EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA,

AND

OTHER POEMS.
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EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA,

AND

OTHER POEMS.

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Σοφώτατον, χρόνος, ανευρίσκει γὰρ πάντα.
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EMPEDOCLES
ON ETNA.
ADEIMTIC POEM.
PERSONS.

Empedocles.

Pausanias, a Physician.

Callicles, a young Harp-player.

The Scene of the Poem is on Mount Etna; at first in the forest region, afterwards on the summit of the mountain.
EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA.

FIRST ACT: FIRST SCENE.

A Pass in the forest region of Etna. Morning.

CALLICLES, alone, resting on a rock by the path.

CALLICLES.

The mules, I think, will not be here this hour.
They feel the cool wet turf under their feet
By the stream side, after the dusty lanes
In which they have toil'd all night from Catana,
And scarcely will they budge a yard. O Pan!
How gracious is the mountain at this hour!
A thousand times have I been here alone
Or with the revellers from the mountain towns,
But never on so fair a morn:—the sun
Is shining on the brilliant mountain crests,
And on the highest pines: but further down
Here in the valley is in shade; the sward
Is dark, and on the stream the mist still hangs:
One sees one's foot-prints crush'd in the wet grass,
One's breath curls in the air; and on these pines
That climb from the stream's edge, the long grey tufts,
Which the goats love, are jewell'd thick with dew.
Here will I stay till the slow litter comes.
I have my harp too—that is well.—Apollo!
What mortal could be sick or sorry here?
I know not in what mind Empedocles,
Whose mules I follow'd, may be coming up,
But if, as most men say, he is half mad
With exile, and with brooding on his wrongs,
Pausanias, his sage friend, who mounts with him,
Could scarce have lighted on a lovelier cure.
The mules must be below, far down: I hear
Their tinkling bells, mix'd with the song of birds,
Rise faintly to me—now it stops!—Who's here?
Pausanias! and on foot? alone?

PAUSANIAS.

And thou, then?

I left thee supping with Pisianax,
With thy head full of wine, and thy hair crown'd,
Touching thy harp as the whim came on thee,
And prais'd and spoil'd by master and by guests
Almost as much as the new dancing girl.
Why hast thou follow'd us?

CALLICLES.

The night was hot,
And the feast past its prime: so we slipp'd out,
Some of us, to the portico to breathe:
Pisianax, thou know'st, drinks late: and then,
As I was lifting my soil'd garland off,
I saw the mules and litter in the court,
And in the litter sate Empedocles;
Thou, too, wert with him. Straightway I sped home; I saddled my white mule, and all night long Through the cool lovely country follow'd you, Pass'd you a little since as morning dawn'd, And have this hour sate by the torrent here, Till the slow mules should climb in sight again. And now?

PAUSANIAS.

And now, back to the town with speed. Crouch in the wood first, till the mules have pass'd: They do but halt, they will be here anon. Thou must be viewless to Empedocles; Save mine, he must not meet a human eye. One of his moods is on him that thou know'st: I think, thou would'st not vex him.

CALLICLES.

No—and yet I would fain stay and help thee tend him: once He knew me well, and would oft notice me. And still, I know not how, he draws me to him,
And I could watch him with his proud sad face,
His flowing locks and gold-encircled brow
And kingly gait, for ever: such a spell
In his severe looks, such a majesty
As drew of old the people after him,
In Agrigentum and Olympia,
When his star reign'd, before his banishment,
Is potent still on me in his decline.
But oh, Pausanias, he is chang'd of late:
There is a settled trouble in his air
Admits no momentary brightening now;
And when he comes among his friends at feasts,
'Tis as an orphan among prosperous boys.
Thou know'st of old he loved this harp of mine,
When first he sojourn'd with Pisianax:
He is now always moody, and I fear him;
But I would serve him, soothe him, if I could,
Dar'd one but try.

PAUSANIAS.

Thou wert a kind child ever.
He loves thee, but he must not see thee now.
Thou hast indeed a rare touch on thy harp,
He loves that in thee too: there was a time
(But that is pass'd) he would have paid thy strain
With music to have drawn the stars from heaven.
He has his harp and laurel with him still,
But he has laid the use of music by,
And all which might relax his settled gloom.
Yet thou mayst try thy playing if thou wilt,
But thou must keep unseen: follow us on,
But at a distance; in these solitudes,
In this clear mountain air, a voice will rise,
Though from afar, distinctly: it may soothe him.
Play when we halt, and when the evening comes,
And I must leave him, (for his pleasure is
To be left musing these soft nights alone
In the high unfrequented mountain spots,)
Then watch him, for he ranges swift and far,
Sometimes to Etna's top, and to the cone;
But hide thee in the rocks a great way down,
And try thy noblest strains, my Callieles,
With the sweet night to help thy harmony.
Thou wilt earn my thanks sure, and perhaps his.

CALLICLES.

More than a day and night, Pausanias,
Of this fair summer weather, on these hills,
Would I bestow to help Empedocles.
That needs no thanks: one is far better here
Than in the broiling city in these heats.
But tell me, how hast thou persuaded him
In this his present fierce, man-hating mood
To bring thee out with him alone on Etna?

PAUSANIAS.

Thou hast heard all men speaking of Panthea,
The woman who at Agrigentum lay
Thirty long days in a cold trance of death,
And whom Empedocles call'd back to life.
Thou art too young to note it, but his power
Swells with the swelling evil of this time,
And holds men mute to see where it will rise.
He could stay swift diseases in old days,
Chain madmen by the music of his lyre,
Cleanse to sweet airs the breath of poisonous streams,
And in the mountain chinks inter the winds.
This he could do of old, but now, since all
Clouds and grows daily worse in Sicily,
Since broils tear us in twain, since this new swarm
Of Sophists has got empire in our schools,
Where he was paramount, since he is banish'd,
And lives a lonely man in triple gloom,
He grasps the very reins of life and death.
I ask'd him of Panthea yesterday,
When we were gather'd with Pisianax,
And he made answer, I should come at night
On Etna here, and be alone with him,
And he would tell me, as his old, tried friend,
Who still was faithful, what might profit me;
That is, the secret of this miracle.
CALLICLES.

Bah! Thou a doctor? Thou art superstitious.
Simple Pausanias, 'twas no miracle.
Panthea, for I know her kinsmen well,
Was subject to these trances from a girl.
Empedocles would say so, did he deign:
But he still lets the people, whom he scorns,
Gape and cry wizard at him, if they list.
But thou, thou art no company for him,
Thou art as cross, as sour'd as himself.
Thou hast some wrong from thine own citizens,
And then thy friend is banish'd, and on that
Straightway thou fallest to arraign the times,
As if the sky was impious not to fall.
The Sophists are no enemies of his;
I hear, Gorgias, their chief, speaks nobly of him,
As of his gifted master and once friend.
He is too scornful, too high-wrought, too bitter.
'Tis not the times, 'tis not the Sophists vex him:
There is some root of suffering in himself,
Some secret and unfollow'd vein of woe,
Which makes the times look black and sad to him.
Pester him not in this his sombre mood
With questionings about an idle tale,
But lead him through the lovely mountain paths,
And keep his mind from preying on itself,
And talk to him of things at hand and common,
Not miracles: thou art a learned man,
But credulous of fables as a girl.

PAUSANIAS.

And thou, a boy whose tongue outruns his knowledge,
And on whose lightness blame is thrown away.
Enough of this: I see the litter wind
Up by the torrent-side, under the pines.
I must rejoin Empedocles. Do thou
Crouch in the brush-wood till the mules have pass'd,
Then play thy kind part well. Farewell till night.
SCENE SECOND

Noon.  A Glen on the highest skirts of the woody region of Etna.

Empedocles.  Pausanias.

Pausanias.

The noon is hot: when we have cross'd the stream We shall have left the woody tract, and come Upon the open shoulder of the hill. See how the giant spires of yellow bloom Of the sun-loving gentian, in the heat, Are shining on those naked slopes like flame. Let us rest here: and now, Empedocles, Panthea's history.  

[A harp note below is heard.

Empedocles.

Hark! what sound was that
Rose from below? If it were possible,
And we were not so far from human haunt,
I should have said that some one touch’d a harp.
Hark! there again!

PAUSANIAS.

'Tis the boy Callicles,
The sweetest harp player in Catana.
He is for ever coming on these hills,
In summer, to all country festivals,
With a gay revelling band: he breaks from them
Sometimes, and wanders far among the glens.
But heed him not, he will not mount to us;
I spoke with him this morning. Once more, therefore,
Instruct me of Panthea’s story, Master,
As I have pray’d thee.

EMPEDOCLES.

That? and to what end?

PAUSANIAS.

It is enough that all men speak of it.
But I will also say, that, when the Gods
Visit us as they do with sign and plague,
To know those spells of time that stay their hand
Were to live free’d from terror.

EMPEDOCLES.

Spells? Mistrust them.

Mind is the spell which governs earth and heaven.
Man has a mind with which to plan his safety.
Know that, and help thyself.

PAUSANIAS.

But thy own words?

"The wit and counsel of man was never clear,
Troubles confuse the little wit he has."
Mind is a light which the Gods mock us with,
To lead those false who trust it.

[The harp sounds again.

EMPEDOCLES.

Hist! once more!

Listen, Pausanias!—Ay, ’tis Callicles:
I know those notes among a thousand. Hark!
CALLICLES sings unseen, from below.

The track winds down to the clear stream,
To cross the sparkling shallows: there
The cattle love to gather, on their way
To the high mountain pastures, and to stay,
Till the rough cow-herds drive them past,
Knee-deep in the cool ford: for 'tis the last
Of all the woody, high, well-water'd dells
On Etna; and the beam
Of noon is broken there by chestnut boughs
Down its steep verdant sides: the air
Is freshen'd by the leaping stream, which throws
Eternal showers of spray on the moss'd roots
Of trees, and veins of turf, and long dark shoots
Of ivy-plants, and fragrant hanging bells
Of hyacinths, and on late anemones,
That muffle its wet banks: but glade,
And stream, and sward, and chestnut trees,
End here: Etna beyond, in the broad glare
Of the hot noon, without a shade,
Slope behind slope, up to the peak, lies bare;
The peak, round which the white clouds play.

In such a glen, on such a day,
On Pelion, on the grassy ground,
Chiron, the aged Centaur, lay;
The young Achilles standing by.
The Centaur taught him to explore
The mountains: where the glens are dry,
And the tir’d Centaurs come to rest,
And where the soaking springs abound,
And the straight ashes grow for spears,
And where the hill-goats come to feed,
And the sea-eagles build their nest.
He show’d him Phthia far away,
And said—O Boy, I taught this lore
To Peleus, in long distant years.—
He told him of the Gods, the stars,
The tides:—and then of mortal wars,
And of the life that Heroes lead
Before they reach the Elysian place
And rest in the immortal mead:
And all the wisdom of his race.

[The music below ceases, and Empedocles speaks,
 accompanying himself in a solemn manner on
 his harp.]

The howling void to span
A cord the Gods first slung,
And then the Soul of Man
There, like a mirror, hung,
And bade the winds through space impel the gusty toy.

Hither and thither spins
The wind-borne mirroring Soul:
A thousand glimpses wins,
And never sees a whole:
Looks once, and drives elsewhere, and leaves its last employ.
The Gods laugh in their sleeve
To watch man doubt and fear,
Who knows not what to believe
Where he sees nothing clear;
And dares stamp nothing false where he finds nothing sure.

Is this, Pausanias, so?
And can our souls not strive,
But with the winds must go
And hurry where they drive?
Is Fate indeed so strong, man's strength indeed so poor?

I will not judge: that man,
Howbeit, I judge as lost,
Whose mind allows a plan
Which would degrade it most:
And he treats doubt the best who tries to see least ill.
Be not, then, Fear's blind slave.
Thou art my friend; to thee,
All knowledge that I have,
All skill I wield, are free.

Ask not the latest news of the last miracle;

Ask not what days and nights
In trance Panthea lay,
But ask how thou such sights
May'st see without dismay.

Ask what most helps when known, thou son of Anchitus.

What? hate, and awe, and shame
Fill thee to see our day;
Thou feelest thy Soul's frame
Shaken and in dismay:

What? life and time go hard with thee too, as with us;
Thy citizens, 'tis said,
Envy thee and oppress,
Thy goodness no men aid,
All strive to make it less:

Tyranny, pride, and lust fill Sicily's abodes:

Heaven is with earth at strife,
Signs make thy soul afraid,
The dead return to life,
Rivers are dried, winds stay'd:

Scarce can one think in calm, so threatening are the Gods:

And we feel, day and night,
The burden of ourselves?—
Well, then, the wiser wight
In his own bosom delves,
And asks what ails him so, and gets what cure he can.
The Sophist sneers—Fool, take
Thy pleasure, right or wrong.—
The pious wail—Forsake
A world these Sophists throng.—
Be neither Saint nor Sophist led, but be a man.

These hundred doctors try
To preach thee to their school.
We have the truth, they cry.
And yet their oracle,
Trumpet it as they will, is but the same as thine.

Once read thy own breast right,
And thou hast done with fears.
Man gets no other light,
Search he a thousand years.
Sink in thyself: there ask what ails thee, at that shrine.
What makes thee struggle and rave?
Why are men ill at ease?
'Tis that the lot they have
Fails their own will to please.
For man would make no murmuring, were his will obey'd.

And why is it that still
Man with his lot thus fights?
'Tis that he makes this will
The measure of his rights,
And believes Nature outrag'd if his will's gainsaid.

Couldst thou, Pausanias, learn
How deep a fault is this;
Couldst thou but once discern
Thou hast no right to bliss,
No title from the Gods to welfare and repose;
Then, thou wouldst look less maz'd
Whene'er from bliss debarr'd,
Nor think the Gods were craz'd
When thy own lot went hard.
But we are all the same—the fools of our own woes.

For, from the first faint morn
Of life, the thirst for bliss
Deep in Man's heart is born,
And, sceptic as he is,
He fails not to judge clear if this is quench'd or no.

Nor is that thirst to blame.
Man errs not that he deems
His welfare his true aim.
He errs because he dreams
The world does but exist that welfare to bestow.
We mortals are no kings
For each of whom to sway
A new-made world up-springs
Meant merely for his play.
No, we are strangers here: the world is from of old.

In vain our pent wills fret
And would the world subdue
Limits we did not set
Condition all we do.
Born into life we are, and life must be our mould.

Born into life: who lists
May what is false maintain,
And for himself make mists
Through which to see less plain:
The world is what it is, for all our dust and din.
Born into life: in vain,
Opinions, those or these,
Unalter'd to retain
The obstinate mind decrees.
Experience, like a sea, soaks all-effacing in.

Born into life: 'tis we,
And not the world, are new.
Our cry for bliss, our plea,
Others have urg'd it too.
Our wants have all been felt, our errors made before.

No eye could be too sound
To observe a world so vast:
No patience too profound
To sort what's here amass'd.
How man may here best live no care too great to explore.
But we,—as some rude guest
Would change, where'er he roam,
The manners there profess'd
To those he brings from home ;—
We mark not the world's ways, but would have it learn ours.

