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**THE TRAVAIL
OF A SOUL**

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OF A
SOUL**

**BY
GEORGE F. BUTLER**



**CHICAGO
RALPH FLETCHER SEYMOUR CO.**

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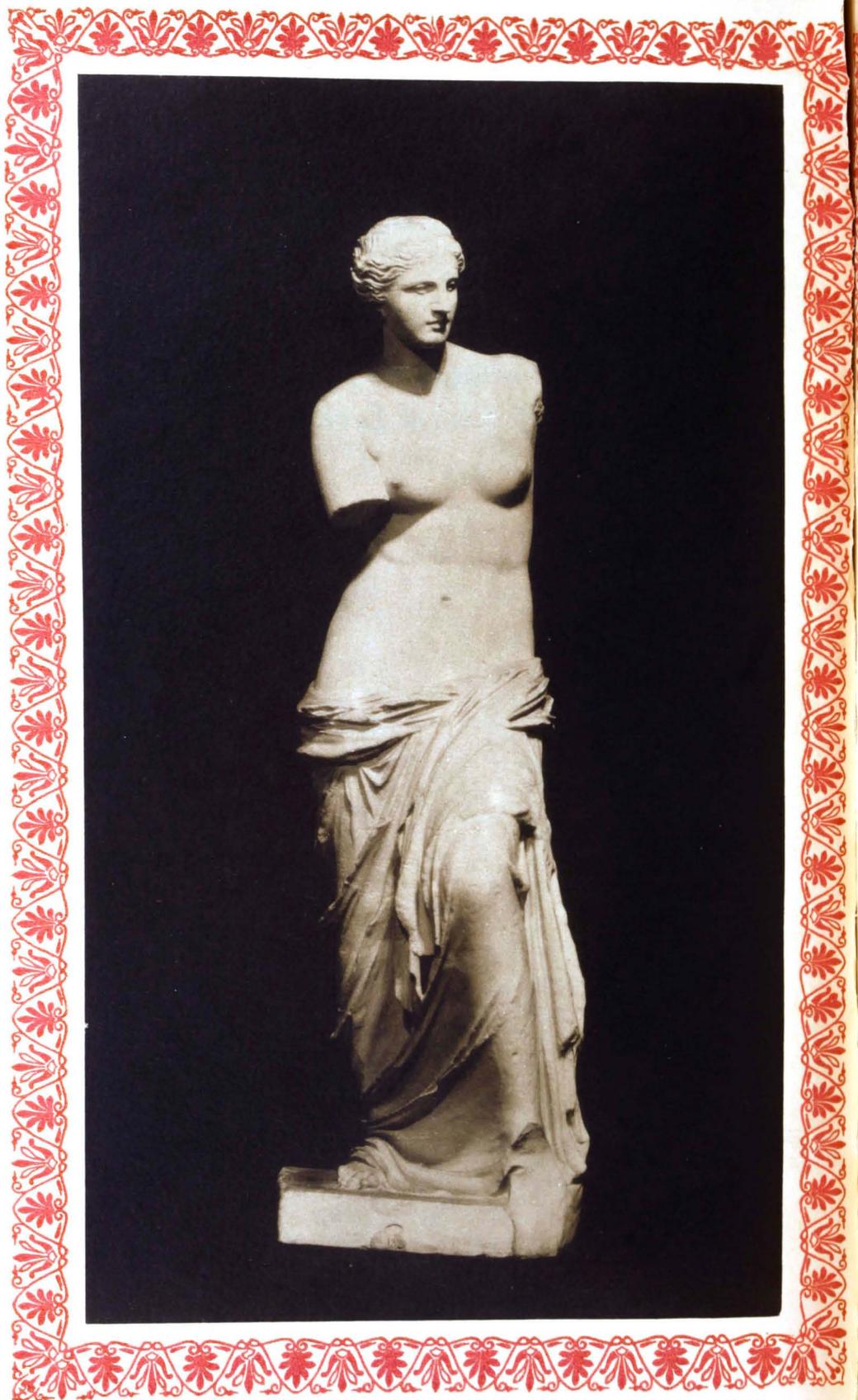
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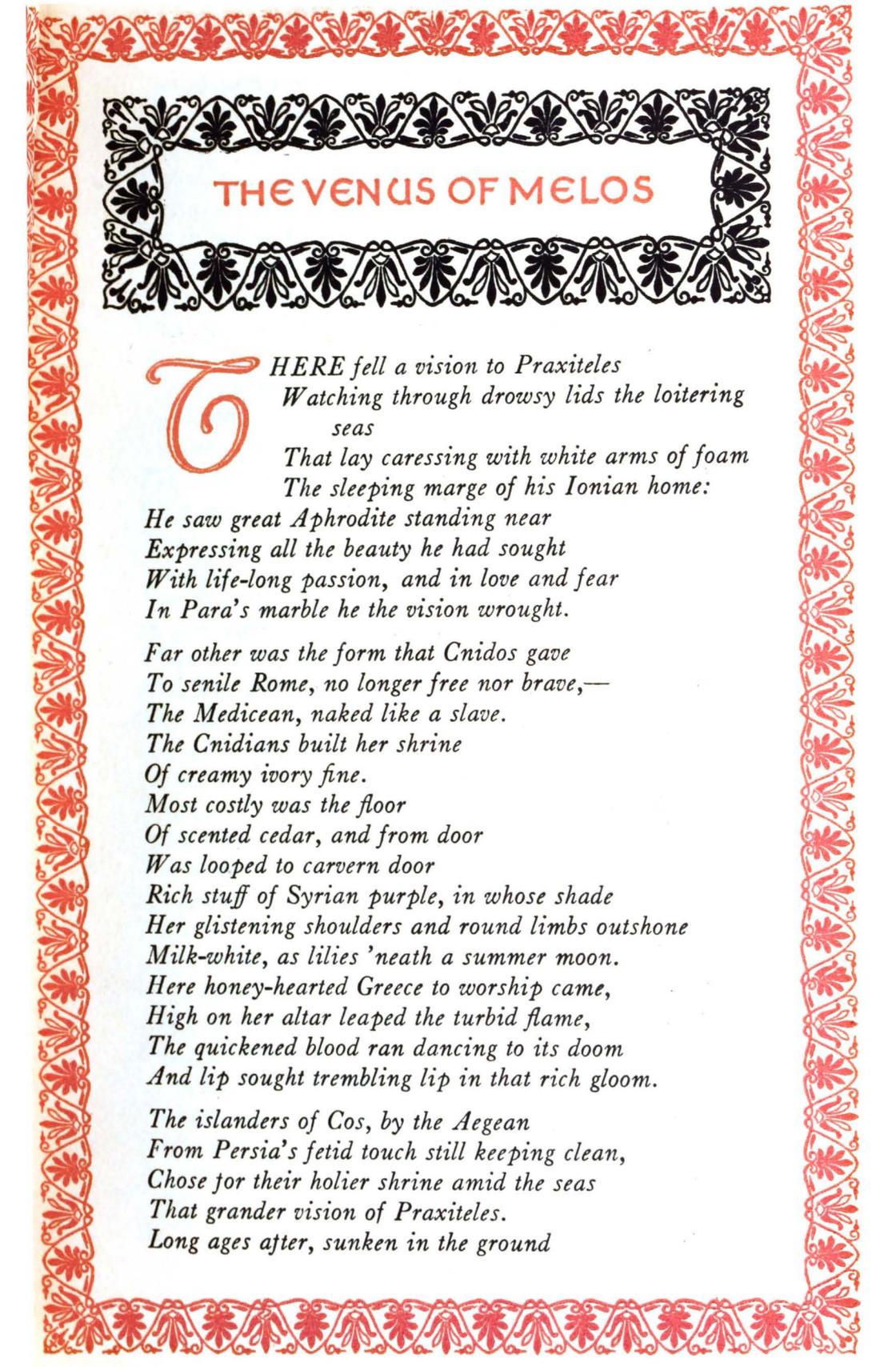
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*Dedicated to the
Votary of Exalted Love*





