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COLLECTED POEMS OF
LAURENCE BINYON



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COLLECTED
POEMS OF
LAURENCE
BINYON

LONDON VISIONS
NARRATIVE POEMS
TRANSLATIONS

MAGMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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LONDON VISIONS

THE LITTLE DANCERS

Lonely, save for a few faint stars, the sky
Dreams; and lonely, below, the little street
Into its gloom retires, secluded and shy.
Scarcely the dumb roar enters this soft retreat;
And all is dark, save where come flooding rays
From a tavern-window; there, to the brisk measure
Of an organ that down in an alley merrily plays,
Two children, all alone and no one by,
Holding their tattered frocks, thro' an airy maze
Of motion lightly threaded with nimble feet
Dance sedately; face to face they gaze,
Their eyes shining, grave with a perfect pleasure.

FEBRUARY TWILIGHT

O Weariness, that writest histories
On all these human faces, and O Sighs
That somewhere silence hears! You have no part,
It seems, in the old earth's deep-flowering heart;
Your way of solace is a different way,

A colour comes upon the end of day.
At this street-corner, budded branches bare
Trace springing lines upon the tender air;
But over the far misty flush one's eye
Lights at an apparition: lo, on high
The little moon! as if she came all fresh
Into this world, where our brief blood and flesh
Is weary of burdens. She has seen all earth's
Most mighty races in their ends and births,
And all the glory and sorrow wrought and sung
Since lips found language; and to-night is young.

THE STATUES

Tarry a moment, happy feet,
That to the sound of laughter glide!
O glad ones of the evening street,
Behold what forms arc at your side!

You conquerors of the toilsome day
Pass by with laughter, labour done;
But these within their durance stay;
Their travail sleeps not with the sun.

They, like dim statues without end,
Their patient attitudes maintain;
Your triumphing bright course attend,
But from your eager ways abstain.

Now, if you chafe in secret thought,
A moment turn from light distress,
And see how Fate on these hath wrought,
Who yet so deeply acquiesce.

Behold them, stricken, silent, weak,
The maimed, the mute, the halt, the blind,
Condemned amid defeat to seek
The thing which they shall never find.

They haunt the shadows of your ways
In masks of perishable mould:
Their souls a changing flesh arrays,
But they are changeless from of old.

Their lips repeat an empty call,
But silence wraps their thoughts around.
On them, like snow, the ages fall;
Time muffles all this transient sound.

When Shalmaneser pitched his tent
By Tigris, and his flag unfurled,
And forth his summons proudly sent
Into the new unconquered world;

Or when with spears Cambyses rode
Through Memphis and her bending slaves,
Or first the Tyrian gazed abroad
Upon the bright vast outer waves;

When sages, star-instructed men,
To the young glory of Babylon
Foreknew no ending; even then
Innumerable years had flown,

Since first the chisel in her hand
Necessity, the sculptor, took,
And in her spacious meaning planned
These forms, and that eternal look;

These foreheads, moulded from afar,
These soft, unfathomable eyes,
Gazing from darkness, like a star;
These lips, whose grief is to be wise.

As from the mountain marble rude
The growing statue rises fair,
She from immortal patience hewed
The limbs of ever-young despair.

There is no bliss so new and dear,
It hath not them far-off allured.
All things that we have yet to fear
They have already long endured.

Nor is there any sorrow more
Than hath ere now befallen these,
Whose gaze is as an opening door
On wild interminable seas.

O Youth, run fast upon thy feet,
With full joy haste thee to be filled,
And out of moments brief and sweet
Thou shalt a power for ages build.

Does thy heart falter? Here, then, seek
What strength is in thy kind! With pain
Immortal bowed, these mortals weak
Gentle and unsubdued remain.

NARCISSUS

By white St. Martin's, where the fountain shone
And plashed unheard in the busy morning air,
March, with rippling shadow and sudden sun,
Laughing riotous round the gusty square,
From frail narcissus heaped in baskets there
Blew to me, as I passed, its odour keen,
Keen and strange, subtle and sweet;
And lo! all new and green,
Spring for me had entered the stony street.

THE BUILDERS

Staggering slowly, and swaying
Heavily at each slow foot's lift and drag,
With tense eyes careless of the roar and throng
That under jut and jag
Of half-built wall and scaffold stream along,
Six bowed men straining strong
Bear, hardly lifted, a huge lintel stone.
This ignorant thing and prone,
Mere dumbness, blindly weighing,
A brute piece of blank death, a bone
Of the stark mountain, helpless and inert,
Yet draws each sinew till the hot veins swell
And sweat-drops upon hand and forehead start,
Till with short pants the suffering heart
Throbs to the throat, where fiercely hurt
Crushed shoulders cannot heave; till thought and
sense
Are nerved and narrowed to one aim intense,
One effort scarce to be supported longer!
What tyrant will in man or God were stronger
To summon, thrall and seize
The exaction of life's uttermost resource
That from the down-weighed breast and aching knees
To arms lifted in pain
And hands that grapple and strain
Upsurges, thrusting desperate to repel
The pressure and the force
Of this, which neither feels, nor hears, nor sees?

THE DESTROYER

He stands on high in the torch-glare,
With planted feet, with lifted axe.
Behind, a gulf of crimsoned air;
Beneath, the old wall that gapes and cracks.

Tossed fragments crash to dust and smoke.
Exulting life, aloft he stands
And drives his unrepentant stroke,
Nor heeds the havoc of his hands.

Below, one lingers gazing. Why
Within his heart docs secret joy
Quivering awaken and reply
To each home-blow, Destroy, destroy?

Lulled in the casual feast of sense,
Awed by the ages' fortress-walls,
Out of its slumber roused, intense,
To the swung axe a demon calls,—

Man's Demon, never satiate,
That finds nought made to its desire;
How shall it to this world be mate,—
To a world of stone, a heart of fire!

THE GOLDEN GALLERY AT SAINT PAUL'S

The Golden Gallery lifts its aery crown
O'er dome and pinnacle: there I leaned and gazed.
Is this indeed my own familiar town,
This busy dream? Beneath me spreading hazed
In distance large it lay, nor nothing broke
Its mapped immensity. Golden and iron-brown,
The stagnant smoke
Hung coiling above dense roofs and steeples dim.
The river, a serpent pale, my wandering eye
Lightened; but houses pressed to his silver brim.
With charging clouds the sky
Broad shadows threw. And now in a sudden shower
A veil sweeps toward me; violent drops fall hard:
Then softly the sun returns on chimney and tower,
And the river flashes, barred
With shadowy arches; warm the wet roofs shine,
And the city is stricken with light from clouds aglow,
Uplifting in dazzling line
O'er valleys of ashy blue, their wrinkled snow.
I leaned and gazed: but into my gazing eyes
Entered a sharp desire, a strange distress.
East I looked, where the foreign masts arise
In rough sea-breathing reaches of broad access;
And North to the hills, and South to the golden haze,
But nowhere found satisfaction more.
Beneath me, the populous ways
Muttered; but idly vast their troubled roar
Went up; I heard no longer: before me rose
Pale as, at morning, mist from autumn streams,
The longing of men made visible, helpless woes,
Fountains of love wasted, and trampled dreams

THE DRAY

Huge through the darkened street
The Dray comes, rolling an uneven thunder
Of wheels and trampling feet;
The shaken windows stare in sleepy wonder.

Now through an open space,
Where loitering groups about the tavern's fume
Show many a sullen face
And brawling figure in the lighted gloom,

It moves, a shadowy force
Through misery triumphant: flushed, on high
Guiding his easy course,
A giant sits, with indolent soft eye.

He turns not, that dim crowd
Of listless forms beneath him to behold;
Shawled women with head bowed
Flitting in hasty stealth, and children old:

Calm as some conqueror
Rode through old Rome, nor heeded at his heel,
'Mid the proud spoils of war,
What woeful captives thronged his chariot wheel.

THE RAG-PICKER

In the April sun
Shuffling, shapeless, bent.
Cobweb-eyed, with stick
Searching, one by one,
Gutter-heaps, intent
Wretched rags to pick.

Oh, is this a man?—
Man, whose spirit erect
Trampling circumstance,
Death and evil, can
Measure worlds, nor checked
By fell time and chance,

With undaunted eye,
With a mouth of song,
Front the starry blue?—
(O you passers-by.
Moving swift and strong,
Answer, what seek you?)

Husk of manhood, mere
Shrivel of his kind!—
In a bloodless mask
How the old eyes peer,
With no light behind!—
Mate of his mean task;

Yet this wreckage fill
With a thought, possess
With a faith's empire,
It shall be a will
Mightier than the seas,
Man, more dread than fire!

A WOMAN

O you that facing the mirror darkly bright
In the shadowed corner, loiter shyly fond,
To ask of your own sad eyes a comfort slight,
Before you brave the pathless world beyond;

Not first to-night invades your spirit this wild
Despair, when loneliness stabs you! Turned, your face
Trembles, and soft hesitation makes you a child,
The child you were in some far, forgotten place,

Amid things for ever rejected. Dreamed you so
From the blankness of life to escape to a region
enjoyed,
Glowing, and strange? Yet blank to-night, I know,
Spreads life, my sister; within you a deeper void.

In all this city, I think, so charged with pain,
None suffers more; desiring what you do
With insupportable longing, and still in vain
Desiring, still condemned to accept, and rue.

Where tarries he, Love, the adored one? In fields
unknown
Roams he apart, or in sound of a pleasant stream
Sleeps? Nay, dwells he in cloudy rumour alone,
A name, a vision, a sweet, eluding dream?

He lives, he lives, my sister; yet rarely to men
He appears; they touch but his robe, and believe it
is he.

But soft, with inaudible feet, he is flown, nor again
Comes soon; rejoicing still to be wayward and free.

A moment, ev'n now, he was near you: invisible
wings
Brushed by you; and infinite longing, to follow, to
find
That vision truth, overcomes you,—the heart's sad
things
To tell in a trusted ear, on a bosom kind.

Alas! not so he is won: when the last despair
Encamps in the heart, at last when all seems vain,
Then, perchance, he will steal to you unaware,
And loose your tears, and understand your pain.

THE STORM

Stooping over London, skies convulsed
With thunder moved: a rumour of storm remote
Hushed them, and birds flew troubled. The gradual
clouds

Up from the West climbing, above the East
Glowed sullen as copper embossed; against their
gloom,

Like ghosts astonished, thronged the steeples white.
Still with absorbed hurry the streets' uproar
Ran, shadowed by strange unquiet, as vaguely
pursued.

Lone workers from drear windows looked and
sighed.

Nearer drooped the sky's contracted face;
The face of a Titan in punishment heavily bowed.
As painful sweat, the drops fell loud: at last,
With silent shivering flashes of angry flame,
Long stifled, his deep thunder burst and groaned.
Then crawling over, the banks of darkness broke
And loosened splendour showered its arrows abroad.
Now, opposite the retreating storm aghast,
In full-recovered sun, new dazzling clouds,
Alp beyond Alp, glitter in awful snow.

Men stop in the street to wonder. The brilliance
runs,

Washing with silent waves the town opprest;
Startles squalid rooms with a sudden smile;
Enters gloomy courts, and glories there.
Strange as a vision the wide expanded heavens

Open; the living wind with nearness breathes,
On weary faces of women of many cares;
They stand at their doors and watch with a soothed
spirit
The marvellous West asleep in endless light.

THE PARALYTIC

He stands where the young faces pass and throng;
His blank eyes tremble in the noonday sun:
He sees all life, the lovely and the strong,
Before him run.

Eager and swift, or grouped and loitering, they
Follow their dreams, on busy errands sped,
Planning delight and triumph; but all day
He shakes his head.

THE SLEEPERS

As a swallow that sits on the roof,
I gaze on the world aloof;

In the silence, when men lie sleeping,
I hear the noise of weeping:

The tears, by Day derided,
To tender Night confided.

Ah, now I listen, I cannot delay
In thoughts apart; I must not stay.

The doors are closed and fast: unseen,
With stealthy feet I glide between.

I see the sleepers asleep in their beds,
Negligent arms, motionless heads;

Beautiful in the bloom of slumber,
Peaceful armies without number.

Not here I linger: the sigh of those
That sleep not, draws me with answered throes.

A mother mapping her day of cares,
On her sleeping baby softly stares.

A youth by shameful sorrow torn,
Thinks on the unendurable morn.

By her husband, a wife unhappy lies,
With bitter heart and open eyes.

An old man hears the voice of the wave,
His dear son's cold unquiet grave.

Alone in the lonely, listening night
A child lies still in dumb affright:

The burden of all dark things unknown
Weighs on his trembling heart like stone.

A man remembers his dead love's smile,
And his tranquil courage is quelled awhile.

My heart is heavy with love and pain;
The tears within me oppress my brain.

What shall I tell you, you that ache
And number the laggard hours awake?

O stabbed and stricken, what soothing art
Shall I use to assuage the wounds that smart?

The consolation that, ere I know
Love and sorrow, I fancied true,

Is faint and helpless, now I find,
As beauty told in the ears of the blind:

And I cannot utter in words the thought
That strengthens me most, when my heart is
wrought.

O brother, that cannot the days undo,
Gould I but the reckoning pay for you!

O mother, sink your head in peace,
And I will your knot of care release.

Dear child, give me your dread to bear:
I hold your hand, I stroke your hair,

It is I, who love you, that watch and keep
Darkness from you, the while you sleep.

I have no counsel; I know not why
In your breasts the arrows burning lie;

I cannot heal your hurts, nor take
The sharp iron out of souls that ache.

O yet, as I watch, the lashes close
A little, the eyes their lids dispose;

The hand that fondly lies in mine
Relaxes; the wearied heads decline.

And now on wings the sorrows flee
From the happy sleepers, hither to me.

O noiseless sorrows, darkly thronging,
My heart is prepared: my tender longing

You alone can appease, with tears,
With pangs, with passion, with shame, with fears.

Feed on my heart that is open and bare,
Feed your fill, sorrow and care:

Take me, pains of all souls forlorn.
For O too swiftly arrives the morn

MAY NIGHT

Come, let us forth, and wander the rich, the murmuring night!

The shy, blue dusk of summer trembles above the street;

On either side uprising glimmer houses pale:

But me the turbulent babble and voice of crowds delight;

For me the wheels make music, the mingled cries are sweet;

Motion and laughter call: we hear, we will not fail.

For see, in secret vista, with soft, retiring stars,

With clustered suns, that stare upon the throngs below,

With pendent dazzling moons, that cast a noonday white,

The full streets beckon: come, for toil has burst his bars,

And idle eyes rejoice, and feet unhasting go.

O let us out and wander the gay and golden night.

DEPTFORD

Well is it, shrouded Sun, thou spar'st no ray
To illumine this sad street! A light more bare
Would but discover more this bald array
Of roofs dejected, window patched that stare
From sordid walls: for the shy breath of Spring,
Her cheek of flowers, or fragrance of her hair,
Thou could'st not, save to cheated memory, bring.

Alas! I welcome this dull mist, that drapes
The path of the heavy sky above the street,
Casting a phantom dimness on these shapes
That pass, by toil disfeatured, with slow feet
And with mistrustful eyes; though in the mud
Children the play of ages old repeat,
Because of quenchless wanting in their blood.

Yet oh, what clouds of heaviness deter
My spirit; what sad vacancy impedes!
I am like some far-ventured traveller,
Whom, in a forest vast, entangled weeds
Have hindered; over whom green darkness fills
The inextricable boughs and stifling feeds
A poisonous fear, that sinks on him and chills.

Nor finds he faith, amid the monstrous trees
Rooted in silence, peopled with strange cries
And stealthy shadows (where alone he sees
Rank growths of the hot marsh, but watching eyes
Imagines), to believe the self-same bark
He leans on, lifts to the unclouded skies
Its crest victorious from that cradle dark.

I with like pain and languor am opprest:
Me too a forest upon poison fed,
Me too the marsh and the rank weeds infest.
Almost I trace in the dumb pall o'erhead
A' net of stubborn boughs that dimly mesh
The air; I stifle: like a chain of lead
They weigh upon my soul, they bind my flesh.

I cannot breathe: the last and worst despair
Begins to invade me, numbing even desire
That panted for sweet draughts of light and air.
Dumb walls against me with blind heaven conspire:
Incredible the sun seems now, a ghost
I dreamed of in my dreams; unreal fire.
The light is blotted out, the blue is lost.

Was it mirage, the glow I fancied warm
On human cheeks, the beauty of my kind?
I feel it fading from me, a brief charm
Flying at touch. Blow hither, storms of wind!
Strike hither, strong sun, to my dulled heart's core!
Awake, disturb me, lest mine eyes grow blind,
By fatal use to a foul dream resigned,
Accept for Nature's body this, her sore.

RED NIGHT

Rolled in a smouldering mist, wrapt in an ardent
cloud,
Over ridged roofs, over the buried roar
That comes and goes
Where shadowy London mutters at the core
Of meeting streets interminably ploughed
Through blackness built and steeped and immense
With felt, unfeatured, waste magnificence,
The night shudders and glows.
Ensanguined skies, that lower and lift and change
Each instant! sullen with a spectral rose
Upon the towered horizon; but more near
A lurid vapour, throbbing up the gloom,
Glares like a furnace fume;
Exhausted pallors hover faint and strange;
Dull fiery flushes melt and reappear;
While over all in lofty glimpses far
Spaces of silence and blue dream disclose
The still eye of a star.

Muffled in burning air, so dumb
Above this monstrous ever-trembling hum,
What hide you, heavens? What sombre presences,
What powers pass over? What dim-legged host,
What peopled pageantries,
With gleam of arms and robes that crimsoned trail.
In silent triumph or huge mockery hail?
O, is it the tumultuous-memored ghost
Of some lost city, fabulous and frail,
Stoops over London; Susa, Thebes, or Tyre,

Rebuilt out of mist and fire?
No, rather to its secret self revealed
The soul of London burning in the skies
Her desolations and her majesties!

There, there is all unsealed:
Terror and hope, ecstasy and despair
Their apparition yield,
While still through kindled street and shadowy square
The faces pass, the uncounted faces crowd,—
Rages, lamentings, joys, in masks of flesh concealed.

Down a grimed lane, around a bare-benched room,
Seven shapes of men are sunken, heads upon hands
bowed.

—O spent and mad desires, lost in the fiery cloud,
What dungeon fled you from?

Across the river's glittering gloom,
Under the towered chimes, a youth steps, bright
With dream that all the future clothes,
Into this new, enchanted land.

Incessant stream the faces into light!

From his wife's hand

Behold a drunkard snatch the toil-earned pence,
And strike her on the patient face with oaths.

But over trees, upon a balcony,

To a young girl life murmurs up immense

Its strange delight,

And in her pulses to her spirit sings.

Along an alley thronged and flaring

A woman's loud self-loathing laughter rings.

The old prowler leers. Fierce cries a mob incense.

(Still the red Night her stormy heart is baring.)

A bent blind beggar taps along the stones.

The indifferent traffic roars and drones.

Blank under a high torch

Gapes a house-ruin, propped with beams; beneath

Some shadow-guarded and neglected porch

A girl and boy

(Whence flowered, O Night, yon soft and fearful
rose?)

Press timid lips and breathe,

Speechless, their joy.

Hither and thither goes

The homeless outcast; students turn the page

By lamplight; the physician sentences;

Dull-eyed or jovial, tavern-loungers drink;

The applauded actor steps upon the stage;

Mothers with far thoughts watch upon their knees

Where children slumber; revellers stamp and shout;

Long-parted bosoms meet in sobbed embrace;

Hope, behind doors, ebbs from the waiting face;

Locked bodies sway and swell

With pain of unendurable farewell:

No instant, but some debt of terror's paid,

Some shame exacted, measureless love poured out,

Weak hearts are helped, strong men are torn,

Wild sorrow in dear arms is comforted,

The last peace dawns upon the newly dead,

And in hushed rooms is heard wail of the newly born.

What ferments rise and mingle,

Night, on your cloudy mirror! what young fire

Shoots, and what endless lassitudes expire!

Yet out of one flesh wrought,

None separate, none single!

Hater and hated, seeker and sought,

O restless, O innumerable shapes,

Kneaded by one all-urging thought,

That none diverts, that none escapes;

So thirsted for, if not in pride, in shame,

If not with tenderness, with railing curse,

If not with hands that cherish, hands that maim,

Life, how vast! Life, how brief!

Eternally wooed and wooing,

That some would stifle, and some hotly seize,

And some by cunning trap into their mesh,

Or plunder in the darkness like a thief;

And these from rapturous pangs of flesh

Would crush to maddening wine, and these
In still renunciation lure to their soul's ease.
Though never in a single heart contained,
Though depth of it no wisest seer may plumb,
Though height of it no hero wholly gained,
Heavenly and human, twined in all our throes
Of passion that in blind heat overflows
To charge the night with thick and shuddering fume,
And felt in every cry, in every deed
Defaced or freed,
Ah, spent at such a dear and cruel cost,—
Possessed a moment, and then, like yon height
Of stars, clouded in our own selves and lost,—
Lives the supreme
Reality, diviner than all dream.

Now all the heaven like a huge smithy glows,
Hollow and palpitating dusk and glare!
Ah, forge of God, where blows
The blast of an incredible flame, what might
Shapes to what uses there
Each obdurate iron or molten fiery part
Of the one infinite wrought human heart,
In tears, love, anger, beauty and despair
Throbbing for ever, under the red night?

THE BATHERS

Hither, from thirsty day
And stifling labour and the street's hot glare,
To twilight shut away
Beyond the soft roar, under hovering trees,
Hither the gleeful multitudes repair,
And by the open, echoing, evening shore,
On the dim grass, to the faint freshened breeze,
With laughter their delighted bodies bare.

Peaceful above the sunset's burning smoke,
One star and white moon lure the eastern night.
Already tasting of that wished delight
The great elms stir their boughs,
As from the day's hot languor they awoke.
But the gliding cool of water whispering calls
The bathers, in soft-plunging falls,
To overtake its ripple with swift stroke,
Or, pillowing their upward faces, drowse
On undulation of an easy peace;
Miraculous release
Of heavy spirits, laving all desire
With satisfaction and with joy entire.

Strange now the factory's humming wheel, the cry
Of tireless engines, the swift-hoisted bales
Unnumbered; strange the smell of ordered wares
In the shop's dimness: noonday traffic fails
Out of the wave-washed ear; stiff office stool,
And busy hush: and like a turbid dream,
The tavern's glittering fume insensibly

Ebbs with the hot race and the gluttoned stream
Of labour, thieving the dear sands of youth.
But ever closer, like sweet-tasting truth,
The vivid drench, the yielding pressure cool;
And like a known touch comes the fitful breeze
From murmuring silence: the suspended trees
Above, the wet drops that from hair and beard
Run down the rippled back, are real and sweet.
Warm are the breathing limbs, and the firm feet
Tread lightly the firm ground, or lightly race
To mirthful cries: while Evening, nearer heard
And felt, a presence of invisible things
Inbreathes, as to the nostril keen she brings
The darkling scented freshness of the grass.

O now from raiment of illusion shed
The perfect body moves, rejecting care,
And to mysterious liberty remits
The rejoicing mind, in native pasture fed;
And mates its glory with the priceless air,
The universal beam, whatever fits
Untamable spirits, nor is bought nor sold;
Equalled with heroes old,
That beautifully people the green morn
Of time, and from pale marble, young and wise
Gaze past our hurrying world, our triumphs worn,
And our hearts trouble with their peaceful eyes.

THE ESCAPE

Destiny drives a crooked plough
And sows a careless seed;
Now through a heart she cuts, and now
She helps a helpless need.

To-night from London's roaring sea
She brings a girl and boy;
For two hearts used to misery,
Opens a door of joy.

Wandering from hateful homes they came,
Till by this fate they meet.
Then out of ashes springs a flame;
Suddenly life is sweet.

Together, where the city ends,
And looks on Thames's stream,
That under Surrey willows bends
And floats into a dream,

Softly in one another's ear
They murmur childish speech;
Love that is deeper and more dear
For words it cannot reach.

Above them the June night is still:
Only with sighs half-heard
Dark leaves above them flutter and thrill,
As with their longing stirred;

And by the old brick wall below
Rustling, the river glides;
Like their full hearts, that deeply glow,
Is the swell of his full tides.

To the farther shore the girl's pale brow
Turns with desiring eyes:
"Annie, what is it you're wishing now?"
She lifts her head and sighs.

"Willie, how peaceful 'tis and soft
Across the water! See,
The trees are sleeping, and stars aloft
Beckon to you and me.

I think it must be good to walk
In the fields, and have no care;
With trees and not with men to talk.
O, Willie, take me there!"

Now hand in hand up to the Night
They gaze; and she looks down
With large mild eyes of grave delight,
The mother they have not known.

Older than sorrow she appears,
Yet than themselves more young;
She understood their childish tears,
Knew how their love was sprung.

The simple perfume of the grass
Comes to them like a call.
Obeying in a dream they pass
Along the old brick wall;

By flickering lamp and shadowy door,
Across the muddy creek,
Warm with their joy to the heart's core,
With joy afraid to speak.

At last the open road they gain,
And by the Bridge, that looms
With giant arch and sloping chain
Over the river's glooms,

They pause: above, the northern skies
Are pale with a furnace light.
London with upcast, sleepless eyes
Possesses the brief night.

The wind flaps in the lamp; and hark!
A noise of wheels, that come
At drowsy pace; along the dark
A waggon lumbers home.

Slow-footed, with a weary ease,
The patient horses step;
The rein relaxed upon his knees,
The waggoner nods asleep.

"Annie, it goes the country way,
Tis meant for me and you:
It goes to fields, and trees, and hay,
Come, it shall take us too!"

He lifts her in his arms, as past
The great wheels groaning ride,
And on the straw he sets her fast,
And lightly climbs beside.

The waggoner nods his drowsy head,
He hears no sound: awhile
Softly they listen in sweet dread.
Then to each other smile.

Odours of dimly flowering June,
The starry stillness deep,
Possess their wondering spirits; soon,
Like children tired, they sleep.

The waggon creaks, the horses plod
By hedges clearer seen,
Down the familiar dusty road,
And past a village green.

The morning star shines in the pond:
A cock crows loud, and bright
The dawn springs in the sky beyond;
The birds applaud the light.

But on into the summer morn
Beneath the gazing East,
The sleepers move, serenely borne:
The world for them has ceased.

MIDSUMMER NOON

At her window gazes over the elms
A girl; she looks on the branching green;
But her eyes possess unfathomed realms,
Her young hand holds her dreaming chin.

Drifted, the dazzling clouds ascend
In indolent order, vast and slow,
The great blue; softly their shadows send
A clearness up from the wall below.

An old man houseless, leaning alone
By the tree-girt fountain, only heeds
The fall of the spray in the shine of the sur
And nothing possessing, nothing needs.

The square is heavy with silent bloom;
The tardy wheels uncertain creep.
Above in a narrow sunlit room,
The widower watches his child asleep.

ELEONORA DUSS AS MAGDA

The theatre is still, and Duse speaks.
What charm possesses all,
And what a bloom let fall
On parted lips, and eyes, and flushing cheeks!
The flattering whisper and the trivial word
No longer heard,
The hearts of women listen, deeply stirred.
For now to each those quivering accents seem
A secret telling for her ear alone:
The child sits wondering in a world foreknown,
And the old nod their heads with springing tear,
Confirming true that acted dream.
And the soul of each to itself revealed
Feels to the voice a voice reply,
With a leaping wonder, a joy, a fear,
It is I, it is I!
But O what radiant mirror is this that dazzles me,
That my dead rapture holds,
That all my joy unfolds,
That sets my longing free,
My sighs renumbers, my old hope renews?
I have lived in a sleep, I have tasted alien bread,
I have spoken the speech, and worn the robes of the
 dead;
I have buried my heart away, and none believed.
But now, speak on, and my bonds untie:
At last, it is I, it is I!

THE CONVICT

By the warm road-side, where chestnut and thorn
The brightness shaded, supine, at ease,
A felon, freed that morn,
Lay idle, and wondered, gazing up through the trees.

O strange no more to be one of a band
Numbered and known; to lose the measure
Of day divided and planned:
To think for the morrow, to choose work or pleasure.

His ear the jostling roar of the street
Amazed: he felt the crowd like a load;
And welcomed, refuge sweet,
Deserted suburb and silent shady road.

For now, with his hands habitual stones
Of the pavement he touched: close to the wall
He nestled, and felt to his bones
The warmth, and the shadow cool on his forehead fall.

And catching a leaf from the chestnut strayed,
He held it, glowing green in the light,
Transparent, with veins inlaid;
And thrust the world and its vastness away from
sight.

Children from school, as they passed him, eyed
His shorn temples, and whispering turned
To mock him: he on his side,
Abstracted, his limbs disposed to a slumber earned.

A grave citizen, homeward bound,
Perceived him, as negligent still he lay,
And swerved askance, and frowned,
And crossed to the opposite pavement and went his
way.

But warming him shone the indifferent noon;
And chestnut and thorn on his sleeping head
In the careless glory of June
Scattered their delicate blossom of white and red.

MARTHA

A woman sat, with roses red
Upon her lap before her spread,
On that high bridge whose parapet
Wide over turbulent Thames is set,
Between the dome's far glittering crest
And those famed towers that throng the west.
Neglectful of the summer air
That on her pale brow stirred the hair,
She sat with fond and troubled look,
And in her hand the roses shook.
Shy to her lips a bloom she laid,
Then shrank as suddenly afraid:
For from the breathing crimson leaf
The sweetness came to her like grief.
Dropping her hands, her eyes she raised,
And on the hurrying passers gazed.
Two children, loitering along
Amid that swift and busy throng,
Their arms about each other's shoulder,
The younger clinging to the older,
Stopped, with their faces backward turned
To her: her heart within her yearned.
They were so young! She looked away:
Oh, the whole earth was young to-day!
The whole wide earth was laughing fair;
The flashing river, the soft air,
The horses proud, the voices clear
Of young men, frequent cry and cheer,
All these were beautiful and free,
Each with its joy: Alas, but she!

She started up, and bowed her head,
And, gathering her roses, fled.

Through dim, uncounted, silent days,
She had trod deep-secluded ways;
'Mid the fierce throng of jostling lives,
Whom unrelenting hunger drives,
Close to the wall had stolen by,
Yet could not shun calamity.
Her painful thrift, her patient face,
Could not the world-old debt erase;
Nor gentle lips, nor feet that glide,
Persuade the sudden blow aside.
This morn, when she arose, her store,
Trusted to others, was no more.
No more avail her years of care.
She must her bosom frail prepare,
Exposed in her defenceless age,
Against the world and fortune's rage.
For bread, for bread, what must be done?
She stole forth in the morning sun.
I will sell flowers, she thought: this way
Seemed gentler to her first dismay.
Soon to the great flower-market, fair
With watered leaves and scented air,
She came: her seeking, timorous gaze
Wandered about her in amaze.
The arches hummed with cheerful sound;
Buyers and sellers thronged around;
Lilies in virgin slumber stirred
Hardly, the gold dust brightly blurred
Upon their rich illumined snow,
As the soft breezes come and go.
From her smooth sheath, with ardent wings,
Purple and gold, the iris springs;
Deep-umbered wall-flowers, dusk between
The radiance and the odour keen
Of jonquils, this sad woman's eyes
And her o'erclouded soul surprise.

But most the wine-red roses, deep
In sunshine lying, warm asleep,
Breathing perfume, drinking light
Into their inmost bosoms bright,
Seemed fathomlessly to unfold
A treasure of more price than gold.
Martha, o'ercome by wonder new,
Into her heart the crimson drew;
The colour burning on her cheek,
She stood, in strange emotion weak.
But she must buy. Her choice was made:
Red rose upon red rose she laid,
Lingering, then hastened out, with eyes
Bright, and her hands about the prize,
And quickened thought that nowhere aims.
Soon, pausing above glittering Thames,
She spreads the flowers upon her knees.
Vast, many-windowed palaces
Before her raised their scornful height
And haughtily struck back the light.
She scarcely marked them, only bent
Her fond gaze on the flowers, intent
To bind them in gay bunches, drest
So to allure the spoiler best.
But now, as her caressing hand
Each odorous fresh nosegay planned,
A new grief smote her to the heart:
Must she from her sweet treasure part?
They seemed of her own blood. O no,
I cannot shame my roses so:
I will get bread some other way.
So she shut out all thought. The day
Was radiant; and her soul, surprised
To beauty, and the unsurmised
Sweetness of life, itself reproved
That had so little felt and loved!
O now to love, if even a flower,
To taste the sweet sun for an hour,
Was better than the struggle vain,
The dull, unprofitable pain,

To find her useless body bread.
Stricken with grievous joy, she fled.

She fled, but soon her pace grew faint.
She paused awhile, and easier went.
Often, in spirits wrought, despair,
Not less than joy the end of care,
A lightness feigns: for all is done,
And certainty at last begun.
Martha, with impulse fresh recoiled
From empty years, forlorn and soiled,
Trembled to feel the radiant breeze
Blowing from unknown living seas,
And, rising eager from long fast,
Drank in the wine of life at last.
Now, as some lovely face went by,
She noted it with yearning eye;
She joyed in the exultant course
Of horses, and their rushing force.

At last, long wandering, she drew near
Her home; then fell on her a fear,
A shadow from the coming Hours.
By chance a hawker, crying flowers,
His barrow pushed along the street,
And the dull air with scent was sweet.
As on her threshold Martha stood,
A sudden thought surprised her blood.
Quickly she entered, and the stair
Ascended: first with gentle care
Cooled her tired roses: then a box
Of little hoardings she unlocks,
And brings her silver to the door
And buys till she can buy no more.
Laden she enters: the drear room
Glow's strangely; the transfigured gloom
Flows over, prodigal in bloom.
Her lonely supper now she spread;
But with her eyes she banqueted.
Over the roofs in solemn flame

The strong beam of the sunset came,
And from the floor striking a glow
Burned back upon the wall; and lo!
How deep, in double splendour dyed,
Blushed the red roses glorified!
When darkness dimmed them, Martha sighed.
Yet still about the room she went
Touching them, and the subtle scent
Wandered into her soul, and brought
All memories, yet stifled thought.
As in her bed she lay, the flowers
Haunted her through the midnight hours:
'Twixt her shut lids the colours crept;
But wearied out, at last she slept.

Next morning she awoke in dread.
O mad, O sinful me! she said,
What have I done? how shall this end
For me? Alas, I have no friend.
She strove to rise; but in her brain
A drowsy magic worked like pain.
She sank back in a weak amaze
Upon the pillow: then her gaze
Fell on the roses; she looked round,
And in the spell again was bound.
The deep-hued blossoms standing by
With serious beauty awed her eye;
Upward, inscrutable, they flamed:
Of that mean fear she was ashamed.
All day their fragrance in the sun
Possessed her spirit: one by one,
She pondered o'er them, dozing still
And waking half against her will.
Her body hungered, but her soul
Was feasting. Gradually stole
The evening shadow on her bed;
She could no longer lift her head,
Deep on her brain the flowers had wrought;
Now in the dim twilight her thought
Put trembling on a strange attire,

And blossomed in fantastic fire.
She stretched her hand out in the gloom:
It touched upon a living bloom.
Thither she turned; the deep perfume
O'ercame her; nearer and more near.
And now her joy is in her fear,
The lily hangs, the rose inclines,
With incense that her soul entwines,
Her inmost soul that dares not stir.
The gentle flowers have need of her.
Unpitying is their rich desire—
Her breath, her being they require.
O, she must yield! She sinks far down,
Conquered, listless, happy, down
Under wells of darkness, deep
Into labyrinths of sleep,
Perishing in sweetness dumb,
By the close enfolding bloom
To a sighing phantom kissed,
Like a water into mist
Melting, and extinguished quite
In unfathomed odorous night.

At last, the brief stars paling, dawn
Breathed from distant stream and lawn.
The earliest bird with chirrup low
Called his mates; softly and slow
The flowers their languid petals part,
And open to the fragrant heart.
And now the first fresh beam returned;
Bright through the lily's edge it burned
And filled the purple rose with fire,
And brightened all their green attire,
And woke a shadow on the wall.

But Martha slept, nor stirred at all.

AUGUST

In drooping leaves of the plane
Hangs blue the early heat;
Stirless, a delicate shade
Sleeps on the parching street.

I wander this listless morning
By the banks of the dazzling river;
On the hot stones lean, where toward me
Lights from the water quiver.

And clasping hands upon eyes,
I plunge my thought in a dream
Of days when the sharp air stung
And the ice crushed cold in the stream;

Vainly! on body and mind
Has the tyrant sun his will:
And to me, on the hot stone leaning,
The city is faint and still,

Is faint as listening sands,
Where, awed by the heavy calm
Of the desert heaven, listens,
For ever alone, the palm.

THE FIRE

With beckoning fingers bright
In heaven uplifted, from the darkness wakes,
Upon a sudden, radiant Fire,
And out of slumber shakes
Her wild hair to the night;
Bewitching all to run with hurried feet,
And stand, and gaze upon her beauty dire.

For her the shrinking gloom
Yields, and a place prepares;
An ample scene and a majestic room:
Slowly the river bares
His bank; above, in endless tier,
Glittering out of the night the windows come
To that bright summons; and at last appear,
Hovering, enkindled, and unearthly clear,
Steeple, and tower, and the suspended dome.

But whence are these that haste
So rapt? What throngs along the street that press.
Raised by enchantment from the midnight waste
That even now was sleeping echoless?
Men without number, lured from near and far
As by a world-portending star!
Lo, on the bright bank without interval
Faces in murmuring line,
With earnest eyes that shine,
Across the stream gaze ever; on the wall
Faces; and dense along the bridge's side
Uncounted faces; softly the wheels glide

Approaching, lest they break the burning hush
Of all that multitude aflush
With secret strange desire.
Warm in the great light, as themselves afire,
Thousands are gazing, and all silently!
How to the throbbing glare their hearts reply,
As tossing upward a dim-sparkled plume,
The beautiful swift Fury scares the sky.
The stars look changed on high,
And red the steeples waver from the gloom.
Distantly clear over the water swells
The roar: the iron stanchions dribble bright,
And faltering with strong quiver to its fall,
Drops, slowly rushing, the great outer wall.
From lip to lip a wondering murmur goes,
As crouching a dark moment o'er its prey,
Swiftly again upleaps
The wild flame, and exulting madly glows;
The city burns in an enchanted day.
Still the great throng impassioned silence keeps,
Like an adoring host in ecstasy.
Did ever vision of the opened sky
Entrance more deeply, or did ever voice
Of a just wrath more terribly rejoice?
The houseless beggar gazing has forgot
His hunger; happy lovers' hands relax;
They look no more into each others' eyes.
Wrapt in its mother's shawl
The fretting child no longer cries.
And that soul-piercing flame
Melts out like wax
The prosperous schemer's busy schemes:
The reveller like a visionary gleams.
An aged wandering pair lift up their heads
Out of old memories; to each, to all,
Time and the strong world are no more the same,
But threatened, perishable, trembling, brief,
Even as themselves, an instant might destroy,
With all the builded weight of years and grief,
All that old hope and pleasant usage dear.

Glories and dooms before their eyes appear;
Upon their faces joy,
Within their bosoms fear!

Is it that even now
In all, O radiant Desolation, thou
Far off prefigurest
To each obscurely wounded breast
The dream of what shall be?
And in their hearts they see
Rushing in ardent ruin out of sight
With all her splendour, with her streaming robe
Of seas, and her pale peoples, the vast globe
A sullen ember crumble into night!

TO A DERELICT

O travelled far beyond unhappiness
Into a dreadful peace!
Why tarriest thou here? The street is bright
With noon; the music of the tidal sound
Of London fills the trembling air with power
Flowing and freed around;
No corner but is stirred
With motion and with voices mingling heard,
That every hour
Bring thousand faces trooping into light
Past thee. O hide thyself beneath the ground!
Trouble not our sunshine longer, lest we see
Too clearly inscribed on thee
All that we fear to be

What dost thou with the sun?
Long since thy race was run.
What spectral task employs
Thy hands? The very boys
That mocked thee, mock no more; they pass thee by,
Like a dumb stone that cannot make reply.
Yet, even as a stone
Will from the turbulent sea
Take voice and motion not its own,
Words on thy lips mechanically stray
With echoes and with gleams that fade and come
Unrecognized, unknown.
And as from some extinguished star
The orphan ray
Still vainly travels its eternal way,

A light of meaning flickers from afar
From what long since was dumb.
Still at the accustomed place
Appears thy ruined face;
And in thy niche all the resounding day,
'Mid busy voices haunting motionless
Thou standest; and to every loitering eye
Resign'st thy history.
Alas! thou also, thou that art so cold,
Thou also once wert young;
And once didst hang upon thy mother's breast
And laugh upon thy father's knee.
But now thy flesh is nearer to the mould
Than the light grass,—and still thou lingerest!
Woe to thee now, because thou chocest ill,
Because each hour thou didst resign
A little more of thy slow-ebbing will,
And to the invading silence didst assent;
Because to Life saying for ever Nay,
To Death thou saidest Yea,
Who leaves thee now engraven with defeat
In this triumphal street,
With all that was and is no longer thine
Yielded and spent
At what a priceless cost.
O face of many battles, and all lost!

Now all thy dues paid, Death possesses thee;
But too secure
To occupy his easy kingdom, spares
To enforce his title; cruelly forbears,
And suffers thee to languish in thy lot,
In this most woeful, that thou weapest not.
So in some street
Stirred with the rushing feet
Of life that glitters and that thunders past,
An aged house, broken and doomed at last,
Ere yet it vanish quite,
Abandons helpless to the light
Spoiled sanctuaries, filled with emptiness,

Where late the weary harboured, and young fears
Were cradled into peace,
And sacred kisses kissed, and private tears
Were dried, and true hearts hid their close delight.
But now the fires are ashes, all is bare,
The torn, gay paper flutters old,
And a phantasmal stair
Climbs into floorless chambers, and hearths cold.

TRAFALGAR SQUARE

Slowly the dawn a magic paleness drew
From windows dim; the Pillar high in air
Over dark statues and dumb fountains, threw
A shadow on the solitary square.

They that all night, dozing disquieted,
Huddled together on the benches cold,
Now shrank apart, distrustful and unfed,
And by the growing radiance unconsoled.

Then one, a woman, silently arose,
And came to the broad fountain, brimming cool,
And over the stone margin leaning close,
Dipped hands and bathed her forehead in the pool.

Now as the fresh drops ran upon her brow
And her hands knotted up her hair, the ways
Of old lost mornings came to her, and how
Into her mirror she would smile and gaze.

Then she was troubled; and looked down once more
Into the glimmering water; and she seemed
The very depth of darkness to explore,
If it might yield all that she feared and dreamed.

But that kind clouding mirror answered her
With a soft answer; liquid mysteries
Of shadow, with a pale breeze just astir,
Yielded only the brightness of her eyes.

It was herself; but O what magic wrought
A presage round her, tender and obscure!
The water without stain refused her not:
In that deep vision she rejoined the pure.

The dawn stole on; and from its buried place
Rose in her bosom the sweet strength of youth;
She, the rejected, had no more disgrace:
Her opening heart drew in a different truth.

She that had come past her last hope, and found
Nothing beyond, and had shed no more tears,
But closing with dull ashes her first wound,
Had trodden into the daily dust all fears:

She now began to wonder and to thrill
Upon a new horizon: and the pain
Of hope began to quicken and to fill
The world with strangeness and desire again.

O then I am not come quite to the end,
She murmured, and life holds more than I knew.
Somewhere by seeking I may find a friend
Perhaps, and something in this world be true.

Alone in this bright battle, whose fierce din
Even now awakes round her defenceless lot,
Without home, friend, comfort or peace within,
The very stones might weep her. She weeps not:

But as a plant, that under parching drouth
Thirsted and drooped and daily heavier grew,
Rises afresh to the soft showering south,
She lifts her forehead to the sun anew.

And in her spirit a still fountain springs
Deeper than hunger, faith crying for life,
That to her eyes an inward clearness brings,
And to her heart courage for any strife.

THE REFORMER

HYDE PARK

August from a vault of hollow brass
Steep upon the sullen city glares.
Yellower burns the sick and parching grass,
Shivering in the breath of furnace airs.

Prone upon their pale, outwearied brows
Miserable forms lie heavily,
Cumbering the earth; untimely boughs
Fallen from this world-o'ershadowing tree,

London, that with every buried sun
Shakes from her strong life a thousand lives,
Feeds her heart with blood of hearts undone;
Nourished with a million sorrows, thrives.

Hither the Reformer comes; a flame
Burns within his dark, enthusiast gaze.
Still he thirsts to show mankind their shame,
Lift and drag them from their sinful ways.

Now amid the prostrate scattered throng
Standing, he uplifts his earnest cry:
"Wake, awake, rise up from lust and wrong,
Quickly seek God's mercy ere you die!

"Thunder on your hesitation hangs.
God prepares your fearful punishment.

Flee, while yet 'tis time, those endless pangs,
Hearken, wretched sinners, and repent."

Scarce the motion of a listless arm,
Scarce the uneasy lifting of a head,
Answers that stern trumpet of alarm.—
Still he sounds his vehement note of dread.

Hand in hand three children solemn-eyed
Wonder up into his face, and pass,
Often turning backward, o'er the wide
Hueless desert of the hazy grass.

Fierce the lava-torrent of his speech
Pours on those dejected souls around;
Yet his words no single bosom reach,
Wither and fall idle on the ground.

Now at last he falters; his own thought,
His own voice, is strange and far to him.
The sun stares his meaning into naught;
In the stillness all his fire is dim.

From those miserable forms unstirred
Now a mute imploring cry he hears,
Like a stricken creature's, without word;
O what vain voice sounds upon our ears!

Powerless are thy terrors to appal.
Welcome even, so we feel the less
Heavy on our hearts and over all
This intolerable emptiness!

Empty is the earth for us, the skies
Empty; only lives the brazen sun.
Empty are our hearts; and if we rise,
There is nothing to be sought nor won.

