

## THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL

### PRELUDE TO PART FIRST°

Over° his keys the musing organist,  
Beginning doubtfully and far away,  
First lets his fingers wander as they list,  
And builds a bridge from Dreamland for his lay°:  
Then, as the touch of his loved instrument  
Gives hope and fervor, nearer draws his theme,°  
First guessed by faint auroral° flushes sent  
Along the wavering vista° of his dream.

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Not only around our infancy°  
Doth heaven with all its splendors lie;      ic  
Daily, with souls that cringe and plot,  
We Sinais° climb and know it not.

Over our manhood bend the skies;  
Against our fallen and traitor° lives  
The great winds utter prophecies°;  
With our faint hearts the mountain strives,°

Its arms outstretched, the druid° wood  
 Waits with its benedicite°;  
 And to our age's drowsy blood  
 Still shouts° the inspiring sea. 20

Earth gets its price for what Earth gives us°;  
 The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in,  
 The priest hath his fee who comes and shrives° us,  
 We bargain for the graves we lie in;  
 At the devil's booth° are all things sold,  
 Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;  
 For a cap and bells° our lives we pay,°  
 Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking:  
 'Tis heaven alone that is given away,  
 'Tis only God may be had for the asking°; 30  
 No price is set on the lavish summer;  
 June may be had by the poorest comer.

And what is so rare as a day in June°?  
 Then, if ever, come perfect days;  
 Then Heaven tries the earth if it be in tune,°  
 And over it softly her warm ear lays:  
 Whether we look, or whether we listen,  
 We hear life murmur, or see it glisten°;  
 Every elod feels a stir of might,

An instinct within it that reaches and towers, 40  
 And, groping blindly above it for light,  
 Climbs to a soul° in grass and flowers;  
 The flush of life° may well be seen  
 Thrilling back over hills and valleys;  
 The cowslip startles° in meadows green,  
 The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice,°  
 And there's never a leaf nor a blade too mean  
 To be some happy creature's° palace;  
 The little bird sits at his door° in the sun,  
 Atilt like a blossom° among the leaves, 50  
 And lets his illumined being o'errun  
 With the deluge of summer° it receives;  
 His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,  
 And the heart in her dumb breast flutters and sings°;  
 He sings to the wide world, and she to her nest, —  
 In the nice° ear of Nature which song is the best?

Now is the high-tide° of the year,  
 And whatever of life hath ebbed away  
 Comes flooding back, with a ripply cheer,  
 Into every bare inlet and creek and bay; 60  
 Now the heart is so full that a drop overfills it,  
 We are happy now because God wills it;  
 No matter how barren the past may have been,

'Tis enough for us now that the leaves are green;  
 We sit in the warm shade and feel right well  
 How the sap creeps up and the blossoms swell;  
 We° may shut our eyes, but we cannot help knowing  
 That skies are clear and grass is growing;  
 The breeze comes whispering in our ear,  
 That dandelions are blossoming near,

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That maize° has sprouted, that streams are flowing,  
 That° the river is bluer than the sky,  
 That the robin° is plastering his house hard by;  
 And if the breeze kept the good news back,  
 For other couriers we should not lack;

We could guess it all by yon heifer's lowing, —  
 And hark! how clear bold chanticleer,°  
 Warmed with the new wine of the year,°  
 Tells all in his lusty crowing°!

Joy comes, grief goes, we know not how; 80  
 Every thing is happy now,

Every thing is upward striving;  
 'Tis° as easy now for the heart to be true  
 As for grass to be green, or skies to be blue,

'Tis the natural way of living:  
 Who° knows whither the clouds have fled?  
 In the unscarred heaven they leave no wake;

And the eyes forget the tears they have shed,  
 And heart forgets its sorrow and ache;  
 The° soul partakes the season's youth, 90  
 And the sulphurous rifts° of passion and woe  
 Lie deep 'neath a silence pure and smooth,  
 Like burnt-out craters healed° with snow.  
 What wonder if Sir Launfal° now  
 Remembered the keeping of his vow?

## PART FIRST

## I

“My golden spurs now bring to me,  
 And bring to me my richest° mail,  
 For to-morrow I go over land and sea  
 In search of the Holy Grail;  
 Shall never a bed for me be spread,° 100  
 Nor shall a pillow be under my head,  
 Till I begin my vow to keep;  
 Here on the rushes° will I sleep,  
 And perchance there may come a vision true  
 Ere day create the world anew.”  
 Slowly Sir Launfal's eyes grew dim,  
 Slumber fell like a cloud° on him,  
 And into his soul the vision flew.°

## II

The° crows flapped over° by twos and threes,  
 In the pool drowed the cattle up to their knees, 110  
 The little birds sang as if it were  
 The one day of summer in all the year,  
 And the very leaves seemed to sing on the trees:  
 The castle° alone in the landscape lay  
 Like an outpost° of winter, dull and gray;  
 'Twas the proudest hall in the North Countree,°  
 And never its gates might opened be,  
 Save to lord or lady of high degree°;  
 Summer besieged it on every side,  
 But the churlish stone her assaults defied; 120  
 She could not scale° the chilly wall,  
 Though round it for leagues her pavilions tall  
 Stretched left and right,  
 Over the hills and out of sight;  
 Green and broad was every tent,°  
 And out of each a murmur went  
 Till the breeze fell off° at night.

