

HELLAS

*A Spectacle with Music and
Dances in four acts*

by

RODNEY COLLIN

PREFACE

THE ideas expressed in this play are not original. They have been expressed many times in history in various ways—now philosophically, now as poetry, and again in painting or even in architecture. I and others learned them as a system of psychology. But psychological language already has a *fin de siècle* flavour: as the author of that form well knew, when he declared before he died:

'I abandon this system. Try to reconstruct it all!'

So much was put into the fashionable jargon of our day — in scientific terms, with electronic matter for divinity, and nuclear fission for its attainment. But not everyone is at home with molecules, and those that are grow tired of them at times. So now we return to legend, striving to reanimate a more attractive form. For myths defy fashion, and no matter how recast, like gold, will never spoil.

The choreography, however, is described from actual dances (once a true expression of ideas), brought from the East, and reconstructed some years since in Europe and America. These dances have not only a symbolic, but practical effect both on performers and on audience. Unfortunately the knowledge of them, always precarious, may entirely disappear with the few who mastered them.

Should these dances, and particularly what lies behind them, be lost. then our play will certainly become—as, barring a miracle, it may be in any case—unplayable.

November 7, 1949

Olympians

APOLLO

CHRONOS

HERA HERMES

APHRODITE ARES

SELENE THE SHADOW

Act One

700 B.C.

PROLOGUEThe Amphitheatre of Heaven

SCENE IA hillside above Athens

SCENE IIA village square in Attica

SCENE IIIA woodland glade in Attica, nine months later

HOMER . . . aged twenty

HELLAS . . . a shepherdess Shepherds,
shepherdesses, villagers, old men and women, a village
elder, a carpenter, a captain, an innkeeper.

Act Two

399 B.C.

PROLOGUEThe Amphitheatre of Heaven

SCENE IA gymnasium in Athens, evening

SCENE IIThe house of a hetaira, Athens, night

SCENE IIIA gymnasium in Athens, early morning

PLATO aged thirty SOCRATES . . . aged seventy

HELLAS a hetaira Apollodorus, Thoas, Crito,
Cebes and other pupils of Socrates, a jailer, dancing-
girls.

Act Three

A.D. 33

PROLOGUEThe Amphitheatre of Heaven

SCENE IOn board ship off the Greek coast

SCENE IIThe throne-room of an eastern caliph,
a year later SCENE IIIA halt in the Syrian desert, six
months later

APOLLONIUS OF TYANA . . . aged forty HELLAS . . . a
Greek woman abroad An old sailor, a Hindu fakir, a
caliph, ministers, courtiers, dancing-girls, an
astrologer, the captain of a caravan, bearers,
muleteers, a Christian apostle.

Act Four

A.D. 268

PROLOGUE ...The Amphitheatre of Heaven

SCENE IA rocky shore near Cape Sunium, morning

SCENE IIA hillside above Athens, afternoon

SCENE IIIA gymnasium in Athens, evening

EPILOGUEThe Amphitheatre of Heaven

PLOTINUS aged sixty-five

HELLAS his daughter and pupil

PORPHYRY . . . aged thirty-five, his pupil
Refugees, Gothic soldiers, pupils of Plotinus, a
Christian fanatic, the mob.

ACT I PROLOGUE

Out of darkness, faint blue radiance upon a long low amphitheatre, at the height of which huge Doric columns melt into a vast dome of starry night. Calm, immensity, timelessness and space.

As the glow gains, music—a rippling and strangely recurrent theme—grows audible and swells. It is a dance, some dance of worlds.

Shadowy movement upon the flight of stairs. Dancers are turning and weaving together in the dusk, their long robes like the petals of some great flower in growth. With each moment the light grows stronger. Now six figures are seen exchanging from place to place, three motionless between—and the whole always the same, yet always in motion and always different.

Behind the motionless figure at the head of the circle a warm golden light begins to grow, strengthening and strengthening like the rising sun. At the same time, so imperceptibly that one cannot tell their beginning, coloured spotlights begin to brighten on the individual dancers, a different colour to each, following them through the interweaving movement to make an ever changing, almost hypnotic pattern of colour and of light.

As one watches, the figures suggest angels, planets, Greek gods and goddesses. One seems to recognize Ares in his red radiance, green Aphrodite, Hermes pinkish-blue, Selene with pale moonlike

glow, Hera amber, Chronos in sombre violet. While the motionless figure against the rising sun must surely be Apollo. Yet the movement and play of lights make it impossible to be sure.

Gradually the lights brighten, the music of the spheres grows stronger, the moving figures more brilliant and full of life against the outer dark and the dome of constellations.

Suddenly, in a tremendous voice, the motionless figure shouts:

T-i-i-i-m-e, STOP!

In the instant, the music ceases, the figures freeze motionless in the mid-postures of their dance. In the centre of the circle, about to pass each other, Hermes and Aphrodite are caught face to face. The spotlights die from the others, while their two join as a single sphere of brilliance in the immensity. Only the god and goddess, and beyond them the dark figure of Apollo against his sunburst, are visible.

How long the scene remains motionless, with only the sphere of light gaining in intensity, it is difficult to say. Then Apollo cries again:

Let there be pause from time!

The gods and goddesses sink into graceful positions upon the stairway where they are; they move, stretch a little, at ease;

a warmer and move ordinary light embraces them.

APOLLO Hermes and Aphrodite, it is your turn. Through you shall be born on earth a new aspect of the eternal majesty and wisdom. Some race must choose, and from the numberless men and women in all its ages born, your love must create a child in your own images, and mine. This child shall be the genius of that race and age, and for

mankind for ever a token of our truth. Art willing?
HERMES AND APHRODITE With thy aid, father.

APOLLO The glorious being whom Chronos and Hera bore in Egypt has now grown old in time, though young in eternity. To whom shall his wisdom pass? Choose thy race, my children. 'Tis joy and anguish to have humankind for sons. They'll teach thee suffering, and make thee more than gods. Choose, then.

HERMES O father, since endless ages we saw this moment come. And knew, though we spoke not, what race of men was ours. In the dark middle sea a rocky promontory lies bathéd in thy light. It bears no cities, no weight of time or custom. All is sweet there and fresh. The men how innocent. . . yet quick, full of invention, nimble in mind and body, songful and gay—and so my sons.

APHRODITE And loving beauty, mine. They love each other's bodies and their own. And sense our work in the sea and soft airs, swelling of fruits and cry of flocks at lambing time. What wanton children!

APOLLO Yes, I know that race, and love to shine upon them. They are not spoiled as yet. You'll enter into them, and so they'll be saved and spoiled. Thus it must be.

HERMES Father, only thou canst save. Shine that we may give light—and beg for us thy other children's aid.

APOLLO I will not fail to love thy offspring no matter what ill they compass. And every god and goddess will shine upon them, each in the time appointed and at all

times. My sons and daughters, what gifts lie in thy rays?
The music of the spheres becomes *audible again in the background*. A spotlight falls on each god and goddess as they speak,

ARES Courage, passion in getting.

APHRODITE Soft growth and sweet begetting.

SELENE Fickleness and sympathy, Water's mystery.

HERMES Wit to fly, songs that perish.

HERA Wisdom to heal and cherish.

CHRONOS Mind and memory, Time's mastery.

APOLLO Just as one egg in millions grows to human child, so of all men and women in the womb of Greece, you must choose one on whom to engender and begin your offspring. One pure, straight, and strong—for the fire of gods' love burns all that is not echo of our harmony.

APHRODITE How shall we choose?

APOLLO [*gesturing between the great columns on the left*] Look down upon this side. and you shall see all as it was and is without your new creation—the men of Greece lying in nature's lap.

Hermes and Aphrodite rise and walk slowly hand in hand to the top of the steps upon the left, where they pause between two columns, and then, leaning upon a balcony, gaze far out and down, silhouetted against the sky, A pause.-

APHRODITE I see one who through all his time seems to gaze upward here. Others now look, now drop their

heads and sleep. He not. He's comely, too, well-made, with my seal upon him.

HERMES Bears a lyre too, and sings, and by his music tries to wake his comrades. How nimbly his fingers play upon the strings, and his tongue upon their hearts!

APOLLO If him you choose, 'tis he must bear the token of your love and mine through all the age of Greece. He'll be immortal—yet with different immortality from that he has, and different from the gods'. Hermes and Aphrodite, as long as your race shall live on earth, he'll live within it—now in this body, now in that—its very seed.

APHRODITE How shall we know him and he us?

APOLLO If him you choose, he may come to you outside time. Here you may show him all. But when he returns to earth to do your will he'll fall within time again, a mortal man, born and decaying. Birth must dim his memory. Yet by your virtue he'll be born again, and die once more, and live and die, till he and Greece have grasped all they may: and even your child itself grows weary with fate fulfilled.

APHRODITE Let him come to us.

A pause. Up the steps from a pit in the front of the stage a human appears. He wears a short light tunic, and seems very small, naked and vulnerable before the long-robed figures of the gods. He comes very slowly his arm up and the back of his hand before his eyes, as though half-blinded— yet firmly and with courage. He passes up into the circle, and throws himself down

before Hermes and Aphrodite.

THE GREEK O most marvellous... master... lady.. dear gods... I did not guess...

APHRODITE You are dear to us, mortal, be still and feel our love.

HERMES Immortal mortal, mortal immortal now.

APHRODITE Do you love Greece?

THE GREEK Next to the gods... with the gods even. How can I say it? I always felt all Greeks my brothers all Hellene women my mother and my wife. As though bound to them all some bond you tied, and we could only be saved together from Nemesis and the Fates. . . ,

APOLLO It is more true: than you could know. If you dare, go up and look where that which yet must be created, is.

He gestures between the columns on the right-hand. Slowly, and as though mastering an overwhelming fear, the Greek forces himself to climb the steps. It is as though he has to lift each foot by a separate effort to the next stair. His hands are clenched, sweat on his brow. There is utter silence. In what seems an immense time he reaches the top, draws himself up to his full height, and looks over. In the same instant he falls back, seeming to crumple, as he covers his face with his hands.

APHRODITE Courage, mortal, our mortal.

With a great effort the Greek masters his body. He draws himself to his feet, grasps the balcony with both hands, and forces himself to look over into the void. This time he stands there, gazing steadfastly.

HERMES What do you see, mortal?

THE GREEK [*his voice trembling*] It is more terrible and lovely than I guessed.

HERMES Yet you can bear it?

THE GREEK [*proudly*] I am a Greek.

APHRODITE What is it like, our offspring? We too must learn to bear it.

THE GREEK I see the past and future, the life and death of Hellas, all together, like some great being lying between the deep and Mount Olympus. Its belly the sea washes, in its heart the temples and mysteries, its head wreathed with the mists of Ida. And all the good and evil that the Greeks shall do are its joy and suffering for ever. ...

APHRODITE And you, mortal, do you see yourself! (there?)

THE GREEK [*awestruck*] How strange! In every part I look I see myself—tilling and praying, committing every crime, myself peasant and priest and warrior and king. And infamous traitor. In this time, and forever, until the end of Greece. [*His voice breaks.*]

APHRODITE [*aside*] The end of what's yet unborn; I am immortal—yet almost he makes me feel the pain of that which passes.

THE GREEK [*turns to her*] And yet those countless figures that I see as I, do not exist. The light shifts, and they are but thy radiance reflected on the rocks of Greece. I am most terribly afraid . . .

APHRODITE We will be with you, mortal.

THE GREEK [overwhelmed] I see that I am nothing . . . nothing . . . Goddess and most holy Hermes, all Greece is thine ... I am thy child. Do as thou wilt with me. . . .

APOLLO [in a tremendous voice] In thy parents' name and mine, wake up thy fellows from their natural sleep!

The light behind Apollo swells to immense brilliance: there is a peal of thunder.

APOLLO [shouts] T-i-i-i-m-e, ROLL ON!

The music of the spheres *grows audible again, the gods and goddesses begin to move and circle; the play of lights weaves, interweaves and gains momentum. Light, colour, motion, speed, mount in crescendo. The whole earth and heaven seem filled with the rhythmic and repeating harmony.*

And in the recurring figure of the dance, Hermes and Aphrodite once more approach. Not suddenly this time, but as if in a kind of swoon, the whole motion dies. The other spotlights fade, those upon Hermes and Aphrodite join to a golden sphere against the darkness. A strange ringing grows about them. As this sphere of light grows more brilliant, the god and goddess, face to face, move imperceptibly together. Each puts out a hand. Their fingers touch. The light upon them, now blinding, seems suddenly to fuse. In the pitch darkness the ringing increases to almost unbearable intensity. It fills the whole air, the whole earth. Then gradually it diminishes. As it becomes tolerable again, the music of the spheres breaks in very faintly, and in the same moment sunlight slowly brightens on an earthly scene.

ACT I SCENE ONE 700 B.C.

A hilltop in Attica. early morning, the soft curve of the highest slope, turf dotted with narcissus, against a clear blue sky. Under a single olive tree a young man half-lying on one elbow, yet seeming to start up, his left arm reaching forward, eyes closed but with face thrown back and as if transfixed. In the moment the light brightens a girl is rising, very gracefully, from his side and out of his embrace. As the ringing dies away, but with the music of the spheres still audible, she stands looking down at him, tender, gentle and teasing.

HELLAS [*softly*] Did you enjoy me, Homer?

HOMER [*under his breath, reverently*] Enjoy? . . . was that enjoyment?

HELLAS 'Tis you should say so, Homer.

HOMER How did it happen? Who are you?

HELLAS [*tenderly*] I am a woman: as you tune your lyre your lyre tuned me: I brought you my body tuned. You are innocent in your blindness, Homer, or you would not ask. Yet I am glad you are innocent.

HOMER [*suddenly, passionately*] I saw ... not with human sight . . . you made me see. . .but with gods' eyes. . . .

HELLAS [*half-coquettish, half-wise*] They say the gods hover near poets . . . but Aphrodite lives in women.

HOMER Aphrodite? Yes, she came to me. . . .

HELLAS It was I who came, Hellas.

HOMER [turning to her] Could you understand, if I told? If I dared to tell you, would you dare to bear it? Or would your own love swallow all, and Zeus blast me for the blasphemy. . . . Yet 'twas through you it happened . . . so you must know. . . ,

HELLAS I have Aphrodite in me, Homer.

HOMER [seriously] Yes, it's true.

She *kneels down a little away* from him, *and lays her hand gently on his knee.*

HELLAS Make music of it. Homer.

HOMER [his *hand moves to the string of his lyre, plucking them*] Later it will be sung. What song! Not a moment till the end of Greece but somewhere in Attica men will be singing it. . . . But now it is not time. It is too new. I do not yet know how.

HELLAS Just tell me then.

HOMER It is strange. Never since babyhood did I see the light, or trees, or women. Yet within me I knew it all. The dark sea, curling like cream upon the rocks: sea-birds crying as arrows in the wind: the bleating of flocks of kids among the hills. Though I was blind, there was no scene in Hellas that was stranger to me. . . . *He pauses.*

Girls would sit beyond the firelight circle as I sang—sometimes they would call out to me, mocking yet tremulous. No woman ever came to me till you, Hellas. I could not take, and you were the first to give.

HELLAS [she *makes a movement* of tenderness towards him] Dear sightless one!

HOMER Yet within me I knew all women. All the soft corners of their bodies, and their caresses, and sweet words, and givings and withholdings, I knew already. How could that be, Hellas?

HELLAS [whispers] I do not know.

HOMER When you came, it was as though a song that one made became alive. All that I felt before as dream, I knew as real . . .all, all at once. . . . [He makes a *great blind gesture*] The gods . . . I saw the gods . . . their dance . . . they spoke with me. . . .

HELLAS Yes, Homer, sometimes it seems like that.

HOMER [astonished] It seems? . . . Did you not see their motion, hear their wings, their voices, see what they showed?

HELLAS I saw that I love you, Homer.

HOMER Understanding was given me, and now I understand you too. I am blind, but I see; your eyes are open, but you dream. . . [tenderly] sweet dreams, tender dreams, Hellas, but wrapped in sleep.

HELLAS [*dreamily*] I did not think of it before, but now I wonder. Suppose I were to be with child by you. . . a little chubby one, with your curls, your voice. . . . [*Suddenly frightened, clings to him*] Would they kill it? No. they could not. Homer. You would save it, would you not? Say it was yours? Promise me you would?

HOMER [*half to himself*] Hellas with child by me? That

also I perceived. Yet was't by me, or by Hermes on Aphrodite? Something was conceived there, as the god and goddess wheeled together, a blaze of blinding light. Some new cosmos, some godling gotten. And in that moment you were in my arms. . . .

HELLAS [*coming close to him*] What else did you see, Homer?

HOMER I saw time open, and in its womb lay all of Hellas now unborn. Great marble palaces, exquisite temples, crowding streets, columns, bazaars and brothels rose and clothed this hill. Men swarmed like ants among the stone they quarried. Sang, quarrelled, cheated, fought, loved and tortured each other, and sold the very dead for profit. Slim ships flew out like needles to every coast on earth, bringing back wine and silk, wise men and bawds. The brotherhood of Hellenes was forgot, and while a few loved the gods, others invoked decay and rot, till the very stones grew putrid, and fell apart upon them. And deep in that womb of time the sky was red with fire and blood. and barbarians whom Pallas never knew thundered on shaggy horses among the abandoned tombs. . . .

As he has been speaking, shepherds, some girls, an old hag gathering sticks, two men with baskets of olives, have come over the hill and from the sides, and hearing him, sit round about to listen.

HOMER And yet—most glorious and terrible—nothing grew nor passed: But all was there. The temples ever building, ever perfect, ever crumbling, and in ruins all at

once. Those babes who fell to the hooves of savages at the end of time, forever screamed and suffered: and in the same moment others played careless with the young lambs on such a hill as this—but all eternally. And I was there in every scene, this morning now, the high hot noon of traffic, the bloody sunset. . . with some task laid on me. Ah, what weight of knowledge! Too much to bear. . . .

A low sigh, almost a moan, goes up from those around.

A YOUNG GIRL [breathless] It's Orpheus.

AN OLD MAN [at the side, *muttering*] Blasphemer, he speaks of the end of Hellas! May Pan pickle him! He spits, *making the sign of the evil eye.*

A BEARDED SHEPHERD [with his *arm round a lusty shepherdess*] Tell us, No-eyes, the world will last till goat-branding? My wench has a kid to drop that month.

HELLAS [close to Homer] You frighten me. Almost I see it too. The white walls in the sun; the blood. But it's only poetry, isn't it?

HOMER [*tenderly and yet sadly*] Dreamer, I was sent to wake you.

HELLAS [passionately] Then take me . . . away.

HOMER Waking is only here.

HELLAS It hurts.

The old man has been muttering all the while, and it has spread to those near him, an ugly rumour.

THE OLD WOMAN WITH STICKS And if the blind and cripples are allowed to get children on our girls, what

kind of monsters shall we have for Greeks? No wonder he sees gods' curse upon us. 'Tis he who brought it.

A THIN ELDER [formally] By the law, the offspring must be exposed to the eagles.

HELLAS [cries out] No!

A SHEPHERD [*jerking a thumb at Homer*] He does no work. He breeds no goats, presses no olives. Lies around with his lyre and his girl all day. Much good is he to Attica —exposure's twenty years too late.

[*There are muffled cries of protest.*] No, no. . . . The gods are with him. Play to us, Homer!

[*But the angry voices drown them*] Blasphemer! Stone him! Her too! Blind man's moll!

Someone throws a stone. *It hits Homer in the side. He feels about in the air, astonished. There is another and another. The shouting rises. A stone strikes Hellas in the breast, the belly.*

HELLAS [moans] Ah, my young. . . .

