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This etext was produced by A Elizabeth Warren (aewarren2@aol.com).

The House of Life

by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Part I. YOUTH AND CHANGE

INTRODUCTORY SONNET

A Sonnet is a moment's monument,--  
Memorial from the Soul's eternity  
To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,  
Whether for lustral rite or dire portent,  
Of its own arduous fulness reverent:  
Carve it in ivory or in ebony,  
As Day or Night may rule; and let Time see  
Its flowering crest imperled and orient.

A Sonnet is a coin: its face reveals  
The soul,--its converse, to what Power 'tis due:--  
Whether for tribute to the august appeals  
Of Life, or dower in Love's high retinue,  
It serve; or, 'mid the dark wharf's cavernous breath,  
In Charon's palm it pay the toll to Death.  
LOVE ENTHRONED

I marked all kindred Powers the heart finds fair:--  
Truth, with awed lips; and Hope, with eyes upcast;  
And Fame, whose loud wings fan the ashen Past  
To signal-fires, Oblivion's flight to scare;  
And Youth, with still some single golden hair  
Unto his shoulder clinging, since the last  
Embrace wherein two sweet arms held him fast;  
And Life, still wreathing flowers for Death to wear.

Love's throne was not with these; but far above  
All passionate wind of welcome and farewell  
He sat in breathless bowers they dream not of;  
Though Truth foreknow Love's heart, and Hope foretell,  
And Fame be for Love's sake desirable,  
And Youth be dear, and Life be sweet to Love. BRIDAL BIRTH

As when desire, long darkling, dawns, and first  
The mother looks upon the new-born child,  
Even so my Lady stood at gaze and smiled



When her soul knew at length the Love it nursed.  
Born with her life, creature of poignant thirst  
And exquisite hunger, at her heart Love lay  
Quickening in darkness, till a voice that day  
Cried on him, and the bonds of birth were burst.

Now, shielded in his wings, our faces yearn  
Together, as his fullgrown feet now range  
The grove, and his warm hands our couch prepare:  
Till to his song our bodiless souls in turn  
Be born his children, when Death's nuptial change  
Leaves us for light the halo of his hair. REDEMPTION

O Thou who at Love's hour ecstatically  
Unto my lips dost evermore present  
The body and blood of Love in sacrament;  
Whom I have neared and felt thy breath to be  
The inmost incense of his sanctuary;  
Who without speech hast owned him, and intent  
Upon his will, thy life with mine hast blent,  
And murmured o'er the cup, Remember me!--

O what from thee the grace, for me the prize,  
And what to Love the glory,--when the whole  
Of the deep stair thou tread'st to the dim shoal  
And weary water of the place of sighs,  
And there dost work deliverance, as thine eyes  
Draw up my prisoned spirit to thy soul! LOVESIGHT

When do I see thee most, beloved one?  
When in the light the spirits of mine eyes  
Before thy face, their altar, solemnize  
The worship of that Love through thee made known?  
Or when in the dusk hours, (we two alone,)  
Close-kissed and eloquent of still replies  
Thy twilight-hidden glimmering visage lies,  
And my soul only sees thy soul its own?

O love, my love! if I no more should see  
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,  
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring,--  
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope  
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,  
The wind of Death's imperishable wing? HEART'S HOPE

By what word's power, the key of paths untrod,  
Shall I the difficult deeps of Love explore,  
Till parted waves of Song yield up the shore  
Even as that sea which Israel crossed dry-shod?  
For lo! in some poor rhythmic period,  
Lady, I fain would tell how evermore

Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor  
Thee from myself, neither our love from God.

Yea, in God's name, and Love's, and thine, would I  
Draw from one loving heart such evidence  
As to all hearts all things shall signify;  
Tender as dawn's first hill-fire, and intense  
As instantaneous penetrating sense,  
In Spring's birth-hour, of other Springs gone by. THE KISS

What smouldering senses in death's sick delay  
Or seizure of malign vicissitude  
Can rob this body of honour, or denude  
This soul of wedding-raiment worn to-day?  
For lo! even now my lady's lips did play  
With these my lips such consonant interlude  
As laurelled Orpheus longed for when he wooed  
The half-drawn hungering face with that last lay.

I was a child beneath her touch,--a man  
When breast to breast we clung, even I and she,--  
A spirit when her spirit looked through me,--  
A god when all our life-breath met to fan  
Our life-blood, till love's emulous ardours ran,  
Fire within fire, desire in deity.\*

\*[sic] NUPTIAL SLEEP

At length their long kiss severed, with sweet smart:  
And as the last slow sudden drops are shed  
From sparkling eaves when all the storm has fled,  
So singly flagged the pulses of each heart.  
Their bosoms sundered, with the opening start  
Of married flowers to either side outspread  
From the knit stem; yet still their mouths, burnt red,  
Fawned on each other where they lay apart.

Sleep sank them lower than the tide of dreams,  
And their dreams watched them sink, and slid away.  
Slowly their souls swam up again, through gleams  
Of watered light and dull drowned waifs of day;  
Till from some wonder of new woods and streams  
He woke, and wondered more: for there she lay. SUPREME SURRENDER

O all the spirits of love that wander by  
Along the love-sown fallowfield of sleep  
My lady lies apparent; and the deep  
Calls to the deep; and no man sees but I.  
The bliss so long afar, at length so nigh,  
Rests there attained. Methinks proud Love must weep

When Fate's control doth from his harvest reap  
The sacred hour for which the years did sigh.

First touched, the hand now warm around my neck  
Taught memory long to mock desire: and lo!  
Across my breast the abandoned hair doth flow,  
Where one shorn tress long stirred the longing ache:  
And next the heart that trembled for its sake  
Lies the queen-heart in sovereign overthrow. LOVE'S LOVERS

Some ladies love the jewels in Love's zone  
And gold-tipped darts he hath for painless play  
In idle scornful hours he flings away;  
And some that listen to his lure's soft tone  
Do love to deem the silver praise their own;  
Some prize his blindfold sight; and there be they  
Who kissed his wings which brought him yesterday  
And thank his wings to-day that he is flown.

My lady only loves the heart of Love:  
Therefore Love's heart, my lady, hath for thee  
His bower of unimagined flower and tree:  
There kneels he now, and all-anhungered of  
Thine eyes grey-lit in shadowing hair above,  
Seals with thy mouth his immortality. PASSION AND WORSHIP

One flame-winged brought a white-winged harp-player  
Even where my lady and I lay all alone;  
Saying: 'Behold, this minstrel is unknown;  
Bid him depart, for I am minstrel here:  
Only my strains are to Love's dear ones, dear.'  
Then said I: 'Through thine hautboy's rapturous tone  
Unto my lady still this harp makes moan,  
And still she deems the cadence deep and clear.'

Then said my lady: 'Thou art Passion of Love,  
And this Love's Worship: both he plights to me.  
Thy mastering music walks the sunlit sea:  
But where wan water trembles in the grove  
And the wan moon is all the light thereof,  
This harp still makes my name its voluntary.' THE PORTRAIT

O Lord of all compassionate control,  
O Love! let this my lady's picture glow  
Under my hand to praise her name, and show  
Even of her inner self the perfect whole:  
That he who seeks her beauty's furthest goal,  
Beyond the light that the sweet glances throw  
And refluent wave of the sweet smile, may know  
The very sky and sea-line of her soul.

Lo! it is done. Above the long lithe throat  
The mouth's mould testifies of voice and kiss,  
The shadowed eyes remember and foresee.  
Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note  
That in all years (O Love, thy gift is this!)  
They that would look on her must come to me. THE LOVE-LETTER

Warmed by her hand and shadowed by her hair  
As close she leaned and poured her heart through thee,  
Whereof the articulate throbs accompany  
The smooth black stream that makes thy whiteness fair,--  
Sweet fluttering sheet, even of her breath aware,--  
Oh let thy silent song disclose to me  
That soul wherewith her lips and eyes agree  
Like married music in Love's answering air.

