Classic Poetry Series

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

- poems -

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A Dedication

Take these rhymes into thy grace, Since they are of thy begetting, Lady, that dost make each place Where thou art a jewel's setting.

Some such glamour lend this Book; Let it be thy poet's wages That henceforth thy gracious look Lies reflected on its pages.

A Mood

A blight, a gloom, I know not what, has crept upon my gladness--Some vague, remote ancestral touch of sorrow, or of madness; A fear that is not fear, a pain that has not pain's insistence; A sense of longing, or of loss, in some foregone exsistence; A subtle hurt that never pen has writ nor tongue has spoken--Such hurt perchance as Nature feels wen a blossomed bough is broken.

A Petition

To spring belongs the violet, and the blown Spice of the roses let the summer own. Grant me this favor, Muse--all else withhold--That I may not write verse when I am old.

And yet I pray you, Muse, delay the time! Be not too ready to deny me rhyme; And when the hour strikes, as it must, dear Muse, I beg you very gently break the news.

A Touch of Nature

When first the crocus thrusts its point of gold Up through the still snow-drifted garden mould, And folded green things in dim woods unclose Their crinkled spears, a sudden tremor goes Into my veins and makes me kith and kin To every wild-born thing that thrills and blows. Sitting beside this crumbling sea-coal fire, Here in the city's ceaseless roar and din, Far from the brambly paths I used to know, Far from the rustling brooks that slip and shine Where the Neponset alders take their glow, I share the tremulous sense of bud and briar And inarticulate ardors of the vine.

Act V

[MIDNIGHT.]

First, two white arms that held him very close, And ever closer as he drew him back Reluctantly, the loose gold-colored hair A thousand delicate fibers reaching out Still to detain him; then some twenty steps Of iron staircse winding round and down, And ending in a narrow gallery hung With Gobelin tapestries--Andromeda Rescued by Perseus, and the sleek Diana With her nymphs bathing; at the farther end A door that gave upon a starlit grove Of citron and clipt palm-trees; then a path As bleached as moonlight, with the shadow of leaves Stamped black upon it; next a vine-clad length Of solid masonry; and last of all A Gothic archway packed with night, and then--A sudden gleaming dagger through his heart.

After the Rain

THE rain has ceased, and in my room The sunshine pours an airy flood; And on the church's dizzy vane The ancient cross is bathed in blood. From out the dripping ivy leaves, Antiquely carven, gray and high, A dormer, facing westward, looks Upon the village like an eye. And now it glimmers in the sun, A globe of gold, a disk, a speck; And in the belfry sits a dove With purple ripples on her neck.

Alec Yeaton's Son

GLOUCESTER, AUGUST, 1720

The wind it wailed, the wind it moaned, And the white caps flecked the sea; "An' I would to God," the skipper groaned, "I had not my boy with me!

Snug in the stern-sheets, little John Laughed as the scud swept by; But the skipper's sunburnt cheeks grew wan As he watched the wicked sky.

"Would he were at his mother's side!" And the skipper's eyes were dim. "Good Lord in heaven, if ill betide, What would become of him!

"For me--my muscles are as steel, For me let hap what may; I might make shift upon the keel Until the break o' day.

"But he, he is so weak and small, So young, scarce learned to stand--O pitying Father of us all, I trust him in Thy hand!

"For Thou, who makest from on high A sparrow's fall--each one!--Surely, O Lord, thou'lt have an eye On Alec Yeaton's son!"

Then, helm hard-port; right straight he sailed Towards the headland light: The wind it moaned, the wind it wailed, And black, black fell the night.

Then burst a storm to make one quail Though housed from winds and waves-They who could tell about that gale Must rise from watery graves!

Sudden it came, as sudden went; Ere half the night was sped, The winds were hushed, the waves were spent, And the stars shone overhead.

Now, as the morning mist grew thin, The folk on Gloucester shore Saw a little figure floating in Secure, on a broken oar! Up rose the cry, "A wreck! a wreck! Pull, mates, and waste no breath!"-They knew it, though 't was but a speck Upon the edge of death!

Long did they marvel in the town At God his strange decree, That let the stalwart skipper drown And the little child go free!

An Alpine Picture

Stand here and look, and softly draw your breath Lest the dread avalanche come crashing down! How many leagues away is yonder town Set flower-wise in the valley? Far beneath Out feet lies summer; here a realm of death, Where never flower has blossomed nor bird flown. The ancient water-courses are all strown With drifts of snow, fantastic wreath on wreath; And peak on peak against the stainless blue The Alps like towering campanili stand, Wondrous, with pinnacles of frozen rain, Silvery, crystal, like the prism in hue. O tell me, love, if this be Switzerland -- Or is it but the frost-work on the pane?

An Elective Course

LINES FOUND AMONG THE PAPERS OF A HARVARD UNDERGRADUATE

The bloom that lies on Fanny's cheek Is all my Latin, all my Greek; The only sciences I know Are frowns that gloom and smiles that glow; Siberia and Italy Lie in her sweet geography; No scolarship have I but such As teaches me to love her much.

Why should I strive to read the skies, Who know the midnight of her eyes? Why should I go so very far To learn what heavenly bodies are! Not Berenice's starry hair With Fanny's tresses can compare; Not Venus on a cloudless night, Enslaving Science with her light, Ever reveals so much as when She stares and droops her lids again.

If Nature's secrets are forbidden
To mortals, she may keep them hidden.
Æons and æons we progressed
And did not let that break our rest;
Little we cared if Mars o'erhead
Were or were not inhabited;
Without the aid of Saturn's rings
Fair girls were wived in those fair springs;
Warm lips met ours, and conquered us
Or ere thou wert, Copernicus!

Graybeards, who wish to bridge the chasm 'Twixt man to-day and protoplasm, Who theorize and probe and gape, And finally evolve an ape--Yours is a harmless sort of cult, If you are pleased with the result. Some folks admit, with cynic grace, That you have rather proved your case. Those dogmatists are so severe! Enough for me that Fanny's here, Enough that, having survived Pre-Eveic forms, she has arrived--An illustration the completest Of the survival of the sweetest.

Linnæus aveunt! I only care
To know what flower she wants to wear.
I leave it to the addle-pated
To guess how pinks originated,

As if it mattered! The chief thing Is that we have them in the Spring, And Fanny likes them. When they come, I straightaway send and purchase some. The Origin of Plants--go to! Their proper end I have in view.

O loveliest book that ever man Looked into since the world began Is Woman! As I turn those pages, As fresh as in the primal ages, As day by day I scan, perplext, The ever subtly changing text, I feel that I am slowly growing To think no other work worth knowing. And in my copy--there is none So perfect as the one I own-- I find no thing set down as such As teaches me to love it much.

Andromeda

The smooth-worn coin and threadbare classic phrase Of Grecian myths that did beguile my youth, Beguile me not as in the olden days: I think more grief and beauty dwell with truth. Andromeda, in fetters by the sea, Star-pale with anguish till young Perseus came, Less moves me with her suffering than she, The slim girl figure fettered to dark shame, That nightly haunts the park, there, like a shade, Trailing her wretchedness from street to street. See where she passes -- neither wife nor maid; How all mere fiction crumbles at her feet! Here is woe's self, and not the mask of woe: A legend's shadow shall not move you so!

