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THE CONSTANTINIAD.

A Poem.

BOOKS I. to VI.



BY

THOMAS STUART.

“ Urbem præclaram statui.”

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P R E F A C E.



To have attempted to embody, in epic poetry, a continued, and not an episodical tragedy, together with satire, and didactic verse, each of which singly might claim a lifetime, blended all together, and built upon the foundation of philosophic truth, which is the only solid groundwork of poetic fiction, is a work which may boldly lay claim to some indulgence, from having never before been undertaken. Far, however, from idly believing myself to have accomplished my task, every day that I take it in hand, I remove the ideal standard to which I am accustomed to compare it, but further from my reach. While it is hard to say whether, when the mind is well pleased, or unsatisfied with its own exertions, that it communicates its over-excitement, or its load of untold depression, in the most exhausting manner to its companion, the bodily frame—to the poor and earthly host, who is put to the unequal task of entertaining a heavenly guest. The exquisitely refined delight,

(unknown and inconceivable to vulgar minds,) which rewards the creative efforts of the human understanding, acts upon us, as though indeed it had separated the soul from its load of clay, and restored it, for the twinkling of an eye, to the pure perceptions of an unembodied state. Whereas, when our efforts have failed us, we feel dragged down to the dust, as though we were girded and laden around by the leaden mantle, to which Dante has doomed the hypocrite in Hell. The fatigue of my undertaking having undermined my health, I am unwillingly induced to publish my poem; which I am unable to forget by throwing it aside. It has been to me as though I had eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and of evil, having awakened faculties within me, of whose possession I was not before aware. But, like the fruits of that tree, its reward will be soon the same.

Yet although widely removed asunder from that goal of perfection, to which, before my health began to fail me, I had perhaps too proudly entertained the hopes of bringing the present work, it is not to be thought that I have had the idle daring to have printed it "before term ends." It was entirely written, and entirely destroyed; twice it was attempted again; and now, for the fourth time

re-written, it is laid before my country. Τρις μὲν ὀρξάτ' ἰών, το δε τεταρτον ———.

It will remain for the people of England, if I deserve it, to fill up the line, and to write it upon my monument.—It has lulled away the best of those days of my life, which mankind commonly give over to the worship of Mammon, now more than ever the overwhelming god of this world; or to atchieving, too often unduly by his help, to the civil distinctions of life. It must serve me instead of the honours of my profession, to which, before I was better acquainted with them, with the world, and with myself, I acknowledge I had at former times the weakness to aspire. It must stand me in the stead of country, family, and fortune; and poor as it is, there is but one thing, in this world, for which I would now exchange it, which would be to recal the guilty follies of my youth; for whose atonement it was originally undertaken.

Before closing these prefaratory remarks, I am called to the painful task of fulfilling a solemn engagement, into which I entered many years ago, to retract, and blot out the writings of my earlier days, in so much as it lay within my power so to do.—To name them were needless, as they

are already forgotten, if indeed they outlived the day of their publication. The editor of a London weekly journal treated them with a degree of slight, from which the versification of the heroic couplets ought perhaps to have shielded them. The "Metropolitan Magazine" judged of them, however, in a very different way; and kindly encouraged their author to proceed. But especially the distinguished Editour of the "Atlas," looked forward to hopes, which I trust he will now find at least partly realised. The celebrated Mathias, the writer of "the Pursuits of Literature," thought so favourably of them, as to embolden me to continue the present poem; for I had made him acquainted with my undertaking—and judging from them alone, in the exquisitely beautiful Latin epistle which he addressed to me, and published in the last collection of his Latin works, he bade me go on upon my way rejoicing, and ventured to foretell of me, as one "*cui summa claritudo paratar.*" The grave has closed over him, and over nearly all of those to whom I should have longed to have imparted any praise; or from whom would have hidden any censure I might have incurred. I lay this portion of my work, therefore, before the public, with abated anxiety, looking forward more

to the decision of posterity than to that of my cotemporaries. The awards of criticism, instead of being too often hastily shuffled into the journals of the day, would require to be slowly, and deliberately formed. Even and then, we have a memorable instance of their failure, in one of the greatest writers in our language. Shaftesbury, in his *Characteristics*, who has judged of both Homer and Plato, with the most refined discernment, and deepest insight into the perfection of their art; has spoken of Milton, and of Shakespeare, in so disparaging a manner, as to show him to have been too prejudiced in favour of the harmony of the polished tongue of Greece, to have allowed of his attending to that daring grandeur which must stand not only unadorned, but naked—and which, in our two great poets, has occasionally a strength and a boldness of metaphor, which “the language of the gods” has never equalled. But the taste of Shaftesbury was shocked too fastidiously, by the many rugged spots, which lie desolate, especially among the enchanted groves, and gardens which Shakespeare’s landscape unfolds, forgetting that the mind of the great tragic bard of England might be likened to a vast country—to a tract of creation, diversified with wilds, with

barren rocks, and wooded mountains, scattered through vales and vinyards, watered by rivers of knowledge, and enriched by mines of exhaustless wealth.

Of the difficulty of undertaking in rhyme such a task as the present, I was but little aware when I began my work. Those transitions of places and of persons, which are so easily narrated in prose by the tragedian, have all to be conveyed in verse in heroic poetry. Like the joints of the human body, though not so beautiful as the full-fleshed limb, they require a nicer contrivance, and more cunning device—Rhyming always to the ear, and never only to the eye, the licence, into which the exquisite taste of Dryden and of Pope was too often betrayed, I have entirely avoided. Daily as the whim of foolish fashion aspires more and more, to accentuate its pronunciation on the first syllables of words, the number of rhyme-able terminations becomes more limited.

