

# The Saviour

## A Drama in One Scene

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### DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

*The Most Venerable Elder: aet. 80.*

*The Blind Elder: aet. 70.*

*The Deaf Elder: aet. 60.*

*The Dumb Elder: aet. 50.*

*The Palsied Elder: aet. 40.*

*The Most Reverend Elder: aet. 30.*

*The Young Plump Elder: aet. 20.*

All these are members of the Town Council of  
the City of Blabre.

*The Prophet of the Gods.*

*The Fool.*

*The Sentinel of the Council Chamber.*

*The Herald of the Council.*

*The Herald of the Gnogues.*

*A Courier.*

*The Saviour.*

*A Standard-bearer.*

*Soldiers.*

*A young girl.*

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*The Elders, clad in furred robes of purple with hoods  
and golden chains, are seated at a long table of carved  
oak. The Most Reverend Elder wears a definitely eccle-  
siastical vestment of black and gold, with a golden bi-  
retta.*

*The table occupies the middle of the chamber, near  
the back of the stage, but allowing plenty of room for  
passage. The room itself is well lighted from three win-*

*dows. The west window is curved, and through it are seen one or two spires. The north window shows much of the tall buildings of a fantastic and elaborately beautiful city, such as Durer or Beardsley might have drawn. The east window shows the towers which surmount the river-gate of the city. Beneath this window is an altar, on which are candles, and images of the gods of Blabre. Beneath the west window are steps, where stands the Herald, gorgeously apparelled, with trumpet and tabard, awaiting the word to proclaim to the people of the city, many of whom are gathered without, the result of the deliberations of the Council.*

*The chamber itself is decorated with a rich but civilized simplicity.*

*The table is covered with inkhorns and old parchments. At its east end stands the Fool in motley, blue and yellow, with cap, bells, and bauble.*

*The door is in the east wall; before it stands the Sentinel, in plate mail, holding erect a fantastically shapen pike. The Elders are seated behind the table, facing the audience, in the following order, west to east: the Young Plump Elder, the Most Reverend Elder, the Palsied Elder, the Most Venerable Elder, the Blind Elder, the Deaf Elder, the Dumb Elder.*

*At the southwest corner of the table, a little distance away, facing the Elders, is the Prophet of the Gods. He is squatting upon the floor. He is clad in dirty white robes, ragged from long use. His frame is spare, and his face is gaunt and sunken, burnt almost black by the sun. Huge wild eyes glitter beneath his matted hair. He is of no particular age; his long and unkempt beard is still black. The robes, torn and open, reveal the breast, with its weals and scars caused by the scourge. There are traces of coagulated blood upon it.*



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

*(His is a long wail or howl, like a coyote. It is uttered quite in the same sudden causeless way as one notices often enough in a dog; it is not intended as part of the conversation. In short, he is just a wild beast, like as the Fool is a tame one; and he receives no notice. It is as if he had not spoken.)*

**The Young Plump Elder:** Why did He not save us before the last extremity was on us? Look at these reports! *(He indicates certain parchments.)* The Gnogues have pushed one salient to within bowshot of the city walls. We are straitly invested. Famine has spread her leathern wings, and sucks the blood of our bravest. Pestilence walks no more by night; under the sun he stalks and smites. We have no necessary thing but air and water; and both are already contaminated with the poison of our own dead.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** Still, we have water while the river-gate is held.

**The Blind Elder:** How many days can we hold out?

*(The Dumb Elder gesticulates.)*

**The Deaf Elder:** My colleague says that the Emperor has promised succor within fifteen days. For myself, I would add that we can live for a month.

**The Palsied Elder:** Then there is hope?

**The Blind Elder:** There is hope while we can hold the river-gate.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Surely, the river-gate is not in danger?

**The Most Venerable Elder:** It is the most strongly fortified of all our positions. The men who guard it are veterans of the ancient war. The captain of the gate is

wily and valiant and trusty. Twelve times already he has repulsed the Gnogues with fearful slaughter.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!

**The Young Plump Elder:** I visited the post last night. I found the captain steadfast on his spear, grim, fierce, and vigilant.

**The Blind Elder:** Besides, the gate is safe against surprise. So strong runs the river that no naked man could swim across, much less a man in armor. There is no landing place; our walls run sheer and smooth into the tide. There is no cover on the other bank; and our towers command it with easy archery. There is only the frail single span of the bridge, so narrow that two men cannot pass, so slight that a single blow with an axe would send it crashing into the tide.