THE VENUS OF MELOS

THERE fell a vision to Praxiteles
Watching through drowsy lids the loitering
seas
That lay caressing with white arms of foam
The sleeping marge of his Ionian home:

He saw great Aphrodite standing near
Expressing all the beauty he had sought
With life-long passion, and in love and fear
In Para's marble he the vision wrought.

Far other was the form that Cnidos gave
To senile Rome, no longer free nor brave,—
The Medicean, naked like a slave.
The Cnidians built her shrine
Of creamy ivory fine.
Most costly was the floor
Of scented cedar, and from door
Was looped to carvern door
Rich stuff of Syrian purple, in whose shade
Her glistening shoulders and round limbs outshone
Milk-white, as lilies 'neath a summer moon.
Here honey-hearted Greece to worship came,
High on her altar leaped the turbid flame,
The quickened blood ran dancing to its doom
And lip sought trembling lip in that rich gloom.

The islanders of Cos, by the Aegean
From Persia's fetid touch still keeping clean,
Chose for their holier shrine amid the seas
That grander vision of Praxiteles.
Long ages after, sunken in the ground

Venus
of
Melos

*Of wave-girt Melos, wondering shepherds found
The marred and dinted statue which men name
Venus de Milo, saved to endless fame.*

*Before the sacred marble, on a day
There came a worshiper. A slanted ray
Struck in across the dimness of her shrine
And touched her face as to a smile divine—
For beauty was the worship of the Greek.
At her loved altar thus I heard him speak:
Men call thee Love. Is there no holier name
Than thine, O foam-born, laughter-loving dame?
All words that pass the lips of mortal men
With inner and with outer meaning shine—
An outer gleam that meets the vulgar ken,
An inner light that but the few divine.
Thou art the Love Celestial, seeking still
The soul beneath the form; the serene will;
The wisdom of whose deeps the sages dream;
The gorgeous beauty that doth brightly gleam
In stars, and flowers, and waters where they roll
Make whosoever sees a homesick soul.
Larger than mortal woman dost thou stand
In rapt attention bending gracefully,
As if those earnest-lighted eyes could see
Some glorious thing far off, to which thy hand
Invisibly stretched outward seems to be.
From thy white forehead's breadth of calm, the hair
Sweeps lightly, as a cloud in sunny air.
Thy brow is curved as that still line at dawn
When the last stars drown in unfathomed skies.
Thy mouth so sweet; is it a smile that dies
Or mild compassion which to weep now tries?
Little as one may tell, some summer morn,
Whether the dreamy brightness is most glad,
Or melancholically sad.
Thy ample waist no narrowing girdle holds;
Thy garment's fallen folds
Leave bare thy fair round breast*

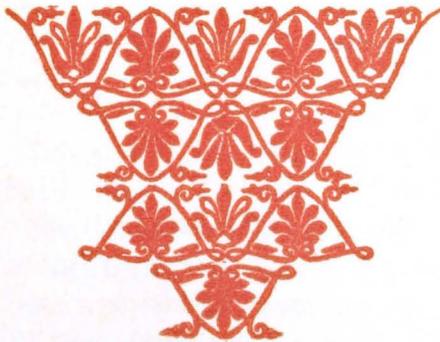
*In charming loveliness and graceful rest.
Around thy firm limb-curves and gentle feet
The robes slope downward as 'round flowering hills
Diaphanous gauze flows free when shadow fills
The hollow canons, and the wind is sweet
From amber oatfields, and the ripening wheat.*

*I bow amazed before thy noble lines.
How pure thy beauty in the marble shines,
How different from the Cnidean grace
Is the immortal glory of thy face!
One is the spirit of all short-lived love
And outward, earthly loveliness.
The crimson morn of lust is in her smile,
Wild sensuality reigns in her grove
And always coveting man's warm caress
She offers keenly her white hill-slopes, the while
Her thrilling voice is heard
In song of wind and wave, and every flitting bird.
When if across the parching plain
Man sees her, she with passion burns
His heart to fever, and he hears
The west winds mocking laughter when he turns
Shivering in mist of ocean's sullen tears.
It is the Medicean. In her lust
Is burning heat and blighting frost.
Woe to the man who feels her breath,
Her love is curse, her kiss is death.
Thou too, O Melos' daughter, walkest here
Upon the lifted hills:
Wherever thy still grace within the breast
The inner beauty of the world has moved,
Wherever men through thee have loved—
In starlight that the dome of evening fills,
On endless waters sounding to the west—
They won the brightest and the best,
Because thou leadst from what is real
Up to thy higher world ideal.
Oh, I adore thee! Through the purple dawn*

Venus
of
Melos

Staring against the dark I see the space
Opening immeasurably, and thy face
Waving and glimmering and soon withdrawn.
And many days when all one's work is vain,
And life goes stretching on, a waste grey plain,
With e'en the short mirage of morning gone,
No cool breath anywhere, no shadow nigh
Where weary man might lie still down and die,
Lo, thou art there before me suddenly,
With shade as if a summer cloud should pass,
And spray of fountains, freshning to the grass.
Oh save me from wild passion's heat
Which drives my heart to feverish beat.
Save from that Medicean dame
Whose love-embrace is ardent flame,
Who fascinates with serpent's glances
The trembling victim of her fancies.
Now, even now she smiling stands
Close, as I turn, with outstretched hands.
She keeps me back. I'm seized. I'm caught,
She has my heart, she has my thought,
I feel her lips on my lips burn,
'Yes, Medicean, I'll return—
With fervour like the pagan gods
I come to kiss thy rosy buds,
Absorbing with delight thy breath
Though knowing that thy kiss is death.'
Melos, thou stand'st too high for me,
Thine eyes look too ideally
Away from earth to heights above.
I cannot grasp thy nobler love;
The transcendental thoughts and dreams
Thy lucid eye around thee beams,
I cannot seize them as I seize
The lustful goddess Medices.
Through her my thought goes unto thee,
In half-divided harmony.
Her's is my earthly heart, to thee above

