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CHANGE,

THE WHISPER OF THE SPHINX.

C H A N G E

THE WHISPER OF THE SPHINX.

BY

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KING EDWIN."

Change is the alphabet of history,
The outer rind of every mystery,—
Perplexing letters, who can read them well?
Or pluck each ripe fruit from encasing shell?

PHILADELPHIA:

J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

1879.

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CHANGE.

I.

A VOYAGER landed on a foreign shore
Beholds with alien eyes all things around,
Wondering observes the land and people o'er,
And each strange thing his watchfulness hath found,—
But this most strange : that in the multitude
Remembrance beams not forth from any eye,
No face calls up a scene that he hath viewed,
Nor recognition by one passer-by.
Not like a stranger's may my voyaging be
Here on life's busy paths and broad highway ;
But everything, familiar, nod to me ;
And when dark mysteries with wonder play,
Deep in the heart of marvels let me find
Nature's response to sympathetic mind.

A friendly land, this cheerful world of ours,
If we will heed each kindly-whispered word
That soft winds blow from perfumed banks of flowers,
Or song in warbling throat of happy bird ;
Or if, when lovely landscapes would beguile
Of weary cares and sorrows, we reply
Unto the Beautiful with answering smile,
And welcome that can charm away Annoy :
And even Change,—before whose mystery
I still would linger as a little boat
Hugs the safe shore, nor dares a stormy sea
Where troubled billows, white with perils, float,—
Hath often kindness in its stern commands,
And toucheth tenderly with giant hands.

But no, I must not linger ; while I wait
The might of Change is on the subject world,
And Joy and Pain obey the calls of Fate,
And stars are fading, and the damp of mould
Claims proudest things of earth. The mountains stand
Not fast forever ; like an arméd host
Bright ocean waves besiege the fortified land ;
The pride of nations is an idle boast,

For Age creeps on them as it comes to all,
And hides them in the dust. Ay, even now,
While but a breathing pause I dare to call,
I may not know if Time will that allow ;
Yet, sure of an eternal government
Above all change, I rest in calm content.

I sing no warrior's wrath, no deeds of arms,
Hero, or sage ; no such adventurous voyaging
As from the shores of Thessaly set forth
In the old mythical Past ; or when from Troy
The wisest of the Greeks came wandering
By Circe's isle and sweet Calypso's cave
Back to his Ithaca ; nor such sea-tossing
As vexed Æneas, pious but perfidious,
Sailing from Carthage with the beacon-fires
Of burning Dido crimsoning sky and sea.
I may not sing th' angelic hosts of heaven,
Nor Eden-life,—that song rings out as sweet,
As grand, to-day as when its glorious verse
Filled the blind poet's lips ;—nor a descent
To shadowy worlds of bliss and punishment ;
Virgil and Dante sit with laurelled brows

At the black gates of Hades, and their songs
Charm back all poesy would venture there.
Why do I summon thus the memories
Of famous verse to dwarf my later thoughts,
And fling upon my page the mighty shadows
Of epic song? I have no marshalled hosts
Of noisy war to wage Homeric battles,
No gods or goddesses in car of cloud
To mingle loves or angers with mortality :
Why conjure up their shapes? Than these, my
 theme
Hath grander scope ; I summon them to set
Beside the olden giants, older Change ;
To show how in the whirl of the remorseless years
Gods, angels, heroes, poets, warriors—all
Are trodden into dust, while Change lives on
As gathering strength from every ruined thing,
And making broad and broader, year on year,
One universal empire. 'Tis a theme
Greater than all the epics of the past ;
But yet how poor my words can picture it :
A giant overtopping the great heads
Of mountains, drest in patchwork of my verse.

O'er his smooth brow a summer shadow steals,
As, hat in hand, the youth salutes gray age,
Bending before a sober-visaged sage
With his important question : " Reverend sir,
The frosts of age are white upon your head ;
Your step is feeble, and your eye lacks fire ;
You stand upon the threshold leaving now
This house of life, this brilliant theatre,
Where vital fire lights up the painted scenes,
And flashes from bright footlights on the acts
Of all the busy people of the drama :
Pray tell me, sir,—you who have lived so long,
And bear on furrowed brow the marks of thought,—
What is the meaning of these bustling scenes ?
What is there underneath these pageantries ?
Can your maturity of age and wisdom
Unlock the secret, make the hidden plain ?"

With head upraised, the sage his dim eyes turned
On the blue mountain like a bank of cloud
Piled in the hazy distance, on fair vales
That sweetly smiled between, upon the town
Where palaces looked down on hovels while decay

Spotted each gilded roof, and feasting hung
With vampire-clutch alike on high and low,
On busy streets where a tumultuous tide
Of populace was moving noisily.
“Why ask of me?” at length he slowly said;
“Lift up your eyes; behold how all things thrill
With common act! Yon mountain-peak afar,
The sunlit vales that smile with loveliness,
The architecture of this crowded town,
The thronging multitudes that fill its streets,
Are sending back an answer to your question;
Nor is it mystery, for Nature’s voice
Is hoarse with shouting down the ages, Change!”

11.

TIME! On my mantel in a crystal case
With steady beat the shining pendulum swings,—
And is this time? Upon my dial's face
I read the legend every instant brings:
The Future, Present, Past. Futurity,
A dream; for nothing is in that dim realm.
The Present all too swiftly comes to me;
Its sudden shocks my startled senses whelm;
And when I rally, 'tis to view the Past:
But here indeed I find a solid land
That is not dreams, a country anchored fast;—
Yet not for me: as slips the hour-glass sand
Still am I hurried on while Memory wrings
Her hands in woe: I fly on Time's broad wings.

Dreamlike and vague, Imagination's vision
Of Nature's birth floats over Nature's facts

As springs the rainbow's arch above bright drops
That build its glittering bow,—dreamlike and vague,
Yet on material facts as strongly pillared
As some aerial dome is set on colonnades
Of marble where each base hath sure foundation
In the deep-anchored, rocky ribs of earth,—
A vision picturing a history,
A bright refraction from material atoms
Touched by the sunlight of man's intellect
Till their bright track of color glows before him,
And builds a shining bridge to bear his thought
Upon its arch across the chasms of time.
And man, whose waking dreams seem often shadows
Of the great heart of ancient mystery
Now opening to him, climbs th' aerial stair,
Sets his small rule against the gleaming heavens,
Measures their vastness, or writes confidently
The daring visions brought by Thought and Fancy
To toiling Mind, the annals of his world.
His world, what is it? that extent abroad
Outreaching sense can gather to his grasp.
He sees about him shifting atoms group,
And the groups cluster aggregating mass;

Then dreams conceptive how in younger time,
In the wide region of the unconfined,
Nebulous matter gathered up in space,
Gases condensing grew to solid forms
Shaping by laws inherent into orbs,—
Stars, suns, earths, planets, and their satellites.
Seeking to know the origin of all,
The key of Nature's puzzling intricacy,
The clue upleading to a Primal Force,
The might propelling atoms in their race
Through the illimitable paths of stars,
He finds philosophy of no avail ;
In Nature's elements his utmost reach ;
And the Beyond,—if he so far may dare,—
A fabulous country dim in hazy distance,
Fancy's wide realm in which Imagination
Builds bright ideals, yet each but the reflection
Of a reality's more sober shape.
Looking abroad for Nature's moving powers,
He only grasps results as atoms fly ;
Finds Change the rule of all created things,
The doom of every wandering molecule,
The history of planets and of suns,

The ripple under which there stirs a law,
The burning car on which a meteor rides.

Or whether Change or Time was elder born,
Or of one birth, it boots not to conjecture ;
Or if they be the same, or different aspects
Of the great scheme of universal progress,
Not much imports. Wherever Change appears
He is so yoked to his companion, Time,
That habit blends the comrades into one.
As daylight to our eyes, Time to our thoughts
Is a familiar; yet this daily theme,
This common, household word, is but a symbol
Set up to represent a larger thing
Than limited thought hath breadth to comprehend ;
A wise device by which we think to mark
With careful numbers all the flying scenes
That crowd successive on the narrow stage
Of our domain, the starlit universe ;
A measure,—happy inspiration!—made
For the immeasurable. Ah, vain man,
How dare he seek to grasp so great a thing !
He cannot hope to give the boundless bounds,

Nor mark the margins of eternity!
Even Imagination, though it rise
A higher flight than Pegasus e'er soared,
Feels weary tremors stay its bold, broad wings
Ere yet is reached the ancient shore of Time ;
Content at last to find some distant spot
Beyond the morning of man's memory
Where it may set, forsooth, its outmost line,
A measure only of conditioned reach.
Anticipation, sweeping through the years
Of coming time and eons yet to be,
Hath no prophetic power or wizard forecast
In the conceptive chambers of the brain
To tell the end of Time.

No star of heaven
Was shining in the cold extent of space
When Time was born, to be its natal light ;
And when Time ends, the all-unnumbered host
Of gleaming lights that flash and glimmer forth
Upon this little world,—ay! the white walls
Of overarching skies, the heaven's star-masonry
Roofed grandly over us,—will, with our world,
Have filled their use, grown cold, and dull, and black,

And died a nameless, unrecorded death.
Time and the stars!—the ocean and a drop!—
The sea-shore and a single grain of sand!—
To gauge eternity by shine of stars
Were burning candles to light up the sun.

Days, months, years, centuries, are woven links
Of which an endless chain is ever made ;
Our dear To-day, the last and nearest one,
Joined to the infinite, our little Now.
One end supported by—we know not what,
Beyond the limit where far-darting thought
Though plumed with fancies fails its baffled flight,
The chain of Time is hung ; down-reaching us
Through the mysterious depths of Age antique.
Out of the darkness of an ancient night
Hang pendant ages lost in ebon depths
As they recede, but on the latest link
Catching the dazzling sunlight of the Present,—
One single spot amid infinitudes,
One light thus glimmering in immensity
That walls it round about, and hangs above,
Waiting the flaming spark to pale and die ;

While, clustering round that light, its fleeting day,
And bathing fragile lives in its sweet beams,
And dreaming this To-day, the one dear thing
For which primeval darkness was pushed back,
And Time's long chain thus kindly forged and hung,
Is man's weak race that labors, laughs, and weeps,
Or, stirred by busy fancies, builds a stair
Of bright imagination's gossamer
Far up the chain on which its day depends.
So round a candle flits an insect brood
Blind in its flickering glare to all beside,
Oft scorching thin-spun wings in touch of flame,
But yet returning to the dazzling peril,
Happy to spend a life of briefest span
Buzzing about a smoking luminary,
The only refuge from surrounding night.

Time, thou art clothed with Mystery's strange awe!
From cloudy gates in mythic fable hid
Thou hast come forth; before thee broadly stretch
Interminable galleries through which
Thy armies march! We hear the noisy din,
The shouts and trampling of life's multitudes

With which our voices mingle and are lost.
We look behind and see the scattered wrecks
Of age on age along the ruined Past
Until the lines of far perspective touch,
And all beyond is merged in misty points,
The periods of our knowledge—in advance,
And a great wall of darkness densely black
Moves as we move, but hides the forward country,
To which we go, from our impatient eyes—
Around, and the quick hurry of the march
Is seen on all: one sings rejoicing songs,
Another weeps, but all with even step
Keep pace to the great march ; or failing so,
Are left dead wrecks upon the track of years—
Dead wrecks on which with back-turned eyes we look
Awhile regretful ; but the jostle soon,
And distance, break our fervent sorrowing
As the fierce hurry of the noisy Present
Drowns with its clamor low-voiced Memory.

From dreamless slumber in the silent land
Of embryos come forth the new, swift years,
Laden with destinies of worlds and men,

Throw down their burdens in the flying Present,
Then leap into the Past. Dim twilight shades
Cast lingering lustre round each flitting form,
But darken soon into one normal night
As close the black, funereal curtains round
A perished age,—save where, faint glimmering
Like an uncertain starlight, Memory's rays
Glance twinkling down amid the night of years ;
But pierce not deepest shadows that lie thick
On far-off eras, like the black of pines
In a night-landscape, hiding all beyond,
While nearer, half-revealed in fitful light,
The valley lies, and sheen of winding stream
Like silver ribbon shining from its fringe
Of birchen clumps, o'er which the starlight flings
Mysterious charms of fairy witchery.

III.

How shall I paint thy presence, Memory ?
Unto my thought thou seem'st a stately queen
Clothed in the purple robes of royalty :
Upon thy broad, fair brow a look serene,
And in thy eyes a wealth of history ;
One hand upraised impatient word would stay,
And lips seen struggling with some mystery :
Over thy face expression's quickening play
Flashes as brightly as a sunbeam's ray ;
But often sad, and sometimes melancholy.
Past pleasures live anew in thy sweet sorcery ;
Yet art thou too an avenger, and thy eye
Hath queenly menace to the heart of guile,
Proclaiming what scared guilt would hide the while.

O Memory, let me not with too faint praise
Slander the greatness of thy ministry !

Without thee man had been as poor a thing
As the blind worm, his type of feebleness.
Thou art the soul's awakening element,
The germ of intellect from which hath come
Through many ages all our mental growth.
Not in maturity,—as from Jove's head
The wise Athena sprung,—came forth mankind;
But struggling upward in a toilful path
From lower levels. In that lowest age,
When helpless in the storm of elements
Man first essayed to guide life's troubled voyage
With wiser thought than native savagery,
The feeble rays of unripe Memory
Shone out alone to light th' uncertain way;
But in their beams his embryotic mind,
Thrilled with awaking powers, burst the dull husks
Of an obscuring ignorance, and grew
Up to the light, threw out each broader thought
As the vine flings long tendrils, till at length,
Grown up to pride of vain maturity,
He deems the patient Memory little part
Of present strength, and would degrade her rank
From guide and counsellor to toiling slave.

With Memory's talisman we boldly press
Upon the track of the all-conqueror, Time,
Snatch for an instant from his victories
A trophy; but, alas, how soon to yield
It back, and learn we have not power to give
New life to his dead victims, nor to stay
A single file of all his countless host
That sweeps unhalting in eternal march,
While muffled music rings along the years
With funeral measure, and a spectral flag,
Emblazoned Change, floats o'er the crowded ranks,
And waves the triumphs of the tyrant-king!

But Memory hath a conjuror's wizard power
To bring for a charmed moment back again,
And rehabilitate with life, the Past,—
The Past as painted on the myriad foldings
And tapestry of brain by artist hands
Of toiling elves that fill the chambered dome
Of thought with pictures numberless, but dim
And overhung till Memory draws the curtain,
And floods with gay or sombre light each scene.
Then as by magic every shape takes life,

And in a marvellous vision, scene by scene,
Appears life's drama ; nor a picture now,
For from the canvas every puppet leaps
To act his part of anger, sorrow, joy,
As it is written in the book of life.
A storm of recollection stirs the heart ;
Again we thrill as we were thrilled of yore
By quick pulsation of the thronging passions,—
By Love, Hope, Fear, Pride, Anger, Jealousy,
Ambition, and Regret—by all the host
Of warrior passions, demons of dear sense,
And the angelic spirits of our virtues,
That throng tumultuous in the human heart,
Crowding its narrow gates and crooked halls
With mingled lines of marshalled combatants
Who win for us our grandest battle-fields,
Or stain the soul with blackness of defeat.

