

PAGAN POEMS
By George Moore
Edited by Robert Becker

George Moore (1852-1933) was a creative Irish writer of modernist fiction, memoir, essay, drama and poetry. He was a contributor to several “movements” and is fondly remembered as a purist who made art for art’s sake.

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À I. D'A

À toi que je desire, à toi qui m'a quitté,
J'offre ces quelques vers à défaut des caresses
D'autrefois, car, hélas! Maîtresse des maîtresses,
Je porte encore en moi ta superbe beauté.

Je t'ai tendu la main, demandant charité,
Et tu m'as prodigué des jours dont les richesses
M'ont brisé, des moments pleins de chastes tristesses,
Qui remplirent mon coeur de divine clarté,

C'est pourquoi, voyant bien que jamais de ce monde
Je ne baiserais plus ta tête folle et blonde,
Je donne à ton image un durable séjour,

Car tu liras ton nom sur les premières pages
De ce pauvre roman, qui parle de l'Amour
Mourant dans les lits clairs et les noirs sarcophages.

Sonnet. Spleen

The room is quiet, the fire flickers and burns,
A heavy silence stagnates in the air.
No hate, no love, no hope and no despair,
Nothing: I read and write and think by turns.

Repulsive, inessential sorrow yearns
And looks within mine eyes; the oil lamp flares,
The portrait of my mistress strangely stares,
A few rich flowers are fading in their urns.

Will this go on for ever? Shall I die
One day? I wonder what I'll be when old?
The moon is slowly wandering through the sky.

Oh! dreamt-of mistress lovely to behold,
But alas! lost in perfect purity,
Is there no sin to cheer my heart grown cold?

Ode to a Beggar Girl

Through the crowded city,
Through the tranquil town,
Pale and passionless you wander,
Holding, as the Virgin holds the Child
In the first Italian masters,
Your neglected baby
Pressed against your breast.

There is something awful in your dark
Look of woe beyond mere sorrow;
Now you seem to me
Sorrow typified incarnate, yea,
Girl, you pass across my dreams
Like a wraith before a festival,
Startling joy to grief.

You are very wonderful!
There is something sphinx-like in your face,
Something mystic in its mournfulness
That oppresses me.
Who are you, and what are you?
Were you born of parents like yourself?
Were you nursed upon a bosom
Like the wretched infant who is sleeping
Now amid the rags
Wrapped around your own?
Did you never know a pleasant hour?
Have you never had a glimpse of life?
Did you never think it fair?

These are dreams of fancy:
You are nothing more
Than a dirty beggar bearing
Traces, ah! of beauty past;
You are just as vile and commonplace
As the thousands straying
Daily through our Paris streets.

I can tell your fortune:
You will bear up still a little longer,
Struggling uselessly against your fate,
Nathless certainly the night will come —
There is no escape for you.

Just a look around, a splash, a cry,
Then, a sense of suffocation...
Onward flows the river
Through the night.

* * *

Yea, about a month ago I walked
Quickly down the never-ending
 Rue de Rivoli,
All was grey, the city and the sky,
Coldly blew the wind across the river.
Hurrying fast along, I crossed the Pont
 Louis Philippe, there,

Facing grimly, looking down upon the river,
Stands a low and almost flat-roofed building
Called the Morgue;
Looking down upon the river like a feudal lord's
Castle watching its domain,
Stands a low and flat-roofed building
Called the Morgue.
Never had I thought before to visit
This, the refuge of the miserable,
But a drizzling rain had just begun
As I crossed the bridge,
So by chance it happened that I sought
Shelter in the Morgue —
Shelter in the porch,
Having little taste for Death.

On the wall that hides the ghastly
Spectacle within from the passer
In the street

Lay a lengthy line of photographs.

First upon the list there came a man
Forty years of age or thereabouts,
Common-looking, marked with toil;
He was swollen like a bladder;
By his side I saw what seemed a woman, —
Long and draggling tresses fell
Round her decomposèd face;
Near to her a youth,
Funnily were rolled his eyes
Upward, well cut mouth and chin,
Twenty years of age.
These amused me for a while; I stood
Pensively composing
Strange biographies until I grew
Sorely tempted to pursue the search
Farther; turning to the right I saw,
Through a long extending wall of glass,
Rows of blackest stretchers,
And a corpse covered with a rough
Piece of canvas and a jet of water
Splashing down upon its face;
Just a look sufficed, and then I turned
Terrified to gaze around...

Nothing but a huge stone building
Lighted from above, divided
Into equal parts
By a lofty glass partition,
One belonging to the dead
And the other to the living.
Having satisfied mine eyes
With the general aspect of the place,
Half involuntary I turned, and leaning
Over the iron railing,
Gazed upon the corpse exposed
Unto the public view.

There she lay, a quiet-looking girl!

Heaps of copper-coloured hair
Fell around and shone against the black
Marble stretcher, trailing even on the ground:
Who was she?
Probably a little stitcher
Cruelly deserted .. Who can tell?
May be nothing but a light of love
Lacking clients....
Little matters! still the world goes on
Quite unconscious of its loss.

Thus I mused until my thoughts were broken
By the sudden opening of the door —
By the opening of the deadhouse door,
And you entered:
Now I recognise you perfectly;
You were with the warder,
You were with your children, and you looked
Just a look! The corpse was laid
On the stretcher next the door,
Then you kissed the poor and clammy lips;
Whilst the toddling child
Played a moment with the dripping tresses,
Sad at heart, you took the ringless hand —
Weary, if not sad at heart, you looked, —
Dropped the hand, and seemed to say Alas!
Long I lingered at the door,
Curious to see you leave the Morgue,
Curious to know if you would weep;
But you did not weep,
Very weary, simply
Looking tired of life, you left the Morgue.

Wonderful indeed it is,
Gazing on you now
Begging pennies of the pitying passer,
For an instant to conceive the strange
Chance of human destiny.
What are you? a beggar born to nothing
Save a large inheritance of woe,

Whilst a dilettanti poet I
Gratify the febrile whim
Born of pampered flesh and intellect.
Either form of pleasure is a book
Never to be read by you, methinks
None could teach you either alphabet,
Still it matters little. — Say
Every life is hopeless when we think
Who will know that we have lived
In a hundred years?

Night is falling o'er the city fast,
Beggar girl, I bid you now farewell;
Catch I throw a penny passing on,
Taking up the thread of broken thoughts.
Pleasant thoughts of pleasure,
Friends, and happy hours;
Yet before I leave you I would add
Just a parting word — a last
Word of pity and advice.

"Life," you say, "is hard to bear."
Every day it will grow harder,
Pluck up courage and escape
All this misery and woe:
Death is always kindly, — die!
Think how beautiful your sister looked,
Made angelical with peace,
When she lay extended on the black
Marble stretcher in the Morgue.
Life ignores you,
You are useless, —
You were black-balled out of life,
There is nothing for you here,
Nothing, — only Death!
Follow her example and escape,
She is absolutely clay —
Common clay that gives us worms and flowers,
Flowers that nourish, worms that change again,
Insects ever seeking higher forms,

Animals extending up to Man,
Man aspiring, reaching up to God!
Ever changing, changing ever,
Wandering through the universe
In a long progressive dream,
Till at last the living clay becomes
Once again incarnate
Of the soul of man becoming God.
Life is but a dream,
And creation but a book of dreams.
Centuries hence, a million centuries hence,
You will dream again the dream of life
In a world more perfect and a form more fair.

À une Poitrinaire

We are alone! Listen, a little while,
And hear the reason why your weary smile
And lute-toned speaking is so very sweet
To me, and how my love is more complete
Than any love of any lover. They
Have only been attracted by the grey
Delicious softness of your eyes, your slim
And delicate form, or some such whimpering whim,
The simple pretexts of all lovers, — I
For other reasons. Listen whilst I try
And say. I joy to see the sunset slope
Beyond the weak hour's hopeless horoscope,
Leaving the heavens a melancholy calm
Of quiet colour chanted like a psalm
In mildly modulated phrases; thus
Your life shall fade like a voluptuous
Vision beyond the sight, and you shall die
Like some soft evening's sad serenity...
I would possess your dying hours, — indeed
My love is worthy of the gift. I plead
For them.

Although I never loved as yet,
Methinks that I might love you; I would get
From out the knowledge that the time was brief
That tenderness, whose pity grows to grief,
My dream of love, and yea, it would have charms
Beyond all other passions, for the arms
Of Death are stretched to youward, and he claims
You as his bride. May be my soul misnames
Its passion; love perhaps it is not, yet
To see you fading like a violet,
Or some sweet thought away, would be a strange
And costly pleasure, far beyond the range
Of common man's emotion. Listen! I
Will choose a country spot where fields of rye
And wheat extend in waving yellow plains,

Broken with woodland hills and leafy lanes,
To pass our honeymoon; — a cottage where
The porch and windows are festooned with fair
Green wreaths of eglantine, and look upon
A shady garden where we'll walk alone
In the autumn sunny evenings; each will see
Our walks grow shorter, till at length to thee
The garden's length is far, and thou shalt rest
From time to time, leaning upon my breast
Thy languid lily face. Then later still,
Unto the sofa by the window-sill
Thy wasted body I shall carry, so
That thou mayst drink the last-left lingering glow
Of even, when the air is filled with scent
Of flowers; and my spirit shall be rent
The while with many griefs. like some fair day
That grows more lovely as it fades away,
Gaining that calm serenity and height
Of love it wanted, as the solemn night
Steals forward, thou shalt sweetly fall asleep
For ever and for ever; I shall weep
A day and night large tears upon thy face,
Laying thee then beneath a rose-red place
Where many flowers blossom, bloom, and bud,
And long thanksgiving for the certitude
That none shall know or see thee e'er again,
That no man's soul shall even hope, so vain
Would be the longing, I shall ever make.
Though time takes all things, this it shall not take, —
Remembrance; and my future years shall be
Filled with the perfume of thy memory.

A Parisian Idyl

This is the twilight of the summer dead,
The last few days of sunny weather; all
The flowers are faded, and the autumn woods
Are filled with yellowing tones of richest brown
And russet red, and here and there have gone
To gold more brilliant than the saffron hair
Of any English maiden. Shall we take
The express that starts at twelve for Fontainebleau,
And pass a pleasant and a charming week
Together? — and the time is opportune.
For he is shooting grouse a thousand miles
From here, and by a very lucky chance
I have at least two hundred francs to spend.
You — you never want for money since
The count, your husband's death, although he died
Leaving to you but little, nothing save
A wretched pittance, some ten thousand francs
A year. I blame you not, for it is quite
Impossible to live in modern Paris
Upon a fortune so inadequate.
You must have horses, carriages, a house
Luxuriantly furnished and — But nay,
'Tis pleasanter to talk of Fontainebleau.
You have not seen the grand old castle, filled
With memories of kings and queens long dead,
And where Napoleon signed the famous act
Of abdication; and no words can paint
The beauty of the park: its avenues
Of close-cut trees and lordly terraces
Broken with artificial waters, groups
Of sculpture, flights of stately marble stairs.
And then there is the forest beautiful
Of right divine. Summer has seen decay
Of roses white and red; and if the air
Still tastes of June, and if the skies are bright,
'Tis only of a soft reflected glow,
Shed of a summer over now and set

For ever: summer has seen decay, so come
And see the falling of the autumn leaves.