At a Reading

The spare professor, grave and bald, Began his paper. It was called, I think, "A Brief Historic Glance At Russia, Germany, and France." A glance, but to my best belief 'T was almost anything but brief--A wide survey, in which the earth Was seen before mankind had birth; Strange monsters basked them in the sun, Behemoth, armored glyptodon, And in the dawn's unpractised ray The transient dodo winged its way; Then, by degrees, through slit and slough, We reached Berlin--I don't know how. The good Professor's monotone Had turned me into senseless stone Instanter, but that near me sat Hypatia in her new spring hat, Blue-eyed, intent, with lips whose bloom Lighted the heavy-curtained room. Hypatia--ah, what lovely things Are fashioned out of eighteen springs! At first, in sums of this amount, The eighteen winters do not count. Just as my eyes were growing dim With heaviness, I saw that slim, Erect, elastic figure there, Like a pond-lily taking air. She looked so fresh, so wise, so neat, So altogether crisp and sweet, I quite forgot what Bismarck said, And why the Emperor shook his head, And how it was Von Moltke's frown Cost France another frontier town. The only facts I took away From the Professor's theme that day Were these: a forehead broad and low, Such as antique sculptures show; A chin to Greek perfection true; Eves of Astarte's tender blue; A high complection without fleck Or flaw, and curls about her neck.

At Bay Ridge, Long Island

Pleasant it is to lie amid the grass
Under these shady locusts, half the day,
Watching the ships reflected on the Bay,
Topmast and shroud, as in a wizard's glass;
To note the swift and meagre swallow pass,
Brushing the dewdrops from the lilac spray;
Or else to sit and while the noon away
With some old love-tale; or to muse, alas!
On Dante in his exile, sorrow-worn;
On Milton, blind, with inward-seeing eyes
That made their own deep midnight and rich morn;
To think that now, beneath Italian skies,
In such clear air as this, by Tiber's wave,
Daisies are trembling over Keats's grave.

At Stratford-Upon-Avon

Thus spake his dust (so seemed it as I read The words): Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbeare (Poor ghost!) To digg the dust enclosed heare -- Then came the malediction on the head Of whoso dare disturb the sacred dead. Outside the mavis whistled strong and clear, The winding Avon murmured in its bed, But in the solemn Stratford church the air Was chill and dank, and on the foot-worn tomb The evening shadows deepened momently. Then a great awe fell on me, standing there, As if some speechless presence in the gloom Was hovering, and fain would speak with me.

At the Funeral of a Minor Poet

[One of the Bearers Soliloquizes:]

. . Room in your heart for him, O Mother Earth, Who loved each flower and leaf that made you fair, And sang your praises in verses manifold And delicate, with here and there a line From end to end in blossom like a bough The May breathes on, so rich it was. Some thought The workmanship more costly than the thing Moulded or carved, as in those ornaments Found at Mycæne. And yet Nature's self Works in this wise, upon a blade of grass, Or what small note she lends the woodland thrush, Lavishing endless patience. He was born Artist, not artisan, which some few saw And many dreamed not. As he wrote no odes When Croesus wedded or Mæcenas died, And gave no breath to civic feasts and shows, He missed the glare that gilds more facile men--A twilight poet, groping quite alone, Belated, in a sphere where every nest Is emptied of its music and its wings. Not great his gift; yet we can poorly spare Even his slight perfection in an age Of limping triolets and tame rondeaux. He had at least ideals, though unreached, And heard, far off, immortal harmonies, Such as fall coldly on our ear to-day. The mighty Zolastic Movement now Engrosses us--a miasmatic breath Blown from the slums. We paint life as it is, The hideous side of it, with careful pains, Making a god of the dull Commonplace. For have we not the old gods overthrown And set up strangest idols? We would clip Imagination's wing and kill delight, Our sole art being to leave nothing out That renders art offensive. Not for us Madonnas leaning from their starry thrones Ineffable, nor any heaven-wrought dream Of sculptor or of poet; we prefer Such nightmare visions as in morbid brains Take shape and substance, thoughts that taint the air And make all life unlovely. Will it last? Beauty alone endures from age to age, From age to age endures, handmaid of God. Poets who walk with her on earth go hence Bearing a talisman. You bury one, With his hushed music, in some Potter's Field; The snows and rains blot out his very name, As he from life seems blotted; through Time's glass Slip the invisible and magic sands

That mark the century, then falls a day The world is suddenly conscious of a flower, Imperishable, ever to be prized, Sprung from the mould of a forgotten grave.
'T is said the seeds wrapt up among the balms And hieroglyphics of Egyptian kings old strange vitality, and, planted, grow After the lapse of thrice a thousand years. Some day, perchance, some unregarded note Of our poor friend here--some sweet minor chord That failed to lure our more accustomed ear--Way witch the fancy of an unborn age. Who knows, since seeds have such tenacity? Meanwhile he's dead, with scantiest laurel won And little of our Ninteenth Century gold. So, take him, Earth, and this his mortal part, With that shrewd alchemy thou hast, transmute To flower and leaf in thine unending springs!

Batuschka

[Author's Note: The title means "little father" or "dear little father", a term of endearment applied to the Tsar in Russian folk-song. --T.B.A.]

From yonder gilded minaret
Beside the steel-blue Neva set,
I faintly catch, from time to time,
The sweet, aerial midnight chime-"God save the Tsar!"

Above the ravelins and the moats Of the white citadel it floats; And men in dungeons far beneath Listen, and pray, and gnash their teeth--"God save the Tsar!"

The soft reiterations sweep Across the horrer of their sleep, As if some dæmon in his glee Were mocking at their misery--"God save the Tsar!"

In his Red Palace over there, Wakeful, he needs must hear the prayer. How can it drown the broken cries Wrung from his children's agonies?--"God save the Tsar!"

Father they called him from of old--Batuschka! . . . How his heart is cold! Wait till a million scourgëd men Rise in their awful might, and then God save the Tsar!

Before the Rain

E knew it would rain, for all the morn A spirit on slender ropes of mist Was lowering its golden buckets down Into the vapory amethyst.

Of marshes and swamps and dismal fens-Scooping the dew that lay in the flowers, Dipping the jewels out of the sea, To sprinkle them over the land in showers. We knew it would rain, for the poplars showed The white of their leaves, the amber grain Shrunk in the wind--and the lightning now Is tangled in tremulous skeins of rain!

Books and Seasons

Because the sky is blue; because blithe May Masks in the wren's note and the lilac's hue; Because -- in fine, because the sky is blue I will read none but piteous tales to-day. Keep happy laughter till the skies be gray, And the sad season cypress wears, and rue; Then, when the wind is moaning in the flue, And ways are dark, bid Chaucer make us gay. But now a little sadness! All too sweet This springtide riot, this most poignant air, This sensuous world of color and perfume. So listen, love, while I the woes repeat Of Hamlet and Ophelia, and that pair Whose bridal bed was builded in a tomb.

By the Potomac

The soft new grass is creeping o'er the graves By the Potomac; and the crisp ground-flower Tilts its blue cup to catch the passing shower; The pine-cone ripens, and the long moss waves Its tangled gonfalons above our braves. Hark, what a burst of music from yon bower! -- The Southern nightingale that hour by hour In its melodious summer madness raves. Ah, with what delicate touches of her hand, With what sweet voice of bird and rivulet And drowsy murmur of the rustling leaf Would Nature soothe us, bidding us forget The awful crime of this distracted land And all our heavy heritage of grief.

Corydon

A PASTORAL

SCENE: A roadside in Arcady

SHEPHERD.

Good sir, have you seen pass this way A mischief straight from market-day? You'd know her at a glance, I think; Her eyes are blue, her lips are pink; She has a way of looking back Over her shoulder, and, alack! Who gets that look one time, good sir, Has naught to do but follow her.

