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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DEATH-WAKE ***

THE DEATH-WAKE

OR LUNACY

A NECROMAUNT

IN THREE CHIMERAS

BY THOMAS T. STODDART

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY ANDREW LANG

Is't like that lead contains her?...
It were too gross
To rib her cerecloth in the obscure grave.
SHAKESPEARE

**LONDON: JOHN LANE
CHICAGO: WAY & WILLIAMS
1895**

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INTRODUCTION TO THE DEATH-WAKE

Piscatori *Piscator*

[2]

*An angler to an angler here,
To one who longed not for the bays,
I bring a little gift and dear,
A line of love, a word of praise,
A common memory of the ways,
By Elibank and Yair that lead;
Of all the burns, from all the braes,
That yield their tribute to the Tweed.*

*His boyhood found the waters clean,
His age deplored them, foul with dye;
But purple hills, and copses green,
And these old towers he wandered by,
Still to the simple strains reply
Of his pure unrepining reed,
Who lies where he was fain to lie,
Like Scott, within the sound of Tweed.*

A. L.

[3]

INTRODUCTION

The extreme rarity of *The Death-Wake* is a reason for its republication, which may or may not be approved of by collectors. Of the original edition the Author says that more than seventy copies were sold in the first week of publication, but thereafter the publisher failed in business. Mr. Stoddart recovered the sheets of his poem, and his cook gradually, and perhaps not injudiciously, expended them for domestic purposes.

Apart from its rarity, *The Death-Wake* has an interest of its own for curious amateurs of poetry. The year of its composition (1830) was the great year of *Romanticisme* in France, the year of *Hernani*, and of Gautier's *gilet rouge*. In France it was a literary age given to mediæval extravagance, to the dagger and the bowl, the cloak and sword, the mad monk and the were-wolf; the age of Pétrus Borel and MacKeat, as well as of Dumas and Hugo. Now the official poetry of our country was untouched by and ignorant of the virtues and excesses of 1830. Wordsworth's bolt was practically shot; Sir Walter was ending his glorious career; Shelley and Byron and Keats were dead, and the *annus mirabilis* of Coleridge was long gone by. Three young poets of the English-speaking race were producing their volumes, destined at first to temporary neglect. The year 1830 was the year of Mr. Tennyson's *Poems, chiefly Lyrical*, his first book, not counting *Poems by Two Brothers*. It was also the year of Mr. Browning's *Pauline* (rarer even than *The Death-Wake*); and it was the year which followed the second, and perhaps the most characteristic, poetical venture of Edgar Allan Poe. In Mr. Tennyson's early lyrics, and in Mr. Poe's, any capable judge must have recognised new notes of romance. Their accents are fresh and strange, their imaginations dwell in untrodden regions. Untouched by the French romantic

[4]

[5]

poets, they yet unconsciously reply to their notes, as if some influence in the mental air were at work on both sides of the Channel, on both sides of the Atlantic. Now, in my opinion, this indefinite influence was also making itself felt, faintly and dimly, in Scotland. *The Death-Wake* is the work of a lad who certainly had read Keats, Coleridge and Shelley, but who is no imitator of these great poets. He has, in a few passages, and at his best, an accent original, distinct, strangely musical, and really replete with promise. He has a fresh unborrowed melody and mastery of words, the first indispensable sign of a true poet. His rhymed heroic verse is no more the rhymed heroic verse of *Endymion*, than it is that of Mr. Pope, or of Mr. William Morris. He is a new master of the old instrument. [6]

His mood is that of Scott when Scott was young, and was so anxious to possess a death's head and cross-bones. The malady is "most incident" to youth, but Mr. Stoddart wears his rue with a difference. The mad monkish lover of the dead nun Agathé has hit on precisely the sort of fantasy which was about to inspire Théophile Gautier's *Comédie de la Mort*, or the later author of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, or Edgar Poe. There is here no "criticism of life;" it is a criticism of strange death; and, so far, may recall Beddoes's *Death's Jest-Book*, unpublished, of course, in 1830. Naturally this kind of poetry is "useless," as Mr. Ruskin says about Coleridge, but, in its *bizarre* way, it may be beautiful.

The author, by a curious analogy with Théophile Gautier, was, in these days, a humourist as well as a poet. In the midst of his mad fancies and rare melodies he is laughing at himself, as Théophile mocked at *Les Jeunes France*. The psychological position is, therefore, one of the rarest. Mr. Stoddart was, first of all and before all, a hardy and enthusiastic angler. Between 1830 and 1840 he wrote a few beautiful angling songs, and then all the poetry of his character merged itself in an ardent love of Nature: of hill, loch and stream—above all, of Tweed, the fairest of waters, which he lived to see a sink of pollution. After 1831 we have no more romanticism from Mr. Stoddart. The wind, blowing where it listeth, struck on him as on an Æolian harp, and "an uncertain warbling made," in the true Romantic manner. He did write a piece with the alluring name of *Ajalon of the Winds*, but not one line of it survives. The rest is not silence, indeed, for, in addition to his lays of trout and salmon, of Tweed and Teviot, Mr. Stoddart wrote a good deal of prose, and a good deal of perfectly common and uninspired verse. The Muse, which was undeniably with him for an hour, abandoned him, or he deserted her, being content to whip the waters of Tweed, and Meggat, and Yarrow. Perhaps unfavourable and unappreciative criticism, acting on a healthy and contented nature, drove him back into the common paths of men. Whatever the cause, the *Death-Wake* alone (save for a few angling songs) remains to give assurance of a poet "who died young." It is needless to rewrite the biography, excellently done, in *Angling Songs*, by Miss Stoddart, the poet's daughter (Blackwoods, Edinburgh, 1889). Mr. Stoddart was born on St. Valentine's Day 1810, in Argyll Square, Edinburgh, nearly on the site of the Kirk of Field, where Darnley was murdered. He came of an old Border family. Miss Stoddart tells a painful tale of an aged Miss Helen who burned family papers because she thought she was bewitched by the seals and decorated initials. Similar follies are reported of a living old lady, on whose hearth, after a night of destruction, was once found the impression of a seal of Mary of Modena. I could give only too good a guess at the *provenance* of those papers, but nobody can interfere. Beyond 1500 the family memories rely on tradition. The ancestors owned lands in the Forest of Ettrick, and Williamhope, on the Tweed hard by Ashestiel. On the Glenkinnon burn, celebrated by Scott, they hid the prophets of the Covenant "by fifties in a cave." One Williamhope is said to have been out at Drumclog, or, perhaps, Bothwell Brig. This laird, of enormous strength, was called the Beetle of Yarrow, and was a friend of Murray of Philiphaugh. His son, in the Fifteen, was out on the Hanoverian side, which was *not* in favour with the author of *The Death-Wake*. He married a daughter of Veitch of The Glen, now the property of Sir Charles Tennant. In the next generation but one, the Stoddarts sold their lands and took to commerce, while the poet's father won great distinction in the Navy. The great-great-grandfather of the poet married a Miss Muir of Anniston, the family called cousins (on which side of the blanket I know not) with Robert II. of Scotland, and, by another line, were as near as in the sixth degree of James III. [7] [8] [9] [10]

As a schoolboy, Mr. Stoddart was always rhyming of goblin, ghost, fairy, and all Sir Walter's themes. At Edinburgh University he was a pupil of Christopher North (John Wilson), who pooh-poohed *The Death-Wake* in *Blackwood*. He also knew Aytoun, Professor Ferrier, De Quincey, Hartley Coleridge, and Hogg, and was one of the first guests of Tibbie Sheils, on the spit of land between St. Mary's and the Loch of the Lowes. In verses of this period (1827) Miss Stoddart detects traces of Keats and Byron, but the lines quoted are much better in *technique* than Byron usually wrote. [11]

The summer of 1830 Mr. Stoddart passed in Hogg's company on Yarrow, and early in 1831 he published *The Death-Wake*. There is no trace of James Hogg in the poem, which, to my mind, is perfectly original. Wilson places it "between the weakest of Shelley and the strongest of Barry Cornwall." It is really nothing but a breath of the spirit of romance, touching an instrument not wholly out of tune, but never to be touched again.

It is unnecessary to follow Mr. Stoddart through a long and happy life of angling and of literary leisure. He only blossomed once. His poem was plagiarised and inserted in *Graham's Magazine*, by a person named Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro (vol. xx.). Mr. Ingram, the biographer of Edgar Poe, observes that Poe praised the piece while he was exposing Tasistro's "barefaced robbery." [12]

The copy of *The Death-Wake* from which this edition is printed was once the property of Mr. Aytoun, author of *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers*, and, I presume, of *Ta Phairshon*. Mr. Aytoun has

written a prefatory sonnet which will be found in its proper place, a set of rhymes on the flyleaf at the end, and various cheerful but unfeeling notes. After some hesitation I do not print these frivolities.

The copy was most generously presented to me by Professor Knight of St. Andrews, and I have only seen one other example, which I in turn contributed to fill the vacant place in the shelves of Mr. Knight. His example, however, is far the more curious of the twain, by virtue of Aytoun's annotations.

I had been wanting to see *The Death-Wake* ever since, as a boy, I read the unkind review of it in an ancient volume of *Blackwood's Magazine*. In its "pure purple mantle" of glazed cloth, with paper label, it is an unaffectedly neat and well-printed little volume. [13]

It would be unbecoming and impertinent to point out to any one who has an ear for verse, the charm of such lines as—

"A murmur far and far, of those that stirred
Within the great encampment of the sea."

Or—

"A love-winged seraph glides in glory by,
Striking the tent of its mortality."

(An idea anticipated by the as yet unknown Omar Khayyam).

Or—

"Dost thou, in thy vigil, hail
Arcturus in his chariot pale,
Leading him with a fiery flight
Over the hollow hill of night?"

These are wonderful verses for a lad of twenty-one, living among anglers, undergraduates, and, if with some society of the lettered, apparently with none which could appreciate or applaud him. [14]

For the matter of the poem, the wild voyage of the mad monkish lover with the dead Bride of Heaven, it strikes, of course, on the common reef of the Romantic—the ridiculous. But the recurring contrasts of a pure, clear peace in sea and sky, are of rare and atoning beauty. Such a passage is—

"And the great ocean, like a holy hall,
Where slept a seraph host maritimal,
Was gorgeous with wings of diamond."

Once more, when the mad monk tells the sea-waves

"That ye have power and passion, and a sound
As of the flying of an angel round,
The mighty world, that ye are one with Time,"

we recognise genuine imagination.

A sympathetic reader of *The Death-Wake* would perhaps have expected the leprosies and lunacies to drop off, and the genius, purged of its accidents, to move into a pure transparency. The abnormal, the monstrous, the boyish elements should have been burned away in the fire of the genius of poetry. But the Muses did not so will it, and the mystic wind of the spirit of song became of less moment to Mr. Stoddart than the breeze on the loch that stirs the trout to feed. Perhaps his life was none the less happy and fortunate. Of the many brilliant men whom he knew intimately—Wilson, Aytoun, Ferrier, Glassford Bell, and others—perhaps none, not even Hogg, recognised the grace of the Muse which (in my poor opinion) Mr. Stoddart possessed. His character was not in the least degree soured by neglect or fretted by banter. Not to over-estimate oneself is a virtue very rare among poets, and certainly does not lead to public triumphs. Modesty is apt to accompany the sense of humour which alleviates life, while it is an almost insuperable bar to success. [15]

Mr. Stoddart died on November 22nd, 1880. His last walk was to Kelso Bridge "to look at the Tweed," which now murmurs by his grave the self-same song that it sings beside Sir Walter's tomb in Dryburgh Abbey. We leave his poem to the judgment of students of poetry, and to him we say his own farewell— [16]

Sorrow, sorrow speed away
To our angler's quiet mound,
With the old pilgrim, twilight grey,
Enter thou the holy ground.

