

THE SPHINX

THE Sphinx is drowsy,
Her wings are furled:
Her ear is heavy,
She broods on the world.
"Who'll tell me my secret,
The ages have kept? —
I awaited the seer
While they slumbered and slept: —

"The fate of the man-child,
The meaning of man;
Known fruit of the unknown;
Dædalian plan;
Out of sleeping a waking,
Out of waking a sleep;
Life death overtaking;
Deep underneath deep?

"Erect as a sunbeam,
Upspringeth the palm;
The elephant browses,
Undaunted and calm;
In beautiful motion
The thrush plies his wings;

THE SPHINX

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Kind leaves of his covert,
Your silence he sings.

"The waves, unashamed,
In difference sweet,
Play glad with the breezes,
Old playfellows meet;
The journeying atoms,
Primordial wholes,
Firmly draw, firmly drive,
By their animate poles.

"Sea, earth, air, sound, silence,
Plant, quadruped, bird,
By one music enchanted,
One deity stirred, —
Each the other adorning,
Accompany still;
Night veileth the morning,
The vapor the hill.

"The babe by its mother
Lies bathed in joy;
Glide its hours uncounted, —
The sun is its toy;
Shines the peace of all being,
Without cloud, in its eyes;
And the sum of the world
In soft miniature lies.

THE SPHINX

“But man crouches and blushes,
Absconds and conceals;
He creepeth and peepeth,
He palter and steals;
Infirm, melancholy,
Jealous glancing around,
An oaf, an accomplice,
He poisons the ground.

“Out spoke the great mother,
Beholding his fear;—
At the sound of her accents
Cold shuddered the sphere:—
‘Who has drugged my boy’s cup?
Who has mixed my boy’s bread?
Who, with sadness and madness,
Has turned my child’s head?’”

I heard a poet answer
Aloud and cheerfully,
‘Say on, sweet Sphinx! thy dirges
Are pleasant songs to me.
Deep love lieth under
These pictures of time;
They fade in the light of
Their meaning sublime.

“The fiend that man harries
Is love of the Best;

THE SPHINX

Yawns the pit of the Dragon,
Lit by rays from the Blest.
The Lethe of Nature
Can’t trance him again,
Whose soul sees the perfect,
Which his eyes seek in vain.

“To vision profounder,
Man’s spirit must dive;
His aye-rolling orb
At no goal will arrive;
The heavens that now draw him
With sweetness untold,
Once found,—for new heavens
He spurneth the old.

“Pride ruined the angels,
Their shame them restores;
Lurks the joy that is sweetest
In stings of remorse.
Have I a lover
Who is noble and free?—
I would he were nobler
Than to love me.

“Eterne alternation
Now follows, now flies;
And under pain, pleasure,—
Under pleasure, pain lies.

THE SPHINX

Love works at the centre,
Heart-heaving alway;
Forth speed the strong pulses
To the borders of day.

“Dull Sphinx, Jove keep thy five wits;
Thy sight is growing blear;
Rue, myrrh and cummin for the Sphinx,
Her muddy eyes to clear!”
The old Sphinx bit her thick lip,—
Said, “Who taught thee me to name?
I am thy spirit, yoke-fellow;
Of thine eye I am eyebeam.

“Thou art the unanswered question;
Couldst see thy proper eye,
Always it asketh, asketh;
And each answer is a lie.
So take thy quest through nature,
It through thousand natures ply;
Ask on, thou clothed eternity;
Time is the false reply.”

Uprose the merry Sphinx,
And crouched no more in stone;
She melted into purple cloud,
She silvered in the moon;
She spired into a yellow flame;
She flowered in blossoms red;

ALPHONSO OF CASTILE

She flowed into a foaming wave:
She stood Monadnoc's head.

Thorough a thousand voices
Spoke the universal dame;
“Who telleth one of my meanings
Is master of all I am.”

ALPHONSO OF CASTILE

I, ALPHONSO, live and learn,
Seeing Nature go astern.
Things deteriorate in kind;
Lemons run to leaves and rind;
Meagre crop of figs and limes;
Shorter days and harder times.
Flowering April cools and dies
In the insufficient skies.
Imps, at high midsummer, blot
Half the sun's disk with a spot;
'T will not now avail to tan
Orange cheek or skin of man.
Roses bleach, the goats are dry,
Lisbon quakes, the people cry.
Yon pale, scrawny fisher fools,
Gaunt as bitterns in the pools,
Are no brothers of my blood;—

They discredit Adamhood.
 Eyes of gods! ye must have seen,
 O'er your ramparts as ye lean,
 The general debility;
 Of genius the sterility;
 Mighty projects countermanded;
 Rash ambition, brokenhanded;
 Puny man and scentless rose
 Tormenting Pan to double the dose.
 Rebuild or ruin: either fill
 Of vital force the wasted rill,
 Or tumble all again in heap
 To weltering Chaos and to sleep.