PILGRIM.

I have not seen this maid, methinks, Though she that passed had lips like pinks.

SHEPHERD.

Or like two strawberries made one By some sly trick of dew and sun.

PILGRIM.

A poet!

SHEPHERD.

Nay, a simple swain
That tends his flock on yonder plain,
Naught else, I swear by book and bell.
But she that passed, you marked her well.
Was she not smooth as any be
That dwell herein in Arcady?

PILGRIM.

Her skin was as the satin bark Of birches

SHEPHERD.

Light or dark?

PILGRIM.

Quite dark.

SHEPHERD.

Then 'twas not she.

PILGRIM.

The peach's side
That's next the sun is not so dyed
As was her cheek. Her hair hung down
Like summer twilight falling brown;
And when the breeze swept by, I wist
Her face was in a sombre mist.

SHEPHERD.

No, that is not the maid I seek. Her hair lies gold against the cheek; Her yellow tresses take the morn Like silken tassles of the corn. And yet--brown locks are far from bad.

PILGRIM.

Now I bethinks me, this one had A figure like the willow-tree Which, slight and supple, wondrously Inclines to droop with pensive grace, And still retains its proper place; A foot so arched and very small The marvel was she walked at all; Her hand--in sooth I lack for words-her hand, five slender snow-white birds. Her voice--though she but said "God-speed"--Was melody blown through a reed; The girl Pan changed into a pipe Had not a note so full and ripe. And then her eye--my lad her eye! Discreet, inviting, candid, shy, An outward ice, an inward fire, And lashes to the heart's desire--Soft fringes blacker than the sloe.

SHEPHERD.

Good sir, which way did this one go?

PILGRIM, solus.

So, he is off! The silly youth Knoweth not love in sober sooth. He loves, thus lads at first are blind-No woman, only Womankind. I needs must laugh, for, by the Mass,

	No maid	at all did this wa	y pass!		
	Thomas E	Bailey Aldrich			
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Echo Song

Ι

Who can say where Echo dwells? In some mountain-cave, methinks, Where the white owl sits and blinks; Or in deep sequestered dells, Where foxglove hangs its bells, Echo dwells. Echo! Echo!

ΙΙ

Phantom of the crystal Air, Daughter of sweet Mystery! Here is one has need of thee; Lead him to thy secret lair, Myrtle brings he for thy hair--Hear his prayer, Echo! Echo!

III

Echo lift thy drowsy head, And repeat each charmed word Thou must needs have overheard Yestere'en ere, rosy-red, Daphne down the valley fled--Words unsaid, Echo! Echo!

IV

Breathe the vows she since denies!
She hath broken every vow;
What she would she would not now-Thou didst hear her perjuries.
Whisper, whilst I shut my eyes,
Those sweet lies,
Echo!
Echo!

Egypt

Fantastic sleep is busy with my eyes; I seem in some waste solitude to stand Once ruled of Cheops; upon either hand A dark illimitable desert lies, Sultry and still -- a zone of mysteries. A wide-browed Sphinx, half buried in the sand, With orbless sockets stares across the land, The wofulest thing beneath these brooding skies Save that loose heap of bleachèd bones, that lie Where haply some poor Bedouin crawled to die. Lo! while I gaze, beyond the vast sand-sea The nebulous clouds are downward slowly drawn, And one bleared star, faint glimmering like a bee, Is shut in the rosy outstretched hand of Dawn.

Eidolons

Those forms we fancy shadows, those strange lights That flash on lone morasses, the quick wind That smites us by the roadside are the Night's Innumerable children. Unconfined By shroud or coffin, disembodied souls, Still on probation, steal into the air From ancient battlefields and churchyard knolls At the day's ending. Pestilence and despair Fly with the startled bats at set of sun; And wheresoever murders have been done, In crowded palaces or lonely woods, Where'er a soul has sold itself and lost Its high inheritance, there, hovering, broods Some mute, invisible, accursèd ghost.

Ellen Terry in the Merchant of Venice

As there she lives and moves upon the scene,
So lived and moved this radiant womanhood
In Shakespeare's vision; in such wise she stood
Smiling upon Bassanio; such her mien
When pity dimmed her eyelids' golden sheen,
Hearing Antonio's story, and the blood
Paled on her cheek, and all her lightsome mood
Was gone. This shape in Shakespeare's thought has been!
Thus dreamt he of her in gray London town;
Such were her eyes; on such gold-colored hair
The grave young judge's velvet cap was set;
So stood she lovely in her crimson gown.
Mine were a happy cast, could I but snare
Her beauty in a sonnet's fragile net.

Enamored Architect of Airy Rhyme

Enamored architect of airy rhyme,
Build as thou wilt, heed not what each man says:
Good souls, but innocent of dreamers' ways,
Will come, and marvel why thou wastest time;
Others, beholding how thy turrets climb
'Twixt theirs and heaven, will hate thee all thy days;
But most beware of those who come to praise.
O Wondersmith, O worker in sublime
And heaven-sent dreams, let art be all in all;
Build as thou wilt, unspoiled by praise or blame,
Build as thou wilt, and as thy light is given;
Then, if at last the airy structure fall,
Dissolve, and vanish -- take thyself no shame.
They fail, and they alone, who have not striven.

Even This Will Pass Away

Touched with the delicate green of early May, Or later, when the rose uplifts her face, The world hangs glittering in starry space, Fresh as a jewel found but yesterday. And yet 'tis very old; what tongue may say How old it is? Race follows upon race, Forgetting and forgotten; in their place Sink tower and temple; nothing long may stay. We build on tombs, and live our day, and die; From out our dust new towers and temples start; Our very name becomes a mystery. What cities no man ever heard of lie Under the glacier, in the mountain's heart, In violet glooms beneath the moaning sea!

Fredericksburg

The increasing moonlight drifts across my bed,
And on the churchyard by the road, I know
It falls as white and noiselessly as snow
'Twas such a night two weary summers fled;
The stars, as now, were waning overhead.
Listen! Again the shrill-lipped bugles blow
Where the swift currents of the river flow
Past Fredericksburg; far off the heavens are red
With sudden conflagration; on yon height,
Linstock in hand, the gunners hold their breath;
A signal rocket pierces the dense night,
Flings its spent stars upon the town beneath;
Hark! -- the artillery massing on the right,
Hark! -- the black squadrons wheeling down to Death!

Guilielmus Rex

The folk who lived in Shakespeare's day And saw that gentle figure pass By London Bridge, his frequent way--They little knew what man he was.

The pointed beard, the courteous mien, The equal port to high and low, All this they saw or might have seen--But not the light behind the brow!

The doublet's modest gray or brown, The slender sword-hilt's plain device, What sign had these for prince or clown? Few turned, or none, to scan him twice.

Yet 't was the King of England's kings! The rest with all their pomps and trains Are mouldered, half-remembered things--'T is he alone that lives and reigns!

Henry Howard Brownell

They never crowned him, never dreamed his worth, And let him go unlaurelled to the grave: Hereafter there are guerdons for the brave, Roses for martyrs who wear thorns on earth, Balms for bruised hearts that languish in the dearth Of human love. So let the grasses wave Above him nameless. Little did he crave Men's praises: modestly, with kindly mirth, Not sad nor bitter, he accepted fate -- Drank deep of life, knew books, and hearts of men, Cities and camps, and war's immortal woe, Yet bore through all (such virtue in him sate His spirit is not whiter now than then) A simple, loyal nature, pure as snow.