Or memories come, each other following,
Like the long swell of waves on summer seas,
Breaking in murmuring ripples at our feet ;
But while we muse, and lose ourselves in visions
Of former happiness, the waves grow black,

Their gentle murmurs changed to angry roar,
As the charmed sea chafes on its sounding shore ;
And back upon us sweeps the frightful storm
That wrecked, perhaps, a fondly cherished hope.
Our pensive thoughts would linger with the hours
Friendship hath consecrated with its wealth
Of generous sympathy and noble help,
Or Love, with tenderer touch, made more than
 hallowed,
Stilling the heart's too passionate pulsations
To measures of remembered happiness.
But like a spectre on such gentle musing
May come the cruel shape of Sin to point
Where stand, unmasked of every specious doubt
The Present heaped upon them, our ill deeds :
And what we would forget comes up again
Out of the Past the brighter from immersion
In Time's dead waves that will not be a Lethe.
Through the hot flood-gates of the conscious
 heart,
Opened by busy hands of wakeful Memories,
Pour past emotions ; and our acts spring forth
On this swift-moving flood, their own avengers,

Or bringing the returns a busy Present
May not have yielded to each modest virtue.

Or Memory may adorn her fairest scenes
With gay imaginations till they mock
Alcina's gardens and the sweet delights
That tempted to her snares the paladin.
As skilful artist, by his coloring, throws
On the broad map of field, and wood, and stream,
So delicate charms that Nature is transformed
To something nobler or more sweet, so Memory,
With bright-eyed Fancy, can transform the Past.
But charms of Contemplation have been sung
In choicer numbers than may grace my page,
Then let me hasten on amid the whirl
Of my great theme ; yet ere I leave thy name,
O grateful Memory ! I would essay
To mark th' uncertain limits of thy realm,
Tell how thy cloudy, visionary shores
Touch on the life-thrilled province of the Present.

Remembrance brings a train of captive facts
Within the pale of Judgment ; builds a base

On which the intellect may set its structures,
Or Fancy rear her quaintly-fashioned shapes ;
Hands down from predecessors heritage
Of science, literature, and mental toil ;
Presents the broad experience of the Past
Rigid in changeless lines of immobility
By which to shape the formless, plastic Present.
As the great volumes of the Past are filled
With the unchanging print of actions done,
We turn a page or two and read the while
Our acts are written there. We fain would change
Or blot the words where Folly's reckless touch,
Or secret or acknowledged sin, has set
Its soiling marks on the accusing page ;
But find, alas ! the Past cannot be changed.
In ancient times they wrote on leaves of brass
Or golden tables some important fact ;
And in our day we cut the granite's face,
Or model iron into pictured shapes,
In the vain hope to tell a future age
Our thoughts or acts, successes or mishaps.
The tooth of rust will gnaw the giant limbs
Of our Colossus, and our Sphinx may hide

In shattered features what we bid her tell ;
Nor leaves of brass, nor chiselled shapes of stone,
Will long endure ; each may be falsified ;
But Fact fails not because the record dies,
Nor shifts from ill to good though sculptures tell
In deep-cut letters monumental lies.

While Memory yields a never-ceasing store
Of recollections, the great power to act
Is vested in each rapidly flying instant,
So brief a space no measure marks its breadth.
Into this breathless moment leaps a thought,
And prompts the deed that cannot be undone.
And so we set our marks along the lines
Of circumstance, so grasp impending facts,
So do the deeds that bring us honor, shame,
Our best of happiness, or worst regret.
Upon the future we may speculate ;
In memory dwell upon the dreamy past ;
One flitting instant only is our own :
The Present sets a seal on every act
Will stand unbroken to eternity.

I V.

How many an eye, O burning lamps of night,
Hath sadly looked upon your distant spheres
In hope, calm stars, to win of your sweet light
One blessed ray to banish haunting fears!—
Calm stars? Ah, no! In every glancing ray
That glimmers forth now pale, now strangely bright,
Methinks I see its fitful flash betray
A demon dancing in the twinkling light,—
The demon, Change; and skies are not serene;
Their silent beauty is a friendly guile,
False, for those lights that sweetly, softly beam
Are monsters roaring in a fierce turmoil:
Yet each huge orb, as through wild change it flies,
With peaceful beauty shimmers in our skies.

When by the action of Primeval Force
Creation was; when laws began to move
The thinnest forms of matter in wide space

That thrilled with impulse of awaking Nature ;
When out of nothing, as from sleep, awoke
The law-poised atoms,—woke to spin and fly
Unresting ever in the countless years,
Pushed on as if across infinity ;
When, closing up, the neighbor elements
Together drew to social union driven,
And definite shape, by instinct of that force
That wrought the contour of each balanced orb,
And framed the architecture of the skies ;
Then Change had its beginning: nor hath known
Leisure or stay since that eventful hour ;
But, like a vast and restless phantom of Fate
Hung over the subjected universe,
Hath suffered no vexed atom to have rest.
A phantom of Fate? if so, perhaps a purpose,
Not all concealed, is in the cruel whirl
Of Change, and every phase is healthful growth
To a determined end. But let us pause,
And listen to the marvellous din of movement ;
Behold the figures shift, and blend, and fade ;
Then, if we will, their ultimate meanings guess,
And seek the clue through this bewildering maze.

The ruler of our system,—to whose heart
The mystic ties of gravitation bind us ;
About whose kingly orb in circling paths
Journey his planetary family of worlds
Cherished and warmed by life-bestowing beams,
And strong upheld ;—is not exempt from Change.
The patient watcher at the telescope
Sees on the sun's bright orb huge, graven marks
That comê and go, pits deep and inky black
Changing their shapes, and drifting o'er his face—
Upon his photosphere the impress of force,
The boiling up of incandescent flames,
Sudden combustions darting into space
Thousands of leagues, falling again like rain
To be absorbed into his molten breast,
Nor to repose, for the tumultuous throes
Which agitate that monstrous bosom cast them
 forth
High-hurled as shot from angry crater-mouths.
Mountains of flaming hydrogen arise,
Each vaster than a hundred earths like ours,
Showing like saw-teeth on his mighty disk ;
And sink, and rise again, fringing his edge

With bright corona, many-tinted fires,
Painting fierce action and unresting Change.
Apparent motions of the starry host
Have taught sky-gazers that the sun stays not
Fixed on his fiery centre to one spot
Immovable amid th' unceasing whirl;
But that across the boundless sea of space
His system journeys toward flashing deeps
Alive with star-lights; yet between whose fires
Open vast galleries for his great march,
While still the star-deeps brightly flash beyond,
Nor wait his coming; but each sphere, propelled
On orbit large, sweeps on its silent path,—
Silent to us because unmeasured depths
Muffle the roar of monstrous chariot-wheels
And frightful clamor of each stellar flight;—
While all the lines of labyrinthian track,
Traced upon ether by the flight of stars,
The broad handwriting of the heavenly host,
Are weird, mysterious cryptograms of Change.

As the sun changeth, Earth, his satellite,
By smaller marks reveals the same great hand

Whose touch perturbs the blazing king of day.
How manifold the changes of the earth
Since it was gathered up amid the heavens,
An infant world, and held in young Time's lap!—
But wherefore young? Time then perchance was
old

When moving inward through impregnate space,
Nebulous cloudlings, from their ether homes,
Drew them together to create a world
Of much attenuated elements
And gases thin; or when, much wrought by force,
And fashioned into being, this new world—
A future home of animated life,
A garden-spot for man to cultivate,
A strange entanglement of many laws—
Joined the great march of planetary spheres,
Sailed in determined path along the heavens.
But Time, grim nurse, took no more heed of it
Than doth the sea of some bright-tinted shell
Rolled up by murmuring tides on diamond beach,
And flashing with gay brilliance as each wave
Breaks on its lustrous curves in sparkling drops
That cannot quench the gleaming opal fire.

Ever from hour of her nativity
Hath restless Change pursued swift-flitting shapes
Whirled round about the Earth's rotundity.
White flaming fires condensed to solid mass
Till round her poles long, sunless winters freeze :
The cooling crust, uptorn by inward throes
That greatly moved her heaving, fervent breast,
Hath pierced the sky with cloud-capped mountain-
chains :

The seas have left their old, accustomed beds
To pour their floods upon the sinking land :
From out the deepest caves in ocean depths
Have islands sprung that, buttressed 'gainst the
sea,

Lift to sweet light great mountains long submerged,
And now rejoice to catch on kindling peaks
The glowing heralds of each new day's dawn :
Sea-grottos where the shark once wooed his love,
Deep under the blue tops of curling waves,
Are now green valleys where the patient cow
Chews the sweet grasses, and Arcadia smiles
While Summer airs, bucolic idyls, sing.

So Change transmutes the varying forms of earth
With a strange alchemy. The troubled atoms
Hurry at call of weird affinities,
Or by the might of a subjecting stroke,
To new alliances as brief as new ;
For scarcely are they joined ere they dissolve,
While the great doom of matter seems to be
A ceaseless agony of dissolution
And shifting shape ; and life and death are names
Of phases in the fitting cycles of Change.
The outward forms of things inanimate,
As Time goes on, are wrought by constant powers
Shaping the contour of the spherical Earth,
Rounding with equal care the rain-drop's globe,
Dispersing it in so small particles
It paints the sky with floating tints of beauty,
Till Nature rounds again its crystal sphere
To launch it forth at an electric signal
From the low bank of black and angry clouds.
Form dies to give new birth ; successive changes
Clasp each the next, a closely-woven chain.
The animation of organic structure
A brief course runs through phases numberless

To stop abruptly at the change of death.
No shape of earth so firm but at the touch
Of wizard Change, as by the magic stroke
Of an enchanter's wand, it melts away.
Resistless might is in this demon hand
To crush together, or to rend apart,
The much-vexed matter. Yet each atomy
Hath an undying life: no change can mar
Its substance, or destroy its entity.
Death is th' inevitable act of laws;
But when decay dissolves a concrete form,
Or quicker rupture strikes organic life,
The death of one foretells another's birth,
From Phoenix-pyre undying matter springs,
Its atoms grouped anew to tint and shape,—
Death but the withered skin a serpent sheds,
The recollection of a perished form.
So from its broken chrysalis comes forth
The painted moth to mock the hues of sunshine,
And flutter brightly o'er its empty case.

The works of man sink crumbling back to dust,
From which with painful toil he raised them up:

The works of Nature, stronger built and vast,
Share the same fate : resolve, and fall, and change.
The highest Alp that lifts its giant mass
Above the clouds, stability's vain type,
Is beat by storms, and gnawed by countless years,
Till, piece by piece, wild torrents drag it down,
Or wilder winds its fragments launch in air.
Man sees the myriad-agéed mountains sink,
But scarce can stay to moralize thereon ;
For while he thinks he groweth old, himself ;
Feels his own atoms fail ; writes hastily
“ Life's lesson's change ! ”—drops wearily his pen,
And points the sentence with the stop of death.

Nor man alone, but all organic forms
Of loose material that Dame Nature builds
Into prolific life, the circuit make
Of birth, maturity, decay, and death.
The countless tribes of animated things
That fondly cling to Earth's maternal breast,
Die on the lap in which they had their birth ;
While vegetation's mantle, wrapped around
The mother of all organisms, is green,

Profuse, luxuriant, ripe, then fades, and falls
In withered piles of decomposing death,
Closing a circuit of organic change ;
And leaving Earth, the nourisher, stripped of all,
To shiver with bared bosom at the wrath
Of Winter till young Spring with touch of sun-
shine
Revive her, and a wealth of life leap forth
From her prolific lap,—the miracle
Of each new year,—as it so oft hath done.

The thoughtful student, poring o'er the past,
Can read on rock-bound ribs of Earth her story :
Broad glacier-marks, the fossil shell and leaf,
Are each an illustration of past time,
A pictured truth in Nature's book of years ;
While every order of successive layers
And incrustations, or their wild disorder
Where some fierce epoch tossed the level ruins
In broken slopes, or piled on edge the strata
Thousands of calmer years combined to build,
Are records how Earth's changing shapes have
moved,

Th' engraven annals of the centuries,
Teaching his mind the broad historic truth
That Nature, yielding to the force of laws
As multitudinous as atomies,
Hath been so carefully fashioned through all time
By this unceasing Change, that what we see
And what we are, this all-important Present,
Is but the outgrowth of the ended years,
And every period of the wondrous Past
Hath marvellously pointed down to us
As we point onward to a coming Future.
Despite of time, a close relationship
Exists between the first created germ
And the last life prolific Earth hath borne.

His mind goes backward from this elder day,
And wanders out amid the storied Past :
Preadamitic visions rise before him,
The ghostly images of former times.
He sees the gloomy foliage of fern-forests
Dark overhead, enormous stems and fronds,
As of a giant world, wave in the wind,
And roar as their high branches swing and chafe.

His breath is stifled by the hot earth's reek ;
Rank, sulphurous fumes are stinging in his nostrils ;
Pushing among the mighty stems and fallen ferns,
Or splashing noisily in vaporous seas,
Move frightful forms of animated life,
The saurian and the monstrous pachyderm,—
These hideous creatures scare away the vision,
And, when he dreams again, the time is changed
Into a later age, the Age of Frost.

Now bright before him the cold glaciers shine,
And one long winter wraps the hapless world—
A frozen world,—white cliffs hang o'er ravines
Of the same ghastly hue, save where the flashing
Of weird auroras gleams along the snows,
Painting their desolation with the tints
Of strange diablery. Adown the sides
Of the precipitous hills no torrents dash ;
No purple banks of cloud sail in the sky ;
Water exists but in its crystal forms,
In phantom snow-wreaths flung o'er hills of ice.
No pine-trees skirt the mountain's gleaming heights,
No oak-clumps in the valleys,—all is bare :
Even the shadows, with their spectral gloom,

Bring no relief to pained and dazzled eyes.
It is a dead world in a frozen shroud.
Shivering he drives away the dreary picture,
Nor dares to summon up another age
Lest yet more horrid visions should appear.

V.

OLD mother, Earth, so great thy family,
Small is the share of love thou giv'st to one.
Out of thy teeming, ripe fecundity
Brood after brood thy countless children come.
Lo, I, thy son, to thy maternity
Make my appeal! Hast thou a mother's heart?
Or art thou callous to thy offspring's cry?
In human loves perhaps thou hast no part,
And all of tenderness to us deny.
Hath Summer's sunshine no beguiling art
To draw thy heart to all the host that cling
To thee? Ah, Mother Earth, if thou dost know
What joy the throbs of sweet affection bring,
Thou can'st not then life's crowning bliss forego!

