

Classic Poetry Series

James Thomson
- poems -

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James Thomson(23 November 1834 - 3 June 1882)

James Thomson, who wrote under the pseudonym Bysse Vanolis, was a Scottish Victorian-era poet famous primarily for the long poem *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874), an expression of bleak pessimism in a dehumanized, uncaring urban environment.

Life

Thomson was born in Port Glasgow, Scotland, and, after his father suffered a stroke, he was sent to London where he was raised in an orphanage, the Royal Caledonian Asylum on Chalk (later Caledonian after the asylum) Road near Holloway. He spoke with a London accent. He received his education at the Caledonian Asylum and the Royal Military Academy and served in Ireland, where in 1851, at the age of 17, he made the acquaintance of the 18-year-old Charles Bradlaugh, who was already notorious as a freethinker, having published his first atheist pamphlet a year earlier.

More than a decade later, Thomson left the military and moved to London, where he worked as a clerk. He remained in contact with Bradlaugh, who was by now issuing his own weekly *National Reformer*, a "publication for the working man". For the remaining 19 years of his life, starting in 1863, Thomson submitted stories, essays and poems to various publications, including the *National Reformer*, which published the sombre poem which remains his most famous work.

The City of Dreadful Night came about from the struggle with insomnia, alcoholism and chronic depression which plagued Thomson's final decade. Increasingly isolated from friends and society in general, he even became hostile towards Bradlaugh. In 1880, nineteen months before his death, the publication of his volume of poetry, *The City of Dreadful Night and Other Poems* elicited encouraging and complimentary reviews from a number of critics, but came too late to prevent Thomson's downward slide.

Thomson's remaining poems rarely appear in modern anthologies, although the autobiographical *Insomnia* and *Mater Tenebrarum* are well-regarded and contain some striking passages. He admired and translated the works of the pessimistic Italian poet [Giacomo Leopardi](http://www.poemhunter.com/count-giacomo-leopardi/) (1798–1837), but his own lack of hope was darker than that of Leopardi. He is considered by some students of the Victorian age as the bleakest of that era's poets. He died in London at the age of 47.

In 1889, four years after Thomson's death, Henry Stephens Salt wrote his first major biography, *The Life of James Thomson* (B.V.).

Thomson's pseudonym, Byshe Vanolis, derives from the names of the poets [Percy Bysshe Shelley](http://www.poemhunter.com/percy-byshe-shelley/) and [Novalis](http://www.poemhunter.com/novalis/). He is often distinguished from the earlier Scottish poet [James Thomson](http://www.poemhunter.com/james-thomson/) by the letters B.V. after the name.

A Chant

'WHILE the trees grow,
While the streams flow,
While the winds blow,
 We will be free:
Free as trees growing,
Free as streams flowing,
Free as winds blowing,
 Evermore free.'

James Thomson

A Polish Insurgent

WHAT would you have? said I;
'Tis so easy to go and die,
'Tis so hard to stay and live,
In this alien peace and this comfort callous,
Where only the murderers get the gallows,
Where the jails are for rogues who thieve.

'Tis so easy to go and die,
Where our Country, our Mother, the Martyr,
Moaning in bonds doth lie,
Bleeding with stabs in her breast,
Her throat with a foul clutch prest,
Under the thrice-accursed Tartar.

But Smith, your man of sense,
Ruddy, and broad, and round—like so!
Kindly—but dense, butt dense,
Said to me: "Do not go:
It is hopeless; right is wrong;
The tyrant is too strong."

Must a man have hope to fight?
Can a man not fight in despair?
Must the soul cower down for the body's weakness,
And slaver the devil's hoof with meekness,
Nor care nor dare to share
Certain defeat with the right?

They do not know us, my Mother!
They know not our love, our hate!
And how we would die with each other,
Embracing proud and elate,
Rather than live apart
In peace with shame in the heart.

No hope!—If a heavy anger
Our God hath treasured against us long,
His lightning-shafts from His thunder-clangour
Raining a century down:

We have loved when we went most wrong;
He cannot for ever frown.

No hope!—We can haste to be killed,
That the tale of the victims get filled;
The more of the debt we pay,
The less on our sons shall weigh:
This star through the baleful rack of the cope
Burns red; red is our hope.

O our Mother, thou art noble and fair!
Fair and proud and chaste, thou Queen!
Chained and stabbed in the breast,
Thy throat with a foul clutch prest;
Yet around thee how coarse, how mean,
Are these rich shopwives who stare!

Art thou moaning, O our Mother, through the swoon
Of thine agony of desolation?—
"Do my sons still love me? or can they stand
Gazing afar from a foreign land,
Loving more peace and gold—the boon
Of a people strange, of a sordid nation?"
O our Mother, moan not thus!
We love you as you love us,
And our hearts are wild with thy sorrow:
If we cannot save thee, we are blest
Who can die on thy sacred bleeding breast.—
 So we left Smith-Land on the morrow,
 And we hasten across the West.

James Thomson

A Recusant

THE CHURCH stands there beyond the orchard-blooms:
How yearningly I gaze upon its spire!
Lifted mysterious through the twilight glooms,
Dissolving in the sunset's golden fire,
Or dim as slender incense morn by morn
Ascending to the blue and open sky.
For ever when my heart feels most forlorn
It murmurs to me with a weary sigh,
How sweet to enter in, to kneel and pray
With all the others whom we love so well!
All disbelief and, doubt might pass away,
All peace float to us with its Sabbath bell.
Conscience replies, There is but one good rest,
Whose head is pillowed upon Truth's pure breast.

James Thomson

A Song Of Sighing

Would some little joy to-day
Visit us, heart!
Could it but a moment stay,
Then depart,
With the flutter of its wings
Stirring sense of brighter things.

Like a butterfly astray
In a dark room;
Telling:--Outside there is day,
Sweet flowers bloom,
Birds are singing, trees are green
Runnels ripple silver sheen.

Heart! we now have been so long
Sad without change,
Shut in deep from shine and song
Nor can range;
It would do us good to know
That the world is not all woe.

Would some little joy to-day
Visit us, heart!
Could it but a moment stay,
Then depart,
With the luster of its wings
Lighting dreams of happy things,
O sad my heart!

James Thomson

Approach To St. Paul's

Eastwards through busy streets I lingered on;
Jostled by anxious crowds, who, heart and brain,
Were so absorbed in dreams of Mammon-gain,
That they could spare no time to look upon
The sunset's gold and crimson fires, which shone
Blessing keen eyes and wrinkled brows in vain.

Right in my path stood out that solemn Fane
Whose soaring cupola of stern grey stone
Lifteth for awful beacon to the sky
The burning Cross: silent and sole amid
That ceaseless uproar, as a pyramid
Isled in its desert. The great throngs pressed by
Heedless and urgent thus Religion towers
Above this sordid, restless life of ours.

James Thomson

Art

1

What precious thing are you making fast
In all these silken lines?
And where and to whom will it go at last?
Such subtle knots and twines!

I am tying up all my love in this,
With all its hopes and fears,
With all its anguish and all its bliss,
And its hours as heavy as years.

I am going to send it afar, afar,
To I know not where above;
To that sphere beyond the highest star
Where dwells the soul of my Love.

But in vain, in vain, would I make it fast
With countless subtle twines;
For ever its fire breaks out at last,
And shrivels all the lines.

2

If you have a carrier-dove
That can fly over land and sea;
And a message for your Love,
"Lady, I love but thee!"

And this dove will never stir
But straight from her to you,
And straight from you to her,
As you know and she knows too.

Will you first ensure, O sage,
Your dove that never tires
With your message in a cage,
Though a cage of golden wires?

Or will you fling your dove:
"Fly, darling, without rest,
Over land and sea to my Love,
And fold your wings in her breast"?

3

Singing is sweet; but be sure of this,
Lips only sing when they cannot kiss.
Did he ever suspire a tender lay
While her presence took his breath away?

Had his fingers been able to toy with her hair
Would they have then written the verses fair?
Had she let his arm steal round her waist
Would the lovely portrait yet be traced?

Since he could not embrace it flushed and warm,
He has carved in stone the perfect form.
Who gives the fine report of the feast?
He who got none and enjoyed it least.

Were the wine really slipping down his throat
Would his song of the wine advance a note?
Will you puff out the music that sways the whirl,
Or dance and make love with a pretty girl?

Who shall the great battle-story write?
Not the hero down in the thick of the fight.
Statues and pictures and verse may be grand,
But they are not the Life for which they stand.

James Thomson

Day

Waking one morning
In a pleasant land,
By a river flowing
Over golden sand:--

Whence flow ye, waters,
O'er your golden sand?
We come flowing
From the Silent Land.

Whither go ye, waters,
O'er your golden sand?
We go flowing
To the Silent Land.

And what is this fair realm?
A grain of golden sand
In the great darkness
Of the Silent Land.

James Thomson

E.B.B.

THE WHITE-ROSE garland at her feet,
The crown of laurel at her head,
Her noble life on earth complete,
Lay her in the last low bed
For the slumber calm and deep:
"He giveth His belovèd sleep."

Soldiers find their fittest grave
In the field whereon they died;
So her spirit pure and brave
Leaves the clay it glorified
To the land for which she fought
With such grand impassioned thought.

Keats and Shelley sleep at Rome,
She in well-loved Tuscan earth;
Finding all their death's long home
Far from their old home of birth.
Italy, you hold in trust
Very sacred English dust.

Therefore this one prayer I breathe,—
That you yet may worthy prove
Of the heirlooms they bequeath
Who have loved you with such love:
Fairest land while land of slaves
Yields their free souls no fit graves.

James Thomson

For I Must Sing Of All I Feel And Know

For I must sing of all I feel and know,
Waiting with Memnon passive near the palms,
Until the heavenly light doth dawn and grow
And thrill my silence into mystic psalms;
From unknown realms the wind streams sad or gay,
The trees give voice responsive to its sway.

For I must sing: of mountains, deserts, seas,
Of rivers ever flowing, ever flowing;
Of beasts and birds, of grass and flowers and trees
Forever fading and forever growing;
Of calm and storm, of night and eve and noon,
Of boundless space, and sun and stars and moon;

And of the secret sympathies that bind
All beings to their wondrous dwelling-place;
And of the perfect Unity enshrined
In omnipresence throughout time and space,
Alike informing with its full control
The dust, the stars, the worm, the human soul;

And most supremely of my human kin --
Their thoughts and deeds, their valors and their fears,
Their griefs and joys, their virtue and their sin,
Their feasts and wars, their cradles and their biers,
Their temples, prisons, homes and ships and marts,
The subtlest windings of their brains and hearts.

So rich and sweet is Life. And what is Death? --
The tranquil slumbers dear and strange and boon
That feed at whiles our waking being's breath;
The solemn midnight of this glorious noon,
With countless distant stars, and each a sun,
Revealed harmonious with our daily one.

James Thomson

Four Points In A Life

I

LOVE'S DAWN

Still thine eyes haunt me; in the darkness now,
The dreamtime, the hushed stillness of the night,
I see them shining pure and earnest light;
And here, all lonely, may I not avow
The thrill with which I ever meet their glance?
At first they gazed a calm abstracted gaze,
The while thy soul was floating through some maze
Of beautiful divinely-peopled trance;
But now I shrink from them in shame and fear,
For they are gathering all their beams of light
Into an arrow, keen, intense and bright,
Swerveless and starlike from its deep blue sphere,
Piercing the cavernous darkness of my soul,
Burning its foul recesses into view,
Transfixing with sharp agony through and through
Whatever is not brave and clean and whole.
And yet I will not shrink, although thou piercest
Into the inmost depths of all my being
I will not shrink, although though now art seeing
My heart's caged lusts the wildest and the fiercest,
The cynic thoughts that fret my homeless mind,
My unbelief, my selfishness, my weakness,
My dismal lack of charity and meekness;
For, amidst all the evil, thou must find
Pervading, cleansing, and transmuting me,
A fervent and most holy love for thee.

II

MARRIAGE

Come to me, oh come to me!
Time is long since we were parted;
I am sad and weary-hearted,
Foiled and almost overthrown,
Fighting with the world alone:
What am I when thou art gone?
Come darling, soon!

Come to me, oh come to me!
Let my failing head find rest, Love,
On thy pure and tender breast, Love;
Calm my overwearied brain,
Soothe away my heart's chill pain,
Bring me hope and strength again:
Come darling, soon!

Come to me, oh come to me!
Evermore the memory lingers,
How your gentle flower-soft fingers,
With a touch when I lay ill
Through my fevered frame could thrill
Cool rich life divinely still:
Come darling, soon!

Come to me, oh come to me !
Dearest heart of love and meekness,
Is not this unmanly weakness?
Ah, with thee such pure sweet calm
Heals my wounds with heavenly balm,
I fighting feel my spear a palm:
Come darling, soon!

Come to me, oh come to me!
Though its perils groomed more fearful
I could fight undaunted, cheerful,
This stern Agony called Life,
Were the pauses of the strife
Blest by thee, my noble Wife:
Come darling, soon!

Come to me, oh come to me!
Strength and hope and faith are waning

With this fierce and pauseless straining;
Ere my soul be conquered quite,
Ere I fail from Truth and Right,
Come, my Life, my joy, my Light,
Come Darling, soon!

III

PARTING

Weep not Dearest, weep not so;
Soon again we two shall meet
Who now part in bitter woe:
After pain shall bliss be sweet.

Few more years of numb despair
Must we wander far apart
Through the desert dead and bare:
Love is courage in the heart.

Few more years of bitter moan
O'er the rugged mountain height,
Must we toil on each alone:
Love can make all burdens light.

Few more years of stricken woe
Erring on an alien shore
Lone and friendless each, must go:
We will love then more and more.

Few short hours of doubt and dread
Trembling on the brink of Night
Spectre-haunted, each must tread:
Love can burn all darkness bright.

All the long lone years must die;
Then shall we together come
Where beneath a calm bright sky
Bright waves bear us to our home.

Weep not Dearest, weep not so;
Soon again we two must meet
Where the calm deep waters flow,
Soothing surely care and woe,
With their mystic murmur sweet.

IV

AT DEATH'S DOOR

Is this the second childhood's feeble sadness?
My eyes are dim now and my hair is white;
Yet never did the sunshine give more gladness,
Never young Spring burst forth in green delight
More freshly; never was the earth more fair,
Never more rapture in the common air.

Still as I near great Death, it seems his portal
Glides gently backward, that I may gaze through
And glimpse far glories of the realm immortal;
The world becomes transparent to my view,
Diviner Heavens expand beyond the skies
The stars grow thoughtful with eternal eyes.

How the green grass and every flower swell yearning
To hint more clearly some high loveliness
Whose mystic soul within their forms is burning;
How strives the sea for ever to express,
With infinite heavings, murmurings manifold,
Some secret grandeur that will not be told!

The life of day is lulled to dreamful musing,
And true life waketh in the world of dream;
While with the Present strangely interfusing
The Future and the Past together stream,
As if the long-drawn waves of Time should be

Settling and mingling in Eternity.

With every golden dawn awakened lightly,
I think I must have slept through Death's calm night;
For lo, how purely, silently and brightly,
The Heavens unfold their gates before my sight;
The tranced sea of crystal spreadeth slowly,
The burning Throne lives out with splendours holy.

Whereon I look to see thee come swift-greeting
From where thou waitest for my laggard feet,
Assured beyond impatience for the meeting,
Crowned with triumphant love and faith complete:
I look in vain as yet; but every hour
So summer-rich may make the bud a flower.

How well, my Love, the thoughtful Heavens endeavour
To make this world and life and time all bear
Dream-lightly on the soul, ere it for ever
Be parted from them! Did I once despair
Through years of lonely anguish unassuaged ?
This calm can scarce believe that storms have raged.

Here is the blessing: I now muse enchanted
In this sweet dawnlike sunset; night comes then
Of restful sleep by gracious visions haunted;
So with new morning I shall rise again
Full of young life, and find my Love for aye,
My Love whom I have missed this long sad day.

James Thomson

From The Midst Of The Fire

FROM the midst of the fire I fling
 These arrows of fire to you:
If they sing, and burn, and sting,
 You feel how I burn too;
But if they reach you there
 Speed-spent, charred black and cold,
The fire burns out in the air,
 The Passion will not be told.

James Thomson

Gifts

Give a man a horse he can ride,
Give a man a boat he can sail;
And his rank and wealth, his strength and health,
On sea nor shore shall fail.

Give a man a pipe he can smoke,
Give a man a book he can read:
And his home is bright with a calm delight,
Though the room be poor indeed.

Give a man a girl he can love,
As I, O my love, love thee;
And his heart is great with the pulse of Fate,
At home, on land, on sea.

James Thomson

In A Christian Churchyard

This field of stones, he said,
May well call forth a sigh;
Beneath them lie the dead,
On them the living lie.

James Thomson

In The Room

'Ceste insigne et tragique comedie' RABELAIS.

I

The sun was down, and twilight grey
Filled half the air; but in the room,
Whose curtain had been drawn all day,
The twilight was a dusky gloom:
Which seemed at first as still as death,
And void; but was indeed all rife
With subtle thrills, the pulse and breath
Of multitudinous lower life.

II

In their abrupt and headlong way
Bewildered flies for light had dashed
Against the curtain all the day,
And now slept wintrily abashed;
And nimble mice slept, wearied out
With such a double night's uproar;
But solid beetles crawled about
The chilly hearth and naked floor.

III

And so throughout the twilight hour
That vaguely murmurous hush and rest
There brooded; and beneath its power
Life throbbing held its throbs suppress

Until the thin-voiced mirror sighed,
I am all blurred with dust and damp,
So long ago the clear day died,
So long has gleamed nor fire nor lamp.

IV

Whereon the curtain murmured back,
Some change is on us, good or ill;

Behind me and before is black
As when those human things lie still:
But I have seen the darkness grow
As grows the daylight every morn;
Have felt out there long shine and glow,
In here long chilly dusk forlorn.

V

The cupboard grumbled with a groan,
Each new day worse starvation brings:
Since he came here I have not known
Or sweets or cates or wholesome things:
But now! a pinch of meal, a crust,
Throughout the week is all I get.
It am so empty; it is just
As when they said we were to let.

VI

What is become, then, of our Man?
The petulant old glass exclaimed;
If all this time he slumber can,
He really ought to be ashamed.
I wish we had our Girl again,
So gay and busy, bright and fair:
The girls are better than these men,
Who only for their dull selves care.

VII

It is so many hours ago--
The lamp and fire were both alight--
I saw him pacing to and fro,
Perturbing restlessly the night.
His face was pale to give one fear,
His eyes when lifted looked too bright;
He muttered; what, I could not hear:
Bad words though; something was not right

VIII

The table said, He wrote so long
That I grew weary of his weight;
The pen kept up a cricket song,
It ran and ran at such a rate:
And in the longer pauses he
With both his folded arms downpressed
And stared as one who does not see,
Or sank his head upon his breast.

IX

The fire-grate said, I am as cold
As if I never had a blaze;
The few dead cinders here I hold,
I held unburned for days and days.
Last night he made them flare; but still
What good did all his writing do?
Among my ashes curl and thrill
Thin ghosts of all those papers too.

X

The table answered, Not quite all;
He saved and folded up one sheet,
And sealed it fast, and let it fall;
And here it lies now white and neat.
Whereon the letter's whisper came,
My writing is closed up too well;
Outside there's not a single name,
And who should read me I can't tell.

XI

The mirror sneered with scornful spite,
(That ancient crack which spoiled her looks
Had marred her temper), Write and write!
And read those stupid, worn-out books!
That's all he does, read, write, and read,
And smoke that nasty pipe which stinks:
He never takes the slightest heed
How any of us feels or thinks.

XII

But Lucy fifty times a day
Would come and smile here in my face,
Adjust a tress that curled astray,
Or tie a ribbon with more grace:

She looked so young and fresh and fair,
She blushed with such a charming bloom,
It did one good to see her there,
And brightened all things in the room.

XIII

She did not sit hours stark and dumb
As pale as moonshine by the lamp;
To lie in bed when day was come,
And leave us curtained chill and damp.
She slept away the dreary dark,
And rose to greet the pleasant morn;
And sang as gaily as a lark
While busy as the flies sun-born.

XIV

And how she loved us every one;
And dusted this and mended that,
With trills and laughs and freaks of fun,
And tender scoldings in her chat !
And then her bird, that sang as shrill
As she sang sweet; her darling flowers
That grew there in the window-sill,
Where she would sit at work for hours.

