

**CHARLES
KINGSLEY**

ANDROMEDA,
AND OTHER
POEMS

Charles Kingsley
Andromeda, and Other Poems

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Charles Kingsley

Andromeda, and Other Poems

ANDROMEDA

Over the sea, past Crete, on the Syrian shore to the southward,
Dwells in the well-tilled lowland a dark-haired Æthiop people,
Skilful with needle and loom, and the arts of the dyer and carver,
Skilful, but feeble of heart; for they know not the lords of Olympus,
Lovers of men; neither broad-browed Zeus, nor Pallas Athené,
Teacher of wisdom to heroes, bestower of might in the battle;
Share not the cunning of Hermes, nor list to the songs of Apollo.
Fearing the stars of the sky, and the roll of the blue salt water,
Fearing all things that have life in the womb of the seas and the livers,
Eating no fish to this day, nor ploughing the main, like the Phœnics,
Manful with black-beaked ships, they abide in a sorrowful region,
Vexed with the earthquake, and flame, and the sea-floods, scourge of
Poseidon.

Whelming the dwellings of men, and the toils of the slow-footed oxen,
Drowning the barley and flax, and the hard-earned gold of the harvest,
Up to the hillside vines, and the pastures skirting the woodland,
Inland the floods came yearly; and after the waters a monster,
Bred of the slime, like the worms which are bred from the slime of
the Nile-bank,

Shapeless, a terror to see; and by night it swam out to the seaward,
Daily returning to feed with the dawn, and devoured of the fairest,
Cattle, and children, and maids, till the terrified people fled inland.

Fasting in sackcloth and ashes they came, both the king and his
people,

Came to the mountain of oaks, to the house of the terrible sea-gods,
Hard by the gulf in the rocks, where of old the world-wide deluge
Sank to the inner abyss; and the lake where the fish of the goddess,
Holy, undying, abide; whom the priests feed daily with dainties.
There to the mystical fish, high-throned in her chamber of cedar,
Burnt they the fat of the flock; till the flame shone far to the seaward.
Three days fasting they prayed; but the fourth day the priests of the
goddess,

Cunning in spells, cast lots, to discover the crime of the people.

All day long they cast, till the house of the monarch was taken,
Cepheus, king of the land; and the faces of all gathered blackness.

Then once more they cast; and Cassiopœia was taken,

Deep-bosomed wife of the king, whom oft far-seeing Apollo

Watched well-pleased from the welkin, the fairest of Æthiop women:

Fairest, save only her daughter; for down to the ankle her tresses

Rolled, blue-black as the night, ambrosial, joy to beholders.

Awful and fair she arose, most like in her coming to Here,

Queen before whom the Immortals arise, as she comes on Olympus,
Out of the chamber of gold, which her son Hephæstos has wrought her.
Such in her stature and eyes, and the broad white light of her forehead.
Stately she came from her place, and she spoke in the midst of the
people.

‘Pure are my hands from blood: most pure this heart in my bosom.
Yet one fault I remember this day; one word have I spoken;
Rashly I spoke on the shore, and I dread lest the sea should have heard
it.

Watching my child at her bath, as she plunged in the joy of her
girlhood,

Fairer I called her in pride than Atergati, queen of the ocean.
Judge ye if this be my sin, for I know none other.’ She ended;
Wrapping her head in her mantle she stood, and the people were silent.

Answered the dark-browed priests, ‘No word, once spoken, returneth,
Even if uttered unwitting. Shall gods excuse our rashness?

That which is done, that abides; and the wrath of the sea is against us;
Hers, and the wrath of her brother, the Sun-god, lord of the sheepfolds.
Fairer than her hast thou boasted thy daughter? Ah folly! for hateful,
Hateful are they to the gods, whoso, impious, liken a mortal,
Fair though he be, to their glory; and hateful is that which is likened,
Grieving the eyes of their pride, and abominate, doomed to their anger.
What shall be likened to gods? The unknown, who deep in the darkness
Ever abide, twyformed, many-handed, terrible, shapeless.

Woe to the queen; for the land is defiled, and the people accursed.
Take thou her therefore by night, thou ill-starred Cassiopœia,
Take her with us in the night, when the moon sinks low to the westward;
Bind her aloft for a victim, a prey for the gorge of the monster,
Far on the sea-girt rock, which is washed by the surges for ever;
So may the goddess accept her, and so may the land make atonement,
Purged by her blood from its sin: so obey thou the doom of the rulers.’

Bitter in soul they went out, Cepheus and Cassiopœia,
Bitter in soul; and their hearts whirled round, as the leaves in the eddy.
Weak was the queen, and rebelled: but the king, like a shepherd of
people,

Willed not the land should waste; so he yielded the life of his daughter.

