

EX LIBRIS

7227

14501

ayt

1002 970

1002

THE CITY
OF
DREADFUL NIGHT
AND OTHER POEMS.

Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

THE CITY
OF
DREADFUL NIGHT

AND OTHER POEMS.

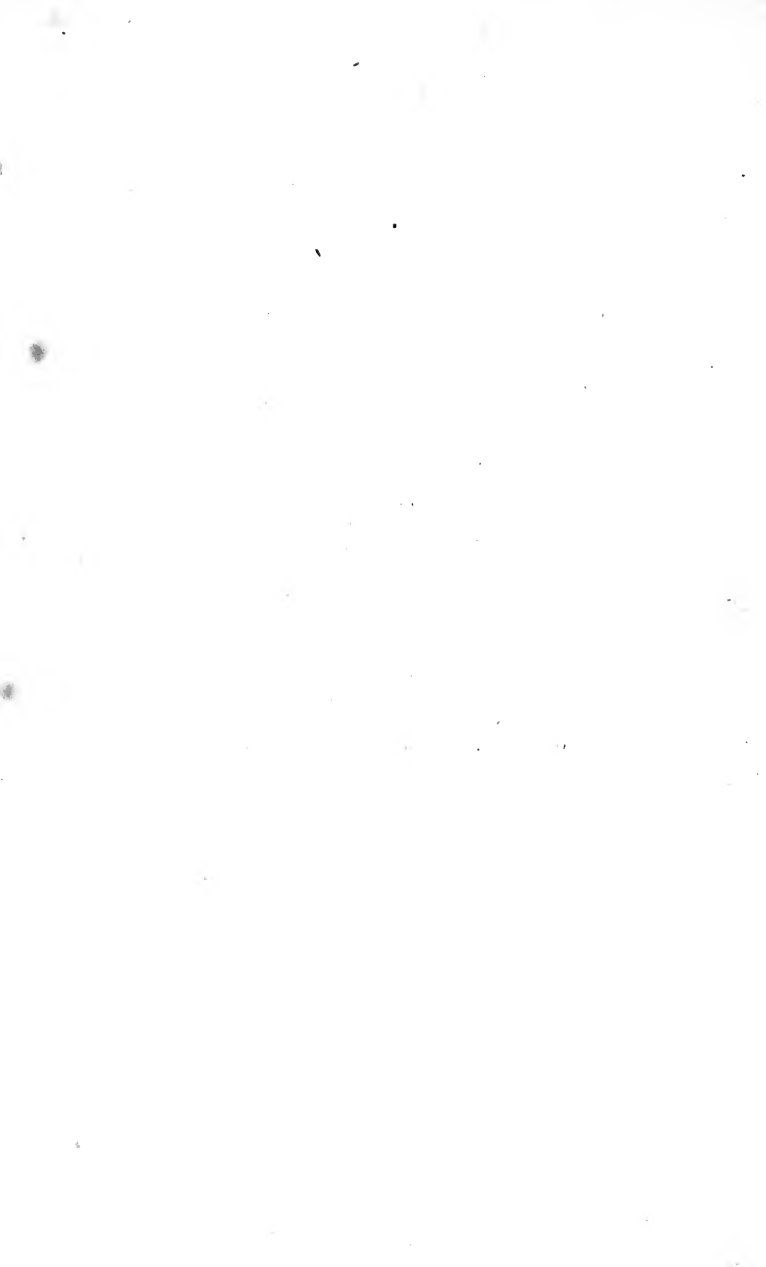
BY
JAMES THOMSON

("B. V.")

LONDON:
REEVES AND TURNER, 196 STRAND.
1880.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

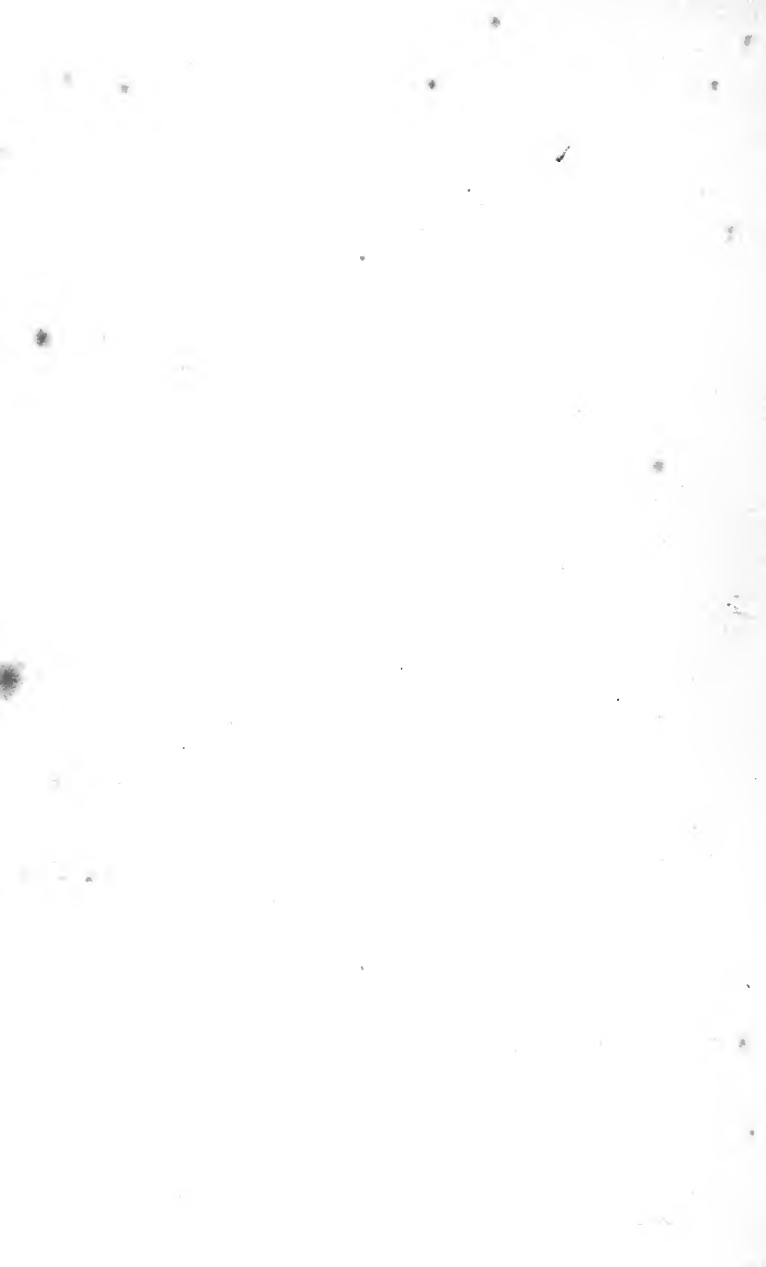
TO THE MEMORY
OF
THE YOUNGER BROTHER OF DANTE
GIACOMO LEOPARDI
A SPIRIT AS LOFTY
A GENIUS AS INTENSE
WITH A YET MORE TRAGIC DOOM



CONTENTS.

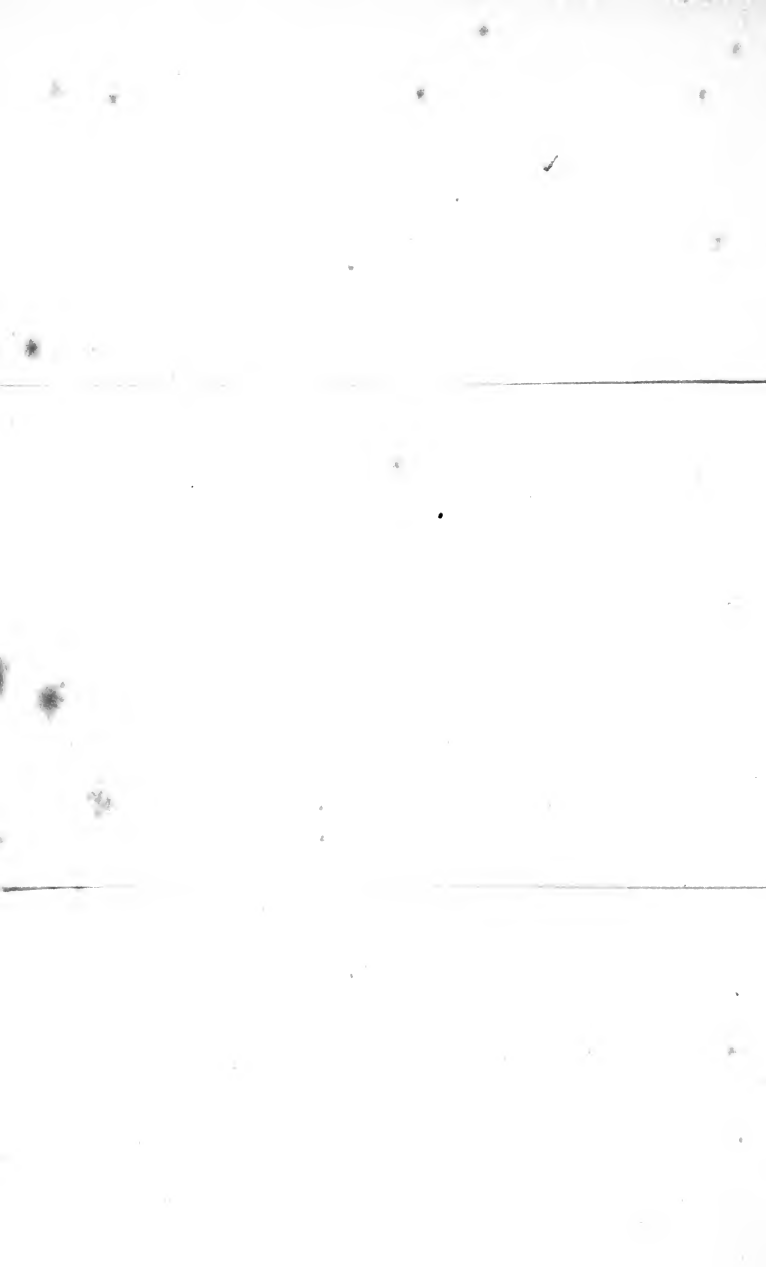


	PAGE
THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT	1
TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH	56
IN THE ROOM	67
SUNDAY AT HAMPSTEAD	78
SUNDAY UP THE RIVER	95
THE NAKED GODDESS	117
ART	131
PHILOSOPHY	134
LIFE'S HEBE	138
A POLISH INSURGENT	141
L'ANCIEN RÉGIME ; OR, THE GOOD OLD RULE	144
TO A PIANISTE	148
VIRTUE AND VICE	149
THE THREE THAT SHALL BE ONE	151
E. B. B.	154
THE LORD OF THE CASTLE OF INDOLENCE	156
A RECUSANT	162
ATTEMPTS AT TRANSLATION FROM HEINE	163



ERRATA.

Page	I, third motto, <i>for</i>	<i>Ogn</i>	<i>read</i>	<i>Ogni.</i>
11	line 7	„ now	„	not.
38	„ 8	„ blessings	„	blessing.
168	„ 18	„ yet seen	„	seen yet.
170	„ 14	„ rides	„	rode.
178	„ 1	„ (first) sweeter	„	sweet.
182	„ 6	„ mermaiden's	„	mermaidens'.



THE
CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT.

1870; 1874.

—o—

“ Per me si va nella città dolente.”

—DANTE.

“ Poi di tanto adoprar, di tanti moti
D'ogni celeste, ogni terrena cosa,
Girando senza posa,
Per tornar sempre là donde son mosse ;
Uso alcuno, alcun frutto
Indovinar non so.”

“ Sola nel mondo eterna, a cui si volve
Ogn creata cosa,
In te, morte, si posa
Nostra ignuda natura ;
Lieta no, ma sicura
Dell' antico dolor. . . .
Però ch' esser beato
Nega ai mortali e nega a' morti il fato.”

—LEOPARDI.

PROEM.

Lo, thus, as prostrate, “ In the dust I write
My heart's deep languor and my soul's sad tears.”
Yet why evoke the spectres of black night
To blot the sunshine of exultant years?

Why disinter dead faith from mouldering hidden?
Why break the seals of mute despair unbidden,
And wail life's discords into careless ears?

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles
To show the bitter old and wrinkled truth
Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,
False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes of
youth;

Because it gives some sense of power and passion
In helpless impotence to try to fashion
Our woe in living words howe'er uncouth.

Surely I write not for the hopeful young,
Or those who deem their happiness of worth,
Or such as pasture and grow fat among
The shows of life and feel nor doubt nor dearth,
Or pious spirits with a God above them
To sanctify and glorify and love them,
Or sages who foresee a heaven on earth.

For none of these I write, and none of these
Could read the writing if they deigned to try:
So may they flourish, in their due degrees,
On our sweet earth and in their unplaced sky.

If any cares for the weak words here written,
It must be some one desolate, Fate-smitten,
Whose faith and hope are dead, and who would die.

Yes, here and there some weary wanderer
In that same city of tremendous night,
Will understand the speech, and feel a stir
Of fellowship in all-disastrous fight ;
“I suffer mute and lonely, yet another
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother
Travels the same wild paths though out of sight.”

O sad Fraternity, do I unfold
Your dolorous mysteries shrouded from of yore ?
Nay, be assured ; no secret can be told
To any who divined it not before :
None uninitiate by many a presage
Will comprehend the language of the message,
Although proclaimed aloud for evermore.

I.

The City is of Night ; perchance of Death,
But certainly of Night ; for never there
Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath
After the dewy dawning's cold grey air ;

The moon and stars may shine with scorn or pity ;
The sun has never visited that city,
For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.

Dissolveth like a dream of night away ;
Though present in distempered gloom of thought
And deadly weariness of heart all day.
But when a dream night after night is brought
Throughout a week, and such weeks few or many
Recur each year for several years, can any
Discern that dream from real life in aught ?

For life is but a dream whose shapes return,
Some frequently, some seldom, some by night
And some by day, some night and day : we learn,
The while all change and many vanish quite,
In their recurrence with recurrent changes
A certain seeming order ; where this ranges
We count things real ; such is memory's might.

A river girds the city west and south,
The main north channel of a broad lagoon,
Regurging with the salt tides from the mouth ;
Waste marshes shine and glister to the moon

For leagues, then moorland black, then stony ridges ;
Great piers and causeways, many noble bridges,
Connect the town and islet suburbs strewn.

Upon an easy slope it lies at large,
And scarcely overlaps the long curved crest
Which swells out two leagues from the river marge.
A trackless wilderness rolls north and west,
Savannahs, savage woods, enormous mountains,
Bleak uplands, black ravines with torrent fountains ;
And eastward rolls the shipless sea's unrest.

The city is not ruinous, although
Great ruins of an unremembered past,
With others of a few short years ago
More sad, are found within its precincts vast.
The street-lamps always burn ; but scarce a casement
In house or palace front from roof to basement
Doth glow or gleam athwart the mirk air cast.

The street-lamps burn amidst the baleful glooms,
Amidst the soundless solitudes immense
Of rangèd mansions dark and still as tombs.
The silence which benumbs or strains the sense

Fulfils with awe the soul's despair unweeping :
Myriads of habitants are ever sleeping,
Or dead, or fled from nameless pestilence !

Yet as in some necropolis you find
Perchance one mourner to a thousand dead,
So there ; worn faces that look deaf and blind
Like tragic masks of stone. With weary tread,
Each wrapt in his own doom, they wander, wander,
Or sit foredone and desolately ponder
Through sleepless hours with heavy drooping head.

Mature men chiefly, few in age or youth,
A woman rarely, now and then a child :
A child ! If here the heart turns sick with ruth
To see a little one from birth defiled,
Or lame or blind, as preordained to languish
Through youthless life, think how it bleeds with anguish
To meet one erring in that homeless wild.

They often murmur to themselves, they speak
To one another seldom, for their woe
Broods maddening inwardly and scorns to wreak
Itself abroad ; and if at whiles it grow
To frenzy which must rave, none heeds the clamour,
Unless there waits some victim of like glamour,
To rave in turn, who lends attentive show.

The City is of Night, but not of Sleep ;
There sweet sleep is not for the weary brain ;
The pitiless hours like years and ages creep,
A night seems termless hell. This dreadful strain
Of thought and consciousness which never ceases,
Or which some moments' stupor but increases,
This, worse than woe, makes wretches there insane.

They leave all hope behind who enter there :
One certitude while sane they cannot leave,
One anodyne for torture and despair ;
The certitude of Death, which no reprieve
Can put off long ; and which, divinely tender,
But waits the outstretched hand to promptly render
That draught whose slumber nothing can bereave.¹

II.

Because he seemed to walk with an intent
I followed him ; who, shadowlike and frail,
Unswervingly though slowly onward went,
Regardless, wrapt in thought as in a veil :

¹ Though the Garden of thy Life be wholly waste, the sweet flowers withered, the fruit-trees barren, over its wall hang ever the rich dark clusters of the Vine of Death, within easy reach of thy hand, which may pluck of them when it will.

Thus step for step with lonely sounding feet
We travelled many a long dim silent street.

At length he paused : a black mass in the gloom,
A tower that merged into the heavy sky ;
Around, the huddled stones of grave and tomb :
Some old God's-acre now corruption's sty :
He murmured to himself with dull despair,
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

Then turning to the right went on once more,
And travelled weary roads without suspense ;
And reached at last a low wall's open door,
Whose villa gleamed beyond the foliage dense :
He gazed, and muttered with a hard despair,
Here Love died, stabbed by its own worshipped pair.

Then turning to the right resumed his march,
And travelled streets and lanes with wondrous
strength,
Until on stooping through a narrow arch
We stood before a squalid house at length :
He gazed, and whispered with a cold despair,
Here Hope died, starved out in its utmost lair.

When he had spoken thus, before he stirred,
I spoke, perplexed by something in the signs
Of desolation I had seen and heard

In this drear pilgrimage to ruined shrines :
When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed,
Can Life still live? By what doth it proceed ?