Against the new-fangled speech of our day I have strained every sinew. The Saxon tongue of England, were it not for King James's Bible, and for Shakespeare, would haply die away from of the tongues of men. It would appear that writers nowadays, strive after Greco-Latin-Anglocising our

language; rather than rendering it back to its Saxon strength,—to a boldness, which may dare expressions, at which the Greeks themselves, with admiration would have wondered; and which Homer, and Demosthenes would have emulating, transplanted into their own. The language of Greece became, in its full perfection, refined by abstractions, upon abstractions, into the capability of delineating the nearly imperceptible lines of lessening shadows, as they sinking, die away. But the English tongue, if it cannot follow all those steps which rather flow than move, flexible, and infinite as the progress of the centiped, owes its imperfection to our having at wholesale borrowed the words of Greece and of Rome, Anglo-cising them too often but badly, instead of translating their ideas into careful combinations of the language of our forefathers.

Where I have sometimes risked newly-compounded words, they have always been of the growth of our father-land. For instance, in place of “a constellation,” having coined “a stargroup,” it appears to me that I have given more than weight for weight;—or, to cite another instance, where I have used “the girdlesky” instead of “the horizon,” partly taking it from Göethe,

who has applied it to the earth, methinks that by an image simple, and expressive, the object which is intended becomes painted in the word which unfolds it. In using once or twice the expression "to guess," where nowadays we are accustomed to supply its place with "to suppose," I have merely returned to the manner of speaking of our forefathers, which still partially prevails in the American continent; and for the use of which I have more than once heard that great nation attempted to be laughed at. Though we have now mewed up the word "to guess," into expressing the effort made to unravel a riddle, it undoubtedly in olden times was used as Americans still often apply it. Before pretending to be so satirical, it would be well to pay more attention to the growing barbarisms of the day which lours upon us. Not contented with "acuteness," for which, a hundred years ago, "sharpness" would have been better written, we must forsooth bring in the Latin word "acumen" in all its crudity. Not satisfied with "a want," or "a wished-want," we must needs have a "desideratum." We have invented railways, and have a right to give them a name; yet must go a-begging to Rome, for a "terminus;" whereas "a railend," "a railstop,"

“ a railport,” or a hundred other ways of speaking might have spared us this addition to the national debt. Travelling having become the fashion, scraps of French and Italian are thrust in, and out of place, into every kind of literature. With a juster pride the French adapt to the nature of their language, the terminations of almost all the foreign words which they receive into their vocabulary. England also did so, in former days; when Germany, Sweden, Italy, Spain, and Sicily, became words done into English; instead of the Mexicos, Belguims, and Polynesias of modern times; while in private life from fashion, finery, or straining thereafter, “ Mary” must be exalted into “ Maria,” and “ Emily” tagged out into “ Emilia.”

In lifting up my feeble voice against all such sorts of speech, I have endeavoured to Anglify in so much as it lay in my power, whatever proper names I have used; and for instance in writing “ Verone,” I have only obeyed the analogy of our language. By allowing the simple ways of speaking of ancient days to fall out of use and wont, the ignorance of modern writers is often put a shift to find a manner of expressing themselves. In a work of no inconsiderable merit, I for instance lately have found occasionally the following phrase:—“ The

castle which was now being built," and many others, of tacking on a present to a past participle ; all of which blunders might have been avoided, by using the words of eld, which would have said " the castle, which was now a-building."

But as these remarks have been only intended, in some measure, to explain the recourse which I have had, to a more Saxon phraseology than usually finds favour in the writers of the day, I must draw them to a close. Yet will not do so before expressing a wish that a Della-Cruscan academy were established to watch over the English language, and to publish its dictionary, of various sizes, in order to do away with those wordbooks which boast in their title pages of adding " two thousand words," or so forth, to the tongue of England.

PERUGIA, 29. *June*, 1844.

THE CONSTANTINIAD.

A Poem.

BOOK I.

OF him I sing, who, Rome and Jove subdued,
Rear'd on the Capitol, Christ's hallow'd rood ;
Proud Helen's son : while bow'd before it fell,
On half the world, o'erwhelm'd, the powers of Hell.
Far as dire Woden's rites were wont to lave,
In human blood, dark wilds of Scandinave :
Or Albion's woods, where ev'ry hideous shade,
Still human blood, drank from the reeking blade :
To Egypt's shores, where base, unmann'd, yet mild,
Crawl'd Superstition, in the dust defiled.
While wide, as Rome's unmoulted eagles soar'd,
The gods of Greece, her fetter'd realms ador'd.
Likeness of ev'ry thralling lust, that scorn'd
By reason, vice has polish'd, and adorn'd ;
Gods, such as rang'd his boundless passions free—
Gods, such as man would make, as man would be.

How then Constantine, more than Titan strove,
And reft his lightnings from Olympian Jove ;
I sing—Blest spirit, plum'd at thy command,
Heav'n-temper'd wings, oh ! might my soul expand !
Such as shot forth from Plato's godlier soul,
To waft him high o'er earth's far, dwindling pole,
To catch a glimpse of Truth—where Truth indeed
Dwells, Thou, my soul, blest Spirit ! hallowing speed ;
That tun'd to numbers, to thy choirs alike,
The lyre of heav'n, my ravisht hand may strike.

For more than Pharaoh routed ; and beyond
Such might as burst fell Egypt's galling bond :
Cleft seas, that into walls embattl'd rose,
Then toppling down on Israel's prancing foes,
Upswallow'd car and charioteer—yet still
Planted far mightier on the sev'n-fold hill,
Tow'rs Christ's triumphant rood—Whose arms about
The world around, in boundless love stretch out ;
While ev'ry age, within that wide embrace,
Clasps realms ; will fold at last the human race.

