

ADONIS
AN ALLEGORY
BY
ALEISTER CROWLEY

Inscribed to Adonis.

PERSONS OF THE ALLEGORY

THE KING OF BABYLON, *tributary to the King of Greece*

HERMES, *a Greek Physician*

THE LADY PSYCHE

THE COUNT ADONIS, *at first known as the Lord Esarhaddon*

THE LADY ASTARTE

The Warriors of the King of Babylon

HANUMAN, *Servant to Hermes*

CHARIS.

ELPIS. } *Attendants on Psyche.*

PISTIS.

Three Aged Women

Handmaidens and Slaves of Astarte

ADONIS

ACT I

SCENE I: *The hanging gardens of Babylon. R., the House of the Lady Astarte; L., a gateway; C., a broad lawn enriched with clustered flowers and sculptures. The sun is nigh his setting. On a couch under the wall of the city reposes the Lord Esarhaddon, fanned by two slaves, a negro boy and a fair Kabyle girl, clad in yellow and blue, the boy's robes being covered with a veil of silver, the girl's with a veil of gold.*

They are singing to him softly:

THE BOY. All crimson-veined is Tigris' flood;

The sun has stained his mouth with blood.

THE GIRL. Orange and green his standards sweep.

THE BOY. His minions keen.

THE GIRL. His maidens weep.

THE BOY. But thou, Lord, thou! The hour is nigh

When from the prow of luxury
Shall step the death of all men's hearts,
She whose live breath, a dagger's darts,
A viper's vice, an adder's grip,
A cockatrice 'twixt lip and lip,
She whose black eyes are suns to shower
Love's litanies from hour to hour,
Whose limbs are scythes like Death's of whom
The body writhes, a lotus-bloom
Swayed by the wind of love, a crime
Too sweetly sinned, the queen of time,
The lady of heaven, to whom the stars,
Seven by seven, from their bars
Lean and do worship—even she
Who hath given all her sweet self to thee,
The Lady Astarte!

THE GIRL. Peace, O peace!

A swan, she sails through ecstasies
Of air and marble and flowers, she sways
As the full moon through midnight's haze
Of gauze—her body is like a dove
And a snake, and life, and death, and love!

THE BOY. Even as the twilight so is she,
Half seen, half subtly apprehended,
Ethereally and bodily.

The soul incarnate, the body transcended!

THE GIRL. Aching, aching passionately,
Insufferably, utterly splendid!

THE BOY. Her lips make pale the setting sun!

THE GIRL. Her body blackens Babylon!

THE BOY. Her eyes turn midnight's murk to grey!

THE GIRL. Her breasts make midnight of the day!

THE BOY. About her, suave and subtle, swims

The musk and madness of her limbs!

THE GIRL. Her mouth is magic like the moon's.

THE BOY. Her breath is bliss!

THE GIRL. Her steps are swoons!

[Enter ASTARTE, with her five handmaidens.

THE BOY. Away, away!

THE GIRL. With heart's accord,

To leave his lady to our lord.

[They go out.

THE BOY. Let him forget our service done

Of palm-leaves waved, that never tires,

In his enchanted Babylon

Of infinite desires!

[ASTARTE kneels at the foot of the couch, and taking the feet of Esarhaddon in her hands, covers them with kisses.

ASTARTE. Nay, never wake! unless to catch my neck

And break me up with kisses—never sleep,

Unless to dream new pains impossible

To waking!

Girls! with more than dream's address,

Wake him with perfume till he smile, with strokes

Softer than moonbeams till he turn, and sigh,

With five slow drops of wine between his lips

Until his heart heave, with young thrills of song

Until his eyelids open, and the first

And fairest of ye greet him like a flower,

So that awakened he may break from you

And turn to me who am all these in one.

1ST MAIDEN. Here is the wealth
Of all amber and musk,
Secreted by stealth
In the domes of the dusk!

2ND MAIDEN. Here the caress
Of a cheek—let it stir
The first liens of liesse
Not to me—but to her!

3RD MAIDEN. Here the quintessence
Of dream and delight,
Evoking the presence
Of savour to sight!

4TH MAIDEN. List to the trill
And the ripple and roll
Of a tune that may thrill
Thee through sense to the soul!

5TH MAIDEN. Look on the fairest,
The masterless maid!
Ere thine eye thou unbarest,
I flicker, I fade.

ALL. Wake! as her garland is tossed in the air
When the nymph meets Apollo, our forehead is bare.
We divide, we disperse, we dislimn, we dissever,
For we are but now, and our lady for ever!

[*They go out.*

ESARHADDON. I dreamed of thee!
Dreams beyond form and name!
It was a chain of ages, and a flash
Of lightning—which thou wilt—since—Oh I see
Nothing, feel nothing, and am nothing—ash
Of the universe burnt through!

ASTARTE. And I the flame!

ESARHADDON. Wreathing and roaring for an ageless æon,
Wrapping the world, spurning the empyrean,
Drowning with dark despotic imminence
All life and light, annihilating sense—
I have been sealed and silent in the womb
Of nothingness to burst, a babe's bold bloom,
Into the upper aethyr of thine eyes.
Oh! one grave glance enkindles Paradise,
One sparkle sets me on the throne above,
Mine orb the world.

ASTARTE. Nay, stir not yet. Let love
Breathe like the zephyr on the unmoved deep,
Sigh to awakening from its rosy sleep;
Let the stars fade, and all the east grow grey
And tender, ere the first faint rose of day
Flush it. Awhile! Awhile! There's crimson bars
Enough to blot the noblest of the stars,
And bow for adoration ere the rim
Start like God's spear to ware the world of Him!
Softly!

