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The **FEAST** *of*
THALARCHUS



Condé Benoist Pallen



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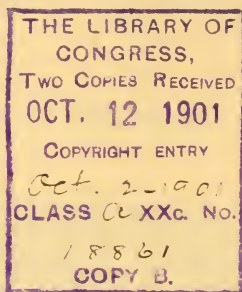
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The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

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*Press of
George H. Ellis
Boston, U.S.A.*

*TO THE MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER*

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Personæ.

THALARCHUS, citizen of Antioch.

SIMEON, the Stylite.

THAIS, an hetæra.

XENARES, slave of Thalarchus.

ANTIPHON,	}	guests at the Feast.
CRITIAS,		
CHARMIDES,		
GLAUCO,		
HERMOGENES,		

Demons, Fauns, Dryads, Naiads, Silenus, Pan, Bacchus
and Bacchanals.

Place, Antioch. Time, first half of fifth century.

THE FEAST OF THALARCHUS

Enter THALARCHUS and XENARES.

Thalarchus.

Is all prepared, Xenares?

Xenares.

Ay, my lord.

Thalarchus.

The guests all summoned?

Xenares.

As thou didst bid, 'tis done.

Thalarchus.

And Thais, too?

Xenares.

My lord, she waits thee now.

Thalarchus.

Now Antioch shall boast a feast to make
The gorgeous riot of Nero's groaning board
A peasant's fare in meanness. Ay, the gods
Themselves, if ancient legends speak the truth,
Shall look with jealous eye from their high seats

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Upon its splendid prodigality.
For I have summoned earth and sea and air
To yield me of their choicest ; wines precious
As gold, tanged with a hundred fiery suns
To make the blood run wanton in the veins ;
The rarest fish that winnow in the deep
To edge with novel savour palates staled
With years of feasting ; daintiest meats unknown
In this our Antioch before, to spur
The jaded appetites of ancient revellers ;
Succulent dishes dressed by so rare art
That sated gluttons shall hunger at the sight ;
Such subtle witcheries for eye and ear
That they shall swoon with giddy surfeit ; Beauty
So prodigal of all her charms that Venus'
Self would stale upon the general eye ;
Music to ravish the amazéd sense
With sweeter melodies than Orpheus blew
In Pluto's ear to charm his wife from hell ;
Ay, such a feast as eats a fortune up
At one swift mouthful, as death swallows men !
'Tis 'gainst stale Fortune's self I throw the die
And scorn her, having basked within her smile
To dull satiety ; and, scorning, court
The oft-reputed thunders of her frown
In sheer despite of her long blandishments.
Let go what will, let come what may, I fling

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Defiance in her face ! Let houses, lands
And slaves and ships, the substance of my all,
Be swallowed in this prodigality,
As thunderous earthquake and the roaring wave
Engulf a prideful city by the sea,
That leaves no stone to mark its ancient place.

Xenares.

My lord, the hour approaches for the feast.
Wilt robe ?

Thalarchus.

Yea, put on the festal garb,
The one I purchased from the Damascene,
The rarest tissue of the patient loom,
Spun from the purest wool in all the East,
White as the unearthed snow and delicate
As petals of the rose ! How soft and light !
Meet for the limbs of the Olympian gods
When they recline at their ambrosial feasts !
How elegant in its simplicity !
Unblemished by the taint of broidery,
Yet richer by the pureness of its woof
Than were it gilded inches deep in gold
And seamed with all the pearls of gorgeous Ind.
Xenares, bring the Memphian jewel, too,—
'Twill fit with this most rich simplicity,—
A single stone white with Promethean flame

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Gathered within the bosom of the earth
When first 'twas stolen from heaven, and angry
 Jove
Ravened the firmament with sulphurous bolts
Against the callous thief. Hear how I talk,
Xenares, babbling a fable of the gods,
The gruesome memory of an ancient lie
Spun in the nurseries of the world, when men
As yet were children. So my humour trips —
The gem! Hand it me. Zeus, how it burns!
White as the sun's white core, yet cold as death!
It was — the Jew I bought it of so said,
The lying trafficker — a sacred stone,
That once on mother Isis' holy breast
Burned 'neath the veil, when men yet worshipt
And bowed with bated breath before her shrine.
A pretty fable this of mother earth;
The gem within her bosom 'neath the veil
The easy symbol of the unquarried stone
Within the darkness of the uncaverned soil,
Ere men, awakened to the lust of things,
Had bared her treasures to the eyes of greed.
Fables, fables, to hide the shamefaced truth
And gloze the ugliness of our own deeds,
Lest we grow frightened at our naked selves!
How prone to invent and hold ourselves excused,
And out of all our baser part erect

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Divinities ! I've had my day of faith,
And hold but wraiths of wasted dreams. I've
run
The gamut up and down, and down again,
To find but jangling discords at the close.
Wealth has been mine, and its sure offshoot,
power,
To make men pliant to my sovereign will
And servants of my every nod. A man,
I've sated every appetite ; a god,
I've bent my little world to every whim ;
Yet bankrupt of all joy I end at last,
Life staled and shattered like a rotted gourd.
Out on it all ! I'll woo me beggary now,
And from her withered womb beget the babe,
Content, to suckle at her barren breasts
And fatten on their emptiness.
'Tis said that little want is slender care,
And lentils feast a witless appetite.

Xenares.

My lord, the guests are all arrived and wait
Upon thy coming.

Thalarchus.

Well, I come. Place thou
The chaplet on my brow, that I go crowned,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

The sovereign of a feast beyond all dreams.
Ye blushes of our common clay, how wonderful !
Ye queenly flowers, the garden's royal flame,
That burn like us a single hour and fade
To lightest ashes blown by death about
The careless earth, — how sweet and beautiful !
Ah me, how pitiful the thing called life,
This tide of freshness quenched in salty death,
Whose famine ever grows the more it feeds,
As the waste sea upon the pleasant streams !
Since to that bitter end do all things flow,
Though ne'er so strong and beautiful. But come,
Let's to the feast, and in full cups deeper
Than memory drown this bleak philosophy.

[*Exeunt THALARCHUS and XENARES.*]

*Hall of feast, guests reclining, music and song as
THALARCHUS enters.*

To the feast, to the feast we come ;
For life is now in its bloom ;
 Full flows the tide
 As onward we glide,
 Forgetful of doom.

Like petals that fall from their flowers,
Time scatters his rose-laden hours.

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Ah, only too brief
Is the blush of the leaf
In morning's white bowers!

Then gather the sweets of the day ;
To-morrow they'll have faded away ;
Seize the swift bloom,
Ere the blight of the tomb,
And live while we may.

Dread are the Fates to the fearful,
Heavy is grief to the tearful ;
But sorrow and death
And the grave's fell breath
Are mocked by the cheerful.

Ripe is the grape on the vine,
Ruddy the blush of the wine ;
The ivy-crowned god
Shall rule with his nod
The revels divine.

Let care at the portal await,
An exile outside of the gate :
Bacchus alone
Shall sit on the throne,
With Venus as mate.

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

What heed for time and its flowing,
What care for life and its going !
 Unreef the white sail
 To catch the full gale
 Of love's winds a-blowing !

The goblet upfill to the brim,
With joy aglow to the rim :
 To Venus our love
 With a snow-white dove,
 To Bacchus a hymn.

As gods on their thrones elate,
We reckon not the threads of fate ;
 Time is our slave,
 And death and the grave
 But shadows that wait.

Snatch then the moment that goes
Blown full with life's crimson rose ;
 To-morrow's dim morn
 Will find but the thorn
 And thee — who knows ?

Critias.

Methinks there is a discord in the song :
'Tis scarcely meet to dwell on death when life

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Is at its full. And, when we feast, 'tis well
To think on nothing but the feasting.

Charmides.

True,

Friend Critias. 'Tis an unsavoury sauce
Wherewith to season mirth : I like it not.
To be reminded death is at the door
Cripples an eager appetite.