There he sleeps, whose heart was twined
With wild stream and wandering burn,
Wooer of the western wind,

THE DEATH-WAKE OR LUNACY

Sonnet to the Author

*O wormy Thomas Stoddart who inheritest
Rich thoughts and loathsome, nauseous words, & rare!
Tell me, my friend, why is it that thou ferrest
And gropest in each death-corrupted lair?
Seek'st thou for maggots, such as have affinity
With those in thine own brain? or dost thou think
That all is sweet which hath a horrid stink?
Why dost thou make Hautgout thy sole divinity?
Here is enough of genius to convert
Vile dung to precious diamonds, and to spare,
Then why transform the diamond into dirt,
And change thy mind w^h. sh^d. be rich & fair
Into a medley of creations foul,
As if a Seraph would become a Goul?*

W.E.A

1834

CHIMERA I

An anthem of a sister choristry!
And like a windward murmur of the sea,
O'er silver shells, so solemnly it falls!
A dying music shrouded in deep walls,
That bury its wild breathings! And the moon,
Of glow-worm hue, like virgin in sad swoon,
Lies coldly on the bosom of a cloud,
Until the elf-winds, that are wailing loud,
Do minister unto her sickly trance,
Fanning the life into her countenance;
And there are pale stars sparkling, far and few
In the deep chasms of everlasting blue,
Unmarshall'd and ungather'd, one and one,
Like outposts of the lunar garrison.

A train of holy fathers windeth by
The arches of an aged sanctuary,
With cowl, and scapular, and rosary
On to the sainted oriel, where stood,
By the rich altar, a fair sisterhood—
A weeping group of virgins! one or two
Bent forward to a bier, of solemn hue,
Whereon a bright and stately coffin lay,
With its black pall flung over:—Agathè
Was on the lid—a name. And who?—No more!
'Twas only Agathè.

'Tis o'er, 'tis o'er,—
Her burial! and, under the arcades,
Torch after torch into the moonlight fades;
And there is heard the music, a brief while,
Over the roofings of the imaged aisle,
From the deep organ panting out its last,
Like the slow dying of an autumn blast.

A lonely monk is loitering within
The dusky area, at the altar seen,
Like a pale spirit kneeling in the light
Of the cold moon, that looketh wan and white
Through the deviced oriel; and he lays
His hands upon his bosom, with a gaze
To the chill earth. He had the youthful look
Which heartfelt woe had wasted, and he shook
At every gust of the unholy breeze,
That enter'd through the time-worn crevices.

[21]

A score of summers only o'er his brow
Had pass'd—and it was summer, even now,
The one-and-twentieth—from a birth of tears,
Over a waste of melancholy years!
And *that* brow was as wan as if it were
Of snowy marble, and the raven hair
That would have cluster'd over, was all shorn,
And his fine features stricken pale as morn.

He kiss'd a golden crucifix that hung
Around his neck, and in a transport flung
Himself upon the earth, and said, and said
Wild, raving words, about the blessed dead:
And then he rose, and in the moonshade stood,
Gazing upon its light in solitude;
And smote his brow, at some idea wild
That came across: then, weeping like a child,
He falter'd out the name of Agathè;
And look'd unto the heaven inquiringly,
And the pure stars.

[22]

"Oh shame! that ye are met,
To mock me, like old memories, that yet
Break in upon the golden dream I knew,
While she—*she* lived: and I have said adieu
To that fair one, and to her sister Peace,
That lieth in her grave. When wilt thou cease
To feed upon my quiet!—thou Despair!
That art the mad usurper, and the heir,
Of this heart's heritage! Go, go—return,
And bring me back oblivion, and an urn!
And ye, pale stars, may look, and only find,
The wreck of a proud tree, that lets the wind
Count o'er its blighted boughs; for such was he
That loved, and loves, the silent Agathè!"
And he hath left the sanctuary, like one
That knew not his own purpose—The red sun
Rose early over incense of bright mist,
That girdled a pure sky of amethyst.
And who was he? A monk. And those who knew
Yclept him Julio; but they were few:
And others named him as a nameless one,—
A dark, sad-hearted being, who had none
But bitter feelings, and a cast of sadness,
That fed the wildest of all curses—madness!

[23]

But he was, what *none* knew, of lordly line,
That fought in the far land of Palestine,
Where, under banners of the cross, they fell,
Smote by the armies of the infidel.
And Julio was the last; alone, alone!
A sad, unfriended orphan, that had gone
Into the world, to murmur and to die,
Like the cold breezes that are passing by!

And few they were that bade him to their board;
His fortunes now were over, and the sword
Of his proud ancestry dishonour'd—left
To moulder in its sheath—a hated gift!

Ay! it was so; and Julio had fain
Have been a warrior; but his very brain
Grew fever'd at the sickly thought of death,
And to be stricken with a want of breath!—
To be the food of worms—inanimate,

[24]

And cold as winter,—and as desolate!
And then to waste away, and be no more
Than the dark dust!—The thought was like a sore
That gather'd in his heart; and he would say,—
"A curse be on their laurels!" and decay
Came over them; the deeds that they had done
Had fallen with their fortunes; and anon
Was Julio forgotten, and his line—
No wonder for this frenzied tale of mine!

Oh! he was wearied of this passing scene!
But loved not death: his purpose was between
Life and the grave; and it would vibrate there,
Like a wild bird that floated far and fair
Betwixt the sun and sea!

He went, and came,
And thought, and slept, and still awoke the same,—
A strange, strange youth; and he would look all night
Upon the moon and stars, and count the flight
Of the sea waves, and let the evening wind
Play with his raven tresses, or would bind
Grottoes of birch, wherein to sit and sing:
And peasant girls would find him sauntering,
To gaze upon their features, as they met,
In laughter, under some green arboret.

[25]

At last, he became monk, and, on his knees,
Said holy prayers, and with wild penances
Made sad atonement; and the solemn whim,
That, like a shadow, loiter'd over him,
Wore off, even like a shadow. He was cursed
With none of the mad thoughts that were at first
The poison of his quiet; but he grew
To love the world and its wild laughter too,
As he had known before; and wish'd again
To join the very mirth he hated then!

He durst not break the vow—he durst not be
The one he would—and his heart's harmony
Became a tide of sorrow. Even so,
He felt hope die,—in madness and in woe!
But there came one—and a most lovely one
As ever to the warm light of the sun
Threw back her tresses,—a fair sister girl,
With a brow changing between snow and pearl,
And the blue eyes of sadness, fill'd with dew
Of tears,—like Heaven's own melancholy blue,—
So beautiful, so tender; and her form
Was graceful as a rainbow in a storm,
Scattering gladness on the face of sorrow—
Oh! I had fancied of the hues that borrow
Their brightness from the sun; but she was bright
In her own self,—a mystery of light!
With feelings tender as a star's own hue,
Pure as the morning star! as true, as true;
For it will glitter in each early sky,
And her first love be love that lasteth aye!

[26]

And this was Agathè, young Agathè,
A motherless, fair girl: and many a day
She wept for her lost parent. It was sad
To see her infant sorrow; how she bade
The flow of her wild spirits fall away
To grief, like bright clouds in a summer day
Melting into a shower: and it was sad
Almost to think she might again be glad,
Her beauty was so chaste, amid the fall
Of her bright tears. Yet, in her father's hall,
She had lived almost sorrowless her days:
But he felt no affection for the gaze
Of his fair girl; and when she fondly smiled,
He bade no father's welcome to the child,
But even told his wish, and will'd it done,
For her to be sad-hearted—and a nun!

[27]

And so it was. She took the dreary veil,
A hopeless girl! and the bright flush grew pale
Upon her cheek: she felt, as summer feels
The winds of autumn and the winter chills,
That darken his fair suns.—It was away,
Feeding on dreams, the heart of Agathè!

The vesper prayers were said, and the last hymn
Sung to the Holy Virgin. In the dim,
Gray aisle was heard a solitary tread,
As of one musing sadly on the dead—
'Twas Julio; it was his wont to be
Often alone within the sanctuary;
But now, not so—another: it was she!
Kneeling in all her beauty, like a saint
Before a crucifix; but sad and faint
The tone of her devotion, as the trill
Of a moss-burden'd, melancholy rill.

[28]

And Julio stood before her;—'twas as yet
The hour of the pale twilight—and they met
Each other's gaze, till either seem'd the hue
Of deepest crimson; but the ladye threw
Her veil above her features, and stole by
Like a bright cloud, with sadness and a sigh!

Yet Julio still stood gazing and alone,
A dreamer!—"Is the sister ladye gone?"
He started at the silence of the air
That slumber'd over him—she is not there.

And either slept not through the live-long night,
Or slept in fitful trances, with a bright,
Fair dream upon their eyelids: but they rose
In sorrow from the pallet of repose;
For the dark thought of their sad destiny
Came o'er them, like a chasm of the deep sea,
That was to rend their fortunes; and at eve
They met again, but, silent, took their leave,
As they did yesterday: another night,
And neither spake awhile—A pure delight
Had chasten'd love's first blushes: silently
Gazed Julio on the gentle Agathè—
At length, "Fair Nun!"—She started, and held fast
Her bright hand on her lip—"the past, the past,
And the pale future! There be some that lie
Under those marble urns—I know not why,
But I were better in that only calm,
Than be as I have been, perhaps, and am.
The past!—ay! it hath perish'd; never, never,
Would I recall it to be blest for ever:
The future it must come—I have a vow"—
And his cold hand rose trembling to his brow.
"True, true, I have a vow. Is not the moon
Abroad, fair Nun?"—"Indeed! so very soon?"
Said Agathè, and "I must then away."—
"Stay, love! 'tis early yet; stay, angel, stay!"
But she was gone:—yet they met many a time
In the lone chapel, after vesper chime—
They met in love and fear.

[29]

[30]

One weary day,
And Julio saw not his loved Agathè;
She was not in the choir of sisterhood
That sang the evening anthem, and he stood
Like one that listen'd breathlessly awhile;
But stranger voices chanted through the aisle.
She was not there; and, after all were gone,
He linger'd: the stars came—he linger'd on,
Like a dark fun'ral image on the tomb
Of a lost hope. He felt a world of gloom
Upon his heart—a solitude—a chill.
The pale morn rose, and still, he linger'd still.
And the next vesper toll'd; nor yet, nor yet—
"Can Agathè be faithless, and forget?"

