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*A LEGEND  
OF ARGOLIS*

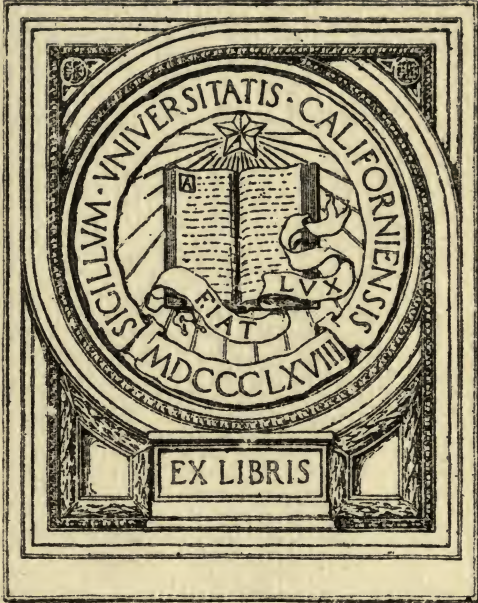
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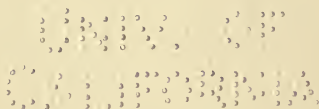
# APHRŌESSA

*A LEGEND OF ARGOLIS*

And other Poems

BY

GEORGE HORTON



LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN

PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1897

Gift of Mrs.  
Schuler

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
PRESS

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*APHRÓESSA.*

HERE on this innocent Ægean isle,  
Whose mountains look on bloomy Argolis,  
Will I take refuge from the world awhile—  
There is no other spot so sweet as this.

Here young-eyed Spring an early haven seeks,  
Fled over sea from the voluptuous south,  
With pink of almond blossoms in her cheeks  
And red of blood-red roses on her mouth.

With laurel leaves her brow is garlanded ;  
Her breath is sea-wind mingled with the sweet,  
Faint breath of flowers that, when they hear  
her tread,  
Swarm out of doors to kiss her rosy feet.

Oh, that I knew the words to picture well  
The almond trees when blossoming their fill !  
Oh, that I wrote as sweetly as they smell,  
Patches of white against the purple hill !

What brings so many swallows ere their time  
O'er heaving leagues of wan and sullen seas ?  
It is because they long in alien clime  
All winter for the heavenly almond trees.

My heart is healed the grief it knoweth of  
When I look up into the skies of Greece,  
For they are deeper than divinest love  
And softer than the brooding wing of peace.

Oh, happy hills of islands far away,  
In purple isolation dreaming there !  
Are ye creations of the truthful day,  
Can any earthly country be so fair ?

The violet, unearthly air of sleep  
Enfolds them in a dim poetic mist,  
And slopes that nearer lie are buried deep  
In tender tints of melted amethyst.

If any little town, distinctly white,  
Embowered sits in silvery olive trees,  
How pleasantly it lingers on the sight,  
Harmonious amid softer harmonies !

What colour is so soft as olive green ?  
Such tints belong not to the garish sun,  
But they must be the moon's ethereal sheen  
That lingers on although the night is done.

And here, if anywhere beneath the sky,  
Spring decks herself as bride awaiting groom,  
For long before 'tis time that she must fly  
A thousand orange orchards are in bloom.

Oh, happy moment for the wanderer  
Who stands at last upon the homing prow,  
When first his village gleams from out the blur,  
And orange orchards breathe upon his brow!

I pray you, simple people, let me bide  
Here in your town and dream for many days ;  
So much I loathe the world of guile and pride  
That I feel worthy of your peaceful ways.

And I will be as one of you : I'll grieve  
If any grieve, and sing when others sing ;  
And if I may but hear it, I'll believe  
In all your lore of elfin happening.

What do we know, we so-called wiser men ?  
They doubt the most who most are counted  
sage,  
Sneering at all things : let us woo again  
The fertile credence of a fresher age.



Oh, surely with becoming awe I'll tell,  
And many prudent signings of the cross,  
What fate a youthful shepherd once befell,  
What joy he had, what long and bitter loss.

Stern manhood had not come to set its mark  
Upon the lip of graceful Spiridon,  
Nor had the sunny upland of his cheek  
Put forth as yet a single tiny sprout  
To hide the wild, red poppies of its youth.

Young Spiridon a shepherd was, and kept  
His woolly flock in flowering Argolis,  
And he was comely as a stripling god.  
More graceful was he than a slender reed  
That guards a midday lurking-place of Pan.  
Brown locks he had that rippled round his  
brow

Like tiny wavelets on a shining beach ;

Narcissus' features, splendid dreamy eyes,  
Lips that the reddest berry could not stain  
And teeth more pearly than a cuttle bone  
Foam-fetched and foam-forsaken on the sands !  
Oh, who can say if any little rill  
Of classic blood has trickled down the years ?  
Has wound its tortuous and shining way  
Through ages of slow disillusionment,  
Of dim despair and dark forgetfulness ?

If this can be, perhaps a tiny drop  
Had mingled with the blood of Spiridon ;  
For he could see the beautiful in things.  
He was not blind nor deaf, as are the brutes  
And brutish men ; no sordid world was his  
Of commonness and dull utility.

O happy shepherd, for whom not in vain  
A myriad wild-wood blossoms lifted sweet

Beseeching faces ! for whom not in vain  
Fleet swallows laid above the level sea  
The invisible carpet of their woven flight.  
If any roguish warbler from a twig  
With saucy curve of neck looked down at  
    him,  
Or if a petal-wingèd butterfly  
Mistook some flower for its love, and with  
Despairing kisses wooed it, Spiridon  
Was heart-stung with a sudden dart of joy.

There is a class of men who only see  
Good pasturage for cattle, tho' the mead  
Is Tyrian-dyed with bright anemones ;  
Who, looking at a Patmian sunset say :  
" 'Twill rain to-morrow," or " It will be dry."

Young Spiridon was not of these, nor yet  
Of those who count the spots upon a moth

And add the creature to a catalogue.  
Untutored was he, yet as finely tuned  
To harmonies of colour, sound and form  
As an æolian lyre to summer winds.

He was enwrapped in Nature, and his soul  
As quick to the great mother's every change  
As is the unborn babe unto the heart  
That feeds it ; every subtle influence  
Of night and day was shadowed in his moods  
As when upon a mountain, moving clouds  
With sky between, cast fluent light and shade.

When first at dawn the awakening hills uprose  
Like old leviathans, and looked about  
To see if yet the shepherd sun were come,  
Young Spiridon was glad—the uncertain  
world  
Seemed full of hope and vague resolve and  
song.

How different that other twilight was  
When Evening poured her horn of purple wine  
Above the world, and spattered all the sky  
With the unmelted jewels in the dregs !  
“O Night, thou bringest all things !” saith the  
    queen  
Of song : to Spiridon she brought the stars.

He floated down a life of golden days  
And lone, mysterious nights, as one who drifts  
By stretches of dim forest, alternate  
With peaceful open, and for comradeship  
His timid flock sufficed him and the stars.

The athletic maidens of the villages,  
However comely in their graceful garb,  
Bewitched him not ; he never came to watch  
The Pyrrhic line of girls upon the green  
Dancing at Easter festivals ; nor sought

The fields in summer, where with crooked  
swords

The fierce, lithe women slew the myriad  
wheat.

Ah, many a twain of tropic eyes that bloomed  
Twin pansy blossoms in a garden face  
Leaned to his smile, and many a simple heart  
Ached secretly beneath his guiltless scorn !

Who could resist the gentle Marigó—  
Who but this dreamer Spiridon ? Indeed,  
I know the truth of his heart history,  
And what strange things befell him in the  
wild.