She drags up Homer, and half shielding, half pushing him, as the shouting and stoning rise to a roar, they pass off-stage to the left. When they are gone, the crowd pauses, baffled, uncertain what to do. There is a faint murmur of shame.

CONFLICTING VOICES She was hurt! Good riddance! What dream was that? A drunkard's nightmare! Let 'em fry in Hades! You heard how he lost his eyes? The poor creature, she's young yet. Pretty too. . . .

THE BEARDED SHEPHERD [above the turmoil, cheerfully] Here, folks, we brought a barrel! Let's drink a cup, and give Dionysos thanks. They're not worth the worrying.

THE OLD MAN WHO MUTTERED That's right, the old gods are safest. *[He drinks]* Lovely Dion! Ah. . . !

THE OLD WOMAN WITH STICKS Sure, the best times are past. When I was a girl, young Pan would come and kick the buckets over as we milked. And that weren't all. He'd catch us by the

THE BEARDED SHEPHERD Drink deep, friends! That's the way to forget and feel. Last year's wine. . . and blessed by the elders, too.

THE THIN ELDER *[stiffly]* To Dionysos!

Cups pass round. Someone has filled a basin. Men put their faces in to drink, roaring with laughter. Others begin singing. A shepherd catches at the young girl who spoke before.

THE YOUNG GIRL Don't touch me! It was Orpheus, and we're bewitched!

THE SHEPHERD I'll bewitch you, witch. Come on, the shepherds' round!

OTHER VOICES The shepherds' round! The shepherds' round!

The men and girls take hands in a circle, others strike up a gay tune on horns and guitars. The circle rocks from side to side, begins to sway then move, gaining momentum. Now they sweep into the centre, now back; now revolve. The circle whirls and shifts like a parody of the other. There are shouts above the din.

MAN Drink to forget the future!

GIRL Dance to return to the deep!

SECOND GIRL Men for the dreams of maidens!

SECOND MAN Woman the pillow for sleep!

The phrases, caught up by the rest and by the music, begin to repeat over and over again, until they are a roaring drunken chorus to the dance. The music grows faster, the dance dizzier, the din more deafening, until, as the whole circle begins to trip and tumble, the curtain falls.

ACT I SCENE TWO

A village square in Attica. Simple huts of timber and tile, fires burning, chickens and pigs wandering about, in one doorway a woman grinding corn, in another a man making shoes. Through an open door figures can be seen teasing wool, while in the garden before the same house girls spin on dancing bobbins as they laugh and talk together. From off-stage comes the cheerful tinkle and clang of a blacksmith's hammer.

In the shade of a big oak tree in mid-stage sits Homer, his lyre hanging from a branch, and a group of men and women squatting about him.

HOMER Carpenter, where is the auger we designed? Is it back from the blacksmith's yet?

CARPENTER [*a nimble little man with sandy hair*] Ay, Homer, it is that—and goes through boards of oak like a spoon through butter. For pegging beams there's been nothing like it. I can't wait to hear what the shipwrights at the Piraeus are going to say.

HOMER Let me feel if 'tis right.

The carpenter hands him a large spiral auger of iron, which Homer takes and delicately feels, his fingers following the whorls from screw to shank.

HOMER [*half to himself*] Yes, thus it was. Thus the sun and revolving planets bore through the void of space,

making a hole through which a wedge of time may enter.

CARPENTER 'Tis a real marvel.

AN OLD WOMAN WITH A BASKET Tell us more of what you saw, Homer.

MANY VOICES Ay, tell us more. What else?

HOMER [*to the old woman*] What have you in your basket, granny?

THE OLD WOMAN Sweet peaches, boy, all round and rosy—what a shame you'll never see 'em. Here I'll choose a good one for you.

She hobbles up to Homer, and puts a large ripe peach into his hand.

HOMER Thank you, granny. [*He feels it delicately then holds it to his nose, savouring the scent.*] Ah, beautiful. . . . Like this was the very earth—turning in heaven, as a ripe fruit falls spinning from its tree. And all the forests and hills and living things we know were no more than this down upon it. And beautiful colours—rose and gold and green—shimmered upon its skin of lands and seas, as the sun sweetened it. And I knew—I know not how—that beneath this skin was flesh of marble and iron and gold that Zeus might eat. And in its inmost core, a terrible hard stone, black kernel that can come to nothing till the earth dies, when from it another earth might spring, and so eternally.

THE OLD WOMAN [*reverently*] The end of mother earth, mercy save us! It gives one goose-flesh just to think of it. And what would happen to the likes of us?

A VOICE IN THE CROWD Don't worry, granny, you'll be worm-food long before!

HOMER How to say what I saw? Yes, you'll be dead then—but alive elsewhere. For I saw the Fates spinning the lives of men on earth, as maidens spin thread upon their bobbins. They spun from the golden fleece of heaven. And there was no end to it. For as each single coil was spun, another followed and fell upon it, covering the last. To men the coil that disappeared seemed dead—yet 'twas but wound upon the bobbin of eternity, still there, and all alive. . . .

As he speaks, the three girls who were spinning in the garden have moved towards the centre of the stage, and begin to sway together in time, spinning their bobbins against their knees, reeling in the thread, and spinning again to a slow gentle rhythm, which they hum softly beneath their breath. Their swaying grows more rhythmical, and they dip from side to side, first left, then right—in a kind of spinning dance.

HOMER Most strange of all, I seemed to see that in the midst Apollo, cross-legged like a cobbler, sat, making some stock of unknown articles. All heaven was his workshop. He'd take the skin of earth, and stretch and knead it, softening, warming, giving it elasticity. Then, cutting certain shapes therefrom, would sew them up with the thread of human life. Each object was a soul—and somewhere had its mate. This was his work.

As he has been speaking four cobblers have gathered from their doors, and squatting cross-legged in a semi-circle before the

girls, they begin to sway to left and right in the same rhythm, stretching the soft leather over their knees and between their hands as they move. The cobblers pick up the humming of the spinsters in a deep bass, and little by little this humming spreads through the whole crowd.

Deftly the maidens dip and spin: deftly the cobblers sew. For now the leather shapes are on their lasts. At their left side lies the awl; on their right knee, needle and thread. Rocking once they stab the hole, and rocking again they stitch. Gradually the rhythm takes possession of them. Other girls join the spinners, and the humming seems to spread to the whole village, so that the women grinding corn, the men teasing wool, and even the blacksmith's hammer sing to it. Somehow all the work of the village has become a single whole, all goes smooth and easily, and from this whole rises a throbbing murmur like a hive of bees.

Suddenly, in the midst of this activity one begins to hear, far off, the strong harsh singing of men's voices. Several are out of tune, some are whistling, the song is broken by shouts and catcalls. But there is vigour about it, an intoxicating swing and gaiety. The voices grow nearer and clearer:

*A-gamemnon's body lies a-mouldering in the grave, A-
gamemnon's body lies a-mouldering in the grave, A-
gamemnon's body lies a-mouldering in the grave, While we
poor devils march on top,
March on top!*

The band of soldiers bursts into the square with a roar on the last line. They are hot, red, sweaty and covered with dust. There suddenly seem to be a lot of lances among the crowd, glint

of *helmets*, shouts, laughter, *greetings*. *The spinning girls run* for cover of their cottages, and the cobblers fish for their lasts *and leather among trampling feet*.

In a minute a wooden table and benches have been dragged under the tree near Homer, and jugs of wine, bowls of soup, and bread set there. The captain and a half-dozen soldiers throw themselves down, others have caught girls round the waist, or are unstrapping their shields and breastplates at the doors of the houses. Shouts and greetings are tossed above the hubbub.

Cheese and pickles, boys!

How many barbarians did you skewer, Jason?

Something to drink, for Pluto's sake!

Leave me be till you're washed and decent, can't you? [*and so on.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*between mouthfuls*] Well, we cleared the blighters down to the plain of Marathon. They'd had time to dig themselves in since spring, and we had to smoke 'em out like rabbits. There was a westerly breeze blowing, and we set the cornfields alight windward of their camp. The whole thing went like tinder. Then the stockade caught. That finished it. Some got away to the shore, where they'd left the boats they came in. Not many though. The rest'll stay till doomsday.

THE INNKEEPER [*standing by, and filling his cup*] Good work, boys. My best calf to Athena to-night—and a barrel of wine in celebration!

OTHER VOICES A sheep! A jar of oil! A load of wood to fire the sacrifice!

THE CAPTAIN *[turns to Homer, wiping his mouth]*
You're silent, poet. How about a paeon of victory, eh?

HOMER I see them homeless in their little boats,
fathers and children dead, adrift on the green sea. . . .

THE CAPTAIN Yes, it is like that. Might have been us
instead. That's war, please Herakles.

HOMER How many died?

THE CAPTAIN A hundred, hundred and fifty maybe.
Not so much, really.

HOMER You gave them the rites?

THE CAPTAIN Sure, we built a great pyre upon the
promontory. tossed 'em all on, and offered up the
prayers. . . . *[He gets up, moves over near Homer, and
his voice becomes serious suddenly.]* I wanted to see
you, Homer. For you're the only one who can
understand what this means.

HOMER What does it mean?

THE CAPTAIN Why, it's the biggest thing since Troy.
Do you realize that to-day there's not a barbarian in
Attica? From Eleusis to Marathon and from the crest of
Parnes to Cape Sunium you'll not find a single bastard
of them. Attica's ours! Pure Greek! Our land!

HOMER *[slowly]* Yes, it was ordained like that.

THE CAPTAIN You don't seem very pleased about it.

HOMER Forgive me, 'tis your rôle. Give me your
hand, brother.

*The Captain comes over and shakes his hand like
a pump-handle.*

THE CAPTAIN That's better, all Greeks together, eh?

[He picks up the auger which is *lying* there.] What's this—a toy? [The carpenter, standing by, *makes dumb* show of its use.] By Zeus, I see—that's devilish ingenious. [He starts to try the *auger* on the *oak tree*, *gets stuck*, and *has to* be helped out with it by the carpenter.]

[sitting down] Gods' spears! if we'd had a few of those at Marathon we'd have shown them something. Under cover of dusk we could have crept to their boats, and in five minutes put half-a-dozen holes in them. They would have noticed nothing till they were out to sea—and that would have settled it.

HOMER [in horror, to himself] O God, was it for this?

THE CAPTAIN [noticing nothing, *walks over and puts a hand across* his shoulder confidentially] Listen, Homer, why don't you invent such things for us? You're always turning out gadgets for folk in the village who'd get on just as well without them. There was that level with a bubble of air you thought up for Artimas the mason. And the spinning-bobbin you made for the girls, and this auger here—and always you have some crazy story that 'twas the gods who showed you how. Of course I know you have to put it like that to keep your position with these dumb-pates here. But you're a clever chap. What could you do for us? Now we could really use your help. At present we've just got the upper hand of all we meet. But it's damned hard work. If you could think of some way to cut down the weight of shield and keep the same protection, or lengthen the spear without spoiling the balance

—why we'd run the country clear to Scythia. . . . Come, what do you say?

HOMER I cannot serve you. That is against the law. But what I give to others, that you'll soon take. And this I cannot stop.

THE CAPTAIN Well, I don't see why you're so stand-offish. But maybe there's something in it. This auger now. . . . *[He picks it up again, and begins playing with it thoughtfully.]* If an arrow had such a twist. . . .

There is a swirl of the crowd, and the captain disappears from sight as men and women surge in front of him. It is a kind of deputation.

THE VILLAGE ELDER O wise Homer, let us weave the sacred carpet in celebration of this victory. Tell us how we weave the Fates, and thus let us imitate them in the ritual. So will our good fortune be pleasant to the gods, and not draw Nemesis upon us.

HOMER It is well. Bring out the sacred loom, and I will tell you.

There is a great bustle of activity. For a moment the table is revealed, with the innkeeper pouring another cup for the captain

THE INNKEEPER *[giving the inside story]* This is something new since you left. Homer's idea. You'll be surprised. . . .

Then the crowd swirls past again. From the left they are dragging on a huge vertical loom, built of wooden beams, on which half a great carpet with a strange pattern of circles and interweaving lines is already woven. The loom is set up in mid-

stage, mats thrown down, and a dozen men take their places cross-legged before it, while the women bring out baskets of coloured wools and set heaps beside them. At either end of the loom is a man with a shuttle, and before it, in the centre, stands the master of the work, reading from a large parchment on which the whole scheme is drawn.

In a little, a quick gay music of pipes begins, and the weavers set to work. With each dip of the tune they pick up a loop of coloured wool upon their left, hook it into the warp, knot, and snip the end. When they have done this three times they beat the row down with a heavy brass comb, then run their fingers along to feel the evenness. When the row is finished, the tune changes, and the shuttle passes down the row from hand to hand, and back again. The music is quick, gay and intricate, weaving itself the pattern of the rug.

In the background, the teasers of wool have come out into the garden, and men are tending the vats of dye: others wash the yarn, girls spin, and even the soldiers are made to carry baskets or thrash the fleece. All is gay industrious and growing.

HOMER So I saw the pattern of our race . . . like a great carpet which the gods wove down the centuries. And each man and woman of the Greeks was a single knot therein, looped immovably within his place: the year, the city, fixed like warp and woof. And some were red like warriors, sailors blue perhaps, others white as priests, of many colours, grouped with their like and unlike in strange patterns that revealed themselves only as the ages passed. Pallas Athene, our godmother, knew this pattern

well, and what it meant, and how 'twould be when finished. But we men knew it not, nor could know—for we are tightly fixed therein, and see no more than the nearest knots about us. Yet Greece is woven of us, and we in her, and shall forever be. And when the last row is finished by the Fates, all is not gone, as men believe—but revealed at last in all its form and beauty: and lies there, a delight and comfort to the gods forever. For time is the warp, but the woof eternity. . . .

His words die away. The music gains strength, and the pattern of movement grows and grows till the whole stage is a kaleidoscope of sound and colour. At its height the curtain falls.

ACT I SCENE THREE

A glade in the woods— Springtime. There are flowers in the grass, cherry-blossom on the trees. At the rear centre of the stage is a kind of arbour, made by weaving the still-growing branches into three walls, a roof. In the arbour is a raised couch of woven branches, covered with straw, and lying on the couch—Hellas.

As the curtain rises, there enters from the left, hobbling upon a staff, the Old Woman with Sticks of Scene 1. She hobbles, with the crowing noises of age, to the arbour and the couch and clumsily falls ON her knees, touching Hellas with her shabby hands.

THE OLD WOMAN WITH STICKS Ah, mercy that I found you, dear. Heart gave me no peace these months, for the ill we did you. . . . All so alone, and alone . . . my, you're far gone, my darling. . . . [She is babbling.]

HELLAS [embracing her] Oh, thank you for coming, granny. It's sweet to see another face. And very soon, very soon now I'll need you.

THE OLD WOMAN And what'll you be doing here—with no fire to warm you, no warm water to wash him, never a clean rag or wrap between you?

HELLAS It's a friendly place, safe—I love it now. There's a stream yonder, clean straw, and my cloak is warm enough for two.

THE OLD WOMAN [bustling about gathering sticks together,

to *kindle a fire*] And were you not frightened, sweetling?

HELLAS More terrified than in all my life: more fearful than I thought one could be and still live. But it passed—

and now I am not afraid.

THE OLD WOMAN What happened? Tell me.

HELLAS That day they stoned us. I knew I had to run away. Run from Homer even, to save Homer's babe.

THE OLD WOMAN And you came here—alone?

HELLAS Alone—something within me said, I must be weaned from weakness, to bear him strong. I must swallow fear, that he be born fearless.

THE OLD WOMAN Poor sweet!

HELLAS I brought a sack of beans, lived on berries, found wild honey. Heaven looked after me . . . heaven scared me too. . . .

THE OLD WOMAN HOW?

She has a fire burning by the couch now, and is putting a pitcher of water to warm upon it.

HELLAS Now it is over I can speak about it, granny. Sometimes, those nights, as light died from the sky, and shapeless darkness crept from the rocks and trees, engulfing all in nothingness and night, fear would come upon me like a ravisher. All fears that ever were sprang from their lurking to possess me. Fear of robbers, demons, wild animals, wicked men; fear of every shadow, every branch that stirred; fear for my body, soul, fear for my mind and all the horrors lurking unknown therein; fear

for Homer, for my babe, and every hurt that cruelty or wanton accident could bring them to. Sometimes I dared not stir for all the fears, like plague of spiders, that the movement of one muscle might release. Darkness was alive with them, and no grass moved but gave out terror. . . .

THE OLD WOMAN [*makes a sign against the evil eye, muttering*] Ay, 'tis strange what demons conjure 'gainst women in child-bearing.

HELLAS Do you know too? And that last hour 'fore dawn . . . when the moon's gone down, dew falls, and a terrible chill comes up from caverns beneath the earth. Then the hand of death seems laid on all the world. All's damp and darkness. One huddles within one's cloak. striving to fight off the dank of death, and cherish within one's breast the last spark left from daylight. That too was fearful, granny. . . .

THE OLD WOMAN [*soothing*] Ay, child, 'tis fearful . . . but 'tis over now.

HELLAS Yes, yes, 'tis over. And for ever. I thank the gods with all my heart they sent great terrors on me, and alone. For most men go through life the slaves of piddling fears, small silly dreads of neighbour's tongue or their own meanness being visible. They know not real fear, but only fright of what fear might be; beset by crawling timors too mean to notice, too small and many for mastering. So they go meanly fearful to the grave, dreading the funeral more than death itself. . . .

From thy retreat,
From thy retreat, So snug,
so sweet,
O babe. come forth! The
sunlight greet,
Remembering,
Remembering!

O babe of light,
Concealed from sight,
Proclaim thy right!
Come forth, come forth, To
find delight,
Remembering,
Remembering!

HELLAS [*as the song dies away*] How sweet the dawn after that night! What joyous birdsong as the last stars melted in the paling sky! Slowly the forms of living things emerged from darkness, took pale hues, the soft hints of colours. Low in the east the heaven began to glow, as Hermes rose to flee and announce the light. A hare started in the glade. Upon the mountain-tops a pink wave broke, the valley still in shadow. At last upon the skyline, molten crescent shone; liquid fire burst upon the earth, o'erwhelming it with colour and with life. O what joy came with that sun! What happiness! The dew rose up to heaven, earth warmed, flowers opened, insects rose

humming in the air, the young colts neighed and played upon the hill. All was joy and light. For fear was gone - for ever.

LARK-SONG The day has dawned,
 And night is scorned;
 The earth adorned
 Awaits with joy A babe
 new-born'd,
 Remembering,
 Remembering!

For light is here,
 Thy birth is near, And
banished fear
 With dark and night-
Come, babe most dear,
 Remembering,
 Remembering!

Time, will and joy
 Make love's alloy, The
earth, gods' toy,
 Lacks but this thing— Thy
coming, boy,
 Remembering,
 Remembering!

THE OLD WOMAN [*bustling about Hellas*] Yes, 'tis the time and day for lambing. Last week my ewe bore four strong lambs at once: and gaffer's mare had a foal that galloped as he dropped. . . . Then the Captain's wife came down yesterday—sure soldiers waste no time, 'tis nine months to the day he came back from Marathon. A boy, ruddy, with freckles, it was, just like his dad. To-day she'll take him to the temple to be cleansed. . . . But you're shuddering!

HELLAS Quiet now, granny. My time is very near.

THE OLD WOMAN Hush then. Word spread you're here. Quite soon the boys and girls will come to bless you.

HELLAS [*cries out loud*] Sweet lord, my time has come! *Slowly from the left enter ten young men, and from the right ten maidens, dressed simply in white tunics and loose*

trousers, bearing flowers. They close, facing the audience, to form a living screen before the arbour.

