

IDYLLS OF GREECE

HOWARD V. SUTHERLAND

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IN PREPARATION

IDYLLS OF GREECE

SECOND SERIES

IDYLLS OF GREECE

IDYLLS OF GREECE

BY
HOWARD V. SUTHERLAND

The winds are story-tellers, and the sea
Remembers still the olden tales of love.



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To
HOPE
A daughter of California

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PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS



PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

A LITTLE love makes life endurable;
Much love would make us gods. And
knowing this

I bide within the shadow with my harp
And sing of love, and lovers who beheld
Long years ago the beauties ye ignore
The while ye seek, with strain'd and tired eyes,
The Stairs of Silence, winding ever down.
And though no more my notes may reach the
skies

Like his of old who charm'd the surging seas
And made the thrushes listen, yet perhaps
Men's hearts may gain some comfort from the
strain

And bless the singer though the stars be mute.
I sing the Past, and singing am content
If one look up. For, startled by my song,

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That one shall see the utter loveliness
Which lured the lovers of the Long Ago,
And know that he is heir to all the dreams
That make men happy. Thus would I be
crown'd.

IN those dear days when Greece was glorious,
And Sappho sang, and gods and goddesses
Made love to mortals in the drowsy woods,
There lived two lovers, whom a year had seen
By Hymen bless'd. The one was Kephalos,
Whose name the winds remember, and the stars;
The other Prokris, sister to the fern
And voiceless pansy; children they of kings.
Among their gifts, the gods on each bestow'd
A wondrous beauty, beauty such as we
Who worship at false shrines no longer know,
Nor dare may hope for; and, the while they
grew,

This precious gift, this utter loveliness,
Seem'd not to wane but, rather, to increase,
As all the world grows fairer with the day.
And nearing manhood, Kephalos became
A god in looks and bearing. Black his locks
And cluster'd like Apollo's; white his skin
As whitest maid's; and though his brow was
free

From wisdom's pencilings, his eyes could meet

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

The frown of Zeus, the Thunder-brow'd, un-
quell'd.

A mate for him was Prokris, with her hair
Yellow and fine, like that the silkworms spin
When fed on mulberry and lettuce leaves ;
With blue eyes bluer than the laughing sea
That mocks the mermaids of the Ægean ;
And whiter limbs than slain and wind-blown
foam,

Whiter than wan and hopeless asphodel.
Beside the sea these two fond lovers lived
And loved each other ; and the men would say —
The while they whisper'd when the feast was
done —

They envied Kephalos, yet wish'd him well ;
While women look'd on Prokris as they might
On some pale lily whom the lordly sun
Has crown'd with gold and made thrice beau-
tiful.

In all that land there was not one that stared
With jealous eyes on them ; not one but sat
In friendship at their feasts, or, singing, strew'd
Their chosen path with flowers and with leaves ;
There was not one that had not shed his blood
In their defense, had he been call'd upon
To fight for them ; for they to all were true,
And thus were served with loyalty themselves.

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AND yet, alas, above their favor'd heads,
Hid in the mists beneath the greater gods,
The three dread Sisters frown'd, as frown they
will

On all whom Love has mark'd as his elect,
And whom bright Fortune favors. Heeding not,
As lovers do the while their hearts are young,
They went their way, and made no sacrifice
Except to him who led them each to each
And gave them joy in one another's arms.
For Love alone these lovers recognized,
And laughed at all that others hold most dear —
Knowing too well that everything must pass,
Desire turn to weariness and ash.

'Twas even said that Kephalos did hold
His Prokris fairer than the foam-fair queen
Whose eyes set gods a-tremble; fairer far
Than all Olympian beauties, and more pure;
While Prokris held her Kephalos more dear
Than all high gods, more proud and worshipful.
This knew the three dread guardians of the
loom,

Who pick'd the threads of their erst happy lives
From tens of thousands; and, all silently,
Prepared, as punishment, to sever them.

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

IT chanced one day that Kephalos, alone,
Went forth to hunt; and erst when Phœbus
The second time his golden chariot [drove
Across the midline of the heaven's arch,
Lay down beneath the hoary oaks to rest.
The Fates had spoil'd his hunting; not a shaft
Had left his bow, nor had he once beheld
In shaded glade or by unrippled pool
An antler'd beauty of Diana's herd.
And while he lay outstretch'd upon the green,
In beauty perfect yet disconsolate,
There came from out the forest's silences
The fair Aurora, whom the whisp'ring leaves
Delight in ush'ring and proclaim their queen —
Astræus' wife, whose children are the stars
And laughing winds, and who Tithonus loved
All secretly, until his fire fail'd
And he grew sick of immortality.
Amazed she stood beneath the ancient tree
And gazed on Kephalos, who lay asleep
And all unconscious; and the while she gazed
She loved him and desired him, who was
The fairest youth in all that land of Greece.
And then she ran to him as though she fear'd
He might elude her; and she knelt by him,
And laid her hands (soft hands and strangely
warm)
Upon his cheeks; and then he woke, and saw


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Her dark eyes lit with passion, and her breast,
Whiter than snow yet heaving like the sea,
Above his own. And thus she netted him.

BUT soon he rose and flung her off from him,
And cursed her beauty which had snared his
From its allegiance. He upbraided her, [love
And blamed himself; and dared not look upon
The bruised flowers, just recovering
From all the shame that had been put on them.
He sigh'd; he wept. He bade the silent trees,
The watchful pools, the company of birds,
Be witness to his ravishing, and how
She came on him as creeps the hungry night
Across the jewel'd bosom of the sky.
And while he acted like a shame-faced youth
Who lets repentance mar what he enjoys,
She stood apart and bound her tangled hair
About her head. Her cheeks were yet aflame,
Her eyes with love and happiness still soft;
And while on him, as on Astræus once,
She look'd, and on Tithonus, still she sigh'd
And thought how fair he was, and what a child
To cast aside what gods had envied long;
And while he raved Aurora laugh'd at him,
And still was busied with her golden hair.
“Thou boy,” said she, “who art more subtly
fair

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Than whitest flower in secluded glen
Wherein no sunbeam enters; who couldst stand
With gods on their Olympus, and still be
Fairer than is the fairest of them all.
What makes thee weep and tear thy lovely hair?
Is it the passion that has left my breast
That moves thee so? or art thou thus enraged
Because man's will is greater than his pow'r?
Come, still thy grief; for I will meet thee here
On lazy noons or nights of quietude
Whene'er thou wilt; and that which thou hast
 had
Is ever thine as long as there are glades
And flower'd beds like these to rest upon."

HUS spake the goddess as she laid her hands
Upon the youth, as though she fain had
drawn

Him back to her; but he turn'd fierce on her
As turns the stag on the pursuing hounds,
And anger's crimson flamed upon his face:
"The gods be witness, Prokris," he exclaim'd,
As though Aurora were not near to him;
"The gods be witness that she crept on me
E'er yet Sleep's weighted curtains were withdrawn
From 'fore mine eyes! Had I been 'ware of her

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She had not won me, nor have made me false
To thee, and to those sacred vows I made,
And which are still the safeguards of our love!
Hear me, ye trees; ye dear and soft-eyed birds,
So faithful ever to your feather'd loves!

By stealth she won me from my spotless wife,
My white-limb'd Prokris with her golden heart."
Again he wept, and lifted to the blue
His claspèd hands, and pray'd to wake and find
His shame a dream; and while the tears still
stream'd

Adown his cheeks, Aurora answer'd him
In taunting tones: "Go home, thou babe," said
she,

"And thou shalt find thy Prokris to be made
Of that same clay which I but now assumed
For thy dear sake. Go thou disguised, and tempt
Thy white-limb'd mistress whom a night has made
Fondly desirous, and thou soon shalt learn
How she will take consoling from the hands
Of him who haps along and proffers it."

Then dried his hot tears' fountain, and he
strode

Across to her, and frown'd her in the eyes;
And while he grasp'd her wrist with violence
He held her off from him and fiercely hissed:
"Thy words are false; as false as thou hast been
To him who father'd the eternal stars

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That shine above our heads. Thou knowest well
My Prokris is as pure as was the veil
That hid white Venus from the mermen's gaze
The while she rose, all-radiant, through the sea.
As pure is she as those anemones
That draw their petals from thine ivoried feet,
And deem thee soil'd; yea, worse than those
dread hags
That haunt the tangled pathways of our woods." He loosed her wrist; and she, who heeded not
His bitter taunt, still busied with her hair,
Conceal'd from him her injury and pain.
"Go hence," she said, "and don a shepherd's
dress,
And hide thy locks beneath a humble cap;
Then woo thy Prokris as she walks this eve
Among her flowers, and thou soon shalt see
If I the knave am or thyself the fool.
Get hence; go straight. Ere yet the purpled robe
Of night's pale mistress turns to sombre grey
Thou, too, shalt curse thy Prokris; thou shalt
curse
The air she breathes, the light within her eyes,
And everything around her, to the sun
That warms her pulses. Then remember me!"
She said no more, but went the way she came
Beneath the trees whose arms were dumbly
stretch'd

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Above her body, warm and doubly white
Amid the green wherein she disappear'd.
She scarce had gone when Kephalos awoke
As from a trance, and gazed where she had
 stood,
But found her not. Then stared he at the sky
And frown'd the while Suspicion prick'd his
 heart
And made him doubt his Prokris. Soon he swore
By all the gods to tempt her; yea, he would
Be sure of her, and know if she were true
When even goddesses made play with men.
Then swung he swiftly homeward, till he came
Upon his pastures, where a shepherd watch'd
His lazy flock. From him he took his cap
And outer garment, and the pleasant reed
With which he whiled the lazy hours away,
And woo'd white dryads or the lovely maids
That smiled on him at dance or festival.

'TWAS night-time now. The purple sky
 was live
With stars that swarm'd like silent, silvery bees
Around the moon. Across the slumbrous land
A zephyr roam'd, and touch'd the painted
 cheeks
Of dreaming flowers, while it sway'd the trees
And woke the forests' tuneful murmurings.

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Afar appear'd the stern and moon-lit crest
Of dread Olympus, proudest of the mounts
That guard the borders of fair Thessaly;
While lesser hills lay dark around his base
Like tired lions crouch'd on shadow'd sands.
Amid such calm strode tortured Kephalos
Beneath the trees that stood like sentinels
About his palace, till at last he came
To one fair spot, most dear to him and her —
His wife's own garden. Then beside the hedge
He hid himself and waited. Soon he heard
Her singing softly, as a bird might sing
Whose joy is still remember'd, though no more
It beats its wings against a gilded cage.
And ere she pass'd beyond him he began
To pipe most sweetly on the shepherd's reed;
And she stood silenced, and with trembling voice
Asked who it was that ventured there, and why?
Then leap'd he o'er the leafy barrier
And knelt to her, and said that he had come
From distant lands to see her and to die.
Because, said he, he loved her, and had heard
How chaste she was, and knew that he could
ne'er
Make his her love, that love which was his life.
Then drew she back as from a poison'd thing,
Nor look'd at him, but bade him go from her
Before she call'd her eunuchs and her guards.

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And he was happy. But again he sought
To win his suit, so bade her bear with him
A little while and let him ease his heart,
And he would go and nevermore return.
Then whisper'd he of love, and of herself,
Who was to him (and many years had been)
The Queen of Love; and how he envied him
Whom she did love, yet who had gone from her
And left her lonely. Thus he tempted her
With honey'd words, but she was ever true
And bade him go as he had promised her.
But now he sigh'd, and sadly beat his breast,
And begg'd her listen till he told his tale
And eased his heart of its unhappiness.
And, being but a woman, she was kind
And pitied him; so bade him haste and tell
His tale of love, if only he would go;
For now 'twas late, and soon her maids would come
To bid her rest. Then led he her to where
A bower was, with seats all vine-entwined,
And bade her sit; and Kephalos made haste
To kneel beside her, further tempting her.
He spoke of wealth and jewels that were his,
And how he dream'd that she was deck'd with
 them;
And how there was no woman in all Greece
So fit to wear them; and, if she would grant
Her lips to him, then would he gladly give

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For each soft kiss a stone a queen might wear.
'Twas late, 'twas dark, and she was young, alone;
And kisses leave no mark, while gems remain;
And, thinking of their beauty, ere she knew
What she had done, she blush'd and lean'd to him.

But, laughing loud, he threw his cap aside,
And then she saw the man was Kephalos;
And like a bird that sees too late the snare,
She fell to earth, afraid, and was as dead.

Above her head the stars still swarm'd behind
The virgin moon, which slipp'd all silently
Across the sky, and saw and pitied her;
For soon the zephyr kiss'd her waxen cheek
Until she woke from her unconsciousness;
And rubb'd her brows; and then remembrance

came

And with it shame for that which she had done.
Then rose she fawn-like, and with one swift
glance

To where her home gleam'd, silent as a tomb,
She kiss'd the cap her Kephalos had worn,
And then fled weeping through the solemn woods.
She rested not until she reach'd the shore,
The burden'd sea's confessional; and there,
While yet her heart was heavy as a stone,
And all the world seem'd grey before her eyes,
She cross'd the sea unquestion'd, and at last
Hid in the forests on Eubœa's isle.

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ILL had it fared with Prokris had she not,
One afternoon, when blindly wandering
Beneath the hoary wårders of the hills,
Met stern Diana with her maids and hounds —
The forest's mistress, pure, implacable.

For those same woods are dark, and there the
bear

And boar are fierce and have their gloomy lairs ;
While horrid Harpies, gaunt and haggard-
eyed,

In shadow'd places dream of bloody feasts.

Two days she lived on berries and the fruits

That grow in forests ; but the third she was
With hunger weak, and scarce could walk beneath
The thorny boughs that ever clutch'd at her.

'Twas then she met Diana, with her limbs

Like youthful shepherd's, color'd by the sun ;
With clear blue eyes and hair drawn tight behind
Her well-poised head ; with shoulders like a
girl's ;

And supple waist, ample and unconfined.

Beside her hounds, huge beasts that knew no
fear,

She walk'd in silence, while behind her came

Her fair attendants with their javelins

And deadly spears, each arm'd and resolute.

But when she first saw Prokris, whom the dogs

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Had fawn'd upon when made aware of her,
She stopp'd the chase, and ask'd her who she was,
And why she roam'd those silent woods alone?
Then ceased the hounds their baying, and the
 maids

Encircled her the while pale Prokris told
Of her misfortunes, grievous and unjust.
Above her head with gentle chirruping
The careless birds her words accompanied;
And while she spoke Diana's maids oft sigh'd,
And e'en their mistress look'd with love on her
Who was a woman, and as such had err'd.
The trees had ne'er so sad a story heard;
The flowers turn'd their faces to the earth,
And all the air was silent till she ceased
And raised her arms, imploring sympathy.
Then spoke Diana, with the voice that calm'd
All things affrighted, from the stricken deer
Whose pleading eyes Death's mists were covering,
To untamed eagles whom a shaft had brought
From highest heaven to her sandal'd feet.
"I blame thee not if thou through Love hast
 err'd;

For Love is young, and guides astray all those
That follow him, all blindly and in vain.
A boy is he, who hath no thought of aught
Except the moment's pleasure; wherefore I,
Who know how Grief his constant shadow is,

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Have Love abjured; so, too, have these my
 maids.

By day we hunt the wild boar and the deer,
And rest at night on this soft-bosom'd couch
Beneath the peaceful heavens. Satyrs come,
And timid nymphs, and dance and sing to us;
And e'er the moon and her attendant stars
Have sought the lands beyond the Ægean,
We sleep as sleeps no lover or his maid.

When wakes the day, gold-hued and glorious,
And casts upon the mountains' highest crests
His bright defiance to the fleeing night,
We rise refresh'd, and through the scented woods
Betake our way till ev'ning ends the chase.

Thus live we here in these secluded woods
Where no man comes our hunting to molest;
Where I am Queen, and where my subjects are
My maidens and my ever-faithful hounds.

Now, if thou wilt, thou, too, canst join with
 them

And follow me, abjuring Love the while;
And I to thee, as unto them, will be
A Queen and sister till thou leavest us."

Thus spoke the Huntress, with a voice most soft
And yet most clear. And Prokris went to her
In happy silence, almost comforted;
And, kneeling down, embraced her lovely knees
And kiss'd them twice. And thus Diana gain'd
A perfect star to crown her radiant train.

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FOR three long months she trod the velvet
sward

With her fair sisters ; and the nymphs were fain,
The while they danced and sang to them at eve,
To cast at her the wreaths of color'd leaves
That crowned their heads. The laughing satyrs
blew,

If she but gazed with azure eyes at them,
Their flutes with softer passion ; and the Queen,
The cold Diana, loved the sight of her
As loves the moon the lily of the vale.

Her clinging gown she long had cast aside,
And wore a tunic of a coarser stuff
Which gave her limbs some freedom ; and her
arms,

As round as slender columns, braved the kiss
Of royal Phæbus and the wind's caress.
Around her brows her golden hair was coil'd,
A glinting crown, which Kephalos had once
So fondly lipp'd ; her skin was still as white
As Annam's ivory, and traced in blue
With little veins on breasts and chisell'd throat.
Of all the maids — and they were fair enough
To make the gods desirous — she was yet
The one most fair, part goddess and part girl ;
Most fleet of foot, most accurate of aim,
Most worthy of Diana's comradeship.

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BUT though she sang the while her sisters
sang,

And danced at eve to please the forest's queen,
Her heart was sad within her, for she long'd
By day and night for Kephalos, her lord.

His face she saw when in the crystal pool
She bathed at morn; his silv'ry voice she heard
When in the boughs the winds faint music made;
Of him she thought when all the dark'ning sky
Above the world hung fondly passionate;

And all her thoughts were ever thoughts of him,
And all her dreams were dreams of Kephalos.

If while she slept, some brown, half-am'rous maid
Encircled her with tantalizing arm,

She call'd his name, and thought that he was near,
Until her sighs awoke her. Thus she grieved;

And though the woods were fill'd with virgin
nymphs

Whose secret love was still unsatisfied,

There was not one that hunger'd for a mate
As grieved fair Prokris for her Kephalos.

This saw Diana, and to comfort one

Whom most she loved, she kept her near to her
And held great hunts, in hopes the chase might
drive

This love from out her dear heart's citadel.

But naught avail'd this scheming; and although
The lovely band pursued its laughing way

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Through darkest brakes or glades of softest
green,
She noticed not where'er her feet might tread.
But feasted ever on her constant grief.

IT chanced one day Diana came on her
While she was kneeling by a lonely pool,
Whereat she linger'd and allow'd her tears
To mingle with its waters. All around
Were lilies white, and fragrant hyacinths,
And blue forget-me-nots, that spoke to her
Of her own love, and his who was not there.
Above her head the sun still slowly climb'd
The azure heavens, and with golden rays
Before, behind, and all around it, swung
On to the West, where lay 'mid bluest seas
Isles of delight no foot had ever stirr'd.
So softly trod Diana o'er the grass
That Prokris heard her not until she stood
Before her, and with speech melodious
Thus woke the sorry maiden from her dreams:
"And why these tears, my own dear Golden-
hair'd?
And why this grief ere yet sad Twilight fills
These pensive woods with whisp'rings sweet and
sad,
That wake again forgotten memories?
Hark to the horn's sweet music, and the bay

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Of eager hounds that scent a frightened deer
And follow hotly its betraying tracks!
See through the copse where go, with happy
shouts,

Thy late-sworn sisters who have sought for thee
And deem'd thee lost, as, too, did I — thy Queen;
And here I find thee by this stilly pool
That loves some centaur who no more may come,
The while thou weapest here, from out the woods
To see his beauty mirror'd in her face.
These many days thou hast been coldly pale,
And I would know what shadow frightens thee.
So tell thy tale before my maids return,
Nor fear to share thy sorrow with a friend;
For grief kept secret, though a maid's delight,
Is fatal to the heart that harbors it."

Then Prokris told the Huntress of her grief
And how she long'd for Kephalos, her own;
Whom she had lost through very love of him
That made her blind to his most subtle snare.
"If I have err'd so grievously," she said,
While yet she knelt, reed-ring'd, beside the pool,
"I now have paid most dearly for my fault
And am become of maids the weariest.
For I am one whose love became my life,
And he who loved me, my unsetting sun;
To whom all others were as minor stars
That hid their shining faces when he pass'd.

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My life he was ; and when that other came
(Who was my lord) his spirit lured my own,
As from the woods is lured the simple bird
That hears its sister in captivity.

Yea, I have err'd ; but erring I was fond ;
And fond of him who taught my eyes to read
Love's subtle language, and to turn to him
Who was my only haven in despair.

