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Sirenica

"Ἦρατο τῶν ἀπεινῶν· οἷα καὶ πολλοὶ πάθον·
Ἔστι δὲ φύλον ἐν ἀνθρώποισι ματαιότατον,
Ὅστις αἰσχύνων ἐπιχώρια παπτάνει τὰ πρόσω,
Μεταμῶνια θηρεύων ἀκράντοισι ἐλπίσιν.

PINDAR, *Pythian*, iii. 20.

Sirenica

By

W. Compton Leith

Author of "Apologia Diffidentis"



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Sirenica

WHEN the Emperor Tiberius inquired of the grammarian what song the Sirens sang, he asked to prove his wit and was gratified when no man answered. Yet there may have been those present at his audience who, questioned in the same way, had not pretended ignorance, but dared to hazard their wide solution. For the song is immortal; the times have been rare throughout the ages in which it has been intermitted, and they were yet beyond experience in the days of the second Cæsar. The Sirens might have been heard then, as they may now be heard; while the Emperor spoke, many a Roman stood fast in their toils, as in our midst at this hour their victims are a great multitude. The Sirens are no more dead than Pan, though, like him, they have sometimes

“What
song the
Sirens
sang.”

"What
song the
Sirens
sang."

rested from their work when the winds have blown furiously, and the sails left the sea, and the ploughs lain rusting. When the world has grown barbarous or too violent for their music, they have withdrawn awhile into the recesses of their sea-caverns, as he into the unvisited clefts of mountains; but they have never renounced their art, or wholly abandoned their assigned part in human tragedy; they are still the fair-speaking handmaidens of Fate, who may never release them from her service. Nor have they ever been overcome by gods or men; it is not true that they flung themselves into the sea in despite, or that they were changed into mute rocks because a single adventurer went safely by them; it is not true that the Muses silenced them for all time by the chance of a single victory. They live on, careless of these tales. They still sing their ancient

melody, nor is there any fear but that the music which survived the Roman Empire will outlast our governments, audible in a new time beyond the prospect of our chronology. And if our life were less confused by the sounding tides of action, in its clamour unpropitious to the fine attention of the soul, we might more often hear to our peril such words as those which made the hero Odysseus fear. For we stand upon a greater height of years than those who have lived before us ; were there more lulls and pauses in the rumour of the world, we might catch echoes out of a vaster distance, and know a wider trouble than they.

A prince, long ages ago, discovered the tenour of the song ; but being a god's offspring, he was saved by a miracle from the fated consequence, and lived to understand the averted danger. He it was who first concealed the truth,

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song the
Sirens
sang."

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fearing for the people's happiness ; it was from him that all later rulers learned to defame the singers, in order that men, deeming them too base for more than the lower love or fear, might give small heed, and be held more readily out of earshot. He set them down as professed temptresses ; their names were made a byword for that which of all frailties was most incongruous with their nature. Their song, it was said, was but a common lure for mariners, the music of concupiscence, the voice of the strange woman wilful in the love of evil. And one age taking up the cry from the other, this old injustice came down the centuries and was at last established almost beyond power of revocation. It was made legendary, and legend outlives truth ; the world has a deep love for its old traditions, and often the falsest are the most faithfully defended. The mischief began with

the tales of Argonauts and heroes sailing back from Troy, tales so ancient and so far-repeated that the names which they once discredited never lost the stain. Century after century, the Sirens were re-condemned as idle daughters of music ; long repetition caused the unbelievable thing to be believed as an article of unquestioned faith. This was a natural simplicity in the darker ages ; it is preposterous in our own. For what but inveterate blind habit should make us hold so long that demi-goddesses and rivals of the Muses had nothing more to sing than longshore ballads or chants for sailors' ears ? Who may in his heart suppose that against such lures as this Odysseus stood defenceless, the hero of a life more various in experience than any lived upon the earth before his day ? Who, once reflecting upon the absurd belief, shall accept the story that such a man dared not

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trust his soul—his mighty soul—within the range of a cheap seduction, or that his limbs—his mighty limbs—trembled beneath him at a sound, and were relaxed by a common blandishment? It is to ask too much; it is to overstrain credulity. What charm had lust or indolence for one sated betimes with the delicate arts of Circe? From a surfeit of the easier pleasures he was but newly fled; he had drunk the dregs of that cup, and in contrition gnawed the shards of it. And now, when at last he was away upon the main, breathing a large air as the sail drew full, and the keel hissed like a share through the long sea-furrows, should he now stay for a languid music, now re-invoke that debasing servitude? His prow was towards Ithaca; night after night as he leaned upon the steering-oar and laid his course for home, it was no amorous vision that he saw, but the

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white walls of his father's house, and the brows of Penelope lightened from the burden of untaken Troy. At such a time of all others in his life, you are to suppose the old lures once more succeeding, the old cup, so over-honeyed and staled upon the sense, more potent than in voluptuous hours. For such rewards as these you are to think the wisest hero who followed Agamemnon to war must so misdoubt his strength that he dare not trust his resolved will as they passed the perilous shore, but the crew must lash him to the mast lest he plunge from the home-bound ship to blunder upon a young man's ruin. This, surely, is a mad tale, and for no serious acceptance. Whatever else be charged against Odysseus, this at least shall never be believed. That he is wronged even in the Homeric song is suggested by another legend. When Argo sailed by the Sirens' coast,

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and, high on the poop, Orpheus drowned their music with his own, there rowed among the crew one Butes, priest of Athena, goddess, let it be recalled, of wisdom and passionless restraint. Yet the story goes that it was this man and none other of the Argonauts who yielded to the melody, and diving into the sea, swam shorewards without a thought for past repute or immediate danger. Then, strange to tell, Athena let him swim to his doom ; but Aphrodite interfered, and bore him off to Lilybæum. Now, if the Sirens were such as common opinion held them, why was it that the priest of the maiden goddess was first to yield ? And why should Aphrodite save him, who, if there were any truth in rumour, should rather have wafted him to land, exulting in his discomfiture ? Is it not plain that the Sirens were in truth no votaresses of hers, and that

their allurements were so little after her heart that she was at exceeding pains to thwart them? Moreover, a third story tells that the Sirens were virginal of inclination, and, since this quality was judged a fault in them, were punished by being stripped of their wings.

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It is clear, then, that the epic itself is unjust to the Sirens and to him who was appointed to hear out their song. It brought them alike down to the baseness of common and weak mortals, whereas they were of a nobler cast, the men heroic, the singers half divine. If the music was indeed perilous for the hero's understanding, it must have sounded some other note of danger, a note grave and exalted, befitting one of so high an ancestry. For Odysseus was of the race of Sisyphus; in his veins flowed the blood of the Attempter who might never fulfil. What voice, then,

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should speak with irresistible appeal to the scion of such a stock, to one versed so deeply in the world? Should it be any idle melody you will, a soft enticement, a sensual promise? Or should it rather be a call to knowledge wider and ever again more wide, the reaching out of the soul after things beyond all past essay? None shall doubt the answer who remember that fated lineage; it was a call not to ease or vain delights, but to the undesigning infinite adventure. This and this only could have made Odysseus fear in the fair hour of his return, this only could have brought him to endure the cords upon his limbs; this alone was so hard to disobey that he might not trust himself to stand unbound when it sounded over the waters in the hot Apulian noon. In the soul of Læertes' son there was but one place vulnerable, and that the voice of the Sirens found, for the

very cause that they sang no voluptuous song but a chant of battle, the high music of sedition which lifts up the heart, which takes the savour from the thing which is here and now, and the peace from tame contentment. It was that music at whose first note the soul is roused against the prescribed and sanctioned, impatient of the ordered life and the arranged happiness, mutinous against the care which would shield grown men from peril of manhood. It was the music which awakens to a glory of arduous dreams. It was the signal which suddenly disgusts the soul with the thing which is all feasible or wholly understood, the summons which calls away from the possessed and measurable land into the uncharted kingdom of the Vague. For the Sirens mean Romance. They awaken that restive yearning within the heart which practical wisdom strives to quell.

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and
Romance.

The Sirens
and
Romance.

They disenchant from the governable life with its gregarious ease and communicable satisfactions. They stand against the dictated sentiment and the admiration ruled by norm ; they mock at happiness, the reward of all these things. But they incite to the sole adventure ; they promise a reward remote from the smiling continent of pleasures, isled in pain, attained and lost alone. They promise joy, the stress and puissance, which carries the soul out to the great verges and holds her a-swoon in ecstasies of incredible life. When their song sounds, the chase is up after the quarry which is not overtaken, and all who follow come again changed men. They have bestridden wild steeds and will lead sumpter-mules no longer ; they will go absorbed and expectant henceforth, seeking nothing but the return of the sign. They will refrain from fellowship, for it

impedes ; garment frays with garment, but not soul with soul. What profit has any State of these, who give no thanks for its benefits and have no regard for its laws ; who dwell in the safe walls and dream perverse of some Mount in Araby ; who eat of the joy-leaf and see all things transformed before them, transformed themselves and witched away from kinship ; who in the throng of near affections care only for the love which is far ? What loyal service shall the ruler hope of these, who live only for the day of issue beyond his marches, wild beings, starting away under the hand of kindness ? These are unprofitable souls upon every scale of his estimation, lives unexpressed, instruments unplayed, symbols undeciphered. Shall he force these into his fold ? Stay the sparks of the blown fire ; bind the flakes of the frozen snow.

What things, then, were the

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The song
of the
Sirens.

The song
of the
Sirens.

Sirens wont to sing, when the ship passed with glistening oars, and the ear of a hero was open to the song? Things fathomless, things æstuant; things lost in the vast perplexities of light. They sang the splendid wells of colour, that tremble and change in their deeps, the blue at the heart of great sapphires, the crimson in the poppy's cup at twilight, the wine of lonely isles. They praised the tongue of the beacons lapping at the darkness, as the lit pines of Ida above Troy fallen, the path of the moon over the sea, and the world's end, and the voids beyond the world. They sang of the unascended heights, of mountains indignant of tamed life from the beginning of remembrance, of the beauty of lithe beasts that range free over the earth, the fawn bounding above the thicket, the panther instant upon the prey. Of the eagle in the height they

sang, and the rhythm of wings in the suave air ; of divine unguarded spaces and the pure zones of starlight. Their song was also of tumultuous things, of the tempests sounding in the gorges, and of the wind upon the neck of the moaning forest. Then, fierce for men's deliverance, they praised the impassioned life, the forthgoing of the wild will on its course, the tracts of infinity overgone. In quick notes of challenge, or lingering notes of tenderness, they awakened yearnings vast as a god's desire. They sang of slaveries redeemed, and brave revolts, and fate confronted in the high splendour of disdain. They sang of all that is above fulfilment and beyond clear vision ; of the immeasurable, the uncontained, the half-imagined ; of that which is touched but never held, implored but unpossessed ; of things supreme and speeding in the vanward

The song
of the
Sirens.

The song
of the
Sirens.

of time. Then they sang the vile-ness of all who live contented upon an alms, and are at ease in bonds, the slaves whose servitude is made sweet by habit. They sang of dulled wits cheated of their birth-right, of fancies wilfully pent, while the clouds race free under the moon or are flung upon the red pyre when the evening ends the rain. On the grey life they chanted scorn, with its rounded tasks, its hopes too soon fordone, its unresisted nonage. With a rising fury of contempt they mocked the mind of dulcet thoughts; the spirit engrossed in mean things weighed and parcelled; they spurned its thin sobrieties, its misdevotions, its lust after the little scantlings of achievement. As the gadfly goaded Io, so they stung the slave of usage over the lands and fords of dream; they mocked him as he stumbled with eyes bent earthward, blind as the

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animals that graze bestial years away. They flouted him in his self-complacence with taunts intolerable upon the lips of women, and words like scorching fire. Whatsoever is of ease or acquiescence; whatsoever imprisons the soul within the walls of swept and tended places; whatsoever hinders, or fences, or impounds the life created for emprise—all this they held to shame in a glow of scorn, lambent over it as the midnight lightning above the farmstead. And then they mocked the hero Odysseus hastening home like a hungry ploughman from the fields, or a fisher from beneath the headland, tired by the labours of a day, while the marvellous world lay yet unknown before him, and the immeasurable Ocean, and the promise of the Fortunate Isles. They made him small in his own sight; they proved him base and fallen; they foretold to him in his

The song
of the
Sirens.

The song
of the
Sirens.

grey hairs, if he refused them now, compunctions beyond mortal suffering and the besieging terrors of remorse. And at the last, wild with the passion of transcendent things and the hatred of all the bounds that infringe upon the soul, they grew contemptuous of the very gods, who at ease upon Olympus, forgot the dream of greater heights, and the menace of the unslumbering Titan, worthier than they of heaven.

The
answer
of the
Greeks.

SUCH was the music of the Sirens in the youth of the world, and so it still sounds, in new languages and under new heavens, seducing from content in the still noons of happiness to the love of flaring dawns and tremendous majesties of evening ; leading astray, but along the mountains ; darkening life, but with immortal shadows. It never wrought man contemptible wrong ; but it en-

circles him with fatal toils and brings him hourly into peril. Of all who in all ages have sought to avert the insidious danger, the rulers of the Athenians had clearest vision of its scope and compass. They showed the one imperfect way of safety free to men, the measured classic way which alone in part avoids the malady of unrest. Many and great services they rendered men, but of all these their war with the Sirens is the highest. It is their other Persian war, unchronicled, unsung, yet no less momentous to the afterworld than the legendary struggle with the Great King. How mighty are those Sirens whom even Hellas could not conquer ; how great was the soul of Hellas, though she might never quite prevail ! For Athens erred by very excess of brilliance ; she would discuss no terms and make no composition, though in compromise lay the one

The
answer
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Greeks.

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chance of a happy issue. She dreamed in her pride that she might wholly crush an immortal enemy ; as well might she have sought to ostracise the winds of heaven. She fought with a fine valiance, and refused no challenge. But she fell into many an ambush which a slower wit would have escaped ; where the Bœotian would have drawn a battle the Athenian lost it. At last she wearied ; and with exhaustion grew intolerance. All must accept her law of measure : to the *barathron* with the unconforming spirit ; let none speak of the forbidden thing. Away with all that might reveal the Sirens' power. Away with the memory of Odysseus ; or if that name were too dear to be forgotten, let it be defamed and hatefully remembered. Let Sophocles lead on the deceiver of Philoctetes ; let Euripedes present the devourer of widows'

houses ; let there remain to after generations a legend of the hard Hellenic Sadducee, *durus Ulixes*, "Ulysses wise and base," shameless of all shames to achieve an argument or carry a merciless design. Exaggerating thus, the nature which was to serve cool reason abjured it ; the instrument of measure was taught to serve excess ; and temperance, the most classic of the virtues, was crowded from the classic mind. The world should pursue happiness in sunlight, composed to ordered days in the worship of the Grace Aglaia. It should create forms of clearest contour ; it should abide in a knowledge succinct and fixed in a clean circumference ; man should rule his way by reason only, persuaded to pursue that alone which might be all seen, to handle that alone which might be wholly done. The arch achievement, the absolute sight, these availed, and beyond

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these nothing. All that was un-governed and impulsive in his nature should be reprobate as a barbarian violence. Emotion should be the unclean thing ; thoughts clouded or suffused with passion no thoughts more, but the draff of idle dreams. Well, it was trenchant war, but fought upon the pure gospel of excess ; the great Greek rule " nothing too much " was belied at every stage of this strategy ; consistency was saved, but the sense of humour sacrificed. For happiness was now defined for Hellenes as " virtuous use of the intellectual energies," and so deep in her loved system was Athens lost, that she heard the chill words as though they fell from Hermes' lips or rustled to her from the oak leaves of Dodona. All passion was cast into one gulf with the banned abstraction Matter, and for the same offence : it interfered with logic ; it blurred the clear lines of

geometric fancy. But though her scheme of things was drawn with her finest art, it was yet a world in diagram, as like reality as the dead map to the living landscape. Athens the sane was grown fantastic; Athens the hardy wrapped herself against the zephyr. She who once went careless in the sun, now set up awnings to keep out starlight.

