

CAIN

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INTRODUCTION

One need not labor the points made by the higher critics of the Old Testament that there is a constant dualism in the account in Genesis—two Gods, two versions of the creation, two Cains, the murderer and the founder of cities, two Noahs, the hero of the Flood and the discoverer of the vine, two relations of the dispersion of the race.

Cain has been throughout the ages a red, sinister figure, called the first murderer.

Probably more learning and skill have been spent on this passage [Gen. 4:1-16] than on any similar short story, and while the work of scholars has thrown much light on ancient modes of thought, with regard to the specific problems it has not achieved great success. The text has suffered severely, questions are raised to which the story itself gives no definite answer, and there is an antique background which cannot be completely recovered. . . . When we turn from separate words to the origin and meaning of the story as a whole, we meet with similar difficulties. . . . This ancient fragment has no real connexion with the story of Paradise; it belongs to a larger world peopled by shepherds, husbandmen and others. . . . Neither do parallels with mythological twin-brothers and ancient city-builders yield much light. We are not sure that Cain and Abel were twins, and the superstitions regarding twins found elsewhere cannot be traced in the Old Testament. . . . To the still deeper question, why was Cain's sacrifice rejected and Abel's accepted, there is no definite answer. . . . Behind this may lie, as Gunkel thinks, the idea that pastoral life

as a whole is more pleasing to Yahweh than husbandry. . . . After all critical questions have been considered, the story still faces us with a certain provocative and stimulating influence. . . . The simple life that is pictured here is bare and hard, it is not idealized, there is no touch of the romantic or idyllic. The relation between God and man is close and real. He is the maker and supreme ruler; man is the helpless creature and submissive servant. Indirectly through the speech of the serpent there is a suggestion of God's jealousy, His watchful care lest man should encroach upon His prerogatives and snatch the divine gifts of knowledge and immortal life.¹

Is it not possible that Hebrew priestcraft and smug Christian theology are responsible for the traditional interpretation of Cain? Actually may not Cain have been, as Nietzsche declared, "of the race of the strong"? If the ancient Hebrews had possessed the imagination of the Greeks, perhaps Cain's character would have met with a more philosophical interpretation. Prometheus had his Aeschylus. Under different literary stars Cain, too, might have found an advocate.

It seems to me that there is something of the same defiance of arbitrary authority, the will to live one's own life in spite of fate and potent gods, in each. Cain's heart was hot against the cruel and selfish experiment of the trees of good and evil in Eden, against the sentence of exile as unjust, because of an act which in last analysis was an expression of the spirit of research, of the quest for truth. He was the first protestant against a God who permitted evil to enter the world, and then punished man for yielding to it. Cain has something of the character of Prometheus, something of that of Milton's Satan. Milton made Satan a hero "because he was a true poet" as Blake has pointed out, "and of the devil's party without knowing it." Byron made Cain and Satan partners in rebellion against God. But so far as I know the literature, the French poet Leconte de Lisle is the only writer who has done

¹ W. G. Jordan, *Ancient Hebrew Stories*, pp. 99-103, 96.

justice to the dramatic potentialities implicit in the story of Cain. From the excellent study of this poet by Mr. Irving Brown I quote the following critical estimate:

Leconte de Lisle's vision of the City and the Race of Cain has been often justly admired. . . . Towards this enormous hive with its walls of iron, its spiral towers and its massive bronze-bound castles, honeycombed with gloomy passage-ways, return towards sunset the descendants of the Avenger, a race of gigantic creatures, stronger than the cedar and taller than the pine. . . . The purple light of the setting sun is reflected from the red rocks on their powerful backs, as on marble. They are the dream of a vanquished race. Frail humanity has ever dreamed of such creatures. They are the super-men of the past.

Jehovah hates them, He is determined to annihilate them with the Deluge, and sends His messenger with the threat. It is then that Cain the Avenger rises from his granite sepulchre on the lofty summit of the City, and facing the sky, addresses the jealous God. . . . "Pray and prostrate thyself," commands the messenger. But Cain replies that he will stand upright, with head unbowed. The shameful coward may crawl on bended knee while Jehovah blesses his flattering fear. *He* will never bend, nor ever cease to cry despairingly for justice. . . . Cain prophesies that a day will come when God will say to his victims, "Adore," and they will answer "No." He prophesies the futility of all the tortures of Hell, and all the Hell on earth, when God's representatives here below will tear the flesh of rebels (heretics) with iron pincers and sear it in flames. "I shall lash thy priests with immortal scorn," cries Cain. "I shall bring to light the cities submerged in the heaping sands of the desert, I shall confine the waters to their foaming beds, and the little children of the nations, now avenged, will laugh in their cradles, knowing thy name no longer." There is a vague suggestion of the discoveries of science, the exploration of the skies by man, and the happiness to be brought about not through fear of nature or God, but through knowledge and through the mastery of the universe by man. . . .

Enraged with His own creatures, God determines to destroy them. The description of the Flood which follows is one of the most vivid and gigantic pieces of imagining in literature. A realis-

tic touch is added by the picture of the large birds, rising in spirals, drenched with rain. When the highest peak has foamed in the swirling waters, the seer, pale with horror, sees a final vision of Cain, Yahweh's immortal enemy, ominously striding through the mist toward the enormous Ark showing dimly in the gathering night. Here the poem ends. . . .