XV

It was not much she ever wrote;
Her fingers had good work to do;
Say, once a week a pretty note;
And very long it took her too.

And little more she read, I wis;
Just now and then a pictured sheet,
Besides those letters she would kiss
And croon for hours, they were so sweet.

XVI

She had her friends too, blithe young girls,
Who whispered, babbled, laughed, caressed,
And romped and danced with dancing curls,
And gave our life a joyous zest.
But with this dullard, glum and sour,
Not one of all his fellow-men
Has ever passed a social hour;
We might be in some wild beast's den.

XVII

This long tirade aroused the bed,
Who spoke in deep and ponderous bass,
Befitting that calm life he led,
As if firm-rooted in his place:
In broad majestic bulk alone,
As in thrice venerable age,
He stood at once the royal throne,
The monarch, the experienced sage:

XVIII

I know what is and what has been;
Not anything to me comes strange,
Who in so many years have seen
And lived through every kind of change.
I know when men are good or bad,
When well or ill, he slowly said;
When sad or glad, when sane or mad,
And when they sleep alive or dead.

XIX

At this last word of solemn lore
A tremor circled through the gloom,

As if a crash upon the floor
Had jarred and shaken all the room:
For nearly all the listening things
Were old and worn, and knew what curse
Of violent change death often brings,
From good to bad, from bad to worse;

XX

They get to know each other well,
To feel at home and settled down;
Death bursts among them like a shell,
And strews them over all the town.
The bed went on, This man who lies
Upon me now is stark and cold;
He will not any more arise,
And do the things he did of old.

XXI

But we shall have short peace or rest;
For soon up here will come a rout,
And nail him in a queer long chest,
And carry him like luggage out.

They will be muffled all in black,
And whisper much, and sigh and weep:
But he will never more come back,
And some one else in me must sleep.

XXII

Thereon a little phial shrilled,
Here empty on the chair I lie:
I heard one say, as I was filled,
With half of this a man would die.
The man there drank me with slow breath,
And murmured, Thus ends barren strife:
O sweeter, thou cold wine of death,
Than ever sweet warm wine of life.

XXIII

One of my cousins long ago,
A little thing, the mirror said,
Was carried to a couch to show,
Whether a man was really dead.
Two great improvements marked the case:
He did not blur her with his breath,
His many-wrinkled, twitching face
Was smooth old ivory: verdict, Death.-

XXIV

It lay, the lowest thing there, lulled
Sweet-sleep-like in corruption's truce;
The form whose purpose was annulled;
While all the other shapes meant use.
It lay, the he become now it,
Unconscious of the deep disgrace,
Unanxious how its parts might flit
Through what new forms in time and space.

XXV

It lay and preached, as dumb things do,
More powerfully than tongues can prate;
Though life be torture through and through,
Man is but weak to plain of fate:
The drear path crawls on drearier still
To wounded feet and hopeless breast?
Well, he can lie down when he will,
And straight all ends in endless rest.

XXVI

And while the black night nothing saw,
And till the cold morn came at last,
That old bed held the room in awe
With tales of its experience vast.
It thrilled the gloom; it told such tales
Of human sorrows and delights,
Of fever moans and infant wails,
Of births and deaths and bridal nights.

James Thomson

In The Train

As we rush, as we rush in the Train,
The trees and the houses go wheeling back,
But the starry heavens above the plain
Come flying on our track.

All the beautiful stars of the sky,
The silver doves of the forest of Night,
Over the dull earth swarm and fly,
Companions of our flight.

We will rush ever on without fear;
Let the goal be far, the flight be fleet!
For we carry the Heavens with us, dear,
While the Earth slips from our feet!

James Thomson

Insomnia

Sleepless himself to give to others sleep.
He giveth His beloved sleep.

I HEARD the sounding of the midnight hour;
The others one by one had left the room,
In calm assurance that the gracious power
Of Sleep's fine alchemy would bless the gloom,
Transmuting all its leaden weight to gold,
To treasures of rich virtues manifold,
New strength, new health, new life;
Just weary enough to nestle softly, sweetly,
Into divine unconsciousness, completely
Delivered from the world of toil and care and strife.

Just weary enough to feel assured of rest,
Of Sleep's divine oblivion and repose,
Renewing heart and brain for richer zest
Of waking life when golden morning glows
As young and pure and glad as if the first
That ever on the void of darkness burst
With ravishing warmth and light;
On dewy grass and flowers and blithe birds singing
And shining waters, all enraptured springing,
Fragrance and shine and song, out of the womb of night.

But I with infinite weariness outworn,
Haggard with endless nights unblessed by sleep,
Ravaged by thoughts unutterably forlorn,
Plunged in despairs unfathomably deep,
Went cold and pale and trembling with affright
Into the desert vastitude of Night,
Arid and wild and black;
Foreboding no oasis of sweet slumber,
Counting beforehand all the countless number
Of sands that are its minutes on my desolate track.

And so I went, the last, to my drear bed,
Aghast as one who should go down to lie
Among the blissfully unconscious dead,

Assured that as the endless years flowed by
Over the dreadful silence and deep gloom
And dense oppression of the stifling tomb,
 He only of them all,
Nerveless and impotent to madness, never
Could hope oblivion's perfect trance for ever:
An agony of life eternal in death's pall.

But that would be for ever, without cure! —
 And yet the agony be not more great;
Supreme fatigue and pain, while they endure,
 Into Eternity their time translate;
Be it of hours and days or countless years,
And boundless aeons, it alike appears
 To the crushed victim's soul;
Utter despair foresees no termination,
But feels itself of infinite duration;
The smallest fragment instant comprehends the whole.

The absolute of torture as of bliss
 Is timeless, each transcending time and space;
The one an infinite obscure abyss,
 The other an eternal Heaven of grace. —
Keeping a little lamp of glimmering light
Companion through the horror of the night,
 I laid me down aghast
As he of all who pass death's quiet portal
Malignantly reserved alone immortal,
In consciousness of bale that must for ever last.

I laid me down, and closed my heavy eyes,
 As if sleep's mockery might win true sleep;
And grew aware, with awe but not surprise,
 Blindly aware through all the silence deep,
Of some dark Presence watching by my bed,
The awful image of a nameless dread;
 But I lay still, fordone;
And felt its Shadow on me dark and solemn
And steadfast as a monumental column,
And thought drear thoughts of Doom, and heard the bells chime
 One.

And then I raised my weary eyes and saw,
By some slant moonlight on the ceiling thrown
And faint lamp-gleam, that Image of my awe,
Still as a pillar of basaltic stone,
But all enveloped in a sombre shroud
Except the wan face drooping heavy-browed,
With sad eyes fixed on mine;
Sad weary yearning eyes, but fixed remorseless
Upon my eyes yet wearier, that were forceless
To bear the cruel pressure; cruel, unmalign.

Wherefore I asked for what I knew too well:
O ominous midnight Presence, What art Thou?
Whereto in tones that sounded like a knell:
'I am the Second Hour, appointed now
To watch beside thy slumberless unrest.'
Then I: Thus both, unlike, alike unblest;
For I should sleep, you fly:
Are not those wings beneath thy mantle moulded?
O Hour! unfold those wings so straitly folded,
And urge thy natural flight beneath the moonlit sky.

'My wings shall open when your eyes shall close
In real slumber from this waking drear;
Your wild unrest is my enforced repose;
Ere I move hence you must not know me here.
Could not your wings fan slumber through my brain,
Soothing away its weariness and pain?
'Your Sleep must stir my wings:
Sleep, and I bear you gently on my pinions
Athwart my span of hollow night's dominions,
Whence hour on hour shall bear to morning's golden springs.'

That which I ask of you, you ask of me,
O weary Hour, thus standing sentinel
Against your nature, as I feel and see
Against my own your form immovable:
Could I bring Sleep to set you on the wing,
What other thing so gladly would I bring?
Truly the Poet saith:
If that is best whose absence we deplore most,
Whose presence in our longings is the foremost,

What blessings equal Sleep save only love and death?

I let my lids fall, sick of thought and sense,
But felt that Shadow heavy on my heart;
And saw the night before me an immense
Black waste of ridge-walls, hour by hour apart,
Dividing deep ravines: from ridge to ridge
Sleep's flying hour was an aerial bridge;
But I, whose hours stood fast,
Must climb down painfully each steep side hither,
And climb more painfully each steep side thither,
And so make one hour's span for years of travail last.

Thus I went down into that first ravine,
Wearily, slowly, blindly, and alone;
Staggering, stumbling, sinking depths unseen,
Shaken and bruised and gashed by stub and stone;
And at the bottom paven with slipperiness,
A torrent-brook rushed headlong with such stress
Against my feeble limbs,
Such fury of wave and foam and icy bleakness
Buffeting insupportably my weakness
That when I would recall, dazed memory swirls and swims.

How I got through I know not, faint as death;
And then I had to climb the awful scarp,
Creeping with many a pause for panting breath,
Clinging to tangled root and rock-jut sharp;
Perspiring with faint chills instead of heat,
Trembling, and bleeding hands and knees and feet;
Falling, to rise anew;
Until, with lamentable toil and travel
Upon the ridge of sand and gravel
I lay supine half-dead and heard the bells chime Two;

And knew a change of Watchers in the room
Without a stir or sound beside my bed;
Only the tingling silence of the gloom,
The muffled pulsing of the night's deep dread;
And felt an Image mightier to appal,
And looked; the moonlight on the bed-foot wall
And corniced ceiling white

Was slanting now; and in the midst stood solemn
And hopeless as a black sepulchral column
A steadfast shrouded Form, the Third Hour of the night.

The fixed regard implacably austere,
Yet none the less ineffably forlorn.
Something transcending all my former fear
Came jarring through my shattered frame outworn:
I knew that crushing rock could not be stirred;
I had no heart to say a single word,
But closed my eyes again;
And set me shuddering to the task stupendous
Of climbing down and up that gulf tremendous
Unto the next hour-ridge beyond hope's farthest ken.

Men sigh and plain and wail how life is brief:
Ah yes, our bright eternities of bliss
Are transient, rare, minute beyond belief,
Mere star-dust meteors in Time's Night-abyss;
Ah no, our black eternities intense
Of bale are lasting, dominant, immense,
As Time which is their breath;
The memory of the bliss is yearning sorrow,
The memory of the bale clouds every morrow
Darkening through nights and days into the night of Death.

No human words could paint my travail sore
In the thick darkness of the next ravine,
Deeper immeasurably than that before;
When hideous agonies, unheard, unseen,
In overwhelming floods of torture roll,
And horrors of great darkness drown the soul,
To be is not to be
In memory save as ghastliest impression,
And chaos of demoniacal possession....
I shuddered on the ridge, and heard the bells chime Three.

And like a pillar of essential gloom,
Most terrible in stature and regard,
Black in the moonlight filling all the room
The Image of the Fourth Hour evil-starred
Stood over me; but there was Something more,

Something behind It undiscerned before,
More dreadful than Its dread,
Which overshadowed It as with a fateful
Inexorable fascination hateful, —
A wan and formless Shade from regions of the dead.
I shut my eyes against that spectral Shade,
Which yet allured them with a deadly charm,
And that black Image of the Hour, dismayed
By such tremendous menacing of harm;
And so into the gulf as into Hell;
Where what immeasurable depths I fell,
With seizures of the heart
Whose each clutch seemed the end of all pulsation,
And tremors of exanimate prostration,
Are horrors in my soul that never can depart.

If I for hope or wish had any force,
It was that I might rush down sharply hurled
From rock to rock until a mangled corse
Down with the fury of the torrent whirled,
The fury of black waters and white foam,
To where the homeless find their only home,
In the immense void Sea,
Whose isles are worlds, surrounding, unsurrounded,
Whose depths no mortal plummet ever sounded,
Beneath all surface storms calm in Eternity.
Such hope or wish was as a feeble spark,
A little lamp's pale glimmer in a tomb,
To just reveal the hopeless deadly dark
And wordless horrors of my soul's fixed doom:
Yet some mysterious instinct obstinate,
Blindly unconscious as a law of Fate,
Still urged me on and bore
My shattered being through the unfeared peril
Of death less hateful than the life as sterile:
I shuddered on the ridge, and heard the bells chime Four.

The Image of that Fifth Hour of the night
Was blacker in the moonlight now aslant
Upon its left than on its shrouded right;
And over and behind It, dominant,
The shadow not Its shadow cast its spell,

Most vague and dim and wan and terrible,
 Death's ghastly aureole,
Pregnant with overpowering fascination,
Commanding by repulsive instigation,
Despair's envenomed anodyne to tempt the Soul.
I closed my eyes, but could not longer keep
 Under that Image and most awful Shade,
Supine in mockery of blissful sleep,
 Delirious with such fierce thirst unalloyed;
Of all worst agonies the most unblest
Is passive agony of wild unrest:
 Trembling and faint I rose,
And dressed with painful efforts, and descended
With furtive footsteps and with breath suspended,
And left the slumbering house with my unslumbering woes.
Constrained to move through the unmoving hours,
 Accurst from rest because the hours stood still;
Feeling the hands of the Infernal Powers
 Heavy upon me for enormous ill,
Inscrutable intolerable pain,
Against which mortal pleas and prayers are vain,
 Gaspings of dying breath,
And human struggles, dying spasms yet vainer:
Renounce defence when Doom is the Arraigner;
Let impotence of Life subside appeased in Death.

I paced the silent and deserted streets
 In cold dark shade and chillier moonlight grey;
Pondering a dolorous series of defeats
 And black disasters from life's opening day,
Invested with the shadow of a doom
That filled the Spring and Summer with a gloom
 Most wintry bleak and drear;
Gloom from within as from a sulphurous censer
Making the glooms without for ever denser,
To blight the buds and flowers and fruitage of my year.

Against a bridge's stony parapet
 I leaned, and gazed into the waters black;
And marked an angry morning red and wet
 Beneath a livid and enormous rack
Glare out confronting the belated moon,

Huddled and wan and feeble as the swoon
Of featureless despair:
When some stray workmen half-asleep but lusty
Passed urgent through the rainpour wild and gusty,
I felt a ghost already, planted watching there.

As phantom to its grave, or to its den
Some wild beast of the night when night is sped,
I turned unto my homeless home again
To front a day only less charged with dread
Than that dread night; and after day, to front
Another night of — what would be the brunt?
I put the thought aside,
To be resumed when common life unfolded
In common daylight had my brain remoulded;
Meanwhile the flaws of rain refreshed and fortified.

The day passed, and the night; and other days,
And other nights; and all of evil doom
The sun-hours in a sick bewildering haze,
The star-hours in a thick enormous gloom
With rending lightnings and with thunder-knells;
The ghastly hours of all the timeless Hells:-
Bury them with their bane!
I look back on the words already written,
And writhe by cold rage stung, by self-scorn smitten,
They are so weak and vain and infinitely inane....

'How from those hideous Malebolges deep
I ever could win back to upper earth,
Restored to human nights of blessed sleep
And healthy waking with the new day's birth?'-
How do men climb back from a swoon whose stress,
Crushing far deeper than all consciousness,
Is deep as deep death seems?
Who can the steps and stages mete and number
By which we re-emerge from nightly slumber? —
Our poor vast petty life is one dark maze of dreams.

James Thomson

L'Ancien Regime

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king,
Our king all kings above?
A young girl brought him love;
And he dowered her with shame,
With a sort of infamous fame,
And then with lonely years
Of penance and bitter tears --
Love is scarcely the thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A statesman brought him planned
Justice for all the land;
And he in recompense got
Fierce struggle with brigade and plot,
Then a fall from lofty place
Into exile and disgrace --
Justice is never the thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A writer brought him truth;
And first he imprisoned the youth,
And then he bestowed a free pyre
That the works might have plenty of fire,
And also to cure the pain
Of the headache called thought in the brain --
Truth is a very bad thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
The people brought their sure
Loyalty fervid and pure;
And he gave them bountiful spoil
Of taxes and hunger and toil,

Ignorance, brutish plight,
And wholesale slaughter in fight --
Loyalty's quite the worst thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A courtier brought to his feet
Servility graceful and sweet,
With an ever ready smile
And an ever supple guile;
And he got in reward the place
Of the statesman in disgrace --
Servility's always a thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A soldier brought him war,
La gloire, la victoire,
Ravage and carnage and groans,
For the pious Te Deum tones;
And he got in return for himself
Rank and honors and pelf --
War is a very fine thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A harlot brought him her flesh,
Her lusts, and the manifold mesh
Of her wiles interwoven with caprice;
And he gave her his realm to fleece,
To corrupt, to ruin, and gave
Himself for her toy and her slave
Harlotry's just the thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king,
Our king who fears to die?
A priest brought him a lie,

The blackness of hell uprolled
In heaven's shining gold;
And he got as guerdon for that
A see and a cardinal's hat --
A lie is an excellent thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Has any one yet a thing
For a gift to our lord the king?
The country gave him a tomb,
A magnificent sleeping-room;
And for this it obtained some rest,
Clear riddance of many a pest,
And a hope which it much enjoyed
That the throne would continue void --
A tomb is the very best thing
For a gift to our lord the king.

James Thomson

Life's Hebe

IN the early morning-shine
Of a certain day divine,
I beheld a Maiden stand
With a pitcher in her hand;
Whence she poured into a cup
Until it was half filled up
Nectar that was golden light
In the cup of crystal bright.

And the first who took the cup
With pure water filled it up;
As he drank then, it was more
Ruddy golden than before:
And he leapt and danced and sang
As to Bacchic cymbals' clang.

But the next who took the cup
With the red wine filled it up;
What he drank then was in hue
Of a heavy sombre blue:
First he reeled and then he crept,
Then lay faint but never slept.

And the next who took the cup
With the white milk filled it up;
What he drank at first seemed blood,
Then turned thick and brown as mud:
And he moved away as slow
As a weary ox may go.

But the next who took the cup
With sweet honey filled it up;
Nathless that which he did drink
Was thin fluid black as ink:
As he went he stumbled, soon,
And lay still in deathlike swoon.

She the while without a word
Unto all the cup preferred;

Blandly smiled and sweetly laughed
As each mingled his own draught.

And the next who took the cup
To the sunshine held it up,
Gave it back and did not taste;
It was empty when replaced:
First he bowed a reverent bow,
Then he kissed her on the brow.

But the next who took the cup
Without mixture drank it up;
When she took it back from him
It was full unto the brim:
He with a right bold embrace
Kissed her sweet lips face to face.

Then she sang with blithest cheer:
Who has thirst, come here, come here!
Nectar that is golden light
In the cup of crystal bright,
Nectar that is sunny fire
Warm as warmest heart's desire:
Pitcher never lacketh more,
Arm is never tired to pour:
Honey, water, milk, or wine
Mingle with the draught divine,
Drink it pure, or drink it not;
Each is free to choose his lot:
Am I old? or am I cold?
Only two have kissed me bold!

She was young and fair and gay
As that young and glorious day.

James Thomson

Lilah, Alice, Hypatia

To Alice and Hypatia Bradlaugh

Who was Lilah? I am sure
She was young and sweet and pure;
With the forehead wise men love,-
Here a lucid dawn above
Broad curved brows, and twilight there,
Under the deep dusk of hair.
And her eyes? I cannot say
Whether brown, or blue, or grey:
I have seen them brown, and blue,
And a soft green grey-the hue
Shakespeare loved (and he was wise):
'Grey as glass' were Silvia's eyes.

So to Lilah's name above
I will add two names I love,
Linking with the bracket curls
Three sweet names of three sweet girls:-
Sunday of Saint Valentine,
Eighteen hundred sixty-nine.

James Thomson

Lines On His Twenty-Third Birthday

LAST evening's huge lax clouds of turbid white
Grew dark and louring, burthened with the rain
Which that long wind monotonous all night
Swept clashing loud through Dreamland's still domain,

Until my spirit in fatigue's despite
Was driven to weary wakefulness again:
With such wild dirge and ceaseless streaming tears
Died out the last of all my ill-used years.

The morn his risen pure and fresh and keen;
Its perfect vault of bright blue heaven spreads bare
Above the earth's wide laughter twinkling green.
The sun, long climbing up with lurid glare
Athwart the storm-rack's rent and hurrying screen,
Leapt forth at dawn to breathe this stainless air;
The strong west wind still streams on full and high,
Inspiring fresher life through earth and sky.