The answer of the Greeks.

The Sirens rejoiced, perceiving her advance along this false way; the wilfulness of this Amazon spared them terms which her genius had else extorted. Her logic was impossibly consistent for this earth of ours; it overreached its aim by sheer supereminence; it lacked the human touch, and could not suffice for men. It was unnatural, and Nature herself arose against it. For in all men there stirs at periods and in mysterious seasons a power intractable to precepts, and primordial in the soul.

Ostracising the winds.

Ostracis-
ing the
winds.

That power must out, though dialectic go down in the rush of it ; who stifles it or denies, though he had taken the Great King by the beard, should surely be humbled for his temerity. For it is not given that it may be disowned, or sundered from thought as a thing of lesser birth. It is twin-born and of the same nobility ; if the right of kinship be denied, it will burst forth alone, an ungovernable flame, and ill befall him who is found then upon its fiery way. What more ironic stroke has Fate delivered than this, that Athens, preaching reason, should have declined to prejudice ; that the seed which for sterility she had aimed at the ox's horn, should fall beyond the mark and bring forth a hundred-fold to her confusion. But though she was of a finer grain than all who had gone before or after, hers was the common lot of preachers who begin inspired and end indoctrin-

ated ; a bias turns them from the right line ; their best disciples will not follow them. Alas the day when the Greek wrested his own judgment ; when this heaven-sent moderator set himself to out-think thought, alembicating life until the virtue left it. Measure and symmetry and restraint were brought into contempt by his over-favour ; pet minions of the mind, they were awarded every prize and their opposites every penalty ; until, like a set paradox of Euclid, the theorem of his ideal life was too absurd for sense. Men wondered ; they grew indignant ; the cleverest and best were drawn insensibly to examine that which was so anxiously abused ; they began to listen for the divine forbidden music. Heretics such as these orthodoxy could not compel. Though she warned and threatened in a sore displeasure, they left the groves and porches for the sea-shore, where the horizon fades in

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Ostracising the winds.

mist and the harsh contours are all dissolved away. And there in the end the voice of the Sirens came to them, stealing with the faint breeze round the head of Sunium.

Great malcontents.

There had always been intellects in Greece which checked at the dogma of full harmony in the world, which could not pay the official price for happiness; there were always souls to echo that lamentation of Theognis which Sophocles renewed, and Posidippus raised again in a later age: "Not to be born is the first boon of man; and the second, if born he be, to return with all speed thither whence he came." Greek literature has undertones, discovered after what centuries of deafness, which prove that the shadow of the Infinite was not to be averted even from the Greek soul, or the desire of it kept dumb for ever. And since this is the greatest literature that ever was, and vibrant with

life, the keenest of all lives that ever ran in veins, its testimony is the word of a faithful witness, and more credible than the cold assurance of the preachers. Philosophers themselves, retained as advocates of the defined and the precise, were found false to their instruction, and blessing that which they were called to curse. Plato in his most prophetic dialogues avows the love of Wisdom a kind of madness, perceiving that without a fusion and kindling of the soul, reason has no way into the heart of truth. He bade philosophy touch the thyrsus, but it did not wound her hand; nor did it seem to many that she had been defiled. Here was no small marvel, but there ensued a greater; the same confession came from men forearmed against it by yet narrower discipline. It was found on the lips of sculptors, whose art more than all others guards a high convention, and is

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dedicated from birth to the law of measure. It was found on the lips of Scopas. Now this is so notable a thing, and so eminent a proof of some weakness in the Greek defence, that we may fitly pause over it awhile and question a great shade. In the story of art, there are few deeds more significant than his, who forsook, when it seemed too strait for truth, a tradition accepted almost as divine. It is hard for us now to conceive to the full the courage of the abandonment; we were never bred up under a Pheidian law; from our infancy we have inbreathed romance. But then, in the Hellenic world, what audacity in this defection! Saul among the prophets was not stranger than was this sculptor delivering the message of the Sirens in a world forbidden to speak their names; it must have seemed to the lovers of the old law that the foundations of the great art were

shaken, and the sacred stream driven backward upon its source. Yet even we may in some faint measure receive the shock of that apostasy, confronted for the first time with a head by Scopas. For it strikes the soul unawares, which looked for no such arrow out of night. The high tranquillity is there, indeed, but pierced through and through; it is the face of one adventured beyond his last defences, alone in a darkness, ringed about with threatening sounds. Here is the look which the archon's eye would not see, but which the gods saw many a time, when the crowds were gone homeward, and the worshipper lingered in the precinct to question his own soul apart. The countenance of that pondering Medici is not strange to us, as he sits above his tomb lost in the yet insoluble secret; we know his day, and the mind which created him in a pause of converse

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Great mal-
contents.

with sibylline and prophetic forms. Michelangelo perceived—his verse glooms and flashes under the thought—that the desire of things remote, let it once pass into the heart, becomes at once a spring of joy and a fire of never-ceasing torment. All this is written in his own face as his contemporaries have left it, stern, visited by dreams, impatient of this trivial world; it shines out of eyes worn by long perusals of the heights and depths beyond common sight. But the mind is as it were affronted, when it divines a like foiled and ardent nature in the child of an earlier age, in a Hellene, in one who had dreamed no terrors of the Doom, nor ever trembled in the severe shadows of theology. The expression of such a nature in such an art is unsanctioned by our canons; it offends as an utterance out of Soli. But in truth this is not so much a lapse as a recovery

and a correction. And it is the Sirens' work; these faces speak their language.

By a peculiar grace of destiny, Scopas was born a Parian; the child's first steps were upon marble. In such an isle, if anywhere on earth, the young Hellene should have grown up in the very spirit of the harmonious life. Roaming the white beaches, or lying upon some promontory above the wine-bright sea, he should have gathered into his soul the consenting gladness of all created things. On such a shore, if the creed of harmony were true, the memory of a bright protected life under the guidance of familiar gods should have remained to him unclouded through his later life as a birth-right of happy fortune. Yet just this man was chosen to prove Greece presumptuous, and that by the very art on which she had most relied, the great clear art of

Scopas.

Scopas.

Pheidias. That the proof might go out into all the Hellenic world, he was called from his narrow isle; a new spirit passed into him; in an unknown hour he was changed, and the manner of his thought transformed. Upon what paths he went, or where the first shadow fell upon him, history does not tell; his is a life but sparsely chronicled. But from the jetsam and poor wreckage of his work, all that remains now to us from his hand, we may divine what shadows they were, from what deeps issuing, into what heights withdrawn. These forms reflect the travail of an unquiet spirit to which the well-preached harmonies were no longer certain. They have lost the poise of godlike life attained in the earlier age; they breathe a disdain of law and a consciousness of high transgression; they betray an initiation of the soul which orthodox Hellenic art would fain

have hidden. They tell of sparkling dangers and serene treacheries perceived, of an undertowing tide upon the bright shores ; and if no poet had ever revealed the secret in anxious verse, these fragments alone would have proclaimed it. Scopas spoke for all those who knew that they bore a burden, and endured no longer to be told by assertive voices that they dreamed, and that their sore shoulders were not galled. For the temple of Athena Alea he wrought the hunt of the Calydonian boar, of which there remain but two mutilated heads, one of an expression tense with such ardour of distress as no mere chase of beasts might ever awaken. He who carved these upturned eyes and parted lips was dreaming of other things than feats of venery, translating the protest of his own soul and of many souls in like affliction ; while he worked, his fancy

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Scopas.

was away in the fields of another destiny, where man himself was at bay, and the mort sounded over a human quarry. The broken relief of a charioteer from the tomb of Mausolus, whether the master himself wrought it or a disciple, speaks in the same language, but in another mood. This driver bending over the chariot-rail is the champion in no battle of which history tells; he is not one who whirls about an arena, stirring the earth over a little space for the prize of a cauldron or painted vase. He is beyond the compute of things; the present is gone from him; his eye is bent upon something beyond the gaps of war or the curve of the course, or the spectators tier on tier beyond. He searches another bourne; the shouts of men are distant to him as the murmur of gnats; the breath of pursuing horses upon his shoulder goes unheeded as the

natural air. He is beyond measure of space; not in the battle or the concourse, but alone with himself like a star in immensity, consumed with gathering flames and careless of all but an unseen goal. The Mænad, though known but in an ancient copy, is of the same kindred. She floats forward like a billow that confronts the wind, with head flung back and tossing hair, wavelike in all her contours, a child of the deep astray upon the earth and called by some wild memory back to ocean. Wave-like she flows on, to be broken on the shore that no man knows. And that head of a maid or goddess from Acropolis bears the like witness, though in her the desire of the things beyond is held in a supreme restraint. In the bloom of life she gazes upward and outward, looking intently upon a distance, as if, like an Iphigenia warned, she saw in it some place

Scopas.

Scopas.

of deepening shadows towards which her youth is driven for sacrifice. There is yearning in them, and a half-subdued dismay ; beneath the proved composure, the passionate hope for a sign delayed. Here is a soul which yet waits her hour ; when the sign glows upon the darkness she shall forsake all to follow ; wherever lie the way, on every path her feet shall be set firm, and her heart prove its valiance. A goddess, but mortally impassioned ; anxious in a world unknown, marvelling, doubting, unserene. This virginal life is not poised : it pulses, dilating and contracting with the heart it quickens. These lips, might the soul be absolved of silence, would tell you in a strain of prophecy, visions of the Erythræan Sibyl, things that reach back into the shadow of oblivion and out towards the mysteries of coming time. But they are mute

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to us; though we ask of her a thousand times, they shall not be moved. Has she already lost, or not yet attempted? Is she mocked by a disillusion, or perplexed by some warning of a dream? Does she doubt of a divine love, or mislament an earthly passion? Or having sung to deaf gods, does she wait for her wandering music to return? This is the countenance of all humanity, troubled by the first whisper of the Sirens' song; it is the classical embodiment of Romance.

Scopas.

IT was so, by some lyric phrase arraiguing the set life, by some high fancy of a philosopher, by a sculptor's seeming aberration, that the Sirens were veritably known to men while Greece was still Greece, and free. The place for the breach was chosen, a party within the walls won over; what need to recount the taking of the city, when it

The in-sufferable Mean.

The in-
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befell in the fullness of unmerciful time ? For awhile, even after the disaster, the old law of measure was allowed to stand ; but at last the substance smouldered away ; it became adust. It remained as a writing upon a paper charred through and through, in a dead stillness a dead thing, telling only this that once it had a meaning, and hardly more material than the breath by which it should be destroyed. The breath came out of the East like a breeze heavy with Sabæan fragrances ; it brought into the West frenzies, strange loves, unknown mysteries. In the very Parthenon there was set up an oriental creed ; the Sirens triumphed ; the defeat of Xerxes was avenged. The shadow of the immeasurable passed over the land of measure ; last indignity of all, it flowed onward to the seven hills of Rome, leaving Hellas aside as a province superseded, a place

of no account. The world was enfranchised from her law, which might no more become law universal than the architecture so evocative of her spirit might satisfy the desire of every people. The Hellenic temple soothes and delights the mind, persuading it of a power in man strong to achieve all things ; in every part, and in the whole, it is instinct with a supreme grace and continence. The columns spring like living stems ; and as, in the tree, the risen sap flows easily along the branches, so all upward effort is diffused along these entablatures and ebbs in a harmony of receding lines. The roof, with its broad gable, confines and embraces the whole ; its calm length, its quiet overshadowing, are symbols of a world summed, contained, and pacified. The temple of Segesta, framed in its peaceful hills, consents with all seen Nature, and in the hour of

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Mean.

The in-
sufferable
Mean.

our devotion there seems no thought ennobling the relation of man and universe which, in the language of its great day, it should not beautifully proclaim. Exact-
ing beyond reason might the life appear, for which this absolute grace were not enough. And yet it does not suffice; it leaves unsatisfied the half of the insurgent human soul. Consummate though it be, and fortified against all the surprises and aggressions of infinity, it yet remains a pattern of the half soul and a regional perfection. The mad yearnings, the misgivings, the revolts of the enchanted spirit find here no countenance; it is too wholly of the gods, to whom alone is given the life without bewitchment: the gods, whose every desire is appeased, who are never long fasting, whose cups run over. As for the ungodlike mass of men multiplying at large upon the

earth, the glory of it elates and flatters them, but is ever incongruous with their discontent; they essay it, but rise unsatisfied, tasting an ambrosia which is not for a mortal hunger. It cannot assuage the dark disturbing fancies or take the poison from the unquiet mind. For them it is spectacular, and reserved for rare days; to the perturbable brood of man, in the usual hour of conflict, a thing insufferably serene.

In the dark ages, when Greece and her works were for a time forgotten, the Sirens, wearied with their victorious war, went apart, and in a cavern filled with tremulous wave-light dreamed centuries away. Many in those times saw Pan, when he stole across the moonlight, or lay among the rocks, pondering the hour when he should come back to his own. And many heard the Sirens singing in their dream the song that goes over

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the world. But none saw face to face, or heard to the full end. The god fled; the music died unapprehended, like that strange chime of ocean which sounds out of the deep and is lost again, when the still night breathes mystery in summer. But when at last the time of preparation was fulfilled, the Sirens awoke like the Seven of Ephesus, refreshed, and prescient of their greater fortune. For the barbarians had changed the face of the earth; like the Avenger of the prophet, they had flowed with an overrunning flood and pursued their enemies into darkness. The minds of men were renewed, and by that long darkness made propense to shadows, as if they had been coloured by the grey stormy heavens in which alone Victory would now spread her wing. Athens was unknown; her art buried, her literature in exile; no power stood now protective

between the Sirens and mankind. So they sang to the master-builder an unthwarted song. They made him body forth the theory of life which Greece refused to utter ; they tempted and incited and beset, until the Gothic style arose and all the charmed stone proclaimed them. There are minds, exact and critical, which reject this name of Gothic, as unworthy of an exalted art ; yet the term is not so ill imagined, or without its poetry, allusive as it is to a certain indomitable wildness in this style, a character of aboriginal strength, drawn, as it were, from the blood of Amals. Is there no point and virtue in a name which so tersely conveys the essential severing quality between the mediæval and the Hellenic art ? They who first aspersed by it, baptized more honourably than they willed, giving to us who have come after, in place of their obscuring slight, a gleam

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of underlying truth. For the great Gothic churches rise as if, like Amphion's walls, they had been called to birth by music; and to music they rose indeed, an Amœbean strain of angels and Sirens, in which the Sirens could never be chanted down. The unrest which the Greek temple denies, the cathedral of the Middle Ages cries to heaven. The high vaults bear down upon the walls, holding them in an unpausing fierce resistance. All here is pitted and opposed; force visibly meets force as when wrestlers stand breast to breast, in appearance still, but alert, and feeling after the first faint sign of advantage. You seem, by a stretch of fancy, to hear sounds issue from these walls, the gasp of the caught breath, the sigh of the living creature in tense endurance. Every stone speaks of struggle; all urges and ascends, from the buttresses which rise one

above the other as if they stormed the height, to the pinnacles and the spires beyond, losing their vanes among the clouds. All the huge structure strives and undergoes ; there are hours when it seems to lament and supplicate. But always it speaks of souls committed to the dread adventure of living, for whom there may be no rest in any Hellenic dream of harmony. When you see the high nave of Amiens occupy the heavens, or Chartres upon its hill, or Lincoln, some dream of finality accomplished may at first deceive the mind ; you may think of the Seraphic Doctor, or of Vincent of Beauvais, building up knowledge into one all-contenting whole. But draw nearer, and perceive the wide-flung shadows, the cavernous entrances, the ranks of pointing stone, the multitude of limbs and features conspiring upward in one sustained ascent ; it is no longer the

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pride in human wisdom achieved which compels the mind; rather the mortal dismay of lowliness shall gain you, the sense of the undone, the yearning after the undiscovered. It is not the silver voice of Aquinas that you hear, but the groan of Abelard under the thrust of his untamed desire. All that the Greek suppressed, here finds its utterance; that which an Ictinus could not say, is outspoken by a Robert de Luzarches. It is by a grace of good event, and full of morality, that the visible forms of Sirens are sometimes carved upon mediæval portals. The clerks will tell you that they are there to point a moral of Honorius, the plain old moral against luxury and the pride of life. Yet any who will, believe it; let them search the bestiaries and take council with the drear scholastics. But none who have heard the song are ignorant of this, that the strange sculptured

figures are not there for edification only, but also for a witness ; they are there as the emblems of that life upon which the Greek refused to let men look, the life untr tranquil and thwarted of achievement, the life enchanted away from happiness, so far away, into such a mystery of distance, that the things which it may here fulfil become indifferent, and the love of the whole soul goes out to things upon which the possessing hand has never closed. In this great art of the North, the Sirens made the world confess them ; here they established against the classic arrogation the equal claim of Romance. Not the coloured chivalry of knights, show of blazons, joy of jousts, charm of the *gai savoir* ; not a posture of affliction in minds unmatu red ; not a literary fashion ; not reverie by lakes, or high sentiment in mountains, the facile tears of René or the fanfarons of Ruy

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Romance.

