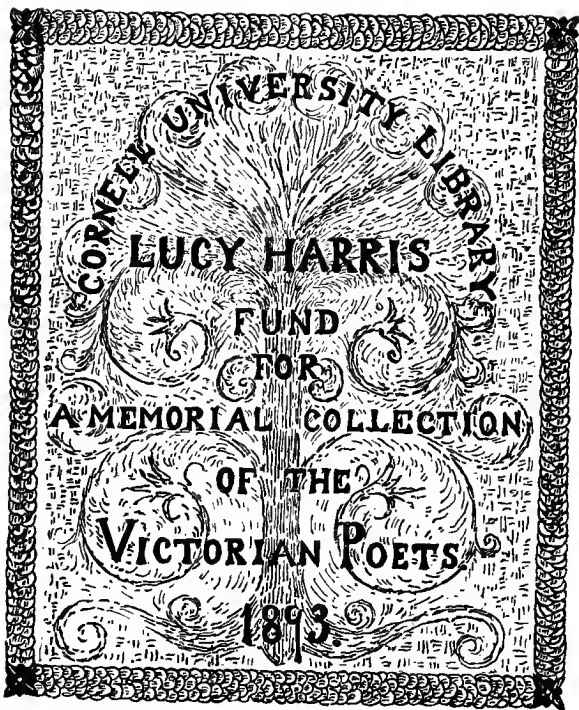


GAI SABER
TALES AND SONGS

MAURICE HEWLETT



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GAI SABER



GAI SABER: TALES AND SONGS

BY

MAURICE HEWLETT

Quant vei lo temps renovellar,
E pareis la fueill' e la flors,
Mi dona ardimen amors
E cor e saber de cantar . . .

BERTRAND DE BORN, le fils.

NEW YORK
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

1916

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DEDICATION

THE KEY

WHO turn'd the Sonnet like a key
To unlock his heart has been reveal'd.
The deed was done; the world made free
With more than that hot shrine conceal'd.

Another key there lay upon it,
A heart of hearts, a master-key
To play and pageant, song and sonnet,
To Comedy and Tragedy.

So here—who seeks, if he have wit,
May learn the truth, what golden heart
Beginning was and end of it,
Fount of my passion and my art.

If I have grace before I die
To lock in verse your lovely worth,
The Gods may plant me low or high;
They'll leave the best of me on earth.

London,
10 May 1914.

GAI SABER

I

CORMAC, SON OF OGMUND

HERE is a tale I've lately read
Which says of Cormac Ogmundsson
That he saw Stangerd with arms bare
And neck and shoulders, full in the sun,
Slanting her head to comb her hair,
The loveliest thing he 'd lookt upon;
And fell to love her then and there,
And serv'd her long and might have wed,
But had no joy of, as men reckon
Their joy of women, board and bed,
Kisses a-plenty, common bacon,
And common toil for common bread
To fill the mouths they make together.

Joy of a kind natheless he had,
They say, to his own taste or tether,
And greatly loved and hugely dared,
Riding the dales or upland heather

Singing of Stangerd, being glad
Because her blissfulness he shared
With every other mother's son
In this good world, with me, with you,
With her two husbands, for she'd two,
And buried both before he had done.
Not only so, but he declared
All Nature was her lord in fee,
And bird and hill-flower, stock and stone,
And spearing grass and springing tree,
The clouds, the river and the sun
Had Stangerd in coparcenry.
Thus Cormac, Heaven and Earth conspired
To make Desire most undesired.

For as he lookt upon the thing
Their beauty was a glass for hers,
And nothing worth considering
But what they told as messengers
Of what she did and what she was.
So the lark lift as she did pass
And said, "The world is bright with glee
Since Stangerd lookt and smiled on me:
Therefore I sing!"—or grass, "Her feet
Press me in love!"—or flower, "How sweet
The breath of Stangerd when she goes
With parted lips!"—or tree, "Who knows—
Passing she laid a lingering hand

On me, and doubtful seem'd to stand
Whether or not to take me to her—
Who knows but she will let me woo her
And be her lover in the dark
When the sap throbs beneath the bark? ”
So did the cloud, a jealous lover,
Beshadow her, as he would cover,
And prove himself her bosom's lord,
And make a guarded woman of her,
Had not the sun with his bared sword
Rent him with gashes, and outpour'd
His courage on her; the which the river
Rejoicing saw: “ O thou brave giver
Of heart to horse, and horse to pasture,”
Cried he, “ I hail thee! Warm the blood
Of Stangerd, that she slip her vesture
And come to me, and know my flood! ”

Or take him in an earlier mood—
His first when he cast eyes upon her—
Which show'd him her, this burning lass,
Daughter of Thorkel of the Tongue,
Goddess's maid, a Maid of Honour,
Flusht in the face, with hair like brass,
Or corn that yellows to the sickle,
Full tall and free and bold and young,
Deep-bosom'd too, with deep blue eyes
Like slumbering pools,—a girl of size,

Whom seeing no man you'd say would stickle
To take to church and make a woman—
Show'd her to him a spirit not human,
Who whether in hall, robed in her white,
She sat at ease with her arms bare
And gaz'd before her at the light,
Dreaming, and her vague eyes astare
Encompast him and gave him sight
Of their blue mystery and intent;
Or whether about the board she went
Serving the men with mead, and came
And stood above him till he bent
Before her, as before the flame
The bushes in a forest bow
And show all white—he had her name
As if 'twas written on her brow:
A Valkyr! Chooser of the slain!
A storm-fraught Spirit fierce as pain,
With whom to clasp and kiss, or grapple
As man with woman, that were thought
To deaden deed, as if you brought
The lonely Night to bed, or fared
To play below the gleaming thrapple
Of the keen daughter of the snow,
And froze when her white hills she bared.
Therefore said he, "Ah! let her go,
Mistress of Destiny, unmov'd

Her way of Gods, her way of woe,
But ever lovely and ever lov'd,
Treading the necks of beaten men! "

Now for the rift 'twixt Now and Then!
While so submit his own neck prov'd
Other men's heads remain'd upright,
And other eyes saw other light
In Stangerd's; which when Cormac found
Averse from his, then he partook
With common men a common ground
Of grievance, and a common grief:
The grief of him who comes too late
To market, or has been too stiff
About the chaffer. Man forsook
Is cheated man the whole world over;
And vainly now this young tomnoddy,
This too exuberant generous wooer,
Rav'd for his benison of the body,
And sang in vain what he might do her
Upon a day unwritten of—
He never did it as I hear.
Tongue-work was all he had of love,
Song-work and suchlike poets' gear.
Yet much he dared and long he strove,
Serving her so for many a year,
Fighting and wandering, till he hove
To sea, and vanisht, singing her.

Not mine to sing, at least not here,
How to the tale came Battle-Berse,
Stangerd's first husband, when Cormac,
Betroth'd, handfasted as he was,
Lover accepted, yet drew back
At the last hour, a thing unchancy—
Witchfinders hint at spell or curse
Upon the plighting: each man has
His own curse in him, and my fancy
Sees Cormac storing her to heart
To sing about in sounding verse,
Making a goddess of a lass,
Not better, but so much the worse
The more herself had art and part
In the business. Call this nigromancy
Done by the spae-wife out of spite,
I tell you Love 's a tricky sprite
For poets' bosoms. Love says, Kiss
Your well-belov'd, she'll kiss again,
Apt pupil; but it's also true
The more you kiss, the more you strain
Together, the less lover you,
And the more she. Skald's wisdom is
To love apart, since love is pain
At all events, howe'er you do;
And out of pain that song cometh
The which you live by, as by breath

Live some, and other some by kiss
(As women all). Where there are two,
And one a poet, one must rue—
And it was Stangerd, as the case is
Whene'er a girl accepts the embraces
Of poet-lover.

Of her now

What shall we say? Was she in sooth
The spirit few see but some may know,
Even as believ'd our ardent youth—
The Essence at the heart of things,
Which makes them things? Substantial truth?
The secret rose of loveliness,
The very flicker in the wings
Of birds, the thrill of sweet distress
You get at heart when a bird sings
At night? The fragrance, hue, impress,
The very life within the dress
That bodies beauty? Was all this
Chance-held in Stangerd's blossomings
For Cormac's vision and his bliss?
Was she so rare or he so tender?
He found her so by hit or miss.

And so he paid for his lachess
Or, if you please, his soul-surrender;
For plain men saw—a piece of goods,
Just a fine girl for all her splendour

II
CORMAC TO STANGERD

I
HE SEES HER FEET

O EYE-DECEIT or heart-deceit,
Lo there, my blessing or my bane!
A lover at a lady's feet
Holding his heart, and there a pain!

A lady's feet, and there a lover:
A patch of snow left by the rain
Afield, or two tufts of white clover . . .
And near beside a young man slain.

II
HE SEES HER EYES

The fire plays with my lady's eyes,
And they make music in my head.
The sea-blue bird that flashing flies
Like a sword down the river-bed
Links the green earth and azure skies;
And so with me is Stangerd wed,
When light with light is handfasted.

III

SHE LIES AND LISTENS

Now Stangerd lay abed within
The house's inmost sanctuaries,
With both her hands between her knees,
And them drawn up towards her chin
Touching the fulness of her breast;
And her wide eyes could get no rest
That sought the dark and saw clouds float,
Clouds of crimson radiant mist
Which gather'd, mass'd and cours'd above her
More lovely than the wings of the West.
If such wild heart should turn to love her,
What love-words would not such a throat
Pour for the overwhelming of her!

IV

THE WORTH OF HER

For all that body's loveliness
I would give Iceland and no less,
And all the lands that lie between
The land where the sun is never seen
And the roaring Western main;
And even so I should be fain
To search the world for more to give:
Yet search I must if I would live.

V

HIS PHILOSOPHY

I love a lovely woman—well,
And if some other love her—good!
All goes to prove my hardihood,
All goes her magicry to tell.
For say she is a miracle,
Say that her beauty is my food,
Am I so surly in my mood
That what feeds me rings t'other's knell?

Nay, should a hundred be about her,
And she of her great bounty feed them,
Is that to say my heart must heed them?
Not so. 'Tis they can't do without her.
Women are so made, they grow stouter
Of heart the more their lovers bleed them.

VI

APOLOGUE

There were four brothers loved one lass—
Ask not how much or when this was.
It was before the world took heed
Of more than how to serve its need.

Their need was sore, her bounty such,
They askt not, nor she gave, too much:

Cormac to Stangerd

They roam'd the heath, they fought and kill'd;
They were as one long sword and shield.

She kept the house; there was no strife
Within doors, such a sweet housewife
Was she, this kindly-kindled lass,
Such wife as no man living has.

VII

THE LOVER'S CREED

Well do they call you Sleeping Gold,
Since no man lives that cannot see
The light-flung glory which you hold
As Erda holds her majesty,
A thing of little worth, the fee
Of whoso asketh, being bold.
Let him draw nigh, the well is free,
Say you, the fire for who's acold:
Let him drink, warm himself of me.

Your heart, O Stangerd, you hold up
For asking men; they need but need.
There is no bottom to the cup,
There is no pauper but may feed.
So in your calm eyes each may read
The truth he asks, if he be true;
So to your arms all come indeed,
And die, as they have liv'd, of you—
And your gold sleeps and takes no heed.

VIII
THEY KISS

Eye-level and heart-level they,
And mouth-level; but till that day
Never had been what now must be:
Kiss'd mouth to kissing mouth is fast,
And two hearts beating to one tune.

Breathless and speechless for their boon
They cling together; but they kiss
No more; but mouth and mouth co-mix
And make one being at the lips.
And the burnt splendour of the moon
Throbs with the heat of burning noon.

IX
VITUPERATION

The scullion and his kettle-snake!
What ail'd him and his blister'd tongue?
Will he scrape me with his muck-rake,
Scatter me as he scatters dung
About the meadow? And the house
That holds her harbours that wood-louse!
Salmon and gudgeon in one lake,
One tree—sea-eagle and titmouse!

X

JOY OF BATTLE

When scythe and broad-sword come to blows
Plain men take heart, and meadow-grass;
But there's no pasture for the ass
However fair the home-mead grows.
Cudgel your wits, I'll cudgel your hides,
Ye greedy pair of hoody crows.

XI

LOVE GROWN SOUR

This is not love that drains me—nay,
This is to crave. O girdled Fricka,
Dare I come near thee with lips gray
For need of thine, and hot tongue-liquor
Where once my mouth was clean to pray?

I would go back! There is no way
To thin the blood I have made thicker;
Save scratch for itch is no allay.
The flame is at its dying flicker,
Blown by hot breath, it cannot stay.
Speed it with scorn that it die quicker—
Alas the hour, alas the day!

XII
RED RAGE

Berse, you have dared impossibly,
Taking what I have feared to take,
Looking where I have feared to see,
Dipping where none may dip and be
Still man, within the lonely lake.
To have scaled the awful mountain pass,
To have seen unblencht the untrod snows,
Affronting with your front of brass
The heart of the everlasting rose—
You have dared enough, and shall give o'er
Your daring. You have dared so much,
Let it suffice: no more, no more.

Yet seeing by that desperate touch
There is come glory on your brow;
And to your name the pride is such
The man who bears it he must die,
I tell you, Berse, the time is now,
Before you've time to blur and dull it
With your gross brain and teeming eye
And tongue, when righteous hand shall clutch
Your throat and take you by the gullet,
And wrench the life out, and the lie
You make of it. And here's the sign:
The clutching hand writes this—'tis mine,

XIII

MYSTIC MOOD

Ah, now indeed I have her—now
When I am leaving her for good.
For good? Ah, yes, for now I know
What Christians call their heavenly food.
You see no flesh, you taste no blood,
The holy flake shines like the snow;
The sweet thin wine has the red flow
But not the salt that drencht the Rood.

Now I have feasted as I would
And go my way with a full heart:
Stangerd and I shall never part
If I can keep this holy mood.

XIV

HIS CONCLUSION

O land where the sea-eagle hovers,
O mountain land and river-flood!
Here is the wonder of the wood
And here a tale of love and lovers.

What have I done? I've heard the note
Thrill'd by the wood-bird in the dark;
It set me soaring like a lark
That on his own song seems afloat.

But what have I done? I was blind
That thought I saw a fair maid pass
And stroke my cheek. That was no lass,
That spirit of the wandering wind.

What have I done, but love too high?
What have I done, but fall too far?
I set my longing on a star,
And there it burns, and here I lie.

III
NIGHT CRY

YOU who in the night
By your shining stair
Shed soft respite
On my despair,
Hear what your lover saith:—
It is my prayer
That when I lie at my last odds,
Man and still a child,
Facing him who broods and nods
The way of the wild,
I may read Requiem
In your eyes mild.

By time and tide men score
Their tale of hopes and fears;
These have swept me frore
And dull'd my ears;
My eyes are dim, for they live
Haunted by tears.
Nothing else have I to tell
Save what you have taught me;

Night Cry

27

Yet I have lov'd you well
Since Night caught me,
Night and you, and the song
Which you two taught me.

Let them answer and speak
By your gracious leave:
You gave, I did not seek;
Yet I believe
When I go into the dark
Your lips will murmur and grieve,
Saying, This was man of mine
And sought me long,
Singling me by secret sign
In and out of the throng:
I was the first and the last
In his song.

IV THE VOYAGE

THE night before our Lady's day
I came to a break in my outward way,
To where the land's end seemed to be;
For now in a dark immensity
Great water flowed, and out of the west
The wind came wet, bringing unrest
To all the earth from the open main;
And I felt the darkness her doors twain
Open and shut as the sea surged,
Like her pulse made audible.

