

**EDWARD
DOWDEN**

POEMS

Edward Dowden

Poems

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PREFACE

Goethe says in a little poem¹ that “Poems are stained glass windows”—“*Gedichte sind gemalte Fensterscheiben*”—to be seen aright not from the “market-place” but only from the interior of the church, “*die heilige Kapelle*”: and that “*der Herr Philister*” (equivalent for “indolent Reviewer”) glances at them from without and gets out of temper because he finds them unintelligible from his “market-place” standpoint. This comparison is a pretty conceit, and holds good as a half truth—but not more than a half: for while the artist who paints his “church windows” needs only to make them beautiful from within, the maker of poems must so shape and colour his work that its outer side—the technical, towards the “market-place” of the public—shall have no lack of beauty, though differing from the beauty visible from the spiritual interior.

The old volume of *Edward Dowden's Poems* of 1876, which is now reprinted with additions, has been, to a limited extent, long before the public—seen from the “market-place” by general critics, who, for the most part, approved the outer side of the “painted windows,” and seen perhaps from within by some few like-minded readers, who, though no definite door was opened into “*die heilige Kapelle*,” somehow entered in.

But a great many people, to whom the author's prose works are well known, have never even heard that he had written poetry. This is due in a measure to the fact that the published book of poems only got into circulation by its first small edition. Its second edition found a silent apotheosis in flame at a great fire at the publisher's in London, in which nearly the whole of it perished.

Edward Dowden's chief work has been as a prose writer. That fact remains—yet it is accidental rather than essential. In the early seventies he felt the urge very strongly towards making verse his vocation in life, and he probably would have yielded to it, but for the necessity to be bread-winner for a much-loved household. Poetry is a ware of small commercial value, as most poets—at least for a long space of their lives—have known, and prose, for even a young writer of promise, held out prospects of bread for immediate eating. Hence to prose he turned, and on that road went his way, and whether the accidental circumstances that determined his course at the parting of the ways wrought loss or gain for our literature, who can say?

But he never wholly abandoned verse, and all through his life, even to the very end, he would fitfully, from time to time, utter in it a part of himself which never found complete issue in prose and which was his most real self.

Perhaps the nearest approaches to his utterance in poetry occurred sometimes in his College lecturing, when in the midst of a written discourse he would interrupt it and stop and liberate his heart in a little rush of words—out of the depths, accompanied by that familiar gesture of his hands which always came to him when emotionally stirred in speaking. Some of his students have told me that they usually found those little extempore bits in a lecture by far the most illuminated and inspiring parts of it, especially as it was then that his voice, always musical in no common degree, vibrated, and acquired a richer tone.

In his prose writings in general he seemed to curb and restrain himself. That he did so was by no means an evil, for the habitual retinence in his style gave to the little rare outbreaks of emotion the quality of charm that we find in a tender flower growing out of a solid stone wall unexpectedly.

¹ “Sechzehn Parabeln,” *Gedichte*, Leoper's edition (p. 180) of Goethe's *Gedichte*.

Not infrequently a sort of hard irony was employed by him, as restraint on enthusiasm, with occasional loosening of the curb.

In Edward Dowden's soul there seemed to be capacities which might, under other circumstances, have made him more than a minor poet. His was a more than usually rich, sensuous nature. This, combined with absolute purity—the purity not of ice and snow, but of fire. And, superadded, was an unlimited capacity for sternness—that quality which, as salt, acts as preservative of all human ardours. He came from his Maker, fashioned out of the stuff whereof are made saints, patriots, martyrs, and the great lovers in the world. His work as a scholar never obliterated anything of this in him. By this, his erudition gained richness—the richness of vital blood. It was as no anæmic recluse that he dwelt amongst his book-shelves, and hence no Faust-like weariness of intellectual satiety ever came to him, no sense of being “*beschränkt mit diesem Bücherhauf*” in his surroundings of his library (which latterly had grown to some twenty-four thousand volumes). He lived in company with these in a twofold way, keenly and accurately grasping all their textual details, and at the same time valuing them for the sake, chiefly, of spiritual converse with the writers.

Besides the spiritual converse he gained thus, he found, as a book-lover, a fertile source of recreation in the collecting of literary rarities, old books, MSS. and curiosities. In this he felt the keen zest of a sportsman. This was his shooting on the moors, his fishing in the rivers. No living creature ever lost its life for his amusement, but in this innocuous play he found unfailing pleasure, and many a piece of luck he had with his gun or rod in hitting some rare bird, or landing some big prize of a fish out of old booksellers' catalogues or the “carts” in the back streets.

His physical nature was fully and strongly developed, and it is out of strong physical instincts that strong spiritual instincts often grow—the boundary line between them being undefined.

His one athletic exercise—swimming—was to him a joy of no common sort. He gave himself to the sea with an eagerness of body, soul and spirit, breasting the bright waters exultingly on many a summer's day on some West of Ireland or Cornish shore, revelling in the sea's life and in his own.

And akin to that, in the sensuous, spiritual region of the soul, was his feeling for all External Nature, his deep delight in the coming of each new Spring—its blackthorn blossoms, its hazel and willow catkins, its daffodils—and his response, as the year went on in its procession, to the glory of the furze and heather glow and to all Earth's sounds and silences.

And of a like sort was his enjoyment of music which had the depth of a passion.

Very possibly, if his lot had been cast in early Christian or mediæval times, all these impulses towards the joy and beauty of the earth might have been sternly crushed out by the moral forces of his character.

Looking at a picture of St. Jerome one day—not unlike E. D. in feature—I said to him, “There's what *you* would have been if you had lived in those times.” (The saint is depicted there as lean, emaciated and woefully dirty!).

