

THE ASCENT OF MAN

BY

MATHILDE BLIND

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
ALFRED R. WALLACE



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE subject of Evolution offers grand material for the poet of the future, but hitherto few have taken advantage of it. Tennyson was the first, and still remains unsurpassed in those exquisite verses of "In Memoriam" which deal with it. The late F. T. Palgrave in his poem, "The Voices of Nature," made use of it in special relation to the spiritual nature of man, and in "The Reign of Law," "Vox Dei," and one or two other short poems, he refers to it. But it was reserved for the authoress of this volume to make it the subject of an important and lengthy poem, devoted more especially to Man—physical, intellectual, and spiritual—in his relation to the Cosmos, to the lower forms of life, and to the Deity.

Her treatment of the subject, if not altogether satisfactory—and it is doubtful whether any living writer could treat it in a manner and with a power fully worthy of the theme—is undoubtedly poetical, and is imbued with modern ideas, though, as was perhaps inevitable, it deals more with the social and spiritual

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aspects of the subject than with those which are purely scientific, though these latter are by no means neglected.

She appears to have taken her main inspiration from Darwin's "Descent of Man," and she anticipated Professor Drummond both as to his title and in some of his main conceptions.

A brief outline of the poem in its subject-matter and mode of treatment, with a few illustrative passages, will enable the reader to form some idea of its nature and scope, and to determine whether it in any way comes up to his conception of what such a poem should be. It consists of three main divisions, respectively entitled, "Chaunts of Life," "The Pilgrim Soul," and "The Leading of Sorrow," each with its special versification and treatment. The first and most important of these is that which deals with physical and mental evolution, from inorganic matter to man, and specially with man's development and progress from savagery to civilisation. In the first ten pages the whole course of evolution, from the lowest forms of life up to man, is sketched out with considerable force and beauty, and with due regard to the keynote of the whole poem—that Life, Love, and God are essentially one.

The beginning of life is thus described :—

“ And vaguely in the pregnant deep,
Clasped by the glowing arms of light
From an eternity of sleep
Within unfathomed gulfs of night,

A pulse stirred in the plastic slime
Responsive to the rhythm of Time.

Enkindled in the mystic dark
Life built herself a myriad forms,
And, flashing its electric spark
Through films and cells and pulps and worms,
Flew shuttlewise above, beneath,
Weaving the web of life and death."

The geological succession of life is then rapidly indicated with some vivid touches, culminating in the anthropoid apes, whence arose man.

" And lo, 'mid reeking swarms of earth
Grim struggling in the primal wood,
A new strange creature hath its birth :
Wild—stammering—nameless—shameless—nude ;"

His helplessness, and the possession of a hand, sharpen his senses and improve his intellect, till—

" With cunning hand he shapes the flint,
He carves the horn with strange device,
He splits the rebel block by dint
Of effort—till one day there flies
A spark of fire from out the stone ;
Fire which shall make the world his own."

Then follows the development of the various arts ; from dreams arises the belief in spirits, demons, and gods ; priestcraft soon follows ; then chieftainship, sacrifices, conquests, and slavery. Man builds walled cities for protection ; vast empires arise with their despotisms, cruelties, and bloodshed, culminating in the giant power and the destruction of Rome. Then the rise of Christianity, of heresies with persecutions and martyrdoms, and the history of Europe is briefly sketched down to the epoch of Napoleon and Waterloo.

There follows a short but effective description of the development of the soul of man—of his intellectual, emotional, and moral nature struggling upwards through superstition and errors towards universal sympathy and love.

The second part—"The Pilgrim Soul"—is an allegory of our modern civilisation in which wealth and pleasure and luxury have to a large extent banished that sympathy and love which can alone secure general happiness and peace. The contrasts of wealth and poverty, of luxury and vice, are painted with a terrible force and plainness. Love is pictured in the form of a child, naked, hungry, and cold, and outcast from the city of wealth and luxury. She who finds him takes him home, shelters and nourishes him, he grows and becomes greater than the lost gods of the cruel city to which he returns for its ultimate salvation.

In the third part—"The Leading of Sorrow"—a veiled phantom

conducts the writer through the world to show her the universality of sorrow and death. We have first a vivid picture of the destruction and war ever going on in the animal world, from the lowest to the highest forms. The pessimistic view of the pain and misery thus arising is that taken by the author—one entirely opposed to that of Darwin and the present writer. Hence she says—

“ Cried I, turning to the shrouded figure—
 ‘ Oh, in mercy veil this cruel strife !
 Sanguinary orgies which disfigure
 The green ways of labyrinthine life.
 From the needs and greeds of primal passion,
 From the serpent’s track and lion’s den,
 To the world our human hands did fashion,
 Lead me to the kindly haunts of men.’ ”

At first this seems fair and peaceful. The cornfields and orchards, the vineyards and farms with their happy peasants, the town in the valley with its contented citizens are brightly described ; but suddenly the sounds and sights of an invading army are brought before us, the country is devastated, the town burnt, and all the horrors of war prevail :—

“ Fallen lies the fair old town, its houses
 Charred and ruined gape in smoking heaps ;
 Here with shouts a ruffian band carouses,
 There an outraged woman vainly weeps.”

I *

“ ‘ Hence ’—I cried in unavailing pity—
 ‘ Let us flee these scenes of monstrous strife,
 Seek the pale of some imperial city
 Where the law rules starlike o’er man’s life.’ ”

But this is found to be only going from bad to worse. It is true there is law and order, wealth and luxury, but along with these is the most intense misery, want, and crime, not as occasional incidents at more or less distant intervals, but perpetually present as a part of the regular order of human life. She sees the

“ Rich folk roll on cushions softly swelling
 To the week-day feast and Sunday prayer.”

But also the

“ . . . human rubbish, gaunt and squalid,
 Whom their country spurns for lack of room.”

Then follow some powerful sketches of the destruction and ruin that so often falls on good and happy lives, calling forth a burst of indignant protest :—

“ ‘ Hence, ah, hence ’—I sobbed in quivering passion—
 ‘ From these fearful haunts of fiendish men !
 Better far the plain, carnivorous fashion
 Which is practised in the lion’s den.’ ”

“ Yea, let earth be split and cloven asunder
 With man’s still accumulating curse—
 Life is but a momentary blunder
 In the cycle of the Universe.”

Then she loses consciousness, and sees a vision of the stars and nebulae, and suns and planets in their complex motions and developments as a mighty whole; and she hears a Voice, saying—

“ Wilt thou judge me, wilt thou curse me, Creature
Whom I raised up from the Ocean slime ?

And the grand course of evolution is grandly described, culminating in the production of man—

“ ‘ I have climbed from reek of sanguine revels
In Cimmerian wood and thorny wild,
Slowly upwards to the dawnlit levels,
Where I bore thee, oh my youngest Child !

“ ‘ I have cast my burden on thy shoulder ;
Unimagined potencies have given
That from formless Chaos thou shalt mould her
And translate gross earth to luminous heaven.’ ”

Then the Voice ceases ; the seer awakes ; the sun rises—

“ And beside me in the golden morning
I beheld my shrouded phantom-guide ;
But no longer sorrow-veiled and mourning—
It became transfigured by my side.
And I knew—as one escaped from prison
Sees old things again with fresh surprise—
It was Love himself, Love re-arisen
With the Eternal shining through his eyes.”

Many readers will, no doubt, consider this presentation of the subject too fragmentary, too fanciful, and altogether inadequate. But the writer knew her own strength, had her own ideas, and has evidently taken great pains to develop them in the manner and to the extent best adapted to her own genius and powers of expression.

And, if carefully considered as a whole, the poem will be found by many to have a fascination and completeness that does not at first appear, and to express in picturesque and forcible language many of those ideas as to the place of man in the great Cosmos, and as to the fundamental cause of the terrible evils that disgrace our civilisation, which permeate the writings of our greatest modern poets, moralists, and thinkers. These ideas are rapidly spreading, and will lead to that combined effort for social and humanitarian improvement which will, in all probability, be the great and distinguishing feature of the coming century.

ALFRED R. WALLACE.

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THE ASCENT OF MAN.

2

PRELUDE



WINGS

ASCEND, oh my Soul, with the wings of the lark ascend !
Soaring away and away far into the blue.
Or with the shrill seagull to the breakers bend,
Or with the bee, where the grasses and field-flowers blend,
Drink out of golden cups of the honey-dew.

Ascend, oh my Soul, on the wings of the wind as it blows,
Striking wild organ-blasts from the forest trees,
Or on the zephyr bear love of the rose to the rose,
Or with the hurricane sower cast seed as he goes
Limitless ploughing the leagues of the sibilant seas.

Ascend, oh my Soul, on the wings of the choral strain,
Invisible tier above tier upbuilding sublime ;
Note as it scales after note in a rhythmical chain
Reaching from chaos and welter of struggle and pain,
Far into vistas empyreal receding from time.

Ascend! take wing on the thoughts of the Dead, my Soul,
Breathing in colour and stone, flashing through epic and song :
Thoughts that like avalanche snows gather force as they roll,
Mighty to fashion and knead the phenomenal throng
Of generations of men as they thunder along.