There was nought that a man could tell
Between me and the ways of sleep,
Save that flood-water dark and deep,
And that hot wind and passionate
Which called me meet I know not what fate
Near or far off; but I knew that a man,
With bright blue eyes in his face of tan
And teeth as white as the cherry flower,
Was by who said, "This is the hour
When you and I take boat. The ship
Rides out yonder, the tide's at neap.

Come, you shall see the cities of men,
And the plains and mountains and rivers of them,
And what the folk do under the eye
Of the sun, and learn of their mystery.”
Stilly he spake, as if from his bed
Of flowers and tapers the folded dead
Should speak, not winking his shut eyes
Nor breaking the dream wherein he lies,
Stilly smiling, wise and not fierce.

Rending the dark with eyes and ears,
I saw a ship but a bowshot out,
I saw her headlight leap and lout
As she dipt to the trough or climbed to be
Atop the ridges of that dark sea.
I heard the waves break at her bows
And the cries of sailors at work or carouse
As they clankt the anchor chain
Against the word to haul amain;
And I saw lights running here and there
Over the deck, and knew what air
Sang in her shrouds. Then I took boat—
He pusht her out and I felt her float
On unknown sea from the unseen shore—
I at the helm and he at the oar
Climbed the ridges of that dark sea
Through the black water racing free,
To rock in the lew of the ship's side,

The Voyage

Straining there, head to tide,
With broad dipt bosom and lifted wing,
Lightly swaying, a living thing,
Strained to windward.

The anchor weighed,

She shook herself, now stoopt, now stay'd,
And drave her course into the wind.
The white foam flew and stream'd behind,
Flakes and splinters of pale gold—
So God further the ship! Behold,
The mast is a pointer, a wagging lance
Weaving arcs where the mad stars dance
Over the sky, as over the turf
The windy tree-tops! With snap of surf,
With surge and swallow along the keel,
With plunging nose and dripping heel
She took the seas. As for me I slept
While about the world's girdle the sun crept,
And stars paled, and Earth was tired,
Like a woman too much hired
And loved until she swoons away.
The stars went out, the Earth grew gray,
And I slept long on the breast of the sea
Till the broad morning awakened me.

O brave world that I lookt upon!
Out on the green-capt cliffs in the sun
The steeple bells were calling to God

The Voyage

31

Faithful people; white gulls rode
Placid the ponded sea; the trees
Out of heaven call'd down a breeze
And, whispering to it, wafted it
Over the sea. Like a wide sheet
Of fairy water silver-white
The sea lay dimpling in the light,
Streakt and fretted with stipples where
The wind had kist her bosom fair
And left a blush to tell his daring.
The breeze held on and shaped our faring
West by south. It came on our quarter
And drave us off into deep water,
Out of sight of homely thing,
Tilth and pasture and farm-steading,
White villages, red-rooft towns,
Gray manors in folds of the downs
Hinting the kindly gods of the hearth;
Out from the confines of the earth
To where in sounding perilous seas
Lay hid the Cassiterides;
To water spread in a circle dim
To a faint far edge, a silver rim:
And the sky was a whole unbroken cup
Of clear crystal, and hid us up.

Four nights, four days since we set sail
We drave the seas on a following gale

With never hint of the land or sight
Of passing ship; but the fifth night
The stars were suddenly quencht, there fell
A hush on the sea, with a long swell
Wherein we wallow'd and sat dumb,
Grimly waiting the storm to come,
Bow'd as a man is bow'd who saith,
The end is near, when the end is death.
Sudden it struck us flat, and the ship
Reel'd; but then, as horse to a whip
Shudders and lays his ears back
Before mad flight, so she lay slack,
Beaten, blind, and quivering,
Then leapt forward, a madden'd thing
Into a sea turn'd ravenous,
Following, threatening, harrying us
To forget God and the sun's cheer,
And Love and Sorrow, and serve Fear
And Lust-of-Living, his blood-brother.
We knew the waves racing each other,
Riding each other, each in haste
To be first upon us, and first to taste
Our dear blood; and so we fled
Derelict, bare before that dread
Space unmeasur'd and time annull'd.

The fury past, the storm was lull'd,
The wind dropt, and we heard the rain

Sting the water and thud amain
On the deck of our beaten barque,
Making a heaven of the dark
Wherein we lay like a soused log,
Drown'd in rain and the rain-fog,
Sodden wrack upon the flood
Without signal or neighbourhood
Of aught but water above or below,
And the sound of water; and, drifting so,
On the sixth morning the clouds of storm
Lifted, and lo! in the sea a form
Vast and black, a lonely cliff
Rear'd up like a hippogriff;
And the foam flashing about his knees
Was as if with wings he should beat the seas,
To rise up and be free to soar.
About his knees the sounding roar,
About his head a cloud, we past
On a swift tide, and felt the blast
Of his fear like a stream of frozen air
Dry our eyelids and lift our hair;
And his howling follow'd us on our flight
Through the deep of the sixth night.

But when the seventh dawn's white hand
Was on the latch I saw a land
Glimmering, husht and still asleep
Without shadow, of cliff and steep

And forest like a cloud. And in
We drew, and saw the waves breaking
On green flats, and heard the thrill
Of One who sang there long and shrill,
As to a harp a harp-player
Who tilts his chin to feel the air,
And holds a high continued note
Trembling in his narrow'd throat,
But finds no words. And there she stood
Who made the song, on the verge of the flood,
On a green shore in full sunlight,
A slim woman, naked and white,
With eyes that shone like the sun on swords,
So near that I saw the singing chords
Ripple as the sound past over.
High were her hands to call her lover
To kiss her and be glad of her;
For they say the Sun is her paramour,
And out of the sea she calls him to her
To her fair service, to be her wooer;
And he cometh to her every day,
And at eve goes.

We on our way
Drave on a swift blue tidal race
By dreaming shores of strange face—
Forests and river mouths, with ships
Sailing into the land, and strips

Of emerald verdure on either strand;
Small white towns on the edge of the sand,
And beyond an infinite country with far
Mountains, wherein the Gods are
For crown of all the heart's desire.
And thence to a country burnt by fire,
A bare country of weald and wold
Brown and gasht, and a city old
With a wall about; and beyond the walls
Men plough'd the glebe. I heard their calls
Over sea as the heavy, slow,
Mild-eyed oxen went to and fro
With bent heads under the yoke.
So now the city, with thin blue smoke
To veil her face, before us lies
White and still, with her men like flies
Crawling her streets and waterways,
Her bridges and yards and busy quays;
And over all a great church
With a gilded dome. And I made search
For cross or crescent atop, but none
Was there, but instead a naked one
Straddled and stood that all might see
The glory of his virility.
Gold was his hair, and bright gold
The eyes of him. His hands he did hold
On high, with fingers all outspread,

As the sun himself, when low and red
He stoops to west, lets his beams fly
Like long fingers over the sky.
They say his name is Heëlios,
And his the city without a cross;
And his the priests and the priestesses;
And the altar-smoke and the blood are his.

The night fell under new stars,
And dawn came red with rumours of wars
And dry heat. Most desolate
Grew the shore as we coasted it;
For now the round world beautiful
Was bleacht like the dome of an old skull,
Sutured with dykes where no water was
And ridged under a sky of brass.
And so we came to a great plain
Of sand and stones, a place of pain
Under the grin of the sun; and there
Lay a dragon voicing his great despair.
There alone on the sand did he lie,
Bitter wounded and slow to die,
Rearing on high his smitten head
To challenge God; but the rest was dead,
Huddled in flat folds: so he
Served out his lonely agony.
But we drave on in the glare of noon
And came to a place of marsh and dune

That like a scarf of smoke was trail'd
About the distance, then and sail'd
Naked to the zenith, and then
Naked stoopt seawards again
And veil'd in ocean his red rim
And hid. And the gold air after him
Fainted to amber, and in green
Died. Rose then the silver queen
Of night, and spread her violet cloak
Over the world, and starlight broke
From every point the eye could hold
While her lamp burn'd, a disk of gold,
And flamed on the sea in fiery flakes,
And made a path for herself, and lakes
Of shining water wherein to float
Fishers in a fairy boat;
And made a witchcraft of the night
Until she paled, and the dawn light
Shiver'd anew across the sea.

So in the glimmer of day-to-be
I saw a city her white arms wide
Stretch to the shore on either side
The bay. Her shipping was like a wood
Of silver poplars hemming a flood;
And her glory rose on terraces
Of temples and marble palaces
And broad stairways to cypress glooms

And the crowning of her place of tombs;
For she is a temple of the dead
Whom the living worshipt there, men said,
Counting no one fortunate
Until he share their calm estate.
For in all the clamour of life's unease
There is one thing to pray for—peace;
And neither beauty nor wisdom skill
Body nor soul ere they be still;
And riches buy no thing so rare
As sleep without dreams in windless air.

Fared we then over wide sea-ways,
And lost the land for a many days
And nights of charmèd solitude,
With never a thing to break our mood
Of spell-bound, high expectancy.
Then, behold! a cloud on the sea,
A dim isle, and the very ship
Seem'd to stay, as when to the lip
The finger goes, and the oncomer
Holds him, saying, Am I so near?

And so by perils we were come
Of warring over the sea foam
To the land where I would be.

V

GUNNAR HELMING'S SAGA

RUDE is this tale, from heathen mint,
Like some old coin of theirs, gog-eyed,
A ragged, straggle-bearded thing,
A travesty of moneying
With little on its face but pride.
And yet the metal's true inside,
And there's some virgin gold within't—
As when the heart of Sigrid cried,
And Gunnar broke her wedding-ring,
Making an unwed wife a bride.
Also of laughing there's no stint
For men not over-sanctified,
Who saying, Heathendom is lies,
Make prudery their prejudice
And cry, A falsehood! to begin't.
But they who feel, as I proclaim,
That there's no virtue and no vice
In human nature as of course,

Will drink me up as water horse;
And as for women, by love made wise,
They'll read so far and take the hint.

It all begins with Ogmund Dint,
Or Dinthead, called so because once
Halward the Strong and peremptory
Had knockt him down and crackt his sconce
For him, and still it bore th' imprint
Of a good man, and a good story
Worth telling if time served—this Dint,
Seeking to pay back that old score,
Meets Gunnar Helming on the shore
In his red hood, taking the air,
As such a handsome rover might,
And brings him in to the affair.

Now Ogmund wore his famous cloak,
For he was rich and took delight
In raiment. It was green and black,
Contrast as curious as rare,
With a gold serpent up the back,
And sable-tails like plumes of smoke
To trim it, glorious to behold.
Which eyeing, and the bearer of it,
Says Gunnar, "Let me make so bold
To ask you, Ogmund, not in joke

But with a thought to common profit,
Were such a garment to be sold
Should you not be the man to doff it,
And I go peacocking instead?
The cloak is young, the cloak is fine;
Your beard is grizzling, whereas mine,
What though it leans towards the red,
Is a young beard; and in my head
No chasm yawns. Come then, combine
With me and name your price!" He smiled
Engagingly. It were as easy
To be offended with a child
As with him, nor was Ogmund queasy
Or high in stomach, who just now
Had other cares to seam his brow.
He laughed. "My cloak then, does it please ye?
Then it is yours, but I'd be vexed
If money marred a pretty tie
Between us. 'T will be my turn next—
Nay! Since the wind is whistling shrewd
And I'll be shivering by-and-by,
A barter's always unoffending:
Take it, and let me have your hood.
'Twill serve to keep me warm and dry,
And as for looks, I'm past the mending."

So said, so done. They made exchange,

And Ogmund, snug in Gunnar's red,
Turned on his errand, but in going
Stopt once again, and turning said,
"You know the common beat and range
Of all men here—where 's the bestowing
Of Halward Strong? I have to speak
A word with him." He stood, not showing
His felon eyes, and smoothed his cheek
With a soft hand. Says Gunnar, "He?
Your friend? He 's new come from the sea.
You'll find him washing off the reek
And scurf of brine in company
With other seamen at the Fish."

Thereon they part, and Ogmund seeks
The Fish, and there 's his man a-washing,
To whom he whispers in the ear,
A word apart. Low-voiced he speaks,
And mighty Halward without fear,
Just as he is, with soapsuds flashing
Upon his beard, follows the hood,
Sure deeming whom he deals with here,
Into the yard. "What is't you would,
Gunnar, with me?" The axe falls crashing
Into his neck, and sends blood splashing
High up the wall—a debt made good.
So much for Halward. Ogmund hies,

Light on the foot as water-fowl
Skimming the surface of a mere,
Or crow that hops before he flies,
With wary eye and heedful ear
But much contentment in his soul,
Out to his boat, and with a stone
Sinks Gunnar's hood a fathom deep
In ooze and water; gets aboard,
And goes to bed, and so to sleep.

Rumour's a strumpet, all men's keep,
And now is busy. Names are roared
About. One knew the hood, one heard
Gunnar's own voice, one knew his walk,
One saw him at it with a sword—
No sword! 'Twas a long bill. No matter—
'Twas Gunnar, that was flat, was flatter
Than Halward now. So raced the talk
In turbid stream. Then one brought word,
The vital word in all this chatter,
Which gave it substance, to Sigurd,
Gunnar's own brother. Straightway he
Took it to Gunnar. "Was this deed
Your doing then?" Gunnar not stirred.
"That be far from me"—and thereon
Shut down his lips, no more would say
Neither to him nor any one.

Then Sigurd: "You were best away.
Off with you!"

Now the tale goes on.

Gunnar betook him to the woods
And lurkt there for a season. Then,
Wearying of berries and such foods
As better nourish birds than men,
Worked eastward to the open fen,
Crossed marshes, skirted lipping floods
Of sea-creeks, and addressed the ridge
Which severs from each other's ken
Norway and Sweden, brake the hedge
Of utmost pines which from the snow
Rise like a ragged eagle's wing,
And roar whatever great winds blow.
He faced the whiplash and the sting
Of icy blasts, and so came down
By many a ravine and rock-ledge
To the Swedes' country all unknown,
To forests deeper than his own
Where by green roads strange companies
Slipt thro' the aisles of sighing trees,
Strange, furtive, long-haired, peering creatures
With bird-bright eyes and sinewy knees,
Their men like monarchs of a herd;
And pale, shy women with the features

And lonely ways of a wood-bird,
Going soft-foot from place to place
Between the aisles of silent trees.

For in those days, through woody Sweden,
Wherever was an open space
There wanned and roamed the dangerous heathen
In gathered bands, like reindeer. They,
A sylvan folk and all untaught,
Served painted gods, and chiefly Frey,
A crownéd God, with oak-leaves wreathen.
Frey had their homage, for they thought
The rain was his which grew the grass,
And sun which burned it into hay:
Briefly, all good that ever was
Upon the land by him was brought.
He willed it, and it came to pass—
Such was his grandipotent way.
Therefore this wonder-working Frey,
This bounty-springing, welling heart
Of earth, this fount of yearly course
Of foison, they kept in a cart,
Which two white oxen, sadly teased
By yoke and nose-ring, haled perforce
To village greens, to fair and mart,
Wherever men were in concourse
To buy or sell, to praise or pray.

Four poles held up the curtains of it
And hid the god until he pleased
Give testimony of his art
To muttering priest or mouthing prophet
Who, given a favourable day,
Might then reveal them painted Frey
Like a young man with crispy hair,
Forkt beard, curved mouth and nostrils gay
With scarlet, and round eyes astare.
His crown he wore, and held within
His dexter hand a gilded cone,
And in his left a rolling pin,
Or that which had the air of one—
A budded rod it seems to have been.