What changes yet remain, O Earth? what fate,
What fortunes, darkling in the future, wait

To make thy age more noble than the Past?
Or to extinguish all thy ancient honors?
O dull, insensible, unloving Earth!
Whom, while you drag our climbing spirits down,
Compelling us to yield to that gross law
By which thou drawest to thy own dull self
All matter kindred in its birth with thee,
We still must love; for with our dearest hopes,
Our largest thoughts, our loves, our happiness,
There mingles what is so allied to thee
We dare not learn how close the kinship lies!—
What changes yet remain? As it hath been
Throughout the Past, so must the Future be;
And still new phases dawn.

There was no sage
In thy first hour to plot a horoscope
From the portents of the bright, watchful host
Of sister orbs that shone upon thy birth.
If we would read thy fate, it must be found
Shadowed in figures of successive change
Upon the Past, and every phase a cipher
In which is written shunless destiny.

But our best science, groping in the dark,
Can only chance upon some plainer parts
Of a great scheme, which we would fain piece out,
Or wisely build with broad philosophy ;
But find our largest plans too small to reach
Beyond ourselves, while stretching far away
Are vast infinities, within whose depths
Our grandest figures sink and disappear.

Will still conserving laws hold in firm grasp
Thee and thy fortunes? or will Change unloose
Thy bonded matter? bid freed elements
Fly off to join them with the neighbor orbs?
Or flit, blind meteors, rayless in the path
Of a wrecked world? Or will the hour arrive
When, fading into nothing, vanishing
Like dream forgotten with the morning sun,
Thou wilt be lost, at once plucked out of space,
Engulfed in darkness like a sinking ship :
No trace remaining in the empty void
To bear the record, There was once a world?
The trembling heart cries out, " This cannot be !"
Forgetting that a greater wonder was

When through the slumbering halls of vacancy
The first call rang that broke eternal silence,
And filled infinity with countless worlds.

Ask we of Science what the years will bring
To Mother Earth? she, the inflexible,
Can build from prophet-shadows of the Past
The substance of a corresponding Future.
There is no void: the vast profound of space
Is filled with ether; our terrestrial ship
Cuts this thin substance as a steamer cuts
With iron prow the denser ocean waves:
Ploughs through a medium so attenuate
Our envelope of thin, encircling air
Strikes it as would a sphere of hardest steel
That dilute air. Yet this embodiment
Quivers elastic with the waves of light
And its companion, heat; doubtless contains
In its mysterious mass the agencies
Of gravitation and electric force;
Within its well-knit substance firmly holds
The visible bodies of the universe;
And matter is complete, one great machine

Endless and voidless, simple and complex,
Throbbing as if endued with conscious life,
One organism built of many parts,
Of which our globe is but a molecule.
This monstrous creature, framed without the bounds
Of space and time, joins in its entity
The sum of all: its tireless energy
Compels all movement with exhaustless force:
Translation, heat, light, organism, life,
Its varied forms of action. But our Earth,
The molecule, the atom of this thing,—
Leaving the whole to watch a little part,—
What is the atom's fate? The energy,
Propelling now our globe through ether-depths,
Will be resolved by variable degrees
Into the form of heat. The viewless path,
On which we move, obstructs our chariot-wheels;
The fires of friction slowly burn up force;
Out of the ether fairy hands are stretched
To stay our journey; nor are stretched in vain;
Still we go on, as heedless of all this,
But in a smaller course. The time must come—
Though all our figures work not out the date—

When these faint frictions will so change our march
That solar gravity, preponderant,
Will draw by its centripetal constraint
Our Earth, in lessening circles spinning round,
Into the fervor of its fierce embrace,
Mingling our little with its mighty mass ;
The fused Earth-molecule dissolved in fire.

It is but working the well-ordered plan
That gathered up the nebulae in space ;
Fashioned the floating matter into orbs ;
Drew in those orbs to merge them into suns ;
To hurl in frightful contact their huge globes,
Transmuting speed in heat. In that mad hour
When all the movement of unnumbered years
Is loosed in flame, a vast expansive force,
Developed of diffusive power of heat,
May hurl dis severed matter back again
Into the limitless from whence it came
By circling journeys of the ended cycle.
Then the thin nebulae will fill again
The long deserted deeps of ether space,
And the new Cycle, leaping into birth

From a dead brother's grave, commence its march,
Primordial atoms gathering into mass
To fashion worlds within the pregnant skies.

So may we follow an imagined plan,
Working from laws whose secrets half-disclosed
Tempt us to guess at what remains unlearned,
Yet doubtful of our steps: for it may chance
That while we build anew the scheme of things,
What we yet know, may bear to the unknown
Too small proportion, and our architecture,
Set on a false foundation, slip away
Like a fair city swallowed by the Earth
That in volcanic rupture widely gapes.
Often our best imaginings appear,
In dawning light of new discovery,
False as fantastic figures of a dream,
Futile as prophecy of raving Madness
That dresses every wild and whirling fancy
In the material garb of sober fact.

VI.

WHAT glimmers, Ocean, in thy bosom bright?
Is starlight glassed upon thy trembling waves?
Methinks you whisper "Shipwreck" to the Night,
And count lost fleets that rot in thy deep caves!
O say not, sailor, 'tis an insect swarm
That fills the sea with strangely shining life!
Here are weird presages of sudden storm;
These spectral fires forebode a coming strife.
Ah, sailor, tell me not the sea's strange glow
Hath natural cause! I read in dancing lights
That leap and flicker in the waves below,
A legend written by the ocean-sprites,—
A legend full of wonders sad and strange,
And pitiful disasters of sea-change.

Blue Ocean shouts in noisy thunderings
Or whispers in low murmurings, of change:

Nor ever rests ; but moves from ebb to flood,
From flood to ebb,—a monster's half-day pulse.
By light winds fanned, its curling ripples smile ;
By tempests tossed, its billows threat the sky.
A fickle element, its smiles deceive,
And hungry waters swallow the deceived—
A type and agent of capricious change,—
The lovely bosom of tranquillity,—
Marvel of majesty and Nature's might,—
The level plain on which rich Commerce floats,—
A boiling whirlpool to engulf whole fleets.

Regardless of old Ocean's smiles or frowns,
His smooth tranquillity or white-capped rage,
A stately steamship crosses the broad sea,
Day after day swift-sailing into the East
Upon the oft-cut track of many keels
And well-known path. Her sails shine white above
The deep blue waves like broad and gleaming wings
Of the sea-cradled albatross ; or when,—
Out of the East head-winds adversely blowing,
Or dropping to a calm,—with folded sails,
Still hurrying on her course with tremulous thrill

Like pulse of life at each strong engine-stroke,
She seems some mighty monster of the deep
With breath of smoke polluting air above,
And iron fins disturbing seas below
That backward gleam along her course for miles,
A foaming, eddying serpent-track.

The restless belt of the Atlantic waves
Is traversed, and a few safe hours will place
The ocean-voyagers in their destined port.
'Tis night upon the sea; mingling with dreams
That hover over sleepers in the ship,
The turbulent waves join their unceasing din.
The deep-toned voices of the ocean swell
Chanting the mighty anthem of the sea—
Ill-fated Schiller, 'tis thy dirge they sing!
Behold above the tossing waves a light!
A ship at sea? No! listen to the roar:
It is the sound of breakers. Ah, too late
Their dreadful warning came! A heavy crash
As if the earth upon its orbit stopped,
A frightful, stunning pause. The mountain waves
Rolled high above,—a moment hung,—then fell.

The boasted work of man's skilled handicraft
Crushed like a nutshell in the sea's fierce might,
And when the waves rolled back it lay a wreck.
Hoist out the boats!—no boat could swim the surge
Of that tumultuous sea. The shattered masts
Fall crashing o'er the side; the waves leap up
To clutch them with a thousand curling hands
Of giant strength; and, howling, bear them off
To tear in pieces on the pointed rocks.
The planks are stripped like ribbons from the decks;
Staunchions and bulwarks—all are swept away;
The great ribs crushed or widely torn apart.
A wild, mad hiss as deluged fires are quenched—
The howl of winds—the frightful dash of waves—
The ship in pieces—water everywhere—
Men, women, children, drowned within their berths,
Or, shrieking, torn from sea-swept decks away.
No time to call on God: the wild of waters
Greedily swallowed into thundering deeps
Each fear-chilled heart that waked from dreams of
 peace
To die too noisily for thoughts of prayer.
Though the black waves toss up their helpless prey,

Though winds as pitiless howl cruel dirge,
Though stretched neglected on the ocean-ooze
The bodies of the drowned, uncared-for, lie ;
Yet the stilled hearts know nothing of all this :
The lost sea-voyagers have sailed o'er the brink
Of mortal life,—one quick, tumultuous change
Hath landed them upon that other shore
Along whose edge mysterious sea-fogs hang.
An hour ago the ship was ocean's lord ;
But, like a slave, the treacherous monster rose,
And crushed with cruel blows his crippled lord—
Alas ! vain man, the lesson still is Change !

VII.

ANCIENT thou art, O War! Far off I see
Thy monstrous shape in mythic glory clad,
The weird mirage of olden history—
A mythic glory!—yea, the sweetness glad,
The grandeur, and the thrill of epic song,
Uplift thee. Not thy tears, Andromache,
Nor the loud wail of Trojan women sad,
Can drown the tumult of the noisy throng
That shout "Achilles!" Ah! hereditary
Despite of gentler teaching still remain
The embers of our early savagery;
And all the growth of mind hath yet the stain
Of that wild passion of heroic joy
That thrilled fierce warriors on the plains of Troy!

In Nature's quick decay, in accident,
Infectious breath of pestilence, the wreck
Upon the sea, the earthquake's yawning mouths,

Th' electric bolt descending from the cloud—
In all humanity finds death's broad change ;
But yet must needs invent a larger means,
A quicker way, to reach the end of life.
Upon the field, in marshalled ranks arrayed,
And long, opposing lines of gleaming steel,
Two armies meet with din of noisy war
And sulphurous fires that light the path of Death.
When from resounding throats the cannon hurl
Through shattered ranks of men an iron storm ;
When beating drums and flying banners lead
Long, glittering lines to stormy Feast of Blood,
Thy demon, Change, rides on the battle-smoke ;
Laughs at the rattling^r sound of rifle-shots,
The crash of cannon, and the din of arms.
Gay-plumed companion of the fatal one,
When thy red hand is raised Time sits him down,
Drops his sharp scythe, to cast admiring eye
Upon thy quicker work, while Pity weeps
O'er bloody victims that are struck by thee,—
Slain for thy frightful hour of vampire-life,
That you may drink the streams of flowing blood,
And revel in a carnival of Death !

Triumphal strains may sing of hero-deeds
Gilding with glory War's unsightly face ;
A thousand voices loudly shout in praise
Of those who come with laurel garlands crowned
And victory's proud triumph in their eyes,
Forgetful in that hour how many deaths
Have bound the shining chaplets on their brows,—
How many homes and hearts are desolate.
But there are those whose sad eyes will not light
With fires of victory, whose memories rest
With silent ones that lie in shallow graves,
Their mangled bosoms ne'er again to thrill
At triumph or the pageantry of war.
The mourners of the dead cannot be glad,
Nor welcome victory with loud acclaim ;
But in their hearts sad moralizing drowns
The victor shouts :—a crown of laurel leaves
Will fade, the noisy songs of triumph cease,
While grief remains to wring a parent's heart,
Sorrow to pale a widow's hollow cheeks,
Suffering to hush the laugh on orphan lips,—
The victims' tears outlast the victors' joys.

VIII.

I DREAMED I sat upon an ancient mound,
And mused of the old dwellers of the land,
Whose toiling hands had raised this sacred ground,
Heaping the earth at some strange god's command.
And while I mused behold a dusky shape
From bosom of the mound rose silently ;
Naught could I do, but on the phantom gape,—
At length found voice to speak, though tremblingly :
“ Hast thou appeared, unearthly one, to tell
The buried secrets of an ancient day
And sad disasters that thy race befell ?
O speak, dim figure, and thy errand say ! ”
I heard no voice from that companion dread ;
But “ Change ” seemed strangely whispered overhead.

Man dies in full maturity of years,
Or earlier stricken by the hand of Change ;

But leaves no vacant place : his progeny,
Inheritors of what he once called his,
Assume his place, and sit in ancient seats
Of many ancestors, till called in turn
To follow their dead fathers, they give up,
With many groans perhaps, what use hath made
Familiar, and depart to shadowy lands
Of their belief; and so the race goes on,—
Not always : even the races of mankind
From natural order of inheritance
Lapse into change. From heritage of lands
Their ancestors have held a thousand years
A people pass ; nor leave untenanted
The country that forgets them. On the track
Of the outgoing race th' incomer treads,
And soon his busy life may fill the land
So noisily its din drowns dying legends
And lingering memories of names and tales
That hang a shadowy recollection round
Secluded spots and lone, forsaken graves.

Nor must we make a weary pilgrimage
To distant lands to find an ancient grave

Where we can sit, and muse of Time, and Change,
And a lost race,—the graves are near at hand.
In grassy vales through which the water-course
Winds its green track meandering to the sea,
Lo, here are vestiges of ancient men!
Great mounds with many-centuried oaks chance-
lodge
Of later growth upspringing from green slopes,
Carefully shaped, the work of old-time zealots,
Covering the earthen altars that yet hold
The ashes of their sacerdotal fires.
On craggy hill-tops run the broken lines
Of ruined forts o'er which in crimson bloom
Now clings the rose-tree, or in later days
Of hazy Autumn loaded grape-vines hang
Their ruby bunches ripening in the sun.
Here once the lines of battle fiercely stormed,
And red blood flowed where now the roses bloom.
Or more remote in forests of Copan
Are ancient sites of ruined, stone-built cities
Where tumbling walls and statues yet well-poised,
Or fallen half-buried in the rank, black soil,
Greet with mysterious mockery every eye

That looks upon their marble solitude ;
While each grim figure with time-mouldered lines
Seems striving still to tell its marvellous tale.
These mounds, hill-fortresses, and statues strange,
Are antique monuments of a dead Past,
A people lost.