*Will ever rise my soul's delightful love.
Then I'll not say farewell. What would earth be
Without thy presence? Surely unto me
A life-long weariness, a dull, bad dream.
Abide with me and let thy calm eyes beam
Fresh hope upon me every amber dawn,
New peace when evening's violet veil is drawn.
Then, though I see along the glooming plain
The Medicean's waving hand again,
And white feet glimmering in the harvest field,
I shall not turn nor yield;
But as heaven deepens and the Cross and Lyre
Lift up their stars beneath the Northern Crown,
Unto the yearnings of the world's desire
I shall beware of answer coming down;
And something, when my heart the darkness stills,
Shall tell me, without sound or any sight,
That other footsteps are upon the hills,
Till the dim earth is luminous with the light
Of the white dawn from some far hidden shore,
That shines upon thy forehead evermore.*





INTRODUCTION



light, ineffable, mantles thy glorious form. Thou art like an emanation of some bright morning thought, some kindling dream by fancy woven into the coarser threads of daily existence, and so shot o'er the colorless fabric of earthly experience that care and sorrow are made tribute to the majesty of thy serene beauty, and doubt and tears abide not in thy magic presence. Wert thou, then, sweet Aphrodite, moulded indeed by the hand of man? Was ever in Arcady a form so spotless fair, a smile so radiant or lips so divinely tender? Could the blue Aegean fashion thee in this imperial loveliness as fable says, or imprint of Jove's finger call thee into being? No, no; only the heart and brain of man hath shaped from dull clay the Beautiful expressed in thee. Only the tremulous outpouring of a human soul could have so wrought the transcendent image of mortal love and aspiration; a witness unto the ages of the truth and power of Love. Not fire nor sword, not vengeance nor despair, is embodied in thee, but that supreme emotion whence issues all that most dignifies and sweetens life, the dream within the dream, all beauty of material insight permeated by the living miracle of Love. Thou art of earth we know. Faint semblances of thy perfection we have looked upon, and in our thoughts the hope doth linger that thy form is but a happy antitype of some breathing image dwelling upon that sacred Melian shore. Yet something awes us as we gaze on thee and whispers that a seraph from heaven once hovered o'er thy creator and guided his unconscious hand.



THE TRAVAIL OF A SOUL

The
Travail
of a
Soul



HIS sorrow makes me pure, for grief doth fold
All thoughts in its dark mantle. Even the fires
That kindled in me passionate desires
No more my heart in anxious thraldom hold.
And with this secret pain I must grow old:
“That my sweet hopes must mount fate’s lurid pyres,
And other fingers sweep love’s sacred lyres
While in my soul the breath divine is cold.”

O Mother Earth, whose bosom still is warm,
Take thou thy child ere time shall bid him weep
O’er memory’s sad heritage! Inform
With light of the new life the hours I keep
As but a withered garland kissed with tears,
The ashes left from dreams of happier years.



BEAUTIFUL IMAGE—which, looking on, none need name, since every feature glows with sacred love and speaks ere we have time to question thy message unto men—how since my youth have I beheld thy wondrous beauty and in imagination longed to dwell forever in the radiance of thy chaste loveliness! Here in this attic-chapel, whither I have crept to rest a while from labor and from men, thou art at length enshrined before my tired eyes, and as I gaze enraptured upon the overmastering light and power and grace that so haunt thee, upon the very spirit of the Beautiful which lights thy glorious form, touches with infinite charm thy purely noble contours, and mantles in thy face divine, all of earth that bound my bleeding heart is folded away as by a curtain of sunset splendor. Thou canst not speak to me, my Aphrodite? Not one sweet word to answer all my kisses? Then let thy mute protection be my amulet, which I will wear in secret among men, and they shall not know why my life seems gentler and more thoughtful, nor why I smile when sorrows thicken and the long, long pilgrimage is lonelier, ghastlier still. Each hidden pang shall be assuaged by memories of thee and of thy brooding, patient benediction, which every morning welcomes and delights, which sends me forth to daily toil in pity and vast love, and in the solemn evening hours transforms this lowly habitation into the dwelling place of God.

Comfort me, O my Venus, my Aphrodite!
Look on my woe with thy divine compassion
And by thy beauty heal this tender heartbreak
Ere death shall call me.

Speak to me, O my Eidolon, my Aphrodite!
Lo, my heart is sere with hopeless passion,
Thou only canst revive its faded embers,
My Aphrodite.



THY image haunts me. I cannot forget
Thy brave, true nature and thy quiet grace.
Oh, since that summer day when first we met
My memory reflects thy radiant face.
I fain would breathe to thee this longing prayer:

“That hand in hand together we might rove
The happy woodlands, finding everywhere
In light and shade the flower of perfect love.”

But this relentless Fate that follows close
Upon my dreams—how can I trust her now?
Or know that when I ask of thee a rose,
Thou wouldst not but the thorn on me bestow?
So leaving e'er these tender thoughts unsaid
I only wish that I were lying dead.



AMID a thousand hearts I wandered, seen and yet unseen, perchance to gather some respite of pain from their joy, some glad consciousness of human feeling that should transfigure the shadow of my solitude. These at least were my countrymen, and in their careless pleasure might I not find the Lethe I sought so long in vain? But still my Beautiful One, I return to thee alone. Here during the summer day hast thou stood charming the silences; here thy smile awaits thy recreant lover, beaming as of old when thou didst thrill my boyish fancy with unutterable longings for the True, the Beautiful and the Good. Did I then forget thee in these wayward hours? Ah, no. Even in the crowd I longed to return to thee and thy calm radiance, to look again with tears of quiet rapture on thy features, and feel within my heart the subtle spell thy beauty doth instil. Thine arms are here no more—yet they are tenderly laid about earth's children, and in their soft embrace we cannot mourn thy mutilation, but rather draw nearer to thy divine face in which there shines a spiritual loveliness and nobility, as if fate had crowned thee with thy loss. O beautiful, my Aphrodite, canst thou not by the power of thy vast loss uplift me ever from the abyss of sorrow and despair? Shall I not know that every thought is chastened by thy presence, and so draw unto me the living truth in thy dear clay that even my griefs shall seem like silent ministers, veiling themselves in tears and darkness only to appear hereafter recreate and full of blessing? What meanness can abide, what thing unlovely or impure, before the glory of thy mute appeal?

Comfort me, O my Eidolon, my Aphrodite!
The summer blooms in skies serene and tender,
In lipping leaves that tremble in the moonlight,
Haunting my fancy.

Let thy pure image speak of love and beauty,
Call to me clear when night and sorrow hasten,
And every thought redeem from aught unworthy
Thy guardian splendor.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



THINK not my love an abject thing, O heart,
Whose shadow beside other hearts is light!
I needs must worship at thy shrine despite
All pain and hopeless longing, or depart
From the sweet life whose sovereign thought
thou art.

