

Of the great sea which hushes it up
 evermore
 With its little wild wailing. No
 stream from its source
 Flows seaward, how lonely soever its
 course,
 But what some land is gladdened.
 No star ever rose
 And set, without influence some-
 where. Who knows
 What earth needs from earth's low-
 est creature? No life
 Can be pure in its purpose and strong
 in its strife
 And all life not be purer and strong-
 er thereby.
 The spirits of just men made perfect
 on high,
 The army of martyrs who stand by
 the Throne
 And gaze into the Face that makes
 glorious their own,
 Know this, surely, at last. Honest
 love, honest sorrow,
 Honest work for the day, honest hope
 for the morrow,

Are these worth nothing more than
 the hand they make weary,
 The heart they have saddened, the
 life they leave dreary?
 Hush! the sevenfold heavens to the
 voice of the Spirit
 Echo: He that o'ercometh shall all
 things inherit.

XLI.

The moon was, in fire, carried up
 through the fog;
 The loud fortress barked at her like
 a chained dog.
 The horizon pulsed flame, the air
 sound. All without,
 War and winter, and twilight, and
 terror, and doubt;
 All within, light, warmth, calm!
 In the twilight, long while
 Eugène de Luvois with a deep,
 thoughtful smile
 Lingered, looking, and listening,
 lone by the tent.
 At last he withdrew, and night
 closed as he went.

THE APPLE OF LIFE.

FROM the river Euphrates, the river whose source is in Paradise, far
 As red Egypt,—sole lord of the land and the sea, 'twixt the home of the
 star
 That is born in the blush of the East, and the porch of the chambers of
 rest
 Where the great sea is girded with fire, and Orion returns in the West,
 And the ships come and go in grand silence,—King Solomon reigned.
 And behold,
 In that time there was everywhere silver as common as stones be, and
 gold
 That for plenty was 'counted as silver, and cedar as sycamore-trees
 That are found in the vale, for abundance. For God to the King gave all
 these,
 With glory exceeding; moreover all kings of the earth to him came,
 Because of his wisdom, to hear him. So great was King Solomon's
 fame.

And for all this the King's soul was sad. And his heart said within
 him, "Alas!
 For man dies! if his glory abideth, himself from his glory shall pass.
 And that which remaineth behind him, he seeth it not any more:
 For how shall he know what comes after, who knoweth not what went
 before?
 I have planted me gardens and vineyards, and gotten me silver and
 gold,
 And my hand from whatever my heart hath desired I did not not with-
 hold:
 And what profit have I in the works of my hands which I take not away?
 I have searched out wisdom and knowledge: and what do they profit me,
 they?
 As the fool dieth, so doth the wise. What is gathered is scattered again.
 As the breath of the beasts, even so is the breath of the children of men:
 And the same thing befalleth them both. And not any man's soul is his
 own."

This he thought, as he sat in his garden and watched the great sun
 going down
 In the glory thereof; and the earth and the sky by the beam of the same
 Were clothed with the gladness of color, and bathed in the beauty of
 flame.
 And "Behold," said the King, "in a moment the glory shall vanish!"
 Even then,
 While he spake, he was 'ware of a man drawing near him, who seemed to
 his ken
 (By the hair in its blackness like flax that is burned in the hemp-dresser's
 shed,
 And the brow's smoky hue, and the smouldering eyeball more livid than
 lead)
 As the sons of the land lies under the sword of the Cherub whose wing
 Wraps in wrath the shut gateways of Paradise. He, being come to the
 King,
 Seven times made obeisance before him. To whom, "What art thou,"
 the King cried,
 "That thus unannounced to King Solomon comest?" The man, spread-
 ing wide
 The palm of his right hand, showed in it an apple yet bright from the
 Tree
 In whose stem springs the life never-failing which Sin lost to Adam,
 when he,
 Tasting knowledge forbidden, found death in the fruit of it. . . . So doth
 the Giver
 Evil gifts to the evil apportion. And "Hail! let the King live forever!"
 Bowing down at the feet of the monarch, and laughingly, even as one
 Whose meaning, in joy or in jest, hovers hid 'twixt the word and the
 tone.
 Said the stranger, "For lo ye" (and lightly he dropped in the hand of the
 King
 That apple), "from 'twixt the four rivers of Eden, God gave me to bring

To his servant King Solomon, even to my lord that on Israel's throne
He hath 'stablished, this fruit from the Tree in whose branch Life abideth :
for none
Shall taste death, having tasted this apple."

