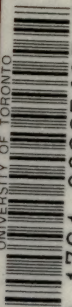


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Hannah C. Preston Macgoun A.S.W.

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Mr Macgillivray

With his warmest love

The Edinburgh Hydrothrace

17<sup>th</sup> November 1907.



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PENTHESILEA

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR.*

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THE DEATH OF ADAM.

ODES.

PORPHYRION, AND OTHER POEMS.

LYRIC POEMS.



# PENTHESILEA

A POEM BY

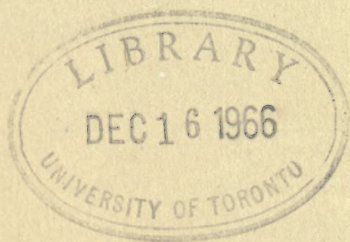
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To  
SIDNEY COLVIN

## ARGUMENT

PENTHESILEA, queen among the Amazons inhabiting the Euxine coast of Phrygia, having unwittingly killed her own sister, and the fame of Hector's death by Achilles being brought over the mountains to the ears of her people, leads her chosen Amazons to Troy; she means to challenge the victorious Achilles, and in battle throw away her life for atonement of her sister's blood. Priam receives her, at first with doubt and incredulity of the prowess of a woman, then, persuaded by her speech, welcomes with some rekindlings of hope. At night she is visited by Andromache, who had supposed her a goddess come to avenge her husband's slaying. Their mutual anger, relenting, and farewell. On the morrow the Greeks, unready for battle, are set on by Trojans and Amazons and driven back to their ships, till Achilles, at first scorning to fight in such war, assails the Trojans in the centre; their confused rout and slaughter on the banks of Simois; Penthesilea's vain quest of Achilles through the disordered battle, till at last he returns from pursuit; their meeting and single combat: the queen dies by his hand, but in dying fills the soul of her conqueror with love.

## PENTHESILEA

### I.—THE COMING OF THE AMAZONS

DARK in the noonday, dark as solemn pines,  
A circle of dark towers above the plain,  
Troy sat bereaved ; her desolation seemed  
To have drawn slowly down in sultry drops  
The sky of gathered and contracted cloud,  
Hung silent, close as is a cavern roof,  
That deep in heavy forests, lost from day,  
Echoes the groans of a hurt lioness  
For her slain cubs ; she fills her den with groans,  
Stretching her hoarse throat to the flinty floor ;  
And with like lamentable echo, barred  
Within the great gates, dirge of women swelled  
Along the dark-door'd streets that lately shone  
With Hector's splendour as he strode to war,  
Wailing for Hector fallen ; upon towers



Unchampioned men grasped idle spears and groaned.  
But in the heart of Troy dead silence dwelt.  
There to a temple, throned on a green mound,  
Andromache was stolen ; there she bowed  
Her widowed forehead, pressed upon the strength  
Of a square pillar ; not a sob, nor sigh  
Passed from her, but immovably inclined  
She waited yet expected nought ; that hour  
Of grief was on her, when the exhausted flood  
Of passion ebbs, and the still shaken heart  
Hungers for staunching silence : then the touch  
Of patient cold stone is desired like bliss.  
So mourned Andromache, unmoved to know  
If earth that lacked her Hector, still endured,  
Absorbed into the vastness of a grief  
Only by its own majesty consoled.  
Crouched at her feet the child Astyanax  
Played on the slabbed floor with the creviced dust,  
Or followed with soft parted lips and eyes  
Bemused, the foiled flight of a swallow's wings  
That, strayed within, sighed swiftly up and down  
The temple gloom ; there was no other stir

In that hushed place of stone, while the slow day  
Declining moved the sullen cope of heaven  
With westering breezes ; under brooding cloud  
Light newly trembled ; looking up, the boy  
Saw wide sheen in the portico that laid  
Long shadows from the pillars. It was then  
A faint and clear sound in the distance rose,  
He knew not what, but wondered, as full soon  
Troy seemed to stir and waken ; it drew nigh  
Up the steep street, a noise of horses' hooves  
Numerous and gallant with the ring of arms.  
He rose up, and on soft feet tripping stole  
To the porch-pillars, looked forth, and returned  
Bright-eyed, back to his mother ; thrice he twitched  
Her robe, ere she perceived ; then slow she turned  
Her face down on him ; bending so, she changed  
As a sky changes when the unmuffled moon  
Steals tender over April's vanished rain ;  
And love, older than sorrow, filled her eyes  
A mother's, not a widow's now. With awe  
In his quick voice the boy cried, ' Mother, come !  
The Goddesses ride up to fight for us.'

Andromache smiled on him ; though she heard,  
Scarce sought to understand ; and yet it seemed  
Those soft lips brought an answer from afar  
As oracle or dream to her sad soul,  
That long had waited ; she too heard that sound,  
And as impetuous freshet in the spring  
Breaks on a stagnant stream, the bright blood-warm  
Extravagance of hope shot like a pain  
Through her dulled body ; then her heart recoiled  
On doubt and trembled, though the noise now near,  
Mingled with cries and swarm of running feet,  
Drew her steps on ; beside her pressed the boy  
Exchanging wonder with his mother's eyes,  
Till on one knee she dropt, and holding him  
In jealous-clasping arms close to her breast  
Looked to the door ; now thronging heads appeared  
Beneath the temple steps ; and they beheld  
Framed in the wide porch men and women pass,  
And over them, proceeding proud and fair,  
Like goddesses indeed, a wondrous troop  
That glorified the sunlight as they rode  
With easy hips bestriding their tall steeds,



Whose necks shone as they turned this way and that,  
Bold riders on bold horses ; light mail-coats  
They wore upon loose tunics, over which  
Where to the throat the stormy bosom swelled  
A virgin shoulder gleamed ; for now the fire  
Of evening, struck back from the temple wall,  
Burned ardent hues upon them, moving past  
Untamable as their own steeds that moved  
With them, and beautiful with ice-bright eyes,  
Glancing around them strange, and tossing hair ;  
Flashed upon bronze bits of the horses, flamed  
Along smooth brown wood of their javelin-shafts  
To the bright points, and radiantly repelled  
From hilt and helm, glowed changing upon shields  
Like moons in August, like a hundred moons  
Of moving brilliance ; scarves of coral red  
Blown from the baldric, trembled like the fire  
In eyes that kindled the beholder's soul  
To presage of what fury these fierce queens  
Should madden with, when they were loosed to dance  
The dance of battle, matched with men or gods,  
Wild as the white brooks when they leap and shout

In tumult, tossing down the wintry hills.  
So filled with wonder the thronged faces saw  
Those terrible and lovely huntresses,  
Mid whom one rode yet queenlier than the rest,  
With steadfast eyes superb ; a spirit crowned  
She seemed, the votaress of some far desire ;  
She turned not like the others, but rode on  
Like one that follows a star fixt in heaven,  
Fixt as her thought is ; whom beholding now  
Mourning Andromache with closer arms  
Entwined her boy ; her heart was full, it pressed  
Against her side, invoking that strange hope  
That here was the avenger of her loss,  
A sword brought from afar ; she leaned at gaze,  
Following that form, impassioned to divine  
What purpose charmed her from the world of men,  
When lo ! the street was empty, all had passed.  
She rose and with uncertain motion stood,  
Swayed like a slender poplar when the south  
Tremulously bows it, over her dear child,  
Who clung upon her fingers looking up  
Wide-eyed with joy : together they went forth.

