

# **The Phoenix**

translated by Charles W. Kennedy



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# The Phoenix

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I have heard that there is far hence in eastern realms, a land most noble, widely known to men. Nor is that corner of the world of easy access to many tribes throughout the earth, but by the might of God it is set apart from sinful men. That plain is full of beauty, blest with joys, with the fairest fragrance of earth. Single in its loveliness that island, noble the Creator, great of heart and rich in might, who stablished there that land. There are often open and revealed unto the blessed the joy of pleasant sounds, the door of heaven.

That is a winsome plain, the woods are green, far—stretching 'neath the sky. Nor there may any rain nor snow, nor breath of frost nor blast of fire, nor storm of hail, nor fall of rime, nor heat of sun, nor everlasting cold, nor warm weather, nor winter shower work harm a whit; but the plain endureth blessed and wholesome. That noble land is starred with blossoms. There stand no hills nor mountains steep, no stony cliffs rise high as here with us, nor dales nor glens, nor mountain gorges, caves nor crags. No whit of roughness bideth there; but the pleasant field, blossoming with delights, bringeth forth beneath the clouds. Twelve fathom measure higher is that radiant land, as sages tell us, wisely in their writings make it known, than any of those hills that here with us rise bright and high under the stars of heaven.

Serene is that pleasant plain; its sunny grove gleameth, winsome its woodland glades. Its increase faileth not, its pleasant fruit; but ever the trees stand green as God gave bidding. In winter and in summer are the groves in likewise hung with fruit; never a leaf fadeth in the air, nor shall flame work them harm for ever, ere that the ending of the world shall be. As of old the turmoil of the waters, the sea—flood, covered all the world, the compass of the earth, yet that noble plain stood all unhurt, firm held against the water's surging, blessed, uninjured of the tossing waves, through the grace of God: so it shall bide in blossoming until the coming of the fire of the judgment of God, when the chambers of death, the shadowy sepulchres of men, shall be open.

In that land there is no hated foe, neither weeping nor vengeance, nor any sign of sorrow, nor age nor misery, nor narrow death, failing of life nor coming of the foe, nor sin nor strife nor tribulation, paupers' toil nor want of wealth, sorrow nor sleep nor bed of pain, nor wintry gust, nor tossing tempests raging beneath the sky, neither the hard frost with chill icicles troubleth any. There no hail nor rime fall upon the earth, nor windy cloud; there water falleth not, stirred in air. But flowing streams, wondrous curious wells, flow forth, watering the earth with pleasant streams. From the wood's middle, from the turf of earth, each month a winsome water breaketh, cold as the sea, faring abundantly through all the grove. It is the bidding of the Lord that twelve times the joy of water—floods shall overflow the glorious land. The groves are hung with bloom and beauteous increase; the holy treasures of the wood wane not beneath the heavens. The fallow blossoms, the beauty of the forest—trees fall not upon the ground; but on the trees the boughs are ever wondrous laden, the fruit new in every season. In the grassy plain the forests fair stand green, joyously garnished by the might of Holy God. Nor is the wood broken in aspect, but there a holy perfume dwelleth in that winsome land. Never shall that know change forever, until He who shaped it in the beginning shall bring His ancient work of wisdom unto its end.

II. In that wood a fowl dwelleth, wondrous fair and strong of wing.

It is called Phoenix. Solitary, strong of heart, it holdeth there its dwelling, its way of life. Never shall death scathe it in that joyous plain while the world standeth. It is said to note the journey of the sun, to go to meet God's candle, that radiant gem, eagerly to watch when that noblest of stars riseth above the ocean waves, shining from the east, gleaming with adornments, ancient creation of the Father, bright token of God. The stars are hid, departing under the moving water unto the western realms, darkened at dawn, and black night creepeth wanly away. Then strong of flight, exulting in his pinions, beneath the sky the fowl gazeth eagerly upon the mountain stream, over the water, when the gleam of heaven may come up gliding from the east over the spacious sea. So the noble fowl at the water—spring bideth in its beauty in the flowing streams; there the glorious bird twelve times doth bathe him in the running brook ere the coming of the beacon, the candle of heaven; in like wise as often

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tasteth the sea-cold water from the pleasant springs at every bath. Then after its water-sport, proud of heart, it soareth to a lofty tree, whence most easily it may behold the journey when over the tossing sea the taper of heaven, the gleam of light, shineth serene. The land is garnished, the world is beautified, when heaven's gem, fairest of stars, over the compass of the sea illumeth the land throughout the earth.

