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AMENOPHRA

AND OTHER POEMS





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AMENOPHRA, AND OTHER POEMS

AMENOPHRA
AND
OTHER POEMS

BY

ERNEST ARTHUR EDKINS
"

DETROIT
EDWIN B. HILL
1889

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TO
E. B. H.

*Virginité du cœur, hélas si tôt ravie !
Songes riants, projets de bonheur et d'amour,
Fraîches illusions du matin de la vie,
Pourquoi ne pas durer jusqu'à la fin du jour ?*

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER.

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IN LIMINE.

I drank of Avon, too,—a dangerous draught,
That roused within the feverish thirst of song.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.

I HAVE suffered these few lyrical efforts to be collected and republished, partly at the instance of my friend, Mr. Hill, and partly because I deem it a fitting acknowledgment to the critics, for the uniform courtesy,—I may even say, clemency—received at their hands. Many of my earlier and lighter poems have been very properly omitted from this volume, and my altered conception of the poetic function as well as of the poetic principle, causes me to hope that they will meet with that Euthanasia which Oblivion generally accords to the immature effusions of youth's third lustrum. Whether the residue herein preserved merits a similar fate, is a question, as Sir Thomas Browne would say, 'not beyond *all* conjecture!'

E. A. E.

AMENOPHRA.¹

THERE are rare moments in this earthly life,—
In this terrestrial arc of being—rife
(E'en as they fade away, we shrink aghast!)
With shrouded phantoms of an unknown past.²
Unknown, I say,—yet to the eye they seem
Strangely familiar, while that fleeting dream
Holds us beneath its spell; in such brief space
As marks the second-hand's erratic race
Once 'round the smaller dial, or twice, perchance,—
We sink, in breathless horror, 'neath the trance,
We faint, and yet the helpless body falls
(It seems for hours!) between green chasmal walls
Of polished, gleaming rock, which ever flee
Upward, in glassy lines, so rapidly
We fall! From sheer excess of horror, then
(Yet still within the trance) the mental ken
Becomes a blank, until a gentler phase
Of spirit-vision meets the searèd gaze,—
Blue seas, fair skies, and slanting Eastern trees
That graceful bend beneath the aromatic breeze.

Passion of Dream-life! in thy vast domain,
Where there is much of pleasure, more of pain,
Where incorporeal Silence takes a Form,
And forests reel beneath a windless storm ;³
Where the weird chaos of a spectral world
Leaves the dazed mind on heaps of horror hurled !—
Down thy enormous, sunless, silent isles
I late have fared. Sardonic, fearful smiles
Writhed on the stony lips of many a head
Of carven marble,—at my echoing tread
A mausoleum, towering in the gloom
Swung wide its ponderous gates, to give me room !
But still I journeyed on, and did emerge
At last, upon this glorious, boundless verge,
Where, gazing through the blue infinite space,
My soul identified its earlier dwelling-place.

I have long idled, here, a life away
Beneath vast marble porticoes,— each day,
Bathed in cool caverns of perfumèd shade
And fanned by graceful Nubian slaves, arrayed
In grotesque garbs. Only at night and morn
Could I see the marine sun's rays adorn
The rolling sea with rich prismatic fires
And gild th' Eternal City's thousand spires,—
Save when I left the couch, the shade, the band

Of slaves, to pace the ribbed and tawny sand.
Then all the blazoned colors of the sky
Were mirrored in my own reflective eye,
And so gave me, throughout the night and day
Strange dreams with which to while the time away.
The slaves, whose unique duty was to find
And exorcise the care that weighed my mind
With growing melancholy, danced in vain
Their graceful measures to assuage my pain,
Or, Seraph-like, evoked '*threttánclo*'⁴
From trembling strings that only voiced my woe.
For an old sage in passing by had said,
In words that seared my soul like molten lead,
'Dream, Amenophra, dream on while the breath
Of Summer fans thy cheek, — full many a death
And resurrection wait thee, ere thy soul
Shall know the great peace of the final goal.'

