













SAUL, A MYSTERY.





SAUL,  
  
A MYSTERY.

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An Evil Spirit from the Lord troubled him.

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Arthur Cleveland Coxe

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "CHRISTIAN BALLADS," "ATHANASION,"  
ETC. ETC. ETC.

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# EPISTLE.

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TO

JOHN JAY, ESQ.,

BEDFORD.

MY DEAR JAY,

YOU are too familiar with the wonderful histories of Holy Writ, to need any intimation that the subject of the Mystery which I dedicate to you, is one of the most interesting which the older Scriptures present. The character of Saul appears to me, to combine those attributes in which the Tragic Muse has heretofore found her noblest material. Magnificent as Prometheus, he is yet wretched as Œdipus, and wicked as Macbeth. I was aware, therefore, from the beginning, how difficult it would be to do justice to my great theme; but experience has convinced me that the greatest difficulties attending it were of a class not foreseen, and of which, as others may not suspect it, I am desirous of reminding you.

I was led to choose a sacred subject, from a conviction that such are the most noble, and the least

appreciated; and from a mysterious and almost romantic love of the very geography of the Holy Land, co-existing with a deep desire to recommend the study of sacred lore, in preference of the worn-out fables of classic Mythology. The finest dramatic hero of Holy Scripture, seemed to me, moreover, to have been singularly overlooked; and the endeavour to inspire others with the deep and awful interest which always moved my spirit at the name of Palestine, or the mention of Saul and David, appeared to be a work, on which I might ask and expect the blessing of the God of my youth. But I did not apprehend the straits, within which my high estimate of my undertaking would necessarily hedge me; nor the scruples which a deeper inspection of the blessed Scriptures would excite, as to the lawfulness of employing its narrations as material for plastic fancy. I was familiar, it is true, with the delicate sensibility of Racine, expressed in the preface to his Esther; but I am sorry to say that, at first, the deep conscientiousness which I have since learned to honour even more than the genius of its subject, struck me as morbid, if not weak. The historical books of Scripture are indeed the least objectionable ground-work for fictitious illustration; and the uninspired narrations of Josephus may be taken as a providential intimation that sacred history has also a place in the civil and social history of the world: but I am constrained to acknowledge that, like Jacob at Bethel, I entered comparatively lightly upon a field, in which I was soon brought to exclaim, *how awful is this place*. Even the least interesting portions of Holy Writ, have

convinced me that they came in no sense, "by the will of man." The characters they set before us are the speculative creations of no superficial judgment; they are, as it were, transcripts from the great books that shall be opened at the Last Day; THE HOLY SPIRIT has revealed them, for example and warning, to all succeeding generations of men; and with their story, we ourselves are in some way mysteriously concerned.

A deepening sense of this great truth has fettered and restrained me in writing. Passages, which I approved as an artist, I have been forced to prune away, as a Christian. And thus, though I present you with the work completed, I do not pretend that it is finished; and if, for allowing it to go forth as it is, I shall be thought, by good men, to have erred in judgment, I can only say that I shall rejoice in the oblivion, to which it is probably destined.

As to the propriety of treating sacred subjects in the dramatic form, I need urge no other plea, than the example of so grave a bishop as S. Gregory Nazianzen, who could employ this means of setting forth no less a theme than "CHRIST and Him Crucified." Grotius, who followed the venerable father, in a Latin Tragedy with the same high argument, has, in his preface, expressed himself with great beauty, as to the limit of a poet's freedom with inspired narrative, and the revealed order of events; and although his rules have chief reference to the thrice holy ground of the sacred Gospels, I have endeavoured generally to regard them, in dealing with the story of Saul. What latitude I

