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## THE POETICAL WORKS OF LEWIS MORRIS

VOLUME TWO

### THE EPIC OF HADES

LONDON  
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE  
1885



*Then with wings  
Of gold we soared, I looking in his eyes  
Over yon dark broad river, and this dim land.*

[Page 228.](#)

## THE EPIC OF HADES

IN THREE BOOKS

BY

**LEWIS MORRIS**

M.A.; HONORARY FELLOW OF JESUS COLLEGE, OXFORD  
KNIGHT OF THE REDEEMER OF GREECE, ETC., ETC.

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"DIFFICILE EST PROPRIE COMMUNIA DICERE"

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NINETEENTH EDITION.

LONDON  
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE  
1885

"The three excellences of Poetry: simplicity of language, simplicity of subject, and simplicity of invention"—*The Welsh Triads*.

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TO ALL

WHO LOVE THE LITERATURE OF GREECE

THIS POEM IS DEDICATED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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### BOOK I.

#### TARTARUS.

# THE EPIC OF HADES.

[3]

In February, when the dawn was slow,  
And winds lay still, I gazed upon the fields  
Which stretched before me, lifeless, and the stream  
Which laboured in the distance to the sea,  
Sullen and cold. No force of fancy took  
My thought to bloomy June, when all the land  
Lay deep in crested grass, and through the dew  
The landrail brushed, and the lush banks were set  
With strawberries, and the hot noise of bees  
Lulled the bright flowers. Rather I seemed to move  
Thro' that weird land, Hellenic fancy feigned,  
Beyond the fabled river and the bark  
Of Charon; and forthwith on every side  
Rose the thin throng of ghosts.

[4]

First thro' the gloom  
Of a dark grove I strayed—a sluggish wood,  
Where scarce the faint fires of the setting stars,  
Or some cold gleam of half-discovered dawn,  
Might pierce the darkling pines. A twilight drear  
Brooded o'er all the depths, and filled the dank  
And sunken hollows of the rocks with shapes  
Of terror,—beckoning hands and noiseless feet  
Flitting from shade to shade, wide eyes that stared  
With horror, and dumb mouths which seemed to cry,  
Yet cried not. An ineffable despair  
Hung over them and that dark world and took  
The gazer captive, and a mingled pang  
Of grief and anger, grown to fierce revolt  
And hatred of the Invisible Force which holds  
The issue of our lives and binds us fast  
Within the net of Fate; as the fisher takes  
The little quivering sea-things from the sea  
And flings them gasping on the beach to die  
Then spreads his net for more. And then again  
I knew myself and those, creatures who lie  
Safe in the strong grasp of Unchanging Law,  
Encompassed round by hands unseen, and chains  
Which do support the feeble life that else  
Were spent on barren space; and thus I came  
To look with less of horror, more of thought,  
And bore to see the sight of pain that yet  
Should grow to healing, when the concrete stain  
Of life and act were purged, and the cleansed soul,  
Renewed by the slow wear and waste of time,  
Soared after æons of days.

[5]

They seemed alone,  
Those prisoners, thro' all time. Each soul shut fast  
In its own jail of woe, apart, alone,  
For evermore alone; no thought of kin,  
Or kindly human glance, or fellowship  
Of suffering or of sin, made light the load  
Of solitary pain. Ay, though they walked  
Together, or were prisoned in one cell  
With the partners of their wrong, or with strange souls  
Which the same Furies tore, they knew them not,  
But suffered still alone; as in that shape  
Of hell fools build on earth, where hopeless sin  
Rots slow in solitude, nor sees the face  
Of men, nor hears the sound of speech, nor feels  
The touch of human hand, but broods a ghost,  
Hating the bare blank cell—the other self,  
Which brought it thither—hating man and God,  
And all that is or has been.

[6]

[7]

A great fear  
And pity froze my blood, who seemed to see  
A half-remembered form.

An Eastern King

It was who lay in pain. He wore a crown  
Upon his aching brow, and his white robe  
Was jewelled with fair gems of price, the signs  
Of pomp and honour and all luxury,  
Which might prevent desire. But as I looked  
There came a hunger in the gloating eyes,  
A quenchless thirst upon the parching lips,  
And such unsatisfied strainings in the hands  
Stretched idly forth on what I could not see,  
Some fatal food of fancy; that I knew  
The undying worm of sense, which frets and gnaws  
The unsatisfied stained soul.

Seeing me, he said:

"What? And art thou too damned as I? Dost know  
This thirst as I, and see as I the cool  
Lymph drawn from thee and mock thy lips; and parch  
For ever in continual thirst; and mark  
The fair fruit offered to thy hunger fade  
Before thy longing eyes? I thought there was  
No other as I thro' all the weary lengths  
Of Time the gods have made, who pined so long  
And found fruition mock him.

Long ago,

When I was young on earth, 'twas a sweet pain  
To ride all day in the long chase, and feel  
Toil and the summer fire my blood and parch  
My lips, while in my father's halls I knew  
The cool bath waited, with its marble floor;  
And juices from the ripe fruits pressed, and chilled  
With snows from far-off peaks; and troops of slaves;  
And music and the dance; and fair young forms.  
And dalliance, and every joy of sense,  
That haunts the dreams of youth, which strength and ease  
Corrupt, and vacant hours. Ay, it was sweet  
For a while to plunge in these, as fair boys plunge  
Naked in summer streams, all veil of shame  
Laid by, only the young dear body bathed  
And sunk in its delight, while the firm earth,  
The soft green pastures gay with innocent flowers,  
Or sober harvest fields, show like a dream;  
And nought is left, but the young life which floats  
Upon the depths of death, to sink, maybe,  
And drown in pleasure, or rise at length grown wise  
And gain the abandoned shore.

Ah, but at last

The swift desire waxed stronger and more strong,  
And feeding on itself, grows tyrannous;  
And the parched soul no longer finds delight  
In the cool stream of old; nay, this itself,  
Smitten by the fire of sense as by a flame,  
Holds not its coolness more; and fevered limbs,  
Seeking the fresh tides of their youth, may find  
No more refreshment, but a cauldron fired  
With the fires of nether hell; and a black rage  
Usurps the soul, and drives it on to slake  
Its thirst with crime and blood.

Longing Desire!

Unsatisfied, sick, impotent Desire!  
Oh, I have known it ages long. I knew  
Its pain on earth ere yet my life had grown  
To its full stature, thro' the weary years  
Of manhood, nay, in age itself; I knew  
The quenchless weary thirst, unsatisfied  
By all the charms of sense, by wealth and power  
And homage; always craving, never quenched—  
The undying curse of the soul! The ministers  
And agents of my will drave far and wide  
Through all the land for me, seeking to find  
Fresh pleasures for me, who had spent my sum  
Of pleasure, and had power, not even in thought,  
Nor faculty to enjoy. They tore apart

[8]

[9]

[10]

[11]

The sacred claustral doors of home for me,  
Defiled the inviolate hearth for me, laid waste  
The flower of humble lives, in hope to heal  
The sickly fancies of the king, till rose  
A cry of pain from all the land; and I  
Grew happier for it, since I held the power  
To quench desire in blood.

[12]

But even thus  
The old pain faded not, but swift again  
Revived; and thro' the sensual dull lengths  
Of my seraglios I stalked, and marked  
The glitter of the gems, the precious webs  
Plundered from every clime by cruel wars  
That strewed the sands with corpses; lovely eyes  
That looked no look of love, and fired no more  
Thoughts of the flesh; rich meats, and fruits, and wines  
Grown flat and savourless; and loathed them all,  
And only cared for power; content to shed  
Rivers of innocent blood, if only thus  
I might appease my thirst. Until I grew  
A monster gloating over blood and pain.

Ah, weary, weary days, when every sense  
Was satisfied, and nothing left to slake  
The parched unhappy soul, except to watch  
The writhing limbs and mark the slow blood drip,  
Drop after drop, as the life ebbed with it;  
In a new thrill of lust, till blood itself  
Palled on me, and I knew the fiend I was,  
Yet cared not—I who was, brief years ago,  
Only a careless boy lapt round with ease,  
Stretched by the soft and stealing tide of sense  
Which now grew red; nor ever dreamed at all  
What Furies lurked beneath it, but had shrunk  
In indolent horror from the sight of tears  
And misery, and felt my inmost soul  
Sicken with the thought of blood. There comes a time  
When the insatiate brute within the man,  
Weary with wallowing in the mire, leaps forth  
Devouring, and the cloven satyr-hoof  
Grows to the rending claw, and the lewd leer  
To the horrible fanged snarl, and the soul sinks  
And leaves the man a devil, all his sin  
Grown savourless, and yet he longs to sin  
And longs in vain for ever.

[13]

[14]

Yet, methinks,  
It was not for the gods to leave me thus.  
I stinted not their worship, building shrines  
To all of them; the Goddess of Love I served  
With hecatombs, letting the fragrant fumes  
Of incense and the costly steam ascend  
From victims year by year; nay, my own son  
Pelops, my best beloved, I gave to them  
Offering, as he must offer who would gain  
The great gods' grace, my dearest.

I had gained  
Through long and weary orgies that strange sense  
Of nothingness and wasted days which blights  
The exhausted life, bearing upon its front  
Counterfeit knowledge, when the bitter ash  
Of Evil, which the sick soul loathes, appears  
Like the pure fruit of Wisdom. I had grown  
As wizards seem, who mingle sensual rites  
And forms impure with murderous spells and dark  
Enchantments; till the simple people held  
My very weakness wisdom, and believed  
That in my blood-stained palace-halls, withdrawn,  
I kept the inner mysteries of Zeus  
And knew the secret of all Being; who was  
A sick and impotent wretch, so sick, so tired,  
That even bloodshed palled.

[15]

For my stained soul,  
Knowing its sin, hastened to purge itself  
With every rite and charm which the dark lore  
Of priestcraft offered to it. Spells obscene,

The blood of innocent babes, sorceries foul  
Muttered at midnight—these could occupy  
My weary days; till all my people shrank  
To see me, and the mother clasped her child  
Who heard the monster pass.

[16]

They would not hear.  
They listened not—the cold ungrateful gods—  
For all my supplications; nay, the more  
I sought them were they hidden.

At the last  
A dark voice whispered nightly: 'Thou, poor wretch,  
That art so sick and impotent, thyself  
The source of all thy misery, the great gods  
Ask a more precious gift and excellent  
Than alien victims which thou prizest not  
And givest without a pang. But shouldst thou take  
Thy costliest and fairest offering,  
'Twere otherwise. The life which thou hast given  
Thou mayst recall. Go, offer at the shrine  
Thy best beloved Pelops, and appease  
Zeus and the averted gods, and know again  
The youth and joy of yore.'

[17]

Night after night,  
While all the halls were still, and the cold stars  
Were fading into dawn, I lay awake  
Distracted with warring thoughts, my throbbing brain  
Filled with that dreadful voice. I had not shrunk  
From blood, but this, the strong son of my youth—  
How should I dare this thing? And all day long  
I would steal from sight of him and men, and fight  
Against the dreadful thought, until the voice  
Seared all my burning brain, and clamoured, 'Kill!  
Zeus bids thee, and be happy.' Then I rose  
At midnight, when the halls were still, and raised  
The arras, and stole soft to where my son  
Lay sleeping. For one moment on his face  
And stalwart limbs I gazed, and marked the rise  
And fall of his young breast, and the soft plume  
Which drooped upon his brow, and felt a thrill  
Of yearning; but the cold voice urging me  
Burned me like fire. Three times I gazed and turned  
Irresolute, till last it thundered at me,  
'Strike, fool! thou art in hell; strike, fool! and lose  
The burden of thy chains.' Then with slow step  
I crept as creeps the tiger on the deer,  
Raised high my arm, shut close my eyes, and plunged  
My dagger in his heart.

[18]

And then, with a flash,  
The veil fell downward from my life and left  
Myself to me—the daily sum of sense—  
The long continual trouble of desire—  
The stain of blood blotting the stain of lust—  
The weary foulness of my days, which wrecked  
My heart and brain, and left me at the last  
A madman and accursed; and I knew,  
Far higher than the sensual slope which held  
The gods whom erst I worshipped, a white peak  
Of Purity, and a stern voice pealing doom—  
Not the mad voice of old—which pierced so deep  
Within my life, that with the reeking blade  
Wet with the heart's blood of my child I smote  
My guilty heart in twain.

[19]

Ah! fool, to dream  
That the long stain of time might fade and merge  
In one poor chrism of blood. They taught of yore,  
My priests who flattered me—nor knew at all  
The greater God I know, who sits afar  
Beyond those earthly shapes, passionless, pure,  
And awful as the Dawn—that the gods cared  
For costly victims, drinking in the steam  
Of sacrifice when the choice hecatombs  
Were offered for my wrong. Ah no! there is  
No recompense in these, nor any charm  
To cleanse the stain of sin, but the long wear  
Of suffering, when the soul which seized too much

Of pleasure here, grows righteous by the pain  
That doth redress its ill. For what is Right  
But equipoise of Nature, alternating  
The Too Much and Too Little? Not on earth  
The salutary silent forces work  
Their final victory, but year on year  
Passes, and age on age, and leaves the debt  
Unsatisfied, while the o'erburdened soul  
Unloads itself in pain.

[20]

Therefore it is  
I suffer as I suffered ere swift death  
Set me not free, no otherwise; and yet  
There comes a healing purpose in my pain  
I never knew on earth; nor ever here  
The once-loved evil grows, only the tale  
Of penalties grown greater hourly dwarfs  
The accomplished sum of wrong. And yet desire  
Pursues me still—sick, impotent desire,  
Fiercer than that of earth.

[21]

We are ourselves  
Our heaven and hell, the joy, the penalty,  
The yearning, the fruition. Earth is hell  
Or heaven, and yet not only earth; but still,  
After the swift soul leaves the gates of death,  
The pain grows deeper and less mixed, the joy  
Purer and less alloyed, and we are damned  
Or blest, as we have lived."

He ceased, with a wail  
Like some complaining wind among the pines  
Or pent among the fretful ocean caves,  
A sick, sad sound.

Then as I looked, I saw  
His eyes glare horribly, his dry parched lips  
Open, his weary hands stretch idly forth  
As if to clutch the air—infinite pain  
And mockery of hope. "Seest thou them now?"  
He said. "I thirst, I parch, I famish, yet  
They still elude me, fair and tempting fruit  
And cooling waters. Now they come again.  
See, they are in my grasp, they are at my lips,  
Now I shall quench me. Nay, again they fly  
And mock me. Seest thou them, or am I shut  
From hope for ever, hungering, thirsting still,  
A madman and in Hell?"

[22]

And as I passed  
In horror, his large eyes and straining hands  
Froze all my soul with pity.

[23]

Then it was  
A woman whom I saw: a dark pale Queen,  
With passion in her eyes, and fear and pain  
Holding her steadfast gaze, like one who sees  
Some dreadful deed of wrong worked out and knows  
Himself the cause, yet now is powerless  
To stay the wrong he would.

Seeing me gaze  
In pity on her woe, she turned and spake  
With a low wailing voice—

"Thou well mayst gaze  
With horror on me, sir, for I am lost;  
I have shed the innocent blood, long years ago,  
Nay, centuries of pain. I have shed the blood  
Of him I loved, and found for recompense  
But self-inflicted death and age-long woe,  
Which purges not my sin. And yet not I  
It was who did it, but the gods, who took  
A woman's loveless heart and tortured it  
With love as with a fire. It was not I  
Who slew my love, but Fate. Fate 'twas which brought  
My love and me together, Fate which barred  
The path of blameless love, yet set Love's flame  
To burn and smoulder in a hopeless heart,

[24]



Where no relief might come.

The King was old,  
And I a girl. 'Tis an old tale which runs  
Thro' the sad ages, and 'twas mine. He had spent  
His sum of love long since, and I—I knew not  
A breath of Love as yet. Ah, it is strange  
To lose the sense of maidenhood, drink deep  
Of life to the very dregs, and yet not know  
A flutter of Love's wing. Love takes no thought  
For pomp, or palace, or respect of men;  
Nor always in the stately marriage bed,  
Closed round by silken curtains, laid on down,  
Nestles a rosy form; but 'mid wild flowers  
Or desert tents, or in the hind's low cot,  
Beneath the aspect of the unconscious stars,  
Dwells all night and is blest.

[25]

My love, my life!

He was the old man's son, a fair white soul—  
Not like the others, whom the fire of youth  
Burns like a flame and hurries unrestrained  
Thro' riotous days and nights, but virginal  
And pure as any maid. No wandering glance  
He deigned for all the maidens young and fair  
Who sought their Prince's eye. But evermore,  
Upon the high lawns wandering alone,  
He dwelt unwed; weaving to Artemis,  
Fairest of all Olympian maids, a wreath  
From the unpolluted meads, where never herd  
Drives his white flock, nor ever scythe has come,  
But the bee sails upon unfettered wing  
Over the spring-like lawns, and Purity  
Waters them with soft dews;<sup>[1]</sup> and yet he showed  
Of all his peers most manly—heart and soul  
A very man, tender and true, and strong  
And pitiful, and in his limbs and mien  
Fair as Apollo's self.

[26]

It was at first

In Trœzen that I saw him, when he came  
To greet his sire. Amid the crowd of youths  
He showed a Prince indeed; yet knew I not  
Whom 'twas I saw, nor that I held the place  
Which was his mother's, only from the throng  
Love, with a barbed dart aiming, pierced my heart  
Ere yet I knew what ailed me. Every glance  
Fired me; the youthful grace, the tall straight limbs,  
The swelling sinewy arms, the large dark eyes  
Tender yet full of passion, the thick locks  
Tossed from his brow, the lip and cheek which bore  
The down of early manhood, seemed to feed  
My heart with short-lived joy.

[27]

For when he stood

Forth from the throng and knelt before his sire,  
Then raised his eyes to mine, I felt the curse  
Of Aphrodité burn me, as it burned  
My mother before me, and I dared not meet  
His innocent, frank young eyes.

Said I then young?

Ay, but not young as mine. For I had known  
The secret things of life, which age the soul  
In a moment, writing on its front their mark  
'Too early ripe;' and he was innocent,  
My spouse in fitted years, within whose arms  
I had defied the world.

[28]

I turned away

Like some white bird that leaves the flock, which sails  
High in mid air above the haunts of men,  
Feeling some little dart within her breast,  
Not death, but like to death, and slowly sinks  
Down to the earth alone, and bears her hurt  
Unseen, by herbless sand and bitter pool,  
And pines until the end.

Even from that day

I strove to gain his love. Nay, 'twas not I,  
But the cruel gods who drove me. Day by day

We were together; for in days of old  
Women were free, not pent in gilded jails  
As afterwards, but free to walk alone,  
For good or evil, free. I hardly took  
Thought for my spouse, the King. For I had found  
My love at last: what matter if it were  
A guilty love? Yet love is love indeed,  
Stronger than heaven or hell. Day after day  
I set myself to tempt him from his proud  
And innocent way, for I had spurned aside  
Care for the gods or men—all but my love.

[29]

What need to tell the tale? Was it a sigh,  
A blush, a momentary glance, which brought  
Assurance of my triumph? It is long  
Since I have lived, I cannot tell; I know  
Only the penalty of death and hell  
Which followed on my sin. I knew he loved.  
It was not wonderful, seeing that we dwelt  
A boy and girl together. I was fair,  
And Eros fired my eyes and lent my voice  
His own soft tremulous tones. But when our souls  
Trembled upon the verge, and fancy feigned  
His arms around me as we fled alone  
To some free land of exile, lo! a scroll:  
'Dearest, it may not be; I fear the Gods;  
We dare not do this wrong. I go from hence  
And see thy face no more. Farewell! Forget  
The love we may not own; go, seek for both  
Forgiveness from the gods.'

[30]

When I read the words,  
The cruel words, methought my heart stood still,  
And when the ebbing life returned I seemed  
To have lost all thought of Love. Only Revenge  
Dwelt with me still, the fiercer that I knew  
My long-prized hope, which came so near success,  
Snatched from me and for ever.

When I rose  
From my deep swoon, I bade a messenger  
Go, seek the King for me. He came and sate  
Beside my couch, and all the doors were closed,  
And all withdrawn. Then with the liar's art,  
And hypocrite tears, and feigned reluctance,  
And all the subtle wiles a woman draws  
From the armoury of hate, I did instil  
The poison to his soul. Cunning devices,  
Feigned sorrow, mention of his son, regrets,  
And half confessions—these, with hateful skill  
Confused together, drove the old man's soul  
To frenzy; and I watched him, with a sneer,  
Turn to a dotard thirsting for the life  
Of his own child. But how to do the deed,  
Yet shed no blood, nor know the people's hate,  
Who loved the Prince, I knew not.

[31]

Till one day  
The old man, looking out upon the sea,  
Besought the dread Poseidon to avenge  
The treachery of his son. Even as we stood  
Gazing upon the breathless blue, a cloud  
Rose from the deep, a little fleecy cloud,  
Which sudden grew and grew, and turned the blue  
To purple; and a swift wind rose and sang  
Higher and higher, and the wine-dark sea  
Grew ruffled, and within the circling bay  
The tiny ripples, stealing up the sand,  
Plunged loud with manes of foam, until they swelled  
To misty surges thundering on the shore.

[32]

Then at the old man's elbow as I stood,  
A deep dark thought, sent by the powers of ill,  
Answering, as now I know, my own black hate  
And not my poor dupe's anger, fired my soul  
And bade me speak. 'The god has heard thy prayer,'  
I whispered; 'See the surge which wakes and swells  
To fury; well I know what things shall be.'

It is Poseidon's voice sounds in the storm  
And sends thy vengeance. Young Hippolytus  
Loves, as thou knowest, on the yellow sand,  
Hard by the rippled margin of the wave,  
To urge his flying steeds. Bid him go forth—  
He will obey—and see what recompense  
The god will send his wrong.'

[33]

In the old man's eyes  
A watery gleam of malice played awhile—  
I hated him for it—and he bade his son  
Drive forth his chariot on the sand, and yoke  
His three young fiery steeds.

And still the storm  
Blew fiercer and more fierce, and the white crests  
Plunged on the strand, and the high promontories  
Resounded counter-stricken, and a mist  
Of foam, blown landward, hid the sounding shore.

Then saw I him come forth and bid them yoke  
His untamed colts. I had not seen his face  
Since that last day, but, seeing him, I felt  
The old love spring anew, yet mixed with hate—  
A storm of warring passions. Tho' I knew  
What end should come, yet would I speak no word  
That might avert it. The old man looked forth;  
I think he had well-nigh forgotten all  
The wrong he fancied and the doom he prayed,  
All but the father's pride in the strong son,  
Who was so young and bold. I saw a smile  
Upon the dotard's face, when now the steeds  
Were harnessed and the chariot, on the sand  
Along the circling margin of the bay,  
Flew, swift as light. A sudden gleam of sun  
Flashed on the silver harness as it went,  
Burned on the brazen axles of the wheels,  
And on the golden fillets of the Prince  
Doubled the gold. Sometimes a larger wave  
Would dash in mist around him, and in fear  
The rearing coursers plunged, and then again  
The strong young arm constrained them, and they flashed  
To where the wave-worn foreland ends the bay.

[34]

[35]

And then he turned his chariot, a bright speck  
Now seen, now hidden, but always, tho' the surge  
Broke round it, safe; emerging like a star  
From the white clouds of foam. And as I watched,  
Speaking no word, and breathing scarce a breath,  
I saw the firm limbs strongly set apart  
Upon the chariot, and the reins held high,  
And the proud head bent forward, with long locks  
Streaming behind, as nearer and more near  
The swift team rushed—until, with a half joy,  
It seemed as if my love might yet elude  
The slow sure anger of the god, dull wrath  
Swayed by a woman's lie.

But on the verge,  
As I cast my eyes, a vast and purple wall  
Swell'd swiftly towards the land; the lesser waves  
Sank as it came, and to its toppling crest  
The spume-flecked waters, from the strand drawn back,  
Left dry the yellow shore. Onward it came,  
Hoarse, capped with breaking foam, lurid, immense,  
Rearing its dreadful height. The chariot sped  
Nearer and nearer. I could see my love  
With the light of victory in his eyes, the smile  
Of daring on his lips: so near he came  
To where the marble palace-wall confined  
The narrow strip of beach—his brave young eyes  
Fixed steadfast on the goal, in the pride of life,  
Without a thought of death. I strove to cry,  
But terror choked my breath. Then, like a bull  
Upon the windy level of the plain  
Lashing himself to rage, the furious wave,  
Poising itself a moment, tossing high  
Its wind-vexed crest, dashed downward on the strand

[36]

[37]

With a stamp, with a rush, with a roar.