A slow gracious music begins. Slowly and graciously develops the dance. Like young birches in the wind white-clad dancers are bent by its rhythm to the right; they straighten, their arms like branches in the wind swing slowly over. They retreat; the rhythm bends them, slowly and graciously to the left, swings out their arms, makes them dip as they retreat and turn. They dip, dip to the very ground under the wind of the rhythm, turn, and advance again. Once more they are bent like birch trees to the right, and once more the wind of the music slowly sweeps their arms across.

The movement is slow, measured and gracious, the play of

a strong silent wind among young bodies full of sap. Because the bodies are young and elastic they answer graciously the surge of the wind, and because they are young and full of sap the wind can possess them wholly and silently. For with all its silence and invisibility, the wind is strong and comes from far off, and there is no denying it.

So the white curtain bends, retreats, dips, billows and surges forward in the strong breath of the wind. There is nothing but the white motion and the slow swell of the music, which sweeps evenly back and forth, like a tide, irresistibly.

As the music dies away, the dancers slowly divide, parted by a last breeze to reveal the arbour. Utter silence falls. The earth is hushed.

For Hellas leans from the couch, holding a baby boy whose feet she lets touch the ground.

And the babe cries out.

In the same second, the dancers throw their flowers at his feet, lark-song soars up, the air is full of laughing and crying out, and nature stirs again - with happiness.

*A boy! He walks! The darling! What legs, what arms!
A hero how he acts! Homer's son!*

And in the same breath:

LARK-SONG O babe of light!
 O babe of light! From
 realms of light Through
 caverns warm,

Into our sight,
Remembering,
Remembering!

From thy retreat,
From thy retreat, So
snug, so sweet,
Into this earth, Where
all worlds meet,
Remembering,
Remembering!

O babe of light,
Born from delight, And
heaven's might,
Reveal to us, What is
thy right,
Remembering,
Remembering!

From the crowd *detach* themselves *an old crone,*
a man in his prime, a young woman, and a youth,
bearing gifts. They come forward, and kneel before
the baby.

THE OLD CRONE I bring thee earth, a platter of pottery.
She places it before him.

THE YOUNG WOMAN I bring thee air, a breath of
heaven's wind.

She leans forward and breathes gently on the baby's
brow.

THE MAN IN HIS PRIME I bring thee liquid, oil with hidden gold.

He pours out a small jug of oil into the platter.

THE YOUNG MAN I bring thee fire, to kindle and be consumed.

With a pair of tongs, he places a red-hot coal upon the platter, beside the oil.

ALL FOUR O babe, if holy breath thou use, To turn what moist and liquid is

To fire,

Then light will follow in thy train, Greece find her king, and thou thine own-Desire.

The Young Woman bends over the platter, and blows upon the hot coal which, glowing white, kindles the oil, and this catching, transforms the whole into a dish of flame. The baby laughs and crows, warming himself. The four retreat into the crowd, and six others come forward, three men and three women, three from either side. They kneel too.

FIRST WOMAN I am a cook — my pot I give to thee. *[Gives it.]*

FIRST MAN And I a minstrel—take my flute. *[Gives it.]*

SECOND WOMAN I a shepherdess—all prospers 'neath my crook. *[Gives it.]*

SECOND MAN Thy friend's a soldier—make his sword thine own. *[Gives it.]* THIRD WOMAN A nurse am I—this vial will ease thy

pain. [Gives it.]

THIRD MAN And I tell the stars—they're writ within this book. [Gives it.]

ALL SIX The pot, the flute, the crook;
The sword, the vial, the book;
Master how and master why, But first and foremost
master 'I';

To rule thee wisely over men.
Master 'I' and master when. *The six melt
back into the crowd, leaving their gifts. The baby
laughs and crows over its new toys.*

*But Hellas, gathering up the child, slowly rises
from the couch and stands before them.*

HELLAS Dear friends, I cannot thank you—for my
heart is so full of joy that my voice breaks. In this day
all is forgiven, all starts afresh. . . . [The babe cries.]
And now I go to the temple to be cleansed with the
babe. Let me be then, for it is the custom to go alone. .

..
*Slowly, carrying the babe, she walks off to the
right, the crowd parting to let her pass, throwing
flowers beneath her feet as she does so. The lark
sings again:*

O babe of light!
Born from delight, And
heaven's might,
Reveal to us, What is
thy right,
Remembering,
Remembering!

When she has gone, the men and girls go off left, leaving the stage empty save for the Old Woman with Sticks kneeling beside the couch. She is crying.

THE OLD WOMAN I see that the world of Pan is past—my childhood when elves came out of the earth to play with us. Then Pan possessed us, and blindly drunk we reeled and staggered, knowing not whether our bodies belonged to ourselves or the sprites that captured them. We lived in a kind of dream, innocent. There was no wrong, because we did not know ourselves, and could do no other than we did, like animals. How warm and easy was that world! Even dying was not difficult, for nothing was asked of us, but to sink back into the warm earth whence we came. . . . Now all is different—because of this babe men shall not sleep in peace; but toss and groan, feeling they should awake, and yet unable to. Something new came to our simple world, some new vision dawned. . . . And the brightness of that vision must blot the elves and naiads from our sight, poor shadowy beasties! So we'll be more lonely than before . . . more sad ... more thoughtful . . . more like the gods. . . .

She buries her head in the straw of the couch, and weeps, with the hoarse crackling sobs of age. Suddenly from the left, enter Homer. He feels his way with a big staff, yet agitatedly, in blind haste.

HOMER [*stops; in an urgent voice*] Is any here?

THE OLD WOMAN [*strangled*] Ay, granny's here.

Homer feels his way forward, comes to the couch, touches it, seats himself at one end, as on a throne.

HOMER [urgently] I passed them on the way. They said Hellas was here, had borne a son. . . .

THE OLD WOMAN [*still kneeling by the other end of the couch, raises her head*] Ay, your Hellas bore your heir, 'tis right.

HOMER A son! . . . Then why's she not here? Where did she go—and why?

THE OLD WOMAN From childbed she rose straight to bear your babe to the temple—to be cleansed as is the custom.

HOMER Alone?

THE OLD WOMAN Alone— so goes the Captain's wife to-day, also.

HOMER [softly] I am afraid. I did not know. . . .

THE OLD WOMAN [*half to herself*] I too am afraid . . . yet not for them, for us.

HOMER Tell me. . . .

Suddenly, bursting down from the right, a shepherd breaks in, sweating, breathless, his clothes torn front rushing through the brambles.

THE SHEPHERD [*breathless*] A terrible thing . . . terrible . . . from the top of my crag I see all down the valley. . . 'twas so clear one could see everything. . . .

HOMER [*in a terrible voice*] What?

THE SHEPHERD [*still panting*] Across the grassy hillside towards the temple . . . two women with babes were walking, innocent. . .so still it was, like a mirrored scene

. . . they did not know. . . .

THE OLD WOMAN [*under her breath*] They did not know?

THE SHEPHERD That's where the Captain's staked his range. . . to test out new weapons, so he says. He's got some twisted arrow that flies twice the old. . . .

HOMER [*like a statue, very softly*] Well?

THE SHEPHERD There was no warning. As the women walked, suddenly one fell—mother and babe transfixed. A stray arrow. There in the sunshine. . . . And the other walked on unknowing with her child. . . . *There is dead silence for a minute. Homer is frozen in his blindness on the couch, the Old Woman crouching on the ground. Then slowly he raises his head, half to heaven, half towards the audience, and in a terrible, tremendous voice, cries out with all his force, as though the shout were wrung from him:*

HOMER O God, which? . . . which? . . .

[*Slow curtain*]

ACT II PROLOGUE

The celestial amphitheatre. Again the divine dance in darkness, light growing, colour, music, interweaving figures, the interplay of the gods.

But when the motion and brilliance is at its height, the rhythm most haunting, one feels that something has changed. Among the bright figures a kind of shadow moves. It is difficult to follow—a figure in black or grey which reflects no light, a kind of moving hole in the radiant pattern, which eclipses now one and now another of the angelic dancers. Somewhere behind the music is a strange elusive discord.

At a certain moment, as Hermes and Aphrodite approach the centre of the dance, the shadow moves between them and the onlooker. And in the same instant comes, like a crash of thunder, the tremendous voice:

T-i-i-i-m-e, STOP!

The dance freezes—and the shadow is there, in the very centre of it.

APOLLO My shadow, with whom I eternally contend, it is thy hour!

The pool of darkness seems to deepen, spread, while other darkness creeps in from the sides, from the front, down from the black night-sky. All is utterly still, and in the stillness the void seems to close in silently upon the shining circle.

THE SHADOW [*deep and utterly flat*] And nothing shall move upon the face of the waters. I am that great nothing. Nothing I see, nothing I hear, nothing I know—for all that exists to me is nothing. Come to me, all who believe in nothing, for I will give you nothing. And wrap you in darkness and in silence as long as nothingness shall last.

A heavy silence falls: the darkness deepens.

APOLLO Each being born of my bright children upon earth must one day look upon the face of nothingness— my child, my father, and my other self. This is their test. For till they can gaze on nothing unengulfed, they too are naught. Hermes and Aphrodite, let then thy son ascend!

HERMES AND APHRODITE Our most dear son!

As the darkness gathers further, a dim light picks out a tiny human figure climbing up the steps from the front. It comes groping blindly, hands stretched before it in the gloom. Even as it comes, the shadow seems to grow before it, rising above the circle, growing, growing, until, with immense shadowy wings outspread, it hangs like a black cloud over the whole stage. Utter darkness.

THE SHADOW Believe only in me, and I will believe in thee!

THE GREEK [*cries out*] O woe, woe! I am utterly afraid.

...

THE SHADOW Dost thou believe in me?

THE GREEK I do not know what to believe. All is taken from me. I am most terribly alone.

THE SHADOW Wilt thou fear me?

THE GREEK My blood is turned to water. I was afraid before—but this is different. In the darkness my heart is stolen from me, and even fear is but a shadow of itself. I vanish, disappear, my very senses are sucked out of me. I am afraid I am not. . . . Nothing . . . ah gods . . . nothing. . . .

THE SHADOW Yes, thou shalt vanish. And I alone can save thee. Deny me, and thou shall be nothing. Accept me, and I will make thee everlasting as the rock.

THE GREEK Ah god, what choice! Could I but see, but see! [He tears *wildly at his eyes, and falls sobbing on the ground.*]

Nothing. . . nothing. . . .

THE SHADOW Believe in nothing, and I'll make thee everlasting. I'll turn thee to crystal, and thou'llt outlive all living things, and never change—eternal as the earth. What dost thou say? Else must thou vanish.

THE GREEK [*plunging* blindly about *the stage*] If I could see! My eyes are dead coals. Darkness, blackness. No form even. Nothing, nothing. If nothing exists, do I? If there's naught to perceive, what's this sweet body's use? If

nothing made, then no creator.

THE SHADOW If nothing exists, then thou art everything. Thou art alone in the universe. Thyself is god—the only god.

THE GREEK No, no—somewhere there must be light. If not for me, yet somewhere. I may be dead, but not the gods. Not that, I could not bear it.

THE SHADOW Think thou the void cares whether thou bear or not? Come, accept the void, and make thyself prince in darkness.

THE GREEK I'd rather die. If in the living world is nothing, then let me die and find the gods in Hades. O let me die, let me but die. . . .

THE SHADOW Do not blaspheme. Dare to live forever, dare to be crystallized. This is courage. Dare to believe in nothing, and nothing shall make thee everlasting and unique.

THE GREEK No, no! [cries out *with all* his force] Dear gods. help me! Apollo, let me see thy glorious light again! Save me from darkness? Sweet Aphrodite, love me still! Hermes. my father, do not *let* me go! I love thee, I believe in thee. Save me from nothingness. . . . He throws *himself upon the ground. And as he does so the Shadow shrinks, the darkness recedes, the circle of gods begins to glow again, and the light of Apollo spreads till all the stage is filled with radiance once more.*

APOLLO [to Hermes *and Aphrodite*] 'Tis well, thy son did not forsake thee.

THE GREEK [*raising his head from the ground*] The light! . . the sun! . . .

APHRODITE [*most gentle*] Dear son, behold that all grows, swells, blossoms, fruits. Unfolds in flowering lace, rainbow-hued, pregnant in curve, and so dies and is born again eternally—full of sap and sweetness. All this is I. Be comforted!

HERMES Behold how fleet the motion of the stars, comets' and meteors' flight, the swoop of hawk and panther's leap, darting of thoughts which fly together in comprehension of the universe! All this is I, Be comforted!

THE GREEK My father and my mother!

APOLLO But I will tell thee more. The fruit swells, falls and dies. The meteor's flight ends in disintegrated dust. Thoughts are forgotten as though they had never been. And thou, and all the crop of men, O Man, must wither equally. From this there's no redress—save one. To make thee a soul. For soul is a fragment of myself. From me must thou steal it, if thou canst.

The Greek turns beseechingly to Hermes and Aphrodite.

APOLLO In this, look not to them. Even my bright children too are transient. They'll cherish thy flesh and sinews. A soul is my gift alone.

THE GREEK How to deserve it, O most mighty one?

APOLLO I told thee to wake thy fellow men. Thou triedst. In this thou shar'st my nature, who morn by morn shines down and wakes each man on earth anew. Continue so.

THE GREEK I tried . . . and failed. Men laughed, or cried, or wondered and then forgot. And those that listened and began to stir—sometimes these made me feel most fearful of all.

APOLLO 'Tis right. There is a danger of which I did not speak. All men are transient, till a soul kindled from me is conceived in them. Then, like me, they begin to taste

of immortality. But there's living immortality, and dead. Look yonder!

He gestures towards the night sky between the columns. And there, beyond the rim of the amphitheatre, strange frozen figures, glittering as though with moonlight, pass. A warrior, crouched, with lion pelt and mask across his face, sword set in frozen fury. Two lovers entwined, turned to statues as they melt upon each other. A jester, pointing in derision, the snarl of mockery fixed upon his face. And others. The silvery, half-transparent forms, glittering like glass, pass in an icy frieze against the cold blue sky.

ARES Agamemnon was my son. Brave as a lion he fought—flashing sword, ever-darting spear—dauntless against a score of men. Fought on when his flesh was torn and ragged with a hundred wounds; and by his very will and courage made him a soul to go on fighting with. Achieved immortality—but could not change his nature. And so fights on eternally, his soul in mid-thrust petrified for ever.

APHRODITE Sappho my daughter. By loving she outgrew her body's self. Longed to have more to give her lover, and by giving gained it. Thus she too grew deathless. But deathless she could dream of nothing but more love. And so, embracing and embraced, her soul -like a pretty ornament—turned all to glass.

CHRONOS My son Epeias learned of me many things. He dreamed to tame the winds that work the universe, and turn the little windmills of men's minds. Tireless he

studied, tireless observed, and came close to knowing. Voyaged the world of ideas till he found the idea of soul, and lived in that. Yet the more he learned, the more he laughed. All men seemed comic but himself. Their antics being the sport of gods, perceiving them he thought himself a god. And so the sea of eternity froze about his little bark, and froze his laugh with it.

The silvery figures move like dolls across the sky-rim, and disappear.

THE GREEK [shivering] They put a chill upon my blood!

APOLLO When they met my shadow, they did not wish to die. So my shadow, not I, gave them immortality.

THE GREEK But if he is thy shadow. . . .

APOLLO He and I are one; yet woe to the mortal who takes one for other.

THE GREEK What can be done for him?

APOLLO Wake him and remake him!

THE GREEK HOW?

APOLLO Dismember and remember!

THE GREEK And he?

APOLLO Must die and fly!

There is a sudden immense explosion of light, and all disappears.

A sunlit open-air gymnasium in Athens. A courtyard, surrounded by a pillared colonnade, in which are vaulting-horses, parallel bars, trapezes, an occasional statue and stone seats. Beyond rises the Acropolis, stepped with arches, houses and temples to the white Parthenon against blue sky.

As the curtain rises, a band of twenty young men in white tunics begin to exercise to the music of three flutes and a drum. First they move their arms in a strange complicated order, all simultaneously; then their legs, then heads, then arms and legs; and finally their heads, arms and legs together. The exercise produces a strangely ungraceful, yet compelling impression, as of something unnatural performed by a great effort of will and attention.

In the foreground, on the step between the courtyard and the colonnade, two men are sitting, one squat, elderly, tough-looking, with an ugly yet attractive squashed face. The other is about thirty, tall, lithe, strangely reminiscent of the Homer of the first act.

SOCRATES [calls out to one of those exercising] Apollodorus, less lusciousness, my boy. You'd stuff sausages as if you were making love. 'Tis an exercise for reason this. He's calm and cool.

The exercise continues, and no one flickers an eyelid to show

that Apollodorus heard.

SOCRATES [cries to another] But not a broomstick, Thoas. Your arms jerk like a puppeteer's doll. Reason's alive and elastic, boy. Court him nicely, then.

THOAS [from the *middle of the class, in a strangled voice*] I'm trying, Socrates.

SOCRATES [sharply] Don't try. but be! [Turns to Plato *beside him.*] You see, Plato, as babes all men receive from Heaven bodies of flesh. But in time they perform on themselves a kind of transformation. So Thoas now has naught but a body of wood, and Apollodorus of melting candy. Some of the others I'm too delicate to speak about.

The exercise comes to an end, the music ceases, and the young-men break up. Some gather round Socrates and Plato, among them Thoas, an awkward stiff young man.

SOCRATES [to Thoas] Did you ever know a woman, or a nice young boy, Thoas?

THOAS [overcome with *embarrassment*] I . . . why . . . I thought. . . .

SOCRATES I knew it. You're drying up like a dead leaf, boy. When the last sap's dry, that's the end. Then they'll pound your dried-up soul, and sell the powder to scribes for blotting parchment.

THOAS [white] Socrates, it isn't my fault. . . .

SOCRATES We don't speak of fault. We speak of harmony, and lack of it. Do you believe your body to be harmonious?

THOAS No, Socrates, it is not.

SOCRATES Because your soul's not either. 'Tis dried up This is the root of it.

THOAS [desperately] I do my best.

SOCRATES The best's not in you. Only god and harmony are best.

He gets up, and turns away as if disgusted, as he does so putting an arm about the shoulders of a plump handsome young man.

SOCRATES [gently] And you, darling, have perfect harmony in your outward parts—'tis a pity there's nothing at all within!

The young man preens himself, obviously not finding this at all offensive. But as he turns aside, with his nose in the air, Socrates sticks out a foot. and he goes over it. head over heels.

APOLLODORUS [on the ground] Damn!

SOCRATES [*laughing* like a schoolboy] Where's your outward harmony now, my fake Apollo? You see, it only looks good right way up, like a bowl of porridge. If it came from within. you'd be as good a philosopher upside down or inside out. He shoos them *all* out.

SOCRATES Run along, my dears. That's enough for today. Be not proud; but bear me, and offend not others.

The young men troop out. with cries of: Farewell, Socrates! Till to-morrow! Stay with the gods, master! Socrates and Plato are left alone in the empty gymnasium.

PLATO [suddenly very serious *and sincere*] Why do you

torture young Thoas so?

SOCRATES Soft-hearted one! He's hard as lava. We have to melt him down again, before he can grow a soul. Do you think that's done with sugared words? Suffering can melt, and for his own good I make him suffer.

PLATO Yes. I know your way. I know what's at stake. But are there no other means? It seems you drive too hard. He's desperate. The boy will do himself some harm.

SOCRATES No man can grow a soul till he be desperate. Much more than Thoas.

PLATO That's for the strong. And what of the weak?

SOCRATES Better they die trying to grow strong, than stew in their own weakness.

PLATO Yes, yes. but. . . [The words *die on* his lips.]