If upon our silence thou intrude.
Speak a speech that we may understand!
Leave us to endure our solitude,
Or reach out to us a brother's hand.

Join us to this life that round us teems;
Let us breathe again that common breath!
Bring us sorrow, labour, terrors, dreams,
Madness; but deliver us from death!

WHITECHAPEL HIGH ROAD

Lusty life her river pours
Along a road of shining shores.
The moon of August beams
Mild as upon her harvest slopes; but here
From man's full-breath'd abounding earth
Exiled she walks, as one of alien birth,
The pale, neglected foster-mother of dreams.
For windows with resplendent stores
Along the pavement dazzle and outstare
The booths that front them; there,
To the throng which loiters by in laughing streams
Babble the criers: and 'mid eager sounds
The flaming torches toss to the wind their hair,
And ruddy in trembling waves the light
Flushes cheeks of wondering boys
Assembled, their lips parted and eyes bright,
As the medicine-seller his magic herb expounds,
Or some old man displays his painted toys.
Deaf with a vacant stillness of the tomb,
At intervals a road deserted gapes,
Where night shrinks back into her proper gloom,
Frighted by boisterous flare
Of the flame, that now through a cluster of green
grapes
Shines wanly, or on striped apple and smooth pear
Flits blushing; now on rug or carpet spread
In view of the merry buyers, the rude dyes
Re-crimsons, or an antic shadow throws
Over the chestnut brazier's glowing eyes;
And now the sleeping head

Of a gipsy child in his dim corner shows,
Huddled against a canvas wall, his bed
An ancient sack: nor torch, nor hundred cries
Awake him from his sweet profound repose.

But thou, divine moon, with thine equal beam
Dispensing patience, stealest unawares
The thoughts of many that pass sorrowful on
Else undiverted, amid the crowd alone:
Embroiderest with beauties the worn theme
Of trouble; to a fancied harbour calm
Steerest the widow's ship of heavy cares;
And on light spirits of lovers, radiant grown,
Dropest an unimaginable balm.
Yet me to-night thy peace rejoices less
Than this warm human scene, that of rude earth
Pleasantly savours, nor dissembles mirth,
Nor grief nor passion: sweet to me this press
Of life unnumbered, where if hard distress
Be tyrant, hunger is not fed
Nor misery pensioned with the ill-tasting bread
Of pity; but such help as earth ordains
Betwixt her creatures, bound in common pains,
One from another, without prayer, obtains.

IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Shafts of light, that poured from the August sun,
Glowed on long red walls of the gallery cool;
Fell upon monstrous visions of ages gone,
Still, smiling Sphinx, winged and bearded Bull.

With burnished breast of ebon marble, queen
And king regarded full, from a tranquil brain
Enthroned together, conquered Time; serene
In spite of wisdom, and older than ancient pain.

Hither a poor woman, with sad eyes, came,
And vacantly looked around. The faces vast,
Their strange motionless features, touched with flame,
Awed her: in humble wonder she hurried past;

And shyly beneath a sombre monument sought
Obscurity; into the darkest shade she crept
And rested: soon, diverted awhile, her thought
Returned to its own trouble. At last she slept.

Not long sweet sleep alone her spirit possest.
A dream seized her: a solemn and strange dream.
For far from home in an unknown land, opprest
By burning sun, in the noon's terrible beam

She wandered; around her out of the plain arose
Immense Forms, that high above her stared.
Calm they seemed, and used to human woes;
Silent they heard her sorrow, with ears prepared.

Now like a bird, flitting with anxious wings,
Imprisoned within some vast cathedral's aisles,
Hither and thither she flutters: to each she brings
Her prayer, and is answered only with grave smiles.

Indescribably troubled, "Crush me," she cries,
"Speak, speak, or crush me!" The lips are dumb.
—She woke, no longer in shadow, the sun on her
eyes,
And sighed, and arose, and returned to her empty
home,

THE THRESHOLD

AN ODE

I walked beside full-flooding Thames to-night
Westward; upon my face the sunset fell:
The hour, the spacious evening, pleased me well.
Buoyant the air breathed after rain, and kind
To senses flattered with soft sound and light
Of merry waves that leapt against the wind,
Where, broadly heaving barge and boat at rest,
The River came at flood; from golden skies
Issuing through arches, black upon the West,
To flame before the sunset's mysteries.

Far off to-night as a remembered dream
That different Thames, familiar as a friend,
That youthful Thames, to whom his willows bend
With private whisper; where my boat would come,
Heaped with fresh flowers, and down the cool smooth
stream
Follow his green banks through the twilight home.
Far from these paven shores, these haughty towers,
Where wave and beam glorying together run,
As though they would disown those cradling bowers,
And gushed immediate from the molten sun.

Dazzled I turn; and lo, the solemn East
Before me comes. Soft to my eyes, yet bright,
London her vastness stretches in hushed light
Murmuring; wharf and terrace curve afar
Past bridge and steeple, thronging, great with least,
To Paul's high cross that sparkles like a star.

The distant windows glitter; and high o'er them,
Clouds unapproachable, illumined snows,
Tinged with calm fire that blushes like a gem,
As though themselves burned inwardly, repose.

All things, methought, that inward glory shared,
A radiant strangeness: nothing I beheld
But spoke in a new tongue to me, or spelled
New meanings; and within me a deep sense
Of portals opening, of an hour prepared,
Prophesied; and a light, transported thence,
Of expectation on me also came.
Glowing, the city waits what shall arrive:
The steep clouds smoulder as to sudden flame
They would burst forth, and the wave leaps alive.

Immediately stole over me the thought
Of this age ending; painful and oppressed,
Its cry, entreating still-rejected rest,
Echoed behind me. But I seemed to stand
Beyond; and over the near threshold brought
Of days to be, the air blew strong and bland.
I listened; and a voice, wherein bore part
Cloud, light, and wind, and water, thus began
Aerial tones; a voice from the deep heart
Of all things speaking to the heart of man.

Say, troubled one, what sorrow is it keeps
Thy spirit? Because thy latest dream is shed,
Is the root sapped, and the strong branches dead?
Forget'st thou that thy generations have
Their seasons, and for them her due term sleeps
Spring, with her buds, dreaming in Autumn's grave?
Because 'twas Autumn with thee, thou sit'st mute,
To the fall of the leaf consenting: yet thine eyes
Cast round thee, and consider what fair fruit
The full seeds bear in charge! Wake, and arise!

Wake, and for blither energy remit
This tedious questing in the inscrutable past.

This pondering the before and after vast.
O couldst thou take, like us, Time's quiet bloom,
On life alone expend thy freshened wit,
The burden and the joy alone resume!
The mountains groan not that the streams devour
With thievish tongue their ancient high estate,
Nor of her pining leaf complains the flower;
But thou enjoy'st not nor reject'st thy fate.

Pitying thee, the Powers that on thee cast
Thy destiny, 'mid labour solace sent.
For veiled they keep that infinite ascent
Of years, and by degrees the pathway show
Up which thou mountest, deemest still the last
Step won, and numbered all the stones of woe.
And easily triumphant thou lean'st forth
To grasp the final palm; when that eludes,
As easily dejected: placid Earth
Remains, a mirror for thy hundred moods.

Dream-builder, for whose dreams thy lips invent
Names of sweet sound, freedom and peace and truth,
Upon the bright fermenting mists of youth
Projecting a foredoomed reality:
Happy, if gross joys could thy brain content,
Or could thy faith match thy credulity;
Ever inweaving Earth's plain warp with thread
Of thy deep wishes, thine own heart's strong hue,
The mind thy prison, thought thy narrow bed,
With truth, with freedom what hast thou to do?

O yet, I answered, not in vain desire
Spurs us to gaze into the infinity,
To dip our hands in that wide whispering sea.
How shall one flower the whole wood's voices tell,
Or one small sphere interpret that full choir
Of orb with orb, music ineffable
From all worlds mingled? Yet since our best joy
Not in possession but beyond us lies,
Our hearts at last, weary of earth's annoy,
Only that far-off music satisfies.

Name beyond names, Heart of the Eternal Life,
Whom our faint thought hardly at times conceives,
Who hear'st but as the oak his fluttered leaves
The cry of parting spirits; who in the pang
For children born rejoicest; from whose strife
And travail issuing the bright worlds outsprang;
If the wide thought of thee my childish grief
Ever effaced, accept my manhood's vow!
O sweet and insupportable, O chief
And first and last of all loves, hear me now!

Me, whom this living vastness once appalled,
And this uproar disheartened and oppressed,
Now larger thoughts enfranchise, with sweet zest
Nourish, and this immensity sustains;
Buoyed as a swimmer upon ocean, called
From time to the eternal, my due pains
Accepting, in thy bosom I repose,
Of joys and griefs together make my bed,
In longing to set sure against all foes
My spirit freed, and with thy spirit wed.

Thou, thou remainest ever in lovely power
Triumphant, whom beginning never knew;
'Tis we alone that our own strength undo,
'Tis we alone that, to thy ardour lame,
Often defeated, miserably deflower
The joy thou gavest, quench the imparted flame,
And native sweet sourly to ashes turn,
O help, inspire! Us with thyself endow!
Through our brief actions let thy greatness burn,
As through the clouds the light is burning now!

For me, since thou this hour to see thee whole
Vouchsafest, no more shall my heart deny
That thou proceed'st, because I fail and cry.
Henceforth will I endure to walk right on
Nor my bliss too much ponder, nor my dole.
And since dear peace fortifies faith alone,
I trust thee, and not loth resign my heart,

Nor though thou shouldst betray me, wound and
rend,
Would my course alter, that the better part
Have chosen, enduring to the unknown end.

So inwardly my lifted spirit sang.
And lo, that solemn joy to authorize,
With answering bloom before my lifted eyes
The clouds moved softly; the far western fires
A moment o'er the steeples paused and sprang.
Now on the eye the fading light expires.
But 'tis to me as if Earth cast off Day,
Assuming her own glory, and her flight
Unwearied urging on the eternal way,
Already glowed among the lamps of Night.

THE ROAD MENDERS

How solitary gleams the lamplit street
Waiting the far-off morn!
How softly from the unresting city blows
The murmur borne
Down this deserted way!
Dim loiterers pass home with stealthy feet.
Now only, sudden at their interval.
The lofty chimes awaken and let fall
Deep thrills of ordered sound;
Subsiding echoes gradually drowned
In a great stillness, that creeps up around,
And darkly grows
Profounder over all
Like a strong frost, hushing a stormy day.

But who is this, that by the brazier red
Encamped in his rude hut,
With many a sack about his shoulder spread
Watches with eyes unshut?
The burning brazier flushes his old face,
Illumining the old thoughts in his eyes.
Surely the Night doth to her secrecies
Admit him, and the watching stars attune
To their high patience, who so lightly seems
To bear the weight of many thousand dreams
(Dark hosts around him sleeping numberless);
He surely hath unbuilt all walls of thought
To reach an air-wide wisdom, past access
Of us, who labour in the noisy noon,
The noon that knows him not.

For lo, at last the gloom slowly retreats,
And swiftly, like an army, comes the Day,
All bright and loud through the awakened streets
Sending a cheerful hum.
And he has stolen away.
Now, with the morning shining round them, come
Young men, and strip their coats
And loose the shirts about their throats,
And lightly up their ponderous hammers lift,
Each in his turn descending swift
With triple strokes that answer and begin
Duly, and quiver in repeated change,
Marrying the eager echoes that weave in
A music clear and strange.
But pausing soon, each lays his hammer down
And deeply breathing bares
His chest, stalwart and brown,
To the sunny airs.
Laughing one to another, limber hand
On limber hip, flushed in a group they stand,
And now untired renew their ringing toil.

The sun stands high, and ever a fresh throng
Comes murmuring; but that eddying turmoil
Leaves many a loiterer, prosperous or unfed,
On easy or unhappy ways
At idle gaze,
Charmed in the sunshine and the rhythm enthralling,
As of unwearied Fates, for ever young,
That on the anvil of necessity
From measureless desire and quivering fear,
With musical sure lifting and downfalling
Of arm and hammer driven perpetually,
Beat out in obscure span
The fiery destiny of man.

NOVEMBER

Together we laughed and talked in the warm-lit
room:

Out now, alone I come
Into the street, in the fall of the early night.
Shadowy skies, with a pale uncertain gloom,
Hover above the houses dim; but bright
In wetness mirrored far,
Retreating lamps outshine the lingering light.
Hazily blue the air, heavy with dews
The wind; and before me the cries and the crowd,
And the sleepless murmur of wheels; not loud,
For a magical softness all imbrues.
The softness estranges my sense: I see and I hear,
But know 'tis a vision intangible, shapes that seem.
All is unreal; the sound of the falling of feet,
Coming figures, and far-off hum of the street;
A dream, the gliding hurry, the endless lights,
Houses and sky, a dream, a dream!

THE MOTHER

The Mother to her brooding breast
Her shrouded baby closely holds,
A stationary shadow, drest
In shadow, falling folds on folds.

With gesture motionless as Night
She stands; through wavering glare and sound
Deep pierces like a sombre light
The full gloom of her gaze profound.

THE TOY-SELLER

The Toy-seller his idle wares
Carefully ranges, side by side;
With coveting soft earnest airs
The children linger, open-eyed.

His haunted soul from far away
Looks in the lamplight absently:
They see not him, O happy they!
He sees not them, O woeful he!

THE BIRCH TREE

Touched with beauty, I stand still and gaze
In the autumn twilight. Yellow leaves and brown
The grass enriching, gleam, or waver down
From lime and elm: far-glimmering through the
haze

The quiet lamps in order twinkle; dumb
And fair the park lies; faint the city's hum.

And I regret not June's impassioned prime,
When her deep lilies banqueted the air,
And this now ruined, then so fragrant lime
Cooled with clear green the heavy noon's high glare;
Nor flushed carnations, breathing hot July;
Nor April's thrush in the blithest songs of the year,
With brown bloom on the elms and dazzling sky;
So strange a charm there lingers in this austere
Resigning month, yielding to what must be.
Yet most, O delicate birch, I envy thee,
Child among trees! with silvery slender limbs
And purple sprays of drooping hair. Night dims
The grass; the great elms darken; no birds sing.
At last I sigh for the warmth and the fragrance flown.
But thou in the leafless twilight shinest alone,
Awaiting in ignorant trust the certain spring.

FOG

Magically awakened to a strange, brown night
The streets lie cold. A hush of heavy gloom
Dulls the noise of the wheels to a murmur dead:
Near and sudden the passing figures loom;
And out of darkness steep on startled sight
The topless walls in apparition emerge.
Nothing revealing but their own thin flames,
The rayless lamps burn faint and bleared and red:
Link-boys' cries, and the shuffle of horses led,
Pierce the thick air; and like a distant dirge,
Melancholy horns wail from the shrouded Thames.
Long the blind morning hooded the dumb town;
Till lo! in an instant winds arose, and the air
Lifted: at once, from a cold and spectral sky
Appears the sun, and laughs in mockery down
On groping travellers far from where they deem,
In un conjectured roads; the dwindled stream
Of traffic in slow confusion crawling by:
The baffled hive of helpless man laid bare.

MOTHER OF EXILES

What far-off trouble steals
In soft-blown drifts of glimmering rain?
What is it the wind feels,
What sighing of what old home-seeking pain
Among the hurried footsteps and the wheels,
The living low continual roar
Of night and London? What is it conies near,
Felt like a blind man's touch along the wall
Questing, and strange, like fear,
Lets a lone silence 'mid the turmoil fall,
Makes the long street seem vaster than before,
And the tall lamp, above dim passers-by,
Gleam solitary as on an ocean shore.

Ships on far tracks are stemming through the night;
South, east and west by foreign stars they steer;
Another half-world in the sun lies bright;
The darkness and the wind are here.

And now the rare late footfall scarce is heard,
But the wind cries along the emptied street.
In cowering lamp-light flicker the fine drops
To vanish wildly blurred;
A hunted sky flies over the housetops.
Importunate gusts beat
Shaking the windows, knocking at the doors
As with phantasmal hands,
A crying as of spirits from far shores
And the bright under-lands,
Seeking one place

That is to each eternal in the hue,
The light, the shadow of some certain hour,
One pang-like moment, years cannot efface.
O infinite remoteness, near and new!
O corner where friend parted from his friend!
O door of the first kiss, the last embrace!
O day when all was possible, O end
Irrevocable! O dream-feet that pace
One street, dear to the dead!
O London stones, that glimmer in the rain,
With bliss, with pain, have you not also bled?

JOHN WINTER

What ails John Winter, that so oft
Silent he sits apart?
The neighbours cast their looks on him;
But deep he hides his heart.

In Deptford streets the houses small
Huddle forlorn together,
Whether the wind blow or be still,
'Tis soiled and sorry weather.

But over these dim roofs arise
Tall masts of ocean ships,
Whenever John Winter looked on them
The salt blew on his lips.

He cannot pace the street about,
But they stand before his eyes!
The more he shuns them, the more proud
And beautiful they rise.

He turns his head, but in his ear
The steady Trade-winds run,
And in his eye the endless waves
Ride on into the sun.

His little boy at evening said,
Now tell us, Dad, a tale
Of naked men that shoot with bows,
Tell of the spouting whale!

He told old tales, his eyes were bright,
His wife looked up to see
And smiled on him: but in the midst
He ended suddenly.

He bade them each good-night, and kissed
And held them to his breast.
They wondered and were still, to feel
Their lips so fondly pressed.

He sat absorbed in silent gloom.
His wife lifted her head
From sewing, and stole up to him.
What ails you, John? she said,

He spoke no word. A silent tear
Fell softly down her cheek.
She knelt beside him, and his hand
Was on her forehead meek.

But even as his tender touch
Her dumb distress consoled,
The mighty waves danced in his eyes
And through the silence rolled.

There fell a soft November night,
Restless with gusts that shook
The chimneys, and beat wildly down
The flames in the chimney nook.

John Winter lay beside his wife.
'Twas past the mid of night.
Softly he rose, and in dead hush
Stood stealthily upright.

Softly he came where slept his boys,
And kissed them in their bed.
One stretched his arms out in his sleep:
At that he turned his head.

And now he bent above his wife.
She slept a sleep serene.
Her patient soul was in the peace
Of breathing slumber seen.

At last he kissed one aching kiss,
Then shrank again in dread,
And from his own home guiltily
And like a thief he fled.

But now with darkness and the wind
He breathes a breath more free,
And walks with calmer step like one
Who goes with destiny.

And see, before him the great masts
Tower with all their spars
Black on the dimness, soaring bold
Among the mazy stars.

In stormy rushings through the air
Wild scents the darkness filled,
And with a fierce forgetfulness
His drinking nostril thrilled.

He hasted with quick feet, he hugged
The wildness to his breast,
As one who goes the only way
To set his heart at rest.

When morning glimmered, a great ship
Dropt gliding down the shore.
John Winter coiled the anchor ropes
Among his mates once more.

SONGS OF THE WORLD UNBORN

Songs of the world unborn
Swelling within me, a shoot from the heart of Spring,
As I walk the ample teeming street
This tranquil and misty morn,
What is it to me you sing?

My body warm, my brain clear,
Unreasoning joy possesses my soul complete;
The keen air mettles my blood,
And the pavement rings to my feet.

O houses erect and vast, O steeples proud,
That soar serenely aloof,
Vistas of railing and roof,
Dim-seen in the delicate shroud of the frosty air,
You are built but of shadow and cloud,
I will come with the wind and blow,
You shall melt, to be seen no longer, O phantoms
fair.

Embattled city, trampler of dreams,
So long deluding, thou shalt delude no more;
The trembling heart thou haughtily spurnest,
But thou from a dream art sprung,
From a far-off vision of yore,
To a dream, to a dream returnest.
Time, the tarrier,
Time the unshunnable,
Stealing with patient rivers the mountainous lands,
Or in turbulent fire upheaving,
Who shifts for ever the sands,

Who gently breaks the unbreakable barrier,
Year upon year into broadening silence weaving,
Time, O mighty and mightily peopled city,
Time is busy with thee.
Behold, the tall tower moulders in air,
The staunch beam crumbles to earth,
Pinnacles falter and fall,
And the immemorial wall
Melts, as a cloud is melted under the sun.
Nor these alone, but alas,
Things of diviner birth,
Glories of men and women strong and fair.
They too, alas, perpetually undone!
As the green apparition of leaves
Buds out in the smile of May;
As the red leaf smoulders away,
That frozen Earth receives;
In all thy happy, in all thy desolate places,
They spring, they glide,
Unnumbered blooming and fading faces!
O what shall abide?

Aching desire, mutinous longing,
Love, the divine rebel, the challenge of all,
Faith, that the doubters doubted and wept her fall,
To an empty sepulchre thronging:
These, the sap of the earth,
Irresistibly sprung,
In the blood of heroes running sweet,
In the dream of the dreamers ever young,
Supplanting the solid and vast delusions,
Harden the heart of the wronged to endure defeat,
The forward-gazing eyes of the old sustain,
Mighty in perishing youth, and in endless birth,
These remain.

THE SUPPER

A rich youth invites a chance company of guests from the street—a blind beggar, a sandwich-man, a tramp, two women, and a thief, all fallen in the world: they are seated at supper in a sumptuous room.

HOST

Linger not, linger not, lift your glasses.
Mirth shall come, as misery passes.
Hark, how the mad wind blows his horn
And hunts the laggards in streets forlorn!
Hark, how fierce the winter rain
Beats and streams on the window pane!
Ill is it now for the houseless head,
And for him that makes on the ground his bed.
But we will forget in the warmth of the fire,
And be glad, and taste of our heart's desire.
Laugh old care and trouble down
And toils and sad remembrance drown!
All is yours; all sorrow bury
To-night, and with me for an hour be merry.

MADGE

You are kind, sir.

HOST

O believe you not
That it makes my joy to cheer your lot?
You see me, who have lived my days
In riches, pleasure, friendship, praise.
I was not happy, I wanted more;
To-day I have found what I missed before.

I have sought you and brought you from cold and rain;

Now I will raise you out of your pain.

And you, old man, shall be young with me,
Brisk and glad as you used to be;

And you, child, with your cheeks so white,
Shall feel fresh blood in your pulse to-night.
Linger not, linger not, eat your fill,
Drink and be merry.

ALL

We will, we will!

BLIND ROGER

Set the glass in my hand. I'm blind and old,
But still I shun to be left in the cold.

HOST

Is it hard at the first to remember the way
Of mirth, and be rid of the load of the day?
Oh, be not afraid to laugh and to smile.

AVERILL

Our lips, it may be, are slow awhile,
And our hearts unused to gaiety yet.
But let us forget.

TONY

Ay, let us forget.

MICHAEL

That's easy, mates; but that's the least.
Now we're set to so rare a feast,
I'm ripe and ready for all gay cheer.
But the great wax lights, so soft and clear,
Abash me, and make my eyes afraid.

HOST

Wait but a moment, the dazzle will fade:
Soon to your eyes will the light be as bloom.
And your ears be filled with the peace of the room.
Were the wind but quiet, instead of the toil
And the traffic beneath, with its huge turmoil,
You'd fancy the lonely fields around.

ANNIE

Tis soft and calm, but I miss the sound.

AVERILL

Oh, it is sweet for an hour to be lulled,
For an hour to be happy with senses dulled.

TONY

Ah, ah, the silver, how it gleams!
I have seen such glitterings in my dreams.

ROGER

Long, long ago, when my eyes could see,
Such sweet odours used to be.

MICHAEL

What a fruit is this to melt in the mouth!

HOST

I have a garden in the South.
It brings me summer warm in frost,
Glories fallen and odours lost.
I love fresh roses in the snow;
I love them best when the leaves are low.

ANNIE

What wonderful colours are these that burn
In the red flower blushing beneath the fern.

MADGE

How cold are your hands, lass!

HOST

Come to the fire.
Come, let us heap the bright coal higher.
Now the sparks fly.

MICHAEL

The fire is good;
The blessed red flames warm my blood.
Better this than the stars I saw
Shine last night, where I lay on the straw,
Through a chink in the roof of the mouldering shed.
Ha, ha! I thought it a famous bed,
And slept like a prince in his palace till day,
When the cursing farmer drove me away.

TONY

Once I sat in as fine a room;
The host was away, but we were at home;
We drank his health in his own red wine.
'Twas midnight when we sat to dine:
We filled our bellies, and slept for a spin.
And softly we laughed as the dawn came in.

MICHAEL

Now we are merrier, now for a song.
O for some music to bear it along.

ROGER

I once could sing my song with the best;
I rolled my voice up out of my chest.
But the sap is dried in my bones: so you,
That have voice and blood and all things new,
Sing; with the burden we'll all come in.

HOST

Moisten your mouth then, ere you begin,
I pledge you, friends. Your health! and yours!

MICHAEL

May you be merry while breath endures.

TONY

May you be merry, whatever befall

ANNIE

Good luck!

MADGE

Good luck!

HOST

Good luck to you all!

MICHAEL *[singing]*

Wander with me, wander with me:
Care to the devil, be free, be free!
Who but a fool would scrape and save,
To heap up a molehill and live in a grave?

ROGER *[quavering]*

Wander with me, wander with me!

MICHAEL

I saw the old landlord, the miser gray,
Gather his greedy rents to-day.
The old gray rat with fiery eyes,
He stamped with his stick and he snuffed for a prize.
Lord, how the starveling tenants shivered,
And into his ravening claws delivered.

Death pulls at his foot with a right good will;
But he fleshes his teeth with a relish still.
What prayers and excuses! I laughed to hear.
I that owed nothing, had nothing to fear.

MADGE

O men are cruel! I've seen them go
And turn folks houseless into the snow.

MICHAEL *[singing]*

What rent pay I to the air and the sun?
The days and the nights are mine, every one;
When I've finished with one, there's another begun.
Wander with me, wander with me,
Care to the devil, be free, be free!

ALL

Wander with me, wander with me!

MICHAEL

Yes, I tell you, sir, I tell you, my friend,
I drink your good luck, but be sure of the end.
You never can tell you won't come to the cold,
And the bed from under your body be sold.
You smile at your ease; you pay no heed;
You think to lay hands on all that you need,
And still you go piling your riches high;
But where is the use of it all, say I?

HOST

Well said, my friend: you've a heart in your breast;
And a brave heart beating is worth all the rest.
Where is the use of it all? 'Tis true:
But we walk in the way we're accustomed to.

MICHAEL

He with his riches, he dares not believe me!
With banquets and couches he thinks to deceive me.

Give me a glass of the bright stuff there;
And you, that sit so straight in your chair,
What are you thinking so sadly of, yonder,
You dreamer of dreams? To be merry and wander
Over the world, is it wiser, say,
Than to sit and grow fat and let life slip away,
Till your blood turns chill and your hair turns gray?

AVERILL

I think I have wandered the whole earth round,
An endless errand, nowhere bound.
I look straight, and nothing see
In the world, and no man looks on me.
What have I with men to do?
I hear them laugh, as I pass them through
In the street; I feel them stop and stare
At the boards that over my shoulder flare.
What matters my ragged and grimy coat,
My aching back, my parching throat?
I am a beacon to laughter and leisure;
I point all day the path to pleasure! *[A pause]*

MADGE

How strange we look in the mirror tall!
It casts a brightness about us all.
Here are we round a table set,
And until this night we had never met!

ROGER

Your mirth soon flags. When I was young,
We'd have been merry the whole night long.

MICHAEL

Ay, mates, we're wasting our pleasure. Drink!
We came not here to be sad and to think.

MADGE

'Tis all day toiling that clouds the head.

HOST

What do you do for daily bread?

MADGE

I sell my matches along the street.
I see the young with nimble feet,
The fair and the foolish, the feeble and old,
That crawl along in the mire and the cold:
And the sound is always in my ears.
O the long, long crowding, trampling years,
Since I was young and followed after
The lights, the faces, the glee, the laughter!
But now I watch them hurry and pass
As I see you all now, there in the glass.
Annie, so pale? What ails you, lass?

ANNIE

I am faint, I am tired; but soon 'twill go—
On the pavement I never felt it so;
All is so strange here, I am afraid.

HOST

Afraid? What grief, my girl, has made
Such foolish fears come into your thought?
We are all friends: and friends or not,
None should harm you within these doors.
Outside is the world that raves and roars.
But you, I marvel how you, so slight,
Endure alone so vast a fight.

ANNIE

I know not how, but down in the street
Tis not so heavy a task to meet.
A power beyond me bears me along,
The faint with the eager, the weak with the strong.
'Tis like an army with marching sound:
I march, and my feet forget the ground.

I have no thought, no wish, no fear;
And the others are brave for me. But here,
I know not why, I long to rest;
I have an aching in my breast.
O I am tired! how sweet 'twould be
To yield, and to struggle no more, and be free!

MICHAEL

Courage, lass, hold up your head;
Never give in till it's time to be dead,

HOST

Nay, rest, if you will. Yet taste this wine,
The cordial juice of a golden vine.
'Twill cheer your spirit, 'tis ripe and good,
And it goes like sunshine into the blood.

MADGE

Eat this fruit, too, that looks so rich,
So smooth and rosy. Is it a peach?
'Tis soft as the cheek of a child, I swear.

ANNIE [*absently*]

As the cheek of a child?

MICHAEL

Gome, never despair—
But the sad man, what is he mumbling there?

AVERILL

To the lost, to the fresh,
To the sweet, to the vain,
Turn again, Time,
And bring me again.

I feel it from afar
Like the scent of a leaf;

I see and I hear;
It is joy, it is grief.

What have we done
With our youth? with the flowers,
With the breeze, with the sun,
With the dream that was ours?

Our thoughts that blossomed
Young and wet!
What have we drunken
Quite to forget?

Where have we buried
Our dead delight?
We could not endure it;
It shone too bright.

O it comes over me
Keener than pain.
All is yet possible
Once, once again!

[A silence]

ANNIE *[starting up]*

What am I doing?
Eating and drinking!
I strangle, I choke
With the pain of my thinking.
He wants me, he cries for me,
Somewhere, my boy,
My baby, my own one joy.
They said 'twas a sin to have borne him:
My sin was to desert him.
He that hung at my breast and trusted me,
How had I heart to hurt him?
I must go, through the night, through the cold,
through the rain,
I must seek, I must toil, till I find him again.

HOST

Stay, stay!

MADGE

O Annie, how can you bear
To tell your shame, where all can hear?

ANNIE

I wish that I were lying
In my love's arms again.
My body to him was precious
As now it is worthless and vain.
What matters to me what you say? Let me go.
But you, O why did you wake my woe?
I wanted not feasting, nor mirth, nor wine,
Nor the things that I know shall never be mine,
I wanted only to sleep and forget.

HOST

She's gone.

MADGE

The night's wild.

AVERILL

Wild and wet!

TONY

Hark, how the wind in the chimney hums.

AVERILL

It beats and threatens like distant drums.

HOST

Come to the fire. Fill once more
Your glasses.

MICHAEL

It is not now as before.
The good drink tastes no longer well.

MADGE

I am full of fears that I cannot tell.
Why am I weak and lonely and old?

ROGER

Where is it gone? I seemed to behold
For a moment, but now, the blessed light.
Alas, again it is black, black night!

TONY

I once was loved by a lass, I see
Her smile, I hear her calling to me.
Could I feel her kiss on my mouth again—

ROGER

O could I see for a moment plain!

MICHAEL

I had a friend, he was dearer than brother,
I loved him as I loved none other.
I struck him in drink; he left me for ever.
I shall grasp his hand again never, never!

AVERILL

What have you done to us? Why have you brought
All sad thoughts that ever we thought,
And this evil spell around us cast?

MADGE

We were all merry a moment past.

HOST

What will you have, friends? What shall I do
For your comfort? What shall I give to you?

AVERILL

My youth!

ROGER

My sight!

TONY

My love!

MICHAEL

My friend!

MADGE

O make me sure of peace in the end.

HOST

I gave you freely of all I had,
It is not my doing, you are not glad.

AVERILL

We want.

TONY

We hunger.

AVERILL

Ah, once more
Let us hope, let us love, let us live.

MICHAEL

Restore
What we have lost, what you possess,
You that are stronger for our distress,
You that have wakened our hearts this day.

HOST

My friend, you know not what you say.

ROGER *[in a low voice]*

Why did he ask us hither to-night?

MADGE

And question, too, of our evil plight?

TONY

Why did he drive us to be glad?

ROGER

To make us remember what once we had.

MADGE

Youth and happiness well forgot!

TONY

To spy on our trouble.

MICHAEL

A devil's plot!
Damn the poison! Drink no more!
I wish I had split my glass on the floor
Ere I made merry with him. His guest!
To watch us befooled, 'twas an excellent jest!

ROGER

I wish I could see his face.

MICHAEL

He stands,
Pale and angry, with twitching hands.

O his sport is spoiled; he's vex't to know
That we've found him out.

MADGE

Let us go, let us go.

MICHAEL

Ay, we've our pride, as well as he.
Come out to the street, in the street we are free.

TONY

Curse the light that dazzled our eyes!

MICHAEL

Curse the drink that taught us lies!

MADGE

Say no more, but let's begone.

ROGER

Curse the mocker that lured us on!

MICHAEL

May your pleasure perish, your grief increase,
Your heart dry up.

AVERILL *[breaking in]*

Peace, friends, peace.

HOST *[astonished, and struggling with himself]*

Ungrateful!

AVERILL

You know not, sir, perchance,
How misery turns the mind askance.

HOST

I pitied you.

AVERILL

Pity, sir, 'tis well,
But it will not hold men up from hell.
Silence, friends: you have had your way,
Now 'tis for me to say my say.
Listen well, our host: my youth
Comes back; I burn with the fire of the truth.
It lights my thoughts and kindles my tongue;
And he must speak, whose heart is wrung.

Behold us, who ask not pity,
We were not what we are;
For a moment now we remember:
Oh, we have fallen far!

We are Necessity's children.
Our Mother, that bore us of old,
Has her mark on us all: she brings us
All, in the end, to her fold.

We have wandered in meadow and sun;
But she calls us up from the flowers.
She is our will, our purpose;
The aching flesh is ours.

Hark, in the lullest tempest,
Close on the wild wind's heels,
The sound that makes men tremble,
The sound of her chariot wheels!

She calls. We must not tarry.
We must take up our yoke again,
With labouring feet for ever
To follow her triumph's train;

To follow her sleepless course,
And to fall when she decrees
With waitings that no man hearkens,
With tramlings that no man sees,

With the great world glorying round us,
As the dying soldier hears,
Far off in the ebb of battle,
His conquering comrades' cheers.

Is your heart grown tender toward us?
Would you lift us up from the mire?
Would you set our feet in the way
To follow our far desire?

Oh, you must have strength to fashion
Our bones and bowels anew,
With fresh blood fill these bodies,
Ere we may have part with you.

Farewell, for our Mother calls:
We go, but we thank you, friend,
Who have lifted us up for a moment,
To behold our beginning and end.

We are clothed with youth and riches,
We are givers of feasts to-night,
We spread our plenteous table
And heap it in your sight.

You need not to sharpen hunger;
All shall be well appeased.
If you find our fare to your pleasure,
You shall depart well pleased.

Have you tasted a relish keener
Than the pang of useless pain?
Know you a spice more rare
Than the tears of wisdom rain?

Come, eat of the mad desires
That rend us we know not why,
The terrors that hunt us, the torment
That will not let us die.

Taste, it is ripe to bursting,
The sorrow-scented fruit.
That weakness sowed in darkness,
That found in the night its root,

That blossomed in great despairs,
And is trodden to earth in scorn,
By the ignorant feet that trample
The faces of babes unborn.

The laughter of men that mock,
The silence of women that fear,
The shrinking of children's hands:
Come taste, all these are here.

Drink, drink of the blood-red wine,
That the smilers and scorers have pressed
From the wrongs of the helpless, the rending
And sobs of the fatherless breast.

We heap our table before you.
Eat and be filled: we go.
O friend, that had pity on us,
It is we that have pity on you!

HOST

[Alone, after a long silence, raising his head]

O what furious serpent's nest
Have I found in my own breast?
Like flames my thoughts upon me leap,
To eat my joy, to kill my sleep.
How dreadful is the silence here!
It weighs like terror on my ear.

Soon will the dawn be shining in,
And men awake, and birds begin;
And I must face the world afresh.
I faint, I fear it in my flesh.
I thought that I could love my kind!
Love is vast, and I was blind.
O mighty world, my weakness spare!
This love is more than I can dare.

NARRATIVE POEMS

NIOBE

"Zeus, and ye Gods, that rule in heaven above,
Is there naught holy, or to your hard hearts dear?
Have ye forgotten utterly to love,
Or to be kind, in that untroubled sphere?
If aught ye cherish, still by that I pray,
Destroy the life that ye have cursed this day!

"No, ye are cold! The pains of tenderness
Must tease not your enjoyed tranquillity,
How should ye care to succour or to bless,
Who have not sorrowed and who cannot die?
Wise Gods, learn one thing from ephemeral breath;
They only love, who know the face of Death.

"When did ye ever come as men to earth
Save to bring plagues, war, misery, to us?
O vanity! We have smiled, yet know that birth
Looks but to death through passions piteous;
While calm ye live, and when these human seas
Wail in your ears, feel deepest your own ease.

"Yet envied ye my keener happiness,
That ye must quench it in such triple gloom?
For, by a mercy more than merciless,
Slaying my children in their guiltless bloom,
Me ye slew not, but suffered, as in scorn,
Accurst to linger in a land forlorn.

"Where are they now, those dead, that once were
mine?
I saw them in their beauty, I thought them fair,
And in my pride dreamed they were half divine.

An idle boast I made, to my despair:
For in that hour they died, and I receive
A fate thrice bitterer, since I live to grieve."

So, on the mountains, hapless Niobe,
With feverish longing and rebellion vain,
Bewailed herself, swift plunged in misery,
Bewailed her children, by dread deities slain;
Those jealous deities, whose bright shafts ne'er miss,
Phoebus, and his stern sister, Artemis.

Nine days those bodies of unhappy death
Lay in their beauty, by Ismenus flood;
For on sad Thebes Zeus breathed an heavy breath,
And men became as marble, where they stood.
Nine suns their unregarded splendour shed;
And still unburied lay those lovely dead.

But on the tenth day the high Gods took pity,
And in the fall of evening from their seats
In heaven, came down toward the silent city,
The still, forsaken ways, the unechoing streets:
And through the twilight heavenly faces shone.
But no man marvelled; all yet slumbered on.

The king sat, brooding in his shadowy halls,
His counsellors ranged round him. With fixed eyes,
Set brows, and steadfast gaze on the dim walls,
He sat amid a kingdom's mockeries;
And seemed revolving many a thought of gloom,
Though his mind slept, and knew not its own doom.

The Gods beheld unheeding, and went through,
And came to the stream's side, where slept the dead.
And while stars gathered in the lonely blue,
They buried them, with haste and nothing said;
Feeling, perchance, some shadow of human years,
And what in heaven is nearest unto tears.

So, their toil ended, the Gods passed again,
Through the deep night, to pale Olympus hill,
But in their passing breathed upon all men,
And loosed the heavy trance that held them chill.
Slowly night waned; the quiet dawn arose;
And Thebes awoke to daylight and her woes.

But Niobe, the mother desolate,
Enduring not to see her home forlorn,
To wander through the vacant halls, that late
Echoed with voice and laughter all the morn,
A homeless queen, went sorrowing o'er the hills,
Alone with the great burden of her ills.

There as she wept, a sleep was sealed on her;
Yet not such sleep as can in peace forget.
The strivings vain of hands that cannot stir,
And swelling passion, poisoned with regret,
And piercing memory, in their dark control
Possess with torment her imprisoned soul.

She, clouded in her marble, seeming cold,
Majestically dumb, augustly calm,
Yet feeling, through all bonds that round her fold,
A nameless fever that can find no balm,
A grief that kindles all her heart to fire,
The crying of a tyrannous desire,

Remains for ever mute, for ever still,
Thebes marvels, gazing at the stony thing,
And deems it lifeless as the barren hill,
To which the winds and rains no bloom can bring:
Yet under that calm front burns deeper woe
Than ever Thebes, with all her hearts, can know.

No hope she sees in any springtime now,
But it is buried in with the autumn leaves.
Yet, when day burns upon her weary brow,
Deadened to her deep pain, she scarcely grieves;
And, burdened with the glory of that great light,
Almost forgets it brought her children night.

But when the pale moon makes her splendour bare,
Terrible in the beauty of cold beams,
The radiance falls on the mute image there,
And Niobe awakens from her dreams.
Those subtle arrows search her soul, with pain
Tenfold more cruel from her children's bane.

Remembering their dead faces, she would sigh:
But the pure marble brooks no sound of grief.
She only lives to sorrow silently,
And, in despair, still hope some last relief.
The Gods are stern; and they to those long years
Ordained an immortality of tears.

1887

PORPHYRION

BOOK I

"O from the dungeon of this flesh to break
At last, and to have peace," Porphyrion cried,
Inly tormented, as with pain he toiled
Before his dwelling in the Syrian noon:
The desert, idly echoing, answered him.
Had not the desert peace? All empty stood
That region, the swept mansion of the wind.
Pillars of skyey rock encompassed it
Afar; there was no voice, nor any sound
Of living creature, but from morn to eve
Silence abounding, that o'erflowed the air
And the waste sunshine, and on stone and herb
The tinge and odour of neglected time.

Yet into vacancy the troubled heart
Brings its own fullness: and Porphyrion found
The void a prison, and in the silence chains.

He in the unripe fervour of sweet youth
Hearing a prophet's cry, had fled from mirth
And revel to assuaging solitude.
He turned from -soft entreaties, he unwound
The arms that would have stayed him, he denied
His friends, and cast the garland from his brow.
Pangs of diviner hunger urged him forth
Into the wild; for ever there to lose
Love, hate and wrath, and fleshly tyrannies,
And madness of desire: tumultuous life,

Full of sweet peril, thronged with rich alarms,
Dismayed his soul, too suddenly revealed:
And far into the wilderness, from face
And feet of men he fled, by memory fierce
Pursued; till in the impenetrable hills
He deemed at last to have discovered peace.
Three years amid the wilderness he dwelt,
In solitary, pure aspiring turned
Toward the immortal Light, that all the stars
Outshines, and the frail shadow of our death
Consumes for ever, and sustains the sun.
The voiceless days in pious order flowed,
Calm as the gliding shadow of a cloud
On Lebanon; morn followed after mom
Like the still coming of a stream: his mind
Was habited in silence, like a robe.

Then gradually mutinous, quenched youth
Swelled up again within him, hard to tame.
For like that secret Asian wave, that drinks
The ever-running rivers, and holds all
In jealous wells; so had the desert drunk
All his young thoughts, wishes, and idle tears,
Nor any sigh returned; but in his breast
Sweet yearnings, and the thousand needs that live
Upon the touch of others, impulses
Quick as dim buds are to the rain and light,
Falterings, and leanings backward after joy,
And dewy flowerings in the heart, that make
Life fragrant, were all sealed and frozen up.
Now, at calm evening, the just-waving boughs
Of the lone tree began to trouble him:
Almost he had arisen, following swift
As after beckoning hands. Now every dawn
At once disrobed him of tranquillity:
Fever had taken him; and he was wrought
Into perpetual strangeness, visited
By rumours and bright hauntings from the world.
And now the noon intolerable grew:
The very rock, hanging about him, seemed
To listen for his footfall, and the stream

Commented, whispering to the rushes. Ah,
The little lizard, blinking in the sun,
Was spying on his soul! A terror ran
Into his veins, and he cried out aloud,
And heard his own voice ringing in the air,
A sound to start at, echoing fearfully.
He paced with fingers clenched, with knotted brow:
He cast himself upon the ground, to feel
His wild breast nearer the impassive earth,
So far away in peace, but all in vain!
And springing up he cast swift eyes around
Like a sore-hunted creature that must seek
A path to fly: alas, from his own thoughts
What outer wilderness shall harbour him?
Then after many idle purposes,
And such vain wringing of the hands, as use
Men slowly overtaken by despair,
He sought in toil, last refuge, to forget:
And he began to labour at the plot
Before his rocky cell, digging the soil
With patience, and the sweat was on his brow.
All the lone day he toiled, until at last
He rested heavy on the spade, and bowed
His head upon his hands: a shadow lay
Beneath him, and deep silence all around.
The silence seized him. As a man who feels
Some eye upon him unperceived, he turned
His head in fear: and lo, a little sound
Among the reeds, like laughter, mocked at him.
And he discerned bright eyes in ambush hid
Beyond the bushes; and he heard distinct
A song, borne to him with the clapping hands
Of banqueters; an old song heard afresh,
That melted quivering in his heart, and woke
Delicious memory: all his senses hung
To listen when that voice sang to his soul:
Then, fearfully aware, he shuddered back;
Yet could not shake the music from his ears.
He cast the spade down, with quick-beating heart,
And sought that voice, whence came it; but the reeds

In the soft-running stream were motionless,
The bushes vacant, all the valley dumb:
And clear upon the yellowed region burned
Evening serene. Then his sore troubled heart
With a tumultuous surging in his breast
Heaved to the calm heaven in a bitter cry:
"I have no strength, I have no refuge more.
Father, ere thou forsake me, send me peace!"

Scarce had the sun into his furnace drawn
The western hills, whose molten peaks shot far
Over the wide waste region fiery rays,
When swiftly Night descended with her stars:
And lo, upon this wrought, unhappy spirit
At last out of the darkness, raining mild
In precious dew upon the desert, peace
Incredibly descended with the night.
He stood immersed in the sweet falling hush.
Over him liquid gloom quivered with stars
Appearing endlessly, as each its place
Remembered, and in order tranquil shone.
Easily all his fever was allayed:
And as a traveller strained against a storm
That meets him, buffeting the mountain side,
Suddenly entering a deep hollow, finds
Magical ease over his nerves, and thinks
He never tasted stillness till that hour;
So eager he surrendered and relaxed
His will, persuaded sweetly beyond hope.

