

RIDERS ON PEGASUS

by

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– vidi ipse materno sanguine nasci

To C. S. Lewis

An Afterword on the characters and their background will be found at the end of the poem.

RIDERS ON PEGASUS

*Of Perseus and Andromeda my verses:
And yet this Tale has slept till now untold.
For delve in thine own heart—thou too shalt find
How their long reign brought in an age of gold
In Aethiopia, where they grew not old
But passed, as thou dost, listening, through time
Out to the Myth, the Word whose form is Man;
Therefore my tale is news; the dew's still on my rhyme:*

*The dew— this drawing up from my own earth
How Myth, being present in the Word, began
To sketch on time his everlasting Now
In master tableaux— whence the soul of man
Took form and substance— takes it rather: Pan
Is piping here, and chaste Bellerophon,
Strong arm and martial spirit, friend, in thee,
Trampling (beneath what hooves!) Chimaera, passes on.*

*Poets—deep minds— would ye be priests of Meaning?
Makers—or scribes? Oh, utter all ye are!
Reach in those souls the world's prophetic soul,
The Whole in each become particular,
The Myth: disclose the Word: growing aware
Of old imagination, born anew
As young experience: withered words shall bloom then,
And all your tales, like this new Tale of mine, be true.*

I

ANDROMEDA

From oozy Congo's fecund and sweaty jungle's
Green tangle of rubber-dropping trunk and bough—
Boisterous superflux of radical moisture
Swelling her soft hot loins—bethink you how
Africa lifts a northward-facing brow,
Till the shock of the land-locked Ocean on her fringe
Bids Thought awake —the prehistoric verge,
Where, moist and dry unmingled, streams on rocks impinge.

Mediterranean murmured about the base,
There, of a rocky promontory, bright,
Long baked in sun-glare. Cool and mother-naked,
In her bare temple rinsed with air and light,
A Parian Aphrodite, dazzling white,
Stood, gazing down, late-born, upon her sea
(Almost you saw its bubbles of dried foam
Popping and vanishing from her), Anadyomene.

Gazing toward Cyprus —and half loth to gaze,
Half turned aside. To praise a mortal Queen,
The skilful carver had prolonged in marble
That moment of sweet shame, when she had been
Surprised by soaring love; and a vast, unseen
Monster's imagined jaws had not availed
To petrify virginity, which strove
To cover up her breast with fettered arms —and failed.

The time—be thou less curious—since her rescue
It may be some four thousand years had passed,

Or days, or decades—well, how should I know?
Dates are a riddle for the scholiast.
But the golden age was breaking up at last
In Aethiopia: men were murmuring
Like wasps: in secret places noble youths
Were being taught by men of wrath to hate the King.

Popinjay sophists argued: hollow men
Listened, believed: and guilty men pretended:
And this—this was the nature of the time
Early one morning, when the young Queen wended
Her way up to the Shrine. One Slave attended,
Alone, her mistress's slow pilgrimage,
Bearing a basket filled with fresh-cut myrtle
And a turtle cooing through a wood and wicker cage.

Lucifer sailed over the Ocean, paling
In faint Aurora's crocus, where she smiled.
Lady Andromeda, coming near the temple,
Spoke to the slave girl "Leave me now, my child!"
And like one to her task ill-reconciled,
Unsure if to keep silence or to tell,
She entered a cool pallor through the pillars:—
"Lady, O Daughter of Sky and Light! All is not well—

"All is not well . . ." She prayed, and halted:— "Perseus—"
She ceased, as though she chided her own folly
Or stooped to chafe some hope into a heart
Cramped with long unadmitted melancholy,
Knowing no Circe could undo, no moly
Prevent that gross enchantment! Unperceived
It had increased on him. It would not cease
For ever! At that 'for ever' her breast heaved.

For all her frame was one heart-shaking sob
Swollen with suppression over mounting years.
The Statue nodded. Soon the Paphian eased
The babbled prayer forth in flowing tears,
Till out they poured pell-mell, her woes and fears:—
“I do not say, God knows I do not say
“He grows unkind, discourteous! Would he were!
“I could reproach him then and scold my tears away!

“Rather, too kind—like—too much like a father;
“I see, as in polished shields, when our eyes meet,
“Andromeda there, become a kind of comedy . . .
“Where is my saviour with his falcon feet
“Stooping at me from heaven? Or where the beat
“Of the plumes from God assumed? If he but knew!
“Mother of Eros, how shall I reach him? Ah,
“What shall I do?” she wailed aloud “What shall I do?”

She sank, all bravery gone, down on the pavement:
Dumb in her bitter grief she knelt a wife,
And rose a priestess,—crossed, and on the altar
Offered the gurgling dove. The copper knife
Flashed in the air—and forth the purple life
Gushed, as bright music quits a shattered harp:
The thread that, till that moment, momentarily
Had payed into the panting warmth was snapped off sharp.

Torn from its normal channel through warm marrow,
The throb of plastic spirit sprang, released,
To cram the hungry concave. Empty space,
Numinous near the carven throat and breast,
Put on articulation, was expressed,
And love, life’s meaning, floated forth as word

Made flesh in real sound. An awful Voice
The Queen adoring, caught up in the goddess, heard:—

“Daughter of Cepheus, Aethiopia’s Queen,
“I, Aphrodite’s Self about thee, hear
“Thy prayer. Take heart; have I not also heard
“The monstrous price amerced for Cassiopeia,
“Thy Mother’s boast, when, mad with shame and fear,
“Chained to thy sterile rock, thou didst abide
“All fathomless Poseidon’s boiling rancour
“Toward my peculiar—mortal beauty’s vaunting pride?

“First I must know thy Perseus. Grows he, daughter,
“In aught unopen? Holds he aught concealed
“From love’s sharp eyes?”

After long silence answered

The Queen:— “There is a Press. The burnished shield
“Of Pallas hangs upon it. Locked and sealed
“From me, his lawful Queen, my husband keeps
“That place, O Goddess, and each night he hides
“His signet underneath his bolster when he sleeps!”

“What lies within it?”

“Nay I cannot say!

“It is unspoken between us, I only guess
“Some tender thing, for sure, that once had life
“And warmth, and now maintains its lastingness
“Only by some machine that feeds the Press
“Through secret flues with cooling air, because
“From underneath the door, across the floor
“Always an outward cold unnatural current draws.

“I get no word. Only, when I surprise him
“Alone with the close friends who form his staff,

"I have thought ere now that the wind lay in that quarter –
"Uneasy silence—warning looks—a laugh
"From one who had dropped a phrase's broken half
"Upon my entrance—talk adroitly led
"Into new channels—all these I have heard!"
"And hast thou never asked him frankly?"
"Once—" she said

And halted: "Once—" her resolution faltered.
She closed her eyes and seemed to search her mind
For strength to probe the past—"Once—once I asked him,
"And Lady, he grew all gentle and too kind!
"Said he must tell me all that lay behind,
"And spoke so softly that he seemed afraid—
"Asking me first how clearly I remembered
"The days that followed after Herpe's darting blade

"Had smashed my chains, and my poor naked body
"Sank shivering in his arms—(but I am sure
"Of nothing after my great shock: I lay
"Delirious in a raging calenture.
"I know they fought. I know that my old wooer,
"Phineus—I must not ask of it, they said—
"And all his gallants, brawling in our Palace,
"Fell, and are lying somewhere—somehow more than dead!)

"Then he began, without a pause, of Danaë
"In her brazen prison, and vowed he must explain:
"I heard him mutter: *Zeus Meteoros!*
"*How can one flinch, whose father was that Rain?*
"Through teeth clenched, like a skull's, on scorn of pain—
"Too fierce to mark if I were pleased or vexed
"And gazing on me so, as on a maze
"His thought were groping entrance to, and he perplexed.

“Then off on some long tale how Earth and Ocean
“Mingled in love, and how Thalassa bore
“Phorcys and Ceto, who themselves, those twain
“(Mingling in love, no doubt!) had issue four—
“Not looking at me now—and more and more
“Remote—engrossed in his own thoughts, at ease,
“He chose the foulest of the four—and glozed
“About some Dragon guarding those Hesperides!

“So on he droned. And soon I could not follow
“And waxed impatient, saying I was tired
“(There were so many names!) of pedigrees
“And labyrinths and lists, and who was sired
“By whom, and I stamped, and said I but enquired
“One simple thing. He broke off, and I wept
“Then, because I had hurt him; and he smiled
“And held his peace, and laughed, and kissed me till I slept.

“But when I woke near dawn, his breath was broken
“As though his sleeping soul lay unredeemed,
“And I raised my breast and touched his poor face, gazing
“To trace the flying troubles while he dreamed . . .
“All in a rush, like some lost soul, he screamed: --
“Andromeda! No, darling! Look at *me!*
“Sobbing caught breaths, like death—till I, all trembling,
“Woke him (Thou know’st if I did well) invoking Thee!”

She ceased, and for a space no answer followed;
Only the hollow silence, made more dense—
Remembrance of her own voice fallen dumb.
Until once more the rustle, past all sense,
The crepitation into sentience
Of space alert, the ghostliness was there

About the Queen; and swift uprose her heart
And slowly, at the noise of that dread Voice, uprose her hair:—

“Fear not!” it said, “pray thou to Cytherea
“Again, when Hesperus winks benign the hour,
“And I will summon Hypnos from his cavern
“And come with him in plenitude of power.
“Lo, the King’s blood shall blossom, like a flower,
“And Hypnos, with his calm and wing-wide gaze,
“Shall loose his dura mater, and sluice with water
“Of Lethe all those secret labyrinthine ways

“Of his brisk brain, and soak the brittle walls,
“Which instantly, if challenged from outside,
“Shall crumble and collapse, and he shall grumble
“And slip back into slumber satisfied.
“So, in the dark, that Press thou shalt fling wide
“Stealing with ease his signet-ring and key,
“And thou shalt take the Thing within the press,
“Unseen of any man, and cast it in the sea.”

She ceased. The Queen arose and scattered myrtle
Out of her basket all about the Shrine,
Then passed without and gazed on the vast ocean
Pondering, and scarcely saw its calm, sweet shine
Or marked the Nereids dancing in the brine,
But swift, in fear, she wheeled about and wondered,
When from the morning sky’s pale shell of blue
Unblemished by one speck of brightest cloud—it thundered!

She only heard—the goddess *saw*—the Father
Urging his chariot through his empty sky
And felt the thunder of his frown condemn
His dangerous Daughter’s awful levity,

Bearing it out at first, with conscious eye
Unwinking, thinking she should not look down—
The Queen, affrighted, saw the temple quiver,
When Aphrodite's eyelids fell before that frown.

Bright gleamed the glossy waves, to see the passing
Of Cytherea's brief discomfiture
And skipped, to feel again her lovely lips
Set in their solemn smile, self-pleased, demure.
What did she care, who, rather than endure
One morsel unpossessed—one distant look,
Unhindered by a qualm, would burn to cinders
The Golden Fleece wrapped round the last Sybilline Book?

The Lady struck a gong. The slave returned
Humming a ditty, while with leather thong
She strapped the trug and cage. As towards the City
They went, the Queen's heart melted into song
Outpouring— 'Praise the Goddess wise and strong!
'Praise we our Lady of Cyprus, praise and bless!
'Who, if we trust her, teaches how to thrust
'Against themselves the danger of their tortuousness!

'Oh, but this hateful thing—this Thought of theirs,
'That never strikes you squarely on the face
'But, meeting with itself behind your feet,
'Includes you in some passionless embrace,
'That softly eats away the very base
'Whereon you stand, like the incoming tide—
'How sweet a thing it is! How simple and neat!
'How economically it may be applied!

'One simple plan! And all shall soon be well,
'And well, and well! Once more upon this breast,

'Uncrowned, his orbèd gravity profound,
'God's wisdom in its box apart, shall rest,
'My little one, hushed quiet and possessed,
'Content (and smiling in his private way)
'As Uranus—Himself containing all
'Was pleased with Gaia—pleased to be contained till day!'

Sighing, she glanced ahead. How sweetly sang,
How couthly, debonairly, paced the slave!
And, when they reached the little white-walled town,
How cool a gloom how quietly it gave!
How fresh and clear the morning! Ah, how brave
The world was! And the Queen thought, as she smiled:—
'A grand, cool closet will be splendid too,
'To save the milk—I mean to have it paved and tiled!'

That very night she prayed to Aphrodite
Devout, when Hesperus winked benign the hour,
Who summoned Hypnos from his shady cavern
And came with him in plenitude of power,
And all the King's blood blossomed like a flower,
Till Hypnos, with his calm and wing-wide gaze,
Unloosed his dura mater and sluiced with water
Of Lethe all his thinking's labyrinthine ways.

So, soon, Andromeda has ring and keys
With ease and, as she glides, with hand half-closed
Warding her taper, down wide corridors,
Nocturnal panics filch her breath—and, most,
Dread of her white self, moving like a ghost,
The pale home-stalking spectre of Medea
With lurid torch, or chamber-haunting Fury
Nearing the couch, where one lies staring back in fear.

What is the Disc that hangs up on the door
There, on the farther side of the vast chamber
Andromeda has reached? A swelling Mirror,
The shadowy gloss of whose distorting camber
Bosoms in polished gloom a star of amber
Quavering – the taper’s splintered aureole –
That frames – what creature waddling down to meet her,
Dolled in the Queen’s nightgown? What portly little droll?

With that her courage failed. She strove to pray –
Aye but to whom? the Cozener of men,
The Hoodwinker of all the Gods in turn,
Desire’s uncertain Self? She had fainted then,
Had not proud Cythera’s subtle denizen,
She of the graceful snood, her mood inclined,
Accepting her not-prayer as a prayer
And swiftly sent an answering thought into her mind:—

‘Thou little undesirable, absurd!
‘Not all the gods are feebler than desire.
‘Look now, where hangs before thee Her bright Shield,
‘Whose steadfastness prevailed—nay, look higher
‘To the Mother of us all, whose sacred fire
‘Tall on her altar burneth, night and day,
‘Deep in thy central chapel’s holy quiet,
‘Thy Home’s eternal Focus—turn to Hestia!’

She prayed—she thought she heard a rush of plumes
Invisible, such as once she had heard before—
Once only, bearing love and banning horror—
For Hestia sent the Carrier, who wore
Talaria on his god-like feet, and bore
A daydream, wherein she saw Perseus rise

From table, saw him resting, laughing, jesting
With sunny little puckers round his faithful eyes . . .

When Perseus' life was threatened in Seriphos
By envious Polydectes' craft malign,
The gray-eyed Goddess and swift Hermes gave him
His wingèd sandals and her Shield divine;
The first he had laid back in the Giver's shrine
Long, long ago. The Shield he guarded still,
As a magic mirror for the stony Terror,
Medusa, whom Athene taught him how to kill

With backward cut, not looking in her eyes.
For when the time for render came, he had pleaded
Extension, since he owned the Gorgon still
And those dead eyes, he said, were sorely needed
To keep the peace and crush the passion seeded
Deep in the hearts of the Queen's rebellious folk,
Which sprouted often in disastrous floutings
Of the edicts of his just and reasonable yoke.

This was the Shield that hung now on the door
Far, in the end wall, where a deep recess
Tomb-like and cyclopean, hollowed out
By the masons in the ashlar, was the Press:
All down the room's unfurnished eeriness—
Her head most carefully, while she drew near,
Averted, lest she catch the distant gleam
And see herself again, the Queen approached in fear.