Were it not so, I should be fain to say  
That he was blind to God's most utter work.  
For who that loves the lovely cannot feel  
That all the beauty of the universe,  
Rife as the countless laughter of the sea,

Reaches flood-tide in woman ? Fairer she  
Than wind-swept stars or song of nightingale  
Or moth, moon-dusted and with dewdrop  
eyes ;

Fairer is she than mountain waterfalls  
Or gentle kine, knee-deep in clover fields ;  
And sweeter than the sun's good-night caress  
Before he puts the drowsy world to bed.  
For woman's beauty makes a man forget  
All other things in heaven or earth beneath  
Until he hears no music save her voice,  
And wots of beauty only in her face.

The sister years had made of Marigó  
Their darling : one by one they went tiptoe  
Across her sunny life, like nymphs that play  
At hide and seek 'twixt two eternities.  
Like nymphs were they, that hear the frolic  
tread

Of sandalled feet, and flee into the shade ;  
And as they passed, each left with Marigó  
Some charm that added to her loveliness.

The opening rose a crowning moment has  
When it retains the beauty of the bud,  
Although the swelling glory of the flower  
Has burst its bars and warmly peeps abroad.  
At such exquisite age of double charm  
Was Marigó : A bud of maidenhood  
That half-fulfilled its riper promises.

Ah, you should see her coming from the well,  
The jug upon her shoulder lifted high !  
One chiselled arm with classic curve upraised,  
Holding the antique amphora, her sleeve  
Slipped shoulder-low from off the dimpled  
    skin ;  
Or look into her deep, dark eyes and say



If they indeed are black ; for Love has come  
And lit his beacon in their splendid night.

A mighty walnut tree its branches spread,  
Like hands in benediction, o'er the home  
Of Anna, mother of our Spiridon ;  
A humble cot of white, where sweet content  
Had dwelt with frugal plenty many a year.  
'Tis evening, and the shrill cicada's song  
Has ceased among the feathery olive trees.  
How suddenly the quiet fell ! but now,  
A million tiny prisoners of the grove  
Were rasping at the bars, when in a breath  
They stopped with one accord, as if they heard  
Night's footfall in the pillared corridors.

Anna stood spinning in her open door.  
The forked distaff leaning from her waist  
A lily seemed, that bloomed in snowy wool.

Deftly her fingers twirled the slender yarn,  
While ever and anon with quavering voice  
She hummed the sweet, monotonous refrain  
Of some Ægean lullaby, first sung  
To Grecian mothers by the crooning sea.  
For Anna was awaiting Spiridon,  
Her pride, her pallikar, her platane tree !  
One after one the great-eyed stars awoke,  
And from an orange grove the hiding moon  
Came forth, dimly yet brightly beautiful.

Who can describe, what human words can  
paint  
Such golden ecstasy, such utter grace ?  
Oh, that the song archangel, he who wrote  
'Neath English skies, "See how the floor of  
heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold,"

Had been baptized in Grecian moonshine !  
then  
The world might read and some would understand.

It is no wonder that the feathered choirs  
Have picked their sweetest throat to sing at  
night,  
Such rare enchantment never could exist  
Without a voice : and when the earth is  
poured  
So full of vague, yet potent ecstasy,  
That even dullards cease from chattering,  
They know not why—Night walks among the  
trees,  
And whispers to her singer, “ Sing my song ! ”

Upon a bench beneath the walnut tree  
Sat Anna, waiting for her Spiridon

Until the nightingales began to spin  
The fleecy moonshine into skeins of song.  
But even then, though all the air was full  
Of their delirium of joy and pain,  
Sweeter and sadder than a seraph's love,  
Her mother's heart forgot not, and she sighed :  
" Why comes he not to hear his nightingales ?  
Perhaps he lingers 'neath the fragrant pines,  
Or gazes long upon the moongilt sea :  
Sing on until he comes, O nightingales !  
He loves you so, my boy, my cypress tree ! "

Out of the Grecian night came Marigó,  
And seemed a part of all that perfectness  
And of the hour ; she wore about her brow  
A broidered kerchief tied in charming haste.  
Her eyes were shining like the stars with  
    love,  
Her tread was light as fall of orange flowers.

“I come,” she said, “to share your loneliness,”  
And kissed the hand that Anna held to her.

But Anna drew the fair cheek to her own,  
And whispered low: “To-night he comes to  
me,

And I shall tell him it is time he wed,

And that I long to see him wed with you.

Why should he say me nay? my slightest wish  
Has ever been his law, he is so good.

Besides, where will he find a fairer maid,

Or I a daughter with a kinder heart?

He shall not put me off, for I am old

And long to see a grandchild ere I go.

I long to hold his chubby little feet,

And feel his soft, red fingers in my hair.”

But Marigó, because she feared the moon

Would tell her blushes, kissed the fond old dame

And fled into the fragrant night, the while

Her heart sang louder than the nightingales.

Meanwhile our Spiridon had left his flock  
Safe in the keeping of his wolfish dogs,  
And homeward down the rugged mountain-  
side  
Was coming slow. Each treacherous step he  
tried  
With long slim crook, while one hand guarded  
well  
And lifted high above the bristling thorns  
A bag of snowy curds. Full soon he came  
Upon a path that led by winding ways  
Into a deep ravine, where timidly  
With many hidings 'mid the tumbled rock,  
A little rill ran to its mother sea.  
The path was dangerous here, and Spiridon  
Stretched him upon a bank of velvet sand  
Until the Night should bring her silver bowl  
Of light, and pour it on the world. Anon  
Sheer loneliness oppressed him ; e'en the dog

That loved him most and always followed  
him

Lay down and slept. Somewhere among the  
rocks

At sad monotonous intervals an owl  
Uttered its single note ; far, far away  
It seemed, yet near, as when a smitten bird  
Peeps feebly while it gasps its life away.  
A cricket too chirped in the wilderness  
Complainingly, because he had no kin  
Or comrades nearer than the firefly stars.  
Even the trees that by the light of day  
Are friends of man and beast, now stood apart  
With cloaks of night about them tightly drawn  
And whispered dread conspiracies. At last  
Instinctively the shepherd's fingers sought  
His pipe of reeds and drew it from his breast ;  
For he was skilled to blow sweet melodies,  
And many an hour that otherwise had been

Companionless, he thought away in tunes.  
In such a way came music in the world—

That old god Pan, because he was uncouth  
And every nymph that chanced to peep at him  
Through parted grasses, frightened ran away,  
Grew lonely, and for many dreary years  
The whispering reeds his only comrades were.  
Oh, long he listened, till at last he learned  
Their secret language and he heard them boast :  
“ We know all music that shall ever be,  
And all that ever was in other worlds.  
We have ensnared the very wildest notes  
Of birds that, perched awry upon our stems,  
Went mad with joy while swaying in the sun.  
We know the dove’s low coo, the lullaby  
Of sighing winds, the lap of laughing waves.  
Our hollow stems are prisons, and they hold  
The fairy souls of silent melodies.”



Then old god Pan, with twinkling, curious  
eyes,

And thick lips parted in astonishment,

Seized one that nearest grew and broke it off.

Long did he listen at the open end,

And shutting one eye, long he peered within.

Darkness was there and silence, nothing more.

At last, with sudden puffing of his cheeks,

He blew into the hole, in hope to drive

The lurking fairy forth ; then straightway leapt

Erect on crooked legs, for he had heard

A vibrant moan ! What wonder that the god,

Sitting thereafter at cross-legged ease,

Wooed the imprisoned sprites of sound until

The shepherds' pipes grew perfect in his  
hands ?

Or that the nymphs, whose rosy faces pushed

The reeds asunder, oftentimes forgot,

Alas ! too late, that old god Pan was there ?

'Twas Pan, quaint denizen of solitudes,  
Who taught the lonely shepherds how to pipe,  
And they from earliest ages have beguiled  
The friendless hours with strange wild melodies.