Tranquil at last, his solitary cell
He entered, and a taper lit, that shed
Upon rude arches and deep-shadowed walls
A clearness, tempering all with gentle beam.
Then he, that with such anguish of desire
Had supplicated peace, now peace was come,
Of all forgetful save of his strange joy,
That dear guest in his bosom entertained;
From trouble and from the stealing steps of time
Sequestered; housed within a blissful mood

Of contemplation, like a sacred shrine;
And poured his soul out, into gratitude
Released: how long, there was no tongue to tell,
Nor was himself aware; no warning voice
Admonished, and the great stars altered heaven
Unnoted, and the hours moved over him,
When on his ear and slowly into his soul
Deliciously distilling, stole a sigh.
O like the blossoming of peace it seemed,
Or like an odour heard; or as the air
Had mirrored his own yearning joy in speech,
A whisper wandering out of Paradise.
"Porphyryon, Porphyryon!" Like a wind
Shaking a tree, that whisper shook his heart.
Keen to reality enkindled now
His inmost fibre was aware of all:
Vast night and the unpeopled wilderness
Around him silent; in that solitude
Himself, and near to him a human sigh!

Immediately the faint voice called again:
"Thou only in this perilous wilderness
Hast found a refuge; ah, for pity's sake
Open! It is a woman weak and lost
In this great darkness, that importunes thee."

Then with a beating heart, Porphyryon spoke.
"O woman, I have made my soul a vow
To look upon a human face no more."

"Yet in some corner might I rest my limbs
That are so weary with much wandering,
And thou be unhurt by the sight of me!"

Sweet was the voice: doubting, he answered slow.
"Thou troublest me. I know not who thou art
That com'st so strangely, and I fear thy voice.
What wouldst thou with me? Enter: but my face
Seek not to meet."

Then he unclosed the door,

But turned aside, and knelt apart, and strove
Again to enter the sweet house of peace.
Yet his heart listened, as with hurried feet
The woman entered; and he heard her sigh,
Like one that after peril breathes secure.
Now the more fixedly he prayed; his will
Was fervent to be lost in holy calm,
So hardly new-recovered: but his ear
Yearned for each gentle human sound, the stir
Of garments, moving hand or heaving breast.
Amid his prayer he questioned, who is this
That wanders in this wilderness alone?
And, as he thought, the faint voice came to him:
"I hunger."

Then, as men do in a dream,
Obeying without will, he sought and found
Food from his store, and brought, and gave to her.
But as he gave, he touched her on the hand:
He looked at unawares, then turned away;
And dared with venturing eyes to look again;
And when he had looked, he could not look else-
where.
O what an unknown sweetness troubled him!
He gazed: and as wine blushes through a cup
Of water slowly, in sure-winding coils
Of crimson, the pale solitude of his soul
Was filled and flushed, and he was born anew.
Instantly he forgot all his despair
And anguished supplications after peace.
Not peace, but to be filled with this strange joy
He pined for, while that lovely miracle
His eyes possessed, nor wonder wanted more.
At last his breast heaved, and he found a voice.

"Mystery, speak! O once again refresh
My famished ear with thy sweet syllables!
Thou comest from the desert night, all bloom!
I fear to look away, lest thou shouldst fade.
Art thou too moulded out of simple earth
As I, or only visitest my sight,

Deluding? Ah, Delusion, breathe again
The music of thy voice into my soul!"

As if a rose had sprung within his cell
And magically opened odorous leaves,
So felt he, as she raised her eyes on him
And spoke.

"Hast thou forgotten then so soon?
Hast thou not vowed never again to look
On face of woman or of man? Remember
Ere it be lost, thy vow, thy treasured vow.
O turn away thy wonder-wounded eyes,
Call back thy rashly wandering looks, unsay
Thy words, and this frail image from thy breast
Lock harshly out! Defend thy soul with prayers,
Nor hazard for a dream thy holy calm;
Lest thou repent, and this joy shatter thee."

While thus she spoke, the stirring of her soul,
Even as a breeze is seen upon a pool,
Appeared upon her face. Like the pale flower
Of darkness, the sweet moon, that dazzles first
And then delights, unfolding more and more
Her beauty, shining full of histories
On the dark world, upon Porphyrion now
She shone; and he was lifted into air
Such as immortals breathe, who dwell in light
Of memory beginningless, and hope
Endless, and joy old and forever fresh.
He heard, yet heard not, and still gazing, sighed:

"Tour on, delicious Music, in my ears
Thy sweetness: for I parch, I am athirst.
Three years have I been vacant of all joy,
Have mocked my sense with famine, and the sound
Of wind and reed: but in thy voice is bliss.
How am I changed, since I have looked on thee!
Thou art not dream. Yet, if a vision only,
Tell me not yet, suffer me still to brim
My sight to overflowing, to rejoice

My heart to melting, even to despair.
Thou art not dream! Yet tell me what thou art,
That in this desert ventur'est so deep?"

"Seek not," she answered, "what I am, nor whence
I come; in destiny, perhaps, my hand
Was stretched toward thee, and my way prepared.
Only rejoice that thou didst not refuse
Help to the helpless, and hast succoured me."

As the awakened earth beholds the sun,
Her saviour, when his beam delivers her
From icy prison, and that annual fear
Of death, Porphyry in his bosom felt
Pangs of recovered ecstasy, old thoughts
Made young, and sweet desires bursting his heart
Like the fresh bursting of a thousand leaves.
Uplifted into rapture he exclaimed:

"O full of bliss, out of the empty world
That comest wondrous, I will ask no more.
Enough that thou art here, that I behold
Thy face, and in thee mirrored all the world
Created newly: Eyes, my oracles,
What days, what years of wonder ye foretell!
As in a dewdrop all the morning shines
I see in you time glorious, grief refreshed,
And Fate undone."

"Seest thou only this?"

She said, and earnestly regarded him:
"Art thou so eager after joy? Yet think
In what a boundless wilderness of time
We wander brief! Art thou so swift to taste
Of thy mortality? Yet I am come
To bring thee tidings out of every sea;
Not pearls alone, but shipwrecks in the night
Unsuccoured, and disastrous luring fires,
And tossings infinite, and peril strange.
O wilt thou dare embark? Dost thou not dread
This ocean, in whose murmur seems delight?"

Will even thy hunger drive thee through the waves
To bliss? I look on thee, and see the joy
Rise up within thy bosom, and I fear.
So fragile is this sweetness, and so vast
The world: O venturous, glad voyager,
Be sure of all thy courage, for I see
Far off the cloud of sorrow, and bright spears,
And dirges, and joy changed from what it seemed.
Art thou still fervent, O impetuous one?
Still hastest thou to fly tranquillity?"

But he on whom she looked with those deep eyes
Of bright compassion, answered undismayed:

"Let me drink deep of this fountain of bliss!
Speak not of mortal fear, speak not of pain:
Thou painest, but with joy. Thou art all joy;
And in the world I have no joy but thee.
O that I had the wasted days once more
Since to this idle, barren wilderness
I fled, in fear of the tumultuous world,
Enamoured of the silence: here I dreamed
In lonely prayer to satiate my soul.
But now, I want. Rain on my thirsty heart
Thy charm, and by so much as was my loss
By so much more enrich me. I have stript
My days, imprisoned wandering desires,
Made of my mind a jealous solitude,
Pruned overrunning thoughts, and rooted up
Delight and the vain weeds of memory,
Imagining far off to capture peace.
Blind fool! But O no, let me rather praise
Foreseeing Fate,, that kept so fast a watch
Over my bliss, and of my heart prepared
A wilderness to bloom with only thee!"

Even now he would embrace her; but awhile
She with delaying gesture stayed him still,
Wistfully doubting, and perusing well
His inmost gaze and his adoring heart.

As from bright water on some early morn,
Under a beautiful dim-branching tree,
A gleam floats up among the leaves, and sends
Light into darkness wavering: from the light
Of his enraptured face a radiance shone
Into the mystery of her eyes; at last
To his warm being she resigned her soul.
She on his heart inscribed for evermore
Her look in that deep moment, and her love.
At unawares this trembled from her lips:

"O joyful spirit, I too have need of thee!"
And now he seemed to fold her in his arms,
And on the mouth to kiss her; close to him,
Surely her swimming eyes were dim with love,
Her lips against him murmured tenderly,
And her cheek touched his own: yet even now,
Even as her bosom swelled within his arms,
As like the inmost richness of a rose
Wounding, the perfume of her soul breathed up
An insupportable joy into his brain,
Even now, alas! faltering in ecstasy,
His arms were emptied; back he sank; despair
Drowned him; upon his sense the darkness closed;
And with a cry, lost in a cloud, he fell.

BOOK II

Slumber these desolated senses guard
With silence interposed and dimness kind;
While in tumultuous ebb joy and dismay
Murmur, re-gathering their surge afar.
Idle thou liest, Porphyryion, and o'erthrown
By violent bliss into a trance as deep:
Yet even in thy trance thou takest vows,
Thou burnest with a dedicated fire,
And thou canst be no more what thou hast been.
A rebel, thou wert in strong bonds, who now
Art chosen and consenting: and prepared

Is all thy path, that no more leads to peace,
But to repining fever; pain so dear,
It will not be assuaged. Awaiting thee
Is all that Love of the deep heart requires;
The ecstasy, the loss, the hope, the want,
The prick of grief beneath the closed eyelid
Of him whom memory visits, but not rest;
The sweetness touched, for ever perishing
Out of the eager hands. Invisibly
Perhaps even now on thy unconscious cheek
Thy Guide is gazing, and to pity moved
He thy forgetful term gently extends.

At last from heavily unclouding sleep
Porphyrion stirs: dimly over his brain
Returns the noon, and opens wide his eyes.
Some moments by the veiling sense of use
Delayed in wonder, troubled he starts up.
Instantly he remembered; and all changed
Appeared his cell, the silence and the light:
She, whom his heart had need of, was not there.
And eager from his dwelling he came forth.
If there were sign of her. But all was still.

Suspended over the forsaken land,
The sun stood motionless, and palsied Time,
Helpless to urge his congregated hours,
Leaned heavy on the mountain: the steep noon
Had all the cool shade into fire devoured.
Then quailed Porphyrion. Lost was his new joy,
An apparition frail as a bright flame
Seen in the sun: irrevocably lost
The old thoughts that so long had sheltered him.
The fear, that presaging the heavy world
Makes wail the newborn child, he now, a man,
Thrice competent to suffer, felt afresh,
To cruel truth re-born, a naked soul.
Now he had eyes to see and ears to hear,
And knew at last he was alone: the sky
Absorbed he saw, the earth with absent face,

The water murmuring only to the reeds.
Unconscious rock, and sun-contented sand.
And even as within him keener rose
Longing unloosed, so much the heavier grew
The intensity of solitude around.

Melancholy had planned her palace here.
Dead columns, to support the burning sky,
For living senses insupportable,
She made, and ample barrenness, wherein
To ponder of defeated spirits, quenched
Desire, o'ertaken hope, courage undone,
Implored oblivion, and rejected joy:
Nor this alone, but idleness so vast
As even the stormiest enterprise becalmed,
Till it was trivial to advance one foot
Beyond the other; rashness to provoke
An echo, where if ever man could laugh,
Laughter had seemed the end of vanity,
Were not a vanity more vain in tears.
For from the blown dust to the extremest hills,
Audible silence, that sustained despair,
A ceiling over all immovable,
Presided; and the desert, nourishing
That silence, listened, jealous of a sound
Younger than her unageing solitude;
The desert, that was old when earth was young.

Wailing into the silence, that rang back
A wounded cry, to the unhearkening ear
Of the austere ravines perhaps not strange,
The youth in that vain region stood, and cast
Hither and thither seeking, his sad eyes.
Out of the dreadful light to his dim cell
He fled for refuge. Here he had possessed
Joy, for a brief space, here She looked on him,
Here had her heart beat in her bosom close
Against his own. Her voice was in his ear;
And suddenly his soul was quieted.

Surely the visitation of such spirits
Comes not of chance, he murmured, but of truth.
Surely this was the shadow of some light
That shines, the odour of some flower that blooms,
And far off mid the great world dwells in flesh
That blissful spirit, and bears a human name.
If she be far, yet have I all my days
For seeking, and no other joy on earth:
I will arise, and seek her through the world.

With this resolve impassioned and inspired,
His thoughts were bright, and his hot bosom calmed.
Sweet was it to behold that radiant goal,
Though far, and hazardous and wide the way.
The greatness of his quest found answer in him
Of greatness, and the thousand teasing cares
That swarm upon perplexity, flew off.
Gladly against his journey he prepared
His pilgrim's need, and laid him down and slept,
And ere the dawn with scrip and staff arose.

Now at his door, irrevocably free,
Before the unknown world, spread dim and vast,
He stood and pondered, gazing forth, which way
To follow, and what distant city or vale
Held his desire; but pondering he was drawn
Forth by some secret impulse; he obeyed,
Not doubting; toward the places of his youth
He turned his face, toward the high mountain slopes
Of the dim west, and Antioch and the sea.
Up the long valley, by the glimmering stream
He went; and over him the stars grew pale.
Cliffs upon either hand in darkness plunged
Built up a shadow; but far off, in front,
Invaded by the first uncertain beam,
Mountain on mountain like a cloud arose.
He seemed ascending some old Titan stair.
That led up to the sky by great degrees,
In the vast dawn; he journeyed eagerly,
Foot keeping pace with thought; for his full heart

Tarried not, but was with its happy goal,
One face, one form, one vision, one desire.

Due onward over the unending hills
He held his way, and the warm morning sprang
Behind him, and a less impatient speed
Drove his feet onward. In the midday heat
He rested weary; and relaxing thought,
Had leisure to perceive where he had come.

Burning beneath the solitary noon
All round him rose, rock upon rock o'erhung,
A fiery silence: undefended now
By clouding grief, nor in illusion armed,
He to the heavy lure all open lay
That from this mortal desolation breathed.
Out of his heart he sought to summon up
The vision, but it fled before his thought.
Only the hot blank everywhere opposed
His spirit, and the silent mountain wall.
Like one, on whom the fear of blindness comes,
For whom the sun begins to fall from heaven,
And the ground darkens, he rose up and fled,
Grasping his staff; and fearful now to pause
In that death-breathing region, onward ran.

Yet was not peril past. He had not come
Far, when his agitated eyes beheld,
Amid the uneven crumbling ground, a stone
Square-hewn and edgeways fallen; and he knew
That he had come where men long since had been.
And as he lifted up his eyes, all round
Were massy granite pillars half o'erthrown,
Propping the air; and yellow marble shone,
Dimly inscribed, fragments of maimed renown.
Over the ruined region he stole on,
Threading the interrupted clue of roads
That led all to oblivion, trenches choked
With weed, and old mounds heaped on idle gold.
And now Porphyryon paused, inhaling fast

Odours of buried fame: as in a dream,
All that remote dead city and her brisk streets,
Repeopled and for mountain battle armed,
He apprehended. The deep wave of time
Subsiding, had disclosed englutted wrecks,
Which now so long slept idle, that they seemed
To emulate the agelessness of earth;
Did not the fondness of mortality
Still haunt them, and a kind of youth forlorn,
As if the Desert their brief fable, man,
Indulging from austerest indolence,
Forbore a just disdain.

Porphyryion,
With beating pulses, and with running blood,
Alone on ashes perishably breathed.
As he who treads the uncertain lava fears
Each moment that his rash foot may awaken
Fire from beneath him, from that sepulchre
Of smouldering ages fearfully he fled.
And sometimes he looked backward, lest his feet
Startle a shadowy population up
In the deserted sunlight, faces stern
Of fleshless kings, to claim him for their own:
So frail appeared the heaving of his breath,
So brief his pace, so idle his desire.

At last beyond the scarred gray walls he came,
And gladly found the savage rock once more
Beneath him, nor yet dared to rest or pause,
But onward pressed, over the winding sides
Of pathless valleys, where an echoing stream
Ran far below; and ridges desolate
He climbed, and under precipices huge
And down the infinite spread slopes made way.
The eagle steering in the upper winds,
As, balanced out of sight, his eye surveyed
From white Palmyra to Damascus, flushed
Among faint-shining streams, saw him afar
Journey, a shadow never wearying
From hour to hour: until at last the hills

Less steep opposed him, toward the distant plains
Declining in great uplands dimly rolled.
Here were few stubborn trees, by sunset now
With sullen glory lighted rich, till night
Rose in the east, and hooded the bare world.

Porphyry had ascended a last ridge
Of many, and his eyes gazed out afar
On boundless country darkening; he lay down
At last, full weary: the keen foreign air
Filled his delighted nostril: and his heart
Was soothed. As on a troubled mere at night
Wind ceases, and the gentle evening brings
Beauty to that vexed mirror, and all fresh
In perfect images the lost returns;
Serenely in his bosom rose anew
The vision: somewhere in that distant world,
He mused, is she; and there is all my joy.

But evening now before his gazing eyes
Receded dim, until the whole wide earth
Appeared a cloud. Then in the gloom a dread
Came whispering, and hope faltered in his breast:

"O if the great world be but fantasy
Raised by the deep enchantment of desire,
And melt before my coming like a cloud!"
Parleying with the ghost of fear, yet still
Cherishing his thought's treasure, he resigned
His senses to the huge and empty night,
When on the infinite horizon, lo!
Sending a herald clearness, upward stole
Tranquil and vast, over the world, the moon.

Delicately as when a sculptor charms
The ignorant clay to liberate his dream,
Out of the yielding dark with subtle ray
And imperceptible touch she moulded hill
And valley, beauteous undulation mild,
Inlaid with silver estuary and stream,

Until her solid world created shines
Before her, and the hearts of men with peace,
That is not theirs, disquiets: peopled now
Is her dominion; she in far-off towns
Has lighted clear a long-awaited lamp
For many a lover, or set an end to toil,
Or terribly invokes the brazen lip
Of trumpets blown to Fate, where men besieged
For desperate sally buckle their bright arms.
All these, that the cheered wanderer on his height
In fancy sees, the lover's secret kiss,
The mirth-flushed faces thronging through the streets,
And ships upon the glimmering wave, and flowers
In sleeping gardens, and encounters fierce,
And revellers with lifted cups, and men
In prison bowed, that move not for their chains,
And sacred faces of the newly dead;
All with a mystery of gentle light
She visits, and in her deep charm includes.

BOOK III

Dawn in the ancient heavens over the earth
Shone up; but in Porphyry's bosom rose
A brighter dawn: the early ray that touched
His slumber, woke the new, unfathomed need,
Fallen from radiant night into his soul,
That thirsted still for beauty; for that joy
Beyond possession, ever flying far
From our dim utterance, beauty causing tears.

He stretched his arms out to the golden sun,
His glorious kin, impetuously glad,
And with aerial morning journeyed on
O'er valley and o'er hill.

The second dawn
Found him far-travelled over pastoral lands,
Where from the shepherds' lonely huts a smoke
Went up, or some white shrine gleamed on a height.

Soon the dark ranging and unchanging pines
Yielded to ash and chestnut; O how fair
Their perishable leaf! Porphyrion knew
That some great city neared him, and his pace
Grew eager, climbing a soft-crested hill
In expectation; yet all unprepared
At last upon his eye the prospect broke,
Dawning serene, and endlessly unrolled.

There lay the city, there embodied hope
Rose to outmatch desire: he cried aloud,
Taken with joy so irresistible,
That he must seize a sapling by the stem
To uphold him, and in ardent silence gazed.
Solitary heaven, strown with vast white clouds,
Moved toward him over the abounding land;
A land of showers, a land of quivering trees,
A land of youth, lovely and full of sap,
Upon whose border trembled the wide sea.
Young were the branches round him, in fresh leaf
Luminously shaded; the arriving winds
Broke over him in soft aerial surge;
For him the grass was glittering, the far cloud
Loosened her faltering tresses of dim rain,
And broad Orontes interrupted shone.
But mid that radiant amphitheatre
He saw but the far city; thither ran
His gaze, and rested on her, in a bloom
Of distant air apparelled, while his heart
Beat at the thought of what she held for him.
Bright Antioch! From the endless ocean wave
Gliding the sunbeam broke upon her towers,
A moment gleaming white, then into shade
Withdrawn, until she seemed a thing of breath,
Created fair, from whose far roofs arose
Soft, like an exhalation, human joy.

Clear as a pool to plunge in, seemed the world
This blissful morn, to him that thither gazed,
Wondering, until unconscious tears were wet

Upon his flushing cheek, while he sent forth
His eager thoughts flying to that sweet goal,
And conjuring wishes waved unknown delight
To come to him. Already in dream arrived,
Close to his ear the hum of those far streets
He hears; already sees the busy crowd
Pass and repass, with laughter and with cries.
Meeting him, children hand in hand from school
Gleefully run, and old men, slow of step,
Approach; the mason, pausing from his toil
Under the plank's cool shadow, looks at him,
Or, with a negligent wonder glancing down,
Beautiful faces; oh, perhaps the face
That to his fate he follows through the world.
That deepest hope, too dear to muse upon,
A moment filled him with a thrilling light:
And as a bird, alighting on a reed
Sprung straight and slender from a lonely stream,
Some idle morning, delicately sways
The mirrored stem, and sings for perfect joy;
So musical, alighted young desire
Upon his heart, that trembled like the reed.

Down from that height, over delicious grass,
Amid the rocks, amid the trees, he sped.
The browsing sheep upstart in the sun,
Scared by his coming; he ran on, and tore
A fresh leaf in his mouth, or sang aloud
Out of his happy heart; such keen delight
His eye was treasuring, that welcomed all
The variable blooms in the high grass,
Borage and mullein and the rust-red plume
Of sorrel, and the sprinkled daisies white.
Even the sap in the young bough he felt
Reach warmly up to the inviting sun,
As if his own blood by the spring renewed
Were theirs, and budding leaves within his breast.

At last, ere he perceived it, he was close
Upon the city walls: through shading boughs

Across a valley they rose populous
With crowding towers and roofs of distant hum.
Then in the midst of joy he was afraid.
So close to him the richness he desired
Dismayed his spirit, that to doubt and fear
Recoiling fell. Not yet will I go up,
He thought; but when the dark comes, I will go.
Even as his purpose was relaxed, his limbs
To sudden heaviness surrendered: down
He laid him in sweet grass beside a pool,
Under a chestnut, opposite a grove
Of cypress; and at once sleep fell on him:
Deep sleep, that into dark unfathomed wells
Plunges the spirit, and with ignorance lost
Acquaints, and inaccessible delight,
And unborn beauty.

But meanwhile the noon
Had ripened and grown pale in the soft sky.
A gentle rain fell as the light declined;
And, the drops ceasing, an unprisoned beam
Out of a cloud flowed trembling o'er the grove,
And ran beside long shadows of the stems,
And lighted the dark underleaves, and touched
The sleeper: suddenly his cheek was warm:
He stirred an arm, and unrelaxing, sighed;
And now, through crimsoned eyelids, on his brain
The full sun burned; to wonder he awoke.
Green over him, in mystery o'erhung,
Was dimness fluttered with a thousand rays;
Unfathomable green; that living roof
A single stem upbore, whose mighty swerve
Upward he followed, till it branched abroad
In heaven, and through the dark leaves shone remote,
Smooth-molten splendour, the broad evening cloud.
Porphyry upon his elbow leaned
And hearkened, for the trembling air was hushed
By hundred birds, praising the peaceful light
Invisibly: a wet drop from the leaf
Spilled glittering on his hand. Then he reclined
Deep into joy, absolved out of himself,

The while the wind brought to him light attired
In fragrance, and the breathing stillness seemed
Music asleep, too lovely to be stirred.

As thus he drew into his pining heart
Such juices as make young the world, and feed
The veins of spring; as into one pure sense
Embodied, he was hearkening blissfully,
A sound came to him wonderful, like pain,
With such a sweetness edged. It was a voice,
A happy voice: and toward it instantly
The fibre of his flesh yearningly turned,
Trembling as at a touch. Then he arose
Troubled: he looked, and in the grove beyond
That peaceful water, lo! a little band
Of youths and maidens under distant trees
Departing: one looked backward ere she went;
And his heart cried within his breast, awaked
Suddenly into blissful hope. Alas!
With flutter of fair robes and mingled, gay,
Faint laughter, down a bank out of his view
They were all taken. Pierced with sudden loss,
And kindled, like a wild, uncertain flame,
Into a hundred joyful, wavering fears,
He gazed upon the empty grove, the pool,
And the light brimming over on fresh grass
And lonely stems: but the bereaved bright scene
No more rejoiced him. Now, to aid his wish,
Swift night upon the fading west inclined:
And he stole forward through the cypress gloom
Toward Antioch. Halting on a neighbour brow,
Afar off he beheld that company
Even now under the dim gate entering in.
He followed, and at last the darkened street
Received him, wondering, back among his kind.

Was ever haven like the dream of it
In peril? or did ever feet attain
Their goal, but still a richer rose beyond?

It was a festal night: gay multitudes
Came idly by, and no man noted him.
His seeking gaze, hither and thither drawn.
Roamed in a mirror of desires amazed,
And found, yet wanted more than it could find.
Beauty he felt around him brushing near,
And joy in others seen; but all to him,
Without the vision that his soul required,
Was idle: solitary was his heart,
And full to breaking: yet, as wounds are dulled
To the frail sense, he knew not yet his grief,
For wonder clothed it; through a veil he heard
And saw.

Thus wandering aimlessly he found
His feet upon a marble stair; in face
A porch rose; issuing was a festal sound,
That drew him onward out of the lone night.
Halting upon the threshold he gazed in.

Pillars in lovely parallel sustained
A roof of shadowed snow, enkindled warm
From torches pedestalled in order bright;
Amid whose brilliance at a banquet sat,
Crowned with sweet garlands, revellers, and cups
Lifted in laughing, boisterous pledge, or gazed
Earnest in joy, on their proud paramours.
Pages, with noiseless tripping feet, had borne
The feast aside; and now the brimming wine
From frosted flagons blushed, and the spread board
Showed the soft cheek of apricot, or glory
Of orange burning from a dusk of leaves,
Cloven pomegranates, brimmed with ruby cells,
Great melons, purpling to the frosty core,
And mountain strawberries. Beyond, less bright,
Was hung mysterious magnificence
Of tapestry, where, with ever-moving feet,
A golden Triumph followed banners waved
O'er captive arms, and slender trumpets blew
To herald a calm hero charioted.

Just when a music, melted from above,
Over the feasters flowed, and softly fixed
The listening gaze, and stilled the idle hand,
Porphyriion entered; all those faces flushed,
Lights, flowers and laughter, and the trembling wine,
And hushing melody, and happy fume
Of the clear torches burning Indian balm,
Clouded his brain with sweetness, like a waft
Of perished youth returned; those wonders held
His eyes, yet were as things he might not touch,
And, if he stretched his hand out, they would fade,

Then he remembered whom he sought. A pang
Disturbed him; eager with bright eyes inspired,
Through those that would have stayed his feet, he
stole

Nearer to bliss. They all regarded him
Astonished; in their joyful throng he seemed
An apparition: darkly the long hair
Hung on his shoulders, and his form was frail.
Some cried, then all were silent; a strange want
Woke in their sated breasts, and wonder dread
Troubled them, whence had come and what re-
quired

This messenger unknown. But he passed on,
And in each woman's face with questioning gaze,
Dazzled by nearer splendour, looked, and sought,
Doubtful.

Already one, whose arm was laid
Around the shoulder of her paramour,
Stayed him, so deep into his heart she looked,
Biting her pearly necklace: in her robe
Was moonlight shivering over purple seas.
Encountering, their spirits parleyed: then
Unwillingly he drew his eyes away.
Another, clothed as in the fiery bloom
Of cloud at evening changing o'er the sun,
Backward reclining, under lids half-closed
Gazed, and a moment held him at her feet:
Until at last one turned and dazzled him,

Of whose attire he knew not, so her face
With sun-like glory drew him: he approached;
And she, presiding beauteous and adored
Queen of that perfumed feast, beckoned him on.
Her bosom heaved; the music from her ears
Faded, and from her sated sense the glow
Of empty mirth: far lovelier were in him
Sorrow and youth and wonder and desire.
Forward she leaned, and showed a vacant place
By her, and he came near, and sat him down,
Charm-stricken also, whispering, Art thou she?
She said no word, but to his shining eyes
Answered, and of the red pomegranate fruit
Gave him to eat, and golden wine to drink,
And with pale honeyed roses crowned his hair.
All marvelled, and with murmur looked on him,
As, high exalted over realms of joy,
He sat in glory, and sweet incense breathed
Of that dominion, riches in a cloud
Descending, and before his feet prepared
The world in bloom, and in his eyes the dream
Of destiny excelled, and rushing thoughts
Radiant, and beauty by his side enthroned.

BOOK IV

Love, the sweet nourishing sun of human kind,
Who with unquenchable fire inhabitest
Worlds, that would fall into that happy death
Out of their course, were not their course so fixt;
Who from the dark soil drawest up the plant,
And the sweet leaves out of the naked tree;
Whose ardent air to taste and to enjoy
All flesh desire, even of bitter pangs
Enamoured, so that this intenser breath
They breathe, and one victorious moment taste
Life perfect, over Fate and Time empowered;
Leave him not desolate, Love, who to thy glory

Is dedicated, and for thee endures
To look upon the dreadful grave of joy,
Knowing the lost is lost; comfort him now,
Thy votary, who by the pale sea-shore
In the young dawn paces uncomforted.
Ah, might not sweet embraces have assuaged
The fever which had burnt him, honeyed mouth
And the close girdle of voluptuous arms?
Nor dimly fragrant hair have curtained him
From memory? Alas, too new he came
From love, too recent from that ecstasy;
And memory mocked him under the cold stars,
With finished yet untasted pleasure sad.

Flying that fragrant lure, unhappy soul,
By the dark shore he paces: and his eyes
The dawn delights not, far off in the east
Discovering the sleeping world, and men
To all their tasks arousing, while she strews
Neglected roses on the unchanging hills,
And over the dim earth and wave unfolds
Beauty, but not the beauty he desires.
To her, to her, who in the desert touched
His spirit, and unsealed his eyes, and showed
Above a new earth a new sun, and brought
His steps forth to this perilous rich world,
Stirred with ineffable deep longing now
He turned; ev'n to behold her from afar,
To touch the hem of her apparel, seemed
Sweeter ten thousandfold than absolute
Taste and possession of a lesser charm.

"Where art thou?" cried he. "Ah, dost thou behold
My desolation and not come to me?
O ere my sick heart all delight refuse,
Return, appear! Or say in what far land
Thou lingerest, that I may seek thee out
And find thee, without whom I have no peace
Nor joy, but wander aimless in a path
Barren and undetermined o'er the world.

Wilt not thou make thy voice upon the wind
Float hither, or in dew thy secret breathe
To answer my entreaty?"

The still shore
Was echoless, unanswered that sad cry.
Warm on the wave the Syrian morning stole.
Out of suspended hazes the smooth sea
Swelled into brilliance, and subsiding hushed
The lonely shore with music: such a calm
As vexes the full heart, inviting it,
Flattered with sighing pause Porphyrion's ear.
The sea hungered his spirit; he could not lift
His eyes from the arriving splendour calm
Of those broad waters, to their solemn chime
Setting his grief; and gradually vast
His longing opened to horizons wide
As the round ocean; deep as the deep sea
His heart, and the unbounded earth his road.

That inward stream and dark necessity,
Which drives us onward in the way of Time,
Moved his uncertain hesitating soul
Into its old course, and his feet set firm
To tread their due path, seeking over earth
The Wonder that made idle all things else.
He raised his brow, inhaling the wide air;
And the wind rose, and his resolve was set.

Broad on the morrow hoisting to the sun
Her sail, a ship out of the harbour stands
Bearing Porphyrion, fervent to renew
His lonely pilgrimage; to fate his way
Committed, and to guiding beams of heaven;
And careless whither bound, so the remote
Irradiated circle, ever fresh,
Glittering into infinity, lead on.

Soon the bright water and keen kiss of the air
His clouded courage cleared; uprising wind
Swelled the resisting sail, and the prow felt

The supple press of water, cleaving it;
And the foam flashed and murmured; hope again
Rose tremulous to that music's buoyant note.
Day pursued day on the blue deep, and shores
Sprang up and faded: still his gaze was cast
Forward, and followed that undying dream.

Standing at last above a harbour strange,
Inland he bent, ever with questioning heart
Expectant; and through wilderness and town
Journeyed all summer; nor could autumn tame
That urging fire; nor mid the gliding leaves
Of bare December could hope fall from him.

Ever a stranger roamed he, nor had thought
To seek a home; for him this vast desire
Was home, that fed his spirit and sheltered him
From care and time and the perplexing world.
For not beside an earthly hearth he deemed
To find her moving whom he sought, though fair
With human limbs, and clothed in lovely flesh.
Rather some visitation swift and strange
His soul awaited. When at evening's end
He rested and each fostered secret wish
Rose trembling; when the dewy yellow moon
Slowly on cypress gardens poured her light,
And from the flowery gloom and whispering
Of leaves, a hundred odours had released,
Dimly he knew that she was wandering near,
A blissful presence, scarce beyond the marge
Of his veiled senses, in a world of beams.
Or journeying through the wild forest, he saw
Her passing robe pale mid the shadowy stems
A moment shine before his quickened steps
To leave him in the deep forsaken gloom
Pining with throbbing breast and desolate eyes;
And once in the thronged market at hot noon
Heard his name spoken, and looked round on air.

So visited, so haunted, he was led

Onward through many a city of the plain
Till vaster grew the silence, and far off
The noise of men; and he began to climb
Pastoral hills that into mountains rose
Skyward, with shelving ridges sloped between,
Long days apart.

And as he wound his way
Thither, from crested town to town, he heard
Rumours of war all round him, men in arms
Saw glittering in winding files, and waved
Banners, and trumpets blown. But all to him
Was distant, borne from a far alien world
Where men in ignorant vain deeds embroiled
Lost the treasure of earth and all their soul.
Onward he kept his course, nor recked of them,
Riding the solitary forest ways.

And now again it was the time of birth,
When the young year arises in the woods
From sleep, and tender leaves, and the first flower.
Old thoughts were stirring in Porphyry's breast,
And old desires, like old wounds, flowed anew.
It was that hour of hesitating spring
When with expanded buds and widened heaven
The heart swells into sadness, wanting joy
More ample, and unnumbered longings reach
Into a void, as tendrils into air.
O now as never seemed he to have need
Of his beloved, to be with her at last,
To see her and embrace her with his arms,
And in her bosom find perpetual peace.
Scarcely aware of the bright leaves around
His path, and heedless of his way, he rode
With bridle slack and forward absent eyes,
When piercing his deep dream a groaning cry
Smote on him; he stayed still and from his horse
Dismounted, and the rough briar pushed aside.

Hard by the path, amid the trodden grass
And bloody brambles, lay a wounded man.

"Friend, fetch me water," groaned he, "for I die.
The spring is near, and I have crawled thus far
But get no farther, struggle how I may."
Quickly Porphyrion ran to where the spring
Gushed bubbling, and fetched water, and came back.
The dying man drank deep, and having drunk
Half rose upon his arm, and eager asked:

"How went the battle? have we won or lost?
I know not whether thou be friend or foe,
But quick, tell me! I faint."

"What sayest thou
Of battles?" said Porphyrion; "I know not
Of what thou speakest, and I fight for none."

Faintly the other with upbraiding eyes
Regarding him, made answer. "Art thou young
And is the blood warm in thy body, and yet
Thou wanderest idle? But perhaps thy hand
Knows not the sword, nor thou the ways of men?"

Then kindled at his heart Porphyrion spoke.

"I have no need of fighting, yet my hand
Knows the sword, and my youth was trained in arms."

"Take then this blade, and bind my armour on.
For over yonder hill I think even now
They fight; there is our camp; ah, bid them come
And bury Orophernes where he fell!"

Even with the word he sank back and expired,
Youthful amid the soft green leaves of spring,
That over his pale cheek and purple lips
Waved shadowing.

Nearer than his inmost thought
Was then the silence to Porphyrion's heart,
As heavily he rode, bearing the sword
For token, and the helmet on his brows.
He sought for his old thoughts and found them not.
Even as when the sudden thunder breaks
A brooding sky, and the air chills, and strange

The altered landscape shines in a cold light,
And they that loitered hasten on, and oft
Shiver in the untimely falling eve,
So now on this irruption of the world
Followed a sadness, and his thoughts were changed
And yearning chilled. How idle seemed his hope,
How infinite his quest! Before his mind
Life spread deserted, vacant as a mist.

So mournful rode he; when beyond a hill,
Whose height, with hanging forest interposed,
Shut off the sun, he came into the light
Over against a valley broad that sloped
Before him; and at once burst on him full
All the glory of war and sounding arms.
He thought no more, but gazed and gazed again.

Dark in the middle of the plain beneath
An army moved against a city towered
Upon a distant eminence: even now
From the gate issued troops, with others joined
New-come to aid them, and together ranked
Stood to encounter stern the foes' assault.
These upon either wing had clouded horse
In squadrons, chafing like a river curbed
By the firm wind that meets it; crest and hoof
Shone restless as the white wind-thwarted waves.

Lonely and loud a sudden trumpet blew;
And fierce a score of brazen throats replied.
The sound redoubled in Porphyryon's soul
And forward drew him; he remembered now
His errand. In that instant the ripe war
Broke like a tempest; the great squadrons loosed
Shot forward glittering, like a splendid wave
That rises out of shapeless gloom, a form
Massy with dancing crest, threatening and huge,
And effortlessly irresistible
Bursts on the black rocks turbulently abroad,
Falling, and roaring, and re-echoing far.

So rushed that ordered fury of steeds and spears
Under an arch of arrows hailing dark
Against the stubborn foe: they from the slope
Swept onward opposite with clang as fierce:
Afar, pale women from the wall looked down.

Porphyrion saw: he was a spirit changed.
He hearkened not to memory, hope or fear,
But cast them from him violently, and swift
To fuse in this fierce impulse all regret,
To woo annihilation, or to plunge
At least in fiery action his unused
Vain life, and in that burning furnace melt
The idle vessel and re-mould it new,
Spurred his horse on into the very midst,
And loud the streaming battle swallowed him.

Just on that instant when the meeting shock
Tumultuously clashed, and cries were mixt
With glitter of blades whirled like spirted spray,
He came: and as the thundering ranks recoiled,
They saw him, solitary, flushed and young,
A radiant ghost in the dead hero's arms.

Amazement smote them; in that pause he rode
Forward; and shouting Oraphernes' name
Jubilant the swayed host came after him.
Iron on iron gnashed: Porphyrion smote
Unwearied; the bright peril stilled his brain,
The terrible joy inspired him: by his side
Vaunting, young men over their ready graves
Were rushing glorious: many as they rushed
Drank violent draughts of darkness unawares,
And swiftly fell; but he uninjured fought.
Easily as men conquer in a dream
He passed through splintered spears, opposing shields
And shouting faces, and wild cries, and blood;
Till now a hedge of battle bristling sprang
All round him, and no way appeared, and dark
This way and that the rocking weight of war
Swung heavy, shields and lances interclasped.

He in his heart felt hungrier the flame
Burning for desolation, and he flushed,
Sanguine of death; the sudden starting blood
Inflamed him, drunk as with a mighty wine.
And on an instant terror from the air
Upon the foemen fell; from heart to heart
As in mysterious mirrors flashed; afar
Triumphing cries rose all at once, and death
Shone dazzling in their eyes, and they were lost.

Then on them rushed the victors glorying.
Shaken abroad the battle fiercely flowed,
Wild-scattering sudden as quicksilver stream
Spilled in a thousand drops; the electric air
Pulsed with the vehemence of strong bodies hurled
In mad pursuit, till yielding or in flight
Or fallen, the defeated armies ran
Broken, and on the wall the women wailed.

Then to their camp the victors came, and all
Followed Porphyriion wondering, and acclaimed
His triumph: he in an exultant dream
Still moved, and had no thought, but from the lips
Of bearded captains, as around their fires
That night they told of old heroic deeds,
Heard his own praise, and feasted, and afar
Drank, like an ocean wind, the air of fame.

Book V

Meanwhile in the surrendered city, night
Went heavy, not in feasting nor in sleep.
Proud in submission were those stubborn hearts,
And nursed through darkness thoughts of far
 revenge,
Mixt with the glory of their courage vain.
And now as the first beam revisited

Their sorrow, and to each his neighbour's face
Disclosed, they stood at leisure to perceive
How grimly famine on their limbs had wrought,
And on their wasted cheeks and temples worn;
And from their eyes shone desolated fire,
Inflexible resolve unstrung in the end.
They saw the sentinels with haughty pace
Trample the thresholds of their homes, and watched
In melancholy indolence all day
Soldiers upon their errands come and go.

At evening afar off a bugle blew,
Sounding humiliation and despair
To them, but triumph to their conquering foes,
Who now in bright magnificence arrayed
Their hosts to enter the dejected walls.
Feigning indifference, each man to his door
Came forth; beneath the battlemented arch
Too soon detested ensign and proud plume
They saw; the broad flag streaming to the air
Fresh flowered purples, like a summer field,
The trumpets blown, the thousand upright spears
Shining, and drums and ordered trampling feet.

But in the van of these battalions stern
All wondered to behold a single youth,
Riding unhelmeted with ardent mien,
And all about him casting his bright eyes.
Up through the thronged street triumphing he rode.
But as he passed, his radiant look, that seemed
From some far glory to have taken light,
Shining among dark faces, suffered change.
Nothing on either side but hate or woe,
Defiant or averted, sullen youth
And wasted age, all misery, smote his gaze.
As the sun's splendour leaves a mountain peak
Sinking into the west, and ashy pale
Leaves it, the sadder from that former glow,
So from Porphyryon's face the glory ebbed,
His eye grew dim, and pain altered his brow.

At last that conquering army, with the night,
Possessed the city; and a hum arose
Like busy noise of settling bees; and fires,
Kindled, shed broad into the gloom a blaze;
And there were sounds of feasting and loud mirth,
And riot late, until by slow degrees
Returned darkness and silence, and all slept.

Only Porphyryon slept not: on his bed,
Turning from lamentable thoughts in vain,
He lay, But in that stillest hour, when first
Stars fade, and mist arises, and air chills,
Quite wearied out with toil and war within,
Slumber at length fell on him; but not peace.
Scarce had he wandered in the ways of sleep
Some moments, when before his feet appeared,
Solemn and in the bright attire of dreams,
She whom his waking soul so many days,
So many months, had followed still in vain,
His dearest unattainable desire.
But now she looked into his face, and saw
His grief, and met him with reproachful eyes.

"What dost thou here, Porphyryon?" Her grave voice
Was musical with sorrow. "Faintest thou
In seeking me, thy joy, tired of the way
Because the hour is not yet come to find?
Dost thou forget what in thy desert cell
I warned thee to be perilous on thy path,
Luring of loud distraction, and delay,
The vastness of the world and thy frail heart?
Seek on, faint not, prove all things till thou find;
And still take comfort; where thou art, I am."

Her voice, that trembled in the dreamer's soul
From some celestial distance, like a breeze,
Ended: the brightness went, and he awoke.
And lo, the placid colours of the dawn
Were stealing in: he rose, and came without.

Ah, now, sweet vision, O my perfect light,

I come to thee, my love, my only truth!
It was not I, but some false clouding self
That fell bewildered in this erring way;
Or an oblivion rose from underground
To blind me; but this place of grief and blood
I leave, to follow thee for evermore.

Full of this fervent prayer, through the dim street
He went: the stillness hearkened at his heels.
Now as he passed, in chilly waftings fresh
He scented the far morning: the blue night
Thinned, and all pale things were disclosed; and now
Even in his earnest pace he could not choose
But pause a moment; for all round he saw
Faces and forms lying in shadowy sleep
Within dark porches, and by sheltering walls,
And under giant temple-colonnades,
Utterly wearied. Some in armour lay
Dewy, with forehead upturned to the dawn;
And some against a pillar leaned, with hands
Open and head thrown back; an ancient pair
With fingers clasping slumbered, by whose side
A bearded warrior moved in his dark dream
Exclaiming fiercely; and a mother pressed
Her baby closer, even in her sleep.
He gazed upon them by a charm detained.
For heavy over all their slumber weighed;
And if one lifted voice or arm, it was
As plants that in deep water idly stir
And then are still: so these, bodies entranced,
Lay under soft oblivion deeply drowned.
But, as they slept, the light stole over them
By pale degrees, and each unconscious soul
Yielded his secret: with the hues of dawn
Into that calm of faces floated up
Out of their living and profound abyss
What thoughts, what dreams, what terrors, what
dumb wails!
What gleams of ever-burning funeral fires
On haunted deserts where delight had been!

Glories, and dying memories, and desires!
What sighs, that like a piercing odour rose
From the long pain of love, what beauty strange
Of joy, and sweetness unreleased, and strength
Fatally strong to bear immortal woe,
And anguish darkly sepulchred in peace.

Porphyryon gazed, and as he gazed, he wept.
For he beheld how in those spirits frail,
Slept also passions mightier than themselves,
Waiting to rend and toss them; tiger thoughts,
Ecstasies, hungers, and disastrous loves,
Violent as storms that sleep under the wave,
Vast longings cruelly in flesh confined,
And wrecking winds of madness and of doom.
He trembled; yet as knowledge, even of things
Terrible, hath power to calm and to sustain,
His soul endured that truth, and to its depth
Feared not to plunge. Now he began to love,
And to be sorrowful with a new sorrow.

"What have I done," he sighed, "what have I lost,
My brothers, that I have no part in you?
Yet am I of your flesh and you of mine.
Sleep for this hour hath separated you
From one another, but from me for ever.
O that I could delay with you, and bear
Your lot! or with enchanting wand have power
To raise you out of slumber into peace!
To be entwined and rooted in that life
Which brings you want of one another, pain
Borne not alone, and all that human joy,
How sweet it were to me! O you of whom,
When you awaken, others will have need,
I envy you those trusting eyes, and hands
Put forth for help: I envy all your grief.
But I am all made of untimeliness.
Necessity drives on my soul to pass
Another way; my errand is not here.
Farewell, farewell, O happy, troubled hearts!"