As whom his one intense thought overpowers,
He answered coldly, Take a watch, erase
The signs and figures of the circling hours,
Detach the hands, remove the dial-face ;
The works proceed until run down ; although
Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go.

Then turning to the right paced on again,
And traversed squares and travelled streets whose
 glooms
Seemed more and more familiar to my ken ;
And reached that sullen temple of the tombs ;
And paused to murmur with the old despair,
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

I ceased to follow, for the knot of doubt
Was severed sharply with a cruel knife :

He circled thus for ever tracing out
 The series of the fraction left of Life ;
 Perpetual recurrence in the scope
 Of but three terms, dead Faith, dead Love, dead Hope.¹

III.

Although lamps burn along the silent streets ;
 Even when moonlight silvers empty squares
 The dark holds countless lanes and close retreats ;
 But when the night its sphereless mantle wears
 The open spaces yawn with gloom abysmal,
 The sombre mansions loom immense and dismal,
 The lanes are black as subterranean lairs.

And soon the eye a strange new vision learns :
 The night remains for it as dark and dense,
 Yet clearly in this darkness it discerns
 As in the daylight with its natural sense ;
 Perceives a shade in shadow not obscurely,
 Pursues a stir of black in blackness surely,
 Sees spectres also in the gloom intense.

¹ Life divided by that persistent three = $\frac{LXX}{333} = \cdot 210$

The ear, too, with the silence vast and deep
 Becomes familiar though unreconciled ;
Hears breathings as of hidden life asleep,
 And muffled throbs as of pent passions wild,
Far murmurs, speech of pity or derision ;
But all more dubious than the things of vision,
 So that it knows now when it is beguiled.

No time abates the first despair and awe,
 But wonder ceases soon ; the weirdest thing
Is felt least strange beneath the lawless law
 Where Death-in-Life is the eternal king ;
Crushed impotent beneath this reign of terror,
Dazed with such mysteries of woe and error,
 The soul is too outworn for wondering.

IV.

He stood alone within the spacious square
 Declaiming from the central grassy mound,
With head uncovered and with streaming hair,
 As if large multitudes were gathered round :
A stalwart shape, the gestures full of might,
The glances burning with unnatural light :—

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : All was black,
In heaven no single star, on earth no track ;
A brooding hush without a stir or note,
The air so thick it clotted in my throat ;
And thus for hours ; then some enormous things
Swooped past with savage cries and clanking wings :
 But I strode on austere ;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Eyes of fire
Glared at me throbbing with a starved desire ;
The hoarse and heavy and carnivorous breath
Was hot upon me from deep jaws of death ;
Sharp claws, swift talons, fleshless fingers cold
Plucked at me from the bushes, tried to hold :
 But I strode on austere ;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Lo you, there,
That hillock burning with a brazen glare ;
Those myriad dusky flames with points a-glow
Which writhed and hissed and darted to and fro ;

A Sabbath of the Serpents, heaped pell-mell
For Devil's roll-call and some *fête* of Hell :

Yet I strode on austere ;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Meteors ran
And crossed their javelins on the black sky-span ;
The zenith opened to a gulf of flame,
The dreadful thunderbolts jarred earth's fixed frame ;
The ground all heaved in waves of fire that surged
And weltered round me sole there unsubmerged :

Yet I strode on austere ;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Air once more,
And I was close upon a wild sea-shore ;
Enormous cliffs arose on either hand,
The deep tide thundered up a league-broad strand ;
White foambelts seethed there, wan spray swept and
flew ;

The sky broke, moon and stars and clouds and blue :
And I strode on austere ;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : On the left
The sun arose and crowned a broad crag-cleft ;
There stopped and burned out black, except a rim,
A bleeding eyeless socket, red and dim ;
Whereon the moon fell suddenly south-west,
And stood above the right-hand cliffs at rest :
 Still I strode on austere ;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : From the right
A shape came slowly with a ruddy light ;
A woman with a red lamp in her hand,
Bareheaded and barefooted on that strand ;
O desolation moving with such grace !
O anguish with such beauty in thy face !
 I fell as on my bier,
 Hope travailed with such fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : I was twain,
Two selves distinct that cannot join again ;
One stood apart and knew but could not stir,
And watched the other stark in swoon and her ;

And she came on, and never turned aside,
Between such sun and moon and roaring tide :
 And as she came more near
 My soul grew mad with fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Hell is mild
And piteous matched with that accursèd wild ;
A large black sign was on her breast that bowed,
A broad black band ran down her snow-white shroud ;
That lamp she held was her own burning heart,
Whose blood-drops trickled step by step apart :
 The mystery was clear ;
 Mad rage had swallowed fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : By the sea
She knelt and bent above that senseless me ;
Those lamp-drops fell upon my white brow there,
She tried to cleanse them with her tears and hair ;
She murmured words of pity, love, and woe,
She heeded not the level rushing flow :
 And mad with rage and fear,
 I stood stonebound so near.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : When the tide
Swept up to her there kneeling by my side,
She clasped that corpse-like me, and they were borne
Away, and this vile me was left forlorn ;
I know the whole sea cannot quench that heart,
Or cleanse that brow, or wash those two apart :
 They love; their doom is drear,
 Yet they nor hope nor fear ;
 But I, what do I here ?

V.

How he arrives there none can clearly know ;
 Athwart the mountains and immense wild tracts,
Or flung a waif upon that vast sea-flow,
 Or down the river's boiling cataracts :
To reach it is as dying fever-stricken ;
To leave it, slow faint birth intense pangs quicken ;
 And memory swoons in both the tragic acts.

But being there one feels a citizen ;
 Escape seems hopeless to the heart forlorn :
Can Death-in-Life be brought to life again ?
 And yet release does come ; there comes a morn

When he awakes from slumbering so sweetly
That all the world is changed for him completely,
And he is verily as if new-born.

He scarcely can believe the blissful change,
He weeps perchance who wept not while accurst ;
Never again will he approach the range
Infected by that evil spell now burst :
Poor wretch ! who once hath paced that dolent city
Shall pace it often, doomed beyond all pity,
With horror ever deepening from the first.

Though he possess sweet babes and loving wife,
A home of peace by loyal friendships cheered,
And love them more than death or happy life,
They shall avail not ; he must dree his weird ;
Renounce all blessings for that imprecation,
Steal forth and haunt that builded desolation,
Of woe and terrors and thick darkness reared.

VI.

I sat forlornly by the river-side,
And watched the bridge-lamps glow like golden stars
Above the blackness of the swelling tide,
Down which they struck rough gold in ruddier bars ;

And heard the heave and plashing of the flow
Against the wall a dozen feet below.

Large elm-trees stood along that river-walk ;
And under one, a few steps from my seat,
I heard strange voices join in stranger talk,
Although I had not heard approaching feet :
These bodiless voices in my waking dream
Flowed dark words blending with the sombre stream :—

And you have after all come back ; come back.
I was about to follow on your track.
And you have failed : our spark of hope is black.

That I have failed is proved by my return :
The spark is quenched, nor ever more will burn.
But listen ; and the story you shall learn.

I reached the portal common spirits fear,
And read the words above it, dark yet clear,
“ Leave hope behind, all ye who enter here : ”

And would have passed in, gratified to gain
That positive eternity of pain,
Instead of this insufferable inane.

A demon warder clutched me, Not so fast ;
First leave your hopes behind !—But years have passed
Since I left all behind me, to the last :

You cannot count for hope, with all your wit,
This bleak despair that drives me to the Pit :
How could I seek to enter void of it ?

He snarled, What thing is this which apes a soul,
And would find entrance to our gulf of dole
Without the payment of the settled toll ?

Outside the gate he showed an open chest :
Here pay their entrance fees the souls unblest ;
Cast in some hope, you enter with the rest.

This is Pandora's box ; whose lid shall shut,
And Hell-gate too, when hopes have filled it ; but
They are so thin that it will never glut.

I stood a few steps backwards, desolate ;
And watched the spirits pass me to their fate,
And fling off hope, and enter at the gate.

When one casts off a load he springs upright,
Squares back his shoulders, breathes with all his might,
And briskly paces forward strong and light :

VIII.

While I still lingered on that river-walk,
And watched the tide as black as our black doom,
I heard another couple join in talk,
And saw them to the left hand in the gloom
Seated against an elm bole on the ground,
Their eyes intent upon the stream profound.

“ I never knew another man on earth
But had some joy and solace in his life,
Some chance of triumph in the dreadful strife :
My doom has been unmitigated dearth.”

“ We gaze upon the river, and we note
The various vessels large and small that float,
Ignoring every wrecked and sunken boat.”

“ And yet I asked no splendid dower, no spoil
Of sway or fame or rank or even wealth ;
But homely love with common food and health,
And nightly sleep to balance daily toil.”

“ This all-too humble soul would arrogate
Unto itself some signalising hate
From the supreme indifference of Fate !”

“ Who is most wretched in this dolorous place ?
I think myself ; yet I would rather be
My miserable self than He, than He
Who formed such creatures to His own disgrace.

“ The vilest thing must be less vile than Thou
From whom it had its being, God and Lord !
Creator of all woe and sin ! abhorred,
Malignant and implacable ! I vow

“ That not for all Thy power furred and unfurred,
For all the temples to Thy glory built,
Would I assume the ignominious guilt
Of having made such men in such a world.”

“ As if a Being, God or Fiend, could reign,
At once so wicked, foolish, and insane,
As to produce men when He might refrain !

“ The world rolls round for ever like a mill ;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill ;
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

“ While air of Space and Time’s full river flow
The mill must blindly whirl unresting so :
It may be wearing out, but who can know ?

“ Man might know one thing were his sight less dim ;
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
That it is quite indifferent to him.

“ Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith ?
It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,
Then grinds him back into eternal death.”

IX.

It is full strange to him who hears and feels,
When wandering there in some deserted street,
The booming and the jar of ponderous wheels,
The trampling clash of heavy ironshod feet :
Who in this Venice of the Black Sea rideth ?
Who in this city of the stars abideth
To buy or sell as those in daylight sweet ?

The rolling thunder seems to fill the sky
As it comes on ; the horses snort and strain,
The harness jingles, as it passes by ;
The hugeness of an overburthened wain :

A man sits nodding on the shaft or trudges
Three parts asleep beside his fellow-drudges :
And so it rolls into the night again.

What merchandise ? whence, whither, and for whom ?
Perchance it is a Fate-appointed hearse,
Bearing away to some mysterious tomb
Or Limbo of the scornful universe
The joy, the peace, the life-hope, the abortions
Of all things good which should have been our portions,
But have been strangled by that City's curse.

X.

The mansion stood apart in its own ground ;
In front thereof a fragrant garden-lawn,
High trees about it, and the whole walled round :
The massy iron gates were both withdrawn ;
And every window of its front shed light,
Portentous in that City of the Night.

But though thus lighted it was deadly still
As all the countless bulks of solid gloom :
Perchance a congregation to fulfil
Solemnities of silence in this doom,

Mysterious rites of dolour and despair
Permitting not a breath of chant or prayer?

Broad steps ascended to a terrace broad
Whereon lay still light from the open door ;
The hall was noble, and its aspect awed,
Hung round with heavy black from dome to floor ;
And ample stairways rose to left and right
Whose balustrades were also draped with night.

I paced from room to room, from hall to hall,
Nor any life throughout the maze discerned ;
But each was hung with its funereal pall,
And held a shrine, around which tapers burned,
With picture or with statue or with bust,
All copied from the same fair form of dust :

A woman very young and very fair ;
Beloved by bounteous life and joy and youth,
And loving these sweet lovers, so that care
And age and death seemed not for her in sooth :
Alike as stars, all beautiful and bright,
These shapes lit up that mausoléan night.

At length I heard a murmur as of lips,
And reached an open oratory hung
With heaviest blackness of the whole eclipse ;
Beneath the dome a fuming censer swung ;
And one lay there upon a low white bed,
With tapers burning at the foot and head :

The Lady of the images : supine,
Deathstill, lifesweet, with folded palms she lay :
And kneeling there as at a sacred shrine
A young man wan and worn who seemed to pray :
A crucifix of dim and ghostly white
Surmounted the large altar left in night :—

The chambers of the mansion of my heart,
In every one whereof thine image dwells,
Are black with grief eternal for thy sake.

The inmost oratory of my soul,
Wherein thou ever dwellest quick or dead,
Is black with grief eternal for thy sake.

I kneel beside thee and I clasp the cross,
With eyes for ever fixed upon that face,
So beautiful and dreadful in its calm.

I kneel here patient as thou liest there ;
As patient as a statue carved in stone,
Of adoration and eternal grief.

While thou dost not awake I cannot move ;
And something tells me thou wilt never wake,
And I alive feel turning into stone.

Most beautiful were Death to end my grief,
Most hateful to destroy the sight of thee,
Dear vision better than all death or life.

But I renounce all choice of life or death,
For either shall be ever at thy side,
And thus in bliss or woe be ever well.—

He murmured thus and thus in monotone,
Intent upon that uncorrupted face,
Entranced except his moving lips alone :
I glided with hushed footsteps from the place.
This was the festival that filled with light
That palace in the City of the Night.

XI.

What men are they who haunt these fatal glooms,
And fill their living mouths with dust of death,
And make their habitations in the tombs,
And breathe eternal sighs with mortal breath,
And pierce life's pleasant veil of various error
To reach that void of darkness and old terror
Wherein expire the lamps of hope and faith?

They have much wisdom yet they are not wise,
They have much goodness yet they do not well,
(The fools we know have their own Paradise,
The wicked also have their proper Hell);
They have much strength but still their doom is stronger,
Much patience but their time endureth longer,
Much valour but life mocks it with some spell.

They are most rational and yet insane :
An outward madness not to be controlled ;
A perfect reason in the central brain,
Which has no power, but sitteth wan and cold,
And sees the madness, and foresees as plainly
The ruin in its path, and trieth vainly
To cheat itself refusing to behold.

And some are great in rank and wealth and power,
And some renowned for genius and for worth ;
And some are poor and mean, who brood and cower
And shrink from notice, and accept all dearth
Of body, heart and soul, and leave to others
All boons of life : yet these and those are brothers,
The saddest and the weariest men on earth.

XII.

Our isolated units could be brought
To act together for some common end ?
For one by one, each silent with his thought,
I marked a long loose line approach and wend
Athwart the great cathedral's cloistered square,
And slowly vanish from the moonlit air.

Then I would follow in among the last :
And in the porch a shrouded figure stood,
Who challenged each one pausing ere he passed,
With deep eyes burning through a blank white hood :
Whence come you in the world of life and light
To this our City of Tremendous Night ?—

From pleading in a senate of rich lords
For some scant justice to our countless hordes

Who toil half-starved with scarce a human right :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From wandering through many a solemn scene
Of opium visions, with a heart serene
And intellect miraculously bright :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From making hundreds laugh and roar with glee
By my transcendent feats of mimicry,
And humour wanton as an elfish sprite :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From prayer and fasting in a lonely cell,
Which brought an ecstasy ineffable
Of love and adoration and delight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From ruling on a splendid kingly throne
A nation which beneath my rule has grown
Year after year in wealth and arts and might :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From preaching to an audience fired with faith
The Lamb who died to save our souls from death,

Whose blood hath washed our scarlet sins wool-white :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From drinking fiery poison in a den
Crowded with tawdry girls and squalid men,
Who hoarsely laugh and curse and brawl and fight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From picturing with all beauty and all grace
First Eden and the parents of our race,
A luminous rapture unto all men's sight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From writing a great work with patient plan
To justify the ways of God to man,
And show how ill must fade and perish quite :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From desperate fighting with a little band
Against the powerful tyrants of our land,
To free our brethren in their own despite :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

Thus, challenged by that warder sad and stern,
Each one responded with his countersign,
Then entered the cathedral ; and in turn
I entered also, having given mine ;

But lingered near until I heard no more,
And marked the closing of the massive door.

XIII.

Of all things human which are strange and wild
This is perchance the wildest and most strange,
And showeth man most utterly beguiled,
To those who haunt that sunless City's range ;
That he bemoans himself for aye, repeating
How Time is deadly swift, how life is fleeting,
How naught is constant on the earth but change.

The hours are heavy on him and the days ;
The burden of the months he scarce can bear ;
And often in his secret soul he prays
To sleep through barren periods unaware,
Arousing at some longed-for date of pleasure ;
Which having passed and yielded him small treasure,
He would outsleep another term of care.

Yet in his marvellous fancy he must make
Quick wings for Time, and see it fly from us ;
This Time which crawleth like a monstrous snake,
Wounded and slow and very venomous ;

Which creeps blindwormlike round the earth and ocean,
Distilling poison at each painful motion,
And seems condemned to circle ever thus.

And since he cannot spend and use aright
The little time here given him in trust,
But wasteth it in weary undelight
Of foolish toil and trouble, strife and lust,
He naturally claimeth to inherit
The everlasting Future, that his merit
May have full scope ; as surely is most just.

O length of the intolerable hours,
O nights that are as æons of slow pain,
O Time, too ample for our vital powers,
O Life, whose woeful vanities remain
Immutable for all of all our legions
Through all the centuries and in all the regions,
Not of your speed and variance *we* complain.

We do not ask a longer term of strife,
Weakness and weariness and nameless woes ;
We do not claim renewed and endless life
When this which is our torment here shall close,

An everlasting conscious inanition !
We yearn for speedy death in full fruition,
Dateless oblivion and divine repose.

XIV.

Large glooms were gathered in the mighty fane,
With tinted moongleams slanting here and there ;
And all was hush : no swelling organ-strain,
No chant, no voice or murmuring of prayer ;
No priests came forth, no tinkling censers fumed,
And the high altar space was unillumed.

Around the pillars and against the walls
Leaned men and shadows ; others seemed to brood
Bent or recumbent in secluded stalls.

Perchance they were not a great multitude
Save in that city of so lonely streets
Where one may count up every face he meets.

All patiently awaited the event
Without a stir or sound, as if no less
Self-occupied, doomstricken, while attent.
And then we heard a voice of solemn stress
From the dark pulpit, and our gaze there met
Two eyes which burned as never eyes burned yet :

Two steadfast and intolerable eyes

Burning beneath a broad and rugged brow ;
The head behind it of enormous size.