Soon as the sun riseth on high above the salty streams, then the grey fowl departeth brightly from its forest tree and fareth, swift of pinion, soaring through the air, singing and carolling to heaven. Fair is the bearing of that fowl, its heart inspired, in bliss exulting; it poureth forth its changing strains with clear note more wondrously than ever child of man heard beneath the heavens since the High King, Craftsman of glory, stablished the world, heaven and earth. The voice of its hymn is sweeter than all song-craft, fairer and winsomer than any strain. Neither horns nor trumpets may be likened unto that sound, neither the music of the harp, nor the voice of any man on earth, nor an organ, nor melody of song, nor feathered swan, nor any of those pleasant sounds that God created to be a joy to men in this mournful world. Thus it singeth, blest with joy, and carolleth till that the sun is sinking in the southern sky.

Then is it silent and listeneth, boweth its head boldly, sage of thought, and shaketh its pinions thrice, fain of flight. The fowl is hushed. Twelve times it telleth off the hours of day and night.

Thus is it ordained that there the dweller of the wood may have joy in that plain with its delights; taste of weal, of life and happiness, the beauties of the land, till that the warder of the forest grove abideth there one thousand winters of this life. Then the grey feathered fowl is stricken, old and full of years; that joy of birds fleeth the green earth, the blossoming land, and seeketh thence a far realm of earth, a home and native land where no man dwell. There it re- ceiveth sovereignty, almighty over all the race of birds, distinguished in their tribe, and for a time with them dwelleth in the waste.

Then strong of flight it departeth unto the west, full of winters, flying swift of wing; and the birds throng round about their lord. Each would fain be thane and servant to their prince, till that it seeketh out the Syrian land with mighty train. There the pure fowl turneth swiftly from them, that within the forest grove in its shade it may dwell in a desert place, concealed and hid from the throngs of men; there in the forest wood it bides and habits in a lofty tree, fast by its roots beneath the roof of heaven; which men on earth call Phoenix from the name of that fowl. The King of might and glory, the Lord of men, hath granted to that tree, as I have heard, that it alone of all the trees springing on the paths of earth is brightest blooming. Nor may aught bitter work it grievous harm, but ever shielded it shall bide uninjured, while the world standeth.

III. When the wind lieth at rest, and fair is the weather, and brightly shineth the holy gem of heaven, when the clouds are done away, and the forces of the waters lie tranquil, and every storm is stilled under heaven, and from the south gleameth warm the weather candle, shining upon the hosts of men, then it begin- neth to build in the boughs and rear its nest.

Great need it hath that it most speedily, by might of wisdom, may turn old age to life and gain a youthful spirit. Then far and near it gathereth and bringeth together unto its dwelling place winsome herbs and blossoms of the wood, every fair perfume of winsome herb which the King of glory, the Father of creation, wrought of fragrance under heaven upon the earth for the lordly race of men. There it beareth rich treasure to that tree. There the wild fowl in the waste upon the lofty tree reareth a house winsome and fair, and lodgeth in that upper chamber, and in the leafy shade setteth body and wings round about on either side with holy fragrance and the fairest blooms of earth. Destined upon a journey hence it nestleth there, when the gem of heaven, the burning sun, in the summer season shineth over the shade, fulfilleth its destiny and gazeth through the world. Then is its house kindled by its radiant gleam, the herbs grow warm, its lovely home steameth with pleasant savours; then in the heat, in the grasp of fire, the fowl burneth with its nest. The funeral flame is kindled, burning seizeth on the house of that fowl, sad unto death. Roughly it hasteth on, nurseth the fallow flame; and full of many years the Phoenix burneth.