The world proclaims the terms
On which man wins content.
Reason its voice confirms.
We spurn them: and invent
False weakness in the world, and in ourselves false powers.

Riches we wish to get,
Yet remain spendthrifts still;
We would have health, and yet
Still use our bodies ill:
Bafflers of our own prayers from youth to life's last scenes.
We would have inward peace,
Yet will not look within:
We would have misery cease,
Yet will not cease from sin:
We want all pleasant ends, but will use no harsh means;

We do not what we ought;
What we ought not, we do;
And lean upon the thought
That Chance will bring us through.
But our own acts, for good or ill, are mightier powers.

Yet, even when man forsakes
All sin,—is just, is pure;
Abandons all that makes
His welfare insecure;
Other existences there are, which clash with ours.
Like us, the lightning fires
Love to have scope and play.
The stream, like us, desires
An unimpeded way.
Like us, the Libyan wind delights to roam at large.

Streams will not curb their pride
The just man not to entomb,
Nor lightnings go aside
To leave his virtues room,
Nor is the wind less rough that blows a good man’s barge.

Nature, with equal mind,
Sees all her sons at play,
Sees man control the wind,
The wind sweep man away;
Allows the proudly-riding and the founder’d bark.
And, lastly, though of ours
No weakness spoil our lot;
Though the non-human powers
Of Nature harm us not;
The ill-deeds of other men make often our life dark.

What were the wise man's plan?
Through this sharp, toil-set life
To fight as best he can,
And win what's won by strife;
But we an easier way to cheat our pains have found.

Scratch'd by a fall, with moans,
As children of weak age
Lend life to the dumb stones
Whereon to vent their rage,
And bend their little fists, and rate the senseless ground;
So, loath to suffer mute,
We, peopling the void air,
Make Gods to whom to impute
The ills we ought to bear;
With God and Fate to rail at, suffering easily.

Yet grant—as Sense long miss'd
Things that are now perceiv'd,
And much may still exist
Which is not yet believ'd—
Grant that the world were full of Gods we cannot
see—

All things the world that fill
Of but one stuff are spun,
That we who rail are still
With what we rail at one:
One with the o'er-labour'd Power that through the
breadth and length
Of Earth, and Air, and Sea,
In men, and plants, and stones,
Has toil perpetually,
And struggles, pants, and moans;
Fain would do all things well, but sometimes fails in strength.

And, punctually exact,
This universal God
Alike to any act
Proceeds at any nod,
And patiently declaims the cursings of himself.

This is not what Man hates,
Yet he can curse but this.
Harsh Gods and hostile Fates
Are dreams: this only is:
Is everywhere: sustains the wise, the foolish elf.
Nor only, in the intent
To attach blame elsewhere,
Do we at will invent
Stern Powers who make their care
To embitter human life, malignant Deities;

But, next, we would reverse
The scheme ourselves have spun,
And what we made to curse
We now would lean upon,
And feign kind Gods who perfect what man vainly tries.

Look, the world tempts our eye,
And we would know it all.
We map the starry sky.
We mine this earthen ball,
We measure the sea-tides, we number the sea-sands:
We scrutinize the dates
Of long-past human things,
The bounds of effac'd states,
The lines of deceas'd kings:
We search out dead men's words, and works of dead men's hands:

We shut our eyes, and muse
How our own minds are made;
What springs of thought they use,
How righten'd, how betray'd;
And spend our wit to name what most employ unnam'd:

But still, as we proceed,
The mass swells more and more
Of volumes yet to read,
Of secrets yet to explore.
Our hair grows grey, our eyes are dimm'd, our heat is tam'd—
We rest our faculties,
And thus address the Gods:—
“True Science if there is,
It stays in your abodes.
Man’s measures cannot span the illimitable All:

“You only can take in
The world’s immense design.
Our desperate search was sin,
Which henceforth we resign:
Sure only that your mind sees all things which befall.”

Fools! that in man’s brief term
He cannot all things view,
Affords no ground to affirm
That there are Gods who do:
Nor does being weary prove that he has where to rest.
Again: our youthful blood
Claims rapture as its right.
The world, a rolling flood
Of newness and delight,
Draws in the enamour'd gazer to its shining breast;

Pleasure, to our hot grasp
Gives flowers after flowers;
With passionate warmth we clasp
Hand after hand in ours:
Nor do we soon perceive how fast our youth is spent.

At once our eyes grow clear:
We see in blank dismay
Year posting after year,
Sense after sense decay;
Our shivering heart is min'd by secret discontent:
Yet still, in spite of truth,
In spite of hopes entomb'd,
That longing of our youth
Burns ever unconsum'd:
Still hungrier for delight as delights grow more rare.

We pause; we hush our heart,
And then address the Gods:—
"The world hath fail'd to impart
The joy our youth forebodes,
Fail'd to fill up the void which in our breasts we bear.

"Changeful till now, we still
Look'd on to something new:
Let us, with changeless will,
Henceforth look on to you;
To find with you the joy we in vain here require."
Fools! that so often here
Happiness mock'd our prayer,
I think, might make us fear
A like event elsewhere:
Make us, not fly to dreams, but moderate desire.

And yet, for those who know
Themselves, who wisely take
Their way through life, and bow
To what they cannot break,—
Why should I say that life need yield but moderate bliss?

Shall we, with tempers spoil'd,
Health sapp'd by living ill,
And judgments all embroi'd
By sadness and self-will,
Shall we judge what for man is not high bliss or is?
Is it so small a thing
To have enjoy'd the sun;
To have liv'd light in the spring,
To have lov'd, to have thought, to have done;
To have advanc'd true friends, and beat down baffling foes;

That we must feign a bliss
Of doubtful future date,
And while we dream on this
Lose all our present state,
And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose?

Not much, I know, you prize
What pleasures may be had,
Who look on life with eyes
Estrang'd, like mine, and sad:
And yet the village churl feels the truth more than you.
Who's loth to leave this life
Which to him little yields:
His hard-task'd sunburnt wife,
His often-labour'd fields;
The boors with whom he talk'd, the country spots he knew.

But thou, because thou hear'st,
Men scoff at Heaven and Fate;
Because the Gods thou fear'st
Fail to make blest thy state,
Tremblest, and wilt not dare to trust the joys there are.

I say, Fear not! life still
Leaves human effort scope.
But, since life teems with ill,
Nurse no extravagant hope.
Because thou must not dream, thou need'st not then despair.

[A long pause. At the end of it the notes of a harp
below are again heard, and Callicles sings:—
Far, far from here,
The Adriatic breaks in a warm bay
Among the green Illyrian hills; and there
The sunshine in the happy glens is fair,
And by the sea, and in the brakes.
The grass is cool, the sea-side air
Buoyant and fresh, the mountain flowers
As virginal and sweet as ours.
And there, they say, two bright and aged snakes,
Who once were Cadmus and Harmonia,
Bask in the glens or on the warm sea-shore,
In breathless quiet, after all their ills.
Nor do they see their country, nor the place
Where the Sphinx liv'd among the frowning hills,
Nor the unhappy palace of their race,
Nor Thebes, nor the Ismenus, any more.

There those two live, far in the Illyrian brakes.
They had staid long enough to see,
In Thebes, the billow of calamity
Over their own dear children roll’d,
Curse upon curse, pang upon pang,
For years, they sitting helpless in their home,
A grey old man and woman: yet of old
The gods had to their marriage come,
And at the banquet all the Muses sang.

Therefore they did not end their days
In sight of blood; but were rapt, far away,
To where the west wind plays,
And murmurs of the Adriatic come
To those untrodden mountain lawns: and there
Placed safely in chang’d forms, the Pair
Wholly forget their first sad life, and home,
And all that Theban woe, and stray
For ever through the glens, placid and dumb.

EMPEDOCLES.

That was my harp-player again—where is he?
Down by the stream?
EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA.

PAUSANIAS.

Yes, Master, in the wood.

EMPEDOCLES.

He ever lov'd the Theban story well.
But the day wears. Go now, Pausanias,
For I must be alone. Leave me one mule;
Take down with thee the rest to Catana.
And for young Callicles, thank him from me;
Tell him I never fail'd to love his lyre:
But he must follow me no more to-night.

PAUSANIAS.

Thou wilt return to-morrow to the city?

EMPEDOCLES.

Either to-morrow or some other day,
In the sure revolutions of the world,
Good friend, I shall revisit Catana.
I have seen many cities in my time
Till my eyes ache with the long spectacle,  
And I shall doubtless see them all again:  
Thou know'st me for a wanderer from of old.  
Meanwhile, stay me not now.  Farewell, Pausanias!  

[He departs on his way up the mountain.]

PAUSANIAS (alone).

I dare not urge him further; he must go:  
But he is strangely wrought;—I will speed back  
And bring Pisianax to him from the city:  
His counsel could once soothe him.  But, Apollo!  
How his brow lighten'd as the music rose!  
Callicles must wait here, and play to him:  
I saw him through the chestnuts far below,  
Just since, down at the stream.—Ho! Callicles!  

[He descends, calling.]
ACT SECOND.

Evening. The Summit of Etna.

EMPEDOCLES.

Alone—

On this charred, blackened, melancholy waste,
Crown'd by the awful peak, Etna's great mouth,
Round which the sullen vapour rolls—alone.
Pausanias is far hence, and that is well,
For I must henceforth speak no more with man.
He has his lesson too, and that debt's paid:
And the good, learned, friendly, quiet man,
May braver front his life, and in himself
Find henceforth energy and heart:—but I,
The weary man, the banish'd citizen,
Whose banishment is not his greatest ill,
Whose weariness no energy can reach,
And for whose hurt courage is not the cure—
What should I do with life and living more?

No, thou art come too late, Empedocles!
And the world hath the day, and must break thee,
Not thou the world. With men thou canst not live;
Their thoughts, their ways, their wishes, are not thine:
And being lonely thou art miserable,
For something has impair'd thy spirit's strength,
And dried its self-sufficing fount of joy.
Thou canst not live with men nor with thyself—
Oh sage! oh sage!—Take then the one way left,
And turn thee to the Elements, thy friends,
Thy well-tried friends, thy willing ministers,
And say,—Ye servants, hear Empedocles,
Who asks this final service at your hands.
Before the Sophist brood hath overlaid
The last spark of man's consciousness with words—
Ere quite the being of man, ere quite the world
Be disarray'd of their divinity—
Before the soul lose all her solemn joys,
And awe be dead, and hope impossible,
And the soul's deep eternal night come on,
Receive me, hide me, quench me, take me home!

[He advances to the edge of the crater. Smoke
and fire break forth with a loud noise, and
Callicles is heard below, singing:—

The lyre's voice is lovely everywhere.
In the court of Gods, in the city of men,
And in the lonely rock-strewn mountain glen,
In the still mountain air.

Only to Typho it sounds hatefully,
Only to Typho, the rebel o'erthrown,
Through whose heart Etna drives her roots of stone,
To imbed them in the sea.

Wherefore dost thou groan so loud?
Wherefore do thy nostrils flash,
Through the dark night, suddenly,
Typho, such red jets of flame?
Is thy tortur'd heart still proud?
Is thy fire-scath'd arm still rash?
Still alert thy stone-crush'd frame?
Does thy fierce soul still deplore
Thy ancient rout by the Cilician hills,
And that curst treachery on the Mount of Gore?
Do thy bloodshot eyes still see
The fight that crown'd thy ills,
Thy last defeat in this Sicilian sea?
Hast thou sworn, in thy sad lair,
Where erst the strong sea-currents suck'd thee down,
Never to cease to writhe, and try to sleep,
Letting the sea-stream wander through thy hair?
That thy groans, like thunder deep,
Begin to roll, and almost drown
The sweet notes, whose lulling spell
Gods and the race of mortals love so well,
When through thy caves thou hearest music swell?
But an awful pleasure bland
Spreading o'er the Thunderer's face,
When the sound climbs near his seat,
The Olympian Council sees;
As he lets his lax right hand,
Which the lightnings doth embrace,
Sink upon his mighty knees.
And the eagle, at the beck
Of the appeasing gracious harmony,
Droops all his sheeny, brown, deep-feather'd neck,
Nestling nearer to Jove's feet;
While o'er his sovereign eye
The curtains of the blue films slowly meet.
And the white Olympus peaks
Rosily brighten, and the sooth'd Gods smile
At one another from their golden chairs;
And no one round the charmed circle speaks.
Only the lov'd Hebe bears
The cup about, whose draughts beguile
Pain and care, with a dark store
Of fresh-pull'd violets wreath'd and nodding o'er;  
And her flush'd feet glow on the marble floor.

EMPEDOCLES.

He fables, yet speaks truth.  
The brave impetuous hand yields everywhere  
To the subtle, contriving head.  
Great qualities are trodden down,  
And littleness united  
Is become invincible.

These rumblings are not Typho's groans, I know.  
These angry smoke-bursts  
Are not the passionate breath  
Of the mountain-crush'd, tortur'd, intractable Titan king.  
But over all the world  
What suffering is there not seen  
Of plainness oppress'd by cunning,  
As the well-counsell'd Zeus oppress'd  
The self-helping son of Earth?  
What anguish of greatness
Rail'd and hunted from the world
Because its simplicity rebukes
This envious, miserable age!

I am weary of it!
Lie there, ye ensigns
Of my unloved preeminence
In an age like this!
Among a people of children,
Who throng'd me in their cities,
Who worshipp'd me in their houses,
And ask'd, not wisdom,
But drugs to charm with,
But spells to mutter—
All the fool's-armoury of magic—Lie there,
My golden cirelet!
My purple robe!

CALLICLES (from below).
As the sky-brightening south wind clears the day,
And makes the mass'd clouds roll,
The music of the lyre blows away
The clouds that wrap the soul.

Oh, that Fate had let me see
That triumph of the sweet persuasive lyre,
That famous, final victory
When jealous Pan with Marsyas did conspire;

When, from far Parnassus' side,
Young Apollo, all the pride
Of the Phrygian flutes to tame,
To the Phrygian highlands came.
Where the long green reed-beds sway
In the rippled waters grey
Of that solitary lake
Where Maeander's springs are born.
Where the ridg'd pine-darken'd roots
Of Messogis westward break,
Mounting westward, high and higher.
There was held the famous strife;
There the Phrygian brought his flutes,
And Apollo brought his lyre,
And, when now the westering sun
Touch'd the hills, the strife was done,
And the attentive Muses said,
Marsyas! thou art vanquished.

Then Apollo's minister
Hang'd upon a branching fir
Marsyas, that unhappy Faun,
And began to whet his knife.

But the Mænads, who were there,
Left their friend, and with robes flowing
In the wind, and loose dark hair
O'er their polish'd bosoms blowing,
Each her ribbon'd tambourine
Flinging on the mountain sod,
With a lovely frighten'd mien
Came about the youthful God.
But he turn'd his beauteous face
Haughtily another way,
From the grassy sun-warm'd place,
Where in proud repose he lay,
With one arm over his head,
Watching how the whetting sped.

