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PETER BOBORUIKIN.

THE GOD OF THE POOR.

THERE was a lord that hight Maltête,
Among great lords he was right great,
On poor folk trod he like the dirt,
None but God might do him hurt.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

With a grace of prayers sung loud and late
Many a widow's house he ate,
Many a poor knight at his hands
Lost his house and narrow lands.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

He burnt the harvests many a time,
He made fair houses heaps of lime;
Whatso man loved wife or maid
Of Evil-head was sore afraid.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

He slew good men and spared the bad;
Too long a day the foul dog had,
As all dogs will have their day;
But God is as strong as man, I say.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

For a valiant knight, men called Boncœur,
Had hope he should not long endure,
And gathered to him much good folk,
Hardy hearts to break the yoke.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

But Boncœur deemed it would be vain
To strive his guarded house to gain;
Therefore, within a little while,
He set himself to work by guile.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

He knew that Maltête loved right well
Red gold and heavy; if from hell
The devil had cried, "Take this gold cup,"
Down had he gone to fetch it up.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Twenty poor men's lives were nought
To him, beside a ring well wrought.
The pommel of his hunting-knife
Was worth ten times a poor man's life.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

A squire new-come from over sea
Boncœur called to him privily,
And when he knew his lord's intent,
Clad like a churl therefrom he went.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

But when he came where dwelt Maltête,
With few words did he pass the gate,
For Maltête built him walls anew,
And, wageless, folk from field he drew.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Now passed the squire through this and that,
Till he came to where Sir Maltête sat,
And over red wine wagged his beard,
Then spoke the squire as one afeard.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Lord, give me grace, for privily
I have a little word for thee."
"Speak out," said Maltête, "have no fear,
For how can thy life to thee be dear?"

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Such a one I know," he said,
"Who hideth store of money red."
Maltête grinned at him cruelly.
"Thou florin-maker, come anigh.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"E'en such as thou once preached of gold,
And showed me lies in books full old,
Nought gat I but evil brass,
Therefore came he to the worsen pass.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Hast thou will to see his skin?
I keep my heaviest marks therein,
For since nought else of wealth had he,
I deemed full well he owed it me."

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Nought know I
The other said, "
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Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Nought know I of philosophy,"
 The other said, "nor do I lie.
 Before the moon begins to shine,
 May all this heap of gold be thine.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Ten leagues hence a man there is
 Who seemeth to know little bliss,
 And yet full many a pound of gold
 A dry well nigh his house doth hold.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"John-a-Wood is he called, fair lord,
 Nor know I whence he hath this hoard."
 Then Maltête said, "As God made me,
 A wizard over-bold is he!

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"It were a good deed, as I am a knight,
 To burn him in a fire bright;
 This John-a-Wood shall surely die,
 And his gold in my strong chest shall lie.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"This very night I make mine avow,
 The truth of this mine eyes shall know."
 Then spoke an old knight in the hall,
 "Who knoweth what things may befall?"

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"I rede thee go with a great rout,
 For thy foes ride right thick about."
 "Thou and the devil may keep my foes,
 Thou redest me this gold to lose.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"I shall go but with some four or five,
 So shall I take my thief alive.
 For if a great rout he shall see,
 Will he not hide his wealth from me?"

Deus est Deus pauperum.

The old knight muttered under his breath,
 "Then mayhap ye shall ride to death."
 But Maltête turned him quickly round,
 "Bind me this grey-beard under ground!"

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Because ye are old, ye think to jape.
Take heed, ye shall not long escape.
When I come back safe, old carl, perdie,
Thine head shall brush the linden-tree."