Yea, I have err'd ; but oh ! I have atoned
For that one fault which drove me from my
home

And doom'd me to this bitter wandering ! ”

DIANA answer'd not, but watch'd the maid
In stilly contemplation. How should she,
Who was immortal, know the grief of her
Whose days were few, and who no more could see
The one who was both light and life to her ?
How should she know, whose cheeks were ne'er
caress'd

Except by winds or rude, unyielding thorns,
The thrill that takes the bitterness from life —
The thrill that is the acme of all bliss ?
How should she know, whose eyes had never
burn'd

All hotly in another's, and whose lips
Had ne'er been sought in dusks of wonderment,
The swoon that brings forgetfulness of aught —

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The swoon that is the chrism of the dream?
So Prokris wept unhinder'd, noting not
How e'en the forest flowers look'd at her,
And sought to comfort with suggestive smiles
The one who was as innocent as they.
Thus on her knees she ask'd the silent Queen
To succor her, and send her home again
To live forever with her Kephalos,
His wife, his love, until her days were done.
"For thou," said she, "canst give to me, O
Queen,
If give thou wilt, some most seductive drink,
Distill'd from herbs, to win the love again
Of him who lost me through his jealousy.
I then will deem thee gracious, and will burn
In temples made of whitest porphyry
By day and night sweet incense in thy praise."
Then laugh'd Diana softly. "Child," said she,
"No drink of herbs is half so powerful
As thy clear eyes, or that sweet voice of thine
Which might seduce the harden'd Boreas,
Or charm the Styx's silent ferryman.
If thou wilt leave our forest sisterhood,
Our leafy home, and win thy Kephalos,
No magic charm will help thee like thine own —
For that would win thee gods as well as men.
But, think thee well; for if thou goest now
To him who drove thee usward, then no more

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Art thou our guest, no more the cherish'd one
Of all my band of lovely wanderers."

Then Prokris clutch'd her garment. "Queen,"
said she,

"Most white Diana, think not ill of me
Who love my lord who is more fair than Love.
For though I lived forever in thy woods,
Or on Olympus, or in yon dim land
Where hopeless ghosts forever congregate,
I still would yearn for him who woke my soul
From girlhood's dreamings. Yea, and though

I quaff'd

Of Lethe's waters, I would still be 'ware
Of his fond kisses and his strong embrace.
What though across the arching heaven sweeps,
When yet the day is bright and passionate,
The car of Phœbus? With my Kephalos
So far away, 'tis blackest night with me!
And though sweet birds and all sweet sounds
that be

Unite in singing praises, naught I hear
When his dear voice — dear voice, so crystal
clear! —

Is not the leader of the joyful pæan.
Then let me haste, good Queen, to him who is
My love, my all; and even though he be
Unkind and spurn me, though he bid me go,
Forgetting all the sweetness of the past,
I still can touch his hand, and then can die."

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WHILE yet she spoke there burst upon the
twain,

As bursts the sunlight on a silent dell
To shade and dew-pearl'd grasses consecrate,
The laughing maidens, loveliness in pairs.
The first with horns, with which they woke the
air

And praised a radiant sister who had brought
The brown deer down. Then came that one
herself,

And then the others, who behind them bore
The stricken beast, dog-follow'd, and still
crown'd

With heavy antlers sharpen'd by the years.
Around their mistress and the kneeling girl
They group'd themselves all silently, and made,
As maids offset their own fair loveliness,
The beauty more apparent of the twain.

But soon Diana lifted to her feet
The weeping maid, and turning to her own,
Who still were very silent, thus she spoke
As one may speak who loses her delight:
"No more," said she, "our sister hunts with us,
No more shall hear the winding of the horn,
The dogs' loud baying when the proud deer
falls.

No more our sister follows us the while
We roam the darken'd forest, nor shall hear

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

The even-song of satyr and of nymph.
Within her heart still burns Love's deathless
flame

Which naught can quench when once it has
been lit.

She goes from us at dawn-burst. Like a star
That hears the morning's trumpets she departs,
Most pure and lovely, and our hearts will be
For many years, the while we think of her,
As sad as these our forests in the night."

Then turn'd she unto Prokris. "Child" said she,
"Ere thou art come to him whom thou wouldst win
Despite his foolish jealousy of thee,
Disguise thyself as he himself disguised
And see if he more faithful husband is
Than thou wert wife. If so, perchance, it be
Thou canst not woo him, then to us return;
For woods are soft and winning. Tempt him
first;

For he who is not tempted is unkind,
While he who falls will readily forgive.
Remember me and this fair sisterhood;
And with thee take, to tell thee of the past
In other days when far we hunt from thee,
This dart of mine, as swift and sure as death,
And this my hound. I love thee, so — farewell!"
Then pass'd Diana slowly to the dark,
And no one follow'd. But the maidens press'd

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Around fair Prokris with her wondrous gifts,
And told her how the deadly instrument
Had brought to earth the fleetest footed deer
And birds that seem'd a speck against the sun.
Then made they protestations of their love,
And bade her always seek them, had she need
Of better friends than she might find in Greece.
On yielding skins the maids then laid them
down

To sleep the sleep that comes to all that know
Their kinship with the forest, and are sure
Of its protection. Patiently and still
Lay watchful Prokris with her dog and dart;
She saw the passing stars above her head,
And wonder'd how the Fates would deal with
her.

AT last the heaven's portals were unbarr'd,
And through them strode, with all its
glow, the Dawn,
And all its promise; and the birds were roused
From dreamless sleep in nests of joyousness,
And all the woods were fill'd with melody.
But Prokris left, ere yet her sisters woke,
Her couch of fern, and pass'd with hound at side
Their sleeping forms, as pass'd the grieving
Night

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

Unseen of all a little while before.
And still the sky grew brighter, while the shades
Fled sadly westward, and the last pale orb
Evanish'd in the glory of the skies.
She came at last to where the singing sea
Lay idly rocking; and again she cross'd
With silent sailors to the shores of Greece,
And saw the distant porches of her home,
And long'd for him who knew not she was near.
But now she paused, and stain'd both face and
 hands,
And hid the tell-tale glory of her hair
Beneath her kerchief; and not Egypt's queen
Had look'd more tempting than the dusky maid.
And when she came to where the slaves were
 ranged
She order'd one, their leader, to inform
His lord and master, noble Kephalos,
That one was come who read the truthful stars
And straightway sought an audience of him.
Then stood she humbly in the shaded court,
Her pulses throbbing and her heart dismay'd,
Until the man return'd, and usher'd her
To where he waited, thunder-brow'd and pale.
Upon a throne of ebony and gold
He silent sat, with eyes downcast, until
The silv'ry tinkle of their anklets told
The slaves' advancing with the one disguis'd.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Then woke his senses to the lovely form
That knelt before him, with the slaves behind;
From off his brow the storm clear'd, as the
clouds

Pass from the hills when once the sun comes
forth;

And in a voice that shook despite his will
He ask'd her name, and what far land her home?
Then spoke she softly, as a wife may speak
To him she loves when warm upon her cheek
She feels the lips that will not be denied.

And though she only told him of her art,
And call'd herself a simple sorceress,
He burn'd to clasp her, so he bade his slaves
Begone and leave them by themselves, alone.

And ere the purple curtains cut them off
He went to her, and raised her tenderly,
And made her sit beside him. This she did
The while she idly dallied with his ring
(A gift of hers) and ask'd who gave it him.

"A king!" he said. "And thou, if thou wilt be
My heart's fond mistress ere the day is done,
Canst bear it hence to Egypt, and declare
That I, who ne'er loved woman, am thy slave,
And love thee only, lovely Sorceress!"

But she feign'd anger, and withdrew herself
From his embracings. "Lord," she softly said,
And once again her words were passion-sweet,

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

“How canst thou make such proffering to me
Of that which is another’s, and not thine?
Hast thou no wife to whom thy vow was made
Of true allegiance? If unmarried, then
What ails thy Grecian maidens? Answer me.”
And then he lied, as lied the first man made,
As lie all men, and will, until their dust
Forgets its passion, and the ruthless wind
Blows it between the mountains and the seas.
“Thou art my love,” said he; “thou only art
My heart’s desire. No vows I made, or will,
Except to thee who art the arbitress
Of all my fortunes. See! I kneel to thee,
Who knelt to none. Thy head a halo has
Of mystic glory, and thy limpid eyes
Allure my soul. Once only have I burn’d
As now I burn to clasp thee. Women pass
Like dolls each day before me; but I heed
Their sighing not, nor all the witchery
Of stolen glance and furtive touch of hand.
The while I plead, thine eyes the darker grow
Like pensive pools at midnight; but thy breast
Heaves like the sea. Now deign to bend to
me!”

But she withdrew her wrist from his embrace.
“I doubt thee not,” she said. “But first I fain
Would see thy hand, and learn what fate is
thine.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Oft have I lain beside the murm'ring Nile
And memoried the flaming messages
Inscribed on heaven's purple. All is writ
Within our hands, though few permitted are
To read the changeless legend of their lives.
Show me thy palm." And Kephalos obey'd
And stretch'd his hand before her; and the while
He watch'd her lips she spell'd his destiny.
"One loved thee well, and loves thee even now;
And one whom thou believest far away
Is very near. This line would say that thou
Art wed to her, and yet thou sayest no.
And this, ah! here is sorrow; but at last
All's sunshine, and — methinks thou art in
love!"

"With thee," he whisper'd hoarsely. "Tempt
me not

To say again the thing the stars deny.
Wedded am I, to one who loves me not
Despite my heart's fierce hunger; where she is
I know not, fair Egyptian; all I know
Is thou art here beside me. Lean to me!"
Then kiss'd she him, not madly, but as one
Who finds her own and is made glad thereby;
And while she drew his head upon her breast
She kiss'd again, and whisper'd: "Kephalos!"
Then knew he all, and, loving her, forgave,
And she was happy and forgave him, too.

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

THEN at the court was great festivity;
A slave was freed and sacrifices made
To Venus Aphrodite; feasts were had
To which there came the wealthy and the famed,
The wise, the brave, and women beautiful.
The shepherds left the silence of the hills
And came to pipe at dances, and take part
In games athletic; and the poor were fed
On choicest meats and wines of Thessaly.
In all the land such days had ne'er been known,
Nor e'er had met in all the land of Greece
So great a throng of happy courtiers
Another's joy to see and celebrate.
But happier far than these the lovers were,
For now they knew how much they both had
lost
By youthful folly. Kephalos now deem'd
His wife more lovely than the whitest nymph
The woods embower'd; and to her he was
More wise than ever and more beautiful.
Before the dawn's gold carpet had been spread
Upon the rugged hill-tops, they would forth
To hear the early songbirds, or to watch
The lazy sheep advancing through the fields.
No hour found them parted; thus they lived
Their courtship over, and, 'tis safe to say,
Had grieved to see the passing of the sun
Had eve not follow'd, and behind it — night.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

NOW, Prokris loved her husband, and
would share
With him the gifts Diana gave to her;
The noble Lælaps, hound invincible,
She kept herself, but gave to Kephalos
The awful dart, death-tipp'd and lightning-
wing'd.
And oft they hunted, side by side, nor fear'd
The surly bear, the deer, or white-tusk'd boar;
For naught that breath'd could face them, and
they grew
To laugh at danger and to seek for it.

SO pass'd the months till singing Spring
was gone,
And blue-eyed Summer, hot and langorous,
Had come to bless the flowers of the fields
E'er Autumn shrived them for the Winter's
sleep.
Beside the pools the drowsy reeds still stood
Their patient guard, the while the lordly sun
Sear'd the lush grass, and baked the cracking
earth,
And made the lazy cattle seek the shade.
Then stay'd our Prokris in the marble court
Where fountains murmur'd, and strange sing-
ing birds

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

Fill'd the cool air with liquid song, and were
Unmindful all of their captivity.

At home she stay'd where maidens sang to her,
Or play'd on lutes and silv'ry instruments,
And made her dream of fragrant forest days
And fleeing nymphs, and satyrs, ivy-crowned.
In dreams she saw Diana following
The wide-eyed deer, her train of lovely ones
In chase behind; in dreams they came to her
And wound red poppies in her golden hair.
And oft she dream'd of Kephalos, her love,
Who minded not the summer's fiery breath
But hunted ever, and would roam the woods
Till night-fall drove him, wearied, home to her.

ONE sultry eve, while yet still far from home,
He cast himself beneath an aged beech
To rest his limbs; and then, as he was warm,
He call'd on Aura (who doth loose the bonds
That hold the fickle zephyrs in control)
To fan his cheeks and minister to him.
And as he lay outstretch'd within the shade,
There came to him from o'er the rocking sea
The gentle Wind, whose fingers, moist and cool,
Soon charm'd his drowsy senses till he slept.
And while asleep there came to him a nymph,
A wan-eyed thing, yet strangely beautiful,
A creature whom a satyr might have loved

IDYLLS OF GREECE

To whom red flowers would exhale their souls
The while she bent above them. When she saw
How white he was, and how divinely fair,
She strove to kiss him. But the youth awoke
And fled from her, and left her passionate
And swearing vengeance by the drunken Pan.
Not long she waited in the empty place
Where lately he had linger'd. Ere the sun
Was hid behind the western barriers,
Impell'd by all the hatred in her heart
She sped behind him, as an arrow speeds
When shot from out the bosom of a bow.
And so she came, ere he was forest free,
By straighter ways, and unentangled paths
To gentle Prokris, and inform'd her how
Her Kephalos was faithless; how he loved
The fickle Aura and had call'd on her
To woo and win him in the beech tree's shade.
She told her how the goddess had embraced
Her love and master; how the birds had sung
Of his undoing; yea, how she had seen
The burning twain exchange their deathless
vows

And cling in perfect silence each to each.
Then Prokris trembled, for she knew too well
How once Aurora won him; and she knew
That man is weak; and, ere she ope'd her eyes,
The nymph was gone and Kephalos arrived.

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

She gave no sign of her unhappiness;
But all that night she listen'd, and at last
She heard him talking wildly of the chase,
And heard him murmur: "Aura!" Then he
 woke,
But she feigned sleep, and feigning, heard him
 sigh,
And lead itself was lighter than her heart.

FOR two whole days he rested, and al-
though
She sought to spend the hours by herself,
Our Prokris could not leave him; woman-like,
Her love was strong although herself was weak.
And though there lurk'd a sorrow in her eyes,
And in her soul a still but constant grief,
She strove to hide her longing, yet would fain
Have told him all and then been comforted.
But swift they pass'd, those days of idleness
When couch'd on skins he lazily reclined
And watch'd the girls their graceful dance per-
 form,
And held in his her unresponsive hand.
He noticed not her secret worriment;
Nor did he know that misery abode
Within the shadow'd temple of her heart,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

That unshed tears were hid behind her eyes
And all her dreams were dreams of weariness.
But when she ask'd him if he loved her yet
As once he loved her in the old, dear days,
When he had come to Athens where she dwelt,
And woo'd and won her, then he kiss'd her lips
And said: "I love thee as I loved thee then,
And yet love more; for all thy love of me
Throughout these years is placed to thy account,
And I am more thy debtor than before.
Thou wert most lovely in thy girlhood's spring,
More fair than was the spotless asphodel
That witness'd our betrothal in the woods.
But now thou art more lovely; for thou art
My love, my wife; and though white Venus
stood
Beside thee here, my lips would turn to thine
As now they turn, O thou, most beautiful!"
Then Prokris grew forgetful of her grief,
But not for long; for when the third day
dawn'd,
And while the morning's mantle yet was grey,
He left her side and sought the woods again
While she was left to mother her despair.
And ere the shadows drove him home to her
The wan-faced nymph came stealthily, and told
Of how at noon the goddess come to him —
The brown-hair'd Aura with the low, cool brow.

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

And once again was Prokris wracked by doubt;
And once again she watch'd him as he slept;
And once again he toss'd uneasily
And murmur'd: "Aura!"; and when next he went
To hunt the deer, poor Prokris follow'd him.

O'ER hill and dale, through woods brown-
carpeted,

She tracked her lord, and pass'd all-silently
Beneath the waving branches of the trees
Which seem'd to bid her linger in the chase.
But naught she saw except his raven curls
And stalwart shoulders; for the Three that
drove

The fated deer were driving her that day
To where the noiseless waters waited her.
Ill fortune seem'd to hunt with Kephalos,
For though he travell'd bravely, ne'er a hind
Arose from out its resting place of fern
To fall a victim to his deadly dart;
No boar rush'd forth to dare him, and the bear
Lay hid within the thicket while he pass'd
But on he went; and when the flaming sun
Attain'd its highest station, down he flung
His tired limbs, while Prokris wearily
Fell to the earth and rested. Very soon,
The while she listen'd for his ev'ry word,
He sigh'd and call'd on Aura, for he was

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Most faint and hot by reason of the chase,
And long'd by her cool breath to be revived.
But, as he spoke that much detested name,
The jealous wife incautiously did move
Within the myrtle thicket where she hid;
For she would see this rival, whom the nymph
Had call'd most fair of all the goddesses.
And while the bushes trembled, Kephalos,
(Who thought, alas, a doe was lurking there)
Let fly his dart — the swift and death-enleagu'd,
The dart Diana hurl'd against her foes.
And then he rose, and follow'd it, and found
No doe nor boar, nor aught that man may kill
And face the gods unflinching, but the thing
He loved the most, his Prokris, deathly pale.

THEN knelt he down and kiss'd the dear,
 white face
Of her who was so lilylike and pure;
And as he press'd that loveliest of heads
Upon his breast, his sad heart's fluttering
Recall'd her spirit, and she smiled at him.
And soon she spoke, but softly, as one speaks
Who stands before the portals of the dead
And fears to wake them. "Love, dear love,"
 she said,
"And lord whom I have honor'd faithfully;
I loved thee so that I did follow thee

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

To see the rival I had learn'd to fear,
Whose name I heard thee murmur in thy sleep
And whom thou didst evoke while lying there.
Forgive me, lord, O lordly love of mine,
If I have err'd through my great love of thee,
And brought fresh sorrow to thy kingly heart,
And to thine eyes their heritage of tears.
For I am passing, cull'd against my will,
And oh, I fain would stay with thee and be
A part of daytime's glory, and a part
Of all the things we loved so long, so well.
I fain would hear thy voice; and I would feel
Thy dear lips' pressure ere mine own grow chill,
And I must pass forever from thy sight —
Although so young, although still loving thee!"
But Kephalos was weeping, and his tears
Upon her upturn'd face now fell like rain
Upon a broken flower. "Love," he said,
"I have no love in all our Greece but thee;
And though I live until my hair shall be
As white as thy dear face, which thus I kiss,
Thou shalt abide within my shadow'd heart
And I will be most faithful unto thee.
And Love and Memory shall fan the flame
Of my true passion, of my love for thee,
Until our Vesta's lamps no more shall burn,
Until the sun is quenched in yonder sky.
And as thou wert mine only, deeming me

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Thy spirit's king, so I, since first I felt
Thy dear lips' pressure have essay'd to win
No woman's love but thine, O white my love!
For she on whom I call'd was but a Wind,
The soothing wind, kind Aura, who would come
When I was weary in the noon-day's heat
And give me strength to wend my way to thee.
Thou art my love, thou only; and although
Thou goest now before me through the mist,
When I shall follow I will trace thee out
By thy dear face's glory, and will stay
With thee, Belovèd, Prokris, thou my love!"

THE while he spoke the glory seem'd to fade,
And o'er the woods a restfulness descend
That told of day's departure. One by one
The shadows of the solemn-thoughted hills
Merged in the dusk, and soon amid the trees
Profoundest quiet held unbroken sway.
Like incense to the unappeasèd gods
From out the soil sweet fragrances arose —
The smell of earth wherein the sun has touch'd
The hidden roots, and quicken'd into life
Things that the dawn shall see made fair with
wings;
Breath of the pine, and fragrance of the fir,
And all the varied odors that arise
When forests slumber; all the scents that prove

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

Corruption changing to the beautiful.
And when the silence seemed the heaviest,
And Kephalos was fearful of the end,
A little bird beheld bright Hesperus,
The even star, and straightway welcomed it
With such a song of wonder and delight
That Prokris heard, and hearing, seem'd to
smile.

And while the song still trembled in the dusk
She drew his warm face nearer to her own
And kiss'd him once, then never kiss'd again;
But still held fast his hand. "Oh, press me
close,"

She whisper'd faintly; "for I seem to be
As far from thee as is the utmost star
From all the passing beauty of the world.
I loved thee ever, Kephalos, mine own!
I loved thee well; and now I go from thee
I know not where, except the ghosts abide
Where I shall be ere sunrise. Press me close!
I see thy face no longer; thou art like
The fleeting radiance of the misty moon
Upon illusive waters. I can hear
Thy distant voice, but thee I cannot see,
Mine own, my love, my darling Kephalos!"