SOCRATES I never spared myself. In the army I out-marched any man: in midwinter I'd go barefoot on ice in a single shift. I do not say it to boast. But the good I gained from not sparing myself, showed me that the best service I can do others is not to spare them either.

PLATO You put me always in the wrong to argue with you, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then leave it, my dear.

At this moment a cloaked figure hurries into the courtyard, throws off its covering, and reveals a middle-aged man, hot and breathless.

CRITO Socrates, you must escape. . . immediately. . .

SOCRATES Escape from what? And whither?

CRITO The council has given orders to take you. Tomorrow at dawn. I was at police headquarters about a slave that's lost, and heard them talking. . . . I think they let me hear, so I should warn you, and you escape, and they be saved the task. . . .

SOCRATES If it's their duty to take me, they must do so. What else?

PLATO [*interrupting*] But what's it about? What charge?

CRITO Corrupting Athenian youth, they say.

PLATO It's so absurd . . . and yet. . . . [to *Socrates*] You'll go?

SOCRATES Does a man leave his house when he hears that guests are coming? No, let's spend the night here, and talk, and drink a little, and so be ready for them in the morning.

CRITO I beg you—leave now, while there's time. We'll be at Eleusis by dawn. They'd never take you there.

SOCRATES You forget yourself—and everything. Why is it the better course not to be taken? Maybe the good exactly lies in that.

CRITO If not for yourself, for us. We need you. They want to frighten you, but if they don't succeed, I am afraid of what they'll do.

SOCRATES If you run from a fool, you convince him his foolishness is right. That's unkind to him.

PLATO [*to Crito*] Tell us more of the charge.

CRITO Well, it's been brewing long enough. You

remember, in the old days before the Sicilian War—you were still a boy, Plato—the people and the council used to laugh at Socrates and his ways. They thought him a clown, nothing more. Though his tricks did get under some folks' skin. Then when his friend Alcibiades began to go crazy, and there was that scandal about the burlesque of the mysteries, and A. skipped over to the Spartans, and all the rest of it, they began to put this down to the influence of Socrates. 'Destructive criticism', 'undermining morals', 'killing conscience', they used to say. And all those who had been riled by him were loudest. Finally, when Critias went the same way as Alcibiades, and he and his thirty butchered and assassinated left and right, using exactly the arguments about democracy and justice they learned from Socrates, this was too much. All those who lost wealth or relations in the troubles remembered all too well—and now they're ready. . . .

SOCRATES Well, what do you say, Plato?

PLATO I do not know. . . . How can the teaching of wisdom leave this trail of evil and bloodshed?

SOCRATES The truth is a drastic medicine. Those who haven't good digestion it destroys.

PLATO But before it does, they destroy thousands more.

SOCRATES Does not the sun wither as well as warm? What is already dry is burned, what moist, grows. This is the law of it.

PLATO It sounds inevitable. . . and yet. . . .

CRITO [urgently] Let's not discuss . . . come now, Socrates, I beg you. I've mules by the city gates. Let's stroll there now; wait in the park till night; and then away.

SOCRATES This is my city as well as theirs. If those less ignorant abandon it, it must get worse not better. Rather let's stay and try once more to show it reason.

CRITO That's fatal.

SOCRATES Ill fate for body, good for soul maybe. No. I'll rest a little. Come back at midnight and we'll have a feast against to-morrow.

From higher up the Acropolis floats down the noise of a confused shouting. All this time it has been growing dusker in the courtyard, and now the glow of hidden flares begins to appear at various points upon the hill. There is a kind of muffled roar, and sometimes single voices are carried upon the rising wind:

Socrates the traitor! Butcher-boys' uncle! He spat on the temple steps! He's messing with our lads! Bloody old devil! To the cliff with him!

SOCRATES [*flat and contemptuous*] The scum!

His voice is so different—like a strange echo of the Shadow's—that Plato turns round startled.

PLATO [*involuntarily*] Who spoke?

SOCRATES Nothing, my friend, nothing!

PLATO But. . . .

SOCRATES Well?

PLATO Damn, let's go.

SOCRATES I'll stay. *Do thou go rest, and meet me here*

at midnight. Crito, bring wine. We'll have our best friends and dine together. The rest is nonsense. The *dark has leapt on apace, and now almost nothing can be seen in the gloom, but the silhouette of the Acropolis against the dark sky, and the glare of fires from there. The distant rumble mounts threateningly, drowns the Farewell! of Crito's and Plato's voices, and is all we hear as the dim figure of Socrates, sitting alone, is finally swallowed up in darkness.*

ACT II SCENE TWO

Later the same evening. A room in the house of Hellas, a hetaira —warm and welcoming, with torches burning softly against the walls, several low couches and tables, a brazier. The centre of the roof is open to the night sky, while to the left through a double row of columns, one looks down into a moonlit rose garden. On one of the couches lies Hellas, lazily plucking a guitar while a slave-girl in the shadows plays a harp.

HELLAS [sings]

My soul melts, when of my love I dream,
And flows to him for whom I long,
Leaving my body tenantless indeed—Empty
vessel echoing empty song. O wraith,
return!

O wandering wraith, return!

Yet 'tis right that he my soul should snare,
Whose child it is, conceived in love, For till it
melted, I did not know 'twas there, And till I lost
it, I had none to lose. O wraith, return!

O woeful wraith, return!

But now I've lost my soul, and know it gone,
And how it would be were it here. O what
great joy if I could call it back— To give it
once again unto my dear. O wraith, return!
O tender wraith, return!

Her voice dies away, and she lays down the guitar. A man's figure comes up out of the garden, rather weary but as if coming home. It is Plato. She turns her head towards him smiling, but does not rise. He throws himself down on the couch by her, kissing her hand.

HELLAS Darling!

PLATO It's soothing here—I'm a little weary.

HELLAS A cup of wine, some sweetmeats — I'll feed you, dear.

PLATO No, let me rest awhile.

HELLAS Lie still: I'll have my girls dance. They'll weave a spell upon you, and you'll sleep.

She claps her hands. The harp sounds again—a different melody, tender, haunting, reminiscent of some mood one cannot catch. As if from nowhere, half-a-dozen girls in loose white tunics and full trousers, with transparent white veils, are there in the flickering half-light of the torches, poised to begin. Liquid chords. And softly the dance unfolds—advancing, retreating, promising, withdrawing. It is very tender, very tragic, all the moods of a woman's life—dream, virginity, longing and fear, ecstasy, child-bearing, motherhood, loss and loneliness—yet no

more than an echo.

It is true, a spell of gentleness and sleep is woven over everything.

HELLAS You like them? They're from Lesbos.

PLATO It is beautiful, but I prefer you alone. *Hellas claps her hands again, and the girls are gone.*

HELLAS There! as you wish!

Plato kisses her gently. Then he draws back to his own couch soberly.

PLATO To-morrow at dawn they take Socrates.

HELLAS At last! So long you feared it!

PLATO Yes, ever since I met him I knew it must be so.

HELLAS And can nothing be done?

PLATO It could, but he does not wish. Crito had good mules ready to take him by night to Eleusis. He would not go.

HELLAS What will you do?

PLATO Stay with him—what else?

HELLAS I don't know . . . it's dangerous . . . I am afraid. . . .

PLATO [*as if to himself*] It is strange. I feel some great drama in the making. And all the plots and betrayals are brewing, and one feels them brewing, and cannot lift a finger to prevent it. For what must be, must be. I am a man of water: if I had but to raise an arm to save him, I think I could not do it.

HELLAS It is not like you, daring one.

PLATO Not like. And the worst is that something in me says the mob is right. I hardly dare admit it to myself.

They are blind, but they feel something that they hate,
and would destroy it . . . the instruments of Nemesis. . .

HELLAS But you loved Socrates. . . .

PLATO More than myself. He is the wisest Greek.
Why criticise the lion when one bears with toads and
wolves? Yet, being so wise, why's he not wiser? I'm full
of joy to hear him, but saddened somehow.

HELLAS What is it irks you?

PLATO Always the indefinable. His logic's like crystal
—gods' light shines through it. But sometimes he
seems to use it like a small boy with a shiny potsherd,
flashing sunlight into the passers' eyes.

HELLAS 'Tis very Greek.

PLATO Exactly. But he should be more than Greek.

HELLAS What more?

PLATO Uncannily he knows each man's tender spot,
and bears upon it till he writhes. I know the method of
the school—and aim. I know 'tis to seek and overcome
one's weakness with his help. And doing so gain
what's far more precious than one's pain. Yet
sometimes there seems more pain than necessary . . .
. And to-night, coming here, I heard that Thoas fell on
his own sword. . . .

HELLAS [*really appalled*] Oh, horrible! How horrible!
What do the others say?

PLATO They say that Thoas was not strong enough,
shouldn't have been there; that when the peasant thra-
shes, the grain comes clean, but the chaff's crushed.

HELLAS [*shudders*] Ugh! 'Tis Spartan!

PLATO Just so! We Athenians think the Spartans lacking in fineness, boorish, with a trained dog's courage. Their very virtues remind one of what's missing. And Socrates, because he has all the virtues of the Greeks, makes me seek a virtue the Greeks have not got. What's lacking in his philosophy? I can't define it.

HELLAS [suddenly moved, not *listening to him*] I love you, Plato.

PLATO [slightly impatient] Yes, but I'm thinking. . . . [He pauses, then suddenly turns and looks at her.] That's it! How strange!

HELLAS What do you mean?

PLATO He cannot love! The Greeks cannot love!

HELLAS HOW?

PLATO Once in Smyrna I saw a house afire, and a Jewish father rush in to rescue his little boy. He was weeping, crying, quite beside himself. Some Greeks were disgusted at his uncontrol. But he rushed in for love. And they could not have done so for philosophy.

HELLAS They say love is not a manly sentiment.

PLATO Yes, they do. Yet it made that Jewish father more than manly.

HELLAS [provocative, *to see what he will say*] They say your Socrates loves young men.

PLATO That too—the fashion of the Greeks! He plays the fashion shamelessly. But 'tis not love, for all they talk of it. And in old times 'twas called perversity.

HELLAS [still provocative] Why not love?

PLATO There's something I half remember . . . but cannot quite. . . . Gods dancing . . . music of the spheres . . . Hermes and Aphrodite . . . and I . . . and you. . . .

HELLAS [very moved] Yes, go on. . . .

PLATO Long, long ago . . . or not yet come . . . and here . . . or somewhere else. . . . I can't remember. . . .

HELLAS A green hillside, bare under the sky beside an olive tree.

PLATO [startled] Why do you say that?

HELLAS I don't know . . . some dream . . . but what of love?

PLATO [*strangely, as though remembering a lesson*] The gods love because they seek perfection. From their love a new world is born. And the image of their love on earth is the love of men and women. Without knowledge of that image pursuit of the gods grows strangely hard and cold. . . . I can't express it. . . .

HELLAS And Socrates?

PLATO This Socrates does not know. Else he could not play with boys. Nor torture Thoas for wisdom's sake. Nor could his dear pupil Critias slaughter a thousand citizens in the name of order. Nor that other, Alcibiades, trick his way through life. All Greek virtues . . . lacking love.

HELLAS [with *passionate violence*] I *hate* your Socrates, hate him. I tell you, *hate, hate, hate*. . . .

PLATO [*staggered*] But Hellas. . . .

HELLAS I hate Socrates, and I hate all Greeks. They treat

their wives as breed cows, make poems for boys, and amuse themselves with courtesans. And love's flown from all.

PLATO [*tenderly*] Yet I learned it from you. And you a courtesan.

HELLAS In this age, what else should I be? Once I was a shepherdess.

PLATO [intrigued] You never told me.

HELLAS [absently] Didn't I?

PLATO [*suddenly feeling that she knows more than he does*] Hellas, what can I do?

HELLAS Wake him and remake him.

PLATO [startled] What did you say?

HELLAS Dismember and remember.

PLATO Where did I hear that? What does it mean? Socrates. . . .

HELLAS [*coming across and kneeling* by his couch, in a *different voice*] About your Socrates a legend is being spun, a legend that will be stuff of the memory of Greece to all eternity. Yet there's still a drop of poison there. 'Tis this I cannot bear. That in his legend a drop of poison should eat away the hearts of men not born. My own sons perhaps. . . . I cannot bear it. . . .

PLATO [slowly, to himself] Dismember and remember. . . . But what can I do? Socrates is as he is.

HELLAS His legend will be what men believe of him. Socrates thought to make his companions souls. They too mould his.

PLATO I do not understand.

HELLAS There's a tale our ancestors would take common babes, and while the bone was tender, bind their heads to noble shape—which, later hardening, they became in fact. . . . Canst make your Socrates more noble than he is? Give him the shape he should have in posterity?

PLATO [shocked] Lie, you mean?

HELLAS [*turning the mood*] O dear silly simple man! Suddenly honest when he does not understand! As if he'd not lie anyway. Come, let Hellas teach thee to lie softly. . . . Lie well, lie still, then . . . lie with me, my dear. . . .

She takes his head in her arms. The curtain falls.

ACT II SCENE THREE

The same *gymnasium* as in Scene I. Towards morning. *Starry sky, faintly paler in the east. Torches burn low in their sconces, lighting a low banqueting table to the right, on which guttering candles flicker over dishes, bowls of fruit, orange-peel, scraps of food, cups and jars of wine. Half-a-dozen couches are set about the table, some dark with sleeping figures, while other figures lean on their elbows, and two or three sit up together on one couch arguing.*

The central figure, on the other side of the table, half-facing the audience, is Socrates. He produces a strange impression — there is a sort of drunken abandon in him. He puts his arm in a maudlin way round Apollodorus beside him, or sticks his face close into the face of Plato on his other side; and yet beside him the others, for all their vivacity, look asleep. He is awake: he can do anything, because he knows what he is doing. There is something frightening about him.

SOCRATES [each arm about the others' shoulders] Another hour to dawn! But whose dawn, that's the question. Mine certainly—but is it yours? [He sticks his face searchingly *first into Apollodorus' then into Plato's, as though to find an answer there.*]

APOLLODORUS [indistinctly] No' mine, Socrates. I'm prac'lly 'sleep. Lemme lie down a li'l. Few hours' sleep,

'n I'll be fine. You look after dawn. Keep it warm for me.

. . .

Socrates gives him a push, so that he collapses on to his couch and in the same instant falls asleep.

SOCRATES [to Crito opposite] And you?

CRITO I'll share it with thee, master.

SOCRATES Pah, pretty words! Have you the price of entrance. . . . Have you?

He turns and suddenly glares into Plato's eyes. A strange spasm — of distaste, longing, determination— passes over the latter's face.

PLATO [rather coldly] We'll see when it comes.

Socrates laughs - whether ironically or with affection is difficult to say. Then pours out more wine into the cups near him, and thrusting them into the hands of all who are able to hold them, lifts his own in a sort of toast.

SOCRATES [in *half-drunken, half-nonsensical* recitative]
The dawn, the dawn! The heavenly lawn, The lawn
on which the sheep are shorn, And born to morn, Or
torn from dawn,

To mourn and mourn and mourn and mourn. . . .

Some *figure in the darkness* begins *clapping*. The
dawn! The dawn!

SOCRATES Idiot, 'tis the sparks before thy eyes where
a wine-jar fell on thee!

He suddenly rises, *and for a moment* seems to loom
above

them *all*. Then he moves round the table, pushing, kicking, dragging up the lazy figures.

SOCRATES [shouts] Up, up! Show me what you'd do to the dances now! Have you won souls to move these drunken bodies, or were the puling nurselings dissolved in alcohol? Come, up! Rouse up!

He goes round, cracking heads, smacking bottoms, whacking the dark figures with his knobbly staff. There are cries of protest, and yelps of those suddenly woken from sleep by a painful blow. But all do try to stagger to their feet, some steadier than others.

SOCRATES The polyrhythm!

A flute begins to play, and the six in rough formation try to do a strange dance or exercise to its music. This consists first of a series of rhythmic movements with the legs, backwards, forwards, sideways, then skipping, in changing time. Then the music changes a little, and they add another series of movements with one arm, also changing, but in contradictory time to the first: then a further series with the other arm, again in opposing rhythm. At the best of times the exercise would be almost impossibly difficult. Now it produces a most extraordinary impression —the lurching of tipsy bodies, combined with an almost superhuman effort of attention to make these bodies do this intricate series of movements against their very nature. Several miss the time, become confused, and find it again. Two figures sway together, get thrown off balance, and tumble in a heap. Socrates kicks them.

SOCRATES Spineless worms!

But *the others struggle on; and with another change in the music, add yet another rhythm—of the head—in yet another time. Each figure is now like some strange clockwork monster in which many different motions, working at different speeds, stop, start, and overlap. But no sooner is the fast motion mastered, than they begin to call out the letters of the alphabet in time to the different motions. All are making a tremendous effort to master their machines. There is an almost unbearable sense of strain. Another becomes confused, misses his step, and falls.*

SOCRATES Enough!

And as the others cease, he does the exercise himself, in its entirety, perfectly, harmoniously, effortlessly—a man who knows every part and member of his body, and it obeys him.

Then they fall back to their couches round the table, with Socrates among them. He *fills* his cup again, and leaning over *the still sleeping Apollodorus*, pours it in his ear. Then, *rocking with laughter as Apollodorus starts up spluttering*, throws his arm about him.

SOCRATES How much longer till dawn? How much longer till these damned dunces of the council come?

It is in fact much lighter, and only a few of the brighter stars now shine in the western sky. The torches blaze very yellow in the twilight. Plato has drawn away from the drunken group, but Socrates sees and rivets him with his gaze. Plato returns it.

SOCRATES [leaning across the table with drunken concentration] Well, scribe, forget not to write it well. Make us all heroic figures, with a few touches of modest valour for yourself.

PLATO 'Tis right. I'll try.

Now Socrates and Plato are sitting across from each other on the stage, Socrates among the sprawling party at the table, Plato—wax tablet and style upon his knee—on a stool set against a column opposite. His eyes still meeting the gaze of Socrates, Plato's hand begins to write. And as he writes, slowly a change begins to come across the scene. Slowly Socrates raises himself, straightens, stands up beyond the table, the look of intense awareness not weakening, but, as it were, becoming purified as he does so. A kind of coolness and sweetness seems to flow into him, and as his figure stands erect, a new nobility fills it. The others too, like men waking from a dream, shift slowly into positions of grace and dignity, listening.

Something has happened to the scene also. A haziness passes over it; the table is now bare and rude, the couches are revealed as plain wooden benches, the statues disappear, and in the light of dawn we see that it is in reality a prison-yard in which the group is gathered.

As the figures stay motionless in the pale light, a coarse squat man with a red face, bristle black hair, and a bunch of huge keys at his leather belt, enters from the right, and walks across in a business-like way to the table.

THE JAILER [*professionally cheerful*] Morning, gents, morning everybody. Good news for Mr. Socrates, this fine morning. We'll have that chain off in a jiffy. By order of the Council. Of course, everything sweet has a sting in the tail—as the man said when he sat on a bee while stealing honey. But that's another question.

CRITO Friend, what is the sting?

THE JAILER Well, I wasn't to say really. They . . . well . . . the Council . . . that is . . . begging your pardon, gentlemen, but Mr. Socrates has to drink the poison today at sunset, Athens time.

There is complete silence. The Jailer goes behind the table, and ducking down beside Socrates with a clanking of keys, rises in a moment triumphantly holding out a chain.

THE JAILER We're short of good chains like that, believe it or not. Such cheap locks they put now, you'd hardly credit. [He walks away.]

SOCRATES [*still standing, still looking at Plato, with great nobility and humour*] How strange the thing called pleasure, and how close to pain—as now I know, when after the chain's ache, my leg feels downright pleasant.

The Jailer turns at the door, his chin unexpectedly shaking.