And as black fir-groves in a large wind bow,
Our rooted congregation, gloom-arrayed,
By that great sad voice deep and full were swayed :—

O melancholy Brothers, dark, dark, dark !

O battling in black floods without an ark !

O spectral wanderers of unholy Night !

My soul hath bled for you these sunless years,
With bitter blood-drops running down like tears:

Oh, dark, dark, dark, withdrawn from joy and light !

My heart is sick with anguish for your bale ;

Your woe hath been my anguish ; yea, I quail

And perish in your perishing unblest.

And I have searched the highths and depths, the scope

Of all our universe, with desperate hope

To find some solace for your wild unrest.

And now at last authentic word I bring,

Witnessed by every dead and living thing ;

Good tidings of great joy for you, for all :

There is no God ; no Fiend with names divine

Made us and tortures us ; if we must pine,

It is to satiate no Being's gall.

It was the dark delusion of a dream,
That living Person conscious and supreme,
Whom we must curse for cursing us with life ;
Whom we must curse because the life He gave
Could not be buried in the quiet grave,
Could not be killed by poison or by knife.

This little life is all we must endure,
The grave's most holy peace is ever sure,
We fall asleep and never wake again ;
Nothing is of us but the mouldering flesh,
Whose elements dissolve and merge afresh
In earth, air, water, plants, and other men.

We finish thus ; and all our wretched race
Shall finish with its cycle, and give place
To other beings, with their own time-doom :
Infinite æons ere our kind began ;
Infinite æons after the last man
Has joined the mammoth in earth's tomb and womb.

We bow down to the universal laws,
Which never had for man a special clause
Of cruelty or kindness, love or hate :
If toads and vultures are obscene to sight,
If tigers burn with beauty and with might,
Is it by favour or by wrath of Fate ?

All substance lives and struggles evermore
Through countless shapes continually at war,
By countless interactions interknit :
If one is born a certain day on earth,
All times and forces tended to that birth,
Not all the world could change or hinder it.

I find no hint throughout the Universe
Of good or ill, of blessings or of curse ;
I find alone Necessity Supreme ;
With infinite Mystery, abysmal, dark,
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark
For us the flitting shadows of a dream.

O Brothers of sad lives ! they are so brief ;
A few short years must bring us all relief :
Can we not bear these years of labouring breath ?
But if you would not this poor life fulfil,
Lo, you are free to end it when you will,
Without the fear of waking after death.—

The organ-like vibrations of his voice
Thrilled through the vaulted aisles and died away ;
The yearning of the tones which bade rejoice
Was sad and tender as a requiem lay :

Our shadowy congregation rested still
As brooding on that "End it when you will."

XV.

Wherever men are gathered, all the air
Is charged with human feeling, human thought ;
Each shout and cry and laugh, each curse and prayer,
Are into its vibrations surely wrought ;
Unspoken passion, wordless meditation,
Are breathed into it with our respiration ;
It is with our life fraught and overfraught.

So that no man there breathes earth's simple breath,
As if alone on mountains or wide seas ;
But nourishes warm life or hastens death
With joys and sorrows, health and foul disease,
Wisdom and folly, good and evil labours,
Incessant of his multitudinous neighbours ;
He in his turn affecting all of these.

That City's atmosphere is dark and dense,
Although not many exiles wander there,
With many a potent evil influence,
Each adding poison to the poisoned air ;

Infections of unutterable sadness,
Infections of incalculable madness,
Infections of incurable despair.

XVI.

Our shadowy congregation rested still,
As musing on that message we had heard
And brooding on that "End it when you will ;"
Perchance awaiting yet some other word ;
When keen as lightning through a muffled sky
Sprang forth a shrill and lamentable cry :—

The man speaks sooth, alas ! the man speaks sooth :
We have no personal life beyond the grave ;
There is no God ; Fate knows nor wrath nor ruth :
Can I find here the comfort which I crave ?

In all eternity I had one chance,
One few years' term of gracious human life :
The splendours of the intellect's advance,
The sweetness of the home with babes and wife ;

The social pleasures with their genial wit ;
The fascination of the worlds of art,
The glories of the worlds of nature, lit
By large imagination's glowing heart ;

The rapture of mere being, full of health ;
The careless childhood and the ardent youth,
The strenuous manhood winning various wealth,
The reverend age serene with life's long truth :

All the sublime prerogatives of Man ;
The storied memories of the times of old,
The patient tracking of the world's great plan
Through sequences and changes myriadfold.

This chance was never offered me before ;
For me the infinite Past is blank and dumb :
This chance recurreth never, nevermore ;
Blank, blank for me the infinite To-come.

And this sole chance was frustrate from my birth,
A mockery, a delusion ; and my breath
Of noble human life upon this earth
So racks me that I sigh for senseless death.

My wine of life is poison mixed with gall,
My noonday passes in a nightmare dream,
I worse than lose the years which are my all :
What can console me for the loss supreme ?

Speak not of comfort where no comfort is,
Speak not at all : can words make foul things fair ?
Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss :
Hush and be mute envisaging despair.—

This vehement voice came from the northern aisle
Rapid and shrill to its abrupt harsh close ;
And none gave answer for a certain while,
For words must shrink from these most wordless woes ;
At last the pulpit speaker simply said,
With humid eyes and thoughtful drooping head :—

My Brother, my poor Brothers, it is thus ;
This life itself holds nothing good for us,
But it ends soon and nevermore can be ;
And we knew nothing of it ere our birth,
And shall know nothing when consigned to earth :
I ponder these thoughts and they comfort me.

XVII.

How the moon triumphs through the endless nights !
How the stars throb and glitter as they wheel
Their thick processions of supernal lights
Around the blue vault obdurate as steel !

And men regard with passionate awe and yearning
The mighty marching and the golden burning,
And think the heavens respond to what they feel.

Boats gliding like dark shadows of a dream,
Are glorified from vision as they pass
The quivering moonbridge on the deep black stream ;
Cold windows kindle their dead glooms of glass
To restless crystals ; cornice, dome, and column
Emerge from chaos in the splendour solemn ;
Like faëry lakes gleam lawns of dewy grass.

With such a living light these dead eyes shine,
These eyes of sightless heaven, that as we gaze
We read a pity, tremulous, divine,
Or cold majestic scorn in their pure rays :
Fond man ! they are not haughty, are not tender ;
There is no heart or mind in all their splendour,
They thread mere puppets all their marvellous maze.

If we could near them with the flight unflown,
We should but find them worlds as sad as this,
Or suns all self-consuming like our own
Enringed by planet worlds as much amiss :

Speak not of comfort where no comfort is,
Speak not at all : can words make foul things fair ?
Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss :
Hush and be mute envisaging despair.—

This vehement voice came from the northern aisle
Rapid and shrill to its abrupt harsh close ;
And none gave answer for a certain while,
For words must shrink from these most wordless woes ;
At last the pulpit speaker simply said,
With humid eyes and thoughtful drooping head :—

My Brother, my poor Brothers, it is thus ;
This life itself holds nothing good for us,
But it ends soon and nevermore can be ;
And we knew nothing of it ere our birth,
And shall know nothing when consigned to earth :
I ponder these thoughts and they comfort me.

XVII.

How the moon triumphs through the endless nights !
How the stars throb and glitter as they wheel
Their thick processions of supernal lights
Around the blue vault obdurate as steel !

And men regard with passionate awe and yearning
The mighty marching and the golden burning,
And think the heavens respond to what they feel.

Boats gliding like dark shadows of a dream,
Are glorified from vision as they pass
The quivering moonbridge on the deep black stream ;
Cold windows kindle their dead glooms of glass
To restless crystals ; cornice, dome, and column
Emerge from chaos in the splendour solemn ;
Like faëry lakes gleam lawns of dewy grass.

With such a living light these dead eyes shine,
These eyes of sightless heaven, that as we gaze
We read a pity, tremulous, divine,
Or cold majestic scorn in their pure rays :
Fond man ! they are not haughty, are not tender ;
There is no heart or mind in all their splendour,
They thread mere puppets all their marvellous maze.

If we could near them with the flight unflown,
We should but find them worlds as sad as this,
Or suns all self-consuming like our own
Enringed by planet worlds as much amiss :

They wax and wane through fusion and confusion ;
The spheres eternal are a grand illusion,
The empyréan is a void abyss.

XVIII.

I wandered in a suburb of the north,
And reached a spot whence three close lanes led down,
Beneath thick trees and hedgerows winding forth
Like deep brook channels, deep and dark and lown :
The air above was wan with misty light,
The dull grey south showed one vague blur of white.

I took the left-hand lane and slowly trod
Its earthen footpath, brushing as I went
The humid leafage ; and my feet were shod
With heavy languor, and my frame downbent,
With infinite sleepless weariness outworn,
So many nights I thus had paced forlorn.

After a hundred steps I grew aware
Of something crawling in the lane below ;
It seemed a wounded creature prostrate there
That sobbed with pangs in making progress slow,
The hind limbs stretched to push, the fore limbs then
To drag ; for it would die in its own den.

But coming level with it I discerned
That it had been a man ; for at my tread
It stopped in its sore travail and half-turned,
Leaning upon its right, and raised its head,
And with the left hand twitched back as in ire
Long grey unreverend locks befouled with mire.

A haggard filthy face with bloodshot eyes,
An infamy for manhood to behold.
He gasped all trembling, What, you want my prize ?
You leave, to rob me, wine and lust and gold
And all that men go mad upon, since you
Have traced my sacred secret of the clue ?

You think that I am weak and must submit ;
Yet I but scratch you with this poisoned blade,
And you are dead as if I clove with it
That false fierce greedy heart. Betrayed ! betrayed !
I fling this phial if you seek to pass,
And you are forthwith shrivelled up like grass.

And then with sudden change, Take thought ! take
thought !
Have pity on me ! it is mine alone.
If you could find, it would avail you naught ;
Seek elsewhere on the pathway of your own :

For who of mortal or immortal race
The lifetrack of another can retrace ?

Did you but know my agony and toil !
Two lanes diverge up yonder from this lane ;
My thin blood marks the long length of their soil ;
Such clue I left, who sought my clue in vain :
My hands and knees are worn both flesh and bone ;
I cannot move but with continual moan.

But I am in the very way at last
To find the long-lost broken golden thread
Which reunites my present with my past,
If you but go your own way. And I said,
I will retire as soon as you have told
Whereunto leadeth this lost thread of gold.

And so you know it not ! he hissed with scorn ;
I feared you, imbecile ! It leads me back
From this accursed night without a morn,
And through the deserts which have else no track,
And through vast wastes of horror-haunted time,
To Eden innocence in Eden's clime :

And I become a nursling soft and pure,
An infant cradled on its mother's knee,
Without a past, love-cherished and secure ;
Which if it saw this loathsome present Me,
Would plunge its face into the pillowing breast
And 'scream abhorrence hard to lull to rest.

He turned to grope ; and I retiring brushed
Thin shreds of gossamer from off my face,
And mused, His life would grow, the germ uncrushed ;
He should to antenatal night retrace,
And hide his elements in that large womb
Beyond the reach of man-evolving Doom.

And even thus, what weary way were planned,
To seek oblivion through the far-off gate
Of birth, when that of death is close at hand !
For this is law, if law there be in Fate :
What never has been, yet may have its when ;
The thing which has been, never is again.

XIX.

The mighty river flowing dark and deep,
With ebb and flood from the remote sea-tides
Vague-sounding through the City's sleepless sleep,
Is named the River of the Suicides ;

For night by night some lorn wretch overweary,
And shuddering from the future yet more dreary,
 Within its cold secure oblivion hides.

One plunges from a bridge's parapet,
 As by some blind and sudden frenzy hurled ;
Another wades in slow with purpose set
 Until the waters are above him furled ;
Another in a boat with dreamlike motion
Glides drifting down into the desert ocean,
 To starve or sink from out the desert world.

They perish from their suffering surely thus,
 For none beholding them attempts to save,
The while each thinks how soon, solicitous,
 He may seek refuge in the self-same wave ;
Some hour when tired of ever-vain endurance
Impatience will forerun the sweet assurance
 Of perfect peace eventual in the grave.

When this poor tragic-farce has palled us long,
 Why actors and spectators do we stay?—
To fill our so-short *rôles* out right or wrong ;
 To see what shifts are yet in the dull play

For our illusion ; to refrain from grieving
Dear foolish friends by our untimely leaving :
 But those asleep at home, how blest are they !

Yet it is but for one night after all :
 What matters one brief night of dreary pain ?
When after it the weary eyelids fall
 Upon the weary eyes and wasted brain ;
And all sad scenes and thoughts and feelings vanish
In that sweet sleep no power can ever banish,
 That one best sleep which never wakes again.

XX.

I sat me weary on a pillar's base,
 And leaned against the shaft ; for broad moonlight
O'erflowed the peacefulness of cloistered space,
 A shore of shadow slanting from the right :
The great cathedral's western front stood there,
A wave-worn rock in that calm sea of air.

Before it, opposite my place of rest,
 Two figures faced each other, large, austere ;
A couchant sphinx in shadow to the breast,
 An angel standing in the moonlight clear ;

So mighty by magnificence of form,
They were not dwarfed beneath that mass enorm.

Upon the cross-hilt of a naked sword
The angel's hands, as prompt to smite, were held ;
His vigilant, intense regard was poured
Upon the creature placidly unquelled,
Whose front was set at level gaze which took
No heed of aught, a solemn trance-like look.

And as I pondered these opposèd shapes
My eyelids sank in stupor, that dull swoon
Which drugs and with a leaden mantle drapes
The outworn to worse weariness. But soon
A sharp and clashing noise the stillness broke,
And from the evil lethargy I woke.

The angel's wings had fallen, stone on stone,
And lay there shattered ; hence the sudden sound :
A warrior leaning on his sword alone
Now watched the sphinx with that regard profound ;
The sphinx unchanged looked forthright, as aware
Of nothing in the vast abyss of air.

Again I sank in that repose unsweet,
 Again a clashing noise my slumber rent ;
The warrior's sword lay broken at his feet :
 An unarmed man with raised hands impotent
Now stood before the sphinx, which ever kept
Such mien as if with open eyes it slept.

My eyelids sank in spite of wonder grown ;
 A louder crash upstartled me in dread :
The man had fallen forward, stone on stone,
 And lay there shattered, with his trunkless head
Between the monster's large quiescent paws,
Beneath its grand front changeless as life's laws.

The moon had circled westward full and bright,
 And made the temple-front a mystic dream,
And bathed the whole enclosure with its light,
 The sworded angel's wrecks, the sphinx supreme :
I pondered long that cold majestic face
Whose vision seemed of infinite void space.

XXI.

Anear the centre of that northern crest
 Stands out a level upland bleak and bare,
From which the city east and south and west
 Sinks gently in long waves ; and thronèd there

An Image sits, stupendous, superhuman,
The bronze colossus of a wingèd Woman,
Upon a graded granite base foursquare.

Low-seated she leans forward massively,
With cheek on clenched left hand, the forearm's might
Erect, its elbow on her rounded knee ;
Across a clasped book in her lap the right
Upholds a pair of compasses ; she gazes
With full set eyes, but wandering in thick mazes
Of sombre thought beholds no outward sight.

Words cannot picture her ; but all men know
That solemn sketch the pure sad artist wrought
Three centuries and threescore years ago,
With phantasies of his peculiar thought :
The instruments of carpentry and science
Scattered about her feet, in strange alliance
With the keen wolf-hound sleeping undistraught ;

Scales, hour-glass, bell, and magic-square above ;
The grave and solid infant perched beside,
With open winglets that might bear a dove,
Intent upon its tablets, heavy-eyed ;

Her folded wings as of a mighty eagle,
But all too impotent to lift the regal
Robustness of her earth-born strength and pride ;

And with those wings, and that light wreath which seems
To mock her grand head and the knotted frown
Of forehead charged with baleful thoughts and dreams,
The household bunch of keys, the housewife's gown
Voluminous, indented, and yet rigid
As if a shell of burnished metal frigid,
The feet thick-shod to tread all weakness down ;

The comet hanging o'er the waste dark seas,
The massy rainbow curved in front of it
Beyond the village with the masts and trees ;
The snaky imp, dog-headed, from the Pit,
Bearing upon its batlike leathern pinions
Her name unfolded in the sun's dominions,
The "MELENCOLIA" that transcends all wit.

Thus has the artist copied her, and thus
Surrounded to expound her form sublime,
Her fate heroic and calamitous ;
Fronting the dreadful mysteries of Time,

Unvanquished in defeat and desolation,
Undaunted in the hopeless conflagration
Of the day setting on her baffled prime.

Baffled and beaten back she works on still,
Weary and sick of soul she works the more,
Sustained by her indomitable will :

The hands shall fashion and the brain shall pore,
And all her sorrow shall be turned to labour,
Till Death the friend-foe piercing with his sabre
That mighty heart of hearts ends bitter war.

But as if blacker night could dawn on night,
With tenfold gloom on moonless night unstarred,
A sense more tragic than defeat and blight,
More desperate than strife with hope debarred,
More fatal than the adamantine Never
Encompassing her passionate endeavour,
Dawns glooming in her tenebrous regard :

The sense that every struggle brings defeat
Because Fate holds no prize to crown success ;
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
Because they have no secret to express ;

That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
Because there is no light beyond the curtain ;
That all is vanity and nothingness.

Titanic from her high throne in the north,
That City's sombre Patroness and Queen,
In bronze sublimity she gazes forth .
Over her Capital of teen and threne,
Over the river with its isles and bridges,
The marsh and moorland, to the stern rock-ridges,
Confronting them with a coëval mien.

The moving moon and stars from east to west
Circle before her in the sea of air ;
Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
Her subjects often gaze up to her there :
The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
The weak new terrors ; all, renewed assurance
And confirmation of the old despair.



TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH.¹

1861.



“ Tired with all these, for restful death I cry.”

