

William Blake (1757-1827)

## **GWIN, KING OF NORWAY.**

COME, Kings, and listen to my song:

When Gwin, the son of Nore,

Over the nations of the North

His cruel sceptre bore;

5 The Nobles of the land did feed

Upon the hungry poor;

They tear the poor man's lamb, and drive

The needy from their door!

The land is desolate; our wives

10 And children cry for bread;

Arise, and pull the tyrant down,

Let Gwin be humbled.

Gordred the giant roused himself

From sleeping in his cave;

15 He shook the hills, and in the clouds

The troubled banners wave.

Beneath them roll'd, like tempests black,

The numerous sons of blood;

Like lions' whelps, roaring abroad,

20 Seeking their nightly food.

Down Bleron's hills they dreadful rush,

Their cry ascends the clouds;

The trampling horse and clanging arms

Like rushing mighty floods!

25 Their wives and children, weeping loud,

Follow in wild array,

Howling like ghosts, furious as wolves

In the bleak wintry day.

"Pull down the tyrant to the dust,

30 "Let Gwin be humbled,"

They cry, "and let ten thousand lives

"Pay for the tyrant's head."

From tower to tower the watchmen cry,

"O Gwin, the son of Xore,

35 "Arouse thyself! the nations black

"Like clouds, come rolling o'er!"

Gwin rear'd his shield, his palace shakes,  
His chiefs come rushing round;  
Each, like an awful thunder-cloud  
40 With voice of solemn sound:  
Like reared stones around a grave  
They stand around the King;  
Then suddenly each seized his spear,  
And clashing steel does ring.  
45 The husbandman does leave his plough  
To wade thro' fields of gore;  
The merchant binds his brows in steel,  
And leaves the trading shore;  
The shepherd leaves his mellow pipe,  
50 And sounds the trumpet shrill,  
The workman throws his hammer down  
To heave the bloody bill.  
Like the tall ghost of Barraton  
Who sports in stormy sky,  
55 Gwin leads his host as black as night,  
When pestilence does fly,  
With horses and with chariots --  
And all his spearmen bold,  
March to the sound of mournful song,  
60 Like clouds around him roll'd.  
Gwin lifts his hand -- the nations halt;  
"Prepare for war," he cries --  
Gordred appears! -- his frowning brow  
Troubles our northern skies.  
65 The armies stand, like balances  
Held in the Almighty's hand; --  
"Gwin, thou hast fill'd thy measure up,  
"Thou'rt swept from out the land."  
And now the raging armies rush'd  
70 Like warring mighty seas;  
The Heavens are shook with roaring war,  
The dust ascends the skies!  
Earth smokes with blood, and groans, and shakes,  
To drink her children's gore,

75 A sea of blood; nor can the eye  
See to the trembling shore.  
  
And on the verge of this wild sea  
Famine and death doth cry;  
The cries of women and of babes  
80 Over the field doth fly.  
  
The king is seen raging afar,  
With all his men of might;  
Like blazing comets scattering death  
Thro' the red feverous night.  
  
85 Beneath his arm like sheep they die,  
And groan upon the plain;  
The battle faints, and bloody men  
Fight upon hills of slain.  
  
Now death is sick, and riven men  
90 Labour and toil for life;  
Steed rolls on steed, and shield on shield,  
Sunk in this sea of strife!  
  
The god of war is drunk with blood,  
The earth doth faint and fail;  
95 The stench of blood makes sick the heavens,  
Ghosts glut the throat of hell!  
  
O what have Kings to answer for  
Before that awful throne!  
When thousand deaths for vengeance cry  
100 And ghosts accusing groan!  
  
Like blazing comets in the sky  
That shake the stars of light,  
Which drop like fruit unto the earth  
Thro' the fierce burning night;  
  
105 Like these did Gwin and Gordred meet,  
And the first blow decides;  
Down from the brow unto the breast  
Gordred his head divides!  
  
Gwin fell: the Sons of Norway fled,  
110 All that remain'd alive;  
The rest did fill the vale of death,  
For them the eagles strive.

The river Dorman roll'd their blood

Into the northern sea;

115 Who mourn'd his sons, and overwhelm'd

The pleasant south country.

*(661 words)*

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