



LOVELL BEARSE PEMBERTON

Collected Poems

THREE BOOKS, DRAMATIC POEMS, AND ARCHIVAL RECORD

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers | Los Angeles, 2026

Lovell Bearse Pemberton

Collected Poems

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

*Edited by Brian Kim Stefans
The Text-Tech Papers*

EDITORIAL EDITION

This edition assembles Pemberton's three poetry books in chronological sections. Poems reprinted in **The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems** with modest changes are printed once, with the later witness recorded in the publication statement. Typography, stanza structure, lineation, dramatic speakers, and intentional indentation have been checked against the original scans; narrow-page continuation wraps have been rejoined.

Lovell Bearse Pemberton

November 25, 1866, near Bethel, Clermont County, Ohio – February 6, 1934,
Redondo Beach, California

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

Research and edition prepared 2026. Historical texts are reproduced for scholarly and educational use.

CONTENTS

Archival Images	5
Introduction	8
Original Prefaces	12
Sappho and Other Songs (1895)	16
<i>Vale!</i>	17
<i>Sappho</i>	18
<i>Song to the Sequoia Gigantea</i>	51
<i>Song to the Plowboy</i>	53
<i>Quivera</i>	55
<i>On Finding a Rosebud Covered with Snow</i>	57
<i>To Florence</i>	59
<i>The Land of Cockaigne</i>	60
<i>If Some Unfeeling Cruel Fate</i>	61
<i>The Rose</i>	62
<i>Song of the Fencing Master</i>	63
<i>Bedouin Love Song</i>	64
<i>Farewell to the Muse</i>	65
Prometheus Unbound (1896)	67
<i>Prometheus Unbound</i>	68
The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems (1929)	99
<i>The Dance at the Spring</i>	100
<i>Lines on Finding a Rusty Hand-Wrought Nail</i>	113
<i>Said Atropos to Lachesis</i>	122
<i>Lines to a Swan with a Broken Wing</i>	124
<i>Daughters of Danaus</i>	127
<i>Uncut Leaves</i>	130
<i>Lines on Viewing a Church with Very Tall Spires</i>	132

<i>Ixion</i>	143
<i>Lines to a Deaf Astronomer</i>	145
<i>The Poor Little Flower Girl</i>	147
<i>To Miss Christina's—</i>	148
<i>"Gul Reazee"</i>	150
<i>Like the Breath of the Rose</i>	151
<i>Reincarnation</i>	152
<i>Rain at Sea</i>	153
<i>The Leaf and the Tree</i>	156
<i>Twilight at the Grand Canyon of the Colorado</i>	158
<i>Dust on the Mirror</i>	159
<i>The Sakieh</i>	161
<i>Gardening</i>	162
<i>Soixante Ans</i>	163
<i>Benedicite!</i>	164
 Editorial Note	 165
 Bibliography	 166
 Colophon	 167

ARCHIVAL IMAGES

Architecture and documentary witnesses



*The Redondo Beach Public Library designed by Lovell Bearse Pemberton and opened in 1930.
Historical photograph reproduced by Digs.net.*



The Diamond Apartments, Redondo Beach, designed by Pemberton and built in 1913. Wikimedia Commons photograph.

INTRODUCTION

Lovell Bearse Pemberton, 1866–1934

Lovell Bearse Pemberton was one of early Los Angeles's most improbable literary figures: an electrical engineer who helped build the region's streetcar systems, an inventor and architect whose buildings still mark the South Bay, and a poet who recast Greek myth for an industrial and democratic age. From *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895) and *Prometheus Unbound* (1896) to *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), his writing joins pageantry, satire, evolutionary speculation, and a fierce suspicion of tyranny. This edition gathers the poetry books in chronological sections, prints later revisions only when they materially clarify the earlier text, and restores stanza structure, dramatic speakers, and intentional indentation from the original scans. It also places the poems beside the electrical, architectural, civic, and Bahá'í-associated journeys that shaped Pemberton's unusually mobile career.

Stage I | Ohio, electricity, and early Los Angeles, 1866–1897

Lovell Bearse Pemberton was born on November 25, 1866, near Bethel in Clermont County, Ohio, the son of George M. Pemberton and Belinda Adair Black Pemberton. He attended Clermont Academy at Clermontville and graduated in 1884. His early working life already showed the range that would characterize his career: he taught school near Bethel in 1885, moved to Topeka, Kansas, in 1886, kept books for two years, and in 1888 became assistant superintendent of Topeka's municipal electric-light plant. Electricity was still a new public technology, and Pemberton learned it not as an abstract science but as a civic system joining machinery, transportation, light, labor, and urban growth.

In 1890 Pemberton moved to Los Angeles after a syndicate acquired a local streetcar line and brought him west to help install an electric rapid-transit system. He served as chief electrician of the Los Angeles Railway until July

1895, represented General Electric in Southern California from 1895 to 1897, and later directed electrical and mechanical work for the Los Angeles Pacific Railway. His subsequent posts included the Santa Barbara Consolidated Electric Company in 1901 and the Los Angeles and Redondo Railway in 1902. He was credited with designing the ‘Mermaid,’ an open excursion streetcar associated with the Redondo line. These were formative years in the conversion of the Los Angeles region from scattered settlements into an electrically connected metropolis, and Pemberton occupied a practical place within that transformation.

Poetry accompanied this technical career from the beginning. His ‘Song to the Sequoia Gigantea’ was read at the Unity Club of Los Angeles Poet’s Contest on November 29, 1893. In 1895 the Times-Mirror Printing and Binding House issued *Sappho and Other Songs*, whose title masque surrounds a modern poet with Sappho, the Muses, love lyrics, comic-opera songs, and self-mocking reflections on the literary vocation. The following year the Editor Publishing Company of Franklin, Ohio, published *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama*. Pemberton’s Prometheus is not Shelley’s ethereal revolutionary but an explicitly democratic ‘God of Progress,’ opposed to tyranny and awaiting a western champion. The drama’s mythic machinery converts his experience of electricity, technology, republican politics, and social change into a large allegory of human emancipation.

Stage II | Railways, family, and architecture, 1898–1913

Pemberton married Janet, or Jeanette, Elizabeth Drummond in 1897. Their daughter, Lucille Ester Adair Pemberton, was born on May 20, 1898. By the turn of the century the family was identified with Redondo Beach, although his professional work carried him throughout the region. Pemberton was a charter member and secretary of Los Angeles’s Gamut Club, an organization devoted to music, drama, and the arts, and contemporary accounts describe him as a poet, playwright, and composer as well as an engineer. Works attributed to him but not located in published form include the five-act tragedy *The Life and Death of Joan of Arc* and the operas *Mardi Gras* and *Nawab*. Jeanette died at the Redondo home in July 1913 at the age of thirty-five, leaving Pemberton and their fifteen-year-old daughter.

Around 1909 Pemberton began practicing architecture, carrying engineering discipline into a second major profession. His documented designs

include the 1911 Ainsworth residence on West Adams Boulevard, the 1913 Diamond Apartments in Redondo Beach, the Marshall Building, the Farmers and Merchants National Bank, Central Grammar School, Hermosa Beach Grammar School, and the Redondo Beach Public Library. The Diamond Apartments, built by Harry Meacham, survive as an early Classical Revival commercial-and-residential building. The library, for which Pemberton also served as a commissioner, opened in 1930 after debate over its site and cost. Its curved form and seaside setting made it one of Redondo Beach's defining civic buildings; the later National Register nomination recognizes both its architectural distinction and Pemberton's importance to the city.

Stage III | Palestine, civic work, and the late collection, 1914–1934

Pemberton's interests also extended to comparative religion and the Bahá'í movement. He accompanied the French-Canadian architect Louis Bourgeois to Haifa when Bourgeois presented plans for a Bahá'í temple to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Pemberton turned the journey into *A Modern Pilgrimage to Palestine*, published by Dorrance in 1925 and illustrated from his own photographs. A contemporary review in *Reality* emphasized both its descriptive travel narrative and its presentation of the Bahá'í message. The trip joined architecture, photography, spiritual inquiry, and travel in the same synthetic manner that his poetry joined classical mythology to modern science. The 1929 poem 'Soixante Ans' is dedicated to Bourgeois's wife, Alice de Longpré Bourgeois. Family records associate Pemberton with a brief later marriage to Alice after Louis Bourgeois's death in 1930, but the consulted public sources do not establish a marriage date.

In 1929 Harold Vinal published *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems*, Pemberton's culminating collection. It reprinted selected early poems and a revised *Prometheus Unbound* while adding long philosophical sequences on dance, matter, religion, war, science, architecture, and mortality. The title poem, prompted by Francis Picabia's painting, treats history as a restless pageant flowing from an unknowable source; 'Lines on Finding a Rusty Hand-Wrought Nail' turns a garden relic into a history of metallurgy and civilization; and 'Lines on Viewing a Church with Very Tall Spires' unfolds a twenty-seven-part critique of inherited theology. The book reveals both Pemberton's ambition and his habit of revision across decades. He died in Los

Angeles County on February 6, 1934, with Redondo Beach as the center of his civic and architectural legacy. His surviving work records a distinctive Southern California modernity in which transit lines, electric power, evolutionary thought, classical myth, architecture, and poetry were not separate pursuits but different instruments for imagining collective progress.

ORIGINAL PREFACES

Pemberton's statements of purpose for the 1895 and 1896 books

Sappho and Other Songs (1895)

Sappho, so her biographers say, flourished about the year 610 B.C., and was a native of Lesbos, an island in the Aegean Sea.

Whether her famous leap from the Leucadian rock in consequence of the neglect and disdain of her lover, Phaon, be true or, as her later commentators would have us believe, a cleverly designed fiction, the fact nevertheless remains that she was matchless in her art, and her name and works will be ever intimately associated with the most perfect and finished productions of the poetic mind. For, of all persons who have ever lived, loved, sang, and suffered, she seems to stand forth as the representative and highest embodiment of the spirit and genius of poetry—being, in fact, even in her own day often designated as the ‘Tenth Muse.’

At any rate, the story of her tragic fate naturally suggests the similar condition to which the cause of poetry has been reduced in these modern times, when the whilom ‘Heavenly Muse’ is considered as an antiquated myth—a mistress somewhat passé—and her devotees are looked upon as guilty of impertinence, or suffering from weakness.

If it were indeed true that the genius of poetry had been forced to succumb to the advance of civilization, it would certainly argue very poorly for our boasted modern civilization that it must drive out all that is beautiful and ethereal in life and nature, and leave for our contemplation only the gross and material.

The keen eye of prophecy has often discovered the fact before that ‘the count / Of mighty Poets is made up; the scroll / Is folded by the muses.’ ‘The sun of poesy is set,’ and such like sinister declarations; but it has generally happened that even then the prosy elements of the times were combining like the darkened cage to develop the embryo songster.

Thus has it been in the past, and sad were it if our advancing civilization should make the future any more unfruitful of genius than the past. Whether or not the muse of poetry shall reassert herself in the future with her former power and beauty, the lamentable fact remains that she is now believed to have fled—like Justice and the other heathen deities—from the earth; and in this work we mourn her loss.

It might be well to add that the foregoing lines are not meant for an apology, but merely serve to introduce the following verses, which are intended for an original composition, although an occasional fragment from Sappho's poems will be found here and there, and especially in 'Sappho's Song at the Feast of Hipparchus,' where nearly all the minor fragments are woven together in one connected piece—and which are now, with a certain feeling of indifference, launched forth on a sea as cold, unfathomable, and uncertain, perhaps, as that one on which the divine Sappho desperately threw herself more than twenty-five centuries ago.

Prometheus Unbound (1896)

Of all the fables of antiquity, the legend of Prometheus has ever attracted considerable attention, not only on account of its great beauty—for many others are perhaps even more justly celebrated in this respect—but also because of a sublimity of conception and simplicity of treatment barely approached in any of the others.

Here we realize that we have been brought into contact with a character whom we take pleasure in remembering, and whom we can scarcely forget. Of late years an extended and scholarly inquiry has been made into the meaning and origin of these old-time myths, and it was in casually looking over the result of some of these investigations that I was struck more forcibly than ever with the full scope and significance of this particular legend.

The grandeur of the brave old Titan as he defied the anger of the tyrant gods and resolutely maintained his affection and anxiety for the poor race of oppressed mortals—who, under his careful guidance, had increased and prospered, but were now threatened with extermination—all this is a picture which invites our consideration and commands our admiration.

Be it blasphemous or not, I am forced to admit that the whole story seemed to me an ideal exemplification of that eternal struggle between man and his

fate—his hopes and aspirations matched against that inevitable power that baffles his best efforts and continually renders his exertions for the most part in vain.

Prometheus—who, with the Greeks, was the God of Forethought—to me looked more aptly the Spirit of Progress, destined at last, after ages of bitter struggles and keenest suffering, ‘to lead the upward-tending world, / thro’ glorious futures, onward to perfection.’

According to the legend, this onward movement of the human race was indefinitely deferred on account of the confinement of its leader, Prometheus, who had been condemned to lie for ages on a remote peak of the Caucasus. From this condition there was absolutely no escape until from the West a champion should come, break the chains of tyranny, and set Prometheus free forever.

The champion prophesied for this event was Hercules, which still further strengthened the analogy in my own mind, as it naturally recalled the fact that Franklin had aptly chosen Hercules as the emblem of the infant republics of America.

Looking at the whole subject from a nineteenth-century standpoint, and through the glamour of a republican atmosphere, the legend now took upon itself the following interpretation: Prometheus became the God of Progress, attended by the nymphs of Liberty. He had been left to languish for ages in the remote mountain fastnesses—unnoticed by ‘these so-called gods reputed of superior mould.’ But now from that far-distant land beyond the ‘Islands of the Blest,’ a champion arises with a new dictum—that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This truth is too new for its real significance to be fully appreciated at the present time; but as the swiftly rolling years recede, this event will rise into bolder prominence and be recognized as one of the most important landmarks in the history of the world.

No extensive claims are set up for the following essay—to which these few words are intended as a preface—as no attempt has been made either to reproduce the lost play of Aeschylus or to imitate those other equally splendid poems of later times bearing upon the same subject. It is sent forth simply as an effort of academic days, when, daily worried with Greek accents and inflections while conning over ‘the glory that was Greece / and the grandeur that was

Rome,' one naturally feels like seeking relief from the one by vainly striving after the other. With these few remarks, showing the plan and nature of the work, the reader, if curious, is invited to proceed.

SAPPHO AND OTHER SONGS (1895)

Stage I | The first collection

Vale!

Go, little Book, upon thy way,
I grieve thou canst not with me stay,
Or that thou must so soon away.
Thy many faults I must confess
I know them all, nor wish them less;
For when we love we love weakness,
So parents, in their first-born, see—
Though all their faults there mirrored be
A piece of faultless progeny.

Go, little Book, the first I've sent
To seek the great World's compliment.
Forgive me: 'tis with good intent,
And many a pang of anxious heart
I send thee to the World's great mart
To let thee find out what thou art.
Go, then, upon thy way farewell!
Boldly thou hast some word to tell;
Humbly thou canst not say it well;
And, if a friend thou canst not find,
Return: here, in my arms confined,
Thou'lt find "An Asylum from the Blind!"

Publication. First published as the prefatory poem to *Sappho and Other Songs* (Los Angeles: Times-Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1895), unnumbered page.

Sappho

A Masque

Poet—

It seems nowadays, there is no use
To try to court the “heavenly Muse.”
Among mankind she has, of late,
Lost something of her former state;
So many scribblers now make suit,
She’s fallen into ill-repute.

Friend—

Then throw aside your useless quill
The world, of wishy-wash has its fill.
Those ancient “fads,” having had their day,
Should be content to pass away.

Poet—

Once field and river, flower and tree
Hold each its own divinity:
Unseen celestials everywhere
Soothed the brow of daily care,
And pleasing fictions—say how wise!
Made man mingle with Deities.

Friend—

But now a wondrous change has crossed
The spirit of this mighty world.

Poet—

The outgrown idols of the past—
Playthings of infancy are hurled,
Like some chaste statue from its base,
Into the dust.

Friend—

Yes, a new race
Inhabits this great earth, whose eyes
See through those old-time phantasies

Poet—

Resolves the planets, reads the skies,
And robs earth of its Deities.

Friend—

This is the age of facts.

Poet—

No more
Nereids sport along the shore;
Dim Dryads dwell in leafy trees,
Nor 'mong the hills fleet Oreads run.
No more Poseidon rules the Seas;
Nor Helios holds the fiery Sun.
Upon the hills of Thessaly
The clouds still mingle with the sky;
But, as the Seasons stand and wait,

They open not those fleecy gates
To let earth-worn Celestials by.
Great Zeus, Phoebus, Athene,
Aphrodite, Eos, Selene
From this majestic world have fled.

Friend—

Gone from the earth

Poet—

Ay, banished!
And all the light that with them shone;
Yet not for unthroned gods alone
We mourn they are immortal still,
With all their wondrous history.
We mourn that on this earth no hill
Is now devoted to the Muses' will:
Of all the brooks that feed the sea
Not one can boast a deity.
Not so much for dead Endymion
We sigh, nor enamored Selene,

As disenchanted Helicon
For the lost waves of Hippocrene!
We mourn that this great world should think
Because those heathen gods have fled
That Poesie has now no brink
Where thirsting souls may come and drink—
No sacred ground for man to tread!

Friend—

Indeed, the torch of Science bright
Has lighted up this earth of ours,
And frightened with its flaming light
Laughing fays from moonlit bowers;
Genii and gnomes from golden caves;
Mermaids and sirens from the waves.
Now in its livid light we see
The haunted hills of Thessaly
Shorn of their fair divinity—
All silent, tenantless, and bare!

Poet—

Your words, alas! are all too true
Our craft is left with naught to do.

Friend—

Then let the argument end here

Poet—

And I have worshiped at a shrine
Dishonored when I thought divine.

Nymph, Goddess, whatsoever thou wert
That once inspired the poet's heart!
Spirit of song! thy former haunt
Where wood-vines creep and wild flowers flaunt
Their modest beauty to the breeze

And thick-leaved, languor-breathing trees
Make coverts cool and musical;
Where rills glide by with rhythmic fall,
And azure skies o'erarch them all

Such spots the pensive eye in vain
May search and hope to find again
The glorious splendor of thy reign.
Gone, gone art thou, and with thee ah
That is of earth ethereal!

INTRODUCTION.

Fair maid, who, in those favored Isles,
Where heaven bends o'er with endless smiles,
Inspired the strain sweet Sappho sung;
If still the Lesbian hills among.
Forgive my folly, if I strive
Thy melting numbers to revive;
In this far land of wild and wood,
Where never Nymph nor Naiad stood:
In this stern age, when men would scorn
A Dryad's wail or Triton's horn;
When Virtue, Justice, Beauty, Love,
Mind itself, but mere sensations prove:
When "Nothing" rules o'er Nature dead,
And life is made a strife for bread;
In such a land, and such a time,
'T may folly seem perchance, 'tis crime
To think of sentiment and rhyme,
Or ask they heaven-tuned voice to hear—
Still, sing! and to my idle ear
'Twill be like songs the master hears,
But cannot sound for other ears;
Or like the form the sculptor sees.

But from his chisel ever flees.
'Twill be like fragrance from the rose,
When Earth is wrapped in chilly snows;
Or like the lily in the green
'Tis beauty still, though still unseen.
Sweet be the strain, such as of yore
Resounded on fair Lesbos' shore!

"Come now, divine shell, become vocal for me."

Sappho, Fragment 45.

How deep, and clear, and soft and blue
The cloudless sky shuts in our view
A veil of velvet to the eye
That screens earth from infinity!
With twinkling look the dimpled sea
Bears home a far-fetched melody;
The laughing waves, with upturned faces,
Come dancing in like lovely Graces:
The odorous wind that o'er me flies
Bears more than fragrance to the skies,
And all things e'en this form of mine
Seems fraught with something more divine.

The earth, the air, the sky, the sea
All breathe of love and harmony:
They murmur of that one sweet chime
That echoes on thro' endless time—
To whose melodious tones above
The stars in solemn concord move,
And faintly to whose whisperings sweet
The human heart, at times, doth beat

E'en trees and rocks make melody—
Then hand my trembling harp to me,
When such celestial sounds distil
And sweet delights all sense o'ercome:
When singing creatures all creation fill,
Why should the heart of man be still,
Why should his lips alone be dumb?

O Lesbos! Island of the fair!
Thy sea serene, thy cloudless sky
Soft-beaming sun, ambrosial air
That bears voluptuous murmurs by
These move my rapturous soul to fly
Above the earth, beyond the sky!
In scenes like this who could deny
Thy heaven-born charms, sweet Poesy?

In heaven, 'tis said,
 Almighty Jove,
 With bended head,
 Lists to the strains of love
 Apollo tunes his trembling lyre;
 The Muses' transcendent strains ascend.

 In rainbow-hued attire
 Fair Hebe pours
 Her copious showers;
 The listening gods engrossed attend.

