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THE FATHER  
OF THE  
PLAGUE - STRICKEN  
AT  
EL ARISH

BY  
JULJUSZ SŁOWACKI.

*Translated from the Polish by*  
MARJORIE BEATRICE PEACOCK  
AND  
GEORGE RAPALL NOYES.

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To *Dr. Wacław Borowcy*  
*with friendly greetings from*  
*George Rapall Noyes*

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TRANSLATORS' NOTE.

Juljusz Słowacki (1809-49) is, next to Mickiewicz, the greatest of the Polish poets. *The Father of the Plague-Stricken at El Arish* is probably the most widely read of his longer works. It was written under the impressions of a journey to Greece, Egypt, and Palestine in 1836-37; in his prose introduction Słowacki narrates the incident that gave rise to it.



# THE FATHER OF THE PLAGUE-STRICKEN AT EL ARISH

By JULJUSZ SŁOWACKI.

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## INTRODUCTION.

### THE FATHER OF THE PLAGUE-STRICKEN AT EL ARISH.

IN explanation of the following poem, I must needs say a few words of the quarantine in the desert between Egypt and Palestine, near the village of El Arish. Through some strange caprice Mohammed Ali has marked on the shifting sand an imaginary boundary between his two states; here he has forced the free Bedouins, under pain of death, to pitch their tents and to live for a fortnight under the oversight of watchmen and a doctor; otherwise they are forbidden to pass from Egypt to Syria. When travelling by camel I was forced to submit to the same fate. After a trip of eight days from Cairo I arrived at a gloomy, sandy valley, where I was doomed to tarry for twelve days. At first I could not comprehend how a desolate spot, strewn with shifting sand, without a single house, could be subject to human law; but the sword of the Pasha seemed to hang in the blue sky above the heads of my Arab guides, for when they came to the valley of the quarantine they at once made the camels kneel, and their dark faces expressed the deep submission of free men to the law of a dreaded ruler. A doctor arrived from the village of El Arish; that village was the first of which I had caught even a distant glimpse since leaving Cairo, and the doctor was the first man whom I had met. This physician was an Italian emigrant named Steble, and he had recently married a lady named Malagamba, a famous oriental beauty of whom Lamartine speaks with enthusiasm. He at once did his best to make comfortable my stay under the open sky. He provided several tents for our troupe; and, as I learned later,

his wife's hands were buried in white and silvery flour in order that I might not lack European bread.

Settling myself within the tent, I gradually became accustomed to the gloomy scene that surrounded me. At some distance from me a brook, almost entirely dry, traversed the sandy valley on its way to the sea; beyond it was a grey fringe of palm trees; to the north the blue ribbon of the Mediterranean broke upon the sand and filled the quiet air above the desert with the dull murmur of its waves. And above the sea, on a pyramidal tumulus of sand, shone the white dome of the Tomb of the Sheik, which inspired terror, for in its vaults were laid the victims of the pestilence; its architecture and its yellowish white colour reminded one of a skeleton. In other directions rose sandy mounds, crowned with the tents of the garrison; from them guardsmen in gay oriental costumes kept watch over the quarantine. The centre of the valley was marked by a hillock that reminded one of a haystack, from which the muezzin in a piercing voice proclaimed the greatness of God each morn, evening, and night. All these pictures the reader will find reproduced in the following tale, and they will appear in their true light, for he will see them through human eyes. As for me, I grew wonted to my tent and enjoyed the quiet of the sandy plain and the roar of the sea, to the shore of which I was allowed to walk, if I took with me one of the quarantine watchmen.

On Christmas Eve (1836), when my thoughts had fled from this quiet desert to my distant country, and to the days of old that I had spent feasting amid my family, a terrific thunderstorm, blown from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, burst by night and deluged with rain my isolated tent. My gloomy spirit, musing upon its own land, gradually became filled with terror. My tent, flapping in the wind and beaten by the rain, tottered above me; reddened by the lightning flashes, it seemed a fiery cherubin watching over a sleepless couch. The tempest had put out my light, and the damp wick could not be rekindled. Description is impossible, for this storm in the desert was of biblical majesty. I thought that the tempest had come which should waft me from the earth and bear me to the land of calm. Yet this sleepless night of dread passed by, and when at dawn I emerged from my tent, iron-grey clouds covered the sky and a fine rain darkened the air. But further fears were in store for me; the cries of the Arabs warned me of a new danger. The brook, which yesterday had been a mere thread of water trickling along its sandy bed, had become a roaring torrent, and with its silvery fins was fairly rushing to engulf the valley on which