In the forgotten time
A nameless race set up its dwellings here ;
Here gathered into nations ; tilled the lands
Tamed down from Nature's wildness by the toils
Of these dead husbandmen : here clustered homes,
And here grew up affections fervent, pure ;
And worthy lives were lived in that old time ;
And human passions wrought for good and ill
As Virtue won her crown of sweet content,
Or Vice upreared its hissing, serpent-head,—
If we may judge this lost humanity
By the known records of historic man.
Here were enacted deeds perhaps as great
As history blazons on its grandest page,
And scenes of terror we may never know
Unless Imagination penetrate

The mouldered dust of buried centuries,
And build again its mould and earth to life.
What wild, strange tales might those grim spectres
tell

If they could rise again from ancient graves,
Rear up erect long-crumbled skeletons,
And fill each hollow bosom with a voice!
Here once was prosperous life, in whose best day
With smiling skies above, broad, ripening fields,
Bright hopes and promises, no bodement told
Of danger, gloomy days, impending death.
Ere yet the shadow of the coming end,
Darkening the Beautiful to anxious eyes,
Had crept upon their landscape, this lost race
Built time-defying marble into piles,
And cut engraven statues with quaint shapes,
In the vain hope to tell a future age
The greatness and the glory of their name.
Vain hope!—How wild had seemed the prophecy
If some Cassandra of a western Troy
Had raised her shrill voice in its populous streets,
And cried, “ In vain!—in vain!—a time will come
When none can read your sculptured monuments,

Nor find in one lone mound or fortress-hill
The story hidden in their long decay !
Your deeds of might, worth, wisdom, wit, and skill,
Shall all be buried in forgotten graves !
And stranger races in these marble streets,—
Then desolate—will marvel who the builders were !’
But none of all the city’s thousands then
Had heeded her mad cries. As they beheld
The land’s prosperity and teeming life ;
Saw on the river-highways busy fleets,
Bands of corn-planters toiling on the shores,
Swart workers delving metals from the mines,
The stately chiefs, the marshalled ranks of war,
The city-builders, and the artisans,
The pious host that worshipped at the mound,
Or buried at its base a warrior-king,
A wise philosopher, a sainted priest,
They smiled to think a solid greatness theirs,
And name enduring as their stone-built temples.
Imagination yet may picture them,
But they have left us no historic trace—
No living type descended from those days
Of might and pride—no weak, degenerate child

To sing the glories of his ancestry—
No record of a name, or law, or deed—
No story of the sad catastrophe
That brought oblivion to their stricken race.

Yet this may be our fate. Such physical change
As in the eras of geology
Hath worked disturbance of Earth's broken crust,
Contagion, failing nature, or a star
Erratic hurled upon our sober sphere,—
A hundred causes could be found would lead
To our destruction. As they passed away,
So we, who have no more security
Of life than they; no surer heritage
Of earth; no stronger grasp of future days:
Our life, mortality, estate, the same:
Like them the atoms that a mighty Hand
Scatters abroad, or kindly gathers up.

Whate'er the cause, before the frowns of Fate
They passed away, and left their vacant homes,
Cities, and lands, for other tenantry.
Where by the stream or on the breezy hills

The dwellings of the older people fell
In slow decay, the savage Indian built
His birchen hut; and roamed along the vales,
And over the smooth sides of sacred mounds;
Hunted with primitive bow the forest game,
Or with rude tackle drew the river's wealth;
But hastened from the hunt in forest glades
And river-fishing to a cruel war
With neighbor tribes; and feasted wild desires
In fierce excitement of barbaric strife.
From whence he came, no records tell the tale;
A few, brief legends only left us now
To sharpen the deep shadows that surround
His coming and first dwelling in the land.
Perhaps he came from East—from West. Perhaps
With overwhelming numbers his wild tribes
Extinguished nobler people that had built
Temple and statued god in Yucatan,
And raised with pious hands in fertile valleys
Their mound-heaped altars; or in last extremity
Stretched rude defences on precipitous hill-tops,
O'er which at length the fierce barbarians swarmed,
When Civilization perished in the slaughter,

Down-trodden, with sweet Art and gentle Culture,
In the wild rush of savage multitudes.
Perhaps 'twas war—perhaps a fatal pest—
Made the red Indian master of the land,
And left but ruined monuments to tell
Of earlier races dead.

From East to West,
From Arctic winter to Antarctic ice,
The Indian tribes filled the wide continent,
Dreamless of Fate yet slumbering in the East,
But soon to pour along Atlantic shores
A locust horde; before whose fatal hosts
Their race must wither, yielding land and life
To pitiless invaders, till at last
Swept from their homes,—nor mound nor temple left
To tell of more than rudest savagery,—
They yielded place unto another race.

And who came next? The story is well known.
In a new dawn of knowledge there was one
Looked with clear eyes o'er misty wastes of ocean,
Pictured broad countries set in equipoise
On the round earth, the far antipodes

To all the East, a new world in the West.
The daring voyager whose clear-seeing mind
Had studied Nature in her many forms,—
Had dared to doubt what all the world believed,—
Had dared believe what doubted all the world,—
Put forth his barks to sea ; steered to the West ;
Sailed o'er the trackless blue to that far land
He oft had seen in his prophetic dreams
Waiting his coming on the ocean's edge.
That land he found, and back returning told
His wondrous story to th' admiring world.
A thousand vessels sailed upon the track
Of the bold sailor who had shown the way,
Landing their freights of men of Eastern race
In forest-homes of Indians of the West.
Their races could not mingle ; step by step,
Each step disputed, was the red man driven
Back from the ocean,—back until his path
Ending in mountain, desert, or the sea,
He can retreat no more : here brought to bay,
And tearing foremost hunters, dies at last
Contending for possession of a spot
Where he may lay his weary body down,

And where his bones may rest,—but not in peace :
The farmer's plough upturning forest mould,
Invades with sacrilege an Indian's grave.

Thus hath the land been peopled, and grim Time
Beheld the actors of Life's drama shift :
One race its exit make, another come ;
But through all changes still the acts go on.
Who lived before the builders of the mounds
We cannot know, yet doubtless man was here.
The silent relics of that early race
Have yet a voice, as hath the ancient Sphinx
Who sits embedded in the sands of Nile,
And if one word could cross the moveless lips
Of Egypt's god, or statues of Copan,
Those stony mouths would surely utter "Change!"

I X.

ONE day upon his throne Chaldea's king
Sat with a clouded brow, and bade them bring
From temple of the star-god, Bel, a priest,
That from black gloom the king might be released ;
And when he came his deep-lined face expressed
A withered age : him, thus the king addressed :

“ They tell me you are wise ; then answer me :
What is this vague, o'erhanging mystery
That clothes my life with strange and sad annoy,
Drowning in my pained bosom every joy ?
Behold my glory ! this proud Babylon
That I have builded, sees my conquests won
From half the world : the city that defied
King Sargon's arms, hath yielded ancient pride
Before my car : the wealth of Tyrian shrines
In blazing gold about my city shines ;

And all Assyria's glory decks me now,
Bound with Chaldea's empire on my brow.
Great Babylon, the queen of cities, is mine own,
And I have palaces, each one alone
Rich as a kingdom ; female slaves as fair
As whitest ivory, their thick-tressed hair
Of woven gold ;—but these no joys impart.
Priest, can you cure the sorrow of my heart ?”

As caverned waters, deeply gurgling, flow,
Came the priest's answer, solemnly and slow :

“ The careful records of two thousand years
Are in our temple, and a thousand seers
Study their figures, tracing mystic lines
Of every star that on Chaldea shines.
Upon these tabled figures of the Past
Seven stars their ruling influence have cast.
When grew Chaldea's empire widely spread,
With growing light the seven blazed overhead ;
But when her fortunes failed, pale grew the seven,
Hiding their brilliance in the deeps of heaven.

O king, alas! though like a beacon-fire
These stars proclaimed the fall of vanquished Tyre,
Yet from that hour their lustre grew less bright,
Dimly retreating in the arch of night
Until Chaldea's eagle-visioned seers
Catch not the twinkle of their distant spheres,
While hostile hosts look down with eyes of gloom,
And angry heavens declare a coming doom.
O king, Chaldea's twenty centuries
Hang o'er her as a hundred winters freeze
My aged blood! thy glory is the crimson light
Of sunset that is fading in a night
Of darkness, an enduring night whose morn
Is in a distant time, a future dawn
Too far for prophecy;—more near I read
In blood-red stars the victories of the Mede
And lost Chaldea. King, thy sorrow strange
Is the dark shadow of impending Change."

And so the priest departed; and the king
Tore from his brow Chaldea's monarch-ring,
And wandered forth bereft of human sense,
Eating the grass with brute insipience.

And when a few, inglorious years were o'er,
Chaldea's ancient kingdom was no more.

The marks of Change, in harsh, unsparing lines,
Are set upon the nations. Kingly power,
Illustrious dignity, the might of arms,
And wide dominion—all of greatness,
The quick years lessen—all of brightness,
Cover with shadows. Pause, and look behind,
Down the long vistas of historic years,
What grand examples do we see of Change!
Egypt, Phœnician Carthage, Macedon,
And greatest of the antique nations, Rome,—
Where now are these? Stupendous forms appear,
Enthroned and crowned with empire's majesty—
Vast, shadowy phantoms of the ancient time
When each, in sceptred might, Colossus-like,
O'erstrode, gigantic, the subjected lands:
While weirdly flashes strange and spectral light
From graves of Empire. Hollow voices cry,
“We were the great of earth in our great day;
But Time and Change have swept our power
away!”

Where now the primitive science Egypt's lore
Gave to the world when to her sun-scorched land
Came student youth, Phœnician, Hebrew, Greek,
To drink with eager thirst of wisdom's cup—
To catch from lips of Isis' large-browed priests
The seeds of thought-matured philosophy
To plant and foster in barbarian lands
Until they ripened in Enlightenment,
And Civilization spread to all the world?
As drifting sand engulfs the palaces
That Egypt reared in her meridian day,
So sands of Time engulf her history;
Arts, wisdom, science, lost amid the years,
With all the marvels of her ancient life.

Where are the ships of Carthage, that of yore
Sailed out with merchandise, or armed for war,—
Adventurous beaks that traversed every sea :
Along the coasts where Grecian Jason sailed
To fruitful Colchis for the Golden Fleece ;
Beyond the pillars built by Hercules
When he went out to capture Geryon's herds ;
Or to that famous " Island of the West,"

The far Atlantis of the ocean-kings?—
Where are they now? They sail the seas no more.
Over the city of the Tyrian queen
The Roman drove his ploughshare, and its tracks
Sowed deep with salt to show his bitter hate.
Carthage, destroyed, rebuilt and destroyed,
Exists no more; nor leaves behind a trace
Of language, law, or ancient monument,
To join her famous past with modern days.

Where is the empire that the bounds of earth
Confined in narrow limits of its map,
Too small a kingdom for th' ambitious one
Who wept for worlds to conquer? Change on change
Hath swept his land, and Macedon is now
A province of the Turk; and that old tale,
How crouched the East beneath the victor foot
Of him who in the Libyan desert claimed
His high descent from Ammon, seems a myth,
The romance of an Eastern story-teller
When the tired caravan at mid-day halts,
And weary camels stretch along the sands
While their swart-visaged masters sit them down

To smoke their perfumed pipes, and hear a tale
Of wondrous marvels such as Scherezade
Told to her sultan in th' Arabian Nights.

Where are Rome's armies? In the olden time
The trampling of her legions shook the lands
From Tigris to the Thames. An iron war
Poured from her city of the palaced hills—
Where Janus' temple stood with open doors—
As from Vesuvius pours its lava streams
In hot destroying floods. Her eagles flew
O'er mountains, rivers, plains, and stormy seas,
Stretching her empire round the trembling world;
Subduing Britons in far-distant isles;
Crushing the Afric on his sandy deserts;
And driving all the North's barbarians
To seek asylum on their mountain-tops.
In the rich East, Rome gathered dearest spoils,—
Spoils to despoil the spoiler: Asia's wealth
And Egypt's pomp relaxed the arm of War,
And lost the victors in the siren charms
Of Luxury and Sloth. While thus effete,
On their soft dalliance came the locust swarms

Of wild barbarians, Tartar, Scyth, and Hun,
Who trampled down Rome's glory and her power.
Now Roman war affrights the world no more ;
The Roman soldier and his victor sword
But types of the antique : they live in bronze
To ornament these days ; their lesson hid
Beneath the glory of dead Cæsar's name.

X.

DEFT hands of Change, the little and the vast,
Are shaping Progress; and each Age elate
With something new, or better than the Past,
Still prides itself upon its high estate;
Looks back on former years with pitying eye;
Sees how the objects of its present pride
Grew up from littleness till broad and high
Their greatness overshadows all beside.
The darlings of this Progress—who can fill
The catalogue? Art, power, philosophy,
Wealth, culture, various fashions good and ill,
Have each in turn had an ascendancy:
And still the World is shouting with vain joy,
And measuring Progress by each new discovery.

As in the Past, the nations of to-day
Are plastic to disturbing touch of Change

That whirls upon them in accomplished facts,
Or shapes their destinies with slower care.
Often Change comes, a lowly, creeping thing
Which we deride, or in the garb of fashions
At which we laugh, but, while we laugh, assume.
Sometimes its progress hides in mysteries
And dark enigmas that we cannot solve ;
Or the strong march of circumstances sets
Broad marks upon the people and the land :
Shaping opinion by the might of acts,
Dressing up Nature in such strange attire
She seems pranked out for some quaint masquerade.

The rustic dwellers of an inland vale,
Wondering, behold a busy, noisy band
Invade their quiet fields. Over the stream,
Along the valley, through the hills, toil these :
Bridging, embanking, cutting, tunnelling,
And laying down in straight or curving track
Their double iron lines. The trespassed vale
Sleeps quietly no more. The reaper turns
To see a clashing train go swiftly by ;
The children run in terror to their homes,

Or, with pale faces, peep from cottage doors ;
Cattle affrighted gallop o'er the fields ;
And dogs bark loudly. From the distant hills
The mocking voice of Echo sends again
Her murmur of the din. Swift to those hills
The monster speeds ; scared Echo's voice is mute ;
And all the tumult dies. But time goes on,
And railroad trains grow into common things,
While populous towns spring up along their line.

The youthful reaper who in wonder turned
To see a thing of noise, and smoke, and strength,
And crashing wheels, disturb his summer day,
Resumed his work again ; but marvelled much,
As often on his mind the thought would push :
The world hath stranger things, perhaps, than this,
Beyond these fields ;—until at length resolved,
He leaves his scythe in less adventurous hands,
And goes to seek his fortune “ down the line,”—
His fortune, Work, of which in time are born
Knowledge and Skill ; these he brings back with
him ;

And in those fields where once he swung a scythe,

Builds hugely up a gaping furnace-stack,
And harvests iron as of old the grain.

So Progress makes strange changes in the land,
And in its people. In the Past they lived
Perhaps content to cultivate the fields
On which like native growth of shrub, or tree,
Or slothful cattle, Fortune cast their lives,—
Content to obey the laws their fathers held,
To question nothing in the plan of things
They had not wit nor wish to understand.
But changeful Progress, jostling men together,
Provokes a multitude of teeming thoughts ;
All things are questioned ; and the old-time law,
Under the pressure of opinion, bends ;
'Tis propped perhaps, or some new form contrived
To suit the fashion of the changing times ;
Or, if too long neglected, breaks downright,
And greater change is built upon its wreck.