ESARHADDON. But kiss me!

ASTARTE. With an eyelash first!

ESARHADDON. Treasure and torture!

ASTARTE. Tantalising thirst
Makes the draught more delicious. Heaven were worth
Little without the purgatory, earth!

ESARHADDON. You make earth heaven.

ASTARTE. And heaven hell. To choose thee
Is to interpret misery "To lose thee."

ESARHADDON. Ay! death end all if it must end thy kiss!

ASTARTE. And death be all if it confirm life's bliss!

ESARHADDON. And death come soon if death fill life's endeavour!

ASTARTE. And if it spill life's vintage, death come never!

ESARHADDON. The sun sets. Bathe me in the rain of gold!

ASTARTE. These pearls that decked it shimmering star-cold
Fall, and my hair falls, wreathes an aureole.
Even as thy love encompasses my soul!

ESARHADDON. I am blinded; I am bruised; I am stung.
Each thread
Hisses.

ASTARTE. There's life there for a thousand dead!

ESARHADDON. And death there for a million!

ASTARTE. Even so.
Life, death, new life, a web spun soft and slow
By love, the spider, in these palaces
That taketh hold.

ESARHADDON. Take hold.

ASTARTE. Keen joyaunces
Mix with the multitudinous murmurings,
And all the kisses sharpen into stings.
Nay! shall my mouth take hold? Beware! Once fain,
How shall it ever leave thy mouth again?

ESARHADDON. Why should it?

ASTARTE. Is not sleep our master yet?

ESARHADDON. Why must we think when wisdom would forget?

ASTARTE. Lest we in turn forget to fill the hour.

ESARHADDON. The pensive bee leaves honey in the flower.

ASTARTE. Now the sun's rim is dipped. And thus I dip
My gold to the horizon of thy lip.

ESARHADDON. Ah! . . .

ASTARTE. There's no liquor, none, within the cup.

ESARHADDON. Nay, draw not back; nay, then, but lift me up.
I would the cup were molten too; I'd drain
Its blasting agony.

ASTARTE. In vain.

ESARHADDON. In vain?
Nay, let the drinker and the draught in one
Blaze up at last, and burn down Babylon!

ASTARTE. All but the garden, and our bed, and—see!
The false full moon that comes to rival me.

ESARHADDON. She comes to lamp our love.

*[A chime of bells without.
I'll tire my hair.*

ASTARTE.

The banquet waits. Girls, follow me.

[They go out, leaving ESARHADDON.

ESARHADDON. How fair
And full she sweeps, the buoyant barge upon
The gilded curves of Tigris. She's the swan
That drew the gods to gaze, the fawn that called
Their passion to his glades of emerald,
The maid that maddened Mithras, the quick quiver
Of reeds that drew Oannes from the river! . . .
She is gone. The garden is a wilderness.
Oh for the banquet of the lioness,
The rich astounding wines, the kindling meats,
The music and the dancers! Fiery seats
Of empire of the archangels, let your wings
Ramp through the empyrean! Lords and Kings
Of the Gods, descend and serve us, as we spurn
And trample life, fill death's sardonyx urn
With loves immortal—how shall I endure
This moment's patience? Ah, she comes, be sure!
Her foot flits on the marble. . . . Open, gate!

[The gate, not of the house but of the garden, opens. The Lady Psyche appears. She is clothed in

deep purple, as mourning, and her hair is bound with a fillet of cypress and acacia. She is attended by three maidens and three aged women.

What tedious guest arrives?

PSYCHE. White hour of fate!

I have found him!

ESARHADDON. Who is this? . . . Fair lady, pardon.

You seek the mistress of the garden?

PSYCHE. I thought I had found the lord I seek.

Your pardon, lord. These eyes are weary and weak

With tears and my vain search.

ESARHADDON. Whom seek you then?

PSYCHE. My husband—my sole miracle of men,

The Count Adonis.

[ESARHADDON *staggers and falls on the couch.*]

PSYCHE. You know of him?

ESARHADDON. No.

I cannot tell what struck me so.

I never heard the name.

PSYCHE. Indeed, your eyes

Are liker his than wedded dragon-flies!

Your brows are his, your mouth is his—

Yet all's awry!

ESARHADDON. May be it is!

PSYCHE. Oh, pardon. Mine is but a mad girl's glance

Adonis is this soul's inheritance.

All else is madness.

ESARHADDON. Mad! Mad! Mad! Mad! Mad!

Why say you this? Who are you? Sad? Glad?

Bad? Bad! Bad! Speak, speak! Bleak peak of mystery?

Weak cheek of modesty?

PSYCHE. Oh, pardon me!

I did not mean to move you thus.

ESARHADDON. I am stirred

Too easily. You used a shameful word!

PSYCHE. Accept my sorrow. I am all alone

In this black night. My heart is stone,

My limbs are lead, mine eyes accurst,

My throat a hell of thirst. . . .

My husband—they suppose him dead. . . .

They made me wear these weeds. Could I

In my heart credit half they said,

Not these funereal robes should wrap me round,

But the white cerements of a corpse, and high

Upon a pyre of sandal and ebony,

Should dare through flame the inequitable profound!

But only these of all mine household come

In faith and hope and love so far from home,

And these three others joined me—why, who knows?

But thou, lord, in whose face his likeness shows—

At the first glance—for now, i' faith, 'tis gone!—

Hast thou dwelt away here in Babylon?

