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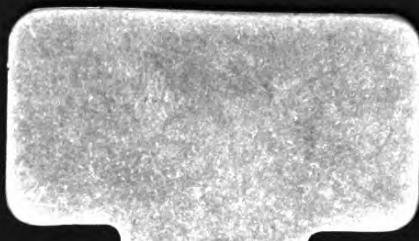


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THE
TOWER OF BABEL



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*"THE HUMAN TRAGEDY" will be published
in the Autumn of 1875.*

THE
TOWER OF BABEL

A POETICAL DRAMA

BY
ALFRED AUSTIN

And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the East, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar ; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven.
—GENESIS, xi. 2-4.



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TO
ALL PURE DESCENDANTS
OF
AFRAEL AND NOEMA

This Poem

IS FAMILIARLY INSCRIBED

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ARAN, the Chief Builder of the Tower.

NOEMA, his wife.

IRAD, their son : a boy of seven.

SIDON, a Philosopher.

EBER, an Astrologer.

KORAH, an Enthusiast and Believer in Perfectibility.

PELEG, a Priest.

FREEMEN.—BONDSMEN.

AFRAEL, a Spirit.

VOICES OF THE AIR.

Scene of the Drama—The Plain of Shinar.

Time—The twenty-third century before Christ.

PREFATORY NOTE.

Will the reader of the following poem be good enough to bear in mind—1°, That at the date ascribed to the building of the Tower of Babel, the Semitic race, or that portion of it at least with whose fortunes the Old Testament is mainly busied, had not, according to the most orthodox Christian exegesis, as yet arrived at the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, even as a speculative opinion ; and 2°, That, whether as regards language and figures of speech, or systems of astronomy and indeed of cosmogony generally, the Author has not concerned himself to eschew what are commonly called anachronisms, but has therein followed his own instincts with all the more confidence, seeing that they are countenanced by the uniform practice of the highest dramatic authority.

ACT I.

65

THE TOWER OF BABEL.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Evening. The tents of ARAN. NOEMA and IRAD in front of the chief tent.*

NOEMA.

COME, Irad, come, the hour for rest is here ;
The sun is no more with us ; see, the west,
Through the moist air, glows like thy cheeks bedewed
With the sweet sweat of pastime's unpaid toils,
And the first star peers o'er the mountain-top.
The very birds are sleeping : why not thou ?
Thou must to rest.

IRAD.

I am not tired, mother.
One little moment more, just one, I beg,

Then will I come. I should not sleep ; indeed
I never was more wakeful. And then see,
I have not finished building up my tower,
Which wants its roof. One second more, just one.

NOEMA.

Well, just a second, Irad. . . . Strange ! how strange !
Childhood should chafe 'gainst manhood's kindest friend,
And sleep, which comes to carelessness, should be
By carelessness pushed off ! whilst care, rich care,
Would give its flocks and herds, ay all its store,
So it might drop its leaden plummet down,
For one brief night, into the depths of slumber.
Oh, may the eve ne'er come to thee, my child,
When thou shalt call on sleep, and find it deaf
Even as the ear of one thou pinest for,
And canst not move : deaf as that stony Fate
'Gainst whose closed doors our hearts still thump in vain !
Now, come, sweet boy, until to-morrow leave
Thy toys and sports, and pray at mother's knee
And she will smooth the pillows of thy crib,
And sing thine eyelids into drowsiness.

IRAD.

But father said that I might wait for him :
He will be coming soon.

NOEMA.

He will be late,—
Too late, to-night, for thee to bide his coming ;
But he shall visit thy repose, and breathe
A father's blessing on thine innocent dreams.
Hearken, dear Irad, to thy mother's voice,
And do her bidding.

IRAD.

O yes, mother dear !
I was not fretful, disobedient,
But only thought you had not heard perhaps
What father said,—that I might wait for him.
Why should he be so late to-night? You know
That all our pretty lambs are big and strong,
Frisk, leap, and run, yes faster than can I,
And have to kneel to tup their mother's dugs,
Whilst we as yet are far from harvest-time,
And the young corn-fields wear a brighter green
E'en than the meadows ere the kingcups come.
It is the season he is home betimes ;
What keeps him, mother ?

NOEMA (*aside*).

Oh, he must not know !
Nor must the dew of his young life be spilt

By shaking doubt ! How shall I answer him ?
What keeps thy father, didst thou ask ? Why, boy,
A thousand things, as thou wilt know some day,
When life no longer splits in equal halves
Of bed and holiday : a world of thought,
For thee, and me, and distant progeny ;
Of ever-shifting suits of homely care,
More frequent than the gorgeous liveries
Even of restless pomp. . . . Now, to thy prayer.

IRAD.

Yes, mother, straight. But I must show you first
My tower,—the tower which I myself have made
With my own hands. Look here !

[IRAD holds up a miniature tower in fresh clay.]

NOEMA.

Why, what is this ?
Why hast thou made so trivial a gaud,
When thou hast scores of playthings, fairer far ?

IRAD.

It is for use, not beauty, mother. This,
This is the tower that is to scale the skies,
And bring us riches without stint or toil.

NOEMA.

Oh, he hath told thee, then! Is't possible
He from thy budding spirit should have torn
The tender hull, making an entrance there
For cankering thought and blight rebellious!
With unpaternal hands, man's poison poured
Into the sweet pure wine of Infancy,
And dropped infection in the very veins
He should have saved from all contagion!
Oh! impious!

[She lets the tower fall, which breaks into fragments.]

IRAD.

O mother! see! you have destroyed my tower.

NOEMA.

Yes! as the high God will that Tower destroy
With which they think to pierce the firmament
And wrench the enclosed lightnings from his grasp!
Oh, it is madness! Men *are* mad sometimes,
And from the heights of strength they topple o'er
Into insanity! No more of it!
Thy father did not mean to tell thee, child,
And he has changed his purpose since the morn:
Be sure of that. . . . And, Irad, ne'er again

Defile thy little hands with such gross work,
That were but given thee to be clasped in prayer.
Now kneel, and clasp them, and repeat with awe
The words I taught thee ere thy lips had ceased
To do their double duty at my breast,
Of feeding thee with life and me with joy.
Begin.

IRAD (*kneels at her feet and prays aloud*).

*Almighty Being, That dost dwell
In the high Heavens apart,
Alone, and inaccessible
Save to the seeing heart !
Be patient and be merciful
To creatures such as we,
Nor ever let Thine ears grow dull
To our infirmity.*

*Shelter our herds, increase our flocks,
Ripen the swelling grain,
Breathe life into the barren rocks,
And send the timely rain.
The thunders yoke, the lightnings curb,
Still feed the flowing stream,
And make with dew, and leaf, and herb,
The untouched earth to teem.*

*Grant to my father length of days,
And to my mother give
A spirit meek, that in Thy gaze,
She humbly still may live !
Cause me to feel, through good, through ill,
How poor a thing am I,
And, when I have fulfilled Thy will,
Resignedly to die.*

NOEMA (*kissing IRAD tenderly*).

Good child ! 'twas sweetly said. O Irad ! ne'er
Be these petitions from thy lips divorced,
So thou dost love me.

IRAD.

Never shall they, mother !

NOEMA.

Then come, and I will lay thee in thy nest ;
And the still Night shall be thy canopy,
Like a broad branch which hangs, but never moves,
Over some absent song-bird's unfledged brood.

[*Mother and Child go into the tent. The last streaks of sunset disappear, and an intense twilight follows, which infuses into the air and sky a deeper radiance. NOEMA returns alone, and gazes out with an air of melancholy.*

SCENE II.

NOEMA.

Oh, how intensely beautiful! The earth
Hath lost its look of gross reality,
And, like the air, waxeth impalpable.
The foliaged trees seem shapes of atmosphere,
And the tall trunks themselves mere bars of light.
The hill-tops and the firmament have blent
In the dread hush of close communion.
There is no sound, save the Euphrates flowing,
Which throws the silence into deeper shade.
O'erhead, the sky wears such transparency,
It seems a wonder that I see not through;
Save that I chance were blinded if I saw
What lies the other side. . . . How beautiful!
It is the hour when, in my inmost being,
I feel a something alien to myself,
Which sets me 'gainst myself rebellious:
A consciousness of kindred unallowed
With the deep gloaming, with the distant sky,
And advent of the silent-speaking stars:
A leaven of unrest, a dumb desire,
A wistfulness of longing that I might
Slough off this torpid chrysalis of flesh,

And nothing be but wings and gossamer
Blown through the empty spaces of the air!
O words! poor words! how behind thought ye lag!
Like crippled forms that, still importunate,
With hurrying gait and plaintive breath pursue,
But cannot catch us up! . . . In such a strait,
Silence and sighs alone are eloquent.

*[She sits silent and rapt in contemplation.
At length she speaks again.]*

How strangely bright gloweth the star of eve!
Surely it never burned so bright since first
God's summons called it from the starless void.
How near it seems! and every moment nearer!
Yet no! 'tis not the star, but from its breast
A fiery scintillation broken off,
Which darts adown the unresisting air,
It cleaves and leaves behind. Withal, 'tis not
A shooting star; for, lo! it is not quenched,
Nor swallowed up, but still, as it descends,
Grows larger, larger, yet less luminous.
No, 'tis no star; it wears half mortal mien.
It is a winged Spirit that doth come,
Commissioned with celestial messages,
Or a belated denizen of air
Strayed far beyond the heavenly boundaries.
How motionless it poises, as in doubt

If to touch earth or sail away again.
Lo! it descends, and on the shell alights
Of this gross sphere. How like, yet how unlike,
One in whose garb youth and first manhood meet,
When beauty shares with strength dominion,
And knowledge gains the ear of innocence!
Yet ne'er was mortal brow like that, which wears
No touch of sadness and no trace of toil;
And though his limbs have form, I can no more
Betwixt them and the air discriminate,
Than in this hour betwixt the day and night.
He doth not yet perceive me, though his feet,
Silent, and slow, and musically move
More closely towards me. . . . Yes, it is a Spirit;
For he is naked, yet he knows no shame,
And I no fear. I wonder will he speak to me?
It may be I am too corporeal
For spiritual sight.

[The Spirit perceives NOEMA and advances towards her.]

AFRAEL.

What star is this?

NOEMA.

This is no star, O dread refulgent Spirit!
This is the Earth thou seest.

AFRAEL.

 This, the Earth !
Then in the thought of Spirits how 'tis wronged !
I fancied it was foul, misshapen, rude,
And of a temper most ungenial ;
Worse and most worthless of the worlds, and left
To be the butt of spiteful elements.
But it is fair as any single orb
I yet have scanned in my discursive flights
Among the planetary spheres that roll
Glibly upon the unsubstantial air.

NOEMA.

Yes, it is fair sometimes, and did this eve
Assume a bright complexion, even as though
Expecting a superior visitant.
I would my lord were nigh to bid you cheer.
To such a lofty guest even men would plead
Their imperfection ; but a woman's state
Too lowly is to welcome thee, or crave
Excuse for such a greeting.

AFRAEL.

 Thou art meek,
Yet doest the Earth's honours graciously ;
Nor could I wish for any to amend

Thy salutation. But wherein do men,
Of whom thou speakest, differ from such as thou?

NOEMA.

They are our larger, stronger selves, to whom
We reverence owe and dumb obedience ;
The delegates of God, who formed us both,
But did depute the former to control
The vain unstable motions of the weak ;
And our volitions with their will they curb,
As Heaven curbs Earth.

AFRAEL.

Men must be godlike, then ?

NOEMA.

'Tis said they are. I scarce have found them so.
But they are stout of limb and stern of heart,
Intrepid, stalwart, nigh invincible,
Cope with all odds, laugh in the tempest's face,
And beard obstruction, whilst we crouch at home,
Dropping our feeble tears upon the ground.
They work for us, and we belong to them,
As scents and blossoms to the strenuous breeze,
Which wafts them where it wills, nor reason gives
Save power to do it.

AFRAEL.

I would I were a man!

NOEMA.

What! Thou!—a Spirit!—be a man, and pay
The forfeit of thine immortality!
Oh! what a miser's bargain wouldst thou make,
Didst thou secrete the treasure of thy life,
Which now returns thee endless happiness,
In the dark cavern of a human heart,
To have it purloined by the greed of death!
We do not live for ever as thou dost.

AFRAEL.

Not live for ever! What, then, do ye do?

NOEMA.

We die, women and men.

AFRAEL.

What is to die?

NOEMA.

It is to bid adieu to joy and pain,
And never meet them more: to sleep with Night,
Nor to awake from her cold-clutching arms;

Never to see the sun again, nor greet
The rising moon with rapture, and the stars
With eyes o'erbrimming with delicious tears:
For the quick-flowing senses to become
A stagnant pool, fetid and nauseous,
Whence is no issue, and the very hands
Which stream of their own being called it once,
Fill up with earth, lest it should poison them,
And bring them level with itself. That's death!

AFRAEL.

But thou, *thou* wilt not die!

NOEMA.

O yes, I shall.

And every generation yet unborn
Will at its birth be dedicate to death,
And seal a compact with oblivion.

AFRAEL.

What will become, then, of those cheeks that seem
To wear an immortality of bloom,
Those golden tresses steeped in glorious noon,
And eyes for which I travel vainly back
Through the scoured Spheres to find comparison:
That brow seraphic, those cherubic lips,
That gently-penetrating voice which sounds

Like the last ripple of the nightingale
Just ere the silence groweth smooth again?

NOEMA.

The worms will have my cheeks, the dust my lips,
And in the socket of mine eyes the snail
Itself ensconce, and, though curled snugly there,
Deem it a sorry penthouse. For my voice,
'Twill, like the nightingale's, break off, but ne'er,
Like to the nightingale's, its note resume,
But perish on the unsympathising air.

AFRAEL.

Then all thy sort will in the end die out,
And this fair Earth be left untenanted.

NOEMA.

Not so. Our race doth still renew itself
By means unknown to Spirits. Man's delight
Is to embrace these carnal substances,
Thou dost too much extol; whilst woman's is
The passionate joy of pain which ends in joy
From which all pain hath passed: to bear him sons,
Who shall repeat the vigour of their sire,
And daughters who shall wax to comeliness
And warm with pride his chill declining years,
Then when their mother comely is no more.

B

And this is compensation e'en for death,—
To feel the little lips tight on your breast,
To have the little arms around your throat,
And hear the little voice lisping your name
In efforts made by love articulate.
This is pure bliss!

AFRAEL.

And thou hast known it?

NOEMA.

Yes.

AFRAEL.

Hast sons and daughters then?

NOEMA.

I have a son,
Just one: a little fellow, fast asleep,
Whom I had kissed and lullabied to rest,
Just ere thou camest. Shall I show him thee?

AFRAEL.

So, an thou wilt. He must be fair as Heaven,
If he resembles thee.

[NOEMA goes into the tent and brings out IRAD,
in her arms, asleep.]

NOEMA.

This is my boy.
Is he not beautiful?

AFRAEL (*with a look of disappointment*).

A pretty thing.
But he hath swarthy cheeks and jet-black curls,
And is not like to thee in aught.

NOEMA.

It is
His sire that mostly lives in him.

AFRAEL.

But why
Are his lids closed, and he so motionless?
This is not death?

NOEMA.

My darling dead! Forefend
That such a stroke befall! that I should lose
My dearest sweet and sole companion,
Who is to me what dew is to the flowers,
Themselves distil, and are fed back by it.
This is the daily mimicry of death,

Without its closing action. This is sleep,
Wherein our senses grow centripetal,
And gather round the kernel of the heart,
Which on the morrow gives them back again,
Dispensing life, motion, and energy.
I wish that you could see him at his play.

*[She carries IRAD back into the tent and returns
without him.]*

AFRAEL.

May I ask more? Spirits are curious :
To feel and know is all our appetite.
And I would learn if men and women have
The power to fashion creatures like themselves,
And multiply their image, as they will.

NOEMA.

They have that power.

AFRAEL.

Why then indeed ye are
Liker to God than any I have heard of.

NOEMA.

Oh, say not so, for that sounds blasphemy.
We have the dark dread power to conjure life,
But not to keep alive ; and mortal fates

Are no more godlike than the leaves that fall,
When fresh leaves come from the same origin.

AFRAEL.

There's something stranger here than thou conceiv'st,
Though I no more unriddle it than thou.
But if the dimpled cherub whom I saw
With folded wings but now within thine arms,
Be born of thee, why art not like the leaves
Whom new leaves threaten,—sapless, shrunk, and sere?
Thou hast a something Spirits do not have,
Who know nor fruit nor blight and ever keep
The blossom of existence, first they wear;
But, though unlike to these, and as to me
It seems, superior far, thou still art young,
And own'st the dewy radiance of the morn.

NOEMA.

I am nor young nor old, mortals would say:
A mother mid-way betwixt youth and age,
Like to the moon, when yet but half eclipsed.

AFRAEL.

It needs must be they see with mortal eyes,
For, to my seeing, youth and age have met,
By some divine attraction, in thy cheeks,
And made a rare complexion. All excess,

As all defect, is banished from thy brow,
And thou art perfect in thy motherhood.
Oh, I could stay and praise thee through the night,
If skies were not importunate, nor I
Must needs,—as loath I never felt before,—
Take all unwillingly my heavenward way.

NOEMA.

Hast thou a lodge in Heaven, and yet canst want
To be a tenant for one instant here,
Where there breathes nought but want unsatisfied,
And bliss that bursts like bubbles in the blowing?
Can that strange malady of mortal blood,
Which still unweds us from ourselves, and woos
That which with self will ne'er amalgamate,
Infect the veins of Spirits? Thy abode
Is in the Heaven of Heavens. What's Earth to thee?

AFRAEL.

The only Heaven that I yet have seen!
Thou misconceiv'st. I am not of the blest,
If such there be,—and if there be, no more
Envy I them,—who see the face of God.
The stars which are fast tingling into sight,
And myriads which thou canst not scan, are all
The native spot of Spirits, and I dwell
In one of these, whither I now return.

But oh! if there be kindness on Earth,
It must within thy bosom have found space;
And art thou kindly, thou wilt bid my feet
Again be lost where thou mayst still be found.
Say, will my wings be welcome?

NOEMA.

Nought so much.
But see! on yon horizon I behold
My lord approaching. Wilt not wait for him?

AFRAEL.

No, not this eve.

NOEMA.

Forgive me if I err,
Through human appetite; and Spirits perchance
Live not as we. But I have fruit, and wine,
Bread, and fresh herbs, if thou wilt eat of them.

AFRAEL.

What doth sustain such loveliness as thine,
Could for no Spirit be unmeet. Withal
We live upon the Universe we see,
And drink its all-sufficing elements.
The glory of the heavens when they open,

Slowly before the up-coming of the sun,
Thy warmth of mid-day skies, the moist decline
Of drooping day, the nightly silences,
And music of the many-cadenced rain,
Colour, and light, and shapes fantastical,
Of plain, and hill, and cloudy pinnacle,
And ever-shifting subtleties of air,
All that we see and feel of fair and far,
Is to us sustenance, as I this eve
Have on thy beauty made a rare repast ;
Which other Spirits will nourish, when to-night
We sit amid the watchfires of the skies,
And tell each other tales of all the worlds.
And I shall tell of thy supremacy.
Farewell ! thou unmatched mortal !

[*He raises and waves his wings over NOEMA,
and soars into the air singing.*]

*'Mid the infinite spaces of air and sky,
Through the æons, from morn to night,
Borne along by the firmament's song,
Have I winged my Spirit's flight.
But never, never, since flight began,
Did my wandering eyes behold
Aught so fair, in the sky, in the air,
As this being of mortal mould.*

*Though I dwell in the planet that, faithful, speeds,
In the track of the sun, and though
Spirits bright as its unquenched light
Tell all that they hear or know,
Oh, never, never, since tales began,
Hath a Spirit or heard or told
Tale so sweet as I bear on my feet,
Of this being of mortal mould.*

*Onwards and onwards, through time and space,
Will my silent pinions sail,
Sailing still at their rudderless will,
'Gainst the waves of the ether's gale.
But never, never, till space and time
Shall end, can my wings enfold
Form divine, as is thine, as is thine,
O thou being of mortal mould!*

NOEMA.

How sweetly doth he sing, still as he soars,
As though his wings were buoyed by melody,
And music were the wind that wafts him on!
Likely he singeth yet, though now, alas!
The heavenly distance to my clouded sense
Denies the strain, and I can but descry,
Dimly, the outline of celestial limbs,

Cleaving the twilight on the sails of song.
Alack! he dwindles, glimmering, into space,
And lo! goes out; and now, for all I cling
With straining eyes into that point of air
Where last he glowed, then vanished, I behold
Only the skyey vista tenantless.
O that I knew in what bright star he dwells,
That I might gaze towards him with straight eyes,
And watch at least the road whereby he went!
I never thought to ask him; for my lips,
As he discoursed, deferring to my ears,
Which drunk his honeyed questioning, forgot
To ply their curious office. So I gaze
Into the darkness, and surmise him not,
Nor whitherward he turned his final way.
Yet he hath left a something in the air,
A something all around me that was not
Here ere his coming, and which lingers still
Behind his blank departure: something soft,
And warm, and near, as unseen odours are,
When flowers that breathed them have been ta'en away.
I felt it when he o'er me waved his wings,
Just ere his lightsome feet forsook the Earth,
And, rising, took their native element:
I feel it still!

[ARAN *approaches*. NOEMA *rises, and advances dutifully towards him*.]

SCENE III.

NOEMA.

Welcome, my spouse and lord !

ARAN.

Is the meal drest ?

NOEMA.

It is, and waits within.

ARAN.

Then let us to't at once. I crave for food,
And drink, and rest, and truce to weariness.

NOEMA.

My lord is spent with toil.

ARAN.

Who would not be ?

But there be toils shall have an end, and mar
The stern Taskmaster's trade for whom we slave,
Son after sire, age after age, unpaid
Save with the pittance of life's menial wage.
No longer will we bear the daily dole

Of food and sleep, ending in famished death.
If there be God or Gods, Gods will we be,
Not slowly-dying drudges. Soon the Tower
Will mount in surging spirals to the sky,
And from its tall intrepid battlements
Will we storm Heaven, its tyranny dislodge,
Or with it strike a compact that shall yield
Its secrets to our knowledge, and secure
Wealth without sweat, and life unplagued by death.
Ay, we have done a good day's work this day,
Though none have paid us for it.

NOEMA.

Oh, my lord!
Thy words wing shafts of terror to my heart.
Hear me a moment, even though I be
But a weak woman, and thy subject wife.
Assailing Heaven, thou dost but build for Hell,
And the foundations of your Tower will sink
Where Lucifer and all his rebels lie,
Further from hope than worst mortality.

ARAN.

Then let us sink, if sink in sooth we must,
But not till after exercise of strength
That shall torment His anger, and at least
Ruffle the surface of His proud neglect:

Not die, like camels, silent, 'neath the load
We to the journey's end submissive bore,
Because our hearts were steeped in sufferance.
'Tis something to be whelmed in endless Hell,
And nourish hate, not Hell itself can quench;
No, nor yet Heaven! But still to be a thing
To moil and die 'neath Heaven's indifference—
This is a doom weak women well may bear.
We were no longer men, did we endure it!

NOEMA.

And yet it is a doom which, Aran, thou,
And thine, and all mankind must bear. Dost think
That to suit mortal passion Heaven will make
Mortals immortal, even for woe and wrath?
Spirits have immortality of joy,
And demons immortality of pain.
But we, a lesser and a lower race,
An adumbration of the two and set
Betwixt the upper and the nether world,
In this frail compound even mixtures own
Of joy that passes and of pain that dies.
This is man's lot: nothing will alter it.

ARAN.

Nothing can leave it worse. So will we strive
To make it better. For we can but die,

Or still live baffled, as we are baffled now.
And what is it we ask? Pale dreamers may
Demand the eternal secrets: I, for one,
Claim food, and drink, and raiment, and the joys
Which come of fulness, ease, and certainty;
A life of even pleasure, edged with death,
When these can please no more. 'Tis all I seek.

NOEMA.

That were a sordid craving. Is't for these
Thou dost arraign the Lord Omnipotent,—
That, having made thee man, He did not make
Thee wholly beastlike? Oh, sir! pardon me
If I do fail in duty! But thine aims,
Thus carnally contained, revolt me more
Than if thou blasphemously shouldst aspire
To be nor beast nor man, but very God!

ARAN.

Ay, ay, I pardon thee: I pity rather.
These are the morbid phantasies which find
An empty chamber in thy woman's brain,
And therein scamper idly. . . . Carnal aims!
Be very God! Who builds a Tower, *now*?
Thou hast the same disease as we in sooth,
But, us unlike, know'st not its name nor cure.
Fine words are women's drapery for facts.

