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THE CITY OF
DREADFUL
NIGHT

JAMES THOMSON
("B.V.")



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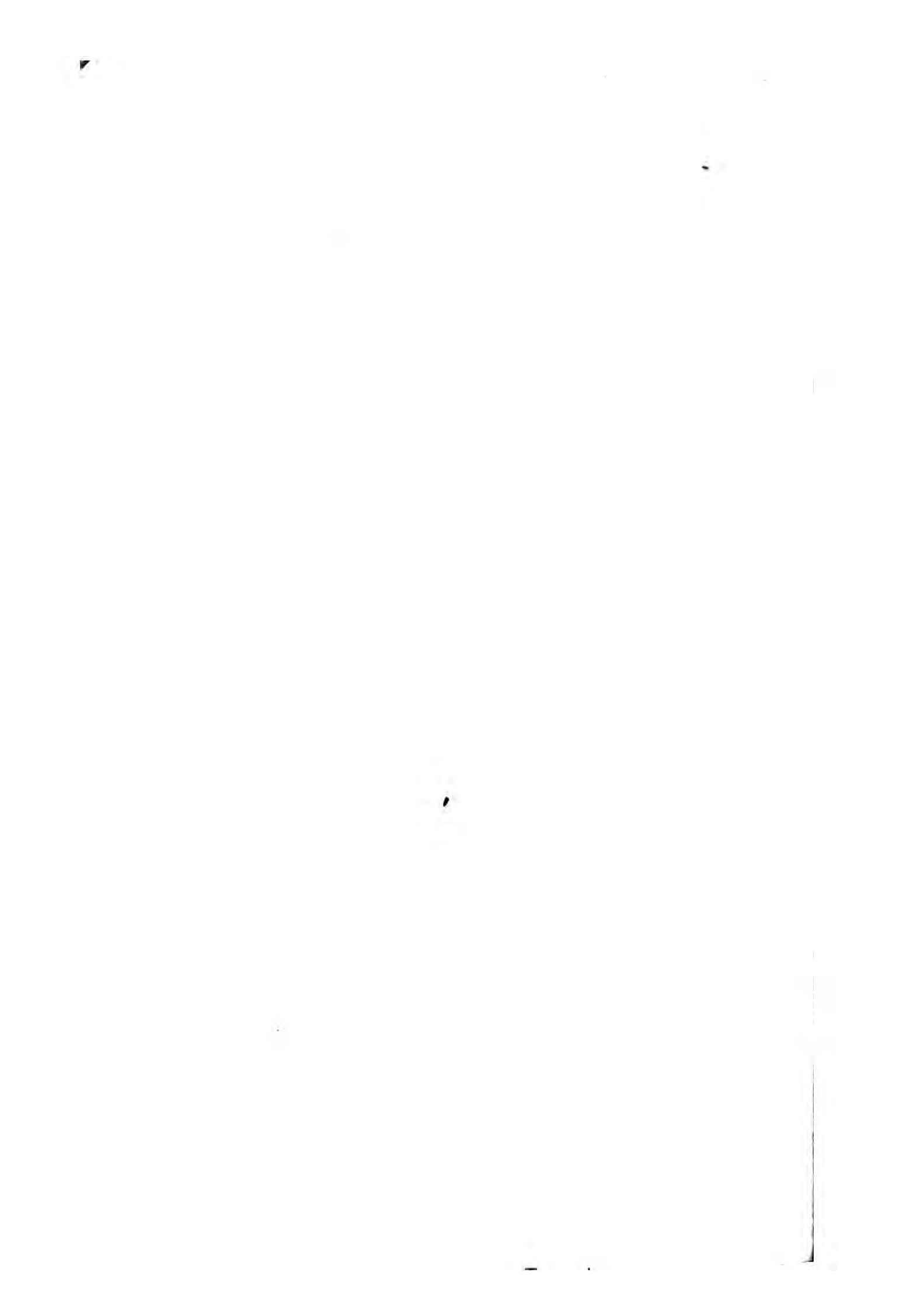
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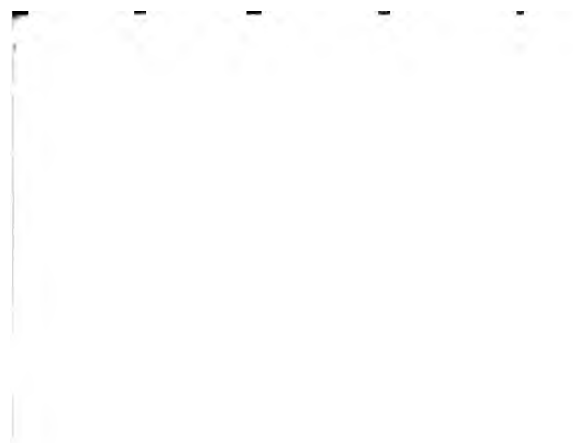


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AND OTHER POEMS

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THE CITY OF
DREADFUL NIGHT
AND OTHER POEMS

BEING A SELECTION
FROM THE POETICAL WORKS
OF
JAMES THOMSON
("B. V.")

WITH PREFACE BY
HENRY S. SALT

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PREFACE

It is now almost sixty years since James Thomson's masterpiece, "The City of Dreadful Night," first appeared in print; ¹ and the cause of the long delay in the recognition of its greatness must be sought partly in the pessimism which darkens it, and still more, perhaps, in its author's outspoken rejection of any religious belief. With what prejudices on that score the poet had to contend may be seen from his letter of thanks, as for "a very brave act," to the editor of a journal in which a review had been given of the work; and even now, though tribute has been paid to its beauty by a number of well-known writers, the distinguished place that it should hold in English literature is not fully acknowledged.

The poem, even when published serially, met with a fair measure of success, and won praise from such critics as George Eliot, Philip Marston, W. M. Rossetti, George Saintsbury, and J. A. Symonds, but it was not till six years later that it was reprinted in a volume. It is strange to reflect that it might never have reappeared at all had it not been for the untiring help that Thomson received from Mr. Bertram Dobell and a few other friends.

¹ In the *National Reformer*, 1874.

As to the origin of "The City of Dreadful Night" there is no need to speculate, for Thomson himself described it as "the outcome of a good deal of sleepless hypochondria"; and it was inevitable that such a record should be deeply tinged with the pessimistic thought which underlay, if it did not dominate, his philosophy of life. To lovers of poetry, apart from all other considerations, the charm of the "City" lies in the majesty of its verse—in what George Eliot justly called "the distinct vision and grand utterance." Despondent though it is, a work so great as this should not be depressing in its effect, but rather, in its right sphere and relation, a source of pleasure and strength; for in art, provided that the form and treatment be adequate, there can be nothing to sadden. "As to pessimism," wrote Herman Melville, and it was Thomson's work that he had in mind, "although neither pessimist nor optimist myself, I relish it in the verse, if for nothing else than as a counterpoise to the exorbitant hopefulness, juvenile and shallow, that makes such a muster in these days." He elsewhere wrote of Thomson's "City" as "the modern Book of Job, duskily looming with the same aboriginal verities."

Readers will not fail to observe the rather elaborate plan on which the poem is constructed, a succession of cantos in two alternating series, the first of which, consisting always of a seven-lined stanza (the metre of Browning's "The Guardian Angel"), forms the main subject or, in musical parlance, the theme,

and is devoted to portraying the desolation of the City, and to moralising on the mysteries of its life; while the second, in which the metre changes, is used for variations and interludes, introducing scenes and characters that illustrate the citizens' despair. It is in the main portion, I think, that the most striking passages occur; indeed, except perhaps in Milton's "Lycidas," it would be difficult to find anything more stately and impressive than those solemn stanzas, each with the slow melodious pause on its fifth and sixth line, and the gravity of the closing verse. The poem ends (as all poems should) with the grandest canto of all, in which there is a wonderful transcript of Dürer's picture, the "Melencolia," here identified with the goddess whose image presides over the City.

"The City of Dreadful Night" is so surely the grandest of Thomson's creations as to be almost in a different class from the rest; and as it is with this, and not with his poems in general, that we are here concerned, I need not discuss certain errors of style that are noticeable in his earlier works. It cannot be doubted that had not this poem run counter, as it does, to religious sentiment, its rare poetical merits would have been far more widely appreciated, and it might have been linked in readers' thoughts with Coleridge's beautiful but deeply pessimistic Ode on "Dejection," or, to come to more recent times, with the scarcely less melancholy "Hound of Heaven," written by Thomson's namesake (or almost name-

sake), Francis Thompson. It could be wished that critics whose judgment carries weight with the public would consider whether the time has not come for redressing what is a wrong not to a poet's memory alone, but to our literature itself.

A pessimistic poem indeed; but too much stress must not be laid on Thomson's personal unhappiness; for, as may be seen from his own Introduction to "A Lady of Sorrow," one of his prose essays, which is a sort of counterpart to the poem, he was well aware that the sadness to which he gave such sombre expression was only a half-truth. "That this composition," he wrote, "is true in relation to the author—that it is genuine—I have no doubt, for the poor fellow had large gifts for being unhappy. But is it true in relation to the world and general life? I think true, but not the whole truth. There is truth of winter and black night; there is truth of summer and dazzling noonday."

This is not a biography of Thomson, and I will not enter on the question whether his "large gifts for being unhappy" were due, as has been suggested, to an inherited melancholia, or to the death of the girl to whom he was deeply attached, or to the gloomy circumstances and errors of his life; but there is plenty of evidence that his pessimism did not prevent his finding pleasure in recreation; and that the solace of good fellowship was not lacking is clear from the part played in his story by such friends as Charles Bradlaugh, Bertram Dobell, Austin Holyoake, G. W.

Foote, Charles Watts, the Theodore Wrights, and others who might be named.

By Secularists, in especial, James Thomson's memory should be treasured, and his great poem held in high regard; the more so because on his shoulders the mantle of Shelley descended as a singer of Freethought. His nom-de-plume, "Bysshe Vanolis," was assumed out of admiration for Shelley and Novalis, and it was to Shelley, as "poet of poets and purest of men," that his "Vane's Story" was dedicated. He would have desired no greater honour than to be remembered in that splendid connection.

It only remains to add that in the choice of some of "B. V.'s" minor poems, for inclusion in this volume, it has been thought advisable to omit those which in their sadness resemble "The City of Dreadful Night," and to give the preference to lighter pieces, such as "Sunday up the River" and "Sunday at Hampstead," which show Thomson with his spirits at their highest, and to a few of the very graceful lyrics.

HENRY S. SALT.

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THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

“ Per me si va nella città dolente.”
—DANTE.

“ Poi di tanto adoprar, di tanti moti
D’ogni celeste, ogni terrena cosa,
Girando senza posa,
Per tornar sempre là donde son mosse;
Uso alcuno, alcun frutto
Indovinar non so.”

“ Sola nel mondo eterna, a cui si volve
Ogni creata cosa,
In te, morte, si posa
Nostra ignuda natura;
Lieta no, ma sicura
Dell’ antico dolor. . . .
Però ch’ esser beato
Nega ai mortali e nega a’ morti il fato.”
—LEOPARDI.

PROEM.

LO, thus, as prostrate, “ In the dust I write
My heart’s deep languor and my soul’s sad
tears.”

Yet why evoke the spectres of black night
To blot the sunshine of exultant years?
Why disinter dead faith from mouldering hidden?
Why break the seals of mute despair unbidden,
And wail life’s discords into careless ears?

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles
To show the bitter old and wrinkled truth

2 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,
False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes
of youth ;
Because it gives some sense of power and passion
In helpless impotence to try to fashion
Our woe in living words howe'er uncouth.

Surely I write not for the hopeful young,
Or those who deem their happiness of worth,
Or such as pasture and grow fat among
The shows of life and feel nor doubt nor dearth,
Or pious spirits with a God above them
To sanctify and glorify and love them,
Or sages who foresee a heaven on earth.

For none of these I write, and none of these
Could read the writing if they deigned to try :
So may they flourish, in their due degrees,
On our sweet earth and in their unplaced sky.
If any cares for the weak words here written,
It must be some one desolate, Fate-smitten,
Whose faith and hope are dead, and who would die.

Yes, here and there some weary wanderer
In that same city of tremendous night,
Will understand the speech, and feel a stir
Of fellowship in all-disastrous fight ;
“ I suffer mute and lonely, yet another
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother
Travels the same wild paths though out of sight.”

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT 3

O sad Fraternity, do I unfold
Your dolorous mysteries shrouded from of yore?
Nay, be assured; no secret can be told
To any who divined it not before :
None uninitiate by many a presage
Will comprehend the language of the message,
Although proclaimed aloud for evermore.

I.

The City is of Night; perchance of Death,
But certainly of Night; for never there
Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath
After the dewy dawning's cold grey air;
The moon and stars may shine with scorn or pity;
The sun has never visited that city,
For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.

Dissolveth like a dream of night away;
Though present in distempered gloom of thought
And deadly weariness of heart all day.
But when a dream night after night is brought
Throughout a week, and such weeks few or many
Recur each year for several years, can any
Discern that dream from real life in aught?

For life is but a dream whose shapes return,
Some frequently, some seldom, some by night
And some by day, some night and day: we learn,
The while all change and many vanish quite,

4 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

In their recurrence with recurrent changes
A certain seeming order ; where this ranges
We count things real ; such is memory's might.

