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Chapter XIX.

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE FALLEN STAR; OR, THE HISTORY OF A FALSE RELIGION.

“AND the STARS sate, each on his ruby throne, and watched with sleepless eyes upon the world. It was the night ushering in the new year, a night on which every Star receives from the Archangel that then visits the uni-

versal galaxy, its peculiar charge. The destinies of men and empires are then portioned forth for the coming year, and, unconsciously to ourselves, our fates become minioned to the stars. A hushed and solemn night is that in which the dark Gates of Time open to receive the ghost of the Dead Year, and the young and radiant Stranger rushes forth from the clouded chasms of Eternity. On that night, it is said, that there is to the Spirits that we see not, a privilege and a power; the dead are troubled in their forgotten graves, and men feast and laugh, while demon and angel are contending for their doom.

It was night in heaven; all was unutterably silent, the music of the spheres had paused, and not a sound came from the angels of the stars; and they who sate upon those shining thrones were three thousand and ten, each resembling each. Eternal youth clothed their radiant limbs with celestial beauty, and on their faces was written the dread of calm, that fearful stillness which feels not, sympathises not with the dooms over which it broods. War, tempest, pestilence, the rise of empires, and their fall, they ordain, they compass, unexultant and uncompassionate. The fell and thrilling crimes that stalk abroad when the world sleeps, the parricide with his stealthy step, and horrent brow, and lifted knife; the unwifed mother that glides out and looks behind, and behind, and shudders, and casts her babe upon the river, and hears the wail, and pities not—the splash, and does not tremble;—these the starred kings behold—to these they lead the unconscious step; but the guilt blanches not their lustre, neither doth remorse wither their unwrin-

kled youth. Each Star wore a kingly diadem; round the loins of each was a graven belt, graven with many and mighty signs; and the foot of each was on a burning ball, and the right arm drooped over the knee as they bent down from their thrones; they moved not a limb or feature, save the finger of the right hand, which ever and anon moved slowly pointing, and regulated the fates of men as the hand of the dial speaks the career of time.

One only of the three thousand and ten wore not the same aspect as his crowned brethren; a Star, smaller than the rest, and less luminous; the countenance of this Star was not impressed with the awful calmness of the others; but there were sullenness and discontent upon his mighty brow.

And this Star said to himself,—“Behold! I am created less glorious than my fellows, and the Archangel apportions not to me the same lordly destinies. Not for me are the dooms of kings and bards, the rulers of empires, or, yet nobler, the swayers and harmonists of souls. Sluggish are the spirits and base the lot of the men I am ordained to lead through a dull life to a fameless grave. And wherefore?—is it mine own fault, or is it the fault which is not mine, that I was woven of beams less glorious than my brethren? Lo! when the Archangel comes, I will bow not my crowned head to his decrees. I will speak, as the ancestral Lucifer before me: *he* rebelled because of his glory, *I* because of my obscurity; *he* from the ambition of pride, and *I* from its discontent.”

And while the Star was thus communing with himself,

the upward heavens were parted as by a long river of light, and adown that stream swiftly, and without sound, sped the Archangel Visiter of the Stars; his vast limbs floated in the liquid lustre, and his outspread wings, each plume the glory of a sun, bore him noiselessly along; but thick clouds veiled his lustre from the eyes of mortals, and while above all was bathed in the serenity of his splendour, tempest and storm broke below over the children of the earth: "He bowed the heavens and came down, and darkness was under his feet."

And the stillness on the faces of the Stars became yet more still, and the awfulness was humbled into awe. Right above their thrones paused the course of the Archangel; and his wings stretched from east to west, overshadowing, with the shadow of light, the immensity of space. Then forth, in the shining stillness, rolled the dread music of his voice: and, fulfilling the heraldry of God, to each Star he appointed the duty and the charge, and each Star bowed his head yet lower as it received the fiat, while his throne rocked and trembled at the Majesty of the Word. But at last, when each of the Brighter Stars had, in succession, received the mandate, and the viceroyalty over the nations of the earth, the purple and diadems of kings;—the Archangel addressed the lesser Star as he sate apart from his fellows:—

"Behold," said the Archangel, "the rude tribes of the north, the fishermen of the river that flows beneath, and the hunter of the forests, that darken the mountain

tops with verdure! these be thy charge, and their destinies thy care. Nor deem thou, O Star of the sullen beams, that thy duties are less glorious than the duties of thy brethren; for the peasant is not less to thy master and mine than the monarch; nor doth the doom of empires rest more upon the sovereign than on the herd. The passions and the heart are the dominion of the Stars, a mighty realm;—nor less mighty beneath the hide that garbs the shepherd, than the jewelled robes of the eastern kings.”

Then the Star lifted his pale front from his breast, and answered the Archangel:—

“Lo!” he said, “ages have past, and each year thou hast appointed me to the same ignoble charge. Release me, I pray thee, from the duties that I scorn; or, if thou wilt that the lowlier race of men be my charge, give unto me the charge not of many, but of one, and suffer me to breathe unto him the desire that spurns the valleys of life, and ascends its steeps. If the humble are given to me, let there be amongst them one whom I may lead on the mission that shall abase the proud; for, behold, oh Appointer of the Stars, as I have sate for uncounted years upon my solitary throne, brooding over the things beneath, my spirit hath gathered wisdom from the changes that shift below. Looking upon the tribes of earth, I have seen how the multitude are swayed, and tracked the steps that lead weakness into power; and fain would I be the ruler of one who, if abased, shall aspire to rule.”

As a sudden cloud over the face of noon was the change on the brow of the Archangel.

“Proud and melancholy Star,” said the Herald, “thy wish would war with the courses of the invisible DESTINY, that, throned far above, sways and harmonises all; the source from which the lesser rivers of fate are eternally gushing through the heart of the universe of things. Thinkest thou that thy wisdom of itself can lead the peasant to become a king?”

And the crowned Star gazed undauntedly on the face of the Archangel, and answered,

“Yea!—grant me but one trial!”

Ere the Archangel could reply, the furthest centre of the heaven was rent as by a thunderbolt; and the Divine herald covered his face with his hands, and a voice low and sweet, and mild with the consciousness of unquestionable power, spoke forth to the repining Star.

“The time has arrived when thou mayest have thy wish. Below thee, upon yon solitary plain, sits a mortal, gloomy as thyself, who, born under thy influence, may be moulded to thy will.”

The voice ceased as the voice of a dream. Silence was over the seas of space, and the Archangel, once more borne aloft, slowly soared away into the farther heaven, to promulgate the Divine bidding to the Stars of far distant worlds. But the soul of the discontented Star exulted within itself; and it said, “I will call forth a king from the valley of the herdsman, that shall trample on the kings subject to my fellows, and render the charge of the contemned Star more glorious than the minions of its favoured bre-

thren; thus shall I revenge neglect—thus shall I prove my claim hereafter to the heritage of the great of earth!”

* * * * *

At that time, though the world had rolled on for ages, and the pilgrimage of man had passed through various states of existence, which our dim traditionary knowledge has not preserved, yet the condition of our race in the northern hemisphere, was then what *we*, in our imperfect lore, have conceived to be among the earliest.