And therewith he vanished.

Remained
In the hand of the King the life-apple : ambrosial of breath, golden-grained,
Rosy-bright as a star dipt in sunset. The King turned it o'er, and perused
The fruit, which, alluring his lip, in his hand lay untasted.

He mused,
"Life is good : but not life in itself. Life eternal, eternally young,
That were life to be lived, or desired ! Well it were if a man could prolong
The manhood that moves in the muscles, the rapture that mounts in the
brain

When life at the prime, in the pastime of living, led on by the train
Of the jubilant senses, exulting goes forth, brave of body and spirit,
To conquer, choose, claim, and enjoy what 'twas born to achieve or inherit.
The dance, and the festal procession ! the pride in the strenuous play
Of the sinews that, pliant of power, the will, though it wanton, obey !
When the veins are yet wishful, and in them the bountiful impulses beat,
When the lilies of Love are yet living, the roses of Beauty yet sweet :
And the eye glows with glances that kindle, the lip breathes the warmth
that inspires,

And the hand hath yet vigor to seize the good thing which the spirit desires !
O well for the foot that bounds forward ! and ever the wind it awakes
Lifts no lock from the forehead yet white, not a leaf that is withered yet
shakes
From the loose crown that laughs on young tresses ! and ever the earth and
the skies

Are crammed with audacious contingencies, measureless means of surprise !
Life is sweet to the young that yet know not what life is. But life, after
Youth,

The gay liar, leaves hold of the bauble, and Age, with his terrible truth,
Pick it up, and perceives it is broken, and knows it unfit to engage
The care it yet craves. . . . Life eternal, eternally wedded to Age !
What gain were in that ? Why should any man seek what he loathes to
prolong ?

The twilight that darkens the eyeball : the dull ear that's deaf to the song,
When the maidens rejoice and the bride to the bridegroom, with music,
is led :

The palsy that shakes 'neath the blossoms that fall from the chill bridal bed.
When the hand saith 'I did,' not 'I will do,' the heart saith 'It was,' not
'Twill be,'

Too late in man's life is Forever,—too late comes this apple to me !"
Then the King rose. And lo, it was evening. And leaning, because he
was old,

On the sceptre that, curiously sculptured in ivory garnished with gold,
To others a rod of dominion, to him was a staff for support,
Slow paced he the murmurous pathways where myrtles, in court up to court,
Mixed with roses in garden on garden, were ranged around fountains that fed

With cool music green odorous twilights : and so, never lifting his head
To look up from the way he walked wearily, he to the House of his Pride
Reascended, and entered.

In cluster, high lamps, spices, odors, each side,
Burning inward and onward, from cinnamon ceilings, down distances vast
Of voluptuous vistas, illumined deep halls through whose silentness passed
King Solomon sighing ; where columns colossal stood, gathered in groves
As the trees of the forest in Libanus,—there where the wind, as it moves,
Whispers, "I, too, am Solomon's servant !"—huge trunks nid in garlands
of gold,

On whose tops the skilled sculptors of Sidon had granted men's gaze to
behold

How the phoenix that sits on the cedar's lone summit 'mid fragrance and fire,
Ever dying, and living, hath loaded with splendors her funeral pyre ;

How the stork builds her nest on the pine-top ; the date from the palm-
branch depends ;

And the aloe's great blossom bursts, crowning with beauty the life that it
ends.