A river girds the city west and south,
The main north channel of a broad lagoon,
Regurging with the salt tides from the mouth ;
Waste marshes shine and glister to the moon
For leagues, then moorland black, then stony ridges ;
Great piers and causeways, many noble bridges,
Connect the town and islet suburbs strewn.

Upon an easy slope it lies at large,
And scarcely overlaps the long curved crest
Which swells out two leagues from the river marge.
A trackless wilderness rolls north and west,
Savannahs, savage woods, enormous mountains,
Bleak uplands, black ravines with torrent fountains ;
And eastward rolls the shipless sea's unrest.

The city is not ruinous, although
Great ruins of an unremembered past,
With others of a few short years ago
More sad, are found within its precincts vast.
The street-lamps always burn ; but scarce a casement
In house or palace front from roof to basement
Doth glow or gleam athwart the mirk air cast.

The street-lamps burn amidst the baleful glooms,
Amidst the soundless solitudes immense
Of rangèd mansions dark and still as tombs.
The silence which benumbs or strains the sense

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT 5

Fulfil with awe the soul's despair unweeping :
Myriads of habitants are ever sleeping,
Or dead, or fled from nameless pestilence !

Yet as in some necropolis you find
Perchance one mourner to a thousand dead,
So there ; worn faces that look deaf and blind
Like tragic masks of stone. With weary tread,
Each wrapt in his own doom, they wander, wander,
Or sit foredone and desolately ponder
Through sleepless hours with heavy drooping head.

Mature men chiefly, few in age or youth,
A woman rarely, now and then a child :
A child ! If here the heart turns sick with ruth
To see a little one from birth defiled,
Or lame or blind, as preordained to languish
Through youthless life, think how it bleeds with
anguish
To meet one erring in that homeless wild.

They often murmur to themselves, they speak
To one another seldom, for their woe
Broods maddening inwardly and scorns to wreak
Itself abroad ; and if at whiles it grow
To frenzy which must rave, none heeds the clamour,
Unless there waits some victim of like glamour,
To rave in turn, who lends attentive show.

The City is of Night, but not of Sleep ;
There sweet sleep is not for the weary brain ;

6 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

The pitiless hours like years and ages creep,
A night seems termless hell. This dreadful strain
Of thought and consciousness which never ceases,
Or which some moments' stupor but increases,
This, worse than woe, makes wretches there insane.

They leave all hope behind who enter there :
One certitude while sane they cannot leave,
One anodyne for torture and despair ;
The certitude of Death, which no reprieve
Can put off long ; and which, divinely tender,
But waits the outstretched hand to promptly render
That draught whose slumber nothing can bereave.¹

II.

Because he seemed to walk with an intent
I followed him ; who, shadowlike and frail,
Unswervingly though slowly onward went,
Regardless, wrapt in thought as in a veil :
Thus step for step with lonely sounding feet
We travelled many a long dim silent street.

At length he paused : a black mass in the gloom,
A tower that merged into the heavy sky ;
Around, the huddled stones of grave and tomb :
Some old God's-acre now corruption's sty :

¹ Though the Garden of thy Life be wholly waste, the sweet flowers withered, the fruit-trees barren, over its wall hang ever the rich dark clusters of the Vine of Death, within easy reach of thy hand, which may pluck of them when it will.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT 7

He murmured to himself with dull despair,
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

Then turning to the right went on once more,
And travelled weary roads without suspense;
And reached at last a low wall's open door,
Whose villa gleamed beyond the foliage dense:
He gazed, and muttered with a hard despair,
Here Love died, stabbed by its own worshipped pair.

Then turning to the right resumed his march,
And travelled streets and lanes with wondrous
strength,
Until on stooping through a narrow arch
We stood before a squalid house at length:
He gazed, and whispered with a cold despair,
Here Hope died, starved out in its utmost lair.

When he had spoken thus, before he stirred,
I spoke, perplexed by something in the signs
Of desolation I had seen and heard
In this drear pilgrimage to ruined shrines:
When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed,
Can Life still live? By what doth it proceed?

As whom his one intense thought overpowers,
He answered coldly, Take a watch, erase
The signs and figures of the circling hours,
Detach the hands, remove the dial-face;
The works proceed until run down; although
Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go.

8 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

Then turning to the right paced on again,
And traversed squares and travelled streets whose
glooms
Seemed more and more familiar to my ken ;
And reached that sullen temple of the tombs ;
And paused to murmur with the old despair,
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

I ceased to follow, for the knot of doubt
Was severed sharply with a cruel knife :
He circled thus for ever tracing out
The series of the fraction left of Life ;
Perpetual recurrence in the scope
Of but three terms, dead Faith, dead Love, dead
Hope.¹

III.

Although lamps burn along the silent streets ;
Even when moonlight silvers empty squares
The dark holds countless lanes and close retreats ;
But when the night its sphereless mantle wears
The open spaces yawn with gloom abysmal,
The sombre mansions loom immense and dismal,
The lanes are black as subterranean lairs.

And soon the eye a strange new vision learns :
The night remains for it as dark and dense,

¹ Life divided by that persistent three = $\frac{LXX}{333} = \cdot 210.$

Yet clearly in this darkness it discerns
As in the daylight with its natural sense ;
Perceives a shade in shadow not obscurely,
Pursues a stir of black in blackness surely,
Sees spectres also in the gloom intense.

The ear, too, with the silence vast and deep
Becomes familiar though unreconciled ;
Hears breathings as of hidden life asleep,
And muffled throbs as of pent passions wild,
Far murmurs, speech of pity or derision ;
But all more dubious than the things of vision,
So that it knows not when it is beguiled.

No time abates the first despair and awe,
But wonder ceases soon ; the weirdest thing
Is felt least strange beneath the lawless law
Where Death-in-Life is the eternal king ;
Crushed impotent beneath this reign of terror,
Dazed with such mysteries of woe and error,
The soul is too outworn for wondering.

IV.

He stood alone within the spacious square
Declaiming from the central grassy mound,
With head uncovered and with streaming hair,
As if large multitudes were gathered round :
A stalwart shape, the gestures full of might,
The glances burning with unnatural light :

10 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : All was black
In heaven no single star, on earth no track ;
A brooding hush without a stir or note,
The air so thick it clotted in my throat ;
And thus for hours ; then some enormous things
Swooped past with savage cries and clanking wings :
 But I strode on austere ;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Eyes of fire
Glared at me throbbing with a starved desire ;
The hoarse and heavy and carnivorous breath
Was hot upon me from deep jaws of death ;
Sharp claws, swift talons, fleshless fingers cold
Plucked at me from the bushes, tried to hold :
 But I strode on austere ;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Lo you, there,
That hillock burning with a brazen glare ;
Those myriad dusky flames with points a-glow
Which writhed and hissed and darted to and fro ;
A Sabbath of the Serpents, heaped pell-mell
For Devil's roll-call and some *fête* of Hell :
 Yet I strode on austere ;
 No hope could have no fear.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT II.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Meteors ran
And crossed their javelins on the black sky-span ;
The zenith opened to a gulf of flame,
The dreadful thunderbolts jarred earth's fixed frame :
The ground all heaved in waves of fire that surged
And weltered round me sole there unsubmerged :
 Yet I strode on austere ;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Air once more,
And I was close upon a wild sea-shore ;
Enormous cliffs arose on either hand,
The deep tide thundered up a league-broad strand ;
White foambelts seethed there, wan spray swept and
 flew ;
The sky broke, moon and stars and clouds and blue :
 And I strode on austere ;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : On the left
The sun arose and crowned a broad crag-cleft ;
There stopped and burned out black, except a rim,
A bleeding eyeless socket, red and dim ;
Whereon the moon fell suddenly south-west,
And stood above the right-hand cliffs at rest :
 Still I strode on austere ;
 No hope could have no fear.

12 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : From the right
A shape came slowly with a ruddy light ;
A woman with a red lamp in her hand,
Bareheaded and barefooted on that strand ;
O desolation moving with such grace !
O anguish with such beauty in thy face !
I fell as on my bier,
Hope travailed with such fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : I was twain,
Two selves distinct that cannot join again ;
One stood apart and knew but could not stir,
And watched the other stark in swoon and her ;
And she came on, and never turned aside,
Between such sun and moon and roaring tide :
And as she came more near
My soul grew mad with fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Hell is mild
And piteous matched with that accursèd wild ;
A large black sign was on her breast that bowed,
A broad black band ran down her snow-white shroud ;
That lamp she held was her own burning heart,
Whose blood-drops trickled step by step apart ;
The mystery was clear ;
Mad rage had swallowed fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
 As I came through the desert : By the sea
 She knelt and bent above that senseless me ;
 Those lamp-drops fell upon my white brow there,
 She tried to cleanse them with her tears and hair ;
 She murmured words of pity, love, and woe,
 She heeded not the level rushing flow :
 And mad with rage and fear,
 I stood stonebound so near.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
 As I came through the desert : When the tide
 Swept up to her there kneeling by my side,
 She clasped that corpse-like me, and they were borne
 Away, and this vile me was left forlorn ;
 I know the whole sea cannot quench that heart,
 Or cleanse that brow, or wash those two apart :
 They love ; their doom is drear,
 Yet they nor hope nor fear ;
 But I, what do I here ?

V.

How he arrives there none can clearly know ;
 Athwart the mountains and immense wild tracts,
 Or flung a waif upon that vast sea-flow,
 Or down the river's boiling cataracts :
 To reach it is as dying fever-stricken ;
 To leave it, slow faint birth intense pangs quicken ;
 And memory swoons in both the tragic acts.

14 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

But being there one feels a citizen ;

Escape seems hopeless to the heart forlorn :
Can Death-in-Life be brought to life again ?

And yet release does come ; there comes a morn
When he awakes from slumbering so sweetly
That all the world is changed for him completely,
And he is verily as if new-born.

He scarcely can believe the blissful change,

He weeps perchance who wept not while accurst ;
Never again will he approach the range

Infected by that evil spell now burst :
Poor wretch ! who once hath paced that dolent city
Shall pace it often, doomed beyond all pity,
With horror ever deepening from the first.

Though he possess sweet babes and loving wife,

A home of peace by loyal friendships cheered,
And love them more than death or happy life,

They shall avail not ; he must dree his weird ;
Renounce all blessings for that imprecation.
Steal forth and haunt that builded desolation,
Of woe and terrors and thick darkness reared :

VI.

I sat forlornly by the river-side,

And watched the bridge-lamps glow like golden stars
Above the blackness of the swelling tide,
Down which they struck rough gold in ruddier bars ;

And heard the heave and plashing of the flow
Against the wall a dozen feet below.

Large elm-trees stood along that river-walk ;
And under one, a few steps from my seat,
I heard strange voices join in stranger talk,
Although I had not heard approaching feet ;
These bodiless voices in my waking dream
Flowed dark words blending with the sombre
stream :—

And you have after all come back ; come back.
I was about to follow on your track.
And you have failed : our spark of hope is black.

That I have failed is proved by my return :
The spark is quenched, nor ever more will burn.
But listen ; and the story you shall learn.

I reached the portal common spirits fear,
And read the words above it, dark yet clear,
“ Leave hope behind, all ye who enter here ” :

And would have passed in, gratified to gain
That positive eternity of pain,
Instead of this insufferable inane.

A demon warder clutched me, Not so fast ;
First leave your hopes behind !—But years have
passed
Since I left all behind me, to the last :

16 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

You cannot count for hope, with all your wit,
This bleak despair that drives me to the Pit :
How could I seek to enter void of it ?

He snarled, What thing is this which apes a soul,
And would find entrance to our gulf of dole
Without the payment of the settled toll ?

Outside the gate he showed an open chest :
Here pay their entrance fees the souls unblest ;
Cast in some hope, you enter with the rest.

This is Pandora's box ; whose lid shall shut,
And Hell-gate too, when hopes have filled it ; but
They are so thin that it will never glut.

I stood a few steps backwards, desolate ;
And watched the spirits pass me to their fate,
And fling off hope, and enter at the gate.

When one casts off a load he springs upright,
Squares back his shoulders, breathes with all his might,
And briskly paces forward strong and light :

But these, as if they took some burden, bowed ;
The whole frame sank ; however strong and proud
Before, they crept in quite infirm and cowed.

And as they passed me, earnestly from each
A morsel of his hope I did beseech,
To pay my entrance ; but all mocked my speech.

Not one would cede a tittle of his store
Though knowing that in instants three or four
He must resign the whole for evermore.

So I returned. Our destiny is fell ;
For in this Limbo we must ever dwell,
Shut out alike from Heaven and Earth and Hell.

The other sighed back, Yea ; but if we grope
With care through all this Limbo's dreary scope,
We yet may pick up some minute lost hope ;

And, sharing it between us, entrance win,
In spite of fiends so jealous for gross sin :
Let us without delay our search begin.

VII.

Some say that phantoms haunt those shadowy streets
And mingle freely there with sparse mankind ;
And tell of ancient woes and black defeats,
And murmur mysteries in the grave enshrined :
But others think them visions of illusion,
Or even men gone far in self-confusion ;
No man there being wholly sane in mind.

And yet a man who raves, however mad,
Who bares his heart and tells of his own fall,
Reserves some inmost secret good or bad :
The phantoms have no reticence at all :
The nudity of flesh will blush though tameless,
The extreme nudity of bone grins shameless,
The unsexed skeleton mocks shroud and pall.

