

PHILOSOPHIES

SIR RONALD ROSS

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PHILOSOPHIES

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PREFACE

These verses were written in India between the years 1881 and 1899, mostly during my researches on malaria. Friends who have read that part of them which is called *In Exile* complained that they could not easily follow the movement of it; and as I am now publishing the poems together with a text-book on malaria—and also because I desire very strongly to rid my mind of this subject which has occupied it for twenty years—I take the opportunity to give such explanation of the work as I can find expression for.

In 1881 I joined the military medical service of India, and was called upon to serve during the next seven years in Madras, Bangalore, Burma, and the Andaman Islands. Having abundant leisure, I occupied most of it in the study of various sciences and arts, in all of which I attempted some works to the best of my ability. For this I make no excuse to my conscience, since to my mind art and science are the same, and efforts in both, however poor the result may be, are to be commended more than idleness. Near the end of the seven years, however, I began to be drawn toward certain thoughts which from the first had occurred to me in my profession, especially as to the cause of the widespread sickness and of the great misery and decadence of the people of India. Racked by poverty, swept by epidemics, housed in hovels, ruled by superstitions, they presented the spectacle of an ancient civilisation fallen for centuries into decay. One saw there both physical and mental degeneration. Since the time of the early mathematicians science had died; and since that of the great temples art had become ornament, and religion dogma. Here was the living picture of the fate which destroyed Greece, Rome, and Spain; and I saw in it the work of nescience—the opposite of science. . . . Returning to Britain in 1888, I qualified myself for pathological researches, and about 1890 or 1891 entered upon a careful study of malarial fever, in the hope of finding out accurately how it is caused and may be prevented. On August 20, 1897, I was fortunate enough to find the clue to the problem—which, I believe, would not have been discovered but for such good fortune; and the next year I ascertained the principal facts which I had been in search of.

These poems are the notes of the wayside. As for *In Exile*, I do not remember the date—but it was early in the course of the labour—when my thoughts began to shape themselves into a kind of sonnet of three short stanzas. It was a pleasure and relief after the day's work to mould them thus, for each set of stanzas required a different balance and structure within its narrow limits, and was, so to speak, inscribed on small squares of stone, to be put away and arranged thereafter. Later, when my researches had attained to success, a sudden disastrous interruption of them compelled me to set aside the verses also, and it was not until nine years afterwards that I found time to arrange them for rough printing. They were then put nearly in the order of writing, some fragments being finished but most omitted. I have blamed myself for this, because the omissions give to the whole a more sombre cast than is natural to me, or than I had intended; but now I judge I was right in it. The poem, such as it is, is not a diary in verse, but rather the figure of a work and of a philosophy. . . . I find I cannot rise with those who would soar above reason in the chase of something supernal. Infinities and absolutes are still beyond us; though we may hope to come nearer to them some day by the patient study of little things. Our first duty is the opposite of that which many prophets enjoin upon us—or so I think. We must not accept any speculations merely because they now appear pleasant, flattering, or ennobling to us. We must be content to creep upwards step by step; planting each foot on the firmest finding of the moment; using the compass and such other instruments as we have; observing without either despair or contempt the clouds and precipices above and beneath us. Especially our duty at present is to better our present foothold; to investigate; to comprehend the forces of nature; to set our state rationally in order; to stamp down disease in body, mind, and government; to lighten the monstrous misery of our fellows, not by windy dogmas, but by calm science. The sufferings of the world are due to this, that we despise those plain earthly teachers, reason, work, and discipline. Lost in many speculations, we leave our house disordered, unkept, and dirty. We indulge too much in dreams; in politics which organise not prosperity but contention; in philosophies which expressly teach irrationalism, fakirism, and nescience. The poor fakir seated begging by the roadside; with his visions—and his sores! Such is man. . . . An old philosophy this—like the opposite one. The poem gathers itself under it and attempts to use the great symbols of that wonderful Land, the drought, the doubt, the pains of self, the arid labour, the horrors of whole nations diseased, the crime of Nescience, parodying God's words, and the victory of His thunder and rain.

The dated stanzas near the end, except the first two lines of the second quatrain, were written the day after the discovery of the parasites of malaria in mosquitos. There are some repetitions, and I fear worse faults; but it is too late to mend them. I am much indebted to Mr. John Masfield and Mrs. Masfield for assisting me in the correction of the proofs.

THE AUTHOR.

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PRELUDES

INDIA

Here from my lonely watch-tower of the East
An ancient race outworn I see—
With dread, my own dear distant Country, lest
The same fate fall on thee.

Lo here the iron winter of curst caste
Has made men into things that creep;
The leprous beggars totter trembling past;
The baser sultans sleep.

Not for a thousand years has Freedom's cry
The stillness of this horror cleaved,
But as of old the hopeless millions die,
That yet have never lived.

Man has no leisure but to snatch and eat,
Who should have been a god on earth;
The lean ones cry; the fat ones curse and beat,
And wealth but weakens worth.

O Heaven, shall man rebelling never take
From Fate what she denies, his bliss?
Cannot the mind that made the engine make
A nobler life than this?

Madras, 1881.

THOUGHT

Spirit of Thought, not thine the songs that flow
To fill with love or lull Idalian hours.
Thou wert not nurtured 'mid the marish flowers,
Or where the nightshade blooms, or lilies blow:
But on the mountains. From those keeps of snow
Thou seëst the heavens, and earth, and marts and towers
Of teeming man; the battle smoke that lours
Above the nations where they strive below;—
The gleam of golden cohorts and the cloud
Of shrieking peoples yielding to the brink—
The gleam, the gold, the agony, the rage;
The civic virtue of a race unbow'd;
The reeling empire, lost in license, sink;
And chattering pigmies of a later age.

1881-2.

SCIENCE

I would rejoice in iron arms with those
Who, nobly in the scorn of recompense,
Have dared to follow Truth alone, and thence
To teach the truth—nor fear'd the rage that rose.
No high-piled monuments are theirs who chose
Her great inglorious toil—no flaming death;
To them was sweet the poetry of prose,
But wisdom gave a fragrance to their breath.
Alas! we sleep and snore beyond the night,
Tho' these great men the dreamless daylight show;
But they endure—the Sons of simple Light—
And, with no lying lanthome's antic glow,
Reveal the open way that we must go.

1881-2.

POWER

Caligula, pacing thro' his pillar'd hall,
Ere yet the last dull glimmer of his mind
Had faded in the banquet, where reclined
He spent all day in drunken festival,

Made impious pretence that Jove with him,
Unseen, walk'd, talk'd and jested; for he spoke
To nothing by his side; or frown'd; or broke
In answering smiles; or shook a playful rim

Of raiment coyly. 'Earth,' he said, 'is mine—
No vapour. Yet Caligula, brother Jove,
Will love thee if he find thee worthy love;
If not, his solid powers shall war with thine

And break them, God of Cloud.' The courtiers round,
As in the presence of two deities, bent
In servile scorn: when, like a warning sent,
An utterance of earthquake shook the ground,

Awful, but which no human meaning bore.
With glaring eyeballs narrowing in dismay,
The huddled creature fallen foaming lay,
Glass'd in the liquid marbles of the floor.

DOGMA

To a poor martyr perisht in the flame
Lo suddenly the cool and calm of Heaven,
And One who gently touch'd and tended, came.
'For thee, O Lord,' he cried, 'my life was given.'

When thus the Pitiful One: 'O suffering man,
I taught thee not to die, but how to live;
But ye have wrongly read the simple plan,
And tum to strife the Heav'nly gift I give.

I taught the faith of works, the prayer of deeds,
The sacrament of love. I gave, not awe,
But praise; no church but God's; no form, no creeds;
No priest but conscience and no lord but law.

Behold, my brother, by my side in Heaven
Judas abhor'd by men and Nero next.
How then, if such as these may be forgiven,
Shall one be damn'd who stumbles at a text?'

FROTH

This bubbling gossip here of fops and fools,
Who have no care beyond the coming chance,
Rough-rubs the angry soul to arrogance
And puts puff'd wisdom out of her own rules.
True, knowledge comes on all winds, without schools,
And every folly has her saw; perchance
Some costly gem from silliest spodomance
May be unash'd; and mind has many tools.
But still, love here rains not her heav'nly dew,
Nor friendship soothes the folly-fretted sense;
But pride and ignorance, the empty two,
Strut arm-in-arm to air their consequence,
And toil bleeds tears of gold for idle opulence.

1881-2.

LIBERTY

When Cassius fell and Brutus died,
Resentful Liberty arose,
Where from aloft the mountain snows
She watch'd the battle's breaking tide;
And as she rent her azure robe
Darkness descended o'er the globe.

'Break never, Night,' she cried, 'nor bring
Before I come again the morn
With all her heav'nly light, for scom
Of this base world so slumbering;
Where men for thrice five hundred years
Their sin shall moum, and me, in tears.'

THE THREE ANGELS

Heav'n vex'd in heaven heard the World
And all the grief thereof, and sent
The angel Strength. Swift he unfurl'd
His wings and flasht his sword and went:
But still the cry of Earth rang to the firmament.

Then gentle Love, most loved in heaven,
Heav'n sent to Earth. His large eyes shone,
Upcast with glory from God given,
And darkening downward from the Throne
He fell: nor bated yet the far terrestrial moan.

