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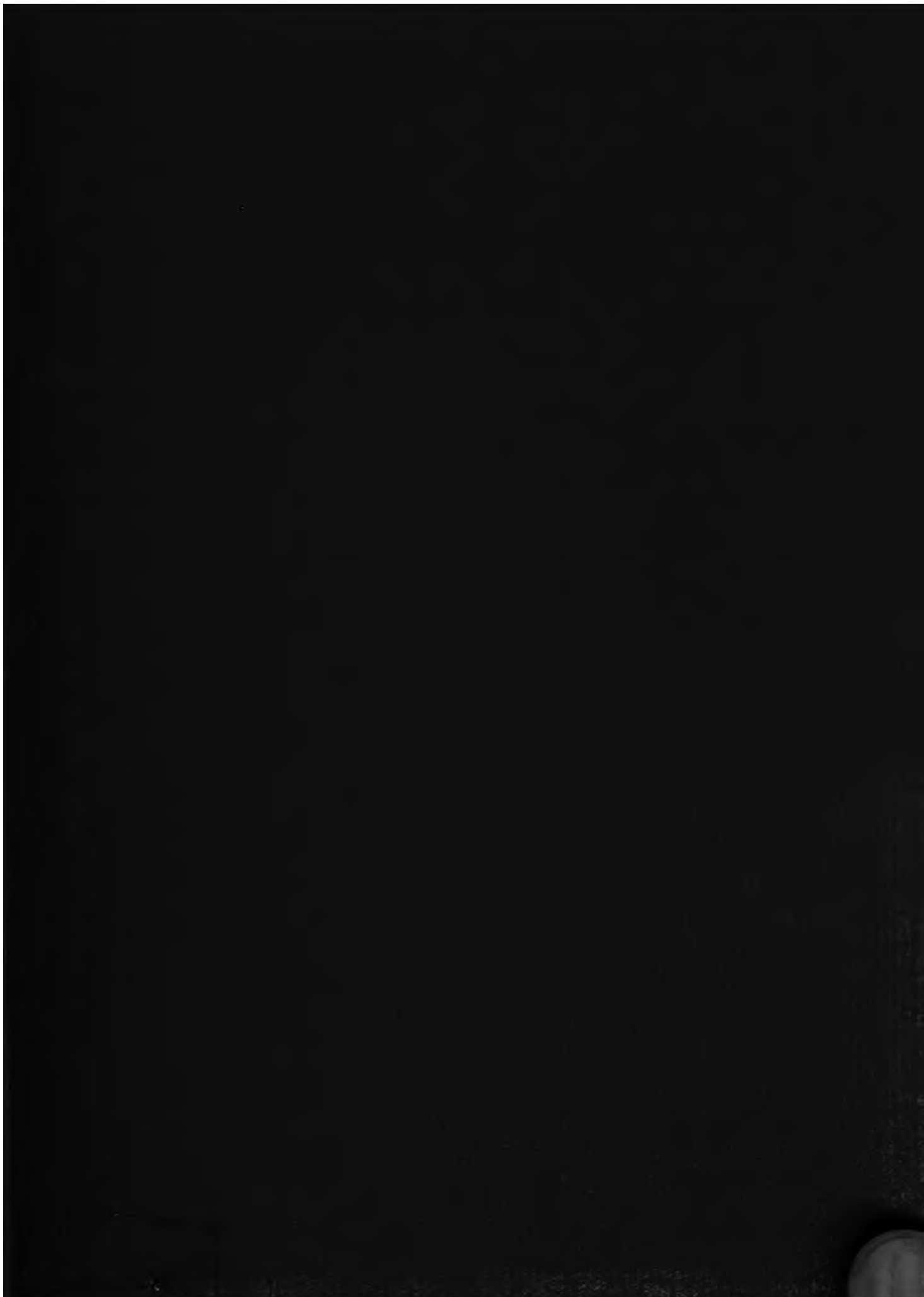


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# THE PURPLE EAST

A SERIES OF SONNETS ON ENGLAND'S

DESERTION OF ARMENIA

BY

WILLIAM WATSON

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

BY

G. F. WATTS R.A.



LONDON : JOHN LANE VIGO ST.