Nor rose the cross alone o'er lordly Rome ;
But waste no more, behold the Bosphor foam !
Fretted by ports, which half his shores have hemm'd ;
By navies bridled, that his waves have stemm'd.
By tow'rs, and temples, palaces surmount,
Long colonnade, proud arch, or gushing fount.
Into the skies, here Parian pillars shoot
The freize acanthine ; twist the light volute.

Or here aloft such statues rear'd, behold,
 As might teach Nature to retouch her mould.
 To see those trophies rise, wept Greece, despoil'd
 Of half her pride—a hundred nations toil'd—
 When fleeting, hardly ere some moons could wane,
 Upsprang a city, such as meet to reign,
 Queen of two-hemispheres—While first amaz'd,
 Upon a rival, Rome indignant gaz'd.

Yet ere atchiev'd, ah! me, what deeds of guilt!
 What strife in Hell! what gory fields were spilt!
 For, dread, mixt up, in all that awful scene,
 Earth, Hell, and Heav'n, have they the play'rs been;
 Ere rose Christ's rood. Hell's toils dark-brooding first;
 Rending the veil, that wraps her realms accurst,
 Unfold blest Spirit! while those deeps I dare,
 Whence spring all woes which blight this upper air.

Where sunk afar, in pangs unutter'd dwell
 Guilt's dread first-born; each in himself a Hell;
 Their woe-crown'd fiend, had blasted from his fall,
 But madlier ris'n, uplooking yet to call
 To battle God again—In conclave met;
 On tortur'd thrones, his loftier Pow'rs were set.
 By hollow globe begirt of smould'ring fire,
 Step above step, guilt's ranks, yet high'r, and high'r,
 Writhing uprise—A mighty planet's womb,
 Which smother'd flames devour; yet ne'er consume;
 Unfolds this amphitheatre of guilt,
 Within a world of solid ruin built—

Above, a firmament of huge basalt,
Drear, murky, flaming lours the molten vault ;
Below, nor flatten'd, but scoop'd-like profound,
An-hunger'd yawns the mighty gulf around.
Outspreads amid, hot, empty, burning air,
That light instead, reflects blue hideous glare,
Such as o'er nature's downfall, sweeping past,
Suns flick'ring out, on crashing worlds might cast.

Like grim Hercynian wild-wood, horrid strown,
The hollow waste, up to its midmost zone,
Frowns one fell host—Nor is there to compare,
Woe to that woe ; despair to that despair—
Whose groans far hoarser, than chaf'd oceans pent,
Shake, all but rend, that, steadfast firmament.

All pangs are there ; unlike our fleeting woes ;
Over which Death at least, a mantle throws ;
For there he cannot come—But fell instead ;
Thrice dreader, lifts Despair her horrid head.
Thence scaring him ; into whose very jaw,
Would rush the damn'd, for rescue in his maw,
From her escap'd. Her locks twine twisted snakes,
She living darts whene'er her brow she shakes.
Swift as her gaze, upon her prey they spring,
Coil, and worm through and through the rankling sting.
Foul brood that never dies ; nor fails ; for sped
One snake, its slimy fellow straight is bred.
Nor thus her living locks are shorn ; but hang
Clothing her waist, which feeds their knawing fang ;

From poison'd veins—What time her writhing grasp,
Tears, hurls one from her, others round her clasp.

Midmost, above, where swelt'ring springs, and molt',
The vaulted woe; nail'd through by thund'ring bolt,
From God's right hand; she with'ring hangs suspense;
While round her brows their creeping clusters thence
Brandish their cloven stings; with wire-drawn hiss,
Shrill scranching through the groaning-jaw'd abyss.

Daughter of Sin and Pride—Not born, but spawn'd,
On chaos crawl'd she slimy forth; ere yawn'd
Yet Hell's foul womb. To her, the damn'd to goad,
God gave—with might to fashion their abode;
Hell; and she made it like herself; the thought
Which burn'd within, to burn without her wrought
Up into solid ill—Both real; such
As mind can one, and other bodies touch.

Torn by such pangs, thus on himself has hurl'd
Satan the fell atchievment of his world,
Wherein, o'ertopping on his flaming throne;
He writhing soars beyond its midmost zone,
High o'er his host; which drear around array'd,
Scowls, as when storms Arabian wastes invade,
Uplifting seas of sand; that bury'd deep,
Swallow whole caravans at one fell sweep.
Yet hideouser ten thousand fold, abroad
Spreads Hell's dire host—while by their pangs unaw'd,

They wilder back, albeit from throes abort',
For ev'ry pang, on God his curse retort.

Such myriads lowr'd around that throne whercon
Their devil-god he sate; Hell's King; and shone,
Blasting and blasted—Fierce as Ætna heaves
Wrath upon Heav'n; his angry brows he weaves
Into defiance knit—while pale disdain
Scoffs on his tortures; and o'ermasters pain.
Direful his mien, as rushing from its sphere,
A ruin'd sun through wrack of worlds might steer,
Well nigh put out. Or, as by him foretold,
Who saw God's Lamb, the living book unfold;
At doom's last trump; when shall the day bedight,
Murky, like sackcloth, hide his face, affright:
For her own steps shall Vengeance kindle—So,
Satan majestic beam'd athwart his woe.
Dread, while his eye, that never blink'd, declar'd
A pride, not ev'n Almighty hands had scar'd.
While foul defeat had to that writhing pride,
Not fear, but flames of redder wrath supplied.
The lightning-furrows which his presence plough'd,
Haughty, for God had launch'd them, he avow'd.
All wounds God struck. Nor lesser arm had weight,
Eternal deeds, to blazon on his gait.