## III

The drawbridge dropped with a surly clang,°  
 And through the dark arch° a charger° sprang,

Bearing Sir Launfal, the maiden knight,° 130  
 In° his gilded mail, that flamed so bright  
 It seemed the dark castle had gathered all  
 Those shafts the fierce sun had shot over its wall  
 In the siege of three hundred summers long,  
 And, binding them all in one blazing sheaf,°  
 Had cast them forth: so, young and strong,°  
 And lightsome as a locust-leaf,°  
 Sir Launfal flashed forth in his unscarred° mail,  
 To seek in all climes for the Holy Grail.

## IV

It was morning on hill and stream and tree, 140  
 And morning in the young knight's heart;  
 Only the castle moodily  
 Rebuffed the gifts of the sunshine free,  
 And gloomed by itself apart;  
 The season brimmed all other things up  
 Full as the rain fills the pitcher-plant's° cup.°

## V

As Sir Launfal made morn° through the darksome gate,  
 He was ware of a leper,° crouched by the same,  
 Who begged with his hand° and moaned as he sate;  
 And a loathing over Sir Launfal came; 150

The° sunshine went out of his soul with a thrill,  
 The flesh 'neath his armor 'gan shrink and crawl,  
 And midway its leap his heart stood still  
 Like a frozen waterfall;  
 For this man so foul and bent of stature,°  
 Rased harshly against his dainty° nature,  
 And seemed the one blot on the summer morn,—  
 So he tossed him a piece of gold in scorn.°

## VI

The leper raised not the gold from the dust:  
 "Better to me the poor man's crust,° 160  
 Better the blessing of the poor,  
 Though I turn me empty from his door;  
 That is no true alms° which the hand can hold;  
 He gives nothing but worthless gold  
 Who gives from a sense of duty;  
 But he who gives a slender mite,°  
 And gives to that which is out of sight,  
 That thread of the all-sustaining Beauty°  
 Which runs through all and doth all unite,—  
 The hand cannot clasp the whole of his alms,° 170  
 The heart outstretches its eager palms,°  
 For a god° goes with it and makes it store°  
 To the soul that was starving in darkness before."

## PRELUDE TO PART SECOND

Down° swept the chill wind from the mountain peak,°  
 From the snow five thousand summers° old;  
 On open wold° and hill-top bleak  
 It had gathered all the cold,  
 And whirled it like sleet° on the wanderer's cheek;  
 It carried a shiver everywhere°  
 From the unleafed° boughs and pastures bare; 180  
 The little brook° heard it and built a roof  
 'Neath which he could house him, winter-proof;  
 All night by the white stars' frosty gleams°  
 He groined° his arches and matched his beams;  
 Slender and clear were his crystal spars°  
 As the lashes of light° that trim the stars;  
 He sculptured every summer delight  
 In his halls and chambers° out of sight;  
 Sometimes his tinkling° waters slipt  
 Down through a frost-leaved forest-crypt,° 190  
 Long, sparkling aisles of steel-stemmed trees°  
 Bending to counterfeit a breeze°;  
 Sometimes the roof no fretwork° knew  
 But silvery mosses that downward grew;  
 Sometimes it was carved in sharp relief°

With quaint arabesques° of ice-fern leaf;  
 Sometimes it was simply smooth and clear  
 For the gladness of heaven° to shine through, and here  
 He had caught the nodding bulrush-tops  
 And hung them thickly with diamond drops, 200  
 That crystallized the beams° of moon and sun,  
 And made a star of every one:  
 No mortal builder's most rare device  
 Could match this winter-palace° of ice;  
 'Twas° as if every image that mirrored lay  
 In his depths serene through the summer day,  
 Each fleeting shadow of earth and sky,  
     Lest the happy model should be lost,  
 Had been mimicked in fairy masonry  
     By the elfin builders of the frost. 210

Within the hall° are song and laughter,  
     The cheeks of Christmas° glow red and jolly,  
 And sprouting is every corbel° and rafter  
 With lightsome° green of ivy and holly;  
 Through the deep gulf° of the chimney wide  
 Wallows the Yule-log's° roaring tide;  
 The broad flame-pennons droop° and flap  
     And belly and tug as a flag in the wind;  
 Like a locust shrills the imprisoned sap,

