

# ELEUSINIA



# ARTHUR MACHEN

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THIS GAMBLIN' MAN PUT HIS LIFE ON  
THE LINE AND CAME THROUGH.  
THANKS TO  
S. ADAM BRASEL

# ELEUSINIA

BY A FORMER MEMBER OF H.C.S.

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*OULDIES MUOMENOS ODURETAL*

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HEREFORD:  
PRINTED BY JOSEPH JONES, 10 BROAD STREET.  
1881.

ELEUSINIA. By a former Member of H.C.S.  
(Hereford: Joseph Jones)

Here we have a graceful and classically conceived poem by a late Herefordian—presumably a beginner in the craft of verse making, but, if so, a beginner full of promise. There is much sweetness in this poetical description of an Eleusinian devotion at Athens; the allusions and references are true to authority, and the sentiment is throughout in harmony with all we know of the worship of Demeter. A line halts here and there, and doubtless the author, if he clings to his first love, will recognize the necessity of dealing more severely with the offspring of his imagination, so as to give them the finish and perfection which we now regard as absolutely indispensable in verses meant to be read; but his actual achievement is sufficiently good to warrant both praise and encouragement. The following verses may convey an idea of the tenderness which is manifest in every stanza of this short poem :—

Are they not weary toiling through the night?  
Is it not long before the dawn is breaking?  
Shall not the pilgrims gladden in the light?  
When God shall burst forth, the powers of darkness shaking.  
No, we are not weary, if the night is long;  
Nay, it is not long before the dawn is breaking.  
For there rises oft the solemn swelling song  
While our holy priest his offering is making.

Demeter all holy, see we toil to meet thee.  
From the distant parts of thy beloved land;  
Demeter all holy, shall we ever see thee  
Standing in thy majesty, while countless as the sand  
On yonder shore, the multitude adore thee  
As thou blessest all men with thy loving hand?

*Lewis Bergant Eager  
in "Hereford Tim"*

# ELEUSINIA.

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## THE ASSEMBLING.

The day is dawning. Whither shall we bend  
Our steps, and whither send  
The herald on before us; mighty clouds  
That have been thick about the path of night,  
Now parting all asunder, let the rays  
Of mighty Paeon glance upon the hills,  
And shew us here and there a marble tower,  
With minarets that climb aloft, and gleam  
Like silver crowns upon the hills of time.  
Let us then climb those hill-tops, if with pain  
And patient limbs we may attain thereto. .

. . . . .

We then at last have come unto the brow,  
And gloried with the rays of the young sun,  
May look upon the valley underneath.  
It is a plain far stretching to the sea,  
Which rocks and tumbles on the distant shore.  
While close beneath the hill on which we stand  
There is a city shining like a bride,  
Whose birth-place was in old Pentelicus.  
And all the roads which lead into the town  
Are crowded with the hurrying steps of men,  
Who have been coming from the north and south,  
And east and west;

That they may see the city on this day,  
And celebrate the praise of Demeter.

Are they not weary toiling through the night?  
Is it not long before the dawn is breaking?  
Shall not the pilgrims gladden in the light?  
When God shall burst forth, the powers of darkness shaking.

No, we are not weary, if the night is long;  
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From the distant parts of thy beloved land;  
Demeter all holy, shall we ever see thee  
Standing in thy majesty, while countless as the sand  
On yonder shore, the multitude adore thee  
As thou blessest all men with thy loving hand?

Athens is thy dwelling place:  
Holy mother, give us grace.  
In the town thy temple stands  
Bright, all marble from thine hands.  
While the gathering people kneel, journeying from many lands.

Is that thy priest who stands within the town?  
Is that thy choir whose thunders roll and swell?  
Hail to thee most mighty, great be thy renown,  
While minstrels sing, and priests thy glory tell.  
And now the glory of the rising sun.  
Poured forth upon the city marble-built;  
And all the crowd of worshippers was come

Unto the temple of the Goddess Queen.  
And there they hymn her with resounding songs.  
Which rise and fall like thunders, or the noise  
Of mighty waters rolling on the shore.  
And so the day goes on in worshipping,  
Until the sun has hid himself behind  
The purple hills that compass Athens round.  
And the moon glitters in the pale blue sky  
Upon the pilgrims, who have laid their limbs  
Weary, but glad at heart, upon the beds  
Of herbs, which all the city strews for them.  
Such was the ending of the opening day.