The parallel between the Titan and Leconte de Lisle's Cain has already been drawn. It is interesting. Both are represented as mighty fighters, defying the gods for the sake of mankind. . . . *Quain* is not only a matchless picture of the legendary past. . . . It is a marvellous vision of the future. . . . Man will learn some day that man himself is his only ally.

Years ago I incidentally discussed the character of Cain as a theme of poetry, with the late William Vaughn Moody, during a conversation concerning Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. As everyone knows, Moody, in the noble fragment called *The Death of Eve*, the third member of his majestic trilogy, introduces Cain. But his Cain is a different man from mine, and his solution the ultimate reconciliation of even Cain with God. Moreover, Eve, not Cain, is the central figure in the drama. Eve, "having survived ages of years, has undergone a new spiritual awakening and with clearing vision sees that her sin need not have been the final, fatal thing it seemed. . . . She sets out to find Cain and take him with her into the lost paradise for the supreme reconciliation." In his stronghold in Nod, reached by rude stone stairs she finds him, in "Cain's City," dwelling like a barbaric king, an old cruel despot, half blind, but whose soul still "is as a torch blown back for speed." In this land of violence Cain is surrounded by vassals and guardsmen as fierce as he. At first Cain fails to recognize his mother, and having done so, rails at her purpose. At last, however, even his wild heart is touched and he consents with her "to break back and back across the shadowy years to Eden, and God calling in the dew," and says "I will go." There the unfinished drama ends.

Moody's solution of Cain is similar to that of Aeschylus in his *Prometheus Unbound*, enough fragments of which survive to show that Aeschylus effected a reconciliation between Zeus and Prometheus. But not all the surrender was on one side. "Time could teach even Zeus." To Shelley this compromise was repugnant. "He scorned the tradition of a compromise that should leave Zeus supreme over men. In his drama Zeus marries Thetis and begets a child mightier than himself, the Demogorgon, who hurls him into the bottomless void, while Man is left triumphant, with his foot on the threshold of a second Golden Age."

I cannot reconcile myself to either of these solutions. To me poetic justice and the eternal fitness of things require Cain to live a rebel to the end, but a rebel justified in his rebellion.

For many years, I have intimated, the theme of Cain has interested me, and in what I have written I have tried to lay this ghost which has long haunted my imagination. Far be it from me to endeavor to match meters with the greatest of American poets. In my own way I have simply tried to express my own interpretation of this world-old theme.

SCENE I

The Garden of Eden, or the Garden of God, that enchanting paradise of ancient Hebrew mythology, colored by traditional memories of the rich luxuriance and beauty of the parks or "paradises" of the Babylonian kings. A pebbled path, clumps of shrubs and beds of flowers, and spreading high and wide the majestic cedar of Eden described by Ezek. 31:8-9, "fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches. . . . The fir trees were not like his boughs and the chestnuts were not like his branches, nor any tree in the Garden of God was like unto him in his beauty . . . so that all the trees of Eden that were in the Garden of God envied him." Beneath this great cedar tree is a magnificently carved seat of alabaster. God is walking in the garden in the cool of the day. Enter the Snake, his mottled skin gleaming in the golden light of the setting sun, his coils doubling in lithe, easy but sinister grace, his eyes like bright stones for light, his vibrant forked tongue playing in and out of his mouth. He makes straight for the feet of God, and when there stands erect upon his tail and begins to dance and to sing to a humming musical accompaniment made by his tail.

SNAKE:

Twine, twine, twine,
In a labyrinthine line,
Like a vine.
Now erect on my tail
Like a flail,
Now supine.
Crawl, crawl, crawl,
Over log, over wall;
Sprawl, sprawl, sprawl,
Over all.
Poison teeth
In a sheath;
Fetid breath
Breathing death.
Adder, cobra, scorpion,
One in three and three in one.
Yellow-brown are my coils,
And my skin gleams like oils;

Diamond-backed is my spine,
Berylstones are my eyen.

I am Snake,
When I wake
All the beasts of jungle quake.
I kissed Eve on the lips,
Lay coiled around her rosy hips;
My slaver fell in jewelled drops
Upon her ivory breasts' pink tops;
And when at last she fell in swoon,
I ravished her 'neath the full moon.
The body's clue to the man,
Man shall rue what I began.
The serpent's seed is seminal
In all man's race with Eve's Fall.
'T will try Thy ingenuity, O Lord,
To save man's soul now from the sword
Of evil. God, I dare Thee tell:
If heaven is, there must be hell.

GOD: Creation's curse, have done with jargoning.
Out of my sight, thou foul ophidian thing.

SNAKE (*cringing on his belly, but with head erect*):
Thou canst not say I am to blame.
Thou madest me sans sense of shame.
A snake's a snake truly as two
And two make four, or sky is blue,
Or fairies dance in the dew
When the moon is young and thin.
What Ho? God, dost Thou rue
The work Thou didst begin?

GOD: Not I, but man, shall rue the day
I formed him from the clay,
Who dared to violate
The mandate given his estate.

SNAKE (*leering*):
If man grow unafraid of Thee, I say
Thou, God, not man, shall rue the day.

GOD (*as if stung by a sudden thought*):

Man unafraid of ME? Who will give
Me the lie, and think to live?
Adam? Eve? Abel?

SNAKE: Cain!

GOD: Cain? Has that rebellious son of Adam ta'en
Counsel of thee, thou foul ophidian?