O Heart? She questioned, and her heart replied:—
Ah, tush! What so it be, it is unreal,
So it presume to part us! Without more:—
'Husband, I come!' she thought, and broke his seal.

The door swung back with loud, long, sobbing squeal –
Look, there was nothing there—save slips of rag
Lying about, the sort that soldiers use
For scouring shields to make them bright, and one old bag,

A goatskin bag—these and the rush of cold
Expected—round her belly like a pall,
An icy hauberk clasping it. She passed,
Breathless, the threshold of man's arsenal,
Stooped, where the bag leaned up against the wall,
And peered into its top—with criss-cross thread,
Roughly, except one corner, caught together . . .
One glance . . . the gloom was merciful . . . she glimpsed the
 Head . . .

She shut the door; was sick; with stiffening tendons
And jerking taper sealed the dropping wax.
Then, slowly as the Earth, she turned, and slowly,
With taper, ring and key, retraced her tracks,
Gray-faced and Saturn-shouldered, seedy, lax,
Creeping over the floor like some old crone
With sagging knees and dragging heels, who feels
She must sit down, and cannot while her work's half done.

Not loathing any more, desiring nothing—
So, back the way she came, uncrowned, unblest,
Poseidon's prey and Perseus' glory shuffled.
At last, the ring and key restored, she pressed
The couch: one hand fell lightly on her breast,
Feeling the frore mist roll up from the plains
Beneath, and swirl around the rosy tips
Of those responsive, milky hills of rilling veins.

Slow, as she lay beside the King, alone,
Through all those veins the deadly marmor ran
Inward. The stream of life-with-memory
That maketh woman woman, and man man,
Shuddered and changed. Her curdled mind began
To turn its sourness backward. Hate and doubt
Crawled in the bud unseen, as outward sheen
Of warmth and health returned. She flung her arms about

Each time the venom touched, with severing power,
Remembered hours when they had seemed most near,
Or striven all-utterly together, given
Either to other; or when she felt it smear
Ineffable caresses with what sneer
Of vile reserve—oh, knocking, bruising, blotching
What tenderest quick of candour! All the while
She dreamed the curious eyes of Perseus watching, watching.

The morning came—the day passed—and more days:
She showed not all at once how she was changed,
Only, forlorn, she dared not be alone;
She must be with him now, where'er he ranged
On foray or assize—but worst estranged
They grew, when she would not be left behind,
The Royal Consort—or as such acclaimed—
Even on those inward journeys of his questing mind.

The less she stayed the pace, the more she claimed
A vain pretence of it, as courtesy due,
The which receiving, still the more incensed
By that pretence's mockery, she grew
A feverish, iridescent assidue
Of passion crude—alloy of shame and pride—

A brassy flower, a thin Danaë's Tower,
Barked her about, and Perseus watched it, anxious-eyed.

And he, God knows, had weighty care enough
Abating this last straw, unhappy King,
To save the realm, because, clear-eyed, he saw
The way the tide was flowing, how the thing
He loved, his god-machine for governing—
The Head inside the bag there in the Press—
(Such singular reports were coming in)
Would stem no longer, soon, for all its lordliness.

II

PERSEUS

There was a time, before Deucalion's flood,
A man whose sacrifice with herbs was clean
And smoked aright, would smoothly sleep at nights
Though fortune spat upon his gabardine;
But I am old—too often have I seen
The gentler virtues work their proper woe
And sweet forbearance fortify misprisions
One flash of passion might have scattered long ago.

So—when his Aethiop queen was crossly charmed—
Was Danaë's child disarmed by chivalry.
He was Athene's Knight, her perfect Knight,
Who willed all men and women to be free.
Even his enemies he loved to see
Unhampered, strong to strike, with room at least
As ample as his own; as he had shown
Often in ambuscade—once at his wedding feast.

(Not till the blood of Phineus and his brood
Had flowed, till the dead and dying choked the hall.
Not till his vaunting victims taunted him
Weakening, with his back against the wall,
On the Gorgon's vantage had he deigned to call,
Crying with a loud voice:—"Ye mock me, hey?—
"Would toast this boasted mistress with me?—So!
"Meet her! *now let all friendly eyes be turned away!*"

And raised aloft the Selfless soul's Imago,
The lapidary Hate, with seething hair!

The shrill Virago—chanticler of death—
Crowed through their brains the venom of her stare . . .)
The horror of that victory made him swear
By Styx himself, by Cerberus' three faces,
Never, never to rip the sack again,
Unless disaster threatened the last holy places.

And he kept his vow with ease, because for years
Through the Queen's native heart at once he heard
If any man were nursing fretful dreams
Or in their bosoms infant treason stirred.
For, as some solitary migrant bird
Strains in its cage, agog, with vibrant wings,
When myriads of small blood-brothers at large
Assemble flockmeal, ripe for journeyings,

Her lissome breast in secret sympathy
Thrilled with her people's humours—a live sense
Of currents stirring. So, his Queen preferring,
With the old intrigue of spies he could dispense.
Andromeda was his intelligence.
It was enough. Before the imposthume swelled,
He would ride forth, and Herpe's glancing blade
Lanced it, and so rebellion at its source was quelled.

But the trickle of intransigence increased
And swelled into a flood, as that distress
Throve in the Queen, which drove her to the Temple,
And she began to spoil their singleness
By probing to improve it. Scot and Cess
Mysteriously decreased; and here a town
Proclaimed democracy and built a wall,
And there Athene's hateful statue was pulled down.

Disorder, hydra-headed, sprang and spread
More vigorously, it seemed, the more he lopped.
Foray on foray now and raid on raid
Followed; he never rested, never stopped
Quelling their riots; closer though it cropped,
Herpe but shaved the haulm, and left still sound,
Supple and intertwined, as stubborn bindweed,
The roots of insurrection shooting underground.

And so, about the time the Queen set forth
On that nocturnal quest, their plight grew worse;
For Phineus' son had roused a flighty nation
In freedom's name to wreak his father's curse;
Whose marble eyes (dead hate's executors)
Converted random raids to planned guerilla
First, and then open war. The Soothsayers
Spoke, and the King, to save the realm, invoked the Killer . . .

What weary years the civil strife dragged on!
Begetting all things vile—vendettas, vices,
Garottings, tortures, treachery, young souls rotting,
The gods despised and starved of sacrifices—
Countering the Gorgon-ray with fresh devices,
Which, following its shape, the Myth will tell,
But, following its shape, must first relate
What thing, what strange and doubtful change, the King befell.

He in a thought-well of divine reflection
Saw truths, so mere they make mere glancers blind:
So, when men wrangled fruitlessly, entangled
In secondary thoughts, his sovran mind
Dropped blessing on them, dancing round behind
The parrot phrase, or pricking vested error

With its own point—the little spot of light
The everywhere at once, the Sun's—his mind a mirror

So slightly turned, it never lost the light,
And with what ease! and not as having striven,
But laughing, like a boy—yet afterwards
Men marveled at the strength they had been given,
And told each other: 'He came down from heaven!
'Those Shoes his youth had on, they left this knack
'Of charming wingèd Thought from lucid Aether
'To split the region cloud in rescue or attack!'

But on the cold Press hung a different Mirror:
No joy consoles like easy action, reft
Of effort by past efforts—wearing Will
Leans on his spade and nods, to see how deft
Are mind and muscle grown—young lords enfeoffed
Of lands he tilled with sweat for them; so nods
Approvingly a father in old age
To hear his grown sons of their own accord revere the gods!

Men love reminders of ability,
No matter if necessity or choice
Pricked its acquiring (every speech he made,
I think, would old Demosthenes rejoice
To hear his own suave, unimpeded voice—
Recalling pebbles): and since it took much knack
To strike a foe reflected in a Shield
And wield a sword in cut and thrust, with head turned back,

Perseus began to love the sacred Shield
Itself, its rimmed horizon; before long
He needed it beside him everywhere.
To use it made him feel so firm and strong;

For in those depths he judged of right and wrong
Aloofly, saw the Whole without infection
Of contact with the part—his darting mind
Pierced all things, insulated from them by reflection.

He had the Shield hung in the Place of Dooms
And gazed upon it while he heard the pleas,
Dissoisins, ousters, writs to curb the laws,
Arsons and piracies on the high seas.
The doers and their knots of witnesses
Whispered, the advocates declaimed and fought
Low on the floor: high on his throne the King
Sat looking at them with his back turned to the Court!

Or on the round wall of the Council Hall—
There, in the high hush, through the mumbled drama
Of Acts of State, Impeachments, grand Debate,
He faced the Bronze, himself ensconced in armour,
His privy councilors a cyclorama
Of dwarfish images—with friendly greeting
Passing from eyes to eyes, and sound advice
From mouth to mouth: truth meeting truth—and no true
meeting!

Framed, like a toy, to please, he deigned to sample
The city hum, where raucous men compete.
He had the Mirror fitted in his litter
And let himself be carried through the street,
Whose brouhaha, in bioscope, was sweet!
To view all men, himself, too, very small
And quaint, relaxed his fighting Spirit, faint
With mightiness—to seem a child among them all!

Till once, from such amusement he returned
And came to where Andromeda sat, wan,
Plying her listless loom—the Shield beside him
Borne by a slave, a captured Nubian;
His mind still on his toy, the King began
To meet the Queen’s reflected eyes, and speak,
Nor saw (they were so small) their glance of horror,
But heard, half-choked, behind his back, her actual shriek.

He turned, amazed, but ere he met her eyes,
She had expressed from them all trace of pain
For fear of paining him—so haply scaring
What spectre of their Hymen might remain.
And he—he thought: ‘Who knows? Would she explain
‘That shriek . . . well, I will try! . . .’ How gently lay
His hand upon her hair, as he began:—
“Andromeda . . . thou dear! . . . look up! . . . Andromeda . . .”

But while he paused, a runner was brought in
Unheralded, all damp with sweat; who kneeled
Craving an audience. Perseus turned his head
And signed to him to talk into the Shield;
And he gasped out news of forces in the field
In strength unheard of, ragged rabbles merging
To disciplined detachments, openly,
And from all quarters on the little town converging.

Then the King turned and faced him stern:—

“My army?”

“Cut down! Surprised in leaguer! Our vedettes
“Drugged with new devilries—this hour to-morrow
“That sun that in the sea so calmly sets
“Will gleam upon their barbarous burgonets

“Advancing!”

For a space the King, astounded,
Stood, then a third time turned, and strode away,
Struggling to feel the true was real—his base surrounded!

Alone, his thought mounted those snowy peaks
Of cold Olympus, where the high gods rule,
As oftentimes in those old fervid days
Back in Seriphos, where men called him fool
And tossed him with their taunts and threats. How cool
Came floating from on high the Wreath that crowns
With earnest olive-leaves her countenance,
Athene’s, tall Protectress of invested towns!

Within the Palace grounds there rose a Temple
Used by the King alone; and there men called her
Athene Basileia. Thither now
Went Perseus, there his priest led by a halter,
Lowing forlorn reproach, and on the altar
Slew, at his Lord’s command, a milk-white cow.
And lo! the Sacker of Cities—the unborn
Crackle of harnessed Levin, darted from God’s brow—

Pallas Athene, through sharp, thin-walled nostrils,
Savoured fat of soul in the steaming blood.
Broad gazes of surprise, important grazings,
The slow, phlegmatic sacrament of cud
And the softness of fresh dung on trampled mud
Uncurled into the smoke of the sacrifice
And censured her brainy truculence—there crept
A lazy gleam of hazel over those Gray Eyes

Responsive, as he bent his brows and thought
Of all he knew of feeble and innocent

Leaning on him—Andromeda's white face
And, what more touched him, her bewilderment;
He called up all that sack of cities meant—
Faces of children waiting to be killed,
Shrill panic, blank despair, stark violence—,
Then, with one grisly wrench, renouncing all, he willed . . .

As once, behind the walls of Ilium
Great Hector, his stern mood to war addressed,
Lifted his child to kiss, and back the boy
Started from helmet and swart, nodding crest
Looming too close, and towards his mother's breast
Stretched little arms, wailing to be let go
Back to his wooden toys, bad Greeks, good Trojans,
And the goddesses and gods in his galanty-show,

So now a huge Casque overgloomed the King,
As stooping Pallas caught him to her Place
High in the heavens, to make him of her mind;
So, while his Spirit met her face to face,
His body's arrogance—which deemed it base
To have been so invaded—gave a groan
And sank to earth indignant, hankering
After the Shield—still, still to call his mind its own!

"Thou hadst the Gorgon's Head!" Athene said,
"That, and my saving Shield—how hast thou failed?"
To her his naked reason, undismayed,
Answered:—"O Goddess, thy fair gifts prevailed
"How nearly! If Medusa's eyes unveiled
"Grow impotent, and I must know defeat,
"It is because this clever Aethiop race
"Evolves new engines in the womb of its conceit."

And so went on to tell (for there are news
Which even the gods can learn from men alone)
Of their new man-made ore—which ash and air
And flame, compounding, bound more hard than stone,
Yet light and structural withal, as bone,
And missile unbelievably; and more:
For by their skill, disposed throughout the mass,
Their smiths could parcel hard and soft. About a core

Soft and disgustful, mashy, like a brain,
And irritably active, they could case
Impermeable cortexes, protective—
The gelatine kissing the carapace
In cockroach-union—soft in hard's embrace.
Nor was this all: the kiss was consummated,
When very essence in their crucibles
Was broken down, and counter qualities equated

Of soft and hard, to breed some substance new;
For truly soft are things that men may mould,
As lead or potter's clay: if pressed askew,
They keep the new shape and forget the old;
But smitten bronze, alert with instant, bold
Elastic will, regains its old extension
It scarcely ceded; soft is like a child,
Hard like a soldier, drilled to start back to attention.

But this new stuff of theirs, he told, combined
Hard's elasticity with soft's compliance,
A bladder-stuff, membranous, tough like gut:
Dead matter aped, through their unholy science,
Resilient Woman, who, without defiance,
Her meek heart by him from her purpose blended,

Obeys her lord—and then, the dawdling way,
Does what her slumbering Will has all the while intended.

Tersely, his girt intelligence reviewed
The gear constructed from it—young Phineus's
Silky translucencies that gloved the face,
Impregnable—its more ingenious uses:
Lithe tubes, in which, through copper, subtle juices,
Swift, and with speech suspended in them, sped,
So that his forces met, reported, planned
Snug, without faring forth to risk the Gorgon's Head.

But when at last he ceased, Athene frowned:—
“Thou know'st I have been ever at thy side.
“Thou speakest much of cleverness. Art thou
“So dull?” she questioned. And Perseus replied
Heavily:—“O high Goddess, I have tried
“All, never wearying, all deeds the foe did
“Myself have done. This war may not be won
“By workings of men's wits alone: the dice are loaded!

“Always their fantasy anticipates:
“Some Influence, whether of Earth or Sky or Ocean
“Works to advantage them; it dreams behind
“The Thought beneath their thought, and speeds the motion
“Of keen invention's wings. As idle notion
“I scorned the tale at first; but now concur,
“Since mine own ears have heard their renegade
“Talk in his wine-cups. He was their philosopher;

“And told of Gordian problems, one by one,
“Solved in a twinkling by some happy guess,
“Which men had thought a task for years; of glances
“On faces startled by their own success;

“Of mushroom sproutings of ingeniousness
“Beyond belief; and how there seemed some flux
“That let, like molten tin, dexterity
“Run in their minds and muscles with strange ease, like
 luck’s.

