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THE

FRANCIS COUTTS

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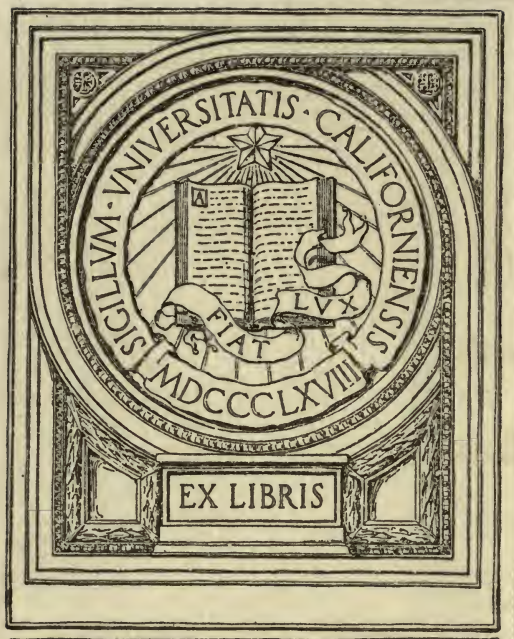
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PSYCHE

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PSYCHE

BY

FRANCIS COUTTS

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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PSYCHE

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

PSYCHE

Once from the suppliant throng, in vast array
Assembled in the audience hall of Heaven,
A soul came forth and stood before the Light,
Crying, " O Father, clothe me with fair flesh,
That I may suffer ; for I well perceive
That greater suffering comes to greater bliss."

No sooner urged than granted was the prayer,
As every prayer is granted in that place,
Whither all worlds, in less and less ellipse
Converging, move, and every creature turns

From farthest range: for some have even endured
To traverse hell, that they might feel the flame,
And, being purified, though pure before,
Yet by experience perfected, might win
A little nearer to eternal joy.

So Love was summoned, once in Hellas called
Eros, the god of Love, and by his might
That spirit was endowed with mortal shape,
Born the first babe of villagers, and named
Psyche, the Soul, or, emblem of the Soul,
The Butterfly; for in that word are joined
Seen and unseen. But he who told the tale
In Roman days has mingled alien myths,
More ancient, not belonging to the South,

Of royal parentage and cruel sisters;
False ornaments, like gaudy vestments thrown
About a moonlit statue of Diana:
For us remains the vision unadorned.

Now who shall say what secret fountains feed
The hearts of children nurtured in a home
Secluded from the world, that such glad streams
Of fondness and affection through them course?
So fond, affectionate, and full of gladness
Was Psyche, when she came to womanhood;
Still childlike, though mature in wit and will;
Whose beauty, like the fragrance of a flower,
Seemed from a self within herself exhaled;
And all her grace with goodness harmonized.

But Eros, though a god, was not immune
From passions men call mortal; though in truth
There is no mortal nor immortal, all
Having but one beginning and one end;
And like that Grecian sculptor, when he saw
His maiden stepping from the Parian base,
Marble no longer, but suffused with life,
So Eros gazed on Psyche, as she passed
To tribulation, radiantly brave,
Intent on human knowledge and its pain,
And loved her, then; but more he loved her now
Become a creature that of all the souls
Whom he had robed with perishable shape
Seemed worthiest of destiny divine.

So then began a wonder in the house
Where Psyche dwelt; sweet melodies were heard
At twilight in her chamber, now of lutes,
Soft as the summer rain on rustling leaves,
Now of a voice, soft as the summer wind
That scarcely flaws the shadow on the lake;
And Psyche's parents wondered, nor refrained
From gossip tales of sign and warning given
Of early death, fearing to see her fade
When the moon changed; but she, like Undine,
laughed,
Like Undine, when the Water-Spirit raved
In rain and river round the woodman's hut.

What message brought those minstrel visitants,

When pensive-featured Evening touched the sky
With her prophetic prospect of the morn,
Best read by those who see the morning break?

"Thou art the loved one of Eros; of Eros, O child,
The Giver of Love and its pleasure and pain—
The body fulfilled and the soul undefiled,
The spirit led forth and enlarged in the boundless domain
Of the goodness and gladness of Earth, of its terror and struggle and stain.