We call it misery; ye call it woe.
We curse our wrongs and pain, whilst ye drop tears,
Bootless as dew, over the canker, grief.

NOEMA.

Nay, call not grief a canker! Canker kills,
But grief doth make us cruelly alive,
And our most torpid pulses sensitive;
Doubles the day by banishing the night,
And chokes us with each mouthful; whilst Time sits,
Droning his weary minutes in our ears,
Till every second seemeth infinite,
Ay, longer than whole centuries of joy.
If grief would murder, 'twere no longer grief;
But he prefers to torture, and to keep
His victim still alive, and quivering;
And, with him paragoned, why canker is
An angel of compassion! Yet against grief
What boots it to rebel? It is the shadow
Which still accompanies our sun of joy;
And when the shadow blots out all the shine,
I fall not unto railing, but, forlorn,
I steep my soul in silence, and I pray.

ARAN.

Pray! I am weary of the word. Why pray,
When ne'er an answer cometh to our prayers?

Have we not prayed, we, and our sires, and, back,
Their sires, for lives on miserable lives,
Burning the flesh of goats, the fat of kine,
Ay, sacrificing yeanlings when their dams
Were smit with barrenness; yielding our last
In the vain hope still to propitiate
The Power that took our first? I am sick of prayer!
When did prayer keep the murrain from our herds,
Or once avert the vultures? Have our flocks
More teeming wombs, thicker or softer fleece?
Or doth the sprouting soil no longer crack
For lack of moisture, stubbornly denied,
That in untimely torrents it may swoop
On the slow-ripening grain, and beat it flat?
These are the fruits of prayer! We pray, whilst He
Hideth aloft in churlish majesty,
Rolling His wanton thunder o'er our heads,
And splitting with His lightning, flashed for sport,
The trunk that gave us shelter. No! the hour
For prayer is past; the hour for deeds is here,
Whose stroke shall render prayer superfluous!

NOEMA.

Alas! thou dost not heed me. But one boon,
One last, one only boon, I yet would urge.
Oh! leave at least to piety and me
The tender, dark-eyed darling of my womb.

Leave me my Irad! Him thou canst not need,
Nor he promote thy direful strategy.
He is so young, so helpless, and so dear.
How couldst thou bare to ears thus innocent
That bold immodest purpose? Think, sir, think,
Though 'twas the seed of thy rebellious loins,
'Twas my long-suffering womb that fostered him;
Sheltered his yet sheathed senses from all hurt,
And fed him with the rain of my life's blood.
Who was it communed with him, while as yet
His life was dim and shapeless as a dream?
Who opened to the light his pretty cheeks,
And kissed his eyelids into consciousness?
Taught him thy name? moulded his little lips
Into a filial welcome? Who but I?
And when enlarging thought could apprehend
The august sense of father, I it was
Who did project thine image into Heaven,
And told him of another Father there.
Oh! how wouldst thou be patient if one came
'Twixt thee and him, and spurred him to rebel
Against thy sceptre and authority?
Nay, make him not a rebel,—for my sake,
If not for thine! I bore, I suckled him,
Tended and shaped. Oh, he is very me!
I have lain nights awake to give him sleep;

And better hadst thou wrenched him from my breast,
And ta'en the nipple with it, than that now
Thou shouldst him tear from Heaven and my poor
heart!

ARAN.

Well, be it as thou wilt. He is a child,
And thou a woman: ye are fairly yoked.
And both will reap the harvest of our act,
Who would not sow the seed. Now, to our meal.

NOEMA.

Hadst thou come timelier to-night, we might
Have entertained an unaccustomed guest.
A Spirit from I know not where, but clad
In garb of airy beauty, settled here,
Just after sunset.

ARAN.

Spake he of the Tower?

NOEMA.

No syllable. But he discoursed so sweetly
Of Earth, and stars, and all that moves between,—
I would that thou hadst heard him.

ARAN.

Not so I :

I have no stomach for such windy food.
I feared perchance he hither came to balk,
Celestial marplot, our terrestrial plans,
Sent by the Arch-designer of our doom.
But if he only fooled thee with fresh dreams,
Foibles, and follies of thy female breast,
It touches me but little ; and I yield
Monopoly of such a guest to thee,
Who art a fitting hostess. Food, now, food !

[ARAN goes in. NOEMA lingers awhile without.

NOEMA (*sol.*)

Because I am a woman ! Is it then
So small a thing ? Just large enough for man
To see and step aside from, lest he crush !
Yet what can crush worse than indifference,
Or that misplaced compassion which denies
All common kinship ? Yon superior Spirit
Disowned me not, but wished that he were man,
Because I am a woman. That was a note
Showed him attuned to heavenly harmony.
Oh ! with what nectared yet decorous words
Did he extol me,—almost as though he loved !

Yet 'twas not love which made that Spirit deem
My plain defects perfection, but, perchance,
That spiritual insight which perceives
Imperfect nought, leaving to lower man
To find things faulty through his faultiness.
This very Earth which we so oft reproach,
He lauded likewise, though his tenderest tones,
I own, were kept for me. Yet, yet, 'tis sure
It was not love. 'Twere as impossible
Spirit should be enamoured of the flesh,
As that forked bolts should flash from stormful waves,
Or the fresh clouds pelt briny torrents down.
And it may be that Spirits are seduced
By the false tricks of specious novelty,
Like creatures of a weaker source and end,
And in the glamour of some newer world,
He will forget me, and will come no more.
That were a loss indeed to leave life blank,
And make to-morrow dead as yesterday.
Oh! he *will* come. He said he would; and I
Bade not adieu, but welcome, when he went.
To want a Spirit, surely were not sin!
Can it be wrong to love—wings and a voice?
And were I with him now, what could befall,
Or fare between us there, to derogate
From carnal homage still exacted here,
And given, if all unwillingly? Ay, there it is!

True love makes false love loathing, and one hour
Of spiritual intercourse bequeathes
A life of shrinking from terrestrial lips.
And I must sleep in Aran's arms to-night !
Oh, horrible !

[She goes in.]

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Early morning, a week later than Act I. The sun not yet risen, but red rays shooting upwards from the eastern horizon into a cloudless and sultry sky. The plain of Shinar, from which the first massive storeys of the Tower arise in slowly narrowing spirals. Gangs of male bondsmen ascending and descending, carrying slime and bricks. Groups of women mixing slime.*

ARAN, SIDON, EBER, KORAH, PELEG. *Crowd of Freeman.*

MALE BONDSMEN (*chanting*).

*Faster, faster, ever faster,
Moves our weary-circling labour,
Whilst the close and stern taskmaster
Flogs us on with thong and sabre.
Resting but refreshens sorrow,
Slumber keeps our bondage endless;
Time forgets us, and to-morrow,
Like to-day, beholds us friendless.
Faster—Faster !*

CHORUS OF WOMEN.

*In anguish and wailing
Our babes see the light,
Drenched with tears unavailing
As cries in the night.
In our wombs we but cherish
A victim, a slave;
Born to suffer, then perish,
And sleep in the grave.*

MALE SLAVES

(chanting).

*Sweating, straining, panting, bleeding,
Upwards, storey piled on storey,
Climb we still, for lords unheeding
Aught save ease, and gain, and glory.
We are both but dust and leaven;
They, as we, are sad and mortal;
Yet if we did win them Heaven,
They would leave us at the portal,
Bleeding, panting!*

CHORUS OF WOMEN.

*Pile the bricks, mix the mortar,
The blinder we plod,
Life will seem to us shorter,
Less pitiless, God!
The sooner the levin
Of death will descend,
And the harshness of Heaven
And Earth have an end!*

ARAN.

With what a fervent and continuous will
They seem to work, this morn, as though the fire
Of our great undertaking did infect
Even their sluggish and inferior veins.
Such is the virtue of high enterprise!
It drags along with it, as to the goal,
The wheels that bear it thither. Oh, the dupes!
Did ye hear their song? They fain would have us deem
They count upon no harvest for their toils,
And are but sickles blunted in our hands
By act of reaping. But I know them well.
The feeble ever still dissimulate,
And with a cunning feint creep underneath
The blundering thrust of strength. 'Tis their redress;

And spite their tearful threnodies be sure
They in their hearts right hopeful rebels are,
Laying no brick of this stupendous Tower,
But that they think to build our sepulchre,
And their redemption. We must baffle them.
As we to Heaven, so unto us they stand,
And 'twere a sorry issue of our work,
To dethrone God, were we ourselves dethroned.

KORAH.

There spake the tyrant and the slave at once.
What! thou wouldst hack thy gyves off, but to clamp
Their teeth upon another: strain at power,
Only to keep thy fellows powerless,
And from the clutch of the gangmaster's hand
Wrench the keen whip that seams and scores thy flesh,
To flog thy brother with! Oh, villanous!
If this but be the purport of our Tower,
Its vaunted aims thus egotistical,
May swift the rampant lightning smite its top,
And following thunder shake its selfish base,
And bury us beneath it!

ARAN.

Hark to him!
This is the folly we can hear at home,
Babbled by lips of women. There are men

Of such a sickly temper, faith ! I trow
That Nature's hand shook when she moulded them,
And from that moment their affections took
Impress unstable and ambiguous.
Why, look you, man ! if you have craft to look,
Some one must serve ; and to emancipate
All equally, would only render thralls
Of all alike. If we should mend our lot,
Theirs may be mended too ; withal, there must
'Twixt us and them be due discrepancy.
The very secret of the sky, we seek
By our assault to learn, is how to rule,
And keep weak spirits in subjection ;
And though, when once triumphant, we might be
More merciful than it, our mercy ne'er
Would plan our own effectual overthrow.
Thank Heaven for this at least, it hath not made
All men mere maunderers.

KORAH.

No, nor all men blind.
Thou bidst me look ; 'tis thou that canst not see.
The self-same ferment thou dost boast, and which
Excites this insurrection in thy breast,
Pervades the heart of all things. 'Tis the barm
Which saves the stuff of life from turning sad,
Heavy, and wholly indigestible.

Thou art the dreamer, dost thou think to keep
The solace of this yeasty discontent
From the bare hearths of slowly-trudging toil?
'Tis there 'tis most at home; not 'neath the roof
Of purple pomp and roomy luxury:
And couldst thou drive it from the proud man's gate,
'Twould refuge take in hovels of the poor.
But ne'er from either will't be banished.
'Tis the one guest that's entertained by all,
The uncomfortable comfort of our lives,
Though welcome ne'er, yet never sent away,
To-morrow's empty balance 'gainst to-day.
It is our common brotherhood that breeds
Common dissatisfaction with our lot;
And common brotherhood should bid us seek
A common remedy, to heal us all.
Ay, build your Tower, and pluck ye down the skies
From their un pitying proud pre-eminence;
But, having purged the Heavens of their pride
Keep not the foul distemper for the Earth!
Oh! I believe the time will come when men
Will be as free and equal as the waves,
That seem to jostle but that never jar,
Which climb and sink together, interfuse,
Grow smooth with meeting, interchange their shapes,
And in each other merge identity.
Blest be the aspirations of the Tower,

Hastening the advent of that day ! If not,
A thousand curses on it !

SIDON.

Well said, both.
But well said is not wisdom. Sense and sound
But rarely travel coupled. Life, large life,
Cannot be wrapped in phrases ; they are too small.
And when of life ye would neat parcels make,
Just as ye stop one end with reasons, it
Runs out on t'other side. As for yon Tower,
'Tis a tall toy, made for the Gods to play with.
For Gods are many or none. Beyond your God,
Either there dwells another, godlier,
Or, like ourselves, they wrangle and dispute,
And half their blows descend upon our heads ;
Whilst from their harmony we suffer more
Even than from their discords. They agree,
Their strifes suspended, to make sport of us,
Treating us much as boys treat cockroaches :
They prick us just to see what we will do.
Shrink, and they prick us more, to know what next.
But case ourselves in mailed indifference,
They fancy us inanimate or dead,
And leave us to our numbness. There's the cure !
'Tis patience makes us level with the Gods,
And baffles their malignity. In vain

The thong is plied on him who will not shrink,
But bites his heart through rather than concede
One cry to cheer the scourger. That is a Tower,
Which needs no building, and is ne'er o'erthrown.

PELEG.

And this is called divine philosophy,
That thinks to outwit God! Patience is well,
But not because man's burdens may not be
Shifted or lightened ever, but that the hand
Which doth impose them is a hand all-wise,
The back that bears them, foolish. Sacrifice,
Prayer, and first fruits, can still propitiate
The Being whom insurrection will not move.
Man's lot is hard, ye say? How do ye know,
It were not harder yet, did ye not proffer
Frankincense and the fragrant steam of flesh,
Entrails and caul of calves, rams without stain,
She-goats, and morn and evening holocaust?
With these we keep the thunder in the skies,
The ocean in its bed, which else would mount,
And roll a final deluge o'er the Earth.
Pile high the Tower; but when its top is crowned,
To Heaven its whorls ascending dedicate,
And Heaven perchance will condescend to lift
Some feathers off your fardels.

EBER.

Worthy priest,
Forgive me if thy words seem little worth.
For whilst among the bowels of the slain
Thou hast been pottering, or devoutly bent
Over the blood of writhing turtle-doves,
I through the silent watches of the night
Have scanned the slow procession of the stars,
In even courses moving ; caught the rhythm
Of the melodious planets as they chime,
Each after each, over the measured sky.
And I have marked that in that upper world
There is continuous concord, order firm,
And a most noble discipline. The clouds
Are fitful, seeing they are born of earth ;
But beyond our capricious envelope
Abides a steady sphere, serene of will,
And governed by a sovran certainty.
I chide no living heart that strives and soars,
And it may be this pile magnificent
Will yield to Aran all he hopes from it,
And unto those who build it. But, for me,
I watch with joy its scaling spirals rise,
Since by its growing summit I am ta'en
Nearer and nearer to the orbs that are

D .

The alphabet of knowledge, whence I seek
To shape a language that shall speak to all
Of what they need to learn: how to conform
To method that ne'er wavers, and provide
'Gainst swift vicissitudes no human power
Can e'er avert, but still to be foreseen:
So that no second deluge find us bare
Of arks of shelter. Stars will teach us this,
And not libations. Thine is the one void task;
For nought is wholly impotent save prayer.

ARAN.

Right bravely uttered! Faith! I did not think
That an astrologer could be so wise.
Thou hast learned somewhat from thy star-gazing,
And art henceforward welcome to a post
Upon our topmost balcony, to watch
The womanish mutations of the moon.
There, perched 'twixt earth and sky, thou chance mayst
catch
Some whispers of the jealous firmament,
And pass them on to us; playing the part
Of daring eavesdropper, under the roof of Heaven!
Thou canst not mar our work, and so mightst aid it.
But not with with Peleg's tactics do I hold,
Nor yet with Sidon's; for in scales of sense,
find an even balance 'tween the Priest

And the Philosopher, in whom there is
A common emptiness. How say ye, friends?

THE CROWD.

We say with Aran. Long live Aran! long
May solid counsel, kin to his, prevail!

ARAN.

Even so I thought. 'Twere folly, cowardice,
Still with oblations to appease the skies,
And buy off threatening tyranny with bribes,
When grasping grows with giving. 'Twere as apt,
To quench a fire with fuel. But no less
Doth patience seem to me inapposite.
We are not *all* philosophers; we are men.

THE CROWD.

True, we are men, and not philosophers!
That should make Sidon wince.

ARAN.

And we, being men,
Men, and not worms more than philosophers,
Will not be trodden on by men or Gods.
As for poor Korah's unripe phantasies,
I put it to you, friends! Will ye consent
That slave and free shall ever be confused,

Or that the menial myriads ye behold
Swarming about that goodly scaffolding,
Shall with you share dominion and delight?
Why, next the steer would ask to be unyoked,
And lambs cry "Hold!" when ye would clip their fleece;
The very earth would chide the lordly share,
And fagots claim exemption from the fire;
Children would break the rod, and,—crowning freak!—
Women with men assert equality.

THE CROWD.

Good, good! There's no philosophy can stand
'Gainst logic such as that!

ARAN.

Then we are agreed.
'Tis in the Tower that our salvation hides;
And what we claim from Heaven is comely life,
Comely and pleasant; mastery over Fate,
The government of rain and wind and drouth,
Harvests abounding, honey, and wine, and oil;
Fat flocks, and herds unvisited by pest,
No fever, ache, nor ague, but an Earth
Fixed and serene as Eber's vaunted spheres,
Long jocund days, and nights in rapture steeped,
Submissive wives, children as dense as bloom,

And novel store of luscious concubines.
We ask no more; but these are what we ask.

THE CROWD.

Nought beyond these. And if we them obtain,
Aran's blest name shall through the ages live!

ARAN.

Then let us urge them faster! Each, my friends,
Each to his post, and expedite the hour
When the usurping Deity shall hear
Our thunder at His gates, and His high throne
Fall with a clash to the abyss of Hell!

CHORUS OF WOMEN

(*chanting*).

*In anguish and wailing
Our babes see the light,
Drenched with tears unavailing
As cries in the night.
In our wombs we but cherish
A victim, a slave,
Born to suffer, then perish,
And sleep in the grave!*

SCENE II.—*The tents of ARAN. Same morning and hour as in Scene I. The topmost circles of the Tower visible in the distance, with Ararat beyond.* NOEMA. IRAD.

IRAD.

Nay, mother, let me go! I see the Tower
Rising and rising higher and higher each day;
And every morn I wake, I can descry
More and still more of its great head. What harm
To see it near, more than to see it far?

NOEMA.

I would thou couldst not see it, far or near.
It is a cursèd thing, and some dread morn
Or angry night will topple down and be
For its projectors grave and monument.
What, Irad, if thou stood'st beneath it then?

IRAD.

I am not frightened, mother.

NOEMA.

Would thou wert!
But in the breast of each male whelp that breathes,

There lurks a devilish audacity,
Which stamps on Earth, and brandishes its pride
Full 'gainst the face of Heaven. Oh, I think,
Not Adam surely, but fell Lucifer,
Was the first father of the race, and left
His rebel poison in the womb of Eve,
To taint all later sons. In vain our meek
And trembling dispositions do conceive,
Foster, and suckle them. Our daughters take
The impress of their mothers; but our boys,
Since cast in the superb Archangel's die,
Consort with terror!

IRAD.

Then, I may go, mother.

NOEMA.

No, Irad, no; indeed thou mayst not go.
Think, darling, think, though thou mayst know no fear,
Thou leav'st a mother's fluttering heart at home,
Startled by every breeze, lest it should bring
Destruction on thy pretty head, and leave
Me worse than widowed!

IRAD.

Then I will not go.
Nay, weep not, mother. I will sail my boat

Upon the shallows by the river's brink,
Returning to thee shortly.

NOEMA.

Bless thee, child!
For if thou hast the male ferocity,
Thou hast the true male gentleness no less.
Thus should it be. The noblest men still are
Tough as the bole, but tender as the leaves;
And whilst the strangling hurricane in vain
Writhes round their trunk, one little tearful cloud
Or kissing zephyr stirs their foliage.
Go to the river, then ; but, Irad, heed
Thou still dost keep the shallows.

IRAD.

O yes, mother!

SCENE III.

NOEMA.

How glad I am to be alone ! It irked
Even to hear Irad's sweet babble purl
In endless ripples round me. I am alone,

Alone, as long I wished. Yet do I wish
Wholly to be alone? I cannot say it.
Oh! where is He, that shadow of myself,
Which I project, or as I sit or move,
And, shadow like, is still before, behind,
But never quite beside me! Yesterday,
Leagued with to-morrow, kills the day that is,
And hearts subsist on memory and hope.
Was it a dream? Hath he forgotten me?
Or have the envious Heavens sucked him up,
And clipped his too erratic pinions?
Was it a dream, only a dream? O no!
I saw his fair celestial properties,
Heard his articulate distinctive voice,
And felt his warm and aromatic wings
Swaying above me as he breathed farewell.
Was that a dream, then all the world's a dream,
Yon upstart spirals wreaths of rising mist,
The mountains flimsy as the atmosphere,
The sun himself an ignis-fatuus,
And all our senses only visionary.
No, 'twas no dream; it is the waking seems so!
Oh! shall I never gaze upon him more,
And must the sweetness of that single hour
Be long life's lasting bitterness? I feel
No wish to name him now; only to hide
The tumults he has bred! O, I do think

That when we lock a secret in our breast,
True to its task, that soft recess assumes
The casket's hardness! O how hard mine feels!
Hark!

A VOICE SINGING.

*Over the realms of balsam and of myrrh,
I have flown, I have flown,
And endless deserts plumed with snow and fir,
All alone, all alone,
Seeing if other on the Earth there were,
Like my own, like my own!*

NOEMA.

Oh! 'tis his voice! I could distinguish it,
Were all the Heavens singing at a time.
'Tis in the air, and yet I cannot see him.

*Under the date-palms fringing tropic lakes,
I have lain, I have lain,
And icy eaves, where Winter never wakes
From its pain, from its pain:
O for that region which my pinion aches
To regain, to regain!*

*Sail where I will, hath passed away the bloom
From the skies, from the skies;
The sun's redundant splendours are but gloom
To mine eyes, to mine eyes,
Till I again do gaze on her for whom
My soul sighs, my soul sighs!*

AFRAEL.

Yes, it is thou, and I have hit my nest
At the first swoop! Dost not remember me?

NOEMA.

Remember? No! For memory implies
Power to forget; and from my constant mind
Ne'er for one moment hath thine image passed.
But why art thou invisible? I hear
Thy silvery notes, but fail to find the spot
Where thou hang'st poisoning.

AFRAEL.

I am on the ground,
Not in the air, and full in front of thee.
'T must be the daylight dazzles thee, and that
Spirits resemble sunshine, and the form
Thou in the gloaming plainly didst discern,

Thou now confoundest with the garish day.
But look ! look ! here,—here where I bend o'er thee !

NOEMA (*shading her eyes*).

Ha ! I can guess thee now, and, as I gaze,
Do from the ambient sunshine round thee off,
And recognise thy seeming. But, how bright,
How wondrous bright thou art, and whilst the air
Shimmers unstably, thou serenely shin'st !
Else were there no distinction twixt the twain,
And thou wert wholly hidden from mine eyes.
But whence hast come so early in the hours ?

AFRAEL.

Straight from my star, the star of dark and dawn !
I met a lark, going up to heaven, and shaking
Dew from his feet and music from his wings,
And I did ask him of thee. At the which,
He shrilled out such a volume of sweet sound,
It filled the azure-vaulted firmament,
And set the stars a-ringing. Then I knew
He from the heaven below, where thou dost dwell,
Had plumed his flight ; and through the air I slid,
Adown the path by which he had ascended.
Oh ! he hath proved to me a trusty guide,
And happy be his song amid the clouds !

NOEMA.

My blessing, too, go with that messenger !
For I did think never to see thee more ;
But, like a bird that on the topmost spray
Of some dark solitary tree alights,
Only to shake it with its song, then leave,
That thou hadst perched an instant on my life,
To make it lonely ever afterward !

AFRAEL.

How couldst think that, when still my wings kept warm
The sense of that brief tenancy, and yearned
To close once more on their delicious perch ?
O that I were a nightingale, that I
Might hide within the scented coppice nigh
The curtain of the chamber where thou keep'st,
And with my song accompany thy dreams !
Might be that summer visitant that hangs
Its cradle under hospitable eaves,
And so abide 'neath the same roof as thou !
Be that, be anything but what I am,
Since what I am keeps me so far from thee !

NOEMA.

Why then didst bridle thy return so long,
And with delay torture expectancy ?

•

AFRAEL.