It was the third sad eve, he heard it said,
"Poor Julio! thy Agathè is dead,"
And started. He had loiter'd in the train
That bore her to the grave: he saw her lain
In the cold earth, and heard a requiem
Sung over her—To him it was a dream!
A marble stone stood by the sepulchre;
He look'd, and saw, and started—she was there!
And Agathè had died; she that was bright—
She that was in her beauty! a cold blight
Fell over the young blossom of her brow.
And the life-blood grew chill—She is not, now.

[31]

She died, like zephyr falling amid flowers!
Like to a star within the twilight hours
Of morning—and she was not! Some have thought
The Lady Abbess gave her a mad draught,
That stole into her heart, and sadly rent
The fine chords of that holy instrument,
Until its music falter'd fast away,
And she—she died,—the lovely Agathè!

Again, and through the arras of the gloom
Are the pale breezes moaning: by her tomb
Bends Julio, like a phantom, and his eye
Is fallen, as the moon-borne tides, that lie
At ebb within the sea. Oh! he is wan,
As winter skies are wan, like ages gone,
And stars unseen for paleness; it is cast,
As foliage in the raving of the blast,
All his fair bloom of thoughts! Is the moon chill,
That in the dark clouds she is mantled still?
And over its proud arch hath Heaven flung
A scarf of darkness? Agathè was young!
And there should be the virgin silver there,
The snow-white fringes delicately fair!

[32]

He wields a heavy mattock in his hands,
And over him a lonely lanthorn stands
On a near niche, shedding a sickly fall
Of light upon a marble pedestal,
Whereon is chisel'd rudely, the essay
Of untaught tool, "Hic jacet Agathè!"
And Julio hath bent him down in speed,
Like one that doeth an unholy deed.

There is a flagstone lieth heavily
Over the ladye's grave; I wist of three
That bore it, of a blessed verity!
But he hath lifted it in his pure madness,
As it were lightsome as a summer gladness,
And from the carved niche hath ta'en the lamp,
And hung it by the marble flagstone damp.

[33]

And he is flinging the dark, chilly mould
Over the gorgeous pavement: 'tis a cold,
Sad grave, and there is many a relic there
Of chalky bones, which, in the wasting air,
Fell smouldering away; and he would dash
His mattock through them, with a cursed clash,
That made the lone aisle echo. But anon
He fell upon a skull,—a haggard one,
With its teeth set, and the great orbless eye
Revolving darkness, like eternity—
And in his hand he held it, till it grew
To have the fleshy features and the hue
Of life. He gazed, and gazed, and it became
Like to his Agathè—all, all the same!
He drew it nearer,—the cold, bony thing!—
To kiss the worm-wet lips. "Ay! let me cling—
Cling to thee now, for ever!" but a breath
Of rank corruption from its jaws of death
Went to his nostrils, and he madly laugh'd,
And dash'd it over on the altar shaft,
Which the new risen moon, in her gray light,

[34]

Had fondly flooded, beautifully bright!

Again he went
To his wild work, beside the monument.
"Ha! leave, thou moon! where thy footfall hath been
In sorrow amid heaven! there is sin
Under thy shadow, lying like a dew;
So come thou, from thy awful arch of blue,
Where thou art even as a silver throne
For some pale spectre-king; come thou alone,
Or bring a solitary orphan star
Under thy wings! afar, afar, afar,
To gaze upon this girl of radiancy,
In her deep slumbers—Wake thee, Agathè!"

And Julio hath stolen the dark chest
Where the fair nun lay coffin'd, in the rest
That wakes not up at morning: she is there,
An image of cold calm! One tress of hair
Lingereth lonely on her snowy brow;
But the bright eyes are closed in darkness now;
And their long lashes delicately rest
On the pale cheek, like sun-rays in the west,
That fall upon a colourless, sad cloud. [35]
Humility lies rudely on the proud,
But she was never proud; and there she is,
A yet unwither'd flower the autumn breeze
Hath blown from its green stem! 'T is pale, 't is pale,
But still unfaded, like the twilight veil
That falleth after sunset; like a stream
That bears the burden of a silver gleam
Upon its waters; and is even so,—
Chill, melancholy, lustreless, and low!

Beauty in death! a tenderness upon
The rude and silent relics, where alone
Sat the destroyer! Beauty on the dead!
The look of being where the breath is fled!
The unwarming sun still joyous in its light!
A time—a time without a day or night!
Death cradled upon Beauty, like a bee
Upon a flower, that looketh lovingly!—
Like a wild serpent, coiling in its madness,
Under a wreath of blossom and of gladness! [36]

And there she is; and Julio bends o'er
The sleeping girl,—a willow on the shore
Of a Dead Sea! that steepeth its far bough
Into the bitter waters,—even now
Taking a foretaste of the awful trance
That was to pass on his own countenance!

Yes! yes! and he is holding his pale lips
Over her brow; the shade of an eclipse
Is passing to his heart, and to his eye,
That is not tearful; but the light will die,
Leaving it like a moon within a mist,—
The vision of a spell-bound visionist!

He breathed a cold kiss on her ashy cheek,
That left no trace—no flush—no crimson streak,
But was as bloodless as a marble stone,
Susceptible of silent waste alone.
And on her brow a crucifix he laid—
A jewel'd crucifix, the virgin maid
Had given him before she died. The moon
Shed light upon her visage—clouded soon, [37]
Then briefly breaking from its airy veil,
Like warrior lifting up his aventayle.

But Julio gazed on, and never lifted
Himself to see the broken clouds, that drifted
One after one, like infant elves at play
Amid the night-winds, in their lonely way—
Some whistling and some moaning, some asleep,
And dreaming dismal dreams, and sighing deep

Over their couches of green moss and flowers,
And solitary fern, and heather bowers.

The heavy bell toll'd two, and, as it toll'd,
Julio started, and the fresh-turn'd mould
He flung into the empty chasm with speed,
And o'er it dropt the flagstone. One could read
That Agathè lay there; but still the girl
Lay by him, like a precious and pale pearl,
That from the deep sea-waters had been rent—
Like a star fallen from the firmament!
He hides the grave-tools in an aged porch,
To westward of the solitary church;
And he hath clasp'd around the melting waist
The beautiful, dead girl: his cheek is press'd
To hers—Life warming the cold chill of Death!
And over his pale palsy breathing breath
His eye is sunk upon her—"Thou must leave
The worm to waste for love of thee, and grieve
Without thee, as I may not. Thou must go,
My sweet betrothed, with me—but not below,
Where there is darkness, dream, and solitude,
But where is light, and life, and one to brood
Above thee till thou wakest—Ha! I fear
Thou wilt not wake for ever, sleeping here,
Where there are none but winds to visit thee,
And convent fathers, and a choristry
Of sisters, saying, 'Hush!'—But I will sing
Rare songs to thy pure spirit, wandering
Down on the dews to hear me; I will tune
The instrument of the ethereal moon,
And all the choir of stars, to rise and fall
In harmony and beauty musical."

[38]

He is away—and still the sickly lamp
Is burning next the altar; there's a damp,
Thin mould upon the pavement; and, at morn,
The monks do cross them in their blessed scorn
And mutter deep anathemas, because
Of the unholy sacrilege, that was
Within the sainted chapel,—for they guess'd,
By many a vestige sad, how the dark rest
Of Agathè was broken,—and anon
They sought for Julio. The summer sun
Arose and and set, with his imperial disc
Toward the ocean-waters, heaving brisk
Before the winds,—but Julio came never:
He that was frantic as a foaming river—
Mad as the fall of leaves upon the tide
Of a great tempest, that have fought and died
Along the forest ramparts, and doth still
In its death-struggle desperately reel
Round with the fallen foliage—he was gone,
And none knew whither. Still were chanted on
Sad masses, by pale sisters, many a day,
And holy requiems sung for Agathè!

[39]

[41]

CHIMERA II

A curse! a curse! the beautiful pale wing
Of a sea-bird was worn with wandering,
And, on a sunny rock beside the shore,
It stood, the golden waters gazing o'er;
And they were heaving a brown amber flow
Of weeds, that glitter'd gloriously below.

It was the sunset, and the gorgeous hall
Of heaven rose up on pillars magical
Of living silver, shafting the fair sky
Between dark time and great eternity.
They rose upon their pedestal of sun,
A line of snowy columns! and anon
Were lost in the rich tracery of cloud

That hung along, magnificently proud,
Predicting the pure star-light, that beyond
The east was armouring in diamond
About the camp of twilight, and was soon
To marshal under the fair champion moon,
That call'd her chariot of unearthly mist,
Toward her citadel of amethyst.

[42]

A curse! a curse! a lonely man is there
By the deep waters, with a burden fair
Clasp'd in his wearied arms—"Tis he; 'tis he
The brain-struck Julio, and Agathè!
His cowl is back—flung back upon the breeze,
His lofty brow is haggard with disease,
As if a wild libation had been pour'd
Of lightning on those temples, and they shower'd
A dismal perspiration, like a rain,
Shook by the thunder and the hurricane!

He dropt upon a rock, and by him placed,
Over a bed of sea-pinks growing waste,
The silent ladye, and he mutter'd wild,
Strange words, about a mother, and no child.
"And I shall wed thee, Agathè! although
Ours be no God-blest bridal—even so!"
And from the sand he took a silver shell,
That had been wasted by the fall and swell
Of many a moon-borne tide into a ring—
A rude, rude ring; it was a snow-white thing,
Where a lone hermit limpet slept and died,
In ages far away. "Thou art a bride,
Sweet Agathè! Wake up; we must not linger."
He press'd the ring upon her chilly finger,
And to the sea-bird, on its sunny stone,
Shouted, "Pale priest! thou liest all alone
Upon thy ocean altar, rise away
To our glad bridal!" and its wings of gray
All lazily it spread, and hover'd by
With a wild shriek—a melancholy cry!
Then swooping slowly o'er the heaving breast
Of the blue ocean, vanish'd in the west.

[43]

And Julio is chanting to his bride,
A merry song of his wild heart, that died
On the soft breeze through pinks beside the sea,
All rustling in their beauty gladsomely.

SONG

[44]

A rosary of stars, love! we'll count them as we go
Upon the laughing waters, that are wandering below,
And we'll o'er the pearly moon-beam, as it lieth in the sea,
In beauty and in glory, like a shadowing of thee!

A rosary of stars, love! a prayer as we glide,
And a whisper in the wind, and a murmur on the tide!
And we'll say a fair adieu to the flowers that are seen,
With shells of silver sown in radiancy between.

A rosary of stars, love! the purest they shall be,
Like spirits of pale pearls, in the bosom of the sea;
Now help thee, virgin mother! with a blessing as we go,
Upon the laughing waters, that are wandering below!

He lifted the dead girl, and is away
To where a light boat, in its moorings lay,
Like a sea-cradle, rocking to the hush
Of the nurse waters. With a frantic rush
O'er the wild field of tangles he hath sped,
And through the shoaling waves that fell and fled
Upon the furrow'd beach.

[45]

The snowy sail
Is hoisted to the gladly gushing gale,
That bosom'd its fair canvass with a breast

Of silver, looking lovely to the west;
And at the helm there sits the wither'd one,
Gazing and gazing on the sister nun,
With her fair tresses floating on his knee—
The beautiful, death-stricken Agathè!

Fast, fast, and far away, the bark hath stood
Out toward the great heaving solitude,
That gurgled in its deeps, as if the breath
Went through its lungs, of agony and death!