THE JAILER You wouldn't be angry with me, Mr. Socrates? Would you, sir? Some of them get angry with me

—though it isn't me that gives the orders. But you wouldn't, not you, sir—the best and most decent gentleman as ever stayed here. Well, good luck, sir. Good luck

—and . . . and take it easy now.

He suddenly bursts into tears, and goes out. Still looking at Plato, Socrates slowly seats himself. A faint haze passes over the scene again. It is now full light. Plato still returns his gaze, but now his hand is writing.

SOCRATES [*with quiet nobility*] There is a doctrine whispered in secret that man is a prisoner who has no right to open the door and run away.

CEBES [pleading] Then why so anxious to leave, Socrates, leave us and the service of the gods here on earth? Does it not grieve thee?

SOCRATES Grieved would I be to go indeed, were I not sure that I go to other gods who are wise and good, and to men departed, better than those I leave behind.

CEBES Will you not leave your thoughts with those you leave?

SOCRATES I'll try . . . what is it, Crito?

CRITO The Jailer says you're not to talk too much. It hinders the poison, makes one dose not enough.

SOCRATES [gently] What a nice man! But let him mind his business . . . and make three at least.

Again a haze passes over the scene. When it clears it is midday, the sun high and bright, the shadows short. Socrates talks across the table to the others—but also beyond, as if to Plato, who still watches him and writes. The conversation is extraordinary easy, intimate,

SOCRATES The state of sleep is opposed to the state of waking. Out of sleep, waking is born; and out of waking, sleep. And the process of birth in the one case is falling asleep, and in the other waking up. Do you agree?

CEBES [sitting opposite, in line between *Socrates and Plato?*] Certainly, I agree.

SOCRATES Then take life and death in the same way. Is not death opposed to life?

CEBES Yes.

SOCRATES And they are born one from the other?

CEBES Yes.

SOCRATES What is born from the living?

CEBES The dead.

SOCRATES And from the dead?

CEBES I can only say—the living.

SOCRATES Then the living—people and things—are born from the dead?

CEBES It's clear.

SOCRATES And one of these processes is visible — for surely the act of dying is visible?

CEBES Surely.

SOCRATES Then are we going to leave out the opposite process? Can nature walk only on one leg? Will not death have some corresponding birth?

CEBES Certainly.

SOCRATES And what is that process?

CEBES Return to life.

SOCRATES And return to *life* if there is such a thing, is the birth of the dead into the world of the living?

CEBES It looks like that.

Once more *the haze draws across the stage, and once more clears again. Now it is afternoon, the shadows longer, the fight is softer and less fierce. All still sit as before.*

SOCRATES You and all men will depart some time or other. 'Me already the voice of fate doth call,' as the second-class poets put it. Soon I must drink the poison. But first I'd better bathe, to save the women some washing afterwards.

CRITO Have you any orders for us, Socrates? We'll vow anything you wish.

SOCRATES Nothing special, Crito. Only watch yourselves, as I always said. For so you'll help me and my work and all of us, whether you vow or no. And if you don't, all your promises won't help.

CRITO We'll do our best, Socrates. And how shall we bury you?

SOCRATES *[laughing]* Anyhow you like . . . but you must catch me first. . . .

Again the haze falls and is withdrawn, and it is evening - shortly before sunset. Enter the Jailer, still rather shaken. He is carrying a cup.

Very gravely Socrates rises and slowly walks across to meet him.

SOCRATES Well, my old friend. You have experience in these matters. You must tell me what I have to do.

THE JAILER It's like this, sir. Take it in one swig—like beer. Then you just keep walking up and down, until your legs feel heavy. Like after eating too many oysters. Then you lie down. comfortable. And it just works - very easy, very simple. Nothing nasty about it nowadays. *He holds out the cup. which Socrates takes. with a little bow.*

SOCRATES *[making to spill a little on the ground]* What do you say about a libation to some god? Would it be right, or not?

THE JAILER *[doubtful]* Well, we only make just enough, Mr. Socrates—you see, it's rationed. sir.

SOCRATES I understand: in that case I must ask the gods to give me pleasant journey—without payment. Thus. . . .

Looking out at the audience, he quietly and cheerfully raises the cup to his lips, and, his eyes unblinkingly upon them, drains it. Those about the table turn away, some brushing their eyes, others weeping openly, one or two watching white-faced. Apollodorus suddenly cries out, a terrible heartbroken wail.

SOCRATES What's that strange outcry? Did I not send the women away, that a man might die in peace? Quiet then, and patience.

He walks up and down a little, looking enquiringly at the Jailer, who begins to sniff again. Then, very slowly and with dignity, he lies down at full length upon the bare table, the others remaining seated about it.

THE JAILER [*feeling his legs in a professional way*] Begging your pardon, do you feel that, sir?

SOCRATES No, I cannot say I do. *A little pause.*

THE JAILER [*feeling higher up*] Nor there either?

SOCRATES No. . . . [*He feels himself in the upper leg, and groin; and adds, half-apologetically*] When the poison reaches the heart, that's the end.

He looks round at them very sweetly, and then with deliberation, draws the sheet up over his face and head.

There is a half-minute of complete silence and stillness. Then he carefully draws down the sheet, and turning his head towards Crito and towards Plato, who still sits beyond:

SOCRATES Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius: will you

remember to pay the debt?

Then quietly he draws the sheet over his head again.

CRITO The debt shall be paid, master. Is there anything else?

But there is no answer. The figures about the sheeted body grow as still as it. Slowly the light fades—the last glow lingering upon Plato, who still sits motionless, his style listless in his lap. He is weeping.

The curtain falls.

ACT III PROLOGUE

The amphitheatre of heaven. The planetary gods in a semi-circle on the flight of stairs, their folded wings rising against the starry sky beyond. A silver radiance picks them from the dusk. At the highest point, Apollo shines golden and alone. All is immense, radiant and still.

Below, in the forefront of the stage, one small dark prostrate figure.

APOLLO [*in a voice which vibrates through heaven*]
Greek, thou shalt learn of time. For time is the greatest mystery, containing all other mysteries. Men—like eyeless fish—swim in the deeps of time. The gods—like dolphins at play upon your wine-dark sea—bask in and out at once, gambolling 'twixt time and the sunlight of eternity. Wholly beyond time only the Nameless dwells.

THE GREEK [*still prostrate*] *I am but man, my lord.*

APOLLO *Emerging from time, men grow like gods.*

THE GREEK *Show me, my lord.*

APOLLO *Behold the first secret—there are many times?*

A strange melody begins to play, which contains within it many different rhythms— a slow bass beat, which reverberates through the floor of heaven; another, its octave echo, vibrating on another level; and yet another, and another, and many others, quicker and quicker, higher and higher—one within the other—

a

counterpoint of times.

Suddenly the gods raise their right arms before them, *as though to evoke life* from the void. *A pause.* Stillness. Then left arms, summoning, are raised—and in the same instant their *right arms* outstretched begin to tap, in quick oscillation, the heart-beat of animals and things. The two times interweave. Another beat, and heads too turn right, then left, commanding east and west. And the three times interpenetrate, beat together, like the complete *ticking of a clock.*

Till suddenly, at the deep slowest beat of time, all the gods *leap to life.* *Their feet,* planted apart, shake *the very earth* as they descend. The melody repeats. *Again the great chord, the feet of the gods change place, earth rocks,* and all begins anew.

Then, as though to evoke from the still vibrating earth some new form of life, *left arms rise once more.* And now, in quicker time, heads turn *right, then left,* to summon east and west; and quicker again, right arms tap the heart-beat of animals and things. And once more the thunder.

So that, from the very gods themselves, from their feet, arms, heads and hands, many motions, many speeds and rhythms are imparted to the quarters of the universe. And all is governed as by some immense *and cosmic metronome.*

And with each successive thunder of their feet, the gods cry out in turn:

CHRONOS The time of my footstep an epoch:

HERA The time of my glance an age:

HERMES The time of my bidding a lifetime:

ARES The time of my pulse one page.

APHRODITE The time of my breath germination:

SELENE The time of my motion a tide:

APOLLO [motionless]

The time of my love transformation, Where now has forever inside. *Suddenly the gods cease their rhythms, shaking one arm up and the other down, as though to scatter their creative force above and below. Then they drop to their knees, and with their left arms bent to one side, revolve their outstretched right arms in wide circles, alternately gazing at the audience and away. It is the same combination of many times in another manifestation. But the circling arms are strangely reminiscent of the turning of planets in their orbits, and the changing regard of some cosmic alternation of day and night.*

While with each *greater chord, the gods again cry out, but in different tone:*

SELENE I revolve—the egg has changed to worm:

HERMES I spin—and movement starts to rule:

APHRODITE I gently shine—the child breathes, is born:

ARES My course complete—he's passion's fool:

HERA Slowly I turn—the human being mates:

CHRONOS With my full circle; half his life is o'er:

He weeps, and fearful prays the Fates . . .

APOLLO [motionless] Until I swallow him once more.

The kneeling gods also fall motionless, their arms crossed upon their breasts.

THE GREEK [still prostrate, with reverence *and longing*]

Swallow me, swallow me utterly, my lord.

APOLLO All men but one or two beg that I eat them not. Thou dost better. For when a man prays with his whole heart for what must be, then what must be is not what he fears.

THE GREEK Devour me and show me, lord.

APOLLO Since thou beg the first, the second lies open to thee. Behold the second secret! Time is change: change return: and return the way out from time.

Now the six gods and goddesses are standing. Immobility and silence lie upon them, and they are clothed in dusk. Behind, Apollo burns.

A rose glow falls upon the first. Very slowly Selene steps forward, and rocks, as if some strange rhythm possesses her, hand high and pointing to some unknown aim. A rhythm goes by; and the same motion passes with its glow to the next in line—while Selene stands still, one arm held high, intently listening. Another rhythm, and the pointing gesture passes to the third, listening to the second, and a new gesture, green-glowing, clothes Selene. So the intricate figures pass from god to goddess. goddess to god, until the whole line is in separate motion—vari-coloured, yet with one rhythm, one rock and dip, as though some sea-swell animates them all.

And now it is seen that the gods are but instruments of the moods, colours, symbols that pass through them: that a whole pattern moves together, its figures rippling from end to end, like light upon dancing waters and that these figures go in pairs, coupling now these, now those of the gods in combination. But all changes, all moves, all shifts, and all remains the same. Each

gesture passes, to return elsewhere; vanishes into nothing, to be reborn at the beginning.

APOLLO Look, then, how the harmony of heaven brings all things to all men. And takes all away again. Be brave, and look: for thou hast said the word that can unlock the universe.

Very slowly the Greek raises himself from his prostration, shielding his eyes, and then kneeling, as slowly draws away his hands.

THE GREEK [*awed*] *I behold, and it is wonderful!*

The dance continues, the gestures, figures, colours, passing from god to god, from place to place, till all glitters and shines with magical illusion.

Then, almost unnoticeably, Selene falls still, and the last light dies from her. And her companion next; and is enveloped too in dusk. And so, as at the beginning motion and light entered the quiet line, so now they retreat from it, and dusk and silence recapture one by one the gods.

APOLLO So time brings all. Light and dark, youth and age, all colours, forms, influences, music, and all history — of worlds and men. Time brings the very marriage of the gods, brings offspring to them, then dissolves their bond, and brings other unions, pregnant with other possibilities. Of one such conjunction, thou and thy race were born. Were born in time—gods' time indeed—yet being in time, already the sands run low for thee and thine. Thy task achieved or not achieved, a greater presses.

THE GREEK Tell me, my lord.

APOLLO Time brings all. Life, death—and even miracles. This is the greatest mystery, most difficult to fathom —most marvellous and terrible both for gods and men.

THE GREEK If I should be destroyed, still tell me, lord.

APOLLO I will tell thee. Beyond time, where alone exists the Nameless, all is miracle—wholly and forever miracle. Time, like a moving curtain, hides miracle from men—lest they be destroyed before they long for it. But time's not seamless. And from age to distant age, when the cycles which thou hast seen pause in their perpetuity, a crack may appear in time. Its very motion brings the fault within its fabric. And through this fault divine, this chink, the eternal miracle shines through to men. descends to earth-infinity incarnate, eternity in time.

As Apollo speaks, all the light on the stage is gathered into him; the rest fades into dusk, into darkness, from which the voices of the gods soar suddenly, in paeon on paeon, each mounting above the last, higher and higher, in one great fountain of rejoicing.

Rejoice for a fault in time! Rejoice
that men now may climb! Rejoice
that hell's pains can end! Rejoice
that the gods descend! Rejoice that
by Nameless grace God yet may
show his face,

And through a fault in time

The light divine

May shine

Shine . . .

Shine . . .

Shine . . .

Shine . . .

Each repetition is taken up by another voice, higher and more soaring than the last. And with each, the light on Apollo seems to gather brilliance, grow more dazzling, till nothing else is visible, and of him naught but light itself. Slowly this radiant Apollo comes forward. The prostrate figure of the Greek, caught in his flame, seems suddenly to catch fire and vanish. And still he advances, to the height of the front steps, every second growing in glory, until as he dazzlingly descends . . . the curtain falls.

ACT III SCENE ONE A.D. 33

On board an Egyptian ship off the Greek coast. In the foreground is the main deck. On the left the stairs up to the fore-castle, on the right the main mast and mast-works. Beyond the rail can be seen a shining expanse of sea, and in the distance the rocky shore-line of Corfu, honey-coloured in the sun, with here and there a green valley coming down to the sea. Over everything lies the stillness of noon.

By the mast, in the shadow of the soil, a man is sitting on a coil of rope. He bears a strange resemblance to the Homer and Plato of the previous acts, but is older—about 40—bearded and in the prime of life. Close by him squats a sailor, splicing rope. Up in the fore-castle, to the right, very much in the background, and hardly noticeable at first, is an old Hindu fakir, cross-legged on his mat, one arm upraised and the other outstretched— completely motionless.

APOLLONIUS OF TYANA [looking out towards the shore, half to himself] How strange! This was the very place. Thirty-three years ago. And the ship, the sea, the sky, the shore—all exactly as it was!

THE OLD SAILOR Thirty-three years! Isis, some water's flowed down the Nile since then. That time I was working a dirty dhow with goatskins. The Roman census lads came on at Alexandria, but they couldn't stand the stink,

so I never got counted. . . . What made you think of it?

APOLLONIUS I was a boy, sailing back from Rome to Athens with my parents. All was wonderful—as it sometimes is in childhood. Early morning. The sunshine, sea, creaking of ropes, the voyage, the unknown future—I stood alone on the deck, drunk with it all, and looked out to just that shore. Then suddenly—I can't describe it—time seemed to stop. Utter stillness fell, and swallowed us. All motion died in air and sea. Earth seemed turned to glass, and my heart with it. How long it lasted, I could never tell. Then—in the stillness—rose from the shore an immense and timeless moan. Such sadness, as though nature's heart would break. And from the land of Greece came tens of thousands of faint voices—water and wood spirits, animals, it seemed, godlings and sylphs—like a great mist of wailing. One could not bear the sadness of it. For like a single voice, 'Pan is dead!' they cried. And again, 'Great Pan is dead!'—till I longed to throw myself into the sea for very sorrow.

THE OLD SAILOR Ay, I heard the story. One Greek chap I knew was on a boat what heard it, and several did chuck themselves over like crazy, so he said. Luckily he was tight, and could hardly stand, so he just sat and stuffed his ears. Turned him fair inside out, he claimed. 'Great Pan is dead!' [*He shivers.*]

APOLLONIUS Yes, only a Greek could understand, I think. 'Twas as though you heard your motherland die beneath your feet. And I—who was born in Cappadocia

and reared in Rome—knew in every nerve that I was Greek and always would be, and that in that day some incalculable sorrow came to me. Afterwards I said, like all the rest, 'Why, Pan is superstition, a pious story, no one believes in him nowadays'. And later I said, too, that Pan—if there was a Pan—was god of the age 'fore ours, god of pre-Homeric Greece, and all the rest. It did not help. Something had been taken from us Greeks, something had gone forever.

THE OLD SAILOR And that was all to it?

APOLLONIUS No—as the wailing died, I heard, high and far off, a choir of different voices. But as the others seemed to rise from earth, these spun down from heaven, high and thin and clear as bells across the sea. Almost inaudible. 'To us this day a child is born,' they sang. But so far off they could not touch me or my sorrow. As though, one's own wife dead, one heard a wedding song across the fields. . . . All this I remember as though it were yesterday.

As he has been speaking a young woman has entered from the right, and paused behind the mast, listening, without his being aware of her presence.

THE OLD SAILOR What's your business now?

APOLLONIUS [*with changed voice, very matter-of-fact*] I trade in wisdom, buying some here, selling at profit there.

THE OLD SAILOR Who sells?

APOLLONIUS A few old men—one in Baghdad, another in Alexandria. It's a small business, but world-wide.

THE OLD SAILOR Who buys?

APOLLONIUS A few who are tired of cheaper wares. A Roman circus owner grown tired of circuses: an Egyptian scientist who finds science dull—and so on.

THE OLD SAILOR And it pays?

APOLLONIUS Too soon to say—one has to pay in advance, then give long credit. We'll see.

THE OLD SAILOR Sounds worse than goatskins—they charge spot cash upstream, then the leather sellers down in the city won't pay till it's made up in saddles and sold again. No profit in that—so I quit. What d'you expect?

APOLLONIUS Ah, that's the devil of it. One can buy the theory of the universe, the explanation of everything—and sell it, too. And that's the best business that there is so far. Certainly it changes men. Much falls away. They see bigger worlds, invent, discover—yet something's missing. And since that day that Pan died. I cannot find it. As though all's stuck, waiting for something. . . .

HELLAS *[quietly, from behind him]* Will you teach me?

APOLLONIUS *[turning sharply]* You! . . . *[But almost in the same moment it occurs to him that he does not know her after all. He stops, puzzled.]* I'm sorry. I thought. . . .

HELLAS *[coming forward]* When I heard you speak of that day, I felt I had been asleep for thirty years, and had not known it. For an instant I seemed to remember some time before . . . Pan still alive, and I. . . .

APOLLONIUS But who are you?

HELLAS Hellas my parents named me. Some call me

Maria—that's Roman fashion.

APOLLONIUS You've been in Rome?

HELLAS Like every other Greek. I gave music lessons, taught singing and dancing there—and heard your reputation.

APOLLONIUS You know me?

HELLAS Stories only. The Sphinx, they call you.

APOLLONIUS Seven years I spent under the Pythagorean vow of silence. And speechless, began to see.

HELLAS Magician, wizard, too.

APOLLONIUS [*wryly, with a touch of sadness*] 'Tis they who long to mystify, not I. With every image, every sound and smell and sight, a drop of divine energy enters us. Ordinary men, in talk and careless action, spill out these drops again as soon as they're received. In care and silence they accumulate—giving the power to withstand what's mechanical. This is your wizardry.

HELLAS And what did you see in silence?

APOLLONIUS [*suddenly speaking to her, as he has spoken to no one else*] Many things. But chiefly this, That Greece droops, like a girl grown listless, awaiting too long her lover. She goes about her tasks, does what she must—but with neither heart nor knowledge in it all. Everywhere offerings are made, statues carved—by habit: the temples tended—but none remembers why. . . .

HELLAS [*slowly*] Yes. this listlessness I know . . . but how to escape it I know not. . . .

APOLLONIUS Nor I yet. And not to know sends me

demon-driven, from city to city, land to land. looking for something. . . .

HELLAS And what do you find?

APOLLONIUS Everything and nothing. In Egypt, Persia, everywhere I see wisdom buried. Great wisdom. Like coal beneath the ground. But how to fire it and kindle Greece. I do not see.

HELLAS Why look abroad?