1896

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## PREFACE

A WORD as to the origin of these Sonnets may perhaps be expedient. The first of them, "The Turk in Armenia," was published as long ago as March 2, 1895, during the Premiership of Lord Rosebery; was subsequently included in the Author's latest volume of verse; and is here reprinted with some alteration. The occasion of the one entitled "Repudiated Responsibility" was a recent public utterance of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. This and its companion pieces, with the exception of three which now see the light for the first time, were contributed in rapid succession to the *Westminster Gazette*, during December and January 1895-6; several have since undergone considerable revision. After the publication of the first seven, there appeared a reply, from



the pen of the present Poet Laureate, in the shape of three sonnets, entitled "A Vindication of England," and addressed "To the Author of 'The Purple East.'" Their substance may with perfect truth and fairness be recapitulated in a few words of prose. The Poet Laureate assured me—First, that whosoever in any circumstances arraigns this country for anything that she may do or leave undone, thereby covers himself with shame; secondly, that although the continued torture, rape, and massacre of a Christian people under the eyes of a Christian continent may be a lamentable thing, it is best to be patient, seeing that the patience of God Himself can never be exhausted; and thirdly, that if I were but with him in his pretty country-house, were but comfortably seated "by the yule-log's blaze," and joining with him in seasonable conviviality, the enigmas of Providence and the whole mystery of things would presently become transparent to me, and more especially after "drinking to England," I should

be enabled to understand that "she bides her hour behind the bastioned brine." To the Laureate's amiable effusion, with its conventional patriotism and its absolute penury of argument, pages 31-4 of this booklet are of the nature of a reply.

Passing to less personal issues, I myself have but little hope that any mere written word can bear visible fruit while the spiritual frost lies so hard upon the land as at this time. I am indeed loth to go so far as the great Painter who suffers my pen to be ennobled by temporary association with his pencil, and who has expressed to me his belief that "nothing at this moment is possible except a national mourning." With profound veneration for the genius that has so often transfused the poet's emotion and the mystic's vision in the splendours of colour and form, I must hope that herein at least he is wrong; that something besides lamentation alone is even yet possible: though I, too, feel that *without* it—without penitent tears for our

tragic errors as the first condition of effort—nothing that is worth the doing can be done.

In the sphere of practical action, if, notwithstanding our paramount naval power, notwithstanding the moral support, and surely, in such a cause, and in eventual emergency, the material support, of all the nobler elements of Anglo-Saxon civilisation throughout the world, the position of England relatively to the European imbroglio and to her own Egyptian, South African, and American complications be really such as to render hopeless any Crusade of this Empire against that Vicegerency of Hell which is acquiesced in as the Ottoman Government, then let us do what many earnest-minded Englishmen, even among those who are no enthusiastic friends of Russia, are urging as the only possible solution of a problem that cries aloud, with the tongues of thrice a hundred thousand martyrs, to be solved. If in very truth England herself cannot move—if she must

perforce sit like the victim of the wand of  
Comus, her nerves

“Chained up in alabaster,  
And she a statue, or as Daphne was,  
Root-bound, that fled Apollo”—

then let her at least abandon her selfish obstruction of those who can move and who would. And if an appeal to the national conscience is vain, let us fall back for a moment upon lower ethical considerations, and ask ourselves whether in the end it will even *advantage* us to have postponed the rescue of a dying people to our own alleged interests in the maintenance of a diabolical tyranny. To have been the accessory to a tremendous crime, whether before or after the fact, whether by direct complicity or by the passive connivance of non-intervention where effective intervention was possible, will not permanently aid a nation, any more than it would aid an individual, to go about the business of life with that inmost self-approval which can afford to ignore the adverse judgments of the half-informed,

and which is more potent than any plaudits to sustain and secretly inspire. Wanting that silent ratification, unfortified by that inward sanction, a nation must needs lose vigour and assurance. Her walk grows feverish, and her rejoicings troubled, for a shadowy accuser waylays her footsteps, and haunts the background of her feasts.