Fain had I watched her when, at some fond thought,  
Her bosom to the writing closelier press'd,  
And her breast's secrets peered into her breast;  
When, through eyes raised an instant, her soul sought  
My soul, and from the sudden confluence caught  
The words that made her love the loveliest. THE LOVERS' WALK

Sweet twining hedgeflowers wind-stirred in no wise  
On this June day; and hand that clings in hand:--  
Still glades; and meeting faces scarcely fann'd:--  
An osier-odoured stream that draws the skies  
Deep to its heart; and mirrored eyes in eyes:--  
Fresh hourly wonder o'er the Summer land  
Of light and cloud; and two souls softly spann'd  
With one o'erarching heaven of smiles and sighs:--

Even such their path, whose bodies lean unto  
Each other's visible sweetness amorously,--  
Whose passionate hearts lean by Love's high decree  
Together on his heart for ever true,  
As the cloud-foaming firmamental blue  
Rests on the blue line of a foamless sea. ANTIPHONY

'I love you, sweet: how can you ever learn  
How much I love you?' 'You I love even so,  
And so I learn it.' 'Sweet, you cannot know  
How fair you are.' 'If fair enough to earn  
Your love, so much is all my love's concern.'  
'My love grows hourly, sweet.' 'Mine too doth grow,  
Yet love seemed full so many hours ago!  
Thus lovers speak, till kisses claim their turn.

Ah! happy they to whom such words as these  
In youth have served for speech the whole day long,

Hour after hour, remote from the world's throng,  
Work, contest, fame, all life's confederate pleas,--  
What while Love breathed in sighs and silences  
Through two blent souls one rapturous undersong. YOUTH'S SPRING-TRIBUTE

On this sweet bank your head thrice sweet and dear  
I lay, and spread your hair on either side,  
And see the newborn wood flowers bashful-eyed  
Look through the golden tresses here and there.  
On these debateable\* borders of the year  
Spring's foot half falters; scarce she yet may know  
The leafless blackthorn-blossom from the snow;  
And through her bowers the wind's way still is clear.

But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;  
So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss  
Creep, as the Spring now thrills through every spray,  
Up your warm throat to your warm lips: for this  
Is even the hour of Love's sworn suitservice,  
With whom cold hearts are counted castaway.

\*[sic] THE BIRTH-BOND

Havv you not noted, in some family  
Where two were born of a first marriage-bed,  
How still they own their gracious bond, though fed  
And nursed on the forgotten breast and knee?--  
How to their father's children they shall be  
In act and thought of one goodwill; but each  
Shall for the other have, in silence speech,  
And in a word complete community?

Even so, when first I saw you, seemed it, love,  
That among souls allied to mine was yet  
One nearer kindred than life hinted of.  
O born with me somewhere that men forget,  
And though in years of sight and sound unmet,  
Known for my soul's birth-partner well enough! A DAY OF LOVE

Those envied places which do know her well,  
And are so scornful of this lonely place,  
Even now for once are emptied of her grace:  
Nowhere but here she is: and while Love's spell  
From his predominant presence doth compel  
All alien hours, an outworn populace,  
The hours of Love fill full the echoing space  
With sweet confederate music favourable.

Now many memories make solicitous  
The delicate love-lines of her mouth, till, lit  
With quivering fire, the words take wing from it;

As here between our kisses we sit thus  
Speaking of things remembered, and so sit  
Speechless while things forgotten call to us. BEAUTY'S PAGEANT

What dawn-pulse at the heart of heaven, or last  
Incarnate flower of culminating day,--  
What marshalled marvels on the skirts of May,  
Or song full-quired, sweet June's encomiast;  
What glory of change by nature's hand amass'd  
Can vie with all those moods of varying grace  
Which o'er one loveliest woman's form and face  
Within this hour, within this room, have pass'd?

Love's very vesture and elect disguise  
Was each fine movement,--wonder new-begot  
Of lily or swan or swan-stemmed galiot;  
Joy to his sight who now the sadlier sighs,  
Parted again; and sorrow yet for eyes  
Unborn that read these words and saw her not. GENIUS IN BEAUTY

Beauty like hers is genius. Not the call  
Of Homer's or of Dante's heart sublime,--  
Not Michael's hand furrowing the zones of time,--  
Is more with compassed mysteries musical;  
Nay, not in Spring's or Summer's sweet footfall  
More gathered gifts exuberant Life bequeathes\*  
Than doth this sovereign face, whose love-spell breathes  
Even from its shadowed contour on the wall.

As many men are poets in their youth,  
But for one sweet-strung soul the wires prolong  
Even through all change the indomitable song;  
So in likewise the envenomed years, whose tooth  
Rends shallower grace with ruin void of ruth,  
Upon this beauty's power shall wreak no wrong.

\*[sic] SILENT NOON

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,--  
The finger-points look through the rosy blooms:  
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms  
'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.  
All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,  
Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge  
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.  
'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.

Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly  
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky:  
So this wing'd hour is dropt to us from above.  
Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,

This close-companioned inarticulate hour  
When twofold silence was the song of love. GRACIOUS MOONLIGHT

Even as the moon grows queenlier in mid-space  
When the sky darkens, and her cloud-rapt car  
Thrills with intenser radiance from afar,--  
So lambent, lady, beams thy sovereign grace  
When the drear soul desires thee. Of that face  
What shall be said,--which, like a governing star,  
Gathers and garners from all things that are  
Their silent penetrative loveliness?

O'er water-daisies and wild waifs of Spring,  
There where the iris rears its gold-crowned sheaf  
With flowering rush and sceptred arrow-leaf,  
So have I marked Queen Dian, in bright ring  
Of cloud above and wave below, take wing  
And chase night's gloom, as thou the spirit's grief. LOVE-SWEETNESS

Sweet dimness of her loosened hair's downfall  
About thy face; her sweet hands round thy head  
In gracious fostering union garlanded,  
Her tremulous smiles, her glances' sweet recall  
Of love; her murmuring sighs memorial;  
Her mouth's culled sweetness by thy kisses shed  
On cheeks and neck and eyelids, and so led  
Back to her mouth which answers there for all:--

What sweeter than these things, except the thing  
In lacking which all these would lose their sweet:--  
The confident heart's still fervour: the swift beat  
And soft subsidence of the spirit's wing,  
Then when it feels, in cloud--girt wayfaring,  
The breath of kindred plumes against its feet? HEART'S HAVEN

Sometimes she is a child within mine arms,  
Cowering beneath dark wings that love must chase,--  
With still tears showering and averted face,  
Inexplicably filled with faint alarms:  
And oft from mine own spirit's hurtling harms  
I crave the refuge of her deep embrace,--  
Against all ills the fortified strong place  
And sweet reserve of sovereign counter-charms.

And Love, our light at night and shade at noon,  
Lulls us to rest with songs, and turns away  
All shafts of shelterless tumultuous day.  
Like the moon's growth, his face gleams through his tune;  
And as soft waters warble to the moon,  
Our answering spirits chime one roundelay. LOVE'S BAUBLES

I stood where Love in brimming armfuls bore  
Slight wanton flowers and foolish toys of fruit:  
And round him ladies thronged in warm pursuit,  
Fingered and lipped and proffered the strange store:  
And from one hand the petal and the core  
Savoured of sleep; and cluster and curled shoot  
Seemed from another hand like shame's salute,--  
Gifts that I felt my cheek was blushing for.

At last Love bade my Lady give the same:  
And as I looked, the dew was light thereon;  
And as I took them, at her touch they shone  
With inmost heaven-hue of the heart of flame.  
And then Love said: 'Lo! when the hand is hers,  
Follies of love are love's true ministers.' PRIDE OF YOUTH

Even as a child, of sorrow that we give  
The dead, but little in his heart can find,  
Since without need of thought to his clear mind  
Their turn it is to die and his to live:  
Even so the winged New Love smiles to receive  
Along his eddying plumes the auroral wind,  
Nor, forward glorying, casts one look behind  
Where night-rack shrouds the Old Love fugitive.

There is a change in every hour's recall,  
And the last cowslip in the fields we see  
On the same day with the first corn-poppy.  
Alas for hourly change! Alas for all  
The loves that from his hand proud Youth lets fall,  
Even as the beads of a told rosary! WINGED HOURS

Each hour until we meet is as a bird  
That wings from far his gradual way along  
The rustling covert of my soul,--his song  
Still loudlier trilled through leaves more deeply stirr'd:  
But at the hour of meeting, a clear word  
Is every note he sings, in Love's own tongue;  
Yet, Love, thou know'st the sweet strain wrong,  
Through our contending kisses oft unheard.