Then all the host of heav'n, amazed,
Cried, 'Next let Wisdom go and prove
Himself and conquer.' But he raised
His face and answer'd, 'Heav'n above,
Like them, alone I fail; send with me Strength and Love.'

APOLOGUES

RETURN

Muse, in my boyhood's careless days
My rev'ence for thee was not small,
Altho' I roam'd by Star and Sea
And left thee, seeking other ways—
I left thee, for I knew that all
Return by Sea and Star to thee.

Not worthy he to hear thy song,
Him thou thyself despisest most,
Who dares not leave thee and arise
To face the World's discordant throng;
Since thou'rt best gain'd by being lost,
And Earth is in thy Heav'nly eyes.

1886-7.

THE STAR AND THE SUN

In Darkness, and pacing the Thunder-Beat Shore
 By many Waves,
No sound being near to me there but the hoarse
 Cicala's cry,
While that unseen Sword, the Zodiacal Light,
 Falchion of Dawn,
Made clear all the Orient, wanning the Silvery Stars,

I heard the fine flute of the Fast-Fading Fire,
 The Moming Star,
Pipe thus to the Glimmering Glories of Night,
 And sing, O World,
If I too must leave thee then who can remain?
 But lo! from the Deep
The Thundering Sun upsprang and responded, I.

Andamans, 1886-7.

THE WORLD'S INHERITORS

God gazing down from Heaven saw the World.
Mighty, himself a heav'n, he fill'd the heavens.
His beard fell like a wasted thunder at eve,
And all his robe was woven with white stars,
 And on his breast a star.

The World was dark. Deep in a forest there,
Where not the rill that routed in the wood
Dared break the silence, nor one murmur of night
Wound to the stagnant, chill, and listening air,
 Five children slumbering lay.

One ruddy as the red grapes of the south;
One duskier, breather of more burning air;
One blue-eyed, blond, and golden-crown'd with locks;
One finely fashion'd in an even mould;
 And one hard wrought as steel.

Lord of the Woods their Sire; enormous, rough,
Hair-tangled like the north-bear: but his Mate
Queen of a myriad palaces that shone
With chalcedon and jasper, justly wrought,
 And gems of jewel'd stone.

Who when he saw her won her; loved her well;
By her abhor'd: and so he slew her then,
And gazed upon her beauty dead, and died
Himself, lamenting his wild woods. And these
 Their wondrous offspring were.

Europe, A.D. 500.

The World beheld them and adored—adored,
And fear'd, and sought to slay them; for
The battle-brood of gods is battle-born.
But they endured; nor in the thunder found
 Harm, or the bolt of death.

And God look'd down and spake, and thro' the Earth
The murmur ran, terranean like the shock
When central earthquakes jar, until the Deep
Foams tingling to the icèd poles; and said,
 To these I give the World.

Andamans, 1886-7.

DEATH-SONG OF SAVAGERY

I have heard it—I have heard the Forest
Strive to bring me comfort, and the Ocean
Roll large-tongued consolation round me.
I have heard the weakling Wildbirds crying,
And the wailing Winds proclaim me brother.
I have heard these things and yet I perish.

From the Flowers, the myriad mouths of Forest,
Honey'd words have come, and from the Billows,
Bursting, issue of sweet cheering voices.
In this Midnight and moon-glamour'd Darkness,
Winds and Wildbirds crying give me pity;
But, altho' I hear them, lo! I perish.

For a mighty Voice rolls thro' my Spirit,
Crying, As thou wert, so art, and shalt be,
Ever and for ever and for ever,
Son of Midnight and moon-glamour'd Darkness,
Rayless, lightless, and thy One Star faded,
Child of Night and Ocean, till thou perish.

Andamans, 1886-7.

Epilogue to the author's romance *The Child of Ocean*.

OCEAN AND THE DEAD

THE DEAD: 'Dost dare to rouse us from our sleep,
Eternal, given of God, O Deep?'

OCEAN: 'A thunder on your bones! In life
You waged with me your pigmy strife.'

THE DEAD: 'Living, but humble mariners we;
Dead, Ocean, what are we to thee?'

OCEAN: 'You hoped to find within your graves
Eternal refuge from my waves.'

THE DEAD: 'Living, we faced thee full of fears;
Dying, thy roar was in our ears.'

OCEAN: 'Dead, I will break your bones for ever.
Man may forgive, but Nature never.'

Andamans, 1886-7.

In 1740 the cemeteries of Dunwich were laid bare by the sea.

OCEAN AND THE ROCK

THE ROCK: 'Cease, O rude and raging Sea,
Thus to waste thy war on me.
Hast thou not enough assail'd,
All these ages, Fool, and fail'd?'

OCEAN: 'Gaunt and ghastly Skeleton,
Remnant of a time that's gone,
Tott'ring in thy last decay
Durst thou still to darken day?'

THE ROCK: 'Empty Brawler, brawl no more;
Cease to waste thy watery war
On my bastion'd Bases broad,
Sanctified by Time and God.'

OCEAN: 'Thou that beëst but to be,
Scornest thou my energy?
Not much longer lasts the strife.
I am Labour, I am Life.'

THE ROCK: 'Roar, then, roar, and vent thy Surge;
Thou not now shalt drone my dirge.
Dost imagine to dismay
This my iron breast with Spray?'

OCEAN: 'Relic of primeval Slime,
I shall whelm thee in my time.
Changeless thou dost ever die;
Changing but immortal I.'

THE BROTHERS

Beneath Socotra, and before
The mariner makes the Libyan shore,
Or him the Doubtful Cape beguiles,
Black in the Night two dreadful Isles.
By Allah chain'd to Ocean's bed,
Each shows above an awful head,
And front to front, envisaged, frown
To frown retorts—by loud renown
The Brothers. But no love between:
Tho' bound, they nurse a mutual spleen;
And, when the thundering Waves engage
In battle, vent immortal rage.

DARZÉ: 'Ho! Thro' the Midnight learn my hate.
When God releases, then thy fate.'

SAMHÉ: 'When God unbinds thy fetter'd feet,
For mercy him, not me, entreat.'

DARZÉ: 'Dost think, because thy head is high,
That thou art more divine than I?'

SAMHÉ: 'Because thy looks are earthward given
Thou hatest one who looks to Heaven.'

DARZÉ: 'Because thou gazest at the Sun
Think'st thou thou art the nobler one?'

SAMHÉ: 'For them who with the Stars converse
There is no better and no worse.'

DARZÉ: 'So! hold thy old philosophy!
Truth and the World enough for me.
For humble Truth was born on Earth,
But Lies, forsooth, have better birth!'

SAMHÉ: 'I watch the white Stars rise and fall;
I hear the vanish'd Eagles call;
For me the World is but a Sod;
I strive to see the eyes of God.'

1888.

The islands about which this legend is told are known as Jezirat Darzé and Jezirat Samhé, east of Cape Gardafui—one high and the other low.

ALASTOR

'Tis said that a noble youth of old
Was to his native village lost,
And to his home, and agèd sire;
For he had wander'd (it is told)
Where, pinnacled in eternal frost,
Apollo leads his awful Choir.

Awful, for nought of human warms
The agony of their song sublime,
Which like the breath of ice is given
Ascending in vapour from all forms,
Where gods in clear alternate chime
Reveal their mystery-thoughts to Heaven.

Nor in those regions of windless cold
Is fiery the Sun, tho' fierce in light;
But frozen-pale the numbèd Moon
Wanders along the ridges that fold
Enormous Peaks, what time the Night
Rivals with all her stars the Noon.

For there, not dimly as here, the Stars,
But globèd and azure and crimson tinct,
Climb up the windless wastes of snow,
Gold-footed, or thro' the long-drawn bars
Of mountain mist, with eyes unblink'd
And scorn, gaze down on the World below;

Or high on the topmost peak and end
Of ranges stand with sudden blaze,
Like Angels born in spontaneous birth;
Or wrap themselves in flame and descend
Between black foreheads of rock in haze,
Slowly, like grievèd gods to earth.

And there for ever the patient Wind
Rakes up the crystals of dry snow,
And mourns for ever her work undone;
And there for ever, like Titans blind,
Their countenance lifting to Heaven's glow,
The sightless Mountains yearn for the Sun.

There nightly the numbèd eagle quells
(Full-feather'd to his feet of horn)
His swooning eye, his cyrie won,
And slumbers, frozen by frosty spells
Fast to the pinnacle; but at Morn
Unfetter'd leaps toward the Sun.

.

He heard, he saw. Not to the air
Dared breathe a breath; but with his sight
Wreak'd on Immortals mortal wrong,
And dared to see them as they were—
The black Peaks blacken'd in their light,
The white Stars flashing with their song.

So fled. But when revealing Morn
Show'd him, descended, giant-grown,
Men ant-like, petty, mean and weak,
He rush'd, returning. Then in scorn
Th' Immortals smote him to a Stone
That aches for ever on the Peak.

LABOURS

SONNET

High Muse, who first, where to my opening sight,
New-born, the loftiest summits of the world,
Silent, with brows of ice and robes unfurl'd
Of motionless thunder, shone above the night,
Didst touch my infant eyes and fill with light
Of snow, and sleepless stars, and torrents hurl'd,
And fragrant pines of morning mist-emppear'd,
And music of great things and their delight:
Revisit me; resume my soul; inspire
With force and cold out of the north—not given
To sickly dwellers in these southern spots,
Where all day long the great Sun rolls his fire
Intol'rabable in the dusty march of heaven,
And the heart shrivels and the spirit rots.