IDYLLS OF GREECE

AND all that eve he held her trembling form
Within his arms, and press'd upon her mouth
His burning lips to give new life to her.
But naught avail'd his sorrow, naught his love.
Paler she grew and paler, and no more
He felt her faint breath warm upon his lips —
The gods had will'd that she should go from
him;

But once her spirit flicker'd like a flame
The while the winds torment it; once she sighed,
And once she whisper'd faintly: "Kephalos!"
Then smiled she constancy; and while he gazed
Upon her lovely features, lo! there pass'd
A shadow over them, and she was gone
Beyond the silent pleading of his lips,
Beyond the awful yearning of his gaze.
And then the forest's silence seem'd a pall
Upon his spirit; and the weight of worlds
Press'd heavily upon him. But he loved
The thing the gods had gather'd to themselves;
And though her lips were still, and though her
eyes

No more were tender, yet he gazed on them
As though in search of her retreating soul.
And still he knelt and waited, lest, perchance,
She wander'd back from where the silent flood
Bears hopeless spirits outward. But, alas,
She was not his, but Death's, who culls at last

PROKRIS AND KEPHALOS

Earth's flowers and the fair ; and when the moon
And all the gentle sisterhood of stars
Appear'd in heaven, and the night forbade
Perusal of her features, then he gave
One bitter cry and, weeping, bore her home.

MELAS AND ANAXE



MELAS AND ANAXE

IMMORTAL he who faithful is in love.
Immortal he who, while new beauties
wait

A lover's ardent wooing, in his heart
Holds one ideal, and dies in constancy.

IN years now long forgotten, ere the Greeks
Went singing to the slaughter of their foe,
The Persian, on the bay of Salamis,
Whose sapphire waves turn'd crimson with the
blood
That pour'd from high-beak'd trireme, there
abode
Within the town a youth who herded sheep,
A comely lad named Melas, born a slave.
Ere yet the sun had splash'd with faintest gold
The valley's dew-pearl'd velvet, he was seen

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Climbing the hills behind his silly flock,
Whose whiteness made men wonder — if they
gazed
From lowly vale upon the sloping heights —
What cloud allured their shepherd, and with
whom
He linger'd thus in speech. The custom then,
In those dead days whose memories we sing
As sings the lark remember'd songs of heav'n,
For gods to mate with mortals. Hoary trees
Have witness'd lovers' meetings, heard the speech
That ends in sweeter silence and is one
With holy music's spirit. Dark and dawn,
And languid day's gold interlude, have seen
White splendors from Olympus at the feet
Of Greece's ivory girlhood; and have heard
Her shepherds and her fishers woo with song
Dryad and nymph and starry goddesses.
For men were then still simple, and the gods
Were fond of them as we to-day are fond
Of little children, in whose eyes abide
Faint hints of things we long ago forgot.
But now the woods are sadder. Long ago
Diana left the forests. Merry Pan
No longer haunts the valleys; on the hills
No oreads trace the footprints of the wind;
And though the foam'd seas thunder as of
yore

MELAS AND ANAXE

The Tritons sleep, unheeding, in their deeps.
All now is changed; and though we sing thereof,
In song whose flight is burden'd with regret,
Nor gods nor men will listen. We are ghosts;
The dead it is that live — the dead that loved
In days when dreams were life in golden Greece.

BUT Melas turn'd unheeding from the gaze
Of those who would have question'd, being
muted

As hills are mute, that all things see, but tell
No man the awful import of their thoughts;
Unconscious of his beauty, like a god
He met the golden morning, clad in skins
Of bears that faced his prowess and succumb'd.
And those whose backs were bow'd above the
soil,

Who till'd the fields while singing, garner'd
grain

Or bore to press the grapes whose purple was
The Grecian dyers' envy, shook their heads
But heeded him no more. Among themselves
They spoke of him as dreamer, and, at last,
After the manner of their kind to-day,
Spoke not at all, but left him isolate.

All save one maid, Dodone, who from where
Her father's hut was perch'd above the sea

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Would gaze each minute at the white-wool'd
sheep

And him who piped behind them. She was one
Who loved in utter silence. Love to her
Was whiter than the foam-white doves that
warm'd

The rosy feet of Venus, whitest thing
In golden glades Olympian. She had seen
But sixteen gentle summers, yet her heart
Was now so full of love's first wonderment
It needed but one fond, responsive glance
To burst in perfect blossom. But as yet
None deem'd her so much woman, least of all
The cause of all her maiden misery —
The brown-limb'd shepherd, dreamer of vain
dreams.

AND ye who in Love's golden lists have
stood,

And unrewarded, wan and weary-eyed,
Have wander'd sighing to the pitying woods
Or in grey towns have steel'd your trembling
lips,

Will know Dodone's sorrow. No new thing
This malady of love unsatisfied,
Nor in all time shall cure for it be found.
Æons before men flared in fated Troy,

MELAS AND ANAXE

Waked from their dreams by Helen's treach'rous
eyes,
Men loved, and lost, and suffer'd. Weary Nile,
Oldest of all earth's waters, and most sad,
Heard love's lament before the awful Sphinx
Crouch'd in the sands to bide the common doom.
And while the soil still brooded over seeds
Now grown to forest Titans, even then
Across man's path stalk'd hoary suffering.
The tale is old that tells of lover's woes,
And old the story of inconstancy.

O DAYS of youth, of dream and wonder-
ment,
That haunt with sweet insistence! When we
stand,
Alone amid the silence, and the stars
That heard our boastful chanting, hear our
sighs,
'Tis then we know how sweet it was — the pain
That was akin to pleasure. Then we know
There are no dreams like those all men may
dream
While yet the morning calls us; while the charms
Of beckoning illusions, rosy hopes
And wingèd thoughts bewitch us. Then we
know
That love was best which vanish'd like the mist;

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The love that's unforgotten — like the red
Of holy, happy sunsets, and the spell
Of wind-awaken'd music. This alone
Was all, is all, when age has sober'd us
And all the past is as a finish'd song.

UNKNOWN to him, the while he told her
At even-tide beneath the drying nets, [tales
Dodone drank the music of his speech
Which fired more her love than solaced it;
Or when they wander'd by the singing sea
That even then re-echoed to the stars
The endless tale of man's unhappiness,
She lean'd to him unconsciously; while he
Spoke on and on, but, in youth's heedlessness,
Of her beside him had no single thought.
Thus pass'd two Springs, and Melas still piped on
Behind new flocks amid the swathing blue
That press'd upon the uplands with a care
Solicitous, maternal. But there came,
Ere yet the summer heats had well begun,
To Salamis a maid, whose fate it was
To end his idle piping. Daughter she
To one of Greece's nobles, and as fair
As forest-fond Diana, and as cold.
Her wont it was each morning to repair,
Ere yet the dew had dried upon the grass,
To a secluded temple, where she pray'd

MELAS AND ANAXE

In maidenwise to Venus for the thing
A maiden most desires. It was on
A golden morning that she dawn'd upon
The startled gaze of Melas. Flute in hand
Behind his sheep he wander'd where the road
Led past the shaded temple. Only once
She look'd at him with unimpassion'd eyes,
As coldly blue as ice-encircled seas,
Then look'd no more, although he gazed at her
As looks the charmèd bird upon the snake.
But when at last her beauty was eclipsed
Behind the temple's portal, and the slaves
Made merry at his gaping, then he fled
To his belovèd pastures, and with Grief
Sat down to brood and wish himself a king.

FOR two long days he suffer'd, days that
seem'd

Like never-ending æons. At his feet
The patient sheep browsed ever, recking not
The troubles of their shepherd. In the hut
Dodone sat and waited; but no more
Came he whom she desired. He was one
With forests and with mountains, lonely things
That brood and mourn in silent solitude
And ask not for compassion. And at last
When sick he was with longing, and the world
Seem'd tinged with his distemper, at his heart

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Grief knock'd and was admitted; and no more
Might Peace and Joy, sweet sisters, dwell there-
in.

AND when the third day dawn'd, he drove
his sheep

To where he first had seen her; and she came
All clad in white, and golden. At her feet
The jewell'd webs were glinting, and the air
Enswath'd her in an aura as of flame
And made her passing splendid. Like a star,
That knows its poised perfection, on she swept,
Her satellites around her, till she came
To where the shepherd linger'd. Once again
She look'd at him with all-unseeing gaze
And pass'd within the temple. And, again,
The slaves, the while they waited, mouth'd at
him

Until he wander'd hillward with his sheep,
But dream'd the more, and only dream'd of her.
For lo! it is for things beyond our reach
We yearn the most. The pearl lies to our hand,
The while the soul grows sick for yonder star;
And though love's rose lies red beneath our
feet

Yet long we still for flowers of Paradise.
And Melas was but human, and a youth,
Who loved and knew desire; and the while

MELAS AND ANAXE

He lay and watch'd the slowly moving clouds
Or marr'd the constant efforts of the ants,
He schemed how best to win this wonder one —
The slim Anaxe, cold and noble born.

TRUE love breeds discontent. Ere many
days
The white sheep browsed and wander'd where
they would,
But Melas piped unheeding. Then he went
And kiss'd the ground where she, the maid, had
knelt
And sacrificed to Venus. In the calm
Of the deserted temple he, too, knelt
And unto her who rules all hearts outpour'd
The hapless tale of his all-hopeless love:
“ O Venus, Queen of lovers, fairest thing
Between the dancing splendor of the sea
And over-arching heaven! Thou more white
Than whitest foam-flowers blown upon the
shore,
More gentle than the zephyr, hear, O hear!
Since first this maiden pass'd before my gaze
With all the stately motion of a cloud,
My heart and peace are strangers. I, a slave,
Am less to her than is the soil beneath
Her arching feet, and lo! I worship her.
O Venus, Cytheræan, by thy loves

IDYLLS OF GREECE

On forest-shaded Ida; by thy joys
On splendor-crown'd Olympus; by all nights
Of bliss divine, celestial happiness,
I plead with thee to aid me. Thou dost hear
The prayers of love-lorn shepherds, of the men
That lure the swift-finn'd fishes from the deep,
Of toilers in the city; hear thou me,
A slave whom Love hath fetter'd now the more.
The stars that light the gods' vast thorough-
fares,
The winds that are their heralds, and the trees
Whose soft compassion is the mountains' balm,
Are witness to my sorrow. Bird and bee
Have listen'd to my sighing; plaintive sea
Has told my story to the farthest shore,
And from her purple throne the lonely moon
Has gazed on me in pity. Pity thou,
And I will offer thee white doves, whose note
Sounds softer in the woods than hymning lutes;
And I will bring red roses unto thee
Still moist and cool and subtly odorous,
Whose tell-tale cheeks remind thee of the love
By thee inspired in all gods and men."

MELAS AND ANAXE

FUSH'D was the cave-cool temple. At
one end
A fountain splash'd in liquid melody
And pearl'd the wide-leaf'd lilies at its base.
Beneath its mist a radiant butterfly,
Whom chance had lured there from the outer
woods,
Pass'd to and fro, or, perch'd upon a leaf,
Clapp'd its soft wings in ecstasy of joy.
The light was growing stronger, for the sun
Had topp'd the highest mountains, and its gold
Pour'd softly down the hillsides till it bathed
The temple's chisell'd whiteness. Then the birds,
First singers of the song Republican,
Shatter'd the heavy silence of the woods
And told in trillings, silvery and sweet,
Of feather'd mates and future nesting times.
And very soon, as one strong sunbeam pierced
The temple's very center, making all
The place aglow with radiance, there was heard
A wondrous voice within it, such a voice
As list'ning fauns may hear when calls a nymph
To laughing Pan at even; such a voice
As lovers oft remember when the lips
That smiled above its utterance'are dust.
"O gentle shepherd, who hast call'd on me
Who sit beside the father of the gods;

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Thy voice is as the wind's voice when it sighs
Among the brooding pines of Thessaly.
I hear thee, and will help thee, for the sake
Of one who fluted on the hills near Troy
While men noised forth to battle, and forgot
All loves and love for Glory's vain reward.
For love of him, and for thy fragrant youth,
More sweet to me than flow'rs of Proserpine,
I hear thy plaint. And though thou lovest her
Whose pride makes wise men shun her, thou
shalt win

Thy wonder-one; and she perchance shall be
Made happy by the greatness of thy love.
But blame not me if thou unhappy art,
And find'st her empty of the wifely charms
Possess'd by others. I can grant thy wish,
But change thy maid I cannot. Heed my
words,

Forgetting naught I tell thee; then, perchance,
When thou and she grow still at even-tide
And cling to one another, thou and she
Shall bless the one thou callest Cytheræan."

All golden now the temple, save where dream'd
The idle, green-leaf'd lilies. In the glow
The jewell'd spray arch'd softly over them
With cool, caressive kisses, and a noise
Of musical contentment, like the hum
Of sated bees above their flower loves.

MELAS AND ANAXE

But Melas was unconscious of the charm
Of idle lilies and the arching mist
That told its own undoing. Prone he lay
Before the shrine and waited, in his ears
The voice still ringing as the sea may sound
In list'ning caves that wait the tide's return.
And soon it broke the silence, as the calm
Of scented night is broken by the bird
That lifts its song against the starry dark
Where only dreams may listen. Then it spoke:
"Go thou this eve along the crumbling shore
That curbs the fretting ocean to the north,
And thou shalt see three cypress, hoary trees
More dread than aught that glooms o'er Acheron.
No footfall breaks their dreamings. Once they

saw

Such things as none should witness; monstrous

joys

Of god and god; strange wooings; huge de-
lights

Beyond man's comprehension. They have seen
The birth of clouds, the slaying of the Day
Upon the crimson altars of the West.

And they have heard the awful requiems
Intoned by winds that whirl among the stars
While night creeps by in mourning. Love and

Death

Have whisper'd them their secrets, and Desire

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Has warm'd their sap and made their boughs
rejoice

In mist and rain and sunshine. Now they sleep,
And sleeping are contented; knowing not
The kisses of warm zephyrs, or the cry
Of am'rous waves that break beneath their feet.
And now they hide, for no man ventures there,
Afraid to brave the menace of their arms,
A horrid hole that leads to fearful depths
Where Horrors guard my girdle. Seek thou
there;

And thou shalt find this wondrous ornament,
Which I for once will lend thee. It will draw
All loves to thee, as it has drawn to me
The loves of the immortals. But beware
That no one sees thee wear this magic thing
Save she whom thou desirest. When her eyes
Shall light upon its glory, she will deem
Thee perfect man, as perfect as a god;
And she will woo thee as Diana woo'd
Endymion on Latmos. Act thy part
In coolness and in patience; thou shalt press
The lips that softer grow beneath thine own;
And though thou art a bondsman, thou shalt be
Brother to Greece's greatest. This I do
For love of one who woo'd me when the clang
Of brass drew men to battle, and because
I love thy shepherd's beauty. Fare thee well!"

MELAS AND ANAXE

A WHILE there linger'd in the restful place
The music of her accents, as the heart
Will hold till death a loved one's memory
Though all the earth lies prone above her clay
And all her spirit's beauty is a dream.
Without, the bright air quiver'd, and the birds
Beheld her radiant presence, white as milk
And guarded by her fond, attendant doves,
Pass silently beyond them. Then they sang
The splendors of the goddess, and their praise
Arose to high Olympus, and was sweet
To those that watch'd her coming, and to her.
But one by one the lovely echoes died
Within the outer glory, and at last
All silent was the temple. In the pool —
Beside whose rim the wond'ring shepherd
knelt —

The wide-leaf'd lilies idled, while the spray
Still pearl'd their snowy petals, over which
The butterfly still dallied. For a while
The silence press'd him downward; but at last,
When very sure the voice would speak no more
To soothe his troubled spirit, he arose
And stretch'd his arms to heaven with a sigh,
Then bath'd his brows with water. Then he
turn'd

And faced the outer sunshine, and was soon
Once more amid the solace of his hills,
No more a slave in spirit, but a king.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

AND while he waited the approach of
night

And even's silver'd sentries, clad in silk
And watch'd by slender women from the Nile
With half-closed lids Anaxe lay and dream'd.
Within her hand a crystal globe she clasp'd —
A thing of limpid wonder, such as held
The dark Pompeïian beauties when the sun
Hung midway in the heavens. Now and then
She gazed at it, and murmur'd, frown'd, then
sigh'd;

Then frown'd again, then closer press'd against
The yielding skins of leopards. At her side
The women stood and fann'd her, with their fans
Of scented peacock feathers, bound with gold
Where come the plumes together, set in rods
Of ebony and silver, bright with gems.
But naught Anaxe saw except the globe.
“ A tale it was,” she mutter'd to herself,
Afraid the slaves might hear. “ A tale it was
The brown witch told me when she gave me this
For my impassion'd rubies. In its heart
All things to come, all things affecting me
Were once to be reflected. Even he
Who is our Greece's idol, demi-god,
Whose fate it is, so said the witch, to woo
And win my body's beauty, was to show

MELAS AND ANAXE

Herein his flaming face. A tale it was
To tell a credulous and gaping maid
Enamor'd of a shepherd. Lies! All lies!"
But as she gazed upon the crystal sphere,
Pure as a tear and colder than the dew,
A mist appear'd within it; and the while
She look'd at it, astonish'd, there evolved
As though within the limpid heart of it
A clear and perfect picture. On a hill
With all his sheep around him, more a king
Than he who struts amid a fawning court,
A shepherd sat disconsolate. His head
Was turn'd to watch the sunset; parting rays
Made visible its beauty and as flared
The orb in parting splendor, she who stared
Upon the fading picture in a trance
Saw who it was, and straightway hated him.
Then from her couch she started, white as flame,
And hurl'd the crystal from her; and it broke
And starr'd the floor of onyx. Naught she
said,

But storm reign'd in her bosom; and her eyes,
Wherein no mercy trembled, and no love,
Were like the hooded snake's eyes when it
strikes.

With one imperious gesture she arose
And frown'd upon the cringing Nubians,
And one by one they kiss'd her tiny feet

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And pass'd behind the curtains ; then she fell
Upon her couch, and hate possess'd her heart.

BUT Melas went, as thus Anaxe lay
And smoulder'd in the silence and the
gloom,

Upon his quest. Along the harried shore
Where roar'd the anger'd ocean, darker now
Than Acheron's ungovernable flood,
He strode and look'd not backward. At his
feet

The snarling waves curl'd fiercely ; and a wind,
That seem'd to know his purpose, smote his
cheeks

And bellow'd hollow threat'nings. But to all
He paid no heed, but forced his breathless bulk
Across the dark and ever-treach'rous sands —
His mind upon the maiden of his dreams.

He came at last where lean'd above the sands
Three hoary, cypress, grey and desolate ;
Such trees as grow in utter solitudes

Where lifts a bird occasional lament,
Where lions, empty-bellied, sniff the air
And roar across unbroken distances.

They, too, had once been beautiful ; had felt
The sea's moist kisses and the warm caress
Of golden sunbeams ; in their foliage

The birds had woo'd and mated, built their
nests,

MELAS AND ANAXE

And grieved when flew the feather'd babes away.
But now their dreams were over; grey and drear
They stood like hopeless sybils, knowing well
The sea was creeping closer, and the sky
Might hurl its bolts against their nakedness;
And soon nor sun nor gentle stars would know
The spot whereon they braved the wind's rebuff.
To them now drew the shepherd, fearful lest
From out the dark a harpy fly at him
Or other peril keep him from his quest.

But Venus guards her lovers, and he reach'd,
Despite each hidden menace of the gloom,
The batter'd trunks in safety; then he search'd,
And found in one a hideous cavity
Where bats and owls and night's fell birds might
lie

And shun the sun's bright fingers. From its
mouth

A subtle radiance issued, which to eyes
Of others might have seem'd but phosphorous,
But told him of his fortune — of the belt
That waken'd fond desire. Then he drew,
With eager fingers and his heart a-throb,
The flaming thing from out its hiding place,
And turn'd the while his eager eyes away.

For never yet has mortal artizan
Made such a thing of wonder, since in hell
Red Vulcan forged this splendor-studded band,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And gave it unto Venus Side by side
The polish'd marvels glister'd — emeralds
Livid with hate and envy; amethysts,
Aglow with sunset softness; topazes,
Yellow and cold and jealous; hopeless jades
And sapphires bluer than the Grecian skies
Were mix'd with moonstones and crocidolite
And fickle, flame-fed opals — rarest gems
By Vulcan torn from out the sullen rocks
And mated in this girdle's fashioning.
To Melas it was sacred. It had clasp'd
The waist of her who was most beautiful
Of mortals and immortals; on its gems
The fingers had lain idle of a hand
Both gods and men had kiss'd, as waves may lip
The pallid cheeks of moon-enamor'd pearls.
Loves holy and unholy it had roused
And seen return to slumber, loves of gods
And melancholy shepherds; all made mad
Desiring her whose cradle was the foam,
Venus, the Cytheræan, Queen of Love.