Deep in the wane of the night, as the moon sank low to the westward,
They by the shade of the cliffs, with the horror of darkness around
them,

Stole, as ashamed, to a deed which became not the light of the sunshine,
Slowly, the priests, and the queen, and the virgin bound in the galley,
Slowly they rowed to the rocks: but Cepheus far in the palace
Sate in the midst of the hall, on his throne, like a shepherd of people,
Choking his woe, dry-eyed, while the slaves wailed loudly around him.
They on the sea-girt rock, which is washed by the surges for ever,
Set her in silence, the guiltless, aloft with her face to the eastward.
Under a crag of the stone, where a ledge sloped down to the water;
There they set Andromeden, most beautiful, shaped like a goddess,
Lifting her long white arms wide-spread to the walls of the basalt,

Chaining them, ruthless, with brass; and they called on the might of the Rulers.

‘Mystical fish of the seas, dread Queen whom Æthiops honour,
Whelming the land in thy wrath, unavoidable, sharp as the sting-ray,
Thou, and thy brother the Sun, brain-smiting, lord of the sheepfold,
Scorching the earth all day, and then resting at night in thy bosom,
Take ye this one life for many, appeased by the blood of a maiden,
Fairest, and born of the fairest, a queen, most priceless of victims.’

Thrice they spat as they went by the maid: but her mother delaying
Fondled her child to the last, heart-crushed; and the warmth of her
weeping

Fell on the breast of the maid, as her woe broke forth into wailing.

‘Daughter! my daughter! forgive me! Oh curse not the murderess!
Curse not!

How have I sinned, but in love? Do the gods grudge glory to mothers?
Loving I bore thee in vain in the fate-cursed bride-bed of Cepheus,
Loving I fed thee and tended, and loving rejoiced in thy beauty,
Blessing thy limbs as I bathed them, and blessing thy locks as I combed
them;

Decking thee, ripening to woman, I blest thee: yet blessing I slew thee!
How have I sinned, but in love? Oh swear to me, swear to thy mother,
Never to haunt me with curse, as I go to the grave in my sorrow,
Childless and lone: may the gods never send me another, to slay it!
See, I embrace thy knees—soft knees, where no babe will be fondled—
Swear to me never to curse me, the hapless one, not in the death-pang.’

Weeping she clung to the knees of the maid; and the maid low
answered—

‘Curse thee! Not in the death-pang!’ The heart of the lady was
lightened.

Slowly she went by the ledge; and the maid was alone in the darkness.

Watching the pulse of the oars die down, as her own died with them,
Tearless, dumb with amaze she stood, as a storm-stunned nestling
Fallen from bough or from eave lies dumb, which the home-going
herdsman

Fancies a stone, till he catches the light of its terrified eyeball.

So through the long long hours the maid stood helpless and hopeless,
Wide-eyed, downward gazing in vain at the black blank darkness.

Feebly at last she began, while wild thoughts bubbled within her—

‘Guiltless I am: why thus, then? Are gods more ruthless than mortals?
Have they no mercy for youth? no love for the souls who have loved
them?

Even as I loved thee, dread sea, as I played by thy margin,
Blessing thy wave as it cooled me, thy wind as it breathed on my
forehead,

Bowing my head to thy tempest, and opening my heart to thy children,
Silvery fish, wreathed shell, and the strange lithe things of the water,
Tenderly casting them back, as they gasped on the beach in the
sunshine,

Home to their mother—in vain! for mine sits childless in anguish!

O false sea! false sea! I dreamed what I dreamed of thy goodness;
Dreamed of a smile in thy gleam, of a laugh in the plash of thy ripple:
False and devouring thou art, and the great world dark and spiteful.'

Awed by her own rash words she was still: and her eyes to the seaward
Looked for an answer of wrath: far off, in the heart of the darkness,
Blight white mists rose slowly; beneath them the wandering ocean
Glimmered and glowed to the deepest abyss; and the knees of the
maiden

Trembled and sunk in her fear, as afar, like a dawn in the midnight,
Rose from their seaweed chamber the choir of the mystical sea-maids.
Onward toward her they came, and her heart beat loud at their coming,
Watching the bliss of the gods, as they wakened the cliffs with their
laughter.

Onward they came in their joy, and before them the roll of the surges
Sank, as the breeze sank dead, into smooth green foam-flecked marble,
Awed; and the crags of the cliff, and the pines of the mountain were
silent.

Onward they came in their joy, and around them the lamps of the sea-
nymphs,

Myriad fiery globes, swam panting and heaving; and rainbows
Crimson and azure and emerald, were broken in star-showers, lighting
Far through the wine-dark depths of the crystal, the gardens of Nereus,
Coral and sea-fan and tangle, the blooms and the palms of the ocean.

