

PR
4222
.S3
1901



SAVL

BY
ROBERT BROWNING



DRAWINGS BY
FRANK O. SMALL



Class PR4222

Book S3
1901

Copyright N^o

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.



SALÉ

By Robert Browning
with drawings by
Frank O. Small



Thomas H. Crowell & Company

Faint, illegible text or markings at the bottom of the page, possibly bleed-through or a library stamp.

List of Illustrations.

“Since the King, O my friend, for thy countenance sent.”

[Stanza I.] Frontispiece.

Said Abner, “At last thou art come.” [Stanza I.]

*“Then a sunbeam, that burst through the tent-roof, showed
Saul.”* [Stanza III.]

*“Where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream’s
bed.”* [Stanza V.]

*“Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their wine
song when hand grasps at hand.”* [Stanza VII.]

*“And then, the last song when the dead man is praised on
his journey.”* [Stanza VII.]

“And then, the glad chaunt of the marriage.” [Stanza VII.]

“Then, the chorus intoned as the Levites go up to the altar.”
[Stanza VII.]

Illustrations.

- “ *The hunt of the bear.*” [Stanza IX.]
- “ *And the sleep in the dried river-channel.*” [Stanza IX.]
- “ *Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose sword thou didst guard when he trusted thee forth with the armies.*” [Stanza IX.]
- “ *Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch from the shore, at their sad level gaze o’er the ocean — a sun’s slow decline.*” [Stanza X.]
- “ *Then fancies grew rife which had come long ago on the pasture.*” [Stanza XII.]
- “ *Let me tell out my tale to its ending.*” [Stanza XIV.]
- “ *The dawn struggling with night.*” [Stanza XIV.]
- “ *He is Saul, ye remember in glory.*” [Stanza XV.]
- “ *That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his vast knees.*” [Stanza XV.]
- “ *I know not too well how I found my way home in the night.*” [Stanza XVIII.]
- “ *As a runner beset by the populace famished for news.*” [Stanza XVIII.]

Introductory Note

BY

JOHN ANGUS MACVANNEL, PH.D.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.



EMBODYING as it does the thoughts and feelings, the inspirations and aspirations of men and women, literature, and especially poetic literature, furnishes one of the best means at our command of acquiring that enrichment and expansion of our nature which characterizes the rich, and ripe, and rounded life. For in the serious study of an author's work (of course an author whose work is worthy of serious study), we reproduce within ourselves that discipline through which his soul attained that soundness, sweetness, and maturity we instinctively feel to be its essential nature, and which in turn exerts a purifying and quickening influence in the soul possessed of that

Introductory Note.

inner preparedness necessary to the reception of a life felt to be higher than its own.

This preparedness of our inner nature is the inevitable medium of the quickening touch of a higher life. It is only through a waiting, listening sympathy that the intimations of the spiritual life become revealed to us. In its last analysis real knowledge is a matter of moral affinity, and only through affinity of nature, partial it may be, and as it too often is, may we come under the wholesome influences of the author's stronger imagination, respond to the deeper pulsations of his larger heart, and thus admitted to the inner circle of a soul that has lived, aspired, and suffered, we learn to feel the infinity of what before were finite things, the beauty of the commonplace, and gradually to fashion for ourselves a fairer object about which to entwine our admirations, our hopes, and our loves.

For life is the one source of life. This is the basic principle of all education. Spiritual life cannot be kept at home; it must radiate, expand, go forth to meet its like. But only the deeper nature can reach the deeper nature of others: it is ever the greater lifting the less. With so many sources of supply it would be strange indeed if the truly earnest soul should forever fail to meet

Introductory Note.

some other that is in the line of its type, some teacher that its nature needs. It is a hard matter to tell just how much one owes to the teacher or author he has once learned to reverence and love. Effects in the spiritual life are matters of soul-attitude and are to be measured only as they are inwardly realized. Yet the one who has made a sympathetic, sincere, patient study, and thereby attained a vital apprehension of even one representative poem of Wordsworth, Tennyson, or Browning, has communed with the poet himself, and henceforth will never quite forget his enrichment through another's life, the mysterious refreshment of his spirit, the inspiration to worthier living.

Browning, with Wordsworth and Tennyson, ever felt himself to be a consecrated voice, indeed, one of God's truth-tellers. This consciousness of his high calling was the informing and fructifying ideal of his career as a man and as a poet. His work as an author, giving to us a soul's experience in its almost unsurpassed variety of revelation, is the message from the deeper life of one who ever strove to be true to himself and true to God. To him the human soul with its faiths, and hopes, and loves, its discouragements, failures, and its infinite wealth of weakness even, is the thing of supreme interest. The religious

Introductory Note.

life as the fullest and freest development of man's nature is for Browning the truly normal life. "Soul and God stand sure;" and the perfect life of the soul is the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. In his earliest poem, "Pauline," published when the poet had just reached his twenty-first year, he thus addresses the Saviour:

"O thou pale form!
Oft have I stood by thee;
Have I been keeping lonely watch with thee
In the damp night by weeping Olivet,
Or leaning on thy bosom, proudly less,
Or dying with thee on the lonely cross,
Or witnessing thine outburst from the tomb."

Never for a moment did Browning give up his allegiance to Christ. The poem "Saul," one of the noblest, if not the noblest, of all his poems, is the one most intensely religious. In no other poem is the claim of Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life of the world more profoundly or more beautifully asserted. Its climax, "To see the Christ stand," is for Browning the highest word of poetry, of religion, and of life. Few, if any, poems in the language touch such depths of the religious life or induce within us the conviction that the incarnation of

Introductory Note.