Then the fire feedeth on its fleeting body life, the spirit of the doomed, is on a journey hence when the funeral flame consumeth flesh and bone. Yet unto it cometh new life after the appointed time. When the cold embers begin to fall together into a heap after the fire is spent, when pure is that fairest of nests, the valiant fowl's abode, destroyed by fire; when the body is cold, and the bony frame is shattered, and the fire slumbers, then in the funeral pile in the ashes is found the likeness of an apple from which groweth a worm wondrous fair, as it were brought forth from an egg, gleaming from the shell. In the shade it waxeth so that at first it is even as an eagle's

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young, a fair birdling. Then further it flourisheth in bliss, so that it is like to an old eagle in growth, and after that beautified with feathers, brightly blooming, even as it was in the beginning. Then it waxeth broad, all renewed and born again, sundered from sin. Even as when man for sustenance bringeth home the fruits of the earth in the harvest season, pleasant food at the time of reaping ere the coming of winter, lest a shower of rain destroy them under the clouds, wherein they find a stay and joy of food when frost and snow with mighty force shroud the earth in winter weeds; from those fruits shall the wealth of man by the nature of the grain again spring forth, which is first sown pure seed, and then the gleaming of the sun in the springtide waketh the germ of life, the riches of the world, so that the fruits, the treasures of the earth, are again begotten of their kind: even so that fowl, old in years, groweth young again and compassed about with flesh. It eateth not food nor meat upon the earth save when it tasteth a whit of honey-dew, which often falleth at the midnight; whereon the noble fowl feedeth its life until it seeketh again its own place, its ancient dwelling.

IV. When the fowl, proud of pinion, is grown again among its herbs, when its life is new, young and full of grace, then from the ground it gathereth the leavings of the flame, its nimble body which the fire devoured aforetime, wisely bringeth together the wasted bones after the fire's raging, assembleth again bones and ashes together, the leavings of the funeral flame, and covereth over that woful spoil, fairly adorned with herbs. Then it hasteth away to seek again its native place, and with its talons it graspeth the leavings of the fire, claspeth them in its claws, and seeketh again joyously its home, its sun-bright seats, its blessed native land. All is renewed, spirit and feathery coat, even as he was in the beginning, when first the God of victory set him in that pleasant plain. There he bringeth his bones and eke the ashes which the surge of fire overwhelmed aforetime upon the funeral mound; the valiant fowl burieth all together, bones and embers, in that island. New unto him is the gleaming of the sun, when the light of heaven, brightest of gems, joy of noble stars, shineth from the east over the ocean wave.

That fowl is fair of hue before, gay with varied colours on its breast; its head is green behind, varied wondrously, blended with scarlet. The tail is fairly divided, part brown, part crimson, cunningly beset with brilliant spots. Its feathers are white behind, the neck green under and above, and the nib gleameth like glass or gem; the jaws are fair within and without. The nature of its eye is stark, in hue most like to stone, or gleaming gem, when set in a golden goblet by cunning of smiths. Round about its neck it is like unto the circle of the sun, brightest of rings woven of feathers! Comely is the belly underneath, and wondrous fair, bright and lovely. The shield is wrought with beauty above the fowl's back. The legs are grown with scales, the feet are yellow. The fowl is single in its beauty, most like the peacock, winsomely grown, as the writings tell. It is neither sluggish nor slow, torpid nor slothful, as are some birds that flap heavily through the air upon their wings; but swift is he and fleet, exceeding light, lovely and winsome, marked with beauty. Eternal is the Prince who granteth him that bliss!