Say, Seigniors, are the old Niles dry,
 Which fed the veins of earth and sky,
 That mortals miss the loyal heats,
 Which drove them erst to social feats;
 Now, to a savage selfness grown,
 Think nature barely serves for one;
 With science poorly mask their hurt;
 And vex the gods with question pert,
 Immensely curious whether you
 Still are rulers, or Mildew?

Masters, I'm in pain with you;
 Masters, I'll be plain with you;
 In my palace of Castile,
 I, a king, for kings can feel.

There my thoughts the matter roll,
 And solve and oft resolve the whole.
 And, for I'm styled Alphonse the Wise,
 Ye shall not fail for sound advice.
 Before ye want a drop of rain,
 Hear the sentiment of Spain.

You have tried famine: no more try it;
 Ply us now with a full diet;
 Teach your pupils now with plenty,
 For one sun supply us twenty.
 I have thought it thoroughly over,—
 State of hermit, state of lover;
 We must have society,
 We cannot spare variety.
 Hear you, then, celestial fellows!
 Fits not to be overzealous;
 Steads not to work on the clean jump,
 Nor wine nor brains perpetual pump.
 Men and gods are too extense;
 Could you slacken and condense?
 Your rank overgrowths reduce
 Till your kinds abound with juice?
 Earth, crowded, cries, 'Too many men!'
 My counsel is, kill nine in ten,
 And bestow the shares of all
 On the remnant decimal.
 Add their nine lives to this cat;
 Stuff their nine brains in one hat;

MITHRIDATES

Make his frame and forces square
 With the labors he must dare ;
 Thatch his flesh, and even his years
 With the marble which he rears.
 There, growing slowly old at ease
 No faster than his planted trees,
 He may, by warrant of his age,
 In schemes of broader scope engage.
 So shall ye have a man of the sphere
 Fit to grace the solar year.

MITHRIDATES

I CANNOT spare water or wine,
 Tobacco-leaf, or poppy, or rose ;
 From the earth-poles to the Line,
 All between that works or grows,
 Every thing is kin of mine.

Give me agates for my meat ;
 Give me cantharids to eat ;
 From air and ocean bring me foods,
 From all zones and altitudes ; —

From all natures, sharp and slimy,
 Salt and basalt, wild and tame :
 Tree and lichen, ape, sea-lion,
 Bird, and reptile, be my game.

TO J. W.

Ivy for my fillet band ;
 Blinding dog-wood in my hand ;
 Hemlock for my sherbet cull me,
 And the prussic juice to lull me ;
 Swing me in the upas boughs,
 Vampyre-fanned, when I carouse.

Too long shut in strait and few,
 Thinly dieted on dew,
 I will use the world, and sift it,
 To a thousand humors shift it,
 As you spin a cherry.
 O doleful ghosts, and goblins merry !
 O all you virtues, methods, mights,
 Means, appliances, delights,
 Reputed wrongs and braggart rights,
 Smug routine, and things allowed,
 Minorities, things under cloud !
 Hither ! take me, use me, fill me,
 Vein and artery, though ye kill me !

TO J. W.

SET not thy foot on graves ;
 Hear what wine and roses say ;
 The mountain chase, the summer waves,
 The crowded town, thy feet may well delay.

Set not thy foot on graves;
 Nor seek to unwind the shroud
 Which charitable Time
 And Nature have allowed
 To wrap the errors of a sage sublime.

Set not thy foot on graves;
 Care not to strip the dead
 Of his sad ornament,
 His myrrh, and wine, and rings,

His sheet of lead,
 And trophies buried:
 Go, get them where he earned them when alive;
 As resolutely dig or dive.

Life is too short to waste
 In critic peep or cynic bark,
 Quarrel or reprimand:
 'T will soon be dark;
 Up! mind thine own aim, and
 God speed the mark!

DESTINY

THAT you are fair or wise is vain,
 Or strong, or rich, or generous;
 You must add the untaught strain
 That sheds beauty on the rose.
 There's a melody born of melody,
 Which melts the world into a sea.
 Toil could never compass it;
 Art its height could never hit;
 It came never out of wit;
 But a music music-born
 Well may Jove and Juno scorn.
 Thy beauty, if it lack the fire
 Which drives me mad with sweet desire,
 What boots it? What the soldier's mail,
 Unless he conquer and prevail?
 What all the goods thy pride which lift,
 If thou pine for another's gift?
 Alas! that one is born in blight,
 Victim of perpetual slight:
 When thou lookest on his face,
 Thy heart saith, 'Brother, go thy ways!
 None shall ask thee what thou doest,
 Or care a rush for what thou knowest,
 Or listen when thou repliest,

DESTINY

Or remember where thou liest,
 Or how thy supper is sodden ;
 And another is born
 To make the sun forgotten.
 Surely he carries a talisman
 Under his tongue ;
 Broad his shoulders are and strong ;
 And his eye is scornful,
 Threatening and young.
 I hold it of little matter
 Whether your jewel be of pure water,
 A rose diamond or a white,
 But whether it dazzle me with light.
 I care not how you are dressed,
 In coarsest weeds or in the best ;
 Nor whether your name is base or brave :
 Nor for the fashion of your behavior ;
 But whether you charm me,
 Bid my bread feed and my fire warm me
 And dress up Nature in your favor.
 One thing is forever good ;
 That one thing is Success, —
 Dear to the Eumenides,
 And to all the heavenly brood.
 Who bides at home, nor looks abroad,
 Carries the eagles, and masters the sword.