SNAKE (*hissing*):

Nay, of himself. Cain is a MAN.

GOD (*in furious wrath*):

Begone! I'll not have speech with thee
More. Begone!

SNAKE (*impudently, as he crawls away*):

We shall see.

[*God flings himself down upon the alabaster seat and holds his head in his hands like a man in despair.*]

SCENE II

A rugged, flinty plain in the midst of which stands a gnarled sycamore tree, underneath which lie two recumbent figures clad in garments of leaves and bark. Each has a cudgel by his side. A cold wind is blowing, and the leaves of the sycamore are sibilant under its influence. Some tufts of bushes. The dawn is just beginning to break through a wrack of gray cloud in the east. Far toward the west where it is yet dark, the huge wall environing Paradise may be dimly descried. Before the gate of Paradise stands an archangel with flaming sword, whose red blade whirls with coruscant menace, cutting the darkness into black segments fringed with fire. The helméd seraphim and mailed cherubim, half luminous from the exhalations of light which they emit, pace back and forth as sentries upon the top of the wall behind the battlements. As these patrols pass each other they cry the watch-word, "Jehovah-Elohim." From time to time, too, snatches of the song of this night-guard are borne upon the breeze:

For God our Lord
Watch and ward
With fiery sword
We keep, we keep,
Sleep, angels, sleep.

The sprawling figures upon the ground move restlessly, and in a few minutes, as the sun is revealed, sit up.

ABEL: The sun has risen, brother. 'T is time to break our fast.

CAIN (*sitting up with a scowl upon his face*): Aye.

[*Each rises and goes away, to return shortly, Abel with a gourd of milk and some parched corn, Cain with some wild grapes and thorn apples. They munch in silence for some minutes.*]

ABEL: And now to work.

CAIN: Wherefore? The beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, they neither sow nor reap. Why should man labor more than they? The world is a brave man's country, wide as the air to birds, the sea to fishes.

ABEL (*solemnly*): The world is very vast.

CAIN: Then is there more room for adventure.

ABEL (*with a shudder*): Thou wouldst be very lonely in the wilderness.

CAIN: Lonely? Does the earth not swim in the Milky Way? Cannot I everywhere see the sun and the stars? Feed on earth's bosom? Drink from her breasts?

ABEL: But it is idleness to wander loose, and not to work.

CAIN: If labor be duty, then is leisure virtue.

[*Abel seems fuitely to ponder his brother's speech for a moment, and then pours some water from a gourd upon his hands.*]

CAIN (*again*): I can tell thee water whereof if thou washest thou wilt ever be clean.

ABEL: What is that water? The dew?

CAIN: 'T is beauty. Drench thy soul in beauty's spring.

ABEL: I know not what thou meanest by beauty.

CAIN: Aye, truly spake, thou sodden wight. Beauty is sunrise and moonrise, the stars, song, the voice of the wind, the flash

of a bird's wing in the coppice, the tawny desert, the sea, color of cloud and flower. Beauty is like the far horizon, distant and unattainable, soever fast we forward forge. Yet it is ever before him who hath eyes to see and heart to understand, hanging before his inward sight like the banners of the dawn. The colors of its tapestries never fade from the soul.

ABEL: I know not what thou meanest by those words "beauty" and "soul." Can I touch them, taste them, handle them? I do not understand thee.

CAIN: Thou dullard. Dreams of infinite beauty are not for thee. Are not the night and the day part of man's thought? Why may not man gaze upon the fairest mysteries of nature and long to make his thought reach out unto riddles beyond this dull plain where we do but work and eat and sleep, and work once more? Seeing all, why may he not wonder at all? Why may he not stretch out daring hands even unto the sea, and cut down giant forest trees to ferry himself to lands beyond? or curiously observe the motions of the stars? or track Night in her pathway and find her western cave?

ABEL: Cain, Cain, thou art mad, that thou shouldst wish to admire the heights of mountains, the billows of the sea, the circuits of the stars, and pass thyself by. Who can understand the circling of the Bear?

CAIN (*singing*):

Without imagination man is clod,
With imagination man is God.
Mind sees, mind hears, mind understands;
All besides is dumb and blind,
Groping hands.

ABEL (*sullenly*): Man was made to labor, not to think.

CAIN: Thought is labor's highest skill.

ABEL: How can I labor with my mind?

CAIN: True, thou canst not, for thou'st no mind to labor with. (*He sings.*)

From nothing nothing's made,
Call a spade a spade,
Fortune is a jade.
Tweedledee and Tweedledum
Were twins as like as peas,
One was blind and one was dumb,
Each wins just as you please.
Nothing to wonder at,
Nothing to thunder at,
Nothing to blunder at.
Just to sit and twiddle thumbs,
Leave the bread and eat the crumbs,
Take stupidly whatever comes.
Hey-diddle-diddle,
Gemini, Cancer,
Life is a riddle,
And God knows the answer.

ABEL: Thy speech soundeth like ribald incantation. Not by usage of black magic mayst thou avoid to toil. God has willed us to labor, and to labor is to work with hands, to sweat and to grow weary with fatigue. To spin words in rhyme as thou doest is idleness, and idleness is sin.

CAIN (*oracularly*): What's well with thee
Is fell for me.

