

## **THE BALLAD OF THE BATTLE OF GIBEON**

Five kings rule o'er the Amorite, Mighty as fear and old as night; Swathed with unguent and gold and jewel, Waxed they merry and fat and cruel. Zedek of Salem, a terror and glory, Whose face was hid while his robes were gory; And Hoham of Hebron, whose loathly face is Heavy and dark o'er the ruin of races; And Piram of Jarmuth, drunk with strange wine, Who dreamed he had fashioned all stars that shine; And Debir of Eglon wild, without pity, Who raged like a plague in the midst of his city; And Japhia of Lachish, a fire that flameth, Who did in the daylight what no man nameth.

These five kings said one to another, 'King unto king o'er the world is brother, Seeing that now, for a sign and a wonder, A red eclipse and a tongue of thunder, A shape and a finger of desolation, Is come against us a kingless nation. Gibeon hath failed us: it were not good That a man remember where Gibeon stood.' Then Gibeon sent to our captain, crying, 'Son of Nun, let a shaft be flying, For unclean birds are gathering greedily; Slack not thy hand, but come thou speedily. Yea, we are lost save thou maintain'st us, For the kings of the mountains are gathered against us.'

Then to our people spake the Deliverer, 'Gibeon is high, yet a host may shiver her; Gibeon hath sent to me crying for pity, For the lords of the cities encompass the city With chariot and banner and bowman and lancer, And I swear by the living God I will answer. Gird you, O Israel, quiver and javelin, Shield and sword for the road we travel in; Verily, as I have promised, pay I Life unto Gibeon, death unto Ai.'

Sudden and still as a bolt shot right Up on the city we went by night. Never a bird of the air could say, 'This was the children of Israel's way.'

Only the hosts sprang up from sleeping, Saw from the heights a dark stream sweeping; Sprang up straight as a great shout stung them, And heard the Deliverer's war-cry among them, Heard under cupola, turret, and steeple The awful cry of the kingless people.

Started the weak of them, shouted the strong of them, Crashed we a thunderbolt into the throng of them, Blindly with heads bent, and shields forced before us, We heard the dense roar of the strife closing o'er us. And drunk with the crash of the song that it sung them, We drove the great spear-blade in God's name among them.

Redder and redder the sword-flash fell. Our eyes and our nostrils were hotter than hell; Till full all the crest of the spear-surge shocking us, Hoham of Hebron cried out mocking us, 'Nay, what need of the war-sword's plying, Out of the desert the dust comes flying. A little red dust, if the wind be blowing-- Who shall reckon of its coming or going?' Back the Deliverer spake as a clarion, 'Mock at thy slaves, thou eater of carrion! Laughest thou at us, in thy kingly clowning, We, that laughed upon Ramases frowning. We that stood up proud, unpardoned, When his face was dark and his heart was hardened? Pharaoh we knew and his steeds, not faster Than the word of the Lord in thine ear, O master.

Sheer through the turban his wantons wove him, Clean to the skull the Deliverer clove him; And the two hosts reeled at the sign appalling, As the great king fell like a great house falling.

Loudly we shouted, and living and dying. Bore them all backward with strength and strong crying; And Caleb struck Zedek hard at the throat, And Japhia of Lachish Zebulon smote. The war-swords and axes were clashing and groaning, The fallen were fighting and foaming and moaning; The war-spears were breaking, the war-horns were braying, Ere the hands of the slayers were sated with slaying. And deep in the grasses grown gory and sodden, The treaders of all men were trampled and trodden; And over them, routed and reeled like cattle, High over the turn of the tide of the battle, High over noises that deafen and cover us, Rang the Deliverer's voice out over us.

'Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon, Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon! Shout thou, people, a cry like thunder, For the kings of the earth are broken asunder. Now we have said as the thunder says it, Something is stronger than strength and slays it. Now we have written for all time later, Five kings are great, yet a law is greater. Stare, O sun! in thine own great glory, This is the turn of the whole world's story. Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon, Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!

'Smite! amid spear-blades blazing and breaking. More than we know of is rising and making. Stab with the javelin, crash with the car! Cry! for we know not the thing that we are. Stand, O sun! that in horrible patience Smiled on the smoke and the slaughter of nations. Thou shalt grow sad for a little crying, Thou shalt be darkened for one man's dying-- Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon, Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!

After the battle was broken and spent Up to the hill the Deliverer went, Flung up his arms to the storm-clouds flying, And cried unto Israel, mightily

crying, 'Come up, O warriors! come up, O brothers! Tribesmen and herdsmen, maidens and mothers; The bondman's son and the bondman's daughter, The hewer of wood and the drawer of water, He that carries and he that brings, And set your foot on the neck of kings.'

This is the story of Gibeon fight-- Where we smote the lords of the Amorite; Where the banners of princes with slaughter were sodden. And the beards of seers in the rank grass trodden; Where the trees were wrecked by the wreck of cars, And the reek of the red field blotted the stars; Where the dead heads dropped from the swords that sever, Because His mercy endureth for ever.