18 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

I have seen phantoms there that were as men
And men that were as phantoms flit and roam ;
Marked shapes that were not living to my ken,
Caught breathings acrid as with Dead Sea foam :
The City rests for man so weird and awful,
That his intrusion there might seem unlawful,
And phantoms there may have their proper home.

VIII.

While I still lingered on that river-walk,
And watched the tide as black as our black doom,
I heard another couple join in talk,
And saw them to the left hand in the gloom
Seated against an elm bole on the ground,
Their eyes intent upon the stream profound.

“ I never knew another man on earth
But had some joy and solace in his life,
Some chance of triumph in the dreadful strife :
My doom has been unmitigated dearth.”

“ We gaze upon the river, and we note
The various vessels large and small that float,
Ignoring every wrecked and sunken boat.”

“ And yet I asked no splendid dower, no spoil
Of sway or fame or rank or even wealth ;
But homely love with common food and health,
And nightly sleep to balance daily toil.”

“ This all-too-humble soul would arrogate
Unto itself some signalising hate
From the supreme indifference of Fate ! ”

“ Who is most wretched in this dolorous place ?
I think myself ; yet I would rather be
My miserable self than He, than He
Who formed such creatures to His own disgrace.

“ The vilest thing must be less vile than Thou
From whom it had its being, God and Lord !
Creator of all woe and sin ! abhorred,
Malignant and implacable ! I vow

“ That not for all Thy power furled and unfurled,
For all the temples to Thy glory built,
Would I assume the ignominious guilt
Of having made such men in such a world.”

“ As if a Being, God or Fiend, could reign,
At once so wicked, foolish, and insane,
As to produce men when He might refrain !

“ The world rolls round for ever like a mill ;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill ;
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

“ While air of Space and Time’s full river flow
The mill must blindly whirl unresting so :
It may be wearing out, but who can know ?

“ Man might know one thing were his sight less dim ;
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
That it is quite indifferent to him.

“ Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith?
It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,
Then grinds him back into eternal death.”

IX.

It is full strange to him who hears and feels,
When wandering there in some deserted street,
The booming and the jar of ponderous wheels,
The trampling clash of heavy ironshod feet :
Who in this Venice of the Black Sea rideth?
Who in this city of the stars abideth
To buy or sell as those in daylight sweet?

The rolling thunder seems to fill the sky
As it comes on; the horses snort and strain,
The harness jingles, as it passes by;
The hugeness of an overburthened wain :
A man sits nodding on the shaft or trudges
Three parts asleep beside his fellow-drudges :
And so it rolls into the night again.

What merchandise? whence, whither, and for whom?
Perchance it is a Fate-appointed hearse,
Bearing away to some mysterious tomb
Or Limbo of the scornful universe
The joy, the peace, the life-hope, the abortions
Of all things good which should have been our portions,
But have been strangled by that City's curse.

X.

The mansion stood apart in its own ground ;
 In front thereof a fragrant garden-lawn,
 High trees about it, and the whole walled round :
 The massy iron gates were both withdrawn ;
 And every window of its front shed light,
 Portentous in that City of the Night.

But though thus lighted it was deadly still
 As all the countless bulks of solid gloom :
 Perchance a congregation to fulfil
 Solemnities of silence in this doom,
 Mysterious rites of dolour and despair
 Permitting not a breath of chant or prayer ?

Broad steps ascended to a terrace broad
 Whereon lay still light from the open door ;
 The hall was noble, and its aspect awed,
 Hung round with heavy black from dome to floor ;
 And ample stairways rose to left and right
 Whose balustrades were also draped with night.

I paced from room to room, from hall to hall,
 Nor any life throughout the maze discerned ;
 But each was hung with its funereal pall,
 And held a shrine, around which tapers burned,
 With picture or with statue or with bust,
 All copied from the same fair form of dust :

22 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

A woman very young and very fair ;
Beloved by bounteous life and joy and youth,
And loving these sweet lovers, so that care
And age and death seemed not for her in sooth :
Alike as stars, all beautiful and bright,
These shapes lit up that mausoléan night.

At length I heard a murmur as of lips,
And reached an open oratory hung
With heaviest blackness of the whole eclipse ;
Beneath the dome a fuming censer swung ;
And one lay there upon a low white bed,
With tapers burning at the foot and head :

The Lady of the images : supine,
Deathstill, lifesweet, with folded palms she lay :
And kneeling there as at a sacred shrine
A young man wan and worn who seemed to pray :
A crucifix of dim and ghostly white
Surmounted the large altar left in night :—

The chambers of the mansion of my heart,
In every one whereof thine image dwells,
Are black with grief eternal for thy sake.

The inmost oratory of my soul,
Wherein thou ever dwellest quick or dead,
Is black with grief eternal for thy sake.

I kneel beside thee and I clasp the cross,
With eyes for ever fixed upon that face,
So beautiful and dreadful in its calm.

I kneel here patient as thou liest there ;
 As patient as a statue carved in stone,
 Of adoration and eternal grief.

While thou dost not awake I cannot move ;
 And something tells me thou wilt never wake,
 And I alive feel turning into stone.

Most beautiful were Death to end my grief,
 Most hateful to destroy the sight of thee,
 Dear vision better than all death or life.

But I renounce all choice of life or death,
 For either shall be ever at thy side,
 And thus in bliss or woe be ever well.—

He murmured thus and thus in monotone,
 Intent upon that uncorrupted face,
 Entranced except his moving lips alone :

I glided with hushed footsteps from the place.
 This was the festival that filled with light
 That palace in the City of the Night.

XI.

What men are they who haunt these fatal glooms,
 And fill their living mouths with dust of death,
 And make their habitations in the tombs,
 And breathe eternal sighs with mortal breath,
 And pierce life's pleasant veil of various error
 To reach that void of darkness and old terror
 Wherein expire the lamps of hope and faith ?

24 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

They have much wisdom yet they are not wise,
They have much goodness yet they do not well,
(The fools we know have their own Paradise,
The wicked also have their proper Hell) ;
They have much strength but still their doom is
stronger,
Much patience but their time endureth longer,
Much valour but life mocks it with some spell.

They are most rational and yet insane :
An outward madness not to be controlled ;
A perfect reason in the central brain,
Which has no power, but sitteth wan and cold,
And sees the madness, and foresees as plainly
The ruin in its path, and trieth vainly
To cheat itself refusing to behold.

And some are great in rank and wealth and power,
And some renowned for genius and for worth ;
And some are poor and mean, who brood and cower
And shrink from notice, and accept all dearth
Of body, heart and soul, and leave to others
All boons of life : yet these and those are brothers,
The saddest and the weariest men on earth.

XII.

Our isolated units could be brought
To act together for some common end ?
For one by one, each silent with his thought,
I marked a long loose line approach and wend

Athwart the great cathedral's cloistered square,
And slowly vanish from the moonlit air.

Then I would follow in among the last :

And in the porch a shrouded figure stood,
Who challenged each one pausing ere he passed,
With deep eyes burning through a blank white hood :
Whence come you in the world of life and light
To this our City of Tremendous Night?—

From pleading in a senate of rich lords
For some scant justice to our countless hordes
Who toil half-starved with scarce a human right :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From wandering through many a solemn scene
Of opium visions, with a heart serene
And intellect miraculously bright :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From making hundreds laugh and roar with glee
By my transcendent feats of mimicry,
And humour wanton as an elfish sprite :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From prayer and fasting in a lonely cell,
Which brought an ecstasy ineffable
Of love and adoration and delight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From ruling on a splendid kingly throne
A nation which beneath my rule has grown

26 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

Year after year in wealth and arts and might :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From preaching to an audience fired with faith
The Lamb who died to save our souls from death,
Whose blood hath washed our scarlet sins wool-white :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From drinking fiery poison in a den
Crowded with tawdry girls and squalid men,
Who hoarsely laugh and curse and brawl and fight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From picturing with all beauty and all grace
First Eden and the parents of our race,
A luminous rapture unto all men's sight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From writing a great work with patient plan
To justify the ways of God to man,
And show how ill must fade and perish quite
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From desperate fighting with a little band
Against the powerful tyrants of our land,
To free our brethren in their own despite :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

Thus, challenged by that warder sad and stern,
Each one responded with his countersign,
Then entered the cathedral ; and in turn
I entered also, having given mine ;
But lingered near until I heard no more,
And marked the closing of the massive door.

XIII.

Of all things human which are strange and wild
This is perchance the wildest and most strange,
And showeth man most utterly beguiled,
To those who haunt that sunless City's range ;
That he bemoans himself for aye, repeating
How time is deadly swift, how life is fleeting,
How naught is constant on the earth but change.

The hours are heavy on him and the days ;
The burden of the months he scarce can bear ;
And often in his secret soul he prays
To sleep through barren periods unaware,
Arousing at some longed-for date of pleasure ;
Which having passed and yielded him small treasure,
He would outsleep another term of care.

Yet in his marvellous fancy he must make
Quick wings for Time, and see it fly from us ;
This Time which crawleth like a monstrous snake,
Wounded and slow and very venomous ;
Which creeps blindwormlike round the earth and
ocean,
Distilling poison at each painful motion,
And seems condemned to circle ever thus.

And since he cannot spend and use aright
The little time here given him in trust,
But wasteth it in weary undelight
Of foolish toil and trouble, strife and lust,

28 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

He naturally claimeth to inherit
The everlasting Future, that his merit
May have full scope ; as surely is most just.

O length of the intolerable hours,
O nights that are as æons of slow pain,
O Time, too ample for our vital powers,
O Life whose woeful vanities remain
Immutable for all of all our legions
Through all the centuries and in all the regions,
Not of your speed and variance *we* complain.

We do not ask a longer term of strife,
Weakness and weariness and nameless woes :
We do not claim renewed and endless life
When this which is our torment here shall close,
An everlasting conscious inanition !
We yearn for speedy death in full fruition,
Dateless oblivion and divine repose.

XIV.

Large glooms were gathered in the mighty fane,
With tinted moongleams slanting here and there ;
And all was hush : no swelling organ-strain,
No chant, no voice or murmuring of prayer ;
No priests came forth, no tinkling censers fumed,
And the high altar space was unillumed.

Around the pillars and against the walls

Leaned men and shadows ; others seemed to brood
Bent or recumbent in secluded stalls.

Perchance they were not a great multitude
Save in that city of so lonely streets
Where one may count up every face he meets.

All patiently awaited the event

Without a stir or sound, as if no less
Self-occupied, doomstricken, while attent.

And then we heard a voice of solemn stress
From the dark pulpit, and our gaze there met
Two eyes which burned as never eyes burned yet :

Two steadfast and intolerable eyes

Burning beneath a broad and rugged brow ;
The head behind it of enormous size,

And as black fir-groves in a large wind bow,
Our rooted congregation, gloom-arrayed,
By that great sad voice deep and full were swayed :—

O melancholy Brothers, dark, dark, dark !

O battling in black floods without an ark !

O spectral wanderers of unholy Night !

My soul hath bled for you these sunless years,
With bitter blood-drops running down like tears :

Oh, dark, dark, dark, withdrawn from joy and light !

My heart is sick with anguish for your bale !

Your woe hath been my anguish ; yea, I quail

And perish in your perishing unblest.

30 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

And I have searched the heights and depths, the scope
Of all our universe, with desperate hope
To find some solace for your wild unrest.

And now at last authentic word I bring,
Witnessed by every dead and living thing ;
Good tidings of great joy for you, for all :
There is no God ; no Fiend with names divine
Made us and tortures us ; if we must pine,
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

It was the dark delusion of a dream,
That living Person conscious and supreme,
Whom we must curse for cursing us with life ;
Whom we must curse because the life He gave
Could not be buried in the quiet grave,
Could not be killed by poison or by knife.

This little life is all we must endure,
The grave's most holy peace is ever sure,
We fall asleep and never wake again ;
Nothing is of us but the mouldering flesh,
Whose elements dissolve and merge afresh
In earth, air, water, plants, and other men.

We finish thus ; and all our wretched race
Shall finish with its cycle, and give place
To other beings, with their own time-doom
Infinite æons ere our kind began ;
Infinite æons after the last man
Has joined the mammoth in earth's tomb and womb.

We bow down to the universal laws,
Which never had for man a special clause
Of cruelty or kindness, love or hate :
If toads and vultures are obscene to sight,
If tigers burn with beauty and with might,
Is it by favour or by wrath of fate ?

All substance lives and struggles evermore
Through countless shapes continually at war,
By countless interactions interknit :
If one is born a certain day on earth,
All times and forces tended to that birth,
Not all the world could change or hinder it.

I find no hint throughout the Universe
Of good or ill, of blessing or of curse ;
I find alone Necessity Supreme ;
With infinite Mystery, abysmal, dark,
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark
For us the flitting shadows of a dream.

O Brothers of sad lives ! they are so brief ;
A few short years must bring us all relief :
Can we not bear these years of labouring breath ?
But if you would not this poor life fulfil,
Lo, you are free to end it when you will,
Without the fear of waking after death.—

The organ-like vibrations of his voice
Thrilled through the vaulted aisles and died away ;
The yearning of the tones which bade rejoice
Was sad and tender as a requiem lay :

32 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

Our shadowy congregation rested still
As brooding on that "End it when you will."

