

There was a wringing of horny hands ;  
 And a swearing of oaths ; and a great deal of laughter ;  
 The grim Earl growling his hoarse commands  
 To the Warden that followed him growling after ;  
 A lowing of cattle along the wet sands ;  
 And a plashing of hoofs on the slippery rafter,  
 As the long-tailed black-maned horses each  
 Went over the bridge from the gray sea-beach.

Then quoth the grim Earl, "fetch me a stoop !"  
 And they brought him a great bowl that dripped from the brim,  
 Which he seized upon with a satisfied whoop,  
 Drained, and flung at the head of him  
 That brought it ; then, with a laugh like a howl,  
 Stroked his beard ; and strode in through the door with a growl.  
 Meanwhile the pale lady grew white and whiter,  
 As the poplar pales when the keen winds smite her :  
 And, as the tree sways to the gust, and heaves  
 Quick ripples of white alarm up the leaves,  
 So did she seem to shrink and reel  
 From the casement—one quiver from head to heel  
 Of whitest fear. For she heard below,  
 On the creaking stairway loud and slow,  
 Like drops that plunge audibly down from the thunder  
 Into a sea that is groaning under,  
 The heavy foot of the Earl as he mounted  
 Step after step to the turret : she counted

Step after step, as he hastened or halted ;  
 Now clashing shrill through the archways vaulted ;  
 Now muffled and thick : now loud, and more  
 Loud as he came near the Chamber door.  
 Then there fell, with a rattle and shock,  
 An iron glove on the iron lock,  
 And the door burst open—the Earl burst through it—  
 But she saw him not. The window-pane,  
 Far off, grew large and small again ;  
 The staggering light did wax and wane,  
 Till there came a snap of the heavy brain ;  
 And a slow-subsiding pulse of pain ;  
 And the whole world darkened into rest,  
 As the grim Earl pressed to his gruesome breast  
 His white wife. She hung heavy there  
 On his shoulder without breath,  
 Darkly filled with sleepy death  
 From her heart up to her eyes ;  
 Dead asleep : and ere he knew it  
 (How Death took her by surprise  
 Helpless in her great despair)  
 Smoothing back her yellow hair,  
 He kissed her icy brows : unwound  
 His rough arms, and she fell to the ground.

*"The woman was fairer than she was wise :  
 But the serpent was wiser than she was fair :  
 For the serpent was lord in Paradise  
 Or ever the woman came there.  
 But when Eden-gates were barred  
 amain,  
 And the fiery sword on guard in the East,  
 The lion arose from a long repose,  
 And quoth he, as he shook out his royal mane,*

*'Now I am the strongest beast.'  
 Had the woman been wiser when she was queen  
 The lion had never been king, I ween.  
 But ever since storms began to lower  
 Beauty on earth hath been second to Power.'*

And this is the song that the Minstrel sung,  
 With the silver hair and the golden tongue,  
 Who sung by night in the grim Earl's hall.  
 And they held him in reverence one and all.

And so she died,—the pale-faced girl.  
 And, for nine days after that, the Earl  
 Fumed and fret, and raved and swore,  
 Pacing up and down the chamber-floor,  
 And tearing his black beard as he went,  
 In the fit of his sullen discontent.  
 And the Seneschal said it was fearful to hear him ;  
 And not even the weather-worn Warden went near him ;  
 And the shock-headed Pages huddled anear,  
 And bit their white lips till they bled,  
 for fear.

But at last he bade them lift her lightly,  
 And bury her by the gray sea-shore,  
 Where the winds that blew from her own land nightly  
 Might wail round her grave through the wild rocks hoar.  
 So they lifted her lightly at dead of night,  
 And bore her down by the long torch-light,—  
 Lank-haired faces, sallow and keen,  
 That burned out of the glassy pools between

The splashing sands which, as they plunged through,  
 The coffin-lead weighed them down into ;  
 And their feet, as they plucked them up, left pits  
 Which the water oozed into and out of by fits—  
 —And so to the deep-mouthed bay's black brim,  
 Where the pale priests, all white-stoled and dim,  
 Lifted the cross and chanted the hymn,  
 That her soul might have peace when her bones were dust,  
 And her name be written among the Just.