Christ, besides being the central fact of time, is the central fact of eternity as well. The poem is instinct with a living passion, the effluence from the vital soul whose experience it records. From beginning to end it is informed by a mystical thought and faith. The form in which the poem is set is beautiful. The oftener it is read the more complete appears the harmony between its soul and body. The music of each line speaks to the ear with its own peculiar effect; but with a far deeper music the poem speaks to the heart, and it is with this appeal this brief introduction is concerned.

First of all, one or two interesting facts about its first publication may be noted; indeed, there is a special interest in the genesis of the poem as showing the gradual development of the thought in the poet's mind. Part I, or the first nine sections of the poem as we now have it, was printed under the same title in No. 7 of "Bells and Pomegranates" (1844); and again without alteration in "Poems" of 1849. In this first part we have a picture of surpassing beauty: the lovely boy-minstrel David by the side of the dark, maddened king. His song is the joy of the hunter, the shepherd, and the reaper; of the Levites as they march to the temple; of the joys of the physical life — the mere living:

Introductory Note.

“ Oh, our manhood’s prime vigor! No spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced,
Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver
 shock
Of the plunge in a pool’s living water, the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is crouched in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed with gold dust divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught
 of wine,
And the sleep, in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so swiftly and well.
How good is man’s life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy! ”

But a deeper note remained to be touched by the poet. Whether he had come to the later insight or not it is needless to inquire. If, indeed, he had attained the higher vision of the poem, as we have it now, when the first part was published, Browning at least seems to have felt his inability to embody it in the language of poetry. It would appear, rather, that the deeper significance of the incident was only gradually revealed to the poet through the more intimate contact with life which succeeded the year 1844. In the poem as enlarged (1855)

Introductory Note.

by the second part, that is, section ten to the end, the deeper note is sounded full and perfect. The good that David has worked for Saul, the king, has reacted on Browning's own nature, and has appeared in a new light. Through it there have been revealed to the poet depths of the divine nature and heights of human possibility undreamt of before: and through this story of a human love he has attained to the vision of the everlasting mercy —

“See the King — I would help him, but cannot, the wishes
fall through.

Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to
enrich,

To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would — knowing
which,

I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through me
now!

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou —
so wilt thou!

So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost
crown —

And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue
with death!

Introductory Note.

As thy love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being beloved!
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand
the most weak,
'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that
I seek
In the Godhead! I seek it and find it. O Saul it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever; a Hand like
this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the
Christ stand!"

Above were quoted a few lines from Browning's early poem "Pauline." Here in these grandly beautiful lines of "Saul" we have the belief of the poet's maturer years — his confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Way of God in the world.

Let us try to follow the thought of the poem a little more closely. It is founded on the incident in 1st Samuel xvi., 23: "And it came to pass when the *evil* spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp and played with his hand: So Saul was refreshed, and was well and the *evil* spirit departed from him."

The poem is a dramatic lyric, the boy David being the

Introductory Note.

speaker throughout. He is the embodiment of the winning tenderness of youth and the perennial beauty of innocence; his whole being is instinct with the sweet pure freshness of happy life; heaven's own gentleness and constancy is in his heart. He tells over, his voice to his heart, a wonderful incident which happened to him on the evening before — an incident whose imprint was on his soul forever. The setting is briefly this: Abner, Saul's cousin, sent to David, desiring him to play his harp before Saul in the hope that through the ministry of song and music the king might be freed from the evil spirit. David, with the kindness of his understanding heart, is glad to obey. He comes to the tent of the melancholy king. Abner's welcome is indeed in the heart's own language, tender, hopeful, loving:

“Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child with His
dew
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living and
blue,
Just broken to twine round thy harp strings, as if no wild heat
Were now raging to torture the desert!”

After a moment's uplifting of his soul in prayer to the God of his fathers, David opened the fold-skirts of Saul's

Introductory Note.

tent, entered, and was not afraid. Saul, like humanity when it wanders far from God, no longer enjoys the daily communions and the favoring love of heaven. Because of his own wilfulness his soul is no longer refreshed by the rills of God's loving mercy; the divine guidance is withdrawn and he suffers the pangs of spiritual loneliness. There in his desert tent :

“He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched out
wide
On the great cross-support in the centre, that goes to each
side ;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his
pangs
And awaiting his change, the king serpent all heavily hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
With the spring time— so agonized Saul, drear and stark,
blind and dumb.”

To the gentle greeting, “ Here is David thy servant,” Saul makes no answer. Untwining from his harp the lilies, emblems of purity and modesty, plucked on the way thither in the beautiful valley of Kedron, David begins to play and sing the simple, heartfelt songs of the lone shepherd lads, the home songs his own sheep know so well; songs in praise of the quiet loveliness

Introductory Note.

and peace of nature, of the flock's instinctive obedience to law; how just as the stars,

“ One after one seeks its lodging, as star follows star
Into the eve and the blue far above us — so blue and so far ! ”

The sense of his nearness to and kinship with all nature revealed through song and music suffused with love fills his young, loving heart. The unity of all life is felt in a new and living way.

“ God made all the creatures and gave them our love and our
fear
To give sign, we and they are his children, one family here.”

God's love is above his law, yet the love is seen in the law of nature's instinctive obedience to His will.

And now the generous sympathy awakened in David's heart inspires him to deeper and more human strains. The song is now the help tune of the reapers, the tender joys of living; now of the reaper's wine-song, when hand grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship, and great hearts expand and grow one in the sense of this world's life. A still gentler, deeper note is found among the strings, a note that speaks of pleading mercy, and the deep joys of wedded life. Now the song is an

Introductory Note.

elegy of the worthy dead, now the builder's chant, now the chorus intoned as the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned.

Here David paused for an instant. The waking memory of his former blessedness causes but a momentary shudder to the king. The soul of Saul will not come home. Wilfulness is the sin of Saul and he will not submit to the will of God whose law is the life of all created things.