ABEL: God made the world and saw that it was good. 'T is from our parents' sin that it hath been impaired. Hast thou so soon forgotten the lesson of our Fall? Rememberest thou not how in yon fairest Eden God spake and said: "Children of my creation, from body of earth I made you, blood of the sea, face of the sun, breath of the wind. If ye keep steadfast, the star-order and thrones of heaven shall endure. But if ye transgress, I swear unto you and your seed a penalty." Thou wottest what hapt from our parents' eating of the forbidden fruit.

CAIN: So? A fine tale that to make us slaves of God, and cowards—to compel us to be making eternal reparation for His blundering and arrogance. God made several worlds before He made ours, and destroyed them all because He bungled the job. Even this world He was once minded to destroy. For when He commanded the waters to be gathered into one place, and the dry land to appear, the sea was wilful and would not obey. The waters piled up themselves and held down the land that was under the sea, so that God in His wrath was minded to let the whole earth slip back into chaos once more. Then the Angel of the Face went down and the rebellious waters were compelled, and stood still and were stayed. Is it then from His impotence that the world endures? or from His cruelty does He preserve it?

ABEL: Whence gottest thou that tale?

CAIN: The Snake told me.

ABEL (*horrified*): The Snake! Hast thou had converse with him? He hath a forkéd tongue.

CAIN (*singing*):

Who thinks, drinks
From truth's own fount;
Who knows, goes
From plain to mount.
Who thinks and stands on his own legs
Climbs up;
Who shrinks and falters,
Who slinks and palters,
Drinks the dregs
In the bottom of the cup.

ABEL: Thou hast a rebellious spirit in thee, Cain.

CAIN: Aye, rebel against God.

ABEL: Be still. Thou art blasphemous.

CAIN: Blasphemy is the courage of the wise, and the hobgoblin of fools. God lied when He said our parents had committed

sin. He was afraid that nothing would be withheld from them after they had eaten of the tree of knowledge. For knowledge grows upon what it feeds. Is truth a thing which one may have and another be deprived of? Is it transgression to wish to grow in knowledge and the joy of a larger life? Do I deprive thee of sleep when I sleep? How then can Man deprive God of knowledge by seeking himself to become wise? It were juster for Man to exile God from his heart than for God to exile Man from Eden. . . . Listen. . . . A God who shows fear ceases to be God. For how can the omnipotent be afraid? Fear has become a demon with power over God. . . . God is a bogey, and no better than a hare that leaps at its own shadow. For the Shadow of Fear haunts God.

ABEL: Shall Man argue against God?

CAIN: Wherefore not? Are not mind, will, understanding, imagination, attributes of Man as well as of God?

ABEL: Divine justice cannot be at fault.

CAIN: Divine fiddlesticks! God had no right to exile our father and our mother from Eden. Why should one be judged of another's conscience—even God's? By what justice doth God condemn us to labor hard and long for our sustenance, and then curse the tilled ground whence we draw that sustenance? Is the suffering of future generations a righteous retribution? Is it worthy of God? Why should the unborn babe in the womb of our mother Eve be made the victim of a fancied transgression? Who is God that we should serve Him? And what profit shall there be if we pray unto Him?

ABEL: Brother, brother, thou art of a froward and perverse mind. Let us here build an altar and worship God.

CAIN: Curse the cowardly fear in thee which makes thee worship and adore Him as God who devised sin, temptation, exile; who invented misery and sorrow and remorse for Man. God's very attributes deny Him to be God. If God were all mercy and compassion, He would choke of His own tears. If His wrath be all-consuming, He will be destroyed by the flame of His own anger.

ABEL: How darest thou speak thus?

CAIN (*defiantly*):

Because the God who made me is terrible, I am intrepid.

I shall be what I will to be,
And not what chance may spill to me,
I will be free.

Does a star blush to be a star?
The sun to shine? the moon to beam?
Shall I belie myself? The vision far
Forego? Forsake the dream?

ABEL: Come, brother, let us build an altar unto the Lord.

[He seizes a mattock made from the shoulder blade of a sheep fastened by a thong to a rough handle, and begins to cut turfs.]

CAIN: I shall build my altar unto *my* God.

ABEL: There is only one God.

CAIN: Thinkest thou so? Why not as many gods as there are things? Why not a god of the sun, another of the moon, others of the stars? Sometimes I think the stars are gods, for they seem like eyes reading the riddle of the night. Why not a god for every thought? Man's real Eden is the garden in his mind, not yonder walled-in paradise. Until life and death shall both have died, mind shall live. Where is mind, there is beauty; where is beauty, there is mind. When mind perishes, then beauty shall perish, too. And when beauty shall perish away, the world and heaven will be dead. For me Nature is God.

ABEL: I know not what thou meanest by "nature." Make thy altar, and we shall see who is right and who is wrong.

CAIN (*sarcastically*): Why buildest thou thy altar of turfs, seeing that God hath cursed the tilled ground?

ABEL (*with a pious whine*): The soil partakes of our unrighteousness, too, for the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together with us.

CAIN: Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum! Thou pratest like God in the garden.
I shall build my altar of stones and fashion them with tools.

ABEL (*shocked*): Thou wouldst deride the craftsmanship of God? Thou wouldst set at naught God's handiwork with thy own artifying? Presumest thou to change the form of that which God has fashioned according to His providence?

