

Browning Elizabeth Barrett

The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Volume 1



Elizabeth Browning

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Barrett Browning. Volume 1**

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Browning E.

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PREFATORY NOTE

In a recent "Memoir of Elizabeth Barrett Browning," by John H. Ingram, it is observed that "such essays on her personal history as have appeared, either in England or elsewhere, are replete with mistakes or misstatements." For these he proposes to substitute "a correct if short memoir: " but, kindly and appreciative as may be Mr. Ingram's performance, there occur not a few passages in it equally "mistaken and misstated."

1. "Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of Edward Moulton Barrett, was born in London on the 4th of March, 1809." Elizabeth was born, March 6, 1806, at Coxhoe Hall, county of Durham, the residence of her father.¹ "Before she was eleven she composed an epic on 'Marathon.'" She was then fourteen.

2. "It is said that Mr. Barrett was a man of intellect and culture, and therefore able to direct his daughter's education, but be that so or not, he obtained for her the tutorial assistance of the well-known Greek scholar Hugh Stuart Boyd ... who was also a writer of fluent verse: and his influence and instruction doubtless confirmed Miss Barrett in her poetical aspirations." Mr. Boyd, early deprived of sight from over-study, resided at Malvern, and cared for little else than Greek literature, especially that of the "Fathers." He was about or over fifty, stooped a good deal, and was nearly bald. His daily habit was to sit for hours before a table, treating it as a piano with his fingers, and reciting Greek – his memory for which was such that, on a folio column of his favourite St. Gregory being read to him, he would repeat it without missing a syllable. Elizabeth, then residing in Herefordshire, visited him frequently, partly from her own love of Greek, and partly from a desire for the congenial society of one to whom her attendance might be helpful. There was nothing in the least "tutorial" in this relation – merely the natural feeling of a girl for a blind and disabled scholar in whose pursuits she took interest. Her knowledge of Greek was originally due to a preference for sharing with her brother Edward in the instruction of his Scottish tutor Mr. M'Swiney rather than in that of her own governess Mrs. Orme: and at such lessons she constantly assisted until her brother's departure for the Charter House – where he had Thackeray for a schoolfellow. In point of fact, she was self-taught in almost every respect. Mr. Boyd was no writer of "fluent verse," though he published an unimportant volume, and the literary sympathies of the friends were exclusively bestowed on Greek.

3. "Edward, the eldest of the family," was Elizabeth's younger by nearly two years. He and his companions perished, not "just off Teignmouth," but in Babbicombe Bay. The bodies drifted up channel, and were recovered three days after.

4. "Her father's fortune was considerably augmented by his accession to the property of his only brother Richard, for many years Speaker of the House of Assembly at Jamaica." Mr. Edward Moulton, by the will of his grandfather, was directed to affix the name of Barrett to that of Moulton, upon succeeding to the estates in Jamaica. Richard was his cousin, and by his death Mr. Barrett did not acquire a shilling. His only brother was Samuel, sometime M.P. for Richmond. He had also a sister who died young, the full-length portrait of whom by Sir Thomas Lawrence (the first exhibited by that painter) is in the possession of Octavius Moulton-Barrett at Westover, near Calbourne, in

¹ The entry in the Parish Register of Kelloe Church is as follows: – Elizabeth Barrett Moulton Barrett, daughter and first child of Edward Barrett Moulton Barrett, of Coxhoe Hall, native of St James's, Jamaica, by Mary, late Clarke, native of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, was born, March 6th, 1806, and baptized 10th of February, 1808.

the Isle of Wight. With respect to the "semi-tropical taste" of Mr. Barrett, so characterised in the "Memoir," it may be mentioned that, on the early death of his father, he was brought from Jamaica to England when a very young child, as a ward of the late Chief Baron Lord Abinger, then Mr. Scarlett, whom he frequently accompanied in his post-chaise when on Circuit. He was sent to Harrow, but received there so savage a punishment for a supposed offence ("burning the toast") by the youth whose "fag" he had become, that he was withdrawn from the school by his mother, and the delinquent was expelled. At the age of sixteen he was sent by Mr. Scarlett to Cambridge, and thence, for an early marriage, went to Northumberland. After purchasing the estate in Herefordshire, he gave himself up assiduously to the usual duties and occupations of a country gentleman, – farmed largely, was an active magistrate, became for a year High Sheriff, and in all county contests busied himself as a Liberal. He had a fine taste for landscape-gardening, planted considerably, loved trees – almost as much as his friend, the early correspondent of his daughter, Sir Uvedale Price – and for their sake discontinued keeping deer in the park.

Many other particulars concerning other people, in other "Biographical Memoirs which have appeared in England or elsewhere" for some years past, are similarly "mistaken and misstated: " but they seem better left without notice by anybody.

R. B.

29 De Vere Gardens, W.
December 10, 1887.

Dedication

TO MY FATHER

When your eyes fall upon this page of dedication, and you start to see to whom it is inscribed, your first thought will be of the time far off when I was a child and wrote verses, and when I dedicated them to you who were my public and my critic. Of all that such a recollection implies of saddest and sweetest to both of us, it would become neither of us to speak before the world, nor would it be possible for us to speak of it to one another, with voices that did not falter. Enough, that what is in my heart when I write thus, will be fully known to yours.

And my desire is that you, who are a witness how if this art of poetry had been a less earnest object to me, it must have fallen from exhausted hands before this day, – that you, who have shared with me in things bitter and sweet, softening or enhancing them, every day, – that you, who hold with me, over all sense of loss and transiency, one hope by one Name, – may accept from me the inscription of these volumes, the exponents of a few years of an existence which has been sustained and comforted by you as well as given. Somewhat more faint-hearted than I used to be, it is my fancy thus to seem to return to a visible personal dependence on you, as if indeed I were a child again; to conjure your beloved image between myself and the public, so as to be sure of one smile, – and to satisfy my heart while I sanctify my ambition, by associating with the great pursuit of my life, its tenderest and holiest affection.

Your

E. B. B.

London: 50 Wimpole Street,
1844.

PREFACE

TO THE FIRST COLLECTED EDITION OF MRS. BROWNING'S POEMS

The collection here offered to the public consists of Poems which have been written in the interim between the period of the publication of my "Seraphim" and the present; variously coloured, or perhaps shadowed, by the life of which they are the natural expression, – and, with the exception of a few contributions to English or American periodicals, are printed now for the first time.

As the first poem of this collection, the "Drama of Exile," is the longest and most important work (to *me*!) which I ever trusted into the current of publication, I may be pardoned for entreating the reader's attention to the fact, that I decided on publishing it after considerable hesitation and doubt. The subject of the Drama rather fastened on me than was chosen; and the form, approaching the model of the Greek tragedy, shaped itself under my hand, rather by force of pleasure than of design. But when the excitement of composition had subsided, I felt afraid of my position. My subject was the new and strange experience of the fallen humanity, as it went forth from Paradise into the wilderness; with a peculiar reference to Eve's allotted grief, which, considering that self-sacrifice belonged to her womanhood, and the consciousness of originating the Fall to her offence, – appeared to me imperfectly apprehended hitherto, and more expressible by a woman than a man. There was room, at least, for lyrical emotion in those first steps into the wilderness, – in that first sense of desolation after wrath, – in that first audible gathering of the recriminating "groan of the whole creation," – in that first darkening of the hills from the recoiling feet of angels, – and in that first silence of the voice of God. And I took pleasure in driving in, like a pile, stroke upon stroke, the Idea of Exile, – admitting Lucifer as an extreme Adam, to represent the ultimate tendencies of sin and loss, – that it might be strong to bear up the contrary idea of the Heavenly love and purity. But when all was done, I felt afraid, as I said before, of my position. I had promised my own prudence to shut close the gates of Eden between Milton and myself, so that none might say I dared to walk in his footsteps. He should be within, I thought, with his Adam and Eve unfallen or falling, – and I, without, with my Exiles, —*I* also an exile! It would not do. The subject, and his glory covering it, swept through the gates, and I stood full in it, against my will, and contrary to my vow, – till I shrank back fearing, almost desponding; hesitating to venture even a passing association with our great poet before the face of the public. Whether at last I took courage for the venture, by a sudden revival of that love of manuscript which should be classed by moral philosophers among the natural affections, or by the encouraging voice of a dear friend, it is not interesting to the reader to inquire. Neither could the fact affect the question; since I bear, of course, my own responsibilities. For the rest, Milton is too high, and I am too low, to render it necessary for me to disavow any rash emulation of his divine faculty on his own ground; while enough individuality will be granted, I hope, to my poem, to rescue me from that imputation of plagiarism which should be too servile a thing for every sincere thinker. After all, and at the worst, I have only attempted, in respect to Milton, what the Greek dramatists achieved lawfully in respect to Homer. They constructed dramas on Trojan ground; they raised on the buskin and even clasped with the sock, the feet of Homeric heroes; yet they neither imitated their Homer nor emasculated him. The Agamemnon of Æschylus, who died in the bath, did no harm to, nor suffered any harm from, the Agamemnon of Homer who bearded Achilles. To this analogy – the more favourable to me from the obvious exception in it, that Homer's subject was his own possibly by creation, – whereas Milton's was his own by illustration only, – I appeal. To this analogy —*not* to this comparison, be it understood – I appeal. For the analogy of the stronger may apply to the weaker; and the reader may have patience with the weakest while she suggests the application.

