

I heard the water hiss, and then methinks
 The crack as of her splitting. Did she take
 Their palaces that are my brothers dear,
 And huddle them with all their ancients
 Under into her breast? If it was black,
 How could this old man see? There was a noise
 'T the dark, and He drew back His hand again.
 I looked — It was a dream, — let no man say
 It was aught else. There, so — the fit goes by.
 Sir, and my daughters, is it eventide? —
 Sooner than that, saith old Methuselah,
 Let the vulture lay his beak to my green limbs.
 What! art Thou envious? — are the sons of men
 Too wise to please Thee, and to do Thy will?
 Methuselah, he sitteth on the ground,
 Clad in his gown of age, the pale white gown,
 And goeth not forth to war; his wrinkled hands
 He claspeth round his knees: old, very old.
 Would he could steal from Thee one secret more —
 The secret of Thy youth! O, envious God!
 We die. The words of old Methuselah
 And his prophecy are ended."

Then the wives,
 Beholding how he trembled, and the maids
 And children, came anear, saying, "Who art thou
 That standest gazing on the Elder? Lo,
 Thou dost not well: withdraw; for it was thou
 Whose stranger presence troubled him, and brought
 The fit of prophecy." And he did turn
 To look upon them, and their majesty
 And glorious beauty took away his words;
 And, being pure among the vile, he cast
 In his thought a veil of snow-white purity
 Over the beauteous throng. "Thou dost not well,"
 They said. He answered: "Blossoms o' the world,
 Fruitful as fair, never in watered glade,

Where in the youngest grass blue cups push forth,
 And the white lily reareth up her head,
 And purples cluster, and the saffron flower,
 Clear as a flame of sacrifice, breaks out,
 And every cedar bough, made delicate
 With climbing roses, drops in white and red, —
 Saw I (good angels keep you in their care)
 So beautiful a crowd."

With that, they stamped,
 Gnashed their white teeth, and, turning, fled and spat
 Upon the floor. The Elder spake to him,
 Yet shaking with the burden, "Who art thou?"
 He answered: "I, the man whom thou didst send
 To fetch through this thy woodland, do forbear
 To tell my name; thou lovest it not, great sire, —
 No, nor mine errand. To thy house I spake,
 Touching their beauty." "Wherefore didst thou
 spite,"

Quoth he, "the daughters?" and it seemed he lost
 Count of that prophecy, for very age,
 And from his thin lips dropt a trembling laugh.
 "Wicked old man," quoth he, "this wise old man
 I see as 'twere not I. Thou bad old man,
 What shall be done to thee? for thou didst burn
 Their babes, and strew the ashes all about,
 To rid the world of His white soldiers. Ay,
 Scenting of human sacrifice, they fled.
 Cowards! I heard them winnow their great wings;
 They went to tell Him; but they came no more.
 The women hate to hear of them, so sore
 They grudged their little ones; and yet no way
 There was but that. I took it; I did well."

With that he fell to weeping. "Son," said he,
 "Long have I hid mine eyes from stalwart men,
 For it is hard to lose the majesty
 And pride and power of manhood: but to-day,

Stand forth into the light, that I may look
Upon thy strength, and think, EVEN THUS DID I,
IN THE GLORY OF MY YOUTH, MORE LIKE TO GOD
THAN LIKE HIS SOLDIERS, FACE THE VASSAL WORLD."

Then Noah stood forward in his majesty,
Shouldering the golden billhook, wherewithal
He went to cut his way, when tangled in
The matted hayes. And down the opened roof
Fell slanting beams upon his stately head,
And streamed along his gown, and made to shine
The jewelled sandals on his feet.

And, lo,

The Elder cried aloud: "I prophesy.
Behold, my son is as a fruitful field
When all the lands are waste. The archers drew,—
They drew the bow against him; they were fain
To slay: but he shall live,—my son shall live,
And I shall live by him in the other days.
Behold the prophet of the Most High God:
Hear him. Behold the hope o' the world, what time
She lieth under. Hear him; he shall save
A seed alive, and sow the earth with man.
O earth! earth! earth! a floating shell of wood
Shall hold the remnant of thy mighty lords.
Will this old man be in it? Sir, and you,
My daughters, hear him! Lo, this white old man
He sitteth on the ground. (Let be, let be:
Why dost Thou trouble us to make our tongue
Ring with abhorrèd words?) The prophecy
Of the Elder, and the vision that he saw,
They both are ended."