But aloof, on the lake strand,
Did the young Olympus stand,
Weeping at his master's end;
For the Faun had been his friend.
For he taught him how to sing,
And he taught him flute-playing.
Many a morning had they gone
To the glimmering mountain lakes,
And had torn up by the roots
The tall crested water reeds
With long plumes, and soft brown seeds,
And had carv'd them into flutes,
Sitting on a tabled stone
Where the shoreward ripple breaks.
And he taught him how to please
The red-snooded Phrygian girls,
Whom the summer evening sees
Flashing in the dance's whirls
Underneath the starlit trees
In the mountain villages.
Therefore now Olympus stands,
At his master's piteous cries,
Pressing fast with both his hands
His white garment to his eyes,
Not to see Apollo's scorn.
Ah, poor Faun, poor Faun! ah, poor Faun!

EMPEDOCLES.

And lie thou there,
My laurel bough!
Though thou hast been my shade in the world's heat—
Though I have lov'd thee, liv'd in honouring thee—
Yet lie thou there,
My laurel bough!

I am weary of thee.
I am weary of the solitude
Where he who bears thee must abide.
Of the rocks of Parnassus,
Of the gorge of Delphi,
Of the moonlit peaks, and the caves.
Thou guardest them, Apollo!
Over the grave of the slain Pytho,
Though young, intolerably severe.
Thou keepest aloof the profane,
But the solitude oppresses thy votary.
The jars of men reach him not in thy valley—
But can life reach him?
Thou fencest him from the multitude—
Who will fence him from himself?
He hears nothing but the cry of the torrents
And the beating of his own heart.
The air is thin, the veins swell—
The temples tighten and throb there—
Air! air!

Take thy bough; set me free from my solitude!
I have been enough alone.
Where shall thy votary fly then? back to men?
But they will gladly welcome him once more,
And help him to unbend his too tense thought,
And rid him of the presence of himself,
And keep their friendly chatter at his ear,
And haunt him, till the absence from himself,
That other torment, grow unbearable:
And he will fly to solitude again,
And he will find its air too keen for him,
And so change back: and many thousand times
Be miserably bandied to and fro
Like a sea wave, betwixt the world and thee,
Thou young, implacable God! and only death
Shall cut his oscillations short, and so
Bring him to poise. There is no other way.

And yet what days were those, Parmenides!
When we were young, when we could number friends
In all the Italian cities like ourselves,
When with elated hearts we join'd your train,
Ye Sun-born virgins! on the road of Truth.
Then we could still enjoy, then neither thought
Nor outward things were clos'd and dead to us,
But we receiv'd the shock of mighty thoughts
On simple minds with a pure natural joy;
And if the sacred load oppress'd our brain,
We had the power to feel the pressure eas'd,
The brow unbound, the thoughts flow free again,
In the delightful commerce of the world.
We had not lost our balance then, nor grown
Thought's slaves, and dead to every natural joy.
The smallest thing could give us pleasure then—
The sports of the country people;
A flute note from the woods;
Sunset over the sea:
Seed-time and harvest;
The reapers in the corn;
The vinedresser in his vineyard;
The village-girl at her wheel.

Fulness of life and power of feeling, ye
Are for the happy, for the souls at ease,
Who dwell on a firm basis of content.
But he who has outliv'd his prosperous days,
But he, whose youth fell on a different world
From that on which his exil'd age is thrown;
Whose mind was fed on other food, was train'd
By other rules than are in vogue to-day;
Whose habit of thought is fix'd, who will not change,
But in a world he loves not must subsist
In ceaseless opposition, be the guard
Of his own breast, fetter'd to what he guards,
That the world win no mastery over him;
Who has no friend, no fellow left, not one;
Who has no minute's breathing space allow'd
To nurse his dwindling faculty of joy;—
Joy and the outward world must die to him
As they are dead to me.

[A long pause, during which Empedocles remains motionless, plunged in thought. The night deepens. He moves forward and gazes round him, and proceeds:—]
And you, ye Stars!
Who slowly begin to marshal,
As of old, in the fields of heaven,
Your distant, melancholy lines—
Have you, too, surviv’d yourselves?
Are you, too, what I fear to become?
You too once liv’d—
You too mov’d joyfully
Among august companions
In an older world, peopled by Gods,
In a mightier order,
The radiant, rejoicing, intelligent Sons of Heaven!
But now, you kindle
Your lonely, cold-shining lights,
Unwilling lingerers
In the heavenly wilderness,
For a younger, ignoble world.
And renew, by necessity,
Night after night your courses,
In echoing unnear’d silence,
Above a race you know not.
Uncaring and undelighted,
Without friend and without home.
Weary like us, though not
Weary with our weariness.

No, no, ye Stars! there is no death with you,
No languor, no decay! Languor and death,
They are with me, not you! ye are alive!
Ye and the pure dark ether where ye ride
Brilliant above me! And thou, fiery world!
That sapp’st the vitals of this terrible mount
Upon whose charred and quaking crust I stand,
Thou, too, brimmest with life;—the sea of cloud
That heaves its white and billowy vapours up
To moat this isle of ashes from the world,
Lives;—and that other fainter sea, far down,
O’er whose lit floor a road of moonbeams leads
To Etna’s Liparean sister fires
And the long dusky line of Italy—
That mild and luminous floor of waters lives,
With held-in joy swelling its heart:—I only,
Whose spring of hope is dried, whose spirit has fail’d—
I, who have not, like these, in solitude
Maintain’d courage and force, and in myself
Nurs’d an immortal vigour—I alone
Am dead to life and joy; therefore I read
In all things my own deadness.

[A long silence. He continues:—

Oh, that I could glow like this mountain!
Oh, that my heart bounded with the swell of the sea!
Oh, that my soul were full of light as the stars!
Oh, that it brooded over the world like the air!

But no, this heart will glow no more: thou art
A living man no more, Empedocles!
Nothing but a devouring flame of thought—
But a naked, eternally restless mind.
[After a pause:—]

To the elements it came from
Everything will return.
Our bodies to Earth;
Our blood to Water;
Heat to Fire;
Breath to Air.

They were well born, they will be well entomb'd.
But Mind!—

And we might gladly share the fruitful stir
Down in our mother Earth's miraculous womb.
Well would it be
With what roll'd of us in the stormy deep.
We should have joy, blent with the all-bathing Air.
Or with the active radiant life of Fire.

But Mind—but Thought—
If these have been the master part of us—
Where will they find their parent element?
What will receive them, who will call them home?
But we shall still be in them, and they in us,
And we shall be the strangers of the world,
And they will be our lords, as they are now;
And keep us prisoners of our consciousness,
And never let us clasp and feel the All
But through their forms, and modes, and stifling veils.
And we shall be unsatisfied as now,
And we shall feel the agony of thirst,
The ineffable longing for the life of life
Baffled for ever: and still Thought and Mind
Will hurry us with them on their homeless march,
Over the unallied unopening Earth,
Over the unrecognising Sea: while Air
Will blow us fiercely back to Sea and Earth,
And Fire repel us from its living waves.
And then we shall unwillingly return
Back to this meadow of calamity,
This uncongenial place, this human life.
And in our individual human state
Go through the sad probation all again,
To see if we will poise our life at last,
To see if we will now at last be true
To our own only true deep-buried selves,
Being one with which we are one with the whole world;
Or whether we will once more fall away
Into some bondage of the flesh or mind,
Some slough of sense, or some fantastic maze
Forg'd by the imperious lonely Thinking-Power.
And each succeeding age in which we are born
Will have more peril for us than the last;
Will goad our senses with a sharper spur,
Will fret our minds to an intenser play,
Will make ourselves harder to be discern'd.
And we shall struggle awhile, gasp and rebel:
And we shall fly for refuge to past times.
Their soul of unworn youth, their breath of greatness:
And the reality will pluck us back,
Knead us in its hot hand, and change our nature.
And we shall feel our powers of effort flag,
And rally them for one last fight—and fail.
And we shall sink in the impossible strife,
And be astray for ever.

Slave of Sense
I have in no wise been: but slave of Thought?—
And who can say,—I have been always free,
Liv’d ever in the light of my own soul?—
I cannot: I have liv’d in wrath and gloom,
Fierce, disputatious, ever at war with man,
Far from my own soul, far from warmth and light.
But I have not grown easy in these bonds—
But I have not denied what bonds these were.
Yea, I take myself to witness,
That I have lov’d no darkness,
Sophisticated no truth,
Nurs’d no delusion,
Allow’d no fear.

And therefore, O ye Elements, I know—
Ye know it too—it hath been granted me
Not to die wholly, not to be all enslav'd.
I feel it in this hour. The numbing cloud
Mounts off my soul: I feel it, I breathe free.

Is it but for a moment?
Ah! boil up, ye vapours!
Leap and roar, thou Sea of Fire!
My soul glows to meet you.
Ere it flag, ere the mists
Of despondency and gloom
Rush over it again,
Receive me! Save me! [He plunges into the crater.]

CALLICLES (from below).

Through the black, rushing smoke-bursts,
Thick breaks the red flame.
All Etna heaves fiercely
Her forest-cloth'd frame.
Not here, O Apollo!
Are haunts meet for thee.
But, where Helicon breaks down
In cliff to the sea.

Where the moon-silver'd inlets
Send far their light voice
Up the still vale of Thisbe,
O speed, and rejoice!

On the sward, at the cliff-top,
Lie strewn the white flocks;
On the cliff-side, the pigeons
Roost deep in the rocks.

In the moonlight the shepherds,
Soft lull'd by the rills,
Lie wrapt in their blankets,
Asleep on the hills.
—What Forms are these coming
So white through the gloom?
What garments out-glistening
The gold-flower'd broom?

What sweet-breathing Presence
Out-perfumes the thyme?
What voices enrapture
The night's balmy prime?—

'Tis Apollo comes leading
His choir, The Nine.
—The Leader is fairest,
But all are divine.

They are lost in the hollows.
They stream up again.
What seeks on this mountain
The glorified train?—
They bathe on this mountain,
In the spring by their road.
Then on to Olympus,
Their endless abode.

—Whose praise do they mention
Of what is it told?—
What will be for ever.
What was from of old.

First hymn they the Father
Of all things: and then
The rest of Immortals,
The action of men.

The Day in its hotness,
The strife with the palm;
The Night in its silence,
The Stars in their calm.
THE RIVER.

Still glides the stream, slow drops the boat
Under the rustling poplars' shade;
Silent the swans beside us float:
None speaks, none heeds—ah, turn thy head.

Let those arch eyes now softly shine,
That mocking mouth grow sweetly bland:
Ah, let them rest, those eyes, on mine;
On mine let rest that lovely hand.

My pent up tears oppress my brain,
My heart is swoln with love unsaid:
Ah, let me weep, and tell my pain,
And on thy shoulder rest my head.
Before I die, before the soul,
Which now is mine, must re-attain
Immunity from my control,
And wander round the world again:

Before this teas'd o'er-labour'd heart
For ever leaves its vain employ,
Dead to its deep habitual smart,
And dead to hopes of future joy.
I too have suffer'd: yet I know
She is not cold, though she seems so:
She is not cold, she is not light;
But our ignoble souls lack might.

She smiles and smiles, and will not sigh,
While we for hopeless passion die;
Yet she could love, those eyes declare,
Were but men nobler than they are.

Eagerly once her gracious ken
Was turn'd upon the sons of men.
But light the serious visage grew—
She look'd, and smiled, and saw them through.
Our petty souls, our strutting wits,
Our labour'd puny passion-fits—
Ah, may she scorn them still, till we
Scorn them as bitterly as she!

Yet oh, that Fate would let her see
One of some better race than we;
One for whose sake she once might prove
How deeply she who scorns can love.

His eyes be like the starry lights—
His voice like sounds of summer nights—
In all his lovely mien let pierce
The magic of the universe.

And she to him will reach her hand,
And gazing in his eyes will stand,
And know her friend, and weep for glee,
And cry—Long, long I've look'd for thee.—
Then will she weep—with smiles, till then,
Coldly she mocks the sons of men.
Till then her lovely eyes maintain
Their gay, unwavering, deep disdain.
INDIFFERENCE.

I must not say that thou wert true,
Yet let me say that thou wert fair.
And they that lovely face who view,
They will not ask if truth be there.

Truth—what is truth? Two bleeding hearts
Wounded by men, by Fortune tried,
Outwearied with their lonely parts,
Vow to beat henceforth side by side.

The world to them was stern and drear;
Their lot was but to weep and moan.
Ah, let them keep their faith sincere,
For neither could subsist alone!
But souls whom some benignant breath
Has charm'd at birth from gloom and care,
These ask no love—these plighted no faith,
For they are happy as they are.

The world to them may homage make,
And garlands for their forehead weave.
And what the world can give, they take:
But they bring more than they receive.

They smile upon the world: their ears
To one demand alone are coy.
They will not give us love and tears—
They bring us light, and warmth, and joy.

It was not love that heav'd thy breast,
Fair child! it was the bliss within.
Adieu! and say that one, at least,
Was just to what he did not win.
TOO LATE.

Each on his own strict line we move,
And some find death ere they find love:
So far apart their lives are thrown
From the twin soul that halves their own.

And sometimes, by still harder fate,
The lovers meet, but meet too late.
—Thy heart is mine!—True, true! ah true!—
Then, love, thy hand!—Ah no! adieu!
ON THE RHINE.

Vain is the effort to forget.
Some day I shall be cold, I know,
As is the eternal moonlit snow
Of the high Alps, to which I go:
But ah, not yet! not yet!

Vain is the agony of grief.
'Tis true, indeed, an iron knot
Ties straitly up from mine thy lot,
And were it snapt—thou lov'st me not!
But is despair relief?
Awhile let me with thought have done.
And as this brimm'd unwrinkled Rhine
And that far purple mountain line
Lie sweetly in the look divine
Of the slow-sinking sun;

So let me lie, and calm as they
Let beam upon my inward view
Those eyes of deep, soft, lucent hue—
Eyes too expressive to be blue,
Too lovely to be grey.

Ah, Quiet, all things feel thy balm!
Those blue hills too, this river's flow,
Were restless once, but long ago.
Tam'd is their turbulent youthful glow:
Their joy is in their calm.
LONGING.

Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again.
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.

Come, as thou cam'st a thousand times
A messenger from radiant climes,
And smile on thy new world, and be
As kind to all the rest as me.

Or, as thou never cam'st in sooth,
Come now, and let me dream it truth.
And part my hair, and kiss my brow,
And say—My love! why sufferest thou?
Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again.
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.
THE LAKE.

Again I see my bliss at hand;
The town, the lake are here.
My Marguerite smiles upon the strand
Unalter'd with the year.

I know that graceful figure fair,
That cheek of languid hue;
I know that soft enkerchief'd hair,
And those sweet eyes of blue.

Again I spring to make my choice;
Again in tones of ire
I hear a God's tremendous voice—
"Be counsell'd, and retire!"
Ye guiding Powers, who join and part,
What would ye have with me?
Ah, warn some more ambitious heart,
And let the peaceful be!
PARTING.