THE ASCENT OF MAN

PART I

**As compressed within the bounded shell
Boundless Ocean seems to surge and swell,
Haunting echoes of an infinite whole
Moan and murmur through Man's finite soul.**

CHAUNTS OF LIFE



I

STRUCK out of dim fluctuant forces and shock of electrical
vapour,

Repelled and attracted the atoms flashed mingling in union
primeval,

And over the face of the waters far heaving in limitless twilight
Auroral pulsations thrilled faintly, and, striking the blank heaving
surface,

The measureless speed of their motion now leaped into light on
the waters.

And lo, from the womb of the waters, upheaved in volcanic
convulsion,

Ribbed and ravaged and rent there rose bald peaks and the rocky
Heights of confederate mountains compelling the fugitive vapours
To take a form as they passed them and float as clouds through
the azure ;
Mountains, the broad-bosomed mothers of torrents and rivers
perennial,
Feeding the rivers and plains with patient persistence, till slowly,
In the swift passage of æons recorded in stone by Time's graver,
There germ grey films of the lichen and mosses and palm-ferns
gigantic,
And jungle of tropical forest fantastical branches entwining,
And limitless deserts of sand and wildernesses primeval.

II

Lo, moving o'er chaotic waters,
Love dawned upon the seething waste,
Transformed in ever new avatars
It moved without or pause or haste :
Like sap that moulds the leaves of May
It wrought within the ductile clay.

And vaguely in the pregnant deep,
Clasped by the glowing arms of light
From an eternity of sleep
Within unfathomed gulfs of night
A pulse stirred in the plastic slime
Responsive to the rhythm of Time.

Enkindled in the mystic dark

Life built herself a myriad forms,
And, flashing its electric spark
Through films and cells and pulps and worms,
Flew shuttlewise above, beneath,
Weaving the web of life and death.

And multiplying in the ocean,

Amorphous, rude, colossal things
Lolled on the ooze in lazy motion,
Armed with grim jaws or uncouth wings ;
Helpless to lift their cumbering bulk
They lurch like some dismasted hulk.

And virgin forest, verdant plain,

The briny sea, the balmy air,
Each blade of grass and globe of rain,
And glimmering cave and gloomy lair,
Began to swarm with beasts and birds,
With floating fish and fleet-foot herds.

The lust of life's delirious fires
Burned like a fever in their blood,
Now pricked them on with fierce desires,
Now drove them famishing for food,
To seize coy females in the fray,
Or hotly hunted hunt for prey.

And amorously urged them on
In wood or wild to court their mate,
Proudly displaying in the sun
With antics strange and looks elate,
The vigour of their mighty thews
Or charm of million-coloured hues.

There crouching 'mid the scarlet bloom,
Voluptuously the leopard lies,
And through the tropic forest gloom
The flaming of his feline eyes
Stirs with intoxicating stress
The pulses of the leopardess.

Or two swart bulls of self-same age
Meet furiously with thunderous roar,
And lash together, blind with rage,
And clanging horns that fain would gore
Their rival, and so win the prize
Of those impassive female eyes.

Or in the nuptial days of spring,
When April kindles bush and brier,
Like rainbows that have taken wing,
Or palpitating gems of fire,
Bright butterflies in one brief day
Live but to love and pass away.

And herds of horses scour the plains,
The thickets scream with bird and beast ;
The love of life burns in their veins,
And from the mightiest to the least
Each preys upon the other's life
In inextinguishable strife.

War rages on the teeming earth ;
The hot and sanguinary fight
Begins with each new creature's birth :
A dreadful war where might is right ;
Where still the strongest slay and win,
Where weakness is the only sin.

There is no truce to this drawn battle,
Which ends but to begin again ;
The drip of blood, the hoarse death-rattle,
The roar of rage, the shriek of pain,
Are rife in fairest grove and dell,
Turning earth's flowery haunts to hell.

A hell of hunger, hatred, lust,
Which goads all creatures here below,
Or blindworm wriggling in the dust,
Or penguin in the Polar snow :
A hell where there is none to save,
Where life is life's insatiate grave.

And in the long portentous strife,
Where types are tried even as by fire,
Where life is whetted upon life
And step by panting step mounts higher,
Apes lifting hairy arms now stand
And free the wonder-working hand.

They raise a light, ærial house
On shafts of widely branching trees,
Where, harboured warily, each spouse
May feed her little ape in peace,
Green cradled in his heaven-roofed bed,
Leaves rustling lullabies o'erhead.

And lo, 'mid reeking swarms of earth
Grim struggling in the primal wood,
A new strange creature hath its birth :
Wild—stammering—nameless—shameless—nude ;
Spurred on by want, held in by fear,
He hides his head in caverns drear.

Most unprotected of earth's kin,
His fight for life that seems so vain
Sharpens his senses, till within
The twilight mazes of his brain,
Like embryos within the womb,
Thought pushes feelers through the gloom.

And slowly in the fateful race
It grows unconscious, till at length
The helpless savage dares to face
The cave-bear in his grisly strength ;
For stronger than its bulky thews
He feels a force that grows with use.

From age to dumb unnumbered age,
By dim gradations long and slow,
He reaches on from stage to stage,
Through fear and famine, weal and woe,
And, compassed round with danger, still
Prolongs his life by craft and skill.

With cunning hand he shapes the flint,
He carves the horn with strange device,
He splits the rebel block by dint
Of effort—till one day there flies
A spark of fire from out the stone :
Fire which shall make the world his own.

III

AND from the clash of warring Nature's strife
Man day by day wins his imperilled life ;
For, goaded on by want, he hunts the roe,
Chases the deer, and lays the wild boar low.
In his rude boat made of the hollow trees
He drifts adventurous on the unoaded seas,
And, as he tilts upon the rocking tide,
Catches the glistening fish that flash and glide
Innumerably through the waters wide.
He'll fire the bush whose flames shall help him fell
The trunks to prop his roof, where he may dwell
Besides the bubbling of a crystal well,
Sheltered from drenching rains or noxious glare
When the sun holds the zenith. Delving there,

His cumbered wife, whose multifarious toil
Seems never done, breaks the rich virgin soil,
And in the ashes casts the casual seeds
Of feathered grass and efflorescent weeds ;
When, as with thanks, the bounteous earth one morn
Returns lush blades of life-sustaining corn.
And while the woman digs and plants, and twines
To precious use long reeds and pliant bines,
He—having hit the brown bird on the wing,
And slain the roe—returns at evening,
And gives his spoil unto her, to prepare
The succulent, wildwood scented, simmering fare,
While with impatient sniffs and eager-eyed
His bronze-limbed children gather to his side.
And, when the feast is done, all take their ease,
Lulled by the sing-song of the evening breeze
And murmuring undertones of many-foliaged trees ;
While here and there through rifts of green the sky
Casts its blue glance like an all-seeing eye.
But though by stress of want and poignant need
Man tames the wolf-sprung hound and rearing steed,

Pens up the ram, and yokes the deep-horned ox,
And through wide pastures shepherds woolly flocks ;
Though age by age, through discipline of toil,
Man wring a richer harvest from the soil,
And in the grim and still renewing fight
Slays loathly worms and beasts of gruesome might
By the close-knitted bondage of the clan,
Which adding up the puny strength of man
Makes thousands move with one electric thrill
Of simultaneous, energetic will ;
Yet still behind the narrow borderland
Where in security he seems to stand,
His apprehensive life is compassed round
By baffling mysteries he cannot sound,
Where, big with terrors and calamities,
The future like a foe in ambush lies :
A muffled foe, that seems to watch and wait
With the Medusa eyes of stony fate.—
Great floods o'erwhelm and ruin his ripening grain,
His boat is shattered by the hurricane,
From the rent cloud the tameless lightning springs—

Heaven's flame-mouthed dragon with a roar of wings—
And fires his hut and simple household things ;
Until before his horror-stricken eyes
The stored-up produce of long labour lies,
A heap of ashes smoking 'neath the skies.—
Or now the pastures where his flocks did graze,
Parched, withered, shrivelled by the imminent blaze
Of the great ball of fire that glares above,
Glow dry like iron heated in a stove ;
Turning upon themselves, the tortured sheep,
With blackening tongues, drop heap on gasping heap,
Their rotting flesh sickens the wind that moans
And whistles poisoned through their chattering bones ;
While the thin shepherd, staring sick and gaunt,
Will search the thorns for berries, or yet haunt
The stony channels of some river-bed
Where filtering fresh perchance a liquid thread
Of water may run clear.—Now dark o'erhead,
Thickening with storm, the wintry clouds will loom,
And wrap the land in weeds of mournful gloom ;
Shrouding the sun and every lesser light

Till earth with all her aging woods grows white,
And hurrying streams stop fettered in their flight.
Then famished beasts freeze by the frozen lakes,
And thick as leaves dead birds bestrew the brakes ;
And, cowering blankly by the flickering flame,
Man feels a presence without form or name,
When by the bodies of his speechless dead
In barbarous woe he bows his stricken head.
Then in the hunger of his piteous love
He sends his thought, winged like a carrier dove—
Through the unanswering silence void and vast,
Whence from dim hollows blows an icy blast—
To bring some sign, some little sign at last,
From his lost chiefs—the beautiful, the brave—
Vanished like bubbles on a breaking wave,
Lost in the unfathomed darkness of the grave.
When, lo, behold beside him in the night,—
Softly beside him, like the noiseless light
Of moonbeams moving o'er the glimmering floor
That come unbidden through the bolted door,—
The lonely sleeper sees the lost one stand

