

# The Gods in Exile

By Henry Iliowizi

The year 1492 was a dark one for the sons of Shem. The fall of Granada and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain are events more generally commemorated than the equally dramatic episode which wound up with the tragic death of Bajazid, the dashing caliph of Damascus, surnamed Yildirim—"the thunderbolt." At no time of the year is the Moslem world so deeply stirred as during the month Shawall, the fifteenth day of which marks the official opening of the great yearly pilgrimage to Mecca. The Haj is the name of the leading caravan which carries the Sultan's gift for Mohammed's shrine, that holds the black stone given by an angel to Abraham. No animal in creation has so many devout eyes concentrated on its unbeautiful outlines as the dromedary which conveys, under a canopy of green silk, the gorgeously embroidered covering for the walls of the Kabah. This *Kiswa*, as it is called, is made of black brocade, and its magnificent golden border spells divine utterance culled from the gems of the Koran. Exceeding it in costliness is a smaller curtain sent along for the Kabah's doors which swing in a frame of silver and gold.

Even in our days that train starts from Damascus with great ceremony, is accompanied by the municipal dignitaries led by the Pasha, and escorted by a regiment in military pomp. No Moslem eye will miss the opportunity of witnessing the *muhmil*, or silken canopy, as it swings on the camel's back, shielding the sacred vesture of the most sacred of Islam's fanes, so that along the line of the procession the immense concourse of the faithful throng every available spot, from the terraced roof down to the gutters of the ill-paved, sinuous lanes.

Such is the religious signal for hundreds of thousands to start for the centre of Moslem devotion from every quarter and corner as far as the crescent is revered, to fulfil the duty of adoring the object of the Prophet's worship. For he who has kissed that heavenly stone is not alone cleansed of all his sins, but is thereafter distinguished by the surname of Hajj.

The departure of the Haj in the year of the discovery of the New World was one of unprecedented commotion. It was known that a great army was being concentrated and hurriedly drilled, and that Bajazid was on the point of taking the field himself, having gained signal triumphs in his repeated wars with Christian powers. That he appeared in his great mosque on the day of the Haj, and, surrounded by his bodyguard, followed the *muhmil* out of the city's confines, was interpreted as an ominous sign of impending danger. The Caliph's countenance was scrutinized with great anxiety by those who caught sight of it, and somber deductions passed from lip to lip. As if to confirm the popular apprehensions, as Bajazid re-entered the city, a yelling saint, looking more like a satyr than a human being, emerged nobody knew whence, and, planting himself in the way of the white steed which carried the Commander of the faithful, cried: "Bajazid, Bajazid, the stars are against thee. Woe! Woe! Damascus! I see thee and thy sister cities swim in blood, thy treasures plundered, thy beauty rifled, thy daughters outraged, with none to avenge thee! Woe! Woe! Woe!" A terrible frown darkened the brows of the hitherto invincible Caliph, but nobody dared lay a hand on the prophet of evil, who was allowed to lose himself in the next grove unmolested. The saint is only an instrument in the hand of Allah, and before the people had sufficiently recovered from their consternation to exchange a word about the fateful prophecy, a courier came tearing along the straight way of the city; another one was close behind, and another, their horses panting for breath. These events were followed by a

sleepless night and feverish activity in the palace. Couriers were speeding to and fro; regiments were moving; batteries were mounted, and the graying dawn saw the Sultan at the head of a division marching out of his citadel never to return.

From the hand of fate Bajazid was to drink the dregs of the bitter cup. Like stubble before the fire, everything withered before the all-engulfing devastation of Timur's unconquerable host. Having swept nations and races before him, that celebrated Tartar conqueror made short work of Bajazid's mighty army. In the province of Angora host encountered host, the Caliph sustained a crushing defeat, his army was shattered, and the dreaded "thunderbolt" was himself among the prisoners in the hands of a merciless foe. With other cities, beautiful Damascus experienced the wrath of the Tartar's beastly nature. An indiscriminate slaughter of the population was followed by pillage, and whatever could not be plundered and taken off was delivered to the flames. The Caliph's fate was sad in the extreme. Dragged along by the conqueror as a trophy in an iron palanquin, which looked more like a cage than aught else, death, more gracious than the savage Tartar, finally delivered Bajazid from a life of humiliation and torture.