Might not this Isle more nearly seem
 The paradise of which we dream?
 Might we not feel in some degree
 The raptures of a deity?
 Blest as Immortals are not we
 Have we not Love and Harmony?

*"Now Love masters my limbs, and shakes me, fatal creature,
 bitter-sweet." Sappho Fragment 40.*

Love! e'en at the word
 All other sounds are hushed, unheard.
 Love, thy very name
 Kindles anew the quenchless flame.
 My bosom rages, burns again
 As when across the waving plain
 The flames are blown thro' ripened grain.

O, Love! long have these lips of mine
 Essayed to sing thy joys divine;
 But all in vain!
 For when Love's soft, warm breath I feel
 Upon my cheek and forehead steal.
 My soul doth melt and melting flow.
 O, joy! Oh, pain!
 Oh, bitter-sweet!
 Weaver of fictions neat!
 Words are but winds that idly blow
 They cannot tell the joy I know!

*“Far sweeter of tone than harp, more golden than gold”—
Sappho, Fragment 122, 123.*

The waves that wanton o’er the beach
Have each a wondrous, silvery speech;
The wind that spreads his spicy wings
Sings as he flies and flying sings;
The rills that trickle to the sea
Glide to a rhythmic melody,
And e’en the stars that brightly shine
Sweetly sing in strains sublime.

The waves, the wind, the stars, the sea
These all are Nature’s poesy.
With hushed wind and voiceless wave
This earth would seem a silent grave!
E’en Love would lose one half her charms
If Poesy were taken from her arms.

If Love’s sweet muse did not portray
The joy, the bliss, the pain, the woe,
The heaven that only lovers know
How dreary life would pass away!
No tender thought, nor soothing verse,
No pleasing sonnet to rehearse—
How long would seem each weary day!

PART II.

Sappho And Her Girl-Friends.

“I yearn and seek.”—Sappho, Fragment 25.

Song of Erinna.

My heart it is a harp
That moves with every wind.
A word, a thought, a sigh
An answer there will find.

How many a human harp

On earth is never tuned;
But e'er to passion wild
And endless discord doomed.

How many a harp, alas!
Gives one sad, ceaseless moan;
No higher, softer strain—
Life's dreary monotone!

How oft of nought they tell
But wrongs, oppression sore,

Or 'neath affliction's hand
They snap to sound no more.

No more? Or can it be
In happy scenes somewhere
These inharmonious hearts
A rapture yet will share?

But oh, how blest is he
Whose soul is harmony.
Who e'en on earth can catch
Heaven's far-off symphony.

Nearest the gods above,
Blest of all men is he,
Whose soul can echo forth
The "Eternal Melody."

O, sisters; dear, proud must he feel
Who sees the world before him kneel;
Whole nations raise their humble prayer—
A smile, a fav'ring glance to share;
Yet, could I choose, and Fate would give,
Far humbler were the life I'd live.
I'd rather lie in mossy nook,
Where shadows play o'er rippling brook,
And let my yearning spirit drink
Immortal draughts from heaven's brink.

Or, lying thus in tranced mood,
Be lulled by sounds that thro' the wood.
From meadows green and throbbing deep

Soothe one to dreams and heavenly sleep.
The soul then, dreaming that 'tis free,
Bounds upward thro' infinity,
Seeking again with joy to be
Absorbed into Deity.

Oh! could I catch but one sweet chime
That echoes soft thro' endless time—
Nature and Creation's rhyme!
Oh! could I strike but once the note
Of those dim melodies remote
So softly sung, so seldom heard;
But which the heart hath ever stirred
Far happier than the monarch I;
My work would live, tho' his should die!

Song of Anactoria.

"This lot may I win, golden-crowned Aphrodite."

Sappho, Fragment 9.

O sister, thou may'st long
To sing the deathless song.
And win, perchance, immortal praise:
Men may in camp and field
Seek death with sword and shield
To wear awhile the conq'rors' bays.
Let those who wish engage
In toils, and warfare wage,
Or court for aye Fame's empty charms.
Let me remembered be
Not by posterity;
But close within my loved one's arms,
There let me lay me down
Unknowing and unknown!

"This will I now sing deftly to please my girl-friends."

Sappho, Fragment 11.

Erinna—

But Sappho, guardian-mother dear,

Say why so sad dost thou appear?
Your loving girl-friends all entreat
To hear once more thy accents sweet.
Oh! breathe again that magic spell
That comes but from thy lips and shell.

Anactoria—

Our idle songs, Sappho, forgive,
If such thine ear doth vex and grieve.
We all with words and looks beseech
The favor of thy silvery speech.
We hang upon thy lips and drink
Like bees upon the clover pink.

Sappho—

Alas! sweet maids, I cannot sing;
My thoughts, disturbed, are wandering.
But could aught on this earth incline
My thoughts to flow in rhythmic line;
If power of music in me were,
At sight of things so pure and fair
Thy rosy arms and love-lit eyes.
Thy thousand winning witcheries
My soul naught else could do,
But pour its fullness forth to you;
Blest by such love as thou dost bring;
Poor were the soul that could not sing.

Times are when e'en the dullest ear
Celestial quiring sweet can hear.
Moments when the ignoblest soul
Soars high beyond the earth's control.

Some time in every life, I ween,
The poorest soul, however mean,
As pure, as holy rapture feels
As e'er thro' Sappho's bosom steals.
For once they catch the glorious strain
Of life and love and being.

Again,
The loftiest soul that ever furled

Its pinions o'er this abject world
To whom, thus sporting in the skies,

Mankind gaze with unfeigned surprise
At times no more could soar and sing
Than could the mountains upward spring.
Drunk with sweets, like butterflies;
Folding its wings, it sits and sighs.

Anactoria—

Alas! has some keen sorrow clipped
Thy spirit's pinions? Hast thou sipped
Of some sweet-sick'ning poison-dew,
And loath'st the sun and heavens blue?

Sappho—

Ah, no, 'twas but an idle dream
A whim of sleep; but still doth seem
More like reality to me
Than what I feel and know and see.

Methought I sat one summer eve
Where climbing vines o'er branches weave;
Close by a mossed, pellucid pool,
Where fragrant shade made covert cool;
And, wearied with the day's repose,
Had sunk into a restless doze
A sort of conscious sleep; when soon
I saw the rising, full-orbed moon
Spread o'er the earth her golden gleam.
Near by a music-murmuring stream
Between its perfumed banks meandered,
Till dimly o'er steep rocks it fled
Into the sea.

Here seemed to stand
Some fav'ring Genius, from whose hand,
In rich profusion, fell sweet peace
And health and loveliness; increase
Of joys from day to day, and still
Some new delight showered out my will.

It was the land it seemed to me
Of Love and Youth and Harmony.
At once the moon, with lurid glare,
Rolled swift thro' black'ning clouds; the air
Was filled with mutt'rings deep and loud,
And shrieks and groans; the forests bowed
Before the gale, or, breaking, fell.
Each sight new terror seemed to tell:
The stream that gentle music made.
Now raging rushed thro' wood and glade,
And plunged headlong into the sea,
Whose billows roared in fiendish glee.
With thunder sound the breakers tall
Did beat the cliffs which crumbling fall
Piecemeal.

Primeval wilderness

It was: a savage world unblessed
By all that gives us peace and rest
And happiness!

I shudd'ring turned,
When lo! some sleight of dreams unlearned,

The scene had quickly changed. Again
'Twas peace and joy and beauty. In vain
The billows raised their roar; a strain
Of more prevailing sweetness swelled
From rock and nook and grassy field;
And there, beside the deep-voiced sea,
A youth sat, leaning pensively
Upon his harp, and fingering
An unthought tune. His face would bring
Shame to the ruddy cheeks of Phoebus,
Or of Dawn. The laggard wind thus
Sad as the sighing Atys tree—
Bore his complaining song to me:

“To the Charming Nymph, Poesie.

(1)

O gen'rous world! wherefore despise

Those strains that warble from the skies
On earth to dwell?
Why do ye hold in high contempt
Those very dreams ye once have dreamt;
But could not tell?

(2)

There is no heart that doth not warm
At Beauty's chaste and virtuous form;
Where'er 't may be.
Then wherefore blindly thus refuse
And treat with scorn the charming Muse
Of Poesie?

(3)

Oh! nymph so fair is found nowhere
But on the stars in midnight air
That beam so bright!
Whoe'er could view that form unmoved,
Or see those loving eyes unloved—
Must have no sight!

(4)

Her form so graceful, tall and slender.
E'en Paradise in all its splendor
Could not surpass,
Her face is fair as lilies are
When off'ring up their evening prayer,
'Mid dewy grass!

(5)

Her eyes divine like planets shine,
And light with cheerful rays benign
Man's bitter lot!
Yet mild, her modest, queenly gaze,
As e'er the day-star's steadiest rays

She changes not!

(6)

No fairer foot nor nymph, nor fay,
From forest flowers e'er brushed away

The morning dew.
Yet not in form lies all her charm;
For like the sun, thro' clouds and storm,
Her soul shines through!

(7)

Then why, O world, withhold your praise—
From her whose brows are wreathed with bays
Time ne'er can blight:
For nymph so fair is found nowhere,
But on the stars in midnight air,
That beam so bright!

Thus was his song which scarce was done,
Till all the sea its roar begun,
And Earth its turmoil to repeat,
A loud wave shook his high-poised seat,
Which, tott'ring, fell, and far did throw
Him headlong in the deep below.
I jumped; methought 'twas I that sunk
Beneath the waves. I shrieked and drunk
With such a sick'ning thought and sight
I woke, to find 'twas dead of night,
And tossing on my bed I lay
With troubled thought till break of day.

But, waking, still I heard waves crash,
And still before my eyes would flash

The dreadful scene. The sea would close
Quickly above him and impose
A sort of curious spell whereby
His words and looks were instantly
Obscured and blotted out. Then I

Would fall, and in my fall, it seemed,
That all I sang or hoped or dreamed

Were swallowed by the restless wave.
This was it seemed the yawning grave
The future had in store for me
The oblivious fate of Poesie!

This, maids, is why I cannot sing.
My Muse sits mourning folds her wing.
Oh! may the time be far removed,
When all we've sighed for, all we've loved.
When all we've lived for, all we've sought,
Shall sink uncared-for from man's thought,
And Earth, with all it might attain,
Plunge into barbarous night again!

PART III.

Sappho At The Feast Of Hipparchus.

*"O Muse of the golden throne, raise that strain which the reverend
elder of Teos used to sing so sweetly."—Sappho, Fragment 26.*

Hipparchus—

Now, poets, let the heavenly strain ascend
Our minds to lighten and from cares unbend.

Now, first, Alcaeus let thy skill divine
With lofty words some noble theme combine:

Then sage Anacreon, forever young,
Let gladdened hearts sip from thy honeyed tongue.

Sing, next, sweet Sappho wonder of all time!
Whose every word is sweetness all sublime.

And, last, Erinna, let us, wond'ring, know
What thoughts in thy young breast doth glow.

Song of Alcaeus.

At thy command, O Prince renowned,
Full many flattering strains resound

Where'er the good assembled are,
They breathe thy name with every prayer;
When mighty men in conclave meet,
Thy words and deeds they oft repeat;
The peasants on their homeward road,
The air with profuse blessings load;
The very slaves toil as they sing,
Blessing the day that made thee King.

Thy empire, on its mountain seat,
The sea lies suppliant at its feet.
Yet, when yon proud Sea's waves were young,
When first these hills swelled from its breast
And mankind to their green slopes clung,
Like young birds clam'ring in their nest
Where was thy glory then, O Greece?
Where was thy crown and laurel brow?
Or let the minstrel's numbers cease,
And where would they be even now?

Hush the rude songs the bards have sung,
Or let the minstrel's harp be now unstrung,
This glorious realm, lord of the Sea!
A wild unheard-of waste would be.

But lest my words convince not thee,
I'll sing at thy request.

The Birth

Of the Fair Muses, and Their Worth.

"Twas ages past
When Ocean's waves were young,
And Earth was wild as new worlds are.
With turmoils vast,
And elemental war.
Ere man brought forth for toil and care
From rough, hard rocks and pebbles sprung
Ere breath of music moved the air;

But mutt'rings thick and angry cries
The forests filled and chafed the skies.

'Twas then.
In that old time,
When mighty Titan hosts combine—
In battle 'gainst the King of heaven
And strive to climb
Olympus' battlements: unfurl
Their rebel banners there: defy
The power of Zeus, and hurl
Him from his throne on high.

But hear!
With thunder sounds.
The Earth rebounds
The Titans come
To break o'er heaven's wall.

In vain! Again outdone.
The giants groan
Grimly the monsters fall, and disappear
Whelmed and o'erthrown!

The long conflict is ended,
The huge Titans distended
Deep in Tartarus.
Now on Olympus
See the great Zeus,
Victorious
Stand.
Glorious
His triumph was greatest
Of masteries grand
Over rebellion and scorn,
Tho' Time shall her latest
Page wait to adorn;
But why the bowed head.
That look of joy fled,
And sighs drawn heavy and long?
Hushed are the throng,
In wonder and fear,

Zeus's sadness' they fear.

"Our joy is incomplete;
Silence is equal to defeat
Tho' victory some joy has lent,
The soul to gladness must give vent.

The voice of joy
Is song alone.
Earth's dull alloy
Melts in its silver tone.
So let there be Maidens Nine,
Whose duty it shall be to sing of things divine!"

Oh. hear!
How sweet and clear
Their rising strain
Salutes the ear!
But higher, sweeter still they sing,
Until such ravishment they bring
Their full refrain
With such delight doth fall,
It doth the gods themselves enthrall.

Higher, higher still their notes, until
Their spell the heavens and earth doth fill!

Now, see the stars glisten.
While the worlds listen.
And the moon in heaven stands still!
See the wide ocean.
Cease its wild motion.
And the little streams stop on the hill!

Now all the woods wild.
With songsters are filled,
Who, in chorus, try to engage.
Now the winds whisper
To the leaf, as they kiss her.
And the brook wanders by.
With a musical sigh,
And old Ocean swells with the rage.

The waves and the leaves,
Such melody weaves
O'er the rock and the stream.
That one nearly would deem
 Them human:
Till the Earth doth seem
 Like a beautiful woman.
Seen in a dream.

How sweet those strains in heaven fell
The gods alone in heaven can tell!
 No mortal ear.
Such ravishment may safely share
No tongue on earth its bliss declare!

 Then, rapture, cease,
 My soul release.
Or captive keep forever!
 The pleasing chains

 Of thy sweet strains,
 Do not too rudely sever;
But, if my farewell I must take.
Oh! let my senses softly wake.

Song of Anacreon.

How Love Languished Until Beauty was Born.

Forlorn the restless God of Love,
From his ambrosial bowers above.
To Cypria's rose-hued island strayed.
Slowly he came, and long delayed,
As on his mind some sorrow weighed:

“Tho' other hearts 'tis mine to fill.
With blissful Love's electric thrill.
Why should not I some rapture know,
And in my own breast feel the glow?
Poor mortals, by my art, less wise,
See angels in each other's eyes;
While I, the god, with all my power,

See nothing I can all adore!”

Thus, sighing, on the sward he lay,
And to his bitter grief gave way.
The King of Heaven, attentive, heard
The little Conqueror’s piteous words

Smiling, his mournful plaint to hear,
Yet sought he some relief to bear.

Meanwhile, across the heaving sea,
The god lay gazing vacantly.
When lo! from out the twinkling deep,
Behold, Incarnate Beauty leap!
“Joy! Joy!” the glad god cries;
“No more I’ll seek the sober skies;
For Beauty to the earth has come.
And earth, henceforth, shall be my home!”

(1)

The stars, in their turn, about the fair moon.
Now veil their bright eyes as she, at her noon,
With lustrous splendor, full-orbed, doth illumine
 All the earth with silver.
From clear, stilly skies, thro’ tall apple-trees,
Cool murmurs around us the star-born breeze;
While softly exhales from quivering leaves
 The sweet dews of slumber.

(2)

The wiles of the dark-eyed daughter of Night
Enwraps the charmed world subdued with delight;

With bright and hopeful eyes, Phoebus of Light,
 We invoke thy favor!
Then down from thy throne gold-broidered, O Queen,
Great Goddess of Beauty, deathless, serene,
Make haste, and mixed with delight, let us drain
 The nectar’s sweet savor.

(3)

And since gods disdain the brow that's ungraced
While he, who appears with sweet flowers chaste
And fair, the foremost of all is e'er placed
 With choicest blessing
Around our foreheads fair maidens shall twine,
With soft and fair hands, cool wreaths of the dill,
And lilies inwove with sweet asphodel
 And roses refreshing.

(4)

Now let the heavenly strain aspire
Such as, O Muse, the Teian sire.
From his divinely-tuned lyre
 Has waked forever.
And ye, pure Graces, rosy-armed,
Haste ye with all your thousand charms
Meek eyes, fair cheeks and voices warm—
 Aid my endeavor!

(5)

Mild-eyed thrice prolong
 Selene,
Thy stay with fair Endymion;
For joys so sweet are ne'er too long,
 Nor known too often!
Too soon beside Cocytus' stream,
We'll wander nameless as our dreams,
Or sit and weep so tear-besteamed.
Our souls will soften.

(6)

Nay! heart of mine, grieve not again;
For those who weep must weep in vain.
And most of all the mournful strain

Befits not thee:
For deep within this world's great heart,
Thou hast, I think, a goodly part,
And years will smile, as they depart,
 Upon thy mem'ry.

(7)

At least, 'tis joy I ne'er can tell,
Beside the Muses' deep, clear well.
To sit, and from their sweet-voiced shell
 Drink inspiration.
'Tis then I feel the fervor treasure—
Till every feeling is a pleasure—
Till, soul-entranced. I cannot measure
Mind's animation,

(8)

O Aphrodite, golden crowned,
Immortal Queen, star-throned, renowned,
Weaver of wiles, of ways profound,
 Hear me, I pray!
Me, whom thou'st often heard afar.
And, yoking up thy silvery car,
Came floating thro' the soft mid-air
 Without delay.

(9)

Down from thy father's house of gold.
Cleaving thin clouds thy chariot rolled,
Till at my door the birds thou told
 To go their way.
O Blessed One, in thy high home,
As thou, to me, wast wont to come
And stay, now let me to thee run
And with thee stay!

(10)

Goddess of Beauty, thou dost know
At first thou taught'st my heart to glow;
Till now within my breast doth grow
 A subtler flame!
Then grant I may be known with thee
Thy ally to posterity!
That with thy praise may sometimes be
 Mingled my name!

(11)

Indeed, 'tis just that we who plot
And plant the seeds of deathless thought,
Should reap some harvest for our lot—
Some memory:
For death is but calamity
Such the immortal God's decree:
Had it been good and fair, surely.
They, too, would die.

(12)

Then pardon us our idle folly
Poor we! soul-sick with melancholy
If for the laurel and the holly
Our brows yearn ever.
Let him condemn our ways who will,
And of contempt take ample fill;
"Twill soon be o'er, and he will still
 Lie dead forever.

(13)

Nor will there any mem'ry be
Of him on earth hereafter; for he
Has gathered not from th' immortal tree
 The roses of Pieria.
E'en in the house of Hades dread.

Obscurely shall his footsteps tread,
 And, flirting 'mong the shadowy dead,
 Drag out existence dreary—

Song of Erinna.

I have drank of the fount,
 Where the Naiades dwell,
 And my soul it doth mount
 And heavenward swell.
 Like the tremulous waves of that well.

I have drank of the fount where the Naiades dwell,
 And the wealth of my joy I am longing to tell.
 I cannot yet sing as Alcaeus has sung;
 Nor in notes such as roll from Sappho's sweet tongue,
 But I somehow have drank from the Muses' deep spring
 And, tho' dumb, I still would endeavor to sing.

'Tis a fount that's been drank of for many a year:
 But its waves are as sweet as ever they were.
 The heart is as deep, and love just as strong.
 Then why can we not its numbers prolong?
 There's more in the heart than has ever been told,
 And its throbs seem to tell us 'twill never be cold.

Then, come, ye but late devotees of the Muse.
 And bathe your young brows with Aonian dews!
 Let us never despair, never tarry, nor tire,
 'Till we've kindled anew the heavenly fire,
 Fear not the great Past, with its glories remote—
 Know the lyre has lost not one single note!

The Past is grand, overwhelming, sublime,
 With the glorious conquests of man over Time;
 Still the Present is more than the Past has e'er been;
 For it holds all the Past with its labors could win.
 And the Future is grander by far than them all;
 For in it shall man rise or most gloriously fall.

Oh! why should the Muse of Humanity die?
 Her numbers grow stronger, brighter and high.
 She feeds and sings from humanity's breath,

And her heart will throb with it till humanity's death;
Then, mourning, away to some wilderness scene.
She'll return once again to her earliest theme.

Then drink of the fount.
Where the Naiades dwell,
And let your soul mount
And heavenward swell.
Like the tremulous waves of that well.