Madras, 1890.

VISION

A valley of far-fallen rocks,
Like bones of mouldering mountains, spread,
And ended by the barren blocks
 Of mountains doom'd or dead:
No rivage there with green recess
Made music in that wilderness.

Despairing fell the sore-spent Sun,
And cried, 'I die,' and sank in fire;
Like conquering Death, the Night came on
 And ran from spire to spire;
And swollen-pale ascended soon,
Like Death in Life, the leprous Moon.

On windy ledges lined with light,
Between the still Stars sparsely strewn,
Two Spirits grew from out the Night
 Beneath the mistless Moon,
And held deep parley, making thought
With words sententious half distraught.

One full-robed; in his hand a book;
His lips, that labour'd for the word,
Scarce moved in utterance; and his look
 Sought, not his face who heard,
But that Sad Star that sobs away
Upon the breast of dying Day.

One, weary, with two-handed stress
Leant on his shoulder-touching spear
His beard blown o'er the hairiness
 Of his great breast; and clear
His eyes shot speculation out
To catch the truth or quell the doubt.

1. 'The dreams of Hope, of blue-eyed Hope,
Melt after morn and die in day;
Love's golden dew-globe, lit aslope,
 Dulls with a downward ray;
Canst thou with all thy thought renew
The flying dreams or drying dew?'
2. 'Not I creator. Hour by hour
I labour without stress or strife
To gain more knowledge, greater power,
 A nobler, longer life.
By thought alone we take our stand
Above the world and win command.'
1. 'Know, Knowledge doth but clip our wings,
And worldly Wisdom weaken worth,
To make us lords of little things,
 And worm-gods of the earth.
Were earth made Heaven by human wit,
Some wild star yet might shatter it.'
2. 'The wings of Fancy are but frail,
And Virtue's without Wisdom weak;
Better than Falsehood's flowery vale,
 The Truth, however bleak.
Tho' she may bless not nor redeem,
The Truth is true, and reigns supreme.'
1. 'Not all, but few, can plead and prove
And crown their brows with Truth and pass;

Their little labours cannot move
The mountain's mighty mass.
To man in vain the Truth appeals,
Or Heav'n ordains, or Art reveals.'

2. 'So self-consuming thought. But see
The standards of Advance unfurl'd;
The buds are breaking on the lea,
And Spring strikes thro' the world.
Tho' we may never reach the Peak,
God gave this great commandment, Seek.'

.

The ponderous bolts of Night were drawn;
The pale Day peer'd thro' cloudy bars;
The Wind awoke; the sword of Dawn
Flasht thro' the flying Stars;
The new-born Sun-Star smote the Gloom:
The Desert burst in endless Bloom.

Bangalore, 1890.

THOUGHT AND ACTION

The Angel of the Left Hand spake. His speech
Fell as when on some shuddering arctic beach
The icy Northern creeps from reach to reach

And curdles motion and with thrilling spell
Fixes the falling ripple. 'Peace and quell.'
He said, 'the action not maturèd well.

What scorn to build with labour, round on round,
And lay the costly marbles, when 'tis found
The whole design at last inapt, unsound!

Beware the bitter moment when awake
We view the mischief that our visions make—
The good things broken in a mad mistake.

But rather use the thought that is divine;
And know that every moment of design
Will save an hour of action, point for line.

And leave to others loss or victory;
And like the stars of heaven seek to be
The wise man's compass but beyond the sea.'

Then He upon the Right. His words came forth
Like the full Southern blowing to the north.
'The time is come,' he said, 'to try thy worth.

For when Thought's wasted candles wane and wink,
And meditations like the planets sink,
The sun of Action rushes from the brink.

Stand not for ever in the towers of Thought
To watch the watery dawning waste to nought
The distant stars deluding darkness brought.

Not timorous weak persuasion, but the brand
Of Action—not discussion, but command—
Can rouse the ranks of God and storm the land,

Where men who know the day still doze again;
Not walls of dust can dam th' outrageous main,
Nor mitigation seize the world and reign.

Fear not. Unsheathe the naked falchion. Try
The end. For in the end, who dares deny,
The utter truth shall slay the utter lie.'

Bangalore, 1890-3.

THE INDIAN MOTHER

Full fed with thoughts and knowledges sublime,
And thundering oracles of the gods, that make
Man's mind the flower of action and of time,
I was one day where beggars come to take
Doles ere they die. An Indian mother there,
Young, but so wretched that her staring eyes
Shone like the winter wolf's with ravening glare
Of hunger, struck me. For to much surprise
A three-year child well nourish'd at her breast,
Wither'd with famine, still she fed and press'd—
For she was dying. 'I am too poor,' she said,
'To feed him otherwise'; and with a kiss
Fell back and died. And the soul answeréd,
'In spite of all the gods and prophets—this!'

Bangalore, 1890-3.

GANGES-BORNE

The fingers which had stray'd
Thro' shining clusters of his children's hair
Now lifeless moved, and play'd
With horrible tresses of the ripples there;
His eyes, as if he pray'd,
Were cast beneath long eyelids, wan and spare.

Rock'd by the roaring flood,
He seem'd to speak as in debate with doom,
Uplooking, while the flood
Bore him with thunder to the ocean foam.
God's face, a luminous cloud,
Look'd thro' the midnight, black, and horrible gloom.

Bangalore, 1890-3.

INDIAN FEVERS

In this, O Nature, yield I pray to me.
I pace and pace, and think and think, and take
The fever'd hands, and note down all I see,
That some dim distant light may haply break.

.

The painful faces ask, can we not cure?
We answer, No, not yet; we seek the laws.
O God, reveal thro' all this thing obscure
The unseen, small, but million-murdering cause.

Bangalore, 1890-3.

THE STAR

Far across the Loneland, far across the Sea,
Far across the Sands, O silver shining
Sister of the Silence, Sister of the Dew,
Sister of the Twilight, lighten me.

Ever art thou beaming, I, with eyes upcast,
Gazing worn and weary from this Dark World,
Ask of thee thy Wisdom, steadfast Eye of God,
That I be as Thou art while I last.

1890-3.

PETITION

Truth, whom I hold divine,
Thy wings are strong to bear
Thro' day or desperate night;
For, ever those eyes of thine,
Fix'd upward full of prayer,
Are seeking for the light.

Guide me and bear. Descend
Into the sulphurous void—
Tho' I so weak, thy wings
Stronger than him who, pen'd
In hell unmerited, buoy'd
Poets past infernal springs.

Take me and bear. Descend
Into these deeps of death,
Wherever the light may lead,
Wherever the way may wend;
And give to my failing breath,
O Spirit, thy words of deed.

IN EXILE

I

DESERT

I

This profit yet remains
Of exile and the hour
That life in losing gains
Perhaps a fuller flower.

Not less the pruned shoot,
Not less the barren year,
Which yields the perfect fruit,
Which makes the meaning clear.

For on this desert soil
A blessing comes unsought—
Space for a single toil,
Time for a single thought.

When in distractions tost,
Since oft distractions claim
For moments never lost
Of each its higher aim,

We live, we learn the wealth
The joyous hours may bring,
But jealous time by stealth
Puts all of it to wing;

Pursuing empty arts
We gain no noble goal,
And lose, in learning parts,
The grandeur of the whole.

If Patience, pouring tears—
She cannot but lament
The long unfruitful years
Of exile, idly spent—

Have patience, she will find
They were not all in vain,
But each has left behind
A little store of gain—

A wider wisdom bought
With labour; problems solved;
The themes of inner thought
More thoroughly revolved.

So one who entertain'd
The prosperous of the earth;
No good from any gain'd,
But lost his wealth and worth;

In wrath he gather'd round
The indigent and old;
Each wretch, amazed he found,

Had left a gift of gold.

So one who sought a land
Where all the earth is ore;
But had he sifted sand
He would have gather'd more.

II

The Sun arose and took
The lofty heav'ns of right;
From out the heav'ns he shook
The pestilence of his light.

He paced upon his path
And from his right hand hurl'd
The javelins of his wrath,
Contemptuous of the world.

Before his scornful lips
The forests fell down dead,
And scowling in eclipse
Disbanding thunders fled.

He fills the hills with fire
And blasts the barren plain;
He hath stript the stricken briar,
And slain the thorn again.

He cracks the rocks, and cakes
The quagmires into crust,
And slays the snake, and makes
The dead leaf writhe in dust.

He halts in heav'n half way
And blackens earth with light;
And the dark doom of day
Lies on us like the night.

A Land of clamorous cries;
Of everlasting light;
Of noises in the skies
And noises in the night.

There is no night; the Sun
Lives thro' the night again;
The image of the Sun
Is burnt upon the brain.

O God! he still returns;
He slays us in the dust;
The brazen Death-Star burns
And stamps us into dust.

III

The air is thunder-still.
What motion is with us?
Deep shocks of thunder fill
The deep sky ruinous;

As if, down lumbering large
Upon these desert tracts,
He had fallen about the marge
In cloudy cataracts.

And spot by spot in dust
The writhing raindrops lie,
And turn like blood to rust—
Writhe, redden, shrink, and dry.

