

**ABSALOM A
CHRONICLE PLAY
IN THREE ACTS**

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Absalom a Chronicle Play in Three Acts by T. Sturge Moore

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T. STURGE MOORE

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BY T. STURGE MOORE**

**London
At the Sign of the Unicorn
In Cecil Court St. Martin's Lane
MDCCCCIII**

TO W. A. P.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

♣
DAVID, king of Israel.

♣
ABSALOM, son of David by Maächah.
SOLOMON, son of David by Bathsheba.

♣
AHITOPHEL, chief of David's council, afterwards of Absalom's.
JONADAB, nephew to David and of his council.
JOAB and ABISHAI, brothers, mighty warriors of David's council.
BENAIAH and ITTAI, captains.
ZADOK and ABIATHA, the priests.
SERAIAH, the scribe.

HUSHAI, a friend of David's and second in Absalom's council.
LEMUEL, a shepherd, armour-bearer to Absalom.
AHIMAAZ, son of Zadok.
JONATHAN, son of Abiatha.
CUSHI, armour-bearer to Joab.
ZIBA, steward to Meribaal, grandson of Saul.
SHIMEI, a descendant of the house of Saul.
ELKANAHA, husband of Mikal.

♣
TAMAR, daughter of David by Maächah.
REBECCA, wife to Lemuel.
MIKAL and LEAH, honest women.
RUTH, MERAB, and others, concubines to David.

♣
SONS of David, ELDERS of the people, WATCHMEN, SOLDIERS,
PEOPLE, PORTERS, SERVANTS.

♣
SCENE, Jerusalem, Mahanaim, The Ford of Kidron, and woodland places.

ABSALOM. ACT I. SCENE I.

§ ABSALOM is discovered in a wood, pulling down saplings by their boughs until the stems crack and they fall towards him. It is noon. A cloak lies on the ground. With arms and knees bare he is dressed in a loose silken vest and boots of leopard skin, straps for hunting knives, horn, pouch, &c., are slung across his shoulders, chains jangle round his neck, and when he straightens up, letting his arms fall, bracelets clatter to his wrists. Pausing to mop his brow he speaks. §

ABSALOM

Did Samson sweat so to lug Dagon down?
Or cracked the pillars with more loud report
That bore his house up—stones that yielding closed
On sweeter anguish than Dalilah ever
Shared in his arms? Doth not this rush of leaves
Sound much as roof and hangings floundering down
Upon those feasting proud Philistian lords?

§ (Holding out his hair.)

My locks are long as Samson's—woven would make
A splendid web to woo a woman with.

§ (He grapples another tree and forcing it down cries.)

Down, Adonijah, son of Haggith, down!
O beautiful Adonijah, bow, for I
Am fairer yet than thou!

§ (Turning to the largest of the trees he has broken.)

And thou, I see,
The first that bowed, art still the greatest. Thou
Art Ammon, eldest of my brothers, first
To bow. And what more likely? Woman-mad
And dissipated in an hundred beds,
Thou dost displease great David.

§ (Turning to the trees one by one.)

See too,

Shammuah, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon—
Slim wise-boy Solomon, and Chileäb
The son of Abigail, and Eglah's son

And little trotting Ibhar and the babe,
This flower frail-stemmed.—Elishama, bow thee too.
§ (Speaking he bends down the head of a tall flower and sets his
foot on it. During the above AHITOPHEL has entered but keeps
close among the trees.)

§ (ABSALOM continues, seating himself on that stem which he has
addressed as AMMON.)

Like sheaves in Joseph's dream they all bow down.
Yet this is not a dream: 't will come more true.
Seer Nathan said, God humbled man in wrath,
Bade him to force subsistence from the earth
And struggle for supremacy once his,
And I believe him: nothing less than scorn
Had equalled me with leopards—hardly me
With lions—beggars groundedly may hope;
Yea, beasts, birds, trees and weeds push for the best.
Must I compete with all who breathe in air?
Tread daisies out of life? Put flies in mourning?
Rob bees of labour? See sweet roses fade
To humour me? Cause women to shed tears
To bear me children? Why, of course I must!
All do; for it is life to reign thus strictly.
And shall I fear to be a man? Old fool
This Nathan with his god-loved paupers was.
I will be proud; for beautiful I am.—
Come, brothers, all is mine or nothing. Give
Or I refuse, and go and lie me down
Among the dogs and muck-heaps till I die.

§ (Seeing AHITOPHEL.)

Yes, I am beautiful, and thou art not;
This tree left standing lives, and these do not;
My father slew the giant, thine did not;
The hills are lifted up, the coasts are not;
David has many sons; would he had not:
To meet, see, hear and envy brothers, I
Have feet, eyes, ears and heart; would I had not,

Ahitophel.
AHITOPHEL

Hush, beautiful Absalom;
Thou wastest kingly power. Thou hast despoiled
A many trees of promise; why? Wouldst thou
Feed pride and pamper vanity with leaves,
Which die as they have lived and know it not?
Who of his toil lacks profit is a fool;
Labour that doth effect no betterment
Is crowned with laughter. Pardon that I laugh.

S. (Laughing.)

Sooth God himself must laugh too, at such times;
Though he grow angry ere his laugh be out.

ABSALOM

Yet there is none of all my father's sons
But makes men laugh at folly: this one, drunk,
With dim self-exculpations woos his slave;
This, sick with love, walks stealthy like a thief;
Another, vain, puts on his father's clothes;
And one hunts through the forest, growing wild,
Striving for honour not with men, but beasts.
Oh, I am fair; there is no fault in me!
And when I wake each morning, I stand up
And say—'Go build a tower on yon hill'—
'My lord, the land is Joab's,' smiles my slave;
I see a woman—'tis some other's wife;
A house—my brother's. Then I bite my lips
And long to break the law so many do,
(Our father pardons most things in his sons)
But thus I fear to lose the chiefest good,
The crown that, as age bows him, slips and slips
From off his drowsy head

S. (Leaping up.)

For whom? A king!

Ah, there's not one is beautiful like me,
Or has so fair a record in his eyes;

Nathless I am not safe ; he loves the late
Out of proportion with the earlier born,
And Solomon is very near his heart ;
His mother still beloved, while mine is dead ;
Besides the boy is wise, though plain enough.—
Nor is there one of all the forty odd
But some chance whim might crown in my despite.

AHITOPHEL

Be prudent, bide thy time ; thy brothers all
Lack not the gift that brings them to the ground.
Virtue is such a gift where is no vice ;
'Twill trip a young man neatly. Solomon,
May be, will grow too wise. Win people's love !
Thy father's voice drops faint ; when nations shout
They never fail of being heard ; what's said
By one old dying man, may well be lost
If all a people shout at the right time.

ABSALOM

Thy wisdom is as certain as God's word :
All men are led by thee ; thou art the king's
Fixed star ; and I by thee will shape my course,
Pilot me till my father's crown be mine.
Ahitophel, the whole world says of thee
' His words stand fast as oracles of God.'

AHITOPHEL

Well, bide thy time and get thee many friends !
Look round ! If some one can be helped, help him !
There's this one has been wronged ; him use well !
Admit the justness of all men's complaints !
Pretend it angers thee to see wrong done.
It doth ? Well, let it visibly ! Be loud
Against the wrong, but name no names ! To-day's
Not thine, nor yet to-morrow ; thine will come.

ABSALOM

I seize a promise ; thou dost point a path !
Who hath touched power so near as when I have