Ye storm-winds of Autumn
Who rush by, who shake
The window, and ruffle
The gleam-lighted lake;
Who cross to the hill-side
Thin-sprinkled with farms,
Where the high woods strip sadly
Their yellowing arms;—

Ye are bound for the mountains—
Ah, with you let me go
Where your cold distant barrier,
The vast range of snow,
Through the loose clouds lifts dimly
Its white peaks in air—
How deep is their stillness!
Ah! would I were there!
But on the stairs what voice is this I hear,
Buoyant as morning, and as morning clear?
Say, has some wet bird-haunted English lawn
Let it the music of its trees at dawn?
Or was it from some sun-fleck'd mountain-brook
That the sweet voice its upland clearness took?

Ah! it comes nearer—
Sweet notes, this way!

Hark! fast by the window
The rushing winds go,
To the ice-cumber'd gorges,
The vast seas of snow.
There the torrents drive upward
Their rock-strangled hum,
There the avalanche thunders
The hoarse torrent dumb.
—I come, O ye mountains!
Ye torrents, I come!

But who is this, by the half-open'd door,
Whose figure casts a shadow on the floor?
The sweet blue eyes—the soft, ash-colour'd hair—
The cheeks that still their gentle paleness wear—
The lovely lips, with their arch smile, that tells
The unconquer'd joy in which her spirit dwells—
   Ah! they bend nearer—
   Sweet lips, this way!

Hark! the wind rushes past us—
Ah! with that let me go
To the clear waning hill-side
Unspotted by snow,
There to watch, o'er the sunk vale,
The frore mountain wall,
Where the nich'd snow-bed sprays down
Its powdery fall.
There its dusky blue clusters
The aconite spreads;
There the pines slope, the cloud-strips
Hung soft in their heads.
No life but, at moments,
The mountain-bee's hum.
—I come, O ye mountains!
Ye pine-woods, I come!

Forgive me! forgive me!
Ah, Marguerite, fain
Would these arms reach to clasp thee:
But see! 'tis in vain.

In the void air towards thee
My strain'd arms are cast.
But a sea rolls between us—
Our different past.

To the lips, ah! of others,
Those lips have been prest,
And others, ere I was,
Were clasp'd to that breast;
Far, far from each other
Our spirits have grown.
And what heart knows another?
Ah! who knows his own?

Blow, ye winds! lift me with you!
I come to the wild.
Fold closely, O Nature!
Thine arms round thy child.

To thee only God granted
A heart ever new:
To all always open;
To all always true.

Ah, calm me! restore me!
And dry up my tears
On thy high mountain platforms,
Where Morn first appears.
Where the white mists, for ever,
Are spread and upfurl'd;
In the stir of the forces
Whence issued the world.
ABSENCE.

In this fair stranger's eyes of grey
Thine eyes, my love, I see.
I shudder: for the passing day
Had borne me far from thee.

This is the curse of life: that not
A nobler calmer train
Of wiser thoughts and feelings blot
Our passions from our brain;

But each day brings its petty dust
Our soon-chok'd souls to fill,
And we forget because we must,
And not because we will.
I struggle towards the light; and ye,
Once long'd-for storms of love!
If with the light ye cannot be,
I bear that ye remove.

I struggle towards the light; but oh,
While yet the night is chill,
Upon Time's barren, stormy flow,
Stay with me, Marguerite, still!
DESTINY.

Why each is striving, from of old,
To love more deeply than he can?
Still would be true, yet still grows cold?
—Ask of the Powers that sport with man!

They yok'd in him, for endless strife,
A heart of ice, a soul of fire;
And hurl'd him on the Field of Life,
An aimless unallay'd Desire.
TO MARGUERITE,

IN RETURNING A VOLUME OF THE LETTERS OF ORTIS.

Yes: in the sea of life enisl'd,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live alone.

The islands feel the enclasping flow,
And then their endless bounds they know.

But when the moon their hollows lights
And they are swept by balms of spring,
And in their glens, on starry nights,
The nightingales divinely sing,
And lovely notes, from shore to shore,
Across the sounds and channels pour;
Oh then a longing like despair
Is to their farthest caverns sent;
—For surely once, they feel, we were
Parts of a single continent.
Now round us spreads the watery plain—
Oh might our marges meet again!

Who order'd, that their longing's fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cool'd?
Who renders vain their deep desire?

A God, a God their severance rul'd;
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea.
HUMAN LIFE.

What mortal, when he saw,
Life's voyage done, his Heavenly Friend,
Could ever yet dare tell him fearlessly,
"I have kept uninfring'd my nature's law.
The inly-written chart thou gavest me
To guide me, I have steer'd by to the end?"

Ah! let us make no claim
On life's incognizable sea
To too exact a steering of our way.
Let us not fret and fear to miss our aim
If some fair coast has lur'd us to make stay,
Or some friend hail'd us to keep company.
Ay, we would each fain drive
At random, and not steer by rule.
Weakness! and worse, weakness bestow'd in vain!
Winds from our side the unsuiting consort rive:
We rush by coasts where we had lief remain.
Man cannot, though he would, live Chance's fool.

No! as the foaming swathe
Of torn-up water, on the main,
Falls heavily away with long-drawn roar
On either side the black deep-furrow'd path
Cut by an onward-labouring vessel's prore,
And never touches the ship-side again;

Even so we leave behind,
As, charter'd by some unknown Powers,
We stem across the sea of life by night,
The joys which were not for our use design'd.
The friends to whom we had no natural right:
The homes that were not destin'd to be ours.
DESPOUNDENCY.

The thoughts that rain their steady glow
Like stars on life's cold sea,
Which others know, or say they know—
They never shone for me.

Thoughts light, like gleams, my spirit's sky,
But they will not remain;
They light me once, they hurry by,
And never come again.
SONNET.

When I shall be divorc'd, some ten years hence,
From this poor present self which I am now;
When youth has done its tedious vain expense
Of passions that for ever ebb and flow;
Shall I not joy youth's heats are left behind,
And breathe more happy in an even clime?
Ah no, for then I shall begin to find
A thousand virtues in this hated time.
Then I shall wish its agitations back,
And all its thwarting currents of desire;
Then I shall praise the heat which then I lack,
And call this hurrying fever, generous fire,
And sigh that one thing only has been lent
To youth and age in common—discontent.
SELF-DECEPTION.

Say, what blinds us, that we claim the glory
Of possessing powers not our share?—
Since man woke on earth, he knows his story,
But, before we woke on earth, we were.

Long, long since, undower’d yet, our spirit
Roam’d, ere birth, the treasuries of God:
Saw the gifts, the powers it might inherit;
Ask’d an outfit for its earthly road.

Then, as now, this tremulous, eager being
Strain’d, and long’d, and grasp’d each gift it saw.
Then, as now, a Power beyond our seeing
Stav’d us back, and gave our choice the law.
Ah, whose hand that day through heaven guided
Man's new spirit, since it was not we?
Ah, who sway'd our choice, and who decided
What the parts, and what the whole should be?

For, alas! he left us each retaining
Shreds of gifts which he refus'd in full.
Still these waste us with their hopeless straining—
Still the attempt to use them proves them null.

And on earth we wander, groping, reeling;
Powers stir in us, stir and disappear.
Ah, and he, who placed our master-feeling,
Fail'd to place that master-feeling clear.

We but dream we have our wish'd-for powers.
Ends we seek we never shall attain.
Ah, some power exists there, which is ours?
Some end is there, we indeed may gain?
LINES WRITTEN BY A DEATH-BED.

Yes, now the longing is o'erpast,
Which, dogg'd by fear and fought by shame,
Shook her weak bosom day and night,
Consum'd her beauty like a flame,
And dimm'd it like the desert blast.
And though the curtains hide her face,
Yet were it lifted to the light
The sweet expression of her brow
Would charm the gazer, till his thought
Eras'd the ravages of time,
Fill'd up the hollow cheek, and brought
A freshness back as of her prime—
So healing is her quiet now.
So perfectly the lines express
A placid, settled loveliness;
Her youngest rival's freshest grace.

But ah, though peace indeed is here,
And ease from shame, and rest from fear;
Though nothing can dismarble now
The smoothness of that limpid brow;
Yet is a calm like this, in truth,
The crowning end of life and youth?
And when this boon rewards the dead,
Are all debts paid, has all been said?
And is the heart of youth so light,
Its step so firm, its eye so bright,
Because on its hot brow there blows
A wind of promise and repose
From the far grave, to which it goes?
Because it has the hope to come,
One day, to harbour in the tomb?
Ah no, the bliss youth dreams is one
For daylight, for the cheerful sun,
For feeling nerves and living breath—
Youth dreams a bliss on this side death.
It dreams a rest, if not more deep,
More grateful than this marble sleep.
It hears a voice within it tell—
"Calm's not life's crown, though calm is well."
'Tis all perhaps which man acquires:
But 'tis not what our youth desires.
TRISTRAM AND ISEULT.
TRISTRAM AND ISEULT.

I.

TRISTRAM.

Is she not come? The messenger was sure.
Prop me upon the pillows once again—
Raise me, my page: this cannot long endure.
Christ! what a night! how the sleet whips the pane!

What lights will those out to the northward be?

THE PAGE.

The lanterns of the fishing-boats at sea.

TRISTRAM.

Soft—who is that stands by the dying fire?
Iseult.

TRISTRAM.

Ah! not the Iseult I desire.

What knight is this, so weak and pale,
Though the locks are yet brown on his noble head,
Propt on pillows in his bed,
Gazing seawards for the light
Of some ship that fights the gale
On this wild December night?
Over the sick man’s feet is spread
A dark green forest dress.
A gold harp leans against the bed,
Ruddy in the fire’s light.

I know him by his harp of gold,
Famous in Arthur’s court of old:
I know him by his forest dress.
The peerless hunter, harper, knight—
Tristram of Lyoness.

What lady is this whose silk attire
Gleams so rich in the light of the fire?
Never surely has been seen
So slight a form in so rich a dress.
The ringlets on her shoulders lying
In their flitting lustre vying
With the clasp of burnish'd gold
Which her heavy robe doth hold.
But her cheeks are sunk and pale.

Is it that the bleak sea-gale
Beating from the Atlantic sea
On this coast of Brittany,
Nips too keenly the sweet flower?

Is it that a deep fatigue
Hath come on her, a chilly fear,
Passing all her youthful hour
Spinning with her maidens here,
Listlessly through the window bars
Gazing seawards many a league.
From her lonely shore-built tower,
While the knights are at the wars?
Or, perhaps, has her young heart
Felt already some deeper smart,
Of those that in secret the heart-strings rive,
Leaving her sunk and pale, though fair?

Who is this snowdrop by the sea?
I know her by her golden hair,
I know her by her rich silk dress
And her fragile loveliness.
The sweetest Christian soul alive,
Iseult of Brittany.

Loud howls the wind, sharp patters the rain,
And the knight sinks back on his pillows again.
He is weak with fever and pain,
And his spirit is not clear.
Hark! he mutters in his sleep,
As he wanders far from here,
Changes place and time of year,
And his closed eye doth sweep
O'er some fair unwintry sea,
Not this fierce Atlantic deep,
As he mutters brokenly—

TRISTRAM.

The calm sea shines, loose hang the vessel's sails—
Before us are the sweet green fields of Wales,
And overhead the cloudless sky of May.—
"Ah, would I were in those green fields at play,
Not pent on ship-board this delicious day.
Tristram, I pray thee, of thy courtesy,
Reach me my golden cup that stands by thee,
And pledge me in it first for courtesy.—"
—Ha! dost thou start? are thy lips blanch'd like mine?
Child, 'tis no water this, 'tis poison'd wine.—
Iseult! . . . .
Ah, sweet angels, let him dream!
Keep his eyelids! let him seem
Not this fever-wasted wight
Thinn'd and pal'd before his time,
But the brilliant youthful knight
In the glory of his prime,
Sitting in the gilded barge,
At thy side, thou lovely charge!
Bending gaily o'er thy hand,
Iseult of Ireland!
And she too, that princess fair,
If her bloom be now less rare,
Let her have her youth again—
Let her be as she was then!
Let her have her proud dark eyes,
And her petulant quick replies,
Let her sweep her dazzling hand
With its gesture of command,
And shake back her raven hair
With the old imperious air.
As of old, so let her be,
That first Iseult, princess bright,
Chatting with her youthful knight
As he steers her o'er the sea,
 Quitting at her father's will
The green isle where she was bred,
And her bower in Ireland,
For the surge-beat Cornish strand,
Where the prince whom she must wed
Keeps his court in Tyntagil,
Fast beside the sounding sea.
And that golden cup her mother
Gave her, that her lord and she
Might drink it on their marriage day,
And for ever love each other,
Let her, as she sits on board,
Ah, sweet saints, unwittingly,
See it shine, and take it up,
And to Tristram laughing say—
"Sir Tristram, of thy courtesy
Pledge me in my golden cup!"
Let them drink it—let their hands
Tremble, and their cheeks be flame,
As they feel the fatal bands
Of a love they dare not name
With a wild delicious pain
Twine about their hearts again.
Let the early summer be
Once more round them, and the sea
Blue, and o'er its mirror kind
Let the breath of the May wind,
Wandering through their drooping sails,
Die on the green fields of Wales.
Let a dream like this restore
What his eye must see no more.

TRISTRAM.

Chill blows the wind, the pleasaunce walks are drear.
Madcap, what jest was this, to meet me here
Were feet like those made for so wild a way?
The southern winter-parlour, by my fay,
Had been the likeliest trysting-place to-day.
'Tristram!—nay, nay—thou must not take my hand—
Tristram—sweet love—we are betray'd—out-plann'd.
Fly—save thyself—save me. I dare not stay."—
One last kiss first!—"'Tis vain—to horse—away!"

Ah, sweet saints, his dream doth move
Faster surely than it should,
From the fever in his blood.
All the spring-time of his love
Is already gone and past,
And instead thereof is seen
Its winter, which endureth still—
The palace towers of Tyntagil,
The pleasaunce walks, the weeping queen,
The flying leaves, the straining blast,
And that long, wild kiss—their last.
And this rough December night
And his burning fever pain
Mingle with his hurrying dream
Till they rule it, till he seem
The press'd fugitive again,
The love-desperate banish'd knight
With a fire in his brain
Flying o'er the stormy main.

Whither does he wander now?
Haply in his dreams the wind
Wafts him here, and lets him find
The lovely orphan child again
In her castle by the coast,
The youngest, fairest chatelaine,
That this realm of France can boast,

Our snowdrop by the Atlantic sea,
Iseult of Brittany.
And—for through the haggard air,
The stain'd arms, the matted hair
Of that stranger knight ill-starr'd,
There gleam'd something that recall'd
The Tristram who in better days
Was Launcelot's guest at Joyous Gard—
Welcom'd here, and here install'd,
Tended of his fever here,
Haply he seems again to move
His young guardian's heart with love;
   In his exil'd loneliness,
In his stately deep distress,
Without a word, without a tear.—
   Ah, 'tis well he should retrace
His tranquil life in this lone place;
His gentle bearing at the side
Of his timid youthful bride;
His long rambles by the shore
On winter evenings, when the roar
Of the near waves came, sadly grand,
Through the dark, up the drown'd sand:
   Or his endless reveries
In the woods, where the gleams play
On the grass under the trees,
Passing the long summer's day
Idle as a mossy stone
In the forest depths alone;
The chase neglected, and his hound
Couch'd beside him on the ground.—

Ah, what trouble's on his brow?
Hither let him wander now,
Hither, to the quiet hours
Pass'd among these heaths of ours
By the grey Atlantic sea.

