

THE ALTAR OF ARTEMIS

(By Aleister Crowley. From *The Soul of Osiris*. 1901)

WHERE, in the coppice, oak and pine
And mystic yew and elm are found,
Sweeping the skies, that grow divine
With the dark wind's despairing sound,
The wind that roars from the profound,
And smites the mountain-tops, and calls
Mute spirits to black festivals,
And feasts in valleys iron-bound,
Desolate crags, and barren ground;—
There in the strong storm-shaken grove
Swings the pale censer-fire for love.

The foursquare altar, rightly hewn,
And overlaid with beaten gold,
Stands in the gloom; the stealthy tune
Of singing maidens overbold
Desires mad mysteries untold,
With strange eyes kindling, as the fleet
Implacable untiring feet
Weave mystic figures manifold
That draw down angels to behold
The moving music, and the fire
Of their intolerable desire.

For, maddening to fiercer thought,
The fiery limbs requicken, wheel
In formless furies, subtly wrought
Of swifter melodies than steel
That flashes in the fight: the peal
Of amorous laughters choking sense,
And madness kissing violence,
Ring like dead horsemen; bodies reel
Drunken with motion; spirits feel
The strange constraint of gods that clip
From Heaven to mingle lip and lip.

The gods descend to dance; the noise
Of hungry kissings, as a swoon,
Faints for excess of its own joys,
And mystic beams assail the moon,
With flames of their infernal noon;
While the smooth incense, without breath,