ESARHADDON. Now must I laugh—forgive me in your sorrow!

My life's not yesterday and not to-morrow.

I live; I know no more.

PSYCHE. How so?

ESARHADDON. I fear
I know but this, that I'm a stranger here.
They call me the Lord Esarhaddon—name
Borrowed or guessed, I cannot tell! I came
Whence I know not—some malady
Destroyed my memory.

PSYCHE. Oh, were you he! But yet I see you are not.
Had you no tokens from the life forgot?

ESARHADDON. Nay, I came naked into Babylon.
I live the starlight and sleep through the sun.
I am happy in love, I am rich, I eat and drink,
I gather goods, I laugh, I never think.
Know me the prince of perfect pleasure!

PSYCHE. Yet
Is there not something that you would forget?
Some fear that chills you? While you talk to me
I see you glance behind you fearfully.

ESARHADDON (*with furtive fear amounting to horror*)
You see the Shadow?

PSYCHE. No: slim shadows stretch
From yonder moon, and woo the world, and etch
With their fantastic melancholy grotesques
The earth—man's destiny in arabesques.

ESARHADDON. You are blind! You are mad! See where he stands!
It is the King of Babylon,
Reeking daggers in his hands—
And black blood oozes, oozes, throbs and dips
From his eyes and nostrils to his lips
That he sucks, gnashing his fangs. Upon
His head is a crown of skulls, and monkeys new
And gibber and mop about him. Skew! Spew! Ugh!
Hu! Mow! Now! Mow! they go—cannot you hear them?
What? have you courage to go near them?

PSYCHE. Nothing is there.

ESARHADDON. Oh, but he has the head
Of a boar, the black boar Night! All dead, dead, dead,
The eyes of girls that once were beautiful
Hang round his neck. Whack! Crack! he slaps a skull
For a drum—Smack! Flack! Thwack! Back, I'll not attack.
Quack! Quack! there's ducks and devils on his back.
Keep him away. You want a man, you say?
Well, there's a king for you to-day.
Go, kiss him! Slobber over him! His ribs
Should be readily tickled. Wah! Wah! Wah! she jibs.
Ugh! there he came too close. I'll bite the dust;
I'll lick the slime of Babylon. Great lust,
Great god, great devil, gar-gra-gra-gra! Spare me!
Take this wench, though she were the womb that bare me!
See! Did I tell you, he's the King, the King,
The King of Terrors. See me grovelling!
Yah! Ha!

PSYCHE. There's nothing there. Are you a man
To craze at naught?

ESARHADDON. Immitigable ban!
Immitigable, pitiful, profound—

Ban, can, fan, ran, and pan is underground,
Round, bound, sound—Oh have pity! . . .

Who art thou

Whose coming thus unmans me? Not till now
Saw I, or felt I, or heard I, the King
So mumbling near; black blood's on everything.
Boo! Scow! Be off! Out! Vanish! Fly! Begone!
Out! Off! Out! Off! I'm King of Babylon.
Oh no! Thy pardon. Spare me! 'Tis as a slip
O' th' lip. Now flip! rip! bawdy harlot, skip!

[He threatens her. She trembles, but holds her ground.]

Strip, yes, I'll strip you naked, strip your flesh
In strips with my lips, gnaw your bones like a dog.
Off, sow! Off, grumpet! Strumpet! Scum-pit! Flails to thresh
Your body! Clubs to mash your face in! Knives
To cut away your cat's nine lives!

ASTARTE. *(Entering hastily.)* What's this? Who are you?
What right have you to come
And make this havoc in the home?
Can you not see what wreck your tempest makes?
Begone! I have a fiery flight of snakes
To lash you hence!

PSYCHE. It may be mine's the right.
It may be you are nothing in my sight.
It may be I have found my lord at last;
And you—his concubine? May be out-cast.

ASTARTE. This is the sure thing, that I chase thee. Slaves!
Hither your whips! that are more black with blood
Of such as this thing than your skins with kisses
Of your sun's frenzy.

[The slaves run up.]

PSYCHE. Thou vain woman! Now
I know him, lost, wrecked, mad, but mine, but mine,
Indissolubly dowered with me, my husband,
The Count Adonis!

ESARHADDON. Ah!

[He falls, but into the arms of ASTARTE.]

ASTARTE. Ho! guard us now
And lash this thing from the garden!

[The slaves form in line between PSYCHE and the others.]

PSYCHE. Adonis!

ESARHADDON. Ah!

Astarte, there's some sorcery abroad.

ASTARTE. The spell is broken, dear my lord.
There is a wall of ebony and steel
About us.

ESARHADDON. What then do I feel
When that name sounds?

ASTARTE. A trick of mind.
Things broken up and left behind

Keep roots to plague us when we least expect them.
The wise—and thou art wise—let naught affect them.
Let us to feast!

ESARHADDON. Ah no! I tremble still,
Despite my reason and despite my will.
Let me lie with thee here awhile, and dream
Upon thine eyes beneath the moon,
Whose slanted beam
Lights up thy face, that sends its swoon
Of languour and hunger through
The infinite space that severs two
So long as they cannot rise above
Into the unity of love.
However close lock hands and feet,
Only one moment may they meet;
When in the one pang that runs level
With death and birth, the royal revel,
The lover and the loved adore
The thing that is, when they are not.

ASTARTE. No more!
Bury thy face between these hills that threat
The heaven, their rosy spears (the gods that fret)
Tipping thine ears, and with my hair I'll hide thee;
And these mine handmaidens shall stand beside thee,
And mix their nightingale with lion
Of the guard that chorus and clash iron,
While as a river laps its banks
My fingertips caress thy flanks!