What of that hour at last, when for her sake  
No wing may fly to me nor song may flow;  
When, wandering round my life unleaved, I  
The bloodied feathers scattered in the brake,  
And think how she, far from me, with like eyes  
Sees through the untuneful bough the wingless skies? MID - RAPTURE

Thou lovely and beloved, thou my love;  
Whose kiss seems still the first; whose summoning eyes,



Even now, as for our love-world's new sunrise,  
Shed very dawn; whose voice, attuned above  
All modulation of the deep-bowered dove,  
Is like a hand laid softly on the soul;  
Whose hand is like a sweet voice to control  
Those worn tired brows it hath the keeping of:--

What word can answer to thy word,--what gaze  
To thine, which now absorbs within its sphere  
My worshipping face, till I am mirrored there  
Light-circled in a heaven of deep-drawn rays?  
What clasp, what kiss mine inmost heart can prove,  
O lovely and beloved, O my love? HEART'S COMPASS

Sometimes thou seem'st not as thyself alone,  
But as the meaning of all things that are;  
A breathless wonder, shadowing forth afar  
Some heavenly solstice hushed and halcyon;  
Whose unstirred lips are music's visible tone;  
Whose eyes the sun-gate of the soul unbar,  
Being of its furthest fires oracular;--  
The evident heart of all life sown and mown.

Even such Love is; and is not thy name Love?  
Yea, by thy hand the Love-god rends apart  
All gathering clouds of Night's ambiguous art;  
Flings them far down, and sets thine eyes above;  
And simply, as some gage of flower or glove,  
Stakes with a smile the world against thy heart. SOUL-LIGHT

What other woman could be loved like you,  
Or how of you should love possess his fill?  
After the fulness of all rapture, still,--  
As at the end of some deep avenue  
A tender glamour of day,--there comes to view  
Far in your eyes a yet more hungering thrill,--  
Such fire as Love's soul-winnowing hands distil  
Even from his inmost arc of light and dew.

And as the traveller triumphs with the sun,  
Glorying in heat's mid-height, yet startide brings  
Wonder new-born, and still fresh transport springs  
From limpid lambent hours of day begun;--  
Even so, through eyes and voice, your soul doth move  
My soul with changeful light of infinite love. THE MOONSTAR

Lady, I thank thee for thy loveliness,  
Because my lady is more lovely still.  
Glorying I gaze, and yield with glad goodwill  
To thee thy tribute; by whose sweet-spun dress  
Of delicate life Love labours to assess

My Lady's absolute queendom; saying, 'Lo!  
How high this beauty is, which yet doth show  
But as that beauty's sovereign votaress.'

Lady, I saw thee with her, side by side;  
And as, when night's fair fires their queen surround,  
An emulous star too near the moon will ride,--  
Even so thy rays within her luminous bound  
Were traced no more; and by the light so drown'd,  
Lady, not thou but she was glorified. LAST FIRE

Love, through your spirit and mine what summer eve  
Now glows with glory of all things possess'd,  
Since this day's sun of rapture filled the west  
And the light sweetened as the fire took leave?  
Awhile now softlier let your bosom heave,  
As in Love's harbour, even that loving breast,  
All care takes refuge while we sink to rest,  
And mutual dreams the bygone bliss retrieve.

Many the days that Winter keeps in store,  
Sunless throughout, or whose brief sun-glimpses  
Scarce shed the heaped snow through the naked trees.  
This day at least was Summer's paramour,  
Sun-coloured to the imperishable core  
With sweet well-being of love and full heart's ease. HER GIFTS

High grace, the dower of queens; and therewithal  
Some wood-born wonder's sweet simplicity;  
A glance like water brimming with the sky  
Or hyacinth-light where forest-shadows fall;  
Such thrilling pallor of cheek as doth enthral  
The heart; a mouth whose passionate forms imply  
All music and all silence held thereby;  
Deep golden locks, her sovereign coronal;  
A round reared neck, meet column of Love's shrine  
To cling to when the heart takes sanctuary;  
Hands which for ever at Love's bidding be,  
And soft-stirred feet still answering to his sign:--  
These are her gifts, as tongue may tell them o'er.  
Breathe low her name, my soul; for that means more. EQUAL TROTH

Not by one measure mayst thou mete our love;  
For how should I be loved as I love thee?--  
I, graceless, joyless, lacking absolutely  
All gifts that with thy queenship best behave;--  
Thou, throned in every heart's elect alcove,  
And crowned with garlands culled from every tree,  
Which for no head but thine, by Love's decree,  
All beauties and all mysteries interwove.

But here thine eyes and lips yield soft rebuke:--  
'Then only,' (say'st thou), 'could I love thee less,  
When thou couldst doubt my love's equality.'  
Peace, sweet! If not to sum but worth we look,  
Thy heart's transcendence, not my heart's excess,  
Then more a thousandfold thou lov'st than I. VENUS VICTRIX

Could Juno's self more sovereign presence wear  
Than thou, 'mid other ladies throned in grace?--  
Or Pallas, when thou bend'st with soul-stilled face  
O'er poet's page gold-shadowed in thy hair?  
Dost thou than Venus seem less heavenly fair  
When o'er the sea of love's tumultuous trance  
Hovers thy smile, and mingles with thy glance  
That sweet voice like the last wave murmuring there?

Before such triune loveliness divine  
Awestruck I ask, which goddess here most claims  
The prize that, howsoe'er adjudged, is thine?  
Then Love breathes low the sweetest of thy names;  
And Venus Victrix to my heart doth bring  
Herself, the Helen of her guerdoning. THE DARK GLASS

Not I myself know all my love for thee:  
How should I reach so far, who cannot weigh  
To-morrow's dower by gage of yesterday?  
Shall birth and death, and all dark names that be  
As doors and windows bared to some loud sea,  
Lash deaf mine ears and blind my face with spray;  
And shall my sense pierce love,--the last relay  
And ultimate outpost of eternity?

Lo! what am I to Love, the lord of all?  
One murmuring shell he gathers from the sand,--  
One little heart-flame sheltered in his hand.  
Yet through thine eyes he grants me clearest call  
And veriest touch of powers primordial  
That any hour-girt life may understand. THE LAMP'S SHRINE

Sometimes I fain would find in thee some fault,  
That I might love thee still in spite of it:  
Yet how should our Lord Love curtail one whit  
Thy perfect praise whom most he would exalt?  
Alas! he can but make my heart's low vault  
Even in men's sight unworthier, being lit  
By thee, who thereby show'st more exquisite  
Like fiery chrysoptase in deep basalt.

Yet will I nowise shrink; but at Love's shrine  
Myself within the beams his brow doth dart

Will set the flashing jewel of thy heart  
In that dull chamber where it deigns to shine:  
For lo! in honour of thine excellencies  
My heart takes pride to show how poor it is. LIFE - IN - LOVE

Not in thy body is thy life at all  
But in this lady's lips and hands and eyes;  
Through these she yields the life that vivifies  
What else were sorrow's servant and death's thrall.  
Look on thyself without her, and recall  
The waste remembrance and forlorn surmise  
That lived but in a dead-drawn breath of sighs  
O'er vanished hours and hours eventual.

Even so much life hath the poor tress of hair  
Which, stored apart, is all love hath to show  
For heart-beats and for fire-heats long ago;  
Even so much life endures unknown, even where,  
'Mid change the changeless night environeth,  
Lies all that golden hair undimmed in death. THE LOVE- MOON

'When that dead face, bowered in the furthest years,  
Which once was all the life years held for thee,  
Can now scarce bide the tides of memory  
Cast on thy soul a little spray of tears,--  
How canst thou gaze into these eyes of hers  
Whom now thy heart delights in, and not see  
Within each orb Love's philtred euphrasy  
Make them of buried troth remembrancers?'