A Land where all day long,
Day-long descending dirge,
The heavy thunders hang
And moan upon the verge;

Where all day long the kite
Her querulous question cries,
And circles lost in light
About the yellow skies;

And thou, O Heart, art hush'd
In the deep dead of day,
Half restless and half crush'd,
Half soaring too away.

Day-long the querulous kite
Her querulous question cries,
And sails, a spot of night,
About the vasty skies.

The puff'd cheeks of typhoons
Blow thro' the worthless clouds
That roll in writhing moons
In skies of many moods,

None fruitful; and the clouds
Take up the dust and dance
A dance of death and shrouds—
Mock, mow, retire, advance.

IV

Where is the rain? We hear
 The footsteps of the rain,
 Walking in dust, and, near,
 Dull thunders over the plain.

Cloud?—dust. The wind awakes;
 The base dust we have trod
 Smokes up to heaven and takes
 The thunderings of God.

No rain. The angry dust
 Cries out against the rain;
 The clouds are backward thrust;
 The monstrous Sun again.

We hoped the rain would fall
 After the dreadful day,
 For we heard the thunders call
 Each other far away.

We hoped for rain because
 After thunder rain is given;
 And yet it only was
 The mockery of heaven.

He is the lord of us;
 He will unconquered sink,
 Red, but victorious,
 And smoking to the brink.

Shout, barren thunders, shout
 And rattle and melt again!
 So fall the fates about,
 So melt the hopes of men.

Rattle aloft and wake
 The sleepers on the roofs,
 Wild steeds of heav'n, and shake
 Heav'n with your echoing hoofs.

Awake the weary at night
 Until they cry, "The rain!"—
 Then take to tempestuous flight
 And melt into air again.

V

This is the land of Death;
 The sun his taper is
 Wherewith he numbereth
 The dead bones that are his.

He walks beside the deep
 And counts the mouldering bones
 In lands of tumbling steep
 And cataracts of stones.

About his feet the hosts
 Of dead leaves he hath slain
 Awaken, shrieking ghosts
 Demanding life again.

O silent Sepulchre,
 Great East, disastrous clime;
 O grave of things that were;
 O catacombs of time;

O silent catacombs;
O blear'd memorial stones;
Where laughing in the tombs
Death plays with mouldering bones;

And through dead bones the stalk
Of the living herb is thrust;
And we, the living, walk
In wastes of human dust.

Dust—thou art dust. Thy Sun,
Thy lord, and lord of dust,
Doth stamp thee into one
Great plain of dust; and dust

Thy heav'ns, thy nights, thy days;
Thy temples and thy creeds;
Thy crumbling palaces;
Thy far forgotten deeds,—

Infinite dust. Half living,
We clothe ourselves in dust
And live, not to be living,
But because we must.

Thy winds are full of death;
Death comes we know not whence;
Thy forests have a breath
Of secret pestilence;

Thy rivers rolling large
Are blest with no sweet green,
But silent at the marge
The waiting monsters seen.

No scented silence, eve,
But night a noisy gloom;
And we thy captives live,
The derelicts of doom.

II

VOX CLAMANTIS

I

Long, long the barren years;
Long, long, O God, hast thou
Appointed for our tears
This term of exile. Lo,

Life is but nothing thus:
Old friendships perishèd;
Not hand in hand with us
The dying father dead;

Narrow'd the mind that should
Thro' all experience range
And grow; in solitude
Unheard the wheels of change.

When sadly numbering
The wasted golden hours
Our fate hath put to wing,
That had perchance been ours

To have seen, to have known, to have trod
About from pole to girth
This heritage of God,
This wondrous sculptured earth,

Seeing that never again
The usurer Time gives back,
How should we not complain
This Present, barren-black?

We said, 'We must not mourn;
The end is always good;
Well past the pain well borne.'
But Sorrow in her mood

Would not be comforted,
And cried, 'I know the truth;
Where are the distant dead,
And where the wasted youth?

Let Wisdom take her ground
And Hope do what she can;
Ill heals the dreadful wound
That severs half a man.'

Sorrow, not so beguiled,
Would take my hand and lead,
But waiting Wisdom smiled
And took my hand instead,

And answered, 'Well I rede
The shackled win the goal;
The body's strengthener Need,
And Sorrow of the soul.

But mine the part be given
To guide and hers to follow,
And so win thro' to heaven.'

And Sorrow said, 'I follow.'

II

To sadness and to self
We should not enter in—
Sadness the shadow of self
And self the shadow of sin—

Unless because the whole
Of human life appears
Clear only when the soul
Is darken'd thro' with tears.

The day too full of light
With light her own light mars;
But in the shading night
The shining host of stars.

That, leaving manhood, men
Should kiss the hands of grief
And, loving but the wen,
The wart, the wither'd leaf,

Amass a hoard of husks
When joy is in the corn
Nor ever evening dusks
Without the tints of mom,

Informs with doubt if good
Be, or omnipotent;
Since in the brightest blood
This idle discontent.

Joy, jester at herself,
And happiness, of woe,
If self at peace with self
Know not, when shall he know?

So one, a prosperous man;
Nightly the people fill
His toast, and what he can
Is only what he will.

They shout; his name is wed
With thunders; torches flare;
Tost in a wretched bed
He chews a trifling care.

III

One says in scorn, 'The strife
To live well keeps us well,
And 'tis the unworthy life
That makes the prison cell.'

And one, 'An angel stood
On sands of withering heat;
The flowerless solitude
Grew green beneath his feet.'

A third, 'Many would lief
Endure thy solitude
As else. Ascribe thy grief
To poison in the blood.'

And I, 'O Soul, content
Yet in thine exile dwell,
And live up to thy bent.
Not more than well is well;

But take the sports divine,
The largesse of the earth;
Wind-drinking steeds be thine
And blowsèd chase—the mirth

Of those who wisely draw
Their lives in nature's vein
And live in the large law,
Of slaying or being slain.

'Or learn by looking round.
Lift up thine eyes. Avow
The gardener of thy ground
Doth worthier work than thou.

From his poor cot he wends
At early break of day;
His pretty charges tends
In his unskilful way.

Much wearied with his toil
He labours thro' the hours,
And pours upon the soil
Refreshment for his flowers.

'Tho' bent with aged stoop,
To him no rest is given,
But the heads of those that droop
He raises up to heaven.

Half ready for the grave,
His weakness he forgets,
More scrupulous to save
The breath of violets.

But at the evening hour
When he shall seek repose,
The voice of every flower
Will bless him as he goes.'

SELF-SORROWS

I

These stones that idly make
An idle land and lie,
Fantastic forms, or break
Down crumbling hills not high

In arid cataracts
Where meagre cattle stray
To search the meagre tracts
Of bitter grass: for aye

They move not, live not, lie
Dull eyes that watch the world,
And exiles asking why
God brought them here or hurl'd.

We would we could have torn
This winding web of fate
Which round us barely born
Hath bought us to this state

Of being cast away
Among these tombs. The river
Of life here day by day
Runs downward slower ever

Into black washes. True
Yet holds our destiny—
To live a year or two,
Look round us once and die.

If we should try to trace
In portions, line by line,
The beauty of a face
To know why thus divine,

Seeing but many curves,
We miss the inner soul
And find no part deserves
That merit of the whole.

And so to analyse
Thy mournful spirit vain,
O Exile; but our sighs
Suffice to prove the pain.

To grow from much to more
In knowledge, and to put
A power to every power,
A foot before a foot,

Toward that goal of good
That glimmers thro' the night
Above the time and mood,
A star of constant light;

At last to meet the dark,
The goal not reach'd indeed,
But full of hours and work,
Are, Exile, not thy creed.

And less to leap to catch
The spinning spokes of change;
In our brief life to snatch

All aspects and to range

Full-face with every view;
To sit with those who toil,
Great spirits, toiling too;
Still less to fan or foil

Those fires that, rushing fast
Thro' all the people's life,
Break roaring round the past
In renovating strife.

If in the energetic West
Man ever grows more large,
Like ocean without rest
Exploring at the marge,

Here lower yet he turns
For ever downward thrust—
The baleful Sun-God burns
And breaks him into dust;

Or like his native plains
Where nothing new appears,
Or hath appeared, remains
Unchanged a thousand years.

II

Tho' sorrows darkly veiled
At all men's tables (nor
The guests make question, paled,
Nor children hush before

Those presences of grief)
Sit, yet to all men due
Due rights; the sweet relief
Of home; the friendship true;

The dying word; to feel
Their country in their keep;
To heave along the wheel,
And push against the steep.

But in this wildemess,
Wed to a rock or two,
What joys have we to bless?
Far, far, our friends and few;

And thou, O happy Land,
We dream of thee in vain—
One moment see, then stand
Within this waste again.

The great earth in her zones
Matureth day by day;
But we, like waiting stones,
Know time but by decay.

Grief hath a shadow, shame;
And manhood, meanly tost
In woes without a name
And sorrows that are lost,

Look'd at, when in the streets
True sorrow, seal'd with sores
And wrap'd in rags, entreats
A charity from ours,

Manhood can best control;
But this dark exile hath
Worse wounds, and of the soul—
A misery and a wrath.

EXILE

I

Happy the man who ploughs
All day his native croft;
He looks to heaven and knows,
Smiling, the lark aloft.

