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B.P.—II. Elizabeth Barrett Browning. A

THE POETICAL WORKS OF ELIZABETH B. BROWNING

SERIES II

WITH PORTRAIT AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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CONTENTS.

	Page.
Prometheus Bound	1
A Lament for Adonis	43
A Vision of Poets	47
A Romance of the Ganges	84
Bertha in the Lane	92
A Child Asleep	100
The Fourfold Aspect	103
Night and the Merry Man	107
Earth and Her Praisers	111
The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus	118
The Soul's Travelling	124
To Bettine	132
Man and Nature	134
A Sea-Side Walk	135
Felicia Hemans	136
L. E. L.'s Last Question	139
Crowned and Wedded	141
Crowned and Buried	144
My Doves	151
Hector in the Garden	153
Sounds	157
The Soul's Expression	162
The Seraph and Poet	162
Bereavement	163
Consolation	163
To Mary Russell Mitford	164
On a Portrait of Wordsworth by B. R. Haydon	164
Past and Future	165
Irreparableness	165
Tears	166
Grief	166
Substitution	167
Comfort	167
Perplexed Music	168

Work 168
Futurity 169
The Two Sayings 169
The Look 170
The Meaning of the Look 170
A Thought for a Lonely Death-Bed 171
Work and Contemplation 171
Pain in Pleasure 172
Flush or Faunus 172
Finite and Infinite 173
An Apprehension 173
Discontent 174
Patience Taught by Nature 174
Cheerfulness Taught by Reason 175
Exaggeration 175
Adequacy 176
To George Sand—
A Desire 176
A Recognition 177
The Prisoner 177
Insufficiency 178
Two Sketches 178
Mountaineer and Poet 179
The Poet 180
Hiram Powers' Greek Slave 180
Life 181
Love 181
Heaven and Earth 182
The Prospect 182
Hugh Stuart Boyd—
His Blindness 183
His Death, 1848 184
Legacies 184
A Song Against Singing 185
Wine of Cyprus 187
A Rhapsody of Life's Progress 193
A Lay of the Early Rose 199
The Poet and the Bird—A Fable 207

The Cry of the Human 207
Confessions 212
Loved Once 216
The House of Clouds 218
A Flower in a Letter 222
The Mask 226
Calls on the Heart 228
Wisdom Unapplied 232
Memory and Hope 234
Human Life's Mystery 237
A Child's Thought of God 239
The Claim 240
Song of the Rose 241
A Dead Rose 241
The Exile's Return 243
The Measure 245
Cowper's Grave 246
The Weakest Thing 249
The Mourning Mother (Of the Dead Blind) 250
A Valediction 253
Lessons from the Gorse 254
The Lady's Yes 255
A Year's Spinning 257
Change Upon Change 258
That Day 259
A Reed 260
A Child's Grave at Florence 261
Catarina to Camoens 266
Life and Love 272
A Denial 273
Proof and Disproof 275
Question and Answer 277
Inclusions 278
Insufficiency 279
Casa Guidi Windows—
Advertisement to the First Edition 280
Part I. 281
Part II. 318

Poems Before Congress—
Napoleon III. in Italy 345
The Dance 358
A Tale of Villafranca 360
A Court Lady 364
An August Voice 368
Christmas Gifts 372
Italy and the World 374
A Curse for a Nation 380
Last Poems—
Little Mattie 387
A False Step 390
Void in Law 391
Lord Walter's Wife 394
Bianca Among the Nightingales 399
My Kate 404
A Song for the Ragged Schools of London . . 406
May's Love 412
Amy's Cruelty 413
My Heart and I 415
The Best Thing in the World 418
Where's Agnes? 419
De Profundis 425
A Musical Instrument 431
First News from Villafranca 433
King Victor Emanuel Entering Florence, April, 1860 435
The Sword of Castruccio Castracani 438
Summing Up in Italy 441
"Died . . . ." 444
The Forced Recruit 446
Garibaldi 449
Only a Curl 452
A View Across the Roman Campagna . . . 456
The King's Gift 458
Parting Lovers 460
Mother and Poet 464
Nature's Remorses 469
The North and the South 473

Mrs. Browning's Poems.

PROMETHEUS BOUND.

FROM THE GREEK OF ÆSCHYLUS.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

PROMETHEUS.	HEPHÆSTUS.
OCEANUS.	IO, daughter of Inachus.
HERMES.	STRENGTH and FORCE.

CHORUS of Ocean Nymphs.

SCENE.—STRENGTH *and* FORCE, HEPHÆSTUS *and* PROMETHEUS, *at the Rocks.*

Strength. We reach the utmost limit of the earth,
The Scythian track, the desert without man.
And now, Hephæstus, thou must needs fulfil
The mandate of our Father, and with links
Indissoluble of adamantine chains
Fasten against this beetling precipice
This guilty god. Because he filched away
Thine own bright flower, the glory of plastic fire,
And gifted mortals with it,—such a sin
It doth behove he expiate to the gods,
Learning to accept the empery of Zeus
And leave off his old trick of loving man.

Hephæstus. O Strength and Force, for you, our Zeus's will
Presents a deed for doing, no more!—but *I*,
I lack your daring, up this storm-rent chasm

To fix with violent hands a kindred god,
Howbeit necessity compels me so
That I must dare it, and our Zeus commands
With a most inevitable word. Ho, thou!
High-thoughted son of Themis who is sage!
Thee loth, I loth must rivet fast in chains
Against this rocky height unclomb by man,
Where never human voice nor face shall find
Out thee who lov'st them, and thy beauty's flower.
Scorched in the sun's clear heat, shall fade away.
Night shall come up with garniture of stars
To comfort thee with shadow, and the sun
Disperse with retrickt beams the morning-frosts,
But through all changes sense of present woe
Shall vex thee sore, because with none of them
There comes a hand to free. Such fruit is plucked
From love of man! and in that thou, a god,
Didst brave the wrath of gods and give away
Undue respect to mortals, for that crime
Thou art adjudged to guard this joyless rock,
Erect, unslumbering, bending not the knee,
And many a cry and unavailing moan
To utter on the air. For Zeus is stern
And new-made kings are cruel.

Strength. Be it so.
Why loiter in vain pity? Why not hate
A god the gods hate? one too who betrayed
Thy glory unto men?

Hephæstus. An awful thing
Is kinship joined to friendship.

Strength. Grant it be;
Is disobedience to the Father's word
A possible thing? Dost quail not more for that?

Hephæstus. Thou, at least, art a stern one: ever bold.

Strength. Why, if I wept, it were no remedy;

And do not *thou* spend labour on the air
To bootless uses.
Hephæstus. Cursed handicraft!
I curse and hate thee, O my craft!
Strength. Why hate
Thy craft most plainly innocent of all
These pending ills?
Hephæstus. I would some other hand
Were here to work it!
Strength. All work hath its pain,
Except to rule the gods. There is none free
Except King Zeus.
Hephæstus. I know it very well:
I argue not against it."
Strength. Why not, then,
Make haste and lock the fetters over HIM
Lest Zeus behold thee lagging?
Hephæstus. Here be chains.
Zeus may behold these.
Strength. Seize him: strike amain:
Strike with the hammer on each side his hands—
Rivet him to the rock.
Hephæstus. The work is done,
And thoroughly done.
Strength. Still faster grapple him;
Wedge him in deeper: leave no inch to stir.
He's terrible for finding a way out
From the irremediable.
Hephæstus. Here's an arm, at least,
Grappled past freeing.
Strength. Now then, buckle me
The other securely. Let this wise one learn
He's duller than our Zeus.
Hephæstus. Oh, none but he
Accuse me justly.

Strength. Now, straight through the chest,
Take him and bite him with the clenching tooth
Of the adamantine wedge, and rivet him.
Hephæstus. Alas, Prometheus, what thou sufferest here
I sorrow over.
Strength. Dost thou flinch again
And breathe groans for the enemies of Zeus?
Beware lest thine own pity find thee out.
Hephæstus. Thou dost behold a spectacle that turns
The sight o' the eyes to pity.
Strength. I behold
A sinner suffer his sin's penalty.
But lash the thongs about his sides.
Hephæstus. So much,
I must do. Urge no farther than I must.
Strength. Ay, but I *will* urge!—and, with shout on shou
Will hound thee at this quarry. Get thee down
And ring amain the iron round his legs.
Hephæstus. That work was not long doing.
Strength. Heavily no
Let fall the strokes upon the perforant gyves:
For He who rates the work has a heavy hand.
Hephæstus. Thy speech is savage as thy shape.
Strength. Be thou
Gentle and tender! but revile not me
For the firm will and the untruckling hate.
Hephæstus. Let us go. He is netted round with chains.
Strength. Here, now, taunt on! and having spoiled the go
Of honours, crown withal thy mortal men
Who live a whole day out. Why how could *they*
Draw off from thee one single of thy griefs?
Methinks the Dæmons gave thee a wrong name,
Prometheus, which means Providence,—because
Thou dost thyself need providence to see
Thy roll and ruin from the top of doom.

Prometheus (*alone*). O holy Æther, and swift-winged Winds,
And River-wells, and laughter innumerous
Of yon sea-waves! Earth, mother of us all,
And all-viewing cyclic Sun, I cry on you,—
Behold me a god, what I endure from gods!
Behold, with throe on throe
How, wasted by this woe,
I wrestle down the myriad years of time!
Behold, how fast around me,
The new King of the happy ones sublime
Has flung the chain he forged, has shamed and bound me!
Woe, woe! to-day's woe and the coming morrow's
I cover with one groan. And where is found me
A limit to these sorrows?
And yet what word do I say? I have foreknown
Clearly all things that should be; nothing done
Comes sudden to my soul; and I must bear
What is ordained with patience, being aware
Necessity doth front the universe
With an invincible gesture. Yet this curse
Which strikes me now, I find it hard to brave
In silence or in speech. Because I gave
Honour to mortals, I have yoked my soul
To this compelling fate. Because I stole
The secret fount of fire, whose bubbles went
Over the ferule's brim, and manward sent
Art's mighty means and perfect rudiment,
That sin I expiate in this agony,
Hung here in fetters, 'neath the blanching sky.
Ah, ah me! what a sound,
What a fragrance sweeps up from a pinion unseen
Of a god, or a mortal, or nature between,
Sweeping up to this rock where the earth has her bound,

To have sight of my pangs or some guerdon obtain.
Lo, a god in the anguish, a god in the chain!
The god, Zeus hateth sore
And his gods hate again,
As many as tread on his glorified floor,
Because I loved mortals too much evermore.
Alas me! what a murmur and motion I hear,
As of birds flying near!
And the air undersings
The light stroke of their wings—
And all life that approaches I wait for in fear.

Chorus of Sea Nymphs, 1st Strophe.

Fear nothing! our troop
Floats lovingly up
With a quick-oaring stroke
Of wings steered to the rock,
Having softened the soul of our father below.
For the gales of swift-bearing have sent me a sound,
And the clank of the iron, the malleted blow,
Smote down the profound
Of my caverns of old,
And struck the red light in a blush from my brow,—
Till I sprang up unsandalled, in haste to behold,
And rushed forth on my chariot of wings manifold.

Prometheus. Alas me!—alas me!
Ye offspring of Tethys, who bore at her breast
Many children, and eke of Oceanus,—he
Coiling still around earth with perpetual unrest!
Behold me and see
How transfixed with the fang
Of a fetter, I hang
On the high-jutting rocks of this fissure, and keep
An uncoveted watch o'er the world and the deep.

B.P.—II. Page 6.

"I hang
On the high-jutting rocks of this fissure, and keep
An uncoveted watch o'er the world and the deep."

Chorus, 1st Antistrophe.

I behold thee, Prometheus; yet now, yet now,
A terrible cloud, whose rain is tears,
Sweeps over mine eyes that witness how
Thy body appears
Hung awaste on the rocks by infrangible chains!
For new is the Hand and the rudder that steers
The ship of Olympus through surge and wind—
And of old things passed, no track is behind.

Prometheus. Under earth, under Hades
Where the home of the shade is,
All into the deep, deep Tartarus,
I would he had hurled me adown.
I would he had plunged me, fastened thus
In the knotted chain with the savage clang,
All into the dark where there should be none,
Neither god nor another, to laugh and see.
But now the winds sing through and shake
The hurting chains wherein I hang,
And I, in my naked sorrows, make
Much mirth for my enemy.

Chorus, 2nd Strophe.

