

THE ANGEL OF DEATH

BY A. W. ALMQVIST

ANGEL OF DEATH

Ye children, Adam's, of earth begotten,
Who unto earth shall again return!
You are my own: Be it not forgotten,
I am the penalty sin did earn!...
 O man, time's guest!
 With my grasp, I reach thee,
 From east to west,
 And by voices, teach thee
With scripture's word in the Master's name,
From air and water and earth and flame.

You build and dwell like the sparrows, building,
In sunny summer, their fragile nest:
Securely feeling, in shady shielding,
They sing so joyful in happy rest;
 But sudden gust
 Of the tempest shatters
 The tiny crust
 Of their nest in tatters-
The merry song, heard so short before,
With grief is silenced forevermore.

Like pigeons, cooing in anxious calling,
You sigh for morn, with to-day not through,
When, unbethought, like a trap-door falling,
The earth unlocketh itself for you-
 You disappear
 Where no light is nearing-
 Soon mem'ry dear
 Is no more endearing-
And new-lit moon, from its silvered sky,
Again, sees others arrive and fly.

In circling dances so lightly swinging
You follow wildly amusement's thread,
With myrtle blooming and music ringing ...
But solemn I on the threshold tread:-
 The dance is checked
 And the clang is wailing,
 The wreath is wrecked
 And the bride is paling:
The end of splendor and joy and might
Is only sorrow and tears and blight.

I am the mighty, who has the power,
Till yet a mightier shall appear.
In deepest pit, on the highest tower,
My chilling spirit is ever near:
 Those plagues of night
 And of desolation,
 Whose breath of blight
 May annul a nation,
They slay the victims, which I select,
Whom shield and armor can not protect.

I wrap the wing round the polar tempest
And calm the waves ere they reach the strand.
I crush the schemes of dynastic conquest,
And wrench the club from the tyrant's hand.
 I eras chase,
 Like the hour just passing;
 And race on race,
 With their works amassing,
Like heaving waves, in my footsteps flow,
Till, last, no ripples their murmur show.

'Gainst me in vain are your wit and letters,
'Gainst me nor weapons nor arts prevail.
I freedom give to the slave in fetters,-
His ruler's will I in irons nail.

 I lead the battle-
 And armies tumble,
 Like slaughtered cattle,
 While cannons rumble,
And never rise from their sudden fall
Until alarmed by the judgment-call.

I wave my hand-and, with whirlwinds' sweeping
All life on earth to that place doth fly,
Where not a sound to the ear is creeping,
Where not a tongue moves to make reply.

 My foot meanders-
 And kings and heroes,
 And Alexanders,
 And wicked Neros,
And princes, lofty in might and lust,
Are all transformed to-a handful dust.

In lowly earth, upon which they bother
And beg and wrangle for rank and gift,
I mix the races among each other,
I lay the centuries, drift on drift.

 Forlorn and friendless
 Exists no pleasure;
 In shadows endless
 No pomp, or treasure.
Their owners left them when on came night-
Now others claim them, with lawful right.

There is no stronghold on earth erected,
No guarded fort, that can save you, known.
Though by recorded transfer protected,
Your gained possession is not your own:

 The purple hems
 Of your silk-robed neighbor,
 The crape, the gems,
 And the yoke of labor,
Lo, other mortals their folds adorn,
On other shoulders their loads are borne!

You have arrived, you shall part in pity;

You have not here either house or home.
You soon shall dwell in that narrow city,
Where sun and moon never lit the dome;
 Where crest and foil
 At the gate shall crumble-
 And, from his toil,
 Be released the humble;
Where captives' fetters, and love's sweet band,
Shall, fragile, break by the same strong hand.

Where is your wife, and where is your mother?-
Then they have wandered away that road,
Whence none returneth to greet another,
The foot-path, soon, to your last abode....
 Take tender care of
 The charge God left thee,
 Ere, unaware of,
 It be bereft thee,
Before your eyes nevermore to mount,
Till for its keeping you shall account!

"Where is your brother? Where is your equal?"
Will then be questions too late to heed.
You then find brethren-such is the sequel-
You spiteful rich, in the worms you feed!
 And when they fattened,
 Like you, expire,
 A reptile batted
 Shall growth acquire,
Whose stings and gnawing shall never cease.
Upon your conscience, devoid of peace.

For you it waits, you, whose greed is preying
On mishap's victims, on joy forlorn;
Who, faith and country alike betraying,
The good deride and the sacred scorn;
 Who, laws repressing
 And hearts decoying,
 Are virtue's blessing,
 For fun, destroying-
And woe is fun's and derision's prize,
When, pale, the phantoms of vengeance rise.

For you it waits, all ye lying spirits,
When, stiff, the tongue to the palate sticks.

Your tongue would poison all honest merits,
Defiling honor by artful tricks;-

But, at my bar,
There is no demurrer:
The tomb I spar,
And I gag the slurrer,-

Who next thereafter, when speech is past,
To Him shall answer, who judges last!