Then said Noah: "The life
Of this my lord is low for very age:
Why then, with bitter words upon thy tongue,
Father of Lamech, dost thou anger Him?"

Thou canst not strive against Him now." He said:
"Thy feet are toward the valley, where lie bones
Bleaching upon the desert. Did I love
The lithe strong lizards that I yoked and set
To draw my car? and were they not possessed?
Yea, all of them were liars. I loved them well.
What did the Enemy, but on a day
When I behind my talking team went forth,
They sweetly lying, so that all men praised
Their flattering tongues and mild persuasive eyes,—
What did the Enemy but send His slaves,
Angels, to cast down stones upon their heads
And break them? Nay, I could not stir abroad
But havoc came; they never crept or flew
Beyond the shelter that I builded here,
But straight the crowns I had set upon their heads
Were marks for myrmidons that in the clouds
Kept watch to crush them. Can a man forgive
That hath been warred on thus? I will not. Nay,
I swear it,—I, the man Methuselah."
The Master-shipwright, he replied, "'Tis true,
Great loss was that; but they that stood thy friends,
The wicked spirits, spoke upon their tongues,
And cursed the God of heaven. What marvel, sir,
If He was angered?" But the Elder cried:
"They all are dead,—the toward beasts I loved;
My goodly team, my joy, they all are dead;
Their bones lie bleaching in the wilderness:
And I will keep my wrath for evermore
Against the Enemy that slew them. Go,
Thou coward servant of a tyrant King,
Go down the desert of the bones, and ask,
'My King, what bones are these? Methuselah,
The white old man that sitteth on the ground,
Sendeth a message, "Bid them that they live,
And let my lizards run up every path
They went to take when out of silver pipes,

The pipes that Tubal wrought into my roof,
I blew a sweeter cry than song-bird's throat
Hath ever formed; and while they laid their heads
Submit upon my threshold, poured away
Music that welled by heartful out, and made
The throats of men that heard to swell, their breasts
To heave with the joy of grief; yea, caused the lips
To laugh of men asleep.

Return to me

The great wise lizards; ay, and them that flew
My pursuivants before me. Let me yoke
Again that multitude; and here I swear
That they shall draw my car and me thereon
Straight to the ship of doom. So men shall know
My loyalty, that I submit, and Thou
Shalt yet have honor, O mine Enemy,
By me. The speech of old Methuselah.””

Then Noah made answer, “By the living God,
That is no enemy to men, great sire,
I will not take thy message; hear thou Him.
‘Behold (He saith that suffereth thee), behold,
The earth that I made green cries out to Me,
Red with the costly blood of beauteous man.
I am robbed, I am robbed (He saith); they sacrifice
To evil demons of My blameless flocks,
That I did fashion with My hand. Behold,
How goodly was the world! I gave it thee
Fresh from its finishing. What hast thou done?
I will cry out to the waters, *Cover it,*
And hide it from its Father. Lo, Mine eyes
Turn from it shamed.’”

With that the old man laughed
Full softly. “Ay,” quoth he, “a goodly world,
And we have done with it as we did list.
Why did He give it us? Nay, look you, son:

Five score they were that died in yonder waste;
And if He crieth, ‘Repent, be reconciled,’
I answer, ‘Nay, my lizards;’ and again,
If He will trouble me in this mine age,
‘Why hast Thou slain my lizards?’ Now my speech
Is cut away from all my other words,
Standing alone. The Elder sweareth it,
The man of many days, Methuselah.”

Then answered Noah, “My Master, hear it not;
But yet have patience;” and he turned himself,
And down betwixt the ordered trees went forth,
And in the light of evening made his way
Into the waste to meet the Voice of God.

BOOK III.

ABOVE the head of great Methuselah
There lay two demons in the opened roof
Invisible, and gathered up his words;
For when the Elder prophesied, it came
About, that hidden things were shown to them,
And burdens that he spake against his time.

(But never heard them, such as dwelt with him;
Their ears they stopped, and willed to live at ease
In all delight; and perfect in their youth,
And strong, disport them in the perfect world.)

Now these were fettered that they could not fly,
For a certain disobedience they had wrought
Against the ruler of their host; but not
The less they loved their cause; and when the fact
O’ the Master-builder were no longer heard,
They, slipping to the sward, right painfully
Did follow, for the one to the other said,
“Behoves our master know of this; and us,
Should he be favorable, he may loose
From these our bonds.”