It was well for Edward Dowden that he was laid hold of in his early life by that great non-ascetic soul, William Wordsworth. He was initiated into the inner secret of Wordsworth. He had experience of the Wordsworthian ecstasy—that ecstasy which comes, if at all, straight as a gift from God, and is not to be taught by the teaching of the scribes.

Through kinship a man who is born potentially a poet comes first into relation with poets, and with E. Dowden's sensuousness of capacities it was natural that he should be in his early years attracted to Keats, to the long, deep, rich dwelling of his verse on the vision and the sounds of Nature. It was not until he had advanced some way towards middle life that he came into vital contact with Shelley. He had felt aloof from him; but the attraction, when once owned, became very powerful, and he yielded to the delight of the swift motion of the Shelleyan utterances.

He always recognized Robert Browning's greatness profoundly, and responded to all his best truths, especially as regards the relation, in love, of Man and Woman, but he never became pledged to an all-round Browning worship; his admiration had no discipleship in it.

For Walt Whitman, with whom a personal friendship, strong on both sides, was formed, he felt the cordial reverence due to the giver of what he reckoned as a gift of immense value. While condemning whatever was unreticent in *Leaves of Grass*, he at the same time saw there the great flood of spirituality available as a force for emancipation of our hearts from pressure of sordidnesses in the world.

It is somewhat remarkable that with all his trend towards the great spiritual and mystical forces in literature he was all along never without a keen appreciation of the writers who brought mundane shrewdness and wisdom. The first book he bought for himself in childhood with the hoarded savings of his pocket-money was *Bacon's Essays*, with which as a small boy he became very familiar. And all through his life he sought with unfailing pleasure the companionship of Jane Austen again and again. And amongst the books which he himself made, it was perhaps his *Montaigne* that gave him, in the process of making, the delicatest satisfaction—the satisfaction of witnessing and analysing the dexterous play of human intellect and character on low levels.

His attraction to Goethe—very dominant with him in middle life—came, I imagine, from the fact that he saw in that mightiest of the Teutons two diverse qualities in operation—the measureless intellectual spirituality and the vast common-sense of mundane wisdom.

In this attraction there was also the element of the magnetism which draws together opposites—not less forcible than the attraction between affinities.

As regards the moral nature, his own was as far as the North Pole is from the South from that of the great sage of Weimar, whose serenely-wise beneficence contained no potentialities of sainthood, martyrdom or absolute human love. He sought gain from Goethe just *because* of that unlikeness to what was in himself.

At one period of his literary work he was intending to make as his "*opus magnus*" a full study of Goethe's life and works, and with that intent he carried on a course of reading, and laid in a great equipment of workman's tools—Goethe books in German, French and English. From this project he was turned aside by a call to write the life of Shelley—a long and difficult task. But he never lost sight of Goethe. In one of the later years of his life, as recreation in a summer's holiday in Cornwall, he translated the whole of the "West-Eastern Divan" into English verse, and previously, from time to time, isolated essays on Goethe themes appeared amongst his prose writings. And yet it is not unlikely that even if the task of Shelley's biography had not intervened, no complete study, such as he had at first planned, might have been ever accomplished by him on Goethe, for with experience there came to him a growing conviction that his best work in criticism could only be done in dealing with what was written in his mother-tongue.

Some of Edward Dowden's friends, Nationalist and Unionist both, have felt regret that he, the gentle scholar, gave such large share of his energies to the strife of politics, as if force were subtracted thereby from his work in Literature. They are mistaken. The output of energy thus given came back to the giver, reinforcing his prose writing with a mundane vigour and virility, exceeding what it might have had if he had kept himself aloof from the affairs of the nation.

Yet, strangely enough, between his politics and his poetry there was a water-tight wall of separation. Other men, to take scattered instances, Kipling, Wordsworth, Milton, fused in various ways their political feeling and their poetical. This Edward Dowden never attempted. I cannot analyse the "why."

Confining myself to some points which seem left out of sight in most of the admirably appreciative obituary notices in last April's newspapers, I have tried to say here, in a fragmentary way, a few things about a man of whom many things—ininitely many—might be said without exhausting the total. He was himself at the same time many and one. He had multiform aspects—interests very diverse—and yet life was for him in no wise "patchy and scrappy," but had unity throughout.

In Shakespeare, whose faithful scholar he was, there are diversities: and yet, do we not image Shakespeare to our minds as one and a whole?

In the volumes now issued by Messrs. J. M. Dent & Sons is contained all the verse that the author left available for publication, with the exception of a sequence of a hundred and one lyrics (which by desire is separately published under the somewhat transparent disguise of editorship). That little sequence, named *A Woman's Reliquary*, is his latest work in verse. Much in it re-echoes sounds that can be heard in his old poems of the early seventies.

E. D. D.

September 1913.

THE WANDERER

I cast my anchor nowhere (the waves whirled
My anchor from me); East and West are one
To me; against no winds are my sails furled;
—Merely my planet anchors to the Sun.