(Chorus.)

MEN. Under the sun there is none, there is none
That hath heard such a word as our lord hath begun.

WOMEN. Under the moon such a tune, such a tune
As his thought hath half caught in this heaven of June.

MEN. Never hath night such a light, such a rite!

WOMEN. Never had day such a ray, such a sway!

MEN. Never had man, since began the earth's plan,
Such a bliss, such a kiss, such a woman as this!

WOMEN. Never had maid since God bade be arrayed
Earth's bowers with his flowers, such a man to her powers!

MEN. Mix in the measure,
Black grape and white cherry!
A passion, a pleasure,
A torment, a treasure,
You to be mournful and we to be merry!

WOMEN. We shall be solemn
And grave and alluring,
You be the column
Upstanding, enduring.
We be the ivy and vine
To entwine—
My mouth on your mouth, and your mouth on mine!

MEN. Burnish our blades
With your veils,

Merry maids!
WOMEN. Sever their cords
With the scales
Of your swords!
MEN. As a whirlwind that licks up a leaf
Let us bear
You, an aureate sheaf
Adrift in the air!
WOMEN. As a butterfly hovers and flits,
Let us guide
To bewilder your wits
Bewitched by a bride!
MEN. Now, as the stars shall
Encircle the moon,
Our ranks let us marshal
In time and in tune!
WOMEN. Leading our lady and lord
To the feast,
Ere the night be abroad,
The black rose of the east!
MEN AND WOMEN. Arise! arise! the feast is spread,
The wine is poured; the singers wait
Eager to lure and lull; the dancers tread
Impatient to invoke the lords of Fate.
Arise, arise! the feast delayed delays
The radiant raptures that must crown its ways.
ASTARTE. Come now. Ah! still the pallor clings?
Wine will redeem the roses. Stretch the strings
Of thy slack heart! Still trembling? Lean on me!
This shoulder could hold up eternity.

[They go forth to the banquet.

SCENE II. THE HALL OF THE PALACE OF ASTARTE. *Onyx, alabaster, porphyry and malachite are the pillars; and the floor of mosaic. In the high seat is ASTARTE, on her right HERMES, a Greek physician. He is a slight, old man, with piercing eyes and every mark of agility and vigour. His dress is that of a Babylonish physician.*

HERMES. And now, polite preliminaries past,
Tell me, dear lady, what the little trouble is!

ASTARTE. It was quite sudden.

HERMES. Good; not like to last.
It bursts, such malady a brittle bubble is!
How is the pulse? Allow me!

ASTARTE. Not for me
Your skill. My husband's lost his memory.

HERMES. Yet he remembers you?

ASTARTE. O quite, of course!

HERMES. Let it alone! Don't flog the willing horse!

Were I to cure him by my magic spells,
The odds are he'd remember someone else!

ASTARTE. Ah, but—a month ago—a woman came—

HERMES. Cool—warm—hot—now we're getting near the flame!

ASTARTE. And what she said or did who knows?

HERMES. These men!

ASTARTE. Yes! But he's never been the same since then!

I've taken endless trouble not to fret him,
Done everything I could to please and pet him,
And now this wretched woman has upset him!

HERMES. Was he distressed much at the time?

ASTARTE. Distressed?

Mad as an elephant in spring!

HERMES. I guessed it. Think he took a fancy to the girl?

ASTARTE. Well, honestly, I don't. My mind's a whirl
With worry. She's a flimsy creature, rags
Of sentiment, and tears, and worn-out tags
Of wisdom.

HERMES. Yes, you've nothing much to fear
While you appear as . . . what you do appear.

ASTARTE. Well, there they stood, crying like butchered swine,

She and her maids. It seems she's lost her man,
Can't get another, wanted to claim mine.

I put a stopper on the pretty plan.
But ever since—well, I can't say what's wrong,
But something's wrong.

HERMES. Yes; yes. Now is it long?

ASTARTE. About a month.

HERMES. What physic have you tried?

ASTARTE. The usual things; young vipers skinned and dried
And chopped with rose-leaves; cow's hoof stewed in dung,
One pilule four times daily, on the tongue;

Lark's brains in urine after every meal,
With just a touch of salt and orange-peel.
HERMES. And yet he is no better?
ASTARTE. Not a whit.
Oh yes, though, not I come to think of it,
Snails pounded up and taken after food
Did seem to do some temporary good.
Of course we kept him on a doubled diet.
HERMES. Have you tried change of air, and rest, and quiet?

ASTARTE. No; what a strange idea!
HERMES. As strange as new.
Yet there seems somehow something in it too!
Still, here's where silence is worth seven speeches—
I might get strangled by my brother leeches.
Now, are you sure you want him cured?

ASTARTE. Why, yes,
Why should I call you in?

HERMES. But none the less
It might be awkward his remembering more.

ASTARTE. I simply want him as he was before.

HERMES. And if it should turn out, as I suspect,
He was this woman's husband.

ASTARTE. Then select
A—you know—something suitable—to put her
Where she won't worry me, or want a suitor.

HERMES. I understand you; but I'm old; your beauty
Might fail to make me careless of my duty.

ASTARTE. I'll take the risk.

HERMES. Then let me see the victim;
If bound, we'll loosen him; if loose, constrict him.
There, madam, in one phrase from heart to heart,
Lies the whole mystery of the healer's art!
Where is the pathic?

ASTARTE. Hush! in Babylon
We say "the patient."