THEN, with closed eyes, the while the wet
wind whipp'd
The moaning sea behind him, unto her —
The first, white wonder of the gleaming world —
He knelt, and sang his gratitude to her.
“ Had I the skill and lute of Orpheus

MELAS AND ANAXE

Whose tutors were the zephyrs and the birds,
Now would I seek to thank thee, and to praise,
Mistress of star-fleck'd heaven and the sea!
Sweet unto thee the soil-scent; sweet the smell
Of budding trees and blossoms; sweet the call
Of deer to deer and kine to patient kine.
Sweet unto thee the cooing of the doves,
The sighs of maidens and the shepherd's song,
And sweet the silv'ry music of the flute
When mated to the laughter of the brook.
The hills and woods adore thee; and the sea,
Aglow with bright caresses, claps its hands
And sings its happy memories of thee.
Thou, only, art immortal. At thy feet
The dew-drench'd roses languish; but thine eyes
Are clearer than the silence-circled stars
That wait upon the ever-mourning moon.
Softer thy breath than incense, soft as winds
That woo the hills at spring-time, when from out
The primal mother bosom step the flow'rs
And cast fond, timid glances at the sky.
Splendid art thou, O Goddess; and I fall
Before thy beauty prostrate, I thy slave."
Then was the tempest silenced. From the sky
The ragged clouds departed, and the moon
Shone full, shone soft upon the tossing flood
Whose waves soon croon'd in wond'rous harmony
The after-song of wild and anger'd seas.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Thus answer'd him the Goddess ; thus she speaks
To those who call upon her, when the voice
Most loved is still ; thus speaks she and gives
 sign

To all who walk in loneliness, yet keep
Within their hearts Love's hallow'd memories.

THEN rising up, he placed the blazing thing
Beneath his sheepskin mantle ; then he strode
Along the sands, which now the eddying wind
Had clear'd of wither'd seaweed, ghostly foam
And all the hopeless wrack of storm and tide.
But nothing now he heeded. In a dream,
As mad and fond men dream who yet have hope,
He saw Anaxe, his desired love,
Descend from off her throne of ivory
And come to him, as mated bird to bird,
And lean her weight upon him. Then he took
Her hand in his — the hand no king had
 kiss'd —

And thus they walk'd where paths led ever on,
And no man heard them whisper. In his dream
He saw the wond'rous soft'ning of her eyes
That told the love within her ; on his cheeks
Her fragrant breath fann'd softly, and anon,
The while he told his spirit's wonderment
In speech that was all broken, to his mouth
She raised her red and ever-thirsty lips,

MELAS AND ANAXE

And, in his dream, he touch'd them with his
own.

And painting thus his hoped-for happiness
The shepherd stumbled onward; in his heart
The craving that is never satisfied
Until at last by true love medicined.

THE night was now advancing. One pale star
Gleam'd forth from out the heaven's violet
And saw the sun forsake one-half its charge;
Then, beckoning its sisters, from the dark
They, one by one, stepp'd forth most modestly
And smiled their still contentment o'er the
world.

Such nights were Greece's only; gentle nights
That meekly follow'd in the steps of day
As silence follows song-burst, when the woods
Are all a-quiver from a wild-bird's hymn,
And Echo listens, breathless. In the shade
Of mighty trees the wearied fauns lay hid
From shaggy satyr lovers; and anon
Diana and her fleeing sisterhood
Would pass their couches, as the shadows pass
And leave no sign to show where they have
been.

All silent now the wide, unruffled sea;
And still'd the cry of sea bird, and the sigh
Of wave to lonely sedges. But of this

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The shepherd heeded nothing; he was still
A captive in a far and phantom land
Forgot when once we leave it; but more sweet
To those who tread its winding, flower'd ways
Than all the scented gardens of the world.
But nearing now the humble fishers' huts
A girlish form approach'd him; on she came
And call'd his name because he look'd not up,
Her hands outstretch'd in welcome. Pausing not
He hasten'd, half-expectant; then he saw,
The maid Dodone, and he dream'd no more.
"O Melas, fickle shepherd," she began,
And lean'd her head upon his shaggy arm,
"For two long nights thou hast been wanderer
In other haunts than ours. In the town
Some say the wolves have frighten'd thee away,
And all thy flock has scatter'd. Others hold
A dryad woos thee, and thou followest
The wind's faint footsteps in thy search of her.
And yestereve, the while our pale lamp burn'd,
The fishermen sat silent at their nets
And plied their mending needles; but their eyes
Were sad as with the sorrow of the sea
Because they miss'd thy presence, as did I."
But Melas only mock'd her. "Go thy way,
And bid the men folk fret not," he replied.
"Am I a boy that I to them must tell
My comings and my goings? Bid them toil

MELAS AND ANAXE

To pay the hard lord's tribute, and beware
They bend on me their surly looks no more.
For Destiny to me holds out her hand,
And I may be their master, even I."

She gazed upon his features, and anon
She bade him stop, and faced him. Then she saw
The flaming belt, half-hid beneath his cloak,
And e'er he might forbid her, open'd it
And stared amazed upon the magic thing.
Then hinted she no longer, but forthwith
Proclaim'd her love; but in a way so sweet,
So subtly sad, so very maidenly,
That Melas frown'd no longer. And, at last,
When all her plaint was utter'd, and she saw
No love, but only pity in his eyes,
The gods were very gracious, and she swoon'd;
And it was dawn before she grieved again.

AND long before the star-eclipsing Day,
With amber hair, forth strode to wake
the world,

The shepherd stood before the palace gates
Wherein his love lay sleeping. It was rear'd
Upon a grassy hillock, ring'd with trees
As ancient as the mountains, and as still;
The sea was not far distant, and the birds

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Oft mingled softer music with its roar.
And ye, who ever dream'd, will know full well
The thoughts of him who watch'd there, while
the light

Triumphant now, and golden like a god
Grew stronger, ever stronger. Sweet, yet sad,
The dreams of youthful lover. Honey sweet,
Yet bitter in fulfilment, when love's won;
But doubly sweet, alas! and doubly sad
When love's impassion'd song must plead in
vain.

And while he mused, the Hours, on their way
To Death, the purple-lidded, sang the song
Of morn's enthronement; and the air grew bright
With wings that flash'd and trembled. More
and more

The light became a glory, and the song
From forest and from meadow made the world
A vast, harmonious temple. And anon
When light and song were blended in one glow
Of marvelous perfection, and it seem'd
All earth was in its flower, there appear'd
Upon the marble stairway's topmost step
The maid Anaxe, and the Day was crown'd!

ARRAY'D in white, she stood there like a
dream

Escaped from Night's embraces; golden all

MELAS AND ANAXE

Her wealth of hair, coil'd firmly to her brows
And fasten'd with a band of emerald.
A while she faced the sunburst, then she turn'd,
And seeing him who waited, would have gone
Had he not then address'd her. For his voice
Was sweet and sad, as sounds the summer rain
When all the night is silent; and his eyes
Were other eyes than those that follow'd her
Within her father's palace. "Stay, ah, stay,
O thou who art most perfect! Melas, I;
Thy father's faithful shepherd. Fear me not!
The hills are my companions, and the stars;
And not a lamb in all thy father's flock
But comes if once I call it. Lo! I stand
Since break of dawn to feast mine eyes on thee,
Than Sirius more splendid; yea, more fair
Than pale narcissi in the pools of peace."
Thus pleading he came nearer; and although
The while he spoke she eyed him with disdain,
Yet listen'd she, and waited. Never yet
Has maid refused the wooing; never yet
Have woman's ears, when woman's heart was
 cold,
To him who wooed and lost been merciful.
Then knelt he down before her, with the stairs'
White distance stretch'd between them; and
 again
With troubled and tempestuous utterance

IDYLLS OF GREECE

He told the maid the story of his love.
“Stay, stay, ah! stay, and be as merciful
As thou art fair and royal! Hear the plaint
Of one who, born beneath thee, is above
All other men in that he worships thee.
There was no glory in the vaulted world
Until thy blue eyes charm'd the paler skies,
Nor was there music till thy sweeter voice
Made heaven's zephyrs envious. What to me
Is ivory Diana? What the grace
Of Venus Aphrodite? In thy steps.
The youthful Joys tread lightly, and Delight
Watches thy very shadow. Peace thou art,
And all things pure and sacred; there is not
In all our land one maiden like to thee.”

THE while he spoke, her eyes were fix'd on him
As stares the Sphinx upon the burning sands
In stony speculation. Who can say
What woman thinks when man lays bare his
soul
And braves worse fate than ever gods bestow?
Who knows her thoughts when he who pleads
becomes
Infatuation's puppet, passion's slave?
And seeing she was silent, he took heart
And climb'd the stairs, and knelt in front of her
With hands outstretch'd. Upon his curly hair

MELAS AND ANAXE

The golden beams descended, and again
He spoke to her, with speech that was a cry:
“Thou sayest naught, and yet my words should
force

Some sign from thee of anger or delight.
I worship thee, Anaxe! Yea, I love
The milk-white form of thee; thy golden hair,
That shrouds thy grace as this same sunshine
shrouds

The hidden wonder of the pulsing earth.
Thy mouth I love, where Sorrow's sisterhood
May lean to hear thy spirit's confidence;
And oh! I love the wonder of thine eyes
Whose deeps no man has fathom'd, nor the
gods!

And I have dream'd, the while I trod thy hills,
Of thee, and only thee. The hills could tell
How I have loved thee since I saw thee first,
And how the very birds have silent been
When charm'd at sound of thy melodious name.
Dawn-burst and eve, and afternoon and night,
Have seen me most disconsolate. The stars
Bear witness to my sorrow, and the winds
Have heard me mingle my lament with theirs
And wonder'd at my hopeless constancy.
I love, Anaxe! Thee alone I love,
Who art more fair than Venus unto me;
And though the gods in utter jealousy

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Heap'd all the stars upon me, I would cry
Thy name aloud, and whisper it in death!"
Then turn'd the maiden on him, and her eyes,
Till then all unresponsive and most cold,
Flash'd hatred's lightnings at him. For a while
She answer'd not, but tower'd over him,
An anger'd splendor, with her arms upraised,
And froze him into silence. Then she spöke:
"Thou utter slave; less valued than the sheep
That fatten on my hillsides! Who art thou
To speak to me of worship — I, whose feet
Would spurn to touch thy body? By the gods,
Thy hound to me is wiser; and a maid
I fain would die before, to be a wife,
I went with thee to kennel. Thou art mad,
Or I would chain thee naked to the trees
And let the wild bear rend thee. Go! make
haste!

For if but once I clap these hands of mine —
These tiny hands, of incense redolent,
These tiny hands that would not touch thy
hair —
Thou shalt not see the sundown. Fierce the
bear,
And tender is thy body; even now
The steps grow red beneath me. Seek thy mate
Among thy kind. And when thou cowerest
Within thy hut at twilight, and thy babes

MELAS AND ANAXE

Are fill'd with milk, and sleeping, thank the gods
Anaxe pitied. Go! My hands are raised!"

BUT suddenly he straighten'd, and the calm
Of mountains enter'd in him. "Nay," he
said,

"I will not go. Nor do I fear the bear,
Nor all thy maiden anger. Fain had I
Won love by lover's pleading; by the love
That surges in me as the strong tides surge
And move the bosom of the mighty sea.
Now help me, Aphrodite! Queen of Love,
Be faithful to thy shepherd, lest the night
Crash in upon my spirit, and I go
Before my time to that unhappy place
Where Love is not, and no man dreams thereof."

Addressing thus the Goddess, he withdrew
Her girdle from his mantle, and it took
The heaven's golden glory to itself
And made the morn less splendid. Then he
stood

And held the bright thing crown-wise; and the
while

Anaxe wonder'd, watching it amazed,
As women ever eye the thing that shines,
She heard his voice behind the radiance:
"Behold the belt of Venus! Lent to me
By her whom gods deem fairest, at whose shrine

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Thou, too, hast knelt and worship'd. She
has heard

My sighs for thee; and, most compassionate,
Would aid me in my wooing. She whose eyes
First gaze upon this girdle shall be charm'd
And made Love's slave; and she shall ever deem
Its holder ever perfect. Look, then, thou;
Whom I would win unaided; look and see
The shepherd who adores thee, as the star
Grows fonder of the heaven's hopeless moon;
And though I am unworthy, love thou me!"

But she was mute no longer. From her eyes
The wonder had departed; as of old
They gazed in steely insolence at him,
And when she spoke he knew the charm had
fail'd,

And wish'd the maid Dodone had not lived.
"Go tend thy sheep," the level voice exclaim'd,
"And when the heavy bear uprears itself
Remember me and tremble. Get thee gone!
For if but once I see thee in my path,
Or once again am memoried of thee,
Nor man, nor maid, nor all the gods that be
Shall save thee from my vengeance." Then she
turn'd,

And struck apart the curtains, and was gone.

MELAS AND ANAXE

THEN seem'd it that the radiance of the
morn

Was darken'd by eclipse, and all the air
Was questioningly silent. In her wrath
The maid had seem'd most splendid, as the orb
That flares through heaven's purple may out-
shine

The placid star of even. Now, alone,
She smoulder'd on her couch skins, lips apart,
Her bosom heaving with the waken'd storm
That made her pulses quiver; but her eyes
Were closed to all the hatefulness of life,
And thus she strove the shepherd to forget.
And one by one her women came to her
And waved their fans above her; then they
play'd

Such music as the list'ning pools might hear
When Daphne woo'd Narcissus in the woods,
Or Pan made love to Pitys, and was loved.
And soon she bade them stroke her fever'd
brows

With crimson poppies and the scented leaves
Of bay and eucalyptus; then she sign'd
All slaves save one to leave her. And at last,
When from her feet the scented Nubian
Had loos'd her jewell'd sandals, she arose
And stretch'd herself, and cool'd her crimson lips

IDYLLS OF GREECE

With icy sherbet from a golden cup,
And laugh'd like one untroubled. Then she
slept.

BUT Melas pray'd and waited, loth to leave
The place that shrined his lost divinity.
For now, at last, he reason'd; and he knew
That she was for another. Never now
His eyes might see her beauty, never now
Her accents thrill his being like a flute
That sobs o'er moon-lit waters. Now he knew
His dream was rudely shatter'd, as all dreams
Must end at last, and all things sweet and
rare —

Fragrance and sounds melodious, golden youth.
Thus pass'd the morn's last hour, and the sun
Was high in middle heaven ere he sought
The gentle woods, and piped his grief to them,
And found such peace as never lovers know
Whose hope is their undoing. For at last,
When finish'd was his piping, and the trees
Sway'd to the youth in pity, lo! his heart
Throbb'd once and broke; and it was well with
him

As it is well with all whose dreams are done,
Whose anxious ears no more are strain'd to hear
Love's airy wing in Life's lone corridors.

MELAS AND ANAXE

O WEARY feet, whose hopeless pilgrimage
Began ere yet from Ghizeh's glaring sands
The hopeless Sphinx outstared the solemn stars,
The gods must surely pity, and at last
Will bid ye cease your futile wandering.
Across the hills some phantom Phyllis calls,
And lo! ye follow, heedless how the peaks
May rise between; Fame beckons, and again
Ye surge in quest of vanity and ash;
Or Glory blows her trumpets, and ye tread
The plains of danger, and the dizzy ledge
That hangs above the hungry maw of death.
O weary feet, the gods must surely see
The prints that through successive centuries
Have proved the long illusion! They must
 know
The bitterness, the yearning, and the smart
That follow'd when Life's lesson had been
 taught,
And Phyllis, Fame and Glory proved a dream;
And in some way of which we know not now,
In lands of cypress-silence, will bestow
The peace desired, as a recompense
For all the striving; and the shatter'd hopes,
And faith despite the mockings of Despair.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

AND thus Dodone found him, led by chance
To where he lay unconscious, on his brow
The placid dignity bestow'd by Death
Alike on king and shepherd. O'er his head
The swaying trees arch'd darkly; while the
grass

Around the marbled sleeper seem'd a-light
With shy anemones, and daffodils
More yellow than Diana's wind-blown hair.
Beside him lay the girdle, now a wreath
Of scented pine, loose woven, crown most fit
For brows that Love has mark'd not for the
bay.

In such a place a god might once have piped
A mournful chant for wood-nymph's funeral;
Or startled Echo, with her wid'ning eyes
Lain down to mourn Narcissus. Here the birds
Were ever still; the wind's soft murmuring
Alone might break the silence. And at last
When through each aisle the melancholy Dusk
In velvet robes preceded holy Night,
The pallid faces of the ghostly blooms
Peer'd forth from out the mystery like flames.
Then kneeling down, Dodone spoke to him
As one may speak to a belovèd flower
That lent its fragrance to her happiness
Before it sigh'd its soul out. "Love," she said,
"My ever gentle Melas! If my tears

MELAS AND ANAXE

Could wash Death's seal from off this brow of
thine

And make thee once more shepherd, I would
weep

Until sweet Sorrow claim'd me. Though I lost
All sight of thee, and of the wonder-world,
I still would weep, content to quicken thee
Who wert so fair and gentle. Pale my love!
Now fall my tears unheeded; for thy face
Is whiter far than lilies which the storm
Has torn from maiden couches. Ah, thou art
More still, more meek, than all dear blooms that
dream

In silent gardens watch'd by Proserpine!
And now thou dost not heed me. How have I
The mighty gods offended, that their wrath
Should fall on me, a simple fisher maid,
Whose longings were most humble, needing thee
To make my heaven perfect. Ah, thou wert
My only need! Thy love was more to me
Than all the fabled treasures of the East;
And I have dream'd, the while I sat by thee
And listen'd to thee speaking, of delight
The young wife knows when, babe upon her
breast,

She bends above its cooing. I have dream'd
Of simple joys that fit with maiden dreams;
For simple joys are sweetest, and least prone

IDYLLS OF GREECE

To tempt rebuke from ever-envious Grief.
But now all dreams are over. I would go
Where thou art gone, to be again with thee
To think with thee on things unknown to us
Who live a while to sorrow and to sleep.
No more for me the forest bird shall sing,
No more the sea make music; nevermore
The gentle deer shall feed from out my hand
Or fawns obey my calling; sun nor star
Shall smile on poor Dodone — thou art dead!”

THEN knelt she down by her belovèd boy,
Unmindful of the sinew'd fishermen
Who glided through the shadow'd aisles, and
form'd
A silent ring around them. They were men
Who knew much sorrow; for the sea demands
Her tribute of her toilers. Now they stood
With bared, grey heads around these younger
ones
And wish'd the gods had been more kind to
them.
Day, too, was slowly dying. In the west
The fire gather'd that had lately warm'd
One half the world and bless'd it. Soon it paled
And there was no more glory, but a glow
Most holy in its softness. On the hills
This wondrous beauty linger'd, clothing them

MELAS AND ANAXE

In robes diaphanous of violet
And faintest pink, through which the verdure
gleam'd,

Grown velvet dark in places. Soon, too soon,
With slow, hush'd steps the widow'd Evening
Prepar'd the woods for slumber. From the skies
Her veil fell softly on them, and they slept
In solemn rows of fragrance and of peace.
The little birds were silent; they had sung
Their vesper songs in chorus; now in nests
Where never dreams might enter, they were laid
With feather'd mates till dawn-burst waken'd
them.

Thus came the Night. And when the stars
stepp'd forth

To greet the heaven's stately arbitress,
And bid her smile in pity on the world,
Dodone kiss'd his forehead; then she rose
And bade the silent, sturdy fishermen
Return her sleeping shepherd to his hills.

ACIS AND GALATÆA



ACIS AND GALATÆA

THE sea's song is the saddest. It has
stared

So long upon the story of the stars
That flame in heaven's purple, that it knows
The sorrows of all peoples, and their griefs,
And all the tale of man's unhappiness.
Æons ago it laved the new-born world
From Pole to Pole, and was all-powerful;
But when its voice was raised in loud lament
Against the harsh decrees of Destiny,
The storming gods descended from their thrones
To quell the condemnation. North and south
They froze the sea to silence, chaining down
The wild, white hands with fetters crystalline
And icy seals which suns might never melt.
But here their vengeance ended, and again
The gods sought high Olympus, satisfied

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The sea would sing the hymns of Orpheus
In praise of them, as sing the subject winds.
But still it cries in protest to the stars
From east and west, and naught shall silence it
Till all the suns are blotted from the sky,
And all that is is swallow'd by the night.
The sea's song is the wildest. It beheld
The earth's mad anguish in the formless days
When Chaos strove for mastery with Light,
When fires lick'd the beauty from the hills,
And all creation suffer'd. It has known
The anguish of the forest, and the pain
Of silent, desert places; for at last
The sea is earth's confessor. Ev'ry brook
That babbles through the meadow, ev'ry stream
That knows the dell's fond secrets, and in haste
Seeks the calm river with its foolish tale,
Confides its secret to the list'ning sea;
And ev'ry bird that hears the whisper'd plaints
Of hopeless lovers and despairing men,
Sings to the sea the story of the grief
That drives the victim to death's precipice.
And while the bearded sailors tell their mates,
With rolling eyes, of cities to be sack'd,
And pearls, and splendid women; and with oaths
That make the heavens tremble, clamor loud
For winds to blow them landward, lo! the sea
Is witness to their boasting! And perchance,

ACIS AND GALATÆA

While yet one sings of booty, or his love,
His bloody corse, with unillumined eyes
And tangled hair, sinks downward through the
kelp

To boast no more. Who doubts the sea is sad?
The sea's song is the truest. Therefore hear —
O ye that lend in this unlovely time
An idle ear to tales that are of dream —
The song the sea once sang me on a day
When heaven's vault was sapphire, and the
breeze

Was soft and warm and wooing, like the breath
That tells the loved one's presence, though unseen.
And question not how seas should sing thereof,
Or idle wand'rers listen. There be ways
By which the humble flower of the field
Makes known to us its message. Bird and bee
Are letter'd in their fashion; and the air,
That swathes us round so lovingly, contains
Insistent voices, strangely spiritual.