On a graver point I must take leave to touch, in further reference to my dramatic poem. The divine Saviour is represented in vision towards the close, speaking and transfigured; and it has been hinted to me that the introduction may give offence in quarters where I should be most reluctant to give any. A reproach of the same class, relating to the frequent recurrence of a Great Name in my pages, has already filled me with regret. How shall I answer these things? Frankly, in any case. When the old mysteries represented the Holiest Being in a rude familiar fashion, and the people gazed on, with the faith of children in their earnest eyes, the critics of a succeeding age, who rejoiced in Congreve, cried out "Profane." Yet Andreini's mystery suggested Milton's epic; and Milton, the most reverent of poets, doubting whether to throw his work into the epic form or the dramatic, left, on the latter basis, a rough ground-plan, in which his intention of introducing the "Heavenly Love" among the persons of his drama is extant to the present day. But the tendency of the present day is to sunder the daily life from the spiritual creed, – to separate the worshipping from the acting man, – and by no means to "live by faith." There is a feeling abroad which appears to me (I say it with deference) nearer to superstition than to religion, that there should be no touching of holy vessels except by consecrated fingers, nor any naming of holy names except in consecrated places. As if life were not a continual sacrament to man, since Christ brake the daily bread of it in His hands! As if the name of God did not build a church, by the very naming of it! As if the word God were not, everywhere in His creation, and at every moment in His eternity, an appropriate word! As if it could be uttered unfitly, if devoutly! I appeal on these points, which I will not argue, from the conventions of the Christian to his devout heart; and I beseech him generously to believe of me that I have done that in reverence from which, through reverence, he might have abstained; and that where he might have been driven to silence by the principle of adoration, I, by the very same principle, have been hurried into speech.

It should have been observed in another place, – the fact, however, being sufficiently obvious throughout the drama, – that the time is from the evening into the night. If it should be objected that I have lengthened my twilight too much for the East, I might hasten to answer that we know nothing of the length of mornings or evenings before the Flood, and that I cannot, for my own part, believe in an Eden without the longest of purple twilights. The evening, =erev=, of Genesis signifies a "mingling," and approaches the meaning of our "twilight" analytically. Apart from which considerations, my "exiles" are surrounded, in the scene described, by supernatural appearances; and the shadows that approach them are not only of the night.

The next longest poem to the "Drama of Exile," in the collection, is the "Vision of Poets," in which I have endeavoured to indicate the necessary relations of genius to suffering and self-sacrifice. In the eyes of the living generation, the poet is at once a richer and poorer man than he used to be; he wears better broadcloth, but speaks no more oracles: and the evil of this social incrustation over a great idea is eating deeper and more fatally into our literature than either readers or writers may apprehend fully. I have attempted to express in this poem my view of the mission of the poet, of the self-abnegation implied in it, of the great work involved in it, of the duty and glory of what Balzac has beautifully and truly called "*la patience angélique du génie*;" and of the obvious truth, above all, that if knowledge is power, suffering should be acceptable as a part of knowledge. It is enough to say of the other poems, that scarcely one of them is unambitious of an object and a significance.

Since my "Seraphim" was received by the public with more kindness than its writer had counted on, I dare not rely on having put away the faults with which that volume abounded and was mildly reproached. Something indeed I may hope to have retrieved, because some progress in mind and in art every active thinker and honest writer must consciously or unconsciously make, with the progress of existence and experience: and, in some sort – since "we learn in suffering what we teach in song," – my songs may be fitter to teach. But if it were not presumptuous language on the lips of one to whom life is more than usually uncertain, my favourite wish for this work would be, that it be received by the public as a step in the right track, towards a future indication of more value and acceptability. I would fain do better, – and I feel as if I might do better: I aspire to do better. It is no new form of

the nympholepsy of poetry, that my ideal should fly before me: – and if I cry out too hopefully at sight of the white vesture receding between the cypresses, let me be blamed gently if justly. In any case, while my poems are full of faults, – as I go forward to my critics and confess, – they have my heart and life in them, – they are not empty shells. If it must be said of me that I have contributed immemorable verses to the many rejected by the age, it cannot at least be said that I have done so in a light and irresponsible spirit. Poetry has been as serious a thing to me as life itself; and life has been a very serious thing: there has been no playing at skittles for me in either. I never mistook pleasure for the final cause of poetry; nor leisure, for the hour of the poet. I have done my work, so far, as work, – not as mere hand and head work, apart from the personal being, – but as the completest expression of that being to which I could attain, – and as work I offer it to the public, – feeling its shortcomings more deeply than any of my readers, because measured from the height of my aspiration, – but feeling also that the reverence and sincerity with which the work was done should give it some protection with the reverent and sincere.

London: 50 Wimpole Street,
1844.

ADVERTISEMENT

This edition, including my earlier and later writings, I have endeavoured to render as little unworthy as possible of the indulgence of the public. Several poems I would willingly have withdrawn, if it were not almost impossible to extricate what has been once caught and involved in the machinery of the press. The alternative is a request to the generous reader that he may use the weakness of those earlier verses, which no subsequent revision has succeeded in strengthening, less as a reproach to the writer, than as a means of marking some progress in her other attempts.

E. B. B.

London, 1856.

A DRAMA OF EXILE

PERSONS.

Christ, *in a Vision.*

Adam.

Eve.

Gabriel.

Lucifer.

Angels, Eden Spirits, Earth Spirits, and Phantasms.

A DRAMA OF EXILE

Scene —*The outer side of the gate of Eden shut fast with cloud, from the depth of which revolves a sword of fire self-moved. Adam and Eve are seen, in the distance flying along the glare.*

Lucifer, alone

Rejoice in the clefts of Gehenna,
My exiled, my host!
Earth has exiles as hopeless as when a
Heaven's empire was lost.
Through the seams of her shaken foundations,
Smoke up in great joy!
With the smoke of your fierce exultations
Deform and destroy!
Smoke up with your lurid revenges,
And darken the face
Of the white heavens and taunt them with changes
From glory and grace.
We, in falling, while destiny strangles,
Pull down with us all.
Let them look to the rest of their angels!
Who's safe from a fall?
HE saves not. Where's Adam? Can pardon
Requicken that sod?
Unkinged is the King of the Garden,
The image of God.
Other exiles are cast out of Eden, —
More curse has been hurled:
Come up, O my locusts, and feed in
The green of the world!
Come up! we have conquered by evil;
Good reigns not alone:
I prevail now, and, angel or devil,
Inherit a throne.