XV.

Wherever men are gathered, all the air
Is charged with human feeling, human thought ;
Each shout and cry and laugh, each curse and prayer,
Are into its vibrations surely wrought ;
Unspoken passion, wordless meditation,
Are breathed into it with our respiration ;
It is with our life fraught and overfraught.

So that no man there breathes earth's simple breath,
As if alone on mountains or wide seas ;
But nourishes warm life or hastens death
With joys and sorrows, health and foul disease,
Wisdom and folly, good and evil labours,
Incessant of his multitudinous neighbours ;
He in his turn affecting all of these.

That City's atmosphere is dark and dense,
Although not many exiles wander there,
With many a potent evil influence,
Each adding poison to the poisoned air ;
Infections of unutterable sadness,
Infections of incalculable madness,
Infections of incurable despair.

XVI.

Our shadowy congregation rested still,
As musing on that message we had heard
And brooding on that "End it when you will";
Perchance awaiting yet some other word;
When keen as lightning through a muffled sky
Sprang forth a shrill and lamentable cry:—

The man speaks sooth, alas! the man speaks sooth:
We have no personal life beyond the grave;
There is no God; Fate knows nor wrath nor ruth:
Can I find here the comfort which I crave?

In all eternity I had one chance,
One few years' term of gracious human life:
The splendours of the intellect's advance,
The sweetness of the home with babes and wife;

The social pleasures with their genial wit;
The fascination of the worlds of art,
The glories of the worlds of nature, lit
By large imagination's glowing heart;

The rapture of mere being, full of health;
The careless childhood and the ardent youth,
The strenuous manhood winning various wealth,
The reverend age serene with life's long truth:

34 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

All the sublime prerogatives of Man ;
The storied memories of the times of old,
The patient tracking of the world's great plan
Through sequences and changes myriadfold.

This chance was never offered me before ;
For me the infinite Past is blank and dumb :
This chance recurreth never, nevermore ;
Blank, blank for me the infinite To-come.

And this sole chance was frustrate from my birth,
A mockery, a delusion ; and my breath
Of noble human life upon this earth
So racks me that I sigh for senseless death.

My wine of life is poison mixed with gall,
My noonday passes in a nightmare dream,
I worse than lose the years which are my all :
What can console me for the loss supreme ?

Speak not of comfort where no comfort is,
Speak not at all : can words make foul things fair ?
Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss :
Hush and be mute envisaging despair.—

This vehement voice came from the northern aisle
Rapid and shrill to its abrupt harsh close ;
And none gave answer for a certain while,
For words must shrink from these most wordless
woes ;

At last the pulpit speaker simply said,
With humid eyes and thoughtful drooping head :—

My Brother, my poor Brothers, it is thus ;
This life itself holds nothing good for us,
 But it ends soon and nevermore can be ;
And we knew nothing of it ere our birth,
And shall know nothing when consigned to earth :
 I ponder these thoughts and they comfort me.

XVII.

How the moon triumphs through the endless nights !
 How the stars throb and glitter as they wheel
Their thick processions of supernal lights
 Around the blue vault obdurate as steel !
And men regard with passionate awe and yearning
The mighty marching and the golden burning,
 And think the heavens respond to what they feel.

Boats gliding like dark shadows of a dream,
 Are glorified from vision as they pass
The quivering moonbridge on the deep black stream ;
 Cold windows kindle their dead glooms of glass
To restless crystals ; cornice, dome, and column
Emerge from chaos in the splendour solemn ;
 Like faëry lakes gleam lawns of dewy grass.

36 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

With such a living light these dead eyes shine,
These eyes of sightless heaven, that as we gaze
We read a pity, tremulous, divine,
Or cold majestic scorn in their pure rays :
Fond man ! they are not haughty, are not tender ;
There is no heart or mind in all their splendour,
They thread mere puppets all their marvellous maze.

If we could near them with the flight unflown,
We should but find them worlds as sad as this,
Or suns all self-consuming like our own
Enringed by planet worlds as much amiss :
They wax and wane through fusion and confusion ;
The spheres eternal are a grand illusion,
The empyréan is a void abyss.

XVIII.

I wandered in a suburb of the north,
And reached a spot whence three close lanes led
down,
Beneath thick trees and hedgerows winding forth
Like deep brook channels, deep and dark and lown :
The air above was wan with misty light,
The dull grey south showed one vague blur of white.

I took the left-hand lane and slowly trod
Its earthen footpath, brushing as I went
The humid leafage ; and my feet were shod
With heavy languor, and my frame downbent,

With infinite sleepless weariness outworn,
So many nights I thus had paced forlorn.

After a hundred steps I grew aware
Of something crawling in the lane below ;
It seemed a wounded creature prostrate there
That sobbed with pangs in making progress slow,
The hind limbs stretched to push, the fore limbs then
To drag ; for it would die in its own den.

But coming level with it I discerned
That it had been a man ; for at my tread
It stopped in its sore travail and half-turned,
Leaning upon its right, and raised its head,
And with the left hand twitched back as in ire
Long grey unreverend locks befouled with mire.

A haggard filthy face with bloodshot eyes,
An infamy for manhood to behold.
He gasped all trembling, What, you want my prize ?
You leave, to rob me, wine and lust and gold
And all that men go mad upon, since you
Have traced my sacred secret of the clue ?

You think that I am weak and must submit ;
Yet I but scratch you with this poisoned blade,
And you are dead as if I clove with it
That false fierce greedy heart. Betrayed ! betrayed !
I fling this phial if you seek to pass,
And you are forthwith shrivelled up like grass.

38 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

And then with sudden change, Take thought ! take
thought !

Have pity on me ! it is mine alone.
If you could find, it would avail you naught ;
Seek elsewhere on the pathway of your own :
For who of mortal or immortal race
The lifetrack of another can retrace ?

Did you but know my agony and toil !
Two lanes diverge up yonder from this lane ;
My thin blood marks the long length of their soil ;
Such clue I left, who sought my clue in vain :
My hands and knees are worn both flesh and bone ;
I cannot move but with continual moan.

But I am in the very way at last
To find the long-lost broken golden thread
Which reunites my present with my past,
If you but go your own way. And I said,
I will retire as soon as you have told
Whereunto leadeth this lost thread of gold.

And so you know it not ! he hissed with scorn ;
I feared you, imbecile ! It leads me back
From this accursèd night without a morn,
And through the deserts which have else no
track,
And through vast wastes of horror-haunted time,
To Eden innocence in Eden's clime :

And I become a nursling soft and pure,
An infant cradled on its mother's knee,
Without a past, love-cherished and secure ;
Which if it saw this loathsome present Me,
Would plunge its face into the pillowing breast,
And scream abhorrence hard to lull to rest.

He turned to grope ; and I retiring brushed
Thin shreds of gossamer from off my face,
And mused, His life would grow, the germ uncrushed ;
He should to antenatal night retrace,
And hide his elements in that large womb
Beyond the reach of man-evolving Doom.

And even thus, what weary way were planned,
To seek oblivion through the far-off gate
Of birth, when that of death is close at hand !
For this is law, if law there be in Fate :
What never has been, yet may have its when ;
The thing which has been, never is again.

XIX.

The mighty river flowing dark and deep,
With ebb and flood from the remote sea-tides
Vague-sounding through the City's sleepless sleep,
Is named the River of the Suicides ;
For night by night some lorn wretch overweary,
And shuddering from the future yet more dreary,
Within its cold secure oblivion hides.

40 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

One plunges from a bridge's parapet,
As by some blind and sudden frenzy hurled;
Another wades in slow with purpose set
Until the waters are above him furled;
Another in a boat with dreamlike motion
Glides drifting down into the desert ocean,
To starve or sink from out the desert world.

They perish from their suffering surely thus,
For none beholding them attempts to save,
The while each thinks how soon, solicitous,
He may seek refuge in the self-same wave;
Some hour when tired of ever-vain endurance
Impatience will forerun the sweet assurance
Of perfect peace eventual in the grave.

When this poor tragic-farce has palled us long,
Why actors and spectators do we stay?—
To fill our so-short *rôles* out right or wrong;
To see what shifts are yet in the dull play
For our illusion; to refrain from grieving
Dear foolish friends by our untimely leaving:
But those asleep at home, how blest are they!

Yet it is but for one night after all:
What matters one brief night of dreary pain?
When after it the weary eyelids fall
Upon the weary eyes and wasted brain;
And all sad scenes and thoughts and feelings vanish
In that sweet sleep no power can ever banish,
That one best sleep which never wakes again.

XX.

I sat me weary on a pillar's base,
And leaned against the shaft; for broad moonlight
O'erflowed the peacefulness of cloistered space,
A shore of shadow slanting from the right:
The great cathedral's western front stood there,
A wave-worn rock in that calm sea of air.

Before it, opposite my place of rest,
Two figures faced each other, large, austere;
A couchant sphinx in shadow to the breast,
An angel standing in the moonlight clear;
So mighty by magnificence of form,
They were not dwarfed beneath that mass enorm.

Upon the cross-hilt of a naked sword
The angel's hands, as prompt to smite, were held;
His vigilant intense regard was poured
Upon the creature placidly unquelled,
Whose front was set at level gaze which took
No heed of aught, a solemn trance-like look.

And as I pondered these opposed shapes
My eyelids sank in stupor, that dull swoon
Which drugs and with a leaden mantle drapes
The outworn to worse weariness. But soon
A sharp and clashing noise the stillness broke,
And from the evil lethargy I woke.

42 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

The angel's wings had fallen, stone on stone,
And lay there shattered; hence the sudden sound :
A warrior leaning on his sword alone
Now watched the sphinx with that regard profound ;
The sphinx unchanged looked forthright, as aware
Of nothing in the vast abyss of air.

Again I sank in that repose unsweet,
Again a clashing noise my slumber rent ;
The warrior's sword lay broken at his feet :
An unarmed man with raised hands impotent
Now stood before the sphinx, which ever kept
Such mien as if with open eyes it slept.

My eyelids sank in spite of wonder grown ;
A louder crash upstartled me in dread :
The man had fallen forward, stone on stone,
And lay there shattered, with his trunkless head
Between the monster's large quiescent paws,
Beneath its grand front changeless as life's laws.

The moon had circled westward full and bright,
And made the temple-front a mystic dream,
And bathed the whole enclosure with its light,
The sworded angel's wrecks, the sphinx supreme :
I pondered long that cold majestic face
Whose vision seemed of infinite void space.

XXI.

Anear the centre of that northern crest
 Stands out a level upland bleak and bare,
 From which the city east and south and west
 Sinks gently in long waves; and thronèd there
 An Image sits, stupendous, superhuman,
 The bronze colossus of a wingèd Woman,
 Upon a graded granite base foursquare.

Low-seated she leans forward massively,
 With cheek on clenched left hand, the forearm's
 might
 Erect, its elbow on her rounded knee;
 Across a clasped book in her lap the right
 Upholds a pair of compasses; she gazes
 With full set eyes, but wandering in thick mazes
 Of sombre thought beholds no outward sight.

Words cannot picture her; but all men know
 That solemn sketch the pure sad artist wrought
 Three centuries and threescore years ago,
 With phantasies of his peculiar thought:
 The instruments of carpentry and science
 Scattered about her feet, in strange alliance
 With the keen wolf-hound sleeping undistraught;
 Scales, hour-glass, bell, and magic-square above;
 The grave and solid infant perched beside,
 With open winglets that might bear a dove,
 Intent upon its tablets, heavy-eyed;

44 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

Her folded wings as of a mighty eagle,
But all too impotent to lift the regal
Robustness of her earth-born strength and pride ;

And with those wings, and that light wreath which
seems

To mock her grand head and the knotted frown
Of forehead charged with baleful thoughts and
dreams,

The household bunch of keys, the housewife's
gown

Voluminous, indented, and yet rigid

As if a shell of burnished metal frigid ;

The feet thick shod to tread all weakness down ;

The comet hanging o'er the waste dark seas,

The massy rainbow curved in front of it,
Beyond the village with the masts and trees ;

The snaky imp, dog-headed, from the Pit,
Bearing upon its batlike leathern pinions

Her name unfolded in the sun's dominions,

The " MELENCOLIA " that transcends all wit.

Thus has the artist copied her, and thus

Surrounded to expound her form sublime,
Her fate heroic and calamitous ;

Fronting the dreadful mysteries of Time,
Unvanquished in defeat and desolation,

Undaunted in the hopeless conflagration

Of the day setting on her baffled prime.

Baffled and beaten back she works on still,
Weary and sick of soul she works the more,
Sustained by her indomitable will :

The hands shall fashion and the brain shall pore
And all her sorrow shall be turned to labour,
Till death the friend-foe piercing with his sabre
That mighty heart of hearts ends bitter war.

But as if blacker night could dawn on night,
With tenfold gloom on moonless night unstarred,
A sense more tragic than defeat and blight,
More desperate than strife with hope debarred,
More fatal than the adamantine Never
Encompassing her passionate endeavour,
Dawns glooming in her tenebrous regard :

The sense that every struggle brings defeat
Because Fate holds no prize to crown success ;
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
Because they have no secret to express ;
That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
Because there is no light beyond the curtain ;
That all is vanity and nothingness.