"Thou art called to this crown, the most regal of all that are known,
In spite of the carping of men who know less

Than the beasts of the field, and to thee shall be
shown
The freedom and fetters of Love, the delight and
distress,
The blessing that yet is a curse and the curse
that has magic to bless.

" He stoops to thy beauty, O Psyche, to make himself
one
With thy body and soul, and with that very
Thee
That shall blossom as a flower enthralled by the sun
And drawn to look upward, and yet shall fly free
As a swallow pursuing the summer far over the
rim of the sea.

"Thou wilt suffer, O Psyche; yet yield! Be not
doubtful to dare;
For the love of the god is a love ever young,
And thou shalt be quit of the woman's despair
When the love-gifts are offered no more nor the
love-songs are sung
And the once stooping stars of desire aloof from
her passion are hung.

"For the love of the god is eternal; through terror
and tears
At last will he bring thee to endless delight,
Deliverance from death and exemption from years,
With their gnawing of beauty and numbing of
mind and of might,

And by his embraces renew thee, as a rose is
renewed by the night.

"Then follow the music, O Psyche, that guiding thy
feet
Will lead to thy lover, and be not afraid;
He loves not in vain; he is waiting to greet
And set thee beside him for ever; and not
disobeyed
Must he be who from all the immortals and
mortals has chosen his maid."

Such songs did Psyche hear; as all may hear
Who can themselves keep silent; songs that died
Into alluring distances and drew

Her steps as surely as Apollo's lyre
Calls forth the bleating flocks, the birds and flowers,
When from beyond an Orient hill he strikes
The glittering, golden chords with golden quill.

The sun had scarcely set, the moon not risen,
When Psyche from her father's cottage stole
Across the bridge, where swiftly ran the river
Between invisible banks, a glimmering flood,
And through the thicket, up the turfy hill,
By paths unlighted, but familiar, followed
The voice persuasive and aerial harps;
Till, guided over unknown ground, she stood
Before a marble entrance, where a lamp,
Like a bronze shell, threw faint and flickering rays

Upon the darkness of an open door,

Set deep within the wall. The escorting sound

Ceased; she was left, as in a dream, alone,

Beneath that cavernous archway, dimly lit.

Now would upon my shoulders might descend

The mantle of Apelles! For what skill

Of words could paint this portrait? O red lips,

What expectation parts you? O wide eyes,

Is blue the colour of love's confidence?

O amber tresses, Eros' hands alone

Are thy fit playmates! O white forehead, clear

Of guilt or guile! O attitude of grace,

Changeless a moment, now about to change!

Almost her brave heart failed her and the fear
Of night, of loneliness, of love itself
O'ermastered her. Was there no woman within?
Almost she fled. Ah, no! the hour was come
Desired and unavoidable. The breeze
Blew fitfully from the sea; a nightingale
Challenged his rival, who afar replied
Across the valley, and the great stars trembled.
Undaunted by the darkness, on she moved,
Paused once again and then the threshold crossed.

At the same moment were the doors flung wide,
And a broad beam of light, as oft, aslant
Through storied windows in cathedral aisles,
When the sun westers on an autumn eve,

Tints the pale effigies of warrior saints,
Touched her with many colours : therewith came
A hundred maidens, like a vestal throng
That celebrates some glad event, who cast
About her shoulders bridal robes and led her
Into a banquet hall, aflame with roses,
Not yet by pampering culture reft of scent,
Poor dumb perfumeless flowers, but such as grow
Along warm walls of fruit-trees, with clove pinks,
Sweet William, marjoram, and mignonette.

There they enthroned her mistress of the feast,
Too humbly proud of loving and of love
To be abashed ; young faces, favouring eyes,
And smiles she found, and music well discoursed,

With sequent harmonies in measured mode
And passages of large deliberate glee,
Calming and yet encouraging. But soon,
Or soon it seemed, a nuptial song was heard,
And all arose; then seven chief damsels, making
A white procession, brought her, like a queen,
Into her chamber, lit by seven clear lamps
On white pilasters; such a place of rest
As even the guiltiest conscience might assuage
With sleep undreaming. There was she disrobed,
Laved in the lustral pool, whose porphyry lips
Low in a tessellated alcove shone,
And thence conducted to her bridal couch;
Yet all was done with ceremonious mirth,
As seemly as the rites of death are done

With sadness; and, departing, each one kissed her,
And each one bore away an unquenched lamp;
For this, they told her, was the will of Eros.