Awakened thought disturbs the minds of men,
And will not let them rest. What one man thinks,
Hath not, in him alone, disturbing power

To move mankind ; but his thought's progeny
May stir the world in countries most remote :
For, while he speaks, his thought is cast abroad
As flies a feathered seed that chance may set
In fertile soil, and kindly sun and rains
Nurture to fruitfulness ; the harvest often
Beyond proportion to the slender planting :
No seed so sure to grow as a new thought.
Public opinion is that thought matured
In many minds, the harvest of the seed,—
A harvest often overwhelming law
Founded on old belief and precedent,
As a mud dike goes down before the storm
And wash of waves. The progress of the world
Is the illumination of the general mind,
And marks advance with corresponding change
On the political framework of each state.

As Knowledge, Science, Art, send kindly beams
On man's intelligence, it is as if
He put a window in a dark, old tower
Where the dim shadows long have had their homes,
And where hath lurked the legendary ghost

With bats, and owls, and creatures of the night,
Now from his ancient perch the spectre flits
To find a place of gloom, the light of day
Dissolving its thin shape in mockery.
This poor, light-haunted ghost is a fit type
Of ignorance; for in the kindling beams
The new day sheds on yesterday's dull gloom,
Old superstitions, born of ignorance,
And reared in darkness, are lit up by truth,
And their grotesque proportions so displayed
That Laughter drives away the things long feared,
As the grown child laughs off a bugaboo.

Could we anticipate the coming years,
Outstrip gray Time in his untiring flight
Through centuries, so looking forward, read
The pages of an unmade history,
What startling changes might such reading show!
What strange development of trifles now
Cast then enormous figures on the page
To mock our prophecies! How will the years
Roll over men? Will such progression make
Them wiser? happier? Will the heavy chains,

Forged in the Past, drop one by one away
Till, free in limb and soul, our race shall stand
Beneath the stars a little less than angels?
Or will the ancient bonds, a heritage
From ancestry of slaves, be heired along
Our line, and keep its last descendant
A slave although impatient of his bondage?
The nations of to-day, will they at length dis sever
As the old peoples of the past have done,
And from their gathered fragments new states
 rise
To grow, and flourish? to decay, and die?
What changes burden the immediate years,
Rounding events our lives assist to shape?

Will War be laid away on marble tomb
Like armored effigy of olden knight,
And Peace with olive wreath on saintly brow,
With sister Justice bearing equal scales,
Sit the fair judges of each questioned claim?
Have years subdued War's fierceness? sapped his
 strength?

Ah, no! this demon, mighty in the Past,

Grows yet more lusty in these modern days ;
Nor feels the wasting touch of time's decay
On his strong limbs ; but with a monarch's voice
Bids Science bring him newly-fashioned arms,
Knowledge equip his strength with each device
Her cunning can contrive, and all the toil
Of modern thought new-sharpen his old sword.
Breech-loading weapons, guns of calibre
Immense, and iron ships impregnable,
Armed with a force beyond the thunder-bolt
The Greek imagined in the hand of Zeus—
Beholding Science toil with blackened hands
And sooty brow, forging his mighty arms,
We may not dream his fierce campaigns are o'er,
Or that mild Peace can steal away his sword,
And teach the olden giant useful arts :
To train the vine, to till the fallow earth,
Or reap the rustling fields of yellow grain.

France, England, Russia, Prussia, Austria, Spain,
The Turk, Egyptian, Tartar, and Chinese,
Through Europe's bounds and Asia's wide domains,
Constantly arm, and discipline for war.

Their workshops ring with busy armorers
Forging War's panoply, Cyclopic arms ;
From furnace-doors the molten iron pours
Ton after ton in gaping cannon-moulds ;
Tax-paying husbandmen groan under toil,
Harvesting unremunerative crops,
That much-drilled soldiers may parade in arms
If full-gorged War shall chance to sleep the while,
Or light his baleful fires, and launch his thunders,
When the fell monster wakes to dreadful carnage.
Like a vast chess-board is the Eastern world,
Where kings, hedged round with bishops, queen, and
knights,
Push on base pawns, plebeian ranks of war,
Across the squares where each contends for place,
While follows castled strength to fortify success.

O Change, thou art the spirit of the three,—
The fabled three that spin, and cut, life's threads !
And from thy distaff run so many lines
Of chanceful fortunes, weaving into webs
Of strange entanglement about our lives,
That like a subtle, calculating Fate

You brood above all things, and weave the Future
From the unfinished patterns of the Past :
And human passions, hopes, and selfishness,
War, Peace, Prosperity, Famine, and Death,
Are figures broidered in your tapestry :
As the life-roll unfolds, they flash before us,
Filling to-days and promising to-morrows,
As they have done in many yesterdays !

XI.

IF I should dream, with old Pythagoras,
My soul through many bodies hath been fleeing ;
Or if I follow paths analogous,
Tracing the man-life up the scale of being ;
Yet at the end of each grand speculation
I find the Psyche fretting in her cage,
Securely locked in her close habitation,
Ambitious tenant in a small message.
Why should she flutter in a vain desire
To break her bars ? why foster so much pride ?
Why scorch her tender wings with passion's fire ?
Or beg Philosophy her flight to guide ?
A few quick-speeding years beneath the stars,
And Death will tear away her prison-bars.

And man, himself, doth change in Nature's plan,—
Man, theme of every song he vainly sings,

Nature's great egotist, for whom the world—
Yea, the wide universe—was greatly built ;
For whom the stars were set within the skies ;
For whom the glad sun shines, the moon revolves,
The rainbow spans the cloud, the cloud is tinged
With rainbow tints ; for whom the flowers bloom,
Summer with harvest smiles, and wholesome fruits
Grow ripe in autumn days ; for whom the tribes
Of lower life exist, his food, his slaves,
Or idle playthings of his idle hours,
Doomed by his theories magnanimous
To please himself, then yield existence up
Without a future, or another use ;
For whom, through the uncounted lapse of ages,
Matter was marvellously moved in space,
By slow degrees Earth's masonry upreared,
A palace builded for this lordly king,
In whose bright halls he struts and domineers
Through an allotted life so very short
That in the process of the general movement
It holds no measure with infinity.—
How doth he change ? Must he perforce believe
In a development from lower things—

From brutal tribes he deems are far beneath
His kingly rank ; and these perhaps derived
From earlier types of ruder animals ;
Descending in a nice, organic scale
By mystic laws through vegetation's forms
To find gross parentage in the primitive rocks ?
This origin hurts his pride, too greatly vain
Of his high powers and higher destiny,—
Which fond desire hath largely pictured out
On the wide canvas of post-mortem life,—
To listen to the claims of Mother-earth,
Or to acknowledge kinship with the sod—
Too much incredulous of power and goodness
To think God's scheme is large enough to hold
In the wide halls of its futurity
Aught but his self-elected, fortunate race.
Yet all his science reads the past in vain,
Or points along a path that leads him down,
Not up, in scale of things intelligent :
Through the lake-dwellers and the Age of Stone,
The pleistocene cave-men and the miocenes,
Comrades of mammoth and rhinoceros,
Back to the days when the wild forest glades

Shook with the terror of gorilla shrieks,—
When, monarch of the wild, the primitive man
Waged dreadful battle with enormous brutes,
Himself as brutal as his hunted quarry,
But king of brutes by right of quenchless valor.
Oft moved perhaps by strange and fitful dawning
Of an intelligence one day to crown
With kinglier glory his posterity.
Finding this genealogy far-traced,
Dragging an ignominious track through brutes,
Not soaring upward to the angels, man
Turns to re-search more carefully the Past,
To find the clue that leads him up, not down ;
Not finding, claims that Science hath presumed
Beyond her province when she followed tracks
Of human footsteps in the dead years' dust,
As if men classed with lower forms of life.

XII.

IDENTITY? Nay, is it not a dream,
An oft-returning fancy of my brain,
That I can lift me from this rushing stream
Of circumstance, myself untouched remain,
The while all else whirls on irrevocably?
A little child laughs gayly as he sails
Out on life's sea, the world a merry play.
Strong manhood thrills while passion's stormy gales
Blow round him, life a fierce reality.
Age, with its slower pulse, looks back, delays,
Finds life perhaps at last a vanity.
So runs disturbing Change through all our days—
Youth, manhood, age—with every hour a phase.
Can one identity run through the maze?

The chemist tests a fragment of the earth,
Counting the elements therein contained;

If we may do the like with all the world,
Making analysis of Nature's mass,
We find three elements compose the whole :
Consciousness, matter, and a moving force.
Matter unmoved by force, had been a death
Without an antecedent life ; for life
Means more than one impulsive throb—
Than merely a creation. One quick change
From nothingness to being would have thrilled
Infinity ; and, after that, a sleep.
The Power that made creation would have shown
A barren exercise of useless Will,
Filling eternity with stagnant death.
No ! to the thing create, an attribute
Of Primal Power was lent : force like a storm
Came down upon the new-born atomies,
And drove them madly forth. No lifeless sleep
Was the great purpose of Creative Thought
In the conception of far-reaching matter.
We cannot read that purpose in its end ;
But know so much : whate'er the end may be,—
If end there is,—'tis fashioned by this Change
That works so busily about us now,

Moulding Earth's substance as a potter moulds
And spins to shape a lump of plastic clay.

Matter and force!—how mightily they move,
And in what puzzling ways of intricacy,
Driving on blazing paths enormous suns,
Sending quick telegrams through nerves of life,
Painting with brilliant hues the moth's bright wings,
Writing a history on the rind of Earth!—
Matter and force! still the great act goes on:
Around us the phenomena of Change
Present a constant action, mingling whirl
Of many wheels that make confusing hum;
Yet all subserve one Purpose and one Will,
While through their clatter, Time, his pendulum
 swings,
Telling that Nature moveth ever on
With certainty. What is the purposed end
Thus wrought by Change? Why this machinery
Whose ceaseless movement rattles in our ears?
What does it mean? The riddle of the Sphinx
Was plain as A, B, C, to these enigmas;
And yet hereon more puzzling riddles hang:

The third great element in Nature's plan,
A consciousness that gathers to itself
Matter and force to shape them into thought,
Is with both force and matter strangely mixed
In its own being. Wherefore are we here?
What is the purpose of the life of man?
Is it to eat, and drink, and fill each sense
To full satiety with animal joys?
Is it to sleep a lazy lifetime out
As one would doze away a dreary stage?
If such the purpose, the machine is built
Too finely for its use. Beneath the whole,
Matter, and force, and this strange consciousness,
The mystery lies; or darkly hidden from us
In the dull fog of our slow faculties
That cannot see beyond their own gray haze
The clear, bright beauty of the Master's thought,
The simple purpose of the numberless wheels
Of this continuous change. Perhaps in vain
We weary brain and heart to learn the thing
Too broad for our conception. In our school
We sit as yet upon the lower seats,
And study rudiments; the time may come

We shall sit higher. In the forms of Change,
And Nature's processes is wisdom written :
May not our mission be to study Change ?
From subtle intricacy evolve its laws ?
The mind's broad powers point to such design,
A nobler use than feeding passions' fever,
Gorging brute sense, the lethargy of slumber,
Or dragging thought on tramways through our lives.
If 'tis too much to hope to know the whole,
Then we may learn a little : lift ourselves
Toward the light, whose glimmering intimates
A wise intent hath drawn the myriad lines
Of tangled web, to us a labyrinth
No Ariadne's thread can guide us through.
Perhaps it is a problem whose solution
Shall slowly bring us intellectual growth,
And ripen mental strength, as step by step
We rise to level of each higher thought
That brings us nearer to the perfect plan.
This is beyond the present reach of mind,
The other end of life's entangled skein ;
Meanwhile we must content us to go on
Still in the rudiments, and leave the end

In the safe hand of an unfailing Wisdom
That fashioned matter, lent it living force,
And placed man's consciousness amid its whirl.

Force into Matter,—the result is Change:
Movement that sends far-travelling sun-rays forth;
That moulds the things of earth; that governs men,
Their races, nations; that disturbs the seas;
That through all nature builds the countless germs,
Developing a universal life.

Force into Consciousness,—there still is Change:
The human mind is not a steadfast thing;
If immaterial its substance be,
It hath so much analogy with earth
To feel the active tyranny of force,
And dance with atoms in their frenzied whirl.

I dare not hug the thought that I, myself,
Am constant to myself; for yesterday
The sunshine and the lovely bloom of flowers
By some sweet mystery seemed parts of me;
But while to-day the same bright sunshine glows,

And loveliest flowers of dainty tint and shape
Put forth sweet bloom and perfume round my way,
Their beauty is a cruel mockery,
As tempting grapes to hunger-wasted lips
Of tortured Tantalus. Are happiness
And misery the same? Alas! in me
The change! There was a gay and radiant time
When bright Romance hung chaplets on each chance
Of wayward fortune; and a dismal time
When mocking demons plucked away each charm
That sweetens life, the great world desolate
And dreary, beauty the unworthy tints
Painted on shameless cheeks to hide decay,—
A time of buoyancy,—a time of gloom,—
Time of credulity and time of doubt.
It is within my bosom and my brain,
Not in the outward world of facts and forms,
Such change belongs. It comes to me
By sympathetic ties of mother-earth;
By oft experience of matter's change;
In joy's gay laugh; in disappointment's tears.
Through all the action of this busy scene
Phase follows phase as spokes flash round a wheel.

So closely crowd conditions in the mind
That momentary beings pass away,
Leaving faint impress on the dizzy brain,
And new ones dawn, which in their turn give place
To others, thronging there, that flash and die,
Dividing life in parts so numberless
We cannot stay to weigh or measure them.
Great epochs, crowning changes come to all,
Broad tide-marks, where the swelling flood of fortune
Floated our life-ship on a glorious sea,
Or, in its ebb, upon some dreary shore
Stranded and wrecked hope's richest-freighted voy-
age,—

Eras on which Remembrance loves to dwell,
Or pale-faced Misery in sorrow broods.
These are apart, perhaps with years between,
While woven round them in embroidered web,
The various fabrics of the lives of men
Unroll their curious patterns to our eyes.

XIII.

“THE god of sunset—see,” the Egyptian cried,—
“It thinks! How dared I, poor earth-creature, cut
Upon the face of Sphinx god-thoughted pride?
His power looks forth! the rock is deified!
Behind that brow of stone is darkly shut
From men his high intents. A hand not mine
Did guide my chisel. While I graved each line
I felt the grasp and thrill of power divine.
What is its thought? I know not. Who can tell?
Too wise for me the purposes that dwell
In that stone face. Perhaps those lips, now still,
May one day speak; that brow, for good or ill,
Unfold its thought. You say, 'tis art of mine:
If it be so, then is my art divine.”