So Spiridon began to play, and slow  
His fingers rose and fell along the stops  
Responsive to his mood ; with eyes half closed,  
Sitting cross-legged on the sand, he blew  
A sad refrain, monotonous and low.  
While thus he sat, a playful infant star  
Passed overhead leading the stately moon,  
And in a magic moment Night had slipped  
Her gauzy veil and flung it to the winds.

Oh, beautiful ! far up the deep ravine,  
Those vague white cliffs a fairy palace are  
Reached by a giant stairway, over which  
Is laid the brooklet's labyrinthine thread.

The sand is silver dust, the shining pools  
Are melted silver, and their bottoms gleam  
With diamond stars down-fallen from the sky.  
Wrapt by the birth of beauty, Spiridon  
Sat gazing at the scene in ravishment,  
His pipe held silently to parted lips.

What is that wild, strange singing that he hears,  
Unearthly sweet ? He springs erect and looks  
Above him where the cavern's rocky walls  
Define a heavenly road bestrown with stars.  
No human form he sees, no sprite adrift  
Beneath the dazzling moon, yet overhead  
A score of voices swell the weird refrain,  
Haunting the night with ghostly harmony.

The singing ceases, and a sudden peal  
Of elfin laughter, like a chime of bells,  
Startles the sky ; far, far and faint it wanes

Ha-ha-ing down the wind. The shepherd youth  
Rubs both his eyes, believing that he sleeps,  
Then looks again in wide-eyed wonderment.  
The laughter dies in throbbing waves, as when  
One gently strikes a thin-lipped bell, and holds  
It to his ear. And now 'tis gone away  
As fitfully as though a door were thrown  
Wide open on a room of revellers  
And closed again. A few belated notes  
Call to each other from far distances  
And all is utter silence. Now indeed  
Great fear has seized the soul of Spiridon.

Quickly he bares his head and many times  
Crosses himself, while calling on the name  
Of Blessed Mary, Mother of Our Lord.

While thus he stood devout, again he heard  
Strange laughter, this time from a single throat.

A maiden's voice it was, so clear, so sweet,  
The shepherd's music-loving heart was thrilled  
With mingled joy and fear, for well he knew  
No earthly voice could have such eerie charm.  
Upon a jutting rock that swam high up  
Full in the magic moon, he fixed his eyes,  
For thence the laughter came, and while he  
gazed

The fluent moonbeams flowed into a shape  
And vision of ethereal loveliness.  
For lo ! an instant on the perilous rock  
A Nereid maiden kneeled, her radiant cheeks  
Abloom with roguish mirth. Her dainty hands  
Clung to the edge, and all her yellow hair  
Fell downward in a flood, from which her face  
Looked forth, as from a moonlit waterfall.

The impulsive shepherd flung his pipe to earth  
And raised his arms in passionate appeal,

But in three heart beats she had melted back  
Into thin moonshine, and the rock was bare.

Alas, for Marigó ! for nevermore  
Will Spiridon so much as turn his head,  
Although the softest eyes in Argolis  
Yearn to him from the white, wild clematis  
Wreathing her father's balcony. Ah, no !  
He would not give the slightest look or thought  
Although the daintiest daughters of the town  
Stood by the church door on a festal day  
In gala dress, more lovely than a patch  
Of mingled daisies and anemones.

The shepherd reached his home before the  
moon  
Had stood lovelorn upon a beetling crag  
And fallen with Sapphic leap into the sea.  
His mother's hand he kissed, and offered her

The snowy curds with all the deference  
Of one who kneels with gems before a queen.  
Then sitting on the bench, his arm about  
The gentle creature's waist, he talked to her  
Of new-born lambs, their clumsy, foolish ways,  
Of dogs that looked into his face with eyes  
Brimming with thought and vainly tried to  
    speak.

He told her of a sunset he had seen  
When one great cloud had waved across the  
    west

In shape so like a mighty angel's wing  
That he had been afraid ; and how last eve  
He climbed a crag to watch the Queen of Night  
Open old Ocean's palace door and stroll  
Into the flowery sky ; but not a word  
Of fairy singing heard beneath the moon  
He said, and not a word about the maid  
Who smiled upon him through her yellow hair.

With harmless guile and much maternal art  
His mother led the talk to Marigó ;  
“ Here is a girl,” she said, “ most beautiful,  
And yet without the pride that beauty brings.  
Who has a whiter neck, a rounder arm ?  
Who has so red a cheek, and who can dance  
So featly at the village festivals ?  
And yet no spider better spins than she,  
No building bird is more industrious.  
She’s not the girl to sit all day and eat  
Muskmelon seeds upon her balcony.  
Alas ! ’tis often true of women folk  
That shrewdest venom flows from sweetest lips ;  
But ’tis not true of Marigó. Her heart  
Is full of love for everything that lives,  
And sweet as St. Helene’s. More than this,  
Her dowry is all ready, and mine eyes  
Have seen the things—dainty embroideries,  
And snowy linen sweet with lavender,



Soft woolly rugs of mingled red and white  
Made by herself ; a score of long-eared goats,  
Whose bleating kids shall quickly swell your  
flock,

The income of a hundred olive trees—  
All these she has, and better than all this,  
Five hundred drachmas safely hid away.”

But who that once a Nereid has seen  
Can talk of marriage with a village maid ?  
Oh, what cares he for fruit of olive trees,  
For bleating kids, or drachmas hid away ?  
“ I am too young to wed,” said Spiridon.  
“ Besides, I do not care for Marigó,  
Nor such as she. She is too big and strong,  
Her cheeks too red and white, and like the rugs  
She makes and dyes.” Such cruel heresies  
Spoke he against the sweetest, kindest soul  
In all the world, for he had been bewitched.

The poppies faded from the shepherd's face,  
And in their stead the pale, sad lilies sprung  
Of bitter yearning. Little hope he had,  
But love thrives best when fed upon despair.

This only hope he clung to : once again  
That he might see her face, that he might hear  
Her peace-destroying voice. And so in all  
The wildest, loneliest places that he knew  
He cried her beauty, and declared his love  
In words so mad they should have moved the  
breast

Of any she that had a woman's heart.

“ Oh, cruel one,” he cried, “ oh, cruel one,  
To rob a simple shepherd of his peace !  
What right had you to come into my life,  
When but to look was sorrow ? What knew I  
Of hair more fine than tangled moonshine,  
what

Of eyes that sparkled through it like the glow  
Of fireflies winking in midsummer grass ?  
Oh, what knew I of arms more white than foam,  
So dazzling pure, it puts the sand to shame,  
Sea-washed a thousand years ? Oft have I  
dreamed

Of maidens fairer than the eye of man  
Has ever seen ; have sat with one for hours  
Waist deep in blooms ; or walked full loverlike  
Through long, cool vistas of an ancient wood.  
But never have I dreamed by night or day  
Of beauty such as yours, so fatal fair."

Is there a dweller in the wilderness  
Who doubts that often he is overheard  
Whether he pipe or sing ? Who does not know  
That all his lonely mutterings are theme  
Of gossip for the unseen folk ? Bright eyes  
Peep at the shepherd from thick-woven vines,

And curious faces from behind grey rocks  
Steal slowly out, then dart from sight again.

And so that beauteous being must have heard  
How that a comely shepherd roamed the hills  
Gone witless for a cruel Nereid's love.

Does there exist a thing in woman's shape,  
Half goddess though she be, who would not  
haste

To breathe the air of worship, and enjoy  
The pain and ruin by her beauty made ?

Often there came to Spiridon the sense  
That she he loved was near, and so because  
The Nereids are a music-loving folk  
He went to sit him in the shade and pipe  
His fondest strains, and as his grief increased  
His piping grew in skill and tenderness,  
Until at last no reed in Argolis  
Could breathe such sweet despair.