APOLLONIUS How to say? The lover comes, and the listless girl awakes. Some new force must come from another land, another line, to wake Greece from her sleep. The fire of another life, not hers, must rouse her. . . .

HELLAS [*deeply strangely*] Yes, so it is. For it seems to me I've been sleeping too, as my homeland has. I thought to go back. But perhaps I too must go beyond, to seek. And later return perhaps . . . and we wake together.

THE OLD SAILOR [*absently*] When I ferried those goatskins down the Nile, we used to pass a kind of lion with a woman's face, all made of rock. Big as a mountain. The people there say she's been sleeping for five thousand years. . . .

HELLAS Five thousand years! [*shivers*] It's cold suddenly.

. . .

THE OLD SAILOR Ay, they say she'll not wake till the sun himself comes down from heaven. . . .

APOLLONIUS [*reverently*] Phoebus Apollo. . . .

THE HINDU FAKIR [*as though part of some continuous prayer grew audible*] . . . Om Brahma Om. . . .

THE OLD SAILOR [*catching sight of him*] Ra save us!

As this goes on, a strange change has been taking place in the light. The whole sky above the shore has been growing darker and darker blue, almost indigo, while at the same time the vertical light shining down on the boat has been growing brighter and brighter and more blinding. The three men look up one by one, Apollonius in longing, the Hindu Fakir slowly and deliberately as though he already knows what he will see, the Old Sailor suddenly startled out of his wits. Hellas sinks on her knees and hides her face.

Gradually, the same ringing that was heard in the first prologue begins to sound, at first very faint and distant, then as if filling more and more of the air, louder and louder, wider and wider, till one feels something must burst within one's very head. Now the sky is almost black, the boat as if white-hot. The ringing grows unbearable—and splits in a single thunderclap.

In the same blinding instant, the incandescent disk of the sun shoots vertically down the black distant sky and vanishes below the horizon, plunging all in darkness.

There is utter silence, save for infinitely faint voices, an echo of an echo, endlessly far away:

The King of the Jews!

Crucify him! Crucify him!

Verily this man is the Son of God!

This day shall ye be with me in paradise!

Then utter silence and blackness for a whole minute. And as suddenly and terribly as before, the blazing sun shoots vertically up through the black sky, filling the boat with the same lurid glare.

*The three men are revealed prostrate, their faces on
the deck,
their arms in horror or adoration above their heads.
And the air is full of innumerable voices, above, below,
near, far, in all the heights of heaven, crying:
Risen! Risen! Risen! Risen! Born! Born!
Born! Born! Saved! Saved! Saved! Saved!
Risen! Born! Risen! Born! Risen! Saved!
Risen! Saved! Risen and born and saved
and risen! Risen and born and saved and
risen! Risen and born and saved and
risen!
endlessly as the curtain falls upon the motionless boat
and the
motionless figures bathed in light.*

ACT III SCENE TWO

A year later. The throne-room of some eastern caliph. Slender columns, arches and niches rising to a gilt and fretted dome. Gorgeous curtains of velvet and damask to break the light, deep carpets of silk upon the floor; and in the rear centre of the hall marble steps mounting to a golden throne, beyond which can be seen—most delicately framed—a pleasure-garden with cedars, orange and lemon trees, and a fountain sparkling in the sun.

The room is thronged with men magnificently dressed—some in long Persian gowns, others in dragon-painted mandarin robes, yet others sashed, trousered and with jewelled turbans on. Ambassadors, ministers, generals, councillors move gravely amid the crowd of slaves wielding fans, of soldiers with scimitars drawn before their bearded faces, of huddling and hopeless petitioners.

To the right in the foreground kneel Apollonius and his companion, the old Hindu Fakir, still half naked and still with one arm held above his head.

APOLLONIUS [*reading from a small illuminated scroll which he holds in his hand*] 'Thy task achieved or not achieved, a greater presses.' [*He turns to the Hindu*] So it is written in the Caliph's summons—and rings familiar somehow. The phrase comes pat to my mind, as though I heard it once. But what could it mean? Or rather, what to him? To me indeed, 'tis pregnant.

THE HINDU FAKIR What does it mean to you?

APOLLONIUS That day we were stricken to the deck by light from heaven, I knew my task. Something within me spoke. 'Redeem the land of Hellas; redeem thy land from the slavery in which she's sold,' it said. . . . 'As another this day prepares to redeem thee and all mankind,' the same voice added. That I did not fully understand. But the first was clear enough.

THE HINDU FAKIR What slavery is your country subject to?

APOLLONIUS To Rome and superstition. . . . There's hardly a Greek but barter his birthright for Roman patronage. All the art, wisdom, skill and culture that our fathers left us, is now for export. Our most hallowed customs, sacred rituals, made shows for Roman tourists. And in this whoring of our heritage, the very true grows false, beauty's a bawd, and wisdom but the tout for her.

THE HINDU FAKIR And how will you redeem her?

APOLLONIUS [*with eager memory*] It seemed my task to make all new again. Gather all knowledge, skill, magic and holiness from the whole world round, and giving it sense again, redeem her with this gift of all that human beings have. This ransom won, I'd bring to Athens—and buy her free again. . . . So seemed my task. . . . [*polite*] And yours?

THE HINDU FAKIR [*his arm still raised to heaven*] To point. *There is a swirl of movement on the far side of the hall: a fanfare of trumpets, and the crowd parts to let through a guard*

of soldiers—tremendously tall, with scarlet uniforms, golden breastplates, plumed helmets and drawn scimitars. Far off a herald cries:

Hear all peoples! The Great Caliph comes! The Son of Sky, and Lord of all the Earth approaches! Obeisance! Homage!—upon pain of death!

All prostrate themselves and hide their faces, except Apollonius and the Fakir, who draw a little behind a curtain.

And over the sea of backs, in the space behind the soldiers, a nervous little man in tight blue trousers and a skimpy blue jacket, can be seen hurrying painfully. His jewelled turban is disarranged and rather too big, and he keeps adjusting his spectacles as he comes—so hurriedly that the fat vizier who is trying to keep a small blue umbrella held over his head, is in danger of tripping.

The Caliph mounts the marble steps to the golden throne, straightens his turban and spectacles.

THE CALIPH [*impatiently*] Well, what are we waiting for? Let them get up, for heaven's sake. Always wasting time. What's first to-day?

The gorgeous throng gets rather painfully to its feet.

THE VIZIER [*trying to regain his breath*] Sire, the Lord of Battles craves your counsel.

THE CALIPH Still can't keep order, eh? Damnable inefficiency. Well, what nonsensical story this time?

THE MINISTER OF WAR Sire, a rout of beggars are forcing their miserable presence on your Serenity's inviolable frontier.

THE CALIPH [irritably] Well, why don't you mobilize the garrisons?

THE MINISTER OF WAR In consequence, Sire, of a most intricate chain of cause and effect, your garrisons are now reaping the just reward of their loyalty in the third circle of paradise.

THE CALIPH [*exploding*] What! Well, send up more at once!

THE MINISTER OF WAR Sire, the troops in the capital have made it known that they would die rather than exchange the sacred task of guarding your august presence for worthless duties upon the border.

THE CALIPH Well, what the devil do you expect from me? Why are you minister, eh? Do something about it, man!

The Minister of War withdraws backwards down the stairs, as gracefully as he can.

THE CALIPH Well, what next?

THE VIZIER The Master of the Harem offers a dance of maidens, newly brought from the West, for your judgment. Sire. [*discreetly*] Now—or later perhaps?

THE CALIPH [*suddenly efficient*] Why not now? No time like the present. [*severely*] Remember that!

The Vizier bows. The Master of the Harem mounts part-way up the marble steps, and making a signal towards the distant archway, a path is cleared through the crowd. A dozen girls—in filmy robes of blue and gold, and veiled to the eyes—come running to the throne.

Music *begins*. Some play, some dance; and between them something inexpressibly delicate is woven amid the pretentious magnificence. The music weaves, weaves in the hush, like a spider spinning—and to it the girls weave their movements, their bodies, their filmy draperies of blue and gold. One of them, in a long arabesque, sweeps by the pillar where Apollonius and the Fakir are sitting.

In the instant recognition flies. It is Hellas. Her eyes above her veil ask Apollonius some question. He starts up. But she has danced away, and the weaving group of girls—like blue butterflies — comes gracefully to rest upon the lowest steps of the throne as the music dies.

THE CALIPH [briskly] Very instructive, very. Pity I'm so busy nowadays. Great pressure of work. Very little time for cultural matters—most unfortunate. . . . [regretfully, to the Vizier] Well, we must get on, I suppose?

THE VIZIER A delegation from the Royal Astrological Observatory, Sire.

THE CALIPH [yawns] Well?

The Chief *Astrologer*, an old man in a long blue-black robe and tall conical hat, approaches nervously.

THE CHIEF ASTROLOGER [much too *fast*] Sire, as we reported last year, a comet was observed which, in relation to the then aspect of your august horoscope, boded most unfavourable personal conditions for yourself. In the hope of discovering other neutralizing influences in the heavens, we built a new telescope which—the claim is conservative—revealed twice as many celestial bodies as

were previously known. Unfortunately, this telescope showed the presence of four more comets, all hostile. The Royal Observatory therefore petitions for a small increase in its subsidy to permit the construction of a further telescope to my own design which—at a modest estimate—will bring in view ten times. . . .

THE CALIPH [*angrily*] Idiot, have the first telescope destroyed at once? . . . Next!

The tempo has been getting quicker. All the time different officials have been pulling at the Vizier's sleeve, inventors pushing exhibits through the crowd, petitioners squeezing forward. Now one ragged man breaks through, and throw himself upon the steps.

THE RAGGED MAN [*urgently*] Sire, in my province they are starving. Men fall in the fields from hunger. Children die in the gutters, their mothers too weak to bury them. . . .

THE MINISTER OF SUPPLY [*angrily, from the other side*] It is a lie, Serenity. Statistics show that last season's crops were the best for forty years. If the Lord of Battles didn't make money by having his troops live off the land. . . .

THE MINISTER OF WAR [*shouting*] Sire, it's most unfair. In the name of economy, logistics and common sense, we send the army to the food instead of the food to the army. . .

Other voices make themselves heard, other figures press forward to the throne.

Sire, a scheme for compulsory procrastination. . . .

Sire, the post of Under-Secretary . . . my nephew's brother. . . .

Sire, an invention to make ice from dewdrops. . . .

There is complete babel. The Caliph thumps on his throne-arm with his fist.

THE CALIPH Stop this racket, for heaven's sake. I can't hear myself think.

There is a moment's lull. But things have got beyond the Vizier's control, and the next minute the clamour rises again, worse than before:

Sire, the national emergency. . . . Free turbans for all. . . . My cousin, Sire. . . .

All this time Apollonius and Hellas have been gazing at each other, as though transfixed. The crowd surges between them; neither can move; no word can pass. But their eyes tell everything.

THE VIZIER [*shouting at the top of his voice, tries to regain command of the situation*] Sire, a magician from Athens is here. The best in the West, they say.

THE CALIPH [*also shouting against the hubbub*] Then what the devil's he waiting for?

The Vizier makes a sign over the heads of the crowd, and suddenly those around Apollonius and the Fakir begin to push them through to the front. At last they emerge, and stand before the throne.

THE CALIPH Pleased to meet you, very pleased to meet you. Terribly busy. Never a quiet moment. Always like good tricks though. Well, what can you do?

APOLLONIUS Give you a quiet moment.

THE CALIPH Splendid, splendid. Let's have it.

Apollonius raises both arms slowly to heaven. There is a long roll like thunder, a cloud seems to pass over the scene—and suddenly the stage is empty except for the Caliph, Apollonius, the Hindu Fakir, and Hellas hiding behind a pillar.

THE CALIPH [*blinking*] Why . . . what? Where. . .? [*Then he notices what has happened. He seems to stretch, expand.*] By Jove, deuced good trick that. Never seen it before. Why, I feel better already. . . . [*He stands up and stretches in the new found space. He seems to grow larger, taller, the worry goes out of his face, and he takes his glasses off.*] Wonderful. . . how do you do it?

APOLLONIUS It's the psychological method of magic, sir. All those people were different sides of yourself. You couldn't choose between them. Then for one lucky moment you called on me, the magician. Lucky, because I am the only one who can make the rest vanish for a while. For of course I am a side of you as well.

THE CALIPH Very glad to hear it. I'm sure.

APOLLONIUS You wanted time to think?

THE CALIPH [*a little startled*] Yes, to be sure—time to think, certainly, certainly.

APOLLONIUS Well, what will you think, now you have the time?

THE CALIPH H'm, yes, now what was I going to think about? Let me see. . . . [*There is a pause. The Caliph rubs his nose thoughtfully.*] It was very important too. Annoying,

very. . . . [Then he *suddenly remembers* something.] By the way, we didn't mention your fee. The usual thing for a successful disappearance is three wishes. Of course there are several hundred wishes on the prohibited list nowadays. So it isn't what it used to be. Still. . . .

APOLLONIUS I must warn you that they will all return as soon as you let me go.

THE CALIPH Well, well, it can't be helped. What do you wish?

APOLLONIUS I wish your help to gather all the true knowledge in your kingdom.

THE CALIPH Simplest thing in the world. A letter to the Minister of Culture, the Royal Societies. . . . And your second wish?

Hellas runs forward from behind her pillar, and throws herself down by Apollonius, clinging to his leg. Apollonius places his hand protectively on her head.

THE CALIPH [*with reserve, inspecting Hellas*] Yes, of course it's the usual thing for second wish. . . . [*notices Apollonius*] Well, if you insist. Not my style, of course. . . . [*A pause*] And the third?

APOLLONIUS [*slowly*] I wish to know what you were going to think of when you had the time.

The Caliph slumps back into his throne thoughtfully, and his head drops slowly in his hands. Apollonius stands upright before him, Hellas kneeling at his side. The Hindu Fakir squats, his arm still pointing impassively to heaven. A very long silence. There is still silence as the curtain falls.

ACT III SCENE THREE

A halt in the Syrian desert. Sand and sandy scrub, stretching flat under a green evening sky to a line of mountains on the horizon. Negro bearers are unloading cases to the right, muleteers preparing fodder for donkeys and camels tethered in the back-ground. Under the shelter of a heap of baggage, rugs are laid out for the evening rest. Apollonius and the Captain of the Caravan are busy with a list; Hellas lies watching them.

APOLLONIUS [*checking the piles*] . . . Four cases of astronomical instruments, two cases alchemical furnace and retorts, three rolls of maps, six cases manuscripts . . . yes, it all seems there. [He wipes the sweat from his *face with* his burnous.]

THE CAPTAIN OF THE CARAVAN It's a terrible load for such a journey, sir—here we've been on the move for thirty-five days without a break, and the men are getting restive.

APOLLONIUS No, they must hold out. The worst is over. How long to Palmyra now?

THE CAPTAIN Maybe a week. But Palmyra's not much of a place to rest up, sir. The men are saying that Baghdad's only two days south. Now that's something like a city—bazaars, girls, everything you want.

APOLLONIUS They must wait a little longer. A week to

Palmyra, you say. Another to Antioch, and if we can find ship quickly—but a third to Athens. One month more, and we'll stand on Grecian soil. *[He turns triumphant]* To found the greatest academy of pure science in the world!

Hellas smiles without speaking, perhaps agreeing, perhaps humouring him.

THE CAPTAIN You don't quite understand, sir. The desert's not like a city. You have to humour the men a bit. Because—when all's said and done—you're in their power. .

. .

APOLLONIUS *[incredulously]* I . . . and this wealth of knowledge. . . in the power of slaves?

THE CAPTAIN It's said, 'Wealth makes the caliph shine the beggar's shoes'.

APOLLONIUS *[suddenly angry]* They must go on.

THE CAPTAIN *[under his breath, touching his forehead with his palm]* Only Allah can say 'must'. . . .

The light is dimming a little. The bearers and cameleers have made all ready for the night. And now there comes a high haunting sound of music in the silence. Thin wailing cries echo the rise and fall of a flute; grow nearer, eerier. And suddenly a crowd of the bearers break in from the right, and ignoring Apollonius and the Captain, form a lamp-lit circle round the flute-player who squats, still fluting, in the sand.

The music becomes restless, vibrating: and the circle, holding out their arms towards the centre, begin a kind of shaking dance, tapping now with left hand and foot, now with right. Gradually the shaking seems to take possession of them, as though

some kind of energy and urgency were being generated. The motion changes irregularly, violently from one side to the other. The rise and fall of the tune grows more forceful, more commanding. And the dancers begin to cry out, in long high ejaculations which chill the blood.

Suddenly, at a change in pitch, the circle flies apart, and the men stream off to the right, shaking, leaping and wailing in a wild abandon of energy.

Hellas, Apollonius and the Captain are left alone, a dim group sitting upon the rugs. It is dusk. The cries continue in the distance.

THE CAPTAIN I don't like that at all. It's a dance they do when they want to work themselves up to something desperate.

APOLLONIUS *[sobered]* Offer them more money.

THE CAPTAIN It may be too late. They know that all this stuff would fetch good money in Baghdad. If it occurs to them. . . .

APOLLONIUS *[appalled]* But our instruments, our books —it's the whole knowledge of the world assembled here. . . .

THE CAPTAIN *[grimly]* With some drink inside them, they won't see it quite like that. After all, that's only your idea. . . .

APOLLONIUS Only my idea! . . . But it would take ten fortunes and twenty years to gather this again. There's work for three centuries to develop the wisdom that lies cradled there. Why, it's the whole future of Hellas that's

at stake.

HELLAS [quietly] Nay, 'tis brass and paper.

APOLLONIUS [exited] It's knowledge. In times of fatness, men no longer value knowledge. It's grown too cheap. They throw it away, or use it to play marbles with—like children who come unaware upon a hoard of pearls. 'Tis then the wise man, like a scavenger, collects what the rest despise . . . and makes all new. . . .

HELLAS 'Tis renewed only in his heart.

APOLLONIUS Knowledge can change anything, even men.

HELLAS Only if they be changed already: and then they have it anyway.

APOLLONIUS [*desperate*] It's my life's task.

THE CAPTAIN [*speculatively*] Might fetch a hundred thousand dinars . . . in Baghdad. . . .

HELLAS [*softly*] Thy task achieved or not achieved, a greater presses.

Apollonius buries his head in his hands.

APOLLONIUS [*in a whisper*] Must *all* be swallowed up?

The cries and wails in the distance begin to change tone, grow more aggressive, gain in volume. The flute acquires an exciting, maddening quality. The bearers are coming back. Suddenly they stream on to the stage, cradling camel-whips. The flute-player is joined by a drummer: they squat in the centre, the others forming a V about them. A sudden alarm comes into the music. The dancers begin to flex their knees in quick time with the urgent pulse of the drum. And all at once they throw

themselves into a pure war-dance. Their camel-whips are transformed into swords, the slash and double-slash of their taut arms into the swing of heavy blades. And as heads dart left, right, up and down, on guard against every side, swords flash and flash again, attacking on every quarter.

Apollonius, Hellas and the Captain of the Caravan crouch in the shadow. Apollonius draws his scimitar.

The war-dance reaches a peak of frenzy; till suddenly the men break from formation again, and leaping and slashing upon all sides, tear down a dozen bundles from the pile, then yelling and wailing in triumph, bear them off into the darkness.

Apollonius is about to leap after them with drawn sword, but the others hold him back. It is dark, save for the glow of camp-fires where they went.

APOLLONIUS [*breaking loose*] Quick, we must rescue what's left ourselves, load what mules we can, and off while they're occupied!

He frantically begins to pull down the baggage-pile, select cases, harness the mules, tighten straps. In the glow of fires off, his shadow lurches fantastically, furiously about the scene. The Captain of the Caravan, a smaller shadow, echoes his. Hellas very quietly rises, gathers her cloak about her.