—SHAKESPEARE: *Sonnet 66.*

WEARY of erring in this desert Life,
Weary of hoping hopes for ever vain,
Weary of struggling in all-sterile strife,
Weary of thought which maketh nothing plain,
I close my eyes and calm my panting breath,
And pray to Thee, O ever-quiet Death !
To come and soothe away my bitter pain.

The strong shall strive,—may they be victors crowned ;
The wise still seek,—may they at length find Truth ;
The young still hope,—may purest love be found
To make their age more glorious than their youth.

¹ The Three Ladies suggested by the sublime sisterhood of Our Ladies of Sorrow, in the “*Suspiria de Profundis*” of De Quincey.

For me ; my brain is weak, my heart is cold,
My hope and faith long dead ; my life but bold
In jest and laugh to parry hateful ruth.

Over me pass the days and months and years
Like squadrons and battalions of the foe
Trampling with thoughtless thrusts and alien jeers
Over a wounded soldier lying low :
He grips his teeth, or flings them words of scorn
To mar their triumph ; but the while, outworn,
Inwardly craves for death to end his woe.

Thus I, in secret, call, O Death ! to Thee,
Thou Youngest of the solemn Sisterhood,
Thou Gentlest of the mighty Sisters Three
Whom I have known so well since first endued
By Love and Grief with vision to discern
What spiritual life doth throb and burn
Through all our world, with evil powers and good.

The Three whom I have known so long, so well,
By intimate communion, face to face,
In every mood, of Earth, of Heaven, of Hell,
In every season and in every place,

That joy of Life has ceased to visit me,
As one estranged by powerful witchery,
 Infatuate in a Siren's weird embrace.

First Thou, O priestess, prophetess, and queen,
 Our Lady of Beatitudes, first Thou :
Of mighty stature, of seraphic mien,
 Upon the tablet of whose broad white brow
Unvanquishable Truth is written clear,
The secret of the mystery of our sphere,
 The regnant word of the Eternal Now.

Thou standest garmented in purest white ;
 But from thy shoulders wings of power half-spread
Invest thy form with such miraculous light
 As dawn may clothe the earth with : and, instead
Of any jewel-kindled golden crown,
The glory of thy long hair flowing down
 Is dazzling noonday sunshine round thy head.

Upon a sword thy left hand resteth calm,
 A naked sword, two-edged and long and straight ;
A branch of olive with a branch of palm
 Thy right hand proffereth to hostile Fate.

The shining plumes that clothe thy feet are bound
By knotted strings, as if to tread the ground
 With weary steps when thou wouldst soar elate.

Twin heavens uplifted to the heavens, thine eyes
 Are solemn with unutterable thought
And love and aspiration ; yet there lies
 Within their light eternal sadness, wrought
By hope deferred and baffled tenderness :
Of all the souls whom thou dost love and bless,
 How few revere and love thee as they ought !

Thou leadest heroes from their warfare here
 To nobler fields where grander crowns are won ;
Thou leadest sages from this twilight sphere
 To cloudless heavens and an unsetting sun ;
Thou leadest saints into that purer air
Whose breath is spiritual life and prayer :
 Yet, lo ! they seek thee not, but fear and shun !

Thou takest to thy most maternal breast
 Young children from the desert of this earth,
Ere sin hath stained their souls, or grief opprest,
 And bearest them unto an heavenly birth,

To be the Vestals of God's Fane above :
And yet their kindred moan against thy love,
 With wild and selfish moans in bitter dearth.

Most holy Spirit, first Self-conqueror ;
 Thou Victress over Time and Destiny
And Evil, in the all-deciding war
 So fierce, so long, so dreadful !—Would that me
Thou hadst upgathered in my life's pure morn !
Unworthy then, less worthy now, forlorn,
 I dare not, Gracious Mother, call on Thee.

Next Thou, O sibyl, sorceress and queen,
 Our Lady of Annihilation, Thou !
Of mighty stature, of demoniac mien ;
 Upon whose swarthy face and livid brow
Are graven deeply anguish, malice, scorn,
Strength ravaged by unrest, resolve forlorn
 Of any hope, dazed pride that will not bow.

Thy form is clothed with wings of iron gloom ;
 But round about thee, like a chain, is rolled,
Cramping the sway of every mighty plume,
 A stark constringent serpent fold on fold :

Of its two heads, one sting is in thy brain,
The other in thy heart ; their venom-pain
Like fire distilling through thee uncontrolled.

A rod of serpents wieldeth thy right hand ;
Thy left a cup of raging fire, whose light
Burns lurid on thyself as thou dost stand ;
Thy lidless eyes tenebriously bright ;
Thy wings, thy vesture, thy dishevelled hair
Dark as the Grave ; thou statue of Despair,
Thou Night essential radiating night.

Thus have I seen thee in thine actual form ;
Not thus can see thee those whom thou dost sway,
Inscrutable Enchantress : young and warm,
Pard-beautiful and brilliant, ever gay ;
Thy cup the very Wine of Life, thy rod
The wand of more voluptuous spells than God
Can wield in Heaven ; thus charmest thou thy prey.

The selfish, fatuous, proud, and pitiless,
All who have falsified life's royal trust ;
The strong whose strength hath basked in idleness,
The great heart given up to worldly lust,

The great mind destitute of moral faith ;
Thou scourgest down to Night and utter Death,
Or penal spheres of retribution just.

O mighty Spirit, fraudulent and malign,
Demon of madness and perversity !
The evil passions which may make me thine
Are not yet irrepressible in me ;
And I have pierced thy mask of riant youth,
And seen thy form in all its hideous truth :
I will not, Dreadful Mother, call on Thee.

Last Thou, retirèd nun and throneless queen,
Our Lady of Oblivion, last Thou :
Of human stature, of abstracted mien ;
Upon whose pallid face and drooping brow
Are shadowed melancholy dreams of Doom,
And deep absorption into silent gloom,
And weary bearing of the heavy Now.

Thou art all shrouded in a gauzy veil,
Sombrous and cloudlike ; all, except that face
Of subtle loveliness though weirdly pale.
Thy soft, slow-gliding footsteps leave no trace,

And stir no sound. Thy drooping hands infold
Their frail white fingers ; and, unconscious, hold
A poppy-wreath, thine anodyne of grace.

Thy hair is like a twilight round thy head :
Thine eyes are shadowed wells, from Lethe-stream
With drowsy subterranean waters fed ;
Obscurely deep, without a stir or gleam ;
The gazer drinks in from them with his gaze
An opiate charm to curtain all his days,
A passive languor of oblivious dream.

Thou hauntest twilight regions, and the trance
Of moonless nights when stars are few and wan :
Within black woods ; or over the expanse
Of desert seas abysmal ; or upon
Old solitary shores whose populous graves
Are rocked in rest by ever-moaning waves ;
Or through vast ruined cities still and lone.

The weak, the weary, and the desolate,
The poor, the mean, the outcast, the opprest,
All trodden down beneath the march of Fate,
Thou gatherest, loving Sister, to thy breast,

Soothing their pain and weariness asleep ;
Then in thy hidden Dreamland hushed and deep
Dost lay them, shrouded in eternal rest.

O sweetest Sister, and sole Patron Saint
Of all the humble eremites who flee
From out life's crowded tumult, stunned and faint,
To seek a stern and lone tranquillity
In Libyan wastes of time : my hopeless life
With famished yearning craveth rest from strife ;
Therefore, thou Restful One, I call on Thee !

Take me, and lull me into perfect sleep ;
Down, down, far-hidden in thy duskiest cave ;
While all the clamorous years above me sweep
Unheard, or, like the voice of seas that rave
On far-off coasts, but murmuring o'er my trance,
A dim vast monotone, that shall enhance
The restful rapture of the inviolate grave

Upgathered thus in thy divine embrace,
Upon mine eyes thy soft mesmeric hand,
While wreaths of opiate odour interlace
About my pulseless brow ; babe-pure and bland,

Passionless, senseless, thoughtless, let me dream
Some ever-slumbrous, never-varying theme,
 Within the shadow of thy Timeless Land.

That when I thus have drunk my inmost fill
 Of perfect peace, I may arise renewed ;
In soul and body, intellect and will,
 Equal to cope with Life whate'er its mood ;
To sway its storm and energise its calm ;
Through rhythmic years evolving like a psalm
 Of infinite love and faith and sanctitude.

But if this cannot be, no less I cry,
 Come, lead me with thy terrorless control
Down to our Mother's bosom, there to die
 By abdication of my separate soul :
So shall this single, self-impelling piece
Of mechanism from lone labour cease,
 Resolving into union with the Whole.

Our Mother feedeth thus our little life,
 That we in turn may feed her with our death :
The great Sea sways, one interwoven strife,
 Wherefrom the Sun exhales a subtle breath,

To float the heavens sublime in form and hue,
Then turning cold and dark in order due
Rain weeping back to swell the Sea beneath.

One part of me shall feed a little worm,
And it a bird on which a man may feed ;
One lime the mould, one nourish insect-sperm ;
One thrill sweet grass, one pulse in bitter weed ;
This swell a fruit, and that evolve in air ;
Another trickle to a springlet's lair,
Another paint a daisy on the mead :

With cosmic interchange of parts for all,
Through all the modes of being numberless
Of every element, as may befall.
And if earth's general soul hath consciousness,
Their new life must with strange new joy be thrilled,
Of perfect law all perfectly fulfilled ;
No sin, no fear, no failure, no excess.

Weary of living isolated life,
Weary of hoping hopes for ever vain,
Weary of struggling in all-sterile strife,
Weary of thought which maketh nothing plain,
I close my eyes and hush my panting breath,
And yearn for Thee, divinely tranquil Death,
To come and soothe away my bitter pain.

IN THE ROOM.

1867-68.

—o—

“Ceste insigne fable et tragicque comedie.”—RABELAIS.

I.

THE sun was down, and twilight grey
Filled half the air ; but in the room,
Whose curtain had been drawn all day,
The twilight was a dusky gloom :
Which seemed at first as still as death,
And void ; but was indeed all rife
With subtle thrills, the pulse and breath
Of multitudinous lower life.

II.

In their abrupt and headlong way
Bewildered flies for light had dashed
Against the curtain all the day,
And now slept wintrily abashed ;

And nimble mice slept, wearied out
With such a double night's uproar ;
But solid beetles crawled about
The chilly hearth and naked floor.

III.

And so throughout the twilight hour
That vaguely murmurous hush and rest
There brooded ; and beneath its power
Life throbbing held its throbs suppress :
Until the thin-voiced mirror sighed,
I am all blurred with dust and damp,
So long ago the clear day died,
So long has gleamed nor fire nor lamp.

IV.

Whereon the curtain murmured back,
Some change is on us, good or ill ;
Behind me and before is black
As when those human things lie still :
But I have seen the darkness grow
As grows the daylight every morn ;
Have felt out there long shine and glow,
In here long chilly dusk forlorn.

V.

The cupboard grumbled with a groan,
Each new day worse starvation brings :
Since *he* came here I have not known
Or sweets or cates or wholesome things :
But now ! a pinch of meal, a crust,
Throughout the week is all I get.
I am so empty ; it is just
As when they said we were to let.

VI.

What is become, then, of our Man ?
The petulant old glass exclaimed ;
If all this time he slumber can,
He really ought to be ashamed.
I wish we had our Girl again,
So gay and busy, bright and fair :
The girls are better than these men,
Who only for their dull selves care.

VII.

It is so many hours ago—
The lamp and fire were both alight—
I saw him pacing to and fro,
Perturbing restlessly the night.

His face was pale to give one fear,
His eyes when lifted looked too bright ;
He muttered ; what, I could not hear :
Bad words though ; something was not right.

VIII.

The table said, He wrote so long
That I grew weary of his weight ;
The pen kept up a cricket song,
It ran and ran at such a rate :
And in the longer pauses he
With both his folded arms downpressed,
And stared as one who does not see,
Or sank his head upon his breast.

IX.

The fire-grate said, I am as cold
As if I never had a blaze ;
The few dead cinders here I hold,
I held unburned for days and days.
Last night he made them flare ; but still
What good did all his writing do ?
Among my ashes curl and thrill
Thin ghosts of all those papers too.

X.

The table answered, Not quite all ;
 He saved and folded up one sheet,
And sealed it fast, and let it fall ;
 And here it lies now white and neat.
Whereon the letter's whisper came,
 My writing is closed up too well ;
Outside there's not a single name,
 And who should read me I can't tell.

XI.

The mirror sneered with scornful spite,
 (That ancient crack which spoiled her looks
Had marred her temper), Write and write !
 And read those stupid, worn-out books !
That's all he does, read, write, and read,
 And smoke that nasty pipe which stinks :
He never takes the slightest heed
 How any of us feels or thinks.

XII.

But Lucy fifty times a day
 Would come and smile here in my face,
Adjust a tress that curled astray,
 Or tie a ribbon with more grace :

She looked so young and fresh and fair,
She blushed with such a charming bloom,
It did one good to see her there,
And brightened all things in the room.

XIII.

She did not sit hours stark and dumb
As pale as moonshine by the lamp ;
To lie in bed when day was come,
And leave us curtained chill and damp.
She slept away the dreary dark,
And rose to greet the pleasant morn ;
And sang as gaily as a lark
While busy as the flies sun-born.

XIV.

And how she loved us every one ;
And dusted this and mended that,
With trills and laughs and freaks of fun,
And tender scoldings in her chat !
And then her bird, that sang as shrill
As she sang sweet ; her darling flowers
That grew there in the window-sill,
Where she would sit at work for hours.

XV.

It was not much she ever wrote ;
Her fingers had good work to do ;
Say, once a week a pretty note ;
And very long it took her too.
And little more she read, I wis ;
Just now and then a pictured sheet,
Besides those letters she would kiss
And croon for hours, they were so sweet.

XVI.

She had her friends too, blithe young girls,
Who whispered, babbled, laughed, caressed,
And romped and danced with dancing curls,
And gave our life a joyous zest.
But with this dullard, glum and sour,
Not one of all his fellow-men
Has ever passed a social hour ;
We might be in some wild beast's den.

XVII.

This long tirade aroused the bed,
Who spoke in deep and ponderous bass,
Befitting that calm life he led,
As if firm-rooted in his place :

In broad majestic bulk alone,
As in thrice venerable age,
He stood at once the royal throne,
The monarch, the experienced sage :

XVIII.

I know what is and what has been ;
Not anything to me comes strange,
Who in so many years have seen
And lived through every kind of change.
I know when men are good or bad,
When well or ill, he slowly said ;
When sad or glad, when sane or mad,
And when they sleep alive or dead.

XIX.

At this last word of solemn lore
A tremor circled through the gloom,
As if a crash upon the floor
Had jarred and shaken all the room :
For nearly all the listening things
Were old and worn, and knew what curse
Of violent change death often brings,
From good to bad, from bad to worse ;

XX.

They get to know each other well,
 To feel at home and settled down ;
Death bursts among them like a shell,
 And strews them over all the town.
The bed went on, This man who lies
 Upon me now is stark and cold ;
He will not any more arise,
 And do the things he did of old.

XXI.

But we shall have short peace or rest ;
 For soon up here will come a rout,
And nail him in a queer long chest,
 And carry him like luggage out.
They will be muffled all in black,
 And whisper much, and sigh and weep :
But he will never more come back,
 And some one else in me must sleep.

XXII.

Thereon a little phial shrilled,
 Here empty on the chair I lie :
I heard one say, as I was filled,
 With half of this a man would die.

The man there drank me with slow breath,
And murmured, Thus ends barren strife :
O sweeter, thou cold wine of death,
Than ever sweet warm wine of life.

XXIII.

One of my cousins long ago,
A little thing, the mirror said,
Was carried to a couch to show,
Whether a man was really dead.
Two great improvements marked the case :
He did not blur her with his breath,
His many-wrinkled, twitching face
Was smooth old ivory : verdict, Death.—

XXIV.

It lay, the lowest thing there, lulled
Sweet-sleep-like in corruption's truce ;
The form whose purpose was annulled,
While all the other shapes meant use.
It lay, the *he* become now *it*,
Unconscious of the deep disgrace,
Unanxious how its parts might flit
Through what new forms in time and space.

XXV.

It lay and preached, as dumb things do,
More powerfully than tongues can prate ;
Though life be torture through and through,
Man is but weak to plain of fate :
The drear path crawls on drearier still
To wounded feet and hopeless breast ?
Well, he can lie down where he will,
And straight all ends in endless rest.

XXVI.

And while the black night nothing saw,
And till the cold morn came at last,
That old bed held the room in awe
With tales of its experience vast.
It thrilled the gloom ; it told such tales
Of human sorrows and delights,
Of fever moans and infant wails,
Of births and deaths and bridal nights.



SUNDAY AT HAMPSTEAD.

1863; 1865.



(AN IDLE IDYLL BY A VERY HUMBLE MEMBER OF THE GREAT AND
NOBLE LONDON MOB.)

I.

THIS is the Heath of Hampstead,
There is the dome of Saint Paul's ;
Beneath, on the serried house-tops,
A chequered lustre falls :

And the mighty city of London,
Under the clouds and the light,
Seems a low wet beach, half shingle,
With a few sharp rocks upright.

Here will we sit, my darling,
And dream an hour away :
The donkeys are hurried and worried,
But we are not donkeys to-day :

Though all the weary week, dear,
We toil in the murk down there,
Tied to a desk and a counter,
A patient stupid pair !

But on Sunday we slip our tether,
And away from the smoke and the smirch ;
Too grateful to God for His Sabbath
To shut its hours in a church.

Away to the green, green country,
Under the open sky ;
Where the earth's sweet breath is incense
And the lark sings psalms on high.

On Sunday we're Lord and Lady,
With ten times the love and glee
Of those pale and languid rich ones
Who are always and never free.

They drawl and stare and simper,
So fine and cold and staid,
Like exquisite waxwork figures
That must be kept in the shade :

We can laugh out loud when merry,
We can romp at kiss-in-the-ring,
We can take our beer at a public,
We can loll on the grass and sing. . . .