Yon hazeless river flashes silver signs
Of where it flows; how delicate and clear
The distant hills curve far their grey-blue lines,
Steadfast amidst the rushing atmosphere,
With every blade distinct the green grass shines,
Untouched by frost; those old trees dark or sere,
Swaying and souging in the lifeful dawn,
Have every leaf and twig distinctly drawn.

This day my own particular year has birth;
The general year is very old to-day:
Yet, with what healthful life o'er heaven and earth
The death-bound monarch holdeth steadfast sway!
Not too austere for much of hearty mirth
And energetic pleasure, nor so grey
But that he still can deck himself with flowers;-
Would that like his could be my dying hours!

Still dew-pearled fuchsias shine like pendent gems,
While some lie purely on the deep-dark mould

Beneath their glossy leaves and ruddy stems;
The thick chrysanthemums range white and cold;
Of all its wealth of marvellous anadems,
That gleamed amidst their fruits of orange gold
Glowing red-hearted in the Autumn sun,
The passion-flower has still for me kept one.
I pace the garden in this genial morn,
And meditate the dirge of my dead year,-
With even less of grief than sharp self-scorn.
The retrospect in truth brings little cheer;
As if of one long-tired, who stares forlorn
Across flat marshland, barren, gloomy, drear;
Where fields, nor home, nor church, his vision greet
Which he has toiled through with unsteady feet.

He turns; before him, as behind, all round
The pathless waste outstretches flat and bare;
From sullen pools amidst the dark heath-ground
Frogs jar their croakings through the murky air,
Which up that vault of solid sky stone-bound
Heaves huge dense glooms to shut on his despair.
Let him crawl on as he has crawled all day,
Till Night comes down upon his homeless way.

My golden morning hours, which should have brought
Strength, wisdom, faith and love, or hope of all,
Have sunk and dribbled while I heeded not
Into the slush of sloth beyond recall.
O nerveless hands, O brain of aimless thought,
O slow dim eyes that never marked their fall-
Absorbed in dreams both waking and asleep
Our golden hours for ever lost, now weep.

All lost for ever! and the hours to come,
Poor refuse! but our sole remaining wealth,
So much the likelier thence to share doom!
The brain unused to mark insidious stealth,
Short-sighted eyes long filled with mist and gloom,
Lax hands uncustomed to the grasp of health,
That lost the fight in their best youth,-shall these
Victorious prove in languor and disease?

Oh, for the flushed excitement of keen strife!
For mountains, gulfs and torrents in my way,
With peril, anguish, fear and strugglings rife!
For friends and foes, for love and hate in fray,-
And not this lone base flat of torpid life!
I fret 'neath gnat-stings, an ignoble prey,
While others with a sword-hilt in their grasp
Have warm rich blood to feed their latest gasp.
Wrathful and dangerous, restless, free, profound,
With fair green islands shining o'er its verge,
The Sea of Life there heaves and roars around.
To pierce its depths, to throb against its surge,
Breasting to gain the Happy Isles!- if drowned,
The loser pays; he fought his game; no dirge!
But to be whelmed in torpor at the last,
As one with this dead crag which holds me fast!

Flushed grapes, full-charged with life's delirious wine,
Brush my wan temples, hanging thick about:
Chained fast I cannot reach them, while I pine
To press their very inmost rapture out,
Flooding with fire these dust-dry lips of mine;
Better, wild drunkenness than hectic drought:
And torture breeds new tortures, in the dread
That ere they fall my power to drink be dead.

The prisoner loses other years than yearn
Within the lifeless dungeon crusht and pent:
Late freedom frees dead ashes from their urn;
His torture has become his element.
This Bride of Life for whom I waiting burn
May grow a withered hag ere she relent,
Herself refused then; or our worn-out eld
In bridal chimings have its funeral kneeled.

O pure West wind, strong life-breath of the day,
Inspire my wasted heart with strength and hope!
Sweep thou its grievous doubts and fears away,
Who swept far-scattering down the eastern slope
The brooding rain-clouds massed in dense array
Till this green earth shone laughing to the cope
Of this pure heaven, whose naked form austere

Yet genial glows with sunshine warm and clear.

I hope, I feel that I can yet break free
From this accursed cage wherein I pine;
There comes a vision of the sounding sea,
The all-sustaining, all-intombing brine:
Through want and peril, wretchedness and glee,
Wrestling with lives more coarse and strong than mine,
I yet may woo its love and dare its strife;
By self-dependence earning careless life.

And so attaining strength! The crazy ship,
Frigate or bumboat, slaver, mission ark,
Shall surely in the first squall heel and dip;
The strong may hope to sail its voyage: and, mark, -
What of the ends, means, issues of its trip
Knows holy vessel or Brazilian barque?
Through storm and calm it does its best to float;
For what? He knows who steers and rules the boat.

So much more strength, so much more life, I say;
So much more love and thought, more soul and sense: I
We pare our members bit by bit away,
Because they're damning us with foul offence:
Cowards! be strong and force them to obey!
Is virtue but a eunuch's continence?
Napoleon, ev'n, seems nobler than such saint
As eighteen centuries have learned to paint.

Thus Hope is born, - pale birth of grim Despair.
Whether the Father Shall his child devour,
Or this poor Babe, maturing strong and fair,
Shall dispossess the parent of his power,
I know not: yet I think that I could dare
A death-stern struggle with the fiercest hour,
Would foolish Wisdom's whirls of dreary thought
But leave my doubt-vexed spirit undistraught.

Meanwhile, then, let me wait and hope, and learn
To curb with galling steel and ruthless hand
These strong and passionate impulses that burn
To sweep me from my post of self-command,

Into the battle raging thick and stern,
Into the desert's freedom vast and grand:
That horseman proves full strength, firm skill indeed,
Who holdeth statue-calm his savage steed.

James Thomson

Mater Tenebrarum

In the endless nights, from my bed, where sleepless in anguish I lie,
I startle the stillness and gloom with a bitter and strong cry:
O Love! O Beloved long lost! come down from thy Heaven above,
For my heart is wasting and dying in uttermost famine for love!

Come down for a moment! oh, come! Come serious and mild
And pale, as thou wert on this earth, thou adorable Child!
Or come as thou art, with thy sanctitude, triumph and bliss,
For a garment of glory about thee; and give me one kiss,
One tender and pitying look of thy tenderest eyes,
One word of solemn assurance and truth that
the soul with its love never dies!

In the endless nights, from my bed, where sleepless in frenzy I lie,
I cleave through the crushing gloom with a bitter and deadly cry:
Oh! where have they taken my Love from our Eden
of bliss on this earth?
Which now is a frozen waste of sepulchral and horrible dearth?

Have they killed her indeed? Is her soul as her body, which long
Has moldered away in the dust where the foul worms throng?
O'er what abhorrent Lethes, to what remotest star,
Is she rapt away from my pursuit through cycles and systems far?

She is dead, she is utterly dead; for her life would hear and speed
To the wild imploring cry of my heart that cries in its dreadful need.
In the endless nights, on my bed, where sleeplessly brooding I lie,
I burden the heavy gloom with a bitter and weary sigh:
No hope in this worn-out world, no hope beyond the tomb;
No living and loving God, but blind and stony Doom.

Anguish and grief and sin, terror, disease, and despair:
Why throw not off this life, this garment of torture I wear,
And go down to sleep in the grave in everlasting rest?
What keeps me yet in this life., what spark in my frozen breast?
A fire of dread, 'a light of hope, kindled, O Love, by thee;
For thy pure and gentle and beautiful soul, it must immortal be.

Mr. MacCall At Cleveland Hall

Mr. MacCall at Cleveland Hall,
Sunday evening-date to fix-
Fifteenth April, sixty-six,
Speech reported and redacted
By a fellow much distracted.

I

Who lectures? No mere scorners;
Clear-brained, his heart is warm.

She sits at the nearest corner
Of I will not say what form.

II

The Conflict of Opinions
In the Present Day, saith Chair.

What muff in the British dominions
Could dispute that she is fair?

III

Mammon-worship is horrid,
Plutocracy is base.

Dark hair from a fine small forehead;
I catch but the still side face.

IV

We wallow in mere dimension,
The Big to us is Great.

If she stood at her utmost tension
She might pass four feet eight.

V

We lay on colour in splashes,
With a mop, or a broom for brush.

How dark are her long eyelashes!
How pure is her cheek's slight flush!

VI

But we have no perception
For form-the divinest-now.

Each curve there is perfection,
In nostril, chin, and brow.

VI

Our women are good kind creatures,
But they cannot dress at all.

Does her bonnet grace her features?
Clear blue with a black lace fall.

VIII

Low Church-very low-in the gutter;
High Church-as ven'son high.

O'er the flower of her face gleams the flutter
Of a smile like a butterfly.

IX

Herder, Wieland, Lessing;
Bossuet, Montalembert.

Fine names, but the name worth guessing

Is the name of the sweet girl there.

The individual; true man;
Individuality.

A man's but one half, some woman
The other half must be.

XI

Persistent valour the sternest,
With love's most gentle grace.

How grand is the eye fixed earnest
In the half-seen up-turned face!

XII

'How did you like the lecture?
Was it not beautiful?'

I should think she was! 'I conjecture
That your brains have been gathering wool!'

P. S.

The Chairman was a rare man;
At every telling point
He smiled at his post like a jolly host
Carving rich cuts from the joint;
Which the name he bore was Richard Moore
Whom Heaven with grace anoint!

That conflict of opinion
It had its counterpart
In conflict for dominion
Between my head and heart.

Night

He cried out through the night:

"Where is the light?

Shall nevermore

Open Heaven's door?

Oh, I am left

Lonely, bereft!"

He cried out through the night:

It spread vaguely white,

With its ghost of a moon

Above the dark swoon

Of the earth lying chill,

Breathless, grave still.

He cried out through the night:

His voice in its might

Rang forth far and far,

And then like a star

Dwindled from sense

In the Immense.

He cried out through the night:

No answering light,

No syllabled sound;

Beneath and around

A long shuddering thrill

Then all again still.

James Thomson

On George Herbert's Poems

WHAT are these leaves dark-spotted and acerb?

'A very holy herb.'

To what good use may I this herb convert?

'Press it on thy soul's hurt.'

When herb unto the hurt I thus apply?

'Herb-ert is sanctity.'

James Thomson

Once In A Saintly Passion

Once in a saintly passion
I cried with desperate grief,
"O Lord, my heart is black with guile,
Of sinners I am chief."
Then stooped my guardian angel
And whispered from behind,
"Vanity, my little man,
You're nothing of the kind."

James Thomson

Philosophy

I

His eyes found nothing beautiful and bright,
Nor wealth nor honour, glory nor delight,
Which he could grasp and keep with might and right.

Flowers bloomed for maidens, swords outflashed for boys,
The world's big children had their various toys;
He could not feel their sorrows and their joys.

Hills held a secret they would not unfold,
In careless scorn of him the ocean rolled,
The stars-were alien splendours high and cold.

He felt himself a king bereft of crown,
Defrauded from his birthright of renown,
Bred up in littleness with churl and clown.

II

How could he vindicate himself? His eyes,
That found not anywhere their proper prize,
Looked through and through the specious earth and skies.

They probed, and all things yielded to their probe;
They saw the void around the massy globe,
The raging fire within its flowery robe.

They pierced through beauty; saw the bones, the mesh
Of nerves and veins, the hideous raw red flesh,
Beneath the skin most delicate and fresh:

Saw Space a mist unfurled around the steep
Where plunge Time's waters to the blackest deep;
Saw Life a dream in Death's eternal sleep.

III

A certain fair form came before his sight,
Responding to him as the day to night:
To yearning, love; to cold and gloom, warm light.

A hope sprang from his breast, and fluttered far
On rainbow wings; beyond the cloudy bar,
Though very much beneath the nearest star.

His eyes drew back their beams to kindle fire
In his own heart; whose masterful desire
Scorned all beyond its aim, lower or higher.

This fire flung lustre upon grace and bloom,
Gave warmth and brightness to a little room,
Burned Thought to ashes in its fight with gloom.

IV

He said: Those eyes alone see well that view
Life's lovely surfaces of form and hue;
And not Death's entrails, looking through and through.

Bones, nerves, and veins, and flesh, are covered in
By this opaque transparency of skin,
Precisely that we should not see within.

The corpse is hid, that Death may work its vile
Corruption in black secrecy; the while
Our saddest graves with grass and fair flowers smile.

If you will analyse the bread you eat,
The water and the wine most pure and sweet,
Your stomach soon must loathe all drink and meat.

Life liveth but in Life, and doth not roam
To other realms if all be well at home:
'Solid as ocean-foam,' quoth ocean-foam.

If Midge will pine and curse its hours away
Because Midge is not Everything For-aye,
Poor Midge thus loses its one summer day;
Loses its all-and winneth what, I pray?

James Thomson

Proem

O antique fables! beautiful and bright
And joyous with the joyous youth of yore;
O antique fables! for a little light
Of that which shineth in you evermore,
To cleanse the dimness from our weary eyes,
And bathe our old world with a new surprise
Of golden dawn entrancing sea and shore.

We stagger under the enormous weight
Of all the heavy ages piled on us,
With all their grievous wrongs inveterate,
And all their disenchantments dolorous,
And all the monstrous tasks they have bequeathed;
And we are stifled with the airs they breathed;
And read in theirs our dooms calamitous.

Our world is all stript naked of their dreams;
No deities in sky or sun or moon,
No nymphs in woods and hills and seas and streams;
Mere earth and water, air and fire, their boon;
No God in all our universe we trace,
No heaven in the infinitude of space,
No life beyond death--coming not too soon.

Our souls are stript of their illusions sweet,
Our hopes at best in some far future years
For others, not ourselves; whose bleeding feet
Wander this rocky waste where broken spears
And bleaching bones lie scattered on the sand;
Who know we shall not reach the Promised Land;
Perhaps a mirage glistening through our tears.

And if there be this Promised Land indeed,
Our children's children's children's heritage,
Oh, what a prodigal waste of precious seed,
Of myriad myriad lives from age to age,
Of woes and agonies and blank despairs,
Through countless cycles, that some fortunate heirs
May enter, and conclude the pilgrimage!

But if it prove a mirage after all!
Our last illusion leaves us wholly bare,
To bruise against Fate's adamant wall,
Consumed or frozen in the pitiless air;
In all our world, beneath, around, above,
One only refuge, solace, triumph,--Love,
Sole star of light in infinite black despair.

Of antique fables! beautiful and bright,
And joyous with the joyous youth of yore;
O antique fables! for a little light
Of that which shineth in you evermore,
To cleanse the dimness from our weary eyes
And bathe our old world with a new surprise
Of golden dawn entrancing sea and shore.

James Thomson

Suggested By Matthew Arnold's Stanzas

That one long dirge-moan sad and deep,
Low, muffled by the solemn stress
Of such emotion as doth steep
The soul in brooding quietness,
Befits our anguished time too well,
Whose Life-march is a funeral knell.

Dirge for a mighty Creed outworn-
Its spirit fading from the earth,
Its mouldering body left forlorn:
Weak idol! feeding scornful mirth
In shallow hearts; divine no more
Save to some ignorant pagan poor;

And some who know how by Its light
The past world well did walk and live,
And feel It even now more bright
Than any lamp mere men can give;
So cling to It with yearning faith,
Yet own It almost quenched in death:

While many who win wealth and power
And honours serving at Its shrine,
Rather than lose their worldly dower
Proclaim their dead thing 'Life divine';
And sacrifice to coward lust
Their own souls' truth, a people's trust.

And will none mourn the mighty Dead,
Pillar of heavenly fire and cloud,
Which through this life's wild desert led
For whole millenniums each grand crowd
Of sages, bards, saints, heroes, all
Whose names we glory to recall?

None mourn Him, dead, with deep-moved soul,
Whom, living, all our sires adored?
None feel the heavy darkness roll
Stifling about us, when the Lord

Leaves us to walk by our own light,
That one pale speck in boundless Night?--

That earthly lamp when sun and star,
When all the heavenly lights are lost:
Does it shed radiance round afar?
Our pathway is by deep gulfs cross'd
It fathoms none. We lift it high:
It casts not one beam on the sky.

If He thus died as no more fit
To lead the modern marcli of thought,
Supreme,-- commanding, guiding it,
With noblest love and wisdom fraught;
He was at least Divine; and none
Of human souls can lead it on.

We pine in our dark living tomb,
Waiting the God-illuminated One
Who, only, can disperse the gloom;
Completing what the Dead begun,
Or farther leading us some space
Toward our eternal resting-place.

But Israel wanders shepherdless,
Or gloom-involved unloving lies,
And in despair's stark sinfulness
Reviles the promised Paradise
It cannot reach -- Father divine!
Let us not long thus hopeless pine.

Still the deep dirge-notcs long and low
Breathe forth strange anguish to recall --
Could we forget -- our direst woe:
A proud strong Age fast losing all
Earth has of heaven; bereft of faith;
And living in Eternal Death.

And loudly boastful of such life:
Blinded by our material might,
Absorbed in frantic worldly strife,
Unconscious of the utter Night

Whose palpable and monstrous gloom
Is gathering for our spirits' tomb.

We feel as gods in our own hearts;
Seeming to conquer Time and Space;
Wealth gorging our imperial marts,
Earth pregnant, from the fierce embrace
Our matter-lusting spirits press,
With unexampled fruitfulness.

God, answering well our worldly prayer,
Our hearts' chief prayer through all the hours
Of selfish joy and sordid care,
Comes down to us in golden showers:
God turns to Mammon at our cry;
Our souls wealth-crushed, dross-stifled lie.

Those few, how rich! while this great mass,
Myriads with equal greed for gold,
Sink in such want and woe, alas!
As never can on earth be told:
These starve, and those yet wealthier rise-
Meanwhile in both the spirit dies.

Hear now the thrilling dirge-notes peal
The anguished cry in thunder rolls:-
The few yet left who think and feel,
Who yearn with strenuous soaring souls
For more than earth or time can grant;
Where, where shall they appease their want?

Black disbelief, substantial doubt
Wreath-blent into one louring cloud
Through which Heaven's light can scarce shine out-
Round all the Faiths: all in such shroud
Fade ghostlike to th' entombing Past:
Our Heaven is wildly overcast.

Yet each Creed, senile, sick, half-dead,
With bitter spite and doting rage
Reviles all others, Whoso, led
By thirst of love to pilgrimage,

Seeks now old God-given Wells of Life,
Finds drought-dry centres of vain strife;

And turns away in blank despair,
To scoff or weep as fits his mood.
O God in Heaven, hear our prayer!
We know Thou art, Allwise, Allgood,
Yet sink in godless misery:
Oh, teach us how to worship Thee!

PART II

The great Form lies there nerveless still:
But as we fix our longing gaze
It grows in grandest beauty, till
We worship in entranced amaze;
Such holy love and wisdom seem
To be there rapt in heavenly dream

.
Oh, if He may once more awake!
Oh, if it be not death, but sleep!
And He from that dread slumber break
Refreshed and strong, full-powered to sweep
The darkness from our path again;
Once more the Guiding Star of men!

Yet -- though it be death -- view It well.
The brow, how nobly high and broad
What love on those shut lips might well!
This Form sublimely templed God:
And, if not perfect, is a shrine
Approaching well the most divine.

Do not turn hastily away
From mighty death to petty life;
Gaze in deep reverence on the clay
With such a soul's expression rife:
Read here, read long, the features worn
By One incarnate Heavenly-born.

So may we hope to recognise
That Greater One who shall succeed
This death-bound Monarch, who now lies
In mute appealing for our need:
God cannot long desert His earth;
In the Old's death the New has birth.

What say we? -- we know well this truth,
There is no death for the Divine,
Which lives in ever-perfect youth:
The Form alone -- its earthly shrine --
Is subject to earth's mortal sway;
Sickens, and dies, and rots away.

Thus each Form in its turn expires,
No more with all revealed Truth rife,
Which even at that time inspires
Some new and nobler form with life,
Grander and vaster to express
More of Its infinite heavenliness.

Thus has it been since Time's first birth,
Thus must it be for evermore:
Still lie, moth-eaten, on the earth
Old garments which this Spirit wore;
Till, soiled and rent, they were off-thrown,
And wider-flowing robes put on.

They could not grow with His great growth,
Pauseless though slow throughout the years;
And vainly worshippers-so loath
To leave what lengthened use endears --
May still the empty robes adore;
Their virtue was from Him who wore.