In the capricious bosoms of mankind
Religion hath as often varying form

As mind's diversity. 'Tis sad or gay,
Austere or merry, full of gentleness,
Or harsh with rigor and compelling fires,
Filling glad hearts with joyful promises,
Or mortifying life with anxious cares.
It howls and whirls in frenzy with the dervish ;
Fasts with the lonely hermit of a cave ;
Falls into prayer with Moslem when the call
Of blind muezzin sounds from minaret ;
Builds the great dome of holy Peter's church ;
Or travels, footsore, to some sacred shrine
With a devoted band of pious pilgrims ;
With Epicurus laughs ; with Cato frowns ;
Or with Diogenes is happy in a tub ;—
Yet under many forms, one principle
Maintains, the common mover of men's hearts.
A keen perception of th' unresting force
That drives its chariot wheels around the earth,
And flashes Change from every star of heaven,
Combined with consciousness of impotence
To stay one atom, or delay one change,
Compels the worshipper on bended knees
To lift his prayers to some symbolic god,

Or bow his soul before the mastery
Of an omniscient and eternal Power—
The creature calls to the divinity.

The savage lifts to his bright sun-god's face
Worshipping hands; adores the silver moon;
Hears a god's voice in the deep tones of thunder;
Beholds his anger flash from night's deep gloom
In crooked, dazzling lines of blinding flame.
He worships an ideal of light and might,
Enthroned mysteriously above the skies.
But when, instructed by conceptive thought,
Or prompted by imagination's dreams,
He fancies likeness to his intellect
In powers that change material shapes of earth,
Then powers of intellect become his gods,
Garbed in the forms of man or manlike beast.
Thus the old Greek with ardent, artist mind,
Set on Olympian heights the thunderer, Zeus,
And heavenly court of his Saturnian kindred.
In Egypt broader thought built larger gods:
Osiris, Isis, were th' imagined ones,
Symbols of force and of prolific Earth,

The great high-priests of a yet higher One,
But dressed in attributes that make up man.
Mind was the moving power behind them all
Compelling worship; man prostrated him
To forms of marble, bronze, or painted wood,
Because his mind adored an ideal mind,
And here its symbol; though the worshipper,
In his fond ecstasy of fervent zeal,
Looked not perchance beyond the symbolism.

The larger culture of Egyptian priests
Decayed with age; Apis and Isis fell,
And smaller gods were set upon their thrones.
O'er classic Greece and Latin Rome swept hordes
Of fierce barbarians from th' uncultured North,
Trampling soft luxury's minions underfoot,
Upsetting empire, crushing old-time rule,
O'erturning statues of divinities
And sacred altars on whose carven shapes
The Greek had lavished all his matchless art.
The sire of Saxons, large-limbed, flaxen-haired,
Dashed with his ponderous axe the front of Jove;
Clutched with fierce hands the radiant, golden zone

Of Venus; robbed god Mercury of his wand;
And laughed disdainful of such ones set up
In pomp of temples for a slavish worship.
In the religion of the cultured South
The Northman sowed the seeds of bolder thought,
Conception of a better heritage
For man, beside, and not beneath, divinity.
Not abject adoration, but a claim
In right of manhood, marked his nobler worship.

Meantime was born a large philosophy;
Out of a people's lowest ranks was given
The pure example of a blameless life;
And lowly, from the midst of fishermen
And humble artisans, came forth a voice
That taught, the purpose of life's scheme is love—
A love that gathers to one Father-heart
His creatures, where the outcast, wretched leper
Hath equal place beside the sceptred king.
Too broad a theme! the narrow-thoughted ages
Caught but a glimmer of the kindly light
Thus shed; and though the high-domed Pantheon
Was emptied of its older deities,

Their counterparts were set in each high niche :
A Mary on the pedestal of Juno,
And row of sad-faced saints upon the blocks
Where once were poised the hero-gods of Greece.
Still over all swept Time, th' iconoclast,
And many saints were hurled from sacred place
To mingle fragments with the broken gods
Of dead mythologies ; and the sweet light
Of love was shadowed in the human heart
By superstition, ignorance, lust of power,
And a vain-glorious zeal of proselytism.
Flashing and flickering in the stormy breath
Of passions,—as a blown torch flares about
In windy gusts, sometimes almost put out,
And the next moment flinging forth bright flames,—
This thought of Father-love, ill-comprehended,
Prompted the dogmas of conflicting creeds ;
Divided churches ; lit the cruel fires
That burnt the martyrs ; sent brave exiles forth
To plant their faith in lands beyond the sea.

So hath Religion, like fantastic masker,
Appeared in many shapes and various dress ;

But yet within, a moving instinct held
Unchangeable its grasp of worshipping hearts:
And we to-day feel the same mystic awe
That bowed our ancestors to wooden blocks,
Bending us down, each to his chosen ideal.

As Science is released from brutal grasp
Of Superstition, in her gratitude
She fills the world with cheerful promises
And ready help; deciphers the strange puzzles
That long have vexed bewildered intellect;
Gathers and classifies determined facts;
Reads the wise laws ordained of old to rule
The primal atoms that creation gave;
Clearing the way to broader reach of thought,
That men may look above with grander zeal
Than object-worship shining in their eyes.
While building the high throne of deity
Grander and brighter than blind adoration
Hath skill to do, she whispers to the souls
Of worshippers suggestions from the thought,
That all the showings of nice powers of sense,
All that wise thinkings yet have ravelled out

From the confusing intricacy around,
Are little parts of a well-ordered whole,
The simpler figures of an infinite scheme
Where relative conditions are the words
God speaks to man by Nature's myriad tongues.
Thus placed a scholar in the school of life,
He needs no more such symbols as of old
To give his mind communion with his God.
Nature gives larger symbols in its facts
Than cloudy attribute or ideal thought,—
A positive showing of the Infinite Will,—
Letters engraven broadly on the world,
Telling of power, beneficence, and love.

Science is knowledge classified, a step
From Nature's manifestations to their laws,
A reading of the lessons set for man
In his first primer-book, the outspread world,
Showing how near at hand, and out beyond,
A supreme Wisdom reigneth. As a scheme
Of nice adjustment and well-balanced force—
Conception of a unity of thought
And steadfast purpose in each busy movement—

A wise contrivance in life's noisiest whirl—
Glimmer in faint reflection on his mind,
They kindle there ambition's daring fires
And grand suggestions that reach broadly out
From atoms, movement, laws, to their First Cause:
That which can comprehend, must be of kind
With that which hath contrived,—the thought is clear;
So man, perceiving Nature may be traced
Through little spaces by his patient thought,
Feels his relation to his God more near;
Feels the religious instinct of his soul
Urge him to follow knowledge in the paths
Where Science leads to Nature's altar, Truth.
Religion, science,—why oppose the words?
One is the impulse to reach up, beyond
Earth's accidents, to Heaven's serenity
And changeless Power that sits upon its throne;
The other shows the way. Another way
Faith, with her heavenward eyes, may point to us;
What matter which we take, the end the same?

The sainted zealot kneeling at the shrine,
Or prostrate cast beneath the crucifix,

Cries in an ecstasy of fervent zeal,
"Salva, O Jesu, me miserrimum!"
An earnest preacher, warm in his belief,
Propounds to rapt disciples holy creed;
Franklin, with kite-string and with Leyden-jar,
His forehead bared to angry elements,
Questions the flashing messengers of God;
Or Young,—not he who wrote his sad "Night-
Thoughts,"
But the learned doctor of philosophy,—
Follows the waves of light through devious maze
Up to the Source that planned their wondrous
ways—
Which of these worshippers, thus lifting hands
Toward His throne, and to His light of truth,
Presents the largest tribute unto Deity?
Lays on His altar most acceptable gifts?
Which best fulfils the purpose of his being?
Follows most surely the instinctive guide
Set, like a compass, in the soul of man?
Which comes the nearest to the Heart of Love
Whose great pulsations fill the universe?—
How dare we judge, or draw dividing line,

The impulse, the admiring heart, the same ;
In all the same up-reaching toward God ?

While thus religion, an eternal law,
Impels mankind as matter is propelled
By gravitation, or as atoms move
Obedient to the laws of their affinities ;
Around this native and unchanging force
We group our symbols in the fond belief
That thus we picture the great gates of Truth ;
And that our thoughts are its mysterious light
Filtered through Nature into souls of men.

XIV.

“ I AM too happy,” the rich Lydian cried,
And cast in hungry mouth of deep-sea tide
His costliest ring ; then with rejoicing breast
Rode gayly home to revel, laugh, and feast.
And when he dined, behold a monstrous fish,
That morning caught, was served on golden dish,
While all the feasters gazed with hungry eyes
As the king’s carver sliced the dainty prize.
Why doth he pause ? what doth he give the king ?
The sea returns the monarch’s precious ring.
Pales the king’s face ; “ Alas ! alas ! ” he cries,
“ The cruel Fates my costly gift despise !
Look down, Apollo, through soft, Lydian skies,
And quench the hate in the fell sisters’ eyes ! ”

I must not trust the pleasant promises
Of smiling Fortune ; nor forget the fillet,

That binds her eyes, may hide her mischievous
 guiles ;

Nor grow enamored of her sunny looks
And dangerous charms until they drive away
Prudence, protecting fears, and recollection
Of all the lessons of her strange caprice.
I may not rest in safe tranquillity
Though custom tell me that to-morrow's sun
Will shine as brightly, and its blossoms open
As sweetly, as to-day's. If, charmed and drugged
By poppy-perfumes of my happiness,
I dream of bright to-morrows, weep perhaps
O'er woes that touch my neighbors,—tears soon
 dried

In my own pleasant sunshine,—nor believe
Calamity can come within the borders
And pleasance of my life ; so perilous dreams
May be the prelude of strange opposites
And dread realities. How rude the shock,
To see th' enchanted palace of my joys
Sail suddenly away ! bare, unknown deserts
Mock my dismay ! to mark on other faces
The sympathetic limning of the misery

That tortures me! Philosophy, alas,
In thy cold schemes there is no sovereign cure
For broken hearts! thy wholesome antidotes
Must be preparatory to our hurts,
And temper joy's wild flush with calming thoughts
Before calamity's black days appear!
As in romantic tale, an errant knight
Puts on his strongest suit of shining mail
When he would venture in enchanted lands,
Or through the magic halls of some strange castle
Where pomp and beauty shine in golden splendor;
So we should buckle wisdom's safest harness
Securely on our bosoms when we go
To meet the fairest fortunes, lest beneath
A Siren's smile may lurk a Siren's guile,—
Harness of wisdom on whose cold steel rings
Misfortune's arrows may unhurtful fall,
And rough Adversity's malicious blows
Rattle in vain. When Fortune sweetly smiles
Let us remember what a sage of old
Declared: "No one may say, 'Happy am I,'
Until his life hath reached a happy end;"
For, lo! the demon, Change, uplifts his head,

And Cræsus is despoiled of countless wealth,
His haughty forehead leveled in the dust,
His crown exchanged for fetters of a slave.

The world presents examples in each life,
Nor need we search to find the one of Change.
'Tis you, myself, my neighbor ; each of us
May fill alike the place. Shall I take one
From his high niche in the world's history,
And set him in my page to blazon it,
To show that Change can reach resistless hand
Above the throne of Empire, and pull down
A monarch to the same unhappiness
That hangs its chains of misery on a slave ?

A boyhood filled with vague imaginings
Of golden castles built upon the tops
Of the sun-lighted, crimson banks of cloud,
The gleaming country of his island skies.
He saw bright hosts press on with waving plumes,
Gay-bannered victories—a breath, a blast
As of a magic horn of wizard might,
And tumbling shapes of air dissolved the spell,

And in its place gleamed towers and palace-walls
Of an imperial city. Who may tell
If not foreshadowed there the changing scenes
Of an eventful life! In sunset glare
Perchance he saw a visioned Moscow burn;
Or in the levin-flash from stormy cloud
Beheld the fatal fires of Austerlitz
Painting the sky with frescoed crowns and thrones.
But time swept on; the days of dream were past,
And speculative thought exchanged for deeds.
With all the ardor of a daring heart
To which Fate whispers thrilling messages,
He came on the arena of the world,
His country's soldier. To his dazzled view,
Above the tumult of chaotic change,
Ambition held the sceptre that before
Fancy had pictured in prophetic skies.
In the confusion of a changing state
He dared to take the helm, and boldly steer
On the wild ocean of a troubled age
With revolution's noisy storm above,
And faction's waves below. The will to dare
Is a charmed talisman to win success.

The world gives place to him that dares to take it,
Denying name and trust of leadership
To careful prudence or slow steps of wisdom,
To cast them down before the resolute foot
That leaps unshrinking to the front of perils.
His star of fortune burned above his head,
And led him ever onward. He achieved
Beyond cloud-painted visions of his youth
And castles built of unsubstantial air.
What youth had deemed above ev'n daring's reach,
Was now within his grasp—more than a king
When conquered nations bent before his knee.
But on these kingly fortunes fell a change :
The star of destiny, on which his heart
Rested in superstitious homage of belief,
Grew pale, and flickered, as it sunk from sight,
Hiding its beams in crimson-tinted snows,
To rise again with cold, despairing ray
On Waterloo's red field ; and there eclipsed,
Shine fortune on him from the skies no more.
He rose from nothing to the greatest height
Of worldly power,—he rose to sink again,
Beat down beneath misfortune's rapid blows.

Power, empire, honors—all were stripped away,
Disgraced and banished from his native land,
Like fettered lion, must he languish out
His heart in weariness, or beat the bars
In savage fury of his wild despair.
How better far, on field of Waterloo,
When Fortune fled, and cast his eagles down,
Have gathered round him broken ranks of war,
And, in one final charge on England's squares,
Retrieved the field, or died a warrior's death:
His shroud, the flag, whose bright and silken folds
Had waved his victories on famous fields!—
Nay, man makes not his lines of destiny;
Draws not the figure of each act of Change:
Defeat or victory—a prize or shame—
Master or fugitive—a throne or chains—
As Fortune turns her wheel! From greatest height
Is most disastrous fall; then happy he,
Perchance, who, little rising, little risks.

XV.

EACH of the world's uncounted multitude
That breathes to-day sweet breath of vital air,
And feels life's stir of passions, be he rude
In unlearned thought, or wise beyond compare,
A naked savage in his wild barbarity,
Or many-titled doctor of philosophy—
Each in his place of time and circumstance
Marks the unfolding of life's history ;
Thrills with expectance of impending chance
And all the wonder of his mystery.
For each, yet with a marvellous variance,
Life runs its course along one common way :
My joys and pangs have countless millions known,
And millions yet to be shall make my hopes and fears
 their own.