Like one returned from some dim, distant land,
Bending towards him with his outstretched hand.
But when he fain would grasp it in his own,
He melts into thin moonshine and is gone—
A spirit now, who on the other shore
Of death hunts happily for evermore.—
A Son of Life, but dogged, while he draws breath,
By her inseparable shadow—death,
Man, feeble Man, whom unknown Fates appal,
With prayer and praise seeks to propitiate all
The spirits, who, for good or evil plight,
Bless him in victory or in sickness smite.
Those are his Dead who, wrapped in grisly shrouds,
Now ride phantasmal on the rushing clouds,
Souls of departed chiefs whose livid forms
He sees careering on the reinless storms,
Wild, spectral huntsmen who tumultuously,
With loud halloo and shrilly echoing cry,
Follow the furious chase, with the whole pack
Of shadowy hounds fierce yelping in the track
Of wolves and bears as shadowy as the hosts

Who lead once more 'as unsubstantial ghosts
Their lives of old as restlessly they fly
Across the wildernesses of the sky.
When the wild hunt is done, shall they not rest
Their heads upon some swan-white maiden's breast,
And quaff their honeyed mead with godlike zest
In golden-gated Halls whence they may see
The earth and marvellous secrets of the Sea
Whereon the clouds will lie with grey wings furled,
And in whose depths, voluminously curled,
The serpent looms whose girth engirds the world ?
Far, far above now in supernal power
Those spirits rule the sunshine and the shower !
How shall he win their favour ; yea, how move
To pity the unpitying gods above,
The Dæmon rulers of life's fitful dream,
Who sway men's destinies, and still would seem
To treat them lightly as a game of chance,
The sport of whim and blindfold circumstance—
The irresponsible, capricious gods,
So quick to please or anger ; whose sharp rods

Are storms and lightnings launched from cloven skies ;
Who feast upon the shuddering victim's cries,
The smell of blood, and human sacrifice ?
But ever as Man grows they grow with him ;
Terrific, cruel, gentle, bright, or dim,
With eyes of dove-like mercy, hands of wrath,
Procession-like, they hover o'er his path
And, changing with the gazer, borrow light
From their wrapt devotee's adoring sight.
And Ormuzd, Ashtaroth, Osiris, Baal—
Love spending gods and gods of blood and wail—
Look down upon their suppliant from the skies
With his own magnified, responsive eyes.
For Man, from want and pressing hunger freed,
Begins to feel another kind of need,
And in his shaping brain and through his eyes
Nature, awakening, sees her blue-arched skies ;
The Sun, his life-begetter, isled in space ;
The Moon, the Measurer of his span of days ;
The immemorial stars who pierce his night
With inklings of things vast and infinite.

All shows of heaven and earth that move and pass
Take form within his brain as in a glass.
The tidal thunder of the sea now roars
And breaks symphonious on a hundred shores ;
The fitful flutings of the vagrant breeze
Strike gusts of sound from virgin forest trees ;
White leaping waters of wild cataracts fall
From crag and jag in lapses musical,
And streams meandering amid daisied leas
Throb with the pulses of tumultuous seas.
From hills and valleys smoking mists arise,
Steeped in pale gold and amethystine dyes.
The land takes colour from him, and the flowers
Laugh in his path like sun-dyed April showers.
The moving clouds in calm or thunderstorm,
All shows of things in colour, sound, or form,
Moulded mysteriously, are freshly wrought
Within the fiery furnace of his thought.

IV

No longer Nature's thrall,
Man builds the city wall
That shall withstand her league of levelling storms ;
He builds tremendous tombs
Where, hid in hoarded glooms,
His dead defy corruption with her worms :
High towers he rears and bulks of glowing stone,
Where the king rules upon a golden throne.

Creature of hopes and fears,
Of mirth and many tears,
He makes himself a thousand costly altars,
Whence smoke of sacrifice,
Fragrant with myrrh and spice,
Ascends to heaven as the flame leaps and falters ;

Where, like a king above the Cloud control,
God sits enthroned and rules Man's subject soul.

Yet grievous here below
And manifold Man's woe ;
Though he can stay the flood and bind the waters,
His hand he shall not stay
That bids him sack and slay
And turn the waving fields to fields of slaughters ;
And, as he reaps War's harvest grim and gory,
Commits a thousand crimes and calls it glory.

Vast empires fall and rise,
As when in sunset skies
The monumental clouds lift flashing towers
With turrets, spires, and bars
Lit by confederate stars
Till the bright rack dissolves in flying showers :
Kingdoms on kingdoms have their fleeting day,
Dazzle the conquered world, and pass away.

THE ASCENT OF MAN

In golden Morning lands
 The blazing crowns change hands,
 From mystic Ind to fleshly Babylon,
 Assyria, Palestine
 Armed with her book divine,
 Dread Persia whose fleet chariots charged and won
 Pale Continents where prostrate monarchs kneel
 Before the flash of her resistless steel.

As one by one they start
 With proudly beating heart
 Fast in the furious, fierce-contested race,
 Where neck to neck they strain
 Deliriously to gain
 The winning post of power, the meed of praise ;
 Some drop behind, fall, or are trampled down
 While the proud victor grasps the laurel crown.

Not only great campaigns
 Shall glorify their reigns,

But high-towered cities wondrous to behold,
With gardens poised in air
Like bowers of Eden fair,
With brazen gates and shrines of beaten gold,
And Palace courts whose constellated lights
Shine on black slaves and cringing satellites.

Eclipsing with her fate
Each power and rival state
With her unnumbered stretch of generations,
A sand-surrounded isle
Fed by the bounteous Nile,
Egypt confronts Sahara—sphinx of nations ;
Taught by the floods that make or mar her shore,
She scans the stars and hoards mysterious lore.

Hers are imperial halls
With strangely scripted walls
And long perspectives of memorial places,
Where the hushed daylight glows
On mute colossal rows
Of clawed wild beasts featured with female faces,

And realmless kings inane whose stony eyes
Have watched the hour-glass of the centuries.

There in the rainless sands
The toil of captive hands,
That eye must do as their taskmaster bids,
Through years of dusty days
Brick by slow brick shall raise
The incarnate pride of kings—the Pyramids—
Linked with some name synonymous with slaughter
Time has effaced like a name writ in water.

For ever with fateful shocks,
Roar as of hurtling rocks,
Start fresh embattled hosts with flags unfurled,
To meet on battle-fields
With clash of spears and shields,
Widowing the world or men to win the world :
The hissing air grows dark with iron rain,
And groans the earth beneath her sheaves of slain.

Triumphant o'er them all,
See crowns and sceptres fall
Before the arms of iron-soldered legions ;
As Capitolian Rome
Across the salt sea foam
Orders her Cæsars to remotest regions :
From silver Spain and Albion's clouded seas
To the fair shrines and marble mines of Greece.

Pallas unmatched in war,
To her triumphal car
Rome chains fallen despots and discrownèd queens
With many a rampant beast,
Birds from the gorgeous East,
And wool-haired Nubians torn from tropic scenes ;
There huge barbarians from Druidic woods
Tower ominous o'er the humming multitudes ;

For still untamed and free
In loathed captivity,

Their spirits bend not to the conqueror's yoke,
 Though for a Roman sight
 They must in mimic fight
Give wounds in play and deal Death's mortal stroke,
While round the arena rings the fierce applause
Voluptuous, as their bubbling life-blood flows

 In streams of purple rain
 From hecatombs of slain
Saluting Cæsar still with failing breath,
 But in their dying souls
 Undying hate, which rolls
From land to land the avalanche of Death,
That, gathering volume as it sweeps along,
Pours down the Alps throng on unnumbered throng.

 From northern hills and plains
 Storm-lashed by driving rains,
From moorland wastes and depths of desolate wood,
 From many an icebound shore,
 The human torrents pour,
Horde following upon horde as flood on flood,

Avengers of the slain they come, they come,
And break in thunder on the walls of Rome.

A trembling people waits
As, surging through its gates,
Break the fierce Goths with trumpet-blasts of doom ;
And many a glorious shrine
Begins to flare and shine,
And many a palace flames up through the gloom,
Kindled like torches by relentless wrath
To light the Spoiler on destruction's path.

Yea, with Rome's ravished walls,
The old world tottering falls
And crumbles into ruin wide and vast ;
The Empire seems to rock
As with an earthquake's shock,
And vassal provinces look on aghast ;
As realms are split and nation rent from nation,
The globe seems drifting to annihilation.

V

“ PEACE on earth and good will unto Men ! ”
Came the tidings borne o’er wide dominions ;
The glad tidings thrilled the world as when
Spring comes fluttering on the west wind’s pinions,
When her voice is heard
Warbling through each bird,
And a new-born hope
Throbs through all things infinite in scope.

“ Peace on earth and good will ! ” came the word
Of the Son of Man, the Man of Sorrow—
But the peace turned to a flaming sword,
Turned to woe and wailing on the morrow

When with gibes and scorns,
Crowned with barren thorns,
Gashed and crucified,
On the Cross the tortured Jesus died.