Happy the man whose toil
Leads on laborious hills;
The rock beneath the soil
The measure of his ills.

Happiest, who can go forth
Thro' every age and clime,
His home the whole of earth,
His heritage all time.

In vasty Wilds and with
No crimson petals pranct
The shallow briars breathe
And bloom and die unthankt.

And we the useless Briar,
And round us Desert spread
The red Sun rolls his fire
And smites the Desert dead;

Death, Silence, and the Star
With scornful nostrils curl'd;
And half-forgotten, far,
The movements of the world.

II

One hour released I rusht
About the world again;
The living thousands crusht;
The streets were full of rain;

I felt the north wind sting
And glory'd in the sleet;
I heard my footsteps ring
Along the frosty street;

And saw—less seen than felt—
Swift-flashing Italy,
And that bright city built
Upon the mirroring Sea.

III

My country, my England, home,
Are thy flowers bright, thy bells
Ringing the spring welcome,
The winter long farewells?

Are thy fields fair—each flower
Fill'd with the heav'nly dew,
My country, at this hour
When I am thinking of you?

Art thou so far, so fair?
Across what leagues of foam,
My country? Art thou still there,
My England, my country, my home?

IV

This hateful desert land
Is pent by a great sea
That booms upon the strand
For ever. Salt the sea

And salt the shore; the thorn
And cactus stand and gaze
Upon these waves; new-born
The young grass ends her days;

Straightly the beach is lined.
I wander to the shore.
The sunset dies behind,
The full moon springs before.

Of these great Deeps that link
The land I love with this,
I wander to the brink,
I watch the waters kiss

This lonely shore. O Waves,
O Winds and Waters, where
My country? Sing, O Waves,
And tell me of it here.

O Night? O Moon that comest,
A sad face fronting mine?
O dusking Deep that boonest,
What tidings of it thine?

V

O Homeland, at this hour
What joys are thine? This moon
What lovers in what bower
Sees? and what jocund tune

From smoky villages
Is heard? What homely light
Shines welcome through the trees?
What watch-dog barks delight?

What lingering linnet flings
Her good-night in the air?
What honeysuckle rings
Her chime of fragrance there?

One moment, and I see
The cot, the lane, the light,
The moon behind the tree,
The evening turn to night;

One moment know the scent
Of smoke of fragrant fires,
And hear the cattle pent
Within the wattled byres.

One moment—and I wake;
The vision fades and falls;
These lifeless deserts make
Me adamantine walls.

III

SOUL-SCORN

No cloak of cloudy wrack
The mistless mystery mars,
But all the desert is black
Beneath the quivering stars.

I hear the pinions creak
Of night-birds, beating by;
And lost hyaenas shriek
Unto the spectral sky.

The Stars, immortal Sons
Of God, are full of fire;
But we, rejected ones,
Know heav'n but in desire.

My Soul said, 'Art thou dead?
The chasm of night is riv'n;
What dost thou see?' I said,
'The full-fired fires of heav'n.'

'Look not but see,' he said.
I said, 'I know not whether
They are the hosts of God
Clashing their spears together.

So bright the stars appear
Their splendour smokes in heav'n;
I think indeed I hear
Their distant voices ev'n.'

He said, 'See not but know.'
I said, 'I cannot see;
I think perhaps they go
To some great victory.'

He said, 'For ever they go,
Still onward, on and on;
And that is why they know
The victory's clarion.'

I said, 'I am too weak
To do more than I must.'
He said, 'Then cease to seek
And perish in the dust.'

RESOLVE

Bound in misfortune's bands,
Blindfold and brought to nought,
I would reach out my hands
And touch eternal thought.

I cannot choose but try
Behind these prison bars
To measure earth and sky
And know the whole of stars;

And what I rede I write,
Vain visions as they rise,
Vain visions of the night,
Unworthy others' eyes.

I said, 'Tho' dungeon'd here
In these deep dens of night,
My soul shall persevere
To seek supernal light;

Untainted Truth to know
From that fair face of Lies
Whose heav'nly features glow
Like Truth's, save in the eyes;

Till, after all these years,
The wisdom come unsought
To see the stars as spheres
And sound the bounds of thought.'

DESERT-THOUGHTS

I hold with them who see
Nor only idly stand
The deed of thought to be
Worth many deeds of hand.

Ever as we journey sink
The old behind the new,
And Heav'n commands we think
As justly as we do.

One golden virtue more
Than virtue we must prize,
One iron duty more
Than duty, to be wise.

Who to himself hath said,
'This chamber must be closed;
This tract of truth I dread,
This darkness God-imposed

May not be lifted,' keeps
An ever-open door
Thro' which deception creeps,
Confounding more and more,

Until to wild extremes
Of falsehood driv'n he dies,
Intoxicate with dreams
And drunk with a thousand lies.

And more if he have taken
A secret lie for friend,
He shall be found forsaken,
And terrible his end.

So one doth travelling ride;
A dreadful forest fears;
Rejoiced at length a guide
He meeteth unawares.

With thunder overthrown
Day dies in solitude;
The guide, a monster grown,
Devours him in the wood.

Idle and base the cry
'If it be so, so be it;
But if it be so, then I
Will look not lest I see it.'

Or this, 'If it be so
We lose this thing or that;
'Twere better not to know.'
The lightning spareth not

The timorous soul who hides
His head in danger thus:
The iron fact abides;
Things were not made for us.

Who answers, who repines?
Not he who works in love,
But he who thinks divines
The thing he cannot prove.

He takes his stand and rolls
The phrase he hopes for Heav'n,
But cheats the hungry souls
And gives them bread of leav'n.

His ears are filled with wax,
His bandaged eyeballs blind,
And yet no doubts perplex,
And he can see the wind.

Though all in science good,
By incessant question found,
Beyond it strayed we brood
And argue round and round;

And where we hoped the end,
Such distance we have come,
Amazed we only find
The point we started from;

And fancies, like the breath
We utter, do but prove
A cloud above, beneath,
To fog us as we move.

We climb from cloud to cloud
The airy precipice;
Fain would we reach to God;
We fall thro' the abyss.

The vapours will not bear.
Wild-clutching we are hurl'd
Thro' measurements of air
Again upon the world.

Clear rings the answer high,
'The mystery makes itself;
The mystery is a lie;
Be cleansed and know thyself.'

If with unshaken will,
Resolving not to stray
But to be rising still,
We clamber day by day

From truth to truth, at last,
In valleys of the night
Not lost, we know the vast
And simple upper light,

Only one labouring knows.
The base, tumultuous wreck
Of rock and forest shows;
The summit, a single peak.

So sought, so seen, so found.
And what the end so high?
A summit splendour crown'd
Between the earth and sky,

Where with sidereal blaze
The mistless planets glow,
And stars unsully'd gaze
On unpolluted snow.

No strife the vast reveals
But perfect peace indeed—
The thunder of spinning wheels
At rest in eternal speed.

THE GAINS OF TIME

Loll'd in the lap of home;
Full-fed with fruits of time
Ripen'd on labour'd loam
By others, since the prime;

Ingrate, we give no thought
To all these golden things
The toiling past hath brought,
The toiling present brings.

But on this silent shore
And waste barbarian,
We hear the engines roar
And mind the might of man.

So one in savage lands:
He enters all alone;
No weapon in his hands.
The secret spears unthrown,

The creepers lose their guile,
Seeing his face, distrest
They know not why. A smile,
A sign or two, a jest,

And all on bended knees
Withhold the savage stroke.
With beating heart he sees
The lessening steamer-smoke.

He draws a power to be
From powers sacrificed;
And in his eyes we see
The teaching of the Christ,

And all the great beside,
The oracles of time
From Delphic clefts have cried
Or crasht in thundering rhyme.

A book his finger parts;
He moves thro' adverse cries;
Master of many arts
And careless of the skies.

What are thy mighty deeds,
O Past, thy gains, O Time?
A dust of ruin'd creeds,
A scroll or two of rhyme?

A temple earthquake-dasht?
A false record of things?
A picture lightning-flasht
Of cruel eyes of kings?

No, these: a wiser rule;
A science of ampler span;
A heart more pitiful;
More mind; a nobler man.

INVOCATION

I

Thee most we honour, thee,
Great Science. Hold thy way.
The end thou canst not see,
But in the end the day.

Seek without seeking ends,
And shatter without ruth;
On thee our fate depends;
Be faithful, keep the truth.

We think it false to dream
Beyond the likely fact;
We grant thee, Truth, supreme,
Whatever thou exact.

I pray thee, Truth, control
My destiny distraught,
And move my sightless soul
In thy high ways of thought.

Hold thou my hand. I go
Wherever thou wilt guide,
Tho' bleak the bitter snow
And black the mountain side.

Or if thou bid'st descend,
I fear not for myself,
Tho' raging thunders rend
And lightnings lash, the gulf.

My deeds I will endow,
My spirit render clean,
O Truth, with thee; and thou
Wilt make the desert green;

And haply show withal
The wells that will not sink,
Sweet pastures for the soul,
And in the desert drink.

Confounded by these briars,
Thy stars will compass me
And be the beacon fires
To light mine eyes to thee.