And thus it came to pass,
That while at dead of night the old dragon lay
Coiled in the cavern where he dwelt, the watch
Pacing before it saw in middle air
A boat, that gleamed like fire, and on it came,
And rocked as it drew near, and then it burst
And went to pieces, and there fell therefrom,
Close at the cavern's mouth, two glowing balls.

Now there was drawn a curtain nigh the mouth
Of that deep cave, to testify of wrath.
The dragon had been wroth with some that served,
And chased them from him; and his oracles,
That wont to drop from him, were stopped, and men
Might only pray to him through that feil web
That hung before him. Then did whisper low
Some of the little spirits that, bat-like, clung
And cluster'd round the opening. "Lo," they said,
While gazed the watch upon those glowing balls,
"These are like moons eclipsed; but let them lie
Red on the moss, and sear its dewy spires,
Until our lord give leave to draw the web,
And quicken reverence by his presence dread,
For he will know and call to them by name,
And they will change. At present he is sick,
And wills that none disturb him." So they lay,
And there was silence, for the forest tribes
Came never near that cave. Wiser than men,
They fled the serpent hiss that oft by night
Came forth of it, and feared the wan dusk forms
That stalked among the trees, and in the dark
Those whiffs of flame that wandered up the sky
And made the moonlight sickly.

Now, the cave
Was marvellous for beauty, wrought with tools
Into the living rock, for there had worked
All cunning men, to cut on it with signs

And shows, yea, all the manner of mankind.
The fateful apple-tree was there, a bough
Bent with the weight of him that us beguiled;
And lilies of the field did seem to blow
And bud in the storied stone. There Tubal sat,
Who from his harp delivered music, sweet
As any in the spheres. Yea, more;
Earth's latest wonder on the walls appeared,
Unfinished, workmen clustering on its ribs;
And farther back, within the rock hewn out,
Angelic figures stood, that impious hands
Had fashioned; many golden lamps they held
By golden chains depending, and their eyes
All tended in a reverent quietude
Toward the couch whereon the dragon lay.
The floor was beaten gold; the curly lengths
Of his last coils lay on it, hid from sight
With a coverlet made stiff with crusting gems,
Fire-opals shooting, rubies, fierce bright eyes
Of diamonds, or the pale green emerald,
That changed their lustre when he breathed.

His head,
Feathered with crimson combs, and all his neck,
And half-shut fans of his admirèd wings,
That in their scaly splendor put to shame
Or gold or stone, lay on his ivory couch
And shivered; for the dragon suffered pain:
He suffered and he feared. It was his doom,
The tempter, that he never should depart
From the bright creature that in Paradise
He for his evil purpose erst possessed,
Until it died. Thus only, spirit of might
And chiefest spirit of ill, could he be free.

But with its nature wed, as souls of men
Are wedded to their clay, he took the dread
Of death and dying, and the coward heart

Of the beast, and craven terrors of the end
 Sank him that habited within it to dread
 Disunion. He, a dark dominion erst
 Rebellious, lay and trembled, for the flesh
 Daunted his immaterial. He was sick
 And sorry. Great ones of the earth had sent
 Their chief musicians for to comfort him,
 Chanting his praise, the friend of man, the god
 That gave them knowledge, at so great a price
 And costly. Yea, the riches of the mine,
 And glorious broidered work, and woven gold,
 And all things wisely made, they at his feet
 Laid daily; for they said, "This mighty one,
 All the world wonders after him. He lieth
 Sick in his dwelling; he hath long foregone
 (To do us good) dominion, and a throne,
 And his brave warfare with the Enemy,
 So much he pitieth us that were denied
 The gain and gladness of this knowledge. Now
 Shall he be certified of gratitude,
 And smell the sacrifice that most he loves."

The night was dark, but every lamp gave forth
 A tender, lustrous beam. His beauteous wings
 The dragon fluttered, cursed awhile, then turned
 And moaned with lamentable voice, "I thirst,
 Give me to drink." Thereon stepped out in haste,
 From inner chambers, lovely ministrants,
 Young boys, with radiant locks and peaceful eyes,
 And poured out liquor from their cups to cool
 His parchèd tongue, and kneeling held it nigh
 In jewelled basins sparkling; and he lapped,
 And was appeased, and said, "I will not hide
 Longer, my much-desirèd face from men.
 Draw back the web of separation." Then
 With cries of gratulation ran they forth,
 And flung it wide, and all the watch fell low.