The Warden walked after the Seneschal grim ;  
 And the shock-headed Pages walked after him :  
 And with mattock and spade a grave was made,  
 Where they carved the cross, and they wrote her name,  
 And, returning each by the way that he came,  
 They left her under the bare black thorn.

The salt sea-wind sang shrill in the head of it ;  
 And the bitter night grew chill with the dread of it ;  
 When the great round moon rose up forlorn  
 From the reefs, and whitened towards the morn.  
 For the forked tree, as the bleak blast took it,  
 Howled through it, and beat it, and bit it, and shook it,  
 Like a living thing, bewitched and bedeviled.  
 Visibly shrunk, and shuddered and shrivelled.

And again the swallow, that false new-comer,

Fluttered over the sea in the front  
of the summer ;  
A careless singer, as he should be  
That only skimmed the mighty sea ;  
Dipped his wings as he came and  
went,  
And chirruped and twittered for  
heart's content,  
And built on the new-made grave.  
But when  
The Summer was over he flew back  
again.  
And the Earl, as years went by, and  
his life  
Grew listless, took him another wife :  
And the Seneschal grim and the  
Warden gray  
Walked about in their wonted way :  
And the lean-jawed, shock-haired  
Pages too  
Sung and swilled as they used to do.  
And the grooms and the squires  
gamed and swore  
And quarrelled again as they quar-  
relled before ;  
And the flowers decayed in their  
dismal beds,  
And dropped off from their lean  
shanks one by one,  
Till nothing was left but the stalks  
and the heads,  
Clumped into heaps, or ripped into  
shreds,  
To steam into salt in the sickly sun.  
And the cattle lowed late up the  
glimmering plain,  
Or dipped knee-deep, and splashed  
themselves  
In the pools spat out by the spiteful  
main,  
Wallowing in sandy dykes and  
delves :  
And the blear-eyed filmy sea did  
boom  
With his old mysterious hungering  
sound :  
And the wet wind wailed in the  
chinks of the tomb,  
Till the weeds in the surf were  
drenched and drowned.

But once a stranger came over the  
wave,  
And paused by the pale-faced Lady's  
grave.

It was when, just about to set,  
A sadness held the sinking sun.  
The moon delayed to shine as yet :  
The Ave-Mary chime was done :  
And from the bell-tower, leaned the  
ringers ;  
And in the chancel paused the sing-  
ers,  
With lingering looks and clasped  
fingers :  
And the day reluctantly turned to  
his rest,  
Like some untold life, that leaves  
express  
But the half of its hungering love  
ere it close :  
So he went sadly toward his repose  
Deep in the heart of the slumbrous  
waves  
Kindled far off in the desolate West.  
And the breeze sprang up in the cool  
sea-caves,  
The castle stood with its courts in  
shade,  
And all its toothed towers imprest  
On the sorrowful light that sunset  
made,—  
Such a light as sleeps shut up in the  
breast  
Of some pining crimson-hearted  
rose,  
Which, as you gaze at it, grows and  
grows  
And all the warm leaves overflows ;  
Leaving its sweet source still to be  
guest.  
The crumpled shadow of the thorn  
Crawled over the sand-heaps rag-  
gedly,  
And over the gray stone cross for-  
lorn,  
And on to that one man musing  
Moveless, while o'er him the night  
crept on,  
And the hot yellow stars slowly, one  
after one,

Mounted into the dark blue air  
And brightened, and brightened.  
Then suddenly,  
And sadly and silently,  
Down the dim breezy brink of the  
sea sank the sun.

Ere the moon was abroad, the owl  
Made himself heard in the echoing  
tower  
Three times, four times. The bat  
with his cowl  
Came and went round the lonely  
Bower  
Where dwelt of yore the Earl's lost  
Lady.  
There night after night, for years, in  
vain  
The lingering moon had looked  
through the pane,  
And missed the face she used to find  
there,  
White and wan like some mountain  
flower  
In its rocky nook, as it paled and  
pined there,  
Only known to the moon and the  
wind there.  
Lights flitted faint in the halls down  
lower  
From lattice to lattice, and then  
glowed steady.