The wizard who had foretold the downfall of the Caliph and the ruin of populous cities was never hereafter seen within the broad circuit of Damascus, a region exceeding in the exuberance of its semi-tropic verdure and panoramic landscape the beauty of Granada's famous valley in its palmy days of Moorish rule. The fatalistic principle of Islam precludes spying into the inscrutable decrees of Allah, whose will is fate from which there is neither appeal nor escape. Why then waste a moment in identifying an oracle whose prophecies pass through him as water passes through a pipe? It is impious to search into the unsearchable.

There were two young men on the scene, however, whose antecedents account for that mad impetuosity with which they stormed onward in pursuit of the oracular saint as soon as it was possible for them to elude the eyes of the crowd. One was Damon Mianolis, a young Greek, who had inherited from his father an avidity for the occult science of astrology; the other was Selim Ebn Asa, a youthful Moslem, who had enabled Damon to witness in disguise the departure of the Haj.

Damon's father was a physician, but had a secret laboratory, and had spent a fortune in attempts at fathoming the mysteries of alchemy and astrology. Damon had been early initiated into those mystic arcana, had learned to cast the horologue, but was wofully disappointed in the matter of extracting gold from other substances, and gave up the hope of ever discovering the elixir of life. The physician's death had put his son in possession of an extensive practice among his fellow-Christians, and Selim's friendship was due to the Moslem's ambition to acquire a knowledge of French, which Damon spoke fluently.

The intimate relation of the two young men led to free discussions of the merits of their respective creeds, with the result that each one believed a little more in his friend's and a little less in his own scheme of salvation. The heavenly city built of gold and precious stones, with twelve gates and glittering streets, through which flows the river of life, bordered on its banks by the tree of life, which bears twelve sorts of fruits and leaves of healing virtue, was pointed to by Damon as the pattern of Mohammed's paradise of which Selim made much in his effort to convert his friend. Selim meant to astonish Damon by referring to those pavilions of pearls in which the houris dwell retired, each pearl sixty miles in dimension; but was met by the even more astonishing promise of St. John that "the days shall come when there shall be vines which shall have each ten thousand branches, and every one of these branches shall have ten thousand lesser branches, and every one of these branches shall have ten thousand twigs, and every one of the twigs shall have ten thousand clusters of grapes, and every one of these clusters shall bear ten

thousand grapes, and every one of these grapes being pressed shall yield two hundred and seventy-five gallons of wine, and when a man shall take hold of one of those sacred branches, another one shall cry out 'I am the better branch; take me and bless the Lord.' ”<sup>1</sup>

This left the youthful Moslem little to boast of in the concern of paradisaical blessedness, and he was totally overwhelmed by a vivid picture of Dante's elaboration of hell. What impressed Selim, however, most profoundly was Damon's familiarity with the heavenly configurations, and his pretended ability to read future events. The fact is that the late Mianolis had shortly before his death predicted Bajazid's overthrow and captivity, and Selim had received a hint of the prediction. No sooner, therefore, had the saint's lamentation fallen on their ears than the young men exchanged a significant look, and the next instant both were on the track of the retreating soothsayer. In but a very few minutes Selim realized the impossibility of his overtaking the fleeing man, whose feet scarcely touched the turf; but not so Damon, who taxed his energies to their uttermost to keep the winged fugitive in sight. Not a living soul crossed them as they hurried onward, the saint leading through a maze of entangling thickets on pathways of his own,—the other following almost out of breath, determined not to give up the chase.

In this way miles had been traversed before Damon noticed that they were at the foot of Anti-Lebanon, and that Selim was not behind him. The ascent had to be made, or the game would have been lost in a moment. From an elevation of several hundred feet Damon's eye was fascinated by the superb view of Damascus, set in a garland of groves, bushes and gardens, distance enhancing the charm of the exquisite panorama. Along the banks of Abana, in the heart of a sea of verdure, rose a grand vision of terraced roofs, surmounted here and there by swelling domes, towering minarets, tipped with gilded crescents, glittering like burnished scythes from the thick foliage of blooming parks. An area of thirty miles in circuit spread like a dream, with a variance of grouping and shading, and a charm of blended tints such as are rarely vouchsafed to the eye even in regions of renowned picturesqueness.

