



EBOOK

APOLLO AND MARSYAS

AND OTHER POEMS

EUGENE LEE-HAMILTON

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AND OTHER POEMS.

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MARSYAS.

Low, but far heard,
Across the Phrygian forest goes a sound
That seems to hush the pines that moan all round.
Is it the weird
Wail of a she-wolf plundered of her own?
Or some maimed Satyr left to die alone?
Or has great Pan, in lonely places feared,
To some belated wretch his wild face shown?

Oh strong rough Pan,
God of lone spots where sudden awe o'erwhelms
Weak souls, but never mine—I love thy realms!
I love the wan
Half-leafless glens, which Autumn's plaint repeat
From tree to tree; I love the shy fawn's bleat;
The cry of lynx and wood-cat safe from man;
The fox's short sharp bark from sure retreat.

The deep lone woods
Which men call silent teem with voice: I hear
Vague wails, low calls, weird notes, now far, now near.
The storm-born floods
That sweep the glens, the gurgling hurrying springs
Impart dim secrets, vague prophetic things;
The whispering winds awake strange wistful moods.
But hush, my flute! Apollo, strike thy strings!

APOLLO.

The harvest-hymns
Rise from the fields, where, in the setting sun,
The reapers stretch by sheaves of golden dun
Their weary limbs;
While many a sunburnt lad or maiden weaves
With every corn-flower that the sickle leaves
Demeter's harvest-crowns, or binds and trims
For the Great Mother her allotted sheaves.

The whole west glows
Like a vast sea of rosy molten ore
Where, here and there, great tracks of pearly shore
Or gleaming rows
Of crimson reefs and isles of amber blaze;
And through the whole a mighty fan of rays
Spreads as the sun approaches earth and throws
A farewell glance before he goes his ways.

A rich warm scent
Of summer ripeness fills the fertile plain;
The ox, unyoked, kneels chewing near the wain;
In one sound blent
The voices of the insect-swarms that fill
Each furrow, indefatigably trill
And chirp and hum; until the bright day spent,
Invokes the dusk to make the lone fields still.

MARSYAS.

What voice-like sounds
Off the Trinacrian coast, low, plaintive, sweet,
Blend with the breeze? or is it Fancy's cheat?
There seem no grounds
For watch or fear: the waves have sunk to sleep
In twilight on the bosom of the deep.
The ship seems half becalmed, and eve surrounds
The crew with dolphins in perpetual leap.

But hark again!
Now here, now there, now all around the ship
The voices sound each from an unseen lip!
Dost hear the strain?
It charms, it lulls, it lures, yet seems to fill
The soul with something ominous of ill,
A strange vague song with which man strives in vain,
Which melts the heart while it benumbs the will.

The weird sounds float
Across the waters from the rocky shore;
The listless crew grow drowsy more and more.
No signs denote
A coming storm; but something slow and strong
Sucks unperceived those spell-bound men along:
Awake, awake! the whirlpool grasps the boat!
It seethes, it roars, it drowns the Sirens' song!

APOLLO.

Out on thy strife
Of winds and birds!—See, see the golden spears
Gleam through the dust, and desperate charioteers
And Death and Life^{9}
Sweep by all wildly blent!—See, see how flash
The helmets in the sun, as onward dash
The waves of war! The very air seems rife
With goading Gods who wield an unseen lash!

O Sun, shine down
On Freedom's ranks; pour strength into their hearts,
And blind the foe with thy resistless darts!
On, on! the crown
Is for you all, both those who live and die!
See, see, they waver! now they turn and fly
In wild mad rout and trample down their own,
While thick as autumn leaves their strewn dead lie.

And as decrease
The rattle and the roar, the crash and cries,
Triumphant hymns from all the vast plain rise,
And never cease
To shake the stars.—Sound high, sound high, my strings!
For from the bloodstained dust the laurel springs;
Ay, and the olive with its fruit of peace,
And freedom's garnered grain and earth's best things!

MARSYAS.

Right sweetly played!
But oh, I love the caves where all is mute
Save unseen dropping waters, or my flute,
Whose tones are made
So strange by echo, that, transformed, increased,
They ape the voice of some wild wounded beast
Or eager hounds; or wail in cavernous shade
Like souls in Hades wailing unreleased.

And not less well
I love deep gorges, whether, in the spring,
With crash of slipping snow their echoes ring;
Or they compel
A summer storm's pent thunder, peal on peal,
To roll along them; or their rent flanks feel
Autumnal waters roar; or fierce howls tell
Of captive wintry winds in wild appeal.

Hark, hark! a scream
Of battling eagles o'er a sheer abyss,
And wind of wings above a torrent's hiss.
The rock-pent stream
Catches the drops of blood, and whirls away
The slow rotating feathers from the fray;
While from the sky the smaller falcons seem
To watch their kings and circle without stay.

APOLLO.

The noon creeps slow,
And wraps the windless world in heat and glare,
And droning beetles stir alone the air;
While, soft and low,
A chant of women weaving at the loom
Falls on the ear from some cool darkened room,
Where flits the restless shuttle to and fro
Beneath bare arms that glimmer in the gloom.

A fresh clear chant
About frail clouds that sea-sprites weave in vain,
And woven rainbows, harbingers of rain
For things that pant;
About Arachne and her wondrous woof;
About grim Time who weaves white hairs in proof
That men grow old, and that life's thread grows scant,
Weave, women, weave! still Hesperus holds aloof;
Still shoots the sun
His random shafts through leafy shade to rouse
The shepherd up, who seeks yet thicker boughs;
Still peep and run
The bright green lizard on the heated stones;
Still through the glare the whirling beetle drones;
Still noontide sleep may end sweet dreams begun.
Marsyas, resume thy flute. What say its tones?

MARSYAS.

Small lurid clouds
Veil and unveil the moon; while, through the lone
Wild Phrygian woods, hot gusts of storm-wind moan.
Each shadow shrouds
Some unknown conscious harm; and all around
Glide unseen rustling things upon the ground.
The air seems full of grabbing hands, and crowds
Of evil fancies wake at every sound.

Now in the night
The sorceress prowls, while others slumber deep,
Cursing the God who robs her of her sleep.
The moon's vague light
Makes her knife gleam, as, muttering low,
She seeks the thrice-curst mandrake which uprooted shrieks,
Such shrieks as drive the unexpected wight
Who hears them, mad, and blanch her own white cheeks.

Now sound strange sighs,
If it be true that evil spirits love,
And seek each other when the moon above
Half veils her eyes;
The woods repeat unhallowed coos and calls,
Kisses and sobs of love whose sound appals
Beyond all shrieks, all moanings and all cries,
While passion grows as deeper shadow falls.

APOLLO.

A golden haze
Has made the bright sea dreamy; and near coasts
Look far, and faint as sunshine-faded ghosts.
From neighbouring bays
A mingled sense of odoriferous wood
And fallen blossoms floats upon the flood
That scarcely heaves, save where the dolphins play;
While some few sea-gulls motionlessly brood.

And o'er that sea,
Bright, tepid, calm, the sunset breezes waft
A chant of sailors from a home-bound craft;
The white gulls flee
At its approach; while from the beach, where run
The tidings of return and riches won,
Come other chants to welcome distantly
The ship that seems to sail from out the sun.

Oh ply the oar,
Ye sun-tanned youths! does patient love not wait
With tight-strained heart, intent upon your fate?
The old loved shore
Is close, close, close! ye hear the lyre's loud strings—
Ye almost hear the words that gladness sings.
Oh ply the oar with might, and each shall pour
Into Love's lap the treasures that he brings!

MARSYAS.

Give ear—give ear!
From yonder grove in sudden gusts there comes
A sound of flutes, of cymbals and of drums;
And now I hear
Wild cries of Mænads who, with ivy crowned,
Toss their mad heads and whirl and leap and bound,
Brandishing snakes; while, in voluptuous fear,
The pale ecstatic votaries press around.

Whirl faster still,
Ye fierce flushed Mænads, lithier than the asp,
Or gleaming adder writhing in your grasp!
The wild flutes fill
The air with madness! Let the hot shift slip,
And show the panting breast, the glistening hip!
Dance ever faster, though the dance should kill!
Whirl on, with flaming eye and quivering lip!

I come, I come,
O Cybele, great Cybele, that hast
Thy chief throne here, I come to thee at last!
From my far home
I bring at last to thy deep rustling grove
The wild pent fire that in my bosom strove;
I come to lift thy praise to heaven's dome;
Perchance to die, on tasting thy dread love.

APOLLO.

Where sunshine clings
To Parian columns, what chaste marshalled throng
Brings thee, Athena, wreaths of flowers and song?
Thy pure fane rings
With measured chants; on horses small and fleet
Come stalwart youths; while with restrained feet
The troop of virgins climb the steps, that brings
The sacred olive and the sacred wheat.

Hark, never cease
The pure chaste hymns to hail the mighty child
Of the cleft brows of Zeus, all undefiled;
Armed friend of peace
From whose strong breastplate streams transcendent light,
Whose spear makes dim the meteors of the night;
Pure Patroness of plenty and increase,
Mistress of sunny cities walled and white!

And, oh, to-day,
Thou armed and placid Pallas, deadly foe
Of all things lewd and wild who once didst throw
In scorn away
The lewd wild flute, too base for thy pure breath,
And doom whoe'er should find it to slow death,
Come to my aid, and let my pure lyre play
Such bright chaste sounds as shall deserve the wreath!

SISTER MARY OF THE PLAGUE.

I.

IN her work there is no flagging,
And her slight frame seems of steel;
And her face and eyes and motions,
Tried by countless nights of watching,
Nor fatigue nor pain reveal.

Yet the Sisters say she eats not,
Spurning food as ne'er did saint,
And they murmur: "She is nourished
By a miracle of Heaven;
God allows not she should faint."

Through the darkened wards she passes
On her round from bed to bed;
And the sick who wait her coming
Cease their groaning, smiling faintly
As they hear her light quick tread.

Through the gabled lanes she hurries;
And the ribald men-at-arms
Hush their mirth, and stepping backward
Let her pass to soothe some death-bed,
Safe from insults and alarms;

And the priests and monks and townsfolk
Whom she passes greet her sight
With a strange respectful pleasure
As she nears in dark blue flannel
And huge cap of spotless white.

Oh, the busy Flemish city
Knows its Sister Mary well;
And the very children show her
To the stranger as she passes,
And her story all can tell:

How she won a lasting glory,
Cleaving to the dread bedside
When the Plague with livid pinions
Lighted on the crowded alleys,
And all others fled or died.

How alone she made men listen
In their fear, and do her will;

Making help and making order
When the customary rulers
Trembled helpless, and stood still.

How she had the corpses buried
When they choked canal and street;
When alone the shackled convicts,
Goaded on with pike and halberd,
Cared to near with quaking feet.

But those days of fear are over,
And the pure canal reflects
Barges decked with pots of flowers
And long rows of tile-faced gables
Which no breeze of death infects.

And once more the city prospers
Through the cunning of its guilds;
While the restless shuttles clatter,
And in peace the busy Fleming
Weaves and tans and brews and builds;
And the bearded Spanish troopers,
Sitting idly in the shade,
Toss their dice with oath and rattle,
Or crack jokes with girls that pass them,
Laughing-eyed and unafraid.

II.

Sister Mary, Sister Mary,
In thy soul there is some change:
For thy face the while thou watchest
By a pale young Spanish soldier
Works with struggle strong and strange.

Thou hast watched a hundred death-beds
Ever calm without dismay;
Fighting like a steady fighter
While the shade of Death pressed onward
Night on night and day on day;

And when Death had proved the stronger
Thou wouldst heave one sigh at most,
And then turn to some new moaner,
Ready to resume the battle,
Just as steady at thy post.

Now thy soul is filled with anguish
Strange and wild, thou know'st not why;
While a voice unknown and inward
Seems to whisper, far and faintly,
"If he dies, thou too wilt die,"

Many months has he been lying
In thy ward and rises not;
Youth and strength avail him nothing;
Growing daily whiter, whiter;
Dying of men know not what.