As a blind man who feels around him move
The blest, who see, and fancies them embraced
Or feasting in each other's joyous eyes;
With such deep envy often he turned back,
Even as he went, to those unconscious forms
That slumbered. But his spirit urged him on,
With kindled heart and quickened feet: and now
He neared the shadow of the city gate,
And saw the mountains rise beyond, far off.

With longing he drew in the freshened air.
But even at that moment he perceived,
Standing before a doorway in the dawn,
A solitary woman, motionless
As cloud at evening piled in the pale east
After retreating thunder: like the ash
Of a spent flame her cheek, and in her eyes
Deep-gazing, a great anguish lay becalmed.
Coldly she looked on him, and calmly spoke
In marble accent: "Enter and behold
What thou hast done!"

He would have passed due on,
Following his way resolved, but like a charm
Beautiful sorrow in this grave regard
Drew him aside. He entered and beheld.

Upon a bed, unstirring and supine,
Lay an old man, so old that the live breath
Seemed rather hovering over him, than warm
Within his placid limbs; yet had he strapped
Ancient armour upon him, and unused
A heavy sword lay by him on the ground.
Dim was the room: a table in the midst
Stood empty; in the whole house all was bare.

Now when Porphyron entered, and with him
The woman, the old man nothing perceived:
But at the sound a boy, that by the wall
Was leaning, opened wide his painful eyes.
Porphyron with accusing heart beheld.
Then to the woman turning, of their story

He questioned: quietly she answered him.

"We were four souls under a happy roof
Until your armies came. Then was our need
More cruel every day. When first our meat
Grew scarce, we sat with feigning eyes and each
The other shunned. I know not who thou art,
But if thou takest pity upon pain,
I pray that no necessity bring thee
Hunger more dear than love. With me it was
So that I dared not look upon my child
Lest I should grudge him eat. To my old father,
Whom age makes helpless as a child, my breast
As to a child I gave: and I have stood
Under the trees and cursed them that so slow
They budded for our want: the buds we tore
Ere they could grow to leaf. So passed our days.
But worse the nights were, when sleep would not
come
For hunger, and the dreadful morn seemed sweet.
And if thou wonder that I weep not now
Recounting them, it is that I have borne
What carries beyond grief."

She in her tale
Spoke nothing of her husband: he lay cold
Without the city fallen; but as now
She ended, the returning thought of him
Absented her sad eyes. And suddenly
Her heart, of a strange tenderness aware,
Out of its heavy frost was melted: then
She bowed her head, and she let forth her tears.

You that have known that bitter wound, of all
The bitterest, since no courage brings it balm,
When silent all the misery of the world
Knocks at your door and you have empty hands,
You know what dart entered Porphyry's breast,
As he beheld and heard.

But now the boy
Turning with restless body and parched lip

Sighed, "Give me water! I am so thirsty, mother,
I cannot fetch the breath into my throat."

Porphyryon filled a cup and gave to him.
Deeply he drank, closing his eyes, as bliss
Were in the cold fresh drops: unwillingly
His fingers from the cup relaxed; and now
The mother spoke.

"Yesterday on the walls
One of your arrows smote him, and the wound
Torments him. If thou wilt, make water warm,
I pray thee, and bind up his cruel hurt
Afresh; for my hand trembles, I am weak."

So he made water warm, and washed the wound
With careful tender hands, and ointment soft
Laid on, and in sweet linen bound it up.
Comforted then the boy put round his neck
One arm, and sighing thanks, as a child will,
With faltering hand caressed him. That fond touch
Porphyryon endured not. Are men born
So apt to misery, thought he, that even this
Is worthy thanks? Yet his wrought heart attained
Even in such slender spending of its love
A little ease.

Now, said he, I must go,
I must not longer tarry: for she calls,
Whom I am vowed to follow and to find.
But when he looked upon those three, they seemed
To need him in their helplessness; the child
Divining, mutely prayed him: he resolved
For that day to remain and then to go.

So all that day he tended them and went
Abroad into the town, and brought them food,
Bartering his share of spoil for meat and bread,
And freshest fruit, and delicatest wine;
Nor marked he as he went the frowning eyes
Of the stern soldiers, how they stood and watched
Murmuring together, sullen and askance.

As in a slumbering great city, snow
With gentle foot comes muffling empty ways,
Corners and alleys, and to the tardy dawn
Faint the murmur of toil ascends, and dumb
The wheels roll, and the many feet go hushed,
So on his mind lay sorrow: hum of arms
And voices, all were soft to him and strange.

Day passed, and evening fell, and in that house
All slept; and once again he would renew
His journey; but once more his heart perplexed
Smote him, to leave them so: They have no friend,
He said, and who will tend them, if not I?
The next day he abode, and with fond care
Ministered to their need, and still the next
Found him delaying and his own dim pain
Solacing sweetly; for the old man now
By faint degrees returned to healthful warmth,
And grave with open eyes serenely looked
In a mild wonder on this unknown friend:
The mother, taxed no longer to endure
Even to her utmost strength, permitted calm
To her worn spirit, and her wasted limbs
Resigned into a happy weariness;
And the child's hurt began to be appeased.

On the fourth morn Porphyryion arose,
And saw them all still laid in peaceful sleep.
Now, said he, will I go upon my quest,
Less troubled: they have need of me no more.
He turned to go, but in the early light
Still looked upon them, and his heart was full;
And softly he unbarred the door, and seemed
Within his soul to see the whole great world
Await his coming, and its wounded breast
Disclose, and all life radiantly unroll
Her riches, opening to an endless end.

Filled with the power of that impassioned thought,
Into the silence of the morning sun

He came; and on a sudden was aware
Of men about the entrance thronged; they set
Their bright spears forward, and his path opposed.
Astonished, he looked on them, and perceived
The faces of those warriors he had brought
Thither exulting, and in victory led;
Yet on their faces he beheld his doom.

He stood in that great moment greatly calm,
Proudly confronting them, and cried aloud:

"What murmur you against me? I for you
Fought, and you triumphed. Have I asked of one
A single boon? Soldiers, will you take arms
Against your captain? Men, will you dare to strike
A man unarmed? You answer not a word!
Put up your swords; for now I will pass on
To my own work, and as I came will go."

There was a stillness as he ceased, and none
Answered, but none gave way. As when in heaven
Clouds curdle, and the heavy thunder holds
All things in stupor hushed, they stood constrained,
Menacing and mistrustful; and their hearts
Grew cruel: the uncomprehended light,
That in Porphyry shone and flushed his brow
With radiance, like the bright ambassador
Come from an unknown power, tormented them;
And dark enchanting terror drove them on.
Then one by stealth an arrow to his bow
Fitted, and strung, and drew it, and the shaft
Beside Porphyry in the lintel stuck
Quivering: and at once they fiercely cried.
Like the loud drop that loosens the pent storm,
That loosened arrow drew tempestuous hail
From every bow: they lusted after blood,
And put far from them pity: and he fell
Before them. Yet astonished and dismayed,
Those sacrificers saw the victim smile
Triumphing and incredulous of death,
Even in anguish: pang upon fresh pang
Rekindled the lost light, the perished bloom

Of memory, and he was lifted far
In exaltation above death; he drank
Wine at the banquet, and the stormy thrill
Of battle caught him, and he knew again
The dart of love and the sweet wound of grief
In one transfigured instant, that illumed
And pierced him, as the arrows pierced his side.
Then, mingling all those bright beams into one
Full glory, dawned upon his dying sense
She whom his feet followed through all the world
Out of the waste, and over perilous paths,
Dearer than breath and lovelier than desire.
Like the first kiss of love recovered new
Was the undreamed-of joy, that he in death
With the last ecstasy of living found,
Tasted and touched, as she embraced his soul.
Then the world perished: stretching forth his arms,
Into the unknown vastness eagerly
He went, and like a bridegroom to his bride.

THE DEATH OF ADAM

Cedars, that high upon the untrodden slopes
Of Lebanon stretch out their stubborn arms,
Through all the tempests of seven hundred years
Fast in their ancient place, where they look down
Over the Syrian plains and faint blue sea,
When snow for three days and three nights hath fall'n
Continually, and heaped those terraced boughs
To massy whiteness, still in fortitude
Maintain their aged strength, although they groan;
In such a wintriness of majesty,
O'ersnowed by his uncounted years, and scarce
Supporting that hard load, yet not o'ercome,
Was Adam: all his knotted thews were shrunk,
Hollow his mighty thighs, toward which his beard,
Pale as the stream of far-seen waterfalls,
Hung motionless; betwixt the shoulders grand
Bowed was the head, and dim the gaze; and both
His heavy hands lay on his marble knees.
So sits he all day long and scarcely stirs,
And scarcely notes the bright shapes of his sons
Moving in the broad light without his tent,
That propt on poles about a giant oak
Looks southward to the river and the vale:
Only sometimes slowly he turns his head,
As seeking to recover some lost thought
From the dear presence of the white-haired Eve
Who, less in strength, hath less endured, and still
With slow and careful footsteps tendeth him,
Or seated opposite with silent eyes

Companions him; their thoughts go hand in hand.
So now she sits reposing in the dusk
Of their wide tent, like a great vision throned
Of the Earth Mother, tranquil and august,
Accorded to some youthful votary
Deep in an Asian grove, under the moon.

Peace also rests on Adam; not such peace
As comes forlornly to men dulled with cares,
Whom no ennobling memory uplifts;
Peace of a power far mightier than his own,
Outlasting all it fostered into life,
Pervades him and sustains him: such a peace
As blesses mossed and mouldering architraves
Of pillars standing few among the wreck
Of many long since fallen, pillars old,
Reared by a race long vanished, where the birds
Nest as in trees, and every crevice flowers,
As mothering Earth, having some time indulged
Men's little uses, makes their ruin fair
Ere in her bosom it be folded up.
Thus Adam's mind relinquishing the world,
That grows more dim around him every day,
Withdraws into itself, and in degree
As all that mates him to the moving hours,
Even as his outward joy and vigour fail,
So surely turns his homing spirit back
Unto those silent sources whence delight
And hope and strength and buoyancy of old
Flowed fresh upon his youth, persisting still
To seek those first and fairest memories
In youth and sunshine O how lightly lost,
How difficult in darkness to regain!
He sits in idle stillness, yet at times
From the dark wells of musing some old hour
Floats upward, as the tender lotus lifts
Her swaying stalk up through the limpid depth
Of pools in rivers never known to man,
And buoyed on idle wet luxurious leaves
Peacefully opens white bloom after bloom.

He is rapt far from this last shore of age;
He sees the face of Eve as she approached
To bring him flowers new-found in Paradise,
Or hiding her young sorrow on his breast;
And Abel as a child and Cain with him
Playing beneath the shadow of old trees,
All dearer by the desert interposed
Of time and toil and passionate regret,
Troubling his inmost spirit, until his face,
Wrought with remembrance and with longing, wears
The pressure and the sign of all that swells
And brims his heart, fain to be freed in speech.

"What ails thee, Adam?" gentle Eve began.
"Why art thou troubled, what thoughts vex thy
mind?

For though my eyes are dim, yet I can see
Thy breast heaves upward, and long sighs go forth,
And thou dost move thy hands, and shake thy head."
But Adam answered not; he seemed alone.
Then, lifting up his eyes, he saw his sons
Slowly approaching in the evening light
With all their flocks; and many voices rose
On the clear air about the tents and trees,
As they made ready for the sacrifice
Before the evening meal: soon they drew near
To Adam's tent; and he looked on them all,
Standing to wait his blessing, of all years,
From the boy Adriel to the aged Seth,
Outlined with glory by the sinking sun.
Strange in their strength and beauty they appeared;
And Adam, though he saw them, seemed to gaze
Beyond them, seeking what he found not there.
Over them all his eyes unresting roved,
While they in silence waited for his word.
At last he spoke: "Where is my first-born Cain?"
They looked on one another. Few had heard
That darkened name; but Eve bowed down her
head.
And Seth stood forth amid them hushed and spoke

With a grave utterance, "Cain is far away.
Thou knowest, O my father, how we have heard
That far beyond the mountains to the east
He dwells, and ever wanders o'er that land.
Many days' journey must a man be gone
Ere he reach thither and return again;
Nor know we certainly where Cain may dwell.
Yet what thou biddest, that shall be performed;
Shall we send to him?" Adam answered, "Send:
Let them go quickly, see that they make haste.
But on the tenth day bid them come again,
Whether they have found him, or have found him not,
For mine eyes fail, yea, and my heart grows cold."

Heavy as pale clouds of October roll
Over the soaring snows of Ararat,
The vapour of oblivion fell once more
Down over Adam's head, in languor drooped
Between his mighty shoulders on his breast.
From morn to night, from night to morn he sat
As in a trance of deep thought undivined.
His children looking on his face were filled
With desolation and disquietude,
Sad as Armenian shepherds when they watch
For the still clouds to roll from those great peaks,
Praying the clear bright North winds to restore
Their guardian mountain; with such heavy hearts
They waited for his face to give a sign
That still gave none. Listless amid their toil
They grew, and sitting idle by their flocks
Each from his station, scattered on the hills,
Turned often to the east, in hope to spy
The messengers returning: but at eve
While the gray-bearded elders patient sat
In the cool tent-doors, they would pace the shore
Under the gathering stars, and murmured low
One to another saying, "What is this
That comes upon us all, what evil thing
Whereof we have not heard? What cloud is fallen
Upon our father Adam, and why seeks he

This Cain whose name we know not? Peace is gone,
And nothing now is as it was before."
And others answered, "Well for us, if they
Whom we have sent on such a hazard come
Ever again or we behold them more!
Would they had never gone on this dark quest!
We have no hunters brave and swift as they,—
Ophir, that was the strongest of us all,
And Iddo, that could match the eagle's sight."
Thus the young men spoke their despondent mind.
But every morn renewing wearied hope
They turned with the sunrising to the east,
And numbered the long hours till noon, and still
Nor morn nor noon brought tidings; and each eve
Watching tall herons by the sandy pools
Widen their wings and slow with trailing feet
And lifted head sail off into the sky,
They followed them with long and silent thoughts
Over the darkening mountains, far and far
Into that never yet imagined world
Beginning to oppress them; whither now
Their fears went wandering through enormous night.
Thus waxed and waned each heavy day; at last
From mouth to mouth the unquiet murmur ran,
"'Tis the ninth evening, and they are not come!"

The kingly star had stolen from his throne
In the first brightening of the morrow morn;
And far in the east, with frail cloud overspread,
Light hovered in the pale immensity.
A mile-broad shade beneath the mountain slept;
But opposite a dewy glimmer soon
Moulded the shapes of rough crags, and beneath
Strewn boulders, and thin streams, and slopes obscure.
There, on the slopes amid the rocks appeared
The youth of Adam's race, assembled forms
Sitting or standing with hand-shaded eyes
At gaze into the eastern gorge, where hills
Between dark shoulders inaccessible
Opened a narrowing way into the dawn.

Still than statues, yet with beating hearts
They waited while the wished light kindled clear,
Invading that deep valley, until the sun
Flamed warm upon their limbs through coloured air,
And slow rose upward: it was nigh to noon:
At last a motion on the horizon stirred
And a faint dust in the far gorge was blown.
Then those that sat rose up and gazed erect,
And those that stood moved and stept on a pace.
And as they watched amid the shining dust
Two far-off forms appeared, but only two.
Their straining eyes watched, but no other came.
A sigh ran through their troubled ranks, they turned
To one another, then again to those
Two lonely journeyers downcast and slow,
Who now discerned them from afar and raised
Their hands in greeting; then some ran, with cakes
Of bread, and skins of milk, and honeycombs,
Down the great slope to meet the messengers;
And others climbed the ridge and backward ran
Down to the tents, the river, and the vale,
And came to where Seth sat beneath a tree
Waiting, with folded arms, and cried to him,
"They come, they come; but Cain comes not with
them."

Then Seth arose and came to Adam's tent,
And stood before his father in the door.
Eve questioning sought his eyes: he shook his head
And looked on Adam; motionless he sat
Plunged in a trance, yet dimly was aware
Of tidings, as he heard the voice of Seth,
"'Tis the tenth morning, and thy sons return."
Faintly by imperceptible degrees
Light stole o'er Adam's features, and Seth saw
The wellings of his troubled mind on them,
As one who in a cavern lifts a torch
And sees the gradual recesses grow
Out of their ancient gloom, uncertain shapes
Of rugged roof and walls without an end:
So dark from innermost obscurity

The slumbrous memories of Adam rose
And on his face appeared: yet still a veil
Remained betwixt his senses and the world;
When now the noise of many feet drew nigh
Softly approaching: and Seth spoke again,
"Behold! thy sons, thy messengers are here."
He drew the matted curtains of the tent
Aside, and Adam raised his head and saw
All his assembled children coming on,
Hushing their steps in awe; they stopped at gaze
Now as his eyes were on them; but before
Came the two messengers and stood alone,
How soiled and burnt with travel! Round the neck
Of Ophir hung the leopard's spotty hide
Stripped from that fierce beast strangled by his hand,
Torn now and stained; neither had paused to wash
The thick dust from his feet; but Iddo held
A spray of leaves new-plucked to freshen him
Seared on the parching mountain; thus they stood
With troubled countenance and hanging head
Till Ophir spoke; all listened rapt and still.
"Father, we went; and lo, we are come back
On the tenth morn, according to thy word.
For we have sought Cain but have found him not.
We passed beyond the mountains and we crossed
The sultry desert, toiling in hot sands
Two heavy days, and thence with difficulty
Climbed the far ridge unto the land beyond.
It is a land not fruitful like our vale,
Barren it is with short grass and few trees;
On the fifth day we came into the midst
Of that bare country and we saw no man,
Nor knew we whither to direct our steps,
When on a slope at unawares we spied
A sheepfold made of stones, and Lo! we said
To one another, Surely he was here.
Then eagerly we climbed the highest hill
And all around gazed long, but saw no more.
But toward the evening, when the light was low
And the extremest mountains grew distinct,

Far off in the clear air, but very far,
We saw a little smoke go up to heaven,
And we cried out, It is the home of Cain!
But deeply we were troubled and perplexed,
For we were faint and footsore, and thy word
Lay heavy on our thoughts, remembering it,
On the tenth morning see that ye be here!
Surely our hearts were eager to go on;
But thinking of thy word we feared to go,
And hardly even now are we returned.
Father, we did thy bidding. Is it well?"
All gathered nearer, hushed and wistful; all
Awaited Adam's voice, but he was mute.
They would have prayed him, but they ventured
not;
Like hunters that at hot noon, lost in woods,
Pressing through boughs and briers, at unawares
Come on the huge throat of a hollow cliff
Ribbed with impending ledges of wet moss,
Whence in a smooth-lipped basin of black stone
Some secret water wells without a sound:
Then sorely though they thirst they fear to drink,
Awed by the mystery of that silent source,
So these awhile with beating hearts delayed
To speak, awaiting what his words might be.
At last he raised his head and turned his eyes
On Eve, and looked upon her long, while she
On him hung gazing: light began to burn
In his dimmed eyes, and his whole frame was wrought
With the stirring of his spirit, as of old.
At length the thoughts were kindled on his tongue:
He lifted up his voice and cried aloud.

"O that mine eyes had seen thee once again,
Cain, that my hands had blessed thee! Thou art
gone,
For ever gone, and still that curse abides
On thee who wast my joy, my first-born child.
Eve, Eve, hast thou forgotten that far hour,
When our first child, our baby newly-born,

Held up his little and defenceless hands
Crying toward thy bosom?" And Eve sighed:
"Surely my bosom hath not forgotten Cain,
Who sucked the tender first milk from its paps.
His feet are worn, wandering the desert wide,
But I have washed them with my tears in dreams.
Oh, in my heart he has not left his home.
Would I might lay my arms about him now!
Yet why, O Adam, utterest thou these thoughts?
Thou knowest how betwixt us and our son
There lies a land we may not overleap
More than the flames of those exiling swords,
Because of our fault, Adam, and of his.
Why dost thou waken this our ancient pain?"
But Adam still uplifted his lament:
"He is gone from us, gone beyond our reach.
Beyond our yearning, he remembers not
These arms that were around his weakness once,
These hands that fed him and that fostered him
And now would bless him. All these have I blessed
With many blessings, but him whom I cursed
Him would I bless at last, and be at peace.
He is gone from me, and now these also go
Whither I know not, and I fear for them.
How often have I seen them going forth
Into the woods upon these hills, how oft
See them with night returning, but now they
Depart for ever and return no more."
Eve wondering replied with earnest voice,
"Behold them, Adam, they are very fair
And strong with all the strength that we have lost.
What ill shall harm them more than hath harmed us?
Remember how when I was used to fear,
Beholding our first child in his soft youth
Go from us on his tender feet alone—
His tender feet a little stone might bruise,
And would have caught him back to my fond breast,
Thou didst rebuke me, saying it must be
That he go forth alone; now thou dost fear,
When these are strong and we can help no more."

But Adam shook his head and answered not.
For he was like a shepherd who hath lit
A fire to warm him on the mountain side
In the first chill after the summer heats,
And drowsing by the embers wakes anon
With wonder-frighted eyes, to see the sparks
Blowing astray run kindling over grass
And withered heath and bushes of dry furze,
And ere his heavy senses, pricked with smoke,
Uncloud, the white fire rushes from his reach,
Leaps to embrace the tall pines, tossing up
A surge of trembling stars, and eagerly
Roars through their topmost branches, wide aflame,
While all around enormous shadows rock
And wrestle, as tumultuous light o'errides
The darkness as with charging spears and plumes,
Till the whole hillside reddens, and beyond
Far mountains waken flushed out of the night:
Then he who ignorantly had started up
This wild exulting glory from its sleep
Forgets to stir his steps or wring his hands;
The swiftness and the radiance and the sound
Beget a kind of rapture in his dread;
Like that amazed shepherd Adam saw
His race, sprung out of darkness, fill the earth
Increasing swift and terrible like fire
That feeds on all its ruins, wave on wave
Streaming impetuous without rest or pause
Right onward to the boundaries of the world:
And he how helpless who had caused it all!
So stood his soul still in a gaze of awe
Filled with the foretaste of calamity:
And his lips broke into a groaning cry.
"What is this thing that I have done, what doom,
What boundless and irrevocable doom,
My children, have I wakened for you all?
O could I see the end, but end is none.
My thoughts are carried from me, and they faint,
As birds that come from out the farthest sky,
Voyaging to a home far, far beyond,

Sink in our valley on a drooping wing
Quite wearied out, yea, we have seen them sink,
So my thoughts faint within my bosom old;
The vision is too vast, I am afraid."

But understanding nothing of his speech,
That yet seemed opening some mysterious door
Disclosing an horizon all unknown,
His children listened, touched to trouble vague
And longing without name: like travellers
Who in a company together pass
On some spring evening by an upland road,
And as they travel, each in thought immersed,
Rich merchants, wise in profitable cares,
Adventurous youths, and timorous old men,
Through deepening twilight the young rising moon
Begins to cast along them a mild gleam,
And shadows trembling from the wayside trees
In early leaf steal forward on the ground
Beside them, and faint balm is past them blown;
All troubles them with beauty fresh and strange,
Stealing their thoughts away; so tenderly
Were Adam's children troubled when they heard.

Long silence fell, At last with heavy voice
And weakened utterance Adam spoke again:
"My children, bring me fruits and bring me flowers,
Set them within my sight that I may see
And touch them, and their sweetness smell once
more."

They hasted and plucked flowers and gathered fruit
Such as their valley yielded; balsam boughs,
Late roses, darkly flushed, or honey-pale,
And heavy clustered grapes, and yellowing gourds,
Plump figs, and dew-moist apples, and smooth pears.
All these they brought and heaped before his sight.
Voyagers in the utmost seas, when ice
Pinions their vessel fast and they prepare
For the blind frozen winter's boundless night,

How jealously they watch the last low rays,
How from the loftiest vantage in their view
Cherish the rosy warmth still on their limbs,
Tarrying until the bright rim wholly dips!
Adam, by huger darkness overhung,
So longed to taste life warm even to the last;
And fostering those fair flowers upon his lap
And holding a gold apple in his hand
Remembered Eden. O what blissful light
Flowed o'er his heart and bathed it in its beams!
It seemed the deep recesses of his soul
Welled up their inmost wisdom at the last:
He glowed with some transfiguring fire; his lips
Moved, and his face uplifted was inscribed
With mighty thoughts, that thus at length unrolled
Their solemnly assembled syllables.

"Look well on me, my children, whom ye lose!
Behold these eyes that have wept tears for you,
Behold these arms that have long toiled for you!—
These hands in Paradise have gathered flowers;
These limbs, which ye have seen so wasted down
In feebleness, so utterly brought low,
They grew not into stature like your limbs.
I wailed not into this great world a child
Helpless and speechless, understanding naught,
But from God's rapture perfect and full-grown
I suddenly awoke out of the dark.
How sweet a languor did enrich the blood
In my warmed veins, as on my opening eyes
The splendour of the world shone slowly in,
Mingling its radiant colours in my soul!
Yea, in my soul and only in my soul
I deemed them to abide: sky, water, trees,
The moving shadows and the tender light,
This solid earth, this wide and teeming earth,
Which we have trodden, weary step by step,
Nor found beginning of an end of it,
I deemed it all abounding in my brain:
The murmur of the waters and the winds

Seemed but a music sighing from my joy;
Then I arose, and ventured forth afoot;
And soon, how soon, was dispossessed of all!
By every step I travelled into truth
That stripped me of my proud dreams, one by one,
Till all were taken. On such faltering feet
By gradual but most certain steps I came
Into my real and perfect solitude,
Alone amid the world that knew not me.
O Eve, thou knowest what I tell not now,
How I was comforted, and all the woe
That fell on our transgression; yet not less
When that first child lay babbling on thy knees,
Then again said I, 'Surely this is mine.'
And you, my children, whom I saw increase
Around me, stronger as my strength decayed,
How often have I called you also mine!
But now my first-born is not any more,
Or wanders lost from me, and ye, ye too
Go from me over earth, forgetting me.
So surely I perceive, for all that I
In joy begot you, ye are mine no more.
But ye, who seem the proud and easy lords
Of this fair earth, ye too must tread the path
Which I trod in my ignorant longing, lose
What I have lost, and find what I have found.
What seek you, O my children, what seek you?
For I behold you in this narrow vale,
That mountains and deep forests compass round
Filled with desires. Beyond is all the world
That hardly shall content them; ye must go
Forth into that vast world, as from my feet
This water glides, we know not whither; yea,
Even as this stream is prisoned in its speed,
So shall ye be imprisoned in desire.
But when you have imagined peace and balm
For your endeavour, musing, 'This is mine,'
When you shall say, 'I have a cause for joy,'
Then be distrustful, lest you only learn
How cruel is desire till it attain,

And being baffled yet more cruel grows,
Indignant not to find what it had sought,
And suffering ye rage, and raging fall
Upon your own flesh. Ah, deal tenderly
With one another, O my sons, for ye,
Caged in these limbs that toil under the noon,
Are capable of sorrow huge as night;
And still must ye bear all, whatever come.
Look how the trees in an untimely spring
Put forth their sweet shoots on the frosty air
That withers up the tender sap, yet still
Cannot delay their ripening, nor fold back
Their wounded buds into the sheltering rind;
So shall ye shrink, yet so must ye endure.
I that was strong and proud in strength, and now
Am come to this last weakness, tell you this:
Alas, could ye but know it as I know.
I speak in vain, ye cannot understand."

He ended sighing: for his mind was filled
With apprehensions rolling up from far
The doom and tribulation of his race.
Looking upon the faces of his sons,
Well he divined their weakness from his own.
He knew what they should suffer; yet the worst
He knew not; had he known, he would have rued
Less to be parent of their feebleness
Than of their strength, the power to maim and rend
And ravage even that which to their hearts
Is dearest, though they know not what they do,
Trampling their peace in dust; had he seen all
The dreadful actors on the endless stage,
Sprung from his loins,—the triumphing blind hordes,
Spurred by an ignorant fury to create
An engine of fierce pleasure in the pangs
Wrung from the brave, the gentle, and the wise,
And raging at a beauty not their own
That vexes all their vileness; till the world,
Discovering too late its precious loss,
Loves and laments in vain: had he seen this,

His grief had gone forth in a bitterer cry.
But they that heard him heard incredulous.
Trouble was far, and sweet youth in their hearts.
The beauty of the world encompassed them;
All else was fable; and they stood elate
Yet stirred and pensive, in such wondering pause
As might a troop of children who have found
In a king's garden, under shadowy yews,
Ancestral marbles on a sculptured wall,
Half hid in vines, and lifting up the leaves
Gaze in a bright-eyed wonder on fair shapes
Of arming heroes and unhappy queens,
Or press soft lips on Helen's woeful mouth,
Touching her perfect breast, and smile on her,
Unknowing how beneath that heavenly mould
Swelled, like a sea, the powers of love and pain,
Powers that shall surely also rock themselves
In storms, and their young courage crush to sobs,
Toss them on easeless beds, blind their hot eyes
With tears, in longing violent as vain,
Till they shall quite forget how life was once
Sweet as a rose's breath and only fair,
As now 'tis fair and sweet to Adam's sons.
Exalted in expectancy, they mused,
And in their veins a warmer current glowed
Round their full-moulded limbs; their open eyes
Shone wistful, and they murmured to themselves,
When Adam's voice recalled them to his grief.
Out of unfathomable deeps his words
Seemed drawn in solemn slowness. "Lo, the light
Makes ready to go from you, even as I.
Hearken, my sons! Upon the mountain side
There is a cave that looks toward the East:
And thence in the evening clearness have I oft
Far-off beheld the gates of Paradise.
Mine eyes would feel that glory once again
Ere they be turned for ever to the night.
Therefore go down and strew a bed for me,
Lay me upon that bed and bear me up.
It grows late and I may not tarry more."

But now at last the certainty of woe
Smote through them, and they feared exceedingly,
Scarce knowing yet what this command might mean.
They would have stayed, but Adam with raised
hands

Moved them unto his bidding; they went down
And busied them, most sadly, o'er that toil
By the stream's shore, plaiting a bed of withes,
And some prepared rough poles, some gathered
leaves.

Adam with Eve remained alone; the light
Slept warm upon the grass and on their feet,
And round about them in the spacious tent
Struck upward hovering glories, pale and clear.
He turned to her those eyes which never yet
Sought there a solace or heart's ease in vain,
And spoke, "O Eve!" but even there his voice
Stopt in the shadow of his coming thoughts,
And he could say no more; but she came near
To lay her hands on his cold hands, and looked
On his bowed face, and with a soft reproach
Answered him, "Adam, thou didst say but now
That all were going from thee o'er the earth
And thou shouldst be alone, and none be thine,
And no companion with thee any more.

Am I not with thee? Shall I go from thee?
Am I not thine? Am I not wholly thine?"

Then Adam lifted up his fallen brow
And gently laid his great arms round her neck;
He looked into her eyes, into her soul.
The face of Eve was falling toward his breast;
Her hair with his was mingled; now no more
They spoke, for they had come beyond all words.
They spoke not, stirred not, but together leaned,
Grand in the marble gesture of a grief
Becalmed for ever in the certitude

Of this last hour that over them stood still.
Thus had they stayed, nor moved, nor heeded aught;
But 'twixt them and the light a shadow fell:
And Adam lifted up his eyes, and saw

Seth standing there; he knew the hour was come.
For lo, about the doorway were the sons
Of Adam all assembled, with their wives
And children weeping; they had brought a bed
Of plaited osiers heaped with leaves; and now
Laying him on that litter, silently
They lifted up the poles. Eve weeping sank
Upon her knees: she kissed the dear last kiss;
She held his body in her tender arms
One aching moment, then relinquished him.
Thus they began, the young men and the old,
To bear him forth, unwillingly, with slow
Sad footsteps planted on the yielding sand,
While all the women wailed and wept aloud,
Beating their breasts; they felt and were afraid
Yet understood not; their despair was blind.
But Eve, who understood her perfect loss
Even to the utmost pang, wept now no more.
Her daughters sobbing round her, hid their heads:
She only, with dim eyes, stretched forth her hands.

But they that bore the litter passed beside
The bright stream's pebbly margin; and with them
The bearded men and boys, all overcome
With desolating thoughts and silent fears,
Followed: soon slowly they began to climb
Slopes scattered darkly o'er their bossy knolls
With shadowy cedars, where the jutting ribs
Of gray rock interposed; until at last
They came to the great cavern in the cliff,
And rested, gazing backward o'er the vale
Reposing in the golden solitude.
Then Adam said, "Lift me, that I may see."
With careful arms they lifted him: he gazed
Down on the valley stretched out at his feet,
Marked with the shining stream; he saw beyond
Ranges of endless hills, and very far
On the remote horizon high and clear
Shone marvellous the gates of Paradise.
There was his home, his lost home, there the paths

His feet had trod in bliss and tears, the streams,
The heavenly trees that had o'ershadowed him,
Removed all into radiance, clear and strange
As to a fisher on dark Caspian waves,
Far from the land, appears the glimmering snow
Of Caucasus, already bathed in dawn,
Like a suspended opal huge in heaven,
And wonder awes him to remember how
Long happy mornings of his youth he strayed
Over those same far valleys of his home,
Now melted and subdued to phantom shade
Beneath that lonely mount hung in the dawn:
So over darkened intervening vales
Tinged in the sweet fire of the light's farewell,
Shone Eden upon Adam. Then he sighed
A sigh not all of grief, "It is enough.
Leave me, my children, to my peace ; go ye
And comfort Eve, go, prosper and be blest."
They each turned fearfully to each, but Seth
Bowed down his head and hushed them with his
hand.

Silent with running tears they wept farewell,
And, often looking backward, on slow feet
Moved down the wide slope. Adam was alone.
At last his eyes were closing, yet he saw
Dimly the shapes of his departing sons,
Inheriting their endless fate; for them
The world lay free, and all things possible.
Perchance his dying gaze, so satisfied,
Was lightened, and he saw how vast a scope
Ennobled them of power to dare beyond
Their mortal frailty in immortal deeds,
Exceeding their brief days in excellence,
Not with the easy victory of gods
Triumphant, but in suffering more divine;
Since that which drives them to unnumbered woes,
Their burning deep unquenchable desire,
Shall be their glory, and shall forge at last
From fiery pangs their everlasting peace.

BAHRAM THE HUNTER

When Bahram rode to the chase,
Then saw ye his soul's delight
Full on his kingly face.
Who could his steed outpace?
He swooped like a falcon's flight;
Like a sunbeam that strikes from a cloud,
Exulting and eager-browed,
So rode he his reckless race.

Bright flashed the pools at morn,
And the sun o'er the mountains burned
And gilded the antelope's horn
In the plain, and the wild ass in scorn
Of the hunter the hard soil spurned,
Snuffing the wind, most fleet
Of quarries, the beat of whose feet
Is music to kings' ears borne.

Bahram smiled as he rode
On the gold-bright sands; debonair
Was his look, and his glad voice flowed.
White was the horse he bestrode,
And over his black beard and hair
The white-furred cap on his head
Was hung with tassels of red:
On his mantle a gold sun glowed.

And round him glittering gay
Rode princes and lords; he turned
To each with a word to say
In his royal courtesy; nay,

Not a heart but joyously burned
To be near to a heart so great,
And was fain to be proved its mate
In a glorious deed this day.

But the king's men shouted; for lo!
The wild ass afar they espied
In the shallowing valley below,
Where bright springs fathomless flow.
He was shaking his neck in pride,
And his heels the dust upthrew:
Then Bahram shot forth to pursue,
As a bolt that is shot from a bow.

The princes of Persia spurred,
But he left them all; this day
There was neither second nor third
To the king. Now a startled bird
From the low thicket fluttered away;
Then the plain smoked up in a cloud
Behind them, and thundered aloud;
Yet never the king they neared.

Swifter the wild ass fled,
But swifter the king came nigher,
Wherever those fleet heels led;
Now soft upon mosses he sped,
Now the hoofs upon stone struck fire;
Till the wild ass turned in his fear
For an instant, and showed him clear
The eyeball strained in his head.

Then the princes shouted as one,
For they heard the king's glad shout,
And saw his spear raised in the sun,
And the light o'er the long shaft run;
As they looked for the steel to flash out
On a sudden the place was bare;
Bahram was no more there,
And the wild ass galloped alone.

Pale they spurred o'er the ground,
Then reined in close with a cry,
Gazing in terror around:
Neither king nor horse they found.
But before them laughed to the sky
A pool of springs that well
From the streams under earth and swell
Through her secret caverns profound.

The women of Ctesiphon wail.
And the young men cry in the street,
"No more now in the Vale
Of Heroes shall Bahram hail
His quarry of glancing feet,
No more shall his voice delight
Our hearts through the battle, and smite
The ranks of the Tartar pale!"

The mother of Bahram hath made
Amid pillars his empty tomb
Of porphyry, jasper and jade.
Clear gums in fire she hath frayed
To cloud it in idle fume.
Not riches from isles of the dawn
Nor spices from far Damaun
Lure hither the strong-winged shade.

Tomb nor prison shall tame
Bahram the hunter's soul.
As of old to the chase he came,
He is turned not aside from his aim.
He is mixed with the streams that roll
Unending as man's desire,
That shall not abate of its fire
Till the whole world crumble in flame.

THE DESERTED PALACE

"My feet are dead, the cold rain beats my face!"
"Courage, sweet love, this tempest is our friend!"
"Yet oh, shall we not rest a little space?
This city sleeps; some corner may defend
Our weary bodies till the storm amend."
"So tired, dear heart? Then we will seek some place
Safe from rude weather and this night air chill,
And prying eyes of those that mean us ill."

These lovers, fleeing through the midnight street,
Breathlessly pause amid the gusty moan
Of winds that have not heard their echoing feet.
Blind houses, towering up, leave light alone
From narrow skies in glimmering swiftness blown:
In front, from vales of darkness wild airs beat;
Behind them, shouldering crests of cloudy pine
Looms, lost in heaven, the cloven Apennine.

Down the strange street their doubtful steps explore
Each shadowy archway, angle, and recess,
For shelter, nor have travelled far before
Giselda, half-despaired for weariness,
Feels on her fingers Raymond lightly press;
Heavy above the surging wind's uproar
With a dull echo, clanging now, then drowned,
Reverberates a sullen stormy sound.

What heart so fixed that darkness cannot shock?
When the mind stumbles with the blind footfall,
What world may not a random sound unlock,
Wild as a fever-dream's original,

Where through black void we should for ever fall,
Did not our hearts freeze as in dungeon rock?
So Night may mask, when reason, numbed in trance,
Quails at the wandering cyclops, idiot Chance.

Beyond a buttress both had crept more near.
In this dim wall was it a gate that swung?
Still hesitating, half-bewitched in fear,
Upon the silent intervals they hung.
Again it clanged as if the senseless tongue
Of Chaos knelled upon the startled ear,
Resounding mockery of that tranquil, bright
Well-featured earth men fable in daylight.

A gate so old it leaned and swung awry,
With such indifferent motion to and fro
As a stone rolled by shore waves fitfully,
Heavy and melancholy, wavering slow,
Then closed and clashing with a sudden blow:
To what forlorn abode, left long to lie
For spider, gray owl, and the blind bat's wing,
Could this be door? What ruin mouldering?

Raymond with doubtful hand felt on the bar
Rusty and wet; pushed slow the ponderous wood
That gaped on blackness; moaning from afar
A riotous gust rolled back the hinge; he stood,
And leaning pressed the dark weight all he could;
Again it yielded with a grinding jar;
They entered, where they knew not; empty ground
Seemed closed by heights of doubled gloom around.

"What place is this? My feet tread soft on grass,"
Giselda whispered. Raymond drew her on.
Across what seemed a weed-grown court they pass—
Black walls around them, heaven above them wan—
Till soon a row of pillars dimly shone
Before them, o'er wet marble steps. "Alas!
I fear," she cried; but he drew close to his
Her cheek, and made her blood brave with a kiss.

Wondering in that deserted colonnade,
They hearkened to the storm, less boisterous there,
Till to their peering sight a hollower shade
Signalled a doorway deep in quiet air;
And now their hearts beat at an omen fair;
For venturing hands, on either doorpost laid,
Found, sculptured there, soft features of a child,
Where, ignorant of darkness, beauty smiled.

As sailors, nearing home, but blown from land,
When the wind bears them scent of fields they knew;
As a blind father, when his son's young hand,
Laid confident on his, brings faith anew
In the lost light and the pure heavenly blue;
As homeless Psyche, when she trembling scanned
Love's fair strange house, and a mild voice drew near
Invisibly, and soothed away her fear;

So thrilled by silent sweet encouragement,
As if some guardian presence ministered
To aid them, onward, hand in hand, they went.
No living sound in all the place they heard;
Still on they groped, but not a form appeared;
Sometimes beneath an arch their heads were bent:
At last a window, pallid through the gloom,
Showed them each other 'mid an empty room.

Each in the other's face, with breathing stilled,
The tender bright eyes tenderly discerned;
And they embraced, while both their bosoms filled
With growing charm of peace so strangely earned.
Rapt thus they stood, nor any longer turned
At sudden gusts that through the midnight thrilled.
He smoothed the rain-drops from her hair that strayed;
She smiled and spoke: "I am no more afraid."

But soon a nest secure from wind they found,
Pillowing their cloaks against the corner wall,
And rested happy; there the roar was drowned,
And only in subsiding interval

Of shuddering flaws, they heard the rushing fall
From rain-swept eaves; 'mid desolation round
Their hearts beat closer to each other, warm
Because of those wild blasts of wandering storm.

Giselda drooped her heavy-lidded eyes;
Tired out, her peaceful bosom sank and swelled:
Soft upon Raymond's shoulder breathed her sighs;
His fostering arm her leaning breast upheld;
Her drowsing head by slumber sweetly quelled
Now and then, lifted in a child's surprise,
Murmured, and soon from all the long day's ache
Slipped into sleep; but Raymond stayed awake.

Bold was his heart; yet extreme tenderness
For that dear heaven enfolded in his arm
Sharpened his fond thoughts to a strange distress,
Threatening his secret storm-encircled charm,
As by the violent waters walled from harm
Amidst the whirlpool's roaring heedlessness
A stillness keeps, most perfect, yet so frail,
That in an instant shattered it may fail.

Then he bethought him of what laughter dead
Had under those old rafters leapt and rung;
What companies of joy had banqueted;
What lovers listened and what ladies sung:
Here had they dwelt, been beautiful, been young!
He bent in tears above that precious head
Slumbering, a thousand times more dear than life,
By him, and whispered, "O my wife, my wife!

"Alas! what eager hearts and hands once wrought
This chosen place to fashion and adorn!
And now their names are faded out of thought,
And their fond toil neglected and forlorn.
This is their grave. O would that it were morn!
All my great love in this dark house seems naught,
And I in a dead midnight-world alone,
Save for thy dear heart beating on my own.

"Beat close, warm heart, ere my sad spirit cower.
From those dead bosoms not a single sigh!
Year heaped on year, hour creeping over hour,
The wilderness of silence spreads more nigh.
And what a momentary moth am I!
Beat nearer, heart! tell me I still have power
To breathe, to move; I grow so faint and dead,
So Time's wide seas weigh heavy on my head!"

Thus murmuring with daunted forehead low
Leant to her breaths, he listened to the rain.
The gloom seemed living, seemed to tower and grow
O'er him, a shadow among shadows vain.
At last the thoughts grew cloudy in his brain;
The young blood in his wearied limbs grew slow;
His arms relaxed, and in his senses lulled
The sadness faded, exquisitely dulled.

Birds that have nested in tall elm-tree tops
Sleep not more sound, when winds that rock them
 roar,
Whirling dry leaves about the wintry copse,
Than both slept now, while on the wild night wore.
At last the storm ebbed and was heard no more,
Save in brief gusts and sudden shaken drops:
The dawn came hushed, and found each peaceful
 face
Turned to the other in entranced embrace.

Raymond awoke. It was the early light
That stole through half-closed shutters o'er the room:
With gleaming stillness it caressed his sight,
And on the floor lay tender like a bloom.
It seemed his own heart wholly to illumine,
Soft as a smile, and growing slowly bright,
Spilled its reflected clearness everywhere
Into all corners of that chamber bare.

Slow in delicious languor turn his eyes
Wondering around him. Still Giselda dreams;

But all things else how new a wonder dyes!
From the sunned floor the young light upward
gleams,
Hovers about the ceiling's coffered beams,
And those deep squares of shadow glorifies,
Smiling fresh colours on the cornice old
And shielded corbels' rich abraded gold;

Where underneath, in clear or faded stain,
The walls were pictured with old stories fair:
The selfsame walls that, prisoning his pain,
Gloomed yesternight so desolately bare
Now blushed and gloried in the morning air,
More beautiful in Time's enchanting wane,
As leaves by spoiling Autumn fostered few
Treasure the wonder of her tenderest hue.

On the left hand there was a wild seashore,
And Hero, leaning from her turret lone,
Gazed out impassioned where the surge upbore
Leander's face turned fainting to her own.
Careless of chill spray through her deep hair blown.
She stretched her arms, never to clasp him more.
Even now his hands were tossed up in the foam,
But from his eyes his soul leapt towards its home.

Upon the right flushed Cephalus hallooed,
Parting green thickets; knew his spear had sped,
But knew not yet the white doe of that wood
Was his own Procris. Low her piteous head
Lay on the grass; her bosom brightly bled,
And her lips trembling strove, while yet they could,
To pardon the dear hand that wrought that wound,
While dumbly she caressed his whimpering hound.

These upon either end wall were portrayed;
But in the midst was Orpheus with his lyre,
Singing to the ear of one beloved shade,
Lost somewhere in those aisles of gloomy fire.

Only for her he poured his souPs desire:
Yet the grim Pluto hearkened as he played,
And Proserpine remembered the sweet spring,
And with wet cheek besought him still to sing.