And the world, once full of flower-hung shrines,
Now forsakes old altars for the new,
Zeus grows faint and Venus' star declines
As Jehovah glorifies the Jew,
 He whom—lit with awe—
 God-led Moses saw,
 Graving with firm hand
In his people's heart his Lord's command.

Holding Hells and Heavens in either hand
Comes the priest and comes the wild-eyed prophet,
Tells the people of some happier land,
Terrifies them with a burning Tophet ;
 Gives them creeds for bread
 And warm roof o'erhead,
 Gives for life's delight
Passports to the kingdom, spirit-bright.

And the people groaning everywhere
Hearken gladly to the wondrous story,
How beyond this life of toil and care
They shall lead a life of endless glory :
Where beyond the dim
Earth-mists Seraphim,
Love-illumined, wait—
Hierarchies of angels at heaven's gate.

Let them suffer while they live below,
Bear in silence weariness and pain ;
For the heavier is their earthly woe,
Verily the heavenlier is their gain
In the mansions where
Sorrow and despair,
Yea, all moan shall cease
With the moan of immemorial seas.

And to save their threatened souls from sin,
Save them from the world, the flesh, the devil,
Men and Women break from bonds of kin
And in cloistered cell draw bar on evil,

Worship on their knees
Sacred Images,
And all Saints above,
The Madonna, mystic Rose of Love.

Mystic Rose of Maiden Motherhood,
Moon of Hearts immaculately mild,
Beaming o'er the turbulent times and rude
With the promise of her blessèd Child ;
Whom pale Monks adore,
Pining evermore
For the heaven of love
Which their homesick lives are dying of.

But the flame of mystical desires
Turns to fury fiercer than a leopard's,
Holy fagots blaze with kindling fires
As the priests, the people's careful shepherds,
In Heaven's awful name,
Set the pile on flame
Where, for Conscience' sake,
Heretics burn chaunting at the stake.

Subterranean secrets of the prison,
Throbs of anguish in the crushing cell,
Torture-chambers of the Inquisition
Are the Church's antidotes to Hell.

Better rack them here,
Mutilate and sear,
Than their souls should go
To the place of everlasting woe.

And a lurid universal night,
Lit by quenchless fires for unquenched sages,
Thick with spectral broods that shun the light,
Looms impervious o'er the stifled ages

Where the blameless wise
Fall a sacrifice,
Fall as fell of old
The unspotted firstlings of the fold.

And the violent feud of clashing creeds
Shatters empires and breaks realms asunder ;
Cities tremble, sceptres shake like reeds
At the swift bolts of the Papal thunder ;

Yea, the bravest quail,
Cast from out the pale
Of all Christendom

By the dread anathemas of Rome.

And like one misled by marish gleams
When he hears the shrill cock's note of warning,
Europe, starting from its trance of dreams,
Sees the first streak of the clear-eyed morning
As it broadening stands
Over ravaged lands
Where mad nations are
Locked in grip of fratricidal war.

Castles burn upon the vine-clad knolls,
Huts glow smouldering in the trampled meadows ;
And a hecatomb of martyred souls
Fills a queenly town with wail of widows
In those branded hours
When red-guttering showers
Splash by courts and stews
To the Bells of Saint Bartholomew's.

Seed that's sown upon the wanton wind
Shall be harvested in whirlwind rages,
For revenge and hate bring forth their kind,
And black crime must ever be the wages
Of a nation's crime
Time transmits to time,
Till the score of years
Is wiped out in floods of staunchless tears.

Yea, the anguish in a people's life
May have eaten out its heart of pity,
Bred in scenes of scarlet sin and strife,
Heartless splendours of a haughty city ;
Dark with lowering fate,
At the massive gate
Of its kings it may
Stand and knock with tragic hand one day.

For the living tomb gives up its dead,
Bastilles yawn, and chains are rent asunder,
Little children now and hoary head,
Man and maiden, meet in joy and wonder ;

Throng on radiant throng,
Brave and blithe and strong,
Gay with pine and palm,
Fill fair France with freedom's thunder-psalm.

Free and equal—rid of king and priest—
The rapt nation bids each neighbour nation
To partake the sacramental feast
And communion of the Federation :

And electrified
Masses, far and wide,
Thrill to hope and start
Vibrating as with one common heart.

From the perfumed South of amorous France
With her wreath of orange bloom and myrtle,
From old wizard woods of lost Romance
Soft with wail of wind and voice of turtle,
From the roaring sea
Of grey Normandy
And the rich champignons
Where the vine gads o'er Burgundian plains ;

From the banks of the blue arrowy Rhone,
And from many a Western promontory,
From volcanic crags of cloven stone
Crowned with castles ivy-green in story ;
From gay Gascon coasts
March fraternal hosts,
Equal hosts and free,
Pilgrims to the shrine of liberty.

But king calls on king in wild alarms,
Troops march threatening through the vales and passes,
Barefoot Faubourgs at the cry to arms
On the frontier hurl their desperate masses :
The deep tocsin's boom
Fills the streets with gloom,
And with iron hand
The red Terror guillotines the land.

For the Furies of the sanguine past
Chase fair Freedom, struggling torn and baffled,
Till infuriate—turned to bay at last—
Rolled promiscuous on the common scaffold,

Vengeful she shall smite
A Queen's head bleached white,
And a courtesan's

Whose light hands once held the reins of France.

She shall smite and spare not—yea, her own,
Her fair sons so pure from all pollution,

With their guiltless life-blood must atone
To the goddess of the Revolution ;

Dying with a song
On their lips, her young
Ardent children end,

Meeting death even as one meets a friend.

And her daughter, in heroic shame,
Turned to Freedom's Moloch statue, crying :

“ Liberty, what crimes done in thy name ! ”
Spake, and with her Freedom's self seemed dying

As she bleeding lay
'Neath Napoleon's sway :
Europe heard her knell

When on Waterloo the Empire fell.

VI

Woe, woe to Man and all his hapless brood !
No rest for him, no peace is to be found ;
He may have tamed wild beasts and made the ground
Yield corn and wine and every kind of food ;
He may have turned the ocean to his steed,
Tutored the lightning's elemental speed
To flash his thought from Ætna to Atlantic ;
He may have weighed the stars and spanned the stream,
And trained the fiery force of panting steam
To whirl him o'er vast steppes and heights gigantic :
But the storm-lashed world of feeling—
Love, the fount of tears unsealing,
Choruses of passion pealing—
Lust, ambition, hatred, awe,
Clashing loudly with the law,

44

But the phantasms of the mind
Who shall master, yea, who bind !

What help is there without, what hope within
Of rescue from the immemorial strife ?
What will redeem him from the spasm of life,
With all its devious ways of shame and sin ?
What will redeem him from ancestral greeds,
Grey legacies of hate and hoar misdeeds,
Which from the guilty past Man doth inherit—
The past that is bound up with him, and part
Of the pulsations of his inmost heart,
And of the vital motions of his spirit ?
Ages mazed in tortuous errors,
Ghostly fears, and haunting terrors,
Minds bewitched that served as mirrors
For the foulest fancies bred
In a fasting hermit's head,
Such as cast a sickly blight
On all shapes of life and light.

Yea, panting and pursued and stung and driven,
The soul of Man flies on in deep distress,
As once across the world's harsh wilderness
Latona fled, chased by the Queen of heaven ;
Flying across the homeless Universe
From the inveterate stroke of Juno's curse :
On whom even mother earth closed all her portals,
Refusing shelter in her cooing bowers,
Or rest upon her velvet couch of flowers,
To the most weary of all weary mortals.

Within whose earth-encumbered form,
Like two fair stars entwined in storm,
Or wings astir within the worm,
Feeling out for light and air,
Struggled that celestial pair,
Phœbus of unerring bow,
And chaste Dian fair as snow.

Ah, who will harbour her ? Ah, who will save
The fugitive from pangs that rack and tear ;

Who, finding rest nor refuge anywhere,
Seems doomed to be her unborn offspring's grave ;
The seed of Jove, murdered before their birth—
Did not the sea, more merciful than earth,
Bid Delos stand—that wandering isle of Ocean—
Stand motionless upon the moving foam,
To be the exile's wave-encircled home,
And lull her pains with leaves in drowsy motion,
Where the soft-boughed olive sighing
Bends above the woman lying
And in spasms of anguish crying,
Shuddering through her mortal frame,
As from dust is struck the flame
Which shall henceforth beam sublime
Through the firmament of Time ?

Oh, balmy Island bedded on the brine,
Harbour of refuge on the tumbling seas,
The fabulous bowers of the Hesperides
Ne'er bore such blooming gold as glows in thine :

Thou green Oasis on the tides of Time
 Where no rude blast disturbs the azure clime ;
 Thou Paradise whence man can ne'er be driven,
 Where, severed from the world-clang and the roar,
 Still in the flesh he yet may reach that shore
 Where want is not, and, like the dew from heaven,
 There drops upon the fevered soul
 The balm of Thought's divine control
 And rapt absorption in the whole :
 Delivery in the realm of art
 Of the world-racked human heart---
 Forms and hues and sounds that make
 Life grow lovelier for their sake.