HERMES. Yes?

ASTARTE. It's often one.
For Babylonish is so quaint a tongue
One often goes too right by going wrong!
I'll call him from the garden.

[Goes out.]

HERMES. (*alone*). Is there need
To see the man? He's simply off his feed.
A child could see the way to make him hearty:
More exercise, less food—and less Astarte!

[Enter ESARHADDON. *I greet your lordship.*

ESARHADDON. Greeting, sir!

HERMES. And so
We're not as healthy as a month ago?
The pulse? Allow me! Ah! Tut! Tut! Not bad.
The tongue? Thanks! Kindly tell me what you had
For dinner.

ESARHADDON. Nothing: practically nothing.
I seem to look on food with utter loathing.

HERMES. Just so; but you contrived to peck a bit?

ESARHADDON. Only a dozen quails upon the spit,
A little sturgeon cooked with oysters, wine,
Mushrooms and crayfish. . . .

HERMES. That is not to dine.

ESARHADDON. Well, after that I toyed with pheasant pasty,
Sliced—you know how—with pineapple.

HERMES. Eat hasty?

ESARHADDON. No, not at all. Well, then a sucking-pig
Stuffed with grape, olive, cucumber, peach, fig,
And lemon. Then I trifled with a curry—

HERMES. You're sure you didn't eat it in a hurry?

ESARHADDON. Quite sure. The curry was simplicity
Itself—plain prawns. Then there was—let me see!—
A dish of fruit, then a kid roasted whole,
Some venison fried with goose-liver, a roll
Of very tender spicy well-cooked veal
Done up with honey, olive oil, and meal,
Some sweets, but only three or four, and those
I hardly touched.

HERMES. But why now?

ESARHADDON. I suppose
I wasn't hungry.

HERMES. Diagnosis right;
A simple case of loss of appetite!
Surely they tempted you with something else.

ESARHADDON. A few live lobsters broiled within their shells.
I ate two only.

HERMES. That explains the tongue.
Now let me listen!

Sound in heart and lung.
(And I should think so!) 'Twas a sage that sung:
"Whom the Gods love, love lobsters; they die young."
And yet greater sage sublimely said:
"Look not upon the lobster when it's red!"

ESARHADDON. A Babylonish bard has said the same
Of wine.

HERMES. Ah, wine now? Out with it! Die game!

ESARHADDON. By fin and tail of great Oannes, I
Am the mere model of sobriety.

HERMES. What did you drink for dinner?

ESARHADDON. Scarce a drop
At any time—four flagons, there I stop.
With just a flask of barley-wine to top.

HERMES. Just so becomes a nobleman of sense
Whose moderation errs toward abstinence.

ESARHADDON. Abstinence! That's the word I couldn't think of!
I'm an abstainer. Everything I drink of
Is consecrated by a melancholic
Priest.

HERMES. Which prevents it being alcoholic!

ESARHADDON. Sir, you appear to understand my case
As no one else has done. Appalling face

These quacks have that crowd Babylon. Your fee?
Though none can pay the service done to me.
HERMES. One moment. What about your memory?
Well, never mind, just follow my advice;
That will come back before you say "knife" twice.
First, fire your slaves, the rogues that thief and laze:
A slave's worse than two masters now-a-days.
Next, live on nothing but boiled beans and tripe,
With once a week a melon—when they're ripe.
Next, sent the Lady Astarte up the river;
She looks to me to have a touch of liver.
And you must teach your muscles how to harden,
So stay at home, and labour in the garden!
ESARHADDON. You damned insulting blackguard! Charlatan!
Quack! Trickster! Scoundrel! Cheating medicine-man!
You ordure-tasting privy-sniffing rogue,
You think because your humbug is the vogue
You can beard me?
HERMES. I'll tell you just one thing.
Disobey me, and—trouble with the King!
ESARHADDON. Ring-a-ling-ting! Ping! Spring!
HERMES. That's cooked his goose.
I'll tell Astarte, though it's not much use. *[He goes out.*
It's only one more of life's little curses—
The best of women make the worst of nurses!

SCENE III. THE CONSULTING-ROOM OF HERMES. *It has two parts, the first filled with stuffed crocodiles, snakes, astrolabes, skeletons, lamps of strange shape, vast rolls of papyri, vases containing such objects as a foetus, a mummied child, a six-legged sheep. Hands (obviously those of criminals) have been painted with phosphorus, and give light. Sculptures of winged bulls and bricks inscribed with arrow-head characters are ranged about the walls. A chair of elephant's bones covered with its hide contains the doctor, who is dressed as before in a long black robe covered with mysterious characters. On his head is a high conical cap of black silk dotted with gold stars. In his right hand is a wand of human teeth strung together, in his left a "book" of square palm-leaves bound in silver. At the back of the room is a black curtain completely veiling its second portion. This curtain is covered with cabalistic characters and terrifying images in white.*

[*Enter the servant of HERMES, a negro uglier than an ape. He is immensely long and lean; his body hangs forward, so that his arms nearly touch the ground. He is clad in a tightly fitting suit of scarlet, and wears a scarlet skullcap. he makes deep obeisance.*]

HERMES. Speak, Hanuman!

HANUMAN. A lady.

[*HERMES nods gravely. Exit HANUMAN.*]

HERMES. Abaoth!
Abraxas! Pur! Pur! Aeou! Thoth!

[*Enter the LADY PSYCHE with one attendant.*"]

Ee! Oo! Uu! Iao Sabaoth!

Dogs of Hell!