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of
Romance.

Blas ; Romance is fulfilled in none of these things. But Romance is the root or substance of which all these are inessential accidents ; it is the dark water under the gay barge, the rock which holds the samphire, the texture over which the bright embroidery runs. It is that which shall remain when these are wrecked, or withered, or torn away, that which was before their beginning ; the answer of the human soul under compulsion of infinity, the mood of a vast desire hungry still when the sops of happiness are gone.

Dante
and
Odysseus.

Though the master-builders had proclaimed them, the Sirens were not yet content ; they sought a poet to spread their message in a southern land. They sang to Dante a sovereign music, inweaving in it marvels resistless in the new age ; they sang of Odysseus, how, by spite of Greeks, he had been

dishonoured for their sake. The seer of lost worlds understood the mysterious heroic soul; he gazed down into it, where, himself deceived, he had set it among the crooked in counsel; and suddenly, as the twin-crested flame swayed to and fro before him, the splendour and surge of inward light broke forth, which jealous men have not the power to quench nor magnanimous gods the will. His own soul flowed to it with an answering fire; the glory of infinite adventure called to him by the voice of the arch-wanderer, and the overclouding of it by ignorance or malice prepense became abominable to him as a proven wrong. As he pondered, he discovered the old injustice: even the Homeric ending was now false to him; its divine flight was spoiled, the greater poetry abased at the will of earthlings. A hater of all turbulence and lover of ancient grandeur, he

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yet did not shrink from violence to the famous story, perceiving it his business to make that high type among men resplendent before other eyes, as now before his own. It was as when a discoverer's hand removes from a statue ill-restored some added and incongruous head, setting upon it once more the authentic brow and features : upon the instant all is changed, the makeshift that once pleased becomes intolerable ; in this form and no other we know that the sculptor embodied his dream. Dante is direct and fearless ; he renews as if the whole poem were his own. With the economy of great art he ends all in a score of memorable verses, which disengage the figure of Odysseus from the falsity and hardness of the later legend ; the veil falls away like a frippery, baring to the sun the form of the hero as he had lived and was now worthily to die. We

see no longer the mean antagonist who went down into Egypt after poisoned arrows ; the obedient minister of tyrants is gone, and the heartless logician of the Attic drama. In his stead we see one of an all-comprehending sight, no reckoner of gains or balancer of dark expedients, but a warrior too proud to feint or foin with weaklings, and even in his decay fierce for the great adventure. That " little speech " is wonderful in which the comrades of the last voyage forget all their feebleness, though their still harbour is far behind them, and before them the unsailed Ocean of the West, awful even to strong men. It is no marvel that a tale thus magically told should have graven itself in the hearts of other poets, who found revelation in it as from a chapter of life written at one dipping of the pen with the high simplicity of a scripture ; the exceeding fire of its

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truth burned it into the memory of our own poet, who, in the mere retelling, rose to a rare height by communion with a greater genius. The message once proclaimed, the old end of the Odyssey is tame to us and unworthy of its earlier course ; the mountain river flags by clay banks ; it dies sluggishly into a leaden sea. What blindness would have had us bid farewell to the returned Odysseus at his hearthside, leaving him to a quiet death in the fullness of his time and among his own people ? It is flat inconsequence that such a one should belie the whole meaning of his life, sinking into a last ease at the end of it. Great adventurers do not so die, least of all they who have heard out the Sirens' music. But how natural it is, when the hero rises up, and the word is passed for sailing ; how it stirs the blood, when the lords of Ithaca obey the call, when they

step the mast with stiff arms of age, and having poured libation to Poseidon, sail for the world's end without a doubt or question, as if they went upon the affairs of a common day. And when they have passed the Pillars of Heracles, and with a following wind run out into the ocean towards the baths of the Western stars, what inevitable rightness sounds out of the words : " Remember the seed from which ye sprang. Ye were not fashioned for animal content, but to follow after valour and understanding." Aye, it is all in the divine way of nature when at last there looms a dark mountain, and there descends from it a blast that spins the ship about, crushing it like a shell in the crossing tides. And when, in view of the Fortunate Isles, far from Ithaca, in a whirlwind and a darkness, Odysseus and his crew go down in forty fathoms, it is the end which the Sirens sung, and the gods

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willed, and Destiny foreordained. In this death these wanderers are themselves ; they have not abandoned the quest ; they have been faithful to the last hour. Meeting his doom so, the great hazarder fulfils a destiny for which his whole life was prelude. The conclusion brings relief ; it exalts at once and satisfies. We had not misread the heroic nature ; we were right when we knew that it was never for him to sit as a grandsire in an angle, who carried home the Sirens' music and gave it echoing-place in the rafters of his hall. We did not err, knowing surely in our hearts that there must come an hour when its melodies should awaken and gather to a tumult, when the door should at last be flung wide, and he should rise up to go with every true man of his fellowship behind him. In the old Odyssey that hour never sounds ; the tale swerves at the end under some pressure of wear-

ness or convention ; Odysseus drifts upon the years like the steersman who nods over the tiller and lets it sway out of his hand. The roamer over immeasurable leagues lies down at the last to wait his death ; he dies upon a bed, like a faint man, by inches. This end is an offence, and a Lucian can but cheapen it with his sneers. All is nobler in the Divine Comedy ; the right Odysseus comes again ; the false *eidolon* which defamed him is driven even from the world of Shades.

Poetry had begun the wrong ; it was meet that poetry should sing the palinode. The Sirens were justified with the hero, and discovered as the chosen instruments of fate. Of all the persons in the Epic, they only might be invoked to explain the new event of the story ; none else could have urged to that last revolt against the flickering, fanned life of age. The end

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and
Odysseus.

The
Sirens'
power.

The
Sirens'
power.

was indeed made certain in the hour when Odysseus stood bound with cords, drinking in sweet sounds and storing his memory with enchantments; it was then that the wanderer knew he should die wandering, to become the exemplar of a passion indelible from the heart of man. Two vast desires pulse through all things, one for rest, the other for endeavour, eternally renewed upon fresh planes and through unfolding mysteries world without end. All in us that is physical and worn by time yields to the first, all that is ponderable verges to its fulfilment. The heaviness of the creation works for it; the subsidence of things prepares its victory. A natural philosopher has said that Matter longs for rest; that the state to which it tends is not perfection, but death; that were the yearning of the atoms fulfilled, the world would be locked in lasting sleep.

But against this dull trending towards repose is matched in primordial opposition a desire of motion in its nature spiritual, a vital quick antagonist, wherever the bolder life moves in its pilgrimage over the earth. Of this desire the Sirens sing, and therefore it is that they survive all change, coeval with the world, and living out all its ages.

The
Sirens'
power.

AGainst the enchantresses who foiled Hellas, simplicity strives in vain. Such elemental spells are theirs that they would surely charm all thought, did not the kindlier gods fear for men, seeking to close their ears by artifice, as by her device of wax Calypso saved the companions of Odysseus. The gods thus preserve the many; yet they would not, if they might, save all, or wholly prevent the danger. For desiring man to rise, they must needs allow him

Their
common
prey.

Their
common
prey.

the perilous way, and when a new height must be scaled, consent to sacrifice that his race may climb nearer their shining seats. They consent with pain, resisting still the sacrifice beyond hope and the profitless waste of life ; but Fate, which is above them and blind, confounds their purpose, driving within the range of the music souls which their mercy would fain have spared. Fate is hard ; she will not suffer choice or pity ; the Sirens must sing to all whom she sends towards them, winning by her fault their evil name for cruelty. They may not do the kind gods' will, and tempt strength or genius only ; all must hear who are driven upon their path, the weak with the strong, the crew with the captain, the faint with the ardent soul. Might they have charmed genius alone, even Greece had praised them ; for when genius obeys the song, it is never wholly thwarted ;

it brings back from the high places of adventure that which may be heard or seen, that which is laudable of men, and abides among them for a witness ; some image of a divine form, some lingering word of angels, some echo of an immortal music ; fragments snatched from a world half apprehended, but like sweet fruits of Eden refreshing the descended soul. Genius is repaid for half its suffering ; yet even the creative life is haunted by the Imagined Better Thing, which in more vivid shapes than any seen of dull minds, will ever arise behind the thing achieved, and deform its beauty for the achiever, until that which all the world praises is to him who wrought it the work of miscreant fancy or the visible nonsense of a duped brain. Genius creates ; genius may buy with blood ; it can afford the cost, and, after all the waste, has some residue of the

Their
common
prey.

Their
common
prey.

The
maleficent
song.

purchase. But woe to those who are made to dream the creator's dream without his finer understanding or his skill of capture.

These are the true victims of the Sirens, the great company of the enchanted, who for an hour of bliss pay dearly by long days of inachievement. These are they whose undoing, so purposeless, so vain, appears an abuse of immortal powers. Surely it is a hard thing that the divine maleficent song should lure towards the height which genius reaches the soul which can never win the vision, but, dazed with a moment's joy, is held ineffectual in a frustrate anguish of attention. The wonders half-revealed are too far or brilliant for this straining sight; all vanishes and flows away, like the beauty of an unknown country under the lightning of a summer night when we are borne across it on swift wheels, never to return

or see it under the sure light of day. Life is despoiled of peace for the chance hearing of one song : life, the best gift of gods ; the flawless jewel is darkened and may never shine tranquilly again. Shall there not be pardon for him whom the mockery of false promise drives to impious complaint ? The marvels half-descried are lost beyond his utterance, yet they will not vanish from his life, or leave him to the old peace, but like a mist indissoluble of the sun, haunt him still with their useless gleams and splendours. They trouble the soul ; they sadden the colours of the world. The cadences heard in those heights descend to him in the low places as a thin murmur out of the infinite distance, ghostly chords and evanescent harmonies which come and go too fitfully for apprehension. So the lark sings on a boisterous day high above a crossing wind : it is sure he sings, for

The
maleficent
song.

The
maleficent
song.

ever and again a note will fall earthward ; but the strained ear may not link into their first order the jewels of scattered sound ; they are gone ; the winds have withdrawn them into immensity, wonders confusedly heard, and glories rendered to oblivion. It is well that the rumour of common life drowns wholly for the mass of men the echo of the Sirens' voice ; it is well that of all earth's millions, thousands only hear. If we but knew, the thunder of the noisy world against which we murmur is a power of safety over life, and often they who rail most loudly against it have best cause for giving thanks. For that all-enfolding din saves more men than the Greek's exclusive reason ; the hebetude born of labour stops more ears than wax. Long joyless poverty in that tumult is nearer happiness than this fantastic affluence which deceives the hungry heart. For across the

solitude the insidious voice comes rounding in the ear ; there is an end of acquiescence in the good things that are ; there rises a mad desire for the visionary grace, the whole being sways to a tide of strange rebellion. And the voice speaks very sweetly, in its melody beyond resistance : “ Happiness is a mean gift ; it is the animal’s ease. But man was not born to go the way of oxen, with his eyes bent earthward, imagining his home-stead all the universe. For whom, if not for man, are the horizons robed in light and colour, and the heavens sown with quivering stars ? Awake, O touched of Circe’s wand, fallen semblances of men, win back the diviner form, and with it the divine desire. Shall the fish leap out above his stream and the mole explore the day, but man keep within set pales and bind his soul upon a tether ? ”

The
maleficent
song.

The
Imagined
Better
Thing.

It is the voice, accursed of the Greeks ; it is the Sirens' voice. Whosoever gives ear, is straightway rapt far from the good common things that he might have loved ; when he returns to them, they are transformed for him and hateful ; he may no longer have the same pleasure of them ; they satisfy his soul no more. The harmonies of life are become a vague dissonance, tuneless and persistent, like an Arab song. In the well of satisfaction rises a water of gall ; the very duty fulfilled leaves behind it a remorse for something haply overlooked or misaccomplished ; until another hour of vision comes, there is nothing but the life pre-occupied, the doing without zeal, the hearkening without attention. Pursuing the smooth paven ways, he seems to himself sedulous over trivial aims, and provident of super-vacuous ends ; the vanity of all these things is so transparent to

him that the business of material existence becomes a by-work, an idle labour of perfunction ; what is it but a screen or cloak to interpose between curious eyes and the secret errantry of the soul ? Let the Imagined Better Thing but distantly appear, and the beauty of all beside is discoloured in the contrast, as the hue of a lowlier stone pales before the royal glow of sards. For the desire of this, the good things of use, the deeds rich in content, are tedious to him and profitless ; and if the absent mind have no success among these, how much less the absent soul ? While he gives them his forced interest, impassioned longing for things beyond breaks in upon his labour and makes it vain. He stands amid the swathes reaping ; suddenly the full ears at his feet are vile to him for the beauty of some zone of distant poppies. He stays his scythe, and is left behind

The
Imagined
Better
Thing.

The
Imagined
Better
Thing.

by the whole company of reapers ; a scorn for all reaping and garnering rises to a full flood within him and possesses him to the last recesses of his nature. From that hour he may work no more. He lets fall the scythe and forsakes the field and his fellow-labourers in this harvest ; his soul, like a bird escaped, flies forth to those golden cities " ten months' journey deep " in the dear wildernesses of imagination. She has outlived the grey day ; it is over and gone ; for a dreamwhile she will live the true life, come what disaster may. Once more she shall know the rapture of attempt, the quickening smart of failure ; once more she shall beat a divine air ; once more wing free under the firmament and the unattainable stars. It shall be a glory for her, but it shall be in vain ; hers is no strength for the flight of eagles. For him whose soul awakes to disillusion

out of this dream, the old joy of work and action wanes ; existence grows cold, like a passion prolonged beyond its hour by some blind loyalty of habit. He moves towards all goals indifferent ; he disputes with the shrugged shoulder ; he concludes by passing on. The midways of life become to him places for digression, its interests trifles, *parerga et paralipomena*, negligible, vain things. If he explores causes and effects, the problem solved is a puzzle contrived for a child's understanding ; if he controls men, he is a mockery to himself, and centurion of a hundred atoms. In this lassitude he sees his day perish ; while his hand hangs idly, the threads of human love are ravelled. Pursuits and occupations are naught, and work a dullness ; they make no music for him ; there is no rhythm of the iron whereon they are forged and fashioned. It is said of the second

The
Imagined
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Thing.