By sheer persistence, strenuous and slow,
 The marble yields and, line by flowing line
 And curve by curve, begins to swell and shine
 Beneath the ring of each far-sighted blow :
 Until the formless block obeys the hand,
 And at the mastering mind's supreme command

Takes form and radiates from each limb and feature
Such beauty as ne'er bloomed in mortal mould,
Whose face, out-smiling centuries, shall hold
Perfection's mirror up to 'prentice nature.

Not from out voluptuous ocean
Venus rose in balanced motion,
Goddess of all bland emotion ;
But she leaped a shape of light,
Radiating love's delight,
From the sculptor's brain to be
Sphered in immortality.

New spirit-yearnings for a heavenlier mood
Call for a love more pitiful and tender,
And 'neath the painter's touch blooms forth in splendour
The image of transfigured motherhood.
All hopes of all glad women who have smiled
In adoration on their first-born child
Here smile through one glad woman made immortal ;
All tears of all sad women through whose heart
Has pierced the edge of sorrow's sevenfold dart
Lie weeping with her at death's dolorous portal.

For in married hues whose splendour
 Bodies forth the gloom and grandeur
 Of life's pageant, tragic, tender,
 Common things transfigured flush
 By the magic of the brush,
 As when sun-touched raindrops glow,
 Blent in one harmonious bow.

But see, he comes, Lord of life's changeful shows,
 To whom the ways of Nature are laid bare,
 Who looks on heaven and makes the heavens more fair,
 And adds new sweetness to the perfumed rose ;
 Who can unseal the heart with all its tears,
 Marshal loves, hates, hopes, sorrows, joys, and fears
 In quick procession o'er the passive pages ;
 Who has given tongue to silent generations
 And wings to thought, so that long-mouldered nations
 May call to nations o'er the abyss of ages :
 The poet, in whose shaping brain
 Life is created o'er again
 With loftier raptures, loftier pain ;

Whose mighty potencies of verse
Move through the plastic Universe,
And fashion to their strenuous will
The world that is creating still.

Do you hear it, do you hear it
Soaring up to heaven, or somewhere near it ?
- From the depths of life upheaving,
Clouds of earth and sorrow cleaving,
From despair and death retrieving,
All triumphant blasts of sound
Lift you at one rhythmic bound
From the thralldom of the ground.

* * * * *

All the sweetness which the glowing
Violets waft to west winds blowing,
All the burning love-notes aching,
Rills and thrills of rapture shaking
Through the hearts that throb to breaking

Of the little nightingales ;
Mellow murmuring waters streaming
Lakeward in long silver trails,
Crooning low while earth lies dreaming
To the moonlight-tangled vales ;
Swish of rain on half-blown roses
Hoarding close their rich perfume,
Which the summer dawn uncloses
Sparkling in their morning bloom ;
Convent peals o'er pastoral meadows,
Swinging through hay-scented air
When the velvet-footed shadows
Call the hind to evening prayer.
Yea, all notes of woods and highlands ;
Sea-fowls' screech round sphinx-like islands
Couched among the Hebrides ;
Cuckoo calls through April showers,
When the green fields froth with flowers
And with bloom the orchard trees ;
Boom of surges with their hollow
Refluent shock from cave to cave,

As the maddening spring tides follow
Moonstruck reeling wave o'er wave ;
Yea, all rhythms of air and ocean
Married to the heart's emotion,
To the interwoven emotion
Of the heart for ever turning
In a whirl of bliss and pain,
Blending in symphonious strain
All the vague, unearthly yearning
Of the visionary brain.

* * * * *

All life's discords sweetly blending,
Heights on heights of being ascending,
Harmonies of confluent sound
Lift you at one rhythmic bound
From the thralldom of the ground ;
Loosen all your bonds of birth,
Clogs of sense and weights of earth,
Bear you in angelic legions
High above terrestrial regions

Into ampler ether, where
Spirits breathe a finer air,
 Where upon world altitudes
 God-intoxicated moods
 Fill you with beatitudes ;
Till no longer cramped and bound
By the narrow human round,
 All the body's barriers slide,
 Which with cold obstruction hide
The supreme, undying, sole
Spirit struggling through the whole,
 And no more a thing apart
 From the universal heart
 Liberated by the grace
 Of man's genius for a space,
 Human lives dissolve, enlace
 In a flaming world embrace.

A SYMBOL



HURRYING for ever in their restless flight
The generations of earth's teeming womb
Rise into being and lapse into the tomb
Like transient bubbles sparkling in the light ;
They sink in quick succession out of sight
Into the thick insuperable gloom
Our futile lives in flashing by illumine—
Lightning which mocks the darkness of the night.

Nay—but consider, though we change and die,
If men must pass shall Man not still remain ?
As the unnumbered drops of summer rain
Whose changing particles unchanged on high,
Fixed, in perpetual motion, yet maintain
The mystic bow emblazoned on the sky.

TIME'S SHADOW



THY life, O Man, in this brief moment lies :
Time's narrow bridge whereon we darkling stand,
With an infinitude on either hand
Receding luminously from our eyes.
Lo, there thy Past's forsaken Paradise
Subsideth like some visionary strand,
While glimmering faint, the Future's promised land,
Illusive from the abyss, seems fain to rise.

This hour alone Hope's broken pledges mar,
And Joy now gleams before, now in our rear,
Like mirage mocking in some waste afar,
Dissolving into air as we draw near.
Beyond our steps the path is sunny-clear,
The shadow lying only where we are.

THE ASCENT OF MAN

PART II

“ Love is for ever poor, and so far from being delicate and beautiful, as mankind imagined, he is squalid and withered . . . homeless and unsandalled ; he sleeps without covering before the doors, and in the unsheltered streets.—PLATO.

THE PILGRIM SOUL



THROUGH the winding mazes of windy streets
Blindly I hurried I knew not whither,
Through the dim-lit ways of the brain thus fleets

A fluttering dream driven hither and thither.—
The fitful flare of the moon fled fast,
Like a sickly smile now seeming to wither,

Now dark like a scowl in the hurrying blast
As ominous shadows swept over the roofs
Where white as a ghost the scared moonlight had passed.

Curses came mingled with wails and reproofs,
With doors banging to and the crashing of glass,
With the baying of dogs and the clatter of hoofs,

With the rush of the river as, huddling its mass
Of weltering water towards the deep ocean,
'Neath many-arched bridges its eddies did pass.

A hubbub of voices in savage commotion
Was mixed with the storm in a chaos of sound,
And thrilled as with ague in shuddering emotion

I fled as the hunted hare flees from the hound,
Past churches whose bells were tumultuously ringing
The year in, and clashing in concord around ;

Past the deaf walls of dungeons whose curses seemed clinging
To the tempest that shivered and shrieked in amazement ;
Past brightly lit mansions whence music and singing

Came borne like a scent through the close-curtained casement,
To vaults in whose shadow wild outcasts were hiding
Their misery deep in the gloom of the basement.

By vociferous taverns where women were biding
With features all withered, distorted, aghast ;
Some sullenly silent, some brutally chiding,

Some reeling away into gloom as I passed
On, on, through lamp-lighted and fountain-filled places,
Where throned in rich temples, resplendent and vast,

The Lord of the City is deafened with praises
As worshipping multitudes kneel as of old ;
Nor care for the crowds of cadaverous faces,

The men that are marred and the maids that are sold—
Inarticulate masses promiscuously jumbled
And crushed 'neath their Juggernaut idol of gold.

Lost lives of great cities bespattered and tumbled,
 Black rags the rain soaks, the wind whips like a knout,
 Were crouched in the streets there, and o'er them nigh
 stumbled

A swarm of light maids as they tripped to some rout.
 The silk of their raiment voluptuously hisses
 And flaps o'er the flags as loud laughing they flout

The wine-maddened men they ne'er satiate with kisses
 For the pearls and the diamonds that make them more fair,
 For the flash of large jewels that fire them with blisses,

For the glitter of gold in the gold of their hair.
 They smiled and they cozened, their bold eyes shone brightly
 And lightened with laughter, as, lit by the flare

Of the wind-fretted gas-lamps, they footed it lightly,
 Or, closely enlacing and bowered in gloom,
 With mouth pressed to hot mouth, their parched lips drain
 nightly

The wine-cup of pleasure red-sealing their doom ;
Brief lives like bright rockets which, aridly glowing,
Fall burnt out to ashes and reel to the tomb.

On, on, loud and louder the rough night was blowing,
Shrill singing was mixed with strange cries of despair ;
And high overhead the black sky, redly glowing,

Loomed over the city one ominous glare,
As dark yawning funnels from foul throats for ever
Belched smoke grimly flaming, which outraged the air.

On, on, by long quays where the lamps in the river
Were writhing like serpents that hiss ere they drown,
And poplars with palsy seemed coldly to shiver,

On, on, to the bare desert end of the town.
When lo ! the wind stopped like a heart that's ceased beating,
And nought but the waters, white foaming and brown,

Were heard as to seaward their currents went fleeing.
But hark ! o'er the lull breaks a desolate moan,
Like a little lost lamb's that is timidly bleating

When, strayed from the shepherd, it staggers alone
By tracks which the mountain streams shake with their thunder,
Where death seems to gape from each boulder and stone.