I Vex Me Not With Brooding on the Years

I vex me not with brooding on the years
That were ere I drew breath; why should I then
Distrust the darkness that may fall again
When life is done? Perchance in other spheres-Dead planets--I once tasted mortal tears,
And walked as now among a throng of men,
Pondering things that lay beyond my ken,
Questioning death, and solacing my fears.
Offtimes indeed strange sense I have of this,
Vague memories that hold me with a spell,
Touches of unseen lips upon my brow,
Breathing some incommunicable bliss!
In years foregone, O soul, was all not well?
Still lovelier life awaits thee. Fear not thou!

Identity

SOMEWHERE--in desolate wind-swept space--In Twilight-land--in No-man's land--Two hurrying Shapes met face to face, And bade each other stand.

"And who are you?" cried one a-gape, Shuddering in the gloaming light. "I know not," said the second Shape, "I only died last night!"

I'll Not Confer With Sorrow

I'll not confer with Sorrow Till to-morrow; But Joy shall have her way This very day.

Ho, eglantine and cresses For her tresses!--Let Care, the beggar, wait Outside the gate.

Tears if you will--but after Mirth and laughter; Then, folded hands on breast And endless rest.

In Westminster Abbey

"The Southern Transept, hardly known by any other name but Poets' Corner" DEAN STANLEY

Tread softly here; the sacredest of tombs
Are those that hold your poets. Kings and queens
Are facile accidents of Time and Chance.
Chance sets them on the heights, they climb not there!
But he who from the darkling mass of men
Is on the wing of heavenly thought upborne
To finer ether, and becomes a voice
For all the voiceless, God annointed him:
His name shall be a star, his grave a shrine.

Tread softly here, in silent reverence tread. Beneath those marble cenotaphs and urns Lies richer dust than ever nature hid Packed in the mountain's adamantine heart, Or slyly wrapt in unsuspected sand--The dross men toil for, and oft stain the soul. How vain and all ignoble seems that greed To him who stands in this dim claustral air With these most sacred ashes at his feet! This dust was Chaucer, Spenser, Dryden this--The spark that once illumed it lingers still. O ever-hallowed spot of English earth! If the unleashed and unhappy spirit of man Have option to visit our dull globe, What august Shades at midnight here convene In the miraculous sessions of the moon, When the great pulse of London faintly throbs, And one by one the stars in heaven pale!

Invita Minerva

Not of desire alone is music born,
Not till the Muse wills is our passion crowned;
Unsought she comes; if sought, but seldom found,
Repaying thus our longing with her scorn.
Hence is it poets often are forlorn,
In super-subtle chains of silence bound,
And mid the crowds that compass them around
Still dwell in isolation night and morn,
With knitted brow and cheek all passion-pale
Showing the baffled purpose of the mind.
Hence is it I, that find no prayers avail
To move my Lyric mistress to be kind,
Have stolen away into this leafy dale
Drawn by the flutings of the silvery wind.

L'Eau Dormante

Curled up and sitting on her feet. Within the window's deep embrasure, Is Lydia; and across the street, A lad, with eyes of roguish azure, Watches her buried in her book. In vain he tries to win a look, And from the trellis over there Blows sundry kisses through the air, Which miss the mark, and fall unseen, Uncared for. Lydia is thirteen.

My lad, if you, without abuse,
Will take advise from one who's wiser,
And put his wisdom to more use
Than ever yet did your adviser;
If you will let, as none will do,
Another's heartbreak serve for two,
You'll have a care, some four years hence,
How you lounge there by yonder fence
And blow those kisses through that screen-For Lydia will be seventeen.

Like Crusoe, Walking by the Lonely Strand

Like Crusoe, walking by the lonely strand And seeing a human footprint on the sand, Have I this day been startled, finding here, Set in brown mould, and delicately clear, Spring's footprint--the first crocus of the year! O sweet invasion! Farewell solitude! Soon shall wild creatures of the field and wood Flock from all sides with much ado and stir, And make of me most willing prisoner!

Memory

My mind lets go a thousand things Like dates of wars and deaths of kings, And yet recalls the very hour--'T was noon by yonder village tower, And on the last blue noon in May--The wind came briskly up this way, Crisping the brook beside the road; Then, pausing here, set down its load Of pine-scents, and shook listlessly Two petals from that wild-rose tree.

Miracles

Sick of myself and all that keeps the light Of the wide heavens away from me and mine, I climb this ledge, and by this wind-swept pine Lingering, watch the coming of the night: 'Tis ever a new wonder to my sight. Men look to God for some mysterious sign, For other stars than such as nightly shine, For some unwonted symbol of His might. Wouldst see a miracle not less than those The Master wrought of old in Galilee? Come watch with me the azure turn to rose In yonder West, the changing pageantry, The fading alps and archipelagoes, And spectral cities of the sunset-sea.

Monody on the Death of Wendell Phillips

Ι

One by one they go Into the unknown dark--Star-lit brows of the brave, Voices that drew men's souls. Rich is the land, O Death! Can give you dead like our dead!--Such as he from whose hand The magic web of romance Slipt, and the art was lost! Such as he who erewhile--The last of the Titan brood--With his thunder the Senate shook; Or he who, beside the Charles, Untoucht of envy or hate, Tranced the world with his song; Or that other, that grey-eyed seer Who in pastoral Concord ways With Plato and Hâfiz walked.

Η

Not of these was the man Whose wraith, through the mists of night, Through the shuddering wintry stars, Has passed to eternal morn. Fit were the moan of the sea And the clashing of cloud on cloud For the passing of that soul!

Ever he faced the storm!
No weaver of rare romance,
No patient framer of laws,
No maker of wondrous rhyme,
No bookman wrapt in his dream.

His was the voice that rang
In the fight like a bugle-call,
And yet could be tender and low
As when, on a night in June,
The hushed wind sobs in the pines.
His was the eye that flashed
With a sabre's azure gleam,
Pointing to heights unwon!

III

Not for him were these days Of clerky and sluggish calm--To the petrel the swooping gale! Austere he seemed, but the hearts Of all men beat in his breast;
No fetter but galled his wrist,
No wrong that was not his own.
What if those eloquent lips
Curled with the old-time scorn?
What if in needless hours
His quick hand closed on the hilt?
'T was the smoke from the well-won fields
That clouded the vetran's eyes.
A fighter this to the end.

Ah, if in coming times Some giant evil arise, And Honor falter and pale, His were a name to conjure with! God send his like again!

No Songs in Winter

The sky is gray as gray may be, There is no bird upon the bough, There is no leaf on vine or tree.

In the Neponset marshes now Willow-stems, rosy in the wind, Shiver with hidden sense of snow.

So too 't is winter in my mind, No light-winged fancy comes and stays: A season churlish and unkind.

Slow creep the hours, slow creep the days, The black ink crusts upon the pen--Just wait till bluebirds, wrens, and jays And golden orioles come again!

On Reading William Watson's Sonnet Entitled The Purple East

Restless the Northern Bear amid his snows
Crouched by the Neva; menacing is France,
That sees the shadow of the Uhlan's lance
On her clipped borders; struggling in the throes
Of wanton war lies Spain, and deathward goes.
And thou, O England, how the time's mischance
Hath fettered thee, that with averted glance
Thou standest, marble to Armenia's woes!
If 'twas thy haughty Dauther of the West
That stayed thy hand,, a word had driven away
Her sudden ire, and brought her to thy breast!
Thy blood makes quick her pulses, and some day,
Not now, yet some day, at thy soft behest
She by thy side shall hold the world at bay.