*(The Dumb Elder gesticulates.)*

**The Deaf Elder:** My colleague says that if we only had food we could endure for ever.

**The Most Reverend Elder** *(piously)*: His mercy endureth for ever. Did He not rain food from heaven upon our forefathers in the days of the great migration?

**The Fool:** Let us read fifteen or twenty cantos of the great epic of Glingue, the sacred bard!

*(No one notices him.)*

**The Blind Elder:** We must hold out. There is no alternative. We know the character of the foe. If we are conquered, he will put every living thing to the sword; he will burn every building with fire; he will efface the City of Blabre from the memory of man.

**The Palsied Elder:** The Gnogues are cruel and remorseless; they spare no soul alive, save for an hour's delight in rape or torture; they eat human flesh.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** The Lord is mighty and merciful, compassionate towards His servants, strong to save.

*(The Most Reverend Elder is really as frightened as the rest, or more so; he says the brave words in a toneless, mechanical way, from habit even more than from the wish to keep up his religious character.)*

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

*(No one notices him.)*

**The Most Venerable Elder:** I think that we should proclaim a message of confidence to the citizens.

**The Young Plump Elder:** At the worst, it is only one more lie.

**The Blind Elder:** Does any one dissent? *(Silence.)*

**The Most Venerable Elder:** Let the Herald speak to the citizens!

**The Herald** *(bows to the Most Venerable Elder, turns to his window, blows a rousing blast upon his trumpet, and proclaims):* Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! Rejoice, we conquer! The Fathers of the City are still sitting in earnest deliberation for your welfare; but in order to calm your anxiety, they bid it be made known that the city is in no danger. It has victoriously repulsed every assault of the enemy; it is provisioned for a ten years' siege; the Emperor has promised that an army of four million veteran troops shall arrive to our succour not later than tomorrow at sunset; the enemy is reported to be utterly disheartened at the failure of his campaign; his men, ill-fed, ill-led, ill-disciplined, are already in open mutiny; civil strife is on the point of breaking out in their capital; their king is reported slain by his men. *(Cheers from without punctuate every sentence. The Herald turns to the Most*

*Venerable Elder, and addresses him.)* Is that sufficient?  
My invention flags.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** It will serve. Perorate.

**The Herald** (*turns, after the usual bow, to window*):  
Joy! Triumph! Victory! Blabre has overthrown her savage  
foes. Once more has civilization repulsed the hea-  
then hordes. Rejoice, we conquer!

*(Cheers without. Within, the elders are still sunk in the  
same awful, hopeless apathy as at first.)*

**The Blind Elder:** We lost eleven hundred of our best  
troops in yesterday's sally.

**The Palsied Elder:** That is nearly one-fifth of our  
whole army.

**The Deaf Elder:** I do not understand how the Gnogues  
resist our valor. Their armor is rude and inferior; their weap-  
ons are but the unwieldy pike and the short scramasax; while  
we have lance, sword, bow, and arquebus, with the new  
cannon.

**The Palsied Elder:** Their hosts are innumerable, and  
their valour desperate.

*(The Dumb Elder gesticulates.)*

**The Deaf Elder:** My colleague calls it treason to the  
city to say so.

**The Palsied Elder:** It is true, nevertheless.

*(All bow their heads sorrowfully.)*

**The Young Plump Elder:** It is doubtful whether they  
are men or beasts. They are of hue blotchy, greenish-  
black, with the head like an ape's.

**The Deaf Elder:** Their king is a devil, whom they wor-  
ship.

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

**The Young Plump Elder:** Do not speak of him. Even his own men dare not speak of him. It is a hidden horror. It is forbidden.

*(The Dumb Elder gesticulates.)*

**The Deaf Elder:** My colleague says that he is known for no coward. You all know his exploits in the Sixteen Years' War. But he begs of you all not to speak of this.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** I agree. It is evil even to think of him. It is almost to invoke. Such things stifle the soul with fear.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** Is there ever a moment when we do not think of him? Is not he the unknown Terror that abides in our hearts, the waking nightmare that obsesses us?

**The Blind Elder:** It is reported that he is a dragon of their marshes.

**The Palsied Elder:** Others say that he is but a black stone, carven like a Satan. Their wizards have conjured it to the 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 fulfill 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 appalls 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.