I turned to the murmur : the clouds swept asunder
And wheeled like white sea-gulls around the white moon ;
And the moon, like a white maid, looked down in mute wonder

On a boy whose wan eyelids were closed as in swoon.
Half nude on the ground he lay, wasted and chilly,
And torn as with thorns and sharp brambles of June ;

His hair, like a flame which at twilight burns stilly,
In a halo of light round his temples was blown, ,
And his tears fell like rain on a storm-stricken lily

Where he lay on the cold ground, abandoned, alone.
With heart moved towards him in wondering pity,
I tenderly seized his thin hand with my own :

Crying, " Child, say how cam'st thou so far from the city ?
How cam'st thou alone in such pitiful plight,
All blood-stained thy feet, with rags squalid and gritty,

A waif by the wayside, unhoused in the night ? "

Then rose he and lifted the bright locks, storm driven,
Which flamed round his forehead and clouded his sight,

And mournful as meres on a moorland at even
His blue eyes flashed wildly through tears as they fell,
Strange eyes full of horror, yet fuller of heaven,

Like eyes that from heaven have looked upon hell,
The eyes of an angel whose depths show where, burning
And lost in the pit, toss the angels that fell.

“ Ah,” wailed he in tones full of agonised yearning,
Like the plaintive lament of a sickening dove
On a surf-beaten shore, whence it sees past returning

The wings of the wild flock fast fading above,
As they melt on the sky-line like foam-flakes in motion :
So sadly he wailed, “ I am Love ! I am Love !

“ Behold me cast out as weed spurned of the ocean,
Half nude on the bare ground, and covered with scars,
I perish of cold here ;” and, choked with emotion,

Gave a sob : at the low sob a shower of stars
Broke shuddering from heaven, pale flaming, and fell
Where the mid-city roared as with rumours of wars.

“ Be these God’s tears ? ” I cried, as my tears ’gan to well.
“ Ah, Love, I have sought thee in temples and towers,
In shrines where men pray, and in marts where they sell ;

“ In tapestried chambers made tropic with flowers,
Where amber-haired women, soft breathing of spice,
Lay languidly lapped in the gold-dropping showers

“ Which gladdened and maddened their amorous eyes.
I have looked for thee vainly in churches where beaming
The Saints glowed embalmed in a prism of dyes,

“ Where wave over wave the rapt music went streaming
With breakers of sound in full anthems elate.
I have asked, but none knew thee, or knew but thy seeming ;

“ A mask in thy likeness on high seats of state ;
And they bound it with gold, and they crowned it with glory,
This thing they called love, which was bond slave to hate.

“ And they bowed down before it with brown heads and hoary,
They worshipped it nightly, loud hymning its praise,
While out in the cold blast, none heeding its story,

“Love staggers, an outcast, with lust in its place.”
Love shivered and sighed like a reed that is shaken,
And lifting his hunger-nipped face to my face :

“Nay, if of the world I must needs die forsaken,
Say thou wilt not leave me to dearth and despair.
To thy heart, to thy home, let the exile be taken,

“And feed me and shelter——” “Where, outcast, ah, where ?
Like thee I am homeless and spurned of all mortals ;
The House of my fathers yawns wide to the air.

“Stalks desolation across the void portals,
Hope lies aghast on the ruinous floor,
The halls that were thronged once with star-browed immortals,

“With gods statue-still o’er the world-whirr and roar,
With fauns of the forest and nymphs of the river,
Are cleft as if lightning had struck to their core.

“ The luminous ceilings, where soaring for ever
Dim hosts of plumed angels smoked up to the sky,
With God-litten faces that yearned to the giver

“ As vapours of morning the sun draws on high,
Now ravaged with rain hear the hollow winds whistle
Through rifts in the rafters which echo their cry.

“ Blest walls that were vowed to the Virgin now bristle
With weeds of sick scarlet and plague-spotted moss,
And stained on the ground, choked with thorn and rank thistle,

“ Rots a worm-eaten Christ on a mouldering Cross.
From the House of my fathers, distraught, broken-hearted,
With a pang of immense, irredeemable loss,

“ On my wearying pilgrimage blindly I started
To seek thee, oh Love, in high places and low,
And instead of the glories for ever departed,

“To warm my starved life in thy mightier glow.
For I deemed thee a Presence ringed round with all splendour,
With a sceptre in hand and a crown on thy brow ;

“And, behold, thou art helpless—most helpless to tender
Thy service to others, who needest their care.
Yea, now that I find thee a weak child and slender,

“Exposed to the blast of the merciless air,
Like a lamb that is shorn, like a leaf that is shaken,
What, Love, now is left but to die in despair ?

“For Death is the mother of all the forsaken,
The grave a strait bed where she rocks them to rest,
And sleep, from whose silence they never shall waken,

“The balm of oblivion she sheds on their breast.”
Then I seized him and led to the brink of the river,
Where two storm-beaten seagulls were fluttering west,

And the lamplight in drowning seemed coldly to shiver,
And clasping Love close for the leap from on high,
Said—"Let us go hence, Love ; go home, Love, for ever ;

"For life casts us forth, and Man dooms us to die."
As if stung by a snake the Child shuddered and started,
And clung to me close with a passionate cry :

"Stay with me, stay with me, poor, broken-hearted ;
Pain, if not pleasure, we two will divide ;
Though with the sins of the world I have smarted,

"Though with the shame of the world thou art dyed,
Weak as I am, on thy breast I'll recover,
Worn as thou art, thou shalt bloom as my bride :

"Bloom as the flower of the World for the lover
Whom thou hast found in a lost little Child."
And as he kissed my lips over and over —

Child now, or Man, was it who thus beguiled?—
Even as I looked on him, Love, waxing slowly,
Grew as a little cloud, floating enisled,

Which spreads out aloft in the blue sky till solely
It fills the deep ether tremendous in height,
With far-flashing snow-peaks and pinnacles wholly

Invisible, vanishing light within light.
So changing waxed Love—till he towered before me,
Outgrowing my lost gods in stature and might.

As he grew, as he drew me, a great awe came o'er me,
And stammering, I shook as I questioned his name ;
But gently bowed o'er me, he soothèd and bore me,

Yea, bore once again to the haunts whence I came,
By dark ways and dreary, by rough roads and gritty,
To the penfolds of sin, to the purlieus of shame.

And lo, as we went through the woe-clouded city,
Where women bring forth and men labour in vain,
Weak Love grew so great in his passion of pity
That all who beheld him were born once again.

SAVING LOVE



WOULD we but love what will not pass away !
The sun that on each morning shines as clear
As when it rose first on the world's first year ;
The fresh green leaves that rustle on the spray.
The sun will shine, the leaves will be as gay
When graves are full of all our hearts held dear,
When not a soul of those who loved us here,
Not one, is left us—creatures of decay.

Yea, love the Abiding in the Universe
Which was before, and will be after us.
Nor yet for ever hanker and vainly cry
For human love—the beings that change or die ;
Die—change—forget : to care so is a curse,
Yet cursed we'll be rather than not care thus.

NIRVANA



DIVEST thyself, O Soul, of vain desire !
Bid hope farewell, dismiss all coward fears ;
Take leave of empty laughter, emptier tears,
And quench, for ever quench, the wasting fire
Wherein this heart, as in a funeral pyre,
Aye burns, yet is consumed not. Years on years
Moaning with memories in thy maddened ears—
Let at thy word, like refluent waves, retire.

Enter thy soul's vast realm as Sovereign Lord,
And, like that angel with the flaming sword,
Wave off life's clinging hands. Then chains will fall
From the poor slave of self's hard tyranny—
And Thou, a ripple rounded by the sea,
In rapture lost be lapped within the All.

MOTHERHOOD



FROM out the font of being, undefiled,
A life hath been upheaved with struggle and pain ;
Safe in her arms a mother holds again
That dearest miracle—a new-born child.
To moans of anguish terrible and wild—
As shrieks the night-wind through an ill-shut pane—
Pure heaven succeeds ; and after fiery strain
Victorious woman smiles serenely mild.

Yea, shall she not rejoice, shall not her frame
Thrill with a mystic rapture ! At this birth,
The soul now kindled by her vital flame
May it not prove a gift of priceless worth ?
Some saviour of his kind whose starry fame
Shall bring a brightness to the darkened earth.

THE ASCENT OF MAN

PART III

“ Our spirits have climbed high
By reason of the passion of our grief,—
And from the top of sense, looked over sense
To the significance and heart of things
Rather than things themselves.”

E. B. BROWNING.

THE LEADING OF SORROW



THROUGH a twilight land, a moaning region,
Thick with sighs that shook the trembling air,
Land of shadows whose dim crew was legion,
Lost I hurried, hunted by despair.
Quailed my heart like an expiring splendour,
Fitful flicker of a faltering fire,
Smitten chords which tempest-stricken render
Rhythms of anguish from a breaking lyre.

Love had left me in a land of shadows,
Lonely on the ruins of delight,
And I grieved with tearless grief of widows,
Moaned as orphans homeless in the night.

Love had left me knocking at Death's portal—
Shone his star and vanished from my sky—
And I cried : " Since Love, even Love, is mortal,
Take, unmake, and break me ; let me die."