The days will pass like minutes, — we will stroll
After a pleasant breakfast through the park
And feed the greedy fish and floating swans;
Our hands and fingers they shall lingering touch,
Breaking the bread; those tender movements half
Involuntary that lovers know: and there
Are Bouchers in the castle, pure chefs-d'oeuvre
Of decorative art: how different
From all that hideousness in the opera house!
And you will bring your horses with you, — we
Will ride together through the forest, watching
The falling of the leaves: you do not know
How beautiful you are when standing whip
In hand, holding your riding habit's skirt
Over your arm, the tiny patent leather
Boots showing beneath your trousers.... How I love
To take the little foot and lift you right
Into the saddle! We shall ride adown
The leafy avenues, restraining tight
In hand our horses briskly cantering
Along, and quietly we shall fall to dream
That everything is fading like the leaves,
Until the sudden stopping of our steeds
Awakes us from our half-sad reveries.

And then my arm will softly pass around
Your waist, and you will backward lean your head,
And softly, silently our lips shall meet;
And when the sunset seems to sleep amid
The distant clouds and forest, slowly we
Shall turn our horses' heads to homeward, still
Watching the falling of the autumn leaves;
And drinking deeply, in subdued delight.
The soundless music of the underskies.
A little dinner shall be ready set
Awaiting by a sparkling bright wood fire,
And we shall dine alone: a little soup,

A bit of fish, a partridge and a roast,
A vegetable and a bunch of grapes,
And afterwards some kissing and a chat
Beside the fire, over the coffee; then
By nine o'clock the servant shall announce
The carriage at the door. The purple vault
Shall glisten gloriously with golden stars —
The moon shall light the world, and we shall drive
About the autumn forest, leaning close
Against each other warmly wrapped within
The rug, the long-haired wolfskin rug, your hand
In mine, reclining back upon the same
Cushion, and breathing with an equal breath
The large and infinite sweetness of the night;
And then there shall be sweeter afterwards,
Of which I will not speak.... You smile, and blush,
And kiss me... Well, to-morrow shall we go
And pass a pleasant week together? Life
Is pleasant, and a very pleasant thing
It is to live, although from time to time
Its current runs vexatiously across
Love-wrecking shoals and reefs; nous aimons bien,
But still we have our trials: you are forced
To dine alone with him three times a month.
I blame you not at all — I know you must
Have horses, carriages, a pleasant house,
Those sweet superfluous necessities
Of life — no lover's kiss could compensate
For want of these; you dine three times a month
Alone with him, and at your bank you find
Paid quarterly some twenty thousand francs.
Society is quieted with balls
And parties, a charity or two, and none
Suspects, for it is done so easily —
With such simplicity. You hide with tact
As much as possible the nasty side,
And make things easy for me, and I strive
To see but little, and that little soon
Forget, for when I dine alone with you
Your kisses chase the hateful thought away

That he is paying for the wine I drink.

Come, sweetest, I will telegraph to-night
For rooms, and we will pass a pleasant week
Together, watching the falling of the leaves.

Sappho

SCENE I.

An Ionic-columned room, Sappho seated amid her attendants who are engaged in completing her toilette. On one side a porphyry table with silver boxes and vases containing odours, essences, pomatums, pins, depilatories, and the little golden scissors. In the middle of the room a bronze dolphin bestridden by a Cupid, blowing from his nostrils two jets of water, one hot, the other cold, into two oriental alabaster basins, into which the women dip alternately the white sponges. Through the purple-curtained windows, between the tops of the laurels grown at the foot of the court-wall, is seen a strip of azure sky.

SAPPHO.

Laïs, not so entwine the golden thread
Within the hair, making a single knot
Beneath the head of all the tresses. Let
Fall loosely one, to wander fitfully
Adown the shoulder. Scropas so arranged
My tresses when I posed for Venus. Thou,
Electra, the gold hairpin ornament
Set higher, and the scent of norris root
Shed sparingly; and thou, O Flora, bring
My lyre, for I would sing the song I made
Last night when we walked wandering by the sea.
But canst thou tell me if Megara goes
Unto the feast of Zeno? words are said
That Hylas loves her not, and that she craves
On bended knees his pity.

FLORA.

Nought is sure!
For all her soul is given up to him
Who will not listen to her sighs and words
Of love, who turns with loathing from her kiss.

SAPPHO.

'Tis strange indeed, for sweeter than a dream

Is that pale face of hers; her breasts are fair
And sweeter in the mouth than any rose
For scent and taste. He must indeed be chill,
And in his veins the blood must poorly pour,
If passion flows not molten-mad between
The flesh and spirit, when her love-warmed breath
Falls faint upon his lips.

LAÏS.

He loveth thee!

SAPPHO.

Poor dreamer ! his desire has nought with mine.

[SAPPHO *takes the lyre from FLORA and sings.*

"That man, God-like, seems to me sitting by thee,
Who alone doth draw to him all thy passion,
Hears thee midwhile whispering tender speaking,
Seeing thee smiling;

"This is what my shuddering senses tortures,
Now I see thee, beautiful, gazing on thee,
All my love-words falter to feeble nothings,
Broken in sighings.

"Subtle flames stray molten in liquid fires
Through my blood-ways, blind are my eyes, and dizzy
Are my stunned ears, deafened with sounds of murmurs
Swimming around me.

"Chilling dew-damps over my flesh are breaking,
And a heart born shivering through me wanders,
I am wan as grass in the summer places,
And I am dying."

[Enter HYLAS.]

SAPPHO.

What! is it thou, O Hylas, who now comes
The third time of this morn, to weep and pray
Here at my feet? Hylas, the well beloved,
And favoured of the Gods with gifts divine
Of loveliness; and Hylas, art thou not
The one adored of sweet Megara, queen
Of the Hetiries?

HYLAS.

Sappho, nay, I know
Not this, nor that, nor can I speak of aught
But one sweet word. I come to ask
Some peace of thee; if it be Death or love
I care not: there is nothing glad in life.

SAPPHO.

'Tis strange and sad that thou shouldst love me thus:
Come, sit against my feet — I fain would know
For what thou lovest me.

HYLAS.

Love knoweth not,
He runs with sightless eyes. How dear it is,
Here in this doubtful light, to lie head laid
Upon thy knees, the perfume of thy flesh
Drinking, as through the textures of thy robe
It steals like wafted incense!

SAPPHO.

Is it then
Only the sweetness of my loveliness
That from Megara turns thy love to me?

HYLAS.

I love thee as the drinker loves the wine
That maddens him — I love thee as I love
Sometimes the moon when, like a floating flower,
She swims and swoons, and fills the languid night
With luminous languors and perfumed poison'd air,
And sickening ecstasy and maddening dreams
That melt my soul like vapour into air,
And leave me chill of an unreached desire!

SAPPHO.

And when didst thou first love me? Tell me, sweet!

HYLAS.

When first thy grave grey eyes like sunlight fell
Upon my face, the dream of dreaming dreams
Arose before me robed in sacred white
Immortally serene. Rememberest thou,
O Sappho, the soft night we walked alone
Amid the shadows of thy garden? Then
Leaning to breathe the perfume of thy throat,
A pitying breeze half swept across my face
A tress of loosened hair; within its night,
The deep luxuriant darkness of thine hair,
I saw the country of my dream: a hot
Exotic world where forests spread at large,
And mystic flowers swing their censers-cups
Across the heavy perfumed silence, where
My soul floats upward in delight as thine
Across the molten murmurs of thy song.

SAPPHO.

Thou art a strange young dreamer. Once I might
Have loved thee; now, my love seeks other ends
Than thee.

HYLAS.

My life is as a rose within thine hand:
Thy breath like April's breeze may set its bud
On flower, or like a hard October wind
Scatter its leaves in pale flocks to the air...

[Enter a slave.]

SLAVE.

Megara, the fair Samian, awaits,
To make thee homage of great offerings,
O Sappho!

SAPPHO (*to Hylas*).

She doth come to thee.

HYLAS.

I will
Go hence....

SAPPHO.

Stay yet a little while, I do
Beseech.

HYLAS.

I will go hence to my despair,
And to the sorrows of a wasted life,
And mourn until the hour when death shall come
And calm these tears with sleep. I will go hence.

[Exit HYLAS and enter MEGARA with slaves bearing presents.]

MEGARA (*throwing herself at Sappho's feet*).

Love and fair wishes and much tenderness,

Which the immortal Gods have ever held
Higher in place than riches of the land,
I bring as a befitting crown to set
Upon the forehead of my gifts. I lay
Here at thy feet, O Sappho, delicate robes
Of gold, by the Phoenician merchants brought
O'er many perilous miles of burning sea,
Where sultry summer hushed the slaves, back-bowed
Across the labouring oars, beyond the reach
Of the awakening lash; these jewels once
Belonged to Princes, they were brought to me
At costly sacrifice of life, they came
From further side of desperate deserts where
Is nought but sky and yellow wastes of sand.
The wealth I lay before thee is the life
Of many nations, many provinces;
It was the meat and bread of shepherd tribes
Who drove their flocks across the mountain brows,
Living their simple life. The fire and sword
Were loosed to prey like hordes of ravening wolves
Upon these stricken tribes, who fled their homes,
Leaving their fruitful fields and olive groves
Unto the pitiless lust of conquerors,
To live in forests and the mountain caves
Of Scythian wilderness.

Much else was done
That my fair body might not ever know
A stain or soil; I held the world rose-wise
Between my lips, and shed its leaves in kisses.
Therefore, O Sappho, let these gifts of mine
Take new price in thine eyes, esteeming them
Beyond their value as symbolical
Of love and hate, of power and feebleness,
Of wealth and poverty, of joy and pain.

SAPPHO.

Thou hast no love for me, thou speakest words,
Fair specious words that know but little love.
Not gracious are thy offerings, since they crave

Some other gift than love for what they give.

MEGARA.

O Sappho, thou who boldest in thine hands
The cup wherein are mixed my life and death
In equal measure, veil not Pity's face,
Down throwing one against the feet of love,
Giving the other with a ruthless hand
Unto the thirsting lips of Death. I come
Not here with words that have no faith to keep,
But with the fair outspoken simpleness
Of much o'erburdened misery that finds
No honied words to seek and beg for grace.
I ask of thee, O Sappho, but one thing, —
Thine heart has ever held it valueless.
I love young Hylas: ah! thou knowest well
What bitterness is love; mine is a flame
That burns the very air I breathe, and like a leaf
My soul is shaken, and in every vein
Blood shivers, where the storm of my desire
Has passed, as greying spaces out at sea
Glimmer beneath the wind. I can but cast
Myself upon the breast of dreams to find
Relief of this hard agony of love.
Give him to me, and a great wealth of love,
O'erweighing gold as feather in the scale,
Will be to thee a large inheritance,
And gratitude as guerdon wilt thou reap,
Whose over-ripened sheaves will ever pour
Sweet harvesting of love around thy feet,
And all my days will be to thee a hymn
Of thankfulness for this large-hearted love,
And unto men my tongue shall sing thy praise,
Sappho, as holiest of women. Yea!
Thy name shall blossom, and to lute and lyre
Be sung before the altars of the Gods,
For have they not as truly righteous
Upheld but those who made much sacrifice?

SAPPHO.

I often sang the bitterness of love
To thee, in words that fell between the tones
Of lyre accompaniment like star fires through
Moon-sweetened air, and after singing time,
When all my passion-lifted spirit leaned
To love, unfearing what the gods must fear,
And spoke the burden of my feverish dreams,
Thou ever didst turn with loathing and with scorn
Away, and all my prayers were but as seed
Thrown on a barren ground, that bore no fruit
But hate; and yet thou kneelest at the feet
Of whom thou ne'er didst pity. But 'tis I,
Sappho, whom Hylas loves, and were I turned
To mercy, could I modulate and tune
The chords of his desire in harmony
With thee?

MEGARA.