That was the shrine and such the God
Who swayed this folk in woodland dense,
Signifying them with his rod
Potential beneficence;
And since they knew by common sense
It is not good to live alone,
Whether you live by prayers or pence,
Whether within a block of wood
You veil yourself, or shapen stone,
Whether of board or wholesome meat
You be, on Frey they had bestowed
To be his wife a woman sweet;

And there upon the cart she rode
Beside of Frey, and shared his seat,
A woman fair and very young,
Vivid and dusky-haired, with eyes
Like golden amber, and a tongue
For music like a low-toned bell
With a bloom on it, such as cries
In the brown bird that men love well
Who hear her low-crooned mysteries,
The nightingale, which seems to gloat
When the rich music creams her throat.
And hers it was Frey's rede to tell
Whenas the God had made her wise;
She wrought the needful miracle,
Calling the rain forth from the skies;
Or when they brought up from the field
Cow late with calf, or gravelled ox,
Or horses galled, or slippery-heeled,
Or spavined, or with running hocks,
Or seedy-toed, or staggering,
To lead beneath Frey's painted eyes,
This still, slim, grave girl from her place
Rose up and searched his wooden face,
And there instructed, she revealed
His will who had her surely wed.
Wedded she was, for unconcealed
Within that cart there stood a bed.

There, on some wild and empty night
Of mystery close if not fulfilled,
She lay with Frey, and there they said
He had done with her what he might
To overpass her maiden dread.
There Frey slept now, and there she slept
Whenas the oxen-cart was led,
A fluttering, gaudy, welcome sight,
From village-stead to village-stead—
Or there she lay awake and wept,
Perhaps, if you could get it right.

Now to this place of sanctuary
Came Gunnar Helming, and accost
Frey's wife. "O woman fair to see,
Be pitiful, or I am lost."
"And who are you?" says she. He says,
"I am an outland-faring wight
Who needs must lurk in these wood ways,
And sleep by day and go by night."
She knit her brows and pondered Frey's,
Her staring master. "He is not
Too sure of you," she says, "and what
Shall I do in such business
Without his sanction?" Laughing light
Gleamed in his eyes. "O sweet mistress,"
Says he—he was a merry man—

“Be you assured of my distress,
And let Frey settle it as he can.”
She met his eyes and found them kind;
She met his eyes awhile, and then,
Feeling them fasten on the mind,
She turned her own towards her feet
And would not look at him again,
Yet said, “Stay here a spell of days,
It may be Frey will warm to it;
He is not harsh with common men.”
“Nor they with him,” bold Gunnar says,
“Who leave him cock of such a hen.”

All that long winter he abode
With Frey and Frey's wife in the woods,
And being fresh and lightly strung,
Most tunable to laughing moods,
The people found him well bestowed
When to their feasts he brought a song
Or rime. He had a golden tongue
Full stored with rare vicissitudes
To give men flavour to their drink.
And Frey was present at the frolic,
Listening to all without a blink,
And Frey's young wife must be thereat,
Of whom when Gunnar stayed to think
He felt himself grow melancholic,

To see how strange, how far she sat
With fixt hard eyes and frozen face
Beside that thing encased in fat
Of varnisht gilt, a painted mammet!
He'd grind his teeth and curse the place
Which suffered such a monstrous fault.
Unholy wedlock! 'twas a case
To seal up paynimry in vault,
And not to shut the door, but slam it.
She too, by woman's wit made wise,
Perhaps read this in Gunnar's eyes,
Perhaps with trembling of the lip
Confessed a tender partnership
In his hot animadvertencies.
It was peculiar to the dim age
In which they were that Gunnar could
Be jealous of a painted image,
But that she should have understood
The poor man's sentimental scrimmage,
To see her tied to gilded wood,
Slave to a block of orpiment,
And found the situation good
That held in him his discontent—
That's woman's universal lore,
Which discerns love, however blent.

Through the long dark the winter wore,

And men began to watch the weather,
Counting the daylight minutes more,
Looking for sign in fur or feather
That life was stirring underneath
The mounded snow and steel-ribbed ice
To bring forth life where now seemed death;
And once more Gunnar's and the eyes
Of Frey's young wife were met together,
Whenas he said, "Sweetheart, what now?
Must I be gone?" Her voice was low,
Her will was like corn in the vice
Of millstones, th' upper and the nether,
That grind it small; for, losing him,
What had she left? And if he stayed
Frey might have scope for comment grim.
She sought his painted eyes; they made
A glare of blue, bleak as a blade,
But not illumed her trouble-spot.
Withal she said, "Nay, leave me not!"
And Gunnar cried, "Your Frey's uncivil,
For though of me he has no care,
Nor lets me know it, just to stare
When a sweet woman asks his pleasure
Is showing less of god than devil.
Now leave we Frey to find at leisure
His godship's and my manhood's level."
Sigrid said nothing, but her pair

Of eyes sought his, and saw no evil.

Now, so it is the time 's at hand
When Frey must travel in his cart
Upon his pious round to bless
And fructify the teeming land,
And with his rod make throb her heart,
And fill her womb with buxomness.
Now are his oxen yoked to start,
Now Frey is ready, ready she
Who fills for him the wifely part;
And, not so ready, with his goad
Stands Gunnar by the axletree
Musing upon his holy load,
And wondering if on earth or sea
Such blissful freight could ever be
Untoucht, unheeded, unbestrode
As in this cart he had bestowed.
"O maid above all maids for me!"
He sighed, and urged the mountain road.

They had not gone six leagues or seven
Before a shrill wind 'gan to blow,
A darkness blotted up blue heaven
And filled the air with whirling snow.
His heart within his breast was riven;
Which was his way he could not know,

Nor how to save himself frostbite,
Nor whether he had lost a toe;
Nor how he stumbled, half in sweven
And half on fire with rage and spite
With gods above and gods below—
Them that could turn day into night,
And them abed while he must go
Numb, blinded, battling, caked in white,
A mockery and frozen show,
Icebound to season Frey's delight!
At last the blundering beasts could fight
No more, nor move the fumbling wain.
Gunnar turned round to back the blast
And shook the curtain: "Hey! it's plain
The beasts are foundered and we're fast."
Faint came her small voice, moved at last,
"O Gunnar, pity on my pain!"

He fed his beasts and overcast
Their heaving flanks, like a good drover,
And forthwith to the cart he passed,
A freezing man but burning lover.
There within the bed lay she
With her dark hair spread like a fan,
And harewide eyes which lookt him over
As if she saw another man
Within the husk of him she knew,

That man whom most a maiden fears
Before she finds she loves him too.
And there in all his paint of pride
Stood Frey, to watch what he would do,
Glaring. But Gunnar's was no mood
To palter with imposing wood.
"You Frey," he said, "let us discover
Which of us two has mastery,
The god or man; and who shall ride
The curtained waggon, and make free
Of this good bedstead; and whose bride
Is this sweet woman presently."
So said, he came on light and fierce,
While Sigrid quaked within her form,
Laid hold of Frey by both his ears
And rocked him as the mountain storm
Plays bitter sport and overbears
The upland trees. "O Frey," she hears
Him say, "If I am overbold
It is no wonder. You are warm,
And in your heat I am not cold."

He lifted Frey as one who bears
A brimming pitcher, and him set
An arm's length off, what time she peers
To see him, but affects not see
How her stiff husband is beset.

“ Stand there, my gilded stock,” says he,
“ You are not one for idle tears
If you are what I think you be.
Nor do I score up old arrears,
Nor look full reckoning to get
Of your snug quarters of three years,
Your ancient fraud and her young fret.
Not so, but I am all apaid
By the warm usury of this maid.”
So said, he laid hands on the axe
Which hung familiar on a nail,
And whirling it, a way he hacks
Through Frey from headpiece to the tail.
“ Lie there,” he says, “ thou half-hewn pale
Till thou enrich the kindling-stacks
Of honest men, and sue thy bail.”
He snuffed the candle with a flip
Of finger, and made haste to strip
His sogging clouts; then unafraid
Him by her quaking side he laid;
And true it is, as they aver
(Who never had it out of her),
That ere her cold lips could say knife
The wife of Frey was Gunnar's wife.

I know not that it boots to tell
How Gunnar said, “ Sweetheart, is it well?”

And she, "Oh, yes"; and yet once more,
"Is it well, sweetheart"? As before
She answered, "Yes." And on the floor
Lay cloven Frey, as stiff a brede
As any other log in store,
With much less bulk, and no more heed.
A last time Gunnar said, "Sweetheart,
Is it well now?" She said, "Oh, yes."
So then he laughed, and for his part
He needed her assurance less
The less she said. Upon the night
The sheeted snow lay fleecy white;
And Frey's two oxen, being snug
Each in his goodly woollen rug,
Sheltered by snow rampart-walls,
Dreamed they were drowsing in their stalls
With cuds to chew, and took no harms,
No more than Sigrid in strong arms.

VI
IOCHEAIRA

NOW I will sing of the Maid
High-girdled, of filleted hair,
And unfetter'd knee,
And bow-arm naked and free,
Deep in Taygetos, there
Where she loves to be.
On the lonely lawns under the stare
Of the snow-pikes, fleetly she speeds,
Wild as the flung foam of the sea,
Cold and keen as the frost in the air,
Savage in sport as the hoar-frost—
And even so
Suddenly melting to our poor needs
In the plain below,
Sorrowing our early lost.
But I love her most
Winging her hills, where the sharp wind stings
In the bents as she fleets,
When the trees crack in the gale, and her wings
are the wings

Of the snow-charged north.
Her arrows go whistling forth
Sparkling like frost And I love her still
retreats

In the thick brush, in the ferny brake,
Under the great trees
Where the tall deer quake
And the boar boweth his knees
In the reeds of the pool; and her arrow sings
Thro' the aiséd trees—
And he stumbles, with glazed eyes and dim!

Sing of her, Queen of the Lake,
Sing true for her secret sake
Her haunt by the rushy mere
Up in the hills, a sapphire flake,
Pheneus the blue and clear;
And then take heart and see her
By the great rivers that flow
Green, furious, fretted out of the snow
Down the valleys of rocks;
And not less dear, and not less holy
Her mood of pastoral melancholy—
The broad rivers gliding through meadow lands
Among the yellow corn-shocks.
For here, to him who knows, she haunts,
And here she breatheth peace

And hope and good increase;
Upon the shallow ford, upon the sands
And pebbly brink
Whereat the slow-eyed cattle drink,
And each deep-drinker plies
His tail among the clouded flies,
And the sun goes red to the folding mists of
the fen.

Chant her in rivers; and then
Seek for her on the wet wide strands
Where the brown water boileth upon the bar;
And beyond, where the rollers are,
And the birds gleam and circle and wail;
And where the tall ships sail
You shall find the print of her feet and feel her
moving hands.

O loveliest by far
Of high God's daughters,
Mistress of hills and woods and waters,
What can I do
Under thy spell,
O lovely shrew,
O untameable,
Of fierce face and hair blown back
And clencht hands and beautiful mouth so fell—
What can I do under thy spell

But await the flash of thine eyes' deep blue
To slay or spare,
To beam upon me or light askare
Even as the whim flies through?
Thy face is aflame, and thy breath
A pasture of sharp flowers—
Thyme and box and mountain heath
Under the ringing hours
When the sun is high and his stroke is death.
High as he, my lady, thou goest,
Knowing nothing of doom or death:
But I in the open lands
Praise thee with ready hands,
And bathe my face
In the wind and light of thy dwelling-place.

When Delos driven out by weather
Roam'd the sea a restless course,
Vext, so soon that Leto's feet
Were cool'd, her anguish ended—
In that peace that follow'd doubt
Cam'st Thou to earth; the sun threw out,
And in the windless caves of night
Sail'd the silver moon.
There, because a holy calm
Open'd from beneath the Palm
After the twin birth,

God said, I have chosen thee,
Delos; thou art and shalt be
Navel of the Earth.

There, Thou wonder and delight,
Breath of Heaven and light of light,
There I saw thee, and there stood
In thy fragrant neighbourhood.
There beginning, there was found
Consummation: I was crown'd.
Now no further word be said.
We are plighted, we are wed:
One heart is our marriage-bed.

VII
ILIAD III

THE OATHS, THE OUTLOOK FROM THE
WALL, THE BATTLE OF PARIS AND
MENELOS

NOW being ordered, all ranks with their chiefs,
The Trojans came on clamorous, flockt like
birds:

Just as to Heaven goes up the crying of cranes
Which flee the winter wet and with harsh cries
Seek out the ocean, carrying murder and woe
Upon the Pigmy tribes, and with the light
Bring battle—so went they. Silent the Greeks
Came out against them, courage in their breath,
And eagerness of man to succour man.

When over mountain crests the South wind
blows
Mist, such as shepherds fear and thieves love
more
Than night, and eye can see but a stone's cast—
So thickly now under their feet the clouds

Of dust roll'd up, as o'er the plain they came;
Whereon, being in range each of the other,
Came godlike Paris forth to champion Troy,
Wearing a leopard-skin, bent bow to hand,
Sworded; and in his hands he shook two spears
Headed with bronze, and cried the Argive chiefs
To battle with him unto death.

Him there

Mightily striding out, King Menelaos,
Whom Ares lov'd, markt down, and in his heart
Laught, as a lion when he happens on
The carcase of a horn'd stag or wild boar,
Ravening, and falls to feast, what tho' fierce dogs
And lusty men beset him—so laught out
The eyes of Menelaos when they lit
On goodly Paris, deeming vengeance come
For sin, and arm'd leapt from his car to earth.
And Paris saw him foremost, and his heart
Stood stricken, and he fell back on his friends
Out of Fate's way: so in a mountain glen,
Seeing a snake, a man flings back and feels
His shaky knees, and runs as pallor gains
His cheeks—so in the dread of Atreus' son
Slipt goodly Paris backward to the throngs
Of Troy. There Hektor saw him and revil'd
With bitter words:

“Thou Paris, seeming fair,

Thou woman-hunting cheat, now would to God
Unborn thou hadst slept or else unwedded died!
That were my prayer, and better far, God knows,
Than have thee here a shame and scare of men.
Well may the long-hair'd Greeks laugh that we
chose

A chief for his good looks, in whom's no might
Nor mettle in the heart. Art thou the man
Who sail'd the seas in ships adventurous
With chosen mates, and commercing abroad,
Out of far country brought back a fair woman,
Wife to a son of warriors, to be a curse
Upon thy father, on thy city and folk,
Joy to thy foes, and unto thee a shame?
Canst thou not face Menelaos? Go to,
Thou shouldst have known the man whose lovely
wife

Thou keepest. Not a harp will serve thy need,
No, nor the Cyprian's gifts of face and hair
Whenas thou liest mingled with the dust
Beneath him. Very cowards we Trojans be!
Else before now a chiton of flung stones
Were thine for all the mischief thou hast done."

Him that fair Paris answer'd: "Hektor, in sooth
With reason chidest thou me, not out of it;
But thou art keenly hearted, like an axe
Wherewith a craftsman cuts him thro' a beam

And shapes the timbers for a ship—whose skill
Better his blows: so drives thy dauntless wit
Within thy breast. But throw not the sweet gifts
Of golden Aphrodité at me. Not so
Are the Gods' splendid bounties to be spurn'd,
The which, because they choose, they give, which
none

Can win by longing. Now then, if thou choose
See me engage in battle, make to sit
Thy Trojans, make the Greeks sit down; set me
Midmost them all with warrior Menelaos,
To fight for Helen and her gear; and he
Who proves the better takes her and her wealth,
And takes them home. And let all men engage
Friendship and sacred oaths, that we may dwell
Here in deep-hearted Troy, and they depart
To pasturing Argos, and fair-daughter'd Greece."