And when I looked,

The shore, the fields, the plain, were one white sea  
Of churning, seething foam—chariot and steeds  
Gone, and my darling on the wave's white crest  
Tossed high, whirled down, beaten, and bruised, and flung,  
Dying upon the marble.

My great love

Sprang up redoubled, and cast out my hate  
And spurned all thought of fear; and down the stair  
I hurried, and upon the bleeding form  
I threw myself, and raised his head, and clasped  
His body to mine, and kissed him on the lips,  
And in his dying ear confessed my wrong,  
And saw the horror in his dying eyes  
And knew that I was damned. And when he breathed  
His last pure breath, I rose and slowly spake—  
Turned to a Fury now by love and pain—  
To the old man who knelt, while all the throng  
Could hear my secret: 'See, thou fool, I am  
The murderess of thy son, and thou my dupe,  
Thou and thy gods. See, he was innocent;  
I murdered him for love. I scorn ye all,  
Thee and thy gods together, who are deceived  
By a woman's lying tongue! Oh, doting fool,  
To hate thy own! And ye, false powers, which punish  
The innocent, and let the guilty soul  
Escape unscathed, I hate ye all—I curse,  
I loathe you!'

[38]

Then I stooped and kissed my love,

And left them in amaze; and up the stair  
Swept slowly to my chamber, and therein,  
Hating my life and cursing men and gods,  
I did myself to death.

But even here,

I find my punishment. Oh, dreadful doom  
Of souls like mine! To see their evil done  
Always before their eyes, the one dread scene  
Of horror. See, the dark wave on the verge  
Towers horrible, and he— Oh, Love, my Love!  
Safety is near! quick! quicker! urge them on!  
Thou wilt 'scape it yet!—Nay, nay, it bursts on him!  
I have shed the innocent blood! Oh, dreadful gaze  
Within his glazing eyes! Hide them, ye gods!  
Hide them! I cannot bear them. Quick! a dagger!  
I will lose their glare in death. Nay, die I cannot;  
I must endure and live—Death brings not peace  
To the lost souls in Hell."

[39]

And her eyes stared,

Rounded with horror, and she stooped and gazed  
So eagerly, and pressed her fevered hands  
Upon her trembling forehead with such pain  
As drives the gazer mad.

[40]

Then as I passed,

I marked against the hardly dawning sky  
A toilsome figure standing, bent and strained,  
Before a rocky mass, which with great pain  
And agony of labour it would thrust  
Up a steep hill. But when upon the crest  
It poised a moment, then I held my breath  
With dread, for, lo! the poor feet seemed to clutch  
The hillside as in fear, and the poor hands  
With hopeless fingers pressed into the stone  
In agony, and the limbs stiffened, and a cry  
Like some strong swimmer's, whom the mightier stream  
Sweeps downward, and he sees his children's eyes  
Upon the bank; broke from him; and at last,  
After long struggles of despair, the limbs  
Relaxed, and as I closed my fearful eyes,  
Seeing the inevitable doom—a crash,

[41]

A horrible thunderous noise, as down the steep  
The shameless fragment leapt. From crag to crag  
It bounded ever swifter, striking fire  
And wrapt in smoke, as to the lowest depths  
Of the vale it tore, and seemed to take with it  
The miserable form whose painful gaze  
I caught, as with the great rock whirled and dashed  
Downward, and marking every crag with gore  
And long gray hairs, it plunged, yet living still,  
To the black hollow; and then a silence came  
More dreadful than the noise, and a low groan  
Was all that I could hear.

[42]

When to the foot  
Of the dark steep I hurried, half in hope  
To find the victim dead—not recognizing  
The undying life of Hell—I seemed to see  
An aged man, bruised, bleeding, with gray hairs,  
And eyes from which the cunning leer of greed  
Was scarcely yet gone out.

A crafty voice  
It was that answered me, the voice of guile  
Part purified by pain:

"There comes not death  
To those who live in Hell, nor hardly pause  
Of suffering longer than may serve to make  
The pain renewed, more piercing. Long ago,  
I thought that I had cheated Death, and now  
I seek him; but he comes not, nor know I  
If ever he will hear me. Whence art thou?  
Comest thou from earthly air, or whence? What power  
Has brought thee hither? For I know indeed  
Thou art not lost as I; for never here  
I look upon a human face, nor see  
The ghosts who doubtless here on every side  
Suffer a common pain, only at times  
I hear the echo of a shriek far off,  
Like some faint ghost of woe which fills the pause  
And interval of suffering; but from whom  
The voice may come, or whence, I know not, only  
The air teems with vague pain, which doth distract  
The ear when for a moment comes surcease  
Of agony, and the sense of effort spent  
In vain and fruitless labour, and the pang  
Of long-deferred defeat, which waits and takes  
The world-worn heart, and maddens it when all—  
Heaven, conscience, happiness, are staked and lost  
For gains which still elude it.

[43]

[44]

Yet 'twas sweet,  
A King in early youth, when pleasure is sweet,  
To live the fair successful years, and know  
The envy and respect of men. I cared  
For none of youth's delights: the dance, the song,  
Allured me not; the smooth soft ways of sense  
Tempted me not at all. I could despise  
The follies that I shared not, spending all  
The long laborious days in toilsome schemes  
To compass honour and wealth, and, as I grew  
In name and fame, finding my hoarded gains  
Transmuted into Power. The seas were white  
With laden argosies, and all were mine.  
The sheltering moles defied the wintry storms,  
And all were mine. The marble aqueducts,  
The costly bridges, all were mine. Fair roads  
Wound round and round the hills—my work. The gods  
Alone I heeded not, nor cared at all  
For aught but that my eyes and ears might take,  
Spurning invisible things, nor built I to them  
Temple or shrine, wrapt up in life, set round  
With earthly blessings like a god. I rose  
To such excess of weal and fame and pride,  
My people held me god-like. I grew drunk  
With too great power, scoffing at men and gods,  
Careless of both, but not averse to fling  
To those too weak themselves, what benefits  
My larger wisdom spurned.

[45]

Then suddenly  
I knew the pain of failure. Summer storms  
Sucked down my fleets even within sight of port.  
A grievous blight wasted the harvest-fields,  
Mocking my hopes of gain. Wars came and drained  
My store, and I grew needy, knowing now  
The hell of stronger souls, the loss of power  
Wherein they exulted once. There comes no pain  
Deeper than to have known delight of power,  
And then to lose it all. But I, I would not  
Sit tame beneath defeat, trimming my sails  
To wait the breeze of Fortune—fickle breath  
Which perhaps might breathe no more—but chose instead  
By rash conceit and bolder enterprise  
To win her aid again. I had no thought  
Of selfish gain, only to be and act  
As a god to those, feeding my sum of pride  
With acted good.

[46]

But evermore defeat  
Dogged me, and evermore my people grew  
To doubt me, seeing no more the wealth, the force,  
Which once they worshipped. Then the lust of power  
Loved, not for sake of others, but itself,  
Grew on me, and the pride which can dare all,  
Save failure only, seized me. Evil finds  
Its ready chance. There were rich argosies  
Upon the seas: I sank them, ship and crew,  
In the unbetraying ocean. Wayfarers  
Crossing the passes with rich merchandise  
My creatures, hid behind the crags, o'erwhelmed  
With rocks hurled downward. Yet I spent my gains  
For the public weal, not otherwise; and they,  
The careless people, took the piteous spoils  
Which cost the lives of many, and a man's soul,  
And blessed the giver. Empty venal blessings,  
Which sting more deep than curses!

[47]

For awhile  
I was content with this, but at the last  
A great contempt and hatred of them took me,  
The base, vile churls! Why should I stain my soul  
For such as those—dogs that would fawn and lick  
The hand that fed them, but, if food should fail,  
Would turn and rend me? I would none of them;  
I would grow rich and happy, being indeed  
Godlike in brain to such. So with all craft,  
And guile, and violence I enriched me, loading  
My treasuries with gold. My deep-laid schemes  
Of gain engrossed the long laborious days,  
Stretched far into the night. Enjoy, I might not,  
Seeing it was all to do, and life so brief  
That ere a man might gain the goal he would,  
Lo! Age, and with it Death, and so an end!  
For all the tales of the indignant gods,  
What were they but the priests'? I had myself  
Broken all oaths; long time deceived and ruined  
With every phase of fraud the pious fools  
Whom oath-sworn Justice bound; battered on blood  
And what was I the worse? How should the gods  
Bear rule if I were happy? Death alone  
Was certain. Therefore must I haste to heap  
Treasure sufficient for my need, and then  
Enjoy the gathered good.

[48]

[49]

But gradually  
There came—not great disasters which might crush  
All hope, but petty checks which did decrease  
My store, and left my labour vain, and me  
Unwilling to enjoy; and gradually  
I felt the chill approach of age, which stole  
Higher and higher on me, till the life,  
As in a paralytic, left my limbs  
And heart, and mounted upwards to my brain,  
Its last resort, and rested there awhile  
Ere it should spread its wings. But even thus,  
Tho' powerless to enjoy, the insatiate greed  
And thirst of power sustained me, and supplied

Life's spark with some scant fuel, till it seemed,  
Year after year, as if I could not die,  
Holding so fast to life. I grew so old  
That all the comrades of my youth, my prime,  
My age, were gone, and I was left alone  
With those who knew me not, bereft of all  
Except my master passion—an old man  
Forlorn, forgotten of the gods and Death.

[50]

So all the people, seeing me grow old  
And prosperous, held me wise, and spread abroad  
Strange fables, growing day by day more strange—  
How I deceived the very gods. They thought  
That I was blest, remembering not the wear  
Of anxious thought, the growing sum of pain,  
The failing ear and eye, the slower limbs,  
Whose briefer name is Age: and yet I trow  
I was not all unhappy, though I knew  
It was too late to enjoy, and though my store  
Increased not as my greed—nay, even sunk down  
A little, year by year. Till, last of all,  
When now my time was come and I had grown  
A little tired of living, a trivial hurt  
Laid me upon my bed; and as I mused  
On my long life and all its villainies,  
The wickedness I did, the blood I shed,  
The guile, the frauds of years—they came with news,  
One now, and now another; how my schemes  
Were crushed, my enterprises lost, my toil  
And labour all in vain. Day after day  
They brought these tidings, while I longed to rise  
And stay the tide of ill, and raved to know  
I could not. At the last the added sum  
Of evil, like yon great rock poised awhile  
Uncertain, gathered into one, o'erwhelmed  
My feeble strength, and left me ruined and lost,  
And showed me all I was, and all the depth  
And folly of my sin, and racked my brain,  
And sank me in despair and misery,  
And broke my heart and slew me.

[51]

[52]

Therefore 'tis  
I spend the long, long centuries which have come  
Between me and my sin, in such dread tasks  
As that thou sawest. In the soul I sinned:  
In body and soul I suffer. What I bade  
My minions do to others, that of woe  
I bear myself; and in the pause of ill,  
As now, I know again the bitter pang  
Of failure, which of old pierced thro' my soul  
And left me to despair. The pain of mind  
Is fiercer far than any bodily ill,  
And both are mine—the pang of torture-pain  
Always recurring; and, far worse, the pang  
Of consciousness of black sins sinned in vain—  
The doom of constant failure.

Will, fierce Will!  
Thou parent of unrest and toil and woe,  
Measureless effort! growing day by day  
To force strong souls along the giddy steep  
That slopes to the pit of Hell, where effort serves  
Only to speed destruction! Yet I know  
Thou art not, as some hold, the primal curse  
Which doth condemn us; since thou bearest in thee  
No power to satisfy thyself; but rather,  
The spring of act, whereby in earth and heaven  
Both men and gods do breathe and live and are,  
Since Life is Act and not to Do is Death—  
I do not blame thee: but to work in vain  
Is bitterest penalty: to find at last  
The soul all fouled with sin and stained with blood  
In vain; ah, this is hell indeed—the hell  
Of lost and striving souls!"

[53]

Then as I passed,  
The halting figure bent itself again  
To the old task, and up the rugged steep

Thrust the great rock with groanings. Horror chained  
My parting footsteps, like a nightmare dream  
Which holds us that we flee not, with wide eyes  
That loathe to see, yet cannot choose but gaze  
Till all be done. Slowly, with dreadful toil  
And struggle and strain, and bleeding hands and knees,  
And more than mortal strength, against the hill  
He pressed, the wretched one! till with long pain  
He trembled on the summit, a gaunt form,  
With that great rock above him, poised and strained,  
Now gaining, now receding, now in act  
To win the summit, now borne down again,  
And then the inevitable crash—the mass  
Leaping from crag to crag. But ere it ceased  
In dreadful silence, and the low groan came,  
My limbs were loosed with one convulsive bound;  
I hid my face within my hands, and fled,  
Surfeit with horror.

[54]

[55]

Then it was again  
A woman whom I saw, pitiless, stern,  
Bearing the brand of blood—a lithe dark form,  
And cruel eyes which glared beneath the gems  
That argued her a Queen, and on her side  
An ancient stain of gore, which did befoul  
Her royal robe. A murderess in thought  
And dreadful act, who took within the toils  
Her kingly Lord, and slew him of old time  
After burnt Troy. I had no time to speak  
When she shrieked thus:

"It doth repent me not  
I would 'twere yet to do, and I would do it  
Again a thousand times, if the shed blood  
Might for one hour restore me to the kisses  
Of my Ægisthus. Oh, he was divine,  
My hero, with the godlike locks and eyes  
Of Eros' self! What boots it that they prate  
Of wifely duty, love of spouse or child,  
Honour or pity, when the swift fire takes  
A woman's heart, and burns it out, and leaps  
With fierce forked tongue around it, till it lies  
In ashes, a dead heart, nor aught remains  
Of old affections, naught but the new flame  
Which is unquenched desire?

[56]

It did not come,  
My blessing, all at once, but the slow fruit  
Of solitude and midnight loneliness,  
And weary waiting for the tardy news  
Of taken Troy. Long years I sate alone,  
Widowed, within my palace, while my Lord  
Was over seas, waging the accursèd war,  
First of the file of Kings. Year after year  
Came false report, or harder, no report  
Of the great fleet. The summers waxed and waned,  
The wintry surges smote the sounding shores,  
And yet there came no end of it. They brought  
Now hopeless failure, now great victories;  
And all alike were false, all but delay  
And hope deferred, which cometh not, but breaks  
The heart which suffering wrings not.

[57]

So I bore  
Long time the solitary years, and sought  
To solace the dull days with motherly cares  
For those my Lord had left me. My firstborn,  
Iphigeneia, sailed at first with him  
Upon that fatal voyage, but the young  
Orestes and Electra stayed with me—  
Not dear as she was, for the firstborn takes  
The mother's heart, and, with the milk it draws  
From the mother's virgin breast, drains all the love  
It bore, ay, even tho' the sire be dear;  
Much more, then, when he is a King indeed,

[58]



Mighty in war and council, but too high  
To stoop to a woman's love. But she was gone,  
Nor heard I tidings of her, knowing not  
If yet she walked the earth, nor if she bare  
The load of children, even as I had borne  
Her in my opening girlhood, when I leapt  
From child to Queen, but never loved the King.

Thus the slow years rolled onward, till at last  
There came a dreadful rumour—'She is dead,  
Thy daughter, years ago. The cruel priests  
Clamoured for blood; the stern cold Kings stood round  
Without a tear, and he, her sire, with them,  
To see a virgin bleed. They cut with knives  
The taper girlish throat; they watched the blood  
Drip slowly on the sand, and the young life  
Meek as a lamb come to the sacrifice  
To appease the angry gods.' And he, the King,  
Her father, stood by too, and saw them do it,  
The wickedness, breathing no word of wrath,  
Till all was done! The cowards! the dull cowards!  
I would some black storm, bursting suddenly,  
Had whelmed them and their fleets, ere yet they dared  
To waste an innocent life!

[59]

I had gone mad,  
I know it, but for him, my love, my dear,  
My fair sweet love. He came to comfort me  
With words of friendship, holding that my Lord  
Was bound, perhaps, to let her die—'The gods  
Were oftentimes hard to appease—or was it indeed  
The priests who asked it? Were there any gods?  
Or only phantoms, creatures of the brain,  
Born of the fears of men, the greed of priests,  
Useful to govern women? Had he been  
Lord of the fleet, not all the soothsayers  
Who ever frightened cowards should have brought  
His soul to such black depths.' I hearkening to him  
As 'twere my own thought grown articulate,  
Found my grief turn to hate, and hate to love—  
Hate of my Lord, love of the voice which spoke  
Such dear and comfortable words. And thus,  
Love to a storm of passion growing, swept  
My wounded soul and dried my tears, as dries  
The hot sirocco all the bitter pools  
Of salt among the sand. I never knew  
True love before; I was a child, no more,  
When the King cast his eyes on me. What is it  
To have borne the weight of offspring 'neath the zone,  
If Love be not their sire; or live long years  
Of commerce, not of love? Better a day  
Of Passion than the long unlovely years  
Of wifely duty, when Love cometh not  
To wake the barren days!

[60]

[61]

And yet at first  
I hesitated long, nor would embrace  
The blessing that was mine. We are hedged round,  
We women, by such close-drawn ordinances,  
Set round us by our tyrants, that we fear  
To overstep a hand's breadth the dull bounds  
Of custom; but at last Love, waking in me,  
Burst all my chains asunder, and I lived  
For naught but Love.

My son, the young Orestes,  
I sent far off; my girl Electra only  
Remained, too young to doubt me, and I knew  
At last what 'twas to live.

So the swift years  
Fleeted and found me happy, till the dark  
Ill-omened day when Rumour, thousand-tongued,  
Whispered of taken Troy; and from my dream  
Of happiness, sudden I woke, and knew  
The coming retribution. We had grown  
Too loving for concealment, and our tale  
Of mutual love was bruited far and wide  
Through Argos. All the gossips bruited it,

[62]

And were all tongue to tell it to the King  
When he should come. And should the cold proud Lord  
I never loved, the murderer of my girl,  
Come 'twixt my love and me? A swift resolve  
Flashed through me pondering on it: Love for Love  
And Blood for Blood—the simple golden rule  
Taught by the elder gods.

When I had taken  
My fixed resolve, I grew impatient for it,  
Counting the laggard days. Oh, it was sweet  
To simulate the yearning of a wife  
Long parted from her Lord, and mock the fools  
Who dogged each look and word, and but for fear  
Had torn me from my throne—the pies, the jays,  
The impotent chatterers, who thought by words  
To stay me in the act! 'Twas sweet to mock them  
And read distrust within their eyes, when I,  
Knowing my purpose, bade them quick prepare  
All fitting honours for the King, and knew  
They dared not disobey—oh, 'twas enough  
To wing the slow-paced hours.

[63]

But when at last  
I saw his sails upon the verge, and then  
The sea-worn ship, and marked his face grown old,  
The body a little bent, which was so straight,  
The thin gray hairs which were the raven locks  
Of manhood when he went, I felt a moment  
I could not do the deed. But when I saw  
The beautiful sad woman come with him,  
The future in her eyes, and her sad voice  
Proclaimed the tale of doom, two thoughts at once  
Assailed me, bidding me despatch with a blow  
Him and his mistress, making sure the will  
Of fate, and my revenge.

[64]

Oh, it was strange  
To see all happen as we planned; as 'twere  
Some drama oft rehearsed, wherein each step,  
Each word, is so prepared, the poorest player  
Knows his turn come to do—the solemn landing—  
The ride to the palace gate—the courtesies  
Of welcome—the mute crowds without—the bath  
Prepared within—the precious circling folds  
Of tissue stretched around him, shutting out  
The gaze, and folding helpless like a net  
The mighty limbs—the battle-axe laid down  
Against the wall, and I, his wife and Queen,  
Alone with him, waiting and watching still,  
Till the woman shrieked without. Then with swift step  
I seized the axe, and struck him as he lay  
Helpless, once, twice, and thrice—once for my girl,  
Once for my love, once for the woman, and all  
For Fate and my Revenge!

[65]

He gave a groan,  
Once only, as I thought he might; and then  
No sound but the quick gurgling of the blood,  
As it flowed from him in streams, and turned the pure  
And limpid water of the bath to red—  
I had not looked for that—it flowed and flowed,  
And seemed to madden me to look on it,  
Until my love with hands bloody as mine,  
But with the woman's blood, rushed in, and eyes  
Rounded with horror; and we turned to go,  
And left the dead alone.

But happiness  
Still mocked me, and a doubt unknown before  
Came on me, and amid the silken shows  
And luxury of power I seemed to see  
Another answer to my riddle of life  
Than that I gave myself, and it was 'murder;'  
And in my people's sullen mien and eyes,  
'Murder;' and in the mirror, when I looked,  
'Murder' glared out, and terror lest my son  
Returning, grown to manhood, should avenge  
His father's blood. For somehow, as 'twould seem,  
The gods, if gods there be, or the stern Fate

[66]

Which doth direct our little lives, do filch  
Our happiness—though bright with Love's own ray,  
There comes a cloud which veils it. Yet, indeed,  
My days were happy. I repent me not;  
I would wade through seas of blood to know again  
Those fierce delights once more.

But my young girl

[67]

Electra, grown to woman, turned from me  
Her modest maiden eyes, nor loved to set  
Her kiss upon my cheek, but, all distraught  
With secret care, hid her from all the poms  
And revelries which did befit her youth,  
Walking alone; and often at the tomb  
Of her lost sire they found her, pouring out  
Libations to the dead. And evermore  
I did bethink me of my son Orestes,  
Who now should be a man; and yearned sometimes  
To see his face, yet feared lest from his eyes  
His father's soul should smite me.

So I lived

Happy and yet unquiet—a stern voice  
Speaking of doom, which long time softer notes  
Of careless weal, the music that doth spring  
From the fair harmonies of life and love,  
Would drown in their own concord. This at times  
Nay, day by day, stronger and dreadfuller,  
With dominant accent, marred the sounds of joy  
By one prevailing discord. So at length  
I came to lose the Present in the dread  
Of what might come; the penalty that waits  
Upon successful sin; who, having sinned,  
Had missed my sin's reward.

[68]

Until one day

I, looking from my palace casement, saw  
A humble suppliant, clad in pilgrim garb,  
Approach the marble stair. A sudden throb  
Thrilled thro' me, and the mother's heart went forth  
Thro' all disguise of garb and rank and years,  
Knowing my son. How fair he was, how tall  
And vigorous, my boy! What strong straight limbs  
And noble port! How beautiful the shade  
Of manhood on his lip! I longed to burst  
From my chamber down, yearning to throw myself  
Upon his neck within the palace court,  
Before the guards—spurning my queenly rank,  
All but my motherhood. And then a chill  
Of doubt o'erspread me, knowing what a gulf  
Fate set between our lives, impassable  
As that great gulf which yawns 'twixt life and death  
And 'twixt this Hell and Heaven. I shrank back,  
And turned to think a moment, half in fear,  
And half in pain; dividing the swift mind,  
Yet all in love.

[69]

Then came a cry, a groan,  
From the inner court, the clash of swords, the fall  
Of a body on the pavement; and one cried,  
'The King is dead, slain by the young Orestes,  
Who cometh hither.' With the word, the door  
Flew open, and my son stood straight before me,  
His drawn sword dripping blood. Oh, he was fair  
And terrible to see, when from his limbs,  
The suppliant's mantle fallen, left the mail  
And arms of a young warrior. Love and Hate,  
Which are the offspring of a common sire,  
Strove for the mastery, till within his eyes  
I saw his father's ghost glare unappeased  
From out Love's casements.

[70]

Then I knew my fate

And his—mine to be slain by my son's hand,  
And his to slay me, since the Furies drave  
Our lives to one destruction; and I took  
His point within my breast.