Yet such pride is mine I could not lay
This treasure at thy feet, my love, always
Did I not scorn thee too, disdain to impart

Unto thine ear my languishment and care,
Slow cankers nourished by my heart's despair.
Go, Love, and let me think of thee as one
Not born of earth, but wandered from some spot
Too fair for mortal feet, and all alone
Breathe out in prayer the soul thou hast forgot.



FACE lingers in thy presence, lovely image,—
peace in thy sightless eyes, thy lips, thy flow-
ing hair; and on thy tender yet majestic brow
the seal of godlike beauty rests supreme.
Where now is the restless throng amid which
an hour ago I sauntered anxiously with ear alert to catch if
possible, some note of cheer, some brave, true token of a liv-
ing spirit ruling this poor clay? Alas, only the empty echoes
of a Vanity Fair; always a husk, the kernel never. Sad
faces even in your smiles tired wanderers. For must not
there come a day to you, as to us all, when the slender
pipings of your carnal loves shall be drowned in the uni-
versal chant? Go unto your feverish couches; *carpe diem*,
and let the sorrow of life remain unheard of in your revelry.
But oh, so sad ye are through all, so full of nothingness
and ignorance and woe. Come I not then to thee, sweet
Aphrodite, with fresher love for thy chaste care? Is not
thy hair unsoiled, thy lips more nobly pure, thy limbs
with virginal loveliness replete? Who will ever know how
thine ineffable radiance illumines my thoughts when the
bewitching light of earthly eyes lure me from the heart's
highest, holiest devotion? For I have none but thee, my
Aphrodite, to call my own, nor can I ever press on lips
save thine my burning kisses, nor pour in mortal ear the
sacred passion that I pour to thee.

Comfort me, O my Eidolon, my Aphrodite!
Let thy bright smile like sunlight o'er my sadness
Fall with this summer day, and leave no token
Of my vast sorrow.

Hearken, sweet image, hearken to my heart beat,
See how its morning love is turned to ashes
And all the dream divine that thrilled my bosom
Forever vanished.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



ANGELIC one, informing mortal mould
With an unearthly loveliness: I gaze
Enraptured, mute, with all my soul ablaze
And feel thy presence my whole heart enfold.
I cannot name the power that doth hold
My spirit bound to thine, nor murmur praise
Of him to whom high creeds their homage raise.
My deepest thought from utterance is controlled;

Yet tenderer than stately litanies
On bended knees beneath the temple's dome,
Are the still dreams that in my bosom rise
When near to thee, my Eidolon, I come
And look into thy calm, thy thoughtful eyes,
With sense of God possessed, with reverence dumb.



AD world and sadder longings for a land of peace. How in the multitude of chill misgivings that arise in viewing the errors and sorrows of humanity, the heart turns within itself to find some oblivion for the wretchedness that is and has been, some mild assurance that the years to come may vouchsafe a little respite from this mighty care. What is there, then, to waken in our breasts sweet pitying thoughts for those who suffer and so nobly endure, or to turn us toward the upward path—the flight of the spirit divine imprisoned in this anxious clay? Beauty, beauty is here to answer and uplift. While blooms a single flower, while the stars of morning sing and the day dies in golden splendor, while but one pure heart beats with ineffable love, one eye beams tenderly upon us, or from one living soul there breaks a high, brave utterance, while songs of radiant children echo through our hearts the cherub gladness with which heaven has set its seal upon their infant years, while art and music dwell with us, and everywhere the tokens of the Beautiful arrest our tired eyes—so long shall sorrow be comforted, so long shall all be well with us even in a world of woe. And thou, my Silent One, thou type of that which eye hath never seen, supremely fair among earth's brightest daughters, when shall I find in living mould the semblance of thy sculptured clay? Yet thou art but a breath from some far human spirit; some exquisite emanation of divine love that by the kindling touch of genius bodied forth its loveliest aspiration, and in this lovely form embodied a mortal thought. How must his hand have trembled as he shaped those lines which in coming ages were to command the veneration of mankind and be his deathless apotheosis! How must his loving eyes have filled with tears of joy and all his delicate nature have been touched to ecstasy as from the earth beneath his feet he wrought that glorious miracle! So unto thee, my Beautiful One, I bring fresh garlands from my heart's depths to crown thee with my longing love. A wreath of violets shall press thy noble brow, and myrtle and orange blossoms and the daintiest vines that grow shall mantle

The
Travail
of a
Soul

thee with my most tender care; for art thou not the purest ray that ever broke upon my solitude, and in this still retreat dost thou not smile upon me night and day and fill my fancy with perennial delight?

Comfort me, O my Eidolon, my Aphrodite!
Thou image of love and tender compassion,
Stoop to receive, even in its dearest flower,
All I can give thee:

All that my living spirit longs to utter,
Finding no ear save thine to stay and hearken,
All that I nevermore to breathing image
Fondly shall whisper.



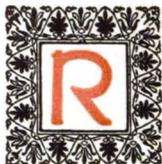
HINE, glorious morn; and let thy beams inspire
This mortal frame with holy reverence,
This mind inform with a diviner sense
Of truth and beauty. From thy Orient pyre
Shed forth a ray to soften man's desire,

And fill the soul with purer feelings, whence
All that is best in life's munificence
We draw, and struggle onward, and aspire.

Beneath thy radiance let this mould of clay
The living temple of high thoughts remain;
Bid our hearts answer to this tuneful air:
Lo, o'er the past how fair this summer day
Breaks with forgiving tenderness, and fain
Would crown each earthly spirit bowed with care.

“ *Tis a great morning.*” Forth from the darkness stands thy matchless form, sweet Aphrodite. Thy regal calm is there, thy softly-parted hair, thy loving eyes—not sightless now but far seeing into the eternal dawn,—thy benign-smile as thou lookest upon the sorrows of earth’s children who will not come to thee and gaze upon thy glorious face. Thy very attitude is that of listening to their cry of loneliness and pain. Thou knowest their long watchings and the tender heartbeats that pulsate through their mortal clay: they will not come to thee, and thy vast love and pity tinge with pensive sadness thy noble countenance, that looketh not to heaven,—since thou art heaven-born and standest girt with infinite, familiar light,—but only to us poor wayward worshipers of trivial things, ignorant of the high destiny written upon the Maker’s scroll, the tending ever of our faltering feet towards the divine, outspeaking in thy silent message unto men. “Fear not, for I am with thee,” whippers thy living oracle of Love. Not baseness of Olympian terrors, not pure passivity of Nirvana, not the sad force of unrelenting anathema or fatal logic of an hour with unholy priests, nay not even the thrilling mysticism of a gropping age, but true, warm, living love, god-given, and endued with perennial freshness and beauty. Touchstone of all reverie and action, purifier of all purifiers, kindler of light ineffable alike in the human heart and at our blessed firesides, dream within dream, savior and strength of that struggling spirit in man, itself akin to thee, to which thy brooding compassion sighs to minister and uplift: Aphrodite, my beautiful, hearken to thy lover.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



RISE weary soul, oh, rise above thy pain;
Thy aims are pure, thy honor without stain.
What tho' the world deny thee every joy
And lonely thoughts thy happiness destroy?
Cling to thy deeper yearnings and believe
That patient goodness will the full relieve
Bring to thy feet at last. Call unto God
In acts of nobleness, and from the sod,

Sown with thy tenderest tears, sweet blooms shall spring
Whose dews like balm on every suffering
Shall fall. Rise, wounded soul, thy powers refine
With prayer that lifteth mortal to divine.
Thro' earth's most poignant grief God's smile doth shine,
And to each troubled soul some peace will bring.