Then, the twilight's grisly veils dividing,
Phantom-like there stole one o'er the plain,
Wavering mists for ever round it gliding
Hid the face I strove to scan in vain.
Spake the veiled one : " Solitary weeper,
'Mid the myriad mourners thou'rt but one :
Come, and thou shalt see the awful reaper,
Evil, reaping all beneath the sun."

On my hand the clay-cold hand did fasten
As it murmured—" Up and follow me ;
O'er the thickly peopled earth we'll hasten
Yet more thickly packed with misery."
And I followed : ever in the shadow
Of that looming form I fared along ;
Now o'er mountains, now through wood and meadow,
Or through cities with their surging throng.

With none other for a friend or fellow
Those relentless footsteps were my guide
To the sea-caves echoing with the hollow
Immemorial moaning of the tide.
Laughed the sunlight on the living ocean,
Danced and rocked itself upon the spray,
And its shivered beams in twinkling motion
Gleamed like star-motes in the Milky Way.

Lo, beneath those waters surging, flowing,
I beheld the Deep's fantastic bowers ;
Shapes which seemed alive and yet were growing
On their stalks like animated flowers.
Sentient flowers which seemed to glow and glimmer
Soft as ocean blush of Indian shells,
White as foam-drift in the moony shimmer
Of those sea-lit, wave-pavilioned dells.

Yet even here, as in the fire-eyed panther,
In disguise the eternal hunger lay,
For each feathery, velvet-tufted anther
Lay in ambush waiting for its prey.

Tiniest jewelled fish that flashed like lightning,
Blindly drawn, came darting through the wave,
When, a stifling sack above them tightening,
Closed the ocean-blossom's living grave.

Now we fared through forest glooms primeval
Through whose leaves the light but rarely shone,
Where the buttressed tree-trunks looked coeval
With the time-worn, ocean-fretted stone ;
Where, from stem to stem their tendrils looping,
Coiled the lithe lianas fold on fold,
Or, in cataracts of verdure drooping,
From on high their billowy leafage rolled.

Where beneath the dusky woodland cover,
While the noon-hush holds all living things,
Butterflies of tropic splendour hover
In a maze of rainbow-coloured wings :
Some like stars light up their own green heaven
Some are spangled like a golden toy,
Or like flowers from their foliage driven
In the fiery ecstasy of joy.

But, the forest slumber rudely breaking,
Through the silence rings a piercing yell ;
At the cry unnumbered beasts, awaking,
With their howls the loud confusion swell.
'Tis the cry of some frail creature panting
In the tiger's lacerating grip ;
In its flesh carnivorous teeth implanting,
While the blood smokes round his wrinkled lip.

'Tis the scream some bird in terror utters,
With its wings weighed down by leaden fears,
As from bough to downward bough it flutters
Where the snake its glistening crest uprears :
Eyes of sluggish greed through rank weeds stealing,
Breath whose venomous fumes mount through the air,
Till benumbed the helpless victim, reeling,
Drops convulsed into the reptile snare.

Now we fared o'er sweltering wastes whose steaming
Clouds of tawny sand the wanderer blind.
Herds of horses with their long manes streaming
Snorted thirstily against the wind ;

O'er the waste they scoured in shadowy numbers,
 Gasp'd for springs their raging thirst to cool,
 And, like sick men mocked in fevered slumbers,
 Stoop to drink—and find a phantom pool.

What of antelopes crunched by the leopard ?
 What if hounds run down the timid hare ?
 What though sheep, strayed from the faithful shepherd,
 Perish helpless in the lion's lair ?
 The all-seeing sun shines on unheeding,
 In the night shines the unruffled moon,
 Though on earth brute myriads, preying, bleeding,
 Put creation harshly out of tune.

Cried I, turning to the shrouded figure—
 “Oh, in mercy veil this cruel strife !
 Sanguinary orgies which disfigure
 The green ways of labyrinthine life.
 From the needs and greeds of primal passion,
 From the serpent's track and lion's den,
 To the world our human hands did fashion,
 Lead me to the kindly haunts of men.”

And through fields of corn we passed together,
Orange golden in the brooding heat,
Where brown reapers in the harvest weather
Cut ripe swathes of downward rustling wheat.
In the orchards dangling red and yellow,
Clustered fruit weighed down the bending sprays ;
On a hundred hills the vines grew mellow
In the warmth of fostering autumn days.

Through the air the shrilly twittering swallows
Flashed their nimble shadows on the leas ;
Red-flecked cows were glassed in golden shallows,
Purple clover hummed with restless bees.
Herdsman drove the cattle from the mountain,
To the fold the shepherd drove his flocks,
Village girls drew water from the fountain,
Village yokels piled the full-eared shocks.

From the white town dozing in the valley,
Round its vast Cathedral's solemn shade,
Citizens strolled down the walnut alley
Where youth courted and glad childhood played.

“Peace on earth,” I murmured ; “let us linger—

Here the wage of life seems good at least :”

As I spake the veiled One raised a finger

Where the moon broke flowering in the east.

Faintly muttering from deep mountain ranges,

Muffled sounds rose hoarsely on the night,

As the crash of foundering avalanches

Wakes hoarse echoes in each Alpine height.

Near and nearer sounds the roaring—thunder,

Mortal thunder, crashes through the vale ;

Lightning flash of muskets breaks from under

Groves once haunted by the nightingale.

Men clutch madly at each weapon—women,

Children crouch in cellars, under roofs,

For the town is circled by their foemen—

Shakes the ground with clang of trampling hoofs.

Shot on shot the volleys hiss and rattle,

Shrilly whistling fly the murderous balls,

Fiercely roars the tumult of the battle

Round the hard-contested, dear-bought walls.

Horror, horror ! The fair town is burning,
Flames burst forth, wild sparks and ashes fly ;
With her children's blood the green earth's turning
Blood-red—blood-red, too, the cloud-winged sky.
Crackling flare the streets : from the lone steeple
The great clock booms forth its ancient chime,
And its dolorous quarters warn the people
Of the conquering troops that march with time.

Fallen lies the fair old town, its houses
Charred and ruined gape in smoking heaps ;
Here with shouts a ruffian band carouses,
There an outraged woman vainly weeps.
In the fields where the ripe corn lies mangled,
Where the wounded groan beneath the dead,
Friend and foe, now helplessly entangled,
Stain red poppies with a guiltier red.

'There the dog howls o'er his perished master,
There the crow comes circling from afar ;
All vile things that batten on disaster
Follow feasting in the wake of war.

Famine follows—what they ploughed and planted
The unhappy peasants shall not reap ;
Sickening of strange meats and fever haunted,
To their graves they prematurely creep.

“ Hence ”—I cried in unavailing pity—
“ Let us flee these scenes of monstrous strife,
Seek the pale of some imperial city
Where the law rules starlike o'er man's life.”
Straightway floating o'er blue sea and river,
We were plunged into a roaring cloud,
Wherethrough lamps in ague fits did shiver
O'er the surging multitudinous crowd.

Piles of stone, their cliff-like walls uprearing,
Flashed in luminous lines along the night ;
Jets of flame, spasmodically flaring,
Splashed black pavements with a sickly light ;
Fabulous gems shone here, and glowing coral,
Shimmering stuffs from many an Eastern loom,
And vast piles of tropic fruits and floral
Marvels seemed to mock November's gloom.

But what prowls near princely mart and dwelling,
Whence through many a thundering thoroughfare
Rich folk roll on cushions softly swelling
To the week-day feast and Sunday prayer ?
Yea, who prowl there, hunger-nipped and pallid,
Breathing nightmares limned upon the gloom ?
'Tis but human rubbish, gaunt and squalid,
Whom their country spurns for lack of room.

In their devious track we mutely follow,
Mutely climb dim flights of oozy stairs,
Where through gap-toothed, mizzling roof the yellow
Pestilent fog blends with the fetid air.
Through the unhinged door's discordant slamming
Ring the gruesome sounds of savage strife—
Howls of babes, the drunken father's damning,
Counter-cursing of the shrill-tongued wife.

Children feebly crying on their mother
In a wailful chorus—"Give us food !"
Man and woman glaring at each other
Like two gaunt wolves with a famished brood.

Till he snatched a stick, and, madly staring,
 Struck her blow on blow upon the head ;
 And she, reeling back, gasped, hardly caring—
 “ Ah, you’ve done it now, Jim ”—and was dead.

Dead—dead—dead—the miserable creature—
 Never to feel hunger’s cruel fang
 Wring the bowels of rebellious nature
 That her infants might be spared the pang.
 “ Dead! Good luck to her ! ” The man’s teeth chattered,
 Stone-still stared he with blank eyes and hard,
 Then, his frame with one big sob nigh shattered,
 Fled—and cut his throat down in the yard.

Dark the night—the children wail forsaken,
 Crane their wrinkled necks and cry for food,
 Drop off into fitful sleep, or waken
 Trembling like a sparrow’s ravished brood.
 Dark the night—the rain falls on the ashes,
 Feebly hissing on the feeble heat,
 Filters through the ceiling, drops in splashes
 On the little children’s naked feet.