But I praise not

The selfish, careless gods who wrecked our lives,  
Making the King the murderer of his girl,

And me his murderess; making my son  
The murderer of his mother and her love—  
A mystery of blood!—I curse them all,  
The careless Forces, sitting far withdrawn  
Upon the heights of Space, taking men's lives  
For playthings, and deriding as in sport  
Our happiness and woe—I curse them all.  
We have a right to joy; we have a right,  
I say, as they have. Let them stand confessed  
The puppets that they are—too weak to give  
The good they feign to love, since Fate, too strong  
For them as us, beyond their painted sky,  
Sits and derides them, too. I curse Fate too,  
The deaf blind Fury, taking human souls  
And crushing them, as a dull fretful child  
Crushes its toys and knows not with what skill  
Those feeble forms are feigned.

[71]

I curse, I loathe,  
I spit on them. It doth repent me not.  
I would 'twere yet to do. I have lived my life.  
I have loved. See, there he lies within the bath,  
And thus I smite him! thus! Didst hear him groan?  
Oh, vengeance, thou art sweet! What, living still?  
Ah me! we cannot die! Come, torture me,  
Ye Furies—for I love not soothing words—  
As once ye did my son. Ye miserable  
Blind ministers of Hell, I do defy you;  
Not all your torments can undo the Past  
Of Passion and of Love!"

[72]

Even as she spake  
There came a viewless trouble in the air,  
Which took her, and a sweep of wings unseen,  
And terrible sounds, which swooped on her and hushed  
Her voice, and seemed to occupy her soul  
With horror and despair; and as she passed  
I marked her agonized eyes.

[73]

But as I went,  
Full many a dreadful shape of lonely pain  
I saw. What need to tell them? We are filled  
Who live to-day with a more present sense  
Of the great love of God, than those of old  
Who, groping in the dawn of Knowledge, saw  
Only dark shadows of the Unknown; or he,  
First-born of modern singers, who swept deep  
His awful lyre, and woke the voice of song,  
Dumb for long centuries of pain. We dread  
To dwell on those long agonies its sin  
Brings on the offending soul; who hold a creed  
Of deeper Pity, knowing what chains of ill  
Bind round our petty lives. Each phase of woe,  
Suffering, and torture which the gloomy thought  
Of bigots feigns for others—all were there.  
One there was stretched upon a rolling wheel,  
Which was the barren round of sense, that still  
Returned upon itself and broke the limbs  
Bound to it day and night. Others I saw  
Doomed, with unceasing toil, to fill the urns  
Whose precious waters sank ere they could slake  
Their burning thirst. Another shapeless soul,  
Full of revolts and hates and tyrannous force,  
The weight of earth, which was its earth-born taint,  
Pressed groaning down, while with fierce beak and claw  
The vulture of remorse, piercing his breast,  
Preyed on his heart. For others, overhead,  
Great crags of rock impending seemed to fall,  
But fell not nor brought peace. I felt my soul  
Blunted with horrors, yearning to escape  
To where, upon the limits of the wood,  
Some scanty twilight grew.

[74]

[75]

But ere I passed

From those grim shades a deep voice sounded near,  
A voice without a form.

"There is an end  
Of all things that thou seest! There is an end  
Of Wrong and Death and Hell! When the long wear  
Of Time and Suffering has effaced the stain  
Ingrown upon the soul, and the cleansed spirit,  
Long ages floating on the wandering winds  
Or rolling deeps of Space, renews itself  
And doth regain its dwelling, and, once more  
Blent with the general order, floats anew  
Upon the stream of Things,<sup>[2]</sup> and comes at length,  
After new deaths, to that dim waiting-place  
Thou next shalt see, and with the justified  
White souls awaits the End; or, snatched at once,  
If Fate so will, to the pure sphere itself,  
Lives and is blest, and works the Eternal Work  
Whose name and end is Love! There is an end  
Of Wrong and Death and Hell!"

[76]

Even as I heard,  
I passed from out the shadow of Death and Pain,  
Crying, "There is an end!"

END OF BOOK I.

[77]

## BOOK II.

### HADES.

[79]

Then from those dark  
And dreadful precincts passing, ghostly fields  
And voiceless took me. A faint twilight veiled  
The leafless, shadowy trees and herbless plains.  
There stirred no breath of air to wake to life  
The slumbers of the world. The sky above  
Was one gray, changeless cloud. There looked no eye  
Of Life from the veiled heavens; but Sleep and Death  
Were round me everywhere. And yet no fear  
Nor horror took me here, where was no pain  
Nor dread, save that strange tremor which assails  
One who in life's hot noontide looks on death  
And knows he too shall die. The ghosts which rose  
From every darkling copse showed thin and pale—  
Thinner and paler far than those I left  
In agony; even as Pity seems to wear  
A thinner form than Fear.

[80]

Not caged alone  
Like those the avenging Furies purged were these,  
Nor that dim land as those black cavernous depths  
Where no hope comes. Fair souls were they and white  
Whom there I saw, waiting as we shall wait,  
The Beatific End, but thin and pale  
As the young faith which made them; touched a little  
By the sad memories of the earth; made glad  
A little by past joys: no more; and wrapt  
In musing on the brief play played by them  
Upon the lively earth, yet ignorant  
Of the long lapse of years, and what had been

[81]

Since they too breathed Life's air, or if they knew,  
Keeping some echo only; but their pain  
Was fainter than their joy, and a great hope  
Like ours possessed them dimly.

First I saw  
A youth who pensive leaned against the trunk  
Of a dark cypress, and an idle flute  
Hung at his side. A sorrowful sad soul,  
Such as sometimes he knows, who meets the gaze,  
Mute, uncomplaining yet most pitiful,  
Of one whom nature, by some secret spite,  
Has maimed and left imperfect; or the pain  
Which fills a poet's eyes. Beneath his robe  
I seemed to see the scar of cruel stripes,  
Too hastily concealed. Yet was he not  
Wholly unhappy, but from out the core  
Of suffering flowed a secret spring of joy,  
Which mocked the droughts of Fate, and left him glad  
And glorying in his sorrow. As I gazed  
He raised his silent flute, and, half ashamed,  
Blew a soft note; and as I stayed awhile  
I heard him thus discourse—

[82]

"The flute is sweet  
To gods and men, but sweeter far the lyre  
And voice of a true singer. Shall I fear  
To tell of that great trial, when I strove  
And Phœbus conquered? Nay, no shame it is  
To bow to an immortal melody;  
But glory.

[83]

Once among the Phrygian hills  
I lay a-musing,—while the silly sheep  
Wandered among the thyme—upon the bank  
Of a clear mountain stream, beneath the pines,  
Safe hidden from the noon. A dreamy haze  
Played on the uplands, but the hills were clear  
In sunlight, and no cloud was on the sky.  
It was the time when a deep silence comes  
Upon the summer earth, and all the birds  
Have ceased from singing, and the world is still  
As midnight, and if any live thing move—  
Some fur-clad creature, or cool gliding snake—  
Within the pipy overgrowth of weeds,  
The ear can catch the rustle, and the trees  
And earth and air are listening. As I lay,  
Faintly, as in a dream, I seemed to hear  
A tender music, like the Æolian chords,  
Sound low within the woodland, whence the stream,  
Flowed full, yet silent. Long, with ear to ground,  
I hearkened; and the sweet strain, fuller grown,  
Rounder and clearer came, and danced along  
In mirthful measure now, and now grown grave  
In dying falls, and sweeter and more clear,  
Tripping at nuptials and high revelry,  
Wailing at burials, rapt in soaring thoughts,  
Chanting strange sea-tales full of mystery,  
Touching all chords of being, and life and death,  
Now rose, now sank, and always was divine,  
So strange the music came.

[84]

Till, as I lay  
Enraptured, swift a sudden discord rang,  
And all the sound grew still. A sudden flash,  
As from a sunlit jewel, fired the wood.  
A noise of water smitten, and on the hills  
A fair white fleece of cloud, which swiftly climbed  
Into the farthest heaven. Then, as I mused,  
Knowing a parting goddess, straight I saw  
A sudden splendour float upon the stream,  
And knew it for this jewelled flute, which paused  
Before me on an eddy. It I snatched  
Eager, and to my ardent lips I bore  
The wonder, and behold, with the first breath—

[85]

The first warm human breath, the silent strains.  
The half-drowned notes which late the goddess blew,  
Revived, and sounded clearer, sweeter far  
Than mortal skill could make. So with delight  
I left my flocks to wander o'er the wastes  
Untended, and the wolves and eagles seized  
The tender lambs, but I was for my art—  
Nought else; and though the high-pitched notes divine  
Grew faint, yet something lingered, and at last  
So sweet a note I sounded of my skill,  
That all the Phrygian highlands, all the white  
Hill villages, were fain to hear the strain,  
Which the mad shepherd made.

[86]

So, overbold,  
And rapt in my new art, at last I dared  
To challenge Phœbus' self.

'Twas a fair day  
When sudden, on the mountain side, I saw  
A train of fleecy clouds in a white band  
Descending. Down the gleaming pinnacles  
And difficult crags they floated, and the arch,  
Drawn with its thousand rays against the sun,  
Hung like a glory o'er them. Midst the pines  
They clothed themselves with form, and straight I knew  
The immortals. Young Apollo, with his lyre,  
Kissed by the sun, and all the Muses clad  
In robes of gleaming white; then a great fear,  
Yet mixed with joy, assailed me, for I knew  
Myself a mortal equalled with the gods.

[87]

Ah me! how fair they were! how fair and dread  
In face and form, they showed, when now they came  
Upon the thymy slope, and the young god  
Lay with his choir around him, beautiful  
And bold as Youth and Dawn! There was no cloud  
Upon the sky, nor any sound at all  
When I began my strain. No coward fear  
Of what might come restrained me; but an awe  
Of those immortal eyes and ears divine  
Looking and listening. All the earth seemed full  
Of ears for me alone—the woods, the fields,  
The hills, the skies were listening. Scarce a sound  
My flute might make; such subtle harmonies  
The silence seemed to weave round me and flout  
The half unuttered thought. Till last I blew,  
As now, a hesitating note, and lo!  
The breath divine, lingering on mortal lips,  
Hurried my soul along to such fair rhymes,  
Sweeter than wont, that swift I knew my life  
Rise up within me, and expand, and all  
The human, which so nearly is divine,  
Was glorified, and on the Muses' lips,  
And in their lovely eyes, I saw a fair  
Approval, and my soul in me was glad.

[88]

For all the strains I blew were strains of love—  
Love striving, love triumphant, love that lies  
Within beloved arms, and wreathes his locks  
With flowers, and lets the world go by and sings  
Unheeding; and I saw a kindly gleam  
Within the Muses' eyes, who were indeed,  
Women, though god-like.

But upon the face  
Of the young Sun-god only haughty scorn  
Sate and he swiftly struck his golden lyre,  
And played the Song of Life; and lo, I knew  
My strain, how earthy! Oh, to hear the young  
Apollo playing! and the hidden cells  
And chambers of the universe displayed  
Before the charmed sound! I seemed to float  
In some enchanted cave, where the wave dips  
In from the sunlit sea, and floods its depths  
With reflex hues of heaven. My soul was rapt  
By that I heard, and dared to wish no more  
For victory; and yet because the sound

[89]

Of music that is born of human breath  
Comes straighter from the soul than any strain  
The hand alone can make; therefore I knew,  
With a mixed thrill of pity and delight,  
The nine immortal Sisters hardly touched  
By this fine strain of music, as by mine,  
And when the high lay trembled to its close,  
Still doubting.

[90]

Then upon the Sun-god's face  
There passed a cold proud smile. He swept his lyre  
Once more, then laid it down, and with clear voice,  
The voice of godhead, sang. Oh, ecstasy,  
Oh happiness of him who once has heard  
Apollo singing! For his ears the sound  
Of grosser music dies, and all the earth  
Is full of subtle undertones, which change  
The listener and transform him. As he sang—  
Of what I know not, but the music touched  
Each chord of being—I felt my secret life  
Stand open to it, as the parched earth yawns  
To drink the summer rain; and at the call  
Of those refreshing waters, all my thought  
Stir from its dark and secret depths, and burst  
Into sweet, odorous flowers, and from their wells  
Deep call to deep, and all the mystery  
Of all that is, laid open. As he sang,  
I saw the Nine, with lovely pitying eyes,  
Sign 'He has conquered.' Yet I felt no pang  
Of fear, only deep joy that I had heard  
Such music while I lived, even though it brought  
Torture and death. For what were it to lie  
Sleek, crowned with roses, drinking vulgar praise,  
And surfeited with offerings, the dull gift  
Of ignorant hands—all which I might have known—  
To this diviner failure? Godlike 'tis  
To climb upon the icy ledge, and fall  
Where other footsteps dare not. So I knew  
My fate, and it was near.

[91]

For to a pine  
They bound me willing, and with cruel stripes  
Tore me, and took my life.

But from my blood  
Was born the stream of song, and on its flow  
My poor flute, to the cool swift river borne,  
Floated, and thence adown a lordlier tide  
Into the deep, wide sea. I do not blame  
Phœbus, or Nature which has set this bar  
Betwixt success and failure, for I know  
How far high failure overleaps the bound  
Of low successes. Only suffering draws  
The inner heart of song and can elicit  
The perfumes of the soul. 'Twere not enough  
To fail, for that were happiness to him  
Who ever upward looks with reverent eye  
And seeks but to admire. So, since the race  
Of bards soars highest; as who seek to show  
Our lives as in a glass; therefore it comes  
That suffering weds with song, from him of old,  
Who solaced his blank darkness with his verse;  
Through all the story of neglect and scorn,  
Necessity, sheer hunger, early death,  
Which smite the singer still. Not only those  
Who keep clear accents of the voice divine  
Are honourable—they are happy, indeed,  
Whate'er the world has held—but those who hear  
Some fair faint echoes, though the crowd be deaf,  
And see the white gods' garments on the hills,  
Which the crowd sees not, though they may not find  
Fit music for their thought; they too are blest,  
Not pitiable. Not from arrogant pride  
Nor over-boldness fail they who have striven  
To tell what they have heard, with voice too weak  
For such high message. More it is than ease,  
Palace and pomp, honours and luxuries,  
To have seen white Presences upon the hills,

[92]

[93]



To have heard the voices of the Eternal Gods."

So spake he, and I seemed to look on him,  
Whose sad young eyes grow on us from the page  
Of his own verse: who did himself to death:  
Or whom the dullard slew: or whom the sea  
Rapt from us: and I passed without a word,  
Slow, grave, with many musings.

[94]

Then I came  
On one a maiden, meek with folded hands,  
Seated against a rugged face of cliff,  
In silent thought. Anon she raised her arms,  
Her gleaming arms, above her on the rock,  
With hands which clasped each other, till she showed  
As in a statue, and her white robe fell  
Down from her maiden shoulders, and I knew  
The fair form as it seemed chained to the stone  
By some invisible gyves, and named her name:  
And then she raised her frightened eyes to mine  
As one who, long expecting some great fear,  
Scarce sees deliverance come. But when she saw  
Only a kindly glance, a softer look  
Came in them, and she answered to my thought  
With a sweet voice and low.

[95]

"I did but muse  
Upon the painful past, long dead and done,  
Forgetting I was saved.

The angry clouds  
Burst always on the low flat plains, and swept  
The harvest to the ocean; all the land  
Was wasted. A great serpent from the deep,  
Lifting his horrible head above their homes,  
Devoured the children. And the people prayed  
In vain to careless gods.

On that dear land,  
Which now was turned into a sullen sea,  
Gazing in safety from the stately towers  
Of my sire's palace, I, a princess, saw,  
Lapt in soft luxury, within my bower  
The wreck of humble homes come whirling by,  
The drowning, bleating flocks, the bellowing herds,  
The grain scarce husbanded by toiling hands  
Upon the sunlit plain, rush to the sea,  
With floating corpses. On the rain-swept hills  
The remnant of the people huddled close,  
Homeless and starving. All my being was filled  
With pity for them, and I joyed to give  
What food and shelter and compassionate hands  
Of woman might. I took the little ones  
And clasped them shivering to the virgin breast  
Which knew no other touch but theirs, and gave  
Raiment and food. My sire, not stern to me,  
Smiled on me as he saw. My gentle mother,  
Who loved me with a closer love than binds  
A mother to her son; and sunned herself  
In my fresh beauty, seeing in my young eyes  
Her own fair vanished youth; doted on me,  
And fain had kept my eyes from the sad sights  
That pained them. But my heart was sad in me,  
Seeing the ineffable miseries of life,  
And that mysterious anger of the gods,  
And helpless to allay them. All in vain  
Were prayer and supplication, all in vain  
The costly victims steamed. The vengeful clouds  
Hid the fierce sky, and still the ruin came.  
And wallowing his grim length within the flood,  
Over the ravaged fields and homeless homes,  
The fell sea-monster raged, satiating his jaws  
With blood and rapine.

[96]

[97]

Then to the dread shrine  
Of Ammon went the priests, and reverend chiefs

[98]

Of all the nation. White robed, at their head,  
Went slow my royal sire. The oracle  
Spoke clear, not as oftentimes in words obscure,  
Ambiguous. And as we stood to meet  
The suppliants—she who bare me, with her head  
Upon my neck—we cheerful and with song  
Welcomed their swift return; auguring well  
From such a quick-spiced mission.

But my sire  
Hid his face from me, and the crowd of priests  
And nobles looked not at us. And no word  
Was spoken till at last one drew a scroll  
And gave it to the queen, who straightway swooned,  
Having read it, on my breast, and then I saw,  
I the young girl whose soft life scarcely knew  
Shadow of sorrow, I whose heart was full  
Of pity for the rest, what doom was mine.

[99]

I think I hardly knew in that dread hour  
The fear that came anon; I was transformed  
Into a champion of my race, made strong  
With a new courage, glorying to meet,  
In all the ecstasy of sacrifice,  
Death face to face. Some god, I know not who,  
O'erspread me, and despite my mother's tears  
And my stern father's grief, I met my fate  
Unshrinking.

When the moon rose clear from cloud  
Once more again over the midnight sea,  
And that vast watery plain, where were before  
Hundreds of happy homes, and well-tilled fields,  
And purple vineyards; from my father's towers  
The white procession went along the paths,  
The high cliff paths, which well I loved of old,  
Among the myrtles. Priests with censers went  
And offerings, robed in white, and round their brows  
The sacred fillet. With his nobles walked  
My sire with breaking heart. My mother clung  
To me the victim, and the young girls went  
With wailing and with tears. A solemn strain  
The soft flutes sounded, as we went by night  
To a wild headland, rock-based in the sea.

[100]

There on a sea-worn rock, upon the verge,  
To some rude stanchions, high above my head,  
They bound me. Out at sea, a black reef rose,  
Washed by the constant surge, wherein a cave  
Sheltered deep down the monster. The sad queen  
Would scarcely leave me, though the priests shrunk back  
In terror. Last, torn from my endless kiss,  
Swooning they bore her upwards. All my robe  
Fell from my lifted arms, and left displayed  
The virgin treasure of my breasts; and then  
The white procession through the moonlight streamed  
Upwards, and soon their soft flutes sounded low  
Upon the high lawns, leaving me alone.

[101]

There stood I in the moonlight, left alone  
Against the sea-worn rock. Hardly I knew,  
Seeing only the bright moon and summer sea,  
Which gently heaved and surged, and kissed the ledge  
With smooth warm tides, what fate was mine. I seemed,  
Soothed by the quiet, to be resting still  
Within my maiden chamber, and to watch  
The moonlight thro' my lattice. Then again  
Fear came, and then the pride of sacrifice  
Filled me, as on the high cliff lawns I heard  
The wailing cries, the chanted liturgies,  
And knew me bound forsaken to the rock,  
And saw the monster-haunted depths of sea.

[102]

So all night long upon the sandy shores  
I heard the hollow murmur of the wave,  
And all night long the hidden sea caves made  
A ghostly echo; and the sea birds mewed

Around me; once I heard a mocking laugh,  
As of some scornful Nereid; once the waters  
Broke louder on the scarpèd reefs, and ebbèd  
As if the monster coming; but again  
He came not, and the dead moon sank, and still  
Only upon the cliffs the wails, the chants,  
And I forsaken on my sea-worn rock,  
And lo, the monster-haunted depths of sea.

Till at the dead dark hour before the dawn,  
When sick men die, and scarcely fear itself  
Bore up my weary eyelids, a great surge  
Burst on the rock, and slowly, as it seemèd,  
The sea sucked downward to its depths, laid bare  
The hidden reefs, and then before my eyes—  
Oh, horrible! a huge and loathsome snake  
Lifted his dreadful crest and scaly side  
Above the wave, in bulk and length so large,  
Coil after hideous coil, that scarce the eye  
Could measure its full horror; the great jaws  
Dropped as with gore; the large and furious eyes  
Were fired with blood and lust. Nearer he came,  
And slowly, with a devilish glare, more near,  
Till his hot fœtor choked me, and his tongue,  
Forked horribly within his poisonous jaws,  
Played lightning-like around me. For awhile  
I swooned, and when I knew my life again,  
Death's bitterness was past.

[103]

Then with a bound  
Leaped up the broad red sun above the sea,  
And lit the horrid fulgour of his scales,  
And struck upon the rock; and as I turned  
My head in the last agony of death,  
I knew a brilliant sunbeam swiftly leaping  
Downward from crag to crag, and felt new hope  
Where all was hopeless. On the hills a shout  
Of joy, and on the rocks the ring of mail;  
And while the hungry serpent's gloating eyes  
Were fixed on me, a knight in casque of gold  
And blazing shield, who with his flashing blade  
Fell on the monster. Long the conflict raged,  
Till all the rocks were red with blood and slime,  
And yet my champion from those horrible jaws  
And dreadful coils was scatheless. Zeus his sire  
Protected, and the awful shield he bore  
Withered the monster's life and left him cold,  
Dragging his helpless length and grovelling crest:  
And o'er his glaring eyes the films of death  
Crept, and his writhing flank and hiss of hate  
The great deep swallowed down, and blood and spume  
Rose on the waves; and a strange wailing cry  
Resounded o'er the waters, and the sea  
Bellowed within its hollow-sounding caves.

[104]

[105]

Then knew I, I was saved, and with me all  
The people. From my wrists he loosed the gyves,  
My hero; and within his godlike arms  
Bore me by slippery rock and difficult path,  
To where my mother prayed. There was no need  
To ask my love. Without a spoken word  
Love lit his fires within me. My young heart  
Went forth, Love calling, and I gave him all.

Dost thou then wonder that the memory  
Of this supreme brief moment lingers still,  
While all the happy uneventful years  
Of wedded life, and all the fair young growth  
Of offspring, and the tranquil later joys,  
Nay, even the fierce eventful fight which raged  
When we were wedded, fade and are deceased,  
Lost in the irrecoverable past?  
Nay, 'tis not strange. Always the memory  
Of overwhelming perils or great joys,  
Avoided or enjoyed, writes its own trace  
With such deep characters upon our lives,

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That all the rest are blotted. In this place,  
Where is not action, thought, or count of time,  
It is not weary as it were on earth,  
To dwell on these old memories. Time is born  
Of dawns and sunsets, days that wax and wane  
And stamp themselves upon the yielding face  
Of fleeting human life; but here there is  
Morning nor evening, act nor suffering,  
But only one unchanging Present holds  
Our being suspended. One blest day indeed,  
Or centuries ago or yesterday,  
There came among us one who was Divine,  
Not as our gods, joyous and breathing strength  
And careless life, but crowned with a new crown  
Of suffering, and a great light came with him,  
And with him he brought Time and a new sense  
Of dim, long-vanished years; and since he passed  
I seem to see new meaning in my fate,  
And all the deeds I tell of. Evermore  
The young life comes, bound to the cruel rocks  
Alone. Before it the unfathomed sea  
Smiles, filled with monstrous growths that wait to take  
Its innocence. Far off the voice and hand  
Of love kneel by in agony, and entreat  
The seeming careless gods. Still when the deep  
Is smoothest, lo, the deadly fangs and coils  
Lurk near, to smite with death. And o'er the crags  
Of duty, like a sudden sunbeam, springs  
Some golden soul half mortal, half divine,  
Heaven-sent, and breaks the chain; and evermore  
For sacrifice they die, through sacrifice  
They live, and are for others, and no grief  
Which smites the humblest but reverberates  
Thro' all the close-set files of life, and takes  
The princely soul that from its royal towers  
Looks down and sees the sorrow.

[107]

Sir, farewell!

If thou shouldst meet my children on the earth  
Or here, for maybe it is long ago  
Since I and they were living, say to them  
I only muse a little here, and wait  
The waking."