**The Herald** *(turns and bows as usual, returns to windows, and blows a blast on his trumpet):* Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! Rejoice, we conquer! Citizens of Blabre, even now a messenger asks for admission to the Council. He comes to sue humbly for peace. The Gnogues sue for peace. The King of the Gnogues is here in person with dust upon his head. He has kissed the feet of the Most Venerable, the Father of the City! Rejoice, we conquer! *(Blast on trumpet. Cheers, and a swelling murmur of satisfaction, have accompanied each phrase. He turns from the window, and bows to the Most Venerable Elder.)* Is that enough?

**The Most Venerable Elder:** It is enough. *(To the Sentinel.)* Admit him. *(The Sentinel goes out.)* Let us ask at least our lives.

*(The Herald of the Gnogues enters. He is a short, thick-set, sturdy man in black chain armor. He bears on a staff the dreaded banner of the Gnogues.)*

**The Herald of the Gnogues:** Greetings of a soldier to brave enemies! I bear the most merciful message of my

most mighty king. Your army is reduced by half; your citizens starve; you must submit to terms.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** Succor is promised us from the Emperor.

**The Herald of the Gnogues:** Where is his promise?

**The Most Venerable Elder** (*lifting a parchment*): This reached us fifteen days ago.

**The Herald of the Gnogues:** Where is his message of yesterday?

**The Most Venerable Elder:** We have received no message.

**The Herald of the Gnogues** (*pulling from his shirt a bloody parchment*): Here is his message of yesterday. (*He hands the parchment to the Fool.*)

**The Fool:** Ten to one this is a forgery. It is a regular Gnogue trick. (*He hands it to the Most Venerable Elder.*)

**The Most Venerable Elder** (*reading*): "The internal troubles of our empire prevent us from sending the aid promised you. May God defend you in your extremity."

**The Prophet** (*rapt as in ecstasy*): The extremity of Blabre!

*(All, sunk yet deeper in apathy, heed him not. A pause. The Fool examines the message with attention.)*

**The Fool:** I am sure this document is a forgery. Previous letters have been written by a clerk. This is his Majesty's own holograph. It is much too genuine. (*A pause.*) If this paper be genuine, it must have been written from the capital. That is ten day's journey off. The ink on this document has been wet within the last four-and-twenty hours.

*(The Dumb Elder gesticulates.)*

**The Deaf Elder:** My colleague says that it is infamous to suggest that his Majesty would lend himself to forgery.

**The Young Plump Elder:** Let me see the document. *(A pause.)* There is something in what the Fool says.

*(The paper is passed round.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** This was never written by the hand of one of our race. It is a clever imitation of the hand of the Emperor. Also, the strokes are not even enough. Also, the words "our" and "us" are spelled with small letters. It is not genuine, in my opinion.

**The Deaf Elder** *(examining the paper with his dumb colleague, and holding a rapid interchange of signs with him):* My colleague and I agree that this is a forged document. The parchment is not of the quality used by our people.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** It is our fears that tells us it is genuine.

**The Blind Elder:** I am absolutely convinced of the authenticity of the document. It bears the strongest possible internal evidence of its truth. There is no doubt possible.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** There is no doubt possible.

*(All relax once more their momentary alertness. They sink visibly into the very abyss of dejection. A pause.)*

**The Herald of the Gnogues:** You must submit to terms. The most mighty King of the Gnogues offers you of his clemency the right to withdraw with all the honors of war. Recognizing a gallant foe, he will not embitter defeat by humiliation. You shall leave the city with all your arms and ammunition, and with all such goods as you can carry with you. But, if you refuse these terms, then expect the direful judgments. He will put every

living thing to the sword; he will burn every building with fire; he will efface the City of Blabre from the memory of man. I have spoken.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** Does it comport with the terms of your command that you retire a while, that we may deliberate?

**The Herald of the Gnogues:** I shall await your pleasure.

*(He goes out.)*

**The Young Plump Elder** *(leaping to his feet)*: Who could have hoped such terms? We are saved!

**The Blind Elder:** Shall we believe it? May we trust him?

**The Deaf Elder:** We must trust him. *(The Dumb Elder gesticulates.)* My colleague says that it is madness to trust him.