Antiphon.

Not so :

Ye be but poor philosophers. 'Tis this
That gives the zest to life, to know it ends.
The moiety of pleasure is pursuit,
The other half the climax of its taste
Subsiding in delicious ecstasy
Of pain. The sweet expectancy that fed
Your hope before this feast is half of it ;
The other half in consummation now,
To end in swift satiety. But, were
The Fates to fix you feasting here forever,
The wine that tingles at your lips were poison,
The viands that sweetly savour to the palate
Would grow polluted as a Harpies' feast,
And ye wane thinner than Tartarian shades
Consumed by the eternal misery
Of sheer monotony. No, friends, be wise ;

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Treasure the hour because it flies ; hold fast
The blossom because it dies ; for therein lies
The essence of our joy, whose little power
Grasps but the moment of vicissitude,
And in the last and greatest change,
That we call death, sums all of life, making
It bearable.

Critias.

By Bacchus, Antiphon,
Thou reasonest well ; I'll drink the deeper for't.

Charmides.

No, no, he argues ill : better to feast
Forever here, recking nor change nor death,
Nor that vast emptiness where Hades yawns
For unsubstantial shades, than sour the wine
By thinking on the lees that lie at bottom.
Think you the rose is sweeter because it fades ?
Nay, rather were its sweetness sweeter still
If it but bloomed in immortality ;
Think you that beauty's beautiful because
It wrinkles into ugliness with age ?
Is Thais' alabaster throat whiter
Than enskyed snow because the tawny years
Will yellow it ? Her lips aflame with love
Because the envious hours will pluck their blossoms

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

And leave them pale and withered? Nay, Antiphon,
Beauty's her own essential loveliness,
And our delight because she is herself,
Nor borrows aught from time's revengeful waste.
Give me the ripened rose because it blooms,
The hour because 'tis filled with present sweets,
And Thais' lips, redder than any rose,
Sweeter and dearer than Olympian bliss,
Because their luscious pastures are abloom
With living loves ripe now for gathering,
And all sufficient in themselves to make
This single hour eternal. Ay, I'd cram
All future into one capacious now,
And this full instant, blown radiant as the sun
With joy, fashion to immortality!

Critias.

Well said, Charmides: come, we'll drink to it!
Thy argument would set all Antioch dry!
Ay, were the circumambient seas all wine,
We'd drain them clean, and make old Neptune
ride
On land. Come, Ganymede, fill up again!

Antiphon.

Thou'rt over-young: thy tongue outruns thy wit.

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Critias.

Thou'rt over-old : thy wit has lost its sap.

Antiphon.

And thine still in the green. Be wise and learn
Of age, which yoked with long experience
Has travelled life's close orbit o'er and o'er :
First, childhood's giddy cycle swings its course,
When all existence is the moment's toy,
And, stayed within its sinuous channel, time
Goes eddying round and round with bubbling
wave,

The hours perennial vessels of delight
Gushing with joy ; then youth with passionate
feet

Pursuing pleasure to the close, draining
The chalice dry, and reaping aftermaths
Of pain in flagging nature's ravished powers ;
Youth spent, mid-age awakening from the dream,
Plucking experience from the thorny vine
Of sorrow, and temperately husbanding
Its joys by holding passion in the leash ;
Lastly, old age, cautious as creeping snails
Feeling the way, on wisdom's slow staff leans,
With prudence for its guide, and treads the path
Of pleasure moderately, knowing the pain
Of haste and ruin of excess.

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Charmides.

Thy blood

Is thin, and wrinkled as the cheek of old
Is thy philosophy, O Antiphon.
Thou preachest for thyself, whose narrow stream
Is running dry in parched and barren sands !
Go spout thy platitudes at funerals,
And in the corpse's stony ear discourse
Upon the vanities of life. Our blood
Is red with lustihood, our years fuller
Than Amalthea's horn : we drink, we feast,
We die not !

Critias.

Come, sweet Ganymede, fill up
Again ! I'm father Bacchus' own to-night,
Immortal as the gods ! Fill up, I say,
And drown these musty arguments in wine.
Here's to thee, ancient Antiphon ! Come, drink !
Warm thine old blood with bacchanalian fires ;
Ruby the ashes of thy beard with wine,
And dream thou'rt young again. I'll wager now
Thou'st not been drunk these thirty years !

Antiphon.

Fie, boy !

Thou'lt feel the Furies' lash to-morrow morn.
Thalarchus, I appeal to thee — holds not
My argument in reason ?

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Thalarchus.

Sweet friends,
Let's not dispute about the festal board,
But all here move to music and to joy
Concordant as the chiming heavens sing
In loves harmonious. Upon the arch
Of time enthroned we sit as gods to-night !
Let not to-morrow stare with stony face
Upon our festival. Olympians all,
We'll make the old Olympian fable true ;
Pleasure and beauty by our side, whilst Love,
Divinest minister, with rosy fingers
Enweaves his flowery chains to hold us all
The bonded servants of his amorous nod.
Thais, O lovelier than Aphrodite's self
Rising resplendent from the shimmering waves
Kissing her feet and worshipping, sing thou
Of love, who art his sovereign mistress now.
Here, boy, the chaplet and the cithara.

Antiphon.

How Bacchus blossoms wanton from his lips !

Critias.

Sweet Hebe, sit thee with me while she sings,
Thy lip and mine upon the crater's rim,
While Venus and the god meet in the cup.

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Hercle ! thou art as lovely as Thais there,
Though Aphrodite envy her ! Hebe
And Ganymede art thou in one, sweeter
Than Hybla's honey —

Charmides.

Cease, Thais begins.

Thais (singing).

Swifter than fire
Is love's desire,
Sweeter than wine ;
Stronger than hate,
Closer than fate
Its tendrils entwine.

Zeus' grim power
Stays not its soft hour,
Its sweet, sharp pain ;
In Danaë's tower
Falls the hot shower
Of golden rain.

Love is a rose
That flame-like blows
In passion's breast ;
Pluck it and hold it,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Softly enfold it
In love's own nest.

Thy lips are red
As the poppy's head,
Thy breath as wine ;
Tender thine eyes
As midnight skies
With stars that shine.

Take me and hold me,
Softly enfold me,
My lips to thine,
As love with desire,
Passion with fire,
And vine with vine.

Thalarchus.

Thais, thy beauty ravishes the eye,
Thy song the ear. Captive thou tak'st the
heart,
And lead'st the soul in gilded chains to love !
Venus were beggared of the golden prize,
Were Paris here to-night.

Thais.

And lov'st thou me,

Thalarchus ?

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Thalarchus.

Yea, as Bacchus wine, Mars war,
As Jove his power, and Venus lovers !

Thais.

Ah !

Thou lovest as I would be loved. Pledge me
As Antony his Cleopatra,
Staking imperial Rome ; and I will plight
As Cleopatra pledged her Antony,
Throwing the priceless pearl within the cup,
Till its dissolvéd beauty made the wine
Precious as Egypt's kingdom. See ! I fling
This pearl, though not so fair as Cleopatra's, —
Oh, would 'twere fairer by a kingdom's worth ! —
Into the ruby flood, and pledge our loves
In its quintuple wealth ; though this be poor
Indeed beside the largess of our hearts,
As beggars' mites compared to Cræsus' gold.

Antiphon.

The very pearl himself once gave her !

Thalarchus.

Nay,

Fairest, touch but the wine with thy rose lips,
And it grows nectar fitter for gods than men,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Richer than all that Cleopatra ruled
Or Antony e'er flung away. I'll pledge,
Not in the fragile beauty of a pearl,—
Whose lustre, like the rainbow, melts away,
With heaven's cloudy tears, before the sun,—
But, worthier still, in the eternal fires
Of this most royal gem, that gleamed and glowed
Of yore on Mother Isis' fecund breast,
And now, from thine drawing a rosier warmth,
Shall shed diviner radiance. Thais, to thee,
Empress of love, fair sovereign of our hearts!
Wear thou the stone, and in thy beauty 'twill
shine
More beautiful. I'll sing to thee of love.