Then search, with rigor, your minds' desire,
Then probe, in tremor, your souls' intent;
With hands and hearts clean and pure, aspire
To Him who knows what, within, you meant.

Yet, thither, mortals,
Your way is wending,
Where, on the portals,
Till time be ending,

There stands this sentence, without reprieve:
Here all shall enter-and none shall leave!

The earth devours you, with your achievements,
And locks together its jaws again,
If by beneficence, or bereavements,
You cheered, or injured, your fellow men-

But of this earth
Do not ask your measure;
For, if in dearth,
Or if blest with treasure,

Your past, your present, what hence befall
He only knoweth, Who knoweth all.

What God requires of man, He told thee;
He meted out, for your life's career,
What griefs should bend, and what cheers uphold thee
And what you had to accomplish here.

His power wrought you
What you transacted,
And wisdom taught you
That right you acted,

If but you heard, from submissive choice,
The great celestial spirit's voice.

Attend the voice of the spirit sounder,
With upright steps, in His errand walk;
And, then, not question if you shall founder,

Nor care for grateful, or thankless, talk!
Fulfill your calling
With courage peerless!
If even falling,
Look upward fearless!
Then there shall clasp thee an angel's hand
And gently lead to thy promised land.

Stand firm, with conscience of pure intention,
Through times of trial, of toil and pain!
Then may your happiness meet prevention,
But mind and virtue can peace retain;
Then, in the sod
Though your corpse be buried,
These words of God
On the soul are veried:
"Thou true hast labored till payments' day,
Now, faithful servant, receive thy pay!"

To all do justice, and help the needy,
And comfort sorrow, where e'er you can!
For truth's defence unto death be speedy,
And win, as christian, and fall, as man!
No worldly samples
Of honors jading
Shall wreath your temples
With laurels fading;
But bright, eternal, shall thee entrance
The blessed holies' inheritance.

What worth had faith, if it lay not resting,
A bright-eyed pearl, in the heart enclosed,
In heav'nward gazes its sparkle vesting,
When crumbling shell leaves the core exposed?
Sweet slumber follows
When pain expires....
And creak the gallows,
And flame the fires,
Lo, martyr! heaven shall open thence,
And your Redeemer shall recompense!

What worth had virtue, if life were reckoned,
With matter's glimmering spark as checked?
Thou first Gustavus! Thou Great, the second!
Thou free and valiant Engelbrekt!

And all ye sage,
And ye tender hearted,
Extolled an age-
Or forgot departed!
What worth had wisdom and heart and fame,
If but the graveyard had been your aim?

What worth had honor, whose voice imposes:
For love of duty your life to spend,-
If on the favors, foul mob disposes
By fouler leaders, she did depend?
Now beam her features
With peace depicted,
Though time's mere creatures
A sigh inflicted;
For dust of time cannot soil that street
Of starry splendor, where move her feet.

What worth had happiness, joy and gladness,
Those links of love in its purest scope,
If, when they sever, in gloomy sadness,
You could not join them by rays of hope?
What then were life?
But a mental stigma,
An empty strife,
An unsolved enigma!
A heartless, cruel, Uriah note,
Which God, in anger, for mankind wrote.

A hoary Jacob his Joseph loses,
And Jonathan from his David parts,
And woe-filled bosom a grief discloses,
To which no solace the world imparts!
And Rachel, weeping,
Her children mourneth;
Her sorrow keeping
She comfort scorneth!
For, gone forever is all she prized
Which mother's heart could have idolized.

But, God is love-so, with hope, look thither,
Ye hearts despondent, and take relief!
The grain, you laid in the ground to wither,
Shall rise to harvests of golden sheaf.
O! what was born

For your hearts to cherish-
And left forlorn
In the grave to perish,
It is not gone; though it is not there-
The One Eternal of it takes care.

In Him there liveth all life; He proveth
All force, and kindleth so clear all light.
His love embraceth, too, what He moveth
To other homes in His house, so bright.
Let fogs not blind thee,
Thou spirit childly!
Once shall find thee
That hour, when mildly
The Father calls thee. But, in the mean,
Endure and labor, with faith serene!

Like Mary, linger, with holy feeling,
And pray and listen, at Jesu feet!
Like Magdalene, at the cross appealing,
See looks of mercy repentance meet!
Like John, so cling thee
To friend ne'er failing!
His love shall bring thee,
From stress and ailing,
To bliss and freedom, forever nigh,
Within His heavenly realm on high.

Well those, who, noble in will, prevailing,
Have sought the right, and the kindly felt,
Who much have loved, spite of all their failing!
Them much forgiveness shall too be dealt.
They were not rated
The best desired;
But angels stated,
With love untired,
What, in the smallest degree, through them,
Had cheered that world from which they came.

They did adhere to their foremost duty,
To fear the Lord, with a fervent heart;
They cleansed their garments, to stainless beauty,
In blood, that innocence doth impart.
All grief is banished,
All sin remitted,

All anguish vanished,
All weeping quitted-
Their names are kept in their Father's grace,
And weary sink they in His embrace.