* * * * *

By a rude and vast pile of stones, the masonry of arts forgotten, a lonely man sate at midnight, gazing upon the heavens, a storm had just passed from the earth—the clouds had rolled away, and the high stars looked down upon the rapid waters of the Rhine; and no sound save the roar of the waves, and the dripping of the rain from the mighty trees, was heard around the ruined pile; the white sheep lay scattered on the plain, and slumber with them. He sate watching over the herd, lest the foes of a neighbouring tribe seized them unawares, and thus he communed with himself: “The king sits upon his throne, and is honoured by a warrior race, and the warrior exults in the trophies he has won; the step of the huntsman is bold upon the mountain

top, and his name is sung at night round the pine fires, by the lips of the bard; and the bard himself hath honour in the hall. But I, who belong not to the race of kings, and whose limbs can bound not to the rapture of war, nor scale the eyries of the eagle and the haunts of the swift stag; whose hand can string not the harp, and whose voice is harsh in the song; *I* have neither honour nor command, and men bow not the head as *I* pass along; yet do *I* feel within me the consciousness of a great power that should rule my species—not obey. My eye pierces the secret hearts of men—I see their thoughts ere their lips proclaim them; and *I* scorn, while *I* see, the weakness and the vices which *I* never shared—I laugh at the madness of the warrior—I mock within my soul at the tyranny of kings. Surely there is something in man's nature more fitted to command—more worthy of renown, than the sinews of the arm, or the swiftness of the feet, or the accident of birth!”

As Morven, the son of Osslah, thus mused within himself, still looking at the heavens, the solitary man beheld a Star suddenly shooting from its place, and speeding through the silent air, till it, as suddenly, paused, right over the midnight river, and facing the inmate of the pile of stones.

As he gazed upon the Star strange thoughts grew slowly over him. He drank, as it were, from its solemn aspect, the spirit of a great design. A dark cloud rapidly passing over the earth, snatched the Star from his sight; but left to his awakened mind the thoughts and the dim scheme that had come to him as he gazed.

When the sun arose one of his brethren relieved him of his charge over the herd, and he went away, but not to his father's home. Musingly he plunged into the dark and leafless recesses of the winter forest; and shaped, out of his wild thoughts, more palpably and clearly, the outline of his daring hope. While thus absorbed, he heard a great noise in the forest, and, fearful lest the hostile tribe of the Alrich might pierce that way, he ascended one of the loftiest pine trees, to whose perpetual verdure the winter had not denied the shelter he sought, and, concealed by its branches, he looked anxiously forth in the direction whence the noise had proceeded. And it came—it came, with a tramp and a crash, and a crushing tread upon the crunched boughs and matted leaves that strewed the soil—it came—it came, the monster that the world now holds no more—the mighty Mammoth of the North! Slowly it moved in its huge strength along, and its burning eyes glittered through the gloomy shade; its jaws, falling apart, showed the grinders with which it snapped asunder the young oaks of the forest; and the vast tusks, which curved downward to the midst of its massive limbs, glistened white and ghastly, curdling the blood of one destined hereafter to be the dreadest ruler of the men of that distant age.

The livid eyes of the monster fastened on the form of the herdsman, even amidst the thick darkness of the pine. It paused—it glared upon him—its jaws opened, and a low deep sound, as of gathering thunder, seemed to the son of Osslah as the knell of a dreadful grave. But after glaring

on him for some moments, it again, and calmly, pursued its terrible way, crashing the boughs as it marched along, till the last sound of its heavy tread died away upon his ear*.

Ere yet however Morven summoned the courage to descend the tree, he saw the shining of arms through the bare branches of the wood, and presently a small band of the hostile Alrich came into sight. He was perfectly hidden from them; and, listening as they passed him, he heard one say to another,—

“The night covers all things; why attack them by day?”

And he who seemed the chief of the band, answered,

“Right. To night, when they sleep in their city, we will upon them. Lo! they will be drenched in wine, and fall like sheep into our hands.”

“But where, O chief,” said a third of the band, “shall our men hide during the day? for there are many hunters among the youth of the Oestrich tribe, and they might see us in the forest unawares, and arm their race against our coming.”

“I have prepared for that,” answered the chief. “Is not the dark cavern of Oderlin at hand? Will it not shelter us from the eyes of the victims?”

Then the men laughed, and, shouting, they went their way adown the forest.

* *The critic* will perceive that this sketch of the beast, whose race has perished, is mainly intended to designate the remote period of the world in which the tale is cast.

When they were gone Morven cautiously descended, and, striking into a broad path, hastened to a vale that lay between the forest and the river in which was the city where the chief of his country dwelt. As he passed by the warlike men, giants in that day, who thronged the streets, (if streets they might be called,) their half garments parting from their huge limbs, the quiver at their backs, and the hunting spear in their hands, they laughed and shouted out, and, pointing to him, cried, "Morven, the woman, Morven, the cripple, what dost thou among men?"

For the son of Osslah was small in stature and of slender strength, and his step had halted from his birth; but he passed through the warriors unheedingly. At the outskirts of the city he came upon a tall pile in which some old men dwelt by themselves, and counselled the king when times of danger, or when the failure of the season, the famine or the drought, perplexed the ruler, and clouded the savage fronts of his warrior tribe.

They gave the counsels of experience, and when experience failed, they drew, in their believing ignorance, assurances and omens from the winds of heaven, the changes of the moon, and the flights of the wandering birds. Filled (by the voices of the elements, and the variety of mysteries which ever shift along the face of things, unsolved by the wonder which pauses not, the fear which believes, and that eternal reasoning of all experience, which assigns causes to effect) with the notion of superior powers, they assisted their ignorance, by the conjectures of their super-

stition. But as yet they knew no craft and practised no *voluntary* delusion; they trembled too much at the mysteries which had created their faith to seek to belie them. They counselled as they believed, and the bold dream had never dared to cross men thus worn and grey with age, of governing their warriors and their kings by the wisdom of deceit.

The son of Osslah entered the vast pile with a fearless step, and approached the place at the upper end of the hall where the old men sat in conclave.

"How, base-born and craven limbed," cried the eldest, who had been a noted warrior in his day; "darest thou enter unsummoned amidst the secret councils of the wise men? Knowest thou not, scatterling, that the penalty is death?"

"Slay me, if thou wilt," answered Morven, "but hear! As I sate last night in the ruined palace of our ancient kings, tending, as my father bade me, the sheep that grazed around, lest the fierce tribe of Alrich should descend unseen from the mountains upon the herd, a storm came darkly on, and when the storm had ceased, and I looked above on the sky, I saw a Star descend from its height towards me, and a voice from the Star said, 'Son of Osslah, leave thy herd and seek the council of the wise men, and say unto them, that they take thee as one of their number, or that sudden will be the destruction of them and theirs.' But I had courage to answer the voice, and I said, 'Mock not the poor son of the herdsman. Behold they will kill me if I utter so rash a word, for I am poor and valueless in the

eyes of the tribe of Oestrich, and the great in deeds and the grey of hair alone, sit in the council of the wise men.'