“I know not its true name, this unseen Power,
“If some new rôle of Chance-controlling Fate,
“So! If aught less, if some malignant God—
“O Thou, who didst not let inordinate
“Unboundaried Poseidon liquidate
“Wily Odysseus on his tiny prow!
“Sweet Casemate of men’s little moated towns!
“Stern daughter of my Father! Sister! Aid me now!”

He ceased, and peered deep in her shadowy features,
Dismayed to mark the solemn look they wore.
“Thou knowest,” she began, “how Earth and Ocean
“Mingled in love at first, till Ocean bore
“Phorcys and Ceto, who had issue four,
“One mortal, three immortal. One alone
“Thou hast subdued—thine enemy and friend,
“Medusa, who, being dead, turns breathing flesh to stone.

“Medusa, firm of breast and soft of hair
“Beyond all mortal women—till that hour
“Of love-play in my temple with Poseidon—
“My Temple!—Much availed her Paramour
“To shield his Fondling! Yet I wield no power
“Over immortals. So those other Three,
“The Dragon of the Garden of the West
“And those vile offal, Stheno and Euryale,

“Still brood disastrous malice—hard Stheno
“And soft Euryale abominable!
“And since the two have watched Medusa’s Head
“Sundered by thee and made the unwilling tool
“For fastening on impulse Reason’s rule,
“Either with other cunningly conspires,
“By mingling their vile natures, to frustrate her:
“For thus what their dead Sister’s deepest Self desires

“They muse to bring about. All this I saw
“Here, where the seeds of human deeds are sown –
“The outcome of that ghostly husbandry
“Now for the first time by thyself am shown.
“O Perseus, not the Gorgon-ray alone,
“Or not as thou hast used, for this last fray,
“I tell thee, shall suffice. A heavier price—
“A heavier price—a nobler deed—some other way!”

The Goddess paused:—“There was a time,” she said,
“Before thou wast entangled with thy love,
“When with thy shadow thou didst sweep the earth,
“Unconquerably swooping from above,
“Armed with the Gorgon. Atlas did not move
“After thy passing. Even so shall it be
“Again—from air—and yet more godlike, too—
“Less hampered—more controlled—wide—with a scope
more free!”

Eagerly whispered Perseus then:—“The deed
“Is mine. I came to Thee, that I might *know*.
“Oh speak!” And him the Goddess answered not
But pointed downward to where, far below,
His body sprawled, which had resisted so

Its mind's release, and shook her shady head,
And the sad olives round the temple rustled
Gently, as with her pitying smile:—"Not thou!" she said,
"That flesh is all Andromeda's, whose breast

"In sympathy (who knows if not in league?)
"Beats with the enemy! I may not chance
"My holy Targe in peril of intrigue.
"No earthly mind that turns, a whirligig
"In soft affection's breeze, shall lift this curse
"Of Stheno and Euryale—and thine?
"I saw thy soul within this hour wholly hers!"

Then, as a tit that darts into a chamber
Filled with some company of romping boys,
Astounded in a strange, unfriendly world
Of clumsy motions, and shrill, dangerous noise,
Is very still; and naught but that poise
Disowns the ice of death—so Perseus grew
Still at those grievous words. Long moments passed
Before his whisper, hoarse and low:—"What shall I do?"

And she, in measured tones:—"Thou shalt go forth
"And thou shalt take with thee the Goatskin Sack.
"In no wise shalt thou seem a King—disguised
"And like a beggar, by the westward track
"Thou shalt forsake my City. On thy back
"My Shield, Medusa's Head upon thy arm,
"Thou shalt go forth alone—"

"Alone?" he said.

"Alone. Her Kinsmen shall preserve thy Queen from harm—

"Because thy trumpeter shall sound surrender—"
She paused, and like near hills, her stony stare

Lay vast upon him: "Hearest thou me, Perseus?
"Hearest thou me? Thy task lies elsewhere.
"I, Pallas, am commanding thee to fare
"Forth from the Land thou savedst not, to find,
"Through endless journeyings and awful queries,
"A Prince on horseback, who shall tell thee all his mind,

"Thinking thou art some common wayfarer.
"Thou shalt not tell him of thy heavenly birth
"Or after-traffic with the Gods, for he
"Abhors proud men, and prizes simple worth
"Beyond nobility. His mind to earth,
"His heart turned to the Gods, he pricks, demure,
"Erect, the path of duty—whom all the beauty
"Of Argos' frail, pathetic Queen could not allure;

"Nor yet the Gorgon's blood incarnate grown,
"Chimaera, thrice inhuman (who transgressed
"The shape of man's one figure, even as thou
"Art disincarnate now for me), could wrest
"His will unwilling from his mind's behest.
"Himself disguised, he neither shall make known
"To thee (save unawares) his true estate,
"Thereof ashamed, nor own his name—Bellerophon."

Next she unfolded some undoubted signs
By which the King must recognise the Prince,
His gait and garb—but, most of all, the Steed
He rode, whose gentle fierceness made it wince
At all but loving tones; of strange hoof-prints
She spoke, and named the Fountain, springing clean,
That gushed from the hard rock the hoofs had struck,
Whose thunder trode Chimaera under—Hippocrene!

“But when thou hast his name, if in discourse
“On duty or great need he shall enlarge
“Or weighty deeds, thou shalt deliver him
“Medusa’s Head and my misused Targe,
“And bid him—nay, the rest is not thy charge.
“I will Myself—“ She ceased, for like a stone,
His stunned and weakened spirit earthward plunged
And, like a meteor after, fell: “Bellerophon . . .”

Bellerophon! a sound—a name! But when
Behind its fleshly eyes it fully woke,
Because his spirit had gone out in fear
And home in haste, all else Athene spoke
Vanished aloof his memory, like smoke,
He only knew he must go forth alone,
Forsaking all his will had once defended—
Must wander o’er the earth to seek Bellerophon.

III

BELLEROPHON

How well for Perseus, that not weeks or days
Are granted for his exodus, but hours!
Ere dusk to dawn can change, he must be gone:
He whips his spirit up and goads his powers
To order all things well—but still it cowers
From choice to tell, or not to tell, the Queen:
Which? In the end he dared not take farewell
But left a letter lying where it must be seen.

The sentry, stamping to keep out the cold,
Chaffed the old scarecrow in his rags uncouth
And let him pass; behind his back arose
The sun; old warmth that warmed his heart in youth,
When Pallas urged him to wear wings for truth,
Rose like a ghost with it, as, like a ghost
Furtively quitting the dear light of day,
He made his way, unhindered, through the invading host.

The unchanging motion of his rangy limbs,
As Phoebus mounted, rocked asleep the ache
Of the overburdened breast. The road lay bare.
He thought:—'No more with each new dawn to wake
'To tangle of hopeless knots! No plans to make
'Or forward-look to feign! No more abiding
'The pressure of her inexpressiveness,
'Watching that mask-like face and wondering what it's
hiding!

'At least now I can breathe! I am alone,
'Free, unoppressed, untormented!' He drew,
Striding, deep breaths of air; and so, by night,
Came to a cool oasis, where the dew
Lingered, and water tinkled, and things grew,
And lay flat on his back and almost wept
Because he was so much at peace. Above
The shining Bears walked round Polaris, while he slept.

The same dawn in the Palace round the Queen
Slaves ran about like ants in some dry mound
A passing heel has brushed; and mid those shouts
And aimless hurryings back and forth and round
Andromeda in the same moment found
His letter and her purpose—but the Myth
Runs on through time and space to where, alone,
The King's prone majesty lies, like a monolith . . .

He woke—or he was wide awake—alert,
Staring: on high the flaming Almagest
Of changeling constellations told the hour
Nigh dawn: one ear against the ground he pressed:
No drum of hooves! his quick experience guessed,
Some animal was near; he made no noise
As he rose and peered around: There! On the ground,
A panther's bound apart, a human shape—a boy's!

Stirless, abrupt, beneath the stars he stood,
Then instantly resolved to close—to wind
The youngster in his cloak, before he woke,
Mobling his smothered captive dumb and blind,
Taking no chances: He crept up behind

And cautiously bent over the small face
Peeping above the sheepskin caked with dust,
Trustfully sleeping like a child's—Andromeda's!

Silent he stared: she had followed him, it seemed!
What! had some idiot servant failed to keep
His secret – told the Queen (intruding fool!)—
Then mounting passion ebbed to reverie deep:—
Musing, he gazed: Who can be wroth with sleep?
How shall the vertical rebuke the prone:—
This brisk vulgarity of instant self
Be angry with that far-off unresisting one?

Rather the prone upbraids: the shuttered flesh
That vacant majesty of stars possesses
Chides this rank tenement, still occupied—
Then hers unlocked such famished tendernesses
(Imagination blending, once, her dress's
Light rise and fall with affluent, effluent Nile—
Watching—her Sphinx—till cautious windows opened
And revenant Psyche flashed through wonder to a smile)!

Who can be wroth? He could not wake her now.
He wrenched himself aside, and bowed his head:
"Pallas Athene, who art all my thought,
"Be thou my will! O let myself be dead!
"Be Thou me absolutely, Thou!" he said—
Before he slept, stern phrases, with no lack
Of tempered kindness in them, teased his mind,
With which, at first of morning, he would send her back.

Dawn broke, and slowly brightened, while the spring
Tinkled unheeded into silence. Day
Shone far advanced, before the ravening wolf,

Couched in this Traveller, woke him with rough play:
Lord! He was hungry as a castaway,
Keen as a razor, empty as a drum:—
'Fit life for men!' he thought—and then remembered
What grievous tack his butler called *viaticum*.

Next he recalled the night, and glanced across
To where, attired betwixt a boy and man,
Andromeda, low kneeling by a fire,
Where larder victuals in some sort of pan
Were frying into fragrance, now began,
With dainty manage and approving head,
Smoothing a little square of diaper
And chopping into dice a loaf of wastel bread.

And I—I know not which to find more strange,
The man's unnatural silence, or the woman's,
For when he rose, as all had been arranged,
Seated together both, they took their commons;
With nothing asked about the awful summons
That set a monarch flitting like a debtor
And nothing offered—where the thunderbolt
Had fallen, it lay: the escape, their journey, his brief letter.

Before they left their bivouac, they saw
Float, like a phantom from the gates of Dis,
Shadowy through the trees a wingèd shape
That flapped off back to the metropolis
Whence it had followed him unmarked; and this,
This glimpse of the white owl afit, where no men
Dwelt and no creature tarried, pleased the Queen
As boding some good hap—but Perseus read the omen,

Vexed with himself, and quibbling with the gods,
Perplexed to find he could not turn her back,
Answering his heart:— 'I did go forth alone!
'Was it my fault she followed? Eh? Alack!
So these two travellers, with no almanac,
Save the bright stars at night, to tell their days,
Wandered together through the desert sands
And came at last again to tilth and trodden ways.

The Myth despises daily accidents,
The dry and the damp sirocco—passes closed
Fevers and sores and rotting sandals—West
They wandered, and then North up to the coast
And, thence embarking, in a small ship crossed,
By night, the waters flowing through the Gates
Of Heracles, and reached this later world,
Whose shores a vaster sea indents and inundates,

And, crossing longshore between moist and dry,
Incessantly retires and advances . . .
But always Perseus marked, through dust and storm,
In shelter or no-shelter—travellers' chances—
What sulphurous (or were they timorous?) glances
She cast upon the Sack—and he would steal
Furtively then, like one who hopes he dreams,
A finger towards the finger which still wore his seal,

Wondering how much she knew, and how—what caused
That stare—And once he paused before a choice
Of forking ways and said:—

“Well, Lady, which?

“Choose thou! We are the gods' and Fortune's toys.

“It matters not.” And she, in toneless voice:—

“My Lord, my thanks; but this I think is clear,
“I cannot make the choice, who do not know
“Where thou and I are going, or why we are here!”

Pricked, he began to teach her in low tones
How to Another soon the Shield must be
Yielded, because—“the gifts the gods bestow
“The gods require”—with conscious majesty
And calm Hellenic poise, looking to see
Respect and wonder light up in her face
Even as he spoke, and, after, to receive
Perhaps her gentle pity, certainly some praise.

She waited patiently till he moved on,
Then moved along with him. She did not speak:
Her silence did. It cried: ‘Remember, Man,
‘The cause of all my woe is still to seek!
‘Once, in the Palace, when thou heard’st the shriek,
‘Thou didst remember—why hast thou not tried
‘Again?’ And even as he drew breath to speak,
A horseman overtook them and fell in beside,

Fell in beside and slowed to walking pace:
Strange rider on a strange mount—square, the man,
Huge, glooming with bowed head; his tattered garb—
A sort of dull and angry fustian—
Hung from his shoulders without shape or plan
As from a rail; as for his horse, a hood
Covered it wholly, trailing cap-a-pie;
Alone the dusty tail, the pasterns caked with mud

Showed plain to view—then, caverned in cloth holes,
Two lustrous, conscious, heaven-absorbing eyes!
The woolen cloak that mocked his noble pace

Itself was mocked by such unsuited toys
As purpled earcaps, fitted point-device,
Stirrup and bit that flashed like miracles,
Two spurs in gleaming gold, a surcingle
Tasselled or tied adroitly with small, jingling bells.

He rarely smiled, this monumental man,
Save as he, glancing, caught from time to time
Bright knurl or glistening loop, or stooped to listen
To the tinkle of those bells, whose daedal chime
Brought joy into his face, as though sublime
Auloi were softly breathing Doric airs.
Courteous he was, and ready of fair speech,
But quick to parry trespass on his own affairs.

Perseus was careful to accost all strangers
And, after fair exchange of talk and jest,
To draw from each of them (thereto impelled
By some dim memory of the gods' behest)
The story of his life; and this request
Had never been denied him yet—in truth
I never met a man in all my days
Who needed much cajoling to recall his youth.

So, while the vanished sun suffused with rose
A fleecy canopy of cloud, content,
They talked of ways and weathers, men and gods,
Until, as they toiled up some slow ascent
That lay before them, crime and punishment
Were spoken of by Perseus, when such zest
Rang in the Stranger's voice as made the King
Resolve to work upon that wakened interest.

He, who knew how to win men's confidence
By slipping in his own, recalled the fate
Of Proetus, Argos' King, who bilked his brother,
Acrisius; the just gods, he said, though late,
Visited the usurper's hate with hate
Most terrible, hate solid, hate's dark flame
Frozen to marble everlastingness,
When he, Acrisius' seed, the Gorgon-bearer, came.

"Proetus?" the Stranger cried, "He was my friend!
"I may not think he was a wicked man,
"Save only as all hearts are wicked! Lonely
"My youth was, outlawed, cowed beneath the ban
"Of the stern gods, and wandering with no plan
"Over the earth, when Proetus took me in
"And friendship healed my sore, and priestly lore
"With sacrifice and intercession purged my sin.

"Those were my best years, while I shared his board
"And the liberty of Argos, while—"

"What sin?"

Andromeda had spoken. Perseus frowned,
Hearing her so discourteously break in;
To whom the Traveller, armed against chagrin
In fierce humility—more self-reliant
Than innocence or pride—forthwith replied
In a calm voice, not more submissive than defiant:—

"Boy, in Ephyrae, when we both were boys,
"I slew my brother!" So, a little space
They all were silent. Both from time to time
Shot sidelong glances at the Horseman's face
That searched in vain for tracks of weak or base.