Outward Bound

I leave behind me the elm-shadowed square
And carven portals of the silent street,
And wander on with listless, vagrant feet
Through seaward-leading alleys, till the air
Smells of the sea, and straightway then the care
Slips from my heart, and life once more is sweet.
At the lane's ending lie the white-winged fleet.
O restless Fancy, whither wouldst thou fare?
Here are brave pinions that shall take thee far -Gaunt hulks of Norway; ships of red Ceylon;
Slim-masted lovers of the blue Azores!
'Tis but an instant hence to Zanzibar,
Or to the regions of the Midnight Sun;
Ionian isles are thine, and all the fairy shores!

Palinode

Who is Lydia, pray, and who Is Hypatia? Softly, dear, Let me breathe it in your ear-They are you, and only you. And those other nameless two Walking in Arcadian air-She that was so very fair? She that had the twilight hair?-They were you, dear, only you. If I speak of night or day, Grace of fern or bloom of grape, Hanging cloud or fountain spray, Gem or star or glistening dew, Or of mythologic shape, Psyche, Pyrrha, Daphne, say-I mean you, dear, you, just you.

Pauline Pavlovna

SCENE: St. Petersburg. Period: the present time. A ballroom in the winter palace of the prince---. The ladies in character costumes and masks. The gentlement in official dress and unmasked, with the exception of six tall figures in scarlet kaftans, who are treated with marked distinction as they move here and there among the promenaders. Quadrille music throughout the dialogue.

Count SERGIUS PAVLOVICH PANSHINE, who has just arrived, is standing anxiously in the doorway of an antechamber with his eyes fixed upon the lady in the costume of a maid of honor in the time of Catharine II. The lady presently disengages herself from the crowd, and passes near count PANSHINE, who impulsively takes her by the hand and leads her across the threshold of the inner apartment, which is unoccupied.

HE.

Pauline!

SHE.

You knew me?

HE.

How could I have failed?
A mask may hide your features, not your soul.
There is an air about you like the air
That folds a star. A blind man knows the night,
And feels the constellations. No coarse sense
Of eye or ear had made you plain to me.
Through these I had not found you; for your eyes,
As blue as the violets of our Novgorod,
Look black behind your mask there, and your voice--I had not known that either. My heart said,
"Pauline Payloyna."

SHE.

Ah! your heart said that? You trust your heart, then! 'T is a serious risk!--How is it you and others wear no mask? HE.

The Emperor's orders.

SHE.

Is the Emperor here? I have not seen him.

HE.

He is one of the six In scarlet kaftans and all masked alike. Watch--you will note how every one bows down Before these figures, thinking each by chance May be the Tsar; yet none knows which he is. Even his counterparts are left in doubt. Unhappy Russia! No serf ever wore Such chains as gall our emperor these sad days. He dare trust no man.

SHE.

All men are so false. HE.

Spare one, Pauline Pavlovna.

SHE.

No; all, all!
I think there is no truth left in the world,
In man or woman. Once were noble souls.-Count Sergius, is Nastasia here to-night?

HE.

Ah! then you know! I thought to tell you first. Not here, beneath these hundred curious eyes, In all this glare of light; but in some place Where I could throw me at your feet and weep. In what shape came the story to your ear? Decked in the teller's colors, I'll be sworn; The truth, but in the livery of a lie, And so must wrong me. Only this is true: The Tsar, because I risked my wretched life To shield a life as wretched as my own, Bestows upon me, as supreme reward--O irony--the hand of this poor girl. Says, "Here, I have the pearl of pearls for you, Such as was never plucked from out of the deep By Indian diver, for a Sultan's crown. Your joy's decreed, and stabs me with a smile.

SHE.

And she--she loves you?

HE.

I know not, indeed. Likes me, Perhaps. What matters it?--her love! The guardian, Sidor Yurievich consents, And she consents. No love in it at all, A mere caprice, a young girl's spring-tide dream. Sick of ear-rings, weary of her mare, She'll have a lover--something ready-made, Or improvised between two cups of tea-- A lover by imperial ukase! Fate said her word--I chanced to be the man! If that grenade the crazy student threw Had not spared me, as well as spared the Tsar, All this would not have happened. I'd have been A hero, but quite safe from her romance. She takes me for a hero--think of that! Now, by our holy Lady of Kazan, When I have finished pitying myself, I'll pity her.

SHE.

Oh no; begin with her; She needs it most.

HE.

At her door lies the blame. Whatever falls. She, with a single word With half a tear, had stopt it at the first, This cruel juggling with poor human hearts.

SHE.

The Tsar commanded it--you said the Tsar

HE.

The Tsar does what she wills--God fathoms why. Were she his mistress, now! but there's no snow Whiter within the bosom of a cloud, Nor colder wither. She is very haughty, For all her fragile air of gentleness; With something vital in her, like those flowers That on our desolate steppes outlast the year. Resembles you in some things. It was that First made us friends. I do her justice, see! For we were friends in that smooth surface way We Russians have imported out of France. Alas! from what a blue and tranquil heaven This bolt fell on me! After these two years, My suit with Ossip Leminoff at an end, The old wrong righted, the estates restored, And my promotion, with the ink not dry! Those fairies which neglected me at birth Seemed now to lavish all good gifts on me--Gold roubles, office, sudden dearest friends. The whole world smiled. Then, as I stooped to taste The sweetest cup, freak dashed it from my lip.

This very night--just think, this very night--I planned to come and beg of you the alms I dared not ask for in my poverty. I thought me poor then. How stript am I now! There's not a ragged medicant one meets Along the Nevski Prospeky but has leave To tell his love, and I have not that right! Pauline Pavlovna, why do you stand there Stark as a statue, with no word to say?

SHE.

Because this thing has frozen up my heart. I think that there is something killed in me, A dream that would have mocked all other bliss. What shall I say? What would you have me say?

HE.

If it be possible, the word of words!

SHE, very slowly.

Well, then--I love you. I may tell you so This once, . . . and then forever hold my peace. We cannot stay here longer unobserved. No--do not touch me! but stand further off, And seem to laugh, as if we jested--eyes, Eyes everywhere! Now turn your face away I love you.

HE.

With such music in my ears
I would death found me. It were sweet to die
Listening! You love me--prove it.

SHE.

Prove it--how? I prove saying it. How else?

HE.

Pauline, I have three things to choose from; you shall choose: This marriage, or Siberia, or France. The first means hell; the second purgatory; The third--with you--were nothing less than heaven!

SHE, starting.

How dared you even dream it!

HE.

I was mad. This business has touched me in the brain. Have parience! the calamity's so new.

[Pause.]

There is a fourth way; but that gate is shut To brave men who hold life a thing of God.

SHE.

Yourself spoke there; the rest was not of you.

HE.

Oh, lift me to your level! So I'm safe. What's to be done?

SHE.

There must be some path out. Perhaps the Emperor--

HE.

Not a ray of hope! His mind is set on this with that insistence Which seems to seize on all match-making folk. The fancy bites them, and they straight go mad.

SHE.

Your father's friend, the Metropolitan--A word from him

HE.

Alas, he too is bitten! Gray-haired, gray-hearted, worldly wise, he sees This marriage makes me the Tsar's protégé, And opens every door to preference.

SHE.

Think while I think. There surely is some key Unlocks the labyrinth, could we but find it. Nastasia!

HE.

What! beg life of her? not I.

SHE.