Nay! who of the gods hath a heart so stern
As to use thy woe for a mock and mirth?
Who would not turn more mild to learn
Thy sorrows? who of the heaven and earth,
Save Zeus? But he
Right wrathfully
Bears on his sceptral soul unbent
And rules thereby the heavenly seed,
Nor will he pause till he content
His thirsty heart in a finished deed;

Or till Another shall appear,
To win by fraud, to seize by fear
The hard-to-be-captured government.

Prometheus. Yet even of *me* he shall have need,
That monarch of the blessed seed,
Of me, of me, who now am cursed
By his fetters dire,—
To wring my secret out withal
And learn by whom his sceptre shall
Be filched from him—as was, at first,
His heavenly fire.
But he never shall enchant me
With his honey-lipped persuasion;
Never, never shall he daunt me
With the oath and threat of passion
Into speaking as they want me,
Till he loose this savage chain,
And accept the expiation
Of my sorrow, in his pain.

Chorus, 2nd Antistrophe.

Thou art, sooth, a brave god,
And, for all thou hast borne
From the stroke of the rod,
Nought relaxest from scorn.
But thou speakest unto me
Too free and unworn;
And a terror strikes through me
And festers my soul—
And I fear, in the roll
Of the storm, for thy fate
In the ship far from shore:
Since the son of Saturnius is hard in his hate
And unmoved in his heart evermore.

Prometheus. I know that Zeus is stern!
I know he metes his justice by his will!
And yet, his soul shall learn
More softness when once broken by this ill—
And curbing his unconquerable vaunt
He shall rush on in fear, to meet with me
Who rush to meet with him, in agony,
To issues of harmonius covenant.

Chorus. Remove the veil from all things and relate
The story to us,—of what crime accused,
Zeus smites thee with dishonourable pangs.
Speak! if to teach us do not grieve thyself.

Prometheus. The utterance of these things is torture to me,
But so, too, is their silence! each way lies
Woe strong as fate!—
When gods began with wrath,
And war rose up between their starry brows,
Some choosing to cast Chronos from his throne,
That Zeus might king it there, and some in haste
With opposite oaths that they would have no Zeus
To rule the gods for ever,—I, who brought
The counsel I thought meetest, could not move
The Titans, children of the Heaven and Earth,—
What time, disdaining in their rugged souls
My subtle machinations, they assumed
It was an easy thing for force to take
The mastery of fate. My mother, then,
Who is called not only Themis but Earth too
(Her single beauty joys in many names),
Did teach me with reiterant prophecy
What future should be, and how conquering god
Should not prevail by strength and violence,
But by guile only. When I told them so,
They would not deign to contemplate the truth
On all sides round; whereat I deemed it best

To lead my willing mother upwardly
And set my Themis face to face with Zeus,
As willing to receive her. Tartarus,
With its abysmal cloister of the Dark,
Because I gave that counsel, covers up
The antique Chronos and his siding hosts,
And, by that counsel helped, the king of gods
Hath recompensed me with these bitter pangs—
For kingship wears a cancer at the heart,—
Distrust in friendship. Do ye also ask
What crime it is for which he tortures me?
That shall be clear before you. When at first
He filled his father's throne, he instantly
Made various gifts of glory to the gods
And dealt the empire out. Alone, of men,
Of miserable men, he took no count,
But yearned to sweep their track off from the world
And plant a newer race there. Not a god
Resisted such desire except myself.
I dared it! *I* drew mortals back to light,
From meditated ruin deep as hell!
For which wrong, I am bent down in these pangs
Dreadful to suffer, mournful to behold,
And I, who pitied man, am thought myself
Unworthy of pity; while I render out
Deep rhythms of anguish 'neath the harping hand
That strikes me thus—a sight to shame your Zeus!

Chorus. Hard as thy chains and cold as all these rocks
Is he, Prometheus, who withholds his heart
From joining in thy woe. I yearned before
To fly this sight; and, now I gaze on it,
I sicken inwards.

Prometheus. To my friends, indeed,
I must be a sad sight.

Chorus. And didst thou sin

No more than so?

Prometheus. I did restrain, besides,
My mortals from premeditating death.

Chorus. How didst thou medicine the plague-fear of death?

Prometheus. I set blind Hopes to inhabit in their house.

Chorus. By that gift thou didst help thy mortals well.

Prometheus. I gave them also,—fire.

Chorus. And have they now,
Those creatures of a day, the red-eyed fire?

Prometheus. They have: and shall learn by it many arts.

Chorus. And, truly, for such sins Zeus tortures thee,
And will remit no anguish? Is there set
No limit before thee to thine agony?

Prometheus. No other! only what seems good to HIM.

Chorus. And how will it seem good? what hope remains?
Seest thou not that thou hast sinned? But that thou hast sinned
It glads me not to speak of, and grieves thee—
Then let it pass from both, and seek thyself
Some outlet from distress.

Prometheus. It is in truth
An easy thing to stand aloof from pain,
And lavish exhortation and advice
On one vexed sorely by it. I have known
All in prevision. By my choice, my choice,
I freely sinned—I will confess my sin—
And helping mortals, found mine own despair!—
I did not think indeed that I should pine
Beneath such pangs against such skyey rocks,—
Doomed to this drear hill and no neighbouring
Of any life! but mourn not ye for griefs
I bear to-day! hear rather, dropping down
To the plain, how other woes creep on to me,
And learn the consummation of my doom.

Beseech you, nymphs, beseech you !—grieve for me,
Who now am grieving ! for Grief walks the earth,
And sits down at the foot of each by turns.

Chorus. We hear the deep clash of thy words,
Prometheus, and obey !
And I spring with a rapid foot away
From the rushing car and the holy air,
The track of birds ;
And I drop to the rugged ground, and there
Await the tale of thy despair.

OCEANUS *enters.*

Oceanus. I reach the bourn of my weary road,
Where I may see and answer thee,
Prometheus, in thine agony !
On the back of the quick-winged bird I glode,
And I bridled him in
With the will of a god.
Behold, thy sorrow aches in me
Constrained by the force of kin.
Nay, though that tie were all undone,
For the life of none beneath the sun
Would I seek a larger benison
Than I seek for thine !
And thou shalt learn my words are truth,—
That no fair parlance of the mouth
Grows falsely out of mine !
Now give me a deed to prove my faith ;
For no faster friend is named in breath
Than I, Oceanus, am thine.

Prometheus. Ha ! what has brought thee ? Hast thou also come
To look upon my woe ? How hast thou dared
To leave the depths called after thee, the caves
Self-hewn and self-roofed with spontaneous rock,

To visit Earth, the mother of my chain?
Hast come indeed to view my doom, and mourn
That I should sorrow thus? Gaze on, and see
How I, the fast friend of your Zeus,—how I
The erector of the empire in his hand,—
Am bent beneath that hand, in this despair!

Oceanus. Prometheus, I behold: and I would fain
Exhort thee, though already subtle enough,
To a better wisdom. Titan, know thyself,
And take new softness to thy manners, since
A new king rules the gods. If words like these,
Harsh words and trenchant, thou wilt fling abroad,
Zeus haply, though he sit so far and high,
May hear thee do it; and, so, this wrath of his
Which now affects thee fiercely, shall appear
A mere child's sport at vengeance. Wretched god,
Rather dismiss the passion which thou hast,
And seek a change from grief. Perhaps I seem
To address thee with old saws and outworn sense,—
Yet such a curse, Prometheus, surely waits
On lips that speak too proudly: thou, meantime,
Art none the meeker, nor dost yield a jot
To evil circumstance, preparing still
To swell the account of grief with other griefs
Than what are borne. Beseech thee, use me then
For counsel: do not spurn against the pricks,—
Seeing that who reigns, reigns by cruelty
Instead of right. And now, I go from hence,
And will endeavour if a power of mine
Can break thy fetters through. For thee,—be calm,
And smooth thy words from passion. Knowest thou not
Of perfect knowledge, thou who knowest too much,
That where the tongue wags, ruin never lags?

Prometheus. I gratulate thee, who hast shared and dared
All things with me, except their penalty!

Enough so! leave these thoughts. It cannot be
That thou shouldst move HIM. HE may *not* be moved;
And *thou*, beware of sorrow on this road.

Oceanus. Ay! ever wiser for another's use
Than thine! the event, and not the prophecy,
Attests it to me. Yet where now I rush,
Thy wisdom hath no power to drag me back;
Because I glory, glory, to go hence
And win for thee deliverance from thy pangs,
As a free gift from Zeus.

Prometheus. Why there, again,
I give thee gratulation and applause!
Thou lackest no goodwill. But, as for deeds,
Do nought! 'twere all done vainly; helping nought,
Whatever thou wouldst do. Rather take rest
And keep thyself from evil. If I grieve,
I do not therefore wish to multiply
The griefs of others. Verily, not so!
For still my brother's doom doth vex my soul,—
My brother Atlas, standing in the west,
Shouldering the column of the heaven and earth,
A difficult burden! I have also seen,
And pitied as I saw, the earth-born one,
The inhabitant of old Cilician caves,
The great war-monster of the hundred heads
(All taken and bowed beneath the violent Hand),
Typhon the fierce, who did resist the gods,
And, hissing slaughter from his dreadful jaws,
Flash out ferocious glory from his eyes
As if to storm the throne of Zeus. Whereat,
The sleepless arrow of Zeus flew straight at him,
The headlong bolt of thunder breathing flame,
And struck him downward from his eminence
Of exultation; through the very soul,
It struck him, and his strength was withered up

To ashes, thunder-blasted. Now, he lies
A helpless trunk supinely, at full length
Beside the strait of ocean, spurred into
By roots of Ætna; high upon whose tops
Hephæstus sits and strikes the flashing ore.
From thence the rivers of fire shall burst away
Hereafter, and devour with savage jaws
The equal plains of fruitful Sicily,
Such passion he shall boil back in hot darts
Of an insatiate fury and sough of flame,—
Fallen Typhon,—howsoever struck and charred
By Zeus's bolted thunder. But for thee,
Thou art not so unlearned as to need
My teaching—let thy knowledge save thyself.
I quaff the full cup of a present doom,
And wait till Zeus hath quenched his will in wrath.

Oceanus. Prometheus, art thou ignorant of this,
That words do medicine anger?

Prometheus. If the word
With seasonable softness touch the soul,
And, where the parts are ulcerous, sear them not
By any rudeness.

Oceanus. With a noble aim
To dare as nobly—is there harm in *that?*
Dost thou discern it? Teach me.

Prometheus. I discern
Vain aspiration, unresultive work.

Oceanus. Then suffer me to bear the brunt of this!
Since it is profitable that one who is wise
Should seem not wise at all.

Prometheus. And such would seem
My very crime.

Oceanus. In truth thine argument
Sends me back home.

Prometheus. Lest any lament for me

Should cast thee down to hate.
Oceanus. The hate of Him
Who sits, a new king, on the absolute throne?
Prometheus. Beware of him, lest thine heart grieve by him.
Oceanus. Thy doom, Prometheus, be my teacher!
Prometheus. Go!
Depart—beware!—and keep the mind thou hast.
Oceanus. Thy words drive after, as I rush before—
Lo! my four-footed bird sweeps smooth and wide
The flats of air with balanced pinions, glad
To bend his knee at home in the ocean-stall.

[OCEANUS *departs.*

Chorus, 1st Strophe.

I moan thy fate, I moan for thee,
Prometheus! From my eyes too tender,
Drop after drop incessantly,
The tears of my heart's pity render
My cheeks wet from their fountains free;
Because that Zeus, the stern and cold,
Whose law is taken from his breast,
Uplifts his sceptre manifest
Over the gods of old.

1st Antistrophe.

All the land is moaning
With a murmured plaint to-day!
All the mortal nations,
Having habitations
In the holy Asia,
Are a dirge entoning
For thine honour and thy brothers',
Once majestic beyond others
In the old belief,—

Now are groaning in the groaning
Of thy deep-voiced grief.

2nd Strophe.

Mourn the maids inhabitant
Of the Colchian land,
Who with white, calm bosoms stand
In the battle's roar:
Mourn the Scythian tribes that haunt
The verge of earth, Mæotis' shore—

2nd Antistrophe.

Yea! Arabia's battle-crown,
And dwellers in the beetling town
Mount Caucasus sublimely nears,—
An iron squadron, thundering down
With the sharp-prowed spears.

But one other before, have I seen to remain
By invincible pain
Bound and vanquished,—one Titan! 'twas Atlas, who bears,
In a curse from the gods, by that strength of his own
Which he evermore wears,
The weight of the heaven on his shoulder alone,
While he sighs up the stars;
And the tides of the ocean wail bursting their bars,—
Murmurs still the profound,—
And black Hades roars up through the chasm of the ground,
And the fountains of pure-running rivers moan low
In a pathos of woe.