So he said, and Hektor heard him and was glad,
And going in the midst of them, refrain'd
The Trojan companies, holding his spear
Mid-shaft; so they sat down; but still the Greeks
Plied their long bows and aim'd their shafts, or
cast

Stones at him, till with a mighty voice the King,
Even Agamemnon, cried, "Ye Argives, hold!
Ye sons of the Achaians, stay your hands!
Lo, bright-helm'd Hektor hath some word to say."

So stay'd he battle, so were silent all,
And Hektor stood between the hosts and said:

“ Hearken, you men of Troy and mailéd Greeks,
The word of Paris, for whose deed we fight,
Saying, Bid all the Trojans and all Greeks
Lay their fair arms upon the bountiful earth
While in the midst he with King Menelaos
Alone does battle for Helen and her gear;
So he who proves the better takes the wealth
And takes the woman too, and takes them home;
But let the rest pledge friendship and sure oaths.”
So said he, and they all kept silent: then
Spake Menelaos of the loud war-cry:

“ Me you shall hear, seeing my grief is worst.
Now then I think at last the severance comes
'Twixt Troy and Argos, the which have suffer'd
sore

For this my grief after that first sin done,
Even Paris's. Now of us two, for whom
Death and his Fate are ready, let him die;
But for you others, go with speed your ways,
And bring two lambs, a white ram and black ewe
For Earth and the Sun; bring me a lamb for
Zeus;

And fetch King Priam hither, that himself
Engage in the oath, seeing these sons of his
Are proud and treacherous, and lest any man

By trespass violate the rite of Zeus;
For young men's hearts ever do overween,
But not old men's: they look before and after
How best to serve both sides."

So he, and all
Rejoiced, both Greek and Trojan, for they saw
A stay of woeful war. Then they drew back
The chariots into ranks, and sat them down
And put by arms, the which upon the earth
They laid, near one another. Little ground
Was there between. And Hektor sent two men
Heralds into the city to fetch the lambs
And summon Priam. And Agamemnon bid
Talthibios to the ships to fetch a ram;
Who went obeying his lord Agamemnon.

Now Iris brought the news to white-arm'd
Helen

In likeness of her husband's sister, wife
To Antenor's son, Laodiké, whom he,
Lord Helikaon, wedded (and she was
Of all King Priam's daughters the most fair);
And in the hall found Helen at her loom
Weaving a purple web of double fold,
Whereon she had ywrought a many fights
'Twixt Trojans, that sway horses, and mail'd
Greeks,

The which for her sake Ares drave them to.
Standing beside her now, swift Iris spake:
“ Hither, sweet sister, see what notable work
Do Trojans, that sway horses, and mail'd Greeks
Who erst upon the plain waged woeful war
One on the other, eager for the strife;
But now sit silent, all the battle stay'd,
And rest upon their shields, their good spears
planted

In earth, while Paris and stout Menelaos
With their spears strive for thee, and who prevails
Shall have thee, and thou shalt be call'd his wife.”
And with her words Iris cast sweet desire
In her for her first lord, and land, and folk;
So straight she veil'd herself in shining linen
And left the chamber, shedding a round tear,
But not alone, but with her two maids went,
Aithré, Pittheus' daughter, and Klymené
Of the brown eyes. So to the Skaian gates
Came she.

There sat, even at the Skaian Gates,
With Priam Panthoös and old Thymoites,
Lampes and Klytios, Hiketaon whose root
Was Ares, and Oukelagon, with him
Antenor—wise men both, elders, stay'd now
By Eld from war, but in assembly good;
Like the cicalas that in woods do sit

On trees and tune sharp voices, so sat they,
Elders of Troy, upon the tower, and saw
Helen come thither; and softly thus they said:

“ Small blame to them that Trojans and mail'd
Greeks

For such a woman bear so long such pains:
Wonderfully like a goddess is she! But so,
Even as she is, let her go back to the ships,
And not stay here, woe to us and our sons.”

So they; but Priam call'd her with his voice,
Saying, “ Hither, dearest child, sit thee with me,
So thy first lord, and kin and friends thou'lt see;
Nor think I blame thee—nay, but I blame the
Gods

Rather, who rais'd this dolorous war of Greeks
Upon me. Now then, name me that fine man,
That Greek of might and stature, who he is.
Lo, by a head others out-top the man,
Yet never saw I with these eyes so fair,
So royal an one, so like unto a king.”

Then Helen, that fair woman, answer'd him:
“ Reverend and dread, dear sir, thou art to me,
Yet I would evil death had been my joy
When that I follow'd hither with thy son,
Household and kin forgot and growing child,
And lovely age-mates! . . .
But that was not so, so I pine and weep.

Now for thy questioning, I'll answer thee—
That is Atreides, wide-realm'd Agamemnon,
Both noble king and spearman good, own brother
To the lord of me the shameless, if ever woman
Was shameful."

So she said, and the old King
Wonder'd and said, "Happy art thou, Atreides,
Blessed of God and fortunately born
To sway so many of the sons of Greece!
Now faring once to vine-girt Phrygia, there
I saw a mort of Phrygians, men of steeds
Invincible, Otreus' folk and goodly Mydon's,
Who by Sangarios' banks stood to their arms
What time as their ally I rankt with them
That day the Amazons came, the peers of men—
But they were not so many as these Greeks."

And seeing next Odysseus, the old man said,
"Now tell me this, dear child; who is that man
Less by a head than Agamemnon, yet
With broader girth of breast and back than he?
Behold, his arms lie on the bountiful earth,
But like a bellwether he ranks his host
Of men—yea, like a thick-fleec'd ram I see him
That ordereth his white company of ewes."

And Helen answer'd, sprung from Zeus himself,
"He is Laertes' son, crafty Odysseus,
Bred up in Ithaka, rough though that be,

And skill'd in all the cunning wiles and shifts
That may be."

Then said wise Antenor, " Lady,
That is a true word spoken. Hither once
Came that Odysseus, ambassador for thee,
And with him Menelaos, Ares' friend;
Whom I entreated friendly in my house
And learn'd of both their nature and wise ways.
For when among us Trojans in Assembly
They were, and all stood up, King Menelaos
Surpast us all in breadth, but sitting down,
Odysseus was the finer man; and when
They were for weaving webs of words and plans
Before us all, Menelaos spoke well—
Few words but clear, being no much-speaker
Nor yet a random, tho' the younger; and then
Odysseus rose, the crafty one, and stood
Looking adown, his eyes rooted to earth,
Neither swaying his staff before or back,
But holding it stiff, like some dull-witted man,
An oaf you would have said, just like a fool;
Then let he forth his deep voice from his chest
With words that fell like winter snow—and none
Of mortal men could face Odysseus then.
Nor did we wonder, seeing the man's aspect."

Thirdly the old King saw Aias, and askt,
" Who is that other Greek, mighty and great,

Out-topping all by measure of head and shoulders?"

And long-rob'd Helen said, the fair lady,
"That is huge Aias, buttress of the Greeks;
And over against him with the Cretan men
Idomeneus like a god, and all about him
Are set the Cretan captains in a band.
Oftentimes Menelaos, Ares' friend,
Welcom'd him to our house when forth from Crete
He chanc't to come. Lo now, I see them all,
The quick-ey'd Greeks, whom I might know, and
tell

Their names—but two I see not, leaders of men,
Kastor, to wit, the horseman, and the boxer
Polydeukes, my brethren, who were born
Of my own mother. Either came they not
From lovely Lakedaimon, or they came
Out in the sea-going ships, but choose not join
The battle of the hosts, asham'd to face
The many flouts and curses which are mine."

So she: but them the fruitful earth held close
In Lakedaimon, fast in their own good land.

Now heralds thro' the city bear the lambs
Of pledge, and mellow wine, fruit of the earth
Bottled in goatskin; and Idaios bore
A golden bowl and cups of gold, and stood

By the old King and urged him with these words,
“ Son of Laomedon, arise, the chiefs
Of the Trojans that sway horses and mail'd Greeks
Summon thee to the plain, there to take oath.
Paris with Menelaos, Ares' friend,
Do battle with their spears to have the lady,
Who with her gear shall fall to who prevails.
We who are left, pledge we our loves and words,
And bide in deep-soil'd Troy, while they depart
To pasturing Argos and fair-daughter'd Greece.”

At this the old man trembled, but bid yoke
His horses, which was speedy done; so he
Got up and drew the reins back, and with him
Antenor mounted the fair chariot;
And those two drove down thro' the gates to the
plain,
And coming to the Greeks and Trojans, down
Out of the chariot gat they to earth, and went
Midway the hosts. Then rose that King of Men,
Agamemnon, then rose that crafty one,
Odysseus, and the offerings to the Gods
Were brought by heralds, and the wine was mixt
In the bowl, and on the kingly hands they poured
Water; and then Atreides drew the knife
Which by his great sword's side hung ever, and
shav'd
The lambs' heads, and the heralds dealt the hair

Among the Achaian chieftains and the Trojans
What time Atreides lifted hands and prayed,
Saying: "Father Zeus, most glorious, most great,
Lording the world from Ida, and thou, Sun,
Who seest us and hearest all we do;
Ye Rivers, Earth and thou, and Ye beneath
Who avenge on broken men their broken oaths,
Witness our deed, watch over this our oath!
If Paris slay Menelaos let him take
Helen and all her gear, while we fare forth
Home in the sea-going ships; but if the King
Slay Paris, let the Trojans give her back,
Her and her gear, with ransom to the Greeks
As seemly is, whereof the fruit shall live
Hereafter. But if Priam and his sons
Choose not redeem the death of Paris, here
Stay I, to fight and win the price of wrong
Even to the end of war and my own end."

So said, he cut the lambs' throats with the knife
And laid the victims, gasping their last breath,
On ground: there lay they strengthless from the
knife.

Then they poured wine forth from the bowl to the
cups

And prayed the Gods—and thus perhaps might pray
Some Greek, some Trojan: "Zeus, greatest and
best,

And all ye Deathless Ones, which first of us
Upon this oath do wrong, even as we pour
This wine, so let his vitals flood the earth,
His and his sons', and let his wife be thrall
To other men!"

They prayed so, but the son
Of Kronos would not yet fulfil their prayer.
Then Dardan Priam spake to all the folk:
"Hearken to me now, Trojans and mail'd Greeks,
I will return again to windy Troy,
Seeing my son and Menelaos fight,
Which is a sight these eyes dare not. But Zeus,
Zeus and the deathless Gods, they know, they
know

Which of those two may be appointed to die."

So said, the godly man laid up the lambs
In the chariot, himself got up and drew
The reins back, and Antenor after him;
And the pair of them drave back to Troy.

But Hektor,
The son of Priam, with Odysseus laid
A ground, and then took lots and shook them up
In a bronze helm, to see which first should cast
Spear at the other man. And all men prayed
With hands uplift; and Greek or Trojan would
say,

"O Lord of Ida, glorious, great, let him

Who wrought this woe upon us find his death
And Hades' house; but give us pledges of love!"

So might they pray while bright-plum'd Hektor
shook

The helm, turning his face. Forth came the lot
Of Paris. Then the people all sat down
In companies, there where the gear and horses
Of each man were. And fair-tress'd Helen's lord,
Paris, did on his shining arms; and first
The greaves upon his legs, most fair to see,
Clasping the silver clasps; the breastplate next
Which was Lykaon's his brother's did he on
And fitted; then his sword of bronze he cast
Over his head, a silver-studded sword.

A great shield and a weighty took he, and last
On his proud head he set a workt fair helm
With horse-hair crest, a nodding dreadful thing,
And took and handled a strong spear. So also
Did warlike Menelaos on his arms.

Now being arm'd each in his host, they came
Midway between the Trojans and the Greeks
With look so fierce that marvel was to see
For Trojan that sways horses or mail'd Greek.
Near to each other, in the order'd lists,
Stood they with shaking spears and eyes of rage;
And first his shadowing spear Paris let drive
And smote Atreides midway his round shield,

But brake not through the bronze, for that good
shield

Turn'd back the point. And then the son of
Atreus,

Menelaos, lift spear, but first he prayed
To father Zeus, "Grant me vengeance, O King,
On him, that Paris, who first did me a wrong.
Lay him beneath my hands, that men to come
May fear to wrong their hosts who treat them
fair."

Praying so, he pois'd his shadowing spear and
flung it,

And smote the son of Priam in his shield,
And thro' the glittering thing the heavy spear
Drave, and thro' breastplate past it to the flank
And tore his tunic; but shrinking aside,
He escaped the darkness of death. Then Menelaos
Drew sword and smote his helm, but on the ridge
Shiver'd the blade in pieces three or four,
Which fell from him: then cried he, looking up
To Heav'n, "King Zeus, what God so harsh as
thou?"

Now had I thought my avenging hour had come
Upon this evil Paris; but the sword
Shatters, the spear falls short, and he unscor'd!"

So said, he rusht at him, and by the crest
Caught him and swung about, and dragg'd the man

Towards the mailéd Greeks. The dainty strap
Tighten'd beneath his chin, the which he wore
To hold his helmet—went near throttling him;
But now had Menelaos got him, and won
An endless glory, had not that child of Zeus,
Aphrodite, been quick to mark; but she
Broke him the thong of bull's-hide and releas'd
The helm, and left that in the King's strong hands,
Which he flung to the Greeks, and turn'd himself,
Eager to slay his enemy with the spear.

But Aphrodite, as a goddess may,
Snatcht Paris up and hid him in a cloud,
And in his fragrant chamber brought and laid,
Then went to seek fair Helen; and found her
On her high tower with women of Troy about,
And came to her and pluckt her scented gown;
And in the semblance of an old woman,
Comber of wool, who used to work for her
In Lakedaimon and had her love, she said:
“Hither, for Paris calls thee back to house,
Being in his chamber, laid upon his bed,
Glowing in beauty and raiment. Who would think
Him come from fighting his man, and not indeed
Primed for the dance, or newly thence to rest?”

So she, and stirr'd the heart in Helen's bosom,
Who when she knew the goddess's sweet throat
And lovely breasts, and saw her shining eyes,

Mov'd to it, spake and named her who she was—
“ Goddess, why needst thou still beguile me? Say,
Art thou for taking me to cities new,
To Phrygia or Maionia, that fair land,
Wherein, maybe, dwells other of thy loves,
For whose sake, seeing Menelaos hath Paris down
And takes me home, accurs'd, for whose dear sake
Craftily hither thou com'st? Nay, quit thy god-
head,

Sit thou with Paris, not in Heaven again
Take up his quarrels, shield him till he choose thee
Minion or wife. As for me, I'll not go:
That were a shameful thing, to ply the bed
Of such an one, and have this new reproach
Of Trojan women on all my numberless griefs.”

Fiercely then spake her, Aphrodite the Queen:
“ Push not too far, thou hardy one, my wrath,
Lest in a rage I leave thee, and my love
Unbounded turn to hate. Then mightst thou see
Bitterer strife 'twixt Greece and Troy, devised
By me, and for thyself a shameful end.”

Then Helen, Child of Zeus, knew fear, and went
Wrapt in her shining veils without a word,
Following the goddess, no one seeing her;
And so to Paris' fair-built house, where straight
Handmaidens dight her. So to the lofty room
Went the fair woman, and the laughing goddess

Brought up a chair, and set her face to face
With Paris; and there Helen sat her down,
Child of the Aegis-Lord, and lookt athwart
At her lord Paris, and spoke him bitter words:

“So, thou hast fought! Would God thou hadst
died there,

Slain by a better man, once lord of me!
It was thy boast in force of arms and spear
To excel Menelaos, Ares' friend:
Well, bid him again to fight thee; but I say,
Hold thee away from him; fight thou no more
With golden Menelaos, man to man.
Beware of him lest his spear lay thee low.”