Now must I slip my secret from its leash.
When in the dwindling twilight of that eve
Consumed in happy intercourse, I sailed
Back to my native ether, I conceived
A pang at parting never felt before,
Parting from whence I might; for novelty
Hath ever been, and is, the Spirit's joy.
But from the hour when I my pinions fledged
To quit thee, novelty had lost its charm.
There was no sun in heaven, no room in space,
No freshness in infinity, nought new
In all the illimitable realms of air.
Then had I swept to thee direct, when lo!
A strange surmise arrested my descent.
What if it were the quality of Earth
To tame the pulse of Spirits, and compel
Him who hath once its narrow bounds essayed,
Still to return, and if it was not thou,
But the mere planet's self, which had subdued
The once discursive temper of my flight?
Swift through the intervening air I shot,
And on the Earth alighted, but not here.
Mountains magnificent, and inland seas
Blue as thine orbs and deep, smooth as thy brow,
Forests of trunks stupendous, sweeping heaven

With dark audacious tops, snow-fed cascades
Taking anon the whiteness of their birth,
Then flashing into silver; oceans vast
With endless manes uplifted, foam-lashed strands,
Sweet-watered valleys, cool, and ever green,
Darkling ravines o'er-pent by crags that faced
And frowned against each other; waving meads
By asphodel and amaranth o'errun,
Stirred into music by the souging breeze;
Lands of wide ribless snow and strident winds,
And howled at by the hungry hurricanes;
Realms of rank heat, and then of scorching cold,
And middle zones of genial compromise
Betwixt these fierce extremes;—o'er these, o'er all,
O'er many more I sailed with curious wing,
Skimming the uneven globe, its heights, its depths,
And all myself to it surrendering,
That it might make me subject, had it power.
Then to the heaven of heavens I backward soared,—
Seven times the sun having withdrawn his light,
The while I journeyed o'er the earth,—and there
Myself replenished with celestial food.

NOEMA.

But in thy travel didst encounter none
Like unto us? no man, no woman,—

AFRAEL.

None,

Though life abounded. In the deep-troughed waves,
Grim monsters rolled and belched. By river-banks
Mountainous creatures basked, their bulging backs
Cracked by the sun. In jungles choked with growth
And knotted stems, prowled gloomy-visaged beasts,
Savage though beautiful, and, as I passed,
Snapped at my wings; others, as meek as fair,
But coy as cloudlets 'fore a noonday sun,
Halted and glanced, then twinkling, disappeared
In leafy coverts; many-plumaged birds,
Dove-like and gentle, piping to themselves,
Amidst a world of sportive butterflies.
But nowhere found I trace of aught like thee,
Or those thou callest thine, though all seemed fit
To be their dwelling: only mute expanse
Of hills, and woods, and wastes, and grievous seas
Moaning around unpeopled continents!

NOEMA.

O would that Aran had been here, to hark
Thy wondrous tale, and therefrom learn what home,
What Heaven, we have to master, and desist
From vain aggression 'gainst the foreign sky!
Say, didst thou mark the egregious edifice

Which yonder looms upon the horizon big,
And with still growingly aggressive gaze
Threatens the placid firmament?

AFRAEL.

I did,
And should this very morn have paused and scanned
Its bulk, which hourly more stupendous grows,
Whilst tree, and plain, and mountain keep the same,
But that my pinions swift refused to swerve
In direct flight towards thee. What may it be?

NOEMA.

An engine of presumption reared by man
To wreck his God; a ladder by whose rungs
Would climbing mortals the Immortal reach,
And hurl Him to its base; Tower from whose top
Earth is to spring and find itself in Heaven!

AFRAEL.

That were a splendid and a central aim,
Could it but hit its mark! But 'twill fly wide;
There's so much room to miss. But why this rage?
Why doth not Earth content Earth's denizens,
Or eyes that see, grudge the Invisible
Its shroud of darkness?

E

NOEMA.

Ah ! because 'tis Earth,
And what we see, and see not, are confused
In a perpetual twilight ! Dost not know
The melancholy story of our race ?

AFRAEL.

No ; but would learn, if thou wilt tell it me.

NOEMA.

There was a Garden planted with delights,
And nightly fed by never-failing dews,
Which rains nor visited, nor drouth, and where
All the concordant seasons reigned at once.
Spring never shed her blossoms, and the fruit
Of Autumn hung eternal on the bough ;
Whilst Winter tempered with its sprightly breath
Summer's too luscious languor. 'Twas a world
Whose atmosphere was fragrance and the sound
Of waters falling from replenished founts,
Eden so-called, a paradise untilled.
And in its midst, its sovran lords, there roamed
A man and woman, parent of us all,
Though not like us degenerate, but he
Comely as thou, she far more fair than I.

AFRAEL.

O would that thou and I had been that pair,
And were it still !

NOEMA.

Nay, hearken ere thou speak,
Nor be the sport of that temerity
Which rushes onward to a goal unseen,
From a fair starting-point ! Happy they were,
As thou too fondly deem'st we too should be,
So circumstanced : not happy to the end.
For in the Garden one strange Tree there bloomed,
One only, of the which they might not eat,—
For God forbade,—the Tree whose fruit conferred
Knowledge of Good and Evil. But they ate.
Straightway the veil of innocence was rent,
And in each other's rankling minds they saw
The base-born brood of Self ; greedy desire,
Grudges, and petulance, and secret aims,
Anger, remorse, reciprocal reproach,
And they who hitherto had been but one,
Were two henceforth !

AFRAEL.

Was there no remedy ?

NOEMA.

'Tis said there was. There stood another tree,
The Tree of Life, of which had they but plucked,—
Such is the tale obscure tradition tells,—
They might have lived for ever, and so balked
The doom which fell upon them, doom of death.
But ere that dismal fault could be repaired,
God drove them from the Garden, and its gates
Guarding with sword of flaming cherubim,
Propelled them to the wilderness, where toil
Is each one's heritage, and tares, and thorns,
Emblems of direr griefs, mix with the corn
Raised by the sweat and furrows of the brow.

AFRAEL.

But is toil pain? What is't but energy,
The same delicious hurricane of will
That sends me scudding in and out the stars,
Bore me around thy deep-indented globe,
And brings me to thy feet? Such toil is rapture!

NOEMA.

Yes, for such toil hath pleasure for its end,
Not profit, and involves none other's pain;
Whereas all mortal energy may fail,

And in succeeding must some mortal hurt.
Toil like to ours means jarring interests,
And is as though in the unfrontiered air
The winged tenants of thy star should clash,
Because their rival pinions strove to beat
The self-same pathway.

AFRAEL.

That we never do.
For Spirits, when they meet, oft lightning make,
But never, thunder.

NOEMA.

So! That tells me why
On summer nights I see the flashes play
About the horizon, though the skies be clear,
And all the stars lustrous and imminent.
Would it were so with us! But we, alas!
Circling in narrow rounds, for ever cross
Each other's track, then push for mastery.
For man hath still a double war to wage,
War against Nature, and thence war with man.
One brings the body ache and age, and one,
Bequeathes the heart disgust, despondency,
And hatred of that Self for which, despite
That very hate, we still are forced to strive.

AFRAEL.

'Tis a strange tale, this that thou tell'st to me.
Yet doth it sound like truth, if I surmise
Rightly its import. What might be the fruit,
The seed of so much bane, or wherefore He,
Who put it in their way, forbade its use,
Outsoars conjecture; for to us no less,
Beyond is still the portal of Beyond,
And Cause is lost in links of Consequence.
This much, withal, seems plain: thy ancestors,
Touching a tree forbidden them, exchanged
Forthwith a prosperous will for needy want,
And in the place of careless appetites
Which found immediate banquet, there arose
Necessity for labour, forethought, greed,
And fears anent the Future. Thence I see
How Self was first begotten,—dismal Self,
Which pines within the dungeon that it builds,
Deeming therein is sole security.
But is there no escape from Self, no rift
In the chill cloud Self's self doth generate,
Through which Unself shines visible beyond?

NOEMA.

O yes, there is! though it be transitory.
Amid this bare flat desert of our lives,

Through whose deep sands with staggering feet we plod,
Its heat, its drouth, its length, its weariness,
With still the same horizon, lo! sometimes
A green oasis shimmers. Oft it proves
Only a mirage, and the saddened heart,
Whose credulous pulse had quickened at the cheat,
Back to its old monotony subsides,
And beats the minutes idly. Oh! but when
It is no mirage, no distressful lie,
But an umbrageous moist reality,
Cool leaves and freshly bubbling spring, then, then,
The desert is forgotten, life and death,
And all the loathsome loads betwixt the twain
We bear, poor wretched sumpters! Then we halt,
Unpack each other's fardels, bending see
Each other's face reflected in the wave,
Drink from the self-same fount, and make our couch
Under the self-same starlit canopy!

AFRAEL.

And what is this oasis?

NOEMA.

It is Love.

AFRAEL.

And what is Love?

NOEMA.

Oh! Love is what it is!
Like nothing else in all the universe,
So is there nought it can be likened to.
To those who know it, patent, but to those
Who ne'er have known it, indescribable.
Go tell me what the tree feels, when in spring
The sweet insidious sap begins to stir
About its roots, flushes its stagnant rind,
And through the gnarled and gouty trunk transmits
The genial shock, till every limb and branch
Thrills to the spray-tips: what the mountain stream,
When glittering April uncongeals its bed,
And sends it dancing downwards to the vale,
Singing the songs of wayward liberty:
Or what the Night must feel, when the deep dark,
Which is but secret seeing, veils the Earth,
And the bared breast of hushed Heaven throbs with
stars!
Tell me all these, and I will tell thee then
What the distinctions and delights of Love.
'Tis a fifth season, a sixth sense, a light,
A warmth beyond the cunning of the sun;
Another element; fire, water, air,
Nor burn, nor quench, nor feed it, for it lives
Steeped in its self-provided atmosphere!

AFRAEL.

Thou mak'st me feel like liberated stream,
Like the warmed trunk, like to the tranced night,
Whilst I stay listening to thine eloquence ;
And all the spheres of all the firmament
Seem to lack something now ! Still, how doth Love
Baffle that self, which clearly I discern
Is Earth's essential bane ?

NOEMA.

O, because 'tis

A transcendental egotism, Love,—
Which deifies a dearer self, and makes
The heart a shrine, pure for the sake of it ;
Upon whose altar Self by self is slain,
And adoration crowned by sacrifice.
Love dwelleth in the tents of the beloved,
Though countless leagues of pasture intervene.
Its thoughts, its wants, are elsewhere ; time, space,
And all conventions are its enemies.
It sickens for one only voice ; the note
Of viol, flute, and hollowed instrument,
Untuned by that, remain unmusical.
One hand alone hath the electric touch,
And by the lightnings of no other eye

Is the world's darkness sundered ! Such is Love ;
And they whose stagnant spirits have been stirred
Once by its subterranean current, know
That Love is all, and all beside is nought,
Emptiness, and the ticking of the brain !

AFRAEL.

Why, then, I love thee ! For that spreading dome
Of boundless blue, which round the universe
Nor endeth nor beginneth, and whose orbs
Are countless as its uncontain'd leagues,
Within whose inexhaustible expanse,
Which knoweth no Without, my pinions range
As unconditioned as itself, and find
Endless pursuit, endless variety,—
Since in that tender twilight I alit
Upon this new-found sphere, and felt my wings
Ruffled with unknown rapture,—hath but seemed
Infinite void, infinite weariness,
And purposeless distraction ! Here alone,
Here in the palm-trees' shade, this spot of Earth,
To which by mortal chances thou art fixed,
Do I now find fulness and amplitude.
There is no pleasant pathway through the stars,
Save towards this bourne it bends,; no journeying,
Which doth not tire before it doth begin,

Unless it doth propose thee for its end.
Thou fill'st for me the spacious universe,
And art its centre, and circumference too!
Say, is this love?

NOEMA.

'Tis strangely like to it!
Nor, wert thou mortal, could I doubt but thou
Hadst by its air-borne seed been fertilised.
But mortal love, though mortals' benison,
Would to immortals surely be but bane;
Since that which adds to poor humanity,
Would but subtract from thee. Nay, think of it!
Love, that can lift us half-way to the spheres,
Must, if thou couldst subserve its influence,
Lure thee half-way below them. Thou art a Spirit;
And Love, for all its potent witchery,
Inextricably tangled in the flesh,
Could not strike root in thee. O, man is gross,
And even his finest motions sensibly
From the affections of the body start,
Or feebly flag towards it as their goal!
Earth being but earth, Love, heaven in part, can bring
Terrestrial darkness some celestial light.
But if the wholly heavenly should essay
To feed on earthy blackness, why, it would
By the foul fog swift be extinguish'd!

AFRAEL.

There is a mystery here, sweet mortal voice !
Which, as it seems to my intelligence,
Thou dost not rightly rede. If there be points
Where Heaven and Earth may meet, and that point Love,
Why cannot Love therefrom a circle spread
That may contain them both ? And thou didst say
That Love is but a transitory gleam.
Yet surely when two mortals have entrapped
That welcome sunshine in their dungeoned lives,
They do not let it go, but love till death
Nor perishes nor pales ?

NOEMA.

Alack ! it does.
That is the deepest tragedy of all,
When Love immortal dies ! When two fair beings,
Who were the morning in each other's eyes,
Fade into irrecoverable night,
And hear each other through the darkness call,
But never find each other's faces more !

AFRAEL.

And doth it end like that ? How pitiful !
Life sure must mark an antedated death,
At such a fell conclusion. But I glean

Flesh is the edge of that catastrophe,
And rash Love topples over! I were safe
'Gainst such a precipice, for Spirit walks
Along the crest of all things, undismayed,
Nor ever dizzyed by sheer eminence.
My love for thee,—for let me call it love,
If only that the word sounds strangely sweet,—
Would be as long-enduring as myself,
Who cannot end.

NOEMA.

Would it indeed be so?
For to be loved by Spirit, and for ever,—
Oh! what could woman dream of more than that?
And 'twere from sensuous homage so estranged,
One could not grudge the other, nor the high
Upon the distant low wreak any slight.

AFRAEL.

Then let me love!

NOEMA.

How can I hinder thee,
An thou dost love? Love asks not leave to blow,
More than the wind which rises in the night,
And comes we know not whence, nor will abate,
Though chance it ruffle our serenity

More than we would. Love is as free as light,
And will shine still, though we put shutters up
To bar it out. There's no extinguishing
Love's sturdy flame by puff of human breath,
Blow we or hot or cold. Neglect, disdain,
Anger, chicane, misuse, indifference,
Weary not out Love's longanimity ;
And all the wiles of doubling waywardness
Foil not Love's keen pursuit ! Who shall say nay
When Love says yes, or contradiction give
To its importunate affirmative ?
Itself unto itself is sovran stay,
Nor needs it smiling countenance to find,
In its own heart, hope and encouragement.

AFRAEL.

Then 'neath my wings will I enfold my love,
And bear it with me to the firmament,
And through the envious constellations sail
With my new treasure for companion !
But wilt not thou thyself, source of this love,
Lend thy divine attractions to my flight,
And let me cleave for thee with feathery plumes
The all too dense and opaque envelope
That wraps thy earthly habitation round,
And buoy thee up through heavenly distances,
Whose distance ne'er will lessen, since its goal,

A canopy of ether that is hung
Over our heads, will with our soaring soar?
Oh! say me yes, and come with me this night,
When to thy seeming all the stars will wake,
Though sleep ne'er comes to their unwearied orbs!

NOEMA.

Dost mean that I should quit the kindred ground,
And with thee journey through the alien air?
I, all of flesh compounded, should be borne
Upon the supersensuous elements,
And this my carnal weight be lifted up
Along with thee, lightsome and volatile?

AFRAEL.

Yes, that is what I ask thee.

NOEMA.

Then, indeed,
Thou dost me love! for love alone could shape
A dream so airy and fantastical.
We are gross clay, I tell thee,—loaded, clogged,
For ever striving to sink lower yet
If lowest Earth would let us; and thy wings,
Which are but shadows to thy will, and sweep,
Straight at its bidding, each imagined curve,

Would fail to wrench this body cumbersome
One foot from off its cradle and its grave.

AFRAEL.

Wilt let me once my Spirit's force essay
On thy fair matter, when the winds are still,
And the down-hanging curtains of the night
Are diapered with stars? this night, this night,
The one that's nearest!

NOEMA.

Thou hast a Spirit's choice,
And drawest a prize where all the rest were blank.
A woman's nights are mostly servitude,
But this one lifts the yoke. There will be held
A mid-nocturnal parley at the Tower,
And I shall watch alone, whilst Irad floats
With dreamy sails o'er sleep's soft-heaving sea.
Come, then, to-night!

AFRAEL.

Yes, I to-night will come.
But may meanwhile the love, which here I lay
Soft on thy breast, like water-lily sink
Into the depths that give it sustenance!

[AFRAEL ascends into the air, singing.

*Oh! I love thee, I love thee, through day and through night,
Though my love seemeth never the same;
For now 'tis a tranquil deep delight,
And now 'tis a torturing flame.
One moment 'tis like to a ringdove fair,
Pluming its wings and breast;
Then anon like an eagle beating the air,
When he cannot find his nest.*

*When I gaze on thy soul, then my soul grows calm,
And when I can hear thy voice,
My own soul silently sings a psalm,
Like the Heavens when they rejoice!
But when on the glamour of face and form
That are thine, my senses fall,
I am tossed, I am whirled, like the leaves in the storm
When the thunder-demons call!*

NOEMA (*sol.*)

What a surpassing gift of song thou hast!
And when thou scal'st such heights of harmony,
I cannot choose but love thee! Love thee? No!
But let myself be loved. That's different,

And may not be escaped. Who blames the shore,
Because the sea woos it perpetually,
Or chides the modest stationary flowers,
Because the vagrant self-indulgent bees
Steal luscious mead from their defenceless lips?
And even to love a Spirit were no more,
Surely, than just to love the atmosphere,
The glitter of the morning, or the strain
Of joyous bird deep-hidden in a brake;
While to be loved by Spirit, were to have
A suitor less familiar than the wind,
Who kisses brow and cheek, and asks no leave.
Still, Love, for all our reasoning, retains
Such arguments to swift confound our words,
That they who know him best, know likewise this,
To name him is to tremble. . . . Oh! I trust,
He will not come to-night!

SCENE IV.—EBER and IRAD *approach*. IRAD *runs forward to his mother*.

IRAD.

See! mother! mother!
See what a ship Eber has made for me!

The keel is carved from cedar-wood, the prow
Is beaked and curled, the hull is hollowed out,
And holds a cargo of the richest dates,
We plucked together. From the canes that grow,—
You know them, mother,—on the Euphrates' banks,
He cut these great tall masts, and from their leaves,
Hauled from the water, shaped their flapping sails.
The cordage is of palm-pith, and the crew
Moulded from river-slime. They are at work,
Tug at the ropes, feel at the helm, and sit
Among the shrouds like living mariners.
Is it not wonderful?

NOEMA.

A splendid toy.

How kind of Eber! Have you thanked him for it?

IRAD.

O yes! But 'tis no toy. How foolish, mother!
It is a real, real ship, with force to skim
What Eber calls the ocean. Oh! I wish
That there were water here, and I could show you
What a grand giant of a ship it is,
And how it butts the wave, when dragged along!

NOEMA.

Where is the trough on which thou sail'st thy boats?

IRAD.

The trough! What, mother, are you thinking of?
'Tis well enough for little paper skiffs,
Such as thou mak'st for me. But Eber says
The river's self is yet too small to bear
A huge live vessel. Oh! that I could see
This ocean, and upon it sail my boats,
And ride on the rough waves along with them!

[EBER comes up.]

I have been showing mother my rare ship.
O Eber, thank you, thank you! But I want
To launch it on the ocean. Mother thinks
A trough will serve for monsters like to this.
When will you show me the broad ocean, Eber?

NOEMA.

Welcome, good Eber! and a mother's thanks
That thou hast so much kindness to waste
Upon her child.

IRAD.

When will you take me, Eber?

NOEMA.

Tax Eber now no more with thy demands,
But with thy silence pay thy gratitude.

Take thy ship, Irad, thy magnificent ship,
And find it storage 'mong thy dwarfer boats.

IRAD.

But see the name Eber has burnt on it!
The Tower! The Tower! My ship is called The Tower!
Why, everybody loves the Tower but mother,
But chiding, darling mother.

[He throws his arms round NOEMA and kisses her.]

Now I go,
To find my ship a good dry landing-place.
Again, I thank you, Eber,—thank you, thank you!

[Exit.]

NOEMA.

I wish thou hadst not called his toy The Tower.
I hate the name.

EBER.

Hate! What is there to hate?
It is a toy like Irad's: bigger truly,
As are its builders; but a toy at which
The Gods but smile, even as we smile at his!

NOEMA.

Why dost thou speak of Gods? There is one God,
Tradition tells, one only, one in Heaven.

EBER.

Tradition is a senile counsellor,
With memory half gone. The same old tales
She loves to mumble, and distort afresh.
She is a toothless crone, whose jumbling wit
Ranges through gossip, dreams, fears, tattered scraps
Of musty prophecy, report, surmise,
And quick-grown rumour, which when pierced, betrays,
Like to a specious spurious agaric,
But smoke and stench inside. Tradition chokes
Discovery's highway, nor can single truth
Elbow its road through fable's dense-packed crowd.
Gods there may be, or God; 'tis yet to prove.
Perchance we ne'er shall prove it. But 'tis well
To clinch this on the mind,—that oft there hides
A treasure-trove in e'en old women's tales,
Though, like a rubbish-heap, they scarcely tempt
A nice hand to disturb them.

NOEMA.

I am a woman;
And likely we are all,—old, young, and those
Nor young nor old,—to wisdom foolishness.
Yet, may be, we have ever and anon
Glimpses of things too coy to let the wise

Upon their delicate proportions stare.
But tell me, what is doing at the Tower;
If Aran wields authority as sure
As when he first affirmed it?

EBER.

More, far more.

Rebellion stooped to pick up brands this morn,
But quick he snatched them from its half-raised arm,
And smote its back with its own instruments.
Oh! it was rare to see the front with which
He frowned down Korah, and the flashing eyes
Before whose scorching fire e'en Peleg shrank,
Lest it should blister him! For though I rate
Their Tower but as a ladder whence I may,
Deciphering, read Heaven's starry hieroglyphs,
Male courage in the male breast echo wakes,
And like an instant hurricane that straight
Tears out the heart o' the forest with its teeth,
He carried all before him. Long live Aran!
Long live our liberation! loudly rang
Up all the massive whorls of the huge Tower,
That seemed to shake with shouting.

NOEMA.

And the end?

EBER.

I am nor prophet nor priest ; and he who scans
The certain skies, learns to be diffident
Of what is all uncertain. But of late
Have I marked strange conjunctions which if read
With due intelligence, to portents point :
Convulsion in the top and bottom worlds,
With trouble in their middle atmospheres ;
Quakes, tremors, tempests, tides irregular,
All order topsy-turvy, ordered yet
By supereminent Order which defies
The reach of calculation short as mine.

NOEMA.

But hast thou not warned Aran of all this ?

EBER.

Warned Aran ! 'Twere as sane to warn the wave
'Twill 'gainst the shore but pound itself to spray,
Warn the fierce-grinning tiger, ere it springs,
'Twill only leap upon the hunter's spear,
As Aran warn with message from the skies.
Doth he not listen to thy homely voice,
The cracking universe would find him deaf.
But pardon me if in my quick retort
I had forgotten who thou art, and who,

He whom I seem to slight. I do not slight him.
His road towards Heaven and mine are different,
And I should tack and trim where he sails slap
In the gale's brunt. But 'tis a fearless heart.
And fearlessness, accounted much by men,
Sums conquest over women. Fare thee well!

[*Exit.*

NOEMA (*sol.*)

But why should we be conquered? Why not won
With patient arts of gentle mastery?
We are crushed easily; that's sure enough.
But is it well or wise, manly or just,
To plant the heel of domination down
With such an emphasis on things so soft?
For we are less than they, more subtle, weak,
Unstable, more the straws of accident;
And only that perverseness, which is part
Of our infirmity, would claim a place
Of equal sway beside them. Like control
Begets a like responsibility;
And Heaven forbid that we should ever be
Responsible against the storms, the cuffs,
And rude surprises of the world, that would
Swift overwhelm us utterly! We need a shield,
But shield which, rough upon the foeful side,
Wears yet a smooth concavity, nor galls

The following breast, it has to save from hurt.
If fearlessness were all, why then one might
As well go couple with the hugging bear,
Lie with the pard and suckle his hot cubs,
Be littered with the lion, kiss the wolf,
Or feel the scratching of the tiger's claws
Upon one's back in amorous savagery!
O gentle-touching Spirit! *thou* dost not crush,
Nor make me feel my inequality,
Though betwixt thee and me extends the space
That lies 'twixt Earth and Heaven! I to thee
Could live subservient ever, and look up
Theeward, as fondly as at some one star,
Seen through blue rifts of fleecy-scudding clouds!
Yet in thy star remain, nor answer me
With the fulfilment of my timid wants,
Which, if they saw the long-feigned goal too near,
Would turn and run affrighted, to regain
The safe confinement of their starting-place.
Such contradiction fights in woman's veins!
He *must* not come to-night!