'Nay, pitiful Love, nay, loving Pity! Well  
Thou knowest that in these twain I have confess'd  
Two very voices of thy summoning bell.  
Nay, Master, shall not Death make manifest  
In these the culminant changes which approve  
The love-moon that must light my soul to Love?' THE MORROW'S MESSAGE

'Thou Ghost,' I said, 'and is thy name To-day?--  
Yesterday's son, with such an abject brow!--  
And can To-morrow be more pale than thou?'  
While yet I spoke, the silence answered: 'Yea,  
Henceforth our issue is all grieved and grey,  
And each beforehand makes such poor avow  
As of old leaves beneath the budding bough  
Or night-drift that the sundawn shreds away.'

Then cried I: 'Mother of many malisons,  
O Earth, receive me to thy dusty bed!'  
But therewithal the tremulous silence said:  
'Lo! Love yet bids thy lady greet thee once:--  
Yea, twice,- whereby thy life is still the sun's;

And thrice, -- whereby the shadow of death is dead.' SLEEPLESS DREAMS

Girt in dark growths, yet glimmering with one star,  
O night desirous as the nights of youth!  
Why should my heart within thy spell, forsooth,  
Now beat, as the bride's finger-pulses are  
Quickened within the girdling golden bar?  
What wings are these that fan my pillow smooth?  
And why does Sleep, waved back by Joy and Ruth,  
Tread softly round and gaze at me from far?

Nay, night deep-leaved! And would Love feign in thee  
Some shadowy palpitating grove that bears  
Rest for man's eyes and music for his ears?  
O lonely night! art thou not known to me,  
A thicket hung with masks of mockery  
And watered with the wasteful warmth of tears? SEVERED SELVES

Two separate divided silences,  
Which, brought together, would find loving voice;  
Two glances which together would rejoice  
In love, now lost like stars beyond dark trees;  
Two hands apart whose touch alone gives ease;  
Two bosoms which, heart-shrined with mutual flame,  
Would, meeting in one clasp, be made the same;  
Two souls, the shores wave-mocked of Sundering seas:--

Such are we now. Ah! may our hope forecast  
Indeed one hour again, when on this stream  
Of darkened love once more the light shall gleam?  
An hour how slow to come, how quickly past,  
Which blooms and fades, and only leaves at last,  
Faint as shed flowers, the attenuated dream. THROUGH DEATH TO LOVE

Like labour-laden moonclouds faint to flee  
From winds that sweep the winter-bitten wold,--  
Like multiform circumfluence manifold  
Of night's flood-tide,--like terrors that agree  
Of hoarse-tongued fire and inarticulate sea,--  
Even such, within some glass dimmed by our breath,  
Our hearts discern wild images of Death,  
Shadows and shoals that edge eternity.

Howbeit athwart Death's imminent shade doth soar  
One Power, than flow of stream or flight of dove  
Sweeter to glide around, to brood above.  
Tell me, my heart;--what angel-greeted door  
Or threshold of wing-winnowed threshing-floor  
Hath guest fire-fledged as thine, whose lord is Love? HOPE OVERTAKEN

I deemed thy garments, O my Hope, were grey,  
So far I viewed thee. Now the space between  
Is passed at length; and garmented in green  
Even as in days of yore thou stand'st to-day.  
Ah God! and but for lingering dull dismay,  
On all that road our footsteps erst had been  
Even thus commingled, and our shadows seen  
Blent on the hedgerows and the water-way.

O Hope of mine whose eyes are living love,  
No eyes but hers,--O Love and Hope the same!--  
Lean close to me, for now the sinking sun  
That warmed our feet scarce gilds our hair above.  
O hers thy voice and very hers thy name!  
Alas, cling round me, for the day is done! LOVE AND HOPE

Bless love and hope. Full many a withered year  
Whirled past us, eddying to its chill doomsday;  
And clasped together where the blown leaves lay,  
We long have knelt and wept full many a tear.  
Yet lo! one hour at last, the Spring's compeer,  
Flutes softly to us from some green byeway.\*  
Those years, those tears are dead, but only they:--  
Bless love and hope, true soul; for we are here.

Cling heart to heart; nor of this hour demand  
Whether in very truth, when we are dead,  
Our hearts shall wake to know Love's golden head  
Sole sunshine of the imperishable land;  
Or but discern, through night's unfeatured scope,  
Scorn-fired at length the illusive eyes of Hope.

\*[sic] CLOUD AND WIND

Love, should I fear death most for you or me?  
Yet if you die, can I not follow you,  
Forcing the straits of change? Alas! but who  
Shall wrest a bond from night's inveteracy,  
Ere yet my hazardous soul put forth, to be  
Her warrant against all her haste might rue?--  
Ah! in your eyes so reached what dumb adieu,  
What unsunned gyres of waste eternity?

And if I die the first, shall death be then  
A lampless watchtower whence I see you weep?--  
Or (woe is me!) a bed wherein my sleep  
Ne'er notes (as death's dear cup at last you drain),  
The hour when you too learn that all is vain  
And that Hope sows what Love shall never reap? SECRET PARTING

Because our talk was of the cloud-control  
And moon-track of the journeying face of Fate,  
Her tremulous kisses faltered at love's gate  
And her eyes dreamed against a distant goal:  
But soon, remembering her how brief the whole  
Of joy, which its own hours annihilate,  
Her set gaze gathered, thirstier than of late,  
And as she kissed, her mouth became her soul.

Thence in what ways we wandered, and how strove  
To build with fire-tried vows the piteous home  
Which memory haunts and whither sleep may roam,--  
They only know for whom the roof of Love  
Is the still-seated secret of the grove,  
Nor spire may rise nor bell be heard therefrom. PARTED LOVE

What shall be said of this embattled day  
And armed occupation of this night  
By all thy foes beleaguered,--now when sight  
Nor sound denotes the loved one far away?  
Of these thy vanquished hours what shalt thou say,--  
As every sense to which she dealt delight  
Now labours lonely o'er the stark noon-height  
To reach the sunset's desolate disarray?

Stand still, fond fettered wretch! while Memory's art  
Parades the Past before thy face, and lures  
Thy spirit to her passionate portraitures:  
Till the tempestuous tide-gates flung apart  
Flood with wild will the hollows of thy heart,  
And thy heart rends thee, and thy body endures. BROKEN MUSIC

The mother will not turn, who thinks she hears  
Her nursling's speech first grow articulate;  
But breathless with averted eyes elate  
She sits, with open lips and open ears,  
That it may call her twice. 'Mid doubts and fears  
Thus oft my soul has hearkened; till the song,  
A central moan for days, at length found tongue,  
And the sweet music welled and the sweet tears.

But now, whatever while the soul is fain  
To list that wonted murmur, as it were  
The speech-bound sea-shell's low importunate strain,--  
No breath of song, thy voice alone is there,  
O bitterly beloved! and all her gain  
Is but the pang of unpermitted prayer. DEATH-IN-LOVE

There came an image in Life's retinue

That had Love's wings and bore his gonfalon:  
Fair was the web, and nobly wrought thereon,  
O soul-sequestered face, thy form and hue!  
Bewildering sounds, such as Spring wakens to,  
Shook in its folds; and through my heart its power  
Sped trackless as the immemorable hour  
When birth's dark portal groaned and all was new.

But a veiled woman followed, and she caught  
The banner round its staff, to furl and cling,--  
Then plucked a feather from the bearer's wing,  
And held it to his lips that stirred it not,  
And said to me, 'Behold, there is no breath:  
I and this Love are one, and I am Death.' WILLOWWOOD

I

I sat with Love upon a woodside well,  
Leaning across the water, I and he;  
Nor ever did he speak nor looked at me,  
But touched his lute wherein was audible  
The certain secret thing he had to tell:  
Only our mirrored eyes met silently  
In the low wave; and that sound came to be  
The passionate voice I knew; and my tears fell.

And at their fall, his eyes beneath grew hers;  
And with his foot and with his wing-feathers  
He swept the spring that watered my heart's drouth.  
Then the dark ripples spread to waving hair,  
And as I stooped, her own lips rising there  
Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth. II

And now Love sang: but his was such a song,  
So meshed with half-remembrance hard to free,  
As souls disused in death's sterility  
May sing when the new birthday tarries long.  
And I was made aware of a dumb throng  
That stood aloof, one form by every tree,  
All mournful forms, for each was I or she,  
The shades of those our days that had no tongue.

