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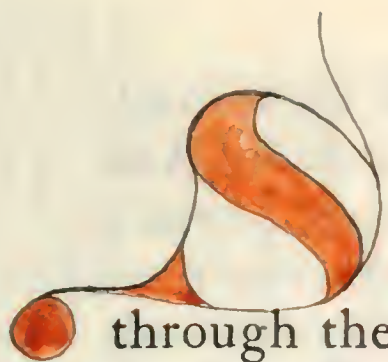
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JAMES D. HART



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I.



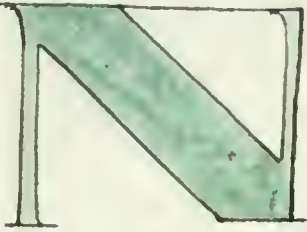
T. AGNES' EVE—Ah,
 bitter chill it was! **T**he owl,
 for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling
 through the frozen grass, **A**nd silent was
 the flock in woolly fold: **N**umb were the
 Beadsman's fingers, while he told **H**is ros-
 ary, & while his frosted breath, **L**ike pious
 incense from a censer old, **S**eam'd taking
 flight for heaven, without a death, **P**ast the
 sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he
 saith.

II.



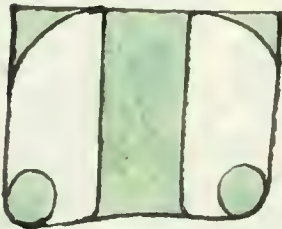
HIS prayer he saith, this pati-
 ent, holy man; **T**hen takes his
 lamp, & riseth from his knees,
And back returneth, meagre,
 barefoot, wan, **A**long the chapel aisle by
 slow degrees: **T**he sculptur'd dead, on each
 side, seem to freeze, **E**mprison'd in black,
 purgatorial rails: **K**nights, ladies, praying
 in dumb orat'ries, **H**e passeth by; and his
 weak spirit fails **T**o think how they may
 ache in icy hoods and mails.

III.



NORTHWARD he turneth
through a little door, **A**nd
scarce three steps, ere Music's
golden tongue **F**latter'd to
tears this aged man and poor; **B**ut no—al-
ready had his deathbell rung; **T**he joys of
all his life were said & sung: **H**is was harsh
penance on St. Agnes' Eve: **A**nother way
he went, and soon among **R**ough ashes sat
he for his soul's reprieve, **A**nd all night
kept awake, for sinners' sake to grieve.

IV.



HAT ancient Beadsman heard
the prelude soft; And so it
chanc'd, for many a door was
wide, From hurry to and fro.
Soon, up aloft, The silver, snarling trum-
pets 'gan to chide: The level chambers,
ready with their pride, Were glowing to
receive a thousand guests: The carved an-
gels, ever eager-ey'd, Star'd, where upon
their heads the cornice rests, With hair
blown back, and wings put cross-wise on
their breasts.

V.

AT length burst in the argent
 revelry, **W**ith plume, tiara,
 and all rich array, **N**umerous
 as shadows haunting faerily
The brain, new stuff'd, in youth, with tri-
 umphs gay **O**f old romance. These let us
 wish away, **A**nd turn, sole-thoughted, to
 one Lady there, **W**hose heart had brood-
 ed, all that wintry day, **O**n love, & wing'd
 St. Agnes' saintly care, **A**s she had heard
 old dames full many times declare.

VI.

THEY told her how, upon St.
 Agnes' Eve, **Y**oung virgins
 might have visions of delight,
And soft adorings from their
 loves receive **U**pon the honey'd middle of
 the night, **I**f ceremonies due they did a-
 right; **A**s, supperless to bed they must re-
 tire, **A**nd couch supine their beauties, lilly
 white; **N**or look behind, nor sideways, but
 require **O**f Heaven with upward eyes for
 all that they desire.


VII.