**The Fool:** Why do we not ask an oracle of the Prophet?

**The Prophet:** Why do we not ask an oracle of the Fool?

**The Most Reverend Elder:** He is not in his sacred trance. Let us rather look for guidance to antiquity!

*(He grasps a parchment; others follow his example. A pause, while they search. The Dumb Elder gesticulates.)*

**The Deaf Elder:** My colleague says that he remembers dimly a passage in the third book of our sacred bard, Glingue, which may help our case.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** I knew it. It was that of which I was thinking. *(He turns over the parchments.)* Here it is!

**The Blind Elder:** Read it! Read it!

**The Most Reverend Elder:**

“In the extremity of Fate  
The full moon shone, our master’s mate.  
In silver armor rode the duke

Against the heathen."

**The Prophet:** It is full moon tonight.

**The Fool:** What fumbling amid fusty folios!

**The Blind Elder:** No: that is not the prophecy. I remember it now. It is this:

"Look to the moon for safety! Dragon helm  
Of rubies, and cuirass of silver, whelm  
The tide of heathen hate. The sword and axe  
Beat down the blows of pike and scramasax!"

**The Deaf Elder:** That is a proper prophecy! That is the true strain of our sacred Glingue!

**The Fool:** Only where is the duke? Where is the hero with these famous arms and accoutrements? The only part of the prophecy that has come true as yet is the part about the extremity of Fate.

**The Prophet** (*in deep meditation*): The extremity of Blabre!

**The Most Venerable Elder:** The fool is wise for once. We had better trust the Herald, and accept the terms of peace.

**The Deaf Elder:** It is absolutely certain that the Emperor's letter is authentic?

**The Blind Elder:** It is absolutely certain.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Here is another prophecy:

"The dragon helm! Like the red moon it glows!  
See where amid the flying ranks of foes  
The silver champion sweeps!"

**The Deaf Elder:** Yes: that is the same thought again!

**The Palsied Elder:** They all seem to be concerned with a warrior in silver armor.

(*The Dumb Elder gesticulates.*)

**The Deaf Elder:** My colleague says: "A giant."

**The Blind Elder:** Yes, a giant, wearing a helm with a dragon of ruby upon it.

**The Fool** (*apostrophizing the images of the gods*): Is it come to this, after all these years, that men take poets



seriously? They have not sense enough to know that all these prophecies are but myths of moonrise!

**The Blind Elder:** But the dragon helm of rubies! How do you explain that?

**The Fool:** By the law of amputatoptatous ambubabopotaton!

*(The Dumb Elder gesticulates.)*

**The Deaf Elder:** My colleague says that this is ribaldry and blasphemy.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** The gods, who made him half-witted, cannot be offended at the outrushings of that feebleness.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** Yet what the Fool says is truth. The prophecies agree on the main point. We of Blabre have waited and longed for him these four hundred years. There is even a statue of him in the Guild Hall. But by what right do we assume that he will appear in this present crisis of our city? We must decide on action. My counsel is surrender.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Are we all convinced of the genuineness of the letter of the Emperor?

**The Blind Elder:** It is positive beyond the possibility of doubt.

*(The Dumb Elder gesticulates.)*

**The Deaf Elder:** My colleague agrees with the Most Venerable. His counsel is surrender.

**The Palsied Elder:** Mine also.

**The Deaf Elder:** I agree.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** With regret, even with dissent, I must agree. Of what use would it be to divide the Council?

**The Blind Elder** (*in sudden exaltation*): I protest. I see him now; I see the Saviour! He is almost at the gates. He is followed by a vast victorious army. The

Gnogues flee before the mere jingle of his harness. (*The moment of exaltation passes.*) Ah me! the visions of the blind! (*A pause.*) I agree.

**The Young Plump Elder:** I agree. Let us save ourselves, and leave Blabre to its doom.

**The Fool:** Oh, triple fools! Tricked by the forgery of the letter! Rummaging antiquity for the rags and bones of folklore when you should have been taking measures for the defence of the city! Praying to your gods when you should have been making the enemy pray to theirs! Hold on but a day! The Emperor will surely be in time to save the city. Also, by all your gods, it were better we perish fighting than fall into the hands of the Gnogues. This offer is black treachery. I know them.