And unnoticed in the turmoil, an old man in a long rough robe, with cord and scrip about his waist, staff in his hand, enters gravely from the left, from the dark desert. He is carrying a lantern. When he is in the middle of the stage, Apollonius turns suddenly with a bundle, and with a start finds himself face to face.

APOLLONIUS [*caught in full flood*] Well, what can I do for

you, my man?

Very slowly the old man raises his lantern until it lights their two faces, and gazes piercingly into his eyes.

THE CHRISTIAN APOSTLE Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

The pair are frozen, looking at each other. Then the old man slowly lets down his lantern, and slowly, slowly, leaning on his staff, goes off into the east and darkness.

Apollonius is left standing motionless in the middle of the stage, lit only by distant fires off. All excitement, all activity has left him. He turns gravely to the Captain of the Caravan.

APOLLONIUS Take what you need. Divide the rest among the men—and let them sell it in Baghdad. We go alone.

THE CAPTAIN [*aghast*] Alone?

APOLLONIUS No longer quite.

He takes Hellas' arm, and throwing his bag over his shoulder, they walk off slowly, into the darkness—westwards.

The curtain falls.

ACT IV PROLOGUE

The amphitheatre of heaven. Stillness and peace.

A great calm lies over all - as the vast blue vault lies over the radiant centre of the stage.

But this time another music plays. It is simpler, a soft pulse and double-beat, like the faint beating of some enormous heart.

And the gods no longer weave their circle, but stand in line on the lower step of the amphitheatre, tall, noble and silent, with Apollo in his radiance behind and a little above them.

Gradually the music grows louder, the throb of the heart ever deeper and more compelling. And suddenly, silently, the gods who stand alternate step backwards with the beat; pause motionless;

with the next beat take a step behind the rest; pause motionless again; and with the third beat are hidden from our sight. Chronos, Aphrodite and Hermes stand alone, Apollo revealed in radiance between them.

For one measure Hera, Ares and Selene remain eclipsed; then with the next they step aside, with the third forward, and with the fourth the line of the gods is again unbroken.

Slowly the throb and double-beat take possession of the heavens. Calm and unmoved, as though their movement were itself the pulse which drove some heart-blood through the universe, the other three gods step back, step sideways, are hidden from us:

step sideways, step forwards, and form line again. So the

alternation of the gods follows the pulsation of the beat and as each trio is hidden, Apollo shines between the rest and, as all re-appear, so he in turn is hidden.

A new note enters the music. And this time, as Hera, Ares and Selene retreat, they throw their left arms up; as they move to the side, left falls and right swings up; as they pause hidden, their arms are behind their heads. Then as they move to the side again, right arms rise, forward—left arms again, and in line once more their arms are before them, touching finger-tips.

The second trio follows suit. The first repeats. And again a new rhythm enters. As they step back their heads turn right, sideways left, and motionless their heads are raised to heaven. For a long time so, and then yet another note. Not only do the gods step, but as they step, they dance in place, a play of twinkling feet: and their arms rise and fall, their heads turn and drop, in an interlacing of alternate motions, an ever renewed pairing and parting to the slow, all-pervading pulse.

And now, beside the arms, the head, the dance, as the first trio retreat, they cry—with each beat a word:

Brooding!

Joy!

Love!

Struggle!

Wisdom!

Peace!

They are in line again, and the second trio begin as the first continue, joyously, pealingly:

Conception!
Embryo!
Birth!

Youth!
Manhood!
Death!

And as they move, turn, dance, the two sets of cries mingle and merge; and as the second trio take up the second chorus, the first cry out a third:

Growth!
Ascent!
Decay!

Crime!
Healing!
Rebirth!

And now all the motions are flashing and weaving together like some living whole, and the words break together in great chords of sound with every beat:

Brooding! Conception! Growth!
Embryo! Joy! Ascent! Love! Birth!
Decay!

Youth! Struggle! Crime! Manhood!
Wisdom! Healing! Death! Peace!
Rebirth!

As the motion, the throbbing, the chords of song are at

their height, the small dark figure of the Greek may be seen climbing the stairs of heaven from below. And at the same moment, in his tremendous voice, comes Apollo's thunder-clap:

T-i-i-i-m-e, STOP!

In the instant, the kaleidoscope congeals, the godlike figures stand frozen in mid-dance. Hera, Ares and Selene alone are seen, the rest eclipsed, with Apollo shining in glorious radiance between. The lights shining on them are mauve, red and green; they deepen and grow fearful.

THE GREEK [*in panic*] Where are my mother and my lord? Hermes! Aphrodite! . . . fled from heaven itself! Woe, woe is me!

He falls on his knees, beating his breast.

APOLLO Poor foolish mortal!

THE GREEK [*wildly, to himself*] I knew it. They are angry. Not for nothing have the years grown more terrible on earth. Our wickedness offends the gods themselves. And now the most fearful's come. They've fled. There's no hope. . . . No mother, lord for Greece. . . . Nothing now. . . .

APOLLO Blind child! How short of sight? How short of time!

THE GREEK [*throwing himself down before Apollo*] O mighty lord, forgive me, forgive us Greeks. I failed in all my enterprises. E'en with thy help, I failed. In every task attempted, wickedness crept in. With every year more rottenness, more crime. The more I struggled, more it seemed that darkness hemmed us in. . . . And now our

very gods are gone away from us. . . .

APOLLO [*in gentle majesty*] How to explain? How to confine our immortality to thine? Thou too wert made immortal. Yet what little immortality, how small!

THE GREEK Tell us, great sire!

APOLLO How to explain that all the toil and tedium of thy years, the growing terror of the centuries, are but a breath for us? My children, Hermes and Aphrodite, looked in each other's eyes. And there was an age of paradise on earth. They barely drew apart. It seemed that desolation came. . . . Yet 'twas but a moment—one glance, one breath, no fault of thine. . . . Canst transcend thy humanity enough to comprehend?

THE GREEK I see suffering all about me. It is difficult.

APOLLO Yea, it is difficult for thee. For one moment thy godlike parents are eclipsed—as in heaven's majestic course, so too am I. To thee it seems all's lost. Yet 'tis but an instant. Look then . . . and rejoice! *And with the same tremendous voice, he cries:*

T-i-i-i-m-e, ROLL ON!

And suddenly, the whole motion, the chords, the heavenly cries and dancing colour live again. All is movement. All is living, breathing; all dependent on some hidden play, some deep disturbing heart-beat of the universe,

And Hermes and Aphrodite have emerged; alive with their warm and tender colours, noble, magnificent and young. The Greek falls in obeisance before them.

APOLLO What little faith ye have! What terrors spring

from thy weak perception, so short sight!

THE GREEK [*still obeisant*] Forgive me, lord.

APOLLO Think ye that this can be tainted by all your wickedness on earth?

THE GREEK [*cries out*] NO, no, no. . . .

APOLLO Yet is the gap between us too great for thee to bear, too vast for understanding as thou art. 'Twixt our time and thine the gulf's unfathomable. So must I temper our time to weakness of thy intellect. Watch then, and try to understand—that thy decay may not be what it seems.

And slowly something strange begins to happen. The music, the dance begin to slow down. More slowly weave the figures, turn heads. arms uplift. The cries grow more drawn out, the intervals more long. And the very motions of the gods from one posture to another. slow down, expand, grow long and lazy—like some tremendous clockwork running down.

Imperceptible the tempo dies. From slow to slower the figures interweave. And what was joy and twinkling gaiety before is now, by elongation of its time, grown ominous. Some strange threat seems bound up with the slow deliberate turning of a head, the long slow lifting of an arm. Some terrible intention masters all the gods. And what was light as air. easy as breath at speed, becomes by pressure of time a tedious and overpowering task.

Now the music has grown so slow that it is no longer harmony. It draws out into a groan and dies. And the movements continue their inexorable running down in silence. Like a quick-moving tinkling brook that is slowly overcome by frost, the group

gradually congeals. Now a single step back is a long minute's effort; the eye can no longer follow the invisible uplifting of an arm. And as movement becomes unseen, fear grows.

At first, as the gods grew slower, a strange fever seemed to possess the Greek. His small mean figure darted feverish about them, head and arms jerking in contrast with their immense deliberation. And in measure as they slowed, so he grew quicker and more afraid.

But now, in awe and terror he draws back before the unseen motion, which yet brings change, some fearful change.

For the lights are slowly *changing too.*

Now *Ares stands in* the mid-point of the front line, and the red *glow deepens on* him, spreads, fades all the other lights. *And Aphrodite, who stood next to him, slowly, inevitably withdraws, her backward step drawn out intolerably. At last one foot rejoins the other; the warm light upon her slowly fades. Her other foot begins its sideways movement to eclipse. Slower and slower she moves, but moves inexorably. Unseen by watching sight, the hem of her robe, one arm, one shoulder move behind Ares' scarlet silhouette. Her warm light pales, dies. Now her breast, her neck, a half of her figure are eclipsed.*

There is no light upon the stage but *waxing* crimson glare, soft waning *glow. And with each second* the first grows fiercer, and the last more faint.

Now but Aphrodite's profile—infininitely sweet, infinitely compassionate—one arm, the outline of her robe remain. Slowly, slowly she moves into *eclipse.*

And the little figure of the Greek, frozen too, one hand in horror to his open mouth, is silhouetted against the crimson glare which now possesses all the stage. The curtain falls.

A rocky shore near Cape Sunium. Dark, stormy and windy. The sound of the sea beating against the cliffs. Ruins of a temple upon a headland left. Huddled under the rocks an old man—perhaps 65—with a white beard, evidently exhausted and in pain, sheltered by a young woman wrapped in a dark cloak. The man is Homer-Plato-Apollonius in extreme old age.

HELLAS This is where Porphyry's message said to set us ashore. There's the ruined temple to Athene that was to be the meeting place. Lucky the boatman knew it.

PLOTINUS [*gently*] Why could we not come to Athens? 'Tis a little fantastic, this.

HELLAS Porphyry said that one could not know from one week to the next in whose hands would Athens be. The barbarians are pouring in from the North, riding twenty miles a day, and looting and burning in the bargain. And not a single regiment to hold them. . . .

PLOTINUS Not a Roman legion in Attica! 'Tis like the end—or the beginning. . . .

HELLAS The beginning?

PLOTINUS When Greece was young, there were no legions.

HELLAS So long ago! Yet almost I remember. When the little boat was carrying us in against the tide, I thought:

'This water never knew baths, nor Roman aqueducts. 'Tis Greek Poseidon bears us up—terrible, godlike, the deep of life and death.'

PLOTINUS [slowly] Yes, to our land. Twenty long years in Rome—yet we were strangers there; ambassadors, now coming home.

HELLAS But you were born in Egypt. . . .

PLOTINUS [*terribly weak, but smiles to himself*] Nearing home then.

HELLAS [*with a gesture of love and pity, wraps her cloak around him*] My father! Dear doubly father!

Plotinus strokes her hand, looking at her with great affection.

The storm beats up in gales of wind and rain, tearing their capes and drowning their voices in the roar of the sea and bursting breakers.

HELLAS [*shouting above the storm*] Poseidon . . . Poseidon . . . is angry!

The lash and beat of the water breaks over her shout and bursts thunderously wave after wave, till its rhythm can be heard as a wild bass song, filling the whole scene.

What shall men do when the waters rise—Po-sei-don!
When the crashing waves wash down the skies?

Po-sei-don!

What but rock can bear the shock When the
floods are loose and gods' dams burst? Who shall
survive when the oceans thirst?—

Po-sei-don!

. . . Po-sei-don! . . . Po-sei-don! . . . *[dying
away, each 'Poseidon' the bursting of a wave.]*

When swirling seas shall swallow the shore—

Po-sei-don! When cities and ships go down their
maw—Po-sei-don!

Sea alone when land is gone, When the whole
earth is a flooded vault, And heaven itself is soaked
and salt—Po-sei-don! . . . Po-sei-don! . . . Po-sei-don!

. . .

Once the end came in heavenly flame—Po-sei-don!

And once in blizzard and hurricane—Po-sei-don!

Fire and air left some to spare, But when
crashing waves wash down the skies, What shall men
do when the waters rise?—Po-sei-don! . . . Po-sei-
don! . . . Po-sei-don! . . .

*A cloaked figure can be seen against the skyline,
struggling head down against the wind. It slips into a
gully and comes scrambling down the cliff to the
shore—a sturdy man of about 35.*

HELLAS [*rushes forward and throws herself in his arms*]
Porphyry!

PORPHYRY You came . . . after all.

HELLAS We did not wish, *he* came. [*she indicates Plotinus*]

He had us give out that he was dead—and amid the mourning, came.

PORPHYRY [*kneeling before him*] Father and master!

PLOTINUS [*kindly*] Well?

PORPHYRY [*earnest*] Why did you come? This is no place. . . .

PLOTINUS I have a journey to make . . . from here.

PORPHYRY To Egypt?

PLOTINUS Perhaps. We'll see. How are the brethren? How is Athens?

PORPHYRY Our people well, but very ill with Athens. There's but one day left, they say. The barbarians came through Thermopylae three nights ago, shaggy ponies as far as the eye could see, we heard. They're massing at Thebes—all there's in flames, the temples looted, butchery. . . . Come not to Athens. father!

PLOTINUS Flames would be warmer than this shore. Besides, 'tis too late to go back now. After so many years . . . I'd like to see my friends.

HELLAS What shall you tell them?

PLOTINUS [*strangely*] Tell, I don't know. What will they see—'s the question. [*He struggles to his feet.*] Well, when can we go?

PORPHYRY There are mules and a litter waiting beyond

the cliff. They will carry us to Athens in three or four hours. Time to see the brethren and get away before the Gothic scouts ride in. Though there's panic everywhere. . . .

PLOTINUS Then let us go up.

With an immense effort he straightens himself, and makes to clamber up the rocky face of the cliff, just able to lift one foot at a time to the next hold.

PORPHYRY [in horror] You cannot go up there!

PLOTINUS [*panting*] We must all go up. . . . There is no other way. . . . It is too wet and cold down here.

HELLAS [*runs to him*] No, no, you are sick, too weak. Wait. Let help come!

PLOTINUS [*to Porphyry*] Help me then!

Porphyry, coming below, helps to place his foot in a crevice in the rock, then half helps, half heaves him further. It is a tremendous struggle. After gaining a few feet, Plotinus almost collapses, falling across a ledge of rock to rest. The wind and storm beat up, tearing about them, deafening. But Plotinus, with a great effort, raises himself, stretches up his hands, feels with his feet, hauls himself further. From below, Porphyry helps as best he can. There is nothing but the roaring of wind and rain, and in a pause the terrible panting of the old man. For what seems an immense time they struggle there, no word spoken, gaining a foot at a time. Hellas is kneeling below, her eyes lifted towards them, as if praying. One still more violent gust and scream of wind—and in the moment's lull that follows:

PLOTINUS [*panting terribly*] Only thus one climbs. Dost

understand?

PORPHYRY [*in an agonized voice*] Not fully, father.

Without saying anything, Plotinus makes another supreme effort, gains one more foot. So it goes on—for perhaps five minutes. At last Plotinus heaves himself on to the top of the cliff, and half sits, half lies there, as Porphyry scrambles up beside him. A single rift of light opens in the low leaden cloud behind them.

PLOTINUS [*faintly*] You see?

HELLAS [*shouts up from below*] Are you safe?

PLOTINUS Nearly safe.

PORPHYRY [*peering into the gloom*] Mules and men—they are coming to take you on. It is safe now. Let me stay with Hellas.

PLOTINUS So be it.

HELLAS [*entreating from below*] Go now, father, I beg you go—but do not leave me quite.

PLOTINUS I will come down to you again—later.

And struggling to his feet, he gathers his staff, his cloak about him, and step by step hobbles along the skyline to the ruined temple left, alone. Porphyry crouching at the top of the gully, and Hellas standing below with arms outstretched, watch him go. But he does not turn back.

The storm rises again, the roaring of the wind grows, the beating of the breakers upon the cliffs surges ever more terrible and insistent. And as the turmoil swells, once more the deep bass song begins to surge through the elements:

What shall men do when the waters rise—Po-sei-
don! When the crashing waves wash down the
skies?

Po-sei-don!

What but rock can bear the shock When the
floods are loose and gods' dams burst? Who shall
survive when the oceans thirst?—

Po-sei-don!

. . . Po-sei-don! . . . Po-sei-don! . . .

When swirling seas shall swallow the shore—
Po-sei-don! When cities and ships go down their
maw—Po-sei-don!

Sea alone when land is gone, When the whole
earth is a flooded vault, And heaven itself is soaked
and salt—Po-sei-don! . . . Po-sei-don! . . . Po-sei-
don! . . .

Once the end came in heavenly flame—Po-sei-don!
And once in blizzard and hurricane—Po-sei-don!

Fire and air left some to spare, But when
crashing waves wash down the skies, What shall
men do when the waters rise?—Po-sei-don! . . . Po-
sei-don! . . . Po-sei-don! . . .

The curtain *falls* slowly upon the storm.

ACT IV SCENE TWO

An open hillside with a road leading down into Athens. It might be the same scene as Act I, Scene I, except for an ancient statue of Hermes at the cross-roads, the head and one arm missing, and an abandoned booth for food or drink upon the right. The tree too, if it is the same tree, is now bare and some branches have been torn off, apparently to kindle the burnt-out fire which lies below. The whole scene is grey and bleak, save for a flickering red glow down to the left, as though from a fire far away.

Up from the direction of this glow comes trudging a nondescript little man pushing a handcart, in which are a baby, two jars, a sack, and some odd bundles. Two dirty unkempt children

are hanging on the sides, and a ragged woman enveloped in a shawl follows a little way behind.

At the same moment Porphyry and Hellas, cloaked, enter from the right, so that the two parties meet in the centre of the stage.

PORPHYRY Where to, citizen?

THE MAN WITH THE HANDCART *[dully]* Don' know. This way like.

PORPHYRY Why, what happened?

THE MAN The bloody Goths 'll be in town by night. they say. Everyone gets 'is throat slit, they say, and the women somethink else first. Better get out while the going's good, I thought. Not much to lose. So 'ere we

are.

HELLAS [*gathers the tired children to her cloak*] Poor dears!

PORPHYRY [*catching sight of something in the cart*] What's this? [*He leans forward quickly to pick it up. The man makes a feeble move to stop him, and then stands there sheepishly, too tired to trouble.*]

PORPHYRY [*unwrapping a bundle*] Great gods! The Holy Mother in pure gold! [*in horror*] Athena . . . from the temple treasury!

THE MAN [*protesting weakly*] 'Tweren't me as took it, sir. There was a crowd of 'em. Said if the Goths were going to get it all, Greeks might as well 'ave some first.

PORPHYRY They sacked the temple treasury? Greeks did that?

THE MAN Well, it sort of 'appened like. One moment they was out in the street, calling for the defence of the city. Then someone shouted: 'There's gold in there!' And the next minute they was swarmin' through the sanctuary, and the stuff was all over the place. I just picked this off the street, straight I did. Might as well me as the next man, I says to meself.

PORPHYRY So low Athens fell! [*He stares at the statuette in his hand, awe and bafflement mixed upon his face, for it has no meaning any more. Then he notices the wrapping*] And this? Why, it's a papyrus from the academy. . . .

THE MAN Sure, they were blowing down the street like beech leaves—so I picked one up to keep the figure decent-like.