Titanic from her high throne in the north,
That City's sombre Patroness and Queen,
In bronze sublimity she gazes forth
Over her Capital of teen and threne,
Over the river with its isles and bridges,
The marsh and moorland, to the stern rock-ridges,
Confronting them with a coëval mien.

46 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

The moving moon and stars from east to west
Circle before her in the sea of air ;
Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.

Her subjects often gaze up to her there :
The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
The weak new terrors ; all, renewed assurance
And confirmation of the old despair.

1870-1874.

SUNDAY UP THE RIVER¹

AN IDYLL OF COCKAIGNE.

“ En allant promener aux champs,
J’y ai trouvé les blés si grands,
Les aubépines florissant.
 En vérité, en vérité,
C’est le mois, le joli mois,
C’est le joli mois de mai.

“ Dieu veuill’ garder les vins, les blés,
Les jeunes filles à marier,
Les jeun’ garçons pour les aimer !
 En vérité, en vérité,
C’est le mois, le joli mois,
C’est le joli mois de mai.”

—*Carol of Lorraine.*²

I.

I LOOKED out into the morning,
I looked out into the west :
The soft blue eye of the quiet sky
Still drooped in dreamy rest ;

The trees were still like clouds there,
The clouds like mountains dim ;
The broad mist lay, a silvery bay
Whose tide was at the brim.

¹ Reprinted from *Fraser's Magazine*, October 1869, with the kind assent of Messrs. Longmans & Co.

² From Victor Fournel's charming book, "*Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris.*"

I looked out into the morning,
I looked out into the east :
The flood of light upon the night
Had silently increased ;

The sky was pale with fervour,
The distant trees were grey,
The hill-lines drawn like waves of dawn
Dissolving in the day.

I looked out into the morning ;
Looked east, looked west, with glee :
O richest day of happy May,
My love will spend with me !

II.

“ Oh, what are you waiting for here, young man ?
What are you looking for over the bridge ? ”
A little straw hat with the streaming blue ribbons
Is soon to come dancing over the bridge.
Her heart beats the measure that keeps her feet
dancing,
Dancing along like a wave o' the sea ;
Her heart pours the sunshine with which her eyes
glancing
Light up strange faces in looking for me.
The strange faces brighten in meeting her glances ;
The strangers all bless her, pure, lovely, and free :
She fancies she walks, but her walk skips and dances,
Her heart makes such music in coming to me.

Oh, thousands and thousands of happy young maidens
Are tripping this morning their sweethearts to see;
But none whose heart beats to a sweeter love-cadence
Than hers who will brighten the sunshine for me.

“ Oh, what are you waiting for here, young man?
What are you looking for over the bridge? ”
A little straw hat with the streaming blue ribbons;
—And here it comes dancing over the bridge !

III.

In the vast vague grey,
Mistily luminous, brightly dim,
The trees to the south there, far away,
Float as beautiful, strange and grand
As pencilled palm-trees every line
Mystic with a grace divine,
In our dreams of the holy Eastern Land.

There is not a cloud in the sky ;
The vague vast grey
Melts into azure dim on high.
Warmth, and languor, and infinite peace !
Surely the young Day
Hath fallen into a vision and a trance,
And his burning flight doth cease.

Yet look how here and there
Soft curves, fine contours, seem to swim,

Half emerging, wan and dim,
 Into the quiet air :
Like statues growing slowly, slowly out
From the great vault of marble ; here a limb,
And there a feature, but the rest all doubt.

Then the sculpturing sunbeams smite,
 And the forms start forth to the day ;
And the breath of the morning sweepeth light
 The luminous dust away :
 And soon, soon, soon,
Crowning the floor of the land and the sea,
 Shall be wrought the dome of Noon.

The burning sapphire dome,
With solemn imagery ; vast shapes that stand
Each like an island ringed with flashing foam,
Black-purple mountains, creeks and rivers of light,
Crag of cleft crystal blazing to the crest :
 Vast isles that move, that roam
A tideless sea of infinite fathomless rest.

 Thus shall it be this noon :
And thus, so slowly, slowly from its birth
 In the long night's dark swoon,
Through the long morning's trance, sweet, vague,
 and dim
 The Sun divine above
Doth build up in us, Heaven completing Earth,
 Our solemn Noon of Love.

IV.

The church bells are ringing :
How green the earth, how fresh and fair !
The thrushes are singing :
What rapture but to breathe this air !

The church bells are ringing :
Lo, how the river dreameth there !
The thrushes are singing :
Green flames wave lightly everywhere !

The church bells are ringing :
How all the world breathes praise and prayer !
The thrushes are singing :
What Sabbath peace doth trance the air !

V.

I love all hardy exercise
That makes one strain and quiver ;
And best of all I love and prize
This boating on our river.
I to row and you to steer,
Gay shall be Life's trip, my dear :
You to steer and I to row,
All is bright where'er we go.

We push off from the bank ; again
We're free upon the waters ;
The happiest of the sons of men,
The fairest of earth's daughters.

And I row, and I row ;
The blue floats above us as we go :
And you steer, and you steer,
Framed in gliding wood and water, O my dear.

I pull a long calm mile or two,
Pull slowly, deftly feather :
How sinful *any* work to do
In this Italian weather !
Yet I row, yet I row ;
The blue floats above us as we go :
While you steer, while you steer,
Framed in gliding wood and water, O my dear.

Those lovely breadths of lawn that sweep
Adown in still green billows !
And o'er the brim in fountains leap ;
Green fountains, weeping willows !
And I row, and I row ;
The blue floats above us as we go :
And you steer, and you steer,
Framed in gliding wood and water, O my dear.

We push among the flags in flower,
Beneath the branches tender,
And we are in a faerie bower
Of green and golden splendour.
I to row and you to steer,
Gay must be Life's trip, my dear ;
You to steer and I to row,
All is bright where'er we go.

A secret bower where we can hide
In lustrous shadow lonely ;
The crystal floor may lap and glide
To rock our dreaming only.
I to row and you to steer,
Gay must be Life's trip, my dear ;
You to steer and I to row,
All is bright where'er we go.

VI.

I love this hardy exercise,
This strenuous toil of boating :
Our skiff beneath the willow lies
Half stranded and half floating.
As I lie, as I lie,
Glimpses dazzle of the blue and burning sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

My shirt is of the soft red wool,
My cap is azure braided
By two white hands so beautiful,
My tie mauve purple-shaded.
As I lie, as I lie,
Glimpses dazzle of white clouds and sapphire sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

Your hat with long blue streamers decked,
 Your pure throat crimson-banded ;
 White-robed, my own white dove unflecked,
 Dove-footed, lilac handed.
 As I lie, as I lie,
 Glimpses dazzle of white clouds and sapphire sky ;
 As you lean, as you lean,
 Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

If any boaters boating past
 Should look where we're reclining,
 They'll say, To-day green willows glassed
 Rubies and sapphires shining !
 As I lie, as I lie,
 Glimpses dazzle of the blue and burning sky ;
 As you lean, as you lean,
 Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

VII.

Grey clouds come puffing from my lips,
 And hang there softly curling,
 While from the bowl now leaps, now slips,
 A steel-blue thread high twirling.
 As I lie, as I lie,
 The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
 As you lean, as you lean,
 In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

I gaze on you and I am crowned,
A monarch great and glorious,
A Hero in all realms renowned,
A Faerie Prince victorious.
As I lie, as I lie,
The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

Your violet eyes pour out their whole
Pure light in earnest rapture ;
Your thoughts come dreaming through my soul,
And nestle past recapture.
As I lie, as I lie,
The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

O friends, your best years to the oar
Like galley-slaves devoting,
This is and shall be evermore
The true sublime of boating !
As I lie, as I lie,
The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
As you lean, as you lean,
In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

VIII.

The water is cool and sweet and pure,
The water is clear as crystal ;
And water's a noble liquid, sure ;—
But look at my pocket-pistol !

Tim Boyland gave it me, one of two
The rogue brought back from Dublin ;
With a jar of the genuine stuff : hurroo !
How deliciously it comes bubblin' !

It is not brandy, it is not wine,
It is Jameson's Irish Whisky :
It fills the heart with joy divine,
And it makes the fancy frisky.

All other spirits are vile resorts,
Except its own Scotch first cousin ;
And as for your Clarets and Sherries and Ports,
A naggin is worth a dozen.

I have watered this, though a toothful neat
Just melts like cream down the throttle :
But it's grand in the punch, hot, strong, and sweet :
Not a headache in a bottle.

It is amber as the western skies
When the sunset glows serenest ;
It is mellow as the mild moonrise
When the shamrock leaves fold greenest.

Just a little, wee, wee, tiny sip !
Just the wet of the bill of a starling !
A drop of dew for the rosy lip.
And two stars in the eyes of my darling !

'Faith your kiss has made it so sweet at the brim
I could go on supping for ever !
We'll pocket the pistol : And Tim, you limb,
May this *craturr* abandon you never !

IX.

Like violets pale i' the Spring o' the year
Came my Love's sad eyes to my youth ;
Wan and dim with many a tear,
But the sweeter for that in sooth :
Wet and dim,
Tender and true,
Violet eyes
Of the sweetest blue.

Like pansies dark i' the June o' the year
Grow my Love's glad eyes to my prime ;
Rich with the purple splendour clear
Of their thoughtful bliss sublime :
Deep and dark,
Solemn and true,
Pansy eyes
Of the noblest blue.

X.

Were I a real Poet, I would sing
Such joyous songs of you, and all mere truth ;
As true as buds and tender leaves in Spring,
As true as lofty dreams in dreamful youth ;
That men should cry : How foolish every one
Who thinks the world is getting out of tune !
Where is the tarnish in our golden sun ?
Where is the clouding in our crystal moon ?
The lark sings now the eversame new song
With which it soared through Eden's purest skies
This poet's music doth for us prolong
The very speech Love learnt in Paradise ;
This maiden is as young and pure and fair
As Eve agaze on Adam sleeping there.

XI.

When will you have not a sole kiss left,
And my prodigal mouth be all bereft ?
 When your lips have ravished the last sweet flush
 Of the red with which the roses blush :
 Now I kiss them and kiss them till they hush.

When will you have not a glance to give
Of the love in whose lustre my glances live ?
 When, O my darling, your fathomless eyes
 Have drawn all the azure out of the skies :
 Now I gaze and I gaze till they dare not rise.

When will you find not a single vow
Of the myriads and myriads you lavish now?
When your voice has gurgled the last sweet note
That was meant from the nightingales to float:
Now I whisper it, whisper it dumb in your throat.

When will you love me no more, no more,
And my happy, happy dream be o'er?
When no rose is red, and no skies are blue,
And no nightingale sings the whole year through,
Then my heart may have no love for you.

XII.

My Love o'er the water bends dreaming;
It glideth and glideth away:
She sees there her own beauty, gleaming
Through shadow and ripple and spray.

Oh, tell her, thou murmuring river,
As past her your light wavelets roll,
How steadfast that image for ever
Shines pure in pure depths of my soul.

XIII.

The wandering airs float over the lawn,
And linger and whisper in at our bower;
(They babble, babble all they know:)

The delicate secrets they have drawn
From bird and meadow and tree and flower ;
 (Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

Some linden stretches itself to the height,
Then rustles back to its dream of the day ;
 (They babble, babble all they know :)

Some bird would trill out its love-delight,
But the honey melts in its throat away ;
 (Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

Some flower seduced by the treacherous calm
Breathes all its soul in a fragrant sigh ;
 (They babble, babble all they know :)

Some blossom weeps a tear of balm
For the lost caress of a butterfly ;
 (Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

Our Mother lies in siesta now,
And we listen to her breathings here ;
 (They babble, babble all they know :)
And we learn all the thoughts hid under her brow,
All her heart's deep dreams of the happy year :
 (Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

XIV.

Those azure, azure eyes
 Gaze on me with their love ;
And I am lost in dream,
 And cannot speak or move.

Those azure, azure eyes
 Stay with me when we part ;
 A sea of azure thoughts
 Overflows my heart.¹

XV.

Give a man a horse he can ride,
 Give a man a boat he can sail ;
 And his rank and wealth, his strength and health,
 On sea nor shore shall fail.

Give a man a pipe he can smoke,
 Give a man a book he can read ;
 And his home is bright with a calm delight,
 Though the room be poor indeed.

Give a man a girl he can love,
 As I, O my love, love thee ;
 And his heart is great with the pulse of Fate,
 At home, on land, on sea.

¹ " Mit deinen blauen Augen
 Siehst du mich lieblich an ;
 Da ward mir so träumend zu Sinne
 Dass ich nicht sprechen kann.

" An deine blauen Augen
 Gedenk' ich allerwärts ;—
 Ein Meer von blauen Gedanken
 Ergiesst sich über mein Herz."—*Heine*.

XVI.

My love is the flaming Sword
 To fight through the world ;
 Thy love is the Shield to ward,
 And the Armour of the Lord,
 And the Banner of Heaven unfurled.

XVII.

Let my voice ring out and over the earth,
 Through all the grief and strife,
 With a golden joy in a silver mirth :
 Thank God for Life !

Let my voice swell out through the great abyss
 To the azure dome above,
 With a chord of faith in the harp of bliss :
 Thank God for Love !