The
Imagined
Better
Thing.

Cain that he had delight of the sound of his hammers, perceiving intervals and just accords, as his work sang to him from the anvil and rejoiced his heart. To all men whose soul is in their labour there sounds the same music; it is well with them; they are the happy; they inherit the earth. But to him who toils with a mutinous and transcending soul, the anvil rings untrue, the fire of the forge dies down to ashes. And by this rough practice the wings of his soul are frayed and wounded; he fears for it as the power of flight is more and more impaired. "Know ye not that the soul that hath but few pens and feathers, he may not well fly?"

The rams
of
Nebaioth.

This, then, is the cruelty of the Sirens' song: all who hear it, save they have genius, are like to be spoiled for the good things that satisfy. They are stricken beyond cure; their blood is tainted with a

poison of disaffection. Let a man once hearken to that music, and thereafter in the world of practice he shall find nothing after his own heart, while from the visionary world he shall come but empty away. Yet the world of visions is now the country of his soul ; though he have no franchise of it, he is less alien and exile there than in the place of noise and war and traffic. Whenever he may win free, he wanders back to the high region of his discomfiture, like some deceived inveterate lover whom no cruelty can keep from his unprofitable devotion. For this madness he becomes a stock for scorn ; he is marked as one without fixed course, eccentric from the orbit of common fortune. His neighbours compare his ineffectual pilgrimage with their rewarded labour ; while he wandered, they have worked on ; they see his fields empty, and the rams of Nebaioth

The rams
of
Nebaioth.

The rams
of
Nebaioth.

graze down their pastures. Nor, being mortal, can he pass the lordly rams and always care nothing; when disillusion unseals his eyes, he also must make comparison and cast a balance to his undoing. He sees himself nothing in this world of the worshipful and esteemed. Like the sage in ancient China, he beholds them happy as on a tower in spring while he has small pleasure of existence; they are full of light; he dwells obscure and desolate amid his unfulfilled desires. Like the Christian mystic, he is inwardly afflicted; the sorrow pierces to the very marrow of his soul. "That which others say shall be heard; what thou sayest shall be accounted nothing. Others shall be in great praise of men, but of thee shall no word be." West and East tell him of the same heart's-misery; they mock him with cures which were never for his constitution. He turns to go his ways alone, and

expiate this condign offence, that once he did not escape a wind which bore the Sirens' song. The general life grows with each day more hard to bear; for the impassioned thought, to him now the only thought, will not endure close comradeship or suffer him to pay the tribute which buys success. It must ever take solitary flight, so individual it is and hard to be imparted, unsocial, and averse from the common law of reason. It is told of lonely settlers who have dwelled long upon the prairies inbreathing a vast air, that they are disquieted in the streets of cities, which are mean to them, and sinister with intolerable shadows of confinement. They chafe like wild creatures captured; at last they return to the infinite plains where the sun in his rising and going down is not walled from their sight, knowing their wilderness homelier to them than all that

The rams
of
Nebaioth.

The rams
of
Nebaioth.

crowded world. It is so with him who, drawn by the spell of the fatal music, has sped even a bow-shot towards Immensity. From the habit of the large air he loses the love of things - precise and trimmed ; the huddling of minds is sordid to him ; the alleys and base-courts of logic are too close for his lungs. He is enticed back into the solitary place ; he yields to its call, a truant thenceforth from his commonwealth. No moralist in Hellas would have given him countenance in such desertion ; the Spartans would have saved him from himself by rude discipline, and haled him off to the mess by violence. But since Romance won its right upon earth, there is no Laconian law, only the law of the unregimented life, which gives license to stray from the flock and be rent upon the thorns.

I HAVE heard of many lives, and seen more than one, too deep sunken already in the bewitchment to hope for their deliverance. I knew a home which had sufficed a man for happy years ; it seemed his very own place, apportioned for his peculiar need ; the peace of it was the only wealth he valued. But the Sirens sang, and insensibly he saw it with new eyes ; they charmed him into contempt for a tranquillity bought at the price of straitness. He felt himself inexplicably yield to wilful aversions ; then, as the eyes reproached him for whose joy till now he had laboured, he covered the vestiges of remorse with shows of strange impatience. Then repentance gave place to callousness without shame. He ceased to make excuse ; openly he forsook the duties of mutual converse for abstruse adventure of the sole mind, until at last the furies marked him ; his very

The
golden
cup.

The
golden
cup.

presence seemed to assert some inhuman right of discommunion. The ease of the shared life being gone, the life itself chafed him. A deep discomfort of soul drove him often abroad ; but all parched about him like meadows in drought, where the fairy ring alone keeps green. In truth the Sirens had made a fairy ring for his soul ; thither they enticed it, to mature under enchantment the passion for difficult and exquisite things. This man, once careless of his own privilege and silent under every provocation, now shaped his whole existence to one point of selfishness, which glittered for him until he had eyes for nothing beside. And now estrangement swiftly grew between him and the soul chosen to be one with his own ; a hateful Rosicrucian pride disjoined them ; he dared to feel the scorn of the initiate for the profane. The old ties, at first loosening slowly, soon

drifted far apart, as Destiny, weary of delay, set her own dexterous fingers to the knot. For that other soul had also her pride, and disdained to be rejected, knowing nothing of the Sirens or their acknowledged office under Fate. Her honest wrath triumphed over all his subtlety, as at length, outraged beyond conciliation, she went from him, in the silence of her departure making the fine protest of her life. The shock of that abandonment almost saved him : could he but have followed, she might have carried him with her, an emigrant to some new land of promise. But the Sirens were at hand to hold him back ; their disespousing music sounded in the empty house ; he went out in a cloud of it, unrepenting. The Russians compare true love to a golden cup, which may be crushed but never broken ; and they say that however roughly it be used, by tender care it be-

The
golden
cup.

The
golden
cup.

comes once more all that ever it was. But that is only true of simple loves ; these only can be made whole, as they were before the blow. All the rest are too intricately graven, or too lavishly enriched with enamel or with gems, ever to win back their first form or the old harmonious tones. The delicate and various work, once impaired, may not be restored when the hand that created them is gone, or the furnace that fired them once extinguished. The cup of this man's love was thus rich ; it was therefore beyond repair. He left it crushed behind him, and went his way to become a pretender for invisible thrones, and to sit by the hearth of his own no more. By diligence he contrived almost to forget the former peace ; but only because his life was now absorbed in storms of change ; there was in it none of the old long-pausing sweetness which wakes

remembrance, but in place of it such calm as broods at the heart of cyclones and is ringed with furious waters. He remained homeless after he left that echoing house. The Sirens do not suffer homes.

There was another household where two together heard the music, just when, by a trained coincidence of purpose, they seemed to have found the true secret of contentment and a clear path to fortune. They had been strenuous beyond belief; but now they were as two dreamers on a farm of tares, with all their barns emptying. Little had they cared, if only their moods might still have accorded. But often the joys and pains of their new state were so perversely timed that when one was with Hope upon the clouds, the other was dungeoned below with Despair; their spirits so seldom moved as one, that they might have been divorced, for all

The golden cup.

The farm of tares.

The farm
of tares.

the comfort they had of union. It was the comedy of enchantment, as that other case the tragedy. Sometimes, indeed, their moods and inspirations would for a short while fall together, and then they were like children who have drunk a strange milk, and are wild with fears or delights incomprehensible to others. They amazed all who had known them in their sobriety; but they were harmless to all save themselves; for, as the Elizabethan said, not everyone that sucketh a wolf is ravening. While they themselves rejoiced, their friends could have wept over these consonant raptures and despairs; they saw in them too clearly the aggravation of a fate heavy enough without, and an impetus to a course that needed none. And, since the Sirens, less kindly than the gods, will not aid those whom they love to die young, this pair has lived on to forget that they ever knew a

calmer lot. They are a sorrow or a diversion to their neighbourhood, according as the hearts of those who regard them are hard or pitiful. Their estate is become a byword : there never grew such tares.

And then there was a poor man who was caught by the music, going to the mill one late winter morning. It seemed to be only a sound of birds calling out of the darkness ; and it took him wholly unawares. After that day the great revolving belts that hummed about him at his work ceased to deaden his soul as before, but called it into new wakefulness ; they were so changed that they might have been the music of the spheres. He lost time listening to them ; he earned less ; his credit fell with his overseer and comrades, the one suspecting him of brooding mischief, the others writing him down a madman. For a time he seemed irresolute what key to

The farm
of tares.

The
enchanted
mill.

The
enchanted
mill.

strike in answer to that strange music. At first he was enraged at the injustice which kept him moiling in a maze of wheels and cogs, while so many had freedom for thought and fancy ; but gradually he perceived in that machinery a perfect plant for the manufacturing of the dreams he loved, there being no place known to him so favourable to this as the mill, and no hours so wonderful as some of those which he passed in its walls. For other men it might produce commodities or wages ; but to him it gave at rare moments, in overflowing measure, things un-saleable and splendid, so that by degrees the suspicious mood left him and he abandoned thoughts of enmity to oafs and ruffians. As years went by, the principle of his existence became more and more a mystery to those about him ; it seemed to remove ever further from their understanding into un-

searched deeps of the man's being, as in the aged the life shrinks into far physical recesses where even death is perplexed and slow to find it. Something other than his labour was wearing him to a shadow; his look seemed that of one anxious before the time and listening for a curfew at noonday. He was negligent of himself, and would often have starved but for those of whose presence about him he seemed but half aware. This man also lost the peace of his home; it became to him a tent in Kedar, a place for the sleep of weariness, and housing visions less well than the dream-factory with its booming music. His own folks, in the wisdom of the simple, took some witchery for granted, and let him be, according to his own desire of being. They endured his unprofitableness as a judgment, and lived on less to cover the damage of the visitation. If times were

The
enchanted
mill.

The
enchanted
mill.

bad, they might give him a hard word ; but their common way was to excuse him to each other by nods and winks silently exchanged behind his back. For all that they did to mar him, he might have been always happy ; but the mischief lay in his own breast where the Sirens' song had brought it. Fair weather or foul, he would walk leagues of Sundays over fields and hills, and along the brown river, coming back so tired that he would be late at the mill gate next morning. Sometimes, in the prime of the year, he would disappear for days, returning with the look of a conspirator, or of a spy fresh from Eldorado. Dejection followed, until they urged him back amid the machinery, which in time reconciled him to a continuance of life. So year in year out they kept him somehow at work, and a roof over his head, until some shock of mental change laid him dead

among them with his secret undiscovered.

So many there are whose lives are thus forfeit at a beck, that sometimes a doubt creeps into the mind whether, after all is said, the loud genius of this age triumphs, or whether the Sirens begin once more to gain on the world. Is it so sure that, in this stour and welter of confused hopes, we fare better against the magic than the Greeks with their lucid scheme, their fine positive convention? There have been so many strategies, and none final yet; so often the Sirens have heard tell of their own death. 'Twas thought the Renaissance killed them, overbrowing them with sheer pride of life. But they came again, until once more the eighteenth century held them at wits' length by outworks drawn like the lines of Vauban. Each period of resistance passed, the one like glory of youth, the other like

The
Citadel of
Noise.

The
Citadel of
Noise.

an accomplished prime ; shall this dynamic genius of ours bring a more lasting conquest ? It has achieved great things ; but perchance we expect of it what no human power can assure, letting ourselves hope too fondly without cause. For it seemed to come to us as an undreamed relief, a god of the machine, proclaiming the life mechanical ; it drowned the lament of Werther and the tumid voice of Manfred with such a burst of sound that we fancied the reign of all insidious arts at an end for ever and a day. Man committed his handicrafts to wheels and pistons ; he steamed to his goal ; he filled the earth with clangour, bandying his discords across ever vaster space, until no sound which held of music was like to survive the unanswerable cacophony. Here at last seemed final safety ; the earth reverberant, Romance protesting in all metres to gods and

men, and cast beyond appeal. But in all this heyday the sanguine world forgot once more the character of the adversary. That pertinacity which the logic of the Hellene could never rebut was not to be quelled by din. The Sirens studied the new warfare; Ligeia sent forth a carrying voice to penetrate the central tumult. Our increased immunity against bewitchment may prove but a bare assumption; for souls are still everywhere decoyed, and of those most visibly enchanted, many are taken in the central bruit, snatched from the inviolable citadel of noise. The world goes on—more fortune to the roar of it—and the multitude does not perceive the loss, each vanishing unmarked as a man may drown in a splashing crowd of bathers. But the watchful grow uneasy, doubting the worth of the new violence. To them it seems that the chosen guardians are no

The
Citadel of
Noise.

The
Citadel of
Noise.

longer a sure defence; the ears of Cerberus relax, the goose gives up the Capitol. And looking out upon a world of gathering discontent, they wonder if it were not well by some eclectic skill to unite the schemes of all the combative ages, and insinuate a Greek temperance amid these turbulent forces. They begin to fear that no system yet essayed shall wholly avail; they would combine the best of each, to attain the one possible success, a resistance obstinate as the attack. For the Sirens will always sing, and many will always hear, and haply all that is effected by our thunder-claps is to make the hearing harder.

Egyptians
of the
wayside.

THE Sirens sing, and the victims of a chance are urged beyond the endurance of their mortality; they grow unquiet as the sea tossing beyond the last shore under

clouds like visible forms of sorrow. They cannot be resigned; the world is not their friend, nor the world's law; they murmur even against a better jurisdiction. Over the pages of the very Scriptures dance minims and quavers of a music which never accorded with that text, till the solemn rubric sinks out of sight beneath them as a stone under rippling water. They are poor, if to desire unattainable things is poverty; they are mad, if a despair of peace is madness. They do not find the cynic's wish fulfilled, that the chains in this gaol of the world should be warmed for the delicate among mortal prisoners. Seduced into a pursuit of visions, they may not dream of quietness; they must ever be computing prospects, or making estimate of their strength. The athlete, living for the day of trial, is not more harassed than these, for whom, as for the Stoic, life is

Egyptians
of the
wayside.

Egyptians
of the
wayside.

rather a wrestler's than a dancer's practice. The ruled existence, whether of religion or of science, refuses to them its thrice-blessed complacencies. They are not content to treat with Infinity by delegation, or learn of the deep at second hand from the Delian divers of theology. It is not given them to find tranquillity either in the daily ritual or in those appeasing exercises of induction with which some natures would replace the exercise of faith. The sameness of set devotion irks them. Science repels by exaggerated claims ; it is a practical system of unrealities ; and they cannot prefer the specialist's fenced acre to the old Limitless of Anaximander. Religion itself they may have, but unruly and individual, steeped in poetry to the fabric of its articles, unsoothed by external acts, indifferent alike to the manuals of sound doctrine or the cordials of

the belief which ails. They must feed their souls after their own way, like those idiorhythmic monks on Athos who provide meats for themselves, and will not be gathered in the common refectory. Though they long sorely for a part in rites, and the solace flowing from these, the fatal music always finds them out in the churches, stealing between Cantores and Decani until the spirit which was almost soothed to acquiescence rebels again and is made incredulous of its peace. They would bestow all their goods for a ritual which would compel to rest, some discipline of hard rule enforced by an Ironside in doctrine ; but when they seem to have found the one system heaven-sent for their need, it fails them upon the trial ; and there comes to them the ancient fear that he who may love no human being perfectly shall never attain the love of God. The Sirens sing, and all proves

Egyptians
of the
wayside.

