horn signalled the host where the war-troop of heroes should bear their arms. So the dark horde was marshalled; throng after throng, in thousands, hastened thither, a countless host. They were resolved, in vengeance for their brothers, to slay the tribes of Israel with the sword, at the break of day.

Then a sound of wailing arose in the camp, an evening-song of woe.

A great fear was upon them; the nets of death encompassed them about.

The fatal tidings flew abroad; tumult arose. The foe were resolute, a horde in armour gleaming, until the mighty angel who upheld that host scattered the proud and hateful multitude, so that no more might one behold another's face; but their journey was divided.

All that long night the fugitives had respite, though foes beset them upon either hand, on the one side that great host, on the other side the sea. They had no way of escape nor any hope of their inheritance, but halted on the hills in shining armour with foreboding of ill. And all the band of kinsmen watched and waited for the coming of the greater host until the dawn, when Moses bade the earls with brazen trumpets muster the folk, bade warriors rise and don their coats of mail, bear shining arms, take thought on valour, and summon the multitude with signal-beacons unto the sandy shore of the sea.

The leaders bold obeyed the battle-signal; the host made ready. The seamen heard the trumpet-summons, and struck their tents upon the hills. The army was astir. They numbered off twelve companies of valiant men to form the van of battle against their foes' grim wrath. The host was in an uproar. From every noble tribe among that people were chosen fifty cohorts, under shield, the flower of the folk. And every cohort of that famous army was of a thousand warriors, far-famed wielders of the spear.

That was a warlike band. The leaders of the army welcomed not among that number the weak, who yet because of youth could not defend them under board and byrnie against a wily foe, who never yet had known the baleful thrust, the bitter wound, the insolent play of the spear over the edge of the linden shield. Nor might the aged, grey-haired warriors be of service in the battle if their strength had failed them. But according to their strength they joined the fray, even according as their valour would endure with honour among men, and their strength suffice to undergo the spear-strife. The army of these sturdy men was mustered, and ready to advance. Their banner rose on high, a gleaming column, and all abode there nigh unto the sea until their guiding beacon pierced the clouds, and shone upon their linden shields.

Then a herald rose before the warriors, a valiant leader, and, lifting up his shield, he bade the captains of the host make silence, that all the multitude might hear the words of their brave lord. The shepherd of the kingdom fain would speak with holy voice unto his legions. The leader of the host in words of worth addressed them:

"Be not afraid though Pharaoh leadeth hither this mighty host of sword-men, a multitude of earls. Upon them all this day Almighty God will give requital by my hand, that they may live no longer to vex the tribes of Israel with woe. Ye shall not dread doomed armies and dead men. Their fleeting life hath run unto the end. The knowledge of God hath vanished from your hearts. I give you better counsel, to serve the God of glory, and pray the Lord of life for victory and grace and safety, wherever ye may journey. He is the Eternal God of Abraham, Creation's Lord, magnanimous and mighty, who with His strong hand guardeth all this host."

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Then the lord of men spake with a loud voice before the multitude and said: "Look now, dearest of people, with your eyes and behold a marvel! In my right hand grasping this green rod I smote the ocean depths. The waves rise up; the waters form a rampart-wall. The sea is thrust aside. The ways are dry: grey army-roads, ancient foundations (never have I heard in all the world that men before set foot thereon), shining plains, imprisoned deep sea-bottoms over which of old the great waves foamed. The south wind, breath of the ocean, hath driven them back. The sea is cleft asunder; the ebbing waters spewed up sand. Well I know Almighty God hath showed you mercy, ye bronze-clad earls. Most haste is best now, that ye may escape the clutch of foes since God hath reared a rampart of the red sea-streams. These walls are fairly buildd to the roof of heaven, a wondrous wave-road.

And after these words the multitude arose, the host of the valiant.

The sea lay tranquil. Upon the sand the legions raised their standards and shining linden shields. And over against the Israelites the wall of water stood firm and upright for the space of one whole day. Of one mind was that company of earls. The wall of water shielded them with sure defence. In no wise did they scorn their holy leader's counsels as the time for deeds drew near, when the words of their well-loved lord were ended, and the voice of his eloquence was still.

The fourth tribe led the way, a throng of warriors, marching through the sea upon the green sea-bottom. The tribe of Judah trod that unknown road alone, before their kinsmen, and God Almighty gave them great reward for that day's work, granting them glory of triumphant deeds, that they might have dominion over kingdoms and sway their kinsmen.

As they descended on the ocean-bottom that mighty tribe had lifted up their standard mid the spear-host, high above their shields their battle ensign, a golden lion, bravest of beasts. Not long would they endure oppression by the lord of any people while they might live and lift their spears to battle. In the van were strife and stubborn hand-play, warriors valiant in the weapon-struggle, fearless fighters, bloody wounds and clash of helmets, onrush of a battle-host, as Judah's sons advanced.