II

But in my state infirm
That Spirit comes and cries
To me in wrath, 'O worm,
They see not who have eyes,

How thou that hast not? Know,
My children drink the sun,
Taking them wings to go
Where others walk or run:

Yet scarcely one life-taught
Can ever rightly heed
The issue of a thought
Or do a fruitful deed.'

DESPAIRS

I

I call no curse on fate,
I call no curse on thee,
O barren bitter state
Of exile, such to me.

I would but only this:
I wish that I could go
And see the thing that is,
And, seeing, better know;

And take things in my hand
And find if false or fit;
But in this far-off land
What hope is there of it?

There is no hope of it;
I see but sad despair,
Unless it may be writ
God cureth care by care.

So one in prison thrust;
He ages span by span,
But in the prison dust
Becomes a better man.

So one is blind from birth;
All day he sitteth still;
He cannot see the earth,
But heaven when he will.

II

I thought that I might rise
And, looking to the stars,
Lift up my blinded eyes
And bless God unawares,

In words whose merit this—
 Poor buds of blighting air—
To know no loveliness
 But breathe the scent of prayer;

Since Heaven hath decreed
 Who suffers lives with God,
And he who writes indeed
 Must write in his own blood

I thought, tho' fetter'd fast,
 I yet might move my hands
To cast or to recast
 Some labour—sift the sands

For knowledge—search the vast
 Some hidden hope to find—
Perhaps to help at last
 The cause of humankind.

O hope abandon'd! Not
 In me the worth or wit.
God gave this lowly lot
 Because I merit it.

In humble ways I move
 Myself to little things;
The heated hands I prove,
 I watch the light that springs

Or fades in fever'd eyes;
 My only solace here,
Not to be rich or wise
 But to have done with fear.

God sees the silent space
 Where footstep never trod;
And in the lonely place
 The listener is God.

IV

INDURATION

Deep, deep in league with Fate,
Fate fast in league with Sorrow,
And Sorrow with my state,
I would that I could borrow,

O Deep, a depth from thee,
O Fate, thy fixèd calm,
O Sorrow, what to me
Thou givest not, thy balm;

That I might worthier show
A scorn of your controls,
And let Misfortune know
Iron chains make iron souls.

If chain'd we could but take
Contagion from the steel,
And wisdom's mantle shake
Around us head to heel,

And chill the eyes and rest
No longer violent,
The steel, still more imprest,
Would banish discontent.

The strongest chains are burst
When we have done with care;
A joy lives in the worst,
A gladness in despair.

So when great clouds all night
Hold high debate of thunder
In awful tones that fright
The huddled cities under;

And roar their rage and move
About the breadths of space,
And sudden flashes prove
The madness in their face;

At length, when break of day
Shows heav'nly peace newborn,
They muttering melt away
Before the might of morn.

WISDOM'S COUNSEL

I

But Wisdom wearying said,
 'I know a nobler way,
Let Fate with Sorrow wed
 And give the Deep his day;

But turn thine eyes and see
 With some more love sincere
The prisoners that with thee
 Are also dungeon'd here—

The pale flower in the chink,
 The spider at the grate,
The bird that comes to drink
 His tollage from thy plate.'

Grief, sitting sad'ning still
 With cold eyes inward cast,
Looks round the empty will
 And dreary chambers vast

Of thought. She cannot sit;
 She loathes her selfish tears;
She looks once more without,
 And lo! worse grief appears.

Her tears bechidden freeze;
 She watches the world's need,
And deeper sorrow sees,
 And that that weeps indeed.

There is no misery
 Attired in mourning wear,
Worse misery may not see,
 And that that goeth bare.

We have no heavy cross
 To some one's is not small;
We weep no heavy loss
 But some one weeps his all;

And not the grief unseen,
 And not the aching mind,
Cries like the sorrow seen
 And shivering in the wind.

II

Half stun'd I look around
 And see a land of death—
Dead bones that walk the ground
 And dead bones underneath;

A race of wretches caught
 Between the palms of Need
And rub'd to utter naught,
 The chaff of human seed;

And all like stricken leaves,
 Despondent multitudes
The wind of winter drives
 About the broken woods.

The toiler tills the field,
 But at his bosom coil'd
The blood-leach makes him yield
 The pence for which he toil'd,

And grows and drops off fat
 From these poor breathless ones,
Who know not this or that
 But work themselves to bones;

And this one fever'd flags,
 And that one hopeless tries,
Or uncomplaining drags
 A giant leg, and dies.

IMPATIENCE

Vain drug! If I am sick
Can others' sickness heal?
Or dead, death make me quick?
I care not what they feel.

What reck I? Let me go.
Is not my bosom full?
The sorrow that I know
Makes others' sorrow dull.

I will shut up the soul,
For only joy is just.
Stones with the river roll,
And we ev'n as we must.

Why should I think of thee,
O Wisdom, and thy lies?
Better laugh and foolish be
Than laugh not and be wise.

The wild-birds heed thee not;
Of thee no torrents roar;
The deep seas know no jot
Of all thy little lore;

But man who cannot 'scape
To follow thee and trust,
Thou takest by the nape
And grindest in the dust.

WORLD-SORROWS

I

Lo! here accursèd caste
Hath made men things that creep;
The beggars totter past,
The baser sultans sleep;

The limping lepers crawl,
The tricking traders cheat;
The lean ones cry and fall,
The fat ones curse and beat;

Never hath freedom's cry
The stifling stillness cleaved;
The hopeless millions die
That yet have never lived.

No noble god of earth,
Man can but snatch and eat;
Starvation murders worth,
Wealth makes the beast complete.

What horror here! Is this
Thy revelation, Truth?
I shake at the abyss.
What hunger, rage, and ruth,

How hopeless! Heaven, we men
Are not the gods we think!—
Base pismires of the fen
That fight and bite and sink.

II

O myriad-childed Mother,
Sitting among their graves
Who thee and one another
Have made for ever slaves,

Great East; O aged Mother,
Too old for Fear and Hope—
Fear that is Pleasure's brother,
And Sorrow's sister, Hope—

As erst in ages gone,
So now, thou art half dead,
Thy countenance turned to stone
By an eternal dread.

With lips that dare not move
And awful lids apart,
While yet faint pulses prove
The life about thy heart,

Thou sitt'st at dreadful gaze
Into the dreadful Vast:
For thou canst well appraise
The future by the past,

Where thou beholdest Death
Confound and desolate,
And men like ants beneath
The giant feet of Fate.

III

Are these thy mighty deeds,
O Past, thy gains, O Time?
This wrack of ruin'd creeds,
This scroll or two of rhyme?—

A temple earthquake-dasht;
A false record of things;
A picture, lightning-flasht,
Of cruel eyes of kings;

A mangled race that bleeds
In cruel custom's claws,
Besotted by their creeds,
And murder'd by their laws?

Right easily understood
Fate's lesson is, tho' slow;
She takes a nation's blood
To jot a word or two.

And for sufficient space
To write a line of hers,
She wipes away a race
And dashes down the verse,

And cries, 'So much to each,
And man may mark or not;
But what I choose to teach
Shall never be forgot.'

PHILOSOPHIES

I

If it be not to be,
Or being be in vain,
That high philosophy
Shall ever counsel men

To mend this mindless state
In which, as in the East,
We drift on floods of fate,
As helpless as the beast,

Then here the issue is—
Look on this land and weep—
A race as ruin'd as this,
A misery as deep.

II

Seeing how pent we are
Within our human ways,
That save in ceaseless war
We cannot spend our days,

In struggle each with each
To get a breathing space,
While Heaven, out of reach,
Looks on with scornful face;

I wonder, for man's sake,
Cannot that mind of his
Which made the engine make
A better state than this?

Here sitting in my place
There comes to me unsought
The beautiful sad face
Of this undying thought.

And with it as in scorn
The present state descried
Of monsters heaven-born
And angels crucify'd,

Where, scourged to unnatural toil,
In palsy'd posture bent,
Man creeping near the soil
Forgets the firmament.

III

Since, since we first began
To measure near and far,
And know that the thoughts of man
His chiefest actions are,

A thousand cries in sooth
Call us thro' time amain,
And every cry a truth
And every truth a gain,

And yet the needful task,
To mend this state withal,
Remains undone; we ask,
What is the good of all?

Do, cries the lofty seer;
Believe, the prelate cries;
Be, beauty's priest austere
Persuades. The man replies,

'We have three beds at home
Where eight of us must lie;
Three blankets and one room,
My children, wife and I.

All day our work we mind;
But little money gain;
At night the wintry wind
Whines thro' the window-pane.'

So one doth read at ease
With comfortable wine
Devout philosophies
That say, for him, divine,

To be, to bear, to act,
To know oneself, be strong,
Are all the heav'ns exact.
He answers, 'I am strong;

I fear not any fate;
I do; I nobly bear.'
A beggar at his gate
Cries in the bitter air.

LIES

I

Come, lie to us, let us glow;
Pour out the red wine; speak;
Pour out the sweet lies—so
We shall be warm and sleek.

Tell us in manner high
The flattering things that soothe;
But hush the outer cry
And crush the inner truth.

What matters all the din
Of truth—discordant cries?
We quaff the joyous wine
And lap ourselves in lies.

The lordly anthem peals
The while the people rot;
The gilded church reveals
The penury of their lot.

No matter—let them starve!
The gorgeous mass atones;
These glorious arches serve
To sepulchre their bones.