When it departeth from that native soil to seek its meadows and its olden home, as the fowl flieth it is seen of many tribes of men in the world; then from north and south and east and west they come together in hosts and journey far and near with throng of folk, that they may see God's fair grace upon that fowl, as the righteous King of triumph in the beginning ordained for it a better nature and a fairer beauty beyond all the race of birds. Then through all the earth men marvel at its beauty and its form, make it known in writings, and with their hands grave it on marble stone, when the day and hour reveal unto their hosts the beauty of the fowl fain of flight. Then the race of birds on either hand throng about in multitudes, descend upon the spacious paths, praise in song and magnify the noble fowl with earnest strains; thus they circle round about the holy bird in its flight in air. The Phoenix is in the midst compassed about by their hosts. Men behold and see with wonder how that gladsome band exalt the wild fowl, one throng after another; mightily proclaim and magnify their king, their well-loved lord, leading joyfully their prince unto his home, till that the lonely dweller, swift of wing, flieth away, so that the host of joyful birds may not follow after him, when that joy of virtues from this earth seeketh his native soil.

V. So the blessed fowl, after his time of death, cometh unto his old abode, his beauteous home. Sad of heart the birds return from that valiant one unto their home again; and the noble fowl is young in his dwelling. God wotteth only, the Almighty King, what his sex may be, male or female; no one of all the race of men knoweth that, save God alone, how wondrous are the ways, the fair decree of old regarding the nature of that bird. There the blessed fowl may joy in its abode, in the running streams within the forest groves, and dwell in the plain until a thousand winters have run. Then is the ending of life for him; the funeral fire wrappeth him in surging flame. Yet he cometh unto life again, wondrously awakened. Wherefore drooping he sorroweth not for death, the sore pain of parting, since ever he wotteth of new life after the fire's raging, spirit after death, when surely, in feathered

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state, he shall be restored from the ashes, grow young again under the span of heaven.

Unto himself he is both son and loving father, and heir again unto his olden life. The mighty Lord of men hath granted him that though the fire take him, yet shall he wondrously become again the same that he was aforetime.

VI. So every blessed man, after sore trial, himself chooseth that eternal life through darksome death, that after the days of his life he may enjoy the grace of God in everlasting bliss and dwell for evermore in glory, as a reward of his works. The nature of this fowl, very like to the chosen thanes of Christ, showeth in the cities of men how in this evil tide they may gain bright joy beneath the heavens by the Father's aid, and win high bliss in realms above. We have learned that the Almighty God wrought man and woman by His wondrous might, and set them in the fairest of earth's fields, which the children of men call Paradise, where they knew no lack of any blessing so long as they would keep the word of the Eternal One, the sayings of holy God in their new joy.

There hatred came upon them, the envy of their olden foe, who offered them as food the fruit of the tree, so that in their folly they both did eat the apple, against the will of God, and tasted the forbidden fruit.

Then was their sorrow bitter after the eating, for them and for their children, for their sons and daughters, a woful feast. Grievously were their busy teeth requited according to their sin. They knew the wrath of God and bitter bale; wherefore their sons have paid the penalty because they ate that food, against the word of the Eternal One. Wherefore, sad of heart, they must needs forego the land's delights through the serpent's malice, what time in days of yore with wily heart he beguiled our parents to their hurt, so that far thence in these vales of death they sought a way of life, a home more sorrowful. The better life was hidden from them in the darkness, and the holy plain by the Fiend's wiles was fastened close for many a winter, till that the King of glory, the joy of men, Comforter of the weary and our only Hope, by His advent unto holy men opened it again.

VII. Even so, as scholars say and tell us in their writings, most like is the flight of that fowl when sagely it foregoeth home and native land and is grown old. Weighed down with winters, with a weary heart, it wingeth its way, where it findeth the high shelter of the forest grove in which it buildeth with rarest twigs and herbs a new dwelling, a nest in the wood. Great need it hath that it may win again a youthful spirit, life after death, by the fiery blast; grow young again, that it may seek its olden home, its sun-bright seats, after the bath of fire. So our parents, who have been before us, left behind them that pleasant plain and lovely seat of glory, going a long journey into great afflictions, where their foes, evil and wretched men, oft wrought them harm.