Once more David bends to his harp and there issues forth a still more wondrous music. His thoughts are of Saul in his young manhood of wonder, of hope, of fulfilment—symbol of all that was manly and strong and joyous. David's song is the song of the vigorous life, the music of human existence. Naturally it is the joy of the physical life which first appeals to the sweet, healthy nature of David. Browning never for a moment lost sight of the truth that the physical should be the healthy, worthy setting of the higher, spiritual life. The physical is a means, not an end. But it must never be forgotten that it is a means. Physical vitality should be a great aid to spiritual vitality. In his deep and vital appreciation of this truth Browning is one of the healthfulest of poets. "All good things are ours, nor soul

Introductory Note.

helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul," exclaims the aged Rabbi in the poet's psalm of life. The spiritual is always the more, never the less. It is only when the so-called natural is transformed and spiritualized that it becomes truly natural. When the natural is made to minister to the spiritual within us then and only then have we the full liberty of the tree of life.

Saul feels somewhat the inspiration of David's heartfelt appeal. The memory of a glorious past with all that it had contained recalls him to a partial consciousness. But it is little more than a memory as yet, and a memory that is powerless to give Saul's life a meaning.

Again the harp responds to the spirit of David as he turns to life's still deeper motives. Will not the transmission of Saul's life in the lives of others avail? Will not the overflow of his once divinely replenished life into the lives which are to come after him sweeten his own life and inspire him to live? Even though death should one day come to him, nevertheless he is one of those ordained in God's Providence to the succession of witnesses to his presence and of the continuity of the spiritual life; nor will heirs ever be wanting to the royal line of those who are indeed kings and priests unto God.

Introductory Note.

“ In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears fruit.”

. . . “ Each deed thou hast done
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world.” . . .

“ Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill
Thy whole people, the countless, with ardor, till they too go
forth
A like cheer to their sons ; who in turn, fill the South and
the North
With the radiance thy deed was the germ of.” . . .

“ He is Saul, ye remember in glory — ere error had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion ; and still, though
much spent
Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same, God did
choose,
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose.”

Such words of solace and inspiration find a response in the troubled spirit of Saul. A human impulse suffuses his darkened heart. He places his rough hands on the golden head of the youth who kneels beside him, and gazes on the mystic light of the love-compelling face, intent to peruse it, as men do a flower.

“ And oh, all my heart how it loved him ! ” This is the moment of high import in the unfolding life of David’s

Introductory Note.

soul — one of the great moments of soul-revelation when the heart is brought by its response of love close to the very heart of God. For David it is a moment of prophetic insight in which he was to see the meaning of his life and the way of God in the world — Christ, and Christ alone. In this supreme moment of loving self-devotion the pure soul of David assimilates the mystery of the Incarnation, just as Pompilia, purest and loveliest of Browning's women, in the great moment of her life exclaims that Christ was "likest God in being born." Both could understand why Christ himself should say: "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me."

David's heart is filled with a passionate love, a longing not to be expressed to do for Saul what he would if only he could. Neither the physical life, nor influence, nor the thought of lives made better by its presence, can satisfy, or give to the immortal soul the rest and peace it craves. His thought is now of the purifying and redeeming influence of love. The truest love, the only true love, is the love that redeems. The good David would do reacts on his own spirit, and there issues forth the yearning of prophetic inspiration. Song and harp are useless now. The only voice that avails is the one that issues

Introductory Note.

from the soul filled with a deathless tenderness. David's heart is flooded with the sweetness of love and self-renunciation. Surely God himself is self-sacrificing. Love must be the mingling of the human with the divine. David can give to Saul no more. Whence, then, this love of the human heart? Whose look can satisfy the yearning of the human face? Surely God would give, as he would if he only could, for the life which is failing, a new, never-failing life. Will not God himself suffer for all men?

In this moment eternal in the life of David sight has become vision and his love for Saul has been the medium of the divine disclosure. On the very heights of his life he has a vision of the Life that is higher. From the sight of the face of Saul whom he loves, he has gained the heavenly vision of his own divine Lover. In this vision of the unseen and eternal Christ is revealed to David, Christ of eternity and of time as well, the fairest among ten thousand and the One altogether lovely — the One alone who can satisfy and save the soul.

“ He who did most, shall bear most ; the strongest shall stand
the most weak,
'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for ! my flesh, that
I seek

Introductory Note.

In the Godhead! I seek it and find it. O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever; a Hand like this
hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the
Christ stand!"

Jowett, of Oxford, once said of the David of the Psalms: "The Psalmist expresses with a fervor and power greater perhaps than has ever been felt or found utterance in any age or country, the longing of the soul after God and the desire to live always in his presence." This is the youth in whom Browning has embodied the need, the trust, the longing of the soul after God. In the gracious performance of duty David has met with God and experienced in the inner recesses of the soul His satisfying presence. In Christ is the soul-clasp, and the heavenly alliance completed. For David, Christ has become the "Great Word which makes all things new."

On his return home all Nature becomes responsive to his inner life and adds her crowning witness. No longer is there world-strangeness; the Face has become familiar. Nature seems glorified with spiritual presences of one kin with his own nature, and speaks to him of hitherto undreamt-of secrets. A new soul-attitude has been

Introductory Note.

gained; the world is seen now with the eyes of the soul. Nature so transfigured reveals not power alone as before, but love as well. Instead of the scorched desert of yesterday, there is the sweetness of the pasture lands; and everywhere whispers may be heard by his spirit now attuned to the deeper harmony of Life. "E'en so, it is so!"

At the beginning of this introduction a few lines were quoted from "Pauline," a confession of the poet's early years. "Saul" is the record of Browning's middle life. In his last poem, the "Reverie" to Asolando, is the poet's final confession of his faith in God and Immortal Love:

"From the first, Power was — I knew,
Life has made clear to me
That, strive but for closer view,
Love were as plain to see.