Then Paris answer'd her, “Reproach me not,
Lady, with cruel words, nor wound me. Truly,
Those two, Athena and he, have won this bout;
Next may be my turn—we have gods for us.
But let us two have joyance of the bed,
Loving each other; for never yet desire
So held me bound—not even when at first
I ravisht thee from Sparta, thy fair land,
And sail'd the sea with thee, and on the isle
Kranaë had joy of love, and lay with thee
And knew thee—not even then so strong was love
As now when longing for thee holds me fast.”

So saying, he took her, and she went with him;
And there those two lay down in the fair bed.

But like a beast Atreides ranged the host,
Seeking by all means Paris; but no man,
Trojan or ally, knew his whereabouts
To point him out, Paris to Menelaos.
But this is true, not for love's sake hid they
The man he sought; for all men hated Paris
Like death.

So then up spake the King of Men,
Agamemnon, "Ye Trojans and Allies,
Dardanians, now hath Menelaos gain'd
His battle, as it seems: so now do you
Give Argive Helen back and all her gear,
With ransom due, to stand in times to come."
So said Atreides, and all the Greeks said, Yea!

VIII
BEFORE DAWN

IN the even hush
Of the dying hours,
When night fails
And the dawn's flush
Shivers and stirs
Like a new breath,
The sea cowers
And lieth still;
No ripple or thrill
Grieveth night's death.
The bent flowers
Submit to the spell
Lie in the sheath;
Even the birds
And grasshopper shrill
In thicket and bush,
On shore and hill
Hide and peep,
Whisper and cheep,
Waiting the words,
O Day, fill!

IX
THE VEILED LOVER

I

OUT of vext Scythia and her holds
Of shrill women who maim the breast
And hide in harness the soft folds
Of maiden limbs for war's behest,
Theseus the Adventurer, having fought
And ruin'd all their swift array,
Took one, Antiopé, and taught
Love's use in some warm Attic bay;
And tam'd that hawk to endure the hood
And jess, and from her stormy eyes
Drew asking looks for love's kind food—
Which gave he till some doubtfuller prize
Call'd him, who lov'd chase more than quarry,
To range again, and so forget her:
Therefore in Athens did she tarry
A many months, where first he set her,
And bare a man-child, like his sire
And wilding dam adventurous,

On whom to spend her surfeit fire
Of love. This was Hippolytus.

But when King Theseus Phaedra took
From Crete, that gray jewel in the sea,
And wedded her, he might not brook
So near his moil'd Antiope.

By night he hasten'd her away
With babe and cot and household gear
To Acharnae, little deme that lay
Remote, and there beneath the sheer
Of Parnés, in a rock-bound nest
The mother in her made her wise,
Soften'd the lines of brow and breast,
And with mild patience gloss'd her eyes,
So that she grew a matron staid
From Amazon, and the boy her son
Guess'd not her service of that Maid
Who to her tribe was God alone—
The Tauric Maid who flies by night,
Smiling as cruelly as she slays,
Who claim'd Mykenae's child by right
And serv'd him seed of bitter days.
No, but he thought her only kind,
Saw her the guardian of his feet,
And scorning, pitied; thought her blind
To half of life, her blindness sweet,
Who at the door would spin white yarn

While he with playmates tumbled and strove,
Or while he slept made haste to darn
His clouts: so royal is children's love!
Mother's love not so; whose rare joy
Is blurr'd beforehand, lest that page
So white be dimm'd, and what the boy
Bids fair shall fail her heart's presage,
And she be riven for that fault.

Therefore Antiopé her old lore
Call'd up, to run, to leap, to vault
Astride the great stud foals, to score
The target with black arrows, string
The bow and, having strung to draw
And down the heron on the wing.
These things she taught him, and the law
In whose way must the hunter stand
Master of man and beast—hold cheap
Flesh, that the spirit may command
All flesh, and master it. Yet to weep
She taught him first, for that is brave:
Who cannot weep 's not man but beast;
Pity alone gives joy to save,
And reverence bendeth to the least
As to the highest. Then she taught
Her Godcraft, all that she had learn'd
By patience to make clean her thought.
She lit his torch from what she burn'd,

Show'd him the glory of land and sea,
Terror and beauty, all their moods
From silver sleep to golden glee;
Heeded the dark, the wind in the woods,
Storm's panoply when Zeus enshrouds
In purple, and his flame of wrath
Jags up the sky; next in the clouds
That hide the hills declar'd his path;
And vow'd him all things goodly and great—
If great, then good, fair, best of all;
So stablisht him and beg'd that Fate
Should heed him and not let him fall.
Yet sore she dreaded lest that hard
Queen she had serv'd should cast bold eyes,
Fen-fires to lure and then discard
The wayfarer, on this her prize
And pledge and utmost.

Now it prov'd
That growing stripling from a child,
Askance amid his comrades rov'd
Hippolytus, and sought the wild,
To be alone with what was there
Unseen, unheard, unknown, but guess'd,
The thronging tenants of the air,
Of wood and water, ridge and waste.
Sea-shores, the nation of the birds,
Fern-mantled Parnés, the wide fells

Where browse the deer in twinkling herds,
The fens where deep the wild-boar dwells,
The emptiness and silent night
Of the forest—here he went all day,
Here wander'd lonely in twilight.
And what could she but watch and pray
While he stay'd out the sable dark
He meet not under the eyeing stars
Night's vice-reine, the Huntress stark,
The Smiler who loves blood and scars?
Buoyant he'd come back, with the light
Filling his eyes, but lips discreet;
She knew not surely how his night
Had sped while she pray'd for his feet,
But fear'd the more the less he told,
And shrank to test what she did fear,
And saw him forth, eager and bold,
Tortur'd, and watcht him eye and ear,
Offering him up to any God
Of rite less cruel than Artemis,
The Scythian of the bloody rod
And sickle-knife—to aught but this.

II

Midway up Parnés climbs a track
By laurels hemm'd and shafted pines
Which shut the sun and steep in black

Shadow and dew and gossamer'd bines
The path and all. Hereby moss-grown
A temple stood, deeply in shade
And lichen'd over tile and stone,
And ferny. Not a prayer was said
Now in that precinct, nor was fire
Lit there, nor victim ever drest,
Heifer or ram; no thin blue spire
Lifted to heaven, to find a rest
In deeper azure. Foot of man
Trode never there, but on the floor
Pine needles lay, the squirrels ran
From plinth to beam, deer sniff'd the door
Or cropt the arbutus that trail'd
Over the cornice; and above
Nor kite nor broad-wing'd vulture sailed
Eyeing the altar; but the dove
Croon'd there her song of homely ease
All day. The God had gone; his house
Become a haunt of sleep and peace,
Gave back their dues to bat and mouse.

Hither the youth, what time he went
Wand'ring, to seek he knew not what,
Came, and found ease and solacement
In the piety by men forgot,
Done once when men and Gods were sib
As new from the womb of Gods and men

Alike; for as woman from man's rib,
So from Dame Gaia came they in.
And poring on the letters rude
Crusted and dimm'd upon that shrine,
He wonder'd what God of Green Wood,
Priapus, Pan, or Proserpine
Touching her mother's breast, had gaz'd
Thence out of sightless marble eyes,
Or smil'd with frozen lips when prais'd,
Or lent cold ears to mortal sighs;
And deem'd some rarer spirit wonn'd
With shyer looks for populous earth,
A maid, yet lovelier, and beyond
All maids who won death with their birth—
Maid, since maid's tremor should be hers,
The rapture earth knows at spring's flush,
The awe, as when the upland firs
Stand bridal-veil'd in frost's great hush.
Eager she'd be, as when the wind
Wins blithe the outposts of the hills,
And free, yet gentle and most kind,
As Autumn lulls before it kills,
With soft hands and cool wistful breath:
So, reason'd he, a Goddess goes
With life acquaint and eke with death,
Knowing death and life are none such foes.
And thinking long, he stood and pray'd

And strained his arms in that still place
Where trees sigh'd music which he made
Deeply within—to see the face
Of that hid God, and nurse the flame
On that cold hearth, and sing him psalms
Till the wood was vocal with his name
And stirr'd to life its breathless calms.

So died one long hot afternoon
And things were darken'd and the sky
All chrysoptera, and the new moon
Peer'd outward temperate and shy;
And no bird wak'd the woodland, save
That one resilient piping thrush
Sounded for Vespers, peaceful, brave,
Making more holy all the hush—
In that charm'd hour a shape of gray
Stole through the shafted pines, which held
A torch, and turn'd her face away
As tho' she fear'd to be sentinel'd
By temple watchers. Then she past
Therein, as going there by rote
Sway'd by some innate power, in haste,
With quick blind hands and throbbing throat;
Swept clean the stone of litter and weed
And eyed it, dreaming; and next tried
To rid of moss the sacred screed
That broider'd it from side to side.

But all unus'd her slender fingers
To such work; she gave o'er the task,
Yet, as who longs but dares not, lingers
And looks, as seeking whom to ask,
So loiter'd this ghost with her sad
And hopeless gaze; at last she sigh'd
And drawing close the robe she had,
Stole forth into the dark wood-ride.

Watching stood he, and saw her fade,
Then shut his eyes, so to enfold
The lovely image that she made
Of all the sorrow this world could hold:
A slim, fair lady like a wraith,
With a sad face, as though she knew
All griefs of men, love, early death,
And walkt expecting of more rue
And ever more till the race be run
Of them and theirs, and the dear earth
Fall silent. Thus she seemed, and the sun
Could show him nothing better worth
His passion while his life endure.

III

Straight, as one set and dedicate
To the service, he made sweet and pure
The shrine and altar, and did plait
Long wreaths to deck it, and a fire

Thereon he laid, and home return'd
For food, well knowing he could not tire
Until the holy offering burn'd
To that sweet Lady, and going he cried
The stars for witness of his love
Thro' life to death. To her, "O bride,"
Said he, "Mak'st thou no matter of
This, that a man loves, with no heed
Of love again? I'll thrill thy heart
With worship, sacrifice, and brede
Of words. Nay, Goddess as thou art,
Thou'rt woman too, and sure am I
So to enhance thee and make glad
Thine eyes, and to thy mansion high
Waft savour and music. Be not sad
For ever, seeing thou hast on earth
One faithful lover, and one shrine
Tended, one watcher by the hearth
To feed thy flame."

With oil and wine,
Honey and meal, rare ambergris,
Resin, he came back on light feet,
And hymn'd at dawn Queen Artemis,
Tho' her he did not know to greet;
But ween'd he serv'd the sad, pale queen
Of Hell, whose mother half the year
Must mourn, and he who did the teen

The Veiled Lover

The other half shall lack his cheer :
Yet all pure song at dawn of day
Is Hymnia's, who heareth but the pure.
So rose the smoke, and all the gray
East broke in fire; then being sure,
He strew'd the barley and pour'd out
The wine, and having laid his cake
Of meal upon the stone, he lout
On knee, and in the deep woodbrake
Sought rest. Thus morn and eve did he
A many moons, and saw days turn
From summer to the chill and dree
Of autumn when the woodlands burn
To crimson death, and the pale sky
Looks far away seen thro' the mist
Wherein Earth passions and falls to die.

So serving, came his high acquist,
She visibly there within the place
Made sweet by his pains. A cloak of blue,
Like night, hid up her form; her face
Was like the moon's when she rides thro'
The press of stars, and looks askance
At their warm commerce. To her chin
She held the hem; downward her glance
Upon him kneeling in lowly pin,
Too wonderful to be afraid,
Too deep in love to deem her lover.

So each faced each, while his heart made
Mad music. Then she did uncover
Her graciousness, and her blest form
Gray-clad was his for reverence
And adoration, quick and warm,
Most tender woman to the sense,
Yet sanctified by that which says
Touch not, nor handle, lest my heart
Betray me, as the sense betrays
That taking solace, leaves a smart.

Her brow was broad and very pure
Wherefrom the ripples of her hair
Ran back as waves which, borne ashore,
Are blown by kissing wind from there;
Her eyes were calm as when dawn comes
After a storm, and deeply blue,
Steadfast, far-gazing, yet the homes
Of knowledge; thence her soul lookt thro'
To his own, as if she weigh'd its worth
Against the eternal. Nought said she,
Nor spake he in that hour of mirth
Of love that riseth wing'd and free,
Needing no service of the sense,
Paying no tribute. The love of each
Wedded the other's in that tense
Long look whose cry transcended speech.
. . . . He arose her lover by that act

Commixt with her, and went his ways
To house, nor any observance lackt
To household Gods; nor when his days
Of wilding ended, and he went
To serve his father and endure
The brawl of Athens, made lament
For his sweet secret, but kept pure
And to his faith stood fast to death;
And ended as he had begun,
With her conjoint, as the tale saith
In a deep wood shut from the sun.

X
IN THE FOREST

DEEP in the forest, where a glade
Holds the glad hum of afternoon,
And gives a chequered maze of shade
After the stroke and heavy swoon
Pan lays upon the world is done,
And all the creatures sleep and dream
Of hiving business in the sun—
There the man-beast of darting eye
And mottled pelt lies half a gleam
And half beshadowed, spiring high
His fitful music of the reed,
Wailing lifts and moaning falls,
Far and sudden intervals,
With many a quavering long-held note,
Such as may thrill in a bird's throat
And cry his wistfulness and need
Thro' the lone wood. O lithe and fine
And supple body, man and goat!
Part rutting beast and part divine,
And all a youth in bud who feels

Unwonted blood like stinging wine
Now throb in his veins, now drug his heels,
And beckon to lie, and stretch, and turn,
And feel the faint, the itch, the burn
Of what he knows not, only this,
The passion beats, the languor steals,
And smarting is sweet, and aching bliss.

Even as the dreamer, his dream is—
The Gods inspire, the Gods fulfil!
Like moths of fitful wavering flight
Slim maidens come to ply their will:
Dryads or Oreads of the hill
In reedy vesture blue and white,
Like gossamer that, wet with dew,
Shrouds the gorse in morning light;
With rosy feet and braided hair
And girdled bosoms, and that still
And spacious gait that maidens wear
When no man sees what they may do;
One by one, in order due,
Speechless, unminstrel'd, without heed
Or thought but of their pastime fair;
One by one with linkéd hands
And faces turn'd for each to read
In each what each one understands
But cannot tell except by look,

They stay beside the glancing brook,
And in the open glade they lead
The lightfoot chorus; and one stands
Apart and sheds her bosom's veil
And weaves alone her happy dance,
Winding her scarf that it may trail
After her footprints. . . .

He askance
Keeps on their play his wary eye,
Lengthening, crouching lest they catch
Gleam on his hide. Slow draws his greed
Within him to a boiling head;
His lust burns till his tongue is dry—
To leap, to scatter, then to snatch
That lone adventurer. Like an ounce,
Prone on his belly he keeps watch,
With toes agrip of earth; one thin
Tense cord he makes, rippling to pounce:
So from his heels to his fierce face
All beast of prey, he couches. Then
Doubt takes him, and he dreams again,
And rises to his manhood's grace,
Stealing a-tiptoe from his lair
As solemn as a priest new-frockt
To stand among them. All astare,
Arrested in the attitude
Of sidelong head, hands interlockt,

As frozen in their dancing mood,
With straightened arms and lips apart
They wait the upshot. He, aware
Of their still beauty, stands afraid
And doubtful. In a flash the wood
Is emptied of them and their light.