The bridegroom tarries: hush,
Ye breezes, and sleep!
No more murmur, thou river, by reed or rush;
Imperious deep,
Couch all thy billows; Night, with calm hand
Soothe into slumber the sun-weary land.

The bride awaits him: hark,
A rustle of wings!
Is he drawing down glory out of the dark?
Her spirit springs

Upward to meet him: Love, grant her grace
To see thee most bright when thou hidest thy face.

The morning broke; and who has seen unmoved
That solemn sight, save those for whom the day's
Long toil begins with sunrise all the year,
Shepherds and mariners and husbandmen,
Grown as familiar with that holy hour
As other men with sunset? Psyche gazed
From the white-balustraded marble steps
Over the cypresses and ilex-trees,
Watching the distant ocean, by faint hues
Of morning flushed, in swift gradation changed;
Beyond were snow-crowned mountains; to the South

A white-towered city, many a league away,
Signalled of man's endeavour; near her flowered
The purple iris and reed-gladiole,
And alabaster basins overflowed
With plashing fountains; while the ring-dove cooed
In the great plane-tree that o'erhung the terrace;
But yet she heard not, for her eyes alone
Were sensible, as if with them she heard
The far-off murmur of the summer surge;
For one gift wanting made all others void,
Nor could a thousandfold of those delights
That now were present to her eye and ear,
Or still more gracious forms that haunt the mind,
Outweigh the dead-weight of that one denial.

Although, according to the unwritten rites
Of Love himself, profaned not by the thought
Of other consecration, she had slept
In Eros' arms, and knew him beautiful,
Yet not by sight, but by that sense she knew
Which women use unconsciously as birds
Who cross the ocean with unerring aim:
For ere the dawn he woke her, whispering
"Psyche,
The sun will soon be risen and I must leave
thee."

"Leave me so soon? So soon!" she answered,
weeping,
"I looked that we should spend long days together,

That I, who have no knowledge, might become,
Learning of thee, more worthy of thy love."

"Worthy thou art; as worthy to be taught
As willing," he replied; "thou shalt not lack
The realm of wonder where thy mind may roam,
To reap new harvests or to sow new fields;
But be content; so long as I am hidden
From thy dear bodily eyes, our love is safe;
Herein shall be the wisdom of our love,
To suffer separation, save when Night
Throws from my world to thine her star-roofed
bridge.
Behold the eternal law—that beauty slurred
In image or reflection is not loved

As beauty that is never seen is loved ;

For so have all religions been at fault

That have interpreted by visible sign

Invisible divinity."

"Stay, stay,"

Cried Psyche ; "leave me not alone, with these

Mysterious warnings ; they will haunt my heart ;"

And Eros answered gravely, "Be it so ;

Strict is the law, and ancient as the hills.

Seek not to break the barrier ; if thou seek,

In the same hour thou seest me, no more

Thou seest me. Farewell, until again

The zephyr-footed Evening whisper 'Come'

And lead me willing to my shrine, thy breast."

So saying, he kissed her tenderly and vanished
She knew not whither. Then she pondered long
The import of his words, until, like doves
Assembling to their cote, her maidens came,
With greeting best belonging to a bride;
But when she was attired she went alone
Forth to the terrace and there stood alone,
Gazing far seaward, as a while ago
I sought to picture her, with wanting words.

Long time she stood; then, with her comrades' aid,
By sedulous care in small employment strove
To empty out her heaviness of thought;
But slowly waned the day, till, weary of light,
Because it brought not love, she loosed the cord

That looped the curtain of her lattices,
Glad of the gloom, ere yet the sun's wide wings
Had grown vermilion; but in vain she spread
Her lure of darkness to entice her lord;
Not till vociferous frogs in chorus croaked,
And bats, that squeak as shrill as grasshoppers,
Chased the white moths around her palace walls
Like swallows of the night, would Eros come.