And her lifted arms sank down  
Upon her knees, and as I passed I saw her  
Gazing with soft rapt eyes, and on her lips  
A smile as of a saint.

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[109]

And then I saw  
A manly hunter pace along the lea,  
His bow upon his shoulder, and his spear  
Poised idly in his hand: the face and form  
Of vigorous youth; but in the full brown eyes  
A timorous gaze as of a hunted hart,  
Brute-like, yet human still, even as the Faun  
Of old, the dumb brute passing into man,  
And dowered with double nature. As he came  
I seemed to question of his fate, and he  
Answered me thus:

[110]

"'Twas one hot afternoon  
That I, a hunter, wearied with my day,  
Heard my hounds baying fainter on the hills,  
Led by the flying hart; and when the sound  
Faded and all was still, I turned to seek,  
O'ercome by heat and thirst, a little glade,  
Beloved of old, where, in the shadowy wood,  
The clear cold crystal of a mossy pool  
Lipped the soft emerald marge, and gave again  
The flower-starred lawn where oftentimes overspent  
I lay upon the grass and careless bathed  
My limbs in the sweet lymph.

But as I neared  
The hollow, sudden through the leaves I saw

A throng of wood-nymphs fair, sporting undraped  
Round one, a goddess. She with timid hand  
Loosened her zone, and glancing round let fall  
Her robe from neck and bosom, pure and bright,  
(For it was Dian's self I saw, none else)  
As when she frees her from a fleece of cloud  
And swims along the deep blue sea of heaven  
On sweet June nights. Silent awhile I stood,  
Rooted with awe, and fain had turned to fly,  
But feared by careless footstep to affright  
Those chaste cold eyes. Great awe and reverence  
Held me, and fear; then Love with passing wing  
Fanned me, and held my eyes, and checked my breath,  
Signing 'Beware!'

[111]

So for a time I watched,  
Breathless as one a brooding nightmare holds,  
Who fleeth some great fear, yet fleeth not;  
Till the last flutter of lawn, and veil no more  
Obscured, and all the beauty of my dreams  
Assailed my sense. But ere I raised my eyes,  
As one who fain would look and see the sun,  
The first glance dazed my brain. Only I knew  
The perfect outline flow in tender curves,  
To break in doubled charms; only a haze  
Of creamy white, dimple, and deep divine:  
And then no more. For lo! a sudden chill,  
And such thick mist as shuts the hills at eve,  
Oppressed me gazing; and a heaven-sent shame,  
An awe, a fear, a reverence for the unknown,  
Froze all the springs of will and left me cold,  
And blinded all the longings of my eyes,  
Leaving such dim reflection still as mocks  
Him who has looked on a great light, and keeps  
On his closed eyes the image. Presently,  
My fainting soul, safe hidden for awhile  
Deep in Life's mystic shades, renewed herself,  
And straight, the innocent brute within the man  
Bore on me, and with half-averted eye  
I gazed upon the secret.

[112]

As I looked,  
A radiance, white as beamed the frosty moon  
On the mad boy and slew him, beamed on me;  
Made chill my pulses, checked my life and heat;  
Transformed me, withered all my soul, and left  
My being burnt out. For lo! the dreadful eyes  
Of Godhead met my gaze, and through the mask  
And thick disguise of sense, as through a wood,  
Pierced to my life. Then suddenly I knew  
An altered nature, touched by no desire  
For that which showed so lovely, but declined  
To lower levels. Nought of fear or awe,  
Nothing of love was mine. Wide-eyed I gazed,  
But saw no spiritual beam to blight  
My brain with too much beauty, no undraped  
And awful majesty; only a brute,  
Dumb charm, like that which draws the brute to it,  
Unknowing it is drawn. So gradually  
I knew a dull content o'ercloud my sense,  
And unabashed I gazed, like that dumb bird  
Which thinks no thought and speaks no word, yet fronts  
The sun that blinded Homer—all my fear  
Sunk with my shame, in a base happiness.

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But as I gazed, and careless turned and passed  
Through the thick wood, forgetting what had been,  
And thinking thoughts no longer, swift there came  
A mortal terror: voices that I knew,  
My own hounds' bayings that I loved before,  
As with them often o'er the purple hills  
I chased the flying hart from slope to slope,  
Before the slow sun climbed the Eastern peaks,  
Until the swift sun smote the Western plain;  
Whom often I had cheered by voice and glance,  
Whom often I had checked with hand and thong  
Grim followers, like the passions, firing me,

True servants, like the strong nerves, urging me  
On many a fruitless chase, to find and take  
Some too swift-fleeting beauty; faithful feet  
And tongues, obedient always: these I knew,  
Clothed with a new-born force and vaster grown,  
And stronger than their master; and I thought,  
What if they tare me with their jaws, nor knew  
That once I ruled them,—brute pursuing brute,  
And I the quarry? Then I turned and fled,—  
If it was I indeed that feared and fled—  
Down the long glades, and through the tangled brakes,  
Where scarce the sunlight pierced; fled on and on,  
And panted, self-pursued. But evermore  
The dissonant music which I knew so sweet,  
When by the windy hills, the echoing vales,  
And whispering pines it rang, now far, now near,  
As from my rushing steed I leant and cheered  
With voice and horn the chase—this brought to me  
Fear of I knew not what, which bade me fly,  
Fly always, fly; but when my heart stood still,  
And all my limbs were stiffened as I fled,  
Just as the white moon ghost-like climbed the sky,  
Nearer they came and nearer, baying loud,  
With bloodshot eyes and red jaws dripping foam;  
And when I strove to check their savagery,  
Speaking with words; no voice articulate came,  
Only a dumb, low bleat. Then all the throng  
Leapt swift on me, and tare me as I lay,  
And left me man again.

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[116]

Wherefore I walk  
Along these dim fields peopled with the ghosts  
Of heroes who have left the ways of earth  
For this faint ghost of them. Sometimes I think,  
Pondering on what has been, that all my days  
Were shadows, all my life an allegory;  
And, though I know sometimes some fainter gleam  
Of the old beauty move me, and sometimes  
Some beat of the old pulses; that my fate,  
For ever hurrying on in hot pursuit,  
To fall at length self-slain, was but a tale  
Writ large by Zeus upon a mortal life,  
Writ large, and yet a riddle. For sometimes  
I read its meaning thus: Life is a chase,  
And Man the hunter, always following on,  
With hounds of rushing thought or fiery sense,  
Some hidden truth or beauty, fleeting still  
For ever through the thick-leaved coverts deep  
And wind-worn wolds of time. And if he turn  
A moment from the hot pursuit to seize  
Some chance-brought sweetness, other than the search  
To which his soul is set,—some dalliance,  
Some outward shape of Art, some lower love,  
Some charm of wealth and sleek content and home,—  
Then, if he check an instant, the swift chase  
Of fierce untempered energies which pursue,  
With jaws unsated and a thirst for act,  
Bears down on him with clanging shock, and whelms  
His prize and him in ruin.

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And sometimes  
I seem to myself a thinker, who at last,  
Amid the chase and capture of low ends,  
Pausing by some cold well of hidden thought  
Comes on some perfect truth, and looks and looks  
Till the fair vision blinds him. And the sum  
Of all his lower self pursuing him,  
The strong brute forces, the unchecked desires,  
Finding him bound and speechless, deem him now  
No more their master, but some soulless thing;  
And leap on him, and seize him, and possess  
His life, till through death's gate he pass to life,  
And, his own ghost, revives. But looks no more  
Upon the truth unveiled, save through a cloud  
Of creed and faith and longing, which shall change  
One day to perfect knowledge.

[119]

But whoe'er

Shall read the riddle of my life, I walk  
In this dim land amid dim ghosts of kings,  
As one day thou shalt; meantime, fare thou well."

Then passed he; and I marked him slowly go  
Along the winding ways of that weird land,  
And vanish in a wood.

And next I knew  
A woman perfect as a young man's dream,  
And breathing as it seemed the old sweet air  
Of the fair days of old, when man was young  
And life an Epic. Round the lips a smile  
Subtle and deep and sweet as hers who looks  
From the old painter's canvas, and derides  
Life and the riddle of things, the aimless strife,  
The folly of Love, as who has proved it all,  
Enjoyed and suffered. In the lovely eyes  
A weary look, no other than the gaze  
Which oftentimes as the rapid chariot whirls,  
And oftentimes by the glaring midnight streets,  
Gleams out and chills our thought. And yet not guilt  
Nor sorrow was it; only weariness,  
No more, and still most lovely. As I named  
Her name in haste, she looked with half surprise,  
And thus she seemed to speak:

"What? Dost thou know  
Thou too, the fatal glances which beguiled  
Those strong rude chiefs of old? Has not the gloom  
Of this dim land withdrawn from out mine eyes  
The glamour which once filled them? Does my cheek  
Retain the round of youth and still defy  
The wear of immemorial centuries?  
And this low voice, long silent, keeps it still  
The music of old time? Aye, in thine eyes  
I read it, and within thine eyes I see  
Thou knowest me, and the story of my life  
Sung by the blind old bard when I was dead,  
And all my lovers dust. I know thee not,  
Thee nor thy gods, yet would I soothly swear  
I was not all to blame for what has been,  
The long fight, the swift death, the woes, the tears  
The brave lives spent, the humble homes uptorn  
To gain one poor fair face. It was not I  
That curved these lips into this subtle smile,  
Or gave these eyes their fire, nor yet made round  
This supple frame. It was not I, but Love,  
Love mirroring himself in all things fair,  
Love that projects himself upon a life,  
And dotes on his own image.

Ah! the days,  
The weary years of Love and feasts and gold,  
The hurried flights, the din of clattering hoofs  
At midnight, when the heroes dared for me,  
And bore me o'er the hills; the swift pursuits  
Baffled and lost; or when from isle to isle  
The high-oared galley spread its wings and rose  
Over the swelling surges, and I saw,  
Time after time, the scarce familiar town,  
The sharp-cut hills, the well-loved palaces,  
The gleaming temples fade, and all for me,  
Me the dead prize, the shell, the soulless ghost,  
The husk of a true woman; the fond words  
Wasted on careless ears, that seemed to hear,  
Of love to me unloving; the rich feasts,  
The silken dalliance and soft luxury,  
The fair observance and high reverence  
For me who cared not, to whatever land  
My kingly lover snatched me. I have known  
How small a fence Love sets between the king  
And the strong hind, who breeds his brood, and dies  
Upon the field he tills. I have exchanged

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People for people, crown for glittering crown,  
Through every change a queen, and held my state  
Hateful, and sickened in my soul to lie  
Stretched on soft cushions to the lutes' low sound,  
While on the wasted fields the clang of arms  
Rang, and the foemen perished, and swift death,  
Hunger, and plague, and every phase of woe  
Vexed all the land for me. I have heard the curse  
Unspoken, when the wife widowed for me  
Clasped to her heart her orphans starved for me;  
As I swept proudly by. I have prayed the gods,  
Hating my own fair face which wrought such woe,  
Some plague divine might light on it and leave  
My curse a ruin. Yet I think indeed  
They had not cursed but pitied, those true wives  
Who mourned their humble lords, and straining felt  
The innocent thrill which swells the mother's heart  
Who clasps her growing boy; had they but known  
The lifeless life, the pain of hypocrite smiles,  
The dead load of caresses simulated,  
When Love stands shuddering by to see his fires  
Lit for the shrine of gold. What if they felt  
The weariness of loveless love which grew  
And through the jealous palace portals seized  
The caged unloving woman, sick of toys,  
Sick of her gilded chains, her ease, herself,  
Till for sheer weariness she flew to meet  
Some new unloved seducer? What if they knew  
No childish loving hands, or worse than all,  
Had borne them sullen to a sire unloved,  
And left them without pain? I might have been,  
I too, a loving mother and chaste wife,  
Had Fate so willed.

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For I remember well  
How one day straying from my father's halls  
Seeking anemones and violets,  
A girl in Spring-time, when the heart makes Spring  
Within the budding bosom, that I came  
Of a sudden through a wood upon a bay,  
A little sunny land-locked bay, whose banks  
Sloped gently downward to the yellow sand,  
Where the blue wave creamed soft with fairy foam,  
And oft the Nereids sported. As I strayed  
Singing, with fresh-pulled violets in my hair  
And bosom, and my hands were full of flowers,  
I came upon a little milk-white lamb,  
And took it in my arms and fondled it,  
And wreathed its neck with flowers, and sang to it  
And kissed it, and the Spring was in my life,  
And I was glad.

[126]

And when I raised my eyes  
Behold, a youthful shepherd with his crook  
Stood by me and regarded as I lay,  
Tall, fair, with clustering curls, and front that wore  
A budding manhood. As I looked a fear  
Came o'er me, lest he were some youthful god  
Disguised in shape of man, so fair he was;  
But when he spoke, the kindly face was full  
Of manhood, and the large eyes full of fire  
Drew me without a word, and all the flowers  
Fell from me, and the little milk-white lamb  
Strayed through the brake, and took with it the white  
Fair years of childhood. Time fulfilled my being  
With passion like a cup, and with one kiss  
Left me a woman.

Ah! the lovely days,  
When on the warm bank crowned with flowers we sate  
And thought no harm, and his thin reed pipe made  
Low music, and no witness of our love  
Intruded, but the tinkle of the flock  
Came from the hill, and 'neath the odorous shade  
We dreamed away the day, and watched the waves  
Steal shoreward, and beyond the sylvan capes  
The innumerable laughter of the sea!

[127]



Ah youth and love! So passed the happy days  
Till twilight, and I stole as in a dream  
Homeward, and lived as in a happy dream,  
And when they spoke answered as in a dream,  
And through the darkness saw, as in a glass,  
The happy, happy day, and thrilled and glowed  
And kept my love in sleep, and longed for dawn  
And scarcely stayed for hunger, and with morn  
Stole eager to the little wood, and fed  
My life with kisses. Ah! the joyous days  
Of innocence, when Love was Queen in heaven,  
And nature unreprieved! Break they then still,  
Those azure circles, on a golden shore?  
Smiles there no glade upon the older earth  
Where spite of all, gray wisdom, and new gods,  
Young lovers dream within each other's arms  
Silent, by shadowy grove, or sunlit sea?

[128]

Ah days too fair to last! There came a night  
When I lay longing for my love, and knew  
Sudden the clang of hoofs, the broken doors.  
The clash of swords, the shouts, the groans, the stain  
Of red upon the marble, the fixed gaze  
Of dead and dying eyes,—that was the time  
When first I looked on death,—and when I woke  
From my deep swoon, I felt the night air cool  
Upon my brow, and the cold stars look down,  
As swift we galloped o'er the darkling plain;  
And saw the chill sea glimpses slowly wake,  
With arms unknown around me. When the dawn  
Broke swift, we panted on the pathless steeps,  
And so by plain and mountain till we came  
To Athens, where they kept me till I grew  
Fairer with every year, and many wooed,  
Heroes and chieftains, but I loved not one.

[129]

And then the avengers came and snatched me back  
To Sparta. All the dark high-crested chiefs  
Of Argos wooed me, striving king with king  
For one fair foolish face, nor knew I kept  
No heart to give them. Yet since I was grown  
Weary of honeyed words and suit of love,  
I wedded a brave chief, dauntless and true.  
But what cared I? I could not prize at all  
His honest service. I had grown so tired  
Of loving and of love, that when they brought  
News that the fairest shepherd on the hills,  
Having done himself to death for his lost love,  
Lay, like a lovely statue, cold and white  
Upon the golden sand, I hardly knew  
More than a passing pang. Love, like a flower,  
Love, springing up too tall in a young breast,  
The growth of morning, Life's too scorching sun  
Had withered long ere noon. Love, like a flame  
On his own altar offering up my heart,  
Had burnt my being to ashes.

[130]

Was it love  
That drew me then to Paris? He was fair,  
I grant you, fairer than a summer morn,  
Fair with a woman's fairness, yet in arms  
A hero, but he never had my heart,  
Not love for him allured me, but the thirst  
For freedom, if in more than thought I erred,  
And was not rapt but willing. For my child,  
Born to an unloved father, loved me not,  
The fresh sea called, the galleys plunged, and I  
Fled willing from my prison and the pain  
Of undesired caresses, and the wind  
Was fair, and on the third day as we sailed,  
My heart was glad within me when I saw  
The towers of Ilium rise beyond the wave.

[131]

Ah, the long years, the melancholy years,  
The miserable melancholy years!  
For soon the new grew old, and then I grew

Weary of him, of all, of pomp and state  
And novel splendour. Yet at times I knew  
Some thrill of pride within me as I saw  
From those high walls, a prisoner and a foe,  
The swift ships flock at anchor in the bay,  
The hasty landing and the flash of arms,  
The lines of royal tents upon the plain,  
The close-shut gates, the chivalry within  
Issuing in all its pride to meet the shock  
Of the bold chiefs without; so year by year  
The haughty challenge from the warring hosts  
Rang forth, and I with a divided heart  
Saw victory incline, now here, now there,  
And helpless marked the Argive chiefs I knew,  
The spouse I left, the princely loves of old,  
Now with each other strive, and now with Troy:  
The brave pomp of the morn, the fair strong limbs,  
The glittering panoply, the bold young hearts,  
Athirst for fame of war, and with the night  
The broken spear, the shattered helm, the plume  
Dyed red with blood, the ghastly dying face,  
And nerveless limbs laid lifeless. And I knew  
The stainless Hector whom I could have loved,  
But that a happy love made blind his eyes  
To all my baleful beauty; fallen and dragged  
His noble, manly head upon the sand  
By young Achilles' chariot; him in turn  
Fallen and slain; my fair false Paris slain;  
Plague, famine, battle, raging now within,  
And now without, for many a weary year,  
Summer and winter, till I loathed to live,  
Who was indeed, as well they said, the Hell  
Of men, and fleets, and cities. As I stood  
Upon the walls, ofttimes a longing came,  
Looking on rage, and fight, and blood, and death,  
To end it all, and dash me down and die;  
But no god helped me. Nay, one day I mind  
I would entreat them. 'Pray you, lords, be men.  
What fatal charm is this which Até gives  
To one poor foolish face? Be strong, and turn  
In peace, forget this glamour, get you home  
With all your fleets and armies, to the land  
I love no longer, where your faithful wives  
Pine widowed of their lords, and your young boys  
Grow wild to manhood. I have nought to give,  
No heart, nor prize of love for any man,  
Nor recompense. I am the ghost alone  
Of the fair girl ye knew; she still abides,  
If she still lives and is not wholly dead,  
Stretched on a flowery bank upon the sea  
In fair heroic Argos. Leave this form  
That is no other than the outward shell  
Of a once loving woman.'

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As I spake,  
My pity fired my eyes and flushed my cheek  
With some soft charm; and as I spread my hands,  
The purple, glancing down a little, left  
The marble of my breasts and one pink bud  
Upon the gleaming snows. And as I looked  
With a mixed pride and terror, I beheld  
The brute rise up within them, and my words  
Fall barren on them. So I sat apart,  
Nor ever more looked forth, while every day  
Brought its own woe.

[135]

The melancholy years,  
The miserable melancholy years,  
Crept onward till the midnight terror came,  
And by the glare of burning streets I saw  
Palace and temple reel in ruin and fall,  
And the long-baffled legions, bursting in  
By gate and bastion, blunted sword and spear  
With unresisted slaughter. From my tower  
I saw the good old king; his kindly eyes  
In agony, and all his reverend hairs  
Dabbled with blood, as the fierce foeman thrust

And stabbed him as he lay; the youths, the girls,  
Whom day by day I knew, their silken ease  
And royal luxury changed for blood and tears,  
Haled forth to death or worse. Then a great hate  
Of life and fate seized on me, and I rose  
And rushed among them, crying, 'See, 'tis I,  
I who have brought this evil! Kill me! kill  
The fury that is I, yet is not I!  
And let my soul go outward through the wound  
Made clean by blood to Hades! Let me die,  
Not these who did no wrong!' But not a hand  
Was raised, and all shrank backward as afraid,  
As from a goddess. Then I swooned and fell  
And knew no more, and when I woke I felt  
My husband's arms around me, and the wind  
Blew fair for Greece, and the beaked galley plunged;  
And where the towers of Ilium rose of old,  
A pall of smoke above a glare of fire.

[136]

What then in the near future?

Ten long years

Bring youth and love to that deep summer-tide  
When the full noisy current of our lives  
Creeps dumb through wealth of flowers. I think I knew  
Somewhat of peace at last, with my good Lord  
Who loved too much, to palter with the past,  
Flushed with the present. Young Hermione  
Had grown from child to woman. She was wed;  
And was not I her mother? At the pomp  
Of solemn nuptials and requited love,  
I prayed she might be happy, happier far  
Than ever I was; so in tranquil ease  
I lived a queen long time, and because wealth  
And high observance can make sweet our days  
When youth's swift joy is past, I did requite  
With what I might, not love, the kindly care  
Of him I loved not; pomps and robes of price  
And chariots held me. But when Fate cut short  
His life and love, his sons who were not mine  
Reigned in his stead, and hated me and mine:  
And knowing I was friendless, I sailed forth  
Once more across the sea, seeking for rest  
And shelter. Still I knew that in my eyes  
Love dwelt, and all the baleful charm of old  
Burned as of yore, scarce dimmed as yet by time:  
I saw it in the mirror of the sea,  
I saw it in the youthful seamen's eyes,  
And was half proud again I had such power  
Who now kept nothing else. So one calm eve,  
Behold, a sweet fair isle blushed like a rose  
Upon the summer sea: there my swift ship  
Cast anchor, and they told me it was Rhodes.

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There, in a little wood above the sea,  
Like that dear wood of yore, I wandered forth  
Forlorn, and all my seamen were apart,  
And I, alone; when at the close of day  
I knew myself surrounded by strange churls  
With angry eyes, and one who ordered them,  
A woman, whom I knew not, but who walked  
In mien and garb a queen. She, with the fire  
Of hate within her eyes, 'Quick, bind her, men!  
I know her; bind her fast!' Then to the trunk  
Of a tall plane they bound me with rude cords  
That cut my arms. And meantime, far below,  
The sun was gilding fair with dying rays  
Isle after isle and purple wastes of sea.

[139]

And then she signed to them, and all withdrew  
Among the woods and left us, face to face,  
Two women. Ere I spoke, 'I know,' she said,  
'I know that evil fairness. This it was,  
Or ever he had come across my life,  
That made him cold to me, who had my love  
And left me half a heart. If all my life

Of wedlock was but half a life, what fiend  
Came 'twixt my love and me, but that fair face?  
What left his children orphans, but that face?  
And me a widow? Fiend! I have thee now;  
Thou hast not long to live. I will requite  
Thy murders; yet, oh fiend! that art so fair,  
Were it not haply better to deface  
Thy fatal loveliness, and leave thee bare  
Of all thy baleful power? And yet I doubt,  
And looking on thy face I doubt the more,  
Lest all thy dower of fairness be the gift  
Of Aphrodité, and I fear to fight  
Against the immortal Gods.'

[140]

Even with the word,  
And she relenting, all the riddle of life  
Flashed through me, and the inextricable coil  
Of Being, and the immeasurable depths  
And irony of Fate, burst on my thought  
And left me smiling in the eyes of death,  
With this deep smile thou seest. Then with a shriek  
The woman leapt on me, and with blind rage  
Strangled my life. And when she had done the deed  
She swooned, and those her followers hasting back  
Fell prone upon their knees before the corpse  
As to a goddess. Then one went and brought  
A sculptor, and within a jewelled shrine  
They set me in white marble, bound to a tree  
Of marble. And they came and knelt to me,  
Young men and maidens, through the secular years,  
While the old gods bore sway, but I was here,  
And now they kneel no longer, for the world  
Has gone from beauty.