They looked on us, and knew us and were known;  
While fast together, alive from the abyss,  
Clung the soul-wrung implacable close kiss;  
And pity of self through all made broken moan  
Which said, 'For once, for once, for once alone!'  
And still Love sang, and what he sang was this:-- III

'O ye, all ye that walk in Willow-wood,  
That walk with hollow faces burning white;  
What fathom-depth of soul-struck widowhood,



What long, what longer hours, one lifelong night,  
Ere ye again, who so in vain have wooed  
Your last hope lost, who so in vain invite  
Your lips to that their unforgotten food,  
Ere ye, ere ye again shall see the light!

Alas! the bitter banks in Willowwood,  
With tear-spurge wan, with blood-wort burning red:  
Alas! if ever such a pillow could  
Steep deep the soul in sleep till she were dead,--  
Better all life forget her than this thing,  
That Willowwood should hold her wandering!' IV

So sang he: and as meeting rose and rose  
Together cling through the wind's wellaway  
Nor change at once, yet near the end of day  
The leaves drop loosened where the heart-stain glows,--  
So when the song died did the kiss unclose;  
And her face fell back drowned, and was as grey  
As its grey eyes; and if it ever may  
Meet mine again I know not if Love knows.

Only I know that I leaned low and drank  
A long draught from the water where she sank,  
Her breath and all her tears and all her soul:  
And as I leaned, I know I felt Love's face  
Pressed on my neck with moan of pity and grace,  
Till both our heads were in his aureole. WITHOUT HER

What of her glass without her? The blank grey  
There where the pool is blind of the moon's face.  
Her dress without her? The tossed empty space  
Of cloud-rack whence the moon has passed away.  
Her paths without her? Day's appointed sway  
Usurped by desolate night. Her pillowed place  
Without her? Tears, ah me! for love's good grace,  
And cold forgetfulness of night or day.

What of the heart without her? Nay, poor heart,  
Of thee what word remains ere speech be still?  
A wayfarer by barren ways and chill,  
Steep ways and weary, without her thou art,  
Where the long cloud, the long wood's counterpart,  
Sheds doubled darkness up the labouring hill. LOVE'S FATALITY

Sweet Love,-- but oh! most dread Desire of Love  
Life-thwarted. Linked in gyves I saw them stand,  
Love shackled with Vain-longing, hand to hand:  
And one was eyed as the blue vault above:  
But hope tempestuous like a fire-cloud hove  
I' the other's gaze, even as in his whose wand

Vainly all night with spell-wrought power has spann'd  
The unyielding caves of some deep treasure-trove.

Also his lips, two writhen flakes of flame,  
Made moan: 'Alas O Love, thus leashed with me!  
Wing-footed thou, wing-shouldered, once born free:  
And I, thy cowering self, in chains grown tame,  
Bound to thy body and soul, named with thy name,  
Life's iron heart, even Love's Fatality.' STILLBORN LOVE

The hour which might have been yet might not be,  
Which man's and woman's heart conceived and bore  
Yet whereof life was barren,--on what shore  
Bides it the breaking of Time's weary sea?  
Bondchild of all consummate joys set free,  
It somewhere sighs and serves, and mute before  
The house of Love, hears through the echoing door  
His hours elect in choral consonancy.

But lo! what wedded souls now hand in hand  
Together tread at last the immortal strand  
With eyes where burning memory lights love home?  
Lo! how the little outcast hour has turned  
And leaped to them and in their faces yearned: --  
'I am your child: O parents, ye have come!' TRUE WOMAN

#### I. HERSELF

To be a sweetness more desired than Spring;  
A bodily beauty more acceptable  
Than the wild rose-tree's arch that crowns the fell;  
To be an essence more environing  
Than wine's drained juice; a music ravishing  
More than the passionate pulse of Philomel; -  
To be all this 'neath one soft bosom's swell  
That is the flower of life!--how strange a thing!

How strange a thing to be what Man can know  
But as a sacred secret! Heaven's own screen  
Hides her soul's purest depth and loveliest glow;  
Closely withheld, as all things most unseen,--  
The wave-bowered pearl, the heart-shaped seal of green  
That flecks the snowdrop underneath the snow. II. HER LOVE

She loves him; for her infinite soul is Love,  
And he her lodestar. Passion in her is  
A glass facing his fire, where the bright bliss  
Is mirrored, and the heat returned. Yet move  
That glass, a stranger's amorous flame to prove,  
And it shall turn, by instant contraries,  
Ice to the moon; while her pure fire to his

For whom it burns, clings close i' the heart's alcove.

Lo! they are one. With wifely breast to breast  
And circling arms, she welcomes all command  
Of love,--her soul to answering ardours fann'd:  
Yet as morn springs or twilight sinks to rest,  
Ah! who shall say she deems not loveliest  
The hour of sisterly sweet hand-in-hand? III. HER HEAVEN

If to grow old in Heaven is to grow young,  
(As the Seer saw and said,) then blest were he  
With youth forevermore, whose heaven should be  
True Woman, she whom these weak notes have sung.  
Here and hereafter,--choir-strains of her tongue,--  
Sky-spaces of her eyes,--sweet signs that flee  
About her soul's immediate sanctuary,--  
Were Paradise all uttermost worlds among.

The sunrise blooms and withers on the hill  
Like any hillflower; and the noblest troth  
Dies here to dust. Yet shall Heaven's promise clothe  
Even yet those lovers who have cherished still  
This test for love:--in every kiss sealed fast  
To feel the first kiss and forebode the last. LOVE'S LAST GIFT

Love to his singer held a glistening leaf,  
And said: 'The rose-tree and the apple-tree  
Have fruits to vaunt or flowers to lure the bee;  
And golden shafts are in the feathered sheaf  
Of the great harvest-marshal, the year's chief,  
Victorious Summer; aye, and 'neath warm sea  
Strange secret grasses lurk inviolably  
Between the filtering channels of sunk reef.

All are my blooms; and all sweet blooms of love  
To thee I gave while Spring and Summer sang;  
But Autumn stops to listen, with some pang  
From those worse things the wind is moaning of.  
Only this laurel dreads no winter days:  
Take my last gift; thy heart hath sung my praise.' PART II. CHANGE AND FATE

#### TRANSFIGURED LIFE

As growth of form or momentary glance  
In a child's features will recall to mind  
The father's with the mother's face combin'd,--  
Sweet interchange that memories still enhance:  
And yet, as childhood's years and youth's advance,  
The gradual mouldings leave one stamp behind,

Till in the blended likeness now we find  
A separate man's or woman's countenance:--

So in the Song, the singer's Joy and Pain,  
Its very parents, evermore expand  
To bid the passion's fullgrown birth remain,  
By Art's transfiguring essence subtly spann'd;  
And from that song-cloud shaped as a man's hand  
There comes the sound as of abundant rain. THE SONG-THROE

By thine own tears thy song must tears beget,  
O Singer! Magic mirror thou hast none  
Except thy manifest heart; and save thine own  
Anguish or ardour, else no amulet.  
Cisterned in Pride, verse is the feathery jet  
Of soulless air-flung fountains; nay, more dry  
Than the Dead Sea for throats that thirst and sigh,  
That song o'er which no singer's lids grew wet.

The Song-god--He the Sun-god--is no slave  
Of thine: thy Hunter he, who for thy soul  
Fledges his shaft: to no august control  
Of thy skilled hand his quivered store he gave:  
But if thy lips' loud cry leap to his smart,  
The inspir'd recoil shall pierce thy brother's heart. THE SOUL'S SPHERE

Come prisoned moon in steep cloud-fastnesses,--  
Throned queen and thrall'd; some dying sun whose pyre  
Blazed with momentous memorable fire;--  
Who hath not yearned and fed his heart with these?  
Who, sleepless, hath not anguished to appease  
Tragical shadow's realm of sound and sight  
Conjectured in the lamentable night?...  
Lo! the soul's sphere of infinite images!