THE FOUNTAIN

(An Introduction To the Sonnets)

Hush, let the fountain murmur dim
Melodious secrets; stir no limb,
But lie along the marge and wait,
Till deep and pregnant as with fate,
Fine as a star-beam, crystal-clear,
Each ripple grows upon the ear.
This is that fountain seldom seen
By mortal wanderer,—Hippocrene,—
Where the virgins three times three,
Thy singing brood, Mnemosyne,
Loosen'd the girdle, and with grave
Pure joy their faultless bodies gave
To sacred pleasure of the wave.
Listen! the lapsing waters tell
The urgency uncontrollable
Which makes the trouble of their breast,
And bears them onward with no rest
To ampler skies and some grey plain
Sad with the tumbling of the main.
But see, a sidelong eddy slips
Back into the soft eclipse
Of day, while careless fate allows,
Darkling beneath still olive boughs;
Then with chuckle liquid sweet
Coils within its shy retreat;
This is mine, no wave of might,
But pure and live with glimmering light;
I dare not follow that broad flood
Of Poesy, whose lustihood
Nourishes mighty lands, and makes
Resounding music for their sakes;
I lie beside the well-head clear
With musing joy, with tender fear,
And choose for half a day to lean
Thus on my elbow where the green
Margin-grass and silver-white
Starry buds, the wind's delight,
Thirsting steer, nor goat-hoof rude
Of the branch-sundering Satyr brood
Has ever pashed; now, now, I stoop,
And in hand-hollow dare to scoop
This scantling from the delicate stream;
It lies as quiet as a dream,

And lustrous in my curvèd hand.
Were it a crime if this were drain'd
By lips which met the noonday blue
Fiery and emptied of its dew?
Crown me with small white marish-flowers!
To the good Dæmon, and the Powers
Of this fair haunt I offer up
In unprofanèd lily-cup
Libations; still remains for me
A bird's drink of clear Poesy;
Yet not as light bird comes and dips
A pert bill, but with reverent lips
I drain this slender trembling tide;
O sweet the coolness at my side,
And, lying back, to slowly pry
For spaces of the upper sky
Radiant 'twixt woven olive leaves;
And, last, while some fair show deceives
The closing eyes, to find a sleep
As full of healing and as deep
As on toil-worn Odysseus lay
Surge-swept to his Ionian bay.

IN THE GALLERIES

I. THE APOLLO BELVEDERE

Radiance invincible! Is that the brow
Which gleamed on Python while thy arrow sped?
Are those the lips for Hyacinthus dead
That grieved? Wherefore a God indeed art thou:
For all we toil with ill, and the hours bow
And break us, and at best when we have bled,
And are much marred, perchance propitiated
A little doubtful victory they allow:
We sorrow, and thenceforth the lip retains
A shade, and the eyes shine and wonder less.
O joyous Slayer of evil things! O great
And splendid Victor! God, whom no soil stains
Of passion or doubt, of grief or languidness,
—Even to worship thee I come too late.

II. THE VENUS OF MELOS

Goddess, or woman nobler than the God,
No eyes a-gaze upon Ægean seas
Shifting and circling past their Cyclades
Saw thee. The Earth, the gracious Earth, wastrod
First by thy feet, while round thee lay her broad
Calm harvests, and great kine, and shadowing trees,
And flowers like queens, and a full year's increase,
Clusters, ripe berry, and the bursting pod.
So thy victorious fairness, unallied
To bitter things or barren, doth bestow
And not exact; so thou art calm and wise;
Thy large allurements saves; a man may grow
Like Plutarch's men by standing at thy side,
And walk thenceforward with clear-visioned eyes!

III. ANTINOUS CROWNED AS BACCHUS

(In the British Museum)

Who crowned thy forehead with the ivy wreath
And clustered berries burdening the hair?
Who gave thee godhood, and dim rites? Beware
O beautiful, who breathest mortal breath,
Thou delicate flame great gloom environeth!
The gods are free, and drink a stainless air,
And lightly on calm shoulders they upbear
A weight of joy eternal, nor can Death
Cast o'er their sleep the shadow of her shrine.
O thou confessed too mortal by the o'er-fraught
Crowned forehead, must thy drooped eyes ever see
The glut of pleasure, those pale lips of thine
Still suck a bitter-sweet satiety,
Thy soul descend through cloudy realms of thought?

IV. LEONARDO'S "MONNA LISA"

Make thyself known, Sibyl, or let despair
Of knowing thee be absolute; I wait
Hour-long and waste a soul. What word of fate
Hides 'twixt the lips which smile and still forbear?
Secret perfection! Mystery too fair!
Tangle the sense no more lest I should hate
Thy delicate tyranny, the inviolate
Poise of thy folded hands, thy fallen hair.
Nay, nay,—I wrong thee with rough words; still be
Serene, victorious, inaccessible;
Still smile but speak not; lightest irony
Lurk ever 'neath thine eyelids' shadow; still
O'ertop our knowledge; Sphinx of Italy
Allure us and reject us at thy will!

V. ST LUKE PAINTING THE VIRGIN

(By Van der Weyden)

It was Luke's will; and she, the mother-maid,
Would not gainsay; to please him pleased her best;
See, here she sits with dovelike heart at rest
Brooding, and smoothest brow; the babe is laid
On lap and arm, glad for the unarrayed
And swatheless limbs he stretches; lightly pressed
By soft maternal fingers the full breast
Seeks him, while half a sidelong glance is stayed
By her own bosom and half passes down
To reach the boy. Through doors and window-frame
Bright airs flow in; a river tranquilly
Washes the small, glad Netherlandish town.
Innocent calm! no token here of shame,
A pierced heart, sunless heaven, and Calvary.