Damon had never before seen Damascus in such a wreath of glory; but the few seconds the sight exacted of his attention frustrated his efforts to locate the wizard's retreat, who had disappeared as though dissolved in air. At the same time a feeling of exhaustion rendered a further ascent impossible, coupled with a somnolence which stole and gained upon the youth, until, succumbing to the spell, he lay stretched on the grass under a tree, lost in oblivion. Re-appearing on the scene as suddenly as he had vanished, the haggard, half-naked wizard waved his crooked staff over the sleeper's head, drew a circle around him, pointed southward, and vanished as before. On returning to consciousness Damon bit his tongue to assure himself that he was really awake; his hand dashed across his eyes,—it was no vision. He felt deathly cold, although his touch left no doubt that he was robed in fur, his head, hands and feet covered by the same material. It was night, and he in an air-ship, under stars he had never seen ere this, and sweeping with great speed through a world of mountains of ice and frozen seas, an icy desolation buried in dense fogs. Before him sat the controlling aeronaut, white as frost and silent as death; to his right sat a female in black, with eyes closed and the countenance of a corpse; to his left sat none else but the saint as he had seen him in the street of Damascus, with no evidence of being in the least affected by the intense cold. Damon suspecting that it was a dream within a dream, closed his eyes tightly to continue his slumber when he heard a voice addressing him thus: "Son of Mianolis the Wise, know that thou art in the chariot of Auster, hurrying toward the great ice regions of the south with me, thy sire's friend, and this dame, the Witch of Endor, on whose grave thou hadst taken thy rest this last day, thus disturbing her spirit that soars over the tomb of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Irenæus, Book V., Chap. 33.

the body which held it when alive. Evil would have befallen thee but for my interposition in thy behalf, and I am indebted to thy father for revelations in the stars and in the realms of nature, which give me foresight and power over spirits. What thou shalt see to-night was the awe of thy ancestors and of those who gave rise to the mightiest progeny on earth; but hold thy breath, lest the frost congeal thy blood, and be not alarmed even if mountains quake and oceans burst," was the wizard's reassuring information.

Even before the last word had been spoken an enormous column of lurid flame and livid smoke upshot from the heart of an immense mountain, and in a continuous flow lost itself in the clouds, a deluge of fire ascending and descending with the tremendous crack and reverberation of thunder. "That southernmost volcano shall mark for generations to come the extreme limit of human penetration into the forbidding regions of ice; the other facing it to eastward burns no more, but is likewise an insurmountable barrier set by nature against the intrusion of man into regions reserved for the dethroned gods. They shall in future years be respectively known and shunned as 'Mount Erebus' and 'Mount Terrors' " volunteered the wizard as an explanation, but further mystifying the already confused aeronaut. On the highest peak of Terror the chariot alighted, and a puff of Auster's breath dissolved the mists around a group of crystal palaces, trimmed with gold, roofed with silver, clustering around an all-outshining, sky-towering edifice reaching up to an ethereal height, overarched by a blazing span of transcendental rainbowed glories, blending into golden haze below, and an indefinable silvery twilight above.—"Asgard," were the first syllables uttered by the Witch of Endor.

Yes, it was Odin's celestial Court<sup>2</sup> where, from his throne, he surveyed heaven and earth, and yon was He exalted high above all others, on his shoulders the ravens Hugin and Munin, who, in ancient times, daily traversed the world to report the happenings among the mortal race, and at his feet the two wolves Friki and Geri, whom Odin feeds with the meat set before him, mead alone being sufficient for him who feeds all creatures.

Overpowering as was the presence of Odin on his throne, another spectacle forced itself on Damon's vision. In front of Valhalla's portal, an entrance as wide as the entire hall, a desperate struggle was raging between redoubtable combatants, who struck at each other with appalling fury. The broad arena was already strewn with numerous bodies cut to pieces. A relentless frenzy appeared to have seized those who were still engaged in the exterminating feud, while the gods looked on with complacency, as though the deathful affair was a mere tournament. When the battle was over there was but one hero left, and he bleeding from many wounds. Presently there came a blast from a horn in Valhalla, which sent a breath of animation through the bulky bodies of the slaughtered. Their wounds closed, their severed limbs knitted and healed, their eyes opened, their frames quivered, straightened and pulsed with life. They rose, picked up their weapons, and straightway repaired to the festive hall where throngs of shining elves attended on them with food and drink. Damon knew then that these were the immortal heroes who, having fallen in battle, were permitted to dwell among the gods, partaking of the meat of Shrimnir, the ever-reviving boar, and of the mead of the she-goat Heidrun. What looked like a fierce battle was simply an amusement.

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<sup>2</sup> In his narrative Malek, from whom this tale is derived, contrasted the Greek gods with those "barbaric gods of the north, who dwell in twilight, build their palace of the rainbow, hunt the wild boar, and fling winged thunder at their adversaries," and the function he assigned to each power seemed to leave no doubt that he referred to Odin's Court, so that I have supplied the names that he did not use. The Orient contains many surprises, and it appealed to me as one of them to find a Mohammedan Parsee familiar with Norse mythology as a tradition of the East. Malek, however, always claimed that the Parsees are the best educated people in the East.