Hunted to death° in its galleries blind; 220  
 And swift little troops of silent sparks,  
     Now pausing, now scattering away as in fear,  
 Go threading the soot-forest's° tangled darks,  
     Like herds of startled deer.°

But the wind without was eager and sharp,  
 Of Sir Launfal's gray hair it makes a harp,  
     And rattles and wrings°  
     The icy strings,°  
 Singing, in dreary monotone,  
 A Christmas carol° of its own, 230  
 Whose burden still, as he might guess,  
 Was — "Shelterless, shelterless, shelterless!"

The voice of the seneschal° flared like a torch°  
 As he shouted the wanderer away from the porch,  
 And he sat in the gateway° and saw all night  
     The great hall-fire, so cheery and bold,  
     Through the window-slits° of the castle old,  
 Build out its piers° of ruddy light  
     Against the drift° of the cold.

## PART SECOND

## I

THERE was never a leaf on bush or tree, 240  
 The bare boughs rattled shudderingly;  
 The river was numb and could not speak,  
 For the weaver Winter° its shroud had spun;  
 A single crow on the tree-top bleak  
 From his shining feathers shed off° the cold sun.  
 Again it was morning, but shrunk and cold,  
 As if her veins were sapless and old,  
 And she rose up decrepitley  
 For a last dim look at earth and sea.

## II

Sir Launfal turned from his own hard gate,° 250  
 For another heir in his earldom° sate;  
 An old, bent man, worn out and frail,  
 He came back from seeking the Holy Grail;  
 Little he recked of his earldom's loss,  
 No more on his surcoat° was blazoned° the cross,  
 But deep in his soul the sign° he wore,  
 The badge of the suffering and the poor.

## III

Sir Launfal's raiment thin and spare  
 Was idle mail° 'gainst the barbèd° air,  
 For it was just at the Christmas time; 260  
 So he mused, as he sat, of a sunnier clime,  
 And sought for a shelter from cold and snow  
 In the light and warmth of long ago;  
 He sees the snake-like° caravan crawl  
 O'er the edge of the desert, black and small,  
 Then nearer and nearer, till, one by one,  
 He can count the camels in the sun,  
 As over the red-hot sands they pass  
 To where, in its slender necklace of grass,  
 The little spring laughed and leapt in the shade,° 270  
 And with its own self like an infant played,  
 And waved its signal of palms.°

## IV

"For° Christ's sweet sake, I beg an alms;"  
 The happy° camels may reach the spring,  
 But Sir Launfal sees only the gruesome thing,  
 The leper, lank as the rain-blanchèd bone,  
 That cowers beside him, a thing as lone  
 And white° as the ice-isles of Northern seas  
 In the desolate horror of his disease.

## V

And Sir Launfal said, — "I behold in thee 280  
 An image of Him who died on the tree°;  
 Thou also hast had thy crown of thorns,° —  
 Thou also hast had the world's buffets and scorns, —  
 And to thy life were not denied  
 The wounds° in the hands and feet and side;  
 Mild Mary's Son, acknowledge me;  
 Behold, through him, I give to thee°!"

## VI

Then the soul of the leper stood up in his eyes°  
 And looked at Sir Launfal, and straightway he  
 Remembered in what a haughtier guise° 290  
 He had flung an alms to leprosie,°  
 When he girt° his young life up in gilded mail  
 And set forth in search of the Holy Grail.  
 The heart within him was ashes and dust°;  
 He parted in twain his single crust,  
 He broke the ice on the streamlet's brink,  
 And gave the leper to eat and drink;  
 'Twas a mouldy crust of coarse brown bread,  
 'Twas water out of a wooden bowl, —  
 Yet with fine wheaten bread° was the leper fed, 300  
 And 'twas red wine he drank with his thirsty soul.°

## VII

As Sir Launfal mused° with a downcast face,  
 A light shone round about the place;  
 The leper no longer crouched at his side,  
 But stood before him glorified,°  
 Shining and tall and fair and straight  
 As the pillar that stood by the Beautiful Gate,° —  
 Himself the Gate° whereby men can  
 Enter the temple of God in Man. 309

## VIII

His words were shed softer than leaves° from the pine,  
 And they fell on Sir Launfal as snows on the brine,  
 Which mingle their softness and quiet in one  
 With the shaggy unrest° they float down upon;  
 And the voice that was calmer than silence° said,  
 "Lo, it is I, be not afraid!  
 In many climes, without avail,  
 Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail;  
 Behold, it is here, — this cup which thou  
 Didst fill at the streamlet for me but now;  
 This crust is my body broken for thee, 320  
 This water His blood that died on the tree;  
 The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,  
 In whatso we share with another's need, —



Not what we give, but what we share, —  
 For the gift without the giver is bare;  
 Who gives himself with his alms feeds three, —  
 Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me.”