Eurydice, through darkness music-drawn,
Was gliding (none forbad her) toward his feet;
And other ghosts like, in the earliest dawn,
Sparrows that stir and raise their restless tweet,
Stole fluttering, because of sound so sweet,
Over the pale flowers of their shadowy lawn,
Lifting their drooping heads as they drew nigh;
And all those faces listening seemed to sigh.

Love, whom no goal, no haven satisfies,
Love hungered and athirst, bound, scarred and lame,
Proud rebel, who through fading mortal eyes
Shoots beams of that clear fire Time cannot tame,
Burned here in suffering flesh his beacon flame.
Ah, who can read these passionate histories,
Nor feel vibrations as of music roll
Ennobling challenge to his kindled soul?

Raymond beheld them; and it seemed all time,
Till now a cave of dimness, without hue,
Flushed back love's colours from its farthest prime,
Claiming the sacrificial fire anew
From his full heart. Nay, every age foreknew
This moment, and the dumb years seemed to climb
Patiently growing toward this latest hour
That bore his own love like a folded flower.

He hung above her slumber, and he spelled
Upon her face the still soul unaware.
A whiter throat than Hero's sorrow swelled
Shone faint beside the flame-brown wave of hair:
But on her cheek the blood's clear tinge how rare!
And the red mouth, how sweet a song it held
Asleep until the living dawn should rise
Brimmed in the perfect sunbirth of her eyes!

O surely here the dead world's shadow-brood
Of spirits yearning from the misty tomb
Hung o'er the presage of earth's coming good,
And poured for her their prayerful hope, in whom
Life triumphing wore all their ravished bloom—
Soft image of immortal womanhood,
For whose dear sake the world waits in its need,
And heroes of the farthest age must bleed.

Raymond gazed on, and could not gaze his fill,
Rapt on a silent stream of thought afloat.
The soft light stirred not; all the house was still;
Only at times with negligent sweet note
A thrush without would fill his freshened throat,
Where the sun slept on the warm window-sill,
And in translucent leaves of trailing vine
Melted his glittering rays to golden wine.

Giselda's face gleamed in the shadowed light.
He bent to wake her; then again delayed,
Lingering upon the foretaste of delight.
'O you dear spirits," suddenly he prayed,
'Whose hearts imagined and whose hands arrayed
This home in beauty, ere you turned to night,
And having shed your grosser mortal part
Live in the beatings of the gazer's heart!

Peace be upon you, peace for ever be!
Let my lips bless you, whose bright faith unmarred
Shows me the core of my felicity,
And who, though deep in drear oblivion barred,
Committing Sorrow into Beauty's guard,
Pour your immortal ardour into me:
To such a faith all my desire I vow,
May it burn ever as 'tis kindled now!

Wake, love, awake. O thou art grown so dear,
Yet in the enriching beams of this new day
Soglorious a spirit, I almost fear
That from sleep's prison thou wilt soar away

Beyond the stretching of my arms. Nay, nay,
I'll hazard hope for truth. Love, I am here,
Shine out thine answer from these opening eyes,
And lift my soul up into Paradise!"

Enraptured thus, he kissed her. She awoke.
Her gaze that wandered, anchored upon his
In happiness, and dreamingly she spoke:
"Do I sleep still? Or what fair house is this?"
Smiling, he answered with joy's perfect kiss,
And raised her up and wrapt her in her cloak.
So both stole forth. The still world seemed to lie
Their radiant kingdom under the wide sky:
Young was the morning, and their hearts were high.

SANTA CRISTINA

At Tiro, in her father's tower,
The young Cristina had her bower,
Over blue Bolsena's lake,
Where small frolic ripples break
Under a grove of sycamore
On the sandy eastern shore.
There one clear May eve she sat
Leaning over the rich mat
Hung across the window-sill,
While her doves with eager bill
Fluttered round her for the grain
In her spread hands; up again
Now they soared through golden light,
Radiant in a swerve of white,
Round the trees, now scattering
With a shiver of many a wing,
Soft as snowy drops of foam
Singly they alighted home,
And swaying each a sheeny throat
Crooned their comfortable note.

On a sudden another sound
Smote Cristina from the ground.
Bending over, she espied
Wretched ragged folk, who cried,
Hoarsely: "See, the doves are fed;
We, men and women, have not bread."
While Cristina, with a shy,
Courteous simplicity,
Looked upon them, her young heart.

New to sorrow, felt the dart
Of pity pierce her body through,
And she spoke: "What must I do?"
Then with a thought her bosom beat,
And swift away on frightened feet
To her father's chapel, rich
With images in carven niche,
Breathless and bright-eyed she sped.
Most in dread of her own dread,
Traitor to her purpose; took
The idols in her hands that shook
And brought them gathered in her gown
And from the window cast them down.
The ragged people cried and snatched
This broken treasure; then were matched
Strange companions: here the bust
Of gazing Jupiter august
Weighed on a sore-blotched cripple; there
Against a scullion's clouted hair
Apollo's silver shoulder shone,
While, near by, a withered crone
Hugged into her bosom old
Venus' arm and breast of gold.
Mumbling o'er their spoils they went,
A troop to stir the merriment
Of gods; but sad Cristina sobbed.

When the stately father robbed,
Entering found his pagan shrine
Emptied of its works divine,
Each by a famous craftsman wrought,
Chosen well and dearly bought,
And suffered only to be scanned
(With fond touches of the hand)
By the nice appraising eye,
Duke Urban cried a grievous cry:
But when at last he understood
The crime of his own flesh and blood,
Grief was swallowed up in rage.

"Pest on this corrupted age!"
He cried. "This is this new god's work.
And now I find the venom lurk
In my own child, in my own home!
I am a citizen of Rome.
She shall have justice: take her hence,
And let my dungeon teach her sense."
Cristina weeping pleads the pain
Of the famished folk; in vain!
Straightway she is cast and bound
In a dungeon underground.
Three days went. "Now bring her out,"
Said Urban. Servants, much in doubt,
Led her from the dungeon door,
Much in doubt yet wondering more,
For the damp and starving gloom
Had but glorified her bloom,
And her brow was brave, as she
Stepped before her father: he
With a sullen doubtful glance
Some moments looked on her askance.
"Art thou taught?" at last he said.
Proud she lifted up her head.
"Father, if I wronged thee, thou
Didst mar the face of mercy. Now,
By God's grace, thy cruel wrong
Hath but made my soul more strong.
I have suffered for thy pride:
Let thy poor be satisfied.
See, God stands upon my side!"
Duke Urban flushed an angry hue.
"Wilt thou brave me to thy rue,
Child?" he cried. "Since in thee still
Some imp of evil works his will,
Pricking thee outrageously,
I will burn him out of thee.
Go, build a furnace; bind her in,
And let the flame purge out her sin."
All her women wept, implored,
"Ah, be merciful, dear lord!"

But the more imperious came
His answer: "Cast her to the flame."

When that evening fell, a light
Rose and shuddered up the night.
On the reddened shore around
Soldiers kept the fiery ground,
Where amid the furnace stood
Cristina: spite of hardihood,
None but turned away his eye
To see so sweet a creature die.
Swifter roared the bright fire, dancing
Madder, on their armour glancing,
While the people kneeling wailed.
Suddenly all faces paled.
In their ears a clear voice sang.
From amidst the fire it sprang
Joyous; and the soldiers raised
Their heads, and all the people gazed;
There in the moving crimson core
Of the flames that sound and soar,
Coil and quiver, twist and spire,
'Mid the insufferable fire,
Like a breathing beauteous rose,
Nay, like a precious vase that glows
Outlined intense and clear and white,
Absorbing all the burning light
Into its tissue, through and through,
To purify the shell-like hue,
They behold Cristina stand,
Lifting either little hand,
And with parted lips, and eyes
That the fierce flame glorifies,
See her form transfigured shine
Singing in that fiery shrine—
An embodied rapture! Awe
Fell upon all them that saw.
The young voice melted in their ears,
And beauty hushed them into tears.
Heaven seemed opening on their sight

To its inmost soul of light,
And the daily world of woes
Fell from off them, and they rose
In a rapture: faces, turned
Each unto his neighbour, burned,
While they cried with voices full,
"A miracle, a miracle!"

Urban in his dark tower heard
Trembling that exultant word.
Rage by stabbing terror spurred
Swelled his heart to madness. Straight
With a torch from the open gate
Striding he commanded: "Curst
Be this snake that I have nursed!
She has witched to her desire
A demon lover, a fiend of fire;
Yet she shall not 'scape me now.
Ere another night, I vow,
She shall die. With morning take
And throw her deep into the lake."

Though men groaned and women shrieked
At such cruel vengeance wreaked,
None this old man's rage gainsaid;
For within their hearts they prayed
Some new marvel should confound
All his fury.

Morning found,
On the glimmering shore assembled,
A great multitude that trembled
Half with hope and half with fear,
Hemmed behind the levelled spear
Of armed ranks; and over all,
Ringed by silent lances tall,
In a high seat Urban sat,
By threatening fingers pointed at,
Motionless with eager frown
And on the wide lake gazing down.
Soon the sun's uprising glowed

Over the eastern hill, and showed,
'Mid the waters that anew
Shivered silvering into blue,
A single boat; it brightly shone
Where Cristina knelt thereon,
And the hangman at her side
Busy bending over tied
Round her neck a great mill-stone;
In the water she was thrown.
Passionate arose the groan
From those watchers, but as soon
Changed into a paeon's tune;
For she sank not, but was seen,
Where death's bubble should have been,
Standing on the stone that bore
Her bare feet floating toward the shore,
With little tremblings at the knees
As the buoyant, urging breeze
Rocked her onward. With a shout
Thronged the people, stretching out
Eager arms, or under spears
Thrust their heads with joyful tears.
Clapped their hands and cried to see
So magical a wonder. She,
Simple in her loveliness,
By one hand holding up her dress
From the wave that washed its hem
With white sparkle, seemed to them
Fresh as Venus on her shell
Borne o'er the blue Ionian swell.
Round her head the soft-blown hair
Played in sunny streams of air,
Save one long tress on her breast
That her clasping fingers pressed.
In a dream she heard the cries,
Saw the bright and crowding eyes
Near and nearer; when a strong
Sudden tumult rose; the throng
Turned, and lo! on his high chair,
'Mid the spearmen struggling there,

Duke Urban with head fallen back
And the full vein swollen black
On his throat: his fingers tear
At the suffocating fear
That holds him by the panting heart
Breathless, and his fixed eyes start,
While the heaving hubbub round
Rocks about him; in hoarse sound
Of vengeance his death-gasp is drowned.

But Cristina floating nigh
When she saw this, piteously
Bowed her gentle forehead low
In her hands, and cried, "Ah, woe
On me and mine! O Lord of Peace,
Now my wretchedness release!"
Even as in despair she prayed,
One that on the shore delayed
At the crowd's edge, watching all
And doubtful what might yet befall,
Scowled and said within his teeth,
"This witch-girl comes to be our death,"
Strung his bow and spurred by fear
Drew an arrow to his ear,
And while still this fierce uproar
Held the wild throng on the shore
Sharp upon the tender throat
The iron barb Cristina smote.
Ere a man had turned to note,
She was falling; ere a tongue
Had one cry of warning rung,
She had fallen, and the foam
Tossing shoreward washed her home.
As a sudden silence rushed
Over lips in terror hushed,
Rolled amid the shallow spray
At their feet her body lay.

Dark is the world to the weak will
As to feet stumbling on a hill

Benighted, when no stars appear.
But as a star that beacons clear,
O beauty of courage, thou dost shine
On souls that falter and that pine.
But most in bodies frail and young
Is thy beauty seen and sung.
There, like a fountain ever new,
Thou dost scatter sunny dew,
Troubling our self-bewildered night
With simplicity of light.
Therefore is Bolsena's lake
Dear for fair Cristina's sake.
Yea, the stone that bore her feet
And still bears the footprint sweet,
Housed in alabaster shrine
Of carved work, as a thing divine,
And by dead lips' kisses worn,
Shall be kissed in sorrow's scorn
By lips of thousands yet unborn.

PENTHESILEA

I. THE COMING OF THE AMAZONS

Dark in the noonday, dark as solemn pines,
A circle of dark towers above the plain,
Troy sat bereaved; her desolation seemed
To have drawn slowly down in sultry drops
The sky of gathered and contracted cloud,
Hung silent, close as is a cavern roof,
That deep in heavy forests, lost from day,
Echoes the groans of a hurt lioness
For her slain cubs; she fills her den with groans,
Stretching her hoarse throat to the flinty floor;
And with like lamentable echo, barred
Within the great gates, dirge of women swelled
Along the dark-door'd streets that lately shone
With Hector's splendour as he strode to war,
Wailing for Hector fallen; upon towers
Unchampioned men grasped idle spears and groaned.
But in the heart of Troy dead silence dwelt.
There to a temple, throned on a green mound,
Andromache was stolen; there she bowed
Her widowed forehead, pressed upon the strength
Of a square pillar; not a sob, nor sigh
Passed from her, but immovably inclined
She waited yet expected nought; that hour
Of grief was on her, when the exhausted flood
Of passion ebbs, and the still shaken heart
Hungers for staunching silence: then the touch
Of patient cold stone is desired like bliss.
So mourned Andromache, unmoved to know
If earth that lacked her Hector, still endured,

Absorbed into the vastness of a grief
Only by its own majesty consoled.
Crouched at her feet the child Astyanax
Played on the slabbed floor with the creviced dust,
Or followed with soft parted lips and eyes
Bemused, the foiled flight of a swallow's wings
That, strayed within, sighed swiftly up and down
The temple gloom; there was no other stir
In that hushed place of stone, while the slow day
Declining moved the sullen cope of heaven
With westerling breezes; under brooding cloud
Light newly trembled; looking up, the boy
Saw wide sheen in the portico that laid
Long shadows from the pillars. It was then
A faint and clear sound in the distance rose,
He knew not what, but wondered, as full soon
Troy seemed to stir and waken; it drew nigh
Up the steep street, a noise of horses' hooves
Numerous and gallant with the ring of arms.
He rose up, and on soft feet tripping stole
To the porch-pillars, looked forth, and returned
Bright-eyed, back to his mother; thrice he twitched
Her robe, ere she perceived; then slow she turned
Her face down on him; bending so, she changed
As a sky changes when the unmuffled moon
Steals tender over April's vanished rain;
And love, older than sorrow, filled her eyes
A mother's, not a widow's now. With awe
In his quick voice the boy cried, "Mother, come!
The Goddesses ride up to fight for us."
Andromache smiled on him; though she heard,
Scarce sought to understand; and yet it seemed
Those soft lips brought an answer from afar
As oracle or dream to her sad soul,
That long had waited; she too heard that sound,
And as impetuous freshet in the spring
Breaks on a stagnant stream, the bright blood-warm
Extravagance of hope shot like a pain
Through her dulled body; then her heart recoiled
On doubt and trembled, though the noise now near,

Mingled with cries and swarm of running feet,
Drew her steps on; beside her pressed the boy
Exchanging wonder with his mother's eyes.
Till on one knee she dropt, and holding him
In jealous-clasping arms close to her breast
Looked to the door; now thronging heads appeared
Beneath the temple steps; and they beheld
Framed in the wide porch men and women pass,
And over them, proceeding proud and fair,
Like goddesses indeed, a wondrous troop
That glorified the sunlight as they rode
With easy hips bestriding their tall steeds,
Whose necks shone as they turned this way and that,
Bold riders on bold horses; light mail-coats
They wore upon loose tunics, over which
Where to the throat the stormy bosom swelled
A virgin shoulder gleamed; for now the fire
Of evening, struck back from the temple wall,
Burned ardent hues upon them, moving past
Untamable as their own steeds that moved
With them, and beautiful with ice-bright eyes,
Glancing around them strange, and tossing hair;
Flashed upon bronze bits of the horses, flamed
Along smooth brown wood of their javelin-shafts
To the bright points, and radiantly repelled
From hilt and helm, glowed changing upon shields
Like moons in August, like a hundred moons
Of moving brilliance; scarves of coral red
Blown from the baldric, trembled like the fire
In eyes that kindled the beholder's soul
To presage of what fury these fierce queens
Should madden with, when they were loosed to dance
The dance of battle, matched with men or gods,
Wild as the white brooks when they leap and shout
In tumult, tossing down the wintry hills.
So filled with wonder the thronged faces saw
Those terrible and lovely huntresses,
Mid whom one rode yet queenlier than the rest,
With steadfast eyes superb; a spirit crowned
She seemed, the votaress of some far desire;

She turned not like the others, but rode on
Like one that follows a star fixt in heaven,
Fixt as her thought is; whom beholding now
Mourning Andromache with closer arms
Entwined her boy; her heart was full, it pressed
Against her side, invoking that strange hope
That here was the avenger of her loss,
A sword brought from afar; she leaned at gaze,
Following that form, impassioned to divine
What purpose charmed her from the world of men,
When lo! the street was empty, all had passed.
She rose and with uncertain motion stood,
Swayed like a slender poplar when the south
Tremulously bows it, over her dear child,
Who clung upon her fingers looking up
Wide-eyed with joy: together they went forth.

Already fast as over an ebb shore
The fresh tide rolls up with a rising wind
Invading dry ledge and deserted pool,
And ere the seaward rocks be overstormed,
Streams gliding with a soft stir far inland,
So fast through Troy the stir of rumour ran
To every hushed house; every chieftain heard
Indoors and sent forth messengers to see.
Even to Priam's palace it was borne.
Then there was hurrying through the empty courts,
And women drawing water at the wells
Set down their pitchers; boys ran out; it seemed
As if a city of sleepers sprang to life,
A thousand beating hearts. Priam alone
Heard not at all, for none was with him now,
But solitary in that pillared hall
Where he had feasted with his glorious sons
In days of old, sat patient, mournful, rapt,
His chilly limbs warmed by a cloak's long fold,
In such December solitude of mind
As when the last leaf glides to frozen earth
And all the boughs are bare: the days to come
Were darkness, and the past days like a sea

Of roaring waters; vacant unto each
He mused upon the evening gold that fell
Aslant a pillar's roundness, holding up
One hand against the fire that burned beside.
He heard not, saw not, though without the sound
Of opened gates and murmuring hubbub fast
Increasing on the distance, gathered in
As to the silent centre where he sat
Alone in gloom, nor noted how behind
Came stealing steps; Cassandra first, the shunned
Of all the happy, who yet disbelieved
The fate of her foreseeing; others next
Of Priam's house, mid whom the heavenly eyes
Of Helen, like a mirror to the doom
Coming on beauty till the end of time,
Shone in their sadness; beautiful she leaned
On fair flushed Paris of the golden head.
They as they entered stood expectantly
Pausing, although the King still sat entranced,
Clouded in sorrow's deep and distant reign;
Until Cassandra touched him on the arm
And his eyes woke; a sad, astonished gaze
He lifted; in that moment the far door
Was opened: lo, upon the threshold gleamed
The splendour of an armed Amazon
Coming towards him; her eyes sought his own:
Slowly, and yet without a pause she came;
And those that saw her deeply breathed; she moved
As if a clearness from within inspired
Her motion, challenging their inmost thoughts.
Simplicity ennobled all her ways;
The heart leapt at the turning of her head;
But in her eyes a soul, deep as the night
Filled by the beauty of assembling stars,
Night on lone mountains, could shine out sword-keen
As now, though touched for Priam's woe she gazed,
While, slowly stirred, he lifted up to her
His brow, and it was kingly: now he seemed,
Though seated, in his stature to resume
Old majesty; for princes of the East

Had sued to him, and Asia sought his word
To hearken to its wisdom. Some few steps
The Amazon approached; at last she spoke.
"Art thou the royal Priam?" "What seek'st thou,"
He answered, "of an old unhappy man?"
"I seek," her voice rose ardently, "to bear
My arms against Achilles in thy cause,
To hazard in the venture all I may
For Troy and thee, O King. This is my quest."
Proudly she spoke; but he, as old men will,
Because he wondered, was displeased, nor knew
How to rub clear the dimmed sense of his grief,
And pausing half incredulous replied,
"What hast thou said? Abuse not these old ears.
Thou know'st that I have suffered—who art thou?
A woman! Art a woman, and would lift
Thy hand against Achilles? Never hand
Of man prevailed against him yet, and thou
A woman made to bear and suckle babes,"—
"A woman," she broke in, "but not as those
Who spin at home and blench to see a sword.
Penthesilea am I called, and am
An Amazon, and Amazons I rule.
They call me queen; but I like them was reared
To suffer and to dare; my body bathed
In cold Thermodon can outrace his speed;
And I have slain the lion in his lair,
Yea, and have fought with men and have prevailed."

Admiring murmur followed on her words,
From those that hearkened with hope-kindled eyes.
Priam said only "Hector fell." That word,
Slow-spoken, not to her, but in the dark
Of his own grieving mind, dropt like a stone
Down a well's echoing silence. There was pause.
Just in that moment stole Andromache
Over the threshold; then her heart drank wine,
For she beheld Penthesilea there,
Moved but not shaken, like a Goddess stand
Of all regarded, while her spirit seemed

To swell within her on some secret wave
Of strength, and lifting up her queenly head
She spoke like music through the darkening hall.
"One certain night I stood upon our hills
Before the dawn was come, and I beheld
All the stars over me from south to north
And east to west, each in his place, as they
Had shone before I was or thou, O King.
And as I looked, one fell: far down the sky
It shot in fire to nothing. Who might think
One of heaven's splendours, fixed in heaven, could
fall?

O Priam, even Achilles, even he,
This far-renowned one, shall be overthrown
For all his glory and his might, perhaps
By hand unguessed, and thou behold him fall,
It may be by another, or by me."

Yet Priam would not be persuaded, nay,
Clinging to his old lamenting thoughts, he cried:
"There was none brave as Hector, and he fell,
Hector is fallen; snap all swords in two,
Break all your bows asunder, as my heart
Is broken: it were better. What avails?
What wouldst thou, Queen?" Yet even as he spoke,
Gazing upon the noble Amazon
The strong bonds of his grief were loosed awhile.
There seemed a courage in those shapely arms,
In that clear brow, which to refuse might be
Unpardoned of the gods: her clarion words
Rang through him still; and as a traveller tired
Vacantly resting at the long day's end
Under the hollow of a stream's high bank
Hears rushing over him the beat of wings
And sees a wild swan snowy-throated take
His effortless great flight in the sun's beams,
So Priam saw her! bound afar to lands
Of morning, like the beauty of those wide wings,
Free, where he might not follow, left alone
In the fast-falling night; but oh, not so,

Not bound afar, but at his feet, with eyes
Of proud petition, of a sweet command,
Penthesilea like a vision stayed
And her voice breathed one silver summons, Hope!

A hush took all who listened, then they stirred.
Only Cassandra, crouching by the King,
Hid her dark face; the others, nearer drawn,
Looked upon Priam, and his soul was moved,
But not as they; his gaze now at the full
Answered the clear magnanimous regard
Of her that spoke with pity, as he replied,
"What sad word hast thou uttered! Oh, thy lips
Are young that shape it, ere they understand.
Look on me that was once called happy, Queen!
What knowest thou of ill? I have borne more
Than my young fears, stretched by some childish
wrong,
Imagined that the whole world could contain,
Or this frail flesh that pens us in our place
Find possible to bear, I have been taught.
None was so blest in sons, and none so curst.
And now I know not if the Gods be kind
Or if 'tis the last cruelty they use,
That having heaped such evil on our heads
They lend us power to bear it. O speak not!
For I can teach thee how men learn to bear;
'Tis not with fortitude of hope increased,
'Tis with dulled sense that thickens on the soul
And all its longings pined in frost that cramps
The quivering heart up, till it feel no more.
I am so knitted in harsh fortune's root
As tottering towers, in bitter fibre bound
That props what it has killed. Yet I endure.
Why wilt thou trouble me? For thy young face
Pricks with its courage like reviving blood
In a numbed arm. I was at peace, O Queen."

He ended, and the glorious Amazon,
Moved even to tears, stept toward him and knelt down

And touched his knees, entreating: "Let me learn,
 Even though the price be of such utmost pain
 As thou hast tasted: I would prove my heart,
 That is prepared for all things: let me go!
 I am not all so ignorant of grief.
 Grant me this boon, that I may fight for thee."
 Priam heard marvelling; bending o'er her, soft
 He laid his old hands on her youthful hair,
 Answering: "Is thy heart so fixed indeed?
 Ah, child, is not life sweet? Turn again home
 In honour, for so surely as I live
 And as Troy stands, thou shalt have honour here.
 The hazard is too much. I, that have ploughed
 This heavy and hard furrow into Time
 Cannot turn back, but thou canst. Wilt thou not?
 None shall reproach thee. O too much ere now,
 Too much, too dear blood in my cause is spilt.
 And thou art dear and shalt be always dear
 And thy name named with blessing in my house."
 Penthesilea lifted up her head.
 She looked on him and smiled. "I thank thee,
 King.
 And thou art wise and I am foolish, yet
 Though Heaven in thunder did forbid me this
 My heart is fixed." Then Priam sighed, she rose,
 And he made answer: "Be it as thou wilt
 And I will say some good thing of the Gods
 Since they have raised a woman's heart so high.
 Bring torches, for the Queen shall feast with us
 This night, and on the morrow if she will
 Go with our battle forth. Bid Troy prepare."
 So Priam ordered, and the chiefs obeyed.
 Through all the city ran the word for war,
 And swords refurbished gleamed in kindled eyes
 At hope of help unlocked for: Troy was glad,
 And all the Amazons that night held feast
 Among the captains in the torch-lit halls
 Of Priam's royal house. At his right hand,
 Admired of all, Penthesilea sat,
 Still in her bright mail, though unhelmeted;

For when she had bathed, they brought her women's
robes

But she refused; for in her heart she thought,
I shall be deemed but as a woman is
And they will put no faith in me for deeds.

How strange the hush was of the glimmering room
In a high tower apart, when after feast
And song were ended, and all gone to rest,
Penthesilea sat beside the bed
Whereon her coat of mail, now laid aside,
Shone keenly crumpled into glittering folds
Next the smooth texture of a coverlet
Embroidered in dim Indian town with shapes
Of golden lions thronged by suns and stars;
A Tyrian rug was soft to her bare feet
When kneeling by her side Harmothoe
Had loosed their sandal-thongs, and bathed them
both

In warm clear water from a brazen bowl;
Who now was gone; and the Queen, left alone,
Stood up, and let the loose white robe fall free,
Holding her strong hands clasped behind her head,
While through their fingers streamed the heavy hair:
She sighed,—a fierce sigh panted from her breast,
Like some imprisoned leopard's, ill at ease
In those rich walls that held her from the air,
And with faint subtlety of old perfume
Wrought on her sense remembrance, as through
dream,

Of what dead women fair in idle hours
Had here adorned them, pacing with soft feet
The coloured stones inlaid upon the floor,
Parting these curtains with their silver rings
To gaze upon a mirror, kneeling down
Beside the ebon coffer, to search out
Within its depths of robe laid over robe
Some beaten armlet of Assyrian gold,
Jade-brooch or branches of rose coral brought
From far bays of Arabian Astabel;

Foreign and fair devices; dream on dream,
In the low lamp-flame's wavering, oppressed
The panting free heart of the Amazon.
Thus as she leaned with heavy-lidded eyes
Backward, and into grandeur slow rebelled
The strong mould of her breast beneath the throat,
Andromache stole in to her; she stood
With wondering gaze fixt faltering in the door
A moment, then, hope trembling at her lips,
While the warm blood rushed up her cheek, she ran
Swift to the other's knees, and falling cried,
"O Goddess, help! Ah, surely thou art come
From heaven to avenge me, for the gods in heaven
Loved Hector well; thou hast a woman's shape
But mov'st not like a woman, no, nor look'st.
O certify my heart, my wounded heart!
Fill me, for I am empty; turn again
The water of life into this stony bed
Where my days used to run. I am alone.
Reveal thyself, if to none else, to me."

Penthesilea with stern looks amazed
With both hands on her shoulders put her off,
Saying, "Who art thou? What wild thought is
thine?"

Rise up, kneel not, embrace not so my knees,
My arms are stronger, nay, look up, behold,"
Then with a milder voice continuing,
"I am no goddess, feel, my heart beats quick;
I am not calm as the gods are in heaven.
This flesh is mortal, strike and it will bleed,
Has bled ere now; and feels thy wound and throbbed
To hear thy supplication, and to see
How like a bird thou droppedst to my feet!"

Andromache sank backward on her knees,
Wide-eyed with fearful doubt, then slowly rose
And stood apart, cold now as if despair
Had closed about her sudden as dark night;
Like thunder-drops her words fell desolate:

"O my great hope, how easy was thy lure,
How sweet and now how bitter to my taste!
The folly of my fond heart bites my heart.
The gods are loth to be revealed when they
Take among men disguises: but oh no,
Thou art a woman, thy face speaks the truth.
And yet, yet, if a woman, whence and why
Comest thou, what madness pricks thee so to dare
What scarce a God might compass, when my own
Great Hector whom none else could vanquish fell?"
But now the Amazon regarding her
More earnestly, spoke heedless of her cry,
"I saw thee in the hall where Priam was.
Art thou not Priam's daughter?" "Hector's wife,"
Answered the other. "Then I know thy name,
Andromache men call thee; and I know
Thy wound: sit by me, be my friend to-night,
Tell me of this Achilles, I would know
What manner of a man is he who sounds
In the world's ear so terrible. Is he
Fair-haired, as I have heard, or swarthy-cheeked
Like those men I have matched my strength against,
The Gargareans? Do his inches tower
Much over mine? How goes he into fight?
On horseback, as we Amazons, or afoot?
Or standing in a chariot hurls his spear?
Tell me of all these things, that I may know
And be aware and in the battle take
What vantage may be mine among the Greeks
The better to avenge thee, if fate will."

Andromache said no word for a space,
Facing her with dulled eyes and mind confused;
Then to her lips a word outleapt her thought
Fledged with a bitter meaning: she exclaimed,
"Thou lovest him!" The queen laughed, a scornful
laugh,
"O woman, have you none but woman's thoughts?
Because you are weak and have such clinging arms,—
I felt them soft and trembling round my knees—

Deem you such weakness rules an Amazon?
What is this love you are so quick to find
The key of all you cannot understand?
To tremble and to wait on a man's mood
And seek I know not what bliss in his arms
That fondle you a plaything, far from all
The thoughts that make him strong! Such thoughts
I have,
Such will to tame and conquer, such delight
In battle, such resolve never to yield
My soul to any other's servitude.
Love, love! Think you I have been wont to bathe
My body in snow-brooks to temper it
True as a sword-blade, slept on forest leaves,
Raced the wild colts to break them, chased the deer,
The lion even, seen the red blood spirt
Of men into whose murderous eyes I looked
And did not quail, think you that such as I
Have hung my life's joy on another's smile,
Pining with fancies such as in close walls
You women fill slow days with feeding on,
Who lie upon soft couches and dream dreams?"

She ended with an anger-burning eye
Standing dilated in her beauteous scorn
Over against Andromache, who shook
Her head, distrustfully insisting still,
"Yet, yet thou lovest him." Suddenly a fire
Swept o'er her and impatiently she cried,
"When thou hast borne a man-child, speak of love!
Thou knowest not, thou, though in thine ignorant
heart
The blind beginnings of that selfsame power
Compel thee where it wills, where thou wouldst not.
Thou hast not loved, thou hast not known a man,
Yet a man's glory, a man's imagined form
Has drawn thee from thy mountains even here,
To meet him face to face. Ask thy heart why!
Hate, hope, fear, longing, 'tis all one; 'tis love
Betwixt a man and woman. Ah, didst think,

Penthesilea, to escape? But now
Necessity has overtaken thee.
Achilles masters and o'ertops thy mind
Who wouldst be wooed not with soft words but
spears.
And thou must seek him. To thy wooing go!
But oh, thou goest into a fell embrace,
For he will clutch thee as a hawk a hare,
And thy bride-bed shall be the bloody ground."

With that harsh word she would have turned to go
But stayed upon the threshold; for the voice
Of Penthesilea called her, changing now
To a deep cry, not angered nor in scorn
But grievous, as though suddenly her heart
Imperiously swelled beyond its bounds
And loosed its secret storm and sweetness out,
The proud voice breaking into truth and pain.
"No, no! not so, thou shalt not leave me so,
Thou dost not know me; far away thy words
Fly over me, they hurt me not at all.
Yet, didst thou know my heart—I am not wise
In love, thou say'st, yet I am wise in grief.
'Twas not Achilles drew me; it was grief
That drove me hither, grief brims up my heart
And blinded me to thy grief: sit by me,
Andromache, and hear me: nay thou must.
I had a sister, whom indeed I loved,
For we were twinned in thought and act and
soul,
My bedfellow and playmate; oft have we
To one another brought a timely arm
Faint in the heat of battle or of chase.
But oh, it was this arm, that should have first
Withered on the shoulder, this right arm that sped
The bolt that slew her, my Hippolyta!
She had outstript me on the woody hills
Hunting a hind that fled us; I saw not;
But where the boughs were stirring in the brake
I drew my bow, the arrow leapt, I ran,

Parted the hazels, and beheld her there
Lying beyond, the arrow in her side,
Where still I see her on soaked yellow ferns
Under a thorn, trailed with black bryony,
So near a pool, the fingers of her hand
Could touch the trembling harebells on its brink.
She bled within,—there was no blood at all
To soil her body that still seemed to live—
Nor gave a cry, but with one hand she beat
On the wet ground a little, then was still.
But when I took her by the hand, it hung
Cold in my grasp, though close I cherished it,
And kissed her cheek, her mouth a hundred times,
Calling upon her name, Hippolyta:
Calling the dead that heard not.—I have seen
When Euxine on a sudden rises black
With storm, a sail that sought our haven swept
Out into darkness, from the cliffs have watched
How it flew onward fearfully, far out
Blind under sheets of tempest and was lost.
From that hour I drove like that driving ship
Borne on, I recked not whither, over wastes
Of time that have no harbour and no peace.
I fled, and yet I feared being thought to flee.
Therefore did I imagine to my soul
Some dear atonement that should make my name
Burn on the lips of men; set up my mark
And that pursued, till the usurping hope
Of glory with a glozing tongue sometimes
Flattered my dark thoughts to forget: but oh,
It is myself that am pursued, the hounds
Of memory are upon me,—Break this off.
Too much is spoken. Yet my heart is eased.
Forget this weakness, tell not to another
Penthesilea's sorrow, for from now
She puts it from her, she is strong again.
Nay, from my childhood up 'twas in my soul
The dearest hope to do a thing of fame.
To-morrow I will slay thy husband's slayer,
Or gladly, if the fates refuse, will die."

While she was speaking, sad Andromache
Changed in her countenance, her soft bosom swelled
And her eyes brightening were soon dimmed with tears.
At last she broke forth: "O unhappy Queen,
Pardon! " But ere another word could pass
Her lips, there was a babbling cry without,
Soft feet came running to the door, and there
Parting the heavy curtain, stood the child
Astyanax, who ran to her and called,
"O Mother, I have found you. Come to bed;
I woke and could not find you, and was afraid."
The old nurse following at his heels began
To chide him, but Andromache embraced
Her boy and kissed him; he looked wondering up
Now at the Amazon and spoke in awe,
"It is the Goddess, mother"; when again
She hugged him close, and gentle came her voice,
"Penthesilea, pardon! I have erred,
My hope was blind and my despair was blind.
I dreamed of Gods come down to succour me.
Lo, here is my avenger!" and she held
The boy before her, while the warrior queen
Admiring his bold limbs and fearless gaze
That wandered to the splendour of the mail
Lying on the bed, uplifted with a smile
The sword beside it, saying, "Wilt thou fight
With such a sword when thou art grown a man?"
Whereat he gravely answered to her face,
"Yea, I am Hector's son." Andromache
Drawing him towards her, with warm kisses, spoke:
"I keep thy father's sword for thee; but now
Thou must to bed and sleep. Sleep also thou,
Penthesilea; and to-morrow morn
Eat with me ere thou go, and thou shalt have
All such as Hector's heart delighted in
When he went forth to battle. Fare thee well."

Penthesilea was alone. She turned;
Lo, in the corner the moon's wandered beam
Lay gentle, like the soul of solitude.

She drew a curtain; over earth the night
Rose naked; and she looked with longing eyes
Past the low plain, where Simois wound his stream
To choke in marsh mist and the creeping ooze,
Up to the mountain tops, and far beyond
Saw in her memory clear a certain glen
Where snows among the pale cloud gleamed above
Crag-pines, but from the spongy mosses sprang
Tall ash and chestnut, plundered by the gusts
Of autumn to let fall gold leaves adrift
Upon the young Thermodon, that between
Gray boulders, dancing in his frolic race
Over the abrupt edge of a gloomy gulf,
Leapt and was lost; but lost in splendour! so
Should her life be ennobled in its end,
Lifting her heart she prayed, and in her mind
Knew how, removed from all that others use
And have their joy in, she must fix her course
One way, since exiles in the world of men
Heroic hearts are unto the end alone.

II. THE BATTLE

Waters of Asia, westward-beating waves
Of estuaries, and mountain-warded straits,
Whose solitary beaches long had lost
The ashen glimmer of that sinking moon,
Listened in darkness to their own lone sound
Moving about the shores of sleep, when first
A faint light stole, and hills in the east emerged,
A faint wind soon, born upon ocean, blew;
The cold stars faded; high on forest slopes
The goatherd woke in his thatched hut and shook
His cloak about him, striding forth, and saw
Pale over the round world of shadow tower
The silently awakened presences
Of Rhodope and Ida, dawning peaks
Far opposite, that slowly flushed, till all
The hill-thronged vales streamed out in sudden gold

He saw the young sun ripple into fire
Propontis, and the bright seas run like wine
Into the dim west where aerial snows
Of Athos hovered o'er a hundred isles;
Nearer, Troy towers stood gleaming; in the plain
The river smoked with mist, and cranes in flocks
Rose through the sun-soaked vapour toward the sea
Beyond the trench and trench-encircled huts
And black-beaked Danaan ships upon the strand.

There in their huts and tents the Danaans woke,
And streamed abroad in the keen morning air,
But armed not yet; their camp made holiday,
With shields hung up, with heads unhelmeted.
Greek challenged Greek to hurling of the quoit,
To wrestle and race; not a sole trumpet rang,
For Troy since Hector's slaying kept her gates
Fast-barred, nor sent her files forth to the war.
So now the battle-weary Greeks prepared
Their meal beside the trenches, eased at heart,
When single scouts came running from the plain:
"Arm, arm!" they cried, "for Troy will fight to-day,
The Amazons are come to succour them."
Then sportful laughter leapt from mouth to mouth
Among the gay-eyed youth, mocking to hear,
And one to another shot a mirthful word.
"The hawk is dead, the twittering swallows come
To harry us! We will go garlanded
To battle and will hale these women home."

So as for sport they armed; but ere the word
Had run through half the camp, Thersites rose,
Filled with his dwarfish malice that rejoiced
In quarrels without causes between friends,
Pleased with the comedy of angry wits
When wisest men show weakest; he arose
Glancing from side to side in evil glee,
And went along the sea-beach till he came
Where lay Achilles and his Myrmidons
Who pitched apart, a separate host; he went

Alone, for all despised him, though they feared
His tongue, and coming to Achilles' tent
Called to him with a gibing pomp of speech.
"Hail, son of Thetis, slayer of thousands, hail!
Hear what fresh tidings echoes through our camp!
Thy fame is flown into the Asian lands,
And how thou didst, a goddess helping thee,
Hew Hector down, provokes the envious world
To emulate thy glory. Lo, to-day
Troy's latest hope, there comes to challenge thee
A woman." Then Achilles laughed aloud,
But he continued: "Nay, it is a queen,
Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons,
Brings her wild squadrons to this faint-heart Troy,
A queen of fame, with courage like a man's
And more than woman's beauty. Agamemnon
Already in his gloating thought adorns
His palace with this all-outshining gem
Captive to him. O Eagle of the Greeks
Doth not the quarry please thee?" But again
Achilles laughed: "Come, yet another day
I shall have peace and leisure from the fight.
I wore a woman's robes once, feigned their ways
In Scyros, and I know them, quick to fire
Upon imagination of a deed
That blazes through them like a strand of flax
Left light as ashes, fluttering, when the hour strikes
For doing what a man's heart leaps to do.
On such Achilles draws not. Get thee gone,
Thersites, let the Greeks fight if they will
With these mad women: but my heart is stirred
To be alone and think upon the dead
This day. Thy wry face puts me out of tune.
Begone, thou crookedness, ere thou be driven!"
So trudging back with ill smiles on his mouth
Thersites went, well pleased to bear bad news.

Achilles stood at his tent-door; the sea
Before him smiled; but heavy thoughts like rain
Clouded his darkening spirit, as his eyes

Looked homeward toward the far Thessalian coast
Where he was nurtured in fresh upland glens
Of Pelion, and his father even now
Kept his old age, watching uncomforted;
But most the thought of dear Patroclus' dust
Drew his soul down to sorrow; pacing slow
The shore he came to where the mound was heaped
On those beloved ashes; there he bade
Fetch wine, and poured libation to the dead.

There came a runner hasting from the camp,
Who cried: "Achilles, arm! The battle joins;
And half our host, yet unprepared, recoils
Before the onset of those Amazons
Whose horses rush upon them, and they cry,
Where is Achilles? Arm, and bring us aid.
'Tis Agamemnon sends thee this command."
But Peleus' son looked frowning and replied,
"Go tell the King I heed not his command
Nor any man's; to-day my sword is sheathed."
With that he turned him to his grief; the peal
Of distant horn and crying of many cries,
All the harsh drone of battle muttering swelled
Beyond the trench and rows of stranded ships
Half-sunk in sand, that with their rampart shut
The beach into its calm of little waves
Falling and hushing; but to Achilles' ear
That roar was vain and hateful; and he drew
His cloak over his head, and cried with groans,
"O to what end, what end? Must our souls beat
Their high-tempered force out, and keen edge
Blunt in a senseless turmoil, but to make
A pageant for the Gods? O friend, I lose
How much more than thyself in losing thee!
Have I appeased thy ghost, and given thee sleep
By my so great revenge? Yet am not I
Appeased. Because in courage and in strength
The Gods have made me excellent beyond
All other sons of men, this is my woe
That none can match me, easy comes the crown

Of glory, and I would toss it from my hand.
Into these careless waters, could I find
Some stay and dear abode such as I found
In those thoughts that together, O my friend,
We held, and well-companioned, ever looked
On through all days with never sated eyes.
But now the splendour and the spur is gone.
I hunger after thine untimeliness
For which my tears were shed. O that these Gods
Who smile on their calm seats in happy heaven
Could be provoked to wrath and themselves come
Against me armed; then were there scope and marge
For this full fire to burn in, that consumes
My soul in puny angers at the pomp
Of Agamemnon's puffed authority.
But me they mean for some inglorious doom,
And even now, plotting my shame, have sent
A woman to defy me!" Thus he cried,
Pacing in angry grief the calm sea-sand,
While still the noise of war, rolled nearer, charged
The air with jarring clamour; noon was passed,
And the sky strewn with slow clouds idly moved;
But ever louder at the trench it rose.

At last a second runner from the camp
Came, and Achilles knew him as he ran;
It was a youth from white lolcos town,
Of Peleus' kin; he sobbed forth breathless words.
"Come to the trench, Achilles, come and see!
Not women are these Amazons but wolves!
Like Maenads, maddened beyond strength of men,
They rage and with amazement bear us down."
So both went forth to the great dyke and looked
Over the trench; then in Achilles' heart
Grief straightway slumbered, and the cruel sting
Of battle stirred in him: as one who sees
A wild bright bay of angry ocean storm
With thunderous upleaping, surge on surge,
Black rampart rocks, filling the brilliant air
With sound and splendour, and joy charms his eyes.

So now rejoiced Achilles; not less fierce
In onset than those waters snowy-maned,
The Amazons on their wild horses rode
Storming upon the stubborn infantry,
And by them, thrice-inspirited, with shouts
Of vengeance, the victorious ranks of Troy.
Achilles looked far o'er the fray and laughed:
"See how the sullen Ajax like a bear
Stung by a bee-swarm, puzzles how to strike:
But you shall see how these same Maenads fly
When that I leap upon them. Say, I come."
Glad the youth turned, and ran back to the Greeks,
And through them flew the word "Achilles comes."