And he murmurs: "Sister Mary,
Now the end is nearing fast;
Thou hast nursed me like God's Angel,
But the hand of God is on me
And thy care must end at last.

"I have few, few days remaining;
Now I scarce can draw my breath;
See my hand: no blood is in it;
And I feel like one who slowly,
Slowly, slowly, bleeds to death."^{23}

And his worn and heavy eyelids
Close again as if in sleep;
While thou lookest at his features
With a long and searching anguish
In thy eyes—that dare not weep.

Sister Mary, Sister Mary,
Watch him closer, closer still!
There be things within the boundless
Realm of Horror, unsuspected—
Things that slowly, slowly, kill!

In his face there is no colour,
And his hand is ivory-white;
But upon his throat is something
Like a small red stain or puncture,
Something like a leech's bite.

Sister Mary, Sister Mary,
Dost thou see that small red stain?
Hast thou never noticed something
Like it on the throats of others
Whom thy care has nursed in vain?

Have no rumours reached thee, Sister,
Of a Thing that haunts these wards
When the scanty sleep thou takest
Cheats the sick of the protection
Which thy vigilance affords?

When, at night, the ward is silent
And the night-lamp's dimness hides,
And the nurse on duty slumbers
In her chair with measured breathing,
Then it glides, and glides, and glides,

Like a woman's form, new risen
From the grave with soundless feet,
Clad in something which the shadows
Of the night-lamp render doubtful
Whether robe or winding-sheet.

And its eyes seem fixed and sightless,
Like the eyeballs of the dead;
But it gropes not and moves onward
Sure and silent, seeking something,
In the ward, from bed to bed.

And if any, lying sleepless,
Sees it, he becomes as stone;
Terror glues his lips together,
While his eyes are forced to follow
All its movements, one by one.

And he sees it stop, and hover
Round a bed, with wavering will,
Like a bat which, ere it settles,
Flits in circles ever smaller,
Nearer, nearer, nearer still.

Then it bends across the sleeper
Restless in the sultry night,
And begins to fan him gently
With its garment, till his slumber
Groweth deep, and dreamless quite;

And its corpse-like face unstiffens
And its dead eyes seem to gloat
As, approaching and approaching,
It applies its mouth of horror
Slowly, firmly, to his throat.

Sister Mary, Sister Mary,
Has no rumour told thee this?
What if he whose life thou lovest
Like thine own, and more, were dying
Of that long terrific kiss?

III.

From the Hospital's arched window,
Open to the summer air,
You can see the monks in couples
All returning home at sunset
Through the old cathedral square.

On the steps of the cathedral,
In the weak declining sun
Sit the beggars and the cripples;
While faint gusts of organ-rolling
Tell that vespers have begun.

Slowly creeps the tide of shadow
Up the steps of sculptured front,
Driving back the yellow sunshine
On each pinnacle and buttress
Which the twilight soon makes blunt

Slowly evening grasps the city,
And the square grows still and lone;
No one passes save, it may be,
Up the steps and through the portal,
Some stray monk or tottering crone.

In this room, which seems the study
Of the Hospital's chief leech,
There is no one; but the twilight
Makes all objects seem mysterious,
Like a conscious watcher each.

Here the snakes whose venom healeth
Stand in jars in hideous file;
While the skulls that crown the book-shelves
Seem to grin; and from the ceiling
Hangs the huge stuffed crocodile.

Here be kept the drugs and cordials
Which the Jew from Syria brings,
And perchance drugs yet more precious,
Melted topaz, pounded ruby
Such as save the lives of kings.

All is silent in the study;
But the door-hinge creaks anon,
And a woman enters softly
Seeking something that seems hidden—
One unnaturally wan.

What she seeks is not in phials
Nor in jars, but in a book;
And she mutters as she searches
Through the book-shelves with a kind of
Brooding hurry in her look;

And she finds the book, and takes it
To the window for more light;
And she reads a passage slowly
With constrained and hissing breathing
And dark brow contracted tight.

*“Most of them,” it says, “are corpses
That have lain beneath the moon,
And that quit their graves at midnight,
Prowling round to prey on sleepers;
But the daybreak scares them soon.*

*“But the worst, called soulless bodies,
Plague the world but now and then;
They have died in some great sickness;
But reviving in the moonbeams
Rise once more and mix with men.*

*“And they act and feel like others,
Never guessing they be dead,
Common food of men they love not;
But at night, impelled by hunger,
In their sleep they quit their bed;*

*“And they fasten on some sleeper,
Feeding on his living blood;
Who, when life has left his body,
Must in turn arise, and, prowling,
Seek the like accursed food.”*

And the book slips from her fingers
And she casts her down to pray;
But convulsions seize and twist her,
And delirious ramblings mingle
With the prayers she tries to say.

In her mouth there is a saltness,
On her lips there is a stain;
In her soul there is a horror;
In her vitals there is something
More like raging thirst than pain;

And she cries, "O God, I knew it:
Have I not, at dead of night,
Waking up, looked round and found me
On the ledge of roofs and windows
In my shift, and shrunk with fright?

"Have I not, O God of mercy,
Passed by shambles in the street,
And stopped short in monstrous craving
For the crimson blood that trickled
In the gutter at my feet?

"Did I not, at last Communion,
Cough the Holy Wafer out?
Blood I suck, but Christ's blood chokes me.
O my God, my God, vouchsafe me
Some strong light in this great doubt!"

And she sinketh crushed and prostrate
In the twilight on the floor,
While the darkness grows around her,
And her quick and laboured breathing
Grows convulsive more and more.

IV.

Sister Mary, all is quiet
In thy wards, and midnight nears:
Seek the scanty rest thou needest;
Seek the scanty rest thou grudgest,
All is hushed and no one fears.

But, though midnight, Sister Mary
Thinks it yet not time to go;
And the night-lamps shining dimly
Show her vaguely in the shadow
Moving softly to and fro.

What is it that she is doing,
Flitting round one sleeper's bed;
Is she sprinkling something round it,
Something white as wheaten flour,
And on which she will not tread?

And at last the work is over,
And she goeth to her rest;
And she sleeps at once, exhausted
By long labour, and, it may be,
By strong struggles in her breast.

Nothing breaks upon the stillness
Of the night, except, afar,
Some faint shouts of ending revel
Or of brawling, in the quarters
Where the Spanish soldiers are.

Time wades slowly through the darkness
Till at last it reaches day,
And the city's many steeples
Buried in the starless heaven
Grow distinct in sunless grey.

And the light wakes Sister Mary,
And she dresses in strange haste,
Giving God no prayer, and leaving
On her bed the beads and crosses
That should dangle from her waist.

And with unheard steps she hurries
Through the ward where all sleep on
To the bed in which is lying
He who day by day is growing
More inexorably wan.

All around the bed is sprinkled
Something white, like thin fresh snow,
Where a naked foot has printed
In the night a many footprints,
Sharp and clear from heel to toe:

Sister Mary, Sister Mary,
Dost thou know thy own small foot?
Would it fit those marks which make thee
Turn more pale than thy own paleness
If upon them it were put?

And the dying youth smiles faintly
Pleasure's last accorded smile;
And he murmurs as he hears her,
"Sister Mary, I am better;
Let me hold thy hand awhile:

"Sister Mary, I would tell thee
Fain one thing before I die;
For a dying man may utter
What another must keep hidden
In the fastness of a sigh.

"Sister Mary, I have loved thee—
Is it sin to tell thee this?
And I dreamt—O God, be lenient
If 'tis sin—that thou didst give me
On the throat a long, long kiss."

THE BRIDE OF PORPHYRION.

DIOCLEA.

PASS on, pass on, and seek thy lair, lone man,
If neighbouring lair thou hast. Night falls; and God
For whom thou once didst snap all human ties
Requires thy evening prayer.

PORPHYRION.

Oh, if I stop
Upon my path and bandy words with woman—
I who for years have shunned man, woman, child,
But woman most—I would not have thee think
In error that thy old familiar voice,
Which seems to come from out the past, has called
Emotion back to life, or that I care
To take advantage of the freak of chance
Which brings us face to face and makes us stand
Each like a spectre in the other's eyes.
But I suspect thee of a rash design
Abhorrent to the Christian; and I ask,
Woman, once more, what brings thee here at dusk—
Here by the deep lone Nile, when rise the mists
Heavy with death, when prowl devouring beasts,
And when God's lonely dweller in the waste
Alone has nought to fear?

DIOCLEA.

What brings me here?
The Nile flower is closing with the day;
The Nile bird hastens to her bulrush nest;
All Nature that is not of night and evil
Is seeking rest; and why should not I too,
If I am weary, find repose at dusk
Where rolls the deep dark stream?

PORPHYRION.

Because the Lord,
Through my unworthy voice, has bid thee quit
This perilous brink, and bear such heavy load
As He, whom none shall judge, may choose to heap
Upon thy head.

DIOCLEA.

Resume thy path, lone man—
Resume thy path in peace. Oh, thou art rash
To linger out this meeting of dead souls!
Art thou not that Porphyron who escaped
Into the waste to shun the sight of woman,
However pure and spotless she might be?
Then leave me to myself; go seek thy lair,
And leave me to the darkness and the night;
Else will I tell thee in one monstrous word
What she now is who once was Dioclea,
And make thy desert-nurtured chastity
Shrink back in fear as from a gust from hell!

PORPHYRION.

Oh, I have wrestled with the Fiend too long
And placed my heel too oft upon his neck
To fear contamination from thy breath!
I care not what thou wast, nor what thou art,
Now that my soul is safe and that long years
Of ruthless castigation of the flesh
Have put me out of reach of woman's snare;
But, as a Christian servant of the Lord,
I may not let thee do the thing thou wouldst,
And which God hates. Thy soul is on the brink
Of the abyss; and God now bids me stretch
My hand to save it.

DIOCLEA.

Oh, not thine, not thine!
The wanton hand that broke the precious vessel
Shall not attempt to mend it.

PORPHYRION.

What I did
Upon that day, I did at God's command.

DIOCLEA.

Upon my bridal morn my father's house
Was full of song; my heart was full of sun;
Yea, and of earnest love and brave intent:
Less snowy was the linen I had woven
With my own hands for thee; less fresh the wreaths
The bridesmaids still were twining; and less pure

The gold of bridal gifts which guest-friends brought,
Than was the heart that waited to be thine.

PORPHYRION.

Upon thy bridal morn my heart was filled
With doubt and fear. My hounded spirit groped
Like one who fears pursuers in the dark
And knows no issue. Yea, within my breast,
Like captive eagles in a cage too narrow,
The love of God, the love of thee, did fight.
I cursed the perilous lustre of thy eyes;
I cursed thy smile and laugh; and cursed myself
That loathed them not. The sounds of mirth and song
That filled the house fell grating on my ear;
The nuptial cakes smacked bitter in my mouth,
Ay, worse than gall; the dewy bridal wreaths
Stank in my nostrils, while an inner voice
Kept thundering in my soul: "Away, away!
The howling waste awaits thee. Not for thee
Are care and kiss of woman; not for thee
Are hearth and home, and kith and kin and friend;
But scourge and shirt of hair!"

DIOCLEA.

And like a thief,
After the priest had blessed us and before
The feast was over, thou didst skulk away,
And all at once convert the sound of song
Into the hum of pity and derision.
I sat alone upon my empty bed,
Wrapped in the double gloom of night and woe.
The pillars of my faith in human good
Had given way; the roof had fallen in
Upon my life. Oh how I cursed the night
For dragging out its black and silent creep!
And when dawn came, oh how I cursed the dawn
For its intrusive stare! And yet that night
Was but the first of many equal nights;
That dawn was but the first of many dawns
In ushering in a loathed and lonely day.
I held aloof from every happier woman,
Suspiciously and silently to brood;
Grudging to one her husband's look of love,
And to the next the infant at her breast;
Grudging to all their house, their home, their hearth,
Their dignity, their duties, and their cares:

And shunning, I was shunned, and, as it were,
Marked out for future shame.