Charmides.

The stone's a treble fortune!

Antiphon.

Treble that,
Charmides! Why, 'twould buy half Antioch!
How she did wheedle him! His juggled wits
Are like the pearl disported in the wine.
Occasion ripe, she played her venture well,
And staked a costly hazard on the die,
To win most preciously. When gain's the game,
Bacchus is never match for Venus.

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Thalarchus (singing).

What made the gods more fair than love?
What wrought the gods more rare than love?
 What compare to love?
 Tell me, ye who love!
Naught in the sea or air, O Love,
In earth or there above,
 O Love, my Love!

Sweeter than tang of wine, O Love,
Brighter than gems that shine, O Love,
 Than gold more fine, O Love,
 Softer than roses, Love;
The gods one gift divine, O Love,
My love with thine, my Dove,
 O Love, my Love!

Thais.

Sweeter than Orpheus fluted in mid-hell,
Thy song, Thalarchus. See, upon my breast,
The roseate gleam of mother Isis' stone.
Thou art a royal lover.

Thalarchus.

 Who but a king
May fitly woo the queen of love?

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Critias.

Hebe,
I'll drink with thee again ; sweet Hebe —
Why, Venus were a hag beside thee now !
O Bacchus is a jolly fellow ! Come,
We'll drink to him, a jolly tipsy god !
Let's sing to him, let's sing, I say !

Antiphon.

Thou'lt snore
With him under the table, Critias,
Before thou'lt sing.

Critias.

Ay, snore with him ; let's snore
With him ; a jolly tipsy god, let's snore
With him, I say ! Hebe, I drink to thee !
A jolly tipsy —

[CRITIAS *falls.*]

Antiphon.

Under the table, swine,
At last. The beast in man is most of him.
Behold, Charmides, thy philosophy,
Under the table. So folly clasps excess
About the neck, and both together drown.
In moderation taste the dangerous cup,

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

And therein find delight ; for reason, master,
Holds back the foaming steeds of sense rushing
Headlong and blind along the parlous course,
Keener and truer for the checking hand
That guides them straining at the reins.

Charmides.

Old owl,

Hoot thy pragmatics to the frosty moon ;
Bathe with cold Dian in her icy streams,
And nourish thy thin blood on chiccory.
But we live in the lusty sun, our hearts
Aglow with all the blessing of the god ;
'Tis mother Ceres stores them in the grape,
And father Bacchus brews them in the wine.
Here's rich Falernian ripe with Italy's tang,
Encasked these many years in the cool earth,
Mellow with her soft days, each draught a dream
Of golden happiness ! Fill, fill again
And drink ! Here's to Thalarchus and his love !
We're gods to-night, and flout the troublous
world !

Glauco.

Hast tasted these delicious ortolans,
Hermogenes ? and these flamingo tongues ?
I would I had a hundred palates now !
Alas, why were we made with only one !

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Hermogenes.

Thou'rt crammed as full as a cock's craw, Glauco !

Glauco.

Oh that I had a craw to stow away
These ortolans ! The gods, Hermogenes,
Were jealous when they made us, else why made
Our small capacities all single ?

Hermogenes.

Yet thou canst eat again. True,

Glauco.

But when again
Wilt find such feast as this ! such ortolans,
Such mullets, all the way from Mauritania !
Such lampreys, luscious with ambrosial sauce,
As though the gods themselves were in the
kitchen !
Such tender mushrooms, sweeter than —

Hermogenes.

Such wines !
Thou hast forgot the wines !

Glauco.

No, no ! drink not,
Hermogenes, before or when thou eat'st.

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

'Tis the first canon of the feaster's art ;
For wine thickens the nicer taste and dulls
The quintessential appetite, that sense,
That cultured sense, whose fine discernment sifts
The subtler flavours of the food, but has
No lodgment in the gross and vulgar mouth.
Then after thou hast eat repletedly,
Drink to the full, and in the vintage drown
Thy woe, that thou canst eat no more.

Hermogenes.

Hercle !

See, Glauco, Thais' beauty glows revealed !
Venus Epistrophia, thou art outdone !

Glauco.

It is an art, Hermogenes, that few
Attain. In eating, men are mostly beasts.
That nice distinction which —

[*Enter Bacchanalians.*]

Hermogenes.

O ravishment !

Behold Silenus and his glittering crew !
Evoe ! Fauns and Nymphs, Dryads and Naiads,
With lute and Father Pan's own mellow reed,
With clash of cymbal and with beat of drum,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

With ivy wreath and verdant myrtle bough,
With tossing arm and heaving breast! Evoe!

Glauco.

Here, boy! That dish of lampreys I'll essay
Again. And put that mullet by my side.
Those locusts, too, place there. As I was saying,
That nice discernment art alone attains
Is won by long —

Hermogenes.

Io! Bacche! Evoe!
It is the ivy-crownéd god himself,
With all his Bacchanals! O wondrous sight!
Thou glittering pageant, feasting the eager eye!
Thou golden dream of fantasy, I leap
For joy! Evoe! Bacche! Io! Io!

Glauco.

How tinsel catches a light soul! Hi, boy!
Bring me those ortolans Hermogenes
Insultingly forgets.

Hermogenes.

How they disport
Themselves! O glorious rout! They sing, they
dance,
They shout and leap with mirth and passion!
See!

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

The Naiads to the fountains run ! The Fauns
Pursue and seize the yielding nymphs ! Evoe !

[*First Chorus of Bacchanals.*]

Io ! Evan !
Clash the cymbal !
Crash the timbrel !
Lash the drum !
We come ! We come !
Io ! Evan !

Let the pipe shrill
Through valley and hill !
Io ! Evan !

Silenus and Pan,
In the wild van,
With riot and song,
Ten thousand strong !
Io ! Evan !

Bacchus, inspire !
We breathe with thy fire !
Io ! Evan !

He who would stay us
Remember Pentheus !
Io ! Evan !

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Clash the cymbal !
Crash the timbrel !
Lash the drum !
We come ! We come !
Io ! Evan !

[*Second Chorus of Bacchanals.*]

Io ! Bacche ! Io !
Twi-mothered god,
With ivy-wreathed rod !
Io ! Bacche ! Io !

Lord of the vine,
Life of the wine,
We are thine, we are thine !
We run and we dance,
We leap and we prance,
The green turf on ;
White-footed Naiad,
Light-footed Dryad,
Goat-footed Faun !
We turn and we twirl,
As leaves when they whirl,
As swift waters swirl
In the eddy's embrace ;
We twist and we spin,
Wind out and wind in

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

In the maze of the race ;
We crouch and we spring,
Our arms toss and fling ;
We shout and we sing
To Bacchus, our king !
 With lips wide apart,
 With swift beating heart,
Wildly we chant,
Heavy we pant,
The breath coming scant,
 As we leap and we prance,
 Rush back and advance,
 As we dance, as we dance, as we dance
To Bacchus, our king !

Thais.

Thalarchus, thou art pale !

Charmides.

Critias, awake !

The great god Bacchus comes !

Antiphon.

Nor fire nor death
Could rouse him now : his wits are drowned and
sodden.

A Dryad (to Antiphon).

I pluck thy beard, Tithonus.

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Charmides.

Pluck it, fair nymph ;
Thou'lt never melt his snows ; he's iced around
With cold discretion twenty inches thick.

Dryad.

I'll be Aurora to his ancientness ;
I'll sit upon his knee and thaw him out.

Antiphon.

Nay, wanton, scorch Charmides with thy flame ;
I'm old and seasoned now these sixty years.
I bear the buckler of experience
Against thy shafts.

Thais.

Thalarchus, art thou ill ?
Thy hand is trembling, and thou spill'st the wine.

Antiphon (to Dryad).

Away, girl ! The years have made me wise.

Charmides.