PART IV.

Sappho'S Musings.

"Break not my spirit with anguish and distress, O Queen." —

Sappho, Part of Fragment I.

Is this the land where roses bloom,
And myrtle green and ivy grows;
Where olives hang in leafy gloom,
And perfume-breathing zephyr blows?

Is this my native, once-loved Isle.
And this, the silvery Sea.
That lulled me with its song and smile
To slumber in my infancy?

Are these the skies of sable stole
That once bent fondly over me;
And these the scenes that fired my soul,
And taught my harp its harmony?

Is this the harp, now breathless, still,
Whose voice charmed Earth's remotest shores?
Am I "the Fair," "the Miracle,"
"The Muse that all the world adores?"

Alas! discordant now the strain
I fondly hoped could more than please.
My voice for verses yearns in vain
They move alone from minds at ease.

How oft I've sat within this grot,
And sang in happier days gone by.
When e'en the winds would whisper not
The waves would hush to harmony.

And he, the youth whom I adore,
For whose sweet sake I tuned my lyre,
Who sat entranced in days of yore,
And fanned with praise the gentle fire

Oh! where are now those honeyed words,
Those winning smiles, embraces dear?
Must I be now unpraised, unheard—
No loving words, nor list'ning ear?

Say, why must I deserted die,
In shame and anguish and despair?
Can I but sing of peace and joy
But feel the thorns these roses bear?

Thou Star that bringest all to rest;
The cattle from the day's alarms,
The young birds to their shelt'ring nest,
The lover to his loved one's arms.

To me, alas! what dost thou bring?
Delightful privilege! to sit,
Beside the Muses' troubled spring,
And let my tears flow into it.

Song to Phaon.

O Phaon. 'mid thy dazzling joys,
Hark! and hear a sadder voice.
Leave awhile thy painted toys;
From the wildering round of pleasure,
Come, trip with me one little measure.
Leave awhile;
Thy dear delights.
Come and smile
On me to-night.

Me, who gave thee Song's bequest;

Me, who in thy youthful breast
First infused Love's sweet unrest;
Who taught thy simple heart to know
That Beauty is a heavenly show—
 And shineth bright
 In mortal eyes,
 To show the light
 Of Paradise.

Phaon, beauteous one, return!
In teaching thy young heart to yearn
My own hath learned to madly burn.
I taught thee all thou dost enjoy,
And shall I now prove but annoy?
 Thou art my care.
 With thee I stay,
 In dreams as fair
 As beauteous day.

Oh! let me but thy smiling see.
I ask thee not to yearn for me;
But only let me burn for thee,
And ever at thy side to raise
To thee my undespised praise:
 To sit but near
 And sing the while.
 That thou mayst hear
 And on me smile.

Thou grace and glory of thy age!
Cease thy erring pilgrimage.
Let toys no more thy time engage
A great heart lives and throbs for thee;
Then cease thy heartless coquetry,
 Or soon will die
 Those darling joys,
 Thou prizest so high
 In thy dear toys.

Once I was thy delightful prey—
Sicilian damsels now hold sway.
Oh! where will next thy footsteps stray?

Where some new fancy may be found
Will praises of thy voice resound?
Matrons of Nisa.
Sicilians fair,
Send back, I pray,
This wanderer!

Song.

“Lesbian Damsel, Fare-thee-well.”

Much as my heart doth yearn for thee,
And bitter tears bedim mine eye;
’Tis not that thou art gone from me
But that thou wentest silently.
At least there could as well
From those fair lips have fell:
“Lesbian damsel.
Fare-thee-well!”

Could I have had one last embrace,
Or ling’ring looked into thy eye,
’Twere joy, at least, from thy dear face
To read tho’ sad my destiny.

To still my troubled breast
Thou mightst have said at least:
“Lesbian damsel.
Fare-thee-well!”

My life has dwindled to a sigh,
And better ’twere it had an end.
God knows ’tis hard enough to die;
But, oh! to die without a friend!
And yet how sweet were death
If thou couldst o’er me breathe:
“Lesbian damsel.
Fare-thee-well!”

PART V.

On The Cliffs Of Leucate.

*"For they whom I benefit injure me most."—
Sappho, Fragment 12.*

Slowly the sun sinks in the sea,
And length'ning shadows gloomily
Creep o'er the world and me.

Sadly the moon climbs up the sky,
With mournful look and silently
It speaks no note of joy.

Sweetly from every vale and tree
The nightingale pours out her glee
'Tis sweet to all but me.

Merrily, as the waves are free.
The sailor's song rings o'er the sea—
Merry to all but me.

Softly the rills flow; but the sea
Devours at last their melody
And thus 'twill be with me.

The Aegean Sea.

I stand upon thy stony brink,
And look into thy waves, O Sea.
Which stretching deep and far doth seem
To compass all the world and me.

I see thy circumambient waves,
With restless sweep surge to and fro;
While echoing thro' my aching soul
A sadness deep doth likewise flow.

For vague and dim there doth appear
Before me now that dreadful hour.
When all terrestrial things shall lie
Submerged by thy all-levelling power.

Mountains and empires, monarchs, thrones.
Glories of art, Egypt, Greece. Rome,

Temples of gods ay! everything
Shall lie dissolved in Ocean's foam.

Oblivious Sea, upon thy brink
I pause in wonder most profound.
A suppliant with harp unstrung,
And laurelled brow with cypress bound.

What salted offering is there,
Libation sweet or sacrifice;

What precious incense may I bring
To thee that thou wilt not despise?

Is there no price at which to buy
Release from Death's oblivious thrall?
Is there no haven where one may
Escape the common fate of all?

Hymn to Apollo.

Phoebus of Light, Immortal Youth,
Splendor-robed, from thy throne of Truth
And Beauty, laurel-crowned, in sooth,
Oh! hear my prayer.
If, with thy iris-mantled maidens three,
Thou flood'st the halls of heaven with harmony;
Or with thy flaming charioteer dost flee
Thro' soft mid-air:

Incline to me thine ear, I pray!
To me, thy life-long votary.
Long has my gaze been far away
To see thy light.
Joy it has been to my sad, eager eyes
To see thy glory beaming thro' the skies.
And love for thy fair day and sweet sunrise
Has brought this night

Thy light that so elates my mind
Inspires my soul to it mankind.
With dull, thick eyes are either blind
From choice or birth.
Indeed, this day-recurring appetite

It sates not; nor low, sensual delight
Provokes nor gratifies hence, in their sight
 'Tis nothing worth.

Yet to my thirsting soul 'tis drink.
Sweet as is slumber when it doth sink
On eyelids tired, when they wink,
 Seeking repose.
Thus has a mighty gulf between us grown:
Their eyes look not into my eyes as one
Would who sees there no 'fault he would disown;
 But like one's foes.

O thou, who in the heavens hast thy home.
How joyful Earth is to behold thee come,
Wreathing thy smiles, enlivening hope in one,
 With thy warm breath;
But when thy last beam fades away
Hope leaves us joyless: with thy ray,
Then cold and gloomy Night holds sway,
 And whispers death.

Where cool Libethra's waves retreat.
The nightingale sings sadly sweet.
Is that the fate we all must meet,
 Father of Song?

If I thy heaven-tuned ear have ever wronged,
With some false note of harmony prolonged.
Or praised myself when praise to thee belonged,
 Forgive the wrong.

A stranger in my native land
Outcast, despised one yet, whose hand
Has increased all of Greece that's grand
 And most enduring
Stories and themes of everlasting worth;
Immortal flowers that spring above the dearth
And bloom the light and glory of the earth
 Ever alluring.

O thou, who, seated by the Delphian hearth
The unmoving center of revolving earth—

Doth read of what the future shall give birth,
Hear thou my cry!
Grant that ere Death my song o'erpowers,
This hope may sweeten those sad hours:
"Thy light that lights this world of ours
Shall never die!"

Here in the gloom I stand alone:
My words like hollow sounds have grown:
My mourning Muse, filled with the moan,
Longs for repose.
Dim as the dying echoes from my throat,
My form shall soon on yon dark billows float.
Blest were I would the careless world but note
And mend my woes.

Epilogue.

Ages ago from stern Leucadia's rock,
The Lesbian Muse neglected, and the mock
Of frittering worldly minds did madly throw
Herself into Aegea's waves below.
Thus was the warmest flame that ever thrilled
The human frame; the highest art; the most
Divine and perfect harmony once stilled,
And from, this earth of ours forever lost.

Now has this busy, wise-grown world again
Declared the poet's labors are in vain.
Once more the frenzied strain the artless song,
'Tis claimed by men 'tis useless to prolong;
And carefully, in deep Oblivion's sea,
A grave have they prepared quite tenderly
Where thou, poor, childish Muse of Poesie*
May, henceforth, lie in sweet obscurity.

Farewell, fair Muse! altho' unworthy be
The halting strains of my poor minstrelsy;
We mourn thy loss, as one who filled with grief
Must mourning sigh, and sighing find relief.
We weep as those who hear the cold earth fall
Upon a loved one's coffin-lid, like rain.

But still, like them, a hope o'ershadows all
We hope that sometime yet thou'lt rise again.

Publication. *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), pp. 11–59. The masque includes its prologue, introduction, five parts, and epilogue.

Song to the Sequoia Gigantea

*Prize poem read before the Unity Club of Los Angeles at the
Poet's Contest, November 29th, 1893.*

Is there no limit to thy upward course.
No bounds to thy temerity,
Thou massive, heaven-aspiring tree?
What awful deity stood at thy birth
And cast thy horoscope? What mighty force
Impelled thee first, firm-rooted in the earth,
To forge up thro' the white clouds' billowy sea
Until thou seem'st at last to touch the sky.
And pierce with green its azure canopy?

How far hast thou determined yet to spread
Thy branches: how high rear thy lofty head
Above the stable earth thou standest on:
But in thy proud growth seemest still to scorn?
Wouldst thou the battlements of heaven o'er-scan
And make a Babel-tower of thy huge form?
Gigantic tree, great monarch of the wood,
Eternal evergreen, the unsubdued,
What mockery of human hopes and fears,
Ambition's struggles, sorrow, pain and tears!
Stupendous sarcasm on the fate of man
His flitting life, small ways and sickly plan!
How little dost thou heed the waste of time,
The war of elements, swift lightning's flash,
Slow, sure decay, or lev'ling earth-quake's crash!
The scorching sun-rays of a tropic clime,

Force of strong winds, friction of rain,
And all that follow in destruction's train—
All have conspired to bring about thy fall;
But yet art thou above beyond them all!

Proud as an eagle's flight thro' empyrean;
Straight and true as an archer's arrow keen;
Erect as set by some huge plummet line;
Firm set and old as Egypt's pyramid—

Huge obelisk of everlasting green!
What message hast thou from the world divine
What mighty secrets in thy bosom hid?

Here at thy foot, in adoration meek,
I humbly bow, and in my weakness feel
There is a sublime something thou could'st speak
Which simple words of mine cannot reveal.
I hear a deep-toned, mystic murmuring;
It moves afar-off and high-up among
Thy softly-rustling leaves. Whence has it sprung?
What new decree to mortals wouldst thou bring?

Solemn, sublime, thy everlasting song,
Thou ancient oracle whose frenzied tones
On winds of prophecy are borne along:
No wailing cry of long-borne wrongs: no groans
Of falling dynasties: no bleaching bones
Strewing the blood-soaked battleground of kings;
No dark idolatry, nor fetich stones.
Here does no poisoned blood-taint from the past,
Nor former rude traditions hold thee fast;
Thou hast a voice that breathes of better things—
The hope and key-note of humanity!

Dim-rustling in thy branches are the wings
Of destiny prophetic murmurings

Of grander themes and triumphs yet to be;
For thou dost seem to me,
Gigantic tree, to be the image and
The emblem of the land
That nourished thee!

Publication. Read at the Unity Club of Los Angeles Poet's Contest, November 29, 1893; first published in *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), pp. 60–62, the copy-text used here; reprinted with light punctuation and spelling revision in *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 80–82.

Song to the Plowboy

A song to the sturdy plowboy,
A song to his unsung worth!
He turns the sod, and sows the seed,
And tills the crops that nations feed.
His father is king; by right of birth,
He, too, is king of all the earth.
Proud emperor's thrones the plowman owns—
They cost him weary years.
The spoils of war his trophies are—
They tost him blood and tears.

I love the ragged plowboy,
I love his manly worth!
He feeds the rich, and clothes the great;
He owns the land, and rules the state.
By virtue rare, and right of birth,
We hail him king of all the earth.
He bears the work that millions shirk,
If e fears no mortal's frown.
With laurel bough, then wreath his brow—
A king should wear a crown!

A song to the humble plowboy,
With brawny arms so swarth.!
True, unpretentious nobleman,
The world may mock thee, Censure scan
And in thy ways find cause for mirth;
But Honor still deplores thy dearth—
And loud would raise her notes of praise
To blazon thy fair name:—
Whose hands disdain a guilty stain,
Whose thoughts dream not of fame.

I love the merry plowboy—
A blessing on his birth!
He cheers with song his lowly hearth,
And whistles care from off the earth.
At home, abroad, in peace or strife,
He leads the same brave, honest life.

Long life and joy to the poor plowboy,
As he whistles o'er the farm.
He grows our wealth; the world itself
He moves with his brown arm.

Publication. First published in *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), pp. 62–63; revised text in *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 89–90, used here.

Quivera

(The mythical name for Kansas)

Steep are the heights where glory leads;
Weary the path that leads to fame.
The hero toils; the warrior bleeds;
The martyr dies—to save a name!

Who weaves the brodered stole of song—
Trimmed o'er with tinkling chains of rhyme—
Must move Thought's massive beam along,
And sound with care each separate chime.

Fame is not all an upward flight,
A giddy, reeling, glorious dream;
But toil—consuming mind and might—
Lights up, with life, the meteor-gleam.

Whoe'er would change man's common doom,
A something more than man must be;
Who, mocking fate, time and the tomb,
In death o'ercomes mortality.

The names that Clio loves to keep
Are those whom Fate seems most to foil.
While others laugh, these few must weep:
While others sleep, they still must toil.

Such are the truths I learned from thee—
Thou star-eyed child of destiny!
Who—ever on life's stormy sea—
Hast kept thy gaze fixed on the sky.

Born to subdue, War's dread alarm
Was o'er thy lonely cradle blown;
Reared in the tempest and the storm,
How lusty are thy sinews grown!

In infancy, like Hercules,
When man shrank back with fright,
Two monster serpents didst thou seize
And bravely strangle with thy might.

With one hand broke the fetters wide
That held the slave from freedom's goal:
And with the other threw aside
The grinding shackles from the soul.

Then o'er thy generous prairies ran
This low, but glorious decree:—
“The body and the soul of man
Within my borders shall be free!”

No fabled cities towering high;
Nor streets wide-paved with pearl and gold;
No glittering treasures met the eye
Of those old-time explorers bold;

But now, in this maturer age
Thy lap a wealth of plenty holds:
To man thou'st left a heritage
Worth more than all their pearls and gold.

Publication. First published in *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), pp. 63–65; revised text in *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 91–92, used here.

On Finding a Rosebud Covered with Snow

In this lone spot I did not think
To find a flower so fair—
With robe of green and lips of pink—
Whose tender beauty now must shrink,
And lose its fragrance rare.

Here 'mid the hind 'ring weeds and stone,
Thou hadst thy lowly birth.
When wintry winds kept dismal moan,
Thou pushed thy way, unseen, unknown,
Up thro' the cheerless earth.

Till now, alas! ere thy full bloom,
Stern fate has cut thee down.
Soft winds shall sigh above thy tomb,
And gentle dews weep o'er thy doom
From yonder skies that frown.

But thy sweet lips shall ne'er unfold;
Thy beauty reach its prime.
Thou ne'er wilt bless this hillside cold;
Nor cheer the wayside wand'rer old
With hint of things divine.

Sad is thy fate, poor rosebud sweet,
By frosts unkindly chilled!
Fair promise of a life complete,
Fond hopes and plans,—ambitions fleet!
Lie broken now and stilled.

What holy purpose—passion pure—
Did thy fair form enclose?
What dreams of life and love's rapture?
What thoughts induced thy look demure,
Thou sweet and lovely rose?

Sad is thy lot and sad to me
The thoughts thou dost recall—
Of one who, young and fair, like thee,
In sweet and virgin purity,

Did thus untimely fall.
O gushing tears, fill not my eyes;
And, throbbing heart, keep still!
Beneath some other, sunnier skies,
My tender flowers both shall rise,
Where frosts shall never kill.

Publication. First published in *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), pp. 65–66; revised text in *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 93–94, used here.

To Florence

Let baser souls besiege the bowl,
 And drain its madd'ning joy:
 No dreams of wine can equal mine,
 No power on earth destroy.
 Let Hindoo brew his arrack stew
 On Ceylon's sunny isle:
 Let Syrian seek his opiate reek
 To drown the world awhile;
 Let bards of yore drain hellebore,
 And vaunt their sacred-ground;
 E'en Celestials sup their nectared cup—
 Tho' Hebe herself hand it round.

One look of thine's worth all their wine—
 All care it doth beguile,
 And joy supreme comes like a dream,
 When thou dost kindly smile.
 The form I see is reality—
 No phantom of the bowl:
 That very flame inhabits thy frame
 That kindled the stars of old.

Thy look of love would marble move—
 It turns the Earth to Heaven!
 Let bards of yore their potions pour,
 And founts to them be given;
 No Pierian spring I ask to sing—
 Thy charm more than suffices.
 At sight of thee my soul leaps free,
 And up to Heaven rises.

Publication. First published in *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), pp. 66–67; revised text in *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), p. 95, used here.

The Land of Cockaigne

There's a magical Isle in these mystical seas,
Where the mythical people do as they please.
Oh! a wonderful land is this land so fine
 With its days so quiet,
 Its nights full of riot,
Its delicate ease and its "charmed moonshine."
 With no care nor hurry.
 With nothing to worry
Oh! there is the spot for me and for you;
For there in that land there is nothing to do!
There's a mysterious king in that magical Isle,
Whose reign is a spring of perpetual smile.
Oh! a wonderful king is the king so fine;
 For, wherever he goes,
 By magic there grows
A pageant so gorgeously rich and sublime!
 And once every year,
 This king comes here
With a pageant that nothing on earth can outshine
And no bounds can the mirth of the people confine.

Publication. First published in *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), in the Selections from Comic Operas section.

If Some Unfeeling Cruel Fate

If some unfeeling, cruel Fate
Us, unforeseen, should separate,
And you afar be forced to roam;

Though other friends you there may find
Oh! promise me you'll bear in mind
The happy days we here have known.
My heart for thee
Shall ever yearn:
Oh! promise me
You will return!

While in some distant place you dwell.
To love new friendships may impel
And thrill your heart as ne'er before.
Somewhere, perchance, your eye may meet
Some form more fair, some face more sweet;
But never one who'll love thee more.
My heart for thee
Shall ever yearn.
Oh! promise me
You will return!

Publication. First published in *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), in the Selections from Comic Operas section.

The Rose

What is there fairer, rarer than the rose,
When first its flushing, blushing beauty shows,
As its tinted, timid leaves unfold
Tender hues of crimson, pink or gold?
If within your heart there grows
A feeling you would fain disclose
Yet prattling words not wish to speak
A rose may be your messenger.

A skillful throw.

A gentle blow

Upon your loved one's cheek,
Softly, surely, will your cause declare.

There is no fairer, rarer, finer way

For a maid her passion to disclose

Than the gentle blow Love's tender play!

Of a perfumed, lovely rose.

This against your loved one's cheek

More than words than volumes speak.

Publication. First published in *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), in the Selections from Comic Operas section.

Song of the Fencing Master

I wield, I wield a deadly blade
The art of fencing is my trade.
I teach men how to thrust and parry,
Of dangerous risks to be quite chary.
I teach them how to cut and slash,
Broad swords to whack or rapier flash.
I wield. I wield a deadly blade—
The art of fencing is my trade.
 Whick-whack! Click-clack!
Like a flash, we cut and slash,
Light bright too swift for sight,
 Our blades so keen before thee gleam.

But swifter, keener than my blade,
Flash the eyes of one fair maid.
Sharper, surer is the wit—
All, indeed, must yield to it.
The arms of war I do defy;
From no mortal foe I fly;
But this, I own's, beyond my skill
I cannot fly, I cannot kill!
 Whick-whack! Click-clack!
 Our blades so keen before thee gleam.
 Light bright and sad is my plight!
This maiden's might upsets me quite.

Publication. First published in *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), in the Selections from Comic Operas section.

Bedouin Love Song

Breath of my body! light of my eyes!
Unless I'm mistaken you are a prize.
How I existed ere I loved thee,
Is matter of deep conjecture to me;
Whether I lived on flesh or on fruit,
What thou canst provide hereafter will suit
Here in thy arms forever I'll lie,
If thou canst so live surely, I shall not die,
 O loveliest dream, say how soon
 Will you bind up my poor heart's scars?
 Tell me how much more of this tune
 Must I measure my love in bars?
 O breath of my life,
 Now, come, be my wife;
For thou art my sun and my moon—
 To say nothing about the stars!