stood our tents. There were but a few moments to spare. With the help of the Arabs we carried our tents to the nearest sand mound, and immediately after our departure the water came and filled those circles of sand that remained in the valley as traces of the dwellings that we had torn up. Chilled and downcast, I gazed from on high at the triumph of that poor little brook, and while gazing I experienced a strange sensation. I was without roof, without fire, without food; I had suffered what amounted to a shipwreck on land; yet I could not betake myself to the village near by, where men were living, and ask them to give me the shelter of a roof or a seat by a hospitable hearth. And still more horrible storms might occur; the sea might come and swallow up the mound on which I was standing: and all this I must endure as best I could; I must survive or perish under the eyes of men who could not and dared not touch either me or my belongings.

Finally the sky cleared, and, taught by experience, I pitched my tent once more, not in the valley, but on the highest mound; and upon the desert descended calm, serene days, which passed quietly by. My interpreter Sulaiman, famous and boastful because he had once been in the service of Champollion, Rosellini, Fresnel, and many others, told me various small details of the travels of his former masters, and probably gathered from me a store of petty observations with which he would divert future wanderers. In the evening this handsome, long-bearded Arab, seated on the ground at the entrance of the tent and illumined by the moonbeams that poured in between the flaps, would sing me strophes of Arabic poems, whose unintelligible sounds and mournful melody lulled me to sleep. And then—perchance the angel of sleep covered me with the cloak of a Crusader, and marked a red cross on my bosom, and transformed the Arab into a squire singing mournful ballads of his native land.

But enough of this mysterious dream of my life, of that golden plain, and of that tent where I had moments of calm; where, when I awoke, my eyes beheld between the opened flaps of cloth the constellation of Orion, so like a starry lute, hung by God over the poor tent of a wandering Pole. Enough of that quiet week of my life—it passed by. Again my camels kneeled before me and rose beneath the musing pilgrim, stretching out their long, snake-like necks towards the sepulchre of Christ. And when I was already an hour's journey towards the east, I turned in my saddle and gazed once more at my green tent; I beheld it on the mound and fancied that of its own will it had ascended a high place in order to bid me

farewell. And whether it was merely the act of men packing their goods, or whether the tent itself, feeling that it no longer sheltered a traveller, pulled some stakes from the ground and waved its folds towards me, disclosing its black and desolate interior—I turned aside from that thing of which the heart was broken on my departure. Soon white lilies began to appear on the sand, announcing that I was approaching a more fertile region; and I reflected that, glancing at those very flowers, Christ had said to his disciples that they should take no thought for the morrow nor for the things of this world, but should consider the lilies, which God himself clothes.

Such is the description of the quarantine through which I passed in the desert; far worse was that endured by the old man who relates his misfortunes in the following poem. The story of his sufferings is not entirely imaginary; it was told me by Dr. Steble, to whom I would here record my thanks both for his tale and for his bread and for the courtesy that he showed me, if I were sure that these few words would find him in the desert. But what would he care for a memorial in an unintelligible language, uttered by a voice that hardly spreads as far as the circles raised by a stone cast in the water?

Thrice, only thrice, has waxed and waned the moon  
Since I pitched tent upon this barren dune.  
A little babe my wife nursed at her breast ;  
Three daughters and three sons, besides that child—  
A family for ever laid to rest—  
Arrived with me. Where yonder flag grows wild  
Upon the sandy wastes that line the shore,  
Nine dromedaries daily went to graze,  
And in a ring lay here when twilight fell—  
Here where the glowing fire shall burn no more.  
My daughters would bring water from the well ;  
My sons would lay the fire, in those glad days ;  
My wife, her child in arms, would cook our meals.  
Today their forms the Sheik's dread tomb conceals,  
Whose snowy dome laughs to the rising sun ;  
Beneath that tomb they lie, their labours done.  
But I return alone, with grief bowed low ;  
Thrice forty ages have I lived in woe,  
Since to my desert home of cloth and skin  
The angel of the plague first entered in.

This sorrow to the world is yet unknown  
That I today within my heart enclose !  
To Lebanon, my home, I go alone—  
The orange tree that in my garden grows  
Will say, " Old man, where are thy children now ? "  
My daughters' flowers that in the breezes bow  
Will ask, " Old man, where did thy daughters go ? "  
The clouds that through the azure heavens blow  
Will ask me first about my sons, my wife,  
My children, rudely torn away from life  
To lie beneath the grim tomb of the Sheik—  
Each echo knowledge of their doom will seek,  
And every man, when I in health draw nigh,  
Will question me.—What then shall I reply ?