Let my voice thrill out beneath and above
 The whole world through :
 O my Love and Life, O my Life and Love,
 Thank God for you !

XVIII.

The wine of Love is music,
 And the feast of Love is song :
 And when Love sits down to the banquet,
 Love sits long :

Sits long and ariseth drunken,
But not with the feast and the wine ;
He reeleth with his own heart,
That great rich Vine.

XIX.

Drink ! drink ! open your mouth !
This air is as rich as wine ;
Flowing with balm from the sunny south,
And health from the western brine.
Drink ! drink ! open your mouth !
This air is as strong as wine :
My brain is drugged with the balm o' the south,
And rolls with the western brine.
Drink ! drink ! open your mouth !
This air is the choicest wine ;
From that golden grape the Sun, i' the south
Of Heaven's broad vine.

XX.

Could we float thus ever,
Floating down a river,
Down a tranquil river, and you alone with me :
Past broad shining meadows,
Past the great wood-shadows,
Past fair farms and hamlets, for ever to the sea.
Through the golden noonlight,
Through the silver moonlight,
Through the tender gloaming, gliding calm and free.

From the sunset gliding,
 Into morning sliding,
 With the tranquil river for ever to the sea.

Past the masses hoary
 Of cities great in story,
 Past their towers and temples drifting lone and free :
 Gliding, never hasting,
 Gliding, never resting,
 Ever with the river that glideth to the sea.

With a swifter motion
 Out upon the Ocean,
 Heaven above and round us, and you alone with me :
 Heaven around and o'er us,
 The Infinite before us,
 Floating on for ever upon the flowing sea.

.
 What time is it, dear, now?
 We are in the year now
 Of the New Creation one million two or three.
 But where are we now, Love?
 We are as I trow, Love,
 In the Heaven of Heavens upon the Crystal Sea.

And may mortal sinners
 Care for carnal dinners
 In your Heaven of Heavens, New Era millions three?
 Oh, if their boat gets stranding
 Upon some Richmond landing,
 They're thirsty as the desert and hungry as the sea !

SUNDAY AT HAMPSTEAD

(AN IDLE IDYLL BY A VERY HUMBLE MEMBER OF
THE GREAT AND NOBLE LONDON MOB.)

I.

THIS is the Heath of Hampstead,
There is the dome of Saint Paul's;
Beneath, on the serried house-tops,
A chequered lustre falls :

And the mighty city of London,
Under the clouds and the light,
Seems a low wet beach, half shingle,
With a few sharp rocks upright.

Here will we sit, my darling,
And dream an hour away :
The donkeys are hurried and worried,
But we are not donkeys to-day :

Through all the weary week, dear,
We toil in the murk down there,
Tied to a desk and a counter,
A patient, stupid pair !

But on Sunday we slip our tether,
And away from the smoke and the smirch ;
Too grateful to God for His Sabbath
To shut its hours in a church.

Away to the green, green country,
Under the open sky ;
Where the earth's sweet breath is incense
And the lark sings psalms on high.

On Sunday we're Lord and Lady,
With ten times the love and glee
Of those pale and languid rich ones
Who are always and never free.

They drawl and stare and simper,
So fine and cold and staid,
Like exquisite waxwork figures
That must be kept in the shade :

We can laugh out loud when merry,
We can romp at kiss-in-the-ring,
We can take our beer at a public,
We can loll on the grass and sing. . . .

Would you grieve very much, my darling,
If all yon low wet shore
Were drowned by a mighty flood-tide,
And we never toiled there more ?

Wicked ?—there is no sin, dear,
In an idle dreamer's head ;
He turns the world topsy-turvy
To prove that his soul's not dead.

I am sinking, sinking, sinking ;
It is hard to sit upright !
Your lap is the softest pillow !
Good-night, my Love, good night !

II.

How your eyes dazzle down into my soul !
I drink and drink of their deep violet wine,
And ever thirst the more, although my whole
Dazed being whirls in drunkenness divine.
Pout down your lips from that bewildering smile,
And kiss me for the interruption, Sweet !
I had escaped you : floating for awhile
In that far cloud ablaze with living heat :
I floated with it through the solemn skies,
I melted with it up the Crystal Sea
Into the Heaven of Heavens ; and shut my eyes
To feel eternal rest enfolding me. . . .
Well, I prefer one tyrannous girl down here,
You jealous violet-eyed Bewitcher, you !
To being lord in Mohammed's seventh sphere
Of meekest houris threescore ten and two !

III.

Was it hundreds of years ago, my Love,
Was it thousands of miles away,
That two poor creatures we know, my Love,
Were toiling day by day ;
 Were toiling weary, weary,
 With many myriads more,
 In a City dark and dreary
 On a sullen river's shore ?

Was it truly a fact or a dream, my Love?
 I think my brain still reels,
 And my ears still throbbing seem, my Love,
 With the rush and the clang of wheels;
 Of a vast machinery roaring
 For ever in skyless gloom;
 Where the poor slaves peace imploring
 Found peace alone in the tomb.

Was it hundreds of years ago, my Love,
 Was it thousands of miles away?
 Or was it a dream to show, my Love,
 The rapture of to-day?
 This day of holy splendour,
 This Sabbath of rich rest,
 Wherein to God we render
 All praise by being blest.

IV.

Eight of us promised to meet here
 And tea together at five :
 And—who would ever believe it?—
 We are the first to arrive !

Oh, shame on us, my darling ;
 It is a monstrous crime
 To make a tryst with *others*
 And be before our time !

Lizzie is off with William,
Quite happy for her part ;
Our sugar in her pocket,
And the sweet love in her heart.

Mary and Dick so grandly
Parade suburban streets ;
His waistcoat and her bonnet
Proving the best of treats.

And Fanny plagues big Robert
With tricks of the wildest glee :
O Fanny, *you'll* get in hot water
If you do not bring us our tea !

Why, bless me, look at that table,
Every one of them there !—
“ Ha, here at last we have them,
The always behindhand pair !

“ When the last trumpet-solo
Strikes up instead of the lark,
They'll turn in their sleep just grunting
Who's up so soon in the dark ? ”

Babble and gabble, you rabble,
A thousand in full yell !
And this is your Tower of Babel,
This not-to-be-finished Hotel.¹

¹ (Since finished, in a fashion. The verses were written in 1863.)

“ You should see it in the drawing,
You’d think a Palace they make,
Like the one in the *Lady of Lyons*,
With this pond for the lovely lake ! ”

“ I wish it wasn’t Sunday,
There’s no amusement at all :
Who was here Hot-cross-bun-day ?
We had such an open-air ball !

“ The bands played polkas, waltzes,
Quadrilles ; it was glorious fun !
And each gentleman gave them a penny
After each dance was done.”

“ Mary is going to chapel,
And what takes her there, do you guess ?
Her sweet little duck of a bonnet,
And her new second-hand silk dress.”

“ *We* went to Church one Sunday,
But felt we had no right there ;
For it’s only a place for the grand folk
Who come in a carriage and pair.

“ And I laughed out loud,—it was shameful !
But Fanny said, *Oh, what lives !*
He must have been clever, the rascal,
To manage seven hundred wives ! ”

“ Suppose we play Hunt-the-Slipper ? ”

“ We can’t, there’s the crinoline ! ”—“ Phew !
Bother it, always a nuisance ! ”

“ Hoop-de-dooden-do ! ”

“ I think I’ve seen all the girls here,
About a thousand, or more ;
But none of them half so pretty
As our own loving four.”

“ *Thank* you ! and I’ve been listening
To lots of the men, the knaves ;
But none of them half such humbugs
As our devoted slaves.”

“ Do you see those purple flushes ?
The sun will set in state :
Up all ! we must cross to the heath, friends
Before it gets too late.

“ We will couch in the fern together,
And watch for the moon and the stars ;
And the slim tree-tops will be lighted,
So the boys may light their cigars.

“ And while the sunset glory
Burns down in crimson and gold,
LAZY shall tell us a story
Of his wonderful times of old.”

V.

Ten thousand years ago, (“ *No more than that ?* ”)
Ten thousand years, (“ *The age of Robert’s hat !* ”—
“ *Silence, you gods !* ”—“ *Pinch Fanny !* ”—“ *Now
we’re good.* ”)

This place where we are sitting was a wood,

Savage and desert save for one rude home
Of wattles plastered with stiff clay and loam ;
And here, in front, upon the grassy mire
Four naked squaws were squatted round a fire :
Then four tall naked wild men crushing through
The tangled underwood came into view ;
Two of them bent beneath a mighty boar,
The third was gashed and bleeding, number four
Strutted full-drest in war-paint, (*" That was Dick ! "*)
Blue of a devilish pattern laid on thick.
The squaws jumped up to roast the carcass whole ;
The braves sank silent, stark 'gainst root and bole.
The meat half-done, they tore it and devoured,
Sullenly ravenous ; the women cowered
Until their lords had finished, then partook.
Mist rose ; all crept into their cabin-nook,
And staked the mouth ; the floor was one broad bed
Of rushes dried with fox and bearskins spread.
Wolves howled and wild cats wailed ; they snored ;
and so
The long night passed, shedding a storm of snow ;
This very night ten thousand years ago.

VI.

Ten thousand years before, (*" Come, draw it mild !
Don't waste Conk-ology like that, my child ! "*)
From where we sit to the horizon's bound
A level brilliant plain was spread all round,

As level and as brilliant as a sea
Under the burning sun ; high as your knee
Aflame with flowers, yellow and blue and red :
Long lines of palm-trees marked out there the bed
Of a great river, and among them gleamed
A few grey tents. Then four swift horsemen streamed
Out of the West, magnificent in ire,
Churning the meadow into flakes of fire,
Brandishing monstrous spears as if in fight,
They wheeled, ducked, charged, and shouted fierce
delight :
So till they reach the camp : the women there
Awaiting them the evening meal prepare ;
Milk from the goats and camels, dates plucked fresh,
Cool curds and cheese, millet, sweet broiled kid's flesh.
The spear struck deep hath picketed each barb ;
A grave proud turbaned man in flowing garb
Supps with a grave meek woman, humbly proud,
Whose eyes flash empire. Then the solemn crowd
Of stars above, the silent plain below,
Until the East resumes its furnace-glow ;
This same night twenty thousand years ago.

VII.

Ten thousand years before, (*" But if you take
Such mouthfuls, you will soon eat up Time's cake ! "*)
Where we are sitting rose in splendid light
A broad cool marble palace ; from the height

Broad terrace-gardens stairlike sank away
 Down to the floor of a deep sapphire bay.
 Where the last slope slid greenly to the wave,
 And dark rich glossy foliage shadow gave,
 Four women—or four goddesses—leaned calm,
 Of mighty stature, graceful as the palm :
 One stroked with careless hand a lion's mane,
 One fed an eagle; while a measured strain
 Was poured forth by the others, harp and voice,
 Music to make the universe rejoice.
 An isle was in the offing seen afar,
 Deep-purple based, its peak a glittering star;
 Whence rowed a galley (drooped the silken sails),
 A dragon-barque with golden burning scales.
 Then four bronzed giants leapt to land, embraced
 The glorious women chanting : “ Did we haste?
 The Cavern-Voice hath silenced all your fears;
 Peace on our earth another thousand years ! ”
 On fruits and noble wine, with song's rich flow,
 They feasted in the sunset's golden glow;
 This same night thirty thousand years ago.

VIII.

Ten thousand years before, (“ *Another ten!*
Good Lord, how greedy are these little men! ”)
 This place where we are sitting (“ *Half asleep.* ”)
 Was in the sea a hundred fathoms deep :
 A floor of silver sand so fine and soft,
 A coral forest branching far aloft ;

Above, the great dusk emerald golden-green ;
Silence profound and solitude serene.
Four mermaids sit beneath the coral rocks,
Combing with golden combs their long green locks,
And wreathing them with little pearly shells ;
Four mermen come from out the deep-sea dells,
And whisper to them, and they all turn pale :
Then through the hyaline a voice of wail,
With passionate gestures, " Ever alas for woe !
A rumour cometh down the Ocean-flow,
A word calamitous ! that we shall be
All disinherited from the great sea :
Our tail with which like fishes we can swim
Shall split into an awkward double-limb,
And we must waddle on the arid soil,
And build dirt-huts, and get our food with toil,
And lose our happy, happy lives ! " And so
These gentle creatures wept " Alas for woe ! "
This same night forty thousand years ago.

IX.

*" Are you not going back a little more ?
What was the case ten thousand years before ? "*
Ten thousand years before 'twas Sunday night ;
Four lovely girls were listening with delight,
Three noble youths admired another youth
Discoursing History crammed full of truth :

They all were sitting upon Hampstead Heath,
And monstrous grimy London lay beneath.
“ The stupidest story LAZY ever told ;
I’ve no more faith in his fine times of old.”
“ How do you like our prospects now, my dears ?
We’ll all be mermaids in ten thousand years.”
“ Mermaids are beautiful enough, but law !
Think of becoming a poor naked squaw ! ”
“ But in these changes, sex will change no doubt ;
We’ll all be men and women turn about.”
“ Then these four chaps will be the squaws ?—that’s
just ;
With lots of picaninnies, I *do* trust ! ”
“ If changes go by fifty thousand, yes ;
But if by ten, they last were squaws, I guess ! ”
“ Come on ; we’ll go and do the very beers
We did this night was fifty thousand years.”
Thou prophet, thou deep sage ! we’ll go, we’ll go :
The ring is round, Life naught, the World an O ;
This night is fifty thousand years ago !