## IX

Sir Launfal awoke,<sup>o</sup> as from a swoond<sup>o</sup>; —  
 “The Grail in my castle here<sup>o</sup> is found!  
 Hang my idle armor up on the wall, 33<sup>o</sup>  
 Let it be the spider’s banquet-hall;  
 He must be fenced with stronger mail<sup>o</sup>  
 Who would seek and find the Holy Grail.”

## X

The castle-gate stands open now,  
 And the wanderer is welcome to the hall  
 As the hangbird<sup>o</sup> is to the elm-tree bough;  
 No longer scowl the turrets tall,  
 The Summer’s long siege<sup>o</sup> at last is o’er;  
 When the first poor outcast went in at the door,  
 She entered with him in disguise, 34<sup>o</sup>  
 And mastered the fortress by surprise;  
 There is no spot she loves so well on ground,  
 She lingers and smiles there the whole year round<sup>o</sup>;

The meanest serf<sup>o</sup> on Sir Launfal’s land  
 Has hall and bower<sup>o</sup> at his command;  
 And there’s no poor man in the North Countree<sup>o</sup>  
 But is lord of the earldom as much as he.

c

AN INDIAN SUMMER<sup>o</sup> REVERIE

WHAT visionary tints the year puts on,  
 When falling leaves falter through motionless air<sup>c</sup>  
 Or numbly cling and shiver to be gone!  
 How shimmer the low flats and pastures bare,  
 As with her nectar Hebe Autumn<sup>o</sup> fills  
 The bowl between me and those distant hills.  
 And smiles and shakes abroad her misty, tremulous  
 hair!

No more the landscape holds its wealth apart,  
 Making me poorer in my poverty,  
 But mingles with my senses and my heart; 10  
 My own projected spirit<sup>o</sup> seems to me  
 In her own reverie the world to steep<sup>o</sup>;  
 'Tis she that waves to sympathetic sleep,  
 Moving, as she is moved, each field and hill and tree.

How fuse and mix, with what unfelt degrees,  
 Clasped by the faint horizon's languid arms,  
 Each into each, the hazy distances!

The softened season all the landscape charms;  
 Those hills, my native village that embay,  
 In waves of dreamier purple roll away, 20  
 And floating in mirage seem all the glimmering farms.

Far distant sounds the hidden chickadee  
 Close at my side; far distant sound the leaves;  
 The fields seem fields of dream, where Memory  
 Wanders like gleaning Ruth<sup>o</sup>; and as the sheaves  
 Of wheat and barley wavered in the eye  
 Of Boaz as the maiden's glow went by,  
 So tremble and seem remote all things the sense re-  
 ceives.

The cock's shrill trump, that tells of scattered corn,  
 Passed breezily on by all his flapping mates, 30  
 Faint and more faint, from barn to barn is borne,  
 Southward, perhaps to far Magellan's Straits<sup>o</sup>;  
 Dimly I catch the throb of distant flails;  
 Silently overhead the henhawk sails,  
 With watchful, measuring eye, and for his quarry<sup>o</sup>  
 waits.

The sobered robin, hunger-silent now,  
 Seeks cedar-berries blue, his autumn cheer;

The squirrel, on the shingly shagbark's bough,  
 Now saws, now lists with downward eye and ear,  
 Then drops his nut, and, with a chipping bound, 40  
 Whisks to his winding fastness underground;  
 The clouds like swans drift down the streaming atmosphere.

O'er yon bare knoll the pointed cedar shadows  
 Drowse on the crisp, gray moss; the ploughman's  
 call  
 Creeps faint as smoke from black, fresh-furrowed  
 meadows;  
 The single crow a single caw lets fall;  
 And all around me every bush and tree  
 Says Autumn's here, and Winter soon will be,  
 Who snows his soft, white sleep and silence over all.

The birch, most shy and lady-like of trees,° 50  
 Her poverty, as best she may, retrieves,  
 And hints at her foregone gentilities  
 With some saved relics of her wealth of leaves;  
 The swamp-oak, with his royal purple on,  
 Glares red as blood across the sinking sun,  
 As one who prouder to a falling fortune cleaves.