[*Cain proceeds to roll up some boulders into a rough circle, and then draws a flint hammer from his belt with which he begins to chip and cleave the stones. As he works he sings.*]

CAIN: Toil and sweat,
Cut and whet,
Hammer, flint,
Without stint.
Hear the groaning of the stones,
Hear the moaning of the stones,
How the boulders
Jostle shoulders,
Saying each unto each
In their harsh granitic speech:
"Have a care, brother Cain,
How you chip and fashion us
With artistic passion thus.
Since God made us, we have lain
Undisturbed upon the plain.
Is the handicraft of God
To be laughed at by your broad
Axe, and the frame
He made us in be put to shame?
Inviolable should be our state,
Man was made to imitate,
No right has he to create."
Let them laugh, I say, for art
Is implanted in the heart.
Axe, axe, axe,
Hacks, hacks, hacks,
God made the stones, but I can make
Them wear the shape I will to take;

Turn round to square, and square to round,
Split a boulder to the ground.
Where is Man, there is mind;
Where is mind, Man you'll find.
God is blind.
Mind can make chaos a myth,
Mind's the thing to conjure with.
Give me tools, give me tools,
Leave paradise unto fools.
Let God walk there,
Let God talk there,
I will think, I will plan,
Mind wills me to be a MAN.

[ABEL, *having completed his turf altar, stands regarding it with smug satisfaction, while he looks with mingled contempt and fear upon Cain's.*]

ABEL: What dost thou purpose to sacrifice upon thy altar?

CAIN: Some fruits and pleasant herbs.

ABEL: Thou wilt set God's teeth on edge therewith. For He hath cursed the ground.

CAIN: What wilt thou offer?

ABEL: The flesh and blood of lambs and kids will be a sweet-smelling savor unto the Lord.

CAIN: Thou wouldst *kill* to please God? Wouldst thou take life? Offer bloody sacrifice?

ABEL: Life be the dearest of earthly possessions, yet it is little enough to become the majesty of the Most High.

CAIN (*grown lyrical in protest*):

Thou wouldst make man the fiercest beast of prey?
Did God, then, His own attributes convey
Unto the clay
He moulded into form,
And breathed into the warm

Breath of His life?
Are violence and strife
His attributes? Not mercy, ruth,
Justice, righteousness and truth?
Then call a spade a spade—
Admit that God is cruel.
Man were a fool
To adore a God of red right hand,
And redder mind—
I'll have no god of such a kind.
The brute beast kills to sate his maw,
He knows the jungle law.
The God would see deprived of life
By sacrificial knife
Yon innocent and fleecy lambs,
Himself damns.

ABEL: Thou art beside thyself, Cain.

CAIN (*fiercely*):

Not God Himself shall daunt me,
Nor the Shadow's face affront me,
I will be free.

[Abel for a moment gazes curiously at his brother, with a look of mingled fear and cunning hatred, and then goes off. Cain follows, and shortly returns with some fruits and herbs which he heaps up upon his stone altar. Then standing erect, with his face to the sun and his hands outstretched toward the sky, he prays to the spirit of nature in resonant tones, the sonorous cadences falling from his lips with a dignity devoid of all sense of humility.]

The height which greater souls attain
Above our baser human life
Retreats. Ah, toil, Ah, pain!
Yet we endure, O Lord of Life.

For stronger limbs than our's the race,
For stronger hearts than our's the stream.
Thou walkst upon the highest place,
We walk in shadows of a dream.

O may thy power, O may thy love,
Thou mightier than mightiest,
Beyond this world's pain far above
Raise me, and give me rest.

[As Cain concludes, Abel returns with a lamb in his arms which he drops, not too tenderly, upon the ground and then proceeds to bind its legs with a thong. While he is so doing the flock of sheep approaches, the mother-sheep bleating piteously.]

Prayer of the Mother-Sheep:

Dear Mother Earth,
Who gave us birth,
On whose rich herbage we have fed;
Whose streams our thirst have wateréd,
Upon whose breast we lie at night,
With stars o'erhead to give us light—
Hear, Mother Earth, list to the prayer
Of us, the flocklings of thy care.

A dark saying shudders down the wind
That God is blind.
How have we offended life,
That we should bear the sacrificial knife?
How do tender lambs that gambol,
And woolly little lambs a-ramble
Pertain unto the plan
God has designed for man?

[A tremor shakes the ground so that some of the boulders on Cain's altar roll off, and a few turfs on that of Abel fall. At the same time a low, dull roaring is to be heard. It is the Voice of the Earthquake. Abel throws himself upon the ground in an access of terror. Cain, though showing trepidation, stands erect, proud and defiant.]

CAIN:

Growl, Earth, and show your teeth,
Protest, Nature, 'gainst this wrong;
Fume, Rivers, Ocean, seethe;
Shout, ye Stars, and join the throng;
Clamor, skyey axes, clamor;
Hammer, subterranean mallets, hammer.

The Voice of Earth protesting against blood pollution:

O sovran Lord,
Chief of heaven,
And master of the wheels:
Stay, stay the sacrificial sword.
Earth's spirit reels
At thought of blood contamination.
Thou who from nothing madest foundation—
The sun, the moon, the planets seven—
Avert, avert, the blood that would incarnadine
This soil of mine.
Spare, spare, the breasts which nourish
All things that live;
Man, beast, bird, reptile, trees, all flourish
Upon the milk I give.

[Abel, as the last tremor of the earth ceases, and the mysterious sound of her voice dies away, recovers courage and rises to his feet. For a moment he seems as a man in a dream. But the plaintive bleat of the shackled lamb recalls him. With a swift stride he approaches the helpless little creature, there is the flash of a knife, and the lamb is slain. He stands silently watching its death-throes with a look of pious self-approbation upon his callous and cunning face.]