But when he came, what happiness was hers,
What converse, what caresses, none can tell
Save women comforted like her, who sleep
As dreamlessly as tired children sleep,
But wake, perchance, an hour before the dawn
And breathe again fond words, till twittering sparrows

Chatter their interruption; signal rude
To Psyche's ear as trumpets that from home
Summon the soldier, who with close embrace
And whispered solace bids his wife farewell;
For so that hour called Eros; who, unseen,
Was well imagined, for his very voice
Was full of intimation to her heart
Of all that women wish their kings to be.

The seasons circled; not with freezing fog
And scorching heat, but temperate changes, marked
By flowers or fruit, by buds or falling leaves;
But not to Psyche brought the seasons change,
Whose days were as the night, the nights as day;
Save that wise men approached her, skilled to rouse

The mind, that like the princess in a trance
Awaits the one particular lover's kiss.
Then first she learnt the wonder of the world:
The heavens, that make sad men remember peace,
But yet themselves are full of furious heat
And rushings round and round and on and on;
The rocks, whose record, in themselves contained,
Tells the long tale of fierce demonic force;
The flowers, like living crystals, that to soil
And climate mould themselves and serve their need
By ministering insects; last, the life
That broke the briny dungeon of the deep
And crawling into Earth's Cyclopean hands
Was shaped into the Man; too like an Ape

To justify the slow stupendous forge
That beat him into being, unless the hammer
Of the ages can still smite him to some mode
Less burdened by the faulty, transient flesh,
Less falsely free, with one hand building up
Structures that with the other he casts down.

Then first she heard the laughter and the wail
Of human life in poetry revealed,
With music, sweet controller of the will,
Not caught, as fable tells, from whispering reed,
Warble of mating bird, or clang of anvil,
But born in men themselves, whose gesture, voice,
And rhythmic speech in passionate moments prove
Art is not artificial; following these,

In dignity not less, though less in rank,
Sculpture and painting brought their brave array
Of sensuous matter by a soul informed.

How happy then was Psyche! Not despising
The due observance and the seemly care
Of household and apparel, but not vexed
By emulous vanity of ornament,
Nor mocked by menials nor enslaved by slaves,
She of no homely practice was ashamed,
And like her damsels clothed herself and fared,
Now bathing with them in the tumbling water,
That fell into a shadowed pool and coiled
Beside the garden; playing now at ball,
Like the King's daughter, of the blameless folk,

Who unashamed the naked Wanderer brought
Home to her father; now with chord and cadence
Of lute and voice, subduing restless thought;
By Thespian interlude persuading hearts
To wholesome laughter; or with tragic mask
Purging the passion of the soul with pity:
But always when the fingers of the Sun
Gathered the dew, or Earth with gentler hands
Had drawn it down again to cool her bosom,
The maidens chanted antiphons of praise
To Him who is and was and is to be;
And oft would Psyche bid them sing the song
That she was wont to hear in former days,
When young and old were sitting in the dusk,
After the evening meal, and all the stars,

Like seraphs burning with clear ardour, watched,
Each from his station on the walls of heaven :

" The vines are heavy with grapes and the olives are laden,
The vast sea moves in voluminous vagrance,
On high floats the orb of the Huntress eternally maiden,
The warm dew falls on the flowers and Earth is refreshed with their fragrance.

" Now the whisperers stoop from the sky and rise from the ocean ;
'Tis the hour of the pause, for regret and remembrance,

When like dancing of gnats o'er the brook seems all
human commotion,
Like a phantom the face that we love and the
world but a shadow or semblance.

"Is darkness or light the more ancient and which
is the stronger?
Soon life burns low and is quenched in few lustres;
When morning arises, the tale of past life will be
longer,
And again when the moon is re-throned amid
bright constellations and clusters;

"Yet soon as the Sun, with his snow-tinting radiance
upsurges,

And the birds offer up their glad song of thanks-
giving,
Again shall we welcome the life and the love that he
urges,
Forgetting the labourless night in the passion of
loving and living."