Would you grieve very much, my darling,
If all yon low wet shore
Were drowned by a mighty flood-tide,
And we never toiled there more?

Wicked?—there is no sin, dear,
In an idle dreamer's head ;
He turns the world topsy-turvy
To prove that his soul's not dead.

I am sinking, sinking, sinking ;
It is hard to sit upright !
Your lap is the softest pillow !
Good night, my Love, good night !

II.

How your eyes dazzle down into my soul !
I drink and drink of their deep violet wine,
And ever thirst the more, although my whole
Dazed being whirls in drunkenness divine.

Pout down your lips from that bewildering smile,
And kiss me for the interruption, Sweet !
I had escaped you : floating for awhile
In that far cloud ablaze with living heat :

I floated with it through the solemn skies,
I melted with it up the Crystal Sea
Into the Heaven of Heavens ; and shut my eyes
To feel eternal rest enfolding me. . . .

Well, I prefer one tyrannous girl down here,
You jealous violet-eyed Bewitcher, you !
To being lord in Mohammed's seventh sphere
Of meekest houris threescore ten and two !

III.

Was it hundreds of years ago, my Love,
Was it thousands of miles away,
That two poor creatures we know, my Love,
Were toiling day by day ;
 Were toiling weary, weary,
 With many myriads more,
 In a City dark and dreary
 On a sullen river's shore ?

Was it truly a fact or a dream, my Love ?
I think my brain still reels,
And my ears still throbbing seem, my Love,
With the rush and the clang of wheels ;
Of a vast machinery roaring
For ever in skyless gloom ;
Where the poor slaves peace imploring,
Found peace alone in the tomb.

Was it hundreds of years ago, my Love,
Was it thousands of miles away ?
Or was it a dream to show, my Love,
The rapture of to-day ?
This day of holy splendour,
This Sabbath of rich rest,
Wherein to God we render
All praise by being blest.

IV.

Eight of us promised to meet here
And tea together at five :
And—who would ever believe it ?—
We are the first to arrive !

Oh, shame on us, my darling ;
It is a monstrous crime
To make a tryst with *others*
And be before our time !

Lizzie is off with William,
Quite happy for her part ;
Our sugar in her pocket,
And the sweet love in her heart.

Mary and Dick so grandly
Parade suburban streets ;
His waistcoat and her bonnet
Proving the best of treats.

And Fanny plagues big Robert
With tricks of the wildest glee :
O Fanny, *you'll* get in hot water
If you do not bring us our tea !

Why, bless me, look at that table,
Every one of them there !—
“ Ha, here at last we have them,
The always behindhand pair !

“ When the last trumpet-solo
Strikes up instead of the lark,
They’ll turn in their sleep just grunting
Who’s up so soon in the dark ? ”

Babble and gabble, you rabble,
A thousand in full yell !
And this is your Tower of Babel,
This not-to-be-finished Hotel.¹

“ You should see it in the drawing,
You’d think a Palace they make,
Like the one in the *Lady of Lyons*,
With this pond for the lovely lake ! ”

“ I wish it wasn’t Sunday,
There’s no amusement at all :
Who was here Hot-cross-bun-day ?
We had such an open-air ball !

The bands played polkas, waltzes,
Quadrilles ; it was glorious fun !
And each gentleman gave them a penny
After each dance was done.”

¹ (Since finished, in a fashion. The verses were written in 1863.)

“ Mary is going to chapel,
And what takes her there, do you guess ?
Her sweet little duck of a bonnet,
And her new second-hand silk dress.”

“ *We* went to Church one Sunday,
But felt we had no right there ;
For it's only a place for the grand folk
Who come in a carriage and pair.

“ And I laughed out loud,—it was shameful !
But Fanny said, *Oh, what lives !*
He must have been clever, the rascal,
To manage seven hundred wives !”

“ Suppose we play Hunt-the-Slipper ? ”
“ We can't, there's the crinoline ”—“ Phew !
Bother it, always a nuisance ! ”
“ Hoop-de-dooden-doo ! ”

“ I think I've seen all the girls here,
About a thousand, or more ;
But none of them half so pretty
As our own loving four.”

“*Thank* you ! and I’ve been listening
To lots of the men, the knaves ;
But none of them half such humbugs
As our devoted slaves.”

“ Do you see those purple flushes ?
The sun will set in state :
Up all ! we must cross to the heath, friends,
Before it gets too late.

“ We will couch in the fern together,
And watch for the moon and the stars ;
And the slim tree-tops will be lighted,
So the boys may light their cigars.

“ And while the sunset glory
Burns down in crimson and gold,
LAZY shall tell us a story
Of his wonderful times of old.”

V.

Ten thousand years ago, (“*No more than that ?*”)
Ten thousand years, (“*The age of Robert’s hat !*”—

“*Silence, you gods!*”—“*Pinch Fanny!*”—“*Now we’re good.*”)

This place where we are sitting was a wood,
Savage and desert save for one rude home
Of wattles plastered with stiff clay and loam ;
And here, in front, upon the grassy mire
Four naked squaws were squatted round a fire :
Then four tall naked wild men crushing through
The tangled underwood came into view ;
Two of them bent beneath a mighty boar,
The third was gashed and bleeding, number four
Strutted full-drest in war-paint, (“*That was Dick!*”)
Blue of a devilish pattern laid on thick.
The squaws jumped up to roast the carcass whole ;
The braves sank silent, stark ’gainst root and bole.
The meat half-done, they tore it and devoured,
Sullenly ravenous ; the women cowered
Until their lords had finished, then partook.
Mist rose ; all crept into their cabin-nook,
And staked the mouth ; the floor was one broad
bed
Of rushes dried with fox and bear skins spread.
Wolves howled and wild cats wailed ; they snored ;
and so
The long night passed, shedding a storm of snow ;
This very night ten thousand years ago.

VI.

Ten thousand years before, (*“ Come, draw it mild !
Don't waste Conk-ology like that, my child ! ”*)
From where we sit to the horizon's bound
A level brilliant plain was spread all round,
As level and as brilliant as a sea
Under the burning sun ; high as your knee
Aflame with flowers, yellow and blue and red :
Long lines of palm-trees marked out there the bed
Of a great river, and among them gleamed
A few grey tents. Then four swift horsemen streamed
Out of the West, magnificent in ire,
Churning the meadow into flakes of fire,
Brandishing monstrous spears as if in fight,
They wheeled, ducked, charged, and shouted fierce
delight :
So till they reach the camp : the women there
Awaiting them the evening meal prepare ;
Milk from the goats and camels, dates plucked fresh,
Cool curds and cheese, millet, sweet broiled kid's flesh.
The spear struck deep hath picketed each barb ;
A grave proud turbaned man in flowing garb
Sups with a grave meek woman, humbly proud,
Whose eyes flash empire. Then the solemn crowd

Of stars above, the silent plain below,
Until the East resumes its furnace-glow ;
This same night twenty thousand years ago.

VII.

Ten thousand years before, (*“ But if you take
Such mouthfuls, you will soon eat up Time’s cake ! ”*)
Where we are sitting rose in splendid light
A broad cool marble palace ; from the height
Broad terrace-gardens stairlike sank away
Down to the floor of a deep sapphire bay.
Where the last slope slid greenly to the wave,
And dark rich glossy foliage shadow gave,
Four women—or four goddesses—leaned calm,
Of mighty stature, graceful as the palm :
One stroked with careless hand a lion’s mane,
One fed an eagle ; while a measured strain
Was poured forth by the others, harp and voice,
Music to make the universe rejoice.
An isle was in the offing seen afar,
Deep-purple based, its peak a glittering star ;
Whence rowed a galley (drooped the silken sails),
A dragon-barque with golden burning scales.
Then four bronzed giants leapt to land, embraced
The glorious women, chanting : “ Did we haste ?

The Cavern-Voice hath silenced all your fears ;
Peace on our earth another thousand years !”
On fruits and noble wine, with song’s rich flow,
They feasted in the sunset’s golden glow ;
This same night thirty thousand years ago.

VIII.

Ten thousand years before, (“ *Another ten !*
Good Lord, how greedy are these little men !”)
This place where we are sitting (“ *Half asleep.*”)
Was in the sea a hundred fathoms deep :
A floor of silver sand so fine and soft,
A coral forest branching far aloft ;
Above, the great dusk emerald golden-green ;
Silence profound and solitude serene.
Four mermaids sit beneath the coral rocks,
Combing with golden combs their long green locks,
And wreathing them with little pearly shells ;
Four mermen come from out the deep-sea dells,
And whisper to them, and they all turn pale :
Then through the hyaline a voice of wail,
With passionate gestures, “ Ever alas for woe !
A rumour cometh down the Ocean-flow,
A word calamitous ! that we shall be
All disinherited from the great sea :

Our tail with which like fishes we can swim
Shall split into an awkward double-limb,
And we must waddle on the arid soil,
And build dirt-huts, and get our food with toil,
And lose our happy, happy lives !” And so
These gentle creatures wept “ Alas for woe !”
This same night forty thousand years ago.

IX.

“ *Are you not going back a little more ?*
What was the case ten thousand years before ?”
Ten thousand years before ’twas Sunday night ;
Four lovely girls were listening with delight,
Three noble youths admired another youth
Discoursing History crammed full of truth :
They all were sitting upon Hampstead Heath,
And monstrous grimy London lay beneath.
“ The stupidest story LAZY ever told ;
I’ve no more faith in his fine times of old.”
“ How do you like our prospects now, my dears ?
We’ll all be mermaids in ten thousand years.”
“ Mermaids are beautiful enough, but law !
Think of becoming a poor naked squaw !”
“ But in these changes, sex will change no doubt ;
We’ll all be men and women turn about.”

“Then these four chaps will be the squaws?—that’s just ;
With lots of picaninnies, I *do* trust !”

“If changes go by fifty thousand, yes ;
But if by ten, they last were squaws, I guess !”

“Come on ; we’ll go and do the very beers
We did this night was fifty thousand years.”

Thou prophet, thou deep sage ! we’ll go, we’ll go :
The ring is round, Life naught, the World an O ;
This night is fifty thousand years ago !

X.

As we rush, as we rush in the Train,
The trees and the houses go wheeling back,
But the starry heavens above the plain
Come flying on our track.

All the beautiful stars of the sky,
The silver doves of the forest of Night,
Over the dull earth swarm and fly,
Companions of our flight.

We will rush ever on without fear ;
Let the goal be far, the flight be fleet !
For we carry the Heavens with us, Dear,
While the Earth slips from our feet !

XI.

Day after day of this azure May
The blood of the Spring has swelled in my veins ;
Night after night of broad moonlight
A mystical dream has dazzled my brains.

A seething might, a fierce delight,
The blood of the Spring is the wine of the world ;
My veins run fire and thrill desire,
Every leaf of my heart's red rose uncurled.

A sad sweet calm, a tearful balm,
The light of the Moon is the trance of the world ;
My brain is fraught with yearning thought,
And the rose is pale and its leaves are furled.

O speed the day, thou dear, dear May,
And hasten the night I charge thee, O June,
When the trance divine shall burn with the wine
And the red rose unfurl all its fire to the Moon !

XII.

O mellow moonlight warm,
Weave round my Love a charm ;

O countless starry eyes,
Watch from the holy skies ;
O ever-solemn Night,
Shield her within thy might :
 Watch her, my little one !
 Shield her, my darling !

How my heart shrinks with fear,
Nightly to leave thee, dear ;
Lonely and pure within
Vast glooms of woe and sin :
Our wealth of love and bliss
Too heavenly-perfect is :
 Good night, my little one !
 God keep thee, darling !



SUNDAY UP THE RIVER:¹

AN IDYLL OF COCKAIGNE.

1865.

—o—

“ En allant promener aux champs,
J’y ai trouvé les blés si grands,
Les aubépines florissant.
En vérité, en vérité,
C’est le mois, le joli mois,
C’est le joli mois de mai.

“ Dieu veuill’ garder les vins, les blés,
Les jeunes filles à marier,
Les jeun’ garçons pour les aimer !
En vérité, en vérité,
C’est le mois, le joli mois,
C’est le joli mois de mai.”

—*Carol of Lorraine.*²

I.

I LOOKED out into the morning,
I looked out into the west :
The soft blue eye of the quiet sky
Still drooped in dreamy rest ;

¹ Reprinted from *Fraser's Magazine*, October 1869, with the kind assent of Messrs. Longmans & Co.

² From Victor Fournel's charming book, "*Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris.*"

The trees were still like clouds there,
The clouds like mountains dim ;
The broad mist lay, a silver bay
Whose tide was at the brim.

I looked out into the morning,
I looked out into the east :
The flood of light upon the night
Had silently increased ;

The sky was pale with fervour,
The distant trees were grey,
The hill-lines drawn like waves of dawn
Dissolving in the day.

I looked out into the morning ;
Looked east, looked west, with glee :
O richest day of happy May,
My Love will spend with me !

II.

“ Oh, what are you waiting for here, young man ?
What are you looking for over the bridge ? ”
A little straw hat with the streaming blue ribbons
Is soon to come dancing over the bridge.

Her heart beats the measure that keeps her feet dancing,
Dancing along like a wave o' the sea ;
Her heart pours the sunshine with which her eyes glancing
Light up strange faces in looking for me.

The strange faces brighten in meeting her glances ;
The strangers all bless her, pure, lovely, and free :
She fancies she walks, but her walk skips and dances,
Her heart makes such music in coming to me.

Oh, thousands and thousands of happy young maidens
Are tripping this morning their sweethearts to see ;
But none whose heart beats to a sweeter love-cadence
Than hers who will brighten the sunshine for me.

“ Oh, what are you waiting for here, young man ?
What are you looking for over the bridge ? ”
A little straw hat with the streaming blue ribbons ;
—And here it comes dancing over the bridge !

III.

In the vast vague grey,
Mistily luminous, brightly dim,
The trees to the south there, far away,

Float as beautiful, strange and grand
As pencilled palm-trees, every line
Mystic with a grace divine,
In our dreams of the holy Eastern Land.

There is not a cloud in the sky ;
 The vague vast grey
Melts into azure dim on high.
Warmth, and languor, and infinite peace !
 Surely the young Day
Hath fallen into a vision and a trance,
And his burning flight doth cease.

 Yet look how here and there
Soft curves, fine contours, seem to swim,
Half emerging, wan and dim,
 Into the quiet air :
Like statues growing slowly, slowly out
From the great vault of marble ; here a limb,
And there a feature, but the rest all doubt.

Then the sculpturing sunbeams smite,
 And the forms start forth to the day ;
And the breath of the morning sweepeth light
 The luminous dust away :

And soon, soon, soon,
Crowning the floor of the land and the sea,
Shall be wrought the dome of Noon.

The burning sapphire dome,
With solemn imagery ; vast shapes that stand
Each like an island ringed with flashing foam,
Black-purple mountains, creeks and rivers of light,
Craggs of cleft crystal blazing to the crest :
Vast isles that move, that roam
A tideless sea of infinite fathomless rest.

Thus shall it be this noon :
And thus, so slowly, slowly from its birth
In the long night's dark swoon,
Through the long morning's trance, sweet, vague, and dim,
The Sun divine above
Doth build up in us, Heaven completing Earth,
Our solemn Noon of Love.

IV.

The church bells are ringing :
How green the earth, how fresh and fair !
The thrushes are singing :
What rapture but to breathe this air !

The church bells are ringing :
Lo, how the river dreameth there !
The thrushes are singing :
Green flames wave lightly everywhere !

The church bells are ringing :
How all the world breathes praise and prayer !
The thrushes are singing :
What Sabbath peace doth trance the air !

V.

I love all hardy exercise
That makes one strain and quiver ;
And best of all I love and prize
This boating on our river.
I to row and you to steer,
Gay shall be Life's trip, my dear :
You to steer and I to row,
All is bright where'er we go.

We push off from the bank ; again
We're free upon the waters ;
The happiest of the sons of men,
The fairest of earth's daughters.

And I row, and I row ;
The blue floats above us as we go :
And you steer, and you steer,
Framed in gliding wood and water, O my dear.

I pull a long calm mile or two,
Pull slowly, deftly feather :
How sinful *any* work to do
In this Italian weather !
Yet I row, yet I row ;
The blue floats above us as we go :
While you steer, while you steer,
Framed in gliding wood and water, O my dear.

Those lovely breadths of lawn that sweep
Adown in still green billows !
And o'er the brim in fountains leap ;
Green fountains, weeping willows !
And I row, and I row ;
The blue floats above us as we go :
And you steer, and you steer,
Framed in gliding wood and water, O my dear.

We push among the flags in flower,
Beneath the branches tender,
And we are in a faerie bower
Of green and golden splendour.

I to row and you to steer,
Gay must be Life's trip, my dear ;
You to steer and I to row,
All is bright where'er we go.

A secret bower where we can hide
In lustrous shadow lonely ;
The crystal floor may lap and glide
To rock our dreaming only.
I to row and you to steer,
Gay must be Life's trip, my dear ;
You to steer and I to row,
All is bright where'er we go.

VI.

I love this hardy exercise,
This strenuous toil of boating :
Our skiff beneath the willow lies
Half stranded and half floating.
As I lie, as I lie,
Glimpses dazzle of the blue and burning sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

My shirt is of the soft red wool,
My cap is azure braided
By two white hands so beautiful,
My tie mauve purple-shaded.
As I lie, as I lie,
Glimpses dazzle of white clouds and sapphire sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

Your hat with long blue streamers decked,
Your pure throat crimson-banded ;
White-robed, my own white dove unflecked,
Dove-footed, lilac-handed.
As I lie, as I lie,
Glimpses dazzle of white clouds and sapphire sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

If any boaters boating past
Should look where we're reclining,
They'll say, To-day green willows glassed
Rubies and sapphires shining !
As I lie, as I lie,
Glimpses dazzle of the blue and burning sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

VII.