What sense shall count them? Whether it forecast  
The rose-winged hours that flutter in the van  
Of Love's unquestioning unreveale'd span,--  
Visions of golden futures: or that last  
Wild pageant of the accumulated past  
That clangs and flashes for a drowning man. INCLUSIVENESS

The changing guests, each in a different mood,  
Sit at the roadside table and arise:  
And every life among them in likewise  
Is a soul's board set daily with new food.  
What man has bent o'er his son's sleep, to brood  
How that face shall watch his when cold it lies?--  
Or thought, as his own mother kissed his eyes,  
Of what her kiss was when his father wooed?

May not this ancient room thou sit'st in dwell  
In separate living souls for joy or pain?  
Nay, all its corners may be painted plain  
Where Heaven shows pictures of some life spent well;  
And may be stamped, a memory all in vain,  
Upon the sight of lidless eyes in Hell. ARDOUR AND MEMORY

The cuckoo-throb, the heartbeat of the Spring;  
The rosebud's blush that leaves it as it grows  
Into the full-eyed fair unblushing rose;  
The summer clouds that visit every wing  
With fires of sunrise and of sunseting;  
The furtive flickering streams to light re-born  
'Mid airs new-fledged and valorous lusts of morn,  
While all the daughters of the daybreak sing:--

These ardour loves, and memory: and when flown  
All joys, and through dark forest-boughs in flight  
The wind swoops onward brandishing the light,  
Even yet the rose-tree's verdure left alone  
Will flush all ruddy though the rose be gone;  
With ditties and with dirges infinite. KNOWN IN VAIN

As two whose love, first foolish, widening scope,  
Knows suddenly, with music high and soft,  
The Holy of holies; who because they scoff'd  
Are now amazed with shame, nor dare to cope  
With the whole truth aloud, lest heaven should ope;  
Yet, at their meetings, laugh not as they  
In speech; nor speak, at length; but sitting oft  
Together, within hopeless sight of hope  
For hours are silent:--So it happeneth  
When Work and Will awake too late, to gaze  
After their life sailed by, and hold their breath.  
Ah! who shall dare to search through what sad maze  
Thenceforth their incommunicable ways  
Follow the desultory feet of Death? HEART OF THE NIGHT

From child to youth; from youth to arduous man;  
From lethargy to fever of the heart;  
From faithful life to dream-dowered days apart;  
From trust to doubt; from doubt to brink of ban;--  
Thus much of change in one swift cycle ran  
Till now. Alas, the soul!--how soon must she  
Accept her primal immortality,--  
The flesh resume its dust whence it began?

O Lord of work and peace! O Lord of life!  
O Lord, the awful Lord of will! though late,

Even yet renew this soul with duteous breath:  
That when the peace is garnered in from strife,  
The work retrieved, the will regenerate,  
This soul may see thy face, O Lord of death! THE LANDMARK

Was that the landmark? What,--the foolish well  
Whose wave, low down, I did not stoop to drink,  
But sat and flung the pebbles from its brink  
In sport to send its imaged skies pell-mell,  
(And mine own image, had I noted well!)  
Was that my point of turning?--I had thought  
The stations of my course should rise unsought,  
As altar-stone or ensigned citadel.

But lo! the path is missed, I must go back,  
And thirst to drink when next I reach the spring  
Which once I stained, which since may have grown black.  
Yet though no light be left nor bird now sing  
As here I turn, I'll thank God, hastening,  
That the same goal is still on the same track. A DARK DAY

The gloom that breathes upon me with these airs  
Is like the drops which strike the traveller's brow  
Who knows not, darkling, if they bring him now  
Fresh storm, or be old rain the covert bears.  
Ah! bodes this hour some harvest of new tares,  
Or hath but memory of the day whose plough  
Sowed hunger once,-- the night at length when thou,  
O prayer found vain, didst fall from out my prayers?

How prickly were the growths which yet how smooth,  
Along the hedgerows of this journey shed,  
Lie by Time's grace till night and sleep may soothe!  
Even as the thistledown from pathsides dead  
Gleaned by a girl in autumns of her youth,  
Which one new year makes soft her marriage-bed. AUTUMN IDLENESS

This sunlight shames November where he grieves  
In dead red leaves, and will not let him shun  
The day, though bough with bough be over-run.  
But with a blessing every glade receives  
High salutation; while from hillock-eaves  
The deer gaze calling, dappled white and dun,  
As if, being foresters of old, the sun  
Had marked them with the shade of forest-leaves.

Here dawn to-day unveiled her magic glass;  
Here noon now gives the thirst and takes the dew;  
Till eve bring rest when other good things pass.  
And here the lost hours the lost hours renew

While I still lead my shadow o'er the grass,  
Nor know, for longing, that which I should do. THE HILL SUMMIT  
This feast-day of the sun, his altar there  
In the broad west has blazed for vesper-song;  
And I have loitered in the vale too long  
And gaze now a belated worshipper.  
Yet may I not forget that I was 'ware,  
So journeying, of his face at intervals  
Transfigured where the fringed horizon falls,--  
A fiery bush with coruscating hair.

And now that I have climbed and won this height,  
I must tread downward through the sloping shade  
And travel the bewildered tracks till night.  
Yet for this hour I still may here be stayed  
And see the gold air and the silver fade  
And the last bird fly into the last light. THE CHOICE

I

Eat thou and drink; to-morrow thou shalt die.  
Surely the earth, that s wise being very old,  
Needs not our help. Then loose me, love, and hold  
Thy sultry hair up from my face that I  
May pour for thee this yellow wine, brim-high,  
Till round the glass thy fingers glow like gold.  
We'll drown all hours: thy song, while hours toil'd,  
Shall leap, as fountains veil the changing sky.

Now kiss, and think that there are really those,  
My own high-bosomed beauty, who increase  
Vain gold, vain lore, and yet might choose our way  
Through many days they toil; then comes a day  
They die not,--never having lived,--but cease;  
And round their narrow lips the mould falls close. II

Watch thou and fear; to-morrow thou shalt die.  
Or art thou sure thou shalt have time for death?  
Is not the day which God's word promiseth  
To come man knows not when? In yonder sky,  
Now while we speak, the sun speeds forth: can I  
Or thou assure him of his goal? God's breath  
Even at the moment haply quickeneth  
The air to a flame; till spirits, always nigh  
Though screened and hid, shall walk the daylight here.

And dost thou prate of all that man shall do?  
Canst thou, who hast but plagues, presume to be  
Glad in his gladness that comes after thee?  
Will his strength slay thy worm in Hell? Go to:

Cover thy countenance, and watch, and fear. Think thou and act; to-morrow thou shalt die.  
Outstretched in the sun's warmth upon the shore,  
Thou say'st: 'Man's measured path is all gone o'er:  
Up all his years, steeply, with strain and sigh,  
Man clomb\* until he touched the truth; and I,  
Even I, am he whom it was destined for.'  
How should this be? Art thou then so much more  
Than they who sowed, that thou shouldst reap thereby?

Nay, come up hither. From this wave-washed mound  
Unto the furthest flood-brim look with me;  
Then reach on with thy thought till it be drown'd.  
Miles and miles distant though the grey line be,  
And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond,--  
Still, leagues beyond those leagues there is more sea.

\*[sic] OLD AND NEW ART

#### I. ST. LUKE THE PAINTER

Give honour unto Luke Evangelist;  
For he it was (the aged legends say)  
Who first taught Art to fold her hands and pray.  
Scarcely at once she dared to rend the mist  
Of devious symbols: but soon having wist  
How sky-breadth and field-silence and this day  
Are symbols also in some deeper way,  
She looked through these to God and was God's priest.

And if, past noon, her toil began to irk,  
And she sought talismans, and turned in vain  
To soulless self-reflections of man's skill,  
Yet now, in this the twilight, she might still  
Kneel in the latter grass to pray again,  
Ere the night cometh and she may not work. II. NOT AS THESE

'I am not as these are,' the poet saith  
In youth's pride, and the painter, among men  
At bay, where never pencil comes nor pen,  
And shut about with his own frozen breath.  
To others, for whom only rhyme wins faith  
As poets,--only paint as painters,--then  
He turns in the cold silence; and again  
Shrinking, 'I am not as these are,' he saith.