He peers, he noses, snuffs the air,
Searches for sign in bruised blade
Of grass or frond of fern—lo there!
The veil abandon'd in her flight,
Like scarf of cloud or filmy shade
Cast by thin branches in the night
Across the moon. He falls to it
And leans his cheek to its warm length,
And rolls and revels in the scent
And balm it holds; but soon the fit
Passes, and leaves him close to sit
With hands to shinbones, and head bent
To furry knees, while all the strength
And grace of her sings in the glade.
Full of desire and full of fears
Lest other creature need as he,
He broods upon his prey, then hears
Some little rustling in the brake,
And lifts it very tenderly
As though a sleeping child he bears;

And swift to harbour doth betake
Him and his gossamer, sets it down
Upon his leafy couch, and holds
His breath, as fearful she should wake;
And leans to her, and closer yet
Leans, urging to her, quick enfolds,
Then covers—back he draws in dread
Of something holy, and instead
Stoops delicately and lays a kiss
Upon the billowing gauzy net,
And lies beside, and leans his head
Until his cheek may feel the bliss
That once it had, her bosom's bed;
And sleeps as dreamless as the dead;
And waking, wonders what this is,
So thin, so draggled, and so wet.

XI

DAPHNE AND LEUKIPPOS

DAPHNE lov'd none, of all maids most retir'd,
And yet Leukippos lov'd her, who long days
Sought her, and found of all maids most desir'd,
Yet least accessible by wooers' ways.

For she was of that votive company
That serves the Virgin Lady of the wild:
Apart they roam, heart-whole and fancy-free,
Following the starry wake of Leto's Child.

Withal he lov'd, and loving her in vain,
Forswore his kind and wander'd in the woods,
Thinking perhaps to ease his crying pain
In their green leisure and husht solitudes.

And straying there, or lying in the brake,
Reading his sad heart or the lone bird's song
That all night through biddeth her sorrow wake,
His love grew stronger as his hair grew long.

So thirsting, when one day he stoopt to drink
In the clear mirror of a woodland pool
All his lovelocks came tumbling o'er the brink,
And ere his lips could touch the well was full.

Whereat, seeing the golden mesh outspread
Over the crystal surface of the tank,
He laught and shook it back behind his head,
And coil'd it up and held it while he drank.

Then looking sideways at his render'd face,
At his clean nape and modish-twisted knot,
Laughing again, he blusht at his own grace,
And lookt the longer as his cheeks grew hot.

“A very girl,” cried he, “I am to view!
Now might I won with Daphne and her peers,
And see and touch my sweet the long day thro',
And watch her dainty fancy as it veers

“From maid to maid for what she cannot get
From any maid at all, to be made woman;
But I have wherewithal to ease her fret,
When she have prov'd her true mate to be true
man.”

He bound his tresses up with scarf and pin,
He donn'd the chiton and the crocus vest,

He pluckt a hair or two from out his chin,
And crost the girdle midway of his breast.

Then stood he forth to sight a very maiden,
And waxing bold, secure in his disguise,
Sought out his Daphne by the banks of Ladon,
And faced the clear truth of her serious eyes;

And told his fib by Ladon's glancing water,
And saw it bite, and thought it not amiss:
"Lady, I am Oenómaos's daughter,"
He said, "and vow'd like you to Artemis.

"If you will make me of your joyous band
I serve with you, if not I serve alone."
Then straight-brow'd Daphne took him by the
hand,
Seeing an honest daughter in sly son.

And well he sped if all may be believ'd,
Save when some boldness native to his sex,
Like fire hid up in ash, by the wind griev'd,
Flasht from him, her to please and him to vex.

For as she laught to see him play the boy
So must he bite his lip and hang his head,
Until it seem'd the seeker was the coy
And the besought the seeker in his stead.

And hence came his undoing. As they lay
Together idling on the grassy bank
Of Ladon, it was Daphne made the play
And lifted high his hopes—until they sank

To nothingness, and ruin star'd at him;
For thus said she: "For all you are so bold,
I challenge you with me to strip and swim
The river. And I lay my ring of gold

"That I am first, against your golden chain.
Come, I am for you!" Whereat she slipt the lace
Upon her shoulder, and the brooches twain
That kept her virgin girdle in its place.

Like shafted poplar-stems when light is dim
Were her fair members naked for the test;
Lithe as a leopard, white as moonlight, slim
As ivory wand, in water to the breast,

She chafed to find him slow, and cried him fool
To sit there glum with face all pincht and gray;
Then scornful of him, plunged into the pool.
With a hoarse cry Leukippos fled away.

And what ensued, and how he paid his cheat
It matters little, where the worse to fall

Must be the better. He is fairly beat
Who dare not risk, 'to win or lose it all.'

They say suspicion reacht her by a swallow
That swept his skirting curve close by her ear;
They say indeed the bird's shape held Apollo
For reasons of his own. He had her dear,

And knew no cause to love the daring youth,
Who yet dar'd not enough, or dar'd be good
Even at the last. I have not all the truth;
But this is true, Leukippos took to the wood,

And went in fear of Daphne's flaming mistress
In whom white anger burns like midnight frost;
And if she slew him, count this lover's distress
Rather that Daphne than his life he lost.

XII
PARALLELS

WHENE'ER I see your glancing feet
I hear a bird sing in the street;
Or if I hear your proud clear tone
I see a mountain torrent run
Sinuous and glad to watersmeet.

When you are coming all the trees
Quiver and rustle in the breeze,
Which like a herald runs before
To call the liegemen to the door,
Crying your shining qualities.

When you have left me half an hour
The sun still glows behind the shower,
And thro' the rain I see the bow,
Still smell the cowslips on the brow,
And know the beanfield still in flower.

Each sigh of you is like a wave
On a warm shore, wherein I lave;

And every vagrance of your hair
Wafts me the lift of some sweet air
Heard as I pass, a wandering stave.

Your quiet speech to me it is
A silver coin, with Artemis
Or Ligeïa grav'd thereon.
Rarely you laugh, and that 's the sun
Flooding the day with auguries.

The motions of your thin sweet hand
Are Gabriel with his lily-wand;
The holy converse of your eyes,
It is the moment when light dies
And a rapt silence holds the land.

I dare not look upon your breast,
Fearing to startle from her nest
Some blessèd bird that sits and broods
In a deep valley fill'd with woods,
Watcht by a skyey mountain crest.

So you and Nature are in pact,
Mother and Daughter: there 's no act
Of hers but has its counterpart
In your instruction of my heart,
Since you are music of her fact.

XIII
HYMNIA

I

BECAUSE your soul is delicate
(Like a new moth with wings set wide),
And, all too virgin to be bride,
Holds up your body in stalemate;

Because your heart is passionate
And flame thereof consumes your side,
So that the veil is rarefied
To a film of flesh irradiate—

Therefore unearthly you flit earth
And languorously the sweet wave flows
That laps and sheathes you, grave your mirth,
Paler your cheek than the wild rose;

Therefore your eyes speak what Heav'n saith,
And leave your mouth for wonder and breath.

II

Outward be dainty, as you are
Within; glance by me swift and slim;
Flash, where I walk; be staid, be prim;
Shiver at noises, things that jar

Your lovely order; levy war
Upon the beastly and the grim;
So shine apart, remote and dim,
To foggy earth a constant star.

Thus to the world you shall appear
Garb'd in your crystal qualities
As closely as the wet rocks wear
The sand-wort of the starry eyes,

Cause and effect, both these in one,
Witness and virtue of the sun.

III

In the hedged garden of your mind
The gray-green sage, Perfection, grows,
And Candourwort and Constant-Kind,
And Modesty, the thornless rose.

There are the herb, Integrity,
And red perennial, Maiden Pride,

And Honour, like an almond-tree,
And Purity aflower beside.

Ardour, that climbs so high, is there,
And Tact, with shrinking outer leaves,
And in the shade the weeper, Prayer,
And Patience, stak'd and tied in sheaves;

And bittersweet Love's creeping root,
A rosy carpet underfoot.

IV

Sev'n swords had Mary in her side,
A sword of Doubt if she was born
To serve men so, a sword of Pride,
A sword of Shame, a sword of Scorn.

And one was driv'n by her dead Lord,
And one by them who shed His blood;
And if there was another sword
It was of Love not understood.

And you, her sister, even so
Have swords to pierce your bountiful breast
Doubt and Despair, the Sight of Woe,
Love thwarted, Love that cannot rest,

Charity held back, Love denied:
Sev'n swords—and your arms open wide

V

Count it not loss that you must give,
Knowing your breast a sacrament
Whereat the child must drink to live,
Whereon sleep after in content.

That is your soul's high testament,
Which is a fount perennial
Streaming from God, and never spent
Except none drink of it at all.

For as the milk is to the child
That drinks, the spending is to you;
Since by your soul's gift reconcil'd
The seeking soul returns your due.

And so your loss is gain indeed,
Since you are fed by them you feed.

XIV
NIGHT-ERRANTRY

THREE long breaths of the blessed night
And I am fast asleep;
No need to read by candle-light
Or count a flock of sheep.

Deep, deep I lie as any dead,
Save my breath comes and goes;
The holy dark is like a bed
With violet curtains close.

And while enfolded I lie there
Until the dawn of day,
My body is the prisoner,
My soul slips out to play.

A-tiptoe on the window-sill
He listens like a mouse,
The calling wind blows from the hill
And circles round the house.

Above the voices of the town
It whispers in the tree,

And brings the message of the Down:
'Tis there my soul would be.

Then while enchain'd my body lies
Like a dead man in grave,
Thither on trackless feet he hies,
On wings that make no wave.

The dawn comes out in cold gray sark
And finds him flitting there
Among the creatures of the dark,
Vixen and brock and hare.

O wild white face that's none of mine,
O eager eyes unknown,
What will you do with Proserpine,
And what shall I, alone?

O flying feet, O naked sides,
O tresses flowing free,
And are you his that all day bides
So soberly in me?

The sun streams up behind the hill
And strikes the window-pane;
The empty land lies hot and still,
And I am I again.

XV

TO A PRETTY WOMAN

YOU walk so choice and featly fair
Within your flowing tell-tale gear,
So timid-seeming, half ascare
And half asmile at what you hear,
Or what you know; you guide and steer
Your dainty argosy and rare
Through our rough traffickers, aware
Complacently of eyes that peer,
Of sidelong eyes, of eyes that stare,
Of joy or trouble far or near:
Have you no arms, no shield or spear
For what the world at large may dare?
Is your heart light? Your eyes are clear,
You falter not. Have you no care?
You bud your lips, and in your ear
Whisper and promise, hope and pray'r
Are as the snowflakes of last year,
Idle, adrift upon the air.

Lady, what is your own affair,
Suspected of the pulpiteer
Who from his gestatorial chair
Thunders upon your dangerous tear,
Your eye of blue or brown or vair,
Your red and white, that lock of hair
Arrayed in disarray, your wear
Of silken things so frail we fear
To touch them, so we hold you dear
Inhabitant, whom we would spare,
Look you, the satyr's wink and leer
Ready to snatch you to his lair?
Intrigued, perplexed, we shift and veer
Our looks, from worship to the glare
Of high displeasure, chafing here
To see you pass us debonair,
Excusing what we commandeer,
Ignoring what you cannot share.
You pass, you go, and leave us bare,
Feeling the chill, old, crabb'd and sere;
Upon your delicate course you fare,
Whether we kneel or scowl or jeer,
Whether we triumph or despair,
Smiling, possess, unfaltering, sheer
Upon your mark, be it here or there.
God! are you simpleton or fere?

London.

XVI
SONG

THE pure in heart shall see God,
But what wilt thou do,
O burning heart, but be God
For men to fall to?

And as for me and my heart,
All that I see,
It is the shrine of thy heart,
The vase of it—thee.

XVII
THE TWO EAGLES


OF the shrill Gods of Fight
I ask blood for my pen,
And the cries of wounded men
For music, and scurrying feet
Of legions in wild retreat
For the rhythm of what I write.

I saw two eagles engage
Down on a sandy plain
Stone-strewn, over a slain
Lamb, patchy with blood.
Far away the dun flood
Of the sea muttered its rage.

One with his wings blown back
And talons set, with his fierce
Beak did ravel and pierce
The carrion. In fury to tear,
His wings battled the air.
The blood coiled snaky and black.

The other assailed the sky
With lifted head and complaint,
Challenge and dreariment.
He beat his wings, and the air
Answered his great despair,
With moans for his havoc-cry.

Even thus in the battle,
The carnage, the death, the shout,
The staring hearth and the rout
Have their minstrel. He stands
By and wringeth red hands,
While his comrade springs the death-rattle.



XVIII
ARKADIA

THE hills made you adventurous,
And the hill-wind gave wings to your feet:
I saw you, Artemis the Fleet,
Ranging your scarr'd Taygetus.
Your two lips parted, amorous
Each for the wooing of the sweet
Strong air; I saw your blue eyes greet
Pheneus, Kyllené, Maenalus,
As thro' lone Arcady we fared
Which first enharbour'd Leto's child.
I watcht you thro' the Holy Places,
Virgin and Huntress of the wild,
Sister and Sovran of the Graces,
Pacing beside you with heart bared.

XIX
DELOS

THE Etesian wind that clouds the seas
To purple had you safe at last
Under the shadow Delos cast
About the girdling Cyclades.
I thought you usher'd by the breeze,
I thought the sentinel islands past
The word about. I stood spellfast,
Watching you at your mysteries,
You and your isle. No crooked knees,
No chant of the ecclesiast,
No panting, no unquiet breast:
Hellenic rite, still ecstasies!
You walkt as he that holds the Cup
Between his hands. I knelt to sup.

XX
A CATCH

YOUR duty to beauty is to wear it, not spare it,
That all who recall who it was that did wear it
May image your passion, and share it.

XXI
WORLDLINGS

THIS life it is a flash in a pan,
Make what you may of it;
A spark from a smithy fan,
Years and a day of it:
Out of the dark into the dark,
That is the way of it.

Hard, when we 've learned to play,
Picked up the knack of it!
Well, let it go its way,
I've had my whack of it.
Lift your head, watch and wait
Doom and the crack of it.

Fly, spark, fly!
Nay, love me long.
But they say we must die?
I sing my song.
Lie close, let me feel your heart
Make mine strong.

Heart of mine, heart of mine,
What is to come of it?
All this good sop in wine,
The juice and crumb of it!
Lift the cup and drink with me,
There 's still some of it.

XXII
TO THE POET LAUREATE

NOT clamour nor the buzzing of the crowd,
Bridges, beset the lonely way you took:
The mountain-path, the laurel-shelter'd nook,
The upland peak earth-hidden in a cloud,
The skyey places—here your spirit proud
Could meet its peers, the lowland rout forsook;
Here were your palimpsest and singing-book,
Here scope and silence, singing-robe and shroud.

Let England learn of thee her ancient way
Long time forgot; the glory of the swift
Is swiftness, not acclaim, and to the strong
The joy of battle battle's meed. Thy song
Will call no clearer, nor less surely lift
Our hearts to Beauty for thy crown of bay.

17 July, 1913.

XXIII

25 FEBRUARY 1897

ALL night we watcht, although he seem'd
asleep;

Then as the morning gray
Came sighing in we saw his haunted eyes
Open, which seem'd to pray
Only the grace to die. He saw the light,
Then turn'd his head away,
As if his heart fainted to meet the day.