Here I arrived. My tents upon the sand  
I pitched, and here my weary camels lay ;  
My babe with childish glee stretched forth his hand  
To feed the friendly birds that came each day,  
And seemed to us an angel on a shrine.

Seest thou the brook whose sunlit waters shine  
In yonder vale?—From it returned one night  
The youngest girl, her pitcher on her head.  
Close to the fire she came, and laughing stood  
And lightly splashed her brothers there at rest.  
The eldest rose, his fevered eye alight,  
Quick seized the jar with trembling hands, and said :  
“ God bless you for the water, for I would  
Drink deep to quench the fire within my breast.”  
But as he spoke, and drank with avid thirst,  
He fell there like a broken palm, and died  
Ere I could even hasten to his side.  
His sisters would have kissed him, but in fear  
I sternly cried, “ Let no one venture near ! ”  
And tossed him to the guards, a thing accurst,  
That they with rakes might drag him to the tomb  
He shared with others who had shared his doom.  
And from that night, so full of grief and pain,  
They counted forty days for me again.

That selfsame night, reclining side by side,  
My daughters, Amina and Hafne died,  
And lo ! so silent was their dying breath  
That though in sorrow for my son’s sad death  
In sleep I had not closed my eyes that night,  
Yet heard I nothing of their spirits’ flight,  
And even their own mother did not hear,  
Although she too in sleepless grief lay near.  
Next morning both the girls, as blue as steel,  
My darlings, marked thus with the plague’s dread seal,  
The guards from out the tent unheeding bore ;  
And thus they left us, to return no more :  
And with a loving daughter’s tender care  
They swept the earth before us with their hair.

In yon blue sky seest thou that ball of gold ?  
Beyond those palms it rises as of old,  
Behind that sandy hill it sinks from sight ;  
And not a cloud obscures the heavens’ light :  
But then it seemed to me, I know not why,  
The sun was not the brilliant orb on high,

The shining orb that yesterday I knew,  
But was a vampire sun of ghostly hue.  
The heavens too, which gazed upon the death  
Of my three children, fading one by one,  
Seemed coarse and misty with the vapour breath  
That rose from earth to shroud the purple sun,  
And I knew not if even prayers could fly  
To God concealed behind that clouded sky.

Thus ten long, dreary days dragged slowly by  
And my remaining children lived—all four.  
My wife's sad heart began to hope once more,  
For still our youngest darling did not die  
Nor fade and wither like a broken flower.  
I too breathed freely in that fateful hour :  
For after God had carried off those three,  
By whose untimely death my heart was rent,  
I could not think that he would take from me  
The four who yet remained within my tent.

Then came an hour of fathomless despair,  
When, gazing at my third loved son with fear,  
I saw Death's ghastly fingerprints appear.  
Ah, I had guarded him with tender care !—  
On that beloved face the shadow fell—  
A father's eye alone could have perceived  
The deathly sign I recognised too well !  
Soon he resembled him for whom I grieved,  
My first-born son, so tragically dead ;  
His countenance was ghastly pale, then red,  
And as I gazed, was suddenly imbued  
With dread discolorations, rusty-hued.  
I cried aloud, " Again Death haunts our tent ! "  
And sadly clasping him, thus marked, I went  
Into the darkness, where the camel train  
Lay quietly upon the shadowed plain,  
That Death might end his sufferings alone,  
Uninterrupted by a mother's moan.

All night we knelt beside the dying child,  
Both man and beast, upon the shifting sands ;

In impotent despair I wrung my hands,  
And bitterly my cursèd fate reviled :  
Would he might live—would he had never been !  
And there above the palms, with ne'er a sigh,  
The pallid moon, ascending, watched him die,  
And gazed unmoved upon that melting scene.  
Ah, time can not destroy that memory,  
Nor can I comprehend such cruelty !  
When in my arms he presently lay dead,  
I cast him in the campfire's glowing bed ;  
But as the fitful flames began to leap,  
I dragged him out into the silent night,  
Whence two gravediggers carried him from sight,  
For with the others he could better sleep.  
And from that perishing and from that pain  
They counted forty days for me again.