[141]

But I think, indeed,  
They well might worship still, for never yet  
Was any thought or thing of beauty born  
Except with suffering. That poor wretch who thought  
I injured her, stealing the foolish heart  
Which she prized but I could not, what knew she  
Of that I suffered? She had loved her love,  
Though unrequited, and had borne to him  
Children who loved her. What if she had been  
Loved yet unloving: all the fire of love  
Burnt out before love's time in one brief blaze  
Of passion. Ah, poor fool! I pity her,  
Being blest and yet unthankful, and forgive,  
Now that she is a ghost as I, the hand  
Which loosed my load of life. For scarce indeed  
Could any god who cares for mortal men  
Have ever kept me happy. I had tired  
Of simple loving, doubtless, as I tired  
Of splendour and being loved. There be some souls  
For which love is enough, content to bear  
From youth to age, from chesnut locks to gray,  
The load of common, uneventful life  
And penury. But I was not of these;  
I know not now, if it were best indeed  
That I had reared my simple shepherd brood,  
And lived and died unknown in some poor hut  
Among the Argive hills; or lived a queen  
As I did, knowing every day that dawned  
Some high emprise and glorious, and in death  
To fill the world with song. Not the same meed  
The gods mete out for all, or She, the dread  
Necessity, who rules both gods and men,  
Some to dishonour, some to honour moulds,  
To happiness some, some to unhappiness.  
We are what Zeus has made us, discords playing  
In the great music, but the harmony  
Is sweeter for them, and the great spheres ring  
In one accordant hymn.

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[143]

But thou, if e'er  
There come a daughter of thy love, oh pray  
To all thy gods, lest haply they should mar  
Her life with too great beauty!"

[144]

So she ceased.

The fairest woman that the poet's dream  
Or artist hand has fashioned. All the gloom  
Seemed lightened round her, and I heard the sound  
Of her melodious voice when all was still,  
And the dim twilight took her.

Next there came

Two who together walked: one with a lyre  
Of gold, which gave no sound; the other hung  
Upon his breast, and closely clung to him,  
Spent in a tender longing. As they came,  
I heard her gentle voice recounting o'er  
Some ancient tale, and these the words she said:

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"Dear voice and lyre now silent, which I heard  
Across yon sullen river, bringing to me  
All my old life, and he, the ferryman,  
Heard and obeyed, and the grim monster heard  
And fawned on you. Joyous thou cam'st and free  
Like a white sunbeam from the dear bright earth,  
Where suns shone clear, and moons beamed bright, and streams  
Laughed with a rippling music,—nor as here  
The dumb stream stole, the veiled sky slept, the fields  
Were lost in twilight. Like a morning breeze,  
Which blows in summer from the gates of dawn  
Across the fields of spice, and wakes to life  
Their slumbering perfume, through this silent land  
Of whispering voices and of half-closed eyes,  
Where scarce a footstep sounds, nor any strain  
Of earthly song, thou cam'st; and suddenly  
The pale cheeks flushed a little, the murmured words  
Rose to a faint, thin treble; the throng of ghosts  
Pacing along the sunless ways and still,  
Felt a new life. Thou camest, dear, and straight  
The dull cold river broke in sparkling foam,  
The pale and scentless flowers grew perfumed; last  
To the dim chamber, where with the sad queen  
I sat in gloom, and silently inwove  
Dead wreaths of amaranths; thy music came  
Laden with life, and I, who seemed to know  
Not life's voice only, but my own, rose up,  
Along the hollow pathways following  
The sound which brought back earth and life and love,  
And memory and longing. Yet I went  
With half-reluctant footsteps, as of one  
Whom passion draws, or some high fantasy,  
Despite himself, because some subtle spell,  
Part born of dread to cross that sullen stream  
And its grim guardians, part of secret shame  
Of the young airs and freshness of the earth,  
Being that I was, enchained me.

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[147]

Then at last,

From voice and lyre so high a strain arose  
As trembled on the utter verge of being,  
And thrilling, poured out life. Thus closelier drawn  
I walked with thee, shut in by halcyon sound  
And soft environments of harmony,  
Beyond the ghostly gates, beyond the dim  
Calm fields, where the beetle hummed and the pale owl  
Stole noiseless from the copse, and the white blooms  
Stretched thin for lack of sun: so fair a light  
Born out of consonant sound environed me.  
Nor looked I backward, as we seemed to move  
To some high goal of thought and life and love,  
Like twin birds flying fast with equal wing  
Out of the night, to meet the coming sun  
Above a sea. But on thy dear fair eyes,  
The eyes that well I knew on the old earth,  
I looked not, for with still averted gaze  
Thou leddest, and I followed; for, indeed,  
While that high strain was sounding, I was rapt

[148]

In faith and a high courage, driving out  
 All doubt and discontent and womanish fear,  
 Nay, even my love itself. But when awhile  
 It sank a little, or seemed to sink and fall  
 To lower levels, seeing that use makes blunt  
 The too accustomed ear, straightway, desire  
 To look once more on thy recovered eyes  
 Seized me, and oft I called with piteous voice,  
 Beseeching thee to turn. But thou long time  
 Wert even as one unmindful, with grave sign  
 And waving hand, denying. Finally,  
 When now we neared the stream, on whose far shore  
 Lay life, great terror took me, and I shrieked  
 Thy name, as in despair. Then thou, as one  
 Who knows him set in some great jeopardy,  
 A swift death fronting him on either hand,  
 Didst slowly turning gaze; and lo! I saw  
 Thine eyes grown awful, life that looked on death,  
 Clear purity on dark and cankered sin,  
 The immortal on corruption,—not the eyes  
 That erst I knew in life, but dreadfuller,  
 And stranger. As I looked, I seemed to swoon,  
 Some blind force whirled me back, and when I woke  
 I saw thee vanish in the middle stream,  
 A speck on the dull waters, taking with thee  
 My life, and leaving Love with me. But I  
 Not for myself bewail, but all for thee,  
 Who, but for me, wert now among the stars  
 With thy great Lord; I sitting at thy feet:  
 But now the fierce and unrestrained rout  
 Of passions woman-natured, finding thee  
 Scornful of love within thy lonely cell,  
 With blind rage falling on thee, tore thy limbs,  
 And left them to the Muses' sepulture,  
 While thy soul dwells in Hades. But I wail  
 My weakness always, who for Love destroyed  
 The life that was my Love. I prithee, dear,  
 Forgive me if thou canst, who hast lost heaven  
 To save a loving woman."

[149]

He with voice  
 Sweeter than any mortal melody,  
 And plaintive as the music that is made  
 By the Æolian strings, or the sad bird  
 That sings of summer nights:

"Eurydice,  
 Dear love, be comforted; not once alone  
 That which thou mournest is, but day by day  
 Some lonely soul, which walks apart and feeds  
 On high hill pastures, far from herds of men,  
 Comes to the low fat fields, and sunny vales  
 Joyous with fruits and flowers, and the white arms  
 Of laughing love; and there awhile he stays  
 Content, forgetting all the joys he knew,  
 When first the morning broke upon the hills,  
 And the keen air breathed from the Eastern gates  
 Like a pure draught of wine; forgetting all  
 The strains which float, as from a nearer heaven,  
 To him who treads at dawn the untrodden snows,  
 While all the warm world sleeps;—forgetting these  
 And all things that have been. And if he gain  
 To raise to his own heights the simpler souls  
 That dwell upon the plains, the untutored thought,  
 The museless lives, the unawakened brain  
 That yet might soar, then is he blest indeed.  
 But if he fail, then, leaving love behind,  
 The wider love of the race, the closer love  
 Of some congenial soul, he turns again  
 To the old difficult steeps, and there alone  
 Pines, till the widowed passions of his heart  
 Tear him and rend his soul, and drive him down  
 To the low plains he left. And there he dwells,  
 Missing the heavens, dear, and the white peaks,  
 And the light air of old; but in their stead  
 Finding the soft sweet sun of the vale, the clouds  
 Which veil the skies indeed, but give the rains

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That feed the streams of life and make earth green,  
And bring at last the harvest. So I walk  
In this dim land content with thee, O Love,  
Untouched by any yearning of regret  
For those old days; nor that the lyre which made  
Erewhile such potent music now is dumb;  
Nor that the voice that once could move the earth  
(Zeus speaking through it), speaks in household words  
Of homely love: Love is enough for me  
With thee, O dearest; and perchance at last,  
Zeus willing, this dumb lyre and whispered voice  
Shall wake, by Love inspired, to such clear note  
As soars above the stars, and swelling, lifts  
Our souls to highest heaven."

[153]

Then he stooped,  
And, folded in one long embrace, they went  
And faded. And I cried, "Oh, strong God, Love,  
Mightier than Death and Hell!"

And then I chanced  
On a fair woman, whose sad eyes were full  
Of a fixed self-reproach, like his who knows  
Himself the fountain of his grief, and pines  
In self-inflicted sorrow. As I spake  
Enquiring of her grief, she answered thus:

[154]

"Stranger, thou seest of all the shades below  
The most unhappy. Others sought their love  
In death, and found it, dying; but for me  
The death that took me, took from me my love,  
And left me comfortless. No load I bear  
Like those dark wicked women, who have slain  
Their Lords for lust or anger, whom the dread  
Propitious Ones within the pit below  
Punish and purge of sin; only unfaith,  
If haply want of faith be not a crime  
Blacker than murder, when we fail to trust  
One worthy of all faith, and folly bring  
No harder recompense than comes of scorn  
And loathing of itself.

Ah, fool, fool, fool,  
Who didst mistrust thy love, who was the best,  
And truest, manliest soul with whom the gods  
Have ever blest the earth; so brave, so strong,  
Fired with such burning hate of powerful ill,  
So loving of the race, so swift to raise  
The fearless arm and mighty club, and smite  
All monstrous growths with ruin—Zeus himself  
Showed scarce more mighty—and yet was the while  
A very man, not cast in mould too fine  
For human love, but oftentimes snared and caught  
By womanish wiles, fast held within the net  
His passions wove. Oh, it was grand to hear  
Of how he went, the champion of his race,  
Mighty in war, mighty in love, now bent  
To more than human tasks, now lapt in ease,  
Now suffering, now enjoying. Strong, vast soul,  
Tuned to heroic deeds, and set on high  
Above the range of common petty sins—  
Too high to mate with an unequal soul,  
Too full of striving for contented days.

[155]

Ah me, how well I do recall the cause  
Of all our ills! I was a happy bride  
When that dark Até which pursues the steps  
Of heroes—innocent blood-guiltiness—  
Drove us to exile, and I joyed to be  
His own, and share his pain. To a swift stream  
Fleeing we came, where a rough ferryman  
Waited, more brute than man. My hero plunged  
In those fierce depths and battled with their flow,  
And with great labour gained the strand, and bade  
The monster row me to him. But with lust  
And brutal cunning in his eyes, the thing

[156]

Seized me and turned to fly with me, when swift  
An arrow hissed from the unerring bow,  
Pierced him, and loosed his grasp. Then as his eyes  
Grew glazed in death there came in them a gleam  
Of what I know was hate, and he said, 'Take  
This white robe. It is costly. See, my blood  
Has stained it but a little. I did wrong:  
I know it, and repent me. If there come  
A time when he grows cold—for all the race  
Of heroes wander, nor can any love  
Fix theirs for long—take it and wrap him in it,  
And he shall love again.' Then, from the strange  
Deep look within his eyes I shrank in fear,  
And left him half in pity, and I went  
To meet my Lord, who rose from that fierce stream  
Fair as a god.

[157]

Ah me, the weary days  
We women live, spending our anxious souls,  
Consumed with jealous fancies, hungering still  
For the beloved voice and ear and eye,  
And hungering all in vain! For life is more  
To youthful manhood than to sit at home  
Before the hearth to watch the children's ways  
And lead the life of petty household care  
Which doth content us women. Day by day  
I pined in Trachis for my love, while he,  
Now in some warlike exploit busied, now  
Fighting some monster, now at some fair court,  
Resting awhile till some new enterprise  
Called him, returned not. News of treacheries  
Avenged, friends succoured, dreadful monsters slain,  
Came from him: always triumph, always fame,  
And honour, and success, and reverence,  
And sometimes, words of love for me who pined  
For more than words, and would have gone to him  
But that the toils of such high errantry  
Asked more than woman's strength.

[158]

So the slow years  
Vexed me alone in Trachis, set forlorn  
In solitude, nor hearing at the gate  
The frank and cheering voice, nor on the stair  
The heavy tread, nor feeling the strong arm  
Around me in the darkling night, when all  
My being ran slow. Last, subtle whispers came  
Of womanish wiles which kept my Lord from me,  
And one who, young and fair, a fresh-blown life  
And virgin, younger, fairer far than I  
When first he loved me, held him in the toils  
Of scarce dissembled love. Not easily  
Might I believe this evil, but at last  
The oft-repeated malice finding me  
Forlorn, and sitting imp-like at my ear,  
Possessed me, and the fire of jealous love  
Raged through my veins, not turned as yet to hate—  
Too well I loved for that—but breeding in me  
Unfaith in him. Love, setting him so high  
And self so low, betrayed me, and I prayed,  
Constrained to hold him false, the immortal gods  
To make him love again.

[159]

But still he came not.  
And still the maddening rumours worked, and still  
'Fair, young, and a king's daughter,' the same words  
Smote me and pierced me. Oh, there is no pain  
In Hades—nay, nor deepest Hell itself,  
Like that of jealous hearts, the torture-pain  
Which racked my life so long.

[160]

Till one fair morn  
There came a joyful message. 'He has come!  
And at the shrine upon the promontory,  
The fair white shrine upon the purple sea,  
He waits to do his solemn sacrifice  
To the immortal gods; and with him comes  
A young maid beautiful as Dawn.'

Then I,  
Mingling despair with love, rapt in deep joy



That he was come, plunged in the depths of hell  
That she came too, bethought me of the robe  
The Centaur gave me, and the words he spake,  
Forgetting the deep hatred in his eyes,  
And all but love, and sent a messenger  
Bidding him wear it for the sacrifice  
To the immortals, knowing not at all  
Whom Fate decreed the victim.

[161]

Shall my soul  
Forget the agonized message which he sent,  
Bidding me come? For that accursèd robe,  
Stained with the poisonous accursèd blood,  
Even in the midmost flush of sacrifice  
Clung to him a devouring fire, and ate  
The piteous flesh from his dear limbs, and stung  
His great soft soul to madness. When I came,  
Knowing it was my work, he bent on me,  
Wise as a god through suffering and the near  
Inevitable Death, so that no word  
Of mine was needed, such a tender look  
Of mild reproach as smote me. 'Couldst not thou  
Trust me, who never loved as I love thee?  
What need was there of magical arts to draw  
The love that never wavered? I have lived  
As he lives who through perilous paths must pass,  
And lifelong trials, striving to keep down  
The brute within him, born of too much strength  
And sloth and vacuous days; by difficult toils,  
Labours endured, and hard-fought fights with ill,  
Now vanquished, now triumphant; and sometimes,  
In intervals of too long labour, finding  
His nature grown too strong for him, falls prone  
Awhile a helpless prey, then once again  
Rises and spurns his chains, and fares anew  
Along the perilous ways. Dearest, I would  
That thou wert wedded to some knight who stayed  
At home within thy gates, and were content  
To see thee happy. But for me the fierce  
Rude energies of life, the mighty thews,  
The god-sent hate of Wrong, these drove me forth  
To quench the thirst of battle. See, this maid,  
This is the bride I destined for our son  
Who grows to manhood. Do thou see to her  
When I am dead, for soon I know again  
The frenzy comes, and with it ceasing, death.  
Go, therefore, ere I harm thee when my strength  
Has lost its guidance. Thou wert rich in love,  
Be now as rich in faith. Dear, for thy wrong  
I do forgive thee.'

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[163]

When I saw the glare  
Of madness fire his eyes, and my ears heard  
The groans the torture wrung from his great soul,  
I fled with broken heart to the white shrine,  
And knelt in prayer, but still my sad ear took  
The agony of his cries.

Then I who knew  
There was no hope in god or man for me  
Who had destroyed my Love, and with him slain  
The champion of the suffering race of men,  
And knowing that my soul, though innocent  
Of blood, was guilty of unfaith and vile  
Mistrust, and wrapt in weakness like a cloak,  
And made the innocent tool of hate and wrong,  
Against all love and good; grown sick and filled  
With hatred of myself, rose from my knees,  
And went a little space apart, and found  
A gnarled tree on the cliff, and with my scarf  
Strangling myself, swung lifeless.

[164]

But in death  
I found him not. For, building a vast pile  
Of scented woods on Oeta, as they tell,  
My hero with his own hand lighted it,  
And when the mighty pyre flamed far and wide  
Over all lands and seas, he climbed on it  
And laid him down to die; but pitying Zeus,

[165]

Before the swift flames reached him, in a cloud  
Descending, snatched the strong brave soul to heaven,  
And set him mid the stars.

Wherefore am I  
Of all the blameless shades within this place  
The most unhappy, if of blame, indeed,  
I bear no load. For what is Sin itself,  
But Error when we miss the road which leads  
Up to the gate of heaven? Ignorance!  
What if we be the cause of ignorance?  
Being blind who might have seen! Yet do I know  
But self-inflicted pain, nor stain there is  
Upon my soul such as they bear who know  
The dreadful scourge with which the stern judge still  
Lashes their sins. I am forgiven, I know,  
Who loved so much, and one day, if Zeus will,  
I shall go free from hence, and join my Lord,  
And be with him again."

[166]

And straight I seemed,  
Passing, to look upon some scarce-spent life,  
Which knows to-day the irony of Fate  
In self-inflicted pain.

Together clung  
The ghosts whom next I saw, bound three in one  
By some invisible bond. A sire of port  
God-like as Zeus, to whom on either hand  
A tender stripling clung. I knew them well,  
As all men know them. One fair youth spake low:  
"Father, it does not pain me now, to be  
Drawn close to thee, and by a double bond,  
With this my brother." And the other: "Nay,  
Nor me, O father; but I bless the chain  
Which binds our souls in union. If some trace  
Of pain still linger, heed it not—'tis past:  
Still let us cling to thee."

[167]

He with grave eyes  
Full of great tenderness, upon his sons  
Looked with the father's gaze, that is so far  
More sweet, and sad, and tender, than the gaze  
Of mothers,—now on this one, now on that,  
Regarding them. "Dear sons, whom on the earth  
I loved and cherished, it was hard to watch  
Your pain; but now 'tis finished, and we stand  
For ever, through all future days of time,  
Symbols of patient suffering undeserved,  
Endured and vanquished. Yet sad memory still  
Brings back our time of trial.

[168]

For the day  
Broke fair when I, the dread Poseidon's priest,  
Joyous because the unholy strife was done,  
And seeing the blue waters now left free  
Of hostile keels—save where upon the verge  
Far off the white sails faded—rose at dawn,  
And white robed, and in garb of sacrifice,  
And with the sacred fillet round my brows,  
Stood at the altar; and behind, ye twain,  
Decked by your mother's hand with new-cleansed robes,  
And with fresh flower-wreathed chaplets on your curls,  
Attended, and your clear young voices made  
Music that touched your father's eyes with tears,  
If not the careless gods. I seem to hear  
Those high sweet accents mounting in the hymn  
Which rose to all the blessed gods who dwelt  
Upon the far Olympus—Zeus, the Lord,  
And Sovereign Heré, and the immortal choir  
Of Deities, but chiefly to the dread  
Poseidon, him who sways the purple sea  
As with a sceptre, shaking the fixed earth  
With stress of thundering surges. By the shrine  
The meek-eyed victim, for the sacrifice,  
Stood with his gilded horns. The hymns were done,

[169]

And I in act to strike, when all the crowd  
Who knelt behind us, with a common fear  
Cried, with a cry that well might freeze the blood,  
And then, with fearful glances towards the sea,  
Fled, leaving us alone—me, the high priest,  
And ye, the acolytes; forlorn of men,  
Alone, but with our god.

But we stirred not:

We could not flee, who in the solemn act  
Of worship, and the ecstasy which comes  
To the believer's soul, saw heaven revealed,  
The mysteries unveiled, the inner sky  
Which meets the enraptured gaze. How should we fear  
Who thus were god-encircled! So we stood  
While the long ritual spent itself, nor cast  
An eye upon the sea. Till as I came  
To that great act which offers up a life  
Before life's Lord, and the full mystery  
Was trembling to completion, quick I heard  
A stifled cry of agony, and knew  
My children's voices. And the father's heart,  
Which is far more than rite or service done  
By man for god, seeing that it is divine  
And comes from God to men—this rising in me,  
Constrained me, and I ceased my prayer, and turned  
To succour you, and lo! the awful coils  
Which crushed your lives already, bound me round  
And crushed me also, as you clung to me,  
In common death. Some god had heard the prayer,  
And lo! we were ourselves the sacrifice—  
The priest, the victim, the accepted life,  
The blood, the pain, the salutary loss.

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[171]

Was it not better thus to cease and die  
Together in one blest moment, mid the flush  
And ecstasy of worship, and to know  
Ourselves the victims? They were wrong who taught  
That 'twas some jealous goddess who destroyed  
Our lives, revengeful for discovered wiles,  
Or hateful of our land. Not readily  
Should such base passions sway the immortal gods;  
But rather do I hold it sooth indeed  
That Zeus himself it was, who pitying  
The ruin he foreknew, yet might not stay,  
Since mightier Fate decreed it, sent in haste  
Those dreadful messengers, and bade them take  
The pious lives he loved, before the din  
Of midnight slaughter woke, and the fair town  
Flamed pitifully to the skies, and all  
Was blood and ruin. Surely it was best  
To die as we did, and in death to live,  
A vision for all ages of high pain  
Which passes into beauty, and is merged  
In one accordant whole, as discords merge  
In that great Harmony which ceaseless rings  
From the tense chords of life, than to have lived  
Our separate lives, and died our separate deaths,  
And left no greater mark than drops which rain  
Upon the unbounded sea. Those hosts which fell  
Before the Scæan gate upon the sand,  
Nor found a bard to sing their fate, but left  
Their bones to dogs and kites—were they more blest  
Than we who, in the people's sight before  
Ilium's unshattered towers, lay down to die  
Our swift miraculous death? Dear sons, and good,  
Dear children of my love, how doubly dear  
For this our common sorrow; suffering weaves  
Not only chains of darkness round, but binds  
A golden glittering link, which though withdrawn  
Or felt no longer, knits us soul to soul,  
In indissoluble bonds, and draws our lives  
So close, that though the individual life  
Be merged, there springs a common life which grows  
To such dread beauty, as has power to take  
The sting from sorrow, and transform the pain

[172]

[173]

Into transcendent joy: as from the storm  
The unearthly rainbow draws its myriad hues  
And steeps the world in fairness. All our lives  
Are notes that fade and sink, and so are merged  
In the full harmony of Being. Dear sons,  
Cling closer to me. Life nor Death has torn  
Our lives asunder, as for some, but drawn  
Their separate strands together in a knot  
Closer than Life itself, stronger than Death,  
Insoluble as Fate."

[174]

Then they three clung  
Together—the strong father and young sons,  
And in their loving eyes I saw the Pain  
Fade into Joy, Suffering in Beauty lost,  
And Death in Love!

By a still sullen pool,  
Into its dark depths gazing, lay the ghost  
Whom next I passed. In form, a lovely youth,  
Scarce passed from boyhood. Golden curls were his,  
And wide blue eyes. The semblance of a smile  
Came on his lip—a girl's but for the down  
Which hardly shaded it; but the pale cheek  
Was soft as any maiden's, and his robe  
Was virginal, and at his breast he bore  
The perfumed amber cup which, when March comes  
Gems the dry woods and windy wolds, and speaks  
The resurrection.

[175]

Looking up, he said:  
"Methought I saw her then, my love, my fair,  
My beauty, my ideal; the dim clouds  
Lifted, methought, a little—or was it  
Fond Fancy only? For I know that here  
No sunbeam cleaves the twilight, but a mist  
Creeps over all the sky and fields and pools,  
And blots them; and I know I seek in vain  
My earth-sought beauty, nor can Fancy bring  
An answer to my thought from these blind depths  
And unawakened skies. Yet has use made  
The quest so precious, that I keep it here,  
Well knowing it is vain.

[176]

On the old earth  
'Twas otherwise, when in fair Thessaly  
I walked regardless of all nymphs who sought  
My love, but sought in vain, whether it were  
Dryad or Naiad from the woods or streams,  
Or white-robed Oread fleeting on the side  
Of fair Olympus, echoing back my sighs,  
In vain, for through the mountains day by day  
I wandered, and along the foaming brooks,  
And by the pine-woods dry, and never took  
A thought for love, nor ever 'mid the throng  
Of loving nymphs who knew me beautiful  
I dallied, unregarding; till they said  
Some died for love of me, who loved not one.  
And yet I cared not, wandering still alone  
Amid the mountains by the scented pines.