"Then the voice said, 'Do my bidding, and I will give thee a token that thou comest from the Powers that sway the seasons and sail upon the eagles of the winds. Say unto the wise men that this very night, if they refuse to receive thee of their band, evil shall fall upon them, and the morrow shall dawn in blood.'

"Then the voice ceased, and the cloud passed over the Star; and I communed with myself, and came, O dread fathers, mournfully unto you. For I feared that ye would smite me because of my bold tongue, and that ye would sentence me to the death, in that I asked what may scarce be given even to the sons of kings."

Then the grim elders looked one at the other, and marvelled much, nor knew they what answer they should make to the herdsman's son.

At length one of the wise men said, "Surely there must be truth in the son of Osslab, for he would not dare to falsify the great lights of Heaven. If he had given unto men the words of the Star, verily we might doubt the truth. But who would brave the vengeance of the Gods of Night?"

Then the elders shook their heads approvingly; but one answered and said—

"Shall we take the herdsman's son as our equal? No." The name of the man who thus answered was Darvan, and his words were pleasing to the elders.

But Morven spoke out: "Of a truth, O councillors of

kings, I look not to be an equal with yourselves. Enough if I tend the gates of your palace, and serve you as the son of Osslah may serve;" and he bowed his head humbly as he spoke.

Then said the chief of the elders, for he was wiser than the others, "But how wilt thou deliver us from the evil that is to come; doubtless the Star has informed thee of the service thou canst render to us if we take thee into our palace, as well as the ill that will fall on us if we refuse."

Morven answered meekly, "Surely, if thou acceptest thy servant, the Star will teach him that which may requite thee; but as yet he knows only what he has uttered."

Then the sages bade him withdraw, and they communed with themselves, and they differed much; but though fierce men, and bold at the war-cry of a human foe, they shuddered at the prophecy of a Star. So they resolved to take the son of Osslah, and suffer him to keep the gate of the council hall.

He heard their decree and bowed his head, and went to the gate, and sate down by it in silence.

And the sun went down in the west, and the first stars of the twilight began to glimmer, when Morven started from his seat, and a trembling appeared to seize his limbs. His lips foamed; an agony and a fear possessed him; he writhed as a man whom the spear of a foeman has pierced with a mortal wound, and suddenly fell upon his face on the stony earth.

The elders approached him; wondering, they lifted him

up. He slowly recovered as from a swoon ; his eyes rolled wildly.

“ Heard ye not the voice of the Star ? ” he said.

And the chief of the elders answered, “ Nay, we heard no sound.”

Then Morven sighed heavily.

“ To me only the word was given. Summon instantly, O councillors of the king, summon the armed men, and all the youth of the tribe, and let them take the sword and the spear, and follow thy servant. For lo ! the Star hath announced to him that the foe shall fall into our hands as the wild beast of the forests.”

The son of Osslah spoke with the voice of command, and the elders were amazed. “ Why pause ye ? ” he cried. “ Do the gods of the night lie ? On my head rest the peril if I deceive ye.”

Then the elders communed together ; and they went forth and summoned the men of arms, and all the young of the tribe ; and each man took the sword and the spear, and Morven also. And the son of Osslah walked first, still looking up at the Star ; and he motioned them to be silent and move with a stealthy step.

So they went through the thickest of the forest, till they came to the mouth of a great cave, overgrown with aged and matted trees, and it was called the cave of Oderlin, and he bade the leaders place the armed men on either side the cave, to the right and to the left, among the bushes.

So they watched silently till the night deepened, when

they heard a noise in the cave and the sound of feet, and forth came an armed man; and the spear of Morven pierced him, and he fell dead at the mouth of the cave. Another and another, and both fell! Then loud and long was heard the war-cry of Alrich, and forth poured, as a stream over a narrow bed, the river of armed men. And the sons of Oestrich fell upon them, and the foe were sorely perplexed and terrified by the suddenness of the battle and the darkness of the night; and there was a great slaughter.

And when the morning came, the children of Oestrich counted the slain, and found the leader of Alrich and the chief men of the tribe amongst them, and great was the joy thereof. So they went back in triumph to the city, and they carried the brave son of Osslah on their shoulders, and shouted forth "Glory to the servant of the Star."

And Morven dwelt in the council of the wise men.

Now the king of the tribe had one daughter, and she was stately amongst the women of the tribe, and fair to look upon. And Morven gazed upon her with the eyes of love, but he did not dare to speak.

Now the son of Osslah laughed secretly at the foolishness of men; he loved them not, for they had mocked him; he honoured them not, for he had blinded the wisest of their elders. He shunned their feasts and merriment, and lived apart and solitary. The austerity of his life increased the mysterious homage which his commune with the Stars had won him, and the boldest of the warriors bowed his head to the favourite of the gods.

One day he was wandering by the side of the river, and he saw a large bird of prey rise from the waters, and give chase to a hawk that had not yet gained the full strength of its wings. From his youth the solitary Morven had loved to watch, in the great forests and by the banks of the mighty stream, the habits of the things which nature has submitted to man; and looking now on the birds, he said to himself, "Thus is it ever; by cunning or by strength each thing wishes to master its kind." While thus moralising, the larger bird had stricken down the hawk, and it fell terrified and panting at his feet. Morven took the hawk in his hands, and the vulture shrieked above him, wheeling nearer and nearer to its protected prey; but Morven scared away the vulture, and placing the hawk in his bosom he carried it home, and tended it carefully, and fed it from his hand until it had regained its strength; and the hawk knew him, and followed him as a dog. And Morven said, smiling to himself, "Behold, the credulous fools around me put faith in the flight and motion of birds. I will teach this poor hawk to minister to my ends." So he tamed the bird, and tutored it according to its nature; but he concealed it carefully from others, and cherished it in secret.

The king of the country was old and like to die, and the eyes of the tribe were turned to his two sons, nor knew they which was the worthier to reign. And Morven passing through the forest one evening, saw the younger of the two, who was a great hunter, sitting mournfully under an oak, and looking with musing eyes upon the ground.

"Wherefore musest thou, O swift-footed Siror?" said the son of Osslah, "and wherefore art thou sad?"

"Thou canst not assist me," answered the Prince, sternly; "take thy way."

"Nay," answered Morven, thou knowest not what thou sayest; am I not the favourite of the Stars?"

"Away, I am no greybeard whom the approach of death makes doting; talk not to me of the Stars; I know only the things that my eye sees and my ear drinks in."

"Hush," said Morven, solemnly, and covering his face, "Hush!" lest the heavens avenge thy rashness. But, behold, the Stars have given unto me to pierce the secret hearts of others; and I can tell thee the thoughts of thine."

"Speak out, baseborn."

"Thou art the younger of two, and thy name is less known in war than the name of thy brother; yet wouldst thou desire to be set over his head, and to sit on the high seat of thy father."

The young man turned pale. "Thou hast truth in thy lips," said he, with a faltering voice.