The feast was rudely interrupted by a note of alarm sounded by Heimdall, the sleepless sentinel of Odin's Court. Heimdall's business is to make the round of the borders of heaven to prevent intruders from ascending by the way of Bifrost, that is the bridge built of the rainbow's light which links earth to Odin's ethereal Court. He is especially anxious to intercept the mischievous giants who are ever on the alert to annoy the powers of Asgard. As Heimdall's ears are so fine that he hears growing of the grass and of the wool on a sheep's back, it is no wonder that his warning of impending danger startled the gods. Thialfi, Thor's inseparable attendant and the swiftest messenger of Asgard, was forthwith despatched northward, whence, according to Heimdall's information, the storm was coming, while the gods and the heroes made ready for the emergency, whatever it might be. Invincible Thor, whose terrific hammer, Miölnir, splits mountains, and returns to the hand of the god when hurled against a foe, girded himself with his belt, which redoubles his terrors, and put on his iron gloves to render the shock of his mallet irresistible.

They soon beheld Thialfi returning all astounded, with tidings which made Thor's veins swell with rage.—“A burning sun, O great Odin, accompanied by a host of gods, goddesses, and their dependents, carry with them hitherward a city of supernal palaces, and will be upon us before thy will can be heard in council,” reported Thialfi. Almost simultaneous with these words fell the first beam of a golden flood on the brilliant domes and towers of Asgard. Night fled to the darkest recesses of Antarctic gloom; the snow softened; the icebergs glittered like mountains of jewels; whale, dolphin and sea-lion gamboled with delight, but the black elves, who dread the sun, were turned by myriads into stones. Of vegetable life there was not as much as a blade of grass to be seen; not a withered leaf, nor a dry shrub to greet the radiant orb. In his all-knowing wisdom Odin exclaimed: “It is the Olympian Thunderer who comes this way; if it means peace we shall open our hall to welcome him; should it mean war, it will be thy task, Thor, to drive him hence with ruin.” Quick as thought did Phœbus suspend his blazing chariot in mid-heaven, eastward of Mount Erebus, which, crowned with light and glory, was instantaneously turned into an Olympus by the fiat of creative powers. Phœbus caused the earth to thaw; Pan called forth a garden of Hesperian richness; Ceres conjured up a crop of golden grain where glaciers had been slowly grinding their way for numberless cycles; the fire-spitting Erebus smiled like May, gailanded by Flora, every god and goddess contributing his or her share to create an Elysium in the most dreary of ice-buried deserts.

In less time than it takes to tell it, Jupiter established himself in a manner which left in Odin no doubt that the whilom sovereign of Olympus had come to stay. Thor burned for action, but Odin restrained his impetuous son, reminding him that if he had the rock-blasting mallet to hurl, so had the Olympian chief something to send in return, which it might be wise to avoid if possible. First the most guileful schemer of Odin's Court was to be employed to ascertain the real purpose of the thunderer's arrival; and this was the malicious Loki, one of the hostile giants, who had succeeded in securing a foothold in Asgard.

Loki's nature may be judged by his three offspring; they are the wolf Fenris, the Midgard serpent, and Hela, that is death. Fenris could not be allowed to roam at large; but to chain him was a problem the gods alone could solve. Every kind of chain having been tried in vain, the mountain spirits were required to fashion one that should not yield like cobweb to the teeth of the horrid monster. It was made of the beards of women, the noise of the cat's paw, the breath of fishes, the roots of stones, the spittle of birds, and the sensitiveness of bears; it was as pleasant to the touch as a silken cord, and was named Glupnir. With this fetter on his neck Fenris was rendered harmless. His twin, the Midgard serpent, is so enormous that her length is thrown

around the earth like a belt, she holding her tail in her mouth. Hela dwells in Elvidnir, a black hall in dark Niffleheim. She feeds on hunger, cuts her food with starvation, decks her bed with misery, employs slowness as her maid, delay as her servant; her threshold is precipice, her tapestries burning anguish. The father of this precious triplet was not a little pleased to be thus honored with the important embassy to the sovereign of the Olympian dynasty, especially since the message was but little short of an ultimatum. Loki's mind was not of a frame to be surprised at anything, or intimidated by any display of might; but the stream of blinding light he had to face, as he turned toward the point of his destination, caused his eyes to water, wholly unused as he was to a splendor which made Asgard's rainbow pale, as does the moon before the rising sun. Whether it was for a purpose or by chance, Phœbus darted his rays with piercing penetration, focussing them on the visage of Odin's envoy, and his chariot, a master work of Hephæstus, forged of glittering metal, and set with resplendent gems, moved in an orbit with an ever-widening periphery. Winged Mercury met Loki half way, bade him stop by a wave of his Caduceus, and required him to give an account of his mission. Satisfied with the answer, Mercury led the way to the gate of clouds guarded by the goddess Seasons, and Loki soon found himself in the radiant palace of Jupiter than which there could be nothing loftier and more glorious under the stars. Here the deities meet in council in the assembly hall of their chief, and here they indulge the divine feast of ambrosia and nectar served by the ineffably lovely goddess Hebe, while Apollo delights the immortals with the ravishing strains of his lyre, accompanied by the song of the nine Muses.