ON THE HEIGHTS

Here are the needs of manhood satisfied!
Sane breath, an amplitude for soul and sense,
The noonday silence of the summer hills,
And this embracing solitude; o'er all
The sky unsearchable, which lays its claim,—
A large redemption not to be annulled,—
Upon the heart; and far below, the sea
Breaking and breaking, smoothly, silently.
What need I any further? Now once more
My arrested life begins, and I am man
Complete with eye, heart, brain, and that within
Which is the centre and the light of being;
O dull! who morning after morning chose
Never to climb these gorse and heather slopes
Cairn-crowned, but last within one seaward nook
Wasted my soul on the ambiguous speech
And slow eye-mesmerism of rolling waves,
Courting oblivion of the heart. True life
That was not which possessed me while I lay
Prone on the perilous edge, mere eye and ear,
Staring upon the bright monotony,
Having let slide all force from me, each thought
Yield to the vision of the gleaming blank,
Each nerve of motion and of sense grow numb,
Till to the bland persuasion of some breeze,
Which played across my forehead and my hair,
The lost volition would efface itself,
And I was mingled wholly in the sound
Of tumbling billow and upjetting surge,
Long reluctance, welter and refluent moan,
And the reverberating tumultuousness
'Mid shelf and hollow and angle black with spray.
Yet under all oblivion there remained
A sense of some frustration, a pale dream
Of Nature mocking man, and drawing down,
As streams draw down the dust of gold, his will,
His thought and passion to enrich herself
The insatiable devourer.

Welcome earth,
My natural heritage! and this soft turf,
These rocks which no insidious ocean saps,
But the wide air flows over, and the sun
Illumines. Take me, Mother, to thy breast,
Gather me close in tender, sustinent arms,

Lay bare thy bosom's sweetness and its strength
That I may drink vigour and joy and love.
Oh, infinite composure of the hills!
Thou large simplicity of this fair world,
Candour and calmness, with no mockery,
No soft frustration, flattering sigh or smile
Which masks a tyrannous purpose; and ye Powers
Of these sky-circled heights, and Presences
Awful and strict, I find you favourable,
Who seek not to exclude me or to slay,
Rather accept my being, take me up
Into your silence and your peace. Therefore
By him whom ye reject not, gracious Ones,
Pure vows are made that haply he will be
Not all unworthy of the world; he casts
Forth from him, never to resume again,
Veiled nameless things, frauds of the unfilled heart,
Fantastic pleasures, delicate sadnesses,
The lurid, and the curious, and the occult,
Coward sleights and shifts, the manners of the slave,
And long unnatural uses of dim life.
Hence with you! Robes of angels touch these heights
Blown by pure winds and I lay hold upon them.

Here is a perfect bell of purple heath,
Made for the sky to gaze at reverently,
As faultless as itself, and holding light,
Glad air and silence in its slender dome;
Small, but a needful moment in the sum
Of God's full joy—the abyss of ecstasy
O'er which we hang as the bright bow of foam
Above the never-filled receptacle
Hangs seven-hued where the endless cataract leaps.

O now I guess why you have summoned me,
Headlands and heights, to your companionship;
Confess that I this day am needful to you!
The heavens were loaded with great light, the winds
Brought you calm summer from a hundred fields,
All night the stars had pricked you to desire,
The imminent joy at its full season flowered,
There was a consummation, the broad wave
Toppled and fell. And had ye voice for this?
Sufficient song to unburden the urged breast?
A pastoral pipe to play? a lyre to touch?
The brightening glory of the heath and gorse
Could not appease your passion, nor the cry
Of this wild bird that flits from bush to bush.
Me therefore you required, a voice for song,

A pastoral pipe to play, a lyre to touch,
I recognize your bliss to find me here;
The sky at morning when the sun uleaps
Demands her atom of intense melody,
Her point of quivering passion and delight,
And will not let the lark's heart be at ease.
Take me, the brain with various, subtile fold,
The breast that knows swift joy, the vocal lips;
I yield you here the cunning instrument
Between your knees; now let the plectrum fall!

“LA RÉVÉLATION PAR LE DÉSERT”

“Toujours le désert se montre à l’horizon, quand vous prononcez le nom de Jéhovah.”

Edgar Quinet.

Beyond the places haunted by the feet
Of thoughts and swift desires, and where the eyes
Of wing’d imaginings are wild, and dreams
Glide by on noiseless plumes, beyond the dim
Veiled sisterhood of ever-circling mists,
Who dip their urns in those enchanted meres
Where all thought fails, and every ardour dies,
And through the vapour dead looms a low moon,
Beyond the fountains of the dawn, beyond
The white home of the morning star, lies spread
A desert lifeless, bright, illimitable,
The world’s confine, o’er which no sighing goes
From weary winds of Time.

I sat me down
Upon a red stone flung on the red sand,
In length as great as some sarcophagus
Which holds a king, but scribbled with no runes,
Bald, and unstained by lichen or grey moss.
Save me no living thing in that red land
Showed under heaven; no furtive lizard slipped,
No desert weed pushed upward the tough spine
Or hairy lump, no slow bird was a spot
Of moving black on the deserted air,
Or stationary shrilled his tuneless cry;
No shadow stirr’d, nor luminous haze uprose,
Quivering against the blanched blue of the marge.
I sat unbonneted, and my throat baked,
And my tongue loll’d dogwise. Red sand below,
And one unlidded eye above—mere God
Blazing from marge to marge. I did not pray,
My heart was as a cinder in my breast,
And with both hands I held my head which throbbed.
I, who had sought for God, had followed God
Through the fair world which stings with sharp desire
For him of whom its hints and whisperings are,
Its gleams and tingling moments of the night,
I, who in flower, and wave, and mountain-wind,
And song of bird, and man’s diviner heart
Had owned the present Deity, yet strove
For naked access to his inmost shrine,—