FULL OF THIS WHIM
 was thoughtful Madeline:
 The music, yearning like a
 God in pain, She scarcely
 heard: her maiden eyes divine, Fix'd on
 the floor, saw many a sweeping train Pass
 by—she heeded not at all: in vain Came
 many a tiptoe, amorous cavalier, And back
 retir'd; not cool'd by high disdain, But she
 saw not: her heart was elsewhere: She
 sigh'd for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of
 the year.

VIII.

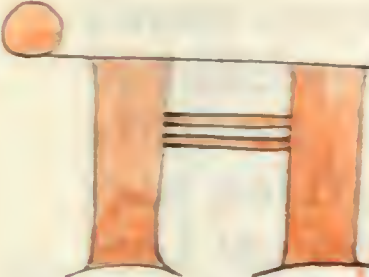
SHE danc'd along with vague,
 regardless eyes, Anxious her
 lips, her breathing quick and
 short: The hallow'd hour was
 near at hand: she sighs Amid the timbrels,
 and the throng'd resort Of whisperers in
 anger, or in sport; 'Mid looks of love, de-
 fiance, hate, and scorn, Hoodwink'd with
 faery fancy; all amort, Save to St. Agnes
 and her lambs unshorn, And all the bliss
 to be before to-morrow morn.

IX.



O, purposing each moment to retire **S**he linger'd still. Mean-
time, across the moors, **H**ad
come young Porphyro, with
heart on fire **F**or Madeline. Beside the por-
tal doors, **B**uttruss'd from moonlight, stands
he, & implores **A**ll saints to give him sight
of Madeline, **B**ut for one moment in the
tedious hours, **T**hat he might gaze & wor-
ship all unseen; **P**erchance speak, kneel,
touch, kiss—in sooth such things have
been.

X.



HE ventures in: let no buzz'd
whisper tell: **A**ll eyes be muf-
fl'd, or a hundred swords **W**ill
storm his heart, Love's fev'r-
ous citadel: **F**or him, those chambers held
barbarian hordes, **H**yena foemen, and hot-
blooded lords, **W**hose very dogs would ex-
ecrations howl **A**gainst his lineage: not one
breast affords **H**im any mercy, in that man-
sion foul, **S**ave one old beldame, weak in
body and in soul.

XI.

H, happy chance! the aged creature came, Shuffling along with ivory-headed wand, To where he stood, hid from the torch's flame, Behind a broad hall-pillar, far beyond The sound of merriment and chorus bland: He startled her; but soon she knew his face, And grasp'd his fingers in her palsied hand, Saying, "Mercy, Porphyro! hie thee from this place; They are all here to-night, the whole blood-thirsty race!"

XII.

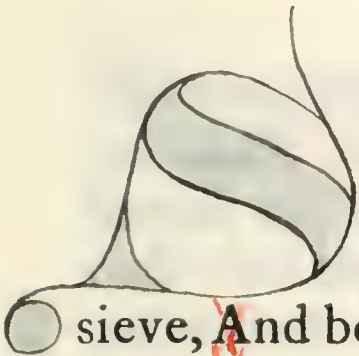
ET hence! get hence! there's dwarfish Hildebrand; He had a fever late, and in the fit He cursed thee and thine, both house and land: Then there's that old Lord Maurice, not a whit More tame for his gray hairs—Alas me! flit! Flit like a ghost away."—"Ah, Gossip dear, We're safe enough; here in this arm-chair sit, And tell me how"—"Good Saints! not here, not here; Follow me, child, or else these stones will be thy bier."

XIII.



HE follow'd through a lowly
 arched way, **B**rushing the cob-
 webs with his lofty plume,
And as she muttered'd "Well-
 a—well-a-day!" **H**e found him in a little
 moonlight room, **P**ale, lattic'd, chill, and
 silent as a tomb. "**N**ow tell me where is
 Madeline," said he, "**O** tell me, Angela,
 by the holy loom **W**hich none but secret
 sisterhood may see, **W**hen they St. Agnes'
 wool are weaving piously."