Still in the trance, I traced my tortuous way
Back through the spectral world of solemn gray;
Still in the dream, I wandered 'neath the smiles
(Frozen and joyless mirth!) that in those isles
Leered saturnine from out the Stygian gloom,
Or mocked me from the carvings on the tomb!
But all the formless phantoms that of yore

Had triumphed o'er me with their hellish lore
I feared no longer : at the last hour of night
'Tis seen, light grows invisible through light, —
Dawn breaks, the brightest planet fades away
Before th' effulgence of the orb of day.
And so, by virtue of the deeper shade
I did not see the lesser ones which strayed
Within my ken ; but still I could not flee
The face of Amenophra by the sea,
(Who was my former self!) the while he died
His glance sought mine, and almost me descried,
In proud impatience, as Death closed his eyes,
To pierce the veil, and thus his second self surmise!

A VISION.

BEHIND, a sheer, precipitous crag that frowned
Portentous, down upon the sullen sea,—
A leaning menace to the seething sea,—
Before, the shelving shingle's narrow bound.
High in the mid-air hell there circled 'round
Vast, misty, bird-like shapes, seeking to flee
The cursèd coast, the sentient enmity
Of the gray sea's sardonic laugh! A sound
More keen, more piercing, clove the foam-fill'd air,—
A human note of wild, unutterable woe,
And down that haunted shore, with streaming hair,
A form, methought I saw, pace to and fro,
Singing a dirge of deep, divine despair,—
I saw the form, I heard the voice, of Poe!

THE SUICIDE.

I.

O WHAT is abroad in the night, in the night!
That I needs must awake from my dreams,
And seek the lone bridge, and the sight, and the sight
Of a sullen deep river that rolls in its might—
Of a horrible river that seems
Like the treacherous tide of my dreams?

II.

I lean o'er the rail in the toils of the trance
And the tide flees away from my face,
But on its broad breast I encounter the glance—
The wild ghastly glance of two eyes that advance
Not an inch in the current's swift race—
That stare blankly up at my face.

III.

Long shuddering swords of resilient light
From the furthestmost sinuous shore,
Trail over the waters or bury their bright

Keen blades in the tide—but they point to a sight
On the glistening, watery floor
That freezes my heart to its core.

IV.

For the eyes, the calm, beautiful unseeing eyes
That hold me enthralled in their spell—
No longer are mortal—their swift vision flies
Up a moon-riven path through the Stygian skies,
And away from this earthly hell
Where the spirit disdained to dwell.

V.

O delicate form down there in the dark,
O pitiful sight that I see—
Thy golden hair cruelly caught in the bark
Of a half sunken tree, and thy body a mark
That the world of to-morrow, by thee,
May its own inhumanity see!

REQUIEM.

SING me a song in a minor chord, a song in
a tender strain,
Soft and low as the warm wet wind that comes
in the wake of rain,
Sad with the burden of vanished joys, and their
heritage of pain.

Sing me a song of the younger time—of the golden
long ago,
(How like the fire-light on the wall dim memories
come and go!)

Sing me a song of pleasure and pain, for my heart
doth overflow.

Softly the prelude, and tremblingly sad, as evoked
by the organ keys,—
There have been doubts as keen and as bitter and
sadly uncertain as these,
Voiced in the moated music-bar that lingers adown
the breeze.

Grandly the prelude, and thunderingly deep, as it
merges into the theme,
Losing itself as a rill is lost in the greater tide
of the stream,—
So the old hopes and aims grew bravely out of
a troubled dream.

Hark! the divine clear voice is thrilled with the
passionate music's woe,
And the eyes are heavy with unshed tears, and the
night doth darker grow—
That those who planted the germ, the fruit thereof
may not know.