Dark the night—the children wail forsaken—

Is there none, ah, none, to heed their moan ?

Yea, at dawn one little one is taken,

Four poor souls are left, but one is gone.

Gone—escaped—flown from the shame and sorrow

Waiting for them at life's sombre gate,

But the hand of merciless to-morrow

Drags the others shuddering to their fate.

But one came—a girlish thing—a creature

Flung by wanton hands 'mid lust and crime—

A poor outcast, yet by right of nature

Sweet as odour of the upland thyme.

Scapegoat of a people's sins, and hunted,

Howled at, hooted to the wilderness,

To that wilderness of deaf hearts, blunted

To the depths of woman's dumb distress.

Jetsam, flotsam of the monster city,

Spurned, defiled, reviled, that outcast came

To those babes that whined for love and pity,

Gave them bread bought with the wage of shame.

Gave them bread, and gave them warm, maternal

Kisses not on sale for any price :

Yea, a spark, a flash of some eternal

Sympathy shone through those haunted eyes.

Ah, perchance through her dark life's confusion,

Through the haste and taste of fevered hours,

Gusts of memory on her youth's pollution

Blew forgotten scents of faded flowers.

And she saw the cottage near the wild wood,

With its lichened roof and latticed panes,

Strayed once more through golden fields of childhood,

Hyacinth dells and hawthorn-scented lanes.

Heard once more the song of nesting thrushes

And the blackbird's long mellifluous note,

Felt once more the glow of maiden blushes

Burn through rosy cheek and milkwhite throat

In that orchard where the apple blossom

Lightly shaken fluttered on her hair,

As the heart was fluttering in her bosom

When her sweetheart came and kissed her there.

Often came he in the lilac-laden
Moonlit twilight, often pledged his word ;
But she was a simple country-maiden,
He the offspring of a noble lord.
Fading lilacs May's farewell betoken,
Fledglings fly and soon forget the nest ;
Lightly may a young man's vows be broken,
And the heart break in a woman's breast.

Gathered like a sprig of summer roses
In the dewy morn and flung away,
To the girl the father's door now closes,
Let her shelter henceforth how she may.
Who will house the miserable mother
With her child, a helpless castaway !
" I, am I the keeper of my brother ?"
Asks smug virtue as it turns to pray !

Lovely are the earliest Lenten lilies,
Primrose pleiads, hyacinthine sheets ;
Stripped and rifled from their pastoral valleys,
See them sold now in the public streets !

Other flowers are sold there besides posies—

Eyes may have the hyacinth's glowing blue,
Rounded cheeks the velvet bloom of roses,
Taper necks the rain-washed lily's hue.

But a rustic blossom ! Love and duty

Bound up in a child whom hunger slays !
Ah ! but one thing still is left her—beauty
Fresh, untarnished yet—and beauty pays.
Beauty keeps her child alive a little,
Then it dies—her woman's love with it—
Beauty's brilliant sceptre, ah, how brittle,
Drags her daily deeper down the pit.

Ruin closes o'er her—hideous, nameless ;

Each fresh morning marks a deeper fall ;
Till at twenty—callous, cankered, shameless,
She lies dying at the hospital.

Drink, more drink, she calls for—her harsh laughter

Grates upon the meekly praying nurse,
Eloquent about her soul's hereafter :

“Souls be blowed !” she sings out with a curse.

And so dies, an unrepenting sinner—
 Pitched into her pauper's grave what time
 That most noble lord rides by to dinner
 Who had wooed her in her innocent prime.
 And in after-dinner talk he preaches
 Resignation—o'er his burgundy—
 Till a grateful public dubs his speeches
 Oracles of true philanthropy.

Peace ye call this? Call this justice, meted
 Equally to rich and poor alike?
 Better than this peace the battle's heated
 Cannon-balls that ask not whom they strike!
 Better than this masquerade of culture
 Hiding strange hyæna appetites,
 The frank ravening of the raw-necked vulture
 As its beak the senseless carrion smites.

What of men in bondage, toiling blunted
 In the roaring factory's lurid gloom?
 What of cradled infants starved and stunted?
 What of woman's nameless martyrdom?

The all-seeing sun shines on unheeding,
 Shines by night the calm, unruffled moon,
 Though the human myriads, preying, bleeding,
 Put creation harshly out of tune.

“Hence, ah, hence”—I sobbed in quivering passion—

“From these fearful haunts of fiendish men!

Better far the plain, carnivorous fashion

Which is practised in the lion’s den.”

And I fled—yet staggering still did follow

In the footprints of my shrouded guide—

To the sea-caves echoing with the hollow

Immemorial moaning of the tide.

Sinking, swelling roared the wintry ocean,

Pitch-black chasms struck with flying blaze,

As the cloud-winged storm-sky’s sheer commotion

Showed the blank Moon’s mute Medusa face

White o’er wastes of water—surges crashing

Over surges in the formless gloom,

And a mastless hulk, with great seas washing

Her scourged flanks, pitched toppling to her doom.

Through the crash of wave on wave gigantic,
Through the thunder of the hurricane,
My wild heart in breaking shrilled with frantic
Exultation—" Chaos come again !
Yea, let earth be split and cloven asunder
With man's still accumulating curse—
Life is but a momentary blunder
In the cycle of the Universe.

" Yea, let earth with forest-belted mountains,
Hills and valleys, cataracts and plains,
With her clouds and storms and fires and fountains,
Pass with all her rolling sphere contains,
Melt, dissolve again into the ocean,
Ocean fade into a nebulous haze !"
And I sank back without sense or motion
'Neath the blank Moon's mute Medusa face.

Moments, years, or ages passed, when, lifting
Freezing lids, I felt the heavens on high,
And, innumerable as the sea-sands drifting,
Stars unnumbered drifted through the sky.

Rhythmical in luminous rotation,
In dædalian maze they reel and fly,
And their rushing light is Time's pulsation
In his passage through Eternity.

Constellated suns, fresh lit, declining,
Were ignited now, now quenched in space,
Rolling round each other, or inclining
Orb to orb in multi-coloured rays.
Ever showering from their flaming fountains
Light, more light, on each far-circling earth,
Till life stirred crepuscular seas, and mountains
Heaved convulsive with the throes of birth.

And the noble brotherhood of planets,
Knitted each to each by links of light,
Circled round their suns, nor knew a minute's
Lapse or languor in their ceaseless flight.
And pale moons and rings and burning splinters
Of wrecked worlds swept round their parent spheres,
Clothed with spring or sunk in polar winters
As their sun draws nigh or disappears.

Still new vistas of new stars—far dwindling—
Through the firmament like dewdrops fall,
Torches of the Cosmos which enkindling
Flash their revelation on the soul.

Yea, One spake there—though nor form nor feature
Shown—a Voice came from the peaks of time :—
“ Wilt thou judge me, wilt thou curse me, Creature
Whom I raised up from the Ocean slime ?

“ Long I waited—ages rolled o'er ages—
As I crystallised in granite rocks,
Struggling dumb through immemorial stages,
Glacial æons, fiery earthquake shocks.
In fierce throbs of flame or slow upheaval,
Speck by tiny speck, I topped the seas,
Leaped from earth's dark womb, and in primeval
Forests shot up shafts of mammoth trees.

“ Through a myriad forms I yearned and panted,
Putting forth quick shoots in endless swarms—
Giant-hoofed, sharp-tusked, or finned or planted
Writhing on the reef with pinioned arms.

I have climbed from reek of sanguine revels
 In Cimmerian wood and thorny wild,
 Slowly upwards to the dawnlit levels
 Where I bore thee, oh my youngest Child !

“ Oh, my heir and hope of my to-morrow,
 I—I draw thee on through fume and fret,
 Croon to thee in pain and call through sorrow,
 Flowers and stairs take for thy alphabet.
 Through the eyes of animals appealing,
 Feel my fettered spirit yearn to thine,
 Who, in storm of will and clash of feeling,
 Shape the life that shall be—the divine.

“ Oh, redeem me from my tiger rages,
 Reptile greed, and foul hyæna lust ;
 With the hero's deeds, the thoughts of sages,
 Sow and fructify this passive dust ;
 Drop in dew and healing love of woman
 On the bloodstained hands of hungry strife,
 Till there break from passion of the Human
 Morning-glory of transfigured life.

“I have cast my burden on thy shoulder ;
Unimagined potencies have given
That from formless Chaos thou shalt mould her
And translate gross earth to luminous heaven.
Bear, oh, bear the terrible compulsion,
Flinch not from the path thy fathers trod,
From Man’s martyrdom in slow convulsion
Will be born the infinite goodness—God.”

Ceased the Voice : and as it ceased it drifted
Like the seashell’s inarticulate moan ;
From the Deep, on wings of flame uplifted,
Rose the sun rejoicing and alone ;
Laughed in light upon the living ocean,
Danced and rocked itself upon the spray,
And its shivered beams in twinkling motion
Gleamed like star-motes of the Milky Way.

And beside me in the golden morning
I beheld my shrouded phantom-guide ;
But no longer sorrow-veiled and mourning—
It became transfigured by my side.

And I knew—as one escaped from prison
Sees old things again with fresh surprise—
It was Love himself, Love re-arisen
With the Eternal shining through his eyes.