"When see? When there dawns a day,
If not on the homely earth,
Then yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth,
And Power comes full in play."

JOHN ANGUS MACVANNEL.



I.

SAID Abner, "At last thou art come! Ere I
tell, ere thou speak,
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!" Then I wished
it, and did kiss his cheek.
And he, "Since the King, O my friend, for thy
countenance sent,
Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until
from his tent

I

Saul.

Thou return with the joyful assurance the King
 liveth yet,
Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the
 water be wet.
For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space
 of three days,
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of
 prayer nor of praise,
To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended
 their strife,
And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch
 sinks back upon life.



Saul.

II.

“Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God’s
child with his dew
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still
living and blue
Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as
if no wild heat
Were now raging to torture the desert!”

Saul.

III.

Then I, as was meet,
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose
on my feet,
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The
tent was unlooped ;
I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under
I stooped ;
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch,
all withered and gone,
That extends to the second enclosure, I groped
my way on
Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then
once more I prayed,
And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was
not afraid
But spoke, "Here is David, thy servant!" And
no voice replied.

Saul.

At the first I saw nought but the blackness ;
but soon I descried

A something more black than the blackness —
the vast, the upright

Main prop which sustains the pavilion : and
slow into sight

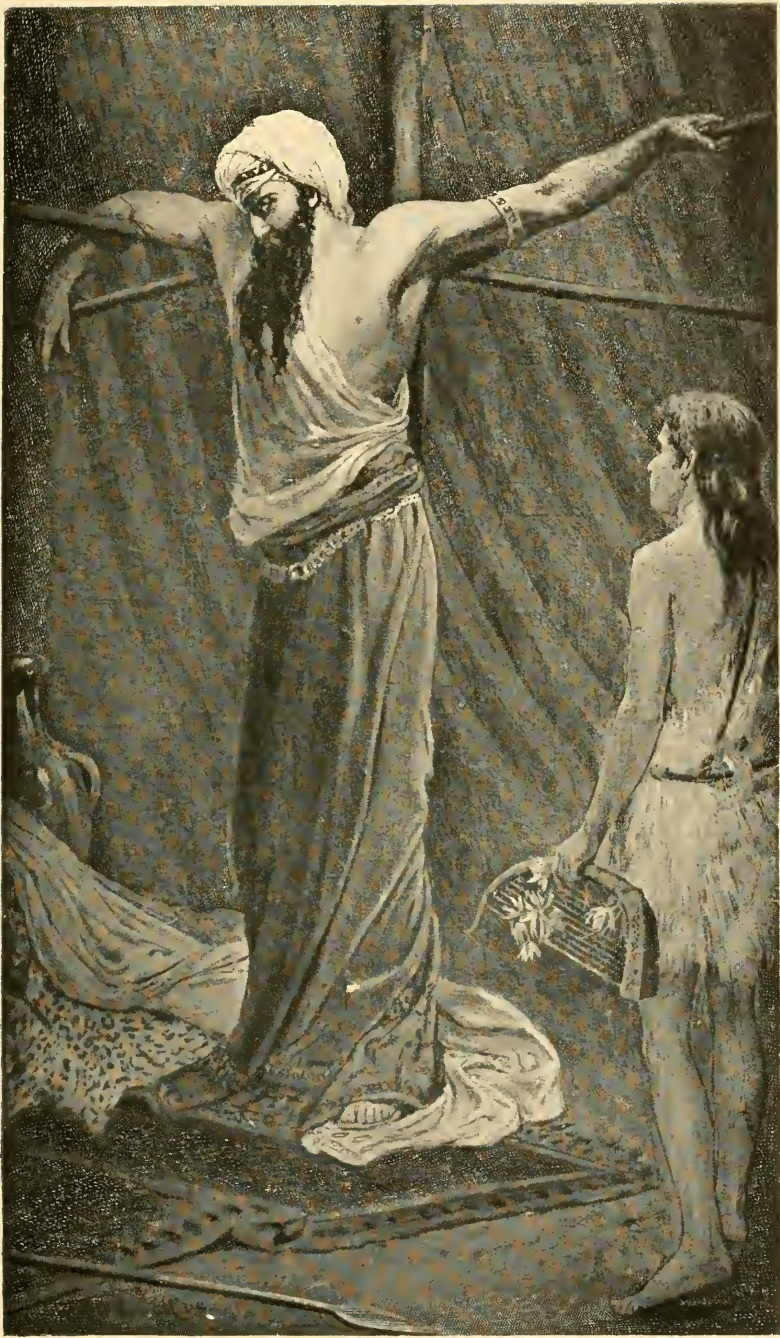
Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest
of all.

Then a sunbeam, that burst through the tent-
roof, showed Saul.

Saul.

IV.

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms
stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the centre, that
goes to each side ;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as,
caught in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all
heavily hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliver-
ance come
With the spring-time, — so agonized Saul, drear
and stark, blind and dumb.



Saul.

V.

Then I tuned my harp, — took off the lilies we
twine round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide
— those sunbeams like swords !
And I first played the tune all our sheep know,
as, one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding
be done.
They are white and untorn by the bushes, for
lo, they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within
the stream's bed ;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star
follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us, — so blue
and so far !

Saul.

VI.

— Then the tune, for which quails on the corn-
land will each leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the
crickets elate
Till for boldness they fight one another: and
then, what has weight
To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his
sand house—
There are none such as he for a wonder, half
bird and half mouse!
God made all the creatures and gave them our
love and our fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, one
family here.



Saul.

VII.

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers,
 their wine-song, when hand
Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friend-
 ship, and great hearts expand
And grow one in the sense of this world's life.
 — And then, the last song
When the dead man is praised on his journey —
 “ Bear, bear him along



Saul.