Onward they came in their joy, more white than the foam which they
scattered,

Laughing and singing, and tossing and twining, while eager, the Tritons
Blinded with kisses their eyes, unreprieved, and above them in worship
Hovered the terns, and the seagulls swept past them on silvery pinions
Echoing softly their laughter; around them the wantoning dolphins
Sighed as they plunged, full of love; and the great sea-horses which
bore them

Curved up their crests in their pride to the delicate arms of the maidens,
Pawing the spray into gems, till a fiery rainfall, unharmed,
Sparkled and gleamed on the limbs of the nymphs, and the coils of
the mermen.

Onward they went in their joy, bathed round with the fiery coolness,
Needing nor sun nor moon, self-lighted, immortal: but others,
Pitiful, floated in silence apart; in their bosoms the sea-boys,
Slain by the wrath of the seas, swept down by the anger of Nereus;
Hapless, whom never again on strand or on quay shall their mothers
Welcome with garlands and vows to the temple, but wearily pining
Gaze over island and bay for the sails of the sunken; they heedless
Sleep in soft bosoms for ever, and dream of the surge and the sea-
maids.

Onward they passed in their joy; on their brows neither sorrow nor
anger;

Self-sufficing, as gods, never heeding the woe of the maiden.
She would have shrieked for their mercy: but shame made her dumb;
and their eyeballs

Stared on her careless and still, like the eyes in the house of the idols.
Seeing they saw not, and passed, like a dream, on the murmuring
ripple.

Stunned by the wonder she gazed, wide-eyed, as the glory departed.
'O fair shapes! far fairer than I! Too fair to be ruthless!

Gladden mine eyes once more with your splendour, unlike to my
fancies;

You, then, smiled in the sea-gleam, and laughed in the plash of the
ripple.

Awful I deemed you and formless; inhuman, monstrous as idols;
Lo, when ye came, ye were women, more loving and lovelier, only;
Like in all else; and I blest you: why blest ye not me for my worship?
Had you no mercy for me, thus guiltless? Ye pitied the sea-boys:
Why not me, then, more hapless by far? Does your sight and your
knowledge
End with the marge of the waves? Is the world which ye dwell in not
our world?'

Over the mountain aloft ran a rush and a roll and a roaring;
Downward the breeze came indignant, and leapt with a howl to the
water,

Roaring in cranny and crag, till the pillars and clefts of the basalt
Rang like a god-swept lyre, and her brain grew mad with the noises;
Crashing and lapping of waters, and sighing and tossing of weed-beds,
Gurgle and whisper and hiss of the foam, while thundering surges
Boomed in the wave-worn halls, as they champed at the roots of the
mountain.

Hour after hour in the darkness the wind rushed fierce to the landward,
Drenching the maiden with spray; she shivering, weary and drooping,
Stood with her heart full of thoughts, till the foam-crests gleamed in
the twilight,

Leaping and laughing around, and the east grew red with the dawning.

Then on the ridge of the hills rose the broad bright sun in his glory,
Hurling his arrows abroad on the glittering crests of the surges,
Gilding the soft round bosoms of wood, and the downs of the coastland;
Gilding the weeds at her feet, and the foam-laced teeth of the ledges,
Showing the maiden her home through the veil of her locks, as they
floated

Glistening, damp with the spray, in a long black cloud to the landward.
High in the far-off glens rose thin blue curls from the homesteads;
Softly the low of the herds, and the pipe of the outgoing herdsman,
Slid to her ear on the water, and melted her heart into weeping.
Shuddering, she tried to forget them; and straining her eyes to the
seaward,

Watched for her doom, as she wailed, but in vain, to the terrible Sun-
god.

'Dost thou not pity me, Sun, though thy wild dark sister be ruthless;
Dost thou not pity me here, as thou seest me desolate, weary,

Sickened with shame and despair, like a kid torn young from its mother?

What if my beauty insult thee, then blight it: but me—Oh spare me! Spare me yet, ere he be here, fierce, tearing, unbearable! See me, See me, how tender and soft, and thus helpless! See how I shudder, Fancying only my doom. Wilt thou shine thus bright, when it takes me? Are there no deaths save this, great Sun? No fiery arrow, Lightning, or deep-mouthed wave? Why thus? What music in shrieking,

Pleasure in warm live limbs torn slowly? And dar'st thou behold them! Oh, thou hast watched worse deeds! All sights are alike to thy brightness!

What if thou waken the birds to their song, dost thou waken no sorrow; Waken no sick to their pain; no captive to wrench at his fetters?

Smile on the garden and fold, and on maidens who sing at the milking; Flash into tapestried chambers, and peep in the eyelids of lovers, Showing the blissful their bliss—Dost love, then, the place where thou smilest?