Hours, if not of ecstasy,
From violent anguish surely free.

TRISTRAM.

All red with blood the whirling river flows,
The wide plain rings, the daz'd air throbs with blows.
Upon us are the chivalry of Rome—
Their spears are down, their steeds are bath'd in foam.
"Up, Tristram, up," men cry, "thou moonstruck knight!"
What foul fiend rides thee? On into the fight!"
—Above the din her voice is in my ears—
I see her form glide through the crossing spears.—
Iseult! . . . .

Ah, he wanders forth again;
We cannot keep him; now as then
There's a secret in his breast
   That will never let him rest.
These musing fits in the green wood
They cloud the brain, they dull the blood.
   His sword is sharp—his horse is good—
Beyond the mountains will he see
The famous towns of Italy,
And label with the blessed sign
The heathen Saxons on the Rhine.
At Arthur's side he fights once more
With the Roman Emperor.
There's many a gay knight where he goes
Will help him to forget his care.
The march—the leaguer—Heaven's blithe air—
The neighing steeds—the ringing blows;

    Sick pining comes not where these are.  
Ah, what boots it, that the jest
Lightens every other brow,  
What, that every other breast
Dances as the trumpets blow,  
If one's own heart beats not light
In the waves of the toss'd fight,
If oneself cannot get free
From the clog of misery?

Thy lovely youthful wife grows pale
Watching by the salt sea tide  
With her children at her side
For the gleam of thy white sail.  
Home, Tristram, to thy halls again!
To our lonely sea complain,

To our forests tell thy pain.
TRISTRAM.

All round the forest sweeps off, black in shade,
But it is moonlight in the open glade:
And in the bottom of the glade shine clear
The forest chapel and the fountain near.

I think, I have a fever in my blood:
Come, let me leave the shadow of this wood,
Ride down, and bathe my hot brow in the flood.

Mild shines the cold spring in the moon's clear light.
God! 'tis her face plays in the waters bright.
"Fair love," she says, "canst thou forget so soon,
At this soft hour, under this sweet moon?"
Iseult! . . .

Ah poor soul, if this be so,
Only death can balm thy woe.
The solitudes of the green wood
Had no medicine for thy mood.
The rushing battle clear'd thy blood
As little as did solitude.
Ah, his eyelids slowly break
Their hot seals, and let him wake.
What new change shall we now see?
A happier? Worse it cannot be.

TRISTRAM.

Is my page here? Come, turn me to the fire.
Upon the window panes the moon shines bright;
The wind is down: but she'll not come to-night.
Ah no—she is asleep in Tyntagil
Far hence—her dreams are fair—her sleep is still.
Of me she recks not, nor of my desire.

I have had dreams, I have had dreams, my page,
Would take a score years from a strong man's age,
And with a blood like mine, will leave, I fear,
Scant leisure for a second messenger.

My princess, art thou there? Sweet, 'tis too late.
To bed, and sleep: my fever is gone by:
To-night my page shall keep me company.
Where do the children sleep? kiss them for me.
Poor child, thou art almost as pale as I:
This comes of nursing long and watching late.
To bed—good night!

She left the gleam-lit fire-place,
She came to the bed-side.
She took his hands in hers: her tears
Down on her slender fingers rain'd.
She rais'd her eyes upon his face—
Not with a look of wounded pride,
A look as if the heart complain'd:—
Her look was like a sad embrace;
The gaze of one who can divine
A grief, and sympathise.
Sweet flower, thy children's eyes
Are not more innocent than thine.
But they sleep in shelter'd rest,
Like helpless birds in the warm nest,
On the castle's southern side;
Where feebly comes the mournful roar
Of buffeting wind and surging tide
Through many a room and corridor.
Full on their window the moon's ray
Makes their chamber as bright as day;
It shines upon the blank white walls,
And on the snowy pillow falls,
And on two angel-heads doth play
Turn'd to each other:—the eyes clos'd—
The lashes on the cheeks repos'd.
Round each sweet brow the cap close-set
Hardly lets peep the golden hair;
Through the soft-open'd lips the air
Scarcely moves the coverlet.
One little wandering arm is thrown
At random on the counterpane,
And often the fingers close in haste
As if their baby owner chas'd
The butterflies again.
This stir they have and this alone;
But else they are so still.

Ah, tired madcaps, you lie still.
But were you at the window now
To look forth on the fairy sight
Of your illumin'd haunts by night;
To see the park-glades where you play
Far lovelier than they are by day;
To see the sparkle on the eaves,
And upon every giant bough
Of those old oaks, whose wet red leaves
Are jewell'd with bright drops of rain—

How would your voices run again!
And far beyond the sparkling trees
Of the castle park one sees
The bare heaths spreading, clear as day,
Moor behind moor, far, far away,
Into the heart of Brittany.
And here and there, lock'd by the land,
Long inlets of smooth glittering sea,
And many a stretch of watery sand
All shining in the white moon-beams.
But you see fairer in your dreams.

What voices are these on the clear night air?
What lights in the court? what steps on the stair?
TRISTRAM AND ISEULT.

II.

Iseult of Ireland.

TRISTRAM.

Raise the light, my page, that I may see her.—

Thou art come at last then, haughty Queen!
Long I've waited, long I've fought my fever:
Late thou comest, cruel thou hast been.

ISEULT.

Blame me not, poor sufferer, that I tarried:
I was bound, I could not break the band.
Chide not with the past, but feel the present:
I am here—we meet—I hold thy hand.
TRISTRAM.

Thou art come, indeed—thou hast rejoin'd me;
Thou hast dar'd it: but too late to save.
Fear not now that men should tax thy honour.
I am dying: build—(thou may'st)—my grave!

ISEULT.

Tristram, for the love of Heaven, speak kindly!
What, I hear these bitter words from thee?
Sick with grief I am, and faint with travel—
Take my hand—dear Tristram, look on me!

TRISTRAM.

I forgot, thou comest from thy voyage.
Yes, the spray is on thy cloak and hair.
But thy dark eyes are not dimm'd, proud Iseult!
And thy beauty never was more fair.
Ah, harsh flatterer! let alone my beauty.
I, like thee, have left my youth afar.
Take my hand, and touch these wasted fingers—
See my cheek and lips, how white they are.

Thou art paler:—but thy sweet charm, Iseult!
Would not fade with the dull years away.
Ah, how fair thou standest in the moonlight!
I forgive thee, Iseult!—thou wilt stay?

Fear me not, I will be always with thee;
I will watch thee, tend thee, soothe thy pain;
Sing thee tales of true long-parted lovers
Join'd at evening of their days again.
TRISTRAM.

No, thou shalt not speak; I should be finding
Something alter'd in thy courtly tone.
Sit—sit by me: I will think, we've liv'd so
In the greenwood, all our lives, alone.

ISEULT.

Alter'd, Tristram? Not in courts, believe me,
Love like mine is alter'd in the breast.
Courtly life is light and cannot reach it.
Ah, it lives, because so deep suppress'd.

What, thou think'st, men speak in courtly chambers
Words by which the wretched are consol'd?
What, thou think'st, this aching brow was cooler,
Circled, Tristram, by a band of gold?

Ah, on which, if both our lots were balanc'd,
Was indeed the heaviest burden thrown,
Thee, a weeping exile in thy forest—
Me, a smiling queen upon my throne?
Vain and strange debate, where both have suffer'd;
Both have pass'd a youth constrain'd and sad;
Both have brought their anxious day to evening,
And have now short space for being glad.

Join'd we are henceforth: nor will thy people
Nor thy younger Iseult take it ill
That an ancient rival shares her office,
When she sees her humbled, pale, and still.

I, a faded watcher by thy pillow,
I, a statue on thy chapel floor,
Pour'd in grief before the Virgin Mother,
Rouse no anger, make no rivals more.

She will say—"Is this the form I dreaded?
This his idol? this that royal bride?
Ah, an hour of health would purge his eyesight:
Stay, pale queen! for ever by my side."
Hush, no words! that smile, I see, forgives me.
I am now thy nurse, I bid thee sleep.
Close thine eyes—this flooding moonlight blinds them—
Nay, all's well again: thou must not weep.

TRISTRAM.

I am happy: yet I feel, there's something
Swells my heart, and takes my breath away:
Through a mist I see thee: near!—come nearer!
Bend—bend down—I yet have much to say.

ISEULT.

Heaven! his head sinks back upon the pillow!—
Tristram! Tristram! let thy heart not fail.
Call on God and on the holy angels!
What, love, courage!—Christ! he is so pale.
TRISTRAM AND ISEULT.

TRISTRAM.

Hush, tis vain, I feel my end approaching. This is what my mother said should be,
When the fierce pains took her in the forest,
The deep draughts of death, in bearing me.

"Son," she said, "thy name shall be of sorrow!
Tristram art thou call'd for my death's sake!"
So she said, and died in the drear forest.
Grief since then his home with me doth make.

I am dying.—Start not, nor look wildly!
Me, thy living friend, thou canst not save.
But, since living we were ununited,
Go not far, O Iseult! from my grave.

Rise, go hence, and seek the princess Iseult:
Speak her fair, she is of royal blood.
Say, I charg'd her, that ye live together:—
She will grant it—she is kind and good.
Now stand clear before me in the moonlight. 
Fare, farewell, thou long, thou deeply lov'd!

ISEULT.

Tristram!—Tristram—stay—I come! Ah Sorrow—
Fool! thou missest—we are both unmov'd!

You see them clear: the moon shines bright.
Slow—slow and softly, where she stood,
She sinks upon the ground: her hood
Had fallen back: her arms outspread
Still hold her lover's hands: her head
Is bow'd, half-buried, on the bed.
O'er the blanch'd sheet her raven hair
Lies in disorder'd streams; and there,
Strung like white stars, the pearls still are,
And the golden bracelets heavy and rare
Flash on her white arms still.
The very same which yesternight
Flash'd in the silver sconces' light,
When the feast was loud and the laughter shrill
In the banquet-hall of Tyntagil.
But then they deck'd a restless ghost
With hot-flush'd cheeks and brilliant eyes
And quivering lips on which the tide
Of courtly speech abruptly died,
And a glance that over the crowded floor,
The dancers, and the festive host,
Flew ever to the door.
That the knights eyed her in surprise,
And the dames whisper'd scoffingly—
"Her moods, good lack, they pass like showers!
But yesternight and she would be
As pale and still as wither'd flowers,
And now to-night she laughs and speaks
And has a colour in her cheeks.
Heaven keep us from such fantasy!"—
The air of the December night
Steals coldly around the chamber bright:
Swinging with it, in the light
Shines the ghostlike tapestry.
And there upon the wall you see
A stately huntsman, clad in green,
And round him a fresh forest scene.
'Tis noon with him, and yet he stays
With his pack round him, and delays,
As rooted to the earth, nor sounds
His lifted horn, nor cheers his hounds
Into the tangled glen below.
Yet in the sedgy bottom there
Where the deep forest stream creeps slow
Fring'd with dead leaves and mosses rare,
The wild boar harbours close, and feeds.

He gazes down into the room
With heated cheeks and flurried air—
Who is that kneeling lady fair?
And on his pillows that pale knight
Who seems of marble on a tomb?
How comes it here, this chamber bright,
Through whose mullion'd windows clear
The castle court all wet with rain,
The drawbridge, and the moat appear,
And then the beach, and mark'd with spray
The sunken reefs, and far away
The unquiet bright Atlantic plain?—

He stares and stares, with troubled face
At the huge gleam-lit fireplace,
At the bright iron-figur'd door,
And the blown rushes on the floor.

Has then some glamour made him sleep,
And sent him with his dogs to sweep,
By night, with boisterous bugle peal,
Through some old, sea-side, knightly hall,
Not in the free greenwood at all?
That knight's asleep, and at her prayer
That lady by the bed doth kneel:
Then hush, thou boisterous bugle peal!
The wild boar rustles in his lair—
The fierce hounds snuff the tainted air—
But lord and hounds keep rooted there.

Cheer, cheer thy dogs into the brake,
O hunter! and without a fear
Thy golden-tassell’d bugle blow,
And through the glades thy pastime take!
   For thou wilt rouse no sleepers here.
For these thou seest are unmov’d;
Cold, cold as those who liv’d and lov’d
A thousand years ago.
A year had flown, and in the chapel old
Lay Tristram and Queen Iseult dead and cold.
The young surviving Iseult, one bright day,
Had wander'd forth: her children were at play
In a green circular hollow in the heath
Which borders the sea-shore; a country path
Creeps over it from the till'd fields behind.
The hollow's grassy banks are soft inclin'd,
And to one standing on them, far and near
The lone unbroken view spreads bright and clear
Over the waste:—This ring of open ground
Is light and green; the heather, which all round
Creeps thickly, grows not here; but the pale grass
Is strewn with rocks, and many a shiver'd mass
Of vein'd white-gleaming quartz, and here and there
Dotted with holly trees and juniper.
In the smooth centre of the opening stood
Three hollies side by side, and made a screen
Warm with the winter sun, of burnish'd green,
With scarlet berries gemm'd, the fell-fare's food.
Under the glittering hollies Iseult stands
Watching her children play: their little hands
Are busy gathering spars of quartz, and streams
Of stagshorn for their hats: anon, with screams
Of mad delight they drop their spoils, and bound
Among the holly clumps and broken ground,
Racing full speed, and startling in their rush
The fell-fares and the speckled mistle-thrush
Out of their glossy coverts: but when now
Their cheeks were flush'd, and over each hot brow
Under the feather'd hats of the sweet pair
In blinding masses shower'd the golden hair—
Then Iseult called them to her, and the three
Cluster'd under the holly screen, and she
Told them an old-world Breton history.

Warm in their mantles wrapt, the three stood there,
Under the hollies, in the clear still air—
Mantles with those rich furs deep glistening
Which Venice ships do from swart Egypt bring.
Long they staid still—then, pacing at their ease,
Mov'd up and down under the glossy trees;
But still as they pursued their warm dry road
From Iseult's lips the unbroken story flow'd,
And still the children listen'd, their blue eyes
Fix'd on their mother's face in wide surprise;
Nor did their looks stray once to the sea-side,
Nor to the brown heaths round them, bright and wide,
Nor to the snow which, though 'twas all away
From the open heath, still by the hedgerows lay,
Nor to the shining sea-fowl that with screams
Bore up from where the bright Atlantic gleams,
Swooping to landward; nor to where, quite clear,
The fell-fares settled on the thickets near.
And they would still have listen'd, till dark night
Came keen and chill down on the heather bright;
But, when the red glow on the sea grew cold,
And the grey turrets of the castle old
Look'd sternly through the frosty evening air,—
Then Iseult took by the hand those children fair,
And brought her tale to an end, and found the path,
And led them home over the darkening heath.