Behind that army proudly marched the seamen, sons of Reuben; the vikings bore their bucklers over the salt sea-marsh, a multitude of men, a mighty legion, advancing unafraid. For his sin's sake Reuben yielded his dominion and marched behind his kinsmen. From him his brother took his right as first-born in the tribe, his eminence and wealth. Yet was he ready.

And after them with thronging bands the sons of Simeon marched, the third division. Banners waved above the marching warriors; with flashing spears the battle troop pressed on. Over the ocean's bosom dawn arose, God's beacon, radiant morning. The multitude went forth, the host advanced, one mail-clad band behind another. And one man only led this mighty folk, tribe after tribe, upon their march beneath the pillar of cloud, whereby he won renown. And each observed the right of nations and the rank of earls, as Moses gave them bidding.

One father had they all, one of the patriarchs, a well-loved leader, wise of heart and dear unto his kinsmen, who held the landright and begat a line of valiant men, the tribe of Israel, a holy race, God's own peculiar people. So ancient writers tell us in their wisdom, who best have known the lineage of men, their kinship and descent.

Noah, the great prince, sailed over unknown waters, deepest of floods that ever came on earth, and his three sons with him. Within his heart he cherished holy faith. Wherefore he steered across the ocean streams the richest treasure whereof I ever heard. To save the life of all the tribes of earth the wise sea-prince had numbered out a lasting remnant, a first generation, male and female, of every living kind that brought forth offspring, more various than men now know. And likewise in the bosom of their ship they bore the seed of every growing thing that men enjoy beneath the heavens.

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Now Abraham's father, as the wise men tell us, was ninth from Noah in lineage and descent. This is the Abraham the God of angels named with a name, and gave the holy tribes into his keeping, far and near, and made him mighty over nations. He lived in exile. Thereafter, at the Holy One's behest, he took the lad, most dear of all to him, and they two, son and father, climbed together a high land unto the hill of Sion. And there, so men have heard, they found a covenant and holy pledge, and saw God's glory. And there, in after years, the son of David, the great king, the wisest of all earthly princes, according to the teaching of the prophets, built a temple unto God, a holy fane, the holiest and highest and most famous among men, the greatest and most splendid of all temples the sons of men have built upon the earth.

Abraham took Isaac, his son, and went to the place appointed, and kindled the altar flame. The first of murderers was not more doomed. As a bequest to men he would have sacrificed his well-loved son with fire and flame, his only heir on earth, the best of children, the lasting hope and comfort of his life, for which he long had waited. The far-famed man laid hand upon the lad and drew his ancient sword (loud rang the blade), and showed he held his son's life not more dear than to obey the King of heaven. Up rose the earl. He would have slain his son, and put the lad to death with blood-red blade, if God had not withheld him. The Glorious Father would not take his son in holy sacrifice, but laid His hand upon him. And out of heaven a restraining Voice, a Voice of glory, spake, and said to him:

"Abraham! Put not the lad, thy son, to death, nor slay him with the sword! The Lord of all hath proven thee, and truth is known, that thou hast kept the covenant with God, a faithful compact. And that shall be to thee an everlasting peace through all the days of thy life for ever. Doth the son of man require a greater pledge? Heaven and earth may not cover the words of His glory, which are ampler and greater than the regions of earth may include, the orb of the world, and the heavens above, the ocean depths and the murmuring air. The King of angels and Wielder of fates, Lord of hosts, Dispenser of victory, sweareth an oath by His life, that men on earth with all their wisdom shall never know the number of thy tribe and kinsmen, shield-bearing men, to tell it truly, except someone shall grow so wise of heart that he alone may number all the stones on earth and stars in heaven, sand of the sea-dunes, and salt waves of the sea. But thy tribe, the best of peoples, free-born of their fathers, shall dwell in the land of Canaan between the two seas even unto the nations of Egypt."... [Gap in the manuscript, probably of one leaf] Then all that folk was smitten with terror fear of the flood fell on their wretched hearts. The great sea threatened death. The sloping hills were soaked with blood; the sea spewed gore. In the deep was uproar, the waves were filled with weapons; a death-mist rose. The Egyptians turned and fled away in fear, perceiving their peril. They were shaken with horror and fain to reach their homes. Their boasting was humbled.

The dreadful rushing sea swept over them. Nor did any of that army come ever again to their homes, but Fate cut off retreat and locked them in the sea.

Where before lay open roads the ocean raged. The host was overwhelmed. The seas flowed forth; an uproar rose to heaven, a moan of mighty legions. There rose a great cry of the doomed, and over them the air grew dark. Blood dyed the deep. The walls of water were shattered; the greatest of sea-deaths lashed the heavens. Brave princes died in throngs. At the sea's end hope of return had vanished away.