As rocks Ceraunian, mantling storms have wrapt,
While on them lean the laden heav'ns cloud-capt,
Only sublimer, midst the roaring crash,
On brows unbent call down the forky flash.

Thus tow'r'd his naked state ; in reckless scorn
Of pomp that lesser empire might adorn ;
But ill had suited with so fall'n a state,
Which only now could in revenge be great.

A cloud of darkness, on that blighted zone ;
Night upon night, rose Satan from his throne ;
Hell upon Hell. Then spake, as rolling seas
Speak to their shores. Awful, his words were these.

“ Oh ye, for whom one name alone I find,
Gods ; for how else declare the dauntless mind,
The God can not enthrall ? Of good as He,
Of ill, our own creation, gods are we,
From evil, whilst one good, our own, we've wrought,
Not his—that might by wrongs and mis'ry taught,
The soul which bolter as through fires, and leave
Its mawkish dregs, upon the writhing sieve ;
Till nature conqu'ring casts the coil ; and frees
The godlike substance, tortur'd from its lees.
Then ill-gods not miscall'd ; hail ! unsubdu'd,
To baffle fate, is't else than godlike good ?
Far less o'ercome ; yet proudly while ye bear
Your pangs, nor whisper one repentant pray'r.
While as e'erlasting is your doom, ye feel
Eternal hatred must your torments heal.
Hatred that scorns submission ; only woe
Ye could not bear ; nor God, he can bestow.

“ If then your inmost being now be hate,
Uplook ye not to master your estate,
Whose heav'n lies in revenge? For ev'n to dwell,
Unwreak'd in heav'n; to me, such heav'n were hell.
For I at least, all other pangs disdain,
Save that I shorn of my revenge remain.
Since ev'n this woe, to me were goodliest bliss,
Heav'n could I drag into its last abyss;
Suns, stars, aye God, his universe, all, all,
Down hurl in one, wide, overwhelming fall.
Upon the wreck, uprearing then my throne,
Should nature's ruin for these pangs atone.

“ One step already, in the dread ascent,
On earth stands planted tow'rds our glorious bent.
For faint, afar from that dim planet seen,
Outskirting, heav'n expands her blue serene.
So fair, that had I ne'er her brightness known;
Save darkly fancied from that dreamy zone;
To conquer heav'n, or be undone, my lance
A hundred worlds would hazard on that glance.

“ Why halt we then? is't not the starry road
To vengeance leading, and our lost abode;
Nor only we advance not, but moreo'er
Fall back, or high beyond all height must soar.
For God revindicates his world; the rood,
Already half our empire, hath subdued.
Why tarry then, until of all bereav'd,
Wreck'd be the bridge from hell to earth atchiev'd?

Is't fear? base thought avaunt! these pangs declare,
 What ye can suffer, and what ye could dare.
 Aye! know we not already Nature's worst?
 Or sinks there Hell, beyond this Hell accurst?
 Then could we fear, what now to dread remains,
 Since all that damning is, our doom contains?

“ For war my voice; for war mine arm prepar'd;
 Defied be heav'n; war in these words declar'd.
 Albeit if all forsake me; war all-hail!
 Alone, all heav'n, will I alone assail.
 Draw down God's lightnings on this brow, and stand
 Between my conquest, and his red right hand.

“ But in your bearing, war bann'd forth I read,
 Then be its place, time, circumstance decreed.
 Mark well my words—O'er earth have ages roll'd,
 Days bringing forth, by Sybil-tongues foretold.
 Wherein around the rood, on Tyber's plain,
 Should Hell, and Heav'n embattl'd strive again.
 Our ken thus far. But lo! mankind survey'd
 Maxence behold! 'gainst Helen's son array'd.
 Maxence our slave—Constantine then our foe,
 Would wrest Hell's sceptre from the world below.
 As soon, all rueful, let us kiss the rod,
 As thus be baffled, more by man than God.
 For battle girt, then wait a die, which cast
 No second leaves behind. Taught by the past,
 Our steps, let slow, consid'rate valour lead;
 For progress keeps not always pace with speed.

Then all wound up into this one intent,
 Pil'd, heap our blasphemies, so high till spent,
 Yield if we must, we may at length provoke,
 From God, his last, annihilating stroke.
 If like may be, nor dragg'd into the void,
 Were all his worlds, his heav'ns, Himself destroy'd !

“ Then up ! and take your proud embattl'd stand ;
 For sure is Aziel's swift return at hand.
 Scout, whom on earth I sent—Up ! arm, arise !
 Await his signal, to invade the skies.
 Up ! murkiest hell ! hark all ye deeps afar !
 Up ! fell Despair, our Hope, retreat debar.
 Conquer, be gods, or else—— Nay up ! amain,
 Fate cannot such alternative contain.”

Thus from his pinnacle of woe, harangu'd
 Satan malign. Hell's hollow caverns clang'd.
 Her hosts at once, all-armed, and dread arose ;
 Like Simoom's scorching ; black as tempest blows,
 Tearing their bristling tops, from forest pines
 Which darken Swedeland—So those dreary lines
 Waved far and wide their crested plumes, mid air ;
 Making Hell shudder. With thrice anger'd glare,
 While quak'd her foul abysses. To and fro,
 Hideous, while roll'd, tongue-forked, her flames of woe.