And is she happy? Does she see unmov'd
The days in which she might have liv'd and lov'd
Slip without bringing bliss slowly away,
One after one, to-morrow like to-day?
Joy has not found her yet, nor ever will:—
Is it this thought that makes her mien so still,
Her features so fatigued, her eyes, though sweet,
So sunk, so rarely lifted save to meet
Her children's? She moves slow: her voice alone
Has yet an infantine and silver tone,
But even that comes languidly: in truth,
She seems one dying in a mask of youth.
And now she will go home, and softly lay
Her laughing children in their beds, and play
Awhile with them before they sleep; and then
She'll light her silver lamp, which fishermen
Dragging their nets through the rough waves, afar,
Along this iron coast, know like a star,
And take her broidery frame, and there she'll sit
Hour after hour, her gold curls sweeping it,
Lifting her soft-bent head only to mind
Her children, or to listen to the wind.
And when the clock peals midnight, she will move
Her work away, and let her fingers rove
Across the shaggy brows of Tristram's hound
Who lies, guarding her feet, along the ground:
Or else she will fall musing, her blue eyes
Fix'd, her slight hands clasp'd on her lap; then rise,
And at her prie-dieu kneel, until she have told
Her rosary beads of ebony tipp'd with gold,
Then to her soft sleep: and to-morrow'll be
To-day's exact repeated effigy.

Yes, it is lonely for her in her hall.
The children, and the grey hair'd seneschal,
Her women, and Sir Tristram's aged hound,
Are there the sole companions to be found.
But these she loves; and noisier life than this
She would find ill to bear, weak as she is:
She has her children too, and night and day
Is with them; and the wide heaths where they play,
The hollies, and the cliff, and the sea-shore,
The sand, the sea birds, and the distant sails,
These are to her dear as to them: the tales
With which this day the children she beguil'd
She glean'd from Breton grandames when a child
In every hut along this sea-coast wild.
She herself loves them still, and, when they are told,
Can forget all to hear them, as of old.

Dear saints, it is not sorrow, as I hear,
Not suffering, that shuts up eye and ear
To all which has delighted them before,
And lets us be what we were once no more.
No: we may suffer deeply, yet retain
Power to be mov'd and sooth'd, for all our pain,
By what of old pleas'd us, and will again.
No: 'tis the gradual furnace of the world,
In whose hot air our spirits are upcurl'd
Until they crumble, or else grow like steel—
Which kills in us the bloom, the youth, the spring—
Which leaves the fierce necessity to feel,
But takes away the power—this can avail,
By drying up our joy in everything,
To make our former pleasures all seem stale.
This, or some tyrannous single thought, some fit
Of passion, which subdues our souls to it,
Till for its sake alone we live and move—
Call it ambition, or remorse, or love—
This too can change us wholly, and make seem
All that we did before, shadow and dream.

And yet, I swear, it angers me to see
How this fool passion gulls men potently;
Being in truth but a diseas’d unrest
And an unnatural overheat at best.
How they are full of languor and distress
Not having it; which when they do possess
They straightway are burnt up with fume and care,
And spend their lives in posting here and there
Where this plague drives them; and have little ease,
Can never end their tasks, are hard to please.
Like that bald Cæsar, the fam’d Roman wight,
Who wept at reading of a Grecian knight
Who made a name at younger years than he:
Or that renown'd mirror of chivalry,
Prince Alexander, Philip's peerless son,
Who carried the great war from Macedon
Into the Soudan's realm, and thunder'd on
To die at thirty-five in Babylon.

What tale did Iseult to the children say,
Under the hollies, that bright winter's day?

She told them of the fairy-haunted land
Away the other side of Brittany,
Beyond the heaths, edg'd by the lonely sea;
Of the deep forest-glades of Broce-liande,
Through whose green boughs the golden sunshine creeps,
Where Merlin by the enchanted thorn-tree sleeps.
For here he came with the fay Vivian,
One April, when the warm days first began;
He was on foot, and that false fay, his friend,
On her white palfrey: here he met his end,
In these lone sylvan glades, that April day.
This tale of Merlin and the lovely fay
Was the one Iseult chose, and she brought clear
Before the children's fancy him and her.

Blowing between the stems the forest air
Had loosen'd the brown curls of Vivian's hair,
Which play'd on her flush'd cheek, and her blue eyes
Sparkled with mocking glee and exercise.
Her palfrey's flanks were mired and bath'd in sweat,
For they had travell'd far and not stopp'd yet.
A briar in that tangled wilderness
Had scor'd her white right hand, which she allows
To rest unglov'd on her green riding-dress;
The other warded off the drooping boughs.
But still she chatted on, with her blue eyes
Fix'd full on Merlin's face, her stately prize:
Her 'haviour had the morning's fresh clear grace,
The spirit of the woods was in her face;
She look'd so witching fair, that learned wight
Forgot his craft, and his best wits took flight,
And he grew fond, and eager to obey
His mistress, use her empire as she may.

They came to where the brushwood ceas'd, and day
Peer'd 'twixt the stems; and the ground broke away
In a slop'd sward down to a brawling brook,
And up as high as where they stood to look
On the brook's further side was clear; but then
The underwood and trees began again.
This open glen was studded thick with thorns
Then white with blossom; and you saw the horns,
Through the green fern, of the shy fallow-deer
Which come at noon down to the water here.
You saw the bright-eyed squirrels dart along
Under the thorns on the green sward; and strong
The blackbird whistled from the dingles near,
And the light chipping of the woodpecker
Rang lonelily and sharp: the sky was fair,
And a fresh breath of spring stirr'd everywhere.
Merlin and Vivian stopp'd on the slope's brow
To gaze on the green sea of leaf and bough
Which glistering lay all round them, lone and mild,
As if to itself the quiet forest smil'd.
Upon the brow-top grew a thorn; and here
The grass was dry and moss'd, and you saw clear
Across the hollow: white anemones
Starr'd the cool turf, and clumps of primroses
Ran out from the dark underwood behind.
No fairer resting-place a man could find.
"Here let us halt," said Merlin then; and she
Nodded, and tied her palfrey to a tree.

They sate them down together, and a sleep
Fell upon Merlin, more like death, so deep.
Her finger on her lips, then Vivian rose,
And from her brown-lock'd head the wimple throws,
And takes it in her hand, and waves it over
The blossom'd thorn-tree and her sleeping lover.
Nine times she wav'd the fluttering wimple round,
And made a little plot of magic ground.
And in that daisied circle, as men say,
Is Merlin prisoner till the judgment-day,
But she herself whither she will can rove,
For she was passing weary of his love.
MEMORIAL VERSES.

April, 1850.

Goethe in Weimar sleeps, and Greece,
Long since, saw Byron’s struggle cease.
But one such death remain’d to come.
The last poetic voice is dumb.
What shall be said o’er Wordsworth’s tomb?

When Byron’s eyes were shut in death,
We bow’d our head and held our breath.
He taught us little: but our soul
Had felt him like the thunder’s roll.
With shivering heart the strife we saw
Of Passion with Eternal Law.
And yet with reverential awe
We watch'd the fount of fiery life
Which serv'd for that Titanic strife.

When Goethe's death was told, we said—
Sunk, then, is Europe's sagest head.
Physician of the Iron Age
Goethe has done his pilgrimage.
He took the suffering human race,
He read each wound, each weakness clear—
And struck his finger on the place
And said—Thou ailest here, and here.—
He look'd on Europe's dying hour
Of fitful dream and feverish power;
His eye plung'd down the weltering strife,
The turmoil of expiring life;
He said—The end is everywhere:
Art still has truth, take refuge there.—
And he was happy, if to know
Causes of things, and far below
His feet to see the lurid flow
Of terror, and insane distress,
And headlong fate, be happiness.

And Wordsworth!—Ah, pale ghosts! rejoice!
For never has such soothing voice
Been to your shadowy world convey'd,
Since erst, at morn, some wandering shade
Heard the clear song of Orpheus come
Through Hades, and the mournful gloom.
Wordsworth is gone from us—and ye,
Ah, may ye feel his voice as we.
He too upon a wintry clime
Had fallen—on this iron time
Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears.
He found us when the age had bound
Our souls in its benumbing round:
He spoke, and loos'd our heart in tears.
He laid us as we lay at birth
On the cool flowery lap of earth;
Smiles broke from us and we had ease.
The hills were round us, and the breeze
Went o'er the sun-lit fields again:
Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.
Our youth return'd: for there was shed
On spirits that had long been dead,
Spirits dried up and closely-furl'd,
The freshness of the early world.

Ah, since dark days still bring to light
Man's prudence and man's fiery might,
Time may restore us in his course
Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force:
But where will Europe's latter hour
Again find Wordsworth's healing power?
Others will teach us how to dare,
And against fear our breast to steel;
Others will strengthen us to bear—
But who, ah who, will make us feel?
MEMORIAL VERSES.

The cloud of mortal destiny,
Others will front it fearlessly—
But who, like him, will put it by?

Keep fresh the grass upon his grave,
O Rotha! with thy living wave.
Sing him thy best! for few or none
Hears thy voice right, now he is gone.
COURAGE.

True, we must tame our rebel will:
True, we must bow to Nature's law:
Must bear in silence many an ill;
Must learn to wait, renounce, withdraw.

Yet now, when boldest wills give place,
When Fate and Circumstance are strong,
And in their rush the human race
Are swept, like huddling sheep, along;

Those sterner spirits let me prize,
Who, though the tendence of the whole
They less than us might recognize,
Kept, more than us, their strength of soul.
Yes, be the second Cato prais'd!
Not that he took the course to die—
But that, when 'gainst himself he rais'd
His arm, he rais'd it dauntlessly.

And, Byron! let us dare admire,
If not thy fierce and turbid song,
Yet that, in anguish, doubt, desire,
Thy fiery courage still was strong.

The sun that on thy tossing pain
Did with such cold derision shine,
He crush'd thee not with his disdain—
    He had his glow, and thou hadst thine.

Our bane, disguise it as we may,
Is weakness, is a faltering course.
Oh that past times could give our day,
Join'd to its clearness, of their force!
Weary of myself, and sick of asking
What I am, and what I ought to be,
At the vessel's prow I stand, which bears me
Forwards, forwards, o'er the star-lit sea.

And a look of passionate desire
O'er the sea and to the stars I send:
"Ye who from my childhood up have calm'd me,
Calm me, ah, compose me to the end.

"Ah, once more," I cried, "ye Stars, ye Waters,
On my heart your mighty charm renew:
Still, still let me, as I gaze upon you,
Feel my soul becoming vast like you."
From the intense, clear, star-sown vault of heaven,
Over the lit sea’s unquiet way,
In the rustling night-air came the answer—
"Wouldst thou be as these are? Live as they.

"Unaffrighted by the silence round them,
Undistracted by the sights they see,
These demand not that the things without them
Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.

"And with joy the stars perform their shining,
And the sea its long moon-silver’d roll.
For alone they live, nor pine with noting
All the fever of some differing soul.

"Bounded by themselves, and unobservant
In what state God’s other works may be,
In their own tasks all their powers pouring,
These attain the mighty life you see."
O air-born Voice! long since, severely clear,
A cry like thine in my own heart I hear.
"Resolve to be thyself: and know, that he
Who finds himself, loses his misery."
A SUMMER NIGHT.

In the deserted moon-blanch'd street
How lonely rings the echo of my feet!
Those windows, which I gaze at, frown,
Silent and white, unopening down,
Repellent as the world:—but see!
A break between the housetops shows
The moon, and, lost behind her, fading dim
Into the dewy dark obscurity
Down at the far horizon's rim,

Doth a whole tract of heaven disclose.

And to my mind the thought
Is on a sudden brought
Of a past night, and a far different scene.
Headlands stood out into the moon-lit deep
As clearly as at noon;
The spring-tide's brimming flow
Heav'd dazzlingly between;
Houses with long white sweep
Girdled the glistening bay:
Behind, through the soft air,
The blue haze-cradled mountains spread away.

That night was far more fair;
But the same restless pacings to and fro,
And the same agitated heart was there,
And the same bright calm moon.

And the calm moonlight seems to say—
—"Hast thou then still the old unquiet breast
That neither deadens into rest
Nor ever feels the fiery glow
That whirls the spirit from itself away,
But fluctuates to and fro
Never by passion quite possess'd,
And never quite benumb'd by the world's sway?"—
And I, I know not if to pray
Still to be what I am, or yield, and be
Like all the other men I see.

For most men in a brazen prison live,
Where in the sun's hot eye,
With heads bent o'er their toil, they languidly
Their lives to some unmeaning taskwork give,
Dreaming of nought beyond their prison wall.
And as, year after year,
Fresh products of their barren labour fall
From their tired hands, and rest
Never yet comes more near,
Gloom settles slowly down over their breast.
And while they try to stem
The waves of mournful thought by which they are prest,
Death in their prison reaches them
Unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest.

And the rest, a few,
Escape their prison, and depart
On the wide Ocean of Life anew.
There the freed prisoner, where'er his heart
Listeth, will sail;
Nor does he know how there prevail,
Despotic on life's sea,
Trade-winds that cross it from eternity.
Awhile he holds some false way, unbarr'd
By thwarting signs, and braves
The freshening wind and blackening waves.
And then the tempest strikes him, and between
The lightning bursts is seen
Only a driving wreck,
And the pale Master on his spar-strewn deck
With anguish'd face and flying hair
Grasping the rudder hard,
Still bent to make some port he knows not where,
Still standing for some false impossible shore.
And sterner comes the roar
Of sea and wind, and through the deepening gloom
Fainter and fainter wreck and helmsman loom,
And he too disappears, and comes no more.
A SUMMER NIGHT.

Is there no life, but these alone?
Madman or slave, must man be one?

Plainness and clearness without shadow of stain,
Clearness divine!

Ye Heavens, whose pure dark regions have no sign
Of languor, though so calm, and though so great
Are yet untroubled and unpassionate:
Who, though so noble, share in the world’s toil,
And though so task’d, keep free from dust and soil:
I will not say that your mild deeps retain
A tinge, it may be, of their silent pain
Who have long’d deeply once, and long’d in vain;
But I will rather say that you remain
A world above man’s head, to let him see
How boundless might his soul’s horizons be,
How vast, yet of what clear transparency.
How it were good to sink there, and breathe free.

How high a lot to fill
Is left to each man still.
Light flows our war of mocking words, and yet,
Behold, with tears my eyes are wet.
I feel a nameless sadness o'er me roll.

Yes, yes, we know that we can jest,
We know, we know that we can smile;
But there's a something in this breast
To which thy light words bring no rest,
And thy gay smiles no anodyne.

Give me thy hand, and hush awhile,
And turn those limpid eyes on mine,
And let me read there, love, thy inmost soul.

Alas, is even Love too weak
To unlock the heart and let it speak?
Are even lovers powerless to reveal
To one another what indeed they feel?
I knew the mass of men conceal'd
Their thoughts, for fear that if reveal'd
They would by other men be met
With blank indifference, or with blame reprov'd:
I knew they liv'd and mov'd
Trick'd in disguises, alien to the rest
Of men, and alien to themselves—and yet
There beats one heart in every human breast.

But we, my love—does a like spell benumb
Our hearts—our voices?—must we too be dumb?

Ah, well for us, if even we,
Even for a moment, can get free
Our heart, and have our lips unchain'd:
   For that which seals them hath been deep ordain'd.