Beg love. She is a woman, young, perhaps Untouched as yet of this too poisonous air. Were she told all, would she not pity us? For if she love you, as I think she must, Would not some generous impulse stir in her, Some latent, unsuspected spark illume? How love thrills even commonest girl-clay, Ennobling it an instant, if no more! You said that she is proud; then touch her pride, And turn her into marble at the touch. But yet the gentler passion is the stronger. Go to her, tell her, in some tenderest phrase That will not hurt too much--ah, but 't will hurt!--Just how your happiness lies in her hand To make or mar for all time; hint, not say, Your heart is gone from you, and you may find--

HE.

A casemate in St. Peter and St. Paul For, say, a month; then some Siberian town. Not this way lies escape. At my first word That sluggish Tartar blood would turn to fire In every vein.

SHE.

How blindly you read her, Or any woman! Yes, I know, I grant How small we often seem in our small world Of trivial cares and narrow precedents--Lacking that wide horizon stretched for men--Capricious, spiteful, frightened at a mouse; But when it comes to suffering mortal pangs, The weakest of us measures pulse with you.

HE.

Yes, you, not she. If she were at your height!
But there's no martyr wrapt in her rose flesh.
There should have been; for Nature gave you both
The self-same purple for your eyes and hair,
The self-same music to your southern lips,
Fashioned you both, as 't were, in the same mould,
Yet failed to put the soul in one of you!
I know her wilful--her light head quite turned

In this court atmosphere of flatteries;
A Moscow beauty, petted and soiled there,
And since spoiled here; as soft as swan's down now,
With words like honey melting from the comb,
But being crossed, vindictive, cruel, cold.
I fancy her, between two rosy smiles,
Saying, "Poor fellow, in the Nertchinsk mines!"
That is the sum of her.

SHE.

You know her not.
Count Sergius Pavlovich, you said no mask
Could hide the soul, yet how you have mistaken
The soul these two months--and the face to-night!

[Removes her mask.]

You!--It was you!

SHE.

Count Sergius Pavlovich, Go find Pauline Pavlovna--she is here--And tell her the Tsar has set you free.

[She goes out hurriedly, replacing her mask.]

Pillared Arch and Sculptured Tower

Pillared arch and sculptured tower Of Ilium have had their hour; The dust of many a king is blown On the winds from zone to zone; Many a warrior sleeps unknown. Time and Death each hold in thrall, Yet is Love the lord of all; Still does Helen's beauty stir Because a poet sang of her!

Pursuit and Possession

When I behold what pleasure is pursuit,
What life, what glorious eagerness it is;
Then mark how full possession falls from this,
How fairer seems the blossom than the fruit -I am perplexed, and often stricken mute
Wondering which attained the higher bliss,
The winged insect, or the chrysalis
It thrust aside with unreluctant foot.
Spirit of verse, that still elud'st my art,
Thou uncaught rapture, thou swift-fleeting fire,
O let me follow thee with hungry heart
If beauty's full possession kill desire!
Still flit away in moonlight, rain, and dew,
Will-of-the-wisp, that I may still pursue!

Reminiscence

Though I am native to this frozen zone
That half the twelvemonth torpid lies, or dead;
Though the cold azure arching overhead
And the Atlantic's never-ending moan
Are mine by heritage, I must have known
Life otherwhere in epochs long since fled;
For in my veins some Orient blood is red,
And through my thought are lotus blossoms blown.
I do remember . . . it was just at dusk,
Near a walled garden at the river's turn
(A thousand summers seem but yesterday!),
A Nubian girl, more sweet than Khoorja musk,
Came to the water-tank to fill her urn,
And, with the urn, she bore my heart away!

Sargent's Portrait of Edwin Booth

That face which no man ever saw And from his memory banished quite, With eyes in which are Hamlet's awe And Cardinal Richelieu's subtle light, Looks from this frame. A master's hand Has set the master player here, In the fair temple that he planned Not for himself. To us most dear This image of him! "It was thus He looked; such pallor touched his cheek; With that same grace he greeted us-Nay, 't is the man, could it but speak!" Sad words that shall be said some day--Far fall the day! O cruel Time, Whose breath sweeps mortal things away, Spare long this image of his prime, That others standing in the place Where, save as ghosts, we come no more, May know what sweet majestic face The gentle Prince of Players wore!

Sestet

SENT TO A FRIEND WITH A VOLUME OF TENNYSON

Wouldst thou know the knightly clash of steel on steel? Or list the throstle singing loud and clear? Or walk at twilight by some haunted mere In Surrey; or in throbbing London feel Life's pulse at highest--hark, the minster's peal! . . . Turn but the page, that various world is here!

Sleep

When to oft sleep we give ourselves away, And in a dream as in a fairy bark Drift on and on through the enchanted dark To purple daybreak -- little thought we pay To that sweet bitter world we know by day. We are clean quit of it, as is a lark So high in heaven no human eye can mark The thin swift pinion cleaving through the gray. Till we awake ill fate can do no ill, The resting heart shall not take up again The heavy load that yet must make it bleed; For this brief space the loud world's voice is still, No faintest echo of it brings us pain. How will it be when we shall sleep indeed?

Song from the Persian

AH, sad are they who know not love, But, far from passion's tears and smiles, Drift down a moonless sea, beyond The silvery coasts of fairy isles.

And sadder they whose longing lips Kiss empty air, and never touch The dear warm mouth of those they love --Waiting, wasting, suffering much.

But clear as amber, fine as musk, Is life to those who, pilgrim-wise, Move hand in hand from dawn to dusk, Each morning nearer Paradise.

Ah, not for them shall angels pray! They stand in everlasting light, They walk in Allah's smile by day, And slumber in his heart by night.

Tennyson

Ι

Shakespeare and Milton--what third blazoned name Shall lips of after-ages link to these? His who, beside the wide encircling seas, Was England's voice, her voice with one acclaim, For threescore years; whose word of praise was fame, Whose scorn gave pause to man's iniquities.

ΙΙ

What strain was his in that Crimean war? A bugle call in battle; a low breath, Plaintive and sweet, above the fields of death! So year by year the music rolled afar, From Euxine wastes to flowery Kandahar, Bearing the laurel or the cypress wreath.

III

Others shall have their little space of time, Their proper niche and bust, then fade away Into the darkness, poets of a day; But thou, O builder of enduring rhyme, Thou shalt not pass! Thy fame in every clime On earth shall live where saxon speech has sway.

IV

Waft me this verse across the winter sea, Through light and dark, through mist and blinding sleet, O winter winds, and lay it at his feet; Though the poor gift betray my poverty, At his feet lay it: it may chance that he Will find no gift, where reverence is, unmeet.

Thalia

"A MIDDLE-AGED LYRICAL POET IS SUPPOSED TO BE TAKING FINAL LEAVE OF THE MUSE OF COMEDY. SHE HAS BROUGHT HIM HIS HAT AND GLOVES, AND IS ABSTRACTEDLY PICKING A THREAD OF GOLD HAIR FROM HIS COAT SLEEVE AS HE BEGINS TO SPEAK:

I say it under the rose-oh, thanks! --yes, under the laurel, We part lovers, not foes; we are not going to quarrel.

We have too long been friends on foot and in guilded coaches, Now that the whole thing ends, to spoil our kiss with reproaches.

I leave you; my soul is wrung; I pause, look back from the portal--Ah, I no more am young, and you, child, are immortal!

Mine is the glacier's way, yours is the blossom's weather--When were December and May known to be happy together?

Before my kisses grow tame, before my moodiness grieve you, While yet my heart is flame, and I all lover, I leave you.

So, in the coming time, when you count the rich years over, Think of me in my prime, and not as a white-haired lover.