PORPHYRY [*not hearing, reads softly from the fragment*]
'And the Stranger said: "Listen now. During a certain period God himself guides each cosmic being in its course. But when at last the circle of its allotted time is done, he lets it go. And it of its own accord runs back the other way—a living creature endowed with intelligence returning to him who fashioned it in the beginning." [*The paper falls from his hand, a groan comes from him, and his whole body seems to wilt.*] O Attica! Attica! [*His voice breaks and he buries his head in his hands.*]

THE MAN Well, I'll be getting along, I guess: though where to, Pallas only knows. . . . [*He takes the statuette, smears some dirt off with the back of his hand, wraps it in the papyrus, and puts it back into his cart. Then he jerks his head at the woman*] !Ere, let's go!

Without a word, she drags herself up, and shuffles off after him, still unknown in her shawl.

Hellas comes over to Porphyry, kneels, and takes his bowed head into her lap. He does not resist.

HELLAS My dear! My very dear!

Porphyry holds her without *lifting his head or speaking. And all at once one notices that they have fallen into an echo of the attitude of Homer and Hellas in Act I, Scene I. The same hillside, but unkempt and grey; the same tree above them, but bare and jagged; and Hellas poised above Porphyry who has let himself slip wearily to the ground. But now it is he who has forgotten, and she who understands.*

HELLAS [*stroking his hair, tenderly*] Suppose I were to be

with child by you . . . a little chubby one, with your curls, your voice. . . . [With sudden *force she lifts up his head and looks deep into his eyes.*] You would not let them kill it, Porphyry? You would protect it with your own life? You promise me that? Promise? [*She speaks with passionate demand— a new Hellas.*]

PORPHYRY [*deeply moved and troubled*] Hellas with child by me? Now, at this time. . . in ruin and bloodshed. . . . O gods, what have you done?

HELLAS [*with deep fervour*] Yes, what did they do to us, Porphyry? That time you came to Rome, that marvellous terrible time . . . did I conceive, or Aphrodite? Something was fashioned there, as god and goddess wheeled together, in a blaze of blinding light. Some new cosmos. some godling gotten. And in that moment you were in my arms. . .

PORPHYRY [holding her close to him] What else did you see, Hellas?

HELLAS I saw time open, and in its womb lay all of Hellas long since buried. The ruins rose again, stone upon stone, grew fresh and gleaming; fallen columns stood; marble glistened and whitened newly in the sun. The sadness of this last age fell away, and the great marble palaces, exquisite temples, bazaars and brothels on the hill turned gay as 'twere high summer. Then figures swarmed like ants upon them, and roughening the bright Stone, bore it away and back into the quarries. Over the place grass grew, fresh flowers bloomed. Men sang,

quarrelled, cheated, fought, loved and tortured each other. . . and seemed each moment younger and braver in the doing. Slim ships like needles flew back from every coast on earth, made fast in harbour, where singing lads took them apart and carting the beams out into the hills, there set them up . . . and straightway they were trees. And thus the forests spread upon the land, all filled with scent of pine, flower-carpeted, gay with bird-song, so that the hearts of men were glad again. And in that dawn I walked upon this very hill, and by this very tree met a blind minstrel boy . . . and stopped, and lay down . . . and you, and he . . . and all was blinding light. . . gods dancing . . . utter wonder. . .

As she has been speaking the light has changed slowly, so that for a little the sky seems blue, the grass green, and the tree clad in blossoms—a hint, a memory. Then it turns back again, and once more all is bleak, grey, save where in the distance the red glow ominously flickers. From the right the little man with the handcart, one unkempt child, and the weary invisible woman in the shawl, trudge back again.

HELLAS [hushed] And yet—most glorious and terrible - nothing grew nor passed: but all was there. Those babes who played with young lambs in the first innocence of time, laughed forever in the grass: and in the same moment others fell screaming under the Gothic hooves —but all eternally. And I was there in every scene, that dawn, the hot high noon, the bloody sunset . . . with some task laid on me. Ah, what weight of knowledge!

Too much to bear. . . .

Hellas and Porphyry cling together.

THE MAN WITH THE HANDCART [*sniffing*] They got the kid. Trampled 'er down. Just like that. Wivout a thought. Then one leans down from 'is 'orse and grabs the stature. 'Gold!' 'e says. 'For that you can 'ave a chance on yer bleedin' life. Ten minutes to get the 'ell from 'ere!' 'e says. And we runs for it, leaving the kid. Not even a decent coffin. Poor kid! [*He wipes his nose and eyes with his sleeve, sniffing. The woman does not move or make a sign.*]

HELLAS O gods. . . .

THE MAN [*turning to them*] You'd better push on. The 'orses went the other way. But there's a party'll be 'ere in 'arf a minute. Excuse me, lady.

He pushes the little cart, *the one child hanging on, the silent beshawled woman following: and they trudge off left, back towards the red glow.*

HELLAS We must find father, and the brethren . . . now. while there's time.

PORPHYRY [*galvanized into action*] Yes, take them away somewhere. One still might buy a boat, and make for Italy . . . your father. . .

HELLAS [*very quietly*] . . . has a journey to make from here. Come, let us go.

They take hands, *and go off down the hill left, towards the ever-brightening glare. The red creeps slowly up the western sky, begins to touch with blood the broken Hermes. Far away one can*

imagine a low crackling.

Then suddenly shouts, orders, war-cries, clatter and beat of hooves. Near pandemonium. A single horseman bent low over a shaggy pony gallops at top speed across the stage from right to left. A moment's pause. Then, with an ear-splitting yell, a second, spinning his javelin. Half the sky is crimson now. And when a party of foot-soldiers, in belted skins and wadded leggings, bursts like a torrent across the stage, their weapons and shields, antler and lion-muzzle crests seem bathed in blood itself from the reflected light. Each man carries a dagger and a wavy two-edged sword, with which he plays tricks, spinning them from hand to hand, tossing them in the air, balancing one across the other, with roars, war-veils, and shouts of laughter. From the round skin shields, strapped to each forearm, animal faces grin.

There is some kind of an order above the din, and with an answering shout, sixteen men run forward into a V-shaped formation, while the rest squat round in a half-circle behind them. Three pot-drums and two harsh flutes begin to beat a strange exciting rhythm, and in sudden unison the circle of men begin to shout, on two rising notes, rocking as they do so:

*Ya Hu! Ya HAQQ! Ya HAIY! Ya HUKM!
Ya HAMD! Ya HAL!*

As they rock forward, the second syllable, in a strange high tone, seems to shoot from the tops of their bowed heads with intoxicating force.

Suddenly the sixteen men begin a fierce dance to the same rhythm, swinging half right, stamping first with one foot, then the other, and in the same moment cutting the air with their

swords *and jabbing* with their *daggers*. Then in unison they all swing forward, stamp, stamp, swords up *and then straight ahead, daggers jabbing, and at each* rhythm shouting with the others:

Ya Hu! Ya HAQQ! Ya HAIY! Ya
HUKM! Ya HAMD! Ya HAL!

The whole air begins to vibrate with the double shout and double stamp, as the warriors swing half left, cutting and jabbing; *then forward again, then in a single* whirl threatening and cutting at the circle of shouters behind them. But the shouters only roar the louder, more overpoweringly:

Ya HAKIM! Ya HALIM! Ya HAFIZ! Ya
HASIB! Ya HAKIM! Ya HAMID!

The rhythm *grows fiercer and fiercer*. The warriors, *swinging now right, now left, now back, now forward, seem to become a single whole, fighting on all sides, against all comers simultaneously, invulnerable, irresistible*. Now the whole scene is blood-red, the whirling swords and *daggers flash scarlet, as though fresh used, in the glare from the left*. The stamping, drumming and shouting *grow to a crescendo, as if generating a single irresistible whirlwind of violence*. Then, *at a sign, the shouters leap to their feet, and with one great roar, all surge together off the stage to the left, down towards the glare of burning Athens*.

ACT IV SCENE THREE

The same open-air gymnasium in Athens as in Act II, Scene I, but under a dark and livid sky. The same courtyard, surrounded by a pillared colonnade, statues and stone seats. But ivy and moss grow up the columns, some statues are broken; and the Acropolis beyond has become overgrown with slums, so that only confused glimpses of the ancient splendour are visible.

Moreover, here and there upon the hill, fires glow redly, an echo of the fires on the night of Socrates' condemnation—but redder and more ominous. A huge blaze near the Parthenon lights the whole sky with crimson. Ugly shouting in the distance.

Round about the courtyard, upon the steps and seats, sit twenty or thirty men and women, both in loose white trousers, Eastern-fashion, and loose white tunics, which the women wear longer and sashed with coloured scarves. There is a strange calm among those in the courtyard, yet charged with deep emotion, and contrasting strangely with the wildness and turmoil one feels abroad in the city beyond.

On a stone seat to the right sits Plotinus. Musicians—men and women—with guitars and flutes, sit upon the steps around him, but at ease, as if waiting for something. A sacrificial fire, with calm white flame, burns near by.

Suddenly from the left two cloaked figures appear. A gust of the violence beyond seems to enter with them. They cross to where

Plotinus sits, *and throw themselves wearily before him. It is Porphyry and Hellas.*

Hellas takes Plotinus' hand, and lays her head upon his knee

without a word, as if coming home.

PORPHYRY [*full of emotion and excitement*] Master, thank God you reached here safely!

PLOTINUS [*calmly*] Why not? It was arranged.

PORPHYRY [*still breathless*] The Goths are a mile from the city gates. One can see the dust of their hooves on the road from Marathon. We were but minutes ahead of them.

PLOTINUS [*still calm*] Well, good that you were.

PORPHYRY It's still clear by the Sacred Western Gate: we could get away to Eleusis, if you're quick. Go back to. . . .

PLOTINUS [*as if quietening a small boy*] Nay, be more calm. It is too late for that. Stay here. Make yourself at ease.

He strokes Hellas' head upon his knee affectionately. The excitement seems to die out of Porphyry at his words, and he too

relaxes at Plotinus' feet.

PORPHYRY [*under his breath*] Pardon, master. . . .

PLOTINUS I came to be with you at the end of all our days. Think you I would go away again so soon?

AN EAGER YOUNG MAN Will you not save yourself for us?

PLOTINUS [*gently*] Better, I think, if we all go together.

THE EAGER YOUNG MAN To your land of Egypt?

PLOTINUS [*strangely*] Perhaps you could come there.

HELLAS [*raises her head*] Tell me rather of Greece, my father.

PLOTINUS [*stroking her hair still*] A thousand years ago the blessing of the gods fell upon this place. The soul of Hellas was flung down from heaven upon this very hill. How beautiful it grew! Clothed itself in temples, music and philosophy, spread to the very ends of earth and taught truth there. And in each age new men made themselves messengers between her and the gods who sired her—Homer and Plato, Apollonius—so that she never could forget her origin. But souls of civilizations too grow old, their bodies weary, duties done—and turn them at last with longing to another time, not this: some other dwelling where the years flow differently from ours. . . .

A STRANGER AT THE DOOR [*cries out suddenly in a loud voice*]

Beware the wrath to come!

PLOTINUS [*quietly*] Welcome, stranger! We would beware that which was also.

HELLAS [*shudders*] Who is it? He frightens me.

PORPHYRY [*stands*] Declare your business, stranger!

THE STRANGER [*in a loud violent voice*] I am a chosen Christian! Come to warn thee! For ye are good men, and may yet be saved from your damnable superstitions. It is the eleventh hour—repent then in time! I, in the name of Christ, command thee!

PLOTINUS [*softly*] *In time, or in eternity? . . .*

[more aloud] Stay with us, stranger, you are very welcome.

THE STRANGER The Goths are at the gates! God's ire incarnate! All rottenness, all that's ancient and decayed must go down before them! Let them burn, destroy! Upon your ruins grows our New Jerusalem!

HELLAS *[her shudder turning to deep terrible sobbing]* O Athens! Athens!

Far away there is a new burst of shouting, war-cries, oaths.

THE STRANGER *[fiercely]* The very devils work for us. They destroy but to make room for what we have to do. A few years more, and Christ will reign openly—new Emperor, new Empire! Ours, ours is the future!

PLOTINUS *[soothing Hellas, softly]* And thine the sweet past. Go back and be refreshed. . . .

With blazing eyes the Stranger strides among the waiting men and women, staring into their faces, pauses before a statue of Aphrodite, and, with a sudden tremendous blow, knocks it from its pedestal. The marble figure falls and breaks in two.

THE STRANGER Whore of Babylon!

There is a sudden sigh of horror from those looking on, and two or three men leap up to throw themselves upon the Stranger. But Plotinus, raising his hand, by some inner force arrests them without a word.

PLOTINUS *[gently]* 'Tis but a figure of stone. Learn to bear all.

For a moment angry murmurs, a movement of indignation, a woman's wail—then silence again, silence charged with intense emotion. The Stranger turns; and with blazing eyes, stands in

the middle of the stage, as if challenging them to deny him anything. Yet something in the strange hush makes him pause.

THE STRANGER What do you wait for, O unhappy ones?

PLOTINUS [calmly] The beginning, friend.

THE STRANGER And where, deceiver, shall you find it?

PLOTINUS In the end.

Far away, the shouting has grown to an immense roar. Rattle of hooves, cries, crackling of fire. The glares in different parts of the city seem to be joining. All in the distance is black smoke, red fire. Yet still in the courtyard calm and silence.

PLOTINUS Our deliverers draw near. May they share the goodness that their act makes possible.

THE EAGER YOUNG MAN I have a sword, master. Place me in the entrance to keep them off!

PLOTINUS [quietly] Remember to do as thou must. [The Young Man goes off eagerly. Plotinus turns to Porphyry beside him] But a little while ago, and those would have been your words.

Now Plotinus, Hellas and Porphyry are very close together. Hellas has her head upon Plotinus' lap, her hand in Porphyry's, who kneels with his other arm about her, staring fixedly into his master's eyes. The three in some way form one whole, apart.

PORPHYRY [under his breath] How quick to act! How hard to bear!

PLOTINUS Bear all, for all to bear thee.

HELLAS I will bear thee.

PORPHYRY Bear me!

THE STRANGER [his back to them, cries aloud to the audience]

Whither?

HELLAS Inwards.

PORPHYRY Backwards.

PLOTINUS Upwards.

THE STRANGER [with *blazing* eyes, urgently] What shall be born, O wicked ones?

HELLAS A hero.

PORPHYRY A soul.

PLOTINUS A world.

THE STRANGER [in a *terrible voice*] Devils, tell me whence?

HELLAS From the womb.

PORPHYRY From the heart.

PLOTINUS From the head.

THE STRANGER [*all his violence* upon the *audience*] By magic, by wicked magic?

HELLAS By woman.

PORPHYRY By man.

PLOTINUS By god.

THE STRANGER [bitterly] Can whore and harlot bear?

HELLAS If she but love and dare.

THE STRANGER Can pagan live again?

PORPHYRY At both ends of the chain.

THE STRANGER And shall magician pray?

PLOTINUS After his fashion, yea.

A pool of light has begun to glow about the group of three, and the Stranger is silhouetted darkly against them. Voices from those around echo Plotinus' words.

Pray in our fashion! The great, the holy prayer, Pallas, attend us! Hermes and Aphrodite! The prayer, the prayer!

All sink upon their knees in a great semicircle about the trio, their heads bent and their arms crossed upon their breasts. The Stranger, too, in the centre front of the stage, eclipsing the group of three, falls on his knees facing the audience and with head back, hands together, remains motionless in Christian prayer.

The musicians begin a strange solemn melody of strings and flutes, and a wave of inner concentration passes through the kneeling figures. There is a long waiting count, and then slowly, all together, the men and women lift their heads and raise their arms, palms forward in adoration. Then they cross them again, and counting always, go through a long strange ritual of invocation and prostration, bowings and turnings, lunges to left and right, beating of breast and head, as though in some prayer of motion not words, some deep, exact and emotional language of the body.

The light on the trio has grown stronger. And now Plotinus rises slowly, wonderfully. He is no longer weak and old, but nobly straight. Slowly he moves among the praying figures, and as he passes each, lays his hand lightly on their crown. Each one he touches, and, as he does, each seems as if filled with the light that follows him. Calm falls upon them, and their movements become' pure and perfect.

When he has finished, slowly, gravely, Plotinus begins to turn, left hand raised, as if to receive some gift from heaven, right extended as if to pass it down to earth. His revolving is calm

like the slow spinning of the sun, making a centre and focus to the ecstatic gestures of the prayer.

The flutes and guitars play. The white-clad figures turn this way and that, bow, bend and abase themselves, lift their heads, raise their arms in longing skywards. And behind it all one now feels a strange inner pattern, some inner time of attention, some knowledge of deep and hidden things. With hands crossed devoutly, they bow to the East, South, West and North, prostrate themselves again, then with their own hands lift themselves by the neck once more. With gesture of rejection they fling themselves away, abandon themselves, throw themselves down, beat foreheads on the ground in gratitude and longing. This, as the sky darkens, the red glow sways and flares, is true prayer, the only prayer, prayer of body, mind and soul in unison, prayer of those who have given all, who can no longer turn back, who must pass beyond the end.

Now the white figures have rolled upon their backs, beaten their heads again in self-abandon on the stones; and then, as if in sudden vision, shielded their eyes from the blinding white light that flares for a minute across the sky.

The music throbs more nobly, more longingly, more majestically, as the clamour of the mob and army comes closer down the hill. The praying men and women lift themselves, up, up in gratitude and adoration. They know, they have seen, they have naught to give but thanks. An extraordinary calm hangs over and protects them, an extraordinary confidence and certainty shine from each face.

For now the mob is at the door. There is a babel of shouts,

clash of weapons, flare of pine torches. The Eager Young Man has put up his sword, been driven back, tripped, and the torrent of savage soldiers pours shouting over him—to burst, screaming, swords flashing, hot with blood and sweat, among the still kneeling figures. Frenzy of war-dance drowns the rhythm of the prayer. Those in white vanish beneath the rush, swords strike, daggers plunge—soft groans, limp figures sprawling beneath the throng. The Stranger kneels, as he has knelt throughout the prayer, motionless, hands uplifted, untouchable.

Behind him the trio of Plotinus, Hellas and Porphyry are linked together in the same strange concentration, a glow of light focussed upon them. Plotinus stands straight and motionless, after the turning. Hellas kneels with her head buried in his robe, Porphyry beside her, gazing up at his master. The slaughter swirls about them, in a rising passion of blood and violence. The sky is black, the torches sway drunkenly about the stage, peals of thunder roll.

And gradually, behind the pandemonium, grows faintly audible the strange ringing with which the opera began. At first one cannot be sure that it is there. Then imperceptibly it penetrates the clamour, pervades it, masters it. The scene now is hell, scarlet and black shadows battling with animal cries over shapeless figures amid ruins crashing and crumbling into darkness. Ever deeper darkness—save for the pool of light that bathes the one still group.

And now the ringing grows unbearable, penetrates all, shatters the ears, seems as if it would disintegrate hell itself. Out of the pitch black a huge barbarian rears suddenly behind the

group, scarlet, sweating, swinging bloody sword. The three do not move, Plotinus' gaze is fixed unflickeringly in Porphyry's, his in the other's. A life-line lies between them. For a fraction of a second all is still, the ringing utterly unendurable. Then the sword plunges in Plotinus' back, and, with eyes wide open as if in consciousness, the old man topples towards gazing Porphyry. There is a terrible sound as his forehead crashes upon the other's upturned face, then utter darkness, ringing, ringing, ringing. . . .

EPILOGUE

And suddenly the amphitheatre of heaven is there, and the gods dancing, music of the spheres, and the whole kaleidoscope of heaven turning in radiant aura of motion, music, love and coloured light. Nor does the ringing pause, but unimaginably swells, till it and the blinding radiance are one—and in this ringing radiance Hermes and Aphrodite move to each other's arms, while in the foreground the small straight figure of the Greek, arms uplifted in adoration, mounts once more towards them. The curtain falls.

THE END