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## THE SEA-SHORE

Now to the sea the mystai bend their steps,  
To purge all stain of guilt from off their souls;  
And as they go, in pure white vestment clad,  
Each one and all implore the goddess queen  
To pardon all the sins of the past life.  
And wash them pure, and free from every fault.  
Down from the temple through the narrow streets,  
And gardens smelling sweet, and cool with leaves.  
Till they have passed out of the city gates,  
And come unto the plain beyond the town,  
All through its levels in a mighty band,  
Singing in praise of Demeter the Queen.

And then the shore—for every one must wash  
His limbs therein, and have it for a sign,  
That, as the flesh is pure and free from stain,  
The soul within is in like manner cleansed.  
So, the cool water sweeps away the stain,  
And all have been absolved—the priest has said.

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## THE FAST

The dawn again is breaking o'er the deep:  
Shall we still journey or yet keep  
The fast in Athens? The sea heaves  
And murmurs, as the yellow autumn leaves  
At eastern winds, and nought relieves  
The masses of grey clouds, but ever dark  
They stand; and on this day no song  
Save of the lark.

For is not now this day a day of tears,  
Kept through the long-past years?  
Kept and is keeping,  
In fast and in weeping.  
Now in the city where they stand,  
Sorrowing in dark attire,  
Wailing at the priest's command  
A dirge, while with a lamp of fire  
Slowly he lights the sacred pyre  
With sad desire.

See, for thy sake is weariness;  
Queen for thy sake is great distress.  
Let us not perish, kind earth mother,  
Sister by sister, brother by brother:  
But heavy with thy heaviness.  
Mourning and weeping on the temple floor,  
Let there be pity for our great complaint.  
And as by the sea shore,  
We, washing, all were freed from taint  
Turn to us, mighty Queen, and weep no more.

So passed the day in mourning and in fast.

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## THE PROCESSION

The day is dawning. Whither shall we bend  
Our steps, or whither send  
The herald on before us; the great plain  
Pours forth a shout of praise and many songs;  
Thunders which roll and sweep the summer air,  
Rising and falling like the swelling sea,  
And striking all the soul with solemn awe.  
Into the heart they rushed like sweet dark wine,  
And all the rocks were ringing with the sound  
All through the plain in which fair Athens stands,  
Until the sailors seaward heard the noise  
Of many thunders, and their hearts were stirred.

And worshipping they too took up the chant:  
So it rolled along  
Over the clean sweet waves till Thetis heard,  
Deep in her palaces beneath the sea.  
So sweet a song they made, the music yet  
Is not all silenced, some clear notes remain  
Though many waves of centuries have passed  
Upon those pleasant days: but hark awhile  
Unto the chorus, though the years have sped,  
And the dim twilight of the word is come.

Goddess most fair,  
Loving the gracious land  
Of Greece, and the golden sand  
Of all its shores, ruling with thy hand  
Thy dear Athenian town, but present everywhere.

Are we not pleasing to thee?  
Goddess and queen of the corn:  
Holiest mother divine,  
Grant us thy glory to see,  
Bright as the coming of morn:  
See how we kneel, and are present, and worship thy shrine.

Hail! thou most sweet  
And gracious one,  
Is it not meet  
To praise thee when the sun  
Pours forth strong far-reaching heat,  
And then at evening when his race is run.

Ah! like a summer sea  
At eventide

Thy beauty is to me,  
I care for nought beside,  
Save only thee;  
Let thine anthems be upraised, let no chorus be denied.

Ah! soft and sweet  
The maidens' voices raise  
Thy hymn of praise,  
As through the winding street  
With eager feet  
They pass, crowned with roses and with bays.

If in the holy place  
Men worship thee;  
And pray to see thy face,  
Se we.

If in the inmost fane  
Thy glory stands;  
Grant us to touch, being without stain,  
Thine hands.

If the priest veils his head  
And boweth low;  
Make us too, pure, as thou hast said,  
As snow.

Keep us, who worship thee,  
Within thy sight;  
Let us, though in the darkness, see  
Thy light.

So the whole city burst into a song  
That reached us where we stood upon the hill;  
And all the altars smoked with frankincense,  
Which sailors, toiling in the eastern seas,  
With many weary furrows of the deep,  
Had brought unto the praise of Demeter.  
And all the day the seven-stringed harp rejoiced.  
And the procession passed along the streets.  
Even until the darkness covered all.  
And wearied with great joy the city slept.

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## THE DAY OF TORCHES

The sun has slowly sought his resting place,  
And the dim twilight of the day has come:  
The worshippers assemble in the streets,  
Coming from all the by-ways of the town.  
The priest is present; every one a torch  
Carries on high, and joins the line of light  
Moving towards the temple: let us go.  
For there is neither song nor choral chant,  
Only the solemn sound of many feet  
Moving with one accord; and at the head  
Slow walks the priest, holding a torch on high.  
At length the long procession reached the place,  
Holy to Demeter: then passing on  
Through gates and dimly lighted passages,  
Until they came unto the central hill.