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*Night of the same day. Interior of the chief tent of ARAN. NOEMA, IRAD asleep.*

NOEMA (*sol.*)

WHY should I tell him more? When last I raised
The veil behind which lies my sanctuary
Of inner life, he barely deigned to look,
But bade me share my superstitious realm
With Spirit consorts,—fit companions!
Why should this superciliousness wound,
When 'tis the low that at the lofty strikes,
And they who soar be ruffled in their flight
By them who grovel? 'Tis the feeble side
Of that in mortals which alone is strong,
To keep them feeble still: that sense of shame,
Which dreads to let the unfamiliar look
Upon our naked selves familiarly,
Even when noble in our nakedness.

Thus when to Aran's misconceiving mind
I bare my heavenly secret, 'twere as though
I unto stranger gaze should bare myself,
And violate my instinct's modesty.
O no! I cannot speak of it again!
Yet secrecy, like woodmite when it gnaws
A fruit upon the side that's next the tree,
Though marring not rotundity and bloom,
Eats out the heart withal. Secretiveness
Is self's most subtle poison, and demands
The antidote of trust. I'll trust my husband.
I hear him coming.

[ARAN enters through a curtain in the tent.]

Must thou go to-night?

ARAN.

There is no must where a firm will presides,
And ordered Forethought, with its crown on top
And active sceptre in its hand, drives back
The rabble urgings of Necessity.
Must is a fiction of the Gods to fool
Their mortal serfs with; a device for slaves,
Children, and women, and the sicklier sort.
But to the man whose mettle centuries
Of cowardly compliance have not quelled,
Must is a wrongful overt enemy,

Who must with overt rights be combated ;
Compelled to quit this 'usurped soil, and leave
A native field for resolution.
I go not to the Tower, because I must,
But, as my words have pushed it through the
clouds,
Because I will. Will shall be sovran here,
Will of the knitted front and tameless eyes,
Whilst blind Necessity may reign in Heaven.

NOEMA.

Count it not sure, my lord, that Heaven is blind,
Or that this higher will which unto us,
Who cannot change it, seems necessity,
Is not deliberate option of the wise ;
Which to resist is but to coax defeat
To come and crush us. Oh ! mistrust thy Tower,
Which, at its top, will fall as short of Heaven,
As all we win falls short of all we want.
Listen, one moment : Let me ask the Spirit,
With whom that twilight eve I did converse,
As straight I told thee, and whose pinions range
Over illimitable leagues of wind,
What distance may divorce the Heavens from Earth,
And what long links man's energy must forge
To marry them once more.

ARAN.

A Spirit, forsooth!

Thou meditatest strange alliances.
Ask of the kestrel how the stare should fly
To balk him when he swoops; go ask the waves
How the jerked bark should foil their turbulence;
Or from the irate wrack and puckered clouds,
How best the thunder-threatened oak should wrap
His fluttering foliage round his aged head,
To meet the lightning harmless! When the wolf
No more shall raven 'mid the scuttling flock,
But bear a crook and gently shepherd them;
When stiff rime feeds the flowers like liquid dew,
Or floods shall excavate the torrent's bed
And fence its banks lest that they overflow,—
Then shall the aborigines of air
Cease to conspire against this solid Earth,
And serve as Heaven's astute auxiliaries.
Could they affect to join their ranks to ours,
They were but traitors in the camp, and thou
Wert but a traitor too, wert not a dupe,
To harbour such a sly ambassador.

NOEMA.

O, thou dost wrong him! He is frank as light,
Clear as the morning, candid as the noon,

And never impious subterfuge could lurk
'Neath such transparent pinions. He would do
All that I asked him, all that thou shouldst ask,
Would run my messages from stage to stage
Of the unsurveyed air, and bring thee count
And exact measure of thy enterprise.

ARAN.

A most obliging Spirit! Use him then
If thou canst make him serviceable. But,
Forgive me if I check intelligence
Fetched from a source suspect. For from the hour
When the intrepid Lucifer was flung,
Since by misgiving Seraphim forsook,
Over Heaven's battlements, no Spirit, 'twould seem,
Hath dared to brew rebellion in the sky,
Or seek allies in man. They live content
To serve celestial spleen and wreak us hurt;
To be the messengers of poisons, plagues,
Blights, mildews, frosts, droughts, famines, hurricanes,
But never once have lent a fanning wing
To mortal aspiration. Help from Spirits!
Why call them Spirits? Spirits spiritless!
When man's encouraging voice at length is heard
Resounding 'mong the stars, and all abreast
We storm God's last intrenchments, then perchance
Will insurrection flame along the Spheres,

G

And their subservient denizens demand
To fight beneath our flag. But until then,
To hope for succour from their half-fledged wings,
Were as though one should look for tiger's teeth
Within the palate of the squealing hare ;
And Spirits' mission, spite their specious name,
Will be to harry men and hoodwink women.

NOEMA.

O Aran ! thou art harsh, incredulous.
The Spirit that hath deigned to touch our home
Is of a gentle and considerate mould,
And would—nay, hear me !—prosper me and mine.
May I not therefore——

ARAN.

Thou mayst what thou wilt,
So thou dost move no counsels 'gainst the Tower.
That would I never brook.

[Goes over to IRAD'S crib and bends over.]

Sleep sound, my boy,
Sleep sound and grow to manhood ! Would thou hadst
Already put on thy virility,
And couldst thy masculine ambition lend
To swell thy father's purpose ! I would wait,
But that my resolution might drop off

Whilst thine was ripening. Thine the harvest be,
So that the seed and sickle fall to me.

[*Exit ARAN.*]

NOEMA (*sol.*)

'Gainst male self-will there is no argument
That is not overborne. He would not listen.
A man knows all before a woman speaks.
Who argues with his shadow? It must follow,
Draw he which way he will. Yet Spirits listen;
And mine submits to me as meek an ear
As though I were a Spirit, he but flesh.
Is it that spirit hearkens to the flesh
Easier than flesh to spirit? That is a thought
Rips up the womb of darkness, and delivers
A ray of struggling light. Yet I to him
Could hearken whilst the glass of time ran out
From day to night, then from night back again,
Nor ever think to fret the even stream
Of his discourse; and I am merest flesh.
'Twere too presumptuous to hope otherwise.
So darkness sucks that glimmer back again,
And leaves us in obscurity. Sleep, child!
Sleep, as he bade thee, soundly; nor awake
To learn how inharmonious is man's heart,
And how its discords grow with added strings!
He wished thee manhood: could he wish thee worse?

Rather would I that curly infancy
Should still around thy unridged temples smile ;
And no anxiety thy course disturb,
That could not straight an ample refuge find
In the fond shallows of thy mother's breast !
Alas ! how soon thou wilt for ever turn
Upon that haven a forgetful keel,
And on the open billows of the world
Too proudly trust to thine own puffed-out sails !
Oh ! may the waves not get thee under them !
For what might she who bare thee and would die
To give thee life a second time, do more
Than stand upon the shore and watch thee sink ?

SCENE II.—*Same night. The Moon. AFRAEL standing
on the edge of an extinct volcano.*

AFRAEL (*sol.*)

Meseems as though this nighest stage to earth,
This uninhabited and jagged ball,
Were unto Earth a travelling tributary.
For 'twixt yon living planet which is now
To my fixed passion chiefest point in space,
And this one, dead, whereon I halt and bide
The hour to bid me sweep to my sweet tryst,

The distance never widens nor yet wanes.
Yes, we are following, following, through the night,
Silently sailing in this azure sea,
Whose waves are all around, yet never overwhelm,
Along the track swayed by that pilot world.
Yet what a wreck this skyey bark appears!
Empty of spirits, empty of all life,
Pastureless, streamless, voiceless, tenantless;
No sound, no movement; silent as deep thought;
Bare of trunk or herb; even no noise
Of falling waters or of flitting wing:
No growth and nought to grow in,—only bare rock,
Cavernous, rugged, huge, precipitous,
Rolled out in slippery unadvancing waves,
Volcanic writhings rigid now in death!
Is this the end of all fidelity
Unto the earthly? Oh! avaunt the thought!
Withal I ne'er have seen a sphere so scarred,
So faced with desolation, so extinct,
So shorn of comfort. Yet it follows still!
Perchance it is its fate to follow still,
Its punishment! Nay, rather let me think,
It is its supreme bliss, its one reward,
That doth outweigh all other penalties.
O melancholy wanderer! I would be
Charred even as thou, extinguished, desolate,
With nought but rock and ashes at my core,

Sooner than once surrender that last right
Still to pursue and worship from afar!
Move on! Move on! ye constellations calm,
That tell the watches of the night, and bring
Swiftly the hour I may indulge my love,
And leap the frontier of my banishment!
For æons unrecorded that mine eyes
Have watched yon marshalled vault, I ne'er have known
 you
Hasten or slacken in your solemn march;
But now to-night ye seem to me to lag
And fall into the rear of Time, whose rhythm
Is marked but by my own impatient heart!

SCENE III.—*Same hour. The tents of ARAN. NOEMA, without,
in the moonlight.*

NOEMA.

If he came now I should be ta'en unarmed:
And in this mystic hour of midmost night,
My heart would prove a traitor to my heart,
And help him seize its sleeping citadel.
He must not come! O no! he must not come.
'Tis different in the gaze of barefaced day.
The earthy then is round us, clear and nigh,

And we are rudely minded of ourselves,
Our mundane substance, mortal accidents,
And the subservient company of ills
That wait upon our actions. Then we see
In a too faithful mirror what we are,
And sadly doff night's fanciful array.
Then this repulsive gaoler, this coarse flesh,
Which on our aspirations keepeth ward,
Mockingly warns us not to dare too far
Beyond the precincts of our prison-house.
But dark confers a treacherous liberty,
And, stealing earthly semblance from the earth,
Gives unto things and shapes terrestrial
A heavenly complexion. Why, look now !
See, the cowed night seems rapt in mental prayer
Before the dim shrine of eternity !
There moveth nothing mortal in the air,
Nor on the ground ; but, 'twixt the dewy grass
And spangled vault, absolute ecstasy !
It is the hour when, finding reason foiled,
Love presses home his final arguments,
And touches his conclusion. O sweet Night !
Thou art the very atmosphere of love,
And every star proclaims thee amorous !
'Twere too much for a mortal, came he now !
Detain him in the sky, ye twinkling orbs,
That must have power to charm, lest that I should

Be in his bright propinquity consumed !
But hark ! What sings ? There is no other voice
Of such unclouded music. It is he !
And Fate hath had no pity on my fears.

AFRAEL

(singing).

*When I gaze on thy soul, then my soul grows calm,
And when I can hear thy voice,
My own soul silently sings a psalm
Like the Heavens when they rejoice.
But when on the glamour of face and form
That are thine, my senses fall,
I am tossed, I am whirled, like the leaves in the storm,
When the thunder-demons call.*

*Oh ! when shall my yearning pulses reach
The haven towards which they roll ?
Was there ever a sea without its beach,
E'en a desert without its goal ?
And surely, surely, despite of Fate,
And this pitiless air and sky,
I yet shall pass through the dreamful gate
And possess thee ere thou die !*

NOEMA.

It was in music that he took farewell,
In music he returns. But when he showed
'Gainst the blue background of the shining morn,
His outline shone but as a ridge of cloud,
Flecked by a rising but still hidden moon.
Now burns he brighter than the brightest star,
And makes illumination in the air.
Oh! he is beautiful beyond the range
Even of clear imagination's eye,
And Fancy, in creative madness, ne'er
Projected such a vision!

SCENE IV.

AFRAEL.

Hail! beloved!

NOEMA.

Hail! gracious Spirit! But I pray thee, come
No nearer than thou art, but deign allow
For the infirmity of mortal gaze.
My sight is almost blinded even now,
And nearer brightness would but leave me dark.

AFRAEL.

Thou too meek mortal! Brightness near to thee
Were only brighter still, and thou the source
And very pivot of its radiance.
Fear not! Thou must my nature closer prove,
And with my aspect grow familiar.
They will not hurt thee. Spirit cannot hurt,
Though it at first may dazzle. Oh! I thought
The hours would never pass, and that the night,
Climbing the upward steep of dark had paused,
And lost herself in sudden drowsiness.
Now on the very topmost point she stands,
Surveying mute her wide dominions,
And I, attentive to the time, am here.

NOEMA.

Yes, thou art punctual as the sun himself.
But love was ne'er a laggard.

AFRAEL.

Then thou own'st
In my desires the quality of love.

NOEMA.

Ah! Love needs stamping none from any mint,
But bears his superscription on his face,

And the bright coinage of thy words would pass
In any mart where lovers merchandise.

AFRAEL.

Then let me drop a plummet in thy heart,
And sound thy soul's affections! If I cull
Nothing but sand-drift and the salt sea-weed,
And all the briny litter of the deep,
Then shall I know my empty-handedness.
But if I to the smiling surface come
With pearls and shells and coralled fantasies,
And all the far-down treasures it doth hide,
Oh! then the sky will crown my enterprise,
And dub me happiest diver! Tell me once,
Once with those eyes that seem the lamps of truth,
And with those lips that are its oracle,
Thou lovest me!

NOEMA.

How may I, mortal, love
Thee, an immortal Spirit? Yet if to yearn
To dwell in the soft shadow of thy wings,
To live in the strange music of thy voice,
And to be bathed in the celestial light
Thy presence radiates, indication be
Of the heart's fever, how shall I deny
That I do love thee? Love is sick alway

For one sole nurse to lullaby its pain,
Taking its medicine from no other hand :
And thou alone canst feed the want of thee.
But how? It is the Spirit that I love,
Though Spirit have I none to love thee with.
Look! I love that to which I may not soar,
Thou lovest that to which thou canst not stoop.
Could mortal with immortal ever blend,
I needs had answered otherwise. But all
Is contradiction here, and reason gives
No hint to instinct in perplexity.

AFRAEL.

Say that thou lov'st me, and I care not how ;
Nor should we let straightforward feeling lose
Itself in tortuous reason's labyrinth.
Surely there is no sophistry in love,
But 'tis ingenuous in its arguments.
Come, let us for the empyrean start,
Now, now while still the rarely-buoyant breath
Of thy avowal will inflate our flight,
And the moon lends her lamp to point the track.

NOEMA.

This is the sheer insanity of love,
To think, because 'twere sweet to do't, thou couldst
Lift me, thus deeply anchored in the flesh,

And drive me through that unresisting sea
Where only unsubstantial Spirits sail.

AFRAEL.

Then see the power of love's insanity !
Lo ! from this petty port of earth we break,
And through the shoreless ocean of the air,
Where continent is none, and starry isles
Are all that dot its blue immensity,
Sailless we sail !

NOEMA.

Oh ! we have quit the ground,
And stand on air ! Fear flushes all my veins.
Thou art too rash. I own thy wondrous power ;
But be content with its brief exercise,
And render me to earth while yet 'tis time ;
And, dropping prudence in the other scale,
Balance thine over-fond temerity !

AFRAEL.

O my most lightsome burden ! what dost fear ?
Dost thou not feel, even as I, that 'tis
Our even wings of love that bear us on ?
See ! not a plume of my own pinion moves,
But in its downy crevices thy head,
Thy golden-tress'd head, recumbent rests.

Dread nothing, thou fair load! I feel thy weight
No more than thou feel'st mine.

NOEMA.

But oh! how fast
The earth recedes from us! I just can see
The glittering roofs of home which dearer grow
As grow they dimmer, and the convex tops
Of the tall palm-trees gleam like drops of dew,
Drinking the moonlight. Now can I nought descry
But the bold stem of the defiant Tower,
Which seems to follow. What, if Irad woke!
My beautiful Irad! if he came to harm!
When, when shall we return?

AFRAEL.

Almost as soon
As the moon takes to clear herself from cloud,
When first she rises in a dappled sky,
Contending with obstruction.

NOEMA.

Why, we seem
To be upon a level with her light,
And like as though she raced us through the air.
How large and luminous she seems!

AFRAEL.

We are
As far from Earth as she is, and from her
But half such journey. Even as we speak,
Behold! she drops below us.

NOEMA.

Ay, and seems
From us to move as whilom did the Earth,
Whilst we appear self-poised and motionless.

AFRAEL.

'Tis an illusion of thy earthly sense,
Thou canst not quite shake off. She moves, but we
Move yet more quickly.

NOEMA.

Smaller now she wanes,
Shining no larger than when seen from Earth,
And look! there is a planet under us,
Twinkling like Saturn, and about as far
Beneath, as he above on winter nights.
What may it be?

AFRAEL.

That is the Earth, we have left.

NOEMA.

The Earth! Why, 'tis as bright as any star!

AFRAEL.

Because it is a star, and all the stars
Have this much earthly in their government,
They are the mirrors, not the face of light;
Reflecting the great aspect of the sun,
Which, in himself too bright to look upon,
Would else through trackless space shine on unglassed.

NOEMA.

But is Earth hung in space?

AFRAEL.

Through space it moves,
Since that in space is nothing stationary.
For motion, mastering all things, sets them free,
That else would rot in sluggish servitude.

NOEMA.

Do stars in aught besides resemble Earth?

AFRAEL.

There is no star like to another star;
Nor doth the faintest-twinkling asteroid

Find anywhere its twin. Infinite change
Through infinite succession sways the air.

NOEMA.

And hast thou seen them all?

AFRAEL.

Seen all the stars?

No! nor shall ever see them. Some there be
That I have followed, followed, followed still,
And still, still followed, till my wings waxed faint,
But never overtook. Others there are,
Towards which I have strained my flight for days, for nights,
And days again succeeding, faster far
Than we have journeyed hither, and their light
Ne'er grew one glimmer brighter to my gaze,
Their radius one span broader. Nor do I doubt
That beyond these, yet other planets glow,
Whose distance unattainable compared
With other, further constellations still,
Is nearness' self. Why, look around thee now!
Skies that were late thy canopy, are spread
A glittering carpet far beneath thy feet;
And stars which gleamed like crowns beyond thy reach,
Now like a jewelled girdle hem thee round!
Yet, some bright orbs thou still must recognise,
Nightly familiar to thine earthly ken,

H

Which are as deeply buried in the blue
High overhanging firmament, as when
We lightly bounded from that carnal ball,
We now can see no more.

NOEMA.

How wonderful !

But I begin to faint in this thin air,
And to my dim disordered gaze the stars
Grow giddy, and the constellations swim.
The planets circle wildly, and the sky
Pales to a misty shroud, which, closing in
With ever-dwindling hollow, stifles me.
Ah ! I can fetch no breath !

AFRAEL.

Then let me draw

Thy fair face upwards, till thy shining hair
Falls over thee and me, indifferently,
And, on this shoulder rested, thy warm cheek
Finds a forgetful pillow, where thou mayst
Live by my lips and feed thy breath with mine !
There ! Dost not breathe anew ?

NOEMA.

O yes ! with breath

Freer and fuller than I e'er have drawn,

And infinitely sweeter! Lo! the stars
Resume their stern serenity and keep
Their high appointed places, and the sky
Once more recedes, and blue, blue grows the vault,
And clear the vision of eternal space.

AFRAEL.

And art thou happy? Tell me thou art happy.

NOEMA.

It is no mortal rapture that I feel,
But a strange undercurrent of delight,
Which flows I know not whitherward. But hark!
Surely I heard ethereal music dying
On the attendant air?

AFRAEL.

Thou hast an ear
Quickly attuned to heavenly cadences.
Yes! they are singing in yon nearest stars,
We scud past now.

NOEMA.

Oh! let us halt and list,
An't be not too presumptuous to o'erhear
Celestial concords.

AFRAEL.

Listen then ! They sing.

FIRST STAR.

*I am the star of the Mystic Number,
Breathing the sacred sign
On the brow and the breast of them that slumber,
Lost in a dream divine ;
But when they awake, I their souls forsake,
And my spell remaineth mine.*

SECOND STAR.

*I am the star of the Past and Future,
I am the Present's star,
And the weft and the woof without seam or suture
Of Time I cross and bar,
Endlessly spinning the Never-Beginning,
And linking the Near and Far.*

THIRD STAR.

*I am the Star of the Unforbidden,
I am the Absolute Star,
And, since Ever, with gleaming crest have ridden
Afront the unswerving car,
That noiselessly rolls unto unguessed goals
Against winds that were and are !*

NOEMA.

What sweet seraphic melodies ! albeit
Through the dull cover of my fleshly sense
The tenuous drift of spiritual song
Scarce penetrates.

AFRAEL.

Nor wholly e'en to me !
For music is not meant to speak like speech,
But, like to gleams of sunshine now we see,
Now lose, discerned is but at intervals ;
Whose silences withal by finer ears
Are clearly apprehended. Music is
An under-aspect of the Universe,
A faint expression, quickly ebb'd away
Into itself, beyond life's boundaries.

NOEMA.

Doth every constellation chant like these ?

AFRAEL.

Not all the stars alone, but all things sing.
The smallest mote that flickers in the sun,
Still as it shines keeps humming to itself,
Lending no less than the loud-spinning Spheres
Distinctive but agreeing voice to aid

The universal concert. Not the winds,
These shrilly-throated choristers whose strain
Floats on the deep-toned cloudland's thunder-fugues,
Not the aggressive waves that roar and rise
Above the feeble trebles of the air,
Though they be heard more plainly, swell the choir,
Ruled by the unseen wand of Nature, more
Than Time harmonic, than melodious Space,
Rhythmical numbers, shapes symphonious,
Darkness, and distance, light, proximity,
An endless diapason! All is song.
And if the music of one part could cease,
The whole would perish with it, and were then
One silent undistinguishable void.
But say, art happy still, here in these heights,
Thou late didst pusillanimously deem
Even by love were inaccessible?

NOEMA.

Happy? That word too weighted is with flesh
To speak the floating exultation felt
In this rare region, and my fancy dreams
I feel what thou must feel when scudding smooth,
Alone, in these thy native latitudes;
That, as I soar, I liker grow to thee,
Till, all unconscious of the cumbrous load

Which is my very consciousness below,
I seem to be of carnal rind disrobed,
And not so much a tenant of the sky
As a mere skyey shape or phantasy,
Shifting with every current of the air,
And owing all sensation unto it.
Say do I limn thy life, and dost thou feel
Like this, when thine imponderable form,
By me unhampered, buoyantly ascends
Unto those heights, to which these heights are depths?

AFRAEL.

Thou hast described it rarely, but not told
How the affections of thy frame are stirred
Towards him who brought thee hither. Lov'st me more,
Or lov'st me less, now that we sail serene
Through unconditioned ether, and respire
The breath that feeds the brightly-throbbing stars?

NOEMA.

More, measurelessly more! for there below
I did not, dared not, love thee! I was cramped
By the chill shackles of forbidding fear,
By the injunctions of distrustful sense,
And much which thou, a Spirit, wot'st not of.
Here am I free to let my longings range

Up all the heights of spiritual space,
Where, as it seems to my unfettered pulse,
There only rules the Infinite and thou,
Which are as one, whom I, their subject, serve.
But thou, thou dost not tell me of thy love,
As when we clung to Earth. Is it that here,
Here in this rarefied and subtle realm,
Whilst love of mortal for immortal burns
To a befitting spire of purity,
That of immortal for a mortal finds
No proper medium, and hence all goes out?

AFRAEL.

O no! not all; nor could the very top
Of highest Heaven that flame so rarefy,
That it should issue in a vaporous void.
Yet, will I own, that strange volcanic want,
Which hotly in the nether world convulsed
My being, still kept subsiding as we soared,
Till, in this final zenith of our quest,
My love is more like memory than hope,
Like stalled content than roaming appetite.

NOEMA.

Ah! then I fear that thou dost love me less
Than once thou didst. Oh! let us back to Earth!

AFRAEL.

Swift, an thou wilt. See, even now we drop,
And as we sink, down,—down,—a rain of stars
Seems to be falling too, in golden showers.
But when we reach the Earth, wilt love no
more,
And wilt afresh, hide up this heaving breast,
Fearlessly bared under the firmament?

NOEMA.

Earth will demand its forfeit doubtlessly
For such a daring trespass, since the skies
Seem to begrudge us perfect happiness.
Thou from thy sapphire element must swoop
And taste the grey dull atmosphere of Earth,
Ere through thy wings the thrill of mortal love
Can make itself a channel; whilst that I
Need to be lifted to inhuman heights,
Before the vile integument falls off
Which there betrays my lowly lineage,
And I surrender my essential self
To lofty sympathies. O Fate perverse!
Thus never are we balanced, but the scales
Of Spirit and sense alternate sink and rise,
And one but helps the other out of reach!

AFRAEL.

