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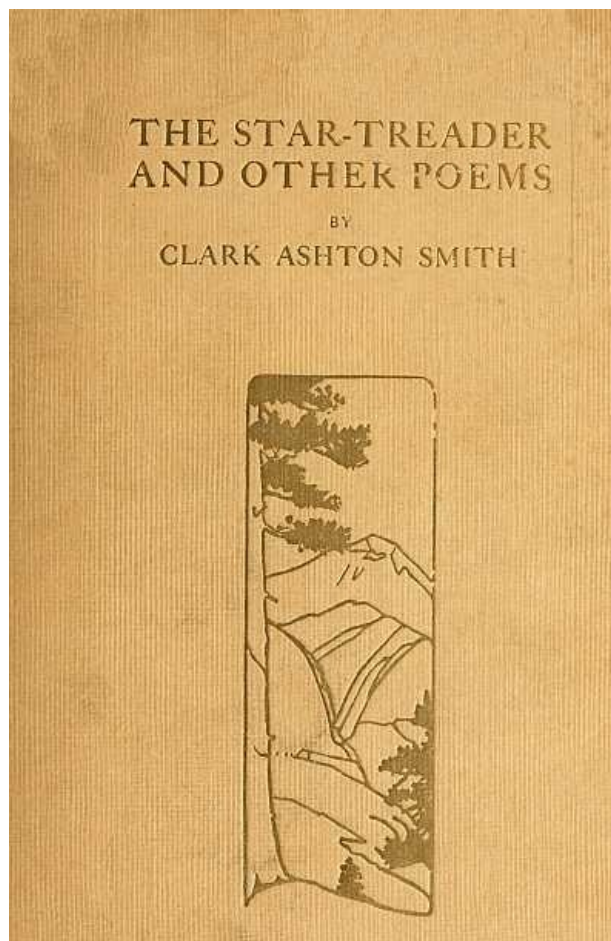
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE STAR-TREADER, AND OTHER POEMS



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BY

CLARK ASHTON SMITH

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CLARK ASHTON SMITH



A. M. ROBERTSON
STOCKTON STREET AT UNION SQUARE
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
MCMXII

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BY
CLARK ASHTON SMITH

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STOCKTON STREET AT UNION SQUARE
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TO MY MOTHER

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NERO

This Rome, that was the toil of many men,
The consummation of laborious years—
Fulfilment's crown to visions of the dead,
And image of the wide desire of kings—
Is made my darkling dream's effulgency,
Fuel of vision, brief embodiment
Of wandering will, and wastage of the strong
Fierce ecstasy of one tremendous hour,
When ages piled on ages were a flame
To all the years behind, and years to be.

Yet any sunset were as much as this,
Save for the music forced by hands of fire
From out the hard strait silences which bind
Dull Matter's tongueless mouth—a music pierced
With the tense voice of Life, more quick to cry
Its agony—and save that I believed
The radiance redder for the blood of men.
Destruction hastens and intensifies
The process that is Beauty, manifests
Ranges of form unknown before, and gives
Motion and voice and hue where otherwise
Bleak inexpressiveness had leveled all.

[2]

If one create, there is the lengthy toil;
The laboured years and days league tow'rd an end
Less than the measure of desire, mayhap,
After the sure consuming of all strength,
And strain of faculties that elsewhere
Were loosed upon enjoyment; and at last
Remains to one capacity nor power
For pleasure in the thing that he hath made.
But on destruction hangs but little use
Of time or faculty, but all is turned
To the one purpose, unobstructed, pure,
Of sensuous rapture and observant joy;
And from the intensities of death and ruin,
One draws a heightened and completer life,
And both extends and vindicates himself.

I would I were a god, with all the scope
Of attributes that are the essential core
Of godhead, and its visibility.
I am but emperor, and hold awhile
The power to hasten Death upon his way,
And cry a halt to worn and lagging Life
For others, but for mine own self may not
Delay the one, nor bid the other speed.
There have been many kings, and they are dead,
And have no power in death save what the wind
Confers upon their blown and brainless dust
To vex the eyeballs of posterity.
But were I god, I would be overlord
Of many kings, and were as breath to guide
Their dust of destiny. And were I god,
Exempt from this mortality which clogs
Perception, and clear exercise of will,
What rapture it would be, if but to watch
Destruction crouching at the back of Time,
The tongueless dooms which dog the travelling suns;
The vampire Silence at the breast of worlds,
Fire without light that gnaws the base of things,
And Lethe's mounting tide, that rots the stone
Of fundamental spheres. This were enough
Till such time as the dazzled wings of will
Came up with power's accession, scarcely felt
For very suddenness. Then would I urge
The strong contention and conflicting might
Of chaos and creation, matching them,
Those immemorial powers inimical,
And all their stars and gulfs subservient—
Dynasts of Time, and anarchs of the dark—

[3]

In closer war reverseless; and would set
New discord at the universal core,
A Samson-principle to bring it down
In one magnificence of ruin. Yea,
The monster Chaos were mine unleashed hound,
And all my power Destruction's own right arm!

I would exult to mark the smouldering stars
Renew beneath my breath their elder fire,
And feed upon themselves to nothingness.
The might of suns, slow-paced with swinging weight
Of myriad worlds, were made at my desire
One long rapidity of roaring light,
Through which the voice of Life were audible,
And singing of the immemorial dead
Whose dust is loosened into vaporous wings
With soaring wrack of systems ruinous.
And were I weary of the glare of these,
I would tear out the eyes of light, and stand
Above a chaos of extinguished suns,
That crowd, and grind, and shiver thunderously,
Lending vast voice and motion, but no ray
To the stretched silence of the blinded gulfs.
Thus would I give my godhead space and speech
For its assertion, and thus pleasure it,
Hastening the feet of Time with casts of worlds
Like careless pebbles, or with shattered suns
Brightening the aspect of Eternity.

[4]

[5]

CHANT TO SIRIUS

What nights retard thee, O Sirius!
Thy light is as a spear,
And thou penetratest them
As a warrior that stabbeth his foe
Even to the center of his life.
Thy rays reach farther than the gulfs;
They form a bridge thereover,
That shall endure till the links of the universe
Are unfastened, and drop apart,
And all the gulfs are one,
Dissevered by suns no longer.

How strong art thou in thy place!
Thou stridest thine orbit,
And the darkness shakes beneath thee,
As a road that is trodden by an army.
Thou art a god,
In thy temple that is hollowed with light
In the night of infinitude,
And whose floor is the lower void;
Thy worlds are as priests and ministers therein.
Thou furrowest space,
Even as an husbandman,
And sowest it with alien seed;
It beareth alien fruits,
And these are thy testimony,
Even as the crops of his fields
Are the testimony of an husbandman.

[6]

THE STAR-TREADER

I

A voice cried to me in a dawn of dreams,
Saying, "Make haste: the webs of death and birth
Are brushed away, and all the threads of earth
Wear to the breaking; spaceward gleams
Thine ancient pathway of the suns,
Whose flame is part of thee;
And deeps outreach immutably
Whose largeness runs
Through all thy spirit's mystery.
Go forth, and tread unharmed the blaze
Of stars where through thou camest in old days;
Pierce without fear each vast
Whose hugeness crushed thee not within the past.
A hand strikes off the chains of Time,
A hand swings back the door of years;
Now fall earth's bonds of gladness and of tears,
And opens the strait dream to space sublime."

II

Who rides a dream, what hand shall stay!
What eye shall note or measure mete
His passage on a purpose fleet,
The thread and weaving of his way!
It caught me from the clasping world,
And swept beyond the brink of Sense,
My soul was flung, and poised, and whirled,
Like to a planet chained and hurled
With solar lightning strong and tense.
Swift as communicated rays
That leap from severed suns a gloom
Within whose waste no suns illumine,
The wingèd dream fulfilled its ways.
Through years reversed and lit again
I followed that unending chain
Wherein the suns are links of light;
Retraced through lineal, ordered spheres
The twisting of the threads of years
In weavings wrought of noon and night;
Through stars and deeps I watched the dream unroll,
Those folds that form the raiment of the soul.

[7]

III

Enkindling dawns of memory,
Each sun had radiance to relume
A sealed, disused, and darkened room
Within the soul's immensity.
Their alien ciphers shown and lit,
I understood what each had writ
Upon my spirit's scroll;
Again I wore mine ancient lives,
And knew the freedom and the gyves
That formed and marked my soul.

[8]

IV

I delved in each forgotten mind,
The units that had builded me,
Whose deepnesses before were blind
And formless as infinity—
Knowing again each former world—
From planet unto planet whirled
Through gulfs that mightily divide
Like to an interval sleep.
One world I found, where souls abide
Like winds that rest upon a rose;
Thereto they creep
To loose all burden of old woes.

And one I knew, where warp of pain
Is woven in the soul's attire;
And one, where with new loveliness
Is strengthened Beauty's olden chain—
Soft as a sound, and keen as fire—
In light no darkness may depress.