And say that this is so, what follows it?  
For were thine eyes set backwards in thine head,  
Such words were well; but they see on, and far.  
Unto the lights of the great Past, new-lit



Fair for the Future's track, look thou instead,--  
Say thou instead 'I am not as \_these\_ are.' III. THE HUSBANDMEN

Though God, as one that is an householder,  
Called these to labour in his vine-yard first,  
Before the husk of darkness was well burst  
Bidding them grope their way out and bestir,  
(Who, questioned of their wages, answered, 'Sir,  
Unto each man a penny:') though the worst  
Burthen of heat was theirs and the dry thirst:  
Though God hath since found none such as these were  
To do their work like them:--Because of this  
Stand not ye idle in the market-place.  
Which of ye knoweth \_he\_ is not that last  
Who may be first by faith and will?--yea, his  
The hand which after the appointed days  
And hours shall give a Future to their Past? SOUL'S BEAUTY

Under the arch of Life, where love and death,  
Terror and mystery, guard her shrine, I saw  
Beauty enthroned; and though her gaze struck awe,  
I drew it in as simply as my breath.  
Hers are the eyes which, over and beneath,  
The sky and sea bend on thee,--which can draw,  
By sea or sky or woman, to one law,  
The allotted bondman of her palm and wreath.

This is that Lady Beauty, in whose praise  
Thy voice and hand shake still,--long known to thee  
By flying hair and fluttering hem,--the beat  
Following her daily of thy heart and feet,  
How passionately and irretrievably,  
In what fond flight, how many ways and days! BODY'S BEAUTY

Of Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told  
(The witch he loved before the gift of Eve,)  
That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,  
And her enchanted hair was the first gold.  
And still she sits, young while the earth is old,  
And, subtly of herself contemplative,  
Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,  
Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers; for where  
Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent  
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?  
Lo! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went  
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent  
And round his heart one strangling golden hair. THE MONOCHORD

Is it this sky's vast vault or ocean's sound  
That is Life's self and draws my life from me,  
And by instinct ineffable decree  
Holds my breath quailing on the bitter bound?  
Nay, is it Life or Death, thus thunder-crown'd,  
That 'mid the tide of all emergency  
Now notes my separate wave, and to what sea  
Its difficult eddies labour in the ground?

Oh! what is this that knows the road I came,  
The flame turned cloud, the cloud returned to flame,  
The lifted shifted steeps and all the way?--  
That draws round me at last this wind-warm space,  
And in regenerate rapture turns my face  
Upon the devious coverts of dismay? FROM DAWN TO NOON

As the child knows not if his mother's face  
Be fair; nor of his elders yet can deem  
What each most is; but as of hill or stream  
At dawn, all glimmering life surrounds his place:  
Who yet, tow'rd noon of his half-weary race,  
Pausing awhile beneath the high sun-beam  
And gazing steadily back,--as through a dream,  
In things long past new features now can trace:--

Even so the thought that is at length fullgrown  
Turns back to note the sun-smit paths, all grey  
And marvellous once, where first it walked alone;  
And haply doubts, amid the unblenching day,  
Which most or least impelled its onward way,--  
Those unknown things or these things overknown. MEMORIAL THRESHOLDS

What place so strange,--though unrevealed snow  
With unimaginable fires arise  
At the earth's end,--what passion of surprise  
Like frost-bound fire-girt scenes of long ago?  
Lo! this is none but I this hour; and lo!  
This is the very place which to mine eyes  
Those mortal hours in vain immortalize,  
'Mid hurrying crowds, with what alone I know.

City, of thine a single simple door,  
By some new Power reduplicate, must be  
Even yet my life-porch in eternity,  
Even with one presence filled, as once of yore  
Or mocking winds whirl round a chaff-strown floor  
Thee and thy years and these my words and me. HOARDED JOY

I said: 'Nay, pluck not,--let the first fruit be:  
Even as thou sayest, it is sweet and red,

But let it ripen still. The tree's bent head  
Sees in the stream its own fecundity  
And bides the day of fulness. Shall not we  
At the sun's hour that day possess the shade,  
And claim our fruit before its ripeness fade,  
And eat it from the branch and praise the tree?'

I say: 'Alas! our fruit hath wooed the sun  
Too long,--'tis fallen and floats adown the stream.  
Lo, the last clusters! Pluck them every one,  
And let us sup with summer; ere the gleam  
Of autumn set the year's pent sorrow free,  
And the woods wail like echoes from the sea.' BARREN SPRING

So now the changed year's turning wheel returns  
And as a girl sails balanced in the wind,  
And now before and now again behind  
Stoops as it swoops, with cheek that laughs and burns,--  
So Spring comes merry towards me now, but earns  
No answering smile from me, whose life is twin'd  
With the dead boughs that winter still must bind,  
And whom to-day the Spring no more concerns.

Behold, this crocus is a withering flame;  
This snowdrop, snow; this apple-blossom's part  
To breed the fruit that breeds the serpent's art.  
Nay, for these Spring-flowers, turn thy face from them,  
Nor gaze till on the year's last lily-stem  
The white cup shrivels round the golden heart. FAREWELL TO THE GLEN

Sweet stream-fed glen, why say 'farewell' to thee  
Who far'st so well and find'st for ever smooth  
The brow of Time where man may read no ruth?  
Nay, do thou rather say 'farewell' to me,  
Who now fare forth in bitterer fantasy  
Than erst was mine where other shade might soothe  
By other streams, what while in fragrant youth  
The bliss of being sad made melancholy.

And yet, farewell! For better shalt thou fare  
When children bathe sweet faces in thy flow  
And happy lovers blend sweet shadows there  
In hours to come, than when an hour ago  
Thine echoes had but one man's sighs to bear  
And thy trees whispered what he feared to know. VAIN VIRTUES

What is the sorriest thing that enters Hell?  
None of the sins,--but this and that fair deed  
Which a soul's sin at length could supersede.  
These yet are virgins, whom death's timely knell

Might once have sainted; whom the fiends compel  
Together now, in snake-bound shuddering sheaves  
Of anguish, while the scorching bridegroom leaves  
Their refuse maidenhood abominable.

Night sucks them down, the garbage of the pit,  
Whose names, half entered in the book of Life,  
Were God's desire at noon. And as their hair  
And eyes sink last, the Torturer deigns no whit  
To gaze, but, yearning, waits his worthier wife,  
The Sin still blithe on earth that sent them there. LOST DAYS

The lost days of my life until to-day,  
What were they, could I see them on the street  
Lie as they fell? Would they be ears of wheat  
Sown once for food but trodden into clay?  
Or golden coins squandered and still to pay?  
Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet?  
Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat  
The throats of men in Hell, who thirst alway?

I do not see them here; but after death  
God knows I know the faces I shall see,  
Each one a murdered self, with low last breath.  
'I am thyself, -- what hast thou done to me?'  
'And I--and I--thyself,' (lo! each one saith,)  
'And thou thyself to all eternity!' DEATH'S SONGSTERS

When first that horse, within whose populous womb  
The birth was death, o'ershadowed Troy with fate,  
Her elders, dubious of its Grecian freight,  
Brought Helen there to sing the songs of home:  
She whispered, 'Friends, I am alone; come, come!'  
Then, crouched within, Ulysses waxed afraid,  
And on his comrades' quivering mouths he laid  
His hands, and held them till the voice was dumb.

The same was he who, lashed to his own mast,  
There where the sea-flowers screen the charnel-caves,  
Beside the sirens' singing island pass'd,  
Till sweetness failed along the inveterate waves...  
Say, soul,--are songs of Death no heaven to thee,  
Nor shames her lip the cheek of Victory? HERO'S LAMP\*

That lamp thou fill'st in Eros name to-night,  
O Hero, shall the Sestian augurs take  
To-morrow, and for drowned Leander's sake  
To Anteros its fireless lip shall plight.  
Aye, waft the unspoken vow: yet dawn's first light  
On ebbing storm and life twice ebb'd must break;

While 'neath no sunrise, by the Avernian Lake,  
Lo where Love walks, Death's pallid neophyte.

That lamp within Anteros' shadowy shrine  
Shall stand unlit (for so the gods decree)  
Till some one man the happy issue see  
Of a life's love, and bid its flame to shine:  
Which still may rest unfir'd; for, theirs or thine,  
O brother, what brought love to them or thee?