In spiritual stature Psyche grew,
Till she who keeps the record of the nations,
Their great endeavour and vicissitude,
Their low beginning and luxurious end,
Seeking disciples, wandered through the world,
And, as a searcher of the storm-piled shingle
Beside the encroaching sea, whose hissing waves
Are driven in winter far across the marshes,

Descries a red carnelian, onyx agate,
Or piece of amber, in the slanting light
Faintly translucent, so the joyful Clio
Discerned the mind of Psyche, crystalline
Among dull pebbles, worthy of her care,
And took her by the hand and touched her eyes
To see the panorama of the past,
The mountains and the seas where Freedom dwells,
The plains of battle and the vales of peace,
The long and patient progress of mankind,
The generations, that, like forest leaves,
Fall but to feed the life from which they fall.

Wherefore to Psyche and her lord there came
Another bridal, far more intimate

Than were their first embraces; she attained
The knowledge hidden since the world began
(Save to the few initiate) that the soul,
And not the blood alone, for marriage cries;
Wherefore unless the mingling of the blood
Be sacramental, it is poured in vain;
The dogs of this world's care shall lap it up:
For often half the night he held her charmed
In converse, following her winding thought;
Skilled in all knowledge and to use it well,
Ungrudgingly he gave, nor stinted aught,
Save what may lie beyond the power of speech.

Most happy then was Psyche; though, like Eve,
One thing she might not have and that she wished;

Yet how much more than Eve to be forgiven !

Who, knowing only good, save discontent,

Desired to know more evil ; but the other

Craved for more knowledge of her greatest good :

The Sun that warmed her, yet denied his light,

Nor could entreaty, reason, tears avail

To uneclipse him ; still would he reply,

" So faithless, Psyche ? If thou disbelieve

The spiritual truth that truth divine

Is not expressed by symbol, but obscured,

Immortal union never shall be ours ;

For bodily eyes can only see a sign

Of what I am ; myself they cannot see."

To whom she answered, " Eros, that my eyes

Persist in longing for thy face and form
Cannot be ill, since seeing is their good;
Nor do I deem thou seekest to conceal
A hideous aspect, such as men have worn
Whose mothers by some monster were dismayed;
Why, then, wilt thou this obstinate curtain draw
Between thyself and me? Of me thou hast
Full sight, though how I know not; yet I know."

As, when a child some riddling question lisps
Of human life, unwitting what it asks,
The grandame knits in silence, taking thought,
With brow more wrinkled than by tears or time,
How warily, yet wisely, to reply,
Irreverent nor of childhood nor of truth,

So Eros paused and pondered how to tell
The everlasting war between the Worlds
Whose boundaries are the mountains of our dreams.

At last he spoke: "Although on Earth I sought thee
And took upon myself the dignity
And the indignity of Man, to woo thee,
We wander not in murk material maze;
We two have built ourselves a bower of bliss,
Deep in a leafy garden, where no storm
Of devastating desert sand can drift;
There, as I am thou seest me; no fault,
Such as pertains to all expressive shape,
Dims my perfection, and no beam oblique
Nor error of thine eyesight can distort me;

Thee too I know by virtue of that place,
Where are no warders of the gates of sense,
Demanding this or that assurance; freely
We mingle there, by passion not compelled,
But in obedience to a blither law.
Why, then, dear Psyche, wouldst thou banish me
Into the visible world?"

A little space
Psyche was silent; soon, with clinging arms
About his neck, she cried, "Thou sayest the truth;
But yet thy native land is mountain land;
An hour I breathe its air and then I falter:
The blue smoke calls me and the russet roofs,
Where in the valley mothers nurse their babes."

So Psyche, shedding tears; but Eros said,

"Weep not nor wonder; larger is this law

Even than the law of Love; for God is seen,

And shall be, only in the heart of Man,

Though oft reported to dwell here and there,

In temples or in shrines; but when Religion

Raises her lamp to see him, he is fled.

But now farewell; the freshness of the dawn

Is wafted o'er the sea: how false the fable

That evil things love darkness and foul woes

Fly with the flying shadow round the world!