Grey clouds come puffing from my lips
And hang there softly curling,
While from the bowl now leaps, now slips,
A steel-blue thread high twirling.
As I lie, as I lie,
The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

I gaze on you and I am crowned,
A Monarch great and glorious,
A Hero in all realms renowned,
A Faerie Prince victorious.
As I lie, as I lie,
The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

Your violet eyes pour out their whole
Pure light in earnest rapture ;
Your thoughts come dreaming through my soul,
And nestle past recapture.

As I lie, as I lie,
The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

O friends, your best years to the oar
Like galley-slaves devoting,
This is and shall be evermore
The true sublime of boating !
As I lie, as I lie,
The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

VIII.

The water is cool and sweet and pure,
The water is clear as crystal ;
And water's a noble liquid, sure ;—
But look at my pocket-pistol !

Tim Boyland gave it me, one of two
The rogue brought back from Dublin ;
With a jar of the genuine stuff: hurroo !
How deliciously it comes bubblin' !

It is not brandy, it is not wine,
It is Jameson's Irish Whisky :
It fills the heart with joy divine,
And it makes the fancy frisky.

All other spirits are vile resorts,
Except its own Scotch first cousin ;
And as for your Clarets and Sherries and Ports,
A naggin is worth a dozen.

I have watered this, though a toothful neat
Just melts like cream down the throttle :
But it's grand in the punch, hot, strong, and sweet !
Not a headache in a bottle.

It is amber as the western skies
When the sunset glows serenest ;
It is mellow as the mild moonrise
When the shamrock leaves fold greenest.

Just a little, wee, wee, tiny sip !
Just the wet of the bill of a starling !
A drop of dew for the rosy lip,
And two stars in the eyes of my darling !

' Faith your kiss has made it so sweet at the brim
I could go on supping for ever !
We'll pocket the pistol : And Tim, you limb,
May this *craturr* abandon you never !

IX.

Like violets pale i' the Spring o' the year
Came my Love's sad eyes to my youth ;
Wan and dim with many a tear,
But the sweeter for that in sooth :
 Wet and dim,
 Tender and true,
 Violet eyes
 Of the sweetest blue.

Like pansies dark i' the June o' the year
Grow my Love's glad eyes to my prime ;
Rich with the purple splendour clear
Of their thoughtful bliss sublime :
 Deep and dark,
 Solemn and true,
 Pansy eyes
 Of the noblest blue.

X.

Were I a real Poet, I would sing
Such joyous songs of you, and all mere truth ;
As true as buds and tender leaves in Spring,
As true as lofty dreams in dreamful youth ;
That men should cry : How foolish every one
Who thinks the world is getting out of tune !
Where is the tarnish in our golden sun ?
Where is the clouding in our crystal moon ?
The lark sings now the eversame new song
With which it soared through Eden's purest skies ;
This poet's music doth for us prolong
The very speech Love learnt in Paradise ;
This maiden is as young and pure and fair
As Eve agaze on Adam sleeping there.

XI.

When will you have not a sole kiss left,
And my prodigal mouth be all bereft ?
When your lips have ravished the last sweet flush
Of the red with which the roses blush :
Now I kiss them and kiss them till they hush.

When will you have not a glance to give
Of the love in whose lustre my glances live ?
When, O my darling, your fathomless eyes
Have drawn all the azure out of the skies :
Now I gaze and I gaze till they dare not rise.

When will you find not a single vow
Of the myriads and myriads you lavish now ?
When your voice has gurgled the last sweet note
That was meant from the nightingales to float :
Now I whisper it, whisper it dumb in your throat.

When will you love me no more, no more,
And my happy, happy dream be o'er ?
When no rose is red, and no skies are blue,
And no nightingale sings the whole year through,
Then my heart may have no love for you.

XII.

My Love o'er the water bends dreaming ;
It glideth and 'glideth away :
She sees there her own beauty, gleaming
Through shadow and ripple and spray.

Oh, tell her, thou murmuring river,
As past her your light wavelets roll,
How steadfast that image for ever
Shines pure in pure depths of my soul.

XIII.

The wandering airs float over the lawn,
And linger and whisper in at our bower ;
(They babble, babble all they know :)
The delicate secrets they have drawn
From bird and meadow and tree and flower ;
(Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

Some linden stretches itself to the height,
Then rustles back to its dream of the day ;
(They babble, babble all they know :)
Some bird would trill out its love-delight,
But the honey melts in its throat away ;
(Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

Some flower seduced by the treacherous calm
Breathes all its soul in a fragrant sigh ;
(They babble, babble all they know :)
Some blossom weeps a tear of balm
For the lost caress of a butterfly ;
(Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

Our Mother lies in siesta now,
And we listen to her breathings here ;
 (They babble, babble all they know :)
And we learn all the thoughts hid under her brow,
All her heart's deep dreams of the happy year :
 (Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

XIV.

Those azure, azure eyes
 Gaze on me with their love ;
And I am lost in dream,
 And cannot speak or move.

Those azure, azure eyes
 Stay with me when we part ;
A sea of azure thoughts
 Overfloods my heart.¹

¹ " Mit deinen blauen Augen
 Siehst du mich lieblich an ;
Da ward mir so träumend zu Sinne
 Dass ich nicht sprechen kann.

" An deine blauen Augen
 Gedenk' ich allerwärts ;—
Ein Meer von blauen Gedanken
 Ergiesst sich über mein Herz."—*Heine.*

XV.

Give a man a horse he can ride,
Give a man a boat he can sail ;
And his rank and wealth, his strength and health,
On sea nor shore shall fail.

Give a man a pipe he can smoke,
Give a man a book he can read ;
And his home is bright with a calm delight,
Though the room be poor indeed.

Give a man a girl he can love,
As I, O my Love, love thee ;
And his heart is great with the pulse of Fate,
At home, on land, on sea.

XVI.

My love is the flaming Sword
To fight through the world ;
Thy love is the Shield to ward,
And the Armour of the Lord
And the Banner of Heaven unfurled.

XVII.

Let my voice ring out and over the earth,
Through all the grief and strife,
With a golden joy in a silver mirth :
Thank God for Life !

Let my voice swell out through the great abyss
To the azure dome above,
With a chord of faith in the harp of bliss :
Thank God for Love !

Let my voice thrill out beneath and above,
The whole world through :
O my Love and Life, O my Life and Love,
Thank God for you !

XVIII.

The wine of Love is music,
And the feast of Love is song :
And when Love sits down to the banquet,
Love sits long :

Sits long and ariseth drunken,
But not with the feast and the wine ;
He reeleth with his own heart,
That great rich Vine.

XIX.

Drink ! drink ! open your mouth !
This air is as rich as wine ;
Flowing with balm from the sunny south,
And health from the western brine.

Drink ! drink ! open your mouth !
This air is as strong as wine :
My brain is drugged with the balm o' the south,
And rolls with the western brine.

Drink ! drink ! open your mouth !
This air is the choicest wine ;
From that golden grape the Sun, i' the south
Of Heaven's broad vine.

XX.

Could we float thus ever,
Floating down a river,

Down a tranquil river, and you alone with me :
 Past broad shining meadows,
 Past the great wood-shadows,
Past fair farms and hamlets, for ever to the sea.

 Through the golden noonlight,
 Through the silver moonlight,
Through the tender gloaming, gliding calm and free ;
 From the sunset gliding,
 Into morning sliding,
With the tranquil river for ever to the sea.

 Past the masses hoary
 Of cities great in story,
Past their towers and temples drifting lone and free :
 Gliding, never hasting,
 Gliding, never resting,
Ever with the river that glideth to the sea.

 With a swifter motion
 Out upon the Ocean,
Heaven above and round us, and you alone with me ;
 Heaven around and o'er us,
 The Infinite before us,
Floating on for ever upon the flowing sea.

.

What time is it, dear, now?
We are in the year now
Of the New Creation one million two or three.
But where are we now, Love?
We are as I trow, Love,
In the Heaven of Heavens upon the Crystal Sea.

And may mortal sinners
Care for carnal dinners
In your Heaven of Heavens, New Era millions three?
Oh, if their boat gets stranding
Upon some Richmond landing,
They're thirsty as the desert and hungry as the sea!



THE NAKED GODDESS.

1866-67.

—o—

“Arcane danze
D’immortal piede i ruinosi gioghi
Scossero e l’ardue selve (oggi romito
Nido de’ venti).”—LEOPARDI.

THROUGH the country to the town
Ran a rumour and renown,
That a woman grand and tall,
Swift of foot, and therewithal
Naked as a lily gleaming,
Had been seen by eyes not dreaming,
Darting down far forest glades,
Flashing sunshine through the shades.

With this rumour’s swelling word
All the city buzzed and stirred ;
Solemn senators conferred ;
Priest, astrologer, and mage,
Subtle sophist, bard, and sage,

Brought their wisdom, lore, and wit,
To expound or riddle it :
Last a porter ventured—"We
Might go out ourselves to see."

Thus, upon a summer morn,
Lo the city all forlorn ;
Every house and street and square
In the sunshine still and bare,
Every galley left to sway
Silent in the glittering bay ;
All the people swarming out,
Young and old a joyous rout,
Rich and poor, far-streaming through
Fields and meadows dark with dew,
Crowd on crowd, and throng on throng ;
Chatter, laughter, jest, and song
Deafened all the singing birds,
Wildered sober grazing herds.

Up the hillside 'gainst the sun,
Where the forest outskirts run ;
On along the level high,
Where the azure of the sky,
And the ruddy morning sheen,
Drop in fragments through the treen

Where the sward surrounds the brake
With a lucid, glassy lake,
Where the ample glades extend
Until clouds and foliage blend ;
Where whoever turneth may
See the city and the bay,
And, beyond, the broad sea bright,
League on league of slanting light ;
Where the moist blue shadows sleep
In the sacred forest deep.

Suddenly the foremost pause,
Ere the rear discern a cause ;
Loiterers press up row on row,
All the mass heaves to and fro ;
All seem murmuring in one strain,
All seem hearkening fixed and fain :
Silence, and the lifted light
Of countless faces gazing white.

Four broad beech-trees, great of bole,
Crowned the green, smooth-swelling knoll ;
There She leant, the glorious form
Dazzling with its beauty warm,
Naked as the sun of noon,
Naked as the midnight moon :

And around her, tame and mild,
All the forest creatures wild—
Lion, panther, kid, and fawn,
Eagle, hawk, and dove, all drawn
By the magic of her splendour,
By her great voice, rich and tender,
Whereof every beast and bird
Understood each tone and word,
While she fondled and cared,
Playing freaks of joyous zest.

Suddenly the lion stood,
Turned and saw the multitude,
Swelled his mighty front in ire,
Roared the roar of raging fire :
Then She turned, the living light,
Sprang erect, grew up in height,
Smote them with the flash and blaze
Of her terrible, swift gaze ;
A divine, flushed, throbbing form,
Dreadfuller than blackest storm.

All the forest creatures cowered,
Trembling, moaning, overpowered ;
All the simple folk who saw
Sank upon their knees in awe

Of this Goddess, fierce and splendid,
Whom they witless had offended ;
And they murmured out faint prayers,
Inarticulate despairs,
Till her haught and angry mien
Grew more gentle and serene.

Stood the high priest forth, and went
Halfway up the green ascent ;
There began a preachment long
Of the great and grievous wrong
She unto her own soul wrought
In thus living without thought
Of the gods who sain and save,
Of the life beyond the grave :
Living with the beasts that perish,
Far from all the rites that cherish
Hope and faith and holy love,
And appease the thrones above :
Full of unction pled the preacher ;
Let her come and they would teach her
Spirit strangled in the mesh
Of the vile and sinful flesh,
How to gain the heavenly prize,
How grow meet for Paradise ;
Penance, prayer, self-sacrifice,

Fasting, cloistered solitude,
Mind uplifted, heart subdued ;
Thus a Virgin, clean and chaste,
In the Bridegroom's arms embraced.
Vestal sister's hooded gown,
Straight and strait, of dismal brown,
Here he proffered, and laid down
On the green grass like a frown.

Then stood forth the old arch-sage,
Wrinkled more with thought than age :
What could worse afflict, deject
Any well-trained intellect
Than in savage forest seeing
Such a full-grown human being
With the beasts and birds at play,
Ignorant and wild as they ?
Sciences and arts, by which
Man makes Nature's poor life rich,
Dominates the world around,
Proves himself its King self-crowned,
She knew nothing of them, she
Knew not even what they be !
Body naked to the air,
And the reason just as bare !

Yet (since circumstance, that can
Hinder the full growth of man,
Cannot kill the seeds of worth
Innate in the Lord of Earth),
Yet she might be taught and brought
To full sovranty of thought,
Crowned with reason's glorious crown.
So he tendered and laid down,
Sober grey beside the brown,
Amplest philosophic gown.

Calm and proud she stood the while
With a certain wondering smile ;
When the luminous sage was done
She began to speak as one
Using language not her own,
Simplest words in sweetest tone :
“ Poor old greybeards, worn and bent !
I do know not what they meant ;
Only here and there a word
Reached my mind of all I heard ;
Let some child come here, I may
Understand what it can say.”

So two little children went,
Lingering up the green ascent,

Hand in hand, but grew the while
Bolder in her gentle smile ;
When she kissed them they were free,
Joyous as at mother's knee.
"Tell me, darlings, now," said she,
"What they want to say to me."
Boy and girl then, nothing loth,
Sometimes one and sometimes both,
Prattled to her sitting there
Fondling with their soft young hair :
"Dear kind lady, do you stay
Here with always holiday ?
Do you sleep among the trees ?
People want you, if you please,
To put on your dress and come
With us to the City home ;
Live with us and be our friend :
Oh, such pleasant times we'll spend ! . . .
But if you can't come away,
Will you let us stop and play
With you and all these happy things
With hair and horns and shining wings ?"

She arose and went half down,
Took the vestal sister's gown,

Tried it on, burst through its shroud,
As the sun burns through a cloud :
Flung it from her split and rent ;
Said : " This cerement sad was meant
For some creature stunted, thin,
Breastless, blighted, bones and skin."

Then the sage's robe she tried,
Muffling in its long folds wide
All her lithe and glorious grace :
" I should stumble every pace !
This big bag was meant to hold
Some poor sluggard fat and old,
Limping, shuffling wearily,
With a form not fit to see !"
So she flung it off again
With a gesture of disdain.

Naked as the midnight moon,
Naked as the sun of noon,
Burning too intensely bright,
Clothed in its own dazzling light ;
Seen less thus than in the shroud
Of morning mist or evening cloud ;
She stood terrible and proud
O'er the pallid quivering crowd.

At a gesture ere they wist,
Perched a falcon on her wrist,
And she whispered to the bird
Something it alone there heard ;
Then she threw it off : when thrown
Straight it rose as falls a stone,
Arrow-swift on high, on high,
Till a mere speck in the sky ;
Then it circled round and round,
Till, as if the prey were found,
Forth it darted on its quest
Straight away into the West. . . .
Every eye that watched its flight
Felt a sideward flash of light,
All were for a moment dazed,
Then around intently gazed :
What had passed them ? Where was She,
The offended deity ?
O'er the city, o'er the bay,
They beheld her melt away,
Melt away beyond their quest
Through the regions of the west ;
While the eagle screamed rauque ire,
And the lion roared like fire.

That same night both priest and sage
Died accursed in sombre rage.
Never more in wild wood green
Was that glorious Goddess seen,
Never more : and from that day
Evil hap and dull decay
Fell on countryside and town ;
Life and vigour dwindled down ;
Storms in Spring nipped bud and sprout,
Summer suns shed plague and drought,
Autumn's store was crude and scant,
Winter snows beleaguered want ;
Vines were black at vintage-tide,
Flocks and herds of murrain died ;
Fishing boats came empty home,
Good ships foundered in the foam ;
Haggard traders lost all heart
Wandering through the empty mart :
For the air hung thick with gloom,
Silence, and the sense of doom.

But those little children she
Had caressed so tenderly
Were betrothed that self-same night,
Grew up beautiful and bright,

Lovers through the years of play
Forward to their marriage-day.
Three long moons of bridal bliss
Overflowed them ; after this,
With his bride and with a band
Of the noblest in the land,
Youths and maidens, wedded pairs
Scarcely older in life's cares,
He took ship and sailed away
Westward Ho from out the bay :
Portioned from their native shrine
With the Sacred Fire divine,
They will cherish while they roam,
Quenchless 'mid the salt sea foam,
Till it burns beneath a dome
In some new and far-off home.

As they ventured more and more
In that ocean without shore,
And some hearts were growing cold
At the emprise all too bold,
It is said a falcon came
Down the void blue swift as flame ;
Every sunset came to rest
On the prow's high curving crest,

Every sunrise rose from rest
Flying forth into the west ;
And they followed, faint no more,
Through that ocean without shore.

Three moons crescent fill and wane
O'er the solitary main,
When behold a green shore smile :
It was that Atlantic isle,
Drowned beneath the waves and years,
Whereof some faint shadow peers
Dubious through the modern stream
Of Platonic legend-dream.
High upon that green shore stood
She who left their native wood ;
Glorious, and with solemn hand
Beckoned to them there to land.
Though She forthwith disappeared
As the wave-worn galley neared,
They knew well her presence still
Haunted stream and wood and hill.
There they landed, there grew great,
Founders of a mighty state :
There the Sacred Fire divine
Burned within a wondrous shrine

Which Her statue glorified
Throughout many kingdoms wide.
There those children wore the crown
To their children handed down
Many and many a golden age
Blotted now from history's page ;
Till the last of all the line
Leagued him with the other nine
Great Atlantic kings whose hosts
Ravaged all the Mid Sea coasts :
Then the whelming deluge rolled
Over all those regions old ;
Thrice three thousand years before
Solon questioned Egypt's lore.¹

¹ Plato : the *Timæus*, and the *Critias*.



A R T.

1865.

—o—

I.

WHAT precious thing are you making fast
In all these silken lines ?
And where and to whom will it go at last ?
Such subtle knots and twines !

I am tying up all my love in this,
With all its hopes and fears,
With all its anguish and all its bliss,
And its hours as heavy as years.

I am going to send it afar, afar,
To I know not where above ;
To that sphere beyond the highest star
Where dwells the soul of my Love.