[In sudden apparition a watch of innumerable Angels, rank above rank, slopes up from around the gate to the zenith. The Angel Gabriel descends

Lucifer. Hail, Gabriel, the keeper of the gate!
Now that the fruit is plucked, prince Gabriel,
I hold that Eden is impregnable
Under thy keeping.

Gabriel. Angel of the sin,
Such as thou standest, – pale in the drear light
Which rounds the rebel's work with Maker's wrath
Thou shalt be an Idea to all souls,
A monumental melancholy gloom
Seen down all ages, whence to mark despair
And measure out the distances from good.
Go from us straightway!

Lucifer. Wherefore?

Gabriel. Lucifer,
Thy last step in this place trod sorrow up.
Recoil before that sorrow, if not this sword.

Lucifer. Angels are in the world – wherefore not I?
Exiles are in the world – wherefore not I?
The cursed are in the world – wherefore not I?

Gabriel. Depart!

Lucifer. And where's the logic of 'depart'?
Our lady Eve had half been satisfied
To obey her Maker, if I had not learnt
To fix my postulate better. Dost thou dream
Of guarding some monopoly in heaven
Instead of earth? Why, I can dream with thee
To the length of thy wings.

Gabriel. I do not dream.
This is not heaven, even in a dream, nor earth,
As earth was once, first breathed among the stars,
Articulate glory from the mouth divine,
To which the myriad spheres thrilled audibly,
Touched like a lute-string, and the sons of God
Said Amen, singing it. I know that this
Is earth not new created but new cursed —
This, Eden's gate not opened but built up
With a final cloud of sunset. Do I dream?
Alas, not so! this is the Eden lost
By Lucifer the serpent; this the sword
(This sword alive with justice and with fire)
That smote, upon the forehead, Lucifer
The angel. Wherefore, angel, go – depart!
Enough is sinned and suffered.

Lucifer. By no means.
Here's a brave earth to sin and suffer on.
It holds fast still – it cracks not under curse;

It holds like mine immortal. Presently
We'll sow it thick enough with graves as green
Or greener certes, than its knowledge-tree.
We'll have the cypress for the tree of life,
More eminent for shadow: for the rest,
We'll build it dark with towns and pyramids,
And temples, if it please you: – we'll have feasts
And funerals also, merrymakes and wars,
Till blood and wine shall mix and run along
Right o'er the edges. And, good Gabriel
(Ye like that word in heaven), *I* too have strength —
Strength to behold Him and not worship Him,
Strength to fall from Him and not cry on Him,
Strength to be in the universe and yet
Neither God nor his servant. The red sign
Burnt on my forehead, which you taunt me with,
Is God's sign that it bows not unto God,
The potter's mark upon his work, to show
It rings well to the striker. I and the earth
Can bear more curse.

Gabriel. O miserable earth,
O ruined angel!

Lucifer. Well, and if it be!
I chose this ruin, I elected it
Of my will, not of service. What I do,
I do volitient, not obedient,
And overtop thy crown with my despair
My sorrow crowns me. Get thee back to heaven,
And leave me to the earth, which is mine own
In virtue of her ruin, as I hers
In virtue of my revolt! Turn thou from both
That bright, impassive, passive angelhood,
And spare to read us backward any more
Of the spent hallelujahs!

Gabriel. Spirit of scorn,
I might say, of unreason! I might say,
That who despairs, acts; that who acts, connives
With God's relations set in time and space;
That who elects, assumes a something good
Which God made possible; that who lives, obeys
The law of a Life-maker ...

Lucifer. Let it pass!
No more, thou Gabriel! What if I stand up
And strike my brow against the crystalline
Roofing the creatures, – shall I say, for that,

My stature is too high for me to stand, —
Henceforward I must sit? Sit *thou*!

Gabriel. I kneel.

Lucifer. A heavenly answer. Get thee to thy heaven,
And leave my earth to me!

Gabriel. Through heaven and earth
God's will moves freely, and I follow it,
As colour follows light. He overflows
The firmamental walls with deity,
Therefore with love; his lightnings go abroad,
His pity may do so, his angels must,
Whene'er he gives them charges.

Lucifer. Verily,
I and my demons, who are spirits of scorn,
Might hold this charge of standing with a sword
'Twixt man and his inheritance, as well
As the benignest angel of you all.

Gabriel. Thou speakest in the shadow of thy change.
If thou hadst gazed upon the face of God
This morning for a moment, thou hadst known
That only pity fitly can chastise:
Hate but avenges.

Lucifer. As it is, I know
Something of pity. When I reeled in heaven,
And my sword grew too heavy for my grasp,
Stabbing through matter, which it could not pierce
So much as the first shell of, — toward the throne;
When I fell back, down, — staring up as I fell, —
The lightnings holding open my scathed lids,
And that thought of the infinite of God,
Hurled after to precipitate descent;
When countless angel faces still and stern
Pressed out upon me from the level heavens
Adown the abysmal spaces, and I fell
Trampled down by your stillness, and struck blind
By the sight within your eyes, — 'twas then I knew
How ye could pity, my kind angelhood!

Gabriel. Alas, discrowned one, by the truth in me
Which God keeps in me, I would give away
All — save that truth and his love keeping it, —
To lead thee home again into the light
And hear thy voice chant with the morning stars,

When their rays tremble round them with much song
Sung in more gladness!

Lucifer. Sing, my Morning Star!
Last beautiful, last heavenly, that I loved!
If I could drench thy golden locks with tears,
What were it to this angel?

Gabriel. What love is.
And now I have named God.

Lucifer. Yet, Gabriel,
By the lie in me which I keep myself,
Thou'rt a false swearer. Were it otherwise,
What dost thou here, vouchsafing tender thoughts
To that earth-angel or earth-demon – which,
Thou and I have not solved the problem yet
Enough to argue, – that fallen Adam there, —
That red-clay and a breath, – who must, forsooth,
Live in a new apocalypse of sense,
With beauty and music waving in his trees
And running in his rivers, to make glad
His soul made perfect? – is it not for hope,
A hope within thee deeper than thy truth,
Of finally conducting him and his
To fill the vacant thrones of me and mine,
Which affront heaven with their vacuity?

Gabriel. Angel, there are no vacant thrones in heaven
To suit thy empty words. Glory and life
Fulfil their own depletions; and if God
Sighed you far from him, his next breath drew in
A compensative splendour up the vast,
Flushing the starry arteries.

Lucifer. What a change!
So, let the vacant thrones and gardens too
Fill as may please you! – and be pitiful,
As ye translate that word, to the dethroned
And exiled, man or angel. The fact stands,
That I, the rebel, the cast out and down,
Am here and will not go; while there, along
The light to which ye flash the desert out,
Flies your adopted Adam, your red-clay
In two kinds, both being flawed. Why, what is this?
Whose work is this? Whose hand was in the work?
Against whose hand? In this last strife, methinks,
I am not a fallen angel!

Gabriel. Dost thou know
Aught of those exiles?

Lucifer. Ay: I know they have fled
Silent all day along the wilderness:
I know they wear, for burden on their backs,
The thought of a shut gate of Paradise,
And faces of the marshalled cherubim
Shining against, not for them; and I know
They dare not look in one another's face, —
As if each were a cherub!

Gabriel. Dost thou know
Aught of their future?

Lucifer. Only as much as this:
That evil will increase and multiply
Without a benediction.

Gabriel. Nothing more?

Lucifer. Why so the angels taunt! What should be more?

Gabriel. God is more.

Lucifer. Proving what?

Gabriel. That he is God,
And capable of saving. Lucifer,
I charge thee by the solitude he kept
Ere he created, – leave the earth to God!

Lucifer. My foot is on the earth, firm as my sin.

Gabriel. I charge thee by the memory of heaven
Ere any sin was done, – leave earth to God!

Lucifer. My sin is on the earth, to reign thereon.

Gabriel. I charge thee by the choral song we sang,
When up against the white shore of our feet
The depths of the creation swelled and brake, —
And the new worlds, the beaded foam and flower
Of all that coil, roared outward into space
On thunder-edges, – leave the earth to God!