X.

As we rush, as we rush in the Train,
The trees and the houses go wheeling back,
But the starry heavens above the plain
Come flying on our track.

All the beautiful stars of the sky,
The silver doves of the forest of Night,
Over the dull earth swarm and fly,
Companions of our flight.

We will rush ever on without fear ;
Let the goal be far, the flight be fleet !
For we carry the Heavens with us, Dear,
While the Earth slips from our feet !

XI.

Day after day of this azure May
The blood of the Spring has swelled in my veins ;
Night after night of broad moonlight
A mystical dream has dazzled my brains.

A seething might, a fierce delight,
The blood of the Spring is the wine of the world ;
My veins run fire and thrill desire,
Every leaf of my heart's red rose uncurled.

A sad sweet calm, a tearful balm,
The light of the Moon is the trance of the world ;
My brain is fraught with yearning thought,
And the rose is pale and its leaves are furled.

O speed the day, thou dear, dear May,
And hasten the night I charge thee, O June,
When the trance divine shall burn with the wine
And the red rose unfurl all its fire to the Moon !

XII.

O mellow moonlight warm,
Weave round my Love a charm;
O countless starry eyes,
Watch from the holy skies;
O ever-solemn Night,
Shield her within thy might :
 Watch her, my little one !
 Shield her, my darling !

How my heart shrinks with fear,
Nightly to leave thee, dear;
Lonely and pure within
Vast glooms of woe and sin :
Our wealth of love and bliss
Too heavenly-perfect is :
 Good night, my little one !
 God keep thee, darling !

1863; 1865.

AT BELVOIR

Sunday, July 3, 1881.

A BALLAD, HISTORICAL AND PROPHEIC.

(" In maiden meditation, fancy free.")

MY thoughts go back to last July,
Sweet happy thoughts and tender;—
"The bridal of the earth and sky,"

A day of noble splendour;
A day to make the saddest heart
In joy a true believer;
When two good friends we roamed apart
The shady walks of Belvoir.

A maiden like a budding rose,
Unconscious of the golden
And fragrant bliss of love that glows
Deep in her heart infolden;
A Poet old in years and thought,
Yet not too old for pleasance,
Made young again and fancy-fraught
By such a sweet friend's presence.

The other two beyond our ken
Most shamefully deserted,
And far from all the ways of men
Their stealthy steps averted :

AT BELVOIR

Of course our Jack would go astray,
 Erotic and erratic ;
But Mary !—well, I own the day
 Was really too ecstatic.

We roamed with many a merry jest
 And many a ringing laughter ;
The slow calm hours too rich in zest
 To heed before and after :
Yet lingering down the lovely walks
 Soft strains anon came stealing,
A finer music through our talks
 Of sweeter, deeper feeling :

Yes, now and then a quiet word
 Of seriousness dissembling
In smiles would touch some hidden chord
 And set it all a-trembling :
I trembled too, and felt it strange ;—
 Could I be in possession
Of music richer in its range
 Than yet had found expression ?

The cattle standing in the mere,
 The swans upon it gliding,
The sunlight on the waters clear,
 The radiant clouds dividing ;
The solemn sapphire sky above,
 The foliage lightly waving,
The soft air's Sabbath peace and love
 To satisfy all craving.

We mapped the whole fair region out
As Country of the Tender,
From first pursuit in fear and doubt
To final glad surrender :
Each knoll and arbour got its name,
Each vista, covert, dingle ;—
No young pair now may track the same
And long continue single !

And in the spot most thrilling-sweet
Of all this Love-Realm rosy
Our truant pair had found retreat,
Unblushing, calm and cosy :
Where seats too wide for one are placed,
And yet for two but narrow,
It's " Let my arm steal round your waist,
And be my winsome marrow ! "

Reclining on a pleasant lea
Such tender scenes rehearsing,
A freakish fit seized him and me
For wildly foolish versing :
We versed of this, we versed of that,
A pair of mocking sinners,
While our lost couple strayed or sat
Oblivious of their dinners.

But what was strange, our maddest rhymes
In all their divagations
Were charged and over-charged at times
With deep vaticinations :

I yearn with wonder at the power
Of Poetry prophetic
Which in my soul made that blithe hour
With this hour sympathetic.

For though we are in winter now,
My heart is in full summer :
Old Year, old Wish, have made their bow ;
I welcome each new-comer.
“ The King is dead, long live the King !
The throne is vacant never ! ”
Is true, I read, of everything,
So of my heart for ever !

My thoughts go on to next July,
More happy thoughts, more tender ;
“ The bridal of the earth and sky, ”
A day of perfect splendour ;
A day to make the saddest heart
In bliss a firm believer ;
When two True Loves may roam apart
The shadiest walks of Belvoir.

There may be less of merry jest
And less of ringing laughter,
Yet life be much more rich in zest
And richer still thereafter ;
The love-scenes of that region fair
Have very real rehearsing,
And tremulous kisses thrill the air
Far sweeter than sweet versing ;

The bud full blown at length reveal
Its deepest golden burning;
The heart inspired with love unseal
Its inmost passionate yearning :
The music of the hidden chord
At length find full expression ;
The Seraph of the Flaming Sword
Assume divine possession.

January 1882.

THE LORD OF THE CASTLE OF INDOLENCE

NOR did we lack our own right royal king,
The glory of our peaceful realm and race.
By no long years of restless travailing,
By no fierce wars or intrigues bland and base,
Did he attain his superlofty place :
But one fair day he lounging to the throne
Reclined thereon with such possessing grace
That all could see it was in sooth his own,
That it for him was fit and he for it alone.

He there reclined as lilies on a river,
All cool in sunfire, float in buoyant rest ;
He stirred as flowers that in the sweet south quiver ;
He moved as swans move on a lake's calm breast,
Or clouds slow gliding in the golden west ;
He thought as birds may think when 'mid the trees
Their joy showers music o'er the brood-filled nest ;
He swayed us all with ever placid ease
As sways the thronèd moon her world-wide wandering
seas.

Look, as within some fair and princely hall
The marble statue of a god may rest,
Admired in silent reverence by all ;
Soothing the weary brain and anguished breast,

LORD OF THE CASTLE OF INDOLENCE 85

By life's sore burthens all-too-much oppressed,
With visions of tranquillity supreme ;
So, self-sufficing, grand and bland and blest,
He dwelt enthroned, and whoso gazed did seem
Endowed with death-calm life in long unwistful dream.

While others fumed and schemed and toiled in vain
To mould the world according to their mood,
He did by might of perfect faith refrain
From any part in such disturbance rude.
The world, he said, indeed is very good,
Its Maker surely wiser far than we ;
Feed soul and flesh upon its bounteous food,
Nor fret because of ill ; All-good is He,
And worketh not in years but in Eternity.

How men will strain to row against the tide,
Which yet must sweep them down in its career !
Or if some win their way and crown their pride,
What do they win ? the desert wild and drear,
The savage rocks, the icy wastes austere,
Wherefrom the river's turbid rills downflow :
But he upon the waters broad and clear,
In harmony with all the winds that blow,
'Mid cities, fields and farms, went drifting to and fro.

The king with constant heed must rule his realm,
The soldier faint and starve in marches long,
The sailor guide with sleepless care his helm,
The poet from sick languors soar in song :

86 LORD OF THE CASTLE OF INDOLENCE

But he alone amidst the troubled throng
In restful ease diffused beneficence ;
Most like a mid-year noontide rich and strong,
That fills the earth with fruitful life intense,
And yet doth trance it all in sweetest indolence.

When summer reigns the joyous leaves and flowers
Steal imperceptibly upon the tree ;
So stole upon him all his bounteous hours,
So passive to their influence seemed he,
So clothed they him with joy and majesty ;
Basking in ripest summer all his time,
We blessed his shade and sang him songs of glee ;
The dew and sunbeams fed his perfect prime,
And rooted broad and deep he broadly towered
sublime.

Thus could he laugh those great and generous laughs
Which made us love ourselves, the world, and
him ;
And while they rang we felt as one who quaffs
Some potent wine-cup dowered to the brim,
And straightway all things seem to reel and
swim,—
Suns, moons, earth, stars sweep through the vast
profound,
Wrapt in a golden mist-light warm and dim,
Rolled in a volume of triumphant sound ;
So in that laughter's joy the whole world carolled
round.

LORD OF THE CASTLE OF INDOLENCE 87

The sea, the sky, wood, mountain, stream and plain,
Our whole fair world did serve him and adorn,
Most like some casual robe which he might deign
To use when kinglier vesture was not worn.
Was all its being by his soul upborne,
That it should render homage so complete?
The day and night, the even and the morn,
Seemed ever circling grateful round his feet,
“ With Thee, through Thee we live this rich life pure
and sweet ! ”

For while he loved our broad world beautiful,
His placid wisdom penetrated it,
And found the lovely words but poor and dull
Beside the secret splendours they transmit,
The heavenly things in earthly symbols writ :
He knew the blood-red sweetness of the vine,
Yet did not therefore at the revel sit ;
But straining out the very wine of wine,
Lived calm and pure and glad in drunkenness divine.

Without an effort the imperial sun
With ever ample life of light doth feed
The spheres revolving round it every one :
So all his heart and soul and thought and deed
Flowed freely forth for every brother's need ;
He knew no difference between good and ill,
But as the sun doth nourish flower and weed
With self-same bounty, he too ever still
Lived blessing all alike with equal loving will.

88 LORD OF THE CASTLE OF INDOLENCE

The all-bestowing sun is clothed with splendour,
The all-supporting sun doth reign supreme ;
So must eternal justice ever render
Each unsought payment to its last extreme :
Thus he most rich in others' joy did seem,
And reigned by servitude all-effortless ;
For heaven and earth must vanish like a dream
Ere such a soul divine can know distress,
Whom all the laws of Life conspire to love and bless.

1859.

HE HEARD HER SING

WE were now in the midmost Maytime, in the
full green flood of the Spring,
When the air is sweet all the daytime with the
blossoms and birds that sing;
When the air is rich all the night, and richest of all
in its noon;
When the nightingales pant the delight and keen
stress of their love to the moon;
When the almond and apple and pear spread wavering
wavelets of snow
In the light of the soft warm air far-flushed with a
delicate glow;
When the towering chestnuts uphold their masses of
spires red or white,
And the pendulous tresses of gold of the slim labur-
num burn bright,
And the lilac guardeth the bowers with the gleam of
a lifted spear,
And the scent of the hawthorn flowers breathes all
the new life of the year,
And the linden's tender pink bud by the green of the
leaf is o'errun,
And the bronze-beech shines like blood in the light of
the morning sun,

And the leaf-buds seem spangling some network of
gossamer flung on the elm,
And the hedges are filling their fretwork with every
sweet green of Spring's realm ;
And the flowers are everywhere budding and blowing
about our feet,
The green of the meadows star-studding and the
bright green blades of the wheat.

An evening and night of song. For first when I left
the town,
And took the lane that is long and came out on the
breeze-swept down,
The sunset heavens were all ringing wide over the
golden gorse
With the skylarks' rapturous singing, a revel of larks
in full force,
A revel of larks in the raptures surpassing all raptures
of Man,
Who ponders the blessings he captures and finds in
each blessing some ban.
And then I went on down the dale in the light of the
afterglow,
In that strange light green and pale and serene and
pathetic and slow
In its fading round to the north, while the light of the
unseen moon
From the east comes brightening forth an ever-
increasing boon.

And there in the cottage my Alice, through the hours
so short and so long,
Kept filled to the brim love's chalice with the wine
of music and song :
And first with colossal Beethoven, the gentlest spirit
sublime
Of the harmonies interwoven, Eternity woven with
Time ;
Of the melodies slowly and slowly dissolving away
through the soul,
While it dissolves with them wholly and our being is
lost in the Whole ;
As gentle as Dante the Poet, for only the lulls of the stress
Of the mightiest spirits can know it, this ineffable
gentleness :
And then with the delicate tender fantastic dreamer
of night,
Whose splendour is starlike splendour and his light a
mystic moonlight,
Nocturn on nocturn dreaming while the mind floats
far in the haze
And the dusk and the shadow and gleaming of a
realm that has no days :
And then she sang ballads olden, ballads of love and
of woe,
Love all burningly golden, grief with heart's-blood in
its flow ;
Those ballads of Scotland that thrill you, keen from
the heart to the heart,

Till their pathos is seeming to kill you, with an
exquisite bliss in the smart.

And then we went out of the valley and over the spur
of the hill,

And down by a woodland alley where the sprinkled
moonlight lay still ;

For the breeze in the boughs was still and the breeze
was still in the sprays,

And the leaves had scarcely a thrill in the stream of
the silver rays,

But looked as if drawn on the sky or etched with a
graver keen,

Sharp shadows thrown from on high deep out of the
azure serene :

And a certain copse we knew, where never in May-
time fails,

While the night distils sweet dew, the song of the
nightingales :

And there together we heard the lyrical drama of
love

Of the wonderful passionate bird which swelleth the
heart so above

All other thought of this life, all other care of this
earth,

Be it of pleasure or strife, be it of sorrow or mirth,

Saving the one intense imperious passion supreme

Kindling the soul and the sense, making the world
but a dream,

The dream of an aching delight and a yearning afar
and afar,
While the music thrills all the void night to the loftiest
pulsating star :
“ Love, love only, for ever ; love with its torture and
bliss ;
All the world’s glories can never equal two souls in
one kiss.”