With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets !
Are balm seeds not here
To console us? The land has none left such as
he on the bier.
Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother !” —
And then, the glad chaunt
Of the marriage, — first go the young maidens,
next, she whom we vaunt
As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling. —
And then, the great march





Saul.

Wherein man runs to man to assist him and
 buttress an arch
Nought can break ; who shall harm them, our
 friends? Then, the chorus intoned
As the Levites go up to the altar in glory en-
 throned.
But I stopped here : for here in the darkness
 Saul groaned.

Saul.

VIII.

And I paused, held my breath in such silence,
and listened apart ;
And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered :
and sparkles 'gan dart
From the jewels that woke in his turban, at once
with a start,
All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies coura-
geous at heart.
So the head : but the body still moved not, still
hung there erect.
And I bent once again to my playing, pursued
it unchecked,
As I sang, —



Saul.

IX.

“ Oh, our manhood's prime vigor ! No
spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing, nor sinew
unbraced.
Oh, the wild joys of living ! the leaping from
rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree,
the cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt
of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched
in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with
gold dust divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the
full draught of wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where
bulrushes tell

Saul.

That the water was wont to go warbling so softly
and well.

How good is man's life, the mere living! how
fit to employ





Saul.

All the heart and the soul and the senses forever
in joy!

Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father,
whose sword thou didst guard

When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for
glorious reward ?

Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother,
held up as men sung

The low song of the nearly-departed, and hear
her faint tongue

Joining in while it could to the witness, ' Let
one more attest,

I have lived, seen God's hand through a lifetime,
and all was for best ?'

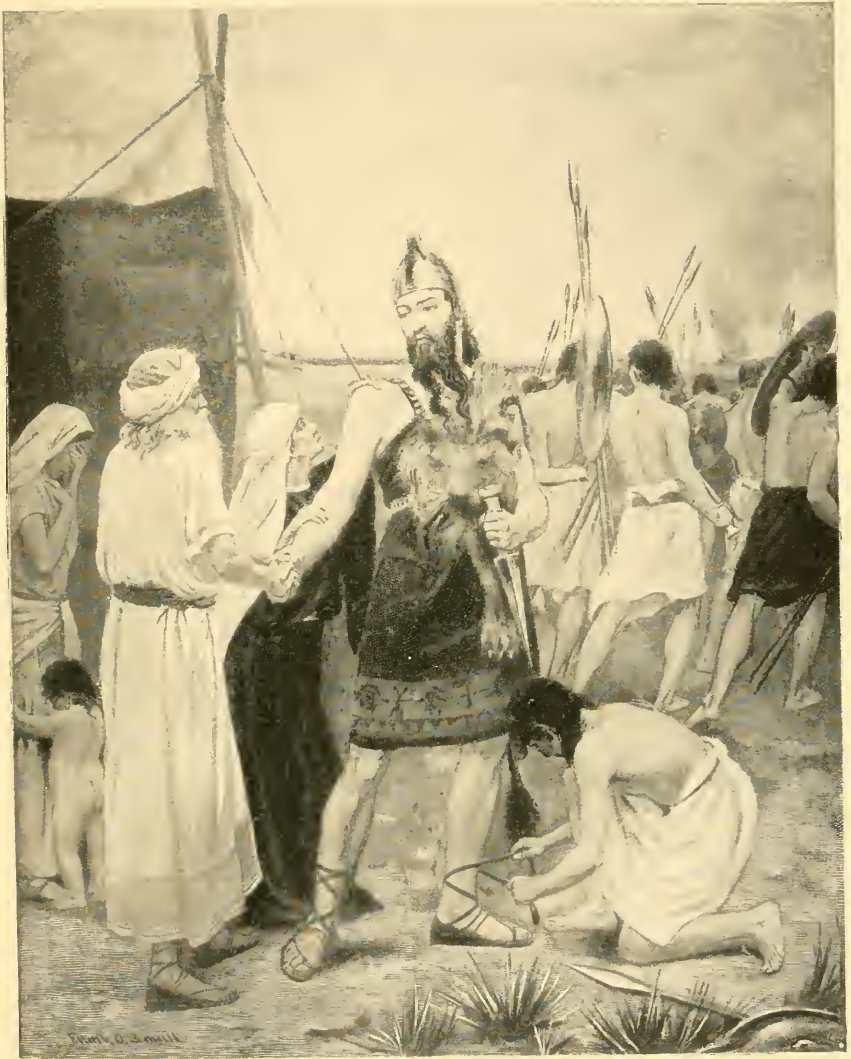
Then they sung through their tears in strong
triumph, not much, but the rest.

And thy brothers, and help and the contest, the
working whence grew

Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the
spirit strained true :

Saul.

And the friends of thy boyhood — that boyhood
of wonder and hope,
Present promise and wealth of the future beyond
the eye's scope, —
Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch ; a people
is thine ;
And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on
one head combine !
On one head, all the beauty and strength, love
and rage (like the throe
That, a-work in the rock, helps its labor and
lets the gold go)
High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame
crowning them, — all
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature —
King Saul !”



Saul.

X.

And lo, with that leap of my spirit, — heart,
hand, harp and voice,
Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each
bidding rejoice
Saul's fame in the light it was made for — as
when, dare I say,
The Lord's army, in rapture of service, strains
through its array,
And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot — "Saul!"
cried I, and stopped,
And waited the thing that should follow. Then
Saul, who hung propped
By the tent's cross-support in the centre, was
struck by his name.
Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons
goes right to the aim,
And some mountain, the last to withstand her,
that held (he alone,

Saul.