Mumble spell!

Up! Up! Up!

Sup! Sup! Sup!

U! Aoth!

Abaoth!

Abraoth!

Sabaoth!

Livid, loath,

Obey the oath!

Ah!

[*He shuts the book with a snap.*]

You have come to me because you are crossed

In love.

PSYCHE. Most true, sir!

HERMES. Ah! you're Greek!

PSYCHE. As you yourself, sir.

HERMES. Then I've lost

My pains. I need not fear to speak.

I took you for a fool. Ho! veil, divide!

[*HANUMAN appears and lays his hand on a cord.*]

Things are much pleasanter the other side.

[*The doctor throws off his cloak and cap, his straggling white hair and long pointed beard, appearing as a youth dressed fashionably; at the same time the curtain pulled back shows a room furnished with the luxury of a man of the world. A low balcony of marble at the back gives a view of the city, and of the Tigris winding far into the distance, where dim blue mountains rim the horizon.*]

[*The doctor conducts his client to a lounge, where they sit.*]

HERMES. Bring the old Chian, Hanuman!

[*The negro goes to obey.*
This joke

Is the accepted way of scaring folk;
And if they're scared, they may find confidence
Which is half cure. Most people have no sense.
If only they would sweat, and wash, eat slow,
Drink less, think more, the leech would starve or go.
But they prefer debauchery, disease,
Clysters, drugs, philtres, filth, and paying fees!
Now then, to business!

PSYCHE. Tell me how you guessed

It was my heart that found itself distressed!

HERMES. I always sing a woman just that song;

In twenty years I've never once been wrong.

Seeing me thus marvellously wise,

Veneration follows on surprise:

Sometime they will do what I advise!

PSYCHE. I see. You have real knowledge.

HERMES. Not to be learnt at college!

PSYCHE. Good; you're my man. I am come from Greece,

Where the Gods live and love us, sorrowing

For my lost husband. I have found him here,

But with his memory gone, his mind distraught,

Living in luxury with a courtesan

(I could forgive him that if he knew me),

Filled with a blind unreasoning fear of what

Who knows? He's haunted by a spectre king.

HERMES. Physicians must know everything:

Half the night burn learning's candle,

Half the day devote to scandal.

Here's the mischief of the matter

That I learn most from the latter!

Yesterday I paid a visit

To the fair . . . Astarte, is it?

Saw the kitchen and the closet,

Deduced diet from deposit,

Saw where silkworm joined with swan

To make a bed to sleep upon,

Saw the crowd of cringing knaves

That have made their masters slaves,

Saw Astarte—diagnosed

What had made him see a ghost!

PSYCHE. Can you cure him?

HERMES. In my hurry

(And a not unnatural worry

At the name of lobster curry)

I so far forgot my duty

As to mention to the beauty

What . . . well! here's the long and short of it!

Just exactly what I thought of it.

Tempests, by Oannes' fin!

PSYCHE. Sorry that he'd called you in?

HERMES. So much so that I'd a doubt
If he wouldn't call me out!

PSYCHE. Then he will not hear your counsel?

HERMES. No; I bade him live on groundsel;
But the little social friction
Interfered with the prescription.

PSYCHE. There's no hope, then?

HERMES. Lend an ear!
We may rule him by his fear!
Somehow we may yet contrive
That he see the King, and live!
Have you influence?

PSYCHE. At Court?
Plenty, in the last resort.
Letters from his suzerain!

HERMES. You are high in favour then?

PSYCHE. Ay, that needs not to be sworn;
I am his own daughter born.

HERMES. In thy blood the spark divine
Of Olympus?

PSYCHE. Even in mine!

HERMES. Hark, then! At the Hour of Fears
When the lordly Lion rears
In mid-heaven his bulk of bane
Violently vivid, shakes his mane
Majestical, and Snake and Bull
Lamp the horizon, and the full
Fire of the moon tops heaven, and spurs
The stars, while Mars ruddily burns,
And Venus glows, and Jupiter
Ramps through the sky astride of her,
Then, unattended, let the king
Press on the little secret spring
That guards the garden, and entering
Lay once his hand upon him, even
While in the white arms of his heaven
He swoons to sleep. That dreadful summons
From the wild witchery his woman's,
That shaft of shattering truth shall splinter
The pine of his soul's winter.
Then do thou following cry once
His name; as from eclipse the sun's
Supernal splendour springs, his sight
Shall leap to light.

PSYCHE. Shall leap to light!
Master, this wisdom how repay?

HERMES. I am sworn unto thy father—Nay!
Weep not and kneel not! See, mine art

[The two other handmaidens are seen standing by their fellow.]

Hath wrought such wonder in thine heart
That—look!

PSYCHE. Ah! Pistis, Elpis! how
Are you here? You were not with me now!

You fled me. Charis only came
Through those dark dreams.

HERMES. Farewell! Proclaim
For my reward my art's success.

More than yourself need happiness.

PSYCHE. Farewell and prosper greatly!

[She goes out with her maidens.]

HERMES. And thou, live high and stately
In glory and gree tenfold
That which thou hadst of old!

[He draws the curtain.]

SCENE IV: THE ANTECHAMBER OF THE KING'S PALACE. *It is a vast hall of black marble. At the corners four fountains play in basins of coloured marble. At the back a narrow door pillared by vast man-bulls in white marble.*

In mid-stage the LADY PSYCHE, seated on the ground, her long hair unloosed, her robe of shining silver, mourns.

With her are the three handmaidens bowed and mourning at front of the stage R., C., and L. The aged women are grouped in front of stage C., on the steps which lead to the hall.