Where are the leaders of that dear time, with a pur-
pose strong and deep?
Shoulder to shoulder they fought like gods, and now
in an iron sleep
Like gods they rest, while I o'er their deeds a lonely
vigil keep.

THE COMING OF SPRING.

I HEAR the lulling lisp of lotus leaves
Whisper her name unto the passing wind,
That faintly flings behind
The echo, ere it onward grieves
Through yon gaunt hill-top pine tree, sharp
defined
Against th' cerulean sky its sword point cleaves.

The tangled grasses bow in reverence,
Enamored swallows, swift of wing and strong,
Follow her path along
That waste where Nature, dumb and tense
Under some ban uncouth, some hideous wrong,
Broke, at the call, from Winter's prison residence.

DEGREES.

I.

WHERE the gray sea deftly moulded the lines
of the curled and carven shore,
And labored with infinite hands at ranging the shells
and pebbles in rows,
I loitered my lazy way, nor recked the work it would
cost to restore
The havoc I made or the ruin I wrought on the
route my fancy chose.

II.

Ah, God! And this young, glorious life that I
held and exalted above
All others, and sought with a tender touch to guide
to planes still higher,
Is left in ruins after a tempest of passion that had
no love,
Is crushed by the passing foot of a wretch in pursuit
of his one desire!

ROUNDEL.

OUT of the deep there came a sound, as of
anguish stricken dumb
In the midst of its cry—the heavy air seemed
all too sad to weep,
Save a raindrop, blood-like, splashed on my hand
as a herald of wrath to come,
Out of the deep.

Breathless, I stood and listened, hearing naught
but the sudden hum
Of wings invisible, 'round my head, of bats
aroused from sleep.
Silent, I crouched and strained my eyes, seeing
naught of the chasm deep.

Then—crash! Creation reels 'neath the final war
begun,
The searching swords of the storm from their
cloudy scabbards leap,
After this awful chaos can there rise to-morrow
a sun
Out of the deep?

ON THE SEA-BOARD.

WHAT magical spell abides in the keen salt
wind and the stinging spray,
That thrills and uplifts my heart from its narrow
life, —
And its hopeless strife,
Till I scourge from my presence all sorrow, and
only remember to-day?

Could not a man lie here forever with the breakers
booming under,
And the blue of the sky above and the cliffs
around
That echo the sound
Of the circling bittern's scream and the angry ocean's
thunder?

Drinking, a soul disembodied, in the days and the
nights that pass,
In the blaze of burning planets at night, and
the dead moon's rays,
Or through long days
List to yon musical cricket in the brine-encrusted
grass!

VIAREGGIO.

O FATEFUL coast, O lone, deserted shore!
Under the spell of that low moon's weird
gleam

Comes back to me, like some forgotten dream,
A memory that will haunt me evermore.
'T was there, 'mid those submerged, accursèd weeds,
Where the strong tide is quenched without a sound,
A body with wide-staring eyes was found
Wedged in between the wreckage and the reeds.
And the waves looked upon it, and fled back,^s
Affrighted at their work. The sea-birds wheeled
Yet lighted not; the shrouded moon revealed
Its face, a moment, through the storm-cloud's rack,—
Beheld, and then withdrew its sickly light
Away from that uplifted, ghastly face,
Locked in the final pitiless embrace
Of Death. and guarded by the jealous night.
Such was the scene; and now it comes again,—
The haggard moon, the sands, the drifting tide,
The ranks of crusted weeds, the corse denied

A grave, and floating out upon the main :
I see the sight, in fancy, o'er and o'er ;
Then, as the East proclaims another day,
I take my staff and slowly turn away,
A fugitive from thought forever more.

TO —.

I.

AFTER thy songs in praise of the others are
 sung, —

Rounded and brought to an end with a passionate
 thrill,

How shall we think of the theme, remembering
 the tongue

Whose last low liquid notes are lingering 'still?

II.