Is there no even region of the air
In which Love's dual bliss may trembling hang,
Yet never lose its equilibrium?
Lo! comes the moon, the furrowed moon, in sight,
And as we near Earth's care-worn tributary,
Again the strange tumultuous trouble 'gins
To ripple 'mong my pinions, and I grow
More intimately conscious thou art there,
There with each warmly undulating tress,
There with thy temples smooth, there with thine eyes
Thy faintly parted lips, thy dimpled throat,
And all thy solid shapely attributes.

NOEMA.

Oh speak not thus! for I too 'gin to grow
Too much aware of my gross quality,
To own this lumpish body, and thy words
But hammer deeper in my ringing brain
The penetrating knowledge.

AFRAEL.

Shall we then
Ascend once more towards the cerulean dome,
Beneath whose never-reached but nearer vault
This misty trouble of the flesh would seem

To be dispelled? Say yes but with thine eyes,
And up we soar, swifter than now we sink,
Into the lap of unimagined zones,
There to be lulled in free beatitude!
Say quickly, quickly! for behold! the moon
No longer is below us, and the sheen
Of her straight light strikes on thy pallid face.

NOEMA.

No! hasten we adown! and ne'er again
Must I, poor earthly mendicant, invade
The rich celestial palace of the sky.
Tell me, O tell me, we are descending still.

AFRAEL.

Swift as a Spirit ever can descend.
See, sails the moon above us now, and look!
We dip into a silvery cloud, which speaks
That we have crossed the frontier that divides
The hazeless Heavens from Earth's outlying mists.

NOEMA.

Then let us part at this clear boundary
Betwixt our hostile homes; thee to thy sky,
Thy happy sky, me to sad Earth repair!
Thou that hast had the witchery to uplift
This sordid burden to resplendent spheres,

Enough of heavenly cunning sure dost own
To drop me gently down, through what remains
Of intervening void, to dullard Earth,
Whilst that thou, shaken loose of this brute clod,
Wingest thy way in joyful solitude
Through undetermined spaces, me forgot
Amid the rapturous singing of the stars!

AFRAEL.

Forgotten, thou! Not till the stars forget
To change their watches at the appointed hour:
Not till the sun, to suck into himself
The froward comet's trail disorderly,
And feed upon its fire: not till the moon,
To journey, patient, by the side of Earth,
Lest this should miss the trackway in the night;
No, nor e'en then! for though moon, sun, and stars
Should, in despite, grow revolutionary,
My steady light of love for thee would keep
A never-changing orbit, and return
Unto thyself, the point it started from!
Nor will I quit thee here, even though thou shouldst
Float down to Earth as safe as gossamer;
But I, who was thy convoy to the skies,
Will pilot thee until thou reach the port
Whence we embarked on our sweet enterprise.

Behold ! that haven glimmers into ken,
And fast we drift towards it.

NOEMA.

Ha ! the Earth !
Art sure thou still hast power to buoy me up ?
I feel so heavy, and so like to sink.

AFRAEL.

Smooth down the ruffled plumes of foolish fear !
For though thou somewhat heavier hang'st than when
We remote ether ranged, and though it seems
As if the Earth were tugging at thy feet,
My lightness lighter grows as we descend,
And through the denser volume of the air
I drop with effort.

NOEMA.

Ah ! there blabs the truth !
I help to drag thee down.

AFRAEL.

Nay, say not that !
Thou only dost for me near Earth what I
Essayed erewhile to do for thee near Heaven,
And thus acquit'st thy debt. Look ! there is the Tower
Splitting the night !

NOEMA.

Then, are we very near.
How impotent and feeble now it seems !
Why, were the Earth piled all on end, it would
Scarce make a visible finger-post to Heaven.
And oh ! I see the snow-white tents of home
Smooth in the moonlight, and the palm-trees tall,
Those never-changing sentinels, that stand
Mute at the portals. Heed lest we alight
On their broad tops. . . . I dizzy grow once more,
And—and——

SCENE V.—*The Earth. The tents of ARAN.*

AFRAEL.

Behold ! in safety thou hast lit.

NOEMA.

Yes ! 'tis the solid ground on which we stand.
Thanks, O most dexterous Spirit ! for nor air,
Nor earth, hath ever seen so true a guide.
But spare me now, nor me ungracious deem,
If straight I haste to see how Irad sleeps.

AFRAEL.

So thou return, I would not wish thee nay.

— [NOEMA *enters the chief tent, and hurries to the spot where she left IRAD sleeping.*

NOEMA.

My boy! my boy! Art safe within thy crib,
Or have the dark divinities of air
Pilfered my earthly treasure, to amerce
My unpermitted trespass on their fields?
No! there he lies, all coiled into himself,
A heap of rosy sleep; one chubby hand
Dimpling the pillow, while his unkempt curls
Over the delicate sinless temples stray,
And a warm moisture dewes his round, soft cheeks.
Oh! thou art fairer to thy mother's eye
Than brightest constellation, and her choice
Would be to sit enslaved to thy small wants,
Rather than sweep the skies from end to end
Upon the pinions of sublime desire!

[*She snatches him up, and kisses him tenderly.*

IRAD (*waking*).

What is it, mother?

NOEMA.

Nothing, my sweet boy,
Save that I love thee, and did yearn to fold
Thy form within my arms! Now, sleep again,
And the light wings of unseen angels be
Thy curtain, and their hymns thy lullaby!

[Exit from the tent, and returns to the open air.]

AFRAEL.

I wager thou didst find him fast asleep:
We have been gone so shortly.

NOEMA.

Yes, he slept.

AFRAEL.

His name I know, for I have heard thee say it,
But even now am ignorant of thine,
Though thee I know so thoroughly. Tell it me.

NOEMA.

They call me Noema.

AFRAEL.

What a sweet name!
Liquid as dew, and fanciful as light!
Dear Noema!

NOEMA.

Are Spirits signified
By sounding appellations, like ourselves?

AFRAEL.

I in my star as Afrael am known.

NOEMA.

Then to thy star, O Afrael, return,
For we must part!

AFRAEL.

And when to meet again?

NOEMA.

When Heaven and Earth shall meet, but not before!

AFRAEL.

They have met now, for they have met in *thee*.

NOEMA.

Only because thy phantasy projects
Thyself in me, no otherwise.

AFRAEL.

Not so.

It is not thou, in sooth, whom I would mend

By any flimsy attribute of mine,
But I who would this shadowy framework fill
With thy substantial shape. O Noema!
I feel a want I never felt before,—
A want to be like thee! to own thy form,
Thy flesh, thy strange, resisting properties.
For now I cannot touch thee as I would;
And as I strain to fold my wings around
Thy body beautiful, I fail to clutch
Its definite perfections, and they seem
Still to escape, whilst my own being thrills
With purposeless strong motions, like a wind
That blows, and blows, with nought to blow
against!

NOEMA.

Why dost talk thus? For language so intense
Doubles my fearsome doubts. Thou art a Spirit,
But seem'st to have caught contagion from the
flesh;
And I can only bid thee swift return
Up to yon pure and passionless domicile,
That is to thee and thine indigenous,
And leave this squalid tenement, this me,
To its degraded inmates, whose defect
It is to grovel on their native ground,
Nor feed on aught beyond!

AFRAEL.

Why, thou didst feed
With a most eager appetite on air,
As though it were thy natural provender!
Hast thou forgot so soon what lofty joy
Thy lightened senses took in upper worlds?
Look! I will talk no more to thee of Earth,
Nor of the new affections it hath bred
Within my bosom, but my constant speech,
Like to myself, shall to the skies revert,
So thou again be my companion.
Come with me now, or come when next thou wilt,
But yield me this assurance, that henceforth
My heavenly tent of blue, no winds uproot,
Shall be thy residence, or that at least
Thou there wilt choose thy home, and make below
But rare and hasty sojourn, borne by me
Backwards and forwards, but with me always!

NOEMA.

How fatuous is love! Dost deem, since once
'Twas granted us together safe to scale,
Then plunge from, the sheer precipice of Heaven,
That I, poor worm, for ever could discard
This crawling coat and prone defect of flesh,
And fledged with lightness, flit from star to star,

Or, an I might, that their invaded fires
Would not resent my wings, and I should drop,
A shrivelled nauseous cinder, back to Earth?
Already like a dream the memory floats
Of that outrageous journey, and I shudder,
Thinking of such a venture safe surpassed.

AFRAEL.

Make it once more with me, then wilt thou know
It is no dream, and nought to shudder at.

NOEMA.

O no! no! no! In gardens of the air
I an exotic were, and quick should pine
For the moist soil of Earth! My roots are here,
And, moved, my leaves were withered soon in Heaven.
But never could I make thee understand,
Though I exhausted all the craft of speech,
And left unused no last hyperbole,
How literal, tame, yet tyrannous are the links
Which tie me to the ground, and these, nor love,
Nor virtue any, e'er could overcome.
I will not name them; I should talk a tongue
To Spirits happily unknown. One bond,
One will I indicate, which, though it stood
Singly, would hold me fast. Thou canst not guess
Maternity's sweet servitude, nor know

How tightly mothers hug their self-wrought chains.
Here, 'fore thy wings, I fling myself, and crave
Thy pity, and thy pardon!

AFRAEL.

Nay, rise, rise!
Thou must not kneel to me! 'Twere to invert
All order, instinct, honour, decency.

NOEMA.

Then hear me thus erect, yet humbled quite!
It were a wasteful exercise of words
To praise thee, or to thank. Thou art too high
For me to extol, too kindly to repay.
But count me not to comeliness all blind,
Nor unto gentle deeds insensible,
Cold, calculating, stony, all that's base,
If I from thee and heavenly glimpses turn,
To clutch the cradle where my Irad sleeps.
Thou hast been good to me, too good, too kind,
Too condescending; but, O glorious Spirit!
I could not leave him e'en to lodge with thee!
Were there no other hindrance, this one bar
Would stand betwixt complete communion.
And 'mid the splendid vastness of the skies,
Charmed by thy voice, charmed by the planets' song,
And my dwarf nature magnified by thine,

My ears would listen for his little shout,
My lips grow drouthy for his April kiss,
And all my heart feel empty, because drained
Of the sweet freshening waters which he struck
Straight from this arid desert rock, when first
I felt him struggling feebly in my womb!
Leave me! nay, leave me! and return to Heaven!

AFRAEL.

Return to Heaven! That were impossible,
Save thou come too! Thou hast unheavened the
Heavens.
And better pluck the sun from his high throne,
Than leave that empty which awaits thy light!
But dost thou, then, love Irad;—him alone?

NOEMA.

I said not so.

AFRAEL.

But thou dost love him more
Than—all; than anything?

NOEMA.

Nay, press me not!
Enough! I could not leave him.

AFRAEL.

Let him come.

Thou him canst bear, and I will bear you both.
For he would love to ride upon the air,
Gambol among the soft unhurtful clouds,
And make his playmates of the wandering winds,
As childish and unpurposed as himself.
Let me interrogate his will, and know
Would he not gladly bear us company.

NOEMA.

O, thou art mad! Love ever warped the brain,
And did the stoutest judgment safe distort.

AFRAEL.

Because Love is the only one thing straight,
And seeks its course direct; twisting and snapping
The shifty thoughts that block its honest path.
Let drop this hesitation to the ground!
Rid of its cumbrous folds, thou wilt ascend,
Easier than erst, up to thy proper home.

NOEMA.

I do not hesitate: I am resolved.

AFRAEL.

Resolved to banish me ! to make my wings
But exiles in their native territory,
And in the very air where I was fledged,
Doom me to roam a stranger !

NOEMA.

Even so,
If so it even must be. Now, farewell !
The Night begins to waver in her sleep,
And dream uneasily ; she soon will wake.
Didst thou not hear a shiver in the trees ?
'Twas an outriding skirmisher of Morn,
That scared them, and has now hied back to bid
Day's glittering legions bodily to advance.

AFRAEL.

O no ! that was a sentry of the Night
Pacing his rounds. Dark yet has nought to fear,
But from its covert frowns impregnable.
Drive me away not yet !

NOEMA.

I must ! I must !
For though the night held out, it would not shield
My fears 'gainst other, dreader enemies.

The parley at the Tower must now be closed,
And Aran even now be on his way.

AFRAEL.

May I not linger till he comes?

NOEMA.

O no!

No! For that were—— Indeed thou must not stay!
I see a something moving through the gloom.
It will be he. Didst thou not hear a step?

AFRAEL.

Nor hear nor see I aught, but only thee.
When first I was thy guest, thou bad'st me bide
Till Aran's coming. Why may I not bide now?

NOEMA.

Oh! then 'twas different. But—but—rend me not
With these excruciating probes! but go!
Go, as thou lov'st me!

AFRAEL.

Ah! then, go I must,
Since thou dost turn my weapons 'gainst myself,
And love confound'st with love's own arguments.
O unfair shaft! But when may I return?

NOEMA.

Not soon ; no, nor for long : I fain would say,
Never ! but cannot say it ! Go, go now !
I hear his footstep : I am sure 'tis he !
I must go in, and leave thee.

AFRAEL.

Then, farewell !

[He folds his wings widely around her.]

Farewell, but not for ever !

[He unfolds his wings, ascends into the air, gazing back, but silent, and disappears.]

NOEMA (*sol.*)

Gone ! He is gone !

And I it was that sent him ! O, come back !
Come back, and fold me in thy plumes once more,
And kiss me, not at one particular point,
But, as it seemed, with all thy wings at once !
'Tis well he cannot hear me. 'Chance, he doth,
And that the faithless dark unto the night
Betrays my madness. It were better hushed !
I will go in. How giddy I do feel !
Those wings ! Those wings ! . . . This is the way, I think,
And this . . . what an embrace ! . . . this, this the spot
Where Irad—Irad. . . . Come to me, my boy !

[She swoons against the crib where IRAD soundly sleeps.]

SCENE VI.—NOEMA *still lying senseless against IRAD'S crib.*

IRAD *asleep.* Enter ARAN.

ARAN (*rousing NOEMA*).

What ails thee, Noema? Why liest thou here?
Why not abed and sleeping?

NOEMA (*slowly opening her eyes*).

Afrael! . . .

Ha! Aran!

ARAN.

Yes: whom else wouldst thou expect?

NOEMA.

None, surely. But I was not yet awake.
I must have fallen asleep.

[*Rises from the ground.*]

What can I get thee?

ARAN.

Nothing.

NOEMA.

And how didst prosper at the Tower?

ARAN.

Rarely ! 'spite Korah's ill-knit prophecies,
And Peleg's knock-kneed fears ! Rarely, to-night !
I baffled them still better than this morn.
And ere another week of bondage crawls
To its tame end, will our determined point
Confront the haughty firmament, eye to eye,
And with Earth's menace equal Heaven's disdain.
Yet Peleg plots to balk me still, and finds
In Korah an accomplice. Dreamers both,
And slaves to the Unseen ! 'Tis action wins,
And common wants, led by uncommon will.

NOEMA.

Betwixt the seen and the Unseen who shall draw
Infallible distinction ? Couldst behold
What I this night beheld, thou wouldst no more
Tether thy reason to some narrow plot,
But give it scope to range through fenceless space,
With Fancy for its consort.

ARAN.

What didst see ?

NOEMA.

I saw the Heavens and all the world of air
And festive Midnight's burnished cressets swung,

Invisibly, and in their motion free,
From the deep azure ceiling of the sky.
And I heard the planets sing, and watched the Earth
Dwindle in distance to a doubtful speck,
Then dwarfed beyond the cunning of the eye
To say 'twas anywhere.

ARAN.

I doubt thee not,
For thou wert ever of a dreaming mind,
Nor, when I caught thee prone by Irad's crib,
That thou such flimsy visions didst conceive.
But what of that? Sure now thou art awake,
And seest the Unseen was not seen at all.
How wouldst thou help our unfantastic work?
For somnolency's fumes yet never baked
One solid brick, nor slumber's filmy stuff
Provide the stable slime to set it with.

NOEMA.

'Twas in no dream that I the Heavens beheld,
But with the open eyes which on thee look.
Whilst thou didst hold convention at the Tower,
I through ethereal strata piercing soared,
And proved, with my own sense, that did each course
Of thy presumptuous masonry annul

A league, and not a span, thou still wouldst strain
More idly at the sky than doth yon child,
A-tiptoe, towards some tantalising toy,
By thee at arm's-length held above thy head.

ARAN.

Spread thyself now one foot above the ground,
And stay there twenty seconds!

NOEMA.

Oh! I could not.
Earth lets not earth unaided quit its side;
'Tis too exacting. Spirit it was that loosed
My inert matter from the ground, and bore
This burden upwards; the same comely Spirit,
Who came unto our tents one twilight eve,
And twice has come again.

ARAN.

And ever comes
When there is none but thou to testify.
Conclusive witness, truly! Like enough,
He is a bubble of thy frothy brain,
Blown through the pipe of fancy. But if not,
And that some specious vagabond of air
Have with his idle wings and subtle talk

Seduced thine ear, and cozened all thy sense,
Why, dost not see, e'en blindworm as thou art,
That such a tricky conjuror could cheat
Thy wildered credence so, thou hast wouldst
swear

Thou hadst been round the Universe, while sooth
Thou hadst but shut thine eyes and opened
them?

Tush! 'tis too childish. . . . Why, if Irad, there,
Babbled such folly, thou wouldst purge him
straight,

Or whip him into soundness. Get thee to bed,
And sleep thyself—back into sanity!

[*Exit.*

NOEMA (*sol.*)

Back into sanity! Am I insane?
Sometimes it nigh would seem so. For the hold
Which this conjunction with the gross maintains
Upon my lighter essence, bids me doubt
The wisdom of all longings to escape.
Do sane birds beat the bars of their small cage?
Do they not rather nibble the trim seed,
And drink the punctual water set for them,
Singing, for payment, taught if curtailed song?
Ay, it *is* madness, to aspire beyond
The unyielding limits of our quality;

And sanity, which turns the homely spit,
Trudges its narrow round contentedly,
And sups with satisfaction! Sane I am not,
Or life's recurring service would suffice.
Were it not well to touch the rest in all,
Touching them in so much? I have a body,
Sight, hearing, sense, members, and appetites,
Needs, aches, fatigues, pleasures, infirmities,
Twin unto theirs? Why then not twin all round?
Because I am insane, and they are not.
Is that the reason? Irad has a toy,
He sometimes plays with, where he jerks a ball,
Away from him it seems, but ere the string
Which holds it snaps, swift pulls it back again,
And lo! it drops into a hollow cup
That fits it most exactly! So this Something,
Which would into Infinity fly off,
To spin unfettered, Something trifles with,
But to draw back into a petty scoop!
Yet am I so insane, as but to dream
The deepest and most solid thoughts that dig
Into me their foundation? Did I dream
That I surveyed the Heavens? O no! no!
For dreams may be recalled, but never yet
Were dreams felt after waking; and I feel
The tingling sense of those enfolding wings

Even more than when they closely wrapped me round,
And shook me to convulsive consciousness.
O sweet insanity! take all that's sane,
And leave me nought but madness!

[She again sinks into a swoon.]

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*The upper air. Deep night. AFRAEL alone.*

AFRAEL.

“NOT soon, no, nor for long; I fain would say,
Never! but cannot say it!” . . . How those words
Stop up my ears, and block the aperture
To the suggestions of all other sound!
Organs unheard the thunder, and the wheels
Of the impetuous planets deafly spin
Upon their axes musical, and dumb
The chorus of the stationary stars.
“Not soon, no, nor for long.” How soon? How long?
All soon is late, all long vain longing seems,
Timed by the impatient tick of gaining Love.
For the dead sand let but quick pulses serve,
And fully half Eternity hath run
Through the exhausted passage of my heart,
Since last I looked on her! . . . “I fain would say,
Never! but cannot say it.” Yet it feels

E'en now as though that Never were my doom!
And she by Love enjoined me! O safe chain!
Which he who wears is plighted not to break,
Thou art as light and frail as gossamer,
Yet Fate could forge none tighter! When will it end,
This temporary banishment that seems
More than eternal? I have hovered oft
Around her dwelling when she was not there,
And hung above her tent whenas she slept,
And from the fragrance she exhales in dreams
Returned to ether, empty!

[He soars silently higher into the air and poises again.]

What an expanse!
Worlds upon worlds, and stars on stars revolve,
Through still-beginning distance. Systems vast
Within yet outer systems spacious move,
And these but inner to yet other rounds,
Themselves but puny circles shut in space!
Yet care I for one only merest mote
Within this shining concave unconvexed,
One speck whereof I ne'er surrender sight,
But still keep plying a short restless wing,
From this last point whence gleams it visible,
To where it round dilates and fills the eye;
Then again back, thence back again once more,
In ceaseless iteration! Other track

Know I not now, nor have I any flight
For all the countless avenues of Heaven.

[He descends rapidly once more, nor pauses till he reaches the Earth, where he alights on the topmost storey of the Tower.]

What a high perch ! This is a wondrous work,
And wondrous they who build it, even if vain.
How big and black it leans against the night,
Sleeping on darkness ! 'Tis a giddy height,
Even for one who gazes from the sky
Into the deeps of space ; for, there, no top,
Nor bottom, nor between, resists the sense,
But all is absolute ; whilst here the eye,
Shrinking to what it looks on, makes compare,
And finds an awful contrast. How deserted,
Silent, and still ! No figure flits or moves
'Mong its prodigious balconies ; no step
Stirs on the spiral rounds of its huge stairs ;
And, coiled within its walls, e'en Echo sleeps !
Why cannot Spirits sleep ? O would that I
Could ever and anon in slumber sheathe
This too sharp edge of wakeful appetite,
That cuts the sense so keenly ! . . . What was that ?
Methought I heard the waving of a wing,
And even felt its sweep ! No ! it was nought.
No Spirits hie this way. I see the stars,

But from their occupants have strayed remote.
I stand above the things that nightly sleep.
Lo! yonder are her tents! *She* sleeps within,
And I watch here, no nearer than if hosts
Of roomy constellations rolled between.
She doth not even know that I am here;
Yet her inert unconsciousness hath power
To draw and keep me towards her!

A VOICE.

Afrael!

AFRAEL.

Who calls my name? And what wouldst have with me?

SECOND VOICE.

What wouldst *thou* have? Thou art a Spirit by birth,
By Spirit still unfed.

AFRAEL.

Who question me?

I hear you speak, but cannot fix your forms.

THIRD VOICE.

We are but Voices; Voices are not seen.
Answer, if thou wouldst find a remedy
To the defect thou wailest thus aloud.

AFRAEL.

I am enamoured of a mortal shape.

FIRST VOICE.

We know it, or we had not questioned thee.
But what with mortal shape hast thou to do?
What wantest thou with her?

AFRAEL.

With her to dwell:
In the high Heavens, or on the lowlier Earth,
But somewhere, anywhere, so not apart
From her who draws me ever!

SECOND VOICE.

Know'st thou not,
She in the Heavens, a mortal, cannot dwell,
Though with audacious pinions thou hast once
That child of dust obtruded on the sky?
She is on Earth: on Earth she must abide.

AFRAEL.

Then let me thither drop, to abide there too!
The Heavens have lost their savour, and the light
Of the interminable ether seems

But darkness more apparent. She is my sun ;
And all is tenebrous where she is not.

THIRD VOICE.

Saner than thou, she knoweth that no Spirit
Can be her consort ; that a ban as dim,
But indestructible, as that which holds
Darkness and light, silence and sound, apart,
Keeps thee and her asunder. Ye cannot blend,
Whilst thou immortal, mortal she, remains.

AFRAEL.

Then let me doff this immortality,
Which is but immortality of want,
And be a mortal, wanting only her,
But crowning want with winning !

FIRST VOICE.

Thou art aware,
For she herself hath told thee, what it is
To be a mortal. Thou wouldst surely die.

AFRAEL.

I fain would die, an I must live like this.
Can that be deemed a forfeit, if I gain,
Which I should count a prize, if I must lose ?

Better to live and die, than not to live:
And this is vacancy; this is not life!

SECOND VOICE.

Bethink thee yet again!

AFRAEL.

Oh! I have thought
Till thinking is a weariness. If ye
Have power to clip these useless wings, and fix
My limber essence to some mortal type,
Exert it now!

THIRD VOICE.

We have no power; for we
Are Voices only. Force resides elsewhere,
Where thou must seek it.

AFRAEL.

Where? Quick, tell me where!

FIRST VOICE.

The force thou seekest for, is lodged on Earth.
There only wilt thou find it.

AFRAEL.

I have been there,
But thence returned with only a vague want,

A penetrating hunger, a desire
That droops for lack of kindred nourishment,
That droops but dies not.

SECOND VOICE.

Ask thy mortal love.
She can assist thee.

AFRAEL.

How?

THIRD VOICE.