Fretful, pierced with regret, the wraith of dead Desire Thrumming a cracked spinnet by a slowly dying fire.

When, at last, I am cold-years hence, if the gods so will it--Say, "He was true as gold," and wear a rose in your fillet!

Others, tender as I, will come and sue for carresses, Woo you, win you, and die--mind you, a rose in your tresses!

Some Melpomene woo, some hold Clio nearest;

You, sweet Comedy--you were ever sweetest and dearest!

Nay, it is time to go-when writing your tragic sister Say to that child of woe how sorry I was I missed her.

Really, I cannot stay, though "parting is such sweet sorrow" . . . Perhaps I will, on my way down-town, look in to-morrow!

The Last Caesar

Ι

Now there was one who came in later days
To play at Emperor: in the dead of night
Stole crown and sceptre, and stood forth to light
In sudden purple. The dawn's straggling rays
Showed Paris fettered, murmuring in amaze,
With red hands at her throat--a piteous sight.
Then the new Cæsar, stricken with affright
At his own daring, shrunk from public gaze

In the Elysée, and had lost the day But that around him flocked his birds of prey, Sharp-beaked, voracious, hungry for the deed. 'Twixt hope and fear beheld great Cæsar hang! Meanwhile, methinks, a ghostly laughter rang Through the rotunda of the Invalides.

Π

What if the boulevards, at set of sun, Reddened, but not with the sunset's kindly glow? What if from quai and square the murmured woe Swept heavenward, pleadingly? The prize was won, A kingling made and Liberty undone. No Emperor, this, like him awhile ago, But his Name's shadow; that one struck the blow Himself, the street-sweeping gun!

This was a man of tortuous heart and brain, So warped he knew not his own point of view--The master of a dark, mysterious smile.

And there he plotted, by the storied Seine And in the fairy gardens of St. Cloud, The Sphinx that puzzled Europe, for awhile.

III

I see him as men saw him once--a face
Of true Napoleon pallor; round the eyes
The wrinkled care; mustache spread pinion-wise,
Pointing his smile with odd sardonic grace
As wearily he turns him in his place,
And bends before the hoarse Parisian cries-Then vanishes, with glitter of gold-lace
And trumpets blaring to the patient skies.

Not thus he vanished later! On his path The Furies waited for the hour and man, Foreknowing that they waited not in vain. Then fell the day, o day of dreadful wrath! Bow-down in shame, O crimson-girt Sedan! Weep fair Alsace! weep, loveliest Lorainne!

So mused I, sitting underneath the trees In that old garden of the Tuileries, Watching the dust of twilight sifting down Through chestnut boughs just touched with autumn's brown--

Not twilight yet, but that illusive bloom Which holds before the deep-edged shadows come; For still the garden stood in golden mist, Still, like a river of golden amethyst, The Seine slipt through its pans of fretted stone, And, near the grille that once fenced in a throne, The fountains still unbraided to the day The unsubstantial silver of their spray.

A spot to dream in, love in, waste one's hours!
Temples and palaces, and gilded towers,
And fairy terraces!--and yet, and yet
Here in her woe came Marie Antoinette,
Came sweet Corday, Du Barry with shrill cry,
Not learning from her betters how to die!
Here, while the nations watched with bated breath,
Was held the saturnalia of Red Death!

For where that slim Egyptian shaft uplifts Its point to catch the dawn's and sunset's drifts Of various gold, the busy Headsman stood. . . . Place de la Concorde--no, the Place of Blood!

And all so peaceful now, one cannot bring Imagination to accept the thing. Lies, all of it! some dreamer's wild romance--High-hearted, witty, laughter-loving France! In whose brain was it that the legend grew Of Mænads shrieking in this avenue, Of watch-fires burning, Famine standing guard, Of long-speared Uhlans in that palace-yard! What ruder sound this soft air ever smote Than a bird's twitter, or a bugle's note? What darker crimson ever splashed these walks Than that of rose-leaves dropping from the stalks? And yet--what means that charred and broken wall, That sculptured marble, splintered, like to fall, Looming among the trees there? . . . And you say This happened, as it were, but yesterday? And here the commune stretched a barricade, And there the final desperate stand was made? Such things have been? How all things change and fade! How little lasts in this brave world below!

Love dies; hate cools; the Cæsars come and go; Gaunt Hunger fattens, and the weak grow strong. Even Republics are not here for long!

Ah, who can tell what hour may bring the doom, The lighted torch, the tocsin's heavy boom!

The Letter

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL, DIED FEBRUARY 27, 1887

I held his letter in my hand, And even while I read The lightning flashed across the land The word that he was dead.

How strange it seemed! His living voice Was speaking from the page Those courteous phrases, tersely choice, Light-hearted, witty, sage.

I wondered what it was that died! The man himself was here, His modesty, his scholar's pride, His soul serene and clear.

These neither death nor time shall dim, Still this sad thing must be--Henceforth I may not speak to him, Though he can speak to me!

The Lorelei

Yonder we see it from the steamer's deck,
The haunted Mountain of the Lorelei -The hanging crags sharp-cut against a sky
Clear as a sapphire without flaw or fleck.
'Twas here the Siren lay in wait to wreck
The fisher-lad. At dusk, as he rowed by,
Perchance he heard her tender amorous cry,
And, seeing the wondrous whiteness of her neck,
Perchance would halt, and lean towards the shore;
Then she by that soft magic which she had
Would lure him, and in gossamers of her hair,
Gold upon gold, would wrap him o'er and o'er,
Wrap him, and sing to him, and drive him mad,
Then drag him down to no man knoweth where.

The Menu

I beg you come to-night and dine. A welcome waits you, and sound wine--The Roederer chilly to a charm, As Juno's breath the claret warm, The sherry of an ancient brand. No Persian pomp, you understand--A soup, a fish, two meats, and then A salad fit for aldermen (When alderman, alas, the days! Were really worth their mayonnaise); A dish of grapes whose clusters won Their bronze in Carolinian sun; Next, cheese--for you the Neufchâtel, A bit of Cheshire likes me well; Café au lait or coffee black, With Kirsch or Kümmel or Cognac (The German band in Irving Place By this time purple in the face); Cigars and pipes. These being through, Friends shall drop in, a very few--Shakespeare and Milton, and no more. When these are guests I bolt the door, With Not at Home to any one Excepting Alfred Tennyson.

The Poets

When this young Land has reached its wrinkled prime, And we are gone and all our songs are done, And naught is left unchanged beneath the sun, What other singers shall the womb of Time Bring forth to reap the sunny slopes of rhyme? For surely till the thread of life be spun The world shall not lack poets, though but one Make lonely music like a vesper chime Above the heedless turmoil of the street. What new strange voices shall be given to these, What richer accents of melodious breath? Yet shall they, baffled, lie at Nature's feet Searching the volume of her mysteries, And vainly question the fixed eyes of Death.

The Rarity of Genius

While yet my lip was breathing youth's first breath, I all too young to know their deepest spell, I saw Medea and Phædra in Rachel; Later I saw the great Elizabeth. Rachel, Ristori -- we shall speak with death Ere we meet souls like these. In one age dwell Not many such: a century shall tell Its hundred beads before it braid a wreath For two so queenly foreheads. If it take Æons to form a diamond, grain on grain, Æons to crystallize its fire and dew, By what slow processes must Nature make Her Shakespeares and her Raffaels? Great the gain If she spoil millions making one or two.