No light comes save through the robes of the LADY PSYCHE from the jewels that adorn her. Their glimmer is, however, such as to fill the hall with moony radiance, misty dim, and lost in the vastness of the building.

PSYCHE. Silence grows hateful; hollow is mine heart

Here in the fateful hall; I wait apart.

Dimmer, still dimmer darkness veils my sight;

There is no glimmer heralding the light.

I, the King's daughter, am but serf and thrall

Where Time hath wrought her cobweb in the hall.

This blood avails not; where's the signet ring

Whose pussiance fails not to arouse the King?

Heir of his heart, I am uncrowned; then, one

That hath no art or craft in Babylon.

I left my home and found a vassal's house—

This lampless dome of death, vertiginous!

O for the foam of billows that carouse

About the crag-set columns! for the breeze

That fans their flagging Caryatides!

For the gemmed vestibule, the porch of pearl,

The bowers of rest, the silences that furl

Their wings upon mine amethystine chamber

Whose lions shone with emerald and amber!

O for the throne whereon my father's awe,

Lofty and lone, lets liberty love law!

All justice wrought, its sword the healer's knife!

All mercy, not less logical than life!

Alas! I wait a widowed suppliant

Betrayed to fate, blind trampling elephant.

I wait and mourn. Will not the dust disclose

The Unicorn, the Unicorn that goes

About the gardens of these halls of Spring,

First of the wardens that defend the King?

First flower of Spring, first maiden of the morn,

Wilt thou not bring me to the Unicorn?

[*The Unicorn passes over. He has the swiftness of the horse, the slimness of the deer, the whiteness of the swan, the horn of the narwhal. He couches upon the right side of the LADY PSYCHE.*]

Hail! thou that holdest thine appointed station,

Lordliest and boldest of his habitation,

Silence that foldest over its creation!

[*The Lion passes over. He is redder than the setting sun. He couches upon the left side of the LADY*

PSYCHE.]

Hail! thou that art his ward and warrior,
The brazen heart, the iron pulse of war!
Up start, up start! and set thyself to roar!

[*The Peacock passes over. This peacock is so great that his fan, as he spreads it on couching before the face of the LADY PSYCHE, fills the whole of the hall.*]

Hail! glory and light his majesty that hideth,
Pride and delight whereon his image rideth,
While in thick night and darkness he abideth!

[*The stage now darkens. Even the light shed by the jewels of the LADY PSYCHE is extinguished. Then, from the gate of the Palace between the man-bulls there issueth a golden hawk. In his beak is a jewel which he drops into the lamp that hangs from the height above the head of the LADY PSYCHE. This lamp remains dark. During this darkness the Unicorn, the Lion, and the Peacock disappear.*]

Love me and lead me through the blind abysses!
Fill me and feed me on the crowning kisses,
Like flowers that flicker in the garden of glory,
Pools of pure liquor like pale flames and hoary
That lamp the lightless empyrean! Ah! love me!
All space be sightless, and thine eyes above me!

Thrice burnt and branded on this bleeding brow, Stamp thou the candid stigma—even now!

[*The lamp flashes forth into dazzling but momentary radiance. As it goes out a cone of white light is seen upon the head of THE LADY PSYCHE, and before her stands a figure of immense height cloaked and hooded in perfect blackness.*]

THE KING. Come! for the throne is hollow. The eagle hath cried:

Come away! The stars are numbered, and the tide
Turns. Follow! Follow! Thine Adonis slumbered. As a bride
Adorned, come, follow! Fate alone is fallen and wried.
Follow me, follow! The unknown is satisfied.

[*The LADY PSYCHE is lifted to her feet. In silence she bows, and in silence follows him as he turns and advances to the gate while the curtain falls.*]

SCENE V: THE GARDEN OF THE LADY ASTARTE. THE LORD ESARHADDON *is lying on the couch with his mistress. Their arms are intertwined. They and their slaves and maidens are all fallen into the abysses of deep sleep. It is a cloudless night; and the full moon, approaching mid-heaven, casts but the shortest shadows.*

The Murmur of the Breeze

I am the Breeze to bless the bowers,
Sigh through the trees, caress the flowers;
Each folded bud to sway, to swoon,
With its green blood beneath the moon
Stirred softly by my kiss; I bear
The sort reply of amber air
To the exhaled sighs of the heat
That dreams and dies amid the wheat,
From the cool breasts of mountains far—
Their serried crests clasp each a star!
The earth's pulse throbs with mighty rivers;
With her low sobs God's heaven quivers;
The dew stands on her brow; with love
She aches for all the abyss above,
Her rocks and chasms the lively strife
Of her sharp spasms of lust, of life.
Hark! to the whisper of my fan,
My sister kiss to maid and man.
Through all earth's wombs, through all sea's waves,
Gigantic glooms, forgotten graves,
I haunt the tombs of kings and slaves.
I hush the babe, I wake the bird,
I wander away beyond stars unstirred,
Soften the ripples of the tide,
Soothe the bruised nipples of the bride,
Help stars and clouds play hide-and-peek,
Wind seamen's shrouds, bid ruins speak,
Bring dreams to slumber, sleep to dream
Whose demons cumber night's extreme.
And softer sped than dream or death
Quiet as the dead, or slain love's breath,
I sigh for loves that swoon upon
The hanging groves of Babylon.
Each terrace adds a shower of scent
Where lass and lad seduce content;
Each vine that hangs confirms the stress
Of purer pangs of drunkenness;
Each marble wall and pillar swerves
Majestical my course to curves
Subtle as breasts and limbs and tresses
Of this caressed suave sorceress's

That raves and rests in wildernesses
Whose giant gifts are strength that scars
Her soul and lifts her to the stars,
Savage, and tenderness that tunes
Her spirit's splendour to the moon's,
And music of passion to outrun
The fiery fashion of the sun.
Hush! there's a stir not mine amid the groves,
A foot divine that yet is not like love's.
Hush! let me furl my forehead! I'll be gone
To flicker and curl above great Babylon.