'Tis we who will not hearken, we whose eyes
Are shut upon the glories that prevail
While all we strive to capture turns to ash.

UPON the rocky coast of Sicily,
Where later on Odysseus, homeward bound,
Outwiled grey Polyphemus, on a day
When all the air was golden there appear'd

IDYLLS OF GREECE

A shepherd from the hill-tops, and in love.
A gentle shepherd, whom the mountain folk
Had watch'd some twenty summers, as they
watch

The steady growing of the sturdy pine,
Or note the solemn swelling of the grain;
And, as he grew to manhood, loved him more
Because of his unbarter'd purity.
But this, perhaps, displeas'd the mirthful gods
Who plot for man's undoing, liking well
To see shame's scarlet tinge the marble brow,
And bent the head that would outstare the
stars.

And seeing now how maidens sought in vain
To snare his careless footsteps, and the nymphs
Made warm advances only to be scorn'd,
They brought the rebel, Acis, from his hills
To where the sea lay rocking. Faint he was,
And footsore from his journey; and although
He fain had slept and eaten, he beheld
No sign of habitation, and no ships
Upon the lazy bosom of the deep.
A spot it was the bronzen fishermen
Had fancied not, and left inviolate
To screaming gull and wheeling pelican;
And Echo, when her faint voice reach'd the
hills,
Had ever warn'd the simple mountaineers

ACIS AND GALATÆA

That this was sacred, here no foot might tread
Lest eyes behold forbidden mysteries.
And Acis therefore wonder'd why the Fates
Had led his footsteps thither, half afraid
The sea might rise in anger, or the cliffs
Crash thund'rously and crush him. Therefore he
With heaviness upon him, and in doubt,
And thinking somewhat sadly of his sheep
And those who elsewhere would have welcomed
 him,
Lay down to brood upon the golden sand
Until Sleep pitied him and he forgot.

O BLESSED Sleep, so wise, so merciful,
Thou art not kin to that unpitying Death
Whose fingers curl the petals of the rose,
And close the lids of those we hold most dear.
Thou dost not lurk, as Death lurks, in the
 path
Where passes Love, undreaming but of bliss;
Thou dost not end the trumpeting of Fame
Nor pale the glow of Glory. Thou dost see,
As through the crimson poppies' trellicing
Thy cool eyes darkle till the day lies down,
Unenvying, the pageantry of life —
The tawdry banner and the vain desire,
The little joy we steal between two dawns.
And when the gods let fall upon the world

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The Twilight's veil to hide it from their scorn,
Thou dost not haunt the shadow as does Death.
Upon our eyes thou layest soothing hands,
And pitiest our longing. Through the night
Thou watchest babe and mother, and the worn;
And sendest maids pale dreams of what may be,
While, through the fretted edges of the clouds,
The moonlight bathes their beauty. Gentle
Sleep!

AND while he slept, there slowly near'd the
shore

The sea's fair daughters, sporting easily
Amid the cradling billows. Laughing all,
Some swam with graceful arm stroke; others
moved

As moved the dolphins near them, lazily,
With no apparent motion. Some had bound
Their rebel tresses to their care-free brows
With strands of brown-gold seaweed; others
wove

Their glorious hair in wind-defying knots
That show'd the neck's full curving; some had
curls

Close-twisted to the contour of their heads,
Like dainty tendrils of a golden vine;
And some, who younger seem'd yet not less fair,
Allow'd this silky, splendid hair of theirs

ACIS AND GALATÆA

To float uncurb'd behind them, till it lay
Outspread upon the water, hiding all
Their body's blinding beauty as they swam.
Around them swarm'd the Tritons, crescent-wise ;
Half-god, half fish, they blew through shells of
pearl

The preludes of symphonic hurricanes,
Or airs of wondrous sweetness, such as woo
Reluctant dryads to the water's edge.
And in the crescent's center there appear'd
A tiny craft of fairy fashioning
As pink as sea-spray'd coral. It was borne
By mighty mermen, tann'd and sinewy,
Who swam beside it slowly. In it knelt
The love of winds and waters, their delight ;
The thing the sea-folk worship'd — Galatæa !

SUCH beauty now no mortal eyes may see
Nor know such pure perfection. In the days
When Greece was young, her maidens were con-
tent

To laugh and love and be most maidenly ;
The songbirds were their teachers, and the lore
The birds would teach suffices for the day.
The wise Minerva with her marbled brow
Sits lonely on Olympus, and beholds,
Beyond the solemn circle of her court,
The Cyprian bind her tresses, and allure

· IDYLLS OF GREECE

The homage of the ages. Men are men,
And ask of woman only tenderness;
'Tis love alone can make the world forget,
And he who can forget is happiest.

THE gods themselves called Galatæa fair;
And fisher folk whose eyes had mirror'd her
On dusky nights of odorous delight,
Their boats becalm'd, had fear'd to gaze on her
Lest madness seize them for desire of her.
And now she seem'd more beautiful, because
Her youth was in its flower, in its spring,
And sunshine proved what twilight hinted at.
Upon a shaggy bearskin, swart as night,
That once had lain where storms the blinding
snow

Along the spectral summits of the Alps,
She knelt, with naught to clothe her save her
hair —

Diaphanous and golden. White was she
As whitest lily that in shaded pools
Shrinks from the sun's advances; for the spray
Lay cool upon her virgin loveliness,
And winds were loth to woo her, lest the gods
In anger drove them from the singing sea.
Only her mouth was crimson, with its lips,
The lower drawn in maiden wistfulness
Beneath its shading sister, like the bow

ACIS AND GALATÆA

Of Cupid when it quivers and is still.
But lips, and hair, and all the white of her,
Became as naught when once beneath their lids
One gazed upon the glory of her eyes.
For these the sea bequeath'd her, and the sun
Had smiled upon them when they open'd first
In quickening amazement. Now they gleam'd
Like amber, jade, and subtle chrysoptase,
As changed the mood within her; but through all
Were strangely sad, as is the splendid sea,
And, like the sea, were strangely beautiful.
Thus kneeling on the bearskin, with her hands
Light press'd upon the edges of her bark,
She watch'd across the shoulders of her maids
The shore that show'd each minute more distinct;
And thought of — what? O ye remembering
The loneliness, the waiting, and the grey
That comes before the azure and the dream,
Ere at the heart's secluded shrine is lit
The fragrant taper consecrate to Love;
And ye that still, like Dis's voiceless ghosts
Unhopeful and unhoping go your way,
Well know the troubled question of her eyes,
And all that she desired of the gods.
Or then, or now, the hunger is the same,
For love is all — the ultimate desire;
And wanting love, ye are as are the wastes
That lack the ministration of the rain,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And so abide in parch'd unfruitfulness.
And while she dream'd of things that had not
 been.

And, all unseeing, gazed upon the shore,
The Tritons caught the music of the winds
And hymn'd their wild affection for the deep:
"O Sea, that art unconquer'd, to our ears
Thy voice is as a cymbal, as the song
That thunders in the chorus of the stars
When pass the gods beneath them. Night and
 day

Thou singest of creation, when the hills
Rose from thy depths, and on the crests of
 them

Bright Phœbus pour'd his glory; thou hast seen
Primæval chaos, and the birth of Light
That rent the womb of Darkness, and became
A splendor and immortal. Thou hast heard
The far, faint voices of the gods, when first
They bent their brows upon the gleaming world
And call'd it good, and thee its fairest thing.

O Sea, O splendid Sea, from thee arose
The blue-eyed Aphrodite, whom the doves,
White as her breasts, delight in following.
Her feet are pink as coral; and her gaze
Is bright as is thy bosom when the sun
Holds thee, his love, in silvery embrace,
And sea winds sing thy nuptials. On the rocks

ACIS AND GALATÆA

Thy lips are laid in murmuring caress,
And lo! they disappear; thy hands demand
Their tribute of the mountains, and behold!
They crumble and are gather'd to thy deeps.
Thou watchest how the wizardry of winds
Conform the heavens to their mighty will,
And blow the clouds in fickle pleasantry
Across its azure softness. Over thee
They pass unnoticed, while the deserts leap,
And fall again in impotent desire
Beneath the breath that wakes them, and is
gone.

Hear thou our song, O many-handed Sea;
Who, at the last, shalt lie victorious
Above the totter'd pillars of the earth,
And brood again beneath the sadden'd stars."

IT was not yet high noon. The laughing
waves
Lifted their hands to heaven, and were
glad
The while the winds made music. Capp'd was
each,
And green as gleaming shark's tooth; from afar
They hasten'd shoreward — an imperial host
That seem'd to answer trumpeters unseen,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And moved with flying banners to its end.
Aware of all the loveliness they bore
They press'd in ranks of tow'ring majesty
To where at last, low-levell'd on the sand,
They burst in foamy splendor. Then the sea,
Which always loves the brave and beautiful,
Admitted them once more to brotherhood;
And still they follow'd where the trumpets call'd,
And cast themselves upon the golden sands —
A thund'rous and unending sacrifice.
As now the sun in heaven higher climb'd
The mighty wind smote softer on its harp,
And soon no sound was heard upon the waves
Except the mingled music of the maids
And chested Tritons, sweet and sonorous.
And soon one turn'd and swam to where the
bark

Rode lightly as a feather, and thereon
She placed her arm, and let the mermen bear
Her added weight. And she who knelt therein
Upon the bearskin, laid her sea-cool hand
Upon the other's fingers. "Nyssa mine!"
She said in accents that bespoke the love
She bore her sunny sister; "Not with me
Thy place to-day, but with the happier ones
Whose merry laughter rises from the waves,
As from the fields the lark's clear threnody.
See yonder shore! Who knows but even now

ACIS AND GALATÆA

With gleaming eye some merry satyr waits
To pipe for thee, as for Eurydice
Piped Orpheus upon his magic reeds.”
But Nyssa stopp’d her quickly. “Nay,” said she,
“No satyr waits to woo me, who as yet
Have never ventured where the woods are dark,
Or where the hills lie lone amid the mists.
But thou, dear Galatæa, one for thee,
Although no piping lover, surely waits?
For thou art fair; thou art so marvellous
That he who woos thee should immortal be
And dower’d with the graces of the gods.
Love is not thine by favor, but by right —
Tell me the name of him who worships thee!”
Then was the hand that lay on hers removed,
And raised as if in protest. “Nay,” she cried;
As pass’d the mists of pain across her eyes —
The mists that hint the sorrow that is dumb
Amid the crying voices of the woes.
“Love is a gift, my Nyssa; none dare claim
The thing of which the gods have ordering;
To some they give, from others they withhold,
Nor thou nor I can force their favoring.
Fame heeds the loudest trumpets; Troys present
Their silver’d heroes’ opportunity;
But love is never wrested, never lured.
It crosses once the tangled paths of men
When gods dispose; but he who welcomes not

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The treasured thing, or, welcoming, proves
false,

Is hated ever after of the gods,

And lives apart and hopeless, like a ghost."

"But unto thee," urged Nyssa, "there has come
The rosy son of Venus? Thou art one
Whom gods would favor, as would men adore;
For thou art true as thou art beautiful,
And, once thy guest, with thee would Love
abide."

Then Galatæa smiled; but now her lips

Were sad as erst her eyes were, and their light

Was dimm'd as is the splendor of the stars

When sea mists fill the heavens. "Not to me

Has come the light-wing'd Eros, with his bow

Of gold and golden quiver," answer'd she.

"Perhaps he has forgotten, or, perhaps,

Some deed of mine has roused the enmity

Of sea-born, splendid Venus. Other maids

Have heard the mystic silences of love,

Or known the hand's warm pressure. They

have felt

A lover's lips laid softly on their cheeks,

As one lays blossoms on the altars of

The chaste Diana, lithe and yellow-hair'd.

To other maids the wonderment has come,

The joy that goes with trusting, and the pain

That is as much a part of truest love

ACIS AND GALATÆA

As tears are part of truest thankfulness.
But I who once ask'd much, and hoped for more,
Have neither suffer'd greatly nor been glad;
And now ask naught, but bide each even's close
Unhoping and unhopeful, and apart —
Except from thee, whose beauty is my joy."

NOW Nyssa answer'd not, but silently
Beside the bark was slowly onward borne
With her whose voice had trembled like a flute
Above the dancing waters. There are times
When silence hints of deeper sympathy
Than words or tears, and thus encourages
A troubled heart's confession. Words may blur
The soul's desired message; tears, vain tears,
Admit the sorrow yet deny the balm;
But when the beat of Love's unwearying wings
Is faintly heard upon the scented air,
And nothing breaks the peace 'twixt soul and
soul,
Grief feels the sacred presence, and is glad,
And consolation finds amid the calm.
And Galatæa now, who long had stared
Upon the purple splendor of the hills,
Press'd once again the hand beneath her own,
And spoke in accents sadly musical:
"So much I asked! For once, as in a dream
I saw the face of him who was to be

IDYLLS OF GREECE

My star, my love. He was most beautiful.
Yet not with bright Apollo's loveliness,
Or that which makes the gods magnificent.
A shepherd he, sun-tann'd and tangle-hair'd,
Who look'd amazed upon the moving sea
And me who came therefrom to welcome him.
For in my dream it seem'd that I was come
A morn like this, my Nyssa, to the shore
With all my maids around me. In the sky
Bright Phœbus rode unchallenged. All the air
Was scintillant and wooing, and the winds
Were chanting wild and wondrous harmonies
To matchless Aphrodite, Queen of Love.
The sea was like a glory; wave on wave,
Thrill'd by the hour's utter happiness,
Lifted white hands in utter ecstasy
And danced in wild abandon. In the depths
I, too, had idly sported, and the spray
Was cool upon my body; thus I came
Upon this simple shepherd, and at first
He knew not which the wonder — I, so white,
Or all the gleaming marvel of the flood.
At first I thought to scorn him; but while yet
He gazed at me astonish'd, having turn'd
His back upon the ocean, I was 'ware
Of something in his bearing that compell'd
My spirit's admiration. Strange the ways
Of Love, my gentle Nyssa; strange the charm

ACIS AND GALATÆA

That draws the destin'd lover to his maid,
And makes her slave to him who worships her!"

"And then, my Galatæa?" Nyssa asked,
Impatient for the sequel. "And what then?
I cannot think that this was but a dream."

The other gazed an instant at the girl,
Then closed her eyes where tears were gathering,
And sadly she continued. "Things of dream
Are things most prized, unconscious verities
Whose worth we know when we from dream
awake.

It seem'd he stared with calm, untroubled gaze
Upon my hot confusion. And at last,
When I had look'd for æons in his eyes,
I saw the promise of his utter'd love
Arching his crimson lips; then, Nyssa mine,
When heav'n itself seem'd opening to me,
The gods remember'd, and my silly dream
Was wreck'd by Polyphemus and the dawn."

THUS ceased she suddenly, and smooth'd the
pain

Upon her low, cool brow; but in her eyes
Still swirl'd such mists of maiden wistfulness
That Nyssa rose in pity from the sea
And lean'd to Galatæa. "Nay," she cried,
"Thy dream shall yet be granted; thou shalt be
Belov'd as once was Psyche, ere the wrath

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Of awful Venus drove her into night.
The joy of love, the dream, the wonderment,
And all the things of which the wild winds
breathe

In ears like mine, my gentle Galatæa,
Shall come to thee, and thou be glad indeed.
Would I might dream of one as wonderful!
Would I could bring, by witchery like thine,
A wooing shepherd, love-lorn, to my feet!"
This said she with a sigh, regretfully,
As if her day were over, and no more
The white dream possible — the wondrous dream
That is more sweet than music, and more sad.
But Galatæa chided. "Child," said she,
"What wouldst thou do if unto thee should come
The fickle Eros, heavenly torturer?
For twenty summers have these eyes of mine
Consider'd and consider'd; now, most wise,
I tread the path unfearing. Blooms there be
That fairer look than lilies, yet if pluck'd
What woes befall the hand that gathers them!
What pitfalls make Love's pathway dangerous!
What brinks and stilly chasms! And what
ghosts

That lurk within the shadow and the peace
To crown with shame the head of innocence!
Ah, Nyssa, gentle Nyssa, thou to whom
The world is but a temple, and the ways

ACIS AND GALATÆA

Of Love are ways of flaming mystery,
How shouldst thou know the bitterness of love?
How shouldst thou know, to whom the winds
intone

Persuasive songs of much-desired joys,
How shouldst thou know that winds are treach-
erous,

And love is oft a phantom and a snare? ”

But Nyssa would not listen. “Nay,” she cried,
“Condemn not love; for lo! the winds have
sigh’d

My sixteen years thereof, and they must know.
Say love is good! The wild bird sings thereof;
And each fair bloom that glorifies the sun
Longs for the night, when fond but fickle bees
Sip the sweet nectar of their fragrant lips.
Say love is pure! For love is maidenhood’s,
Along with fern and pensive violets,
With daffodils and startled marguerites,
And each shy priestess of the wood and field.
Say love is true! For if this shepherd came
And loved me not, I still could worship him,
And then could die. Though old thou art and
wise,

Love shall outlive the doubt of centuries.”

IDYLLS OF GREECE

THUS argued they, and thus were onward
borne

Upon the crested billows, surging still
To where the yellow sands awaited them.
Around them swam the Tritons, jubilant,
And singing still the praises of the sea
And Venus Aphrodite. In their midst
The maidens laugh'd and sported, looking back
To where their adoration, Galatæa,
Still knelt upon the bearskin, questioning
The purple hills with unimpassion'd eyes,
And lips still curved in an unchanging grief.
But Nyssa's eyes were laughing. And the while
The sea-spray smote her shoulders and her neck,
And winds and waves made merry with her hair,
She chanted still the thought that fill'd her heart
As sings the bird its song against the sky:
"Love, love, white love, love fair as foam or
flower;
Love, love, white love, love deathless as the sea;
Love, love, white love, love-held and love-
inspired;
Love, love, white love, such love be thine and
mine!"

AND when the sun was highest, Acis lay
In troubled rest upon his couch of sand;
For Sleep's soft juices now dripp'd lazily

ACIS AND GALATÆA

Upon his eyes, and dreams tormented him.
He dream'd he sat enthroned upon a rock,
Its sombre ruggedness made subtly soft
With dainty moss and weeds that once had
graced

The soundless gardens of the sunless deeps.
Around him stretch'd the sands, all scintillant,
As when from Dian's head the wind-blown hair
Lies bright along the highways of the skies,
And suns are lost amid it. To the south
The sea rock'd languidly, upon its breast
No lifted canvas woo'd the scented winds
That sigh'd the songs of solemn Africa;
On sea and shore none other was but he,
Who gazed upon the scene's serenity
Through fancy's rosy mists, and ever was
To all its soft enchantment prisoner.
But soon he heard the far, illusive notes
Of magical Æolians, sweeter far
Than haunting flutes or silv'ry cymbalry,
More soothing than the cooing of the dove.
And then it seem'd he was no more alone;
But one by one all-silently appear'd,
Born of the air and father'd by the sun,
Such beauties as no waking man may see,
Or seeing, thinks he dreams, and fears to wake.
These ring'd around him slowly, while he lay
And watch'd them step from glades ethereal

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And forests unsubstantial; and anon
His ears were woo'd by some such melody
As lilies hear when, through their stately stalks,
The spiced wind sighs its passionate appeal,
And stars are all a-tremble. And at last
One fairer than the others, loveliest
Of lovely things and things whose loveliness
Remains untouch'd of Time, the ravenor,
Appear'd before him kneeling, and with smiles
Whose sweetness might have soften'd Cerberus
Essay'd to woo and win him. Then he woke!

BUT stranger far than things that are of
dream
Are things that be. For now around him lay
Beauty in flesh, warm-scented loveliness,
Rounded and white; such loveliness as lies
On silky rugs of wondrous arabesques
Behind the latticed porches of Byzant.
Only these maids seem'd fairer; for the sun
Had touch'd their golden girlhood with the kiss
That wakes the rose's beauty; and they were
Alive, alert and happy. In their ears
The Tritons' song still echo'd — of the Sea,
Whose kiss is pure, whose infinite desire
Is chaste and solemn, like the love that is
Akin to bless'd pity, love that finds
In woman's heart eternal harborage.