"Not from me, but from the Stars, descends the truth."

"Can the Stars grant my wish?"

"They can; let us meet to-morrow." Thus saying, Morven passed into the forest.

The next day, at noon, they met again.

"I have consulted the gods of night, and they have given me the power that I prayed for, but on one condition."

"Name it."

"That thou sacrifice thy sister on their altars; thou must build up a heap of stones, and take thy sister into the wood, and lay her on the pile, and plunge thy sword into her heart; so only shalt thou reign."

The Prince shuddered, and started to his feet, and shook his spear at the pale front of Morven.

"Tremble," said the son of Osslah, with a loud voice, "hark to the gods that threaten thee with death, that thou hast dared to lift thine arm against their servant!"

As he spoke, the thunder rolled above; for one of the frequent storms of the early summer was about to break. The spear dropped from the Prince's hand; he sate down and cast his eyes on the ground.

"Wilt thou do the bidding of the Stars, and reign?" said Morven.

"I will!" cried Siror, with a desperate voice.

"This evening, then, when the sun sets, thou wilt lead her hither, alone; I may not attend thee. Now, let us pile the stones."

Silently the huntsman bent his vast strength to the fragments of rock that Morven pointed to him, and they built the altar, and went their way.

And beautiful is the dying of the great sun, when the last song of the birds fades into the lap of silence; when the islands of the cloud are bathed in light, and the first star springs up over the grave of day!

“Whither ledest thou my steps, my brother,” said Orna, “and why doth thy lip quiver? and why dost thou turn away thy face?”

“Is not the forest beautiful; does it not tempt us forth, my sister?”

“And wherefore are those heaps of stone piled together?”

“Let others answer, *I* piled them not.”

“Thou tremblest, brother, we will return.”

“Not so; by those stones is a bird that my shaft pierced to day; a bird of beautiful plumage that I slew for thee.”

“We are by the pile; where hast thou laid the bird?”

“Here!” cried Siror, and he seized the maiden in his arms, and casting her on the rude altar, he drew forth his sword to smite her to the heart.

Right over the stones rose a giant oak, the growth of immemorial ages; and from the oak, or from the heavens, broke forth a loud and solemn voice, “Strike not, son of kings, the Stars forbear their own; the maiden thou shalt not slay; yet shalt thou reign over the race of Oestrich; and thou shalt give Orna as a bride to the favourite of the Stars. Arise, and go thy way!”

The voice ceased; the terror of Orna had overpowered for a time the springs of life; and Siror bore her home through the wood in his strong arms.

“Alas!” said Morven, when at the next day he again met the aspiring Prince; “alas! the Stars have ordained me

a lot which my heart desires not; for I, lonely of life, and crippled of shape, am insensible to the fires of love; and ever, as thou and thy tribe know, I have shunned the eyes of women, for the maidens laughed at my halting step and my sullen features; and so in my youth I learned betimes to banish all thoughts of love; but since they told me, (as they declared to *thee*,) that only through that marriage, thou, O beloved Prince! canst obtain thy father's plumed crown, I yield me to their will."

"But," said the Prince, "not until I am king can I give thee my sister in marriage, for thou knowest that my sire would smite me to the dust, if I asked him to give the flower of our race to the son of the herdsman Osslah."

"Thou speakest the words of truth. Go home and fear not; but when thou art king the sacrifice must be made, and Orna mine. Alas! how can I dare to lift my eyes to her! But so ordain the dread Kings of the Night!—who shall gainsay their word?"

"The day that sees me king, sees Orna thine," answered the Prince.

Morven walked forth, as was his wont, alone, and he said to himself, "The king is old, yet may he live long between me and mine hope!" and he began to cast in his mind how he might shorten the time. Thus absorbed, he wandered on so unheedingly, that night advanced, and he had lost his path among the thick woods, and knew not how to regain his home; so he lay down quietly beneath a tree, and rested till day dawned; then hunger came upon him, and

he searched among the bushes for such simple roots as those with which, for he was ever careless of food, he was used to appease the cravings of nature.

He found, among other more familiar herbs and roots, a red berry of a sweetish taste, which he had never observed before. He ate of it sparingly, and had not proceeded far in the wood before he found his eyes swim, and a deadly sickness come over him. For several hours he lay convulsed on the ground expecting death; but the gaunt spareness of his frame, and his unvarying abstinence, prevailed over the poison, and he recovered slowly, and after great anguish; but he went with feeble steps back to the spot where the berries grew, and, plucking several, hid them in his bosom, and by nightfall regained the city.

The next day he went forth among his father's herds, and seizing a lamb, forced some of the berries into its stomach, and the lamb, escaping, ran away, and fell down dead. Then Morven took some more of the berries and boiled them down, and mixed the juice with wine, and he gave the wine in secret to one of his father's servants, and the servant died.

Then Morven sought the king, and coming into his presence alone, he said unto him, "How fares my lord?"

The king sate on a couch, made of the skins of wolves, and his eye was glassy and dim, but vast were his aged limbs, and huge was his stature, and he had been taller by a head than the children of men, and none living could bend the bow he had bent in youth. Grey, gaunt, and

worn, as some mighty bones that are dug at times from the bosom of the earth,— a relic of the strength of old.

And the king said faintly, and with a ghastly laugh—

“ The men of my years fare ill. What avails my strength? Better had I been born a cripple like thee, so should I have had nothing to lament in growing old.”

The red flush passed over Morven's brow ; but he bent humbly—

“ O king, what if I could give thee back thy youth? what if I could restore to thee the vigour which distinguished thee above the sons of men, when the warriors of Alrich fell like grass before thy sword?”

Then the king uplifted his dull eyes, and he said—

“ What meanest thou, son of Osslah; surely I hear much of thy great wisdom, and how thou speakest nightly with the Stars. Can the gods of the night give unto thee the secret to make the old young?”

“ Tempt them not by doubt,” said Morven, reverently. “ All things are possible to the rulers of the dark hour; and, lo! the Star that loves thy servant spake to him at the dead of night, and said, ‘ Arise and go unto the king; and tell him that the Stars honour the tribe of Oestrich, and remember how the king bent his bow against the sons of Alrich; wherefore, look thou under the stone that lies to the right of thy dwelling—even beside the pine-tree; and thou shalt see a vessel of clay, and in the vessel thou wilt find a sweet liquid, that shall make the king thy master forget his age for ever.’ Therefore, my lord, when

the morning rose I went forth, and looked under the stone, and behold the vessel of clay; and I have brought it hither, to my lord, the king."

"Quick—slave—quick! that I may drink and regain my youth!"

"Nay, listen, oh king: further said the Star to me.

"It is only at night, when the Stars have power, that this their gift will avail; wherefore the king must wait till the hush of the midnight, when the moon is high, and then may he mingle the liquid with his wine. And he must reveal to none that he hath received the gift from the hand of the servant of the Stars. For THEY do their work in secret, and when men sleep; therefore they love not the babble of mouths, and he who reveals their benefits shall surely die."