A tree there was,  
A mighty platane tree, that flourished near  
The thicket's edge, and towered above the  
copse,  
Herded below in gnarled and thorny strife,  
As mortals great in goodness overtop  
Their pigmy kind. Oh, 'twas a noble growth !  
And only lived to bring into the world  
A meed of joy and peace. On summer noons,  
With palms uplift, it motioned back the sun  
And murmured soothingly, "Nay, not so  
fierce !"  
And beckoning to the weary horse it said,  
"Here is a haven, come and rest with me."  
Often through long and sultry afternoons,  
Sleek, thoughtful cattle lingered in its shade.  
And there the nodding goat would lie and  
watch  
Her offspring gambol, nor took heed if one

Leaped nimbly on her side and looked abroad,  
Deeming the earth the radius of his eyes.

Amid the spacious foliage of this tree  
Abode a world of insect tribes, whose life  
Flowed on through endless generations, like  
The lives of men upon a little star.  
The industrious ant was there, the adventurous  
bee,  
The brigand spider, and the dainty moth,  
And sometimes droves of flies droned drowsily,  
Making a mellow music round its trunk.

One August afternoon came Spiridon  
Beneath the tree, and finding that the place  
Was cool and fair, he sat him down to pipe  
And muse upon his love ; the slender reed  
Was lifted to his lips, but ere he blew  
The fickle breath escaped him in a sigh.

“ Was ever lover so forlorn,” he cried,  
“ As I who live upon the memory  
Of one delicious moment ? Yet her face  
Is cut more vividly upon my heart :  
Than goddess’ profile on an old-time gem.  
Ah, happier the shepherd lad who loves  
Some high-born dame, some princess sweetly  
proud !

For he at least may look upon her face,  
May worship from afar, as heathen men  
Kneel to the moon—oh, happy, happy swain !  
For he may tell his grief and bear the jeers  
That are the highest praise the world can  
give :

Can follow her with distant steps and say,  
‘ It is not madness here to love in vain,  
But simple worship.’ Ah, unhappy me !  
What can I do but loiter in the shade  
And sigh my sorrow to a gossip reed ?”

While thus bemoaning fate, he stretched him  
prone

And gazed into the deep green sky of leaves  
That arched above his head ; their infinite stir  
Fell like the blur of sleep upon his mind,  
Confusing thought, and all the images  
Of wakefulness were trembled out of shape,  
As when a zephyr blows across the face  
Of some reflecting pool. While thus he lay  
The low, melodious hum of clumsy flies  
Boomed its full bass among the tenor hymn  
Of insects swarming in the dim, warm shade.  
Thought was asleep, and so all faintest sounds  
Came clear and far, familiar and yet strange.  
He heard a blackbird shout in mockery  
The choicest trills of half a hundred throats,  
Then rise to such a heavenly height of song  
It seemed Apollo after Marsyas.

A lone cicada lit upon a limb



And tuned his strident violin. A dove  
Cooed in the wood, the voice of dreaming  
love.

“Aphróessa ! Aphróessa !” what sound  
Is that, what name wind-murmured in his ear ?  
Who whispered it, what red and roguish lips  
Laughed from the tangled thyme “Aphróessa” ?  
The timid dove repeats “Aphróessa,”  
The blackbird listening cries “Aphróessa !”

The shepherd leapt erect and called the name  
In wonder mixed with fear, and when he  
heard

Sweet laughter fainting as it fled, he knew  
That he must sigh henceforth “Aphróessa.”

The shepherd came unto a crystal spring  
That filled a rocky basin ; it was clear

As mountain air and pure as innocence.  
The waters bubbled up through snowy sands  
And, overflowing, made a little brook  
Along whose edges lush green grasses grew,  
Haunt of limp frogs and slim, smooth water-  
snakes.

Ferns dipped their silken tresses in the spring  
And velvet mosses crept around its brim,  
Uncertain if beneath the wave or not.

Oh, every influence about the spot  
Was cool and fresh, for e'en the myriad  
blooms

Upon a neighbouring oleander bush  
Were tinted with the pink of early dawn.

A lusty fig tree stood not far away,  
Domed like a mosque, and holding 'mong its  
leaves

Entangled twilight, where secreted deep  
In dim recesses hung the purple figs.

Oh, spot of blest refreshment ! All day long  
The lavish plash and bubble of the flood  
Was heard among the hollows, making there  
Delicious music for the thirsty soul.  
How many creatures to this fountain came  
For life and joy ! The graceful partridge cock  
At early dawn stepped softly from the wood  
And whistled to his flock if all was safe.  
Often the song-bird, panting in the shade,  
Flew down to bathe and flutter in the pool,  
And when the day was hottest, yellow wasps  
Stood tiptoe on the brink and buzzing drank.

So Spiridon a moment ere he knelt  
To quaff the limpid freshness, paused to list  
The voice of running waters, while his eyes  
Outran delay and quickly drank their full.

What says " Aphróessa, Aphróessa " ?  
Not loudly, as a mocking-bird might call

A word so fair 'tis music in itself,  
But whisperingly, as a zephyr lips  
Among the nodding tree-tops. Yet no breeze  
Was stirring in the pines ; the spindles hung  
Untrembling in the balsam-laden air.

“ ‘Aphróessa ! Aphróessa’ ! so oft  
I’ve breathed the name that every lovely sound  
In nature seems an echo of my thought.  
My heart beats out its syllables ; and yet  
I hear ‘Aphróessa, Aphróessa’ ? ”

So mused the shepherd, much perplexed, until  
He spied a spot below him where the brook  
Fell thinly o’er a ledge of rocks and bloomed  
In drifts of creamy foam, pink shot with sun.  
Thither he ran to listen, but he heard  
Naught save the silken hissing of the stream.

“Aphróessa ! Aphróessa” ! and now  
The overflowing waters of the spring  
Bubble the word as children talk in tears ;  
But when he turns to look, oh, mockery !  
The rhythmic wavelets of a shallow pool  
Take up the sound and laugh it on the sands.

He sees the pallid moon, disconsolate,  
For night has led the stars away and left  
Her there, forgotten in an alien sky :  
He sees this only, and the rocks and trees  
And the glad waters flinging back the sun.

In sheer despair he kneels beside the pool  
To bathe his throbbing brow—what lovely face  
Looks from the wave in roguish innocence,  
Now vague amid the fluent lymph, now clear  
As mirrored beauty smiling at itself ?  
'Twas she, Aphróessa, as whitely fair

As though a water-lily stood tiptoe  
But could not lift its petals to the air.  
Her parted lips were redder than the bright  
Anemone that blooms beneath the sea—  
How soft they tremble on her coral teeth !  
Her eyes made dim the clearness of the pool,  
And all about her in the crystal flood  
Her yellow tresses floated pale and fine.

“At last !” cried Spiridon—“oh, love, at last !”  
And falling on his face he thrust his arms  
Deep in the pool. How shall I tell his grief,  
How shall I tell his tortures as he lay  
Panting with passion ? For the twentieth  
time  
The sweet face trembled back to perfectness,  
But if he touched the fluid mirror, if  
He breathed upon it with kiss-shapen lips,  
The features mocked him with large grimaces.

And once he wooed the shape with honeyed  
prayers

Most piteously sweet, and then it smiled  
So tenderly upon him that he threw  
His arms about the yellow floating hair—  
Alas ! alas ! 'twas cold elusiveness.

At earliest morning Spiridon had gone  
Into an ancient forest ; 'twas a place  
Of dim solemnity, whose mossy trunks  
Made quiet corridors, that seemed more sad  
Than some old cloister long untenanted.  
'Twas spacious as a Jovian portico  
Or antique stoa suitable for thought,  
Whose giant shafts, beleaguered by the years,  
Make their last stand among their fallen kin.