Thus far in hell——On earth, on Narbon's coast
 Encamp'd, Constantine arm'd his mighty host,

Bye Ar'late's walls. On high Night held her state,
With all her stars, that handmaids on her wait.
To march begirt; whene'er the herald East
Sang forth; those armies sipt the poor man's feast,
Bidden by sleep; to leavings of whose fare,
Kings from their proud pre-eminence of care,
How glad would oft stoop down. Whereon harass'd
Lay Helen's son—A dream before him past;
Such as would make him grasp at empty air,
Clenching his hands—while stood on end his hair.
Embattl'd as two armies, rang'd he sees
Prance on mid heav'n; light-driving on the breeze.
A flaming cross, one bore aloft; and one
Rome's eagle rear'd—But lo! their strife begun,
They charge, draw back, then rallied, charge again;
To earth while show'ring falls their blood like rain.
Glow's heav'n all crimson; red on earth below,
Kindling alike, blood-red the mountains glow.
Snorting forth flames their chargers sweep; like beams
Of flashing light, each falling weapon streams.
They clash; they grapple; steel to airy steel;
Or spear to spear; the clouds beneath them reel:
Till Rome's proud eagle, pierced by many a stroke,
Falls—like a falling star—Constantine woke—
Sprang from his couch. “Can thus a mocking dream,”
Troubled he cried, “so big with being teem,
Nor yet bring forth? Shame on't! this earthy ball,
When sinks Rome's eagle, then herself shall fall;
Both in one doom. What narrow'r fun'ral pile
Were broad enough, for like estate and style?”

“ Sleeps not that eagle, still on clouds entrench’d,
 With all Jove’s lightnings in his talons clench’d ?
 Sits not proud Rome, an Amazon who strides
 The world ; her war-horse as through heaven she rides ?
 Though like a mother, blanch’d whose cheeks have been
 Of bravest sons bereft—yet towers her mien ;
 As if o’ertopping all her wide domain ;
 Such brows she lifts—too lofty to complain ;
 Her griefs eat inwards—Hence ! then lying dream ;
 On Rome’s fall’n eagle, never sun shall beam.

“ Yet what then bodes that star, whose flaming hair,
 Sweeps like a brand athwart the nightly air,
 To burn up worlds ? Why blacken’d lours at noon,
 Tainted the sun ? Why crimson glares the moon ?
 Why reels this mighty earth ; and fever’d quakes,
 Shudd’ring like him, a third day’s ague shakes ?
 While women bear miscarriages ; by dint
 Or dwarfs bring forth ; while Nature maim’d, and stint,
 Breaks her own ell-rod ; like a thief, to steal
 From men their shapes—All gladsome wont and weal
 Of life lies fulsome drugg’d. Fields, hunger sow’d,
 For bread, at harvest scowl with thistles mow’d.
 Dumb beasts speak out ; while flitting on the breeze,
 Glide shrivell’d ghosts ; yell horrid shrieks ; Disease
 Makes revel, feasting Death—dread, yet more dread,
 As though new worlds, at once to battle led,
 Sweep nations forth, like shifting sands ; uncouth
 Choke Danaw’s floods ; the Don, or dreary Pruth.

Cloud all the dismal North ; ill-boding, or
 Hurl forth the savage hurricane of war
 From wilds beyond the human steps of man ;
 'Yond Parthian wastes, Sarmace, or Ecbatan,
 From earth's mysterious skirts ; huge swarms outpour'd ;
 Robbing man's outward shape, with mind unstor'd,
 Which stands for seal, mark, witness to our deed
 And title to be men. What streams must bleed !
 Forth Him'lay's mountains, roars the cry of war !
 Wide Atlas answers ; shout the rocks of Taur !
 Harsh, horrid tongues unwrit—My battle-field
 The world—her sword have I not thews to wield ?
 Slake war's unsated steeds in blood again ;
 Steeds, man may start, hardly ev'n gods can rein.
 Nor could I, will I curb them, till one bound,
 Mine empire, and the world, one bourne have found !”

Thus forth his mighty soul, in stormy vent,
 Pour'd Helen's son. When lo ! within his tent,
 Before him stood, what look'd in outward guise,
 A man ; yet awful from his brows and eyes
 Beam'd godlikeness. His beard, and hoary crown
 White flow'd, as lofty swan's soft-moulted down ;
 Clothing his face with rev'rence—Pow'r high dwelt
 Thron'd on his brows ; like him who never knelt
 But to his God, he stood. Such rooted gait,
 Its presence rear'd—Calm, as the will of fate.
 Fearless, since guiltless ; strong in conscious right,
 All might of kings what boots, before such might ?

“ What art thou ? speak !” Constantine cried ; “ Thy pow’r,
To beard me thus, in evil-boding hour ?”

“ Of flesh like thine,” a dauntless voice replied,

“ Unarm’d, I thee, and all thy hosts abide :

Unarm’d, save only on my breast I feel

Mine age, mine innocence a garb of steel.”

“ No base assassin,” thus proud Helen’s son,

Sheathing his blade, “ could think what thou hast done.

Speak on—for wert thou harbinger from Hell,

Dare I tenfold not hear, what thou dar’st tell ?

Yet slept my sent’nels ? touching let me seal

Mine eye’s frail witness ; flesh, not shape reveal.”

“ Chide not thy watch,” replied those lips unknown ;

“ My father’s ring found presence to thy throne.

This wondrous sapphire ; such as catch fall’n stars

From heav’n, and store them up in sky-blue spars,

Whence twinkle six bright rays. Thou know’st it well,

He on my finger put, and bade it tell

His love for me—Thy vet’rans kisst this hand,

It wears—I pass’d—and lo ! before thee stand.

A man who serves Christ’s poorest slave, but he

Will not, oh ! Emperour, bow down to thee !

Sylvester thou beholdest—often, thou,

This hour, hast grasp’d—it comes appointed now,

By God : that God I serve, who is alone,

Was, will be : earth his footstool, heav’n his throne.

Who spake, they are—and if he will, were not ;

Where stood this world, yon stars, an empty spot.