Lovest thou cities aflame, fierce blows, and the shrieks of the widow? Lovest thou corpse-strewn fields, as thou lightest the path of the vulture?

Lovest thou these, that thou gazest so gay on my tears, and my mother's, Laughing alike at the horror of one, and the bliss of another?

What dost thou care, in thy sky, for the joys and the sorrows of mortals? Colder art thou than the nymphs: in thy broad bright eye is no seeing. Hadst thou a soul—as much soul as the slaves in the house of my father, Wouldst thou not save? Poor thralls! they pitied me, clung to me weeping,

Kissing my hands and my feet—What, are gods more ruthless than mortals?

Worse than the souls which they rule? Let me die: they war not with ashes!

Sudden she ceased, with a shriek: in the spray, like a hovering foam-bow,

Hung, more fair than the foam-bow, a boy in the bloom of his manhood,

Golden-haired, ivory-limbed, ambrosial; over his shoulder Hung for a veil of his beauty the gold-fringed folds of the goat-skin, Bearing the brass of his shield, as the sun flashed clear on its clearness. Curved on his thigh lay a falchion, and under the gleam of his helmet Eyes more blue than the main shone awful; around him Athené Shed in her love such grace, such state, and terrible daring.

Hovering over the water he came, upon glittering pinions, Living, a wonder, outgrown from the tight-laced gold of his sandals; Bounding from billow to billow, and sweeping the crests like a sea-gull; Leaping the gulfs of the surge, as he laughed in the joy of his leaping. Fair and majestic he sprang to the rock; and the maiden in wonder Gazed for a while, and then hid in the dark-rolling wave of her tresses,

Fearful, the light of her eyes; while the boy (for her sorrow had awed him)

Blushed at her blushes, and vanished, like mist on the cliffs at the sunrise.

Fearful at length she looked forth: he was gone: she, wild with amazement,

Wailed for her mother aloud: but the wail of the wind only answered.

Sudden he flashed into sight, by her side; in his pity and anger

Moist were his eyes; and his breath like a rose-bed, as bolder and bolder,

Hovering under her brows, like a swallow that haunts by the house-eaves,

Delicate-handed, he lifted the veil of her hair; while the maiden

Motionless, frozen with fear, wept loud; till his lips unclosing

Poured from their pearl-strung portal the musical wave of his wonder.

‘Ah, well spoke she, the wise one, the gray-eyed Pallas Athené,—

Known to Immortals alone are the prizes which lie for the heroes

Ready prepared at their feet; for requiring a little, the rulers

Pay back the loan tenfold to the man who, careless of pleasure,

Thirsting for honour and toil, fares forth on a perilous errand

Led by the guiding of gods, and strong in the strength of Immortals.

Thus have they led me to thee: from afar, unknowing, I marked thee,

Shining, a snow-white cross on the dark-green walls of the sea-cliff;

Carven in marble I deemed thee, a perfect work of the craftsman.

Likeness of Amphitrité, or far-famed Queen Cythereia.

Curious I came, till I saw how thy tresses streamed in the sea-wind,

Glistening, black as the night, and thy lips moved slow in thy wailing.

Speak again now—Oh speak! For my soul is stirred to avenge thee;

Tell me what barbarous horde, without law, unrighteous and heartless,

Hateful to gods and to men, thus have bound thee, a shame to the sunlight,

Scorn and prize to the sailor: but my prize now; for a coward,

Coward and shameless were he, who so finding a glorious jewel

Cast on the wayside by fools, would not win it and keep it and wear it,

Even as I will thee; for I swear by the head of my father,

Bearing thee over the sea-wave, to wed thee in Argos the fruitful,

Beautiful, meed of my toil no less than this head which I carry,

Hidden here fearful—Oh speak!’

But the maid, still dumb with amazement,

Watered her bosom with weeping, and longed for her home and her mother.

Beautiful, eager, he wooed her, and kissed off her tears as he hovered,

Roving at will, as a bee, on the brows of a rock nymph-haunted,

Garlanded over with vine, and acanthus, and clambering roses,

Cool in the fierce still noon, where streams glance clear in the mossbeds,

Hums on from blossom to blossom, and mingles the sweets as he tastes them.

Beautiful, eager, he kissed her, and clasped her yet closer and closer,

Praying her still to speak—

‘Not cruel nor rough did my mother
Bear me to broad-browed Zeus in the depths of the brass-covered
dungeon;

Neither in vain, as I think, have I talked with the cunning of Hermes,
Face unto face, as a friend; or from gray-eyed Pallas Athené
Learnt what is fit, and respecting myself, to respect in my dealings
Those whom the gods should love; so fear not; to chaste espousals
Only I woo thee, and swear, that a queen, and alone without rival
By me thou sittest in Argos of Hellas, throne of my fathers,
Worshipped by fair-haired kings: why callest thou still on thy mother?
Why did she leave thee thus here? For no foeman has bound thee; no
foeman

Winning with strokes of the sword such a prize, would so leave it behind
him.’