So as he lay we watcht, and heard his moan
Quaver towards the skies:
“ Ah, God!” it said, “ wilt thou not set me free?
Have I not earn'd this prize?
Not toil'd enough, been strenuous, kept the faith
I took? Ah, God, my eyes
Are worn with watching: seal them now
requiem-wise.”

Dumb anguish held us, unarm'd witnesses
About that lonely bed

Where the spent soul and body fought their fight,
And day with feet of lead
Crept on her hopeless round. Mercy at last
Came, and it seem'd she said,
"Lo, it is finisht." He bow'd his patient head.

Take your last look on whom you lov'd, and see
How very gently death
Has toucht his eyes and smooth'd out all his scars,
And crown'd as with a wreath
Of snow his rested brows. Look at his lips:
It is as though a breath
Whisper'd through them: "I am at peace," he
saith.

Come away now, we have no more to do;
The world, that took no thought
Of him, is not so much with us that we
Should forget how he fought,
Or what he won of honour and long love
Where such cannot be bought.
Let us leave him facing the Truth he sought.

What though they say, His deeds are writ in
sand—
Have we not read them there?
Have we not stored them in our heart of hearts,
Not seen that they were fair?

25 February 1897

Not ponder'd and not wonder'd, not been glad
That they were as they were,
And we could read? Enough! Give thanks and
prayer.

Addington.

XXIV WAR RIMES

I. A SHORT HISTORY OF MAN

SOME years ago, it may have been a million—
'Twas thereabouts, as everyone allows—
The first man, Adam, pight the first pavilion
And roofed it rustically with green boughs.
He built it for himself and his new spouse
In a fair ground, which can't have been a chilly one,
Seeing that they fix the site in Mesopotamy,
Where you need wear no clothes, ever. if you've
got any.

God made this world for man, His jewel and minion,
His latest work, the apple of His eye.
Not only over pad and fin and pinion
Had he the kinch, but surer mastery
Was put into his hands to hold it by;
For over himself the Lord gave him dominion:
Not only had he five wits, but the Poet
Declares he could make use of them, and know it.

Passions he had, and means to keep them under
Or let them go, seeing a Will was his,
And Understanding, and a trick of wonder,
To shape the Is-not like to that which is.
Hence come idealistic fallacies,
Megalomania, and many a blunder
Wherein the sick world yet must groan and travail,
Waiting a clue the labyrinth to unravel.

All this made good, the Lord of Heaven addressed
Man, and said in effect, O sublimation
Of Our pure thought, here is the very best
That We can do for you, Our last creation.
Above the beasts, yet you can choose your station
Below them; or if Heaven be the crest
Of your desire, earn it! You can partake of it;
It's in your hands: let's see what you can make
of it.

This world is yours if you know how to use it:
Call upon Us in trouble, We shall hear.
Although We have the power, We may refuse it;
We do not undertake to interfere.
From time to time We'll send a prophet here
With an Evangel for you if you choose it.
Well, We shall see! We judge that, if We try him,
You'll either ignore him or you'll crucify him.

The Lord departed. Man increased and spread
Over the earth, and soon found out a means
Of dominating nature. His wives bred,
His sons married his daughters in their teens.
But this soon brought about domestic scenes
And was tabooed. Cousins then cousins wed,
And all went fairly well till Cain drew knife
Upon his brother and robbed him of his life.

Abel stood well with God, or said he did,
And Cain not so, or thought that he did not.
All would be well with him, he thought, once rid
Of one psalm-singing rascal. He grew hot.
He ought to have remembered, but forgot
That all 's not covered with the coffin-lid.
In that red rage of his he set the fashion
Of easing by bloodshed tumultuous passion.

Men took it up, and whereso'er they settled
Upon the face of th' inhabitable earth
There was no tribe of them but, being nettled
By any hint or sight of neighbour's worth,
Immediately must strangle it at birth
By fire or sword. They said they were high-
mettled,
And *amour propre* could not brook to view
A nation prosper more than theirs could do.

So they learned hatred early, and they learned
That tribal hate is strongest hate of all.
Was a tribe rich, straight all the others burned
Not for its wealth so much as its downfall.
Young men were bred up in the way to call
This kind of hatred love. Their bowels yearned
To prove all men were brothers and at one
By killing everybody's but their own.

The tribes made war—defence or brigandage,
All made it. But no single tribe could guess
That if the beaten suffered from the rage
Of the conqueror, himself suffered no less.
For he was grudged, and hardly could possess
His new domains, or leave a heritage
To his successor with the least security
That he could hope to keep it in futurity.

The Lord had not provided in His plan
For that which quickly proved to be the way,
That man should use his wit to outwit man,
To pound him, to entice him or betray.
He had not thought that brother men would play
At Cat and Mouse or Catch-as-catch-who-can.
He gave all men this earth to make the best of it,
And found each took as much as he could wrest
of it.

Yet they had other crafts beside warfare,
For they had love and all that love implies;
And art they had, the which has little care
Whether another man be rich or wise.
Commerce they had; they could philosophize,
And prove you what a very small affair
This life was, and how very much depended
On what they thought might happen when it
ended.

But they had one craft which they put above
All others, and made learning, land, or pelf
The test of it; while as for art and love,
They put those by, like physic on a shelf
For case of need. That craft was care of Self,
Its end was Profit, and its maxim Shove;
And its one rule to drive into perdition
Whatever seemed to thwart a man's ambition.

Philosophers engrost their rivals' lore
Or libelled them of commercing with witches;
A landed man by all means must have more,
A moneyed man conveyed his neighbour's riches
By tricks into the pockets of his breeches,
And fastened those up like a chapel door
From Monday until Saturday, then emptied
Into the Bank before he could be tempted

To tenderness of conscience most unthrifty.
But he had lawyers now to assure possession,
And call due process what was first called shifty,
Making chicane a dignified profession.
'Twas held that twenty thieves in public session
Might be a Body Corporate, and fifty
A National Assembly, and their tricks
The reasonable pursuit of politics.

And more men multiplied, and more they spread,
The more they sought to drive their neighbours
back.

The earth, which God made green, was dyed
with red

Which mixing made a gray, inclined to black.
It looked as if some fulgurous chimney-stack
Had smothered up the blue sky overhead;
So when the rain fell down in God's good time,
Its wholesomeness was soured by man's bad
grime.

Soon there arose strong men by no means pious
Who found it easy to become commander
Of others not so strong. There were Darius,
Nebuchadnezzar, Sennacherib, Alexander,
Whose simple need was to be more or grander
Than any king on earth. With this plain bias

They led their hosts to war, and what they needed
They got—until the next strong man succeeded.

Hist'ry deals more with these empurpled sinners
Than with the daring ones who tried to down them.
It leaves the cooks for the eaters of the dinners,
Looks to the kings, ignores the folk who crown
them.

Take horses, not the stockbrokers who own them,
Say ha'p'ny newspapers a-spotting winners!
This history sees the plain men on our planet
No better off than when God first began it.

Whose fault is that? Not God's. You dare not
blame Him

For having given you wits which you've perverted.
He sent a Messenger—I need not name Him—
To whom most of us owed to be converted.
I know not how or when his host deserted,
Or what it was decided men to shame Him.
He said the Meek and Peacemakers were blissful,
We see no blessings but for the successful.

We say, The best man wins; but what by that
We mean exactly is to be arreded.
Let us define the thing we are getting at:
We certainly don't mean the same as He did.

And as for him for whom his Master pleaded,
He very often don't win here—that's flat.
What would he get who turned the other cheek
But be laughed into the middle of next week?

But there were other Gospels. Con-fu-tze's
Was one. Another came from Prince Gautama,
Which flew north-eastward on a scented breeze
From Singapore to sea-board Yokohama.
Another ended in a harrowing drama,
When they brought hemlock in to Socrates,
And he, as one who sees what an escape he has,
Bid sacrifice a cock to Æsculapius.

One burden each one's message underlay:
Nothing endures; this world is like an inn.
Take what you need, not long have you to stay;
The only thing worth having is within.
That stands when all the rest is worn down thin,
Emperors and the Empires they betray.
And why the snows of yester-year deplore?
Where are the conquests of the year before?

You would have thought such things the merest
platitude,
Seeing that the land lies here, while we must
leave it;

You would have hoped more reasonable attitude
Whether we hail the end with joy or grieve it.
The odd thing is that still we don't believe it,
Or act as if we only should have latitude
To enter the next life as men of property,
The only ones whose goods are not in jeopardy.

No, no! We still drive free men out like cattle,
We still catch them with pressgang and the crimp;
We still wreck pastures with our filthy battle
Or tangle them with coils of barbèd gimp.
Though Cæsar, Philip, and Napoleon Imp.
Were played to grave with groaning and death-
rattle,
We still believe a man may be War-Lord,
And still submit our quarrels to a sword.

You, Sir, put up of late to play the beast
And teach your decent Germans how to hate—
Look lest your walls serve you Belshazzar's feast
And score a title you don't meditate.
Emperors without an Empire are not great,
And there's a day when greatest may be least.
What do you think of this for epitaph:
With this man even Satan cared not laugh?

For look, This was a man who taught his sons
To lie and thieve, and had no wiser thought

Than stand men up as fodder for the guns
Of them who had to fight because he fought.
He found a peaceful land, left it distraught,
Found happy folk and left unhappy ones:
Most arrogant of men, he lived to rue it,
Because he was the wretchedest—and knew it.

If mankind ever of itself shake free,
And man disdain another to degrade
To work his infamous purpose, that his fee
Be doubled and his vileness not betrayed,
It will regard the bloody work you made
As crown and ensign of your misery,
And men will pity you and say, This wretch
Was made a rogue lest other rogues might stretch.

They set you trading truth as merchandise ;
They set you murdering children and their
 mothers ;
They turned your foolish hands to such red vice
That men could say Herod and you were brothers.
They bid you brand your good name as that
 other's
Is staring still with terror, blood, and lies.
Judas betrayed his Lord for pieces thirty,
And Krupp goes rich and clean—since you go
 dirty.

Where can the world find you a sorrier thing
Than monarch playing catspaw to a rascal?
If kingship 's come to this, then has a king
A business on his hands which well might task all
The casuists left in Christendom. What Paschal
Atonement meets a sin so grovelling?
God sent His Son to cleanse a world o'erweening,
But your name now doesn't seem worth the
cleaning.

II. FOR TWO VOICES

- “ **O** MOTHER, mother, isn't it fun,
The soldiers marching past in the sun! ”
- “ Child, child, what are you saying?
Come to church. We should be praying. ”
- “ Look, mother, at their bright spears! ”
“ The leaves are falling like women's tears. ”
- “ You are not looking at what I see. ”
“ Nay, but I look at what must be. ”
- “ Hark to the pipes! See the flags flying! ”
“ I hear the sound of a girl crying. ”
- “ How many hundreds before they are done! ”
“ How many mothers wanting a son! ”
- “ Here rides the general pacing slow! ”
“ Well he may, if he knows what I know. ”
- “ O this war, what a glorious game! ”
“ Sin and shame, sin and shame. ”

III. THE EMPEROR OF ALMAIN

THE Emperor of Almain
Went rocking out to fight,
The thunder of his legions
Was heard across the night.

There stood a charter'd nation
Upon his road to France,
But Pooh! says he, What 's treaties?
And order'd the advance.

The Belgian he says, Easy!
And holds him up a spell.
Treachery! cries the Emperor,
"This people is from hell.

"You cannot treat this people
As men of common measure,
Who smite the friendly German
A-taking of his pleasure.

"You cannot fight this people—
How can you fight with clowns?
But you can burn their houses
And sack their ancient towns;

“ And you can shoot their old men,
And do their women shame
For facing of an Emperor
And spoiling of his game.

“ And if you meet civilians,
Don't let your natural ire
Inflame you. Set them forward
Upon the line of fire.

“ Then they're in this dilemma,
That if they shoot they kill
Their own, and if they don't shoot
I work my Imperial Will.”

Now when he got thro' Belgium
And enter'd pleasant France,
He found an English army
Opposing his advance.

The Emperor of Almain
He swore like one possest.
Says he, “ Remember Louvain,
And rid me of this pest.

“ Whate'er you do with Frenchmen,
The English you shall slay,
For they should be my henchmen
Instead of in my way.

“ If they had half the culture
That other Saxons have
They'd know that God has purpos'd
Germania rule the wave.”

We fought him up to Paris
And pusht him back again;
He dug himself in trenches
Above the banks of Aisne.

And there he got the toothache
As common people may,
And had to see his Germans
Be slain instead of slay.

But he saw likely plunder,
A great church made of dreams
In stone, a thing of wonder,
The fair-wrought Church of Rheims;

At which he plugg'd and batter'd
Till all in fire and smoke
It shockt the sky, and shatter'd,
The roof sagg'd in and broke.

The world cried out upon him,
But culture soon miscarries
When a man has the toothache
And cannot get to Paris.

War Rimes

And when a man is worried
His wits are not at call.
He fired the church, supposing
It was a hospital.

And so it was, for in it
His wounded soldiers lay
Till honest Frenchmen bore them
Out of the shrapnel's way.

The Germans went on shelling,
With glasses on the fun,
And one another's telling,
"See how those beggars run!"

And so he eased his toothache,
The Emperor of Almain;
And proud should be his doctors,
Rheims, Dinant and Louvain.

But he must get a many
Before his war is done,
And even might have heartache
If he possesses one.

IV. A SINGSONG OF ENGLAND

O ENGLAND is an island,
The fairest ever seen;
They say men come to England
To learn that grass is green.
And Englishmen are now at war,
All for this, they say,
That they are free, and other men
Must be as free as they.

The Englishmen are shepherds,
They plough, they sow and reap;
Their king may wear his leopards,
His men must lead their sheep.
But now the crook and sickle,
The coulter and the sieve
Are thrown aside; they take the gun
That other men may live.

Some Englishmen are fishermen,
And other some are miners,
And others man the shipping yards
And build the Ocean liners;

But one and all will down tools
And up with gun and sword
To make a stand for Freedom
Against the War Lord.

The pretty girls of England
Are husbanding their charms,
For not a girl of them but has
Her sweetheart under arms.
And not a girl of all the flock
Would call across the waves
Her sweetheart to her kindness
While other men are slaves.

There's been an English Kingdom
For twice a thousand years;
Her men have plough'd and reap'd it
Thro' merriment and tears.
But never a twenty year has past
Without some stroke 's been given
For Freedom; and the land is free
As any under heaven.

The Roman and the Spaniard,
The Corsican, have tried
Their worst, and now the German
Must perish in his pride.

He may burn and thieve and slaughter,
He may scold and storm and pray;
But we shall fight till even his
Stand up free men some day.

When he is free of Germany
And Germany of him
There'll be a chance for plain men
To get old Europe trim.
Then on, you sturdy English hands,
And keep the colours flying;
And we'll not grudge your blessed blood
If Tyranny's a-dying.

V. THE SOLDIERS PASS

THE soldiers pass at nightfall,
A girl within each arm,
And kisses quick and light fall
On lips that take no harm.
Lip language serves them better
Who have no parts of speech:
No syntax there to fetter
The lore they love to teach.

What waist would shun th' indenture
Of such a gallant squeeze?
What girl's heart not dare venture
The hot-and-cold disease?
Nay, let them do their service
Before the lads depart!
That hand goes where the curve is
That billows o'er the heart.

Who deems not how 'tis given,
What knows he of its worth?
'Tis either fire of heaven
Or earthiness of earth.

And if the lips are fickle
That kiss, they'll never know
If tears begin to trickle
Where they saw roses blow.

“The girl I left behind me,”
He'll sing, nor hear her moan,
“The tears they come to blind me
As I sit here alone.”