The dipping gull: and the long gray  
pool :  
And the reed that shows which way  
the breeze blows cool,  
From the wide warm sea to the low  
black land :  
And the wave makes no sound on  
the soft yellow sand :  
But the inland shallows sharp and  
small  
Are swarmed about with the sultry  
midge.  
And the land is still, and the ocean  
still :  
And the weeds in the rifted rocks at  
will  
Move on the tide, and float or glide.  
And into the silent western side

Of the heaven the moon begins to  
fall.  
But is it the fall of a plover's call  
That is answered warily, low yet  
shrill,  
From the sand-heaped mound and the  
rocky ridge ?  
And now o'er the dark plain, so  
wild and wide  
Falls the note of a horn from the old  
drawbridge.  
Who is it that waits at the castle-  
gates ?  
Call in the minstrel, and fill the  
bowl.  
Bid him loose the great music and  
let the song roll.  
Fill the bowl.  
And first, as was due, to the Earl he  
bowed :  
Next to all the Sea-chieftains, blithe  
friends of the Earl's :  
Then advanced through the praise  
of the murmuring crowd,  
And sat down, as they bade him,  
and all his black curls  
Bowed over his harp, as in doubt  
which to choose  
From the melodies coiled at his  
heart. For a man  
O'er some Beauty asleep for one  
moment might muse,  
Half in love, ere he woke her. So  
ere he began,  
He paused over his song. And they  
brought him, the Squires,  
A heavy gold cup with the red wine  
ripe in it,  
Then wave over wave of the sweet  
silver wires  
'Gan ripple, and the minstrel took  
heart to begin it.  
A harper that harps through moun-  
tain and glen,  
Wandering, wandering the wide  
world over,  
Sweetest of singers, yet saddest of  
men,  
His soul's lost Lady in vain to dis-  
cover.

Most fair and most frail of the daughters of men,  
 O blest and O curst, the man that should love her !  
 Who has not loved ? and who has not lost ?  
 Wherever he wander, the wide world over,  
 Singing by city, and castle, and plain,  
 Abiding never, forever a rover,  
 Each man that shall hear him will swear almost  
 In the minstrel's song that his heart can discover  
 The self-same lady by whom it was crost,  
 For love is love the wide world over.

What shall he liken his love unto ?  
 Have you seen some cloud the sun sets through,  
 When the lingering night is close at hand ?  
 Have you seen some rose lie on the snow ?  
 Or a summer bird in a winter land ?  
 Or a lily dying for dearth of dew ?  
 Or a pearl sea-cast on a barren strand ?  
 Some garden never sunshine warms  
 Nor any tend ? some lonely tree  
 That stretches bleak its barren arms  
 Turned inland from the blighting sea ?  
 Her cheek was pale : her face was fair :  
 Her heart, he sung, was weak and warm ;  
 All golden was the sleepy hair  
 That floated round about her form,  
 And hid the sweetness breathing there.  
 Her eyes were wild, like stars that shine  
 Far off in summer nights divine :  
 But her smile—it was like the golden wine  
 Poured into the spirit, as into a cup,  
 With passion brimming it up and up,

And marvellous fancies fair and fine.  
 He took her hair to make sweet strings :  
 He hid her smile deep in his song.  
 This makes so rich the tune he sings  
 That o'er the world 'twill linger long.

There is a land far, far away from yours.  
 And there the stars are thrice as bright as these.  
 And there the nightingale strange music pours  
 All day out of the hearts of myrtle-trees.  
 There the voice of the cuckoo sounds never forlorn  
 As you hear it far off through the deep purple valleys  
 And the fire-fly dances by night in the corn.  
 And the little round owls in the long cypress alleys  
 Whoop for joy when the moon is born. [tree,  
 There ripen the olive and the tulip  
 And in the sun broadens the green prickly pear ;  
 And the bright galingales in the grass you may see ;  
 And the vine, with her royal blue globes, dwelleth there,  
 Climbing and hanging deliciously  
 By every doorway and lone latticed chamber,  
 Where the damsel-fly flits, and the heavy brown bee  
 Humms alone, and the quick lizzards rustle and clamber.  
 And all things, there, live and rejoice together,  
 From the frail peach blossom that first appears  
 When birds are about in the blue summer weather,  
 To the oak that has lived through his eight hundred years.  
 And the castles are built on the hills, not the plains.

