

## EMPEDOCLES

BY RUDOLF KASSNER

WHEN the Elders and Priests learned that he, who wandered much, was drawing nigh to their city, they went out before the great gate to meet him, and they praised the happiness which had befallen them, and anointed his head with oil, and twisted ivy and white wool in and out of his black hair; and he, consecrated and like unto one who receives sacrifices, passed on through the great gate in a cloak of the colour of purple and with sandals of gold, and the multitude, marvelling greatly, thronged the streets, and strewed roses onto the ground and spread flame-coloured carpets under his feet, and the whole city was, as it were, a temple for him, and the high vault of heaven was the roof of the temple. His wisdom, the people said, was great as the love of the Gods, great as the perdition which they send into the world, his heart was pure and still as the heart of the conqueror in the battle, and his eyes, they told, could see beyond the longings of the human heart. And the multitude hung upon the words which fell from his lips, and it stood silent and like unto a great painting, when suddenly one of the people, who to all appearance was poor and clad in rags and tatters, spake gently to him who stood next to him and said: "Behold, here verily is a man who has overcome death!" Nobody had heard the words, for the people and the Elders and the Priests were waiting for that which he would say to them, and likened painted images. But he had heard the words: "Behold, here verily is a man who has overcome death." And it seemed to him as if a strange hand had grasped his heart right through his naked breast, and now his heart beat loud and fast, and darkness lay straight before him, and his eyes burned and smarted, and his mind grew confounded. He

did not see the people any more or notice that they, full of dumb questioning, had left the street to him. He did not know that the gate and the towers and the white walls of the city were far behind him, did not hear his golden sandals hitting hard upon the stones of the steep and empty path, and the cold wind catching hold of the many folds of his cloak of the colour of purple. He saw nothing but the fire deep down beneath the earth and beneath the rocks, and above it the smoking mouth of the furnace. And he felt as if somebody strong and silent were leading him and helping him up the mountain, right up to the dark gate of the great fire. The hot smoke singed his eye-lashes and his long black hair, from off his feet he stroked the golden sandals, disentangled the ivy and the white wool from his anointed hair, and threw off the cloak of the colour of purple, and then, lightly and naked his body, which still was young, sank down into the eternal flames.

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#### THE MOTHER

Many years ago a wealthy Prince lived in one of the great Cities of India. He owned many wives, and each of his wives had presented him with a son. And the sons of the wealthy Prince were full of love for each other and for their mothers, but they hated Mahidasa, because Mahidasa's mother had been a slave of their father's, and because Mahidasa did not know his mother. And the sons of the wealthy Prince called Mahidasa, their brother: "Son of a harlot," and drove Mahidasa from their father's house.

Mahidasa wandered about for a long time and at last came upon a Sage, who lived all alone in the forest, and of whom the people said, that he possessed Truth. Mahidasa told the Sage that his mother had been the slave of his father, who was a wealthy Prince, and that he did not know his mother, and that his brothers had driven him from his father's house; and as the Sage felt drawn to Mahidasa he spoke to him and said: "Abide with me, and I will teach thee Truth, and when thou knowest Truth, thou wilt be mightier than all thy brethren, and thy brethren will not drive thee from thy father's house any more."

The Sage taught Mahidasa Truth, and Mahidasa tarried with him for a long while; and when Mahidasa knew Truth, he left the

Sage and returned to his father's house, and mingled with his brethren, and spoke to them and told them, that the Sage, of whom the people said that he possessed Truth, had taught him this Truth, and that he now was mightier than they for the sake of his Truth, and that for this reason they would in future not drive him away from his father's house any more.

When the brothers heard Mahidasa speak in this way, they firstly marvelled and answered not a word, but suddenly they looked at each other and laughed out loud, and left Mahidasa alone. Mahidasa flushed deeply with shame and forsook his father's house, and ran into the forest to the Sage, who had taught him Truth and cried: "I am ashamed of the Truth which thou hast taught me. I will have no more of thy Truth. Take Truth away from me!"

The Sage laughed and then looked deep into his eyes and spoke slowly: "Mahidasa, show me the Truth which I have taught thee, and that he now was mightier than they for the sake of this Truth,

Mahidasa could not understand what had befallen him, and he hid his face in his hands and wept bitterly.