Just as at first some colt, wild-eyed, with quivering nostril,
Plunges in fear of the curb, and the fluttering robes of the rider;
Soon, grown bold by despair, submits to the will of his master,
Tamer and tamer each hour, and at last, in the pride of obedience,
Answers the heel with a curvet, and arches his neck to be fondled,
Cowed by the need that maid grew tame; while the hero indignant
Tore at the fetters which held her: the brass, too cunningly tempered,
Held to the rock by the nails, deep wedged: till the boy, red with anger,
Drew from his ivory thigh, keen flashing, a falchion of diamond—
‘Now let the work of the smith try strength with the arms of Immortals!’
Dazzling it fell; and the blade, as the vine-hook shears off the vine-
bough,
Carved through the strength of the brass, till her arms fell soft on his
shoulder.

Once she essayed to escape: but the ring of the water was round her,
Round her the ring of his arms; and despairing she sank on his bosom.
Then, like a fawn when startled, she looked with a shriek to the seaward.

‘Touch me not, wretch that I am! For accursed, a shame and a hissing,
Guiltless, accurst no less, I await the revenge of the sea-gods.
Yonder it comes! Ah go! Let me perish unseen, if I perish!
Spare me the shame of thine eyes, when merciless fangs must tear me
Piecemeal! Enough to endure by myself in the light of the sunshine
Guiltless, the death of a kid!’

But the boy still lingered around her,
Loth, like a boy, to forego her, and waken the cliffs with his laughter.
‘Yon is the foe, then? A beast of the sea? I had deemed him immortal.
Titan, or Proteus’ self, or Nereus, foeman of sailors:
Yet would I fight with them all, but Poseidon, shaker of mountains,
Uncle of mine, whom I fear, as is fit; for he haunts on Olympus,
Holding the third of the world; and the gods all rise at his coming.
Unto none else will I yield, god-helped: how then to a monster,
Child of the earth and of night, unreasoning, shapeless, accursed?’

‘Art thou, too, then a god?’

‘No god I,’ smiling he answered;

‘Mortal as thou, yet divine: but mortal the herds of the ocean,
Equal to men in that only, and less in all else; for they nourish
Blindly the life of the lips, untaught by the gods, without wisdom:
Shame if I fled before such!’

In her heart new life was enkindled,
Worship and trust, fair parents of love: but she answered him sighing.

‘Beautiful, why wilt thou die? Is the light of the sun, then, so
worthless,

Worthless to sport with thy fellows in flowery glades of the forest,
Under the broad green oaks, where never again shall I wander,
Tossing the ball with my maidens, or wreathing the altar in garlands,
Careless, with dances and songs, till the glens rang loud to our laughter.
Too full of death the sad earth is already: the halls full of weepers,
Quarried by tombs all cliffs, and the bones gleam white on the sea-
floor,

Numberless, gnawn by the herds who attend on the pitiless sea-gods,
Even as mine will be soon: and yet noble it seems to me, dying,
Giving my life for a people, to save to the arms of their lovers
Maidens and youths for a while: thee, fairest of all, shall I slay thee?
Add not thy bones to the many, thus angering idly the dread ones!
Either the monster will crush, or the sea-queen’s self overwhelm thee,
Vengeful, in tempest and foam, and the thundering walls of the surges.
Why wilt thou follow me down? can we love in the black blank
darkness?

Love in the realms of the dead, in the land where all is forgotten?
Why wilt thou follow me down? is it joy, on the desolate oozes,
Meagre to flit, gray ghosts in the depths of the gray salt water?
Beautiful! why wilt thou die, and defraud fair girls of thy manhood?
Surely one waits for thee longing, afar in the isles of the ocean.
Go thy way; I mine; for the gods grudge pleasure to mortals.’

Sobbing she ended her moan, as her neck, like a storm-bent lily,
Drooped with the weight of her woe, and her limbs sank, weary with
watching,

Soft on the hard-ledged rock: but the boy, with his eye on the monster,
Clasped her, and stood, like a god; and his lips curved proud as he
answered—

‘Great are the pitiless sea-gods: but greater the Lords of Olympus;
Greater the Ægis-wielder, and greater is she who attends him.
Clear-eyed Justice her name is, the counsellor, loved of Athené;
Helper of heroes, who dare, in the god-given might of their manhood,
Greatly to do and to suffer, and far in the fens’ and the forests
Smite the devourers of men, Heaven-hated, brood of the giants,
Twyformed, strange, without like, who obey not the golden-haired
Rulers.