Fate, which foresaw
How frivolous a baby man would be,
By what distractions he would be possess'd,
How he would pour himself in every strife,
And well-nigh change his own identity;
That it might keep from his capricious play
His genuine self, and force him to obey
Even in his own despite, his being's law,
Bade, through the deep recesses of our breast,
The unregarded river of our life
Pursue with indiscernible flow its way;
And that we should not see
The buried stream, and seem to be
Eddying about in blind uncertainty,
Though driving on with it eternally.

But often, in the world's most crowded streets,
But often, in the din of strife,
There rises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge of our buried life,
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
In tracking out our true, original course;
A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart that beats
So wild, so deep in us, to know
Whence our thoughts come and where they go.
And many a man in his own breast then delves,
But deep enough, alas, none ever mines:
And we have been on many thousand lines,
And we have shown on each talent and power,
But hardly have we, for one little hour,
Been on our own line, have we been ourselves;
Hardly had skill to utter one of all
The nameless feelings that course through our breast,
But they course on for ever unexpress'd.
And long we try in vain to speak and act
Our hidden self, and what we say and do
Is eloquent, is well—but 'tis not true:
And then we will no more be rack'd
With inward striving, and demand
Of all the thousand nothings of the hour
Their stupifying power,
Ah yes, and they benumb us at our call;
Yet still, from time to time, vague and forlorn,
From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
As from an infinitely distant land,
Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
A melancholy into all our day.

Only—but this is rare—
When a beloved hand is laid in ours,
When, jaded with the rush and glare
Of the interminable hours,
Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
When our world-deafen'd ear
Is by the tones of a loved voice caress'd,
   A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again:
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow
And hears its winding murmur, and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.

And there arrives a lull in the hot race
Wherein he doth for ever chase
That flying and elusive shadow, Rest.
An air of coolness plays upon his face,
And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.

And then he thinks he knows
The Hills where his life rose,
And the Sea where it goes.
A FAREWELL.

My horse's feet beside the lake,
Where sweet the unbroken moonbeams lay,
Sent echoes through the night to wake
Each glistening strand, each heath-fring'd bay.

The poplar avenue was pass'd,
And the roof'd bridge that spans the stream.
Up the steep street I hurried fast,
Lit by thy taper's starlike beam.

I came, I saw thee rise;—the blood
Came flooding to thy languid cheek.
Lock'd in each other's arms we stood,
In tears, with hearts too full to speak.
Days flew: ah, soon I could discern
A trouble in thine alter'd air.
Thy hand lay languidly in mine—
Thy cheek was grave, thy speech grew rare.

I blame thee not:—this heart, I know,
To be long lov'd was never fram'd;
For something in its depths doth glow
Too strange, too restless, too untam'd.

And women—things that live and move
Min'd by the fever of the soul—
They seek to find in those they love
Stern strength, and promise of control.

They ask not kindness, gentle ways;
These they themselves have tried and known:
They ask a soul that never sways
With the blind gusts which shake their own.
I too have felt the load I bore
In a too strong emotion's sway;
I too have wish'd, no woman more,
This starting, feverish heart away.

I too have long'd for trenchant force,
And will like a dividing spear;
Have praised the keen, unscrupulous course,
Which knows no doubt, which feels no fear.

But in the world I learnt, what there
Thou too wilt surely one day prove,
That will, that energy, though rare,
Are yet far far less rare than love.

Go, then! till Time and Fate impress
This truth on thee, be mine no more!
They will: for thou, I feel, no less
Than I, wert destin'd to this lore.
A FAREWELL.

We school our manners, act our parts:
But He, who sees us through and through,
Knows that the bent of both our hearts
Was to be gentle, tranquil, true.

And though we wear out life, alas!
Distracted as a homeless wind,
In beating where we must not pass,
In seeking what we shall not find;

Yet we shall one day gain, life past,
Clear prospect o'er our being's whole:
Shall see ourselves, and learn at last
Our true affinities of soul.

We shall not then deny a course
To every thought the mass ignore:
We shall not then call hardness force,
Nor lightness wisdom any more.
Then, in the eternal Father's smile,
Our sooth'd, encourag'd souls will dare
To seem as free from pride and guile,
As good, as generous, as they are.

Then we shall know our friends: though much
Will have been lost—the help in strife;
The thousand sweet still joys of such
As hand in hand face earthly life—

Though these be lost, there will be yet
A sympathy august and pure;
Ennobled by a vast regret,
And by contrition seal'd thrice sure.

And we, whose ways were unlike here,
May then more neighbouring courses ply,
May to each other be brought near,
And greet across infinity.
How sweet, unreach'd by earthly jars,
My sister! to behold with thee
The hush among the shining stars,
The calm upon the moonlit sea.

How sweet to feel, on the boon air,
All our unquiet pulses cease—
To feel that nothing can impair
The gentleness, the thirst for peace—

The gentleness too rudely hurl'd
On this wild earth of hate and fear:
The thirst for peace a raving world
Would never let us satiate here.
STANZAS

IN MEMORY OF THE AUTHOR OF "OBERMANN."

In front the awful Alpine track
Crawls up its rocky stair;
The autumn storm-winds drive the rack
Close o'er it, in the air.

Behind are the abandoned baths
Mute in their meadows lone;
The leaves are on the valley paths;
The mists are on the Rhone—

The white mists rolling like a sea.
I hear the torrents roar.
—Yes, Obermann, all speaks of thee!
I feel thee near once more.
I turn thy leaves: I feel their breath
Once more upon me roll;
That air of languor, cold, and death,
Which brooded o'er thy soul.

Fly hence, poor Wretch, whoe'er thou art,
Condemn'd to cast about,
All shipwreck in thy own weak heart,
For comfort from without:

A fever in these pages burns
Beneath the calm they feign;
A wounded human spirit turns
Here, on its bed of pain.

Yes, though the virgin mountain air
Fresh through these pages blows,
Though to these leaves the glaciers spare
The soul of their mute snows,
Though here a mountain murmur swells
Of many a dark-bough’d pine,
Though, as you read, you hear the bells
Of the high-pasturing kine—

Yet, through the hum of torrent lone,
And brooding mountain bee,
There sohs I know not what ground tone
Of human agony.

Is it for this, because the sound
Is fraught too deep with pain,
That, Obermann! the world around
So little loves thy strain?

Some secrets may the poet tell,
For the world loves new ways.
To tell too deep ones is not well;
It knows not what he says.
Yet of the spirits who have reign’d
In this our troubled day,
I know but two, who have attain’d,
Save thee, to see their way.

By England’s lakes, in grey old age,
His quiet home one keeps;*
And one, the strong much-toiling Sage,
In German Weimar sleeps.

But Wordsworth’s eyes avert their ken
From half of human fate;
And Goethe’s course few sons of men
May think to emulate.

For he pursued a lonely road,
His eyes on nature’s plan;
Neither made man too much a God,
Nor God too much a man.

* Written in November, 1849.
Strong was he, with a spirit free
From mists, and sane, and clear;
Clearer, how much! than ours: yet we
Have a worse course to steer.

For though his manhood bore the blast
Of a tremendous time,
Yet in a tranquil world was pass'd
His tenderer youthful prime.

But we, brought forth and rear'd in hours
Of change, alarm, surprise—
What shelter to grow ripe is ours?
What leisure to grow wise?

Like children bathing on the shore,
Buried a wave beneath,
The second wave succeeds, before
We have had time to breathe.
STANZAS.

Too fast we live, too much are tried,
Too harass'd, to attain
Wordsworth's sweet calm, or Goethe's wide
And luminous view to gain.

And then we turn, thou sadder sage!
To thee: we feel thy spell.
The hopeless tangle of our age—
Thou too hast scann'd it well.

Immoveable thou sittest; still
As death; compos'd to bear.
Thy head is clear, thy feeling chill—
And icy thy despair.

Yes, as the Son of Thetis said,
One hears thee saying now—
"Greater by far than thou are dead:
Strive not: die also thou."—
Ah! Two desires toss about
The poet's feverish blood.
One drives him to the world without,
And one to solitude.

The glow of thought, the thrill of life—
Where, where do these abound?
Not in the world, not in the strife
Of men, shall they be found.

He who hath watch'd, not shar'd, the strife,
Knows how the day hath gone;
He only lives with the world's life
Who hath renounced his own.

To thee we come, then. Clouds are roll'd
Where thou, O Seer, art set;
Thy realm of thought is drear and cold—
The world is colder yet!
And thou hast pleasures too to share
With those who come to thee:
Balms floating on thy mountain air,
And healing sights to see.

How often, where the slopes are green
On Jaman, hast thou sate
By some high chalet door, and seen
The summer day grow late,

And darkness steal o'er the wet grass
With the pale crocus starr'd,
And reach that glimmering sheet of glass
Beneath the piny sward,

Lake Leman's waters, far below:
And watch'd the rosy light
Fade from the distant peaks of snow:
And on the air of night
Heard accents of the eternal tongue
Through the pine branches play:
Listen’d, and felt thyself grow young;
Listen’d, and wept——Away!

Away the dreams that but deceive!
And thou, sad Guide, adieu!
I go; Fate drives me: but I leave
Half of my life with you.

We, in some unknown Power’s employ,
Move on a rigorous line:
Can neither, when we will, enjoy;
Nor, when we will, resign.

I in the world must live:—but thou,
Thou melancholy Shade!
Wilt not, if thou can’st see me now,
Condemn me, nor upbraid.
For thou art gone away from earth,
And place with those dost claim,
The Children of the Second Birth
Whom the world could not tame;

And with that small transfigur'd Band,
Whom many a different way
Conducted to their common land,
Thou learn'st to think as they.

Christian and pagan, king and slave,
Soldier and anchorite,
Distinctions we esteem so grave,
Are nothing in their sight.

They do not ask, who pin'd unseen,
Who was on action hurl'd,
Whose one bond is, that all have been
Unspotted by the world.
There without anger thou wilt see
Him who obeys thy spell
No more, so he but rest, like thee,
Unsoil'd:—and so, Farewell!

Farewell!—Whether thou now liest near
That much-lov'd inland sea,
The ripples of whose blue waves cheer
Vevey and Meillerie,

And in that gracious region bland,
Where with clear-rustling wave
The scented pines of Switzerland
Stand dark round thy green grave,

Between the dusty vineyard walls
Issuing on that green place,
The early peasant still recalls
The pensive stranger's face,
And stoops to clear thy moss-grown date
Ere he plods on again:
Or whether, by maligner fate,
Among the swarms of men,

Where between granite terraces
The Seine conducts her wave,
The Capital of Pleasure sees
Thy hardly heard of grave—

Farewell! Under the sky we part,
In this stern Alpine dell.
O unstrung will! O broken heart!
A last, a last farewell!
Mist clogs the sunshine.
Smoky dwarf houses
Hem me round everywhere.
A vague dejection
Weighs down my soul.

Yet, while I languish,
Everywhere, countless
Prospects unroll themselves
And countless beings
Pass countless moods.

Far hence, in Asia,
On the smooth convent-roofs,
On the gold terraces
Of holy Lassa,
Bright shines the sun.
CONSOLATION.

Grey time-worn marbles
Hold the pure Muses.
In their cool gallery,
    By yellow Tiber,
They still look fair.

Strange unlov'd uproar*
Shrills round their portal.
Yet not on Helicon
    Kept they more cloudless
Their noble calm.

Through sun-proof alleys,
In a lone, sand-hemm'd
City of Africa,
    A blind, led beggar,
Age-bow'd, asks alms.

* Written during the siege of Rome by the French.
No bolder Robber
Erst abode ambush'd
Deep in the sandy waste:
   No clearer eyesight
Spied prey afar.

Saharan sand-winds
Sear'd his keen eyeballs.
Spent is the spoil he won.
   For him the present
Holds only pain.

Two young, fair lovers,
Where the warm June wind,
Fresh from the summer fields,
   Plays fondly round them,
Stand, tranç'd in joy.
With sweet, join'd voices,
And with eyes brimming—
"Ah," they cry, "Destiny!
Prolong the present!
Time! stand still here!"

The prompt stern Goddess
Shakes her head, frowning.
Time gives his hour-glass
Its due reversal.
Their hour is gone.

With weak indulgence
Did the just Goddess
Lengthen their happiness.
She lengthen'd also
Distress elsewhere.
The hour, whose happy
Unalloy'd moments
I would eternalize,
    Ten thousand mourners
Well pleas'd see end.

The bleak stern hour,
Whose severe moments
I would annihilate,
    Is pass'd by others
In warmth, light, joy.

Time, so complain'd of,
Who to no one man
Shows partiality,
    Brings round to all men
Some undimm'd hours.
LINES

WRITTEN IN KENSINGTON GARDENS.

In this lone open glade I lie,
Screen'd by dark trees on either hand;
And at its head, to stay the eye,
Those black-topp'd, red-bol'd pine-trees stand.

The clouded sky is still and grey,
Through silken rifts soft peers the sun.
Light the green-foliag'd chestnuts play,
The darker elms stand grave and dun.

The birds sing sweetly in these trees
Across the girdling city's hum;
How green under the boughs it is!
How thick the tremulous sheep-cries come!
Sometimes a child will cross the glade
To take his nurse his broken toy:
 Sometimes a thrush flit overhead
Deep in her unknown day’s employ.

Here at my feet what wonders pass,
What endless active life is here!
What blowing daisies, fragrant grass!
An air-stirr’d forest, fresh and clear.

Scarce fresher is the mountain sod
Where the tired angler lies, stretch’d out,
And, eas’d of basket and of rod,
Counts his day’s spoil, the spotted trout.

I, on men’s impious uproar hurl’d,
Think sometimes, as I hear them rave,
That peace has left the upper world,
And now keeps only in the grave.
Yet here is peace for ever new.
When I, who watch them, am away,
Still all things in this glade go through
The changes of their quiet day.

Then to their happy rest they pass.
The flowers close, the birds are fed;
The night comes down upon the grass:
The child sleeps warmly in his bed.

Calm Soul of all things! make it mine
To feel, amid the city's jar,
That there abides a peace of thine,
Man did not make, and cannot mar.

The will to neither strive nor cry,
The power to feel with others give.
Calm, calm me more; nor let me die
Before I have begun to live.
SONNET.

So far as I conceive the World's rebuke
To him address'd who would recast her new,
Not from herself her fame of strength she took,
But from their weakness, who would work her rue.

"Behold, she cries, so many rages lull'd,
So many fiery spirits quite cool'd down:
Look how so many valours, long undull'd,
After short commerce with me, fear my frown.
Thou too, when thou against my crimes wouldst cry,
Let thy foreboded homage check thy tongue."—
The World speaks well: yet might her foe reply—

"Are wills so weak? then let not mine wait long.
Hast thou so rare a poison? let me be
Keener to slay thee, lest thou poison me."
THE SECOND BEST.

MODERATE tasks and moderate leisure;
Quiet living, strict-kept measure
Both in suffering and in pleasure,
'Tis for this thy nature yearns.

But so many books thou readest,
But so many schemes thou breedest,
But so many wishes feedest,
That thy poor head almost turns.