Already fast as over an ebb shore  
The fresh tide rolls up with a rising wind  
Invading dry ledge and deserted pool,  
And ere the seaward rocks be overstormed,  
Streams gliding with a soft stir far inland,  
So fast through Troy the stir of rumour ran  
To every hushed house ; every chieftain heard  
Indoors and sent forth messengers to see.  
Even to Priam's palace it was borne.  
Then there was hurrying through the empty courts,  
And women drawing water at the wells  
Set down their pitchers ; boys ran out ; it seemed  
As if a city of sleepers sprang to life,  
A thousand beating hearts. Priam alone  
Heard not at all, for none was with him now,  
But solitary in that pillared hall  
Where he had feasted with his glorious sons  
In days of old, sat patient, mournful, rapt,  
His chilly limbs warmed by a cloak's long fold,  
In such December solitude of mind  
As when the last leaf glides to frozen earth  
And all the boughs are bare : the days to come



Were darkness, and the past days like a sea  
Of roaring waters ; vacant unto each  
He mused upon the evening gold that fell  
Aslant a pillar's roundness, holding up  
One hand against the fire that burned beside.  
He heard not, saw not, though without the sound  
Of opened gates and murmuring hubbub fast  
Increasing on the distance, gathered in  
As to the silent centre where he sat  
Alone in gloom, nor noted how behind  
Came stealing steps ; Cassandra first, the shunned  
Of all the happy, who yet disbelieved  
The fate of her foreseeing ; others next  
Of Priam's house, mid whom the heavenly eyes  
Of Helen, like a mirror to the doom  
Coming on beauty till the end of time,  
Shone in their sadness ; beautiful she leaned  
On fair flushed Paris of the golden head.  
They as they entered stood expectantly  
Pausing, although the King still sat entranced,  
Clouded in sorrow's deep and distant reign ;  
Until Cassandra touched him on the arm

And his eyes woke ; a sad, astonished gaze  
He lifted ; in that moment the far door  
Was opened : lo, upon the threshold gleamed  
The splendour of an armèd Amazon  
Coming towards him ; her eyes sought his own :  
Slowly, and yet without a pause she came ;  
And those that saw her deeply breathed ; she moved  
As if a clearness from within inspired  
Her motion, challenging their inmost thoughts.  
Simplicity ennobled all her ways ;  
The heart leapt at the turning of her head ;  
But in her eyes a soul, deep as the night  
Filled by the beauty of assembling stars,  
Night on lone mountains, could shine out sword-keen  
As now, though touched for Priam's woe she gazed,  
While, slowly stirred, he lifted up to her  
His brow, and it was kingly : now he seemed,  
Though seated, in his stature to resume  
Old majesty ; for princes of the East  
Had sued to him, and Asia sought his word  
To hearken to its wisdom. Some few steps  
The Amazon approached ; at last she spoke.

‘ Art thou the royal Priam ? ’ ‘ What seek’st thou,’  
He answered, ‘ of an old unhappy man ? ’  
‘ I seek,’ her voice rose ardently, ‘ to bear  
My arms against Achilles in thy cause,  
To hazard in the venture all I may  
For Troy and thee, O King. This is my quest.’  
Proudly she spoke ; but he, as old men will,  
Because he wondered, was displeased, nor knew  
How to rub clear the dimmed sense of his grief,  
And pausing half incredulous replied,  
‘ What hast thou said ? Abuse not these old ears.  
Thou know’st that I have suffered—who art thou ?  
A woman ! Art a woman, and would lift  
Thy hand against Achilles ? Never hand  
Of man prevailed against him yet, and thou  
A woman made to bear and suckle babes,’—  
‘ A woman,’ she broke in, ‘ but not as those  
Who spin at home and blench to see a sword.  
Penthesilea am I called, and am  
An Amazon, and Amazons I rule.  
They call me queen ; but I like them was reared  
To suffer and to dare ; my body bathed



In cold Thermodon can outrace his speed ;  
And I have slain the lion in his lair,  
Yea, and have fought with men and have prevailed.'

Admiring murmur followed on her words,  
From those that hearkened with hope-kindled eyes.  
Priam said only 'Hector fell.' That word,  
Slow-spoken, not to her, but in the dark  
Of his own grieving mind, dropt like a stone  
Down a well's echoing silence. There was pause.  
Just in that moment stole Andromache  
Over the threshold ; then her heart drank wine,  
For she beheld Penthesilea there,  
Moved but not shaken, like a Goddess stand  
Of all regarded, while her spirit seemed  
To swell within her on some secret wave  
Of strength, and lifting up her queenly head  
She spoke like music through the darkening hall.  
'One certain night I stood upon our hills  
Before the dawn was come, and I beheld  
All the stars over me from south to north  
And east to west, each in his place, as they

Had shone before I was or thou, O King.  
And as I looked, one fell : far down the sky  
It shot in fire to nothing. Who might think  
One of heaven's splendours, fixed in heaven, could fall?  
O Priam, even Achilles, even he,  
This far-renowned one, shall be overthrown  
For all his glory and his might, perhaps  
By hand unguessed, and thou behold him fall,  
It may be by another, or by me.'

Yet Priam would not be persuaded, nay,  
Clinging to his old lamenting thoughts, he cried :  
'There was none brave as Hector, and he fell,  
Hector is fallen ; snap all swords in two,  
Break all your bows asunder, as my heart  
Is broken : it were better. What avails ?  
What wouldst thou, Queen ?' Yet even as he spoke,  
Gazing upon the noble Amazon  
The strong bonds of his grief were loosed awhile.  
There seemed a courage in those shapely arms,  
In that clear brow, which to refuse might be  
Unpardoned of the gods : her clarion words

Rang through him still ; and as a traveller tired  
Vacantly resting at the long day's end  
Under the hollow of a stream's high bank  
Hears rushing over him the beat of wings  
And sees a wild swan snowy-throated take  
His effortless great flight in the sun's beams,  
So Priam saw her ! bound afar to lands  
Of morning, like the beauty of those wide wings,  
Free, where he might not follow, left alone  
In the fast-falling night ; but oh, not so,  
Not bound afar, but at his feet, with eyes  
Of proud petition, of a sweet command,  
Penthesilea like a vision stayed  
And her voice breathed one silver summons, Hope !

A hush took all who listened, then they stirred.  
Only Cassandra, crouching by the King,  
Hid her dark face ; the others, nearer drawn,  
Looked upon Priam, and his soul was moved,  
But not as they ; his gaze now at the full  
Answered the clear magnanimous regard  
Of her that spoke with pity, as he replied,



‘What sad word hast thou uttered! Oh, thy lips  
Are young that shape it, ere they understand.  
Look on me that was once called happy, Queen!  
What knowest thou of ill? I have borne more  
Than my young fears, stretched by some childish wrong,  
Imagined that the whole world could contain,  
Or this frail flesh that pens us in our place  
Find possible to bear. I have been taught.  
None was so blest in sons, and none so curst.  
And now I know not if the Gods be kind  
Or if ’tis the last cruelty they use,  
That having heaped such evil on our heads  
They lend us power to bear it. O speak not!  
For I can teach thee how men learn to bear;  
’Tis not with fortitude of hope increased,  
’Tis with dulled sense that thickens on the soul  
And all its longings pined in frost that cramps  
The quivering heart up, till it feel no more.  
I am so knitted in harsh fortune’s root  
As tottering towers, in bitter fibre bound  
That props what it has killed. Yet I endure.  
Why wilt thou trouble me? For thy young face

Pricks with its courage like reviving blood  
In a numbed arm. I was at peace, O Queen.'