Egyptians
of the
wayside.

vanity. Remains the sweet well-being of aspiration as Augustine knew it, with the brightness, the fragrance, the caressing presences by which, in elect hours, humanity heightens all which it undergoes ; glories of the dear earth carried heavenward by the adventuring soul. That rare emotion will sometimes seem more near attainment ; but it is personal to the individual nature, and tires with its weakness ; it has no strength of strands like the bond of a confederated worship. The thin thread is snapped continually ; and though it may be tied again and again, it is a string of knots swaying in the wind, with no support for heaviness. And the ordered knowledge of facts has no better comfort. For learning too wide for communication estranges from men ; and a narrow learning, though it make for happiness, is often so closely shut to sentiment

that it chills the enchanted mind. In the lairs of subdivided knowledge, *chascun dans sa chascunière*, each with God's universe all to himself, dwell those who have solved that final problem to their satisfaction, and learned to bury the Infinite below the Finite where it shall never disturb them more. These also are happy ; the place of the Sirens' liegemen can never be with these. He and his kind are as the Egyptians of the highway who tarry for a night under the clipped garden-hedges ; but are driven on with the morning, hag-ridden souls, misprising the given good, and pursuing on hurt feet the marsh-light of their illusion. Forever following, forever thwarted, dreaming all and fulfilling nothing, they would long for death, were it the indisputable end of ends. But death too is suspected of them as no last issue, itself a phase in the processes of change, a

Egyptians
of the
wayside.

Egyptians
of the
wayside.

vagrancy continuing into another world the deception born in this, where arch-achievement is of trifles only, and nothing that is real or great is ever utterly done.

Amiel.

And even the exalted paths of contemplation are not true ways of escape; though, with a refinement of their first cruelty, the Sirens will suffer one slave here and another there to steal far along them and dream for a moment of manumission. The soul of a sensitive cast they will let climb from height to height of perverse and delicate mislife, until it is grown almost too fastidious to endure the ways of earth; then, upon the very hour of its absorption into the Infinite, they send their song up to it, to draw it back to action and to itself. Such usage they meted to Amiel, a soul unserviceably fine like a vessel of rare glass made long ago in a caprice by a cunning master in Murano. Broken by the handling

of the rough world, buried deep under mounded sorrows, he decayed to a marvellous iridescence, beautiful with fugitive and delinquent splendours. A vessel from which none ever drank sustaining draughts, but thin potions of disillusion, elixirs of a bewildering despair. For him there was at last but one joy, to mark the audible stream of time and the flowing downward of universal being. All else that men call delight lost for him its pertinence and sweetness; in this alone he found oblivion of many sufferings. While this endured, the sorrow of his sterility was fainter to him; he knew suavity of release such as the wounded and the sick may know when the siege of physical pain is raised, and in the passing away of agony, a film of ease floats over the stilled consciousness. *Qui scrutator est majestatis opprimetur a gloria.* The beatific vision had

Amiel.

Amiel.

spoiled his sight for all that was nearer and more human ; when the radiance of Infinity faded round him, he beheld forms of men as through a telescope reversed, ants of the wayside, unworthy of his regard to whom all immensity lay open, and the sound of rolling worlds was a familiar thing. His thought flowed away in soft profusion ; the banks that once held it were left unstrengthened and the sluices unrepaired, until at last it had no strength more for human service and was evaporated in a lifeless waste of sand. Born with all fine instincts of affection, intending faithful comradeship, he forsook them without knowing the betrayal. Personality grew pale to him ; he lived aloof, disenamoured of appearances, a shadow belated in embodiment. Yet even this man was called back again and ever again that he might taste the full bitterness of vanity ; even this man

with his voice that whispered of entranced worlds, like a tired wind dying into the heart of wintry forests.

For the hard enchantresses will give men over to the falsest hopes, letting them dream even the Eastern dream of reabsorption into the eternal being. They give them to see the celestial Buddha in the clouds, the Lord of the Measureless Light, the Deliverer who redeems out of passion all with a pure heart calling ten times upon his name. They suffer them to approach the delicate hands used to benediction; they leave them almost at the foot of the lotus-throne. It is the most subtle of all their cruelties. For there is in the Eastern dream a peace which Hellas herself did not imagine, the passionless calm which in the grey hours the soul desires more than anything in earth or heaven. There is in it that which even the Christian

Amiel.

The
Measure-
less Light.

The
Measure-
less Light.

hope but imperfectly assures, since after personal redemption some old agony of the several life might revive in an immortal body. But should not the soul be absolved of all this fear, and all that menace be removed from her timeless prospect, if she obeyed the bidding of those mild eyes and made the tenfold invocation? The heaven of forms and contours once abandoned, there should be no peril of relapse, but lenient influences, oblivion, deep peace, a chastity of imperishable light. There are moods in which the countenance of Amitabha can say more than the lit face of Hermes, leader of souls, more than the brows of the Christ of Pity. At such times, when the feet have strayed out far from all companionship and seem almost brought to the flaming cincture of our world, the calm exotic-presence rises upon the dark as the lord proper to an impending exile; it

Sirenica

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persuades us by a natural authority into treason, until then feared more than death. But he whom the Sirens hold under their enchantment may never enjoy the promise. Before the invocation has passed his lips, their voices come to him again, the golden mist dissolves; the august shape is lost in a formless tide of light. And thereupon the spirit is drawn back to a life made harder by this dream, half initiate now, and chilled at the thought of the puny strength in which once it had taken its pride. It is dismayed by vastness, and abased beneath the starry heaven, having less hope than before that the power which controls the galaxy should regard an individual life here among men in the corner of a minor star. With the scope of dismay enlarged, it is condemned once more to fret within the infinitesimal self, discovering a deeper vanity in all things; the

The
Measure-
less Light.

The
Measure-
less Light.

kingdoms of the earth are paltry plots, their histories a tale of notches on a stick. Man passes away like the shadow of a shade, like all that imagination may conceive most frail and inessential; shall he not be suffered to pass unvexed, in the silence which is the one privilege of shades?

Edens
lost.

But whether the cruelty be simple, or refined to this last subtlety among oriental visions, none who have borne the yoke can shake it off, or ever be wholly free again. There is a story that in their first night of exile Eve and Adam returned to Eden, picking their way in the darkness where the angel seemed to sleep, his sword glowing upon the ground beside him. But when they came into the garden, it was all changed. The creatures, that very day carressed and fawning, now rose with bared fangs and threatened them. The trees were still bowed with

fruit, but when they plucked and would have eaten, they tasted only ashes. One tree alone fulfilled its promise : it was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which had given them understanding. Upon its branches the orbed and ruddy fruit hung yet luscious, as when the serpent praised it. They plucked and plucked again, biting to the core in the hope of slaked thirst and sated hunger. But from the moment that they ate, hope fled ; a wintriness touched Eden, and they felt it more desolate to them now than the outer world of exile. They were dismayed at the embittering of kindly and familiar things ; the snarling of great beasts grew louder, unquiet footsteps closed in narrowing circles round them. They looked into each other's eyes, and, without a word or a backward glance, went out again into the place of weary labour. And now they did not

Edens
lost.

Edens
lost.

walk delicately as they approached the angel ; they went with natural steps, as knowing the worst, carelessly and without heed of danger. He saw them depart, as he had seen them come ; but his hand was holden, that they might see with their own eyes and accept the judgment. When they were gone forth, he rose to his feet and girded on his extinguished sword. Dawn was breaking ; his work was done. Absolved now of his ungrateful duty, he lightly spread his wings, and soaring out over the four rivers and the garden of God, was lost at one flight in the clouds of morning. There is no restoring of the protected Eden which to each was as a royal garden of youth before the Sirens' song was heard ; there is only such brief return, that the soul may assure herself of her state and see the lees in the cup of destiny. If in young life the Sirens' music float towards you over still

waters, put the helm about while it is yet an uncertain sound ; let those whose ears are closed lash you to the mast until the echoes are heard no longer. Beware lest for a moment's heedlessness your days be consumed away, lest kindred, fatherland, and friends be lost to you, and your bones lie bleaching upon that shore. Believe it not, when pride or flattery would persuade that you are of a force to meet the insidious danger ; none are of that force, not even the heroes and the slayers of many dragons. If fortune offers peace of happiness, with all its estimable solid gain, its neighbourhood of minds and profitable communions, why go the lonelier way, consorting with shadows, feeding upon vanity of dreams ? You are like to become among men as the poplar among the trees, too sensitive to dwell in commonality, whitening the wayside with a floss that none

Edens
lost.

Edens
lost.

shall spin. Be wise, return among the happy of mankind for whom laws are framed and politics constructed; who, trenching themselves within a pale and taming down ambitions, receive their certain wages in the weighed gold of tranquillity. For they only hold a safer course who have never heard that call, they whom the mediator in old Norwich knew, souls "having not the apprehension to deplore their own natures, and framed so far within the circumference of hope that the wisdom of God has necessitated their contentment."

The
Second
Best.

But if the die is cast, and the Imagined Better Thing spoil for you even the good thing in the moment of achieving, do not therefore cease from action; that were to lose the life for the uncertain promise, *propter vivendi causas perdere vitam*. Remain among men; fear that inhuman solitude

where the influence of sweet charities is never known. The Sirens will not forbid a forced activity in the interlude of their enchantment; they will rather approve, knowing that it keeps the nature in mobility and prepared for the effort which they will demand again in their hour. Use therefore all means to be doing, lest a sick weariness of deeds, that old *acedia* or staleness of the uninterested mind, creep into the blood of the great veins and make despair a habit. Use every art, use even jealousy itself; it is marvel what a clean envy without malice will do for one who in his heart despises the things of competition. If it cannot bring him joy of victory, it will yet disturb indifference, and though the service of the whole heart is of the greener virtue, there is a good sap in the half. That is an old fallacy which rejects all but the intense glow before the

The
Second
Best.

The
Second
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deed; "with half my heart" is not always a fool's device, but often the word of considered wisdom. It is a principle not despised by the preacher of holiness, who knows the labyrinthine world, and the flesh in its presumption; it is better to toil for a dim spark, like the savage, painfully revolving his drill for fire, than to languish weary days in cold and idleness. "Perform the outward action of fervour," says St. Francis of Sales, "though the fervour itself be lacking." It is a principle to which even genius has been beholden. Many a true artist sees the forms of his high fancy displaced by crowding of baser shapes, and common life encroaching upon him; but he does not cease to work; he paints on, that he may keep his soul fluent and alert for the return of more noble visions. Much he may do at such times unworthy of his repute, but he lives watching, and

seizes the good hour upon the wing. Do likewise upon your lower plane; cold though you be to deeds, yet keep doing. Be busy over measurable things, be occupied with temporalities and outputs; their hold is stringent to the soul, like a tightening of the belt upon the body in hunger. At the worst there is some gain from this feint of sustenance; the nature bears up longer against life's hardship. And sometimes, by a high chance, the secondary drab thing is transanimate and made other than itself; the insignificant glows with meaning; the trivial becomes great with wonders of suggestion. So a foul pane will flame with red of opals against the setting sun; an iron swung against a grate will chime like the Bourdon of Notre Dame.

"But," he who doubts may say, "I who desire the purple distances and follow after things delicate and intangible, how should I hew this

The
Second
Best.

The half
heart.

The half
heart.

withered wood and draw this stagnant water? How should I practise a gross envy for things unenviable of my soul? How should I rival Pandect, the man of Law, of Futurus of the Exchange, or the ungentle scholar Preterite; how cope with Agricola, my country neighbour, who lives intent upon byres and barns, and is enraptured by a vision of fatted cattle? Shall I leave the glory of the far heavens for the nice alignment of a furrow, or forget the aerial thought, reckoning a crass weight of swine? I could not, for Nestor's counsel, compete for prizes or for solidities of profit; as well bid me prefer to Turner's skies the earth-loving heavens of a Dutchman's landscape." "Protest, but try," the counsellor will answer; the hour comes—you will wonder at its swift feet—when the lawyer's reputation will be to you for a reproach, and the scholar's name for

an incitement ; when your sleep will be troubled by the desire to outcultivate Agricola, and the fingers too delicate for rough use will tingle for a grasp of his plough. While the envy endures, the poppies in the corn and the sorrel in the hay will be to you no more, as in enchanted hours, the final cause of all the field ; but as base weeds to the farmer, marring all the prospect of good harvest. Therefore indulge clean envy well ; let it run out its course. These jealousies and fervours are healthful for you ; they counter the detachment to which you were else abandoned ; you were in a fair way towards madness ; they will keep you human. The things that awaken them have not, be it confessed, the virtue of the true gods or the perdurable ; yet they are useful idols of a meanwhile ; they will possess the mind until the lodestar shines again. They

The half heart.

The half
heart.

shall hold your spirit to such an exacting round as most you need, averting it from wild thoughts and the last irreligion of despair. When the song sounds to you again, and the shadow of the gnomon falls once more upon the hour of divine impossible things, you shall not soar or dream the worse for this service in the house of bondage ; nor, when the flight ends, shall the mind have aught but benefit from that alternation of concern amid sound things coveted and practised. What if it be never yours to seek them with a whole heart ? Give what dimidiated zeal you may, and bear with them in good faith for their nearness to humanity. And though sometimes they are done in a stupor, as a man might labour the morning after ruin, or between shocks of earthquake, this very insensibility has charm. There is a pleasant recklessness in desperate hours, which have their own

sufficiency, and may hold the spirit almost upon the verge of happiness.

For without the common tasks and feasible plain things of competition the world is too hard for the Siren's bondman, who must wait often in weariness for the return of the soul's desire. The intervals between his joys are too long for still endurance; remoter sounds and happenings of a life not truly shared become intolerable to the spirit held motionless and expectant; it is in silence that the water maddens, heard dripping upon the stone, in the stillest night that the heart is frozen. Without the anodyne of planned activity, he will be drawn down into the gulf that yawns for him: there will be nothing fixed and firm to stay him, no handhold for his clutching fingers. In the deeps to which then he falls there is existence, but not life; there the infolded thoughts, lost to all beyond, flock inward upon them-

The
Unknown
Worse.

The
Unknown
Worse.

selves ; or if one dash out for freedom, a swift memory will head it back, as the shepherd's fierce dog rounds in the sheep. There is no release in swoon, for when consciousness returns it flows more darkly, as to one fallen asleep in the pain of evil tidings. At the moment of such awakening, the heart is felt to sink ; all sinks with it and falls, pressed beneath a descending cloud of misery, down and ever further down into those bottomless depths where the soul implores annihilation and is not answered. There is known the suspended fear of the unknown Worse, which is before, behind, and round about, an incalculable infesting presence. The brain seems quickened for one end only, to revolve misery ; in the dim light, the eye is aware of things moving, glimmering forms of concealed but certain fear, "glancing, shifting mortal woes" luminous with their own faint and

sinister light. And sometimes, in the most dreadful hour, a lordlier form of terror passes, formidable and slow, as the Angel of the Abyss might fly over his gulf, and all sounds be stilled but the beat of his darkening wings. Tremendous hours, incommunicable between soul and soul, unimaginable after escape as tortures of other beings in a world remote from ours, yet always near to many, high and low, learned or without letters, to this man who governs a State, or that man who goes about a little business, and nearest of all to those who have heard the Sirens' song. If there be any labour which may avert these hours, God bring it to the hand and send it done.

The victim who would not thus go under must use his intervals in a fury and wrath of action. He must use them with such fierce diligence, that the work which he has to show at the end may absolve

The
Unknown
Worse.

Centri-
petal
force.