W EIGHED down with sorrows and with disappointment, my heart lifts its longing prayer to thee, sweet Aphrodite. Many and cruel waters have gone over me, fires of hell have burned into my soul, and darkness unutterable shrouded from my eyes the light of day. Yet I still struggle with the surge, still mounting upward feel the cool breath of morning upon my cheek, still catch afar the glimmering light that breaks from the empurpled East. Out of that new day bursts thy glorious image, just risen from the echoing sea, bright with a creator's loving impress, Immortal Love. And where shall I find thee the garland of thy sacred devotion, or how fashion hymn to thee in fitting honor of thy coming? So pure, so lofty, so benignant—and art thou indeed standing in this lonely chamber far from thy Melian niche to shed thy splendor on my sorrowing thoughts? Loved, loving Aphrodite. Nor myrtle nor amaranth to weave a chaplet for thy royal brow, nor does earth hold attendance fair enough to honor thee, though the daughters of land and sea be thy handmaidens. Thou dost not longer dwell in Arcady, thou art come unto a strange abode and to the clatter and frivolity of a coarser age. Yet thy searching eyes, so they look well and long, shall yonder descry thy modern votary, and even in the thoughtless multitude shalt thou find some delicate nature to answer thee and adore. I at least will not forsake thee, though we dwell alone; and morn and even thine shall be my tenderest homage, messenger of Love Supreme.

Thou art so pure, thou art so fair and holy,
And thy dull clay by Love's impress transfigured
Beams like a star amid this night of passion,
Stainless and glorious.

Yet in thy features kindles now a beauty,
Who shall say whether 'tis divine or mortal?
Passionless, yet suffused with loving radiance,
Humanly tender.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



NE perfect gift hath Fortune to bestow,
With which of all her stores none can compare,
One priceless treasure than all else more fair,
Possessing which to us all others flow.

To win this boon might mortal well forego
Each lesser thought, each joy however rare;
Might o'er a trackless desert bravely fare
Or patiently accept fate's sternest blow.

Ask ye what so can move the heart to praise,
Invest the clod with grandeur, touch the springs
Of finer feeling in us, and above
All meaner passions its true praises raise
Triumphant 'mid a thousand sufferings?
'Tis the enchanted amulet of Love.



WOULD be dumb to all the world save thee, my Aphrodite. Yes, though my heart trembled with suppressed longings, it should neither seek nor find other ears than thine, other lips to kiss, other smiles to greet me. For mortals are o'ershadowed by the hues of melancholy thoughts, and waywardness and sorrow are their destiny; but thou standest forever girt with light and joy. In thee there is no change. Only at times methinks thy face doth wear a look of inner sadness and thy sweet mouth reveal a tremulous tenderness of mild pathos, the sombre reflection perchance of that which binds me to the realm of desolation. Yet hope is never wanting in thy fair lineaments. Something of native dignity is there always in thy calm gaze, for art thou not divinely born and nurtured, and dost thou not behold with thy clear vision the far-off truth whose tokens unto man are mystery and care?

O radiant Queen, emblem of holiest aspiration which burning in the human heart transmutes to bliss the sufferings to which humanity is heir: O beautiful, my Aphrodite, step from thy throne one hour endued with majesty of life and motion that I may behold thee robed in breathing semblance of immortal love.

Comfort me, O my Beautiful, my Aphrodite!
Draw to thy bosom all this silent anguish
Stilling my passionate heart with words and kisses
Divinely tender.

“**C**AST not thy pearls”—so pride with scornful tone
Bids us be still and wait, nor lay our treasure
Beneath the feet of them who with a stone
Answer us asking bread, and for full measure
Of loving kindness not one little grain

Of sympathy would offer; yet the heart
Is mighty, and a whisper comes again
From the clear-seeing soul that dwells apart,

In majesty of truth, saying, “Not so;
Give of thy bounteous will nor count the cost
Tho’ centuries wait thy guerdon to bestow.
Whate’er is good and true shall not be lost;
But every word and deed sprung from the spirit
In nobleness shall fairest meed inherit.”



WHAT must have been the rapture of those beauty-loving Greeks, when in thy wave-girt isle thou stoodst revealed? How must each piping swain have kindled with quiet ecstasy and maidens longed to crown thee with myrtle and olive, for surely never had all their tenderest visions taken shape in art as in thy glorious form! What happy pilgrimages o'er enchanted seas must have borne to thy bright shrine the homage of a grateful people, and what lips of children repeated thy name, what sires rejoiced as at the breaking of celestial day? Long, long didst thou wait in thy earthen crypt ere reverent generations were permitted to gaze upon thy loveliness, and to gather strength and truth from thy undying message unto men. Now here, even in this far chamber, art thou come to dwell with me. The dying centuries have not cast one shadow o'er thy glowing features, nor has the wanton touch of human hand marred thy perfection. Fresh thou art, my Aphrodite, as on that memorable morn when the young sculptor stood entranced before thee and wondered if indeed his hand had wrought so magically.

Speak to my heart and bid it feel the longing,
The gentle thoughts and tears of gentle passion
Which touched his soul, and with this dream of beauty
His heart inspired.

Let me, like him who moulded thy fair features,
Something create of beauty, truth and goodness,
Which in the hearts of reverent generations
Shall live forever.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



HERE is no ill that cometh not for good.
Ah! could we in the apothegm discern
The living truth for which we strive and
yearn,

And from despair, defeat, and solitude,
Rise with the patience of a dauntless mood!
But sorrow keeps the heart too weak to learn
The strength of hope, the blighted aims that burn,
With fate's repression all misunderstood!

No woes ought to depress the steadfast soul:
There cometh for the hearts who hope and pine
A sudden change, and what we deem mischance
Is fate's decision; true to her control,
Good comes from ill. O'er every circumstance
A will rules, high, mysterious, and divine.