Vainly rebelling they rage, till they die by the swords of the heroes,
Even as this must die; for I burn with the wrath of my father,
Wandering, led by Athené; and dare whatsoever betides me.
Led by Athené I won from the gray-haired terrible sisters
Secrets hidden from men, when I found them asleep on the sand-hills,

Keeping their eye and their tooth, till they showed me the perilous pathway

Over the waterless ocean, the valley that led to the Gorgon.

Her too I slew in my craft, Medusa, the beautiful horror;

Taught by Athené I slew her, and saw not herself, but her image,

Watching the mirror of brass, in the shield which a goddess had lent me.

Cleaving her brass-scaled throat, as she lay with her adders around her,

Fearless I bore off her head, in the folds of the mystical goat-skin

Hide of Amaltheié, fair nurse of the Ægis-wielder.

Hither I bear it, a gift to the gods, and a death to my foe-men,

Freezing the seer to stone; to hide thine eyes from the horror.

Kiss me but once, and I go.'

Then lifting her neck, like a sea-bird

Peering up over the wave, from the foam-white swells of her bosom,

Blushing she kissed him: afar, on the topmost Idalian summit

Laughed in the joy of her heart, far-seeing, the queen Aphrodité.

Loosing his arms from her waist he flew upward, awaiting the sea-beast.

Onward it came from the southward, as bulky and black as a galley,

Lazily coasting along, as the fish fled leaping before it;

Lazily breasting the ripple, and watching by sandbar and headland,

Listening for laughter of maidens at bleaching, or song of the fisher,

Children at play on the pebbles, or cattle that pawed on the sand-hills.

Rolling and dripping it came, where bedded in glistening purple

Cold on the cold sea-weeds lay the long white sides of the maiden,

Trembling, her face in her hands, and her tresses afloat on the water.

As when an osprey aloft, dark-eyebrowed, royally crested,

Flags on by creek and by cove, and in scorn of the anger of Nereus

Ranges, the king of the shore; if he see on a glittering shallow,

Chasing the bass and the mullet, the fin of a wallowing dolphin,

Halting, he wheels round slowly, in doubt at the weight of his quarry,

Whether to clutch it alive, or to fall on the wretch like a plummet,

Stunning with terrible talon the life of the brain in the hindhead:

Then rushes up with a scream, and stooping the wrath of his eyebrows

Falls from the sky, like a star, while the wind rattles hoarse in his pinions.

Over him closes the foam for a moment; and then from the sand-bed

Rolls up the great fish, dead, and his side gleams white in the sunshine.

Thus fell the boy on the beast, unveiling the face of the Gorgon;

Thus fell the boy on the beast; thus rolled up the beast in his horror,

Once, as the dead eyes glared into his; then his sides, death-sharpened,

Stiffened and stood, brown rock, in the wash of the wandering water.

Beautiful, eager, triumphant, he leapt back again to his treasure;

Leapt back again, full blest, toward arms spread wide to receive him.

Brimful of honour he clasped her, and brimful of love she caressed him,

Answering lip with lip; while above them the queen Aphrodité

Poured on their foreheads and limbs, unseen, ambrosial odours,

Givers of longing, and rapture, and chaste content in espousals.

Happy whom ere they be wedded anoints she, the Queen Aphrodité!

Laughing she called to her sister, the chaste Tritonid Athené,
‘Seest thou yonder thy pupil, thou maid of the Ægis-wielder?
How he has turned himself wholly to love, and caresses a damsel,
Dreaming no longer of honour, or danger, or Pallas Athené?
Sweeter, it seems, to the young my gifts are; so yield me the stripling;
Yield him me now, lest he die in his prime, like hapless Adonis.’

Smiling she answered in turn, that chaste Tritonid Athené:
‘Dear unto me, no less than to thee, is the wedlock of heroes;
Dear, who can worthily win him a wife not unworthy; and noble,
Pure with the pure to beget brave children, the like of their father.
Happy, who thus stands linked to the heroes who were, and who shall
be;

Girdled with holiest awe, not sparing of self; for his mother
Watches his steps with the eyes of the gods; and his wife and his
children

Move him to plan and to do in the farm and the camp and the council.
Thence comes weal to a nation: but woe upon woe, when the people
Mingle in love at their will, like the brutes, not heeding the future.’