What else had you to offer,
Poor spendthrift of the town?
Lay out your unlockt coffer—
The Lord will know his own.

VI. A BALLAD OF THE 'GLOSTER'

Old Style.

COME landsmen all and ladies,
And listen unto me
A-singing of the 'Gloster'
Upon the Middle Sea.

The 'Goeben' and the 'Breslau'
They cruised th' Italian main;
No ship was there to stay them,
Their course was fair and plain.

But when the cruel guns open'd
Upon them from the shore,
From stem to stern they shiver'd,
Not being men of war.

Says 'Goeben,' "Mate, it won't do;
This means there's war declared.
We'll find a place to hold two,
Leastways if we be spared.

“The strait it is no place for us
With all these beastly shells;
We'll out and seek the Turkish waters
And the Dardanelles.

“Their winds are not so boist'rous,
Their men are not so free,
And not so hard on poor sailors
Weary of the sea.”

Just then the saucy 'Gloster'
And her four thousand tons
Came up against the 'Goeben'
And ran beneath her guns.

“What make you on the high sea,
And whither will you fare?”

“We seek a goodly haven
Where we can take the air.”

“I'll put you to a haven
Which ought your case to fit.
D. Jones is harbour-master,
You show him this here *chit*.”

The seaman gunner pickt a shell
And spat upon it first,
Says he, “This here should give 'em beans
If so be that she burst.”

The 'Breslau' gives a halloa,
"Be careful how you play;
For by your random markmanship
My funnel's shot away."

"Good shooting," says the 'Gloster',
"Now give the 'Goeben' one,"
And being on a stern chase
She lays the swivel gun.

A thirty shots the 'Goeben'
Let fly; the 'Gloster' three;
And one she raked the main deck,
And one she struck the sea;

The third she struck amidships,
"A-done!" the 'Goeben' bawled,
"I've got a nasty list now,
And must be overhauled.

"But for that blasted 'Gloster'—
If I could do her down
I'd be the brightest jewel
Upon my Kaiser's crown.

"She beats us with her gunning;
But we've got better heels.
Let's have a race," says 'Goeben'
"And see how victory feels."

The 'Gloster,' she gave over—
She'd had her little games,
The 'Breslau' and the 'Goeben,'
They now bear other names.

Now God bless all our seamen
Who keep the English seas,
And send them equal fortune
With worthier foes than these.

VII. SOLDIER, SOLDIER . . .

“**S**OLDIER, soldier, off to the war,
Take me a letter to my sweetheart O.
He's gone away to France
With his carbine and his lance,
And a lock of brown hair of his sweetheart O.”

“Fair maid of London, happy may you be
To know so much of your sweetheart O.
There's not a handsome lad,
To get the chance he's had,
But would skip, with a kiss for his sweetheart O.”

“Soldier, soldier, whatever shall I do
If the cruel Germans take my sweetheart O?
They'll pen him in the jail
And starve him thin and pale,
With never a kind word from his sweetheart O.”

“Fair maid of London, is that all you see
Of the lad you've taken for your sweetheart O?
He'll make his prison ring
With his God save the King,
And his God bless the blue eyes of my sweet-
heart O!”

“Soldier, soldier, if by shot or shell
They wound him, my dear lad, my sweetheart O,
He'll lie bleeding in the rain
And call me, all in vain,
Crying for the fingers of his sweetheart O.”

“Pretty one, pretty one, now take a word from
me:
Don't you grudge the life-blood of your sweet-
heart O.
For you must understand
He gives it to our land,
And proud should fly the colours of his sweet-
heart O.”

“Soldier, soldier, my heart is growing cold—
If a German shot kill my sweetheart O!
I could not lift my head
If my dear love lay dead
With his wide eyes waiting for his sweetheart O.”

“Poor child, poor child, go to church and pray,
Pray God to spare you your sweetheart O.
But if he live or die
The English flag must fly,
And England take care of his sweetheart O!”

VIII. TYE STREET

I KNOW a song of Tye Street
As simple as it's true.
Down there they want the candles out
For what they have to do.

Young Molly lived in Tye Street,
Her mother's name was Moss.
She had no father—God knows
Who her father was.

Yet she grew like a lily
So lax and warm and white,
Yet she grew like a lily flower
That cannot get the light.

She danced upon the pavement
With lifted pinafore
Until the boys took notice,
And then she danced no more.

The war broke over Tye Street
In newsbills and in rags,

And all the upper windows
Showed little faded flags.

And soon the pavement corners
Held stout young men in buff,
And there were clingings after dark,
And sobs and answers gruff.

And Molly had a sweetheart
As everybody does,
And never knew for her part
Why he should kiss so close.

No sooner got than going,
'Twas hers it seems to bless
The waiting hours in Tye Street.
It was a sweet distress.

And so he went to Portsmouth
And left her to her tears
And waking dreams at night-time,
And twice eight years.

And then she had a burden
To carry in her shawl,
And had to hold her head high
For fear that she should fall.

Out and about she took him,
And whiter grew and thinner,
Knowing the passion of her need
That he should get his dinner.

And well for her down Tye Street
She goes in fear of falling:
She has need of a lifted head
In her new calling.

IX. THE DROWNED SAILOR

LAST night I saw my true love stand
All shadowy by my bed.
He had my locket in his hand;
I knew that he was dead.

“ Sweetheart, why stand you there so fast,
Why stand you there so grave ?”

“ I think (said he) this hour 's the last
That you and I can have.

“ You gave me this from your fair breast,
It's never left me yet;
And now it dares not seek the nest
Because it is so wet.

“ The cold gray sea has covered it,
Deep in the sand it lies,
While over me the long weeds flit
And veil my staring eyes.

“ And there are German sailors laid
Beside me in the deep.
We have no need of gun or blade,
United in our sleep.”

“ Dear heart, dear heart, come to my bed,
My arms are warm and sweet!”

“ Alack for you, my love,” he said,
“ My limbs would wet the sheet.

“ Cold is the bed that I lie on
And deep beneath the swell.
No voice is left to make my moan
And bid my love farewell.”

Now I am widow that was wife—
Would God that they could prove
What law should rule, without the strife
That's robbed me of my love!

X. BRAVE WORDS FROM KIEL

IT was a Teuton publicist
Whose words flowed calm and true:
“I wish to make it clear,” he said,
“What we propose to do
About your fleet.” The sailor said,
“Meinherr, it’s up to you.”

“We have ein fleet—in all your days
You saw not such a sight.
That was the most almighty
That ever went to fight.”
“But it *don't* go,” the sailor said,
“It barks, but it don’t bite.”

“Der bark it is from thunder-guns;
So has that mighty fleet
Ein gun—aber so wunderschön!
To lay it is to hit.”
“It may be so,” the sailor said,
“But let me look at it.”

“The Dreadnoughts what we have in there
Would freeze you with their thunder

Of gunnery; also your ships
Would be their sport und plunder
If you so out of senses were—”
The sailor said, “I wonder.”

“And we have cruisers wunderschnell,
Whose valour there 's no curbin'.
They was like greyhounds from ein leash
When they work up their turbine.”
The sailor mused. “Perhaps,” said he,
“You're talking of the 'Goeben'?”

“There 's plenty more like her inside;
She was not all we've got.
Das Wilhelmshaven she is full
Of what could sink your lot.”
The sailor said, “Well, that 's all right.
Why don't you have a shot?”

“If you could see that splendid fleet
Which is der Kaiser's pride,
You would not be so hot in haste
Der issue to decide.”
“Come on, old son,” the sailor said,
“We're waiting just outside.”

“Der Admiral is such a man
As is the great Von Kluck.

These was his two great qualities,
His prudence und his pluck.
Und when he shtart—!" The sailor said,
" You never know your luck."

" You think the German fleet hangs fire
Until the sea was flat!
Or do you say we fear to meet
Our foe?" The sailor spat.
" Well, some say one thing, some another—
What *are* you playing at?"

XI. IN THE TRENCHES

AS I lay in the trenches
Under the Hunter's Moon,
My mind ran to the trenches
Cut in a Wiltshire down.

I saw their long black shadows,
The beeches in the lane,
The gray church in the meadows
And my white cottage—plain.

Thinks I, the down lies dreaming
Under that hot moon's eye,
Which sees the shells fly screaming
And men and horses die.

And what makes she, I wonder,
Of the horror and the blood,
And what's her luck, to sunder
The evil from the good?

'Twas more than I could compass,
For how was I to think
With such infernal rumpus
In such a blasted stink?

But here 's a thought to tally
With t'other. That moon sees
A shrouded German valley
With woods and ghostly trees.

And maybe there 's a river
The like of ours at home,
With poplar-trees aquiver
And clots of whirling foam.

And over there some fellow,
A German and a foe,
Whose gills are turning yellow
As sure as mine are so,

Watches that riding glory
Apparel'd in her gold,
And craves to hear the story
Her frozen lips enfold.

And if he sees as clearly
As I do where her shine
Must fall, he longs as dearly,
With heart as full as mine.

XII. SNOW

THE snow comes fleeting
Over the fen,
With a white sheeting
For us dead men.
Black specks above us,
White shrouds below—
And my blood on the snow.

There 's Jack in cover
From feet to head—
He was always a lover
Of a soft bed.
How the stuff drifts
Along the hedgerow—
A white flurry of snow!

When they got me
I was fairly done;
I had said, Come, pot me,
My race is run.
And all the time
It kept on snowing—
And that 's my life-blood flowing.

There 's my old mother
To hear of it first:
She hasn't another,
And that is the worst.
What would she say
At me lying so,
In a blanket of snow?

There 's Black Maria,
That swoop and shatter!
They are bringing her nigher,
But that don't matter.
I'm that drowsy
I can sleep now—
It's quiet here in the snow.

I've preached no sermons
And made no fuss
About the Germans—
They're just like us.
He took *me* first,
Next time *he'll* go—
And lie snug in the snow.

Who 's worked as I did
To get a rest
Will soon be tidied

In a white nest.
And all our filthiness
Smothered below
The folded lap of the snow!

The dark comes quickly
To blot the ground,
And the snow 's falling thickly
With no sound.
I'm a long long way
From a friend or a foe
Here, in my fleece of snow.

XIII. THE BUGLES

NOW who are ye that cross the sea
To the bugles' breaking key?
Mother, we are your eldest born
That claim to follow the sounding horn.

Carry on! Carry on!

For England must be free.

What is this you bring me home
With flags to shroud them and pulsing drum?
We bring you back your early lost;
Bugles, give them the *Last Post*

And then Carry on!

Reveill  is to come.

Wipe my cheeks and dry my eyes,
For the flag still floats and flies.
Sons I have left to hear the warning
Flung across the eyes of morning—

Carry on! Carry on!

So the land replies.

Sound, bugle, and banner, flaunt
Your answer to the tyrants' taunt.
Line the dyke and trench the dune
While the bugles' piercing tune,
 Clarion calling *Carry on!*
Flings him back his vaunt.

NOTES

P. 9. CORMAC, SON OF OGMUND: This was published in *The English Review*, and is a brief meditation upon the Kormak Saga as it is found in *Origines Islandicæ*, translated in all its austerity and with all its mutilations by York Powell and Vigfussen.

P. 17. CORMAC TO STANGERD: In *Kormak Saga* the rhymes and songs of the poet-hero are no more than hinted at, and according to the learned editors, nearly all of them are spurious. I made a prose paraphrase of the tale the other day, and gave these songs to Cormac to sing. They are quite near enough to the original scraps, those of them which are not themselves original.

P. 28. THE VOYAGE: First published in *Poetry and Drama*.

P. 51. ILIAD, III: Perhaps I owe an explanation to the unwary reader, who in a book of octosyllabics, finds himself plunged into blank verse pentameters, and in a book professedly original finds a translation. I have tried Homer in eight-syllable verse, and feel that it's too tight a fit. You are either unintelligible, or you are diffuse; and if you are diffuse you must fill up spaces with things which are not in Homer. Otherwise, the speed of octosyllables makes them a tempting measure. Hexameters will never do in English. If they depend upon stresses they are detestable; if they attempt quantity they are unreadable. It is not that we have no quantity: every language has it. Rather it is that we have too much. We cannot say of a syllable, You are either a long or a short. Moreover, ours is a monosyllabic language. We want polysyllables, indigenous, not imported or ac-

quired. We want natural dactyls, we want dissyllables, natural spondees. Those which we have adapted to our purpose reek of their date. Used in such a business as this of the Iliad you get the same sort of effect as you would if you read a leading article in the open air. They would be destructive of their own illusion, no nearer to the broad, simple, splendid, surging thing than Pope with his mazy leverets and verdant lawns. For much the same reason rhyme is a dangerous game to play with Homer. Chaucer would have used it—but would Chaucer have been like Homer?

What is like Homer, in English? Well, the Old Testament is uncommonly like him, and so is "Lang, Leaf and Myers." There is the best translation of the Iliad in the world, I feel sure—literally and, so to speak, transcendently correct, archaic, but hardly ever archaistic, sensitive and subtle but not precious; wanting but one thing, which indeed it does not claim, the power to march. For solitary reading that doesn't matter so much; but for reading aloud it matters greatly. I have read it aloud from end to end in sympathetic company. It is difficult to read, and difficult to listen to. It doesn't march, which Homer so essentially does. I say again that this is not its aim or intention. Literal accuracy and susceptibility to the atmosphere of Homer are the things to be sought in a prose translation of a poem, and nowhere else to be found as they are found here.

But suppose one could get one's blank verse as close to the original, as sensitive to atmosphere, as remote from, say, *The Light of Asia*, or other explicitly blank verse narrative as this book succeeds in getting prose—and yet push on with the tale, get something of Homer's effect of a river-flood, of unstaying, streaming, irresistible flow—would that not be worth trying after? That is what I have tried to get here.

One word more. I have chosen the third book because not only is it the turning-point of the Iliad, but it is the crisis, the second crisis, if you like (though I don't agree), of Helen's life. By breaking the oath the Trojans doomed themselves; by breaking with his honour Paris doomed himself. From that hour when he did violence to her delicacy Helen abhorred him. I worked that out in *Helen Redeemed*.

P. 72. **THE VEILED LOVER.** This is fragmentary, and was begun to be much longer, to include, in fact, the death and transmigration of Hippolytus. But I lost the mood, could not recapture it, so print the thing as it is—with a few lines of conclusion to give it at least a clean edge.

P. 85. **IN THE FOREST:** First published in *The Fortnightly Review*. This is a version of a version of a version of Mallarmé's *Après-midi d'un Faune*. M. Debussy turned that poem into orchestral music, M. Nijinsky made it a wonder to behold, I have never read the original, and owe my rendering to M. Nijinsky's art.

P. 90. **DAPHNE AND LEUKIPPOS:** This story is in Pausanias.

P. 101. **NIGHT-ERRANTRY:** First published in *The Westminster Gazette*.

P. 112. **TO THE POET LAUREATE:** Published in *The Westminster Gazette*.

P. 129. **WAR RIMES.** All of these rimes have been published in periodicals: *The English Review*, *The Westminster Gazette*, *The Daily Chronicle*. One of them, number 6, was published as a broadside by the Poetry Bookshop, and all the others, except number 1, in chapbook form, under the title of *Singsongs of the War*. It only becomes me to say this about them, that they are an attempt to express what has been, I don't doubt, the experience of many besides myself: the sudden deepening and widening of my sympathies. Before this horrible business was upon us, I walked very much alone. Now, for the better part of a year, I have been aware of all sorts and conditions of men and women travelling my way. They have helped me to carry my share of the common burden, and I have tried to help them. That's all.