The worst woes haunt the day. But ah! forget not

To keep secure our garden. Set a watch

To compass it about; admitting none,

Howe'er commissioned or imperative;

Footsteps the most divine would there profane."

Like two young angels, by celestial love

Transfigured, in each other's arms they lay;

But even as Psyche kissed him, he was gone,

Although a while, she thought, he lingered near her,

While thus the aerial choir his praise declared:

"Eros, creator of life, thyself the first creature created,

Thou didst bestow upon life, from its birth and beginning,

Love, with a dower of grace and the power of sinning,

Love, the giver of joy, and Love the fatal and
fated.

"Life by thy absolute word into bridegroom and
bride was divided,
Whence love was by children enlarged, and the
waves of the leaven
Spread in irradiate rings to the confines of
heaven,
Encompassed in vain by the dullness of darkness and
vainly derided.

"The choir of the Earth and the Sea and the Air
in loud harmony raises
Thanksgiving to thee who didst brood o'er the
unteeming waters,

Conceiving the husband and wife, and their sons
and their daughters;
And the mates and the babes of all creatures to thee
chant the psalm of their praises.

"Hadst thou endowed them with life, nothing more,
in what revel of ravage,
In what violent contention and strife had their
habitants squandered
The days and the nights of their sojourn and
homelessly wandered!
But thou didst redeem them by love from the life
that is loveless and savage.

"Hail to the great god of love! Still wider and
wider are flowing

His aureole waves, that expanding grow stronger
and stronger,
Till the nations of Earth shall be separate nations
no longer,
But all shall be subject to him, as a field is subdued
by the sowing."

So sang the spirits attendant; or so seemed
Their song, interpreted by mortal ears.
But Psyche was left lonely; and, alone,
Both men and women oft contrive their woe.

Then on a day when her near sorrow hurt her
(Because no mist of misery more obscures
The sunshine from the heart than one close blur),

She called the damsel to her side, beloved
The most of all, though all she loved, and said,
" Neræa, to thee I have confided much,
And thou to me. Bright is the nesting time ;
The cherry foams with flower, the fig is green,
The birds are trilling, and all buds must break ;
But yet to me no brightness is undimmed.
The noble youth who loves thee—he who learns,
In yonder white-towered city where he dwells,
To labour for the common good, despite
His frolic temper—is he not in haste
To wed thee, pretty pigeon ? "

" Yes, indeed,"
Neræa answered, " but when Eros wills ;

For always when I pray to him, I hear
A voice cry 'Wait!' Ah, wilt thou not entreat
him?"

"Wilt thou not wait?" asked Psyche.

"Not for ever,"
The damsel answered.

"Nay, but wait his will,"
Psyche replied, "for not in vain he rules,
But both are his—to punish and reward."

"Art thou, then, happy," said Neræa, "thou
Whose flower of life upon his altar lies?"

Her mistress, gazing on her, thus pursued:

"Suppose thyself now wedded and fulfilled
All the desired endearments; and suppose
That thou hadst never seen thy husband's face,
Though darkness brought thee his enfolding arms
And converse sweet: couldst thou be happy?"

"No,"
Neræa cried, "I could not bear it."

"This
I have to bear," said Psyche.

And the other murmured,
"I know, I know; it is the law of Eros;"

Then, after silence, suddenly vehement,
Stood up, and with defiant gesture, vowed
"I would not bear it; I would break the rule
And let him punish me; if gods descend
To marry mortals, let them mortal usage
Observe, or marry goddesses; this crime
Would I commit, that I would treat my god
As husbands should be treated. Should I look?
Yes, truly; frown at him, if there were need;
Or bid him smile, as oft there might be need.
Why not? These teasing tricks are the rough edge
Of fleecy comfort that a woman wraps
About a man, to keep him from the cold
Of friends' ingratitude and friendship false
And all the world's disdain."

"How know'st thou this,"

Psyche demanded, "thou who art so young?"

Neræa said, "My father was born rich;

He used to talk to me; but then he spoke

Of men, not gods."

"But gods need comfort too,"

Psyche replied, "or why should they wed women?"

