

# THE GOLDEN LEGEND

adapted from the poem of Longfellow by Joseph Bennett  
and set to music by Arthur Sullivan

## ARGUMENT.

Prince Henry, of Hoheneck, lying sick in body and mind at his Castle of Vautsberg, on the Rhine, has consulted physicians of Salerno, and learned that he can be cured only by the blood of a maiden who shall, of her own free will, consent to die for his sake. Regarding the remedy as impossible, the Prince gives way to despair, when he is visited by Lucifer, disguised as a travelling physician. The Fiend tempts him with alcohol, to the fascination of which he ultimately yields in such measure as to be deprived of place and power, and driven forth as an outcast.

Prince Henry finds shelter in the cottage of one of his vassals, whose daughter, Elsie, moved by great compassion for his fate, resolves to sacrifice her life that he may be restored. The prayers of her mother, Ursula, are of no avail to turn her from this purpose, and, in due time, Prince Henry, Elsie, and their attendants set out for Salerno. On their way, they encounter a band of pilgrims, with whom is Lucifer, in the garb of a friar. He too is journeying to Salerno.

On reaching their destination, Prince Henry and Elsie are received by Lucifer, who has assumed the form of Friar Angelo, a doctor of the medical school. Elsie persists in her resolve to die, despite the opposition of the Prince, who now declares that he intended to do no more than test her constancy. Lucifer draws Elsie into an inner chamber, but the Prince and attendants, breaking down the door, rescue her at the last moment.

Miraculously healed, Prince Henry marries the devoted maiden, and is restored to his rightful place.

The six scenes of the cantata illustrate passages in the foregoing story. In the Prologue, the defeat of Lucifer is foreshadowed by an impotent attempt to wreck the Cathedral of Strasburg. In the Epilogue, the beneficent devotion of Elsie is compared to the course of a mountain brook, which cools and fertilizes the arid plain.

## CHARACTERS:

ELSIE, soprano  
URSULA, contralto  
PRINCE HENRY, tenor  
LUCIFER, bass  
A FORESTER, bass  
CHORUS

PROLOGUE. – *The Spire of Strasburg Cathedral. Night and storm.* LUCIFER,  
*with the Powers of the Air, trying to  
tear down the Cross.*

*Lucifer.*

Hasten! Hasten!  
O ye spirits!  
From its station drag the ponderous  
Cross of iron, that to mock us  
Is uplifted high in air!

*Voices.*

O, we cannot;  
For around it  
All the saints and guardian angels  
Throng in legions to protect it;  
They defeat us everywhere!

*The Bells.*

Laudo Deum verum!  
Plebem voco!  
Congrego clerum!

*Lucifer.*

Lower! Lower!  
Hover downward!  
Seize the loud vociferous bells, and  
Clashing, clanging, to the pavement  
Hurl them from their windy tower.

*Voices.*

All thy thunders  
Here are harmless!  
For these bells have been anointed  
And baptized with holy water!  
They defy our utmost power.

*The Bells.*

Defunctos ploro!  
Pestem fugo!  
Festa decoro.

*Lucifer.*

Shake the casements!  
Break the painted  
Panes, that flame with gold and  
crimson:  
Scatter them like leaves in Autumn,  
Swept away before the blast!

*Voices.*

O, we cannot;  
The Archangel  
Michael flames from every window.  
With the sword of fire that drove us,  
Headlong, out of heaven, aghast!

*The Bells.*

Funera plango!  
Fulgura frango!  
Sabbata pango!

*Lucifer.*

Aim your lightnings  
At the oaken,  
Massive, iron-studded portals!  
Sack the house of God, and scatter  
Wide the ashes of the dead!

*Voices.*

O, we cannot;  
The Apostles  
And the Martyrs, wrapped in mantles  
Stand as warders at the entrance,  
Stand as sentinels o'erhead!

*The Bells.*

Excito lentos!  
Dissipo ventos!  
Paco cruentos!

*Lucifer.*

Baffled! Baffled!  
Inefficient,  
Craven spirits! leave this labour  
Unto Time, the great Destroyer!  
Come away, ere night is gone!