Oh, very sad was Spiridon ! His eyes  
Were fixed upon the earth, and when he  
sighed

'Twas tremulously, as a punished child  
Breathes in its sleep. Unto such wretched  
state

Love brings a man. Sometimes in feverish  
spleen

He paused and cursed his fate and with his  
staff

Beat on the guiltless ground. "Fool ! fool !"  
he cried,

"Cowardly fool, who might have drowned  
myself

While yet her image lingered in the wave,  
And so have died seeing her last of all."

While thus he mused, much wondering he  
heard

The golden strumming of a lyre, as sweet  
As though the boom of bees, when first they  
rise



In flight, were set to music. Straight and fair  
Before him stretched a sylvan avenue  
Under whose leafy portal peeped the day,  
And thither hied the shepherd, for the sounds  
Grew louder as he went. Tiptoe he walked  
And scarcely breathed, for ever in his heart  
Was that one hope to see Aphróessa.

Behind a chieftain rock about whose form  
Attending vines had thrown a verdant robe  
Inwove with snowy blooms, stood Spiridon.  
Pushing the leaves aside, full cautiously  
He looked upon a meadow, brightly green,  
Where countless yellow dandelions grew  
And white wild carrots lifted high their stems,  
As though a prince of India lolled along  
With pomp of sunward-tilted parasols.  
And all amid the fluffy, golden flowers  
Zigzagged the robber bees, or swaggered there  
Among the pollen with thick-booted thighs.

A chosen spot there was of velvet sward  
Close-cropped and shaded by a mighty rock.  
And there upon a little mound of earth  
Sat one who lyred, akimbo at the strings,  
In pose more graceful than a poet's dream  
Of Lesbian Sappho with her cithara.  
Voluptuous music was her every move,  
And as she tapped the earth with sandalled toe,  
Or swayed her sweet form to the melody,  
Her slightest attitude was so instinct  
With gracefulness, she seemed bewitched with  
rhythm.

Three Nereid maids meanwhile expressed the  
air  
In stately dance, sweet music's pantomime.  
It was an ancient Lydian harmony,  
Monotonous and slow, as when the lyre  
Had fewer strings and only those of love.

But now indeed I pause in deep despair,  
Knowing full well that I shall never mix  
Words that would paint the picture of those  
nymphs.

Yes, even he who told a Grecian urn  
In song more dainty than the thing itself  
Would meet with failure here, nor could the  
brush

Of deftest painter catch the easy sway  
Of supple bodies, or the varied charm  
Of changing poses when each moment brings  
Its own fair picture ; hand in hand they  
danced—

Bending far back like lilies in the wind—  
Or nodding all their heads together while  
They tripped it in a ring ; sometimes aline  
They started o'er the green, with lifted leg  
And foot poised ready for the tiptoe step.  
And ever as they moved, their drapery

Clung to their forms or floated on the breeze  
In undulations of Pæonion grace.

White clad were they, except their pink-white  
arms,

And these were bare; upon their heads they wore  
Crowns of the starry jasmine, honey sweet.

Their hair was yellow as ripe wheat and fine  
As the silk thread wherein the mummy worm  
Dreams of his heaven and wakes to find it  
true :

E'en to the feet it fell, a priceless robe,  
Like that which Lady Godiva enwrapped  
About her modest nudeness; in their hands,  
With many wavy floatings on the wind  
And many playful flutterings, they held  
Their magic veils, those wondrous strips of  
gauze

That give invisibility, and power  
To swim like thistledown upon the air,

And youth that drifts along the centuries  
Unwithered as a rosebud in a brook

What shepherd has not heard a hundred times  
From wise old women, and from other springs  
Of certain knowledge, how the Nereid's power  
Lies in her magic veil? Snatch that away  
And she will follow like a little child—

The slave of him who holds it. Who shall tell  
The joy and torture of our Spiridon

Hid there among the vines? Aphróessa

Was dancing with the dancers. He could see  
Her body gleaming through the gauzy robe  
And hear the whisper of her drapery

Upon her smooth round limbs. Oh, heartless

Love,

Who tortures us with such a cruel flame

And lets us look on heaven! that heathen  
dream

Of one who bent with parched and swollen  
tongue

O'er cooling waters that eluded him,  
Is love's own parable.

Now Spiridon

Stood trembling in the vines, one moment hot  
One moment cold, for love's malaria  
Had crept into his marrow ; all his soul  
And all his life were centred in the thought  
To snatch the Nereid's veil. He was more  
tense

Than the sleek cat that crouches patiently  
Beneath the fluttering bird ; at last ! at last !  
Aphróessa came near, and as she danced  
The filmy fabric floated by his face—

Out darted Spiridon and leapt at it,  
When lo ! the maidens vanished from his gaze

As utterly as people of a dream  
From eyes that open on reality.

One instant stands the shepherd so perplexed  
He does not hear sweet laughter mocking him,  
Or if he hears, it is as when the door  
Of sleep is left ajar, and waking sounds  
Flit in like day-birds into candle light.

But when his own name floated merrily  
Adown the rippling syllables of mirth  
He looked, and there upon the forest's edge  
Stood fair Aphróessa ; to Spiridon  
She stretched inviting arms and from her eyes  
There leapt a laughing challenge ; in one hand  
She held the magic veil ; her snowy robe  
Was bound beneath her bosom with a zone  
Of golden scales ; no modern woman she  
Attired in stiff, unchanging ugliness.

The supple form was free, one breast was bare,

A snowy hill upon whose summit love  
Had set a beacon pyre ; 'twas virgin firm  
And yet voluptuous, as when some girl  
Diana slender hints at motherhood.

The fluent drapery falling from her belt  
Whether it clung or floated free, obeyed  
The Grecian fingers of the officious wind.  
Her feet were nude, except that o'er them  
crossed

A sandal's fastenings ; not large were they  
Nor small, for either is deformity.

The lovely toes, like white mice all asleep,  
Lay side by side. Oh, happy Spiridon,  
Whose eyes at least might kiss his lady's feet !  
Her chest was deep as Hera's, and the neck  
Arose from sloping shoulders round and fair  
As an uplifted column ; suddenly  
She twined her hair about a glowing arm



And with the white hand held it to her breast ;  
Turning as though to flee into the wood  
She cast a backward glance the while she sang :

“ Who would catch a Nereid maid  
He must follow, follow  
Fleetly on through sunny glade  
And through sylvan hollow.  
Come away at early morn  
If you love me, mortal,  
While the knight bee winds his horn  
At the rose's portal.”

The ardent youth sprang forward, and the  
nymph  
Flitted before him through the leafy wood.  
So doth a child pursue a butterfly  
Among the roses on a summer's morn.  
The gaudy creature slightly moves its wings  
And swims the wind with fleet, ærial grace ;

The eager boy flies after, unawares  
Of weariness or hunger, while his cheeks  
So redly glow, the insect often turns  
To see if it shall light on them or not.  
With chubby arms outstretched, with parted  
    lips  
And fascinated eyes, the child pursues  
The prize that now is at his finger-tips,  
Now floating far away ; and if it rests  
One moment on the bosom of a rose  
It flits before his fingers close on it.

So Spiridon through all that summer morn  
Followed Aphróessa among the trees.  
Sometimes her drapery seemed to brush his  
    face,  
But he could no more catch it than a cloud.  
Sometimes she sat upon a fallen tree  
And mocked at him, beseeching him to come

And take her in his arms, but when he would,  
She bounded from him with a playful scream  
And burst of sunny laughter ; once she stood  
Tiptoe behind a bush, and peeping o'er  
Besought him : " Gentle shepherd, stand you  
still

Behind this leafy wall and woo awhile.

What ! would you chase a woman like a sheep  
And hook her with your staff ? Call me sweet  
names,

Tell me how fair I am. No woman lives  
Who will not yield to him who pleads aright."