PORPHYRION.

If like a thief
I stole away unseen, oh it was not
To spend that night in any rival's arms!
Rock, hard and wind-swept, was my marriage bed;
The wilderness my bride; the starry sky
My roof; the distant, interrupted howl
Of beasts of prey my nuptial lullaby.
Before me lay the waste, strewn here and there
With ribs of men and camels, or the wreck
Of perished cities; yea, and thirst and pain
In vaguely measured sum. But in my soul
The voice of thunder cried: "Push on, push on
Into the waste, Porphyrion! thou art still
Too near to human haunts, too far from God!"
And I pushed on; and in an empty tomb
In a deserted city of the dead
I made my lair, alone with stones and God;
Living off locusts and such scanty herbs
As grew in clefts of rock and empty wells.
Oh what a silence, what a loneliness!
The temple columns and the huge carved stones
Cast long black shadows on the sun-baked sand
In endless rows; and through the livelong day
No moving shadow crossed them save my own,
As, like a leper whom his sores have doomed
To lead the lonely life, I prowled for food.
Oh, it was hard! For knowing that the Fiend
Would come ere long to scare and tempt me back
To human haunts, I sought with prayer, and scourge,
And thirst, and hunger, and restricted sleep
To arm myself against him and his strength;
And come he did. He prowled at first at night,
Shaped as a roaring lion, round and round
My lonely cell; but his re-echoing roar
Deterred me not, nor stopped a single prayer.
And then he came with soft insidious step
During my sleep, and strove to tempt the flesh
In woman's guise—yea, in thy very shape—
And sought to lure me to caress and kiss,
Taking thy face, thy eyes, thy very voice
In all their beauty and their blandishment;
But I defied him, and he howling fled,

And changed his plan. He made the solid ground
Lurch ever and anon beneath my feet;
He made me shiver in the blazing sun
With mortal cold; and sometimes, in the dusk
He made the huge stone heads of sphinxes nod
And gibber as I passed them. Oh, for years
I wrestled with him in the awful waste;
But I o'ercame his strength.

DIOCLEA.

And dost thou think
That I, in that worse waste, which was not strewn
Like thine with stones, but with the wreck of hopes
And wreck of love, was not sought out by fiends
As well as thou? Ay, ay, they came, the fiends;
They whispered in my ear that I was young,
And that my youth was passing unenjoyed;
They whispered in my ear that I was fair—
Fairer than any other far or near,
And that the beauty that a fool had spurned
Would wane before its time. They said: "Look up!
Thou mournest Love whom thou believest dead,
And Love, hard by, is waiting for one word,
One motion of encouragement, one glance.
Give but the signal, and the lonely one
Whom maid and matron scorn, and who now holds
Suspiciously aloof from life and joy,
Will be a very Empress new-enthroned,
And waste her life no more." But oh, I clung
To the dull honour of my broken life;
I struggled with the Tempter long and hard;
I said unto myself that after all
Thou mightst at last return to me; and strove
With all my strength to keep me pure for thee.
But years went by and still thou didst not come,
And round and round my heart the Tempter prowled,
Nearer and ever nearer with new arts,
New wiles, new snares, new whispers, day by day,
And proved at last the stronger of the two.
I fled my father's house for ever more;
I loved; was loved; I saw luxurious cities
Where pleasure triumphed—Alexandria,
Antioch and Athens, ay, and even Rome—
Courtied where'er I went; until the day
When he proved false, and when once more I sat
Upon my lonely bed and prayed for dawn.

And yet I loved again; yea, twice and thrice.
Down, down the winding stair of love I went,
Until the slippery and precipitous steps
Became so dark and noisome all at once
That I threw up my arms and shrieked in fear;
But all my strength was gone, and heaven's faint light
Too far above my head. Oh, since we two
Last saw each other's eyes, not thou alone
Hast felt the scourge alight upon thy back,
Not thou alone hast known the howling waste;
For I have felt that nine times knotted scourge
Which makes the soul and not the body writhe.
Descending on me fiercely; and have found
In men's embrace a loneliness more dread,
A desert more terrific and more bare
Than any which thy bruised unsandalled foot
Has ever trodden yet.

PORPHYRION.

The worse for thee.
I freed thee from the weight of human ties;
I pointed out the path that leads to heaven
Across life's wreck; and if, instead of God,
Thou chosest Satan, what is that to me?
Thou mightst have built a mansion for thy soul
Upon the ruins of an earthly home;
Thou mightst like me have wrestled with the Fiend,
And felt the pride of bruising with thy heel
The Tempter's head; thou mightst like me have felt
The fierce voluptuous pleasure of the scourge;
Nay, even, like myself thou mightst, with time,
Have sought to snatch from Heaven's hand the crown,
The glorious crown of martyrdom: for if
Upon this day thou meetest me so near
The haunts of men, it is because I wait
For some fresh outburst of the Pagan's wrath
Against our sect, to court the lingering death.
But lo, we waste our words; for I have warned
And summoned thee to leave the perilous brink
Of this dark circling water; and if thou
Still cleavest to thy heathenish design
Of self-destruction, not upon my soul
Shall fall the wrath of Heaven for the deed.
Once more I bid thee, woman, leave the brink;
For see, the night has come; and, as thou say'st,
God needs my evening prayer.

DIOCLEA.

Ay, ay, the night
Has wrapped us round: I scarce can see the flowers
That glimmered on the current; though I hear
The sweet faint rustling of the stream-bent reeds.
Pass on thy way, lone man—pass on in peace;
There is no link between us, and no love.
Go, find thy rest, as I at last find mine;
And leave me here, beside the deep lone Nile,
Where woe will sink, and haply leave no trace.

HUNTING THE KING.

1792.

AND the two in the twilight spurred fiercely again,
While behind them went trooping the trees,
And the darkening rutty cross-roads of Champagne,
With their patches of wood and their patches of grain,
Grew more solemn and lone by degrees.

Like the hurrying ghosts of two riders they rode,—
For the few whom they met, indistinct;
And the lights that sprang up few and far away showed
Where, to right or to left, lay a human abode;
And more stars overhead came and winked.

Through the maze of cross-roads they went ever more fast,
As if he who led on never doubted;
Till the other by dint of hard spurring at last
Brought his horse alongside, and between them there passed
Hurried words that were broken and shouted.

“Slacken pace! slacken pace!” “Spur him on without stay!
What’s a horse to the saving of France?”
“Art thou sure of the place where they change the relay?”
“At Varennes, nigh on twelve. Trust to me for the way!
France is saved if we get in advance!”

And the postmaster Drouet once more shot ahead,
Closely followed by Guillaume his friend;
Never seeming to waver or doubt as he led,
Or to see less distinct the invisible thread
Of short-cut on short-cut without end.

But the roads and the fields and the low hedges grew
Every minute more lonely and dark,
While his horse, nearly merged in the darkness, now drew
From the flint of the road with its thundering shoe
Every minute more brilliant a spark.

But he thought in his heart: “If the moon does not rise
When we get to the woods, I shall doubt;
And he’ll get to the army and German allies,
And the land, unprepared, will be caught by surprise,
And the great revolution stamped out.”

But a glow, faint at first, and then brighter, was spread
In the sky, and the moon showed her face,
And the plain and the hills were lit up far and wide;
And a galloping shadow appeared at his side,
And took part all at once in the race.

Oh the moon that plays tricks with the shadows she throws
Might have given that shadow the shape
Of the Rider who rides us all down, friends and foes,
And was now ere their time coming down upon those
Who had trusted to God for escape.

Hurry on, ye postillions, so royally paid,
That suspect not a King and a Queen!
Though ye never have heard in the course of your trade
Of a thing that the doctors of Paris have made,
Of a thing that they call Guillotine!

Hurry on to the chopper-shaped square of Varennes
Where your fellow-postillions await!
Hurry on! hurry on, ye dull whip-cracking men!
For each stride that ye take, there is one who takes ten,
And who gallops like Death and like Fate!

He caught sight of a face in the dark carriage-hood
As ye rolled from his door and were gone,
And he looked with a closeness that boded no good
At the crumpled bank-note where that face graven stood—
Hurry on! hurry on! hurry on!

There were clouds near the moon, and they girt her about
As if trying to screen and to save,
And the darkness one moment filled Drouet with doubt;
But she baffled them all and shone brilliantly out
To abet with the light that she gave.

And the stems of the corn flashed metallic and bright
And like bayonets distantly blue,
And the breeze-rippled patches of grain in the light
Looked like distant battalions restrained from the fight
That a thrill of impatience runs through.

But the patches of grain grew more scanty anon,
And the road grew more hard to discern;
And they entered the lonely dark woods of Argonne
Where the moon through the branches could ill help them on,
And they trampled on brushwood and fern.

As they galloped each oak with its black knotty arm
Seemed to grab at the two like a claw;
While the air seemed all full of destruction and harm,
And the one who rode second felt vaguely alarm
At each shadow and shape that he saw.

But the other dashed on, as with hounds on the scent
In his thundering, thundering speed;
Giving neither a thought to his horse nearly spent
Nor a look to his comrade, but solely intent
On a prey that was royal indeed.

Did no angel of life, as he spurred yet more fast,
Cry, "O God, for a slip or a stumble
That shall save from the block the heads sinking at last
Into sleep, now that fear of pursuers is past,
And the heads of a many more humble!

"O Thou God for a doubt that shall bring to a stop,
For a stone in the shoe to retard,
Or more heads in the basket of sawdust will drop
Than the bunches of grapes that the vintagers lop
On a day that their labour is hard;
"And the fields will be lashed not by tempests of rain,
But by tempests of iron and lead;
And manured year by year with fresh blood all in vain,
And each summer will bring not a harvest of grain,
But a harvest of cripples and dead;

"And the nations in carnage will ceaselessly strive
With a roar that disperses the clouds;
Where the trains of artillery furiously drive
And the gun-wheels make ruts through the dead and the live,
And the balls make long lanes through the crowd.

"Let his horse break a vein or his saddle a girth,
Trip him up on the rough, hardened mud!
For each drop from the rowel that falls to the earth
If he reaches Varennes, O Thou God, will give birth
To an ocean of innocent blood!"

Or did spirits invisible fly by his side
And in whispers excite him and goad
And exulting foretell him the end of his ride,
As his spur-mangled horse with his long fatal stride
One by one killed the miles of the road.

Did they cry: "Lash him on, as in lightness of heart
They have ridden the people to death;
Lash him on, as the Saviour of France that thou art;
Lash him on, till the blood from his nostrils shall start;
Lash him on! never think of his breath!"

Did they cry: "Lash him on without mercy or stay!"
As his arm, numb with lashing, desisted;
"Lash him on, as the quarterers lashed on the day
When their horses 'mid clapping of hands tugged away,
And the live limbs of Damiens resisted!

"Lash him on, for the freedom of nations depends
On the flag which at last is unfurled!
Lash him on, lash him on, till his very life ends!
Lash him on, lash him on, for the breath that he spends
Is for Freedom, and France, and the World!

"So shall Kellermann's steed at Marengo be spurred
When the earth by his squadrons is shaken,
And the thunder of man o'er God's thunder is heard,
And there runs from the Alps to the Tiber one word,
And the lands from their torpor awaken!

"So the couriers shall spur and the miles disappear
From the Oder, the Elbe, and the Po,
When the victories follow each other so near
That the bearers of tidings are filled with a fear
Lest another their tidings outdo!

"Lash him on, lash him on! and the three-coloured flag
That has sprung from the black Paris gutter
Shall be carried by plain and by valley and crag
And, all riddled by bullets, a mere tattered rag,
From Alhambra to Kremlin shall flutter!"

And he lashed, and he left his companion behind
And sped furiously on all alone,
With the sinister shadow the moon had designed
Flitting on just in front of him, vaguely defined,
At a pace that was wild as his own.