*Voices.*

Onward! Onward!  
With the night-wind,  
Over field, and farm, and forest,  
Lonely homestead, darksome hamlet,  
Blighting all we breathe upon.  
[*They sweep away. Organ and  
Gregorian Chant.*]

*Choir.*

Nocte surgentes  
Vigilemus omnes.

SCENE I. —*The Castle of Vautsberg on the Rhine. A chamber in a tower.*  
PRINCE HENRY *sitting alone, ill, and restless. Midnight.*

*Prince Henry.*

I cannot sleep! my fevered brain  
Calls up the vanished Past again,  
And throws its misty splendours deep  
Into the pallid realms of sleep!  
Rest, rest! O give me rest and peace!  
The thought of life that ne'er shall  
cease

Has something in it like despair,  
A weight I am too weak to bear!  
Sweeter to this afflicted breast,  
The thought of never-ending rest!  
Sweeter the undisturbed and deep  
Tranquillity of endless sleep.

[*A flash of lightning, out of which*  
LUCIFER *appears, in the garb of a*  
*travelling Physician.*

*Lucifer.*

All hail, Prince Henry!

*Prince Henry.*

Who is it speaks?

What may your wish and purpose be?

*Lucifer.*

Your Highness, you behold in me  
Only a travelling physician;  
One of the few who have a mission  
To cure incurable diseases,  
Or those that are called so.  
What is your illness?

*Prince Henry.*

It has no name.

A smouldering, dull, perpetual flame.  
Even the doctors of Salern  
Send me back word they can discern  
No cure for a malady like this,  
Save one, which in its nature is  
Impossible, and cannot be.

*Lucifer.*

What is their remedy?

*Prince Henry.*

You shall see;

Writ in this scroll is the mystery.

*Lucifer.*

[*Reading*

"The only remedy that remains  
Is the blood that flows from a maiden's  
veins,  
Who of her own free will shall die,  
And give her life as the price of  
yours."

That is the strangest of all cures,  
And one, I think, you will never try.  
Meanwhile permit me to recommend,  
As the matter admits of no delay,  
My wonderful Catholicon,  
Of very subtle and magical powers.

*Prince Henry.*

Purge with your nostrums and drugs  
infernal

The spouts and gargoyles of these  
towers,

Not me. My faith is utterly gone  
In every power but the Power  
Supernal.

*Lucifer.*

[*showing a flask.*

Behold it here! This little flask  
Contains the wonderful quintessence,  
The perfect flower and efflorescence  
Of all the knowledge man can ask!  
'Tis Alcohol, in the Arab speech  
Of him whose wondrous lore I teach!

*Prince Henry.*

How limpid, pure, and crystalline!  
The little wavelets dance and shine!

*Lucifer.*

[*pouring.*

Let not the quantity alarm you;  
You may drink all; it will not harm  
you.

*Angels.*

Ah! what ambush lurks below!  
Woe, woe, eternal woe!

This fearful curse  
Shakes the great universe.

*Lucifer.*

*[disappearing.]*

Drink, drink, and thy soul shall sink  
Down into the deep abyss.

*Prince Henry.*

*[drinking.]*

Through every vein  
I feel again  
The fever of youth, the soft desire.  
A rapture that is almost pain  
Throbs in my heart and fills my brain.

*Angels.*

Beware, O beware,  
For sickness, sorrow, and care,  
All are there.

*Prince Henry.*

*[sinking back.]*

Golden visions wave and hover,  
Golden vapours, waters streaming,  
Landscapes moving, changing,  
gleaming!

I am like a happy lover.

*[His head falls on his book.]*

*Angels.*

*[receding.]*

Alas, alas!

Like a vapour, the golden vision  
Shall fade and pass.

SCENE II. —*Before the house of*  
URSULA. *Villagers have gathered after*  
*labour. Evening.*

*Ursula.*

Slowly, slowly up the wall,  
Steals the sunshine, steals the shade,  
Evening damps begin to fall,  
Evening shadows are displayed.  
Shafts of sunlight from the west  
Paint the dusky windows red.  
Darker shadows, deeper rest,  
Underneath and overhead.

*[Lamps are lit in the house.]*

EVENING HYMN.

O gladsome Light  
Of the Father immortal,  
And of the celestial  
Sacred and blessed  
Jesus our Saviour!