The sun is lost within the labyrinth
Of clouds of purple and pale hyacinth,
That are the frontlet of the sister Sky
Kissing her brother Ocean; and they lie
Bathing in blushes, till the rival queen
Night, with her starry tiar, floateth in—
A dark and dazzling beauty! that doth draw
Over the light of love a shade of awe
Most strange, that parts our wonder not the less
Between her mystery and loveliness!

[46]

And she is there, that is a pyramid
Whereon the stars, the statues of the dead,
Are imaged over the eternal hall,
A group of radiances majestic!
And Julio looks up, and there they be,
And Agathè, and all the waste of Sea,
That slept in wizard slumber, with a shroud
Of night flung o'er his bosom, throbbing proud
Amid its azure pulses; and again
He dropt his blighted eye-orbs, with a strain
Of mirth upon the ladye:—Agathè!
Sweet bride! be thou a queen, and I will lay
A crown of sea-weed on thy royal brow;
And I will twine these tresses, that are now
Floating beside me, to a diadem;
And the sea foam will sprinkle gem on gem,
And so will the soft dews. Be thou the queen
Of the unpeopled waters, sadly seen
By star-light, till the yet unrisen moon
Issue, unveiled, from her anderoon,
To bathe in the sea fountains: let me say,
"Hail—hail to thee! thrice hail, my Agathè!"

[47]

The warrior world was lifting to the bent
Of his eternal brow magnificent,
The fiery moon, that in her blazonry
Shone eastward, like a shield. The throbbing sea
Felt fever on his azure arteries,
That shadow'd them with crimson, while the breeze
Fell faster on the solitary sail.
But the red moon grew loftier and pale,
And the great ocean, like the holy hall,
Where slept a seraph host maritimal,
Was gorgeous, with wings of diamond
Fann'd over it, and millions beyond
Of tiny waves were playing to and fro,
All musical, with an incessant flow
Of cadences, innumerably heard
Between the shrill notes of a hermit bird,
That held a solemn paeon to the moon.

[48]

A few devotional fair clouds were soon
Breathed o'er the living countenance of Heaven,
And under the great galaxies were driven
Of stars that group'd together, and they went
Like voyagers along the firmament,
And grew to silver in the blessed light
Of the moon alchemist. It was not night,
Not the dark deathly shadow, that falls o'er
The eye-lid like a curse, but far before
In splendour, struggling through a fall of gloom,
In many a myriad gushes, that do come
Direct from the eternal stars beyond,

Like holy fountains pouring diamond!

A sail! awake thee, Julio! a sail!
And be not bending to thy trances pale.
But he is gazing on the moonlit brow
Of his dead Agathè, and fondly now,
The light is silvering her bloodless face
And the cold grave-clothes. There is loveliness
As in a marble image, very bright!
But stricken with a phantasy of light
That is not given to the mortal hue,
To life and breathing beauty: and she too
Is more of the expressless lineament,
Than of the golden thoughts that came and went
Over her features like a living tide
No while before.

[49]

A sail is on the wide
And moving waters, and it draweth nigh
Like a sea-cloud. The elfin billows fly
Before it, in their armories enthrall'd
Of radiant and moon-breasted emerald;
And many is the mariner that sees
The lone boat in the melancholy breeze,
Waving her snowy canvass, and anon
Their stately vessel with a gallant run
Crowds by in all her glory; but the cheer
Of men is pass'd into a sudden fear,
And whisperings, and shakings of the head—
The moon was streaming on a virgin dead,
And Julio sat over her insane,
Like a sea demon! O'er and o'er again,
Each cross'd him, as the stately vessel stood
Far out into the murmuring solitude!

[50]

But Julio saw not; he only heard
A rushing, like the passing of a bird,
And felt him heaving on the foam, that flew
Along the startled billows; and he knew
Of a strange sail, by broken oaths that fell
Beside him, on the coming of the swell.

They knew thou wert a queen, my royal bride!
And made obeisance at thy holy side.
They saw thee, Agathè! and go to bring
Fair worshippers, and many a poet-king,
To utter music at thy pearly feet.—
Now, wake thee! for the moonlight cometh sweet,
To visit in thy temple of the sea;
Thy sister moon is watching over thee!
And she is spreading a fair mantle of
Pure silver, in thy lonely palace, love!—
Now, wake thee! for the sea-bird is aloof,
In solitude, below the starry roof;
And on its dewy plume there is a light
Of palest splendour, o'er the blessed night.
Thy spirit, Agathè!—and yet, thou art
Beside me, and my solitary heart
Is throbbing near to thee: I must not feel
The sweet notes of thy holy music steal
Into my feverous and burning brain,—
So wake not! and I'll hush thee with a strain
Of my wild fancy, till thou dream of me,
And I be loved as I have loved thee:—

[51]

SONG

'Tis light to love thee living, girl, when hope is full and fair,
In the springtide of thy beauty, when there is no sorrow there—
No sorrow on thy brow, and no shadow on thy heart!
When, like a floating sea-bird, bright and beautiful thou art!

'Tis light to love thee living, girl—to see thee ever so,
With health, that, like a crimson flower, lies blushing in the snow;
And thy tresses falling over, like the amber on the pearl—

[52]

Oh! true it is a lightsome thing, to love thee living, girl!

But when the brow is blighted, like a star of morning tide,
And faded is the crimson blush upon the cheek beside;
It is to love, as seldom love, the brightest and the best,
When our love lies like a dew upon the one that is at rest.

Because of hopes, that, fallen, are changing to despair,
And the heart is always dreaming on the ruin that is there,
Oh, true! 'tis weary, weary, to be gazing over thee,
And the light of thy pure vision breaketh never upon me!

[53]

He lifts her in his arms, and o'er and o'er,
Upon the brow of chilliness and hoar,
Repeats a silent kiss;—along the side
Of the lone bark, he leans that pallid bride,
Until the waves do image her within
Their bosom, like a spectre—'Tis a sin
Too deadly to be shadow'd or forgiven,
To do such mockery in the sight of Heaven!
And bid her gaze into the startled sea,
And say, "Thy image, from eternity,
Hath come to meet thee, ladye!" and anon,
He bade the cold corse kiss the shadowy one,
That shook amid the waters, like the light
Of borealis in a winter night!

And after, he did strain her sea-wet hair
Between his chilly fingers, with a stare
Of mystery, that marvell'd how that she
Had drench'd it so amid the moonlit sea.
The morning rose, with breast of living gold,
Like eastern phoenix, and his plumage roll'd
In clouds of molted brilliance, very bright!
And on the waste of waters floated light.—

[54]

In truth, 'twas strange to see that merry bark
Skimming the silver ocean, like a shark
At play amid the beautiful sea-green,
And all so sadly desolate within.

And hours flew after hours, a weary length,
Until the sunlight, in meridian strength,
Threw burning floods upon the wasted brow
Of that sea-hermit mariner; and now
He felt the fire-light feed upon his brain,
And started with intensity of pain,
And wash'd him in the sea; it only brought
Wild reason, like a demon, and he thought
Strange thoughts, like dreaming men—he thought how those
Were round him he had seen, and many rose
His heart had hated; every billow threw
Features before him, and pale faces grew
Out of the sea by myriads:—the self-same
Was moulded from its image, and they came
In groups together, and all said, like one,
"Be cursed!" and vanish'd in the deep anon.
Then thirst, intolerable as the breath
Of Upas, fanning the wild wings of death,
Crept up his very gorge,—like to a snake,
That stifled him, and bade the pulses ache
Through all the boiling current of his blood.
It was a thirst, that let the fever flood
Fall over him, and gave a ghastly hue
To his cramp'd lips, until their breathing grew
White as a mist, and short, and like a sigh,
Heaved with a struggle, till it falter'd by.

[55]

And ever he did look upon the corse
With idiot visage, like the hag Remorse
That gloateth over on a nameless deed
Of darkness and of dole unhistoried.
And were there that might hear him, they would hear
The murmur of a prayer in deep fear,
Through unbarr'd lips, escaping by the half,
And all but smother'd by a maniac laugh,

That follow'd it, so sudden and so shrill,
That swarms of sea-birds, wandering at will
Upon the wave, rose startled, and away
Went flocking, like a silver shower of spray!
And aye he called for water, and the sea
Mock'd him with his brine surges tauntingly,
And lash'd them over on his fev'rous brow,
Volleying roars of curses:—"Stay thee, now,
Avenger! lest I die; for I am worn
Fainter than star-light at the birth of morn;
Stay thee, great angel! for I am not shriven,
But frantic as thyself: Oh Heaven! Heaven!
But thou hast made me brother of the sea,
That I may tremble at his tyranny;
Or am I slave? a very, very jest
To the sarcastic waters? let me breast
The base insulters, and defy them so,
In this lone little skiff—I am your foe!
Ye raving, lion-like, and ramping seas,
That open up your nostrils to the breeze,
And fain would swallow me! Do ye not fly,
Pale, sick, and gurgling, as I pass you by?

[56]

"Lift up! and let me see, that I may tell
Ye can be mad, and strange, and terrible;
That ye have power, and passion, and a sound
As of the flying of an angel round
The mighty world; that ye are one with time,
And in the great primordium sublime
Were nursed together, as an infant-twin,—
A glory and a wonder! I would fain
Hold truce, thou elder brother! for we are,
In feature, as the sun is to a star,
So are we like, and we are touch'd in tune
With lunacy as music; and the moon,
That setteth the tides sentinel before
Thy camp of waters, on the pebbled shore,
And measures their great footsteps to and fro,
Hath lifted up into my brain the flow
Of this mad tide of blood.—Ay! we are like
In foam and frenzy; the same winds do strike,
The same fierce sun-rays, from their battlement
Of fire! so, when I perish impotent
Before the night of death, they'll say of me,
He died as mad and frantic, as the sea!"

[57]

A cloud stood for the east, a cloud like night,
Like a huge vulture, and the blessed light
Of the great sun grew shadow'd awfully:
It seem'd to mount up from the mighty sea,
Shaking the showers from its solemn wings,
And grew, and grew, and many a myriad springs,
Were on its bosom, teeming full of rain.
There fell a terrible and wizard chain
Of lightning, from its black and heated forge,
And the dark waters took it to their gorge,
And lifted up their shaggy flanks in wonder
With rival chorus to the peal of thunder,
That wheel'd in many a squadron terrible
The stern black clouds, and as they rose and fell
They oozed great showers; and Julio held up
His wasted hands, in likeness of a cup,
And drank the blessed waters, and they roll'd
Upon his cheeks like tears, but sadly cold!—
'Twas very strange to look on Agathè!
How the quick lightnings, in their elfin play,
Stream'd pale upon her features, and they were
Sickly, like tapers in a sepulchre!

