

RIZPAH.

BY E. TALLMADGE ROOT.

Why should my Lord, the King, inquire
The name

Of such a dead dog? such a worthless flea?
Thy servant is a man of Gibeon.

Placed by my brethren here on guard. For
when

Jehovah sent long famine on the land,
Because Saul's bloody house kept not the
oath

Which Joshua to our wily fathers swore,
My Lord himself gave up seven sons of Saul,
And them we hanged before the face of God.
Then, to thy servant, said the Gibeonites;
"Watch thou, lest any pluck these bodies
down."

Let not my Lord in wrath say: "None
would touch
The hated of Jehovah and the King!"—
For one did dare show kindness.

When I saw,—
Just as the first long day grew dark with
night,—

That figure robed in sackcloth, quick I ran,
Stood in the path, and cried: "Back, on
thy life!"

Then, lo! a woman's sob shook the strange
form;

And as the parting cloud shows white and
gold,

The swaying sackcloth to mine eyes disclosed
Fine linen and such gems as queens may wear.
"Wilt thou forbid me to approach my sons?"

"Daughter of Aiah," I exclaimed, "for
thee

This grim sight were not fit! To gaze on
flowers

Thine eyes were made; thy limbs, for
damaak couch.

True, dead is Saul; and princely Abner, dead;
But men there are who live—"I stopped,
amazed.

So have I seen the lioness, at bay,
Glare, while she screened her whelps.

"Fool! let me pass!
Two, yonder, are my boys!"

"Woman," said I,
"If one be taken, my corpse hangs for his."

"Now as Jehovah liveth," burst she forth;
"I swear that I will loose nor thong nor nail!

I will but drive away the beasts by night,
And birds of air by day, from their dear
forms.

Then, if I break my oath, strike thou me
dead."

My Lord, what could I do? I let her pass;
For in my heart I thought: "Within an hour,

From the first wolf that howls, back will
she flee!"

O King, seest thou these big and welcome
drops?

The rains for which this bloody offering
prayed,

The autumn rains, are near. 'Twas harvest
then,

First days of barley harvest, when they died,
See, still she keeps her vigils!

Stout my heart,
King David, tho' ye call me "hewer of wood
And drawer of water" still; and I have seen
Thy lion-hearted men of Judah fight.

But never have I known courage like this!
No man of all mankind but what had fled,
Long moons ago, from yon accursed spot!

Fled from the grim realities of day,
And from the half-heard horrors of the night,
Lest sounds and sights and smells had set
him mad!

But Rizpah spread her sackcloth on the rock,
And bared her dainty arm to sun and wind.
And with her slender wrists beat back brute
might;

Till angry eagles quailed before her eye,
And lions fled rage fiercer than their own,
The fierceness of a human mother's love!

My Lord, Saul would not know the girl
he made

The pretty plaything of his idle hours;
Nor Abner recognize the face for which
His soul turned traitor to his master's house.
Gaunt, haggard, withered, browned, un-
kempt and foul—

She that once matched the glowing, fragrant
rose!

Yet to my mind, she seems more glorious,
Thus stripped of every grace that woman
loves,

In the sheer grandeur of her motherhood.

Woe, woe is me! that I have spoken thus,
Who am but dust and ashes, to the King!
What saith my Lord? Have my ears heard
aright?—

Ho! Rizpah, ho! Thy vigils have an end!
Yet shall thy sons lie with the great of earth
Where troubleshooters cease and where the weary
rest!

For one hath told King David of thy deed;
And lo! he comes to give fit burial
To all the house of Saul—Now weep, poor
eyes!

Hands tense and torn, unclench! Relax,
brave heart!

E'en hate and hell yield to a mother's love!

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