V

Where no terrestrial dreams had trod
My vision entered undismayed,
And Life her hidden realms displayed
To me as to a curious god.
Where colored suns of systems triplicate
Bestow on planets weird, ineffable,
Green light that orbs them like an outer sea,
And large auroral noons that alternate
With skies like sunset held without abate,
Life's touch renewed incomprehensibly
The strains of mirth and grief's harmonious spell.
Dead passions like to stars relit
Shone in the gloom of ways forgot;
Where crownless gods in darkness sit
The day was full on altars hot.
I heard—once more a part of it—
The central music of the Pleiades,
And to Alcyone my soul
Swayed with the stars that own her song's control.
Unchallenged, glad I trod, a revenant
In worlds Edenic longly lost;
Or walked in spheres that sing to these,
O'er space no light has crossed,
Diverse as Hell's mad antiphone uptossed
To Heaven's angelic chant.

[9]

VI

What vasts the dream went out to find!
I seemed beyond the world's recall
In gulfs where darkness is a wall
To render strong Antares blind!
In unimagined spheres I found
The sequence of my being's round—
Some life where firstling meed of Song,
The strange imperishable leaf,
Was placed on brows that starry Grief
Had crowned, and Pain anointed long;
Some avatar where Love
Sang like the last great star at morn
Ere Death filled all its sky;
Some life in fresher years unworn
Upon a world whereof
Peace was a robe like to the calms that lie
On pools aglow with latter spring:
There Life's pellucid surface took
Clear image of all things, nor shook
Till touch of Death's obscuring wing;
Some earlier awakening
In pristine years, when giant strife
Of forces darkly whirled
First forged the thing called Life—
Hot from the furnace of the suns—
Upon the anvil of a world.

[10]

VII

Thus knew I those anterior ones
Whose lives in mine were blent;
Till, lo! my dream, that held a night
Where Rigel sends no word of might,
Was emptied of the trodden stars,
And dwindled to the sun's extent—
The brain's familiar prison-bars,
And raiment of the sorrow and the mirth

THE MORNING POOL

All night the pool held mysteries,
Vague depths of night that lay in dream,
Where phantoms of the pale-white stars
Wandered, with darkness-tangled gleam.

And now it holds the limpid light
And shadeless azure of the skies,
Wherein, like some enclaspèd gem,
The morning's golden glamour lies.

[12]

THE NIGHT FOREST

Incumbent seemingly
On the jagged points of peaks
That end the visible west,
The rounded moon yet floods
The valleys hitherward
With fall of torrential light,
Ere from the overmost
Aggressive mountain-cusp,
She slip to the lower dark.
But here, on an eastward slope
Pointed and thick with its pine,
The forest scarcely remembers
Her light that is gone as a vision
Or ecstasy too poignant
And perilous for duration.
Withdrawn in what darker web
Or dimension of dream I know not,
In silence pre-occupied
And solemnest rectitude
The pines uprear, and no sigh
For the rapture of moonlight past,
Comes from their bosom of boughs.
Far in their secrecy
I stand, and the burden of dusk
Dull, but at times made keen
With tingle of fragrances,
Falls on me as a veil
Between my soul and the world.

[13]

What veil of trance, O pines,
Divides you from my soul,
That I feel but enter not
Your distances of dream?
Ah! strange, imperative sense
Of world-deep mystery
That shakes from out your boughs—
A fragrance yet more keen,
Pressing upon the mind.

The wind shall question you
Of the dream I may not gain,
And all its sombreness
And depth immeasurable,

Shall tremble away in sound
Of speech not understood
That my heart must break to hear.

[14]

THE MAD WIND

What hast thou seen, O wind,
Of beauty or of terror
Surpassing, denied to us,
That with precipitate wings,
Mad and ecstatical,
Thou spurnest the hollows and trees
That offer thee refuge of peace,
And findest within the sky
No safety nor respite
From the memory of thy vision?

[15]

SONG TO OBLIVION

Art thou more fair
For all the beauty gathered up in thee,
As gold and gems within some lightless sea?
For light of flowers, and bloom of tinted air,
Art thou more fair?

Art thou more strong
For powers that turn to thee as unto sleep?
For world and star that find thy ways more deep
Than light may tread, too wearisome for song
Art thou more strong?

Nay! thou art bare
For power and beauty on thine impotence
Bestowed by fruitful Time's magnificence;
For fruit of all things strong, and bloom of fair,
Thou still art bare.

[16]

MEDUSA

As drear and barren as the glooms of Death,
It lies, a windless land of livid dawns,
Nude to a desolate firmament, with hills
That seem the fleshless earth's outjutting ribs,
And plains whose face is crossed and rivelled deep
With gullies twisting like a serpent's track.
The leprous touch of Death is on its stones,
Where for his token visible, the Head
Is throned upon a heap of monstrous rocks,
Grotesque in everlasting ugliness,
Within a hill-ravine, that splits athwart
Like some old, hideous and unhealing scar.

Her lethal beauty crowned with twining snakes
That mingle with her hair, the Gorgon reigns.
Her eyes are clouds wherein Death's lightnings lurk,
Yet, even as men that seek the glance of Life,
The gazers come, where, coiled and serpent-swift,
Those levins wait. As 'round an altar-base
Her victims lie, distorted, blackened forms
Of postured horror smitten into stone,—
Time caught in meshes of Eternity—
Drawn back from dust and ruin of the years,
And given to all the future of the world.
The land is claimed of Death: the daylight comes
Half-strangled in the changing webs of cloud
That unseen spiders of bewildered winds
Weave and unweave across the lurid sun
In upper air. Below, no zephyr comes
To break with life the circling spell of death.
Long vapor-serpents twist about the moon,
And in the windy murkness of the sky,
The guttering stars are wild as candle-flames
That near the socket.

[17]

Thus the land shall be,
And Death shall wait, throned in Medusa's eyes.
Till, in the irremeable webs of night
The sun is snared, and the corroded moon
A dust upon the gulfs, and all the stars
Rotted and fall'n like rivets from the sky,
Letting the darkness down upon all things.

[18]

ODE TO THE ABYSS

O many-gulfed, unalterable one,
Whose deep sustains
Far-drifting world and sun,
Thou wast ere ever star put out on thee;
And thou shalt be
When never world remains;
When all the suns' triumphant strength and pride
Is sunk in voidness absolute,
And their majestic music wide
In vaster silence rendered mute.
And though God's will were night to dusk the blue,
And law to cancel and disperse
The tangled tissues of the universe,
And mould the suns anew,
His might were impotent to conquer thee,
O invisible infinity!
Thy darks subdue
All light that treads thee down a space,
Exulting o'er thy deeps.
The cycles die, and lo! thy darkness reaps
The flame of mightiest stars;
In aeon-implicating wars
Thou tearest planets from their place;
Worlds granite-spined
To thine erodents yield
Their treasures centrally confined
In crypts by continental pillars sealed.
What suns and worlds have been thy prey
Through unhorizoned stretches of the Past!
What spheres that now essay
Time's undimensioned vast,
Shall plunge forgotten to thy gloom at length,
With life that cried its query of the Night
To ears with silence filled!
What worlds unborn shall dare thy strength,

[19]

Girt by a sun's unwearied might,
And dip to darkness when the sun is stilled!

O incontestable Abyss,
What light in thine embrace of darkness sleeps—
What blaze of a sidereal multitude
No peopled world is left to miss!
What motion is at rest within thy deeps—
What gyres of planets long become thy food—
Worlds unconstrainable,
That plunged therein to peace,
Like tempest-worn and crew-forsaken ships;
And suns that fell
To huge and ultimate eclipse,
And lasting gyre-release!
What sound thy gulfs of silence hold!
Stupendous thunder of the meeting stars,
And crash of orbits that diverged,
With Life's thin song are merged;
Thy quietudes enfold
Paeon and threnody as one,
And battle-blare of unremembered wars
With festal songs
Sung in the Romes of ruined spheres,
And music that belongs
To younger, undiscoverable years
With words of yesterday.
Ah, who may stay
Thy soundless world-devouring tide?
O thou whose hands pluck out the light of stars,
Are worlds grown but as fruit for thee?
May no sufficient bars,
Nor marks inveterate abide
To baffle thy persistency?
Still and unstriving now,
What plottest thou,
Within thy universe-ulterior deeps,
Dark as the final lull of suns?
What new advancement of the night
On citadels of stars around whose might
Thy slow encroachment runs,
And crouching silence, thunder-potent, sleeps?

[20]

[21]

THE SOUL OF THE SEA

A wind comes in from the sea,
And rolls through the hollow dark
Like loud, tempestuous waters.
As the swift recurrent tide,
It pours adown the sky,
And rears at the cliffs of night
Uppiled against the vast.

Like the soul of the sea—
Hungry, unsatisfied
With ravin of shores and of ships—
Come forth on the land to seek
New prey of tideless coasts,
It raves, made hoarse with desire,
And the sounds of the night are dumb
With the sound of its passing.

[22]

THE BUTTERFLY

I

O wonderful and wingèd flow'r,
That hoverest in the garden-close,
Finding in mazes of the rose,
The beauty of a Summer hour!