They go so peaceful in God to slumber,
They greet so joyful the final day:
No tribulations their rest encumber,
No visitations of fortune's sway.
No longer thwarted,
As earth compels us,
They have departed,
The spirit tells us,
Exchanging thralldom for freedom's gem,
And their achievements shall follow them.

A noble feeling each step impelling,
They gained the home of their Father soon.
That ample city shall be their dwelling,
Whose light depends not on sun and moon:
For greater light,
Than the sun containeth,
Has He, whose might
From the throne there reigneth,
With grace to all in that city stay;
And life and bliss doth His glance convey!

And room for all, who, in faith, are hoping,
For all is room in the Promised Land!
And, like, when fig-trees their buds are opening
You know that summer is near at hand;
Thus, when the chill
Of your evening broaches,
You feel, with thrill,
That the friend approaches,
To lead you homeward, where joys excel,
United ever with Him to dwell.

When day be cooling, and shadows cover,
With sombre curtains, your hills and dales,
Then, to release you, He near shall hover,
Whose power, great as his love, prevails.
The eye-lids, laded,
A while are closing, ...
The work-tools, jaded,

Benumbed reposing, ...
Another while-and a new career,
In splendor, shall to your view appear!

And earth is new, as is heaven's portal;
The son of heaven and earth is new,
And misses not, since become immortal,
The narrow homestead, whence he withdrew.

It ceased existing,
It ceased attracting-
But faith persisting,
But virtue acting!

You have, before you, the lot prepared,
By abject spirits not seen or shared.

Then wiped away are all tears forever,
All wounds removed by the healing hand....
Again, midst corpses and biers, I never,
With torch inverted and quenched shall stand

In darkness rife;-
But, the torch upturning,
By flames of life
I restore its burning-

And then, Seraphic, with you unite
In songs of praise at the Throne of Light.

[Illustration]

BRIEF EXPLANATORY NOTES.

PAGE 17, last line; i. e.-AIR, WATER, EARTH, FIRE, the four elements, in which, according to the ancient philosophers, all exists, and of which the whole world is composed.

PAGE 24, "ALEXANDERS" i. e.-Such as Alexander III, "the Great," king of Macedonia, etc., the greatest of Military Conquerors; born 356 B. C.; died, 323 B. C.

"NEROS" i. e.-Such as Nero, Lucius Domitius, Roman Emperor; born 37; died 68; probably the most prominent type known of wickedness and

cruelty, and, nevertheless, a coward.

PAGE 27, "CREST AND FOIL;" emblematic of Knighthood or Nobility.

PAGE 29, "BROTHER" "EQUAL," i. e.-Neighbor, as exemplified by Christ to the Lawyer; see Gospel, St. Luke, x. 25, et. seq. The emphasized "then" on the second line refers to when "for its keeping you shall account;" (see previous stanza, page 28) the sense of the two first lines being: too late then to mend evil deeds by charity.

PAGE 39, lines 3 and 4; see Swedish and General History; Three champions of political and religious liberty; prominent in removing excessive taxation, extending the rights, guarantees and educational facilities of the people and undermining and finally crushing the pernicious and immense power, wealth and influence of a corrupt and arbitrary hierarchy.-

ENGELBREKT, an influential private citizen, went, on his own responsibility, to demand of the then king (Erik XIII) amelioration in the condition of the utterly enslaved, tax-ridden and tyrannized people. This being refused, he induced the people, under his leadership, to rise in arms (in the fall of 1433) and, during three years of successive victories, drove out of the country all foreign oppressors and their adherents, put other men in their places, and enforced changes in the government, and a reduction everywhere of 33 per cent. in the taxes. He was murdered April 27th, 1436.

GUSTAVUS 1st, savior of the independence of Sweden, who gave it new Constitution, new Laws, new Church-government, and was the first to institute general education, by establishing public schools throughout the country. He was born in 1496, and reigned from 1521 to his death, 1560.

GUSTAVUS II, ADOLPHUS, born in 1592, Grandson of Gustavus 1st, was king of Sweden from 1611 to his death 1632, when he fell in the famous battle at Luetzen, Germany, in the "thirty years war," while fighting for the grand cause of liberty of conscience.

PAGE 41, "Uriah-note," see Bible, II Samuel, chapter XI.

PAGE 42, 1st line; see Bible, Genesis, chapter XXXVII.

PAGE 42, 2nd line; see Bible, II Samuel, chapter I.

PAGE 42, 5th line; see Bible, Jeremiah XXXI, verse 15; also, Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter II, verse 18.

PAGE 45, 1st line; see Bible, Gospel of St. Luke, XX, 39.

PAGE 45, 3rd line; see Bible, St. John, XIX, 25.

PAGE 45, 5th line; see Bible, St. John, XIV, 13.

PAGE 50, 3rd line, see Bible, St. Mark, XIII, 13.