*(No one takes the slightest notice of the speech. The Dumb Elder does not even trouble to repeat it to his colleague, but makes a contemptuous gesture to indicate to him that it is rubbish.)*

**The Most Venerable Elder:** Summon the Herald of the Gnogues!

*(The Sentinel obeys.)*

**The Prophet** (*mechanically as ever*): Woe unto Blabre! Woe to the wicked city!

*(The Herald of the Gnogues re-enters.)*

**The Most Venerable Elder:** We have ended our deliberations. We are disposed to accept the terms of honorable capitulation offered to us by your master. It is understood that we depart unharmed, every man with all such goods as he may carry with him, and that the army of the Gnogues will not molest us on our march, or enter the city until four-and twenty hours be passed.

**The Herald of the Gnogues:** It is understood. It is agreed. Give me the keys of the city.

**The Most Venerable Elder** (*rising, and detaching a bunch of enormous iron keys from his girdle*): Here are

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**The Prophet** (*with wild eyes, leaping to his feet with a furious gesture*): Hear ye the Word of the Lord! The whirlwind awaketh! The Lord is upon the whirlwind! The Lord flingeth forth the lightning! The Lord maketh to resound his thunder! Hear ye the Word of the Lord!

*(All the elders, dominated by his personality, spring to energy and resolution, or rather to the simulation of these qualities which is conferred by contagious hysteria, from their previous drooping dullness. They seem to drink his words gluttonously. The Herald and the Sentinel, even, abandon their military discipline, and listen with all their ears. But the Fool yawns, and appears bored, while the Herald of the Gnogues shows violent amazement, as one beholding the antics of some incredible animal.)*

**The Prophet:** The Lord hath lifted up his hand! The Lord hath appointed a Saviour! Behold, even now is the hour of our salvation! Glory to the Lord, that hath had mercy upon his servants! Blessed be these eyes, that have looked upon the moon of resurrection! The Saviour cometh! The Saviour cometh! The Saviour cometh! I see him with mine eyes; mine ears rejoice at the music of his harness as he strides to our salvation. O Saviour of the City of Blabre! Oh thou that art the sword in the hand of the Lord against the heathen!

**The Most Reverend Elder** (*in a thrilled intense voice*): Do you see him? Do you see him?

**The Prophet** (*very calm, on a sudden*): I see him. I see the champion of the Lord. He cannot come to us as long as we defend ourselves. It is by the ordeal of faith that the Lord tries our souls!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** What is he like?

**The Prophet:** He is an head above the common height of man. On his helm is a dragon of rubies. His armor is of silver. His sword is bare; it flashes in the moonlight. On the crook of his left arm is his battleaxe. He shall split asunder the heathen; they shall be as an old rotten tree that splits when it is stricken by the lightning!

**The Most Venerable Elder** (*in a voice of thunder*): It is the fulfillment! The ancient prophecies come true!

**The Prophet** (*to the Herald of the Gnogues*): Depart, thou carrion of the vultures that watch Blabre! Before the night fall thou shalt be with Satan!

**The Herald of the Gnogues** (*to the Most Venerable Elder*): I do not comprehend the ravings of this mad-man. Give me the keys of the fortress.

**The Most Venerable Elder** (*in a phrenzy of senile rage*): Dog! Heathen! Murderer! Begone! The Saviour of Blabre is at hand. The Prophet of the Lord hath spoken! (*To the Sentinel.*) Out with him! Out with the heathen dog!

*(All are now in a fury, and threaten the Herald of the Gnogues with their fists. Even the Palsied Elder tries to scramble up after him. The Prophet, the Fool, and the Herald do not join in the demonstration. The Sentinel, catching the insensate rage of the Elders, thrusts out the Herald of the Gnogues, and slams the door upon him. A breathless silence; heaving of great breasts.)*

**The Prophet** (*calm yet intense*): The Voice of the Lord is in my mouth. Let the people be gathered together! Let the voice of the people go up in a great cry to the Most Holy One that watcheth over the City of Blabre! Gather together the people in the market-place; let not one man fail thereof! There let them await the coming of the Saviour!

**The Young Plump Elder:** It is well spoken; it is the voice of the Lord. Let every man obey, except such as

are employed upon the defences of the city. Most Venerable Father, let order be given!

**The Prophet:** O faithless and unbelieving men! Why will ye perish? Trust ye even now in the arm of flesh, when but a moment, and ye were ready to surrender the city? Withdraw the garrison; abandon the fortresses; leave open the rivergate! It is by the gate of the river that I see him come, shining in his burnished silver armor. The dragon of rubies glitters upon his helm. In his hand is the sword of the Lord! (*To the Sentinel.*) Go! join the acclamation of the people! Shall we sentinel our gate against the Saviour?