The Stranger said:—"So swift year followed year,
"Until the Queen wrecked all. The restless will
"That ever fills their busy minds provoked Antea

"To dream she loved me! Who, when tears and wiles
"Nor all her wanton wanderings in the night
"Nor shameful gifts depraved me—tore her shift
"And hissed: *Thou miserable anchorite!*
"Then shrieked to her sweet lord to do her right
"Ere he be cuckolded. To see me slain
"Before her silly eyes was Madam's will—
"But Proetus only packed me wandering again."

He ceased. And from the excitement of the Queen
A gloaming impulse, neither thought nor dream,
Sped Eastward, mothlike, to the Cyprian's throne,
Who, mounting swift behind her feathery team,
Flashed back over the momentary gleam
Of Ocean, thence across the northern lands
And, lost in twilight, stayed her car unseen,
Hovering lightly over where the lady stands,

Bidding her murmur, half against her will:—
"Not all men, Stranger, would have wrought like this!
"Not all men would have strained bright honour so
"To spurn in dismal night the cup of bliss
"Freely bestowed on them—"

"By Artemis!"

The Stranger laughed, "Not all men would have seen,
"Boy, in the crutch of those seductive arms
"There, where a moment since, a pretty breast had been,

"Mantling, unbodied, pitiless, aghast
"With blank, horrific stare, the Old—"

Abrupt

He ceased, because his sober-pacing beast
Had halted, whinnying wild and shrill, and upped,
Staggering with forehooves high in air: he cupped
With hand possessive the taut, straining neck
Nor cursed, but rather, chiding like a nurse,
Whispered:—"Ground, Ground, my Fury! What? Check,
hinny, check!"

Meekly the creature sank on all four feet,
Heeding his voice, but ere it deigned to walk,
The dallying Goddess grasped her silken reins
And stayed no more to listen to such talk:
She sprang aloft, her bright hair's orichale
Streaming to mingle with the sunset's flame,
And, darkling, piloted indignant doves,
Through flocks of blushing cirrus, home the way she came.

All day they had been climbing. Now the way
Led between flanking walls, cut through a mass
Of rock, and now began to drop—and now,
Turning his head to glance back at the pass:—
"So," said the Traveller softly, "so it was!
"In such a spot! I had plodded up the strath
"Thirsting all day, and so at shut of eve
"I came upon Her swiftly, sprawled across my path,

"Seeming at first to be an old She-goat
"Squatting inert: I cursed the noisome stench
"And halted as it smote on me, then spat
"And started on again—ashamed to blench
"Before the plague that any farming wench
"Encounters daily. Only her vast size

“And squalid shapelessness, I know not how,
“That, and her foolish mouth and mean, sardonic eyes,

“I know not how, enthralled me as I neared,
“Till a most hideous hate began to freeze
“My blood: how politic, how old in sin
“The tufted chin! Ye smile, but thoughts like these,
“The greedy simper of her cold caprice,
“The impudent streamline of the backward sweep
“Of her delicate, thin horn were horrible:
“I drew my sword . . . And friends, I saw her melt, like sleep,

“Into all-otherness! My hatred died:—
“A ghastly Lioness’s counterfeit
“Sheathed and unsheathed her claws, and stretched and
 yawned,
“Purring unholy puissance:—Oh, most sweet
“It seemed to me that ‘twixt those velvet feet
“The strength of all my limbs must be outpoured,
“That, while she arched in ecstasies of ease,
“I must be teased and mauled and languidly devoured!

“Round either haunch appeared and disappeared
“Obscenely pilled, provocatively slow,
“A sinuous lean tail, whose felted tip,
“Continuously hovering to and fro,
“Slid like a living Serpent’s head! And so—
“And so—“

 The Stranger halted; his square jaw
Dropped with recalled dismay, and now he said,
Patting his Horse:—“If once the creature rips the Law

“Fixed in its Form, old Chaos shoulders through
“And monster buds from monster—as Despair

“Breeds fantasies . . . The Hooded Horror grew:
“And still I stood and stared into the stare
“Above that flickering fork—how every hair
“Stood out upon my skin! Enamelled coils,
“Compact of buxom rondure, glistened bright
“With copper-slippery colours, like a witch’s oils—

“Oh long, long afterwards—and even now,
“May be—when young Aurora laughs serene,
“And horns are blowing, all the freshness fades
“From her fair hues, and that too beauteous sheen
“Slips, like a stealthy lacquer, in between
“Creation and my eyes—a scaly crust
“That brightens, first, the visionary gleam,
“Then leaves me chewing bitter ashes of disgust—

“Faugh!— let us talk now of some other thing!
“There is no mystery here. Let others yield
“To their Antea, Boy, for whom the gods
“Never ordained their memories should wield
“The spectre of Chimaera for a shield—
“Not I!”

“But is she—lies Chimaera dead?
“Thou hast not told us how thou didst prevail
“Over the Beast at last!” the Gorgon-slayer said.

“And were it *now*— and had I prayed the gods
“For strength to flee,” the Traveller replied,
“And they had heard my prayer—but I was young
“And honour was the name I gave to pride:
“So I returned to Her—this time astride
“My Beautiful! We rode for death or glory,
“My Beautiful and I—“ so, making much
Of his great Beast—“and—well—here was another story!”

Now, while Andromeda kept in her heart
His history, and was silent, there began
Between the twain a rapid interchange
Of argument, debating man with man
The mystery of craft equestrian,
Of stud and manage and the Trojan art
Of taming steeds—from which, having heard enough,
The Queen withdrew herself a little space apart,

And lapsed into a reverie, whereat,
Seeing her lagged beyond their voices' range,
The King spoke out—because he loved the man,
And purposing in no wise to estrange
Fair candour by withholding fair exchange
(For always he recalled his temple-trance
Wherein Athene named Bellerophon
And warned him he must find in words let fall by chance

Signs that would privately reveal the Prince
To whom the Head and Shield must be resigned)—
Therefore he told him of the Queen's disguise
And hurriedly disclosed her womankind,
Passing to other theme, as from behind
With hastening steps, she drew once more abreast
And, silent still and smiling to herself,
Walked now upon the far side of the Stranger's beast.

She smiled because her practised eye had seen
There, in the shabby cloth, what guileless art hid,
Or failed to hide, with stitches, a long rent,
Which, as she guessed, the golden spur had started,
A grievous gash that zig-zagged up and parted

Over the rippling shoulder in a tear
Hard by her cheek, wherethrough she slipped a hand
To feel his friendly hide and sleek and pat him there.

In early Spring, when slivers of blue sky
Upon the meadows lie, in shallow floods,
Ere any shiver, any cuckoo cry
Has shaken the bare boughs of the wet woods,
The willow-branches, trim with willow-buds,
Are broken by the children off the trees,
Who hardly fancy little button-flowers
Could be so silky-soft to touch, so hard to squeeze:

So hard, so soft was this whereon her palm
So lightly rested—once, and years ago
(Her startled heart stood still as she remembered),
This pleased palm had rested even so
Even upon such feathers; when great woe
Smote her because they quarreled, and all day,
After he left, she stayed in Hermes' temple,
Stroking the god-like plumes of his Talaria.

Now she withdrew her hand and laid her cheek
An instant there, where through the narrow rent
The pinion gleamed, and closed her eyes and whispered:—
“Thou darling!” Now she prayed, now round she went
And walked beside the wordy two, intent
Still on the thing they loved, as men will be,
Impersonal, exact about the facts
Of the clever, beautiful technique of Chivalry.

Soon, following the mountain's downward slope,
The track had reached a turfy, smooth plateau
Whence, like a lingering hawk, the rested eye

Could hover over all the plains below
Exulting; but delaying afterglow
Was dying Westward now; two planets bright
Showed in the East, and overhead the stars
Were winking faintly. Here they halted for the night.

The Stranger's horse, loose-tethered, cropped the thyme
Through tender lips with dainty appetite;
The three on the smooth turf reclined together,
Savouring the warm wonder of the night;
The moon set; the cigalas chirred; a slight
Rustle of beechen foliage round shed deep
Contentment, while a great fatigue possessed
Their resting limbs, that seemed a substitute for sleep.

Soon for the full tale of Chimaera's death
The Queen, who had pondered much, began to press
The Stranger; but the Stranger had put on
Some creaking panoply of courtliness,
Because he knew her sex, an arch address
Larded with *Madam's* and Arcadian bows,
Turning her serious questions with a smile
That met no answering smile upon the lady's brows.

There was a time, when she must have responded,
And gaily—stepping out the double dance
Of gallantry together; but not now,
Not since the night of that fell, fleeting glance
Within the Sack! What hateful arrogance
Grinned through his mask of homage, what contempt
Too deep for words! She heard, or thought she heard,
What biting irony behind a compliment!

At last, as one confused:—"Madam," he prosed,
"So just, and so" – he bowed—"so fair a Court
"To faulty recollection, halting testimony
"Will grant indulgence"—here she cut him short
And told him briefly to describe the mort,
Asked if his horse had panicked (her two eyes
Were needles while he answered) and then said:—
"I hardly think, O stranger, all was in this wise.

"Thou hast not let us hear of the grapple yet!
"How did thy destrier support her gaze?
"Or rode ye round? But if she blocked the road
"Between the rocks, ye met her face to face!
"How then escape the all-smothering embrace,
"The stare, the sting? Or was, perchance, thy blow
"(Dost thou remember now?) not rather struck
"Sir Stranger—I am guessing—from above, below?"

Thus boldly she. But Perseus grew abashed
And yearned to make amends on her behalf,
Hearing her rattle; so he sharply turned
And cried out to the Stranger, with a laugh:—
"I think the Trojans never bred, Sir, half
"So leapable or so sweet-mouthed a foal
"As this, the lady's Fancy—by my troth,
"A capital curvet—a topping capriole!"

But when he ceased, the Stranger into the fire
Stared more intently, seeming not to hear,
Then towards the Queen a little turned his face
Saying—his voice now solemn and severe:—
"Not over-courteously thou comest near,
"Unbidden, Lady—well, it shall be so!

“The mark at which these pointed shafts are aimed,
“The mystery of my Courser’s breed ye both shall know!”

IV

PEGASUS

“There is a pool men call ‘The Fountain Tarn,’
“A windless mirror of aetheric light—
“Nay, but I ride too fast; I first must tell
“How, in my budding manhood, to requite
“That old iniquity, the gods my sight
“Forsook, their ghostly breath from Earth withdrew,
“Which gradually, like the morning haze,
“Vanished away beyond the overarching blue.

“Praise ye the living gods, who have not known
“A world forlorn of god—her oceans dry
“Of all save water, her soft heaven of night
“Hard as if hollowed out of porphyry—
“Who never watched the nymphs and naiads die,
“Like wintry birds, or heard from some stark tree
“Not Philomela but a nightingale
“Mocking with trills deaf dark that is not now Procne.

“And worse than a world forsaken, worse than all
“That mausoleum of mere earth and sky,
“The charnel stillness of the world within;
“Where impulse checks at reason’s bantering *Why*;
“Till will has put on mind’s infirmity,
“And old man’s languor settles unperceived,
“And lotus-rotted are the lips that mutter:—
“‘Nought can be felt or done, since naught can be believed.’

“Alas, how desolate young men may be
“That look so brisk! What listless days, what days

"I lolled beside the Fountain Tarn, assoiling
"In the quiet water my unquiet gaze!
"(Dear dimple on Acrocorinthia's
"Rock-wrathful countenance!) Till there befell,
"After my first encounter with Chimaera
"Not many days, this thing I scarce know how to tell.

"Often I mused if there might come a time
"When youth, all youth, were ill, as I was ill—
"How if the god—enough! One Autumn day
"When the surface of the water spread so still,
"Its turfy edge was like a window-sill
"Opening upon Antipodean sky,
"Where now and then, from unreflected trees,
"A falling leaf came fluttering up reluctantly,

"I, as my wont was, lay beside the brink—
"When nothing signifies, when we despair,
"Then most to silly trifles we attend;
"So I at one dead leaf began to stare—
"Followed it planing through that mirrored air
"Some less meandering error than the rest—
"Courting absorption for absorption's sake,
"Because it seemed to slack tight bands about my breast.

"Friends, have ye ever stared upon a word,
"Some common word men utter every day,
"So hard that, on the parchment or the wax,
"Somehow the little syllable looks *fey*?
"Seen all the pith of meaning drain away
"That made its face familiar—stood spellbound,
"A barbarous man that never learned to speak,
"Gaping upon that slab of unrelated sound?

“So went it with me now, beside the Pool,
“Lying so tranquil in that mountain air,
“So blank and so familiar—suddenly
“There was no reason why it should be there . . .
“And in that instant I became aware
“Of goings-on—some older tale than Reason’s—
“Pirene’s fountain streaming far above,
“And the lift and lapse of vapours in Earth’s dance of
 seasons.

“Then, in that instant, shaken, I beheld
“Most clear the shape my mind miscalled a leaf
“Alter to some thing, large and far away,
“That moved with purpose: Eager sprang belief
“In the unbelievable—a sky-born Skiff
“With spreading sails, a Dragon, some great Fish
“Oaring the air with wings . . .

‘Imaginings!’

“Said dull experience drily, ‘You see what you wish.

““This is that gleam the thirsting Arab sees,
““Mariner-mirage in the barren main!’
“And I looked up from the water, swift as thought:
“And found it was a phantom of my brain! . . .
“But when, after some days, it gleamed again,
“I held the image, while its questioned source
“Dropped earthward, like a blessing, and this time
“Glassed in the Fountain Tarn beheld a Flying Horse!

“Trembling I gazed—remember, I had seen,
“Save for Chimaera, now, for long long years,
“No numen fair or foul—river and cloud,
“But never a glimpse of Arethusa’s tears;

“Odorous gums I smelt, not Leucothea’s
“Warm body perfumed for Apollo’s kiss;
“To my dull sight no beastly form was bright
“Or passionate with a recent metamorphosis—

“Trembling I gazed and trembling misbelieved
“The orient shape I met reflected there,
“Then raised again—poor cautious dupe—my eyes
“To rake with killing custom’s pury stare
“The iron crags and all the empty air,
“Where dead leaves loitered, where an eagle screamed
“Angrily—ah, but, friends, the third time, when
“Deep in the sleeping waters argent plumage gleamed,

“I was prepared, and lifted not my eyes . . .
“The travelled helix, which he left behind,
“As nearer earth in narrowing sweeps he planed
“Scooped, as if some enchanter’s wand defined,
“A giant funnel, in whose heel reclined
“My breathing self—in-tapering from a rim
“Wide as the infinite embrace of Heaven,
“Whose breaths are moist and dry, hot, cold, and bright and
dim.

“This time I never stirred, till I was sure
“His feet were on the turf. How shall I say
“What then I saw, how paint the gentle joy
“When hippogriffs on earth make holiday?
“It was like looking at a gusty day
“Made of a horse, tough trees and restless ocean
“Tossing, rip-tearing, scampering, scudding, skimming,
“Each twig and every shivering wave alive with motion.

“Then there would follow calm, and he would stand
“Grave as a priest—except one jolly whisk
“Of his bushy tail—to crop some asphodel
“(Look at him now, beside the tamarisk!)
“Then up again his mane, and oh, his brisk
“Melodious neigh! slow nostrilfall of sound,
“Whose multitudinous neesings seemed to say:—
“*Never heed a penny any heaven— Ohé the Ground!*

“At last he trotted to the Tarn and drank
“And shook himself and neighed. I watched him fold
“Closer about his flanks his silver wings
“And lapse into the flowers, where he rolled
“Savouring who knows what potable gold,
“What ecstasies! whereof having drunk his fill,
“On Gaia’s breast he, staring at the sky,
“Wise like a baby, four stiff legs in air, lay still.