Prometheus. Beseech you, think not I am silent thus
Through pride or scorn! I only gnaw my heart
With meditation, seeing myself so wronged!

For see—their honours to these new-made gods,
What other gave but I,—and dealt them out
With distribution? Ay—but here I am dumb!
For here, I should repeat your knowledge to you,
If I spake aught. List rather to the deeds
I did for mortals; how, being fools before,
I made them wise and true in aim of soul!
And let me tell you—not as taunting men,
But teaching you the intention of my gifts;
How, first beholding, they beheld in vain,
And hearing, heard not, but, like shapes in dreams,
Mixed all things wildly down the tedious time,
Nor knew to build a house against the sun
With wicketed sides, nor any woodcraft knew;
But lived, like silly ants, beneath the ground
In hollow caves unsunned. There, came to them
No steadfast sign of winter, nor of spring
Flower-perfumed, nor of summer full of fruit,—
But blindly and lawlessly they did all things,
Until I taught them how the stars do rise
And set in mystery, and devised for them
Number, the inducer of philosophies,
The synthesis of Letters, and, beside,
The artificer of all things, Memory,
That sweet Muse-mother. I was first to yoke
The servile beasts in couples, carrying
An heirdom of man's burdens on their backs!
I joined to chariots, steeds, that love the bit
They champ at—the chief pomp of golden ease!
And none but I originated ships,
The seaman's chariots, wandering on the brine
With linen wings. And I—oh, miserable!—
Who did devise for mortals all these arts,
Have no device left now to save myself
From the woe I suffer!

Chorus. Most unseemly woe
Thou sufferest, and dost stagger from the sense,
Bewildered! like a bad leech falling sick,
Thou art faint at soul, and canst not find the drugs
Required to save thyself.
Prometheus. Harken the rest,
And marvel further—what more arts and means
I did invent,—this, greatest: if a man
Fell sick, there was no cure, nor esculent,
Nor chrism, nor liquid; but, for lack of drugs,
Men pined and wasted, till I showed them all
Those mixtures of emollient remedies
Whereby they might be rescued from disease.
I fixed the various rules of mantic art,
Discerned the vision from the common dream,
Instructed them in vocal auguries
Hard to interpret; and defined as plain
The wayside omens,—flights of crook-clawed birds,—
Showed which are, by their nature, fortunate,
And which not so, and what the food of each,
And what the hates, affections, social needs,
Of all to one another,—taught what sign
Of visceral lightness, coloured to a shade,
May charm the genial gods, and what fair spots
Commend the lung and liver. Burning so,
The limbs encased in fat, and the long chine,
I led my mortals on to an art abstruse,
And cleared their eyes to the image in the fire,
Erst filmed in dark. Enough said now of this.
For the other helps of man hid underground,
The iron and the brass, silver and gold,
Can any dare affirm he found them out
Before me? None, I know! unless he choose
To lie in his vaunt. In one word learn the whole,—
That all arts came to mortals from Prometheus.

Chorus. Give mortals now no inexpedient help,
Neglecting thine own sorrow. I have hope still
To see thee, breaking from the fetter here,
Stand up as strong as Zeus.
Prometheus. This ends not thus,
The oracular Fate ordains. I must be bowed
By infinite woes and pangs, to escape this chain.
Necessity is stronger than mine art.
Chorus. Who holds the helm of that Necessity?
Prometheus. The threefold Fates and the unforgetting Furies.
Chorus. Is Zeus less absolute than these are?
Prometheus. Yea,
And therefore cannot fly what is ordained.
Chorus. What is ordained for Zeus, except to be
A king for ever?
Prometheus. 'Tis too early yet
For thee to learn it: ask no more.
Chorus. Perhaps
Thy secret may be something holy?
Prometheus. Turn
To another matter: this, it is not time
To speak abroad, but utterly to veil
In silence. For by that same secret kept,
I 'scape this chain's dishonour and its woe.

Chorus, 1st Strophe.

Never, oh never,
May Zeus, the All-giver,
Wrestle down from his throne
In that might of his own
To antagonise mine!
Nor let me delay
As I bend on my way
Toward the gods of the shrine,

Where the altar is full
Of the blood of the bull,
Near the tossing brine
Of Ocean my father.
May no sin be sped in the word that is said,
But my vow be rather
Consummated,
Nor evermore fail, nor evermore pine.

1st Antistrophe.

'Tis sweet to have
Life lengthened out
With hopes proved brave
By the very doubt,
Till the spirit enfold
Those manifest joys which were foretold.
But I thrill to behold
Thee, victim doomed,
By the countless cares
And the drear despairs
For ever consumed,—
And all because thou, who art fearless now
Of Zeus above,
Didst overflow, for mankind below,
With a free-souled, reverent love.

Ah friend, behold and see!
What's all the beauty of humanity?
Can it be fair?
What's all the strength?—is it strong?
And what hope can they bear,
These dying livers—living one day long?
Ah, seest thou not, my friend,
How feeble and slow
And like a dream, doth go

This poor blind manhood, drifted from its end?
And how no mortal wranglings can confuse
The harmony of Zeus?

Prometheus, I have learnt these things
From the sorrow in thy face!
Another song did fold its wings
Upon my lips in other days,—
When round the bath and round the bed
The hymeneal chant instead
I sang for thee, and smiled,—
And thou didst lead, with gifts and vows
Hesione, my father's child,
To be thy wedded spouse.

Io *enters.*

Io. What land is this? what people is here?
And who is he that writhes, I see,
In the rock-hung chain?
Now what is the crime that hath brought thee to pain?
Now what is the land—make answer free—
Which I wander through, in my wrong and fear?
Ah! ah! ah me!
The gad-fly stingeth to agony!
O Earth, keep off that phantasm pale
Of earth-born Argus!—ah!—I quail
When my soul descries
That herdsman with the myriad eyes
Which seem, as he comes, one crafty eye.
Graves hide him not, though he should die,—
But he doggeth me in my misery
From the roots of death, on high—on high—
And along the sands of the siding deep,
All famine-worn, he follows me,

And his waxen reed doth undersound
The waters round,
And giveth a measure that giveth sleep.

Woe, woe, woe!
Where shall my weary course be done?
What wouldst thou with me, Saturn's son?
And in what have I sinned, that I should go
Thus yoked to grief by thine hand for ever!
Ah! ah! dost vex me so,
That I madden and shiver,
Stung through with dread?
Flash the fire down, to burn me!
Heave the earth up, to cover me!
Or plunge me in the deep, with the salt waves over me,
That the sea-beasts may be fed!
O king, do not spurn me
In my prayer!
For this wandering everlonger, evermore,
Hath overworn me,
And I know not on what shore
I may rest from my despair.

Chorus. Hearest thou what the ox-horned maiden saith?
Prometheus. How could I choose but hearken what she saith,
The phrensied maiden?—Inachus's child?—
Who love-warms Zeus's heart, and now is lashed
By Heré's hate along the unending ways?

Io. Who taught thee to articulate that name,—
My father's? Speak to his child
By grief and shame defiled!
Who art thou, victim, thou who dost acclaim
Mine anguish in true words on the wide air,

And callest too by name the curse that came
From Heré unaware,
To waste and pierce me with its maddening goad?
Ah– ah—I leap
With the pang of the hungry—I bound on the road—
I am driven by my doom—
I am overcome
By the wrath of an enemy strong and deep!
Are any of those who have tasted pain,
Alas! as wretched as I?
Now tell me plain, doth aught remain
For my soul to endure beneath the sky?
Is there any help to be holpen by?
If knowledge be in thee, let it be said!
Cry aloud—cry
To the wandering, woeful maid.

Prometheus. Whatever thou wouldst learn I will declare,—
No riddle upon my lips, but such straight words
As friends should use to each other when they talk.
Thou seest Prometheus, who gave mortals fire.
Io. O common Help of all men, known of all,
O miserable Prometheus,—for what cause
Dost thou endure thus?
Prometheus. I have done with wail
For my own griefs—but lately—
Io. Wilt thou not
Vouchsafe the boon to me?
Prometheus. Say what thou wilt,
For I vouchsafe all.
Io. Speak then, and reveal
Who shut thee in this chasm.
Prometheus. The will of Zeus,
The hand of his Hephæstus.
Io. And what crime

Dost expiate so?

Prometheus. Enough for thee I have told
In so much only.

Io. Nay, but show besides
The limit of my wandering, and the time
Which yet is lacking to fulfil my grief.

Prometheus. Why, not to know were better than to know
For such as thou.

Io. Beseech thee, blind me not
To that which I must suffer.

Prometheus. If I do,
The reason is not that I grudge a boon.

Io. What reason, then, prevents thy speaking out?

Prometheus. No grudging; but a fear to break thine heart.

Io. Less care for me, I pray thee. Certainty
I count for advantage.

Prometheus. Thou wilt have it so
And, therefore, I must speak. Now hear—

Chorus. Not yet!
Give half the guerdon my way. Let us learn
First, what the curse is that befell the maid,—
Her own voice telling her own wasting woes:
The sequence of that anguish shall await
The teaching of thy lips.

Prometheus. It doth behove
That thou, Maid Io, shouldst vouchsafe to these
The grace they pray,—the more, because they are called
Thy father's sisters: since to open out
And mourn out grief where it is possible
To draw a tear from the audience, is a work
That pays its own price well.

Io. I cannot choose
But trust you, nymphs, and tell you all ye ask,
In clear words—though I sob amid my speech
In speaking of the storm-curse sent from Zeus,

And of my beauty, from which height it took
Its swoop on me, poor wretch ! left thus deformed
And monstrous to your eyes. For evermore
Around my virgin-chamber, wandering went
The nightly visions which entreated me
With syllabled smooth sweetness.—"Blessed maid,
Why lengthen out thy maiden hours, when fate
Permits the noblest spousal in the world?
When Zeus burns with the arrow of thy love,
And fain would touch thy beauty?—Maiden, thou
Despise not Zeus ! depart to Lerne's mead
That's green around thy father's flocks and stalls,
Until the passion of the heavenly Eye
Be quenched in sight." Such dreams did, all night long,
Constrain me—me, unhappy !—till I dared
To tell my father how they trod the dark
With visionary steps. Whereat he sent
His frequent heralds to the Pythian fane,
And also to Dodona, and inquired
How best, by act or speech, to please the gods.
The same returning brought back oracles
Of doubtful sense, indefinite response,
Dark to interpret; but at last there came
To Inachus an answer that was clear,—
Thrown straight as any bolt, and spoken out—
This—"he should drive me from my home and land
And bid me wander to the extreme verge
Of all the earth—or, if he willed it not,
Should have a thunder, with a fiery eye,
Leap straight from Zeus, to burn up all his race,
To the last root of it." By which Loxian word
Subdued, he drove me forth and shut me out,
He loth, me loth,—but Zeus's violent bit
Compelled him to the deed: when instantly
My body and soul were changèd and distraught,

And, hornèd as ye see, and spurred along
By the fanged insect, with a maniac leap
I rushed on to Cerchnea's limpid stream
And Lerne's fountain-water. There, the earth-born,
The herdsman Argus, most immitigable
Of wrath, did find me out, and track me out
With countless eyes set staring at my steps:
And though an unexpected sudden doom
Drew him from life, I, curse-tormented still,
And driven from land to land before the scourge
The gods hold o'er me. So thou hast heard the past,
And if a bitter future thou canst tell,
Speak on. I charge thee, do not flatter me
Through pity, with false words; for, in my mind,
Deceiving works more shame than torturing doth.

Chorus.

Ah! silence here!
Nevermore, nevermore
Would I languish for
The stranger's word
To thrill in mine ear—
Nevermore for the wrong and the woe and the fear
So hard to behold,
So cruel to bear,
Piercing my soul with a double-edged sword
Of a sliding cold.
Ah Fate! ah me!
I shudder to see
This wandering maid in her agony.

Prometheus. Grief is too quick in thee, and fear too full:
Be patient till thou hast learnt the rest.
Chorus. Speak! teach—
To those who are sad already, it seems sweet,

By clear foreknowledge to make perfect, pain.