Centri-
petal
force.

him from the charge of vanity. He must stifle his inner conviction of an absurdness in these tasks, and win an approval from the general judgment which may never be accorded by his own, in secret wondering that any such things should avail, yet illogically willing to be justified. He will not have worked amiss if this his second best appear his whole ambition, for he will have won in spare hours a testimony of good service which shall stand him in lasting stead; he shall be habilitated before others, and somewhat ease, by a softly-cheating fallacy, the pain of in-achievement which gnaws within him. It is well for him to have known the compelling attraction of mankind, which, like the attraction of earth for material things, is ever operative upon the soul. For as the earth draws the torn leaf, and will have it at last, however long the winds toss it up or

whirl it in the air, so every soul yields to this indrawing strength, which is an indefeasible power, constant as gravitation itself, and as quietly exerted. The wonderful path of man was made straight by common deeds ; our forefathers inaugurated the world's course with nothing better ; all through the ages they strove with each other, doing, getting and exchanging, by concussion and hard argument of life no less than by its friendliness, joined indissolubly to each other. Often the strife was violent, but it welded ; there was chaos, but the good ground formed ; it solidified ; it has remained. In the underworld of forgotten time the fancy sees customs and beliefs overlie and mingle with each other ; it is as if, in a dream of creation, you watched the earth molten, and strata of ancient rocks flow to their first repose. The plain forces worked out their way ;

Centri-
petal
force.

Centri-
petal
force.

*In ipsis
floribus.*

the world settled to plain life ; it is so that humanity was shaped into its greatness. Our common days continue the old heroic effort ; who would not drudge between two dreams for a share of them ?

Happy is the life which is not uttered all in parenthesis, but spoken out full in rounded periods. It is amenable in the hour of weariness to the obvious and approved recreation. Does he who lives it tire awhile of his unmemorable activities ? There are the reliefs of nature, of art, of religion, each fashioned for his convenience *in usum deficientis*. But the Sirens do not permit any victim of theirs such light release. Though he is exhausted to a faintness, they will weigh out to him each remedy of the worn soul as it were by the drachm and scruple ; like the surgeon at the pulse of the racked prisoner, they watch for the hour when the heart shall prove of a

torturable strength ; and stinting it of rest to the last point of safety, compel it to the hard assay once more. And they are too fine to end the respite by any visible brutality ; that does not assort with their subtle purpose. They softly overcloud and delicately blight, until the mind becomes aware of a disillusion imparted it knows not whence or how. Each mercy thins from its fullness into a dissatisfying vapour, as if imperceptibly it thwarted itself to serve them ; unconscious of the process used upon him, the sufferer awakes in a new strength, but with an abated confidence. Neither religion, nor art, nor nature is frank to him, but each has an insincerity of second intent ; which he resents the more, in that he went to them like a man foredone in a great exhaustion, desperately trustful, and in such evil case as only a malignance could abuse. Nature her-

*In ipsis
floribus.*

*In ipsis
floribus.*

self is suborned against him ; even in her plenary hour she inexplicably fails, changing without seen cause the motherly to the novercal face. In her festival of high summer she prepares so many glories that the mind is held rapt in one long pleasure of surprise, until all suspicion is drowned in the bright flood. Like healing like, this new enchantment seems to prevail over the old ; the earth laughs doubt away. The lime-tree is fragrant on the air ; the honeysuckle crowns the lustrous holly and the briony the hedges ; the hop-bines sway in the breeze, reaching out after each other from pole to pole ; in the cottage gardens the great lilies ranged before the larkspurs image the white clouds upon the sky above them. Invisible gnats keep a sustained murmur above ; a distant wain makes for the barn behind which the fresh-ploughed land runs back, like a faintly rippled

sea bounding a peninsula of trees. All floats on the summit and crest of full perfection ; it is the ripe hour of all things. No sign of autumn appears yet among the leaves ; in the gardens the time of the sad asters is far ; the nights have breathed balm upon them after every sunset, and there is still no breath of decay. Shall he believe that Nature betrays him with a kiss of peace, so that the mind forgets its warfare, living for a while in a pathetic wonder, like a child used to blows and suddenly caressed ? Yet she does betray ; the Sirens teach her their art and force her to do their bidding. And often she must do it under that cloudless heaven in the third hour after the meridian, which is the day's autumn, the fatal hour, unbearably steeped in sorrow. For then an English afternoon may wear that evil brilliance of the tropic under which men know

*In ipsis
floribus.*

*In ipsis
floribus.*

themselves mocked, and the heart is made empty, and despair flows into the soul which love has left unguarded ; and many, asked in what hour they have perceived themselves most desolate and under Medusa's eyes, would answer : " At this hour, and upon a summer's day." By such an effluence of pure sadness the cruel end is attained, and this serene heaven is used as readily as the known ministers of unrest, the unharboured clouds, or fretting waves, or mists, or the broken silences of pine-woods when the cones fall one by one. The voice of the Sirens is of so divine a charm that even the mother of all created things herself must do their pleasure.

The
Sirens'
own art.

THE Sirens can trouble all the healing wells, even the deep well of Nature. The well of Faith they disturb lightly ; they know where haunt the little breaths of

sly heresy and noisier gusts of schism which come suddenly down to flaw it. The bright well of Art they also trouble, causing it to shimmer from the deeps with a multitude of springs that bubble out of the rock and blur the still reflections upon its face. The painter must often yield to their voice ; even the sculptor may not always resist ; the architect cannot but obey. But the musician anticipates the song, and seems almost to catch it upon their lips. For this is their own art, and formidable indeed to all who confess their sovereignty. In the perception of this danger the Hellenes conspicuously proved their insight, though they knew nothing of the bow, by which the supreme magic passes into instruments of strings. For them there was a peril even in Terpander's lyre ; but what dread had not been theirs if some god or hero had taught them this last

The
Sirens'
own art.

The
Sirens'
own art.

device ; if Apollo on Parnassus, or Orpheus in the world of Shades, had drawn the bow over the viol, as Raphael and Signorelli have portrayed them, unwilling to conceive the heaven or the hell which could be charmed without it. Music was never safe for enchanted minds ; even for the mind subdued to custom it may be rife with hidden menace. The Hellene did not err when he sought to control it always in bonds of language, suffering it to range abroad only under guard of words, and held always within the cold scrutiny of reason. He feared the imploring harmonies which entice into the measureless by measure, and tempt the geometric mind out of its fastness. Absolute music, freed, like a symphony, from constraint of words, he denounced as an incalculable and uncivic power. For he marked the deceitful art begin with unassuming notes, a march of smooth

plastic forms made audible, which seem at first to brace and temper the spirit. But behind this stage he perceived another, which threatened to destroy the man, to waste away his spirit, and, in the phrase of Plato, to cut out the sinews of his soul, until he should decline into a feeble citizen and an unvictorious warrior. Against these insidious arts of decay he waged unremitted war. We may smile at this strait philosophy, and at the law which would sanction none but the Dorian style ; for to-day an agora will not contain a nation, nor may a people be corrupted in the fleeting of an hour. We put our trust in size, and ask safety of mere tumult, which subjects all music to the distracting din of life. In the market and the street, men cannot hear the fine strain if they will ; securely multitudinous, they go their ways ignorant of danger, and whistling uncharmed melodies

The
Sirens'
own art.

The
Sirens'
own art.

down the wind, where all is merged with the echo of traffic, or dispute, or pastime. But withdrawn into some still place in some moving hour, the individual is yet imperilled; and above all, he whom the Sirens have taught to hear. For him the risk is not less, but tenfold greater. For this art has grown beyond the range of Greek imagination, and the adventuring mind once thoroughly searched by it can conceive no longer a limit to its omnipotence. When the great musician of modern Germany came to interpret the genius of Beethoven, he found the master supreme in this, that he had transported music beyond the æsthetic beauty of rhythm and symmetry, away into her proper sphere of the Sublime, where the mere form is perceived subordinate and is beaten down under her wings. For since Beethoven, she soars out into high places where the unaided reason is

too short-breathed to follow ; she speaks a language of divine meaning and beyond competence of your analysing thought. In her kingdom there is no tyrant's art of definition, no pedant's love of marshalled concepts ; the reason may only pass its borders exalted by the glow of spiritual fire. How much more perilous is she thus become with the glamour of high philosophy about her name, and herself, as a philosopher has said, auricular metaphysic with incantation for half her argument. Music is not safe for you, followers of the Sirens ; look back and recall the dangers into which in past years she has beguiled you, and say if, in the knowledge of her power, you would dare blindly to follow her flight. Remember how in some hour when all things have consented to a deep emotion, the control of the very life was lost to you ; not a blow could you have struck

The
Sirens'
own art.

The
Sirens'
own art.

for freedom, as you stood hearkening without help or counsel, stilled to a voluptuous helplessness, drunken with the joy of your bondage. Perhaps in some crowded place your soul was clean taken from your governance, or perhaps in the company of one other only ; taken it was, and humbled until it knew itself no more. As the moon rose over the fields of harvest I have heard an arpeggio struck by invisible hands, preluding to a great music. In the succeeding pause all the mysteries of the hour and place seemed gathered for an inspiration ; at last the deep notes came quivering from the strings, and all that the pent consciousness embraced was dissolved into the relieving flood of sound. Plaintive chords, undulant and joyous harmonies, they flowed out from the brimming chamber over lawns and paths, meeting the sigh of night as it replied from the hushed,

attending forest. In such an hour what control was left to the will, what discipline remained to reason overwhelmed by the surge of infinite divine things? When the tide breaks, the dyke of reason goes down like the ramparts of a child's castle in the sand; the set ordinances of life are annulled; the soul is drawn away on a celestial pilgrimage; the call of the Sirens has been obeyed. Following paths of wonder, she knows swift change of joy and suffering; she moves over the formless waters of the uncreated, hovering in the heart of the void, drinking the crimson wine of dawn and sunset. Free, and glorying, and elate she wings over the coasts of light; she hears the waves break far below her, and the winds moan by; the wonder of things vast and infinitesimal consumes her, as she floats dissolved in the trance of her unincarnate passion. Under that

The
Sirens'
own art.

The
Sirens'
own art.

enchantment all the fabric of laws and religions and philosophies is tossed away upon the wind, as thistledown adrift over the meadows. Nothing is fastheld more, or founded ; all flows and changes, descending, mounting, approaching, withdrawn, in regions dark with austere shadows, aglow with splendours of inapprehensible light. They who once adventure where these things are, would never exchange the starry ways for the firm ground of earth, or the cloud-walls for its bonded masonries, or for its most assured rewards, the superb impossibilities of hope. When certain harmonies encompass them, they are severed from the world ; at each return the fiery particles of the soul are stirred more deeply. This influence is an affection of elements ; its power is ultimate, it abides. The Russian mystic was not alone among thinkers who in our day have

shared the dread which disturbed the ancient world. But he has described the terror well, confessing that the music which he had so loved in youth became at last an art of arcane power, and awful to him in contemplation. His mind misgave him for the dread of it. He feared with a more than Hellenic fear.

By mastery of such an art, aggrandised to a new scope, the Sirens are now advantaged in the onset. It is the first preparation of their spell; scarce are the words of the magic framed, when already the soul is a yielded prey. They sing to these new harmonies the old sweet cajoleries and bitter taunts. "What part have you in the reaped earth, children of the divine unrest? Would you turn from us now? would you pretend forgetfulness? You on whose ears the great charm fell, have done with vile content! These among whom

The
Sirens'
own art.

The song
renewed.

The song renewed.

you hide are deceivers of their own souls, gilding the grey lead for gold. Come forth from among them, come forth far ; ascend to sight ; know ecstasy, and moments as the lit foam of time. Know daring ; love the inordinate hope ; unswathe the soul ; arise. About you murmurs the unuttered life which might be spoken, the imprisoned life which might be free, the obedient life which need not serve. Have no lot with serfs. Let the thought leap out ; shake from you all that clings ; fling off the encumbering folds. Come ; for these are cowering and remiss natures, clusterers, afraid alone ; slow-thighed bees, clogged with their own honey, forgetful of the tree-tops, insects of the tended hive. Come forth from them ; they are blind to joy ; their life is a dupery, their love a straitening. Let them go in the rote of the nether ease ; let them piece out

cloying happiness ; their days are a dust and bestowed in vanity ; the world wastes the ages. Disdain their restless round, and come far ; as the bird whirrs from the low grass, come out upon the great winds, clean as the breath of seas. For a while, when our voices were not heard, it was permitted to you to share their foolishness, to revolve for their pleasure and cheat sorrow with speed, to be the toy of their solemn pastime. The top sleeps upon the point ; while the game lasts, it is well. But now we are come again, singing low and clear and nigh you, cease and look cloudward. For now the dreamed Better Thing appears, and you shall win to it ; from false goals and dull aims misreversed you shall depart, you shall soar out till you look down upon the hillock Olympus. Know this, that more worth is lost by peace than by passion. The quickening joy scathes,

The song renewed.

The song
renewed.

but have pride of your scars ; that which has not suffered does not know ; the unwounded have not lived. Come forth, trust no sanctuary ; you are ours, and neither shrine, nor fortalice, nor uttermost dark retreat shall divide us from our own. Though you are carried from the verdure and the bloom, and the thickets thronged with birds ; though all be gone which assuaged this servitude, gentleness and kind looks and caring voices, yet be not dismayed ; for we will take the need of them from your heart and set your desire upon nobler sounds and presences. Would you shrink back because men say that to approach the immortal is to endure more pain ? And were it even so, what argument that for noble natures ? All that is noble grows in pain ; as it ever was, so it shall be ever, till Fate get eyes or be tamed to pity. Come then to the life emulous and

uncrowned ; is there no pleasure of upward strife, is not the supreme thing far and half-discerned more than the near conspicuous vanity ? If life were a haunting of quiet and green places, it should satisfy a heart, but a bird's heart—if that were all of life. And if it were a diligence of bearing loads, it would suffice a mind, but an ant's mind—if that were all. Absolute whole life is more than ease or profit ; it is an ascent and a transcending, it evades ; it loves the outrance. He who cramps it in the press dishonours it with unfair misuse. We touch you with shafts of golden sound ; cling to your safe mean no more, but come where the high strains wander ; where the free life wins glory of health, and the pest of ordinance is overcome ; where the unwarded soul, without sentinel or patron, is proven in the great space alone. Come forth from among them, children of

The song renewed.

The song
renewed.

An
immortal
Sophistry.

Divine unrest ; you on whose ears the great charm fell, have done with vile content."

With such words they provoke the spirit, interfusing through the wild music their own irresistible self. And the bondman rises to obey, as Odysseus rose, though long years have gone by since last they sang to him. He obeys, knowing in his heart they lie, but like the wild thing captured, unable to contrive his deliverance. He knows that happiness, his birth-right, is rapt from him by a sleight of immortal sophistry ; he knows that the song of freedom cozens, and the singers themselves are bond, compelled by a fate which calls for ruin of men. With whatever charm they sing, with what promises soever they entice, whatsoever disgust with present things their voice may instil, in the very hour of capitulation some instinct yet will tell him that the unmys-

terious fond things are best, the things of every day, that they alone nourish life, that he was only born to love them. He must rise ; he must follow. Yet among all who obey the call, scarce one but would not liever remain, might he pause to cast a balance and measure the need of his own humanity. But no briefest respite is accorded ; he is swept away too fast for the saving calculation. Thereupon all regret for the broken ties pales first to affectionate contempt and then to cold oblivion, as joy eclipses happiness, and every memory of calm delights is lost in the splendour of its appearing.

For the voices come, as to one imprisoned at a desk memories of shore or moorland, perverting the mind from every covenant of duty. When they are abroad, interflowing with the sounds of life, all that was solid and firm dissolves, all pomp and consequence is as a

An
immortal
Sophistry.

The
poison of
Nonacris.