Lost in his boundlessness—yet to the brim,

No drop were wanting, flowing o’er with Him.

Such is the God I serve. Whose herald, here
I stand, Constantine. To his words give ear.
Up! then to battle; gird around thy blade!
Before thee flee thy scatter'd foes dismay'd.
I see them routed; wrathful as he roars,
Hark Tyber lashes his blood-sprinkl'd shores!
To horse! away before thy foaming speed;
Alps bow ye down! ye rolling floods recede!
Hear'st thou not rush Maxence's chariot wheels?
They rattle! see! yon arch below them reels.
Hark! how it crashes! falls; 'tis his own spade
Which delv'd the pit, the hunter's grave hath made.
Thou hast o'ercome. But other lips than thine,
Of grapes thy feet have trodden, drink the wine.
Fall'n lies Rome's eagle—Shorn those wings which spann'd
Eas'ly the world; as perch-rod in his hand,
Who plants his garden-shade. The cross instead,
O'er Rome shall rise; to lands unknown be sped.
Start not! some hours; thyself shalt see it rise,
Mount, soar, fill heav'n, o'erflood the blazing skies:
Till like a taper it put out the sun.
A twinkling—and it passes; else undone
All eyes were stricken blind. Hence snatch'd away,
Turn'd into farthest stars, of mildest ray,
Hail'd, shall it glad, some weary sailor cheer,
Beyond earth's girdle, who his hopes shall steer;
Starcross of South'ren deeps. That cross thy flag
Uplift; and by the cross o'ercome; and drag
Thy foes all fetter'd to thy car—— Yet bow'd
Down to the dust; oh! man, beware the proud,

Else sip shalt thou, of horrid wrath a cup,
 Such as not Hell—forbid it heav'n! up! up!
 To battle gird thee. Art not thou his sword,
 In God's right hand? Not for thyself outpour'd,
 The blood thou sheddest falls. Thy throne shall pass;
 A thousand thrones—sands in Time's hourly glass.
 Meanwhile that rood, thy battles rush to build,
 Shall reign, till burst the doom of worlds fulfill'd;
 Rear'd on the Capitol. Whence down shall dasht
 Lie Jove's proud idol, temple, thunders smasht
 Like potter's shards. But quaking, lo! I feel,
 Unhing'd, the steadfast earth below me reel.
 Farewell! anon to meet." He spake, and went;
 While groan'd the ground, and to and fro the tent,
 Flapp'd like a wounded eagle's wings—Earth quak'd
 Thrice, as if up from her foundations rak'd.
 Aghast, Constantine stood—Like flesh which creeps
 O'er a man's bones, whose blood a-curdling keeps;
 At once throughout his host, as o'er one man,
 A shudder, like Death's cramping fingers, ran.

Meanwhile Valere, she of Maximian's bed
 The widow'd spouse, to Pluto's fane had sped;
 There to do sacrifice. Sate by her side,
 Her daughter Faustine, great Constantine's bride.
 Behind her Cedric stood, who deeply school'd
 In Druid lore, the mother-empire rul'd;
 Son of a Gaelic sire; at heart a Celt,
 Though now a slave; hot kingly blood he felt

Roll hatred through his veins—Dread o'er them sprung
The vault, from whence a hundred lamps there swung.
Kindling all red the marble altar glow'd ;
While heard without a hundred heifers low'd.
Beneath that altar hideous gap'd, and grim
A cave. Rear'd on a tripod o'er its brim,
The pontiff sate. By times there dismal roll'd
Sounds, by that cavern's tongue deep-echoing told ;
As heard from midmost earth. Like mutt'ring cloud,
Whose stiff'd thunders gasp to breathe aloud.
“ Ages have fled,” Voltorn, the hoary priest,
Began, “ Since hush'd this cavern's voice hath ceas'd ;
Ev'n since Tibere ; when, as our annals tell,
By earthquakes rent, first yawn'd those jaws of Hell.
Whose wrath to feed, here soothing blood was spilt ;
Uprose that altar, soars this temple built.
Its fate ; mankind's—within this scroll reveal'd,
A Sybil writ ; to aftertimes appeal'd.
Handed from our first pontiff down, it thus
Awful hath come, with worship kisst, to us. ✱
Faster than iron, for these flimsy thongs
Bind it ; by chaunted spells, and mutter'd songs ;
In curses wrapt ; to sleep, till of itself
It woke—And there, upon that marble shelf,
It rev'rent lay. Unravel, for who could
Those knotted words ? An hour since understood ;
Breaking the ground, asunder rending broke
The marble, whence this scroll down rolling—woke !
Those words unwarping thus, which dark and wierd,
Through folly's elvish mask, at wisdom sneer'd.

“ To hear it's doom, Augustal dames, dismay'd,
At all those signs, your presence here I pray'd,
Wherewith, our evil times go big. If so,
Why Hell frowns thus an-anger'd it may show.
Whose wrath burns red, if I arightly guess,
Because in these god-fangling days men dress
New idols up. With tongues, unknown, or not,
Bestow them ; to a tittle or a jot,
Wrangle their meanings out ; as if that pen
Which wrote the world, a nibbing begg'd from men.
Day, after day, begets some worship ; each
Which all God knows, at finger-ends can teach.
His providence, and sounding, upward draws,
A sample, on its lead, of Nature's cause.
As though the worm had wimbl'd forth to climb
The heav'ns, like earth, crawl'd over with its slime.