Ushered into the awful presence of the Olympian thunderer, Loki beheld himself in the midst of a galaxy of deities, whose various attributes and aspects would have astonished him had they not been eclipsed by the overpowering grandeur of the son of Saturnus, who, enthroned in supernal majesty, with the Ægis, shining like the sun before him, and his thunder-speeding eagle next to him, formed a striking contrast to Odin's dimmer environments.

At the sight of Loki, Apollo struck his lyre, the Muses joined their heavenly voices to swell the melody, and Hebe served to all the food and drink of the gods, including Odin's envoy in the divine conviviality. But ambrosia and nectar affected Loki's palate so differently from the meat of the boar Shrimnir and the mead of the she-goat Heidrun that the first quaff of the new beverage made his facial muscles contract and distend in so ludicrous a fashion that the vast hail resounded with the laughter of the Olympians. Loki did not like the idea of being made the butt of ridicule, but, though stung to the quick, joined in the merriment at his expense, there being no hope for vengeance thus far. Required to state the purport of his message, he began thus:

"It is Odin's wish that peace prevail betwixt his Court and thine, O mighty Chief, and I am sent to remind thee, that when Alfadur had doomed thy rule and his in Midgard, a new order having risen with a new time, the compact was that thou withdraw to the fields swept by Boreas, the Valkyrior kindling the north lights for thy benefit, and he, undeterred by severer cold and longer night, should settle in this drearier end of earth, where Day returns but for a double month, allowing Night and Frost to rule supreme. What means thy coming hither with such consuming heat, such pomp as make Odin's bleak retreat unbearable, unless he strive to hold by force what is his by treaty? In substance this is Odin's message. As guests he welcomes thee and thine with all Valhalla has to entertain, and honors powers akin to him in weal and woe, who had tasted the bitters of dethronement and exile. But if thy purpose be to fix a permanent abode within the bounds of Odin's hitherto undisputed empire, war will be the outcome; and war with Asgard means chaos and the end."

The thunderer shook his locks; his eagle's eye flashed fire. Among the superior gods the face of Mars glowed like a meteor. Minerva assumed a menacing air, and the others gave evidence of a stern determination to go to the bitter end in whatever part they were able to sustain the right and dignity of their challenged head. But Jupiter, inclined toward conciliation if possible, dismissed Loki with earnest mien, promising his answer should reach Odin forthwith. And forthwith Mercury was at Loki's heels, and proceeded with him to Asgard, where Odin gave ear to Jupiter's reply thus conveyed.

"Great Odin, the cloud-compelling power who wields the thunderbolt, but whose old sovereignty has been lamentably curtailed, deploras his condition and thine. True, when the empire over Midgard had to be abandoned in favor of Alfadur's anointed, the extremities of earth alone afforded refuge from the universal spread of those hateful inspirations which, like a deluge, submerged the better world,—synagogue, church, or mosque supplanting those pantheons of art, poetry and beauty, which, in the golden age of dream and fable, song, dance and free love, made man as happy as an unbridled child. When the time had come for our stern trials, it is remembered that, to render our banishment bearable, thou hast benignly agreed to let the Olympian dynasty retreat northward of the habitable world, thou and thine being more seasoned to endure the severer rigors of this inclement zone. But whither flee from the ever-swelling might of the cross and the crescent? Not satisfied with the conquest of blessed Midgard, their votaries dare penetrate the very extremes of the frigid north, and the cross may be seen where neither wolf nor vulture can breathe. Yea, the western hemisphere, hitherto unknown to the world, is being discovered, and ere long will bristle with the spires of a myriad churches. This extreme alone seems forever barred against the intrusion of man, its terrors bringing death to him;—night, frost and sterility are here in league against mortal flesh. Necessity forced upon our father the resolution to seek once more a new home where, undisturbed by the detestable symbols of new creeds, we may continue with as much comfort as powers inalienable insure for us. Jupiter sends thee peace, O, mighty Odin, not that he shrinks from war, or heeds threats, but because of his benign temper—unless provoked, when his wrath would prove too much even for the giants on whom Asgard has a watchful eye. For it is he who made Saturnus disgorge his progeny, and holds him chained in the deeps of Erebus."