And sourer than an unripe grape.

Dryad.

No, no !
How soft the silken silver of thy beard !

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Thy beard is older than thy face. Bacche !
But thou'rt not old ! Thou slanderest thyself ;
Thy skin's as soft as youth's, thine eye as clear.

Antiphon.

Thou flatt' r'st me !

Dryad.

I do but see thee close ;
Take off thy beard, and thou'rt as young as any.

Antiphon.

Now, now ! dost thou say truly !

Thais.

Speak, Thalarchus !
Like chiselled marble thou dost stand and stare !

Thalarchus.

Where art thou, Thais ? Charmides ! Antiphon !
Where are the lights that made our banquet
blaze ?
How dim, how chill, like breath from sepulchres,
This fetid air !

Thais.

I hold thee by the hand —
What spell is on him ?

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Antiphon.

'Tis the wine that mounts
His brain, and weaves the foolish phantasy.

Thalarchus.

A mirk mist rises floating up as o'er
A fen, and slowly moves and curls heavy
And dun, yet ghastly with a bluish light
As from a dying moon — and in it, see!
A shadow like a giant's!

Thais.

I see naught,
Save feast and feasters, a round of mirth and joy,
A full blown rose of pleasure. Come, shake off
This most unnatural and deadly humour,
This cankerous blight, this sick unwholesome
dread
That nips thy valour and thy wonted charm,
And be thy gracious self again!

Thalarchus.

Hear'st not
The rumble of vast voices gathering far,
Like distant thunder in the womb of wrath!

Thais.

Naught but the songs of revel and of love,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

The joyous halloo of Bacchus and his crew,
The cithern's silver cadence and the lute's,
Free laughter and wild dalliance-echoing mirth.

Thalarchus.

Out of the muggy mist issues a stench,
As from a thousand rotting carcasses.
God! How it sickens the revolted sense!

Thais.

Nay! 'Tis but the odor of the rose
That makes the air most redolently sweet;
And yonder font of Araby's perfumes,
Plashing and sparkling in its jewelled bay,
Casting their precious scents upon the breeze.

Thalarchus.

The shadow deepens! See! The cloud now
swirls
And parts; and, topping o'er the misty rheum,
A lofty pillar rears its stony crest.
And on it, lo! the figure of a man,
In suppliant attitude, all bent and bowed,
As one crushed utterly! About him swarm
And crowd a thousand hideous shapes, gibing
And threatening! Horrible! Oh, horrible!

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Demons.

Stinking hypocrite ! Bah !
Think'st thou to atone for others ?
Thy frailty bear their sins !
Bald fool on the pillar's top !
Thou leprous scab of folly !
Ha ! ha ! Hell shouts with laughter !

Simeon.

My God, my God ! Help thou me in the trial !
I faint with weakness !

Demons.

He faints, the cowardly wretch !
A little pain, and he falls down,
O'ercome. Seize him, and rack him
From head to foot. Crush him flat
With hell's full vengeance. Shoot lightnings
Through his spine, and in his eyeballs
Spit keen fire to his brain.
He'd make amends for others' sins,
Would he ? and bear the penalty,—
This lump of foulness, this filthy clay,
This idiot on the pillar's top,
Unshorn, unkempt, unwashed,
Imputing sanctity to dirt !
Drivelling fanatic ! Hoary fool !

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Simeon.

Upon thy merits, Lord, alone I lean :
I have no strength but thine. Thou didst endure,

Within the garden's keep, the agony
Of sin's embrace, and felt its fetid breath
Upon the mirror of thy purity ;
And all the reeking tide of evil poured
Its slimy floods upon thee, stifling thee,
Till nature, pushed beyond her durance, swooned
And sweated blood through all thine aching
veins !

Pour from the precious treasury of thy pain
Some little grace to stay my impotence !
Fill up my emptiness with thy vast merit ;
For I but merit in thy merit, Lord,
And gain but in thy gain.

Demons.

Craven ! poltroon ! He's afraid ;
He dares not fight alone,
And calls for aid upon another.
We call upon no over-lord :
Our strength's our own, all undivided !
In independent might self-lords,
We bend no cringing back,
And lift no suppliant voice

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Whining to the tyrant !
Upon him, Spirits of the Deep !
Rend him ! flay him with your teeth
From head to heel, till the red flesh
Quiver and palpitate ! This
For the lusts of Antioch !

Simeon.

They scourged thee at thy pillar, Lord, till Thou
Didst stand in thine own blood. The knotted lash
That flaked thy flesh away — O piteous sight ! —
Was the red tooth of foul concupiscence ;
And Thou didst stand in patience and endure,
Silent, the ravenous fang that bit and tore
Thine innocence in offering for our sins !
And from a thousand wounds thy mangled flesh
Wept bloody streams upon the guilty earth !
By thy fierce scourging, Lord, grant me new
strength,
And from the vessels of thy grace fill up
My nothingness with power !

Demons.

Again he seeks defence
Behind another's might.
The skulker ! White-livered dotard !
Dastard, we spit on thee !

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Hast thou not set thyself up
On this high pillar's top,
A shining mark of sanctity
For all the country round,
A protest and rebuke
To lustful Antioch !
And for its sins acceptest
The rigorous penalties ;
Endurest wind and rain
And storm and cold and heat
For its soft luxuries ;
Sufferest the filth and dirt
Of thy scab-crustèd body,
Fouling these long and tedious years
For its nice daintiness,
Its sensual cleanliness ;
Bearest hunger and thirst
For its vile gluttonies,
Silence and solitude
For its wild blasphemies
And lascivious hours ;
The narrow prison of the pillar
For its licentiousness !
And thou'rt a saint, forsooth,
And workest miracles,
And hearest the people call thee saint,
And pray to thee for help

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

At thy tall pillar's base !
A sorry saint, indeed,
Who darest not own thy shadow,
Nor comest forth to meet a foe
Out of thine own valiance,
But, supplicating, whinest
A mongrel prayer to Heaven,
Timid and trembling ! Bah !
Psalm-droner ! Prayer-monger !
Thou a saint ! Ha ! ha !

Simeon.

O Lord, upon thy handiwork look down
With love's forbearing eye ; for I am naught
Within the searching splendour of thy sight,
Whose vision equals to thyself alone,
One Lord omnipotent and infinite,
Maker of heaven and earth through thy sole
Word !

Within my mother's womb thou madest me,
And out of the abyss of nothingness
Didst give me being through very love ! — O

Lord,
My God, let me not fail to love again ! —
And nourished me and cherished me, a babe,
Who knew thee not, in helpless infancy,
And guided me through all the wayward years

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Of youth, and led me wandering in the paths
Of sin back to the bosom of thy mercy !
Let me not fail, my God, nor deem myself
Before thee aught but thy poor creature, dust
And ashes in thy hand !

Demons.

Groveller ! Abject worm,
In vile abasement crawling !
Cracked vessel of dishonour !
Upon him, Spirits ! Befoul him
With utmost stench and filth !
Traitor to his manhood !
Betrayer of his sovereign will !
Thou mimic of a saint !
Thou manikin ! Despiser
Of the sacred precious gift
Of freedom, kept by us alone
Intact against the tyrant !

Simeon.

O Lord, Thou dost solicit me with love,
And gently knockest at my heart, calling
Upon me sweetly ! And I may close the door
Against Thee, Lord, and answer not ; for Thou,
O Lord, respectest in thy handiwork
The gift of freedom, which Thou didst bestow

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Upon Thy creature, who but holds as he
Receives from Thee. And when, O Lord, I bid
Thee come, moved by thy blandishment, Thou
com'st

In the swift whirlwind of thy love, and snatch'st
Me up in ecstasy, and hold'st me ravished
With love ! For I am thine, O Lord, by right
Of sovereignty ; and Thou art mine by might
Of love ! Thou gavest me myself, O Lord,
And hold'st me in the hollow of Thy hand,
Suspended o'er the void of nothingness ;
And then Thou gavest me thyself, O Lord,
Pouring thy goodness upon me like a flood
Of pleasant waters on a barren plain !