Each on his face, as drunk with sudden joy.
 Thus marked he, glowing on the branchèd moss,
 Those red rare moons, and let his serpent eyes
 Consider them full subtly, "What be these?"
 Inquiring: and the little spirits said,
 "As we for thy protection (having heard
 That wrathful sons of darkness walk to-night,
 Such as do oft ill-use us) clustered here,
 We marked a boat afire, that sailed the skies,
 And furrowed up like spray a billowy cloud,
 And lo, it went to pieces, scattering down
 A rain of sparks and these two angry moons."
 Then said the dragon, "Let my guard, and you,
 Attendant hosts, recede;" and they went back,
 And formed about the cave a widening ring,
 Then, halting, stood afar; and from the cave
 The snaky wonder spoke, with hissing tongue,
 "If ye were Tartis and Deleisonon,
 Be Tartis and Deleisonon once more."

Then egg-like cracked the glowing balls, and forth
 Started black angels, trampling hard to free
 Their fettered feet from out the smoking shell.

And he said, "Tartis and Deleisonon,
 Your lord I am: draw nigh." "Thou art our lord,"
 They answered, and with fettered limbs full low
 They bent, and made obeisance. Furthermore,
 "O fiery flying serpent, after whom
 The nations go, let thy dominion last,"
 They said, "forever." And the serpent said,
 "It shall: unfold your errand." They replied,
 One speaking for a space, and afterward
 His fellow taking up the word with fear,
 And panting, "We were set to watch the mouth
 Of great Methuselah. There came to him
 The son of Lamech two days since." "My lord,

They prophesied, the Elder prophesied,
Unwitting, of the floods of waters, — ay,
A vision was before him, and the lands
Lay under water drowned. He saw the ark, —
It floated in the Enemy's right hand."
"Lord of the lost, the son of Lamech fled
Into the wilderness to meet His voice
That reigneth; and we, diligent to hear
Aught that might serve thee, followed, but, forbid
To enter, lay upon its boundary cliff,
And wished for morning."

"When the dawn was red
We sought the man, we marked him; and he
prayed, —

Kneeling, he prayed in the valley, and said —"
"Nay," quoth the serpent, "spare me, what devout
He fawning grovelled to the All-powerful;
But if of what shall hap he aught let fall,
Speak that." They answered, "He did pray as one
That looketh to outlive mankind, — and more,
We are certified by all his scattered words,
That HE will take from men their length of days,
And cut them off like grass in its first flower:
From henceforth this shall be."

That when he heard,
The dragon made to the night his moan.

"And more,"
They said, "that He above would have men knew
That He doth love them, whoso will repent,
To that man He is favorable, yea,
Will be his loving Lord."

The dragon cried,
"The last is worse than all. O man, thy heart
Is stout against His wrath. But will He love?
I heard it rumored in the heavens of old

(And doth He love?). Thou wilt not, canst not, stand
Against the love of God. Dominion fails;
I see it float from me, that long have worn
Fetters of flesh to win it. Love of God!
I cry against thee; thou art worse than all."
They answered, "Be not moved, admirèd chief
And trusted of mankind;" and they went on,
And fed him with the prophecies that fell
From the Master-shipwright in his prayer.

But prone

He lay, for he was sick: at every word
Prophetic cowering. As a bruising blow,
It fell upon his head and daunted him,
Until they ended, saying, "Prince, behold,
Thy servants have revealed the whole."

Thereon

He out of snaky lips did kiss forth thanks.
Then said he, "Tartis and Deleisonon,
Receive your wages." So their fetters fell;
And they, retiring, lauded him, and cried,
"King, reign forever." Then he mourned, "Amen."

And he, — being left alone, — he said: "A light!
I see a light, — a star among the trees, —
An angel." And it drew toward the cave,
But with its sacred feet touched not the grass,
Nor lifted up the lids of its pure eyes,
But hung a span's length from that ground pollute,
At the opening of the cave.

And when he looked

The dragon cried, "Thou newly-fashioned thing,
Of name unknown, thy scorn becomes thee not.
Doth not thy Master suffer what thine eyes
Thou countest all too clean to open on?"
But still it hovered, and the quietness

Of holy heaven was on the drooping lids ;
 And not as one that answereth, it let fall
 The music from its mouth, but like to one
 That doth not hear, or, hearing, doth not heed.