Thy words are arrows barbed with flame,
That pierce my weak heart like the winter winds
The wounded fawn belated on the hills.
The Gods, in their derision, give, alas!
What joy my life beholds as fair, to thee
To waste and ruin as a worthless thing.
To-day the world is fair, for Spring o'erflows
The land with songs and blossoms, but I am wan
For him of whom my spirit dreams until
The dream becomes incarnate of delight.
I ask no gift impossible: thou hast
No love for him — then leave thy place to me
From sunset unto sunrise; he will see
Me not, he will believe 'tis thou. Oh, give
Me, Sappho, this imperfect night of love!

SAPPHO.

Askest thou death of life, or night of day?

Delight of pain, or sweet of brine, or joy
Of grief, or fruit of sand? Wherefore then ask
This thing of me? Shall I tread pain to wine
For bridal cup, and sing my sorrow's pang
To bridal measure, and with my desire
Weave garland for another's brow? Take hence
These gold-spun raiments, take them hence and go!
Take hence thy wealth, and lay it at his feet,
Buying the love that thou wouldst buy of me.

MEGARA.

O Sappho! turn not with a hardened heart
Against my offerings. I another gift
Will lay to them, and with united worth
Purchase this one thing, soul of my desire!
Here at thy feet, O cruel Sappho! I
Make unto thee my body full in flower
And perfect bloom of ripened womanhood,
As bond-slave bounden to thy plainest will,
A thing to please the pleasure of thy strange
Passion, a rose to cherish and to kill
With kisses keener than the wind or sea,
And bitter-sweet with aching softness, stung
With all the sultry perfumes of desire.

SAPPHO.

With hate and love an equal balance may
Be made whilst death be in the scale unlaid
For weight deciding. Bow, Megara, down
Thine head, and then uplift it looking straight
Towards the ruling Gods, whom we hold high
In reverence and love, and call on them
To witness this thine oath: that when the world
Awakes fair-flushed beneath the kisses quick
Of morning, thou wilt tremble not at all,
Asking no respite, but with faithful hand
Wilt pitiless cast thy lover's life to death.
There is the dagger. Swear thine oath to heaven!

MEGARA.

Hush, Sappho, veil thy head with mourning veil,
And humbly pray repentance of the gods,
For surely his scarce summer sun warmed life
Is not decreed in instant prime to death.
O Sappho! think of his fair face, so sweet
And softly fair, and those full fleshly limbs
Of perfect moulded grace against thee leaned,
Aweary with the wan vicissitudes
Of passion: the instinct love of womanhood
Would rise within thy breast, and thou wouldst sheath
The dagger set against his rose-white throat
And stain its snow with flush of kisses. Why,
O Sappho! ask of me what even thou
Couldst never do? I cannot give to death
The life that I would consecrate to love!
I bare my body to thee: there ensheath
The teeth and claws of passion, till I be
As dead before thee, but, O Sappho! spare
This one sweet life!

SAPPHO.

Too pitiful is thy love:
I would do all things for a thing desired.
When once a love is no more mine, what worth
Is it to me? Far better see it dead
Than see it turn to loathing. Is it not
My body's beauty that he loves? 'Tis these
Sweet bosoms he will dream of, and not thine.

MEGARA.

O Sappho! Pity! I am weak as snow
In love's consuming hands. I am as one
Dragged onward by foul demon dreams to edge,
Divined but by the thunder-throated sea,
Of unseen precipice engulfed in night.

I cast my arms in air, but nothing reach
For help, but the loose yielding breeze.

SAPPHO.

Take this, —
Here is my dagger: it will shield thy love
Against the loathing glances of his eyes.
Thou shalt lie in my place to night, and from
The sundown to the dawning thy desire
Shall be all wholly thine; let Hylas die
In his delight, — the waking would be cruel.

SCENE II.

The sleeping chamber of Sappho, a marble-walled room divided by an immense richly embroidered curtain hanging by large rings from an iron rod, with bread-fruit ornaments at each end; against the curtain a low couch raised upon lion's claws, upon which Megara sits half reclining, gazing upon Hylas, who lies by her side in a profound slumber. Close by her hand at the head of the couch is a small tripod on cloven feet, upon it an inlaid casket with a jewelled dagger. The floor is of multicoloured marble; on the left, nearly in the middle of the room, placed on a table of a precious wood, is a female figure holding in her extended arms a mirror of polished metal. On the right is a statue of Sappho.

MEGARA.

Hath heaven aught more fair to show than this?
Sweet breast, sweet limbs, sweet hands, sweet hair.
Are they not end enough for all desire,
Though it be set with wings that darken sun
And starry throng? O Earth! most fruitful mother!
O perfect mother! Mother ever bountiful
Of gifts! What sweeter than thy lakes and streams?
What goodlier than thy sun-unfolded fields
Of sky, thy corn fields and thy sea fields hoar,
And vineyards waxing from the green to red
Fruit in their sun appointed time? What form
Diviner than these supple moulded limbs,
These passion-parted lips, so good to kiss,
This tender throat half hidden in the hair,

And these full arms entwined around me yet?
What is there holier than thy nakedness,
Implacable relentless Venus, born
Of sea-foam and the bitterer foam of blood?
Thy shrine is built upon the world's great want.
Thy worshipper is man, and thy hands fill
The measure of his pleasure and his pain,
For thou art one with life and life is one
With thee.

SAPPHO (*heard singing outside*).

"Have not high Gods longing with loathing given,
And our sleepings woven around with dreamings
And the whole world crowned with a crown of sorrow
Filling it full with....

MEGARA (*interrupting*).

The moon looks not upon the daytime yet,
But sits as a yellow-faced Egyptian queen
Filled with the languors of a southern love
Amid the purple starrèd draperies
That fold her throne. Then why doth Sappho come?
What need the imminent hour of messenger?

SAPPHO (*continuing*).

"Thorns of passion, weakness, and fervid willing,
Hope, the green shoot grafting of weary grieving,
Love, the sense-smit shuddering of the spirit,
Weeping and laughter...

MEGARA.

The stars grow pale as aspen leaves, the night
Dies fast, and round her trailing garments cling
My dreams like children round a dying mother.

(*looking at him*)

God making thee just dreamt of woman, sweet,
Thou shouldst e'er lie head laid across my knees,
And dream adown the shifting agonies
Of Love's steep seasons, seeing the green flower catch
On red and pleasure wane to weariness,
In dreaming passing interludes of love
And weariness to pleasure wax again
In molten mood of passion's full-tide height.

SAPPHO (*singing again*).

"Weary are they, sorrowful are their dreamings
Whom the high Gods stricken with perfect vision
Making soul-will infinite, and the senses
Mortal and weakling."

MEGARA.

The measure of thy days is meted out,
Thy sweet young life is taken as a prey,
And strangest loves are knelt to and adored
At Lesbian shrine with thee for sacrifice.
These lips will give delight to maiden mouth
No more; thine eyes will never long
And look with lingering fancies filled of love
Again; no girl will ever pass her hands and hold
Unto her languid lips this heavy hair,
Laying her head caressingly against
This cheek. Ay, thou art verily too sweet
For death. Just here, beneath this red breast-fruit
The heart lies trembling like a fluttering bird.
Poor heart! that ne'er was mine, the dagger's point
Down-turned lies over like a hawk above
A brooding dove, thine eyes must never ope
To look on me... I would not see thine eyes...
And I will veil mine own, lest sudden fear
The steel's sharp point should turn aside from Death...
Why wilt thou not look up? Could those sweet eyes
Avert thy doom! The dagger trembles, quick.

Courage... Poor heart of mine!

(She kills him.)

*** * ***

He shuddered once.
Yea, it is done! I can now turn my head;
He started not, no groan slipped from his lips:
Yea, he is dead; I can unveil my face,
He cannot see me now, for he is dead.

SAPPHO (*heard outside singing*).

"Through the twilight shadows of fading evening,
By the shore-strand, glimmering in the rays of
Purple sunset, purpling all the ocean
Cliffs and the headlands.

"Women dream there, sorrowful women, dreaming,
Gazing sunward whispering sweetest secrets,
Hands on hands laid, shivering with the languors
Born of their passion.

"Others white-robed, sister-like, wander slowly
Through the dark woods filled with the apparitions,
Mixing fearful frothing of pleasure unto
Weeping of torments."

Sonnet. The Corpse

Wondering I gaze upon each lineament
Defaced by worms and swollen in decay,
And watch the rat-gnawed golden ringlets play
Around the sunken outline, shrivelled, bent

In hideous grimace. The bosom rent
Is opening rose-like 'neath the sun's warm ray,
And nature, smiling on the new-born May,
Doth own this corpse a part of her intent.

I try to lift it from the ground, but lo!
The poor head falls. A locket thus detached
Lies in my hand; fear seizes hold on me, —

I gaze upon it, trembling, for I know
The trinket well; one word thereon is scratched:
I read, and, bending, kiss her reverently.

Ballad of a Lost Soul

One night a ghost laid hands on me,
 The sorrowful spirit of my dream,
And led me wandering o'er the sea,
 A sea divided by a gleam.
The wind scarce moved the burnt black heath,
 On dry cliff's edge, the fluctuant tide
In green foam-whitened waves beneath,
 Curled low against the steep rock's side.

He sate me on a narrow ledge,
 And at my feet he laid him there;
I could not flee, upon the ridge
 Of life he held me. In despair
I took my soul from out my heart,
 And flung it from me without care:
Skyward it flew like bow-shot dart,
 Or wrist-cast hawk that springs in air.

Then, swooping into sudden sight,
 On straightened wings across my eyes,
Then wheeling, fled from left to right,
 Sailing incessantly the skies;
Thro' pathless wastes of heaven unknown
 My soul did wander thus in fear,
Seeking the yet unrisen sun,
 Not knowing whither side to steer.

And sitting on the dusky height
 Over the moon-unbeaconed sea,
I watched my soul's unguided flight
 In terror and expectancy;
Until a star arose above
 The long wall of the green sea-line, —
I knew it was the planet of love
 By its cold crescent crystalline.

Astarte-ward my soul then fell,

Beyond the light of Love's bent face,
Like passing star, from heaven to hell
 A down the interlying space;
Betrothed unto new bridal bed
 A bought slave kissed, and drugged, and sold.
Poppy and red rose chapleted,
 Cheek filleted and robed in gold.

* * *

The demon still glares in mine eyes,
 Stretched lying at my pale weak feet,
He counts on finger-tips my sighs,
 And keeps my tears. He laughs a sweet
Low laugh within my stricken ears,
 And leads me weeping in control
Along this shore whose waves are tears,
 Until his shadow grows my soul.

Sonnet. Chez Moi

My white Angora cats are lying fast
Asleep, close curled together, and my snake,
My many-coloured Python, is awake,
Crawling about after a two-months' fast.

The parrot screams from time to time my last
Love's name; the atmosphere doth softly ache
With burning perfume, lazily I rake
And sift the smouldering embers of the past.

The women I have loved arise, and pass
Before me like the sun rays in a glass, —
Alice and Lizzy, Iza and Juliette;

And some are blushing, some are pale as stone:
Heigho! The world spins in a circle yet...
My life has been a very pleasant one.

A Love Letter

Iza, do you remember that your sweet
 White body was surrendered to my tears?
Do you remember when I kissed your feet —
 Your dove-like feet, and then your shell-like ears?

But well we knew, alas! my own sweet lady,
That never have the stars of love shone steady.

Have you another lover? Is his love
 Sweeter than mine, and is it what you sought?
Nay, Iza, tell me all these things, and prove
 To me the vanity of human thought.

For well I know, alas! my own sweet lady,
That never have the stars of love shone steady.

We met by common chance, as leaflet meets
 A leaflet in a wind or stream, and we
Remained together whilst the July heats
 Over the roses wafted listlessly.

But well we knew, alas! my own sweet lady,
That never have the stars of love shone steady.