He ended, and the glorious Amazon,  
Moved even to tears, stept toward him and knelt down  
And touched his knees, entreating : 'Let me learn,  
Even though the price be of such utmost pain  
As thou hast tasted : I would prove my heart,  
That is prepared for all things : let me go !  
I am not all so ignorant of grief.  
Grant me this boon, that I may fight for thee.'  
Priam heard marvelling ; bending o'er her, soft  
He laid his old hands on her youthful hair,  
Answering : 'Is thy heart so fixed indeed ?  
Ah, child, is not life sweet ? Turn again home  
In honour, for so surely as I live  
And as Troy stands, thou shalt have honour here.  
The hazard is too much. I, that have ploughed  
This heavy and hard furrow into Time  
Cannot turn back, but thou canst. Wilt thou not ?  
None shall reproach thee. O too much ere now,  
Too much, too dear blood in my cause is spilt.

And thou art dear and shalt be always dear  
And thy name named with blessing in my house.'  
Penthesilea lifted up her head.  
She looked on him and smiled. 'I thank thee, King.  
And thou art wise and I am foolish, yet  
Though Heaven in thunder did forbid me this  
My heart is fixed.' Then Priam sighed, she rose,  
And he made answer: 'Be it as thou wilt  
And I will say some good thing of the Gods  
Since they have raised a woman's heart so high.  
Bring torches, for the Queen shall feast with us  
This night, and on the morrow if she will  
Go with our battle forth. Bid Troy prepare.'  
So Priam ordered, and the chiefs obeyed.  
Through all the city ran the word for war,  
And swords refurbished gleamed in kindled eyes  
At hope of help unlooked for: Troy was glad,  
And all the Amazons that night held feast  
Among the captains in the torch-lit halls  
Of Priam's royal house. At his right hand,  
Admired of all, Penthesilea sat,  
Still in her bright mail, though unhelmeted;



For when she had bathed, they brought her women's  
robes

But she refused ; for in her heart she thought,  
I shall be deemed but as a woman is  
And they will put no faith in me for deeds.

How strange the hush was of the glimmering room  
In a high tower apart, when after feast  
And song were ended, and all gone to rest,  
Penthesilea sat beside the bed  
Whereon her coat of mail, now laid aside,  
Shone keenly crumpled into glittering folds  
Next the smooth texture of a coverlet  
Embroidered in dim Indian town with shapes  
Of golden lions thronged by suns and stars ;  
A Tyrian rug was soft to her bare feet  
When kneeling by her side Harmothoe  
Had loosed their sandal-thongs, and bathed them both  
In warm clear water from a brazen bowl ;  
Who now was gone ; and the Queen, left alone,  
Stood up, and let the loose white robe fall free,  
Holding her strong hands clasped behind her head,

While through their fingers streamed the heavy hair :  
She sighed,—a fierce sigh panted from her breast,  
Like some imprisoned leopard's, ill at ease  
In those rich walls that held her from the air,  
And with faint subtlety of old perfume  
Wrought on her sense remembrance, as through dream,  
Of what dead women fair in idle hours  
Had here adorned them, pacing with soft feet  
The coloured stones inlaid upon the floor,  
Parting these curtains with their silver rings  
To gaze upon a mirror, kneeling down  
Beside the ebon coffer, to search out  
Within its depths of robe laid over robe  
Some beaten armlet of Assyrian gold,  
Jade-brooch or branches of rose coral brought  
From far bays of Arabian Astabel ;  
Foreign and fair devices ; dream on dream,  
In the low lamp-flame's wavering, oppressed  
The panting free heart of the Amazon.  
Thus as she leaned with heavy-lidded eyes  
Backward, and into grandeur slow rebelled  
The strong mould of her breast beneath the throat,

Andromache stole in to her ; she stood  
With wondering gaze fixt faltering in the door  
A moment, then, hope trembling at her lips,  
While the warm blood rushed up her cheek, she ran  
Swift to the other's knees, and falling cried,  
' O Goddess, help ! Ah, surely thou art come  
From heaven to avenge me, for the gods in heaven  
Loved Hector well ; thou hast a woman's shape  
But mov'st not like a woman, no, nor look'st.  
O certify my heart, my wounded heart,  
Fill me, for I am empty ; turn again  
The water of life into this stony bed  
Where my days used to run. I am alone.  
Reveal thyself, if to none else, to me.'

Penthesilea with stern looks amazed  
With both hands on her shoulders put her off,  
Saying, ' Who art thou ? What wild thought is thine ?  
Rise up, kneel not, embrace not so my knees,  
My arms are stronger, nay, look up, behold,'  
Then with a milder voice continuing,  
' I am no goddess, feel, my heart beats quick ;



I am not calm as the gods are in heaven.  
This flesh is mortal, strike and it will bleed,  
Has bled ere now ; and feels thy wound and throbb'd  
To hear thy supplication, and to see  
How like a bird thou droppedst to my feet !'

Andromache sank backward on her knees,  
Wide-eyed with fearful doubt, then slowly rose  
And stood apart, cold now as if despair  
Had closed about her sudden as dark night ;  
Like thunder-drops her words fell desolate :  
' O my great hope, how easy was thy lure,  
How sweet and now how bitter to my taste !  
The folly of my fond heart bites my heart.  
The gods are loth to be revealed when they  
Take among men disguises : but oh no,  
Thou art a woman, thy face speaks the truth.  
And yet, yet, if a woman, whence and why  
Comest thou, what madness pricks thee so to dare  
What scarce a God might compass, when my own  
Great Hector whom none else could vanquish fell ?'  
But now the Amazon regarding her

More earnestly, spoke heedless of her cry,  
'I saw thee in the hall where Priam was.  
Art thou not Priam's daughter?' 'Hector's wife,'  
Answered the other. 'Then I know thy name,  
Andromache men call thee; and I know  
Thy wound: sit by me, be my friend to-night,  
Tell me of this Achilles, I would know  
What manner of a man is he who sounds  
In the world's ear so terrible. Is he  
Fair-haired, as I have heard, or swarthy-cheeked  
Like those men I have matched my strength against,  
The Gargareans? Do his inches tower  
Much over mine? How goes he into fight?  
On horseback, as we Amazons, or afoot?  
Or standing in a chariot hurls his spear?  
Tell me of all these things, that I may know  
And be aware and in the battle take  
What vantage may be mine among the Greeks  
The better to avenge thee, if fate will.'