[*The Gate of the Garden opens. THE LADY PSYCHE advances and makes way for THE KING OF BABYLON. He is attended by many companies of warriors in armour of burnished silver and gold, with swords, spears, and shields. These take up position at the back of the stage, in perfect silence of foot as of throat.*]

[*THE LADY PSYCHE remains standing by the gate; THE KING OF BABYLON advances with infinite stealth, dignity, slowness, and power, toward the couch.*]

PSYCHE. Life? Is it life? What hour of fate is on the bell?
Of this supreme ordeal what issue? Heaven or hell?
I am stripped of all my power now when I need it most;
I am empty and unreal, a shadow or a ghost.
All the great stake is thrown, even now the dice are falling.
All deeds are locked in links, one to another calling
Through time: from the dim throne the first rune that was ree'd
By God, the supreme Sphinx, determined the last deed.

[*THE KING OF BABYLON reaches forth his hand and arm. It is the hand and arm of a skeleton. He touches the forehead of the sleeping lord. Instantly, radiant and naked, a male figure is seen erect.*]

PSYCHE. Adonis!

ADONIS. Psyche!

[*They run together and embrace.*]

PSYCHE. Ah! long-lost!

ADONIS. My wife!

Light, O intolerable! Infinite love! O life
Beyond death!

PSYCHE. I have found thee!

ADONIS. I was thine.

PSYCHE. I thine

From all the ages!

ADONIS. To the ages!

PSYCHE. Mine!

[*The KING passes over and departs.*]

Chorus of Soldiers

Hail to the Lord!
Without a spear, without a sword
He hath smitten, he hath smitten, one stroke of his
Worth all our weaponed puissiances.
There is no helm, no hauberk, no cuirass,
No shield of sevenfold steel and sevenfold brass
Resists his touch; no sword, no spear but shivers
Before his glance. Eternally life quivers

And reels before him; death itself, the hound of God,
Slinks at his heel, and licks the dust that he hath trod.

[*They follow their Lord, singing.*]

PSYCHE. I am a dewdrop focussing the sun
That fires the forest to the horizon.
I am a cloud on whom the sun begets
The iris arch, a fountain in whose jets
Throbs inner fire of the earth's heart, a flower
Slain by the sweetness of the summer shower.

ADONIS. I am myself, knowing I am thou.
Forgetfulness forgotten now!
Truth, truth primeval, truth eternal,
Unconditioned, sempiternal,
Sets the God within the shrine
And my mouth on thine, on thine.

[*THE LADY ASTARTE wakes. In her arms is the corpse of the LORD ESARHADDON.*]

ASTARTE. O fearful dreams! Awake and kiss me! Awake!
I thought I was crushed and strangled by a snake.

[*She rises. The corpse falls.*]

He is dead! He is dead! O lips of burning bloom,
You are ashen.
The black laughter of the tomb!
Then let me kill myself! Bring death distilled
From nightshade, monkshood. Let no dawn regild
This night. Let me not see the damnèd light
Of day, but drown in this black-hearted night!
Ho, slaves!

[*The jaw falls.*]

[*ADONIS and PSYCHE advance to her.*]

ADONIS. Thyself a slave! What curse (unbated
Till patient earth herself is nauseated)
Is worse than this, an handmaiden that creeps
Into her mistress' bed while her lord sleeps,
And robs her?

ASTARTE. And what worse calamity
Than his revenge? But leave me, let me die!

[*She falls prone at their feet.*]

PSYCHE. Add robbery to robbery! We need thee
To serve us. Let us raise thee up and feed thee,
Comfort and cherish thee until the end,
Less slave than child, less servitor than friend.

ADONIS. Rise! let the breath flow, let the lips affirm
Fealty and love. To the appointed term
Within thy garden as beloved guests
Of thine, let us abide. Now lips and breasts
Touching, three bodies and one soul, the triple troth
Confirm.

PSYCHE. The great indissoluble oath!

ASTARTE. Lift me!

[*They raise her; all embrace.*]

By him that ever reigns upon
The throne, and wears the crown, of Babylon,
I serve, and love.

PSYCHE. This kiss confirm it!

ADONIS. This!

ASTARTE. I have gained all in losing all. Now kiss

Once more with arms linked!
ADONIS. The dawn breaks!
ASTARTE. Behold
Love's blush!
PSYCHE. Light's breaking!
ADONIS. Life's great globe of gold!
ASTARTE. Come! let us break our fast.
PSYCHE. My long fast's broken.
ADONIS. Let us talk of love.
PSYCHE. Love's first-last word is spoken.
ADONIS. Nay! but the tides of trouble are transcended.
The word's begun, but never shall be ended.
And through the sun forsake the maiden east,
Life be for us a never-fading feast.

[They go towards the house, singing.]

ALL. The Crown of our life is our love,
The crown of our love is the light
That rules all the region above
The night and the stars of the night;
That rules all the region aright,
The abyss to abysses above;
For the crown of our love is the light,
And the crown of our light is our love.