*(The Sentinel, whose enthusiasm has been constantly growing, throws down his pike and rushes out.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** The word of the Lord in the mouth of the Prophet of the Lord! The ancient faith is justified of her children!

**The Most Venerable Elder:** Blabre is saved! Proclaim it! Proclaim aloud the coming of the Saviour!

**The Herald** (*he blows a rousing and triumphant blast upon his trumpet*): Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! Rejoice, we conquer! The years of his silence are past; the Prophet of the Lord hath spoken. Rejoice, we conquer! The City of Blabre is saved. He cometh, like a mighty tower that is moved against a city wall! He cometh, the Saviour, in silver armor, and on his helm is a dragon of rubies! In his hand is a naked sword, and in his left arm rests the battleaxe of victory. Rejoice! Rejoice! Moreover, be attentive! Be attentive! Be attentive to the order of the Council! Gather yourselves at once together in the market-place, man, woman, and child; let none fail thereof at his peril. Let the soldiers withdraw from the lines and from the fortresses and from the gates and from the battlements; let the river gate be left open, that the Saviour may enter thereby! Gather yourselves together in

the market-place, and await the coming of the Saviour!  
Rejoice, we conquer!

*(He blows a yet more confident blast upon his trumpet.)  
(This speech has been listened to in silence; but toward  
the end a murmur of excitement begins, and swells to a  
roar, ending in a thunder of cheers. Then some one  
starts the Te Deum Laudamus, which, however, grows  
faint at its close, as the crowd disperse in pursuance of  
the orders of the Council.)*

**The Fool** *(tearing off his cap, and throwing down his  
bauble):* I resign mine office! You must find some  
younger man — or some older man — for the place.  
The competition is too strong for me. *(He goes out. No  
one notices his outburst.)*

*(There is a pause of silence, during which the hysteria of  
the Elders subsides. The Herald stiffens once more into  
his military demeanor. Only the Prophet is unchanged,  
his fixed and glassy stare probing the Unseen, his lips  
moving in intense prayer. The Elders become uneasy  
and embarrassed. They begin to wriggle. Several half  
start to speak; but none dare voice the contagious spirit  
of distrust which obsesses them.)*

**The Young Plump Elder** *(with infinite tact and diffi-  
dence, tentatively):* I think the Saviour cometh at the  
hour of sunset.

**The Prophet:** Verily and Amen! The Lord hath light-  
ened thine eyes, O blessed among the Elders of Blabre!  
The red sun blushes on his silver armour!

*(A pause. The Elders are by no means reassured.)*

**The Most Venerable Elder** *(trying another gambit):*  
Is there any sign of his coming? Should we not make  
ready to receive him?

**The Prophet:** You are not ready to receive him. You have not faith. The sign of his coming is the extremity of our helplessness. To your knees, faint-hearted ones, beseech the Lord that he may make free your spirits; it is with awe and gladness that ye should await the coming of the Saviour. (*To the Most Reverend Elder.*) And thou, false fox, if thou be worth aught beneath thy mummeries, speak for these, even for these, unto the Lord!

*(The Elders rise, and group themselves before the images of the gods. They kneel. The Palsied Elder is assisted by his neighbor. The Most Reverend Elder standing before them spreads his hands and prays. The Herald also kneels, a little apart. The Prophet sits down again upon the floor, about half way between the table and the west window, but near the footlights; he faces the door.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder** (*lifting his hands*): Hear us, most high, most holy, of the gods of Blabre! Hear us, who humbly —

*(The door opens. A courier, booted, spurred, and dusty, but recognizably in the same uniform as the Herald, rushes in, breathless and exhausted. In his hand is a parchment, which he extends mechanically; with the other hand he clutches the table for support.)*

**The Courier** (*gasping*): Salvation to Blabre from the Emperor! Greetings and victory! Hold out for six hours more, at the most, and all is saved! The Emperor is at hand with his whole army; the heads of his columns are not two hours behind me. And yet I have ridden! I have ridden! (*He clutches at his heart; the parchment falls from his hand. He staggers.*) I have ridden! (*The words burst from his throat. The blood gushes from his mouth, and he falls dead.*)

**The Young Plump Elder:** The Fool was right!

*(All shrink, appalled, realizing the risk they have taken, and the needlessness of it. A long silence of agony.)*

**The Prophet:** Pray, pray, thou favored of the Lord!  
There is no salvation in the arm of flesh!

**The Most Reverend Elder** (*trembling*): Let us lift up our eyes unto the Lord in the hour of our distress; let us utter our calamity in his ears, and let our hearts be humbled before him!