Lucifer. My woe is on the earth, to curse thereby.

Gabriel. I charge thee by that mournful Morning Star

Which trembles ...

Lucifer. Enough spoken. As the pine
In norland forest drops its weight of snows
By a night's growth, so, growing toward my ends
I drop thy counsels. Farewell, Gabriel!
Watch out thy service; I achieve my will.
And peradventure in the after years,
When thoughtful men shall bend their spacious brows
Upon the storm and strife seen everywhere
To ruffle their smooth manhood and break up
With lurid lights of intermittent hope
Their human fear and wrong, – they may discern
The heart of a lost angel in the earth.

CHORUS OF EDEN SPIRITS

(chanting from Paradise, while Adam and Eve fly across the Sword-glare)

Hearken, oh hearken! let your souls behind you
Turn, gently moved!
Our voices feel along the Dread to find you,
O lost, beloved!
Through the thick-shielded and strong-marshalled angels,
They press and pierce:
Our requiems follow fast on our evangels, —
Voice throbs in verse.
We are but orphaned spirits left in Eden
A time ago:
God gave us golden cups, and we were bidden
To feed you so.
But now our right hand hath no cup remaining,
No work to do,
The mystic hydromel is spilt, and staining
The whole earth through.
Most ineradicable stains, for showing
(Not interfused!)
That brighter colours were the world's forgoing,
Than shall be used.
Hearken, oh hearken! ye shall hearken surely
For years and years,
The noise beside you, dripping coldly, purely,
Of spirits' tears.
The yearning to a beautiful denied you
Shall strain your powers;
Ideal sweetnesses shall overglide you,

Resumed from ours.
In all your music, our pathetic minor
Your ears shall cross;
And all good gifts shall mind you of diviner,
With sense of loss.
We shall be near you in your poet-languors
And wild extremes,
What time ye vex the desert with vain angers,
Or mock with dreams.
And when upon you, weary after roaming,
Death's seal is put,
By the foregone ye shall discern the coming,
Through eyelids shut.

Spirits of the Trees.
Hark! the Eden trees are stirring,
Soft and solemn in your hearing!
Oak and linden, palm and fir,
Tamarisk and juniper,
Each still throbbing in vibration
Since that crowning of creation
When the God-breath spake abroad,
Let us make man like to God!
And the pine stood quivering
As the awful word went by,
Like a vibrant music-string
Stretched from mountain-peak to sky;
And the platan did expand
Slow and gradual, branch and head;
And the cedar's strong black shade
Fluttered brokenly and grand:
Grove and wood were swept aslant
In emotion jubilant.

Voice of the same, but softer.
Which divine impulsion cleaves
In dim movements to the leaves
Dropt and lifted, dropt and lifted,
In the sunlight greenly sifted, —
In the sunlight and the moonlight
Greenly sifted through the trees.
Ever wave the Eden trees
In the nightlight and the noonlight,
With a ruffling of green branches
Shaded off to resonances,
Never stirred by rain or breeze.
Fare ye well, farewell!
The sylvan sounds, no longer audible,
Expire at Eden's door.

Each footstep of your treading
Treads out some murmur which ye heard before.
Farewell! the trees of Eden
Ye shall hear nevermore.

River Spirits.

Hark! the flow of the four rivers —
Hark the flow!
How the silence round you shivers,
While our voices through it go,
Cold and clear.

A softer Voice.

Think a little, while ye hear,
Of the banks
Where the willows and the deer
Crowd in intermingled ranks,
As if all would drink at once
Where the living water runs! —
Of the fishes' golden edges
Flashing in and out the sedges;
Of the swans on silver thrones,
Floating down the winding streams
With impassive eyes turned shoreward
And a chant of undertones, —
And the lotos leaning forward
To help them into dreams!
Fare ye well, farewell!
The river-sounds, no longer audible,
Expire at Eden's door.
Each footstep of your treading
Treads out some murmur which ye heard before.
Farewell! the streams of Eden
Ye shall hear nevermore.

Bird Spirit.

I am the nearest nightingale
That singeth in Eden after you;
And I am singing loud and true,
And sweet, — I do not fail.
I sit upon a cypress bough,
Close to the gate, and I fling my song
Over the gate and through the mail
Of the warden angels marshalled strong, —
Over the gate and after you.
And the warden angels let it pass,
Because the poor brown bird, alas,
Sings in the garden, sweet and true.
And I build my song of high pure notes,

Note over note, height over height,
Till I strike the arch of the Infinite,
And I bridge abysmal agonies
With strong, clear calms of harmonies, —
And something abides, and something floats,
In the song which I sing after you.
Fare ye well, farewell!
The creature-sounds, no longer audible,
Expire at Eden's door.
Each footstep of your treading
Treads out some cadence which ye heard before.
Farewell! the birds of Eden,
Ye shall hear nevermore.

Flower Spirits.

We linger, we linger,
The last of the throng,
Like the tones of a singer
Who loves his own song.
We are spirit-aromas
Of blossom and bloom.
We call your thoughts home, — as
Ye breathe our perfume, —
To the amaranth's splendour
Afire on the slopes;
To the lily-bells tender,
And grey heliotropes;
To the poppy-plains keeping
Such dream-breath and blee
That the angels there stepping
Grew whiter to see:
To the nook, set with moly,
Ye jested one day in,
Till your smile waxed too holy
And left your lips praying:
To the rose in the bower-place,
That dripped o'er you sleeping;
To the asphodel flower-place,
Ye walked ankle-deep in.
We pluck at your raiment,
We stroke down your hair,
We faint in our lament
And pine into air.
Fare ye well, farewell!
The Eden scents, no longer sensible,
Expire at Eden's door.
Each footstep of your treading
Treads out some fragrance which ye knew before.
Farewell! the flowers of Eden,

Ye shall smell nevermore.

[There is silence. Adam and Eve fly on, and never look back. Only a colossal shadow, as of the dark Angel passing quickly, is cast upon the Sword-glare

Scene. —*The extremity of the Sword-glare*

Adam. Pausing a moment on this outer edge
Where the supernal sword-glare cuts in light
The dark exterior desert, – hast thou strength,
Beloved, to look behind us to the gate?

Eve. Have I not strength to look up to thy face?

Adam. We need be strong: yon spectacle of cloud
Which seals the gate up to the final doom,
Is God's seal manifest. There seem to lie
A hundred thunders in it, dark and dead;
The unmolten lightnings vein it motionless;
And, outward from its depth, the self-moved sword
Swings slow its awful gnomon of red fire
From side to side, in pendulous horror slow,
Across the stagnant ghastly glare thrown flat
On the intermediate ground from that to this.
The angelic hosts, the archangelic pomps,
Thrones, dominations, pryncedoms, rank on rank,
Rising sublimely to the feet of God,
On either side and overhead the gate,
Show like a glittering and sustained smoke
Drawn to an apex. That their faces shine
Betwixt the solemn clasping of their wings
Clasped high to a silver point above their heads, —
We only guess from hence, and not discern.

Eve. Though we were near enough to see them shine,
The shadow on thy face were awfuller,
To me, at least, – to me – than all their light.

Adam. What is this, Eve? thou droppest heavily
In a heap earthward, and thy body heaves
Under the golden floodings of thine hair!

Eve. O Adam, Adam! by that name of Eve —
Thine Eve, thy life – which suits me little now,
Seeing that I now confess myself thy death

And thine undoer, as the snake was mine, —
I do adjure thee, put me straight away,
Together with my name! Sweet, punish me!
O Love, be just! and, ere we pass beyond
The light cast outward by the fiery sword,
Into the dark which earth must be to us,
Bruise my head with thy foot, — as the curse said
My seed shall the first tempter's! strike with curse,
As God struck in the garden! and as he,
Being satisfied with justice and with wrath,
Did roll his thunder gentler at the close, —
Thou, peradventure, mayst at last recoil
To some soft need of mercy. Strike, my lord!
I, also, after tempting, writhe on the ground,
And I would feed on ashes from thine hand,
As suits me, O my tempted!