Let none say the Divine is dead,
Although this Form be soul-less quite:
The Heavenly Sun doth ever shed
His life-giving heat, His saving light;
Never our earth doth lose His ray,
Save when she turns herself away.

Let none say the Divine is dumb,
Although His voice no more we hear:
It is that we are deaf become.
For measured to each eye and ear
His glory shines, His voice outspeaks;
To each He gives the most it seeks.

Our spirits may for ever grow;
And He will fill them as before,
And still their measure overflow
With His unlesened infinite More:
He gives us all we can receive;
He teaches all we can believe.

The pure can see Him perfect -- pure;
The strong feel Him, Omnipotence;
The wise, All-wise; He is obscure
But to the gross and earth-bound sense:
Alas for us with blinded sight
Who dare to cry, There is no light!

PART III

Nay, ask us not to rise and leave
Him from whom power and life seem gone;
Say not that it is weak to grieve;
Duty does not, now, urge us on:
In vain ye urge; too well we know
We cannot by our own strength go.

Vainly ye choose you Saviours now
Of men, -- however good and wise
Be those your mean faith would endow
With power to which no man can rise:
No best men living lure our faith
From the Divine though veiled in death.

Vainly ye wander every way
Throughout the earth in search of Heaven,
Changing your useless path each day

With each new transient impulse given
By human guides, who still agree
In naught but fallibility.

We should know better from the lore
Of worldly wisdom -- keen mistrust --
On which our minds so love to pore;
Nor leave for any child of dust
This One Divine: to Him adhere
Till the diviner One appear.

My brothers, let us own the truth,
Bitter and mournful though it be, --
That we who spent our dreary youth
In foul and sensual slavery,
Are all too slavish, too unmanned,
For Conquerors of the Promised Land.

In unprogressive wanderings
We plod the desert to and fro;
And fiery serpents' mortal stings,
Earthquake and sword and weary woe
And pestilence deal fearful death
Amongst us for our want of faith.

Far-scattered o'er the Waste forlorn
Our bones shall whiten through the years,
And startle pilgrims yet unborn;
Our noblest captains, priests and seers,
Dark death shall one by one remove,
For lack of wisdom, faith, or love.

Yet be we patient, meek and pure,
Unselfishly resigned to God's
Mysterious judgements; and endure
Our sore scarce-intermitted loads
Of grief and weary pain, imbued
With sternly passive fortitude:

And pray that those who shall succeed
Prove worthy of a happier life
Than we dare ask for as our meed;

That they a constant noble strife
Victorious against Ill may wage,
And gain the glorious heritage.

Cease now to cry and storm, and move,
By such tumultuous toil opprest
As, without guidance, vain must prove.
When God keeps still can ye not rest?
When He sends night so dark and deep,
Why shrink from renovating sleep?

Sleep, to His care resigned, a space;
That when He rises in His might
To lead our hosts from this dire place,
We may have strength and heart to fight
All evils that would bar our way,
And march unfaltering all the day.

Yes, let us stay in loving grief,
Which patient hope and trust yet cheer,
Silent beside our silent Chief,
Till His Successor shall appear;
Till death's veil fall from off His face,
Or One anointed take His place.

Nay, -- our adoring love should have
More faith than to believe that He,
Before Another comes to save,
Can leave us in blind misery
Without a Guide: God never can
So utterly depart from man.

We will move onward! -- Let us trust
That there is life and saving power
In this dear Form which seems but dust.
Arise, arise! though darkness lower,
Earnest, bold-hearted, cease to mourn;
It shall before our hosts be borne.

Triumphantly He ever led
Our faithful armies while alive;
What though His form be cold and dead,

His Spirit doth that death survive:
We conquer by that Soul this Form
Enshrined, not ill, while free and warm.

Thus men have honoured fellow men,
Who dying left a lofty fame;
And won most glorious victories then
By inspiration of a Name:
If in men's names such life abode,
Shall there not in His, -- Son of God?

A dawn-light creeps throughout the gloom,
Sullenly sinks the storm of wrath;
Life blossoms in our desert tomb;
Mysteriously we find a path
Which leadeth on to Paradise.
Thus to our love's faith He replies!

But, while the dirge still rolls away
In passionate thunders wildly blent
With mournful moanings, let us pray --
Still on our Holy War intent --
'O God, revive the seeming Dead;
Or send Another in His stead!

'The wintry midnight drear is past,
But still the dawn gleams grey and cold;
Dread phantoms haunt each restless blast,
Our stumblings still are manifold:
Oh, let Thy cloudless Sun rise soon,
And flood us with His summer noon!'

James Thomson

Sunday At Hampstead

I

(AN VERY IDLE IDYLL BY A VERY HUMBLE MEMBER OF THE GREAT AND NOBLE LONDON MOB.)

This is the Heath of Hampstead,
This is the Dome of Saint Paul's;
Beneath, on the serried house-tops,
A chequered luster falls:

And the might city of London,
Under the clouds and the light,
Seems a low, wet beach, half shingle,
With a few sharp rocks upright.

Here we sit, my darling,
And dream an hour away:
The donkeys are hurried and worried,
But we are not donkeys to-day:

Through all the weary week, dear,
We toil in the murk down there,
Tied to a desk and a counter,
A patient, stupid pair!

But on Sunday we slip our tether,
And away from the smoke and the smirch;
Too grateful to God for His Sabbath
To shut its hours in a church.

Away to the green, green country,
Under the open sky;
Where the earth's sweet breath is incense
And the lark sings psalms on high.

On Sunday we're Lord and Lady,
With ten times the love and glee
Of those pale, languid rich ones
Who are always and never free.

The drawl and stare and simper,
So fine and cold and staid,
Like exquisite waxwork figures
That must be kept in the shade.

We can laugh out loud when merry,
We can romp at kiss-in-the-ring,
We can take our beer at a public,
We can loll on the grass and sing.

Would you grieve very much, my darling,
If all yon low wet shore
Were drowned by a mighty flood tide,
And we never toiled there more?

Wicked—there is no sin, dear,
In an idle dreamer's head;
He turns the world topsy-turvy
To prove that his soul's not dead.

I am sinking, sinking, sinking;
It's hard to sit upright!
Your lap is the softest pillow!
Good night, my love, good night!

II

How your eyes dazzle down into my soul!
I drink and drink of their deep violet wine,
And ever thirst the more, although my whole
Dazed being whirls in drunkenness divine.

Pout down your lips for that bewildering smile,
And kiss me for the interruption, Sweet!
I had escaped you: floating for awhile
In that far cloud ablaze with living heat:

I floated with it though the solemn skies,
I melted with it up the Crystal Sea
Into the heaven of Heavens; and shut my eyes

To fell eternal rest enfolding me . . .

Well, I prefer on tyrannous girl down here,
You jealous violet-eyed Bewitcher, you!
To being lord in Mohammed's seventh sphere
Of meekest hours threescore ten and two!

III

Was it hundreds of years ago, my Love,
Was it thousands of miles away,
The two poor creatures we know, my Love,
Were toiling day by day;
Were toiling weary, weary.,
With many myriads more,
In a City dark and dreary
On a sullen river's shore?

Was it truly a fact or a dream, my Love?
I think my brain still reels,
And my ears still throbbing seem, my Love,
With the rush and clang of wheels;
Of vast machinery roaring
Forever in skylless gloom;
Where the poor slaves peach imploring,
Found peace alone in the tomb.

Was it hundreds of years ago, my Love,
Was it thousands of miles away?
Or was it a dream to show, my Love,
The rapture of today?
This day of holy splendor,
This Sabbath of rich rest,
Wherein to God we render
All praise by being blest.

IV

Eight of us promised to meet here
And tea together at five:

And -- who would ever believe it? --
We are the first to arrive!

Oh, shame on us, in darling;
It is a monstrous crime
To make a tryst with others
And be before our time!

Lizzie is off with William,
Quite happy for her part;
Our sugar in her pocket,
And the sweet love in her heart.

Mary and Dick so grandly
Parade suburban streets;
His waistcoat and her bonnet
Proving the best of treats.

And Fanny plagues big Robert
With tricks of the wildest glee:
O Fanny, you'll get in hot water
If you do not bring us our tea!

Why, bless me, look at that table,
Every one of them there! --
'Ha, here at last we have them,
The always behindhand pair!

'When the last trumpet-solo
Strikes up instead of the lark,
They'll turn in their sleep just grunting
Who's up so soon in the dark?'

Babble and gabble, you rabble,
A thousand in full yell!
And this is your Tower of Babel,
This not-to-be-finished Hotel. *

* THOMSON'S NOTE: Since finished, in a fashion. The verses were written in 1863.

'You should see it in the drawing,

You'd think a Palace they make,
Like the one in the Lady of Lyons,
With this pond for the lovely lake!

'I wish it wasn't Sunday,
There's no amusement at all:
Who was here Hot-cross-bun-day?
We had such an open-air ball!

'The bands played polkas, waltzes,
Quadrilles; it was glorious fun!
And each gentleman gave them a penny
After each dance was done.'

'Mary is going to chapel,
And what takes her there, do you guess?
Her sweet little duck of a bonnet,
And her new second-hand silk dress.'

'We went to Church one Sunday,
But felt we had no right there;
For it's only a place for the grand folk
Who come in a carriage and pair.

'And I laughed out loud, -- it was shameful!
But Fanny said, Oh, what lives!
He must have been clever, the rascal,
To manage seven hundred wives!'

'Suppose we play Hunt-the-Slipper?'
'We can't, there's the crinoline!' --- 'Phew!!
Bother it, always a nuisance!'
'Hoop-de-dooden-do!'

'I think I've seen all the girls here,
About a thousand, or more;
But none of them half so pretty
As our own loving four.'

'Thank you! and I've been listening
To lots of the men, the knaves;
But none of them half such humbugs

As our devoted slaves.'

'Do you see those purple flushes?
The sun will set in state:
Up all! we must cross to the heath, friends,
Before it gets too late.

'We will couch in the fern together,
And watch for the moon and the stars;
And the slim tree-tops will be lighted,
So the boys may light their cigars.

'And while the sunset glory
Burns down in crimson and gold,
LAZY shall tell us a story
Of his wonderful times of old.'

V

Ten thousand years ago, ('No more than that?')
Ten thousand years, ('The age of Robert's hat!'-
'Silence you gods!' -- 'Pinch Fanny!' -- 'Now we're good.')

This place where we are sitting was a wood,
Savage and desert save for one rude home
Of wattles plastered with stiff clay and loam;
And here, in front, upon the grassy mire
Four naked squaws were squatted round a fire:
Then four tall naked wild men crushing through
The tangled Underfeed came into view;
Two of them bent beneath a mighty boar,
The third was gashed and bleeding, number four
Strutted full-drest in war-paint, ('That was Dick!')

Blue of a devilish pattern laid on thick.

The squaws jumped up to roast the carcass whole;
The braves sank silent, stark 'gainst root and bole.
The meat half-done, they tore it and devoured,
Sullenly ravenous; the women cowered
Until their lords had finished, then partook.
Mist rose; all crept into their cabin nook,
And staked the month; the floor was one broad bed

Of rushes dried with fox and bearskins spread.
Wolves howled and wild cats wailed; they snored; and so
The long night passed, shedding a storm of snow;
This very night ten thousand years ago.

VI

Ten thousand years before, ('Come, draw it mild!
Don't waste Conk-ology like that, my child!')
From where we sit to the horizon's bound
A level brilliant plain was spread all round,
As level and as brilliant as a sea
Under the burning sun; high as your knee
Aflame with flowers, yellow and blue and red:
Long lines of palm-trees marked out there the bed
Of a great river, and among them gleamed
A few grey tents. Then four swift horsemen streamed
Out of the West, magnificent in ire,
Churning the meadow into flakes of fire,
Brandishing monstrous spears as if in fight,
They wheeled, ducked, charged, and shouted fierce delight:
So till they reach the camp: the women there
Awaiting them the evening meal prepare;
Milk from the goats and camels, dates plucked fresh,
Cool curds and cheese, millet, sweet broiled kid's flesh.
The spear struck deep hath picketed each barb;
A grave proud turbaned man in flowing garb
Sups with a grave meek woman, humbly proud,
Whose eyes flash empire. Then the solemn crowd
Of stars above, the silent plain below,
Until the East resumes its furnace-glow;
This same night twenty thousand years ago.

VII

Ten thousand years before, ('But if you take
Such mouthfuls, you will soon eat up Time's cake!')
Where we are sitting rose in splendid light
A broad cool marble palace; from the height
Broad terrace-gardens stairlike sank away

Down to the floor of a deep sapphire bay.
Where the last slope slid greenly to the wave,
And dark rich glossy foliage shadow gave,
Four women -- or four goddesses -- leaned calm,
Of mighty stature, graceful as the palm:
One stroked with careless hand a lion's mane,
One fed an eagle; while a measured strain
Was poured forth by the others, harp and voice,
Music to make the universe rejoice.
An isle was in the offing seen afar,
Deep-purple based, its peak a glittering star;
Whence rowed a galley (drooped the silken sails),
A dragon-barque with golden burning scales.
Then four bronzed giants leapt to land, embraced
The glorious women, chanting : 'Did we haste?
The Cavern-Voice hath silenced all your fears;
Peace on our earth another thousand years!'
On fruits and noble wine, with song's rich flow,
They feasted in the sunset's golden glow;
This same night thirty thousand years ago.

VIII

Ten thousand years before, ('Another ten!
Good Lord, how greedy are these little men!')
This place where we are sitting ('Half asleep.')
Was in the sea a hundred fathoms deep:
A floor of silver sand so fine and soft,
A coral forest branching far aloft;
Above, the great dusk emerald golden-green;
Silence profound and solitude serene.
Four mermaids sit beneath the coral rocks,
Combing with golden combs their long green locks,
And wreathing them with little pearly shells;
Four mermen came from out the deep-sea dells,
And whisper to them, and they all turn pale:
Then through the hyaline a voice of wail,
With passionate gestures, 'Ever alas for woe !
A rumour cometh down the Ocean-flow,
A word calamitous! that we shall be
All disinherited from the great sea:

Our tail with which like fishes we can swim
Shall split into an awkward double-limb,
And we must waddle on the arid soil,
And build dirt-huts, and get our food with toil,
And lose our happy, happy lives!' And so
These gentle creatures wept 'Alas for woe!
This same night forty thousand years ago.

IX

'Are you not going back a little more?
What was the case ten thousand years before?'
Ten thousand years before 'twas Sunday night;
Four lovely girls were listening with delight,
Three noble youths admired another youth
Discoursing History crammed full of truth:
They all were sitting upon Hampstead Heath,
And monstrous grimy London lay beneath.
'The stupidest story LAZY ever told;
I've no more faith in his fine times of old.'
'How do you like our prospects now, my dears?
We'll all be mermaids in ten thousand years.'
'Mermaids arc beautiful enough, but law!
Think of becoming a poor naked squaw!'
'But in these changes, sex will change no doubt;
We'll all be men and women turn about.'
'Then these four chaps will be the squaws?-that's just;
With lots of picaninnies, I do trust!'
'If changes go by fifty thousand, yes;
But if by ten, they last were squaws, I guess!'
'Come on; we'll go and do the very beers
We did this night was fifty thousand years.'
Thou prophet, thou deep sage! we'll go, we'll go:
The ring is round, Life naught, the World an 0;
This night is fifty thousand years ago!

X

As we rush, as we rush in the Train,
The trees and the houses come wheeling back,

But the starry heavens about the plain
Come flying on our track.

As we rush, as we rush in the Train,
The trees and the houses go wheeling back,
But the starry heavens above the plain
Come flying on our track.

All the beautiful stars of the sky,
The silver doves of the forest of Night,
Over the dull earth swarm and fly,
Companions of our flight.

We will rush ever on without fear;
Let the goal be far, the flight be fleet!
For we carry the Heavens with us, dear,
While the Earth slips from our feet!

XI

Day after day of this azure May
The blood of the Spring has swelled in my veins;
Night after night of broad moonlight
A mystical dream has dazzled my brains.

A seething might, a fierce delight,
The blood of the Spring is the wine of the world;
My veins run fire and thrill desire,
Every leaf of my heart's red rose uncurled.

A sad sweet calm, a tearful balm,
The light of the Moon is the trance of the world;
My brain is fraught with yearning thought,
And the rose is pale and its leaves are furled.

O speed the day, thou dear, dear May,
And hasten the night I charge thee, O June,
When the trance divine shall burn with the wine
And the red rose unfurl all its fire to the Moon!

XII

O mellow moonlight warm,
Weave round my Love a charm;
O countless starry eyes,
Watch from the holy skies;
O ever-solemn Night,
Shield her within thy might:
Watch her, my little one!
Shield her my darling!

How my heart shrinks with fear,
Nightly to leave thee, dear;
Lonely and pure within
Vast glooms of woe and sin:
Our wealth of love and bliss
Too heavenly perfect is:
Good night, my little one!
God keep thee, darling!

James Thomson

The City Of Dreadful Night

Per me si va nella citta dolente.

--Dante

Poi di tanto adoprar, di tanti moti
D'ogni celeste, ogni terrena cosa,
Girando senza posa,
Per tornar sempre la donde son mosse;
Uso alcuno, alcun frutto
Indovinar non so.

Sola nel mondo eterna, a cui si volve
Ogni creata cosa,
In te, morte, si posa
Nostra ignuda natura;
Lieta no, ma sicura
Dell' antico dolor . . .
Pero ch' esser beato
Nega ai mortali e nega a' morti il fato.

--Leopardi

PROEM

Lo, thus, as prostrate, "In the dust I write
My heart's deep languor and my soul's sad tears."
Yet why evoke the spectres of black night
To blot the sunshine of exultant years?
Why disinter dead faith from mouldering hidden?
Why break the seals of mute despair unbidden,
And wail life's discords into careless ears?

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles
To show the bitter old and wrinkled truth
Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,
False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes of youth;
Because it gives some sense of power and passion
In helpless innocence to try to fashion
Our woe in living words howe'er uncouth.

Surely I write not for the hopeful young,
Or those who deem their happiness of worth,
Or such as pasture and grow fat among
The shows of life and feel nor doubt nor dearth,
Or pious spirits with a God above them
To sanctify and glorify and love them,
Or sages who foresee a heaven on earth.

For none of these I write, and none of these
Could read the writing if they deigned to try;
So may they flourish in their due degrees,
On our sweet earth and in their unplaced sky.
If any cares for the weak words here written,
It must be some one desolate, Fate-smitten,
Whose faith and hopes are dead, and who would die.

Yes, here and there some weary wanderer
In that same city of tremendous night,
Will understand the speech and feel a stir
Of fellowship in all-disastrous fight;
"I suffer mute and lonely, yet another
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother
Travels the same wild paths though out of sight."

O sad Fraternity, do I unfold
Your dolorous mysteries shrouded from of yore?
Nay, be assured; no secret can be told
To any who divined it not before:
None uninitiate by many a presage
Will comprehend the language of the message,
Although proclaimed aloud for evermore.

I

The City is of Night; perchance of Death
But certainly of Night; for never there
Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath
After the dewy dawning's cold grey air:
The moon and stars may shine with scorn or pity

The sun has never visited that city,
For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.

Dissolveth like a dream of night away;
Though present in distempered gloom of thought
And deadly weariness of heart all day.
But when a dream night after night is brought
Throughout a week, and such weeks few or many
Recur each year for several years, can any
Discern that dream from real life in aught?

For life is but a dream whose shapes return,
Some frequently, some seldom, some by night
And some by day, some night and day: we learn,
The while all change and many vanish quite,
In their recurrence with recurrent changes
A certain seeming order; where this ranges
We count things real; such is memory's might.

A river girds the city west and south,
The main north channel of a broad lagoon,
Regurging with the salt tides from the mouth;
Waste marshes shine and glister to the moon
For leagues, then moorland black, then stony ridges;
Great piers and causeways, many noble bridges,
Connect the town and islet suburbs strewn.

Upon an easy slope it lies at large
And scarcely overlaps the long curved crest
Which swells out two leagues from the river marge.
A trackless wilderness rolls north and west,
Savannahs, savage woods, enormous mountains,
Bleak uplands, black ravines with torrent fountains;
And eastward rolls the shipless sea's unrest.