“ A message : ‘ I have heard thee, while remote
 I went My rounds among the unfinished stars.’
 A message : ‘ I have left thee to thy ways,
 And mastered all thy vileness, for thy hate
 I have made to serve the ends of My great love.
 Hereafter will I chain thee down. To-day
 One thing thou art forbidden ; now thou knowest
 The name thereof : I told it thee in heaven,
 When thou wert sitting at My feet. Forbear
 To let that hidden thing be whispered forth :
 For man, ungrateful (and thy hope it was,
 That so ungrateful he might prove), would scorn,
 And not believe it, adding so fresh weight
 Of condemnation to the doomèd world.
 Concerning that, thou art forbid to speak ;
 Know thou didst count it, falling from My tongue,
 A lovely song, whose meaning was unknown,
 Unknowable, unbearable to thought,
 But sweeter in the hearing than all harps
 Toned in My holy hollow. Now thine ears
 Are opened, know it, and discern and fear,
 Forbearing speech of it for evermore.’ ”

So said, it turned, and with a cry of joy,
 As one released, went up ; and it was dawn,
 And all boughs dropped with dew, and out of mist
 Came the red sun and looked into the cave.

But the dragon, left a-tremble, called to him,
 From the nether kingdom, certain of his friends, —
 Three whom he trusted, councillors accursed.
 A thunder-cloud stooped low and swathed the place
 In its black swirls, and out of it they rushed,

And hid them in recesses of the cave,
 Because they could not look upon the sun,
 Sith light is pure. And Satan called to them, —
 All in the dark, in his great rage he spake :
 “ Up,” quoth the dragon ; “ it is time to work,
 Or we are all undone.” And he did hiss,
 And there came shudderings over land and trees,
 A dimness after dawn. The earth threw out
 A blinding fog, that crept toward the cave,
 And rolled up blank before it like a veil, —
 A curtain to conceal its habiters.
 Then did those spirits move upon the floor,
 Like pillars of darkness, and with eyes aglow.
 One had a helm for covering of the scars
 That seamed what rested of a goodly face ;
 He wore his vizor up, and all his words
 Were hollower than an echo from the hills :
 He was hight Make. And lo, his fellow-fiend
 Came after, holding down his dastard head,
 Like one ashamed : now this for craft was great ;
 The dragon honored him. A third sat down
 Among them, covering with his wasted hand
 Somewhat that pained his breast.

And when the fit
 Of thunder, and the sobbings of the wind,
 Were lulled, the dragon spoke with wrath and rage,
 And told them of his matters : “ Look to this,
 If ye be loyal ; ” adding, “ Give your thoughts,
 And let me have your counsel in this need.”

One spirit rose and spake, and all the cave
 Was full of sighs, “ The words of Make the Prince,
 Of him once delegate in Betelgeux :
 Whereas of late the manner is to change,
 We know not where ’twill end ; and now my words
 Go thus : give way, be peaceable, lie still

And strive not, else the world that we have won
 He may, to drive us out, reduce to naught.
 "For while I stood in mine obedience yet,
 Steering of Betelgeux my sun, behold,
 A moon, that evil ones did fill, rolled up
 Astray, and suddenly the Master came,
 And while, a million strong, like rooks they rose,
 He took and broke it, flung it here and there,
 And called a blast to drive the powder forth;
 And it was fine as dust, and blurred the skies
 Farther than 'tis from hence to this young sun.
 Spirits that passed upon their work that day,
 Cried out, 'How dusty 'tis.' Behooves us, then,
 That we depart, as leaving unto Him
 This goodly world and goodly race of man.
 Not all are doomed: hereafter it may be
 That we find place on it again. But if,
 Too zealous to preserve it, and the men
 Our servants, we oppose Him, He may come,
 And, choosing rather to undo His work
 Than strive with it for aye, make so an end."
 He sighing paused. Lo, then the serpent hissed
 In impotent rage, "Depart! and how depart!
 Can flesh be carried down where spirits wonn?
 Or I, most miserable, hold my life
 Over the airless, bottomless gulf, and bide
 The buffetings of yonder shoreless sea?
 O death, thou terrible doom: O death, thou dread
 Of all that breathe."

A spirit rose and spake:
 "Whereas in Heaven is power, is much to fear;
 For this admirèd country we have marred.
 Whereas in Heaven is love (and there are days
 When yet I can recall what love was like),
 Is naught to fear. A threatening makes the whole,
 And clogged with strong conditions: 'O, repent,

Man, and I turn.' He, therefore, powerful now,
 And more so, master, that ye bide in clay,
 Threateneth that He may save. They shall not die."