[177]

Till one fair day, when all the hills were still,  
Nor any breeze made murmur through the boughs,  
Nor cloud was on the heavens, I wandered slow,  
Leaving the nymphs who fain with dance and song  
Had kept me 'midst the glades, and strayed away  
Among the pines, enwrapt in fantasy,  
And by the beechen dells which clothe the feet  
Of fair Olympus, wrapt in fantasy,  
Weaving the thin and unembodied shapes  
Which Fancy loves to body forth, and leave  
In marble or in song; and so strayed down  
To a low sheltered vale above the plains,  
Where the lush grass grew thick, and the stream stayed  
Its garrulous tongue; and last upon the bank

Of a still pool I came, where was no flow  
Of water, but the depths were clear as air,  
And nothing but the silvery gleaming side  
Of tiny fishes stirred. There lay I down  
Upon the flowery bank, and scanned the deep,  
Half in a waking dream.

[178]

Then swift there rose,  
From those enchanted depths, a face more fair  
Than ever I had dreamt of, and I knew  
My sweet long-sought ideal: the thick curls,  
Like these, were golden, and the white robe showed  
Like this; but for the wondrous eyes and lips,  
The tender loving glance, the sunny smile  
Upon the rosy mouth, these knew I not,  
Not even in dreams; and yet I seemed to trace  
Myself within them too, as who should find  
His former self expunged, and him transformed  
To some high thin ideal, separate  
From what he was, by some invisible bar,  
And yet the same in difference. As I moved  
My arms to clasp her to me, lo! she moved  
Her eager arms to mine, smiled to my smile,  
Looked love to love, and answered longing eyes  
With longing. When my full heart burst in words,  
'Dearest, I love thee,' lo! the lovely lips,  
'Dearest, I love thee,' sighed, and through the air  
The love-lorn echo rang. But when I longed  
To answer kiss with kiss, and stooped my lips  
To her sweet lips in that long thrill which strains  
Soul unto soul, the cold lymph came between  
And chilled our love, and kept us separate souls  
Which fain would mingle, and the self-same heaven  
Rose, a blue vault above us, and no shade  
Of earthly thing obscured us, as we lay  
Two reflex souls, one and yet different,  
Two sundered souls longing to be at one.

[179]

There, all day long, until the light was gone  
And took my love away, I lay and loved  
The image, and when night was come, 'Farewell,'  
I whispered, and she whispered back, 'Farewell,'  
With oh, such yearning! Many a day we spent  
By that clear pool together all day long.  
And many a clouded hour on the wet grass  
I lay beneath the rain, and saw her not,  
And sickened for her; and sometimes the pool  
Was thick with flood, and hid her; and sometimes  
Some cold wind ruffled those clear wells, and left  
But glimpses of her, and I rose at eve  
Unsatisfied, a cold chill in my limbs  
And fever at my heart: until, too soon!  
The summer faded, and the skies were hid,  
And my love came not, but a quenchless thirst  
Wasted my life. And all the winter long  
The bright sun shone not, or the thick ribbed ice  
Obscured her, and I pined for her, and knew  
My life ebb from me, till I grew too weak  
To seek her, fearing I should see no more  
My dear. And so the long dead winter waned  
And the slow spring came back.

[180]

And one blithe day,  
When life was in the woods, and the birds sang,  
And soft airs fanned the hills, I knew again  
Some gleam of hope within me, and again  
With feeble limbs crawled forth, and felt the spring  
Blossom within me; and the flower-starred glades,  
The bursting trees, the building nests, the songs,  
The hurry of life revived me; and I crept,  
Ghost-like, amid the joy, until I flung  
My panting frame, and weary nerveless limbs,  
Down by the cold still pool.

[181]

And lo! I saw  
My love once more, not beauteous as of old,  
But oh, how changed! the fair young cheek grown pale,  
The great eyes, larger than of yore, gaze forth

With a sad yearning look; and a great pain  
And pity took me which were more than love,  
And with a loud and wailing voice I cried,  
'Dearest, I come again. I pine for thee,'  
And swift she answered back, 'I pine for thee;'  
'Come to me, oh, my own,' I cried, and she—  
'Come to me, oh, my own.' Then with a cry  
Of love I joined myself to her, and plunged  
Beneath the icy surface with a kiss,  
And fainted, and am here.

[182]

And now, indeed,  
I know not if it was myself I sought,  
As some tell, or another. For I hold  
That what we seek is but our other self,  
Other and higher, neither wholly like  
Nor wholly different, the half-life the gods  
Retained when half was given—one the man  
And one the woman; and I longed to round  
The imperfect essence by its complement,  
For only thus the perfect life stands forth  
Whole, self-sufficing. Worse it is to live  
Ill-mated than imperfect, and to move  
From a false centre, not a perfect sphere,  
But with a crooked bias sent oblique  
Athwart life's furrows. 'Twas myself, indeed,  
Thus only that I sought, that lovers use  
To see in that they love, not that which is,  
But that their fancy feigns, and view themselves  
Reflected in their love, yet glorified,  
And finer and more pure.

[183]

Wherefore it is:  
All love which finds its own ideal mate  
Is happy—happy that which gives itself  
Unto itself, and keeps, through long calm years,  
The tranquil image in its eyes, and knows  
Fulfilment and is blest, and day by day  
Wears love like a white flower, nor holds it less  
Though sharp winds bite, or hot suns fade, or age  
Sully its perfect whiteness, but inhales  
Its fragrance, and is glad. But happier still  
He who long seeks a high goal unattained,  
And wearies for it all his days, nor knows  
Possession sate his thirst, but still pursues  
The fleeting loveliness—now seen, now lost,  
But evermore grown fairer, till at last  
He stretches forth his arms and takes the fair  
In one long rapture, and its name is Death."

[184]

Thus he; and seeing me stand grave: "Farewell.  
If ever thou shouldst happen on a wood  
In Thessaly, upon the plain-ward spurs  
Of fair Olympus, take the path which winds  
Through the close vale, and thou shalt see the pool  
Where once I found my life. And if in Spring  
Thou go there, round the margin thou shalt know  
These amber blooms bend meekly, smiling down  
Upon the crystal surface. Pluck them not.  
But kneel a little while, and breathe a prayer  
To the fair god of Love, and let them be.  
For in those tender flowers is hid the life  
That once was mine. All things are bound in one  
In earth and heaven, nor is there any gulf  
'Twixt things that live,—the flower that was a life,  
The life that is a flower,—but one sure chain  
Binds all, as now I know.

[185]

If there are still  
Fair Oreads on the hills, say to them, sir,  
They must no longer pine for me, but find  
Some worthier lover, who can love again;  
For I have found my love."

And to the pool  
He turned, and gazed with lovely eyes, and showed  
Fair as an angel.

[186]

Leaving him enwrapt  
In musings, to a gloomy pass I came  
Between dark rocks, where scarce a gleam of light,  
Not even the niggard light of that dim land,  
Might enter; and the soil was black and bare,  
Nor even the thin growths which scarcely clothed  
The higher fields might live. Hard by a cave  
Which sloped down steeply to the lowest depths,  
Whence dreadful sounds ascended, seated still,  
Her head upon her hands, I saw a maid  
With eyes fixed on the ground—not Tartarus  
It was, but Hades; and she knew no pain,  
Except her painful thought. Yet there it seemed,  
As here, the unequal measure which awaits  
The adjustment, and meanwhile, inspires the strife  
Which rears life's palace walls; and fills the sail  
Which bears our bark across unfathomed seas,  
To its last harbour; this bore sway there too,  
And 'twas a luckless shade which sat and wept  
Amid the gloom, though blameless. Suddenly,  
She raised her head, and lo! the long curls, writhed  
Tangled, and snake-like—as the dripping hair  
Of a dead girl who freed from life and shame,  
From out the cruel wintry flow, is laid  
Stark on the snow with dreadful staring eyes  
Like hers. For when she raised her eyes to mine,  
They chilled my blood, so great a woe they bore;  
And as she gazed, wide-eyed, I knew my pulse  
Beat slow, and my limbs stiffen. Then they wore,  
At length, a softer look, and life revived  
Within my breast as thus she softly spoke:

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"Nay, friend, I would not harm thee. I have known  
Great sorrow, and sometimes it racks me still,  
And turns me into stone, and makes my eyes  
As dreadful as of yore; and yet it comes  
But seldom, as thou sawest, now, for Time  
And Death have healing hands. Only I love  
To sit within the darkness here, nor face  
The throng of happier ghosts; if any ghost  
Of happiness come here. For on the earth  
They wronged me bitterly, and turned to stone  
My heart, till scarce I knew if e'er I was  
The happy girl of yore.

That youth who dreams  
Up yonder by the margin of the lake,  
Knew but a cold ideal love, but me  
Love in unearthly guise, but bodily form,  
Seized and betrayed.

[189]

I was a priestess once,  
Of stern Athené, doing day by day  
Due worship; raising, every dawn that came,  
My cold pure hymns to take her virgin ear;  
Nor sporting with the joyous company  
Of youths and maids, who at the neighbouring shrine  
Of Aphrodité served. Nor dance nor song  
Allured me, nor the pleasant days of youth  
And twilights 'mid the vines. They held me cold  
Who were my friends in childhood. For my soul  
Was virginal, and at the virgin shrine  
I knelt, athirst for knowledge. Day by day  
The long cold ritual sped, the liturgies  
Were done, the barren hymns of praise went up  
Before the goddess, and the ecstasy  
Of faith possessed me wholly, till almost  
I knew not I was woman. Yet I knew  
That I was fair to see, and fit to share  
Some natural honest love, and bear the load  
Of children like the rest; only my soul  
Was lost in higher yearnings.

[190]

Like a god,  
He burst upon those pallid lifeless days,  
Bringing fresh airs and salt, as from the sea,  
And wrecked my life. How should a virgin know  
Deceit, who never at the joyous shrine

Of Cypris knelt, but ever lived apart,  
And so grew guilty? For if I had spent  
My days among the throng, either my fault  
Were blameless, or undone. For innocence  
The tempter spreads his net. For innocence  
The gods keep all their terrors. Innocence  
It is that bears the burden, which for guilt  
Is lightened, and the spoiler goes his way,  
Uncaring, joyous, leaving her alone,  
The victim and unfriended.

[191]

Was it just  
In her, my mistress, who had had my youth,  
To wreak such vengeance on me? I had erred,  
It may be; but on him, whose was the guilt,  
No heaven-sent vengeance lighted, but he sped  
Away to other hearts across the deep,  
Careless and free; but me, the cold stern eyes  
Of the pure goddess withered; and the scorn  
Of maids, despised before, and the great blank  
Of love, whose love was gone—this wrung my heart,  
And froze my blood; set on my brow despair,  
And turned my gaze to stone, and filled my eyes  
With horror, and stiffened the soft curls which once  
Lay smooth and fair into such snake-like rings  
As made my aspect fearful. All who saw,  
Shrank from me and grew cold, and felt the warm,  
Full tide of life freeze in them, seeing in me  
Love's work, who sat wrapt up and lost in shame,  
As in a cloak, consuming my own heart,  
And was in hell already. As they gazed  
Upon me, my despair looked forth so cold  
From out my eyes, that if some spoiler came  
Fresh from his wickedness, and looked on them,  
Their glare would strike him dead; and those fair curls  
Which once the accursèd toyed with, grew to be  
The poisonous things thou seest; and so, with hate  
Of man's injustice and the gods', who knew  
Me blameless, and yet punished me; and sick  
Of life and love, and loathing earth and sky,  
And feeding on my sorrow, Hate at last  
Left me a Fury.

[192]

Ah, the load of life  
Which lives for hatred! We are made to love—  
We women, and the injury which turns  
The honey of our lives to gall, transforms  
The angel to the fiend. For it is sweet  
To know the dreadful sense of strength, and smite  
And leave the tyrant dead with a glance; ay! sweet,  
In that fierce lust of power, to slay the life  
Which harmed not, when the suppliants' cry ascends  
To ears which hate has deafened. So I lived  
Long time in misery; to my sleepless eyes  
No healing slumbers coming; but at length,  
Zeus and the goddess pitying, I knew  
Soft rest once more veiling my dreadful gaze  
In peaceful slumbers. Then a blessed dream  
I dreamt. For, lo! a god-like knight in mail  
Of gold, who sheared with his keen flashing blade;  
With scarce a pang of pain, the visage cold  
Which too great sorrow left me; at one stroke  
Clean from the trunk, and then o'er land and sea,  
Invisible, sped with winged heels, to where,  
Upon a sea-worn cape, a fair young maid,  
More blameless even than I was, chained and bound,  
Waited a monster from the deep and stood  
In innocent nakedness. Then, as he rose,  
Loathsome, from out the depths, a monstrous growth,  
A creature wholly serpent, partly man,  
The wrongs that I had known, stronger than death,  
Rose up with such black hate in me again,  
And wreathed such hissing poison through my hair,  
And shot such deadly glances from my eyes,  
That nought that saw might live. And the vile worm  
Was slain, and she delivered. Then I dreamt  
My mistress, whom I thought so stern to me,

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Athené, set those dreadful staring eyes,  
And that despairing visage, on her shield  
Of chastity, and bears it evermore  
To fright the waverer from the wrong he would,  
And strike the unrepenting spoiler, dead."

[195]

Then for a little paused she, while I saw  
Again her eyes grown dreadful, till once more,  
And with a softer glance:

"From that blest dream

I woke not on the earth, but only here.  
And now my pain is lightened since I know  
My dream, which was a dream within the dream  
Which is our life, fulfilled. And I have saved  
Another through my suffering, and through her  
A people. Oh, strange chain of sacrifice,  
That binds an innocent life, and from its blood  
And sorrow works out joy! Oh, mystery  
Of pain and evil! wrong grown salutary,  
And mighty to redeem! If thou shouldst see  
A woman on the earth, who pays to-day  
Like penalty of sin, and the new gods  
(For after Saturn, Zeus ruled; after him  
It may be there are others) love to take  
The tender heart of girlhood, and to immure  
Within a cold and cloistered cell the life  
Which nature meant to bless, and if Love come  
Hold her accursèd; or to some poor maid,  
Forlorn and trusting, still the tempter comes  
And works his wrong, and leaves her in despair  
And shame and all abhorrence, while he goes  
His way unpunished,—if thou know her eyes  
Freeze thee like mine—oh! bid her lose her pain  
In succouring others—say to her that Time  
And Death have healing hands, and here there comes  
To the forgiven transgressor only pain  
Enough to chasten joy!"

[196]

And a soft tear  
Trembled within her eyes, and her sweet gaze  
Was as the Magdalen's, the horror gone  
And a great radiance come.

[197]

Then as I passed

To upper air, I saw two figures rise  
Together, one a woman with a grave  
Fair face not all unhappy, and the robes  
And presence of a queen; and with her walked  
The fairest youth that ever maiden's dream  
Conceived. And as they came, the throng of ghosts,  
For these who were not wholly ghosts, arose,  
And did them homage. Not the chain of love  
Bound them, but such calm kinship as is bred  
Of long and difficult pilgrimages borne  
Through common perils by two souls which share  
A common weary exile. Nor as ghosts  
These showed, but rather like two lives which hung  
Suspended in a trance. A halo of life  
Played round them, and they brought a sweet brisk air  
Tasting of earth and heaven, like sojourners  
Who stayed but for awhile, and knew a swift  
Release await them. First the youth it was  
Who spake thus as they passed:

[198]

"Dread Queen, once more

I feel life stir within me, and my blood  
Run faster, while a new strange cycle turns  
And grows completed. Soon on the dear earth  
Under the lively light of fuller day,  
I shall revive me of my wound; and thou,  
Passing with me yon cold and lifeless stream,  
And the grim monster who will fawn on thee,  
Shalt issue in royal pomp, and wreathed with flowers,  
Upon the cheerful earth, leaving behind

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A deeper winter for the ghosts who dwell  
Within these sunless haunts; and I shall lie  
Once more within loved arms, and thou shalt see  
Thy early home, and kiss thy mother's cheek,  
And be a girl again. But not for long;  
For ere the bounteous Autumn spreads her hues  
Of gold and purple, a cold voice will call  
And bring us to these wintry lands once more,  
As erst so often. Blest are we, indeed,  
Above the rest, and yet I would I knew  
The careless joys of old.

For in hot youth,  
Oh, it was sweet to greet the balmy night  
That was love's nurse, and feel the weary eyes  
Closed by soft kisses,—sweet at early dawn  
To wake refreshed and, scarce from loving arms  
Leaping, to issue forth, with winding horn,  
By dewy heath and brake, and taste the fair  
Young breath of early morning; and 'twas sweet  
To chase the bounding quarry all day long  
With my true hounds and rapid steed, and gay  
Companions of my youth, and with the eve  
To turn home laden with the spoil, and take  
The banquet which awaited, and sweet wine  
Poured out, and kisses pressed on loving lips;  
Circled by snowy arms. Oh, it was sweet  
To be alive and young!

For sure it is  
The gods gave not quick pulses and hot blood  
And strength and beauty for no end, but would  
That we should use them wisely; and the fair,  
Sweet mistress of my service was, indeed,  
Worthy of all observance. Oh, her eyes  
When I lay bleeding! All day long we rode,  
I and my youthful peers, with horse and hound,  
And knew the joy of swift pursuit and toil  
And peril. At the last, a fierce boar turned  
At bay, and with his gleaming tusks o'erthrew  
My steed, and as I fell upon the flowers,  
Pierced me as with a sword. Then, as I lay,  
I knew the strange slow chill which, stealing, tells  
The young that it is death. Yet knew I not  
Of pain or fear, only great pity, indeed,  
That she should lose her love, who was so fond  
And gracious. But when, lifting my dim gaze,  
I saw her bend o'er me,—the lovely eyes  
Suffused with tears, and her sweet smile replaced  
By agonized sorrow,—for a while I stayed  
Life's ebbing tide, and raised my cold, white lips,  
With a faint smile, to hers. Then, with a kiss—  
One long last kiss, we mingled, and I knew  
No more.

But even in death, so strong is Love,  
I could not wholly die; and year by year,  
When the bright springtime comes, and the earth lives,  
Love opens these dread gates, and calls me forth  
Across the gulf. Not here, indeed, she comes,  
Being a goddess and in heaven, but smooths  
My path to the old earth, where still I know  
Once more the sweet lost days, and once again  
Blossom on that soft breast, and am again  
A youth, and rapt in love; and yet not all  
As careless as of yore; but seem to know  
The early spring of passion, tamed by time  
And suffering, to a calmer, fuller flow,  
Less fitful, but more strong."

Then the sad Queen  
"Fair youth, thy lot I know, for I am old  
As the old earth and yet as young as is  
The budding spring, and I was here a Queen,  
When Love was not or Time, and to my arms  
Thou camest as a little child, to dwell  
Within the halls of Death, for without Death  
There were nor Birth nor Love, nor would Life yearn  
To lose itself within another life,

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And dying, to be born. I, too, have died  
For love in part, and live again through love;  
For in the far-off years, when Time was young,  
And Love unborn on earth, and Zeus in heaven  
Ruled, a young sovereign; I, a maiden, dwelt  
With dread Demeter on the lovely plains  
Of sunny Sicily. There, day by day,  
I sported with the maiden goddesses,  
In virgin freedom. Budding age made gay  
Our lightsome feet, and on the flowery slopes  
We wandered daily, gathering flowers to weave  
In careless garlands for our locks, and passed  
The days in innocent gladness. Thought of Love  
There came not to us, for as yet the earth  
Was virginal, nor yet had Eros come  
With his delicious pain.

[204]

And one fair morn—  
Not all the ages blot it—on the side  
Of Ætna we were straying. There was then  
Summer nor winter, springtide nor the time  
Of harvest, but the soft unfailing sun  
Shone always, and the sowing time was one  
With reaping; fruit and flower together sprung  
Upon the trees; and blade and ripened ear  
Together clothed the plains. There, as I strayed,  
Sudden a black cloud down the rugged side  
Of Ætna, mixed with fire and dreadful sound  
Of thunder, rolled around me, and I heard  
The maids who were my fellows turn and flee  
With shrieks and cries for me.

But I, I knew  
No terror while the god o'ershadowed me,  
Hiding my life in his, nor when I wept  
My flowers all withered, and my blood ran slow  
Within a wintry land. Some voice there was  
Which said, 'Fear not. Thou shalt return and see  
Thy mother again, only a little while  
Fate wills that thou shouldst tarry, and become  
Queen of another world. Thou seest that all  
Thy flowers are faded. They shall live again  
On earth, as thou shalt, as thou livest now  
The Life of Death—for what is Death but Life  
Suspended as in sleep? The changeless rule  
Where life was constant, and the sun o'erhead,  
Blazed forth for ever, changes and is hidden  
Awhile. This region which thou seest, where all  
The trees are lifeless, and the flowers are dead,  
Is but the self-same earth on which erewhile  
Thou sportedst fancy free.'

[205]

So, without fear  
I wandered on this bare land, seeing far  
Upon the sky the peaks of my own hills  
And crests of my own woods. Till, when I grew  
Hungered, ere yet another form I saw;  
Along the silent alleys journeying,  
And leafless groves; a fair and mystic tree  
Rose like a heart in shape, and 'mid its leaves  
One golden mystic fruit with a fair seed  
Hid in it. This, with childish hand, I took  
And ate, and straight I knew the tree was Life,  
And the fruit Death, and the hid seed was Love.

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Ah, sweet strange fruit! the which if any taste  
They may no longer keep their lives of old  
Or their own selves unchanged, but some weird change  
And subtle alchemy comes which can transmute  
The blood, and mould the spirits of gods and men  
In some new magical form. Not as before,  
Our life comes to us, though the passion cools,  
No, never as before. My mother came  
Too late to seek me. She had power to raise  
A life from out Death's grasp, but from the arms  
Of Love she might not take me, nor undo  
Love's past for all her strength. She came and sought  
With fires her daughter over land and sea,

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Beyond the paths of all the setting stars,  
In vain, and over all the earth in vain,  
Seeking whom love disguised. Then on all lands  
She cast the spell of barrenness; the wheat  
Was blighted in the ear, the purple grapes  
Blushed no more on the vines, and all the gods  
Were sorrowful, seeing the load of ill  
My rape had laid on men. Last, Zeus himself,  
Pitying the evil that was done, sent forth  
His messenger beyond the western rim  
To fetch me back to earth.

But not the same  
He found me who had eaten of Love's seed,  
But changed into another; nor could his power  
Prevail to keep me wholly on the earth,  
Or make me maid again. The wintry life  
Is homelier often than the summer blaze  
Of happiness unclouded; so, when Spring  
Comes on the world, I, coming, cross with thee,  
Year after year, the cruel icy stream;  
And leave this anxious sceptre and the shades  
Of those in hell, or those for whom, though blest,  
No Spring comes, till the last great Spring which brings  
New heavens and new earth; and lay my head  
Upon my mother's bosom, and grow young,  
And am a girl again.

A soft air breathes  
Across the stream and fills these barren fields  
With the sweet odours of the earth. I know  
Again the perfume of the violets  
Which bloom on Ætna's side. Soon we shall pass  
Together to our home, while round our feet  
The crocus flames like gold, the wind-flowers white  
Wave their soft petals on the breeze, and all  
The choir of flowers lift up their silent song  
To the unclouded heavens. Thou, fair boy,  
Shalt lie within thy love's white arms again,  
And I within my mother's. Sweet is Love  
In ceasing and renewal; nay, in these  
It lives and has its being. Thou couldst not keep  
Thy youth as now, if always on the breast  
Of love too late a lingerer thou hadst known  
Possession sate thee. Nor might I have kept  
My mother's heart, if I had lived to ripe  
And wither on the stalk. Time calls and Change  
Commands both men and gods, and speeds us on  
We know not whither; but the old earth smiles  
Spring after Spring, and the seed bursts again  
Out of its prison mould, and the dead lives  
Renew themselves, and rise aloft and soar  
And are transformed, clothing themselves with change  
Till the last change be done."

As thus she spake,  
I saw a gleam of light flash from the eyes  
Of all the listening shades, and a great joy  
Thrill through the realms of Death.