Now found God doubtless, for he filled the heaven
Like brass, he breathed upon the air like fire.
But I, a speck 'twixt the strown sand and sky,
Being yet an atom of pure and living will,
And perdurable as any God of brass,
With all my soul, with all my mind and strength
Hated this God. O, for a little cloud
No bigger than a man's hand on the rim,
To rise with rain and thunder in its womb,
And blot God out! But no such cloud would come.
I felt my brain on fire, heard each pulse tick;
It was a God to make a man stark mad;
I rose with neck out-thrust, and nodding head,
While with dry chaps I could not choose but laugh;
Ha, ha, ha, ha, across the air it rang,
No sweeter than the barking of a dog,
Hard as the echo from an iron cliff;
It must have buffeted the heaven; I ceased,
I looked to see from the mid sky an arm,
And one sweep of the scimitar; I stood;
And when the minute passed with no event,
No doomsman's stroke, no sundering soul and flesh,
When silence dropt its heavy fold on fold,
And God lay yet inert in heaven, or scorn'd
His rebel antic-sized, grotesque,—I swooned.

Now when the sense returned my lips were wet,
And cheeks and chin were wet, with a dank dew,
Acrid and icy, and one shadow huge
Hung over me blue-black, while all around
The fierce light glared. O joy, a living thing,
Emperor of this red domain of sand,
A giant snake! One fold, one massy wreath
Arched over me; a man's expanded arms
Could not embrace the girth of this great lord
In his least part, and low upon the sand
His small head lay, wrinkled, a flaccid bag,
Set with two jewels of green fire, the eyes
That had not slept since making of the world.
Whence grew I bold to gaze into such eyes?
Thus gazing each conceived the other's thought,
Aware how each read each; the Serpent mused,
"Are all the giants dead, a long time dead,
Born of the broad-hipped women, grave and tall,
In whom God's sons poured a celestial seed?
A long time dead, whose great deeds filled the earth
With clamour as of beaten shields, all dead,
And Cush and Canaan, Mizraim and Phut,
And the boy Nimrod storming through large lands

Like earthquake through tower'd cities, these depart,
And what remains? Behold, the elvish thing
We raised from out his swoon, this now is man.
The pretty vermin! helpless to conceive
Of great, pure, simple sin, and vast revolt;
The world escapes from deluge these new days,
We build no Babels with the Shinar slime;
What would this thin-legged grasshopper with us,
The Dread Ones? Rather let him skip, and chirp
Hymns in his smooth grass to his novel God,
'The Father'; here no bland paternity
He meets, but visible Might blocks the broad sky,
My great Co-mate, the Ancient. Hence! avoid!
What wouldst thou prying on our solitude?
For thee my sly small cousin may suffice,
And sly small bites about the heart and groin;
Hence to his haunt! Yet ere thou dost depart
I mark thee with my sign."

A vibrant tongue
Had in a moment pricked upon my brow
The mystic mark of brotherhood, Cain's brand,
But when I read within his eyes the words
"Hence" and "avoid," dim horror seized on me,
And rising, with both arms stretched forth, and head
Bowed earthward, and not turning once I ran;
And what things saw me as I raced by them,
What hands plucked at my dress, what light wings brushed
My face, what waters in my hearing seethed,
I know not, till I reached familiar lands,
And saw grey clouds slow gathering for the night,
Above sweet fields, whence the June mowers strolled
Homewards with girls who chatted down the lane.

Is this the secret lying round the world?
A Dread One watching with unlidde eye
Slow century after century from his heaven,
And that great lord, the worm of the red plain,
Cold in mid sun, strenuous, untameable,
Coiling his solitary strength along
Slow century after century, conscious each
How in the life of his Arch-enemy
He lives, how ruin of one confounds the pair,—
Is this the eternal dual mystery?
One Source of being, Light, or Love, or Lord,
Whose shadow is the brightness of the world,
Still let thy dawns and twilights glimmer pure
In flow perpetual from hill to hill,
Still bathe us in thy tides of day and night;

Wash me at will a weed in thy free wave,
Drenched in the sun and air and surge of Thee.

THE MORNING STAR

I

Backward betwixt the gates of steepest heaven,
Faint from the insupportable advance
Of light confederate in the East, is driven

The starry chivalry, and helm and lance,
Which held keen ward upon the shadowy plain,
Yield to the stress and stern predominance

Of Day; no wanderer morning-moon awane
Floats through dishevelled clouds, exanimate,
In disarray, with gaze of weariest pain;

O thou, sole Splendour, sprung to vindicate
Night's ancient fame, thou in dread strife serene,
With back-blown locks, joyous yet desperate

Flamest; from whose pure ardour Earth doth win
High passionate pangs, thou radiant paladin.

II

Nay; strife must cease in song: far-sent and clear
Piercing the silence of this summer morn
I hear thy swan-song rapturous; I hear

Life's ecstasy; sharp cries of flames which burn
With palpitating joy, intense and pure,
From altars of the universe, and yearn

In eager spires; and under these the sure
Strong ecstasy of Death, in phrase too deep
For thought, too bright for dim investiture.

Of mortal words, and sinking more than sleep
Down holier places of the soul's delight;
Cry, through the quickening dawn, to us who creep

'Mid dreams and dews of the dividing night,
Thou searcher of the darkness and the light.

III

I seek thee, and thou art not; for the sky
Has drawn thee in upon her breast to be
A hidden talisman, while light soars high,

Virtuous to make wide heaven's tranquillity
More tranquil, and her steadfast truth more true,
Yea even her overbowed infinity.

Of tenderness, when o'er wet woods the blue
Shows past white edges of a Sundering cloud,
More infinitely tender. Day is new,

Night ended; how the hills are overflowed
With spaciousness of splendour, and each tree
Is touched; only not yet the lark is loud,

Since viewless still o'er city and plain and sea
Vibrates thy spirit-wingèd ecstasy.