WILLIAM WATSON.

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## THE TURK IN ARMENIA

WHAT profits it, O England, to prevail  
In camp and mart and council, and  
bestrew

With argosies thy oceans, and renew  
With tribute levied on each golden  
gale

Thy treasures, if thou canst hear the  
wail

Of women martyred by the turbaned  
crew

Whose tenderest mercy was the sword that  
slew,



And lift no hand to wield the purging  
flail?

We deemed of old thou held'st a charge  
from Him

Who watches girdled by His seraphim,  
To smite the wronger with thy destined  
rod.

Wait'st thou His sign? Enough, the  
unanswered cry

Of virgin souls for vengeance, and on high  
The gathering blackness of the frown of  
God!

## CRAVEN ENGLAND

NEVER, O craven England, nevermore  
Prate thou of generous effort, righteous aim!  
Betrayed of a people, know thy shame!  
Summer hath passed, and Autumn's  
    threshing-floor  
Been winnowed; Winter at Armenia's door  
Snarls like a wolf; and still the sword and  
    flame  
Sleep not; *thou only* sleepest; and the same  
Cry unto heaven ascends as heretofore;  
The guiltless perish, and no man regards;  
And sunk in ease, and lost to noble pride,

Stirred by no clarion blowing loud and wide,  
Thy sons forget what Truth and Honour  
meant,

And, day by day, to sit among the shards  
Of broken faith are miserably content.

## THE PRICE OF PRESTIGE

You in high places; you that drive the  
steeds

Of Empire; you that say unto our hosts,  
"Go thither," and they go; and from our  
coasts

Bid sail the squadrons, and they sail, their  
deeds

Shaking the world: lo! from a land that  
pleads

For mercy where no mercy is, the ghosts  
Look in upon you faltering at your posts—  
Upbraid you parleying while a People bleeds

To death. What stays the thunder in your  
hand?

A fear for England? Can her pillared fame  
Only on faith forsworn securely stand,  
On faith forsworn that murders babes and  
men?

Are such the terms of Glory's tenure?

Then

Fall her accursed greatness, in God's name!

## HOW LONG?

HEAPED in their ghastly graves they lie, the  
breeze

Sickening o'er fields where others vainly  
wait

For burial: and the butchers keep high  
state

In silken palaces of perfumed ease.

The panther of the desert, matched with  
these,

Is pitiful; beside their lust and hate,

Fire and the plague-wind are compassionate

And soft the deadliest fangs of ravaging seas.

How long shall they be borne? Is not the  
cup

Of crime yet full? Doth devildom still lack  
Some consummating crown, that we hold  
back

The scourge, and in Christ's borders give  
them room?

How long shall they be borne, O England?

Up,

Tempest of God, and sweep them to their  
doom!

## REPUDIATED RESPONSIBILITY

I HAD not thought to hear it voiced so  
plain,

Uttered so forthright, on their lips who  
steer

This nation's course: I had not thought to  
hear

That word re-echoed by an English thane,  
Guilt's maiden-speech when first a man lay  
slain,

"Am I my brother's keeper?" Yet full  
near

It sounded, and the syllables rang clear



As the immortal rhetoric of Cain.

“Wherefore should *we*, sirs, more than they—  
or they—

Unto these helpless reach a hand to save?”

An English thane, in this our English air,  
Speaking for England? Then indeed her  
day

Slopes to its twilight, and for Honour there  
Is needed but a requiem, and a grave.

## ENGLAND TO AMERICA

O TOWERING Daughter, Titan of the West,  
Behind a thousand leagues of foam secure ;  
Thou toward whom our inmost heart is pure  
Of ill intent : although thou threatenest  
With most unfilial hand thy mother's breast,  
Not for one breathing-space may Earth  
endure

The thought of War's intolerable cure  
For such vague pains as vex to-day thy  
rest !

But if thou hast more strength than thou  
canst spend

In tasks of Peace, and find'st her yoke too  
tame,

Help us to smite the cruel, to befriend  
The succourless, and put the false to shame.  
So shall the ages laud thee, and thy name  
Be lovely among nations to the end.