"Fear not," said the king, grasping the vessel; "none shall know—and behold, I will rise on the morrow; and my two sons—wrangling for my crown—verily I shall be younger than they!"

Then the king laughed loud; and he scarcely thanked the servant of the Stars, neither did he promise him reward; for the kings in those days had little thought,—save for themselves.

And Morven said to him, "Shall I not attend my lord? for without me perchance the drug might fail of its effect."

"Ay," said the king, "rest here."

"Nay," replied Morven; "thy servants will marvel and talk much, if they see the son of Osslah sojourning in

thy palace. So would the displeasure of the gods of night perchance be incurred. Suffer that the hinder door of the palace be unbarred, so that at the night hour, when the moon is midway in the heavens, I may steal unseen into thy chamber, and mix the liquid with thy wine."

"So be it," said the king; "thou art wise, though thy limbs are crooked and curt; and the Stars might have chosen a taller man." Then the king laughed again; and Morven laughed too, but there was danger in the mirth of the son of Osslah.

The night had begun to wane, and the inhabitants of Oestrich were buried in deep sleep, when hark a sharp voice was heard crying out in the streets, "Woe, woe! Awake, ye sons of Oestrich—woe!" Then forth, wild,—haggard,—alarmed,—spear in hand, rushed the giant sons of the rugged tribe, and they saw a man on a height in the middle of the city, shrieking "Woe!" and it was Morven, the son of Osslah! And he said unto them as they gathered round him, "Men and warriors, tremble as ye hear. The Star of the West hath spoken to me, and thus said the Star. 'Evil shall fall upon the kingly house of Oestrich, yea, ere the morning dawn; wherefore go thou mourning into the streets, and wake the inhabitants to woe.' So I rose and did the bidding of the Star." And while Morven was yet speaking, a servant of the king's house ran up to the crowd, crying loudly—"The king is dead." So they went into the palace and found the king stark upon his couch, and his huge

limbs all cramped and crippled by the pangs of death, and his hands clenched as if in menace of a foe—the Foe of all living flesh! Then fear came on the gazers, and they looked on Morven with a deeper awe than the boldest warrior would have called forth;—and they bore him back to the council-hall of the wise men, wailing and clashing their arms in woe, and shouting ever and anon, “Honour to Morven the Prophet;” and that was the first time the word Prophet was ever used in those countries.

At noon on the third day from the king’s death, Siror sought Morven, and he said, “Lo, my father is no more, and the people meet this evening at sunset to choose his successor, and the warriors and the young men will surely choose my brother, for he is more known in war. Fail me not, therefore.”

“Peace, boy,” said Morven sternly, “nor dare to question the truth of the gods of night.”

For Morven now began to assume on his power among the people, and to speak as rulers speak, even to the sons of kings. And the voice silenced the fiery Siror, nor dared he to reply.

“Behold,” said Morven, taking up a chaplet of coloured plumes, “wear this on thy head, and put on a brave face, for the people like a hopeful spirit, and go down with thy brother to the place where the new king is chosen, and leave the rest to the Stars. But above all things forget not that chaplet, it has been blessed by the gods of night.”

The Prince took the chaplet and returned home.

It was evening, and the warriors and chiefs of the tribe were assembled in the place where the new king was to be elected. And the voices of the many favoured Prince Voltoch, the brother of Siror, for he had slain twelve foemen with his spear, and verily in those days that was a great virtue in a king.

Suddenly there was a shout in the streets, and the people cried out, "Way for Morven the prophet, the prophet." For the people held the son of Osslah in greater respect even than did the chiefs. Now, since he had become of note, Morven had assumed a majesty of air which the son of the herdsman knew not in his earlier days, and albeit his stature was short and limbs halted, yet his countenance was grave and high. He only of the tribe wore a garment that swept the ground, and his head was bare, and his long black hair descended to his girdle, and rarely was change or human passion seen in his calm aspect. He feasted not, nor drank wine, nor was his presence frequent in the streets. He laughed not, neither did he smile, save when alone in the forest,—and then he laughed at the follies of his tribe.

So he walked slowly through the crowd, neither turning to the left nor to the right, as the crowd gave way; and he supported his steps with a staff of the knotted pine.

And when he came to the place where the chiefs were met, and the two princes stood in the centre, he bade the people around him proclaim silence; then mounting on a huge fragment of rock, he thus spake to the multitude.

“Princes, Warriors, and Bards! ye, O council of the wise men, and ye, O hunters of the forests, and snarers of the fishes of the streams; hearken to Morven, the son of Osslah. Ye know that I am lowly of race, and weak of limb; but did I not give into your hands the tribe of Alrich, and did ye not slay them in the dead of night with a great slaughter? Surely, ye must know this of himself did not the herdsman's son; surely he was but the agent of the bright gods that love the children of Oestrich. Three nights since, when slumber was on the earth, was not my voice heard in the streets? Did I not proclaim woe to the kingly house of Oestrich? and verily the dark arm had fallen on the bosom of the mighty, that is no more. Could I have dreamt this thing merely in a dream, or was I not as the voice of the bright gods that watch over the tribes of Oestrich? Wherefore, O men and chiefs, scorn not the poor herdsman son of Osslah, but listen to his words, for are they not the wisdom of the Stars? Behold, last night I sate alone in the valley, and the trees were hushed around and not a breath stirred; and I looked upon the Star that counsels the son of Osslah; and I said, ‘Dread conqueror of the cloud, thou that bathest thy beauty in the streams and piercest the pine boughs with thy presence; behold thy servant grieved because the mighty one hath passed away, and many foes surround the houses of my brethren; and it is well that they should have a king valiant and prosperous in war; the cherished of the Stars. Wherefore, O Star, as thou gavest into our

hands the warriors of Alrich, and didst warn us of the fall of the oak of our tribe, wherefore I pray thee give unto the people a token that they may choose that king whom the gods of the night prefer!' Then a low voice, sweeter than the music of the bard, stole along the silence. 'Thy love for thy race is grateful to the Stars of night: go then, son of Osslah, and seek the meeting of the chiefs and the people to choose a king, and tell them not to scorn thee because thou art slow to the chace, and little known in war; for the Stars give thee wisdom as a recompense for all. Say unto the people that as the wise men of the council shape their lessons by the flight of birds, so by the flight of birds shall a token be given unto them, and they shall choose their kings. For, saith the Star of night, the birds are the children of the winds, they pass to and fro along the ocean of the air, and visit the clouds that are the war-ships of the gods. And their music is but broken melodies which they glean from the harps above. Are they not the messengers of the storm? Ere the stream chafes against the bank, and the rain descends, know ye not, by the wail of birds and their low circles over the earth, that the tempest is at hand? Wherefore, wisely do ye deem that the children of the air are the fit interpreters between the sons of men and the lords of the world above. Say then to the people and the chiefs, that they shall take, from among the doves that nest in the roof of the palace, a white dove, and they shall let it loose in the air, and verily the gods of the night shall deem the dove

as a prayer coming from the people, and they shall send a messenger to grant the prayer and give to the tribes of Oestrich a king worthy of themselves.'