All set with marble columns, dimly seen,  
And here and there a lamp with rosy light  
Burning before a statue or a shrine,  
Lighting the dimness of the painted walls:  
Until the place is full.

All through the night never a voice is heard  
In all the echoing passages and halls.

All through the watches of the silent night  
The lurid light of many torches shines,  
On altar, statue, dimly painted frieze,  
Of which the figures flicker, hardly seen  
In the dim light of torches borne on high.  
Still not a word! the watches of the night  
Are passing swiftly: and the day is near.

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Still must they stand,  
Waiting and longing for the dawn to come;  
For every light burns dimly; and the soul,  
Weary of anguish, sickened with the watch.  
Paler and paler grows the torch's light,  
More and yet more uncertain shew the walls,  
And still no sign,             •     •  
Not from the priest, or from the weary crowd,  
But very silence.             •     •

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See! the rosy dawn  
Is come at last: the priest has given the sign,  
"Depart in peace, thy vigil has been watched."

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## IACCHUS

The day is dawning. Whither shall we bend  
Our steps, or whither send  
The herald on before us? many strings  
Are swept, and many echoings of song  
Sound and resound throughout the city streets.  
Is there a minstrel left?  
Or any music which is still unthrilled  
Among their choirs? ah! the voices rush  
Up like a trumpet through the summer air.  
Was ever song like this? the birds rejoice  
And sing for gladness; but let us be still,  
We are not worshippers; the years are fled,  
And hushed the music, if a lingering voice  
And echo of their gladness be revealed,  
It is enough. Ah! that in early years,  
Before the greyness of the world has come,  
I could have worshipped also, but enough.  
Perchance across the waste, and strain to hear,  
What music then was made for weary hearts.  
Hark! the chant sweeps and thrills,

Falling and rising like a mighty voice  
Of many waters.

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Through the city gates,  
Unto the plain they pass a mighty throng,  
For it is near the end, and a great joy  
Fills every heart with praise and loud acclaim.

Sweet, we are thine, thy vision is not far,  
But close the temple stair  
And marble altars; faint not by the way  
And fall not, for the fair  
Queen shineth like a star  
At close of day.  
Press on yet faster, lest there be delay.

The maidens are not silent: what a strain  
Of love and sweet desire floats along  
Their clean sweet voiced chorus: is there any song  
Like to their music, pleasure and sweet pain  
Are met together, mingled in a chain,  
There is no failing; e'en the weak are strong.  
The sweet soft scent of roses fills the air  
With silent music, even as a dream  
The lilies anguish and the censors stream.  
Sweet sounds and scents are mingled everywhere;  
Far in the clear blue distance climbs the mountain stair.

Thus with their offering of solemn song  
The glad procession sweeps along the road,

With dances and with music, till afar  
They see the temple: with renewed acclaim  
The waves of song burst forth as each one sees  
The goal of his desire.  
Clear in the summer air it stands and shines  
Like music carved in marble, and a song.  
What can we say or sing  
Of such a moment, for the swelling chords  
Are broken of the old resounding harp;  
Let there be silence and a solemn awe.  
And as we strain across the blinding storm  
Of many ages: only semitones  
Half broken, half resounding, echo yet,  
Heard by a few who love the former time,  
And dim remembrance of the far-off years.  
Now peace awhile, the night is drawing near;  
Peace, and let silence fall  
Upon the temple, peace and solemn fair.

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## THE INITIATION

The night has come, a cloud of darkness falls  
Upon the temple, save a lonely torch  
Lighting at intervals the silent throng,  
Who still are waiting there until the time  
When all its glories shall be seen by them;  
And still a silence.        .        .

The heart is sick with waiting, half afraid  
And half expectant, is not yet the time?  
But ever silence.           .           .

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Hark the trumpet sounds!  
Upon the steps the holy herald stands,  
And bids the worshippers prepare to see  
The glory of the goddess.  
How awful darkness broods, and one by one  
They pass within; but what is seen by them  
Within the temple; who of men shall tell,  
Only dim legends handed down and told  
From age to age; but no man knows the truth,  
Only they tell that sudden light was seen,  
And then the darkness covered all again.  
Anon the thunder rolls and breaks along,  
Crashing and thrilling all the halls among,  
And then the silence covered all again.

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Sweet and fearful sounds,  
Following in alternation till the soul  
Was melted all within, the heart was still  
And almost life departed, then at last  
The glory of the goddess was revealed.

FINIS.