And Thou hast bought me with a price, O Lord !
And, in the covenant of Christ made flesh,
Hast pledged thyself to me, and feedest me
Upon thyself, till I abide in Thee,
And Thou in me ; whereof in Thee I find
The fulness of all love, the round and sum
Of all desire ! for in Thee, Lord, I am
And have my life, and move, O Lord, in Thee,
Who art our perfect good and perfect love,
First impulse and last term of liberty.
For I, O Lord, am as a little child,
And Thou the eager mother of the child,
Who first instils in him desire to walk,

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

And leads him by the hand that he may walk,
Then kisses him, rewarding him, because
He walked, who neither had desire to walk,
Save through the inspiration of her love,
Nor yet had walked save by her guiding hand,
And still withal of his own motion walked ;
For thine the grace, O Lord, that moves, and
thine
The grace that aids, and thine the guerdoning
grace,
That crowns thy creature's free response, who
moves
To Thee by love divine solicited,
And rests in Thee by love divine rewarded.

Demons.

Caviller ! Word-monger !
Hoary sophist fouling
Man's limpid intelligence with murky phrases ;
Clouding the crystal brightness
Of independent reason
With muddy mysteries !
We'll teach thee proper pride
For the high dignity
Of outraged intellect
Betrayed and surrendered
By thee in shameless fear,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

To be tramped mockingly
Under the Tyrant's feet !
Lift him in mid-air
By the heels, and dash him down
Upon the rocks beneath,
Smashing his foolish skull,
Scattering the muddled brains,
That shame the high prerogative
And abase the lofty puissance
Of man's lordly mind —
Rush upon him ! Sweep him off !

Thalarchus.

My God, my God, let not the malignant host
Prevail !

Thais.

Of whom, Thalarchus, speakest thou ?

Antiphon.

There is some maggot in his o'erwrought brain,
That feeds upon his reason ; let be, let be,
He'll mend by morning.

Thalarchus.

Like a surcharged cloud,
Green with the sulphurous wrath of pent light-
nings,

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

They gather round him, ominous, muttering !
And now with sudden fury unleash upon him !
O God ! — See, they touch him not ! but break
Against the pillar's edge as the giant sea
Flinging against a beetling cliff is stayed
Roaring, and beaten back draws to the deep
Again, foaming in angry impotence !

Simeon.

Thy brows were crowned with thorns, my God,
 piercing
Thy temples with their spikes, and all around
Thy head circled the barren coronal
Pressed by the ribald soldiers' cruel staves
Into the bruised flesh. This mock, O Lord,
Thou didst endure in silent humbleness,
And wore this leafless diadem of pride
For sins of those, who insolently boast
The shallow plummet of their little minds
Sounding the muddy waters of time's sea,
Above the immeasurable, sacrosanct
Eternal Reason of their God filling
The crystal oceans of the infinite.
Hear me, O Lord, and let thy strength be
 mine !
Lift thou me up to thy humility,
Who only knows to conquer through thy pain !

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

And in the bloody wine spilled from the vine,
Whose bitter thorns envised thy tender brows,
Sustain my weakness, and thy pardon pour
Upon the pride of boastful Antioch !

Thalarchus.

His prayer prevails ! Their horrid ranks re-
pulsed,
Staggered and broken, scatter like thinning rack
Before the first keen breath of crystal winds
Clearing the labouring heavens.

Demons (retiring).

Not through thy might, Simeon,
Is our due vengeance stayed :
Another's power holds us,
Tyrannously thrusts us back.
Our valour undismayed
Yields only for the moment.
We'll come again new armed,
And crush thee flat against
The earth, and stamp thee down
Into the mire, like dung !

Simeon.

Now praise to Thee, O Lord, my God, all praise !
For thine the power and thine the glory, Lord,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Who sittest on the Cherubim, the earth
Thy lowly footstool and the heavens thy throne !
Before thy servant Thou didst hold thy shield
Against the demons' power, and Hell prevailed
not !

For who shall stand against thy might, O Lord ?
Before thy wrath the heavens are shrivelled,
The earth is smoke, and all the goods thereof ;
The sun goes out in darkness, and the stars
Flicker and die ; time like a spent breath
Evanishes, and space through all its utmost
bounds

Shrinks shuddering ! Nor earth, nor heaven,
nor hell

May stand before thee, Lord, eterne and sole,
Coequal with thyself alone in being,
In power, in love and goodness infinite,
Perfect and absolute and all-sufficient
Within thyself who art eternal good !
But thou, O Lord, wilt not destroy thy works :
Thou lov'st the goodly order of thy hand,
And out of the disorder of our sins
Hast drawn still sweeter harmonies of love
Through him thine only Son, consubstant God
With Thee, who stooping to our lowliness
Lifted our nature to thy holiness,
And spanned the chasm in nature and in grace,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Which sin had breached through all our uni-
verse ;
And, bearing all the burden of our fault,
Made gracious healing in vicarious pain, ,
Consummate in the awful sacrifice
Upon Golgotha's trembling mount, when all
The elements made moan, and stricken Nature,
Sighing through all her ways, in darkness veiled
Her conscious eyes ! Through Him, O Lord, the
power,
By Him the victory, and unto Him
The glory ! I but a shaken reed fearful
Before the blast, broken, save for thy hand
Sheltering thy creature's weakness in the storm.

Thalarchus.

Oh, how sublime his words, how great the power
Thereof, scattering the hellish crew like dust
In the whirlwind, beating their malice down
As the keen hail levels the boastful pride
Of summer fields ! O mystery of pain
And death, that issueth in power and life,
Grant me to see ! Upon my purblind heart
Pour down thy deep irradiance, and pierce
The fetid exhalations of my sins,
That blind the soul's uncleansed and rheumy
eye !

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Inflame me with desire, and purge me clean
In penitential fires, till I, too, learn
To love as Simeon, a holocaust in Christ
For wanton Antioch's iniquities !
Simeon, upon thy pillar's top pray thou
For me, who mocked thee and thy God, and
knew

Thee not, nor him, and, knowing not, reviled
And called thee fool, fanatic, dotard, dolt,
And heaped upon thee all the ribaldry
Of the contemptuous world, the scorn of pride,
The scoff, the jest, the easy ridicule
Of sensual hearts, whose unpurged lust feeling
The secret sting of others' holiness,
As the sharp thorn beneath the rose, resents
The silent imputation of its guilt,
And brooking not the impeachment of its shame,
With pitchy tongue envenomed in foul hates,
Spits out the bawdy mockeries of its filth
Upon the lilies of love's sanctities.

O Simeon, pray for me, whose sins thou takest
In suffering upon the pillar's height,
Under the pitiless sun, the icy stars,
In pangs of nature and assaults of hell ;
Pray thou for me, who from the depths below
Cries out in agonies of shame and calls
In Christ's dear name for mercy and for pardon !

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Simeon.

I hear a voice as of one calling out
And beating at the gates of mercy ! Lord,
Hear him and open unto him !

Thais.

Who is't
His madness now addresses ?

Antiphon.

One, Simeon,
They call the Stylite, an idiot monk, who lives
Upon a pillar's top near Antioch,
Some twenty miles beyond the city's gates.

Thais.

I've heard the rumour of this strange disease.

Simeon.

Lord, by thy bloody sweat, have mercy, Lord !

Antiphon.

Under the subtle witchery of the wine
This monkish madness has seized upon his wits,
And holds his fancy : it will pass anon.

Simeon.

By thy red scourging at the pillar, Lord,
Have mercy ! Let his cry come unto Thee !

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Charmides.

Heed not, Thalarchus, Thais : to-morrow's morn
Will see his health restored. — Come, I pledge
Thy beauty in this draught !

Thais.

I'll drink with thee !
Let Bacchus blow the fire and Venus lead !

Simeon.