Prometheus. The boon ye asked me first was lightly won,—
For first ye asked the story of this maid's grief
As her own lips might tell it. Now remains
To list what other sorrows she so young
Must bear from Heré !—Inachus's child,
O thou !—drop down thy soul my weighty words,
And measure out the landmarks which are set
To end thy wandering ! Toward the orient sun
First turn thy face from mine and journey on
Along the desert flats till thou shalt come
Where Scythia's shepherd peoples dwell aloft,
Perched in wheeled waggons under woven roofs,
And twang the rapid arrow past the bow—
Approach them not ; but, siding in thy course,
The rugged shore-rocks resonant to the sea,
Depart that country. On the left hand dwell
The iron-workers, called the Chalybes,
Of whom beware ! for certes they are uncouth
And nowise bland to strangers. Reaching so
The stream Hybristes (well the *scorner* called),
Attempt no passage,—it is hard to pass,—
Or ere thou come to Caucasus itself,
That highest of mountains, where the river leaps
The precipice in his strength. Thou must toil up
Those mountain-tops that neighbour with the stars,
And tread the south way, and draw near, at last,
The Amazonian host that hateth man,
Inhabitants of Themiscyra, close
Upon Thermodon, where the sea's rough jaw
Doth gnash at Salmydessa and provide
A cruel host to seamen, and to ships
A stepdame. They with unreluctant hand
Shall lead thee on and on, till thou arrive
Just where the ocean-gates show narrowest

On the Cimmerian isthmus. Leaving which,
Behoves thee swim with fortitude of soul
The strait Mæotis. Ay, and evermore
That traverse shall be famous on men's lips,
That strait, called Bosphorus, the horned one's road,
So named because of thee, who so wilt pass
From Europe's plain to Asia's continent.
How think ye, nymphs? the king of gods appears
Impartial in ferocious deeds? Behold!
The god desirous of this mortal's love
Hath cursed her with these wanderings. Ah, fair child,
Thou hast met a bitter groom for bridal troth!
For all thou yet hast heard, can only prove
The incompleted prelude of thy doom.

Io. Ah, Ah!

Prometheus. Is't thy turn, now, to shriek and moan?
How wilt thou, when thou hast hearkened what remains?

Chorus. Besides the grief thou hast told, can aught remain?

Prometheus. A sea—of foredoomed evil worked to storm.

Io. What boots my life, then? why not cast myself
Down headlong from this miserable rock,
That, dashed against the flats, I may redeem
My soul from sorrow? Better once to die,
Than day by day to suffer.

Prometheus. Verily,
It would be hard for thee to bear my woe,
For whom it is appointed not to die.
Death frees from woe: but I before me see
In all my far prevision not a bound
To all I suffer, ere that Zeus shall fall
From being a king.

Io. And can it ever be
That Zeus shall fall from empire?

Prometheus. *Thou*, methinks,

Wouldst take some joy to see it.

Io. Could I choose?

I who endure such pangs now, by that god!

Prometheus. Learn from me, therefore, that the event shall be.

Io. By whom shall his imperial sceptred hand Be emptied so?

Prometheus. Himself shall spoil himself, Through his idiotic counsels.

Io. How? declare: Unless the word bring evil.

Prometheus. He shall wed; And in the marriage-bond be joined to grief.

Io. A heavenly bride—or human? Speak it out, If it be utterable.

Prometheus. Why should I say which? It ought not to be uttered, verily.

Io. Then, It is his wife shall tear him from his throne?

Prometheus. It is his wife shall bear a son to him, More mighty than the father.

Io. From this doom Hath he no refuge?

Prometheus. None—or ere that I, Loosed from these fetters—

Io. Yea—but who shall loose While Zeus is adverse?

Prometheus. One who is born of thee— It is ordained so.

Io. What is this thou sayest?— A son of mine shall liberate thee from woe?

Prometheus. After ten generations, count three more, And find him in the third.

Io. The oracle Remains obscure.

Prometheus. And search it not, to learn
Thine own griefs from it.
Io. Point me not to a good,
To leave me straight bereaved.
Prometheus. I am prepared
To grant thee one of two things.
Io. But which two?
Set them before me; grant me power to choose.
Prometheus. I grant it; choose now: shall I name aloud
What griefs remain to wound thee, or what hand
Shall save me out of mine?
Chorus. Vouchsafe, O god,
The one grace of the twain to her who prays;
The next to me; and turn back neither prayer
Dishonour'd by denial. To herself
Recount the future wandering of her feet;
Then point me to the looser of thy chain,
Because I yearn to know him.
Prometheus. Since ye will,
Of absolute will, this knowledge, I will set
No contrary against it, nor keep back
A word of all ye ask for. Io, first
To thee I must relate thy wandering course
Far winding. As I tell it, write it down
In thy soul's book of memories. When thou hast past
The refluent bound that parts two continents,
Track on the footsteps of the orient sun
In his own fire, across the roar of seas,—
Fly till thou hast reached the Gorgonæan flats
Beside Cisthene. There, the Phorcides,
Three ancient maidens, live, with shape of swan,
One tooth between them, and one common eye,
On whom the sun doth never look at all
With all his rays, nor evermore the moon
When she looks through the night. Anear to whom

Are the Gorgon sisters three, enclothed with wings,
With twisted snakes for ringlets, man-abhorred:
There is no mortal gazes in their face
And gazing can breathe on. I speak of such
To guard thee from their horror. Ay, and list
Another tale of a dreadful sight; beware
The Griffins, those unbarking dogs of Zeus,
Those sharp-mouthed dogs!—and the Arimaspian host
Of one-eyed horsemen, habiting beside
The river of Pluto that runs bright with gold:
Approach them not, beseech thee. Presently
Thou'lt come to a distant land, a dusky tribe
Of dwellers at the fountain of the Sun,
Whence flows the river Æthiops; wind along
Its banks and turn off at the cataracts,
Just as the Nile pours from the Bybline hills
His holy and sweet wave; his course shall guide
Thine own to that triangular Nile-ground
Where, Io, is ordained for thee and thine
A lengthened exile. Have I said, in this,
Aught darkly or incompletely?—now repeat
The question, make the knowledge fuller! Lo,
I have more leisure than I covet, here.

Chorus. If thou canst tell us aught that's left untold,
Or loosely told, of her most dreary flight,
Declare it straight! but if thou hast uttered all,
Grant us that latter grace for which we prayed,
Remembering how we prayed it.

Prometheus. She has heard
The uttermost of her wandering. There it ends.
But that she may be certain not to have heard
All vainly, I will speak what she endured
Ere coming hither, and invoke the past
To prove my prescience true. And so—to leave
A multitude of words and pass at once

To the subject of thy course—when thou hadst gone
To those Molossian plains which sweep around
Dodona shouldering Heaven, whereby the fane
Of Zeus Thesprotian keepeth oracle,—
And, wonder past belief, where oaks do wave
Articulate adjurations—(ay, the same
Saluted thee in no perplexèd phrase
But clear with glory, noble wife of Zeus
That shouldst be,—there some sweetness took thy sense !)
Thou didst rush further onward, stung along
The ocean-shore, toward Rhea's mighty bay,—
And, tost back from it, wast tost to it again
In stormy evolution !—and, know well,
In coming time that hollow of the sea
Shall bear the name Ionian and present
A monument of Io's passage through,
Unto all mortals. Be these words the signs
Of my soul's power to look beyond the veil
Of visible things. The rest, to you and her,
I will declare in common audience, nymphs,
Returning thither where my speech brake off.
There is a town Canobus, built upon
The earth's fair margin at the mouth of Nile
And on the mound washed up by it ; Io, there
Shall Zeus give back to thee thy perfect mind,
And only by the pressure and the touch
Of a hand not terrible ; and thou to Zeus
Shalt bear a dusky son who shall be called
Thence, Epaphus, *Touched*. That son shall pluck the fruit
Of all that land wide-watered by the flow
Of Nile ; but after him, when counting out
As far as the fifth full generation, then
Full fifty maidens, a fair woman-race,
Shall back to Argos turn reluctantly,
To fly the proffered nuptials of their kin,

Their father's brothers. These being passion-struck,
Like falcons bearing hard on flying doves,
Shall follow, hunting at a quarry of love
They should not hunt; till envious Heaven maintain
A curse betwixt that beauty and their desire,
And Greece receive them, to be overcome
In murtherous woman-war, by fierce red hands
Kept savage by the night. For every wife
Shall slay a husband, dyeing deep in blood
The sword of a double edge—(I wish indeed
As fair a marriage-joy to all my foes!)
One bride alone shall fail to smite to death
The head upon her pillow, touched with love,
Made impotent of purpose and impelled
To choose the lesser evil,—shame on her cheeks,
Than blood-guilt on her hands: which bride shall bear
A royal race in Argos. Tedious speech
Were needed to relate particulars
Of these things—'tis enough that from her seed
Shall spring the strong He, famous with the bow,
Whose arm shall break my fetters off. Behold,
My mother Themis, that old Titaness,
Delivered to me such an oracle,—
But how and when, I should be long to speak,
And thou, in hearing, wouldst not gain at all.

Io. Eleleu, eleleu!
How the spasm and the pain,
And the fire on the brain,
Strike, burning me through.
How the sting of the curse, all aflame as it flew,
Pricks me onward again!
How my heart, in its terror, is spurning my breast,
And my eyes, like the wheels of a chariot, roll round!
I am whirled from my course, to the east, to the west,

In the whirlwind of phrensy all madly inwound—
And my mouth is unbridled for anguish and hate,
And my words beat in vain, in wild storms of unrest,
On the sea of my desolate fate.

[Io *rushes out.*

Chorus,—Strophe.

Oh, wise was he, oh, wise was he
Who first within his spirit knew,
And with his tongue declared it true,
That love comes best that comes unto
The equal of degree!
And that the poor and that the low
Should seek no love from those above,
Whose souls are fluttered with the flow
Of airs about their golden height,
Or proud because they see arow
Ancestral crowns of light.

Antistrophe.

Oh, never, never may ye, Fates,
Behold me with your awful eyes
Lift mine too fondly up the skies
Where Zeus upon the purple waits!
Nor let me step too near—too near
To any suitor, bright from heaven:
Because I see, because I fear
This loveless maiden vexed and laden
By this fell curse of Heré, driven
On wanderings dread and drear.

Epode.

Nay, grant an equal troth instead
Of nuptial love, to bind me by!

It will not hurt—I shall not dread
To meet it in reply.
But let not love from those above
Revert and fix me, as I said,
With that inevitable Eye!
I have no sword to fight that fight,
I have no strength to tread that path,
I know not if my nature hath
The power to bear,—I cannot see
Whither, from Zeus's infinite,
I have the power to flee.

Prometheus. Yet Zeus, albeit most absolute of will
Shall turn to meekness,—such a marriage-rite
He holds in preparation, which anon
Shall thrust him headlong from his gerent seat
Adown the abysmal void, and so the curse
His father Chronos muttered in his fall,
As he fell from his ancient throne and cursed,
Shall be accomplished wholly. No escape
From all that ruin shall the filial Zeus
Find granted to him from any of his gods,
Unless I teach him. I the refuge know,
And I, the means. Now, therefore, let him sit
And brave the imminent doom, and fix his faith
On his supernal noises, hurtling on
With restless hand the bolt that breathes out fire;
For these things shall not help him, none of them,
Nor hinder his perdition when he falls
To shame, and lower than patience: such a foe
He doth himself prepare against himself,
A wonder of unconquerable hate,
An organiser of sublimer fire
Than glares in lightnings, and of grander sound
Than aught the thunder rolls, out-thundering it,
With power to shatter in Poseidon's fist

The trident-spear which, while it plagues the sea,
Doth shake the shores around it. Ay, and Zeus,
Precipitated thus, shall learn at length
The difference betwixt rule and servitude.

Chorus. Thou makest threats for Zeus of thy desires.

Prometheus. I tell you, all these things shall be fulfilled
Even so as I desire them.

Chorus. Must we then
Look out for one shall come to master Zeus?

Prometheus. These chains weigh lighter than his sorrows shall.

Chorus. How art thou not afraid to utter such words?

Prometheus. What should *I* fear, who cannot die?

Chorus. But *he*
Can visit thee with dreader woe than death's.

Prometheus. Why, let him do it! I am here, prepared
For all things and their pangs.

Chorus. The wise are they
Who reverence Adrasteia.

Prometheus. Reverence thou,
Adore thou, flatter thou, whomever reigns,
Whenever reigning! but for me, your Zeus
Is less than nothing. Let him act and reign
His brief hour out according to his will—
He will not, therefore, rule the gods too long.
But lo! I see that courier-god of Zeus,
That new-made menial of the new-crowned king;
He doubtless comes to announce to us something new.

HERMES *enters.*

Hermes. I speak to thee, the sophist, the talker down
Of scorn by scorn, the sinner against gods,
The reverencer of men, the thief of fire,—
I speak to thee and adjure thee! Zeus requires

Thy declaration of what marriage-rite
Thus moves thy vaunt and shall hereafter cause
His fall from empire. Do not wrap thy speech
In riddles, but speak clearly! Never cast
Ambiguous paths, Prometheus, for my feet,
Since Zeus, thou may'st perceive, is scarcely won
To mercy by such means.