And as midnight was nearing, at last there appeared
The faint lights of Varennes far ahead,
And then only it was, as he finally cleared
The last miles of the road, that he suddenly feared
That his horse might fall suddenly dead.

But his horse did not drop; and with thundering feet
He dashed on to the inn of the Post;
While he shouted to all that his eye chanced to meet,
"Sound the tocsin! the tocsin! all up the long street!
Bar the Bridge! bar the Bridge! or all's lost!"

And the patriots crouched in the shade of the old
Narrow archway, all holding their breath;
Till a carriage and four was heard coming, and rolled
Slowly, heavily, in; while the tocsin still tolled
Like a knell that anticipates death.

ABRAHAM CAREW.

YE righteous Judges of this Christian state,
Ye bid me speak; ye bid me show good cause
Why I, whose hand is red with Christian blood,
Yea, even with the blood of my own child,
Of my own Edith, should not be condemned
To die upon the scaffold, nor be locked
For life within a mad-house: and I speak.
I fear not death; for now that she is dead,
Now that dull silence hath replaced her voice,
Life hath but little charm; and were it not
That to consent to ignominious death
For having acted by command of God
Would be unfit, and might call down His wrath
Upon the land, I think I scarce should take
The pains to plead; but strength hath narrow bounds,
And I confess intolerable fear
Lest ye condemn me to complete my years
Among the mad. O Thou Almighty God
Who for Thy purposes inscrutable
Hast pushed me on and nerved my quaking arm
To slay my child, preserve from such dread fate
One who has offered up what most he loved
Here upon earth, and give unto my tongue
Such eloquence as may convince these men
That I am sane!

I am a self-made man
Grown rich by building engines for the rail,
A man of little learning; one whose youth
Was spent in striking sparks from reddened iron
Amid the roar and clanging of a forge;
Knowing no books except the Book of books,
Whose sacred pages when my work was done
I turned with grimy hands, therein to learn
The will and orders of a jealous God,
A God of wrath, a God whose unseen hand
Falls heavily and chasteningly on all,
And most on them He loveth. Little time
Did I bestow on pleasure and those sports,
Unseemly for the most part, which divert
The spirit from obedience, and prevent
The growth of labour's fruit; and God allowed
That I should prosper in my worldly wealth.
And that the name of Abraham Carew

Should hold high credit in the market-place,
 And that my fellow-townsmen one and all
 Should put their faith in my integrity,
 Electing me an Elder of the Church
 And civil Magistrate. But, as I say,
 The Lord doth love to chasten; and He laid,
 As years went by and multiplied my store,
 Great tribulations on me. One by one
 I saw the godly household which had grown
 Around me, fall as fell the summer flowers
 Around an aged tree when winter nears,
 And leave him in his listless loneliness.
 One child alone, one twining clinging flower—
 Edith, my latest born—remained unnipped,
 And in my rash presumption I believed
 That God would spare her; for upon her cheek
 The hectic spot appeared not which had marked
 Her mother and her brethren; and I saw
 With sinful joy how she increased in strength
 As grew her beauty and her loveliness—
 Yea, yea, a sinful joy which was to rouse
 The jealousy of God. But if my tongue
 Is to convince you of the thing I tell
 And justify His ways, oh let me speak—
 Oh let me tell you how I loved my child!
 I loved her as an old man loves the sun
 Which warms his limbs and keeps the palsy off;
 I loved her as the plundered miser loves
 The small secreted heap that yet remains;
 I loved her as the shipwrecked drowning wretch
 Loves the frail plank which each approaching wave
 May tear from his embrace.

No vain gold chain,
 No gaudy ribbon decked her nut-brown hair;
 But in such sober raiment as befits
 The virgin-mistress of a godly house
 She went the round of her domestic duties,
 In need of no adornment to enhance
 The chaste and holy beauty which she wore
 Unconscious to herself, and lived her life
 Of cheerfulness and thrift, beloved by all;
 Reading at morn and eve the Bible page
 To our assembled servants, in a clear
 And reverent voice; devoting patient hours
 To teaching little children; and by help
 Of her own needle, plied while others slept,

Providing winter clothing for the poor
Before the earliest chill of autumn came.
A grave and gracious girl, whose smile of love
Was as a light for my declining years;
Who prized the walks which we were wont to take
Together, through the lanes and ripening corn,
Above all routs and shows. Too great, too great
To please a jealous God, had grown the love
For Edith in my bosom; and at times
I felt a cruel tightening of the heart,
And a prophetic something seem to say
Unto my spirit: "Abraham, beware!
The Lord will claim His rights, and ask again
For that which He hath given unto thee.
Thy love is given to an earthly thing;
A common, natural instinct rules thy life,
And not the love of God." But on her cheek
The ruddiness of health diminished not,
And I loved on.

There came a Sabbath day,
On which it chanced that at the Meeting House
The Scripture page was read in which it said
How he whose name I bear, in days of yore
Obeyed the dire injunction of the Lord,
And offered up his Isaac. By my side
Edith was sitting listening to the words
With fixed attention, as was e'er her wont.
The light athwart the high and narrow window
Streamed down upon her, lighting up her hair
With golding streakings, just as rays of sun
Light up the seaweed in a tide-left pool,
And played upon her features—ne'er before
Had she appeared so lovely. As my eyes
Were resting thus upon her sitting there,
A fear flashed through my spirit, and I thought:
"What if the Lord were to demand her life,
And bid thee offer up thy only child
As Abraham did Isaac?" and I felt
A strange and frightful struggle stir my soul—
Yea, stir my nature to its inmost depths.
I listened little to the words of prayer;
And on our homeward way, when Edith asked
What made my brow so suddenly o'ercast,
I answered not.

Ye wise and upright men
Who sit to-day deciding on my fate,
Ye wonder at the measure of my speech
Ye miss what ye expected ye would find,
A madman's incoherence, or the glare
And desperate wild defence of guilt at bay?
Confess, confess, I speak not like the mad.
Oh, I have drilled and disciplined my tongue
In these long months of prison; I
From morn to eve within my narrow cell
Taming my own excitement, so that if,
When came the day of trial, God should make
No outward revelation of the truth
To save His servant, I might yet convince
My judges and the world. He hath not deigned
To make the attestation at my prayer.
No thunder from the blue unclouded sky,
No quaking of the earth hath helped my cause,
And God hath left me only earthly means
To prove to men that what they call a crime
I did by His command.

It came, it came,
That dread command! I had not long to wait;
I seemed to feel it coming; day and night
The frightful expectation filled my soul;
And by a natural instinct, thrice accurst,
The more I dreaded that an angry God,
Roused by the sinful greatness of my love,
Would claim her life, the more my love increased.
It came, it came, the awful summons came!
It was the dead of night: I lay awake;
And in the soundless darkness, all at once,
While on my flesh the hair from fear stood up,
I heard the awful voice: it cried, "Arise,
Take up thy knife, and sacrifice thy child
Whom I bestowed; for I the Lord thy God,
I am a jealous God, and bid thee strike."

Then came three days of human agony;
The flesh contending with the will of God,
And writhing upward like a trodden snake
Beneath religion's heel: for I believed
That God would pardon me three days' delay
To conquer human nature. Once I thought
To tell her all—to ask her for her life—
To call on her obedience to submit—

To shift upon her shoulders half the weight
Of agony and horror; but I looked
Upon her face and set aside the plan,
Misdoubting woman's strength. In Edith's eyes
I saw a strange suspicious look—a look
Which told me that the tempest in my soul
Was finding outward vent upon my face.
I caught her watching me, and understood
That if I struck not soon, perchance my arm
Would be restrained by man; so I prepared.
There was a spot beside the sedgy stream,
A solitary spot, which in our walks
We sometimes crossed. I led her out that way.
It was a hot close day; no ray of sun
Shone through the lowering clouds, and now and then
The thunder's distant rumble met the ear.
We reached the lonely river-bank. I stopped,
And was about to do it, when she laid
Her hand upon my arm with a caress,
And asked me in her sweet familiar voice
To pluck a water-lily, which I did,
And then walked on, for somehow I was balked;
I could not do it.

With the fall of night
The pent-up tempest burst; and in its roar
I seemed to hear God's formidable wrath.
I heard it in the howling of the wind;
I heard it in the pelting of the rain
Against the windows; and each rattling peal,
Each burst of rolling echo in the dark
Which made me cower like a chastened hound
Recalled me to obedience. But the flesh,
The strong rebellious flesh, oh how it writhed
Against the spirit! How the natural love,
The common human instinct, fought and fought,
And, backed by Satan's whisper, held its own!
At length the spirit conquered, and I rose
To do the will of God; but, in my crushed
And humbled anguish, I implored the Lord
To stay my lifted arm, and at the last
To save her life as Isaac's had been saved.
Then I went up the stairs, as if each step
Were a delay, a respite, and a hope,
And sought the chamber where my Edith slept.
The walk had worn her limbs; her sleep was deep.
The storm had not aroused her; nor did I.

I kissed her, and I slew her; for the Lord
Did not vouchsafe to stay His servant's arm.
For one short moment after she was dead,
I thought perchance that He would bring her back
To life. But all was silent there.

And now,
Ye righteous judges of this Christian land,
Ye godly Elders, look me in the face.
Ye know ye dare not hang me. Will ye dare
To place me in the madhouse for a deed
Which God Himself exacted—which ye teach
Your children to revere in Abraham
From year to year? Ye know ye dare not do it.
And if ye ask me how I knew God's voice,
Ask of the shepherd's watch-dog how he knows
His master's call when darkness girds the fold!
Ye know that Abraham of old, if now
He stood before you, could at your command
Give you no other answer. It was God
Who, putting to the test His servant's faith,
Impelled my hand. Ye may not judge this deed.

{69}

AN ODE OF THE TUSCAN SHORE.

WHEN the Spirits that are masters
Of the ever-ready storm,
And that love to hound the waters,
To destroy and to deform,
See a mortal in their power
They prepare a joyous hour,
Venting their primeval hatred
Of the thing whose blood is warm.

And they lay on ocean's surface
Their innumerable hands,
And each hand creates a billow
That advances and expands;
Till, amid the petrel's screaming,
Rope and tattered sail are streaming
High above the seething water
From the mast that still withstands.

But then hate is blind: they know not
What each human prey is worth:

Not more cruel than impartial
Is their elemental mirth:
And their fury is not keener
O'er the greater than the meaner,
Though their victim were a Shelley
And the glory of the earth.

Look around thee in the sunshine;
Watch this satin-surfaced deep,
Which alone some rolling dolphins
Stir out yonder in its sleep,
Till upon the sea shall settle
Sunset hues of molten metal,
Red and bright as crater gleamings,
And the noon shall cease to creep.

Here was washed ashore the greatest
Of the victims snatched away
By the Spirits that are masters
Of the wind and of the spray;
When the waves might have exulted
O'er the body they insulted
With a shriller wilder clamour
Than since Nature's earliest day!

Cæsar braved the great Sea Spirits,
And he bade his men row on;
And he cried: "Ye carry Cæsar:
Then why tremble and turn wan?"
And the great waves roared more loudly;
But his galley sailed out proudly
From the peril of the tempest
Like an onward-hurried swan.

Yet the world would scarce have missed him—
There be Cæsars more than one:
But a poet like to Shelley,
Where be such beneath the sun?
And mankind had lost a treasure
Past all mourning and all measure,
When the beach-waves gently shelved him
With a moan for what was done.

For an English ear, the breakers
On this fatal Tuscan shore
Seemed to lisp the name of Shelley,
And to mourn it evermore;
And the name appears to mingle

With the rolling of the shingle
And with every sound of Nature
Which he lived but to adore.

Oh, I hear it in the murmur
Of the fragrant woods of pine
As the sea-breeze softly hurries
Through their long-extended line;
And I hear it faintly coming
From the never-ending humming
Of the world of busy insects
That the undergrowths confine.