“ Then Jove ! up ! save thine empire ! fall, or will't,
Though proud to look upon ; and lofty built,
It gorgeous tow'r an all-god's temple ; stands
It yet on halt-foundations ; quick in sands.
Vain on its walls, in arabesques, men paint
Eld greedy of belief ; bald, grim, and quaint,
To lure young days. Nor, though the groundwork lack
Propping, betake them to spade, pick and axe,
To raise it buttresses. Now Fate unseal
This scroll ; the future, past to thee, reveal,
That wert, wilt, art at once.” The golden shears,
Then took like one, to do, who doing fears,

Yet does, and does not. Clipping so, then tight
His left held up the parchment ; while his right
Pull'd it out rustling ; nor all down, his hold
Let go ; when from both ends it startl'd, roll'd
Up curling till the shrunken met, and crisp
Tingl'd—as ploughman, by Will o' the wisp,
A-wooning scar'd at midnight, stands bound fast,
By fear begrappl'd ; so the priest aghast,
Star'd wilder'd. “ Ha !” then cried, “ foul scoffing at,
Rather a slave upon my beard had spat ;
Augustal dames, than such bare mock'ry brook !
There 's treach'ry in 't.” He then the parchment took,
Tearing it open, widely spread, as reach'd
His passion-palsied hands ; while anger bleach'd,
White as his hairs, his cheeks ; what time unroll'd
The scroll held forth a blazon'd cross of gold.
“ Thou worshipt lie ?” when thus aloud began
His lips blaspheming. “ Flouting gods and man,
How camest here ?” when scarce the words he spake,
Impious, when lo ! began the ground to shake :
Nor from his tripod, could he spring before
Back, headlong, roll'd it toppling with him o'er
The crumbling cavern's brim. Heard as they dasht
Down, till as though by some small pebble splasht,
Gurgl'd the pool far sunk. Up rushing sprang
The white-rob'd throng : the temple shrieking rang.
When thund'ring louder, sank their cries all drown'd,
Deep swallow'd in the hollow bellowing ground.
Which mutter'd wrath. While crackling overhead,
Yawn'd wide the rifted vault. Below them fled

From underfoot, the quaking earth : while fell,
On his own altar dasht, the god of Hell.

Pale, haggard, Faustine shudder'd—while Valere
Sprang up. Unblench'd but smil'd the Druid seer.
All else had fled. When she the widow'd queen,
To Cedric spake, “ What bodes thy gladden'd mien ?
Which with an earthquake, like a childish toy,
Can play ? From man art dwindl'd to a boy ?
Speak ! ” When he answer'd “ Both the child, and sage,
On dangers, smile alike, which on them wage ;
Because they are, or are not understood.
Thus earthquakes, sunshine strike, as with our mood
They chime—Thou quakest, thence to thee all earth
Quakes ; while to me, it dances in my mirth.

“ This hour long panted, pray'd for, long foreseen,
Hath haply come ; or tarries not, great queen.
Nor Vola sang in vain. He comes ! see Thor !
His lightnings grasp ! while hark ! the gods of War,
Round Woden rushing from the Hall of slain,
Hell's monsters throttle, on the starry plain.
The blood-hound, wolf, and crested snake have burst
The bonds of ages : on they stride accurst ;
Shaking the world. Lo ! now their fangs assail
The kindly gods. See Hell's dark pow'rs prevail !
For sure the twilight of the gods at hand,
Their starry race, the sun and moon are spann'd,
As with a reed—Yon purple vault shall rent,
Be crush'd together like a stricken tent.

While earth uprooted, like a whirling ball,
Through space ; from God's geometry shall fall.
For lo ! the mighty year, month, aye, and ev'n
Haply is come that hour, by bards foreseen ;
Her star-halt ; Nature's winding up, which brings
The death, at once two-fold, and birth of things.
When all the fires of heav'n together clash'd,
Shall downward flaming from their thrones be dash'd ;
Raining like drops of fire. One ruin, one
Dread 'whelming waste—Then ages blest begun,
Shall from the wreck, new, brighter worlds, arise ;
New earth, new heav'n, sun, moon, and starry skies !"
His Rhunic lore, thus Cedric, rapt, outpour'd,
Full as a river ; slaying like a sword.
When from behind the marble altar, bright
Uprose a cross, with burning sheen bedight ;
By hands unseen uprear'd. Now black, now blanch
Woe clouded Cedric's brow—Nor longer staunch
Stood rooted in her thought Valere, but shook
By anger torn—While neither word nor look
Scap'd Faustine ; such as might unmask, how work'd
Her soul, which deep in cunning'st ambush lurk'd.
So their suspense. When from the cavern stream'd
Foul, sulph'ry stench ; flick'ring pale, blue gleam'd
The lamps, then vanish'd ; all was darkness, save
What awful light the cross more glowing gave.
When forth for air, they gasping rush'd, o'erwrought
By dread ; and back, the palace straightway sought.

But morn had dawn'd, as though a kiss from heav'n,
 Wak'ning to earth, her rosy lips had giv'n.
 When forth Constantine rode, as though decreed,
 First on the Capitol to curb his steed.
 With mind to grasp the world, his ken had scann'd ;
 With might to hold it, bridled in his hand :
 So rode he forth : in gesture, pride, and port,
 Like day's first beam. His warriors round, made court.
 Hostilian, Teuton, Fulvian and Eumede,
 Each, who to vict'ry, though alone might lead.
 Aurele and Vulsine, Arval, and Metaur,
 The plumes of Valour ; and the swords of war.
 Besides such thousands, as no trumpet's tongue
 Could tell ; all brave, all glorious to be sung :
 His legions clothing far, in arm'd array,
 The flashing plain ; stretch'd like the sun's bright way.
 As though like him, the world they would o'erarch,
 And both together close their conqu'ring march.