[58]

The ship! that self same ship, that Julio knew
Had pass'd him, with her panic-stricken crew,
She gleams amid the storm, a shatter'd thing
Of pride and lordly beauty: her fair wing
Of sail is wounded—the proud pennon gone:
Dark, dark she sweepeth like an eagle, on

[59]

Through waters that are battling to and fro,
And tossing their great giant shrouds of snow
Over her deck. Ahead, and there is seen
A black, strange line of breakers, down between
The awful surges, lifting up their manes,
Like great sea lions. Quick and high she strains
Her foaming keel—that solitary ship!
As if, in all her frenzy, she would leap
The cursed barrier; forward, fast and fast—
Back, back she reels; her timbers and her mast
Split in a thousand shivers! A white spring
Of the exulted sea rose bantering
Over her ruin; and the mighty crew,
That mann'd her decks, were seen, a straggling few,
Far scatter'd on the surges. Julio felt
The impulse of that hour, and low he knelt,
Within his own light bark—a prayful man!
And clasp'd his lifeless bride; and to her wan,
Cold cheek did lay his melancholy brow.—
"Save thou a mariner!" He starteth now
To hear that dying cry; and there is one,
All worn and wave-wet, by his bark anon,
Clinging, in terror of the ireful sea,
A fair hair'd mariner! But suddenly
He saw the pale dead ladye, by a flame
Of blue and livid lightning, and there came
Over his features blindness, and the power
Of his strong hands grew weak,—a giant shower
Of foam rose up, and swept him far along;
And Julio saw him buffeting the throng
Of the great eddying waters, till they went
Over him—a wind-shaken cerement!

[60]

Then terribly he laugh'd, and rose above
His soul-less bride—the ladye of his love
Lifting him up, in all his wizard glee;
And he did wave, before the frantic sea,
His wasted arm. "Adieu! adieu! adieu!
Thou sawest how we were; thou sawest, too,
Thou wert not so; for in the inmost shrine
Of my deep heart are thoughts that are not thine.
And thou art gone, fair mariner! in foam
And music-murmurs, to thy blessed home—
Adieu! adieu! Thou sawest how that she
Sleeps in her holy beauty, tranquilly;
And when the fair and floating vision breaks
From her pure brow, and Agathè awakes—
Till then, we meet not; so adieu, adieu!"
Still on before the sullen tempest flew,
Fast as a meteor star, the lonely bark:
And Julio bent over to the dark,
The solitary sea, for close beside
Floated the stringed harp of one that died
In that wild shipwreck, and he drew it home,
With madness, to his bosom: the white foam
Was o'er its strings; and on the streaming sail
He wiped them, running, with his fingers pale,
Along the tuneless notes, that only gave
Seldom responses to his wandering stave!

[61]

[62]

TO THE HARP

I

Jewel! that lay before the heart
Of some romantic boy,
And startled music in her home,
Of mystery and joy!

II

The image of his love was there;
And, with her golden wings,

She swept her tone of sorrow from
Thy melancholy strings!

III

We drew thee, as an orphan one,
From waters that had cast
No music round thee, as they went
In their pale beauty past.

IV

No music but the changeless sigh—
That murmur of their own,
That loves not blending in the thrill
Of thine aerial tone.

V

The girl that slumbers at our side
Will dream how they are bent,
That love her even as they love
Thy blessed instrument.

VI

And music, like a flood, will break
Upon the fairy throne
Of her pure heart, all glowing, like
A morning star, alone!

VII

Alone, but for the song of him
That waketh by her side,
And strikes thy chords of silver to
His fair and sea-borne bride.

VIII

Jewel! that hung before the heart
Of some romantic boy;
Like him, I sweep thee with a storm
Of music and of joy!

And Julio placed the trembling harp before
The ladye, till the minstrel winds came o'er
Its moisten'd strings, and tuned them with a sigh.
"I hear thee, how thy spirit goeth by,
In music and in love. Oh Agathè!
Thou sleepest long, long, long; and they will say
That seek thee,—'She is dead—she is no more!'
But thou art cold, and I will throw before
Thy chilly brow the pale and snowy sheet."
And he did lift it from her marble feet,
The sea-wet shroud! and flung it silently
Over her brow—the brow of Agathè!

But, as a passion from the mooded mind,
The storm had died, and wearily the wind
Fell fast asleep at evening, like one
That hath been toiling in the fiery sun.
And the white sail dropt downward, as the wing
Of wounded sea-bird, feebly murmuring
Unto the mast. It was a deathly calm,
And holy stillness, like a shadow, swam
All over the wide sea, and the boat stood.
Like her of Sodom, in the solitude,
A snowy pillar, looking on the waste.
And there was nothing but the azure breast
Of ocean and the sky—the sea and sky,
And the lone bark; no clouds were floating by
Where the sun set, but his great seraph light,
Went down alone, in majesty and might;
And the stars came again, a silver troop,
Until, in shame, the coward shadows droop
Before the radiance of these holy gems,

[63]

[64]

[65]

That bear the images of diadems!

And Julio fancied of a form that rose
Before him from the desolate repose
Of the deep waters—a huge ghastly form,
As of one lightning-stricken in a storm;
And leprosy cadaverous was hung
Before his brow, and awful terror flung
Around him like a pall—a solemn shroud!—
A drapery of darkness and of cloud!
And agony was writhing on his lip,
Heart-rooted, awful agony and deep,
Of fevers, and of plagues, and burning blain,
And ague, and the palsy of the brain—
A wierd and yellow spectre! And his eyes
Were orbless and unpupil'd, as the skies
Without the sun, or moon, or any star:
And he was like the wreck of what men are,—
A wasted skeleton, that held the crest
Of Time, and bore his motto on his breast!

[66]

There came a group before of maladies,
And griefs, and Famine empty as a breeze,—
A double monster, with a gloating leer
Fix'd on his other half. They drew them near,
One after one, led onward by Despair,
That like the last of winter glimmer'd there,—
A dismal prologue to his brother Death,
Which was behind, and, with the horrid breath
Of his wide baneful nostrils, plied them on.
And often as they saw the skeleton
Grisly beside them, the wild phantasies
Grew mad and howl'd; the fever of disease
Became wild frenzy—very terrible!
And, for a hell of agony—a hell
Of rage, was there, that fed on misty things,
On dreams, ideas, and imaginings.

[67]

And some were raving on philosophy,
And some on love, and some on jealousy,
And some upon the moon; and these were they
That were the wildest; and anon always
Julio knew them by a something dim
About their wasted features like to him!

But Death was by, like shell of pyramid
Among old obelisks, and his eyeless head
Shook o'er the wieri ribs, where darkness lay
The image of a heart—He is away!
And Julio is watching, like Remorse,
Over the pale and solitary corse!

Shower soft light, ye stars, that shake the dew
From your eternal blossoms! and thou, too,
Moon! minded of thy power, tide-bearing queen!
That hast a slave and votary within
The great rock-fetter'd deeps, and hearest cry
To thee the hungry surges, rushing by
Like a vast herd of wolves,—fall full and fair
On Julio as he sleepeth, even there,
Amid the suppliant bosom of the sea!—
Sleep! dost thou come, and on thy blessed knee
With hush and whisper lull the troubled brain
Of this death-lover?—Still the eyes do strain
Their orbs on Agathè—those raven eyes!
All earnest on the ladye as she lies
In her white shroud. They see not, though they are
As if they saw; no splendour like a star
Is under their dark lashes: they are full
Of dream and slumber—melancholy, dull!

[68]

A wide, wide sea! and on its rear and van
Amid the stars, the silent meteors ran

All that still night, and Julio with a cry
Woke up, and saw them flashing fiercely by.

[69]

Full three times three, its awful veil of night
Hath Heaven hung before the blessed light;
And a fair breeze falls o'er the sleeping sea,
Where Julio is watching Agathè!
By sun and darkness hath he bent him over—
A mad, moon-stricken, melancholy lover!

And hardly hath he tasted, night or day,
Of drink or food, because of Agathè!
He sitteth in a dull and dreary mood,
Like statue in a ruin'd solitude,
Bearing the brent of sunlight and of shade
Over the marble of some colonnade.

The ladye, she hath lost the pearly hue
Upon her gorgeous brow, where tresses grew
Luxuriantly as thoughts of tenderness,
That once were floating in the pure recess
Of her bright soul. These are not as they were,
But are as weeds above a sepulchre,
Wild waving in the breeze: her eyes are now
Sunk deeply under the discolour'd brow,
That is of sickly yellow, and pale blue,
Unnaturally blending. The same hue
Is on her cheek: it is the early breath
Of cold Corruption, the ban dog of Death,
Falling upon her features.—Let it be,
And gaze awhile on Julio, as he
Is gazing on the corse of Agathè!

[70]

In truth, he seemeth like no living one,
But is the image of a skeleton:
A fearful portrait from the artist tool
Of Madness—terrible and wonderful!

There was no passion there—no feeling traced
Under those eyelids, where had run to waste,
All that was wild, or beautiful, or bright;
A very cloud was cast upon their light,
That gave to them the heavy hue of lead;
And they were lorn, and lustreless, and dead!
He sate like vulture from the mountains gray,
Unsated, that had flown full many a day
O'er distant land and sea, and was in pride
Alighted by the lonely ladye's side.

[71]

He sate like winter o'er the wasted year—
Like melancholy winter, drawing near
To its own death.—"Oh me! the worm, at last,
Will gorge upon me, and the autumn blast
Howl by!—Where?—where?—there is no worm to creep
Amid the waters of the lonely deep;
But I will take me Agathè upon
This sorrowful, sore bosom, and anon,
Down, down, through azure silence, we shall go,
Unepitaph'd, to cities far below;
Where the sea triton, with his winding shell,
Shall sound our blessed welcome. We shall dwell
With many a mariner in his pearly home,
In bowers of amber weed and silver foam,
Amid the crimson corals; we shall be
Together, Agathè! fair Agathè!—
But thou art sickly, ladye—thou art sad;
And I am weary, ladye—I am mad!
They bring no food to feed us, and I feel
A frost upon my vitals, very chill,
Like winter breaking on the golden year
Of life. This bark shall be our floating bier,
And the dark waves our mourners; and the white,
Pure swarm of sunny sea birds, basking bright

[72]

On some far isle, shall sorrowfully pour
Their wail of melancholy o'er and o'er,
At evening, on the waters of the sea,—
While, with its solemn burden, silently,
Floats forward our lone bark.—Oh, Agathè!
Methinks that I shall meet thee far away,
Within the awful centre of the earth,
Where, earliest, we had our holy birth—
In some huge cavern, arching wide below,
Upon whose airy pivot, years ago,
The world went round: 'tis infinitely deep,
But never dismal; for above it sleep,
And under it, blue waters, hung aloof,
And held below,—an amethystine roof,
A sapphire pavement; and the golden sun,
Afar, looks through alternately, like one
That watches round some treasure: often, too,
Through many a mile of ocean, sparkling through,
Are seen the stars and moon, all gloriously,
Bathing their angel brilliance in the sea!