Andromache said no word for a space,  
Facing her with dulled eyes and mind confused;

Then to her lips a word outleapt her thought  
Fledged with a bitter meaning: she exclaimed,  
'Thou lovest him!' The queen laughed, a scornful  
    laugh,

'O woman, have you none but woman's thoughts?  
Because you are weak and have such clinging arms,—  
I felt them soft and trembling round my knees—  
Deem you such weakness rules an Amazon?  
What is this love you are so quick to find  
The key of all you cannot understand?  
To tremble and to wait on a man's mood  
And seek I know not what bliss in his arms  
That fondle you a plaything, far from all  
The thoughts that make him strong! Such thoughts  
    I have,

Such will to tame and conquer, such delight  
In battle, such resolve never to yield  
My soul to any other's servitude.  
Love, love! Think you I have been wont to bathe  
My body in snow-brooks to temper it  
True as a sword-blade, slept on forest leaves,  
Raced the wild colts to break them, chased the deer,

The lion even, seen the red blood spirt  
Of men into whose murderous eyes I looked  
And did not quail, think you that such as I  
Have hung my life's joy on another's smile,  
Pining with fancies such as in close walls  
You women fill slow days with feeding on,  
Who lie upon soft couches and dream dreams ?'

She ended with an anger-burning eye  
Standing dilated in her beauteous scorn  
Over against Andromache, who shook  
Her head, distrustfully insisting still,  
'Yet, yet thou lovest him.' Suddenly a fire  
Swept o'er her and impatiently she cried,  
'When thou hast borne a man-child, speak of love !  
Thou knowest not, thou, though in thine ignorant heart  
The blind beginnings of that selfsame power  
Compel thee where it wills, where thou wouldst not.  
Thou hast not loved, thou hast not known a man,  
Yet a man's glory, a man's imagined form  
Has drawn thee from thy mountains even here,  
To meet him face to face. Ask thy heart why !



Hate, hope, fear, longing, 'tis all one ; 'tis love  
Betwixt a man and woman. Ah, didst think,  
Penthesilea, to escape? But now  
Necessity has overtaken thee.

Achilles masters and o'ertops thy mind  
Who wouldst be wooed not with soft words but spears.  
And thou must seek him. To thy wooing go!  
But oh, thou goest into a fell embrace,  
For he will clutch thee as a hawk a hare,  
And thy bride-bed shall be the bloody ground.'

With that harsh word she would have turned to go  
But stayed upon the threshold ; for the voice  
Of Penthesilea called her, changing now  
To a deep cry, not angered nor in scorn  
But grievous, as though suddenly her heart  
Imperiously swelled beyond its bounds  
And loosed its secret storm and sweetness out,  
The proud voice breaking into truth and pain.  
'No, no ! not so, thou shalt not leave me so,  
Thou dost not know me ; far away thy words  
Fly over me, they hurt me not at all.

Yet, didst thou know my heart—I am not wise  
In love, thou say'st, yet I am wise in grief.  
'Twas not Achilles drew me ; it was grief  
That drove me hither, grief brims up my heart  
And blinded me to thy grief : sit by me,  
Andromache, and hear me : nay thou must.  
I had a sister, whom indeed I loved,  
For we were twinned in thought and act and soul,  
My bedfellow and playmate ; oft have we  
To one another brought a timely arm  
Faint in the heat of battle or of chase.  
But oh, it was this arm, that should have first  
Withered on the shoulder, this right arm that sped  
The bolt that slew her, my Hippolyta !  
She had outstript me on the woody hills  
Hunting a hind that fled us ; I saw not ;  
But where the boughs were stirring in the brake  
I drew my bow, the arrow leapt, I ran,  
Parted the hazels, and beheld her there  
Lying beyond, the arrow in her side,  
Where still I see her on soaked yellow ferns  
Under a thorn, trailed with black bryony,

So near a pool, the fingers of her hand  
Could touch the trembling harebells on its brink.  
She bled within,—there was no blood at all  
To soil her body that still seemed to live—  
Nor gave a cry, but with one hand she beat  
On the wet ground a little, then was still.  
But when I took her by the hand, it hung  
Cold in my grasp, though close I cherished it,  
And kissed her cheek, her mouth a hundred times,  
Calling upon her name, Hippolyta :  
Calling the dead that heard not.—I have seen  
When Euxine on a sudden rises black  
With storm, a sail that sought our haven swept  
Out into darkness, from the cliffs have watched  
How it flew onward fearfully, far out  
Blind under sheets of tempest and was lost.  
From that hour I drove like that driving ship  
Borne on, I recked not whither, over wastes  
Of time that have no harbour and no peace.  
I fled, and yet I feared being thought to flee.  
Therefore did I imagine to my soul  
Some dear atonement that should make my name

Burn on the lips of men ; set up my mark  
And that pursued, till the usurping hope  
Of glory with a glozing tongue sometimes  
Flattered my dark thoughts to forget : but oh,  
It is myself that am pursued, the hounds  
Of memory are upon me,—Break this off.  
Too much is spoken. Yet my heart is eased.  
Forget this weakness, tell not to another  
Penthesilea's sorrow, for from now  
She puts it from her, she is strong again.  
Nay, from my childhood up 'twas in my soul  
The dearest hope to do a thing of fame.  
To-morrow I will slay thy husband's slayer,  
Or gladly, if the fates refuse, will die.'

While she was speaking, sad Andromache  
Changed in her countenance, her soft bosom swelled  
And her eyes brightening were soon dimmed with tears.  
At last she broke forth : ' O unhappy Queen,  
Pardon ! ' But ere another word could pass  
Her lips, there was a babbling cry without,  
Soft feet came running to the door, and there



Parting the heavy curtain, stood the child  
Astyanax, who ran to her and called,  
‘ O Mother, I have found thee. Come to bed ;  
I woke and could not find thee, and was afraid.’  
The old nurse following at his heels began  
To chide him, but Andromache embraced  
Her boy and kissed him ; he looked wondering up  
Now at the Amazon and spoke in awe,  
‘ It is the Goddess, mother ’ ; when again  
She hugged him close, and gentle came her voice,  
‘ Penthesilea, pardon ! I have erred,  
My hope was blind and my despair was blind.  
I dreamed of Gods come down to succour me.  
Lo, here is my avenger ! ’ and she held  
The boy before her, while the warrior queen  
Admiring his bold limbs and fearless gaze  
That wandered to the splendour of the mail  
Lying on the bed, uplifted with a smile  
The sword beside it, saying, ‘ Wilt thou fight  
With such a sword when thou art grown a man ? ’  
Whereat he gravely answered to her face,  
‘ Yea, I am Hector’s son.’ Andromache

Drawing him towards her, with warm kisses, spoke :  
‘ I keep thy father’s sword for thee ; but now  
Thou must to bed and sleep. Sleep also thou,  
Penthesilea ; and to-morrow morn  
Eat with me ere thou go, and thou shalt have  
All such as Hector’s heart delighted in  
When he went forth to battle. Fare thee well.