Hearken unto Thy creature's cry, O Lord !
Gird not the bowels of mercy up, but hear !
For Thou hast said, Whoso shall knock, to him
Shall it be opened. By the clotted thorns
About thy brow, the raillery and the mock
Of Pilate's soldiers spitting on Thee, Lord,
Incline unto thy creature's lowliness,
Who cries to thee from out the depths, and calls
Unto the ear of thy compassion, Lord ;
For Thou didst take our frailty on thyself
In pity of our sins.

Thalarchus.

Blessed be thou,
O Simeon, thrice blessed thou who pray'st
For me sunk in the foulness of my sins !

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Simeon.

Thou wilt not, Lord, refuse a contrite heart ;
And Thou didst pardon Mary Magdalene,
Who wept her sorrow on thy sacred feet,
And him who cried to Thee beside thy cross ;
And Thou didst heal the lepers of their sores,
Till they were fair to look upon ; and him
That lay asick of bed, thou didst unloose
Of all his sins and bid him rise and walk ;
For thou didst come with healing in thy hands
And mercy unto life again for them
That would arise from out their sinfulness
To walk with thee.

Demons (in distance).

He's winning Thalarchus from us !
Let him not prevail ! Curse him !
Were't not for the Despot's power,
Who tyrannously holds us back,
We'd snatch and lift his column
In mid-air, and dash it to earth
And smash it, and him with it,
Who now, on his filthy eerie
Of vantage, drones his prayers
To listening Heaven against
Our valour and our might !
We ask but a fair field

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

To smite him down and crush him !
This vagabond of sanctity !
Let him go back to his cell
And mumble his unctuous prayers
In secret to his fattened God.
Hate seize us and rack us
At mention of that name !
Let him not stand conspicuous
Upon the pillar's top before
The people, to seduce them
From their soft living
And mellowed luxuries
By his austere ensample
Of dire mortification
And penance vicarious !
'Tis against the cloister's rule :
Why do they tolerate it ?
But we'll o'ercome him yet :
Hell's not easily foiled !
We have an arrow left
In our quiver to pierce him.
Ha ! ha ! we know a way
To snare this filthy bird,
And drag him from his nest.
Ha ! ha ! we'll show him yet
The craft of independent
Intellect he so derides

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

And flouts in abject obeisance
To the Tyrant he worships ! Ha ! ha !
We know a way to lime him !
We'll double on the ancient fox
Before he runs to earth again !

Simeon.

Let him not perish, Lord, who calls on Thee !
As Thou didst suffer Simon to take Thy cross
Upon the heavy way to Calvary,
Though asking not, yet after bearing gladly,—
Suffer Thy creature now who pleads with thee,
To share its burden humbly, Lord, with thee,
And out of the vast fulness of thy love
Draw balm and healing for his sinful hurts.
On me, O Lord, the creature of thy hand,
Who am as nothing in thy sight, the least
Of those who serve Thee, of infirmities
Full as a sieve of meshes holding nought,—
On me, O Lord, the fellow of this hour,
His country, and his city, pour the pain
Of his offending, till thy justice shifts
Her beam and balances her scale again
In full amend of penance done. And this,
O Lord, prostrate before thee in the dust
Of mine unworthiness, mote in the breath
Of thine infinitude, I humbly pray
Out of the preciousness of Christ's spent blood,

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Which purchased us with ransom infinite,
Eternal price of Adam's and our sin !

Demons (approaching).

Woe ! woe ! we're overcome,
Routed by Simeon's prayer !
Great is his holiness,
That conquereth our might,
Lords of the deep with power
O'er hell's dominion wide ;
Spirits of darkness knowing
The potent secrets of nature,
Seducing the lordly race
Of men to open rebellion
Against their Maker. Woe ! woe !
Our pride is fallen, our boast
Is broken, crushed down flat
By Simeon's might in prayer.
Woe to us, woe ! Keener
Than pangs of hell the shame
Of defeat by Simeon brought
Upon our puissant ranks
Broken against the rampart
Of his potent prayer,
As the dusty simoon breaks
Against the bulwarked mountain !
Woe ! woe ! O shameful woe !
Hate unto him forever !

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Simeon.

Bear down upon me, Lord, bear down and plunge
Me in the abyss of emptiness, whence I
Was drawn by Thee, the creature of thy love !
The clamour of hell is but a noisy wind
Before Thee, vain as froth upon the wave.
The arrow of their hate they aim at Thee,
I but the seeming mark. For Thine, O Lord,
The power that scatters them ; and they, O Lord,
As I, are but the creatures of thy breath,
Hardened against Thee in their pride, envious
Of man whom thou hast made to fill their place.
And I am but an empty vessel filled
With the omnipotence of prayer, which Thou
In largess of thy love hast poured in me ;
And sufferest me to use against their power,
Whose damning praise is but the silken snare
Of flattery, with which bold Satan once
Essayed to take the soul of Christ himself !
And Christ's the glory sole against the power
Of hell broken by him forever !

Demons (on right side, disguised now as Angels
of Light).

Hail, Simeon, victor o'er the hellish host !
By Heaven sent, we come to solace thee
With happy tidings and assurance glad

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Of Heaven's high approval. Thou hast fought
The goodly fight and won. Hail to thee, saint!

Simeon.

Now praise to Jesus Christ alone! To Him
The glory, whose right hand of power reaches
To midmost hell!

Demons (on left side, undisguised).

Why speaks he the Terrible Name,
That makes all hell shudder
Unto its deepest deeps!
Curse it! curse it! curse it!

Demons (on right side).

Rest thee, Simeon; for thou hast earned thy meed.
Behold the raging elements repressed,
Which hell with malice vain against thee roused.
And all the air that lately shook with storm
And roared, rent with the crackling thunderbolt,
Slumbers in mellow quiet and breathes soft balm.
Down from the glowing arches of the night,
Peace, dovelike on her rediscovered nest,
In feathery silence drops, and dreaming broods;
Tender as mothers' eyes upon their babes,
And pure, the glimmering ardour of the stars
Falls on the shadowed earth and wearied men

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Sunk in the bath of slumber after toil,
To wake upon the coming morn refreshed
Against the burden of the hastening day.
All nature sleeps and rests, drawing new life
From the deep fountains of repose ; for so
The wisdom of the Maker foreordained,
Dividing night from day. Rest thee, and sleep,
O holy Simeon, while we watch and guard.

Simeon.

The rounded beauty of the night, thy hand,
O Lord, in the beginning builded up,
And fixed the pillars of the firmament,
And gave their motions to the wheeling stars,
Making thy glory manifest on high :
Thy word uttered above the void brought forth
The solid earth and all that live thereon,
The circling seas and all that swim therein,
The liquid air and all that fly therein,
Each in its place and moving in its sphere
With variant note blending concordant song,
And making in the conchéd ear of Heaven
Vast harmony. And so the whole round world
And the respondent heavens, O Lord, utter
Thy glory and make manifest thy praise !
For thine the gentle silence of the night,
And thine the softness of the balmy air,

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

And thine the sweet refreshment of repose
And strength renewed in man and beast and
fowl ;
And thine the glory of the golden morn,
And all the splendour of the rising sun
Shedding the benediction of its light
Upon the waking world.

Demons (on right side).

Nay, holy man,
Rest thee ; and whilst thou slumberest, drawing
New vigour from the crystal founts of sleep,
We'll raise on high the hymn of praise.

Thalarchus.

Simeon,

Pray thou for me, and at the feet of Christ
Make intercession for my grievous sins !

Demons (on right side).

Thou'rt wearied, Simeon, and thy force is spent.
The very desert sleeps, and darkness shrouds
The land heavy with silence, wooing all
To rest. Deep is the shadow of the night,
And nature yields responsive to the law
Ordained in the beginning. Spent art thou
With battling 'gainst the routed hosts of hell,

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

And all thy racked and bruised frame leaden
With weight of toil drags down thy spirit worn
With unremitted prayer against thy foe.
Respite thy vigilance and prayerful might ;
And to great nature's hest surrendering,
In due obedience to its Maker's law,
In slumber steep thy flagging powers, and rest.