## A BIRTHDAY

It is the birthday of the Prince of Peace :  
Full long ago He lay with steeds in stall,  
And universal Nature knew through all  
Her borders that the reign of Pan must  
cease.

The fatness of the land, the earth's increase,  
Cumbers the board ; the holly hangs in  
hall ;

Somewhat of her abundance Wealth lets  
fall ;

It is the birthday of the Prince of Peace.  
The dead rot by the wayside ; the unblest

Who live, in caves and desert mountains

lurk

Trembling, His foldless flock, shorn of their

fleece.

Women in travail, babes that suck the

breast,

Are spared not. Famine hurries to her

work.

It is the birthday of the Prince of Peace.

## THE TIRED LION

SPEAK once again, with that great note of  
thine,

Hero withdrawn from Senates and their  
sound

Unto thy home by Cambria's northern bound,  
Speak once again, and wake a world supine.

Not always, not in all things, was it mine  
To follow where thou led'st : but who hath  
found

Another man so shod with fire, so crowned  
With thunder, and so armed with wrath  
divine ?

Lift up thy voice once more! The nation's  
heart

Is cold as Anatolia's mountain snows.

Oh, from these alien paths of base repose

Call back thy England, ere thou too depart—

Ere, on some secret mission, thou too start

With silent footsteps, whither no man knows.

## THE BARD-IN-WAITING

TREACHERY's apologist, whose numbers rung,  
But yesterday, remonstrant in my ear ;  
Thou to whom England seems a mistress  
    dear,

Insatiable of honey from thy tongue :  
Because I crouch not fawning slaves among,  
How is my service proved the less sincere ?  
Have not I also deemed her without peer ?  
Her beauty have not I too seen and sung ?  
But for the love I bore her lofty ways,  
What were to me her stumblings and her  
    slips ?



And lovely is she still, her maiden lips  
Pressed to the lips whose foam around her  
plays!

But on her brow's benignant star whose  
rays

Lit them that sat in darkness, lo! the  
eclipse.

## LEISURED JUSTICE

"SHE bides her hour." And must I then  
believe

That when the day of peril is o'erpast,  
She who was great because so oft she cast  
All thought of peril to the waves that heave  
Against her feet, shall greatly undeceive  
Her purblind son who dreamed she shrank  
aghast

From Duty's signal, and shall act at last,  
When there is naught remaining to retrieve?  
At last! when the last altar is defiled,  
And there are no more maidens to deflower—

When the last mother folds with famished  
arms

To her dead bosom her last butchered  
child—

Then shall our England, throned beyond  
alarms,

Rise in her might! Till then, "she bides  
her hour."

## THE PLAGUE OF APATHY

No tears are left ; we have quickly spent  
that store !

Indifference like a dewless night hath come.  
From wintry sea to sea the land lies  
numb.

With palsy of the spirit stricken sore,  
The land lies numb from iron shore to  
shore.

The unconcerned, they flourish : loud are  
some,  
And without shame. The multitude stand  
dumb.

The England that we vaunted is no more.  
Only the witling's sneer, the worldling's  
    smile,  
The weakling's tremors, fail him not who  
    fain  
Would rouse to noble deed. And all the  
    while,  
A homeless people, in their mortal pain,  
Toward one far and famous ocean isle  
Stretch hands of prayer, and stretch those  
    hands in vain.

## THE KNELL OF CHIVALRY

O VANISHED morn of crimson and of gold,  
O youth and roselight and romance, wherein  
I read of paynim and of paladin,  
And Beauty snatched from ogre's dungeoned  
hold!

Ever the recreant would in dust be rolled,  
Ever the true knight in the joust would win,  
Ever the scaly shape of monstrous Sin  
At last lie vanquished, fold on writhing fold.  
Was it all false, that world of princely deeds,  
The splendid quest, the good fight ringing  
clear?

Yonder the Dragon ramps with fiery gorge,

Yonder the victim faints and gasps and

bleeds ;

But in his merry England our St. George

Sleeps a base sleep beside his idle spear.