The city is not ruinous, although
Great ruins of an unremembered past,
With others of a few short years ago
More sad, are found within its precincts vast.
The street-lamps always burn; but scarce a casement
In house or palace front from roof to basement
Doth glow or gleam athwart the mirk air cast.

The street-lamps burn amid the baleful glooms,
Amidst the soundless solitudes immense
Of ranged mansions dark and still as tombs.
The silence which benumbs or strains the sense
Fulfils with awe the soul's despair unweeping:
Myriads of habitants are ever sleeping,
Or dead, or fled from nameless pestilence!

Yet as in some necropolis you find
Perchance one mourner to a thousand dead,
So there: worn faces that look deaf and blind
Like tragic masks of stone. With weary tread,
Each wrapt in his own doom, they wander, wander,
Or sit foredone and desolately ponder
Through sleepless hours with heavy drooping head.

Mature men chiefly, few in age or youth,
A woman rarely, now and then a child:
A child! If here the heart turns sick with ruth
To see a little one from birth defiled,
Or lame or blind, as preordained to languish
Through youthless life, think how it bleeds with anguish
To meet one erring in that homeless wild.

They often murmur to themselves, they speak
To one another seldom, for their woe
Broods maddening inwardly and scorns to wreak
Itself abroad; and if at whiles it grow
To frenzy which must rave, none heeds the clamour,
Unless there waits some victim of like glamour,
To rave in turn, who lends attentive show.

The City is of Night, but not of Sleep;
There sweet sleep is not for the weary brain;
The pitiless hours like years and ages creep,
A night seems termless hell. This dreadful strain
Of thought and consciousness which never ceases,
Or which some moments' stupor but increases,
This, worse than woe, makes wretches there insane.

They leave all hope behind who enter there:

One certitude while sane they cannot leave,
One anodyne for torture and despair;
The certitude of Death, which no reprieve
Can put off long; and which, divinely tender,
But waits the outstretched hand to promptly render
That draught whose slumber nothing can bereave

II

Because he seemed to walk with an intent
I followed him; who, shadowlike and frail,
Unswervingly though slowly onward went,
Regardless, wrapt in thought as in a veil:
Thus step for step with lonely sounding feet
We travelled many a long dim silent street.

At length he paused: a black mass in the gloom,
A tower that merged into the heavy sky;
Around, the huddled stones of grave and tomb:
Some old God's-acre now corruption's sty:
He murmured to himself with dull despair,
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

Then turning to the right went on once more
And travelled weary roads without suspense;
And reached at last a low wall's open door,
Whose villa gleamed beyond the foliage dense:
He gazed, and muttered with a hard despair,
Here Love died, stabbed by its own worshipped pair.

Then turning to the right resumed his march,
And travelled street and lanes with wondrous strength,
Until on stooping through a narrow arch
We stood before a squalid house at length:
He gazed, and whispered with a cold despair,
Here Hope died, starved out in its utmost lair.

When he had spoken thus, before he stirred,
I spoke, perplexed by something in the signs
Of desolation I had seen and heard

In this drear pilgrimage to ruined shrines:
Where Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed,
Can Life still live? By what doth it proceed?

As whom his one intense thought overpowers,
He answered coldly, Take a watch, erase
The signs and figures of the circling hours,
Detach the hands, remove the dial-face;
The works proceed until run down; although
Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go.

Then turning to the right paced on again,
And traversed squares and travelled streets whose glooms
Seemed more and more familiar to my ken;
And reached that sullen temple of the tombs;
And paused to murmur with the old despair,
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

I ceased to follow, for the knot of doubt
Was severed sharply with a cruel knife:
He circled thus forever tracing out
The series of the fraction left of Life;
Perpetual recurrence in the scope
Of but three terms, dead Faith, dead Love, dead Hope. [1]

LXX

[1] Life divided by that persistent three = $\frac{1}{3}$ = .210.

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III

Although lamps burn along the silent streets,
Even when moonlight silvers empty squares
The dark holds countless lanes and close retreats;

But when the night its sphereless mantle wears
The open spaces yawn with gloom abysmal,
The sombre mansions loom immense and dismal,
The lanes are black as subterranean lairs.

And soon the eye a strange new vision learns:
The night remains for it as dark and dense,
Yet clearly in this darkness it discerns
As in the daylight with its natural sense;
Perceives a shade in shadow not obscurely,
Pursues a stir of black in blackness surely,
Sees spectres also in the gloom intense.

The ear, too, with the silence vast and deep
Becomes familiar though unreconciled;
Hears breathings as of hidden life asleep,
And muffled throbs as of pent passions wild,
Far murmurs, speech of pity or derision;
but all more dubious than the things of vision,
So that it knows not when it is beguiled.

No time abates the first despair and awe,
But wonder ceases soon; the weirdest thing
Is felt least strange beneath the lawless law
Where Death-in-Life is the eternal king;
Crushed impotent beneath this reign of terror,
Dazed with mysteries of woe and error,
The soul is too outworn for wondering.

IV

He stood alone within the spacious square
Declaiming from the central grassy mound,
With head uncovered and with streaming hair,
As if large multitudes were gathered round:
A stalwart shape, the gestures full of might,
The glances burning with unnatural light:--

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: All was black,

In heaven no single star, on earth no track;
A brooding hush without a stir or note,
The air so thick it clotted in my throat;
And thus for hours; then some enormous things
Swooped past with savage cries and clanking wings:
But I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: Eyes of fire
Glared at me throbbing with a starved desire;
The hoarse and heavy and carnivorous breath
Was hot upon me from deep jaws of death;
Sharp claws, swift talons, fleshless fingers cold
Plucked at me from the bushes, tried to hold:
But I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: Lo you, there,
That hillock burning with a brazen glare;
Those myriad dusky flames with points a-glow
Which writhed and hissed and darted to and fro;
A Sabbath of the Serpents, heaped pell-mell
For Devil's roll-call and some fete of Hell:
Yet I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: Meteors ran
And crossed their javelins on the black sky-span;
The zenith opened to a gulf of flame,
The dreadful thunderbolts jarred earth's fixed frame;
The ground all heaved in waves of fire that surged
And weltered round me sole there unsubmerged:
Yet I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: Air once more,
And I was close upon a wild sea-shore;
Enormous cliffs arose on either hand,

The deep tide thundered up a league-broad strand;
White foambelts seethed there, wan spray swept and flew;
The sky broke, moon and stars and clouds and blue:
Yet I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: On the left
The sun arose and crowned a broad crag-cleft;
There stopped and burned out black, except a rim,
A bleeding eyeless socket, red and dim;
Whereon the moon fell suddenly south-west,
And stood above the right-hand cliffs at rest:
Yet I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: From the right
A shape came slowly with a ruddy light;
A woman with a red lamp in her hand,
Bareheaded and barefooted on that strand;
O desolation moving with such grace!
O anguish with such beauty in thy face!
I fell as on my bier,
Hope travailed with such fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: I was twain,
Two selves distinct that cannot join again;
One stood apart and knew but could not stir,
And watched the other stark in swoon and her;
And she came on, and never turned aside,
Between such sun and moon and roaring tide:
And as she came more near
My soul grew mad with fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: Hell is mild
And piteous matched with that accursed wild;
A large black sign was on her breast that bowed,
A broad black band ran down her snow-white shroud;
That lamp she held was her own burning heart,

Whose blood-drops trickled step by step apart:
The mystery was clear;
Mad rage had swallowed fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: By the sea
She knelt and bent above that senseless me;
Those lamp-drops fell upon my white brow there,
She tried to cleanse them with her tears and hair;
She murmured words of pity, love, and woe,
Shee heeded not the level rushing flow:
And mad with rage and fear,
I stood stonebound so near.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: When the tide
Swept up to her there kneeling by my side,
She clasped that corpse-like me, and they were borne
Away, and this vile me was left forlorn;
I know the whole sea cannot quench that heart,
Or cleanse that brow, or wash those two apart:
They love; their doom is drear,
Yet they nor hope nor fear;
But I, what do I here?

V

How he arrives there none can clearly know;
Athwart the mountains and immense wild tracts,
Or flung a waif upon that vast sea-flow,
Or down the river's boiling cataracts:
To reach it is as dying fever-stricken
To leave it, slow faint birth intense pangs quicken;
And memory swoons in both the tragic acts.

But being there one feels a citizen;
Escape seems hopeless to the heart forlorn:
Can Death-in-Life be brought to life again?
And yet release does come; there comes a morn
When he awakes from slumbering so sweetly

That all the world is changed for him completely,
And he is verily as if new-born.

He scarcely can believe the blissful change,
He weeps perchance who wept not while accurst;
Never again will he approach the range
Infected by that evil spell now burst:
Poor wretch! who once hath paced that dolent city
Shall pace it often, doomed beyond all pity,
With horror ever deepening from the first.

Though he possess sweet babes and loving wife,
A home of peace by loyal friendships cheered,
And love them more than death or happy life,
They shall avail not; he must dree his weird;
Renounce all blessings for that imprecation,
Steal forth and haunt that builded desolation,
Of woe and terrors and thick darkness reared.

VI

I sat forlornly by the river-side,
And watched the bridge-lamps glow like golden stars
Above the blackness of the swelling tide,
Down which they struck rough gold in ruddier bars;
And heard the heave and plashing of the flow
Against the wall a dozen feet below.

Large elm-trees stood along that river-walk;
And under one, a few steps from my seat,
I heard strange voices join in stranger talk,
Although I had not heard approaching feet:
These bodiless voices in my waking dream
Flowed dark words blending with sombre stream:--

And you have after all come back; come back.
I was about to follow on your track.
And you have failed: our spark of hope is black.

That I have failed is proved by my return:

The spark is quenched, nor ever more will burn,
But listen; and the story you shall learn.

I reached the portal common spirits fear,
And read the words above it, dark yet clear,
"Leave hope behind, all ye who enter here:"

And would have passed in, gratified to gain
That positive eternity of pain
Instead of this insufferable inane.

A demon warder clutched me, Not so fast;
First leave your hopes behind!--But years have passed
Since I left all behind me, to the last:

You cannot count for hope, with all your wit,
This bleak despair that drives me to the Pit:
How could I seek to enter void of it?

He snarled, What thing is this which apes a soul,
And would find entrance to our gulf of dole
Without the payment of the settled toll?

Outside the gate he showed an open chest:
Here pay their entrance fees the souls unblest;
Cast in some hope, you enter with the rest.

This is Pandora's box; whose lid shall shut,
And Hell-gate too, when hopes have filled it; but
They are so thin that it will never glut.

I stood a few steps backwards, desolate;
And watched the spirits pass me to their fate,
And fling off hope, and enter at the gate.

When one casts off a load he springs upright,
Squares back his shoulders, breathes will all his might,
And briskly paces forward strong and light:

But these, as if they took some burden, bowed;
The whole frame sank; however strong and proud
Before, they crept in quite infirm and cowed.

And as they passed me, earnestly from each
A morsel of his hope I did beseech,
To pay my entrance; but all mocked my speech.

No one would cede a little of his store,
Though knowing that in instants three or four
He must resign the whole for evermore.

So I returned. Our destiny is fell;
For in this Limbo we must ever dwell,
Shut out alike from heaven and Earth and Hell.

The other sighed back, Yea; but if we grope
With care through all this Limbo's dreary scope,
We yet may pick up some minute lost hope;

And sharing it between us, entrance win,
In spite of fiends so jealous for gross sin:
Let us without delay our search begin.

VII

Some say that phantoms haunt those shadowy streets,
And mingle freely there with sparse mankind;
And tell of ancient woes and black defeats,
And murmur mysteries in the grave enshrined:
But others think them visions of illusion,
Or even men gone far in self-confusion;
No man there being wholly sane in mind.

And yet a man who raves, however mad,
Who bares his heart and tells of his own fall,
Reserves some inmost secret good or bad:
The phantoms have no reticence at all:
The nudity of flesh will blush though tameless
The extreme nudity of bone grins shameless,
The unsexed skeleton mocks shroud and pall.

I have seen phantoms there that were as men

And men that were as phantoms flit and roam;
Marked shapes that were not living to my ken,
Caught breathings acrid as with Dead Sea foam:
The City rests for man so weird and awful,
That his intrusion there might seem unlawful,
And phantoms there may have their proper home.

VIII

While I still lingered on that river-walk,
And watched the tide as black as our black doom,
I heard another couple join in talk,
And saw them to the left hand in the gloom
Seated against an elm bole on the ground,
Their eyes intent upon the stream profound.

"I never knew another man on earth
But had some joy and solace in his life,
Some chance of triumph in the dreadful strife:
My doom has been unmitigated dearth."

"We gaze upon the river, and we note
The various vessels large and small that float,
Ignoring every wrecked and sunken boat."

"And yet I asked no splendid dower, no spoil
Of sway or fame or rank or even wealth;
But homely love with common food and health,
And nightly sleep to balance daily toil."

"This all-too-humble soul would arrogate
Unto itself some signalling hate
From the supreme indifference of Fate!"

"Who is most wretched in this dolorous place?
I think myself; yet I would rather be
My miserable self than He, than He
Who formed such creatures to His own disgrace.

"The vilest thing must be less vile than Thou

From whom it had its being, God and Lord!
Creator of all woe and sin! abhorred
Malignant and implacable! I vow

"That not for all Thy power furled and unfurled,
For all the temples to Thy glory built,
Would I assume the ignominious guilt
Of having made such men in such a world."

"As if a Being, God or Fiend, could reign,
At once so wicked, foolish and insane,
As to produce men when He might refrain!

"The world rolls round for ever like a mill;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill;
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

"While air of Space and Time's full river flow
The mill must blindly whirl unresting so:
It may be wearing out, but who can know?

"Man might know one thing were his sight less dim;
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
That it is quite indifferent to him.

"Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith?
It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,
Then grinds him back into eternal death."

IX

It is full strange to him who hears and feels,
When wandering there in some deserted street,
The booming and the jar of ponderous wheels,
The trampling clash of heavy ironshod feet:
Who in this Venice of the Black Sea rideth?
Who in this city of the stars abideth
To buy or sell as those in daylight sweet?

The rolling thunder seems to fill the sky

As it comes on; the horses snort and strain,
The harness jingles, as it passes by;
The hugeness of an overburthened wain:
A man sits nodding on the shaft or trudges
Three parts asleep beside his fellow-drudges:
And so it rolls into the night again.

What merchandise? whence, whither, and for whom?
Perchance it is a Fate-appointed hearse,
Bearing away to some mysterious tomb
Or Limbo of the scornful universe
The joy, the peace, the life-hope, the abortions
Of all things good which should have been our portions,
But have been strangled by that City's curse.

X

The mansion stood apart in its own ground;
In front thereof a fragrant garden-lawn,
High trees about it, and the whole walled round:
The massy iron gates were both withdrawn;
And every window of its front shed light,
Portentous in that City of the Night.

But though thus lighted it was deadly still
As all the countless bulks of solid gloom;
Perchance a congregation to fulfil
Solemnities of silence in this doom,
Mysterious rites of dolour and despair
Permitting not a breath or chant of prayer?

Broad steps ascended to a terrace broad
Whereon lay still light from the open door;
The hall was noble, and its aspect awed,
Hung round with heavy black from dome to floor;
And ample stairways rose to left and right
Whose balustrades were also draped with night.

I paced from room to room, from hall to hall,
Nor any life throughout the maze discerned;

But each was hung with its funereal pall,
And held a shrine, around which tapers burned,
With picture or with statue or with bust,
all copied from the same fair form of dust:

A woman very young and very fair;
Beloved by bounteous life and joy and youth,
And loving these sweet lovers, so that care
And age and death seemed not for her in sooth:
Alike as stars, all beautiful and bright,
these shapes lit up that mausolean night.

At length I heard a murmur as of lips,
And reached an open oratory hung
With heaviest blackness of the whole eclipse;
Beneath the dome a fuming censer swung;
And one lay there upon a low white bed,
With tapers burning at the foot and head:

The Lady of the images, supine,
Deathstill, lifesweet, with folded palms she lay:
And kneeling there as at a sacred shrine
A young man wan and worn who seemed to pray:
A crucifix of dim and ghostly white
Surmounted the large altar left in night:--

The chambers of the mansion of my heart,
In every one whereof thine image dwells,
Are black with grief eternal for thy sake.

The inmost oratory of my soul,
Wherein thou ever dwellest quick or dead,
Is black with grief eternal for thy sake.

I kneel beside thee and I clasp the cross,
With eyes forever fixed upon that face,
So beautiful and dreadful in its calm.

I kneel here patient as thou liest there;
As patient as a statue carved in stone,
Of adoration and eternal grief.

While thou dost not awake I cannot move;
And something tells me thou wilt never wake,
And I alive feel turning into stone.

Most beautiful were Death to end my grief,
Most hateful to destroy the sight of thee,
Dear vision better than all death or life.

But I renounce all choice of life or death,
For either shall be ever at thy side,
And thus in bliss or woe be ever well.--

He murmured thus and thus in monotone,
Intent upon that uncorrupted face,
Entranced except his moving lips alone:
I glided with hushed footsteps from the place.
This was the festival that filled with light
That palace in the City of the Night.

XI

What men are they who haunt these fatal glooms,
And fill their living mouths with dust of death,
And make their habitations in the tombs,
And breathe eternal sighs with mortal breath,
And pierce life's pleasant veil of various error
To reach that void of darkness and old terror
Wherein expire the lamps of hope and faith?

They have much wisdom yet they are not wise,
They have much goodness yet they do not well,
(The fools we know have their own paradise,
The wicked also have their proper Hell);
They have much strength but still their doom is stronger,
Much patience but their time endureth longer,
Much valour but life mocks it with some spell.

They are most rational and yet insane:
And outward madness not to be controlled;
A perfect reason in the central brain,

Which has no power, but sitteth wan and cold,
And sees the madness, and foresees as plainly
The ruin in its path, and trieth vainly
To cheat itself refusing to behold.

And some are great in rank and wealth and power,
And some renowned for genius and for worth;
And some are poor and mean, who brood and cower
And shrink from notice, and accept all dearth
Of body, heart and soul, and leave to others
All boons of life: yet these and those are brothers,
The saddest and the weariest men on earth.

XII

Our isolated units could be brought
To act together for some common end?
For one by one, each silent with his thought,
I marked a long loose line approach and wend
Athwart the great cathedral's cloistered square,
And slowly vanish from the moonlit air.

Then I would follow in among the last:
And in the porch a shrouded figure stood,
Who challenged each one pausing ere he passed,
With deep eyes burning through a blank white hood:
Whence come you in the world of life and light
To this our City of Tremendous Night?--

From pleading in a senate of rich lords
For some scant justice to our countless hordes
Who toil half-starved with scarce a human right:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From wandering through many a solemn scene
Of opium visions, with a heart serene
And intellect miraculously bright:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From making hundreds laugh and roar with glee

By my transcendent feats of mimicry,
And humour wanton as an elvish sprite:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From prayer and fasting in a lonely cell,
Which brought an ecstasy ineffable
Of love and adoration and delight:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From ruling on a splendid kingly throne
A nation which beneath my rule has grown
Year after year in wealth and arts and might:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From preaching to an audience fired with faith
The Lamb who died to save our souls from death,
Whose blood hath washed our scarlet sins wool-white:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From drinking fiery poison in a den
Crowded with tawdry girls and squalid men,
Who hoarsely laugh and curse and brawl and fight:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From picturing with all beauty and all grace
First Eden and the parents of our race,
A luminous rapture unto all men's sight:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From writing a great work with patient plan
To justify the ways of God to man,
And show how ill must fade and perish quite:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From desperate fighting with a little band
Against the powerful tyrants of our land,
To free our brethren in their own despite:
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

Thus, challenged by that warder sad and stern,
Each one responded with his countersign,
Then entered the cathedral; and in turn

I entered also, having given mine;
But lingered near until I heard no more,
And marked the closing of the massive door.

XIII

Of all things human which are strange and wild
This is perchance the wildest and most strange,
And showeth man most utterly beguiled,
To those who haunt that sunless City's range;
That he bemoans himself for aye, repeating
How Time is deadly swift, how life is fleeting,
How naught is constant on the earth but change.

The hours are heavy on him and the days;
The burden of the months he scarce can bear;
And often in his secret soul he prays
To sleep through barren periods unaware,
Arousing at some longed-for date of pleasure;
Which having passed and yielded him small treasure,
He would outsleep another term of care.