CAIN (stooping down and tenderly stroking the body of the lamb):

Little lamb, little lamb,
Frolic firstling of thy dam,
Fleecy, flossy innocent
With thy legs so queerly bent,
With those eyes of liquid brown,
And thy funny wrinkled frown,
Thy ambling life—how does it cross
Man's far gain and man's far loss?
Thy path should lie where willows hedge
The brook, or up on hilly ledge
Where pied flowers blow in sunny air,
And everything is bright and fair.

[He stands up to his full height and his voice is the voice of imprecation.]

If they who are strong
Can do no wrong,
And might makes right,
Then black is white.
When suns and stars were young,
The spheres in chorus sung;
But now the music rings no more
Since Paradise's portals four
On us were closed. . . . Forbidden Tree,
Mother thou art of mystery.
What is evil, what is sin,
And why they are, I cannot win.

[During this soliloquy Abel has been industriously cleaving wood for his altar, and having heaped the faggots up according to his liking, he picks up the body of the lamb and flings it upon the top of the pile. Cain, his mood traversed by his brother's interruption, turns to his own altar and begins to split some wood also with his stone hatchet. After some minutes Cain picks up a flint flake and endeavors to strike fire from it.]

ABEL (*watching him*): Thou wouldst make fire? Fire is of God.

CAIN: My fire shall not be such. I will not take it as a gift from heaven.

ABEL: Thou must pray for fire.

CAIN: Not I. What I have a right to have, God has no right to exact gratitude for.

ABEL: But fire is God's symbol. We may not use it without worshipping Him.

CAIN: Leave worship to the angels. They like it.

[He begins to sing as he hammers at the flint.]

Carry steel
And harry flint;
Steel's the key
To unlock
Fast and free
The fire in't.
Knock, knock, knock.
Spark leap after
Spark with laughter;
Fire, fire, burn this stubble;
Faggot, smoke, and fresh sap bubble.
Spark, spark, spark,
Hark, hark, hark,
From these ringing flint-flakes leap
Like the lightning on the steep;
Kindle yonder cleft wood, Fire,
Fire, Fire, Fire.

Fire, Fire, and nothing else,
Round my altar weave thy spells,
Flame like rhododendron, flare
Like the tiger in his lair.
Stripes of yellow,
Smoke bands fellow,
Tongues of red,
Teeth of dread.
Spark, spark, spark,
Hark, hark, hark,
By the sun's eye's awful glance,
By the livid lightning's lance,
By the mountain's smoking arch,
By the aurora's flashing march,
By the comet's flowing mane,
By the thought within my brain,
By my own promethean name,
I charge, thee, Fire, burst into flame.

[In spite of his energetic efforts, the sparks fail to kindle the faggots on Cain's altar, and with a gesture of impatience he throws down his hammer and wipes the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand.]

ABEL: I told thee, brother, thou wert wrong.

CAIN: Hold thy peace. God rules the world with arbitrary, whimsical power. . . . But never mind. . . . The day after tomorrow belongs to me.

ABEL (*puzzled*): That will be two sunrises and two sunsets hence. I know not what thou meanest.

CAIN (*oracularly*):

He dreams, who is awake.
Who sleeps, snores.
The brother of the ape
Walks on all fours.

ABEL (*after a moment of hesitation during which he scans Cain's face for an answer to this riddle*): Thou art wilful, Cain. Be humble.

CAIN: Do n't be so smug.

ABEL (*falling on his knees before his altar*): O God, in humility and contriteness for my manifold iniquities, I bend before Thee. Show thy might and thy power and let the virtue which is in this sacrifice of mine be opened unto Thee.

[A terrific flash of lightning and an appalling thunder peal breaks the pause which follows the termination of Abel's prayer. Both men are thrown prostrate to the ground. Cain's altar is riven by the bolt and the débris scattered all around, while Abel's altar breaks into flame and the smell of burning flesh fills the air.]

VOICE OF THE FIRE:

I am Flame,
No man may tame.
I am Fire,
Changing, yet the same.

Higher, higher, higher
I climb, but never tire.
Before earth was begun
I was born of His nod,
I am Son of the Sun,
I am the breath of God.
I speak and my lips are hot;
I speak, and my tongue is red;
I speak when man may not;
I speak. . . . My name is dread.
I am God's breath, His voice,
His flaming avatar.
With me hath no man choice.
Obey, or bear the scar.

ABEL: See, brother, the fire, the fire.

CAIN: Do n't brother me. Thou art no better than the apes.

ABEL (*striking Cain with his cudgel*): Take that for thyspeech.

CAIN (*attempting to avert the blow*): So thou wouldst shed man's blood also!

[*He picks up a small round boulder and flings it at Abel, who falls. For a few minutes Cain stands silent and perplexed. Never having seen the death of man he knows not what to make of it. He advances toward Abel's prostrate body and takes him by the wrist.*]

He feigns to be asleep. . . . No, he sleeps. . . . But how cold and stiff he grows Abel Abel awake thou.

[*He shakes the body and as he turns it over he observes blood oozing from Abel's forehead and a pool of it on the ground.*]

Blood. . . . Then is his life taken like that of the lamb he slew. . . . This is death. . . . Can a man, too, die like an animal? Is our exile from Eden an exile of the soul as well as of the body? Of the spirit as well as of the flesh?