While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers)
 on a broad bust of stone
A year's snow bound about for a breast-plate, —
 leaves grasp of the sheet ?
Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously
 down to his feet,
And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet,
 your mountain of old,
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of
 ages untold —
Yes, each harm got in fighting your battles,
 each furrow and scar
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest —
 all hail, there they are !
— Now again to be softened with verdure, again
 hold the nest
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to
 the green on his crest
For their food in the ardors of summer. One
 long shudder thrilled



Saul.

All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank
and was stilled
At the King's self left standing before me, re-
leased and aware.
What was gone, what remained? All to trav-
erse 'twixt hope and despair;
Death was past, life not come: so he waited.
Awhile his right hand
Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant
forthwith to remand
To their place what new objects should enter:
't was Saul as before.
I looked up and dared gaze at those eyes, nor
was hurt any more
Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch
from the shore,
At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean — a sun's
slow decline
Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'er-
lap and entwine

Saul.

Base with base to knit strength more intensely :
so, arm folded arm

· O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

Saul.

XI.

What spell or what charm,
(For, awhile there was trouble within me,) what
next should I urge
To sustain him where song had restored him?—
Song filled to the verge
His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all
that it yields
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty :
beyond, on what fields,
Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to
brighten the eye
And bring blood to the lip, and commend them
the cup they put by?
He saith, “It is good ;” still he drinks not : he
lets me praise life,
Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.

Saul.

XII.

Then fancies grew rife
Which had come long ago on the pasture, when
 round me the sheep
Fed in silence — above, the one eagle wheeled
 slow as in sleep ;
And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world
 that might lie
'Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip 'twixt
 the hill and the sky :
And I laughed — “ Since my days are ordained
 to be passed with my flocks,
Let me people at least, with my fancies, the
 plains and the rocks,
Dream the life I am never to mix with, and
 image the show
Of mankind as they live in those fashions I
 hardly shall know !



Saul.

Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the
courage that gains,
And the prudence that keeps what men strive
for.”

And now these old trains
Of vague thought came again ; I grew surer ;
so, once more the string
Of my harp made response to my spirit, as
thus —

Saul.

XIII.

“Yea, my King,”

I began — “thou dost well in rejecting mere
comforts that spring

From the mere mortal life held in common by
man and by brute :

In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our
soul it bears fruit.

Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree, —
how its stem trembled first

Till it passed the kid’s lip, the stag’s antler ;
then safely outburst

The fan-branches all round ; and thou mindest
when these too, in turn,

Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed per-
fect : yet more was to learn,

E’en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit.
Our dates shall we slight,

When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow ?
or care for the plight

Saul.

Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced
them? Not so! stem and branch

Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while
the palm-wine shall stanch

Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour
thee such wine.

Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the
spirit be thine!

By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee,
thou still shalt enjoy

More indeed, than at first when unconscious, the
life of a boy.

Crush that life, and behold its wine running!
Each deed thou hast done

Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until
e'en as the sun

Looking down on the earth, though clouds
spoil him, though tempests efface,

Can find nothing his own deed produced not,
must everywhere trace

Saul.

The results of his past summer-prime, — so,
each ray of thy will,
Every flush of thy passion and prowess, long
over, shall thrill
Thy whole people, the countless, with ardor, till
they too give forth
A like cheer to their sons, who in turn, fill the
South and the North
With the radiance thy deed was the germ of.
Carouse in the past !
But the license of age has its limit ; thou diest
at last :
As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose
at her height,
So with man — so his power and his beauty for-
ever take flight.
No ! Again a long draught of my soul-wine !
Look forth o'er the years !
Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual ;
begin with the seer's !

Saul.

Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make
his tomb — bid arise
A gray mountain of marble heaped four-square,
till, built to the skies,
Let it mark where the great First King slum-
bers: whose fame would ye know?
Up above see the rock's naked face, where the
record shall go
In great characters cut by the scribe, — Such
was Saul, so he did;
With the sages directing the work, by the popu-
lace chid, —
For not half, they 'll affirm, is comprised there!
Which fault to amend,
In the grove with his kind grows the cedar,
whereon they shall spend
(See, in tablets 't is level before them) their
praise, and record
With the gold of the graver, Saul's story, — the
statesman's great word

Saul.

Side by side with the poet's sweet comment.
The river 's a-wave
With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other
when prophet-winds rave :
So the pen gives unborn generations their due
and their part
In thy being ! Then, first of the mighty, thank
God that thou art ! ”



Saul.

XIV.

And behold while I sang . . . but O Thou who
 didst grant me that day,
And before it not seldom hast granted thy help
 to essay,
Carry on and complete an adventure, — my
 shield and my sword
In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy
 word was my word, —
Still be with me, who then at the summit of
 human endeavor
And scaling the highest, man's thought could,
 gazed hopeless as ever
On the new stretch of heaven above me — till,
 mighty to save,
Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance —
 God's throne from man's grave !
Let me tell out my tale to its ending — my voice
 to my heart

Saul.

Which can scarce dare believe in what marvels
 last night I took part,
As this morning I gather the fragments, alone
 with my sheep,
And still fear lest the terrible glory vanish like
 sleep !
For I wake in the gray dewy covert, while
 Hebron upheaves
The dawn struggling with night on his shoul-
 der, and Kidron retrieves
Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.