O symbol of Impermanence,
Thou art a word of Beauty's tongue,
A word that in her song is sung,
Appealing to the inner sense!

Of that great mystic harmony,
All lovely things are notes and words—
The trees, the flow'rs, the songful birds,
The flame-white stars, the surging sea,

The aureate light of sudden dawn,
The sunset's crimson afterglow,
The summer clouds, the dazzling snow,
The brooks, the moonlight chaste and wan.

Lacking (who knows?) a cloud, a tree,
A streamlet's purl, the ocean's roar
From Nature's multitudinous store—
Imperfect were the melody!

[23]

II

O Beauty, why so sad my heart?
Why stirs in me a nameless pain
Which seems like some remembered strain,
As on this product of thine art

Enraptured, marvelling I gaze,
And note how airily 'tis wrought—
A wingèd dream, a bodied thought,
The spirit of the summer days?

Thy beauty opes, O Butterfly,
The doors of being, with subtle sense
Of Beauty's frail impermanence,
And grief of knowing it must die.

Again I seem to know the tears
Of other lives, the woe and pain
Of days that died; resurgent wane
The moons of countless bygone years.

III

On other worlds, on other stars,
To us but tiny points of light,
Or lost in distances of night
Beyond our system's farthest bars,

A priest to Beauty's service sworn,
I sought and served her all my days,
With music and with hymns of praise.
In sunset and the fires of morn,

With thrilling heart her form I knew,
And in the stars she whitely gleamed,
And all the face of Nature seemed
Expression of her shape and hue.

I grieved to watch the summers pass
With all their gorgeous shows of bloom,
And sterner autumn months assume
Their realm with withered leaves and grass.

Mine was the grief of Change and Death,
Of fair things gone beyond recall,

[24]

The paling light of dawns, and all
The flowers' vanished hues and breath.

IV

From out the web of former lives,
The ancient catenated chain
Of joy and sorrow, loss and gain,
One certain truth my heart derives:—

Though Beauty passes, this I know,
From Change and Death, this verity:
Her spirit lives eternally—
'Tis but her forms that come and go.

[25]

V

Lo! I am Beauty's constant thrall,
Must ever on her voice await,
And follow through the maze of Fate
Her luring, strange and mystical.

Obedient to her summonings,
Forever must my soul aspire,
And seek, on wings of lyric fire,
To penetrate the Heart of Things,

Wherein she sits, augustly throned,
In loveliness that renders dumb—
The Essence and the final Sum—
With peril and with wonder zoned

What though I fail, my duller sense
Baffled as by a wall of stone?
The high desire, the search alone
Are their own prize and recompense.

[26]

THE PRICE

Behind each thing a shadow lies;
Beauty hath e'er its cost:
Within the moonlight-flooded skies
How many stars are lost!

[27]

THE MYSTIC MEANING

Alas! that we are deaf and blind
To meanings all about us hid!
What secrets lurk the woods amid?
What prophecies are on the wind?

What tidings do the billows bring
And cry in vain upon the strand?
If we might only understand
The brooklet's cryptic murmuring!

The tongues of earth and air are strange.
And yet (who knows?) one little word
Learned from the language of the bird

ODE TO MUSIC

O woven fabric and bright web of sound,
 Whose threads are magical,
 And with swift weaving thrall
 And hold the spirit bound!
 We may not know whence thy strange sorceries fall—
 Whether they be Earth's voices wild and strong,
 Her high and perfect song.
 Or broken dreams of higher worlds unfound.
 For, lo, thou art as dreams.
 And to thy realm all hidden things belong—
 All fugitive and evanescent gleams
 The soul hath vainly sought;
 All mystic immanence;
 All visions of ungrasped magnificence,
 And great ideals pinnacled in thought;
 All paths with marvel fraught
 That lead to lands obscure:
 For, lo, upon thy road of sound we pass,
 Seeking thy magic lure,
 To vales mist-implicated and unsure,
 Where all seems strange as visions in a glass;
 And wonder-haunted hills,
 Where Beauty is an echo and a dream
 In sighing pines, and rills
 Clouded and deep with imaged tree and sky;
 And where bright rivers gleam
 Past cities towering high,
 Each wonderful as some cloud-fantasy.

[29]

Thou loosenest the bondage of the years,
 Making the spirit free
 Of all sublunar joys and fears.
 Who mounts on thine imperious wings shall see
 The ways of life as threads of day and night;
 Serene above their change,
 His eyes shall know but far transcendent things,
 His ears shall hark but voices free and strange;
 Vast seas of outer light
 Shall beat upon his sight,
 Eternal winds shall touch him with their wings;
 His heart shall thrill
 To larger, purer joy, and grief more deep
 Than earth may know;
 And e'en as dews of morning fill
 The opened flower, into his soul shall flow
 High melodies, like tears that angels weep.
 Then shall he penetrate
 The veils and outer barriers of sound,
 And near the soul of melody,
 Where, rapt in aural splendors ultimate,
 His soul shall see
 The marvel and the glory that surround
 Eternal Beauty's shrine;
 And catch afar the glint divine
 Of her moon-colored robe, or haply hear,
 With world-oblivious ear,
 Some echo of her voice's mystery.

[30]

Thou hast Love's power to find
 The soul's most secret chords, that else were still,
 And stir'st them till they thrill
 Disclosed to least, faint movements of thy wind.
 Thine aural sorcery

O'erwhelms the heart as sunset storms the sight,
For thou art Beauty bodied forth in sound—
Her colors bright
And diverse forms expressed in harmony:
Within thy bound,
The flare of morning is become a song,
And tree and flower a music sweet and long.
And in thy speech
The power and majesty that swing
Planet and sun, and each
Dim atom of the system manifest,
Become articulate, expressed
Like ocean in the brooklet's whispering.
Beyond the woof of finite things,
Thy threads of wonder deep-entangled lie—
Time's intertexturings
Within Eternity—
With Song, mayhap, to be his memories;
For Beauty borders nigh
The ultimate, eternal Verities.

[31]

THE LAST NIGHT

I dreamed a dream: I stood upon a height,
A mountain's utmost eminence of snow,
Whence I beheld the plain outstretched below
To a far sea-horizon, dim and white.
Beneath the sun's expiring, ghastly light,
The dead world lay, phantasmally aglow;
Its last fear-weighted voice, a wind, came low;
The distant sea lay hushed, as with affright.

I watched, and lo! the pale and flickering sun,
In agony and fierce despair, flamed high,
And shadow-slain, went out upon the gloom.
Then Night, that grim, gigantic struggle won,
Impended for a breath on wings of doom,
And through the air fell like a falling sky.

[32]

ODE ON IMAGINATION

Imagination's eyes
Outreach and distance far
The vision of the greatest star
That measures instantaneously—
Enisled therein as in a sea—
Its cincture of the system-laden skies.
Abysses closed about with night
A tribute yield
To her retardless sight;
And Matter's gates disclose the candent ores
Rock-held in furnaces of planet-cores.
She penetrates the sun's transplendent shield,
And through the obstruction of his vestment dire,
Pierces the centermost sublimity
Of his terrific heart, whose gurge of fire
Heaves upward like a monstrous sea,
And inly riven by Titanic throes,
Fills all his frame with outward cataract

Of separate and immingling torrent streams.
Her eyes exact
From the Moon-Sphinx that wanes and grows
In wastes celestial, alien dreams
Brought down on wings of fleetest beams.
Adown the clefts of under-space
She rides, her steed a falling star,
To seek, where void and vagueness are,
Some mark or certainty of place.
Upon their heavenly precipice
The gathered suns shrink back aghast
From that interminate abyss,
And threat of sightless anarchs vast.

[33]

She stands endued
With supermundane crown, and vestitures
Of emperies that include
All under-worlds and over-worlds of dream—
Kingdoms o'ercast, and eminent heights extreme
Where moon-transcending light endures.
She wanders in fantastic lands, where grow
In scarce-discernèd fields and closes blind,
Vague blossoms stirred by wings of eidolons;
Or roves in forests where all sound is low:
Each voice that shuns
The noiseful day, and enters there to find
Twilight that naught exalts nor grieves,
Is quickly tuned to the susurrous leaves.

Upon some supersensual eminence
She hears the fragments of a thunder loud,
Where lightnings of ulterior Truth intense
Flame through the walls of hollow cloud.
But these she may not wholly grasp
With incomplete terrestrial clasp.
Her eyes inevitably see,
'Neath rounds and changes of exterior things,
The movements of Essentiality—
Of ageless principles—that alter not
To temporal alterings—
Unswerved by shattered worlds upbuilt once more.
And stars no longer hot;
Or broken constellations strewn
Like coals about the heavenly floor,
And rush of night upon the noon
Of their lost worlds, unsphered restorelessly
In icy deserts of the sky.
From the beginning of the spheres,
When systems nebulous out-thrown
Drove back the brinks
Of nullity with limitary marks,
Till end of suns, and sunless death of years,
To her are known
The unevident inseparable links
That bind all deeps, all suns, all days and darks.