have allowed myself, has usually been in accordance with admitted canons of criticism, or at least such as not materially to affect the fact. The purely imaginative portions of the poem, will be found symbolical of principles which I deemed it important to keep in mind; and this remark I make with special allusion to the part sustained in the plot by the Ideal of an evil spirit. I was not satisfied, as a mere dramatist would be, with representing the apostate monarch as a prey merely to his own conflicting passions: for the Christian is bound to believe that, like all who trifle with their election of God, he had become the subject of infernal excitement to sin, and to ruin. This fearful truth I have not cared to explain away after the pert and conceited philosophy of an age that lacks the greatest element of noble mind—religious veneration. Exhibiting this principle in the conception of Merodach, I have also united with it an illustration of the evil conscience and unrepented sin, which gave Satan such advantage over the soul of his servant. That haunting of remorse, which the greatest of poets has so powerfully pictured in the blood-boltered Banquo, I have more feebly symbolized in the *body of death*, which the Evil Spirit is represented as inhabiting for the purpose of producing, in his victim, the deeper despair. From the Hadad of our lamented Hillhouse, I perhaps took the hint of such a demoniacal possession; and though I employ it for a purpose so different from his that the acknowledgment might not be demanded, I am glad of the opportunity of paying this passing tribute to a fine fan-

cy and gentle heart, of which his country has been so prematurely bereaved.

I will only add that if I have occasionally preferred to walk in other than buskin'd measures, I have found it almost indispensable, in varying a poem of such length and seriousness. One consigned by Inspiration itself to the laugh and scorn, as well as the fear of men, will be found chief speaker in the groundling style: and as for the mere machines of the action, I have not scrupled to let them talk, as I suppose the rustics of all lands have in all ages been wont to talk. And so I leave you to your own criticisms, with the intimation, that though half the Horatian period of seasoning has passed over my poem, between its first sketch, and the present date, you must not expect a much greater degree of finish, on that account. During that time, I have been forced by graver studies to leave it untouched for years together: and duties every way of paramount importance have only allowed me to make this work an occasional amusement, while (to translate from Grotius) I strove to vary the odd hours which I was able to steal from severer occupations for the refreshing cultivation of the Muse, in such wise that even they might not be lost to Christian meditation.

Remember sometimes the charming autumnal evening and the delightful retreat, of which my date will remind you. Hither have we often retired together from the noisy city, whose hum is musical when once we hear it across the broad Hudson, so mellowed as only to tell us that we have escaped its din: and here to-day

you have read the completed work, which from the first I proposed to inscribe with a name dear to my country for his sake who wore it once, and to me for his who wears it now.

Ever faithfully yours,

A. C. C.

WEEHAWKEN,

October 13, 1842.

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### ADVERTISEMENT.

ALTHOUGH this Poem was announced as about to be published in the fall of 1842, it has been withheld for private reasons, which now no longer interfere with the fulfillment of the author's obligations to those kind friends, who have been pleased to express an impatience to see it forthcoming. It has, perhaps, been benefitted by the delay.

ST. JOHN'S RECTORY, HARTFORD,  
February, 1845.



## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

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SAUL,	AHINOAM,
DAVID,	ABIGAIL,
JONATHAN,	HEZRO,
ABNER,	MERODACH,
ABISHAI,	DOEG,
AMASA,	HAG,
AHIMELECH,	HUNCHBACK,
ABIATHAR,	COWHERD,
ZADOK,	A PHILISTINE CHIEF,
THE PROPHET SAMUEL,	THE WITCH OF ENDOR,

HERALDS, OUTLAWS, SHEPHERDS, ETC. ETC. ETC.

*The SCENE is chiefly laid in the hill country of Judæa, and parts adjacent; but changes in the fourth act to the mountains surrounding the valley of Esdrelon.*



# SAUL.

  

## A MYSTERY.

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AN EVIL SPIRIT FROM THE LORD TROUBLED HIM.

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### ACT I.

SCENE I. *The wilderness near Gibeah of Saul. A high place, looking eastward over a valley. The dawn slowly breaking over Mount Nebo in the distance. DAVID worshipping.*

DAVID.

Now roll the mists away,  
That swathed the slumbering world,  
Through all the silent night.  
The heavens are telling, Lord;  
Thy glory and thy power,  
As light goes forth into the silent soul,  
Of meditative man,  
And calls as with a voice ;  
Waking, like echoes in its labyrinths