He looks a sachem, in red blanket wrapt,  
 Who, 'mid some council of the sad-garbed° whites,  
 Erect and stern, in his own memories lapt,  
 With distant eye broods over other sights, 60  
 Sees the hushed wood the city's flare replace,  
 The wounded turf heal o'er the railway's trace,  
 And roams the savage Past of his undwindled rights.°

The red-oak, softer-grained, yields all for lost,  
 And, with his crumpled foliage stiff and dry,  
 After the first betrayal of the frost,  
 Rebuffs the kiss of the relenting sky;  
 The chestnuts, lavish of their long-hid gold,  
 To the faint Summer, beggared now and old,  
 Pour back the sunshine hoarded 'neath her favoring  
 eye. 70

The ash her purple drops forgivingly  
 And sadly, breaking not the general hush;  
 The maple-swamps glow like a sunset sea,  
 Each leaf a ripple with its separate flush;  
 All round the wood's edge creeps the skirting  
 blaze  
 Of bushes low, as when, on cloudy days,  
 Ere the rain falls, the cautious farmer burns his brush.

O'er yon low wall, which guards one unkempt  
 zone,  
 Where vines and weeds and scrub-oaks intertwine  
 Safe from the plough, whose° rough, discordant  
 stone 80  
 Is massed to one soft gray by lichens fine,  
 The tangled blackberry, crossed and recrossed,  
 weaves  
 A prickly network of ensanguined leaves;  
 Hard by, with coral beads, the prim black-alders shine.

Pillaring with flame this crumbling boundary,  
 Whose loose blocks topple 'neath the ploughboy's  
 foot,  
 Who, with each sense shut fast except the eye,  
 Creeps close and scares the jay he hoped to shoot,  
 The woodbine up the elm's straight stem aspires,  
 Coiling it, harmless, with autumnal fires; 90  
 In the ivy's paler blaze the martyr° oak stands mute.

Below, the Charles — a stripe of nether sky,  
 Now hid by rounded apple trees between,  
 Whose gaps the misplaced° sail sweeps bellying  
 by,

Now flickering golden through a woodland screen,  
 Then spreading out, at his next turn beyond,  
 A silver circle, like an inland pond —  
 Slips seaward, silently, through marshes purple and  
 green.

Dear marshes! vain to him the gift of sight  
 Who cannot in their various incomes share, 100  
 From every season drawn, of shade and light,  
 Who sees in them but levels brown and bare;  
 Each change of storm or sunshine scatters free  
 On them its largess of variety,  
 For Nature with cheap means still works her wonders  
 rare.°

In Spring they lie one broad expanse of green,  
 O'er which the light-winds run with glimmering  
 feet;  
 Here, yellower stripes track out the creek unseen,  
 There, darker growths o'er hidden ditches meet:  
 And purpler stains show where the blossoms  
 crowd, 110  
 As if the silent shadow of a cloud  
 Hung there becalmed, with the next breath to fleet.

All round, upon the river's slippery edge,  
 Witching to deeper calm the drowsy tide,  
 Whispers and leans the breeze-entangling sedge;  
 Through emerald glooms the lingering waters slide,  
 Or, sometimes wavering, throw back the sun,  
 And the stiff banks in eddies melt and run  
 Of dimpling light, and with the current seem to glide.

In Summer 'tis a blithesome sight to see, 120  
 As, step by step, with measured swing, they pass,  
 The wide-ranked mowers wading to the knee,  
 Their sharp scythes panting through the thickset  
 grass;  
 Then, stretched beneath a rick's shade in a ring,  
 Their nooning take, while one begins to sing  
 A stave that droops and dies 'neath the close sky of  
 brass.

Meanwhile that devil-may-care, the bobolink,  
 Remembering duty, in mid-quaver stops  
 Just ere he sweeps o'er rapture's tremulous brink,  
 And 'twixt the winrows most demurely drops, 130  
 A decorous bird of business, who provides  
 For his brown mate and fledglings six besides,  
 And looks from right to left, a farmer 'mid his crops.

Another change subdues them in the Fall,  
 But saddens not; they still show merrier tints,  
 Though sober russet seems to cover all;  
 When the first sunshine through their dew-drops  
 glints,  
 Look how the yellow clearness, streamed across,  
 Redeems with rarer hues the season's loss,  
 As Dawn's feet there had touched and left their rosy  
 prints. 140

Or come when sunset gives its freshened zest,  
 Lean o'er the bridge and let the ruddy thrill,  
 While the shorn sun swells<sup>o</sup> down the hazy west,  
 Glow opposite; — the marshes drink their fill  
 And swoon with purple veins, then slowly fade  
 Through pink to brown, as eastward moves the  
 shade,  
 Lengthening with stealthy creep, of Simond's darken-  
 ing hill.