“Here was my chance: I rose: but, when I stirred,
“He, with a cat’s quick back trick, on all fours,
“Twisting his torse, had landed. As I neared,
“For one bright trice remembrance racks to hours
“He rested on me two soft eyes like flowers,
“Then, like the morning cock in act to crow,
“Clapped his great wings and off into deep heaven
“Streaked, like a silver arrow clanged from Phoebus’ bow.

“Now, Lady,” smiled the Stranger, “art thou pleased?
“Will those death-darting eyes leave off to scold
“Their humble serjeant? Shriven am I? Not therefor,
“I swear it, shall I leave my tale half-told—
“Yet ask not of what Sire he was foaled.
“I only know that he was born in heaven

“And flew to earth.”

But Perseus thundered “No!

“By Zeus the cloud of my forgetfulness is riven!

“All that Athene showed me in my trance

“Comes whelming back—Chimaera—the Winged Horse”

(And then, half-fallen into a trance again,

Moulding each sound with hieratic force:—)

“While through the sky (she said) I steered a course

“Towards Aethiopia, from Medusa’s neck

“Drops of arterial blood, too fierce to clot,

“Dripped on the Libyan Desert, fleck by fleck by fleck:

“And where they landed, drank them the hot sand,

“Till soaked in blood and sun, the barren grains

“Grew seminal, and soon you might have seen

“An alteration in the sullen stains,

“A bloom, a ferment, struggles, growing pains

“Of Anger crowding into space, a smother

“Of fiery serpents, dragonish, and some

“With wings, the loathly bantlings of that lawless Mother.

“Not all engendered so: when one drop dripped,

“A tiny cloud was sailing past the sun,

“Softening his glare: it spattered on a rock

“And, ere the shadow lifted, from that one

“Gout of the Gorgon-blood a Stallion

“Started up lordly, snorting, plumed, aglow,

“Which straight (her own words) *off into deep heaven*

“*Streaked, like a silver arrow clanged from Phoebus’ bow.*

“So sprang from Earth thy Pegasus—whom so

“She named—and soon on Earth again was known,

“Was often seen among the chaste Novena

“Of Lady Sisters, who trip naked on
“The smooth slopes of Cadmeian Helicon:
“Who danced, and decked his flanks with garlands bright
“And musically groomed his wilting plumes
“And crowned his Horseship their sweet, masculine Delight.

“But, as the world grew old and weatherworn,
“His feathers clogged with particles of dust
“For all their grooming; so he neighed adieu
“And flew off up to heaven in disgust:
“‘Lest Pegasus should be dis-Pegasus’d,’
“He thought and, in the thought, the barren rock
“Spurned with his glancing hoof . . .
“A gushing Fountain rushed to answer that sharp knock!

“This was the Horse’s Fountain—Hippocrene—
“And, O sweet Prince Bellerophon, and thou,
“Dearest Andromeda, that happy stream
“Ceased not to gurgle—hark! tis gurgling now!
“Yea, wheresoever there is earth to plough
“Or plant with corn and vine (she said) redound
“The voices of its waterbrooks inaudible;
“Asleep, mysterious, wilful, purling underground.

“Even in the far North, where thick, smarting mists
“Have blotted all our Muses, all our gods
“From humorous eyes, in melancholy Thule,
“Mad poets wander with divining rods,
“And now and then the pithy hazel nods,
“Cramping their fingers, while it stirs the spleen,
“They dig, and from below a slip and crumble
“It dashes out again, undoubted Hippocrene.

“Few (said the Goddess) hear the sound, few listen;
“For out of patience their sad sense is deaved
“By harsh banausic dins, but, once they take it—
“Mark now the marvel!— once they have received
“The local chuckle, ears grow unbereaved
“And drink the whole great Fountain of the Horse,
“The general noise commingled or, at choice,
“Each babble, cluck, roar, gurgle, far back to the source.

“Each fancy chooses where to tune her ear,
“And, if she will, in turn may hear them all:
“Soft Scythian burr; Danubian rustle-rush;
“Diamond drip drip on worn stones in Gaul;
“The clean, abrupt Castilian waterfall;
“Ausonia’s bell-mouthed clangour; last she wins
“To where the water pounds, in Thessaly,
“With boom and crash and thunder, on those cauldron
lynns.”

He paused: the Graces morris’d in his eyes:
Now, while the word had hovered by the Beast,
The Queen had hung upon the Prince’s tongue
Entranced, and her intensity increased,
When Perseus followed on and, like a priest,
Sang of the true nativity; she heard,
She saw—and once he looked at her and caught
Her half forgotten dazzling smile—but when the word

Checked at the Fountain, her attention strayed—
No King can mount, no Prince back Hippocrene:—
“But what now of the wondrous Horse?” she said.
“Why, Pegasus no more on Earth was seen,”
Perseus replied, “save when, Belovèd Queen,

“He visited the Fountain Pool for sport,
“Or some light reek or rumour of Chimaera
“Reverberated up in some man’s soaring thought,

“And overbore his natural buoyancy
“That lifts him swiftly back to his abode
“In the moment of forsaking it—as mass
“Darts oppositely down to that dense lode
“That nestles at Earth’s core. Athene showed
“How the great sides can scarcely hold it in,
“The greater heart, that swells with rage to trample
“His arch, hereditary, soft, detested kin.”

“Kin!” cried the Horseman (stranger now no more,
But named by his true name, Bellerophon)
“How oddly tripped thy tongue, intending ‘foe’!”
And all his guileless face with anger shone.
But Perseus gravely laid a hand upon
The Prince’s arm:—“The gods must be believed!
“Chimaera was, no less than Pegasus,
“Through that same ‘odd’ Medusa, whom I slew, conceived.

“Pallas discovered all their pedigree,
“But all as at this time I do not tell,
“Lest I ungently maze my gentle Queen—
“There are so many names!—More fierce and fell
“Than slain Medusa those twin slips of Hell,
“Her deathless Sisters, leagues beyond the sea,
“Seethe with astute intrigues, and loathe the gods,
“And plot my overthrow—Stheno—Euryale;

“Who saw their ghostly Sister by me forced
“To baffle their own lawless will, and dreamed
“A plot to baffle mine; but when they heard

“That Pegasus was born, they clanged and screamed
“Horribly:—*Gorgon! Gorgon!* Since it seemed
“Almost as if Reason herself had wings,
“Whom, bound to earth, they could have scotched, but now
“Beheld the wreck of all their gloomy purposings.

“Those are not lightly to be overthrown,
“Who work through generation: deeply laid
“Their plans, and ripen late: Medusa’s Son
“(Begotten when she, still a candid maid,
“With huge Poseidon in the Temple played),
“Chrysaor, lives; from whom a monstrous birth,
“To counter Pegasus, the twain procured
“With cantrips foul, and so Chimaera came on Earth.

“But now”—he smiled—“but now it seems Chimaera
“Herself is countered—happy, happy day!
“Far-sighted Gorgons, who might not foresee
“Bellerophon! How far ye planned astray!
“Then praise—“

“I wonder,” said Andromeda
Softly, and held her peace. When the two turned
Uplifted brows on her, she smiled, and said:—
“Finish thy story, Prince! As yet we have not heard

“How he was captured at the last, and tamed,
“This hooded jennet here, that was so shy,
“And now he only jingles little bells
“And stalks sedately with that conscious eye!
“When will he disappear into the sky?”
“Madam, be sure that he would dwell there still
“For any skill of mine! What use to tell
“My baby ruses? He was bridled by God’s will.

“Many more times I waited near the Tarn,
“Patient till he alit. All calls I tried,
“All cozenings. (Gods! I nearly danced and sang,
“Hoping the creature would be mystified
“And take me for a Muse!) I learned to hide
“Behind the very bush he grazed upon,
“But always, when I sprang up with my bridle
“And thought to fling it—like forked lightning, he was gone!

“Almost I yielded to despair: at last,
“One night, when in deep sleep my sense was sealed,
“A tall, still Goddess, whom I knew to be
“Pallas Athene, though she bore no shield,
“Stood by my bed, to whom I humbly kneeled,
“Because she was so huge and I so small,
“And many secrets she made plain to me,
“Which, waking, I was never able to recall.

“At last she pointed to my heart, and looped
“A golden curb and bridle on a tree,
“Then turned, once more admonishing, and vanished,
“And I woke—and thought at first my fantasy
“Had painted all, the Goddess, ay, maybe
“The Horse himself: to think at all seemed idle,
“If dreams were about dreams—and then I knew
“Gods do not mock men—on the tree still swung the Bridle!

“What followed, Lady, thou at least, I fancy,
“Knowest untaught. To bring my barque to land
“In few: upon the next day, by the Pool,
“The heavenly Horse that never yet was manned
“Came trotting meekly to a murderer’s hand

“And sniffed his Bridle—no need to recount
“What followed next: Suffice that, even willing,
“A hippogriff is not an easy beast to mount!

“It cost me, who am rated to excel
“All men on horseback, countless desperate tries,
“But, seated once, all effort lay behind:
“To tread, with Pegasus between his thighs,
“Chimaera, seemed man’s natural exercise!
“And Oh, I would I could forget that hour—
“Holding the divine Ire—upheld—white wings
“Threshing—tiny Aegean Isles—Ah, god-like Power!”

He had risen, and now was pacing to and fro;
A faggot smashed, a flame leaped in the fire,
And all the dancing shadows, born of night,
Bowed to the huge shape of the stooping Flyer
Sublime against the dark; and ever higher
His stature grew in the King’s eyes, who scanned
Him marvelling, till at last he dreamed he saw
Indolent in the sky, a spent bow in one hand

Dangling, the other raised to his broad brow
To shade his gaze against the target Sun,
Smiling, at ease, a shagged and mighty Centaur;
And the King said:—“O thou Bellerophon
“And thou Andromeda, what was begun
“In Pallas’ fane is now accomplishèd.
“I had thought to break my heart, when I must part
“With these so dearly bought, the Shield, the Gorgon’s
Head.

“I find it is not so.” And all his soul
Flamed with devotion swift and rosy love,

As he got upon his feet, half shy, half smiling,
And towards Bellerophon began to move:
Suddenly he threw up one arm above
His head, and cried in a loud voice:—"Receive
"The Hallows!" And forthwith Andromeda
Breathed in an urgent whisper, while she plucked his sleeve:—

"Ask him, Man, ask him first how he will use them,
"Before thou giv'st our property away!"
And, when he would not speak, she cried herself:—
"What wilt thou do, Prince, with God's bounty? Say!
"Wilt thou fly over Aethiopia
"And help us?"

But Bellerophon stood by
The dying fire and gazed into the glow
Sadly, before he answered:—"I will never fly.

"Never again, never, till black be white,
"Hard, soft—till frost shall burn and fire freeze,
"Never, though Pegasus were bound to spread
"His white wings over the Hesperides—
"Though Kings command and Queens upon bare knees
"Weeping implore!"

The Gorgon-slayer stood
Gaping, astounded:—"So! In spite of all
"Thou found'st thou could'st not manage him?"

"I found I *could*,"

The Prince replied, "Have I not bared my pride?
"Have I not answered to thy Lady free
"All her pert questions, and wilt *thou* begin?
"Nay, by the Dog, ye get no more of me—
"Alas, dear Aethiopia's Majesty

“And thou, fair Queen, I know not what I say!
“Forgive, but ask not of my flight toward Heaven.
“Enough, ye know I tried: the way is not that way!

“The Empyrean barely reached, I felt
“A gathering weight of cloud press on my mind
“And heard, like thunder, the Cloud-gatherer’s
“Enormous Voice:—*Wilt thou, thou little blind
“Bellerophon, o’erleap the law of kind
“So easily? Great Prince! How thou wast born
“Hast thou forgot so soon? Down, down to earth!
“Lift up thy heart henceforth, O Man, and not thy horn!*

“Friends, it shows meritorious in the creature
“To cover up such dangerous parts as lack
“Prescribed, obedient function. Quadrupeds,
“Mountant on wings, blaspheme the Zodiac.
“So, when we grounded, I flung o’er his back
“This duffle housing here, which safely tents
“His insolence of wings and holds his rage
“Harmless, and charms with these permitted ornaments.”

He smiled and stepped up to the Horse and shook
Athene’s golden bridle, making tingle
The strapped up arteries with a hearty slap
That stirred beneath the housing and surcingle,
So that they heard the tiny bells all jingle
Delicious in the dark. But Perseus cried,
Impatient now:—“What is all this to me,
“This talk of God knows what and quadrupeds and pride?

“Thou art Bellerophon, I think, that Prince!
“Then know that of Bellerophon I ask
“No questions. Who am I? Divinity

“Made plain to me the rest was not my task,
“Rather declared she would herself unmask
“Her further purposes. Why then delay?
“The time is ripe now for Athene’s deed.
“Leave us a little space alone, Andromeda!”

But when she heard such words, Andromeda’s
Deep heart grew desperate for time: and sent
Out of her mouth a tumbling stream of words,
Which buzzed them both to dumb bewilderment,
Industriously seeking her intent
In the thicket of her speech—while underneath,
Fierce in the silence she had forced, she prayed
To Aphrodite:— ‘Smiler under the gay wreath!

‘Guardian of Paphos! If I ever pious
‘(Though late apostate) have adored thy throne,
‘If thou hast ever drunk within thy Temple
‘The music of my sighs, my pigeon’s moan,
‘Now by thine azure snood, thy holy Zone,
‘Let not Bellerophon have Pegasus!
‘Let Perseus ride him!’ while aloud she ended:—
“Therefore I say it will be wiser far for us

“To sleep till morning. Go we all to bed!
“It is so late now, Perseus, and I grow
“Sleepy. I doubt not that the Prince is tired.
“Is’t not discourteous to importune so
“At all hours of the morning, when we know
“He can do nought, before Aurora leaves
“The couch of old Tithonus and the rose,
“The half-forgotten rose of Phoebus’ kiss receives?”

She looked towards Perseus, but Bellerophon
Pointed them to the sky with smiling mouth,
Sweeping an arm to show where westering dipped
Arcturus, where the Bowman ruled the South:—
“Say what we will, the Lady speaks the truth,”
He said, and yawned, “And I—I do consent
“Gladly for my part.” Perseus nodded. So,
Scattering the ashes of their fire, to ground they went.

V

THE GODS

Dreams are the strangers in our gates. Today
We laugh, or else we marvel, or we go
Paying the young soul-doctor a gold fee
For his yesterday-born jargon: but not so
Shall it be always. One day we shall know
More with the morning: out of sleep will break,
Warm with melodious reverberations,
Answers to earnest questions humbly asked awake.

So, while the glimmering Hyads in the East
Rose from the bath of Ocean—rose to fade,
Withdrawn into dim dawn—Andromeda
Began to dream, who had so lately prayed
Asking the Cyprian so, and for such aid
As, whether or no she willed it, that appeal
Sank through the gateway of her human shape
Into the Myth-womb of man's total woe and weal.

Deeply she slept, and she slept deep. She saw
A vision in deep sleep, a waste of water
Extreme, and, rising far out from the land,
A marble-pale Colossus was the Daughter
Of Zeus, bold Lemman of the God of Slaughter;
About the waves were scattered bobbing faces
Fixed on the Goddess, while along the shore
Young people laughed and shouted in safe shallow places,

Pretending not to mark the undertow,
And gallant women prayed with strangled cries,

And old men smiled like babies nigh those breasts
But found no pity in those violet eyes,
Which gazed out over vast immensities
Sightless, or, seeming melting with soft fire,
Scanned, like a salt unbending admiral's,
The raging sea of insupportable desire.

