

LA LÉGENDE DES SIÈCLES.

CAIN.

("Lorsque avec ses enfants Cain se fût enfui.")

[Bk. II]

Then, with his children, clothed in skins of brutes,
Dishevelled, livid, rushing through the storm,
Cain fled before Jehovah. As night fell
The dark man reached a mount in a great plain,
And his tired wife and his sons, out of breath,
Said: "Let us lie down on the earth and sleep."
Cain, sleeping not, dreamed at the mountain foot.
Raising his head, in that funereal heaven
He saw an eye, a great eye, in the night
Open, and staring at him in the gloom.
"I am too near," he said, and tremblingly woke up
His sleeping sons again, and his tired wife,
And fled through space and darkness. Thirty days
He went, and thirty nights, nor looked behind;
Pale, silent, watchful, shaking at each sound;

No rest, no sleep, till he attained the strand
Where the sea washes that which since was Asshur.
"Here pause," he said, "for this place is secure;
Here may we rest, for this is the world's end."
And he sat down; when, lo! in the sad sky,
The selfsame Eye on the horizon's verge,
And the wretch shook as in an ague fit.
"Hide me!" he cried; and all his watchful sons,
Their finger on their lip, stared at their sire.
Cain said to Jabal (father of them that dwell
In tents): "Spread here the curtain of thy tent,"
And they spread wide the floating canvas roof,
And made it fast and fixed it down with lead.
"You see naught now," said Zillah then, fair child
The daughter of his eldest, sweet as day.
But Cain replied, "That Eye--I see it still."
And Jubal cried (the father of all those
That handle harp and organ): "I will build
A sanctuary;" and he made a wall of bronze,
And set his sire behind it. But Cain moaned,
"That Eye is glaring at me ever." Henoah cried:
"Then must we make a circle vast of towers,
So terrible that nothing dare draw near;
Build we a city with a citadel;
Build we a city high and close it fast."
Then Tubal Cain (instructor of all them

That work in brass and iron) built a tower--
Enormous, superhuman. While he wrought,
His fiery brothers from the plain around
Hunted the sons of Enoch and of Seth;
They plucked the eyes out of whoever passed,
And hurled at even arrows to the stars.
They set strong granite for the canvas wall,
And every block was clamped with iron chains.
It seemed a city made for hell. Its towers,
With their huge masses made night in the land.
The walls were thick as mountains. On the door
They graved: "Let not God enter here." This done,
And having finished to cement and build
In a stone tower, they set him in the midst.
To him, still dark and haggard, "Oh, my sire,
Is the Eye gone?" quoth Zillah tremblingly.
But Cain replied: "Nay, it is even there."
Then added: "I will live beneath the earth,
As a lone man within his sepulchre.
I will see nothing; will be seen of none."
They digged a trench, and Cain said: "'Tis enow,"
As he went down alone into the vault;
But when he sat, so ghost-like, in his chair,
And they had closed the dungeon o'er his head,
The Eye was in the tomb and fixed on Cain.

BOAZ ASLEEP.

("Booz s'était couché.")

[Bk. II. vi.]

At work within his barn since very early,
Fairly tired out with toiling all the day,
Upon the small bed where he always lay
Boaz was sleeping by his sacks of barley.

Barley and wheat-fields he possessed, and well,
Though rich, loved justice; wherefore all the flood
That turned his mill-wheels was unstained with mud
And in his smithy blazed no fire of hell.

His beard was silver, as in April all
A stream may be; he did not grudge a stook.
When the poor gleaner passed, with kindly look,
Quoth he, "Of purpose let some handfuls fall."

He walked his way of life straight on and plain,
With justice clothed, like linen white and clean,
And ever rustling towards the poor, I ween,
Like public fountains ran his sacks of grain.

Good master, faithful friend, in his estate
Frugal yet generous, beyond the youth
He won regard of woman, for in sooth
The young man may be fair--the old man's great.

Life's primal source, unchangeable and bright,
The old man entereth, the day eterne;
And in the young man's eye a flame may burn,
But in the old man's eye one seeth light.

As Jacob slept, or Judith, so full deep
Slept Boaz 'neath the leaves. Now it betided,
Heaven's gate being partly open, that there glided
A fair dream forth, and hovered o'er his sleep.

And in his dream to heaven, the blue and broad,
Right from his loins an oak tree grew amain.
His race ran up it far, like a long chain;
Below it sung a king, above it died a God.

Whereupon Boaz murmured in his heart,
"The number of my years is past fourscore:
How may this be? I have not any more,
Or son, or wife; yea, she who had her part.