Mercury's bold language came near to costing him his head. Thor was restrained with difficulty by his father from sending his hammer against the brazen front of Jupiter's messenger, who was, however, allowed to depart unmolested. There was great commotion in Valhalla, and Odin sent his last word to the intruders requiring them to vacate the invaded heights forthwith, or Asgard would proceed to expel them by force. Thialfi imparted this warning to the Olympians and was dismissed with scorn. Heimdall's horn, Giallar, summoned all the Gods and heroes to battle, while Thor held his mallet in readiness to do fearful execution.

Odin's terrific frown was the signal given for the engagement; it isolated the hostile encampment, giving it the appearance of an illumined island in an ocean of dense night. The moments of suspense were being utilized on both sides to call in and muster all the reserves available. Nobody was happier than the mischievous Loki, who was charged to communicate by the roots of the Ygdrasil tree with the inhabitants of Jotunheim, it being the place where those prodigious giants live, the glove of one of whom Thor had once mistaken for a cavern wherein he spent a night, and was disturbed in his sleep by the snoring of the colossus that shook him like an earthquake.

Should those Jotuns be slow in coming, Loki was to rouse Ymir from his rest, Ymir the terrific giant Frost, whose blood is the seas, whose body forms the earth, whose bones are the

mountains, whose skull is the heavens, whose brains are the clouds and what they discharge in the shape of rain or snow, and whose eyebrows supplied the material for the making of Midgard, the habitable portion of the globe. Ymir sleeps under the Ygdrasil tree whose branches extend to every quarter of the universe, while its three roots connect Asgard with Niffleheim and Jotunheim. Ymir's disturbed slumbers make the earth quake and shudder; his awaking would bring about the end of things. Loki's malice had never been more gratified, he having thus far been an unwelcome presence among the gods of Asgard, who had even once gone to the trouble of slaying him for treason to Baldur; but Loki had another life to spare, and here he was bustling, busier than ever before.

Neither were they on Erebus idle. The response to Odin's threatening scowl was an intensified light and such a heat as began to dissolve whatever had remained frozen as stone since Time outspread his wings. Phœbus assumed the terrors of a bursting hell, so that whatever life there was in the sea buried itself deep under its surface. With a due appreciation of his dreadful adversaries, Jupiter arrayed himself in his most appalling panoply, and called on Tartarus to bring to light the pack of Titans prominent among whom were Cottus, Briareus and Gyes, each one having a hundred hands and fifty heads, well known as the subduers of Saturnus, who indulged the unpaternal habit of feasting on his own offspring. Useless to add, the other Olympians were prepared for the fray, but they waited for the aggressive deed to come from Asgard.

It came like a dart of lightning. Enraged by the consuming heat, Thor aimed a fatal blow at the sun's fiery steeds, hoping to shatter at one stroke the entire team. With its unflinching accuracy Mjölnir struck the glowing chariot. Phœbus had a narrow escape, holding tightly the reins; the horses reared wildly, bleeding from many wounds, which closed, however, by virtue of their deathless substance. But as the mallet, by its nature, returned to Thor's grasp, the god roared like a hundred lions; it was a red-hot mass of metal and could not be handled before another fling had passed it through a fathom's depth of a glacier's icy bed. By the time Thor was ready to renew his experiment he felt himself lifted off his feet and hurled headlong into an abyss back of Asgard. Such was the effect of a lightning bolt sent by Jupiter's hand, who had ascended the azurean height of his citadel whence he caused an ominous thunder-cloud to overshadow the Court of Odin. Though dazed by the blasting shock and the fall, Thor was on his feet, and from a cliff, which he quickly ascended, winged his hammer with unerring precision against the cloud-enshrouded tower of Erebus. Mjölnir was met half way by another fulmination of the Olympian thunderer, and the collision of the missiles reverberated like the crack of doom.

Not less fierce was the engagement of the other powers on both sides, who, without deploying into battle array, strove with prodigious might, the one stunning or hurting the other. Malicious Loki, hugely amused to see the whilom invincible Thor wheel through the air and land ignominiously in a chasm, assumed the colossal proportions of the giant race to which he virtually belonged, making effective use of his enormous limbs. Having picked out Mars as his target, he aimed an iceberg at the Olympian war-dog who was inflicting terrible punishment on the gods and heroes of Asgard; but Neptune was at hand with a tremendous billow of tepid water warmed by Phœbus it struck the frozen mass, deflecting it from its fatal course, so that there was at once a great splash and a harmless crash.