(And the wild wind-flowers burn about in the courts there)  
 They are white and undrenched by the gray winter rains.  
 And the swallows, and all things, are blithe at their sports there.  
 O for one moment, at sunset, to stand  
 Far, far away, in that dear distant land  
 Whence they bore her,—the loveliest lady that ever  
 Crost the bleak ocean. O, nevermore, never,  
 Shall she stand with her feet in the warm dry grasses  
 Where the faint balm-heaving breeze heavily passes  
 And the white lotus-flower leans lone on the river.  
 Rare were the gems which she had for her dower.  
 But all the wild-flowers she left behind her.  
 —A broken heart and a rose-roofed bower.  
 O oft, and in many a desolate hour,  
 The cold strange faces she sees shall remind her  
 Of hearts that were warmer, and smiles that were kinder,  
 Lost, like the roses they plucked from her bower !  
 Lonely and far from her own land they laid her !  
 —A swallow flew over the sea to find her.  
 Ah cold, cold and narrow, the bed that they made her !  
 The swallow went forth with the summer to find her.  
 The summer and the swallow came back o'er the sea,  
 And strange were the tidings the bird brought to me.  
 And the minstrel sung, and they praised and listened,—  
 Gazed and praised while the minstrel sung.

Flushed was each cheek, and each fixt eye glistened,  
 And husht was each voice to the minstrel's tongue.  
 But the Earl grew paler more and more  
 As the song of the Singer grew louder and clearer,  
 And so dumb was the hall, you might hear the roar  
 Of the sea in its pauses grow nearer and drearer.  
 And . . . hush ! hush ! hush !  
 O was it the wind ? or was it the rush  
 Of the restless waters that tumble and splash  
 On the wild sea-rocks ? or was it the crash  
 Of stones on the old wet bridge up there ?  
 Or the sound of the tempest come over the main ?  
 —Nay, but just now the night was fair.  
 Was it the march of the midnight rain  
 Clattering down in the courts ? or the crash  
 Of armor yonder ? . . . Listen again !  
 Can it be lightning ? can it be thunder ?  
 For a light is all round the lurid hall  
 That reddens and reddens the windows all,  
 And far away you may hear the fall  
 As of rafter and boulder splitting asunder.  
 It is not the thunder, and it is not the lightning  
 To which the castle is sounding and brightening,  
 But something worse than lightning or thunder ;  
 For what is this that is coming yonder ?  
 Which way ? Here ! Where ?  
 Call the men ! . . . Is it there ?

Call them out ! Ring the bell !  
Ring the Fiend back to Hell !  
Ring, ring the alarm for mercy !  
. . . Too late !  
It has crawled up the walls—it has  
burst in the gate—  
It looks through the windows—it  
creeps near the hall—  
Near, more near—red and clear—  
It is here !  
Now the saints save us all !

And little, in truth, boots it ringing  
the bell.  
For the fire is loose on its way one  
may tell  
By the hot simmering whispers and  
humming up there  
In the oak-beams and rafters. Now  
one of the Squires  
His elbow hath thrust through the  
half-smouldered door,—  
Such a hole as some rat for his  
brown wife might bore,—  
And straightway in snaky, white  
wavering spires  
The thin smoke twirls through, and  
spreads eddying in gyres  
Here and there toucht with vanish-  
ing tints from the glare  
That has swathed in its rose-light  
the sharp turret stair.  
Soon the door ruined through : and  
in tumbled a cloud  
Of black vapor. And first 'twas all  
blackness, and then  
The quick forked fires leapt out  
from their shroud  
In the blackness : and through it  
rushed in the armed men  
From the court-yard. And then  
there was flying and fighting,  
And praying and cursing,—confusion  
confounded.  
Each man, at wild hazard, through  
smoke ramparts smiting,  
Has struck . . . is it friend ? is it  
foe ? Who is wounded ?  
But the Earl.—who last saw him ?  
Who cares ? who knows ?