By mortal Love!
She can endue thee with consuming flesh,
And burn thy wings to ashes. Tell her that,
And see if she will aid thee.

AFRAEL.

What! If she
But once consents to help me rend the film
Which floats between us, I shall then assume
A mortal semblance, and, with flesh equipped,
Be armed to live, her life's companion?

FIRST VOICE.

So!

SECOND VOICE.

Even so!

THIRD VOICE.

Ay, even so it is!

AFRAEL.

And when may I demand this certain boon?

[*A pause.*]

The Voices answer not. Are ye then gone,
Ye misty messengers? Speak once again,
If to assure me that I heard ye right;
That ye were Voices verily, and not
Mere echoes of soliloquising love!
Where hide ye, unseen sounds? No answer comes,
And even silence hath absorbed them now!
Yet were they oral then, nor did I thrust
My thought into their speech. My thought! I ne'er
Could conjure such a craft as they project.
But I conceive it now, and, as I live,
They bade me go to Noema and pluck,
Where I did catch contagion, there my cure.
O sweet enchantress! When wilt work the spell?
For I am sick with thy disease, and fret
To drink thy drastic medicine!

A VOICE.

Afrael!

AFRAEL.

O what a melancholy Voice was that !
Distinct from any of the trinity
That hailed me first. Sad Voice ! why dost thou call,
Or why at least respond not ?

ANOTHER VOICE.

Afrael !

AFRAEL.

Another wailing tongue ! What ails the air,
That it is charged with sadness, and my name
Seems the one sigh that lifts its weariness ?
O that the curtain of the night would split,
And show the morning ! For I then should fly,
To her who hath no torments in her tongue,
From these distressful weepings of the wind.

MANY VOICES.

O Afrael ! Afrael ! wilt thou leave us, Afrael !

AFRAEL.

Be still, ye droning sycophants of woe !
Ye servile specious mourners ! or float up
To yonder ether fanciful, that is

Like to yourselves, pale and impalpable.
Thus do I quit you !

*[He lifts his wings, and, leaving the Tower,
wends his way through the air.]*

SCENE II.—*The hour just before dawn. The sky dark and troubled.
Rising ground on the outskirts of a wood. An altar of fagots,
on which lies a white he-goat, its feet bound, and its horns wreathed
with flowers. PELEG—KORAH—a crowd of Bondsmen.*

PELEG.

Wait till the first streaks of the crimson dawn,
The unspeaking heralds of the Lord, announce
He with His hand hath driven away the dark,
And given the daylight leave to move from sleep.
He made the sea, He made the solid land,
He made the clouds, the air, the spreading wrack,
Stars, and the moon, and the unquenched light
Of the round-rolling sun. He made them all.
He raised His arm, and lo ! the mountains swelled,
Obedient to His drawing. He breathed, and straight
The waters fled before Him, and the torrents,
Following the channels of His glancing eye,
Took their allotted courses. The deep sea
He scooped out with the hollow of His hand,

Then spake, and swift the great waves filled it up,
And took their moaning from His mighty voice.
The valleys were His digging, and the plains
Crouched at His bidding and lay stretch'd out.
He willed it and the waters swarmed with life,
The air flashed dark with pinions, and the earth,
Touched by His finger, teemed with walking things,
Four-footed beasts, and limbs that crawl the ground.
The thunders are His messengers, the clouds
His footstool, and the winds fulfil His word ;
And light and darkness, in their changes, are
The awful aspects of His countenance !
Fear then the Lord your God, for He is great,
Encompassing the things He made, and sworn
To be avenged on them that fear Him not.

[He pauses and gazes at the eastern sky.]

The dawn yet breaks not, for the Lord your God
Is angry with His people. Ye have strayed
Far from His paths, have hearkened not His voice,
And now the earth's foundations are disturbed,
And tremble at His wrath. The tempests wake,
And are grown livid with your wickedness.
Ye have forsaken His commands, and ta'en
The ordinance of man upon your backs,
And builded up yon proud rebellious Tower,
To pry into His secrets, that He hides

Within the dazzling darkness of the Heavens.
I will beseech His mercy, that He stay
The scourge of His right hand, and seek to turn
The straightness of His anger with the smoke
And savour of this whole-burnt-offering.
For He doth love the flesh of kids and goats,
When tendered Him with pure and humble hearts.
But tarries still the dawn, and ye must bide
The lifting of his eyelids.

*[He turns away to the altar, and the Bondsmen gather
round, KORAH and SIDON in their midst.]*

CROWD OF BONDSMEN.

Korah speaks.

Let us hear Korah ; Korah ever leans
Upon the bondsman's side.

KORAH.

Yes, friends ! I lean
Towards the feeble and oppressed ; and ye
Are crushed like corn, ay, beaten with the flail
Of the oppressor's greed. If ye avert
Your eyes from Heaven, now whither shall ye turn ?
The ground is set against you, and the lords
Of the abundant earth begrudge your mouths
The forage for your limbs, and grind you down,
Even as the corn is ground between the stones,

And the stones eat not. Look! I bid ye take
Earth, and Earth's fulness, and the fruits thereof,
Nor from its harvests wish to be estranged.
Ye are Earth's sons, like as your tyrants are,
And, like your tyrants, ye must wring the soil
Till it gives forth its treasures. But whilst Heaven
Stands on your side, with Heaven remain allied,
And listen unto Peleg when he prays.
Hark! he would speak to you again.

[PELEG turns again to the people. As he does
so, the first red streaks of dawn appear in
the sky, and a crowd of Freemen are seen
hurrying up, led by ARAN.]

PELEG.

Now doth the Lord command His unseen hosts
To strike the tents of darkness, and up-furl
The skirts of night and slumber; and the day
Comes forth apparelled from His glorious hand.
So will we offer now a holocaust,
This ram without a stain, and cry to Him,
To spare His people, even though they have,
Urged by the wicked, planted yon tall Tower
Full in His presence!

[The crowd of Bondsmen begin to be agitated, to
whisper among themselves, and to turn their
eyes in the direction of the rapidly approach-
ing Freemen. PELEG continues.]

Hitherward they come,
The wicked who have urged you and have forged
Chains 'gainst the Lord their God, and made ye raise
A rampart for their cunning. But, stand firm,
And put your trust in Him in Whose just sight
Bondsmen are free, freemen are slaves, so these
Rebel against His face, and those obey.

KORAH.

Yes, flinch not, worthy friends! Now is the hour
To rise against your chains and shake them off.
Tower or no Tower, why should ye hew them wood
And draw them water? They have arms like you,
Whilst to your palate, as to theirs, the tongue
Of thirsty aspiration hotly cleaves.
Are ye not flesh and blood? What more are they,
That they should wield the whip, and ye should wince
Beneath its whistling swoop?

[The Freemen rush up, with ARAN at their head.]

ARAN.

How now, ye slaves!
What mean your truant faces, and from whom
Gat ye this empty-handed leave to-day?
'Tis not the seventh morn, and if it were,
Ye shall not loose your palms without our nod.
A pretty tale! whilst flag the kilns for breath,

And the raw slime in unmixed puddles lies,
To turn your slothful backs upon the Tower,
To pipe and frisk beside a summer wood!
Back to your work, or we will flog you to't!
Who hath begot this mutiny in your hearts,
And moved your slow conceptions to rebel?
Ha! 't must be Korah! For I see his front
Peering above your dwarf and narrow brows.
He hath inspired this monstrous holiday,
To feed you with the wind of your desires,
And blow you out with vanity.

[He pushes his way through the Bondsmen, followed by some of his companions, the crowd of Bondsmen being thus split into two parts. As he advances, he perceives PELEG, the altar, and the sacrificial goat.]

So! so!

There's more behind this seeming. I was nigh
To striking at the irritating buzz
Of yonder sacerdotal drone, and letting
The nuisance' self to slip away unhurt!
Workers should sting this idle mouth to death,
That feeds on others' honey, and keeps warm
In comfortable cells the rest contrive.
How dar'st thou, busybody priest, draw off
These toilers from their serviceable task,
To figure in thy feeble pantomime?

FREEMEN.

Now stand aside, ye slaves, nor press around,
But give your betters room to speak and hear.

PELEG.

This is the altar of the Lord, and this
The acceptable sacrifice that turns
His edge of wrath aside. We sport not here,
But seek to stay His vengeance from your heads,
Ye with yon godless edifice provoke.

ARAN.

Keep thy celestial fooling for the hours
When we can spare a chorus for the part.
But thus encroach upon life's serious ground,
Soon shall no more thy superstition cheat
The six days of the sixth part of their sweat,
But toil shall seize the seventh!

KORAH.

Hear him, friends!

Your fetters are not tight enough. He burns
To give the shackles yet another twist,
And leave no space betwixt their clutch and you!
Enslaved to earth, ye now must break with Heaven,
Lest that untrusty hope should lead you on

To find allies much nearer in yourselves,
And subtly teach you how to file your gyves,
And face the sun with freedom.

BONDSMEN.

Long live Korah !
Korah, the bondsman's prophet !

ARAN.

Now, enough !
Hence to your hods, your mortar, and your planks,
Ye catch-fly open-mouthed loons, and 'scape
The scourge that's knotting for you ! Ye are dupes ;
And dupes may yet be saved from penalty,
So they but retch rogues' poison back again.
As for this mouthing mischief-maker here,
Who fills his belly with the Future till
He cannot see the fresh and wholesome ground,—
Peace, wind-bag !

FREEMEN.

Now, ye hounds, will not to work ?

BONDSMEN.

No, we will not ; nor will be hounded more.
We'll stay to see the he-goat offered up.

SIDON.

Assuage ye both? Why do ye clash your tongues?
Why should ye reckon, sirs, if these bondsmen here
Itch for a spectacle, for bondsmen meet?
Or why, ye thoughtless slaves, should ye incense
The hand that flicks the lash? I pray ye both,
Let me make terms between you. Fate is a foe,
That thrives upon men's quarrels. Close your ranks,
And, though ye may not crush your enemy,
Fight not his battles for him. Let me be
Umpire betwixt you!

ARAN.

Tush! Philosopher!
We'll fight with Fate, and them, and thee as well,
Couldst enough wisdom fetch to choose a side,
And cease to make a see-saw of thy wit,
Now up, now down, a child at either end!

FREEMEN.

We will have all: we want no compromise.

BONDSMEN.

Nor umpire, we; for we will give up none.

PELEG (*setting fire to the altar of fagots
from below*).

The Lord decide between you ! for behold
The smoke arises from the ground, and curls
Round and about the ram without a stain.

ARAN.

Sonorous charlatan ! Thus do I break
Thy paltry toys !

[*He rushes at PELEG, thrusts him aside, and
liberates the ram.*]

Now, drive these stray herds home,
Nor spare the whipcord !

[*The Freeman attack the Bondsmen, who snatch
up the kindling brands from the altar to
defend themselves. PELEG and SIDON retire
into different parts of the wood. The Bonds-
men are soon disarmed and beaten and fly
towards the Tower, followed by ARAN and
the Freeman, who flog them as they fly.
SIDON alone is left upon the ground, where
he contemplates the mangled remains of the
ram, which has been trampled to death in
the fray.*]

SCENE III.—*Same hour as in the preceding Scene.* AFRAEL,
poised a league above the Earth.

AFRAEL (*sol.*)

How slowly morning breaks! The upcoming sun
Through the embattled pitchy-volumed clouds
Can barely force his way. Look at him now!
His javelins blunted, and his dazzling shield
Forgotten in his haste to breast the foe,
He hath to fight the battle all unarmed.
Withal, he wins, and through the shattered ranks
Of the resisting wrack he breaks, and lo!
Whilst they with sullen thunder veil the rout,
Dapples his path with blood, until the skies
Are with his conquest all incarnadined.
O, what a crimson triumph!

[*He circles in the air, and gazes round.*]

It is as though
The air were all on fire, and that the wrack
Were smoke of its wide kindling. Never yet
Have I beheld such havoc in the sky.
It seems as though the filmy atmosphere
Had, in the night, of perturbation supped,
And reels unstably. Nothing smooth or soft
Denotes the sky, but under, and above,

Are ravelled clouds and nightmares nebulous.
The axis of the round infinite world
Trembles and tilts untrustily ; and shakes
The Universe with rude unrhythmic spasms.
Order has been unthroned in the spheres,
Calm ravished of its crown, and the mute sceptre
Struck from the hand of regal Harmony !
I can but guess where blackly spins the Earth,
For constellation none, nor wandering star,
Spangles the murky cloak that wraps me round.
Yet will unerring instinct thither guide
My unillumined flight ; for Love, unhelped,
Straight through the heart of darkness strikes a track,
And makes its bourne with certainty. Now growl,
Ye disproportioned thunders ! and ye clouds,
Pile up your shaggy mountains till they bulge
Into the jealous sky's serenest realms,
And make the ether yours ! Let all the air
Confounded be with motions contrary,
Planets roll backwards, and the Heavens distend
With loud infernal laughter ! What is't to me,
Who only want one little point of space,
One nook of shelter which the storm must miss,
If only that *she* hides there ? Leave me that,—
Then let Creation crumble !

*[He prepares to descend to Earth, and as he starts,
he breaks into song.]*

*She is mine, She is mine! Let the lightnings make
Their nests in the downy clouds.
She is mine, She is mine! Let the thunders quake,
As they crouch in the whirlwind's shrouds.
At heights where the eagle's wing would flag,
Where the skylark's note would pine,
I circle as tern round a sea-scourged crag,
And I cry, She is mine! She is mine!*

*I am hers, I am hers! Let the dimpling wave
Creep up to the waiting land;
I am hers, I am hers! Let them kiss, and crave
One couch on the smooth soft sand.
There's a love by which never the shore was rent,
And a want which no ocean stirs;
'Tis the want and the love which my wings torment,
Till I feel I am hers, I am hers!*

*We are one, we are one! Let the planets roll,
Each on his own bright car,
From the lazulite gates to the vermeil goal,
Singly, alone, afar!*

*We, we will revolve in the self-same sphere,
In one orbit our lives shall run,
And from round to round, and from year to year,
Will we sing, We are one, we are one!*

*[He alights upon the Earth, close to the tents of
ARAN. At the same moment NOEMA comes
forth to view the morning.]*

SCENE IV.

AFRAEL.

Exact as echo to a calling voice,
Which takes up the first syllable before
The second's uttered! Thou respondest ere
I could complete my song to call thee forth.
O comprehensive Noema!

NOEMA.

I did not hear thee.
But wherefore hast thou come? Oh! what a dawn!
The air is in the clutches of the wind,
And violently 'gainst its violence
Struggles and shrieks. Dust, leaves, and waifs of nature,
Are whirled and tossed together overhead;
The clouds are torn and frayed; and the sky looks

Like a dim canvas stippled o'er with red.
Oh, I am sore afraid!

AFRAEL.

Fear not, fair thing!
For though the hollow globe, and all that swims
In its conception, should be cracked, and run
To one chaotic mass, my love should make
Another shell around thee, and my wings
Brood on thy part and keep it safe and warm.
Oh, let me show thee how!

[He draws close to her, but she falls back.]

NOEMA.

No! no! Stand off!
Nor yet again envelop thou this form,
Which is too frail for such encompassing!
Why hast thou come? I told thee not to come.
Thou dost not love me, or thou hadst not come!
Thou lovest thyself only.

AFRAEL.

Say not so,
Until thou knowest what has brought me here.
I have a mighty message from the skies.

NOEMA.

About the Tower?

AFRAEL.

No! About thee and me.
Time and Eternity are in thy hands,
And deal them as thou wilt. Thou canst on me
Bestow the flesh-fed flame of mortal life,
And keep it by thee till it be consumed
Unto the final flicker; or thou mayst
Condemn this selfish unsubstantial light
To glow in void unprofitably, through
The weary watches of Eternity.
O speak! then act! and with one magic touch
Transform me into human?

NOEMA.

What! Dost mean
I have a wand to pass thee into flesh,
And thou wouldst have me use it!

AFRAEL.

Ay! even that!
Now conjure quickly, and delay me not,
For all my plumes are ready for the trick.

NOEMA.

How? Change to flesh a spirit! lop thy wings,
And make thy course pedestrian! With my arts

Inject a carnal current in thy veins,
Now lightly stirred by rippling purity!
Dull thy bright shape, put thine effulgence out,
And with base body hobble thee to Earth!
O what a foul, vile sorceress should I be,
Sooth could I work such wicked miracle,
If I conceived to do it!

AFRAEL.

But thou must.
The skies consent, and I implore thee to't!

NOEMA.

Never! Though sky take part against the sky,
And thou against thyself, I will not do it!
Oh! couldst thou with celestial thought surmise
How meagre, starved, and mean a thing is life,—
A cry, a consciousness, a little fume,
And then oblivion,—thou wouldst sooner ask
Some angry star to shrivel up thy wings
And burn thy being with them, than decline
To such a shrunk condition!

AFRAEL.

Thou forget'st!
Unto such change I such a change should bring,
Life would be life no longer, but would house

A more than mortal guest, transcendent Love!
Oh! never in this planet of my hope
Was such a perfect passion e'er conceived,
As we will breed between us, to endow
The starved with strength, the mean and meagre make
Rounded and whole with noble sustenance!
Nay, dally not with argument, but haste
To clasp the grand conclusion!

NOEMA.

Oh! I cannot!
I might as well go league to build the Tower,
As against Heaven attempt such blasphemy!
But who hath promised thee that I can wield
A power so diabolical?

AFRAEL.

Voices,
Unseen, untouched, that were but voice alone,
Yet with authoritative cadence spoke.

NOEMA.

Oh, thou hast dreamt it all,—if spirits dream,—
And chance they do nought else! Thou soon wouldst
find,
If this imputed virtue I essayed,
Thou art the sport of sleepy phantasy.

AFRAEL.

Come then, essay ! Exert thy mortal love !
For herein, said the Voices, lies thy spell,
And prove it on me !

NOEMA.

'Tis impossible !
For I have no such craft, and if I had,
I would not so abuse it.

AFRAEL.

Then 'tis plain,
Thou lov'st me not.

NOEMA.

Oh, but I do !

AFRAEL.

Thou dost !

Then bring that wide avowal to a point,
And do with it as thou must do with me,
Making it definite ! Dost think that I,
If I should see thee sinking, would not save ?
And wilt thou unto me, for ever tossed
On the vague sea of space and shoreless time,
Refuse the restful haven of thy heart ?

M

Tell me thou lov'st me not, and I will go,
A wandering sigh amid the homeless stars.
But if thou lov'st me, love me as Love loves,
And open all thy portals to my knock !

NOEMA.

Why dost thou drive me thus to bay, when there
I needs must turn and rend thee? Afrael !
How I do love thee, neither human voice
Nor song of Spirit ever could devise,
Though they should vanquish Silence, and usurp
The realms of Time with overrunning speech !
But Love is not the monarch of the Earth,
Or with one word from his sufficing mouth
Were sorrow swift abolished. He is but
A poor and scorned conspirator who seeks
To topple down the mighty from their stools,
Wealth, place, presumption, all the filthy brood
Of our gross getting ; to dethrone dull pomp,
Parade, and vanity, the vulgar throng
That wait upon that despot, pride of life,
Whose aping courtiers all the world would be.
And these are his inveterate enemies,
Who, is he caught red-handed in the game,
Straight brand him as a rebel to their rule,
Then leave him to the hootings of the crowd.

AFRAEL.

But we would be his co-conspirators,
To——

NOEMA.

——More than share his doom and penalties!
He is immortal, so they cannot kill him,
Maltreat him as they will, and he survives
Their racks and mocks, ever to plot afresh.
But not so they who would assume his cause.
They can be slain outright, or left to live
With mortifying hearts, or,—direst end!—
Buy from convention a deserter's peace,
And creeping to the alien camp become
The loudest of the persecuting train!

AFRAEL.

Then let them slay us! I am well content
To perish in thy arms, so once I live there!

NOEMA.

Oh! I but speak in vain. Thou art a Spirit
As I so oft have told thee, and the things
Of clay and flesh thou apprehendest not.
I am a slave!—I am not free as thou!—
I have a husband, a contracted lord,

Who draws my body and service after him,
As in the patient camel's desert march,
The fore-foot draws the hinder.

AFRAEL.

Dost thou love him?

NOEMA.

Oh! do not ask! Can we love what is ill?
Have I not owned I love thee? Let it rest.
For I am his, not thine, and so must keep.
E'en wert thou not a Spirit, but warm flesh,
I could not else have answered thee. Nay, it is
Because thou hast its coarse infection sucked,
I know not how, I needs must—well I must
Break off, nor fence keen fact with wordy foil.
Hadst thou been only Spirit! Now,—go, go!
Nor let me ever gaze upon thee more,
Till with death's eyes I can serenely look,
And bid thee safe farewell!

AFRAEL.

Not verily!

What! Wilt thou be to me like hard sea-face,
The poor white waves keep climbing fondly up,
Only to fall again?

NOEMA.

I am not hard.

I am too soft; else mightst thou here remain.
But by my softness I beseech thee, go!

AFRAEL.

Close but those wild white arms, thou spread'st abroad
In vacant misery, once about my form,
Then will I go!

NOEMA.

I dare not, Afrael!

Lest chance that fearsome spell should 'gin to work,
The Voices told thee of. Thou fold, instead,
Round me thy heavenly wings, but not for long!
And, when they loosen, then quick take the air,
Ere I have time to wish them back again!

[He folds his wings closely round her.]

NOEMA.

Oh! what bliss!

AFRAEL.

And wilt thou e'er forget me?

NOEMA.

Never! till darker wings than thine enfold
This weak out-worn automaton of clay.

And I am curtailed by oblivion !
Till then, towards thy memory will I gaze,
As in the winter of the world men look
Through bare black branches up to shining stars !
Now, now undo thy wings ! Look ! all the air
Grows murk and dense ! Thou wilt not see thy
way.
Go ! I abjure thee !—go !

AFRAEL.

Farewell ! Farewell !
But shouldst thou ever call me in thy need,
Thy voice will reach me, and my broken wings
Will flutter towards thee !

[He ascends, and is instantly lost in the murky air.]

SCENE V.—*The tents of ARAN. A terrific tempest and thunder-storm. Enter ARAN in hot haste.*

ARAN (*sol.*)

The Heavens have heard our challenge, and take up
The note of our defiance. Hark ! on high,
The thunderous roll of hollow-bowelled clouds
Sounds the attack. Where art thou, Noema ?

The welkin moves in surly masses on
Before the march of the sky's armed hosts,
Hidden as yet behind the dust of war.
Shortly we shall behold the embattled lines,
And Heaven and Earth be locked in wrestling grip,
And see who throws the other. Noema!
Where doth she skulk? How hisses the swift hail!
As yet they shoot their javelins from afar,
Wasting their shafts in showy bravery.
Celestial madmen! husband up your points,
Till to close quarters ye have come, for then
Ye'll need them all! Why! what weak bolts are
these,
That scarce would scare the turtle to her nest?
Ha! that was better! They wax nearer now!
Welcome, ye overt enemies that thus
Announce your coming. We will meet you. Lo!
That ragged flash rent the creased rack in twain,
And yet I did not see them! How was that?
I should have caught the glimmer of their files
Through that tremendous opening. What a peal!
It was a bellow fit to shake the spheres;
And sooth the Earth did quake. But not with
dread,—
Think not, with dread!—ye noisy emissaries!
Come on, and we will prove you, foot to foot,
And if we cannot shout as loud as you,

We'll strike the harder! Where is Noema?
Never at hand at need! I want my spear;
The same that, wedded to my passion, hath
In many a foray split the raging boar,
And to the jungle sent the hyæna scotched!
Now shall it dip its beak in loftier gore!

[He stumbles over NOEMA.]

Ha! there thou art! What! again sunk in swoon,
When hubbub is enough o'erhead to wake
The leaden-dreaming dead! Well, sleep thou there
Till it blows over. 'Tis a feeble heart,
Just fit to bear the note of victory,
But not the bray of battle! Louder still!
That crash must be the prelude. Ha! my spear!
And I shall be in time! They'll hold till then.
Bristles the Tower, compact, from head to foot.
Upon each circling balcony I left
A regiment all armed, and on the top
The bravest of my friends with eager edge
Await the onset. At the base are drawn
Dense cohorts in reserve, whom I will pour,
Upwards by stair and corridor, to take
The place of those hurled headlong, so that ne'er
A gap shall spoil our ranks, but they shall push
Wedgewise to Heaven!

[Enter IRAD.]

IRAD.

O father! what a storm!

ARAN.

Ay, boy! it is a very noble storm.
Wilt face it with me?

IRAD.

Yes, if mother wills.