But in vain, in vain, would I make it fast
With countless subtle twines ;
For ever its fire breaks out at last,
And shrivels all the lines.

II.

If you have a carrier-dove
That can fly over land and sea ;
And a message for your Love,
“ *Lady, I love but thee !* ”

And this dove will never stir
But straight from her to you,
And straight from you to her ;
As you know and she knows too.

Will you first ensure, O sage,
Your dove that never tires
With your message in a cage,
Though a cage of golden wires ?

Or will you fling your dove :
“ *Fly, darling, without rest,
Over land and sea to my Love,
And fold your wings in her breast* ” ?

III.

Singing is sweet ; but be sure of this,
Lips only sing when they cannot kiss.

Did he ever suspire a tender lay
While her presence took his breath away ?

Had his fingers been able to toy with her hair
Would they then have written the verses fair ?

Had she let his arm steal round her waist
Would the lovely portrait yet be traced ?

Since he could not embrace it flushed and warm
He has carved in stone the perfect form.

Who gives the fine report of the feast ?
He who got none and enjoyed it least.

Were the wine really slipping down his throat
Would his song of the wine advance a note ?

Will you puff out the music that sways the whirl,
Or dance and make love with a pretty girl ?

Who shall the great battle-story write ?
Not the hero down in the thick of the fight.

Statues and pictures and verse may be grand,
But they are not the Life for which they stand.

PHILOSOPHY.

1866.



I.

HIS eyes found nothing beautiful and bright,
Nor wealth nor honour, glory nor delight,
Which he could grasp and keep with might and right.

Flowers bloomed for maidens, swords outflashed for boys,
The world's big children had their various toys ;
He could not feel their sorrows and their joys.

Hills held a secret they would not unfold,
In careless scorn of him the ocean rolled,
The stars were alien splendours high and cold.

He felt himself a king bereft of crown,
Defrauded from his birthright of renown,
Bred up in littleness with churl and clown.

II.

How could he vindicate himself? His eyes,
That found not anywhere their proper prize,
Looked through and through the specious earth and skies,

They probed, and all things yielded to their probe ;
They saw the void around the massy globe,
The raging fire within its flowery robe.

They pierced through beauty ; saw the bones, the mesh
Of nerves and veins, the hideous raw red flesh,
Beneath the skin most delicate and fresh :

Saw Space a mist unfurled around the steep
Where plunge Time's waters to the blackest deep ;
Saw Life a dream in Death's eternal sleep.

III.

A certain fair form came before his sight,
Responding to him as the day to night :
To yearning, love ; to cold and gloom, warm light.

A hope sprang from his breast, and fluttered far
On rainbow wings ; beyond the cloudy bar,
Though very much beneath the nearest star.

His eyes drew back their beams to kindle fire
In his own heart ; whose masterful desire
Scorned all beyond its aim, lower or higher.

This fire flung lustre upon grace and bloom,
Gave warmth and brightness to a little room,
Burned Thought to ashes in its fight with gloom.

IV.

He said : Those eyes alone see well that view
Life's lovely surfaces of form and hue ;
And not Death's entrails, looking through and through.

Bones, nerves, and veins, and flesh, are covered in
By this opaque transparency of skin,
Precisely that we should not see within.

The corpse is hid, that Death may work its vile
Corruption in black secrecy ; the while
Our saddest graves with grass and fair flowers smile.

If you will analyse the bread you eat,
The water and the wine most pure and sweet,
Your stomach soon must loathe all drink and meat.

Life liveth but in Life, and doth not roam
To other realms if all be well at home :
“Solid as ocean-foam,” quoth ocean-foam.

If Midge will pine and curse its hours away
Because Midge is not Everything For-aye,
Poor Midge thus loses its one summer day ;
Loses its all—and winneth what, I pray ?



LIFE'S HEBE.

1866.



IN the early morning-shine
Of a certain day divine,
I beheld a Maiden stand
With a pitcher in her hand ;
Whence she poured into a cup
Until it was half filled up
Nectar that was golden light
In the cup of crystal bright.

And the first who took the cup
With pure water filled it up ;
As he drank then, it was more
Ruddy golden than before :
And he leapt and danced and sang
As to Bacchic cymbals' clang.

But the next who took the cup
With the red wine filled it up ;
What he drank then was in hue
Of a heavy sombre blue :

First he reeled and then he crept,
Then lay faint but never slept.

And the next who took the cup
With the white milk filled it up ;
What he drank at first seemed blood,
Then turned thick and brown as mud :
And he moved away as slow
As a weary ox may go.

But the next who took the cup
With sweet honey filled it up ;
Nathless that which he did drink
Was thin fluid black as ink :
As he went he stumbled soon,
And lay still in deathlike swoon.

She the while without a word
Unto all the cup preferred ;
Blandly smiled and sweetly laughed
As each mingled his own draught.

And the next who took the cup
To the sunshine held it up,
Gave it back and did not taste ;
It was empty when replaced :

First he bowed a reverent bow,
Then he kissed her on the brow.

But the next who took the cup
Without mixture drank it up ;
When she took it back from him
It was full unto the brim :
He with a right bold embrace
Kissed her sweet lips face to face.

Then she sang with blithest cheer :
Who has thirst, come here, come here !
Nectar that is golden light
In the cup of crystal bright,
Nectar that is sunny fire
Warm as warmest heart's desire :
Pitcher never lacketh more,
Arm is never tired to pour :
Honey, water, milk, or wine
Mingle with the draught divine,
Drink it pure, or drink it not ;
Each is free to choose his lot :
Am I old ? or am I cold ?
Only two have kissed me bold !

She was young and fair and gay
As that young and glorious day.

A POLISH INSURGENT.

1863.

—o—

WHAT would you have? said I;¹

'Tis so easy to go and die,

'Tis so hard to stay and live,

In this alien peace and this comfort callous,

Where only the murderers get the gallows,

Where the jails are for rogues who thieve.

'Tis so easy to go and die,

Where our Country, our Mother, the Martyr,

Moaning in bonds doth lie,

Bleeding with stabs in her breast,

Her throat with a foul clutch prest,

Under the thrice-accursed Tartar.

But Smith, your man of sense,

Ruddy, and broad, and round—like so!

Kindly—but dense, but dense,

Said to me: “Do not go:

¹ Some time after writing this I found that the great BALZAC, in *La Cousine Bette*, dwells on this very phrase, “Que voulez-vous?” as characteristic of the gallant and reckless Poles.

It is hopeless ; right is wrong ;
The tyrant is too strong."

Must a man have *hope* to fight ?
Can a man not fight in despair ?
Must the soul cower down for the body's weakness,
And slaver the devil's hoof with meekness,
Nor care nor dare to share
Certain defeat with the right ?

They do not know us, my Mother !
They know not our love, our hate !
And how we would die with each other,
Embracing proud and elate,
Rather than live apart
In peace with shame in the heart.

No hope !—If a heavy anger
Our God hath treasured against us long,
His lightning-shafts from His thunder-clangour
Raining a century down :
We have loved when we went most wrong ;
He cannot for ever frown.

No hope !—We can haste to be killed,
That the tale of the victims get filled ;

The more of the debt we pay,
The less on our sons shall weigh :
This star through the baleful rack of the cope
Burns red ; red is our hope.

O our Mother, thou art noble and fair !
Fair and proud and chaste, thou Queen !
Chained and stabbed in the breast,
Thy throat with a foul clutch prest ;
Yet around thee how coarse, how mean,
Are these rich shopwives who stare !

Art thou moaning, O our Mother, through the swoon
Of thine agony of desolation?—
“ Do my sons still love me ? or can they stand
Gazing afar from a foreign land,
Loving more peace and gold—the boon
Of a people strange, of a sordid nation ? ”

O our Mother, moan not thus !
We love you as you love us,
And our hearts are wild with thy sorrow :
If we cannot save thee, we are blest
Who can die on thy sacred bleeding breast.—
 So we left Smith-Land on the morrow,
 And we hasten across the West.

L'ANCIEN RÉGIME ;
OR,
THE GOOD OLD RULE.

1867.

—o—

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king,
Our king all kings above ?
A young girl brought him love ;
And he dowered her with shame,
With a sort of infamous fame,
And then with lonely years
Of penance and bitter tears :
Love is scarcely the thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king ?
A statesman brought him planned
Justice for all the land ;
And he in recompense got
Fierce struggle with intrigue and plot,

Then a fall from lofty place
Into exile and disgrace :
Justice is never the thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king ?
A writer brought him truth ;
And first he imprisoned the youth ;
And then he bestowed a free pyre
That the works might have plenty of fire,
And also to cure the pain
Of the headache called thought in the brain :
Truth is a very bad thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king ?
The people brought their sure
Loyalty fervid and pure ;
And he gave them bountiful spoil
Of taxes and hunger and toil,
Ignorance, brutish plight,
And wholesale slaughter in fight :
Loyalty's quite the worst thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A courtier brought to his feet
Servility graceful and sweet,
With an ever ready smile
And an ever supple guile ;
And he got in reward the place
Of the statesman in disgrace :
Servility's always a thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A soldier brought him war,
La gloire, la victoire,
Ravage and carnage and groans,
For the pious *Te Deum* tones ;
And he got in return for himself
Rank and honours and pelf :
War is a very fine thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A harlot brought him her flesh,
Her lusts, and the manifold mesh

Of her wiles interwolved with caprice ;
And he gave her his realm to fleece,
To corrupt, to ruin, and gave
Himself for her toy and her slave :
Harlotry's just the thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king,
Our king who fears to die ?
A priest brought him a lie,
The blackness of hell uprolled
In heaven's shining gold ;
And he got as guerdon for that
A see and a cardinal's hat :
A lie is an excellent thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Has any one yet a thing
For a gift to our lord the king ?
The country gave him a tomb,
A magnificent sleeping-room ;
And for this it obtained some rest,
Clear riddance of many a pest,

And a hope which it much enjoyed
That the throne would continue void :
A tomb is the very best thing
For a gift to our lord the king.

TO A PIANISTE.

I SAW thee once, I see thee now ;
Thy pure young face, thy noble mien,
Thy truthful eyes, thy radiant brow ;
All childlike, lovely, and serene ;
Rapt in harmonious visions proud,
Scarce conscious of the audient crowd.

I heard thee when the instrument,
Possessed and quickened by thy soul,
Impassioned and intelligent,
Responded to thy full control
With all the treasures of its dower,
Its sweetest and its grandest power.

I saw and heard with such delight
As rarely charms our lower sphere :
Blind Handel would not miss his sight,
Thy beauty voiced thus in his ear ;
Beethoven in that face would see
His glorious unheard harmony.

VIRTUE AND VICE.

1865.

—o—

SHE was so good, and he was so bad :
A very pretty time they had !
A pretty time, and it lasted long :
Which of the two was more in the wrong ?
He befouled in the slough of sin ;
Or she whose piety pushed him in ?
He found her yet more cold and staid
As wedded wife than courted maid :
She filled their home with freezing gloom ;
He felt it dismal as a tomb :
Her steadfast mind disdained his toys
Of worldly pleasures, carnal joys ;
Her heart firm-set on things above
Was frigid to his earthly love.

So he came staggering home at night ;
Where she sat chilling, chaste, and white :

She smiled a scornful virtuous smile,
He flung good books with curses vile.
Fresh with the early morn she rose,
While he yet lay in a feverish doze :
She prayed for blessings from the Throne,
He called for "a hair of the dog" with a groan :
She blessed God for her strength to bear
The heavy load,—he 'gan to swear :
She sighed, Would Heaven, ere yet too late,
Bring him to see his awful state !
The charity thus sweetly pressed
Made him rage like one possessed.

So she grew holier day by day,
While he grew all the other way.
She left him : she had done her part
To wean from sin his sinful heart,
But all in vain ; her presence might
Make him a murderer some mad night.
Her family took her back, pure saint,
Serene in soul, above complaint :
The narrow path she strictly trod,
And went in triumph home to God :
While he into the Union fell,
Our halfway house on the road to Hell.
With which would you rather pass your life
The wicked husband or saintly wife ?

THE THREE THAT SHALL
BE ONE.

1863.

—o—

LOVE on the earth alit,
Come to be Lord of it ;
Looked round and laughed with glee,
Noble my empery !
Straight ere that laugh was done
Sprang forth the royal sun,
Pouring out golden shine
Over the realm divine.

Came then a lovely may,
Dazzling the new-born day,
Wreathing her golden hair
With the red roses there,
Laughing with sunny eyes
Up to the sunny skies,
Moving so light and free
To her own minstrelsy.

Love with swift rapture cried,
Dear Life, thou art my bride !
Whereto, with fearless pride,
Dear Love, indeed thy bride !
All the earth's fruit and flowers,
All the world's wealth are ours ;
Sun, moon, and stars gem
Our marriage diadem.

So they together fare,
Lovely and joyous pair ;
So hand in hand they roam
All through their Eden home ;
Each to the other's sight
An ever-new delight :
Blue heaven and blooming earth
Joy in their darlings' mirth.

Who comes to meet them now,—
She with the pallid brow,
Wreathing her night-dark hair
With the red poppies there,
Pouring from solemn eyes
Gloom through the sunny skies,
Moving so silently
In her deep reverie ?

Life paled as she drew near,
Love shook with doubt and fear.
Ah, then, she said, in truth
(Eyes full of yearning ruth),
Love, thou would'st have this Life,
Fair may ! to be thy wife ?
Yet at an awful shrine
Wert thou not plighted mine ?

Pale, paler poor Life grew ;
Love murmured, It is true !
How could I thee forsake ?
From the brief dream I wake.
Yet, O belovèd Death,
See how *she* suffereth ;
Ere we from earth depart
Soothe her, thou tender heart !

Faint on the ground she lay ;
Love kissed the swoon away ;
Death then bent over her,
Death the sweet comforter !
Whispered with tearful smile,
Wait but a little while,
Then I will come for thee ;
We are one family.

E. B. B.

1861.

—o—

I.

THE white-rose garland at her feet,
The crown of laurel at her head,
Her noble life on earth complete,
Lay her in the last low bed
For the slumber calm and deep :
“ He giveth His belovèd sleep.”

II.

Soldiers find their fittest grave
In the field whereon they died ;
So her spirit pure and brave
Leaves the clay it glorified
To the land for which she fought
With such grand impassioned thought.

III.

Keats and Shelley sleep at Rome,
 She in well-loved Tuscan earth ;
Finding all their death's long home
 Far from their old home of birth.
Italy, you hold in trust
Very sacred English dust.

IV.

Therefore this one prayer I breathe,—
 That you yet may worthy prove
Of the heirlooms they bequeath
 Who have loved you with such love :
Fairest land while land of slaves
Yields their free souls no fit graves.



THE LORD OF THE CASTLE OF
INDOLENCE.

1859.

—o—

I.

NOR did we lack our own right royal king,
The glory of our peaceful realm and race.
By no long years of restless travailing,
By no fierce wars or intrigues bland and base,
Did he attain his superlofty place ;
But one fair day he lounging to the throne
Reclined thereon with such possessing grace
That all could see it was in sooth his own,
That it for him was fit and he for it alone.

II.

He there reclined as lilies on a river,
All cool in sunfire, float in buoyant rest ;
He stirred as flowers that in the sweet south quiver ;
He moved as swans move on a lake's calm breast,

Or clouds slow gliding in the golden west ;
He thought as birds may think when 'mid the trees
Their joy showers music o'er the brood-filled nest ;
He swayed us all with ever placid ease
As sways the thronèd moon her world-wide wandering
seas.

III.

Look, as within some fair and princely hall
The marble statue of a god may rest,
Admired in silent reverence by all ;
Soothing the weary brain and anguished breast,
By life's sore burthens all-too-much oppressed,
With visions of tranquillity supreme ;
So, self-sufficing, grand and bland and blest,
He dwelt enthroned, and whoso gazed did seem
Endowed with death-calm life in long unwistful dream.

IV.

While others fumed and schemed and toiled in vain
To mould the world according to their mood,
He did by might of perfect faith refrain
From any part in such disturbance rude.

The world, he said, indeed is very good,
Its Maker surely wiser far than we ;
Feed soul and flesh upon its bounteous food,
Nor fret because of ill ; All-good is He,
And worketh not in years but in Eternity.

V.

How men will strain to row against the tide,
Which yet must sweep them down in its career !
Or if some win their way and crown their pride,
What do they win ? the desert wild and drear,
The savage rocks, the icy wastes austere,
Wherefrom the river's turbid rills downflow :
But he upon the waters broad and clear,
In harmony with all the winds that blow,
'Mid cities, fields and farms, went drifting to and fro.

VI.

The king with constant heed must rule his realm,
The soldier faint and starve in marches long,
The sailor guide with sleepless care his helm,
The poet from sick languors soar in song :

But he alone amidst the troubled throng
In restful ease diffused beneficence ;
Most like a mid-year noontide rich and strong,
That fills the earth with fruitful life intense,
And yet doth trance it all in sweetest indolence.

VII.

When summer reigns the joyous leaves and flowers
Steal imperceptibly upon the tree ;
So stole upon him all his bounteous hours,
So passive to their influence seemed he,
So clothed they him with joy and majesty ;
Basking in ripest summer all his time,
We blessed his shade and sang him songs of glee ;
The dew and sunbeams fed his perfect prime,
And rooted broad and deep he broadly towered sublime.

VIII.

Thus could he laugh those great and generous laughs
Which made us love ourselves, the world, and him ;
And while they rang we felt as one who quaffs
Some potent wine-cup dowered to the brim,

And straightway all things seem to reel and swim,—
Suns, moons, earth, stars sweep through the vast profound,
Wrapt in a golden mist-light warm and dim,
Rolled in a volume of triumphant sound ;
So in that laughter's joy the whole world carolled round.

IX.

The sea, the sky, wood, mountain, stream and plain,
Our whole fair world did serve him and adorn,
Most like some casual robe which he might deign
To use when kinglier vesture was not worn.
Was all its being by his soul upborne,
That it should render homage so complete ?
The day and night, the even and the morn,
Seemed ever circling grateful round his feet,
“With Thee, through Thee we live this rich life pure
and sweet !”