Penthesilea was alone. She turned ;  
Lo, in the corner the moon’s wandered beam  
Lay gentle, like the soul of solitude.  
She drew a curtain ; over earth the night  
Rose naked ; and she looked with longing eyes  
Past the low plain, where Simois wound his stream  
To choke in marsh mist and the creeping ooze,  
Up to the mountain tops, and far beyond  
Saw in her memory clear a certain glen  
Where snows among the pale cloud gleamed above  
Crag-pines, but from the spongy mosses sprang  
Tall ash and chestnut, plundered by the gusts  
Of autumn to let fall gold leaves adrift  
Upon the young Thermodon, that between

Grey boulders, dancing in his frolic race  
Over the abrupt edge of a gloomy gulf,  
Leapt and was lost ; but lost in splendour ! so  
Should her life be ennobled in its end,  
Lifting her heart she prayed, and in her mind  
Knew how, removed from all that others use  
And have their joy in, she must fix her course  
One way, since exiles in the world of men  
Heroic hearts are unto the end alone.

## II.—THE BATTLE

WATERS of Asia, westward-beating waves  
Of estuaries, and mountain-warded straits,  
Whose solitary beaches long had lost  
The ashen glimmer of that sinking moon,  
Listened in darkness to their own lone sound  
Moving about the shores of sleep, when first  
A faint light stole, and hills in the east emerged,  
A faint wind soon, born upon ocean, blew ;  
The cold stars faded ; high on forest slopes  
The goatherd woke in his thatched hut and shook  
His cloak about him, striding forth, and saw  
Pale over the round world of shadow tower  
The silently awakened presences  
Of Rhodope and Ida, dawning peaks  
Far opposite, that slowly flushed, till all  
The hill-thronged vales streamed out in sudden gold.  
He saw the young sun ripple into fire



Propontis, and the bright seas run like wine  
Into the dim west where aerial snows  
Of Athos hovered o'er a hundred isles ;  
Nearer, Troy towers stood gleaming ; in the plain  
The river smoked with mist, and cranes in flocks  
Rose through the sun-soaked vapour toward the sea  
Beyond the trench and trench-encircled huts  
And black-beaked Danaan ships upon the strand.

There in their huts and tents the Danaans woke,  
And streamed abroad in the keen morning air,  
But armed not yet ; their camp made holiday,  
With shields hung up, with heads unhelmeted.  
Greek challenged Greek to hurling of the quoit,  
To wrestle and race ; not a sole trumpet rang,  
For Troy since Hector's slaying kept her gates  
Fast-barred, nor sent her files forth to the war.  
So now the battle-weary Greeks prepared  
Their meal beside the trenches, eased at heart,  
When single scouts came running from the plain :  
' Arm, arm ! ' they cried, ' for Troy will fight to-day,  
The Amazons are come to succour them.'

Then sportful laughter leapt from mouth to mouth  
Among the gay-eyed youth, mocking to hear,  
And one to another shot a mirthful word.

‘The hawk is dead, the twittering swallows come  
To harry us ! We will go garlanded  
To battle and will hale these women home.’

So as for sport they armed ; but ere the word  
Had run through half the camp, Thersites rose,  
Filled with his dwarfish malice that rejoiced  
In quarrels without causes between friends,  
Pleased with the comedy of angry wits  
When wisest men show weakest ; he arose  
Glancing from side to side in evil glee,  
And went along the sea-beach till he came  
Where lay Achilles and his Myrmidons  
Who pitched apart, a separate host ; he went  
Alone, for all despised him though they feared  
His tongue, and coming to Achilles’ tent  
Called to him with a gibing pomp of speech.  
‘Hail, son of Thetis, slayer of thousands, hail !  
Hear what fresh tidings echoes through our camp !

Thy fame is flown into the Asian lands,  
And how thou didst, a goddess helping thee,  
Hew Hector down, provokes the envious world  
To emulate thy glory. Lo, to-day  
Troy's latest hope, there comes to challenge thee  
A woman.' Then Achilles laughed aloud,  
But he continued: 'Nay, it is a queen,  
Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons,  
Brings her wild squadrons to this faint-heart Troy,  
A queen of fame, with courage like a man's  
And more than woman's beauty. Agamemnon  
Already in his gloating thought adorns  
His palace with this all-outshining gem  
Captive to him. O Eagle of the Greeks  
Doth not the quarry please thee?' But again  
Achilles laughed: 'Come, yet another day  
I shall have peace and leisure from the fight.  
I wore a woman's robes once, feigned their ways  
In Scyros, and I know them, quick to fire  
Upon imagination of a deed  
That blazes through them like a strand of flax  
Left light as ashes, fluttering, when the hour strikes

For doing what a man's heart leaps to do.  
On such Achilles draws not. Get thee gone,  
Thersites, let the Greeks fight if they will  
With these mad women : but my heart is stirred  
To be alone and think upon the dead  
This day. Thy wry face puts me out of tune.  
Begone, thou crookedness, ere thou be driven !'  
So trudging back with ill smiles on his mouth  
Thersites went, well pleased to bear bad news.

Achilles stood at his tent-door ; the sea  
Before him smiled ; but heavy thoughts like rain  
Clouded his darkening spirit, as his eyes  
Looked homeward toward the far Thessalian coast  
Where he was nurtured in fresh upland glens  
Of Pelion, and his father even now  
Kept his old age, watching uncomforted ;  
But most the thought of dear Patroclus' dust  
Drew his soul down to sorrow ; pacing slow  
The shore he came to where the mound was heaped  
On those beloved ashes ; there he bade  
Fetch wine, and poured libation to the dead.



There came a runner hasting from the camp,  
Who cried : ‘ Achilles, arm ! The battle joins ;  
And half our host, yet unprepared, recoils  
Before the onset of those Amazons  
Whose horses rush upon them, and they cry,  
Where is Achilles ? Arm, and bring us aid.  
’Tis Agamemnon sends thee this command.’  
But Peleus’ son looked frowning and replied,  
‘ Go tell the King I heed not his command  
Nor any man’s ; to-day my sword is sheathed.’  
With that he turned him to his grief ; the peal  
Of distant horn and crying of many cries,  
All the harsh drone of battle muttering swelled  
Beyond the trench and rows of stranded ships  
Half-sunk in sand, that with their rampart shut  
The beach into its calm of little waves  
Falling and hushing ; but to Achilles’ ear  
That roar was vain and hateful ; and he drew  
His cloak over his head, and cried with groans,  
‘ O to what end, what end ? Must our souls beat  
Their high-attempered force out, and keen edge  
Blunt in a senseless turmoil, but to make

A pageant for the Gods? O friend, I lose  
How much more than thyself in losing thee!  
Have I appeased thy ghost, and given thee sleep  
By my so great revenge? Yet am not I  
Appeased. Because in courage and in strength  
The Gods have made me excellent beyond  
All other sons of men, this is my woe  
That none can match me, easy comes the crown  
Of glory, and I would toss it from my hand  
Into these careless waters, could I find  
Some stay and dear abode such as I found  
In those thoughts that together, O my friend,  
We held, and well-companioned, ever looked  
On through all days with never sated eyes.  
But now the splendour and the spur is gone.  
I hunger after thine untimeliness  
For which my tears were shed. O that these Gods  
Who smile on their calm seats in happy heaven  
Could be provoked to wrath and themselves come  
Against me armed; then were there scope and marge  
For this full fire to burn in, that consumes  
My soul in puny angers at the pomp

Of Agamemnon's puffed authority.