[*A low strident moaning is to be heard.*] He moans. Then he lives.

[*He puts his ear against Abel's mouth.*] . . . 'T is not from his lips.

[*Cain lays his ear close to the ground and then starts up affrighted.*]

'T is from the earth [*He shudders.*] . . . My flesh creeps.

[*Abel's blood rises in the form of a red phantom.*]

THE PHANTOM:

From the heart of the first slain,
From pulsing artery and vein,
I have risen amain.
Red my garments, tint of doom,
Woven in his young heart's loom.
Stopped is now his shuttle breath,
He is dead,
Snapt the thread
Of his life by murdering death.
Eye for eye, tooth for tooth,
Law has not fellowship with ruth;
Blood for blood, bone for bone,
Man man's murder shall atone.
For Abel dead
Cain's forehead
Through day and dark
Shall bear the mark.
Behold . . . now . . . now,
God's dart—
The SHART—
Doth smart
Cain's brow.
The blood of Abel dead shall stalk
By side of Cain where'er he walk.
Phantom red,
Phantom dread,
I shall haunt thee,
I shall daunt thee,
I shall taunt thee,

Awake, adream, asleep,
In sunlight or in shadow deep.
I am Conscience, I am Fear.
Whispering ever in thy ear.
My silent footfalls thee shall follow
Over plains, through valleys hollow;
Voices sinister in air
Shall enmesh thee with a snare;
Incantations magical,
Prophesies dark, tragical,
Shall break the silence of the waste
Soever fast thy feet may haste.

[The Phantom vanishes. During this incantation Cain has lain prone upon the ground in silence. The sound of footsteps as of a man approaching, is heard. Cain assumes a sitting posture and gazes around with mingled fear and perplexity.]

CAIN: Who comes? . . . I hear the breathing of God, and his footsteps as once I heard Him in Eden walking in the cool of the day.

GOD: Cain, where art thou?

CAIN: Here am I.

GOD: But where is thy brother Abel?

CAIN: Am I my brother's keeper? Thou art He who knows all things and watchest all things, from the butterfly that opens and folds its gaudy vans upon a thistle-head to the elephant which stalks through the jungle, and yet Thou askest me of my brother. Behold my brother Abel's corpse. With his soul have Thou to do. His spirit was not kin to mine.

GOD: Thy vast enormity hath risen unto heaven like exhalation from a foul and stagnant fen.

CAIN *[looking around furtively and speaking under his breath]*: Are there informers who denounce me? Is the wind a tell-tale? My father Adam and my mother Eve be the sole other persons living, yet they know not my deed. . . . *[defiantly]* . . . How knowest thou, God, that I have slain my brother?

GOD: I know the things which have been, those which are, and those which are to be. As the stars whirl through immensity of darkness, so my thought runs backward before time was, and stretches forward beyond the pole of eternity, when time shall be no more.

CAIN (*sullenly*): Thou abidest in heaven. How dost thou know what things are done on the earth beneath?

GOD: Nothing can *not* be known in heaven. Naught can be known on earth. I know all things. I look on both sides of death.

CAIN: "Death"? What is death?

GOD: That is thy brother Abel; that is thou and thy father's seed that shall be after him. So shall whirl the race of man like autumn leaves unto the winter of its long sojourn.

CAIN (*defiantly*): True, I slew my brother Abel. But thou didst create the impulse within me. For thou hast created all things, both good and evil.

GOD: Doth not the Judge of all the earth do right? My glory reaches to the heavens.

CAIN: The more shall thy shame reach to the nethermost part of the earth. He who created the riddle of sin must also solve it, else must he suffer inquisition of his nature. Art thou sure of thy own righteousness, O God?

GOD: Fool! I carry the whole world. I made it and I bear it.

CAIN (*sarcastically*): Thou bearest the whole world, yet my sin thou canst not bear, Ha, Ha.

GOD: My ways are past finding out.

CAIN: So much have I learned already.

GOD (*in great wrath*): Son of Adam, now art thou cursed upon the face of the earth. The voice of thy brother Abel crieth unto me from the ground. A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the world.

CAIN: But yesterday thou didst banish my father and my mother from paradise. In sooth, it seems to be thy way to banish them that displease Thee. [*Cain blazes with wrath.*] Thou thinkest of thyself as alone wise, while men like shadows flit. I tell thee, God, to thy teeth, time is with men, not Thee. Thou hast given man reason; with reason shall he acquire knowledge. Man's knowledge shall yet throw Thee into panic, break Thy power and make man Thy equal. The day shall come when Thy existence shall lie in the hollow of his hands. *For if man have not need of Thee, then Thou art not.*

God: Son of man, thou mockest.

CAIN: Not those who suffer injustice, but those who inflict injustice should take time to think. Thy future, God, is in the mind of man, not his future in Thy mind.

God (*sighing*): My creation begins to wear upon me. What a farce has Eden become. Before anything existed which is visible, I held my way among the invisible things of my creation like the sun amid the stars, like the tide in the sea. But now I have no peace. Begone, Cain. I abandon thee to the terror that walks in the waste places, to the pestilence that stalketh in darkness, to the beasts of the jungle.¹ Go, get thee gone.