SWEET Aphrodite. Let me anew dedicate to thee my purest thoughts. Again let me look up to thee as to a protecting genius whose loving kindness follows me into the waste places of earth and transforms whatever is unsightly and full of sorrow, smoothing the wrinkles of age till it seems but a happy crown of days even to the poor and the afflicted, gilding with fairest gold the morning of youth, whose feet shall never pass beyond the blessed portals of innocence, as by some wondrous alchemy transmuting all worldly dross into beauty, and so permeating life with thy quiet radiance that all seems good and lovely when I think of thee. Let every morning be to me a morn of new life as I wake to find thee standing o'er my bed and hail that heavenly smile, more beautiful than ever graced the lips of mortals, tender and strong, as if thou wert listening to some oracle divine, the solution of human mystery and pain, which unto our dull ears may never, never come. What is it, then, fair Goddess, thou dost hear?—that in some bright realm beyond the purple sunset all our gentle longings shall be fulfilled? That softer arms shall be laid about us than any moulded for earthly caress? That sweeter voices shall call, or eyes more loving greet us in the long hereafter, whose glorious dawn we see in brighter moments of the soul's prophetic vision, in fleeting fancies that summon us to their enchanted abode, in dreams that all unbidden enter into our lonely hearts and dwell with us unseen, in swift emotions welling upwards from the spirit's deeps and gathering all our hopes and passions in a silent, prayerful tear? O tell me, Aphrodite, what morning light illumines thy countenance. I seek yet find it not—it is not here.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



O wrest from sin the kernel of God's truth,
To carve from stern life's adamant the form
Of beauty and of love, to shape our ruth
Into glad paeans, and the spirit warm
E'en with the icy breath of fate; to see
All joyance fade into the night of pain,
Wherein is living death, and still be free
And hear hope's angels whispering again—

Oh, if such boon be ours, can we repine
That the pure blossom of our years should rise
Thro' desert sands watered with tears divine,
Tender with peace of the far azure skies?
Earth is not all; nor doubt, nor sophist's power
Can rob the soul of its immortal dower.



INTO the charmed atmosphere of thy chaste beauty steals my longing heart, O Aphrodite, craving the benison of that serenity which encompasseth thee, the peace that mortality can but behold in fleeting visions, vanishing ere the spirit has ceased to wonder and adore. Can care and pain abide with such as thee? And is there care in heaven? Ah, no, it must be otherwise with them that follow thee into the silent land, tracing thy footsteps through the intricate mazes of life and at last answering thy loving call, though thou be changed perchance and all this dream of mortal loveliness assume a guise here unimagined and unseen. Type of Love's majesty, look now upon these anxious days spread in an open scroll before thy gracious sight. See if in the waste places of this tremulous heart there be any thought unworthy thy beloved presence, or a desire that should not be cherished by thy loyal votary. Ask of this child that but now nestled to my bosom; ask of the dewy morning, of the stars of midnight, of the forest arches or the wildwood blossoms that gem the aisles that lead to nature's altar, if in the silent depths of meditation I have any thought save of thy celestial loveliness and glory. Symbol of the Beautiful embodied in so sweet an image, call to me here and now in every lonely hour and let not thy face be hid from me, that I may tread the path of life unscathed amid ten thousand foes.

Comfort me, O my Eidolon, my Aphrodite!—
Let my heart be even as a crystal fountain
Before thine eyes, and its translucent waters
Reflect thine image.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



T is not for the past I constantly
Weary kind Love with unremitting sighs,
Tis not that the first joy that made mine eyes
O'erflow with happy thoughts no more can be;
But thro' the vista of long years to see
No loving hand to save me ere I die,
To look into this pure ethereal sky
That overarches nought but misery:—

This stays my life-blood and dries up the spring
Whence flows the stream divine; this preys upon
My shuddering spirit night and day and leaves
The world a blank and dull and hideous thing,
Tho' decked in Beauty's robes All, all is done
Since Fate so dread the passionate heart bereaves.



O Leopardi loved; so pined Torquato Tasso in his cell; so heart-stricken Petrarca languished in his beloved Avignon. O Aphrodite, dost thou know how many tears are shed for thee? In grace and joy thou camest from the ocean surges, the white foam caressing thy feet, and on thy dewy hair and in thy sparkling eyes was a light celestial beaming. Why shouldst thou bring to mortals pain, bright Aphrodite? Call I now to mind that gentle form like Leopardi's vision, that wooed my waking spirit in those far-off days. In memory's lonely halls the listless echo whispers to me her name. Pure as the knot of May flowers, first tribute to her love, delicate as their ethereal perfume, lovely as the faint flush of beauty that tinges their soft petals as they wake beneath the snows—so pure, so delicate, so lovely was she. What tongue can rehearse the Vita Nuova in whose rich atmosphere my soul then gathered strength and hope? On brightest wings of fancy soaring, sped I then towards the empyrean of Infinite Love. Alas, as I withdrew from earth and mounted the azure sky a chilling air benumbed me. I learned in tears and sorrow and a heart's bereavement that shall never cease how all things bright and lovely known to mortal sense are but fleeting dreams caught by imagination for an instant, speeding quickly when we would behold them nearer, like a captured butterfly, from an open hand. Cloud o'er that ineffable vision and what hath earth possessed for me, save the simulacrum of light and love and happiness; what boon in store save Death's most lovely kiss?

Here at thy feet I fall with tears of anguish
 Bathing thy lovely image, till my burden,
 Unseen of mortals, by thy smile is lifted
 Sweet Aphrodite.

Light my lone chamber by thy beauteous presence,
 Guard every thought that kindles in my bosom,
 And in my dreams still, lovely form, be nigh me
 Radiant and holy.



BORN of the mist of phantasy of thought
I saw a form of wondrous loveliness,
And all in adoration longed to press
My lips to hers and look, through fancy wrought,
Forever at that face. But suddenly—

Like a polluting vapor came between
Our lives the passion of a woman's spleen
Destroying the fair flower that was to be.

Yet still within my heart I, treasuring
That vanished form, see only her fond glance,
Her soft brown hair and chaste, sweet lineaments;
Nor years of sorrow to my love shall bring
Aught but her memory, nor heaven enhance
My joy, should she, my love, have wandered thence.



WEET Eidolon, my Aphrodite, hear my prayer. I wandered the beauteous earth in search of the Beautiful. I sought the forest aisles and sunlit mountain tops, the cool vales, and many a winding stream reflected in whose quiet bosom rested the clouds of heaven, and upon whose gentle waters lay an infinite calm as of a spirit gliding peacefully toward its eternal home. I lay beneath the midnight skies and saw the glittering host of worlds beyond our ken sweep on majestically through the limitless fields of space; I saw the eye of day illumine this poor, anxious orb and its sunset radiance transfigure the dull vapors of midday, heavy with watching o'er the lonely toil of man, with myriad splendors curtaining the couch of light with half-melancholy tenderness of farewell. I turned again to earth and those that tread with me these mysterious, devious paths of dream and reality, sunshine and shadow. Then, and not till then, arose upon my rapturous vision the image of the Beautiful I had sought in vain. Out of sorrow and darkness stepped across my way the form of one who fired all my heart with ecstasy divine. Alas, when I would but touch her garment's hem the image was dissolved and only the silent air retained the perfume of her darling presence, and the garden walk and meadow and wooded hill lisped the lingering echo of that voice. Yet oftentimes I thought she came again and sighed to find I was so lonely. So followed I her vanished form, and many spake kind words to me, and some smiled in bitter mockery of my most tender love. Then in a new vision I beheld the glory of thy face, my Aphrodite, and though thou couldst not speak, there lay upon thy loving lips a smile so passing piteous and kind that I forswore thy breathing counterpart for thee; and I cling to thee and worship with increasing fervor the blessed form that haunts my fancy night and day.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



SAW as in a dream that vision pass,
Felt her sweet presence as I lingered nigh
To breathe the fragrance of her purity.
And in mute adoration thought, alas,
How like an Ishmealite on earth I was,
How hard to live and just remembered be
While hour by hour my cold obscurity
Should like the steps of doom above me pause.