Penthesilea through the press all day
Had sought for Hector's slayer, and sought in vain,
Though many a captain on her path in arms
So tall, so splendid stood, that hope had sprung
Not twice or thrice alone that this was he
She should defy; the rest she scorned, yet some
Essayed her prowess and came wounded off
Or fell beneath her, and so trampled, died.
Lo, as a potter strikes with eager hands
Shapes of soft moulded clay, fired with the thought
To make a thing more noble, so she smote
Those meaner challengers, crushed idly down
If haply from the wreck and tumult might
Spring the desired Achilles; her bright axe
Shone over shouts and groans and maddened more
The tempest of those headlong Amazons
Who rushed black-maned upon spurred horses, where
The spears bristled the thickest. They outmatched
The fury of impetuous Diomed,
Who even now where fierce Antandra struck
Hardly avoided, catching at her rein,
And was borne backward raging in his beard
With half his helm-plumes shorn away; with her
Derione and Thermodossa, red
With rapture of the sword, Antibrote,
Hippodamia and Brontissa drave

Like screaming gusts of whirlwind when the air
Fills with torn boughs of cracking oaks, and pines
Shiver to ground uprooted; thrust on thrust
Met shrieks, where desperately tugging hands
Clutching a spear were tost up suddenly
As it stabbed home; strange-echoing female cries
Exulted; in the van Harmothoe
Called, as her axe-blows rang about her path
Hard as the white hail when it strips the vines
And their bruised clusters; the gay Danaan youth,
Spoiled of their sweet imagined sport, laughed now
But as the mad in whom no mirth is, driven
Before the Amazons in pale amaze
And terror of their beauty and their strength,
While crest on crest the Phrygians followed on.
But most all marvelled, friend and foe, to see
Clear where the foremost onset hurled and clanged,
Penthesilea like a star in storm
That through the black rents of a burying cloud
Rides unimperilled; for none stayed her, not
Diomed, nor Ajax; yet her quest despaired;
Achilles came not; something failed the hour,
And ere he came 'twas lost: there at the trench
In baffled frenzy the wild warring queens
Perceived it in their hearts, and raged the more,
Wanting the one goal's glory that should force
Their last strength onward; by so much as they
Began to faint, by so much more the foe
Rousing his stubborn manhood, clenched his ranks
And bore them backward. Then Achilles came.
He leapt upon the dyke, bright as a brand
Breaking to sudden fire; they saw him shine,
They heard his great voice clear above the roar,
And half the battle swerved along the plain
Toward Simois. Far upon the city wall
Andromache was gazing; now she pressed
Her hands upon her bounding heart in fear;
She saw her own host in the centre break
Before Achilles and roll back; in vain
Penthesilea on the seaward wing

Maintained the onset; half her Amazons
Caught in the frayed edge of the flight, were turned,
Were flying; nay, it seemed that earth and heaven
Joined in that altered combat and pursuit,
For in the west the sun charged out of clouds
And shot his rays forth over shadowy isles
Set in the fiery seas, and flashed behind
The Argives and their crested coming on,
Dazzling the ranks of Troy, that broken now
Reeled from the middle outward, here and there
Stemmed by a chieftain's cry; with hot-blood cheek
The youthful Troilus was storming, shamed,
And shouted: "Rally at the river bank!"
But now among the fleers thudding hooves,
The maddened steeds of single Amazons,
Headlong and helpless, thrice confounded them,
In whom the terror of Achilles stung
Sharp as a cruel rowel in the flanks
Of those scared horses; uncontrollably
Crushed, wrestling, groaning, trodden, all were
hurled
Together wild as from a foundered ship
A hundred men, flung forth, one moment strive
Huddled in the hollow of one tremendous wave,
The next upon its crest toss up to crash
Down upon rocks they agonize to shun:
So desperate in a huge blind tide of flight
Phrygian and Amazon together reeled.
All in a moment they had reached the stream.
A grove of oaks stood on the hither side,
Where Troilus made rally some stout hearts
Staying the rout. Woe then to him that fled,
When in his back the pouncing arrow plunged
And straight was bloody to the feathers! woe
To him that fled, there was no help for him!
Ingloriously he fell, or pressed by shields
Of comrades from behind was beaten down,
Or on the crumbling bank was crushed by hooves
That broke the bones in many a breathing breast
Of strong men, trampled like tall mallow stalks

At the stream's edge, broken like leafy boughs
That cracked and splintered in the whirling stroke
Of swords; and many falling in the stream
Meshed by long weeds were strangled in the ooze.
Black-haired Antandra there, forced with the rout,
Strove ever like a raging lioness
To turn on her pursuers: on the bank
She stayed her horse, and some Thessalian youth,
Stung by her beauty, caught her by the belt
And dragged her from the saddle; she, so spent,
Let fall the axe from her dead-weary arms,
But with sobbed breath caught him so desperately
That both together in a blind embrace
Fell plunging in the shallows, rolled among
Marsh-marigolds; she thrust upon his face
Under the water, laughed and strove to rise,
When even then a javelin bit her breast
And clove her through; so died Antandra; so
Fell many another; pity there was none,
For cruel is the anger of men shamed
When they avenge their shame; and that fierce hour
Made many a widow on far hill-town wall
That golden evening dandling with fond smile
A son already fatherless; and still
Achilles' murderous and resistless hands
Were stayed not. So by Simois the red flight
Streamed swift and fearful as a fever-dream.

But meanwhile upon either wing the war
Swung doubtful, nay, the Greeks were overmatched,
Wanting their champion, drawn with all his men
So far dispersed, though now shrill trumpets rang
Recalling them, for on the seaward side
Penthesilea pressing hardly, she
With the fierce remnant of her Amazons
And gray Antenor, passionately smote
As in a kind of anguish; like a net
Trapping a lion's limbs, the battle closed
Round her deep-thwarted spirit: Sthenelus
Assailed her, striding huge among the rest;

And riding at him, as she struck, the axe
Crashed broken on his helm, she wrenched the spear
From his stunned arm, when on the other side
Leapt Ornytus against her, and she swerved
To dart the spear-point through him, crying out,
"O that thou wert Achilles!" All at once
Clear from the distant battle's farther edge
Sounded upon a sudden several horns,
Harsh-blown bull's horns; Antenor knew the note
Of signal, and he called across the spears,
"Penthesilea, hark, upon the left
The son of Aphrodite holds the day.
Between us all the foe is locked and hemmed,
And hot Achilles has pursued too far.
Press, 'tis Troy's hour!" and even as he spoke
The Greeks relaxed; but now, flushed from the rout,
Those same pursuers singly and in troops
Mixed in the battle, all confused, and swung
A score of ways with half-arrested clash
And crossing tides of onset; streaming loose
In separate combats, or bewildered pause
Where all was doubt. Penthesilea burned
Amid the scattered mellay; surely now
From Simois through the dust and disarray
She spied a great crest and a blazing spear
Returning, and Harmothoe cried out,
"Penthesilea!" with so keen a cry
That her heart leapt; she knew Achilles came.

All knew, the spent arms and the shouting heads
Were stayed and turned; they halted man by man
As knowing the hour was other than their own,
Awaiting in a thrilled expectancy,
As a drawn bowstring ere the arrow fly,
That strange encounter, not alone the shock
Of chosen champions, but a storm of worlds
Where the deep blood-tides, man and woman, met
Penthesilea kindled, her soul soared
Above the beating of her heart, alone
Answering that high peril, that made pale

The boldest round her, all their fluttered hope
Afraid, as with a deep imperious cry
And striding pace, through moil of crimsoned arms,
Dinted and shattered shields, Achilles came
Shining from head to heel; a demigod
Whom smouldering anger dyed in fire, whose limbs
For swiftness and for strength unmatchable
Seemed but the prison of a spirit that, freed
As a flame leaps in beauty to and fro,
Splendid in indignation should have towered
Against the lords of heaven; a spirit wronged,
That for oblivion of its sore heart-strings
Had robed itself so red in slaughterous deeds
And as in scorn feasted on dying cries,
Hot like a reveller seeking to forget;
But as a reveller comes out into dawn
Shooting bright beams up to the fading stars,
So was it with Achilles when he found
The royal Amazon; in ardour she
Leaned on her reined horse forward, all her soul
Ingathered at a breath, ready to launch
And dare, as those together-leaping looks
Like stone and steel flashed! To the fingers tense,
She poised in one uplifted hand her spear
Against him over challenging proud eyes,
That quailed not where the eyes of kings had quailed.

"Turn again home! Thou canst not fight with men,
And least with me, whom no man overcomes,"
Scornfully with a mighty voice he cried,
"Madwoman, turn, or here thou spill'st thy soul!"
Clear rang her voice back, "Put me to the proof!
Have I not sought thee, Achilles, all this day,
And having found thee, shall I let thee go?"
With that she hurled, and the spear bounded forth
Straight at Achilles' face, but lifting up
His shield, he caught it on the golden boss
That shivered it to pieces: his own spear
Flew on the instant, the shock marred his aim,
And not the queen he smote, but smote her horse

Deep in the shoulder: with sharp shriek he reared
And staggering fell; but lightly ere he fell
Penthesilea leapt upon the ground,
As swiftly Achilles plucked his weapon back.
Pale grew the Trojans, glad the Greeks exclaimed.
But she stood, deeply breathing, and her mind
Debated if to draw her sword and rush
On death at once; while marvelling to behold
The beauty of the daring on her brow
Achilles called, "Thou tameless one, be tamed!
Else thou art dead, no god shall save thee now."
She answered, "Nay, thou shalt not think such scorn
Of me that am a woman. Men are bold,
All men are bold, and women are all weak,
Thou think'st, yet when a woman's heart is bold,
By so much more it can outmatch a man's
As all her strength is in extremity,
Sped like a shaft that stops but in a wound!
Though but a woman, thou hast cause to fear
And fear me most, because I stand alone."
She called undaunted, yet her heart despaired;
When quickly came Harmothoe and thrust
A second javelin in her hand; at which
Achilles frowned: "Bold art thou, overbold;
And surely as high Zeus on Ida sits
And watches now, I swear none braver moves
In this day's battle, nay, alone of all
Worthy my strife. Be wise, venture not more."
He spoke, reluctant. But without a word
She, moving in his path until she backed
The low sun where he faced it full, upraised
The spear, and cast at him with all her force.
Then taken half at unawares, he swerved.
On the left shoulder, near the neck, above
The great shield's rim it smote and grazed the flesh,
So that the blood sprang: like winged Victory
The Amazon flushed bright, a hundred throats
Broke into one loud cry, and the Greeks clutched
Their swords, as that exulting murmur ran
Trembling and echoing o'er the plain to Troy.

There was such pause as when the ear waits thunder.
Achilles' face was dark, yet lightning-lit;
And all the ruthless eagle in his soul
Called instant for her death; yet she was fair,
Young, and a woman, and surpassing fair;
But she had shamed him: as an eagle beats
Towering against the mastery of a storm
That blows him o'er a tossed lake backward, then
Upon a lull swoops forward, so his wrath
Leapt conquering on a sudden, and the spear
Flamed from his hurling hand; she saw it come,
She raised her shield, but through the shield it
crashed
Under the arm, through the tough panther-skin
And plates of iron; in her side it pierced
And bore her down; imperially she fell
Without a cry, sank on lost feet, nor heard
Achilles' dread voice, "Art thou satisfied,
Penthesilea?" but the heavy shield
Rang on her fallen, the helmet rolled in dust
From her proud head, and the long, loosened hair
Tossed one tress richly over throat and bosom
Shuddering strongly up from where the blood
Welled dark about the spear forced deep within;
And sudden as a torch plunged in a pool
Her face lay dead-pale with the eyes quite closed.

Some moments held, still as deep snow is still,
The hearts of either watching throned, for whom
There seemed a glory fallen from the world
Where she lay fallen, stirred not: spear and shield
Were silent; then among the Danaans woke
A cruel exultation as they saw
The Trojan faces; and one cast a spear
At random; harsh the shouts of battle rose.

But still Achilles stood where he had hurled,
Filled with besieging thoughts that in his brain
Like thunder broke: he heard the cry and clang
Renewing, and faced back upon his Greeks,

Staying them sternly: wrath was in his soul,
Wrath with those spirits despised, and wrath with her
That had provoked him, wrath that his right hand
Abhorred its own act, and deep wrath with heaven
And fate; so darkened inly, like a storm
He came, and standing o'er the fallen queen
Gazed on the shape his wound had marred, a shape
Where strength had into beauty thewed and strung
Thighs of swift purpose, deep bosom and loins
Largely imagined, a God's dream; such limbs
As in the forges of desire should mould
Heroes oh never now to be! So pale
She lay, a life that might have with him soared
Abreast, but all its world of hope a cup
Quite spilled, a splendour ravelled and undone
By his own hand who now, so darkly stirred,
Saw her eyes open on him, full and strange.

Imperiously, "O thou shalt live!" he cried;
Flung his shield off, with a fierce tenderness
Bending beside her to uplift the weight
Of her resigning shoulder on his arm.
But faint she moaned, "I thirst." Then at his call
One ran to where a stream welled near a bush
Hard by; but quicker ran Harmothoe
And brought her helmet brimming, which the queen
Drank of a little, though the bubbling cold
Of her own mountain springs hardly had eased
The growing anguish of the wound; when now
Among the Greeks murmur and strife arose,
Where loud among the rest Thersites mocked.
"See, lords of Hellas, see this prince you fame
So high beyond us all, and fawn upon
His all-contemptuous pride, shows his true heart.
A fonder of soft women would he be,
A Paris! Kills, and weeps on those he kills.
We should have left him in his proper robes
On Scyros, hollow braggart that he is.
What is this woman she should baulk our fray?
Let kites and dogs stay over her, not we."

But ere he ceased Achilles sprang on him,
Flaming. "Thou toad!" he cried, and in an instant
Seized with both furious hands and lifted him,
Towering and terrible, above his head,
And as a lion flings a snarling hound,
Tossed him afar to fall with gnashing noise
Horribly biting the blood-spattered earth.
"Spit thy slime there, thou shalt not on a thing
Less vile than thine own soul!" Achilles cried.
And all the rest, half wroth, half shamed before
The domination of his burning eyes,
Fell backward. "To the trench and to your huts!"
He called again. "Go, for the night comes on.
You fight to-day no more!" He shouted stern;
And one to another whispered in his fear,
"The Gods have sent a madness on this man.
Stir not his fury." So they all retired,
And on their side slowly the men of Troy
Drew homeward: but alone Achilles came
Back to the Amazon, propped on the knees
Of sad Harmothoc, and darkling stood
Over her, where she cast her eyes around
And knew the earth and heaven but saw them strange;
Saw the stilled armies and far towers, and light
Upon the great clouds drooping sanguine plumes
On Ida from the zenith over Troy,
Where wept Andromache; brief evening burned
One solemn colour o'er a world at pause:
Last she beheld Achilles: in their eyes
Meeting, the marvel of what might have been
Was with that moment married, as a touch
On thrilling strings wakes from the eternal void
Beauty unending, but the excluded heart
Heaves mutinous in pangs at the dear cost
And pity to be mortal: pangs more keen
Pierced now Achilles gazing, and in smart
He cried, "Thou smilest!" for her countenance
changed,
Eased out of anguish under falling calm,
A lightening and release. Now not on him

Her dying eyes looked, not on him who stood
Meshed in the wrath of his own fiery deeds,
Passionate, yet transfixed, as if the power
Of some Immortal had made vain his might
And helpless his victorious hands; her head
Sank, and her liberated spirit, where
He might not follow, was already flown.

THE BATTLE OF STAMFORD BRIDGE

"Haste thee, Harold, haste thee North!
Norway ships in Humber crowd.
Tall Hardrada, Sigurd's son,
For thy ruin this hath done—
England for his own hath vowed.

"The earls have fought, the earls are fled.
From Tyne to Ouse the homesteads flame.
York behind her battered wall
Waits the instant of her fall
And the shame of England's name.

"Traitor Tosti's banner streams
With the invading Raven's wing;
Black the land and red the skies
Where Northumbria bleeds and cries
For thy vengeance, England's king!"

Since that frightened summons flew
Not twelve suns have sprung and set.
Northward marching night and day
Has King Harold kept his way.
The hour is come; the hosts are met.

Morn thro' thin September mist
Flames on moving helm and man.
On either side of Derwent's banks
Are the Northmen's shielded ranks.
But silent stays the English van.

A rider to Earl Tosti comes:
"Turn thee, Tosti, to thy kin!
Harold thy brother brings thee sign
All Northumbria shall be thine.
Make thy peace, ere the fray begin."

"And if I turn me to my kin,
And if I stay the Northmen's hand,
What will Harold give to his friend this day?
To Norway's king what price will he pay
Out of this English land?"

That rider laughed a mighty laugh.
"Six full feet of English soil!
Or, since he is taller than the most,
Seven feet shall he have to boast.
This Harold gives for Norway's spoil."

"What rider was he that spoke thee fair?"
Harold Hardrada to Tosti cried.
"It was Harold of England spoke me fair
But now of his bane let him beware.
Set on, set on! We will wreck his pride."

Sudden arrows flashed and flew;
Dark lines of English leapt and rushed
With sound of storm that stung like hail,
And steel rang sharp on supple mail
With thrust that pierced, with blow that crushed.

And sullenly back in a fierce amaze
The Northmen gave to the river-side.
The main of their host on the further shore
Could help them nothing, pressed so sore.
In the ooze they fought; in the wave they died.

On a narrow bridge alone one man
The English mass and fury stays.
The spears press close, the timber cracks,
But high he swings his dreadful axe;
With every stroke a life he slays;

Till pierced at last from the stream below
He falls; the Northmen break and shout.
Forward they hurl in wild onset.
But as struggling fish in a mighty net
The English hem them round about.

Now Norway's King grew battle-mad,
Mad with joy of his strength he smote.
But as he hewed his battle-path
And heaped the dead men for a swath,
An arrow clove him through the throat,

And where he slaughtered, red he fell.
O then was Norway's hope undone,
Doomed men were they that fought in vain,
Hardrada slain, and Tosti slain!
The field was lost, the field was won.

York this night rings all her bells.
Harold feasts within her halls.
The captains lift their wine-cups.—Hark!
What hoofs come thudding through the dark
And sudden stop? What silence falls?

Spent with riding staggers in
One who cries: "Fell news I bring,
Duke William has o'erpast the sea.
His host is camped at Pevensey.
Save us, save England now, O King!"

Woe to Harold! Twice 'tis not
His to conquer and to save.
Well he knows the lot is cast.
England claims him to the last.
South he marches to his grave.

RUAN'S VOYAGE

I

The mist has fallen over the isles,
And Ruan turns his boat for home.
The wind is down; with an oar he steers
The narrow races, where at whiles
To left or right through fog he hears
The low roar and short hiss of foam,
As either rock-sharp shore he nears.
Full glad at heart he guides for home,
Full gladly looks ere night to reach
The little haven, twilit beach,
And pleasant smell of the green earth,
That he has left three days ago;
To warm both hands before the glow
Of peats upon the cottage-hearth,
Where his gray father will be mending
The old nets, and his mother, bending
Over the fire, at his step uplook
From the pot that smokes in the ingle-nook.

Is it a sea-mew's cry that calls
Loud through the mist and wailing falls?
Suddenly the white veil lifted,
And in smoking coils was drifted.
Ruan felt a cry ring through him.
There on a jutting rock alone
Stood a woman crying to him;
White her hair was heedless blown;
'Mid gleaming surf the rock rose bare;
Her withered arms were stretched in prayer.

"Fisherman, fisherman, help!" she cried.
Ruan turned his boat aside
Swiftly in the eddying tide.

"Fisherman, take me in thy boat
And to my own home carry me.
To the isle of Melilot
That lies upon the western sea."

"How earnest thou on this stormy strand,
A barren rock that men avoid?"

"Robbers came upon our land,
Burnt and pillaged and destroyed.
Half our women folk they reft,
And me upon this rock they left."

"Where is this isle of Melilot?
For of all the isles I know it not."

"Come hither and take me in with thee
And I will guide thee across the sea."

Heavily Ruan thought on his home
In Westerncass across the foam;
But he turned his oar and glided near;
As it were his mother, he lifted her.

She sat in the stern, cloaked and dim,
And through the chill mist guided him.

It seemed that day had never an end,
It seemed that sea had never a shore,
Such weary hours he seemed to bend
Upon his never-resting oar,
And felt the cold salt on his lip,
And from his hair the vapour drip;
But still the blank fog brooded round
Over an ocean without sound.

At last along the glassy seas
Crept faint upon his face a breeze,
And like a shadow soft and light
Stole up a little wave that knocked
Upon the stern; the boat was rocked;
He looked, and O heart-stilling sight!
She who sat there was not the same!
Before his eyes the winter old
Fell from her; the full hair outrolled
In splendour soft as springing flame,
Breathing out a perfume sweet,
Over her shoulders to her feet.
Now like a bloom her face became,
Her arms and bosom rounded fair,
And even then was Ruan 'ware
Of blueness breaking the white air
And his own shadow trembling there;
And ere his tongue strove into speech
The keel was grating on a beach.
When mortals gaze on goddesses,
So high the hope of our dreaming is,
The wonder loses fear, the charm
Drinks up the wonder; Ruaii leapt
Upon a shore in sunshine warm,
And forth with him the Lady stopt;
And each to the other lightly talked,
As 'twere their wont so, hand in hand,
To wander through a lovely land.
By solitary slopes they walked.
The mist was scattered, but still before them
Was blown in fleecy tuft and trail;
And tremulous mid the melting cloud,
Upon the bushes low that bore them
Were crimson flowers that danced and bowed,
And green leaves fluttered their edges pale.

II

In a moment's space behold
The blue noon fell to evening gold.

Suddenly before them stood
A palace silent in a wood.
A dream of the eyes when music fills the ear
By night, and through the lulled brain ebbs and flows,
Might build and colour so unearthly clear
So fair and strange a house as rose
On Ruan's eyes; such gleaming walls,
Delicate towers and airy porticoes.
Pillars of clear jade, whose pale capitals
Like tiger's claws were ivory, smooth and bright,
Upheld a lintel fair like fretted snows.
The carved work by its shadow glowed distinct;
No crevice but was brimmed with brooding light:
Upon the roof a bird of Atlas blinked,
Sun-drowned in splendour from the gorgeous West,
And preened his plumes with languid crest;
Open, beneath, a shadowy doorway stood;
And fragrant smoke from fires of citron wood
Beckoned to happy senses, and the guest
Bade cross the threshold, enter, and be blest.

By now they paused within a spacious room,
Curtained about with glimmering tapestries,
That in the hush and richness of the gloom
Hung like a forest gemmed with fancied eyes.
Pale tendrils twined about the clustered pipe
Of reeds, and black trunks branched above remote
To heavy fruit that hovered over-ripe
Of fiery gold and dull vermilion stripe,
A waste of boughs for wild birds' pillaging:
And over dimness large leaves seemed to float,
That here were spotted like a serpent's throat
And there were greener than a finch's wing.
It seemed to live, though all was whist,
And Ruan gazing seemed to hear
With heart-throb quickened into fear
The drooping briars writhe and twist,
The branches wave with stealthy stir
Of dappled leaves or dappled fur—
A sound as if the tangle hissed!

He trembled as the room he scanned.
The Lady clasped him by the hand.
He looked into her face; she stole
In that moment all his soul.
"Fear not, fear not; all is thine,
Ruan, so thou wilt be mine!
I am Morgaine, whom mortals call Le Fay,
And I have brought thee to my house this day
Because I love thee and will give thee more
Than thou hast dreamed in all thy life before."
With that she kissed him on the mouth, and he
Was like warm wax before her witchery;
And as she spoke the arras changed to view
Tender and tremulous and clear in hue
As April woods of white anemone;
And in his heart fear died to joy anew.

She led him on with willing feet.
Through many a perfumed hall they glided;
His brain grew giddy with that incense sweet,
But still the smile of Morgaine guided
Betwixt slim pillars, on a floor
Of brindled coromandel wood,
Where now 'twas scented dusk no more
But airy peace calmed all his blood,
For in the wall a window wide
Looked out on magic eventide.
Far, far beneath them a blue lake was cupped
Hollow amid the twilight of a vale,
And over wan mist floating frail
A rosy mountain soared abrupt.
Black pines and gold-green mosses there
On rocks whose distance none could tell
Were pictured in the soundless air
And rivulets that faintly fell
As in some gorge of Saianfu,
Where from her porcelain palace-tower.
Lone on a crag's mist-cradled throne,
A princess leans amid the dew
Of such a marvellous evening hour

O'er balustrade and precipice,
Her lute and woven silk laid by,
Dreaming with a sudden sigh
Of the world-enchanting kiss.

With such a sigh was Kuan's bosom heaving,
With such a sting of beauty past believing,
When soft beside him spoke Morgaine, "Come, tell:
O Ruan, doth my Kingdom please thee well?"
"Princess, princess," he answered, "I am blest
Beyond all mortals: tell me thy behest
And I will be thy servant." But that word
She smiled away; his arms leapt round her, pressed
With mad joy, as she whispered "Be my lord!"

III

Morgaine, that lurest the souls of men that are
greedy of joy,
What soughtest thou out, Morgaine, in the face of a
fisher-boy?
Were the souls of the great ones of earth so easy a
prey to thy snare,
Lightly bound to thy hand by a single shining hair,
That the simple heart of a youth, untempted, in
hard ways bred,
To thy siren hunger is sweeter than kings or captains
dread?
Thou sang'st him songs that lapped him in utter
forgetfulness
Of the green hills and the rocks and the waters of
Westerncss,
Till Time, like a wandering light that is stayed on
an opal, shone
Kindled and many-coloured; the charmed days
moved not on.
His thoughts were borne as idly as clouds on the
slow South,

Or a willow leaf that glides on a wandering summer
stream,
And the light that bathed his body, and breathed so
sweet to his mouth
Was such as mortals know but in splendid rents of
dream
Piercing the cloud of sleep from the dull day-world
beguiled.
Together they sailed the calm of evening waters isled
With knolls of gemmy grass, and thickets of nightin-
gales;
They gathered flowers and listened, and moved with
drooping sails;
And anon they rose from a feast, from close-
embowered delights,
To hunt the timid gazelles on passionate moonlit
nights,
Blue nights of milky stars, where fluttering petals
snowed
From windswept boughs and scented delicious dusk,
and rode
Home by shadowy glades upon soft invisible lawn
Hand in hand through the dews of a shy dove-
coloured dawn.
They drank of a fairy wine, till their hearts were
weary of earth,
And them, embraced, the mighty wings of Phoenix
bore
Up through the light exulting to soar and still to
soar,
And the world dropped down beneath them; they
clapped their hands in mirth
Mocking the baffled eagle: but how should mortal
tell
What wonders Morgaine wove for Ruan in her spell
To charm the nights and days with hopes that never
tire,
Morgaine of blissful body and eyes of far desire?

IV

Count the hours that bind and freeze,
That break the breast and shake the knees!
What need of Time's all-patient dial
To him that drinks of this deep phial?
These perfumed hours of white and red
Flowered and were never shed.
It might have been a morning's span
Or twice and thrice the years of man:
For Ruan was not Then nor Now;
He was as young as his desire, as young
As on sweet lips an old song newly sung.
O idle thought to number how
The days onrushed, the morrow flushed.
Thicker than blossoms on an apple-bough.
But on a morn at early dawn awaking
He saw the cold light through the lattice breaking.
A spider there her web had made;
Softly in the air it swayed.
Memory in a drowsy muse
Lost and sought such filmy clues.
Till upon a sudden plain
In Ruan's vision, sharp like pain,
Pictured was his home again,
And the long nets, loosely hung
From the white wall, stirred and swung.
He rose and broke into a mournful cry,
Which Morgaine heard with half-shut eye
And caught him with both hands and strove
To turn him with soft words of love,
But he would not; so sharp a pang
Of desolation in him sprang
For all the dearness long forgot
In his own kind's deserted lot;
A tear fell from his eyelids hot
Upon the marble floor below.
He wept; and in an instant, lo!
Beheld the floor transparent glow.
Yawning, a spectral region shone

Where cold abysses plunged betwixt
Sheer mountain column-peaks whereon
That very palace-floor was fixt.
Ruan shuddered as he gazed.
For toward his eyes were eyes upraised
From human faces, forms that froze
Within the rock-walls as they rose,
A thousand forms, a prisoned host
Imbedded in the mountain frost.
But swift a storm of wind and fire
Up those abysses roared and rushed;
The shapes were stirred; a vain desire—
As they would struggle, nearer, higher,—
Their eyes awoke, their bodies flushed.
And then the blast as sudden passed,
The limbs of torment slowly sank
To ice-green languor, fleshless bone,
And starving ruggedness of stone;
The life within them swooned and shrank
To dungeoned attitudes again,
Their half-closed upturned eyes alone
Were gazing in the gaze of pain.

With eyes of horror opened wide
"Save me, save me!" Ruan cried.
But Morgaine in her arms hath wound him,
Her panting fierce embrace hath bound him,
Her eyes exulting change and glow
Like lights upon a shaken sword.
She pants as in unearthly throe,
Her arms cling tighter than a cord;
How shall Ruan dare to brook
The demon challenge of her look?

"Listen, Ruan, canst thou hear
How the whole world cries in fear?
Lights not splendour in the air
To dance above the world's despair?
They toil in hunger, grief and night
For our desire, for our delight—

They the twisting roots, and we
The topmost red flower on the tree!"

But Ruan with both hands that pressed
Against the burning of her breast,
Trembled and groaned in that embrace,
And strove from that exultant face,
When soft she melted, sank before him, kneeled
And clung, beseeching him that would not yield.
"They are my flesh, my blood, and I
Must go to seek them, or I die."
When Morgaine heard that lamentable cry
She knew the heart of joy in him was dead,
Looked in his soul and saw her hour had fled.

"Go then," she wept, "but come again
To thy delight, to thy Morgaine.
Yet if thou go, this casket take with thee;
Hid in thy breast, 'twill guide thee safe to me
Without a rudder o'er the wandering sea,
But O beware thou never open this,
Else art thou lost and all thy hope of bliss.
Farewell!" she kissed him, "Farewell," Ruan said,
And took the casket with averted head,
Nor turned him back, but swiftly passed the door
Of the charmed house, and came to the seashore.

V

O what a calm as of old days come back
With their old wont and clear untroubled way
Lifted the heart of Ruan, on the track
Of ocean steering for his native bay!
Over blue waves the morning air sang sweet
Full on his sail; he was all fire to greet
The hearth of home, his father's joyful face,
His mother's tears and tremulous embrace.
He sailed beneath the summer's early noon
With the warm favouring wind; and strangely soon

Rose up the coast, till nearing on the swell
He saw the dark waves glitter as they fell
Against the cliff's worn bases, drained of foam.
Now he is past the headland. There is home!
The boats drawn up, the sands, and the green mound
Beyond them; peaceful, sunned, familiar ground.
It seemed he had not been three days away.
With a light heart he beached amid the spray
His boat, and moored it as of old, and sprang
Ashore; a young girl to a baby sang,
Sitting on fishing-nets spread forth to dry.
She looked up, and her song stopped, and her eye
Was filled with wonder; but impatiently
Ruan ran up the beach, where he might catch
The first glimpse of his father's cottage thatch.
He came, he looked; and the heart in him failed.
The house was not. What lonely strangeness ailed
The world? He thrust his hand within his vest
And felt the casket cold upon his breast.
Helpless he gazed; but lo, there slowly came
An old man with a stick, coughing and lame,
Bowed by his years; then towards him Ruan ran,
With a swift thought of pity, almost scorn,
In his young strength for such old age forlorn,
And cried upon the way, "Old man, old man,
Where is my father? Surely thou know'st me;
I am Ruan, Ruan! I am home from sea."
The old man lifted up his faint blue eye
And peered upon him slow and curiously
As on some strange thing from the sea upcast.
"Nay, Ruan's name I know not," came at last
The answer. Ruan cried, "Dwell'st thou not here?"
"Ay, all my life, three-score and fifteen year."
"And yet thou know'st not Ruan?" The old man
Puzzled his withered brow as he began
Seeking some far-sunk memory in his brain.
"Ay, so it is," he slowly spoke again,
"They told a tale of Ruan; ay, 'tis so.
How he was lost, but that was long ago,
Hundreds of years, I think; he sailed away,

And his old parents died of grief, they say."
He still spoke on: but Ruan heard no more,
For he was wandering fast along the shore
In the lone sunshine; aimlessly he strayed,
Dazzled and indescribably afraid.
On a sudden flamed a thought
Through his body: straight he sought
Within his breast the casket hid,
Crying, "Morgaine, thou shalt tell,
Though the answer come from Hell!"
With trembling fingers he undid
The silken cord, the golden lid.
Lo, from the opened casket broke
A stealing skein of purple smoke,
A wandering faint cloud of perfume
That rippled up in filmy plume,
And lingered, faltering like a prayer,
Then melted into sunlit air.
Three hundred years had melted there,
Three hundred years of faery bliss,
Perished sooner than a single kiss!
As Ruan stares upon the empty box,
His outstretched fingers stiffen stark,
His cheek is shrivelled, his eyes grow dark,
Either knee together knocks;
Ere he can pray, ere he can groan.
Swift as grass in a furnace thrown,
Or a crumpled clod in a heedless hand,
He withers into whitened bone.
Where his breathing body stood,
Flushed with life and warm with blood
Is a heap of ashes, a drift of sand,
And the wind blowing, and the silent strand.

TRANSLATIONS FROM DANTE

INFERNO

CANTO I

Midway the journey of this life I was 'ware
That I had strayed into a dark forest,
And the right path appeared not anywhere.
Ah, tongue cannot describe how it oppressed,
This wood, so harsh, dismal and wild, that fear
At thought of it strikes now into my breast.
So bitter it is, death is scarce bitterer.
But, for the good it was my hap to find,
I speak of the other things that I saw there.
I cannot well remember in my mind
How I came thither, so was I immersed
In sleep, when the true way I left behind.
But when my footsteps had attained the first
Slope of a hill, at the end of that drear vale
Which with such terror had my spirit pierced,
I looked up, and beheld its shoulders pale
Already in clothing of that planet's light
Which guideth men on all roads without fail.
Then had my bosom a little of respite
From what had all the lake of my heart tost
While I so piteously endured the night.
As one, whom pantings of his breath exhaust,
Escaped from the deep water to the shore,
Turns back and gazes on the danger crost,
So my mind, fleeing still and stricken sore,
Turned back to gaze astonished on that pass
Which none hath ever left alive before.

When my tired body had rested a brief space
I trod anew the slope, desert and bare,
With the firmer foot still in the lower place.
And at the ascent, as't were on the first stair,
Behold! a Leopard light and swift of limb
And covered with a hide of spotted hair.
And he would not depart, but still would trim
His pace to front me, so that many a time
I turned me to go back, because of him.
The moment was the morning's earliest prime,
And the sun mounted up, accompanied
With those stars chosen in his choir to climb
When divine Love first motioned and enskied
Those beauteous things; so that a hope I caught
To evade that creature with the freckled hide.
The hour of time and the sweet season wrought
Thus on me; yet not so much, but when appeared
A Lion, terror to my heart he brought,
He seemed coming against me with head reared
Ravening with hunger, and so terrible
That the very air seemed of his breath afeared.
And a She-Wolf, that in her famished fell
Looked all infuriate craving; she hath meant
To many ere now that they in misery dwell.
On me the grimness of her aspect sent
A burden that my spirit overpowered,
So that I lost the hope of the ascent.
As one that is with lust of gain devoured,
When comes the time that makes him lose, will
rack
His thoughts, lamenting all his hope deflowered,
To such state brought me, in dread of his attack,
That restless beast, who by degrees perforce
To where the Sun is silent drove me back.
While I was rushing on my downward course
Suddenly on my sight there seemed to start
One who appeared from a long silence hoarse.
When I beheld him in that great desert
"Have pity on me!" I cried out to his face,
"Whatsoever—shade or very man—thou art."

He answered me: "Not man; man once I was.
 My parents both were of the Lombard name,
 Of Mantua by their country and by their race.
Sub Julio was I born, though late I came:
 In Rome the good Augustus on me shone,
 In the time of the false Gods of lying fame,
 Poet was I, and sang of that just son
 Of old Anchises, who came out from Troy
 After the burning of proud Ilion.
 But thou, why turn'st thou back to such annoy?
 Why climbest not the Mount Delectable
 Whence groweth the beginning of all joy?"
 "And art thou, then, that Virgil, and that well
 Which pours abroad so ample a stream of song?"
 I answered him abashed, with front that fell.
 "O glory and light of all the poets' throng!
 May the ardent study and great love serve me now
 Which made me to peruse thy book so long!
 Thou art my Master and my Author thou.
 Thou only art he from whom the noble style
 I took, wherein my merit men avow,
 Regard yon beast from which I made recoil!
 Help me from her, renowned sage, for she
 Puts all my veins and pulses in turmoil."
 "Needs must thou find another way to flee,"
 He answered, seeing my eyes with weeping fill,
 "If thou from this wild place wouldst get thee
 free;
 Because this beast, at which thou criest still,
 Suffereth none to go upon her path,
 But hindereth and entangleth till she kill,
 And hath a nature so perverse in wrath,
 Her craving maw never is satiated
 But after food the fiercer hunger hath.
 Many are the creatures with whom she hath wed,
 And shall be yet more, till appear the Hound
 By whom she is to die discomfited.
 He will not batten on pelf or fruitful ground,
 But wisdom, love, and virtue shall he crave.
 'Twixt Feltro and Feltro shall his folk abound.

He that abased Italy shall save,
For which Euryalus, Turnus, Nisus died,
For which her virgin blood Camilla gave.
And her through every city far and wide
Back into Hell's deep dungeon shall he chase,
Whence envy first let loose her ravening stride.
Wherefore I judge this fittest for thy case
That I should lead thee, and thou follow in faith,
To journey hence through an eternal place,
Where thou shalt hear cries of despairing breath,
Shalt look on the ancient spirits in their pain,
Such that each calls out for a second death.
And thou shalt see those who in fire refrain
From sorrow, since they hope to come in the end,
Whensoever it be, where bliss they may obtain.
To whom if thou desirest to ascend
There shall be a spirit worthier than I,
When I depart, who shall thy steps befriend.
For that Lord Emperor who doth reign on high,
Because I was not to his law submit,
Wills not that I to his city come too nigh.
In every part he ruleth, and all is his,
There is his city, there is his high seat:
O happy, whom he chooseth for that bliss!"
And I to him: "O Poet, I entreat
In the name of that God whom thou didst not
know,
So that I 'scape this ill and worse ill yet,
Lead me where thou hast spoken of but now.
So that my eyes St. Peter's gate may find
And those whom thou portrayest in such woe!"
Then he moved onward: and I went behind.

CANTO II

The day was going, and the umber'd air
Was taking from its toil each animal
That is on the earth; I only, alone there,

Essayed to arm my spirit against all
 The terror of the journey and pity's plea,
 Which memory, that errs not, shall recall.
 O Muses, O high Genius, strengthen me!
 O Memory, that what I saw hast writ,
 Here shall be made known thine integrity.
 I began: "Poet, who guidest now my feet,
 Look if the virtue in me avail to endure
 The arduous pass, ere thou trust me to it.
 Thou sayest the father of Silvius went secure
 In his corruptible body, and that world knew
 Which Death knows not, of all his senses sure.
 But if the Adversary of Sin that due
 Of favour gave him, weighing the high effect
 And who, and what, should be his great issue,
 This seems not unmeet to man's intellect;
 For he was born to father and prepare
 Rome and her fostering rule, as one elect.
 Both of these, the true history to declare,
 Were the foundations of that sainted spot
 Which is the seat of greatest Peter's heir.
 By this adventure, whence thy praise he got,
 He learned things that for him were argument
 Of victory, and the Papal Mantle wrought.
 Afterwards too the Chosen Vessel went
 The confirmation of that faith to bring
 Which is for way of our salvation sent.
 But I, why go? By whose commissioning?
 I am not Æneas, no, nor Paul: too weak
 I, and others also, deem me, for this thing.
 If I resign me, then, that world to seek,
 I fear the quest prove folly and accurst.
 Thou art wise and canst divine more than I speak."
 And like one who unwills what he willed first
 And by new thoughts his former thoughts grow
 sick,
 So that his resolution is dispersed,
 So on that dim slope did my purpose stick,
 For I with thinking had dulled down the zest
 That at the starting sprang so prompt and quick.

"If rightly I read the trouble in thy breast"
 The shade of the Magnanimous replied,
 "With cowardice thy spirit is oppressed.
 Which oftentimes a man hath mortified,
 So that it turns him back from noble deed,
 As with false seeing a beast will start aside.
 Now, that thy heart may from this fear be freed,
 Hear why I came and what I heard, and where,
 When first I felt the pity of thy need.
 I was with those who are in suspense: and there
 A Lady of so great beauty and blessedness,
 I craved for her command, called me to her.
 Her eyes so shone, the Morning Star shines less.
 And she began to speak, gentle and low,
 In the angel voice that did her soul express:
 O courteous Mantuan spirit, whom men fame so
 That thy renown yet lasts, and till Time end
 The motion of his hours, shall greater grow,
 He that is my friend, but not fortune's friend,
 Stands so bewildered on the desert moor
 That from the way he shrinks, in terror penned.
 Already I fear he may have erred so sore
 That I have risen to succour him too late,
 From what I have heard of him within Heaven's
 door.
 Go now, and with thy poet's speech ornate
 And what means else may rescue courage weak
 Help him, and me deliver of this care's weight.
 I am Beatrice who send thee, him to seek.
 I come from that place for which now I sigh.
 It was love moved me and made my lips to speak.
 Often to thy praise will I testify
 When I am come into my Lord's presence.
 She then was silent; and I made reply:
 O Lady, who art the only virtue whence
 Mankind may overpass what is contained
 Within the heaven of least circumference,
 So welcome is the bidding thou hast deigned,
 That were it now done, it were done too slow.
 Needs not thy wish further to be explained:

But tell me why into this core of woe
 Thou shun'st not to descend, turning thy face
 From the ample air, whither thou yearn'st to go?
 Since thou, she answered, so much of this case
 To know desirest, briefly shalt thou hear
 Why I shrink not to come into this place.
 Those things that have the power to wound and sear,
 To them alone should due of dread be paid;
 To the others not, they are not things to fear.
 I am by God so, in his mercy, made,
 I am not hurt by touching of your pain,
 Nor in the scorch of this fire am I frayed.
 There is a glorious Lady in heaven who hath ta'en
 So great compassion on this soul distressed
 That the hard law she hath chosen to restrain.
 She called to her Lucy, and made request,
 Saying, Now thy faithful one hath need of thee:
 I entrust him to thee; and do thou the rest.
 Lucy, the enemy of all cruelty,
 Arose and came and stood within my gaze
 There, where the ancient Rachel sat by me.
 She spoke and said: Beatrice, God's true praise,
 Why help'st thou not him, who loved thee so
 That for thy sake he left the vile crowd's ways?
 Hearest thou not the plaining of his woe?
 Seest thou not what death would him undo
 By that wild stream the sea may not o'ercrow?
 None in the world was ever swift to ensue
 His good, or fly his hurt, as these my feet
 At once after those words were uttered few
 Hasted to come down from my blessed seat,
 Confiding in thy speech, so nobly graced
 It honours both thee and those hearing it.
 Having said this, her footsteps she retraced
 Turning from me her eyes that wept and shone;
 At sight of which she made me more to haste.
 Thus I came to thee, as she desired, and won
 Thee from that ravening beast which would with-
 hold
 The short way to the Beateous Mount begun.

What is it, then, keeps thee? Why, why haltest cold?
Why in thy heart nourishes! fear so base?
Why art thou not delivered, eager, bold,
When three such blessed Ladies of their grace
Care in the court of Heaven for thy plight,
And my words promise thee such good to embrace?"

As little flowers, that by the chill of night
Are closed, prick up their stems drooping and bent,
And to the early ray re-open white,
So was it with my courage fallen and spent;
And I began, as one from bondage freed,
So good a warmth about my body went,
"O most compassionate She, who helps my need!
O courteous thou, who to that uttered word
Didst listen, and to its truth so swift give heed!
Thou makest me so eager in accord
With what thou say'st, and quickenest so my heart,
That to my first resolve I am restored.

Now it is one will moves us both; thou art
Guide, master, lord!" These words to him I said,
And then, perceiving that he made to start,
Began the desolate, arduous path to tread.

CANTO III

"Through me the way is to the City of Woe:
Through me the way into the eternal pain;
Through me the way among the lost below.
Righteousness did my maker on high constrain.
Me did divine Authority uprear;
Me supreme Wisdom and primal Love sustain.
Before I was, no things created were
Save the eternal, and I eternal abide.
Relinquish all hope, ye who enter here."
These words, of a dim colour, I espied
Written above the lintel of a door.
Whereat; "Master, the sense is hard," I cried.

And he, as one experienced in that lore;
 "Here all mistrustfulness must thou reject.
 Here cowardice must die and be no more.
 We are come to the place I told thee to expect,
 Where thou shouldst see the people whom pain stings
 And who have lost the good of the intellect."
 His hand on mine, to uphold my falterings,
 With looks of cheer that bade me comfort keep,
 He led me on into the secret things.
 Here lamentation, groans, and wailings deep
 Reverberated through the starless air,
 So that it made me at the beginning weep.
 Uncouth tongues, horrible shriekings of despair,
 Deep voices rasped, outcries of pain and rage,
 And, with it all, smiting of hands, were there,
 Making a tumult, nothing could assuage,
 To swirl in air not by the seasons dyed,
 Like sand within the whirlwind's eddying cage.
 And I, whose head swam with the horror, cried;
 "Master, what is it that my ear affrays?
 Who are these that seem in pain so crushed to
 gride?"
 And he to me: "These miserable ways
 The forlorn spirits endure of those who spent
 Life without infamy and without praise.
 They are mingled with that caitiff regiment
 Of the angels, who rebelled not, yet avowed
 To God no loyalty, on themselves intent.
 Heaven chased them forth, lest their allegiance cloud
 Its beauty, and the deep Hell refuses them,
 For, beside such, the sinner would be proud."
 And I: "Master, what is the grief extreme
 Which makes them so their fortune execrate?"
 He answered; "Brief words best their case beseem.
 They have no hope of death; and their estate
 Is so abased in the blind life they own
 That they are envious of all others' fate.
 Report of them the world permitteth none.
 Mercy and Justice have them in disdain.
 Let us not talk of them. Look, and pass on."