[34]

[35]

THE WIND AND THE MOON

Oh, list to the wind of the night, oh, hark,
How it shrieks as it goes on its hurrying quest!
Forever its voice is a voice of the dark,
Forever its voice is a voice of unrest.
Oh, list to the pines as they shiver and sway
'Neath the ceaseless beat of its myriad wings—
How they moan and they sob like living things
That cry in the darkness for light and day!
Now bend they low as the wind mounts higher,

And its eerie voice comes piercingly,
Like the plaint of humanity's misery,
And its burden of vain desire.
Now to a sad, tense whisper it fails,
Then wildly and madly it raves and it wails.

Oh, the night is filled with its sob and its shriek,
Its weird and its restless, yearning cry,
As it races adown the darkened sky,
With scurry of broken clouds that seek,
Borne on the wings of the hastening wind,
A place of rest that they never can find.
And around the face of the moon they cling,
Its fugitive face to veil they aspire;
But ever and ever it peereth out,
Rending the cloud-ranks that hem it about;
And it seemeth a lost and phantom thing,
Like a phantom of dead desire.

[36]

LAMENT OF THE STARS

One tone is mute within the starry singing,
The unison fulfilled, complete before;
One chord within the music sounds no more,
And from the stir of flames forever winging
The pinions of our sister, motionless
In pits of indefinable duress,
Are fallen beyond all recovery
By exultation of the flying dance,
Or rhythms holding as with sleep or trance
The maze of stars that only death may free—
Flung through the void's expanse.

In gulfs depressed nor in the gulfs exalted
Shall shade nor lightening of her flame be found;
In space that litten orbits gird around,
Nor in the bottomless abyss unvaulted
Of unenviored, all-outlying night.
Allotted gyre nor lawless comet-flight
Shall find, and with its venturous ray return
From gloom of undiscoverable scope,
One ray of her to gladden into hope
The doubtful eyes denied that truthward yearn,
The faltering feet that grope.

[37]

Beyond restrainless boundary-nights surpassing
All luminous horizons limited,
The substance and the light of her have fed
Ruin and silence of the night's amassing:
Abandoned worlds forever morningless;
Suns without worlds, in frory beamlessness
Girt for the longer gyre funereal;
Inviolable silence, earless, unawaking
That once was sound, and level calm unbreaking
Where motion's many ways in oneness fall
Of sleep beyond forsaking.

Circled with limitation unexceeded
Our eyes behold exterior mysteries
And gods unascertainable as these—
Shadows and shapes irresolubly heeded;
Phantoms that tower, and substance scarcely known.
Our sister knows all mysteries one alone,
One shape, one shadow, crowding out the skies;
Whose eyeless head and lipless face debar
All others nameless or familiar,
Filling with night all former lips and eyes

Of god, and ghost, and star:

For her all shapes have fed the shape of night;
All darker forms, and dubious forms, or pallid,
Are met and reconciled where none is valid.
But unto us solution nor respite
Of mystery's multiform incessancy
From unexplored or system-trodden sky
Shall come; but as a load importunate,
Enigma past and mystery foreseen
Weigh mightily upon us, and between
Our sorrow deepens, and our songs abate
In cadences of threne.

[38]

A gloom that gathers silence looms more closely,
And quiet centering darkness at its heart;
But from the certitude of night depart
Uncertain god nor eidolon less ghostly;
But stronger grown with strength obtained from light
That failed, and power lent by the stronger night,
Perplex us with new mystery, and doubt
If these our flames, that deathward toss and fall
Be festal lights or lights funereal
For mightier gods within the gulfs without,
Phantoms more cryptical.

New shadows from the wings of Time unfolding
Across the depth and eminence of years,
Fall deeper with the broadening gloom of fears.
Prophetic-eyed, with planet-hosts beholding
The night take form upon the face of suns,
We see (thus grief's vaticination runs—
Presageful sorrow for our sister slain)
A night wherein all sorrow shall be past,
One with night's single mystery at last;
Nor vocal sun nor singing world remain
As Time's elegiast.

[39]

THE MAZE OF SLEEP

Sleep is a pathless labyrinth,
Dark to the gaze of moons and suns,
Through which the colored clue of dreams,
A gossamer thread, obscurely runs.

[40]

THE WINDS

To me the winds that die and start,
And strive in wars that never cease,
Are dearer than the level peace
That lies unstirred at summer's heart;

More dear to me the shadowed wold,
Where, with report of tempest rife,
The air intensifies with life,
Than quiet fields of summer's gold.

I am the winds' admitted friend:
They seal our linked fellowships

With speech of warm or icy lips,
With touch of west and east that blend.

And when my spirit listless stands,
With folded wings that do not live,
Their own assuageless wings they give
To lift her from the stirless lands.

* * * * *

Within the place unmanifest
Where central Truth is immanent,
Lies there a vast, entire content
Of sound and movement one in rest?

[41]

I know not this. Yet in my heart,
I feel that where all truths concur,
The shrine is peaceless with the stir
Of winds that enter and depart.

[42]

THE MASQUE OF FORSAKEN GODS

SCENE: *A moonlit glade on a summer midnight*

THE POET

What consummation of the toiling moon
O'ercomes the midnight blue with violet,
Wherein the stars turn grey! The summer's green,
Edgèd and strong by day, is dull and faint
Beneath the moon's all-dominating mood,
That in this absence of the impassioned sun,
Sways to a sleep of sound and calm of color
The live and vivid aspect of the world—
Subdued as with the great expectancy
Which blurs beginning features of a dream,
Things and events lost 'neath an omening
Of central and oppressive bulk to come.
Here were the theatre of a miracle,
If such, within a world long alienate
From its first dreams, and shut with skeptic years,
Might now befall.

THE PHILOSOPHER

The Huntress rides no more
Across the upturned faces of the stars:
'Tis but the dead shell of a frozen world,
Glittering with desolation. Earth's old gods—
The gods that haunt like dreams each planet's youth—
Are fled from years incredulous, and tired
With penetrating of successive masks,
That give but emptiness they served to hide.
Remains not faith enough to bring them back—
Pan to his wood, Diana to her moon,
And all the visions that made populous
An eager world where Time grows weary now.
Yet Youth, that lives, might for a little claim
The pantheon of dream, on such a night,
When 'neath the growing marvel of the moon
The films of time wear perilously thin,
And thought looks backward to the simpler years,
Till all the vision seems but just beyond.
If one have faith, it may be that he shall
Behold the gods—once only, and no more,
Because of Time's inhospitality,
For which they may not stay.

[43]

THE POET

Within the marvel of the light, what flower
Of active wonder from quiescence springs!
Is it a throng of luminous white clouds,
Phantoms of some old storm's death-driven Titans,
That float beneath the moon, and speak with voices
Like the last echoes of a thunder spent?
'Tis the forsaken gods, that win a foothold
About the magic circle which the moon
Draws like some old enchantress round the glade.

[44]

THE PHILOSOPHER

I see them not: the vision is addressed
Only to thine acute and eager youth.

JOVE

All heaven and earth were once my throne;
Now I have but the wind alone
For shifting judgment-seat.
The pillared world supported me:
Yet man's old incredulity
Left nothing for my feet.

PAN

Man hath forgotten me:
Yet seems it that my memory
Saddens the wistful voices of the wood;
Within each erst-frequented spot
Echo forgets my music not,
Nor Earth my tread where trampling years have stood.

[45]

ARTEMIS

Time hath grown cold
Toward beauty loved of old.
The gods must quake
When dreams and hopes forsake
The heart of man,
And disillusion's ban
More chill than stone,
Rears till the former throne
Of loveliness
Is dark and tenantless.
Now must I weep—
Homeless within the deep
Where once of old
Mine orbèd chariot rolled,—
And mourn in vain
Man's immemorial pain
Uncomforted
Of light and beauty fled.

APOLLO

Time wearied of my song—
A satiate and capricious king
Who for his pleasure bade me sing,
First of his minstrel throng.
Till, cloyed with melody,
His ear grew faint to voice and lyre;
Forgotten then of Time's desire,
His thought was void of me.

[46]

APHRODITE

I, born of sound and foam,
Child of the sea and wind,
Was fire upon mankind—
Fuelled with Syria, and with Greece and Rome.

Time fanned me with his breath;
Love found new warmth in me,
And Life its ecstasy,
Till I grew deadly with the wind of death.

A NYMPH

How can the world be still so beautiful
When beauty's self is fled? 'Tis like the mute
And marble loveliness of some dead girl;
And we that hover here, are as the spirit
Of former voice and motion, and live color
In that which shall not stir nor speak again.

ANOTHER NYMPH

Nay, rather say this lovely, lifeless world
Is but a rigid semblance, counterfeiting
The world which was. Nor have the gods retained
Such power as once informed and rendered vital
The cryptic irresponsiveness of stone,—
That statue which Pygmalion made and loved.

[47]

ATÈ

I, who was discord among men,
Alone of all Time's hierarchy
Find that Time hath no need of me,
No lack that I might fill again.