The battle continued to rage along the line, the elements of fire, water, wind and earth being wielded with whelming impetuosity. Between Thor and Jupiter the duel was incessant, with no turn in favor of Odin's most redoubtable combatant. In the general confusion Loki threw himself with a force on the enemy's flank, endeavoring thus to attack the gate which he had been

permitted to enter as Odin's messenger. From his cloudy height the Olympian chief discerned the move of the perfidious strategist, brandished one of his forked lightning-bolts, and Asgard beheld with amazement one of its mightiest hurled into oblivion.

Odin surveyed the situation, and recognized the hopelessness of the struggle, even if Ymir could be caused to budge and the giants of Jotunheim arrived in time. Where Thor failed who could succeed? And the dreaded Titans were likely to appear on the scene at any moment. Thialfi was, therefore, directed to recall Thor, and ask the Olympians to suspend hostilities, pending the consideration of a peaceful settlement. The brightening of the atmosphere around Asgard indicated Odin's change of mind. Jupiter agreed to a truce, and Phoebus relaxed the severity of his unbearable heat. Odin declared himself willing to withdraw his Court to the extreme south, provided the Olympians would not follow him thither. Jupiter swore the irrevocable oath attested by the river Styx, that there shall be no further encroachments hereafter, come what may. And Mercury was instructed to convey peaceful greetings to Odin. "Let our brother know that we properly appreciate his magnanimous offer to withdraw further south; that we reluctantly waged war against a kindred power dethroned by Him who is above all enthroned. No, not thus shall we part, mailed in threatening panoply, with grim war bristling and sullen. Festive joy, cordial intercourse and divine conviviality shall mark the season of our conciliation. Great Odin and his Court are to be honored in this hall. Since man has ceased to pay us worshipful homage, our own felicity be our sole care." In response to this effusion of friendship Odin signified his pleasure by ordering his black elves, to whose skilful workmanship Thor was indebted for his wonderful hammer, to throw an arched span of gold over the hollow which separated the mountains of Terror and Erebus. But the long-nosed, dirty little artificers durst not face Phoebus, whose glare brought them death; wherefore the blazing chariot of the sun-god made room for Aurora Australis, when the bridge rose like a vision, competing with the rainbow in multicolored brilliancy. For once Vulcan confessed surprise at the exquisite mastery in metal work in which he had thought himself unrivalled, while Pluto was amazed at the lavishness of the precious material, which he knew to be limited in quantity. Once more did Heimdall sound his horn, this time to proclaim the opening of the grand feast in which all the gods, goddesses, heroes and dependencies of Asgard were required to participate.

On their side the Olympians were neither to be eclipsed in splendor nor outdone in all that goes to make a feast of gods. Robed in supernal glory, each god and goddess, surrounded by their retinues, wore the symbols of their respective powers and attributes, but stood overawed by the transcendent magnificence of their chief; whom no mortal eye could behold without being consumed. From his throne above the clouds, surrounded by his family, who shone like stars, Jupiter beheld Odin issue from Valhalla, mounted on his eight-legged steed, Sleipnir, who could leap over mountains. Him followed Frigga and Freya, his wife and daughter, the one as beautiful as Iris, the other, who stood for love, blushing like sweet Aurora, escorted by Thor and his inseparable attendant, Thialfi. Like a stream of radiant gold, flowed behind them a host of sunny elves, diminutive creatures, stirring the air with weird music. In their wake, leading another host of those unsightly elves clad in burnished brass, and blowing sonorous instruments of the same metal, came Frey in a chariot drawn by the boar Gullinbursti, along with Heimdall bestriding his horse, Gulltopp. The train's rear was taken up by a great number of inferior gods, heroes and mountain giants, as well as their colossal frost companions.

Gratifying his mischievous nature, Cupid perched himself on the main entrance guarded by Seasons, and as this goddess opened it to admit Odin and his cortege, a shower of love's arrows descended on the unsuspecting powers of Asgard, who were received by Pluto and Neptune, and

led into the assembly hail of Jupiter's palace. Here the Olympian dynasty were found standing, except Jupiter and Juno, who likewise rose, while Venus, wearing the Cestus which imparts ineffable grace to the wearer, welcomed the head of Asgard and escorted him to a lofty throne at the left hand of her father. A sweet fragrance was diffused among the star-like assembly by a heavenly smile from Jupiter, who was at once captivated by the eyes of Freya, the goddess of love. Odin found it impossible to make a secret of his enchantment by Venus, while Thor had no eye for anyone but Hebe. Heimdall found in Juno the crown of sweetness, Thialfi bowed to Diana, and Frey paid his tender respects to Minerva. The other deities selected their partners in accordance with their natural bent of mind, or destined appointment in the divine economy.