[73]

"And there are shafted pillars, that beyond,
Are ranged before a rock of diamond,
Awfully heaving its eternal heights,
From base of silver strewn with chrysolites;
And over it are chasms of glory seen,
With crimson rubies clustering between,
On sward of emerald, with leaves of pearl,
And topazes hung brilliantly on beryl.
So Agathè!—but thou art sickly sad,
And tellest me, poor Julio is mad—
Ay, mad!—was he not madder when he swore
A vow to Heaven? was there no madness there,
That he should do—for why?—a holy string
Of penances? No penances will bring
The stricken conscience to the blessed light
Of peace,—Oh! I am lost, and there is night,
Despair and darkness, darkness and despair,
And want, that hunts me to the lion-lair
Of wild perdition: and I hear them all—
All cursing me! The very sun-rays fall
In curses, and the shadow of the moon,
And the pale star light, and the winds that tune
Their voices to the music of the sea,—
And thou,—yes, thou! my gentle Agathè!—
All curse me!—Oh! that I were never, never!—
Or but a breathless fancy, that was ever
Adrift upon the wilderness of Time,
That knew no impulse, but was left sublime
To play at its own will!—that I were hush'd
At night by silver cataracts, that gush'd
Through flowers of fairy hue, and then to die
Away, with all before me passing by,
Like a fair vision I had lived to see,
And died to see no more!—It cannot be!
By this right hand! I feel it is not so,
And by the beating of a heart below,
That strangely feareth for eternity!"

[74]

He said, and gazing on the lonely sea,
Far off he saw, like an ascending cloud,
To westward, a bright island, lifted proud
Amid the struggling waters, and the light
Of the great sun was on its clifted height,
Scattering golden shadow, like a mirror;
But the gigantic billows sprung in terror
Upon its rock-built and eternal shore,
With silver foams that fell in fury o'er
A thousand sunny breakers. Far above,
There stood a wild and solitary grove
Of aged pines, all leafless but their brows,
Where a green group of tempest-stricken boughs
Was waving now and then, and to and fro,
And the pale moss was clustering below.

[75]

Then Julio saw, and bent his head away
To the cold wasted corpse of Agathè,
And sigh'd; but ever he would turn again
A gaze to that green island on the main.

The bark is drifting through the surf, beside
Its rocks of gray upon the coming tide;
And lightly is it stranded on the shore
Of pure and silver shells, that lie before,
Glittering in the glory of the sun;
And Julio hath landed him, like one
That aileth of some wild and weary pest;
And Agathè is folded on his breast,—
A faded flower! with all the vernal dews
From its bright blossom shaken, and the hues
Become as colourless as twilight air—
I marvel much, that she was ever fair!

[76]

[77]

CHIMERA III

Another moon! and over the blue night
She bendeth, like a holy spirit bright,
Through stars that veil them in their wings of gold;
As on she floateth with her image cold
Enamell'd on the deep. A sail of cloud
Is to her left, majestically proud!
Trailing its silver drapery away
In thin and fairy webs, that are at play
Like stormless waves upon a summer sea
Dragging their length of waters lazily.

Ay! to the rocks! and thou wilt see, I wist,
A lonely one, that bendeth in the mist
Of moonlight, with a wild and raven pall
Flung round him. Is he mortal man at all?
For, by the meagre fire-light that is under
Those eyelids, and the vizer shade of wonder
Falling upon his features, I would guess,
Of one that wanders out of blessedness!
Julio! raise thee!—By the holy mass!
I wot not of the fearless one would pass
Thy wizard shadow. Where the raven hair
Was shorn before, in many a matted layer
It lieth now; and on a rock beside
The sea, like merman at the ebb of tide,
Feasting his wondrous vision on Decay,
So art thou gazing over Agathè!

[78]

Ah me! but this is never the fair girl,
With brow of light, as lovely as a pearl,
That was as beautiful as is the form
Of sea-bird at the breaking of a storm.
The eye is open, with convulsive strain—
A most unfleshy orb! the stars that wane
Have nothing of its hue; for it is cast
With sickly blood, and terribly aghast!
And sunken in its socket, like the light
Of a red taper in the lonely night!
And there is not a braid of her bright hair
But lieth floating in the moonlight air,
Like the long moss, beside a silver spring,
In elfin tresses, sadly murmuring.
The worm hath 'gan to crawl upon her brow—
The living worm! and with a ripple now,
Like that upon the sea, are heard below,
The slimy swarms all ravening as they go,
Amid the stagnate vitals, with a rush;
And one might hear them echoing the hush
Of Julio, as he watches by the side
Of the dead ladye, his betrothed bride!

[79]

And, ever and anon, a yellow group
Was creeping on her bosom, like a troop

Of stars, far up amid the galaxy,
Pale, pale, as snowy showers; and two or three
Were mocking the cold finger, round and round,
With likeness of a ring; and, as they wound
About its bony girth, they had the hue
Of pearly jewels glistening in dew.
That deathly stare! it is an awful thing
To gaze upon; and sickly thoughts will spring
Before it to the heart: it telleth how
There must be waste where there is beauty now.
The chalk! the chalk! where was the virgin snow
Of that once heaving bosom!—even so,—
The cold pale dewy chalk, with yellow shade
Amid the leprous hues; and o'er it played
The straggling moonlight, and the merry breeze,
Like two fair elves, that, by the murmuring seas,
Woo'd smilingly together; but there fell
No life-gleam on the brow, all terrible
Becoming, through its beauty, like a cloud
That waneth paler even than a shroud,
All gorgeous and all glorious before;
For waste, like to the wanton night, was o'er
Her virgin features, stealing them away—
Ah me! ah me! and this is Agathè?

[80]

"Enough! enough! Oh God! but I have pray'd
To thee, in early daylight and in shade,
And the mad curse is on me still—and still!
I cannot alter the Eternal will—
But—but—I hate thee, Agathè! I hate
What lunacy hath bade me consecrate:
I am *not* mad!—*not now!*—I do not feel
That slumberous and blessed opiate steal
Up to my brain—Oh! that it only would,
To people this eternal solitude
With fancies, and fair dreams, and summer mirth,
Which is not now—And yet, my mother earth,
I would not love to lie above thee so,
As Agathè lies there—oh! no! no! no!
To have these clay-worms feast upon my heart!
And all the light of being, to depart
Into a dismal shadow! I could die
As the red lightnings, quenching amid sky
Their wild and wizard breath; I could away,
Like a blue billow, bursting into spray;
But, never—never have corruption here,
To feed her worms, and let the sunlight jeer
Above me so.—'Tis thou!—I owe thee, Moon,
To-night's fair worship; so be lifting soon
Thy veil of clouds, that I may kneel, as one
That seeketh for thy virgin benison!"

[81]

He gathers the cold limpets, as they creep
On the grey rocks beside the lonely deep;
And with a flint breaks through into the shell,
And feeds him—by the mass! he feasteth well.
And he hath lifted water in a clam,
And tasted sweetly, from a stream that swam
Down to the sea; and now is turn'd away,
Again, again, to gaze on Agathè!

[82]

There is a cave upon that isle—a cave
Where dwelt a hermit man; the winter wave
Roll'd to its entrance, casting a bright mound
Of snowy shells and fairy pebbles round;
And over were the solemn ridges strewn
Of a dark rock, that, like the wizard throne
Of some sea-monarch, stood, and from it hung
Wild thorn and bramble, in confusion flung
Amid the startling crevices—like sky,
Through gloom of clouds, that sweep in thunder by.
A cataract fell over, in a streak
Of silver, playing many a wanton freak;
Midway, and musical, with elfin glee
It bounded in its beauty to the sea,

Like dazzling angel vanishing away.
In sooth, 'twas pleasant in the moonlight gray
To see that fairy fountain leaping so,
Like one that knew not wickedness nor woe!

[83]

The hermit had his cross and rosary;
I ween like other hermits, so was he;
A holy man, and frugal, and at night
He prayed, or slept, or, sometimes, by the light
Of the fair moon, went wandering beside
The lonely sea, to hear the silver tide
Rolling in gleesome music to the shore:
The more he heard, he loved to hear the more.
And there he is, his hoary beard adrift
To the night winds, that sportingly do lift
Its snow-white tresses; and he leaneth on
A rugged staff, all weakly and alone,
A childless, friendless man!

He is beside

The ghastly Julio, and his ghastlier bride.
'Twas wondrous strange to gaze upon the two!
And the old hermit felt a throbbing through
His pulses:—"Holy virgin! save me, save!"
He deem'd of spectre from the midnight wave,
And cross'd him thrice, and pray'd, and pray'd again:—
"Hence! hence!" and Julio started, as the strain
Of exorcisms fell faintly on his ear:—
"I knew thee, father, that thou beest here,
To gaze upon this girl, as I have been.
By yonder moon! it was a frantic sin
To worship so an image of the clay;
It was like beauty—but is now away—
What lived upon her features, like the light
On yonder cloud, all tender and all bright;
But it is faded as the other must,
And she that was all beauty, is all dust."

[84]

"Father! thy hand upon this brow of mine,
And tell me, is it cold?—But she will twine
No wreath upon these temples,—never, never!
For there she lieth, like a streamless river
That stagnates in its bed. Feel, feel me, here,
If I be madly throbbing in the fear
For that cold slimy worm. Ay! look and see
How dotingly it feeds, how pleasantly!
And where it is, have been the living hues
Of beauty, purer than the very dews.
So, father! seest thou that yonder moon
Will be on wane to-morrow, soon and soon?
And I, that feel my being wear away,
Shall droop beside to darkness; so, but say
A prayer for the dead, when I am gone,
And let the azure tide that floweth on
Cover us lightly with its murmuring surf
Like a green sward of melancholy turf.
Thou mayest, if thou wilt, thou mayest rear
A cenotaph on this lone island here,
Of some rude mossy stone, below a tree,
And carve an olden rhyme for her and me
Upon its brow."

[85]

He bends, and gazes yet
Before his ghastly bride! the anchoret
Sate by him, and hath press'd a cross of wood
To his wan lips.

"My son! look up and tell thy dismal tale.
Thou seemest cold, and sorrowful, and pale.
Alas! I fear but thou hast strangely been
A child of curse, and misery, and sin.
And this—is she thy sister?"—"Nay! my bride."
"A nun! and thou:"—"True, true! but then she died,

[86]

And was a virgin, and is virgin still,
Chaste as the moon, that taketh her pure fill
Of light from the great sun. But now, go by,
And leave me to my madness, or to die!
This heart, this brain are sore.—Come, come, and fold
Me round, ye hydra billows! wrapt in gold,
That are so writhing your eternal gyres
Before the moon, which, with a myriad tiars
Is crowning you, as ye do fall and kiss
Her pearly feet, that glide in blessedness!
Let me be torture-eaten, ere I die!
Let me be mangled sore with agony!
And be so cursed, so stricken by the spell
Of my heart's frenzy, that a living hell
Be burning there!—Back! back! if thou art mad—
Methought thou wast, but thou art only sad.
Is this thy child, old man? look, look, and see!
In truth it is a piteous thing for thee
To become childless—Well-a-well, go by!
Is there no grave? The quiet sea is nigh,
And I will bury her below the moon;
It may be but a trance or midnight swoon,
And she may wake. Wake, ladye! ha! methought
It was like *her*—Like her! and is it not?
My angel girl! my brain, my stricken brain!—
I know thee now!—I know myself again."