ARAN.

Heed not thy mother now! This is no time
To borrow leave from women. Wilt come, my lad?
I'm going to the Tower, and thou shalt, too,
Art thou but half a man.

IRAD.

Oh! I should like!
But mother would be vexed.

ARAN.

Go to thy mother!
And whine and gab with women all thy life.
Thou art a girl disguised!

IRAD.

Then I will go, father!

ARAN.

Quick, then! for time is pricking at our heels.
Give me thy hand! Be nimble with thy limbs;
And show in every aspect of thy gait,
That Aran is thy father!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE VI.—*The Tower. Every compartment and balcony crowded with armed men. EBER, unarmed, on a coign of vantage, half-way up, surveying the storm. Round the base, crowds likewise of armed men; and amongst these, but without armour, PELEG, KORAH, and SIDON.*

PELEG.

See what it is to rise against the Lord,
And dare His wrath omnipotent! He frowns,
And straight the whirlwinds spread their wings and
wreak
Their ravage on ye! Lo! He stamps His foot,
And mighty-mouthed thunders, roused from sleep,
Come growling from their lairs! Lay down your
arms,
Ere they be stricken from your paltry hands,

Or their points turned against ye! On your knees,
And, with your foreheads burrowed in the dust,
Clamour for pardon!

SOME.

Ay, 'twere best! For look!
The Heavens with rage wax purple. Surely, then,
The ground did rock?

OTHERS.

Ay, that it did! But wait!
'Tis but a storm at worst. Prayer will not lay it.
Nay, let us, friends, be valiant to the last,
And bide the upshot.

SIDON.

Yes, 'tis a tempest only.
For Nature hath grown fractious, and contends
Against herself. Eber will tell us why,
When this her wanton mood hath rolled away.
Look where he's perched, and with impassive eye
Scans her vagaries, just as though he were
Carved and incorporate with the edifice!
'Tis a brave sight; and not with looks alone,
But with your deeds commend him. Wait and see
What this explosive termagant, this Nature,

Means by her tears, her gestures, and her shrieks.
These are the empty imprecations hurled
By the infuriate Void. 'Twill pass away,
As violence doth ever. As for prayer,
Think you it would be heard in such a din?
Look on and learn, or else to bed and sleep
Until it's over. Ye can do no more.
Either were something.

*[The fierceness of the tempest increases ;
the thunder rolls louder ; and the earth
is shaken violently.]*

PELEG.

On your knees, I say !
And imitate the instinctive fowls that crouch,
When blows the hurricane.

SOME.

What say ye ?

OTHERS.

No !

Let us hold on at least till Aran comes.
Where is he, now ?

KORAH.

Why, gone, I warrant ye,

To strike a private bargain for himself
With foes he hath provoked and cannot match.

SOME.

Think ye that's so?

OTHERS.

Tush! Korah's jealous tongue
Invents a coward. Aran is as brave
As loftiest cedar that on loftiest top
Of Ararat ne'er budes, though the storm
Tears up the soil it stands on!

KORAH.

But if not,
And Aran seeks no safety for himself,
See to your own! Cry out to Eber there
To crave a parley with the skies. This war,
With its abhorrent front and threatening face,
Against your peaceful destiny offends.
Throw down your arms, and call upon the Heavens
To throw down theirs. Patch up a treaty quick,
And swear the heralds of the upper world
Not to molest ye more, but leave the Earth
To its own shifts and purposes, as ye
Will henceforth leave the spheres. Thus will ye keep
An open Future for yourselves, wherein

Man may pursue uninterruptedly
His pathway to Perfection!

SOME.

Aran comes!
Look where he cleaves the mist!

OTHERS.

And with him brings
The little Irad, who steps bravely out
And lags behind his father's stalwart stride,
No further than one's shadow when one walks
Straightly north-eastward from a western sun.

ALL.

Hail to stout Aran, Builder of the Tower!
Long live man's truest leader!

ARAN.

Was it you,
Or the Heaven's braggart thunders that I heard?
These vultures of the welkin seem to think
To scare us with their shrieking! Ye do well
To pay them noise for noise. Now clash your shields,
So that they cannot fail to know ye are here,
And thrill to meet the vanguard of their strokes,

With such impatience as the bridegroom feels
For the first shock of rapture !

*[Those at the foot of the Tower clash their shields,
and the action is imitated by the armed hosts
on each storey in succession, to the very top.
Almost simultaneously there is a fresh peal
of thunder, louder and longer than any of the
preceding ones.]*

Music for music ! But I like yours best !
The Heavens have heard your cymbals clang, and roll
Their drums to answer ye ! Now, quick, come forth,
Ye slow supernal athletes, and make good
The tumult of your challenge ! We are here,
And Earth's smooth dust is ready to receive
The thud of your celestial overthrow !

*[As he speaks, lightning strikes the summit of
the Tower, and, amidst the roar of thun-
der, the topmost storeys with their armed
defenders, are hurled headlong through the
air, crushing, as they reach the ground, many
of those collected at the base ; amongst these,
PELEG and SIDON. Some of the survivors
fly from the ground. Others crowd fearfully
round ARAN.]*

ARAN.

Why do ye shake, ye aspen-wooded hearts,
At the first breath of battle ? Let them fly,
Those mock-heroic supernumeraries !

What want we with their fluttering pulses here?
They shall be bondsmen when the battle's done,
When ye shall rule as Gods! Hold firm, up there,
On ledge, and balcony, and jutting coign!
Ye have the post of honour now, nor yield
One inch of what ye hold! Dream not to save
Your lives by coming lower! By this spear,
If any thinks to fly from death at top,
He'll find it at the bottom! Do ye deem,
I who have brought this unarmed baby here
To sniff the risky breath of victory,
Will let *men* shirk the tussle?

[He perceives the dead body of PELEG.]

Ha! what is this?
Peleg as dead as sacrificial kid!
O empty Priest, how empty art thou now!
But what a pack of blundering combatants
Not to know friend from foe! The clumsy Heavens!

[Kicking the body aside.]

He is their dead, and they must bury him,
When we've done fighting. What! And Sidon, too!
A stale conclusion to thy arguments!
Priest, and Philosopher, by one blind bolt
Hit and confounded! There is humour then
In these celestial strokes!

[A fresh peal is heard, and several more storeys, injured by the previous shock, are toppled down; EBER among those who fall.]

What! struck again!

See! here comes Eber, like a falling star!

He'll soon be out!

Now, death! and ruin! what is this base work?

Come forth, ye skulking Spirits, ye curs of Heaven!

Out from your opaque ambush, and descend

In visible battalions on our points!

This is but cowards' work!

KORAH.

Leave him, friends!

Hear how he raves! It was a madman's hand

Piled up the Tower, a madman who defends.

Away, and keep yourselves for better days!

What's Heaven to you, who still have got the Earth?

'Ware lest ye lose them both!

ARAN.

How, insolent!

Thou wouldst incite my legions to desert,

And march towards the Future! March there thou!

[He pierces KORAH with his spear, who falls.]

But travel unaccompanied! Thou art

N

Perfected now, for thou hast surely touched
The goal of all things! . . . Now, ye craven imps,
Angel or devils, gods or mercenaries
Of some one God more potent than yourselves!
Slaves of the sky, purveyors of the thunder,
Ye noisy rabble of the clouds! appear
Afront our serried infantry, that we
May drive you homewards, following at your heels!
Dare none of you be patent? Why, I thought
'Twas only women hid behind their veils!

*[A thunder-crash is heard more violent than any
gone before. The ground rocks and splits.
IRAD, who has till now remained scared but
silent by his father's side, utters a cry.
AFRAEL swoops through the air towards
him.]*

Ha! Here is one of them at last! Now, taste
The savour of my spear, which those shall chew
Who follow after thee!

*[He strikes at AFRAEL with his spear, which
catches a flash of lightning on its point, and
ARAN falls, a blackened carcass. AFRAEL
bears IRAD into the air. Seeing ARAN fall,
those still at the base of the Tower fly in all
directions, whilst those left above hurry down,
and do the same. The storm begins to abate
and die away.]*

SCENE VII.—*The tents of ARAN.*NOEMA (*waking from her swoon*).

What was that sound? Methought I heard a crash
As though the Earth were splitting! And how dark
And weird it is, even here! I must have swooned,
Again have swooned,—O thou too feeble heart,
Why art thou such a tell-tale?—and but wake
To what was happening. Aran! Art thou there?
He answers not. To the accurs'd Tower,
As daily, hath he gone. Ho! Irad! Irad!
Where art thou, Irad? If there brews a storm,
He waits for it to burst, the fearless rogue,
And I shall find him, with his eager eyes
Facing the tempest!

[*She goes to the front of the chief tent.*

Oh! what a storm has been!
Though now it seems to sob itself away.
But look! the Tower has gone. And what is that?
Oh! as I live, the jagged and blackened stump
Of what was once the Tower! Irad! Aran!
Irad! where art thou, Irad? Where is my boy?
Oh! he hath gone, whilst I was blind in swoon,
And 'neath the rage that whelms the wicked, found
An innocent's destruction!

[*She runs back into the tents, and hurries to and fro.*

Irada! Irada!

Art thou there, Irada? Shout but once to me,
And I shall know thou livest. What! No voice!
No sound! Not here! not here! Oh! he is dead,
And I am branchless! . . . Irada! . . . 'Tis in vain!
And I must gather up my feet and go
To seek his little limbs among the dead!
Keep up, my heart, nor totter so! When once
I press my dear dead darling to my lips,
Thou shalt have leave to fall, to rise no more!

IRADA (*crying without*).

O mother! mother! Where art thou, dearest mother?

NOEMA.

He lives! It is his voice! My boy! my boy!
Here, here! this way! I come.

[IRADA *rushes in*.

IRADA.

O mother! mother!

[*He rushes into the arms of NOEMA, who folds him to her heart; and for a moment both are silent.*

NOEMA.

Where hast thou been, my child?

IRAD.

I went along
With father to the Tower.

NOEMA.

And where is he?

IRAD.

Father is dead.

NOEMA.

Dead!

IRAD.

Yes, and many more,
Buried beneath the Tower.

NOEMA.

Didst see it fall?

IRAD.

O yes! with such a crash—once—twice!—and men
Fell through the air in flocks. And how it thundered!
Mother, you never heard how loud it thundered!
And all the time the zigzag lightnings flashed,
And the ground heaved and swayed, and every one

Was sore afraid, save father; and he died,
Daring the Heavens to fight him.

NOEMA.

Died as he lived,
Defiant and unbroken! But, my boy,
How didst thou from the common wreck escape?

IRAD.

I scarce can tell you how. But when the Tower
Had fallen, and those who fell with it and those
On whom it fell, were or dashed down or crushed,—
Eber, and Peleg, Sidon, thousands more,—
Then all began to scatter, save a few
Who stood by father; and I stood by him.
But Korah sought to make these others fly,
Deserting father's side, and father slew him.

NOEMA.

With his own hand?

IRAD.

Yes, mother! with his spear.
And then it was that the Earth split and shook,
And I who had been terrified from first,
But did my best to stifle every cry,
Not to vex father, gave a girlish scream,

And some one, not a mortal, clove the air,
And father thrust at him, but thrust in vain,
And fell as though by lightning hit, and scorched,
And charred all in a moment! whilst, as swift,
He who had swooped upbore me through the air,
As a gerfalcon bears a suckling lamb,
But with such tender clutches, that I seemed
Only to be, mother, rocked upon your breast!
And when we had gone up, a little way,
Soft he sailed down again, and set me here,
Here at my dear, dear home. O mother! mother!

[He buries his face in her neck and clings to her tightly.]

NOEMA.

But where is he who brought thee back to me?

IRAD.

I do not know. I did not look nor stay,
But rushed to find you, mother! Was it wrong?
I did not even thank him.

NOEMA.

'Twas ungracious.

Thou shouldst have thanked a saviour so alert,
And bidden him wait till I could thank him too,
For his most precious burden. Tell me, child,
What was he like?

IRAD.

I had no eyes to see ;
It was so strange ! But he was smooth and soft,
As, don't you know, a summer cloud might be,
If one could lie on it !

NOEMA.

Is he there still ?

IRAD.

He may be, mother.

NOEMA.

Then stay here, dear boy,
Till I go see.

*[She goes to the exterior of the chief tent where
she beholds AFRAEL.]*

SCENE VIII.

NOEMA.

How shall I thank thee, Afrael ?

AFRAEL.

By thanking not at all. Hast seen thy child ?

NOEMA.

O yes ! and from his living lips have heard
Who saved his rashness !

AFRAEL.

Say, is there aught more
That I can do for thee ?

NOEMA.

Yes, tell me—quick !
It was no flash of thine, smote Aran dead ?

AFRAEL.

I have no power of death ; and if I had,
On him I had not used it. Thou forget'st :
The face of Aran still is strange to me.

NOEMA.

Thank Heaven ! But in the tumult of the brain
The memory trips. 'Twas Aran who was struck
And shrivelled at the instant of thy swoop
To snatch up Irad.

AFRAEL.

Then I saw him fall,
Blistered and burnt and blackened all at once.
He caught a shred of lightning on his spear,
Just as he thrust at me, and down he went,
Consumed by what he captured. That was Aran !
Well, he died bravely.

NOEMA.

But thou,—how didst thou come
To be in such a ruin ?

AFRAEL.

Canst thou doubt ?
When that I left thee in the clotted dawn,
'Twas as thou saidst ;—I scarce could force my way
Through mist, and clouds, and currents contrary ;
And in the blackness I was whirled along
With the fierce hurricane that swept intent
Still 'gainst the Tower. There I beheld a sight,
Which had enslaved my presence even though
There were no mortal link to keep me close
To Earth's vicissitudes !

NOEMA.

Didst see it all ?

AFRAEL.

Not all ; for ever and anon the clouds
Closed up and barred both Tower and Earth from
view.

Withal, through fitful openings I could see
Tier upon tier bristling with armèd men,
A line of war set edgewise against Heaven,
Propped by an armèd concourse from below,
But propped in vain ; for I saw the summit sway,
And, as I strained my gaze through thunders thick
To watch it topple and fall, with horror spied
Irak amidst it all ! No eye for more,
For any but him only, had I now.
The tattered clouds got tangled in my wings,
The blistering hail hissed blinding in mine eyes,
But still I pushed, contentious, 'gainst the storm,
And beat the winds aside. The rest thou know'st,
And Irak lives to save thy happiness.
Shall I go now ? Or shall I stay awhile
To help thee in this outset of thy needs ?

NOEMA.

Good Afrael, go ! for I am very sad.

AFRAEL.

And may I e'er return ?

NOEMA.

Ay, when thou wilt !
At least, when Time hath quieted my pain,
And the distraction of this hour shall be,
Like yon late tempest, over. Not till then !
Come when the moon is next, as now, at full ;
And choose the same sweet moment as when first
I heard thy voice and blessed it ! Then will I thank thee
For all that thou hast done for me this day !

[He ascends, without a word, into the sky.]

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

A C T V.

SCENE I.—*The air. Midsummer. Late evening twilight,
through which the moon rises, at full.*

AFRAEL (*sol.*)

THE night, the hour have come ! O long, long Moon,
How I have waited for thee to refill
Thy pale dim outline with clear rounded light !
Now thou art full and fervent. And shall not
This pale dim Me, this shadowy nothingness,
This tenuous adumbration of delight,
Be with substantial aspect and real glow
Filled in, like thee, and burn, a perfect sphere ?
Can she deny me now, now that the sky
Hath, my ally, her earthly shackles snapped ?
No ! She will grant that necessary boon,
And then, fair luminary ! unlike thee,
I shall nor wax nor wane, but, night and day,
Be full of *her* ! Now farewell, heavenly space !
Farewell, thou vault sublime ! Farewell ye stars,
That hold the keys of fix'd harmony,

Ye golden chords of the eternal lyre !
Ye combinations infinite, farewell !
Forget me not ! I never will forget ye !
But o'er that new and lesser home which waits
My transformation, watch with constant ray,
Nor me desert, deserter though I be,
And for her gentle sake propitious shine,
For whom I quit ye !

SCENE II.—*Same hour. The tents of NOEMA.*

NOEMA (*sol.*)

It seems like yesternight that I sate here,
And saw him first. Same spot, same hour, and see !
The self-same face of Heaven ! How beautiful !
How still ! How motionless ! How dreadly steeped
In deep ambiguous solemnity !
Yet in all else how utterly unlike
That then from now ! Oh ! I am terrified !
My fences are uprooted, and I stand
Open to every trespass, who was once
By close and thorny borders hedgèd in.
Why did I so ephemeral a bar
Place 'twixt me and his coming ? And 'tis sure
That he will come ! He never failed me yet.

What, if he did! Oh! I should call for him,
And leave the sky no quiet till he came!
For I *must* thank him,—him who from the edge
Of my despairing madness snatched me back,
And showed me Irad. O poor sophistry!
How flimsy is thy curtain! For behind
This cold dead screen of gratitude, there hide
The warm and living characters of love,
Which only wait his coming to enact
The part so oft rehearsed! There! it is out!
But come not, all the same! Yet if he came,
What fervour could anneal and weld in one
Spirit and flesh? Impossible! Ay, though
He loved me, flesh, with all a Spirit's force,
I loved him, Spirit, with all my body's strength,
And both should work together! . . . Is that the moon
Whose keen bright edge the blue horizon cleaves?
It is! For see, its golden-curving rim
Soars slowly crescent, and before my heart
Moves on afresh, will shine an unshorn disc.
Halt! halt one moment, O thou gentle moon,
Who carriëst all my fortunes in thy pace,
And leave me time to think!

IRAD (*from within*).

Ho! mother! mother!

O

NOEMA (*rushing into the tent, and making
for his crib*).

What is it, Irad? Art thou not asleep?

IRAD.

I was; but I was wakened by a dream.

NOEMA.

Then sleep again, my child, and dream no more.
See, I will sit by thee.

IRAD.

Oh, but such a dream!
I dreamed that I was plucked again aloft
By him who saved me at the Tower, and borne
Swift through the air, but higher much than then;
And when we had got, ever so far from earth,
That then he dropped me, and I fell—fell—fell,—
And still was falling, when I woke and called
To you for help. Well, I will turn and sleep.
But, mother, do you think that he will come
Ever again? For I should like to thank him.
And then, perhaps, he'd lift me up afresh,
And ride me in the air. How I should like it!

NOEMA.

We'll talk of it to-morrow. But now, sleep !
Or thou wilt find thee, when to-morrow comes,
Still wearied with the sports of yesterday.
Kiss me and close thine eyelids !

[IRAD kisses his mother, and composes himself to sleep. The moment he slumbers she steals out silently, and returns to the exterior of the tents.

SCENE III.—*In the moonlight.*

NOEMA.

Afrael !

AFRAEL.

Yes, I am here, true as yon rounded moon,
Thou didst appoint to register my fate ;
And I am come for judgment !

NOEMA.

Oh, 'tis soon !

I never dreamed that Time could fly so fast,
Or reach a point so quickly ! Nay, I think,
The moon hath played me false.

AFRAEL.

Played false to thee !

None would do that ! But upon me, I swear,
Her craft of late hath foisted many a trick.
A thousand times she nearly filled her horns,
Then from that margin thousand times retired ;
Now let a golden flush creep o'er her face,
And, as I gazed upon the rising tide,
Ere it suffused her fully, rolled it back,
And, like this lonely watcher of her whims,
Again was pale and empty ! But no more
Will I insist to thee how dull the load
Of waiting's weary interval hath been
To patience all impatient ! For 'tis past !
And all I now would pour into thine ears,
Is Love's long-bridled torrent.

NOEMA.

Wait ! O wait !

I am not ready, Afrael, for the rush
Of such a swollen current ! Dost not see
My banks are broken down, my channels choked,
My bed a desolation, dry, and strewn
With drift, and sand, and naked boulders left
By the rough stream which flowed there once, but now
Hath run out to the ocean ?

AFRAEL.

That is why
I now must fill thy shrunk stream up again,
That ne'er was meant to be left parched and bare.
And I will do't with such a gentle course,
And with such even flowing, thou wilt know
Thou art anew being flushed and plenished,
Only by seeing old havoc disappear,
And the hard rocks sink slowly out of sight.
Mine shall be waters only, waters sweet
Charged with no rude encumbrance, that with time
Will wear away, unfelt and unperceived,
The obstructions of the past !

NOEMA.

O Afrael !
Be silent for a little while ! For I
Cannot resist thy voice !

AFRAEL.

Nor I thine ears,
Thine eyes, thy lips, thy body, that everything
Which is unutterable Thou ! Too late
Thou tell'st me to be silent. I have ta'en
Of the Eternal Heavens eternal leave,
And bidden the stars farewell ! Thine am I now,

And never, never, never, can I turn
Back to the Spheres, that I have left for Thee!

NOEMA.

Thou know'st not what thou dost. Think, think once
more,
What 'tis to be a Spirit, and what 'twill be
To be encased in flesh! Death, sorrow, pain,
And disenchantment, are familiars
That never quit its side.

AFRAEL.

What, if they be!
All the foul fiends and furies walk by my side,
So I but walk by thine!

NOEMA.

Oh! no! no! no!
Look up! Look up! Remember thy abode,
And contemplate those interspersed orbs,
The golden gleams on yon lake lazulite,
The glittering gems on the all-circling crown
Of Majesty Eternal! Lift thy gaze
Back unto those, not lower it down on me,
Where thou wilt but a crude amalgam find
Of dust and yearning! If a falling star

Ne'er yet touched aught but darkness, how wilt thou
Reach light and life by such a headlong plunge?

AFRAEL.

Nay, but away with these half-arguments !
Didst ever see a star that tried to turn ?
I will not back ! Though constellations glowed
A thousand times as bright, and boundless space
Yet infinitely more unbounded spread,
I'd leap the one, and blow the other out,
If they did keep me from thee !

NOEMA.

Then, 'tis vain !
Since thou dost range thy Spirit's potency
Upon the side of flesh, flesh needs must win.
I am the victor and the vanquished, too.

AFRAEL.

But, dost thou love me ?

NOEMA.

Shall I cease to love,
Who loved thee once, because thou lov'st me thus ?
Why, any love, in such a rapturous guise,
Would from the ground lift resolution up,
And leave it nought to stand on !

AFRAEL.

Then, thou art mine !
And in these wings, I call thee to annul,
For the last time I fold thee !

*[As his wings encircle her, she throws her arms
around him, and they kiss.]*

NOEMA.

Oh ! sweet love !

AFRAEL.

See, they are fading now, and in their place
Fresh definite members come ! I feel the rush
As of a thousand torrents through my being,
But torrents at volcanic sources warmed !
And now I burn and shiver all at once !
Canst thou not feel me now, as ne'er before ?
For I, as ne'er before, do now feel thee !

NOEMA.

Yes ! Thou art waxing human to my touch,
And thee intensely do I see, hear, know,
As though thou wert myself !

AFRAEL.

And so I am !

NOEMA.

Yes, love! thou art! And I? oh! what am I?

AFRAEL.

My own, my own! My deep, my very own!

SCENE IV.— *A week later. Sundown. The tents of AFRAEL and NOEMA.*

NOEMA (*sol.*)

Yonder they come; my comely Afrael,
And little Irad ambling at his side,
Linked hand in hand. How kindly doth he lean
His ear to childlike prattle, even as when,
Whilst yet a Spirit, by my earthly voice
He let himself be captured! Oh, but 'tis
A gentle soul, dissembling half its strength,
'Neath the smooth garb of prompt urbanity,
Like to that awful force in nature hid,
Which only shows itself in fruits and flowers!
How strangely, too, Irad seems drawn to him,
Quitting him never. Why, I almost think
The boy as lief would be with him as me,
And loves him even more, were't possible.

For we are one, and who loves him loves both.
Yet were it strange to feel such preference?
When men have gentleness as well as strength,
They are both men and women, and it haps
They answer either purpose. Oh! how fair,
How beautiful he is! ay, fairer e'en
Than when he shimmered, dazzling, on my gaze,
And was but scent and sunshine! How I love him
And he seems happy in this lower lot,
Which he still vows not less nor lower is,
But higher, better, and more spiritual.
Oh! had he not been happy! What a thought!
It almost blotted out the wholesome sun,
Swift as it passed me. Had I worked the spell
Which flesh endows me with, to drag him down,
A free, a happy, lofty, winged Spirit,
Into the mire of darksome slavery,
And disillusion's dungeon! Think of it!
Demons of Hell, and Seraphim of Heaven,
Have no such power as women; and the weal
Of this poor Earth hangs on its exercise!