Now to the sunset  
Again hast Thou brought us,  
And, seeing the evening  
Twilight, we bless Thee,  
Praise Thee, adore Thee.

Father Omnipotent!  
Son, the Life-giver!  
Spirit, the Comforter!  
Worthy at all times  
Of worship and wonder!

*Prince.*

*[at the door.]*

Amen.

*[The Villagers disperse to their homes.]*

*Ursula.*

Who was it said Amen?

*Elsie.*

It was the Prince. He is gone again.  
Would I could do something for his  
sake;  
Something to cure his sorrow and pain!

*Ursula.*

That no one can, neither thou nor I,  
Nor any one else.

*Elsie.*

And must he die?

*Ursula.*

Unless some maiden of her own accord  
Offers her life for that of her lord.

*Elsie.*

I will.

*Ursula.*

Foolish child, be still.

*Elsie.*

I mean it truly; for his sake  
I will myself the offering make,  
And give my life to purchase his.

*Ursula.*

My child, my child, thou must not die!

*Elsie.*

Why should I live? do I not know  
The life of woman is full of woe?  
Toiling on and on and on,  
With breaking heart and tearful eyes,  
And silent lips, and in the soul  
The secret longings that arise,  
Which this world never satisfies!

*Ursula.*

Ah, woe is me! Ah, woe is me!  
Alas that I should live to see  
Thy death, beloved, and to stand  
Above thy grave. Ah, woe the day!

*Elsie.*

Thou wilt not see it. I shall lie  
Beneath the flowers of another land,  
For at Salerno, far away,  
Over the mountains, over the sea,  
It is appointed me to die.

*Ursula.*

In God's own time, my heart's delight,  
When He shall call thee; not before.

*Elsie.*

I heard him call. When Christ ascended  
Triumphantly from star to star,  
He left the gates of Heaven ajar.  
I had a vision in the night  
And saw Him standing at the door  
Of His Father's mansion, vast and  
splendid,  
And beckoning to me from afar.

*Ursula.*

*[entering the house.]*

What if this were God! Ah! then  
Gainsay dare I not. Amen.

*Elsie.*

*[left alone.]*

My Redeemer and my Lord,  
I beseech Thee, I entreat Thee,  
Guide me in each act and word,  
That hereafter I may meet Thee,  
Watching, waiting, hoping, yearning,  
With my lamp well trimmed and  
burning.

If my feeble prayer can reach Thee,  
O, my Saviour, I beseech Thee,  
Let me follow where Thou leadest,  
Let me, bleeding as Thou bleedest,  
Die, if dying I may give  
Life to one who asks to live;  
And more nearly,  
Dying thus, resemble Thee.

*[PRINCE HENRY enters.]*

*Elsie.*

My life is little –  
Only a cup of water  
Yet pure and limpid;  
Take it, O my Prince!  
Let it refresh you,  
Let it restore you,  
May God bless the gift!

*Angels.*

Amen.

*Prince.*

And the giver.

*Angels.*

Amen.

*[The PRINCE and ELSIE pass slowly  
into the house. It is now dark.]*

SCENE III. – *On the road to Salerno.*  
PRINCE HENRY, ELSIE, and their  
attendants.

*Elsie.*

Onward and onward the highway runs  
to the distant city, impatiently  
bearing

Tidings of human joy and disaster, of  
love and of hate, of doing and  
daring!

*Prince.*

This life of ours is a wild Æolian harp  
of many a joyous strain,  
But under them all there runs a loud  
perpetual wail, as of souls in pain.

*Elsie.*

All the hedges are white with dust,  
while onward the horses toil and  
strain.

*Prince.*

Now they stop at the wayside inn, and  
the waggoner laughs with the  
landlord's daughter.

*Elsie.*

All through life there are wayside inns,  
where man may refresh his soul with  
love;  
Even the lowest may quench his thirst  
at rivulets fed by springs from above.  
[*They turn down a green lane.*

*Both.*

Sweet is the air with the budding haws,  
and the valley stretching for miles  
below  
Is white with blossoming cherry trees,  
as if covered with lightest snow.

*Prince.*

Hark, what sweet sounds are those,  
whose accents holy  
Fill the warm noon with music sad and  
sweet?