The dragon said, "I tremble, I am sick."
 He said with pain of heart, "How am I fallen!
 For I keep silence; yea, I have withdrawn
 From haunting of His gates, and shouting up
 Defiance. Wherefore doth He hunt me out
 From this small world, this little one, that I
 Have been content to take unto myself,
 I here being loved and worshippèd? He knoweth
 How much I have foregone; and must He stoop
 To whelm the world, and heave the floors o' the deep,
 Of purpose to pursue me from my place?
 And since I gave men knowledge, must He take
 Their length of days whereby they perfect it?
 So shall He scatter all that I have stored,
 And get them by degrading them. I know
 That in the end it is appointed me
 To fade. I will not fade before the time."

A spirit rose, the third, a spirit ashamed
 And subtle, and his face he turned aside:
 "Whereas," said he, "we strive against both power
 And love, behooves us that we strive aright.
 Now some of old my comrades yesterday,
 I met, as they did journey to appear
 In the Presence; and I said, 'My master lieth
 Sick yonder, otherwise (for no decree
 There stands against it) he would also come
 And make obeisance with the sons of God.'
 They answered, naught denying. Therefore, lord,
 'Tis certain that ye have admittance yet;
 And what doth hinder? Nothing but this breath.
 Were it not well to make an end, and die,
 And gain admittance to the King of kings?"

What if thy slaves by thy consent should take
 And bear thee on their wings above the earth,
 And suddenly let fall, — how soon 'twere o'er!
 We should have fear and sinking at the heart;
 But in a little moment we should see,
 Rising majestic from a ruined heap,
 The stately spirit that we served of yore."

The serpent turned his subtle deadly eyes
 Upon the spirit, and hissed; and, sick with shame,
 It bowed itself together, and went back
 With hidden face. "This counsel is not good,"
 The other twain made answer; "look, my lord,
 Whereas 'tis evil in thine eyes, in ours
 'Tis evil also; speak, for we perceive
 That on thy tongue the words of counsel sit,
 Ready to fly to our right greedy ears,
 That long for them." And Satan, flattered thus
 (Forever may the serpent kind be charmed
 With soft, sweet words, and music deftly played),
 Replied, "Whereas I surely rule the world,
 Behooves that ye prepare for me a path,
 And that I, putting of my pains aside,
 Go stir rebellion in the mighty hearts
 O' the giants; for He loveth them, and looks
 Full oft complacent on their glorious strength.
 He willeth that they yield, that He may spare;
 But, by the blackness of my loathed den,
 I say they shall not, no, they shall not yield;
 Go, therefore, take to you some harmless guise,
 And spread a rumor that I come. I, sick,
 Sorry, and aged, hasten. I have heard
 Whispers that out of heaven dropped unaware.
 I caught them up, and sith they bode men harm
 I am ready for to comfort them; yea, more,
 To counsel, and I will that they drive forth
 The women, the abhorred of my soul;

Let not a woman breathe where I shall pass,
 Lest the curse falleth, and she bruise my head.
 Friends, if it be their mind to send for me
 An army, and triumphant draw me on
 In the golden car you wot of, and with shouts,
 I would not that ye hinder them. Ah, then
 Will I make hard their hearts, and grieve Him sore
 That loves them, O, by much too well to wet
 Their stately heads, and soil those locks of strength
 Under the fateful brine. Then afterward,
 While He doth reason vainly with them, I
 Will offer Him a pact: 'Great King, a pact,
 And men shall worship Thee, I say they shall,
 For I will bid them do it, yea, and leave
 To sacrifice their kind, so Thou my name
 Wilt suffer to be worshipped after Thine.'"
 "Yea, my lord Satan," quoth they, "do this thing,
 And let us hear thy words, for they are sweet."
 Then he made answer, "By a messenger
 Have I this day been warned. There is a deed
 I may not tell of, lest the people add
 Scorn of a Coming Greatness to their faults.
 Why this? Who careth, when about to slay,
 And slay indeed, how well they have deserved
 Death whom he slayeth? Therefore yet is hid
 A meaning of some mercy that will rob
 The nether world. Now look to it, — 'Twere vain,
 Albeit this deluge He would send indeed,
 That we expect the harvest; He would yet
 Be the Master-reaper; for I heard it said,
 Them that be young and know Him not, and them
 That are bound and may not build, yea, more, their
 wives,
 Whom, suffering not to hear the doom, they keep
 Joyous behind the curtains, every one
 With maidens nourished in the house, and babes