And then again  
A youthful shade I saw, a comely boy,  
With lip and cheek just touched with manly down,  
And strong limbs wearing Spring; in mien and garb  
A youthful chieftain, with a perfect face  
Of fresh young beauty, clustered curls divine,  
And chiselled features like a sculptured god,  
But warm and breathing life; only the eyes,  
The fair large eyes, were full of dreaming thought,  
And seemed to gaze beyond the world of sight,  
On a hid world of beauty. Him I stayed,  
Accosting with soft words of courtesy;  
And, on a bank of scentless flowers reclined,  
He answered thus:

"Not for the garish sun

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I long, nor for the splendours of high noon  
In this dim land I languish; for of yore  
Full often, when the swift chase swept along  
Through the brisk morn, or when my comrades called  
To wrestling, or the foot-race, or to cleave  
The sunny stream, I loved to walk apart,  
Self-centred, sole; and when the laughing girls  
To some fair stripling's oaten melody  
Made ready for the dance, I heeded not;  
Nor when to the loud trumpet's blast and blare  
My peers rode forth to battle. For, one eve,  
In Latmos, after a long day in June,  
I stayed to rest me on a sylvan hill,  
Where often youth and maid were wont to meet  
Towards moonrise; and deep slumber fell on me  
Musing on Love, just as the ruddy orb  
Rose on the lucid night, set in a frame  
Of blooming myrtle and sharp tremulous plane;  
Deep slumber fell, and loosed my limbs in rest.

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Then, as the full orb poised upon the peak,  
There came a lovely vision of a maid,  
Who seemed to step as from a golden car  
Out of the low-hung moon. No mortal form,  
Such as oft-times of yore I knew and clasped  
At twilight 'mid the vines at the mad feast  
Of Dionysus, or the fair maids cold  
Who streamed in white processions to the shrine  
Of the chaste Virgin Goddess; but a shape  
Richer and yet more pure. No thinnest veil  
Obscured her; but each exquisite limb revealed,  
Gleamed like a golden statue subtly wrought  
By a great sculptor on the architrave  
Of some high temple-front—only in her  
The form was soft and warm, and charged with life,  
And breathing. As I seemed to gaze on her,  
Nearer she drew and gazed; and as I lay  
Supine, as in a spell, the radiance stooped  
And kissed me on the lips, a chaste, sweet kiss,  
Which drew my spirit with it. So I slept  
Each night upon the hill, until the dawn  
Came in her silver chariot from the East,  
And chased my Love away. But ever thus  
Dissolved in love as in a heaven-sent dream,  
Whenever the bright circle of the moon  
Climbed from the hills, whether in leafy June  
Or harvest-tide, or when they leapt and pressed  
Red-thighed the spouting must, I walked apart  
From all, and took no thought for mortal maid,  
Nor nimble joys of youth; but night by night  
I stole, when all were sleeping, to the hill,  
And slumbered and was blest; until I grew  
Possessed by love so deep, I seemed to live  
In slumber only, while the waking day  
Showed faint as any vision.

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So I turned  
Paler and paler with the months, and climbed  
The steep with laboured steps and difficult breath,  
But still I climbed. Ay, though the wintry frost  
Chained fast the streams and whitened all the fields,  
I sought my mistress through the leafless groves,  
And slumbered and was happy, till the dawn  
Returning found me stretched out, cold and stark,  
With life's fire nigh burnt out. Till one clear night,  
When the birds shivered in the pines, and all  
The inner heavens stood open, lo! she came,  
Brighter and kinder still, and kissed my eyes  
And half-closed lips, and drew my soul through them,  
And in one precious ecstasy dissolved  
My life. And thenceforth, ever on the hill  
I lie unseen of man; a cold, white form,  
Still young, through all the ages; but my soul,  
Clothed in this thin presentment of old days,  
Walks this dim land, where never moonrise comes,  
Nor day-break, but a twilight waiting-time,

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No more; and, ah! how weary! Yet I judge  
My lot a higher far than his who spends  
His youth on swift hot pleasure, quickly past;  
Or theirs, my equals', who through long calm years  
Grew sleek in dull content of wedded lives  
And fair-grown offspring. Many a day for them,  
While I was wandering here, and my bones bleached  
Upon the rocks, the sweet autumnal sun  
Beamed, and the grapes grew purple. Many a day  
They heaped up gold, they knelt at festivals,  
They waxed in high report and fame of men,  
They gave their girls in marriage; while for me  
Upon the untrodden peaks, the cold, grey morn,  
The snows, the rains, the winds, the untempered blaze,  
Beat year by year, until I turned to stone,  
And the great eagles shrieked at me, and wheeled  
Affrighted. Yet I judge it better indeed  
To seek in life, as now I know I sought,  
Some fair impossible Love, which slays our life,  
Some fair ideal raised too high for man;  
And failing to grow mad, and cease to be,  
Than to decline, as they do who have found  
Broad-paunched content and weal and happiness:  
And so an end. For one day, as I know,  
The high aim unfulfilled fulfils itself;  
The deep, unsatisfied thirst is satisfied;  
And through this twilight, broken suddenly,  
The inmost heaven, the lucent stars of God,  
The Moon of Love, the Sun of Life; and I,  
I who pine here—I on the Latmian hill  
Shall soar aloft and find them."

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With the word,  
There beamed a shaft of dawn athwart the skies,  
And straight the sentinel thrush within the yew  
Sang out reveillé to the hosts of day,  
Soldierly; and the pomp and rush of life  
Began once more, and left me there alone  
Amid the awaking world.

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Nay, not alone.  
One fair shade lingered in the fuller day,  
The last to come, when now my dream had grown  
Half mixed with waking thoughts, as grows a dream  
In summer mornings when the broader light  
Dazzles the sleeper's eyes; and is most fair  
Of all and best remembered, and becomes  
Part of our waking life, when older dreams  
Grow fainter, and are fled. So this remained  
The fairest of the visions that I knew,  
Most precious and most dear.

The increasing light  
Shone through her, finer than the thinnest shade,  
And yet most full of beauty; golden wings,  
From her fair shoulders springing, seemed to lift  
Her stainless feet from the cold ground and snatch  
Their wearer into air; and in her eyes  
Was such fair glance as comes from virgin love,  
Long chastened and triumphant. Every trace  
Of earth had vanished from her, and she showed  
As one who walks a saint already in life,  
Virgin or mother. Immortality  
Breathed from those radiant eyes which yet had passed  
Between the gates of death. I seemed to hear  
The Soul of mortals speaking:

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"I was born  
Of a great race and mighty, and was grown  
Fair, as they said, and good, and kept a life  
Pure from all stain of passion. Love I knew not,  
Who was absorbed in duty; and the Mother  
Of gods and men, seeing my life more calm  
Than human, hating my impassive heart,  
Sent down her perfect son in wrath to earth,

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And bade him break me.

But when Eros came,  
It did repent him of the task, for Love  
Is kin to Duty.

And within my life  
I knew miraculous change, and a soft flame  
Wherefrom the snows of Duty flushed to rose,  
And the chill icy flow of mind was turned  
To a warm stream of passion. Long I lived  
Not knowing what had been, nor recognized  
A Presence walking with me through my life,  
As if by night, his face and form concealed:  
A gracious voice alone, which none but I  
Might hear, sustained me, and its name was Love.

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Not as the earthly loves which throb and flush  
Round earthly shrines was mine, but a pure spirit,  
Lovelier than all embodied love, more pure  
And wonderful; but never on his eyes  
I looked, which still were hidden, and I knew not  
The fashion of his nature; for by night,  
When visual eyes are blind, but the soul sees,  
Came he, and bade me seek not to enquire  
Or whence he came or wherefore. Nor knew I  
His name. And always ere the coming day,  
As if he were the Sun-god, lingering  
With some too well-loved maiden, he would rise  
And vanish until eve. But all my being  
Thrilled with my fair unearthly visitant  
To higher duty and more glorious meed  
Of action than of old, for it was Love  
That came to me, who might not know his name.

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Thus, ever rapt by dreams divine, I knew  
The scorn that comes from weaker souls, which miss,  
Being too low of nature, the great joy  
Revealed to others higher; nay, my sisters,  
Who being of one blood with me, made choice  
To tread the lower ways of daily life,  
Grew jealous of me, bidding me take heed  
Lest haply 'twas some monstrous fiend I loved,  
Such as in fable oft-times sought and won  
The innocent hearts of maids. Long time I held  
My love too dear for doubt, who was so sweet  
And lovable. But at the last the sneers,  
The mystery which hid him, the swift flight  
Before the coming dawn, the shape concealed,  
The curious girlish heart, these worked on me  
With an unsatisfied thirst. Not his own words:  
'Dear, I am with thee only while I keep  
My visage hidden; and if thou once shouldst see  
My face, I must forsake thee: the high gods  
Link Love with Faith, and he withdraws himself  
From the full gaze of Knowledge'—not even these  
Could cure me of my longing, or the fear  
Those mocking voices worked; who fain would learn  
The worst that might befall.

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And one sad night,  
Just as the day leapt from the hills and brought  
The hour when he should go: with tremulous hands,  
Lighting my midnight lamp in fear, I stood  
Long time uncertain, and at length turned round  
And gazed upon my love. He lay asleep,  
And oh, how fair he was! The flickering light  
Fell on the fairest of the gods, stretched out  
In happy slumber. Looking on his locks  
Of gold, and faultless face and smile, and limbs  
Made perfect, a great joy and trembling took me  
Who was most blest of women, and in awe  
And fear I stooped to kiss him. One warm drop—  
From the full lamp within my trembling hand,  
Or a glad tear from my too happy eyes,  
Fell on his shoulder.

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Then the god unclosed  
His lovely eyes, and with great pity spake:

'Farewell! There is no Love except with Faith,  
And thine is dead! Farewell! I come no more.'  
And straightway from the hills the full red sun  
Leapt up, and as I clasped my love again,  
The lovely vision faded from his place,  
And came no more.

Then I, with breaking heart,  
Knowing my life laid waste by my own hand,  
Went forth and would have sought to hide my life  
Within the stream of Death; but Death came not  
To aid me who not yet was meet for Death.

[225]

Then finding that Love came not back to me,  
I thought that in the temples of the gods  
Haply he dwelt, and so from fane to fane  
I wandered over earth, and knelt in each,  
Enquiring for my Love; and I would ask  
The priests and worshippers, 'Is this Love's shrine?  
Sirs, have you seen the god?' But never at all  
I found him. For some answered, 'This is called  
The Shrine of Knowledge;' and another, 'This,  
The Shrine of Beauty;' and another, 'Strength;'  
And yet another, 'Youth.' And I would kneel  
And say a prayer to my Love, and rise  
And seek another. Long, o'er land and sea,  
I wandered, till I was not young or fair,  
Grown wretched, seeking my lost Love; and last,  
Came to the smiling, hateful shrine where ruled  
The queen of earthly love and all delight,  
Cypris, but knelt not there, but asked of one  
Who seemed her priest, if Eros dwelt with her.

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Then to the subtle-smiling goddess' self  
They led me. She with hatred in her eyes:  
'What! thou to seek for Love, who art grown thin  
And pale with watching! He is not for thee.  
What Love is left for such? Thou didst despise  
Love, and didst dwell apart. Love sits within  
The young maid's eyes, making them beautiful.  
Love is for youth, and joy, and happiness;  
And not for withered lives. Ho! bind her fast.  
Take her and set her to the vilest tasks,  
And bend her pride by solitude and tears,  
Who will not kneel to me, but dares to seek  
A disembodied love. My son has gone  
And left thee for thy fault, and thou shalt know  
The misery of my thralls.'

Then in her house  
They bound me to hard tasks and vile, and kept  
My life from honour, chained among her slaves  
And lowest ministers, taking despite  
And injury for food, and set to bind  
Their wounds whom she had tortured, and to feed  
The pitiful lives which in her prisons pent  
Languished in hopeless pain. There is no sight  
Of suffering but I saw it, and was set  
To succour it; and all my woman's heart  
Was torn with the ineffable miseries  
Which love and life have worked; and dwelt long time  
In groanings and in tears.

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And then, oh joy!  
Oh miracle! once more at length again  
I felt Love's arms around me, and the kiss  
Of Love upon my lips, and in the chill  
Of deepest prison cells, 'mid vilest tasks,  
The glow of his sweet breath, and the warm touch  
Of his invisible hand, and his sweet voice,  
Ay, sweeter than of old, and tenderer,  
Speak to me, pierce me, hold me, fold me round  
With arms Divine, till all the sordid earth  
Was hued like heaven, and Life's dull prison-house  
Turned to a golden palace, and those low tasks  
Grew to be higher works and nobler gains  
Than any gains of knowledge, and at last  
He whispered softly, 'Dear, unclose thine eyes.'

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Thou mayst look on me now. I go no more,  
But am thine own for ever.'

Then with wings  
Of gold we soared, I looking in his eyes,  
Over yon dark broad river, and this dim land,  
Scarce for an instant staying till we reached  
The inmost courts of heaven.

But sometimes still  
I come here for a little, and speak a word  
Of peace to those who wait. The slow wheel turns,  
The cycles round themselves and grow complete,  
The world's year whitens to the harvest-tide,  
And one word only am I sent to say  
To those dear souls, who wait here, or who now  
Breathe earthly air—one universal word  
To all things living, and the word is 'Love.'"

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Then soared she visibly before my gaze,  
And the heavens took her, and I knew my eyes  
Had seen the soul of man, the deathless soul,  
Defeated, struggling, purified, and blest.

Then all the choir of happy waiting shades,  
Heroes and queens, fair maidens and brave youths,  
Swept by me, rhythmic, slow, as if they trod  
Some unheard measure, passing where I stood  
In fair procession, each with a faint smile  
Upon the lip, signing "Farewell, oh shade!  
It shall be well with thee, as 'tis with us,  
If only thou art true. The world of Life,  
The world of Death, are but opposing sides  
Of one great orb, and the Light shines on both.  
Oh, happy happy shade! Farewell! Farewell!"  
And so they passed away.

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END OF BOOK II.

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## BOOK III.

## OLYMPUS.

But I, my gaze  
Following the soaring soul which now was lost  
In the awakening skies, floated with her,  
As in a trance, beyond the golden gates  
Which separate Earth from Heaven; and to my thought  
Gladdened by that broad effluence of light,  
This old earth seemed transfigured, and the fields,  
So dim and bare, grew green and clothed themselves  
With lustrous hues. A fine ethereal air  
Played round me as I mused, and filled the soul  
With an ineffable content. What need  
Of words to tell of things unreached by words?  
Or seek to engrave upon the treacherous thought  
The fair and fugitive fancies of a dream,  
Which vanish ere we fix them?

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But methinks

He knows the scene, who knows the one fair day,  
One only and no more, which year by year  
In springtime comes, when lingering winter flies,  
And lo! the trees blossom in white and pink.  
And golden clusters, and the glades are filled  
With delicate primrose and deep odorous beds  
Of violets, and on the tufted meads  
With kingcups starred, and cowslip bells, and blue  
Sweet hyacinths, and frail anemones,  
The broad West wind breathes softly, and the air  
Is tremulous with the lark, and thro' the woods  
The soft full-throated thrushes all day long  
Flood the green dells with joy, and thro' the dry  
Brown fields the sower strides, sowing his seed,  
And all is life and song. Or he who first,  
Whether in fair free boyhood, when the world  
Is his to choose, or when his fuller life  
Beats to another life, or afterwards,  
Keeping his youth within his children's eyes,  
Looks on the snow-clad everlasting hills,  
And marks the sunset smite them, and is glad  
Of the beautiful fair world.

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A springtide land

It seemed, where East winds came not. Sweetest song  
Was everywhere, by glade or sunny plain;  
And thro' the golden valleys winding streams  
Rippled in glancing silver, and above,  
The blue hills rose, and over all a peak,  
White, awful, with a constant fleece of cloud  
Veiling its summit, towered. Unfailing Day  
Lighted it, for no turn of dawn and eve  
Came there, nor changing seasons, but a broad  
Fixed joy of Being, undisturbed by Time.

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There, in a happy glade shut in by groves  
Of laurel and sweet myrtle, on a green  
And flower-lit lawn, I seemed to see the ghosts  
Of the old gods. Upon the gentle slope  
Of a fair hill, a joyous company,  
The Immortals lay. Hard by, a murmurous stream  
Fell through the flowers; below them, space on space,  
Laughed the immeasurable plains; beyond,  
The mystic mountain soared. Height after height  
Of bare rock ledges left the climbing pines,  
And reared their giddy, shining terraces  
Into the ethereal air. Above, the snows  
Of the white summit cleft the fleece of cloud  
Which always clothed it round.

Ah, fail-and sweet,

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Yet with a ghostly fairness, fine and thin,  
Those godlike Presences. Not dreams indeed,  
But something dream-like, were they. Blessed Shades  
Heroic and Divine, as when, in days  
When Man was young, and Time, the vivid thought  
Translated into Form the unattained  
Impossible Beauty of men's dreams, and fixed  
The Loveliness in marble.

As with awe

Following my spotless guide, I stood apart,  
Not daring to draw near; a shining form  
Rose from the throng, and floated, light as air,  
To where I trembled. And I knew the face  
And form of Artemis, the fair, the pure,  
The undefiled. A crescent silvery moon  
Shone thro' her locks, and by her side she bore  
A quiver of golden darts. At sight of whom  
I felt a sudden chill, like his who once  
Looked upon her and died; yet could not fear,  
Seeing how fair she was. Her sweet voice rang  
Clear as a bird's:

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"Mortal, what fate hath brought  
Thee hither, uncleansed by death? How canst thou breathe  
Immortal air, being mortal? Yet fear not,  
Since thou art come. For we too are of earth  
Whom here thou seest: there were not a heaven

Were there no earth, nor gods, had men not been,  
But each the complement of each and grown  
The other's creature, is and has its being,  
A double essence, Human and Divine.  
So that the God is hidden in the man,  
And something Human bounds and forms the God;  
Which else had shown too great and undefined  
For mortal sight, and having no human eye  
To see it, were unknown. But we who bore  
Sway of old time, we were but attributes

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[3]Of the great God who is all Things that be—  
The Pillar of the Earth and starry Sky,  
The Depth of the great Deep; the Sun, the Moon,  
The Word which Makes; the All-compelling Love—  
For all Things lie within His Infinite Form."

Even as she spake, a throng of heavenly forms  
Floated around me, filling all my soul  
With fair unearthly beauty, and the air  
With such ambrosial perfume as is born.  
When morning bursts upon a tropic sea,  
From boundless wastes of flowers; and as I knelt  
In rapture, lo! the same clear voice again  
From out the throng of gods:

"Those whom thou seest

Were even as I, embodiments of Him  
Who is the Centre of all Life: myself  
The Maiden-Queen of Purity; and Strength,  
Divine when unabused; Love too, the Spring  
And Cause of Things; and Knowledge, which lays bare  
Their secret; and calm Duty, Queen of all,  
And Motherhood in one; and Youth, which bears,  
Beauty of Form and Life and Light, and breathes  
The breath of Inspiration; and the Soul,  
The particle of God, sent down to man,  
Which doth in turn reveal the world and God.

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Wherefore it is men called on Artemis,  
The refuge of young souls; for still in age  
They keep some dim reflection uneffaced  
Of a Diviner Purity than comes  
To the spring days of youth, when all the world  
Smiles, and the rapid blood thro' the young veins  
Courses, and all is glad; yet knowing too  
That innocence is young—before the soil  
And smirch of sadder knowledge, settling on it,  
Sully its primal whiteness. So they knelt  
At my white shrines, the eager vigorous youths,  
To whom life's road showed like a dewy field  
In early summer dawns, when to the sound  
Of youth's clear voice, and to the cheerful rush  
Of the tumultuous feet and clamorous tongues  
Careering onwards, fair and dappled fawns,  
Strange birds with jewelled plumes, fierce spotted pards,  
Rise in the joyous chase, to be caught and bound  
By the young conqueror; nor yet the charm  
Of sensual ease allures. And they knelt too,  
The pure sweet maidens fair and fancy-free,  
Whose innocent virgin hearts shrank from the touch  
Of passion as from wrong—sweet moonlit lives  
Which fade, and pale, and vanish, in the glare  
Of Love's hot noontide: these came robed in white,  
With holy hymns and soaring liturgies:  
And so men fabled me, a huntress now,  
Borne thro' the flying woodlands, fair and free;  
And now the pale cold Moon, Light without warmth,  
Zeal without touch of passion, heavenly love  
For human, and the altar for the home.

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But oh, how sweet it was to take the love  
And awe of my young worshippers; to watch  
The pure young gaze and hear the pure young voice  
Mount in the hymn, or see the gay troop come  
With the first dawn of day, brushing the dew  
From the unpolluted fields, and wake to song

The slumbering birds; strong in their innocence!  
I did not envy any goddess of all  
The Olympian company her votaries!  
Ah, happy days of old which now are gone!  
A memory and a dream! for now on earth  
I rule no longer o'er young willing hearts  
In voluntary fealty, which should cease  
When Love, with fiery accents calling, woke  
The slumbering soul; as now it should for those  
Who kneel before the purer, sadder shrine  
Which has replaced my own. But ah! too oft,  
Not always, but too often, shut from life  
Within pale life-long cloisters and the bars  
Of deadly convent prisons, year by year,  
Age after age, the white souls fade and pine  
Which simulate the joyous service free  
Of those young worshippers. I would that I  
Might loose the captives' chain; or Herakles,  
Who was a mortal once."

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But he who stood  
Colossal at my side:  
"I toil no more  
On earth, nor wield again the mighty strength  
Which Zeus once gave me for the cure of ill.  
I have run my race; I have done my work; I rest  
For ever from the toilsome days I gave  
To the suffering race of men. And yet, indeed,  
Methinks they suffer still. Tyrannous growths  
And monstrous vex them still. Pestilence lurks  
And sweeps them down. Treacheries come, and wars,  
And slay them still. Vaulting ambition leaps  
And falls in bloodshed still. But I am here  
At rest, and no man kneels to me, or keeps  
Reverence for strength mighty yet unabused—  
Strength which is Power, God's choicest gift, more rare  
And precious than all Beauty, or the charm  
Of Wisdom, since it is the instrument  
Thro' which all Nature works. For now the earth  
Is full of meekness, and a new God rules,  
Teaching strange precepts of humility  
And mercy and forgiveness. Yet I trow  
There is no lack of bloodshed and deceit  
And groanings, and the tyrant works his wrong  
Even as of old; but now there is no arm  
Like mine, made strong by Zeus, to beat him down,  
Him and his wrong together. Yet I know  
I am not all discrowned. The strong brave souls,  
The manly tender hearts, whom tale of wrong  
To woman or child, to all weak things and small,  
Fires like a blow; calling the righteous flush  
Of anger to the brow; knotting the cords  
Of muscle on the arm; with one desire  
To hew the spoiler down, and make an end,  
And go their way for others; making light  
Of toil and pain, and too laborious days,  
And peril; beat unchanged, albeit they serve  
A Lord of meekness. For the world still needs  
Its champion as of old, and finds him still.  
Not always now with mighty sinews and thews  
Like mine, though still these profit, but keen brain  
And voice to move men's souls to love the right  
And hate the wrong; even tho' the bodily form  
Be weak, of giant strength, strong to assail  
The hydra heads of Evil, and to slay  
The monsters that now waste them: Ignorance,  
Self-seeking, coward fears, the hate of Man,  
Disguised as love of God. These there are still  
With task as hard as mine. For what was it  
To strive with bodily ills, and do great deeds  
Of daring and of strength, and bear the crown,  
To his who wages lifelong, doubtful strife

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With an impalpable foe; conquering indeed,  
But, ere he hears the pæan or sees the pomp  
Laid low in the arms of Death? And tho' men cease  
To worship at my shrine, yet not the less  
I hold, it is the toils I knew, the pains  
I bore for others, which have kept the heart  
Of manhood undefiled, and nerved the arm  
Of sacrifice, and made the martyr strong  
To do and bear, and taught the race of men  
How godlike 'tis to suffer thro' life, and die  
At last for others' good!"

The strong god ceased,  
And stood a little, musing; blest indeed,  
But bearing, as it seemed, some faintest trace  
Of earthly struggle still, not the gay ease  
Of the elder heaven-born gods.

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And then there came  
Beauty and Joy in one, bearing the form  
Of woman. How to reach with halting words  
That infinite Perfection? All have known  
The breathing marbles which the Greek has left  
Who saw her near, and strove to fix her charms,  
And exquisitely failed; or those fair forms  
The Painter offered at a later shrine,  
And failed. Nay, what are words?—he knows it well  
Who loves, or who has loved.