THE POET

Tell me, O gods, are ye forever doomed
To fall and flutter among spacial winds,
Finding release nor foothold anywhere—
Debarred from doors of all the suns, like spirits
Whose names are blotted from the lists of Time,
Though they themselves yet wander undestroyed?

THE GODS TOGETHER

Throneless, discrowned, and impotent,
In man's sad disillusionment,
We passed with Earth's returnless youth,
Who were the semblances of truth,
The veils that hid the vacantness
Infinite, naked, meaningless,
The blank and universal Sphinx
Each world beholds at last—and sinks.
New gods protect awhile the gaze
Of man—each one a veil that stays—
Till the new gods, discredited,
Like mist that melts with noon, are fled—
That power oppressive, limitless,
The tyranny of nothingness.
Our power is dead upon the earth
With the first dews and dawns of Time;
But in the far and younger clime
Of other worlds, it hath re-birth.
Yea, though we find not entrance here—
Astray like feathers on the wind,
To neither earth nor heaven consigned—
Fresh altars in a distant sphere
Are keen with fragrance, bright with fire,
New hearths to warm us from the night,
Till, banished thence, we pass in flight
While all the flames of dream expire.

[48]

[49]

A SUNSET

As blood from some enormous hurt
The sanguine sunset leapt;
Across it, like a dabbled skirt,
The hurrying tempest swept.

[50]

THE CLOUD-ISLANDS

What islands marvellous are these,
That gem the sunset's tides of light—
Opals aglow in saffron seas?
How beautiful they lie, and bright,
Like some new-found Hesperides!

What varied, changing magic hues
Tint gorgeously each shore and hill!
What blazing, vivid golds and blues
Their seaward winding valleys fill!
What amethysts their peaks suffuse!

Close held by curving arms of land
That out within the ocean reach,
I mark a faery city stand,
Set high upon a sloping beach
That burns with fire of shimmering sand.

Of sunset-light is formed each wall;
Each dome a rainbow-bubble seems;
And every spire that towers tall
A ray of golden moonlight gleams;
Of opal-flame is every hall.

[51]

Alas! how quickly dims their glow!
What veils their dreamy splendours mar!
Like broken dreams the islands go,
As down from strands of cloud and star,
The sinking tides of daylight flow.

[52]

THE SNOW-BLOSSOMS

But yestereve the winter trees
Reared leafless, blackly bare,
Their twigs and branches poignant-marked
Upon the sunset-flare.

White-petaled, opens now the dawn,
And in its pallid glow,
Revealed, each leaf-lorn, barren tree
Stands white with flowers of snow.

[53]

THE SUMMER MOON

How is it, O moon, that melting,
Unstintedly, prodigally,
On the peaks' hard majesty,
Till they seem diaphanous
And fluctuant as a veil,
And pouring thy rapturous light
Through pine, and oak, and laurel,
Till the summer-sharpened green,
Softening and tremulous,
Is a lustrous miracle—
How is it that I find,
When I turn again to thee,
That thy lost and wasted light
Is regained in one magic breath?

[54]

THE RETURN OF HYPERION

The dungeon-clefts of Tartarus
Are just beyond yon mountain-girdle,
Whose mass is bound around the bulk
Of the dark, unstirred, unmoving East.
Alike on the mountains and the plain,
The night is as some terrific dream,
That closes the soul in a crypt of dread
Apart from touch or sense of earth,
As in the space of Eternity.

What light unseen perturbs the darkness?
Behold! it stirs and fluctuates
Between the mountains and the stars
That are set as guards above the prison
Of the captive Titan-god. I know
That in the deeps beneath, Hyperion
Divides the pillared vault of dark,
And stands a space upon its ruin.
Then light is laid upon the peaks,
As the hand of one who climbs beyond;
And, lo! the Sun! The sentinel stars
Are dead with overpotent flame,
And in their place Hyperion stands.
The night is loosened from the land,
As a dream from the mind of the dreamer.
A great wind blows across the dawn,
Like the wind of the motion of the world.

[55]

LETHE

I flow beneath the columns that upbear
The world, and all the tracts of heaven and hell;
Foamless I sweep, where sounds nor glimmers tell
My motion nadir-ward; no moment's flare
Gives each to each the shapes that, unaware,
Comingle at my verge, to test the spell
Of waves intense with night, whose deeps compel
One face from pain, and rapture, and despair.

The fruitless earth's denied and cheated sons
Meet here, where fruitful and unfruitful cease.
And when their lords, the mightier, hidden Ones,
Have drained all worlds till being's wine is low,
Shall they not come, and from the oblivious flow
Drink at one draught a universe of peace?

[56]

ATLANTIS

Above its domes the gulfs accumulate
To where the sea-winds trumpet forth their screeed;
But here the buried waters take no heed—
Deaf, and with closed lips from press of weight
Imposed by ocean. Dim, inanimate,
On temples of an unremembered creed
Involved in long, slow tentacles of weed,
The dead tide lies immovable as Fate.

From out the ponderous-vaulted ocean-dome,
A clouded light is questionably shed
On altars of a goddess garlanded
With blossoms of some weird and hueless vine;
And wingèd, fleet, through skies beneath the foam,
Like silent birds the sea-things dart and shine.

[57]

THE UNREVEALED

How dense the glooms of Death, impervious
To aught of old memorial light! How strait
The sunless road, suspended, separate,
That leads to later birth! Untremulous
With any secret morn of stars, to us
The Past is closed as with division great
Of planet-girdling seas—unknown its gate,
Beyond the mouths of shadows cavernous.

Oh! may it be that Death in kindness strips
The soul of memory's raiment, rendering blind
Our vision, lest surmounted deeps appal,
As when on mountain peaks a glance behind
Betrays with knowledge, and the climber slips
Down gulfs of fear to some enormous fall?

[58]

THE ELDRITCH DARK

Now as the twilight's doubtful interval
Closes with night's accomplished certainty,
A wizard wind goes crying eerily;
And in the glade unsteady shadows crawl,
Timed to the trees, whose voices rear and fall
As with some dreadful witches' ecstasy,

Flung upward to the dark, whence glitters free
The crooked moon, impendent over all.

Twin veils of covering cloud and silence thrown
Across the movement and the sound of things,
Make blank the night, till in the broken west
The moon's ensanguined blade awhile is shown....
The night grows whole again.... The shadows rest,
Gathered beneath a greater shadow's wings.

[59]

THE CHERRY-SNOWS

The cherry-snows are falling now;
Down from the blossom-clouded sky
Of zephyr-troubled twig and bough,
In widely settling whirls they fly.

The orchard earth, unclothed and brown,
Is wintry-hued with petals bright;
E'en as the snow they glimmer down;
Brief as the snow's their stainless white.

[60]

FAIRY LANTERNS

'Tis said these blossom-lanterns light
The elves upon their midnight way;
That fairy toil and elfin play
Receive their beams of magic white.

I marvel not if it be true;
I know this flower has lighted me
Nearer to Beauty's mystery,
And past the veils of secrets new.

[61]

NIRVANA

Poised as a god whose lone, detachèd post,
An eyrie, pends between the boundary-marks
Of finite years, and those unvaried darks
That veil Eternity, I saw the host
Of worlds and suns, swept from the furthest
Of night—confusion as of dust with sparks—
Whirl tow'rd the opposing brink; as one who harks
Some warning trumpet, Time, a withered ghost,
Fled with them; disunited orbs that late
Were atoms of the universal frame,
They passed to some eternal fragment-heap.
And, lo, the gods, from space discorporate,
Who were its life and vital spirit, came,
Drawn outward by the vampire-lips of Sleep!

[62]

THE NEMESIS OF SUNS

Lo, what are these, the gyres of sun and world,
Fulfilled with daylight by each toiling sun—
Lo, what are these but webs of radiance spun
Beneath the roof of Night, and torn or furled
By Night at will? All opposite powers upwhirled
Are less than chaff to this imperious one—
As wind-tossed chaff, until its sport be done,
Scattered, and lifted up, and downward hurled.

All gyres are held within the path unspanned
Of Night's aeonian compass—loosely pent
As with the embrace of lethal-tightening weight;
All suns are grasped within the hollow hand
Of Night, the godhead sole, omnipotent,
Whose other names are Nemesis and Fate.

[63]

WHITE DEATH

Methought the world was bound with final frost;
The sun, made hueless as with fear and awe,
Illumined yet the lands it could not thaw.
Then on my road, with instant evening crost,
Death stood, and in its shadowy films enwound,
Mine eyes forgot the light, until I came
Where poured the inseparate, unshadowed flame
Of phantom suns in self-irradiance drowned.

Death lay revealed in all its haggardness—
Immitigable wastes horizonless;
Profundities that held nor bar nor veil;
All hues wherewith the suns and worlds were dyed
In light invariable nullified;
All darkness rendered shelterless and pale.