"In this my couch, O Lord! is now in Thine;
And she, half living, I half dead within,
Our beings still commingle and are twin,
It cannot be that I should found a line!

"Youth hath triumphal mornings; its days bound
From night, as from a victory. But such
A trembling as the birch-tree's to the touch
Of winter is an eld, and evening closes round.

"I bow myself to death, as lone to meet
The water bow their fronts athirst." He said.
The cedar feeleth not the rose's head,
Nor he the woman's presence at his feet!

For while he slept, the Moabiteess Ruth
Lay at his feet, expectant of his waking.
He knowing not what sweet guile she was making;
She knowing not what God would have in sooth.

Asphodel scents did Gilgal's breezes bring--
Through nuptial shadows, questionless, full fast
The angels sped, for momentarily there passed
A something blue which seemed to be a wing.

Silent was all in Jezreel and Ur--

The stars were glittering in the heaven's dusk meadows.
Far west among those flowers of the shadows.
The thin clear crescent lustrous over her,

Made Ruth raise question, looking through the bars
Of heaven, with eyes half-oped, what God, what comer
Unto the harvest of the eternal summer,
Had flung his golden hook down on the field of stars.

BP. ALEXANDER.

SONG OF THE GERMAN LANZKNECHT

("Sonnex, clarions!")

[Bk. VI. vii.]

Flourish the trumpet! and rattle the drum!
The Reiters are mounted! the Reiters will come!

When our bullets cease singing
And long swords cease ringing
 On backplates of fearsomest foes in full flight,
We'll dig up their dollars
To string for girls' collars--
 They'll jingle around them before it is night!
 When flourish the trumpets, etc.

We're the Emperor's winners
Of right royal dinners,
 Where cities are served up and flanked by estates,
While we wallow in claret,
Knowing not how to spare it,
 Though beer is less likely to muddle our pates--
 While flourish the trumpets, etc.

Gods of battle! red-handed!

Wise it was to have banded

Such arms as are these for embracing of gain!

Hearken to each war-vulture

Crying, "Down with all culture

Of land or religion!" Hoch! to our refrain

Of flourish the trumpets, etc.

Give us "bones of the devil"

To exchange in our revel

The ingot, the gem, and yellow doubloon;

Coronets are but playthings--

We reckon not who say things

When the Reiters have ridden to death! none too soon!--

To flourish of trumpet and rattle of drum,

The Reiters will finish as firm as they come!

H.L.W.

KING CANUTE.

("Un jour, Kanut mourut.")

[Bk. X. i.]

King Canute died.[1] Encoffined he was laid.
Of Aarhus came the Bishop prayers to say,
And sang a hymn upon his tomb, and held
That Canute was a saint--Canute the Great,
That from his memory breathed celestial perfume,
And that they saw him, they the priests, in glory,
Seated at God's right hand, a prophet crowned.

I.

Evening came,
And hushed the organ in the holy place,
And the priests, issuing from the temple doors,
Left the dead king in peace. Then he arose,
Opened his gloomy eyes, and grasped his sword,
And went forth loftily. The massy walls
Yielded before the phantom, like a mist.

There is a sea where Aarhus, Altona,

And Elsinore's vast domes and shadowy towers
Glass in deep waters. Over this he went
Dark, and still Darkness listened for his foot
Inaudible, itself being but a dream.
Straight to Mount Savo went he, gnawed by time,
And thus, "O mountain buffeted of storms,
Give me of thy huge mantle of deep snow
To frame a winding-sheet." The mountain knew him,
Nor dared refuse, and with his sword Canute
Cut from his flank white snow, enough to make
The garment he desired, and then he cried,
"Old mountain! death is dumb, but tell me thou
The way to God." More deep each dread ravine
And hideous hollow yawned, and sadly thus
Answered that hoar associate of the clouds:
"Spectre, I know not, I am always here."
Canute departed, and with head erect,
All white and ghastly in his robe of snow,
Went forth into great silence and great night
By Iceland and Norway. After him
Gloom swallowed up the universe. He stood
A sovran kingdomless, a lonely ghost
Confronted with Immensity. He saw
The awful Infinite, at whose portal pale
Lightning sinks dying; Darkness, skeleton
Whose joints are nights, and utter Formlessness

Moving confusedly in the horrible dark
Inscrutable and blind. No star was there,
Yet something like a haggard gleam; no sound
But the dull tide of Darkness, and her dumb
And fearful shudder. "'Tis the tomb," he said,
"God is beyond!" Three steps he took, then cried:
'Twas deathly as the grave, and not a voice
Responded, nor came any breath to sway
The snowy mantle, with unsullied white
Emboldening the spectral wanderer.
Sudden he marked how, like a gloomy star,
A spot grew broad upon his livid robe;
Slowly it widened, raying darkness forth;
And Canute proved it with his spectral hands
It was a drop of blood.