And a voice cried out everywhere: "I am
"Pandemos Aphrodite! Though they drown,
"Their hope is set upon me. I will keep
"And I will keep their world from running down
"And seeding in obedient rote. The Noun
"Shall not debauch the Verb." And the voice ceased
And the Queen's soul rose to the plane of dreams
Which memory holds. Slightly her breathing's pace
increased.

And now the Goddess, in the form she knew,
Stood by her head, a Woman tall and fair;
And, as the sunshine on a summer's day
Sings in the blue beatitude of air,
So, in her snood, sang Cytherea's hair,
Gladdening the dreamer's heart by gleaming through,
Where, leaning over her, she wisely smiled
Stroking the Queen's hair, while she told her what to do;

Coaching her as to a question which, that day,
She must make Perseus ask Bellerophon
And afterwards by every means delay
His bearing off the Head: and she must con
The words of it, till she knew every one:
"And I," said Aphrodite, "shall be near,
"Doubt not, to eavesdrop what the men will say,
"For all depends on what I trust to overhear."

At last the sun rose, and they all awoke
And sat there on the ground to break their fast;
But first Andromeda besought the King
Apart: —“My Lord, if ever in the past,
“When my poor folk grew malapert, thou hast
“Taken my counsel and been glad—now, pray,
“Ask this one question of Bellerophon,
“Before thou giv’st thy—giv’st the—giv’st our Things
away!”

He answered not. She knew he would obey.
And her memory of the promise in the dream
Flew Eastward, bee-like to the Cyprian’s throne,
Who, mounting swift behind her feathery team,
Flashed back over the momentary gleam
Of ocean, thence along the northern strand—
And only Andromeda marked the Morning Star
Unusually shining over daylight land,

Or saw it flash, as Aphrodite smiled,
Well-pleased to watch the Gorgon-slayer wince,
Doing the Queen’s will, when:—“I make no terms,”
He said, “need no assurance to convince
“That thou art called to bear this Armour, Prince . . .
“Look—when thou hast them, if—I say but *if*—
“Our Lady of Athens, by some word or sign,
“Herself should bid thee rise upon thy Hippogriff,

“Say, wouldst thou *then* obey?” Bellerophon
Stared hard upon him: weighted words, and slow,
Reluctant then, he spoke:—“I am her Knight,
“Pallas Athene’s—all I am and know
“Is hers . . . I cannot say—She could not so.”
“Sir,” said Andromeda, “the question stands:

“True heart will answer frankly:—Yes or no!”
His elbows on his knees, his cheeks sunk in his hands,

Bellerophon sat silent, then at last
Muttered, still looking down:—“I cannot say.”
And instantly the listening Goddess gathered
The reins in her white hands and flew away
To seek her Sister, whom she found that day
In windy Athens, where the free-born youth
Paced in their echoing gymnasium
And straight-nosed old philosophers were chasing truth

Through thickets of preposterous argument,
With pawky malice poked, to spike the chase;
And smiling flashed Athene’s teeth, to see
How first the Idols of the Market-place
Stumbled and fell, too gross to stay the pace,
And next the Idols of the Cave fell down,
The Idols of the Cave that hide the light
From men—and she was holding out an olive crown

To grace the victor. First the Cyprian spoke:—
“Well may’st thou, Sister, spend thy godhead on
“This idle gossip, these old husbands’ tales!
“And, whilst thou smilest on some hoary don
“Or soft youth, all the time Bellerophon
“Flouts unabashed thy will! The question-game
“Is swiftness played, where Knights are battledores
“And the light-banded shuttlecock thy sacred Name!”

Therewith she told Athene what was spoken
Between the three upon the mountain-side;
Who, while she hearkened, scowled, and her face darkened,
And when at last she ceased, no word replied

But took towards Aphrodite one sharp stride
And, like a nettle, all at once, her hair
Grasping, thrust under her strong arm, and so
Hastened her off, protesting, through the Upper Air.

“Spinster of wish! Blind Hoodwinker!” she hissed,
“If thy deep purpose moles beneath my ken,
“I can at least force that this tale be heard
“Before the Father of all gods and men!
“*He will not be deceived!*”

The two came then
To where the bright clouds around Olympus rolled
Beneath their flight: there all the gods, assembled,
Sate, each upright, alone on his own throne of gold.

Save where some few stood round, with curious looks
Examining the harp that Orpheus played:
And loud the thunder-laughter of the gods
Outrang, to see so firm the Warrior Maid
Grasp, that the Cyprian snood was disarrayed;
And louder still the shout, to see her frown
To hear the shout—for what can Beauty do,
Scanted for breath, with one looped elflock tumbling down?

But, tortuous as the thoughts beneath that snood,
The old Myth doubles now, to find the three
Silent, at odds upon the mountain-side:
What follows next? Unless she find a key,
Andromeda must watch catastrophe,
Must see Bellerophon ride off the field,
Equipped victorious, leaving her stripped lord
With neither Pegasus, nor Gorgon’s Head, nor Shield!

She did not falter now: she only knew
That all her heart was set upon delay,
That swiftly she must act. To fetch the Sack
Perseus arose; but ere he turned away,
Even as he spoke them, spinning words to say: --
"Wilt thou," she cried, "Sir Servant, ere we part,
"Allow (I know thou wilt) this lady free
"One more pert question, which still hives within her
heart?"

And she let the memory of her second dream,
Winning in on her, sweeten all her face
With Paphian courtesy, so that all seemed fair
(The very asking seemed to do him grace!),
But first she blushed and murmured low:—"In case
"My foolish chatter overburden thee—
"As there has been some show of it—I know
"Thou wilt forgive a woman's curiosity!

"Thou seem'st a tender and a gentle man—
"Why didst thou slay thy brother?"

He replied,
Staring, unmoved:—"I found him with his slave,
"Lashing her naked back with the raw hide.
"Not that I came in time: she also died."
"A savage monster," said the King, "God knows
"Is miscreant—yet—and yet a brother's life
"Was weighty payment for a lawful owner's blows!"

"Because," the warrior muttered, "on the face
"I saw the grin—the nadir of man's shame—
"Sign-manual of damnation (mine own blood!)—
"The last lasciviousness that bears no name—

“All that I am leapt out of me, a flame
“To blast my brother’s life—my sword had spelt
“Catastrophe, ere yet I knew it writ!
“I had felt before I thought, and struck before I felt!”

Luck is the oldest of the gods; men fight,
They die: the good, or else the ill, prevails:
They pray, they labour, plan through sleepless nights—
And, in the end, what tipped the trembling scales?
A saucyboxful of wind in sagging sails,
Or four fine days, absurd, from Kent to France!
Nations demobilize, and statesmen sing
Of glory, while historians harp on circumstance.

Silenced, the Queen gave up all hope. What now?
What farther thing, so answered, might she say,
To hinder the great Render? Silently,
Unmasked, a little space she drew away.
“First thou and I, Bellerophon, shall pray—“
She heard the King’s low voice, as she espied,
Along the way they had travelled yesterday,
Coming post haste and romage down the mountain-side,

A horse, a man, a mounted Nuntius!
Panting and eager, she ran back again
And bade them, if this act they went about
Were one no common fellow might profane,
They should a little longer yet refrain.
She pointed, and they turned and stood and waited
Impatient, till the dusty cavalier
Drew nearer and his horse’s headlong pace abated.

The man, dismounting, made obeisance low
Not more to Perseus than to Andromeda.

He told them he had ridden hard and long
With slender hope to cheer him on his way.
He had escaped from Aethiopia,
He said, no easy feat, but harder still
His task to find the King and cast their fate,
The nation's, on the bosom of his sovereign will.

He said the younger Phineus, victory got,
Had fastened on the people each device
Invented to protect them from Medusa,
And had them gripped now in a closing vice:
There was a dreariness around his eyes,
That told of mineral depths beyond despair:—
“Wings—” he kept whispering, and upon his voice
Settled, like snow, a Mystery-hush—“Wings in the air!

“His first act was to close the frontiers
“And send the King's friends into banishment:
“None from without can enter: none within
“May leave on pain of death! So has he bent
“Their minds and pleased their flesh, that discontent
“Is unknown: peace and health are everywhere!
“No man is any longer poor or sick
“Throughout all Aethiopia—wings in the air!

“His arts of war progress in peace far more;
“Those thin translucencies and carapaces
“Which once against the fearful Gorgon-ray
“Armed their keen darts and gloved their glowing faces,
“Are worn by women, to step up their graces—
“To waist and paste and lace them—lovers wear
“Tissues of thin Phinean assidue
“Between their flower-soft, mingling limbs—wings in the
air!”

Poets, he told them, sang of the new stuff
In odes: they said its constancy was such
As kisses must adore—crystal as light,
Nor interfered with any sense but touch,
It was so tenuous—and that not much,
Being itself like smooth skin with no hair:
Constant, because no violent embrace
Its papery tenacity need fear to tear.

“And those lithe tubes—the infants call them ‘Mother’,
“Sucking—and yet no bastardy is rife,
“For through their lissome distance the lewd father
“May swive a slave and fecundate his wife
“Living apart from him. The surgeon’s knife
“Is guiltless of abortion—all is fair
“And cleanly done in baths and hospitals—
“Wings over Aethiopia—wings in the air!”

Some harder products of those arts had kept
Pace with the soft, or even outstripped a little:
Timber and marble were almost unknown;
They had found a means of processing the spittle
Of bats to thin rigidities, unbrittle,
Much used in building homes—and everywhere
For statues of the Gods, and children’s toys,
And lamps and vases stamped in shapes, and light as air.

“The flame on the high Altar of Athene
“Is quenched: the cackling priests that wear her cloth
“And draw their stipend from her Temple-treasure,
“Openly sacrifice to gipsy Thoth.
“The women pray aloud to Ashtaroth,
“Forsaking Aphrodite, and their prayer

"Is heard in Lesbos, while philosophers
"Proclaim to all that *Zeus* is an old name for air.

"O King," the Courier ended, "we well know
"Some god has made thee leave us in our plight;
"Yet (for we can no other) we beseech thee—
"There is no help for us, unless the flight,
"Renewed of dire Medusa! If it be right,
"Thou wilt not leave us sealed in hell! We pray
"Hourly for thy return, and, while we pray,
"We dream, we dream still of thine old Talaria!

"And if they be no longer thine, the Shoes
"Thy youth had on—so be it! Yet some hold
"Even the Sandals Hermes wore too slight
"To save us now. Maybe some flight more bold,
"More ranging, more sustained than thine of old
"It needs! Oh, I but babble of these things!
"We know not how! My embassy is this:
"Save us and hover over us with sovran wings!"

Silent they stood up on the mountain-slope,
Silent—a breeze stole rustling through the whins—
Silent, like figures on a vase. Above
Phoebus was leading up the Heavenly Twins
Nigher the zenith; while upon the Prince
Silent, accusing, both with one accord,
Andromeda and Perseus bent their eyes
And "O Bellerophon," they cried, "what is thy word?"

And he:—"Have I not said I may not fly?
"How shall the Gorgon make the lewd less lewd?
"Rather *His* Levin purges! Therefore pray,
"Casting yourselves upon the Fatherhood

“Of Zeus, who giveth all. I have learnt that good
“Is not one man on wings, but each man’s choice
“Instantly to obey: when lean wolves howl,
“The Mastiff cocks his ears up for his Master’s voice!

“Your people grow inhuman, sin, turn monstrous—
“There is one hope still! Send a fratricide
“On Pegasus! Unstrap the surcingle
“And monstrous wings come floating from his side,
“Being a horse —I say, a glorified
“Chimaera! scorning his dear law of kind,
“Twy-natured, dangerous! Chaos shall rule chaos
“And pride shall cast out pride! Ye crazy fools and blind!”

Then they besought him, by his knees, to go,
Because a god had made her Shield his own,
And, when he would not, Perseus’ pitying soul
Went wandering out to Pallas, like a moan.
But She, on far Olympus, by the Throne
Of Aegis-bearing Zeus, where, ranged in place,
The grave-eyed gods sate watching, all that while
Stood facing Aphrodite, arguing her case.

There first the Foam-born Queen had held the word,
Telling her story—whom Athene bade
(Fearing some trick) swear first by Night and Styx
To speak the truth: and next the Warrior Maid
Addressed the Father’s throne with close-arrayed
Ideas: and beauty sat on all those brows,
Contemplating the self-articulation
And global counterpoint of archetypal Nous.

As in some Council Hall or Parliament
The bandied catchwords, ‘communist’ or ‘tory’,

Keep a quick twittering of ninny minds,
Until some Elder Statesman, firm and hoary,
Rises, and glaring round, takes up the story,
A doctor in a school of pastrycooks,
And history lights upon his lips and truth,
For well he knows men's cities and their minds and books,

And when he takes his seat again, he hears
A low, unwilling murmur of applause—
So cool Athene now their free assent
Compelled, herself the Fountain of men's Laws
Of Thought, with 'so' and 'now', sub-clause in clause
Of marshalled rhetoric subsumed; and all
The gods awaited, poised, with bated breath,
Her lapidary predicates effectual.

She was demanding sanctions (aptly citing
The nature of Proof, to prove compulsive force
In free assent), to force Bellerophon
To rise obedient on the Wingèd Horse
Over Aethiopia, and what further course
She should prescribe for him:—"My Knight, my word,
"Surely! Thy thunders, Father, to compel
"Knight-service, which, not serving—what were more
absurd?"

A windy susurration filled the place
Of her ceased voice—innumerable gods
Nodding assent—the forests of Olympus,
Rustling, became the forest of those nods:
And like one man, who has laid fearful odds
On some great Boxing-Match or Public Game,
All the Immortals, as the silence deepened,
Awaited Aphrodite's eager counterclaim;

Waited to hear some fierce tirade—but She,
Honey-sweet Crookedglancer, not with pleas
Answered the Brain-born; rather upon the ground
Sank, like a seabird lighting on rough seas,
And nestled herself up to Zeus's knees
Daughterly, while she took and stroked his hand,
Twisting his ring, till closer than herself
The Father knew what twisting schemes her heart had
planned.

Then—as in some face-flowering concert-hall,
Through double-basses and sharp violins
And coy wood-wind, the theme-announcing Horn
Calls with an unassuming call, that thins
The blood and all the awestruck spirit dins—
So dinned the Father's voice, as he began:—
“Ye Gods immortal—and except these twain,
“Small heed, it seems, ye take what fate befalleth Man!

“And you—ye Two, who strive to bend his will
“Each her own way—be still! Necessity,
“Who once wrought well with your old jars round Troy—
“Ye know it—reigns no more. No man will I
“Neither unhorse by force, nor force to fly.
“What follows then? Who knows? May be, I love
“This Prince Bellerophon, as men below
“Their spaniels—and all day beside his boot or glove

“They lie and never stir; but, when at eve
“He steps, and his dear hand the bolt unbars,
“They leap and bark about with abject eyes! . . .
“Whether he do some service in your wars
“And at the last be named among the stars,
“Lies in his choice; who not the less shall come,

“Guided and hastened by his god-like thirst,
“To some delicious inn of bland Elysium.

“Therefore my word is: Let the Brain-born now
“Lay on the doubtful Prince her dire command
“To take up arms—her Shield, the Gorgon’s Head,
“And fly the Wing’d Horse over the waste land.
“And if he will—but if he shall withstand
“Her godhead, then the Foam-born shall such part
“Perform as to her bosom seemeth good:
“And best she knows the wish that hives in my dear heart!