*Elsie.*

It is a band of pilgrims, moving  
slowly,  
On their long journey, with uncovered  
feet.

*Pilgrims.*

[*Chanting the hymn of St. Hildebert.*  
Me receptet Sion illa,

Sion David, urbs tranquilla,  
Cujus faber auctor lucis.  
Cujus portae lignum crucis,  
Cujus clavis lingua Petri,  
Cujus cives semper laeti.  
Cujus muri lapis vivus  
Cujus custos Rex festivus!

*Lucifer.*

[*as a Friar in the procession.*

Here am I, too, in the pious band,  
The soles of my feet are hard and  
tanned.  
There is my German Prince again,  
Thus far on his journey to Salern,  
And the lovesick girl, whose heated  
brain  
Is sowing the cloud to reap the rain;  
But it's a long road that has no turn!  
Let them quietly hold their way,  
I have also a part in the play.  
But first I must act to my heart's  
content  
This mummery and this merriment,  
And drive this motley flock of sheep  
Into the fold where drink and sleep  
The jolly old friars of Benevent.  
Of a truth, it often provokes me to  
laugh,  
To see these beggars hobble along,  
Lamed and maimed and fed upon  
chaff,  
Chanting their wonderful piff and paff,  
And to make up for not understanding  
the song,  
Singing it fiercely, and wild, and  
strong!

*Pilgrims.*

In hâc urbe, lux solennis,  
Ver æternum, pax perennis;  
In hâc odor implens cœlos,  
In hâc semper festum melos!  
[*The Pilgrims pass on, their chant*  
*is heard in the distance.*  
Urbs cœlestis, urbs beata,  
Supra petram collocata,  
Urbs in portu satis tuto,  
De longinquo te saluto,  
Te saluto, te suspiro,

Te affecto, te requiro!  
[PRINCE HENRY, ELSIE, and  
Attendants journey on. They  
reach a height overlooking the  
sea and encamp. Evening.

*Prince.*

It is the sea, it is the sea,  
In all its vague immensity,  
Fading and darkening in the distance!  
Silent, majestic, and slow  
The white ships haunt to and fro,  
With all their ghostly sails unfurled,  
As phantoms from another world  
Haunt the dim confines of existence.

*Elsie.*

The night is calm and cloudless,  
And still as still can be,  
The stars come forth to listen  
To the music of the sea;  
In snow-white robes uprising  
The ghostly choirs respond,  
And sadly and unceasing  
The mournful voice sings on,  
And the snow-white choirs still  
answer,  
Christe eleison!

*Attendants.*

The night is calm and cloudless, etc.

SCENE IV. —*The Medical School at  
Salerno, LUCIFER dressed as a doctor.*

*Lucifer.*

My guests approach! There is in the air  
An odour of innocence and of prayer!  
I cannot breathe such an atmosphere;  
My soul is filled with a nameless fear,  
That after all my restless endeavour,  
The most ethereal, most divine,  
Will escape from my hands for ever  
and ever.

But the other is already mine.

[Enter PRINCE HENRY and ELSIE,  
with attendants.

*Prince.*

Can you direct us to Friar Angelo?

*Lucifer.*

He stands before you.

*Prince.*

Then you know our purpose.  
I am Prince Henry of Hoheneck, and  
this  
The maiden that I spake of.

*Lucifer.*

Does she  
Without compulsion, of her own free  
will,  
Consent to this?

*Prince.*

Against all opposition  
She will not be persuaded.

*Lucifer.*

[to ELSIE.  
Have you thought well of it?

*Elsie.*

I come not here to argue,  
But to die!

*Attendants.*

O pure in heart! O pure in heart! from  
thy sweet dust shall grow  
Lilies, upon whose petals will be  
written  
"Ave Maria" in characters of gold!

*Elsie.*

[To the Attendants.

Weep not, my friends! rather rejoice  
with me,  
I shall not feel the pain, but shall be  
gone,  
And you will have another friend in  
heaven.  
There is no more to say, let us go in.

*Prince.*

Not one step further! I only meant  
To put thy courage to the proof.  
Friar Angelo! I charge you on your  
life,

Believe not what she says, for she is mad.

*Elsie.*

Alas! Prince Henry!

*Lucifer.*

Come with me this way.