A CHILD'S NOONDAY SLEEP

Because you sleep, my child, with breathing light
As heave of the June sea,
Because your lips soft petals dewy-bright
Dispart so tenderly;

Because the slumbrous warmth is on your cheek
Up from the hushed heart sent,
And in this midmost noon when winds are weak
No cloud lies more content;

Because nor song of bird, nor lamb's keen call
May reach you sunken deep,
Because your lifted arm I thus let fall
Heavy with perfect sleep;

Because all will is drawn from you, all power,
And Nature through dark roots
Will hold and nourish you for one sweet hour
Amid her flowers and fruits;

Therefore though tempests gather, and the gale
Through autumn skies will roar,
Though Earth send up to heaven the ancient wail
Heard by dead Gods of yore;

Though spectral faiths contend, and for her course
The soul confused must try,
While through the whirl of atoms and of force
Looms an abandoned sky;

Yet, know I, Peace abides, of earth's wild things
Centre, and ruling thence;
Behold, a spirit folds her budded wings
In confident innocence.

IN THE GARDEN

I. THE GARDEN

Past the town's clamour is a garden full
Of loneness and old greenery; at noon
When birds are hushed, save one dim cushat's croon,
A ripen'd silence hangs beneath the cool
Great branches; basking roses dream and drop
A petal, and dream still; and summer's boon
Of mellow grasses, to be levelled soon
By a dew-drenchèd scythe, will hardly stop
At the uprunning mounds of chestnut trees.
Still let me muse in this rich haunt by day,
And know all night in dusky placidness
It lies beneath the summer, while great ease
Broods in the leaves, and every light wind's stress
Lifts a faint odour down the verdurous way.

II. VISIONS

Here I am slave of visions. When noon heat
Strikes the red walls, and their environ'd air
Lies steep'd in sun; when not a creature dare
Affront the fervour, from my dim retreat
Where woof of leaves embowers a beechen seat,
With chin on palm, and wide-set eyes I stare,
Beyond the liquid quiver and the glare,
Upon fair shapes that move on silent feet.
Those Three strait-robed, and speechless as they pass,
Come often, touch the lute, nor heed me more
Than birds or shadows heed; that naked child
Is dove-like Psyche slumbering in deep grass;
Sleep, sleep,—he heeds thee not, you Sylvan wild
Munching the russet apple to its core.

III. AN INTERIOR

The grass around my limbs is deep and sweet;
Yonder the house has lost its shadow wholly,
The blinds are dropped, and softly now and slowly
The day flows in and floats; a calm retreat
Of tempered light where fair things fair things meet;
White busts and marble Dian make it holy,
Within a niche hangs Dürer's Melancholy
Brooding; and, should you enter, there will greet
Your sense with vague allurements effluence faint
Of one magnolia bloom; fair fingers draw
From the piano Chopin's heart-complaint;
Alone, white-robed she sits; a fierce macaw
On the verandah, proud of plume and paint,
Screams, insolent despot, showing beak and claw.

IV. THE SINGER

“That was the thrush’s last good-night,” I thought,
And heard the soft descent of summer rain
In the drooped garden leaves; but hush! again
The perfect iterance,—freer than unsought
Odours of violets dim in woodland ways,
Deeper than coilèd waters laid a-dream
Below mossed ledges of a shadowy stream,
And faultless as blown roses in June days.
Full-throated singer! art thou thus anew
Voiceful to hear how round thyself alone
The enrichèd silence drops for thy delight
More soft than snow, more sweet than honey-dew?
Now cease: the last faint western streak is gone,
Stir not the blissful quiet of the night.

V. A SUMMER MOON

Queen-moon of this enchanted summer night,
One virgin slave companioning thee,—I lie
Vacant to thy possession as this sky
Conquered and calmed by thy rejoicing might;
Swim down through my heart's deep, thou dewy bright
Wanderer of heaven, till thought must faint and die,
And I am made all thine inseparably,
Resolved into the dream of thy delight.
Ah no! the place is common for her feet,
Not here, not here,—beyond the amber mist,
And breadths of dusky pine, and shining lawn,
And unstirred lake, and gleaming belts of wheat,
She comes upon her Latmos, and has kissed
The sidelong face of blind Endymion.

VI. A PEACH

If any sense in mortal dust remains
When mine has been refined from flower to flower,
Won from the sun all colours, drunk the shower
And delicate winy dews, and gained the gains
Which elves who sleep in airy bells, a-swing
Through half a summer day, for love bestow,
Then in some warm old garden let me grow
To such a perfect, lush, ambrosian thing
As this. Upon a southward-facing wall
I bask, and feel my juices dimly fed
And mellowing, while my bloom comes golden grey:
Keep the wasps from me! but before I fall
Pluck me, white fingers, and o'er two ripe-red
Girl lips O let me richly swoon away!

VII. EARLY AUTUMN

If while I sit flatter'd by this warm sun
Death came to me, and kissed my mouth and brow,
And eyelids which the warm light hovers through,
I should not count it strange. Being half won
By hours that with a tender sadness run,
Who would not softly lean to lips which woo
In the Earth's grave speech? Nor could it aught undo
Of Nature's calm observances begun
Still to be here the idle autumn day.
Pale leaves would circle down, and lie unstirr'd
Where'er they fell; the tired wind hither call
Her gentle fellows; shining beetles stray
Up their green courts; and only yon shy bird
A little bolder grow ere evenfall.