Adam. My beloved,
Mine Eve and life — I have no other name
For thee or for the sun than what ye are,
My utter life and light! If we have fallen,
It is that we have sinned, — we: God is just;
And, since his curse doth comprehend us both,
It must be that his balance holds the weights
Of first and last sin on a level. What!
Shall I who had not virtue to stand straight
Among the hills of Eden, here assume
To mend the justice of the perfect God,
By piling up a curse upon his curse,
Against thee — thee?

Eve. For so, perchance, thy God,
Might take thee into grace for scorning me;
Thy wrath against the sinner giving proof
Of inward abrogation of the sin:
And so, the blessed angels might come down
And walk with thee as erst, — I think they would, —
Because I was not near to make them sad
Or soil the rustling of their innocence.

Adam. They know me. I am deepest in the guilt,
If last in the transgression.

Eve. Thou!

Adam. If God,
Who gave the right and joyaunce of the world
Both unto thee and me, — gave thee to me,
The best gift last, the last sin was the worst,

Which sinned against more complement of gifts
And grace of giving. God! I render back
Strong benediction and perpetual praise
From mortal feeble lips (as incense-smoke,
Out of a little censer, may fill heaven),
That thou, in striking my benumbèd hands
And forcing them to drop all other boons
Of beauty and dominion and delight, —
Hast left this well-beloved Eve, this life
Within life, this best gift between their palms,
In gracious compensation!

Eve. Is it thy voice?
Or some saluting angel's – calling home
My feet into the garden?

Adam. O my God!
I, standing here between the glory and dark, —
The glory of thy wrath projected forth
From Eden's wall, the dark of our distress
Which settles a step off in that drear world —
Lift up to thee the hands from whence hath fallen
Only creation's sceptre, – thanking thee
That rather thou hast cast me out with *her*
Than left me lorn of her in Paradise,
With angel looks and angel songs around
To show the absence of her eyes and voice,
And make society full desertness
Without her use in comfort!

Eve. Where is loss?
Am I in Eden? can another speak
Mine own love's tongue?

Adam. Because with *her*, I stand
Upright, as far as can be in this fall,
And look away from heaven which doth accuse,
And look away from earth which doth convict,
Into her face, and crown my discrowned brow
Out of her love, and put the thought of her
Around me, for an Eden full of birds,
And lift her body up – thus – to my heart,
And with my lips upon her lips, – thus, thus, —
Do quicken and sublimite my mortal breath
Which cannot climb against the grave's steep sides
But overtops this grief.

Eve. I am renewed.
My eyes grow with the light which is in thine;

The silence of my heart is full of sound.
Hold me up – so! Because I comprehend
This human love, I shall not be afraid
Of any human death; and yet because
I know this strength of love, I seem to know
Death's strength by that same sign. Kiss on my lips,
To shut the door close on my rising soul, —
Lest it pass outwards in astonishment
And leave thee lonely!

Adam. Yet thou liest, Eve,
Bent heavily on thyself across mine arm,
Thy face flat to the sky.

Eve. Ay, and the tears
Running, as it might seem, my life from me,
They run so fast and warm. Let me lie so,
And weep so, as if in a dream or prayer,
Unfastening, clasp by clasp, the hard tight thought
Which clipped my heart and showed me evermore
Loathed of thy justice as I loathe the snake,
And as the pure ones loathe our sin. To-day,
All day, beloved, as we fled across
This desolating radiance cast by swords
Not suns, – my lips prayed soundless to myself,
Striking against each other – "O Lord God!"
('Twas so I prayed) "I ask Thee by my sin,
"And by thy curse, and by thy blameless heavens,
"Make dreadful haste to hide me from thy face
"And from the face of my beloved here
"For whom I am no helpmeet, quick away
"Into the new dark mystery of death!
"I will lie still there, I will make no plaint,
"I will not sigh, nor sob, nor speak a word,
"Nor struggle to come back beneath the sun
"Where peradventure I might sin anew
"Against thy mercy and his pleasure. Death,
"O death, whatever it be, is good enough
"For such as I am: while for Adam here,
"No voice shall say again, in heaven or earth,
"*It is not good for him to be alone.*"

Adam. And was it good for such a prayer to pass,
My unkind Eve, betwixt our mutual lives?
If I am exiled, must I be bereaved?

Eve. 'Twas an ill prayer: it shall be prayed no more;
And God did use it like a foolishness,
Giving no answer. Now my heart has grown

Too high and strong for such a foolish prayer,
Love makes it strong and since I was the first
In the transgression, with a steady foot
I will be first to tread from this sword-glare
Into the outer darkness of the waste, —
And thus I do it.

Adam. Thus I follow thee,
As erewhile in the sin. — What sounds! what sounds!
I feel a music which comes straight from heaven,
As tender as a watering dew.

Eve. I think
That angels — not those guarding Paradise, —
But the love-angels, who came erst to us,
And when we said 'God,' fainted unawares
Back from our mortal presence unto God,
(As if he drew them inward in a breath)
His name being heard of them, — I think that they
With sliding voices lean from heavenly towers,
Invisible but gracious. Hark — how soft!

CHORUS OF INVISIBLE ANGELS

Faint and tender

Mortal man and woman,
Go upon your travel!
Heaven assist the human
Smoothly to unravel
All that web of pain
Wherein ye are holden.
Do ye know our voices
Chanting down the Golden?
Do ye guess our choice is,
Being un beholden,
To be hearkened by you yet again?

This pure door of opal
God hath shut between us, —
Us, his shining people,
You, who once have seen us
And are blinded new!
Yet, across the doorway,
Past the silence reaching,
Farewells evermore may,

Blessing in the teaching,
Glide from us to you.

First Semichorus.

Think how erst your Eden,
Day on day succeeding,
With our presence glowed.
We came as if the Heavens were bowed
To a milder music rare.
Ye saw us in our solemn treading,
Treading down the steps of cloud,
While our wings, outspreading
Double calms of whiteness,
Dropped superfluous brightness
Down from stair to stair.

Second Semichorus.

Or oft, abrupt though tender,
While ye gazed on space,
We flashed our angel-splendour
In either human face.
With mystic lilies in our hands,
From the atmospheric bands
Breaking with a sudden grace,
We took you unaware!
While our feet struck glories
Outward, smooth and fair,
Which we stood on floorwise,
Platformed in mid-air.

First Semichorus.

Or oft, when Heaven-descended,
Stood we in our wondering sight
In a mute apocalypse
With dumb vibrations on our lips
From hosannas ended,
And grand half-vanishings
Of the empyreal things
Within our eyes belated,
Till the heavenly Infinite
Falling off from the Created,
Left our inward contemplation
Opened into ministration.

Chorus.

Then upon our axle turning
Of great joy to sympathy,
We sang out the morning
Broadening up the sky,

Or we drew
Our music through
The noontide's hush and heat and shine,
Informed with our intense Divine:
Interrupted vital notes
Palpitating hither, thither,
Burning out into the æther,
Sensible like fiery motes.
Or, whenever twilight drifted
Through the cedar masses,
The globèd sun we lifted,
Trailing purple, trailing gold
Out between the passes
Of the mountains manifold,
To anthems slowly sung:
While he, – aweary, half in swoon
For joy to hear our climbing tune
Transpierce the stars' concentric rings, —
The burden of his glory flung
In broken lights upon our wings.

[*The chant dies away confusedly, and Lucifer appears*]

Lucifer. Now may all fruits be pleasant to thy lips,
Beautiful Eve! The times have somewhat changed
Since thou and I had talk beneath a tree,
Albeit ye are not gods yet.

Eve. Adam! hold
My right hand strongly! It is Lucifer —
And we have love to lose.