[64]

RETROSPECT AND FORECAST

Turn round, O Life, and know with eyes aghast
The breast that fed thee—Death, disguiseless, stern;
Even now, within thy mouth, from tomb and urn,
The dust is sweet. All nurture that thou hast
Was once as thou, and fed with lips made fast
On Death, whose sateless mouth it fed in turn.
Kingdoms debased, and thrones that starward yearn,
All are but ghouls that batten on the past.

Monstrous and dread, must it fore'er abide,
This unescapable alternity?
Must loveliness find root within decay,
And night devour its flaming hues away?
Sickenings, will Life not turn eventually,
Or ravenous Death at last be satisfied?

[65]

SHADOW OF NIGHTMARE

What hand is this, that unresisted grips
My spirit as with chains, and from the sound
And light of dreams, compels me to the bound
Where darkness waits with wide, expectant lips?
Albeit thereat my footing holds, nor slips,
The threats of that Omnipotence confound
All days and hours of gladness, girt around
With sense of near, unswervable eclipse.

So lies a land whose noon is plagued with whirr
Of bats, than their own shadows swarthier,
Whose flight is traced on roofs of white abodes,
Wherein from court to court, from room to room,
In hieroglyphics of abhorrent doom,
Is slowly trailed the slime of crawling toads.

[66]

THE SONG OF A COMET

A plummet of the changing universe,
Far-cast, I flare
Through gulfs the sun's uncharted orbits bind,
And spaces bare
That intermediate darks immerse
By road of sun nor world confined.
Upon my star-undominated gyre
I mark the systems vanish one by one;
Among the swarming worlds I lunge,
And sudden plunge
Close to the zones of solar fire;
Or 'mid the mighty wrack of stars undone,
Flash, and with momentary rays
Compel the dark to yield
Their aimless forms, whose once far-potent blaze
In ashes chill is now inurned.
A space revealed,
I see their planets turned,
Where holders of the heritage of breath
Exultant rose, and sank to barren death
Beneath the stars' unheeding eyes.
Adown contiguous skies
I pass the thickening brume
Of systems yet unshaped, that hang immense
Along mysterious shores of gloom;
Or see—unimplicated in their doom—
The final and disastrous gyre
Of blinded suns that meet,
And from their mingled heat,
And battle-clouds intense,
O'erspread the deep with fire.

[67]

Through stellar labyrinths I thrid
Mine orbit placed amid
The multiple and irised stars, or hid,
Unsolved and intricate,
In many a planet-swinging sun's estate.
Ofttimes I steal in solitary flight
Along the rim of the exterior night
That grips the universe;
And then return,
Past outer footholds of sidereal light,
To where the systems gather and disperse;

And dip again into the web of things,
To watch it shift and burn,
Hearted with stars. On peaceless wings
I pierce, where deep-outstripping all surmise,
The nether heavens drop unsunned,
By stars and planets shunned.
And then I rise
Through vaulting gloom, to watch the dark
Snatch at the flame of failing suns;
Or mark
The heavy-dusked and silent skies,
Strewn thick with wrecked and broken stars,
Where many a fated orbit runs.
An arrow sped from some eternal bow,
Through change of firmaments and systems sent,
And finding bourn nor bars,
I flee, nor know
For what eternal mark my flight is meant.

[68]

[69]

THE RETRIBUTION

Old Egypt's gods, Osiris, Ammon, Thoth,
Came on my dream in thunder, and their feet
Revealed, were as the levin's fire and heat.
The hosts of Rome, the Arab and the Goth
Have left their altars dark, yet stern and wroth
In olden power they stood, whose wings were fleet,
And mighty as with strength of storms that meet
In mingled foam of clouds and ocean-froth.

Above my dream, with arch of dreaded wings,
In judgement and in sentence of what crime
I knew not, sate the gods outcast of time.
They passed, and lo, a plague of darkness fell,
Unsleeping, and accurst with nameless things,
And dreams that stood the ministers of Hell!

[70]

TO THE DARKNESS

Thou hast taken the light of many suns,
And they are sealed in the prison-house of gloom.
Even as candle-flames
Hast thou taken the souls of men,
With winds from out a hollow place;
They are hid in the abyss as in a sea,
And the gulfs are over them
As the weight of many peaks,
As the depth of many seas;
Thy shields are between them and the light;
They are past its burden and bitterness;
The spears of the day shall not touch them,
The chains of the sun shall not hale them forth.

Many men there were,
In the days that are now of thy realm,
That thou hast sealed with the seal of many deeps;
Their feet were as eagles' wings in the quest of Truth—
Aye, mightily they desired her face,
Hunting her through the lands of life,

As men in the blankness of the waste
That seek for a buried treasure-house of kings.
But against them were the veils
That hands may not rend nor sabers pierce;
And Truth was withheld from them,
As a water that is seen afar at dawn,
And at noon is lost in the sand
Before the feet of the traveller.
The world was a barrenness,
And the gardens were as the waste.
And they turned them to the adventure of the dark,
To the travelling of the land without roads,
To the sailing of the sea that hath no beacons.
Why have they not returned?
Their quest hath found end in thee,
Or surely they had fared
Once more to the place whence they came,
As men that have travelled to a fruitless land.
They have looked on thy face,
And to them it is the countenance of Truth.
Thy silence is sweeter to them than the voice of love,
Thine embrace more dear than the clasp of the beloved.
They are fed with the emptiness past the veil,
And their hunger is filled;
They have found the waters of peace,
And are athirst no more.
They know a rest that is deeper than the gulfs,
And whose seal is unbreakable as the seal of the void;
They sleep the sleep of the suns,
And the vast is a garment unto them.

[71]

[72]

A DREAM OF BEAUTY

I dreamed that each most lovely, perfect thing
That Nature hath, of sound, and form, and hue—
The winds, the grass, the light-concentering dew,
The gleam and swiftness of the sea-bird's wing;
Blueness of sea and sky, and gold of storm
Transmuted by the sunset, and the flame
Of autumn-colored leaves, before me came,
And, meeting, merged to one diviner form.

Incarnate Beauty 'twas, whose spirit thrills
Through glaucous ocean and the greener hills,
And in the cloud-bewildered peaks is pent.
Like some descended star she hovered o'er,
But as I gazed, in doubt and wonderment,
Mine eyes were dazzled, and I saw no more.

[73]

THE DREAM-BRIDGE

All drear and barren seemed the hours,
That passed rain-swept and tempest-blown.
The dead leaves fell like brownish notes
Within the rain's grey monotone.

There came a lapse between the showers;
The clouds grew rich with sunset gleams;
Then o'er the sky a rainbow sprang—

A LIVE-OAK LEAF

How marvellous this bit of green
I hold, and soon shall throw away!
Its subtile veins, its vivid sheen,
Seem fragment of a god's array.

In all the hidden toil of earth,
Which is the more laborious part—
To rear the oak's enormous girth,
Or shape its leaves with poignant art?

[75]

PINE NEEDLES

O little lances, dipped in grey,
And set in order straight and clean,
How delicately clear and keen
Your points against the sapphire day!

Attesting Nature's perfect art
Ye fringe the limpid firmament,
O little lances, keenly sent
To pierce with beauty to the heart!

[76]

TO THE SUN

Thy light is as an eminence unto thee,
And thou are upheld by the pillars of thy strength.
Thy power is a foundation for the worlds;
They are builded thereon as upon a lofty rock
Whereto no enemy hath access.
Thou puttest forth thy rays, and they hold the sky
As in the hollow of an immense hand.
Thou erectest thy light as four walls,
And a roof with many beams and pillars.
Thy flame is a stronghold based as a mountain;
Its bastions are tall, and firm like stone.

The worlds are bound with the ropes of thy will;
Like steeds are they stayed and contrained
By the reins of invisible lightnings.
With bands that are stouter than iron manifold,
And stronger than the cords of the gulfs,
Thou withholdest them from the brink
Of outward and perilous deeps,
Lest they perish in the desolations of the night,
Or be stricken of strange suns;
Lest they be caught in the pitfalls of the abyss,
Or fall into the furnace of Arcturus.

Thy law is as a shore unto them,
And they are restrained thereby as the sea.

[77]

Thou art food and drink to the worlds;
Yea, by thy toil are they sustained,
That they fail not upon the road of space,
Whose goal is Hercules.
When thy pillars of force are withdrawn,
And the walls of thy light fall inward,
Borne down by the sundering night,
And thy head is covered with the Shadow,
The worlds shall wander as men bewildered
In the sterile and lifeless waste.
Athirst and unfed shall they be,
When the springs of thy strength are dust,
And thy fields of light are black with dearth.
They shall perish from the ways
That thou showest no longer,
And emptiness shall close above them.

[78]

THE FUGITIVES

O fugitive fragrances
That tremble heavenward
Unceasing, or if ye linger,
Halt but as memories
On the verge of forgetfulness,
Why must ye pass so fleetly
On wings that are less than wind,
To a death unknowable?
Soon ye are gone, and the air
Forgets your faint unrest
In the garden's breathlessness,
Where fall the snows of silence.