VIII. LATER AUTUMN

This is the year's despair: some wind last night
Utter'd too soon the irrevocable word,
And the leaves heard it, and the low clouds heard;
So a wan morning dawned of sterile light;
Flowers drooped, or showed a startled face and white;
The cattle cowered, and one disconsolate bird
Chirped a weak note; last came this mist and blurred
The hills, and fed upon the fields like blight.
Ah, why so swift despair! There yet will be
Warm noons, the honey'd leavings of the year,
Hours of rich musing, ripest autumn's core,
And late-heaped fruit, and falling hedge-berry,
Blossoms in cottage-crofts, and yet, once more,
A song, not less than June's, fervent and clear.

THE HEROINES

HELENA

(Tenth year of Troy-Siege)

She stood upon the wall of windy Troy,
And lifted high both arms, and cried aloud
With no man near:—
“Troy-town and glory of Greece
Strive, let the flame aspire, and pride of life
Glow to white heat! Great lords be strong, rejoice,
Lament, know victory, know defeat—then die;
Fair is the living many-coloured play
Of hates and loves, and fair it is to cease,
To cease from these and all Earth’s comely things.
I, Helena, impatient of a couch
Dim-scented, and dark eyes my face had fed,
And soft captivity of circling arms,
Come forth to shed my spirit on you, a wind
And sunlight of commingling life and death.
City and tented plain behold who stands
Betwixt you! Seems she worth a play of swords,
And glad expense of rival hopes and hates?
Have the Gods given a prize which may content,
Who set your games afoot,—no fictile vase,
But a sufficient goblet of great gold,
Embossed with heroes, filled with perfumed wine?
How! doubt ye? Thus I draw the robe aside
And bare the breasts of Helen.

Yesterday
A mortal maiden I beheld, the light
Tender within her eyes, laying white arms
Around her sire’s mailed breast, and heard her chide
Because his cheek was blood-splashed,—I beheld
And did not wish me her. O, not for this
A God’s blood thronged within my mother’s veins!
For no such tender purpose rose the swan
With ruffled plumes, and hissing in his joy
Flashed up the stream, and held with heavy wings
Leda, and curved the neck to reach her lips,
And stayed, nor left her lightly. It is well
To have quickened into glory one supreme,

Swift hour, the century's fiery-hearted bloom,
Which falls,—to stand a splendour paramount,
A beacon of high hearts and fates of men,
A flame blown round by clear, contending winds,
Which gladden in the contest and wax strong.
Cities of Greece, fair islands, and Troy town,
Accept a woman's service; these my hands
Hold not the distaff, ply not at the loom;
I store from year to year no well-wrought web
For daughter's dowry; wide the web I make,
Fine-tissued, costly as the Gods desire,
Shot with a gleaming woof of lives and deaths,
Inwrought with colours flowerlike, piteous, strange.
Oblivion yields before me: ye winged years
Which make escape from darkness, the red light
Of a wild dawn upon your plumes, I stand
The mother of the stars and winds of heaven,
Your eastern Eos; cry across the storm!
Through me man's heart grows wider; little town
Asleep in silent sunshine and smooth air,
While babe grew man beneath your girdling towers,
Wake, wonder, lift the eager head alert,
Snake-like, and swift to strike, while altar-flame
Rises for plighted faith with neighbour town
That slept upon the mountain-shelf, and showed
A small white temple in the morning sun.
Oh, ever one way tending you keen prows
Which shear the shadowy waves when stars are faint
And break with emulous cries unto the dawn,
I gaze and draw you onward; splendid names
Lurk in you, and high deeds, and unachieved
Virtues, and house-o'erwhelming crimes, while life
Leaps in sharp flame ere all be ashes grey.
Thus have I willed it ever since the hour
When that great lord, the one man worshipful,
Whose hands had haled the fierce Hippolyta
Lightly from out her throng of martial maids,
Would grace his triumph, strengthen his large joy
With splendour of the swan-begotten child,
Nor asked a ten years' siege to make acquist
Of all her virgin store. No dream that was,—
The moonlight in the woods, our singing stream,
Eurotas, the sleek panther at my feet,
And on my heart a hero's strong right hand.
O draught of love immortal! Dastard world
Too poor for great exchange of soul, too poor
For equal lives made glorious! O too poor
For Theseus and for Helena!

Yet now
It yields once more a brightness, if no love;
Around me flash the tides, and in my ears
A dangerous melody and piercing-clear
Sing the twin siren-sisters, Death and Life;
I rise and gird my spirit for the close.

Last night Cassandra cried 'Ruin, ruin, and ruin!'
I mocked her not, nor disbelieved; the gloom
Gathers, and twilight takes the unwary world.
Hold me, ye Gods, a torch across the night,
With one long flare blown back o'er tower and town,
Till the last things of Troy complete themselves:
—Then blackness, and the grey dust of a heart."

ATALANTA

“Milanion, seven years ago this day
You overcame me by a golden fraud,
Traitor, and see I crown your cup with flowers,
With violets and white sorrel from dim haunts,—
A fair libation—ask you to what God?
To Artemis, to Artemis my Queen.