" Ah !" cried the panting shepherd, " now you  
set

A task too hard for me ; I'll follow you  
While I've a single heart-beat left, or strength  
To lift a limb. Oh, I can die for you  
But cannot tell how fair you are, our speech

Was never made with thought of loveliness  
Like yours, there are not words to cope with  
it."

At this she clapped her little hands and cried :  
"This want of language is more eloquent  
Than any richness. I am almost won.  
Yet would I hear the sweetest things you  
know.

I have a woman's ear, that takes delight  
In honeyed names and flattering metaphor."

At this her head she tilted like a bird  
That hears a new note in the wilderness,  
In pretty pose of curiosity.  
"If you'll but stand and let me feast my eyes  
Upon your goddess face," cried Spiridon,  
"I'll pour you out a tireless stream of talk,  
Whose every wave shall be a simile

Praising your loveliness. You are more sweet,  
Yea, more delicious than cold water is  
Found suddenly by one who raves for drink  
In desert sands. So do I long for you,  
So do I look and thirst but cannot drink.  
Your voice is like the sound of such a stream."

"Nay, turn me not to water," laughed the  
nymph ;

"Am I so cold and do I babble so ?"

"There's not a berry in the wood whose blood  
Could stain your lips. If but the wild, red  
rose

Could steal the fragrance of the jasmine bloom  
I'd shut my eyes and kiss it for your mouth.  
Your lips are bright as a pomegranate bloom  
When all the tree save that one little flower  
Is overshadowed by woodland clematis."

“Nay, leave my lips, good shepherd, 'tis not  
meet

To dwell so long upon a maiden's lips !”

“Your neck is whiter than fresh milk, your  
skin

More soft and delicate than new-made curds.”

“Fie, saucy shepherd ! is it thus you woo ?  
Am I as cold as water, sour as curds ?”

“Mock on, Aphróessa, mock all you will !

Laugh me into the meanest thing alive

So you'll but stay and let me hear your voice.”

“Tell me about my cheeks. Of course you'll  
say

They're like a peach ?”

“Why, if an autumn peach,  
Of softest skin and downy bloom most rare,

Were tinted with bright blood that came and  
went

Beneath transparent whiteness, then I'd say  
Your cheeks were like a peach. They are in truth  
Like all the fairest peaches on a tree  
Where all are beautiful. If one is pale,  
It is Aphróessa, perchance in thought ;  
Its neighbour here has but a crimson spot  
Among its dainty pallor : 'tis my love  
When she is angry with poor Spiridon.  
Another is all red, and so you looked  
When dancing on the dandelions there.  
Here's one beneath whose downy surface  
spreads  
A faint but general bloom : it is my love  
When she's asleep. I see her glossy cheek  
Nesting upon her arm——”

“ Oh, fare thee well ! ”

Exclaimed Aphróessa. “ I'm put to bed,

So it's high time I said 'good-night' to you."  
With that she danced away, and in a breath  
Was flitting whitely 'mong the solemn trees.  
Where a long vista narrowed to its end,  
A shaft of sunshine pierced the sombre shade  
And glorified her while she paused to sing :

“Never mind the midday sun,  
White in summer weather,  
For you follow after one  
Airy as a feather.

All the yellow afternoon  
You must falter never :  
Should the weary shepherd swoon,  
I am gone for ever !”

Love winged the shepherd's feet and bore him  
up ;  
He noted not the passing hours, nor thirst,



Nor heat, nor weariness, but ran and ran  
Over the silent floor of fallen leaves  
In vain pursuit of the fair, cruel sprite.  
Once lightly up a rocky steep she led,  
And bending o'er him warbled from a ledge :

“ Up the steepest mountain height  
You must struggle after ;  
Where I go in easy flight,  
Where you hear my laughter.”

At eventide stood fair Aphróessa  
Upon the western borders of the wood.  
The regal sun forgot his fierce regard  
And gave the world a mellow parting smile  
Before he left it with the satrap stars ;  
An old gold light lay on the sea, and shot  
Its level lances o'er the meadow-land.  
Into the wood the furtive splendour crept,

Searching its inner nooks. The tall, bare  
trunks

Were touched with glory toward the dying day.

“Farewell, good shepherd!” said Aphróessa :

“The night is near, and I must hie me home

Unto my people. But before I go,

I thank you for a pleasant summer day.

You run right well, and from your honeyed  
tongue

Drips most persuasive flattery. ’Tis rue

To waste such talents on a Nereid maid.

Leave the chase, unhappy lad !

Or if you must marry,

Make a village maiden glad—

Though she run she’ll tarry.”

Then dropping both her silken-fringed lids

Over the eyes that would not feign at grief,

She sighed most dolefully ; while her red lips

Into a rosebud that is half a rose  
She drew, and from her gathered finger-tips  
Wafted a kiss. Oh, joyless mockery !  
“ Farewell,” she sighed, “ good shepherd, fare  
you well !”

And turning with a proud and queenly sweep  
Of gathered robes, and with a stately bow  
Like some great lady in a minuet,  
She fled, when lo !

A zephyr caught her veil  
And twisted it about a thorny branch.  
Now ! shepherd, now ! if you would taste  
delights  
Worthy the young old gods ! One heart-beat  
more  
And all is lost. See in what frantic haste  
Aphróessa is struggling for the veil.  
But Spiridon is there, his weary limbs  
Electrified with sudden hope ! He leaps,

He breaks the limb away, and tears  
The gauzy thing from out the Nereid's grasp.  
She springs upon him like a lioness. In vain !  
He throws his right arm round the glowing  
form

And holds the veil behind his back. At last  
The struggles cease, the yielding body lies  
Soft on his breast as though in willingness.  
He feels the strong heart beat beneath his  
hand,

The cool, smooth hair upon his cheek. He  
hides

His face among it and breathes deep, as one  
Would smell a flower. What flower was e'er  
so sweet ?

Our Spiridon grows faint, but will not swoon.  
He must not die of joy—not yet ! not yet !  
He lifts her face and looks into her eyes

As one would lift a flower with broken stem.  
She smiles a wan, sad smile : " Give me my  
veil !

What ! Will the comeliest youth in Argolis,  
The strongest and the very wisest too,  
Descend to force a helpless maiden's love ?  
Give me my veil and woo me as you should."

But Spiridon replied : " You should not have  
Your veil by pleading here a thousand years.  
No, though you blamed me with such elo-  
quence

As made the very stones cry ' shame ' on me  
Would I not yield. Nor will I heed your tears  
Quenching with ruffian brine the sweetest eyes  
That ever broke a heart. I pity more  
The wretch I would be if I had you not !"

He took her by the hand, and through the  
wood

He led her like a disobedient child,  
Brought to its mother to confess a fault.  
Backward she hung, reluctantly, with head  
Drooping to hide her face ; her lily neck  
Blushed rosy with the dawn of maiden shame.

“ Fear not,” said Spiridon, “ my love, my life,  
My heart’s delight, my joy, my little bird !  
I know a cavern by a crystal brook ;  
Tall oleanders grow before the door,  
And all about beneath the pleasant trees  
Are flowery couches, whereon we may sit  
And talk of love, and when we tire of these,  
I’ll spread soft fleeces on the cavern floor.  
Oh, we will wander ’neath the summer moon,  
My arm about your waist, pausing full oft  
To hear the impatient nightingales express  
Those raptures that we feel but cannot say.  
I’ll bring the fairest blossoms of the year,

And weave them into garlands for your brow.  
Wild roses red as blood, pomegranate flowers,  
Sprigs of the scented basil, osier blooms,  
And morning glories purple, pink and white.  
And I know, too, a hundred little blooms  
That hide among the grasses ; tiny things,  
So small that we must bend to look for them,  
And yet most perfect ; dainty bells that swing  
Tolling out perfume ; heaven-gazing stars  
That do not catch the wild bee's eye, yet each  
As wonderful and perfect as a sun.