And from hall on to hall, in the doors, mute, magnificent slaves, watchful-
Bowed to earth as King Solomon passed them. And, passing, King Solo-
mon sighed.

And, from hall on to hall pacing feebly, the king mused . . . "O fair Shula-
mite !

Thy beauty is brighter than starlight on Hebron when Hebron is bright,
Thy sweetness is sweeter than Carmel. The King rules the nations ; but
thou,

Thou rulest the King, my Belovéd."

So murmured King Solomon low
To himself, as he passed through the portal of porphyry, that dripped, as
he passed
From the myrrh-sprinkled wreaths on the locks and the lintels ; and en-
tered at last,

Still sighing, the sweet cedarn chamber, contrived for repose and delight,
Where the beautiful Shulamite slumbered. And straightway, to left and
to right,

Bowing down as he entered, the Spirits in bondage to Solomon, there
Keeping watch o'er his love, sank their swords, spread their wings, and
evanished in air.

The King with a kiss woke the sleeper. And, showing the fruit in his hand,
"Behold ! this was brought me erewhile by one coming," he said, "from
the land

That lies under the sword of the Cherub. 'Twas pluckt by strange hands
from the Tree

Of whose fruit whoso tastes lives forever. And therefore I bring it to thee,
My Belovéd. For thou of the daughters of women are fairest. And lo,
I, the King, I that love thee, whom men of man's sons have called wisest,
I know

That in knowledge is sorrow. Much thought is much care. In the beauty
of youth,

Not the wisdom of age, is enjoyment. Nor spring, is it sweeter, in truth,
Than winter to roses once withered. The garment, though broidered with
gold,
Fades apace where the moth frets the fibres. So I, in my glory, grow old.
And this life maketh mine (save the bliss of my soul in the beauty of thee)
No sweetness so great now that greatly unsweet 'twere to lose what to me
Life prolonged, at its utmost, can promise. But thine, O thou spirit of
bliss,

Thine is all that the living desire,—youth, beauty, love, joy in all this !
And O were it not well for the praise of the world to maintain evermore
This mould of a woman, God's masterwork, made for mankind to adore ?
Wherefore keep thou the gift I resign. Live forever, rejoicing in life !
And of women unborn yet the fairest shall still be King Solomon's wife."
So he said, and so dropp'd in her bosom the apple.

But when he was gone,
And the beautiful Shulamite, eyeing the gift of the King, sat alone
With the thoughts the King's words had awakened, as ever she turned and
perused

The fruit that, alluring her lip, in her hand lay untasted—she mused,
"Life is good ; but not life in itself. So is youth, so is beauty. Mere stuff
Are all these for Love's usance. To live, it is well ; but it is not enough.
Well, too, to be fair, to be young ; but what good is in beauty and youth
If the lovely and young are not surer than they that be neither, forsooth,
Young nor lovely, of being beloved ? O my love, if thou lovest not me,
Shall I love my own life ? Am I fair, if not fair, Azariah, to thee."
Then she hid in her bosom the apple. And rose.

And, reversing the ring
That, inscribed with the word that works wonders, and signed with the
seal of the King,
Compels even spirits to obedience—(for she, for a plaything, erewhile
From King Solomon's awful forefinger, had won it away with a smile)—
The beautiful Shulamite folded her veil o'er her forehead and eyes,
And unseen from the sweet cedarn chamber, unseen through the long
galleries,

Unseen from the palace, she passed, and passed down to the city unseen,
Unseen passed the green garden wicket, the vineyard, the cypresses green,
And stood by the doors of the house of the Prince Azariah. And cried,
In the darkness she cried,—“Azariah, awaken ! ope, ope to me wide !
Ope the door, ope the lattice ! Arise ! Let me in, O my love ! It is I,
I, the bride of King Solomon, love thee. Love, tarry not. Love, shall I
die

At thy doors ? I am sick of desire. For my love is more comely than
gold.