Prometheus. A speech well-mouthed
In the utterance, and full-minded in the sense,
As doth befit a servant of the gods!
New gods, ye newly reign, and think forsooth
Ye dwell in towers too high for any dart
To carry a wound there!—have I not stood by
While two kings fell from thence? and shall I not
Behold the third, the same who rules you now,
Fall, shamed to sudden ruin?—Do I seem
To tremble and quail before your modern gods?
Far be it from me!—For thyself, depart,
Re-tread thy steps in haste. To all thou hast asked
I answer nothing.

Hermes. Such a wind of pride
Impelled thee of yore full sail upon these rocks.

Prometheus. I would not barter—learn thou soothly that!—
My suffering for thy service. I maintain
It is a nobler thing to serve these rocks
Than live a faithful slave to father Zeus.
Thus upon scorners I retort their scorn.

Hermes. It seems that thou dost glory in thy despair.

Prometheus. I glory? would my foes did glory so,
And I stood by to see them!—naming whom,
Thou art not unremembered.

Hermes. Dost thou charge
Me also with the blame of thy mischance?

Prometheus. I tell thee I loathe the universal gods,
Who for the good I gave them rendered back

The ill of their injustice.

Hermes. Thou art mad—
Thou art raving, Titan, at the fever-height.

Prometheus. If it be madness to abhor my foes,
May I be mad!

Hermes. If thou wert prosperous
Thou wouldst be unendurable.

Prometheus. Alas!

Hermes. Zeus knows not that word.

Prometheus. But maturing Time
Teaches all things.

Hermes. Howbeit, thou hast not learnt
The wisdom yet, thou needest.

Prometheus. If I had,
I should not talk thus with a slave like thee.

Hermes. No answer thou vouchsafest, I believe,
To the great Sire's requirement.

Prometheus. Verily
I owe him grateful service,—and should pay it.

Hermes. Why, thou dost mock me, Titan, as I stood
A child before thy face.

Prometheus. No child, forsooth,
But yet more foolish than a foolish child,
If thou expect that I should answer aught
Thy Zeus can ask. No torture from his hand
Nor any machination in the world
Shall force mine utterance ere he loose, himself,
These cankerous fetters from me. For the rest,
Let him now hurl his blanching lightnings down,
And with his white-winged snows and mutterings deep
Of subterranean thunders mix all things,
Confound them in disorder. None of this
Shall bend my sturdy will and make me speak
The name of his dethroner who shall come.

Hermes. Can this avail thee? Look to it!

Prometheus. Long ago
It was looked forward to, precounselled of.
Hermes. Vain god, take righteous courage! dare for
once
To apprehend and front thine agonies
With a just prudence.
Prometheus. Vainly dost thou chafe
My soul with exhortation, as yonder sea
Goes beating on the rock. Oh, think no more
That I, fear-struck by Zeus to a woman's mind,
Will supplicate him, loathèd as he is,
With feminine upliftings of my hands,
To break these chains. Far from me be the thought!
Hermes. I have indeed, methinks, said much in vain,
For still thy heart, beneath my showers of prayers,
Lies dry and hard—nay, leaps like a young horse
Who bites against the new bit in his teeth,
And tugs and struggles against the new-tried rein,—
Still fiercest in the feeblest thing of all,
Which sophism is; since absolute will disjoined
From perfect mind is worse than weak. Behold,
Unless my words persuade thee, what a blast
And whirlwind of inevitable woe
Must sweep persuasion through thee! For at first
The Father will split up this jut of rock
With the great thunder and the bolted flame,
And hide thy body where a hinge of stone
Shall catch it like an arm; and when thou hast passed
A long black time within, thou shalt come out
To front the sun while Zeus's winged hound,
The strong carnivorous eagle, shall wheel down
To meet thee, self-called to a daily feast,
And set his fierce beak in thee and tear off
The long rags of thy flesh and batten deep
Upon thy dusky liver. Do not look

For any end, moreover, to this curse,
Or ere some god appear, to accept thy pangs
On his own head vicarious, and descend
With unreluctant step the darks of hell
And gloomy abysses around Tartarus.
Then ponder this—this threat is not a growth
Of vain invention ; it is spoken and meant ;
King Zeus's mouth is impotent to lie,
Consummating the utterance by the act ;
So, look to it, thou ! take heed, and nevermore
Forget good counsel, to indulge self-will !

Chorus. Our Hermes suits his reasons to the times ;
At least I think so, since he bids thee drop
Self-will for prudent counsel. Yield to him !
When the wise err, their wisdom makes their shame.

Prometheus. Unto me the foreknower, this mandate of power,
He cries, to reveal it.
What's strange in my fate, if I suffer from hate
At the hour that I feel it?
Let the locks of the lightning, all bristling and whitening,
Flash, coiling me round,
While the æther goes surging 'neath thunder and scourging
Of wild winds unbound !
Let the blast of the firmament whirl from its place
The earth rooted below,—
And the brine of the ocean, in rapid emotion,
Be driven in the face
Of the stars up in heaven, as they walk to and fro !
Let him hurl me anon into Tartarus—on—
To the blackest degree,
With Necessity's vortices strangling me down ;
But he cannot join death to a fate meant for *me!*

Hermes. Why, the words that he speaks and the thoughts that he thinks

Are maniacal!—add,
If the Fate who hath bound him should loose not the links,
He were utterly mad.
Then depart ye who groan with him,
Leaving to moan with him,—
Go in haste! lest the roar of the thunder anearing.
Should blast you to idiocy, living and hearing.

Chorus. Change thy speech for another, thy thought for a new,
If to move me and teach me indeed be thy care!
For thy words swerve so far from the loyal and true,
That the thunder of Zeus seems more easy to bear.
How! couldst teach me to venture such vileness? behold!
I *choose*, with this victim, this anguish foretold!
I recoil from the traitor in hate and disdain,
And I know that the curse of the treason is worse
Than the pang of the chain.

Hermes. Then remember, O nymphs, what I tell you before,
Nor, when pierced by the arrows that Até will throw you,
Cast blame on your fate and declare evermore
That Zeus thrust you on anguish he did not foreshow you.
Nay, verily, nay! for ye perish anon
For your deed—by your choice. By no blindness of doubt
No abruptness of doom, but by madness alone,
In the great net of Até, whence none cometh out,
Ye are wound and undone.

Prometheus. Ay! in act now, in word now no more,
Earth is rocking in space.
And the thunders crash up with a roar upon roar,
And the eddying lightnings flash fire in my face,
And the whirlwinds are whirling the dust round and round,
And the blasts of the winds universal leap free
And blow each upon each with a passion of sound,

And æther goes mingling in storm with the sea.
Such a curse on my head, in a manifest dread,
From the hand of your Zeus has been hurtled along.
O my mother's fair glory! O Æther, enringing
All eyes with the sweet common light of thy bringing!
Dost see how I suffer this wrong?

A LAMENT FOR ADONIS.

FROM THE GREEK OF BION.

I.

I MOURN for Adonis—Adonis is dead,
Fair Adonis is dead and the Loves are lamenting.
Sleep, Cypris, no more on thy purple-strewed bed:
Arise, wretch stoled in black; beat thy breast unrelenting,
And shriek to the worlds, "Fair Adonis is dead."

II.

I mourn for Adonis—the Loves are lamenting.
He lies on the hills in his beauty and death;
The white tusk of a boar has transpierced his white thigh.
Cytherea grows mad at his thin gasping breath,
While the black blood drips down on the pale ivory,
And his eyeballs lie quenched with the weight of his brows,
The rose fades from his lips, and upon them just parted
The kiss dies the goddess consents not to lose,
Though the kiss of the Dead cannot make her glad-hearted:
He knows not who kisses him dead in the dews.

III.

I mourn for Adonis—the Loves are lamenting.
Deep, deep in the thigh is Adonis's wound,

But a deeper, is Cypris's bosom presenting.
The youth lieth dead while his dogs howl around,
And the nymphs weep aloud from the mists of the hill,
And the poor Aphrodité, with tresses unbound,
All dishevelled, unsandalled, shrieks mournful and shrill
Through the dusk of the groves. The thorns, tearing her feet,
Gather up the red flower of her blood, which is holy,
Each footstep she takes; and the valleys repeat
The sharp cry she utters, and draw it out slowly.
She calls on her spouse, her Assyrian; on him
Her own youth, while the dark blood spreads over his body,
The chest taking hue from the gash in the limb,
And the bosom, once ivory, turning to ruddy.

IV.

Ah, ah, Cytherea! the Loves are lamenting.
She lost her fair spouse and so lost her fair smile:
When he lived she was fair, by the whole world's consenting,
Whose fairness is dead with him: woe worth the while!
All the mountains above and the oaklands below
Murmur, ah, ah Adonis! the streams overflow
Aphrodité's deep wail; river-fountains in pity
Weep soft in the hills; and the flowers, as they blow,
Redden outward with sorrow, while all hear her go
With the song of her sadness through mountain and city.

V.

Ah, ah, Cytherea! Adonis is dead,
Fair Adonis is dead—Echo answers, Adonis!
Who weeps not for Cypris, when bowing her head,
She stares at the wound where it gapes and astonies?

—When, ah, ah!—she saw how the blood ran away
And empurpled the thigh, and, with wild hands flung out,
Said with sobs, "Stay, Adonis! unhappy one, stay,
Let me feel thee once more, let me ring thee about
With the clasp of my arms, and press kiss into kiss!
Wait a little, Adonis, and kiss me again,
For the last time, beloved,—and but so much of this,
That the kiss may learn life from the warmth of the strain!
—Till thy breath shall exude from thy soul to my mouth,
To my heart, and, the love-charm I once more receiving,
May drink thy love in it and keep, of a truth,
That one kiss in the place of Adonis the living.
Thou fliest me, mournful one, fliest me far,
My Adonis, and seekest the Acheron portal,—
To Hell's cruel King goest down with a scar,
While I weep and live on like a wretched immortal,
And follow no step! O Persephoné, take him,
My husband!—thou'rt better and brighter than I,
So all beauty flows down to thee: *I* cannot make him
Look up at my grief; there's despair in my cry,
Since I wail for Adonis who died to me—died to me—
Then, I fear *thee!*—Art thou dead, my Adored?
Passion ends like a dream in the sleep that's denied to me,—
Cypris is widowed, the Loves seek their lord
All the house through in vain. Charm of cestus has ceased
With thy clasp! O too bold in the hunt past preventing,
Ay, mad, thou so fair, to have strife with a beast!"
Thus the goddess wailed on — and the Loves are lamenting.

VI.

Ah, ah, Cytherea! Adonis is dead.
She wept tear after tear with the blood which was shed,

And both turned into flowers for the earth's garden-close,
Her tears, to the wind-flower; his blood, to the rose.

VII.

I mourn for Adonis—Adonis is dead.
Weep no more in the woods, Cytherea, thy lover!
So, well: make a place for his corse in thy bed,
With the purples thou sleepest in, under and over.
He's fair though a corse—a fair corse, like a sleeper.
Lay him soft in the silks he had pleasure to fold
When, beside thee at night, holy dreams deep and deeper
Enclosed his young life on the couch made of gold.
Love him still, poor Adonis; cast on him together
The crowns and the flowers: since he died from the place,
Why, let all die with him; let the blossoms go wither;
Rain myrtles and olive-buds down on his face.
Rain the myrrh down, let all that is best fall a-pining,
Since the myrrh of his life from thy keeping is swept.
Pale he lay, thine Adonis, in purples reclining;
The Loves raised their voices around him and wept.
They have shorn their bright curls off to cast on Adonis;
One treads on his bow,—on his arrows, another,—
One breaks up a well-feathered quiver, and one is
Bent low at a sandal, untying the strings,
And one carries the vases of gold from the springs,
While one washes the wound,—and behind them a brother
Fans down on the body sweet air with his wings.

VIII.

Cytherea herself, now, the Loves are lamenting.
Each torch at the door Hymenæus blew out;
And, the marriage-wreath dropping its leaves as repenting,
No more "Hymen, Hymen," is chanted about.
But the *ai ai* instead—"ai alas" is begun
For Adonis, and then follows "ai Hymenæus!"

The Graces are weeping for Cinyris' son,
Sobbing low each to each, "His fair eyes cannot see us!"
Their wail strikes more shrill than the sadder Dioné's.
The Fates mourn aloud for Adonis, Adonis,
Deep chanting; he hears not a word that they say:
He *would* hear, but Persephoné has him in keeping.
—Cease moan, Cytherea: leave pomps for to-day,
And weep new when a new year refits thee for weeping.