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She with a smile  
Playing around her rosy lips; as plays  
The sunbeam on a stream:  
"Shall I complain  
Men kneel to me no longer, taking to them  
Some graver, sterner worship; grown too wise  
For fleeting joys of Love? Nay, Love is Youth,  
And still the world is young. Still shall I reign  
Within the hearts of men, while Time shall last  
And Life renews itself. All Life that is,  
From the weak things of earth or sea or air,  
Which creep or float for an hour; to godlike man—  
All know me and are mine. I am the source  
And mother of all, both gods and men; the spring  
Of Force and Joy, which, penetrating all  
Within the hidden depths of the Unknown,  
Sets the blind seed of Being, and from the bond  
Of incomplete and dual Essences  
Evolves the harmony which is Life. The world  
Were dead without my rays, who am the Light  
Which vivifies the world. Nay, but for me,  
The universal order which attracts  
Sphere unto sphere, and keeps them in their paths  
For ever, were no more. All things are bound  
Within my golden chain, whose name is Love.

[250]

And if there be, indeed, some sterner souls  
Or sunk in too much learning, or hedged round  
By care and greed, or haply too much rapt  
By pale ascetic fervours, to delight  
To kneel to me, the universal voice  
Scorns them as those who, missing willingly  
The good that Nature offers, dwell unblest  
Who might be blest, but would not. Every voice  
Of bard in every age has hymned me. All  
The breathing marbles, all the heavenly hues  
Of painting, praise me. Even the loveless shades  
Of dim monastic cloisters show some gleam,  
Tho' faint, of me. Amid the busy throngs  
Of cities reign I, and o'er lonely plains,  
Beyond the ice-fields of the frozen North,  
And the warm waves of undiscovered seas.

[251]

For I was born out of the sparkling foam  
Which lights the crest of the blue mystic wave,  
Stirred by the wandering breath of Life's pure dawn

From a young soul's calm depths. There, without voice,  
Stretched on the breathing curve of a young breast,  
Fluttering a little, fresh from the great deep  
Of life, and creamy as the opening rose,  
Naked I lie, naked yet unashamed,  
While youth's warm tide steals round me with a kiss,  
And floods each limb with fairness. Shame I know not—  
Shame is for wrong, and not for innocence—  
The veil which Error grasps to hide itself  
From the awful Eye. But I, I lie unveiled  
And unashamed—the livelong day I lie,  
The warm wave murmuring to me; and, all night,  
Hidden in the moonlit caves of happy Sleep,  
I dream until the morning and am glad.

[252]

Why should I seek to clothe myself, and hide  
The treasure of my Beauty? Shame may wait  
On those for whom 'twas given. The sties of sense  
Are none of mine; the brutish, loveless wrong,  
The venal charm, the simulated flush  
Of fleshly passion, they are none of mine,  
Only corruptions of me. Yet I know  
The counterfeit the stronger, since gross souls  
And brutish sway the earth; and yet I hold  
That sense itself is sacred, and I deem  
'Twere better to grow soft and sink in sense  
Than gloat o'er blood and wrong.

[253]

My kingdom is  
Over infinite grades of being. All breathing things,  
From the least crawling insect to the brute,  
From brute to man, confess me. Yet in man  
I find my worthiest worship. Where man is,  
A youth and a maid, a youth and a maid, nought else  
Is wanting for my temple. Every clime  
Kneels to me—the long breaker swells and falls  
Under the palms, mixed with the merry noise  
Of savage bridals, and the straight brown limbs  
Know me, and over all the endless plains  
I reign, and by the tents on the hot sand  
And sea-girt isles am queen, and on the side  
Of silent mountains, where the white cots gleam  
Upon the green hill pastures, and no sound  
But the thunder of the avalanche is borne  
To the listening rocks around; and in fair lands  
Where all is peace; where thro' the happy hush  
Of tranquil summer evenings, 'mid the corn,  
Or thro' cool arches of the gadding vines,  
The lovers stray together hand in hand,  
Hymning my praise; and by the stately streets  
Of echoing cities—over all the earth,  
Palace and cot, mountain and plain and sea,  
The burning South, the icy North, the old  
And immemorial East, the unbounded West,  
No new god comes to spoil me utterly—  
All worship and are mine!"

[254]

With a sweet smile  
Upon her rosy mouth, the goddess ceased;  
And when she spake no more, the silence weighed  
As heavy on my soul as when it takes  
Some gracious melody, and leaves the ear  
Unsatisfied and longing, till the fount  
Of sweetness springs again.

[255]

But while I stood  
Expectant, lo! a fair pale form drew near  
With front severe, and wide blue eyes which bore  
Mild wisdom in their gaze. Great purity  
Shone from her—not the young-eyed innocence  
Of her whom first I saw, but that which comes  
From wider knowledge, which restrains the tide  
Of passionate youth, and leads the musing soul  
By the calm deeps of Wisdom. And I knew

My eyes had seen the fair, the virgin Queen,  
Who once within her shining Parthenon  
Beheld the sages kneel.

[256]

She with clear voice  
And coldly sweet, yet with a softness too,  
As doth befit a virgin:

"She does right  
To boast her sway, my sister, seeing indeed  
That all things are as by a double law,  
And from a double root the tree of Life  
Springs up to the face of heaven. Body and Soul,  
Matter and Spirit, lower joys of Sense  
And higher joys of Thought, I know that both  
Build up the shrine of Being. The brute sense  
Leaves man a brute; but, winged with soaring thought  
Mounts to high heaven. The unembodied spirit,  
Dwelling alone, unmated, void of sense,  
Is impotent. And yet I hold there is,  
Far off, but not too far for mortal reach,  
A calmer height, where, nearer to the stars,  
Thought sits alone and gazes with rapt gaze,  
A large-eyed maiden in a robe of white.  
Who brings the light of Knowledge down, and draws  
To her pontifical eyes a bridge of gold,  
Which spans from earth to heaven.

[257]

For what were life,  
If things of sense were all, for those large souls  
And high, which grudging Nature has shut fast  
Within unlovely forms, or those from whom  
The circuit of the rapid gliding years  
Steals the brief gift of beauty? Shall we hold,  
With idle singers, all the treasure of hope  
Is lost with youth—swift-fleeting, treacherous youth,  
Which fades and flies before the ripening brain  
Crowns life with Wisdom's crown? Nay, even in youth,  
Is it not more to walk upon the heights  
Alone—the cold free heights—and mark the vale  
Lie breathless in the glare, or hidden and blurred  
By cloud and storm; or pestilence and war  
Creep on with blood and death; while the soul dwells  
Apart upon the peaks, outfronts the sun  
As the eagle does, and takes the coming dawn  
While all the vale is dark, and knows the springs  
Of tiny rivulets hurrying from the snows,  
Which soon shall swell to vast resistless floods,  
And feed the Oceans which divide the World?

[258]

Oh, ecstasy! oh, wonder! oh, delight!  
Which neither the slow-withering wear of Time,  
That takes all else—the smooth and rounded cheek  
Of youth; the lightsome step; the warm young heart  
Which beats for love or friend; the treasure of hope  
Immeasurable; the quick-coursing blood  
Which makes it joy to be,—ay, takes them all  
And leaves us naught—nor yet satiety  
Born of too full possession, takes or mars!  
Oh, fair delight of learning! which grows great  
And stronger and more keen, for slower limbs,  
And dimmer eyes and loneliness, and loss  
Of lower good—wealth, friendship, ay, and Love—  
When the swift soul, turning its weary gaze  
From the old vanished joys, projects itself  
Into the void and floats in empty space,  
Striving to reach the mystic source of Things,  
The secrets of the earth and sea and air,  
The Law that holds the process of the suns,  
The awful depths of Mind and Thought; the prime  
Unfathomable mystery of God!

[259]

Is there, then, any who holds my worship cold  
And lifeless? Nay, but 'tis the light which cheers  
The waning life! Love thou thy love, brave youth!  
Cleave to thy love, fair maid! it is the Law  
Which dominates the world, that bids ye use  
Your nature; but, when now the fuller tide

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Slackens a little, turn your calmer eyes  
To the fair page of Knowledge. It is power  
I give, and power is precious. It is strength  
To live four-square, careless of outward shows,  
And self-sufficing. It is clearer sight  
To know the rule of life, the Eternal scheme;  
And, knowing it, to do and not to err,  
And, doing, to be blest."

The calm voice soared  
Higher and higher to the close; the cold  
Clear accents, fired as by a hidden fire,  
Glowed into life and tenderness, and throbbed  
As with some spiritual ecstasy  
Sweeter than that of Love.

[261]

But as they died,  
I heard an ampler voice; and looking, marked  
A fair and gracious form. She seemed a Queen  
Who ruled o'er gods and men; the majesty  
Of perfect womanhood. No opening bud  
Of beauty, but the full consummate flower  
Was hers; and from her mild large eyes looked forth  
Gentle command, and motherhood, and home,  
And pure affection. Awe and reverence  
O'erspread me, as I knew my eyes had looked  
On sovereign Heré, mother of the gods.

She, with clear, rounded utterance, sweet and calm  
"I know Love's fruit is good and fair to see  
And taste, if any gain it, and I know  
How brief Life's Passion-tide, which when it ends  
May change to thirst for Knowledge, and I know  
How fair the realm of Mind, wherein the soul  
Thirsting to know, wings its impetuous way  
Beyond the bounds of Thought; and yet I hold  
There is a higher bliss than these, which fits  
A mortal life, compact of Body and Soul,  
And therefore double-natured—a calm path  
Which lies before the feet, thro' common ways  
And undistinguished crowds of toiling men,  
And yet is hard to tread, tho' seeming smooth,  
And yet, tho' level, earns a worthier crown.

[262]

For Knowledge is a steep which few may climb,  
While Duty is a path which all may tread.  
And if the Soul of Life and Thought be this,  
How best to speed the mighty scheme, which still  
Fares onward day by day—the Life of the World,  
Which is the sum of petty lives, that live  
And die so this may live—how then shall each  
Of that great multitude of faithful souls  
Who walk not on the heights, fulfil himself,  
But by the duteous Life which looks not forth  
Beyond its narrow sphere, and finds its work,  
And works it out; content, this done, to fall  
And perish, if Fate will, so the great Scheme  
Goes onward?

[263]

Wherefore am I Queen in Heaven  
And Earth, whose realm is Duty, bearing rule  
More constant and more wide than those whose words  
Thou heardest last. Mine are the striving souls  
Of fathers toiling day by day obscure  
And unrewarded, save by their own hearts,  
Mid wranglings of the Forum or the mart;  
Who long for joys of Thought, and yet must toil  
Unmurmuring thro' dull lives from youth to age;  
Who haply might have worn instead the crown  
Of Honour and of Fame: mine the fair mothers  
Who, for the love of children and of home,  
When passion dies, expend their toilful years  
In loving labour sweetened by the sense  
Of Duty: mine the statesman who toils on  
Thro' vigilant nights and days, guiding his State.

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Yet finds no gratitude; and those white souls  
Who give themselves for others all their years  
In trivial tasks of Pity. The fine growths  
Of Man and Time are mine, and spend themselves  
For me and for the mystical End which lies  
Beyond their gaze and mine, and yet is good,  
Tho' hidden from men and gods.

For as the flower  
Of the tiger-lily bright with varied hues  
Is for a day, then fades and leaves behind  
Fairness nor fruit, while the green tiny tuft  
Swells to the purple of the clustering grape  
Or golden waves of wheat; so lives of men  
Which show most splendid; fade and are deceased  
And leave no trace; while those, unmarked, unseen,  
Which no man recks of, rear the stately tree  
Of Knowledge, not for itself sought out, but found  
In the dusty ways of life—a fairer growth  
Than springs in cloistered shades; and from the sum  
Of Duty, blooms sweeter and more divine  
The fair ideal of the Race, than comes  
From glittering gains of Learning.

Life, full life,  
Full-flowered, full-fruited, reared from homely earth,  
Rooted in duty, and thro' long calm years  
Bearing its load of healthful energies;  
Stretching its arms on all sides; fed with dews  
Of cheerful sacrifice, and clouds of care,  
And rain of useful tears; warmed by the sun  
Of calm affection, till it breathes itself  
In perfume to the heavens—this is the prize  
I hold most dear, more precious than the fruit  
Of Knowledge or of Love."

The goddess ceased  
As dies some gracious harmony, the child  
Of wedded themes which single and alone  
Were discords, but united breathe a sound  
Sweet as the sounds of heaven.

And then stood forth  
The last of the gods I saw, the first in rank  
And dignity and beauty, the young god  
Who grows not old, the Light of Heaven and Earth,  
The Worker from afar, who sends the fire  
Of inspiration to the bard and bathes  
The world in hues of heaven—the golden link  
Between High God and Man.

With a sweet voice  
Whose every note was sweetest melody—  
The melody has fled, the words remain—  
Apollo sang:

"I know how fair the face  
Of Purity; I know the treasure of Strength;  
I know the charm of Love, the calmer grace  
Of Wisdom and of Duteous well-spent lives:  
And yet there is a loftier height than these.

There is a Height higher than mortal thought;  
There is a Love warmer than mortal love;  
There is a Life which taketh not its hues  
From Earth or earthly things; and so grows pure  
And higher than the petty cares of men,  
And is a blessed life and glorified.

Oh, white young souls, strain upward, upward still,  
Even to the heavenly source of Purity!  
Brave hearts, bear on and suffer! Strike for right,  
Strong arms, and hew down wrong! The world hath need  
Of all of you—the sensual wrongful world!

Hath need of you, and of thee too, fair Love.  
Oh, lovers, cling together! the old world  
Is full of Hate. Sweeten it; draw in one

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Two separate chords of Life; and from the bond  
Of twin souls lost in Harmony create  
A Fair God dwelling with you—Love, the Lord!

Waft yourselves, yearning souls, upon the stars;  
Sow yourselves on the wandering winds of space;  
Watch patient all your days, if your eyes take  
Some dim, cold ray of Knowledge. The dull world  
Hath need of you—the purblind, slothful world!

Live on, brave lives, chained to the narrow round  
Of Duty; live, expend yourselves, and make  
The orb of Being wheel onward steadfastly  
Upon its path—the Lord of Life alone  
Knows to what goal of Good; work on, live on:  
And yet there is a higher work than yours.

[270]

To have looked upon the face of the Unknown  
And Perfect Beauty. To have heard the voice  
Of Godhead in the winds and in the seas.  
To have known Him in the circling of the suns,  
And in the changeful fates and lives of men.

To be fulfilled with Godhead as a cup  
Filled with a precious essence, till the hand  
On marble or on canvas falling, leaves  
Celestial traces, or from reed or string  
Draws out faint echoes of the voice Divine  
That bring God nearer to a faithless world.

Or, higher still and fairer and more blest,  
To be His seer, His prophet; to be the voice  
Of the Ineffable Word; to be the glass  
Of the Ineffable Light, and bring them down  
To bless the earth, set in a shrine of Song.

[271]

For Knowledge is a barren tree and bare,  
Bereft of God, and Duty but a word,  
And Strength but Tyranny, and Love, Desire,  
And Purity a folly; and the Soul,  
Which brings down God to Man, the Light to the world;  
He is the Maker, and is blest, is blest!"

He ended, and I felt my soul grow faint  
With too much sweetness.

In a mist of grace  
They faded, that bright company, and seemed  
To melt into each other and shape themselves  
Into new forms, and those fair goddesses  
Blent in a perfect woman—all the calm  
High motherhood of Heré, the sweet smile  
Of Cypris, fair Athené's earnest eyes,  
And the young purity of Artemis,  
Blent in a perfect woman; and in her arms,  
Fused by some cosmic interlacing curves  
Of Beauty into a new Innocence,  
A child with eyes divine, a little child,  
A little child—no more.

[272]

And those great gods  
Of Power and Beauty left a heavenly form  
Strong not to act, but suffer; fair and meek,  
Not proud and eager; with soft eyes of grace,  
Not bold with joyous youth; and for the fire  
Of song, and for the happy careless life,  
A sorrowful pilgrimage—changed, yet the same  
Only Diviner far; and keeping still  
The Life God-lighted and the sacrifice.

[273]

And when these faded wholly, at my side,  
Tho' hidden before by those too-radiant forms,  
I was aware once more of her, my guide  
Psyche, who had not left me, floating near  
On golden wings; and all the plains of heaven  
Were left to us, me and my soul alone.

Then when my thought revived again, I said

Whispering, "But Zeus I saw not, the prime Source  
And Sire of all the gods."

And she, bent low  
With downcast eyes: "Nay. Thou hast seen of Him  
All that thine eyes can bear, in those fair forms  
Which are but parts of Him and are indeed  
Attributes of the Substance which supports  
The Universe of Things—the Soul of the World,  
The Stream which flows Eternal, from no Source  
Into no Sea, His Purity, His Strength,  
His Love, His Knowledge, His unchanging rule  
Of Duty, thou hast seen, only a part  
And not the whole, being a finite mind  
Too weak for infinite thought; nor, couldst thou see  
All of Him visible to mortal sight,  
Wouldst thou see all His essence, since the gods—  
Glorified essences of Human mould,  
Who are but Zeus made visible to men—  
See Him not wholly, only some thin edge  
And halo of His glory; nor know they  
What vast and unsuspected Universes  
Lie beyond thought, where yet He rules, like those  
Vast Suns we cannot see, round which our Sun  
Moves with his system, or those darker still  
Which not even thus we know, but yet exist  
Tho' no eye marks, nor thought itself, and lurk  
In the awful Depths of Space; or that which is  
Not orb'd as yet, but indiscrete, confused,  
Sown thro' the void—the faintest gleam of light  
Which sets itself to Be. And yet is He  
There too, and rules, none seeing. But sometimes  
To this our heaven, which is so like to earth  
But nearer to Him, for awhile He shows  
Some gleam of His own brightness, and methinks  
It cometh soon; but thou, if thou shouldst gaze,  
Thy Life will rush to His—the tiny spark  
Absorbed in that full blaze—and what there is  
Of mortal fall from thee."

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But I: "Oh, soul,  
What holdeth Life more precious than to know  
The Giver and to die?"

Then she: "Behold!  
Look upward and adore."

And with the word,  
Unhasting, undelaying, gradual, sure,  
The floating cloud which clothed the hidden peak  
Rose slow in awful silence, laying bare  
Spire after rocky spire, snow after snow,  
Whiter and yet more dreadful, till at last  
It left the summit clear.

[276]

Then with a bound,  
In the twinkling of an eye, in the flash of a thought,  
I knew an Awful Effluence of Light,  
Formless, Ineffable, Perfect, burst on me  
And flood my being round, and take my life  
Into itself. I saw my guide bent down  
Prostrate, her wings before her face; and then  
No more.

But when I woke from my long trance  
Behold, it was no longer Tartarus,  
Nor Hades, nor Olympus, but the bare  
And unideal aspect of the fields  
Which Spring not yet had kissed—the strange old Earth  
So far more fabulous now than in the days  
When Man was young, nor yet the mystery  
Of Time and Fate transformed it. From the hills,  
The long night fled at last, the unclouded sun,  
The dear, fair sun, leapt upward swift, and smote  
My sight with rays of gold, and pierced my brain  
With too much light ere my entrancèd eyes  
Could hide themselves.

[277]

And I was on the Earth  
Dreaming the dream of Life again, as late  
I dreamed the dream of Death.

Another day  
Dawned on the race of men; another world;  
New heavens, and new earth.

[278]

And as I went  
Across the lightening fields, upon a bank  
I saw a single snowdrop glance, and bring  
Promise of Spring; and keeping my old thought  
In the old fair Hellenic vesture dressed,  
I felt myself a ghost, and seemed to be  
Now fair Adonis hasting to the arms  
Of his lost love—now sad Persephone  
Restored to mother earth—or that high shade  
Orpheus, who gave up heaven to save his love,  
And is rewarded—or young Marsyas,  
Who spent his youth and life for song, and yet  
Was happy though in torture—or the fair  
And dreaming youth I saw, who still awaits,  
Hopeful, the unveiling heaven, when he shall see  
His fair ideal love. The birds sang blithe;  
There came a tinkling from the waking fold;  
And on the hillside from the cot a girl  
Tripped singing with her pitcher. All the sounds  
And thoughts which still are beautiful—Youth, Song,  
Dawn, Spring, Renewal—and my soul was glad  
Of all the freshness, and I felt again  
The youth and spring-tide of the world, and thought,  
Which feigned those fair and gracious fantasies.

[279]

For every dawn that breaks brings a new world,  
And every budding bosom a new life;  
These fair tales, which we know so beautiful,  
Show only finer than our lives to-day  
Because their voice was clearer, and they found  
A sacred bard to sing them. We are pent,  
Who sing to-day, by all the garnered wealth  
Of ages of past song. We have no more  
The world to choose from, who, where'er we turn,  
Tread through old thoughts and fair. Yet must we sing—  
We have no choice; and if more hard the toil  
In noon, when all is clear, than in the fresh  
White mists of early morn, yet do we find  
Achievement its own guerdon, and at last  
The rounder song of manhood grows more sweet  
Than the high note of youth.

[280]

For Age, long Age!  
Nought else divides us from the fresh young days  
Which men call ancient; seeing that we in turn  
Shall one day be Time's ancients, and inspire  
The wiser, higher race, which yet shall sing  
Because to sing is human, and high thought  
Grows rhythmic ere its close. Nought else there is  
But that weird beat of Time, which doth disjoin  
To-day from Hellas.

[281]

How should any hold  
Those precious scriptures only old-world tales  
Of strange impossible torments and false gods;  
Of men and monsters in some brainless dream,  
Coherent, yet unmeaning, linked together  
By some false skein of song?

Nay! evermore,  
All things and thoughts, both new and old, are writ  
Upon the unchanging human heart and soul.  
Has Passion still no prisoners? Pine there now  
No lives which fierce Love, sinking into Lust,  
Has drowned at last in tears and blood—plunged down  
To the lowest depths of Hell? Have not strong Will  
And high Ambition rotted into Greed  
And Wrong, for any, as of old, and whelmed

The struggling soul in ruin? Hell lies near  
Around us as does Heaven, and in the World,  
Which is our Hades, still the chequered souls  
Compact of good and ill—not all accurst  
Nor altogether blest—a few brief years  
Travel the little journey of their lives,  
They know not to what end. The weary woman  
Sunk deep in ease and sated with her life,  
Much loved and yet unloving, pines to-day  
As Helen; still the poet strives and sings.  
And hears Apollo's music, and grows dumb,  
And suffers, yet is happy; still the young  
Fond dreamer seeks his high ideal love,  
And finds her name is Death; still doth the fair  
And innocent life, bound naked to the rock,  
Redeem the race; still the gay tempter goes  
And leaves his victim, stone; still doth pain bind  
Men's souls in closer links of lovingness,  
Than Death itself can sever; still the sight  
Of too great beauty blinds us, and we lose  
The sense of earthly splendours, gaining Heaven.

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And still the skies are opened as of old  
To the entrancèd gaze, ay, nearer far  
And brighter than of yore; and Might is there,  
And Infinite Purity is there, and high  
Eternal Wisdom, and the calm clear face  
Of Duty, and a higher, stronger Love  
And Light in one, and a new, reverend Name,  
Greater than any and combining all;  
And over all, veiled with a veil of cloud,  
God set far off, too bright for mortal eyes.

And always, always, with each soul that comes  
And goes, comes that fair form which was my guide,  
Hovering, with golden wings and eyes divine,  
Above the bed of birth, the bed of death,  
Still breathing heavenly airs of deathless love.

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For while a youth is lost in soaring thought,  
And while a maid grows sweet and beautiful,  
And while a spring-tide coming lights the earth,  
And while a child, and while a flower is born,  
And while one wrong cries for redress and finds  
A soul to answer, still the world is young!

THE END.

Footnotes:

- [1] Euripides, "Hippolytus," lines 70-78.
- [2] Virgil, "Æneid," vi. 740.
- [3] See the Orphic Hymns.

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LONDON AND BECCLES.

Transcriber's Notes:

This text is hemistichia, in that the end of one stanza is vertically aligned with the start of the next stanza. The original font, possibly Caslon Old Face is similar to Goudy Old Style and the text in this file has been aligned for reading using Goudy Old style or a similar font. Inconsistent Hyphenation and text retained.  
Pg 168: (Sovereign Here) changed to (Sovereign Heré)

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