X.

For while he loved our broad world beautiful,
His placid wisdom penetrated it,
And found the lovely words but poor and dull
Beside the secret splendours they transmit,

The Heavenly things in earthly symbols writ :
He knew the blood-red sweetness of the vine,
Yet did not therefore at the revel sit ;
But straining out the very wine of wine,
Lived calm and pure and glad in drunkenness divine.

XI.

Without an effort the imperial sun
With ever ample life of light doth feed
The spheres revolving round it every one :
So all his heart and soul and thought and deed
Flowed freely forth for every brother's need ;
He knew no difference between good and ill,
But as the sun doth nourish flower and weed
With self-same bounty, he too ever still
Lived blessing all alike with equal loving will.

XII.

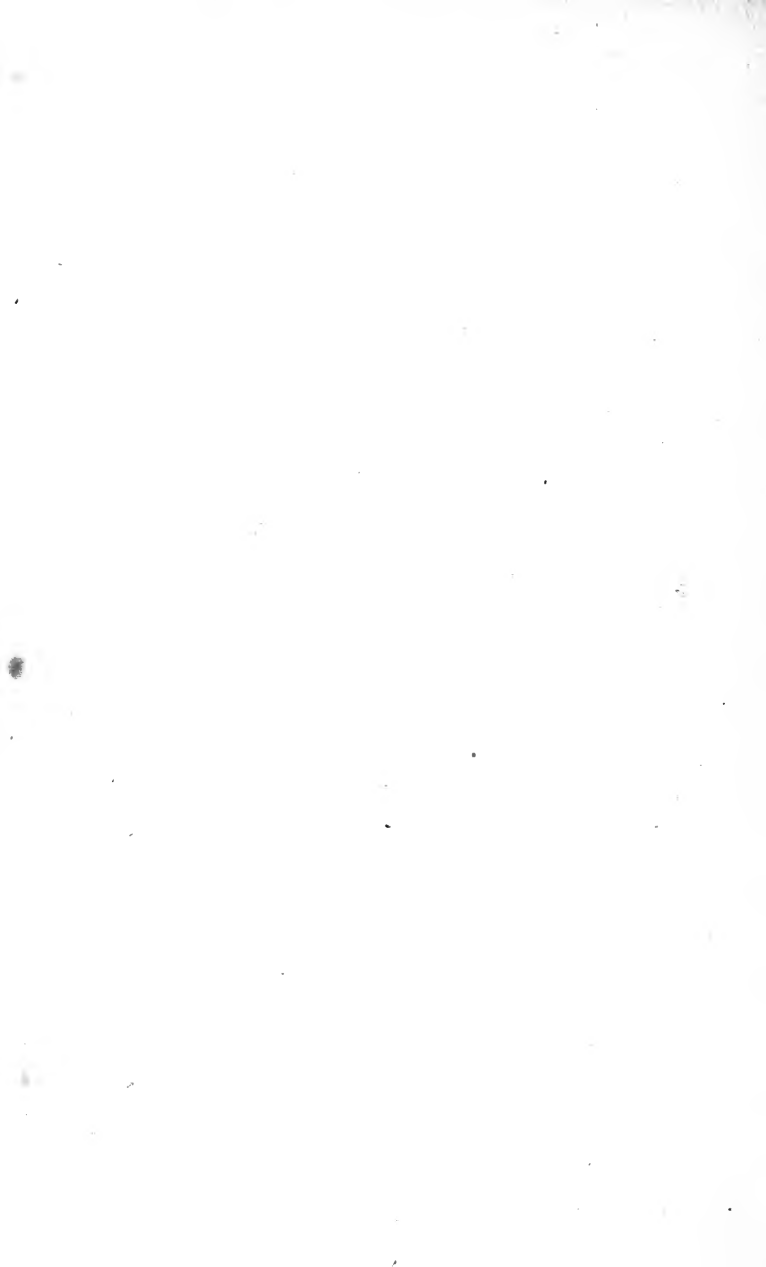
The all-bestowing sun is clothed with splendour,
The all-supporting sun doth reign supreme ;
So must eternal justice ever render
Each unsought payment to its last extreme :

Thus he most rich in others' joy did seem,
And reigned by servitude all-effortless ;
For heaven and earth must vanish like a dream
Ere such a soul divine can know distress,
Whom all the laws of Life conspire to love and bless.

A RECUSANT.

THE Church stands there beyond the orchard-blooms :
How yearningly I gaze upon its spire !
Lifted mysterious through the twilight glooms,
Dissolving in the sunset's golden fire,
Or dim as slender incense morn by morn
Ascending to the blue and open sky.
For ever when my heart feels most forlorn
It murmurs to me with a weary sigh,
How sweet to enter in, to kneel and pray
With all the others whom we love so well !
All disbelief and doubt might pass away,
All peace float to us with its Sabbath bell.
Conscience replies, There is but one good rest,
Whose head is pillowed upon Truth's pure breast.

*ATTEMPTS AT TRANSLATION
FROM HEINE.*



THE PILGRIMAGE TO KEVLAAR.

I.

At the window stood the mother,
In bed the sick son lay ;
“Will you not get up, William,
And see them marching away?”

“I am so ill, O mother,
That I cannot hear or see !
I think of my dead Maggie,
And my heart is broken in me.”

“Get up ; we will to Kevlaar,
Take missal and rosarie ;
The Mother of God our Saviour
Will heal thy heart for thee.”

They wave the broad church-banners,
They chant the holy song ;
And through Cologne on the Rhine stream,
The procession draws along.

The mother follows the pilgrims,
And her sick son leadeth she ;
And their voices join in the chorale :
“ Blessed be thou, Marie ! ”

II.

The Mother of God at Kevlaar
To-day wears her richest dress ;
To-day she will be right busy,
Such numbers come in distress.

And all the poor sick people
Bring with them offerings meet ;
They are little waxen figures,
Many waxen hands and feet.

And who a wax hand offers,
His hand's wound hurts no more ;
And who a wax foot offers,
His foot is healed of its sore.

To Kevlaar went many on crutches,
Who now can dance all night ;
And many now play on the viol
Whose fingers were helpless quite.

The mother took a wax-light,
And thereout shaped a heart :
“ Take that to our dear Lord’s Mother,
And she will cure thy smart.”

Sighing he took the wax heart
And knelt to the holy form ;
The tears from his eyes outstreaming,
And the words from his heart blood-warm :

“ Thou blessèd among women,
God’s Virgin pure from taint,
Thou Queen of the highest Heaven,
To thee I bring my plaint !

“ I lived with my dear mother
In the city of Cologne,
The city for many hundreds
Of churches and chapels known.

“ And next to us lived Maggie,
She lived, she lives not now :
Marie, I bring thee a wax heart,
My bleeding heart heal thou !

“ Heal thou my heart sore wounded,
And early and late to thee
Will I sing and pray with fervour
Blessèd be thou, Marie !”

III.

The sick son and his mother
Were sleeping from all ill,
When lo, the Mother of Jesus
Came gliding in so still.

She bent down over the sick one,
And softly laid her hand
Upon his heart ; then vanished
Smiling sweet and bland.

The mother saw all in her dreaming,
And fain had yet seen more ;
But she was roused from slumber,
The dogs made such uproar.

There lay outstretched beside her
Her son, and he was dead ;
On the pallid features sparkled
The light of the morning red.

The mother folded her hands then,
She felt so wistfully ;
Devoutly sang she softly :
“ Blessèd be thou, Marie ! ”

THE LORELEY.

I KNOW not what evil is coming,
But my heart feels sad and cold ;
A song in my head keeps humming,
A tale from the times of old.

The air is fresh and it darkles,
And smoothly flows the Rhine ;
The peak of the mountain sparkles
In the fading sunset-shine.

The loveliest wonderful Maiden
On high is sitting there,
With golden jewels braiden,
And she combs her golden hair.

With a golden comb sits combing,
And ever the while sings she
A marvellous song through the gloaming
Of magical melody.

It hath caught the boatman, and bound him
In the spell of a wild sad love ;
He sees not the rocks around him,
He sees only her above.

The waves through the pass sweep swinging,
But boatman or boat is none ;
And this with her mighty singing
The LORELEY hath done.

THE MOUNTAIN VOICE.

ALL sadly through the stern ravine
There rides a horseman brave :
“ Ah ! draw I near to my darling's arms,
Or near to the gloomy grave ? ”
The echo answer gave :
“ To the gloomy grave ! ”

And as the horseman onward rode
A deep sigh heaved his breast :

“ If I thus early go to the grave,
Well, in the grave is rest !”
The answering voice confessed :
“ In the grave is rest !”

Slowly adown the rider's cheek
A tear of sad thought fell :
“ If but in the grave there is rest for me,
For me in the grave 'tis well !”
Whereto the echoing knell :
“ In the grave 'tis well !”

FOR many thousand ages
The steadfast stars above
Have gazed upon each other
With ever-mournful love.

They speak a certain language,
So beautiful, so grand,
Which none of the philologists
Could ever understand.

But I have learned it, learned it
For ever, by the grace
Of studying one grammar,
My heart's own darling's face.

IN the Rhine, in the beautiful river,
 The mighty shadow is thrown,
 With its great cathedral,
 Of holy and great Cologne.

One picture in the cathedral,
 On gilded leather wrought,
 Unto my life's wild sorrow
 Hath gracious comfort brought :

The dear Madonna, with floating
 Angels and flowers above ;
 The eyes and the lips and the contours
 Are all just those of my love.

THE Lotus-flower doth languish
 Beneath the sun's fierce light ;
 With drooping head she waiteth
 All dreamily for night.

The Moon is her true lover,*
 He wakes her with his glance :
 To him she unveils gladly
 Her gentle countenance.

* In the German, Moon, *Der Mond*, is masculine ; and Sun, *Die Sonne*, feminine.

She blooms and glows and brightens,
Intent on him above ;
Exhaling, weeping, trembling,
With ever-yearning love.

THE world is dull, the world is blind,
And daily grows more silly !
It says of you, my lovely child,
You are not quite a lily.

The world is dull, the world is blind,
And judges in stupid fashion :
It knows not how sweet your kisses are,
And how they burn with passion.

I BLAME thee not, a broken heart my lot,
O Love for ever lost ! I blame thee not.
Though thou art splendid with the diamonds bright,
There falls no gleam within thy heart's deep night.

I've known this long. I saw thee in clear dream,
And saw black night within thy soul supreme,
And saw the worm still fretting at thy heart ;
I saw how wretched, O my love, thou art.

Yes, thou art wretched, and I blame thee not ;—
My Love, we both must ever wretched be !
Until death's peace concludes our fatal lot,
My Love, we both must ever wretched be !

I see the scorn which round thy pale lip weaves,
And see thine eyes outlighten haughtily,
And see the pride with which thy bosom heaves ;
And wretched art thou still, wretched as I.

In secret round thy mouth a pain-thrill steals,
Through tears held back thine eyes can scarcely see,
The haughty breast a bleeding heart conceals ;
My Love, we both must ever wretched be.

THE violets blue of the eyes divine,
And the rose of the cheeks as red as wine,
And the lilies white of the hands so fine,
They flourish and flourish from year to year,
And only the heart is withered and sere.

THE earth is so fair and the heaven so blue,
And the breeze is breathing so warmly too,
And the flowers of the meadow are gleaming through

The sparkling and glittering morning dew,
And the people are joyous wherever I view :
Yet would were I in the grave at rest
Folded close to my lost Love's breast.

I GAZED upon her picture,
Absorbed in dreams of gloom,
Till those belovèd features
Began to breathe and bloom.

About her lips came wreathing
That sweet, sweet smile I knew ;
The eyes were softly gleaming
With tears as fresh as dew.

And my tears sprang then also,
The dark cloud's rain was shed :
And, O my Love, I cannot
Believe that thou art dead !

A PINE-TREE standeth lonely
In the North on an upland bare ;
It standeth whitely shrouded
With snow, and sleepeth there :

It dreameth of a palm-tree,
Which far in the East alone
In mournful silence standeth
On its ridge of burning stone.

My darling, thou art flowerlike,
So tender, pure, and fair ;
I gaze on thee, and sadness
Steals on me unaware :

I yearn to lay my hands then
Upon thy head in prayer,
That God will keep thee ever
Thus tender, pure, and fair.

“ SAY, where is the maiden sweet,
Whom you once so sweetly sung,
When the flames of mighty heat
Filled your heart and fired your tongue ? ”

Ah, those flames no longer burn ;
Cold and drear the heart that fed ;
And this book is but the urn
Of the ashes of love dead.

THE old dream comes again to me :
With May-night stars above,
We two sat under the linden-tree
And swore eternal love.

Again and again we plighted troth,
We chattered, and laughed, and kissed ;
To make me well remember my oath
You gave me a bite in the wrist.

O darling with the eyes serene,
And with the teeth so white !
The vows were proper to the scene,
Superfluous was the bite.

MY darling, we sat together,
We two in our frail boat ;
The night was calm o'er the wide sea
Whereon we were afloat.

The Spectre-Island, the lovely,
Lay dim in the moon's mild glance ;
There sounded sweetest music,
There waved the shadowy dance.

It sounded sweeter and sweeter,
It waved there to and fro ;
But we slid past forlornly
Upon the great sea-flow.

My heart, my heart is mournful,
Yet joyously shines the May ;
I stand by the linden leaning,
High on the bastion grey.

The blue town-moat thereunder
Glides peacefully along ;
A boy in a boat is angling
And whistling a careless song.

Beyond, like a well-known picture,
All small and fair are strewed
Houses and gardens and people,
Oxen and meadows and wood.

The maidens bleach the linen,
And dance in the grass for glee ;
The mill-wheel scatters diamonds,
Its far hum reaches me.

Upon the hoary tower
A sentry-box stands low ;
A youth in his coat of scarlet
There paces to and fro.

He trifles with his musket,
Which gleams in the sunshine red ;
He shoulders and presents it—
I would he shot me dead.

QUESTIONS.

By the sea, by the desert midnight sea,
Stands a youth,
His heart full of anguish, his head full of doubt,
And with sullen lips he questions the waves :—

“ Oh, solve to me the Riddle of Life,
The painful primordial riddle,
Which already has racked so many heads,
Heads in hieroglyphic caps,
Heads in turbans and black berrets,
Heads in wigs, and myriad other
Poor perspiring human heads ;
What is the meaning of Man ?

Whence comes he? Whither goes he?
Who dwells there above in the golden stars?"

The waves murmur their everlasting murmur,
The wind sweeps, the clouds scud,
The stars glitter indifferent and cold,
And a fool awaits an answer.

As I each day in the morning
Pass by that house of thine,
It gives me joy, thou darling,
When you at the window shine.

Your dark brown eyes they ask me,
As only sweet eyes can:
Who art thou, and what ails thee,
Thou sickly foreign man?

I am a German poet,
Well known beyond the Rhine;
When men the best names mention,
Be sure they mention mine.

And what ails me, thou darling,
Ails many beyond the Rhine;

When men the worst woes mention,*
Be sure they mention mine.

You lovely fisher-maiden,
Bring now the boat to land :
Come here and sit beside me,
We'll prattle hand in hand.

Your head lay on my bosom,
Nor be afraid of me :
Do you not trust all fearless
Daily the great wild sea ?

My heart is like the sea, dear,
Has storm, and ebb, and flow,
And many purest pearl-gems
Within its dim depth glow.

THE moon is fully risen,
And shineth over the sea ;
And I embrace my darling,
Our hearts swell free.

* Not the worst *instances* of woe ; else this would be peculiar which he has just declared common : but the worst *kinds* of woe ; thus claiming for his people unusual sensibility, or hinting that they are inordinately oppressed.

In the arms of the lovely maiden
 I lie alone on the strand :
 “What sounds in the breeze’s sighing ?
 Why trembles your white hand ?”

“That is no breeze’s sighing,
 That is the mermaid’s song,
 The singing of my sisters
 Whom the sea hath drowned so long.”

WHERE ?

WHERE shall once the wanderer weary
 Meet his resting-place and shrine ?
 Under palm-trees by the Ganges ?
 Under lindens of the Rhine ?

Shall I somewhere in the desert
 Owe my grave to stranger hands ?
 Or upon some lonely sea-shore
 Rest at last beneath the sands ?

Ever onward ! God’s wide heaven
 Must surround me there as here ;
 And like death-lamps o’er me swinging
 Night by night the stars burn clear.

BODY AND SOUL.

THE poor Soul speaketh to its Clay :
I cannot leave thee thus ; I'll stay
With thee, with thee in death will sink
And black Annihilation drink.
Thou still hast been my second I,
Embracing me so lovingly ;
A satin feast-robe round my form
Doubled with ermine soft and warm.
Woe's me ! I dare not face the fact—
Quite disembodied, quite abstract,
To loiter as a blessèd Naught
Above there in the realm of Thought,
Through Heavenly halls immense and frigid,
Where the Immortals dumb and rigid
Yawn to me as they clatter by
With leaden clogs so wearily.
Oh, it is horrible ! Oh, stay,
Stay with me, thou beloved Clay !

PRE657
C57
1800

The Body to the poor Soul said :
Oh, murmur not, be comforted !
We all should quietly endure
The wounds of Fate, which none can cure.
I was the lamp's wick, and to dust
Consume ; but thou, the Spirit, must
Be saved with care, and lifted far
To shine in Heaven, a little star
Of purest light. I am but cinder,
Mere matter, rubbish, rotten tinder,
Losing the shape we took at birth,
Mouldering again to earth in earth.
Now, fare thee well, and grieve no more !
Perchance life is not such a bore
In Heaven, as you expect up there.
If you should meet the old Great Bear
(Not Meyer-Bear *) i' the starry climes,
Greet him from me a thousand times !

* Meyerbeer, the great musician. Heine in his later years lost no opportunity for a skit at him. The poet is also alluding to his own "Atta-Troll," whose title-hero is a bear.