'Tis the spot; and nought discordant
Mars its beauty and repose.
All along the tideless margin
Pine or bay or ilex grows,
Filled with an eternal warble;
While Carrara's crags of marble,
Bare and lofty, print the azure,
And, to landward, all enclose.

All is peace and glorious sunshine;
Nature seems redeemed from war.
Nothing stirs from beach to offing,
Where a few feluccas are,
Waiting for the breeze that's lazy;
While beyond, where all is hazy,
Like the ghost of dwindled power
Loometh Elba, faint and far.

But his genius knew no Elba,
And his star, without decline,
Was extinguished at its zenith
In the wild and tossing brine;
Not war's red and lurid planet
As of incandescent granite,
But a star of whiter radiance,
Clear, effulgent and divine.

Mighty treasures lie for ever
In each slimy ocean cave;
Galleons with their gold lie buried
Where the dark depth knows no wave;
But the total of their measure
Matches not the matchless treasure
That in yonder stretch of water
Has for ever found a grave:

There the great unwritten poems
Of a mighty poet lie—
Unborn children of a lineage
Which, once born, may never die.
But the water mirrors heaven
With the smile of one forgiven,
While the breakers in the sunshine
Sing an endless lullaby.

SWORD AND SICKLE.

*“Mid the harvest-shining plain
Where the peasant heaps his grain
In the garner of his foe.”*

IN the noontide, safe and free,
Basks the plain of Lombardy.
Never now, nor near nor far
Looms the lurid form of War
That to overspread it came
With her wings of smoky flame.
Unmanured with blood the plain
Yields in peace its yearly grain;
And the milk-white broad-browed pair
Of huge bullocks in the glare
Drag the fruit of Freedom's tillage
Through each straggling Lombard village
Which no Croat thirsts to pillage.
Not a foe, save where unseen
In the rice-swamp's treacherous green
Fever lurks, while wade and reap
Through the sparkling waters deep
Girls ill-sheltered from the sun,
Which shoots down to scorch and stun,
By their crimson kerchiefs light,
And who there in Fever's spite
Cheer their souls with laugh and song
As the noontide creeps along;
Not a foe, save when o'erflows
Adige big with melted snows,
Or when Po's dark whirling foam
Threatens many a thriving home,
Rolling all its bridges under
With a dull unceasing thunder,

Till it sweeps ere close of day
Bridge and dyke and home away.

Through the broad Subalpine plain
Peace and work and freedom reign.
Here and there in monstrous heaps
Some vast ossuary keeps
For men's wondering eyes the bones
Of the nation's slaughtered sons;
But no other traces show
Where a few short years ago
Countless balls of iron ploughed
Through the serried quivering crowd—
Where the broadcast Austrian lead
Fell on furrows live and dead—
Where for miles and miles were heaped
The human harvests freshly reaped—
Where the routed fled like chaff
At the canon's thunderous laugh,
While the gun-wheels made red mud
Of men weltering in their blood.
Times are changed, and memories hold
In the breasts but of the old.
On Custozza's once red earth
By the Lombard peasant's hearth
Now the Austrian may sit
Where no brows with hate shall knit:
Who would dream that there can be
Such a thing as tyranny?
Italy appeals no longer
To God's throne against the stronger;
And the Poet loves her now
For the beauty of her brow,
Not for that great crown of woe
Whence the blood-drops used to flow.

Lands are freed, and lands enslaved;
But your name is there engraved
In the hearts of those now freed
Ye who helped them in their need!
Nor do they remember now
Those who lent them all the glow
Of their genius and their feeling,
And Compassion's balm that's healing,
And the thunder of their curse
In a heaven-shaking verse.
Reckon not on thanks for long,

Ye who fight with sword or song
For the weak against the strong:
Give your help for justice' sake,
Caring no reward to take.
Freedom's face is not less fair
For remembering not your share;
And the sheaves of sacred wheat,
Which spring up beneath her feet
From the liberated plain,
Not less full of golden grain.

Years ago one day I stood,
In the autumn's sunset flood,
Looking down with sweeping sight
From a bastion's terraced height
On the then unconquered plain
Of the fair and French Lorraine.
Scarce was autumn's first leaf yellow;
Ripened Earth had made air mellow.
Like a snake inert and blue,
Winding slowly corn-fields through,
Wound the broad Moselle afar
To the horizon's utmost bar,
Catching on each burnished fold
Restless gleams of molten gold
Till the sun was near to sink,
When it caught a flaming pink
From the crimson clouds slow sailing
Where the amber light was failing.
And surveying that expanse,
What, I thought, is fair as France?
Now the Prussian sentries stand
Where I stood, and scan the land,
Which for ever seems their own,
With their ugly Prussian frown;
And the sullen land has nought
But the freedom of its thought,
Of its thought that hopes and hates
And from year to year awaits.

And what of thee upon whose head
All evil's phials have been shed—
Thou whom those who now have gotten
Their own freedom, have forgotten—
Thou whose name is never heard,
Thou whose hope is aye deferred,
Thou whose tongue thy foes outroot,

Thou whose sons they chain and shoot—
Poland, heiress of the knout?
Lo, the century grows old
And thy hour has not yet tolled.
On thy form benumbed and bruised,
Whence the life-blood half has oozed,
Lies the dark Colossus still
Whom his own sons now would kill—
Tormentors that like vipers start
From his huge frame's every part;
But he holds thee all the tighter
While thy bloodless face grows whiter,
And his limbs that on thee weigh
Grow more rotten day by day.

Hark! I hear a muffled sound
Deep beneath the frozen ground
Where a buried Poland pines
In the dark Siberian mines,
In the sunless vaults that ape
Those of Hell in gloom and shape,
Where the gangs who death await
Unlearn to think, but not to hate:
Is't a growl of joy that runs
Where are chained half Poland's sons?
Ay, a growl of joy it is
To each mine's extremities,
And for once Despair has laughed
In each black pestiferous shaft:
He who sent them there lies dead
On his gory Imperial bed—
He who made them walk in chains,
In long goaded staggering trains,
Through the endless snow-clad plains
To the grave in which they lie,
Not yet dead, but soon to die:
Even he has found his hour,
Murdered in his boundless power
By his own, and rots in death
As they rot who here draw breath.

A PAGEANT OF SIENA.

THE old red, towered walls climb round the hills
On which Siena stands in lonely state,

Scanning the ridgy plain, where gleam no rills
And loom no towns, but only endless lines
Of livid furrowed hillocks which the great
White, ploughing bullocks speck. From gate to gate
A few tall cypresses and scattered pines
Climb too, where, guarding streets that silence fills,
The old red, towered walls climb round the hills.

Silent and empty in the August glare
The old depopulated city sleeps;
Its dizzy belfry climbs the fiery air
Into the sky's inexorable blue;
Across its great scooped shell-shaped square there creeps
No living soul, nor up the high paved steeps
That be its streets; perhaps some carts sway through
Its dusty gates, behind a huge-horned pair,
Creaking and empty in the August glare.

O for the pageantry of olden days,
Thou silent square—ye palaces that wind
Up to the still cathedral, where the rays,
Now gentler, kiss the marble and the gold!
O for the throngs that Time has left behind,
Ye buttressed lanes, ye lofty archways lined
With faded saints; show those ye used to hold
When the strong prosperous city loved displays
And gaudy pageantry in olden days.

I hear a hum of men, a tramp and tread;
The city's Districts muster. First appears
The District of the Panther—white and red
Its men-at-arms and pages, fifes and drums;
And next the yellow-liveried troop that bears
The Ghibelline standard of the Eagle nears;
Then Tortoise, Hedgehog, Snail and Glowworm come;
And the Guelf She-Wolf, with her arms ahead
All black and silver, comes with tramp and tread.

The Districts muster for the August race,
And take their glossy racers to be blessed,
Each in its own rich church, where, held in trace
Of gold, the startled barb with hoof-steps loud
Is led through flaunting banner, shield and crest
To the high altar's rail, where kneel close pressed
The pages and the soldiers and the crowd,
Who scan the gleaming limbs that shall efface
Last year's defeat and win the August race.

The huge old square scooped like a palmer's shell,
Siena's forum and its hippodrome,
Echoes a roar that drowns the mighty bell
From battlemented belfry in the sky;
The ring of olden palaces, become
Ablaze with crimson hangings, looks like some
Enchanted Coliseum, in which vie
Scutcheon and standard; so you scarce could tell
The strange old square scooped like a palmer's shell.

In bright procession ere the race is run
The rival Districts wind around the course,
Each with its banner in the evening sun,
Its clarions, and its Captain capped with steel,
Its pages and its men that lead the horse
Caparisoned and guarded by a force
Of gaudy pikemen; while the clarions peal
And the crowd cheers the Panther that has won
Its fickle favour ere the race is run.

And as the standard-bearers one and all
March by in motley blazonry, they cast
Their standards high in air, and as they fall
Catch them above the throng with rapid hand
And twirl and twist them dexterously and fast
In one unceasing play, until at last
The whole vast square is by the bright silk fanned,
And they have marched before the great Town Hall
Where stand the city's rulers one and all.

Then comes, drawn by six bullocks of huge size
All white as milk, with many-coloured strings
About their horns, broad brows and large black eyes,
The old Republic's standard-bearing wain.
With its great Martinella bell that rings
Oft o'er the battle's roar, and whose sound brings
Fear to the heart of her who plots in vain,
Perfidious Florence. From its high mast flies
Siena's She-Wolf's standard of huge size.

And now the course is clear, and those who don
The colours of the Panther feel no fear;
A hundred thousand partizans look on
With inborn urban rivalry, and hail
The horses one by one as they appear,
And hoot the Shell, or Wave, or wildly cheer
The Hedgehog, or the Dragon, or the Snail,

Or the great Eagle that so oft has won,
Whose knaves and rider yellow colours don.

At last they start, and at terrific pace
In dreadful crush adown the slope they tear,
The Tortoise leading for a little space;
Then from the crowd the Panther shooting out,
Maintains the lead thrice round the perilous square;
Then suddenly a great shout rends the air:
“The Snail! The Snail!” all cry; and in hushed doubt
All watch the two. The Snail has won the race,
And slowly slackens its terrific pace.

And in the District of the Snail to-night
Is revelry and feasting in the street;
From great wrought-iron torch-holders the light
Falls red and flaring on grim palace walls
Decked with bright banners; boards where all may eat
Who care, are crowded; while the old repeat
Many an oft-told story that recalls
What things the Snail had done in race and fight.
Sleep shuns the District of the Snail to-night.

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THE WONDER OF THE WORLD.

WHEN this shall reach you I shall be no more;
For do not men in presence of some score
Too great for payment constantly prefer
Quick death to base insolvency, and spur
A trembling self across life's brink. And yet
They owe but gold—perhaps a paltry debt
To some vile Jew; while I, alas, alas!
Owe all mankind a thing which did surpass
All other treasures; a grand peerless thing
Beyond all pricing and all wondering,
Which should be man's, but which to save my own
Mean life I sacrificed. And days have grown
To be long months, and months to be long years;
And with each year the frightful debt appears
More insupportable. Oh, how immense
Has grown its weight! How horrible the sense
Of utter helplessness! But I have now
To tell the fatal tale of when and how
I lost it for the world, and not to speak
Of these sad days when conscience loves to wreak

Her retribution on me in such vast
And unremitting anguish.