Come, hymn the dying wretch
With pæans on the harps;
Nard and vermilion fetch
To paint and scent the corpse.

II

Into the hand of man,
When by the gods first form'd,
They gave this talisman,
The dull stone Reason, am'd

With which to brave the skies
And make the earth his throne.
But to his infant eyes
A brighter treasure shone—

The tinsel Fancy, flame
Illusive; and alas,
He flung away the gem
And took the glittering glass.

III

Vain, vain the visions—vain,
Dreams that intoxicate
In the dark day when men
Come face to face with fate.

Not out of knowledge grown
The empty dogmas rise,
But gilded bubbles blown
From the foul froth of lies.

Cease! Let the lies be hurl'd
Back to the darkling past.
Truth, only, saves the world,
And Science rules the vast.

TRUTH-SERVICE AND SELF-SERVICE

I

Alas! we know not what
 Withholds us from the goal
For ever; an inner rot
 Consumes the seeing soul.

Only the truth will serve;
 But he who follows it,
And finds, has not the nerve
 To rule the world with it.

The cunning keep the crown;
 And fate decrees that he
Who lives with truth alone
 Shall win no victory.

II

Not to be granted great,
 Not to be crowned in youth,
His soul is passionate
 With anger for the truth.

He feels the spirit-drouth,
 He seeks the mad emprise
To mock the mocking mouth
 And smite the lips of lies.

Not his the happy guile
 To veil the flinching eye,
Here where we sit and smile
 To hear each other lie.

But ours to live, forsooth;
 We keep a decent face
And seize the skirts of truth
 And skip into a place;

With bearded wisdom thence
Our noble plan unfold
For gathering good—pretence
Indeed for gathering gold.

But he—he cannot rise;
He slowly falls apart;
For all these human lies
Are needles in his heart.

He has the truth, he thinks;
He shivers in his rags;
The laughing liar chinks
His bursting money-bags

Of lie-begotten pelf,
And climbs the ladder of lies
To fortune—for himself,
And not for wisdom, wise.

We crown the charlatan;
But show to him who shapes
A priceless work for man
The gratitude of apes.

So one with toil hath writ
The work which is his life.
Being poor, he has no wit;
His reader is his wife;

They live in direst need;
No fortunate patron shows
The work for men to read;
He dies, and no one knows.

A jealous rival burns
The work he will not save;
The buried poet turns
And mutters in his grave.

III

Old Ape, old Earth, we smile,
Thou ancient Land of Lies,
At all thy simple guile,
Thy wisdom that's not wise.

Scum of the populace,
The chatterer, cheat, and fool,
Thou puttest in high place
To scourge thee and to rule;

But him who thee hath given
The good food of the land
Or water out of heaven
Thou bitest in the hand.

WRATHS

My soul is full of fire,
Wrath and tempestuous dirge;
I feel but one desire,
To find a sword and scourge:

Since man, by right of birth
And nature's gift at least
A god upon the earth,
Remaineth but a beast,

Ill-ruling, blind and halt,
And not by powers' unknown,
Or far-off Heaven's, fault,
But chiefly by his own.

Lies!—let us drink them up,
The sweet and bitter lies!
Man takes the maddening cup
And drinks and dreams and dies.

Pure as revealing mom
The angel Truth stands there;
But we, oh basely born!
Dare not to look at her.

Not by eternal laws
Condemn'd to eternal rath,
We suffer; but because
We dare not face the truth.

We wreath and sanctify us
To the inferior gods;
For things which vilify us
We lash ourselves with rods.

We rip our veins and bleed
Before the gods of mire;
For Moloch, without need,
Consume our babes in fire;

But the greatest God of all
In eternal silence reigns;
To His high audience-hall
No human soul attains.

VISION OF NESCIENCE

I

A vision of the night.
I started in my bed.
A finger in the night
Was placed upon my head.

A ray of corruption, blue
As in encharm'd air
On corpses comes. I knew
A Death, a Woman there.

Delirious, knee to knee,
They drank of love like wine,
He skeleton thin, and she
Most beautiful, most divine.

He with his eyes half warm'd
Out of their wan eclipse
With lipless kisses storm'd
Upon her living lips,

And like a vulture quaff'd,
And raised his hideous head
With joy aloft, and laugh'd
Like vultures sipping blood.

The purple, fold by fold,
Fell from her, and, unseen,
The diadem of gold
By which I knew her queen.

Nor he unknown: for at
His feet the fiery brand
And freezing fetters that
Endow him with command.

And on his head a crown
Of thirsty thorns of flame
That flicker'd up and down
In words that went and came

Like God's, 'I am of God';
And said, 'Duty to me
Is duty unto God';
And said, 'Come unto me,

And I will give you rest.'
Then as I wonder'd, lo!
I saw the Woman waste
To nothing; and he, as tho'

Blood nourisht by her blood,
Grow grosser in the gloom
And leprous like the toad
That battens in the tomb.

And both corrupted pined.
And lo! a voice that wept,
And then a faint far wind
Of laughter; and I slept.

II

Methought the heav'ns were crusht;
A myriad angels stood;
A wind of thunder rusht
Before the feet of God.

He spake: 'Accurséd men,
I find your earth a hell;
Show me what ye have done;
I bade ye order well.'

They said, 'Well we have pray'd,
Lord, and for Heaven's hope
A thousand temples made.'
And His lightning lickt them up.

THE DEEPS

I

Spirit, tho' without a name,
 Great, the left hand of God;
 Who coolest the quick flame
 And bendest back the rod

His awful right hand bears,
 Till the dull worm of earth
 No worse in darkness fares
 Than things of brighter birth,

Nor in the lapse of hell
 All everlasting gloom,
 Help us to suffer well
 These dark days of our doom.

Swift Smiter of extremes,
 Who only lettest us live;
 Who feedest with bright dreams
 At midnight, and dost give

Even to the poorest wretch
 Of this distressful land
 A draught, a rag, a stretch
 Of soil, a loving hand,

Ours too the guardian Thou;
 And if no other good
 Thou wilt bestow, endow
 At least with fortitude.

II

Long, long the barren years.
A deeper darkness grows;
The road-side tree appears
No more; the shadows close.

Lost, I sit down with night
And weave night-horrors here—
Sad voices heard in flight,
And warnings in the air,

And convocations of thunder
Above tumultuous woods,
And white stars weeping under
Black threatening of clouds.

Loss

I

Death too hath come with Sorrow.
Sorrow enough to-day
Brings Death with her to-morrow,
Unwelcome guest, to stay

With us. If I be sick
I know not, care not, and
The night is very thick;
My tract of toil is sand.

Hated the daily toil;
Hated the toil I loved;
Daily the worthless soil
Sinks back as it is moved.

II

I seized the hands of Grief;
I would not thus be thrown;
But Death came like a thief
Behind and seized my own

I held debate with Pain,
And half persuaded her;
Then came the utterance plain
Of Death, the Answerer.

'Cryest thou so before
Thou sufferest?' he said;
'Wait yet a little more
And thou shalt cry indeed.'

Sorrow so darkly veiled
Will take my hand and lead.
O Wisdom, thou hast failed,
And Sorrow, she must lead;

And Death with her. He goes
Before and readeth plain
The painful list of those
Dear ones whom he hath slain.

They fail, they fall, they sink,
Tom from the treacherous sands;
The deeps of death they drink
And reach out madden'd hands.

A mist across the deep
Of future and of past,
The rock whereon we creep,
The present we hold fast,

Visible alone. Around,
The rolling wreathes of fog;
The unseen surges sound;
Dead eyes are in the fog.

We have no airy scope;
We are not things that fly;
We are but things that grope
From hand to hand and die.

Not many friends, O God,
Ours, and so far, so dear.
So far that less manhood,
Losing, can nobly bear

The loss, as, having, more
Must love. What bitter loss
To us so distant. For
No dying word to us;

No hand in ours; not even
To see the well-known spot,
The room, the chair is given;
To visit the sacred plot.

* * *

III

O Lily that to the lips
Pal'st at the name of death,
And with 'rest in eclipse,
And yieldest a sickly breath:

And Rose that sheddest thy leaves
And tremblest as they fall,—
Know ye what power bereaves
And takes the sum of all?

Now slowly perishing
Down to the leafless core,
Ye die; no lovely thing;
A heart, and nothing more.

IV

If we could think that death
As surely as we dream,
To us who dwell beneath
The summit of supreme

Prospective—Love and Peace—
Will open Heav'nly sweets;
It would be wise to cease,
If ceasing thus completes;

Unless the further faith,
Malefiant power pursue
In death those who in death
Have hoped to struggle thro'.

V

The tropic night is husht
With hateful noises—hark!
The fluttering night-moth crusht
By reptiles in the dark

About the bed; the sound
Of tiny shrieks of pain;
Of midnight murders round;
Of creatures serpent-slain.

A moan of thunder fills
The stagnant air; and soon
A black cloud from the hills
Devours the helpless moon.

Those faces stamp in air
When all the hateful night
We toss, and cannot bear
The heated bed, and night

Is full of silent sounds
That walk about the bed
(The whining night-fly wounds
The ear; the air is dead;

The darkness madness; heat
A hell; appear and gaze;
Are silent; at the feet
Stand gazing; going gaze.

VI

DEATH

I

The Sun said, 'I have trod
The hateful Darkness dead,
And the hand of approving God
Is placed upon my head.'