[79]

AVERTED MALEFICE

Where mandrakes, crying from the moonless fen,
Told how a witch, with gaze of owl or bat
Found, and each root malevolently fat
Pulled for her waiting cauldron, on my ken
Upstole, escaping to the world of men,
A vapor as of some infernal vat;
Against the stars it clomb, and caught thereat
As if their bright regard to veil again.

Despite the web, methought they saw, appalled,
The stealthier weft in which all sound was still ...
Then sprang, as if the night found breath anew,
A wind whereby the stars were disenthralled ...
Far off, I heard the cry of frustrate ill—
A witch that wailed above her curdled brew.

[80]

THE MEDUSA OF THE SKIES

Haggard as if resurgent from a tomb,
The moon uprears her ghastly, shrunken head,
Crowned with such light as flares upon the dead
From pallid skies more death-like than the gloom.
Now fall her beams till slope and plain assume
The whiteness of a land whence life is fled;
And shadows that a sepulcher might shed
Move livid as the stealthy hands of doom.

O'er rigid hills and valleys locked and mute,
A pallor steals as of a world made still
When Death, that erst had crept, stands absolute—
An earth now frozen fast by power of eyes
That malefice and purposed silence fill,
The gaze of that Medusa of the skies.

[81]

A DEAD CITY

The twilight reigns above the fallen noon
Within an ancient land, whose after-time
Lies like a shadow o'er its ruined prime.
Like rising mist the night increases soon
Round shattered palaces, ere yet the moon
On mute, unsentried walls and turrets climb,
And touch with whiteness of sepulchral rime
The desert where a city's bones are strewn.

She comes at last; unburied, thick, they show
In all the hoary nakedness of stone.
From out a shadow like the lips of Death
Issues a wind, that through the stillness blown,
Cries like a prophet's ghost with wailing breath
The weirds of finished and forgotten woe.

[82]

THE SONG OF THE STARS

From the final reach of the upper night
To the nether darks where the comets die,
From the outmost bourn of the reigns of light
To the central gloom of the midmost sky,
In our mazeful gyres we fly.
And our flight is a choral chant of flame,
That ceaseless fares to the outer void,
With the undersong of the peopled spheres,
The voices of comet and asteroid,
And the wail of the spheres destroyed.
Forever we sing to a god unseen—
In the dark shall our voices fail?
The void is his robe inviolate,
The night is his awful veil—
How our fires grow dim and pale!

From the ordered gyres goes ever afar
Our song of flame o'er the void unknown,
Where circles nor world, nor comet, nor star.
Shall it die ere it reach His throne?

On the shoreless deeps of the seas of gloom
Sailing, we venture afar and wide,
Where ever await the tempests of doom,
Where the silent maelstroms lurk and hide,
And the darkling reefs abide.
And the change and ruin of stars is a song
That rises and ebbs in a tide of fire—
A music whose notes are of dreadful flame,
Whose harmonies ever leap high'r
Where the suns and the worlds expire.
Is such music not fit for a god?
Yet ever the deep is a dark,
And ever the night is a void,
Nor brightens a word nor a mark
To show if our God may hark.

[83]

From the gyres of change goes ever afar
Our flaming chant o'er the deep unknown,
The song of the death of planet and star.
Shall it die ere it reach His throne?

In our shadows of light the planets sweep,
And endure for the span of our prime—
Globed atoms that hazard the termless deep
With races that bow to the law of Time,
And yet cherish a dream sublime.
And they cry to the god behind the veil.
Yet how should their voices pass the night,
The silence that waits in the rayless void,
If he hear not our music of light,
And the thundrous song of our might?
And they strive in the gloom for truth—
Yet how should they pierce the veil,
When we, with our splendors of flame,
In the darkness faint and fail,
Our fires how feeble and pale!

[84]

From the ordered gyres goes ever afar
Our song of flame o'er the void unknown,
Where circles nor world, nor comet, nor star,
Shall it die ere it reach His throne?

[85]

COPAN

Around its walls the forests of the west
Gloom, as about some mystery's final pale
Might lie its multifold exterior veil.
Sculptured with signs and meanings unconfessed,
Its lordly fanes and palaces attest
A past before whose wall of darkness fail
Reason and fancy, finding not the tale
Erased by time from history's palimpsest.

Within this place, that from the gloom of Eld
Still meets the light, a people came and went
Like whirls of dust between its columns blown—
An alien race, whose record, shadow-held,
Is sealed with those of others long forespent
That died in sunless planets lost and lone.

[86]

A SONG OF DREAMS

A voice came to me from the night, and said,
What profit hast thou in thy dreaming
Of the years that are set
And the years yet unrisen?
Hast thou found them tillable lands?
Is there fruit that thou canst pluck therein,
Or any harvest to be mown?
Shalt thou dig aught of gold from the mines of the past,
Or trade for merchandise
In the years where all is rotten?
Are they a sea that will bring thee to any shore,
Or a desert that vergeth upon aught but the waste?
Shalt thou drink from the springs that are emptied,
Or find sustenance in shadows?
What value hath the future given thee?
Is there aught in the days yet dark
That thou canst hold with thy hands?
Are they a fortress
That will afford thee protection
Against the swords of the world?
Is there justice in them
To balance the world's inequity,
Or benefit to outweigh its loss?

Then spake I in answer, saying,
Of my dreams I have made a road,
And my soul goeth out thereon
To that unto which no eye hath opened,
Nor ear become keen to hearken—
To the glories that are shut past all access
Of the keys of sense;
Whose walls are hidden by the air,
And whose doors are concealed with clarity.
And the road is travelled of secret things,
Coming to me from far—
Of bodiless powers,
And beauties without colour or form
Holden by any loveliness seen of earth.
And of my dreams have I builded an inn
Wherein these are as guests.
And unto it come the dead
For a little rest and refuge
From the hollowness of the unharvestable wind,
And the burden of too great space.

The fields of the past are not void to me,
Who harvest with the scythe of thought;
Nor the orchards of future years unfruitful
To the hands of visionings.
I have retrieved from the darkness
The years and the things that were lost,
And they are held in the light of my dreams,
With the spirits of years unborn,
And of things yet bodiless.
As in an hospitable house,
They shall live while the dreams abide.

[87]

[88]

THE BALANCE

The world upheld their pillars for awhile—
Now, where imperial On and Memphis stood,
The hot wind sifts across the solitude
The sand that once was wall and peristyle,
Or furrows like the main each desert mile,

Where ocean-deep above its ancient food
Of cities fame-forgot, the waste is nude,
Traceless as billows of each sunken pile.

Lo! for that wrong shall vengeance come at last,
When the devouring earth, in ruin one
With royal walls and palaces undone,
And sunk within the desolated past,
Shall drift, and winds that wrangle through the vast
Imingle it with ashes of the sun.

[89]

SATURN

Now were the Titans gathered round their king,
In a waste region slipping tow'rd the verge
Of drear extremities that clasp the world—
A land half-moulded by the hasty gods,
And left beneath the bright scorn of the stars,
Grotesque, misfeatured, blackly gnarled with stone;
Or worn and marred from conflict with the deep
Conterminate, of Chaos. Here they stood,
Old Saturn midmost, like a central peak
Among the lesser hills that guard its base.
Defeat, that gloamed within each countenance
Like the first tinge of death, upon a sun
Gathering like some dusk vapor, found them cold,
Clumsy of limb, and halting as with weight
Of threatened worlds and trembling firmaments.
A wind cried round them like a trumpet-voice
Of phantom hosts—hurried, importunate,
And intermittent with a tightening fear.
Far off the sunset leapt, and the hard clouds,
Molten among the peaks, seemed furnaces
In which to make the fetters of the world.

Seared by the lightning of the younger gods,
They saw, beyond the grim and crouching hills,
Those levins thrust like spears into the heart
Of swollen clouds, or tearing through the sky
Like severing swords. Then, as the Titans watched,
The night rose like a black, enormous mist
Around them, wherein naught was visible
Save the sharp levin leaping in the north;
And no sound came, except of seas remote,
That seemed like Chaos ravening past the verge
Of all the world, fed with the crumbling coasts
Of Matter.

[90]

Till the moon, discovering
That harsh swart wilderness of sand and stone
Tissued and twisted in chaotic weld,
Lit with illusory fire each Titan's form,
They sate in silence, mute as stranded orbs—
The wrack of Time, upcast on ruinous coasts,
And in the slow withdrawal of the tide
Safe for awhile. Small solace did they take
From that frore radiance glistening on the dull
Black desert gripped in iron silences,
Like a false triumph o'er contestless fates,
Or a mirage of life in wastes of Death.
Yet were they moved to speak, and Saturn's voice
Seeming the soul of that tremendous land
Set free in sound, startled the haughty stars.

"O Titans, gods, sustainers of the world,
Is this the end? Must Earth go down to Chaos,
Lacking our strength, beneath the unpracticed sway

Of godlings vain, precipitate with youth,
 Who think, unrecking of disastrous chance,
 To bind their will as reins upon the sun,
 Or stand as columns to the ponderous heavens?
 Must we behold, with eyes of impotence
 That universal wrack, even though it whelm
 These our usurpers in impartial doom
 Beneath the shards and fragments of the world?
 Were it not preferable to return,
 And meeting them in fight unswervable,
 Drag down the earth, ourselves, and these our foes,
 One sacrifice unto the gods of Chaos?
 Why should we stay, and live the tragedy
 Of power that survives its use?"