Yet in his marvellous fancy he must make
Quick wings for Time, and see it fly from us;
This Time which crawleth like a monstrous snake,
Wounded and slow and very venomous;
Which creeps blindwormlike round the earth and ocean,
Distilling poison at each painful motion,
And seems condemned to circle ever thus.

And since he cannot spend and use aright
The little time here given him in trust,
But wasteth it in weary undelight
Of foolish toil and trouble, strife and lust,
He naturally claimeth to inherit
The everlasting Future, that his merit
May have full scope; as surely is most just.

O length of the intolerable hours,
O nights that are as aeons of slow pain,

O Time, too ample for our vital powers,
O Life, whose woeful vanities remain
Immutable for all of all our legions
Through all the centuries and in all the regions,
Not of your speed and variance WE complain.

WE do not ask a longer term of strife,
Weakness and weariness and nameless woes;
We do not claim renewed and endless life
When this which is our torment here shall close,
An everlasting conscious inanition!
We yearn for speedy death in full fruition,
Dateless oblivion and divine repose.

XIV

Large glooms were gathered in the mighty fane,
With tinted moongleams slanting here and there;
And all was hush: no swelling organ-strain,
No chant, no voice or murmuring of prayer;
No priests came forth, no tinkling censers fumed,
And the high altar space was unillumed.

Around the pillars and against the walls
Leaned men and shadows; others seemed to brood
Bent or recumbent in secluded stalls.
Perchance they were not a great multitude
Save in that city of so lonely streets
Where one may count up every face he meets.

All patiently awaited the event
Without a stir or sound, as if no less
Self-occupied, doomstricken while attent.
And then we heard a voice of solemn stress
From the dark pulpit, and our gaze there met
Two eyes which burned as never eyes burned yet:

Two steadfast and intolerable eyes
Burning beneath a broad and rugged brow;
The head behind it of enormous size.

And as black fir-groves in a large wind bow,
Our rooted congregation, gloom-arrayed,
By that great sad voice deep and full were swayed:--

O melancholy Brothers, dark, dark, dark!
O battling in black floods without an ark!
O spectral wanderers of unholy Night!
My soul hath bled for you these sunless years,
With bitter blood-drops running down like tears:
Oh dark, dark, dark, withdrawn from joy and light!

My heart is sick with anguish for your bale;
Your woe hath been my anguish; yea, I quail
And perish in your perishing unblest.
And I have searched the highths and depths, the scope
Of all our universe, with desperate hope
To find some solace for your wild unrest.

And now at last authentic word I bring,
Witnessed by every dead and living thing;
Good tidings of great joy for you, for all:
There is no God; no Fiend with names divine
Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

It was the dark delusion of a dream,
That living Person conscious and supreme,
Whom we must curse for cursing us with life;
Whom we must curse because the life he gave
Could not be buried in the quiet grave,
Could not be killed by poison or the knife.

This little life is all we must endure,
The grave's most holy peace is ever sure,
We fall asleep and never wake again;
Nothing is of us but the mouldering flesh,
Whose elements dissolve and merge afresh
In earth, air, water, plants, and other men.

We finish thus; and all our wretched race
Shall finish with its cycle, and give place
To other beings with their own time-doom:

Infinite aeons ere our kind began;
Infinite aeons after the last man
Has joined the mammoth in earth's tomb and womb.

We bow down to the universal laws,
Which never had for man a special clause
Of cruelty or kindness, love or hate:
If toads and vultures are obscene to sight,
If tigers burn with beauty and with might,
Is it by favour or by wrath of Fate?

All substance lives and struggles evermore
Through countless shapes continually at war,
By countless interactions interknit:
If one is born a certain day on earth,
All times and forces tended to that birth,
Not all the world could change or hinder it.

I find no hint throughout the Universe
Of good or ill, of blessing or of curse;
I find alone Necessity Supreme;
With infinite Mystery, abysmal, dark,
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark
For us the flitting shadows of a dream.

O Brothers of sad lives! they are so brief;
A few short years must bring us all relief:
Can we not bear these years of laboring breath?
But if you would not this poor life fulfil,
Lo, you are free to end it when you will,
Without the fear of waking after death.--

The organ-like vibrations of his voice
Thrilled through the vaulted aisles and died away;
The yearning of the tones which bade rejoice
Was sad and tender as a requiem lay:
Our shadowy congregation rested still
As brooding on that "End it when you will."

XV

Wherever men are gathered, all the air
Is charged with human feeling, human thought;
Each shout and cry and laugh, each curse and prayer,
Are into its vibrations surely wrought;
Unspoken passion, wordless meditation,
Are breathed into it with our respiration
It is with our life fraught and overfraught.

So that no man there breathes earth's simple breath,
As if alone on mountains or wide seas;
But nourishes warm life or hastens death
With joys and sorrows, health and foul disease,
Wisdom and folly, good and evil labours,
Incessant of his multitudinous neighbors;
He in his turn affecting all of these.

That City's atmosphere is dark and dense,
Although not many exiles wander there,
With many a potent evil influence,
Each adding poison to the poisoned air;
Infections of unutterable sadness,
Infections of incalculable madness,
Infections of incurable despair.

XVI

Our shadowy congregation rested still,
As musing on that message we had heard
And brooding on that "End it when you will;"
Perchance awaiting yet some other word;
When keen as lightning through a muffled sky
Sprang forth a shrill and lamentable cry:--

The man speaks sooth, alas! the man speaks sooth:
We have no personal life beyond the grave;
There is no God; Fate knows nor wrath nor ruth:
Can I find here the comfort which I crave?

In all eternity I had one chance,

One few years' term of gracious human life:
The splendours of the intellect's advance,
The sweetness of the home with babes and wife;

The social pleasures with their genial wit:
The fascination of the worlds of art,
The glories of the worlds of nature, lit
By large imagination's glowing heart;

The rapture of mere being, full of health;
The careless childhood and the ardent youth,
The strenuous manhood winning various wealth,
The reverend age serene with life's long truth:

All the sublime prerogatives of Man;
The storied memories of the times of old,
The patient tracking of the world's great plan
Through sequences and changes myriadfold.

This chance was never offered me before;
For me this infinite Past is blank and dumb:
This chance recurreth never, nevermore;
Blank, blank for me the infinite To-come.

And this sole chance was frustrate from my birth,
A mockery, a delusion; and my breath
Of noble human life upon this earth
So racks me that I sigh for senseless death.

My wine of life is poison mixed with gall,
My noonday passes in a nightmare dream,
I worse than lose the years which are my all:
What can console me for the loss supreme?

Speak not of comfort where no comfort is,
Speak not at all: can words make foul things fair?
Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss:
Hush and be mute envisaging despair.--

This vehement voice came from the northern aisle
Rapid and shrill to its abrupt harsh close;
And none gave answer for a certain while,

For words must shrink from these most wordless woes;
At last the pulpit speaker simply said,
With humid eyes and thoughtful drooping head:--

My Brother, my poor Brothers, it is thus;
This life itself holds nothing good for us,
But ends soon and nevermore can be;
And we knew nothing of it ere our birth,
And shall know nothing when consigned to earth:
I ponder these thoughts and they comfort me.

XVII

How the moon triumphs through the endless nights!
How the stars throb and glitter as they wheel
Their thick processions of supernal lights
Around the blue vault obdurate as steel!
And men regard with passionate awe and yearning
The mighty marching and the golden burning,
And think the heavens respond to what they feel.

Boats gliding like dark shadows of a dream
Are glorified from vision as they pass
The quivering moonbridge on the deep black stream;
Cold windows kindle their dead glooms of glass
To restless crystals; cornice dome and column
Emerge from chaos in the splendour solemn;
Like faery lakes gleam lawns of dewy grass.

With such a living light these dead eyes shine,
These eyes of sightless heaven, that as we gaze
We read a pity, tremulous, divine,
Or cold majestic scorn in their pure rays:
Fond man! they are not haughty, are not tender;
There is no heart or mind in all their splendour,
They thread mere puppets all their marvellous maze.

If we could near them with the flight unflown,
We should but find them worlds as sad as this,
Or suns all self-consuming like our own

Enringed by planet worlds as much amiss:
They wax and wane through fusion and confusion;
The spheres eternal are a grand illusion,
The empyrean is a void abyss.

XVIII

I wandered in a suburb of the north,
And reached a spot whence three close lanes led down,
Beneath thick trees and hedgerows winding forth
Like deep brook channels, deep and dark and lown:
The air above was wan with misty light,
The dull grey south showed one vague blur of white.

I took the left-hand path and slowly trod
Its earthen footpath, brushing as I went
The humid leafage; and my feet were shod
With heavy languor, and my frame downbent,
With infinite sleepless weariness outworn,
So many nights I thus had paced forlorn.

After a hundred steps I grew aware
Of something crawling in the lane below;
It seemed a wounded creature prostrate there
That sobbed with pangs in making progress slow,
The hind limbs stretched to push, the fore limbs then
To drag; for it would die in its own den.

But coming level with it I discerned
That it had been a man; for at my tread
It stopped in its sore travail and half-turned,
Leaning upon its right, and raised its head,
And with the left hand twitched back as in ire
Long grey unreverend locks befouled with mire.

A haggard filthy face with bloodshot eyes,
An infamy for manhood to behold.
He gasped all trembling, What, you want my prize?
You leave, to rob me, wine and lust and gold
And all that men go mad upon, since you

Have traced my sacred secret of the clue?

You think that I am weak and must submit
Yet I but scratch you with this poisoned blade,
And you are dead as if I clove with it
That false fierce greedy heart. Betrayed! betrayed!
I fling this phial if you seek to pass,
And you are forthwith shrivelled up like grass.

And then with sudden change, Take thought! take thought!
Have pity on me! it is mine alone.
If you could find, it would avail you naught;
Seek elsewhere on the pathway of your own:
For who of mortal or immortal race
The lifetrack of another can retrace?

Did you but know my agony and toil!
Two lanes diverge up yonder from this lane;
My thin blood marks the long length of their soil;
Such clue I left, who sought my clue in vain:
My hands and knees are worn both flesh and bone;
I cannot move but with continual moan.

But I am in the very way at last
To find the long-lost broken golden thread
Which unites my present with my past,
If you but go your own way. And I said,
I will retire as soon as you have told
Whereunto leadeth this lost thread of gold.

And so you know it not! he hissed with scorn;
I feared you, imbecile! It leads me back
From this accursed night without a morn,
And through the deserts which have else no track,
And through vast wastes of horror-haunted time,
To Eden innocence in Eden's clime:

And I become a nursling soft and pure,
An infant cradled on its mother's knee,
Without a past, love-cherished and secure;
Which if it saw this loathsome present Me,
Would plunge its face into the pillowing breast,

And scream abhorrence hard to lull to rest.

He turned to grope; and I retiring brushed
Thin shreds of gossamer from off my face,
And mused, His life would grow, the germ uncrushed;
He should to antenatal night retrace,
And hide his elements in that large womb
Beyond the reach of man-evolving Doom.

And even thus, what weary way were planned,
To seek oblivion through the far-off gate
Of birth, when that of death is close at hand!
For this is law, if law there be in Fate:
What never has been, yet may have its when;
The thing which has been, never is again.

XIX

The mighty river flowing dark and deep,
With ebb and flood from the remote sea-tides
Vague-sounding through the City's sleepless sleep,
Is named the River of the Suicides;
For night by night some lorn wretch overweary,
And shuddering from the future yet more dreary,
Within its cold secure oblivion hides.

One plunges from a bridge's parapet,
As if by some blind and sudden frenzy hurled;
Another wades in slow with purpose set
Until the waters are above him furled;
Another in a boat with dreamlike motion
Glides drifting down into the desert ocean,
To starve or sink from out the desert world.

They perish from their suffering surely thus,
For none beholding them attempts to save,
The while thinks how soon, solicitous,
He may seek refuge in the self-same wave;
Some hour when tired of ever-vain endurance
Impatience will forerun the sweet assurance

Of perfect peace eventual in the grave.

When this poor tragic-farce has palled us long,
Why actors and spectators do we stay?--
To fill our so-short roles out right or wrong;
To see what shifts are yet in the dull play
For our illusion; to refrain from grieving
Dear foolish friends by our untimely leaving:
But those asleep at home, how blest are they!

Yet it is but for one night after all:
What matters one brief night of dreary pain?
When after it the weary eyelids fall
Upon the weary eyes and wasted brain;
And all sad scenes and thoughts and feelings vanish
In that sweet sleep no power can ever banish,
That one best sleep which never wakes again.

XX

I sat me weary on a pillar's base,
And leaned against the shaft; for broad moonlight
O'erflowed the peacefulness of cloistered space,
A shore of shadow slanting from the right:
The great cathedral's western front stood there,
A wave-worn rock in that calm sea of air.

Before it, opposite my place of rest,
Two figures faced each other, large, austere;
A couchant sphinx in shadow to the breast,
An angel standing in the moonlight clear;
So mighty by magnificence of form,
They were not dwarfed beneath that mass enorm.

Upon the cross-hilt of the naked sword
The angel's hands, as prompt to smite, were held;
His vigilant intense regard was poured
Upon the creature placidly unquelled,
Whose front was set at level gaze which took
No heed of aught, a solemn trance-like look.

And as I pondered these opposed shapes
My eyelids sank in stupor, that dull swoon
Which drugs and with a leaden mantle drapes
The outworn to worse weariness. But soon
A sharp and clashing noise the stillness broke,
And from the evil lethargy I woke.

The angel's wings had fallen, stone on stone,
And lay there shattered; hence the sudden sound:
A warrior leaning on his sword alone
Now watched the sphinx with that regard profound;
The sphinx unchanged looked forthright, as aware
Of nothing in the vast abyss of air.

Again I sank in that repose unsweet,
Again a clashing noise my slumber rent;
The warrior's sword lay broken at his feet:
An unarmed man with raised hands impotent
Now stood before the sphinx, which ever kept
Such mien as if open eyes it slept.

My eyelids sank in spite of wonder grown;
A louder crash upstartled me in dread:
The man had fallen forward, stone on stone,
And lay there shattered, with his trunkless head
Between the monster's large quiescent paws,
Beneath its grand front changeless as life's laws.

The moon had circled westward full and bright,
And made the temple-front a mystic dream,
And bathed the whole enclosure with its light,
The sworded angel's wrecks, the sphinx supreme:
I pondered long that cold majestic face
Whose vision seemed of infinite void space.

XXI

A near the centre of that northern crest
Stands out a level upland bleak and bare,

From which the city east and south and west
Sinks gently in long waves; and throned there
An Image sits, stupendous, superhuman,
The bronze colossus of a winged Woman,
Upon a graded granite base foursquare.

Low-seated she leans forward massively,
With cheek on clenched left hand, the forearm's might
Erect, its elbow on her rounded knee;
Across a clasped book in her lap the right
Upholds a pair of compasses; she gazes
With full set eyes, but wandering in thick mazes
Of sombre thought beholds no outward sight.

Words cannot picture her; but all men know
That solemn sketch the pure sad artist wrought
Three centuries and threescore years ago,
With phantasies of his peculiar thought:
The instruments of carpentry and science
Scattered about her feet, in strange alliance
With the keen wolf-hound sleeping undistraught;

Scales, hour-glass, bell, and magic-square above;
The grave and solid infant perched beside,
With open winglets that might bear a dove,
Intent upon its tablets, heavy-eyed;
Her folded wings as of a mighty eagle,
But all too impotent to lift the regal
Robustness of her earth-born strength and pride;

And with those wings, and that light wreath which seems
To mock her grand head and the knotted frown
Of forehead charged with baleful thoughts and dreams,
The household bunch of keys, the housewife's gown
Voluminous, indented, and yet rigid
As if a shell of burnished metal frigid,
The feet thick-shod to tread all weakness down;

The comet hanging o'er the waste dark seas,
The massy rainbow curved in front of it
Beyond the village with the masts and trees;
The snaky imp, dog-headed, from the Pit,

Bearing upon its batlike leathern pinions
Her name unfolded in the sun's dominions,
The "MELENCOLIA" that transcends all wit.

Thus has the artist copied her, and thus
Surrounded to expound her form sublime,
Her fate heroic and calamitous;
Fronting the dreadful mysteries of Time,
Unvanquished in defeat and desolation,
Undaunted in the hopeless conflagration
Of the day setting on her baffled prime.

Baffled and beaten back she works on still,
Weary and sick of soul she works the more,
Sustained by her indomitable will:
The hands shall fashion and the brain shall pore,
And all her sorrow shall be turned to labour,
Till Death the friend-foe piercing with his sabre
That mighty heart of hearts ends bitter war.

But as if blacker night could dawn on night,
With tenfold gloom on moonless night unstarred,
A sense more tragic than defeat and blight,
More desperate than strife with hope debarred,
More fatal than the adamant Never
Encompassing her passionate endeavour,
Dawns glooming in her tenebrous regard:

To sense that every struggle brings defeat
Because Fate holds no prize to crown success;
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
Because they have no secret to express;
That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
Because there is no light beyond the curtain;
That all is vanity and nothingness.

Titanic from her high throne in the north,
That City's sombre Patroness and Queen,
In bronze sublimity she gazes forth
Over her Capital of teen and threne,
Over the river with its isles and bridges,
The marsh and moorland, to the stern rock-ridges,

Confronting them with a coeval mien.

The moving moon and stars from east to west
Circle before her in the sea of air;
Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
Her subjects often gaze up to her there:
The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance
And confirmation of the old despair.

James Thomson

The Doom Of A City

I

FROM out the house I crept,
The house which long had caged my homeless life:
The mighty City in vast silence slept,
Dreaming away its tumult, toil, and strife:
But sleep and sleep's rich dreams were not for me,
For me, accurst, whom terror and the pain
Of baffled longings, and starved misery,
And such remorse as sears the breast,
And hopeless doubt which gnaws the brain
Till wildest action blind and vain
Would be more welcome than supine unrest,
 Drove forth as one possest
To leave my kind and dare the desert sea;
 To drift alone and far,
Dubious of any port or isle to gain,
 Ignorant of chart and star,
Upon that infinite and mysterious main
Which wastes in foam against our shore;
Whose moans and murmurs evermore,
 Insupportably sublime,
Haunting the crowded tumult of our Time,
 Suspend its hurrying breath -
Like whispers of sad ghosts and spirits free
 From worlds beyond our life and death,
The unknown awful realm where broods Eternity.

II

I paced through desert streets, beneath the gleam
Of lamps that lit my trembling life alone;
Like lamps sepulchral which had slowly burned
Through sunless ages, deep and undiscerned,
Within a buried City's maze of stone;
Whose peopling corpses, while they ever dream
Of birth and death - of complicated life
 Whose days and months and years
Are wild with laughters, groans, and tears,

As with themselves and Doom
They wage, with loss or gain, incessant strife,
Indeed, lie motionless within their tomb,
Lie motionless and never laugh or weep,
All still, and buried deep
For ever in death's sleep,
While burn the quiet lamps amidst the breathless gloom.

III

My boat lay waiting there,
Upon the moonless river
Whose pulse had ceased to quiver
In that unnatural hush of brooding night.
I thought, Free breezes course the billowy deep!
And rowed on panting through the feverous air,
Leaving the great main waters on in my right
For that canal which creeps into the sea
Across the livid marshes wild and bare.
So slowly faded back from sight,
As cloth a dream insensibly
Fade backward on the ebbing tide of sleep,
That city which had home nor hope for me,
That stifling tomb from which I now was free.

IV

Like some weak life whose sluggish moments creep
Diffused on worthless objects, yet whose tide
With dull reluctance hard to understand
Refrains its death-in-life from death's full sleep,
The river's shallow waters oozed out wide,
Inclosing dreary flats of barren sand;
So merged at last into the lethal waste
That bounds of sea and stream could not be traced.

V

Long languidly I rowed,

With sick and weary pain,
Between the deepest channel's bitter weeds
Whose rankness salt slime feeds;
And so out blindly through the dismal main,
Now shaken with a long hoarse-growling swell.
And soon the Tempest-as a King who had slept
The sleep of worn-out frenzy, while his slaves
Cowered still in stupor till he woke again
Refreshed for carnage-from his torpor leapt
Breathed swarthy pallor through the dense low sky,
And hurrying swift and fell
Outspeded his own thunder-bearing glooms;
Then prone and instantaneous from on high
Plunged down in one tremendous blast,
Which crashed into white dust the heaving waves
And left the ocean level when it past....
There was a moment's respite; silence reigned;
Such shuddering silence as may once appal
The universe of tombs,
Ere the last trumpet's clangour rend them all:
And I sank down, one frail and helpless man
Alone with desolation on the sea,
To pray while any sense of prayer remained
Amidst the horrors overwhelming me.