Publication. First published in *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), in the Selections from Comic Operas section.

Farewell to the Muse

Thou power that has ruled me thro' youth,
'Tis time thy dominion should cease:
Tho' undrained are the fountains of Truth,
This "deep drinking," I feel, must decrease.
Although there are things I would utter,
And thoughts, p'raps too sweet, to be said;
Just now it's a question of butter,
And the miserable problem of bread.
O Muse! thy short stay has been sweet,
Thy voice, I assure you, most dear;
But while I've been scanning thy feet,
I have lost my own standing, I fear.
Tho' few are the songs I have sung;
Tho' seldom my efforts were blest
There's water just now on my tongue
And an aching void under my vest.

Oh! gladly I'd stay with thee still,
And hug thee, sweet phantom, forever;
But the landlord will come with his bill,
And it's sloppy to move in this weather.

The minstrels of the air do not sing
When storms and misfortune hang over
If they'd half my troubles on the string,
They'd conclude they're a long ways from clover.

My lyre has been only a toy,
I scarcely have yet learned a chord;
But I'll just hand it down to my boy,
And go out and cut wood in the yard.
If Fortune shall favor, I'll see thee again.
And sing with thee worthier lays;
But now moves me a different strain
The mortgage that soon we must raise.
There's been ever a vague, sweet something,
I've labored in vain to express:
But this won't paint the house in the spring;
Nor buy our new baby a dress.

I have watched for the floodtime of feeling,
And the fancies oft borne in its flow:
But the truth's just now over me stealing
That the coal in the bin's getting low.

So away! reams of paper and quill;
Away, with your lyrics and sonnet!
Henceforth, 'twill require all my skill
To provide for the coming spring bonnet.
I'm too old to be "courting," they say,
 So, farewell! my sweet spirit of yore:
But, remember, should you pass by this way,
 The latch-string hangs outside on our door.

Publication. First published in *Sappho and Other Songs* (1895), in the miscellaneous poems section.

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

(1896)

Stage I | The lyrical drama

Prometheus Unbound

A Lyrical Drama

ACT I

SCENE—A wild and desolate peak in the Caucasus Mountains. Prometheus is discovered, bound to a rocky cliff, where for ages he has lain confined.

PROMETHEUS (solus):

Ah, miserable me! thus doomed by Fate
And heaven's unjust decree to linger out
An everlasting life—aeons of woe,
Constrained to this high rock with massive chains
Of iron and adamant, stronger than man
Or mortal strength could ever hope to bear.
O thou, bright Sun! whose swift, unfettered beams
Earth and the depths of air doth permeate;
Thou gentle Wind! that with unhindered course
Glides o'er the fruitful land and wave-crisped sea;
And ye bright Stars! that o'er my bended head
Shine nightly in unnumbered throng, look down
Upon me in my woe—e'en tho' thy glance
Doth pierce and burn me to the core with shame
Of my condition, once as free as thine.
Grant ye, at least, from these unanswering depths
Of desert air that swallow up my groans
And cries, some breath of sympathy may spring;
Let me but feel, ye friendly elements,
Some other soul beats kindly to mine own,
And fain would share some burden of my woe.

And yet I grieve not for the pain I feel,
That racks this wasted form of mine—wasted,
Alas! for ages—but immortal still;
Nor does my spirit moan the glorious shame
Of these huge chains that bind me to the earth—
All these a soul like mine can scorn; but here's
The groan that rends my heart—to lie abject,
Supine, bound hand and foot, twixt earth and heaven,
Yet forced to waste in idleness the days

And years away—this is the fiercest hell
 A proud, ambitious soul can ever feel.
 'Tis this that makes my pain no pain at all,
 But still unbearable; 'tis this that loads
 My chains with double strength and makes their weight
 So galling.

Oh! to expand this cramp'd chest,
 Stretch out these close, contracted limbs, to take
 But one short step upon the soft, green earth,
 Erect and free—as gods and men should be—
 'Twere better than a whole eternity
 Of this inert decrepitude.

Ah, me!

Why was it thus that I should suffer worse
 Than death, and yet could never die? But soft!
 E'en sorrow hath its joys, and dear they are—
 Because so few—and few because so dear.
 By gentle whirl of drooping wings, I know
 The dear companions of my woe approach,
 And with their presence bring a joy that soothes
 And dulls the edge of all my suffering.
 Thrice many thousand times hath yonder Sun
 His daily round performed, and in his course
 Ruthlessly scattered ruin and decay;
 But ever at my side with hopeful words
 These high-browed maidens of the mountain sit—
 The champions of my cause; and thus we see
 Oft-times upon the cold gray rocks of woe
 There blooms the tender flower of joy.

CHORUS:

Hail! hail! we welcome thee,
 Although we shudder as we see
 Again thy frown of agony.
 Ah, me! that gods must feel and know
 The grinding heel, the curse and blow
 Of tyranny.
 Thro' the clear air we heard you speak,

ECHO:

With bated breath,
Thoughts that made our hearts grow weak.
Dream'st thou of Death?
Keep not from us the jewels of your mind,
But speak the wisdom we ourselves could never find.

The thoughts

PROMETHEUS:

That stirred my breast, whose echoes ye have heard,
Are not so doleful as they seem, though death,
Perchance, should be their theme. To mortal eyes
Death is the height of all calamities.
Alas! how gladly would I now cast off
This outward cloak of harrowing renown,
And deem it highest joy to cease this life
And sink my woes in Lethe's oblivious waves.
If mankind knew the burden and the pain
Of this unceasing immortality,
They would not raise such loud and piteous moan
For what soon tires, but ne'er can be disowned.

How sweet the sleep of Death

ECHO:

To those who have no fear,
Who calmly yield their latest breath,
And sink to rest,
Like babes at breast,
Without a pang, without a tear.

HYALE:

How hard the bitter lot
Of poor mortality,
If toil and suffering were not
Cut short by Death's decree,
When fretful mind
Is left behind
With pain and strife and penury!

CHORUS:

Oh! who would not down life's small stream

Sail out upon the azure Ocean,
Entranced in Death's delightful dream,
To the source of being and of motion?
Who would not keep
The hallowed sleep
That crowns a life of pure devotion?

NEPHELE:

In death what can we lose?
For life,
Bound to this earth
In strife
To toil, or worse—to use
The days of dearth
For naught of worth—
Has nothing much to lose.

PROMETHEUS:

To me death were a joy unspeakable
Had it been so decreed that I should lie
Forever clinched to this seamed precipice,
For benefits no needy man bestowed;
But thus throughout the ages has it been—
Whoe'er on man has showered a precious gift
Has drunk the cup of sorrow in return.
O Death! thou magic and undying sleep
That cures at last the deepest wounds of pain
And woe, enwrapped in thy caressing arms,
O what a heav'n of everlasting dreams
Our disembodied senses doth embrace
And soothe to endless and ecstatic bliss!

CHORUS:

Death, physician to mankind,
Who heals the woes of troubled mind;
Restores the deaf, the dumb, the blind;
Who keeps the keys to towers high
Wherefrom the soul at last may spy
The meaning of life's mystery;
Releaser from fatigue and pain,
None ever asks thy aid in vain—

Tho' many reap unsought thy gain.
Tis not so strange that those who weep
Seek death for that sweet, quiet sleep
Which, while on earth, they cannot keep.

PROMETHEUS:

This suffering of mine shall have its end;
These sad and heavy eyes of mine are not
From pining sadness due—they but reflect
That dim and immaterial world whose dreams
Become the stern realities and facts
Of future time.

CHORUS:

Nay! nay! but tell us all.
Shall something worse befall
To give thee cause for grief?
Our hearts are torn for thee—
Unless we mourn for thee
We cannot find relief.

PROMETHEUS:

Know, then, there is a world
Within us and about us, which the eyes
Of common kind do not as yet discern.
Like clumsy boulders in a tinkling stream,
Some souls ne'er feel the subtle waves that surge
From center to circumference of this
Great Spirit-World. Here dwell the finer joys
That taste of heaven, and here the deeper thoughts
Whence spring and flow in swift, concentric waves
The sterner truths that strike the heart of man.
'Tis this unseen, unreal world that is
Of all things—ay! the only thing that's real,
Tho' hid within a coarse and outer growth
Of universal falsehoods and enigmas.

CHORUS:

O world mysterious,
Thou art so near to us

We would know more of thee;
Thou art more, it seems,
Than a realm for dreams,
 And keepest in store
 The deeper lore
Of truth and destiny.

PROMETHEUS:

By these prophetic eyes—whose joy 't has been
To watch the massing clouds, the drift and flow
Of these dim agencies whose mingling forms
Bring forth the varying offspring of events—
I see strange happenings, undreamed-of things,
That still lie deep within the womb of time.

CHORUS:

Down thro' the circling years of time
 Thou hast seen all;
And many things perhaps sublime
 Thou couldst recall
Whose meaning we could not divine.
 Thy watchful eye
 Not only viewed
 The savage land
Fruitful become and beautify,
But, with thy helping hand,
 Saw cities rise
 From hovels rude;
 Under thy care,
 Dull man grow wise,
 And wealth increase
 Thro' toils of war
 And spoils of peace;
 But long aeons before
 When first old Chaos bore
 To love a child
Whose mother—when she knew
The child she'd brought to view,
 And that it smiled—
 With horror filled,

Shrieking perished in her pain,—
When Order into being came.
All this and more hast thou beheld,
Which are the treasures of the Eld.
Pray tell us of the long-gone-by,
For 'tis a garden to our eye.

PROMETHEUS:

The Past, methinks, is an unfruitful theme,
Unless the telling o'er may teach us how
To read the Future or to comprehend
The Now. Much as the mind may love to learn,
Wisdom must oft to pleasure yield the palm;
For idlest folly is at times more wise
Than foolish wisdom. But the time drags on—
My leisure hours are lengthened into years—
And as the looking o'er those far-off scenes
May make us overleap our present woe,
Say what thou'dst know and gladly I will tell.

CHORUS:

Almighty Mind—
That backward throws
Thy glance to when from Chaos blind
And Night's black heart
The universe arose—
How wonderful thou art!

PROMETHEUS:

Boldly against the rise and wreck of worlds
The human Mind stands forth, sublime, steadfast,
Alone! The seasons come and go; men live
And die and cease to be; new worlds are born,
Grow into beauty, wither and decay;
The stars spring forth, then fall and fade away.
And yet, thro' all this mighty, ceaseless change,
The Mind as if from some high eminence
Looks calmly on, unmoved, unaltered still.

CHORUS:

Wonders of all wonders on earth,
From thee they all have their birth.

PROMETHEUS:

And yet how different the view to him
Who from some tall unsheltered height surveys
The scene entire, compared to one close by,
Who in the valley toils and merely sees
The narrow stream as it rolls nearly by.

Ere man, or earth, or starry sky, I was,
And from the whirling elemental mass

Of Chaos saw one by one the seething worlds
Go spinning on their everlasting course,
Till all the azure archway of the skies
Was fretted o'er with fair and radiant stars.

Oh! what a glorious sight 'twas then to view,
Adown the long, illumined avenues
Of space, the onward train of endless worlds.
The first great step was taken, and the march
Of evolution had at last begun!
The bud of life had bursted, and its leaves
Began to peep beyond the husk and shell.
Ere long on these infinitesimal spheres,
Which writhing suns when in their agony
Threw madly off—of which our earth is one—
Behold! the cooling rocks crumble, decay,
And soon luxuriant foliage springs forth—
Grasses, and trees, sweet herbs, and finer flowers;
Then later, crude, half-shapeless moving things
Were seen—precursors of the human form!
Ages on ages passed, and then we see
Those upright figures who have lately been
Like human beings wand'ring here and there—
Whose gaze was ever upward and above them—
In their bewildered minds at last had dawned
An inner light unlike the glare of noon
Or gleam of night—the God within now stood
Revealed!

The Ego of eternity,
That had indwelt and woven out the forms
Of ever finer, still-unfolding life,
Now, thro' the thinner, fair envelopment
Of human flesh, shone forth at last—divine!
Creation was complete! It was for this
That Chaos groaned, and fiery suns were cooled—
That on this quiet and out-lying world
Might germinate the last and highest fruit
Of all creative toil—the human Soul!

CHORUS:

O grand triumphal hour!
When man first felt the inner power
Of consciousness revealed;
When low, brutish desires
Are purged by purer, holier fires
Ere then in man concealed.

PROMETHEUS:

By slow and tedious steps I then taught men
To reap the fruit of knowledge—which is wisdom;
Beneath my watchful guidance, too, began
The useful arts and sciences to flourish;
But now the tyrant Zeus doth seek to stay
My course, and crush man from the earth forever.

CHORUS:

And yet with sorrow's clearer eye,
And mind replete
With varied memory,
The clothéd moments fly
More unperceivéd by,
And seemingly more fleet.
While every hour can borrow
From out the Past some gleam,
There's little room for sorrow—
Unless it's too, a dream.

PROMETHEUS:

All this and more I have beheld, and know
Wherewith to profit by. But here I lie—
Bound by the haughty will of Zeus thro' Fate—
On this huge rock, unmoved, immoveable.

CHORUS:

Is not thy miserable state
The fruit alone of Zeus' hate?

PROMETHEUS:

These present Gods are like the summer's wind—
A little gust which blows, and then is not.
There is a mighty Power that lives behind
And moves this vast, majestic universe;
Wrapped in its own impenetrable mind
Reposes some deep, everlasting scheme—
Too great for finite minds to apprehend.

This scheme lies at the root of all existence,
Brought systems forth and order out of Chaos.
All is controlled by Fate, the stern compeller,
The source of mind, phenomena, and life.
Within the circle of its vision keen
Has ever widened the concentric waves
Of human thought and action.

CHORUS:

Now my mind with fervor burns,
Now my clearer eye discerns
The purpose and the plan.
At last we can, tho' dimly, see
An all-controlling Deity
Whose hopes converge in Man.

Yet for me

PROMETHEUS:

Is endless pain and gloom and misery.
Alas! must this wide earth beneath me be
The toy and plaything of the petty few—
Those puny, petted nurslings of the skies—

And forced to yield always to their mad whims?
Shall god-like Man, whom I have nourished, be
By these new Gods destroyed, and Tyranny
Forever reign supreme?

I who have seen
All things, can only pause and answer—Why?
And yet I have but lately grown to doubt
What most I had believed, believe whate'er
Before was doubted—only to doubt again
As soon as 'twas believed.

Alas! the day
Seems ever darker than the night it ends,
And night more gloomy than the morning past.
And yet, alas! I must endure.

CHORUS:

All things will yet be well;
Tis only for a spell
That clouds can hide the sun.
Behind the night's thick gloom

The sun lies, and the moon
And stars must vanish one by one.

Thus roll
The days and years away; the roseate dreams
Of years ago have withered and decayed;
Bright hopes and splendid futures have become
Sepulchral mounds and monuments to mark
The dim and shadowy outlines of the past.
Alas! that we should ever rise on heaps
Of shattered hopes. My soul, that early chose
A glorious course, now feels its tired wings
Weighed down with clay, and seeks no more to soar.
Night, with its gloom, blots out another day,
And still for me no sign—no help—no hope.

ACT II

SCENE—Same as in Act I. Demeter and her Nymphs call upon Prometheus, complaining of the unfruitfulness of the earth and the general discontent of Man.

CHORUS:

Hail! hail! all hail to thee,
Great mother of Persephone,
Who makes the harsh and rugged soil
Yield to the laborer's honest toil;
Who follows round the plodding plow,
And crowns the faith of those who sow,
With harvests bright of ample yield;
O thou, whose hope is in the field,
Whose care is those who therein ply
Th' unvaried arts of industry,
Thy mighty power we revere—
Beneficent Earth-mother dear!

DRYADES:

To thee we come,
Thou Titan-son,
Who, chained to this dread, lonely rock,
Has long defied
The tyrant's pride,
Endured the storm and earthquake shock;
Tho' all their chains could not confine
One thought in that proud breast of thine,
Nor bind e'en those who at thy shrine
With thoughts of Liberty incline.

Alas! what wealth and time
The world lost in its prime!
What store it might have gained
Had Prometheus been unchained!
Oh! how we mourn for thee,
To see thee lie
Abject and torn
Beneath the fangs of Tyranny.

The joy I feel at thy approach is less,

PROMETHEUS:

Perhaps, than it should seem; for sudden Shame
Crowds all my better feelings back, and Fear
Unchecked would know what great and equal cause
Could urge thee to so perilous a journey?

DEMETER:

Grieve not to me, God most beneficent,
For what thou seemest to be nor what thou art.
I know thee, and familiar is the cause
Unjust that leads to thy discomfiture—
The fault is not thine own, and those who bear
The fruit of others' faults should not be shamed;
Besides, I have good cause for vent'ring hither.

Much do I crave to know and yet I fear

PROMETHEUS:

These heartless tyrants have some newer form
Of tyranny devised—I dread to hear!

DEMETER:

Alas! 'tis deeper than mere outward form—
The malady lies at the root of things;
The soil concedes no more its wonted yield—
The fruit blights in the blossom and the leaves
Fall slowly crisp and crumbling to the ground.
For long the heavens have refused to give
One drop of moist'ning dew or rain; of late
Despondent man has ceased his usual toil
And slowly waits his sure extermination.

DRYADES:

Our abode is stripped of its leaves,
It stands deserted and bare;
The earth no moisture receives,
But burns in the hot sun's glare.

NALIADES:

The streams grow shallow and dry,
We soon must away from them flee
Unless the Gods hear our cry—

They surely our misery see.

NYMPHS OF THE AIR:

The air is parched and hot,
Our gaspings are slower and fewer;
Unless relief soon is brought
We cannot much longer endure.

CHORUS:

The future as the Past is blind—
No cause, no course, no end;
All things to nothing tend—
Prometheus is confined!

O Earth! O Time! O Mind!
O Life! O Misery!
No joy, no hope we see—
Prometheus is confined!

INVISIBLE EVIL SPIRITS:

At last the day's coming
When Vice and Tyranny
Shall reign supreme.
Away, ye demons, fling
This phantom of Liberty—
Tis but a dream,
And dreams must be destroyed.
Quick! quick! let us begin
The long-deferred triumph of Sin—
Earth, heaven, should be—a void!

DEMETER:

Ah, me! those dreadful words, they drive despair
Into my soul. And when I daily see
The toiling millions blindly turn to heaven
Their dull, despairing eyes, in vain, for hope—
While aimlessly they wander to and fro,
Or work to wear their useless lives away—
My sad heart aches and tears rush in my eyes.

DRYADES:

Alas! the piteous sight!
How sad Man's wretched plight
 When Tyranny doth reign!
The gifts that cheer and bless—
Peace, joy, and happiness—
 Man seeks, but seeks in vain.

DEMETER:

The Father groans beneath his galling load,
Which still grows more and more o'erwhelming;
The mother sighs with far-off, vacant look;
E'en babes, with sickly voices much subdued,
Make poor pretense of play; while awkward youth
Grow up to feel one dull, short pang of love
And then—take up the burden of existence.
O age of misery! I pray thee tell
Where is there cause for joy in life or love
While wretched scenes like these aggrieve the eye?

DRYADES:

O cruel Fate! whose harsh decree
 Has chained the force,
 The cause, the source
Of Progress and of Liberty!

CHORUS:

O cruel Fate! we cannot see
 The course and end
 Towards which we tend,
But blindly put our trust in thee.

PROMETHEUS:

Nay! tho' the heavens fall, do not despair;
There is a course, in all material things,
That sprung indeed from Chaos, but shall not
Thither return. I, who suffer, have learned
To look with greater calmness and insight
Upon the grief and suffering of others.

I, who have taught mankind to strive with skill

To know and pluck the ripened fruit of knowledge;
I, who have been their counsel and their guide—

Tho' chained for ages to these mountain rocks,
Unmoved, immovable,—I now perceive,
Unless all signs and prophecies read wrong,
A greater gloom, that merely doth presage
The nearness of the morning light. Ere long
These chains will loosen; I shall be released
Once more to lead the upward-tending world
Thro' glorious futures onward to perfection.

DRYADES:

O happy day! we yet may rove
Unhindered thro' the shadowy grove—
Locked in the arms of those we love.

NAIADES:

Then shall we sit by cresséd stream—
Tell o'er our loves and fondly dream.

CHORUS:

O joy! we have not hoped in vain,
Or treasured up a fruitless cause;
For Right shall o'er the earth yet reign—
Obedient to eternal laws.

DEMETER:

Art sure these new-raised Gods will be o'erthrown?

PROMETHEUS:

Such is the will of Fate. These so-called Gods,
Reputed of superior mould, must fall
And bite the dust they now so much disdain.

DEMETER:

But will the change be soon?