After thy sad-glad life, like an Autumn day,
Smiles through the twilight bravely, and dies in
 the gloom,

How shall we grudge thee the laurel wreath and
 the bay,

Knowing that voice forever stilled at thy tomb?

INTAGLIOS.

I.

HAIR of gold against a sky of blue,
Never colors were more richly blended,
How the South-wind, like a cunning Jew,
Caught her hair and all its wealth distended
Where glints o' the warm Sun sifted through and
through.

II.

Face of ivory in a frame of gold,
Half averted from my eager gaze,
Oh Grecian face, thy beauty I behold
In rapturous, unutterable amaze,—
A radiant angel's face, self-aureoled!

QUATRAINS.

DEATH.

A TIRED, sleepy child, that shuts his eyes
And lays him down for slumber to bequeath
Its dear repose at night, and doth arise
In the Sun's glorious morning ; this is Death.

SUNRISE.

All of a sudden the sea-damp drifted up,
And the great bowl of the Sun^t came out of
the Sea,
Daylight had filled and lifted its drinking cup,
And sweet was the promise of joy it pledged
to me.

WOE.

Over a moonless, bare, deserted sea
Of shifting sand and palms disconsolate,
There came an awful, lonely cry to me,—
A lion mourning for its captured mate.

LINES TO A YOUNG GIRL.

WITH lingering step we paced the walk
Beneath those stately trees,
How light and careless was our talk,
Our hearts how ill at ease!

The wind caressed your tawny hair
And kissed your starry eyes, —
Twin orbs of Heaven! none half so fair
Are left within the skies!

The river softly wandered by,
The moon was veiled[^] above, —
My heart had learned once more to sigh,
And yours, poor child, to love!

LOVE.

‘L OVE rules the world,’ she sang, and tripped
along

The meadow path, near where the brooklet purred
And seemed to raise its voice to swell the song,
‘Love rules the world.’

Just where the stream its tiny vortex whirled
Around the stepping-stones, could it be wrong
That I should pray Love’s arrow to be hurled?

Together on Life’s way we stroll along
And oft remember where the brook once swirled
Its mimic maelstrom, and joined in our song
‘Love rules the world.’

SORROW.

THRICE welcome, Sorrow, though thy hand be
hard,

'T is but the grip of friendship, and I see
In thy stern eye's cold light the chastity
That marks a soul from pleasure self-debarred.
Men tell me that thy comradeship has marred
The lives of countless beings, but to me
There seems a higher destiny for thee
Than that so often sung by mournful bard,

For in the pain and anguish, in the smart
Of injury, in the helpless sense of wrong
There lies a chastening power, which doth make
Us more of men, if there is in the heart
Aught of true manliness, and we grow strong
And live, and work and learn for Sorrow's sake.

SONNET TO MY MOTHER,

ON HER RECOVERY FROM A DANGEROUS ILLNESS.

MOTHER! I breathe the dear name soft and
low,

Afraid lest I disturb thee in thy sleep,—

'T is well that thou shouldst slumber while I
weep

And inly shudder, knowing all I know:

For thou didst lately leave me here, to go

Wide-eyed yet all unseeing, down the steep

Of that dim, silent Vale, whose shadows deep

Blot out Life's feeble sunset after-glow.

But looking back, perchance, with curious gaze

(Not longingly, for life was pain to thee),

Thou didst behold me, mute and sorrow-slain:

Then thy stilled heart with Mother-love did blaze

Into quick life,—the solving alchemy

Of Death was stayed,—and thou didst live again!

APRIL NIGHTS.

I.

WHEN the moon is a blur in the sky, —
Faint, and affrighted, and far, —
When the breeze of the night is a sigh
For the light of the morning star ;
When Earth turns, troubled, in sleep,
And the East shows a sullen stain,
My watchful vigil I keep
O Love! at thy window-pane.

II.