Then from her gold-strung loom, where she wrought in her chamber
of cedar,

Awful and fair she arose; and she went by the glens of Olympus;
Went by the isles of the sea, and the wind never ruffled her mantle;
Went by the water of Crete, and the black-beaked fleets of the
Phœnics;

Came to the sea-girt rock which is washed by the surges for ever,
Bearing the wealth of the gods, for a gift to the bride of a hero.
There she met Andromeden and Persea, shaped like Immortals;
Solemn and sweet was her smile, while their hearts beat loud at her
coming;

Solemn and sweet was her smile, as she spoke to the pair in her wisdom.

‘Three things hold we, the Rulers, who sit by the founts of Olympus,
Wisdom, and prowess, and beauty; and freely we pour them on mortals;
Pleased at our image in man, as a father at his in his children.

One thing only we grudge to mankind: when a hero, unthankful,
Boasts of our gifts as his own, stiffnecked, and dishonours the givers,
Turning our weapons against us. Him Até follows avenging;
Slowly she tracks him and sure, as a lyme-hound; sudden she grips him,
Crushing him, blind in his pride, for a sign and a terror to folly.
This we avenge, as is fit; in all else never weary of giving.

Come, then, damsel, and know if the gods grudge pleasure to mortals.’

Loving and gentle she spoke: but the maid stood in awe, as the goddess
Plaited with soft swift finger her tresses, and decked her in jewels,
Armlet and anklet and earbell; and over her shoulders a necklace,
Heavy, enamelled, the flower of the gold and the brass of the mountain.
Trembling with joy she gazed, so well Hæphaistos had made it,
Deep in the forges of Ætna, while Charis his lady beside him
Mingled her grace in his craft, as he wrought for his sister Athené.
Then on the brows of the maiden a veil bound Pallas Athené;

Ample it fell to her feet, deep-fringed, a wonder of weaving.
Ages and ages ago it was wrought on the heights of Olympus,
Wrought in the gold-strung loom, by the finger of cunning Athené.
In it she wove all creatures that teem in the womb of the ocean;
Nereid, siren, and triton, and dolphin, and arrowy fishes
Glittering round, many-hued, on the flame-red folds of the mantle.
In it she wove, too, a town where gray-haired kings sat in judgment;
Sceptre in hand in the market they sat, doing right by the people,
Wise: while above watched Justice, and near, far-seeing Apollo.
Round it she wove for a fringe all herbs of the earth and the water,
Violet, asphodel, ivy, and vine-leaves, roses and lilies,
Coral and sea-fan and tangle, the blooms and the palms of the ocean:
Now from Olympus she bore it, a dower to the bride of a hero.
Over the limbs of the damsel she wrapt it: the maid still trembled,
Shading her face with her hands; for the eyes of the goddess were awful.

Then, as a pine upon Ida when southwest winds blow landward,
Stately she bent to the damsel, and breathed on her: under her breathing
Taller and fairer she grew; and the goddess spoke in her wisdom.

‘Courage I give thee; the heart of a queen, and the mind of Immortals;
Godlike to talk with the gods, and to look on their eyes unshrinking;
Fearing the sun and the stars no more, and the blue salt water;
Fearing us only, the lords of Olympus, friends of the heroes;
Chastely and wisely to govern thyself and thy house and thy people,
Bearing a godlike race to thy spouse, till dying I set thee
High for a star in the heavens, a sign and a hope to the seamen,
Spreading thy long white arms all night in the heights of the æther,
Hard by thy sire and the hero thy spouse, while near thee thy mother
Sits in her ivory chair, as she plaits ambrosial tresses.
All night long thou wilt shine; all day thou wilt feast on Olympus,
Happy, the guest of the gods, by thy husband, the god-begotten.’

Blissful, they turned them to go: but the fair-tressed Pallas Athené
Rose, like a pillar of tall white cloud, toward silver Olympus;
Far above ocean and shore, and the peaks of the isles and the mainland;
Where no frost nor storm is, in clear blue windless abysses,
High in the home of the summer, the seats of the happy Immortals,
Shrouded in keen deep blaze, unapproachable; there ever youthful
Hebé, Harmonié, and the daughter of Jove, Aphrodité,
Whirled in the white-linked dance with the gold-crowned Hours and
the Graces,

Hand within hand, while clear piped Phœbe, queen of the woodlands.
All day long they rejoiced: but Athené still in her chamber
Bent herself over her loom, as the stars rang loud to her singing,
Chanting of order and right, and of foresight, warden of nations;
Chanting of labour and craft, and of wealth in the port and the garner;
Chanting of valour and fame, and the man who can fall with the
foremost,
Fighting for children and wife, and the field which his father
bequeathed him.

Sweetly and solemnly sang she, and planned new lessons for mortals:

Happy, who hearing obey her, the wise unsullied Athené.