[IRAD, *leaving AFRAEL, and outstripping him,
comes running to his mother.*]

IRAD.

See, mother, what a lovely nest I have,
With all its little brood; not fledged as yet,

But daintily feathered almost to their beaks,
And snugly cuddled up within their crib!
I almost wish I were a bird myself;
They look so cosy.

NOEMA.

What a pretty sight!

IRAD.

Yes, but when first we looked at them, they made
Such a commotion! opened yellow nibs,
Fluttered and tumbled 'gainst each other so,
And cheeped, and gaped, and almost asked for food.
I thought they would have spoken! But we poured
Crushed, moistened millet down their hungry crops,
And they are happy now, and lie quite close,
And have forgot their mother.

NOEMA.

Where is she?

IRAD.

Ah! is it not sad? A cruel, greedy snake
Hath made them orphans; otherwise we had
Not ta'en them from their home. For Afrael says
We must be kind to bird, and beast, and tree,
Even as to man!

NOEMA.

Observe him, then, my child !
For, as I love to hear him moralise,
All these unto ourselves are kin and bound
By common veins of sadness and of mirth,
Pain, pleasure, struggle, passive sufferance,
Infirmity, and death ! and what they lend
To human services, emotion, thought,
And speculation which maintains us lords
Of them and all things, our affections should
With a compassionate mindfulness repay.
Stamp that on memory, Irad !

IRAD.

So I will.
Even the serpent with its shifty eyes
He lets writhe on unhurt ; and when I urge
That it hath been the source of all our woe,
He answers that its woe is worse than ours,
And will not hear the name of enmity !
Things that, of old, at hint of human step,
Started, and straight into the thicket fled,
Come at the sound of his inviting voice,
Sniff at his heels and nibble from his palm,
Or rub against his knees their charm'd ears.

O mother! he is native kindness,
And all harsh growths are foreign to his heart.

NOEMA.

Be like him then, my child, and take thy hues
And shape from his example!

IRAD.

Now I must go
And seek a leafy eastward-facing nook,
Which I can reach and pry in, for these mites,
And feed them every morning, noon, and eve,
Until, as Afrael says, they feel their wings,
And fly from us to freedom!

NOEMA.

Go, then, child!

[IRAD runs off, and as AFRAEL approaches. NOEMA
goes to meet him. They embrace.]

SCENE V.

NOEMA.

Belovèd Afrael!

AFRAEL.

Sweet mortal mine !
How fair, how good, how exquisite is life !
Shall we sit down upon yon wrinkled bole,
And 'neath this palm-tree's courteous canopy,
Watch tired day drop into the arms of night ?

[They sit, close together, hand in hand.]

NOEMA.

And dost thou verily find this earthly life
Worthy of thy true praise ? Art really happy,
And hast thou nothing, Afrael, to regret ?

AFRAEL.

Nothing, my all ! It is a larger life,
A wider, and a deeper, than to float,
All unconditioned, through unbounded space,
One could nor mould nor alter. For be sure,—
Let lame Tradition stumble as it will,—
No God invented labour as a curse.
It is the best and truest friend we have ;
And, take away that prompter, Nature would
Lose half her meaning, and e'en Love forget
The cues and purport of his master part !

NOEMA.

Oh, with what happiness it brims my heart,
To hear thee talk like that! Tell, tell me more!

AFRAEL.

What shall I tell thee? How I worked this day?
For lustily I did! Thou shouldst have seen
The sweat-drops on my temples, dense as dew;
And as I paused an instant just to feel
How thick they were, and brush a space for more,
I thought that they perhaps might match in worth
Even the gems on Night's reposeful brow!
A divine triad, these,—Love, Nature, Work,
Whose oneness meets in Song, which needs them all
To round the parts of spherèd Harmony!

NOEMA.

Then I may hug this surety to my breast,
That Work will ne'er dissever thee from Song?

AFRAEL.

Dissever me from Song! Why, love, that were
From thee to be dissevered!

NOEMA.

So it were!

This is the one great truest truth in life,—
And in thy arms I learned it!—only they
Who are potential poets, e'er can know
Love's actual force and dread significance.
The common herd may borrow it, and play
In idle moments with its mysteries,
As children play with books they cannot read,
Only to soil them! But the sacred few,
The Company elect, melodious souls,
Who carry in their ears the Eternal Song,
Alone can ever feel, have ever felt,
The rhythmic rapture of concerted Love!

AFRAEL.

Sad that they cannot! Let us teach them then.
For if all ears were only tuned alike,
How should we then make discord? It were hushed,
And banished to the realms of silent death!

NOEMA.

Can it be taught to those discordant ears
That have survived the falling of the Tower?

AFRAEL.

No! they are broken instruments, that ne'er
Will give forth music, or respond to it,—
The crowd of Nature's failures. It were well

Could that disaster perish with themselves.
But they will raise fresh clangours through their sons,
Fresh discords in their daughters. It is we,
New Adam and new Eve, who must begin
The work afresh, and through our shapely stock
Transmit pure melody.

NOEMA.

And dost thou think
That all our sons will own thy gift of song,
Our daughters, all, my sympathy of ear?

AFRAEL.

Thine, all must have, daughters and sons alike,
Or they are not our children; power to catch,
And love, and prize, the notes of Harmony.
But 'tis enough to hear it; for e'en they
Who seem to make it, make it not at all,
But with a finer apprehension dowered,
Do but repeat the Music they o'erhear,
Which is made elsewhere;—in Heaven perchance,
I' the stars, i' the air; who knows?—but not by man.

NOEMA.

And will all our posterity inherit
The lower apprehension?

P

AFRAEL.

Yes, love, all !

But heavenly gifts are quickly forfeited,
And some, alas ! that delicate bequest
Will squander amongst brutish profligates,
Or, grafting on their own the alien stock
Of Babel's builders, parents be in part
Of a deaf race.

NOEMA.

But will not our strong blood
Assert itself in these, and make them hear ?

AFRAEL.

I think it must, sometimes. But this is sure,
That whensoever one of the bastard brood
True Music sings or feels, 'twill be that he
Reverts unto his nobler ancestry,
And craving readmission to the home
From which his parents strayed, proclaims himself
Thy child and mine ! Why dost thou weep, my love ?

NOEMA.

Because my cup of happiness is full,
And overflows in tears !

AFRAEL.

Then let me sing
A little song which rippling came to-day
Adown the vacant channels of my sense,
As I stood gazing at the happy sky,
And listening to the love-birds' dainty note.

*Could I again on pinions soar,
And of the air be free,
What could I do, my darling, more
Than fly afresh to thee?
Or had I leave again to roam
From starry seat to seat,
How were I better, whose one home
Is here, love, at thy feet?*

*The Spheres revolve, the planets spin,
Along the track divine;
Yet these but end where they begin:
What is their bliss to mine?—
Whose constellation only hath
In one fixed spot to burn,
Whither, were all the Heavens its path,
It, wearied, would return?*

*To blend with toil a lyric hymn,
And with Twin-Self to kneel
At Nature's shrine, whose secrets dim,
Though seen not, still we feel :
This, this is more than if one's wing
Were with all Space allied,
I still would spurn, to love, and sing,
And labour, at thy side !*

NOEMA.

A tender song ; and tender be my thanks !
Wilt take them—thus ?

[She kisses him fondly.]

AFRAEL.

O richest recompense !
Now let us listen to the silence, love !
For it concerts what never mortal voice
Can render into music.

SCENE VI.—*The interior of the tents of NOEMA and AFRAEL.
Deep night.*

AFRAEL.

Then, shall we go ?

NOEMA.

Yes, Afrael, if thou wilt.
For there is nothing here I care to keep,
Save thee and Irad! Sadness lags behind,
In whatso places that we leave; and some,
Some few prompt natural drops perhaps will fall,
When from the lintel of past days I turn,
Never to cross it more! 'Twas here I gained
A mother's knowledge, deepest of all lore;
Here I first heard thy questions musical,
And here—here—here,—where now we lie entranced,
I learned Love's awful secret!

AFRAEL.

So it was!
Nor shall I leave it panglessly. But, Noema,
We need another land for our new race,
Remote from this one, old, which, it would seem,
Hath from the ruin of its dismal Tower
Learnt nought but fear. It is unteachable!
For the best tutor still is cheerful Hope,
Who leads us on from day to day, until
The task of Life is mastered.

NOEMA.

Is it true

They speak with divers tongues, and understand
One not the other?

AFRAEL.

'Tis conceivable.

Nought is so unintelligent as fear,
For whilst it speaks with obscure stammering lips,
It comprehends not what is plainly said.
You cannot parley with it. And, besides,
'Tis credible that they who sought to pierce
The Impenetrable Barrier, were rolled back
In dire perplexity upon themselves,
And nothing apprehend. Thus will it fare
Ever with their temerity who think
To storm and raze the Unknown. Preposterous Towers,
Absolute wreck, and tongues' confusion,—
Such, through all change of circumstance and time,
Will be their brief and doleful history!

NOEMA.

Hast thou no sure conception how the Tower
Was overthrown? Whether a frolic troop
Of Seraphim invisible rode by,
And with the points of their light-poised spears
Tilted, and down it went? Or lightnings real,
With thunder in reserve, successive launched

By Heaven's almighty Captain, smote its front,
And routed its pretenders ?

AFRAEL.

Who shall say ?

I saw no armoured Seraphim, nor heard
Thunders unparalleled or lightnings strange,
But only complete sickness of the air,
Clouds vomiting fire, and with deep rumblings vexed,
To which the Earth responded ; and the Tower
Collapsed in their commotion. It may be
That one of Nature's mindless accidents
The ruin wrought ; or that the Unseen Power
Made that loud music with man's folly chime,
And with a fixed coincidence rebuked
His weak extravagance. We cannot know.
E'en in that star whose denizen I was
Ere Earth's more blest inhabitant I turned,
God's face was all as dim as seems it here.
How were it otherwise ? Let finite feet
With straining breath and clamorous tongue pursue,
With faster feet Infinity recedes,
And we drop ever more behind the view,
Which ere we started it, was very close ;
Ay, if we do not frighten it away,
By prying if 'tis there, still keeps a seat
In every human breast !

NOEMA.

And must we be
Content with that?

AFRAEL.

My love, I think we must.

NOEMA.

And when we die?

AFRAEL.

Ah! then we shall know more,
Or else of this vexation be quite cured
That still we know so little! It is strange
Thy sires bethought them never, that Death may
Be but the falling of a wave, enlarged
By rising of another,—half the same!
Dost think that thou and I can all go out,
Or Love's prized household gods but serve to swell
The lumber of Oblivion? If 't must be,
At least we ne'er need know it, and 'twere wise,
With a resigned humility to hope
That Death's dark door, upon the other side,
Upon a more than living brightness looks.

NOEMA.

Here is a mystery in the heart of life,
We scarce could do without. Take it away,
The sun would shine but once, to shine no more.
The pathos of the winter wolds would pass,
From April's tears the glamour would be fled,
The smoke and smell of autumn's smouldering woods,
When summer's fire is out, no more would be
The soul of luscious sadness, and the face
Of this fair world, blank and expressionless!

AFRAEL.

Then let us go where it is fairest far,
And most its various aspect is expressed ;
To the Land I told thee of, which 'witched my gaze
When I, a Spirit, this void globe surveyed,
And which we now must people with our race.
Into the largest of all inland seas
Earth's 'dented shores enclose, it jutteth out,
A long and lovely promontory lulled
By the soft murmurs of the soothing wave.
Vigilant mountains from its smiling vales
And slopes of hanging beauty fence the snows
The jealous North despatches, and adown
Its mild meandering length, soft-soaring crests
Catch the bright rays of the round-travelling sun,

East where he rises, westwards when he sets,
And pour them down into its laughing plains.
All Shinar's wealth is there ; the sweet-pithed date,
Cedars, and pines, and many a waving grass,
And fields of dimpling corn, no sickle touched.
But other growths I saw which sprout not here ;
Gardens of golden fruit that had not robbed
The glistening foliage of rich-scented bloom,
And tapering bunches of thick-clustering beads,
Which seemed to lock the sunshine in their veins,
Drooping from lissom, leafy-hidden stems,
Carelessly swung from happy bough to bough.
Let us go there, and make it with our blood
The land of Love, as 'tis of loveliness,
Art, Poesy, and Thought ; all that can flow
From human minds wedded to human hearts !

NOEMA.

Yes ! With to-morrow's dawn then let us go,
And take this wisdom with us : Though the Earth
May not ascend to Heaven, by Tower or aught
Of man's devising, Heaven descends to Earth
For those who will receive it. We have it here,
Here in each other's arms, where Spirit and flesh
Have recognised their kinship. Love is nought
But shadow or mere carcass, save it blend

The breath of both :—a name, a nothingness,
Or wholly self and bestial !

AFRAEL.

There it is !
Spirit is not extinguished by the flesh,
Nor flesh repelled by Spirit. One is flame,
The other fuel ; both are requisite
For Love's most sacred fire. That is a truth,
A Being well might abdicate the skies,
To learn and teach !

NOEMA.

And thou hast taught it me.

AFRAEL.

Then, Noema, good night ! Sound be thy sleep !

NOEMA.

And sweet thine, Afrael ! My love, good night !

END OF THE TOWER OF BABEL.

INTERLUDES

The title of Interludes, already borne by a volume of the Author's shorter poems, is adhered to here, as a convenient designation for those occasional pieces which are written in the intervals of longer compositions.

INTERLUDES.



CELESTIAL HEIGHTS.

I.

HAIL ! steep ascents and winding ways,
Bedrenched with melting morning haze,
 Hail ! mountain herd-bells chiming clear !
Hail ! meads and cherry-orchards green,
And hail, thrice hail ! thou golden mean,
 The chalet's simple cheer !

II.

I leave the highwayed world behind,
And amid pathless pinewoods wind,
 I drink their aromatic air ;
Leap with kin feet the leaping stream,
And wake, as from an evil dream,
 To dawn and speechless prayer.

III.

Like subterranean waters, start
Fresh fancies from my arid heart,
 Arid, abiding still below ;
To childlike tenderness I melt,
And with emotions long unfelt
 My unsluiced senses flow.

IV.

Louder I hear the cattle-bells,
Wider the prospect spreads and swells,
 Lakes, mountains, snow-peaks, round me throng ;
I veil mine eyes, with awe oppressed,
Then gaze, and with a carolling breast
 Burst into native song.

V.

The moist cool dews are round my feet ;
Forests of wild-flowers, simple, sweet,
 With honey load each vacant breeze,
Which healing bears upon its wing,
Breathes with an air of more than Spring,
 And banishes disease.

VI.

My limbs their youthful stride regain,
From off me fall fatigue and pain,
 I mount more borne on wings than feet;
My blood in faster current flows,
Yet like stream fed by mountain snows,
 Is coolest when most fleet.

VII.

And not this common frame alone
Resumes its youth, its pulse, its tone,
 I feel my soul, my mind expand;
That here the spirit, as the flesh,
Grows fragrant, dewy, healthful, fresh,
 And like the landscape, grand!

VIII.

Is it then so? And must the soul,
That unseen wing towards unseen goal,
 Disdain the crowded vale's delights,
Its heat unfruitful, vapid noise,
And soaring, solitary, poise
 Among celestial heights?

IX.

Even so. And, poised aloft, my soul,
Far above human fret and dole
 In empyrean calm abides.
No mortal voice the silence mars;
I hear the singing of the stars,
 And the eternal tides.

X.

The greedy aims, the lean regrets,
The disenchantment Hope begets
 On ravished hearts,—beheld from here,
Like unto hamlet, pasture, stream,
Confused in one indifferent dream,
 Mean and minute appear.

XI.

Man's trivial fury, envious hates,
The pain that upon pleasure waits,
 The exhaustion of tumultuous love,
The hopes that dwindle, fears that grow,
All, all that rends the plain below,
 Tranquil, I breathe above.

XII.

Yet 'mid these sun-confronting peaks,
The undesisting spirit seeks
 To mount to loftier, rarer height.
Are what we see but toys of sense,
And we who see them but a lens
 Refracting heavenly light?—

XIII.

—Imperfect mirror, faulty glass,
Who let the pure white rays to pass,
 But twist the coloured beams awry,
Belittle all the good we see,
And ill, since of our own degree,
 Absorb, to magnify?

XIV.

Who knoweth, or shall answer find?
I hear the rising of the wind,
 More near and full the torrent's plash;
The swaying pine-woods murmur deep,
The lightnings laugh, and, roused from sleep,
 The storm-winds meet and crash!

XV.

From underneath their lurid cowls,
Rossberg 'gainst Righi frowns and scowls,
 Across Arth's vale that cowers for dread ;
And, mustering for their awful goal,
The phalanxed thunders, rumbling, roll
 Around Pilatus' head !

XVI.

Zug's gentle bosom heaves with fear,
And Küssnacht's waves, late soft and clear
 As maiden's gaze or childhood's kiss,
Wax black as murkiest pool of hell
When the infernal tempests swell,
 And demons jeer and hiss.

XVII.

'Midst such a ferment what is Man ?
He sits beneath the rainbow's span,
 And contemplates his little state :
He hears the darkness call, and deems
The skies speak to him in his dreams,
 And recognise him great.

XVIII.

Yet is't for him the Heavens engage
In their reverberating rage,
 For him the ambushed levins fight?
Him?—but a fainter lightning-flash,
Him?—but a feebler thunder-crash,
 Ending in deeper night!

XIX.

Lo! unto other lands of air
The elemental furies bear
 The roar of unexhausted strife;
And, freed from the sepulchral gloom,
Earth once again, as from the tomb,
 Rises to light and life.

XX.

Pilatus frees his rugged head,
Zug's crouching lake, released from dread,
 Looks up and smiles with face serene;
And, gazed on by the dying sun,
The phantom snow-crests, one by one,
 Glow with transfigured mien.

XXI.

Dead ! And the tender twilight sighs.
Wan wane her cheeks, moist grow her eyes,
 She draws her robes of mourning round :
Slowly she lights her widowed lamp,
And listens, through the night-dews damp,
 To catch some cheering sound.

XXII.

Yet in her loneliness how fair !
There is a sadness in the air
 Sweeter than all the chords of joy ;
A fragrance, as of spices borne
Unto the tomb of one we mourn,
 And can no more annoy !

XXIII.

Cham's spire, I scarce in heaven descry,
Inverted, in that other sky,
 The lake's lit breast, still plain doth glow :
So Soul, that darkly points above,
Shows sure and clear, when glassed by love
 In answering heart below !

XXIV.

No more the grazing herds I see,
But still their bells chime silvery
 The tuneful, if unmeasured peal,
And, as when heard in dewy morn,
From lonely mind and heart forlorn
 Their desolation steal.

XXV.

The legions of the starry host,
Each to their high and solemn post,
 In silent discipline repair,
And from the unbattlemented sky,
With an intrepid calm defy
 The demons of the air.

XXVI.

And, lo ! athwart their ordered lines,
That strange auxiliary shines,
 Who wears the bright long-flowing crest ;
Weird warrior from another world,
Whose banner shortly will be furled,
 Or waved in realms unguessed. .

XXVII.

Erratic pilgrim ! go not yet !
And, each fair planet, do not set !
For once, if only once, O Time !
Stay thine interminable march
Round and still round that hollow arch,
Where æons vainly chime !

XXVIII.

For when the tide, which unto Heaven
Brings night, 'gainst earth is backward driven,
In waves of rising day, ah ! then,
Me helpless will it bear once more
Unto that thronged but barren shore,
Ploughed by the cares of men !

FELSENEGG, 13th July 1874.

ALL HAIL TO THE CZAR!

I.

ALL hail to the Czar! By the fringe of the foam
That thunders, untamed, around Albion's shore,
See multitudes throng, dense as sea-birds whose home
Is betwixt the deaf rocks and the ocean's mad roar;
And across the ridged waters stand straining their eyes
For a glimpse of the Eagle that comes from afar:
Lo! it swoops towards the beach, and they greet it with cries
That silence the billows—"All hail to the Czar!"

II.

All hail to the Czar! England's noblest and best,
Her oldest, her newest, her proudest are there,
And they vie in obeisance before the great guest,
For the prize of his nod, for the alms of his stare.
To the seat of their Empire they draw him along,
Where the Palace flies open to welcome his car,
And Prince, Press, and People, with leader and song,
Ring the change on the pæan—"All hail to the Czar!"

III.

All hail to the Czar! the bold Monarch who shook
From the heart of the Lion its insolent lust,
That once from the strongest no outrage would brook,
Till it crouched at his feet, till it crawled in the dust!
Who the laurels bequeathed to us tore from our brow,
Who extinguished our fame that once shone like a star,
Made our rulers to tremble, our heralds to bow,
And our bosoms to mock us—"All hail to the Czar!"

IV.

All hail to the Czar! O yes! show him your ships,
Had your courage not failed, he had seen before now,
As they dally at anchor, the gag on their lips,
And the peace-loving holiday trim on their prow!
Yes! show him your army, that mighty array
He so rashly defied when he ventured to mar
The last work of its hands, and remind it to say,
But with bayonets inverted—"All hail to the Czar!"

V.

All hail to the Czar! As ye revel and feast,
I marvel the ghosts of the bootlessly slain
Do not come from their cold lonely graves in the East,
From the hillside that looks o'er the desolate main,

Which they perished to save, ye surrender, to live,
To the man ye now slaver, all base as ye are!
Do not stalk through the banquet-hall, pallid, and give
The gay toast ere ye drink it—"All hail to the Czar!"

VI.

All hail to the Czar! For his daughter he gave,
Like Atrides of old, without shrinking or qualm,
Though not that the white ships might move o'er the wave,
But that ours still might ride in immovable calm!
What Religion could once, now can Statecraft persuade;
And if ye would devote to the Furies of War
Half as freely your sons as he gave up his maid,
Without shame might ye shout then—"All hail to the
Czar!"

VII.

All hail to the Czar! Are ye then sunk so low,
O ye sons of the once fearless masters of earth!
That ye pour out the wine for an insolent foe,
That in depths of dishonour ye simulate mirth?
That, like unto mongrel hounds beaten and cowed,
Ye, crouched, lick alternately smiter and scar?—
O rather my country lay deaf in its shroud,
Than had lived to hear silent—"All hail to the Czar!"

20th May 1874.

A TUSCULAN QUESTION.

I.

ONE day as on an ass I rode,
By many a twisting gully,
To where once stood the famed abode
Of philosophic Tully,

II.

A shepherd lad with hat aslouch
Was singing to his flock O ;
I pulled my money from my pouch,
And chucked him a baiocco.

III.

A moment gone, and with his psalm
The hills and woods were ringing ;
But when the copper touched his palm,
Sudden he ceased his singing.

IV.

Ah! like to bees that cease to hum,
When pressing on for honey,
So doth the singing soul grow dumb,
Intent on clogging money.

V.

Kind Heaven! forbid that ever I
Should sink in golden torpor!
If, living, I may sing, I'll die
Contentedly a pauper.

FRASCATI, *May* 1863.

THE GOLDEN YEAR!

I.

WHEN piped the love-warmed throstle shrill,
And all the air was laden
With scent of dew and daffodil,
I saw a youth and maiden,
Whose colour, Spring-like, came and fled,
'Mong purple copses straying,
Whilst birchen tassels overhead
Like marriage-bells kept swaying;
Filled with that joy that lingers still,
Which Eve brought out of Aiden,—
With scent of dew and daffodil
When all the air was laden.

II.

When primrose banks turn pale and fade,
And meads wax deep and golden,
And in lush dell and laughing glade
Summer's gay Court is holden,
Them, nestling close, again I saw,
Affianced girl and lover,
She looking up with eyes of awe
To burning gaze above her ;
Playing anew the part oft played,
Sung by the poets olden,—
When primrose banks turn pale and fade,
And meads wax deep and golden.

III.

When autumn woods began to glow,
And autumn sprays to shiver,
Once more I saw them walking slow,
By sedgy-rustling river.
The season's flush was on her cheek,
The season's sadness o'er him:
He stroked her hand, and bade her speak
Of all the love she bore him.
That only made her tears to flow,
And chill his heart to quiver,—
While autumn woods began to glow,
And autumn sprays to shiver.

IV.

When winter's fields stretched stiff and stark,
And wintry winds shrilled eerie,
I saw him creep, alone, at dark,
Into the churchyard dreary.
He laid him down against the stone,
'Neath which she aye lay sleeping,
Kissed its cold face with many a moan,
Then loudly fell a-weeping :
" Oh ! let me in from lonely cark,
Or come thou back, my dearie ! "—
But still the wintry fields stretched stark,
And the wintry winds shrilled eerie !

THE END.