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Therewith he rode with his five men,
And Bonccœur's spie, for good leagues ten,
Until they left the beaten way,
And dusk it grew at end of day.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

There, in a clearing of the wood,
Was John's house, neither fair nor good.
In a ragged plot anigh,
Thin coleworts grew but wretchedly.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

John-a-Wood in his doorway sat,
Turning over this and that,
And chiefly how he best might thrive,
For he had will enough to live.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Green coleworts from a wooden bowl
He ate; but careful was his soul,
For if he saw another day,
Thenceforth was he in Bonccœur's pay.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

So when he saw how Maltête came
He said, "Beginneth now the game!"
And in the doorway did he stand
Trembling, with hand joined fast to hand.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

When Maltête did this carle behold
Somewhat he doubted of his gold,
But cried out, "Where is now thy store
Thou hast through books of wicked lore?"

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Then said the poor man, right humbly,
"Fair lord, this was not made by me,
I found it in mine own dry well,
And had a mind thy grace to tell.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

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Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Therefrom, my lord, a cup I took
 This day; that thou thereon might look,
 And know me to be leal and true,"
 And from his coat the cup he drew.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Then Maltête took it in his hand,
 Nor knew he aught that it used to stand
 On Boncœur's cupboard many a day.
 "Go on," he said, "and show the way.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Give me thy gold, and thou shalt live,
 Yea, in my house thou well may'st thrive."
 John turned about, and 'gan to go
 Unto the wood with footsteps slow.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

But as they passed by John's woodstack,
 Growled Maltête, "Nothing now doth lack
 Wherewith to light a merry fire,
 And give my wizard all his hire."

Deus est Deus pauperum.

The western sky was red as blood,
 Darker grew the oaken-wood;
 "Thief and carle, where are ye gone?
 Why are we in the wood alone?"

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"What is the sound of this mighty horn?
 —Ah, God! that ever I was born!
 The basnets flash from tree to tree;
 Show me, thou Christ, the way to flee!"

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Boncœur it was, with fifty men,
 Maltête was but one to ten,
 And his own folk prayed for grace,
 With empty hands in that lone place.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Grace shall ye have," Boncœur said,
 "All of you but Evil-head."
 Lowly could that great lord be.
 Who could pray so well as he?"

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Then could Maltête howl and cry,
 Little will he had to die.
 Soft was his speech, now it was late,
 But who had will to save Maltête?

Deus est Deus pauperum.

They brought him to the house again,
 And toward the road he looked in vain.
 Lonely and bare was the great highway,
 'Neath the gathering moonlight grey.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

They took off his gilt basnet,
 That he should die there was no let;
 They took off his coat of steel,
 A damned man he well might feel.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Will ye all be rich as kings,
 Lacking nought of all good things?"
 "Nothing do we lack this eve;
 When thou art dead, how can we grieve?"

Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Let me drink water ere I die,
 None henceforth comes my lips anigh."
 They brought it him in that bowl of wood.
 He said "This is but poor men's blood!"

Deus est Deus pauperum.

They brought it him in the cup of gold.
 He said "The women I have sold
 Have wept it full of salt for me;
 I shall die gaping thirstily."

Deus est Deus pauperum.

On the threshold of that poor homestead
 They smote off his Evil-head;
 They set it high on a great spear,
 And rode away with merry cheer.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

At the dawn, in lordly state,
 They rode to Maltête's castle-gate.
 "Whoso willeth laud to win
 Make haste to let your masters in!"

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Forthwith opened they the
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Deus est Deus pauperum.

Forthwith opened they the gate,
No man was sorry for Maltête.
Boncœur conquered all his lands,
A good knight was he of his hands.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

Good men he loved, and hated bad;
Joyful days and sweet he had;
Good deeds did he plenteously;
Beneath him folk lived frank and free.
Deus est Deus pauperum..

He lived long, with merry days;
None said aught of him but praise.
God on him have full mercy;
A good knight merciful was he.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

The great lord, called Maltête, is dead;
Grass grows above his feet and head,
And a holly-bush grows up between
His rib-bones, gotten white and clean.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

A carle's sheep-dog certainly
Is a mightier thing than he.
Till London-Bridge shall cross the Nen,
Take we heed of such-like men.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

WILLIAM MORRIS.