And I will make you every day a wand  
Of jasmine buds that, threaded on a twig,  
Will open when you kiss them, and breathe  
    back  
Your very breath ; and I will bring you too  
The prettiest little lambs in all the flock  
To love you, Dear, and be your followers.

Nor shall you lack for dainties, for I'll choose  
The whitest curds for you, and fill a gourd  
Each morn with sweetest milk ; besides, who  
    knows

So well as I where juiciest berries grow,  
Delicious figs, and golden mousmoula ?”

She seemed to heed him, in a breath she  
    dropped

Her mood of angry sorrow and became  
As shyly happy as a half-hour bride  
When love is maddest. Thus she hid her eyes  
The while her body shivered at his touch,  
Or flashed brief glances through him, looks  
    that spoke

Of shame and joy commingled—joy so great  
No shame could hide it—shame that fiercer  
    grew

Even with the bliss it blushed for. So they  
    came



At purple evening to the port of love,  
And all night long upon a flowery couch  
The shepherd drank the strong, delirious wine  
That youth and love mix only once for man ;  
The Nereid plied him with the cup of bliss  
Until he lost all knowledge save the thought  
That he was drunk with joy. She held him  
close,

So flooding him with tingling ecstasy  
That he believed her kisses, and at last  
She cozened him to give her back the veil.

She took him like a mother to her breast,  
Her balmy breast, whose rhythmic rise and  
fall

Lulled him as softly as a summer wave.  
With her cool hair she soothed his burning  
eyes,

Piling the fragrant tresses on his face

And on her own. She whispered lip to lip :  
“ See how I love you, darling, for I stay  
E’en though I have the veil. For your dear  
sake

Will I give up my thousand years of life  
And we’ll grow old together. Now I know  
That perfect joy must wither like a flower ;  
But while it lasts, how sweet ! how sweet it is !  
Now close your eyes, my love, and sleep, and  
sleep.”

Her poppy kisses lay upon his lids ;  
Her fragrant sighs were like a breeze that blows  
From indolent islands of the southern seas  
Where life is but a dream of love. He slept.

Then did the fair, false creature lay his head  
Upon the earth, and, springing from the couch,  
Vanished for ever from the eyes of men.

Here ends the simple tale of Spiridon.  
The madness of an hour had blighted him,  
Changing his life to worse than weariness.  
They found him dead beside the magic spring.  
His crook lay near, but never more would he  
Run to the rescue of the wayward lambs.  
They buried him among the rustic dead,  
And many village maidens wept for him ;  
And one, fairest of all the countryside,  
Grieved with a lifelong sorrow. Even now,  
After long years, her withered, trembling  
    hands  
Hang frequent wreaths upon the unsightly  
    cross  
Of wood that marks the shepherd's grave. Ah,  
    me !  
Love blooming in an aged woman's heart  
Is very sad and beautiful, as when  
One lone rose lingers where a garden was.

Old Father Zeus is dead, long, long ago ;  
He drank sweet nectar from a golden bowl,  
And lived high up above the cares of men.  
He breathed sweet incense from a thousand  
fires,  
And smiled benignly while immortal bards  
Assuaged his soul with most harmonious  
praise.

But he is gone, and with him all the gods  
That wont to loll upon Olympian clouds.

Ah, me ! sweet Cytherea is no more,  
The fairest dream of men who dreamt most  
fair.

She was the poet's woman—passionate  
As some young girl whose pulses are athrill  
With most delicious torture, strange to her,

Until she look upon the chosen swain.  
And she was beautiful beyond the power  
Of God or man to look and live in peace ;  
Most delicate and yet voluptuous,  
Divinely and yet softly beautiful.  
Her every undulate move was a caress,  
And never from her lips a moment strayed  
The roguishness and tenderness of love.  
Her breath was perfume, and her rosy skin  
Soft as the bosom of first motherhood.

And Artemis is gone for evermore,  
Who followed with fleet foot the flying stag  
Far into deeps of forests old and dim.  
She was more graceful than the fairest boy  
Ever idealised upon an urn,  
And, save for dimpled knees and budding  
    breasts  
And wealth of hair that often in the chase

Slipped from its coil and clothed her to the  
thighs,

She might have looked another Ganymede,  
Or him who died of innocent despair  
Because no maid was lovelier than he.

She was all woman too, and when the moon  
Poured its full splendour through the Latmian  
wood

She fled the chase for many and many a night  
To mourn beside her lost Endymion.

Oh, blissful moment when he oped his eyes  
To see the lovelorn goddess floating down,  
Her robes of woven moonlight drifting close  
About the beauty of her radiant form !

And Psyche too is gone, who wandered far  
Seeking for tidings of her vanished love.

Sometimes a shepherd leaning on his staff  
Was startled by a plaintive voice that called,

“I prithee, shepherd, hast thou seen my love ?”

And there a girlish figure clad in white

Stood lily-wise among the anemones.

And as he looked in mute astonishment!

He heard again the pleading voice that said,

“Oh, tell me, shepherd, did he pass this way ?”

Sometimes she saw a swain who played the  
pipe,

And hailed him till he paused with gathered  
lips :

“Oh, tell me, piper, have you seen my love ?”

Oh, many days she went her lonely way

Seeking for tidings of the vanished one,

And oftentimes some kindly soul would ask :

“How looked your love ? What sort of man  
was he ?”

Then would her full heart overflow its bounds

And flood the ear with sudden eloquence :

“Oh, he was fairer than a wild, white rose  
That flushes faintly with a hue of pink,  
And baby soft was all his naked flesh.  
Thick curls about his waxen temples grew—  
Light brown were they and fine as spiders' silk.  
His lips were redder than a poppy leaf  
That blazes in a bed of snowy thyme,  
And when he sighed his breath was like  
perfume  
Wind-wafted from the climbing clematis,  
And sweeter were his kisses than the scent  
Down sifting from a heaven of jasmine stars.”

What happy beings were the ancient gods !  
How beautiful they were, how lifted up  
Above the mean and sordid thoughts of men,  
And free from every pain save those of love !  
Their memories are as sad and beautiful  
As columns of old temples that uprear



Their graceful heads o'er heaps of ruined walls—  
And so they gleam amid the ruined past.

What man is there who loves the beautiful  
Who has not grieved for stately Artemis—  
For Aphrodite and her rosy son,  
For bright Apollo and sweet Ganymede ?

Their temples are destroyed, their images  
Long since have been despoiled by impious  
    hands,  
And they themselves have waned like proud,  
    fair stars  
Before the fierce sun of a later creed.

But not alone the skies of Greece were  
    thronged  
With deities, for river, grove, and fount  
Were peopled with a vague, ethereal folk ;

And some of these, because they were not  
great,

But lived deep hid in forests hoar and still,  
Whose giant trunks eternal twilight made,  
Have never been molested in their haunts.

Often the simple shepherd of to-day,  
Bending to drink from out a crystal pool,  
Beholds a sweet face trembling in the lymph ;  
Sometimes he hears wild singing in the wood,  
And if the voice be more than mortal sweet  
He signs the cross and mutters hasty prayers.  
They even know, the pious village folk,  
Of fairy routs that play on ancient pipes  
And dance, white-clad, beneath the summer  
moon.

Strange tales the watchers of the vineyards tell,  
Huddled at noon within their leafy huts ;

Ah, then no merry laugh is heard, no song  
From hearts however full of joy or love,  
For woodland spirits lie asleep at noon,  
And rise in wrath if any sound they hear.  
Strange tales the shepherds tell around the fires  
That gleam at night upon the lonely hills.

Oh, for a touch of that poetic charm  
That sifts into the hearts of uncouth men,  
Who lodge apart beneath the large white stars  
And listen to the whispering wilderness !