And, (the world's so madly jangled,
Human things so fast entangled)
Nature's wish must now be strangled
For that best which she discerns.
So it must be: yet, while leading
A strain'd life, while overfeeding,
Like the rest, his wit with reading,
   No small profit that man earns,

Who through all he meets can steer him,
Can reject what cannot clear him,
Cling to what can truly cheer him:
   Who each day more surely learns

That an impulse, from the distance
Of his deepest, best existence,
To the words "Hope, Light, Persistance,"
     Strongly stirs and truly burns.
REVOLUTIONS.

Before Man parted for this earthly strand,
While yet upon the verge of heaven he stood,
God put a heap of letters in his hand,
And bade him make with them what word he could.

And Man has turn'd them many times: made Greece,
Rome, England, France:—yes, nor in vain essay'd
Way after way, changes that never cease.
The letters have combin'd: something was made.

But ah, an inextinguishable sense
Haunts him that he has not made what he should.
That he has still, though old, to recommence,
Since he has not yet found the word God would.
And Empire after Empire, at their height
Of sway, have felt this boding sense come on.
Have felt their huge frames not constructed right,
And droop'd, and slowly died upon their throne.

One day, thou say'st, there will at last appear
The word, the order, which God meant should be.
    Ah, we shall know that well when it comes near.
The band will quit Man's heart:—he will breathe free.
THE YOUTH OF NATURE.

Rais'd are the dripping oars—
Silent the boat: the lake,
Lovely and soft as a dream,
Swims in the sheen of the moon.
The mountains stand at its head
Clear in the pure June night,
But the valleys are flooded with haze.
Rydal and Fairfield are there;
In the shadow Wordsworth lies dead.
So it is, so it will be for aye.

Nature is fresh as of old,
Is lovely: a mortal is dead.

The spots which recall him survive,
For he lent a new life to these hills.
The Pillar still broods o'er the fields
That border Ennerdale Lake,  
And Egremont sleeps by the sea.  
The gleam of The Evening Star  
Twinkles on Grasmere no more,  
But ruin'd and solemn and grey  
The sheepfold of Michael survives,  
And far to the south, the heath  
Still blows in the Quantock coombs,  
    By the favourite waters of Ruth.  
These survive: yet not without pain,  
Pain and dejection to-night,  
Can I feel that their Poet is gone.

He grew old in an age he condemn'd.  
He look'd on the rushing decay  
Of the times which had shelter'd his youth.  
Felt the dissolving throes  
Of a social order he lov'd.  
Outliv'd his brethren, his peers.
And, like the Theban seer,
    Died in his enemies' day.

Cold bubbled the spring of Tilphusa.
Copais lay bright in the moon.
Helicon glass'd in the lake
Its firs, and afar, rose the peaks
Of Parnassus, snowily clear.
Thebes was behind him in flames,
And the clang of arms in his ear,
When his awe-struck captors led
The Theban seer to the spring.
    Tiresias drank and died.
Nor did reviving Thebes
See such a prophet again.

Well may we mourn, when the head
Of a sacred poet lies low
In an age which can rear them no more.
The complaining millions of men
Darken in labour and pain;
But he was a priest to us all
Of the wonder and bloom of the world,
Which we saw with his eyes, and were glad.

He is dead, and the fruit-bearing day
Of his race is past on the earth;
And darkness returns to our eyes.

For oh, is it you, is it you,
Moonlight, and shadow, and lake,
And mountains, that fill us with joy,
Or the Poet who sings you so well?
Is it you, O Beauty, O Grace,
O Charm, O Romance, that we feel,
Or the voice which reveals what you are?
Are ye, like daylight and sun,
Shar’d and rejoic’d in by all?
Or are ye immers’d in the mass
Of matter, and hard to extract,
Or sunk at the core of the world
Too deep for the most to discern?
   Like stars in the deep of the sky,
Which arise on the glass of the sage,
But are lost when their watcher is gone.

"They are here"—I heard, as men heard
In Mysian Ida the voice
Of the Mighty Mother, or Crete,
The murmur of Nature reply—
"Loveliness, Magic, and Grace,
They are here—they are set in the world—
They abide—and the finest of souls
Has not been thrill'd by them all,
Nor the dullest been dead to them quite.
The poet who sings them may die,
But they are immortal, and live,
For they are the life of the world.
Will ye not learn it, and know,
When ye mourn that a poet is dead,
That the singer was less than his themes,
Life, and Emotion, and I?

"More than the singer are these.
Weak is the tremor of pain
That thrills in his mournfullest chord
To that which once ran through his soul.
Cold the elation of joy
In his gladdest, airiest song,
To that which of old in his youth
Fill'd him and made him divine.
Hardly his voice at its best
Gives us a sense of the awe,
The vastness, the grandeur, the gloom
Of the unlit gulf of himself.

"Ye know not yourselves—and your bards,
The clearest, the best, who have read
Most in themselves, have beheld
Less than they left unreveal'd.
Ye express not yourselves—can ye make
With marble, with colour, with word,
What charm'd you in others re-live?
Can thy pencil, O Artist, restore
The figure, the bloom of thy love,
As she was in her morning of spring?
Canst thou paint the ineffable smile
Of her eyes as they rested on thine?
Can the image of life have the glow,
The motion of life itself?

"Yourselves and your fellows ye know not—and me
The mateless, the one, will ye know?
Will ye scan me, and read me, and tell
Of the thoughts that ferment in my breast,
My longing, my sadness, my joy?
Will ye claim for your great ones the gift
To have render'd the gleam of my skies,
To have echoed the moan of my seas,
Utter'd the voice of my hills?
When your great ones depart, will ye say—
"All things have suffer'd a loss—
Nature is hid in their grave?"

"Race after race, man after man,
Have dream'd that my secret was theirs,
Have thought that I liv'd but for them,
That they were my glory and joy.—
They are dust, they are chang'd, they are gone.
I remain."
THE YOUTH OF MAN.

We, O Nature, depart,
Thou survivest us: this,
This, I know, is the law.
Yes, but more than this,
Thou who seest us die
Seest us change while we live;
Seest our dreams one by one,
Seest our errors depart:

Watchest us, Nature, throughout,
Mild and inscrutably calm.

Well for us that we change!
Well for us that the Power
Which in our morning prime,
Saw the mistakes of our youth,
Sweet, and forgiving, and good,
Sees the contrition of age!

Behold, O Nature, this pair.
See them to-night where they stand,
Not with the halo of youth
Crowning their brows with its light,
Not with the sunshine of hope,
Not with the rapture of spring,
Which they had of old, when they stood
Years ago at my side
In this selfsame garden, and said;
"We are young, and the world is ours,
For man is the king of the world.
Fools that these mystics are
Who prate of Nature! but she
Has neither beauty, nor warmth,
Nor life, nor emotion, nor power.
But Man has a thousand gifts,
And the generous dreamer invests
The senseless world with them all.
    Nature is nothing! her charm
Lives in our eyes which can paint,
Lives in our hearts which can feel!"

Thou, O Nature, wert mute,
Mute as of old: days flew,
Days and years; and Time
With the ceaseless stroke of his wings
Brush'd off the bloom from their soul.
Clouded and dim grew their eye,
Languid their heart; for Youth
Quicken'd its pulses no more.
Slowly within the walls
Of an ever-narrowing world
They droop'd, they grew blind, they grew old.
Thee and their Youth in thee,
Nature, they saw no more.
Murmur of living!
Stir of existence!
Soul of the world!
Make, oh make yourselves felt
To the dying spirit of Youth.
Come, like the breath of the spring.
Leave not a human soul
To grow old in darkness and pain.
Only the living can feel you:
But leave us not while we live.

Here they stand to-night—
Here, where this grey balustrade
Crowns the still valley: behind
Is the castled house with its woods
Which shelter'd their childhood, the sun
On its ivied windows; a scent
From the grey-wall'd gardens, a breath
Of the fragrant stock and the pink
Perfumes the evening air.

Their children play on the lawns.
They stand and listen: they hear
The children's shouts, and, at times,
Faintly, the bark of a dog
From a distant farm in the hills:—
Nothing besides: in front
The wide, wide valley outspreads
To the dim horizon, repos'd
In the twilight, and bath'd in dew,

Corn-field and hamlet and copse
Darkening fast; but a light,
Far off, a glory of day,
Still plays on the city spires:
And there in the dusk by the walls,
With the grey mist marking its course
Though the silent flowery land,

On, to the plains, to the sea,
Floats the imperial Stream.
Well I know what they feel.
They gaze, and the evening wind
Plays on their faces: they gaze;
Airs from the Eden of Youth,
Awake and stir in their soul:
The past returns; they feel
What they are, alas! what they were.
They, not Nature, are chang'd.
Well I know what they feel.

Hush! for tears
Begin to steal to their eyes.
Hush! for fruit
Grows from such sorrow as theirs.

And they remember
With piercing untold anguish
The proud boasting of their youth.
   And they feel how Nature was fair.
And the mists of delusion,
And the scales of habit,
Fall away from their eyes.
And they see, for a moment,
Stretching out, like the desert
In its weary, unprofitable length,
Their faded ignoble lives.

While the locks are yet brown on thy head,
While the soul still looks through thine eyes,
While the heart still pours
The mantling blood to thy cheek,
Sink, O Youth, in thy soul!
Yearn to the greatness of Nature!
Rally the good in the depths of thyself.
MORALITY.

We cannot kindle when we will
The fire that in the heart resides,
The spirit bloweth and is still,
In mystery our soul abides:

But tasks in hours of insight will’d
Can be through hours of gloom fulfill’d.

With aching hands and bleeding feet
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone;
We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day, and wish ’twere done.

Not till the hours of light return
All we have built do we discern.
Then, when the clouds are off the soul,
When thou dost bask in Nature's eye,
Ask, how she view'd thy self-control,
Thy struggling task'd morality.

Nature, whose free, light, cheerful air,
Oft made thee, in thy gloom, despair.

And she, whose censure thou dost dread,
Whose eye thou wert afraid to seek,
See, on her face a glow is spread,
A strong emotion on her cheek.

"Ah child," she cries, "that strife divine—
Whence was it, for it is not mine?

"There is no effort on my brow—
I do not strive, I do not weep.
I rush with the swift spheres, and glow
In joy, and, when I will, I sleep.—

Yet that severe, that earnest air,
I saw, I felt it once—but where?"
"I knew not yet the gauge of Time,
Nor wore the manacles of Space.
I felt it in some other clime—
I saw it in some other place.

—'Twas when the heavenly house I trod,
And lay upon the breast of God."
The Master stood upon the Mount, and taught.
He saw a fire in his Disciples' eyes.
"The old Law," they said, "is wholly come to nought;
Behold the new world rise!"

"Was it," the Lord then said, "with scorn ye saw
The old Law observed by Scribes and Pharisees?
I say unto you, see ye keep that Law
More faithfully than these.

"Too hasty heads for ordering worlds, alas!
Think not that I to annul the Law have will'd.
No jot, no tittle from the Law shall pass,
Till all shall be fulfill'd."
So Christ said eighteen hundred years ago.
And what then shall be said to those to-day
Who cry aloud to lay the old world low
   To clear the new world's way?

"Religious fervours! ardour misapplied!
Hence, hence," they cry, "ye do but keep man blind!
But keep him self-immers'd, preoccupied,
   And lame the active mind."

Ah, from the old world let some one answer give—
"Scorn ye this world, their tears, their inward cares?
I say unto you, see that your souls live
   A deeper life than theirs.

"Say ye,—The spirit of man has found new roads;
And we must leave the old faiths, and walk therein?—
Quench then the altar fires of your old Gods!
    Quench not the fire within!
"Bright else, and fast, the stream of life may roll,
And no man may the other's hurt behold.
Yet each will have one anguish—his own soul
Which perishes of cold."

Here let that voice make end: then, let a strain
From a far lonelier distance, like the wind
Be heard, floating through heaven, and fill again
These men's profoundest mind—

"Children of men! the unseen Power, whose eye
Ever accompanies the march of man,
Hath without pain seen no religion die,
Since first the world began.

"That man must still to some new worship press
Hath in his eye ever but serv'd to show
The depth of that consuming restlessness
Which makes man's greatest woe."
"Which has not taught weak wills how much they can,
Which has not fall'n on the dry heart like rain?
Which has not cried to sunk self-weary man,
"Thou must be born again?"

"Children of men! not that your age excel
In pride of life the ages of your sires;
But that you too feel deeply, bear fruit well,
The Friend of man desires."
A wanderer is man from his birth.
He was born in a ship
On the breast of the River of Time.
Brimming with wonder and joy
He spreads out his arms to the light,
Rivets his gaze on the banks of the stream.

As what he sees is, so have his thoughts been.
Whether he wakes
Where the snowy mountainous pass
Echoing the screams of the eagles
Hems in its gorges the bed
Of the new-born clear-flowing stream:
Whether he first sees light
Where the river in gleaming rings
    Sluggishly winds through the plain:
Whether in sound of the swallowing sea:—
    As is the world on the banks
So is the mind of the man.

Vainly does each as he glides
Fable and dream
Of the lands which the River of Time
Had left ere he woke on its breast,
Or shall reach when his eyes have been clos'd.
Only the tract where he sails
He wots of: only the thoughts,
Rais'd by the objects he passes, are his.

Who can see the green Earth any more
As she was by the sources of Time?
Who imagines her fields as they lay
In the sunshine, unworn by the plough?
Who thinks as they thought,  
The tribes who then liv'd on her breast,  
    Her vigorous primitive sons?

What girl  
Now reads in her bosom as clear  
As Rebekah read, when she sate  
At eve by the palm-shaded well?  
Who guards in her breast  
As deep, as pellucid a spring  
Of feeling, as tranquil, as sure?

What Bard,  
At the height of his vision, can deem  
Of God, of the world, of the soul,  
With a plainness as near,  
As flashing as Moses felt,  
When he lay in the night by his flock  
On the starlit Arabian waste?
Can rise and obey
The beck of the Spirit like him?

This tract which the River of Time
Now flows through with us, is the Plain.
Gone is the calm of its earlier shore.
Border'd by cities and hoarse
With a thousand cries is its stream.
And we on its breast, our minds
Are confus'd as the cries which we hear,
   Changing and shot as the sights which we see.
And we say that repose has fled
For ever the course of the River of Time.
That cities will crowd to its edge
In a blacker incessanter line;
That the din will be more on its banks,
Denser the trade on its stream,
Flatter the plain where it flows,
   Fiercer the sun overhead.
That never will those on its breast
See an ennobling sight,
Drink of the feeling of quiet again.

But what was before us we know not,
And we know not what shall succeed.

Haply, the River of Time,
As it grows, as the towns on its marge
Fling their wavering lights
On a wider statelier stream—
May acquire, if not the calm
Of its early mountainous shore,
   Yet a solemn peace of its own.

And the width of the waters, the hush
Of the grey expanse where he floats,
Freshening its current and spotted with foam
As it draws to the Ocean, may strike
Peace to the soul of the man on its breast:

As the pale waste widens around him—
As the banks fade dimmer away—
As the stars come out, and the night-wind
Brings up the stream
Murmurs and scents of the infinite Sea.
BY THE SAME AUTHOR,

THE STRAYED REVELLER,

AND

OTHER POEMS.

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