Only a single shred of golden hair
Borne by some pitying wind, and from her eyes
A saintly look that touched my heart to tears,
As 'twere a sudden gleam from paradise
Shot o'er the desert of impassioned years,
Awaking hope and banishing all fears.



GAIN have I beheld thy living counterpart, my Aphrodite, thy sacred essence enthroned in breathing clay. Only a sweet, modest face and lustrous hair, and lips half-parted dropping diamonds, and eyes aglow with heavenly fire; yet from that lovely vision I turned as from the light of day and wept, bitterly contrasting the splendor of my dream with the speechless shadow of my heart's bereavement. For is there in mortal life aught that entrances, save thou bless and sanctify its hope? Is honor dear without thee, or riches to be coveted, or talent to be nurtured, or art and poetry and music wooed, unless thy hand be laid in ours? I sit as one by the wayside and watch the carnival of human joys: bright, innocent loves that sweeten all the air with their perfume; eyes turned to answering eyes in holy, mute affection; some, daughters and true wives following, crowned with celestial light and happiness; and over all the tender azure vault of heaven smiling in benediction. And I, with broken lyre and vision dimmed with burning tears, sit by the way deserted and forgotten. Only now and then falls at my feet a stray petal shaken from their garlands, which I would press in rapture to my trembling lips, save that their perfume has ere this been shed for other hearts and other loves than mine. O thou, my Eidolon, my Aphrodite; look on my desolation and confuse into these awe-stricken senses the charmed Lethe of thy beautiful repose. Thou surely hast no lover, for thou art queen of all earthly love. Thou hast not pined in solitude, for all human hearts are tribute to thy spell. Even thy little Love-Boy is but an incarnation of the divine dream, too vast, too subtle to be dwarfed by mortal mould. So let me take shelter in the universal emotion which shall surely live though human idols perish.

Comfort me O my Eidolon, my Aphrodite!
In the sweet light of thy immortal beauty

The
Travail
of a
Soul

Let my soul's blossom ope refreshed with tear drops
Like dew from heaven.

Pure as the sparkle of clear flowing fountains,
Tender as tints that clothe the summer sunset,
Let my still thoughts, my spirit's meditation,
Hallow thy presence.



THE brightest flowers that deck the brow of May,
The purest stars that gem the evening sky,
But symbols are of the divinity
That clothes the soul enthralled in human clay.
A morn is ever breaking far away
Whose smile transfigures sin and misery;
And gentle thoughts whose glory cannot die
The mind of man recall from passion's sway.

Courage, O weary heart! the hour is near,
The dew of tears life's blossoms shall revive;
Across the waste that yet before thee lies
The lily-bells are ringing sweet and clear.
The past is gone, thy tender yearnings live
And through them thou o'er every pain shall rise.



too have dwelt a day in Arcady." Not by clear flowing streams or whispering groves and thickets vocal with wildwood song; not beneath azure skies or breathing the balmy airs of earthly paradise, but in this silent attic chamber alone with thee, my Aphrodite. From thy most loving presence hath my fancy drawn bright images of beauty during all these weary hours. Not a sound hath broken the stillness of this quiet room, not a living being crossed this threshold, or aught betokened that for me exists one mortal whose heart responds unto my desolate cry. Yet sunshine fell around thee, Goddess of the Beautiful; and from thy heavenly lineaments broke forth a glory such as once illumined Tempe's sacred vale, and bore me far beyond these narrow walls to where bright day eternal dwells. I heard the streamlet lisp to the bereaved shore as to its parting tide the morning willows waved adieu; I heard along the meadow brook the matins of sweet songsters calling unto man to lift up his thankful voice unto God who gave the song of trust and gratitude, and listened to the vesper sparrow in far pastures sighing with excess of joy. And brooding skies were blue and winds and waters poured aloft the tender psalm of nature, till what had once seemed to my breaking heart but sorrow, now appeared a vale of lovely cloud from which at last the unapproachable and divine light of the spirit's heaven burst forth upon me. So let me ever dream when thou art nigh, sweet Aphrodite. So let my thoughts be calm and pure amid all earthly shadows, and every sense and feeling own thy beauteous sway. Here is thy hidden shrine shut in by my heart's zealous care, lest grosser eyes behold thee, and thy fair image be desecrated by profane and vulgar minds. I have even veiled thy divine form to guard thy chastity from wanton thoughts that lurk anear. Am I not faithful unto thee, my queen?

The
Travail
of a
Soul



So one who walks upon an ice-floe sees
His hope depart, and underneath him feels
The fated berg dissolving, while there steals
O'er his crazed thoughts a soothing dream of
peace

When death at last brings him the glad release;
So now my spirit in its silence reels
To know that Fate, to whom my heart appeals,
Is cold as that chill doom mid shoreless seas.

So wait I patiently the dawn to be,
When portals of the sighed-for shall unbar
And e'en in anguish passing I shall hear
Sweet songs of joy and heavenly minstrelsy
Of harps in that diviner, loftier sphere,
Wherein these griefs shall sparkle as a star.



TILL thoughts of thee make music in my heart, sweet Aphrodite. All, all is gone save thee: the early dream, the passionate hopes of ripening manhood, and now the darling visions of earthly joy fast fleeting one by one. Like a forsaken wretch upon an ice-floe in mid-ocean I am borne along by the irresistible currents of fate. The hour must come when this cold footing too will tremble and melt away beneath me; and o'er the wide verge looms no friendly bark to shelter and to save. Better to lie down and rest in Plato's peace, not fearing aught, and lulled to slumber by loved memories of thee. O ye who sicken with excess of pleasure, whose paths have led o'er flowery fields and meadows bright with dew, by calm-flowing waters and largesse of nature's offerings, what know ye of one who creeps unheeded and alone to gather even the crumbs which fall from the rich banquet of human affection? What can ye divine of the dread isolation which pleads with loving tears at the touch of a child's hand or glance of those confiding eyes; that looks on beauty and kind words and deeds, and crouches bowed with stinging sense of life's reality as all the weight of Ishmael's woe is laid upon him? Can honor or virtue or a selfish ease atone for this unutterable loss? But thou art constant, Beloved One, though thou art but a dream, a vision of creative thought, a symbol of that whose exquisite incarnation I may nevermore behold. Whate'er betide when I shall follow still alone into the silent land, I think some recollection of thy glorious face will haunt my dying fancy, some awakening impulse drawn from thy divine impress stir my brain and lead me forth to fairer visions still. All, all is gone save thee, but in the garden of my soul thy immortal beauty hath set love's violets and forget-me-nots, and they shall bloom anew forever.