A mother looks with wistful wondering
In her child's infant face, and while she soothes

His restless murmuring, fondly speculates
On what the future hath in store for him :
In the sweet beauty of his baby smile
Sees promise of a bright prosperity ;
Kisses his chubby hands, and dreams of fortunes
Beyond the luck of all his ancestry
Waiting her darling in the coming years.
So Eve, perchance, a glorious life imagined
For Cain, the first-born of the sons of men
And first of murderers, as he lay, a cherub,
In smiling innocence in her fond arms ;
And so the Hebrew mother of the traitor
Among the twelve dreamed that her son might win
The plaudits of the world. The morn of life !
What countless possibilities appear
Awaiting him whose little, untried feet
Press on life's threshold !—will he win ? or fail
Amid the changes of his swift career
From cradle to the grave ? His infancy
Is passed in prattle, wonder, laughter, shouts,
A few half-smiling tears. The magical touch
Of Change soon brings to his bright, laughing eyes
A look of thought ; his golden hair grows dark ;

The dimples disappear from his round cheeks ;
And the fond mother sees with smiling pride
Her baby grown a tall and manly youth.
He feels the change with many a tingling thrill
Of quick emotion. In his bounding heart
A hundred sanguine hopes with clamorous cries
Shout happy fortunes. Life, that in childhood's eyes
Seemed a long stretch of unknown galleries
Immersed in gloom, by strange enchantment now,
Responsive to his own awakenings
And new, mysterious birth of intuitions,
Catches bright lustre from his glowing thoughts,
And shines illumined like a summer-dawn
With rosy light,—then casts each veiling shadow
Of morning twilight, and arrays fair shapes
In charms and gay enticements of delight.
As if the signal-bell had loudly rung
In life's great theatre, the curtain lifts,
And shows a marvellous scene, as beautiful
As new ; on which not only his glad eyes
May gaze, but his elastic footsteps tread.
Enraptured doth he pass the golden gate
Of the enchanted garden of the Hesperides,—

Enchanted by twin spells of youth and hope.
The golden fruit hangs yellow o'er his head,
The dragon sleeps; he laughs to see the prize
Within his reach, and bending to his hand.
Yet, ere he plucks, fair Pleasure smiling comes,
And beckons him to join her laughing train,
And revel with her and her rosy hours.
Then buoyant youth in his glad heart exults;
The merry dance, the jovial crew, allure;
Life's prizes are forgotten in that hour
Of sweet enchantment and beguiling joys.
Trampling beneath his hasty, careless steps
The perfumed roses, he would catch each joy
That laughing flies, while laughing, he pursues;
Turns to each fairy shape that gayly flits
On summer wing, a bright-hued butterfly;
Sleeps amid flowers, to wake, and laugh again,
And drink to full satiety delight.
But the gay laugh at length forsakes his lips;
The garden blossoms fall from withered boughs;
The golden fruit, that dazzled once his eyes,
Unplucked, neglected, rots upon the ground;
Pleasure departs with all her noisy train,

A cynic sneer upon each back-turned face ;
And sweets grow sour : the dragon from his sleep
Awakes, and Danger threatens in the paths
Where Pleasure danced with sweet seducing wiles.
Maturity now gathers up his powers
To fight the dragon though the guarded prize
Be lost, and if he win, or if he fail,
The golden opportunity returns no more,
That once seemed his. He deems youth's darling
 hopes,

The vain illusions of green ignorance ;
Pleasure's bright joys, the tinsel of a show ;
The garden flowers, rank weeds without a use ;
Beauty too often falsehood's painted mask.
Strong in himself, he sets his limb and brain
Against the powers that be ; but, while he boasts
Of robust strength, feels Time's so heavy hand
On his strong limbs, and the firm muscles shrink,—
On his wise brain, and memory vainly seeks
To hold the thought in which his thought was
 strong.

While yet he strives to re-collect his strength,
Hears his grandchildren prattling of his age ;

Strokes his gray beard, and tells the youngsters tales
Of what their grandsire did; sleeps in his chair
In dozing dulness while quick-footed hours
Run past him; wakes to prattle like a child,
To laugh again, a caricature of childhood,
With little, merry laughers round his knee;
But sleeps at length more soundly, and is laid
With funeral honors in abiding bed
Of garden mould;—on which perhaps is set
A monumental stone whose cold, deep-chiselled
words
Record his name and age, or haply make
A line or two of title, place, or rank,—
On which his children gaze complacently,—
Or scrap of verse which soon becomes antique,
And makes the curious reader smile the while
He ponders of the frail mortality of men

“Life is no little thing. O tell me not,
Man is a worm conceived of crumbling dust,
And fragile as its atoms! Lo, I breathe!
And the sweet breath that fills my rising breast
Sends joy with life through every quickening pulse.

Bright fancies crowd in my conceptive brain,
And fashion thoughts that rise on heaven-born wings
So far above the narrow walls that hold
This organism of dust, that I forget
My habitation is a group of cells,
A walking figure, an automaton
Wound up to run a course of fourscore years ;
While in my heart beat such ecstatic throbs
Of sympathy with grand ideals, that life
Is lifted to their levels. Not a worm !
The thing of dust compounded, and no more,
Can never rise above his native dust
Save as the moth may flap his shining wings :
But I have higher wisdom than the laws
Of this organic dust could give, and Nature whispers :
This human wisdom is the bright crown-jewel
Of my inherited kingdom, to whose halls
This shape of earth is but the narrow portal.”
So speaks gay Health. Come to his darkened room,
And hear the invalid on his bed of pain :
“ O weary hours, how slow !—how slow you move !
Your feet were quick to dance in days of health,
But now you linger as enamored of Pain.

You would not stop to toy with bright-eyed Pleasure;
Now will you stay to dally with Disease?
What an unworthy thing is weary life!
How poor a creature, man! Imprisoned thus,
A wretched victim in a torture-chamber,
I feel the cruel rack of pitiless pain
Distress each nerve and fibre of my body,
More sensitive to anguish than in health
They ever thrilled to the delights of pleasure.
Ah! once I dreamed my soul was set above
The organism of life in such high place,
Its calm serenity might be unmoved
Although Disease, with cruel vulture-beak,
Should make each delicate nerve his shrinking prey—
Alas! Serenity deserts me now;
And many fears and doubts, that long ago
Were laid to rest by wise philosophy,
Come darkly back, their wide, distended shapes
Casting disturbing shadows on my couch.
Weird Fancy, that in days of better health
Built up enchanted palaces of hope,
Now pictures sombre halls of darkening gloom,
Or frights me with the grave's deep, narrow walls."

So groans the sick man from his weary couch,
Till wilder phantoms come to chase away
Each reasonable thought, surrounding him
With all the strange, fantastic crew of shapes
Hot Fever brings in her attendant train,
Frightful and motley in confusion mixed,
A dance of demons, clown, and harlequin.

XVI.

Is it a pleasant country where we go
When this life ends? I would believe it so;
Nor terrify my soul with bugbear fear,
Or fancied torture, anguish, sorrow, woe,
Of which, alas! we have sufficient here.
Although the unseen world hath gloomy gate,
About whose portal many terrors wait,
I love to think, the painful threshold passed,
A better dwelling will appear at last :
If not the wondrous city we are told
Hath shining streets adorned and paved with gold,
A land where we with loving friends may be,
Our lifted souls more pure and clear to see
The beautiful and true in God's high ministry.

The strife is over, and multitudinous phases
Of life concluded ; silent, cold, lies death

In rigid lines o'er which pale Beauty hovers
In fond remembrance of the parted spirit
Till frightened by Decay. No power remains
To stir again the nicely-fashioned nerves,
Flashing intelligence to intellect,
Or bringing back the ready mind's response.
The mechanism of muscle, frame of bone,
Sinews, cells, tissues, blood, veins, arteries,
Are perfect; but that weird invisibility,
The soul, hath fled the pulseless shape of clay.
Relieved of tenancy, the empty house,—
Its walls of flesh no longer held upright
By mystic agency of vital fires,—
Returns again to kindred clay of earth,
Resolving into native elements,
A pile of dust that Nature's artist hand
May touch anew, and model into forms
Of nice organic structure, which a breath
May thrill, life animate, and mind control,
Again to die, to be by death renewed.

But whither goes the earth-enfranchised soul?
None may disclose the secret of its flight,

Hidden behind tear-sprinkled, gloomy gates
That cannot be repassed. Why would we know
Our future dwelling and our future lot?
Why seek to put aside the veil that hides
The change from life to death? An idle wish
Whose gratifying might belittle life,
Poor in its contrast with the life to be—
Often most poor in its most fortunate light;
But, ah, how shrunken might it seem to us
In the effulgence of the clearer future!
In that last hour when pitiless Death shall come,
Blighting the body with his withering touch,
The secret may be known. Though death's dark
gates
Close on mortality with a dull clang,
Beyond their portal the freed soul may spring,
The infant creature of another world,
Perhaps new dressed in shape and organism
For onward journey of another stage
In the far pilgrimage of human souls.

Death, thy funereal curtain, hung between
Man and his future, hides with sable folds

A multitude of scenes! The unseen world,
As Faith, or Hope, or legends picture it,
Is set beyond the last momentous change
Life's delicate organism of sense can feel.
How many dreams of strained, conceptive fancy,
Visions evoked from fevered brain of zeal,
Are placed beyond the threshold of this life!
Thrilled with an inspiration, Fervor paints
With daring touch the glorious halls of Heaven
And the new life, from death reanimate,
After the promptings of a fond desire,
Fancy's bright tints, or ecstasy's delirium ;
And thinks the picture by a hand divine ;—
But always Change ; the fatal door once passed,
New life and garments clothe the translated soul.
The unseen world—to one 'tis like a dream :
Full of vague shadows, thin, phantasmal shapes
Dim and mysterious on a bank of clouds.
Another sees it with Faith's trustful eyes,
As clearly shown as face of household friend,
Its outlines firm as letters cut in stone.
Unto a third it blazes like the sun,
A splendor dazzling with effulgent light

Too bright to look upon ; earth-atomed eyes
And brain of clay too weak to bear the beams
That broadly stream from fountain-head of truth.

The din of arms rang through the ancient North ;
And blue-eyed Norsemen cased gigantic limbs
In panoply of war. Their war-god, Odin,
Breathed on the blast mysterious messages
That stirred the hearts of warriors. From his brow
The fierce berserker swept his uncombed hair
That hung its tangled, tawny masses down
His brawny shoulders and gigantic breast,
And lifted upward eyes that gleamed in light
Of frenzied zeal. He saw above him blaze
Walhalla's halls, where, clad in gleaming steel,
Were met the heroes of his ancestry,
Tall chiefs whose swords had cut the shields of kings,
Upon the swan's-bath with their dragon beaks
Defied the Storm-king and his dash of waves.
Upon vast tables spreads a mighty feast,
The marvellous boar's flesh and the crooked horns
Foaming with fragrant mead,—glad healths go round,
And the huge feasters shout together, "Skoal!"

The Northman's stormy heaven of gods and heroes
Saved him from Niflheim, from the gloomy Hela,
From famine, misery, and dread abode
In the deep cave of thick and hungry fogs.
A savage creed, by cruel legends taught,
Filled his barbaric heart with stormy joys ;
Drowned Pity's pleading voice in war's alarms ;
Drove the berserker, like a demon, forth,
The frenzied zealot of the savage North,
Who wooed grim Death,—to him, a lovely bride,—
As on the spears he rushed, and shouting fell,
That, from wide-gaping wounds, his ghost might
 spring
To high Walhalla, and of Odin claim
A feaster's bench in his great banquet hall.

A change of scene—the clash of noisy cymbals
And piercing notes of Moorish music ring
Wildly among the fig-tree groves that skirt
The shining walls of some old Syrian town.
Behold the swarthy Arabs how they ride
On their fleet steeds : a sudden locust-flight
That stops to devastate, then on again

To conquests new! Beneath the holy crescent
To die is gain; for Allah's prophet points
To golden seats and sensual joys that wait
The true believer in that blissful heaven
Holy Mohammed hath proclaimed to men.
The glow of wild fanaticism shines
In the keen Arab's face; his black eyes gleam;
He waves his tall lance; urges with lithe limbs
His foam-flecked steed; and rides as joyfully
To death as, marching through dry wastes of desert,
The thirsty camels come to some cool spring.
In his death hour he sees the graceful forms
Of lovely houries whose soft, snowy arms
Lift him from Earth; the ardent joys of sense,
Wine-cups that sparkle, love-enticing maidens,
Possess his passing soul. The Earth recedes
From his dim sight; but not one last regret
Bids him delay; for Allah's kingdom dawns
Upon him, and he hails the joyful morn
Gladly as guest, invited to a feast,
Crossing the threshold, sees a well-spread board,
Bright lights, and all the pleasant garniture,
Promising sense and appetite delight.

Inspired by faith, the Hindoo casts himself
Before the car of Vishnu, his great god,
Preserver of the world and of the soul
That dares to seek him at the gates of death.
As the freed spirit leaves his mangled form
Visioned delights await him in the sky :
Delightful groves, bright crystal streams, and lakes
With pearl-embedded strands ; o'er fragrant waves
The lotus-blossoms float, and gay-winged birds
That carol songs of love, flit radiantly—
Such is the vision greets his glazing eyes,
His dear reward for sacrifice of life.

The dying Christian turns his thoughts from Earth,
And as, with weary ebb, his life goes out,
Looks to the home his Father and his God
Hath made for him when Death shall bid him come
To his inheritance, a mansion built
By Father-love for his eternal rest.
While chilly tremblings seize his mortal frame,
Celestial music fills his dying ears :
The songs of seraphs call him up from Earth,
And pure-eyed angels on their snowy wings,
A shining host, attend his flight to Heaven.

XVII.

THE untaught savage bows his dusky face
Low in the dust before the presence dread
Of some rude-carven idol of his race,
And of the frightful monster begs a place
In distant halls of kingdom of the dead.
Of this same kingdom Plato speculates,
Conjures philosophy its bounds to trace,
To paint what change in its dim future waits,
What glories crown ambition's latest goal
With death-bought fortunes of the human soul.
Lo! here broad-visaged, wise Philosophy
Meets the brute savage at death's narrow gates,
And thenceforth, hand-in-hand enforcedly,
The ill-matched pair go down eternity.

A sceptic cries, "There is no more beyond
The present life, nothing to hope, to fear.

Death is an end of thinkings, pleasures, pains.
Who would ask more, would be dissatisfied
At last with an eternity of life.
Why drag the thing beyond its natural length
With fanciful translation to the skies?
Would you, like Alexander, be a god,
Who fill too poorly the small place of man?
Have all the ages taught mankind in vain
By their examples multiplied beyond
His computation, by analogies
Plainly presented on the Earth's broad face,
That posthumous existence is hope's folly?—
Poor child of vanity!—an idle fancy?
Man's weak attempt to glorify himself?"
Then brings he skilful arts of sophistry
To show that man is nothing, matter nothing,
Mind incapable of proving its identity,
Apparent facts, sensations unreliable,
And his environment, th' unknowable

Then soul is but a myth; and what is man?
Ephemeral compound of the elements;
A happy union of material laws;

A fungus springing from the clods of earth ;
No higher birth ; no greater destiny :
And his immortal hopes, his large desires,
His yearning after God's eternal light
Of truth,—these then are vain delusions all.