I come not with lute or with song, —
'T were a petty art to employ,
For mine is a passion too strong,
For mine is a tongueless joy, —
When the silence is solemn and deep
And the night shadows Westward flee,
I watch o'er thy dreamless sleep,
Else there is no peace in me.

LINES TO M——.

O VIOLIN, O violin,
Thou ever faithful friend of mine;
O violin, dear violin
That cheers me with thy voice divine;
Break this oppressive solitude,—
Interpret thou my varying mood.

.

There was a time, there was a time
So dear, alas, so long ago,
When, in Italia's sunny clime
This tremulous, caressing bow
Wooded from the strings a melody
Like to the love I offered thee.
Ah me! the fires at the shrine
Of my lost love are waxing cold;
The skillful touch that once was mine
Has gone, nor can I as of old
Hope for that which may never be
And speak through this violin, to thee.

Oh, perished love, oh dead intent ;
Sad relics of the buried past !
I gently touch my instrument
And memories crowding thick and fast
Come with the sobbing, low refrain
And bear me back to youth again.

AT TWENTY.

THERE 'S something noble in a shattered hope
That bends its remnant still against the blast,
There 's pathos in the blindness that doth grope
Where light lay, last,
In level lines across Life's rugged Western slope.

And he who battled nobly in the strife
Is loved, and he who bravely fell is mourned,
But one, ah God! I know, whose empty life
Is justly scorned
E'en by himself, with myriad sad reflections rife.

O twenty barren years, forever fled!
O horror of inverted life, when age
Is felt in youth, and youth's desires are dead,
When the sweet mage
Of music vainly seeks to thrill this heart of lead!

MADELAINE.

MYSTERIOUS child! whose luminous eyes
Can calmly scan my trembling heart;
Whither doth trend our destinies, —
What, in your life, shall be my part?

I fear, each time I go away,
That you will fail to wait for me, —
That back to Heaven you will stray,
Lost in some strange, sweet reverie!

A SADDLE SONG, BEFORE BATTLE.

I.

THE revel no longer holds sway, and the morn-
ing is dawning,
Impatient my charger doth chafe at his bit in the
stall,
The guests have all gone with the last dark hour
of morning,
And a rosier light than the cresset illumines the
wall.

II.

Afar stretch the curving gray shores, where my path
intermingles,
And loses itself in the sinuous belt of the sand, —
A vanishing, shimmering line which the sea ever
singles
To mould at its pleasure, — the terminal loop of
the land.

III.

To my love's lattice window I look, where per-
chance she is hiding
To watch me depart; and a last long libation I
pour
To her lips and her eyes and her manner so sweet
and confiding,—
Then ho! for whate'er may befall me adown the
dim shore!

MEDEA.

EYES all ablaze with awful wrath and pain,
That sear the pulsing space through which
they gaze,
So fierce their light. The long, interminable days
Drag their length by unheeded, since her reign
Is ended. But that glorious bosom's swell,
(On which a king might die!) and in her hand
The jeweled dagger that usurps the wand,
And those knit, gloomy brows, the story tell.

CORRESPONDENCES.

I.

ALL colors, odors and sounds are bound
Together, by a strange invisible chain,—
Thus, some faint perfumes I have found
Soft, like a flute's low liquid sound,
Sad, like autumnal rain.

II.

Fresh, like the sweet, firm flesh of a child
Or the wind-blown golden hair of a girl,—
Some odors!—exuberant, keen and wild
Like long lush grasses, all beguiled
By the brook's seductive purl.

III.

And some are as fierce as a wanton's kiss—
Some have the expansion of infinite things
That madden the senses with sudden bliss,
Transporting to worlds remote from this
The spirit, on viewless wings!

THE PINE.

I.

O TREE! O tree! I am sad and world
 awearry,
Let me recline by thy resinous trunk, and share
For an hour thy dear immunity from care,—
What matters how dreary
This hill-side be, with its slopes all worn and
 bare.

II.

