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*Wood Magic*

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(9TH CENTURY.)

I will walk warily in the wise woods on the fringes of  
eventide,

For the covert is full of noises and the stir of nameless  
things.

I have seen in the dusk of the beeches the shapes of the  
lords that ride,

And down in the marish hollow I have heard the lady  
who sings.

And once in an April gloaming I met a maid on the  
sward,

All marble-white and gleaming and tender and wild  
of eye ;—

I, Jehan the hunter, who speak am a grown man,  
middling hard,

But I dreamt a month of the maid, and wept I knew  
not why.

Down by the edge of the firs, in a coppice of heath and  
vine,

Is an old moss-grown altar, shaded by briar and  
bloom,

Denys, the priest, hath told me 'twas the lord Apollo's  
shrine

In the days ere Christ came down from God to the  
Virgin's womb.

I never go past but I doff my cap and avert my eyes—  
    (Were Denys to catch me I trow I'd do penance for  
    half a year)—

For once I saw a flame there and the smoke of a  
    sacrifice,  
    And a voice spake out of the thicket that froze my  
    soul with fear.

Wherefore to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy  
    Ghost,

    Mary the Blessed Mother, and the kindly Saints as  
    well,

I will give glory and praise, and them I cherish the  
    most,

    For they have the keys of Heaven, and save the soul  
    from Heil.

But likewise I will spare for the Lord Apollo a grace,

    And a bow for the lady Venus—as a friend but not as  
    a thrall.

'Tis true they are out of Heaven, but some day they  
    may win the place ;

    For gods are kittle cattle, and a wise man honours  
    them all.