XIV.



ST. AGNES! Ah! it is St.
 Agnes' Eve—**Y**et men will
 murder upon holy days: **T**hou
 must hold water in a witch's
sieve, **A**nd be liege-lord of all the Elves &
 Fays, **T**o venture so: it fills me with amaze
To see thee, Porphyro!—St. Agnes' Eve!
God's help! my lady fair the conjuror plays
This very night: good angels her deceive!
But let me laugh awhile, I've mickle time
 to grieve."

XV.

FEEBLY she laugheth in the languid moon, While Porphyro upon her face doth look, Like puzzled urchin on an aged crone Who keepeth clos'd a wondrous riddle-book, As spectacled she sits in chimney nook. But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told His lady's purpose; and he scarce could brook Tears, at the thought of those enchantments cold, And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old.

XVI.

SUDDEN a thought came like a full-blown rose, Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart Made purple riot: then doth he propose A stratagem, that makes the beldame start: "A cruel man and impious thou art: Sweet lady, let her pray, & sleep, and dream Alone with her good angels, far apart From wicked men like thee. Go, go!—I deem Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem."

XVII.

I WILL not harm her, by all saints I swear," Quoth Porphyro: "O may I ne'er find grace When my weak voice shall whisper its last prayer, If one of her soft ringlets I displace, Or look with ruffian passion in her face: Good Angela, believe me by these tears; Or I will, even in a moment's space, Awake, with horrid shout, my foemen's ears, And beard them, though they be more fang'd than wolves & bears."

XVIII.

H! why wilt thou affright a feeble soul? A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing Whose passing-bell may ere the midnight toll; Whose prayers for thee, each morn & evening, Were never miss'd." — Thus plaining, doth she bring A gentler speech from burning Porphyro; So woful, and of such deep sorrowing, That Angela gives promise she will do Whatever he shall wish, betide her weal or woe.

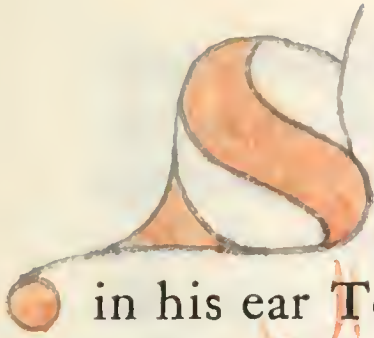
XIX.

WHICH was, to lead him, in close secrecy, Even to Madeline's chamber, & there hide Him in a closet, of such privacy That he might see her beauty unespied, And win perhaps that night a peerless bride, While legion'd faeries pac'd the coverlet, And pale enchantment held her sleepy-ey'd. Never on such a night have lovers met, Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt.

XX.

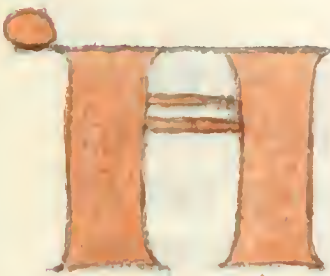
IT shall be as thou wishest," said the Dame: "All cates & dainties shall be stored there Quickly on this feast-night: by the tambour frame Her own lute thou wilt see: no time to spare, For I am slow and feeble, and scarce dare On such a catering trust my dizzy head. Wait here, my child, with patience; kneel in prayer The while: Ah! thou must needs the lady wed, Or may I never leave my grave among the dead."

XXI.



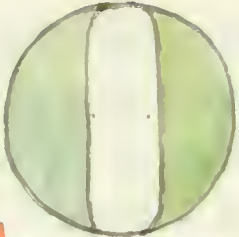
O saying, she hobbled off with busy fear. The lover's endless minutes slowly pass'd; The dame return'd, and whisper'd in his ear To follow her; with aged eyes aghast From fright of dim espial. Safe at last, Through many a dusky gallery, they gain The maiden's chamber, silken, hush'd, and chaste; Where Porphyro took covert, pleas'd amain. His poor guide hurried back with agues in her brain.