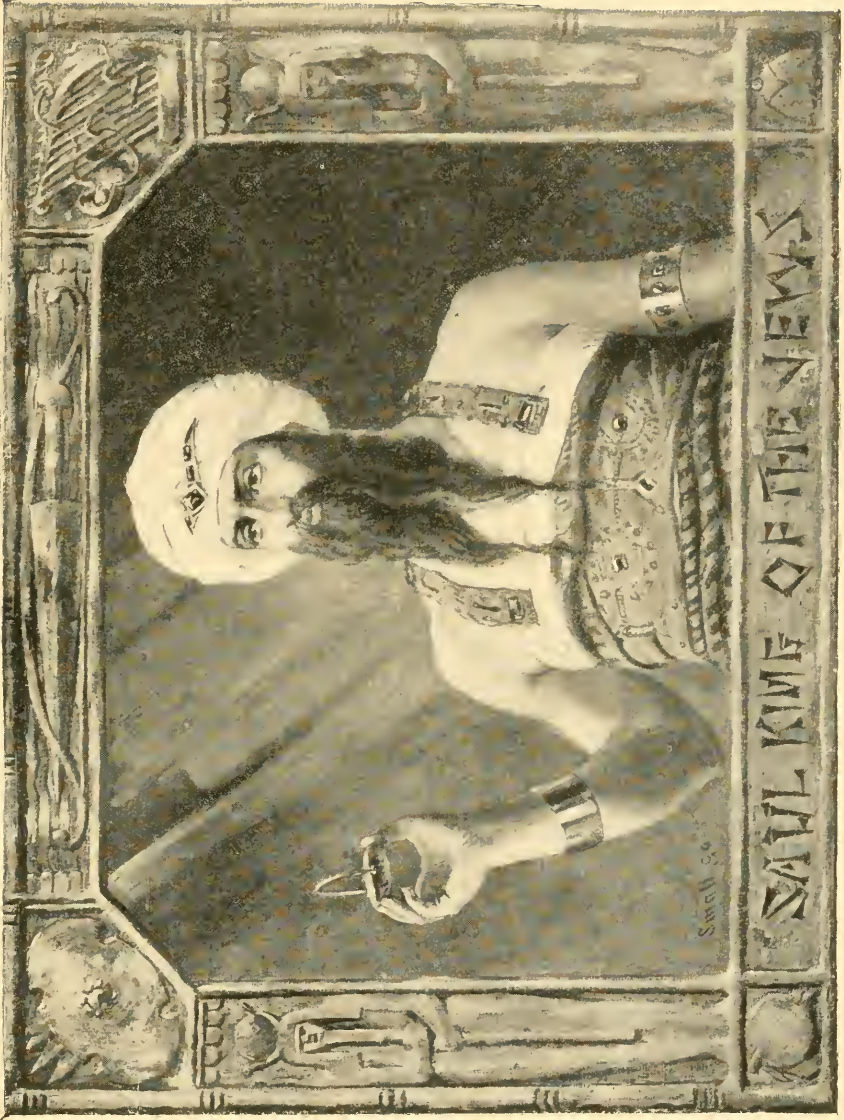
Saul.

XV.

I say then, — my song
While I sang thus, assuring the monarch, and
 ever more strong
Made a proffer of good to console him — he
 slowly resumed
His old motions and habitudes kingly. The
 right hand replumed
His black locks to their wonted composure, ad-
 justed the swathes
Of his turban, and see — the huge sweat that
 his countenance bathes,
He wipes off with the robe ; and he girds now
 his loins as of yore,
And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the
 clasp set before.
He is Saul, ye remember in glory, — ere error
 had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion ;
 and still, though much spent

Saul.

Be the life and the bearing that front you, the
same, God did choose,
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate,
never quite lose.
So sank he along by the tent-prop till, stayed
by the pile
Of his armor and war-cloak and garments, he
leaned there awhile,
And sat out my singing, — one arm round the
tent-prop, to raise
His bent head, and the other hung slack — till
I touched on the praise
I foresaw from all men in all time, to the man
patient there ;
And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then
first I was 'ware
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above
his vast knees
Which were thrust out on each side around me,
like oak roots which please



Saul.

To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked
up to know
If the best I could do had brought solace : he
spoke not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid
it with care
Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my
brow : through my hair
The large fingers were pushed, and he bent
back my head, with kind power —
All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do
a flower.
Thus held he me there with his great eyes that
scrutinized mine —
And oh, all my heart how it loved him ! but
where was the sign ?
I yearned — “Could I help thee, my father, in-
venting a bliss,
I would add, to that life of the past, both the
future and this ;

Saul.

I would give thee new life altogether, as good,
ages hence,
As this moment,—had love but the warrant,
love's heart to dispense !”



Saul.

XVI.

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more
— no song more ! out-broke

“I have gone the whole round of creation : I
saw and I spoke :

I, a work of God’s hand for that purpose,
received in my brain

And pronounced on the rest of his handwork —
returned him again

His creation’s approval or censure ; I spoke as
I saw :

I report, as a man may of God’s work — all’s
love, yet all’s law.

Now I lay down the judgeship he lent me.
Each faculty tasked

To perceive him, has gained an abyss, where a
dewdrop was asked,

Have I knowledge ? confounded it shrivels at
Wisdom laid bare.

Saul.

Have I forethought? how purblind, how blank,
to the Infinite Care!

Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?
I but open my eyes, — and perfection, no more
and no less,

In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God
is seen God

In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul
and the clod.

And thus looking within and around me, I ever
renew

(With that stoop of the soul which in bending
upraises it too)

The submission of man's nothing-perfect to
God's all-complete,

As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to
his feet.

Yet with all this abounding experience, this
deity known,

I shall dare to discover some province, some
gift of my own.

Saul.

There's a faculty pleasant to exercise, hard to
hoodwink,
I am fain to keep still in abeyance, (I laugh as
I think)
Lest, insisting to claim and parade in it, wot ye,
I worst
E'en the Giver in one gift. — Behold, I could
love if I durst !
But I sink the pretension as fearing a man may
o'ertake
God's own speed in the one way of love : I
abstain for love's sake.
— What, my soul ? see thus far and no farther ?
when doors great and small,
Nine-and-ninety flew ope at our touch, should
the hundredth appall ?
In the least things have faith, yet distrust in the
greatest of all ?
Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ulti-
mate gift,

Saul.