Beneath the circle of the sun, blood-red,  
And under that infected tent we dwelt,  
Nor murmured of the agony we felt,  
Moving in silence with averted head ;  
And, scarcely living, counterfeited Death,  
That we might shun his pestilential breath :  
We thought we were deceiving God on high,  
And this engulfing plague would pass us by.  
But no ! God's murdering angel came again !  
He found me tearless, with a heart of lead :  
My weary spirit felt no further pain,  
And coldly, " Let God take them all," I said.  
I saw with stony heart and tearless eye  
One more son, stricken like the others, die ;  
Already grief was as my daily bread.  
And now my second son before my face—  
Least cherished of my household group—lay dead.  
Least mourned, least held within our hearts' embrace,  
He won God's pity and this recompense,  
That calmly, coldly he departed hence,  
Without the pain by which Death takes his toll,  
Or fears of a delusion-tortured soul.  
He died and stiffened and became like stone,  
An image horrible beyond compare,  
As if he wished no unfelt tear or moan,

But only that our loveless hearts might bear  
The imprint of that gaze, our eyes be blind  
To aught beside, and that its horror hind  
A cloud upon our souls that ne'er dispersed,  
A vengeful face that cried, "Ye are accurst!"

He died. I thought, with a despairing heart,  
That if God willed the others should depart,  
And sent the angel of the plague again,  
He first would call my babe and then my wife,  
And then demand my own unhappy life.  
No thought of my loved daughter brought me pain,  
And no alarm for her gnawed at my breast.  
She was so young, so charming, and so gay,  
When she would sooth my weary head to rest,  
And on my brow her lily hands would lay;  
Or when some dainty silken web she made,  
Running about beneath the cedar's shade,  
And darting like a spider to and fro.  
See! Even this, my glittering girdle fair,  
She wove! These dull eyes, saddened now by woe,  
She sheltered with a veil of golden hair,  
So that I gazed upon her with delight,  
As on a rose, sun-drenched with dewy light,  
Ah, she was mistress of my home and heart!  
She, like the guardian angels from above,  
Watched o'er my cradled babe with tender love,  
And in each grief and sorrow claimed a part,  
Weeping with us for all our trials and fears,  
And wiping with her flowing hair our tears.

Ten days, ten long and dreary nights had passed,  
In which Death's presence might have been withdrawn;  
Ten days, ten other sleepless nights at last  
Crept slowly by, and hope began to dawn.  
My wife's great weeping for her children ceased,  
And thirty morns our fragile hope increased.  
At last, bereft of strength and memory,  
I laid me down and fell asleep by night;  
And as I slept and murmured fitfully,  
My two dead daughters rose before my sight.  
Veiled in transparent mist, each girl held fast

Her sister's hand, and blessed me as she passed.  
With eyes that glittered, but that still were mild,  
To where the others slept within the tent  
With slow and silent step they moved, and bent  
Above the mother's couch, above the child.  
Then o'er my best-loved, youngest girl they bowed,  
And on her laid their hands of ghostly blue.  
Cursing, I woke and thought the vision true.  
" My Hatfa ! Hatfa ! " then I cried aloud.  
Birdlike she softly came across the floor  
And threw her arms about me as I lay,  
And I was sure she had not gone away,  
Feeling her heart against my own once more.  
But on the morrow came the thunderbolt !  
My child—but why repeat my soul's revolt !  
This daughter too death tore from my embrace ;  
This daughter perished too before my face.  
The dreadful moment came when, racked with pain,  
She turned her tortured eyes to me in vain.  
" Save me, my father, save ! " she faintly cried,  
And then her lips were rosy with her blood,  
Like an unopened rose, a crimson bud.  
And thus my best-belovèd daughter died.  
My heart broke then beneath its load of care ;  
And she, my child, in death was angel-fair.

Then came the guards to weep my hapless plight  
And drag that scarce-cold body from my sight.  
With careless hook they caught it from the ground ;  
The hook fell on her bosom, firm and round—  
God save them from my living death, for there  
Before my face I saw the soft flesh tear !  
Thou, God, wilt punish them with fitting doom !  
Then in my arms I bore her to the tomb.