**Chorus of Elders:** Let the Lord give ear unto the complaining of his servants!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** In the extremity of the City is our hope fixed upon the Lord; let the Lord send us a saviour in the time of our need, even a saviour to lead us upon the mountains of victory!

**Chorus:** Let the Lord behold our disquietude; let him open the Eye of Mercy upon us!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord, thy people await the outpouring of thy salvation; as a great river bursting from the ice-dam let thy might flood forth upon us; as the moon that breaketh from a cloud, as a panther that leapeth from the woodland, so let thy victory shine forth!

**Chorus:** O Lord, let thy glory be manifest in our salvation!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord! the prophets have prophesied in the market-place, and in the cathedrals have the preachers made proclamation of the Saviour. The sacred bards of olden time have made songs concerning him; the carver and the gilder have limned our hope upon oak and upon marble; in bronze and in orichalc hath the sculptor cast his statue.

**Chorus:** We have believed the word of the prophet! We have had faith in the word of the Lord God.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** With the eye of faith may we behold him, a span and half a span above the com-



mon height of man. His silver armor flashes in the moonlight; on his helm the ruby dragon glows and sparkles with the fire of his wrath. In his hand is the sword of vengeance; and in the crook of his left arm is the battleaxe of victory!

**Chorus:** O Lord, let us behold also with our eyes! Let us come to the hour of fulfillment!

*(The sun is now near his setting. His rays strike through the western window.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord! O God of Blabre! By the devotion of thy people, we adjure thee to hear us! By thy saints and martyrs, by thy hermits and thy virgins, we recall thy favor! We invoke thee by the commemoration of thy glory!

**Chorus:** We adjure thee, we commemorate thy glory!

*(A pause, while all bend deeper in prayer. The door opens, and the Fool rushes in, dishevelled.)*

**The Fool:** The suburbs are filled with the advancing armies of the Gnogues! They move slowly, fearing stratagem, O brother fools! But they advance, inexorable as death himself. The banner of black crawls in the suburbs of Blabre! *(He goes to the window.)* All the other fools are kneeling too — and the black banner creeps towards the heart of Blabre!

*(They do not notice him, openly, but a trembling again takes hold on them.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord, vouchsafe unto thy servants the earnest of thy salvation!

**Chorus:** O Lord, hear us!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Lord, suffer not the enemy to enter the city!

**Chorus:** O Lord, arise and smite the hosts of them that hate us!

**The Fool:** From every side the banners of black writhe on like serpents.

*(The sunlight, leaving the kneeling crowd, now strikes nearer the roof.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord! it is the hour. It is the hour of our salvation.

**Chorus:** Lord, let thy mercy be extended upon us! Let the last ray of the sun be darkened before the dawn of thy salvation!

*(The Herald rises, as if by a sudden instinct, and takes a position by the side of the altar, on a raised dais, so that he can see fully out of the eastern window.)*

**The Fool:** The heads of the main columns issue from the alleys. They see the people kneeling; the captains halt in amazement.

**The Most Venerable Elder** *(losing patience)*: Is there no sign, no sign, O Lord, of the Saviour?

**The Herald:** There is no sign of the Saviour.

*(The sun's rays, striking the ceiling, grow pale. The scene begins to darken.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord, it is the hour of the fulfillment of thy word! It is the hour of the salvation of Blabre at the hand of the Lord God!

**The Herald:** There is no sign of the Saviour.

**The Fool:** The captains meet at the edge of the marketplace; they consult; they withdraw; it is as if they waited even as we wait!

**The Most Reverend Elder:** The fear of the vengeance of the Lord is already upon them!

**The Fool:** The captains are whispering some order; it passes down the ranks like the wind through a field of wheat.

**The Herald** (*turning to the western window for a moment*): The rim of the sun is gone down beneath the waters.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Is there no sign of the Saviour?

**Chorus:** Is there no sign of the Saviour?

**The Herald:** There is no sign of the Saviour.

**The Most Reverend Elder:** Mighty and merciful! Strong to save! Lord of our people, Lord almighty, Lord God everlasting, send us, we beseech thee, send us the Saviour!