But me they mean for some inglorious doom,  
And even now, plotting my shame, have sent  
A woman to defy me !' Thus he cried  
Pacing in angry grief the calm sea-sand,  
While still the noise of war, rolled nearer, charged  
The air with jarring clamour ; noon was passed,  
And the sky strewn with slow clouds idly moved ;  
But ever louder at the trench it rose.

At last a second runner from the camp  
Came, and Achilles knew him as he ran ;  
It was a youth from white Iolcos town  
Of Peleus' kin ; he sobbed forth breathless words.  
' Come to the trench, Achilles, come and see !  
Not women are these Amazons but wolves !  
Like Mænads, maddened beyond strength of men,  
They rage and with amazement bear us down.'  
So both went forth to the great dyke and looked  
Over the trench ; then in Achilles' heart  
Grief straightway slumbered, and the cruel sting  
Of battle stirred in him : as one who sees

A wild bright bay of angry ocean storm  
With thunderous upleaping, surge on surge,  
Black rampart rocks, filling the brilliant air  
With sound and splendour, and joy charms his eyes,  
So now rejoiced Achilles ; not less fierce  
In onset than those waters snowy maned,  
The Amazons on their wild horses rode  
Storming upon the stubborn infantry,  
And by them, thrice-inspired, with shouts  
Of vengeance, the victorious ranks of Troy.  
Achilles looked far o'er the fray and laughed :  
' See how the sullen Ajax like a bear  
Stung by a bee-swarm, puzzles how to strike :  
But you shall see how these same Mænads fly  
When that I leap upon them. Say, I come.'  
Glad the youth turned, and ran back to the Greeks,  
And through them flew the word ' Achilles comes.'

Penthesilea through the press all day  
Had sought for Hector's slayer, and sought in vain,  
Though many a captain on her path in arms  
So tall, so splendid stood, that hope had sprung



Not twice or thrice alone that this was he  
She should defy ; the rest she scorned, yet some  
Essayed her prowess and came wounded off  
Or fell beneath her, and so trampled, died.  
Lo, as a potter strikes with eager hands  
Shapes of soft moulded clay, fired with the thought  
To make a thing more noble, so she smote  
Those meaner challengers, crushed idly down  
If haply from the wreck and tumult might  
Spring the desired Achilles ; her bright axe  
Shone over shouts and groans and maddened more  
The tempest of those headlong Amazons  
Who rushed black-maned upon spurred horses, where  
The spears bristled the thickest. They outmatched  
The fury of impetuous Diomed,  
Who even now where fierce Antandra struck  
Hardly avoided, catching at her rein,  
And was borne backward raging in his beard  
With half his helm-plumes shorn away ; with her  
Derione and Thermodossa, red  
With rapture of the sword, Antibrote,  
Hippodamia and Brontissa drave

Like screaming gusts of whirlwind when the air  
Fills with torn boughs of cracking oaks, and pines  
Shiver to ground uprooted ; thrust on thrust  
Met shrieks, where desperately tugging hands  
Clutching a spear were tost up suddenly  
As it stabbed home ; strange-echoing female cries  
Exulted ; in the van Harmothoe  
Called, as her axe-blows rang about her path  
Hard as the white hail when it strips the vines  
And their bruised clusters ; the gay Danaan youth,  
Spoiled of their sweet imagined sport, laughed now  
But as the mad in whom no mirth is, driven  
Before the Amazons in pale amaze  
And terror of their beauty and their strength,  
While crest on crest the Phrygians followed on.  
But most all marvelled, friend and foe, to see  
Clear where the foremost onset hurled and clanged,  
Penthesilea like a star in storm  
That through the black rents of a burying cloud  
Rides unimperilled ; for none stayed her, not  
Diomed, nor Ajax ; yet her quest despaired ;  
Achilles came not ; something failed the hour,

And ere he came 'twas lost : there at the trench  
In baffled frenzy the wild warring queens  
Perceived it in their hearts, and raged the more,  
Wanting the one goal's glory that should force  
Their last strength onward ; by so much as they  
Began to faint, by so much more the foe  
Rousing his stubborn manhood, clenched his ranks  
And bore them backward. Then Achilles came.  
He leapt upon the dyke, bright as a brand  
Breaking to sudden fire ; they saw him shine,  
They heard his great voice clear above the roar,  
And half the battle swerved along the plain  
Toward Simois. Far upon the city wall  
Andromache was gazing ; now she pressed  
Her hands upon her bounding heart in fear ;  
She saw her own host in the centre break  
Before Achilles and roll back ; in vain  
Penthesilea on the seaward wing  
Maintained the onset ; half her Amazons  
Caught in the frayed edge of the flight, were turned,  
Were flying ; nay, it seemed that earth and heaven  
Joined in that altered combat and pursuit,

For in the west the sun charged out of clouds  
And shot his rays forth over shadowy isles  
Set in the fiery seas, and flashed behind  
The Argives and their crested coming on,  
Dazzling the ranks of Troy, that broken now  
Reeled from the middle outward, here and there  
Stemmed by a chieftain's cry ; with hot-blood cheek  
The youthful Troilus was storming, shamed,  
And shouted : ' Rally at the river bank !'  
But now among the fleers thudding hooves,  
The maddened steeds of single Amazons,  
Headlong and helpless, thrice confounded them,  
In whom the terror of Achilles stung  
Sharp as a cruel rowel in the flanks  
Of those scared horses ; uncontrollably  
Crushed, wrestling, groaning, trodden, all were hurled  
Together wild as from a foundered ship  
A hundred men, flung forth, one moment strive  
Huddled in the hollow of one tremendous wave,  
The next upon its crest toss up to crash  
Down upon rocks they agonise to shun :  
So desperate in a huge blind tide of flight



Phrygian and Amazon together reeled.  
All in a moment they had reached the stream.  
A grove of oaks stood on the hither side,  
Where Troilus made rally some stout hearts  
Staying the rout. Woe then to him that fled,  
When in his back the pouncing arrow plunged  
And straight was bloody to the feathers ! woe  
To him that fled, there was no help for him !  
Ingloriously he fell, or pressed by shields  
Of comrades from behind was beaten down,  
Or on the crumbling bank was crushed by hooves  
That broke the bones in many a breathing breast  
Of strong men, trampled like tall mallow stalks  
At the stream's edge, broken like leafy boughs  
That cracked and splintered in the whirling stroke  
Of swords ; and many falling in the stream  
Meshed by long weeds were strangled in the ooze.  
Black-haired Antandra there, forced with the rout,  
Strove ever like a raging lioness  
To turn on her pursuers : on the bank  
She stayed her horse, and some Thessalian youth,  
Stung by her beauty, caught her by the belt

And dragged her from the saddle ; she, so spent,  
Let fall the axe from her dead-weary arms,  
But with sobbed breath caught him so desperately  
That both together in a blind embrace  
Fell plunging in the shallows, rolled among  
Marsh-marigolds ; she thrust upon his face  
Under the water, laughed and strove to rise,  
When even then a javelin bit her breast  
And clove her through ; so died Antandra ; so  
Fell many another ; pity there was none,  
For cruel is the anger of men shamed  
When they avenge their shame ; and that fierce hour  
Made many a widow on far hill-town wall  
That golden evening dandling with fond smile  
A son already fatherless ; and still  
Achilles' murderous and resistless hands  
Were stayed not. So by Simois the red flight  
Streamed swift and fearful as a fever-dream.