ACIS AND GALATÆA

A while he stared and wonder'd, unconfused
By such display of tempting loveliness
Because a youth, a shepherd, and a Greek ;
But soon their beauty seem'd to weary him,
And then his eyes roved seaward, and delight
Curved his red lips as leap'd the joyous waves
And wasted frothy kisses on the sand.
He saw the gulls, that ancient sisterhood
Whose thin lament has shrill'd in awful wastes
Where storm and mist make darkness terrible ;
But now their cry was almost musical
As, idle-wing'd, they floated on a sea
Wherein the heavens trembled, lost themselves
As lover in the eyes of the Belov'd.
And seeing that he scorn'd them, one by one
The sea-maids scorn'd him also, knowing well
That theirs was body's beauty, and far less
To him than was the beauty of the wave,
Far less than was the mystery of dawn.
Then from a couch whereon as yet lay hid
The golden Galatæa, she arose
And placed her weight upon her bended arm —
An arm the gods might worship — and in tones
Of silv'ry sweetness bade her maids depart,
And find wild berries in the near-by woods.
One only she bade linger, she who was
The morn's companion, Nyssa, whom the Fates,
To serve the dire purpose of the gods,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Were watching now, and now considering.
And when the last white figure disappear'd
Within the forest's coolness, and their song
Was no more heard, then Galatæa call'd
To him who still gazed seaward. And he turn'd
And look'd at her, and trembled as he lay,
Feeling that now his life was to be changed.
And seeing how the other maids had gone,
And left these two together, he arose,
Then went to her, and question'd: "Callest
thou?"

HE saw but Galatæa. From the first
He felt her his, and knew that he was hers;
He went to her as goes the wild grey dove
Straight to its mate though hills rise high, and
hide
The brake where bides its loved one and their
nest.

This is true love. The love that slowly dawns
To delicate perfection, as the day
Grows hourly more golden; love that is
The sister of the rosebud, opening
Its petals to the music of the birds —
This for the man whose speculative eye
Tells of unfever'd pulses, and a heart
Where passion is to prudence ever slave.
True love is swift. It leaps from heart to heart

ACIS AND GALATÆA

As leaps the eager lightning from the dark,
And sees its own, and homes there, unafraid.

UNMINDFUL now of seagull and of wave,
And heeding not fair Nyssa, Acis knelt
And laid his lips upon a truant tress
Of Galatæa's hair. Then answer'd she:
"I call'd thee not, my shepherd. In thy home
The maids may be less modest, and may woo
When pensive youths stare moodily to sea,
And pay no heed to beauty — but not I."
Then Acis blush'd and murmur'd: "Then I
dream'd.

And yet it seem'd across the pearly haze
Of a delicious silence came a gust
Of scented breeze, like that which warms the sea
That laps about Cyrene. And anon
My name was utter'd in a voice that thrill'd
My being as it never has been stirr'd.
So sad a voice, and yet a voice that knew
Joy's golden notes that echo to the stars
And make the breezes jealous. Such a voice
As thine it was, that spoke to me but now,
And made my heart thy spirit's prisoner."
But Galatæa still made mock of him,
As maidens will of lovers they have won
Too easily. "Now, Nyssa, hear," said she,
"How raves this silly shepherd! Surely he

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Is mad with too much piping, or the stars
Have cluster'd in that raven hair of his,
And set his wits a-whirling. How his eyes
Burn like the coals of Vesta's altar fires!
Ask him, my Nyssa, if he ne'er has seen
Hair soft like mine, and golden; for his hand
Is clench'd upon it strangely, and his lips,
Erst redder than the poppies, now are pale
With all the lily loveliness of death."
Thus spoke she, but in no wise sought to free
The tress he held imprison'd. Then to him
Turn'd Nyssa, laughing softly, in her eyes
The still untroubled beauty of the pool
That knows not yet the teasing of the wind.
"My mistress bids me ask if thou art mad?"
She said, and touch'd his shoulder with a foot
So small, so white, the weary asphodel
That starr'd the shadow'd forest murmur'd not
The while it pass'd above them. "Art thou
mad?
Or only shepherd-foolish, loving where
Thy wild eye finds the thing most beautiful?"
But Acis only gazed at Galatæa,
And unto her made answer. "If to love
Consumingly, with passion that might warm
The frozen seas that hold the world in bond;
If this be mad — to love as now I love —
Then am I hopeless, helpless. When I gaze

ACIS AND GALATÆA

Upon thy head's bright glory; when I see
The mystic light that gleams within thine eyes;
And when thy fragrance makes my pulses throb
As throb the drums of battle, then it seems
The world's aflame; infinity is fill'd
With whirling stars, and in their midst art thou,
Imperious and splendid — thou, my dream!"
"This surely is the rhapsody of love,"
Sigh'd Galatæa, softly. "He is mad,"
Pale Nyssa sadly answer'd. "On his head
The moon has poured her silver; he has sipp'd
The dew that cools the rose's burning cheeks,
Or lain at dusk where wood nymphs lay them
down.

The heavy moth has fann'd his sense away
The while he slept at midnight; in his ears
The nightingale, whose sorrow is the world's,
Has pour'd the hopeless passion of her song,
And charm'd him while he slumber'd on the hills.
And I have heard that he who looks too long
Upon the moonstone, Dian's amulet,
By naiads worn that scorn the wiles of Love,
Falls sick of such strange fever, as can cure
Not herbs, but she who wears it — she alone.
Upon thy hand thou wearest such a gem,
With Dian's face upon it; marvel not
That charm'd by double witchery like this
A witless shepherd loves thee, worships thee.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

These things make mad, and he is surely mad,
Or he would look less hungrily at thee."

AND speaking thus, as though she spoke in
dream,
She lean'd to Galatæa, feigning fear
Of him who gazed beyond her at the face
That flamed with love and maiden wonderment.
Then Galatæa soften'd. "Yes," said she,
"I call'd thee, gentle shepherd; for my heart
Found sudden need of thee. Ah, blame me not,"
(As Nyssa gazed with startled eyes at her,
And straightway straighten'd.) "Blame not me,
For all the sea's wild moods are in my blood;
And thou art he for whom my spirit longs
In time of tempest and in time of calm.
My Nyssa here foretold thy happening!
This very morn she sang of love to me
The while my own heart doubted; now I see
The gods are good, for thou art truly come
To lift Love's golden chalice to my lips,
And soothe my spirit with its draught of peace."
Then turn'd she unto Nyssa, and would fain
Have kiss'd her brow had she not left in haste
To hide the tears that gather'd in her eyes.

ACIS AND GALATÆA

AND while the shepherd murmur'd of his love
In accents soft, yet subtly musical,
The nymphs return'd with berries or with fruits,
And marvell'd much to see him worshiping.
But he again was unaware of them,
As one who in a garden notes the rose
Above the other beauties of her court ;
And when the simple meal had been prepared
By fingers sweeten'd by the sea's moist kiss,
They brought to him and her whom he adored
The leaves that held their berries, and the soft,
Clear mountain water temper'd by the winds.
They knew of Polyphemus ; how the dread
And one-eyed Cyclops was enamor'd of
The gentle Galatæa ; how the stars
Beheld his monstrous wooing, and were glad
When sea mists hid the sorry spectacle.
From where they lay they watch'd the happy
pair
Who fondled each the other, offer'd fruits
To mouths that sigh'd for other things than
food,
And were unconscious of the destiny
The gods had, æons since, allotted them.
The sea was strangely silent. Now and then
A lazy wave would leave upon the sands
Its whisper'd message of the utter peace
That ends the moods of nature. In the sky

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The colors changed from blue to violet,
Save where the sun's attendants, clothed in gold,
Follow'd their lord's advance upon the west.
These, too, soon pass'd; and then a modest star
Shone in the distant gardens of the gods
And usher'd in the twilight, luminous,
Mysterious and fragrant, as is love.

BUT Nyssa wander'd sadly by the shore,
And would not join her sisters. Love
had pierced

Her heart with too great suddenness; and like
A lily brought by wanton winds to grief,
With bended head she pined beside the deep,
And thought of him, of Acis. Now she knew
Love, like the stars, is not in man's control,
And hearts must break that sweetness be diffused
In desert places where no blossoms grow.
And while she dream'd of things that might
have been,

As lovers dream who are of love denied,
Her brain conceived a sudden stratagem
By which her heart might profit. She would go
To where the dreaded Cyclops had his lair,
A sea-swept cavern where he crouch'd in gloom
And glared upon the noisy turbulence

ACIS AND GALATÆA

With awful speculation. There she hoped
To tell her story in such simple way
As might awake his pity; she would tell
The dreams of all her heavy maidenhood,
Of years that seem'd so many, though so few.
This Polyphemus, whom the gods had shunn'd,
Would smile perhaps to hear her piteous tale
Of love for her wild shepherd; he might deign
To harass him to leave fair Sicily,
And Nyssa then could follow — dreams like
these,

Like thistle-drift upon a scented wind,
Drifted across her vision; and the while
She dream'd her dreams her yearning urged
her on.

That very morn the lair she had espied
Beneath a ledge that overhung the sea,
With ebon woods above it. Gaunt and gnarled,
Each hoary tree loom'd shudderingly grim,
And made the forest monstrous, threatening,
As though a horror crouch'd within its shade.
The tow'ring cliff loom'd blankly. On its face
The primal flames had breathed their enmity
Until the gods controll'd them, and within
Earth's bowels bound them, where they work for
weal.

Then follow'd storm and tempest, lightning,
hail;

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And æons through all elemental hate
Batter'd and beat thereon; and all the while
The famish'd tides, the ever-pitiless,
Had gnaw'd its base with unrelenting lip,
And made the ancient Cyclops a retreat.

THE light had now departed from the sky;
A sombre beauty clothed the highest hills
That erst were bathed in splendor. Peace came
forth,
And laid her ivory hands upon the world,
And bade the doves coo softly. In the west
A touch of crimson made the grey seem warm
As on a robin's bosom; but the East
Already was majestically dark,
And there Night held dominion. Now the sea
Was sadder-voiced than ever, knowing well
How Tragedy and Horror, sisters grim
That shun the eye of Phœbus, haunt the gloom,
Accomplishing their purpose. Here and there
A darting phosphorescence lit the waves,
As though there pass'd beneath the purple flood
To palaces of coral and of pearl
Enamor'd mermen with their finny loves.
At stated times the mighty swell crash'd in —
The ocean's sigh — and flung upon the shore,
To mix with tangled blossoms of the deep,
Flowers of foam that vanish'd like the snow.

ACIS AND GALATÆA

But Nyssa's feet sped swiftly o'er the sands
Because Hope bade her hasten, Hope that is
Illusion's smiling sister. Twice she left
A point behind; and as the moonlight pour'd
Its argent flood upon the swelling sea,
And all the air grew softly luminous,
Above she saw the outline of the wood,
And stood at last where Hope deserted her.

THE lovers had not miss'd her. They had left
The whisp'ring nymphs at sundown, and
had stray'd

To where the woods allured them. In a glade
Where daffodils and pale anemones
Like moveless lamps flared softly in the dusk,
They found a bank the sun that morn had woo'd
With aureate enchantment, and had charm'd
From out the ever-fruitful womb of earth
Such blooms as hint of Nature's sorcery.
And there they sat them by the other down,
And Galatæa told her shepherd-love
The ever-stirring story of the sea,
The sea that was her home. And he was mute
The while he watch'd what lights made soft her
eyes —

The lights that tremble and the lights that wane
As burns Love's sacred fire. Then he spoke;
But not of hills and sheepfolds. She had seen

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The solemn glory of the golden dawn,
And all the peace of sunset. She had known
The dew's cool kiss upon her slender feet,
The wind's caress, the pity of the rain,
The songs that tremble earthward from the
stars.

And so he told her of herself, of how
The while the twilight swathed him, and across
The drowsing hills the pensive shadows pass'd,
He dream'd of one who was in days to come
His own to be. "And thou," he said, "art she
Who pass'd before the curtains of mine eyes,
And woke the quenchless fever in my soul."
Then silence follow'd for a little space,
Unbroken save when sighs were audible —
The modest heart's remonstrance. In the air
The ministrants of human destinies,
Unseen and voiceless, passionless and calm,
Beheld their wooing; but the day is plann'd
Before the dawn adventures, and they knew
How gods had will'd this love-affair should end.

THEN turn'd the maid from Acis, and she said:
"Thy breath descends as sweetly on my lips
As dew upon the desert. I am parch'd
With too much longing, who have yearn'd for
thee
As years the sea throughout the centuries;

ACIS AND GALATÆA

Oh, I am glad the gods have made me fair,
For I am thine, and thine my beauty is.
The gods that gave it look in wonderment
Upon their priceless dower; thine it is,
For thou alone hast won me. But before
Thy madness makes thy soul my prisoner,
I ask thee pause. To-night I am thine own —
To-night whose cheeks shall pale so soon, so
soon;

Whose footsteps hasten now to where the Day
Peers through the eastern bars, yet heeds us not.
To-morrow — Polyphemus and despair
Must claim me, and—”. She finish'd not, but
turn'd

As turns the golden flower to the sun,
And laid her hand upon his eager eyes.
But he made haste to soothe her. “Nay,” said he,
“Let Polyphemus tremble! I am strong.
My arm has bent the brown bear to the ground;
Against my chest I strangled once a wolf,
And those who know me leave me to myself
When anger lines my forehead. Thee I love,
My dream, my Galatæa! Thee I love;
And I will slay this Cyclops, and the sea
Shall crimson like a sunset with his blood
When once his bulk confronts us. I have
sworn!”

But Galatæa doubted. She had seen

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The monster crush his fellows in a fight
That split the rocks, and made the strain'd earth
 gape,

And vomit writhing horrors. Well she knew
How he was adamantine; how his hands
Could squeeze the life-blood from the oldest tree,
And crush the marble boulder. Where he lay
The caving earth was sterile, and the woods
Were silent when he shoulder'd through their
 gloom.

And so she sigh'd, and touch'd his curling hair,
And lean'd her weight upon him, speaking not
The thought that cast its shadows o'er her heart
And made her lashes tremble. "Love," she
 said,

"The night is ours, and the night is here;
And thou art with me, with thy wind-blown hair
And eyes where dreams still linger. I can smell
In thee the forest's fragrance, scent of pines
And sweet wild myrtles. I would weave for thee
A wreath of fadeless laurel; but thy youth
Will someday pass, my Acis. Even now
Within the shade Change stands and watches
 thee;

Nor thou nor I, Belovèd, can abide
When all must tread the stairway of the dead
Where song is not, nor sunshine; where no more
The whisp'ring voices tell the praise of love.

ACIS AND GALATÆA

The Now alone is ours — thine and mine.
And Night bids us enjoy it, gentle Night!
See how she bends above the drowsy world,
About her brow her starry diadem,
The mists of pity in her lower'd eyes!
I think she sees us, Acis; for the Night
Has watch'd the golden fleet of flying Day
Since first he ruled the heavens. She has loved;
And, loving, she has lost; but is most kind,
And thinks a lover's sorrows are her own."

SHE paused again, till Acis press'd her
hand,
And bade her speak: "Thy voice more wooing is
Than winds that sigh above a languid sea;
Thy voice is dusk; thy voice the echo is
Of flutes that sob their passion to the stars;
Thy voice is softer than the autumn breeze
That breathes its love upon the fallen leaves,
And curls them out of pity. Speak to me!"
Then Galatæa teased him. "Nay," she said;
"My words thou hearest not, my voice alone;
A thrush could sing and make thine eyes as soft.
Thou art enamor'd of a melody —
Thou lovest me, and yet thou lovest not."
"I love thee," Acis answer'd. "Never yet
Has maid so won my senses from the charm
Of all that is about us. I have loved

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The trees whose arms allured me. I have loved
The silent hills, the flowers in their laps,
The little brook, whose Doric murmuring
Disturbs the solemn forest's revery.

But now they are forgotten, and I see
Thee, only thee; the others are no more.

I love thee, Galatæa; thou who art

Part goddess, and above me. Through the dusk
Thy golden face is glowing, and thy hair
Is like the mist that swathes the blinding form
Of Venus, the Immortal. I can see

Thy parted lips, half-drooping, and thy chin
That shows resolve yet still is womanly;

Greek at its best thy profile; but thine eyes,
Now grey and somewhat weary, somewhat sad,
Are pools of peace, cool haunts of restfulness,
Wherein my soul would linger till I die."

Within her own then held she light his hand,
And press'd it to her bosom. "Ah," she said,

"Too well I see thou lovest. In the night

Sad songs the sea has sung me. Once it said
That I must bear for countless centuries,

As though it were a weight within my heart,
The burden of the one I most should love;

And thou art he, though what the song may
mean

I know not yet, nor care, if me thou lov'st.

I love thee, Acis, thou my morning star;

ACIS AND GALATÆA

I, Galatæa, love thee, I who am
As pure as is the bloom that has not known
The rude advances of the fickle bee.
Now take me while the Night's soft cloak
 descends
To hide us from the anger of the gods —
I love thee!" Then most sweetly still was she,
And gazing for one moment in his eyes,
A moment like to an eternity,
She lean'd to him, and kiss'd him; and her kiss
Was like the kiss of Twilight on a bud
The Dawn shall ravish. And the Hours pass'd
All-silently before them; and the moon
Look'd once and then departed; and the stars
Sang softly as they slowly follow'd her
Along the paths that lead behind the sea.
The forest seem'd deserted. Only once
A faun surprised their bower; but while yet
They whisper'd softly, and while yet they kiss'd,
The startled thing had vanish'd, and again
The boughs closed in about them. They were one
Beneath the stars of heaven; they were one
In that desired comradeship of which
The gods are blest partakers; they were one
Within the shadow of the shelt'ring wings
Where all may be forgotten save desire,
And naught may be remember'd save the dream.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

AND there he found them in the amber
dawn —

The Cyclops, Polyphemus. He had heard
The half of Nyssa's story, till she told
How Acis woo'd the sea-nymph, Galatæa,
And how she smiled upon her shepherd-love.
Then rose he up, and roar'd to her to hide
Or he would fling her body to the sea;
And strode away, uprooting mighty trees,
And cursing Galatæa and the gods.
Behind him follow'd Nyssa, sad at heart,
Yet hopeful that the Night, compassionate,
The friend of hopeless lovers, might have hid
The objects of his fury. Now she knew
How fanciful her dreaming, and how vain,
And wish'd that she had suffer'd silently
As women suffer when the gods decree.
But Polyphemus, wild and terrible,
Whose single eye lit hideously the dark
Along the mangled path through which he
crash'd,
Was unaware of her, or he had turn'd
As turns the bear when follow'd, and had torn
Her flower limbs in pieces. On he went,
Implacable and awful, to the place
Where instinct led him, and the lovers lay,
And dream'd their dreams together. On his arm
Her head reposed, with all its golden hair

ACIS AND GALATÆA

In disarray ; and one bright butterfly
Above her hover'd as if loth to leave
The spot where bloom'd such utter loveliness.
But Polyphemus rudely waken'd them ;
And later, when he lumber'd to his lair,
The fainting Galatæa in his arms,
He left behind such bloody evidence
Of hate and hellish vengeance, that the birds
Utter'd their frighten'd protest to the dawn,
And then were very silent. Only she,
The gentle Nyssa with the weary heart
And broken feet, remain'd beside her dead,
And smooth'd his locks and pearl'd them with
her tears.

CEME AND CEONUS



ŒME AND ŒONUS

THE heart that holds no flaming face
enshrined.

Is like a temple whence the gods have fled
And taken music with them; mute, more mute
Than shells whose lips have never learn'd to
hymn

The low and subtle cadence of the sea.
Who loves is good; who is beloved is great,
As stars are great, and all fair things are good
That answer Nature's whispers, unashamed
To share the primal passion; undismay'd
Though all that is, goes, laughing, to the
grave.