Later, and yet ere Winter wholly shuts,  
 Ere through the first dry snow the runner grates,  
 And the loath cart-wheel screams in slippery  
 ruts, 150  
 While firmer ice the eager boy awaits,<sup>o</sup>

Trying each buckle and strap beside the fire,  
 And until bed-time plays with his desire,  
 Twenty times putting on and off his new-bought  
 skates; —

Then, every morn, the river's banks shine bright  
 With smooth plate-armor,<sup>o</sup> treacherous and frail,  
 By the frost's clinking hammers forged at night,  
 'Gainst which the lances of the sun prevail,  
 Giving a pretty emblem of the day  
 When guiltier arms in light shall melt away,<sup>o</sup> 160  
 And states shall move free-limbed, loosed from war's  
 cramping mail.<sup>o</sup>

And now those waterfalls<sup>o</sup> the ebbing river  
 Twice every day creates on either side  
 Tinkle, as through their fresh-sparred grotts<sup>o</sup> they  
 shiver  
 In grass-arched channels to the sun denied;  
 High flaps in sparkling blue the far-heard crow,  
 The silvered flats gleam frostily below,  
 Suddenly drops the gull and breaks the glassy tide.

But, crowned in turn by vying seasons three,  
 Their winter halo hath a fuller ring; 170  
 This glory seems to rest immovably, —

The others were too fleet and vanishing;  
 When the hid tide is at its highest flow,  
 O'er marsh and stream one breathless trance of  
 snow  
 With brooding fulness awes and hushes every thing.

The sunshine seems blown off by the bleak wind,<sup>o</sup>  
 As pale as formal candles lit by day;  
 Gropes to the sea the river dumb and blind;  
 The brown ricks, snow-thatched by the storm in  
 play,  
 Show pearly breakers<sup>o</sup> combing o'er their lea, 180  
 White crests as of some just enchanted sea,  
 Checked in their maddest leap and hanging poised  
 midway.

But when the eastern blow, with rain aslant,  
 From mid-sea's prairies green and rolling plains  
 Drives in his wallowing herds of billows gaunt,  
 And the roused Charles remembers in his veins  
 Old Ocean's blood and snaps his gyves of frost,  
 That tyrannous silence<sup>o</sup> on the shores is tost  
 In dreary wreck, and crumbling desolation reigns.

Edgewise or flat, in Druid-like<sup>o</sup> device, 190  
 With leaden pools between or gullies bare,

The blocks lie strewn, a bleak Stonehenge° of ice;  
 No life, no sound, to break the grim despair,  
 Save sullen plunge, as through the sedges stiff  
 Down crackles riverward some thaw-sapped cliff,  
 Or when the close-wedged fields of ice crunch here  
 and there.

But let me turn from fancy-pictured scenes  
 To that whose pastoral calm before me lies:  
 Here nothing harsh or rugged intervenes;  
 The early evening with her misty dyes 200  
 Smooths off the ravelled edges of the nigh,  
 Relieves the distant with her cooler sky,  
 And tones the landscape down, and soothes the wearied  
 eyes.

There gleams my native village, dear to me,  
 Though higher change's waves each day are seen,  
 Whelming fields famed in boyhood's history,  
 Sanding with houses the diminished green;  
 There, in red brick, which softening time defies,  
 Stand square and stiff the Muses' factories°; —  
 How with my life knit up is every well-known  
 scene! 210

Flow on, dear river! not alone you flow  
 To outward sight, and through your marshes wind;  
 Fed from the mystic springs of long-ago,  
 Your twin flows silent through my world of mind:  
 Grow dim, dear marshes, in the evening's gray!  
 Before my inner sight ye stretch away,  
 And will for ever, though these fleshly eyes grow blind.

Beyond the hillock's house bespotted swell,<sup>o</sup>  
 Where Gothic chapels° house the horse and chaise,  
 Where quiet cits in Grecian temples dwell, 220  
 Where Coptic tombs° resound with prayer and  
 praise,  
 Where dust and mud the equal year divide,  
 There gentle Allston° lived, and wrought, and died,  
 Transfiguring street and shop with his illumined gaze.

*Virgilium vidi tantum*, — I have seen  
 But as a boy, who looks alike on all,  
 That misty hair, that fine Undine-like mien,<sup>o</sup>  
 Tremulous as down° to feeling's faintest call; —  
 Ah, dear old homestead°! count it to thy fame  
 That thither many times the Painter came; — 230  
 One elm yet bears his name, a feathery tree and tall.

Swiftly the present fades in memory's glow, —  
 Our only sure possession is the past;  
 The village blacksmith° died a month ago,  
 And dim to me the forge's roaring blast;  
 Soon fire-new mediævals° we shall see  
 Oust the black smithy from its chestnut tree,  
 And that hewn down, perhaps, the bee-hive green and  
 vast.