Yet are there many men who under heaven hearken well unto the Creator in holy practices and glorious deeds, so that the Lord, High King of heaven, is gracious unto them in heart. That is the lofty tree wherein holy men do have their dwelling, where the olden foe with poison nor with guileful token in this evil tide may not work them harm a whit. But the champion of the Lord worketh him a nest against all hatred by his glorious deeds, when he dealeth alms unto the poor and graceless men, proclaimeth the Lord, the Father, unto them to their succour; hasteth forth, and quengeth the evils of this fleeting life: the darksome deeds of sin; bravely in his heart keepeth the law of God; with pure thought seeketh prayer and nobly boweth down his knee unto the earth; fleeth every evil, all dire iniquities, for his fear of God, and, glad of heart, yearneth that he may work the greatest deal of godly deeds. For that man is the Lord, the Wielder of victory, Joy-giver of hosts, a shield in all his walks.

Those are the plants, the flowers of fruit, which the wild-fowl gathereth under heaven far and wide unto his abiding place, where wondrous firm of heart it worketh a nest against all hatred. So now the champions of the Lord with heart and might accomplish His will in their dwellings, for which Eternal and Almighty God will grant them gracious gifts. Of those plants a home is wrought for them in the City of glory as a reward of their works, for that they kept His holy teachings; day and night with glowing heart and fervid spirit loved the Lord, choosing with radiant faith the Well-beloved rather than worldly weal. No joyful hope it is to them that they may long abide in this fleeting life. An earl thus blessed earneth by his virtue eternal bliss, a home in heaven with the High King until cometh the end of numbered days, when Death, that warrior greedy of slaughter, girt round about with weapons, taketh every life and swiftly sendeth into the bosom of earth these fleeting bodies, deprived of souls, where they long shall bide, covered over with clay, until the coming of the fire.

Then the host of the race of men shall be led unto the assembly. The Father of angels, the Righteous King of triumphs, the Lord of hosts, shall hold a council and judge with justice. Then shall all mortal men have resurrection as the mighty King, the Lord of angels, Saviour of souls, by the trumpet's voice commandeth over the spacious earth. For blessed men dark death shall be ended by the might of God. Nobly they shall turn away, thronging in multitudes, when this sinful world burneth in shame, kindled by fire. Every one shall be afraid in

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heart when the fire crasheth through all the fleeting riches of the world, when the flame consumeth the olden treasures of the earth, clutcheth eagerly on appled gold, and swalloweth greedily the land's adornments. Then in that all revealing hour shall come to light for men the fair and pleasant token of this fowl, when the Sole Power shall rouse up all before the knee of Christ, gather the bones from the graves, body and limbs together, the guest of the flame. The King in splendour from His high seat shall shine unto the holy, a beauteous gem of glory. Well will it be with him who maybe pleasing unto God in that dread hour.

VIII. There the bodies, purged of sin, shall wander joyously; their spirits shall pass again into their bony frames, when the fire mounteth on high to heaven. Hot shall be for many that fearful flame, when every man, righteous or sinful, body and soul together, from his mouldy grave shall seek the judgment of the Lord, dismayed with fear. The fire shall be astir, burning the sins of men. There after their time of exile blessed men shall be encircled by their deeds, their own works; these are the noble winsome herbs wherewith the wild fowl hedgeth his nest about, so that it swiftly burneth with fire, and kindleth in the sun, and with it he himself, and then after the fire receiveth again life anew.

So every one of the race of men shall be shrouded in flesh, lovely and ever-young, who here on earth worketh to his own gain, so that the mighty King of glory in that assembly shall be merciful to him. Then holy spirits shall chant and righteous souls pure and chosen, lift up song, strain upon strain, exalting the splendour of their King, and fairly perfumed with their goodly deeds shall mount to glory. Let no one of the race of men ween that I write this song and frame this lay with lying words. Hear ye the wisdom of the hymns of Job! Inspired in heart with grace of spirit he boldly lifted up his voice; adorned with glory, spake this word:

"I reject it not from the thoughts of my heart, that in my nest I shall know death, a broken man, and wofully go hence upon a long journey, compassed about with clay, mourning for my former deeds in the bosom of earth; and then after death even as the Phoenix fowl, by the Lord's grace I may win new life after my resurrection, bliss with the Lord, where the dear throng exalt the Well-beloved. Never need I look for ending of that life, that light and joy, forever; though my body in its house of mold groweth decayed, a joy to worms, yet after its time of death the God of hosts shall free my soul and wake it unto glory. That hope never faileth in my breast, that ready joy, which I have, firm-set upon the Lord of angels."