A VISION OF POETS.

A POET could not sleep aright,
For his soul kept up too much light
Under his eyelids for the night.

And thus he rose disquieted,
With sweet rhymes ringing through his head,
And in the forest wanderèd;

Where, sloping up the darkest glades,
The moon had drawn long colonnades
Upon whose floor the verdure fades

To a faint silver: pavement fair,
The antique wood-nymphs scarce would dare
To footprint o'er, had such been there,

And rather sit by breathlessly,
With fear in her large eyes, to see
The consecrated sight. But HE—

The poet who, with spirit-kiss
Familiar, had long claimed for his
Whatever earthly beauty is,

Who also in his spirit bore
A beauty passing the earth's store,
Walked calmly onward evermore.

His aimless thoughts in metre went,
Like a babe's hand, without intent,
Drawn down a seven-stringed instrument:

Nor jarred it with his humour, as,
With a faint stirring of the grass,
An apparition fair did pass.

He might have feared another time,
But all things fair and strange did chime
With his thoughts then, as rhyme to rhyme.

An angel had not startled him,
Alighted from Heaven's burning rim
To breathe from glory in the Dim—

Much less a lady riding slow
Upon a palfrey white as snow,
And smooth as a snow-cloud could go.

Full upon his she turned her face,—
"What ho, Sir Poet! dost thou pace
Our woods at night, in ghostly chase

"Of some fair Dryad of old tales,
Who chants between the nightingales,
And over sleep by song prevails?"

She smiled; but he could see arise
Her soul from far adown her eyes,
Prepared as if for sacrifice.

She looked a queen who seemeth gay
From royal grace alone. "Now, nay,"
He answered, "slumber passed away

"Compelled by instincts in my head
That I should see to-night, instead
Of a fair nymph, some fairer Dread."

She looked up quickly to the sky,
And spake: "The moon's regality
Will hear no praise; She is as I.

"She is in heaven, and I on earth;
This is my kingdom: I come forth
To crown all poets to their worth."

He brake in with a voice that mourned—
"To their worth, lady! They are scorned
By men they sing for, till inurned.

"To their worth! Beauty in the mind
Leaves the hearth cold, and love-refined
Ambitions make the world unkind.

"The boor who ploughs the daisy down,
The chief whose mortgage of renown,
Fixed upon graves, has bought a crown—

"Both these are happier, more approved
Than poets!—why should I be moved
In saying both are more beloved?"

"The south can judge not of the north,"
She resumed calmly; "I come forth
To crown all poets to their worth.

"Yea, verily, to anoint them all
With blessed oils which surely shall
Smell sweeter as the ages fall."

"As sweet," the poet said, and rung
A low sad laugh, "as flowers are, sprung
Out of their graves when they die young;

"As sweet as window-eglantine,
Some bough of which, as they decline,
The hired nurse gathers at their sign:

"As sweet, in short, as perfumed shroud
Which the gay Roman maidens sewed
For English Keats, singing aloud."

The lady answered, "Yea, as sweet!
The things thou namest being complete
In fragrance, as I measure it.

"Since sweet the death-clothes and the knell
Of him who, having lived, dies well;
And holy sweet the asphodel,

"Stirred softly by that foot of his,
When he treads brave on all that is
Into the world of souls, from this.

"Since sweet the tears, dropped at the door
Of tearless Death,—and even before:
Sweet, consecrated evermore.

"What! dost thou judge it a strange thing
That poets, crowned for vanquishing,
Should bear some dust from out the ring?

"Come on with me, come on with me,
And learn in coming: let me free
Thy spirit into verity."

She ceased : her palfrey's paces sent
No separate noises as she went ;
'Twas a bee's hum, a little spent.

And while the poet seemed to tread
Along the drowsy noise so made,
The forest heaved up overhead

Its billowy foliage through the air,
And the calm stars did far and fair
O'erswim the masses everywhere :

Save when the overtopping pines
Did bar their tremulous light with lines
All fixed and black. Now the moon shines

A broader glory. You may see
The trees grow rarer presently ;
The air blows up more fresh and free :

Until they come from dark to light,
And from the forest to the sight
Of the large Heaven-heart, bare with night,—

A fiery throb in every star,
Those burning arteries that are
The conduits of God's life afar.

A wild brown moorland underneath,
And four pools breaking up the heath
With white low gleamings, blank as death.

Beside the first pool, near the wood,
A dead tree in set horror stood,
Peeled and disjointed, stark as rood ;

Since thunder-stricken, years ago,
Fixed in the spectral strain and throe
Wherewith it struggled from the blow :

A monumental tree, alone,
That will not bend in storms, nor groan,
But break off sudden like a stone.

Its lifeless shadow lies oblique
Upon the pool,—where, javelin-like,
The star-rays quiver while they strike.

" Drink," said the lady, very still—
" Be holy and cold." He did her will
And drank the starry water chill.

The next pool they came near unto
Was bare of trees ; there, only grew
Straight flags, and lilies just a few

Which sullen on the water sate,
And leant their faces on the flat,
As weary of the starlight-state.

" Drink," said the lady, grave and slow—
" *World's use* behoveth thee to know."
He drank the bitter wave below.

The third pool, girt with thorny bushes,
And flaunting weeds and reeds and rushes
That winds sang through in mournful gushes,

Was whitely smeared in many a round
By a slow slime ; the starlight swound
Over the ghastly light it found.

"Drink," said the lady, sad and slow—
"*World's love* behoveth thee to know."
He looked to her, commanding so;

Her brow was troubled but her eye
Struck clear to his soul. For all reply
He drank the water suddenly,—

Then, with a deathly sickness, passed
Beside the fourth pool and the last,
Where weights of shadow were downcast

From yew and alder and rank trails
Of nightshade clasping the trunk-scales
And flung across the intervals

From yew to yew: who dares to stoop
Where those dank branches overdroop,
Into his heart the chill strikes up;

He hears a silent, gliding coil—
The snakes strain hard against the soil,
His foot slips in their slimy oil,

And toads seem crawling on his hand,
And clinging bats, but dimly scanned,
Full in his face their wings expand.

A paleness took the poet's cheek:
"Must I drink *here?*" he seemed to seek
The lady's will, with utterance meek:

"Ay, ay," she said, "it so must be—"
(And this time she spake cheerfully)—
"Behoves thee know *World's cruelty.*"

He bowed his forehead till his mouth
Curved in the wave, and drank unloth
As if from rivers of the south;

His lips sobbed through the water rank,
His heart paused in him while he drank,
His brain beat heart-like, rose and sank,

And he swooned backward to a dream
Wherein he lay 'twixt gloom and gleam,
With Death and Life at each extreme:

And spiritual thunders, born of soul
Not cloud, did leap from mystic pole
And o'er him roll and counter-roll,

Crushing their echoes reboant
With their own wheels. Did Heaven so grant
His spirit a sign of covenant?

At last came silence. A slow kiss
Did crown his forehead after this;
His eyelids flew back for the bliss—

The lady stood beside his head,
Smiling a thought, with hair dispread;
The moonshine seemed dishevellèd

In her sleek tresses manifold;
Like Danae's in the rain of old
That dripped with melancholy gold:

But SHE was holy, pale, and high
As one who saw an ecstasy
Beyond a foretold agony.

"Rise up!" said she with voice where song
Eddied through speech, "rise up; be strong:
And learn how right avenges wrong."

The poet rose up on his feet:
He stood before an altar set
For sacrament, with vessels meet,

And mystic altar-lights which shine
As if their flames were crystalline
Carved flames that would not shrink or pine.

The altar filled the central place
Of a great church, and toward its face
Long aisles did shoot and interlace

And from it a continuous mist
Of incense (round the edges kissed
By a yellow light of amethyst)

Wound upward slowly and throbbingly,
Cloud within cloud, right silverly,
Cloud above cloud, victoriously,—

Broke full against the archèd roof,
And, thence refracting, eddied off
And floated through the marble woof

Of many a fine-wrought architrave,—
Then, poising its white masses brave,
Swept solemnly down aisle and nave

Where now in dark, and now in light,
The countless columns, glimmering white,
Seemed leading out to the Infinite.

Plunged half-way up the shaft they showed,
In that pale shifting incense-cloud
Which flowed them by, and overflowed,

Till mist and marble seemed to blend,
And the whole temple, at the end,
With its own incense to distend,—

The arches like a giant's bow
To bend and slacken,—and below,
The nichèd saints to come and go:

Alone amid the shifting scene
That central altar stood serene
In its clear steadfast taper-sheen.

Then first, the poet was aware
Of a chief angel standing there
Before that altar, in the glare.

His eyes were dreadful, for you saw
That *they* saw God; his lips and jaw
Grand-made and strong, as Sinai's law

They could enunciate, and refrain
From vibratory after-pain,
And his brow's height was sovereign:

On the vast background of his wings
Rises his image; and he flings,
From each plumed arc, pale glitterings

And fiery flakes (as beateth more
Or less, the angel-heart) before,
And round him, upon roof and floor,

Edging with fire the shifting fumes:
While at his side, 'twixt lights and glooms,
The phantasm of an organ booms.

Extending from which instrument
And angel, right and left-way bent,
The poet's sight grew sentient

Of a strange company around
And toward the altar; pale and bound
With bay above the eyes profound.

Deathful their faces were, and yet
The power of life was in them set—
Never forgot, nor to forget:

Sublime significance of mouth,
Dilated nostril full of youth,
And forehead royal with the truth.

These faces were not multiplied
Beyond your count, but side by side
Did front the altar, glorified,

Still as a vision, yet exprest
Full as an action—look and geste
Of buried saint, in risen rest.

The poet knew them. Faint and dim
His spirits seemed to sink in him—
Then, like a dolphin, change and swim

The current—these were poets true,
Who died for Beauty as martyrs do
For Truth—the ends being scarcely two.

God's prophets of the Beautiful
These poets were ; of iron rule,
The rugged cilix, serge of wool.

Here, Homer, with the broad suspense
Of thunderous brows, and lips intense
Of garrulous god-innocence.

There, Shakespeare, on whose forehead climb
The crowns o' the world : O eyes sublime—
With tears and laughters for all time!

Here, Æschylus, the women swooned
To see so awful, when he frowned
As the gods did : he standeth crowned.

Euripides, with close and mild
Scholastic lips,—that could be wild,
And laugh or sob out like a child

Even in the classes. Sophocles,
With that king's look which, down the trees,
Followed the dark effigies

Of the lost Theban. Hesiod old,
Who, somewhat blind and deaf and cold,
Cared most for gods and bulls. And bold

Electric Pindar, quick as fear,
With race-dust on his cheeks, and clear
Slant startled eyes that seem to hear

The chariot rounding the last goal,
To hurtle past it in his soul.
And Sappho, with that gloriole

Of ebon hair on calmèd brows—
O poet-woman! none forgoes
The leap, attaining the repose.

Theocritus, with glittering locks
Dropt sideway, as betwixt the rocks
He watched the visionary flocks.

And Aristophanes, who took
The world with mirth, and laughter-struck
The hollow caves of Thought, and woke

The infinite echoes hid in each.
And Virgil: shade of Mantuan beech
Did help the shade of bay to reach

And knit around his forehead high;
For his gods wore less majesty
Than his brown bees hummed deathlessly.

Lucretius—nobler than his mood,
Who dropped his plummet down the broad
Deep universe, and said, "No God—"

Finding no bottom: he denied
Divinely the divine, and died
Chief poet on the Tiber-side,

By grace of God! his face is stern
As one compelled, in spite of scorn,
To teach a truth he would not learn.

And Ossian, dimly seen or guessed;
Once counted greater than the rest,
When mountain-winds blew out his vest.

And Spenser drooped his dreaming head
(With languid sleep-smile, you had said,
From his own verse engenderèd)

On Ariosto's, till they ran
Their curls in one: the Italian
Shot nimbler heat of bolder man

From his fine lids. And Dante stern
And sweet, whose spirit was an urn
For wine and milk poured out in turn.

Hard-souled Alfieri; and fancy-willed
Boiardo, who with laughter filled
The pauses of the jostled shield.

And Berni, with a hand stretched out
To sleek that storm. And, not without
The wreath he died in and the doubt

He died by, Tasso; bard and lover,
Whose visions were too thin to cover
The face of a false woman over.

And soft Racine; and grave Corneille,
The orator of rhymes, whose wail
Scarce shook his purple. And Petrarch pale,

From whose brain-lighted heart were thrown
A thousand thoughts beneath the sun,
Each lucid with the name of One.