But yet this accident—this happy chance,—
Phenomenon of sensitive nonentity,—
Thing of a base, material ancestry,—
Mere composite of atoms,—dares to claim
Beyond the aggregation of its parts ;
Sets up a court of inquiry, and sends out
To parent laws an absolute subpœna ;
Tests them with question and nice measurement
Until it learns the limitation of that
Hath built its structure and environment ;
Weighs law with law, and traces movement back
Beyond the active agency of laws ;
Winning at last the prize of toiling thought,
A faint conception of some lesser parts
Of the great scheme of matter, force, and life,
Of which its parent laws are but blind servants.
Can a created thing so far surpass

Its limited creators, and enjoy
A reach beyond the makers of its life?
Whence can it have enlargement of their powers?
Can laws create a thing to question laws?
Out of an earthen jar a genius rise
As in the fable of th' Arabian tale?
So strange a thought mocks our credulity,
Less easy of belief than Zeal's great schemes,
The bright, elaborate picturings of Faith,
The grandest altar-piece her hand hath wrought,
The warmest coloring by Fancy laid,
The richest imagery of impassioned thought.

The lily rises from the lap of Earth
To burst in golden sunshine swollen buds,
And blushing yield to her bright bridegroom, day,
In soft profusion wealth of virgin bloom.
A delicate commingling of soft tints,
Graceful perfection of the lines of shape,
Blend them together into loveliness;—
Yet hath the flower no beauty. The calm ox,
Cropping the young and tender blades of grass,
Lifts not his stupid head and great, slow eyes

To gaze enamored of the lovely bloom
That loads the lily's stem ; he thinks indeed
The sweet, short grasses are more admirable
Than all the bloom of lilies. Whence is this ?
Here are the lines of grace, the exquisite tints,
And here the nice machinery of the eye
To catch the mingling of those shapes and hues ;
Yet no effect of beauty. Not in flower
Or beast exists the precious mystery
That heaves man's bosom, and excites his thought,
When he beholds the lily's loveliness.
The mystery of beauty is a light
That flashes on his brain at the appeal
Of Nature's picturings, as if he caught
An inspiration of the master-thought
Of which all Nature is the imagery.
No consciousness of pleasing tint, or grace
Of perfect form, exists beneath sweet bloom.
Its language is the nice concept of man ;
Speaks in his soul, not in the lovely plant.
His recognition of a higher thought
Than useful purpose, or economy
In grouping atoms, is the blossom's story,

Its sweetest whisper. Though an organism
Reaching to this expression of a thought,
A rich vitality compelling Earth
To place in such exactness every part,
Are tied together in the lily's stem,
They give no hint of inborn, native thought.
The movements are exact; no light caprice
Puts forth rose-blossoms on a lily's stem,
Or changes tints of bloom from pink to blue,
Or blushes brighter beauty in the praise
Of admiration's eye. From Earth's rank soil
The plant is reared, grows, blossoms, fades, and dies,
Without an act of conscious energy;
Concrete of laws, but an objective thing;
Matter impelled, not a self-sentient force.
And will man say that he is like the flower,
A choice production of the fertile earth,
On which is written a mysterious legend
Bearing intelligence between unknowns?
No; 'tis a desecration of himself
At which his intellect its protest makes
In every exercise of conscious thought.

Away vain doubts that clashing creeds suggest !
And if I may not climb on Jacob's ladder
Where every step is a disputed dogma,
Yet am I not content to sleep in dust
Forever, only a forgotten shape
Of Earth, that chance hath built of restless atoms.
Here in close confines of small space and time,
Mocked by the bickering forms of constant change,
And haunted by grim doubts of that desire
That fills my bosom, lest it be a strain
Of siren melody, and not the voice
Of truth ; yet is this life the worthier, nobler,
That it must battle with strange mysteries,
And bravely win its crowning victories
By patient toil and wise intelligence.
Entangled in the labyrinth of Change,
While Time's quick tumult whirls and hurries on,
We yet may work life's problem so far out :
Not to confound the sentient force of thought
That finds expression in mind's organism,
With matter,—though its law-thrilled atomies
Put on a mockery of supreme power,

Wearing the semblance of a potency
Inherent in their substance, when the while
They are but senseless and objective points
On which is pressed the moving Power of life.

XVIII.

WHEN the stormy Ocean with unceasing roar,
Like a shouting Titan, thunders on its shore,—
When the hum of Summer singeth busily,
In the storm or murmur, what doth Nature say?
Is it matter crying in its agony?
Is it atoms sighing in their harmony?
Is it but the grinding of untiring wheels?
Is it the rejoicing grateful Nature feels?
Ask thy soul these questions, and her answer hear:
“For each sound Earth utters thou hast a tuneful
ear.”

But much noise and turbulence tell not grandest acts;
Under hush of silence Earth brings forth great facts.
Let not noise disturb thee, nor night's silence lone;
Let not din perturb thee,—Nature and God are one.

Search where we will, abroad, within ourselves,
Through thought's extremest reach, there is no thing

In which material elements combine,
Or composite of matter and of laws,—
No substance, be it simple or compound,
The greatest mass of aggregated atoms,
Or one poor, individual entity
Invisible through extreme littleness,
A minute molecule, or monster sun,
But through each instant of advancing time
It thrills and dances in the acts of Change.

What doth not change? What is there constant ever?
The laws of God that vivify the world ;
That drive vexed matter through unceasing Change ;
That mould the crystal into angles fixed ;
That organize with vegetative life
Forest and field, clothing bare ribs of Earth
With many-tinted, flower-embroidered robes ;
That by their impulse fill with vital force
Earth, air, and ocean—a prolific brood ;
That give to every atom movement, work ;
That build each short-lived age from crumbled dust
Of all the past ; and shape each new-born thing
Of that which hath so often been unshaped,

That form is but the garment of Dame Change,
As often out of fashion, and renewed,
As the gay robes of a capricious lady
Each hour new-toileted;—yet in themselves
Are laws immutable: their varied actions
New combinations of unvarying powers.

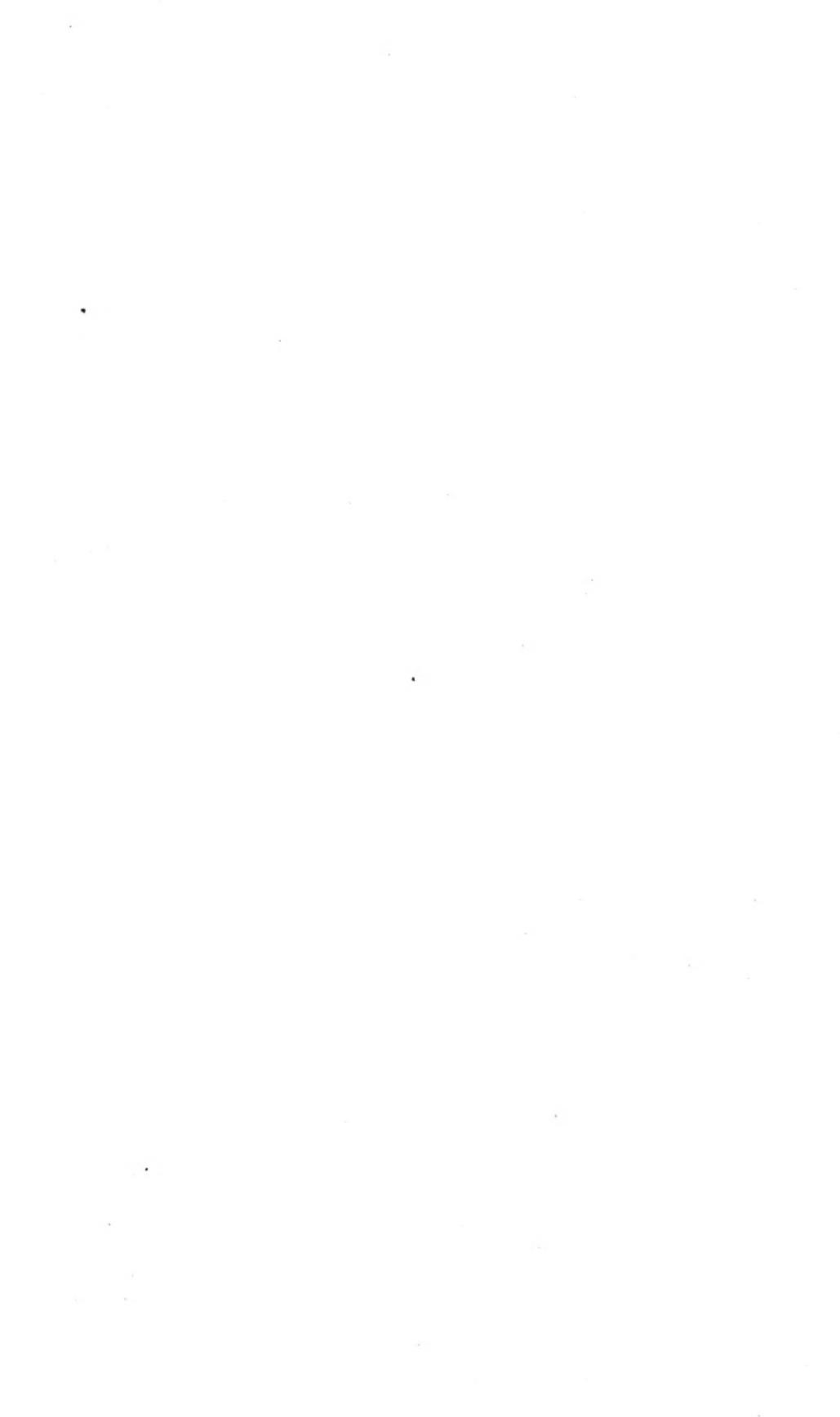
What last condition waits to crown the atom
When all its restless laws at length shall sleep,
Is past our knowledge; but so grand a march
Must be to some great end. And so of man:
His reach of thought goes out so far beyond
His little place of time and circumstance,
That every germ of truth he gathers here
Is full of promise, and unless it wither
Into a falsehood, breaking each relation
It bears to him and all, must still abide
With him, and grow to bloom and perfect fruitage
Beyond this ripple of the sea of Change
In clearer light and purer airs of Heaven.

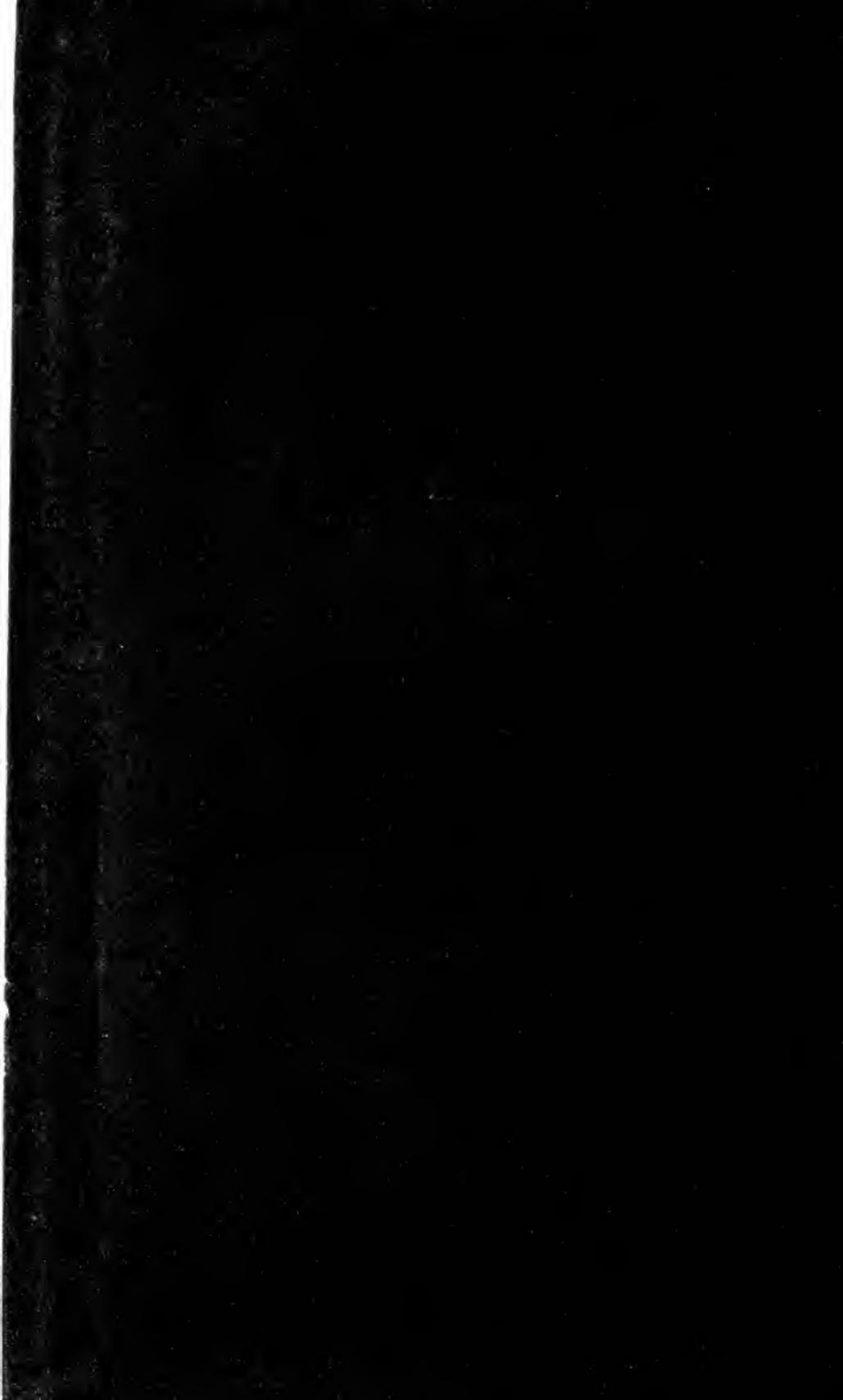
Change is the movement of the Master's hand,
And constant purpose is divinely whispered

Beneath its touch: so are we ever drawn
By what is best in us to what is best
And wisest over all. If all too slow
We seem to come to good, the scheme extends
So far beyond our narrow symbol, Time,
That in eternity the fast and slow
Are merged and one; and even Change
May there at length exhaust its energies
When the full purpose of its course is won.

THE END.







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