I, who looked, beheld a banner all a-strain,
 Which moved, and, as it moved, so quickly spun
 That never a respite it appeared to deign.
 And after it I saw so many run,
 I had not believed, they seemed so numberless,
 That Death so great a legion had undone.
 When I had marked some few among the press,
 I chanced the shade of him to recognize
 Who made the great refusal, from meanness.
 Forthwith I was assured, and knew mine eyes
 Looked of a truth on the abject crew that were
 Odious to God and to his enemies.
 These paltry, who never were alive, were bare
 As to the body, and all about were stung
 By stings of the wasps and hornets that were there.
 Because of these, blood, from their faces sprung,
 Was mingled with their tears and flowed to feast
 The loathly worms about their feet that clung.
 Then as my peering eyes made further quest,
 I saw folk on the shore of a great stream.
 "Master," I said, "make to me manifest
 Who these are and what habit inureth them
 Willingly to pass over and be gone,
 If rightly I can discern by the faint gleam."
 And he to me: "The things shall all be known
 To thy understanding when our steps are stayed
 Upon the mournful shores of Acheron."
 Casting abashed eyes downward, and afraid
 Lest that my words should some offence have
 wrought,
 I ceased from speech until the stream we made.
 And toward us lo! arriving in a boat
 An Ancient, white with hair upon him old,
 Crying, "Woe to you, ye spirits misbegot!
 Hope not that heaven ye ever shall behold.
 I come to carry you to yon shore, and lead
 Into the eternal darkness, heat and cold.
 And thou who art a living spirit, with speed
 Get hence, nor with these who are dead delay—"

But when he noted that I took no heed,

He said, "By another ferry, another way
 Of entrance must thou seek to pass, not here.
 Needs must a lighter vessel thee convey."
 My Guide to him: "Charon, thy frowns forbear.
 Thus is this thing willed there, where what is
 willed
 Can be accomplished. Further question spare."
 Then were the shaggy cheeks from trouble stilled
 Of that old steersman on the livid fen
 Around whose eyes flames in a circle wheeled.
 But those forlorn and naked spirits of men
 Changed colour, chattering with their teeth, all
 numb,
 Soon as the harsh words sounded in their ken.
 They blasphemed God, blasphemed their mother's
 womb,
 The human kind, the place, the time, the seed
 Of their engendering, and their birth and doom;
 Then weeping all together in their sad need
 Betook themselves to the accursed shore
 Which awaits each who of God takes no heed.
 Charon, the demon, beckoning before,
 With eyes of glowing coal, assembles all:
 Whoever lags, he beats him with his oar.
 And as the late leaves of November fall
 One after one till on the earthen floor
 The ruined bough looks on their funeral,
 So by that river Adam's seed impure
 Cast themselves from the wharf, one after one,
 At signals, as the bird goes to the lure.
 Thus are they borne across the water dun;
 And ere they disembark on the far strand
 On this another gathering is begun.
 "Son," said the courteous Master, "understand
 That all those who have died in the anger of
 God
 Congregate hither out of every land.
 And they are prompt to pass over the flood
 For Divine Justice pricketh in them so
 That fear is changed to longing in their blood.

By this way no good spirit is seen to go.
Therefore if Charon doth of thee complain,
What his words mean thou easily may'st know."
When he had ended, the whole shadowy plain
Shuddered so strongly, that the terror past
Still at the memory bathes me in sweat again.
Out of the region of tears came forth a blast
That made a crimson light before me leap
And numbness over all my senses cast.
And I fell, like to one seized with a sleep.

CANTO IV

Rumble of thunder upon my brain deep-drowsed
So shook the sleep that at the heavy sound
I started, like a man by force aroused.
And my now rested eyes casting around
I rose upright, with peering gaze intent
To know the place wherein myself I found.
True it is, I stood on the edge of the descent
Where the hollow of the gulf out of despair
Amasses thunder of infinite lament.
Sombre, profound, and brimmed with vaporous air
It was, so that I, seeking to pierce through
To the very bottom, could see nothing there.
"Let us go down to the blind world below,"
Began to me the Poet, all amort.
"I shall be first, and thou behind me go."
And I, who had marked his cheek change in that sort,
Said: "How shall I come where thou lovest cheer
Who art wont my hesitation to support?"
And he to me: "The misery that is here,
Down among this folk, maketh my face wan
With pity, which thine eyes mistake for fear.
Descend we: the long way constrains us on."
So he entered, and he made me enter too,
On the first circle that the abyss doth zone.

Here was no sound that the ear could catch of rue,
 Save only of sighs, that still as they complain
 Make the eternal air tremble anew.
 And this rose from the sorrow, unracked by pain,
 That was in the great multitude below
 Of children and of women and of men.
 The good Master to me: "Wouldst thou not know
 What spirits are these thou seest and hearest
 grieve?
 I'd have thee learn before thou farther go,
 These sinned not: but the merit that they achieve
 Helps not, since baptism was not theirs, the gate
 Of that faith, which was given thee to believe.
 And if ere Christ they came, untimely in date,
 They worshipped not with right experience;
 And I myself am numbered in their state,
 For such defect and for no other offence
 We are lost, and only in so far amerced
 That without hope we languish in suspense."
 I, when I heard this, to the heart was pierced,
 Because I knew men to much virtue bred
 Whose spirits in that Limbo were athirst.
 "Tell me, my Master, tell me, Sir!" I said,
 Seized with a longing wholly to be assured
 Of that faith wherein error cannot tread,
 "Did ever any of those herein immured
 By his own or other's merit to bliss get free?"
 And he, aware what meant my covert word,
 Answered: "I was yet new in this degree
 When I saw one in power crowned appear
 On whom the signs of victory were to see.
 He took from us the shade of our first sire;
 Of his son Abel, and Noah of that same seed;
 Moses, the obedient and the law-giver;
 The patriarch, Abraham, and the King, David;
 Israel with his father and with his sons;
 Rachel also, to win whom so much he did;
 And many another; and made them blessed ones;
 And I would have thee know that, before these,
 There has been no human soul that he atones."

We ceased not to go on by slow degrees,
 Though he spoke still, and past the wood had come,
 The wood I say of spirits thick like trees,
 And, since my slumber, had not advanced therefrom
 Far, when a radiant glow beyond us shone
 Which overcame a hemisphere of gloom.
 A little distance from us it lay on,
 Yet not so much but that I saw in part
 What honourable folk that place had won,
 "O thou that honourest all Science and Art,
 Who are these that have such honour and acclaim
 That it removes them from the rest apart?"
 And he to me: "The glory of the name
 Which sounds of them above in the earthly sphere
 Gains favour of Heaven which thus promoteth
 them."
 Meanwhile a voice was sounding in my ear:
 "Honour ye all the great Poet: his shade
 That had departed, now again is here."
 After the voice had paused and silent stayed,
 I saw four great shades come with one accord.
 They had an aspect neither gay nor sad.
 The good Master began to speak his word:
 "On him who bears the sword thine eyes now cast,
 Who comes before the others, as their lord.
 He is Homer, who all poets hath surpassed.
 The next who comes is Horace, satirist,
 Ovid the third, and Lucan is the last.
 Because each nature doth with mine consist
 By virtue of that name which the one voice chose
 They do me honour, and themselves not least."
 Thus I saw gather the noble school of those
 Masters of soaring song, whose sovran style
 Over the others like an eagle goes.
 After they had talked together a little while,
 They turned to me and welcoming signs displayed:
 At which salute I saw my Master smile.
 And yet more honour unto me they paid,
 For me into their band did they invite,
 So that I a sixth amid such wisdom made.

Thus we went moving onwards toward the light
Speaking such things as here were better mute,
Though there to speak them was both meet and
right.

Now came we to a Noble Castle's foot,
With lofty walls seven times engirdled round,
And a fair rivulet moated it about.

This we passed over as it had been dry ground.
Through seven gates entering with those sages, lo!
A meadow of fresh verdure there I found.

On it were people with grave eyes and slow,
And great authority was in their mien.
They spoke seldom, with mild voices and low.

Thus we retired on one side that demesne
Into an open, luminous, high place,
So that they stood where they could all be seen.

There on the green enamel, face to face,
Were shown me the great spirits, so that I
Exalt myself to have enjoyed such grace.

I saw Electra in a great company
Among whom Hector and Æneas were,
And armed Caesar with the falcon eye.

I saw Camilla and Penthesilea there
Over against them, and the Latian King;
Lavinia his daughter sitting near;

That Brutus who drove out the proud Tarquin;
Lucrece, Cornelia, Julia, Marcia, four
Together, and by himself the Saladin.

When I had raised my eyes a little more,
I saw the Master of those who know: he sate
Amid the sons Philosophy to him bore.

All do him honour, all eyes on him wait.

Here I beheld Plato and Socrates
Who of all are nearest to his high estate.

Democritus, whose world blind Chance decrees;
Diogenes, Thales, Anaxagoras;

Zeno, Heraclitus, and Empedocles:

Him who was skilled the virtue of plants to class,
Dioscorides, I saw; and Orpheus' shade;
Tully's and Linus'; moral Seneca's.

Euclid, and Ptolemy, who the stars surveyed;
Hippocrates, Avicenna, and Galen,
Averroes also, who the Comment made.
I may not portray all in the full scene,
Being hurried on so by the long theme's care,
That oft the word comes short of the thing seen.
The band of six to two hath dwindled, where
By another road the sage Escort inclines
Out of the quiet into the trembling air.
I come to a place where there is naught that shines.

CANTO V

From the first circle I thus descended down
Into the second, which less space admits,
And so much more pain that it stings to groan.
There Minos, hideously grinning, sits,
Inspects the offences at the entering in,
Judges and, as he girds himself, commits.
I say, that when the ill-born spirit comes in
Before his presence, he confesses all;
Thereon that scrutinizer of each sin
Sees what place Hell holds for its fittest stall;
Round him as many times his tail doth throw
As the degrees he wills that it should fall.
Always before him stand they, row on row;
To sentence comes each of the wretched train:
They tell, and hear; and straight are whirled below.
"O thou, who comest to the home of pain,"
Said Minos to me, when my face he spied,
Leaving his business of the great Arraign,
"Beware in whom thou, entering, dost confide.
Let not the broad approach thy feet ensnare."
"Why criest thou out?" Answered to him my
Guide:
"Hinder thou not his destined steps. Forbear!
Thus is the thing willed there, where what is willed
Can be accomplished. Further question spare."

Now begin wailing notes; the flesh is thrilled
 To hear them and to feel them. I am come
 Where thronging lamentations hold me chilled.
 I came into a place of all light dumb
 That bellows like a storm in the sea-deep
 When the thwart winds that strike it roar and hum.
 The abysmal tempest that can never sleep
 Snatches the spirits and headlong hurries them,
 Beats and besets them with its whirling sweep.
 When they arrive before the ruin, stream
 The cries up; there the wail is and the moan,
 There the divine perfection they blaspheme.
 I learnt that in such restless violence blown'
 This punishment the carnal sinners share
 Who let Desire pull Reason from her throne.
 And as their beating wings the starlings bear
 At the cold season, in broad flocking flight,
 So those corrupted spirits were rapt in air
 To and fro, down, up, driven in helpless flight,
 Comforted by no hope ever to lie
 At rest, nor even to bear a pain more light.
 And as the cranes in long line streak the sky
 And in procession chant their mournful call,
 So I saw come with sound of wailing by
 The shadows fluttering in the tempest's brawl.
 Whereat, "O Master, who are these," I said,
 "On whom the black winds with their scourges
 fall?"
 "The first of those concerning whom thou hast prayed
 To know," he answered, "had dominion
 Of many tongues, which she as empress swayed.
 So wild a race of luxury did she run,
 That she made lust a law by her decree,
 To obliterate the shame that she had won.
 She is Semiramis: we read that she
 Came after Ninus, and had been his bride.
 She ruled the land the Soldan holds in fee.
 That other is she who by her own hand died
 For love's sake, to Sichaeus' urn untrue.
 Lascivious Cleopatra comes beside.

See Helen, for whose sake the long years drew
 Ill after ill; see great Achilles there.
 Who fought with love in the end, and whom love
 slew.
 See Paris, Tristram!" More than a thousand pair
 He with his finger pointing at shades of fame
 Showed me, whom love had power from life to tear.
 After that I had heard my Teacher name
 Each lady of old, lost with her lovely knight,
 My thoughts were mazed, such pity upon me came.
 I began: "Poet, I fain would, if I might,
 Speak with those two that hand in hand appear
 And, as they move, seem to the wind so light."
 And he to me: "When they approach more near,
 Thou shalt see. By the love which is their guide
 Do thou entreat them then, and they will hear."
 Soon as the wind's whirl made them nearer glide,
 I raised my voice up: "O tired spirits, come
 And speak with us, if that be not denied."
 Eagerly as a pair of pigeons, whom
 Desire calls, and their will bears, down the sky
 On wide unfaltering wings to their sweet home,
 So swerved those spirits from out the company
 Where Dido is, flying toward us underneath
 The ghastr mirk; such a power had my fond cry.
 "O kind and gracious creature that hast breath
 And comest journeying through the black air
 To us who made the earth bloody with our death,
 Were but the world's Lord friend to us, a prayer
 Should from us both implore Him for thy peace
 Because thou hast taken pity on our despair.
 Whether to speak or listen better please,
 We will speak with you, and hear and understand,
 Now while the lull'd wind spares a little ease.
 The place where I was born sits on the strand
 Where Po descends to his peace, and with him takes
 All the other streams that follow him down the land.
 Love, that in gentle heart so soon awakes,
 Took him with this fair body, which from me
 Was torn: the way and wound of it yet aches.

Love, that to no loved one remits his fee,
 Took me with joy of him, so deep in-wrought,
 Even now it hath not left me, as thou dost see.
 Love led us both to one death. He that sought
 And spilt our life—Cain's place awaits him now."
 These words to us upon the wind were brought.
 When I had heard those wounded spirits, my brow
 Sank downward, and I held it where it was,
 Until the Poet spoke: "What musest thou?"
 And when I answered, I began: "Alas!
 How many sweet thoughts and what longings fain
 Led them into the lamentable pass!"
 I turned, and I began to speak again:
 "Francesca, the tears prick into mine eyes
 For sorrow, and for pity of thy pain.
 But tell me: in the time of the sweet sighs
 How did Love vouchsafe proof of what he is,
 And of the obscure yearnings make you wise?"
 And she to me: "No grief surpasses this
 (And that thy Teacher also knows full well)—
 In the midst of misery to remember bliss.
 But if thou so desire to know how fell
 The seed whose first root in our bosoms fed,
 I'll tell, as one who can but weep and tell.
 One day together, for pastime, we read
 Of Launcelot, and how Love held him in thrall.
 We were alone, and without any dread.
 Sometimes our eyes, at the word's secret call,
 Met, and our cheeks a changing colour wore.
 But it was one page only that did all.
 When we read how that smile, so thirsted for,
 Was kissed by such a lover, he that may
 Never from me be separated more
 All trembling kissed my mouth. The book I say
 Was a Galahalt to us, and he beside
 That wrote the book. We read no more that day."
 While the one spirit spoke thus, the other cried
 So lamentably, that the whole life fled
 For pity out of me, as if I died;
 And I fell, like a body falling dead.

CANTO VI

When my mind came back, that had closed at
sight
Of those two kinsfolk in their misery bound,
Pity of which in sorrow had mazed me quite,
New torments, new tormented ones around,
Whatever step I take, wherever strain
My eyes, I see, peopling the shadowy ground,
I am now in the Third Circle of the Rain,
Eternal, cold, accurst, and charged with woe.
Its law and quality ever the same remain.
Big hail, and clots of muddied water, and snow
Pour downward through the darkness of the air:
The ground they beat stinks with the overflow.
Cerberus, cruel and uncouth monster, there
Stretches his three throats out and hound-like bays
Over the people embogged about his lair.
His beard is slobbered black, his red eyes blaze,
His belly is big, his hands clawed; and with growl
The spirits he clutches, rends piecemeal and flays.
The rain provoketh them like dogs to howl.
They with one side the other strive to screen:
Often they turn themselves, those sinners foul.
When we by Cerberus, the great Worm, were seen,
He showed the tusks within each grinning jaw:
He had no limb but quivered with his spleen.
My Guide spread out his palms, when this he saw,
And took up clods of earth, and with full fist
Crammed them into each madly ravening maw.
And like the craving dog whose barks persist
But whom the first full bites of food appease,
For all his fever is but to champ that grist,
So was it with those squalid visages
Of demon Cerberus, who roars so loud
The spirits would fain that deafness gave them
ease.
Now passed we on over the shadows bowed
Beneath the crushing rain, and our feet set
On seeming bodies that were empty as cloud.

They all lay grovelling prone amid the wet
 Save one who sat up quickly and raised his
 head,
 Seeing us pass before him, and our eyes met.
 "O thou who through this drizzling hell art led,"
 He cried out, "Recognize me if thou may'st,
 For thou wast made before I was unmade."
 And I to him: "The anguish which thou hast
 It may be so obscures thee to my mind
 That 'tis for me as if thou never wast.
 But tell me: who art thou in such place confined
 And to such punishment condemned, that though
 Worse may be, none is of so loathsome kind."
 And he to me: "Thy city, which brims so
 With envy that the sack is ripe to spill,
 Contained me in the sunny life ye know.
 You citizens called me Ciacco: I did ill.
 For the fell sin of gluttony I atone.
 Thou seest how in the rain I suffer still.
 And I, unhappy spirit, am not alone.
 For all of these are in like penal state
 For the like trespass." More he would speak none.
 I answered him: "Ciacco, thy piteous fate
 Weighs on me so, it moves me to lament.
 But, if thou canst, tell me what things await
 The citizens of the city that strife has rent,
 If any in it be just: and tell me why
 Such discord doth within it so ferment."
 And he to me: "They from contention high
 Shall come to blood; the Party of the White
 With contumely shall force the other to fly.
 This one must fall ere three suns spend their light,
 And the other shall in turn prevail, upborne
 By him who now keeps tacking left and right.
 Long shall it hold high the proud front of scorn,
 Making the other with sore burdens bleed,
 Though with the shame of bondage it be torn.
 Two indeed are just: but none to them gives heed.
 Pride, Envy, and Avarice are the triple spark
 Which sows in all those bosoms fiery seed."

Here ended he his lamentation dark.

And I to him: "Continue, for I would

Hear yet more from thee and thine instruction mark.

Farinata and Tegghiaio, who worthiest stood,

Arrigo, Rusticucci, and Mosca, and those

Others who fixed their will on doing good,

Where are they? And what place found they at the
close?

For fain would I be certain, if I may,

Whether they taste Hell's poison or Heaven's re-
pose."

And he to me: "Among the blackest they.

Them may'st thou see, if thou so far descend,

Whom different guilt doth to the bottom weigh.

But when thou art come to the sweet world, befriend

My memory, and recall to men my fate.

No more I tell thee: here I make an end."

He twisted then his eyes askint from straight,

Looked at me a little, and then bowed down his
head

And mid his blind companions fell prostrate.

My Guide spoke to me: "No more from that bed

He wakes until the angel trumpet sounds

When the adverse Power shall make his advent
dread.

They shall revisit then their sad grave-mounds,

And each his flesh and his own shape resume,

And hear what through eternity resounds."

Thus passed we on through the commingled gloom

Of the shadows and the rain with paces slow,

Touching a little on the life to come.

Wherefore I said: "Master, these pangs of woe,—

Shall they be increased after the great Assize

Or stay scorching as now, or lesser grow?"

And he: "Turn to thy science and be wise.

The more a thing perfected is, the more

It feels bliss, and in pain the sharper sighs.

Although the state of these accurst at core

Never indeed in true perfection ends,

They look then to be nearer than before."

We made along that circle as round it bends,
Speaking much more than I repeat, till we
Attained the point whereat the road descends.
Here found we Plutus, the Great Enemy.

CANTO VII

"Pape Satan, Aleppe, Pape Satan!"

That gentle sage who knew what all speech meant,
When Plutus thus with clucking noise began,
Said for my comfort: "Fear not, nor repent
Thy journey; for our descending of this rock
Whatever power he hath shall not prevent.

He turned him to that swollen visage and spoke;

"Cease, thou accursed Wolf, thy rage to spit!

Within thyself consume it till thou choke.

Not without cause our journey is to the pit.

There is it willed on high, where Michael

For the rebel arrogance took vengeance fit."

As sails that sudden gusts of tempest swell,

Fall when the mast breaks, tangled past amend,

So to the ground that cruel goblin fell.

Thus down to the fourth hollow we descend,

Taking the more in of that bank of grief

Wherein all the evil of the world is penned.

Ah! Divine Justice! Who shall pack in brief

The multitude of fresh pains that I met?

And from our guilt why taste we no relief?

Like to the wave above Charybdis' threat

That breaks against the wave it meeteth there,

So are the people here at counter set.

Here saw I troops more numerous than elsewhere

With yells prolonged on this side and that side

Rolling dead weights with full chest pushing square.

Smiting against each other in force they vied,

Then wheeled about just there and rolled them
back.

"Why holdest thou?" "Why flingest away?" they
cried.

Thus they return along the dismal track
 On either hand to the point opposite,
 And their refrain of scolding never slack.
 Then everyone when he had compassed it
 Through his half-circle turned to the other mark,
 And my heart felt as though itself were hit.
 "Master mine," said I, "lighten my mind's dark.
 Who are these? And all those that the tonsure wear,
 Those on our left side, were they each a clerk?"
 And he: "All these in mind so squint-eyed were
 In their first life, that they were quite without
 All measure, whether to expend or spare.
 Most clearly may'st thou tell this from their shout
 When they the two points of the circle have won
 Where difference of guilt divides the rout.
 Priests were they that no hairy cover have on
 Their heads, and Popes, and Cardinals, in whom
 Avarice hath its utmost mischief done."
 And I: "Master, among this crew are some
 Whose faces surely I should recognize,
 Who were polluted with this evil scum."
 And he to me: "Confused is thy surmise,
 The squalor that in life their senses shut
 Now makes them too dim to be known of eyes.
 For ever at one another must they butt.
 These from the grave shall rise up with fists tight,
 Those others with their very hair close-cut.
 Ill-giving, ill-hoarding, lost for them the light
 Of the bright world, and in this scuffling caught.
 I beautify no words to tell their plight.
 Now, my son, see to what a mock are brought
 The goods of Fortune's keeping, and how soon!
 Though to possess them still is all man's thought.
 For all the gold that is beneath the moon,
 Or ever was, never could buy repose
 For one of those souls, faint to have that boon."
 "Master," said I, "tell me from what power rose
 This Fortune upon whom thy word did glance.
 What is she, whose grasp doth the world's good
 enclose?"

And he to me: "How heavy the ignorance,
 O foolish creatures, that on you is laid!
 Hear now my judgment of her governance.
 The wisdom that transcendeth all, and made
 The heavens and gave them guides to rule them
 right,
 So that each splendour should the other aid
 With equal distribution of the light,
 In like sort also a general minister
 Set over this world's glory and fond delight,
 From time to time those vain goods to transfer
 From people to people, and from class to class,
 Beyond cunning of mortals to deter.
 Hence the empire from that race to this must pass,
 In wax and wane obeying her decree
 Which lurketh like a snake hid in the grass.
 She is past your wit to understand; but she
 Provideth, judgeth, governeth her own,
 As the other Gods do theirs in their degree.
 To her mutations is no respite known.
 Necessity in her forbiddeth pause:
 Thus comes he oft who is raised or overthrown.
 This is she who is cursed without a cause,
 And even from those hath maledictions got,
 Unjustly, of whom she should have won applause.
 But she is in her bliss, and hears them not.
 In chime with the other primal creatures glad,
 She turns her sphere and tastes her blissful lot.
 Descend we now to miseries more sad.
 The stars that when I set forth climbed on high
 Sink, and to stay too long my charge forbad."
 To the other bank we crossed the circle, nigh
 Above a spring that boiled and overflowed
 Down through the cleft it wore to issue by.
 Darker than blackest purple the water showed.
 We followed down the sombre stream's decline
 And reached the floor below by a strange road.
 These sullen waves into a fen combine
 Called Styx, whenas the water's last descent
 Reaches the foot of that gray scaur malign.

And I who stood with fixed looks intent
Saw muddied people in that slough who stuck,
All naked and with brows in anger bent.
Not with hands only each the other struck
But with the head and breast and heels that spurn:
At one another with their teeth they pluck,
"Son," said the gracious Master, "Here discern
The souls of those whom anger stupefied.
And I would have thee for a surety learn
That sobbing underneath the water abide
People who make the surface bubble and froth,
As the eye may tell, turned to whatever side.
Fixed in slime, groan they: We were sullen and wroth
In the sweet air made glad by the Sun's fire;
Our hot hearts smouldered in a bitter sloth,
And now we gloom and blacken in the mire.
This sad refrain they gurgle in their throat
Because they cannot speak the words entire."
We 'twixt the dry bank and the putrid moat
Compassed a wide arc of those waters sour,
And still those swallowers of the filth we note.
At last we reached the broad base of a tower.

CANTO VIII

I say, continuing, that as on we went,
Long ere the base of that high tower we hit.
Our eyes were drawn up to its battlement
Because of two flames that we saw there lit,
And yet another answering them discerned
So far, the eye scarcely could distinguish it.
To the Sea of all Intelligence I turned,
And spoke: "What says this beacon, and what
replies
That other fire, and by whom are they burned?"
And he to me: "Over the foul wave flies
What is awaited: save it be withheld
By the marsh-mist, thou'lt see it with thine eyes."

Never did arrow from the string propelled
 With such a vehemence the air divide
 As the small pinnacle that I now beheld
 Over the water toward us lightly glide;
 And at the helm a single steersman was.
 "Art thou arrived, fell spirit?" aloud he cried.
 And my Lord answered, "Phlegyas, Phlegyas,
 Thou criest this time in vain. Take us for freight,
 But for no more than ferry of the morass."
 As one who hearkens to some great deceit
 Done to him, and his spirit is fiercely frayed,
 So Phlegyas raged in chafe of his defeat.
 My Guide stept down into the boat, and made
 Me to enter after him; nor till I trod
 Within it, did that vessel seem down-weighed.
 Soon as my Guide and I the thwart bestrode,
 The ancient prow began to cleave anew
 The water, deeper than with other load.
 As the dead channel we were running through,
 Before me rose one full of mud, and cried,
 "Who art thou, come before thy time is due?"
 And I to him; "I come, but not abide.
 But thou, who art thou, so beastly that hast grown?"
 "I am one who weeps, thou seest," he replied.
 And I to him: "With weeping and with moan
 Stay on, accursed spirit! For though thou roll
 In all thy filth, yet thou to me art known."
 Then he stretched both hands out to clutch the thole.
 Whereat, watchful, the Master at him struck,
 Saying, "Off! Away, with the other dogs to
 growl!"
 And put his arms about my neck, and took
 And kissed my face. "Indignant soul," he said,
 "Blessed be she that bore thee and gave thee suck!
 Arrogant in your world he held his head:
 Now there is none to speak of him good things.
 So is his shadow upon rages fed.
 How many above there deem themselves great kings
 Now, who shall lie wallowing in mire like swine,
 Leaving a name that with dishonour rings!"

And I, "Master, my wishes much incline
 To see him plunged into this broth, before
 We pass the ferry and this lagoon's confine."
 And he to me: "Ere that thou see the shore
 Thou shall be satisfied. Fit it is, my son,
 That thou enjoy this thing thou cravest for."
 A little after I saw such mangling done
 Upon him by the foul folk muddy-cheeked,
 I still praise God that sight to have looked upon.
 "Have at Filippo Argenti!" they all shrieked.
 The spirit of the outrageous Florentine
 Turned biting and on himself his fury wreaked.
 We left him. He gets no more word of mine.
 But on mine ears now smote a wailful din,
 And I peered forth, its meaning to divine.
 Said my good Master: "Now, Son, we begin
 To approach near to the city named of Dis.
 Sad citizens, vast throngs are there within,"
 "Already," I said, "mine eye distinguishes
 Clearly its minarets within the vale,
 All red, as if they had come from furnaces."
 And he to me: "This their exterior shell
 The eternal fire within them maketh red,
 Even as thou seest, in this low hollow of Hell."
 We now arrived in the deep fosses' bed
 That moat about that place disconsolate.
 Of iron seemed the walls above my head.
 Not before making circuit long and late,
 We came to a stop, and loud the boatman there
 Cried out to us: "Land ye now. Here is the gate."
 Above I saw a thousand spirits in air
 Rained down from heaven, who angry as if
 betrayed
 Cried: "Who is this who without death cloth dare
 The kingdom of the dead folk to invade?"
 And my sage Master, making sign to them
 Of his desire, a secret parley essayed.
 Their great scorn then did they a little stem,
 And said: "Alone come! let that other plod
 Back, who so bold into this kingdom came."

Let him return the way his folly trod.
 Try, if he can: for here shalt thou remain
 Who hast brought him hither by so dark a road."
 Think, Reader, if my heart misgave me then
 To hear the accursed words, for from that shore
 I thought not ever to return again.
 "O my loved Guide, who seven times and more
 Hast me from peril that stood before me freed,
 And didst to sweet security restore,
 Leave me not so undone in my hard need,
 And if we may no farther go, retrace
 The path," I cried, "with all we can of speed."
 And that Lord, who had led me to this place,
 Said to me: "Fear not, for our passage none
 Can take from us! 'twas given us by such Grace,
 But thou, wait for me here. Thy spirit fordone
 Feed upon good hope, and be comforted.
 I will not leave thee in the low world alone."
 Thus goes away and leaves me to my dread
 The gentle Father, and I with doubting dwell,
 For Yes and No contend within my head.
 What then he proffered them I could not tell;
 But not long stood he among them in debate
 When all rushed suddenly in again pell-mell.
 So did our adversaries close the gate
 Upon my Lord's breast, who, shut out in scorn
 To me with slow steps turned back desolate.
 His eyes upon the ground, and eyebrows shorn
 Of all boldness, "Oh," he exclaimed with sighs,
 "Who is it excludes me from the abodes forlorn?"
 And he to me said: "Though my anger rise,
 Be not dismayed, for I shall bring thee through,
 Whatever hindrance they within devise.
 This frowardness of theirs is nothing new.
 They used it once at a less secret door
 Which standeth still without bars to undo.
 Thou sawest the dead writing that it bore.
 And now, this side of it, comes hitherward
 Down the steep circles, dreadless, one before
 Whose might the city shall be to us unbarred."

CANTO IX

The colour cowardice had painted pale
Upon my cheek, seeing my Guide turn back,
Made him more promptly his own hue counter-
vail.

He stopt, like one who some far sound would track,
Listening: for but short distance could eye strive
Into the dim air filmed with vapour black.

"Yet needs must that the victory we contrive,"
He began; "unless,... we were promised aid ...
O how long seems it till that one arrive!"

Well I perceived how his beginning stayed,
And how with other words the first he sought
To cover, and with a difference overlaid.

Nevertheless his language on me wrought;
For it may be the words he faltered on
I drew to a worse meaning than his thought.

"Into this bottom of the shell's drear cone
Comes ever any from the first degree,
Whose only punishment is hope forgone?"

So did I question; and he answered me:

"Rarely it chanches that any of us essay
This journey upon which I go with thee.

True it is that once ere now I came this way,
By that Erichtho fearfully conjured
Who summoned back the shadows to their clay,

To the body's loss not long was I inured
When she made me to enter within that wall
To fetch a spirit in Judas' circle immured.

That is the lowest and most dark place of all,
Farthest from the Heaven that moveth all. I
know

Full well the way: let naught then thee appal.

This marsh, whose exhalation stinketh so,
Girdles the dolorous city of the dead,

Where without anger now we cannot go."

My memory hath not kept what more he said,
Because mine eyes drew me all up where I stood
To the high tower's top, palpitating red,

Where, all in a moment risen up, with blood
 Spotted on them, three Hellish Furies frowned.
 Women they were in body and attitude,
 And they were girt with bright green hydras round.
 For hair they had small snakes and horn'd vipers
 About the ghastness of their temples wound.
 He recognizing well the ministers
 Who serve the Queen of Sorrow that hath no cease,
 Said to me: "Mark now the Erinnyes fierce!,
 The Fury upon the left Megæra is;
 Alecto is she that clamours on the right;
 'Twixt them Tisiphone." Then he held his peace.
 Each at her breast was clawing, and then would smite
 Her body with the palms: so loud their moan,
 I pressed close to the poet in my affright.
 "Let come Medusa, and change we him to stone!"
 All with one voice, and eyes bent downward, said.
 "Ill made we Theseus his assault atone."
 "Turn backwards. Keep thine eyes closed in thy
 head!
 For if thou with the Gorgon should'st be faced,
 There would be no return up from the dead."
 Thus spoke the Master, and he himself made haste
 To turn me, and would not in my hands confide
 But with his own me also he encased.
 O ye who have sane intellects for guide
 Consider well the doctrines that for cloak
 Beneath the strangeness of the verses hide!
 And now upon the turbid waters broke
 A crash, terrible with re-echoings
 That into trembling cither shore awoke.
 It was a sound as of a wind that springs
 Impetuous, when the adverse heats are dry,
 Which unrelaxing all the forest wrings,
 Wrenches the boughs off, breaks and beats awry.
 Rolling the dust, imperiously it towers,
 And makes the wild beasts and the shepherds fly.
 Freeing my eyes, he said: "Narrow thy powers
 Of vision over the foam of the ancient lake,
 Where most the smoke is and the swart air lours."

As frogs before their enemy the snake
 Run through the water, scattered at his threat,
 Till each squats on the bottom, there to quake,
 So saw I thousand ruined spirits set
 In flight before one, who came down apace
 And passed the Stygian ferry with soles unwet.
 He waved the gross fumes from before his face,
 Moving often his left hand as he went,
 And only of that annoyance showed he trace.
 Well did I know that he from Heaven was sent,
 And turned to the Master, and he signed his will
 That I should stand all quiet with head down-bent.
 Ah, with what scorn his countenance seemed to fill!
 He came to the gate, and with a wand he held
 Set it wide open, unresisted still.
 "O race contemptible, from Heaven expelled!"
 Began he then, on the malign threshold,
 "Why is your contumacy yet unquelled?
 Why at that Will still spurn ye, as of old,
 Whose infinite fulfilment naught frustrates
 And which hath oft increased your pains fourfold?
 What profits it to butt against the Fates?
 Cerberus yet rues his chin peeled and throat
 scored
 For this, if ye remember, at yon gates."
 Then on the unclean journey, without word
 Spoken to us, returned he, and looked like one
 By other business constrained and spurred
 Than that of those who stand before him. On
 We moved, and toward the city made our way,
 Secure of what the sacred words had done.
 We entered into it without any affray.
 And I who had desire to scrutinize
 What things, and how, within such fortress lay,
 Soon as I was within, sent round my eyes
 And saw a wilderness on either hand
 Full of evil torments and of miseries.
 Like as at Aries, where Rhone stagnates in sand,
 Like as at Pola, by Quarnaro Sound,
 That barriers Italy and bathes her strand,

Sepulchres make uneven all the ground,
So here on every side were tombs arrayed,
Only that here was bitterer burial found.
For scatterings of flame among them played
Whereby they were so heated through and through
That no craft needeth iron hotter made.
Their covers were all raised up in our view,
And out of them such hard lamenting rose
As seemed the cry of a most wretched crew.
And I spoke: "Tell me, Master, who are those
Who, within these chests buried, so beseech
With grievous sighs compassion on their throes?"
And he: "The Arch-Heretics are here, with each
His following of all sects: and heavier load
These tombs have in them than thy thought can
reach.
Here like with like is buried in one abode,
And less or more hot are the monuments."
Then to the right hand turning, our feet trod
Between those sighs and the high battlements.

CANTO X

Now journeying along a straitened track
Between the ramparts and the sufferers
My Master goes, and I behind his back.
"O sovran Virtue, who down the circling tiers
Of the impious leadest me where thou dost bid,
Satisfy," I said, "the wish that in me stirs.
The people who in these sepulchres are hid,
May they be seen? None watches; none keeps guard.
And see! already raised is every lid."
And he to me: "All shall be fast and barred
When from Jehosophat they shall hither hie
Each with the body he left under the sward.
This is the quarter wherein buried lie
Epicurus and all those his doctrine swayed,
Who with the body make the soul to die.

Therefore unto the question thou hast made
Here within soon shalt thou an answer find
And also to the wish thou hast not betrayed."
And I: "I keep not from thee, Escort kind,
My thought, save that, as thou too didst require
Ere now, I speak but in few words my mind."
"Tuscan, who goest through the city of fire
Alive, with honest speech upon thy tongue,
Halt here, if thou wilt tarry at my desire.
The speech thou usest manifests thee sprung
From that famed country which, it maybe, I tried
Too hardly, and with strife too often stung."
Suddenly in my ear this sound was cried
From out one of those coffers; and I drew,
In fear, a little closer to my Guide.
And he to me spoke: "Turn! What dost thou do?
See Farinata, raising himself amain!
From the waist all of him shall rise in view.
My gaze from him I could not now have ta'en:
And he rose up to front me, face and breast,
As if of Hell he had a great disdain.
With prompt, inspiriting hands my Guide then prest
Me towards him, past the other sepulchres,
The while he warned me: "To spare words were
best."
When I was at that tomb of the evil-doers,
He looked at me a little, and with a kind
Of scorn he questioned: "Who were thy forbears?"
I, who had it to obey him in my mind,
Concealed nothing from him, but told all out,
At which his brows upward a little inclined:
Then he said: "Fiercely did they use to flout
Me and my forefathers; and fiercely spurned
My party. Twice I scattered them in rout."
"If they were chased, on all sides they returned,
Both times," I answered, "from adversities.
But yours that art have not so rightly learned."
Beside him then a shadow by degrees
Emerged, and was discovered to the chin:
I think he had raised himself upon his knees.

He looked around as if he had thought to win
 Sight of some other who might be with me;
 And when that hope was dimmed and quenched
 within,
 Cried weeping: "If through this blind prison, free,
 Thou goest by virtue of thy nature's height,
 Where is my son? Why is he not here with thee?"
 And I to him then: "Not by my own right
 I come; he that waits yonder leads me here,
 Of whom perhaps thy Guido had despite."
 His words, and manner of penance, made appear
 His name, as if I had read it on his brow,
 Therefore my answer had I made thus clear.
 Suddenly erect, he cried: "What saidest thou?
 He *had*? Lives he not, then, in the sweet air?
 Does the sun's light not strike upon him now?"
 When of a certain pause he was aware
 Ere I replied, where he had risen to stand
 Down he fell backward, and so vanished there.
 But, haughty of spirit, that other, at whose demand
 I had halted, changed not aspect, nor his head
 Moved, nor his side bent, no, nor stirred a hand.
 "And if," continuing his own words, he said,
 "To learn that art they have so little wit,
 It tortureth me more than doth this bed.
 But fifty times shall not afresh be lit
 The countenance of the Lady who reigns here
 Ere thou shalt know the cost of learning it.
 And, so thou would'st return back to the dear
 Earth, tell me why against my blood and folk
 That people in all its laws is so severe?"
 Then I: "The havoc of the slaughterous stroke
 That filled the reddened Arbia with the slain
 Causeth our prayers a judgment to invoke."
 He sighed, shaking his head; then spoke again:
 "In that I was not single; nor, I swear,
 Would I have stirred in an ill cause or vain.
 But single I was in that place yonder, where
 All on the ruin of Florence had agreed.
 I only with open face defended her."

"Ah, so may peace come also to thy seed,
 Resolve me," I prayed him, "this hard knot that
 ties
 'My judgment in it, and the riddle read.
 It seemeth, if I hear aright, your eyes
 Perceive beforehand what Time brings with him,
 But with the present ye use otherwise."
 "We see like those for whom the light is dim,"
 He answered me, "the things that are remote;
 So much still shines for us the Lord Supreme,
 When they come near, or are, then avails not
 Our understanding, and we know no more,
 Save what is told us, of your human lot.
 Easily may'st thou understand, therefore,
 That all we have of knowledge shall be dead
 From that time when the Future shuts its door."
 Then pricked in conscience for my fault, I said,
 "Will you not now acquaint that fallen one
 His child is not yet from the living fled?
 And if before to his answer I made none
 Tell him it was my thought that was not free,
 Being in that knot which now you have undone."
 And now my Master was recalling me.
 Therefore more earnestly the spirit I prest
 To tell me who were those with him. And he:
 "With more than a thousand I lie here opprest.
 Yonder the Second Frederic is inurned,
 The Cardinal also: I speak not of the rest."
 With that he hid himself. My steps I turned
 Back toward the ancient Poet, pondering
 That saying wherein some menace I discerned.
 He moved, and as we went: "What is this thing,"
 He said to me, "which teases so thy mind?"
 I satisfied him in his questioning.
 "Keep in thy memory what thine ears divined
 To be against thee," warned the Sage. "Attend
 Now," and with finger lifted he enjoined:
 "When thou before the radiance shalt bend
 Of that Lady, whose beauteous eyes see all,
 Thou shalt learn thy life's journey unto its end."

Then to the left he turned his steps; the wall
We quitted, toward the middle advancing by
A path that strikes into a valley's fall,
Wherefrom the fume rose noisome even thus high.

CANTO XXVI

Rejoice, Florence, because thy fame is flown
Over earth and sea, winging the heavenly vault,
And even through Hell's regions is it known.
Among the Thieves I found five of that fault
Thy citizens, whence shame comes to my cheek,
Nor thou thine honour greatly dost exalt.
But if the truth in dream of morning speak,
Thou shalt in short time feel what upon thee
The others, and even Prato, thirst to wreak.
If it were now, not too soon would it be.
Since come it must, I would that come it were,
For, with each year, heavier it is for me.
Thence we departed; and by that same stair
Which served for our descent, of ledges frayed,
My Guide climbed back, and me with him up-bare.
And as our solitary way we made
Among the juts and splinters of the scarp,
The foot sped not without the hand to aid.
Then did I grieve, and grief returneth sharp,
Seeing what I saw in memory, and I rein
More than of wont my genius, lest it warp
And run where Virtue is not to constrain,
So that if good star or aught better still
Have thus enriched me, I may not lose the gain.
Like fire-flies that the peasant on the hill
Reposing in that season, when he who shines
To light our world his face doth least conceal,
At the hour when fly to humming gnat resigns,
Sees glimmering down along the valley broad,
There, where, it may be, he toils among the vines,—

So numerous the flames in the Eighth Chasm glowed
 Down all its depth, laid open to mine eyes
 Soon as I came to where the bottom showed.
 As he who avenged him by the bears saw rise
 The fiery chariot that Elijah bore
 With horses mounting straight into the skies,
 For follow it with his eyes he could not more
 Than to behold only the flame serene
 Like to a little cloud above him soar,
 Thus moved along the throat of that ravine
 Each flame, for what it stole it doth not show,
 And within each a sinner is, unseen.
 I stood upon the bridge, rising tip-toe.
 Had I not caught a rock and on it leant
 I should have fallen, without thrust or blow.
 The Guide, who saw me gazing thus attent,
 Said: "Within these fires are the spirits confined,
 Burned by the shroud within which they are
 pent."
 Master, I answered, "This had I divined
 Myself already, which thou makest plain.
 And ev'n now was the question in my mind:
 Who is in that fire which comes so torn in twain
 As if it rose above the pyre that heard
 Eteocles beside his brother slain?"
 He answered me: "Ulysses there is cursed,
 And with him Diomed; as in wrath erewhile
 Together, so together now amerced,
 They in their flame, tormented for old guile,
 Bemoan the Horse whose wooden ambuscade
 The gentle seed of Romans did exile.
 And they lament the wrong, whereby the shade
 Of Deidamia for Achilles rues;
 And for Palladium stolen are they paid."
 "If they within those sparks a voice can use,
 Master," I said, "I pray thee of thy grace—
 A thousand times I'll pray thee, if thou refuse—
 Forbid me not to tarry in this place
 Until the horned flame blow hitherward:
 See, toward it how the longing bends my face."

And he to me: "The thing thou hast implored
 Deserveth praise: and for that cause thy need
 Is answered: yet refrain thy tongue from word.
 Leave me to speak, for well thy wish I read.
 But they, since they were Greeks, might turn aside,
 It may be, and thy voice disdain to heed."
 When that the fire had come, where to my Guide
 Time and the place seemed fit, I heard him frame
 His speech upon this manner, as he cried:
 "O ye who are two within a single flame,
 If any merit I of you have won,
 If merit, much or little, had my name,
 When the great verse I made beneath the sun,
 Move not, but let the one of you be heard
 Tell where he went to perish, being undone."
 The greater horn of the ancient flame was stirred
 To shudder and make a murmur, like a fire
 When in the wind it struggles and is blurred,
 Then tossed upon a flickering crest yet higher,
 As it had been a tongue that spoke, it cast
 A voice forth from the strength of its desire,
 Saying: "When I from Circe broke at last,
 Who more than a year by Gaeta (before
 Æneas had so named it) held me fast,
 Not sweet son, nor revered old father, nor
 The long-due love which was to have made glad
 Penelope for all the pain she bore,
 Could conquer the inward hunger that I had
 To master earth's experience, and to attain
 Knowledge of man's mind, both the good and
 bad.
 But I put out on the deep, open main
 With one ship only, and with that little band
 Which chose not to desert me; far as Spain,
 Far as Morocco, either shore I scanned.
 Sardinia's isle I coasted, steering true,
 And the isles of which that water bathes the strand.
 I and my crew were old and stiff of thew
 When, at the narrow pass, we could discern
 The marks that Hercules set far in view

That none should dare beyond, or further learn.
Already I had Sevilla on the right,
And on the larboard Ceuta lay astern.
"Brothers," I said, "who manfully, despite
Ten thousand perils, have attained the West,
In the brief vigil that remains of light
To feel in, stoop not to renounce the quest
Of what may in the sun's path be essayed,
The world that never man-kind hath possessed.
Think on the seed ye spring from! Ye were made
Not to live life of brute beasts of the field
But follow virtue and knowledge unafraid."
With such few words their spirit so I steel'd,
That I thereafter scarce could have contained
My comrades from the voyage, had I willed.
And, our poop turned to where the Morning
reigned,
We made, for the mad flight, wings of our oars,
And on the left continually we gained.
By now the Night beheld within her course
All stars of the other pole, and ours so low,
It was not lifted from the ocean-floors.
Five times beneath the moon re-kindled slow
The light had been, and quenched as oft, since
we
Broached the hard issue we were sworn to know,
When there arose a mountain in the sea,
Dimm'd by the distance: loftier than aught
That ever I beheld, it seemed to be.
Then we rejoiced; but soon to grief were brought.
A storm came out of the strange land, and found
The ship, and violently the fore-part caught.
Three times it made her to spin round and round
With all the waves; and, as Another chose,
The fourth time, heaved the poop up, the prow
drowned,
Till over us we heard the waters close."

CANTO XXXIII

That sinner raised up from the brute repast
His mouth, wiping it on the hairs left few
About the head he had all behind made waste.
Then he began: 'Thou wiltiest that I renew
Desperate grief, strangling my very heart
Even at the thought, before I tell it you.
But if my words prove seed for fruit to start
Of infamy for the traitor I gnaw now
Thou shalt hear words that hot with weeping
smart.