[87]

He flings him on the ladye, and anon,
With loathly shudder, from that wither'd one
Hath torn him back. "Oh me! no more—no more!
Thou virgin mother! Is the dream not o'er,
That I have dreamt, but I must dream again
For moons together, till this weary brain
Become distemper'd as the winter sea?
Good father! give me blessing; let it be
Upon me as the dew upon the moss.
Oh me! but I have made the holy cross
A curse, and not a blessing! let me kiss
The sacred symbol; for, by this—by this!
I swear, and sware again, as now I will—
Thou Heaven! if there be bounty in thee still,
If thou wilt hear, and minister, and bring
The light of comfort on some angel wing
To one that lieth lone, do—do it now;
By all the stars that open on thy brow
Like silver flowers! and by the herald moon
That listeth to be forth at nightly noon,
Jousting the clouds, I swear! and be it true,
As I have perjured me, that I renew
Allegiance to thy God, and bind me o'er
To this same penance, I have done before!
That night and day I watch, as I have been
Long watching, o'er the partner of my sin!
That I taste never the delight of food,
But these wild shell-fish, that may make the mood
Of madness stronger, till it grapple Death—
Despair—Eternity!"

[88]

He saith, he saith,
And, on the jaundiced bosom of the corse,
Lieth all frenzied; one would see Remorse,
And hopeless Love, and Hatred, struggling there,
And Lunacy, that lightens up Despair,
And makes a gladness out of agony.
Pale phantom! I would fear and worship thee,
That hast the soul at will, and gives it play,
Amid the wildest fancies far away;
That thronest Reason, on some wizard throne
Of fairy land, within the milky zone,—
Some spectre star, that glittereth beyond
The glorious galaxies of diamond.

[89]

Beautiful Lunacy! that shapest flight
For love to blessed bowers of delight,
And buldest holy monarchies within

The fancy, till the very heart is queen
Of all her golden wishes. Lunacy!
Thou empress of the passions! though they be
A sister group of wild, unearthly forms,
Like lightnings playing in their home of storms!
I see thee, striking at the silver strings
Of the pure heart, and holy music springs
Before thy touch, in many a solemn strain,
Like that of sea-waves rolling from the main!

[90]

But say, is Melancholy by thy side,
With tresses in a raven shower, that hide
Her pale and weeping features? Is she never
Flowing before thee, like a gloomy river,
The sister of thyself? but cold and chill,
And winter-born, and sorrowfully still,
And not like thee, that art in merry mood,
And frolicksome amid thy solitude!

Fair Lunacy! I see thee, with a crown
Of hawthorn and sweet daisies, bending down
To mirror thy young image in a spring;
And thou wilt kiss that shadow of a thing
As soul-less as thyself. 'Tis tender, too,
The smile that meeteth thine! the holy hue
Of health! the pearly radiance of the brow!
All, all as tender—beautiful as thou!

And wilt thou say, my sister, there is none
Will answer thee? Thou art—thou art alone,
A pure, pure being! but the God on high
Is with thee ever, as thou goest by.

[91]

Thou poetess! that harpest to the moon,
And, in soft concert to the silver tune
Of waters, play'd on by the magic wind,
As he comes streaming, with his hair untwined,
Dost sing light strains of melody and mirth,—
I hear thee, hymning on thy holy birth,
How thou wert moulded of thy mother Love,
That came, like seraph, from the stars above,
And was so sadly wedded unto Sin,
That thou wert born, and Sorrow was thy twin.
Sorrow and mirthful Lunacy! that be
Together link'd for time, I deem of ye
That ye are worshipp'd as none others are,—
One as a lonely shadow, one a star!

Is Julio glad, that bendeth, even now,
To his wild purpose, to his holy vow?
He seeth only in his ladye-bride
The image of the laughing girl, that died
A moon before—The same, the very same—
The Agathè that lisp'd her lover's name,
To him and to her heart: that azure eye,
That shone through sunny tresses, waving by;
The brow, the cheek, that blush'd of fire and snow,
Both blending into one ethereal glow;
And that same breathing radiancy, that swam
Around her, like a pure and blessed calm
Around some halcyon bird. And, as he kiss'd
Her wormy lips, he felt that he was blest!
He felt her holy being stealing through
His own, like fountains of the azure dew,
That summer mingles with his golden light;
And he would clasp her, till the weary night
Was worn away.

[92]

And morning rose in form
Of heavy clouds, that knitted into storm
The brow of Heaven, and through her lips the wind
Came rolling westward, with a track behind
Of gloomy billows, bursting on the sea,

All rampant, like great lions terribly,
And gnashing on each other: and anon,
Julio heard them, rushing one by one,
And laugh'd and turn'd.—The hermit was away,
For he was old and weary, and he lay
Within his cave, and thought it was a dream,
A summer's dream? and so the quiet stream
Of sleep came o'er his eyelids, and in truth
He dreamt of that strange ladye, and the youth
That held a death-wake on her wasting form;
And so he slept and woke not, till the storm
Was over.

[93]

But they came,—the wind and sea,
And rain and thunder, that in giant glee,
Sang o'er the lightnings pale, as to and fro
They writhed, like stricken angels!—White as snow
Roll'd billow after billow, and the tide
Came forward as an army deep and wide,
To charge with all its waters. There was heard
A murmur far and far, of those that stirr'd
Within the great encampment of the sea,
And dark they were, and lifted terribly
Their water-spouts like banners. It was grand
To see the black battalions, hand in hand
Striding to conflict, and their helmets bent
Below their foamy plumes magnificent!

[94]

And Julio heard and laugh'd, "Shall I be king
To your great hosts, that ye are murmuring
For one to bear you to your holy war?
There is no sun, or moon, or any star,
To guide your iron footsteps as ye go;
But I, your king, will marshal you to flow
From shore to shore. Then bring my car of shell,
That I may ride before you terrible;
And bring my sceptre of the amber weed,
And Agathè, my virgin bride, shall lead
Your summer hosts, when these are ambling low,
In azure and in ermine, to and fro."
He said, and madly, with his wasted hand,
Swept o'er the tuneless harp, and fast he spann'd
The silver chords, until a rush of sound
Came from them, solemn—terrible—profound;
And then he dash'd the instrument away
Into the waters, and the giant play
Of billows threw it back unto the shore,
A shiver'd, stringless frame—its day of music o'er!
The tide, the rolling tide! the multitude
Of the sea surges, terrible and rude,
Tossing their chalky foam along the bed
Of thundering pebbles, that are shoring dread,
And fast retreating to the gloomy gorge
Of waters, sounding like a Titan forge!

[95]

It comes! it comes! the tide, the rolling tide!
But Julio is bending to his bride,
And making mirthful whispers to her ear.
A cataract! a cataract is near,
Of one stupendous billow, and it breaks
Terribly furious, with a myriad flakes
Of foam, that fly about the haggard twain;
And Julio started, with a sudden pain,
That shot into his heart; his reason flew
Back to its throne; he rose, and wildly threw
His matted tresses over on his brow.
Another billow came, and even now
Was dashing at his feet. There was no shade
Of terror, as the serpent waters play'd
Before him, but his eye was calm as death.
Another, yet another! and the breath
Of the weird wind was with it; like a rock
Unriveted it fell—a shroud of smoke
Pass'd over—there was heard, and died away,
The voice of one, shrill shrieking, "Agathè!"

[96]

The sea-bird sitteth lonely by the side
Of the far waste of waters, flapping wide
His wet and weary wings; but *he* is gone,
The stricken Julio!—a wave-swept stone
Stands there, on which he sat, and nakedly
It rises looking to the lonely sea;
But Julio is gone, and Agathè!
The waters swept them madly to their core,—
The dead and living with a frantic roar!
And so he died, his bosom fondly set
On her's; and round her clay-cold waist were met
His bare and wither'd arms, and to her brow
His lips were press'd. Both, both are perish'd now!

He died upon her bosom in a swoon;
And fancied of the pale and silver moon,
That went before him in her hall of blue:
He died like golden insect in the dew,
Calm, calm, and pure; and not a chord was rung
In his deep heart, but love. He perish'd young,
But perish'd, wasted by some fatal flame
That fed upon his vitals; and there came
Lunacy sweeping lightly, like a stream,
Along his brain—He perish'd in a dream!

[97]

In sooth, I marvel not,
If death be only a mysterious thought,
That cometh on the heart, and turns the brow
Brightless and chill, as Julio's is now;
For only had the wasting struggle been
Of one wild feeling, till it rose within
Into the form of death, and nature felt
The light of the immortal being melt
Into its happier home, beyond the sea,
And moon, and stars, into eternity!

The sun broke through his dungeon long enthrall'd
By dismal cloud, and on the emerald
Of the great living sea was blazing down,
To gift the lordly billows with a crown
Of diamond and silver. From his cave
The hermit came, and by the dying wave
Lone wander'd, and he found upon the sand,
Below a truss of sea-weed, with his hand
Around the silent waist of Agathè,
The corse of Julio! Pale, pale, it lay
Beside the wasted girl. The fireless eye
Was open, and a jewell'd rosary
Hung round the neck; but it was gone,—the cross
That Agathè had given.

[98]

Amid the moss,
The hermit scoop'd a solitary grave
Below the pine-trees, and he sang a stave,
Or two, or three, of some old requiem
As in their narrow home he buried them.
And many a day, before that blessed spot
He sate, in lone and melancholy thought,
Gazing upon the grave; and one had guess'd
Of some dark secret shadowing his breast.
And yet, to see him, with his silver hair
Adrift and floating in the sea-borne air,
And features chasten'd in the tears of woe,
In sooth 'twas merely sad to see him so!
A wreck of nature, floating far and fast,
Upon the stream of Time—to sink at last!

[99]

And he is wandering by the shore again,
Hard leaning on his staff; the azure main
Lies sleeping far before him, with his seas
Fast folded in the bosom of the breeze,
That like the angel Peace hath dropt his wings
Around the warring waters. Sadly sings
To his own heart that lonely hermit man,
A tale of other days, when passion ran

Along his pulses, like a troubled stream,
And glory was a splendour, and a dream!
He stoop'd to gather up a shining gem,
That lay amid the shells, as bright as them,—
It was a cross, the cross that Agathè
Had given to her Julio: the play
Of the fierce sunbeams fell upon its face,
And on the glistering jewels—But the trace
Of some old thought came burning to the brain
Of the pale hermit, and he shrunk in pain
Before the holy symbol. It was not
Because of the eternal ransom wrought
In ages far away, or he had bent
In pure devotion sad and reverent;
But now, he started, as he look'd upon
That jewell'd thing, and wildly he is gone
Back to the mossy grave, away, away:—
"My child! my child! my own, own Agathè!"

[100]

It is her father,—he,—an alter'd man!
His quiet had been wounded, and the ban
Of misery came over him, and froze
The bright and holy tides, that fell and rose
In joy amid his heart. To think of her,
That he had injured so, and all so fair,
So fond, so like the chosen of his youth,—
It was a very dismal thought, in truth,
That he had left her hopelessly, for aye,
Within the cloister-wall to droop, and die!
And so he could not bear to have it be;
But sought for some lone island in the sea,
Where he might dwell in doleful solitude,
And do strange penance in his mirthless mood,
For this same crime, unnaturally wild,
That he had done unto his saintly child.
And ever he did think, when he had laid
These lovers in the grave, that, through the shade
Of ghastly features melting to decay,
He saw the image of his Agathè.