[ELSIE goes in with LUCIFER, who thrusts PRINCE HENRY back, and closes the door.]

*Prince.*

Gone, and the light of all my life gone with her!  
A sudden darkness falls upon the world.

[To Attendants.]

Why did you not lay hold on her and keep her  
From self-destruction? Angelo!  
Murderer!

[Struggles at the door, but cannot open it.]

*Elsie.*

[Within.]

Farewell, dear Prince, farewell!

*Prince and Attendants.*

Unbar the door!

*Lucifer.*

It is too late!

*Prince and Attendants.*

It shall not be too late!

[They burst the door open and rush in.]

SCENE V. – URSULA'S Cottage.

*Ursula.*

[looking through the open door.]

Who is it coming under the trees?  
A man in the Prince's livery dressed!  
He fills my heart with strange alarm!

[Enter a Forester.]

*Forester.*

Is this the tenant Gottlieb's farm?

*Ursula.*

This is his farm and I his wife.

*Forester.*

News from the Prince!

*Ursula.*

Of death or life?

*Forester.*

Your daughter lives, and the Prince is well.

You will learn, ere long, how it befell.  
Her heart for a moment never failed:  
But when they reached Salerno's gate,  
The Prince's nobler self prevailed,  
And saved her for a nobler fate.

*Ursula.*

Virgin, who lovest the poor and lowly,  
If the loud cry of a mother's heart  
Can ever ascend to where thou art,  
Into thy blessed hands and holy,  
Receive my prayer of praise and thanksgiving,  
Our child who was dead again is living.

O bring me to her; for mine eyes  
Are hungry to behold her face;  
My very soul within me cries;  
My very hands seem to caress her,  
To see her, gaze at her, and bless her;  
Dear Elsie, child of God and grace!

SCENE. VI. – *The Castle of Vautsberg on the Rhine.* PRINCE HENRY and ELSIE stand on the Terrace. It is the evening of their marriage day. The sound of bells heard from a distance.

*Prince.*

We are alone; the wedding guests  
Ride down the hill with plumes and cloaks,  
And the descending dark invests



The forest hoar and haunted oaks.

*Elsie.*

What bells are those that ring so slow,  
So mellow, musical, and low?

*Prince.*

They are the bells of Geisenheim  
That with their melancholy chime  
Ring out the curfew of the sun.

*Elsie.*

Listen, beloved!

*Prince.*

They are done.

Dear Elsie, many years ago  
These same soft bells at eventide  
Rang in the ears of Charlemagne,  
As, seated by Fastrada's side  
At Ingelheim, in all his pride,  
He heard their sound with secret pain.

*Elsie.*

Their voices only speak to me  
Of peace and deep tranquillity,  
And endless confidence in thee.

*Prince.*

Thou know'st the story of her ring,  
How when the court went back to Aix,  
Fastrada died; and how the king  
Sat watching by her night and day.  
Till into one of the blue lakes  
Which water that delicious land,  
They cast the ring drawn from her  
hand:  
And the great monarch sat serene  
And sad beside the fated shore,  
Nor left the land for evermore.

*Elsie.*

That was true love.

*Prince.*

For him the queen  
Ne'er did what thou hast done for me.

*Elsie.*

Wilt thou as fond and faithful be?

Wilt thou so love me after death?

*Prince.*

Thou hast Fastrada's ring. Beneath  
The calm blue waters of thine eyes,  
Deep in thy steadfast soul it lies,  
And, undisturbed by this world's  
breath,  
With magic light its jewels shine.

*Both.*

In life's delight, in death's dismay,  
In storm and sunshine, night and day,  
In health and sickness, in decay,  
Here and hereafter I am thine.

[*They go in.*]

#### CHORAL EPILOGUE.

God sent His messenger, the rain,  
And said unto the mountain brook,  
"Rise up, and from thy caverns look,  
And leap, with naked snow-white feet,  
From the cool hills into the heat  
Of the broad and arid plain."

God sent His messenger of faith  
And whispered in the maiden's heart,  
"Rise up, and look from where thou  
art,  
And scatter with unselfish hands  
Thy freshness on the barren sands  
And solitudes of death."

The deed divine  
Is written in characters of gold  
That never shall grow old,  
But through all ages  
Burn and shine!