"With that the Star spoke no more."

Then the friends of Voltoch murmured among themselves, and they said, "Shall this man dictate to us who shall be king?" But the people and the warriors shouted, "Listen to the Star; do we not give or deny battle according as the bird flies,—shall we not by the same token choose him by whom the battle should be led?" And the thing seemed natural to them, for it was after the custom of the tribe. Then they took one of the doves that built in the roof of the palace, and they brought it to the spot where Morven stood, and he, looking up to the Stars and muttering to himself, released the bird.

There was a copse of trees at a little distance from the spot, and as the dove ascended a hawk suddenly rose from the copse and pursued the dove; and the dove was terrified, and soared circling high above the crowd, when lo, the hawk, poising itself one moment on its wings, swooped with a sudden swoop, and, abandoning its prey, alighted on the plumed head of Siror.

"Behold," cried Morven in a loud voice, "behold your king!"

"Hail, all hail the king!" shouted the people; "All hail the chosen of the Stars!"

Then Morven lifted his right hand, and the hawk left the

prince, and alighted on Morven's shoulder. "Bird of the gods!" said he, reverently, "hast thou not a secret message for my ear?" Then the hawk put its beak to Morven's ear, and Morven bowed his head submissively; and the hawk rested with Morven from that moment and would not be scared away. And Morven said, "The Stars have sent me this bird, that, in the day-time when I see them not, we may never be without a councillor in distress."

So Siror was made king, and Morven the son of Osslah was constrained by the king's will to take Orna for his wife; and the people and the chiefs honoured Morven the prophet above all the elders of the tribe.

One day Morven said unto himself, musing, "Am I not already equal with the king? nay, is not the king my servant? did I not place him over the heads of his brothers? am I not therefore more fit to reign than he is? shall I not push him from his seat? It is a troublous and stormy office to reign over the wild men of Oestrich, to feast in the crowded hall, and to lead the warriors to the fray. Surely if I feasted not, neither went out to war, they might say, this is no king, but the cripple Morven; and some of the race of Siror might slay me secretly. But can I not be greater far than kings, and continue to choose and govern them, living as now at mine own ease? Verily the Stars shall give me a new palace, and many subjects."

Among the wise men was Darvan; and Morven feared him, for his eye often sought the movements of the son of Osslah.

And Morven said, "It were better to *trust* this man than to *blind*, for surely I want a helpmate and a friend." So he said to the wise man as he sate alone watching the setting sun,

"It seemeth to me, O Darvan! that we ought to build a great pile in honour of the Stars, and the pile should be more glorious than all the palaces of the chiefs and the palace of the king; for are not the Stars our masters? and thou and I should be the chief dwellers in this new palace, and we will serve the gods of night, and fatten their altars with the choicest of the herd, and the freshest of the fruits of the earth."

And Darvan said, "Thou speakest as becomes the servant of the Stars. But will the people help to build the pile, for they are a warlike race and they love not toil?"

And Morven answered, "Doubtless the Stars will ordain the work to be done. Fear not."

"In truth thou art a wondrous man, thy words ever come to pass," answered Darvan; "and I wish thou wouldst teach me, friend, the language of the Stars."

"Assuredly if thou servest me, thou shalt know," answered the proud Morven; and Darvan was secretly wroth that the son of the herdsman should command the service of an elder and a chief.

And when Morven returned to his wife he found her weeping much. Now she loved the son of Osslah with an exceeding love, for he was not savage and fierce as the men she had known, and she was proud of his fame among the

tribe; and he took her in his arms and kissed her, and asked her why she wept. Then she told him that her brother the king had visited her and had spoken bitter words of Morven; "He taketh from me the affection of my people," said Siror, and blindeth them with lies. And since he hath made me king, what if he take my kingdom from me? Verily a new tale of the Stars might undo the old." And the king had ordered her to keep watch on Morven's secrecy, and to see whether truth was in him when he boasted of his commune with the Powers of Night.

But Orna loved Morven better than Siror, therefore she told her husband all.

And Morven resented the king's ingratitude, and was troubled much, for a king is a powerful foe; but he comforted Orna, and bade her dissemble, and complain also of him to her brother, so that he might confide to her unsuspectingly whatsoever he might design against Morven.

There was a cave by Morven's house in which he kept the sacred hawk, and wherein he secretly trained and nurtured other birds against future need, and the door of the cave was always barred. And one day he was thus engaged when he beheld opposite a chink in the wall, that he had never noted before, and the sun came playfully in; and while he looked he perceived the sunbeam was darkened, and presently he saw a human face peering in. And Morven trembled, for he knew he had been watched. He ran hastily from the cave, but the spy had disappeared amongst the trees, and Morven went straight to the

chamber of Darvan and sate himself down. And Darvan did not return home till late, and he started and turned pale when he saw Morven. But Morven greeted him as a brother, and bade him to a feast, which, for the first time, he purposed giving at the full of the moon, in honour of the Stars. And going out of Darvan's chamber he returned to his wife, and bade her rend her hair, and go at the dawn of day to the king her brother, and complain bitterly of Morven's treatment, and pluck the black plans from the breast of the king. "For surely," said he, "Darvan hath lied to thy brother, and some evil waits me that I would fain know."

So the next morning Orna sought the king, and she said, "The herdsman's son hath reviled me, and spoken harsh words to me; shall I not be avenged?"

Then the king stamped his feet and shook his mighty sword. "Surely thou shalt be avenged, for I have learnt from one of the elders that which convinceth me the man hath lied to the people, and the base-born shall surely die. Yea, the first time that he goeth alone into the forest my brother and I will fall upon him, and smite him to the death." And with this comfort Siror dismissed Orna.

And Orna flung herself at the feet of her husband. "Fly now, O my beloved — fly into the forests afar from my brethren, or surely the sword of Siror will end thy days."

Then the son of Oslah folded his arms, and seemed buried in black thoughts; nor did he heed the voice of Orna, until again and again she had implored him to fly.

“Fly!” he said at length. “Nay, I was doubting what punishment the Stars should pour down upon our foe. Let warriors fly. Morven the prophet conquers by arms mightier than the sword.”

Nevertheless Morven was perplexed in his mind, and knew not how to save himself from the vengeance of the king. Now, while he was musing hopelessly, he heard a roar of waters; and behold the river, for it was now the end of Autumn, had burst its bounds, and was rushing along the valley to the houses of the city. And now the men of the tribe, and the women, and the children, came running, and with shrieks, to Morven’s house, crying, “Behold the river has burst upon us, save us, O ruler of the Stars.”

Then the sudden thought broke upon Morven, and he resolved to risk his fate upon one desperate scheme.

And he came out from the house calm and sad, and he said “Ye know not what ye ask; I cannot save ye from this peril; ye have brought it on yourselves.”

And they cried, “How, O son of Osslah? we are ignorant of our crime.”

And he answered, “Go down to the king’s palace and wait before it, and surely I will follow ye, and ye shall learn wherefore ye have incurred this punishment from the gods.” Then the crowd rolled murmuring back, as a receding sea; and, when it was gone from the place, Morven went alone to the house of Darvan, which was next his own: and Darvan was greatly terrified, for he was of a

great age, and had no children, neither friends, and he feared that he could not of himself escape the waters.