VI

How shall I tell that tempest's thunder-story?
The soldier plunged into the Battle-stress,
Struggling and gasping in the mighty flood,
Stunned with the roar of cannon, blind with smoke,
'Midst yells and tramlings drunk and mad with blood,
What knows he of the Battle's spheric glory?
Of heavenly laws that all its evil bless -
Of sacred rights of justice which invoke
Its sternest pleading - of the tranquil eye
Triumphant o'er its chaos - of the Mind
Commanding all, serene and unsubdued,
Which having first with wisest care designed
Works to the end with vigilant fortitude;
And from that field so drenched with angry blood

Shall reap the golden harvest, VICTORY?

VII

There was a stupor stung with pain and fear,
Amidst the strangling surf flung on and on;
There was bewilderment above all dread,
Delirious calm and desperate joy austere
Of revelling through the tempest lorn and lone.
My boat and I with dizzy swiftness sped,
In strange salvation from the certain doom,
Along the urgent ridges over-reeling
And gathering up their ruins as they fled;
And down into the depths of scooped-out gloom
Whose crystal walls glowed black in the revealing
Of lightning-kindled foam; and up again,
Perched on the giddy balance of two waves
Which fiercely countering mingle with the shock,
And rush aloft confused, and tower and rock
Foaming with wild convulsion, till amain
The mass heaves down from struggling, self-destroyed,
And leaves us shuddering in a gulfy void.
Confused and intermingled, fire, sea, air,
Wrought out their ravage; for the thunders there
Were echoing in the dreadly stormless caves
And shook the deep foundations of the seas;
The air was like an ocean, drenched with spray
Whose meteor-flakes outflashed tumultuously
Against the sinking heaven's black incline,
When sudden lightnings seemed to burst their way
Up through the deep to flood and fire its brine,
Ingulping for each moment all the Night,
The blackness and the howling rage, in light
More lurid and appalling, a World-pyre....
But heart and brain were overwrought; and soon,
All vision reeling from my powerless eyes,
I lay in quiet mercy-granted swoon
As senseless as the boat in which I lay:
And we two things through all the agonies
Of night, tornado, sea, and fire,
Were drifted passive on our fearful way.

VIII

I know not for what time I lay in trance,
Nor in what course the tempest hurled us on.
At length to scarce-believed deliverance
I woke; and saw a sweet slow silent dawn
Upgrowing from the far dim grey abyss,-
So slow, it seemed like some celestial flower
Unfolding perfect petals to its prime,
And feeling in its secret soul of bliss
Each leaf a loveliness for many an hour,
With amaranthine queenship over time.
It grew: its purple splendours, flecked and starred
With golden fire, spread floating up the steep
Until they sole possessed the mighty sweep
Of crystal lucent aether: its regard,
The blessing of a light of peace and love,
Charmed with a gradual spell the sullen mood
Of the sea-giant, until all-subdued
No more his huge bulk livid shook and hove
The meteor-threatenings of his tawny mane,
No more growled lingering wrath and turbulent pain;
But calm and glad th' unmonstered monster lay
Beneath the royal sun's perfected sway.

IX

And there was Land. Where seemed a bank of clouds
Piled in the South, now nobly, one by one,
The pinnacles of lofty mountain-peaks
Flamed keen as stars, enkindled by the sun;
Emerging as with life from out their shrouds
Of silvern haze far-cleft with roseate streaks:
And far beneath them, down along the shore,
A wave of low round hills gleamed pure and pale.
But soon-like any human life
The golden promise of whose dawn doth fail
Into the same drear noon of barren strife
Of which our hearts were weary-sick of yore-

The day grew chill and dark;
And through its sullen hours the wintry gale
Beat restlessly my bark,
Beside that coast-line drifting to and fro
Upon the ocean's vapour-shrouded flow.

X

I saw grey phantoms, fading as they fled,
Glide hurrying in loose rank
O'er livid backgrounds of the upper sky,
Whose vast and thunderous threat'ning overfrowned
Abysses strangely dread-
Cold, glassy gulfs, each like an evil eye
Of serpent-malice which is dead and blank
To every sight but woe and agony.
The fascination of their wan green glance
Was fixed upon the hills which (at the foot
Of that stern wall of mountain lifted proud
Above the firmament of level cloud)
Lay stretched out cold and mute,
In leaden bulk, beneath the long expanse
Of dark and desert sky, whose brooding gloom
Was blanched with cruel pallor here and there-
Pallor of wrath or dread, instinct with doom.
There stretched they far, a dark and silent host,
Like monsters stranded from their deep-sea lair
Benumbed with terror cowering;
Still unrecovered from the storm whose ire
Had drowned them in wild floods of pitiless fire,
Or prescient of some deadlier tempest lowering.

XI

At intervals, opposing the sun's track,
Circling about the North
Shone strangely blazoned forth
Wild rainbow-fragments on the sweeping rack,
The gale's rent symbol on rent banners borne.
For ever and anon the sun gazed down

From dizzy summits of the cloud-craggs black;
Or where the wind had torn
Vast jagged rifts athwart their mass
(Behind whose heavy frown
Faint smiles of soothing like a robe of grass
Had fallen from him on the frozen hills),
He gazed out powerless o'er the rain-grey sea:
No eye which sorrow fills
With constant bitter tears,
Drowning all life and lustre, joy and pride,
Can gaze more faint and wan and hopelessly
Into the homeless world and waste of years
Spread out between it and the grave's sweet sleeping;
Can let the dark lid sink upon its weeping
More often, fain to hide
The chilling desolation blurred with strife
Which, seen or unseen, maps its future life.

XII

Ere sunset came a storm of rain
Ploughing up the barren main
With fierce and vital energy,
While brief bright lightnings flashed incessantly.
And then the South stood up, one solid wall
Of battlemented cloud, in which the mountains
And hills were fused together out of sight:
The sinking sun from his intense fire-f'ountains
Poured out against its heaven-absorbing might
Seas of lurid purple light
And fulvous meteors, surging and devouring
The shattered crests, the crumbling slopes,
The massive walls, the riven copes,
In fortitude of glowing bronze far-towering.

XIII

From all the secret caverns of the air
Night's gloomy phantoms issuing, gathered dense
To blot and stifle out the pageant there;

The murmur of their motions breathing wide
Through that new silence thrilled upon the sense;
When gazing southward I became aware
Of some slow movement by the dim sea-side,
As of a wind arousing from its lair
To rend the settled vapours. I descried,
After an interval of rapt suspense,
By what faint gloaming yet was left of day,
Two startling lamps uplifted slowly glide
From out the thick and dun immensity,
Fronting a long dark line like some array
Of men that came in silent mystery,
Across the undulations of the shore
Long-winding coil on coil unbrokenly,
To celebrate weird rites and sorceries hoar,
Shrouded in gloom beside the moaning sea.

XIV

I knew, but would not know,
I knew too well, but knowledge was despair.
It came on vast and slow,
And dipt those baleful meteors in the brine;
Whence soon it lifted them with hideous cries
That flung strange horror through the shuddering air.
Haling its length in many a monstrous twine,
It bore on steadfastly those loathsome eyes,
Set in the midst of intertangled hair
Like sea-weed in whose jungle have their lair
All foul and half-lived things:
With such a gleam as haunts the rotting graves
They fixed upon me their malignant stare;
Shallow and slimy, fiendish, eyes of death.
It neared me soon with ponderous wallowings
Athwart the heaving and repugnant waves;
Then paused a moment, and with one harsh roar
Heaved up its whole obscene and ghastly bulk,
To rankle in my memory evermore
With hissing shrieks and bursts of' strangled breath,
Torn by some agonizing pang, it fell,
And lay upon the sea a vast dead hulk;

But raised yet once the huge and formless head
Whence blood-dark foam was showering; and those eyes
Glared blinking on me with the hate of Hell,
Before it turned reluctantly and fled.
Down, down, convicted by the holy skies,
Away, away, O God! it hurtled forth;
To cower in frozen caverns of the deep;
To haunt - a nightmare in that ghastly sleep-
The death and desolation of the North.

XV

A man forlorn has wandered, cursed from rest,
Through Time's dead wastes and savage howling seas,
Bearing a fateful Horror in his breast,
Formless and dim, but mighty to disease;
Devouring, poisoning, stifling his pure life.
And suddenly, when Hope can hope no more,
He feels its coils unwinding from his heart,
And rich vitality with glorious strife
Surging through veins all shrunk and numb before:
But also sees the Incubus depart,
Coil after coil reluctant dragged away
As were a serpent's from its strangled prey,
And thus in his first health is clearly shown
What still was hidden from his lunacy,
The full obscene and deadly ghastliness
Of that which held and ruled him to this day:
Abhorrence almost chills him into stone,
And that great blow which struck the prisoner free
Hath nearly slain him by its mighty stress.
Such was my agony of joy that hour,
When saved for ever from the monster's power.

XVI

The sky was spacious warm and bright,
The clouds were pure as morning snow;
In myriad points of living light
The sea lay laughing to and fro.

Above the hills a depth of sky,
Dim-pale with heat and light intense,
Was overhung by clouds piled high
In mountain-ranges huge and dense;
Whose rifts and ridges ran aloft
Far to their crests of dazzling snow,
Whence spread a vaporous lustre soft
Veiling the noontide's azure glow.
Through mists of purple glory seen
Those dim and panting hill-waves lay,
Absorbed into the heavens serene,
Dissolving in the perfect day.

But when the sun burned high and bare
In his own realm of solemn blue,
The clouds hung isolated there,
Dark purple grandeurs vast and few;
Like massive sculptures wrought at large
Upon that dome's immensity,
Like constant isles whose foamlit marge
Rose high from out that sapphire sea.

And all the day my boat sped on
With rapid gliding smooth as rest,
As if by mystic dreamings drawn
To some fair haven in the West;
Flew onward swift without a gale
As if it were a living thing,
And spread with joy its snow-white sail
As spreads a bird its snow-white wing;
Flashed on along the lucid deep
Dividing that most perfect sphere,
A vault above it glowing steep,
A vault beneath it no less clear;
Within whose burning sapphire-round
The clouds, the air, the land, the sea,
Lay thrilled with quivering glory, drowned
In calm as of Eternity.

James Thomson

The Doom Of A City Part II: The City

I

A near the dying of that royal day
Those amber-vested hills began to swerve;
And soon a lofty Pharos, gleaming white
Upon its isle set darkly in the light,
Beckoned us onward to the spacious bay
Encompassed broadly by their noble curve.
And so at length we entered it; and faced
The thin dark lines of countless masts, all traced
Upon the saddest sunset ever seen -
Spread out like an interminable waste
Of red and saffron sand, devoured by slow
Persistent fire; beneath whose desolate glow
A City lay, thick-zoned with solemn green
Of foliage massed upon the steeps around.
Between those mast-lines flamed the crystal fires
Of multitudinous windows; and on high
Grand marble palaces and temples, crowned
>With golden domes and radiant towers and spires,
Stood all entranced beneath that desert sky,
Based on an awful stillness. Dead or dumb,
That mighty City through the breathless air
Thrilled forth no pulse of sound, no faintest hum
Of congregated life in street and square:
Becalmed beyond all calm those galleons lay,
As still and lifeless as their shadows there,
Fixed in the magic mirror of the bay
As in a rose-flushed crystal weirdly fair.
A strange, sad dream: and like a fiery pall,
Blazoned with death, that sky hung over all.

II

Where, eastward from the town, the shore was low,
I drew at length my shallop up the sand,-
The quiet and gloomless twilight gathering slow;
And took my way across the lonely strand,
And onward to the City, lost in thought.

Who shall his own wild life-course understand?
From terror through great terrors I am brought
To front my fate in this mysterious land.
In my old common world, well fenced about
With myriad lives that fellowed well my own,
Terror and deadly anguish found me out
And drove me forth to seek the dread Unknown;
Through all whose terrors I have yet been brought,
Though hopeless, helpless, utterly alone.
May yet my long wild night be blessed with morn?
Some revelation from the awful Throne
Awaits me surely: if my life, torn free
From dire Egyptian bondage, has been led
In safety through the all-devouring sea;
If, lost in foodless deserts, it was fed
Though murmuring ever; hath it truly trod
Such paths for nothing? Shall it not be brought
To stand awe-stricken 'neath some Mount of God
Wrapt in thick clouds of thunder, fire and gloom,
And hear the Law of Heaven by which its doom
To good or evil must be henceforth wrought?

III

The moon hung golden, large and round,
Soothing its beauty up the quiet sky
In swanlike slow pulsations, while I wound
Through dewy meads and gardens of rich flowers,
Whose fragrance like a subtle harmony
Was fascination to the languid hours.
A tender mist of light was interfused
Upon the hills and waters, woods and leas,
Throughout the gloomless gloaming: and I mused
Dim thoughts deep-floating in delicious dream,
Until the long stern lines of cypress trees,
Amidst whose plumes funereal there did seem
To creep with quivering sobs a moaning breath,
Awed back my heart to life - to life and death.
Far in the mystic moonlight lay outspread,
In trance of solemn beauty still and weird,
That Camp and City of the ancient dead;

And far around stood up in dense array
Those monumental marbles ever reared
By men still battling with the powers of Life
To those released before them from its sway:
Victors or vanquished in the fearful strife,
What matters? - ah, within our Mother's breast,
From toil and tumult, sin and sorrow free,
Sphered beyond hope and dread, divinely calm,
They lie, all gathered into perfect rest;
And o'er the trance of their Eternity
The cypress waves more holy than the palm.

IV

A funeral train was gathered round a bier:
The reverend priest with lifted hands and face,
Appealing silently to Heaven's grace
For this young soul called early from our sphere;
And white-robed maidens pale, whose hands scarce held
What further symbol-flowers they had to shed
Upon their sweet lost sister, - awe and dread
Numbing their noisier grief, they stood compelled
To meet Death's eyes which wither youth from Life;
And leaning sole against a tree apart,
As one might lean just stricken to the heart,
A youth, wrought calm by woe's self-slaying strife -
His head was sunken nerveless on his breast,
He stood a dumb blind statue of Despair.
While all yet moved not, I approached them there,
Murmuring: They bring this maiden to her rest
Beneath the pure sad moon, in thoughtful night,
Rather than in the garish day whose King
Rides through the heavens for ever triumphing
Throned above ruth in never-darkened light;
That ere the blank dawn chills them they may gaze,
And see her soul as some white cloud on high
Floating serenely up the star-strewn sky....
My steps were now close near them, when amaze
Convulsed me with a swooning suddenness -
What people dwell within this Silent Land,
Who thus have placed, through day and night to stand,

This Scene complete in all its images
Of Life in solemn conference with Death,
Amidst the wide and populous solitude
Of Death's own realm? - a people of strange mood.
For all, - the maidens meek with bated breath
And eyes weighed down by awe and fear and sorrow,
The priest appealing to the heavens above,
The youth whose mortal night could hope no morrow,
The sweet young girl new-riven from his love, -
All save the flowers, the withered flowers alone,
Were carven weirdly in unconscious stone.

James Thomson

The Fire That Filled My Heart Of Old

The fire that filled my heart of old
Gave luster while it burned;
Now only ashes gray and cold
Are in its silence urned.
Ah! better was the furious flame,
The splendor with the smart;
I never cared for the singer's fame
But, oh! for the singer's heart
Once more--
The burning fulgent heart!

No love, no hate, no hope, no fear,
No anguish and no mirth;
Thus life extends from year to year,
A flat of sullen dearth.
Ah! life's blood creepeth cold and tame,
Life's thought plays no new part;
I never cared for the singer's fame,
But, oh! for the singer's heart
Once more--
The bleeding passionate heart!

James Thomson

The Lord Of The Castle Of Indolence

I

NOR did we lack our own right royal king,
The glory of our peaceful realm and race.
By no long years of restless travailing,
By no fierce wars or intrigues bland and base,
Did he attain his superlofty place;
But one fair day he lounging to the throne
Reclined thereon with such possessing grace
That all could see it was in sooth his own,
That it for him was fit and he for it alone.

II.

He there reclined as lilies on a river,
All cool in sunfire, float in buoyant rest;
He stirred as flowers that in the sweet south quiver;
He moved as swans move on a lake's calm breast,
Or clouds slow gliding in the golden west;
He thought as birds may think when 'mid the trees
Their joy showers music o'er the brood-filled nest;
He swayed us all with ever placid ease
As sways the throned moon her world-wide wandering seas.

III.

Look, as within some fair and princely hall
The marble statue of a god may rest,
Admired in silent reverence by all;
Soothing the weary brain and anguished breast,
By life's sore burthens all-too-much oppressed,
With visions of tranquillity supreme;
So, self-sufficing, grand and bland and blest,
He dwelt enthroned, and whoso gazed did seem
Endowed with death-calm life in long unwistful dream.

IV.

While others fumed and schemed and toiled in vain
To mould the world according to their mood,
He did by might of perfect faith refrain
From any part in such disturbance rude.

The world, he said, indeed is very good,
Its Maker surely wiser far than we;
Feed soul and flesh upon its bounteous food,
Nor fret because of ill; All-good is He,
And worketh not in years but in Eternity.

V.

How men will strain to row against the tide,
Which yet must sweep them down in its career!
Or if some win their way and crown their pride,
What do they win? the desert wild and drear,
The savage rocks, the icy wastes austere,
Wherefrom the river's turbid rills downflow
But he upon the waters broad and clear,
In harmony with all the winds that blow,
'Mid cities, fields and farms, went drifting to and fro.

VI.

The king with constant heed must rule his realm,
The soldier faint and starve in marches long,
The sailor guide with sleepless care his helm,
The poet from sick languors soar in song:
But he alone amidst the troubled throng
In restful ease diffused beneficence;
Most like a mid-year noontide rich and strong,
That fills the earth with fruitful life intense,
And yet doth trance it all in sweetest indolence.

VII.

When summer reigns the joyous leaves and flowers
Steal imperceptibly upon the tree;
So stole upon him all his bounteous hours,
So passive to their influence seemed he,
So clothed they him with joy and majesty;
Basking in ripest summer all his time,
We blessed his shade and sang him songs of glee;
The dew and sunbeams fed his perfect prime,
And rooted broad and deep he broadly towered sublime.

VIII.

Thus could he laugh those great and generous laughs
Which made us love ourselves, the world, and him;

And while they rang we felt as one who quaffs
Some potent wine-cup dowered to the brim,
And straightway all things seem to reel and swim,—
Suns, moons, earth, stars sweep through the vast profound,
Wrapt in a golden mist-light warm and dim,
Rolled in a volume of triumphant sound;
So in that laughter's joy the whole world carolled round.

IX.

The sea, the sky, wood, mountain, stream and plain,
Our whole fair world did serve him and adorn,
Most like some casual robe which he might deign
To use when kinglier vesture was not worn.
Was all its being by his soul upborne,
That it should render homage so complete?
The day and night, the even and the morn,
Seemed ever circling grateful round his feet,
"With Thee, through Thee we live this rich life pure and sweet!"

X.

For while he loved our broad world beautiful,
His placid wisdom penetrated it,
And found the lovely words but poor and dull
Beside the secret splendours they transmit,
The Heavenly things in earthly symbols writ:
He knew the blood-red sweetness of the vine,
Yet did not therefore at the revel sit;
But straining out the very wine of wine,
Lived calm and pure and glad in drunkenness divine.

XI.

Without an effort the imperial sun
With ever ample life of light doth feed
The spheres revolving round it every one:
So all his heart and soul and thought and deed
Flowed freely forth for every brother's need;
He knew no difference between good and ill,
But as the sun doth nourish flower and weed
With self-same bounty, he too ever still
Lived blessing all alike with equal loving will.

XII.

The all-bestowing sun is clothed with splendour,
The all-supporting sun doth reign supreme;
So must eternal justice ever render
Each unsought payment to its last extreme:
Thus he most rich in others' joy did seem,
And reigned by servitude all-effortless;
For heaven and earth must vanish like a dream
Ere such a soul divine can know distress,
Whom all the laws of Life conspire to love and bless.