The Shipman's Tale

Listen my masters! I speak naught but truth. From dawn to dawn they drifted on and on, Not knowing wither nor to what dark end. Now the North froze them, now the hot South scorched. Some called to God, and found great comfort so; Some gnashed their teeth with curses, some laughed An empty laughter, seeing they yet lived, So sweet was breath between their foolish lips. Day after day the same relentless sun, Night after night the same unpitying stars. At intervals fierce lightning tore the clouds, Showing vast hollow spaces, and the sleet Hissed, and the torrents of the sky were loosed. From time to time a hand relaxed its grip, And some pale wretch slid down into the dark With stifled moan, and transient horror seized The rest who waited, knowing what must be. At every turn strange shapes reached up and clutched The whirling wreck, held on awhile, and then Slipt back into that blackness whence they came. Ah, hapless folk, to be so tost and torn, So racked by hunger, fever, fire, and wave, And swept at last into the nameless void--Frail girls, strong men, and mothers with their babes!

And was none saved? My masters, not a soul!

O shipman, woful, woful is thy tale! Our hearts are heavy and our eyes are dimmed. What ship is this that suffered such ill fate?

What ship, my masters? Know ye not?--The World!

The Sisters' Tragedy

A.D. 1670

AGLÄE, a widow. MURIEL, her unmarried sister.

It happened once, in that brave land that lies For half the twelvemonth wrapt in sombre skies, Two sisters loved one man. He being dead, Grief loosed the lips of her he had not wed, And all the passion that through heavy years Had masked in smiles unmasked itself in tears. No purer love may mortals know than this, The hidden love that guards another's bliss. High in a turret's westward-facing room, Whose painted window held the sunset's bloom, The two together grieving, each to each Unveiled her soul with sobs and broken speech.

Both were young, in life's rich summer yet; And one was dark, with tints of violet In hair and eyes, and one was blond as she Who rose--a second daybreak--from the sea, Gold-tressed and azure-eyed. In that lone place, Like dusk and dawn, they sat there face to face.

She spoke the first whose strangely silvering hair No wreath had worn, nor widow's weed might wear, And told her blameless love, and knew no shame--Her holy love that, like a vestal flame Beside the body of some queen Within a guarded crypt, had burned unseen From weary year to year. And she who heard Smiled proudly through her tears and said no word, But, drawing closer, on the troubled brow Laid one long kiss, and that was words enow!

MURIEL.

Be still, my heart! Grown patient with thine ache, Thou shouldst be dumb, yet needs must speak, or break. The world is empty now that he is gone.

AGLÄE.

Ay, sweetheart!

MURIEL.

None was like him, no, not one. From other men he stood apart, alone In honor spotless as unfallen snow. Nothing all evil was it his to know;
His charity still found some germ, some spark
Of light in natures that seemed wholly dark.
He read men's souls; the lowly and the high
Moved on the self-same level in his eye.
Gracious to all, to none subservient,
Without offence he spake the word he meant-His word no trick of tact or courtly art,
But the white flowering of the noble heart.
Careless he was of much the world counts gain,
Careless of self, too simple to be vain,
Yet strung so finely that for conscience-sake
He would have gone like Cranmer to the stake.
I saw--how could I help but love? And you--

AGLÄE.

At this perfection did I worship too . . .
'I was this that stabbed me. Heed not what I say! I meant it not, my wits are gone astray,
With all that is and has been. No, I lie-Had he been less perfection, happier I!

MURIEL.

Strange words and wild! 'T is the distracted mind Breathes them, not you, and I no meaning find.

AGLÄE.

Yet 't were as plain as writing on a scroll had you but eyes to read within my soul.-How a grief hidden feeds on its own mood, Poison's the healthful currents of the blood With bitterness, and turns the heart to stone! I think, in truth, 't were better to make moan, And so be done with it. This many a year, Sweetheart, have I laughed lightly and made cheer, Pierced through with sorrow!

Then the widowed one With sorrowfullest eyes beneath the sun, Faltered, irresolute, and bending low Her head, half whispered,

Dear, how could you know?
What masks are faces!--yours, unread by me
These seven long summers; mine, so placidly
Shielding my woe! No tremble of the lip,
No cheek's quick pallor let our secret slip!
Mere players we, and she that played the queen,
Now in her homespun, looks how poor and mean!

How shall I say it, how find words to tell
What thing it was for me made earth a hell
That else had been my heaven! 'T would blanch your cheek
Were I to speak it. Nay, but I will speak,
Since like two souls at compt we seem to stand,
Where nothing may be hidden. Hold my hand,
But look not at me! Noble 't was, and meet,
To hide your heart, nor fling it at his feet
To lie despised there. Thus saved you our pride
And that white honor for which earls have died.
You were not all unhappy, loving so!
I with a difference wore my weight of woe.
My lord was he. It was my cruel lot,
My hell, to love him--for he loved me not!

Then came a silence. Suddenly like death
The truth flashed on them, and each held her breath-A flash of light whereby they both were slain,
She that was loved and she that loved in vain!

The Undiscovered Country

Forever am I conscious, moving here,
That should I step a little space aside
I pass the boundary of some glorified
Invisible domain -- it lies so near!
Yet nothing know we of that dim frontier
Which each must cross, whatever fate betide,
To reach the heavenly cities where abide
(Thus Sorrow whispers) those that were most dear,
Now all transfigured in celestial light!
Shall we indeed behold them, thine and mine,
Whose going hence made black the noonday sun? -Strange is it that across the narrow night
They fling us not some token, or make sign
That all beyond is not Oblivion.

Thorwaldsen

Not in the fabled influence of some star,
Benign or evil, do our fortunes lie;
We are the arbiters of destiny,
Lords of the life we either make or mar.
We are our own impediment and bar
To noble endings. With distracted eye
We let the golden moment pass us by,
Time's foolish spendthrifts, searching wide and far
For what lies close at hand. To serve our turn
We ask fair wind and favorable tide.
From the dead Danish sculptor let us learn
To make Occasion, not to be denied:
Against the sheer precipitous mountain-side
Thorwaldsen carved his Lion at Lucerne.

Threnody

Ι

Upon your hearse this flower I lay Brief be your sleep! You shall be known When lesser men have had their day: Fame blossoms where true seed is sown, Or soon or late, let Time wound what it may.

ΙΙ

Unvext by any dream of fame, You smiled, and bade the world pass by: But I--I turned, and saw a name Shaping itself against the sky--White star that rose amid the battle's flame!

III

Brief be your sleep, for I would see Your laurels--ah, how trivial now To him must earthly laurel be Who wears the amaranth on his brow! How vain the voices of mortality!

To L.T. in Florence

You by the Arno shape your marble dream, Under the cypress and the olive trees, While I, this side the wild wind-beaten seas, Unrestful by the Charles's placid stream, Long once again to catch the golden gleam Of Brunelleschi's dome, and lounge at ease In those pleached gardens and fair galleries. And yet perchance you envy me, and deem My star the happier, since it holds me here. Even so one time, beneath the cypresses, My heart turned longingly across the sea To these familiar fields and woodlands dear, And I had given all Titian's goddesses For one poor cowslip or anemone.

With Three Flowers

Herewith I send you three pressed withered flowers: This one was white, with golden star; this, blue As Capri's cave; that, purple and shot through With sunset-orange. Where the Duomo towers In diamond air, and under pendent bowers The Arno glides, this faded violet grew On Landor's grave; from Landor's heart it drew Its clouded azure in the long spring hours. Within the shadow of the Pyramid Of Cais Cestius was the daisy found, White as the soul of Keats in Paradise. The pansy -- there were hundreds of them hid In the thick grass that folded Shelley's mound, Guarding his ashes with most lovely eyes.