You left me soon; but nay, I will not tire
 Your ears with any weak and vapourish
Lamenting, for you gave me my desire,
 You never thwarted any febrile wish.

But well we knew, alas! my own sweet lady,
That never have the stars of love shone steady.

You were so perfect that my soul should have
 In dreaming of your beauty found enough,
And carried down unto the sunless grave
 Unsullied all your many gifts of love.

But, ah! you know, alas! my own sweet lady,
That never have the stars of love shone steady.

If I have been not faithful, still I think
 Of you, but there have been disgraceful days,
Shameful discordant days that did not link
 The present to the holy past I praise.

But well you know, alas! my own sweet lady,
That never have the stars of love shone steady.

For these false frailties I humbly crave
 Your fair forgiveness, for I only sinned
Because the flesh is weak, regrets will lave
 My body purer than the mountain wind.

Ah! well you know, alas! my own sweet lady,
That never have the stars of love shone steady.

Have you another lover? Tell me all, —
 Yea, even that you love him; I can bear
To hear the worst, knowing that love must gall
 Your passions just a little, here and there.

For well I know, alas! my own sweet lady,
That never have the stars of love shone steady.

I thank you for your love, and whilst things change,
 And men fight hard for glory, love and fame,
My thoughts shall dream, and dreaming scarcely range
 Beyond the sacred precincts of your name.

For know you not, my own, my lovely lady,
In skies of dream the stars of love shine steady?

Sonnet. Used Up

PART I.

Yea, I am sick of women, one and all;
And thankfully I take my leave of vows
And lips and tresses, bodies, hands and brows,
For verily love tastes to me like gall.

At last I am free, and now your tiresome thrall
Is broken, and my thoughts like loosened boughs
Spring back against the light, the spirit cows
No longer, and the fleshly fetters fall.

Yea, I am sick of scent and patent leather shoes,
Silk stockings, large cravats, and jewelry,
And all this delicate life of love-abuse.

It is a weak and drivelling thing to be
The boudoir blossom that the ladies use
And then keep faded in their diary.

PART II.

A Richmond villa with a close-cut lawn,
A wife, a well-stocked kitchen garden lined
With fruit trees, stables and coach-house just behind,
Is certainly the prize I should have drawn

In life; indeed, I willingly would pawn
All this for that, for verily I find
Vice tiresome and stale, — my flesh has sinned
Enough. Before the vilest lust I yawn.

I would relieve the poor when times were hard,
Amid the congregation sing the psalm
On Sundays, and attend the vestry-board.

Such seems to me a perfect dream of life, —
And then at last to die in Christian calm,

Amid my children, and my aged wife.

La Maîtresse Maternelle

An artist's studio. A large room lighted from above, with doors opening upon a garden. A quantity of furniture in different styles scattered over a Turkey carpet, low-cushioned seats, deep divans, Italian cabinets and inlaid tables. On the right a piano draped with a rich Indian shawl; on the left a fireplace and small writing-table. The walls are covered with innumerable studies, old tapestries and mirrors.

Enter LA COMTESSE DE BEAUSAC.

THE COUNTESS.

Not here! But it is only two o'clock:
I said at three. The fault is mine, or rather
My watch's. Still I think that I will wait,
Although it be for nothing, save the joy
Of loitering through the saddest of farewells,
For I would muse and dream a moment here,
Collecting every straying memory
Upon this hour.

(Sitting down.)

So all is finished now!
I was deceived in nothing, for I knew
That all would end as it has ended — nought
Was hidden from me, and I make no false
Complaint. I loved that boy as verily
His mother never loved him. Did I not
Assist him in his bitter poverty.
When he was friendless? Is not his success
Half owing to my efforts? With what pride
I watched each step he made, and what delight
It was to be his benefactress!
For when I knew him, years ago, he used
To work at pictures which he only sold
For sixty or a hundred francs; I bought
Them secretly from all the dealers. Well
I can recall to mind his studio,
High up beneath the slates: how cold it was
In winter! and how suffocating hot
In summer! yet it seemed a paradise
To me. I often think of it, for there

I held him for the first time in my arms;
And these are very sweet remembrances,
That compensate for other hateful years.
But everything must end; and it has ended
Scarcely too soon, for verily my hair
Is filled with silver, and in three years hence
I shall be old for love; it finished not
Too soon, for otherwise he would have learned
To loathe me.

(Getting up.)

All is over now, except
To say good-bye. I wonder where he is?
But it is only two o'clock: I am before
My time.

(Going to the window.)

How sweet the garden smells! the sun
Is shining softly; I will go and bid
Sadly a long farewell to all my flowers.

[Exit by the window.]

Enter ALBERT DE CRÉMONT.

(Looking at his watch.)

'Tis half-past two; in half an hour or there-
Abouts she will be here. I shall explain
The matter simply. Often she has said
That lovers live to see the hour when lips
Instead of hands are given. Why not part
To-day if we must part some day? A chance
Is offered me to settle down in life:
I cannot marry her, and every man
Must marry — there is time for everything —
And I have loved her well these many years;
Better perhaps than I shall ever love
Again, for she has been so very kind,
So full of sweetness for me, and the five
Delicious years of love that we have passed
Together are so many delicate chains
That bind me; every day arises now
Distinct before mine eyes, and every night, —

The parties where we danced, our walks along
The seaside, where we used to sit amid
The rocks, and in the fields; our dinners here,
The whispering and the chatting by the fire,
And then the excursion that we made last year
Through Italy. How happy we have been!
And I am sorry all must change. These rooms
Will soon be sold: I bid them now farewell!
There is her seat, the sofa where she used
To sit, — these cushions where she laid her head,
These chairs, these tiger-skins, this table where
She used to place her work-basket, and here
I find the book that she is reading, half
The leaves are yet uncut. But these regrets
Are vain: there is no use in dreaming o'er
The past — the future will be pleasanter
And purer: am I not engaged to Blanche,
The only girl I ever really loved?
Her heart is lighter than a bird, her mouth
Is redder than a rose. How simply chaste
She seemed the other day, her brown hair loosed
Into a falling bunch that hung adown
Her dress of white muslin. She gave her hand
And spoke so sweetly, showing me her flowers
In the conservatory. I feel I love
Her — certainly I love her: who could help
Loving her innocence? and she shall be
My wife, and very soon... But I am still
Another woman's lover... Ah! how weak,
How miserably weak, how very feebly weak!
But this shall end at once.

(Looking at his watch.)

'Tis nearly three;
'Tis clear she is not coming here to-day, —
Then I will go to her... it is not quite
Five minutes' walk, not more; yes, I will go
And tell her everything.

(Going out.)

What will she say?
She is, I think and hope, a little tired

Of me; if so, it will be easier said.

[Exit.

Enter the COUNTESS.

Has he forgotten me? He cometh not,
For he is sitting by her side, and thinks
Of nothing save her presence. She is young
And delicately simple as a flower,
And I am old... What bitterness is this!
My heart is aching like a wounded bird,
And I am very weary of my life,
For age is overtaking me. Dear God!
'Tis terrible to think that there should be
No sweet returning. If I had my youth,
How happy we might be: alas!
'Tis time that separates us. Yes, I love
That boy, and there is nothing in the world
For me except my love!

(Going to the glass.)

But am I not
A handsome woman still? — there are in truth
No wrinkles in my face. What matter one,
Or two, or three grey hairs? at twenty some
Are grey.

(Turning away.)

But, this, alas! is very vain.
I thought that I had crushed and trampled down
My passions, and I thought I was prepared
To bear my sorrow: I am very weak.

*(She bursts out crying: after a pause, with
forced calm,)*

But nay, I will be stronger: all is over;
I know it; I am reconciled, and none
Shall know I suffer.

(Turning over some music on the piano,)

What is here? His songs!
And all addressed to me. Here are the first
Verses he made for me; I love them well,
For none has ever sung them save myself.

(She goes to the piano and sings.)

"La nuit est pleine de silence,
Ainsi qu'une immense douleur,
Et dans une douce indolence
La lune dort comme une fleur.

"Je suis ton amant, et ta blonde
Gorge tremble sous mon baiser,
Et le feu de l'amour inonde
Nos deux cœurs sans les apaiser.

"Rien ne peut durer; mais ta bouche
Est telle qu'un fruit fait de sang,
Tous passe, mais ta main me touche
Et je me donne en frémissant.

"Douce maîtresse, écoute: J'aime
À caresser tes longs cheveux,
Et je ne vois dans le ciel même
Que ton cœur, ton corps, et tes yeux."

Enter ALBERT hurriedly.

Alas! alas! I cannot; but indeed
It is no fault of mine — my courage failed
Me, that is all: I was determined quite
To tell her, but my resolution went,
And here I am as helpless as a child.
I do not know how everything will end,
And care but little, for I cannot change
Myself. I love that woman — that is all:
'Tis folly if you will, but it is so...
I know not what to do.

*(He falls into a chair and Marie leaves the piano
and approaches without being heard.)*

MARIE.

But you must tell
Me all your sorrows...

ALBERT (*starting*).

Who is this? 'tis you...
How came you here? I thought you would not come
Again.

MARIE.

And why?

ALBERT.

I scarcely know: I think
You do not like this studio...

MARIE.

I think
I have been to see you in a poorer place:
Have you forgotten quite Montmartre?

ALBERT.

Ah! no
The little studio, underneath the slates.
You used to come and see me all the way,
Five flights of stairs. How happy we were then!

MARIE.

Are you not happy here?

ALBERT.

Perhaps; but list:
I only know I love you, Marie, — all
My dreams, my thoughts, all sentiments of life

And death you gave me, and I have become
Only a part of you.

MARIE.

I know you love
Me; you have been the sweetest and the best
Lover a woman ever kissed, and yet
The time will come when we shall meet as friends.

ALBERT.

But there have been lovers who did not part.

MARIE.

Perhaps, but such is not our lot, alas!
You know that we must say farewell for ever —
To-day.

ALBERT (*laughing*).

Of course, farewell; we are indeed
No longer lovers.

MARIE.

Nay; you must not jest.

ALBERT (*laughing*).

I must not jest, Marie? I never dreamt
Of jesting!

MARIE.

Have a little pity; yea,
I know the truth.

ALBERT (*anxiously*).

What truth?

MARIE.

Your marriage!

ALBERT.

Who
Has told you this? I swear that it is false:
I never loved but you. — It is a lie!

MARIE.

I know the truth!

ALBERT (*hiding his face in his hands*).

I cannot marry her.

MARIE.

You must not weep, indeed — there is no use
In weeping: all have duties to perform,
And this is one of yours....

ALBERT.

To say good-bye?

MARIE.

Yea, even so!

ALBERT.

You want to rid yourself
Of me; I know you: this is some caprice,
A passionate whim of yours. And is he dark
Or fair? and who is this Adonis? — some

Dear friend of mine, for it is always so.

MARIE.

I have no other wish except to see
You happy, prosperous, and beloved by all
Who know you.

ALBERT.

I am happy here.

MARIE.

Do you remember in the ball-room, when
After the waltz we went to sit beneath
The laurels, how you leaned and suddenly
We kissed the first sweet kisses? All the night
I lay awake considering what were best
To do. I reasoned well and strove against
Temptation, but my love was very strong,
For after many years of loveless life
'Tis harder to resist and firmly turn
Away from gladness, and refuse to touch
The lips that you have kissed a thousand times
In dream. I knew that all must pass away
And sadly, but my heart said only this:
"Accept the last chance offered you — accept!
Your life is empty, you have only wealth,
And wealth is not enough." I did accept,
And I have not regretted; but I grow .
Too old for you. To-day your kisses are
A lover's, but in five years hence they will
Be nothing but a son's; and you will spare
Me this humiliation. Let us say
Good-bye.