Now spake
 Enceladus, when that the echoings
 Of Saturn's voice had fled remote, and seemed
 Dead thunders caught and flung from star to star;
 "Wouldst hurl thy kingdom down the nightward gulf,
 Like to a stone a curious child might cast
 To test the fall of some dark precipice?
 Patience and caution should we take as mail,
 Not rashness for a weapon—too keen sword
 That cuts the strained knot of destiny,
 Ne'er to be tied again. Were it not best
 To watch the slow procedure of the days,
 That we may grasp a time more opportune,
 When desperation is not all our strength,
 Nor the foe newly filled with victory?
 Then may we hope to conquer back thy realm
 For thee, not for the gods of nothingness."

[92]

He ceased, and after him no lesser god
 Gave voice upon the shaken silences,
 None venturing to risk comparison,
 Inevitable then, of eloquence
 With his; but silence like the ambiguousness
 Of signal and of lesser stars o'er cast
 And merged in one confusion by the moon,
 Possessed that multitude, till Saturn rose.
 Around his form the light intensified,
 And strengthened with addition wild and strange,
 Investing him as with a phantom robe,
 And gathering like a crown about his brow.
 His sword, whereon the shadows lay like rust
 He took, and dipping it within the moon,
 Made clean its length of blade, and from it cast
 Swift flickerings at the stars. And then his voice
 Came like a torrent, and from out his eyes
 Streamed wilder power that mingled with the sound.

* * * * *

And his resurgent power, in glance and word,
 Poured through the Titans' souls, and was become
 The fountains of their own, and at his flame
 Their fires were lit once more, whose restlessness
 Leapt and aspired against the steadfast stars.
 And now they turned, majestic with resolve,
 Where, red upon the forefront of the north,
 Arcturus was a beacon to the winds.
 And with the flickering winds, that lightly struck
 The desert dust, then sprang again in air,
 They passed athwart the foreland of the north.

[93]

Against their march they saw the shrunken waste,
 A rivelled region like a world grown old
 Whose sterile breast knew not the lips of Life
 In all its epoch; or a world that was
 The nurse of infant Death, ere he became
 Too large, too strong for its restraining arms,
 And towered athwart the suns.

And there they crossed
 Metallic slopes that rang like monstrous shields,

But gave not to their tread, and clanging plains
Like body-mail of greater, vaster gods.
Where hills made gibbous shadows in the moon,
They heard the eldritch laughters of the wind,
Seeming the mirth of death; and 'neath their gaze
Gaunt valleys deepened like an old despair.
Yet strode they on, through the moon's fantasies,
Bold with resolve, across a land like doubt.

And now they passed among huge mountain-bulks,
Themselves like peaks detached, and moving slow
'Mid fettered brethren, adding weight and gloom
To that mute conclave great against the stars.
Emerging thence, the Titans marched where still
Their own portentous shadows went before
Like night that fled but shrunk not, dusking all
That desert way.

And thus they came where Sleep,
The sleep of weary victory, had seized
The younger gods as captives, borne beyond
All flight of mounting battle-ecstasies
In that high triumph of forgetfulness.
And on that sleep the striding Titans broke,
Vague and immense at first like forming dreams
To those disturbèd gods, in mist of drowse
Purblind and doubtful yet, though soon they knew
Their erst-defeated foes, and rising stood
In silent ranks expectant, that appeared
To move, with shaking of astonished fires
That bristled forth, or were displayed like plumes
Late folded close, now trembling terribly,
Pending between the desert and the stars.
Then, sudden as the waking from a dream,
The battle leapt, where striving shapes of gods
Moved brightly through the whirled and stricken air,
Sweeping it to a froth of fire; and all
That ancient, deep-established desert rocked,
Shaken as by an onset of the gulfs
Of gathered and impatient Chaos, while,
Above the place where central battle burned
The stars drew back in fright or dazzlement,
Paling to more secluded distances.
Lo, where the moon had wrought illusive dreams
That clothed the wild in doubt and fantasy,
Hiding its hideousness with bright mirage,
Or deepening it with gulfs and glooms of Hell,
Mightier confusion, chaos absolute
Upon the imperilled sky and trembling world,
Now made a certainty within itself,
The one thing sure in shaken sky or world.
Maelstroms of battle caught in storms of fire,
Torn and involved by weaponry of gods—
Crescented blades that met with rounds of shields;
Grappling of shapes, seen through the riven blaze
An instant, then once more obscure, and known
Only by giant heavings of that war
Of furious gods and roused elements,
Divided, leagued, contending evermore
Along the desert—these, augmentative
Round one thick center, stunned the faltering night.

So huge that chaos, complicate within
With movements of gigantic legionry,
Antagonistic streams, impetuous-hurled
Where Jove and Saturn thunder-crested, led
In fight unswervable—so wide the strife
Of differing impulse, that Decision found
No foothold, till that first confusion should
In ordered conflict re-arrange, and stand
With its true forces known. This seemed remote,
With that wide struggle pending terribly,
As if all-various, colored Time had made
A truce with white Eternity, and both
Stood watching from afar.

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[95]

[96]

Through drifts of haze
The broadening moon, made ominous with red,
Glared from the westering night. And now that war
Built for itself, far up, a cope of cloud,
And drew it down, far off, upon all sides,
Impervious to the moon and sworded stars.
And by their own wild light the gods fought on
'Neath that stupendous concave like a sky
Filled and illumed with glare of bursting suns.
And cast by their own light, upon that sky
The gods' own shadows moved like shapen gloom,
Phantasmagoric, changed and amplified,
A shifting frieze that flickered dreadfully
In spectral battle indecisive. Then,
Swift, as it had begun, the contest turned,
And on the heaving Titans' massive front
It seemed that all the motion and the strength
Self-thwarting and confounded, of that strife,
Was flung in centered impact terrible,
With rush of all that fire, tempestuous-blown
As if before some wind of further space,
Striking the earth. Lo, all the Titans' flame
Bent back upon themselves, and they were hurled
In vaster disarray, with vanguard piled
On rear and center. Saturn could not stem
The loosened torrents of long-pent defeat;
He, with his host, was but as drift thereon,
Borne wildly down the whelmed and reeling world.

[97]

Hurling like slanted rain, the lurid levin
Fell o'er that flight of Titans, and behind,
In striding menace, all-victorious Jove
Loomed like some craggy cloud with thunders crowned
And footed with the winds. In that defeat,
With Jove's pursuit involved and manifold,
Few found escape unscathed, and some went down
Like senile suns that grapple with the dark,
And reel in flame tremendous, and are still.

Ebbing, the battle left those elder gods
Upcast once more on coasts of black defeat—
Gripped in despair, a vaster Tartarus.
The victor gods, their storms and thunders spent,
Went dwindling northward like embattled clouds,
And where the lingering haze of fight dissolved,
The pallor of the dawn began to spread
On darkness purple like the pain of Death.
Ringed with that desolation, Saturn stood
Mute, and the Titans answered unto him
With brother silence. Motionless, they seemed
Some peristyle or range of columns great,
Alone enduring of a fallen fane
In deserts of some vaster world whence Life
And Faith have vanished long, that vaguely slips
To an immemorial end. And twilight slow
Crept round those lofty shapes august, and seemed
Such as might be the faltering ghostly noon
Of mightier suns that totter down to death.

[98]

Then turned they, passing from that dismal place
Blasted anew with battle, ere the swift
Striding of light athwart stupendous chasms
And wasteful plains, should overtake them there,
Bowed with too heavy a burden of defeat.
Slowly they turned, and passed upon the west
Where, like a weariness immovable
In menace huge, the plain its monstrous bulk,
The peaks its hydra heads, the whole world crouched
Against their march with the diminished stars.

[99]

FINIS

It seemed that from the west
The live red flame of sunset,
Eating the dead blue sky
And cold insensate peaks,
Was loosened slowly, and fell.
Above it, a few red stars
Burned down like low candle-flames
Into the gaunt black sockets
Of the chill insensible mountains.
But in the ascendant skies
(Cloudless, like some vast corpse
Unfeatured, cerementless)
Succeeded nor star nor planet.
It may have been that black,
Pulseless, dead stars arose
And crossed as of old the heavens.
But came no living orb,
Nor comet seeming the ghost,
Homeless, of an outcast world,
Seeking its former place
That is no more nor shall be
In all the Cosmos again.
Null, blank, and meaningless
As a burnt scroll that blackens
With the passing of the fire,
Lay the dead infinite sky.
Lo! in the halls of Time,
I thought, the torches are out—
The revelry of the gods,
Or lamentation of demons
For which their flames were lit,
Over and quiet at last
With the closing peace of night,
Whose dumb, dead, passionless skies
Enfold the living world
As the sea a sinking pebble.

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