

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 fulfilment! 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 madman. 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 river-gate! 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 diffidence, tentatively*): I think the Saviour cometh at the hour of sunset.

The Prophet: Verily and Amen! The Lord hath lightened 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 halfway 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 Em-