O tree! O tree! Night hides in thy dusky arms
Through the hot day, and wandereth forth again
When sinks the Day-God, baffled, beneath the
 plain,—
From Life's sudden alarms
Would I could flee to thee ever, O soother of pain!

III.

There is a Spirit which broods in thy deeper shade,
There is a Voice in thy branches overhead,
And I listen as one who heareth a voice from
the dead,
Yet though I have stayed
Till moon-rise, know I the meaning of what it
hath said!

L. of C.

IN NOVEMBER.

A LONELY, limpid, lustrous star,
Not high, but remote in the wild weird sky,
Gleams red through the wintry dusk, afar,
To where, in a thicket maze, I lie. .

A chill wind thrills through the leafless thorn,—
Or was it Autumn went by in the gloom
So hurriedly? Even now she is gone,
Leaving a faint perfume.

The red star flashes a ruby light
Down in the darkling woodlands drear,
We, and we only, mark the flight
Of the gracious Queen of the Year. .

CHIMÆRA.

WHERE willows shiver, gaunt and stark,
Above the black, moon-mirroring waves,
There is a path whence one may mark
The Mohawk, as it onward raves.
And oft I linger there at night
When the mad March-winds overhead,—
Weird harpers!—sound in their dim flight
Strange music 'mid the branches dead.
The stars that light that lonely spot
Gleam redly down, meseems,
And a shadowy Past, remembered not,
Returns to me in dreams!
O! is this chant the night-wind sings
But the shrill cadence of the breeze,—
Or do I hear the rushing wings
Of the swift Stymphalides?
And are those stars (so strangely bright!)
Stars only,—or do I again
Behold that glare of lurid light
Athwart the vast Pharsalian Plain?

Chimæra's wings have fanned the air,
And I between her children stand,—
Lost in unending reverie,—where
They lie, half-buried in the sand.
I see within their awful eyes
The mirrored mysteries of the Past,
So veil'd that I can but surmise,—
Yet, thus surmising, stand aghast!

Old world visions and dreams antique
Of a dim, Pre-natal life are mine;
By the dying fire's columnar reek
I have waited in vain for the Two to speak,—
O Sphinxes! dost make no sign?

NOSTALGIA.

THE low and listless wash of languid seas,
Lapping the level shores of tropic lands,—
The strange sweet perfume of a fluctuant breeze
Blowing at midnight o'er the damp sea-sands :
Visions of pyramids, and palms and pines,
The lotos-laden Nile, and dreamful nights
In amorous Venice, where one's soul divines
All the old pagan passions and delights,—
Why do ye haunt me?

I can feel again
The touch of thrilling fingers, the caress
Of moist emollient lips—the joy, the pain,
And all the old Love's power to blast or bless !
In a tense reverie, led by gray Regret,
I softly tread amid the wreck of years,
Finding, where I had prayed I might forget,
Mem'ries that blind my eyes with bitter tears !

NOTES.

NOTES.

1.

The idea of *Amenophra*,—so far as there *is* any tangible idea attached to such a mere fragment,—was suggested to me by reading Charles Baudelaire's *La Vie Antérieure*.

2.

O sollecito dubbio e fredda temà
Che pensando l'accresci. — TASSO.

3.

And wandering amid those awful hills, I beheld sombre and moss-bearded pine-forests, the which were of vast size and inconceivable age, . . . tossing their arms wildly to the sky, and crashing against each other, *the while there was no breath of wind stirring beneath that gloomy and evil vault.* — TRITEMIUS.

4.

This is the beautiful representative echo by which Aristophanes expresses the sound of the Grecian *phorminx*, or of some other instrument, which conjecturally has been shown most to resemble our modern European harp. — DE QUINCEY.

5.

See Racine's *Phædra*, -- 'Le flot qui l'apporta recule épouvanté.'

CORRECTION.

In line 27, page 2, and line 66, page 3, read 'aisles' for 'isles.'



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