And when I had bidden farewell to my Love at the
cottage door,
For a night and a day farewell, for a night and a day
and no more,
I went down to the shining strand of our own beloved
bay,
To the shore of soft white sand caressed by the pure
white spray,
In the arms of the hills serene, clothed from the base
to the crest
With garments of manifold green, curving to east and
to west ;
And high in the pale blue south where the clouds
were white as wool,
Over the little bay-mouth the moon shone near the
full ;
And I walked by the waves’ soft moan, for my heart
was beyond control,
And I needed to be alone with the night and my love
and my soul,

And I could not think of sleep in the moonlight broad
and clear,
For a music solemn and deep filled all my spirit's
sphere,
A music interwoven of all that night I had
heard,
From the music of mighty Beethoven to the song of
the little brown bird.

And thus as I paced the shore beneath the azure
abyss,
And my soul thrilled more and more with a yearning
and sadness of bliss,
A voice came over the water from over the eastern
cape,
Like the voice of some ocean daughter wailing a
lover's escape,—
A voice so plaintive and distant, as faint as a wounded
dove,
Whose wings are scarcely resistant to the air beneath
and above,
Wavering, panting, urging from the farthest east to
the west,
Over some wild sea surging in the hope forlorn of its
nest;
A voice that quivered and trembled, with falls of a
broken heart,
And then like that dove reassembled its forces to play
out its part;

Till it came to a fall that was dying, the end of an
infinite grief,
A sobbing and throbbing and sighing that death was
a welcome relief ;
And so there was silence once more, and the moon-
light looked sad as a pall,
And I stood entranced on the shore and marvelled
what next would befall.

And thus all-expectant abiding I waited not long, for
soon
A boat came gliding and gliding out in the light of
the moon,
Gliding with muffled oars, slowly, a thin dark line,
Round from the shadowing shores into the silver shine
Of the clear moon westering now, and still drew on
and on,
While the water before its prow breaking and glistening
shone,
Slowly in silence strange ; and the rower rowed till it lay
Afloat within easy range deep in the curve of the bay ;
And besides the rower were two ; a Woman, who sat
in the stern,
And Her by her fame I knew, one of those fames that
burn,
Startling and kindling the world, one whose likeness
we everywhere see ;
And a man reclining half-curved with an indolent grace
at her knee,

The Signor, lord of her choice ; and he lightly touched
a guitar ;—

A guitar for that glorious voice ! Illumine the sun
with a star !

She sat superb and erect, stately, all-happy,
serene,

Her right hand toying unchecked with the hair of that
page of a Queen ;

With her head and her throat and her bust like the
bust and the throat and the head

Of Her who has long been dust, of Her who shall
never be dead,

Preserved by the potent art made trebly potent by
love,

While the transient ages depart from under the
heavens above,—

Preserved in the colour and line on the canvas
fulgently flung

By Him the Artist divine who triumphed and vanished
so young :

Surely there rarely hath been a lot more to be envied
in life

Than thy lot, O FORNARINA, whom RAPHAEL'S heart
took to wife.

There was silence yet for a time save the tinkling
capricious and quaint,

Then She lifted her voice sublime, no longer tender
and faint,

Pathetic and tremulous, no ! but firm as a column
it rose,
Rising solemn and slow with a full rich swell to the
close,
Firm as a marble column soaring with noble pride
In a triumph of rapture solemn to some Hero deified ;
In a rapture of exultation made calm by its stress
intense,
In a triumph of consecration and a jubilation immense.
And the Voice flowed on and on, and ever it swelled
as it poured,
Till the stars that throbbed as they shone seemed
throbbing with it in accord ;
Till the moon herself in my dream, still Empress of
all the night,
Was only that voice supreme translated into pure
light :
And I lost all sense of the earth though I still had
sense of the sea ;
And I saw the stupendous girth of a tree like the
Norse World-Tree ;
And its branches filled all the sky, and the deep sea
watered its root,
And the clouds were its leaves on high and the stars
were its silver fruit ;
Yet the stars were the notes of the singing and the
moon was the voice of the song,
Through the vault of the firmament ringing and swell-
ing resistlessly strong ;

And the whole vast night was a shell for that music
of manifold might,
And was strained by the stress of the swell of the
music yet vaster than night.
And I saw as a crystal fountain whose shaft was a
column of light
More high than the loftiest mountain ascend the abyss
of the night ;
And its spray filled all the sky, and the clouds were
the clouds of its spray,
Which glittered in star-points on high and filled with
pure silver the bay ;
And ever in rising and falling it sang as it rose and it
fell,
And the heavens with their pure azure walling all
pulsed with the pulse of its swell,
For the stars were the notes of the singing and the
moon was the voice of the song
Through the vault of the firmament ringing and swell-
ing ineffably strong !
And the whole vast night was a shell for that music
of manifold might,
And was strained by the stress of the swell of the
music yet vaster than night :
And the fountain in swelling and soaring and filling
beneath and above,
Grew flushed with red fire in outpouring, transmuting
great power into love,
Great power with a greater love flushing, immense
and intense and supreme,

As if all the World's heart-blood outgushing ensanguined the trance of my dream ;
And the waves of its blood seemed to dash on the shore of the sky to the cope
With the stress of the fire of a passion and yearning of limitless scope.
Vast fire of a passion and yearning, keen torture of rapture intense,
A most unendurable burning consuming the soul with the sense :—

“ Love, love only, for ever ; love with its torture of bliss ;
All the world's glories can never equal two souls in one kiss :
Love, and ever love wholly ; love in all time and all space ;
Life is consummate then solely in the death of a burning embrace.”

And at length when that Voice sank mute, and silence fell over all
Save the tinkling thin of that lute, the deep heavens rushed down like a pall,
The stars and the moon for a time with all their splendours of light,
Were quenched with that Voice sublime, and great darkness filled the night. . . .
When I felt again the scent of the night-flowers rich and sweet,
H

As ere my senses went, and knew where I stood on
my feet,
And saw the yet-bright bay and the moon gone low in
my dream,
The boat had passed away with Her the Singer
supreme ;
She was gone, the marvellous Singer whose wonderful
world-wide fame
Could never possibly bring her a tithe of her just
acclaim.
And I wandered all night in a trance of rapture and
yearning and love,
And saw the dim grey expanse flush far with the
dawning above ;
And I passed that copse in the night, but the nightin-
gales all were dumb
From their passionate aching delight, and perhaps
whoever should come
On the morrow would find, I have read, under its bush
or its tree
Some poor little brown bird dead, dead of its melody,
Slain by the agitation, by the stress and the strain of
the strife,
And the pang of the vain emulation in the music yet
dearer than life.
And I heard the skylarks singing high in the morning
sun,
All the sunrise heavens ringing as the sunset heavens
had done :

And ever I dreamed and pondered while over the
fragrant soil,
My happy footsteps wandered before I resumed my
toil :
Truly, my darling, my Alice, truly the whole night
long
Have I filled to the brim love's chalice with the wine
of music and song.
I have passed and repassed your door from the
singing until the dawn
A dozen times and more, and ever the curtains drawn ;
And now that the morn is breaking out of the stillness
deep,
Sweet as my visions of waking be all your visions of
sleep !
Could you but wake, O my dearest, a moment, and
give one glance,
Just a furtive peep the merest, to learn the day's
advance !
For I must away up the dale and over the hill to my
toil,
And the night's rich dreams grow pale in the working
day's turmoil ;
But to-night, O my darling, my Alice, till night it will
not be long,
We will fill to the brim love's chalice with the wine of
music and song ;
And never the memory fails of what I have learnt in
my dream



From the song of the nightingales and the song of
the Singer supreme :—

“ Love, love only, for ever ; love with its torture and
bliss ;

All the world's glories can never equal two souls in one
kiss :

Love, love ever and wholly ; love in all time and all
space ;

Love is consummate then solely in the death of a
burning embrace.”

February 1882.

WILLIAM BLAKE

HE came to the desert of London town
Grey miles long;
He wandered up and he wandered down,
Singing a quiet song.

He came to the desert of London town,
Mirk miles broad;
He wandered up and he wandered down,
Ever alone with God.

There were thousands and thousands of human kind
In this desert of brick and stone :
But some were deaf and some were blind,
And he was there alone.

At length the good hour came; he died
As he had lived, alone :
He was not missed from the desert wide,
Perhaps he was found at the Throne.

1866.

ROBERT BURNS

HE felt scant need
Of church or creed,
He took small share
In saintly prayer,
His eyes found food for his love ;
He could pity poor devils condemned to hell,
But sadly neglected endeavours to dwell
With the angels in luck above :
To save one's precious peculiar soul
He never could understand is the whole
Of a mortal's business in life,
While all about him his human kin
With loving and hating and virtue and sin
Reel overmatched in the strife.
“ The heavens for the heavens, and the earth for the
earth !
I am a Man—I'll be true to my birth—
Man in my joys, in my pains.”
So fearless, stalwart, erect and free,
He gave to his fellows right royally
His strength, his heart, his brains ;
For proud and fiery and swift and bold—
Wine of life from heart of gold,
The blood of his heathen manhood rolled
Full-billowed through his veins.

1859.

SONG

“ **T**HE Nightingale was not yet heard,
For the Rose was not yet blown.”¹
His heart was quiet as a bird
Asleep in the night alone,
And never were its pulses stirred
To breathe or joy or moan :
The Nightingale was not yet heard
For the Rose was not yet blown.

Then She bloomed forth before his sight
In passion and in power,
And filled the very day with light,
So glorious was her dower ;
And made the whole vast moonlit night
As fragrant as a bower :
The young, the beautiful, the bright,
The splendid peerless Flower.

Whereon his heart was like a bird
When Summer mounts his throne,
And all its pulses thrilled and stirred
To songs of joy and moan,

¹ “ Traveller in Persia ” (Mr. Binning) ; cited by Mr. Fitzgerald in the notes to his translation of Omar Khayyam.

To every most impassioned word
And most impassioned tone;
The Nightingale at length was heard
For the Rose at length was blown.

February 1877.

THE FIRE THAT FILLED MY
HEART OF OLD

I.

THE fire that filled my heart of old
Gave lustre while it burned ;
Now only ashes grey and cold
Are in its silence urned.
Ah ! better was the furious flame,
The splendour with the smart :
I never cared for the singer's fame,
But, oh ! for the singer's heart
Once more—
The burning fulgent heart !

II.

No love, no hate, no hope, no fear,
No anguish and no mirth ;
Thus life extends from year to year,
A flat of sullen dearth.
Ah ! life's blood creepeth cold and tame,
Life's thought plays no new part :
I never cared for the singer's fame,
But oh ! for the singer's heart
Once more—
The bleeding passionate heart.

LILAH,¹ ALICE, HYPATIA

WHO was Lilah? I am sure
She was young and sweet and pure;
With the forehead wise men love,—
Here a lucid dawn above
Broad curved brows, and twilight there
Under the deep dusk of hair.

And her eyes? I cannot say
Whether brown, or blue, or grey;
I have seen them brown, and blue,
And a soft green grey—the hue
Shakespeare loved (and he was wise),
“Grey as glass” were Silvia’s eyes.

So to Lilah’s name above
I will add two names I love,
Linking with the bracket curls
Three sweet names of three sweet girls,
Sunday of Saint Valentine
Eighteen hundred sixty-nine.

¹ Thomson bought at a second-hand bookstall a copy of La Motte Fouqué’s “Undine,” with the name “Lelah” already inscribed in the middle of the front page. With this he bracketed the two other names, and adding these charming lines gave the book to the little girls, Alice and Hypatia.

VIRTUE AND VICE

SHE was so good, and he was so bad :
A very pretty time they had !
A pretty time and it lasted long ;
Which of the two was more in the wrong ?
He befouled in the slough of sin ;
Or she whose piety pushed him in ?
He found her yet more cold and staid
As wedded wife than courted maid :
She filled their home with freezing gloom ;
He felt it dismal as a tomb :
Her steadfast mind disdained his toys
Of worldly pleasures, carnal joys ;
Her heart firm-set on things above
Was frigid to his earthly love.

So he came staggering home at night,
Where she sat chilling, chaste, and white :
She smiled a scornful virtuous smile,
He flung good books with curses vile.
Fresh with the early morn she rose,
While he yet lay in a feverish doze :
She prayed for blessings from the Throne,
He called for " a hair of the dog " with a groan :
She blessed God for her strength to bear
The heavy load,—he 'gan to swear :

She sighed, Would Heaven, ere yet too late,
Bring him to see his awful state !
The charity thus sweetly pressed
Made him rage like one possessed.

So she grew holier day by day,
While he grew all the other way.
She left him : she had done her part
To wean from sin his sinful heart,
But all in vain ; her presence might
Make him a murderer some mad night.
Her family took her back, pure saint,
Serene in soul, above complaint :
The narrow path she strictly trod,
And went in triumph home to God :
While he into the Union fell,
Our halfway house on the road to Hell.
With which would you rather pass your life,
The wicked husband or saintly wife ?

1865



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