ALBERT.

Nay, ask me not: alas! I can

Do nothing, for my love is as a child's.
I would that we were lying fast asleep
Together in some quiet tomb afar
From all this trouble.

(With passion.)

Tell me, will you die
With me? and is not this occasion quite
Enchanting, — in this chamber hung with silk,
Encumbered everywhere with vases, flowers,
Venetian mirrors, Chinese ornaments,
And Turkish lamps? On either side of this
Deep crimson sofa we will light and place
Two altar candles, and then lying down,
Not coiled together, but in one of those
Holy and simple poses that we often
See sculptured on the tombs in churches, breathe
Our souls away.

MARIE.

You dream of lovely dreams.
Alas! a modern lover never ends
So perfectly. Your Blanche — you see I know
Her name — is very sweet, and you will learn
To love her better...

ALBERT.

No, I gave what love
I had to give; I have no more.

MARIE.

My dear,
I am to-day your mother, my desire
Is only that I may assist and help
You towards success and happiness in life,
And for this end we now must say good-bye.
But you shall come and see me when I have grown
A little older, with your wife; and you

Shall bring your children with you, — I
Will love them for your sake, and they
Shall sit upon my knees.

ALBERT.

Alas! let love
Burn slowly till it fades to ashes.

MARIE.

Nay,
I would preserve a perfect memory
Of love and happiness, and for this end
I bid you now farewell.

I bring you back
Your letters; you have nothing now to fear.

*(She gives him a packet of letters, he looks at
them, and then she takes and throws them
into the fire.)*

And that you may be purified in fire

(after a pause)

I think that you had better give me mine.

(He takes a packet of letters out of a drawer.)

ALBERT.

I hoped to keep these letters for a link
To bind me to the past.

MARIE.

Old letters read
Distastefully. I read some yesterday;
They made me sad.

*(She takes the packet and throws them into
the fire.)*

ALBERT.

The flame devours each leaf
In turn, they grow from white to red and turn
To black; we read a word, and then all fades
To senseless ashes, all is gone for aye,
And we are strangers with our faces set
On different stars, our feet on different roads;
We do not know, it may have been a dream.

MARIE.

And life is even so. One kiss: farewell!

(He kisses her.)

ALBERT.

And shall I never see you any more?

MARIE.

After a year or two of marriage you
Must come and introduce me to your wife
And baby; all will be forgotten then,
And I will stand as godmother. Farewell.

[Exit. ALBERT stands looking after her.]

Bernice

Pale in moonlight glistening
 Water-lilies lie,
I at window listening
Hear the fountain warble
Softly to the marble
 Breathing to the sky
 Echoes of a cry.

Upon the purple bosom of the night
The moon is dreaming softly, she doth seem
Like a pale beauty languidly reclining
Amid rich silken-cushioned canopies.
The winds are hushed, no breeze disturbs the scene,
Only the warbling of the fountain's song
And the full molten murmur of a bird
The silver silence break with melody.
The sultry air is filled with rose perfume
And soft-shed scent, whose wings upbear my soul
Higher than wildest music ever flew,
Into a heaven where mystic chords unite
Shadow with heat, the day unto the night.
Here in this garden, thro' the odorous summer,
I dream and satisfy my love with dreams
Of pleasure: one is stealing o'er me now,
And all my being shudders with delight.

The flowers are moving, and I see a snake,
A monstrous many-coloured serpent: all
Her lingering length is trailing slowly down
A flight of marble stairs; her eyes absorb
My soul as sunlight drinks the morning dew.
She slips along my naked side, between
My knees, along my body quite around
Leaning her close caressing head against
My face; and sudden pains and pleasure pangs
Of brutalizing joy are crushing me

Amid the weight of her voluptuous coils.
But slowly they relax, and I arise
And feebly watch the moon: she sleeps — she sleeps.
Here in the shadow of the purple roses
I listen to the fountain murmuring
Softly, oh, softly, to the water-lilies,
The secret of Bernice. I see her face
Arise from out the blanching water-flowers,
Her face of white rose, gazing on me sadly.
Oh, would I might forget! but when I hearken
Unto this fountain's mazy murmuring
I fain would hear her story, — none is listening, —
The old sad tale of Bernice and the lilies.
No one is listening, all is silent here,
Yea, I can tell it softly, breathe it low,
In under-voice to this sweet purple rose.

One summer night, — ah! years have passed since then —
I sat with her beneath the oriel window,
Drinking the dreamy splendour of the moon
And the delirious perfumes of the night,
Till in my feverish flesh the blood took fire,
And love fell sick with famine for her face.—
I held her feet between my hands, and laid
My head between her knees, and gazed upon
Her downward-gazing eyes in ecstasy.
I wound the heavy tresses of her hair
Across my face, and tried to weep: passion
Had dried my tears — life longèd unto death.
The demon of her destiny then spoke:
"The night is fair, let us stray down the garden
And sit beside the fountain where the lilies
Lie gazing on the moon. It will be sweet
To bathe by night." With linkèd hands we went
Unto the tiny lake of fountain born,
And bathed unwatched, alone, amid the flowers.
She was a vision of voluptuousness,
And over the water streamed her wondrous hair
Like braids of gold: she standing bosom-deep
Leaning from out the silver gleaming wave,
The love of all my years came over me,

Her lips were fast upon my face, I gazed
Within the vaporous languors of her eyes,
Until love's burden grew intolerable.
I know not how it was, her kisses stung,
Her bird-like throat full-filled with fluttering voice
Leaned over me, and all her sultry hair
Fell round my face. The perfume of the roses
Drove me mad. I know not how it was,
In kissing her I held her face beneath
The pallid water-flowers until it grew
More wan than they. The roses were asleep,
The moon saw not between the darkling trees,
Only the lilies saw her drowned face.
And now, through all the odorous summer nights,
I hearken to the fountain's warbling song,
Murmuring softly, oh, softly, to the lilies
The secret of Bernice, Love and Death.

Pale in moonlight glistening
Water-lilies lie,
I at window listening
Hear the fountain warble,
Softly to the marble
Breathing to the sky
Echoes of a cry.

A Joyous Death

Ladies of Love and mistresses, I have
Excluded all but you; around my bed
Weeping, you tell me of the good days dead,
You know that nothing new can help or save.

Watch the last watch, remember that you gave
Your promises that your hands should prepare
My body for the shroud, and that your fair
Shoulders should bear my coffin to the grave.

In later years I hope that you will meet
Often around my grave, and in the gathering gloom
Of evening tell how good I was and sweet.

And you shall be the gardeners of the place,
And pensively let each one come and trace
Her name for epitaph upon my tomb.

The Portrait

PROLOGUE.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE FLESH.

We have passed from the regions of dreams and of visions,
And the flesh is the flesh and the rose is the rose;
And we see but the absolute joy of the present
 In the sunlight of beauty.

I am filled with carnivorous lust: like a tiger
I crouch and I feed on my beautiful prey:
There is nought in the monstrous world of Astarte
 So fair as thy body.

Let me lie, let me die on thy snow-coloured bosom,
I would eat of thy flesh as of delicate fruit,
I am drunk of its smell, and the scent of thy tresses
 Is as flame that devours.

Thou art demon and god, thou art hell, thou art heaven,
Thou art love that is lust, thou art lust that is love,
And I see but the heavenly grace of thy body,
 A picture — a poem.

And the flesh is a soul, tho' it be not eternal.

SECOND PART.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE SOUL.

I live alone, but I am never lonely
In these luxuriant chambers filled with flowers,
Italian vases, old engravings, pictures.

Surrounded with these relics of past ages,

That still retain the odour of your presence,
I live alone, but I am never lonely;
For you are here, and you will never leave me,
No more deceptions, weary idle grieving,
But peaceful ease and tender meditation.

So little and so much: a broad black velvet
Hat forming a circle round the face within it. —
At last my rooms have found a ministering spirit.

And you will watch me hour by hour for ever,
And never change the grand and strange expression
Of those brown eyes deep-set in crimson shadow.

I live alone, but I am never lonely;
For your eyes luminous with love and longing,
Like watching stars, burn softly throughli my dreaming.

Yea, even when I muse or write my poems,
I feel of instinct certain you are looking,
And then my soul grows happy and immortal.

And I am happy and my life is perfect,
Embalmed in dreams, the past lives on for ever —
The same old love, the same delightful passion.

All this will stay, there will be no more parting,
Nor sighs, nor tears, nor any bitter grieving,
But peaceful thoughts and tender meditation.

For, like a monk who weds his love ideal,
Beyond the busy hum of men and women,
I live alone, but I am never lonely.

And I am happy, for my love is perfect:
I drank with you the life of every passion;
My memories are their disembodied spirits.

Life giveth much — I make no vain lamenting,
For verily I am deprived of nothing,

For was the past more perfect than the present?

The past is past, but now I have the sweetness
Of looking back, and all my life is scented
With perfumed memories blown across the ocean

Across the seas around whose shores I wander.
Listening for ever to their wandering murmur:
The past and present are not twain, but single.

The ideal is the offspring of the real,
And in the child we have the mother's features,
Loving the one in memory of the other.

I live alone, but I am never lonely,
For you are here and you will never leave me,
And time can touch me not, nor any sorrow.

Delightful ease, perfumed with meditation,
Made holy by your sanctifying presence,
Shall fill my life with all its dreams of heaven!

For time can touch me not, nor any sorrow,
For you are here, and you will never leave me
Until the hour when all must part for ever...

Yet some assert that we may meet hereafter.

THIRD PART.

THE TRIUMPH OF TIME.

Now, after more than twenty years of living,
Of everything that constitutes existence,
I stand within these old deserted chambers.

The tapestries are full of dust and faded,
And spiders weave around the lofty windows;
And here were passed my early youth and manhood!

All things seem changed and altered: even the parrot
Is speaking new and unfamiliar phrases;
The old, alas! we both have well forgotten.

But nought is stirred; the flowers, — they have fallen
Across their painted urns in heavy tangles,
And spiders weave around the lofty windows.

Upon this sofa oft I lay composing
Sweet dreams of love and fancy into metre,
And now a verse I hardly can remember.

Upon this sofa oft I sat with women,
Kissing their raven tresses or their golden;
And where are they? and where are last year's roses?

Even their names are now well-nigh forgotten,
(The spiders weave around the lofty windows,)
And all the world is full of dreams and sorrows.

Ye poor old women, withered now and faded,
The years have spared but little — very sadly
Ye dream like me of goodly days gone over.

Perhaps the sweet love-hours we passed together
Are lingering places in your youthward wandering...
But where are you? and where are last year's roses?

And if we met, how sad a sight and useless!
Not one of you would know your former lover.
There is my portrait — tis but little faded,

But by its side I see within the mirror
Reflected side by side another picture:
The half bald forehead of a man of fifty.

Yea, time with fierce hands drives us forward ever;
Alas! alas! there is no sweet returning,
There is no rest until the final resting.

The books within the bookcase are forgotten,
And the authors dead... I read a dusty journal,
What once was news is now the oldest story.

And spiders'-webs hang round the lofty windows,
And in the drawers I find some faded letters;
To read them seems almost an indiscretion.

Those words of love were written to another,
Unto the youth portrayed upon the canvas,
And not the man reflected in the mirror.

But turning now, I see another picture
Part hidden in a drapery half-fallen, —
Perhaps she was the writer of those letters...

It is the portrait of a lady: — shaded
Within the large hat forming quite a circle,
An oval face doth glisten like a jewel.

There is but little, one sweet tone of colour,
The dark eyes glow full-filled with southern languors,
The mouth burns crimson like a fiery blossom.