The cushats cooed around them, seeking mates,

And they, like cushats, to each other cooed,

Planning a deed, though guileless as the doves,

More dangerous to perform than building nests.

Ah, why should vernal mist the prospect veil,
When in our youth we sow our favourite flowers
And the unforgètting sun falls on our plot,
To fertilise the seed ? Too soon we dream
Of fairer plants that grow beyond the cloud ;
Into its cold and clammy arms we plunge
And down a precipice are dashed to death,
Or choked in a fierce cataract ; or stagger
Into black gorges and are seen no more :
And even if high and arduous ways attaining
We reach the uttermost neck, the windy ridge,
Another country full of vapour waits
To clasp us with chill clutch, or some bleak height
Emerging, like a monster on a throne,
Commands us to his emptiness and silence.

Again a summer night: the crescent moon
Looked like a cradle in a cameo, poised
Westward beneath the placid-shining planet,
The throne of Aphrodite; round the horizon
Thunderless lightning quivered; the world was hushed.
Eros beside his lady sighed in sleep,
When softly she arose and trembling stood
In the thick darkness, with dilated eyes
Watching; and presently a line of light
One instant gleamed; thither with noiseless feet
She crept, and like a nurse with noiseless hands
Tending the sick, drew back the chamber door,
And found Neræa, with a lighted lamp
Darkened beneath a fold of her dark robe,

Which Psyche took. Neræa, motionless,

Watched her as she re-entered.

Ponderously

The moments pass, when swings the heavy soul

Through the alternate arcs of hope and fear,

Marking at each extreme Time's labouring lapse.

So to the listening maid the moments passed,

In darkness and in silence, till she heard

The sound of weeping, and a sadder sound

Even than weeping, like a moaning wind

That wails o'er mounded graves and cries "Too late."

So Psyche wept and so the voices wailed

For Love departed; though men still pursue

His spectral presence, indeterminate
As shadows wavering under wind-blown trees;
But down the broadening channel of the years
Dispersed is that sad song, until some bard,
Great as the Florentine to whom Love talked
As friend to friend, shall fashion it anew.

Soon as the weird and warning chant had ceased,
A snake of tortuous lightning writhed from heaven,
With crash of instantaneous thunder; riven
The palace seemed, from roof to floor, as once,
When midday darkness on the city fell
And dead men walked abroad, the Veil was rent.
The women cowered, locked in each other's arms;
The flickering lamp their frightened faces lit;

And up and down the awakened maidens ran,
With cries of terror, till their mistress rose,
Pale, but majestic, and commanded search,
Lest that sulphureous bolt had kindled flame.

Now dawn, bare-bosomed, breathed along the sea,
Ruffling the little waves to curl like shells,
And like pink shells they curled, when Psyche threw
The terrace door wide open: not the house,
But that great plane-tree, from the topmost plume
Down to the very tap-root, had been split,
Splintered and hurled and scattered far and near,
As if a giant woodman, no less crazed
Than Ajax, when he slew the silly flocks,
Had cloven and hewn the bole and leafy boughs,

Strewing the fragments like the flakes that fly
Around a mason as he trims the stone.

Then fell poor Psyche passing sick and pined
As pines a hyacinth when winds of March
Blow bleakly through the hazel copse and dash
The gold dust of the catkins to the ground;
Nor dared Neræa ask (so frail she seemed)
What awful sight had struck her or what worse
Bruised her than sight; or if alone that song
And bolt delivered from heaven, sure sign of wrath,
Had dulled the dancing life-light of her eyes.

So passed the summer, so the winter passed;
Then the two sad companions wandered forth,

One sunny noon, beyond the lichened wall
That ringed the budding lemons and the grove
Of oranges, in flower and golden fruit
Perpetual. To the South, tall cypress trees
Shadowed their way; all round them, scattered rocks
Were overhung with clumps of sea-green spurge,
Ablaze with yellow bracts; and here and there,
An arbutus with fairy pitchers decked
Her fronds, in pink wax clusters. Soon the path
Descending kept the border of a wood,
Fringed with the red acacia; like the sloe,
In blossom ere in leaf; and, round about,
The myrtle spread her starry pasturage
For humming bees and silent butterflies,
Who, when they wearied of that sweet, could flit

To the sea-mallow, star-anemone,
And honeyed lebourine; to lavender
And rosy cistus, breathing balmy scent;
Or that Parnassian plant, white asphodel;
And overhead, among the cresting boughs,
The black-capped warbler, faithful to the home
Where he was born, poured forth his song profuse.