PROMETHEUS:

Sooner, perhaps,

Than even dreams would dare to prophesy;
For daily now such mighty things are wrought,
'Tis plain it is with no mere common means
The Fates are working out their wondrous will.
Today's the greatest day in history—
It marks an onward, ne'er-o'ertaken step.

DEMETER:

But tell us why thou hast to prophet turned,
And what good reasons lead to these forecasts?
For faith, altho' of higher growth than reason,
Doth still require this lower, baser stock
To lean upon, for then it feels secure.

PROMETHEUS:

Thou hast, O Earth, but a mere atom seen
O' the plan by which creation doth proceed.
This earth is merely to the realms of space
A sheltered bay for few and shallow waves
To drift and play in, while the Ocean great
Rolls deep beyond. Ages on ages past,
One grand, mysterious process was begun—
Whose final work is not yet done. At first
It stationed suns, then moulded planets dim
And made them fair with useful plants and flowers;
Wove out the lower forms of moving things,
Then more and more complex and perfect types,
Till all at last was consummate in Man—
Or will be when the mighty task is done.

DEMETER:

Then not created for my care alone
Was Man; he is to hold a higher place—
The climax in the series of events!

PROMETHEUS:

Faintly but firm the print is seen; towards Man
All things have tended since creation's dawn.
The flow of coming ages will purge out
The coarse and baser elements till all

The taint of ancestry shall be effaced,
Until the Soul shines forth—a perfect gem!

DEMETER:

But after all these years of toil, when Time
Has worn away the traces of his birth,
Will he then dwell upon the earth forever?

PROMETHEUS:

Why dost thou still pursue thy questioning?
With knowledge oft comes sorrow. Wouldst thou drive
The Infinite itself unto the wall,
And call the unborn ages forth to speak
Before their time?

DEMETER:

This only would I know;
For have I not the keen solicitude
That ever lies within a mother's heart?
I ask but this.

Then to thy sorrow search

PROMETHEUS:

The hidden things, and learn what is to be:
A few short years will see Man pass away—
The earth roll cold and pulseless thro' dim space;
Like some sad, lonely moon—

DEMETER:

O bitter Truth!
I know thee now too well—thou art but gall!
Cruel is Fate—this life not worth the toil!
Ah, woe is me! not merely that I am,
But that I know I am a thing of time—
A creature born to struggle and to die!
Where is the good of these aeons of toil,
Of struggle, pain, and slow development—
All for a perfect hour, fleeting and vain?
O Truth! what mockery has called thee sweet?
Bitter thou art; to me, wormwood and gall!

DRYADES:

Alas! whene'er we rise
 Upon the swell of joy,
 Our spirit sinks and dies
 E'en as the wave rolls by.

Peace, peace, for shame! Gods should not grieve like men—

PROMETHEUS:

Altho' they be not far removed from them.
The gloss and finish of this earthly life
Will well be worth the toil when all is done.
A glorious end will surely be attained—
Else all creation were a failure vast
And all this universe most incomplete.
To hurl the discus further at a throw,
Or shoot the arrow nearer to the mark,
To feel the blood flow quick from exercise—
All nerves the human hand to still reach forth
To pluck Perfection's rare and vaunted flower.

DEMETER:

Indeed, most glorious does all this seem;
But where's the glory that can compensate
In any measure for a lack of living?

CHORUS:

Pray tell us more of that still distant date,
When Man shall thrive in his perfected state.

My words—altho' a God's—cannot describe

PROMETHEUS:

The more than heavenly transports of those times.
None then would think these travail-burdened days
Had not brought forth a most abundant fruit.
The rank of tyranny will be forgot;
War, famine, strife, and pinching poverty
Will have become, like childish toys, outgrown—
Diseases, dim traditions of the past,
And all this flesh—now vile—insensibly

Have lost its aches and pains, and grown to be
At last a fair and holy temple, fit
For pure, angelic spirits to reside.

DEMETER:

Scarcely can I believe such wondrous things
On this sad earth will ever be.

PROMETHEUS:

I know
The heart that ever hopes is called a fool—
Fit only to be duped; but sure as noon
Succeeds the morn, so will these things yet be;
They are the leaves and flowers that grow forth
In proper season on the Tree of Life.
We now are blindly toiling at the roots,
But ages hence will see above our heads
The spreading branches and the ripened fruit.

CHORUS:

O glorious day!
Earth moves along
Upon its ever upward-tending way.
With joyful song
We bless each day
That speeds it on its upward-tending way.

PROMETHEUS:

'Tis true each day that dawns upon the earth
Repeats no more the details of the last—
It labors now with new and great events.

ACT III

SCENE—Same as before. The Nymphs of the Morning inform Prometheus of the long-looked-for Champion, who has at last appeared in the West.

EONIAN NYMPHS:

Over mountain, over plain,
Over land and pathless main,

With lightsome steps we speed.
Thro' the cool and dewy air,
Ere the last star fades afar,
Our course we onward lead—
Making the way for Helios.

Not a moment may we waste,
Round the earth we quickly haste,
With signs of coming day.
Rosy tints and gentle sound,
Spreading softly, far around
O'er the face of morning gray—
Making the way for Helios.

PROMETHEUS:

Maidens of the morning bright and beautiful,
Seest thou in thy wide flight aught new or strange?

BOREIA:

So swiftly we flee
Little leisure have we
Man's doings to see.
As we hasten by
They slumbering lie—
Dead to their misery.

AUSTERIA:

Where silence has been
I lately have seen
Activity keen.
Man's slumber, it seems,
Has broken in dreams
Newly lit with strange gleams.

EONIAN NYMPHS:

Of late from out the distant West,
Beyond the "Islands of the Blest,"
A champion bold has come.
With valiant arm and towering crest,
On—ever towards the effete East,
He nears the rising sun.

PROMETHEUS:

Ye rosy nymphs, whose lips are pure and fair
As tinted shells that drink the ocean tide,
Whose murmurs are as solemn yet more sweet—
Know ye the glorious day is not far hence
That shall disperse this dark but waning night!
A prophecy there was, of old, which once
The ancient Titan, Themis, taught to me:
“One day a champion, from the people born,
With god-like powers, from the West shall come,
And break the cursed chains of tyranny.”
Thus doth this ancient prophecy come true.
Deliverance will be ere long at hand;
For even now my riven chest feels not
The binding staple’s thrall, and on my wrists
These once huge chains have shrunk to gossamer.

EONIAN NYMPHS:

High upon the Western world,
Behold! new colors are unfurled—
 The Champion appears!
The cause of Truth is marching on,
The world each day is being won—
 With spoils of other years.

CHORUS:

The sun from out the Eastern ocean
 Shone dimly thro’ the night;
But from its later, higher station,
 It floods the earth with light.

ECHO:

Daylight first dawned on Orient shores;
 But with the growing light
It westward moved, and thus the East
 Was shrouded first in night.

NEPHELE:

Another day has dawned—

A brighter than the last:
It casts a brilliance forward
And a shadow o'er the Past.

yale. But other days shall brighten,
Better far than this.
Man's toil and burden lighten,
And life will seem not all amiss.

PROMETHEUS:

Upon the Eastern shores Empire first stood,
And westward still has traveled with the Sun,
Until, e'en as the setting sun throws back
Upon the tired world a softer glow—
A holier light,—so now the pensive hours
Of this serene earth-twilight has begun,
And early morning's barbarous strife must cease.

CHORUS:

But speak to us that secret word
That has been kept so long unheard.

PROMETHEUS:

That secret dread, before whose awful power
The race of tyrants tremble and shall fall,
Is but the secret of the Multitude!
Who soon shall simply and sublimely say:
"All power is of us, and is ours alone."
This even now seems borne upon the breeze,
And madly strives for force and utterance.

CHORUS:

Would we could wreath
In proper lines
Th' elusive thought
That Man divines,
And fain would breathe—
But yet cannot.

PROMETHEUS:

Know ye these songs we scarcely breathe—these thoughts
We only to ourselves, half-smothered, think
Somehow find root and growth in other's minds—
Spreading like unseen thistles in the wind—
Till when we bravely speak them out, we find
The same from other lips had halfway crept.

HYALE:

There's some mysterious chain
That binds all souls together.

ECHO:

Like some ethereal main
Whose waves move with the weather.

NEPHELE:

As zephyrs from the rose-leaves
Go fraught with like perfume,
So this thought-wave now breathes
To Man his coming doom.

PROMETHEUS:

Beneath the overhanging mists I see
E'en now upon the troubled earth strange signs
Foreboding new and great events. To heaven
It casts no more its old accustomed look.

CHORUS:

We see small groups of men
Talk solemnly awhile—
Whose looks do in the end
Develop into smiles.

PROMETHEUS:

Long have we waited, but ere long the Earth
Shall see the full-blown flower of its hopes.

ECHO:

Out in the distant West—
Where Nature yields its best—

A child from Tyranny was born.
It dreamed of Freedom's might—
Has dared maintain its right,
And holds the Old World up to scorn.

PROMETHEUS:

The subtle breath of this sweet Liberty
Has touched upon and breathed a malady
Into the sickly hearts of human kind;
And, like as poison pricked into the blood
Drives out the deadly venom of disease,
So now this gentle remedy bids fair
To cure the world of its great present ill.

ACT IV

SCENE—Same as before. Hercules, the Champion long-prophesied, arrives, breaks the fetters that have confined the God, Prometheus, and sets him free.

HESPERIDES:

Out of the far-off West we come,
Beyond where Atlas holds the dome
Of heav'n upon his shoulders bare;
From out those glorious gardens fair,
Where breezes whisk and whisper low
On golden apples as they grow,
Where heav'n inhales the rich perfume,
As sunbeams dream on Summer's bloom—
From that fair land we come—we go—
From where Earth's golden apples grow.

DRYADES:

High and higher still we climb,
Far above the oak and pine,
Fleet of foot, but faint of limb—
On, and onward still!
In the leafy shade we lay
Whisp'ring loves and verses stray,
When tones of a sublimer hymn
Our startled ears did fill.

NYMPHS OF THE AIR:

Whither, O where,
Thro' these unending
Realms of air
Are we now tending?
Is't Destiny
Marks out our flight?
Blindly we fly—
On—thro' the night.

DEMETER:

Even as the peaceful sky that heralds oft
The deadly hurricane or earthquake shock,
So now the hushed world appears to me.

SPIRITS OF THE DEEP:

Something has stirred
The depths below;
The Earth has heard
That fatal word—
“Liberty!”
The heaving sea,
With many a throe,
Moans “Liberty!”
The despot's pall;
The cure for all
Earth's keenest woe.
Something has driven
Us out of the depths
Upward—towards heaven.
To heights more sublime,
With faltering steps,
On—upward we climb!

CHORUS:

At last the glad Earth seems to smile—
As tho' ensnared in Beauty's wile.

PROMETHEUS:

Am I confined here still? Do these huge chains

Indeed weigh down my limbs, or do I dream?
Tho' bound, I am not far from being free.

CHORUS:

Ye, whose bright eyes reflect the Sun,
Look ye—behold the champion
Now climbs the rugged height!
He nearest to the Gods has come,
And in their presence yet shall roam—
A shining star of light.

DEMETER:

Prometheus, now is thy delivery—
Altho' the weight of ages has withheld
Thy onward course, and made thy soul to feel
A soaring hope chained to a deep despair,
Rejoice, for now thy freedom is at hand.

PROMETHEUS:

'Tis well; and better is it to rejoice
And drink our joy from Future's gauzy wing
Than fondly wait till fickle Time alights;
For then, perchance, the honey of our flower
Will turn to gall.

DEMETER:

Strike up the joyful sound);
Let poets sing, and music's lofty strain
Proclaim the glorious theme, "Freedom to Men!"

PROMETHEUS:

Like all good things in life, the best comes last.
Tho' tardy, it is welcome none the less.

MUSES:

From Tempe's vale
And Helicon's lone shrine
Again we spring.
Long used to wail,
O'er cold neglect to pine,

Once more we sing.
A nobler strain
Of new and better themes
Breathes from the Past.
The highest vane
Of human hopes and dreams
Is reached at last.

Not Helen fair
Nor old Aeneas' name
Now loads our tongue;
The deeds of war,
The hero's single fame
Has long been sung.

Not one brave heart
Nor one fair woman's face
Now stirs our wings;
A higher art
And more perfected grace
Seeks grander things.

Too great is Earth,
With all its human needs
And hopes unfurled,
To let the worth
Of one man's faith and deeds
Eclipse the world.

For centuries
A silence we may keep
Like that of death;
Then waking, rise
To chant those dreams of sleep
With waking breath.

This life of ours
But inspirations are
On which spring forth
From heavenly bowers
The thoughts and things too rare
For worldly birth.

We pause, perchance,
We sleep, but never die.
Each new return
Marks an advance—
Higher the course we fly,
Fiercer we burn.

No idle dream
Now wakes our lyre again
In tender call;
Henceforth our theme
Will be not Man—but Men;
Not one—but all.
We hail the star
That heralds better things
And grander deeds;
Ancestry's scar,
The envious, bitter stings
And poisonous seeds,
That choke the earth
And stint the heart of Man
Must now give way.
We sing the birth
Of Freedom's generous plan—
Of Manhood's sway.

HERCULES:

At last I see before my eager eyes
The glorious task for which I was brought forth.
Ages have groaned and waited helplessly;
But now behold! the mighty deed is done.
Beneath the yoke of unjust tyranny
The leader of mankind shall bow no more;
I break the chains—behold Prometheus free!

CHORUS:

Break, break the cursed chains
And let the God be free.
Let tyrants know 'tis not in vain
We seek for liberty.

NYMPHS OF THE AIR:

Take, take the glorious news,
And bear it to the sea.
Where one doth gain the many lose—
All lose when none are free.

SPIRITS OF THE DEEP:

Wake, wake the sound, ye waves,
And bear it o'er the sea;
Foul tyranny is in its grave,
And Man at last is free.

DRYADES:

Breathe, breathe, ye forest leaves,
That spread on every tree.
The Earth her highest hope receives—
Behold Prometheus free!

PROMETHEUS:

Earth, Air, and Sea, and all ye living forms
That dwell in either realm, and e'er can feel
A sense of joy, come now; rejoice with me!

HERCULES:

The highest deed that human hand can do
Has now been done. The shackles, old as time,
That have weighed down and bound the limbs of Man
Lie wrenched, broken and pow'rless at his feet.

DEMETER:

The world is free!

PROMETHEUS:

And this is liberty!
How sweet, let those who taste and feel its joys
Alone declare—none else can estimate!
How joyfully my lungs drink in these draughts
Of heavenly air, and all my soul expands!
Could all men taste the sweets of liberty,
What a gigantic stride the world would take!

And so 'twill be.

 The mighty Ananke
Of ages past hath now redeemed our hopes,
And shown itself to be, blind tho' it seemed—
In truth we were the ones that could not see—
That stern Necessity, whose deep-laid schemes
Unspoken force alone could consummate.
FORCE, FATE, GOD—call't what ye will,—
It has its mighty purpose to fulfil,
And is the source and end of all things still.

Publication. First published as *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama* (Franklin, Ohio: The Editor Publishing Company, 1896), the copy-text used here; revised and reprinted in *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 113–155. The later witness modernizes punctuation and contractions and supplies a small number of verbal adjustments; no wholly reconceived version is printed separately.

THE DANCE AT THE SPRING AND OTHER POEMS (1929)

Stage III | The late collection

The Dance at the Spring

Suggested by Picabia's painting of the same name

—I—

(Origin of Poetry)

Light-footed words in measured movement blending,
Linked-up in lilting lines, and sweetly ending,
Revealing, while concealing, thoughts that soar and sing,—
(As tilting in th' leafy tree, the tuneful bird
Warbles for joy, and nowise to be heard;
So has the hidden poet woven from day to day
The three-fold mantle—story, song and play,
With shuttled threads of many hues and kinds—
Threads spun by supple hands and dyed by subtle minds),—
Enduring Speech, the favored words of Time!
Clothed with delight in meter, rhythm and rhyme,
Echoing along the changing grooves of song—
The dim reverberations of those scanty sounds
That savage man emitted in his playful rounds—
The uncouth lays of prehistoric days
That rippled from the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing
The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—2—

(Pageant of the Dance)

O Dance never ending—forms floating, fleeting, contending,
Advancing, receding, ever strangely meeting and blending!
Perpetual pageant! unreal and ghostly, it gleams,
Like a wonderful vision seen in the light of dreams;
Like vapors arising, surging, menacing crowds
Of monsters blood-red and rampant, dissolving like clouds
Suffused with color at sunset—changing from rose-tints to shrouds;
Then pastoral scenes, where sporting nymphs are seen
In shadowy groves, or dancing on the green.
Thus ever-changing, widely ranging, an endless throng

Display their passing moods in dance and bursts of song;
Lays of peaceful life, cries of war and strife
All ripple from the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—3—

(The Spring of Life)

Up from its ancient source unknown and deep-hidden,
The Spring of Life pours forth forever, and unbidden;
Full-flowing, like Syrian springs, from the side
And solid frame of the earth, its deep, life-giving tide,
Throwing o'er the mountain's head the forest's shadows,
And beyond them stretching a-slope the out-lying meadows.
From its moisture springs the myriad of flowering things
That brighten the landscape, and spread their colorful wings
O'er the carpet of green in the valleys. Love's bowers
It builds, and the restful oasis with cool shade it endowers.
Like the seasons it varies—receding, wildly-out-breaking;
Bitter, then sweet to the taste of each one partaking;
Refreshing to man and wild beast and the birds in the air—
Great Giver of life and delight, still haunt where the Muses repair!
Clear, placid and cool; then troubled and turbid the pool

Whence ripples the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—4—

(Spirit of the Dance)

From Life's Spring flows a force that has been and is still giving
To what we call substance (the seemingly dead and the living)
An ordered rhythm—the breath of the First
Great Cause
That wedded substance and Spirit by strict, immutable laws;
For all things, from the lowest to the highest in station,
Are formed of merely different rates of vibration
Of one only and simple essence ever revolving

Swiftly in circles and orbits eccentric, dissolving
Into molecules, atoms and what is finally known
As the ultimate, indivisible. ion!
In manner distracting, expanding, contracting,
Hither and thither flying, combining, reacting;
With likes and dislikes dispelling and calling,
Distilled into solids, liquids and gases; filling
The Vase of Life to the brim, then heedlessly spilling
And draining down to the dregs; creating and killing;
Ever lighting, the tapers of the volatile vapors
That rise from the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!



(Progress of the Dance)

Like a pendulum perpetually swaying and swinging
To and fro, from extreme to extreme fretfully flinging,
Like the tides of the ocean ever twinkling and dancing,
With serried waves in continuous cycles advancing,
Then breaking in myriads of bubbles that run
On the smooth, sloping beach, and sparkle in the sun;
So, gladly or sadly, the dancers madly go round—
Swayed by moods or emotions light or profound;
By crowd-excitement carried swiftly along,
Involved by pleasure, or lashed by passions strong—
A heated, unruly mob, shouting a ribald song!
Like dressed-up puppets, propelled by hidden strings,
The dancers run, and shake their tinsel wings!
Lightly tripping, tracing out the figures blind
Designed and patterned in the Ballet-Master's mind!
Varied by Time, Life's circling pantomime
Ever ripples from the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!