More precious to me is my love than the throne of a king that is old.
Behold, I have passed through the city, unseen of the watchmen. I stand
By the doors of the house of my love, till my love lead me in by the hand."
Azariah arose. And unbolted the door to the fair Shulamite.
"O my queen, what dear folly is this, that hath led thee alone, and by
night,

To the house of King Solomon's servant ? For lo you, the watchmen
awake.
And much for my own, O my queen, must I fear, and much more for thy
sake.
For at that which is done in the chamber the leek on the house-top shall
peep :

And the hand of a king it is heavy : the eyes of a king never sleep :
But the bird of the air beareth news to the king, and the stars of the sky
Are as soldiers by night on the turrets. I fear, O my queen, lest we die."
"Fear thou not, O my love ! Azariah, fear nothing. For lo, what I
bring !

'Tis the fruit of the Tree that in Paradise God hideth under the wing
Of the Cherub that chased away Adam. And whoso this apple doth eat
Shall live—live forever ! And since unto me my own life is less sweet
Than thy love, Azariah, (sweet only my life is if thou lovest me !)
Therefore eat ! Live, and love, for life's sake, still, the love that gives
life unto thee !"

Then she held to his lips the life-apple, and kissed him.

But soon as alone,
Azariah leaned out from his lattice, he muttered, "'Tis well ! She is
gone."

While the fruit in his hand lay untasted. "Such visits," he mused, "may
cost dear.

In the love of the great is great danger, much trouble, and care more than
cheer."

Then he laughed and stretched forth his strong arms. For he heard from
the streets of the city

The song of the women that sing in the doors after dark their love ditty.
And the clink of the wine-cup, the voice of the wanton, the tripping of
feet,

And the laughter of youths running after, allured him. And "*Life, it is
sweet*

While it lasts," sang the women, "*and sweeter the good minute, in that
it goes.*

For who, if the rose bloomed forever, so greatly would care for the rose ?
Wherefore haste ! pluck the time in the blossom." The prince mused,
"The counsel is well."

And the fruit to his lips he uplifted : yet paused. "Who is he that can
tell

What his days shall bring forth ? Life forever . . . But what sort of life ?
Ah, the doubt !"

'Neath his cloak then he thrust back the apple. And opened the door and
passed out

To the house of the harlot Egyptian. And mused, as he went, "Life is
good :

But not life in itself. It is well while the wine-cup is hot in the blood,
And a man goeth whither he listeth, and doeth the thing that he will,
And liveth his life as he lusteth, and taketh in freedom his fill
Of the pleasure that pleaseth his humor, and feareth no snare by the way.
Shall I care to be loved by a queen, if my pride with my freedom I pay ?

Better far is a handful in quiet than both hands, though filled to o'erflow
 With pride, in vexation of spirit. And sweeter the roses that blow
 From the wild seeds the wind, where he wanders, with heedless benefi-
 cence flings,
 Than those that are guarded by dragons to brighten the gardens of kings.
 Let a man take his chance, and be happy. The hart by the hunter pur-
 sued,
 That far from the herd on the hill-top bounds swift through the blue
 solitude,
 Is more to be envied, though Death with his dart follow fast to destroy,
 Than the tame beast that, pent in the paddock, tastes neither the danger
 nor joy
 Of the mountain, and all its surprises. The main thing is, not to live
long,
 But to *live*. Better moments of rapture soon ended than ages of wrong.
 Life's feast is best spiced by the flavor of death in it. Just the one chance
 To lose it to-morrow the life that a man lives to-day enhance.
 The may-be for me, not the must-be! Best flourish while flourish the
 flowers,
 And fall ere the frost falls. The dead, do they rest or arise with new
 powers?
 Either way, well for them. Mine, meanwhile, be the cup of life's fulness
 to-night.
 And to-morrow . . . Well, time to consider" (he felt at the fruit).
 "What delight
 Of his birthright had Esau, when hungry? To-day with its pottage is
 sweet.
 For a man cannot feed and be full on the faith of to-morrow's baked
 meat.
 Open! open, my dark-eyed beguiler of darkness.