She holds a fan widespread across her bosom,
The pose is graceful: 'tis a sketch unfinished
And signed by my dear friend Edward Manet.

Yes, yes, I now remember well the story:
He gave me that sweet pastel as a present,
Because he always said I was her lover.

It is the portrait of a Polish lady, —
I wonder if she is now dead or living, —
I loved her once, but love is soon forgotten.

Love is not soon forgot, but there is nothing
That time doth write not out with firm erasure;
Sooner or later all must pass and perish.

The spiders weave around the lofty windows.

A Night of June

The night was drowned
 And crowned
With over-much delight;
 A breathless heat
 Too sweet
Made faint the sense and sight.

Hanging between
 The green
Of vine-inwoven bower,
 A plenilune
 In swoon
Glowed like a golden flower.

The shadows slept
 And crept
Like fairies to and fro,
 And roses hung
 And swung
Their censers high and low.

Her gleaming breast
 Was dressed
In clouds of amber hair;
 And her breath came
 Like flame
Thro' the deep moon-lit air.

Her arms were wound
 Around
My downward gazing face;
 And lips reposed
 And closed
Close kissing on the place.

Till passion's ache
 Could take
No new breath to respire;

But sank to sleep
In deep
Visions of blind desire.

Our souls were filled
And stilled
With weight of heavenly tears,
And sacred, glad
And sad
Unreachable strange fears.

"Oh! Misery!
Ah me!"
She murmured o'er and o'er,
"This night will pass,
Alas!
As other nights before."

The moon doth bathe
Her path
In liquid light and splendour;
As even so
Doth glow
My soul with love most tender.

Life gives us gleams
In dreams
Of something in swift flight,
An instant star
Afar
Lost in the deeps of night.

Joy and delight
Are bright
Only a short-lived hour;
And day's too soon
In June,
And love's too frail a flower.

In the Morning

Look yonder, swiftly shines the silver river,
The night has faded from the skies, the dawn
Is rising softly; all the aspens shiver
In the cool keen breeze, the timid hind and fawn
 Are grazing on the lawn.

Our night of love is past, and over yonder
The sun-haze heaves, and there the wet-winged dove
Crosses from wood to wood. Come, let us wander
Out and assain our bodies of their love
 And all the fires thereof.

The night is done, and love is past and over,
This room perfumed of musk is hateful now.
Come, let us go, I am no more thy lover:
 Are not my kisses colder far than snow
 And thine are even so.

Nay, thou art very weary of caresses
And their delight. Come, leave this flower-hung room
And deep divans and samite-hid recesses.
My brain is aching likewise of the fume
 Of smouldering perfume.

Nay, come, my sweet, and we will walk together
After the heat and turmoil of the night
Half friend-like and half lover-like, and gather
A few wild flowers in bunches red and white,
 All with the fresh dew bright.

And, as the wet leaves brush across our faces,
And chattering blackbirds fly across our way,
As we go wandering through the grass-grown places
Where a skylark pours forth his matin lay,
 Our thoughts shall pause and pray.

Yes, we shall pray, and our weak hearts be lifted

Unto the regions of pure thoughts and dreams,
Where all desires of sin and shame are sifted,
Till they may flow to Godward in sweet streams
 And glad effulgent beams.

The night is o'er, but it has not been wasted,
For though I kiss thee not, I love thee still,
Not as fierce wine is this time to be tasted,
But as the water of a shivering rill,
 Whose spring is sweet but chill.

The night is done, the bright bleak morning teaches
Us many things, sweet: let us go to-day,
Since it is day, and sit beneath the beeches,
Half friend-like and half lover-like, and say
 Why love outlasts not May.

In the Temple of Time

Weary of sorrows and weary of pains, griefs, passions, and false joys,
Sadly I wandered in dream down to a desolate plain.
Faintly and bitter the moon shone over the mountainous headlands,
Over a grey-coloured sky filled with the wind of the night;
Sound there was none but the sound of a storm-struck ocean lamenting,
Dark clouds wandered and cast shadows and torturous gleams.
Sadly I listened, — the ocean and sky said nothing but one word;
Rock, stars, clouds, waves, moon echoed the ominous fate:
"Now or to-morrow, what matter if death be the certain and sure end?"
Mine heart answered and said: "Nothing is sweeter than Death."
Held as a gained prey fast in the hard-struck talons of fell dreams,
Gazing I saw half-lost, hid in the glooms of the mist,
Walls of a temple gigantic, enclasped and resplendent with high gates,
Thrown back wide on the walls — portals as large as the world,
Where man enters to weep for awhile, there earning his rest time.
Forests of columns arose stately and grand in the gloom,
Which hung thickly and shrouded in tenebrous shadows the high roofs;
Arch upon arch hung wide crossing in tangles like clouds
Over the mystic remote strange chapels entombed in a dark night
Where great silence was heard, infinite, vast and eternal.
Calm with the passion of dreaming, I sate down under a pillar,
Deep in the shadow, and there sadly I watched and I saw
Straying processions of dusk-draped figures re-passing before me;
Some were robed in white, others in blood-coloured robes.
Ever the other avoiding, they wandered in circles and knelt down,
Filled with the languors of hope, pale with the strength of despair,
Sadly in turn at the altars of Jove, Christ, Hela, Astarte,
Where all wearily sank sooner or later to Death,
Down in the ocean, beyond shoals, reefs, and the foam of the shore surf.
New ones thronging refilled quickly the break in the ranks
Scattered, and onward they went e'er seeking the shadows that lured them.
Shaken of vision my soul cried in its bitterness out.
Lifting its eyes to the vast and titanic statue of Tempus,
Who smiled cruelly down, filled with the splendour of scorn:
"Say, great God, where leadest thou these thy perishing soul-flocks?
Which is the goal to be sought? which is the end that is best?
Myriads of echoes replied all, giving an answer the selfsame;
Laughing and weeping in turn, mocking my question, they said:

"Those are Desires, — look, headlong all soon drop by the wayside,
Vain hopes, false joys, griefs, sadly they carry to gods. —
God there is none save one God, Time is the infinite Godhead!
Bow down all, for the great guerdon he gives ye — is Death!"

Sonnet [Idly she yawned]

Idly she yawned, and threw her heavy hair
Across her flesh-filled shoulders, called the maid.
And slipped her sweet blond body out of bed,
Searching her slippers in the wintry air.

The fire shed over all a sullen glare, —
Then in her bath she sponged from foot to head,
Her body, arms, breasts, thighs, and things unsaid,
Powdered and dried herself with delicate care.

Then Zoë entered with the *Figaro*,
The chocolate, the letters, and the cat,
And drew the blinds to show the falling snow.

Upon the sofa still her mistress sat
Drawing along her legs, as white as milk,
Her long stockings of finely-knitted silk.

Ballad of a Lover of Life

MY days for loving and singing are over,
For now I am stretched in the narrow bed
That the flowers and leaves and the wild grasses cover,
And likewise the snow when the summer is dead.
The bosoms where oft I have lain my head, —
Zara, and Lily, and Annie, and May, —
Like me are asleep in the common clay.
But to ye who are giving or selling love's wares
To them who are feeble and foolish, I say
My love was stronger and fiercer than theirs.

Ye golden moths that now flit and hover
From the blossom of white to the blossom of red,
Remember me, for a lordly lover
I was till the time allotted had sped,
I would not be wholly forgotten, tho' fled
For aye from the place of your pleasure and play;
Give a thought when unloosing your evening array,
In my years had you lived, my sighs and my prayers
Might have won you from weakly lovers away —
My love was stronger and fiercer than theirs.

I have passed into earth, no worm can discover
Much food in this body — to dust it is shed;
I hear not the pipe of the wandering plover,
I hear not the sound of a passing tread;
And yet the namesakes of women I wed
For the space of a year, a month, or a day,
Make merry with gallants as all maids may.
Could I wake I'd prove them the poorest of players;
Had you known me you'd turn from them in dismay —
My love was stronger and fiercer than theirs.

ENVOI.

Prince was I ever of festival gay,
And time never silvered my locks with grey;
The love of your lovers is as hope that despairs,

So think of me sometimes, dear ladies, I pray —
My love was stronger and fiercer than theirs.

Ambition

Yea, I would change my lot with any one,
A king, a scavenger, a courtezan,
A priest, a murderer, an artizan,
For nothing worth the doing have I done.

Just once, before I sleep beneath the stone,
I want to act and not to dream, I can;
And leave within the future world of man
Some seed to blossom when I shall be gone.

If I am bad or good I little heed,
For are not all things vile or virtuous
According to the standard of our need?

A soldier burnt the temple of Ephesus, —
It was, perhaps, a very dreadful deed, —
But it preserved his name, Erostratus.

A Page of Boccace

A crimson light, all faint with delight,
 Steals thro' my lady's room,
And the scented air is moved by the rare
 Songs spun in the mystic loom
Of canaries' throats, whose untaught notes
 Float thro' the glimmer and gloom.

Dreaming she lies with fast-closed eyes
 Within the dim alcove,
As I bend over her she seems to stir
 With the instinct of my love,
For down the streams of her drifting dreams
 I may be the spirit above.

The breath from her mouth is like air from the south,
 It kisses my face and eyes,
And the touch of her hair which falls everywhere
 In restless harmonies,
My spirit doth wake to joys that break
 In a broken song of sighs.

She is bathed in the deep dream-mist of sleep
 Guided by love's faint ray,
In her lap's soft bed lies a book half read,
 A book I read yesterday;
It tells how human is soft sweet woman.
 How her love doth pass away.

I gently took from her lap the book
 And opened it at the place,
That she waking might see how erringly
 A woman may run in love's race;
I awoke not her, but without a stir
 I dreamingly kissed her face.

Sonnet. Une Fantaisie Parisienne

You whispered quickly, and your words were warm
With dreams, and down the glistening marble flight
Of steps you passed me saying, "Come to-night,
The music told me of a tempting charm."

I saw you turn, I saw your gorgeous arm
Amid the silk and lace; the electric light
Shed over all a mystical delight,
And vision filled my soul with sweet alarm,

Now wondering what your fancy might invent,
I pass a thickly carpeted saloon
To youward guided by the certain scent;

Lifting a curtain suddenly, — what meets
My gaze? — you, glittering like a precious stone
Amid the splendours of black satin sheets.

The Temptation

Sitting in the silence, in the glimmer
Of my window where the light was dimmer,
Gazing in the night,

Woman fairer than all mortal dreaming,
Weirdly lovely more than earthly seeming,
Saw I in delight.

Wrapped in clouds of golden glittering tresses,
Stepped she swiftly from the dark recesses
In the silver glare,

Stood beneath the moon, a white robe twining
Round her, hiding not the bosom shining
Thro' her woven hair.

Like a lily seemed she, and a flower
Such as pallid passion doth devour
Bore she in her hand.

That strange bloomless blossom born of vision,
Offering of a tired Love's derision,
Held she to me, and

Kneeling at my feet, her white arms over
My face down drawn, speaking like a lover
Words in symbols clothed,

Wooing in low quivering serpent hisses,
Crouching by me, feeding with live kisses
Me, that longed yet loathed.

Then she, gathering me to burning bosom,
Gave to tempted lips the grievous blossom,
Saying: "Taste of this..."

"Nothing but a rose in shape and colour,
Sighing only tender light shed odour,

Taste it in a kiss!"...

Then I, overcome with weak'ning passion,
Mad'ning dreamings knowing no compassion,
Drank the perfume deep.

But the breathings of the flower exotic
Stilled my senses like a soft narcotic
Into mystic sleep,

Where the bridal bed was incense laden,
And with strangest flowers o'ershaden
Shedding mystic calm,

And the overpowering airs were foison
With the languors of a subtle poison
Soothing as a balm,

Where the bridegroom was a snake enfolden
Round me in a circle green and golden, ...
Whose undreamt desire

Did reveal me perilous joys ecstatic,
Troubled, visioned, sweetness enigmatic,
Love reborn of fire...