GUY

MORTAL mixed of middle clay,
 Attempered to the night and day,
 Interchangeable with things,
 Needs no amulets nor rings.
 Guy possessed the talisman
 That all things from him began ;
 And as, of old, Polycrates
 Chained the sunshine and the breeze,
 So did Guy betimes discover
 Fortune was his guard and lover ;
 In strange junctures, felt, with awe,
 His own symmetry with law ;
 That no mixture could withstand
 The virtue of his lucky hand.
 He gold or jewel could not lose,
 Nor not receive his ample dues.
 Fearless Guy had never foes,
 He did their weapons decompose.
 Aimed at him, the blushing blade
 Healed as fast the wounds it made.
 If on the foeman fell his gaze,
 Him it would straightway blind or craze,
 In the street, if he turned round,
 His eye the eye 't was seeking found.

GUY

It seemed his Genius discreet
 Worked on the Maker's own receipt,
 And made each tide and element
 Stewards of stipend and of rent;
 So that the common waters fell
 As costly wine into his well.
 He had so sped his wise affairs
 That he caught Nature in his snares.
 Early or late, the falling rain
 Arrived in time to swell his grain;
 Stream could not so perversely wind
 But corn of Guy's was there to grind:
 The siroc found it on its way,
 To speed his sails, to dry his hay;
 And the world's sun seemed to rise
 To drudge all day for Guy the wise.
 In his rich nurseries, timely skill
 Strong crab with nobler blood did fill;
 The zephyr in his garden rolled
 From plum-trees vegetable gold;
 And all the hours of the year
 With their own harvest honored were.
 There was no frost but welcome came,
 Nor freshet, nor midsummer flame.
 Belonged to wind and world the toil
 And venture, and to Guy the oil.

HAMATREYA

BULKELEY, Hunt, Willard, Hosmer, Meriam, Flint,
 Possessed the land which rendered to their toil
 Hay, corn, roots, hemp, flax, apples, wool and wood.
 Each of these landlords walked amidst his farm,
 Saying, 'T is mine, my children's and my name's.
 How sweet the west wind sounds in my own trees!
 How graceful climb those shadows on my hill!
 I fancy these pure waters and the flags
 Know me, as does my dog: we sympathize;
 And, I affirm, my actions smack of the soil.'

Where are these men? Asleep beneath their grounds:
 And strangers, fond as they, their furrows plough.
 Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys
 Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs;
 Who steer the plough, but cannot steer their feet
 Clear of the grave.
 They added ridge to valley, brook to pond,
 And sighed for all that bounded their domain;
 'This suits me for a pasture; that's my park;
 We must have clay, lime, gravel, granite-ledge,
 And misty lowland, where to go for peat.
 The land is well,—lies fairly to the south.
 'T is good, when you have crossed the sea and back,

To find the sitfast acres where you left them.
 Ah! the hot owner sees not Death, who adds
 Him to his land, a lump of mould the more.
 Hear what the Earth says:—

EARTH-SONG

‘ Mine and yours ;
 Mine, not yours.
 Earth endures ;
 Stars abide—
 Shine down in the old sea ;
 Old are the shores ;
 But where are old men ?
 I who have seen much,
 Such have I never seen.

‘ The lawyer’s deed
 Ran sure,
 In tail,
 To them, and to their heirs
 Who shall succeed,
 Without fail,
 Forevermore.

‘ Here is the land,
 Shaggy with wood,
 With its old valley,
 Mound and flood.
 But the heritors ?—

Fled like the flood’s foam.
 The lawyer, and the laws,
 And the kingdom,
 Clean swept herefrom.

‘ They called me theirs,
 Who so controlled me ;
 Yet every one
 Wished to stay, and is gone,
 How am I theirs,
 If they cannot hold me,
 But I hold them ?’

When I heard the Earth-song
 I was no longer brave ;
 My avarice cooled
 Like lust in the chill of the grave.

THE RHODORA:

ON BEING ASKED, WHENCE IS THE FLOWER ?

In May, when sea-winds pierced our solitudes,
 I found the fresh Rhodora in the woods,
 Spreading its leafless blooms in a damp nook,
 To please the desert and the sluggish brook.
 The purple petals, fallen in the pool,