That I doubt his own love can compete with it?
Here, the parts shift?
Here, the creature surpass the Creator — the
end, what Began?
Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for
this man,
And dare doubt he alone shall not help him,
who yet alone can?
Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare
will, much less power,
To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the
marvellous dower
Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to
make such a soul,
Such a body, and then such an earth for in-
sphering the whole?
And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm
tears attest),
These good things being given, to go on, and
give one more, the best?

Saul.

Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, main-
tain at the height
This perfection, — succeed with life's dayspring,
death's minute of night ?
Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul
the mistake,
Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now, — and
bid him awake
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to
find himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life, — a
new harmony yet
To be run, and continued, and ended — who
knows ? — or endure !
The man taught enough by life's dream, of the
rest to make sure ;
By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning inten-
sified bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose, by the
struggles in this.

Saul.

XVII.

" I believe it ! 'T is thou, God, that givest, 't is I
who receive :

In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to
believe.

All's one gift : thou canst grant it moreover, as
prompt to my prayer

As I breathe out this breath, as I open these
arms to the air.

From thy will, stream the worlds, life and
nature, thy dread Sabaoth :

I will ? — the mere atoms despise me ! Why am
I not loth

To look that, even that in the face too ? Why
is it I dare

Think but lightly of such impuissance ? What
stops my despair ?

This : — 't is not what man Does which exalts
him, but what man Would do !

Saul.

See the King — I would help him but cannot,
the wishes fall through.

Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow
poor to enrich,

To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would —
knowing which,

I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak
through me now!

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst
thou — so wilt thou!

So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest,
uttermost crown —

And thy love fills infinitude wholly, nor leave up
nor down

One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by
no breath.

Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins
issue with death!

As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty
be proved

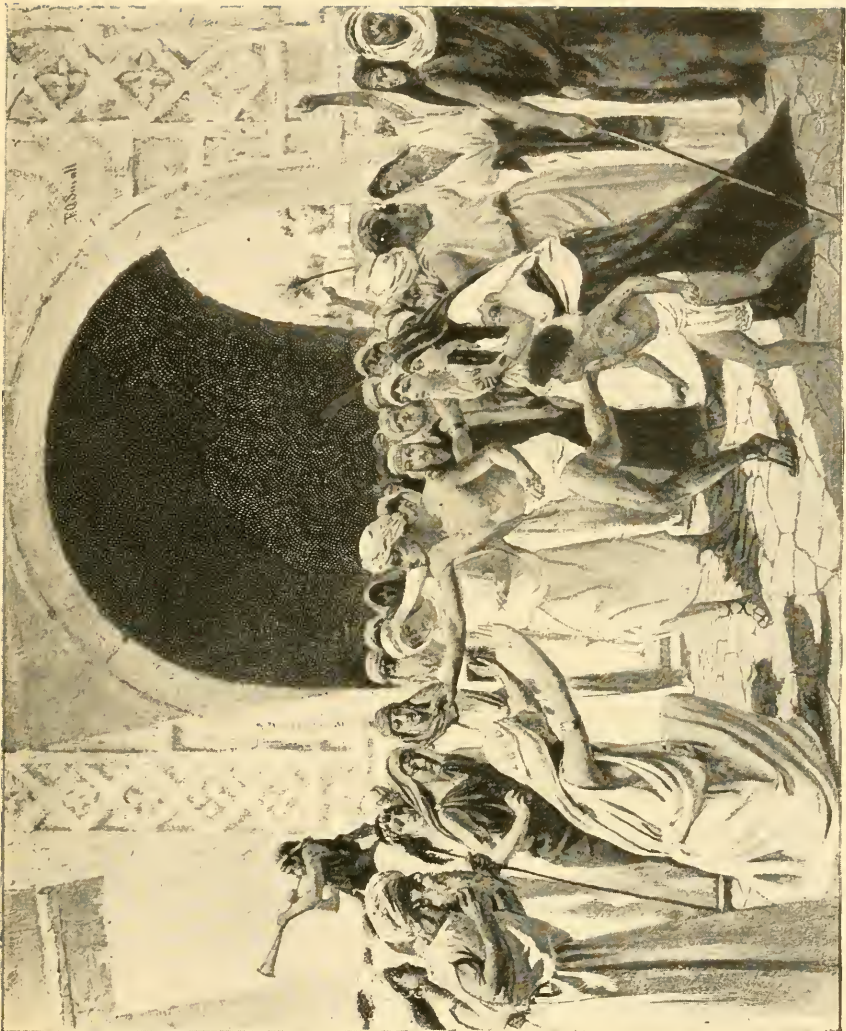
Saul.

XVIII.

I know not too well how I found my way home
in the night.
There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left
and to right,
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive,
the aware :
I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as
struggingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for
news —
Life or death. The whole earth was awakened,
hell loosed with her crews ;
And the stars of night beat with emotion, and
tingled and shot
Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge :
but I fainted not,
For the Hand still impelled me at once and
supported, suppressed

Saul.

All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and
holy behest,
Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth
sank to rest.
Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered
from earth —
Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's
tender birth ;
In the gathered intensity brought to the gray of
the hills ;
In the shuddering forests' held breath ; in the
sudden wind-thrills ;
In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each
with eye sidling still
Though averted with wonder and dread ; in the
birds stiff and chill
That rose heavily, as I approached them, made
stupid with awe :
E'en the serpent that slid away silent, — he felt
the new law.



Saul.

The same stared in the white humid faces up-
turned by the flowers ;
The same worked in the heart of the cedar and
moved the vine-bowers :
And the little brooks witnessing murmured,
persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices --
“ E'en so, it is so ! ”

FINIS.

JUN 21 1901

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 433 564 8