Not by my will did you escape the spear
Though piteous I might be for your glad life,
Husband, and for your foolish love: the Gods
Who heard your vows had care of you: I stooped
Half toward the beauty of the shining thing
Through some blind motion of an instant joy,—
As when our babe reached arms to pluck the moon
A great, round fruit between dark apple-boughs,—
And half, marking your wile, to fling away
Needless advantage, conquer carelessly,
And pass the goal with one light finger-touch
Just while you leaned forth the bent body's length
To reach it. Could I guess I strove with three,
With Aphrodite, Eros, and the third—
Milanion? There upon the maple-post
Your right hand rested: the event had sprung
Complete from darkness, and possessed the world
Ere yet conceived: upon the edge of doom
I stood with foot arrested and blind heart,
Aware of nought save some unmastered fate
And reddening neck and brow. I heard you cry
'Judgment, both umpires!' saw you stand erect,
Panting, and with a face so glad, so great
It shone through all my dull bewilderment
A beautiful uncomprehended joy,
One perfect thing and bright in a strange world.
But when I looked to see my father shamed,
A-choke with rage and words of proper scorn,
He nodded, and the beard upon his breast
Pulled twice or thrice, well-pleased, and laughed aloud,
And while the wrinkles gathered round his eyes
Cried 'Girl, well done! My brother's son retain
Shrewd head upon your shoulders! Maidens ho!
A veil for Atalanta, and a zone
Male fingers may unclasp! Lead home the bride,
Prepare the nuptial chamber!' At his word
My life turned round: too great the shame had grown
With all men leagued to mock me. Could I stay,

Confront the vulgar gladness of the world
At high emprise defeated, a free life
Tethered, light dimmed, a virtue singular
Subdued to ways of common use and wont?
Must I become the men's familiar jest,
The comment of the matron-guild? I turned,
I sought the woods, sought silence, solitude,
Green depths divine, where the soft-footed ounce
Lurks, and the light deer comes and drinks and goes,
Familiar paths in which the mind might gain
Footing, and haply from a vantage-ground
Drive this new fate an arm's-length, hand's-breadth off
A little while, till certitude of sight
And strength returned.

At evening I went back,
Walked past the idle groups at gossipry,
Sought you, and laid my hand upon your wrist,
Drew you apart, and with no shaken voice
Spoke, while the swift, hard strokes my heart out-beat
Seemed growing audible, 'Milanion,
I am your wife for freedom and fair deeds:
Choose: am I such an one a man could love?
What need you? Some soft song to soothe your life,
Or a clear cry at daybreak?' And I ceased.
How deemed you that first moment? That the Gods
Had changed my heart? That I since morn had grown
Haunter of Aphrodite's golden shrine,
Had kneeled before the victress, vowed my vow,
Besought her pardon, 'Aphrodite, grace!
Accept the rueful Atalanta's gifts,
Rose wreaths and snow-white doves'?

In the dim woods
There is a sacred place, a solitude
Within their solitude, a heart of strength
Within their strength. The rocks are heaped around
A goblet of great waters ever fed
By one swift stream which flings itself in air
With all the madness, mirth and melody
Of twenty rivulets gathered in the hills
Where might escapes in gladness. Here the trees
Strike deeper roots into the heart of earth,
And hold more high communion with the heavens;
Here in the hush of noon the silence broods
More full of vague divinity; the light
Slow-changing and the shadows as they shift
Seem characters of some inscrutable law,
And one who lingers long will almost hope

The secret of the world may be surprised
Ere he depart. It is a haunt beloved
Of Artemis, the echoing rocks have heard
Her laughter and her lore, and the brown stream
Flashed, smitten by the splendour of her limbs.
Hither I came; here turned, and dared confront
Pursuing thoughts; here held my life at gaze,
If ruined at least to clear loose wrack away,
Study its lines of bare dismantlement,
And shape a strict despair. With fixed hard lips,
Dry-eyed, I set my face against the stream
To deal with fate; the play of woven light
Gleaming and glancing on the rippled flood
Grew to a tyranny; and one visioned face
Would glide into the circle of my sight,
Would glide and pass away, so glad, so great
The imminent joy it brought seemed charged with fear.
I rose, and paced from trunk to trunk, brief track
This way and that; at least my will maintained
Her law upon my limbs; they needs must turn
At the appointed limit. A keen cry
Rose from my heart—‘Toils of the world grow strong,
‘Yield strength, yield strength to rend them to my hands;
‘Be thou apparent, Queen! in dubious ways
‘Lo my feet fail; cry down the forest glade,
‘Pierce with thy voice the tangle and dark boughs,
‘Call, and I follow thee.’

What things made up
Memorial for the Presence of the place
Thenceforth to hold? Only the torrent’s leap
Endlessly vibrating, monotonous rhythm
Of the swift footstep pacing to and fro,
Only a soul’s reiterated cry
Under the calm, controlling, ancient trees,
And tutelary ward and watch of heaven
Felt through steep inlets which the upper airs
Blew wider.

On the grass at last I lay
Seized by a peace divine, I know not how;
Passive, yet never so possessed of power,
Strong, yet content to feel not use my strength
Sustained a babe upon the breasts of life
Yet armed with adult will, a shining spear.
O strong deliverance of the larger law
Which strove not with the less! impetuous youth
Caught up in ampler force of womanhood!
Co-operant ardours of joined lives! the calls

Of heart to heart in chase of strenuous deeds!
Virgin and wedded freedom not disjoined,
And loyal married service to my Queen!

Husband, have lesser gains these seven good years
Been yours because you chose no gracious maid
Whose hands had woven in the women's room
Many fair garments, while her dreaming heart
Had prescience of the bridal; one whose claims,
Tender exactions feminine, had pleased
Fond husband, one whose gentle gifts had pleased,
Soft playful touches, little amorous words,
Untutored thoughts that widened up toward yours,
With trustful homage of uplifted eyes,
And sweetest sorrows lightly comforted?
Have we two challenged each the other's heart
Too highly? Have our joys been all too large,
No gleaming gems on finger or on neck
A man may turn and touch caressingly,
But ampler than this heaven we stand beneath—
Wide wings of Presences august? Our lives,
Were it not better they had stood apart
A little space, letting the sweet sense grow

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