Where the low and throbbing pleasures sicken,
And refluctuant sudden spasms quicken,
Wearing out the soul,

Changing them to sterile, stagnant hour,
Where the trembling senses aching cower,
Passed beyond the goal.

Such a sullen feverish dream I lay in
Till the morning chilly came by greying
All the midnight skies.

Then I rose with many a shuddering shiver,
Tortured by the love that still did quiver

In my waking sighs,

Vainly seeking, looking backward, even
Like an angel fallen from high heaven,
Questioning every pain,

Sought I by some guessing known to no man
To unite the serpent and the woman
In one vision twain.

Both had fled for ever, both were dreamings,
Phantoms seen in gleamings, mystic seemings,
Things that never were.

Yet, there was beneath my bosom smitten,
Such small wound as serpent might have bitten
Bleeding softly there.

The Hermaphrodite

"Marble most beautiful thou —
Thou art the dream that I dream:
Why standest thou pitiless there,
In the shade of the long green leaves?
Why cannot my passion awaken,
Life in thy bosom of stone,
And give thee to love and me?"
Said a young man weary and pale
(As a star when the morning is nigh)
Of febrile delight and desire.
Laying his face in his hands
He wept, and the silence was deep,
And the fountain murmured alone
To the beautiful blossoms and birds,
And a green light came from without
To mix with the crimson within,
And played o'er the purified seats
Of a boudoir curtained with silk.

Arising, and weeping, he went
To the feet of a marble statue
That stood in a middle place,
A guardian goddess or god,
And softly his footsteps fell
Over the carpeted floor.
Then leaning he kissed the cold
White bosom — too bitterly cold —
And said, "O epicene maid,
In the dark dim sleep of creation
Wert thou unable as I
To choose, and turning too late
From the sensuous form of a girl
To the grander grace of a boy,
Attained but the height where love
And beauty untouched by the soiling
Stain of a sex remains,
A perfect immutable thing,
As useless to man as to God,

Belonging to neither — a dream
Belonging to poets alone."

Then the young man sank on the deep
Divan, and resting his head on his hand,
On his milk-white fingers, he gazed
Long on the statue. It leaned
In a soft voluptuous pose
Like that of a leaning snake;
And the face bent backward threw
Over the arms the tresses
Adown its feminine back,
And the boyish bosom was raised
By the movement upward, and on
It fell the principal light.

"I have lived on thy love in a world
Apart from the world of man,"
He said, as he raised his eyes
To watch the loll of the lovely
Limbs as they leaned in repose.
"Alas! I have lived in a dream
Listening to febrile desires,
Chaunting the mystic acute
Strains of a song that explains
Nothing of human delight,
Strains that are tuneless and strange
To the common desire of man.
For even as thou art I am —
A strayed thing, straying beyond
The limits of actual love,
Into the kingdom of dream,
Where fruit there is none to gather —
Only the flower of a dream.

"But thou, what love would thy love
Seek in this world of ours?
Would it be a girl's soft bosom,
Or the broad fair breast of a boy?
Or dost thou dream of the fond

Undreamable love of one
As fair and as strange as thyself?
Perfect indeed is the thought
Of what such a love might be, —
To die and to know not of God,
To love and to know not of hate,
To live and to know not of death,
Contented with life to joy
In the love of another as fair;
And to live for a while in the sight
Of infinite beauty as angels
Live in the presence of God.

I have loved only thee, and none other,
And known but the shadows of thee,
The dim blurred beauty that seemed
Sometimes like pictures of thee,
Pictures reflecting thy face.
But mortals are only motes
Seen in the passing rays,
And dreaming will never save,
Though immortal his dreams may be,
The dreamer the fate of the grave;
For sooner or later we leave
The sunlight, the moonlight and flowers,
To sleep in the wet cold clay.
This is hard, but harder it is
To die without kissing but once
The face that we see in our dreams;
'Tis bitter to leave the world
Without attaining the end,
Leaving behind what you seek,
For if it exists in a dream
It must exist in the flesh."

He hid here his face in his hands
And wept, and the silence was deep,
And the fountain murmured alone
In the green conservatory, full
Of blossoms and birds, till at last

The silence was stirred by the voice
Of a page, who shouted in vain
To two great staghounds, that came
And bounded and gambolled in joy
Around their master who wept.

A Modern Poem

A sea of green, a glittering sea of grass,
Before you, on the right and left, adorned
By groves of stately beeches, oaks,
And lofty elms and silent larches. Far
The branches waved, their thousand shades of green
A violent, a delicate, a grey.
The distance on the right was planted thick
With pines: they grew amid the barren cliffs
Where a cascade fell sparkling in the sun.
Through the interspaces herds of browsing deer
Were wandering, sharply on the velvet turf
Their lengthening shadows were defined; and some
Were stooping to the placid river's flow
To drink. The stream was full of floating swans
And lilies; here 'twas open to the sky,
And there amid the overhanging woods
'Twas lost a moment; then it reappeared,
A-creeping through the meadows like a snake
Gliding away. A rabbit started out
The sun-lit ferns, and scurried quickly towards
A neighbouring covert; but the gamekeeper,
A hard-faced man attired in corduroy
And gaiters, lifted his gun and bowled him over.
A baldcoot fluttered through the reeds; the deer
Bounded across the pastures of the park,
Across the hillocks through the elms and oaks,
Till lost within the brushwood on the left.
The keeper picked the kicking rabbit up,
And with a sharp stroke of his side-turned hand
He broke its back; and, as he stuffed it in
The game-bag hanging o'er his shoulder, muttered,
"A couple o' brace of partridge and a brace
Of rabbits is enough," and forthwith turned
To leave them at the Manor. Red and huge
It stood, approached by steps with balustrades
Where Irish setters slumbered in the sun,
And peafowl strutted haughtily. One wing
Was filled with Tudor windows, but the left

Was better Gothic. Poor Sir Hubert knew
Pugin, he cultivated taste and learned
A learned name which sounded strange amid
The senseless verbiage that he mumbled. Poor
Sir Hubert thought himself a perfect judge
Of pictures, but he could not tell, I think,
A Rubens from a Raphael. Many a man
Sows here instead of there, and wastes what might
Have been a useful life. Supposing he
Had loved his horses more and pictures less,
The good man would have left an honest name,
As did his ancestors, for riding hard
And bringing down the pheasant rocketing;
And after dinner, when the wine goes round,
And memory awakes, each drinker would
Recall some anecdote and speak of him
As coming of the good old stock, instead
Of mumbling lame excuses: "Poor
Sir Hubert, he was very fond of art."
Sir George, the present baronet, is all
He should be: an honest country gentleman,
With no new-fangled notions.

Just enough
Of scholarship to talk in common ways
Of common things. He learned that Caesar wrote
Good Latin, and he knew a dozen names
In ancient history, four in modern, — this
Was quite enough. And then he came to Kent,
To ride and shoot and marry. Wooing well,
He won his cousin Lucy, and he placed
The heir Sir George upon his father's knee.
Blessing his son, the old man died soon after.
Apparently contented with the way
That life had come to him; perhaps there was
A weak regretting rambling in his breast,
Of some façades and windows. Gothic ones,
He had not added to the eastern wing;
And perhaps that he had never seriously
Gone in for painting.

George, his son, has lived

A life of broad contentment, and the years
Pass over seeing but very little change.
The death of Margaret, a girl as fair
And delicate as a cloud in summer, told
Him what there was of sorrow in the world
For him to bear.

A massive cut-stone bridge
Led to the pleasure grounds. The laurels stretched
This side and that side, and the green alleys
Were rippling over with the crimson foam
Of many roses; the flower-beds and vases
Were kept in perfect order, and the grass
Was closely shaven like a face. Within
A sheltered corner out o' the wind was laid
The tennis ground; the courts were freshly marked
And rolled. A goodly company was there, —
A dozen county families at least.
Beneath the laurels and the flowering trees,
That cast a broad sweet shade across the sward,
The matrons and the players who awaited
Their turn to play were sitting, and they talked,
Watching the game, from time to time applauding
A stroke. A foreigner would be surprised
To see these slender-waisted maidens run
And show such skill. Miss Fanshaw was
A thin wee girl attired in bluish silk,
And as the coming champion all did speak
Of her. Those English girls, so fair and fresh
With exercise and health, seemed strange to one
Accustomed to the cultivated dolls
Of Paris. Quaint their aprons, 'broidered round
The edges with an olive green design,
Arid their dear jerseys innocently slim.
Miss Fanshaw then was playing in a double,
And with a switching cut she served the ball.
Well served, and well returned! Jim Wright,
The county's champion player, ran and got
It up. "Oh, played indeed!" the company cried,
Clapping their hands; again it was sent back,
Again and once again, this time lobbed over,

Then with a cutting stroke returned until
Miss Fanshaw ran and killed it at the net,
Winning the game. Two powdered footmen wheeled
A table spread with teacups and decanters
Beneath the laurels; Lady Marian filled
The cups, and Ellen, her daughter, strove to make
Another double. "Lord Mount Henry, you
Had better play with Miss Fitzwilliam, Sir John
And Lady Florence."

"What, Sir John! do you
Play tennis?" asked astonished Mrs. Ash,
A fresh and portly lady. Her white hands
Were the sweet fruit of many centuries'
Idleness.

"And pray why not?" he answered,
Laughing; "my girls have taught it me. At first
They had to drag me out, but now I go
More willingly than they. I thought indeed
My days for games were over, but it keeps
Me down in weight and up in spirits.

"Tom
Will teach you," said he, quizzing her, and with
A nod he pointed out a stalwart lad,
Her son. A real English boy, his fresh
Neck showed beneath his open tennis shirt;
The light and graceful figure summoned up
The thought the Athenian sculptor felt when he
Beheld in some Greek youth the Disque-player.
A double and a single set being now arranged,
The latter for the county's championship,
A match looked forward to, Miss Summerville
Was free of duty. She walked dreaming through
The laurels, through the pleasure grounds in all
Their summer pride of ornamental beds,
Flaring with flowers, and as she strolled along
The gravel walk, shading the tender pink
And whiteness of her face, too liable
To freckle, with a long-fringed parasol,
She looked most wonderfully modern; the dark
Blue jersey showed her figure tail and slim

In all its gradual developments.
Taking the walk that led along the stream,
She wandered towards a spot she knew of. Beeches
Extended huge majestic branches o'er
The river, there the ferns grew high, and there
The flowering rhododendrons filled the air
With colour, and the screening leaves were sprinkled
With the azure of the sky. Beside the brink
She sat upon a fallen tree whose boughs
Lay in the flow; contemplative and still,
She watched the water rippling through the lilies,
Which floated on the flow, regretfully
She dreamt, recalling pleasant hours and days,
And ghost-like she returned upon the past,
Gliding adown its current, pausing here
And there at dated days. Her life had been
A summer-coloured picture filled with scenes
Of animal enjoyments. There were balls
Where silver-shouldered women rustling glode
Through parquèd drawing-rooms magnificent
With light; the moving mass of colour stained
With black coats peeping through; and oh, the wit
And laughter! Supper tables covered o'er
With jellies, creams, and lobster salads, wings
Of chicken eaten, glasses of champagne
Drunken between the rapturous waltzes; then
The moments when she sat in the rotund
Amid the long cool plants, and talked in whispers,
In hearing of the music. Softly her dream
Wandered, and Ellen on a chestnut nag
Is standing near some furze and larches. "Hark!
To admiral," cries the huntsman, and the pack
Run rushing to the spot and verify
A find! "Take care, you'll head him," cries the whip,
As he comes galloping along. "No fear
Of that: look there, this side he's broke," they cry,
And Reynard streams away across the fields, —
Sun-lit delicious pasture-lands, whose green
Is speckled here and there with tillage. Through
The boundary fence the hounds are pouring, now

They settle to the scent and drive along
In all the silent ecstasy of pace.
"Forward!" cries one and "Line" another, as
They cram their horses at a double rail.
The chestnut flies it; "Jove! how well she rides!"
Cries many a stopping man. The hounds in view
Cross furrow and ridge with lowered sterns and bristles
Erect; a hedge succeeds a rail, a ditch
A gate; and on we go, at every fence
Diminishing in number. Sweet the air;
The sky is dappled o'er with sun-lit clouds,
The dew is on the grass. At last, thank God,
A check. The panting horses get their wind;
But few are there, — the chestnut is. They try
A cast, the hounds disperse a moment; then
Away they go across the grassy plains,
Broken by woods and dotted here and there
By standard trees. The hounds are hunting now;
Along the hedgerows how they turn, they wheel
Like pigeons, following every trace of scent.
He steals along this fencing, black with mire,
His narrow, knavish-looking countenance
Intent on his pursuers, running for
His life. The hounds are through; he turns and shows
His teeth. They tumble over him in fierce
And hungry confusion. Crash! and comes
A horseman through the rail, and through the gap
Another; higher up the chestnut rises,
And safely lands this side.