R. GARNETT.

II.

But he saw nothing; space was black--no sound.
"Forward," said Canute, raising his proud head.
There fell a second stain beside the first,
Then it grew larger, and the Cimbrian chief
Stared at the thick vague darkness, and saw naught.

Still as a bloodhound follows on his track,
Sad he went on. 'There fell a third red stain
On the white winding-sheet. He had never fled;
Howbeit Canute forward went no more,
But turned on that side where the sword arm hangs.
A drop of blood, as if athwart a dream,
Fell on the shroud, and reddened his right hand.
Then, as in reading one turns back a page,
A second time he changed his course, and turned
To the dim left. There fell a drop of blood.
Canute drew back, trembling to be alone,
And wished he had not left his burial couch.
But, when a blood-drop fell again, he stopped,
Stooped his pale head, and tried to make a prayer.
Then fell a drop, and the prayer died away
In savage terror. Darkly he moved on,
A hideous spectre hesitating, white,
And ever as he went, a drop of blood
Implacably from the darkness broke away
And stained that awful whiteness. He beheld
Shaking, as doth a poplar in the wind,
Those stains grow darker and more numerous:
Another, and another, and another.
They seem to light up that funereal gloom,
And mingling in the folds of that white sheet,
Made it a cloud of blood. He went, and went,

And still from that unfathomable vault
The red blood dropped upon him drop by drop,
Always, for ever--without noise, as though
From the black feet of some night-gibbeted corpse.
Alas! Who wept those formidable tears?
The Infinite!--Toward Heaven, of the good
Attainable, through the wild sea of night,
That hath not ebb nor flow, Canute went on,
And ever walking, came to a closed door,
That from beneath showed a mysterious light.
Then he looked down upon his winding-sheet,
For that was the great place, the sacred place,
That was a portion of the light of God,
And from behind that door Hosannas rang.
The winding-sheet was red, and Canute stopped.
This is why Canute from the light of day
Draws ever back, and hath not dared appear
Before the Judge whose face is as the sun.
This is why still remaineth the dark king
Out in the night, and never having power
To bring his robe back to its first pure state,
But feeling at each step a blood-drop fall,
Wanders eternally 'neath the vast black heaven.

Dublin University Magazine

[Footnote 1: King Canute slew his old father, Sweno, to obtain the crown.]

THE BOY-KING'S PRAYER.

("Le cheval galopait toujours.")

[Bk. XV. ii. 10.]

The good steed flew o'er river and o'er plain,
Till far away,--no need of spur or rein.
The child, half rapture, half solicitude,
Looks back anon, in fear to be pursued;
Shakes lest some raging brother of his sire
Leap from those rocks that o'er the path aspire.

On the rough granite bridge, at evening's fall,
The white horse paused by Compostella's wall,
('Twas good St. James that reared those arches tall,
Through the dim mist stood out each belfry dome,
And the boy hailed the paradise of home.

Close to the bridge, set on high stage, they meet
A Christ of stone, the Virgin at his feet.
A taper lighted that dear pardoning face,
More tender in the shade that wrapped the place,
And the child stayed his horse, and in the shine
Of the wax taper knelt down at the shrine.

"O, my good God! O, Mother Maiden sweet!"
He said, "I was the worm beneath men's feet;
My father's brethren held me in their thrall,
But Thou didst send the Paladin of Gaul,
O Lord! and show'dst what different spirits move
The good men and the evil; those who love
And those who love not. I had been as they,
But Thou, O God! hast saved both life and soul to-day.
I saw Thee in that noble knight; I saw
Pure light, true faith, and honor's sacred law,
My Father,--and I learnt that monarchs must
Compassionate the weak, and unto all be just.
O Lady Mother! O dear Jesus! thus
Bowed at the cross where Thou didst bleed for us,
I swear to hold the truth that now I learn,
Leal to the loyal, to the traitor stern,
And ever just and nobly mild to be,
Meet scholar of that Prince of Chivalry;
And here Thy shrine bear witness, Lord, for me."

The horse of Roland, hearing the boy tell
His vow, looked round and spoke: "O King, 'tis well!"
Then on the charger mounted the child-king,
And rode into the town, while all the bells 'gan ring.