Thus, wise of heart, in olden days the sage, God's herald, chanted of his resurrection to eternal life, that we might understand more clearly the glorious token which the radiant fowl revealeth through its burning.

The remnants of its bones, ashes and embers, all it gathereth together after the surge of fire; the fowl beareth them in its talons unto the gardens of the Lord, towards the sun; where thenceforth he abideth many winters renewed in form, all young again; nor then within that realm may any menace him with deeds of malice. So after death, by the might of God, souls and bodies journey together, fairly adorned, most like to that fowl, in bliss, with pleasant perfumes, where the righteous sun gleameth in beauty over the thronging hosts in the city of glory.

IX. Then high above the roofs of earth for righteous souls shineth the Saviour Christ. Winsome birds, radiantly restored, in bliss exulting, chosen spirits, follow Him in that joyous home forever, where the hostile shameless Fiend may not work them evil. But there they dwell forever, clothed with light, like to the Phoenix fowl, beauteous in the peace of God and in His glory. The work of every man gleameth brightly in that blithe home, peacefully before the face of the Eternal Lord, like to the sun. There a radiant crown, woven of precious stones, riseth o'er the head of every blessed soul. Arched with splendour their foreheads gleam; the diadem of their Prince fairly adorneth every righteous man radiantly in that life, where everlasting joy, eternal and ever-young, never fadeth, but they dwell in beauty, clothed in glory and adornments fair, with the Father of angels. They know no whit of sorrow in those courts, sin nor want nor days of toil, burning hunger nor bitter thirst, nor misery nor age. But the noble king granteth them every good, where that spirit-throng giveth glory to the Saviour, exalteth the power of the King of heaven, and singeth praise to God. That peaceful host in mighty strains maketh melody serene round about the holy throne of God; saints and angels blithely bless their worthy Lord thus with united voices:

"Peace be unto thee, True God, reigning in majesty! Craft of wisdom and thanks for all Thy new gifts, for every good thing; mighty and measureless the strength of Thy glory, high and holy! The heavens are fairly filled, Father Almighty, Glory of glories, with Thy majesty among angels above, and on the earth beneath. Guard us, Thou Lord of all beginnings. Thou art the Father Almighty, ruling in the heights of heaven."

Thus shall godly men, proved of sin, sing in that beauteous city, proclaim His royal glory, a throng of

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righteous souls singing their Ruler's praise in heaven:

"To Him only is eternal honour without an end; for Him was no beginning nor source of bliss. Although He was born unto the world upon this earth in the image of a child, yet His abundant might bode high above the heavens in holiness, His unbroken judgments. Though He must needs endure the pang of death upon the cross and bitter woe, yet on the third day after the death of the body He received life again by the Father's grace. So in his haunts the youthful Phoenix foreshoweth the power of the Son of God, when from the ashes he waketh again unto the life of life, girt round with limbs. So the Saviour by His body's death wrought help for us, life without ending, even as that fowl filleth both his wings with sweet and winsome herbs, the fair blossoms of the earth, and wingeth hence his flight."

Those are the words, as the writings say, the chant of holy men, whose souls are wafted unto heaven, unto the God of mercy, unto the joy of joys, where for a gift to God they bring the winsome savour of their words and works, unto their Lord, unto that glorious realm, unto that life of light. Praise be to Him forever, and grace of glory, honour and might in the celestial kingdom of the heavens. He is the King indeed of this middle-earth, and of majesty, circled with glory, in that beauteous city. The author of light hath granted us that we may here by goodly deeds deserve and win delights in heaven; that we may seek that mighty realm; sit on high thrones and live in bliss of light and peace; have seats of tender joy, and know blissful days, behold the Lord of victories merciful and mild, and blessed mid the angels, endlessly sing His praise with everlasting laud. Alleluia.

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