But he that loves not, and is unbeloved,
Though on his path be strewn the roses' leaves
And all the air about him be a song,
Yet when he dies shall die unsatisfied,
And after death be hopeless and unhoused.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

THE sacrifice was over. To their homes
The women were returning; singing still
Their hymns in praise of Juno, bearing boughs
And peacocks' plumes. Their gentle song was like
The sound of rain at night-time, or the sweet
And gentle twitter of the nesting birds
When shadows close about them. On the air
Was faintly borne the thunder of the sea
That laved the sands of Argos; else no sound
Awoke the dreamy silence, or disturb'd
The temple of the goddess, now appeased.
In silent groups behind them walk'd the men,
Each stately as a marble which the wind
Hath touch'd and quicken'd into pulsing life.
Some young and beardless were, while others wore
The consciousness of manhood as a crown;
And others yet, as noble as the gods,
Whose whiten'd locks bespoke them privileged,
Bent rugg'd brows upon the springy earth
And ponder'd well what things appeal to age.
Thus o'er the hills where solemn cedars sway'd
In contemplation o'er the humbler flowers,
The people wander'd homeward, to the town
That lay asleep a mile or so away.
Behind the others, at a slower pace,
Conversing now and now considering,
Two men approach'd, whose modell'd faces
show'd

ŒEME AND ŒEONUS

Patrician birth and breeding. One was young,
ŒEonus, come from Athens, and the guest
Of Dion, lord of Argos, and his friend;
The other was that same lord's counsellor,
Mature in judgment, hesitant of praise.
Of sacrifice they argued, and the gods
Whose glory was departing, like the dawn
When day dispels its ghostly wonderment.
"The gods have been, the gods must ever be,"
ŒEonus said, with youth's assurety;
"And thou, my Colchis, when the obulii
Are laid upon those tired eyes of thine,
Shalt wish, perhaps, thou hadst been lenient,
And promised life to things that cannot die."
Thus half in jest and half in seriousness
He chid the other for his unbelief,
And roused him to replying: "Gods and men
Alike must pass, ŒEonus. Systems change,
As stars evanish from the firmament;
The things that are creations of a thought
Like thought itself are but impermanent.
The grass that springs to-day beneath thy feet
Is gone to-morrow, and thou followest;
And all thy dreams, ŒEonus, all thy hopes,
Desires and ambitions and regrets,
Are but as fragrance that a while lies sweet
Upon the silent air, and is no more.
The gods of Egypt and the gods of Greece

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Have served their purpose, made the dull mind
think,

The brain aware of something — say, the soul.
And now comes what? The Galilean said
His god is God, and would outlive all time.
I know not, and I care not. I am old.”

“No wonder thou art wearied! I am young,”
Æonus said, “and glad that faith is mine.
Therein the secret lies. If once I doubt,
Or am no more sincere, then am I old.

Believing not, thou playest but a part
And art two selves. At heart believing not,
Thy presence lends thy sanction to the things
Thy mind denies — the things thou deemest
false.

Believing not, these hours thou hast stood
And watch'd the rites that nothing mean to thee.
Thy lips have made responses; thou hast seen
The smoke arise to where dark Juno sits
And hears the wrongs of men; but in thy heart
Are doubt and mockery. I see not why
Thou goest daily to the sacrifice?”

“I go where Beauty is, where women are,”
The older man made answer. “I would live
Where things of dream can make the hour fair,
Where flowers, girls and music may be found.
I may no more believe; but I enjoy
The incense and the chanting; and to see

ŒEME AND ŒEONUS

The happy faces of our Grecian girls,
And hear the pleasing murmur of their song,
Is to be glad, as once I, too, was glad,
Yet free from all the turbulence of youth.
Thou still art young, ŒEonus; and to thee
These things seem strange, as strange that
youth must end

And Love pass, looking backward, to the dark.”

“Let Love abide the while I still am young,”

ŒEonus answer'd, “and I care not how
It comes or goes when age has sadden'd me.

But tell me thou, who knowest people here,
Who then was she that watch'd the sacrifice

With startled eyes, and ever stood alone;
A thing most white, a thing most maidenly;

A thing that seem'd unearthly, and a part
Of forests where no horn has ever blown?”

“Thus ends a dissertation on the gods!”

And Colchis laugh'd. “O dread divinity!

This worshiper of thine is treasonous

To turn from thee, immortal, luminous

Among Olympian splendors, to a maid

Whose simple grace reminds him of the dell

Unstartled by the winding of a horn!

ŒEonus, shame on thee! When I was young

The men of Athens —” “Were as now they are,”

ŒEonus answer'd. “Colchis, tease me not,

But tell me who this maiden is whose eyes

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Have fill'd my veins with fire. Who is she?"
"The ward of Dion, Ceme, just return'd
From Rome where she has relatives. This morn
The ship put in that bore her, and to-night
Thou shalt be seated next her at the feast."
"Be Venus praised that I to Argos came,"
The youth replied. "O Colchis, she is fair,
And this the first time is that I have loved!
Smile not thy doubt. No maid has look'd to me
As Ceme looks, and scores I might have won
In Athens, where we say they are most fair.
'Tis now six years since she who bore me went
Where go the flowers when their day is done,
And since that night no lips have clung to mine,
No hand has laid its blessing on my hair.
I dare not think that she might look at me.
Perhaps a lover drew her hence to Rome?
And yet, why stay'd she not? O Proserpine,
This fairest of thy flowers give to me;
Give now while yet the bloom is on her cheek,
While yet our dreams are holy. Never yet
These eyes of mine have seen so fair a maid,
And if I win her not I then shall die."
"Thou wilt not die, believe me," Colchis said,
And laid his hand upon the other's arm;
"One never dies of love unsatisfied,
But rather of the weariness thereof.
Whisper thy nothings in her shell-like ear

ŒEME AND ŒEONUS

And she will heed thee, and believe thee, too;
Thy back is broad, thy teeth are likewise white,
Thy father well-to-do. Why shouldst thou fear?
They say she thinks, and thought is a disease
Most fatal to a woman. Were I young
I would not think, ŒEonus; only love.
Who loves is mad, and with impassion'd gaze
Beholds the world through lattices of dream.
The dust to him is golden; silv'ry stars
Jewel the fragrant tresses of the night,
And heaven's eyes are azure. Silence is
To him sweet Music's sister, on whose lips
Is laid her rosy finger while she hears
The hymns that thrill, unheard of us, the air.
I would that I were young, that I might love.
If gods there be, or not,—leave that to fools,
Contenting thee with ŒEme, or the girl
Whose beauty makes the hour endurable.
A day or so, ŒEonus, thou art here
To make a little stir beneath the stars,
Or dream thy dream where brood the cypresses
That pity thee in silence; then the while
The stars smile on, and things inanimate
Endure the ravage of consuming years,
Thou, who hast toil'd, accomplish'd, even loved,
Art gather'd in by Death, and art forgot.
Content thee then with ŒEme, and be wise.
There are no teachers like a woman's lips,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Her heart hath more of wisdom than the seer;
And all our logic, all our argument
Persuades not half so fully as her arms.
But, see! The doves have flutter'd from our sight,
And thine has vanish'd with them. Thus the gods,
Created by some lover, love-denied,
Evanish when the heart attains its own!"
" 'Tis good for thee thou art not now in Rome,"
Æonus answer'd, gaily. "What a sight
To see my Colchis pinn'd upon a cross,
Or drawling to the lions of the gods!
'Tis said they fatten best on such as doubt,
And show peculiar fondness for a Greek;
But tell me now, the fair one being known,
And I assured of meeting her this night,
How fares it here in Argos with the sect
Professing Christus? We of Athens seem
One day to slaughter and the next to praise
The madman's converts; but the gods endure,
And soon the folly will outwear itself."
"Great truths have small beginnings," Colchis
said;
"And tyrants well may tremble at a seed."
Then look'd he seaward where a cloud appear'd
Above the far horizon. "Storm!" he said;
"But calm beyond. That calm they may not see
Who face to-day the lions or the cross
Yet tremble not. But Christus shall prevail,

ŒME AND ŒONUS

And all our gods be spoken of in jest.
In other years who knows but other gods
May take his place? It matters not to me,
For I shall long be sleeping. But to-day
The Christians fare not well; the populace
Has torn a score to pieces, so that he
Who serves the Cross keeps silent unless ask'd,
Then tells the truth, and suffers as a fool.
The deed once done, the populace permits,
As like as not, the body's burial
With Christian rites; thereby discovering
Who gives to God the homage due the gods.
An unknown man performs these services;
He claims he saw the Master, and as yet
He comes and goes unharm'd. I hear of him
But him I have not seen, nor heard his name.
Of late suspected Christians have been slain
By unknown hands, as though from out the dark
A vengeance smote them; and the end is not
For there are doubtless many in our midst,"
"And dost thou think our ancient gods are
doom'd?"

Œonus ask'd. "Yet I, lest that might be,
Would join the rabble and would ferret out
The ultimate offender, though my friend!"
"I praise thy zeal and wish I too were young,"
The older man replied. "But let us haste.
The storm moves swifter than our lagging feet;

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And should it burst before we reach the walls
The gods may wrack these ancient joints of mine
Until I cry for mercy. Youth, O Youth,
If thou wert mine I'd drop this breezy robe,
And race the tempest homeward; but, alas!
My running days are over, and I save
What breath I have to keep me from the tomb."

THEN bending low against the wind's rebuff
They struggled on in silence. Overhead,
The driven clouds were huddled each on each
And hung in purple menace o'er the hills;
But far at sea the purple turn'd to black,
And anger'd clouds look'd down on anger'd
waves

While snarl'd the winds between them. Suddenly
The air was silent, hot; and from the dark
A sword leap'd forth that split the swollen
skies;

And while the men stood panting at the gates,
The thunder roar'd above them, and the rain
Was pour'd upon the uncomplaining earth,
Upon the tossing bosom of the sea.

ŒME AND ŒONUS

THE storm was over, and the even star
Had long departed from its modest post
And led its sisters in their wanderings;
And all the air was cool and softly moist,
As though vast wings had touch'd the dripping
trees

And fann'd a fragrance o'er the gleaming earth.
For now the moon, the constant penitent,
Whose pallor tells the ages of her grief,
Had clear'd the mountains in her calm ascent
And spill'd her argent charm upon the fields.
More lonely than the furthest orb in space,
Above their pity and beyond their love,
Throughout unending æons she has climb'd
In hopeless quest the heaven's wind-swept stairs.
In hopeless quest; for she who loves the sun
Shall climb and climb and never reach to him,
Seeing, perhaps, the splendor of his hair
But never once the glory of his eyes.
O hapless moon, thou art not thus alone
In hopeless wooing. Thou, perchance, art loved
In stilly way by some unfading star,
Who in his turn is worship'd from afar
By one unnoticed blossom of the skies.
And we, who note thy pallid loveliness,
The while we tread the ways allotted us,
The puppets are of that same destiny

IDYLLS OF GREECE

That mocks the fiery longing of the spheres.
Some few there are that hope not overmuch,
And so creep on unnoticed; some that woo
The thing no god has envied, and are glad.
But he who loves the face that ever flares
Above all other faces, like a torch
Held high amid the blackness of the night,
Loves oft in vain; and till his day is done,
And stars peep down in pity at his dust,
From dawn till dark pursues a golden dream
Beyond him ever, and desired of all.

THE lanterns gleam'd beneath the portico
Of Dion's palace. If one outward stared
One saw the woods like moss upon the hills,
And then the sea, far rolling, and at peace
Beneath the glinting heavens. But below,
The eye met naught but awful emptiness,
As though the cliff, on which the palace stood,
Grew from the distant bowels of the earth
In sheer ascent terrifically straight.
For Dion was an eagle among men
And loved not much to mingle with the herd
That browse in level places. In his youth
He drew away from things that beckon'd them,
That made them shout their ill-bestow'd ap-
plause,
And learn'd what calm is link'd with solitude.

ŒME AND ŒONUS

Now growing old he weigh'd the byegone years
And what the gods might grant him, finding joy
In whoso came to see him, and in her
Who was his ward, and very beautiful.
This night, however, Dion had been sad,
Withdrawing from the music and the feast
While yet his guests made merry. As he left,
They held their brimming wine cups to their lips
And pledged him as a man will pledge a friend,
And then return'd to feasting and their dice.
But when the curtains veil'd him, Œme rose,
And, unobserved of all the revellers
Except Œonus, sought the portico
And there sat down. Her slave had followed her,
A white-skinn'd German from the Roman mart,
With eyes as blue as Œme's. Now she stood
Behind the bench of fragrant sandalwood
And loosed the coils that wound on Œme's brow
The golden glory of her silky hair.
And while she work'd, her mistress question'd her.
"Thou sayest that ye meet no more in caves
As here we do, and as they do in Rome?"
"No more in caves, my mistress, but beneath
The heaven's blue, where He, the Father, lives,
Or so the elders teach us. For myself
I sometimes think all gods are gather'd there
And live in peace; but they that teach say —
No god there is save one; and He that died

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The shameful death His Son is. 'This is truth.'
"The Truth it is," said Æme. "I believe!
And glad am I to say that I believe,
Because, believing this, I cannot die."
"But have a care, my mistress," said the slave,
"Lest they that hate and watch us strike thee
down.

This very morn an eye dwelt long on thee,
So coldly that I trembled. They that love
The olden gods will kill thee when they know
Thou art a Christian. Yea, we talk these
things

Who should not even whisper. Hear the oaths,
The songs at yonder table! They would tear
Thy flower-limbs in pieces did they guess
The secret that binds thee and me to God."
But Æme's eyes look'd seaward, and her
thoughts

Had left the stars behind them. "Dion lives,
And is the lord of Argos," she replied.
"If I am call'd, I shall not hesitate,
But step from out this pulsing vestiture,
Unfrighten'd by the splendor of the spheres,
To face the glory that is promised us.
And yet, I am not anxious to be call'd,
For life is sweet, the world is beautiful,
And he who sat beside me at the feast
Had eyes that hinted much I have not known.

ŒEME AND ŒONUS

If thou and I, and such a one as he,
Might dwell amid thy northern fastnesses
And worship God unhinder'd — But, be still!"
She whisper'd, rising, as a white-robed form
Appear'd upon the threshold. Then she spoke
As might a queen whose rights are overlook'd:
"Who shoulders thus his pathway through the
dusk,

And comes upon my presence unannounced?
Who art thou? Speak. I bid thee." "It is I,
Thy friend Œonus. Peace!" the voice replied,
As slowly he approach'd to where she stood.
"And peace to thee," said Œeme, sitting down
And waving Læna from her. But the youth
Stood silent at her shoulder, while she stared,
To gain her heart's composure, at the sea
And tried to think of other things than him.
And when she spoke, she mock'd him: "Thou
hast left

So soon my uncle's table that I fear
His cooks have lost their cunning. Sit thee down
On yonder bench and tell me, if thou wilt,
How Athens tempts her nobles. Dion said
He wish'd to please thee, for thou art his friend."
But heeding not her gentle raillery,
Œonus sat beside her. "From the hall
The glory had departed, and the charm,"
He answer'd; "and no longer could I bide

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Where music was, and feasting. Here is peace ;
And here, with thee and peace, I fain would be.
See how the dark enswathes the sleeping world,
And how from highest heaven tiny stars
Lean out and send us greeting! Yonder sea,
Whose surging sounds like distant cymbalry,
Has rock'd away its passion, and now lies
At rest beneath the melancholy moon.

The bird that twitter'd but an hour ago
Is sleeping now; but that poor nightingale,
Whose note awakes thy pity, has a heart
That suffers most at twilight; thus he sings
Eternally of sorrow, or of love."

"Unheard, perhaps, of her for whom the song
Is scatter'd on the silence," Ceme sigh'd;

"For that is life. Who sings must suffer, too;
Who loves must bear more burden than the
rest."

"Thou speakest sadly for a maid so young,"
Cæonus answer'd. "Is thy sorrow true,
Or but the fancied semblance of a grief?
For, if the one, the gods have been unkind,
And, if the other, thou dost wrong thyself."

"My mother died before I learn'd to smile,"
The girl replied, "and day has darker seem'd
Than night itself, when dreams might comfort
me."

"And hast thou lived in Argos all thy life?"

ŒEME AND ŒEONUS

ŒEonus ask'd. "My eyes first open'd here,
And here I heard the nightingale first sing,"
She answered, gazing seaward. "Many years
I heard his song, and wonder'd; now I know
The cause of all his musical distress."
Then was ŒEonus silent. In his heart
He knew this maid was sadder than her years,
But knew not why. Youth has no sympathy;
Youth lives, enjoys, but does not understand;
The solemn years, with what experience
May come with age, alone can sanctify,
Can make another's sorrow as our own.

AND while ŒEonus thus consider'd her
With eyes that found each feature in the
And wonder'd if to tell her of his love [gloom,
Were now to win her or forever lose,
She rose and led him to the parapet
That gave them safety from the black abyss,
And laid her arms along its liliated edge
And let her gaze dream downward to the dark.
"One sorrows not in Athens," she began;
"For life is there, and there one may forget
The consciousness of self, which frets and frets
To free itself from earthly circumstance
And, in a newer body, rise again.
But here in Argos, where alone I watch
Morn turn to noon, and day array itself

IDYLLS OF GREECE

In shades of ever deep'ning sombreness,
Always I seem expectant of a woe,
Always I hear a warning. Why is this?"
"Perhaps thou thinkest deeply, overmuch;"
Æonus answer'd, leaning to her hair
Which now enshrined within its golden haze
Her face's pallid beauty. "Athens says:
'Think not, but live. The now alone is thine;
The morrow, like the wind, is yet unborn.'
And Athens knows. For Athens has beheld
The birth and death of more philosophies
Than thou hast ever heard of. Rome itself
Gives heed to Athens' judgment; and from where
The jealous sea entones its thund'rous hymns
Along the amber'd ramparts of the North,
Down to the shifting deserts that surround
The glaring walls of burning Africa,
All faces turn to Athens, who has said:
'The gods exist; but ye must pass away.'"
"Thou art not just to Athens," she replied;
"And yet is Athens wrong." Then dreamily,
The while her gaze was fix'd upon the sea
And cheeks and brow paled white as ivory,
She chanted low her faith beneath the stars —
Oldest of all confessors, and most sad.
"The gods are not; the gods have never been;
One God there is, eternal, everywhere.
His Son was He whom men have crucified,

ŒEME AND ŒONUS

And He has died that all the world be saved.
In Him alone I trust; and I believe
That when I die I shall arise again,
As rise the flowers breathed upon by Spring,
To dwell with Him in heaven, and to be
Most happy then, though here that may not be.”

BUT while she spoke Œonus drew away
And stared at her in horror. “Thou!” he cried,
As though no ears might hearken but his own;
“So fair a thing! The thing more beautiful
Than dawn’s bright gold, or dews of even-tide!
Hear not, ye gods, the blasphemy of lips
That still should prattle at a mother’s side;
Hear not the foolish ravings of a child
Who knows not yet the meaning of her words.
O ye that fling misfortunes in our midst,
That wreak your vengeance on the thing ye
 hate,
Heed not the words of her, for she is young,
And she shall praise ye yet. O hear her not!”
But she, while yet he spoke, confronted him
With widen’d eyes and arms that form’d a cross
Upon her heaving bosom. But no more
He thought to woo and win her. She had
 scorn’d
The gods whose wrath no mortal might with-
 stand,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The gods who notice all things, 'all things hear;
And all he thought of was to win her back
To ways that promised safety for herself.
And though her eyes betray'd her love for him,
And on her lips unutter'd longing lay,
He saw it not, but strove to reason her
With broken speech as bitter as a cry.
"Thou art too young, O Ceme, to deny
The things our greybeards doubt not. This
new creed

Has caught thy maiden fancy, with the Cross —
Renunciation's symbol — and a dream
Of heaven with its everlasting bliss.
Our gods more gracious are; they bid enjoy,
The while we live, all things the world affords —
The soil-scent and the sunset, hymns of birds,
The dawnburst and the utterance of winds.
To rise while yet the grass is scintillant
And watch the shadows shorten on the hills,
To see the glory spread across the fields
And hear the lark's clear treble wake the air;
And more than all, O Ceme, the delight
Of pure companionship at eventide
When flowers close, and stars come, one by one,
To mourn day's solemn passing — these are
things
Of more account than all the promised joys
That lure thy spirit to the mocking grave.

ŒME AND ŒONUS

The gods are close about us. In the wind
Is heard their laughter, and the stirring leaves
Have seen a presence hid from mortal eyes;
Their glory is reflected in the stars;
And not a glade but one has linger'd there
Whose burnish'd hair is brighter than the beams
That spread themselves upon his mossy couch.
Doubt not the gods, O Œme. Thou and I
Must pass to shade and silence; but the gods,
Unmindful of our whispers or our sighs,
Shall see this fretful world outwear itself.”
But Œme laid her finger on his lips,
Then turn'd from him her eyes away, and said:
“Thy thought is not my thought, nor is thy way
The way whereon my weary feet must tread.
Someday, perchance, the Truth may lead thee up
To where I stand and wait thee. Now, farewell;
Farewell, Œonus, whom I wish the best.
Thou knowest well the thought within my heart,
And night and day my prayers shall rise for thee
To Him who listens at the lattices
That open to the sorrow of the world.
Bend now thy head. Upon thy brow I place
My lips, which no man yet has ever touch'd,
And seal thee thus to Him throughout all time.”
And he said naught, but stood with bended head
Before the maid, until her gentle voice
Disturb'd again his spirit's revery.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

“Farewell, Æonus; thou must leave me now,”
She said at last, and look’d no more at him;
“Behold! the dawn is glowing. In the east
The sky is like the bosom of a dove,
All grey and crimson; and the sea begins
To move and moan beneath the changing
heav’ns.