And Camoens, with that look he had,
Compelling India's Genius sad
From the wave through the Lusiad,—

The murmurs of the storm-cape ocean
Indrawn in vibrative emotion
Along the verse. And, while devotion

In his wild eyes fantastic shone
Under the tonsure blown upon
By airs celestial,—Calderon.

And bold De Vega,—who breathed quick
Verse after verse, till death's old trick
Put pause to life and rhetorick.

And Goethe—with that reaching eye
His soul reached out from, far and high,
And fell from inner entity.

And Schiller, with heroic front
Worthy of Plutarch's kiss upon 't,
Too large for wreath of modern wont.

And Chaucer, with his infantine
Familiar clasp of things divine—
That mark upon his lip is wine.

Here, Milton's eyes strike piercing-dim :
The shapes of suns and stars did swim
Like clouds from them, and granted him

God for sole vision. Cowley, there,
Whose active fancy debonaire
Drew straws like amber—foul to fair.

Drayton and Browne,—with smiles they drew
From outward Nature, still kept new
From their own inward nature true.

And Marlowe, Webster, Fletcher, Ben—
Whose fire-hearts sowed our furrows, when
The world was worthy of such men.

And Burns, with pungent passionings
Set in his eyes: deep lyric springs
Are of the fire-mount's issuings.

And Shelley, in his white ideal,
All statue-blind. And Keats the real
Adonis, with the hymeneal

Fresh vernal buds half sunk between
His youthful curls, kissed straight and sheen
In his Rome-grave, by Venus queen.

And poor, proud Byron,—sad as grave,
And salt as life; forlornly brave,
And quivering with the dart he drave.

And visionary Coleridge, who
Did sweep his thoughts as angels do
Their wings, with cadence up the Blue.

These poets faced (and many more)
The lighted altar looming o'er
The clouds of incense dim and hoar:

And all their faces, in the lull
Of natural things, looked wonderful
With life and death and deathless rule.

All, still as stone, and yet intense;
As if by spirit's vehemence
That stone were carved, and not by sense.

But where the heart of each should beat,
There seemed a wound instead of it,
From whence the blood dropped to their feet,

Drop after drop—dropped heavily,
As century follows century
Into the deep eternity.

Then said the lady—and her word
Came distant,—as wide waves were stirred
Between her and the ear that heard,—

"*World's use* is cold, *world's love* is vain,—
World's cruelty is bitter bane;
But pain is not the fruit of pain.

"Hearken, O poet, whom I led
From the dark wood: dismissing dread,
Now hear this angel in my stead.

"His organ's clavier strikes along
These poets' hearts, sonorous, strong,
They gave him without count of wrong,—

"A diapason whence to guide
Up to God's feet, from these who died,
An anthem fully glorified—

"Whereat God's blessing, IBARAK (יברך)
Breathes back this music—folds it back
About the earth in vapoury rack,

"And men walk in it, crying 'Lo!
'The world is wider, and we know
'The very heavens look brighter so:

"'The stars move statelier round the edge
'Of the silver spheres, and give in pledge
'Their light for nobler privilege :

"'No little flower but joys or grieves—
'Full life is rustling in the sheaves ;
'Full spirit sweeps the forest-leaves.'

"So works this music on the earth ;
God so admits it, sends it forth
To add another worth to worth—

"A new creation-bloom that rounds
The old creation and expounds
His Beautiful in tuneful sounds.

"Now hearken!" Then the poet gazed
Upon the angel glorious-faced,
Whose hand, majestically raised,

Floated across the organ-keys,
Like a pale moon o'er murmuring seas,
With no touch but with influences :

Then rose and fell (with swell and swound
Of shapeless noises wandering round
A concord which at last they found)

Those mystic keys—the tones were mixed,
Dim, faint, and thrilled and throbbed betwixt
The incomplete and the unfixed :

And therein mighty minds were heard
In mighty musings, inly stirred,
And struggling outward for a word :

Until these surges, having run
This way and that, gave out as one
An Aphrodité of sweet tune,—

A Harmony, that, finding vent,
Upward in grand ascension went,
Winged to a heavenly argument,

Up, upward! like a saint who strips
The shroud back from his eyes and lips,
And rises in apocalypse:

A harmony sublime and plain,
Which cleft (as flying swan, the rain,—
Throwing the drops off with a strain

Of her white wing) those undertones
Of perplext chords, and soared at once,
And struck out from the starry thrones

Their several silver octaves, as
It passed to God. The music was
Of divine stature—strong to pass:

And those who heard it, understood
Something of life in spirit and blood—
Something of Nature's fair and good:

And while it sounded, those great souls
Did thrill as racers at the goals
And burn in all their aureoles;

But she the lady, as vapour-bound,
Stood calmly in the joy of sound,—
Like Nature with the showers around:

And when it ceased, the blood which fell
Again, alone grew audible,
Tolling the silence as a bell.

The sovran angel lifted high
His hand, and spake out sovranly:
"Tried poets, hearken and reply!

"Give me true answers. If we grant
That not to suffer, is to want
The conscience of the jubilant,—

"If ignorance of anguish is
But ignorance; and mortals miss
Far prospects, by a level bliss,—

"If, as two colours must be viewed
In a visible image, mortals should
Need good and evil, to see good,—

"If to speak nobly, comprehends
To feel profoundly,—if the ends
Of power and suffering, Nature blends,—

"If poets on the tripod must
Writhe like the Pythian, to make just
Their oracles, and merit trust,—

"If every vatic word that sweeps
To change the world, must pale their lips,
And leave their own souls in eclipse,—

"If to search deep the universe
Must pierce the searcher with the curse,—
Because that bolt (in man's reverse)

"Was shot to the heart o' the wood and lies
Wedged deepest in the best,—if eyes
That look for visions and surprise

"From influent angels, must shut down
Their eyelids first to sun and moon,
The head asleep upon a stone,—

"If ONE who did redeem you back,
By His own loss, from final wrack,
Did consecrate by touch and track

"Those temporal sorrows till the taste
Of brackish waters of the waste
Is salt with tears He dropt too fast,—

"If all the crowns of earth must wound
With prickings of the thorns He found,—
If saddest sighs swell sweetest sound,—

"What say ye unto this?—refuse
This baptism in salt water?—choose
Calm breasts, mute lips, and labour loose?

"Or, O ye gifted givers! ye
Who give your liberal hearts to me,
To make the world this harmony,—

"Are ye resigned that they be spent
To such world's help?"
The Spirits bent
Their awful brows, and said—"Content!"

Content! it sounded like *Amen*,
Said by a choir of mourning men
An affirmation full of pain

And patience,—ay, of glorying
And adoration, as a king
Might seal an oath for governing.

Then said the angel—and his face
Lightened abroad until the place
Grew larger for a moment's space,—

The long aisles flashing out in light,
And nave and transept, columns white,
And arches crossed, being clear to sight

As if the roof were off, and all
Stood in the noon-sun,—"Lo! I call
To other hearts as liberal.

"This pedal strikes out in the air:
My instrument has room to bear
Still fuller strains and perfecter.

"Herein is room, and shall be room
While Time lasts, for new hearts to come
Consummating while they consume.

"What living man will bring a gift
Of his own heart, and help to lift
The tune?—The race is to the swift!"

So asked the angel. Straight the while,
A company came up the aisle
With measured step and sorted smile;

Cleaving the incense-clouds that rise,
With winking unaccustomed eyes,
And love-locks smelling sweet of spice.

One bore his head above the rest
As if the world were dispossessed,
And one did pillow chin on breast,

Right languid—an as he should faint;
One shook his curls across his paint,
And moralised on worldly taint;

One, slanting up his face, did wink
The salt rheum to the eyelid's brink,
To think—O gods! or—not to think!

Some trod out stealthily and slow,
As if the sun would fall in snow
If they walked to instead of fro;

And some, with conscious ambling free,
Did shake their bells right daintily
On hand and foot, for harmony;

And some, composing sudden sighs
In attitudes of point-device,
Rehearsed impromptu agonies.

And when this company drew near
The spirits crowned, it might appear
Submitted to a ghastly fear;

As a sane eye in master-passion
Constrains a maniac to the fashion
Of hideous maniac imitation

In the least geste—the dropping low
O' the lid, the wrinkling of the brow,
Exaggerate with mock and mow,—

So mastered was that company
By the crowned vision utterly,
Swayed to a maniac mockery.

One dulled his eyeballs, as they ached
With Homer's forehead, though he lacked
An inch of any; and one racked

His lower lip with restless tooth,
As Pindar's rushing words forsooth
Were pent behind it; one his smooth

Pink cheeks, did rumple passionate
Like Æschylus, and tried to prate
On trolling tongue of fate and fate;

One set her eyes like Sappho's—or
Any light woman's; one forbore
Like Dante, or any man as poor

In mirth, to let a smile undo
His hard-shut lips; and one that drew
Sour humours from his mother, blew

His sunken cheeks out to the size
Of most unnatural jollities,
Because Anacreon looked jest-wise;

So with the rest: it was a sight
A great world-laughter would requite,
Or great world-wrath, with equal right.

Out came a speaker from that crowd
To speak for all, in sleek and proud
Exordial periods, while he bowed

His knee before the angel—"Thus,
O angel who hast called for us,
We bring thee service emulous,

"Fit service from sufficient soul,
Hand-service to receive world's dole,
Lip-service in world's ear to roll

"Adjusted concords—soft enow
To hear the wine-cups passing, through
And not too grave to spoil the show:

"Thou, certes, when thou askest more,
O sapient angel, leanest o'er
The window-sill of metaphor.

"To give our hearts up? fie! that rage
Barbaric antedates the age!
It is not done on any stage.

"Because your scald or gleeman went
With seven or nine-stringed instrument
Upon his back,—must ours be bent?

"We are not pilgrims, by your leave;
No, nor yet martyrs; if we grieve,
It is to rhyme to—summer eve:

"And if we labour, it shall be
As suiteth best with our degree,
In after-dinner reverie."

More yet that speaker would have said,
Poising between his smiles fair-fed
Each separate phrase till finishèd;

But all the foreheads of those born
And dead true poets flashed with scorn
Betwixt the bay leaves round them worn—

Ay, jetted such brave fire that they,
The new-come, shrank and paled away
Like leaden ashes when the day

Strikes on the hearth. A spirit-blast,
A presence known by power, at last
Took them up mutely—they had passed.

And he, our pilgrim-poet, saw
Only their places, in deep awe,—
What time the angel's smile did draw

His gazing upward. Smiling on,
The angel in the angel shone,
Revealing glory in benison;

Till, ripened in the light which shut
The poet in, his spirit mute
Dropped sudden as a perfect fruit:

He fell before the angel's feet,
Saying, "If what is true is sweet,
In something I may compass it:

"For, where my worthiness is poor,
My will stands richly at the door
To pay shortcomings evermore.

"Accept me therefore: not for price,
And not for pride, my sacrifice
Is tendered, for my soul is nice,

"And will beat down those dusty seeds
Of bearded corn, if she succeeds
In soaring while the covey feeds.

"I soar, I am drawn up like the lark
To its white cloud: so high my mark,
Albeit my wing is small and dark.

"I ask no wages, seek no fame:
Sew me, for shroud round face and name,
God's banner of the oriflamme.

"I only would have leave to loose
(In tears and blood if so He choose)
Mine inward music out to use;

"I only would be spent—in pain
And loss, perchance—but not in vain—
Upon the sweetness of that strain;

"Only project, beyond the bound
Of mine own life, so lost and found,
My voice, and live on in its sound;

"Only embrace and be embraced
By fiery ends, whereby to waste,
And light God's future with my past."

The angel's smile grew more divine—
The mortal speaking; ay, its shine
Swelled fuller, like a choir-note fine,

Till the broad glory round his brow
Did vibrate with the light below;
But what he said, I do not know.

Nor know I if the man who prayed,
Rose up accepted, unforbade,
From the church-floor where he was laid;

Nor if a listening life did run
Through the king-poets, one by one
Rejoicing in a worthy son:

My soul, which might have seen, grew blind
By what it looked on: I can find
No certain count of things behind.

I saw alone, dim, white and grand
As in a dream, the angel's hand
Stretched forth in gesture of command,

Straight through the haze. And so, as erst,
A strain, more noble than the first,
Mused in the organ, and outburst:

With giant march from floor to roof
Rose the full notes, now parted off
In pauses massively aloof,

Like measured thunders, now rejoined
In concords of mysterious kind,
Which fused together sense and mind,

Now flashing sharp on sharp along,
Exultant, in a mounting throng,—
Now dying off to a low song

Fed upon minors,—wavelike sounds
Re-eddying into silver rounds,
Enlarging liberty with bounds:

And every rhythm that seemed to close,
Survived in confluent underflows,
Symphonious with the next that rose.