But meanwhile upon either wing the war  
Swung doubtful, nay, the Greeks were overmatched,  
Wanting their champion, drawn with all his men

So far dispersed, though now shrill trumpets rang  
Recalling them, for on the seaward side  
Penthesilea pressing hardy, she  
With the fierce remnant of her Amazons  
And grey Antenor, passionately smote  
As in a kind of anguish ; like a net  
Trapping a lion's limbs the battle closed  
Round her deep-thwarted spirit : Sthenelus  
Assailed her, striding huge among the rest ;  
And riding at him, as she struck, the axe  
Crashed broken on his helm, she wrenched the spear  
From his stunned arm, when on the other side  
Leapt Ornytus against her, and she swerved  
To dart the spear-point through him, crying out,  
' O that thou wert Achilles ! ' All at once  
Clear from the distant battle's farther edge  
Sounded upon a sudden several horns,  
Harsh-blown bull's horns ; Antenor knew the note  
Of signal, and he called across the spears,  
' Penthesilea, hark, upon the left  
The son of Aphrodite holds the day.  
Between us all the foe is locked and hemmed,

And hot Achilles has pursued too far.  
Press, 'tis Troy's hour!' and even as he spoke  
The Greeks relaxed; but now, flushed from the rout,  
Those same pursuers singly and in troops  
Mixed in the battle, all confused, and swung  
A score of ways with half-arrested clash  
And crossing tides of onset; streaming loose  
In separate combats, or bewildered pause  
Where all was doubt. Penthesilea burned  
Amid the scattered mellay; surely now  
From Simois through the dust and disarray  
She spied a great crest and a blazing spear  
Returning, and Harmothoe cried out,  
'Penthesilea!' with so keen a cry  
That her heart leapt; she knew Achilles came.

All knew, the spent arms and the shouting heads  
Were stayed and turned; they halted man by man  
As knowing the hour was other than their own,  
Awaiting in a thrilled expectancy,  
As a drawn bowstring ere the arrow fly,  
That strange encounter, not alone the shock



Of chosen champions, but a storm of worlds  
Where the deep blood-tides, man and woman, met.  
Penthesilea kindled, her soul soared  
Above the beating of her heart, alone  
Answering that high peril, that made pale  
The boldest round her, all their fluttered hope  
Afraid, as with a deep imperious cry  
And striding pace, through moil of crimsoned arms  
Dinted and shattered shields, Achilles came  
Shining from head to heel ; a demigod  
Whom smouldering anger dyed in fire, whose limbs  
For swiftness and for strength unmatchable  
Seemed but the prison of a spirit that, freed  
As a flame leaps in beauty to and fro,  
Splendid in indignation should have towered  
Against the lords of heaven ; a spirit wronged,  
That for oblivion of its sore heart-strings  
Had robed itself so red in slaughterous deeds  
And as in scorn feasted on dying cries,  
Hot like a reveller seeking to forget ;  
But as a reveller comes out into dawn  
Shooting bright beams up to the fading stars,

So was it with Achilles when he found  
The royal Amazon ; in ardour she  
Leaned on her reined horse forward, all her soul  
Ingathered at a breath, ready to launch  
And dare, as those together-leaping looks  
Like stone and steel flashed ! To the fingers tense,  
She poised in one uplifted hand her spear  
Against him over challenging proud eyes,  
That quailed not where the eyes of kings had quailed.

‘ Turn again home ! Thou canst not fight with men,  
And least with me, whom no man overcomes,’  
Scornfully with a mighty voice he cried,  
‘ Madwoman, turn, or here thou spill’st thy soul !’  
Clear rang her voice back, ‘ Put me to the proof !  
Have I not sought thee, Achilles, all this day,  
And having found thee, shall I let thee go ?’  
With that she hurled, and the spear bounded forth  
Straight at Achilles’ face, but lifting up  
His shield, he caught it on the golden boss  
That shivered it to pieces : his own spear  
Flew on the instant, the shock marred his aim,

And not the queen he smote, but smote her horse  
Deep in the shoulder, with sharp shriek he reared  
And staggering fell ; but lightly ere he fell  
Penthesilea leapt upon the ground,  
As swiftly Achilles plucked his weapon back.  
Pale grew the Trojans, glad the Greeks exclaimed,  
But she stood, deeply breathing, and her mind  
Debated if to draw her sword and rush  
On death at once ; while marvelling to behold  
The beauty of the daring on her brow  
Achilles called, ‘ Thou tameless one, be tamed !  
Else thou art dead, no god shall save thee now.’  
She answered, ‘ Nay, thou shalt not think such  
scorn

Of me that am a woman. Men are bold,  
All men are bold, and women are all weak,  
Thou think’st, yet when a woman’s heart is bold,  
By so much more it can outmatch a man’s  
As all her strength is in extremity,  
Sped like a shaft that stops but in a wound !  
Though but a woman, thou hast cause to fear  
And fear me most, because I stand alone.’

She called undaunted, yet her heart despaired ;  
When quickly came Harmothoe and thrust  
A second javelin in her hand ; at which  
Achilles frowned : ‘ Bold art thou, overbold ;  
And surely as high Zeus on Ida sits  
And watches now, I swear none braver moves  
In this day’s battle, nay, alone of all  
Worthy my strife. Be wise, venture not more.’  
He spoke, reluctant. But without a word  
She, moving in his path until she backed  
The low sun where he faced it full, upraised  
The spear, and cast at him with all her force.  
Then taken half at unawares, he swerved.  
On the left shoulder, near the neck, above  
The great shield’s rim it smote and grazed the flesh,  
So that the blood sprang : like winged Victory  
The Amazon flushed bright, a hundred throats  
Broke into one loud cry, and the Greeks clutched  
Their swords, as that exulting murmur ran  
Trembling and echoing o’er the plain to Troy.

There was such pause as when the ear waits thunder.



Achilles' face was dark, yet lightning-lit ;  
And all the ruthless eagle in his soul  
Called instant for her death ; yet she was fair,  
Young, and a woman, and surpassing fair ;  
But she had shamed him : as an eagle beats  
Towering against the mastery of a storm  
That blows him o'er a tossed lake backward, then  
Upon a lull swoops forward, so his wrath  
Leapt conquering on a sudden, and the spear  
Flamed from his hurling hand ; she saw it come,  
She raised her shield, but through the shield it crashed  
Under the arm, through the tough panther-skin  
And plates of iron ; in her side it pierced  
And bore her down ; imperially she fell  
Without a cry, sank on lost feet, nor heard  
Achilles' dread voice, 'Art thou satisfied,  
Penthesilea ?' but the heavy shield  
Rang on her fallen, the helmet rolled in dust  
From her proud head, and the long, loosened hair  
Tossed one tress richly over throat and bosom  
Shuddering strongly up from where the blood  
Welled dark about the spear forced deep within ;

And sudden as a torch plunged in a pool  
Her face lay dead-pale with the eyes quite closed.

Some moments held, still as deep snow is still,  
The hearts of either watching throug, for whom  
There seemed a glory fallen from the world  
Where she lay fallen, stirred not : spear and shield  
Were silent ; then among the Danaans woke  
A cruel exultation as they saw  
The Trojan faces ; and one cast a spear  
At random ; harsh the shouts of battle rose.