 She got the brush
And many compliments: 'tis hanging up
Over the fireplace in her room.

 Her dream
Wanders to other scenes: she sees herself
Feeding her pigeons in the poultry-yard,
And ordering dinner as they fly around
Her head. The cook is obstinate, the bills
Are high, and everything is running wrong
Through vexing ways and channels. In the post
There is much consolation; here it comes!

No letters! but a fresh relay of books,
And Ouida's latest! — pleasant it will be,
When all the household work is done to sit
From twelve to two perusing lazily
The novel in a rocking-chair, a-hid
Beneath the trees upon the lawn, and grow
Quite sentimental in the sunlight. Jack
And Willy love her well, as well as men
Have ever loved, and she loves Jack the best
Of all. It matters little now: the past
Is dead for aye, although its features yet
Are warm, for she will wed Lord Haughtington.
He was indifferent to her, — a tall
Spare man, with wide shoulders and a thin
Neck, and a somewhat vacant stare in his
Chilly blue eyes, a ceremonious way
Of talking to you: this was right and that
Was wrong, and such things could not be.

The birds
Flew in and out amid the scrubby bushes
That grew along the water's edge; they pecked,
Flirted and quarrelled 'mid the rustling leaves.
The sensual silent softness of the place
Was dear to sadness, and adown the tides
The swans came floating, basking in the sun;
The sweet persuasive perfumes of the earth,
The woods, the plants and flowers, floated and filled
The golden light, and all around was heard
The musical emotion of the world.

As sailors watch from their prison
For the long grey line of the coasts,
I look to the past rearisen,
And joys come over in hosts
Like the white sea-birds from their roosts.

I love not th' indelicate present.
The future's unknown to our quest,
To-day is the life of the peasant,
But the past is a haven of rest, —

The joy of the past is the best.

The rose of the past is better
Than the rose we ravish to-day;
'Tis holier, purer, and fitter
To place on the shrine where we pray, —
For the secret thoughts we obey.

There, are no deceptions nor changes,
There, all is placid and still;
No grief, nor fate that estranges,
Nor hope that no life can fulfil;
But ethereal shelter from ill.

The coarser delights of the hour
Tempt, and debauch and deprave;
And we joy in a poisonous flower,
Knowing that nothing can save
Our flesh from the fate of the grave.

But surely we leave them, returning
In grief to the well-loved nest,
Filled with an infinite yearning,
Knowing the past to be rest —
That the things of the past are the best.

Ellen re-lived her girlhood in the dreams
That came and flitted like the birds; she sat
And wondered what the future had in store
For her. The flaxen hair just tinged with gold
Was slipping o'er her shoulders, vacantly
Her blue eyes watched the birds, sweet eyes
That told the delicate story of her chaste
And healthy life. Her face, a little long,
Was very pale — her mouth, a flower of blood,
Was large — her throat was white and flexible,
Her figure slim and graceful, like a deer's.
Though Ellen loved the excitement of the hounds
And tennis lawn, her heart was filled with love
Ever as a flower with odour. She had dreamed

Delicious girlish dreams as delicate
As gossamer, and purer than its dew;
Yet not the febrile stuff ascribed to girls,
But wholesome passion born of wholesome flesh.
Who is the lover of the modern maid?
We all have seen him and admired his tall
Figure and fearless English face, and Ellen
Had heard his manly love proposed, had felt
The warm caressing pressure of his hand;
But all is nothing, everything is nought,
The banquet passes, and no bill of fare
Is needed, — there's the solitary dish,
Eat and be satisfied. And so her dreams
Rambled until the approaching sound of steps
Coming along the gravel called her thoughts
From reveries. Surprised, she rose to meet
Lord Haughtington; grey hair replaced the black,
A cold bleak smile a joyful one, and thus
The real uncrowns the empire of the dream.
She gave her hand — he broke the silence first
With ordinary words. "I thought to meet
You on the tennis ground. This is a place
To find 'Il Penseroso.' Are not these
High-arching trees, so solemn and so calm,
Unsuited to 'L'Allegro's' character?"
"The twain are one; the separation is
Merely poetic licence," she returned,
With rippling laughs and smiles. "But since you think
Me so prosaic, tell me why you came
To find me here. — I compliment myself
It was not me you came to seek."

"Not so;

But still I thought you loved the poetry
Of pleasure more than that of sadness."

"Yes,

I think I do."

"You asked me to betray,"

He answered, striving to be humorous,
"The confidence of kind informing friends?
I will be frank: 'twas Lady Marian;

She said that frequently you went to feed
Your swans at evening."

"Yes, I merely thought
To throw the bits of bread I saved for them
At lunch, and then regain my company,"
She answered hurriedly; "I think I must
Return to them."

"I hope," he murmured gravely,
"I shall not be deprived of seeing you feed
Your swans and cygnets."

"If you care to see
Them, come this way; I think that we shall find
Them near the waterfall: I know their haunts."

Gaily, but with affected glee, she talked
Of common topics, knowing well that this
Was the occasion he desired — that he
Was following each expression; any word
Or phrase might be the stepping stone desired
For. If she talked of flowers, he might at once
Tell her she was the fairest of them all,
Or if she spoke of fashions, he would gaze
And say she never looked so well. She dared
Not linger, — every subject nervously
She skirted, just as if each phrase concealed
The dreaded precipice; for well she knew
That if he asked her for her hand, although
The payment with her lips was sour, she had
Scarcely the moral courage to resist.
Against an azure arch of sky they went,
A vista leading to the open park; —
Reaches of velvet turf extended, green
Beneath their feet, but greying as it stretched
Into the distance, till it touched the far
Horizon, where the sun had flooded all
With gold. They strolled beneath the sombre cedars
Which grew this side o' the bridge, gigantic trees
Whose shade fell o'er the sun-lit meadow down
To the river. Swans and cygnets, all the brood,
Were swimming in and out the arches. From

The parapet she threw them bits of bread; —
He watched her white hands whiter than the birds,
Lifted to throw.

Did he admire her? Say
He loved her as an honourable wife,
And all is said.

He could not love: the power
To love is learned, the sentiment acquired.
For every passion cultivates the heart
To bear a better and a richer fruit.
But those who have not love can buy: an hour,
A day, a year, a lifetime if you will.
Money does all things: it can pluck and place
That lovely lily in a golden vase
To die. The price makes pure, for certainly
In gold, not water, is the modern world
Baptized. A hushed, a tender calm was felt,
The sunlight fell in heavy drops upon
The water-lilies, but the solemn man
Who stood beside her leaning against the bridge
Felt little of his unloved youth arise
Within his veins. The story of his life
At full length lies within a paragraph.
After his college days he made a tour
Through Europe: Paris he had seen, and Rome;
He knew them as the starrer in the crowd
The colour of a passing lady's dress. He went
To see the world, as was befitting his
Position. London drawing-rooms, the best,
Were open to him; but he never gained
The triumphs of the salon. Ladies tired
His graver mind, with all their fanciful
Futilities, — he felt he wearied them;

And in the club-room he was voted just
A well-bred bore. His loves in Chelsea proved,
After repeated absolutions, still
Very unfaithful; and a thousand dropped at cards
Convinced him that the quietude of Kent
Was better suited to his special mind.

And there his tenantry and his estate
Gave him sweet occupation — there he found
His mission — there he found that every life
May be resolved to good account. And so
The solemn years passed by in soft and grey
Succession, till the thought of lonely age,
Childless and wifeless, came to haunt him; first
It was a wandering thought, but soon it fixed
Itself for ever in his mind.

The last
Morsel of bread being given, Ellen turned
To go; but laying his hand upon her arm,
He said the simple words that every man
Must say: he asked her with much dignity,
Yet not without a touch of tenderness,
To be his wife. She raised her faint blue eyes
And murmured low, without embarrassment —
"I will, Lord Haughtington." This grave grey man
Had never played the lover, and the joys
Of sensuous vows and kisses could be guessed
But dimly, yet he felt that he had missed
An inner portion of this life of ours.
He could not think that a Lord Haughtington
Usurped another's place, but yet he felt
He was antithetical to this sweet girl
Feeding her swans at eventide. The sun
Sank slowly over the horizon, drowned
Little by little in a bath of gold.
The river glittered in the lingering light,
Reflecting all the stillness of the reeds
And trees. They turned to-homewards silently.
Plucking the leaves and roses as they went
Through the dark laurels and the flowering trees
That filled the woods adjacent to the house.
The evening air tasted of flowers and fruit,
And from afar they heard the pearly laughs
Of many nightingales. They passed along
The emptying tennis lawn, where still some three
Or four were playing, whilst the others stood
Upon the steps and strolled around the sweep.

Then Ellen and Lord Haughton rejoined
The company. To stay to dinner some
Had been invited; the others sought their wraps
And ordered round their carriages. A group
Stood wishing Lady Marian good-bye.
She spoke but little, getting rid of them
With short and single phrases, while she watched
Her daughter nervously, and strove to read
'Accepted' in her eyes. Her last friend gone,
And from the clucking talk of one young man,
Who lingered yet, escaping, she rejoined,
Her daughter. Ellen murmured just a word
Anent the evening and the swans, and passed
To bid adieu to some departing guest,
Leaving her mother and Lord Haughton
Alone. With expectation all were still,
Brothers and sisters, friends and company.
And as along the leafy avenues
The carriages and phaetons rolled, all drew
Together, whispering that she was engaged.
Ellen stood on the steps and watched the stars,
The passionless pale planets that appeared
From time to time adown the blue expanse,
Lost and absorbed by the magnetic charm
Of space, till startled suddenly by steps.
A young man passed from out the hall; he stopped
And held his hand to her; she took it, saying,
"I could not help it: you will not forget
The pleasant times that we have had, the times...
Forgive me and forget me, dearest Jack."

AFTERWORD

This ebook of *Pagan Poems* contains authentic text of the first English edition — London: Newman and Co., 1881.

The text was transcribed from the printed first edition and edited by Robert S. Becker, PhD, on behalf of George Moore Interactive LLC. Original spelling is preserved; printing errors are eliminated.

All poems of *Pagan Poems* are individually available on the [GMI website](#) with many other writings and artifacts of the author. Visitors to the website may post comments and questions for the editor and community.