**Chorus:** Send us the Saviour.

**The Fool:** The Gnogues are deploying; it is as if they were forming in four ranks, ready to charge.

*(The stage is now in total darkness.)*

**Chorus:** Send us, O send us, the Saviour.

**The Herald:** There is no sign of the Saviour.

**The Most Reverend Elder** (*to the Prophet*): Hast thou lied unto us in the name of the Lord?

**The Herald:** Look! I see a glint as of silver upon the bridge of the river-gate!

*(This is visible to the audience, a single spark.)*

**The Fool:** O triple fool! (*He has joined the Herald at the eastern window.*) It is the first glint of moonlight that shall see us murdered every one! They will put every living thing to the sword; they will burn every building with fire; they will efface the City of Blabre from the memory of man!

**The Herald:** I see the dragon helm of ruby!

*(There is a faint red spark visible in the darkness, above the silver spark.)*

**The Fool:** It is the blood of the veins of your mad eyes.

*(The light increases through the eastern window, very slowly.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder:** O Lord! Wilt thou not have mercy upon thy chosen people? Wilt thou not remember thy people in the hour of their extremity?

**Chorus:** O Lord! O our Lord God! is there no help for the city?

*(A pause. All bend deeper, muttering in prayer. The moonlight strikes the roof of the council-chamber. The Fool returns to the western window.)*

**The Fool:** The captains turn to the ranks; they exhort their men to be pitiless. The spearmen charge their pikes, and the swordsmen raise the scramasax.

**The Most Venerable Elder:** Where is the sword of the Lord? and the battleaxe in the hands of the Saviour?

*(Moonlight now floods the council-chamber, but as a diffused gleam.)*

**The Most Reverend Elder** *(furiously, to the Prophet):* Thou hast lied in the name of the Lord!

*(The door opens. There enters a man of gigantic stature. He is clad in silver armour. On his head is a helmet with closed visor above which towers a dragon of rubies. He moves to the center of the stage, near the footlights, and turns to face east. The moon, rising through the window, throws him into startlingly bright light. In his hand is a naked sword, and in the crook of his left arm rests a battleaxe. He surveys the scene with perfect self-possession.)*

**The Herald** (*who has been passionately gazing out to the east, now turning, and so the first to observe him, as the Elders are all in prayer, the Fool watching the market-place, and the Prophet again sunk in self-absorption*): Behold the Saviour!

*(All except the Prophet and the Fool rise and rush toward the person thus indicated, even the Palsied restored to energy by the ecstasy of relief which floods them all. They sink on their knees before him in adoration. The Young Plump Elder, on the side next the foot-lights, clasps his knees and kisses them. All cry aloud in rapture: "The Saviour!" "Praise to the Lord!" "The Saviour of the City of Blabre!" "Glory to the Lord God Most High!" etc., in a violent and confused manner. The clamor makes no impression upon the dignity and immobility of the newcomer.)*

**The Herald** (*rushing to the west window, and blowing a tremendous blast upon his trumpet*): Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! Rejoice, we conquer! The Saviour of the City hath appeared in the Chamber of the Council of the fathers of the City! Rejoice, we conquer! (*He blows another yet more joyful blast. Cries of joy without; the people raise the National hymn. The Elders continue their confused cries of rapture. The Herald returns.*) Hail, Saviour of Blabre!

*(A standard bearer, and two soldiers, of the Gnogues enter. The former bears the banner of black; the latter drag by her long fair hair a young girl of the people of Blabre. Behind these are as many other soldiers as may be convenient. At the same moment the Saviour slowly raises his visor. (These two directions must be carefully synchronized.) He is seen to be of the race of the Gnogues.)*

**The King of the Gnogues** (*without excitement, but in the peculiar harsh intonation which is natural to Gnogues*): Put every living thing to the sword; burn every building with fire; efface the City of Blabre from the memory of man. (*He pinches the cheek of the Young Plump Elder, who like the rest is paralyzed by the horror of the situation.*) Roast me this man for supper! Let him be larded with the fat of this young girl, when I have finished with her.

(*The standard-bearer goes to the window, and signals.*)  
(*The National Hymn turns to shrieks, which mingle with the roar of the charging Gnogues.*)

**The Prophet** (*above the tumult, an ecstasy of joy thrilling his hollow voice*): Woe unto Blabre! Woe to the wicked City!

(*The curtain falls quickly.*)