(The Birth of the Dance)

When the pangs of the birth of the young earth were scarce over,
 The clumsy, uncouth Cave-man comes out from his cover—
 Hairy, unkempt, like an ape in movement and shape,
 Uttering coarse, gibbering laughter, and inarticulate cries.
 With loud clapping of hands and smiting of thighs,
 He rises and squats, then crawling and creeping—
 Portraying the beast of prey on its victim leaping;
 Reeling and kneeling, his vile-smelling body revealing
 The lowest of passions—the depth of sensual feeling!
 Near by him his women and filthy progeny lie
 Stolid, agape at his awkward mimicry,
 As step by step he simulates the rapture
 Of the chase—the wild beast's slaughter or its capture.
 Yet from scenes so mean the magic of the poet's brain
 Has wrought the sweet and simple beauty of his strain.
 From lowest savagery has come the lyric cry
 that ripples from the Spring—overflowing,
 Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—f he Spring eternal, everflowing!
 f

—7—

(In the Stone Age)

The skin-clad savage more proud and martial soon waxes,
 Armed with darts, flint spear-heads and double-edged axes—
 No longer fleeing in terror from th' beasts of the wood,
 Nor fearing a supply of fresh and plentiful food,
 From the slice of life he zealously squeezes a zest,
 And feels in his throbbing veins the thrills of conquest!
 Reliant, defiant, he bravely goes forth to renew
 His unsettled feuds, or provoke new foes to subdue.
 Singing—with pride unbounded—bringing in glee
 From his fresh encounter a gory head for a trophy—
 A human head, (his foe, perchance, or his rival),
 First and grim reminder of the law of survival!
 Anon, in more peaceful moods, he quickens his blood
 With song and dance improvised, and half-understood;
 The gorge of the feast, the glamour of marriage
 He construes in song, in gesture and carriage;

In sickness and misfortune he implores and importunes
The powers of darkness that hover around him—
That ever watch and wait to confound him

As they rise from the Spring—everflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—8—

(Dawning of Religious Dances)

Into the nebulous mind of the savage, unstable and credulous,
Come forebodings of evil and fears stealthy and sedulous.
In the darkness of night he discerns huge monsters of evil,
Revengeful spirits ever pursuing him—angry and hostile.
Hoping to appease or disperse them he seeks for a charm
Or crude incantation and magic to preserve him from harm—
By offerings of food, by praying and chanting—
By joining of hands, loud wailing and dancing!
To shape and display the Unknown Power whose aid
He invokes, his ideal—the fetish and idol—was made
Of unusual rocks or pebbles—odd pieces of wood,
Later carved into totems or colored with blood;
Then animals, supposed to be sacred, began
To be chosen as gods, and the head of each clan.
Soon his vision enlarges, and raising his sight,
He adores the sun—the giver of life and light!
Then costlier gods are devised, of marble and gold,
Studded with rare and precious jewels of value untold,

Housed in awe-striking temples of increasing resplendence,
In charge of liveried priests and paid attendants.
For each time and place and each different race
A change comes over the Deity's face;
New religions and rites, new hopes and delights
Ever rise from the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—9—

(In Egypt)

In the land of Isis, Osiris and the hawk-headed
Horus,
Where the long-buried Past still lives and is lying before us!
Home of ram-headed Ammon, the Jackal Anubis,
The ibis-headed Thout, and the sacred bull Apis;
Land of the seven-mouthed Nile, whose tear-swollen stream
Unrolls and covers th' black land with a vesture of green!
Land of lotus and lebbakh, the royal uraeus,
Winged sun-discs, papyrus and sacred scarabaeus;
Of pylons, temples Titanic, colossi Cyclopic,
Obelisks, pyramid—s, sphinxes and vases Canopic,
Of burning incense—resins, kyphi and myrrh!
Land of mysteries and magic—where the many
Gods were
Included in One, from whose divine eye came forth
Man, and all manner of things; where nothing on earth!
Existed until Ra saw them and gave them a name!
Where man was first taught that his name would blossom again
Like the sacred tree, or renewed like th' Osirian grain;
That out in the West, in the wonderful Fields of
Aahlu,
United by magic, his six-fold life would renew!

Hut alas! the search for "the God they always were seeking"
Is finished—the forgotten formulae no one is speaking.
Pharaohs and fellahin have all been proven akin;
For each lives and dies, like the vapors that rise
And elapse from the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—10—

(Modern Oriental Views)

Under the star-flecked sky, near the sound of running waters,
To tinkling cymbals, dance the desert's dark-eyed daughters,
Swaying, like th' palm-leaves playing overhead in the breeze,
Each fibre vibrant and tense—tho' seeming at ease;

Or caged-up in narrow-laned cities, inhaling the scent
Of ill-smelling bazaars and cafes acrid and pungent,
Nautch beauties, painted and brazen, gaudily arrayed,
Hot-veined as the desert, are plying their incontinent trade—
With movements seductive—muscular writhing and twitching,
Sensually suggestive—a swirl of color bewitching!
Whirling dervishes—with rag-streamered staff, and dress
Of strips parti-colored—gyrating and falling senseless!
Humped-up in th' dark market-places, camels kneeling about
Waiting to be unloaded, or caravans heading out
Into the trackless desert, following the leader
Cross burning sands! Horsemen with sword and spur

Spreading the creed of the Prophet, and dealing death
To the unbeliever! Muezzins, with sonorous breath,
Calling from minarets the faithful to prayer!
Myriads of bobbing tarbushes in the busy streets where
The lure of the thousand-mosqued City calls from afar;
But briefly—like the twinkling of a star
Or the tinkling of the camel's bell—
Is woven the strange and lurid desert's spell;
Life's caravan draws near and passes by—
Toiling thro' sands—beneath a burning sky!
Thus the bustle and the glory of Life's phantasmagory
Ever moves around the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—II—

(*Among the Ancient Greeks*)

Land where the vision and worship of beauty once lingered!
Ere then unapproached in fulness and since then unfingered!
Proud of th' perfection of man and the beauty of woman!
Land of sibyls and sages whose wisdom and words
I, thro' the ages
Persist and adorn our last and most illustrious pages!
Builders of temples and carvers of marble immortal!
Looking down the long vista of Time at thy doors is the portal
Of Art, and Letters, wherein the almost inarrable shade

Of thought and feeling has never been better portrayed!
 Land of Olympian games, of athletes and runners;
 Castalian groves; home of Acadian summers!
 Shining exemplar, the cadrans of life in thy hand
 Has polished the gems of thought in every land!
 Narcissus-like at thy brook we lovingly look,
 And linger at the Spring—overflowing,
 Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
 The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—12—

(The Dark Ages)

Impure, unpellucid, th' dark waters now swirl and eddy—
 To music discordant the dancers stagger unsteady;
 Overcast is the sky and murky—with lightnings and thunder;
 Near and far is war, bloodshed, rapine and plunder!
 Overrun by the Vandals and Goths, the swiple of wrath
 And ruin lays waste the culture of earth in its path;
 From their bases chaste statues broken, like rubbish, overturned—
 The pillaged temples demolished—the palaces burned!
 Superstition stalks o'er the land, and the distraught peoples
 From pagan temples build churches and cloud-piercing steeples
 And under them chambers for torture! Inquisitors, martyrs,
 Heretics, serfs, barons, crusaders! In all quarters
 Of earth mankind into hell-pits inextricably stumbled,
 And the candle of reason snuffed-out from its sconce darkly tumbled!
 Death led the dance (the grim Dance Macabre!) grinning

And fleshless, swiftly circling without end or beginning—
 Luxury of disgust—ever gazing on. corruption and lust!
 Long and dark are the nights—sleepless and tearful;
 Darker and longer the days—disastrous and fearful!
 The clash among men in Hades, angry and striving,
 Was outdone everywhere on the earth by the living!
 For Dead Sea apples man struggles and grapples
 As he reels around the Spring—overflowing,
 Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
 The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—13—

(Founding of the United States)

Fleeing the hand of oppression, into the New
World
Came the Pilgrims. Armed with patience and faith they unfurled
Their banner of freedom-in-manner-of-worship and thought!
Far from the old-world Pharaohs, by a new Moses brought
Safely across unparted seas—a band
Of sturdy adventurers seeking the Promised Land!
“The land of liberty!”—the whole world hearkened in awe—
“Where all are free and equal under the law!
Land where the hand of bounty is opened wide;
Where all may seek, and all be amply supplied!”
Enduring privations and hardships, the dangers that lurk
On every side, unceasingly they work
To found a commonwealth where man’s ideal—
His hopes and aspirations at last may be real!
Where forests once stood soon hamlets and cities arose;
Men labored and prospered, and age was crowned with repose.
For the blessings of life bestowed without stint to the living,
After the harvests of autumn all rejoiced with
Thanksgiving!

Still westward and onward, o’er mountains and prairies, the course
Of empire rolled on with irresistible force—
A mighty nation—enshiefed of sovereign States—
Where in each one the grandeur of an empire waits,
Built by the brawn and brain of every land,
Outstretching to all the glad and welcoming hand—
To the proud or oppressed, the strong or distressed;
The latest torch-bearer to the world-weary wayfarer
That halts by the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—14—

(The French Revolution)

Down the rough cobbled road comes a mob, howling, inhuman,

Armed with scythes and pitch-forks—men and angry fish-women
 Surging into the courtyard, beating down the doors of the palace;
 A king, in the wake of kings wicked and callous,
 Waits within. In the Square a death-dealing machine
 Is standing erect and ready—the keen guillotine!
 Filled is the Place with people nonchalantly watching
 A long line of carts slowly arriving—the king
 And royalists loaded therein, and waiting to be
 Swiftly beheaded, while the onlookers shout in glee:
 “Liberty, Fraternity, Equality!”
 The torch of reason by madmen has lately been lighted—
 Seeking their wrongs by greater wrongs to be righted!
 Nightmare of the ages! Revenge has poisoned thy food,
 And engendered a thirst unassuaged with torrents of blood!
 The sweet fruit of life falls wormed and decayed to the core—
 With man turned to monster, and woman fallen still lower!

A reeling tarantism on the verge of life’s abysm
 Spurting from the Spring—overflowing,
 Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
 The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—15—

(*Ages of Science*)

The tides of mind have a turning, the era of learning
 Appears—with the tapers of knowledge every-where burning;
 Marvels of science, letters, music and art,
 Great inventions playing their inexiguous part;
 The hand and brain of man, now working in union,
 Extends his reach—connecting in instant communion
 All parts of the earth—subduing the forces of nature!
 Reaching aloft, to the skies man raises his stature—
 Computing the stars and scanning the imponderable ether;
 Travelling under the earth and ocean hinders him neither.
 Looking into and thro’ dense objects opaque to the eye;
 Rising from the earth, he floats thro’ the veils of the sky!
 He girdles the globe; makes the obsequious ether declare
 The inaudible messages embalmed in the air!
 The old gods, Terminii, are all passed hurriedly by

In the search and pursuit of the Ultimate Boundary:

Tho' each widening of vision but shows a deeper misprision
Of life, as it leaps from the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—16—

(Age of Skepticism and Unrest)

The pendulum of life—ineluctably swinging—
Beats time to new anthems adown the earth-aisles now ringing;
From material back thro' ethereal pathways to themes
And things deemed more substantial and real—the dreams
Of mind-stuff from which is building this every-day world!
Time-honored and age-old shackles are broken and hurled
Into the dust and debris of discredited things;
Man's restless spirit, fluttering, beating its wings,
Struggles to rise, and soar from life's common-place springs.
Age of unrest! of labor and capital contentiously dealing—
Of strikes and boycotts—new thought—meta-physical healing;
Unions seeking disunion—nations distrusting
Each other—huge armies in training—empires lusting
For conquest—false teachings placing old faiths under ban;
Much preaching of th' wolf-and-lamb doctrine—of th' superman!
With compass unboxed, drifting on without pilot or sail,

Life's ship in mid-ocean flounders adrift in the gale
That sweeps from the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—17—

(The World War)

Strong and well-strung is the bow—full-plenished the quiver;
The archer expert—the bolt emplaced to deliver;
The moment arrives—the arrow is sped on its way—
No matter how specious the pretext—they applaud: “To the Day!”
Then comes the marching of endless battalions—line

After line—bombing and burning of cities—malign
 Maiming of old men—murder of women and children,
 And heinous crimes too atrocious for words to record—
 All the while the devouring hell-snake still wriggling onward!
 Then a halt—a hasty retreat of armies in panic—
 Returning through blackened lands, like pathways volcanic!
 Huddled in haste into long lines of trenches—dug-outs,
 Guarded by barbed wire entanglements—redoubts—
 No Man's Land-terrific bombardments—sorties—
 Billows of poisonous gas—storming parties—
 Train-loads of wounded hurled to the rear—roadways

Crowded with refugees—villages ablaze—
 Aerial conflicts—bombing of far-off cities,
 Of hospitals and churches; on the free, high seas
 Submarines in their ruthless course are proceeding!
 Pierced to the heart, the exhausted world lies bleeding—
 Aghast at the Spring—overflowing,
 Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
 The Spring eternal, everflowing!

—18—

(Post-war Problems)

Quiet reigns! The era of hate and red carnage is ended;
 The vanquished victors retire—the fierce conflict suspended!
 Great joy and relief is renewed in the hearts of the nations!
 Then comes a time of reaction, of revaluations;
 The comforting garments of peace replace the panoplies
 Of war, and the bruised warrior shod in his slippers of ease
 Leaves in the hands of the statesmen the baffling burden
 Of defining and portioning out his dearly-bought guerdon.
 Hopeless endeavor! to harmonize the syncretic
 Aims of inordinate nations, unsatisfied, quick.
 To anger and blows, but bereft of all higher ideals!
 Plot follows plot, and under it all, Greed reveals
 Its grasping fingers. The final end is not yet—
 Much yet must be given to wipe out th' ineradicable debt!
 In the ashes of sacrifice the smouldering embers still slumber—
 Waiting only a breath to rekindle war's lightnings and thunder.
 The heart where love nested is still foul and viper-infested—

Hate's unforgotten note still lying half-formed in the throat!

A hush at the Spring—overflowing,
Flowing from a Source beyond our knowing—
The Spring eternal, everflowing!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (Boston: Harold Vinal, 1929), pp. 9–38.

Lines on Finding a Rusty Hand-Wrought Nail

—I—

Time-worn, disfigured relic, half-entombed
Beneath the leafy mould, once more exhumed—
Far from thy first and native resting place,
Where, from the filmy ethers whirled thro space,
Thy atoms first caught up the out-poured Breath
In sluggish currents—one remove from death—
Then, calmed and hardened by the mighty Flame,
Became the chief supporter of Earth's frame!

Hiding thy head among the tender roots,
Wherefrom my hard and thorny rose-tree shoots,
From what remote, perchance, unheard-of spot
Comest thou to burrow in my garden plot?
What aeons since thy cold earth-life began!
What ages since the first rough touch of man
Dislodged thee from thy "cribbed and cabined" home,
And on the anvil gave thee power to roam!

Melted and spewed by fierce volcano's ire,
Fashioned by blows and purified by fire,
Upheaved by rending storms and earth-quake's shock,
Wrought in man's forge, thou brother to the rock!
Rough are the many knocks, the mighty din
That comes to wake the sleeping God within;
Obedient to the Word—thro' endless strife
Thy dormant spirit grows to higher life.

To keener eyes—that have the power to see—
What marvelous tales are conjured up by thee!
Meseems thy crumbling particles embrace
The course and progress of the human race!
The works and monuments of peaceful times;
War's so-called triumphs, carnage and its crimes;
Man's upward struggle, growth and mastery
Of Nature—all keep equal step with thee!

Not unlike mine, the joy, that- after days
Of fruitless search—rewards the miner's gaze,
When, in the burning sands or mountain's side,
The nugget's gleam reveals where treasures hide!
With what delight he hails the precious find!
What sudden transport fills his startled mind!
Visions of instant wealth and easeful years
Blot out an age of earlier toil and tears.

He sees, in some unfruitful solitude,
Spring up—like magic—frontier cabins rude,
Wherefrom a race of feverish, uncouth men
Swarm o'er the hills and delve in every glen.
Borne on the unseen winds, to distant lands
The secret flies—the whole world understands;
The axeman stops, the reaper leaves the field
To seek where Nature gives an ampler yield.

His fancy sees again the motley trains
Of canvassed wagons move across the plains,
And flocks of white-winged vessels, piled with freight
From alien lands, throng thro the Golden Gate.

Thousands behind the hills, with eager hands
Winnow their wealth from rifts of golden sands;
They turn huge rivers from their ancient bed,
And giant mountains o'er the valleys spread.

He looks again. Now boundless ice and snow
Immerge the peaks and smoothe the vales below.
Here in the frozen North has Nature stored
The richest treasures of her secret hoard.
Man hears the call, and heeding not the cold
Nor arduous trip spans half the earth for gold.
Such is the lure—the never-failing charm;
Even tho the flesh may freeze, the heart keeps warm!

Further he looks. Now, space by Fancy rent,
Reveals far-off the "Darkest Continent."
He hears the babble of a foreign tongue—
Sees plodding Jacob's barefoot children young,
Playing with diamonds, in each tiny hand

Treasures are held that Kings could not command;
Unpolished gems are carelessly thrown down—
More precious than the jewels of a crown.

Thus may the pensive mind again review
Those favored spots where lavish riches grew,
Or backward turn, and from the storied page,
Pile up the fortunes of each former age;
Let gold and silver, jewels, all combine—
Their total wealth cannot compare with thine;
Most precious ore thou art—tho not from dearth—
Man's chiefest wealth—the sinews of the earth!

—II—

Thy crumbling form, encased in sheaths of scale,
Is proof of how the strongest things must fail;
And yet, beneath thy panoply of rust,
There lies a truth: "All things turn not to dust!"
Untarnished—thus the nobler metals rest
Immune from Time or acid's crucial test;
Unheard by them the Law that seems to say:
"Death follows birth; life comes from life's decay!"

Hand-wrought and clumsy relic of an age
When mankind struggled on a cruder stage,
Ere time evolved that inner power and will
That brought to human hands their present skill;
Stern hint of savage life—of Nature's slaves
That burrowed in the earth or dwelt in caves
Already formed, until, urged by desire,
They built rude huts and learned to rear the spire!

Axeheads and spears of flint—the Age of Stone—
Eked out with smaller tools and blades of bone
The savage found defaultive in his need;
From each new conquest sprang a greater greed!
He longed for deadlier weapons—hence the Age
Of Bronze and blows, when wars began to rage;
Then Fate upturned the Vial and outpoured
The Iron Age—the era of the sword!

Then o'er the world the Mediaeval night
Closed down—an age without a ray of light!
When magic grew and man perverted groped
For occult things; invoked black art, and hoped

In some mysterious manner to distil—
From charmed alembic or heated crucible—
The secret essence that the atoms hold,
And coin the baser metals into gold.

Eight wasted centuries the fruitless quest
For that elusive, wonderous Alcahest;
The “Great Elixir”—which, should it be found,
No possible container could impound;
That mighty “Stone,” sought for with so much pains,
Showed in the last retort—“worthless remains.”
The only fruit of all these years man sums
In these few words: “From nothing nothing comes!”

Nor could the vague philosopher resist
The weird delusions of the alchemist;
Building to suit his tastes a mighty scheme,
And painting up the facts to fit the dream,
He postulates all matter to require
Four elements—earth, water, air and fire;
That sulphur wed to mercury gave birth
To seven metals now interred in earth.

Each metal, likened to some planet dim,
Received therefrom a starry synonym:
To lustrous gold was given the orb of day;
Pale silver symbolized the moon's cold ray;
Quicksilver seemed to Mercury akin,
Venus to copper, Jupiter to tin;
For iron, Mars displayed his bristling head,
And sluggish Saturn was assigned to lead.

—III—

Despite thy cold and unattractive mien,
Romantic parts are played by thee unseen.
Tis said the ripening apple's ruddy hue

To subtle tincture of the iron is due;
The rosy blush that mantles on the cheeks
Of modest youth thy essence soft bespeaks;
While manhood's virile strength and Beauty's bloom
Are woven by thy shuttle in life's loom.

Heart of a lover, too, hast thou, o steel!
Thy sluggish particles can move and feel;
Some occult and unfathomed influence
Imbues thy molecules with life and sense,
And to thy inert mass a movement gives
That manifests in everything that lives;
A feeling—in the minerals innate—
That shows in higher life as love and hate.

That mighty thing that reaches out thro space—
Whose giant arms hold all the spheres in place—
Is but the outer, more extended force
That thro the atoms of the lode-stone course.
The iron earth, revolving on its pole,
Sets up the secret currents that control
The ship's unerring needle—holds it true,
When stars are out and land recedes from view.

Thy rusty coat of rough and ragged mail
But amplifies the moral of life's tale—
Points out Death's lurking head beneath the crown.
This ceaseless building-up and tearing-down;

This woeful waste, rot, ruin, endless blight;
The promise of the Morn revoked by Night—
All seem the sorry legend to display:
"The food of Nature is her own decay."

This death that in and o'er all things doth lie
Writes large our brief of immortality.
What is not, cannot be; what once has been
Must always be! No grace gives life, no sin
Nor punishment destroys. One added grain
Is more than earth or heaven can hope to gain;
The drop of dew may mask as steam or frost;
But nought is gained in nature—nothing lost!

—IV—

Man's many moves—his jaunts from shore to shore
Are mainly records of his quest for ore.
What bitter carnage raged, what empires fell,
The bloody annals of the past will tell!
For thee whole nations passed beneath the yoke,
And weaker races sank beneath the stroke.
Forever filching from Earth's treasury
This "Robber Industry" lays nothing by.

Early we read, in books of sacred lore,
Of Tubal-Cain—the son that Zillah bore—
First-known instructor of artificers
In iron and brass. The wordy comforters
Of Job also declared that man must feel
"The iron weapon, and the bow of steel
Shall strike him through." Thus on the holy page
Is blazed thy ancient, honored lineage.

Likewise, in other lands, and times profane,
Mute records of thy hoary age remain.
Ages before man tried to mark the flight
Of time, or with the stylus learned to write,
The swarthy sons of Egypt fled the sun
And subterranean mines began to run;
For sixty centuries, in silence hid,
Lay tools that builded Gizeh's pyramid—.

When venturous craft the Gates of Hercules
At length passed through, and ploughed the open seas—

Skirting the unknown lands by day, at night
Watching the stars to keep their course aright—
Still pushing on, at last Brittania's shores
Revealed a wealth of tin and iron ores
Which these intrepid rovers bore away
To trade for silks and spices from Cathay.

