

**JUDITH AND  
HOLOFERNES.  
A POEM**

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Judith and Holofernes. A poem by Thomas Bailey Aldrich

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**THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH**

**JUDITH AND  
HOLOFERNES.  
A POEM**



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# JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES

A POEM

BY

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH



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1896

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## NOTE

THE invocation on page 15, a few brief passages scattered through Books I and II, and the lyrical interlude in Book III — amounting in all to about one hundred and twenty lines — are from an earlier poem. The other eight or nine hundred lines constituting the context are now printed for the first time.

There are Greek and Syriac versions of the story of Judith and Holofernes which differ essentially from that given in the Apocrypha. It is fable and not history, and in the following narrative the author has taken such liberties with the myth as suited his dramatic purpose. He

has widely departed from precedent in his delineation of Judith, who moves through the Apocrypha a beautiful and cold-blooded abstraction, with scarcely any feminine attribute excepting her religious fervor. The distance between her and Charlotte Corday, humanly speaking, is immeasurable, though their heroic deeds are nearly identical in motive. Judith's character throughout the ancient legend lacks that note of tenderness with which the writer has here attempted to accent her heroism.

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BOOK I

# JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES

## BOOK I

### JUDITH IN THE TOWER

UNHERALDED, like some tornado loosed  
Out of the brooding hills, it came to pass  
That Holofernes, the Assyrian,  
With horse and foot a mighty multitude,  
Crossed the Euphrates, ravaging the land  
To Esdraëlon, and then hawk-like swoopt  
On Bethulia : there his trenches drew,  
There his grim engines of destruction set  
And stormed the place ; and gave them little rest  
Within, till sad their plight was ; for at last  
The wells ran low, the stores of barley failed,

And famine crept on them. A wheaten loaf  
Was put in this scale and the gold in that,  
So scarce was bread. Now were the city streets  
Grown loud with lamentation, women's moans  
And cries of children; and one night there came  
The plague, with breath as hot as the simoom  
That blows the desert sand to flakes of fire.

Yet Holofernes could not batter down  
The gates of bronze, nor decent entrance make  
With beam or catapult in those tough walls,  
Nor with his lighted arrows fire the roofs.  
Gnawing his lip, among the tents he strode —  
Woe to the slave that stumbled in his path ! —  
And cursed the doting gods, who gave no aid,  
But slumbered somewhere in their house of cloud.  
Still wan-checked Famine and red-spotted Pest