Eversley, 1852,

HYPOTHESES HYPOCHONDRIACÆ ¹

And should she die, her grave should be
Upon the bare top of a sunny hill,
Among the moorlands of her own fair land,
Amid a ring of old and moss-grown stones
In gorse and heather all embosomed.
There should be no tall stone, no marble tomb
Above her gentle corse;—the ponderous pile
Would press too rudely on those fairy limbs.
The turf should lightly lie, that marked her home.
A sacred spot it would be—every bird
That came to watch her lone grave should be holy.
The deer should browse around her undisturbed;
The whin bird by, her lonely nest should build
All fearless; for in life she loved to see
Happiness in all things—
And we would come on summer days
When all around was bright, and set us down
And think of all that lay beneath that turf
On which the heedless moor-bird sits, and whistles
His long, shrill, painful song, as though he plained
For her that loved him and his pleasant hills;
And we would dream again of bygone days
Until our eyes should swell with natural tears
For brilliant hopes—all faded into air!
As, on the sands of Irak, near approach
Destroys the traveller's vision of still lakes,
And goodly streams reed-clad, and meadows green;
And leaves behind the drear reality
Of shadeless, same, yet ever-changing sand!
And when the sullen clouds rose thick on high
Mountains on mountains rolling—and dark mist
Wrapped itself round the hill-tops like a shroud,
When on her grave swept by the moaning wind
Bending the heather-bells—then would I come
And watch by her, in silent loneliness,
And smile upon the storm—as knowing well
The lightning's flash would surely turn aside,
Nor mar the lowly mound, where peaceful sleeps
All that gave life and love to one fond heart!
I talk of things that are not; and if prayers
By night and day availed from my weak lips,
Then should they never be! till I was gone,
Before the friends I loved, to my long home.

¹ This and the following poem were written at school in early boy-hood.

Oh pardon me, if e'er I say too much; my mind
Too often strangely turns to ribald mirth,
As though I had no doubt nor hope beyond—
Or brooding melancholy cloys my soul
With thoughts of days misspent, of wasted time
And bitter feelings swallowed up in jests.
Then strange and fearful thoughts flit o'er my brain
By indistinctness made more terrible,
And incubi mock at me with fierce eyes
Upon my couch: and visions, crude and dire,
Of planets, suns, millions of miles, infinity,
Space, time, thought, being, blank nonentity,
Things incorporeal, fancies of the brain,
Seen, heard, as though they were material,
All mixed in sickening mazes, trouble me,
And lead my soul away from earth and heaven
Until I doubt whether I be or not!
And then I see all frightful shapes—lank ghosts,
Hydras, chimeras, krakens, wastes of sand,
Herbless and void of living voice—tall mountains
Cleaving the skies with height immeasurable,
On which perchance I climb for infinite years; broad seas,
Studded with islands numberless, that stretch
Beyond the regions of the sun, and fade
Away in distance vast, or dreary clouds,
Cold, dark, and watery, where wander I for ever!
Or space of ether, where I hang for aye!
A speck, an atom—inconsumable—
Immortal, hopeless, voiceless, powerless!
And oft I fancy, I am weak and old,
And all who loved me, one by one, are dead,
And I am left alone—and cannot die!
Surely there is no rest on earth for souls
Whose dreams are like a madman's! I am young
And much is yet before me—after years
May bring peace with them to my weary heart!

Helston, 1835.

TREHILL WELL

There stood a low and ivied roof,
As gazing rustics tell,
In times of chivalry and song
‘Yclept the holy well.

Above the ivies’ branchlets gray
In glistening clusters shone;
While round the base the grass-blades bright
And spiry foxglove sprung.

The brambles clung in graceful bands,
Chequering the old gray stone
With shining leaflets, whose bright face
In autumn’s tinting shone.

Around the fountain’s eastern base
A babbling brooklet sped,
With sleepy murmur purling soft
Adown its gravelly bed.

Within the cell the filmy ferns
To woo the clear wave bent;
And cushioned mosses to the stone
Their quaint embroidery lent.

The fountain’s face lay still as glass—
Save where the streamlet free
Across the basin’s gnarled lip
Flowed ever silently.

Above the well a little nook
Once held, as rustics tell,
All garland-decked, an image of
The Lady of the Well.

They tell of tales of mystery,
Of darkling deeds of woe;
But no! such doings might not brook
The holy streamlet’s flow.

Oh tell me not of bitter thoughts,
Of melancholy dreams,
By that fair fount whose sunny wall
Basks in the western beams.

When last I saw that little stream,
A form of light there stood,
That seemed like a precious gem,
Beneath that archway rude:

And as I gazed with love and awe
Upon that sylph-like thing,
Methought that airy form must be
The fairy of the spring.

Helston, 1835.

IN AN ILLUMINATED MISSAL

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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