With arms crossed on her breast and head bent low  
Three days the mother sat in silent woe,  
A yellow, wooden image of despair.  
The babe grew pale and fretted for her care,  
For now the mother's milk began to fail,  
And from the cradle came a ceaseless wail.  
That sand—thou hast no children buried there—



To thee it seems not menacing but fair,  
Gilded perchance, a place of life and mirth—  
To me it is the plain of hell on earth !  
Across that plain, across those sandy heaps,  
They dragged the swarthy corpses of my dead—  
And when against yon hill the ocean leaps,  
For thee it roars, for me it howls instead ;  
Or when no wind disturbs its silent deeps,  
For thee it murmurs, but for me it weeps.  
Each day, when came the peaceful evening hour,  
I heard the lone muezzin from his tower  
Chanting ; as though he sorrowed for my fate,  
His voice had then a sombre, mournful sound,  
As still he shouted from his sandy mound  
To the unhappy father, “ God is great ! ”  
O Allah ! Allah ! Praise be unto thee !  
By fire that sweeps o'er cities like the sea,  
By earthquakes that destroy great fortress walls,  
By plague whose hand upon my children falls  
And leaves their weeping mother desolate !  
Oh ! Allah akbar ! Allah ! God is great !

Now all that had the face of man were seen  
To draw aloof from me, as one unclean.  
My tent's bright cover, by my daughters spun,  
Blackened with dew and faded by the sun,  
Tore at a touch, and, lightly pulled, seemed dry  
As punk plucked from a coffin's rotting wood.  
Even upon my tent the plague-mark stood.  
And dost thou know ? Those sparrows that would fly  
Hither in swarms with each returning day  
To bathe in sand and eat our crumbs of bread,  
After Death took my first-born son away,  
No more came flocking eager to be fed.  
Did the torn tent-cloth frighten them, perchance,  
Or my despairing face and haggard glance ?  
Not one flew up of all that came before ;  
And when I noticed this, my heart was sore.

Five days passed by. O God, an evening came  
When on the shore the roaring waves beat high ;  
The gloomy sun concealed its sullen flame

Behind the darkling clouds that veiled the sky.  
Night fell, a still-remembered, ghastly night,  
Its darkness torn by forks of lurid light.  
Even today I see and feel and hear ;  
Hear how the heavy rain assails the tent,  
Which stretches, rustles, by the fury bent,  
And rocks above me in the darkness drear,  
While over it the jagged lightning plays,  
Like demons' tombs o'er which the hell fires blaze.  
Then through the tumult of the wind and rain  
I seemed to hear my cherished dead again,  
Their voices raised in a dull, piercing wail.  
I strained my sight, my ears above the gale,  
And thought, while fearful visions filled my mind,  
On such a night what peace the dead could find !

Then all at once—why did Death's angel creep  
So stealthily once more into our tent !—  
While by the storm the midnight skies were rent,  
The cradled babe softly began to weep.  
That cry inspired within us fresh dismay,  
And straightway both of us together rushed  
To where the stricken little creature lay.  
And though the wail was very low and hushed,  
It seemed to both of us so loud and clear,  
So sorrowful, so strained, so full of fear,  
As from his inmost tortured soul it burst !  
So knowing of his fate ! and so accurst !  
That thunderstruck we ran unto the bed  
With hope and consciousness already dead !

And we were not deceived that Death drew nigh !  
He too was withered by the fatal blast,  
And went to rest there where his brothers lie,  
My infant son . . . my dearest . . . and my last !  
Death tore him from me nor bemoaned my fate.  
And he will never grow to man's estate,  
Nor ever will my house see him again !  
He will return no more ! I mourn in vain !

A long night came. The silent stars hung low.  
Within our tent we sat benumbed with woe,

While on the table lay our baby—dead,  
His quiet sleep filling our hearts with dread.  
I felt then, gazing at him as he lay,  
That if with us that quiet form might stay  
Through all the years, not otherwise, just so,  
My heart would thus be eased of half its woe.  
Then—'twas not I nor yet the guards who bore  
That tiny body to the chapel door,  
Which yawned again for us, the door of doom—  
His mother carried him unto his tomb.