Without, the subordinate attendants grouped themselves harmoniously, so that no sooner were the strains of Apollo's lyre heard, accompanied by the enravishing song of the Muses, than the broad spaces between the dwellings of the gods teemed with the airy dancers. Elf, nymph, naiad, satyr and dryad abandoned themselves to the spell of Apollo's music. This was only a faint reflex of what was doing in the star-illuminated hall of the Olympian thunderer. Here the celestial food and beverage were being offered by Hebe, after the first grand march of the superior gods. Odin, who never tasted of Shrimnir's flesh, and indulged in but drink of the mead of the she-goat Heidrun, now emptied a capacious goblet of nectar handed him by Hebe, at the same time that one was given to Thor. The head of Asgard's Court found it hard to swallow the strange liquid, so unlike mead, and, unable to retain it, ejected it in a manner to bring up the Olympian host and his entire house. As to Thor, the unspeakable drink and the mirth provoked by his ludicrous grimaces enraged him to such an extent that, but for the subduing charm of Hebe's look, he would have dashed his mallet against the very throne which filled gods with awe. Good nature prevailed, however, and as the refreshments passed around, the hilarity grew at the cost of Asgard.

Now struck Terpsichore her instrument, the graces joining to swell the strains which cause the gods to move in rhythmic measure. Looked at from the vantage ground occupied by Damon, the divine spectacle resembled a scattered constellation, the stars moving in pairs, then grouping in clusters, then spreading in lines, straight and curved, then forming in circles, then breaking up to renew and multiply the harmonious evolutions. There appeared nothing to intercept the minutest detail of the celestial scene, and Damon was intoxicated with felicity, ear and eye being equally ravished. While the feast was at its height, Erebus shook with a convulsion which reminded Jupiter of the summons he had sent to Tartarus, and that the Titans had access to the upper world by way of the lava-vomiting mountain. At the same instant Heimdall gave the alarm, his ear having recognized the tramp of the Jotuns for whom Odin had sent his son, Hermond the Nimble. Quick as were the gods in rushing to arms, and in manning every strategic and vulnerable point, they were not quick enough to prevent a collision between Briareus on one side and Skrymir on the other, each one sustained by his gigantic followers, who tore up glaciers and made icebergs fly as flakes of snow driven by a storm. As if by a tacit understanding, Thor and Jupiter combined their terrific instruments of destruction, hurling them from opposite directions at the monstrous combatants, who heaped Pelion on Ossa in their furious efforts to crush each other. Briareus disappeared like a flash in the womb of Erebus, drawing his companions after him; the Jotuns took to their heels as fast as their gigantic limbs could carry them.

But there was no clearing of the atmosphere. The mountains trembled, the air grew oppressive and seemed saturated with fetid gases. A moment's ominous quiet was broken by another far-reaching convulsion, followed by a crack which terrified the gods and threw Damon out of his seat deep down into a chasm. The womb of Erebus opened wide. A deluge of fire burst from the

bowels of the earth, melting glaciers and causing frozen seas to boil. Heaven glowed like a furnace, and Damon beheld with terror a stream of liquid metal pour down in a cataract from a height above his head. His attempt to flee from destruction proved his limbs to be of lead; he could not budge. He was going to be buried under fathoms of molten ore. Once more he tried to get to his feet, the glowing metal bursting on him from every side. In growing terror he grasped for something to assist him in his struggle for life, striking out right and left. His numbness gave way; his limbs softened in their joints, and a vitalizing energy enabled him to raise his head. What did he see? A full-rounded moon shedding a silver flood on a slumbering landscape, glorified by a weird maze of far-away dazzling white, varied by domes and spires of other hues. It was neither Asgard nor the heavenly city built by Hephæstus; it was Damascus, oblivious of her impending doom. Damon was grateful to be here, conscious of the fact that the wizard he had followed had but sported with him. Yet what he had seen was worth the sacrifice. How much greater the God of infinity, how much holier than they of Asgard and Olympus, He with whom a myriad galaxies count for naught as He sways the boundless Universe by the breath of His mouth!