James Thomson

The Naked Goddess

Arcane danze

D'immortal piede i ruinosi gioghi
Scossero e l'ardue selve (oggi romito
Nido de' venti). LEOPARDI

Through the country to the town
Ran a rumour and renown,
That a woman grand and tall,
Swift of foot, and therewithal
Naked as a lily gleaming,
Had been seen by eyes not dreaming,
Darting down far forest glades,
Flashing sunshine through the shades.
With this rumour's swelling word
All the city buzzed and stirred;
Solemn senators conferred;
Priest, astrologer, and mage,
Subtle sophist, bard, and sage,
Brought their wisdom, lore, and wit,
To expound or riddle it:
Last a porter ventured -- 'We
Might go out ourselves to see.'

Thus, upon a summer morn
Lo the city all forlorn;
Every house and street and square
In the sunshine still and bare,
Every galley left to sway
Silent in the glittering bay;
All the people swarming out,
Young and old a joyous rout,
Rich and poor, far-streaming through
Fields and meadows dark with dew,
Crowd on crowd, and throng on throng;
Chatter, laughter, jest, and song
Deafened all the singing birds,
Wildered sober grazing herds.

Up the hillside 'gainst the sun,
Where the forest outskirts run;
On along the level high,
Where the azure of the sky,
And the ruddy morning sheen,
Drop in fragments through the trees
Where the sward surrounds the brake
With a lucid, glassy lake,
Where the ample glades extend
Until clouds and foliage blend;
Where whoever turneth may
See the city and the bay,
And, beyond, the broad sea bright,
League on league of slanting light;
Where the moist blue shadows sleep
In the sacred forest deep.

Suddenly the foremost pause,
Ere the rear discern a cause;
Loiterers press up row on row,
All the mass heaves to and fro;
All seem murmuring in one strain,
All seem hearkening fixed and fain:
Silence, and the lifted light
Of countless faces gazing white.

Four broad beech-trees, great of bole,
Crowned the green, smooth-swelling knoll;
There She leant, the glorious form
Dazzling with its beauty warm,
Naked as the sun of noon,
Naked as the midnight moon:
And around her, tame and mild,
All the forest creatures wild --
Lion, panther, kid, and fawn,
Eagle, hawk, and dove, all drawn
By the magic of her splendour,
By her great voice, rich and tender,
Whereof every beast and bird
Understood each tone and word,
While she fondled and caressed,
Playing freaks of joyous zest.

Suddenly the lion stood,
Turned and saw the multitude,
Swelled his mighty front in ire,
Roared the roar of raging fire:
Then She turned, the living light,
Sprang erect, grew up in height,
Smote them with the flash and blaze
Of her terrible, swift gaze;
A divine, flushed, throbbing form,
Dreadfuller than blackest storm.

All the forest creatures cowered,
Trembling, moaning, overpowered;
All the simple folk who saw
Sank upon their knees in awe
Of this Goddess, fierce and splendid,
Whom they witless had offended;
And they murmured out faint prayers,
Inarticulate despairs,
Till her haught and angry mien
Grew more gentle and serene.

Stood the high priest forth, and went
Halfway up the green ascent;
There began a preachment long
Of the great and grievous wrong
She unto her own soul wrought
In thus living without thought
Of the gods who sain and save,
Of the life beyond the grave:
Living with the beasts that perish,
Far from all the rites that cherish
Hope and faith and holy love,
And appease the thrones above:
Full of unction pled the preacher;
Let her come and they would teach her
Spirit strangled in the mesh
Of the vile and sinful flesh,
How to gain the heavenly prize,
How grow meet for Paradise;
Penance, prayer, self sacrifice,

Fasting, cloistered solitude,
Mind uplifted, heart subdued;
'Thus a Virgin, clean and chaste,
In the Bridegroom's arms embraced.
Vestal sister's hooded gown,
Straight and strait, of dismal brown,
Here he proffered, and laid down
On the green grass like a frown.

Then stood forth the old arch-sage,
Wrinkled more with thought than age:
What could worse afflict, deject
Any well-trained intellect
Than in savage forest seeing
Such a full-grown human being
With the beasts and birds at play,
Ignorant and wild as they?
Sciences and arts, by which
Man makes Nature's poor life rich,
Dominates the world around,
Proves himself its King self-crowned,
She knew nothing of them, she
Knew not even what they be!
Body naked to the air,
And the reason just as bare!
Yet (since circumstance, that can
Hinder the full growth of man,
Cannot kill the seeds of worth
Innate in the Lord of Earth),
Yet she might be taught and brought
To full sovranty of thought,
Crowned with reason's glorious crown.
So he tendered and laid down,
Sober grey beside the brown,
Amplest philosophic gown.

Calm and proud she stood the while
With a certain wondering smile;
When the luminous sage was done
She begin to speak as one
Using language not her own,
Simplest words in sweetest tone:

'Poor old greybeards, worn and bent!
I do know not what they meant;
Only here and there a word
Reached my mind of all I heard;
Let some child come here, I may
Understand what it can say.'

So two little children went,
Lingering up the green ascent,
Hand in hand, but grew the while
Bolder in her gentle smile;
When she kissed them they were free,
Joyous as at mother's knee.
'Tell me, darlings, now,' said she,
'What they want to say to me.'
Boy and girl then, nothing loth,
Sometimes one and sometimes both,
Prattled to her sitting there
Fondling with their soft young hair:
'Dear kind lady, do you stay
Here with always holiday?
Do you sleep among the trees?
People want you, if you please,
To put on your dress and come
With us to the City home;
Live with us and be our friend:
Oh, such pleasant times we'll spend! ...
But if you can't come away,
Will you let us stop and play
With you and all these happy things
With hair and horns and shining wings?'

She arose and went half down,
Took the vestal sister's gown,
Tried it on, burst through its shroud,
As the sun burns through a cloud:
Flung it from her split and rent;
Said: 'This cerement sad was meant
For some creature stunted, thin,
Breastless, blighted, bones and skin.'

Then the sage's robe she tried,

Muffling in its long folds wide
All her lithe and glorious grace:
'I should stumble every pace!
This big bag was meant to hold
Some poor sluggard fat and old,
Limping, shuffling wearily,
With a form not fit to see!'
So she flung it off again
With a gesture of disdain.

Naked as the midnight moon,
Naked as the sun of noon,
Burning too intensely bright,
Clothed in its own dazzling light;
Seen less thus than in the shroud
Of morning mist or evening cloud;
She stood terrible and proud
O'er the pallid quivering crowd.

At a gesture ere they wist,
Perched a falcon on her wrist,
And she whispered to the bird
Something it alone there heard;
Then she threw it off: when thrown
Straight it rose as falls a stone,
Arrow-swift on high, on high,
Till a mere speck in the sky;
Then it circled round and round,
Till, as if the prey were found,
Forth it darted on its quest
Straight away into the West....
Every eye that watched its flight
Felt a sideward flash of light,
All were for a moment dazed,
Then around intently gazed:
What had passed them?
Where was She,
The offended deity?
O'er the city, o'er the bay,
They beheld her melt away,
Melt away beyond their quest
Through the regions of the west;

While the eagle screamed rauque ire,
And the lion roared like fire.

That same night both priest and sage
Died accursed in sombre rage.
Never more in wild wood green
Was that glorious Goddess seen,
Never more: and from that day
Evil hap and dull decay
Fell on countryside and town;
Life and vigour dwindled down;
Storms in Spring nipped bud and sprout,
Summer suns shed plague and drought,
Autumn's store was crude and scant,
Winter snows beleaguered want;
Vines were black at vintage-tide,
Flocks and herds of murrain died;
Fishing boats came empty home,
Good ships foundered in the foam;
Haggard traders lost all heart
Wandering through the empty mart:
For the air hung thick with gloom,
Silence, and the sense of doom.

But those little children she
Had caressed so tenderly
Were betrothed that self-same night,
Grew up beautiful and bright,
Lovers through the years of play
Forward to their marriage-day.
Three long moons of bridal bliss
Overflowed them; after this,
With his bride and with a band
Of the noblest in the land,
Youths and maidens, wedded pairs
Scarcely older in life's cares,
He took ship and sailed away
Westward Ho from out the bay:
Portioned from their native shrine
With the Sacred Fire divine,
They will cherish while they roam,
Quintiles 'mid the salt sea foam,

Till it burns beneath a dome
In some new and far-off home.

As they ventured more and more
In that ocean without shore,
And some hearts were growing cold
At the emprise all too bold,
It is said a falcon came
Down the void blue swift as flame;
Every sunset came to rest
On the prow's high curving crest,
Every sunrise rose from rest
Flying forth into the west;
And they followed, faint no more,
Through that ocean without shore.

Three moons crescent fill and wane
O'er the solitary main,
When behold a green shore smile:
It was that Atlantic isle,
Drowned beneath the waves and years,
Whereof some faint shadow peers
Dubious through the modern stream
Of Platonic legend-dream.
High upon that green shore stood
She who left their native wood;
Glorious, and with solemn hand
Beckoned to them there to land.
Though She forthwith disappeared
As the wave-worn galley neared,
They knew well her presence still
Haunted stream and wood and hill.
There they landed, there grew great,
Founders of a mighty state:
There the Sacred Fire divine
Burned within a wondrous shrine
Which Her statue glorified
Throughout many kingdoms wide.
There those children wore the crown
To their children handed down
Many and many a golden age
Blotted now from history's page;

Till the last of all the line
Leagued him with the other nine
Great Atlantic kings whose hosts
Ravaged all the Mid Sea coasts:
Then the whelming deluge rolled
Over all those regions old;
Thrice three thousand years before
Solon questioned Egypt's lore.

James Thomson

The Vine

The wine of Love is music,
And the feast of Love is song:
And when Love sits down to the banquet,
Love sits long:

Sits long and arises drunken,
But not with the feast and the wine;
He reeleth with his own heart,
That great, rich Vine.

James Thomson

Through Foulest Fogs

THROUGH foulest fogs of my own sluggish soul,
Through midnight glooms of all the wide world's guilt,
Through sulphurous cannon-clouds that surge and roll
Above the steam of blood in anger spilt;
Through all the sombre earth-oppressing piles
Of old cathedral temples which expand
Sepulchral vaults and monumental aisles,
Hopeless and freezing in the lifeless land;
I gaze and seek with ever-longing eyes
For God, the Love-Supreme, all-wise, all-good:
Alas! in vain; for over all the skies
A dark and awful shadow seems to brood,
A numbing, infinite, eternal gloom:
I tremble in the consciousness of Doom.

James Thomson

To A Pianiste

I SAW thee once, I see thee now;
Thy pure young face, thy noble mien,
Thy truthful eyes, thy radiant brow;
All childlike, lovely, and serene;
Rapt in harmonious visions proud,
Scarce conscious of the audient crowd.

I heard thee when the instrument,
Possessed and quickened by thy soul,
Impassioned and intelligent,
Responded to thy full control
With all the treasures of its dower,
Its sweetest and its grandest power.

I saw and heard with such delight
As rarely charms our lower sphere
Blind Handel would not miss his sight,
Thy beauty voiced thus in his ear;
Beethoven in that face would see
His glorious unheard harmony.

James Thomson

To H.A.B. On My Forty-Seventh Birthday

WHEN one is forty years and seven,
Is seven and forty sad years old,
He looks not onward for his Heaven,
The future is too blank and cold,
Its pale flowers smell of graveyard mould;
He looks back to his lifeful past;
If age is silver, youth is gold:-
Could youth but last, could youth but last!

He turns back toward his youthful past
A-throb with life and love and hope,
Whose long-dead joys in memory last,
Whose shining days had ample scope;
He turns and lingers on the slope
Whose dusk leads down to sightless death:-
The sun once crowned that darkening cope,
And song once thrilled this weary breath.

Ali, he plods wearily to death,
Adown the gloaming into night,
But other lives breathe joyous breath
In morning's boundless golden light;
Their feet are swift, their eyes are bright,
Their hearts beat rhythms of hope and love,
Their being is a pure delight
In earth below and heaven above.

And you have hope and joy and love,
And you have youth's abounding life,
Whose crystal currents flow above
The stones and sands of care and strife.
May all your years with joys be rife,
May you grow calmly to your prime,
A maiden sweet, a cherished wife,
A happy mother in due time.

All good you wish me, past my prime,
I wish with better hope to you,
And richer blessings than old Time

And Fate or Fortune found my due:
For you are kind and good and true,
And so when you are forty-seven
May spouse and children in your view
Make Home the happiest life-long Heaven.

James Thomson

Two Lovers

Their eyes met; flashed an instant like swift swords
That leapt unparring to each other's heart,
Jarring convulsion through the inmost chords;
Then fell, for they had fully done their part.

She, in the manner of her folk unveiled,
Might have been veiled for all he saw of her;
Those sudden eyes, from which he reeled and quailed;
The old life dead, no new life yet astir.

His good steed bore him onward slow and proud:
And through the open lattice still she leant;
Pale, still, though whirled in a black rushing cloud,
As if on her fair flowers and dreams intent.

Days passed, and he passed timid, furtive, slow:
Nights came, and he came motionless and mute,
A steadfast sentinel till morning-glow,
Though blank her window, dumb her voice and lute.

She loved: the Cross stretched rigid arms to scare
Her soul from the perdition of that love;
She saw Christ's wounds bleed when she knelt in prayer,
And frown abhorrent all the saints above.

He loved: the Crescent hung with sharp cold gleam,
A scimitar to cleave such love in twain;
The Prophet menaced in his waking dream,
Livid and swoln with wrath that great brow-vein.

Each sternly true to the immortal soul,
Crushed down the passion of the mortal heart;
Which bled away beneath the iron control,
But inwardly: they die; none sees the smart.

Thus long months went, until his time came round
To leave that city terrible and dear;
To go afar on soulless business bound,
Perchance for absence of a whole dead year.

No word: but as she knelt to pray one night,
What was that silk thing pendant from the Cross?
Half of a talisman of chrysolite:
Farewell! Full triumph stunned like fatal loss.

A sacred jewel-charm of sovereign power
'Gainst demons haunting soul and sense and brain,
'Gainst madness: had it not until that hour
Despite love's impious frenzy kept him sane?

Now let her look forth boldly day by day;
He will not come to wound her with his eyes;
Now at the open lattice darkling stay,
Only the stars are watching from the skies;

Now with clear spirit let her sing and pray;
No human presence clouds her Lord's full light:
Now let her weep and moan and waste away,
With broken heart a-bleeding day and night.

Thin as a spectre, haggard, taciturn,
He reached his native city; there did all
He had to do: indifferent yet stern,
As one whose task must end ere evening-fall.

Then sank, and knew that Azrael was near:
The hard dull rage of impotent remorse
Burned into passion that consumed old fear:
He loathed his un-lived life, his unspent force.

'Must we be sundered, then, beyond the grave,
By that which here has sundered us? Not so!
I can be lost with her I cannot save,
And with these Christian dogs to deep Hell go.'

A priest baptized the sinking renegade,
A priest assured him of the Heaven he spurned;
His wealth for many a mass thereafter paid;
And many a Moslem his example turned.

A friend had sworn to do his last behest;
To be his swift and faithful messenger:
His own half talisman from his true breast
Would seal the truth of all things told to her.

The funeral over, while the stars yet shone
Though pale in the new dawn, this friend forth-spurred:
Brief rests, long stages, hurried fiercely on;
Hating the errand, loyal to his word.

Twenty days' travel done in thrice three days,
He reached her city, found her mansion there;
A crowd before it busy with amaze,
Cries from within it wounding the sweet air.

She was no more since that day's sun had set;
But wonder outran grief; for ere she died
Infinite yearning, fathomless regret,
Flooded her soul and drowned its faith and pride.

'Shall I be happy with the saints above,
While he is burning in the paynim Hell?
Here I have cheated him of all my love,
But there with him I can for ever dwell.'

So she renounced the Cross and threefold God,
And died in Islam; whence the bruit was great.
Silent the friend his backward journey trod,
Silent, and shrouded with the sense of Fate.

Thus in the very hour supreme of death
These two great hearts first dared live perfect life; go
Drew inspiration with their failing breath,
Snatched victory as they sank down slain in strife.

And thus Fate mocked them, who when life was sweet
Had kept apart, both famished to the core;
Let them draw near and in the death-point meet,
But to diverge for ever, evermore.

Yet both died happy in self-sacrifice;
A dolorous happiness, yet true and deep:
And Gods and Fate and Hell and Paradise
Perchance are one to their eternal sleep.

Poor human hearts, that yearn beyond the tomb,
Wherein you all must moulder into dust!
What has the blank immitigable gloom
Of light or fervour to reward your trust?

Live out your whole free life while yet on earth;
Seize the quick Present, prize your one sure boon;
Though brief, each day a golden sun has birth;
Though dim, the night is gemmed with stars and moon.

Love out your cordial love, hate out your hate;
Be strong to grasp a foe, to clasp a friend:
Your wants true laws are; thirst and hunger sate:
Feel you have been yourselves when comes the end.

Let the great gods, if they indeed exist,
Fight out their fight themselves; for they are strong:
How can we puny mortals e'er assist?
How judge the supra-mortal right and wrong?

But if we made these gods, with all their strife,
And not they us: what frenzy equals this;
To starve, maim, poison, strangle our poor He,
For empty shadows of death's dark abyss?

This man and maiden claim a brother's tear,
Martyrs of sweet love, killed by bitter faith;
Defrauded by the Gods of glad life here,
And mocked by Doom in their heroic death.

James Thomson

Two Sonnets

I

"Why are your songs all wild and bitter sad
As funeral dirges with the orphans' cries?
Each night since first the world was made hath had
A sequent day to laugh it down the skies.
Chant us a glee to make our hearts rejoice,
Or seal in silence this unmanly moan."
My friend, I have no power to rule my voice --
A spirit lifts me where I lie alone,
And thrills me into song by its own laws;
That which I feel, but seldom know, indeed
Tempering the melody it could not cause.
The bleeding heart cannot forever bleed
Inwardly solely; on the wan lips, too,
Dark blood will bubble ghastly into view.

II

Striving to sing glad songs, I but attain
Wild discords sadder than Grief's saddest tune;
As if an owl with his harsh screech should strain
To over-gratulate a thrush of June.
The nightingale upon its thorny spray
Finds inspiration in the sullen dark;
The kindling dawn, the world-wide joyous day
Are inspiration to the soaring lark;
The seas are silent in the sunny calm,
Their anthem surges in the tempest boom;
The skies outroll no solemn thunder psalm
Till they have clothed themselves with clouds of gloom.
My mirth can laugh and talk, but cannot sing;
My grief finds harmonies in everything.

James Thomson

Virtue And Vice

SHE was so good, and he was so bad
A very pretty time they had!
A pretty time, and it lasted long:
Which of the two was more in the wrong?
He befouled in the slough of sin;
Or she whose piety pushed him in?
He found her yet more cold and staid
As wedded wife than courted maid:
She filled their home with freezing gloom;
He felt it dismal as a tomb:
Her steadfast mind disdained his toys
Of worldly pleasures, carnal joys;
Her heart firm-set on things above
Was frigid to his earthly love.

So he came staggering home at night;
Where she sat chilling, chaste, and white:
She smiled a scornful virtuous smile,
He flung good books with curses vile.
Fresh with the early morn she rose,
While he yet lay in a feverish doze:
She prayed for blessings from the Throne,
He called for "a hair of the dog" with a groan:
She blessed God for her strength to bear
The heavy load,—he 'gan to swear:
She sighed, would Heaven, ere yet too late,
Bring him to see his awful state!
The charity thus sweetly pressed
Made him rage like one possessed.

So she grew holier day by day,
While he grew all the other way.
She left him: she had done her part
To wean from sin his sinful heart,
But all in vain; her presence might
Make him a murderer some mad night.
Her family took her back, pure saint,
Serene in soul, above complaint:
The narrow path she strictly trod,

And went in triumph home to God:
While he into the Union fell,
Our halfway house on the road to Hell.
With which would you rather pass your life
The wicked husband or saintly wife?

James Thomson

William Blake

He came to the desert of London town
Gray miles long;
He wandered up and he wandered down,
Singing a quiet song.

He came to the desert of London town,
Mirk miles broad;
He wandered up and he wandered down,
Ever alone with God.

There were thousands and thousands of human kind
In this desert of brick and stone;
But some were deaf and some were blind,
And he was there alone.

At length the good hour came; he died
As he had lived, alone.
He was not missed from the desert wide;
Perhaps he was found at the throne.

James Thomson