*PAN.*

THAT old god Pan,  
By some sweet stream that ran  
Through dreamy fields Arcadian,

Safe hid would lie  
'Mongst reeds and rushes high,  
And watch the flashing waves go by.

Often he made  
Soft music in the shade,  
And all things listened while he played.

He earliest knew  
What sound-souls fair and true  
In whispering reeds imprisoned grew.

'Twas he that in  
Their hollow pipes and thin  
Found all of Nature's dulcet din.

He played ; the thrush,  
Hid in leaf-bower lush,  
With head awry grew mute and hush,

And honey-bees,  
Quiring in blossomed trees,  
Would cease to list his melodies.

His pipe to hear,  
The timid fawn stole near  
And, quite entranced, forgot its fear.

And many a face  
Of nymph and woodland grace  
Peeped through into his hiding-place.

We of to-day  
On scannel pipes that play,  
Make discord, blow them how we may.

Oh, that some man  
By stream Arcadian  
Might find the syrinx of old Pan !

*CUPID SLEEPING.*

(FROM THE ANTHOLOGY.)

THROUGH a shady forest going,  
Found we Cupid all alone,  
And his cheeks, so smoothly glowing,  
Like to golden apples shone.

He had not his quiver by him,  
Nor his bow, well bent and strung ;  
But we soon espied them nigh him,  
'Midst the leafy branches hung.

Chains of sleep his limbs encumbered,  
As among the flowers he lay,  
Smiling even while he slumbered,  
In his cruel, roguish way.

Swarms of tawny bees came flying  
All about his waxen lip—  
Often thus one sees them trying  
Flowers, that with honey drip.



*THE HONEY THIEF.*

(FROM THE ANTHOLOGY.)

LOVE, the thief, chanced on a day  
Near the bees to linger,  
When a naughty one, they say,  
Stung him on the finger.

Oh, the wound it hurt him so !  
How he blew and shook it !  
How he stamped and danced with woe,  
Then to mother took it !

Spreading all his fingers, he  
Sobbed to Aphrodite :  
“ Mother, little is the bee,  
But its sting is mighty ! ”

Then the Queen of Passion smiled,  
And she answered merely :  
“ You are small yourself, my child,  
But you wound severely.”

*BALLADE OF SAPPHO'S FAME.*

(TO MADAME BAKHMÉTEFF, ATHENS.)

OH, who was lord of Lesbos' isle  
When Sappho sang for many a year,  
And great Apollo's self the while,  
Ceased from the lyre and bent to hear ?  
The titles to his heart so near,  
His lineage, who can now repeat ?  
Yet she escaped oblivion drear  
Who said that love is "bitter-sweet."

And who by wealth or selfish guile  
Became the island's proudest peer ?  
What siren with voluptuous wile  
Was potent at the royal ear ?

Who gained renown with sword and spear ?  
Their fame is dust beneath the feet  
Of Time, and she alone is dear  
Who said that love is "bitter-sweet."

Our joy is sadder than the smile  
Of grief that cannot shed a tear ;  
Our lives are like a little mile  
Marked on the orbit of a sphere ;  
The wisdom that we most revere  
Is mixed with folly and defeat :  
Her laurel never can grow sere  
Who said that love is "bitter-sweet."

## ENVOI.

From out that pallid atmosphere  
Where dawn and darkness vaguely meet,  
Comes but her lark-note cool and clear  
Who said that love is "bitter-sweet."

*A NIGHT IN LESBOS.*

Δέδυκε μὲν ἅ σελάνα  
Καὶ Πληιάδες, μέσαι δὲ  
νύκτες, πάρα δ' ἔρχεται ὥρα,  
ἔγω δὲ μόνα κατεύδω.

SAPPHO.

THE moon has left the sky,  
The Pleiades are flown,  
Midnight is creeping nigh,  
And I am still alone.

Ah me ! how long, how long  
Are all these weary hours !  
I hate the night-bird's song  
Among the Lesbian flowers.

I hate the soft, sweet breeze  
That comes to kiss my hair  
From oleander trees  
And waters cool and fair.

My heart is fierce and wild ;  
The winds should rave and moan.  
Ah ! why is Nature mild  
When I am here alone ?

While yet the silver moon  
Rode o'er the laughing sea,  
My heart was glad, for, " Soon,"  
I said, " He comes to me."

But when its placid sphere  
Slid swiftly 'neath the wave,  
I sighed, " He is not here.  
Be brave, my heart, be brave !"

Then for an age of woe,  
Of doubts and hopings vain,  
I watched the white stars snow  
On yon Ægean plain.

I named them by their names—  
Alcyone, and all  
Those far and happy flames  
On which we mortals call.

“Ere that one sets,” I said  
“My soul shall swim in bliss ;”  
And then, “Ere that is fled  
My lips shall feel his kiss.”

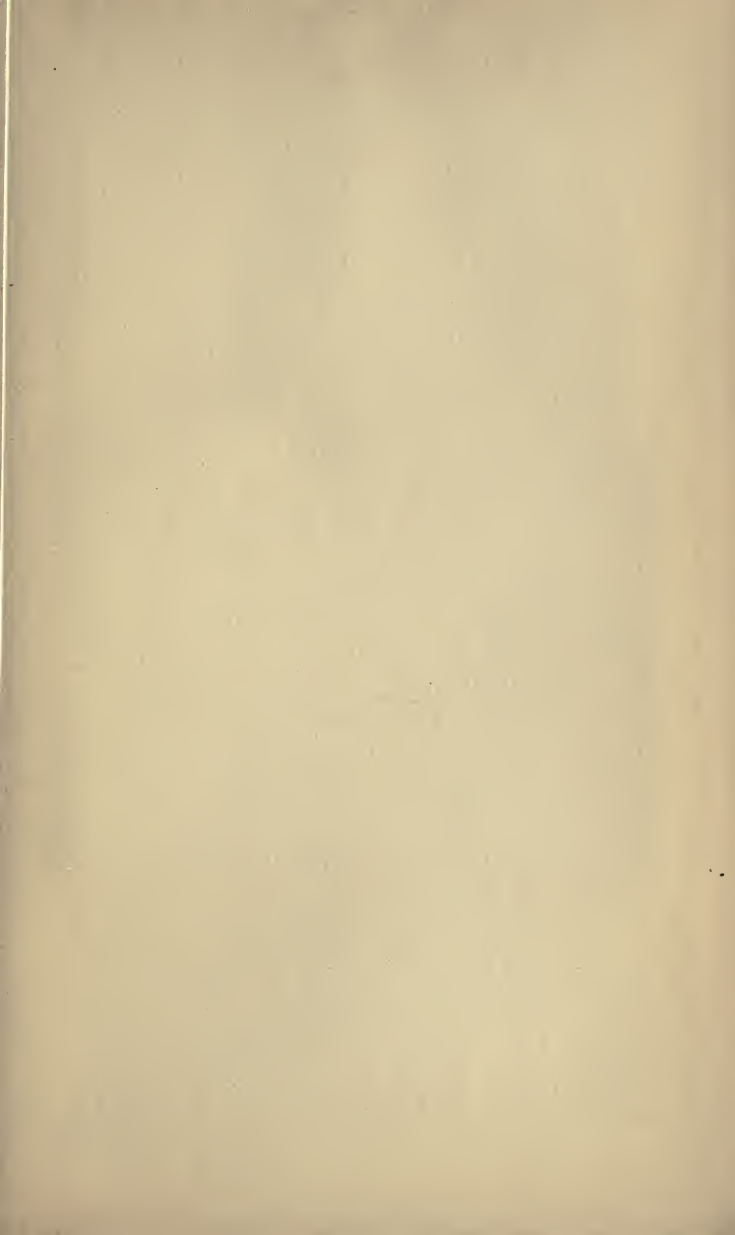
The moon has left the Pole,  
The Pleiades are flown ;  
’Tis midnight in my soul,  
And I am here alone !

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