“And you, our Daughters, daughters both, both dear,
“Pay good heed to our words, for this we say:
“Since the last menace of the Dragon’s breath
“From Gorgon-darkened Aethiopia
“Man only may avert—go now away:
“In some more sisterly accord agree,
“Lest your extreme jars wreck the theme they wrought
“And Earth fall down disastrous Troy’s catastrophe!”

He ceased, and They, with chastened flight and slow
Floated together downward to the root
Of forest-crowned Olympus; but by then
Their conversation swelled to bitter fruit,
With both their voices raised in fierce dispute
And angry looks between them. If to fly,
When roundly bid, Bellerophon declined,
Pallas (the Cyprian said) must wield authority,

Nod her injunction, and as roundly bid
The recreant from Pegasus alight,
Never to mount again:

"By Truth will I!
"I—with a sasserara!—mine own Knight,
"To please thee, shall unhorse! To do me right
"The Father hath refused. He knoweth best,
"Doubtless," Athene cried, "who also said
"He would unhorse no man by force. Do thou the rest!"

Thus the two Sister Goddesses approached,
Bickering, the Mountain where the anxious four
Stood, and Bellerophon, with Sack and Shield
Piled on his steed, would listen now no more,
But turned to go. And from that far-off shore,
To meet them, iron-winged above the sea,
Roused by some waft of danger, flying low,
Bickering, the Gorgons groped—Stheno, Euryale.

VI

THE GORGONS

I feel the Myth beneath me gathering speed.
The actors crowd the stage, the end draws near.
How steep the way! if, after all, I made
An overweening start! I pause, in fear,
To speculate from this my belvedere
Of invocation, forward to my end
And back to my beginning: whom to call
To bless the uncompleted tale? What Muse? What friend

Among the affable and mighty dead?
I know they cannot teach me what to say—
Or was it a finger creeping down my wrist,
To check these unsure choices when they stray?
Would he, who long, long since Nausicaa
Sang, and the gods at loggerheads, or he,
Who that soft-hearted Son, of Venus born,
When enterprise was duty, sent to Italy,

Answer; or he, who joined baptised Ruggiero
With Bradamante dipped in Merlin's cave?
But, more than all, my perilous ending needs
Him, whose *Endymion* scooped the wide enclave
Of Greece in Hampstead: All these helps I crave
And yet, for inspiration, turn my soul
To you, O Uncompleted Tales, yourselves
And you, ye Constellations blazing next the Pole!

Feebly I call upon the Myths and Stars!
For, whether thou look backward into time
Or outward into space, thou dost behold
Thy Architects, O Man, thy Muse, my Rhyme—
Paradigm on celestial paradigm!
While, baby'd in thy heart, the Fiery Zest
That flung them once, with thy voice calls:— *I am!*
Behold! thus art thou half-created, Man—do thou the rest!

As in some dreary time, ere Man was fleshed,
When Troy was jungle still—Meander's plains
A swift, black water roughing down a gorge—
Two pterodactyls, flapping broad membranes
Of creaky gristle, ribbed with bones for veins—
Obscene upraisers of their vast of sloth—
From island to Aegean island crossed
A shipless waste of waters—so those Gorgons both

Came lumbering on what seemed their wings, yet touched
Or seemed to touch the horizon with their tips,
Roofing the hollow, oily firmament
With stifling haze; the sailors on their ships,
Hearing the mutters from their horny lips,
Hurried about their work, or glanced in fear
Up at the mast for weather signs, aghast,
And knew not if the lift were far away or near.

Many many leagues of ocean underneath
The abomination of their passing ran
Backward, ere Stheno spoke—nor checked a second
The fall and rise of either swishing van
That bore her on. Between the two began
Parley in figured noises, wombs of words

(As Alphabeta sprang from mother-glyphs
Of Eyes and Roofs and Rising Suns and Looms and Birds).

A wolvis longing those rude shapes expressed
To batten down the wing-fog on the Earth
And nest upon it, all obscurely mixed
With shadow-shows of Pegasus's birth
And fears of his ascent—his bursting forth
And piercing through with arrowy upward flight,
Cracking with sunshine and a snatch of sky
The roof of their dominion, letting in the light

On dreary, twilit columns of young men
With eager hair and automatic eyes,
Marching and counter-marching through the fog,
Mashing and mangling truth, and praising lies,
Till language rotted down to snarls and cries
And meaning perished. Comfort, too, they found,
For on the back of their dream-Pegasus
A dream-Bellerophon still pressed him to the ground.

Some sewers are too common for the Muse:—
Think thou hast heard two procuresses chat,
Eyeing a vestal—pause, and plunge as far
Beneath the squalor of their hints as that
Itself was meaner than Magnificat:
So shall thy fancy hear Euryale
Mutter, hear Stheno answer—hear that pair,
With nagging itch and scratching, sketch their strategy;

Planning to play into each other's hands—
Self-immolating, soft Euryale
And the breastless Beak of nude, intrusive will,
Stheno—to undermine their Enemy,

To steal his arms, till all his strength should be
His weakness, to turn back the holy force
Of the very gods against themselves, to make
Bellerophon keep Perseus off the Wingèd Horse.

Meanwhile, beside the mountain-track, the Prince
Sprang on to Pegasus and towered astride
And, even as he turned to say farewell,
Andromeda came running to his side
And murmured low, and he in wrath replied,
Then turned to ride away . . . So must have said
A watcher, but the core of what befell
In those short moments by the Myth must be outspread,

Slow-motioned over many stanzas—first
The bickering goddesses approached unseen
And stood on either side the Prince; and now
The Gorgons, walking up, slipped in between;
Now suddenly their wings shot out, a screen,
Wherethrough the Olympian influence must ray:
The soft disaster masking Aphrodite,
While Stheno, with her back to Pallas heard her say,

Without word, pointing to the Shield and Sack:—
“Think’st thou my Arms were given thee in jest?
“Or Pegasus to ride? Thy hands do hold
“The Golden Bridle—and thou falterest!”
And now the Gorgon heard the stern behest
Laid on Bellerophon, forthwith to soar
Astride of the Wing’d Steed, and through the sky
Speed to the rescue, or be her true Knight no more.

But She, the steely, cunning Horror, filtered
Athene’s voice and made it seem to be

The Gorgon's, not the Goddess's: bemused,
He swayed and, looking down and groaning, he
Prayed; but inside his heart Euryale
Stirred up a medley of those ancient fears,
Antea, Chimaera, and the cloud-vain voice
Of Zeus remembered ranting in his sensual ears.

He prayed, but made no motion to obey.
Above the Gorgon's wing—"O thou sole Fount
"Of Zeus-born Reason," Aphrodite called,
"I say the Father wills him to dismount!
"Surely thou art his Lady Paramount!
"It lies with thee!"

But vexed Athene burned
With wrath:—"Ah, let him go his ways!" she said,
"I have done with him for ever!"

Proudly she returned

Back to the School at Athens, where she found
All in disorder: some old man propounded
Ironical dilemmas to pert youth,
Confounding them—but they were not confounded,
But plucked his beard, and mocked his voice, and hounded
His weak old age, and clutched him round the waist
And rantipoled him up and down, still struggling
To argue, vexed with tears and stuttering in his haste:

And all the time he thought how, on Seriphos,
He had taught a lad and watched his wits unfold,
Coaxed in the sunshine of Philosophy:
'Ah, where is Danaë's Boy, the quick, the bold,'
He thought, 'Where now is he? I am too old!
'If he were here with me, we would be strong!'

So, when Athene came, she strengthened him
And truth unclouded gleamed again, but not for long.

Meanwhile the Paphian Goddess, more adroit,
Practised in soft, exclusive whisperings,
Sent parley down to the Queen's heart. Too wise
To let it filter through the Gorgon's wings,
Rather her honey-breathing mouth she brings
Close to her heart, and prompts her what to say
Then feeling that heart shrink, she lets it drink
Of blossomy warm wish. Swiftly Andromeda

Runs to the Prince, astride on Pegasus,
And shyly hints the Father's Will revealed
Miraculous to her—he must dismount,
Give place to Perseus, up to Perseus yield
The Wing'd Horse and the Death's Head and the Shield!
Bellerophon grew rigid in his place,
Like one who fancies far-off sounds, and then
Slowly he turned and stared into the Queen's fair face.

Who knows what passes in the heart of hearts?
Who sees the demiurge's demiurge?
Ask not who guard the Guards, but ask who steer
The Steersman—what centripetals converge,
Where indecision alters into urge:
Bellerophon was staring at the Queen:
Who knows what passes in the heart of hearts?
And, afterwards, who knows? Who knows what might have
been?

Euryale said:—*Stheno, our trial is*
Now! Stheno, like a dream-pealed ordnance shot,

Voided—obscene: the spastic influence
Smote him, reversed in spirit—round one spot
Case-hardening his heart, that screamed white-hot,
Till it spat venom: forth the long flame leapt,
Lickerish, and scorched the woman with some name
Men use in scorn among themselves. And the Queen wept.

“Thou sapient Queen,” he snarled, “What knowest thou
“Of things equestrian, or how horse and man
“Are grown to be one flesh? When I am thrown,
“It shall be time enough. Let him, who can
“Unhorse me! For thee too I have made a plan:
“That thou shouldst turn thy care from things half-known
“Back to thy needle. What the Father wills,
“Fear not, but by the Father’s self I shall be shown!”

Then soft Euryale laughed in the place
That once had been a breast, and croaked:—*Well done!*
And clanged her iron wings, and tossed across
A kiss-worm to her dark companion.
Like some old harridan, she croaked:—*Come on!*
Let’s get back now! Bellerophon will keep
The fat Cob grounded! Gorgon! Hoot! up Gorgon!
And, wing to wing, they sagged off home, to stink and sleep.

But Cytherea, whispering, comforted
Gently her darling:—“Darling, do not weep!
“This hour, even this hour, thou shalt prevail,
“I being thy helper—so thine arrows keep
“Their sharpness! And now maybe thou shalt sleep
“A little while!” So, when she ceased, the Queen
Wondered and brightened, and let fall her pride:—
‘How small I am!’ she thought, ‘How silly I have been,

'Pitting myself against the stately men,
'And talking, talking!' Now she seemed to hear
Her own voice, muted to a madding whine,
Droning its monotone in Perseus' ear,
Humming incessant on, year after year,
Lifelong: her very body tried to shrink
For shame of it: her arms into her sides
So close she pressed, the one in the other seemed to sink.

She was amazed, it seemed so very small,
Her waist; and this was all; she slept, nor felt
Thin gauze wings from a vanish of slim shoulders
Uncrumple, neither saw the love-curly melt
Into antennae . . . When the Goddess dealt
The stroke of metamorphosis, she dreamed—
Being a Gadfly now—she was the Queen,
Herself, alone with Perseus—only Perseus seemed

Also to be Bellerophon; the Man
Was sitting in a corner, playing chess,
Himself against himself: at needlework,
Exasperated by his thoughtfulness,
She sat and talked in vain; the Secret Press
Flew to her mind; she spoke; he answered not,
Or absently—and she, she thought at last
Desperately: 'All men nurse some tender, muffled spot!

'I will touch his, who cares no more for me!
'I will get underneath that placid skin!'
So, without altering her tone, she murmured,
Piercing some soft cloth with a tacking-pin:—
"The milk—I wonder, might we store it in . . ."
And heard herself no more . . . With giant roar

Perseus sprang up and knocked his table flying—
And the high vault cracked and rumbled and crashed on the
floor.

The Gadfly, whining in the noonday heat,
Swift on the Wing'd Horse—in the waking world—
Dived, while she dreamed, and stung in some soft place,
And stung and stung: the startled creature hurled
His hoofs above his head so high, he whirled
Round, like a wheel—a crack, a shout, a tear
Mingled in one intense flash, while he hung
Or seemed to hang, a silver globe, self-poised in air.

But when his legs had found the ground again,
The surcingle was snapped, the housing gone,
And two white pinions from his trembling flanks
Sprang arching. Like a catapulted stone,
Far off upon the ground Bellerophon
Lay still, and, swifter than the startled steed,
Perseus was by him, kneeling at his head
And would have helped him rise. He said:—"There is no need!

"There is no fear of falling off the ground.
"I am glad, I am glad to stroll and be a fool!"
And he rose and limped across to Pegasus
And clasped his strong neck:—

"Farewell, Beautiful!"

He murmured, "Dost thou mind the Fountain Pool?"
And, while he fondled, Pegasus' great wing,
Like the strange love of woman, curved above
His bruised shoulders, nervous, awful, sheltering.

But he, when first he felt its feathery touch,
Stared, like a man remembering things: some old

Horror came over him, as though he heard
A stealthy serpent rustling to enfold
Flesh with its flesh: he ducked, loosing his hold,
And passed in front, below the Horse's head,
Hastening as best he might; then, turning not,
Alone for ever down the mountain, limping, fled,

Fled from his friends, who would have loved him well
Over the mountain-shoulder, out of sight.
So the Myth knows no more of him. Alone
He eked out his humdrum years, till kindly night
Of death caressed him—now an eremite
And now a wandering beggar; and was known
No more in courts; but the common sort of men
Would turn and say:—"There goes that old Bellerophon!"

Passing him in the street, and gossips told
How with each added year they watched him grow
More full of crotchets, how the children mocked him,
How all things through the day must run just so
As he was used to them, or he would go
Grumbling to bed and blaming. Yet the Blest
Received him when he died—no fiery stars
Whirling, but steeped Elysium dowered his ghost with rest.

VII

THE TEMPLE

Before the Gorgon-slayer tired of gazing
After the Prince, the Goddess had restored
The Queen to her own shape, and far away,
Dove-borne, to seek out her great Sister, soared:
The Queen, awaking, called aloud:—"My Lord!
"There is no time to lose, no time!" and pointed
Toward Pegasus—"Oh, think no more of me!
"Thy people need thee now, for whom thou art anointed.

"As for my safe return, this faithful Squire
"Is warrantice enough. Make haste, make haste!"
Then for a moment Perseus gazed on her,
Still tender for his friend: and grew amazed
And for that beauty and devotion praised
The gods—but knew not yet how she was clean,
Restored in truth, the marmor purged, the bride
Sweet from the bitter rock a second time—the Queen!

He turned and leapt astride. With Sack and Shield
Before him piled, he clucked the coaxing sound
And rose to wave adieu; but Pegasus
Closed in his wings and obstinately downed
His knowing neck, and fingerpawed the ground
As though to be up and away he burned
And wondered why the naughty snaffle checked
His tender mouth. Then Perseus understood. He turned,

Smiling, to face his eager Queen and cried:—
"Lady—behold!—he will not be gainsaid!

“He waits for thee to mount!” Andromeda
Hid, for her people’s sake, how glad, how glad
Her heart within her leaped:—

“Lord, thou art mad!

“Thou must be free for this! I may not stint
“The swift manoeuvre! Go! And go!” she said;
And he:—“We may not overpass the gods’ own hint!

“It is enough, I bid thee mount! Obey!”

He stooped. She sprang. The Wing’d Horse, with one bound,
Is off the ground; and, with soft-humming sound,
Slowly at first, and slowly, circles round
Over the Nuntius, who stands spellbound.
Look, as a good ship casts off from the quay
And noses round the shoals, but when the bar
Is crossed at last, the bell tings full speed up to sea,

So Pegasus is gone! Betwixt his wings
The pair, like eager babes, now lay their heads
Whispering together, leaning now apart,
To watch, below, the streams, inlaid like threads
Of silver, vanish up to watersheds
Or fray to deltas. Yet not home their course
Is set. The King observed, but held his peace
And smiled, content to trust the great sagacious Horse.