—V—

How great have grown the thriving world's desires,
Since glowing embers from stray forest fires
First hinted to the straggling hunter's mind
How native ores by fire might be refined!
And yet for centuries was man content,
With bursting cheeks thro pursed-up lips to vent
His labored breath and spur the lagging blaze—
The crude forced-draught of prehistoric days!

At length he placed upon the mountain-side
In rocky clefts, wherefrom the ore was pried,
Layers of seasoned wood, with ore inurned,
So faced that the roaring winds of heaven burned
With ease a greater bloom. Then came at last
The next rude step—the intermittent blast!
Contrived when some ingenious craftsman learned
How goat-skins into bellows could be turned.

What tedious, slow and unavailing toil
When, with bare hands, man sorted from the soil
The loosened mineral, or with rude blocks
Of yielding wood he tried to cleave the rocks!
How proud and satisfied was he to own
The more effective implements of stone;
But with what joy he hailed the crude pick, dressed
From chunks of ore—his latest tool, and best!

No newer implements, no better ways
Relieved the hum-drum of the sapper's days,
Till Watt made practical the walking-beam,
And proved the economic power of steam;

Then monstrous pumps and engines brought a change
That gave to mining projects wider range;
Deeper they pierced the metalized terrain,
And worked to greater lengths the fruitful vein.

Then, came the time when man was due to shake
His adolescent lethargy, and wake;
Ages of contact with the outer world
Had thought and reason in his mind impearled,
Until at last, like the scintillating sprays

The bursting rocket suddenly displays,
So did the fleeting visions of his dream
Take form and shape—be facts instead of seem.

Feeling the fetters from his pinions fall—
No more a mere “tool-making” animal—
Man learned the presence of the God within,
Whose power of thought can work, and working, win.
No task is now too difficult to note,
No secret thing too hidden or remote.
He probes the depths of earth, the ends of space,
And subtler, unseen worlds his thoughts embrace.

Close in the wake of steam’s all-conquering course,
Came still a newer and a mightier force;
The harnessed lightning—tamed and made to go
In wired circuits from the dynamo;
Subdued and held subservient to man’s use—
The “subtle fluid” first so-called—the “juice”

Of common parlance—gave a longer reach,
And swift as thought conveyed man’s will and speech.

With steel to aid the daring schemes of man,
The modern age of miracles began:
Cities of Babel-towers, where great ships wait
The separating seas to obliterate!
Huge bridges rise—like fabrics of a dream—
In mid-air clasping hands above the stream!
Miles of converging rails, whereon swift trains
Climb mountains steep and cross the boundless plains!

Strong-armed ally! across the yawning years
Thy iron tendons spanned the chasm of fears,
And safely thro life’s labyrinthine maze
Led mankind upward to more perfect days—
On Pisgah’s glorious height serene to stand
And view spread out below—the Promised Land!
The toil and dangers of the desert passed,
The White-walled City meets our gaze at last!

Despite the mighty exploits man has wrought
Since first he learned the compelling power of thought,

Yet common products on life's lower plane
Outweigh the brilliant triumphs of his brain;
The flights of genius—the restless conqueror's schemes
Are evanescent as an infant's dreams
Compared to those wide benefits that flow
From the steam-engine, printing press or dynamo!

—VI—

Cold, heavy, dense thy particles appear—
Symbol of strength, disdaining stress and shear!
Tho drifting darkly thro the starry ways,
On nearing earth thy path becomes a blaze;
And by the furnace of the sun sucked in,
Thy solid mass floats as a vapor thin;
Thus wastrel worlds, caught by its glare and pull,
Moth-like, rush sun-wards, and keep the cauldron full.

Useful, abundant and much-needed ore,
In various forms, crops out on every shore;
From Sweden's bogs to Taranaki's sand—
Where Gellivara's iron mountains stand—
Down thro the earth's rock-ribbed and ancient crust,
World-wide, erratic lies thy precious dust;
But stored within our own United States
The greatest treasure of the world awaits!

Giant among the nations! within thy hands
The hope and future of the race expands!
Thy starry flag, from coast to coast unfurled,
Proclaims this land—the workshop of the world!
To thee the war-worn nations give their sons—
The active, virile and rich-blooded ones—
To build a new and brawnier race to be
The Keepers of the Ark of Liberty!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 39–51.

Said Atropos to Lachesis

(Clotho, the youngest of the Fates, put the wool around the spindle, Lachesis spun the thread, and Atropos cut it off with her shears.)

—I—

“Fair is the thread through my fingers flying—
Warm as the flow of fresh-drawn milk;
Smoothly-entwisted the strands are lying—
Soft to the touch as the filmiest silk!
So, richly and radiantly, unfold
Sheen of silver and glimmer of gold!
All through the dawn, the heat of day,
While the stars patrol the Silent Way,
With tireless hands, twisting the strands,
We spin, and spin unceasingly
The threads of human destiny.
To new-born mortals I release
Lives of happiness and peace—”

Said Atropos to Lachesis:—
“Enough! sister, servant of Dis!
Beware! too much of bliss must not be given!
Remember! this is earth—not heaven!
Mortals must sting with pain and loss.”

(Snip! went the shears of Atropos)

—2—

“Ever with joy are all things created,
Only with life can joy remain!
Love gives the call when souls are mated—
Hell is a moment of heaven in pain!”
(Thus sang the youngest maid of the three,
As they wove the web of destiny.)
“Now cotton coarse and carded wool
I cull, and pile the spindle full;
For common folk the earth has need

To plow the land and sow the seed;
On tired wings, their toil and strife
Brings honey to the hive of life;
For millions on earth must work and weep,
And many must sorrow while some may sleep—”

Said Atropos to Lachesis:—
“Aye! pain and sorrow come not amiss;
By life’s rough lashes are mortals driven
To know their bounds is earth—not heaven!
Each body is born to bear a cross!”

(Snip! went the shears of Atropos!)

—3—

“Motley and mixed the strands are blending—
Knotted and snarled are the threads of life!
A pang at birth and a groan at the ending—
Earth-flowers must bloom in a garden of strife!
Comes fame or wealth to warm the heart,
Peace and health, like tired guests, depart;
If the wine of love life’s flagon fills,
A stroke—a crash—the precious liquor spills!
Perchance the poet pens his choicest lays—
Upon his bier they place the tardy bays!
Way-showers come to lead the erring world—
Curses and stones on their heads are hurled!
Youth has a thrill at Love’s brief inning;
Hopes and fond dreams fill life’s beginning—”

Said Atropos to Lachesis:—
Enough! Sister, be not remiss!
Too much to mortals must not be given!
Remember! this is earth—not heaven!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 52–54.

Lines to a Swan with a Broken Wing

—1—

Victim of man's inhuman vanity,
That finds delight in doing others ill—
Grim vestige of ancestral savagery,
Long prone to kill for sport or test of skill—
Sadly we view the joyous flight so soon
Cut short—transformed into a twinging
 swoon;
In vain we mourn the crimson marks upon
Thy snowy breast, poor, luckless, wandering
 swan!

—2—

Thine own appointed sphere has ever been
Winging thy way thro' Aether's realm serene;
Or floating on where inland streams begin,
Deep merged in solitudes forever green;
But now thy heaven of happiness and light
In one brief moment is eclipsed in night,
And thou, beside this dank and narrow fen
Must cower in pain—nor hope to rise again.

—3—

Oft wilt thou lift thy eager wings to fly,
And loudly beat—alas! the empty air;
Oft in the night-time raise thy pent-up cry,
And longing wait—and listen in despair.
Oft-times will airy voices, echoing fall
Upon thy ear in wild familiar call;
Anon the notes will faint and fainter grow—
Then leave thee lonely in thy silent woe.

—4—

Thy wild, far-sweeping instincts still throb on,

And Fancy still lights up thy feverish brain;
 But gone those days of joyous flight—and gone
 The power to bring their ecstasy again.
 Thy cup shall be, henceforth, to drink distress,
 And catch the echoes of life's happiness:
 Bound to the earth—a barren fugitive,
 Thou canst not either die, nor wholly live.

—5—

o mem'ry sad, and prospect more severe!
 To dream of soaring in one's element—
 Far from the sordid earth—in heaven's high sphere,
 Knowing no hindrance save thine own intent—
 Then wake to find a weight upon thy heart;
 Thy spirit pinned by Fate to earth's dull mart;
 To see that for unnumbered days is given
 A dwelling in the mire—a dream of heaven!

—6—

And who will pause to hear thy feeble cry,
 Or note the flutter of thy struggling wing?
 Who, to thy upturned, melancholy eye
 One glance of sympathy would deign to bring?
 Alone, cast-down, unnoticed and unheard,
 Thy plight a sadness in my breast has stirred;
 For ruthlessly has stubborn Fate accursed
 Those chaste ideals, youth had fondly nursed.

—7—

Thy bitter lot is but a metaphor
 Of other lives as sadly crushed as thine.
 Such is the ardent hero felled in war,
 And such the spirit poised for flight divine;
 But daily bound to trudge the pointed rocks,
 Or tread the tiresome furrow with the ox;
 Such are the countless wrecks of human strife—
 Dumb heroes in the tragedy of life!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 55–57.

Daughters of Danaus

—1—

The finished task gives to the heart of man
Its keenest joy. The toil, the tedious hours—
That slowly traced the ground-work of the plan
Are crowned at last with stately domes and towers.
The work is finished, and we feel the thrill
Of doing and creating what—we will.
The joy of doing breathes a kindlier spell
In knowing that the work is done—and well!

—2—

Ye kindly daughters of a kingly line,
What fiercer torments could the heavenly mind
Devise to fit an awful crime like thine—
What cruelty more endless and refined?
No racking pains, nor mortal agony
To dignify thy curse of drudgery:
No rest, nor respite in the mocking task
Of ever pouring in the empty cask!

—3—

Pity thy fate we must in spite of all:
The crime red-handed, and thy murd'rous heart
Was but responsive to a parent's call
That vilely bade thee play the evil part.
The filial off' ring on thy altars spread
Was branded as a curse upon thy head.
Poor victims of untoward circumstance,
Eternal torments thy inheritance!

—4—

Not thee alone do we commiserate,
And mourn thy unremitting punishment:

But all the untold millions yet to wait
The fruitless labor of a life ill-spent:
Who live, like other things, as best they can—
Content to simply live th' allotted span—
Who leave their sphere of earth-activity
No whit the better for their tenancy.

—5—

Others there be whose only thought is how
To squeeze the greatest perfume from the flower.
Some strive to reap the harvest ahead the plow,
Or catch the total rain-drops in each shower:
Some plume their feathers, vying with the moth.
And some there be who feed on idle sloth;
Others are bent to revel and carouse,
And dying, leave behind—an empty house!

—6—

How like a seeming curse, Daughters of Eve,
Has been thy lot through all the passing years:
To work—to weep—to suffer—to conceive
To build Love's rainbow with thy smiles and tears:
To melt the pearls of youth and constancy—
Like snow flakes dropping on the solvent sea:
To drain thy beauty, strength, all life can give—
And see it vanish thro the fateful sieve.

—7—

The course of Nature runs its wonted round.
The pale moon waxes—then begins to wane;
The ocean ebbs and flows with mighty sound;
Day follows night—night blots it out again;
The tree sucks up its verdure from the mold,
Then, dying, drops it back for earth to hold.
Thus all this ceaseless motion, sound and life
Are but the echoes of an endless strife.

—8—

A. task unfinished and forever new!
Tho doing, never done! Age after age
Each new race finds the self-same things to do,
And rounds the circle of Life's pilgrimage.
The ladder of our hope is raised with zest—
Alas! we climb no further than the rest.
Daughters of Danaus, we mourn thy task,
And pitying, we, too, pour in the cask!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 58–60.

Uncut Leaves

—1—

These well-thumbed leaves have oft been turned,
By other hands as unconcerned,
 And quite as casually;
Striving to trick an empty hour,
Flitting from bud to brighter flower—
 Slaves of a wandering eye!

—2—

Page after page I've idly scanned—
Seeking—but not to understand;
 Searching—but not to find.
Blindly, along the beaten tread,
By former aimless foot-prints led,
 I, too, am doubly blind.

—3—

Wrapped in a superficial dream,
The soul drifts down Life's sheltered stream;
 While fancy fondly weaves
A tinsel web of nothingness
That covers with its gaudy dress
 What oft the spirit grieves.

—4—

Thus lie unseen in some dim spot
Those unobtrusive pearls of thought
 The healing wound conceives;
Inclosed—as in a tinted shell—
Concealed from careless eyes they dwell
 Between the uncut leaves.

—5—

Could we but turn Life's volume thro';
Its vague, uneven lines review—
 While hope no more deceives...
The choicest gems of thought and song;
Our fondest themes, we'd find among
 Alas!—the uncut leaves!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 61–62.

Lines on Viewing a Church with Very Tall Spires

—1—

Cloud-piercing spires that proudly rise,
 Buttressed and pinnacled—with copings
 And quoins, and sloped weatherings,
And louvred gablets set cross-wise;
Subtly receding in each stage—
 The topmost spire still tapering more,
 With gnarled crockets arised o'er,
And barbarous stone foliage:
Triumph of gloomy, Gothic art!
 Offspring of that benighted Night
 Of Ages, what canst thou delight—
Except the sad and penitential heart?

—2—

Grotesque, archaic monument;
 That, from each dark and crannied nook,
 Bespeaks the limited outlook
Of times of turbulent content!
Thou sorry beacon, whose sad beams
 The ancient rocks and shoals proclaim.
 The sloughs and deep desponds—the same
That haunted the Crusader's dreams.
Thy flick'ring light doth still denote
 The self-same shrine and guiding star
 That mankind welcomed from afar—
When India's wise men conned their sacred rote.

—3—

Reminder of the fabled fall
Of man—of all that complex scheme—
That man-wrought iridescent dream—

Whereby the creeds have promised all
The balm of an immortal life:
A future heaven of joy and peace—
A strange, vicarious release
From sorrow, suffering and strife:
And by some simple, ceremonial rites,
Unthinking prayers and penitence;
By giving alms, or Peter's pence—
To clothe misdeeds with heavenly delights.

—4—

Poor Image, what supreme conceit
First privileged thy consciousness
To claim thyself the sole likeness
Of that great Power that would complete
The unperfection of this earthly life?
Presumptuous Man, that would not see
His short-lived personality
Snuffed out in Nature's ceaseless strife:
An endless chain of melting links—
A moving shadow on the floor—
A tiny pebble on the shore
That shortly into Being's ocean sinks!

—5—

Man's scope and trend are not from chance,
Nor yet resolved by some star—
Tho' predetermined his acts are—
The gifts of long inheritance!
Each present thought comes from afar;
Each act and impulse of the soul
Was faintly written on his scroll
At birth—he but engraves a deeper scar!
Some come to serve; some to command:
No matter where each pegs his tent,
The day and night is ever spent
Beneath the shadow of the Iron Hand!

—6—

Each whimsy fling man's pride may sway,
And make him of some import feel:
But like the potter at the wheel,
He can but take his lump of clay,
And fashion it as best he may.
A perfect form his skill may wait—
A worthless shard may be its fate.
The Oven of Life burns many kinds of clay—
Each from the other different;
But clay will not to crystal blend,
And man proves nought more in the end
Than Nature's most exalted element.

—7—

In Nature's strict economy
There is no loss nor gain. The scales
Hang even, and the life that fails
Gives place and room for other lives to be:
The sum must ever be the same.
The endless change of life and force—
That ebbs and flows from Nature's source—
Means nothing new but in the name.
The flick'ring flame, the zephyr's breath
The fluttering leaf, the falling star—
The solemn brief cadences are
In the eternal rhythm of life and death.

—8—

Some things there be that mortal mind
Can know, and some it may believe,
Others we labor with, and grieve;
But cannot solve. What lies behind
These knowable phenomena is all
A deep and dark enigma still.
We cannot glimpse—strive how we will—

The first, great Inner Principle.
The countless creeds—oft called divine—
Are but the feeble renderings
Of clumsy artists—human things
That sketch mere features of the great Design.

—9—

In the grey of early morn, the eye
Sees darkly; things familiar
Take on a strange, fantastic air
That oft their real natures much belie.
After the Night, the waking mind
Peered vaguely thro' the first, dim rays—
Exalted—deemed Creation's maze
Was plotted solely for mankind,
And reasoned that this vale of tears,
With all its sore defects must have
Some recompense beyond the grave—
With boundless peace and joy, and endless years.

—10—

In those dark days, we wonder not—
So cheerless every prospect seemed—
The seared and seamy conscience deemed
Its earthly habitation but a blot—
Its lusty flesh born for the scourge,
And when a song his voice would raise—
An incensed Deity to praise—
The plaintive chant sunk to a dirge:
His sinful soul was held in bond—
With penance as the sole relief:
Fated for sorrow, pain and grief—
Man's only hope lay in the great Beyond!

—11—

Immortal fluid! balm for woe!

Fond dream of pious egotist!
Eternal sunlight that has kissed
The precious crystals of this pure soul snow—
Too hasty and outspoken seems
Thy promises of bliss;
For heav'n an untold menace is,
And sorts not with our mortal dreams:
For life serene would prove a hell
To spirits differently inclined,
And grosser souls no joy could find;
But chafe beneath that beatific spell.

—12—

Myths are the food of early youth—
The sugared sweets of childhood days—
The nurse-maid's croon—the filmy haze
That hangs about the sober peaks of Truth.
Of late this long-taught mystery—
Of fancy and illusion born—
By searching Reason has been shorn
Of its supposed divinity.
The angry Father, in the souls—
That bear his image—breathes no more
His breath immortal as of yore—
No man-like God our destinies controls!

—13—

Full many a pious votary
The sacred score oft-times rewrote;
Struck out each separate, jarring note
That sounded in Creation's harmony:
Each twist and turn and subterfuge,
Each prop and bolster so applied
Made still another blotch to hide—
Each patch produced a rent more huge.
Doctrine on doctrine has been hurled
From pulpit, throne and chancell'ry

To complement and satisfy
The so-called moral order of the world.

—14—

The ripened fruit doth oft decay—
From lusty, well-hung branches fall;
The budding flower—fairest of all—
Will oft-times droop and fade away.
Yet all the crooks and ruts that groove
A rugged pathway up the hill
Would not imply that there was still
A road beyond that runs more smooth.
So he who strives to read the plan,
Interprets it in his conceit,
And then concludes some future sheet
Must fill the higher destiny of man.

—15—

Some sink, while others ford the stream,
And some dry-shod sail by them both:
Thus oft the hand of Bounty doth
More open to the undeserving seem.
The wicked prosper, and the good—
Tho' ne'er so good—strive how they will,
Make shift to gain a livelihood.
To even up these sore defects;
Dispense unsatisfied desires,
A pious wish the scheme inspires,
And compensative justice interjects.

—16—

Tho' all should speak—yet Truth comes not
In numbers. The thoughts the masses hold
Have oft in former times been told.
We only know and teach what has been taught,
And being taught, we straightway feel
These few and simple truths must be

Common to all humanity—
For so do innate truths appeal.
Yet do we find intelligence
So gross, and intellects refined
Agreeing both that mortal mind
Doth lose itself at death, and goes not hence.

—17—

That simple, immaterial
And indivisible entity—
The human soul—is said to be
The breath of Deity—being withal
Of no known substance—hence must be
Superior to mortality
And incorruptible. Thus we
Have builded on this fallacy
For ages, and have oft admired
The hollow super-structured—reared
By lofty faith—until we feared
Not even death, and thought the scheme inspired.

—18—

The gilded idol at whose feet
The pious kneel in reverent awe—
The private word; the superior law
Dispensed directly from the judgment seat—
Such are the things men call revealed.
Fair creature, Superstition's child!
Daughter of Fancy undefiled!
Thy glorious presence has concealed
The thought of doubtful parentage.
Expectants first thy message heard,
And drinking in each honied word,
Have fondly passed thee down from age to age.

—19—

Thus doth the tiny roots creep in,
And change the current of our thought;
Thus by the rivetings are wrought
The lofty structural frame where-in
The solid walls and stories are.
When mortal mind shook off its swoon,
Successive presentations soon—
Glimmering like a distant star—
Became the source of memory
Which after ripened into reason;
Then blossomed forth in proper season
The flower of conscience—to crown life's finished tree.

—20—

The clouds that sail across the blue,
Viewed in the sunset's glow, take on—
E'en like the swift chameleon—
Each second a different form and hue.
Today we set down things as true
Beyond dispute; tomorrow's light
Some newer aspects will invite—
Each day new angles meet our view,
And in the end, the mountain peak
Seems further off than at the start.
Truth is not bought at every mart;
But we must search, and finding, still must seek.

—21—

Not in the gloom of cloistered walls—
Nor rising clouds of sweet incense;
Not washed in tears of penitence;
Not holy wars, nor fierce sectarian brawls:
But underneath the open sky
Where shines the sun and myriad stars—
There Truth her sacred temple rears.
In leafy woods, where seas roll high—
On snowy hills, and rolling plain—

By babbling stream, and moonlit bowers—
In opening leaves, and budding flowers—
”Tis there the goddess Truth doth live and reign!