I had passed
Six idle years since taking my degree,
When I fell in at Athens casually
With one called Richard Strongclyffe, who had been
My college friend, but whom I had not seen
Since then, and who meanwhile had made a name
Through study of Greek Art. We soon became
As intimate as of old; and as no claim
Of work or pleasure summoned me elsewhere,
He let me roam through Greece with him, and share
His own strong daily life—the sheer reverse
Of my accustomed life of waste, and worse
Than waste, the aimless life of which my soul
Was more than sick; it had become so foul.
He had an iron will; his hand was rough;
His heart was gentle. God had used strong stuff
In making him—weak stuff in making me.
And yet I was not worthless utterly.
Spite all my sins there were some better strings
In my weak heart; the wind of angels' wings
Made them vibrate—but with faint echo, like
Æolian chords that gusts too fitful strike.
Mine is a double nature, which depends
Wholly on its surroundings, and which blends
With good or evil, with the low or high,
With the same drifting weak facility.
In Strongclyffe's hands my nature's worthier side
Alone found vent; pure tastes that had not died
Grew strong, while half-forgotten culture found
A sudden use, and from all things around
Increased its wealth. I think that he enjoyed
His power over me; his strong soul toyed
With my soft malleable mind, which had,
In spite of degradations many and sad,
Affinities of taste, and could admire
And understand him. Oh what strength and fire
Beneath his quiet ways! What scorn could burst
From his cold lip! what ceaseless ceaseless thirst
He had for knowledge! Even as my mind
Grew intimate with his, new worlds defined
Their shape on my horizon, like the grey
Faint, shadowy Greek Isles which far away
Loomed through the mists of dawn, but which became,

As we approached them in the sunrise flame,
Each minute more distinct.

We seldom stayed
Long in one self-same spot; but we obeyed
The needs of Strongclyffe's studies, which entailed
Research in many places; and we sailed
From isle to isle, or rode from place to place,
Now in the less-known parts of Greece and Thrace,
And now in rocky Lydia. Oh, what fields
Where men dig gold, what far Golconda yields
Such wealth, such gems, as those impoverished plains
In which the spade turns up the scant remains
Of bygone genius; where the obedient earth,
Summoned to yield her buried dead, gives birth,
As if compelled by an enchanter's rod,
To what is ever young—now to some god
In all his strength and beauty, now to some
Fantastic child of Pan, who seems fresh come
From dewy woods that long have ceased to be?
And Strongclyffe had the art to make one see
The hidden through the seen—to reconstruct
Past life and loveliness, and to conduct
The mind through perished worlds; and everywhere
He showed the same keen interest and a rare
Persistence of research. Yet what he did
Seemed somehow trifling; oft I thought it hid
Higher preoccupation—some great aim
Which time was ripening; so that when there came
One day a sudden change in him—when all
Was thrown aside, and when I heard him call
Upon my help, with triumph on his lips,
In a great enterprise which should eclipse
Even the greatest, I received his words
Not wholly unprepared.

How my heart's chords
Vibrate as I recall them! 'Twas about
The third year's close; and we were sitting out
Upon our terrace looking on the sea
At Thyna, after sundown. Purposely,
As I now fancy, Strongclyffe had led on
Our idle talk to what might yet be won
Back by mankind, of the great wreck we call
Antiquity; and then we talked of all
That splendid half of antique art which must
From the materials used have turned to dust

Almost as soon as did the artist's hands.
Where be thy works, Apelles? where now stands,
Phidias, thy gold and ivory gems, renowned
Through the broad world? and where stands she who owned
As her fit seat the new-born Parthenon,
Thy gold and ivory Pallas? What would man
Not give to-day if only he could scan
In one short glimpse the splendour of that shape
Which Fancy's restorations vainly ape,
If he for one short minute could behold
That ivory face, that drapery of gold
As Phidias modelled it?

"And yet," I said,
"That Art was not so frail; for I have read
That that same effigy of Pallas, spared
From age to age, existed unimpaired
Till the Crusaders, under Baldwin, took
And sacked Constantinople."

A strange look
Flashed out from Strongclyffe's eyes. "There is no truth
In that old tale," he answered; "and Time's tooth
Still spared the statue when it many a year
Had gnawed the bones of Baldwin in his bier,
Ay, and of Baldwin's sons."

"How know you that?"
I asked.

He left the bench on which we sat,
And with a strange excitement he began
To pace the terrace. "I am not the man,"
He cried, "to make rash statements; yet I say
Deliberately, Percy, that to-day
That Pallas still exists. Oh, Earth has still
Surprises for mankind; and with God's will
And patient work, the world shall see her yet!
Think not that I am mad: wait till I set
My proofs before your eyes. When you behold
The text in John Ionides, the old
Byzantine Chronicler, which had defied
All guesses to this day, and by its side
A certain passage in the life of Paul
Of Trebizond—and when you've counted all
The links of evidence which year by year
I have augmented both at home and here,
Until I now have found the very spot—

Then call me mad. 'Tis years since I have got
The certainty that long ere Baldwin's sack
The Emperor, in fear of some attack
Upon the palace, had her safe conveyed
By vessel to a distance, and (by aid
Of trusty workmen) carefully concealed
In crypts beneath a temple. Nought revealed
The secret at the time; the Emperor died
Soon after; and, none caring to unhide
The statue, men forgot her. But where lay
The temple—or the ruins which to-day
No doubt replace it? Here I seemed to lose
My way and reach mere nothing. All my clues
Led to one spot—Thelopis; and that spot,
In spite of all my search, I found it not.
Oh, with what patience in these three long years
Have I not sought! Oh, with what hopes and fears
Have I not searched the present and the past
To find that place Thelopis! And at last
I have found out. Thelopis was a town,
If town it could be called, that was burnt down
Ten centuries ago, and where has grown
The present village Thos—the place that is
Nearest the temple of Peripolis:
The temple is Peripolis. And see,
The distance and direction both agree:
The passage says, 'a five days' eastward sail,
And then three days of road.' No clues now fail;
There under Peripolis, girt round
By solitude and silence, will be found
The gold and ivory Pallas. Oh, I know
That you will answer that she long ago
Must have become mere shapeless mouldering dust—
That after seven centuries she must
Have blent with earth; and yet I say she stands
As grand and splendid as when all Greek lands
First hailed her beauty! Do you think that they
Who used such pains, in safety to convey
And hide her in that distant spot, would spare
The slight pains needed to exclude the air
And ward away the damp? Again I say
She lives—she lives!"

And so the following day
We started for Peripolis—a long
And arduous journey; for it lies among
Wild unfrequented mountains, in a small

And fever-stricken plain. The hills are all
Possessed by tribes which, though uncouth and wild,
Are not unfriendly. When you once have toiled
Through the last defiles, and behold the lone
Still distant ruins below you, that seem thrown
There to die slow, like those whom in its haste
A routed host abandons in the waste,
There creeps across your soul a sort of fear,
A sense of isolation such as ne'er
Has filled your heart. The broken columns throw
Their shadows on bare shingle; nought will grow
For miles around save thin scorched grass that feeds
A few lean goats, and some few clumps of reeds
Where there is water. Oh, the tract around
Speaks utter desolation; and we found
The task not easy even to collect
The workmen we required. The heaps of wrecked
And weed-grown marble where the spade was tried
Had more than once been searched, and seemed to hide
Nought worth men's pains—at most some shattered bit
Of Greco-Roman sculpture; but we lit
On some strange crypts; and in a few more days
We had discovered a bewildering maze
Of subterranean chambers, large and small,
And catacomb-like passages, which all
Were cut in soft dry stone, and stretched away
Far underground, beyond the ruins that lay
In the sun's light; and all were wholly bare.
Strongclyffe at once, pretending not to care
For empty crypts, employed the men elsewhere;
While he and I, by torch-light and alone,
Explored the maze. But sometimes, as loose stone
Obstructed here and there the way, we had
A boy to help—a dull half-witted lad
Of whom we felt no fear. For days we sought
With boundless care, but all our searching brought
Nothing to light; we sounded every wall,
We grew familiar with each inch of all
The lonely crypts; and even Strongclyffe seemed
To grow depressed. But suddenly there gleamed
Fresh ardour in his eyes: "Look there!" he said,
And showed me something like an arrow's head
Cut in the wall; a small, scarce visible mark
Which led to others like it through the dark
Perplexing crypt; and where the last marks were
We scrutinized the wall with greater care,

And found its surface rougher, as if there
It had been tampered with. "This is the spot,"
He whispered. "She is here;" and having got
A pick, he struck. And as, beneath the stroke
Of Vulcan's hammer once, the aching brow
Of Zeus was cleft for Pallas' birth, so now
The stricken cloven stone exposed to sight
The long-sought Goddess; and the flickering light
Of the red torch flashed in a tremulous flood
Upon her golden breastplate as she stood
Intact, in all the glory and the glow
Of her incomparable beauty.

So
Was she discovered; I must now compel
My weak and miserable self to tell
How she was lost. There was no time to lose,
And we agreed, or rather Strongclyffe chose
That he should start at once for the chief town
Of that wild province, as he long had known
The there commanding Pasha, to obtain
A guard of men; while I was to remain
To watch the workmen. He was to be back
Within three days. Alas! I had no lack
Of buoyant thoughts at first; my soul was filled
With our immense success; my nerves still thrilled
With triumph and delight; and the first day
Of Strongclyffe's absence lightly passed away.
The men worked on as usual, and my mind
Conceived no fear. But when the sun declined
There crept across my spirit, with the tide
Of slowly creeping shadow as day died,
A vague uneasiness; and my hands felt
For the revolver hanging at my belt,
I thought; and I remembered that when we
Had found the prize, we were not two but three.
The boy had seen the whole; and though I knew
That he was dull of wit and had no clue
To find the spot again in that vast maze
Of hidden crypts and subterranean ways,
I wished he had not seen. The men had gone
Back to their distant huts. I sat alone
Upon a broken column; one by one
The large stars twinkled forth from out the blue;
The shattered standing columns dusky grew,
And very solemn; and the wakening bat
Began to flit around me. As I sat,

I thought of Strongclyffe's generosity;
How he had said ere setting out that I,
His faithful friend, must have an equal share
In the world's praise; that it would not be fair
That I——

O God!

I gave a strangled shout
And fell, dragged backwards by a noose about
My throat. Three men were kneeling on my chest
Binding me tight with cords, while others pressed
All round about me, uttering no sound
As if all dumb. When I was firmly bound
All save my feet, which, purposely let loose
To let me walk, were in a running noose,
One of the men addressed me: "Listen well
To what I say," he said. "If you rebel
We take your life; and none can help you now.
We have no wish to harm you; but we know
That you have found a treasure, and have got
The clue. Lead on."

"I understand you not,"
I said.
He took a pistol from his sash
And held it at my ear. "Come, be not rash,"
He said, "but lead the way." Oh, would to God
That he had fired! But though like a mere clod
I still moved not, he did not fire, but placed
Once more the gleaming pistol in his waist,
And whispered with the others; then they drew
The cords still tighter round my limbs, and threw
My unresisting body on the bed
In my own hut hard by. "Mark well," they said,
"Ere dawn we come. Thy blood be on thy head!"

At first I had no thoughts, nought but the sense
Of cramped and swelling limbs, and an intense
Desire to burst my bonds. But by-and-by
A sense of infinite calamity
Began to weigh upon me; and at last,
The sense came home that time was slipping fast,
That I was there to make an awful choice
'Twixt Life and Death; and then an inner voice
Began to state the argument each way,
Not clearly, coldly, as I may to-day
Do in this letter, but confused, close-pressed,

Repeated and repeated in my breast
 In every shape, until my weary brain,
 Exhausted by the conflict and the pain,
 Yielded to sleep. And even in my sleep
 The struggle still went on; I felt it keep
 Possession of my dreams, and take the shape
 Of shifting nightmare, leaving no escape.
 I saw the glorious Pallas, calm no more,
 But threatening and terrific, kneeling o'er
 My prostrate body, with red eyes that gleamed
 So fiery in the darkness, that it seemed
 As if one of the Furies had put on
 Her golden panoply. Then, wild and wan,
 I saw the face of Strongclyffe looming out
 From a black whirling gulf; and heard him shout
 Like some spent swimmer half sucked down.
 And there
 I think I woke, and with a vague despair
 Resumed the pleadings of each adverse side;
 While, ever louder, something in me cried:
 "Choose death, choose death! in fifty years from this,
 When thou art swallowed in the dark abyss
 Of Time, what will it be to thee or thine
 Whether thou diedst to-day at twenty-nine,
 Or knew'st old age? But man whom Time devours
 Not, and who lives by centuries, not hours,
 Will be possessed of one transcendent gift,
 To add to his small store of things that lift
 The soul to higher spheres—a gift from which
 Will flow perennial charm for poor and rich,
 For young and old. If but mankind could know
 That some great treasure lost long, long ago—
 A famed Greek play, for instance—had been lost
 Because a certain man had grudged the cost
 Of his brief life to save it, that man's name,
 For ever handed down in scorn and shame,
 Would be all nations' by-word. Who can say
 That some great work which man enjoys to-day—
 The Melos statue, Hamlet or Macbeth,
 Or the Gioconda—was not saved from death,
 In some great unknown peril that it ran,
 By some unknown, unthanked and nameless man
 Who gave his life instead? And then, in place
 Of something rarer yet, wouldst have the face
 To give the world thy mean half-wasted life
 With which it can do nought? Thou hast no wife,

No child to need thy care. Choose death, choose death,
While yet 'tis time!"