XXII.

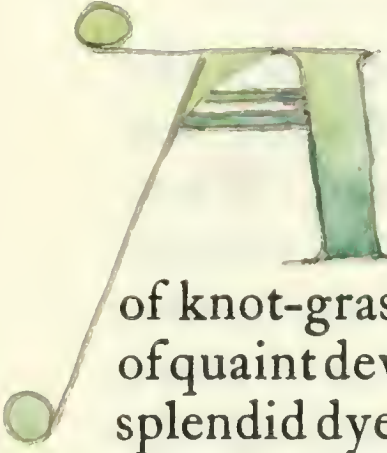


HER falt'ring hand upon the balustrade, Old Angela was feeling for the stair, When Madeline, St. Agnes' charm-ed maid, Rose, like a mission'd spirit, un-ware: With silver taper's light, and pious care, She turn'd, and down the aged gossip led To a safe level matting. Now prepare, Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed; She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove fray'd and fled.

XXIII.

 UT went the taper as she hurried in; Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died: She clos'd the door, she panted, all akin To spirits of the air, and visions wide: No uttered syllable, or, woe betide! But to her heart, her heart was voluble, Paining with eloquence her balmy side; As though a tongueless nightingale should swell Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.

XXIV.

 CASEMENT high & triple-arch'd there was, All garlanded with carven imag'ries Of fruits, and flowers, & bunches of knot-grass, And diamonded with panes of quaint device, Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes, As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings; And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries, And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings, A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens & kings.

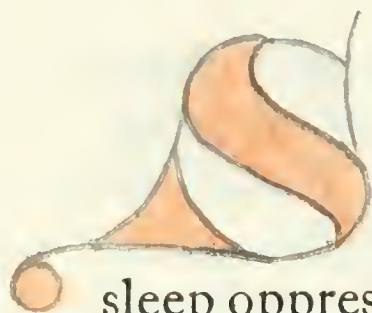
XXV.

FULL on this casement shone
 the wintry moon, And threw
 warm gules on Madeline's
 fair breast, As down she knelt
 for heaven's grace and boon; Rose-bloom
 fell on her hands, together prest, And on
 her silver cross soft amethyst, And on her
 hair a glory, like a saint: She seem'd a
 splendid angel, newly drest, Save wings,
 for heaven:—Porphyro grew faint: She
 knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal
 taint.

XXVI.

ANON his heart revives: her
 vespers done, Of all its wreath-
 ed pearls her hair she frees;
 Unclasps her warmed jewels
 one by one; Loosens her fragrant boddice;
 by degrees Her rich attire creeps rustling
 to her knees: Half-hidden, like a mermaid
 in sea-weed, Pensive awhile she dreams a-
 wake, and sees, In fancy, fair St. Agnes in
 her bed, But dares not look behind, or all
 the charm is fled.

XXVII.



SOON, trembling in her soft
 & chilly nest, In sort of wake-
 ful swoon, perplex'd she lay,
 Until the popped warmth of
 sleep oppress'd Her soothed limbs, & soul
 fatigued away; Flown, like a thought, un-
 til the morrow-day; Blissfully haven'd both
 from joy and pain; Clasp'd like a missal
 where swart Paynims pray; Blinded alike
 from sunshine and from rain, As though a
 rose should shut, and be a bud again.

XXVIII.



STOL'N to this paradise, and
 so entranced, Porphyro gaz'd
 upon her empty dress, And
 listen'd to her breathing, if it
 chanced To wake into a slumberous ten-
 derness; Which when he heard, that min-
 ute did he bless, And breath'd himself: then
 from the closet crept, Noiseless as fear in a
 wide wilderness, And over the hush'd car-
 pet, silent, stept, And 'tween the curtains
 peep'd, where, lo!—how fast she slept.

XXIX.