Adam. I' the name of God,
Go apart from us, O thou Lucifer!
And leave us to the desert thou hast made
Out of thy treason. Bring no serpent-slime
Athwart this path kept holy to our tears!
Or we may curse thee with their bitterness.

Lucifer. Curse freely! curses thicken. Why, this Eve
Who thought me once part worthy of her ear
And somewhat wiser than the other beasts, —
Drawing together her large globes of eyes,
The light of which is throbbing in and out
Their steadfast continuity of gaze, —
Knots her fair eyebrows in so hard a knot,
And down from her white heights of womanhood

Looks on me so amazed, – I scarce should fear
To wager such an apple as she plucked
Against one riper from the tree of life,
That she could curse too – as a woman may —
Smooth in the vowels.

Eve. So – speak wickedly!
I like it best so. Let thy words be wounds, —
For, so, I shall not fear thy power to hurt.
Trench on the forms of good by open ill —
For, so, I shall wax strong and grand with scorn,
Scorning myself for ever trusting thee
As far as thinking, ere a snake ate dust,
He could speak wisdom.

Lucifer. Our new gods, it seems,
Deal more in thunders than in courtesies.
And, sooth, mine own Olympus, which anon
I shall build up to loud-voiced imagery
From all the wandering visions of the world,
May show worse railing than our lady Eve
Pours o'er the rounding of her argent arm.
But why should this be? Adam pardoned Eve.

Adam. Adam loved Eve. Jehovah pardon both!

Eve. Adam forgave Eve – because loving Eve.

Lucifer. So, well. Yet Adam was undone of Eve,
As both were by the snake. Therefore forgive,
In like wise, fellow-temptress, the poor snake —
Who stung there, not so poorly! [*Aside.*]

Eve. Hold thy wrath,
Beloved Adam! let me answer him;
For this time he speaks truth, which we should hear,
And asks for mercy, which I most should grant,
In like wise, as he tells us – in like wise!
And therefore I thee pardon, Lucifer,
As freely as the streams of Eden flowed
When we were happy by them. So, depart;
Leave us to walk the remnant of our time
Out mildly in the desert. Do not seek
To harm us any more or scoff at us,
Or ere the dust be laid upon our face,
To find there the communion of the dust
And issue of the dust, – Go!

Adam. At once, go!

Lucifer. Forgive! and go! Ye images of clay,
Shrunk somewhat in the mould, – what jest is this?
What words are these to use? By what a thought
Conceive ye of me? Yesterday – a snake!
To-day – what?

Adam. A strong spirit.

Eve. A sad spirit.

Adam. Perhaps a fallen angel. – Who shall say!

Lucifer. Who told thee, Adam?

Adam. Thou! The prodigy
Of thy vast brows and melancholy eyes
Which comprehend the heights of some great fall.
I think that thou hast one day worn a crown
Under the eyes of God.

Lucifer. And why of God?

Adam. It were no crown else. Verily, I think
Thou'rt fallen far. I had not yesterday
Said it so surely, but I know to-day
Grief by grief, sin by sin.

Lucifer. A crown, by a crown.

Adam. Ay, mock me! now I know more than I knew:
Now I know that thou art fallen below hope
Of final re-ascent.

Lucifer. Because?

Adam. Because
A spirit who expected to see God
Though at the last point of a million years,
Could dare no mockery of a ruined man
Such as this Adam.

Lucifer. Who is high and bold —
Be it said passing! – of a good red clay
Discovered on some top of Lebanon,
Or haply of Aornus, beyond sweep
Of the black eagle's wing! A furlong lower
Had made a meeker king for Eden. Soh!
Is it not possible, by sin and grief

(To give the things your names) that spirits should rise
Instead of falling?

Adam. Most impossible.
The Highest being the Holy and the Glad,
Whoever rises must approach delight
And sanctity in the act.

Lucifer. Ha, my clay-king!
Thou wilt not rule by wisdom very long
The after generations. Earth, methinks,
Will disinherit thy philosophy
For a new doctrine suited to thine heirs,
And class these present dogmas with the rest
Of the old-world traditions, Eden fruits
And Saurian fossils.

Eve. Speak no more with him,
Beloved! it is not good to speak with him.
Go from us, Lucifer, and speak no more!
We have no pardon which thou dost not scorn,
Nor any bliss, thou seest, for coveting,
Nor innocence for staining. Being bereft,
We would be alone. – Go!

Lucifer. Ah! ye talk the same,
All of you – spirits and clay – go, and depart!
In Heaven they said so, and at Eden's gate,
And here, reiterant, in the wilderness.
None saith, Stay with me, for thy face is fair!
None saith, Stay with me, for thy voice is sweet!
And yet I was not fashioned out of clay.
Look on me, woman! Am I beautiful?

Eve. Thou hast a glorious darkness.

Lucifer. Nothing more?

Eve. I think, no more.

Lucifer. False Heart – thou thinkest more!
Thou canst not choose but think, as I praise God,
Unwillingly but fully, that I stand
Most absolute in beauty. As yourselves
Were fashioned very good at best, so *we*
Sprang very beauteous from the creant Word
Which thrilled behind us, God himself being moved
When that august work of a perfect shape,
His dignities of sovran angel-hood,

Swept out into the universe, – divine
With thunderous movements, earnest looks of gods,
And silver-solemn clash of cymbal wings.
Whereof was I, in motion and in form,
A part not poorest. And yet, – yet, perhaps,
This beauty which I speak of, is not here,
As God's voice is not here, nor even my crown —
I do not know. What is this thought or thing
Which I call beauty? Is it thought, or thing?
Is it a thought accepted for a thing?
Or both? or neither? – a pretext – a word?
Its meaning flutters in me like a flame
Under my own breath, my perceptions reel
For evermore around it, and fall off,
As if it too were holy.

Eve. Which it is.

Adam. The essence of all beauty, I call love.
The attribute, the evidence, and end,
The consummation to the inward sense,
Of beauty apprehended from without,
I still call love. As form, when colourless,
Is nothing to the eye, – that pine-tree there,
Without its black and green, being all a blank, —
So, without love, is beauty undiscerned
In man or angel. Angel! rather ask
What love is in thee, what love moves to thee,
And what collateral love moves on with thee;
Then shalt thou know if thou art beautiful.

Lucifer. Love! what is love? I lose it. Beauty and love
I darken to the image. Beauty – love!

[He fades away, while a low music sounds

Adam. Thou art pale, Eve.

Eve. The precipice of ill
Down this colossal nature, dizzies me:
And, hark! the starry harmony remote
Seems measuring the heights from whence he fell.

Adam. Think that we have not fallen so! By the hope
And aspiration, by the love and faith,
We do exceed the stature of this angel.

Eve. Happier we are than he is, by the death.

Adam. Or rather, by the life of the Lord God!
How dim the angel grows, as if that blast
Of music swept him back into the dark.

[The music is stronger, gathering itself into uncertain articulation

Eve. It throbs in on us like a plaintive heart,
Pressing, with slow pulsations, vibrative,
Its gradual sweetness through the yielding air,
To such expression as the stars may use,
Most starry-sweet and strange! With every note
That grows more loud, the angel grows more dim,
Receding in proportion to approach,
Until he stand afar, – a shade.

Adam. Now, words.

SONG OF THE MORNING STAR TO LUCIFER

He fades utterly away and vanishes, as it proceeds

Mine orbèd image sinks
Back from thee, back from thee,
As thou art fallen, methinks,
Back from me, back from me.
O my light-bearer,
Could another fairer
Lack to thee, lack to thee?
Ah, ah, Heosphoros!
I loved thee with the fiery love of stars
Who love by burning, and by loving move,
Too near the throned Jehovah not to love.
Ah, ah, Heosphoros!
Their brows flash fast on me from gliding cars,
Pale-passioned for my loss.
Ah, ah, Heosphoros!