But oh the pleasant breath
Of life; the strong, strong stream of youth and health
That bounds along the veins; the unused wealth
Of what we call the Future, with its schemes,
Emotions, friendships, loves, surprises, dreams;
The thing we call Identity, the I
To which the wretched cling, they know not why,
And which no evils press me to destroy;
The simple pleasures which I now enjoy—
What, give up all? What right has Fate, what right,
To thrust me from Life's hearth into the night,
The darkness and the cold? What right or need
Has Fate to come, and while I sit and read
Life's pleasant page, to summon me to shut
The open book, and leave two thirds uncut?
Who dares to tell me that a living man
Whom God has made, who feels the cool winds fan
His heated brow, is not in God's sight worth
A thing that is man's work, upon this earth?
My life is mended now; each passing day
Now rolls, though idly, harmlessly away.
The bright green fields, the flowers and the trees,
The rippling streams, the sun, the passing breeze,
The million things that in their life rejoice
And gladden mine, call out with mighty voice,
"Choose life, choose life!"

And when at dawn they came,
And bade me show the spot—O shame! O shame!
I nodded an assent. Oh let me now,
With shame's familiar brand upon my brow,
For once spare my base self, and hurry by
Those monstrous minutes! Slowly, silently,
I led them to the spot. I saw their eyes
With excusable rapture scan the prize
To which their souls were dead. I saw them take
Their hatchets in their impious hands, and break
Into small fragments hideous to behold,
And shapeless dust of ivory and of gold,
The beauty which the world would have despaired
To match, and twenty centuries had spared
In vain—in vain! Awhile, I think, I heard
Ferocious wrangling, oath and threatening word
Over the booty; but my sickened brain

Took little note. And when I sought again
To see and hear and think, all sounds had ceased;
I was alone, and free.

And—O mean beast,
Mean coward that I was!—I dared not face
The sight of Strongclyffe; but I fled the place,
Leaving a letter; and in guilt and fear,
Just like a thief, stole back to England here,
Alone with my incomparable debt.
He never saw me more; although we met
In these o'er-crowded London streets one day,
And oh how changed he was—how old and grey
He had become, though scarce two years had passed
Over his head since I had seen him last!
He saw me not, but passed with vacant eye;
While I, as if to vanish bodily
Into the solid stones, shrank to the wall.
He now is dead—and I? Oh, does not all
Compel me too to die? What have I done,
In these ten years of anguish, to atone
For having chosen life? What use—what good
Have I been to mankind since first I stood
So fatally and wholly in its debt?
What drops of compensation have I yet
Wrung out of my weak worthless self, and cast
Into the deep abyss? Oh, I have passed
A cruel, cruel time! And year by year
I feel less wish to live, less strength to bear^{107}
The weight of my immense insolvency.
And in the street as each man passes by
I mutter to myself, “If he but knew
What he has lost, would he not stop and sue
For what can ne’er be paid, and cry, ‘Come forth!
And show thyself to men, what thou art worth!
Thou art the thing which men have got instead
Of the Incomparable: raise thy head!’”

IPSISSIMUS.

THOU Priest that art behind the screen
Of this confessional, give ear:
I need God’s help, for I have seen
What turns my vitals limp with fear.
O Christ, O Christ, I must have done

More mortal sin than anyone
Who says his prayers in Venice here!

And yet by stealth I only tried
To kill my enemy, God knows;
And who on earth has e'er denied
A man the right to kill his foes?
He won the race of the Gondoliers;
I hate him and the skin he wears—
I hate him and the shade he throws.

I hate him through each day and hour;
All ills that curse me seem his fault:
He makes my daily soup taste sour,
He makes my daily bread taste salt;
And so I hung upon his track
At dusk to stab him in the back
In some lone street or archway vault.

But oh give heed! As I was stealing
Upon his heels, with knife grasped tight,
There crept across my soul a feeling
That I myself was kept in sight;
Each time I turned, dodge as I would,
A masked and unknown watcher stood
Who baffled all my plan that night.

What mask is this, I thought and thought,
Who dogs me thus when least I care?
His figure is nor tall nor short,
And yet has a familiar air.
But oh, despite this watcher's eye,
I'll reach my man yet by-and-by,
And snuff his life out yet, elsewhere.

And though compelled to still defer,
I schemed another project soon;
I armed my boat with a hidden spur
To run him down in the lagoon.
At dusk I saw him row one day
Where lone and wide the waters lay,
Reflecting scarce the dim white moon.

No boat, as far as sight could strain,
Loomed on the solitary sea;
I saw my oar each minute gain
Upon my death-doomed enemy,
When lo, a black-masked gondolier,

Silent and spectre-like, drew near,
And stepped between my deed and me.

He seemed from out the flood to rise,
And hovered near to mar my game;
I knew him and his cursed guise,
His cursed mask: he was the same.
So, balked once more, enraged and cowed,
Back through the still lagoon I rowed
In mingled wonder, wrath, and shame.

Oh, were I not to come and pray
Thee for thy absolution here
In the Confessional, to-day
My very ribs would burst with fear.
Leave not, good Father, in the lurch
A faithful son of Mother Church,
Whose faith is firm and soul sincere.

Behind St. Luke's, as the dead men know,
A pale apothecary dwells,
Who deals in death both quick and slow,
And baleful philters, withering spells;
He sells alike to rich and poor,
Who know what knocks to give his door,
The yellow dust that rings the knells.

Well, then, I went and knocked the knock
With cautious hand, as I'd been taught;
The door revolved with silent lock,
And I went in, suspecting nought.
But oh, the self-same form stood masked
Behind the counter, and unasked
In silence proffered what I sought.

My knees and hands like aspens shook:
I spilt the powder on the ground;
I dared not turn, I dared not look;
My palsied tongue would make no sound.
Then through the door I fled at last
With feet that seemed more slow than fast,
And dared not even once look round.

And yet I am an honest man
Who only sought to kill his foe:
Could I sit down to see each plan
That I took up frustrated so,
When as each plan was marred and balked,

And in the sun my man still walked,
I felt my hate still greater grow?

I thought, "At dusk with stealthy tread
I'll seek his dwelling, and I'll creep
Upstairs and hide beneath his bed,
And in the night I'll strike him deep."
And so I went; but at his door
The figure, masked just as before,
Sat on the step as if asleep.

Bent, spite all fear, upon my task,
I tried to pass: there was no space.
Then rage prevailed; I snatched the mask
From off the baffling figure's face.
And oh, unutterable dread!
The face was mine, mine white and dead,
Stiff with some frightful death's grimace.

What sins are mine, O luckless wight,
That doom should play me such a trick
And make me see a sudden sight
That turns both soul and body sick?
Stretch out thy hands, thou priest unseen
That sittest there behind the screen,
And give me absolution, quick!

O God, O God, his hands are dead!
His hands are mine, O monstrous spell!
I feel them clammy on my head.
Is he my own dead self as well?
Those hands are mine—their scars, their shape:
O God, O God, there's no escape,
And seeking Heaven, I fall on Hell!

AN ODE TO THE TRAVELLING THUNDER.

(Suggested by a line in the magnificent opening description of Miss A. MARY F. ROBINSON'S "Janet Fisher.")

GOD'S wrath is travelling overhead,
God's wrath upon the wing,
Which makes man cower in his bed
If he has heaven's strength to dread,
And hides some guilty thing.

The booming peals of thunder shake
These walls and the black night;
They make the mountains thrill and quake:
I listen as I lie awake,
While Earth and Heaven fight.

What seek'st thou with repeated stroke,
Wrath, as thou hurriest past?
Is it, through night's scorched riven cloak,
Some huge old solitary oak
Or some doomed storm-bent mast?

The mountains court thy blow and each
Unfathomable abyss,
Where thy white blasting stroke may reach
Some Titan still unstruck whose speech
Is the wild torrent's hiss.

There mayst thou, where presumptuous pines
To climb God's sky aspire,
Do battle 'gainst their serried lines,
And ere the lurid storm-dawn shines,
Strike dead their kings with fire.

There may thy peal, enclosed by rock,
Long struggle and die slow;
And while it seeks some gorge's lock,
Growl, laugh and roar, and fiercely mock
Each sound of human woe.

Along the backs of the mountain chain
Where thou awhile mayst cling,
O'er the boundless sea and the endless plain,
With driven hail and sheeted rain
Thick shaken from thy wing,
Thou hurriest on, black cloud of wrath,
Thou hater of human walls,
Shaking men's souls upon thy path
As thou dost shake the beams, like lath,
In battlemented halls;

Or pausing, broodest o'er the night,
In silence gathering strength;
While, ever and anon, the light
Quivers from out thee, dazzling bright,
And shows earth's breadth and length.

So have I seen thee, dreaded Power,
Show Venice in her sleep
More vivid than at noon's fierce hour,
With every palace, dome, and tower
That rises from the deep;

Tinting the briny city pink,
In one long quivering flash;
Then snatching back, ere you could think,
All into darkness black as ink—
Dumb save the ceaseless splash.^{117}

Then on, and on, black cloud of fire,
Upon thy stormy ways,
To vault the shaken sky with ire,
To shatter the presumptuous spire,
To make the forest blaze.

To roll in folds of lurid steam
O'er ocean's rolling waves,
With rolling peals of sound that seem
To ask account for the dead that teem
In all its oozy caves.

By sea or land, by night or day,
Thy savage booming voice
Makes, as thou hurriest on thy way,
And all earth's shaken pillars sway,
My awe-struck soul rejoice.

Even as stormy passions here,
Battling with God above,
Revenge and wrath, despair and fear,
Make glorious music to my ear,
Beyond all songs of love.

SONNETS.



IDLE CHARON.

THE shores of Styx are lone for evermore,
And not one shadowy form upon the steep

Looms through the dusk, far as the eye can sweep,
To call the ferry over as of yore;
But tintless rushes all about the shore
Have hemmed the old boat in, where, locked in sleep,
Hoar-bearded Charon lies; while pale weeds creep
With tightening grasp all round the unused oar.
For in the world of Life strange rumours run
That now the Soul departs not with the breath,
But that the Body and the Soul are one;
And in the loved one's mouth, now, after death,
The widow puts no obol, nor the son,
To pay the ferry in the world beneath.

THE OBOL.[\[A\]](#)

SCARCE have I rhymed of Charon looming grey
Amid pale rushes through the dusky air,
And of the obol we no longer care
To put in dead men's mouths as ferry-pay,
When, lo, I find, amongst some pence, to-day
Received as common change, I know not where,
A stray Greek obol, seeming Charon's fare
To put between my lips when I be dead.
Poor bastard Obol, even couldst thou cheat
The shadowy Boatman, I should scarcely find
The heart to cross: extinction seems so sweet.
I need thee not; and thou shalt be consigned
To some old whining beggar in the street,
Whose soul shall cross, while mine shall stay behind.