Neræa heeding all and Psyche nought
Now reached a curving bench, in marble carved,
Where sloped the land abruptly to pale leagues
Of olive trees, far spreading to the bend
Of a broad river; all beyond was haze
Of shimmering distance and blue edges blurred.
Here hand in hand they rested; here at last,

As Psyche looked across the vale and saw
The first faint gossamer mist of evening fall,
Her tears welled up and with them welled her words :
" He comes no more," she cried ; " I saw him not,
And yet I saw him ; scarcely can I tell
Whether I saw him, though my eyes were filled
With beauty ; more like music visible,
If that may be, when the harper weaves his spell
In mood most tender. But, ah me, too short,
Too short the moment ! Like a gleam of sun
That strikes the valley on a stormy day
With loveliness unearthly, so the sight
Passed of my lord's dear presence, and the dark
Of desolation gathered ; there was left
Nothing except remembrance."

One degree

At least the shadow of the dial had crept

Before Neræa answered, sore distraught

For counsel rashly given and consequence

Inexorably cruel; scarce she knew

The words she uttered: "He will come again:"

Her mistress answered, "He will come no more;

And vainly should I plead with kindly Death,

The silent usher who so oft has led

Less lonely wives to their removéd lords;

For I was made immortal by the kiss

Of love immortal; wherefore I must seek

No more for mortal pleasure, but must learn

Immortal joy, more difficult; that so,

Winged with renunciation, I ascend,

Leaving this cloud of pale encumbrances
And sensuous questioning of false and true,
With him in equal happiness to dwell."

Neræa, not understanding, listened, awed
To silence, and in silence long they stayed,
Watching, as children watch, the sun descend
Between his ranks of gorgeous-liveried cloud,
Till, like a token of love, the first great star
Burst into brilliance and announced the night.

That ancient chronicler (to whom be praise
For the sweet story in his book embalmed)
Declared that Psyche, after trial and task
Imposed by Venus, angry that her son

Should wed an earthly maiden, found her way
Into the Courts of Heaven, where she achieved
Eternal marriage with her lord long lost:
But minds by Fancy unbemused must deem
That still in that enchanted house she dwells,
Expectant in despair; because she waits
Like one who watches the disastrous waves,
Yet hopes the ship's return; and there at eve
In moving song to lute or harp complains,
And draws down every cheek the slow, warm tears:

"All the long day the ring-dove coos
And whoso say he grieves
Are fools or false, for his mate he woos
In a tangle of forest leaves:

She warms her nest
With her feathery breast
While he sits happily by
And utters his sweet cry.

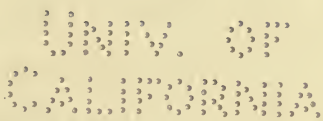
"From dark to dawn the nightingale,
More glad than in sunny hours,
Over the dell to the farther dale
His torrent of passion showers,
And whoso feigns
That he complains
Has never drawn so nigh
His ecstasy as I.

"At break of day, when lambkins bleat,
Following their mothers along

The dewy mead with frisking feet,
The lark begins his song,
And young hearts throb
And old men sob
To hear those untaught notes
Of longing that sunward floats.

"But woe to the bird that cannot fly
Prisoned in painted bars,
To her native land beyond the sky,
Green isles beyond the stars,
Undying flowers
And sorrowless bowers
Of Love who needs no night
To make his presence bright."

Beside the winter hearth, when crackling logs
Blaze and the wind at every casement shrieks
His message of near snow on desolate moors,
Oft let this tale be told, and let the sire
Its meaning thus recite: "By that degree
Of observation and attempt to shrine
The Presence of the God, does he withdraw
To farther distance. He who drew aside
The Veil of severance from the Holy Place,
To find the Deity, found empty space."



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