Mine orbèd heats drop cold
Down from thee, down from thee,
As fell thy grace of old
Down from me, down from me,

O my light-bearer,
Is another fairer
Won to thee, won to thee?
Ah, ah, Heosphoros,
Great love preceded loss,
Known to thee, known to thee.
Ah, ah!
Thou, breathing thy communicable grace
Of life into my light,
Mine astral faces, from thine angel face,
Hast inly fed,
And flooded me with radiance overmuch
From thy pure height.
Ah, ah!
Thou, with calm, floating pinions both ways spread,
Erect, irradiated,
Didst sting my wheel of glory
On, on before thee
Along the Godlight by a quickening touch!
Ha, ha!
Around, around the firmamental ocean
I swam expanding with delirious fire!
Around, around, around, in blind desire
To be drawn upward to the Infinite —
Ha, ha!

Until, the motion flinging out the motion
To a keen whirl of passion and avidity,
To a dim whirl of languor and delight,
I wound in gyant orbits smooth and white
With that intense rapidity.
Around, around,
I wound and interwound,
While all the cyclic heavens about me spun.
Stars, planets, suns, and moons dilated broad,
Then flashed together into a single sun,
And wound, and wound in one:
And as they wound I wound, – around, around,
In a great fire I almost took for God.
Ha, ha, Heosphoros!

Thine angel glory sinks
Down from me, down from me —
My beauty falls, methinks,
Down from thee, down from thee!
O my light-bearer,
O my path-preparer,
Gone from me, gone from me!
Ah, ah, Heosphoros!

I cannot kindle underneath the brow
Of this new angel here, who is not thou.
All things are altered since that time ago, —
And if I shine at eve, I shall not know.
I am strange – I am slow.
Ah, ah, Heosphoros!
Henceforward, human eyes of lovers be
The only sweetest sight that I shall see,
With tears between the looks raised up to me.
Ah, ah!
When, having wept all night, at break of day
Above the folded hills they shall survey
My light, a little trembling, in the grey.
Ah, ah!
And gazing on me, such shall comprehend,
Through all my piteous pomp at morn or even
And melancholy leaning out of heaven,
That love, their own divine, may change or end,
That love may close in loss!
Ah, ah, Heosphoros!

Scene. —*Farther on. A wild open country seen vaguely in the approaching night*

Adam. How doth the wide and melancholy earth
Gather her hills around us, grey and ghast,
And stare with blank significance of loss
Right in our faces! Is the wind up?

Eve. Nay.

Adam. And yet the cedars and the junipers
Rock slowly through the mist, without a sound,
And shapes which have no certainty of shape
Drift dusky in and out between the pines,
And loom along the edges of the hills,
And lie flat, curdling in the open ground —
Shadows without a body, which contract
And lengthen as we gaze on them.

Eve. O life
Which is not man's nor angel's! What is this?

Adam. No cause for fear. The circle of God's life
Contains all life beside.

Eve. I think the earth
Is crazed with curse, and wanders from the sense

Of those first laws affixed to form and space
Or ever she knew sin.

Adam. We will not fear;
We were brave sinning.

Eve. Yea, I plucked the fruit
With eyes upturned to heaven and seeing there
Our god-thrones, as the tempter said, – not GOD.
My heart, which beat then, sinks. The sun hath sunk
Out of sight with our Eden.

Adam. Night is near.

Eve. And God's curse, nearest. Let us travel back
And stand within the sword-glare till we die,
Believing it is better to meet death
Than suffer desolation.

Adam. Nay, beloved!
We must not pluck death from the Maker's hand,
As erst we plucked the apple: we must wait
Until he gives death as he gave us life,
Nor murmur faintly o'er the primal gift
Because we spoilt its sweetness with our sin.

Eve. Ah, ah! dost thou discern what I behold?

Adam. I see all. How the spirits in thine eyes
From their dilated orbits bound before
To meet the spectral Dread!

Eve. I am afraid —
Ah, ah! the twilight bristles wild with shapes
Of intermittent motion, aspect vague
And mystic bearings, which o'ercreep the earth,
Keeping slow time with horrors in the blood.
How near they reach ... and far! How grey they move —
Treading upon the darkness without feet,
And fluttering on the darkness without wings!
Some run like dogs, with noses to the ground;
Some keep one path, like sheep; some rock like trees;
Some glide like a fallen leaf, and some flow on
Copious as rivers.

Adam. Some spring up like fire;
And some coil ...

Eve. Ah, ah! dost thou pause to say

Like what? – coil like the serpent, when he fell
From all the emerald splendour of his height
And writhed, and could not climb against the curse,
Not a ring's length. I am afraid – afraid —
I think it is God's will to make me afraid, —
Permitting these to haunt us in the place
Of his belovèd angels – gone from us
Because we are not pure. Dear Pity of God,
That didst permit the angels to go home
And live no more with us who are not pure,
Save *us* too from a loathly company —
Almost as loathly in our eyes, perhaps,
As *we* are in the purest! Pity us —
Us too! nor shut us in the dark, away
From verity and from stability,
Or what we name such through the precedence
Of earth's adjusted uses, – leave us not
To doubt betwixt our senses and our souls,
Which are the more distraught and full of pain
And weak of apprehension!

Adam. Courage, Sweet!
The mystic shapes ebb back from us, and drop
With slow concentric movement, each on each, —
Expressing wider spaces, – and collapsed
In lines more definite for imagery
And clearer for relation, till the throng
Of shapeless spectra merge into a few
Distinguishable phantasms vague and grand
Which sweep out and around us vastly
And hold us in a circle and a calm.

Eve. Strange phantasms of pale shadow! there are twelve.
Thou who didst name all lives, hast names for these?

Adam. Methinks this is the zodiac of the earth,
Which rounds us with a visionary dread,
Responding with twelve shadowy signs of earth,
In fantasque apposition and approach,
To those celestial, constellated twelve
Which palpitate adown the silent nights
Under the pressure of the hand of God
Stretched wide in benediction. At this hour,
Not a star pricketh the flat gloom of heaven:
But, girdling close our nether wilderness,
The zodiac-figures of the earth loom slow, —
Drawn out, as suiteth with the place and time,
In twelve colossal shades instead of stars,
Through which the ecliptic line of mystery

Strikes bleakly with an unrelenting scope,
Foreshowing life and death.

Eve. By dream or sense,
Do we see this?

Adam. 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.

Eve. And the dim twelve...

Adam. Are dim exponents of the creature-life
As earth contains it. Gaze on them, beloved!
By stricter apprehension of the sight,
Suggestions of the creatures shall assuage
The terror of the shadows, – what is known
Subduing the unknown and taming it
From all prodigious dread. That phantasm, there,
Presents a lion, albeit twenty times
As large as any lion – with a roar
Set soundless in his vibratory jaws,
And a strange horror stirring in his mane.
And, there, a pendulous shadow seems to weigh —
Good against ill, perchance; and there, a crab
Puts coldly out its gradual shadow-claws,
Like a slow blot that spreads, – till all the ground,
Crawled over by it, seems to crawl itself.
A bull stands hornèd here with gibbous glooms;
And a ram likewise: and a scorpion writhes
Its tail in ghastly slime and stings the dark.
This way a goat leaps with wild blank of beard;
And here, fantastic fishes dusky float,
Using the calm for waters, while their fins
Throb out quick rhythms along the shallow air.
While images more human —

Eve. How he stands,
That phantasm of a man – who is not *thou*!
Two phantasms of two men!

Adam. One that sustains,
And one that strives, – resuming, so, the ends
Of manhood's curse of labour.² Dost thou see

² Adam recognizes in *Aquarius*, the Water-bearer, and *Sagittarius*, the Archer, distinct types of the man bearing and the man combating, – the passive and active forms of human labour. I hope that the preceding zodiacal signs – transferred to the earthly shadow

That phantasm of a woman?
Eve. I have seen;
But look off to those small humanities³
Which draw me tenderly across my fear, —
Lesser and fainter than my womanhood,
Or yet thy manhood – with strange innocence
Set in the misty lines of head and hand.
They lean together! I would gaze on them
Longer and longer, till my watching eyes,
As the stars do in watching anything,
Should light them forward from their outline vague
To clear configuration.

