

power of speech; and by its oracles they fight.

*(The Dumb Elder gesticulates.)*

**The Deaf Elder:** My colleague says that their king is in reality a woman, shrewish and fierce.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** No man has seen him.

**The Blind Elder:** I thank God that I can never see him.

**The Palsied Elder:** Who presided at the torture of the captured general?

**The Most Reverend Elder:** I was present in person.

**The Palsied Elder:** Be pleased to make your report.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** I beg of you to pardon me. There is nothing to say.

*(He shows such horror that they determine that he shall speak.)*

**The Most Venerable Elder:** Most Reverend, I charge on your great oath of fealty to this Council that you make your report.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** *(He rises, clutching the table, shaking and sweating with the most abject fear.)* We applied the torture three times without result.

**The Palsied Elder:** What form of torture did you use?

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Preliminary to the examination, the tortures by water and fire were applied. As usual, he was given to understand that this was not serious. My time being short, I applied at once on my arrival the Torture of the Scorpions at the Nine Gates. Before each gate, I asked three times the question in these words: Describe your king. At the sixth gate he broke into a kind of mad laughter, raucous and horrible.

**The Most Venerable Elder** *(rising in excitement):* The sixth gate! Do you tell us that he reached the sixth gate? It is not to be believed.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** I doubted mine own eyes. I verified. It was true. The man was not of mortal flesh. It is only our own great god that in his death passed through the ninth. In history only one man reached even the fifth. This man, at the sixth, only laughed.

**The Most Venerable Elder** *(sitting down again, broken up by fear and horror):* Oh God! what men are these?

**The Most Reverend Elder:** In wonder and rage, I directed the application of the seventh Scorpion, a black beast, lusty and venomous. *(He sits down suddenly, overcome, and buries his face in his arms. A pause. Then he staggers once again to his feet.)* The prisoner became calm, and smiled. He said these words: I am happy, and I thank you. I have never seen him, and now I shall never see him. With that he died.

**The Blind Elder:** But his soldiers must see him in battle.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** They have never seen his face. Only a few know even his form. So much we learned from the first prisoners we took.

**The Most Venerable Elder** *(in an ecstasy of dejection):* No man has seen him.

**The Fool:** That is true, and that is all; why do ye babble thus? This much is known, that his soldiers are valiant and cunning, that they are cruel and remorseless, that they spare no soul alive, save for an hour's delight of rape or torture, and that they eat human flesh.

*(The Dumb Elder gesticulates.)*

**The Deaf Elder:** My colleague says that it is infamous to say such things.

**The Fool:** It is indeed rather foolish, even for me, to say them; for all men know them.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** Men are often too stupid to believe even what they know. It is sufficient for Authority to deny these things. A panic among the citizens would ruin us.

**The Blind Elder:** We are already lost. You said that we have food for a month, when we know that it will last a bare week. We lie even among ourselves.

**The Deaf Elder** *(to the Young Plump Elder):* How is it that you are so plump?

**The Young Plump Elder:** I foresaw famine. I stored food. It is necessary that I should be strong to fulfil my destiny.

**The Blind Elder:** So you are the great captain that shall save us?

**The Young Plump Elder:** It is in the hands of the Lord.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** It is in the hands of the Lord.

**The Blind Elder:** Will the Lord restore my sight? Then may the Lord exalt the blue banner of Blabre above the black pennon of the Gnogues!

**The Most Venerable Elder:** It is terrible and sinister, that triangle of death! Had they a dragon, or a skull, embroidered on it, I would fear it less. It is the blank of blackness that appals me.

**The Blind Elder:** I see it every day, and every night!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Oh death to these dreadful and ominous croakings! Is there not hope in the Most High?

**The Palsied Elder:** Why does not the prophet utter aught in his most sacred trance? He is as silent as death itself. I would rather that he cursed us, that he pronounced inexorable doom upon our city.

**The Prophet:** Woe unto Blabre! Woe to the wicked city!

**The Fool:** Behold! he earns his crust. He seeks to please your lordships. Clothe him in purple, while you have the purple! Hang golden chains upon his neck, ere you yourselves are hanged in chains of iron!

**The Prophet:** Woe unto Blabre! Woe to the wicked city!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Declare unto us the oracles of God!

**The Most Venerable Elder:** What is to be our fate?

**The Young Plump Elder:** May Blabre be saved?

**The Most Reverend Elder:** He answers not. His eyes are dull and glazed, turned inward on his soul. He is not yet entranced. By the might and majesty of the Most High, I command thee, declare unto us the oracles of God!

*(The Prophet rises, stretches, yawns, spits contemptuously, and sits down again, his back to the Most Reverend Elder.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** The curse of the Most High upon him! He was thus ever!

*(Knocking without.)*

**The Sentinel:** There is an alarm at the door.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** See who wants admission.

*(The Sentinel lowers his pike, and opens the door cautiously. Without, his comrade beckons him. They converse in whispers. The first Sentinel returns.)*

**The Sentinel:** The herald of the King of the Gnogues humbly demands audience of your lordships. His master sues for peace.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** It is the end. *(To the Herald.)* Proclaim that we have conquered; that the King of the Gnogues sues humbly for our mercy.