The
poison of
Nonacris.

shadow. While that music still trembles in the air, how vain the homily of the Industrious Apprentice who rose to claim a place upon the dais, and sat in a carved chair, an exemplar to unadventuring souls. For such moralities there is then no room; who follows whither the Sirens call is lost to the rich promises of fortune and shall find no promotion in the world. Lost also to things less dispensable than these, stayed from gladness, diminished in the heart's virtue. For the roots which the heart throws out to others are weakened and die back; instead of a commingling, there is at first an uncertain touch; at last they wither, and search no longer after the true food of their life. The heart bewitched is made ungenial; only the glad are kind. Even the tried affection is dimmed; and slowly, as a stone weathers, the spirit darkens from the old fidelities.

Like the rule of some rigid order, the service of the Sirens chills human sympathy; theirs is a sequestering law, too strange to share with many. Every hour of abandonment, each adventurous escape, enfeebles the hold upon common life; the colours of love and dislike grow paler, as all is said to pale when a long sickness draws to its end, and the soul is near its passing. The surface of the mind dulls like a mirror of silver tarnished; the reflections that once played over it come no more; it is estranged from the old light and the moving images of the world. To one thus inhumanly entreated, all men become as travellers moving in the next room of the inn, arriving and departing, brought nearer or removed by a machinery of unshared indifferent fates. His nature is slowly frozen; a fatal coldness rises in him, as from that

The
poison of
Nonacris.

The
poison of
Nonacris.

icy poison of Nonacris of which it is fabled that Alexander died.

The bond
of wild
want.

AN old religious writer has said that human wants are the true ligatures between God and man; had we not wanted, we had never been gratified; we are bound by an infinite debt because our needs are without end. There is solace in this thought of the soul's need as bond between the passing and the eternal life, between that which yearns and that which satisfies; it seems to cover unrest with a grace of divine protection, and confute that evil old doctrine of the Envy of the Gods. None who have hearkened to the Sirens' music but will follow the argument thus far. But they cannot stay within the bound set by this man of fortunate piety; it is too near for their extravagance, they must lend another meaning than his to infinity of desire. For

how should he know the strange places of half-perception, the refuges of the driven soul, the wastes of the outer light? The very name of infinity awed him; his mind shrank from the approaches of it; he recked too much of many things to be the true guide of their audacity. The sheltered plats and borders of his parsonage were never planted with herbs of magic; they stood thick with old-world flowers disposed about a dial, offering their nectaries to the bees, stems to be plucked in a quiet hour and set in a bowl of Delft among piled folios of the Fathers. But the Sirens lead the steps among blooms of another beauty, such growths as sprang from the bewitched soil in Virgil's garden of Avellino, and dangerous in the gathering as the strange root mandragora. Wild wants, insatiable desires, these also are bonds no less than the sanctioned wish which in

The bond
of wild
want.

The bond
of wild
want.

shamefastness receives its apportioned gift. These also are of divine descent, the Sirens say ; it may not be that they should be disowned by any god. For what celestial name but should lose nobility preventing these, which bid the soul dare to forget her mortal deference, to despise all gain, to leap out beyond count of life and profit? The sweet sound comes, the spirit answers ; and all molecular affairs are as the dust under a lee when a great wind veers to scatter it. Then is the hour of quest after invisible perfections for ever beyond seizure ; of joy rewarding the pursuit, instant as swift flame and incomparable with all other guerdons. Joy wild and pure born in the purple of deep skies, consuming like a fire, maddening like a potion, but of the stained nature never known, from the common slave of sense to Sardanapalus, Akyndaraxes' son.

With this joy the Sirens lure the impassioned soul, now exquisitely troubled, and able no more to abide in the calm ease which flows on a curve and rounds to the full circle of contentment. With joy they charm her, the glory of stars, the flower of the miraculous heaven. For joy and happiness, confused in the thought of men, are in truth of different kindred ; from their very birth they are estranged ; the heart which the one frequents is often abandoned by the other. To joy the house of happiness is a kempt place too trimly tended, ordered by unbearable wonts of peace, shuttered and barred in too close a privacy ; and all that is beyond its firelight is lost to it as the far side of the moon. It seems a place of sedentary affections and imperfect generousities ; the love which pours a mild ray through its chambers is too placid for ardent life. And to the happy, joy is a

Happi-
ness and
Joy.

Happi-
ness and
Joy.

strange vagrant spirit, and too wayward for their company, a haunter of brinks and perilous verges which are not for guided feet. It passes, but they keep close within ; none who would know still days would unbar for such a visitant : a profound instinct bids them fear it. Happiness is all things to all men ; a thousand definitions should not describe its nature. It is sufficiency for the day ; it is the peace of the good conscience ; it is the virtuous use of intellectual energies ; it is the wealth of nations ; it is any heartsease or all, if its range be but short and its aim feasible. The happy are they who reach their want, who achieve, who set hand to those things only which are done utterly and to the end, who complete their work in a good conceit of their sufficiency. Their secret lies in the sage limit of attempt and the assurance of swift fulfilment. From Hesiod to Burns, all who

have sung happiness have gone to the countryside for the exemplar of it, where the horizon of all work is near, and each task all feasible and visibly completed. "What a fine life the countryman's, who ploughs his field all day with his pair of oxen, and at eve brings them home and feeds them, and eats himself, and sleeps soundly." The marrow of happiness is in this strait activity; the unknown Italian of the fifteenth century who put it so, set forth the truth for all ages; the aphorist did but paraphrase when he said that he is happy who is fit for one thing only, and does it. Light are the footsteps of the Hours which have their ways in the furrows; this was well sung, O Hellene; no feet have moved lighter, or perhaps shall move while man loves a harvest. For the scattered seed grows and ripens, it is reaped and threshed; the foreseen gift is present and the

Happiness and
Joy.

Happi-
ness and
Joy.

long labour crowned. Raise the plane of life, change the occupation; something in all whole satisfaction will still tell of the old Georgic straitness. Happiness is the use that wears patiently to a comfort; it is the habit of the heart's ease; it moves upon the path which millions have trodden smooth. But joy is elate, immoderate, ungovernable; it flies, and is uncontained within any bound. Happiness is current gold; worn in the markets and multiplied in transaction. Joy is neither weighed nor minted; its revenues are beyond exchange, visionary treasures of desire laid up in the clouds and eternally unimparted. Happiness is still a wine; there is a fume upon joy, which seethes in the cup and is beaded about its brim; the draught of it exalts the soul of him who drinks, until the world falls far from him as the earth below rapt Ganymede; he

looks down, and the great globe is gone from beneath him like a thing rejected. Happiness is of a hempen texture ; joy is woven of the stuff of dreams ; it shall be rent by the lightest wing that flutters, of so fine a gossamer is its substance. Joy is of instants, born and dead in one darting point of time ; happiness is of hours, and completed upon the long rounds of leisure. Happiness is of silver afternoons. The mother of joy is night ; it wells golden out of the darkness ; it is auroral, it cometh in the morning. Its voice rings like the bells which bear its name. In a moment it is rung out upon the dull world ; it calls to far winds and rides upon them into the distance ; it returns, and the profound air is rumorously with the gathering music. Sometimes, upon a day of festival, you may hear the ringers mass their rippling peal into sudden intermitting chimes, each flung upon the

Happiness and
Joy.

Happi-
ness and
Joy.

air in one sonorous fall, a cataract of sound that breaks upon the city and races far over its roofs, until at last the intervals are lost, and all is tremulous with echoes, flying, following, and overtaken. The high tower rocks to the tossing bells; the mind is shaken with pulsing of delight. Could joy flow suave as happiness, who would not abandon all for it? Nothing but this were then the world's desire. But the magical wild power is fitful and unsustained; it troubles and alarms; hearts are not healed but seared at its touch, and the bereaving hours which end that rapture are often grey with desolation. It sets aflame, and roaring out its life, leaves ember and ash to die down in a freezing night. In this dread usage it does not spare or attemper; the fierce change rives at the very life, which is worn down by them and at each return diminished. In tropic mountains, where night

frosts follow upon the glare of raging suns, the peaks are splintered by the fury of the succeeding heat and cold. Fragments fall from them in the high solitudes ; their flanks are scarred with wounds ; more is reft in short years from their adamantine substance than in quiet centuries from the slopes of English hills.

What virtue, then, has this unsteadfast creature that it should rival happiness ? It is various and rich in change and is so commended to mutable humanity. Its transience quickens ; the nature grows more sensitive to fine subtleties of transformation, and is enriched, as by an art of delicate experience. The mere passing in or passing out becomes in itself such a delight as the steady follower of happiness, in his plain issues and returns, perhaps may never know. Without warning given, in the dreariest hour there steals upon the mind a sense

Happiness and Joy.

Peripheral things.

Peri-
pheral
things.

of strain relaxed ; a film draws over it ; all softens and is clothed with colour. It is an amnesty, a sudden glory of release, as when the iron Arctic ground yields to the sun of spring, and is pierced with the tender roots of flowers. These gliding passages of sense come at last to be desired for themselves ; they have a several existence and awaken their own delight. No longer dreaded as vain delays, they add to joy a certain sweetness of suspense, like the false dawn which checks the day to make it fairer. The day comes at last, more beautiful for the prelude ; so joy breaks and flows free through things, quickening the soul with a more marvellous flame. And joy, being vast in range, makes the athlete soul ; for it summons to divine hardship and leads into the far-unfolding spaces entered of none save those stripped of paraments and trinkets. He who

would find it must penetrate the heart of deserts not to be crossed by the encumbered spirit. "*Nudos amat Eremus*," said St. Jerome ; and there is but one truth for the saint and the bewitched. In these great spaces, where joy is made manifest, the Soul is central to a horizon upon all sides remote, yet felt as an immediate and embracing presence ; the void that divides her from it is lit with a familiar splendour. On the borders of immensity she is searched by influences fresh from the spring of days, streaming in upon her and meeting, as it were, in a foam of light. This far-sent radiance becomes her life ; by the magic of it she is drawn away from earth, from care, from home and kindred. All loveliness flows away into unattainable things ; these only are vital to her ; for these alone she cares to live. The sense and reason are fused in a strange passion,

Peripheral things.

Peri-
pheral
things.

"*Dalle
piu alte
stelle.*"

revealed at last as that "light intellectual fulfilled in love" which is the supreme boon of mind.

Such love of far peripheral things is their help whom the Sirens have sent wandering away beyond the pales of happiness. It is often poured first into the heart by a half-uttered voice of nature, learned upon the sea, made actual by a journey into wildernesses. The sense of this strange union is bracing as keen air; there is a sharpness upon it as of the early spring; its offspring are born in danger and endure but a little while, like the crocus-flowers aflame under the clenched unsheltering buds. This farness of descent, this affinity with the distance as the one thing needful, absorbed the mind of Michelangelo; it is the gospel of his poems. With a persistence born of revelation, he tells it in phrases uneasily combined, labouring at an

art which was not his own, chiselling painfully at the words which resist him to the end like granite. Often the springs of fancy seem to fail him ; he repeats to weariness his similes of ice and fire. But the message is clear at last ; the sense breaks through with a concise and noble utterance : " from the stars of the uttermost height comes the splendour down ; to these it draws the heart's desire ; this is that which is named love." In these lines his faith is all confessed ; his soul is eased of a burden ; he has said the say for which he believed the sculptor called to become a poet. They shine through the obscure approaches like the light of altars down glooming aisles ; they bring the gold of daffodils into a chamber dark with winter. These words have comfort when sadness or privation of joy troubles the enchanted spirit ; when, too rapt even to love, it is driven

*" Dalle
piu alte
stelle."*

*"Dalle
piu alte
stelle."*

beyond the ways of happiness, or goes aside, reluctantly averse, from the hearths of consolation. Their echoes impart new steadfastness; like the Lucretian strain to which they bear affinity, they rebind in a high allegiance. At such times, it is with them as with the traveller, when in the charmed night-silences he sits alone under eastern stars. The dearest memory grows pale to him then as the moonlit sands; and whatever fulfilment life holds is summed in that perfected hour of solitude.

As in some exercise of skill a man cares no more for rudiments when once he is advanced toward mastery, but is intent only upon the difficult and subtle problems of the game, so he who is estranged from near affections is blest in delicate and faintest contacts to which only the trained sense may make some imperfect answer. He is environed of things, exquisite and

starry. He seeks that which is beyond plain apprehension and yet suffers pursuit ; he is impassioned at a light breath, as the poplar quivers when all other trees are still. The spark falls ; the life grows quick ; it flames out its ecstatic hour. For the desire of intellectual beauty, however tenuous it seem, is passion still ; a violence, a force, a fury, a vibration. It descends from the clouds ; like the Love of Sappho's forgotten verse, it comes to the earth in purple ; it pulses with life as it comes. Transitory it may be, unabiding, unknown, and never all possessed. Yet such is the high charm, that its memory lives when all else dies ; it shall endure through the greater pain and overpass the profounder gulf ; they who obey it may not be tempted by a more certain wage to another service. Though they suffer more and longer, the reward is worth the

*"Dalle
piu alte
stelle."*

*"Dalle
piu alte
stelle."*

anguish; and they would not change its moment for a thousand placid morrows of fruition. For them the glow which is intense and perfect is never of the foreground; it is like fire of sunset among the hills, where the best is always furthest, and upon the last verge of sight. The near range holds its several shapes and colours, with fields, trees, and farms yet all distinct; the second yields up its varied hues and forms, and looms unfeatured, steeped to the extreme rims in azure shadows; from the third the darkness and the mass are already gone, and all is dissolved in pearly light. But beyond, the last range lifts peaks that burn like topaz, now seen, now hidden again, as the clouds move about it, molten in a surge of fire. Such is the loveliness which their souls pursue, ethereal, apparitional; and even so it passes, lost in an amazing confluence of

splendours before which a nearer cloud spreads at last its darkening veil.

Joy works alone ; it asks no contribution ; it avoids the pomps and standards, and all the unneeded, vain necessities of spoiled lives. The solitary place is sufficient for its habitation ; it is freed, as the Stoics would have said, from the tyranny of external things. It does not recede, like happiness, with lost friends or vanished youth, when the ways of life darken to the bereaved, like deep lanes poured full with evening shadows. They who have known it once may possess it always. For them there shall be no sadness of surrender, but that ecstasy of endeavour shall be prolonged to the end. They shall not see the pleasures which they have loved come down like autumn leaves, or sigh over the meagre cheer of age, remembering lost activities. For the tree of their

Joy
steadfast.

Joy
steadfast.

life shall not slowly rust to dull hues, but flush to a swift splendour in the woods of autumn, until at last it is absorbed into one clear flame, as though it should not die, but glow into annihilation. While the mind performs its office, and the wedlock of body and soul holds undissolved, there shall still be scope for dreams not unimpassioned, the soul shall yet be quickened with the unquenchable fire. So long as the eye has light, the heart shall yet be enamoured of arduous hopes, as in the blazing days of manhood. And in the distance there shall be surer glimpses of that which youth but half perceived; the things which were invisible but not vain shall seem now to pause for them, the flash shall linger; a steadfast sight shall perceive the vision.

Joy
fugitive.

Yet, as in wonder-tales the most splendid gift of the magician is often granted upon some hard

terms, not hidden or kept back by the giver, but forgotten awhile by the receiver in the bravery of first possession, so it has ever been with this gift of joy. It is lit with starry lights and touched with amazing fires ; but it remains of a supernal nature beyond their expression or control ; it is ever to be redeemed by pain. None shall summon it at will, or keep it continually under guard ; it will not outstay its hour even for tears or passionate supplication. It has not that great selfless quality which makes happiness seem best when most divided ; it is incommunicable, and may not be shared at will with others. Only souls of an imperial genius may bid it abide or persuade it to return when they list ; for them alone will it consent to linger under the regard, as they follow from height to height, proving the wings of the soul. A Shelley or a Schubert will come

Joy
fugitive.