And cried, 'Where art thou, Night?
Come forth, thou Worm; appear,
That I may slay thee quite.'
And the Night answered, 'Here.'

And the Sun said, 'My might
Is next to His, Most High;
Canst thou destroy me, Night?'
And the Night answered, 'Aye.'

II

This moonèd Desert round,
Those deeps before me spread,
I sought for Hope, and found
Him beautiful, but dead.

In this resounding Waste
I sought for Hope, and cried,
'Where art thou, Hope?'—Aghast,
I found that he had died.

I cried for Hope. The Briers
Pointed the way he'd gone;
Cold were the Heav'nly Fires,
Colder the numb-lipped Moon.

'Where art thou, Hope?'—'I go,
Returning,' he had said;
I found him white as snow
And beautiful, but dead.

He would return, he said.
When that I heeded not,
Lo, he had fallen dead.
Dead; Hope is dead; is not.

I tear my hands with briars,
My face in earth I thrust;
I curse the heav'nly fires,
I drink the desert dust.

A threat of thunder fills
Us. Lo, a voice! The waves
A breathless horror stills;
The sand, a sea of graves.

Methought the mocking Moon
Open'd her yellow lips
And spake. The Planets swoon
In vapoury eclipse.

'Fool, all the world is dust;
Even I who shine on thee.
There perish and add thy dust
To that sepulchral sea.'

III

In exile here I trod
And with presumptuous breath
Call'd out aloud for God:
The Answer came from Death.

O World, thy quest is cold;
O World, who answereth?
Distracted thou hast call'd;
The Answer came from Death.

I call'd for God and heard
No voice but that of Death:
Then came the bitter word,
'Fool, God himself is Death.

Great Death; not little death
That nips the flowers unfurl'd
And stays the infant's breath;
But Death that slays the world.

And in despair I ran,
And stumbled at the marge,
And saw from span to span
Death's ocean rolling large;

And only the breadth accused
Of billows barring hope,
That thunder'd, 'Death,' and burst
In tears upon the slope.

Nor in the Heavens hope.
The Sun drew in and shrank
His flashes from the cope,
And answer'd, 'Death,' and sank.

I sought the sacred Night
And solace of the Stars,
For surely in their light
No shade of Death appears.

Like tears their Answer came,
Dropt one by one from heaven;
Their Answer was the same;
No other word was given.

IV

But then the Silence said,
'Resolve thy visioning mind:
Is action for the dead
Or seeing in the blind?

Cry not with fruitless breath.
Is it not understood,
If God had utter'd Death
Then also Death is good?

Abandon Wrath and Ruth.
Touch not the High, nor ask.
For God alone the Truth.
Perform thy daily task.'

VII

THE MONSOON

I

What ails the solitude?
Is this the Judgment Day?
The sky is red as blood;
The very rocks decay

And crack and crumble, and
There is a flame of wind
Wherewith the burning sand
Is ever mass'd and thin'd.

Even the sickly Sun
Is dimmèd by the dearth,
And screaming dead leaves run
About the desolate earth.

Die then; we are accurst!
And strike, consuming God!
The very tigers thirst
Too much to drink of blood;

The eagle soareth not;
The viper bites herself;
The vulture hath forgot
To rend the dying wolf.

The world is white with heat;
The world is rent and riv'n;
The world and heavens meet;
The lost stars cry in heav'n.

* * *

II

Art thou an Angel—speak,
Stupendous Cloud that comest?
What wrath on whom to wreak?
Redeemest thou, or doonest?

Thine eyes are of the dead;
A flame within thy breast
Thy giant wings outspread,
Like Death's, upon the west

Thy lifted locks of hair
Are flames of fluttering fire;
Thy countenance, of Despair
Made mad with inner ire.

III

Who cries! The night is black
As death and not as night;
The world is fallen back
To nothing; sound and light

And moon and stars and skies,
Thunder and lightning—all
Gone, gone! Not even cries
The cricket in the hall,

The dog without. At last
The end of all the hours.
Was that a Spirit pass'd
Between the slamming doors?

We slept not yet we wake!
Was it a voice that cried,
'Awake, ye sleepless; wake,
Ye deathless who have died'?

No voice. No light, no sound.
It was the fancy that
At midnight makes rebound
Of thoughts we labour at

At mid-day. Let us sleep.
The night is very black,
The heat a madness—sleep
Before the day comes back.

Who cries!—The voice again!
It is the storm that breaks!
The tempest and the rain!
The quivering crash that shakes!

The thunder and the flash,
The brand that rips and roars,
The winds of God that dash
And split a thousand doors!

The chariots of God
That gallop on the plain
And shake the solid sod!
Awake!—The rain, the rain!

Thunder and burst, O Sky;
Thunder and boil, O Deep;
Let the thick thunder cry;
Let the live lightning leap!

Smite white light like the sword
Of Heav'n from heav'n's height;
Consume the thing abhor'd
And quell the dreadful night!

Smite white light like the brand
Of God from heav'n to earth;
And purge the desolate land
Of this destroying dearth!

IV

O Wildemess of Death,
O Desert rent and riv'n,
Where art thou?—for the breath
Of heav'n hath made thee Heav'n.

I know not now these ways;
The rocky rifts are gone,
Deep-verdured like the braes
Of blest Avilion.

Here where there were no flowers
The heav'nly waters flow,
And thro' a thousand bowers
Innum'able blossoms blow.

* * *

REPLY

I

This day relenting God
Hath placed within my hand
A wondrous thing; and God
Be praised. At His command,

Seeking His secret deeds
With tears and toiling breath,
I find thy cunning seeds,
O million-murdering Death.

I know this little thing
A myriad men will save.
O Death, where is thy sting?
Thy victory, O Grave?

August 21, 1897.

II

Before Thy feet I fall,
Lord, who made high my fate;
For in the mighty small
Thou showedst the mighty great.

Henceforth I will resound
But praises unto Thee;
Tho' I was beat and bound,
Thou gavest me victory.

Tho' in these depths of night
Deep-dungeon'd I was hurl'd,
Thou sentest me a light
Wherewith to mend the world.

O Exile, while thine eyes
Were weary with the night
Thou weepedst; now arise
And bless the Lord of Light.

Hereafter let thy lyre
Be bondsman to His name;
His thunder and His fire
Will fill thy lips with flame.

He is the Lord of Light;
He is the Thing That Is;
He sends the seeing sight;
And the right mind is His.

III

The caged bird awake
All night laments his doom,
And hears the dim dawn break
About the darken'd room;

But in the day he sips,
Contented in his place,
His food from human lips,
And learns the human face.

So tho' his home remain
Dark, and his fields untrod,
The exile has this gain,
To have found the face of God.

Confounded at the close,
Confounded standing where
No further pathway shows,
We find an angel there

To guide us. God is good;
The seeing sight is dim;
He gives us solitude
That we may be with Him.

By that we have we lose;
By what we have not, get;
And where we cannot choose
The crown of life is set.

Lo, while we ask the stars
To learn the will of God,
His answer unawares
Strikes sudden from the sod.

Not when we wait the word
The word of God is giv'n;
The voice of God is heard
As much from earth as heav'n.

The voice of God is heard
Not in the thunder-fit;
A still small voice is heard,
Half-heard, and that is it.

PÆANS

MAN

Man putteth the world to scale
And weigheth out the stars;
Th' eternal hath lost her veil,
The infinite her bars;
His balance he hath hung in heaven
And set the sun therein.

He measures the lords of light
And fiery orbs that spin;
No riddle of darkest night
He dares not look within;
Athwart the roaring wrack of stars
He plumbs the chasm of heaven.

The wings of the wind are his;
To him the world is given;
His servant the lightning is,
And slave the ocean, even;
He scans the mountains yet unclimb'd
And sounds the solid sea.

With fingers of thought he holds
What is or e'er can be;
And, touching it not, unfolds
The sealèd mystery.
The pigmy hands, eyes, head God gave
A giant's are become.

But tho' to this height sublime
By labour he hath clomb,
One summit he hath to climb,
One deep the more to plumb—
To rede himself and rule himself,
And so to reach the sum.

LIFE

From birth to death the life of man
Is infinite on the earth,
To know and do that which he can
And be what he is worth.

Our mortal life, however wrought,
Eternity is indeed;
For every moment brings a thought,
And every thought's a deed;

And that is so much infinite
Which may be divided much;
And if we live with might and mirth
Our human life is such.

For him who has not might and mirth
That which is not now is never;
And he who can live well on earth
Does live in heaven for ever.

WORLD-SONG

O Vision inviolate, O Splendour supernal,
We stand in Thy white light like lamps alit in day;
Before Thee, Omnipotent, in sight of Thy glory,
Our countenance is witherèd like stars in the sun.

Before Thee our symphonies are still'd into silence;
Thy wisdom we wot not nor ever shall we know;
But from Thy high throne, O God, Thy voice and Thy thunder
In utterance reiterate give glory and strength.

FINIS

Transcriber's Notes:

Punctuation has been corrected without note. Archaic spellings and hyphenation have been retained. Other errors have been corrected as noted below. Original list of Contents at the beginning contained only listings for Parts in the section *IN EXILE* so links for individual poem titles have been added for reader convenience.

page 26, But but because we must. ==> [But because](#) we must.