Thus the whole strain being multiplied
And greatened,—with its glorified
Wings shot abroad from side to side,—

Waved backward (as a wind might wave
A Brocken mist, and with as brave
Wild roaring) arch and architrave,

Aisle, transept, column, marble wall,—
Then swelling outward, prodigal
Of aspiration beyond thrall,

Soared,—and drew up with it the whole
Of this said vision, as a soul
Is raised by a thought. And as a scroll

Of bright devices is unrolled
Still upward with a gradual gold,—
So rose the vision manifold,

Angel and organ, and the round
Of spirits, solemnised and crowned;
While the freed clouds of incense wound

Ascending, following in their track,
And glimmering faintly like the rack
O' the moon in her own light cast back.

And as that solemn dream withdrew,
The lady's kiss did fall anew
Cold on the poet's brow as dew.

And that same kiss which bound him first
Beyond the senses, now reversed
Its own law and most subtly pierced

His spirit with the sense of things
Sensual and present. Vanishings
Of glory with Æolian wings

Struck him and passed : the lady's face
Did melt back in the chrysopras
Of the orient morning sky that was

Yet clear of lark,—and there and so
She melted as a star might do,
Still smiling as she melted—slow :

Smiling so slow, he seemed to see
Her smile the last thing, gloriously,
Beyond her, far as memory.

Then he looked round : he was alone.
He lay before the breaking sun,
As Jacob at the Bethel stone.

And thought's entangled skein being wound,
He knew the moorland of his swound,
And the pale pools that smeared the ground ;

The far wood-pines like offing ships ;
The fourth pool's yew anear him drips—
World's cruelty attaints his lips,

And still he tastes it, bitter still ;
Through all that glorious possible
He had the sight of present ill.

Yet rising calmly up and slowly,
With such a cheer as scorneth folly,
A mild delightsome melancholy,

He journeyed homeward through the wood
And prayed along the solitude,
Betwixt the pines,—"O God, my God!"

The golden morning's open flowings
Did sway the trees to murmurous bowings,—
In metric chant of blessed poems.

And passing homeward through the wood,
He prayed along the solitude,—
"THOU, Poet-God, art great and good!

"And though we must have, and have had
Right reason to be earthly sad,
THOU, Poet-God, art great and glad!"

CONCLUSION.

Life treads on life, and heart on heart;
We press too close in church and mart,
To keep a dream or grave apart:

And I was 'ware of walking down
That same green forest where had gone
The poet-pilgrim. One by one

I traced his footsteps. From the east
A red and tender radiance pressed
Through the near trees, until I guessed

The sun behind shone full and round;
While up the leafiness profound
A wind scarce old enough for sound

Stood ready to blow on me when
I turned that way, and now and then
The birds sang and brake off again

To shake their pretty feathers dry
Of the dew sliding droppingly
From the leaf-edges, and apply

Back to their song: 'twixt dew and bird
So sweet a silence ministered,
God seemed to use it for a word.

Yet morning souls did leap and run
In all things, as the least had won
A joyous insight of the sun,

And no one looking round the wood
Could help confessing, as he stood,
This Poet-God is glad and good!

But hark! a distant sound that grows,
A heaving, sinking of the boughs,
A rustling murmur, not of those!

A breezy noise, which is not breeze!
And white-clad children by degrees
Steal out in troops among the trees;

Fair little children, morning-bright,
With faces grave yet soft to sight,—
Expressive of restrained delight.

Some plucked the palm-boughs within reach,
And others leapt up high to catch
The upper boughs and shake from each

A rain of dew, till, wetted so,
The child who held the branch let go,
And it swang backward with a flow

Of faster drippings. Then I knew
The children laughed; but the laugh flew
From its own chirrup, as might do

A frightened song-bird; and a child
Who seemed the chief, said very mild,
"Hush! keep this morning undefiled."

His eyes rebuked them from calm spheres;
His soul upon his brow appears
In waiting for more holy years.

I called the child to me, and said,
"What are your palms for?" "To be spread,"
He answered, "on a poet dead.

"The poet died last month; and now
The world, which had been somewhat slow
In honouring his living brow,

"Commands the palms; they must be strown
On his new marble very soon,
In a procession of the town."

I sighed and said, "Did he foresee
Any such honour?" "Verily
I cannot tell you," answered he.

"But this I know,—I fain would lay
My own head down, another day,
As *he* did,—with the fame away.

"A lily, a friend's hand had plucked,
Lay by his death-bed, which he looked
As deep down as a bee had sucked;

"Then, turning to the lattice, gazed
O'er hill and river, and upraised
His eyes illumined and amazed

"With the world's beauty, up to God,
Re-offering on their iris broad
The images of things bestowed

"By the chief Poet.—'God!' he cried,
'Be praised for anguish, which has tried,
For beauty, which has satisfied:

"'For this world's presence, half within
And half without me—thought and scene—
This sense of Being and Having been.

"'I thank Thee that my soul hath room
For Thy grand world! Both guests may come—
Beauty, to soul—Body, to tomb.

"'I am content to be so weak:
Put strength into the words I speak,
And I am strong in what I seek.

"'I am content to be so bare
Before the archers, everywhere
My wounds being stroked by heavenly air.

"'I laid my soul before Thy feet,
That images of fair and sweet
Should walk to other men on it.

"'I am content to feel the step
Of each pure image: let those keep
To mandragore, who care to sleep.

"'I am content to touch the brink
Of the other goblet, and I think
My bitter drink a wholesome drink.

"'Because my portion was assigned
Wholesome and bitter—Thou art kind,
And I am blessed to my mind.

"'Gifted for giving, I receive
The maythorn, and its scent outgive:
I grieve not that I once did grieve.

"'In my large joy of sight and touch
Beyond what others count for such,
I am content to suffer much.

"'I *know*—is all the mourner saith,—
Knowledge by suffering entereth,
And Life is perfected by Death.'"

The child spake nobly: strange to hear,
His infantine soft accents clear
Charged with high meanings, did appear;

And fair to see, his form and face
Winged out with whiteness and pure grace
From the green darkness of the place.

Behind his head a palm-tree grew;
An orient beam which pierced it through
Transversely on his forehead drew

The figure of a palm-branch brown,
Traced on its brightness up and down
In fine fair lines,—a shadow-crown:

Guido might paint his angels so—
A little angel, taught to go
With holy words to saints below—

Such innocence of action yet
Significance of object met
In his whole bearing strong and sweet.

And all the children, the whole band,
Did round in rosy reverence stand,
Each with a palm-bough in his hand.

"And so he died," I whispered. "Nay,
Not *so*," the childish voice did say,—
"That poet turned him first to pray

"In silence, and God heard the rest,
'Twixt the sun's footsteps down the west.
Then he called one who loved him best,

"Yea, he called softly through the room
(His voice was weak yet tender)—'Come,'
He said, 'come nearer! Let the bloom

"'Of Life grow over, undenied,
This bridge of Death, which is not wide—
I shall be soon at the other side.

"'Come, kiss me!' So the one in truth
Who loved him best,—in love, not ruth,
Bowed down and kissed him mouth to mouth:

"And in that kiss of Love was won
Life's manumission. All was done:
The mouth that kissed last, kissed *alone*.

"But in the former, confluent kiss,
The same was sealed, I think by His,
To words of truth and uprightness."

The child's voice trembled—his lips shook,
Like a rose leaning o'er a brook,
Which vibrates though it is not struck.

"And who," I asked, a little moved
Yet curious-eyed, "was this that loved
And kissed him last, as it behoved?"

"*I*," softly said the child; and then,
"*I*," said he louder, once again;
"His son,—my rank is among men:

"And now that men exalt his name,
I come to gather palms with them.
That holy Love may hallow Fame.

"He did not die alone, nor should
His memory live so, 'mid these rude
World-praisers—a worse solitude.

"Me, a voice calleth to that tomb
Where these are strewing branch and bloom,
Saying, 'Come nearer:' and I come.

"Glory to God!" resumèd he,—
And his eyes smiled for victory
O'er their own tears, which I could see

Fallen on the palm, down cheek and chin—
"That poet now has entered in
The place of rest which is not sin.

"And while he rests, his songs, in troops,
Walk up and down our earthly slopes,
Companioned by diviner Hopes."

"But *thou*," I murmured,—to engage
The child's speech farther—"hast an age
Too tender for this orphanage."

"Glory to God—to God!" he saith—
"KNOWLEDGE BY SUFFERING ENTERETH,
AND LIFE IS PERFECTED BY DEATH."

A ROMANCE OF THE GANGES.

I.

SEVEN maidens 'neath the midnight
Stand near the river-sea,
Whose water sweepeth white around
The shadow of the tree;
The moon and earth are face to face,
And earth is slumbering deep;
The wave-voice seems the voice of dreams
That wander through her sleep:
The river floweth on.

II.

What bring they 'neath the midnight,
Beside the river-sea?
They bring the human heart wherein
No nightly calm can be,—

That droppeth never with the wind,
Nor drieth with the dew:
Oh, calm it, God! thy calm is broad
To cover spirits too.
The river floweth on.

III.

The maidens lean them over
The waters, side by side,
And shun each other's deepening eyes,
And gaze adown the tide;
For each within a little boat
A little lamp hath put,
And heaped for freight some lily's weight
Or scarlet rose half shut.
The river floweth on.

IV.

Of shell of cocoa carven,
Each little boat is made;
Each carries a lamp, and carries a flower,
And carries a hope unsaid;
And when the boat hath carried the lamp
Unquenched, till out of sight,
The maiden is sure that love will endure;
But love will fail with light.
The river floweth on.

V.

Why, all the stars are ready
To symbolise the soul,
The stars, untroubled by the wind,
Unwearied as they roll;
And yet the soul, by instinct sad,
Reverts to symbols low—

To that small flame, whose very name
Breathed o'er it, shakes it so!
The river floweth on.

VI.

Six boats are on the river,
Seven maidens on the shore,
While still above them steadfastly
The stars shine evermore.
Go, little boats, go soft and safe,
And guard the symbol spark!
The boats aright go safe and bright
Across the waters dark.
The river floweth on.

VII.

The maiden Luti watcheth
Where onwardly they float;
That look in her dilating eyes
Might seem to drive her boat:
Her eyes still mark the constant fire,
And kindling unawares
That hopeful while, she lets a smile
Creep silent through her prayers.
The river floweth on.

VIII.

The smile—where hath it wandered?
She riseth from her knee,
She holds her dark, wet locks away—
There is no light to see!
She cries a quick and bitter cry—
"Nuleeni, launch me thine!
We must have light abroad to-night,
For all the wreck of mine."
The river floweth on.

IX.

"I do remember watching
Beside this river-bed
When on my childish knee was leaned
My dying father's head;
I turned mine own to keep the tears
From falling on his face:
What doth it prove, when Death and Love
Choose out the self-same place?"
The river floweth on.

X.

"They say the dead are joyful,
The death-change here receiving:
Who say—ah, me! who dare to say
Where joy comes to the living?
Thy boat, Nuleeni! look not sad—
Light up the waters rather!
I weep no faithless lover where
I wept a loving father."
The river floweth on.

XI.

"My heart foretold his falsehood
Ere my little boat grew dim;
And though I closed mine eyes to dream
That one last dream of *him*,
They shall not now be wet to see
The shining vision go:
From earth's cold love, I look above
To the holy house of snow."[1]
The river floweth on.

[1] The Hindoo heaven is localised on the summit of Mount Meru—one of the mountains of Himalaya or Himmaleh, which signifies, I believe, in Sanscrit, the abode of snow, winter, or coldness.

XII.

"Come thou—thou never knewest
A grief, that thou shouldst fear one!
Thou wearest still the happy look
That shines beneath a dear one:
Thy humming-bird is in the sun,[1]
Thy cuckoo in the grove,
And all the three broad worlds, for thee
Are full of wandering love."
The river floweth on.

XIII.

"Why, maiden, dost thou loiter?
What secret wouldst thou cover?
That peepul cannot hide thy boat,
And I can guess thy lover;
I heard thee sob his name in sleep,
It was a name I knew:
Come, little maid, be not afraid,
But let us prove him true!"
The river floweth on.

XIV.

The little maiden cometh,
She cometh shy and slow;
I ween she seeth through her lids,
They drop adown so low:
Her tresses meet her small bare feet—
She stands and speaketh nought,
Yet blusheth red as if she said
The name she only thought.
The river floweth on.

[1] Himadeva, the Indian god of love, is imagined to wander through the three worlds, accompanied by the humming-bird, cuckoo, and gentle breezes.