Thalarchus.

Simeon, Simeon, pray thou for me, whose heart
Is withered with his sins !

Antiphon.

The night hath past
The middle heavens two hours and more : 'tis
late.
I go. Farewell, good friends.

Charmides.

Love knows no hour :
I stay with thee, Thais, be it night or day.

Thais.

Now is the ripened hour of revel. Stay,
O Antiphon, and drink with me ! I touch
Thy goblet with my lips. Wilt not refuse
My pledge !

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Antiphon.

I yield the golden moment, Thais,
And staying court the precious, sweet delay.

Thalarchus.

Simeon, Simeon, pray thou for me whose soul
Lies in the darkness of its evil days !

Simeon.

Let him not perish, Lord, whose voice I hear
Out of the night in supplication raised !
Renew his heart, and thy refreshment pour
Upon his bruised spirit crying out !
If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities,
Lord, who shall stand ? Spare us, and gather
not
Our sins against thy day of wrath, but hear,
O Lord, and let our prayer come unto thee !
Thy mercy, Lord, is even above thy works ;
And thou hast made thy mercy manifest
In Christ, who stood for our iniquities,
And took our sins away ! Have mercy, Lord,
And by Christ's blood hearken unto our cry !

Demons (on left side).

Confusion upon him ! Tempt him !
Let him not escape ! Tempt him !

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Demons (on right side).

Heaven commends thy vigilance, O saint,
And we but tried thee for the Lord. The voice
Thou hearest crying is the voice of one
Who prays in Antioch, by Heaven's power
Permitted through the thick and heavy night
To see thee on thy pillar's top, and, touched
By grace at sight of thee, cries out for pardon.
The ways of Heaven are merciful, nor time
Nor place resists the beating floods of grace
Poured from the copious fountains of its love :
E'en in the midst of riot and of sin
The impetuous tide of mercy snatches him,
And bears him to the deeps of love beyond.
And Heaven, to solace thee in recompense
Of all thou hast endured and overcome,
Puts back the murky curtain of the dark,
And suffers thee to look upon the scene :
Behold Thalarchus and the wanton feast,
Where thou hast conquered and beat back the
 lords
Of hell ! Look, Simeon, and rejoice !

Thalarchus.

Pray, pray,
O Simeon ; for my heart is dust, my soul
Ashes, and all my years but bitterness !

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Simeon.

The Lord will water thee and make thee sprout ;
For he is Lord of love. Mighty His power,
That overcometh death and puts down sin
Under his feet ! How wonderful thy ways,
O Lord, and no man knoweth them ; for who
Hath been thy counsellor ? For of thee, Lord,
And by thee are all things, and in thee all,
Who are from the beginning sole, and are
Eternal term unto thyself alone !

Praise ye the Lord, ye heavenly creatures,
praise !

Ye Cherubim and Seraphim and Powers
And all Angelic Hierarchies ranged
In flaming choirs, and all ye blessed hosts
And saints that bask within his beam eterne,
Ye spotless lilies of Christ's fruitful love, —
Praise ye the Lord through all your ringing
ranks !

And thou, whose virgin flesh didst bear His Son,
Alone of Adam's race untouched of sin,
Co-worker in Redemption's plan by grace
Of Him who had regard for thy humility,
And lifted thee above all creatures else
In Heaven's celestial ranks or on the earth
Unto that dignity of motherhood
So sacrosanct that none save Him alone

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

May comprehend the height and depth and term
Of its exalted holiness,— praise ye
The Lord ! Rejoice and be glad with me
Who, falling down before His Face, lift up
My voice and cry out in exceeding joy,
Seeing this marvel of the Lord's right hand !
For wonderful the starry heavens above,
The unseen fountains of the crystal sea,
The far foundations of the fixed earth,
The little things and great of all that is,
The tiny creature floating in the light,
The spaces of the yawning universe,
And time's wide tract from utmost shore to shore
Of his eternity, so wonderful
And beautiful in number, weight, and measure,
Balanced within his all-sustaining hand,
And moving in the order of his power
To that ordained and harmonious end
Set in His wisdom for their perfect close,—
Praise ye the Lord for these His mighty works,
But praise ye more beyond all praise of words,
Beyond all utterance of human tongue,
Beyond the vastest reach of angel's thought,
That mystery of grace and farthest love,
Touching the sinner's hard averted will,
Subduing pride and melting all the soul
To tears, till it incline to him again ;

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

And spurning all its hated servitude,
Inviolate of all constraint, rises
Enfranchised from its reeking bed of sin
And freely answers to the call of Love !
O wondrous miracle, O mystery
Of Love beyond all knowing ! Praise ye
The Lord, ye hills and mountains, valleys and
 plains,
O earth and heaven, and ye shining stars,
Ye blessed hosts of happiness, ye Powers,
Ye Dominations, Angels, and Archangels,
Till all the universe of high and low
Trembling, responsive with the harmony
In circling joy about the throne of Love,
Sing in the swelling chorus of its praise,
Hosanna to the Lord ! Hosanna ! Hosanna !

Thalarchus.

O waters of great joy upon my soul,
Refreshing all my faintness ! On the wings
Of morning am I lifted up ! O balm
Of healing to my wounded spirit ! Simeon,
Thy words are holy courage in my heart !

Demons (on left side).

Confusion on him ! Tempt him !
He prays like a mighty fountain

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Leaping to Heaven — tempt him !
Ye sluggish spirits, shame
On your vaunted cunning, boasters !
Shall it be said in hell
That this broken and wasted fool
Worsted the high intelligence
Of pure spirits heaven-born,
Though cast out by the Tyrant
By sheer force — shame us not !
Make no delay ! Tempt him !
And in this subtle net
Drag him from his high perch !

Demons (on right side).

Thy prayers have wrenched Thalarchus from the
grip
Of hell e'en midst the orgies of the feast !
Upon thy victory feed thine eager soul ;
For Heaven vouchsafes this sweet reward. Be-
hold
The banquet's vast luxuriance scattered
By prodigality with wanton hands
Careless of use. The enamoured heavy air,
Pregnant with perfume of a thousand flowers,
Falling in flaky rain from unseen hands,
Melts all the soul to indolence, and soothes
The swooning sense ; the fountains splash and
murmur

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

In dreamy rhythm on the drowsy ear,
Blending with throbbing music soft and low,
Whose gentle cadences, from fretted string
And oaten stop blowing its mellow sound,
Mingle their dulcet harmonies, stealing
Into the brain and mellowing the spirit
To sensuous languors. See, around about
A thousand lamps, feeding on scented oils
In jewelled transparencies encaged, throw out
Their irised radiance, shedding warmth and light
Upon the gleaming marbles of the hall,
Teeming with mirth and revelry and love.
Rest thee, O Simeon, a little moment here ;
And let thy wearied eye, that naught beholds
Save blinding leagues of sandy wastes stretching
Beneath the beating glare of desert suns,
Couch now an instant on the mellow scene.

Simeon.

Bleak were thy hills, O Judah, when He came,
My Lord and God, unsheltered from the winds,
Save for the lonely stable's broken thatch ;
And for his tender limbs the manger's straw,
Cropped by the dumb, unconscious brutes, that
shared
His lowliness. Cast out by men, he found
Rude habitation with the beasts alone ;

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Nor light nor warmth diffused their tenderness
Around, nor ministrant were servile hands
In purple and fine linen to array
His innocence. He came unto his own,
And they received him not, and knew him not,
Rejected and despised of men. O Lord,
My God, e'en in the cradle thou didst choose
The way of sorrow, and, a babe, espouse
The bitter bride of poverty, to point
The way of those who love. O Holy Babe,
So low in thy humility that man,
By thine ensample, may be lifted up,
Raise us from out this slough of wantonness,
And by the desolation of thy crib
Forgive us this our sin's luxurious ease !