Now festering sores were stripped and washed and healed
With truth revealed; now sleeping dogs were woken
And thumped approving tails, as both confessed—
Her midnight journey first, and his seal broken:
His follies with the Mirror—griefs unspoken,
Unspeakable that seemed—old wounds that warped
Sweet amity to gall, hurt not at all,
As tediously they chimed and havered, harped and carped.

At last the Hippogriff, descending, made
A gentle landfall, letting them alight
Low on a sea-girt rock. A Temple stood
There, with no land or living thing in sight.
This was that Temple, where Medusa, bright
And vestal, once had served the Gray-eyed Queen
Of Truth with her clean youth, before Poseidon
Abused her, ere Athene wrought the change obscene.

What passed within that Shrine I dare not say
I wholly know: such fragments I unfold
As I remember, walking once by night
Alone, a man who overtook me told—
A courteous man, as young as he was old,
And laughed because he loved; he said deep joy
Lay at the world's root, and the gods were gay,
And now he seemed a sage, now seemed a romping boy.

In attitude of benison (he told)
Both manifest to both, the Deities
On either side the Sanctuary stood,
And warmer rayed the Sisters, and more wise,
Atoned: What lightnings Aphrodite's eyes
Darted! What thunders rolled round Pallas' brow!
As on the longboat, when the leadsman calls
Soundings to steersman—fore and aft, from poop to prow,

Two faces close on intervening space,
So, goddess-guided, now the Queen and King
Stood up, with all the hollow Temple's length
Between, and, praying, heard its silence sing
Like the sea, far-off, in a shell roaring;
But soon Athene stirred; she took the Shield

From Perseus' arm and paced and struck it down
Upright before Andromeda, who stood concealed.

Then straight, returning down the figured pavement,
Raised from a bracket, where it hung, a Crown
Of Olive, fairly wrought with leaf and bark
And fruit, and still no wreath, a very crown
For triumph or defeat; she pressed it down
Firmly upon his forehead, who then smiled,
Seeing his image in the bossy Shield
A grimy beggar hallowed, yet most like a child.

Most like a child he seemed in his own eyes,
A child that played at kings. Meanwhile no less
The Cyprian tended her beloved Queen,
Whom from her boyish weeds she bade undress,
But swiftly comforted her nakedness,
Draping her majesty all in its own
Epiphany: for low she stooped and slipped
From her blest Waist the Cestus, her immortal Zone,

And cast it round a mortal! When at last
The Goddess drew the polished Shield away
And raised it high above the woman's head –
Where shall I fly for strength? How shall I say
What Perseus saw, or what Andromeda?
Look, what thou sawest when thou wast in love,
They saw more clearly—how that one was dear
And shining bright with glory from the gods above.

Not thus for long; for Aphrodite spoke
Low, and the Queen upon the ground inclined
Obedient eyes: she saw not Perseus now
Nor with what gesture Aphrodite signed

Swift to her Sister, who stood tall behind
The King, till Pallas gripped the Goatskin Bag
And ripped it wide, and grasped what lay within
And raised it slowly . . . Even as one awful crag

Out of low foothills, rises on the sight
Of one who glideth backward—like a star
Ominous in the east at dawn—arose
Medusa: then Love, pointing, cried:—"Thus far
"Lift up thine eyes! No farther! All worlds are
"Suspended, Lady, on thy steadfast will!
"Shoot straight, shoot straight the arrow of thy gaze!"
The Queen's eyes rose. As once a father's tortured skill

Winged, neither high nor low, the clothyard shaft
True toward the apple on the darling's head,
So, neither high nor low, but on his Crown
Her steady, loving eyes she riveted:
O double interchange of holy dread
And counterpoint of passion's dance! His eyes,
Challenged by Pallas, left the polished Shield
And sank to rest on those thrice-blest convexities

Advanced as if to greet him, polished shields,
But soft, more soft than anything men knew,
Than pilèd summer clouds' high cumulus
Or drifted snow so white that it is blue
Or upland valley pastures, which the dew
Is joyful and the shadow gentle on.
Till, sounding in a sunbeam, down the Temple,
Two voices, clear, rejoicing rose in antiphon:—

"Perseus!" she called, and he:—*"Andromeda!"*—
"Thou art the Sword, the Saviour from the Beast!"—

"Thou art the Meaning of the Abstract Word!"—
"Thou art my Head!"—
"And Thou my Will released,
"The glory round the Head!"—
"Be it increased!
"Thou art my King!" she sang, and he:—"Thou art
"Mine Impulse freed, the self-warm Deed, my Soul!"—
"I will not break thy seal!"—
"I will not break thy heart!"

I faint upon my end: where is my friend?
If he were here for me, he would attest
What mystery there was done, how Perseus changed,
How deep within his heart the Fiery Zest
Awoke, how he himself into his breast
Magical, as on Pegasus uprose;
His potency of manhood, like a lotus,
Opened, and all the Congo bloomed, a Grecian rose.

Sudden the wind rose: round the white-walled Temple
Dashed the tremendous, the unbridled Sea.
Poseidon sought to enter in, resenting
Mortals from their mortality set free—
Daring again his old impiety
There in that holy Place, and listening fear
Thrilled through Andromeda, remembering
The sea-girt Rock, the monstrous Jaws; but Cytherea

Called to Athene, and Athene called
Divinely loud, and some God came across
The waste of waters, hasting to their need;
A sable-winged and youthful God he was,
Late-comer to Olympus— Thanatos
His name and, where he came, he stilled the waves,

Walking erect on them: where he passed by,
He poured on anger oil of the dear grace that saves.

Time is: time was: the high solemnity
Is ended. Perseus, on the godlike Steed,
Is boun for Aethiopia—at the stirrup
Andromeda stands bidding him God-speed.
The Cyprian promises she will take heed
Over the Queen's return. Fixed in the Shield,
Medusa's visage glares—but how if Hard,
Tempered with Soft, be toughened to pure Strength—
annealed?

There, in its place of freezing, Lust's hard stare
Had rested, drawn with Perseus' ardent gaze,
On melting mirrors, whence it had received
Refraction, not of light, but vital rays
Of womanhood restored, Andromeda's.
And now half-human grown, half Gorgon still,
She was Destroyer and Preserver, bound
Henceforth to brace and strengthen whom she failed to kill.

So, on unconquerable wings, he came
Back to the Kingdom which proud Cassiopeia
Had ruled with Cepheus long ago—where now
Men watched each other and went home in fear.
Even when the whisper ran:—*The King is here!*
They looked not up: 'What can we do alone?'
They thought, but, as the Wing'd Horse rose and fell,
The Shield appalled true hearts to steel, and false to stone.

What followed: how on Pegasus he cruised
Tireless, how fiery zest maintained the pace,

Till slippery subterfuges, unrenewed,
Perished, till even the adroit must turn and face
Medusa, naked-visaged, or give place—
Let others chronicle; I but record
Saturnian resurrection, how at last
An age of gold was born, (the learned said 'restored').

The thymy turf round Aphrodite's Temple
Pastured the Wing'd Horse. When the war was won,
Lady Andromeda rose betimes one morning
And climbed the hill—but Pegasus was gone!
Time, in a shining golden stream, flowed on
Over their heads, and each returning spring,
At cuckoo-time, they looked for him—then years
Passed, and they ceased to talk about his tarrying.

The gods loved Aethiopia in those days,
For Perseus' rule was courteous and sedate.
His throne was each man's heart, and while the King
Indwelt there, Freedom walked inviolate.
Whole in each household, total in the State
Harmony reigned through all that golden time,
Because, harmonious in everyman,
Body and soul and spirit rang a triple chime.

One night in June the Palace roses breathed
Such incense, midnight found the royal bed
Vacant; the casement open, where they stood,
Let in soft streams by Philomela shed;
And, welling down from warm stars overhead,
Now faint, now clear, there seemed a far-off humming.
Then the Queen whispered, like one in a dream:—
"Hush! Dost thou hear, Belovèd? Pegasus is coming!"

And, when the humming ceased, they hearkened still,
Motionless, hushed, her cheek against his knees,
To pindrop, garden stirrings . . . out of doors
A separate rustle, like to dawn's first breeze
Or Eleusinian Persephone's
Priest-whispered Name, shivered below their sill;
And they leaned over then, and saw white wings
Moving enough to hold a hovering body still,

And understood the Sending. Soon the night
Quickened to voices flustering, wisps of air
That flashed, like meteors, back, as up they soared:—
Who rides?

What! Saw ye not the happy pair?

Whither?

*High, circumpolar spaces, bare,
August, await them!*

So, from mortal gaze
They passed and did not pass. Lift up thine eyes,
Reader, now evening darkens on these autumn days;

And dusk itself surprises the clear mind
Conditioned to undying summer eves
And gloaming midnight skies! Lift up thine eyes
Over thy little smoke of burning leaves
And wonder, while thy shaping ghost receives
Huge, ghostly shapes into it! Read, and mark—
Forgetting astro-physics and light-years—
What immemorial Diagrams prick through the dark!

High in the East, beyond those Louvre-pots,
Cassiopeia, the stately, on her chair,
Circles; beside her, toward the Cynosure
Holding her pride true-centred, lest it err,

Honest, broad-shouldered Cepheus whirls; and there
Low in the South, where damp November dims
With rising mist the prospect of deep heaven,
The monster Cetus round the sky's Equator swims;

And what between? What Power upholds the Throne?
What alien Giant, with what spritely head?
One arm upraised to flash the twinkling mirror,
And one to brandish Herpe's crescent blade,
One shoulder pouring down in a cascade
Swift to his heel that springs from the seven shy stars
Men call the Pleiads—bold—a shower of gold—
Perseus is marching, Perseus is dancing up the wars!

And yet, how still, above Andromeda
Bending, adores her bridal carcanet's
Enchanting cirque, at Algol in his lap!
While westward, at the star called Alpheratz,
Her dainty foot on Pegasus she sets,
Egging him on, and Pegasus tips gay
And pranceable, and mad, and upside down,
Because he feels the foot of fair Andromeda—

Of fair Andromeda, who in her midst
Holds the great Nebula, that vast maelstrom
Extra-galactic, which the sage proclaim
A furious womb of Firmaments to come . . .
Ah, but the Myth would rather draw thee home
From vain surmise, imagination's way
To Pegasus from Perseus, down those three
Bright stabs of flame, which men still name *Andromeda*.

THE END

AFTERWORD

The Characters and the Myth

Perseus was the son of Danaë. Zeus took the form of a shower of gold, in order to visit Danaë in the brazen tower, where her own father, Acrisius, had imprisoned her; and Perseus was the fruit of that union. His youth was spent in the island of Seriphos, until the jealousy of its King Polydectes drove him forth to seek the Gorgon's Head.

Andromeda was the daughter of Cepheus, King of Aethiopia and his Queen Cassiopeia. Because Cassiopeia had boasted that Andromeda was more beautiful than the Nereids, Poseidon, the god of the sea, sent a sea-monster to lay waste the country. Deliverance was promised if Andromeda should be given up to the monster, and she was accordingly chained to a sea-girt rock. At the eleventh hour the sea-beast was slain by Perseus, descending from the sky on winged sandals lent to him by the god Hermes, and Andromeda became his bride. Her former suitor, *Phineus*, tried to prevent the wedding and was destroyed by Perseus with all his followers.

Bellerophon was the grandson of Sisyphus. He was so called because in his youth he slew his brother Beller. To be purified from the murder he fled to Proetus, King of Argos, whose wife Antea fell in love with him. When he rejected her offers, she falsely denounced him to Proetus whose subsequent efforts to compass Bellerophon's destruction resulted in his being sent to kill the female monster Chimaera – part goat, part lioness, and part serpent. Mounted upon the winged horse *Pegasus* he was successful in slaying Chimaera, but thereafter drew upon himself

the hatred of the gods and wandered, lonely and sorrowful, avoiding the paths of men.

The two goddesses, *Aphrodite*, born of the sea-foam – mother of Eros – and gray-eyed *Athene*, who sprang fully armed from the forehead of Zeus, hardly need my gloss. Their qualities and their mutual antipathy have been celebrated too often.

Phorcys and *Ceto* (both born of a marriage between Earth and Ocean) had four offspring, namely, the *Dragon* who was set to watch the Gardens of the Hesperides and the three Gorgons, *Medusa*, *Stheno* and *Euryale*. Stheno and Euryale were hideous and immortal, but Medusa was a mortal woman of matchless beauty, until she committed fornication with Poseidon in the temple of Athene; whereupon Athene transformed her into a frightful creature with serpents instead of hair and a stare so appalling that it turned all living creatures to stone. Medusa is the best known of the three Gorgons and is commonly referred to as *the Gorgon*.

With the aid of a helmet of darkness and the Talaria (the winged sandals of Hermes), Perseus was able to approach near enough to Medusa to cut off her head. But he could only do so by using the Shield of Athene as a mirror; for reflected in the Shield the Gorgon's stare was harmless. The severed head retained its petrifying qualities and it was with this weapon that Perseus destroyed, first, the sea-monster approaching to devour Andromeda and afterwards her old suitor, Phineus and his followers, all of whom he turned to stone.

From the blood-drops that fell from Medusa's head sprang Pegasus, who immediately flew up to Heaven. From the rock which Pegasus struck with his glancing hoof there flowed the fountain *Hippocrene*. Either from these same blood-drops, or as the more normal fruit of Medusa's connection with Poseidon, *Chrysaor*

was born, who was the father of *Chimaera*. Thus Pegasus and Chimaera both owe their origin to Medusa and the curious may like to reflect that the fabulous creature from whose act the Greeks derived the Fountain of the Muses, was the nephew of three abominations and the uncle of a fourth. The ambiguous quality of his parent, Medusa, is one of several enigmas which caused the foregoing poem to be written.

In it I have taken the sort of liberties which seem to me permissible, or rather for which the dreamlike elusiveness of all but a few central dramatic moments and the astonishingly rich symbolical content of so many Greek myths seem almost to cry aloud. Thus, in the case of Bellerophon, the events either narrated by him or actually occurring in the poem do not extend the limits of the story of his life as it will be found in the sources, but substantially re-tell it. In the case of Perseus and Andromeda, however, I have presumed to continue their joint history from the time of the rescue to the event of their constellation. Perhaps the greatest liberty of all is the combining of the two stories. While I know of no tradition to that effect, there are, even apart from the Mother of Pegasus, three links which seemed to me to justify in some way the desire which had come upon me to bring Perseus and Bellerophon, and Perseus and Pegasus together.

First, Proetus, the King of Argos, who played such an important part in the life of Bellerophon, was also, according to Ovid, the usurper of the throne of Acrisius the father of Danaë, and was ultimately destroyed by Perseus by means of Medusa's head. Second, there is at least one version of the story of Perseus, according to which he flew to the rescue of Andromeda, not on the winged sandals of Hermes (the Talaria), but on Pegasus. The third, and for me most important, link is the position of the constellations in the sky. Bellerophon is not there, it is true. I do not think he will be found anywhere among the stars. But

Perseus, Andromeda and Pegasus are inseparably, and by no means inconspicuously, linked. For this brilliant group, together with the Mother and Father of Andromeda, may fairly be said to dominate the northern heavens.