[101]

And now the truth had flash'd into his brain:
And he is fallen, with a shriek of pain,
Upon the lap of pale and yellow moss;
For long ago he gave that blessed cross
To his fair girl, and knew the relic still,
By many a thousand thoughts, that rose at will
Before it, of the one that was not now,
But, like a dream, had floated from the brow
Of Time, that seeth many a lovely thing
Fade by him, like a sea-wave murmuring.

The heart is burst!—the heart that stood in steel
To woman's earnest tears, and bade her feel
The curse of virgin solitude,—a veil;
And saw the gladsome features growing pale
Unmoved: 'tis rent, like some eternal tower
The sea hath shaken, and its stately power
Lies lonely, fallen, scatter'd on the shore:
'Tis rent, like some great mountain, that, before
The Deluge, stood in glory and in might,
But now is lightning-riven, and the night
Is clambering up its sides, and chasms lie strewn,
Like coffins, here and there: 'tis rent! the throne
Where passions, in their awful anarchy,
Stood sceptred! There was heard an inward sigh,
That took the being, on its troubled wings,
Far to the land of dim imaginings!

[102]

All three are dead; that desolate green isle
Is only peopled by the passing smile
Of sun and moon, that surely have a sense,
They look so radiant with intelligence,—
So like the soul's own element,—so fair!
The features of a God lie veiled there!

And mariners that have been toiling far
Upon the deep, and lost the polar star,
Have visited that island, and have seen
That lover's grave: and many there have been
That sat upon the gray and crumbling stone,
And started, as they saw a skeleton
Amid the long sad moss, that fondly grew
Through the white wasted ribs; but never knew
Of those who slept below, or of the tale
Of that brain-stricken man, that felt the pale
And wandering moonlight steal his soul away,—
Poor Julio, and the ladye Agathè!

[103]

We found them,—children of toil and tears,
Their birth of beauty shaded;
We left them in their early years
Fallen and faded.

We found them, flowers of summer hue:
Their golden cups were lighted
With sparkles of the pearly dew—
We left them blighted!

[104]

We found them,—like those fairy flowers;
And the light of morn lay holy
Over their sad and sainted bowers—
We left them, lowly.

We found them,—like twin stars, alone,
In brightness and in feeling;
We left them,—and the curse was on
Their beauty stealing.

They rest in quiet, where they are:
Their lifetime is the story
Of some fair flower—some silver star,
Faded in glory!

POEMS

[105]

THE IRIS

[107]

A pale and broken Iris in the mirror
Of a gray cloud,—as gray as death,
Slow sailing in the breath
Of thunder! Like a child, that lies in terror
Through the dark night, an Iris fair
Trembled midway in air.
The blending of its elfin hues
Was as the pure enamel on
The early morning dews;
And gloriously they shone,
Waving everyone his wing,
Like a young aërial thing!
That Iris came
Over the shells of gold, beside
The blue and waveless tide;
Its girdle, of resplendent flame,
Met shore and sea, afar,
Like angel that shall stand
On flood and land,
Crown'd with a meteor star.

[108]

The sea-bird, from her snowy stone,
Beheld it floating on,

Like a bride that bent her way
To the altar, standing lone,
In some cathedral gray.
The melancholy wave
Started at the cry she gave,
Hailing the lovely child
Of the immortal sun,—
A tender and a tearful one,
Bounding away, with footsteps wild!

Old Neptune on his silver bed
The dazzling image threw;
It laid like sunbeam on the dew,
Its young tress-waving head.
The god upon the shadow gazed,
And silently upraised
A gentle wave, that came and kiss'd
Fair Iris in her holy rest.
Her pearly brow grew pale:
It felt the sinful fire,
And from her queenly tiar
She drew the veil.
The sun-wing'd steeds her sacred car
Wheel'd to her throne of star.

[109]

TO A SPIRIT

[110]

Spirit! in deathless halo zoned,
A chain of stars with wings of diamond,—
Is music blended into thee
With holy light and immortality?
For, as thy shape of glory swept
Through seas of darkness, magic breathings fell
Around it, like the notes that slept
In the wild caverns of a silver shell.

Thou camest, as a lightning spring
Through chasms of horrid cloud, on scathless wing;
Old Chaos round him, like a tiar,
Swathed the long rush of immaterial fire;
As thou, descending from afar,
Wast canopied with living arch of light,
Pale pillars of immortal star,
Burst through the curtains of the moonless night.

[111]

Phantom of wonder! over thee,
Trembles the shadow of the Deity;
For face to face, on lifted throne,
Thou gazest to the glory-shrouded One,
Where highest in the azure height
Of universe, eternally he turns
Myriads of worlds; with blaze of light
Filling the hollow of their golden urns.

Why comest thou, with feelings bound
On thy birth-shore, the long unenter'd ground?
To visit where thy being first,
Through the pale shell of embryo nothing, burst?
Or, on celestial errand bent,
To win to faith a sin enraptured son,
And point the angel lineament
Of mercy on a cross,—the Bleeding One?

Spirit! I breathe no sad adieu:
The altars where thou bendest never knew
Sigh, tear, or sorrow, and the night
No chariot drives behind the wheel of light;
Where every seraph is a sun,
And every soul an everlasting star.—
Go to thy home, thou peerless one!
Where glory and the Great Immortal are!

[112]

HER, A STATUE

Her life is in the marble! yet a fall
 Of sleep lies on the heart's fair arsenal,
 Like new shower'd snow. You hear no whisper through
 Those love-divided lips; no pearly dew
 Trembles on her pale orbs, that seem to be
 Bent on a dream of immortality!

She sleeps: her life is sleep,—a holy rest!
 Like that of wing-borne cloud, that, in the west
 Laves his aërial image, till afar
 The sunlight leaves him, melting into star.
 Did Phidias from her brow the veil remove,
 Uncurtaining the peerless queen of love?
 The fluent stone in marble waves recoil'd,
 Touch'd by his hand, and left the wondrous child,
 A Venus of the foam! How softly fair
 The dove-like passion on the sacred air
 Floats round her, nesting in her wreathed hair,
 That tells, though shadeless, of its auburn hue,
 Bathed in a hoar of diamond-dropping dew!

[114]

How beautiful!—Was this not one of eld,
 That Chaos on his boundless bosom held,
 Till Earth came forward in a rush of storm,
 Closing his ribs upon her wingless form?
 How beautiful!—The very lips do speak
 Of love, and bid us worship: the pale cheek
 Seems blushing through the marble—through the snow!
 And the undrap'ried bosom feels a flow
 Of fever on its brightness; every vein
 At the blue pulse swells softly, like a chain
 Of gentle hills. I would not fling a wreath
 Of jewels on that brow, to flash beneath
 Those queenly tresses; for itself is more
 Than sea-born pearl of some Elysian shore!

Such, with a heart like woman! I would cast
 Life at her foot, and, as she glided past,
 Would bid her trample on the slavish thing—
 Tell her, I'd rather feel me withering
 Under her step, than be unknown for aye:
 And, when her pride had crush'd me, she might see
 A love-wing'd spirit glide in glory by
 Striking the tent of its mortality!

[115]

TO A STORM-STAIID BIRD

[116]

Trembler! a month is past, and thou
 Wert singing on the thorn,
 And shaking dew-drops from the bough
 In the golden haze of morn!

My heart was just as thou, as light—
 As loving of the breeze,
 That kiss'd thee in its elfin flight,
 Through the green acacia trees.

And now the winter snow-flakes lie
 All on thy widow'd wing;
 Trembler! methinks I hear thee sigh
 For the silver days of spring.

But shake thy plume—the world is free
 Before thee—warbler, fly!
 Blest by a sunbeam and by me,
 Bird of my heart! good-bye!

[117]

THE WOLF-DROVE

No night-star in the welkin blue! no moonshade round the trees
That grew down to the sea-swept foot of the ancient Pyrenees!
The cold gray mantle of the mist, along the shoulders cast
Of those wild mountains, to and fro, hung waving in the blast.

A snow-crown rising on their brows, in royalty they stood,
As if they vice-reign'd on a throne of winter solitude;
Those hills that rose far upward, till in majesty they bent
Their world's great eye-orb on her own immortal lineament!

[119]

The howl, the long deep howl was heard, the rushing like a wave
Of the wolf train from their forest haunt, in some old mountain cave;
Like a sea-wave, when the wind is horsed behind its foamy crest,
And it lifts upon the shell-built shore, its azure-spotted breast.

They came with war-whoop, following each other, like a thread,
Through the long labyrinth of trees, in sunless archway spread;
Their gnarled trunks in shadowy lines rose dimly, few by few,
Mail'd in their mossy armouring,—a pathless avenue!

In sooth, there was a shepherd girl by her aged father's side;
He gazed upon her deep dark eyes, in glory and in pride;
The mother's soul was living there,—the image full and wild,
Of one he loved—of one no more, was beaming in her child.

[120]

And she was at her father's side, her raven tresses felt
Upon his care-worn cheek, as gay and joyfully she knelt,
Kissing the old man's tears away, by the embers burning faint,
While she sung the holy aves, and a vesper to her saint.

"Now bar the breezy lattice, love!—but hist! how fares the night?
Methought I heard the wolf abroad. Heaven help! I heard aright—
My mantle!—By the Mother Saint! our flock is in the fold?
How think you, love? wake up the hound, I ween the wolf is bold."

[121]

"Stay, stay; 'tis past!" "I hear it still; to rest, I pray, to rest."
"Nay, father! hold; thou must not go;" and silently she press'd
The old man's arm, and bade him stay, for love of Heaven and her:
His danger was too wild a thought, for so fond a girl to bear.

He kiss'd her, and they parted then; but, through the lattice low,
She gazed amid the vine-twigs pale, all cradled to and fro;
The holy whisper of the wind stole lightly by the eaves,—
A sad dirge, sighing to the fall of the winter-blighted leaves.

He comes not! 'Tis a dreadful thing to hear them as they rave,
The savage wolf-train howling, like the near burst of a wave.
She thought it was a father's cry she heard—a father's cry!
And she flung her from the cottage door, in startled agony.

[122]

Good Virgin save thee, gentle girl! they are no knightly train
That mark thee for their sinless prey—thou wilt not smile again;
The blood is streaming on thy cheek; the heart it ceases slow;
A father gazes on his child—God help a father's woe!

[123]

HYMN TO ORION

Orion! old Orion! who dost wait
Warder at heaven's star-studded gate,
On a throne where worlds might meet
At thy silver sandal'd feet,
All invisible to thee,
Gazing through immensity;
For thy crowned head is higher
Than the ramparts of earth-searching fire,
And the comet his blooded banner, there
Flings back upon the waveless air.

Old Orion! holy hands
Have knit thy everlasting bands,
Belted by the King of kings,
Under thy azure-sheathed wings,
With a zone of living light,
Such as bound the Apostate might,
When from highest tower of heaven,
His vaunting shape was wrathly driven
To its wane, woe-wall'd abode,
Rended from the eye of God!

[124]

Dost thou, in thy vigils, hail
Arcturus on his chariot pale,
Leading his sons—a fiery flight—
Over the hollow hill of night?
Or tellest of their watches long,
To the sleepless, nameless throng,
Shoaling in a wond'rous gleam,
Like channel through the azure stream
Of life reflected, as it flows,
In one broad ocean of repose,
Gushing from thy lips, Orion!
To the holy walls of Zion?

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