Albeit I know not who thou art, nor how
Thou hast descended hither, Florentine,
Unless thy speech deceive me, seemest thou.
Know then that I was the Count Hugolin
And this man, Roger, the Archbishop; Hell
Neighbours us, as thou'lt hear, for the same
sin.

How into a snare I by his malice fell
Because I trusted in his perfidy,
And after came to die, needs not to tell.
But what hath not yet been reported thee,
How cruel was that dying, hear, and then
Judge with what injury he hath injured me.
The narrow slit within the rock-ribbed pen
From me named Famine's tower (and as I
think
It yet shall hold the bones of other men)
Had shown me more than one moon through its
chink

When evil dream revealed what peril faced
My feet, and how I stood close on the brink.
This man appeared as a great lord who chased
The wolf and wolf-cubs on the hills that screen
Lucca from where the Pisan towers are placed.
He chased with hounds, cunning and fierce and
lean.
Before the master there Gualandi went;
Sismondi and Lanfranchi rode between.

Full soon it seemed both sire and sons were spent;
 And in my vision the strained flanks grew red
 Where by the tearing teeth the flesh was rent.
 When I awoke dark on my stony bed
 I heard my children weeping in their sleep,
 Them who were with me, and they cried for
 bread.
 Cruel art thou if thou from tears canst keep
 To think of what my heart misgave in fear.
 If thou weep not, at what then canst thou weep?
 By now they were awake, and the hour drew near
 When food should be set by us on the floor.
 Still in the trouble of our dreams we were:
 And down in the horrible tower I heard the door
 Locked up. Without a word I looked anew
 Into my sons' faces, all the four.
 I wept not, so to stone within I grew,
 They wept; and one, my little Anselm, cried:
 "You look so, Father, what has come on you?"
 But I shed not a tear, neither replied
 All that day nor the next night, until dawn
 Of a new day over the world rose wide.
 A cranny of light crept in upon the stone
 Of that dungeon of woe; and I saw there
 On those four faces the aspect of my own.
 I bit upon both hands in my despair.
 And they supposing it was in the access
 Of hunger, rose up with a sudden prayer,
 And said: "O Father, it will hurt much less
 If you of us eat: take what once you gave
 To clothe us, this flesh of our wretchedness."
 Thereon I calmed myself, their grief to save.
 That day and the one after we were dumb.
 Hard earth, couldst thou not open for our grave!
 But when to the fourth morning we were come,
 Gaddo at my feet stretched himself with a cry;
 "Father, why won't you help me?" and lay numb
 And there died. Ev'n as thou scest me, saw I,
 One after the other, the three fall. They drew,
 Between the fifth and sixth day, their last sigh.

I, blind now, groping arms about them threw,
And still called on them that were two days
dead.

Then fasting did what anguish could not do." •
He ceased, and with eyes twisted in his head
His teeth seized on the lamentable skull
Strong as a dog's upon a bony shred.

Ah, Pisa! thou offence to the whole people
Of the fair land where sound is heard of Si,
Since in thy neighbours' hands vengeance is dull,
Caprara and Gorgona moved be

Into Arno's mouth, and Arno back be rolled,
That every living soul be drowned in thee!
For if Count Hugolin by treachery sold

Thy forts, it was not cause thou should'st torment
His little sons, whatever of him was told.

Their youth, O thou new Thebes, made innocent
Ugucione and Brigata, and those

Two others who in my verse have made lament.

We passed on, where the frost imprisons close
Another crew, stark in a rugged heap,
Not bent down, but reversed all where they froze.

The very weeping there forbids to weep;
And the grief, finding in the eyes a stop,
Turns inward, to make anguish sink more deep.

For their first tears collect in one great drop,
And like a vizor of crystal, in the space
Beneath the brows, fill all the hollow up.

And now although, as with a callous place
Upon the skin, because the cold stung so,
All feeling had departed from my face,

It seemed as if I felt some wind to blow.
Wherefore I: "Master, who is it moves this air?
Is not all heat extinguished here below?"

Whereto he answered: "Soon shalt thou be where,
Seeing the cause which poureth down the gust,
Thine eye to this the answer shall declare."

And one sad shadow amid the icy crust
Cried to us: "O ye souls, so cruel found,
That into this last outpost ye are thrust,

Raise the stiff veils wherein my face is bound,
 So that the grief which chokes my heart, have vent
 A little, ere the weeping harden round."
 Wherefore I: "Tell me, so I to this consent,
 Who thou art, and if I do not succour thee,
 May I to the bottom of the ice be sent."
 "I am Friar Alberic," then he answered me;
 "He of the fruits out of the bad garden,
 Who, dates for figs, receive here my full fee."
 "Ah," replied I to him, "Thou art dead, then,
 Already?" He answered, "I have no knowledge
 How stands my body in the world of men.
 This Ptolomea hath such privilege
 That often a soul falls down into this place
 Ere Atropos the fated thread abridge.
 And that thou may'st more willingly the glaze
 Of tears wipe from my cheek-bones' nakedness,
 Know that, on the instant when the soul betrays,
 As I did, comes a demon to possess
 Her body, and thenceforth ruleth over it
 Until the timed hour come for its decease.
 She falls down headlong to this cistern-pit.
 The body of him who winters there behind
 Perhaps among men still appears to sit.
 Thou must, if newly come, call it to mind.
 It is Ser Branca d'Oria. Years enough
 Have passed since he was to his prison assigned."
 "I think," I said, "that thou dost lie; whereof
 Proof is, that Branca d'Oria never died
 And eats, drinks, sleeps, and puts clothes on and
 off."
 "Up there in Malebranche," he replied,
 "Where sticky pitch boils in the trenches' bed,
 Not yet had Michel Zanche come to bide,
 When this man left a devil in his stead
 In his own body, and in one of his house
 Who with him played the traitor and did the deed.
 But stretch thy hand out hither and uncloset
 My eyes for me." And I unclosed them not
 And to be rude to him was courteous.

Ah, Genoese, who have utterly forgot
All honesty and in corruption abound,
Why from the earth will none your people blot?
For with Romagna's evillest spirit I found
One of you, who, for deeds he did contrive
Even now in soul is in Cocytus drowned
And still in body appears on earth alive.

PURGATORIO

CANTO I

Now hoists her sail for more serene voyage
The pinnacle of my wit, and smoother flies,
Leaving behind a sea so dark with rage,
And of that second realm, which purifies
Man's spirit of its soilure, will I sing,
Where it becometh worthy of Paradise.
Here let dead Poesy from her grave up-spring,
O sacred Muses, whom I serve and haunt,
And sound, Calliope, a louder string
To accompany my song with that high chant
Which smote the Magpies' miserable choir
That they despaired of pardon for their vaunt.
Tender colour of orient sapphire
Which on the air's translucent aspect grew,
From mid heaven to horizon deeply clear,
Made pleasure in mine eyes be born anew
Soon as I issued forth from the dead air
That had oppressed both eye and heart with
rue.
The planet that promoteth Love was there,
Making all the East to laugh and be joyful,
And veiled the Fishes that escorted her.
I turned to the right and contemplated full
The other pole; and four stars o'er me came,
Never yet seen save by the first people.
All the heavens seemed exulting in their flame.
O widowed Northern clime, from which is ta'en
The happy fortune of beholding them!

When from my gaze I had severed them again,
 Turning a little to the other pole, whose law
 By now had sunken out of sight the Wain,
 Near me an old man solitary I saw,
 Worthy of so great reverence to regard
 That no son owes a father more of awe.
 Long and with white hairs brindled was his beard,
 Like to his locks, of which a double list
 Down on his shoulders and his breast appeared.
 The beams of the four sacred splendours kist
 His countenance, and they glorified it so
 That in its light the sun's light was not missed.
 "Who are ye, that against the blind stream go,"
 Shaking the venerable plumes, he said,
 "And steal up from the eternal walls of woe?
 Who hath guided you? or what lamp your footsteps
 led,
 Issuing from that night without fathom
 Which makes a blackness of the vale of dread?
 Is the law of the abyss thus broken from?
 Or is there some new change in Heaven's decrees,
 That, being damned, unto my cliffs ye come?"
 Then did my leader on my shoulder seize
 And with admonishing hand and word and sign
 Make reverent my forehead and my knees.
 Then spoke: "I come not of my own design.
 From Heaven came down a Lady, at whose prayer,
 To help this man, I made his pathway mine.
 But since it is thy will that we declare
 More of our state, how it truly is, obey
 I needs must, for deny thee I would not dare.
 He hath never yet seen darken his last day,
 Yet so near thereto through his folly went
 That short time was there to re-shape his way.
 Even as I said, to his rescue I was sent,
 Nor other way appeared that was not vain
 But this on which our footsteps now are bent.
 I have shown him all the sinners in their pain,
 And now intend that he those spirits behold
 Which under thy charge cleanse themselves of stain.

How I have brought him were too long to unfold.
 Through virtue that descendeth from on high
 To guide him toward thy wisdom am I bold,
 Now on his coming look with gracious eye.
 He seeketh freedom, that so precious light,
 How precious, he knows who for her will die.
 Thou know'st: for her sake, death did not affright
 Thee in Utica, where thou didst abdicate
 What at the great day shall re-clothe thee bright.
 The eternal laws are still inviolate;
 For he doth live, nor me doth Minos bind.
 But I am of the circle where the chaste eyes wait
 Of Marcia, filled with prayer, that in thy mitid,
 O sainted breast, thou hold her for thine own.
 For love of her, then, be to us inclined.
 Suffer that thy seven realms to us be shown.
 Good word of thee shall unto her be brought,
 If there below thou deign still to be known."
 "Marcia was so pleasing to my thought
 Above on the earth," he answered, "and I so
 fond,
 Whate'er she willed, I could refuse her naught.
 Now no more may she move me, since beyond
 The evil stream she dwells, by the decree
 Made when I was delivered from that bond.
 But if a heavenly lady hath missioned thee,
 As thou hast said, of flattery is no need.
 Enough, that in her name thou askest me.
 Go then; first gird this man with a smooth reed,
 And see thou bathe his features in such wise
 That from all filthiness they may be freed.
 It were not meet that mist clouded his eyes
 To dim them, when the first he goes before
 Of those Angels that serve in Paradise.
 This little isle, there where for evermore
 The waters beat all round about its foot,
 Bears rushes on the soft and oozy shore.
 No other plant that would put forth a shoot
 Or stiffen, but from life there is debarred,
 Since to the surf it yields not from its root.

And then return not this way afterward.

The sun, at point to rise now, shall reveal

Where the mount yieldeth an ascent less hard."

So he vanished; and I rose up on my heel

Without word spoken, and all of me drew back

To my guide, making with mine eyes appeal.

He began: "Son, follow thou in my track.

Turn we on our footsteps, for this way the lea

Slopes down, where to the wave the low shores
break."

The dawn was moving the dark hours to flee

Before her, and far off amid their wane

I could perceive the trembling of the sea.

We paced along the solitary plain,

Like one who seeks to his lost road a clue,

And till he reach it deems he walks in vain.

When we had come there where the melting dew

Contents against the sun, being in a place

Where the cool air but little of it updrew,

My Lord laid both hands out on the sweet grass

Gently, amid the drops that it retained.

Wherefore I, conscious what his purpose was,

Lifted to him my cheeks that tears had stained;

And at his touch the colour they had worn,

Ere Hell had slurred and dimmed them, they
regained.

Then came we down to the land's desert bourne,

Which never yet saw man that had essayed

Voyage upon that water and knew return.

There did he gird me as that other bade.

O miracle! even as it was before,

The little plant put forth a perfect blade

On the instant in the place his fingers tore.

CANTO II

Now the sun touched the horizon with his flame,

The circle of whose meridian, at the height

It reaches most, covers Jerusalem.

And opposite to him in her circling, Night
 Came up from Ganges, and the Scales with her
 That from her hand fall as she grows in might;
 So that Aurora's cheeks of roses, there
 Where I was, gave their lovely hues away,
 Sallowing, as if old age had turned them sere.
 We lingered yet by the ocean-marge, as they
 Who think upon the road that lies before
 And in their mind go, but in body stay;
 And lo! as at the approach of morning frore
 Mars through the mist glimmers a fiery red
 Down in the West over the ocean-floor,
 (O that these eyes still on the wonder fed!) '
 Appeared, moving across the water, a light
 So swift, all earthly motion it outsped.
 From which when for a space I had drawn my
 sight
 Away, and of my Guide the meaning sought,
 I saw it now grown bigger and more bright.
 On either side of it I knew not what
 Of white appeared to gleam out; and below
 Another whiteness by degrees it got,
 My master yet spoke not a word, till lo!
 When those first whitenesses as wings shone free
 And his eyes now could well the Pilot know,
 He exclaimed: "Bend, see that thou bend the knee.
 Behold the Angel of God! Lay hand to hand!
 Such ministers henceforth thou art to see.
 Look, how he scorneth aid that man hath planned,
 And wills not oar nor other sail to ply,
 But only his own wings from far land to land.
 See how he has them stretcht up toward the sky,
 Drawing the air with that eternal plume
 Which moulteth not as the hair of things that die."
 Such an exceeding brightness did allume
 The Bird of God, who near and nearer bore,
 Mine eyes to endure him might not now presume,
 But bent them down; and he came on to shore
 Upon a barque so swift and light and keen
 As scarcely a ripple from the water tore.

On the heavenly Steersman at the stern was seen
 Inscribed that blissfulness whereof he knew;
 And more than a hundred spirits sat within.
 Together all were singing *In Exitu*
Israel de Egypto as one host
 With what of that psalm doth those words ensue,
 With the holy sign their company he crossed;
 Whereat themselves forth on the strand they threw.
 Swift as he came, he sped, and straight was lost.
 They that remained seemed parted from all clue
 To the strange place, casting a wondering eye
 Round them, like one assaying hazards new.
 On every side the arrowing sun shot high
 Into the day, and with his bright arrows
 Had hunted Capricorn from the mid sky,
 When the new people lifted up their brows
 Towards us, and spoke: "If that ye know it,
 show
 What path to us the mountain-side allows."
 And Virgil answered: "Peradventure you
 Suppose we have experience of the way;
 But we are pilgrims, even as ye are too.
 We came but now, a little before you, nay,
 By another road than yours, so steep and rude
 That the climb now will seem to us but play."
 The spirits, who by my breathing understood
 That I was still among the living things,
 Marvelling, became death-pale where they stood.
 As round a messenger, who the olive brings,
 Folk, to hear news, each on the other tread,
 And none is backward with his elbowings,
 So on my face their gaze intently fed
 Those spirits, all so fortunate, and forgot
 Almost to go up and be perfected.
 One of them now advanced, as if he sought
 To embrace me, with a love so fond and fain,
 That upon me to do the like he wrought.
 O Shades, in all but aspect, void and vain!
 Behind it thrice my hands did I enlace,
 And thrice they came back to my breast again.

Wonder, I think, was painted on my face:
 At which the spirit smiled and backward drew,
 And following it I sprang forward a pace.
 Gently it bade me pause: and then I knew
 Who it was, and prayed him pity on me to show
 And talk with me as he was used to do.
 "As in the mortal body I loved thee, so
 In my release I love thee," he answered me.
 "Therefore I stay: but thou, why dost thou go?"
 "Casella mine, that this place I may see
 Hereafter," I said, "have I this journey made.
 But how hath so much time been stolen from thee?"
 And he to me: "None have I to upbraid,
 If he who takes when he doth choose, and whom,
 This passage many times to me forbade.
 For in a just will hath his will its home.
 Truly he has taken now these three months past
 Whoso hath wished to enter, in all welcome.
 Wherefore I, whose eyes on the sea-shore were cast
 Where Tiber's water in the salt is checked,
 By him benignly was gathered in at last.
 To that mouth now his wings doth he direct,
 Because for ever are gathered in that spot
 They who sink not down to Acheron, abject."
 And I: "If a new law forbid thee not
 Memory and usage of the enamoured song
 Which used to assuage all my hot trouble of
 thought,
 May it please thee awhile to solace with thy tongue
 My spirit that, in its mortal mask confined,
 The journey hither bitterly hath wrung."
"Love that discourseth to me in my mind"
 Began he then so sweetly, that the sound
 Still in my heart with sweetness is entwined.
 My Master and I, and all that people around
 Who were with him, had faces so content
 As if all else out of their thoughts were drowned.
 We to his notes, entranced, our senses lent:
 And lo! the old man whom all the rest revere
 Crying, "What is this, ye laggard spirits faint?

What truancy, what loitering is here?
Haste to the Mount and from the slough be freed
Which lets not God within you to appear."
As doves, when picking corn or darnel seed,
All quiet and close-crowding to that fare,
Their strut of pride forgotten in their greed,
If anything appear their hearts to scare
On the instant leave the food there, where it lies,
Because they are assailed by greater care,
So saw I that new company arise,
And leave the song, and the steep slope essay,
Like one who goes, knowing not of where he hies.
Nor had our parting any more delay.

CANTO XXVIII

Now eager to search out through all its maze
The living green of the divine forest
Which to my eyes tempered the new sun's rays,
I came down from the bank, nor stayed to rest
But took the plain by slow and slow degrees
On ground that gave sweet smells where the foot
prest.
Gentle air, harbouring no inconstancies
Within its motion, smote upon my brow
With no more violence than a gracious breeze;
And trembling to the touch of it, each bough
Was bending all its foliage toward that side
Where the Holy Mount casteth its first shadow,
Yet not so far from upright was blown wide
But that the small birds on the topmost spray
All their sweet art continually still plied,
And from a full throat singing loud and gay
Welcomed the first thrills in the leaves, that bore
A burden to the descant of their lay,
Such as swells up along Ravenna's shore
From branch to branch of the pine-forest blown,
When Æolus has loosed Sirocco's roar.

Already my slow steps had borne me on
 So far within that immemorial wood
 That I could no more see whence I had gone;
 And lo! a stream that stopped me where I stood;
 And at the left the ripple in its train
 Moved on the bank the grasses where it flowed.
 All waters here that are most pure from stain
 Would qualified with some immixture seem
 Compared with this, which veils not the least grain,
 Altho' so dark, dark goes the gliding stream
 Under the eternal shadow, that hides fast
 For ever there the sun's and the moon's beam.
 With my feet halting, with my eyes I passed
 That brook, for the regaling of my sight
 With the fresh blossoms in their fair contrast.
 And then appeared (as in a sudden light
 Something appears which from astonishment
 Puts suddenly all other thoughts to flight)
 A lady who all alone and singing went,
 And as she sang plucked flowers that numberless
 About her path made colour and sweet scent.
 "I pray thee, gentle Lady, if, as I guess,
 Thou warm'st thyself from Love's most radiant
 sphere—
 For looks arc wont to be the heart's witness,—
 I pray thee toward this water to draw near
 So far," said I to her, "while thou dost sing,
 That with my understanding I may hear.
 Thou putt'st me in remembrance of what thing
 Proserpine was, and where, when by mischance
 Her mother lost her, and she lost the spring."
 Even as a lady turns round in the dance
 With feet close to each other and to the ground
 And hardly foot beyond foot doth advance,
 Toward me with maiden mien she turned her round
 Upon the floor of flowers yellow and red,
 Holding the while her modest eyes earth-bound.
 My supplication then she comforted,
 So near approaching, that her song divine
 Reached me with meaning to the music wed.

Soon as she came to where the grasses line
 The fair stream's bank and stand wet in its
 wave,
 She accorded me to lift her eyes to mine.
 I think not that the light such glory gave
 Beneath the eye-lids of Venus, being hit
 So strangely by the dart her own boy drave.
 She smiled upon the right bank opposite,
 Still with her hands plucking the flowers there
 Which that land bears without seed sown in it.
 Three paces the stream parted me from her;
 But Hellespont, where Xerxes bridged the strait
 That still makes human vaunt a bridle wear,
 Endured not from Leander keener hate,
 'Twixt Sestos and Abydos full in foam,
 Than this from me, because it closed the gate.
 "It may be," she began, "since new ye come
 And see me smiling in this place elect,
 Made for mankind to be their nest and home,
 That wonder and some misgiving hold you checked.
 But the psalm *Delectasti* beams a ray
 Which haply shall discloud your intellect.
 And thou who art first and didst beseech me, say
 If there is aught that doth thy question rouse,
 Behold! I am here thy mind's thirst to allay."
 "The running water," I said, "and rustling boughs
 Perplex me, appearing to serve other laws
 Than what a new belief made me espouse."
 Then she: "I'll tell thee how from its own cause
 Cometh to pass what doth thy wonder tease,
 And purge away the mist that gives thee pause.
 The Supreme Good, who himself alone doth please,
 Made man good, and for goodness, and this clime
 Gave him for promise of eternal peace.
 By his default he sojourned here small time:
 By his default, for tears, labour, and sweat
 He exchanged honest laughter and sweet pastime.
 And lest the tumults that beneath it beat,
 From water and earth by exhalation bred,
 Which follow, far as they can rise, the heat,

Should vex the peace man here inherited,
 This mount thus far up toward the heavens rose,
 And, barred secure from storm, lifts up its head.
 Now since all the air in one smooth circuit flows,
 And, save its circle is broken in some sense,
 Revolving with the primal motion goes,
 Such motion, striking on this eminence,
 That rises free in living air and light,
 Wakes music from the wood, where it is dense.
 And all the plants, so smitten, contain such might
 In them, that with their virtue the air they strew
 Which scatters it abroad in circling flight,
 All regions else, according to their due
 Of soil and climate thus conceive and bear
 Trees of each kind and each diverse virtue.
 Thou wilt not then as on a marvel stare,
 This known, when some plant without seed hath
 struck
 Invisibly its root, to burgeon there.
 Know that the blest plain whereon thou dost look
 Is pregnant of all seed that earth can use
 And bears fruit in it no hand there doth pluck.
 The water which thou seest doth not ooze
 From wells, that mist, by cold condensed, restores,
 Like rivers that in volume gain and lose,
 But issues from a spring's unfailing stores
 Which God's will, plenishing it, still re-makes
 So that on either side it freely pours.
 On this side it streams virtue such as takes
 Soilufe of sin out of the memory;
 On the other, memory of good deeds awakes.
 On this side, Lethe, the other, Eunoe
 Its name is; nor comes healing from this well
 Unless upon both sides it tasted be.
 This savour doth all savours far excel.—
 Now, though it may be all thy thirstiness
 Is quenched, even were this all that I should tell,
 I give thee this corollary as a grace;
 Nor do I think my words shall less be prized
 By thee, that they exceed my promises.

They who in ancient fable poetized
Of the felicity of the Age of Gold
In Helicon's dreams perchance this place agnized.
Innocent here was man's first root of old.
Here blooms perpetual Spring, all fruits abound:
This is the nectar of which earth hath told."
Then full upon my poets I moved me round;
And I perceived that they with smiles had learned
The interpretation that her discourse crowned.
To the fair lady then my face I turned.

CANTO XXIX

Still singing, like a lover of his dream,
She to the closing words continued on:
Blessed are they whose sins are pardoned them.
Like nymphs that used to wander each alone
Amid the shadowing green from tree to tree,
One seeking, and one hiding from, the sun,
Against the motion of the stream moved she
Upon the bank; and I with her abreast
Made little step with little step agree.
Not to a hundred had our steps increased
When both the banks so curved as to compel
My feet to turn aside unto the East.
Thus went we, and were not far, when it befell
The Lady toward me turning full about
Said, "Now, my brother, look and listen well!"
And lo! a sudden splendour dazzled out
From all sides of the forest through the trees,
So that, if it were lightning, I made doubt.
But since the lightning, as it comes, ceases,
And this, remaining, ever intenser grew,
Within my thought I said "What thing is this?"
And a sweet melody ran thrilling through
The luminous air; which in my righteous zeal
Made me the hardihood of Eve to rue,

Who, but a woman, newly formed to feel,
 Alone, where all earth and all heaven obeyed,
 Presumed to abide not under any veil,
 Beneath which had she in devotion stayed,
 I should of those ineffable delights
 Supp'd sooner, and with me longer had they de-
 layed.
 While thus I went mid the first sounds and sights
 Of the eternal pleasance, hesitant
 In joy that hoped to touch yet heavenlier heights,
 Before us, under the green boughs aslant,
 The air kindled, like a fire in a soft blast,
 And the sweet sound was heard now as a chant.
 O Virgins holy and high, if ever fast,
 And cold, and vigil, I for you endured,
 Now the hour comes when I claim reward at last.
 Helicon's founts for me be full out-poured,
 With all her choir Urania me uphold
 To attempt in verse things scarce to thought assured.
 A little farther on seven trees of gold
 Seemed to be such by reason that the tract
 Dividing us from them the sight cajoled.
 But when a nearer vision had unpacked
 The general image, which our fancies gloze,
 So that no one of all its features lacked,
 The power that matter unto reason shows
 Perceived them candlesticks, even as they were,
 And clear the words into "Hosanna" rose.
 Above was flaming forth the pageant fair,
 Brighter by far than is the moon's mild blaze
 In her mid month through the clear midnight air.
 I turned me backward in my rich amaze
 To the good Virgil, and for answer read
 No less a weight of wonder in his gaze.
 Then to the things of glory again my head
 I turned, and they came moving on so slow,
 They had been passed by a bride newly wed.
 The Lady cried to me: "Why dost thou glow
 To look upon the living lights in awe,
 Nor seekest what comes after them to know?"

Then saw I people in white apparel draw
 Nearer, as if one led them, rank by rank:
 Such whiteness upon earth none ever saw.
 The water glittered bright on my left flank,
 And gave to me my left side, if my face
 Looked into it, like a mirror, from the bank.
 When on my shore I had found such vantage-place
 That only the stream's width kept me confined,
 The better to behold, I stayed my pace.
 I saw the flames come onward, and behind
 Leave the air as if by painted colour sleeked,
 Flowing like pennons trailed upon the wind,
 So that the air remained in order streaked
 With seven bands, the hues the Sun hath dyed
 His bow, and Delia her girdle freaked.
 To rearward, farther than the eye descried,
 These banners streamed; as I computed it,
 Ten paces might the outermost divide.
 Under so lovely a sky, as I have writ,
 Came four and twenty elders, two by two,
 And they wore crowns of the white lilies knit.
 "Among the daughters of Adam blessed Thou,
 And blessed," they continued in their song,
 "Thy beauties, the eternal ages through."
 Soon as the flowers and the fresh grass along
 The other bank, opposite to my eye,
 Were freed of those elect ones and their throng,
 As star comes after star into the sky,
 Four mighty creatures followed in their train,
 Crowned with green leaves, slowly advancing
 nigh.
 Each with six wings was plumed, the plumy grain
 Filled full of eyes; and even such would gleam
 The eyes of Argus, could they live again.
 But further to define the forms of them,
 I spare to spend rhymes, reader, having shame
 Of lavishness, constrained to other theme.
 But read Ezekiel, who their form and frame
 Paints as he saw them, from the region cold
 Coming upon the wind in cloud and flame.

As thou upon his page dost find them scrolled,
 So were they here; but for the wings they wore,
 John is with me, and hath the difference told.
 The midmost of the space between the four
 Contained a car on two wheels, triumphing,
 Which at his neck a Gryphon onward bore.
 And he stretcht upward one and the other wing
 Twixt the mid band and those to left and right,
 So that to none might he an injury bring.
 They rose so high that they were lost to sight.
 So far as he was bird, his limbs were scaled
 With gold, the rest was vermeil mixt with white.
 With car so fair never was Rome regaled
 By Africanus, nor Augustus, nay,
 The Sun's own car beside it would be paled,
 The Sun's own car that perished, driven astray,
 At Earth's devout prayer fallen in flames extinct,
 When Jove let justice have her secret way.
 Beside the car's right wheel came dancing linked
 Three ladies in a ring; so red was one,
 That scarce in fire her form had been distinct:
 The next was like as if her flesh and bone
 Were made all of an emerald; the third
 Seemed snow on which the air had newly blown.
 And now the red to lead the rest appeared,
 And now the white; and from the chant which
 led
 They took the time, as slow or quick they heard.
 By the left wheel came four with festal tread,
 In purple, following in their order due
 One of them, who had three eyes in her head.
 After the passing of this retinue
 I saw two aged men, unlike arrayed,
 But like in mien, reverend and grave to view.
 One showed him a familiar of that trade
 Ennobled by supreme Hippocrates,
 Whom Nature for her dearest creatures made.
 Contrary care the other seemed to please:
 He bore a sword so keen and bright, its glance
 Made, even across the stream, fear on me seize.

Then saw I four, of aspect humble, advance;
And behind all was an old man alone
Coming, with piercing visage, in a trance.
And all these seven had a like raiment on
With the first troop, but round about the head
A garlanding of lilies had they none,
Of roses rather, and other blossoms red.
One from short distance viewing them would swear
That over the eyes a fire upon them fed.
Now when the car came opposite me, the air
Thundered; and this folk in their solemn lines,
Seeming forbidden, did no farther dare,
Halting in that place with the van's ensigns.

CANTO XXX

Now when those Seven of the First Heaven stood still
Which rising and declension never knew
Nor veil of other mist than the evil will,
And which apprized each there what he should do,
Even as the starry Seven in lower air
Guide him to port who steereth by them true,
The people in whom truth doth itself declare,
Who first between it and the Gryphon came,
Turned to the car, as of their peace aware.
And one, as if Heaven prompted that acclaim,
Veni sponsa de Libano chanted thrice,
And after him all the others cried the same.
As at the last trump shall the saints arise
With voice in alleluias re-attired
Each from the charnel cavern where he lies,
Upon the heavenly chariot so inspired
A hundred sprang *ad vocem tanti senis*,
Messengers of eternal life, who quired,
Singing together *Benedictus qui venis*,
While from their hands flowers up and down were
thrown,
And *manibus O date lilia plenis*.

I have seen ere now at the beginning dawn
 The region of the East all coloured rose,
 (The still sky else in purity withdrawn)
 When shadowed the sun's face uprising shows,
 So that the mists, attempering his powers,
 Let the eye linger upon him in repose;
 So now for me amid a cloud of flowers
 That from the angels' hands up-floated light
 And fell, withinside and without, in showers,
 A lady, olive-crowned o'er veil of white,
 Clothed in the colour of a living flame,
 Under a mantle green, stole on my sight.
 My spirit that a time too long to name
 Had passed, since, at her presence coming nigh,
 A trembling thing and broken it became,
 Now by no recognition of the eye
 But virtue invisible that went out from her
 Felt old love seize me in all its mastery.
 When smote my sight the high virtue that, ere
 The years of boyhood were behind me laid,
 Pierced the inmost of my heart, like to a spear,
 With such trust as a child that is afraid
 Or hurt, runs to his mother with his pains,
 I turned me to the left, to seek me aid
 And say to Virgil: 'Scarce one drop remains
 Of blood in me that trembles not: by this
 I recognize the old flame within my veins.'
 But Virgil had from us his company's
 Sweet solace taken, Virgil, father kind,
 Virgil, who for my soul's weal made me his,
 Nor all that our first mother had resigned
 Availed to keep my cheeks, washed with the dew,
 From the dark tears that stained them, welling
 blind.
 "Dante, that Virgil leaves thee, and from thy view
 Is vanished, O not yet weep; weep not yet,
 For thou must weep, another wound to rue."
 Even as an Admiral who, on high poop set,
 Looks on his men, in the other ships dispersed,
 Their willing hearts to embolden and abet,

So on the left side of the car, when first
 I turned, hearing my own name in my ear
 (Which of necessity is here rehearsed)
 I found the gaze of her I had seen appear
 Erewhile, veiled, in the angelic festival,
 Toward me, this side the stream, directed clear;
 Howbeit the veil which from her head did fall,
 With gray leaf of Minerva chapleted,
 Disclosing her, did not disclose her all.
 Still severe, standing in her queenlihead,
 She spoke on, like to one whose heart's caprice
 Holds the hottest word back till the last be said.
 "Look on me well: I am, I am Beatrice.
 How, then, didst thou deign to ascend the Mount?
 Knewest thou not that, here, man is in bliss?"
 I dropt mine eyes down to the lucent fount,
 But seeing myself there, drew them back in haste
 To the grass, heavy upon my shame's account.
 As to a child a mother looks stern-faced,
 So to me seemed she: pity austere in thought
 Hath in its savour a so bitter taste.
 She ceased then, and from every angel throat
 Straightway *In te, Domine, speravi* rose
 But beyond *pedes meos* they passed not.
 As on the chine of Italy the snows
 Lodged in the living rafters harden oft
 To freezing, when the East upon them blows,
 Then, inly melted, trickle from aloft,
 If in the unshadowed places a breath stirs,
 Like in the flame a candle melting soft,
 So was I, without sighs and without tears,
 In presence of their singing who accord
 Their notes to music of the eternal spheres;
 But when there trembled through me the sweet chord
 Of their compassion, more than if they spoke
 Saying, Lady, why this shame upon him poured?
 The ice that round my heart had hardened woke
 Warm into breath and water, and from my breast
 In anguish, through mouth and through eyes,
 outbroke.

She, standing ever in her still'd arrest
 Upon the car's same side, to the array
 Of those compassionate beings these words ad-
 drest:
 "Ye so keep watch in the everlasting day
 That neither night stealeth from you, nor sleep,
 One step that the world takes upon its way;
 Therefore my answer shall the more care keep
 That he may understand me amid those tears,
 So that transgression equal sorrow reap.
 Not only by operation of great spheres
 Which to some certain end each seed uptrain
 According as the starry voice it hears,
 But bounty of heavenly graces, which for rain
 Have exhalations born in place so high
 That our eyes may not near to them attain,
 This man was such in natural potency,
 In his new life, that all the ingrained good
 Looked in him to have fruited wondrously.
 But so much groweth the more rank and rude
 The soil with bad seed and unhusbanded,
 The more it hath of strength and hardihood.
 His spirit some time my countenance comforted
 With look of my young eyes for its support,
 Drawing him, the right path with me to tread.
 Soon as the threshold I had passed, athwart
 The second period, and life came to its change,
 Me he forsook, with others to consort.
 When from the flesh I had risen in spirit to range
 And beauty and virtue greater in me grew,
 Less precious was I to him, and more strange.
 And with perverted steps on ways untrue
 He sought false images of good, that ne'er
 Perform entire the promise that was due.
 Nor helped me the inspiration won by prayer
 Whereby through dream or other hidden accost
 I called him back; so little had he care.
 So low he sank, all means must I exhaust,
 Till naught for his salvation profited
 Save to be shown the people that are lost.

For this I broached the gateway of the dead,
For this to that one my entreaty brought,
Who hither with lamenting hath him led.
The ordinance of high God were set at naught
If Lethe were passed over into peace,
And such viand enjoyed, without some scot
Of penitence that may the tears release."

PARADISO

CANTO XXX

Perchance six thousand miles away is spread'
The blaze of noon, and this world more and
more
Inclines its shadow as to a level bed;
When over us the heavens' unfathomed core
Begins to alter, so that one by one
Stars lose their faint path down to this low floor:
And as the brightest handmaid of the Sun
Comes on, so doth the closing heaven efface
Sight after sight, till the most fair is gone.
Even so the triumph that for ever plays
About the point which overwhelmed me quite,
Seeming embraced by what it doth embrace,
By little and little stole out of my sight,
So that, by vacancy of vision led,
And love, I turned to Beatrice for light.
If all of her that heretofore is said
Could in a single perfect praise be quit,
'Twere still too small my full need to bestead.
The beauty I saw not only exceeds our wit
To measure, past all reach, but I aver
He only who made it fully enjoyeth it.
And I avow me more defeated here
Than by their theme's extremity of cost
Comic or tragic poet ever were.
As the sun troubles the eyes that tremble most
So doth to me the thought of the sweet smile,
Whereby, shorn of itself, my mind is lost.

From the first day when I beheld her, while
She was in this life, till that vision blest,
Never did aught my song from her beguile.
Yet needs must be relinquished further quest
To follow in verse her beauty; it now forgoes,
As must each artist to his last power prest.
For mightier notes than this my trumpet blows
So lovely I leave her, even upon the throne
Of the arduous theme, which draws now toward
its close.

With a leader's gesture and voice she spoke anon:
"Now from the greatest body emerged we move
Into the heaven that is pure light alone;

Light of the understanding, full of love,
Love of the true good, full of joy within,
Joy that transcends all the heart conceiveth of.

Thou shalt see either soldiery therein
Of Paradise; the one in the aspect they
Shall at the Judgment be approved to win."

As abrupt lightning-flash doth disarray
The visual spirits, so that the eye is reft
Of power to grasp even things that strongest stay,
The living light in such a radiant weft
Enwound me of glory and splendour without name,
That in it all was burnt and nothing left.

"Ever doth the Love which stilleth heaven acclaim
Its own with salutation like to this,
Disposing so the torch unto the flame."

Soon as these brief words entered like a bliss
Into me, I was 'ware that I had aid
To overpass my proper faculties.

And such new vision of the sense it made
That there is no intensity, my sight
Could not have borne to endure it unafraid.

And I beheld, shaped like a stream, a light
Tawny in its burning, between banks whereon
The miracle of the spring was pictured bright.

Out of this river living sparkles thrown
Shot everywhere a fire amid the bloom
And there like rubies gold-encrusted shone;

Then as if dizzy with the spiced perfume
 They plunged into the enchanted eddy again:
 As one sank, rose another fiery plume.
 "The high desire that burns thee now to attain
 To the true knowledge of the things thou seest
 Pleaseth me more, the stronger it doth strain.
 But thou must needs even of this water taste
 Ere thou the parch of so great thirst appease."
 So spoke mine eyes' Sun to me, and scarce had ceased
 When she added: "The river and the topazes
 That enter and issue, and the smiling grass,
 Are of their truth the shadowy prefaces.
 Not that in them the fault is to harass
 Thy mind, but in thyself doth it impede
 Because thou canst not thine own sight surpass."
 No child is there that flings him at such speed
 With face turned to the milk, if he awake
 Far later than his wont, as at my need
 I did, more perfect mirrors still to make
 Of mine eyes, bending to the wave profound
 That floweth for our more salvation's sake.
 Soon as mine eyes within the eyelids' bound
 Had drunken of that luminous wave, straightway
 The length of it shone altered into round.
 Then as a mask doth a man's face portray
 Other than it was,—if he but cast aside
 The counterfeit that did the truth bewray,
 So into festal aspect magnified
 Sparkles and flowers changed; Heaven with either
 Court
 Revealed before me opened far and wide.
 O Splendour of God, whereby I could support
 With these mine eyes truth realmed in triumph, fill
 My lips with power the vision to report!
 Light above lives there which makes visible
 Creator to creation, that alone
 In seeing him can in its own peace dwell.
 In the figure of a circle it stretcheth on
 And out, so far that its circumference
 Would be too wide a girdle for the sun.

All of it that appears rays effluence,
 On high reflected from the First Moved Sphere,
 Whose virtue and energy proceedeth thence.
 As a hill looks, in mirror of a mere,
 Down on its own adornments where they lie
 Reflected, profuse flowers in verdure clear,
 So standing o'er the light before mine eye,
 Mirrored in thousand ranks, about me rose
 All of us that hath won return on high.
 And if the least degree so greatly glows,
 What measure shall suffice for the amplitude
 Of the extremest petals of the Rose?
 The breadth, the height, my vision could include
 Undazzled, and that joy which blooms for aye,
 Its quality and its sum, I understood.
 Near and far adds not there nor takes away,
 For where God governeth immediate
 The natural law runs not, and hath no sway.
 In the yellow of the Rose that knows no date
 But flushes and expands, perfumed with song
 To the Sun that doth eternal spring create,
 Me, like to one made mute, with lips that long
 To speak, Beatrice drew to her and cried:
 "Look on the white-apparelled, how they throng!
 Behold our City, and how it circleth wide!
 Behold our thrones, so filled full that but few
 Yet to be numbered there, those seats abide.
 On that great scat thine eyes are drawn unto
 By the sword hung already over it,
 Ere at this wedding feast thyself art due,
 The soul, on earth imperial, shall sit
 Of the high Henry, coming the false course
 Of Italy to lighten, yet unfit,
 Because the greed that blinds you with its curse
 Hath made you like the child who perishes
 Of hunger, and peevish driveth off his nurse.
 The prefect of the court of Heaven's decrees
 Shall then be one who in open and secret
 ways
 Shall not be such as with his course agrees.

But in the holy office but short space
Shall God endure him: he shall be thrust down
Where Simon Magus hath his own just place
And him of Anagna shall yet deeper drown."

CANTO XXXIII

"Maiden and Mother, daughter of thine own Son,
Beyond all creatures lowly and lifted high,
Of the Eternal Design the corner stone!
Thou art she who did man's substance glorify
So that its own Maker did not eschew
Even to be made of its mortality.
Within thy womb the Love was kindled new
By generation of whose warmth supreme
This flower to bloom in peace eternal grew.
Thou art here to us the full meridian beam
Of love revealed: below, to mortal sight,
Hope, that for ever springs in living stream.
Lady, thou art so great and hast such might
That whoso crave grace, nor to thee repair,
Their longing even without wing seeketh flight.
Thy succour doth not only him up-bear
Who prays, but in thy bounty's large excess
Thou oftentimes dost even forerun the prayer.
In thee is pity, in thee is tenderness,
In thee magnificence, in thee the sum
Of all that in creation most can bless.
Now he that from the deepest pit hath come
Of the universe, and seen, each after each,
The spirits as they live and have their home,
He of thy grace so much power doth beseech
That he be enabled to uplift even higher
His eyes, and to the Final Goodness reach.
And I who never burned with more desire
For my own vision than for his, persist
In prayer to thee—my prayers go forth in
choir,—

Supplicating, that thou disperse all mist
 Of his mortality with prayers of thine,
 Till joy be his of that supreme acquist.
 Also I implore thee. Queen who canst incline
 All to thy will, let his affections stand
 Whole and pure after vision so divine.
 The throbbings of the heart do thou command!
 See, Beatrice with how many of the blest,
 To second this my prayer, lays hand to hand."
 Those eyes, of God loved above all the rest,
 Still fixt upon him speaking, the delight
 She hath in the devoted prayer confest.
 Then were they lifted to the eternal light,
 Wherein it may not be believed that eye
 So clear in any creature sendeth sight.
 And I, who to the goal was drawing nigh
 Of all my longings, now, as it behoved,
 Began to consummate their ecstasy.
 Bernard signed, smiling, as a hand he moved,
 That I should lift my gaze up; but I knew
 Myself already such as he approved,
 Because my sight, becoming purged new,
 Deeper and deeper entered through the beam
 Of profound light which in itself is true.
 Thenceforth my vision was too great for theme
 Of our speech, that such glory overbears,
 And memory faints at such assault extreme.
 As he who dreams sees, and when disappears
 The dream, the passion of its print remains,
 And naught again unto the mind adheres,
 Even such am I; for almost wholly wanes
 My vision now, yet still the drops I feel
 Of sweetness it engendered in my veins.
 Even so the sunbeam doth the snow unseal,
 So was the Sibyl's sentence strewn inert
 Upon the thin leaves for the wind to steal.
 O supreme Light, who dost thy glory assert
 High over our imagining, lend again
 Memory a little of what to me thou wert!

Vouchsafe unto my tongue such power to attain
 That but one sparkle it may leave behind
 Of thy magnificence to future men.
 For by returning somewhat to my mind
 And by a little sounding in this verse
 More of thy triumph shall be thence divined.
 So keenly did the living radiance pierce
 Into me, that I think I had been undone
 Had mine eyes faltered from the light averse.
 And I remember that with the more passion
 I clove to it, till my gaze, thereat illumed,
 With the Infinite Good tasted communion.
 Grace abounding, whereby I presumed *
 To fix upon the eternal light my gaze
 So long, that in it I my sight consumed!
 I beheld leaves within the unfathomed blaze
 Into one volume bound by love, the same
 That the universe holds scattered through its maze.
 Substance and accident, and their modes, became
 As if together fused, and in such wise
 That what I speak of is a simple flame.
 Verily I think I saw with mine own eyes
 The unravelled universal form of things,
 To tell of it my joy so magnifies.
 A single moment deeper oblivion brings
 Than five and twenty centuries have wrought
 Since Neptune saw the shadow of Argo's wings.
 Thus did my mind in the suspense of thought
 Gaze fixedly all immovable and intent,
 And ever fresh fire from its gazing caught.
 Man at that light becometh so content
 That other sight to choose and this reject,
 It were not possible that he consent,
 Because the good which is the will's object
 Concentres there, and that within its pale
 Is perfect, which, without, hath some defect
 And now must language the remembrance fail
 Ev'n farther, and less than could an infant's
 store
 Of speech, who at the pap yet sucks, avail.

Not that within the living light was more
Than one sole aspect of divine essence,
Being still for ever as it was before,
But the one semblance, seen with more intense
A faculty, even as in me was found
Change, was itself transfigured to my sense.
To me amid the luminous profound
Three circles from its substance now appeared,
Of three colours, and of one equal round.
One its reflection on the next conferred
As Iris upon Iris, and the two
Breathed equally the fire that was the third.
To my conception oh how frail and few
The words! and that, to what I looked upon,
Is less than little, if I bespeak it true.
O Light Eternal that in thyself alone
Dwell'st and thyself know'st, and self-understood,
Self-understanding, smilest on thine own,
That which in thee had the similitude
Of circles by reflection glowing orb'd,
Being by mine eyes a little longer woo'd,
Though of one inward colour undisturbed,
Seemed with our human effigy to fill,
Wherefore was all my sight in it absorbed.
As the geometer who bends all his will
To measure the circle, and how so e'er he try
Fails, for the principle escapeth still,
Such at this mystery new-disclosed was I,
Fain to understand how the image doth alight
Upon the circle, and with its form comply.
But these my wings were fledged not for that flight.
Save that my mind a sudden glory assailed
And the wish came revealed to it in that light.
To the high imagination force now failed.
But like to a wheel whose circling nothing jars
Already on my desire and will prevailed
The Love that moves the Sun and the other Stars.

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THE END