\*After the deaths of Leander and Hero, the signal-lamp was dedicated to  
Anteros, with the edict that no man should light it unless his love had  
proved fortunate. THE TREES OF THE GARDEN

Ye who have passed Death's haggard hills; and ye  
Whom trees that knew your sires shall cease to know  
And still stand silent:--is it all a show,  
A wisp that laughs upon the wall?--decree  
Of some inexorable supremacy  
Which ever, as man strains his blind surmise  
From depth to ominous depth, looks past his eyes,  
Sphinx-faced with unabashed augury?

Nay, rather question the Earth's self. Invoke  
The storm-felled forest-trees moss-grown to-day  
Whose roots are hillocks where the children play;  
Or ask the silver sapling 'neath what yoke  
Those stars, his spray-crown's clustering gems, shall wage  
Their journey still when his boughs shrink with age. 'RETRO ME, SATHANA!'

Get thee behind me. Even as, heavy-curl'd,  
Stooping against the wind, a charioteer  
Is snatched from out his chariot by the hair,  
So shall Time be; and as the void car, hurled  
Abroad by reinless steeds, even so the world:  
Yea, even as chariot-dust upon the air,  
It shall be sought and not found anywhere.  
Get thee behind me, Satan. Oft unfurled,  
Thy perilous wings can beat and break like lath  
Much mightiness of men to win thee praise.  
Leave these weak feet to tread in narrow ways.  
Thou still, upon the broad vine-sheltered path,  
Mayst wait the turning of the phials of wrath  
For certain years, for certain months and days. LOST ON BOTH SIDES

As when two men have loved a woman well,  
Each hating each, through Love's and Death's deceit;  
Since not for either this stark marriage-sheet  
And the long pauses of this wedding bell;  
Yet o'er her grave the night and day dispel

At last their feud forlorn, with cold and heat;  
Nor other than dear friends to death may fleet  
The two lives left that most of her can tell:--

So separate hopes, which in a soul had wooed  
The one same Peace, strove with each other long,  
And Peace before their faces perished since:  
So through that soul, in restless brotherhood,  
They roam together now, and wind among  
Its bye-streets, knocking at the dusty inns. THE SUN'S SHAME

I

Beholding youth and hope in mockery caught  
From life; and mocking pulses that remain  
When the soul's death of bodily death is fain;  
Honour unknown, and honour known unsought;  
And penury's sedulous self-torturing thought  
On gold, whose master therewith buys his bane;  
And longed-for woman longing all in vain  
For lonely man with love's desire distraught;  
And wealth, and strength, and power, and pleasantness,  
Given unto bodies of whose souls men say,  
None poor and weak, slavish and foul, as they:--  
Beholding these things, I behold no less  
The blushing morn and blushing eve confess  
The shame that loads the intolerable day. As some true chief of men, bowed down with stress  
Of life's disastrous eld, on blossoming youth  
May gaze, and murmur with self-pity and ruth,  
'Might I thy fruitless treasure but possess,  
Such blessing of mine all coming years should bless; '--  
Then sends one sigh forth to the unknown goal,  
And bitterly feels breathe against his soul  
The hour swift-winged of nearer nothingness:--

Even so the World's grey Soul to the green World  
Perchance one hour must cry: 'Woe's me, for whom  
Inveteracy of ill portends the doom,--  
Whose heart's old fire in shadow of shame is furl'd:  
While thou even as of yore art journeying,  
All soulless now, yet merry with the Spring!' MICHELANGELO'S KISS

Great Michelangelo, with age grown bleak  
And uttermost labours, having once o'ersaid  
All grievous memories on his long life shed,  
This worst regret to one true heart could speak:--  
That when, with sorrowing love and reverence meek,  
He stooped o'er sweet Colonna's dying bed,  
His Muse and dominant Lady, spirit-wed,

Her hand he kissed, but not her brow or cheek.

O Buonarruoti,--good at Art's fire-wheels  
To urge her chariot!--even thus the Soul,  
Touching at length some sorely-chastened goal,  
Earns oftenest but a little: her appeals  
Were deep and mute,--lowly her claim. Let be:  
What holds for her Death's garner? And for thee? THE VASE OF LIFE

Around the vase of Life at your slow pace  
He has not crept, but turned it with his hands,  
And all its sides already understands.  
There, girt, one breathes alert for some great race;  
Whose road runs far by sands and fruitful space;  
Who laughs, yet through the jolly throng has pass'd;  
Who weeps, nor stays for weeping; who at last,  
A youth, stands somewhere crowned, with silent face.

And he has filled this vase with wine for blood,  
With blood for tears, with spice for burning vow,  
With watered flowers for buried love most fit;  
And would have cast it shattered to the flood,  
Yet in Fate's name has kept it whole; which now  
Stands empty till his ashes fall in it. LIFE THE BELOVED

As thy friend's face, with shadow of soul o'erspread,  
Somewhile unto thy sight perchance hath been  
Ghastly and strange, yet never so is seen  
In thought, but to all fortunate favour wed;  
As thy love's death-bound features never dead  
To memory's glass return, but contravene  
Frail fugitive days, and always keep, I ween  
Than all new life a livelier lovelihed:--

So Life herself, thy spirit's friend and love,  
Even still as Spring's authentic harbinger  
Glow with fresh hours for hope to glorify;  
Though pale she lay when in the winter grove  
Her funeral flowers were snow-flakes shed on her  
And the red wings of frost-fire rent the sky. A SUPERScription

Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been;  
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell;  
Unto thine ear I hold the dead-sea shell  
Cast up thy Life's foam-fretted feet between;  
Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen  
Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my spell  
Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,  
Of ultimate things unuttered the frail screen.

Mark me, how still I am! But should there dart  
One moment through thy soul the soft surprise  
Of that winged Peace which lulls the breath of sighs,  
Then shalt thou see me smile, and turn apart  
Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart  
Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes. HE AND I

Whence came his feet into my field, and why?  
How is it that he sees it all so drear?  
How do I see his seeing, and how hear  
The name his bitter silence knows it by?  
This was the little fold of separate sky  
Whose pasturing clouds in the soul's atmosphere  
Drew living light from one continual year:  
How should he find it lifeless? He, or I?

Lo! this new Self now wanders round my field,  
With plaints for every flower, and for each tree  
A moan, the sighing wind's auxiliary:  
And o'er sweet waters of my life, that yield  
Unto his lips no draught but tears unseal'd,  
Even in my place he weeps. Even I, not he. NEWBORN DEATH

I

To-day Death seems to me an infant child  
Which her worn mother Life upon my knee  
Has set to grow my friend and play with me;  
If haply so my heart might be beguil'd  
To find no terrors in a face so mild,--  
If haply so my weary heart might be  
Unto the newborn milky eyes of thee,  
O Death, before resentment reconcil'd.

How long, O Death? And shall thy feet depart  
Still a young child's with mine, or wilt thou stand  
Fullgrown the helpful daughter of my heart,  
What time with thee indeed I reach the strand  
Of the pale wave which knows thee what thou art,  
And drink it in the hollow of thy hand? II

And thou, O Life, the lady of all bliss,  
With whom, when our first heart beat full and fast,  
I wandered till the haunts of men were pass'd,  
And in fair places found all bowers amiss  
Till only woods and waves might hear our kiss,  
While to the winds all thought of Death we cast:  
Ah, Life! and must I have from thee at last



No smile to greet me and no babe but this?

Lo! Love, the child once ours; and Song, whose hair  
Blew like a flame and blossomed like a wreath;  
And Art, whose eyes were worlds by God found fair;  
These o'er the book of Nature mixed their breath  
With neck-twined arms, as oft we watched them there:  
And did these die that thou mightst bear me Death? THE ONE HOPE

When all desire at last and all regret  
Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain,  
What shall assuage the unforgotten pain  
And teach the unforgetful to forget?  
Shall Peace be still a sunk stream long unmet,--  
Or may the soul at once in a green plain  
Stoop through the spray of some sweet life-fountain  
And cull the dew-drenched flowering amulet?

Ah! when the wan soul in that golden air  
Between the scripted petals softly blown  
Peers breathless for the gift of grace unknown,  
Ah! let none other written spell soe'er  
But only the one Hope's one name be there,--  
Not less nor more, but even that word alone.

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