MHEN by the bed-side, where
the faded moon **M**ade a dim,
silver twilight, soft he set **A**
table, & halfanguish'd, threw
thereon **A** cloth of woven crimson, gold,
and jet:—**O** for some drowsy Morphean
amulet! **T**he boisterous, midnight, festive
clarion, **T**he kettle-drum, and far-heard
clarionet, **A**ffray his ears, though but in
dying tone:—**T**he hall door shuts again,
and all the noise is gone.

XXX.



AND still she slept an azure-
lidded sleep, **I**n blanched lin-
en, smooth, and lavender'd,
While he from forth the closet
brought a heap **O**f candied apple, quince,
and plum, and gourd; **W**ith jellies soother
than the creamy curd, **A**nd lucent syrups,
tinct with cinnamon; **M**anna and dates, in
argosy transferr'd **F**rom **F**ez; and spiced
dainties, every one, **F**rom silken Samar-
cand to cedar'd Lebanon.

XXXI.

THESSE delicates he heap'd
 with glowing hand On gold-
 en dishes & in baskets bright
 Of wreathed silver: sumptu-
 ous they stand In the retired quiet of the
 night, Filling the chilly room with per-
 fume light.—“And now, my love, my ser-
 aph fair, awake! Thou art my heaven, and
 I thine eremite: Open thine eyes, for meek
 St. Agnes' sake, Or I shall drowse beside
 thee, so my soul doth ache.”

XXXII.

THUS whispering, his warm,
 unnerved arm Sank in her pil-
 low. Shaded was her dream
 By the dusk curtains:—'twas
 a midnight charm Impossible to melt as
 iced stream: The lustrous salvers in the
 moonlight gleam; Broad golden fringe up-
 on the carpet lies: It seem'd he never, never
 could redeem From such a stedfast spell his
 lady's eyes; So mus'd awhile, entailed in
 woofed phantasies.

XXXIII.

A WAKENING up, he took her hollow lute,—Tumultuous,—and, in chords that tenderest be, He play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute, In Provence call'd, “La belle dame sans mercy:” Close to her ear touching the melody;—Wherewith disturb'd, she utter'd a soft moan: He ceas'd—she panted quick—and suddenly Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone: Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone.

XXXIV.

HER eyes were open, but she still beheld, Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep: There was a painful change, that nigh expell'd The blisses of her dream so pure and deep At which fair Madeline began to weep, And moan forth witless words with many a sigh; While still her gaze on Porphyro would keep; Who knelt, with joined hands and piteous eye, Fearing to move or speak, she look'd so dreamingly.

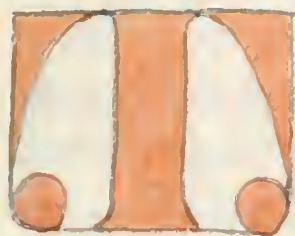
XXXV.

AH, Porphyro!" said she, "but even now Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear, Made tuneable with every sweetest vow; And those sad eyes were spiritual & clear: How chang'd thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear! Give me that voice again, my Porphyro, Those looks immortal, those complainings dear! Oh leave me not in this eternal woe, For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go."

XXXVI.

BEYOND a mortal man impassion'd far At these voluptuous accents, he arose Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose; Into her dream he melted, as the rose Blendeth its odour with the violet,—Solution sweet: meantime the frost-wind blows Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set.

XXXVII.



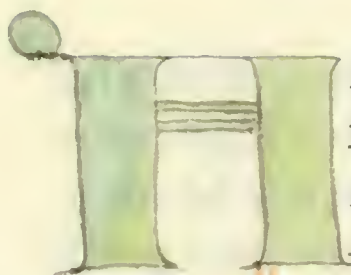
IS dark: quick pattereth the
flaw-blown sleet: "This is no
dream, my bride, my Madeline!" 'Tis dark: the iced gusts
still rave and beat: "No dream, alas! alas!
and woe is mine! Porphyro will leave me
here to fade and pine.—Cruel! what traitor
could thee hither bring? I curse not, for
my heart is lost in thine, Though thou forsakest
a deceived thing;—A dove forlorn
and lost with sick unpruned wing."