Thalarchus.

O Christ, thy poverty be mine !

Demons (on right side).

The savour of rare viands rise up to whet
The appetite, and moist the wrinkled lip
Of hunger with sharp longing.

Simeon.

Thou, O Lord,
Didst fast within the desert forty days,
And Satan tempted thee !

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

Demons (right side).

Thy throat is parched,
And all thy tongue aflame with thirst ; for dry
And hot the air under the desert sun,
And small the share of water brought to thee
By thy forgetful brethren of the cells.
Packed in its snowy bed the crater stands,
And cool the wine upon the crackled lip ;
Refreshing is the sweet, red draught charging
The feverish veins with ruddy life again.

Simeon.

When thou, O Lord, upon thy cross didst cry,
“I thirst,” they gave thee vinegar and gall.

Demons (on right side).

Thou’rt ever mindful, Simeon, of thy Lord ;
And valorous art thou in thy vigilance.
All heaven rejoices in thy holiness.
Thalarchus thou hast won by dint of prayer
Accepting all the burden of his sins.
For this high Heaven permitted the assault
Of hell to-night to try thy fortitude ;
And gloriously hast thou conquered, Simeon.
And now let not thy charity wane cold ;
But as the imperial sun in heaven’s high arch,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Whose glowing eye looks down upon the earth's
Outstretched demesne from morn's to eve's red
 marge,
And sheds celestial heats on all alike,
So let the furnace of thy saintly love
Beam down its radiance on all sinners here.
Have pity on them, Simeon, and draw from
 Heaven,
Through the vicarious offering of thyself,
Pardon and mercy. Heaven will hear ; for what
More grateful in heaven's eye, after the Lord's
Own sacrifice, the source and root of all,
Than the abandonment of utter love
Making atonement for another's sin ?
For greater love than that a man lay down
His life for other, no man hath.

Simeon.

Yea, Lord,
Thy life Thou didst lay down for each and all,
Thy love immeasurable, and as thy love
Thy sacrifice. And Thou wast lifted up
To draw all things to Thee, and, drawing, win
The hearts of men to sacrifice of self,
And lose themselves in love of Thee, to find
Themselves in Thee transfigured ! I, O Lord,
Seek only Thee, and them in Thee, and Thee

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

In them, whom Thou hast bought with a great
price !

Thou callest them, O Lord : grant them to hear !
And in thy mercy lift them up !

Demons (on right side).

Simeon,

Behold Thais, the chiefest sinner here,
Steeped in the slumber of the wine ! Pray thou
For her, a sinful daughter of weak Eve.
Let not such beauty be the prey of hell !
Not Eve herself came from her Maker's hand
More fair. Slipped from the fillet's amorous
clasp,
Her locks, like silken gold from looms of light,
Shower down a streaming glory gleaming about
The whiteness of her shoulder's ivory arch,
As star-shafts on the billow's crested foam ;
Her lips incarnadine, her flushed cheek —

Simeon.

They gashed thy hands and feet with nails, O
Lord,
And, lifting up thy heavy gibbet, plunged
It in its earthy socket shuddering,
Tearing thy tender, gaping wounds anew,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

And racking all thy jarred and bruised frame
With sudden agony ! Pierce me, O Lord,
With that fierce pain, and rack this recreant
flesh,

The weak inheritance of Adam's sin,
That through thy merit I may somewise share
With thee the dire atonement of her sin !

Demons (on left side).

He escapes ! Confusion and shame !
He escapes !

Demons (on right side, throwing off disguise).

We are baffled !
The Tyrant suffers us not
To gain one slightest foothold
Within the circle of his soul !

Demons (on left side).

Upon him ! Seize him !
Tear him ! Smash his pillar !

Demons (on right side).

Unleash your pent rage like hail !
Assault him and crush him ! Come !
Let all rush on like furious fire !

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Thalarchus.

All hell vomits itself upon him ! Lord,
Thy servant guard ! Portentous they loom,
monstrous,
In size giants, in shape most horrible ;
With eyes of fire and wide outstretching vans
With flaming lightnings veined, onward they
sweep,
As though to engulf the world in hellish storm !
But no ! See, Heaven forbids ! They sway !
They stop !
And now as swollen clouds, pregnant with death,
Meeting an adverse wind, are stayed and blown
back,
Their dreadful host, sullen and muttering,
Recede before the breath of Heaven ! And, lo !
They melt away into the empty air !

Enter XENARES.

Xenares.

My lord, the night is dying in the west,
And dawn appears. The guests are gone, save
those
Who lie here drowned in wine. The air is dank
With poisonous humours of the heavy morn,
And thou art pale. Wilt go within ?

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Thalarchus.

'Tis gone!
Evanished! O gracious vision by Heaven
vouchsafed!

Xenares.

What, my lord?

Thalarchus.

The wonder of it!

Xenares.

My lord,
Wilt come within? 'Tis damp: thou'rt ill.

Thalarchus.

I am,
Xenares, ill and well.

Xenares.

How's that, my lord?

Thalarchus.

Ill with the past, and well with what's to come.

Xenares.

My lord, I do not understand.

Thalarchus.

Last night
Thou saw'st me ill.

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Xenares.

Nay, my good lord, never
Did health mantle more ruddy in thy cheek,
Nor shine so loudly in thine eye.

Thalarchus.

Yet was I ill ;

Sick unto death ! Ill in the lustful riot
Of misspent days, those precious pearls of time,
Which I, with wanton and regardless hand,
Flung on the dung-heaps of this wasteful world ;
But now, Xenares, well in the high hope
Of Simeon's prayers and mine own penitence
Rooted within the rich, most precious earth
Of Christ's vast charity.

Xenares.

May't please thee, sir,

To go within ?

Thalarchus.

No, Xenares — hear me :

Of all my goods take inventory : pay
What I may owe out of my fortune's wreck,
Reserving for thyself a moiety
To keep thee from the fangs of beggary.
What may remain, give to the poor. To-day
I manumit thee : thou art free. I know

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Thy worth and honest heart, and so repose
My trust. I go from Antioch.

Xenares.

Indeed,
My lord, thou'rt very ill. I pray thee —

Thalarchus.

Nay,

Be not thus urgent. Hence I go forever.
I've quitted me the burden of this world.
The brave apparel of its swelling pride
I here discard, resigning all its pomp,
Its purpled show, and strutting pageantry.
And I, who clothed me in its trumperies,
And waxed on all its fustianed vanities
As flaunting weeds upon the mucky earth,
These many and gross years, pitiless
Now scythe the rank and vicious growth, whose
bane

So long infected all the blood, and killed
The tender shoots of virtue in the soul.
Behold, Xenares, how the sober dawn,
In ghostly vapours creeping up the east,
Unmasks the glamour of the dying night,
And on the sodden ashes of our feast,
That flamed in furious riot this little while,
Spreads pale and gray as ghastly death

The FEAST *of* THALARCHUS

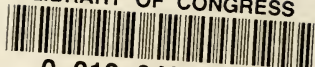
Upon the face of one who yields his soul.
So pass the sudden heats of time, the lusts
Of appetite, the hunger of possession,
Ambition's passion, love's desire, — all,
Yes, all that men, unrecking lower things
By higher lights, set heart upon below,
Mere bavin for the fiery tongue of change,
Scarce kindled ere in ashes ! I've seen
This night, Xenares, through high Heaven's
 mercy,
That which has shaken all my soul and torn
From out its ancient roots my tree of life
To plant anew in other soil, with hope
Of fruit celestial ! For now I know,
My soul illumined by that kindly beam,
The deep philosophy of poverty,
The wealth of having naught, the precious gain
Of self-surrender, riches infinite,
Out of the nothingness of this base earth
Transmuted in th' alembic of God's love !
'Tis this I seek. Farewell : I go,
Xenares, and return no more.

Xenares.

My lord, my lord !

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