And Morven said to him, soothingly, "Lo, the people love me, and I will see that thou art saved, for verily thou hast been friendly to me, and done me much service with the king."

And, as he thus spake, Morven opened the door of the house and looked forth, and saw that they were quite alone; then he seized the old man by the throat, and ceased not his gripe till he was quite dead. And, leaving the body of the elder on the floor, Morven stole from the house, and shut the gate. And as he was going to his cave, he mused a little while, when, hearing the mighty roar of the waves advancing, and afar off the shrieks of women, he lifted up his head, and said, proudly, "No! in this hour terror alone shall be my slave; I will use no art save the power of my soul." He shut the gate, and, leaning on his pine staff, he strode down to the palace. And it was now evening, and many of the men held torches, that they might see each other's faces in the universal fear. Red flashed the quivering flames on the dark robes and pale front of Morven; and he seemed mightier than the rest, because his face alone was calm amidst the tumult. And louder, and hoarser, came the roar of the waters; and swift rushed the shades of night over the hastening tide.

And Morven said in a stern voice, "Where is the king; and wherefore is he absent from his people in the hour of dread?" Then the gate of the palace opened; and, behold,

Siror was sitting in the hall by the vast pine fire, and his brother by his side, and his chiefs around him; for they would not deign to come amongst the crowd at the bidding of the herdsman's son.

Then Morven, standing on a rock above the heads of the people, (the same rock whereon he had proclaimed the king,) thus spake:—

“Ye desired to know, O sons of Oestrich, wherefore the river hath burst its bounds, and this peril hath come upon you. Learn then that the Stars resent as the foulest of human crimes, an insult to their servants and delegates below. Ye are all aware of the manner of life of Morven, whom ye have surnamed the Prophet! He harms not man or beast; he lives alone; and, far from the wild joys of the warrior tribe, he worships in awe and fear the Powers of Night. So is he able to advise ye of the coming danger,—so is he able to save ye from the foe. Thus are your huntsmen swift, and your warriors bold; and thus do your cattle bring forth their young, and the earth its fruits. What think ye, and what do ye ask to hear? Listen, men of Oestrich! they have laid snares for my life; and there are amongst you those who have whetted the sword against the bosom that is only filled with love for ye all. Therefore have the stern lords of heaven loosened the chains of the river—therefore doth this evil menace ye. Neither will it pass away until they who dug the pit for the servant of the Stars are buried in the same.”

Then, by the red torches, the faces of the men looked

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fierce and threatening; and ten thousand voices shouted forth, "Name them who conspired against thy life, O holy prophet, and surely they shall be torn limb from limb."

And Morven turned aside, and they saw that he wept bitterly; and he said,

"Ye have asked me, and I have answered; but now scarce will ye believe the foe that I have provoked against me; and by the heavens themselves, I swear, that if my death would satisfy their fury, nor bring down upon yourselves, and your children's children, the anger of the throned Stars, gladly would I give my bosom to the knife. Yes," he cried, lifting up his voice, and pointing his shadowy arm towards the hall where the king sate by the pine fire—"yes, Thou whom by my voice the Stars chose above thy brother—yes, Siror, the guilty one, take thy sword, and come hither—strike, if thou hast the heart to strike, the Prophet of the Gods!"

The king started to his feet, and the crowd were hushed in a shuddering silence.

Morven resumed:

"Know then, O men of Oestrich, that Siror, and Voltoch his brother, and Darvan, the elder of the wise men, have purposed to slay your prophet, even at such hour as when alone he seeks the shade of the forest to devise new benefits for you. Let the king deny it, if he can!"

Then Voltoch, of the giant limbs, strode forth from the hall, and his spear quivered in his hand.

"Rightly hast thou spoken, base son of my father's

herdsman, and for thy sins shalt thou surely die; for thou liest when thou speakest of thy power with the Stars, and thou laughest at the folly of them who hear thee; wherefore put him to death."

Then the chiefs in the hall clashed their arms, and rushed forth to slay the son of Osslah.

But he, stretching his unarmed hands on high, exclaimed, "Hear him, O dread ones of the night—hark how he blasphemeth!"

Then the crowd took up the word, and cried, "He blasphemeth—he blasphemeth against the prophet!"

But the king and the chiefs, who hated Morven, because of his power with the people, rushed into the crowd; and the crowd were irresolute, nor knew they how to act, for never yet had they rebelled against their chiefs, and they feared alike the prophet and the king.

And Siror cried, "Summon Darvan to us, for he hath watched the steps of Morven, and he shall lift the veil from my people's eyes." Then three of the swift of foot started forth to the house of Darvan.

And Morven cried out with a loud voice, "Hark, thus saith the Star who, now riding through yonder cloud, breaks forth upon my eyes—'For the lie that the elder hath uttered against my servant, the curse of the Stars shall fall upon him.' Seek, and as ye find him, so may ye find ever the foes of Morven and the gods!"

A chill and an icy fear fell over the crowd, and even the cheek of Siror grew pale; and Morven, erect and dark

above the waving torches, stood motionless with folded arms. And hark—far and fast came on the war-steeds of the wave—they heard them marching to the land, and tossing their white manes in the roaring wind.

“Lo, as ye listen,” said Morven, calmly, “the river sweeps on—haste, for the Gods will have a victim, be it your prophet or your king.”

“Slave,” shouted Siror, and his spear left his hand, and far above the heads of the crowd sped hissing beside the dark form of Morven, and rent the trunk of the oak behind. Then the people, wroth at the danger of their beloved seer, uttered a wild yell, and gathered round him with brandished swords, facing their chieftains and their king. But at that instant, ere the war had broken forth among the tribe, the three warriors returned, and they bore Darvan on their shoulders, and laid him at the feet of the king, and they said tremblingly, “Thus found we the elder in the centre of his own hall.” And the people saw that Darvan was a corpse, and that the prediction of Morven was thus verified. “So perish the enemies of Morven and the Stars!” cried the son of Osslah. And the people echoed the cry. Then the fury of Siror was at his height, and waving his sword above his head he plunged into the crowd, “Thy blood, base-born, or mine!”

“So be it!” answered Morven, quailing not. “People, smite the blasphemer. Hark how the river pours down upon your children and your hearths. On, on, or ye perish.”

And Siror fell, pierced by five hundred spears.

“Smite! smite!” cried Morven, as the chiefs of the royal house gathered round the king. And the clash of swords, and the gleam of spears, and the cries of the dying, and the yell of the trampling people, mingled with the roar of the elements, and the voices of the rushing wave.

Three hundred of the chiefs perished that night by the swords of their own tribe. And the last cry of the victors was, “Morven the prophet,—*Morven the king!*”

And the son of Osslah, seeing the waves now spreading over the valley, led Orna his wife, and the men of Oestrich, their women, and their children, to a high mount, where they waited the dawning sun. But Orna sate apart and wept bitterly, for her brothers were no more, and her race had perished from the earth. And Morven sought to comfort her in vain.