Within the empty tent we sat alone.  
But canst thou see?—The sorrow we had known,  
That grief with which our very souls were filled,  
Tore at our hearts and in our souls distilled  
A poison God alone can purify.  
Our grief was like a bitter, searing hate,  
A cloud that rose between us, black and great ;  
And we were sundered by our closest tie  
And spoke no word throughout each dreary day.  
For tell me, what could there have been to say  
Between us two within that place of pain,  
Between the stricken parents of the slain ?  
The sun rose red to cast its burning glow ;  
Each day it sank into the sea below,  
A flaming torch to set the world ablaze.  
And thus the childless lived through weary days.  
Our tent lay plunged in darkness deep and vast :  
Save only where some mouse the grasses stirred,  
No other sound of living thing was heard,  
While forty days and nights of waiting passed.  
Then came the doctors of the quarantine  
And gazed upon our faces dark with gloom :  
The wonder in their eyes was clearly seen,  
For I was bent, with hair greyed by my doom,  
While from her sleepless grief and hopeless care  
Like amber-tinted wax my wife appeared ;  
Upon her head a crown of greying hair—  
Upon her cheek the bricklike flush I feared ;  
And in her eyes the lightning flaming bright  
Of those who go from dungeons into light.  
The doctor bade us strike each limb in turn,

There where the plague's first fatal markings burn.  
My friends! Will ye believe? I felt no pain!  
I who had kissed each corpse among the slain  
Came forth from quarantine unharmed and well.  
My wife, who scarce had touched them after death,  
Striking her breast, turned pale, with half-drawn breath,  
And tottered with a dying groan—and fell.  
Clasping the woman's body to my breast,  
I placed it in the tent upon the ground,  
And sank beside it there without a sound.  
I woke—and lived—through forty days unrest.

The mother had confessed with her last breath  
That she had gone unto the infant's tomb  
For some memorial, a stone, a bloom,  
A golden curl from him now cold in death.  
And these mementoes of her best-loved child—  
Behold! this image that he oft caressed,  
These golden hairs today still undefiled,  
Plucked from the tiny head in its last rest—  
For the grief-stricken mother had such power  
That she exhumed him at the midnight hour;  
She found him uncorrupted, angel-fair,  
Kissed him upon the lips yet coral red,  
And then replaced the trappings of the dead—  
That kiss and those reminders of despair,  
Snatched from the earth that held them jealously,  
Slew her and took my cherished wife from me.

Once more the sandy graveyard yawned and there  
I placed the slain, the mother of the slain,  
Then turned me to my cave of cloth again,  
To hide myself, a monster in its lair.  
No more I saw the sun's bright, piercing ray,  
Nor did men see me on the plain by day.  
For I was childish, like the very old:  
No living face dwelt in my memory,  
Only those ghastly faces, blue and cold,  
That the foul vampire plague had torn from me.  
And in the day and during each dark night  
They stayed here in the tent within my sight.  
I spoke with them, imagined talks rehearsed

In which that ghostly throng and I conversed ;  
And oftentimes by some strange chance I spoke  
In tones that they had used in days gone by.  
At night from ghastly dreaming I awoke  
To hear the dread hyenas' piercing cry  
About the graves, and hearkened, as I lay,  
How the corpse-eaters wept above their prey.  
At last I grew cold, heartless, like a snake,  
And days and weeks passed by without a break.  
Untouched by visions, pains, or memory,  
I grew unyielding, hard and cold, like stone.  
And once—God's providence was over me !—  
I saw that I no longer was alone,  
For some one stood outlined against the light ;  
But 'twas no human face of sympathy  
That viewed so tenderly my tragic plight ;  
'Twas my old camel, gazing quietly,  
And looking so compassionate and mild  
That I fell weeping loudly, like a child.

Thus once more forty gloomy days passed by  
Until the hour of liberty drew nigh.  
Men came at last to give me my release.  
Ah ! bitter liberty and time of flight !  
I have grown wonted to my tent's dark peace :  
With sadness, grief, and terror at my plight  
I shall tear up the stakes, the ropes untie  
That—God eternal, hearken to my pain  
And give me light !—in days now long gone by  
My children helped me plant upon this plain.  
Ah, help me tear them up !—I am alone !  
Perchance this cloth's sad rustling will unfold  
To thee more tragic griefs than I have told.  
It has seen all, each awful death has known.  
Does it not picture forth each tortured hour ?  
Gaze on it ! Touch ! Fear not to be defiled !  
Fear not Death's cold, blue touch and fatal power,  
For thou, my son, art not in truth my child.  
Yet flee away ! This cloth's infected breath  
Must seem in strangers' eyes a thing of fear—  
Death from the plague ! That is a ghastly death !  
First one forgets the faces held most dear,

Then fire consumes him, and a dreadful thirst—  
Eight have I watched die thus, eight of mine own ;  
And each day hearkening to a dying moan,  
Here have I sat three months, a man accurst.  
Today, nine camels stand without the door—  
Eight empty saddles to be used no more ;  
God only is my refuge and abode :  
There lies my graveyard—and there lies my road.

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