Some one, no doubt, by the weight  
of his blows.  
And they all, at times, heard his  
oath—so they swore:—  
Such a cry as some speared wild  
beast might give vent to  
When the lean dogs are on him, and  
forth with that roar  
Of desolate wrath, the life is sent  
too.  
If he die, he will die with the dying  
about him,  
And his red wet sword in his hand,  
never doubt him :  
If he live, perchance he will bear  
his new bride  
Through them all, past the bridge,  
to the wild seaside.  
And there, whether he leave, or  
keep his wife still,  
There's the free sea round him, new  
lands, and new life still.  
And . . . but ah, the red light there !  
And high up and higher  
The soft, warm, vivid sparkles crowd  
kindling, and wander  
Far away down the breathless blue  
cone of the night.  
Saints ! can it be that the ships are  
on fire,  
Those fierce hot clots of crimson  
light,  
Brightening, whitening in the  
distance yonder ?  
Slowly over the slumbrous dark  
Up from those fountains of fire spark  
on spark  
(You might count them almost)  
floats silent : and clear  
In the steadfast glow the great cross-  
beams,  
And the sharp and delicate masts  
show black ;  
While wider and higher the red  
light streams,  
And oozes and overflows at the back.  
Then faint through the distance a  
sound you hear,  
And the bare poles totter and dis-  
appear.

Of the Earl, in truth, the Seneschal  
swore  
(And over the ocean this tale he  
bore)  
That when, as he fled on that last  
wild night,  
He had gained the other side of the  
moat,  
Dripping, he shook off his wet  
leathern coat,  
And turning round beheld, from  
basement  
To cope, the castle swathed in light,  
And, revealed in the glare through  
My Lady's casement,  
He saw, or dreamed he saw, this  
sight—

Two forms (and one for the Earl's he  
knew,  
By the long shaggy beard and the  
broad back too)  
Struggling, grappling, like things half  
human.  
The other, he said, he but vaguely  
distinguished,  
When a sound like the shriek of an  
agonized woman  
Made him shudder, and lo, all the  
vision was gone !  
Ceiling and floor had fallen through,  
In a glut of vomited flame ex-  
tinguished ;  
And the still fire rose and broadened  
on.  
How fearful a thing is fire !  
You might make up your mind to die  
by water  
A slow cool death,—nay, at times,  
when weary  
Of pains that pass not, and pleasures  
that pall,  
When the temples throb, and the  
heart is dreary  
And life is dried up, you could even  
desire  
Through the flat green weeds to fall  
and fall  
Half asleep down the green light  
under them all,  
As in a dream, while all things seem

Wavering, wavering, to feel the  
stream  
Wind, and gurgle, and sound and  
gleam.  
And who would very much fear to  
expire  
By steel, in the front of victorious  
slaughter,  
The blithe battle about him, and  
comrades in call ?  
But to die by fire—  
O that night in the hall !

And the castle burned from base to  
top.  
You had thought that the fire would  
never stop,  
For it roared like the great north-  
wind in the pines,  
And shone as the boreal meteor  
shines  
Watched by wild hunters in shudder-  
ing bands,  
When wolves are about in the icy  
lands.  
From the sea you might mark for a  
space of three days,  
Or fainter or fiercer, the dull red  
blaze.  
And when this ceased, the smoke  
above it  
Hung so heavy not even the wind  
seemed to move it ;  
So it glared and groaned, and night  
after night  
Smouldered, — a terrible beacon-  
light.

Now the Earl's old minstrel,— he  
that had sung  
His youth out in those halls,—the  
man beloved, [tongue,  
With the silver hair and the golden  
They bore him out from the fire ; but  
he roved  
Back to the stifled courts ; and there  
They watched him hovering, day  
after day,  
To and fro, with his long white hair  
And his gold harp, chanting a lonely  
lay ;

Chanting and changing it o'er and  
o'er,  
Like the mournful mad melodious  
breath  
Of some wild swan singing himself to  
death,  
As he floats down a strange land  
leagues away.  
One day the song ceased. They  
heard it no more.

Did you ever an Alpine eagle see  
Come down from flying near the sun  
To find his eyrie all undone  
On lonely cliffs where chance hath  
led

Some spying thief the brood to  
plunder?

How hangs he desolate overhead,  
And circling now aloft, now under,  
His ruined home screams round and  
round,

Then drops flat fluttering to the  
ground.