How many times, prouder than king on throne,  
 Loosed from the village school-dame's A-s and B-s, 240  
 Panting have I the creaky bellows blown,  
 And watched the pent volcano's red increase,°  
 Then paused to see the ponderous sledge, brought  
 down  
 By that hard arm voluminous and brown,  
 From the white iron swarm° its golden vanishing bees.

Dear native town! whose choking elms each year  
 With eddying dust before their time turn gray,  
 Pining for rain, — to me thy dust is dear;  
 It glorifies the eve of summer day,  
 And when the westering sun half-sunken burns, 250  
 The mote-thick air to deepest orange turns,  
 The westward horseman rides through clouds of gold  
 away.

So palpable, I've seen those unshorn few,  
 The six old willows° at the causey's end,  
 (Such trees Paul Potter° never dreamed nor drew),  
 Through this dry mist their checkering shadows  
 send,  
 Striped, here and there, with many a long-drawn  
 thread,  
 Where streamed through leafy chinks the trem-  
 bling red,  
 Past which, in one bright trail, the hangbird's flashes  
 blend.

Yes, dearer for thy dust than all that e'er, 260  
 Beneath the awarded crown of victory,  
 Gilded the blown Olympic charioteer;  
 Though lightly prized the ribboned parchments  
 three,  
 Yet *collegisse juvat*° I am glad  
 That here what colleging was mine I had, —  
 It linked another tie, dear native town, with thee!

Nearer art thou than simply native earth,  
 My dust with thine concedes a deeper tie;  
 A closer claim thy soil may well put forth,  
 Something of kindred more than sympathy; 270



For in thy bounds I reverently° laid away  
 That blinding anguish of forsaken clay,  
 That title I seemed to have in earth and sea and sky,

That portion of my life more choice to me°  
 (Though brief, yet in itself so round and whole)  
 Than all the imperfect residue can be;—  
 The Artist saw his statue of the soul  
 Was perfect; so, with one regretful stroke,  
 The earthen model into fragments broke,  
 And without her the impoverished seasons roll. 280

## RHÆCUS

God sends his teachers unto every age,  
 To every clime, and every race of men,  
 With revelations fitted to their growth  
 And shape of mind, nor gives the realm of Truth  
 Into the selfish rule of one sole race:  
 Therefore each form of worship that hath swayed  
 The life of man, and given it to grasp  
 The master-key of knowledge, reverence,  
 Enfolds some germs of goodness and of right;  
 Else never had the eager soul, which loathes 10  
 The slothful down of pampered ignorance,  
 Found in it even a moment's fitful rest.

There is an instinct in the human heart  
 Which makes that all the fables it hath coined,  
 To justify the reign of its belief  
 And strengthen it by beauty's right divine,  
 Veil in their inner cells a mystic gift,  
 Which, like the hazel twig, in faithful hands,  
 Points surely to the hidden springs of truth.

For, as in nature naught is made in vain, 20  
 But all things have within their hull of use  
 A wisdom and a meaning which may speak  
 Of spiritual secrets to the ear  
 Of spirit; so, in whatsoe'er the heart  
 Hath fashioned for a solace to itself,  
 To make its inspirations suit its creed,  
 And from the niggard hands of falsehood wring  
 Its needful food of truth, there ever is  
 A sympathy with Nature, which reveals,  
 Not less than her own works, pure gleams of light 30  
 And earnest parables of inward lore.  
 Hear now this fairy legend of old Greece,  
 As full of freedom, youth, and beauty still  
 As the immortal freshness of that grace  
 Carved for all ages on some Attic frieze.

A youth named Rhœcus, wandering in the wood,  
 Saw an old oak just trembling to its fall,  
 And, feeling pity of so fair a tree,  
 He propped its gray trunk with admiring care,  
 And with a thoughtless footstep loitered on. 40  
 But, as he turned, he heard a voice behind  
 That murmured "Rhœcus!" 'Twas as if the leaves,  
 Stirred by a passing breath, had murmured it.

And, while he paused bewildered, yet again  
 It murmured "Rhœcus!" softer than a breeze.  
 He started and beheld with dizzy eyes  
 What seemed the substance of a happy dream  
 Stand there before him, spreading a warm glow  
 Within the green glooms of the shadowy oak.  
 It seemed a woman's shape, yet all too fair 50  
 To be a woman, and with eyes too meek  
 For any that were wont to mate with gods.  
 All naked like a goddess stood she there,  
 And like a goddess all too beautiful  
 To feel the guilt-born earthliness of shame.  
 "Rhœcus, I am the Dryad° of this tree,"  
 Thus she began, dropping her low-toned words  
 Serene, and full, and clear, as drops of dew,  
 "And with it I am doomed to live and die;  
 The rain and sunshine are my caterers, 60  
 Nor have I other bliss than simple life;  
 Now ask me what thou wilt, that I can give,  
 And with a thankful joy it shall be thine."