## A TRIAL OF ORTHODOXY

THE clinging children at their mother's knee  
Slain ; and the sire and kindred one by one  
Flayed or hewn piecemeal ; and things name-  
less done,

Not to be told : while imperturbably  
The nations gaze, where Rhine unto the sea,  
Where Seine and Danube, Thames and  
Tiber run,

And where great armies glitter in the sun,  
And great kings rule, and man is boasted  
free !

What wonder if yon torn and naked throng



Should doubt a Heaven that seems to wink  
and nod,

And having moaned at noontide, "Lord, how  
long?"

Should cry, "Where hidest Thou?" at even-  
fall,

At midnight, "Is He deaf and blind, our  
God?"

And ere day dawn, "Is He indeed at all?"

“ I F ”

YEA, if ye could not, though ye would, lift  
hand—

Ye halting leaders—to abridge Hell's reign ;  
If, for some cause ye may not yet make  
plain,

Yearning to strike, ye stood as one may  
stand

Who in a nightmare sees a murder planned  
And hurrying to its issue, and though fain  
To stay the knife, and fearless, must  
remain

Madly inert, held fast by ghostly band ;—

If such your plight, most hapless ye of  
men!

*But if ye could and would not, oh, what  
plea,*

Think ye, shall stead you at your trial,  
when

The thunder-cloud of witnesses shall loom,  
With Ravished Childhood on the seat of  
doom,

At the Assizes of Eternity?

## A HURRIED FUNERAL

A LITTLE deeper, sexton. You forget,  
She you would bury 'neath so thin a crust  
Of loam, was fiery-souled, and ev'n in dust  
She may lie restless, she may toss and  
fret,

Nay, she might break a seal too lightly set,  
And vex, unmannerly, our ease! She must  
Beneath no lack of English earth lie thrust,  
Would we unhaunted sleep! Nay, deeper  
yet.

Quick, friend, the cortège comes. There—  
that will serve;

Deep enough now ; and thou'lt need all thy  
nerve,

If, in her coffin, at the last, amid

The mourners in the customary suits,

And to the scandal of these decent mutes,

This corpse of England's Honour burst the  
lid!

## A WONDROUS LIKENESS

STILL, on Life's loom, the infernal warp and  
weft

Woven each hour! Still, in august renown,  
A great realm watching, under God's great  
frown!

Ever the same! The little children cleft  
In twain: the little tender maidens reft  
Of maidenhood! And through a little town  
A stranger journeying, wrote this record  
down,

"In all the place there was not one man  
left."

O friend, the sudden lightning of whose pen  
Makes Horror's countenance visible afar,  
And Desolation's face familiar,  
I think this very England of my ken  
Is wondrous like that little town, where are  
In all the streets and houses no more men.

## LAST WORD

AND save to mourn, is there nought left to  
do,

Nought *ye* can do, O sons of England?

Yes :

Ye can arise, reclaim your manliness,

And flee the things that are unmaking you.

Still in your midst there dwells a remnant,  
who

Love not an unclean Art, a Stage no less

Unclean, a gibing and reviling Press,

A febrile Muse, and Fiction febrile too.

And they it is would pluck you from this slime



Whereof the rank miasma clouds your brain  
With sloth that slays and torpor that is  
crime

Till ye can feel nought keenly, see nought  
plain.

Hearken their call, and heed, while yet is  
time,

Lest ye be lulled too deep to wake again.

## TO THE SULTAN

CALIPH, I did thee wrong. I hailed thee  
late

“Abdul the Damned,” and would recall my  
word.

It merged thee with the unillustrious herd  
Who crowd the approaches to the infernal  
gate—

Spirits gregarious, equal in their state  
As is the innumerable ocean bird,  
Gannet or gull, whose wandering plaint is  
heard

On Ailsa or Iona desolate.

For, in a world where cruel deeds abound,  
The merely damned are legion: with such  
souls

Is not each hollow and cranny of Tophet  
crammed?

Thou, with the brightest of Hell's aureoles  
Dost shine supreme, incomparably crowned,  
Immortally, beyond all mortals, damned.



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