But still Achilles stood where he had hurled,  
Filled with besieging thoughts that in his brain  
Like thunder broke : he heard the cry and clang  
Renewing, and faced back upon his Greeks,  
Staying them sternly : wrath was in his soul,  
Wrath with those spirits despised, and wrath with her  
That had provoked him, wrath that his right hand  
Abhorred its own act, and deep wrath with heaven  
And fate ; so darkened inly, like a storm  
He came, and standing o'er the fallen queen

Gazed on the shape his wound had marred, a shape  
Where strength had into beauty thewed and strung  
Thighs of swift purpose, deep bosom and loins  
Largely imagined, a God's dream ; such limbs  
As in the forges of desire should mould  
Heroes oh never now to be ! So pale  
She lay, a life that might have with him soared  
Abreast, but all its world of hope a cup  
Quite spilled, a splendour ravelled and undone  
By his own hand who now, so darkly stirred,  
Saw her eyes open on him, full and strange.

Imperiously, ' O thou shalt live ! ' he cried ;  
Flung his shield off, with a fierce tenderness  
Bending beside her to uplift the weight  
Of her resigning shoulder on his arm.  
But faint she moaned, ' I thirst, ' then at his call  
One ran to where a stream welled near a bush  
Hard by ; but quicker ran Harmothoe  
And brought her helmet brimming, which the queen  
Drank of a little, though the bubbling cold  
Of her own mountain springs hardly had eased

The growing anguish of the wound ; when now  
Among the Greeks murmur and strife arose,  
Where loud among the rest Thersites mocked.  
' See, lords of Hellas, see this prince you fame  
So high beyond us all, and fawn upon  
His all-contemptuous pride, shows his true heart.  
A fondler of soft women would he be,  
A Paris ! Kills, and weeps on those he kills.  
We should have left him in his proper robes  
On Scyros, hollow braggart that he is.  
What is this woman she should baulk our fray ?  
Let kites and dogs stay over her, not we.'

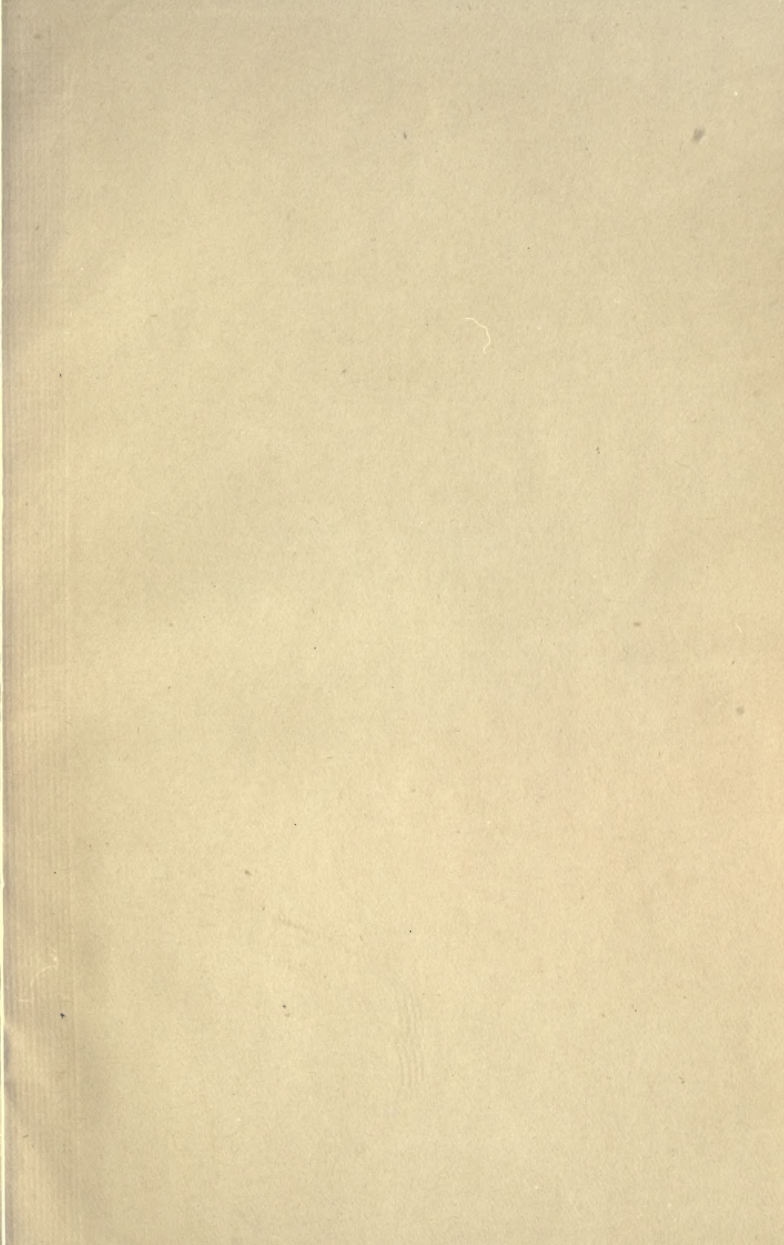
But ere he ceased Achilles sprang on him,  
Flaming. ' Thou toad ! ' he cried, and in an instant  
Seized with both furious hands and lifted him,  
Towering and terrible, above his head,  
And as a lion flings a snarling hound,  
Tossed him afar to fall with gnashing noise  
Horribly biting the blood-spattered earth.  
' Spit thy slime there, thou shalt not on a thing  
Less vile than thine own soul ! ' Achilles cried.

And all the rest, half wroth, half shamed before  
The domination of his burning eyes,  
Fell backward. ‘To the trench and to your huts!’  
He called again. ‘Go, for the night comes on.  
You fight to-day no more!’ He shouted stern;  
And one to another whispered in his fear,  
‘The Gods have sent a madness on this man.  
Stir not his fury.’ So they all retired,  
And on their side slowly the men of Troy  
Drew homeward: but alone Achilles came  
Back to the Amazon, propped on the knees  
Of sad Harmothoe, and darkling stood  
Over her, where she cast her eyes around  
And knew the earth and heaven but saw them  
    strange;  
Saw the stilled armies and far towers, and light  
Upon the great clouds drooping sanguine plumes  
On Ida from the zenith over Troy,  
Where wept Andromache; brief evening burned  
One solemn colour o’er a world at pause:  
Last she beheld Achilles: in their eyes  
Meeting, the marvel of what might have been



Was with that moment married, as a touch  
On thrilling strings wakes from the eternal void  
Beauty unending, but the excluded heart  
Heaves mutinous in pangs at the dear cost  
And pity to be mortal : pangs more keen  
Pierced now Achilles gazing, and in smart  
He cried, 'Thou smilest!' for her countenance changed,  
Eased out of anguish under falling calm,  
A lightening and release. Now not on him  
Her dying eyes looked, not on him who stood  
Meshed in the wrath of his own fiery deeds,  
Passionate, yet transfixed, as if the power  
Of some Immortal had made vain his might  
And helpless his victorious hands ; her head  
Sank, and her liberated spirit, where  
He might not follow, was already flown.







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