War-shields flashed. The wall of water, the mighty sea-stream, rushed over the heroes. The multitude was fettered fast in death, deprived of escape, cunningly bound. The ocean-sands awaited the doom ordained when the flowing billows, the ice-cold, wandering sea with its salt waves, a naked messenger of ill, a hostile warrior smiting down its foes, should come again to seek its ancient bed.

The blue air was defiled with blood. The roaring ocean menaced the march of the seamen with terror of death, till the just God swept the warriors away by Moses' hand. The flood foamed, hunting them afar, bearing them off in its deadly embrace. The doomed men died. The sea fell on the land; the skies were shaken. The watery ramparts crumbled, the great waves broke, the towering walls of water melted away, when the Mighty Lord of heaven with holy hand smote the warriors and that haughty race. They could not cheek the onrush of the sea, nor the fury of

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the ocean–flood, but it destroyed the multitude in shrieking terror. The raging ocean rose on high; its waters passed over them. A madness of fear was upon them; death–wounds bled. The high walls, fashioned by the hand of God, fell in upon the marching army.

With ancient sword the foamy–bosomed ocean smote down the watery wall, the unprotecting ramparts, and at the blow of death the great host fell asleep, a sinful throng. Fast shut in they lost their lives, an army pale with terror of the flood, when the brown waste of waters, the raging waves, broke over them. The flower of Egypt perished when the host of Pharaoh, a mighty multitude, was drowned. The foe of God discovered as he sank that the Lord of the ocean–floods was mightier than he, and, terrible in wrath, with deadly power would end the battle.

The Egyptians won a bitter recompense for that day's work. Never came any survivor of all that countless host unto his home again to tell of his journey or rehearse to the wives of heroes, throughout the cities, the grievous tidings, the death of their treasure–wardens; but a mighty sea–death came upon them all and swallowed their legions, and slew their heralds, and humbled their boasting. For they had striven against God!

Then on the shore of the sea Moses, the noble–hearted, preached to the Israelites, in holy words, eternal wisdom and enduring counsels.

They name it the day's work! And still men find in Scripture every law which God, in words of truth, gave Moses on that journey. If life's interpreter, the radiant soul within the breast, will unlock with the keys of the spirit this lasting good, that which is dark shall be made clear, and counsel shall go forth. It hath the words of wisdom in its keeping, earnestly teaching the heart, that we may not lack the fellowship of God, or mercy of our Lord. He giveth us, as learned writers say, the better and more lasting joys of heaven.

This earthly joy is fleeting, cursed with sin, apportioned unto exiles, a little time of wretched waiting. Homeless we tarry at this inn with sorrow, mourning in spirit, mindful of the house of pain beneath the earth wherein are fire and the worm, the pit of every evil ever open. So now arch–sinners win old age or early death; then cometh the Day of Judgment, the greatest of all glories in the world, a day of wrath upon the deeds of men. The Lord Himself, in the assembly, shall judge the multitude. Then shall He lead the souls of the righteous, blessed spirits, to heaven above, wherein are light and life and joy of bliss. In blessedness that host shall praise the Lord of hosts, the King of glory, for ever and for ever.

So spake the mildest of men, in a loud voice, mindful of counsel, and made great in strength. In silence the host awaited his fixed will, perceiving the wonder, the hero's words of goodly wisdom. And he spake unto the throng and said:

"Mighty is this multitude and great our Leader, a strong Support who governeth our march. He hath given the tribes of Canaan into our hands, their cities and treasure, and wide–stretching realms. If ye will keep His holy precepts, the Lord of angels will fulfil the promise which He swore to our forefathers, in days of old that ye shall vanquish every foe and hold in victory the banquet halls of heroes between the two seas. Great shall be your fortune!"

And at these words the host was glad. The trumpets sang their song of triumph, and banners tossed to strains of joyous music. The folk had reached the land. The pillar of glory had led the host, the holy legions, under God's sheltering hand. They rejoiced that their lives were saved from the clutch of the foe, though boldly had those warriors ventured under the roof of the waves. They beheld the walls upstanding. All the seas seemed bloody unto them through which they bore their armour.

They rejoiced with a song of battle that they were safe. The army–legions lifted up their voice and praised the Lord for that great work. The mighty host in chorus, man and maiden, sang psalms and battle anthems, with reverent voices chanting all these wonders.

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Then could be seen on the shore of the sea African maidens adorned with gold. They raised their hands in thanks for their deliverance; they were blithe beholding their safety; they took heed of the spoils; their bonds were broken. On the sea-shore they dealt out the booty among the standards, ancient treasure and raiment and shields. They divided the gold and the woven cloth, the treasure of Joseph, the riches of men. But their foes, the greatest of armies, lay still in that place of death.