And, hark! From depths the eye can never
pierce

A bird has flung its note against the sky
To greet the spreading glory. In thy soul
May peace abide; and may the holy Light,
As grows yon crimson promise of the day,
There glow and brighten till thou see’st God.”

WHEN Colchis met Æonus at the baths
He asked the youth of Æme. “She is
fair,”

Was all he said, and turn’d his head away,
And watch’d the swimmers in the crystal pool.
Then Colchis knew the night had not sufficed
To win her from the lure of maidenhood,
And wonder’d why, but spoke of her no more.
Only his mind was troubled; for it seem’d
That day there was a menace in the air

ŒEME AND ŒEONUS

As though the gods were anger'd, and would
strike,

Yet knew not whom to mark for sacrifice.

Again a storm was nearing, and the while

The men were resting in the cool retreat,

The distant thunder rumbled, and the slaves

Perform'd their tasks with faces pale with fear.

"It is the Christians, master," mutter'd one;

"They hate our gods, whose wrath on us descends,

'Tis said they slaughter children. In the night

They meet in caves, though where we know not yet

Or it were easy to be rid of them."

But Colchis bade the frighten'd herd begone.

"I know not why the gods created them,"

He said when they had left them to themselves.

"They look like men, yet act as might the

beasts.

The Romans say the people have the heart;

But these same people, brutes possessing speech,

Would tear apart the agèd or the young

In superstitious fury, then would laugh.

Despise the herd, ŒEonus. Choose the best,

The fair, the favored, and the fortunate;

Abide with them, and let the rabble bark

Without thy palace gates. A destiny

Ordain'd their rags and rages. Heed them not."

"But Christus seem'd to hold another faith,"

ŒEonus mused, recalling ŒEme's words.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

“He died, O Colchis, in behalf of all;
And though I hold him to have been insane,
The thought is worthy — Nay, it troubles me
To argue things for scholars to decide.”

“Or fools, Æonus,” said the older man.

“But, come! The morn is passing, and as yet
We have not watch’d the people on the street.
Perhaps there is a maid more beautiful
Than she who caught thy fancy yesterday;
Thou knowest well the rose that bloom’d this
morn

Is fairer than the rose a little blown!”

THEN pass’d they slowly down the marble
steps

And join’d the laughing idlers. Here and there
The stately greybeards, robed in spotless white,
Conversed apart, or weigh’d with eyes that knew
Too well the hour’s folly, youth and life,
And thank’d the gods that they at last were old.
Maidens on foot with roses in their hair,
And scented women borne by stalwart slaves
In silk-lined litters; soldiers, copper-helm’d,
Their chests enclosed in burnish’d, dinted brass;
Strangers from Rome, aloof, contemptuous,
Wan priests and flower vendors — earnest all,
As on a thousand dusty thoroughfares
Has moved the doom’d procession to the grave.

ŒME AND ŒONUS

AMID the throng one walk'd who scann'd
each face

With eyes that burn'd beneath projecting brows
Like Ætna's awful fires; one who seem'd
Less man than spirit manifest in man,
Intense, impassion'd. In a robe of brown,
Whose tatter'd edge reveal'd his sandal'd feet,
His frame was hidden, and his tangled hair
Fell ruddy to his bosom like a flame.

And those at whom he stared, stared back at him
With vague concern, and cheeks that sometimes
paled,

And ask'd each other if they knew this man
Whose eyes were all a-flame, whose presence
seem'd

Reproof to laughter. But none knew him there.

And as the lightning's menace is forgot
When once the storm is over, so these men
Forgot his eyes as soon as he was gone,
And laugh'd again as though he had not been.
But Colchis, who was leaning with his friend
Beside a statue of the piping Pan,
Had laugh'd when ask'd if he the stranger
knew,

And shrugg'd his shoulders. "I! I know him not,
As like as not a madman from the hills,"

He answer'd, as Œonus watch'd the man
Thread his swift way among the gaping crowd.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

“ He stares at us, Æonus. Have a care
Lest dreams torment thy slumber, or the bats
Drive sleep itself this night away from thee.”
But only for one instant as he pass’d
He eyed the older man, then bent his brows
Upon Æonus — stared and disappear’d
As though the human tide had swallow’d him.
“ He look’d as if he knew of things to come,”
Æonus said. “ He seemed to read my thoughts,
In one quick second delving to my soul
And mastering my secrets. Let us haste
And see if we can find him. He may be
A fortune teller from the distant Nile,
One who has practised rites unknown to us,
And wise is in the mysteries of stars.”
But Colchis laugh’d and linger’d. “ Nay,” he
said;

“ The man is gone, and knows far less of thee
Than thou of him; there let this matter rest.
What man can read the story of his life,
How, then, can tell another’s? Ere to-night
Thou shalt forget the fellow, with his eyes
That seem’d to burn because thou art a-fire
With love already!” But while yet he spoke
The street was in an uproar, and a slave
With bloody hands ran shouting through their
midst:

“ Another dead! Take notice, O ye gods,

ŒEME AND ŒONUS

I slew the Christian that the curse might fall
From off our backs — the Christian with the eyes
That glow'd like fire, and that glow no more.”
And while the people roar'd like hungry beasts,
And surged to hurl their curses at the corpse,
Œonus hid his face within his hands.

But Colchis eyed the women. “It is naught;
An unknown man, a Christian, too,” he said
And beat the dust from off his purple robe;
“The slaves must have their sport or they might
hunt

Our precious selves, Œonus. Come! 'Tis noon.
At home fresh fruit is waiting, and a wine
To cool thy fever'd pulses. Rhodope,
My perfect slave, has learn'd new songs of late.
Her voice is softer, for she loves the knave
I sent to thee in Athens. Come! my throat
Is parch'd, Œonus, like the Libyan waste.”

THAT self-same morning Œeme and her slave
Had stray'd within their garden. All the night
She lay awake, and heard the nightingales
Remind her of her sorrow and their own.
And erst when light laid soft its bless'd hand
Upon the dewy beauty of the world,
She fell asleep to dream in troubled wise
Of him who was her love and her lament.
She dream'd it was the Judgment Day, and she

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Had risen from a flower-cover'd grave
To soar through endless pearly distances
To where perfection glisten'd. There she stood,
A white-robed, wingèd wonder, and beheld
From out the blue profundity ascend
Unending rows of angels. And the while
She watch'd this vast ascension, there arose
A Voice, proclaiming judgment; such a voice
As might resound were all four winds to blow
Through some terrific cavern, trumpet-wise.
And one by one the new-arisen heard
The words that doom'd to heaven or to hell
Their swaying souls; yet woe, alike with bliss,
So utter was that silently they rose
To dwell in light or sank to punishment,
And naught was heard except the Voice itself,
Dispassionate and clear. And soon she heard
Æonus summon'd from the azure void;
And though she stretch'd her arms across to him,
And call'd his name as one might breathe a
prayer,
Her hope was shatter'd when the Voice intoned
His spirit's long damnation. Then she woke.
And all that morn she walk'd with Misery
Among her roses, on whose petals gleam'd
The dew that hints of flower tragedies
Beyond our understanding. All that is
Must suffer sometime, sometime must be glad;

ÆME AND ÆONUS

Each tree and stone, each meteor flung afar,
The shrouded Poles and seas that surge between,
And all the hills that swell beneath the sun
Must pay the price of life, and consciousness.
But Æme knew this not. 'Twas she alone
Who seem'd to bear the burden of the world;
For she was young, and youth must pass away
Before one learns how all are heirs to grief.
When Læna heard the dream, she trembled too:
"If this Æonus loves thee," she began,
"He will abjure these hated gods of Greece
And cleave to thine, and thee. Love reasons not,
Love questions not at all. Love only sees
The light in the Belovèd, and the good.
If sure thou art he loves thee, grieve no more;
For that same light which burns within thine
eyes

Will lead him from his darkness; and, at last,
When sounds the Voice in judgment, thou and he
In other gardens resting place shall find."
"I would that it were so," the girl replied,
And bent above her roses. "Would that we,
He, thou and I, might leave this smiling Greece,
Where life is for the moment, like a dream,
And go where brood the fir trees and the pine.
The sunshine here oppresses. Day and night
The ghostly eyes of spectral deities,
Remember'd yet, although no more enthron'd,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Peer out upon our striving, mocking us
Who lift our hands to Him who is unseen.
The northern air is purer. I would know
The hush of solemn forests, and the peace
That trembles down from starry stillnesses
And seems like benediction. There the faith
Grows strong and sure, as thrives the mountain
flower

Amid the snows; there men keep faith with men,
And woman is their helper, not a gem
That's worn a while to show its costliness
And wake the envy of the gaping crowd.
I would that we might dwell there. Would that he
Were mine, my soul's! Ah, would that he and I
In one belief, in one sublimest trust,
Together trod the path that leads to God!"
"All this shall be," the slave said, "if he loves.
But, see! The gathered roses in thine arms
Are all athirst and wilting. There to die
Might please, perhaps, Æonus; they would live
To be with thee the longer. Let us haste
And seek the shelter'd coolness of thy porch
Before their cheeks grow paler than thine own."

THERE Læna tempted Æeme with the fruit
That morning gather'd in the market place—
Peaches and figs and luscious pomegranates,
And swollen grapes — until the noon was past,

ŒME AND ŒONUS

Then fann'd her slowly till she fell asleep
And heeded not the mutter of the storm.
And while she slept, the slave peer'd dreamily
With eyes of northern softness down the gulf,
Wherein the trees now look'd like tiny blooms,
So far were they, so very far beneath.
And snapping one cool lily from its stalk
She idly dropp'd it in the sheer abyss,
And saw it vanish like a tiny star
A-down the depths, to lose itself amid
The shadows and the silence. Then she turn'd
And watch'd her mistress who was still asleep.

THE storm was passing hillward. From the sea
In wayward gusts the wind blew fragrantly
And teased the curling tendrils of the vines;
It set the leaves a-tremble, smoothed the grain
In darken'd circling patches, and at last
Was lost among the forests on the hills.
Afar at sea the tilted fishing boats
Sail'd to and fro like gaily-plumaged birds,
And, one by one, came skimming to the shore,
Where now the women chatter'd. But the slave
Gazed only at her mistress, at the pale,
Sweet face of her — the face of ivory
Encircled by its golden aureole,—
And croon'd the while a northern lullabye
Of firs and snow and dancing fairyfolk,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And stars that watch'd from palaces of dream
The heads of sleepy children. Then she rose
To waken Œeme, for the hour had come
To hear the poor of Argos, and adjust,
As best she might, the wants that burden'd them.
And while they laugh'd together at the sleep
That lurk'd behind her lashes, and essay'd
To bind the sandals to her arching feet,
A slave appear'd whom Œeme bade approach.
And kneeling down he offer'd her a rose
To which was tied, with purple cord, a scroll,
All smooth and scented, and thereon she read —
The seal now broken and the man dismiss'd —
In golden letters: “I would come this night
To ask thee much, perchance to tell thee more
Than thou mayst dream. So if thou pityest
Thy friend Œonus, in thy blessèd hair
Wear thou this rose that at the feast his heart
May not be heavy as it is this noon.”
“‘To ask thee much, perchance to tell thee more
Than thou may'st dream,’” she whisper'd to
herself,
The scented roll a-tremble on her breast;
“‘So if thou pityest . . . thy blessèd hair . . .
Wear thou this rose . . . his heart.’ O Læna,
pray
He may be saved; that Light may come to him.
He says ‘to-night’; he fain would come to-night;

ŒME AND ŒONUS

But dare I face his shining eyes so soon —
Those eyes that made me think of Paradise? ”
“ He loves thee,” Læna answer’d. “ Wear his
rose! ”

AND all who ask’d that afternoon
received ;
Not one but left the palace comforted ;
Not one but bless’d her as she gave to them,
With words of cheer, the things they could not
buy.

For Œeme now was happy, happier
To dwell awhile in sweet uncertainty,
Than all to know, and thus to yearn no more.
She knew that he was soon to come to her
For aid, for consolation ; and although
His scented scroll contain’d no words of love,
No soft suggestion of a heart’s unrest,
His soul seem’d now awaken’d, and to her
His soul was more than his belovèd heart.
And all the while the slave attired her
She held the rose, his rose, a-close her lips
And kiss’d its fragrant crimson. “ Gentle
rose, ”

She whisper’d to it softly : “ Would o’er me
His lips had hover’d as they have o’er thine.
Would that these curving petals might reveal
The secrets of the sender ; then, perchance,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The very stars might sing for me this night,
And all the skies be golden till the end.
I kiss thee, thus, to charm thee into speech.
And yet, be silent, rose; for he will tell,
In God's good time, the things my heart would
hear

If aught's to tell. If not — God pity me!
Ah, gentle rose, I place thee in my hair
That he may see thee, and perhaps may know
My soul is heavy while his own is sad.
And rose, sweet rose, perhaps this night of
nights,

When I have lit the greater Light in him,
His eyes may turn to mine; and reading there
The olden love, may fold me in his arms
The while I weep a little. Then, dear rose,
His lips again shall bend o'er thee and me,
And thou be ever consecrate to both.
And if the solemn dawn beholds me stand
Where now I stand, alone, and very pale,
Thou still shalt be my comfort through the
years,

For thou hast heard my secret, lovely rose!"
And then amid the glory of her hair
She placed the crimson beauty, and beheld
Its faint reflection in the polish'd steel.
For it was even now. Upon the hills
The shadows slowly lengthen'd, and the dusk

ŒEME AND ŒONUS

Descended softly on the resting world
To guard its sacred slumber. From the skies
The clouds had long departed, leaving Peace
To rule in heav'n, and greet the gentle stars.
The woods were very silent, for the birds
Awaited now, in nests or on the boughs,
The nightingale, the priestess of the night,
To shrive them and commend them to the dark.
Only the sea, whose restless hands have waved
The pitying Sleep for evermore away,
Still rock'd itself beneath the purpling skies
And moan'd its grief eterne. But Œeme heard
No sound except the voices of the dusk,
Insistent, sweet, until a slave appear'd
To say the feast was ready. Then she smiled,
And, touching once the rose within her hair,
Stepp'd, glorious and golden, to the hall.

“ AND art thou happy now?” Œonus
asked,

When he had kiss'd the cross she offer'd him,
And placed it in his bosom. “Is thy heart
At rest, O Œeme, now our faith is one?”
But she said naught, but gazed most wistfully
Upon the dark, wherein bright splendors
whirl'd
And gemm'd the reaches of infinity.
For now they sat beneath the portico

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Enhalo'd by the grave and holy night,
Alone, and somewhat weary. She had told
The tale of her conversion, and the hope
That lit the misty borderland of death
Now life eternal had been promised her.
And then she placed his dread divinities,
Incestuous and vengeful, blood-imbrued,
Against the pale and gentle-hearted Christ,
And bade him choose. And he, remembering
The weariness of Colchis, and his doubt,
And all the utter emptiness of life,
Left her a while and look'd upon the night,
The restless sea and the eternal stars.
And standing thus his soul awoke in him
And error fell from off him as a robe.
And, going back, he said no word but knelt
Beside her seat, and on his raven hair
She laid her hands and bless'd him. "In His
Name

I now receive thee, until one shall come
To seal thee with the water. Peace to thee."
And then they rose together, and again
They lean'd against the marble barrier,
And heard soft whispers wake the fragrant
night

Suggesting things immortal. And at last
Because she answer'd not, but look'd away
From where his dark eyes hunger'd, he grew bold

ŒEME AND ŒONUS

And laid his lips upon her trembling hand,
And like a flame his passion master'd him.
"To-night it seems I stand on holy ground,"
He whisper'd, drawing nearer. "From above
Mysterious faces watch us, and below
Voices of utter sweetness fill the dark.
And thou art in their midst, as hangs the rose
Between the soil's warm fragrance and the sun.
Before I knew thee I was but of clay;
To me all things were dust, fair shapes that
 pass'd
From beauty to corruption, and the grave
Awaited all and was not satisfied.
There was no promise in the burst of dawn,
No solace in the sunset; in the storm
The anger'd gods rebuked unhoping men,
And menace gloom'd above them in the night.
I had not known life's meaning but for thee;
For now I am awaken'd from a sleep
Wherein all beauty was a thing of dream,
To find the world more lovely than before,
And hints of heaven in thy countenance.
This new Œonus is thy handiwork,
This new Œonus owes his life to thee;
And now on thee his eyes would ever rest
As thine now rest upon the starry spheres
That light the highways leading up to God."
So close he lean'd, his breath disturb'd her hair

IDYLLS OF GREECE

That glisten'd in the moonlight. And her face
Was pale within its halo, like the face
That shimmers in an unsubstantial dream
And is the more desired. Closer still
Æonus lean'd, awaiting word or look
That she had heard, or that she pitied him.
And still she answer'd not, but on her lips
Peace laid her soothing finger, and she smiled.
It seem'd as though a love from far away,
A spirit love, supremely delicate,
Was pleading at the portal of her heart
And soon she must admit it; but as yet
She gave no sign, but let the voice plead on
Impassion'd now, and vibrant like a harp.
" My life I owe to thee, and thee I need,
O Æeme, my Belovèd. Light thou art,
And Love itself, and lacking thee I die!
I love thee, Æeme! Thou art lovelier
Than aught created, lovelier than she
Whose whiteness was the woe of fated Troy.
Thy beauty is the pearl's; thou art more fair
Than she whose feet fly softly o'er the hills
While yet the dews are gleaming; in thine eyes
The heaven's blue is mirror'd, and its peace.
I love thee, Æeme! At the sacrifice
I loved thee first, and ask'd thy holy name.
I loved thee when I saw thee at the feast
And when I met thee on thy portico.

ŒEME AND ŒEONUS

I loved thee when my gods were scorn'd of thee,
And when I fear'd that on thy blessèd head
Their curses would assemble. Now the more
I love thee, Œeme, who hast shown me God
And placed my feet upon the upward stair.
This soul thou hast awaken'd — it is thine;
This heart that throbs so wildly beats for thee;
So heart and soul I lay at thy dear feet —
I love thee, Œeme; tell me, lov'st thou me?"

A LITTLE while she waited, that his words
Might slowly steep her being with their charm
And fragrance it for ever; then she turn'd
Her soft gaze slowly from the gleaming stars
And let her eyes dream evermore in his.
And he said naught, but clasp'd her to his
breast,
And trembled lest those eyes should turn away
To comfort find amid the spheres that whirl'd
Triumphantly in heaven. But no more
She gazed at things deem'd beautiful before;
No more she thought of aught except the dream
That comes but once and fades so soon away.
And when she spoke her voice was like the
sound
Of children's voices when they pray at eve —
Most tender and most trustful, unafraid:
"I love thee, dear Œeonus; and to thee

IDYLLS OF GREECE

I give my heart and my immortal soul
For ever and for ever. I am thine."

AND there she stood, alone, when overhead
The golden-footed morning, luminous
With splendid dreams, hopes unattainable
And glorious desires, warm'd the skies.
Her face was turn'd to where the glowing East
Was pregnant with its promise. And it seem'd
Æonus still was with her, still she heard
The words that told her soul she was belov'd —
The gentle wind reminded of his breath.
From out the velvet softness of the woods
Suggested music trembled; songs of birds
But half-awake, and isolated notes
Of feather'd lovers woke the stillness
That hung in benediction o'er the world.
Beneath, the city slumber'd; dream'd its dreams
And sigh'd in sleep as dreamers ever sigh;
While here and there men woke, nor dream'd
again,
For day to them meant toil and weariness.
But o'er their heads, beneath the portico
Whose lilies now were slowly opening
In answer to the fond, caressive light,
The girl still linger'd; seemingly aware
That maidenhood was passing, giving way
To something finer, as the perfect chord

ŒEME AND ŒONUS

Is more harmonious than the single note.
And standing there she dream'd perhaps the
dreams
Pale Mary dream'd, whose promise was the
world's;
And dreaming, she was happy; for our dreams
Are life as we could make it, did we dare
To force the hand of fickle Circumstance
To serve and not to rule us. All alone
She stood there dreaming. In her hand a rose,
His rose, their rose, was drooping to its death
Unmindful of its mistress, heeding not
The way she press'd its beauty to her heart
As though it were her lover. And the dawn,
Unfolding in the heavens, now was like
A perfect, golden flower; west and east
The dark had vanish'd, and at last the sun
Flung its first beam across the waken'd sea,
And in the vault of heaven it was day.
Then Œeme placed the rose within her breast
And whisp'ring once the name made consecrate,
The name that was for her more musical
Then all the skiey voices of the stars,
Amid the growing glory knelt in prayer.





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