[*Two Spirits, of Organic and Inorganic Nature, arise from the ground*]

But what Shapes
Rise up between us in the open space,
And thrust me into horror, back from hope!

Adam. Colossal Shapes – twin sovran images,
With a disconsolate, blank majesty
Set in their wondrous faces! with no look,
And yet an aspect – a significance
Of individual life and passionate ends,
Which overcomes us gazing.
O bleak sound,
O shadow of sound, O phantasm of thin sound!
How it comes, wheeling as the pale moth wheels,
Wheeling and wheeling in continuous wail
Around the cyclic zodiac, and gains force,
And gathers, settling coldly like a moth,
On the wan faces of these images
We see before us, – whereby modified,
It draws a straight line of articulate song
From out that spiral faintness of lament,
And, by one voice, expresses many griefs.

First Spirit.
I am the spirit of the harmless earth.
God spake me softly out among the stars,
As softly as a blessing of much worth;
And then his smile did follow unawares,
That all things fashioned so for use and duty

and representative purpose – of Aries, Taurus, Cancer, Leo, Libra, Scorpio, Capricornus, and Pisces, are sufficiently obvious to the reader.

³ Her maternal instinct is excited by Gemini.

Might shine anointed with his chrism of beauty —
Yet I wail!
I drave on with the worlds exultingly,
Obliquely down the Godlight's gradual fall;
Individual aspect and complexity
Of gyratory orb and interval
Lost in the fluent motion of delight
Toward the high ends of Being beyond sight —
Yet I wail!

Second Spirit.

I am the spirit of the harmless beasts,
Of flying things, and creeping things, and swimming;
Of all the lives, erst set at silent feasts,
That found the love-kiss on the goblet brimming,
And tasted in each drop within the measure
The sweetest pleasure of their Lord's good pleasure —
Yet I wail!
What a full hum of life around his lips
Bore witness to the fulness of creation!
How all the grand words were full-laden ships
Each sailing onward from enunciation
To separate existence, – and each bearing
The creature's power of joying, hoping, fearing!
Yet I wail!

Eve. They wail, beloved! they speak of glory and God,
And they wail – wail. That burden of the song
Drops from it like its fruit, and heavily falls
Into the lap of silence.

Adam. Hark, again!

First Spirit.

I was so beautiful, so beautiful,
My joy stood up within me bold to add
A word to God's, – and, when His work was full,
To "very good" responded "very glad!"
Filtered through roses did the light enclose me,
And bunches of the grape swam blue across me —
Yet I wail!

Second Spirit.

I bounded with my panthers: I rejoiced
In my young tumbling lions rolled together:
My stag, the river at his fetlocks, poised
Then dipped his antlers through the golden weather
In the same ripple which the alligator
Left, in his joyous troubling of the water —
Yet I wail!

First Spirit.

O my deep waters, cataract and flood,
What wordless triumph did your voices render
O mountain-summits, where the angels stood
And shook from head and wing thick dews of splendour!
How, with a holy quiet, did your Earthy
Accept that Heavenly, knowing ye were worthy!
Yet I wail!

Second Spirit.

O my wild wood-dogs, with your listening eyes!
My horses – my ground-eagles, for swift fleeing!
My birds, with viewless wings of harmonies,
My calm cold fishes of a silver being,
How happy were ye, living and possessing,
O fair half-souls capacious of full blessing!
Yet I wail!

First Spirit.

I wail, I wail! Now hear my charge to-day,
Thou man, thou woman, marked as the misdoers
By God's sword at your backs! I lent my clay
To make your bodies, which had grown more flowers:
And now, in change for what I lent, ye give me
The thorn to vex, the tempest-fare to cleave me —
And I wail!

Second Spirit.

I wail, I wail! Behold ye that I fasten
My sorrow's fang upon your souls dishonoured?
Accursed transgressors! down the steep ye hasten, —
Your crown's weight on the world, to drag it downward
Unto your ruin. Lo! my lions, scenting
The blood of wars, roar hoarse and unrelenting —
And I wail!

First Spirit.

I wail, I wail! Do you hear that I wail?
I had no part in your transgression – none.
My roses on the bough did bud not pale,
My rivers did not loiter in the sun;
I was obedient. Wherefore in my centre
Do I thrill at this curse of death and winter? —
Do I wail?

Second Spirit.

I wail, I wail! I wail in the assault
Of undeserved perdition, sorely wounded!

My nightingale sang sweet without a fault,
My gentle leopards innocently bounded.
We were obedient. What is this convulses
Our blameless life with pangs and fever pulses?
And I wail!

Eve. I choose God's thunder and His angels' swords
To die by, Adam, rather than such words.
Let us pass out and flee.

Adam. We cannot flee.
This zodiac of the creatures' cruelty
Curls round us, like a river cold and drear,
And shuts us in, constraining us to hear.

First Spirit.
I feel your steps, O wandering sinners, strike
A sense of death to me, and undug graves!
The heart of earth, once calm, is trembling like
The ragged foam along the ocean-waves:
The restless earthquakes rock against each other;
The elements moan 'round me – "Mother, mother" —
And I wail!

Second Spirit.
Your melancholy looks do pierce me through;
Corruption swathes the paleness of your beauty.
Why have ye done this thing? What did we do
That we should fall from bliss as ye from duty?
Wild shriek the hawks, in waiting for their jesses,
Fierce howl the wolves along the wildernesses —
And I wail!

Adam. To thee, the Spirit of the harmless earth,
To thee, the Spirit of earth's harmless lives,
Inferior creatures but still innocent,
Be salutation from a guilty mouth
Yet worthy of some audience and respect
From you who are not guilty. If we have sinned,
God hath rebuked us, who is over us
To give rebuke or death, and if ye wail
Because of any suffering from our sin,
Ye who are under and not over us,
Be satisfied with God, if not with us,
And pass out from our presence in such peace
As we have left you, to enjoy revenge
Such as the heavens have made you. Verily,
There must be strife between us, large as sin.

Eve. No strife, mine Adam! Let us not stand high
Upon the wrong we did to reach disdain,
Who rather should be humbler evermore
Since self-made sadder. Adam! shall I speak —
I who spake once to such a bitter end —
Shall I speak humbly now who once was proud?
I, schooled by sin to more humility
Than thou hast, O mine Adam, O my king —

My king, if not the world's?

Adam. Speak as thou wilt.

Eve. Thus, then – my hand in thine —
... Sweet, dreadful Spirits!
I pray you humbly in the name of God,
Not to say of these tears, which are impure —
Grant me such pardoning grace as can go forth
From clean volitions toward a spotted will,
From the wronged to the wronger, this and no more!
I do not ask more. I am 'ware, indeed,
That absolute pardon is impossible
From you to me, by reason of my sin, —
And that I cannot evermore, as once,
With worthy acceptation of pure joy,
Behold the trances of the holy hills
Beneath the leaning stars, or watch the vales
Dew-pallid with their morning ecstasy, —
Or hear the winds make pastoral peace between
Two grassy uplands, – and the river-wells
Work out their bubbling mysteries underground, —
And all the birds sing, till for joy of song
They lift their trembling wings as if to heave
The too-much weight of music from their heart
And float it up the æther. I am 'ware
That these things I can no more apprehend
With a pure organ into a full delight, —
The sense of beauty and of melody
Being no more aided in me by the sense
Of personal adjustment to those heights
Of what I see well-formed or hear well-tuned,
But rather coupled darkly and made ashamed
By my percipency of sin and fall
In melancholy of humilient thoughts.
But, oh! fair, dreadful Spirits – albeit this
Your accusation must confront my soul,
And your pathetic utterance and full gaze
Must evermore subdue me, – be content!
Conquer me gently – as if pitying me,

Not to say loving! let my tears fall thick
As watering dews of Eden, unrepached;
And when your tongues reprove me, make me smooth,
Not ruffled – smooth and still with your reproof,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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