[\[A\]](#) The coin referred to in this sonnet was a modern Greek piece of five lepta, rather smaller than a halfpenny, and bearing the word *Obolos* on the reverse. ^{120}

LETHE.

I had a dream of Lethe, of the brink
Of leaden waters, whither many bore
Dead, pallid loves, while others, old and sore,
Brought but their tottering selves, in haste to drink.
And, having drunk, they plunged, and seemed to sink
Their load of love or guilt for evermore,
Reaching with radiant brow the sunny shore
That lay beyond, no more to think and think.

Oh, who will give me, chained to Thought's dull strand,
A draught of Lethe, salt with final tears,
Were it no more than fills the hollow hand?
Oh, who will rid me of the wasted years,
The thought of Life's fair structure vainly planned,
And each false hope, that mocking re-appears?

ACHERON.

WHERE rolls in silent speed through cave on cave
Soul-freighted Acheron, and no other light
Evokes the rocks from an eternal night
Than the pale phosphorescence of the wave,
Shall men not meet, and have one chance to crave
Forgiveness for rash deeds—one chance to right
Old earthly quarrels, and in Death's despite
Unsay the said, and kill the pang they gave?

See, see! there looms from yonder soul-filled bark
That passes ours, a long-loved, long-lost face,
And with a cry we stretch our ghostly arms.
But heeding not, they whirl into the dark,
Bound for a sea beyond all time and space,
Which neither life nor love nor sunlight warms.

ON SIGNORELLI'S FRESCO OF THE RESURRECTION.

I SAW a vast bare plain; with, overhead,
A half-chilled sun, that shed a sickly light;
And all around, till out of reach of sight,
The earth's thin crust heaved with the rising dead,
Who, as they struggled from their dusty bed,
At first mere bones, by countless years made white,
Took gradual flesh, and stood all huddled tight
In mute, dull groups, as yet too numb to dread.
And all the while the summoning trump on high
With rolling thunder never ceased to shake
The livid vault of that unclouded sky,
Calling fresh hosts of penitents to take
Each his identity; until well-nigh
The whole dry worn-out earth appeared to wake.

ON SIGNORELLI'S FRESCO OF THE BINDING OF THE LOST.

IN boundless caves, lit only by the glare
Of pools of molten stone, the lost are pent
In countless herds, inextricably blent,
Yet each alone with his own black despair;
While, through the thickness of the lurid air,
The bat-winged fiends, from some far, unseen vent,
Bring on their backs the damned in swift descent,
To swell the crowds that wait in silence there.

And then begins the binding of the lost
With snaky thongs, before they be transferred
To realms of utter flame or utter frost;
And, like a sudden ocean boom, is heard,
Uprising from the dim and countless host,
Pain's first vague roar, Hell's first wild useless word.

MUSSET'S LOUIS D'OR.

ASLEEP, a little fisher-girl one day
Lay on the sands, within an old boat's shade;
Her skirt was tattered, and the sea-breeze played
With her brown loosened hair a ceaseless play.
A poet chanced to pass as there she lay;
Her sun-burnt face, her tatters he surveyed;
A golden coin between her lips he laid,
And, letting her sleep on, he went his way.

What came of that gold windfall? Did it breed
Those long-loved coins which patient thrift can show
With proud pure smile to meet the household need?
Or stolen gold? or those curst coins which grow
Each year more sought, more loathed, and are the meed
Of women's loveless kisses? Who can know?

THE PHANTOM SHIP.

WE touch Life's shore as swimmers from a wreck
Who shudder at the cheerless land they reach,
And find their comrades gathered on the beach
Watching a fading sail, a small white speck—
The phantom ship, upon whose ample deck

There seemed awhile a homeward place for each.
The crowd still wring their hands and still beseech,
But see, it fades, in spite of prayer and beck.

Let those who hope for brighter shores no more
Not mourn, but turning inland, bravely seek
What hidden wealth redeems the shapeless shore.
The strong must build stout cabins for the weak;
Must plan and stint; must sow and reap and store;
For grain takes root though all seems bare and bleak.

SPRING.

FOR those who note the fate of earthly things
There lurks a sadness in the April air,
A dreamy sense of what the future brings
To things too good, too hopeful, and too fair.
The spring brings greenness to the recent grave,
But brings no solace to the mourning heart;
Nor will its rustling and its piping save
A single pang to him who must depart.
The ivy bloom is full of humming bees;
The linnets whistle in the leaves on high;
Around the stems of all the orchard trees
In flaky heaps the fallen blossoms lie:
But every leaf upon each new-clad tree
Tells but of boundless mutability.

TO V. P.,

ABOUT TO VISIT OXFORD.

SO you will see what I can see no more:
The broad quadrangles where the sunlit sward,
At which you peep through some old oaken door,
Is girt around by stone-work black and scarred;
The sedgy Isis, which the swift Eight cleaves
With mighty stroke, all rippled by the breeze;
The narrow Cherwell, gliding under leaves;
The City's towers rising o'er the trees.
All this, alas, for me is fading fast,
And dimness seems descending on those walls

While Cherwell slowly glides into the Past.
The throng in cap and gown which filled those halls
Is turning into ghosts, whose names at last
I shall forget, as twilight round me falls.

BY THE FIRE.

I SAT beside the fire, ten years ago,
And in the dusk wreathed fancies in its flare,
Meting the Future out, to each his share,
While danced the restless shadows to and fro.
And when at last the yellow flame grew low
And leapt and licked no more, I still sat there
Watching with eyes fast fixed, but mind elsewhere
The darkening crimson of the flameless glow.

And lo, at dusk, I watch once more to-day
The slowly-sinking flame, the faint dull crash
Of crumbling embers deadening into grey;
But see alone the Past, misspent and rash,
And wasted gifts, and chances thrown away.
The Present and the Future? All is ash.

NIGHT.

THOU heedest not, inexorable Night,
Whether besought from some lone prison cell
To stay thy hours, by one whose scaffold-knell
Will sound not later than return of light,
Or prayed to urge them by some suffering wight
Who notes their creep as wearily and well
As men not for eternity in Hell
May note the purging flames' decreasing height.

Hark! in the street I hear a distant sound
Of music and of laughter and of song,
As go a band of revellers their round:
And under prison-walls it comes along,
And under dull sick-rooms, where moans abound;
For who shall grudge their strumming to the strong?

RIVER BABBLE.

THE wreathing of my rhymes has helped to chase
Away despair from each untasted day,
And, on my soul, I pray of Time to stay
His hand, when I be dead, and not efface.
Yet would I tear them all, could that replace
The fly-rod in my hand, this day of May,
And watch unmoved their fragments float away
Into oblivion, on a trout-stream's face.

Alas, thou fool! thou weary, crippled fool!
Thou never more wilt leap from stone to stone,
Where rise the trout in every rocky pool!
Thou never more wilt stand at dusk alone
Girt round by gurgling waters, in the cool,
While dance the flies, and make the trout thy own!

SUNKEN GOLD.

IN dim green depths rot ingot-laden ships,
While gold doubloons that from the drowned hand fell
Lie nestled in the ocean-flower's bell
With Love's gemmed rings once kissed by now dead lips.
And round some wrought-gold cup the sea-grass whips
And hides lost pearls, near pearls still in their shell,
Where sea-weed forests fill each ocean dell,
And seek dim sunlight with their countless tips.

So lie the wasted gifts, the long-lost hopes,
Beneath the now hushed surface of myself,
In lonelier depths than where the diver gropes.
They lie deep, deep; but I at times behold
In doubtful glimpses, on some reefy shelf,
The gleam of irrecoverable gold.

ON RAPHAEL'S ARCHANGEL MICHAEL.

FROM out the depths of crocus-coloured morn
With rush of wings the strong Archangel came
And glistening spear; and leapt as leaps a flame
On Satan unprepared and earthward borne;

And rolled the sunless Rebel, bruised and torn,
Upon the earth's bare plain, in dust and shame,
Holding awhile his spear's suspended aim
Above the humbled head in radiant scorn.
So leaps within the soul on Wrong or Lust
The warrior Angel whom we deem not near,
And rolls the rebel impulse in the dust,
Scathing its neck with his triumphal tread,
And holding high his bright coercing spear
Above its inextinguishable head.

ON A SURF-ROLLED TORSO OF VENUS,

FOUND AT TRIPOLI VECCHIO, AND NOW IN THE LOUVRE.

ONE day in the world's youth, long, long ago,
Before the golden hair of Time grew grey,
The bright warm sea, scarce stirred by the dolphins' play,
Was swept by sudden music soft and low;
And rippling, as 'neath kisses, parted slow,
And gave a new and dripping goddess birth,
Who brought transcendent loveliness on earth,
With limbs more pure than sunset-tinted snow.
And lo, that self-same sea has now upthrown
A mutilated Venus, rolled and rolled
For ages by the surf, and that has grown
More soft, more chaste, more lovely than of old,
With every line made vague, so that the stone
Seems seen as through a veil which ages hold.

ON MANTEGNA'S SEPIA DRAWING OF JUDITH.

I.

WHAT stony, bloodless Judith hast thou made,
Mantegna? Draped in many a stony fold,
What walking sleeper hast thou made, to hold
A stony head and an unbloody blade?
In thine own savage days, wast thou afraid
To paint such Judiths as thou mightst behold
In open street, and paint the heads that rolled
Beneath the axe, in every square displayed?
No, no; not such was Judith, on the night

When, in the silent camp, she watched alone,
Like some dumb tigress, in the tent's dim light
Her sleeping prey; nor, when her deed was done,
She seized the head, and with intent delight
Stared in a face as quivering as her own.

II.

There was a gleam of jewels in the tent
Which one dim cresset lit—a baleful gleam—
And from his scattered armour seemed to stream
A dusky, evil light that came and went.
But from her eyes, as over him she bent,
Watching the surface of his drunken dream,
There shot a deadlier ray, a darker beam,
A look in which her life's one lust found vent.
There was a hissing through her tightened teeth,
As with her scimitar she crouched above
His dark, doomed head, and held her perilous breath,
While ever and anon she saw him move
His red lascivious lips, and smile beneath
His curled and scented beard, and mutter love.

STRANGLED.

THERE is a legend in some Spanish book
About a noisy reveller who, at night,
Returning home with others, saw a light
Shine from a window, and climbed up to look,
And saw within the room, hanged to a hook,
His own self-strangled self, grim, rigid, white,
And who, struck sober by that livid sight,
Feasting his eyes, in tongue-tied horror shook.

Has any man a fancy to peep in
And see, as through a window, in the Past,
His nobler self, self-choked with coils of sin,
Or sloth or folly? Round the throat whipped fast
The nooses give the face a stiffened grin.
'Tis but thyself. Look well. Why be aghast?

PROMETHEAN FANCIES.

I.

WHEN on to shuddering Caucasus God pours
The phials of his anger hoarded long,
Plunging in each abyss his fiery prong
As if to find a Titan; when loud roars
The imprisoned thunder groping for the doors
Of never-ending gorges; when, among
The desperate pines, Storm howls his battle-song—
Then wakes Prometheus, and his voice upsoars.

Yea, when the midnight tempest hurries past,
There sounds within its wail a wilder wail
Than that which tells the anguish of the blast;
And when the thunder thunders down the gale,
A laugh within its laugh tells woe so vast
That God's own angels in the darkness quail.

II.

Prometheus—none may see him. But at night
When heaven's bolt has made some forest flare
On Caucasus, and when the broad red glare
Rushing from crag to crag at infinite height
Stains sleeping wastes of snow, or, ruby bright,
Runs sparkling up the glacier crests to scare
The screaming eagles out of black chasms, where
But half dislodged the darkness still clings tight—
Then on some lurid monstrous wall of rock
The Titan's shadow suddenly appears
Gigantic, flickering, vague; and, storm-unfurled,
Seems still to brave, with hand that dim chains lock,
Midway in the unendingness of years,
The Author of the miscreated world.