Then Rhœcus, with a flutter at the heart,  
 Yet, by the prompting of such beauty, bold,  
 Answered: "What is there that can satisfy  
 The endless craving of the soul but love?

Give me thy love, or but the hope of that  
 Which must be evermore my spirit's goal."  
 After a little pause she said again,  
 But with a glimpse of sadness in her tone,  
 "I give it, Rhœcus, though a perilous gift;  
 An hour before the sunset meet me here."  
 And straightway there was nothing he could see  
 But the green glooms beneath the shadowy oak,  
 And not a sound came to his straining ears  
 But the low trickling rustle of the leaves,  
 And far away upon an emerald slope  
 The falter of an idle shepherd's pipe.

70

Now, in those days of simpleness and faith,  
 Men did not think that happy things were dreams  
 Because they overstepped the narrow bourne  
 Of likelihood, but reverently deemed  
 Nothing too wondrous or too beautiful  
 To be the guerdon of a daring heart.  
 So Rhœcus made no doubt that he was blest,  
 And all along unto the city's gate  
 Earth seemed to spring beneath him as he walked,  
 The clear, broad sky looked bluer than its wont,  
 And he could scarce believe he had not wings,  
 Such sunshine seemed to glitter through his veins  
 Instead of blood, so light he felt and strange.

80

90

Young Rhœcus had a faithful heart enough,  
 But one that in the present dwelt too much  
 And, taking with blithe welcome whatsoever  
 Chance gave of joy, was wholly bound in that,  
 Like the contented peasant of a vale,  
 Deemed it the world, and never looked beyond.  
 So, haply meeting in the afternoon  
 Some comrades who were playing at the dice,  
 He joined them and forgot all else beside.

100

The dice were rattling at the merriest,  
 And Rhœcus, who had met but sorry luck,  
 Just laughed in triumph at a happy throw,  
 When through the room there hummed a yellow bee  
 That buzzed about his ear with down-dropped legs  
 As if too light. And Rhœcus laughed and said,  
 Feeling how red and flushed he was with loss,  
 "By Venus! does he take me for a rose?"  
 And brushed him off with rough, impatient hand.  
 But still the bee came back, and thrice again  
 Rhœcus did beat him off with growing wrath.  
 Then through the window flew the wounded bee,  
 And Rhœcus, tracking him with angry eyes,  
 Saw a sharp mountain-peak of Thessaly  
 Against the red disk of the setting sun,—

110

And instantly the blood sank from his heart,  
 As if its very walls had caved away.  
 Without a word he turned, and, rushing forth,  
 Ran madly through the city and the gate, 120  
 And o'er the plain, which now the wood's long shade,  
 By the low sun thrown forward broad and dim,  
 Darkened well-nigh unto the city's wall.

Quite spent and out of breath he reached the tree,  
 And, listening fearfully, he heard once more  
 The low voice murmur "Rhœcus!" close at hand:  
 Whereat he looked around him, but could see  
 Naught but the deepening glooms beneath the oak.  
 Then sighed the voice, "O Rhœcus! nevermore  
 Shalt thou behold me or by day or night, 130  
 Me, who would fain have blessed thee with a love  
 More ripe and bounteous than ever yet  
 Filled up with nectar any mortal heart:  
 But thou didst scorn my humble messenger,  
 And send'st him back to me with bruised wings.  
 We spirits only show to gentle eyes.  
 We ever ask an undivided love,  
 And he who scorns the least of nature's works  
 Is thenceforth exiled and shut out from all.  
 Farewell! for thou canst never see me more." 140

Then Rhœcus beat his breast, and groaned aloud,  
 And cried, "Be pitiful! forgive me yet  
 This once, and I shall never need it more!"  
 "Alas!" the voice returned, "'tis thou art blind,  
 Not I unmerciful; I can forgive,  
 But have no skill to heal thy spirit's eyes;  
 Only the soul hath power o'er itself."<sup>o</sup>  
 With that again there murmured "Nevermore!"  
 And Rhœcus after heard no other sound,  
 Except the rattling of the oak's crisp leaves, 150  
 Like the long surf upon a distant shore,  
 Raking the sea-worn pebbles up and down.  
 The night had gathered round him: o'er the plain  
 The city sparkled with its thousand lights,  
 And sounds of revel fell upon his ear  
 Harshly and like a curse; above, the sky,  
 With all its bright sublimity of stars,  
 Deepened, and on his forehead smote the breeze:  
 Beauty was all around him and delight,  
 But from that eve he was alone on earth. 160