How fair ! in lying smiles, from peace suborn'd,
 Has horrid War, his direful mien, adorn'd.
 Pride, pomp, and order, handmaids on him wait ;
 While music marches heralding his state.
 'Mid steeds he comes, 'mid banners, plumes and spears ;
 Mankind all madden ; 'tis a god appears !
 To gild his way, their festal garbs they rend ;
 To drag his car, they glory-drunken bend ;
 To gorge him, stint their sons, of bread bereft ;
 To robe him, strip, ev'n Virtue naked left.

Laurels and weave him, water'd which have fed
On widow's tears, on blood their children shed.

Meanwhile, in Ar'late, at the trumpet's blast,
Full many mothers started up aghast.
Yet first, for most she lov'd, Alexine's fears
Heard, and replied by her foreboding tears.
" Fabian," she thus her aged lord address,
" Hear yonder voice cry, " barrenness is blest."
Four times have not, upon fair-tiding morn,
These halls proclaim'd to us a son is born?
Yet thrice, till ev'ry stone had found a tongue,
To death have these ancestral roofs not rung?
Must then Calist, ev'n as his breth'ren went,
Go too; and leave our household lamp nigh spent?
Who then shall life to its faint beam supply,
If this our last, our hoarded cruise wax dry?"
Hardly she spake; when Fabian straight arose,
Snatching his blade, long votive to repose,
Down from the trophied wall. His helm indent
By honour, crown'd his silv'ry age unbent.
Forth trapp'd in scars his war-horse pranc'd, that far'd
Ev'n like his lord. Their toils and glories shar'd.
Though not that horse and rider, that of yore
Their front in battle, like a centaur bore:
But arm'd with more than either sword or shield,
He girded triumphs won from many a field.

Hail'd, mark'd, and hist'ried, as he pass'd, he went,
Brief, to Constantine, when his lips gave vent,

“ From out four sons, great sire, his mother had,
But one is left, Calist, a tender lad.
I taught the boy ; and now have come to see
The man, with honour, clothe himself and me.
Age to his youth, without its pains, I’ll give,
While young in him, already twice, I live.”

Meanwhile, as herald to the city bound,
Calist had sped—A moment spar’d he found,
At will to clasp his mother to his heart,
Or his betroth’d. For far they dwelt apart.
Cruel, yet brief his choice. Love twice may glow,
Two mothers not all nature can bestow.

To her he went. For much she long’d to tell
Of thrift, of counsel, blessing, and farewell.
But parch’d, within her mouth had cleav’d her tongue,
Unto her jaws. She gasp’d, faint round him clung,
Sank speechless—Is there language ever spake
A mother’s love ? Her heart about to break !

But lo ! to march the trumpet peal’d. Proud stept
Those armies forth ; when like a tempest swept,
Re-echoed hollow from the Rhegian shore,
Whose winds hoarse, heard rebellow on Pelore ;
Roll’d deep a sound, which drew the vaulting tread
Back ; for earth heav’d below ; while heav’n o’erhead
Flash’d, as had all her lightnings in one flash
Been hurl’d ; and all her thunders in one crash.

Then standing on the sun arose upright
 A flaming cross ; high tow'ring o'er all height.
 To heav'n's whole breadth it stretch'd abroad ; and shone
 Through space, where light before had never gone.
 Hell saw it in her murkiest deeps ; and would
 Have fled ; had fate not pil'd around withstood.
 Death felt the beam, he could not see ; and shrunk
 Within the grave, would down have deeper sunk,
 While Night fled on, dismay'd ; and flying still
 Had found light all the grasp of being fill,
 Nor place to hide her left. Seen, vanish'd ; all,
 Within the flashing of a thought, might fall ;
 When day his race resum'd. For he disturb'd,
 His steeds bewilder'd in their path, had curb'd :
 Else ruin had swept heav'n. Compar'd, yet shone,
 To that dread cross, the sun abash'd and wan.
 Nor was there yet, of all that host, could raise
 His eyes, still blinded ; such their rapt amaze.

First Helen's son broke through his troubl'd mood ;
 Such as in breasts, that cannot fear, may brood ;
 When loud a voice unknown, uplifted cried,
 " The cross," " The cross," ten thousand tongues replied ;
 " The cross," Constantine now the shout begun,
 " The cross my banner, have I fought and won
 The world—And as it crown'd yon flaming skies,
 All earth it conqu'ring, shall my flag arise !"
 He spake : then handed on, from whence, or whom,
 None knew ; a banner wov'n by Syrian loom,

Of purple silks, was giv'n him ; bright whereon,
A silver cross inwrit, with " Vict'ry " shone.
Hail'd like a bird of weal, he waving seiz'd
The standard cross. His mighty host, well pleas'd,
Shook like a murm'ring sea. Against his shield,
Dash'd ev'ry warrior's knee. Heav'n clanging peal'd.
With swords aim'd nak'd, each at his own throat,
Hark ! legions, to the cross, their blood devote.
While blended in one breath, one vow, one clang,
" The cross ! Constantine ! " thrice resounding rang.

But now behold ! a thousand shields unite,
Sifted o'erhead into an orb of light.
Pow'r's throne, outshining pomp. Whereon uprais'd,
Constantine, clad in all his glory, blaz'd,
Such, could our eyelids brook day's living stream,
From noontide car, as might Apollo beam.
Around him light, in sweeping circle plays ;
Himself the wellspring of his rusling rays.
On light he stands ; while light dilating feeds
The fiery nostrils of his flaming steeds.
Light paves his path ; all welkin glowing reels,
As lightning flashes from his chariot wheels.
But light of that light, his awful eyes
Have but to open, and o'erflood the skies.

To nought less glorious ; though in wide compare,
Might Helen's son some proud resemblance dare ;
As flaming clad, in mail of burnish'd sheen,
Pow'r arm'd his presence ; empire crown'd his mien.