When the morning rose, they saw that the river had overspread the greater part of the city, and now stayed its course among the hollows of the vale. Then Morven said to the people, “The Star Kings are avenged, and their wrath appeased. Tarry only here until the waters have melted into the crevices of the soil.” And on the fourth day they returned to the city, and no man dared to name another, save Morven, as the king.

But Morven retired into his cave and mused deeply, and then, assembling the people, he gave them new laws, and he made them build a mighty temple in honour of the Stars, and made them heap within it all that the tribe held most

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precious. And he took unto him fifty children from the most famous of the tribe; and he took also ten from among the men who had served him best, and he ordained that they should serve the Stars in the great temple;—and Morven was their chief. And he put away the crown they pressed upon him, and he chose from among the elders a new king. And he ordained that henceforth the servants only of the Stars in the great temple should elect the king and the rulers, and hold council, and make war: but he suffered the king to feast, and to hunt, and to make merry in the banquet halls. And Morven built altars in the temple, and was the first who in the North sacrificed the beast and the bird, and afterwards human flesh, upon the altars. And he drew auguries from the entrails of the victim, and made schools for the science of the prophet, and Morven's piety was the wonder of the tribe, in that he refused to be a king. And Morven, the high-priest, was ten thousand times mightier than the king. He taught the people to till the ground, and to sow the herb, and by his wisdom, and the valour that his prophecies instilled into men, he conquered all the neighbouring tribes. And the sons of Oestrich spread themselves over a mighty empire, and with them spread the name and the laws of Morven. And in every province which he conquered, he ordered them to build a temple to the Stars.

But a heavy sorrow fell upon the years of Morven. The sister of Siror bowed down her head and survived not long the slaughter of her race. And she left Morven childless.

And he mourned bitterly and as one distraught, for her only in the world had his heart the power to love. And he sate down and covered his face, saying,

“Lo! I have toiled and travailed, and never before in the world did man conquer what I have conquered. Verily the empire of the iron thews and the giant limbs is no more! I have founded a new power, that henceforth shall sway the lands; the empire of a plotting brain and a commanding mind. But, behold! my fate is barren, and I feel already that it will grow neither fruit nor tree as a shelter to mine old age. Desolate and lonely shall I pass unto my grave. O Orna! my beautiful! my loved! none were like unto thee, and to thy love do I owe my glory and my life! Would for thy sake, O sweet bird! that nestled in the dark cavern of my heart;—would for thy sake that thy brethren had been spared, for verily with my life would I have purchased thine. Alas! only when I lost thee, did I find that thy love was dearer to me than the fear of others:” and Morven mourned night and day, and none might comfort him.

But from that time forth he gave himself solely up to the cares of his calling; and his nature and his affections, and whatever there was yet left soft in him, grew hard like stone;—and he was a man without love, and he forbade love and marriage to the priests.

Now in his latter years there arose *other* prophets, for the world had grown wiser even by Morven’s wisdom, and some did say unto themselves, “Behold Morven, the herds-

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man's son, is a king of kings; this did the Stars for their servant; shall we not also be servants to the Stars?"

And they wore black garments like Morven, and went about prophecying of what the Stars foretold them. And Morven was exceeding wroth; for he, more than other men, knew that the prophets lied; wherefore he went forth against them with the ministers of the temple, and he took them, and burnt them by a slow fire; for thus said Morven to the people:—"A true prophet hath honour, but *I* only am a true prophet;—to all false prophets there shall be surely death."

And the people applauded the piety of the son of Osslah.

And Morven educated the wisest of the children in the mysteries of the temple, so that they grew up to succeed him worthily.

And he died full of years and honour, and they carved his effigy on a mighty stone before the temple, and the effigy endured for a thousand ages, and whoso looked on it trembled; for the face was calm with the calmness of unspeakable awe.

And Morven was the first mortal of the North that made Religion the stepping-stone to Power.—Of a surety Morven was a great man!

It was the last night of the old year, and the Stars sate, each upon his ruby throne, and watched with sleepless eyes

upon the world. The night was dark and troubled, the dread winds were abroad, and, fast and frequent, hurried the clouds beneath the thrones of the kings of night. And ever and anon fiery meteors flashed along the depths of heaven, and were again swallowed up in the grave of darkness. But, far below his brethren, and with a lurid haze around his orb, sate the discontented Star that had watched over the hunters of the north.

And on the lowest abyss of space there was spread a thick and mighty gloom, from which, as from a cauldron, rose columns of wreathing smoke; and still, when the great winds rested for an instant on their paths, voices of woe and laughter, mingled with shrieks, were heard booming from the abyss to the upper air.

And now, in the midst of night, a vast figure rose slowly from the abyss, and its wings threw blackness over the world. High upward to the throne of the discontented Star, sailed the fearful shape, and the Star trembled on his throne, when the form stood before him face to face.

And the shape said—"Hail, brother!—all hail!"

"I know thee not," answered the Star; "thou art not the Archangel that visitest the kings of night."

And the shape laughed loud. "I am the fallen Star of the Morning—I am Lucifer, thy brother! Hast thou not, O sullen king, served me and mine?—and hast thou not wrested the earth from thy Lord that sittest above, and given it to me, by darkening the souls of men with the religion of fear? Wherefore come, brother, come—thou

hast a throne prepared beside my own in the fiery gloom—Come! The heavens are no more for thee.”

Then the Star rose from his throne, and descended to the side of Lucifer. For ever hath the spirit of discontent had sympathy with the soul of pride. And they sank slowly down to the gulf of gloom.

It was the first night of the new year, and the Stars sate, each on his ruby throne, and watched with sleepless eyes upon the world. But sorrow dimmed the bright faces of the kings of night, for they mourned in silence and in fear for a fallen brother.

And the gates of the heaven of heavens flew open with a golden sound, and the swift Archangel fled down on his silent wings; and the Archangel gave to each of the Stars, as before, the message of his Lord, and to each Star was his appointed charge. And when the heraldry seemed done, there came a laugh from the abyss of gloom, and halfway from the gulf rose the lurid shape of Lucifer the Fiend.

“Thou countest thy flock ill, O radiant shepherd! Behold! one Star is missing from the three thousand and ten!”

“Back to thy gulf, false Lucifer, the throne of thy brother hath been filled.”

And lo! as the Archangel spake, the Stars beheld a young and all lustrous stranger on the throne of the erring Star; and his face was so soft to look upon, that the dimmest of human eyes might have gazed upon its splendour unabashed; but the dark Fiend alone was dazzled by its

lustre, and with a yell that shook the flaming pillars of the universe he plunged backward into the gloom.

Then, far and sweet from the Arch Unseen, came forth the Voice of God—

“Behold! on the throne of the Discontented Star sits the Star of Hope; and he that breathed into mankind the Religion of Fear, hath a successor in him who shall teach earth the Religion of Love.”

And evermore the Star of Fear dwells with Lucifer, and the Star of Love keeps vigil in heaven!

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