Joy
fugitive.

radiant to earth with it, and holding it visible awhile, send it homing to the stars where, by the gods' grace, he came upon it; a Wordsworth draws it into the circle of his hills and gives it rest in the arbour of a cottage garden. These wizards had some word of power with which to call it down, potent as charms of old magic, Agla, or Ananizapta, or Tetragrammaton the Unutterable Name; they knew some spell by which it should seem to be imparted; for them alone it outstayed the cockcrow and knew serene hours of day. But for all the rest there is no such high control; the music out of the spheres escapes them when most they love it; the starry form is consumed away in a quick jealousy of darkness. Yet even the residue is riches; that which fleets from sight is steadfast in remembrance. There is pleasure from the flying shadows of clouds upon

the fields, though none may trace their outline, or stay them for a moment as they pass.

The Sirens are cruel mistresses, yet often royal in largesse. They teach the spirit to beat off beleaguering circumstance; they discover to it sovereign simples against oppression, dittany for great wounds and infallible charms of fernseed. The soul to which they call will travel on the prompting of an instant; it can be out and away while others only dream of stirring; before heavy lids are rubbed, it is departed. It knows no frontiers which might bar escape; it observes the will of none, and waits the hazards of no caprice. In a well-known passage, Sterne has told how literature could carry him far from the sad ways of life; how, in a moment, when the path became too rough or steep for his feet, he was off it upon soft lawns and places

The
recipe of
fernseed.

The
recipe of
fernseed.

scattered with rosebuds of delight. Such deliverance the Sirens also promise; and if in the regions whither they entice, the flowers are flames and the lawns immeasurable fields of space, there is the same elation of escape, there is the same joy over the filed gyves left behind. They sweep away the ambitions which conflict with freedom or make subservient to a patronage; the soul which they have taught to dream shall take no heed of jealous judgment; the treasures which it enjoys are of a divine abundance and beyond the talons of the harpies. It avoids the torment of Reputation, besieged upon its pinnacle, and, like that priest of Nemi, torn hourly by fear of the supplanter, who shall creep through the grove, and cut the golden bough, and take the priesthood at the point of the sword. It does not listen in an anguish for the footstep of the challenger, or by a sick fancy call

down defeat out of the void. It never knows the dwindling of men's applause and slow withdrawal of favour, feared as a woman fears the loss of an acclaimed beauty, and defended, as she defends, by pathetic artifices of self-deception, until some quick brutality of chance tells that all was done in vain. They who have never known praise are spared this sadness ; on this stage they were not engaged ; they do not hang upon an audience or watch their fortunes cruelly tossed upon a sea of faces.

The Roman, tired of the city, with its smoke and din, and the oppression of all its riches, prepared for himself a place of refuge in the country where he might hear the fall of waters, and look out upon blue, silent mountains. He lived two lives, confessing that neither might satisfy his nature ; his wheels devoured the road between town and country, bearing him at the

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headlong speed which alone could assuage his fever. The Sirens' liegeman, when the hard world oppresses, escapes into a refuge more sure than Tusculan villa or Sabine farm, whence the eye ranges over a vaster distance to heights more arduous than Soracte. The life of man, it has been said, has many lurking-coigns and deep recesses ; more often than we know it is doubly lived by seeming simple men, because the Sirens have come unawares and changed them wholly. The character that we deemed transparent is made impenetrable ; parents grow opaque to children, husband to wife, and friend to friend. They fashion to themselves deep secrets which the eyes of Argus should never find. The habitation of their soul is as a house hung with concealing tapestries, and pierced with many posterns invisible to the stranger or even the guest ; but when these

are gone, the arras is lifted up, a stone revolves in the wall, and the wind in the hidden stairway calls to freedom. When others think that a soul lodged after this wise keeps the hearth, often it is leagues away, on seas or mountains or in the forests where no axe has ever sounded. There it follows things fugitive and swift, fleeter than hart or hare, and of a more infinite endurance; there it tastes the proven delight of a servitude exchanged, for it serves still, but now aerial and winged powers. And though the wanderer in these wild places may lose the comfortable shelter of circumscription, he is no more encompassed or impounded; he has leaped the enclosures of that life where eyes are focussed to one length, and slow to perceive at every other. It may be peace to ignore immensity and dwell within a fold; to build a sanctuary, and at appointed times to circumambulate

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its walls ; to leave the infinite to the care of sworn interpreters. Achievement it may be to saw out measured lengths of fact, and with dovetail and rebate to complete the cunning joinery. But those who have been once allured beyond the workshop and 'the chapel, distrust the peace and dislike the carpentry. They abstain from the deep cups of induction with which the world's thirst is quenched. "It is brief," they say, "this little nonce of life, but not too short for brave adventure. Though we forsake the sure prospect, who shall prove it madness? For who shall tell us which is best, to know the transient well, or to follow after the shadow of the abiding?"

Truancy.

The wanderer knows a more generous wine than the thin vintage of Abiezer ; and the spice in it is the joy of truancy, which outlasts the days of youth and is

inextinguishable in all to whom the Sirens have ever sung. The man remembers with delight how in boyhood he would steal afield on a summer night to chase moths along the hedges, exalted under the influence of the bland moonlight, drawn into mysterious distances by a charm beyond the vision of fluttering wings or the desire of a difficult prey. How the great moth would appear not at all, or only under a waned moon, gleaming high above his net, and never for his seizure; how he would find himself far from home, when the night began to fail and the shadows under the boughs gave back before the dawn; how he would race home on feet drenched with dews, and sleep like a young god exhausted. A mystery breathes to him still out of those suave nights, so vast, so delicately haunted, heavy with the fragrance of the meadow-sweet, with the whirr

Truancy.

Truancy.

and subdued murmur of soft wings; nights of the dreamy fields and silent paths, when the pursuer was taken himself in an enchantment, and winged himself, and lifted up to an unimaginable rapture. Somewhat of that joy survives to all who are held in the allegiance of the Sirens; they are always truant in soul; through the long days they may obey the punctualities of rule, and keep the statutes of observance, but their hearts are in the ghostly meadows where the great moth hovered and was never taken. He who thus outwardly conforms is fast vowed to errantry; the desire of it is inveterate in him; for the secret joy of it he lives aloof in a seeming poverty of affection. A weak competitor for all solid gains, but in the retrospect at the end of life perhaps in better case than Amurath the Caliph, who in age looked back on a career of royal opportunity and knew but

fourteen days of happiness. The memories of those great escapes shall come to him in the still chambers where he sits imprisoned; they shall not find him mute to them, but like a violin of the Amati, he shall grow more resonant with years, and at the end take up the master-theme; it shall return with nobler harmonies; his soul shall stir to its departure upon that sound.

NO god is dead who ever won an enduring worship. Evil or good, mild or terrible, all must live on; it is not given them to die. The timid pagan erred who told of a voice over the waters crying: "Great Pan is dead." Hephæstus forges dread arms; Athena governs; Aphrodite roams the world, and Our Lady of the Wild Creatures. And the nature which is half divine is also immortal; Herakles girds to new labours; Prometheus toils for

Truancy.

No more
dead than
Pan.

No more
dead than
Pan.

men; the Muses are still present deities. Let none, therefore, wonder that the ancient enemies of the Nine live also; for if Pan signifies all nature, the Muses and the Sirens together mean all art, and the Sirens alone romance. And therefore policy has feared them, and all the deedful and strenuous energies have rallied for their undoing. Philosophers have preached and good men practised to compass their destruction. Religion has been fain to save their victims from themselves with the murmur of her liturgies. And yet they are not silenced, nor are their victims saved. For all who have heard the song to its end are marked for wanderings as surely as the returned Odysseus, who visited the temples, and performed his vows, but was none the less in jeopardy for all his offerings, and died searching he knew not what in the peril of the outer seas. It may be that in

comparison with the great gods of War and Love and Wealth, the Sirens are weak in retinue; but where once their dart flies home it wounds perdurably, and the weapon of Eros is a child's bow to theirs. They spread before all eyes the royal colour they love, the hue of the great distances and the deep skies; it passes into the texture of life, and like the dye which the great waters might not wash out, it holds ineradicable to the end. And if their voice was full of peril in the youth of the world, how fatally resistless now, when they have added to the old spell new charms drawn from all experience and the subtlest arts of life, until it is become the arch-music, binding the soul from the first chords with enchainments of perfect sound. What things were dreamed of Xanadu or stolen from the heavens for Adonais, what whispers breathed into enchanted

No more
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Pan.

No more
dead than
Pan.

flutes or called out of haunted lands for Euryanthe, all the promises which man has overheard in the winds, or surprised in the night-watches, these they have engrafted upon their own and made integral with the former sorcery. Like the hunter who slew the eagle with a shaft winged from its own feather, they have used dreams of men for the wounding of human kind. Only the child of the gods, the divine changeling in the cradle, may obey their call and approach the vision, and yet have full part in a human happiness. For the rest there is but the swift flash of joy, coming from the darkness and returning to it; or the gleam of that Intellectual Beauty which to the poet was as the music of the night-wind over the strings of an unfingered lute.

The
clouded
fire.

The song of the Sirens is sung with mastery : they did not strive with the Muses in vain. All that

the rhetorician knows they know : to magnify, to make significant, or to suppress, that their cause may always seem the better. They do not sing of the drear interludes between sight and sight, or of the soul outstripped and fallen exhausted. They do not sing of achievement betraying promise, or the misery of affinities never joined. They leave unsung the visions that blind, and the darkness that dismays ; the grief, the abandonment, the slowly murdering silences. They veil the clear Hellenic light with wreaths of magical cloud. But they sing the glory of the chase in enchanted forests and the straining to the quarry over the mountains ; of adventure, of ascent, of soaring valiance, of Infinity brought to man's compass ; of time and space annulled, the æon and the moment made one ; of the almightiness of joy approaching the splendour of

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tremendous thrones. These things they sing; and whosoever shall hear out their song shall hate as they hate, and love as seems good to them, suffered only to hide under heaped memories, like seeds beneath dead leaves, the little after-thoughts and treasons which they have not deigned to crush. Their bondman shall forsake Pheidias for Scopas; he shall ask of Shelley the transcending forms which Sophocles saw and renounced; he shall desire above that which is simple and august and still, the sonorous, the moving, and the richly dyed; he shall give up his soul to the lure of divine impossible things. The crystal classic thought shall satisfy him no more; through its clear shoals he shall see the natural man; but what is that to him who has looked into Eastern rubies and discerned his angel there? All this lucidity is false to him; it is barren and pale; the

glow and the wonder are analysed away. It is his punishment and his very grievous loss ; for whom the classic spirit informs, it saves for happiness ; romance has no like redemption. But the colour, and the glow, and the clouded inward fire he must have, though the pure line of beauty perish under his eyes. He receives in place of the clear good the inapprehensible gift, committing, in the sight of prudence, an ineffable folly of exchange. But what if the clear be shallow, and the sharpest facet of proof the most arrant artifice ; if your precise, trimmed knowledge be vain as lore of heraldry, exact in forms that never were ; if the symbol confessed, the aspiration, the dream, win nearer than your definitions to the beating heart of truth ? If all that is drawn from penumbra into hard light is only man's convenient fiction, were there not some

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consolation then for the exchange which prudence deems so mad? If the Real lives only in the Vague, should not the Sirens deserve praise despite their cruelty, singing the eternal truth, and the terror and dread joy that come to the soul out of the deeps in which it dwells? Such doubt is ever goading him and all his fellows in unrest. And whenever a pre-science of that returning song begins to trouble them, they make answer to all who in compassion would keep them from the way: "Let us alone," they say; "the pansy of the dune is more to us than the ranged flowers along your walls. We must go far where the hours are unimputed; we must be harmed of light. We shall soar and fall; yet we shall have known joy of ascent, and nothing shall take from us the remembrance. Say no more that this ecstasy is against nature; it is the very way

of the soul. For she was never wholly of the creation and is not to be contained by its laws. Hers is a transcending spirit which is abused, forever constrained to present things. And she is not least faithful to her own nature when she disdains to be held by them, passing for awhile into the limitless and untempered, out of which she came. Let us go, then, without reproach; a permitted force carries beyond your happiness. But when we return, once more defeated, we will again seek to do your pleasure in gratitude for your goodwill. For often when you might have turned from us you have forgiven, endeavouring to make us share that which you deem to be the greatest good for men. When we are released, we will toil with the most patient, though there be not one among the least of you but shall have greater satisfaction of his labour.

The
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fire.

Only suffer us always to look for
the sign and to depart upon its
coming; for when the mystical
wind stirs, and the music streams
into these shadows, then we
must rise and go, though
all the mercy of earth
were put forth
to hold us
back.”

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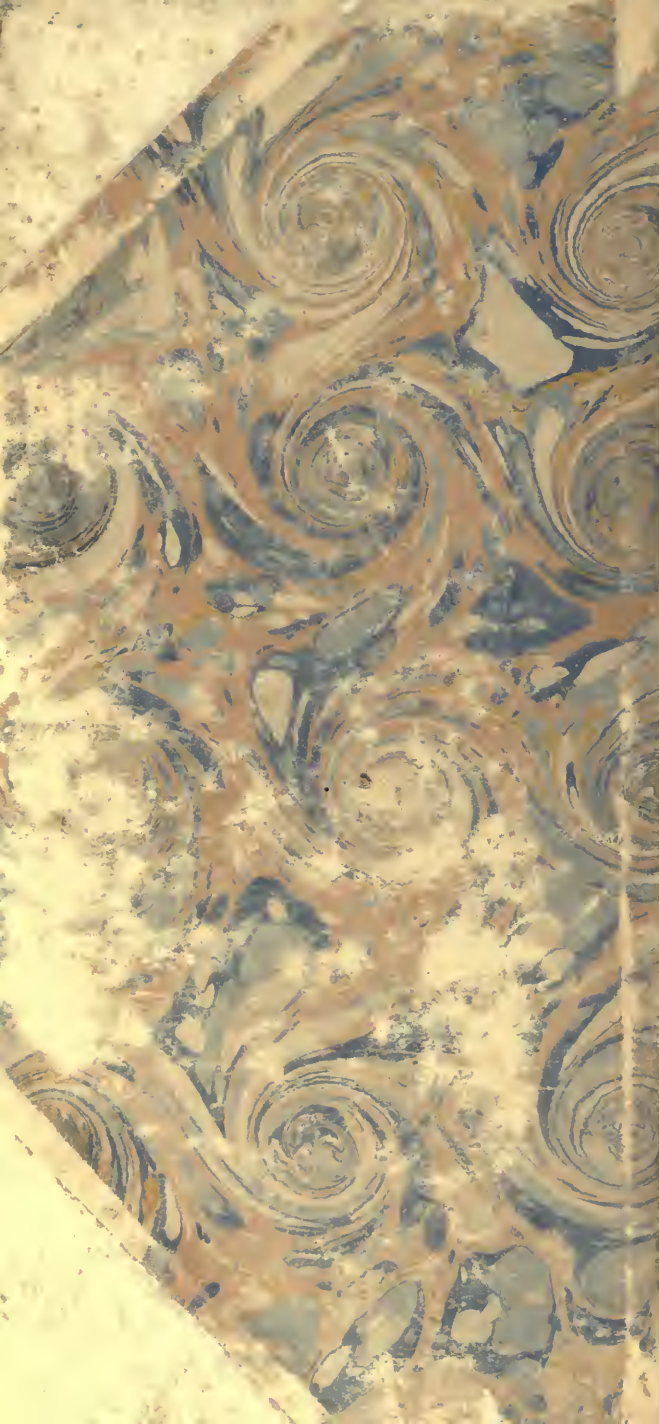
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