Up rose to his knock,
 Light of foot, the lascivious Egyptian, and lifted the latch from the lock,
 And opened. And led in the prince to her chamber, and shook out her
 hair,
 Dark, heavy, and humid with odors; her bosom beneath it laid bare,
 And sleek sallow shoulder; and sloped back her face, as, when falls the
 slant South
 In wet whispers of rain, flowers bend back to catch it; so she, with shut
 mouth
 Half-unfolded for kisses; and sank, as they fell, 'twixt his knees, with a
 laugh,
 On the floor, in a flood of deep hair flung behind her full throat; held him
 half [lay,
 Aloof with one large, languid arm, while the other uppropped, where she
 Limbs flowing in fulness and lucid in surface as waters at play,
 Though in firmness as slippery marble. Anon she sprang loose from his
 clasp,
 And whirled from the table a flagon of silver twined round by an asp
 That glittered,—rough gold and red rubies; and poured him, and praised
 him, the wine

Wherewith she first brightened the moist lip that murmured, "Ha, fool!
 art thou mine?
 I am thine. This will last for an hour." Then, humming strange words
 of a song,
 Sung by maidens in Memphis the old, when they bore the Crowned Image
 along,
 Apples yellow and red from a basket with vine-leaves o'erlaid she 'gan take,
 And played with, peeled, tost them, and caught them, and bit them, for
 idleness' sake;
 But the rinds on the floor she flung from her, and laughed at the figures
 they made,
 As her foot pusht them this way and that way together. And "Look,
 fool," she said,
 "It is all sour fruit, this! But those I fling from me,—see here by the
 stain!—
 Shall carry the mark of my teeth in their flesh. Could they feel but the
 pain,
 O my soul, how these teeth should go through them! Fool, fool, what
 good gift dost thou bring?
 For thee have I sweetened with cassia my chambers." "A gift for a king,"
 Azariah laughed loud; and tost to her the apple. "This comes from the
 Tree
 Of whose fruit whoso tastes lives forever. I care not. I give it to thee.
 Nay, witch! 'tis worth more than the shekels of gold thou hast charmed
 from my purse.
 Take it. Eat, and thank me for the meal, witch! for Eve, thy sly mother,
 fared worse,
 O thou white-toothéd taster of apples?" "Thou liest, fool!" "Taste,
 then, and try.
 For the truth of the fruit's in the eating. 'Tis thou art the serpent, not I."
 And the strong man laughed loud as he pushed at her lip the life-apple.
 She caught
 And held it away from her, musing; and muttered . . . "Go to! It is
 naught.
 Fool, why dost thou laugh?" And he answered, "Because, witch, it
 tickles my brain
 Intensely to think that all we, that be Something while yet we remain,
 We, the princes of people,—ay, even the King's self,—shall die in our day,
 And thou, that art Nothing, shalt sit on our graves, with our grandsons,
 and play."
 So he said, and laughed louder.

But when, in the gray of the dawn, he was gone,
 And the wan light waxed large in the window, as she on her bed sat
 alone,
 With the fruit that, alluring her lip, in her hand lay untasted, perusing,
 Perplexed, the gay gift of the Prince, the dark woman thereat fell a musing,
 And she thought . . . "What is Life without Honor? And what can the
 life that I live
 Give to me, I shall care to continue, not caring for aught it can give?
 I, despising the fools that despise me,—a plaything not pleasing myself,—
 Whose life, for the pelf that maintains it, must sell what is paid not by
 pelf!