XXXVIII.



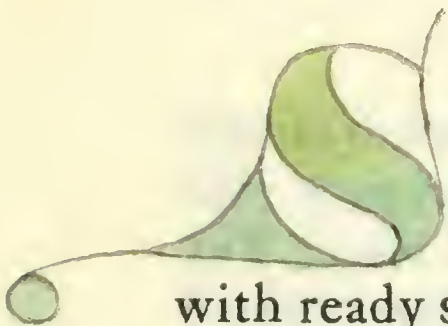
Y Madeline! sweet dreamer!
lovely bride! Say, may I be
for aye thy vassal blest? Thy
beauty's shield, heart-shap'd
and vermeil dy'd? Ah, silver shrine, here
will I take my rest After so many hours of
toil and quest, A famish'd pilgrim,—sav'd
by miracle. Though I have found, I will
not rob thy nest Saving of thy sweet self; if
thou think'st well To trust, fair Madeline,
to no rude infidel.

XXXIX.



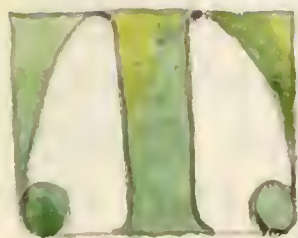
ARK! 'tis an elfin storm from
 faery land, Of haggard seem-
 ing, but a boon indeed: Arise
 —arise! the morning is at
 hand;—The bloated wassaillers will never
 heed:—Let us away, my love, with happy
 speed; There are no ears to hear, or eyes to
 see,—Drown'd all in Rhenish & the sleepy
 mead: Awake! arise! my love, and fearless
 be, For o'er the southern moors I have a
 home for thee.”

XL.



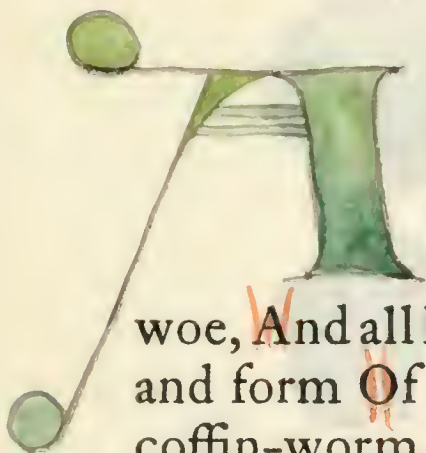
HE hurried at his words, be-
 set with fears, For there were
 sleeping dragons all around,
 At glaring watch, perhaps,
 with ready spears—Down the wide stairs
 a darkling way they found.—In all the
 house was heard no human sound. A chain-
 droop'd lamp was flickering by each door;
 The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and
 hound, Flutter'd in the besieging wind's
 uproar; And the long carpets rose along
 the gusty floor.

XLI.



HEY glide, like phantoms,
 into the wide hall; Like phan-
 toms, to the iron porch, they
 glide; Where lay the Porter,
 in uneasy sprawl, With a huge empty flag-
 gon by his side: The wakeful bloodhound
 rose, and shook his hide, But his sagacious
 eye an inmate owns: By one, and one, the
 bolts full easy slide:—The chains lie silent
 on the footworn stones;—The key turns,
 and the door upon its hinges groans.

XLII.



AND they are gone: aye, ages
 long ago These lovers fled a-
 way into the storm. That night
 the Baron dreamt of many a
 woe, And all his warrior-guests, with shade
 and form Of witch, and demon, and large
 coffin-worm, Were long be-nightmar'd.
 Angela the old Died palsy-twitch'd, with
 meagre face deform; The Beadsman, after
 thousand aves told, For aye unsought for
 slept among his ashes cold.

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