[*Cain slowly yet proudly turns upon his heel as the Voice of God ceases speaking, and walks away into the waste. As he disappears Adam and Eve enter seeking the body of Abel.*]

Dirge of Adam and Eve:

Clay, clay, clay
Is he, and stark, stark, stark.
Day, day, day,
Is dark, dark, dark.
Away, away, away,
Carry him.
But whither shall we carry him?
Earth repudiates his corse,
Fire refuses his consuming force.

¹ In Gen. 4:14 the wilderness lying beyond the bounds of Palestine was regarded as being outside the confines of Yahveh's sway.

Let him lie
'Neath the sky.
Over his bones
Let us heap stones.
The winter leaf
Shall whisper grief,
And wild winds knell
With solemn bell.
Come away, come away, Life;
Come away, come away, husband, wife;
Come away, come away, father, mother;
Come away, unborn brother.
He is dead,
Leave him in his bed.

[They heap stones over Abel's body.]

SCENE III

A wild, lonely heath. It is a night without stars. The form of Cain may dimly be descried in the darkness sitting cross-legged on the ground. Beside him is a camel, its ungainly bulk making a huge, three-cornered outline in the natural darkness.

CAIN: I have learned knowledge of terrible things. The strong exacts what he can, the weak must grant what he must. Error seems already old, and the world yet so young.

[Suddenly a golden ball of light like a fire-mist appears in the sky. As Cain watches, it breaks into points of light which form into lines, then into triangles, squares. Finally the figure assumes the form of the swastika, and stands fixed like a constellation.]

. . . . What is that? A star? Nay, all the stars be blotted out. . . . I know the path of the moon and the motions of the wandering stars. I know the Pleiads' skein and Orion's shape. The circles of the Great Bear, too. . . . Ho, what art thou, thou labyrinthine maze which breaks the meters of the sky?

THE FLAMING SWASTIKA:

Mortal to my influence bowed,
Be not thou with fear endowed,
Sun and stars of thee are proud.

CAIN: Fear? What is that? I know not the word.

THE FLAMING SWASTIKA: Fear is that which clutches at the heart of God lest man need him not.

CAIN: That much have I told Him already.

THE FLAMING SWASTIKA: But God fears thou wilt tell others the secret thou hast discovered. Thou art a bold spirit, Cain. . . . Listen. I have come from the seven solitudes unto thee. I am the light of the sun, the lamp of the moon, the spark in the taper stars. I am rhythm in time, sound in space, word on thy lips, strength in thy heart, seed in thy loins, thought in thy mind. I am adventure, mystery, beauty, power. Come, follow me.

CAIN (*springing to his feet and singing with proud defiance*):

New pathways shall I tread,
New speech shall come to me.
I shall stamp upon the serpent's head,
And learn the passion of the sea.
The patience and the passion
Of Nature's arts that fashion
Beasts, and birds with wings,
The chambered nautilus and creeping things,
Herbs, trees, and flowers' blossomings.
Into the dangerous world I leap,
To walk with lions in the waste;
Let others sow and others reap—
O soul of mine make haste.
The thistle and the thorn
Shall be my comrades brave;
They, too, with words foresworn,
From Eden's soil were drave.
The sour bread of scorn,
The bitter wine of wrath,

The soul that's nobly born
For daily portion hath.

I shall feel the rain's wet smite,
Have glimpse of rising stars,
Above the gleaming lintels of the night
Shining on this world of scars.
I shall thresh the mountains,
And beat the hills as chaff,
I shall drink of fountains,
I shall dance and laugh.
I shall haunt the haunter,
Hunt the lion to his lair,
I shall daunt the daunter—
Not God's red wrath shall scare.

Lord of the Waste let be!
God, I take thy gage.
'T is better to be free
Than pay thee sordid wage.
I shall sing a ditty
Shall ring on seraphs' helms;
I shall build a city,
A Lady among Realms.
Within shall rise high halls
With windows like the sun;
Upon gigantic walls
The deeds which men have done
Shall be recorded—vision
Of poet, prophet's gleam
Of future world elysian,
The light of painter's dream.
And above the archéd portals
In script of flaming glass
I'll write the legend: "Mortals,
Enter. God shall not pass."

[The Flaming Swastika goes out in a flash of darkness. Simultaneously far out in the darkness and the desert an eerie voice as of a woman, yet with a singular unhuman quality in its timbre, is heard singing. It is Lamia, part djinn of the waste, part dryad, a siren of

the wilderness and yet a woman. She is a daughter of the Nephilim, those weird creatures born of a union of the Sons of God with half-human beings created before Adam was—pre-Adamite men.

LAMIA (*singing*):

I lean my ear unto the earth,
I hear the beating of her heart,
The inner throb, the pang of birth,
To me she doth impart.

I drink the milk of her sweet breast,
I sup on her fair food,
I lie upon her lap for rest
When night draws down her hood.

The wind that sways the fronded palms
It is earth's gentle breath;
Balsam and honey-dew she gives for alms,
And rest to him that wandereth.

CAIN (*springing into the darkness*):

Evoe! Evoe! Daughter of Air,
Evoe! Evoe! Daughter of Fire,
Wait, wait, wait for me, thou art so fair,
Go with me unto the Land of Desire.

LAMIA:

A wraith, a sorceress, a sprite,
A woman, Lamia, am I.
A dark word shudders down the night
That God Himself shall die.

CAIN (*shouting aloud*):

Come forth, thou lovely Talisman,
And go with me to the Land of Nod.
In the world there is nothing great but man,
And man is god and God is clod.

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