I? . . . the man called me Nothing. He said well. 'The great in their glory must go.'
 And why should I linger, whose life leadeth nowhere?—a life which I know
 To name is to shame—struck, unsexed, by the world from its list of the lives
 Of the women whose womanhood, saved, gets them leave to be mothers and wives.
 And the fancies of men change. And bitterly bought is the bread that I eat;
 For, though purchased with body and spirit, when purchased 'tis yet all unsweet."
 Her tears fell: they fell on the apple. She sighed . . . "Sour fruit, like the rest!
 Let it go with the salt tears upon it. Yet life . . . it were sweet if possessed
 In the power thereof, and the beauty. 'A gift for a king' . . . did he say?
 Ay, a king's life is a life as it should be,—a life like the light of the day, wherein all that liveth rejoiceth. For is not the King as the sun
 That shineth in heaven and seemeth both heaven and itself all in one?
 Then to whom may this fruit, the life-giver, be worthily given? Not me. Nor the fool Azariah that sold it for folly. The King! only he,—
 Only he hath the life that's worth living forever. Whose life, not alone is the life of the King, but the life of the many made mighty in one.
 To the King will I carry this apple. And he (for the hand of a king is a fountain of hope) in his handmaid shall honor the gift that I bring.
 And men for this deed shall esteem me, with Rahab by Israel praised, as first among those who, though lowly, their shame into honor have raised:
 Such honor as lasts when life goes, and, while life lasts, shall lift it above
 What, if loved by the many I loathe, must be loathed by the few I could love."

So she rose, and went forth through the city. And with her the apple she bore
 In her bosom: and stood 'mid the multitude, waiting therewith in the door
 Of the hall where the King, to give judgment, ascended at morning his throne:
 And, kneeling there, cried, "Let the King live forever! Behold, I am one
 Whom the vile of themselves count the vilest. But great is the grace of my lord.
 And now let my lord on his handmaid look down, and give ear to her word."
 Thereat, in the witness of all, she drew forth, and (uplifting her head) showed the Apple of Life, which who tastes, tastes not death. "And this apple," she said,
 "Last night was delivered to me, that thy servant should eat, and not die. But I said to the soul of thy servant, 'Not so. For behold, what am I?

That the King, in his glory and gladness, should cease from the light of the sun,
 Whiles I, that am least of his slaves, in my shame and abasement live on.'
 For not sweet is the life of thy servant, unless to thy servant my lord stretch his hand, and show favor. For surely the frown of a king is a sword,
 But the smile of the King is as honey that flows from the clefs of the rock,
 And his grace is as dew that from Horeb descends on the heads of the flock:
 In the King is the heart of a host: the King's strength is an army of men:
 And the wrath of the King is a lion that roareth by night from his den:
 But as grapes from the vines of En-Gedi are favors that fall from his hands,
 And as towers on the hill-tops of Shenir the throne of King Solomon stands.
 And for this, it were well that forever the King, who is many in one, should sit, to be seen through all time, on a throne 'twixt the moon and the sun!
 For how shall one lose what he hath not? Who hath, let him keep what he hath.
 Wherefore I to the King give this apple.'

Then great was King Solomon's wrath. And he rose, rent his garment, and cried, "Woman, whence came this apple to thee?"
 But when he was 'ware of the truth, then his heart was awakened. And he knew at once that the man who, erewhile, unawared coming to him, had brought
 That Apple of Life was, indeed, God's good Angel of Death. And he thought
 "In mercy, I doubt not, when man's eyes were opened, and made to see plain
 All the wrong in himself, and the wretchedness, God sent to close them again
 For man's sake, his last friend upon earth—Death, the servant of God, who is just.
 Let man's spirit to Him whence it cometh return, and his dust to the dust!"

Then the Apple of Life did King Solomon seal in an urn that was signed with the seal of Oblivion: and summoned the Spirits that walk in the wind
 Unseen on the summits of mountains, where never the eagle yet flew;
 And these he commanded to bear far away,—out of reach, out of view,
 Out of hope, out of memory,—higher than Ararat buildeth his throne.
 In the Urn of Oblivion the Apple of Life.

But on green jasper-stone
 Did the King write the story thereof for instruction. And Enceh, the seer,
 Coming afterward, searched out the meaning. And he that hath ears, let him hear.