So moaning round the roofs they saw  
him,

With his gleaming harp and his  
vesture white :

Going, and coming, and ever return-  
ing  
To those chambers, emptied of beauty  
and state

And choked with blackness and  
ruin and burning ;

Then, as some instinct seemed to  
draw him,  
Like hidden hands down to his fate,  
He paused, plunged, dropped forever  
from sight ;

And a cone of smoke and sparkles  
rolled up,  
As out of some troubled crater-cup

As for the rest, some died ; some  
fled

Over the sea, nor ever returned.  
But until to the living return the  
dead,

And they each shall stand and take  
their station

Again at the last great conflagration,  
Never more will be seen the Earl or  
the stranger.

No doubt there is much here that's  
fit to be burned.

Christ save us all in that day from  
the danger !

And this is why these fishermen say,  
Sitting alone in their boats on the  
bay,

When the moon is low in the wild  
windy nights,

They hear strange sounds, and see  
strange sights.

Spectres gathering all forlorn  
Under the boughs of this bare black  
thorn.

## A SOUL'S LOSS.

"If Beauty have a soul this is not she."—TROIUS AND CRESSIDA.

'TwiXt the Future and the Past  
There's a moment. It is o'er.  
Kiss sad hands ! we part at last.  
I am on the other shore.  
Fly, stern Hour ! and hasten fast.  
Nobler things are gone before.

From the dark of dying years  
Grows a face with violet eyes,  
Tremulous through tender tears,—

Warm lips heavy with rich sighs,—  
Ah, they fade ! it disappears,  
And with it my whole heart dies !

Dies . . . and this choked world is  
sickening ;

Truth has nowhere room for breath.  
Crusts of falsehood, slowly thicken-  
ing

From the rottenness beneath

These rank social forms, are quick-  
ening  
To a loathsome life-in-death.

O those devil's market-places !  
Knowing, nightly, she wa there,  
Can I marvel that the traces  
On her spirit are not fair ?  
I forgot that air debases  
When I knew she breathed such  
air.

This a fair immortal spirit  
For which God prepared his  
spheres ?

What ! shall this the stars inherit ?  
And the worth of honest tears ?  
A fool's fancy all its mirth !  
A fool's judgment all its fears !

No, she loves no other ! No,  
That is lost which she gave me.  
Is this comfort,—that I know  
All her spirit's poverty ?  
When that dry soul is drained low,  
His who wills the dregs may be !

Peace ! I trust a heart forlorn  
Weakly upon boisterous speech.  
Pity were more fit than scorn.  
Fingered moth, and bloomless  
peach !

Gathered rose without a thorn,  
Set to flee in all men's reach !

I am clothed with her disgrace.  
O her shame has made my own !  
O I reel from my high place !  
All belief is overthrown.

What ! This whirligig of lace,  
This is the Queen that I have  
known ?

Starry Queen that did confer  
Beauty on the barren earth !  
Woodlands, wandered oft with her  
In her sadness and her mirth,  
Feeling her ripe influence stir  
Brought the violets to birth.

The great golden clouds of even,  
They, too, knew her, and the  
host

Of the eternal stars in heaven ;  
And I deemed I knew her most.  
I, to whom the Word was given  
How archangels have been lost !

Given in vain ! . . . But all is over !  
Every spell that bound me broken !  
In her eyes I can discover  
Of that perisht soul no token.  
I can neither hate nor love her.  
All my loss must be unspoken.

Mourn I may, that from her features  
All the angel light is gone.  
But I chide not. Human creatures  
Are not angels. She was none.  
Women have so many natures !  
I think she loved me well with  
one.

All is not with love departed.  
Life remains, though toucht with  
scorn.

Lonely, but not broken-hearted.  
Nature changes not. The morn  
Breathes not sadder. Buds have  
started  
To white clusters on the thorn.

And to-morow I shall see  
How the leaves their green leaves  
sheath

Have burst upon the chestnut-tree.  
And the white rose-bush beneath  
My lattice which, once tending, she  
Made thrice sweeter with her  
breath,

Its black buds through moss and  
glue

Will swell greener. And at eve  
Winking bats will waver through  
The gray warmth from eave to  
eave,

While the daisy gathers dew.  
These things grieve not, though I  
grieve.