—22—

No lavish ceremonial show—
Nor strictest dogma labored through—
No oft-repeated creed will woo
One syllable from Truth that man would know.
Yon costly edifice of stone,
With lofty towers that rise in pride—
And in the clouds their finials hide—
All these doth modest Truth disown.
No narrow, shut-in, vaulted nave—
With chanting choir, and organ’s wail—
Can dignify the dolorous tale
That Truth doth triumph—but beyond the grave!

—23—

A selfish creed fits man the best;
But selfish to the right degree.
Live first is Nature’s first decree—
Then to our fellow-man give all the rest.
Thro every life should ever run
The golden vein of charity.
And over all should tolerance be
Reflected like the noon-day sun:
And when there flows compassion’s tear—
If tears, perchance, must needs be shed—
Then let the heart be garnished
With thoughts of love and sympathy sincere.

—24—

To teach this simple, outdoor creed
We need no paid interpreter
To rouse the sleepy worshipper,

Or show 'twas made to fit man's daily need.
No complicated subtleties
To reason out, and justify;
No fetishes to deify;
No dumb imploring of the skies,
Nor senseless rituals to rehearse.
The law of Nature is not dim—
Plainly is seen the struggle grim
That still goes on throughout the universe.

—25—

Sad tho' it seems, there is a joy
In knowing that we see aright.
The seeming darkness of the night
Obscures the day's landscape—does not destroy.
Our opened eyes plainly descry
The struggle everywhere for life—
That endless, universal strife
That permeates the earth and sky:
But all in manner dutiful
There side by side with saving grace
Throughout all time—in every place—
We see the good, the true, the beautiful!

—26—

Thus should we face the stubborn facts,
And regulate our soul's desires.
With daily courage that inspires
Go bravely thro life's various scenes and acts,
And play with zeal our different parts.
To here and now do all we can
To better self, and better man
New dignity to life imparts.
To feel that in our offspring's veins
Runs on our immortality
Gives life new meaning—and to die
Is rest eternal from our toil and pains.

—27—

Then take no thought but of today—
Not in the past nor future grope.
Cast from thy heart the doubtful hope
Of better things to grow from death's decay.
Plant flowers through this vale of tears—
Weed out false superstition's weeds,
And sow instead Truth's fruitful seeds
To nurture life's declining years.
Let not this thought thy mind enslave—
That man has here a period brief
This frame to chasten, and with grief
Torment—to merit bliss beyond the grave!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 63–76.

Ixion

*"Proud Ixion, doom'd to feel
The tortures of the eternal wheel."
—Sophocles.*

—I—

Not for some fancied wrong toward fabled God
Was old Ixion's frame supinely bound
To that eternal wheel, with fire-brands shod,
And made to turn its unremitting round:
Not to the father and the son alone
The steady torment of the wheel was known;
Each generation feels its grinding power,
And to the future leaves the dreaded dower.

—2—

The wheel turns on. Lashed to its ponderous rim,
By Fate's strong arms, with strands of steel,
In turn each makes the self-same cycle grim—
Constrained its daily agonies to feel,
And wonder why the jest, or whose the whim?

—3—

Out of the Nadir's Night of Being flung,
Feebly we move upon the rising trend:—
A moment only on Life's Zenith hung—
Then slowly on the downward course descend
Into the depths of Darkness—whence we sprung.
Eternal forces—past our weak control—
At birth unite earth-substance with a soul,
Weigh out a brain; its convolutions form,
And grant our modicum of worth or charm.

—4—

The wheel turns on. Man's store of strength and force
And skill are predetermined at the start.
Before his birth—stretched from an earlier source—
A thousand cords no human strength can part
Drags on or curbs him thro' Life's devious course.

—5—

Supine we dumbly stare into the sun,
Or seek some answer from the myriad stars.
If this unvarying round be never done,
Wherefore begun? Why all this toil—these scars?
The sickly Hope of Ages, and the Creed,
We turn to them—they fail us in our need.
The sorry lessons of Earth-life avow:
“No Providence but Fate—no World but
Now!”

—6—

The wheel turns on. Singly the gauntlet's run.
Each transitory passenger, ill-starred,
Beholds a vast procession long begun—
By mortal sins and crimes 'gainst Nature scarred—
Ever beginning—ending—never done!

—7—

The sorry round of consciousness is run;
Our passage brief beguiles the sun-beam's mote:
The glow-worm lights our going with her sun:
The insect mocks our message with its note.
And yet what weighty hopes each worshiper
Hangs fondly on Life's thread of gossamer!
What odds, pray, where or how the flail-ends strike
The threshing floor? Are not the straws alike?

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 77–79.

Lines to a Deaf Astronomer

—I—

Beneath his sky-like, narrow canopy,
 Shrouded in silence deep, unbroken gloom,
 And all the solemn grandeur of the tomb,
 Night after night the ag'd astronomer
 Searches the starry outposts of the sky.
 Below—the dead world lies without a stir;
 Above—whirls on a host of nameless suns,
 In cycles vast that mock the range of time.
 Deaf to all earthly harmonies, he shuns
 The varied strain responsive Nature sings;
 The woodland's sigh, the mountain's trickling springs;
 Warbling of birds, the whirl of insect's wings;
 The torrent's roar, old Ocean's peal sublime:—
 Unnoticed all—thro' scores of tedious years—
 He seeks a loftier chime; in dreams he hears
 The mystic, long-sought 'music of the spheres.'

—2—

Since first the human mind began to turn
 Its curious glances up to heaven, and burn
 To reach its fingers up into the stars,
 And pluck the secret of the Infinite
 From out their fiery souls; vainly we still
 With heavier weapons, more determined skill,
 Bombard the still unshaken citadel.
 With sharpened eyes we search the silent night,
 For some faint inkling of the General Scheme—
 Some clue to find the meaning of Life's dream.
 Not distant Uranus, nor ardent Mars,
 Nor Luna pale, nor all the myriad stars,
 Whose twinkling beams light heaven's remotest ways,
 None yield a sign of why, or whence they come,
 Or whither go: beneath his steady gaze—
 Sphinx-like, they stare thro' space—stone-deaf and dumb!

—3—

Under his silent, crypt-like canopy,
The ag'd astronomer, shrouded in gloom,
And all the solemn grandeur of the tomb,
With bended head, his last lone vigil keeps.
Lifeless he sits—his closed and sightless eye
No more shall search the unresponsive sky.
His tedious watch is o'er; baffled he sleeps—
Leaving again the great Enigma still
Unsolved; unless at last from some high hill
In heaven's mysterious realm his spirit sees
The outline of the Infinite Mysteries:
His fetters rent, perchance, he faintly hears
At last—the long-sought “music of the spheres.”

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 83–85.

The Poor Little Flower Girl

From the Italian of Francesco Dall' Ongaro

—1—

“Roses and violets! Who will—pray,
Buy a few buds, a little boquet?
Oh, what fragrance! what colors so gay!
Who’ll buy some fine flowers today?”

—2—

Nobody will have them—no one will buy!
My sweet, pretty roses must wither and die;
Like my heart, you must languish alone—
Unnoticed, unloved and unknown.

—3—

The blind world may still go on its way—
Throb, O heart, we together will stay.
The base world, it deserved thee not;
'Tis unworthy my heart—or my thought.

—4—

Such on earth here is ever the fate
That both virtue and beauty await—
To delight us God made them both sweet;
But man tramples them under his feet!

“Who’ll buy my flowers—my flowers gay?
Who’ll buy my fine flowers today?”

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), p. 86.

To Miss Christina's—

—I—

Idyllia, maiden shy—
Who blesses no one but the poet's eye—
Where'er thy form sequestered be,
Come, aid my halting minstrelsy!
Like safe Odysseus bound,
With ravished ear
Once more I'd hear
Thy rapture-breathing sound.

Thro' darkening shades my lonely way
Has been, meseems, for many a day;
An oaten pipe—a written shell
The joys of such a sphere could tell;
But now I rise
To Paradise,
And—like Durante bold—
A greater goddess must uphold.

What tho' all thro' the early day,
The sun has shone with slanting ray,
While stubborn thorns and thistles hide
The flowers that lurked on either side?
At last the azure sky peeps thro';
The sun, full-orbed, is mounting high;
Auspicious crows and eagles saunter by
Across the cloudless blue.

—2—

Invoke that fervor, maid divine,
That makes the waking moments seem
Beguiled from some entrancing dream,
Or drained from draughts of rich mulled wine;
Blot out for me life's tedious years;
Dispel its gloom and lurking fears;
From sorrow's face erase each line,
And with some sweet oblivious accents teach

The joy and splendor of that speech
That echoes only from such lips as thine.

What tho' for years the task of life
Has seemed one round of toil and strife?

 "All things will yet be well;
 'Tis only for a spell
That clouds can hide the sun.
 Behind the night's thick gloom
 The sun lies, and the moon
And stars must vanish one by one!"

Let others seek what course they may,
I only ask along my narrow way
This hope alone may run
To cheer my heart from sun to sun:

 "As long as life shall last
 To think of pleasures past
And thro' the future days to be
 Remembered still
 Thro' good and ill
By such as thee!"

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 87–88.

“*Gul Reazee*”

Scattering the Rose Leaves

CHORUS

Light be your tread and airy.
 Float ye as gently on the wind;
Soft as the rose-leaves you carry,
 Leave ye no sound nor trace behind.
 Scattering the rose-leaves,
 Spreading perfume on the air,
 Scattering the rose-leaves,
 Gently they our message bear.
Floating petals, white and pink,
Breathing sweetness as they sink,
Rose-leaves, roses sweet and pure,
 Bright and gay,
 Pave the way
For the bride—so chaste, demure.

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), p. 96.

Like the Breath of the Rose

Like the breath of the rose in the Springtime,
Is love:
Like the thought and the tune all in rhyme,
Is love:
Like the morn's early blush,
Like the noon's fiery flush,
Is love:
Like the calm, still delight
Of the cool, starry night,
Is love:
The charm that all time—all seasons combine—
The glory of earth—of your heart and mine—
Is love!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), p. 97.

Reincarnation

—I—

The white-robed snow stern Winter leaves
Outstretched upon the mountain-tops;
Soon,—warmed by Summer's ardent sun,—
Dissolves to life in separate drops;
From shallow, sheltered rivulets
 They join a larger company,
And drift along in rivers broad
 Down to the shoreless sea.
Eternal mists from the ocean rise,
Pouring fresh moisture from the skies;
But does the sea that swallowed the rain
Sort out from the mass the same drops again?
Or when anon one earthward springs
Will some new plumage tinge its wings?

—2—

Softly each separate drop,—effaced,
 Absorbed, immersed without a trace,—
In the sombre, deep, obsequious sea,
 Sinks to its restless resting-place;
But, with its fellow ones commingling,
 It feels the force of Love's control;
New matings of the atoms change
 The separate parts that make the whole.
Each added drop thus lends a cure,
Or makes the stagnant more impure;
As far as eye or mind can range,
Nothing endures but growth, death, change!
And so may not its race be run
When each is absorbed in the One?

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 98–99.

Rain at Sea

A Reverie on Those Who Die in Infancy

—1—

The eye seeks vainly to define
Earth's distant, dim, dividing-line;
The heavy dome seems downward driven;
The hazy deep upraised to heaven.
Down thro the low'ring cloud's gray pall
The loosened drops in myriads fall—
Pouring their brief identity
Into the vast, oblivious sea.

—2—

With many a moan the passing wave
Will lap the portals of their grave;
Loud winds will howl, and tempests rage,—
Clanging the billows of their cage;
But outward signs of grief, alas!
Can never fill their upturned glass,
Nor hale them back to Being's shore—
To launch life's fragile bark once more.

—3—

Swept thro thy course so hurriedly,
What worlds of joy were lost to thee!
To purl along o'er pebbles cool,
Or idly dream in quiet pool;
To glide from th' woodland's darkened aisle
Out where wide, open pastures smile;
Or from sheer mountain-wall cast loose,
Falling, to catch the rainbow's noose!

—4—

All lost to thee, the recompense
Of contact with the world of sense!

The thrill of stealing thro the root
Of flowering plant, then upward shoot
Into the stalk and tapering stem
To moist sweet scents, for th' budding gem;
Or sink down deep in th' fragrant cells
Of modest lilies' drooping bells!

—5—

Ungessed by thee the thrill that springs
From th' touch of living, fleshly things!
The hand of man thou ne'er didst press,
Nor Beauty's soft, warm cheek caress;
Ne'er the parched palate's thirst assuage,
Nor cooled the brow from fever's rage;
Ne'er blessed with balm the pious soul,
Nor from the grief-stabbed eyelid roll!

—6—

What joy to feel the old remain,
When transformed to some different plane!
From filmy cloud congeal in rain;
From liquid drops take wings again;
In frost or snow gleam crystalline;
By heat expand to vapor fine;
Or feel the current of the stream
Stop short, and harden like a beam!

—7—

Leaping from cloud to cloud in air—
Lit up by vivid lightning's glare;
Coaxing the fleeing thistle-down
To halt and spread its tendrils down;
Hiding deep in the leafy mould,
Swelling the heart of th' acorn cold;
Whatever thy form or on what plane,
What magic dwells in a drop of rain!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 100–103.

The Leaf and the Tree

—1—

Unfading tree of evergreen—
Full-leaved, despite the tooth of Time—
More favored thou than seasonable things
To keep thus—always in thy prime!
Thro wind and rain and winter's rage
Thy branches flaunt their foliage,
Unfurling to the upturned sky
Thy gage of immortality!

—2—

Incessantly thy unhinged leaves
Sift slowly down to earth;
First nurtured by its rays, then slain
By th' same sun that gave them birth.
Ever dropping the old as the new comes on
Undying robes thy branches don;
The rotting leaves enrich the mold—
Giving thy roots new strength to hold.

—3—

Crumpled and crumbling, one by one,
The sapless leaves in silence fall;
It boots not on what branch they hung—
Whether high or low, whether great or small;
For one, as like the other, must,
Decaying, mingle with the dust,
And give its substance—(food and grace!)—
To those that come to take their place.

—4—

As in Delphian days, may not some truth
On these dead leaves be oracled?
The meaning of this endless round
Of life, may't not thereon be spelled?
Whether idly dreaming in the skies

Or here below our future lies?
If in other souls again will flow
The current that our lives let go?

Unfading tree of evergreen,
Is life a partly-lighted screen—
A turning wheel that fills its cup,
Then empties back what it dipped up?

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 104–105.

Twilight at the Grand Canyon of the Colorado

What are the words or works of man—
His plummet line, rod, or measuring line?
What all his pomp? What time's brief span
Compared to ages such as thine?
What the painter's palette? What his skill
To limn thy changeful aspects, or bestow
The native colors of each wall and hill
That sinks in silence in the depths below?

What human eye or brain can e'er include
Even a fraction of thy magnitude?
Gazing spell-bound, our senses swim,
As, standing on thine awful rim,
We strive to pierce thy dim twilight,
Thou shadow of the Infinite!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), p. 106.

Dust on the Mirror

In the Eastern clime they spend much time
In serious meditation;
They look below this outward show
Of visible creation,
Then read the plan as best they can—
(And nothing could be clearer!),
All things, they find, are just One Mind
Reflected like a mirror!

To us, youth's days run on like plays;
And life's brimfull of wonder,
Till doubt slips up, upsets the cup,
And knocks our feet from under;
This rant and rage that fills the stage—
(Could anything be queerer?)

Can all this be Reality
Reflected from a mirror?

Should pain or sorrow chill each tomorrow
Or hunger add confusion,
We only need to stop, and read,
To learn that all's illusion.
What're rags and tatters? Nothing matters—
(All eyes please step up nearer!),
Look sharp, and find, we're simply blind
Reflections in a mirror!

In chill December, when life's dull ember

I.

Relinquishes its spark;
When the evening bell tolls out our knell,
And all for us is dark;
May some kind friend stay to the end
To say to any hearer:—
“A particle of dust has just
Been polished off the mirror!”

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), pp. 107–108.

The Sakieh

“Hi-ten enten, Hi-ten enten,—
Aha-u I Aha-u!”

“Step along, oxen,
Thresh a little faster!
The straw is for your pen;
The grain for your master!”

Adown the years this droning song
Has urged the lagging oxen, while
The creaking sakieh turned, along
The fecund, old, inundant Nile.

Brimfull the dripping pots ascend,
And overturning spill their store;
Then on the downward circuit trend—
To fill their earthen cups once more.

Unvaried and unending still
The turning wheel keeps on its rounds:
The scanty buckets take their fill—
The mighty river onward bounds.

“Hie along, oxen,
Turn the wheel faster!
More grain for the garden;
More grass in the pasture!”

“Shesu en Nebuten, Shesu en Nebuten,
Aha-u I Aha-u!”

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), p. 109.

Gardening

What wholesome sport to have a garden-plot!
In shallow furrows hide the pregnant seeds,
Uprooting here and there encroaching weeds—
One's mind, meanwhile, unreined in random thought.
How dearly is our little harvest bought!
What tender care each plant and flower needs!
How seldom what we cultivate succeeds,
While noxious things o'errun the place unsought!

Tis then we meditate on how 'twill end,
If nature, unopposed, pursues its course;
We swear—as leaves and fruit all downward trend,
Obedient to some unyielding force,
And matters still grow worse instead of mend—
All things are flowing from a higher Source!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), p. 110.

Soixante Ans

Dédié à Mme. Alice DeL. Bourgeois

When I reflect that sixty years have flown
 Since first my eyes looked on this world of Time—
And my weak powers have well-nigh reached their prime;
I pause, unwearied, at this last mile-stone
To marvel at how long the way has grown,
 And scrutinize my scanty store of rhyme.
So light the load, it seems, and short the climb,
How many detours must these years have known!
Though few in this wide world have heard my lays,
Or helped with friendly words to fan the flame;
 So now, unprejudiced by blame or praise,
I leave my missive at the door of Fame;
 In some unguarded moment may she raise
The meagre scroll, and read aloud my name!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), p. III.

Benedicite!

Ye myriad atomies, united still
 Harmoniously a unit for a spell
 Cohabiting in this corporeal shell
To give it life and feeling, thought and will,
How long ere Time thy vigil will fulfil?
 What final onset will unloose the bond,
 Disperse thy legions through the Great Beyond,
And leave this body tenantless and chill?

In what unnumbered cycle, or how soon,
 If ever, all these elements combine,
Somewhere on earth, the stars, or changeful moon,
 To animate another frame like mine?
If so, then may some liberal credits be
Vouchsafed for all the travail borne with me!

Publication. *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* (1929), p. 112.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Texts, variants, and sources

The copy-text for each poem is identified in its publication statement. When an 1895 or 1896 poem reappeared in *The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems* with only punctuation, spelling, or modest verbal changes, one text is printed and the other witness is recorded. No substantially reconceived duplicate was found that required independent presentation.

Lineation, stanza divisions, italics, dramatic labels, and clearly intentional inset lines follow the original scans. Line breaks caused only by the narrow source page have been rejoined. Hanging indents created by the source measure are not reproduced. The difficult pages of the 1929 book were collated between its two surviving local scans, and the dramatic text was reread from the 1896 page images.

The poems are arranged chronologically by book. Searches of the local journal archive and current bibliographic resources did not locate independently verifiable periodical poems outside these books. Publication statements identify the source after each poem.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works by and about Lovell Bearse Pemberton

Works by Lovell Bearse Pemberton

Sappho and Other Songs. Los Angeles: Times-Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1895.

Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama. Franklin, Ohio: The Editor Publishing Company, 1896.

A Modern Pilgrimage to Palestine. Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company, 1925.

The Dance at the Spring and Other Poems. Boston: Harold Vinal, 1929.

The Life and Death of Joan of Arc. Five-act tragedy; no published edition located.

Mardi Gras. Opera; no published edition located.

Nawab. Opera; no published edition located.

Works about Lovell Bearse Pemberton

California State Historic Preservation Office. 'Redondo Beach Public Library.' *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*.

California State Historic Preservation Office. 'Diamond Apartments.' *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*.

Guinn, James Miller. 'Pemberton, Lovell Bearse.' *Who's Who in the Pacific Southwest*. Los Angeles: Times-Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1913.

Pitt, Leonard, and Dale Pitt. 'Historic Library Holds Memories for Redondo.' *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1993.

Adams Boulevard Los Angeles. '2190 West Adams Boulevard.' 2013.

'A Modern Pilgrimage to Palestine.' *Reality* 10 (1925): review of Pemberton's book and account of the Bourgeois journey to Haifa.

COLOPHON

Production record

This critical reader's edition was prepared for *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. It is set in EB Garamond at six by nine inches. The cover uses unlettered artwork supplied by Brian Kim Stefans, cleaned for the live series typography and standard palette of the edition.

Research consulted historic-register nominations, contemporary biographical directories and reviews, architectural records, family research documents, bibliographic catalogs, and the original scans archived with the production files.