

THE SEEDS IN ADAM'S SKULL

A BALLAD ON THE HISTORY OF THE HOLY CROSS

When Father Adam looked at Death,
He said: *Pray hold my head, dear Seth.*
Nine hundred years and thirty, I
Have drawn a mortal breath.

I ate the fruit and felt the schism
Of nature from its godly bysm.
In Eden grows the Tree of Life;
I hanker for its chrism.

The good son Seth and good wife Eve
Kissed Adam's face and took their leave,
To beg the Garden's guardian
That unguent to retrieve.

They walked the pathway, long desert,
Of footprints burned into the dirt
Where Eve and Adam once had fled,
In snakeskin garments girt.

The angel with the turning sword
Stood listening as Seth implored
At Eden's oriental gates —
The angel of the Lord.

*I cannot give, the cherub said,
The balm of life to smear the dead.
A boon to all his progeny
I offer thee instead.*

*These are three seeds, that very tree's;
Ask not for any more than these.
Place them beneath thy father's tongue
And he shall die at ease.*

And Seth obeyed, and Adam died.
Around him, linen sheets they tied.
They laid him in a sepulcher,
With Abel close beside.



Then seven hundred twenty-six
Years shrank away like candlewicks.
The earth was filled with wickedness,
And kicks against the pricks.

And while the clouds and lightnings loomed
Above a population doomed,
The righteous Noah took his spade,
And Adam's bones exhumed.

There was an altar in the hull
Of Noah's Ark, where Adam's skull
Was honored by the family
Who lived until the lull.

The cataclysm came and went.
Men planted on the sediment
Till fifty and three hundred years
Like candlewax were spent.

When Death to Father Noah came,
He called his favored son by name:
*Dear Shem, go bury Adam's skull;
Let dust the dust reclaim.*

Shem sought the hill of greatest worth,
Where Adam to his wife gave birth:
The juncture of the continents,
The navel of the earth.

Shem buried there the cranium.
He nearby built a city, from
Which he could watch, as priest and king,
For holy things to come.

Three seedlings sprouted then; the trine
At once began to intertwine,
Until a single tree they were,
Yet fir and box and pine.



The ages passed, like blooms that wilt.
King Solomon a Temple built,
From marble squared by shamir-worm,
And cedar, carved and gilt.

The carpenters cut down the tree
And carried it from Calvary.
They stripped its branches and its bark,
And planed it carefully.

The beam was beautiful and strong,
But just too short or just too long.
They tried to fit it here and there;
It everywhere fit wrong.

The architect, his patience lost,
The wood athwart a channel tossed.
It was an undistinguished bridge
That many persons crossed.

When Sheba's queen approached the beam,
She had a vision like a dream.
She would not place her goose-foot there,
But waded through the stream.

She said to Solomon: *Attend!*
Upon this timber shall depend
The man who shall thy Temple ruin,
Thy kingdom also end.

King Solomon discreetly frowned.
He hid the timber underground.
The ages passed, like figs that rot.
The timber was not found.

The pit where it was put became
A bathing pool of goodly fame,
Where angels stirred the waters and
Made whole the sick and lame.



When Providence the moment chose
For older Testaments to close,
The beam unsepulchered itself,
And to the surface rose.

They found it by the avenue —
The Roman legionaries who
Refashioned it into a cross,
And gave it to a Jew.

He clambered to the very hill
Where Adam's skull was buried still.
The tree was planted there again,
An instrument to kill.

The Son of Man was crucified,
And from His perforated side
The aquavitæ flowed, a gift
To Adam undenied.

NOTES

ACCORDING TO CURSOR MUNDI AND OTHER MEDIEVAL TEXTS, THE FOOTSTEPS OF ADAM AND EVE AS THEY FLED PARADISE PERMANENTLY SCORCHED THE EARTH AND WITHERED ITS GREENERY.

THE TARGUM JONATHAN PROPOSES THAT THE GARMENTS GIVEN BY GOD TO ADAM AND EVE WERE MADE FROM THE SKIN OF THE EDEN SERPENT.

TRADITIONAL JEWISH EXEGESIS HOLDS THAT SHEM, THE SON OF NOAH, AND MELCHIZEDEK, THE PRIEST-KING OF SALEM, WERE THE SAME MAN. CERTAIN CHURCH FATHERS, INCLUDING JEROME AND EPHREM THE SYRIAN, BELIEVED THIS AS WELL, ALTHOUGH MANY OTHERS DID NOT.

A LEGEND ASSERTS THAT KING SOLOMON, NOT WANTING THE STONES FOR THE TEMPLE TO BE CUT WITH HAMMERS OR AXES, SOUGHT OUT THE SHAMIR, A MARVELOUS WORM THE SIZE OF A BARLEYCORN CAPABLE OF DISINTEGRATING ROCK.

ANOTHER LEGEND SAYS THAT THE QUEEN OF SHEBA HAD MISSHAPEN FEET. IN MEDIEVAL ART, THESE WERE

DEPICTED WEBBED, LIKE THOSE OF A GOOSE. UPON
WADING THROUGH THE WATER OUT OF RESPECT FOR
THE SACRED WOOD, HER DEFORMITY WAS HEALED.

BYSM

FOUNDATION

AQUAVITÆ

WATER OF LIFE