Some light will break in this dark waste of sorrow,
Some loving hand will lead me gently on
O'er brighter fields. To this long night some morrow

The
Travail
of a
Soul

With joy will feel life's solemn undertone.
Some light will break.

Not here, not here, but in the glad hereafter,
When all the passionate dream is overpast.
Then tears shall dry, then wake the gladsome laughter,
And echo through eternity so vast.
Not here, not here.

Heart, hear, oh, hear! lay in its grave thy yearning!
Let thy true pathos be its requiem,
And, to thy lonely memories returning,
Bid sweeter, holier hopes transfigure them!
Heart, hear, oh, hear!

Be still, my soul, nor move with grief consuming
Thy palsied hours. See how e'en at thy feet
In pregnant woods the violets now are blooming,
Exhaling for thy senses fragrance sweet.
Be still, my soul!

The
Travail
of a
Soul



dreamy haze hangs o'er the quiet fields;
It is October's first still afternoon,
And sweet oblivion as of a swoon
Pervades her senses. Earth to silence yields,
After the turmoil of another year,
Labor and care and restlessness of pain.
Now peace is come, and all her beauteous train
Fills joyously the golden atmosphere.

Such season makes within the anxious heart
Some blest Lethean sense of sorrow past,
And bitter tears that nevermore will rise.
The mind that feels cannot but form a part
Of nature's calm. Would it might always last—
This revery divine 'neath cloudless skies.



FROM the quiet Autumn fields returning I come to thee, loved Eidolon, bearing fresh incense from a heart o'erfull of sorrow, whose deepest comfort is in silent communing with thy imprisoned spirit. The sunlit clouds that floated majestically o'er me; the Indian-summer air transfusing the still landscape with tender melancholy; the lingering wildflowers loth to go unto their long, long sleep; the brooklet singing merrily beneath the elders; yes, every feature of the scene and hour called back to me the image of the Beautiful inspired in thee. Thou art become a personal shape and inspiration, lovely One. Thy hand in fancy leads me on from bower to bower of sweet thoughts. Thy face is beaming alway before me, and thy calm look, just tinged with pensive sadness as thou seest the folly and purblindness of mortals, grows dearer and more benignant as it appears before imagination's longing gaze. I know thou art but humble clay, and all thy wondrous beauty but reflects the ethereal thought of him who moulded thee, and that chaste mind was but an emanation of Him whose holiest name is Love. What matters it that separate ages strive to name Creation's Lord?

But ever, with the splendor of art that called thee into being, thy chaste features assume a more human guise. Thou art no longer formed of clay but wrought divinely, as if from morning skies had floated unto earth the vision all complete. Well may that happy sculptor have kissed thy image in the very ecstasy of loving reverence. Well may he who first beheld thee liberated from thy earthen crypt have stood spell-bound before thy beauteous form, and trembled lest his hand should mar thy imperial loveliness. And gentle centuries have spared thee so. And shall the wondering child of today not mingle his homage with theirs?

The
Travail
of a
Soul



THOU knowest, Lord, that I have called to thee
At morn and even, laying my poor heart
Low at Thy footstool. Evermore thou art
To me a living light. Thy grace I see
In every thought and feeling. Can it be,
Spirit of Good, that thou and I must part?
Oh, from my eyes tears of repentance start
Unheeded by Thy wondrous charity.

Wilt thou forsake me now when darker still,
And fainter Thy pathway glimmers in the night
Of woe, through depths of sorrow none can tell?
Dost thou refuse Thy goodness to fulfill,
The wrongs of nature fondly to requite,
And whisper to my spirit, "All is well?"



ES, all my meditation is of that Love Immortal of which thou standest the sweetest symbol, Aphrodite. There is no other thought which can so hold empire in my heart of heart, no face like thine to cheer, no presence like thine own to charm away the lurking demon of despair. Whilst thou livest I shall live; when thou smilest I shall smile, even amid sorrows and this isolation worse than death. Storms and darkness gather about me, the light of day is hidden and thick forebodings crush the fair flower that in my soul is struggling upward towards the pure sunshine of a more exalted life. And yet I know that God surely will one day close this tired pilgrimage, roll back the gloom, and bid a brighter dawn awaken every dreaming joy. There is no twilight shadow on thy brow, Beloved One; no lightnings of passion have fallen upon thy radiant head as on my own, to clear the soul's atmosphere and bend above me the blessed bow of peace. Thou from thy birth hast stood godlike and glorious; no solemn vestiture of sin hath ever veiled thy loveliness; but Arcady hath known thy infant tread, and murmuring groves and glancing waters and many an ivy-wreathed fane have witnessed the rapturous worship of earth's children as they called to thee to bless their happy hours. Age shall revere and nature shelter thee, O Beautiful One! Thy look of love cannot be changed by time. Fresher grace shall invest thy virgin form, and tenderer lovelight haunt thy noble features, as men learn to know thou art the uttered emblem of their loftiest, gentlest aspirations.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



THRO' gardens fair I roamed and saw the earth
Break in a million blooms; in regal state
Each on its dewy throne triumphant sate,
And thro' those faery aisles I caught the mirth
Of palace-halls. Of wealth there was no dearth,
For gold and diamonds did captivate
The heart of him who wandered all elate,
With soft imaginings which gave new birth.

To thoughts ne'er felt before. Yet was I glad,
And with a weight of ecstasy I passed
To a green meadow set with humble gems,
And there beside a rivulet that made
Low music at my feet I found at last
This violet, fairer than all diadems.



LIKE a tired prodigal I return to thee, sweet Aphrodite. How many hours I have spent in weary watchings since last I spoke with thee; how many careful thoughts have oppressed me, how many strange faces have I stared upon! And this worried ant-hill, the world of bargaining and money-changers, seemed to me never so inane. Great indeed is Allah, yet in these crowded streets there rides a greater than he, whose name is Mammon. Gold and silver glitter upon his vestments; precious jewels sparkle upon his breast; and tender hearts are the pavement for his chariot-wheels. Yet in his countenance is naught that wakens human love: his Juggernaut-car passes amid the execrations of mankind, and his face is low and brutal, like Caligula's. One simple deed of kindness eclipses all the splendor of his reign; one word of pity shines beside the awful gloom that shrouds his triumph. So sad a retinue the world hath never seen: potsherds bewildered with his contemptuous largesse, ignorance and vulgar ambition riding in his train with poor obsequious smiles and lip-servility, godly natures now impoverished by wealth and luxury, palms that should be open, long since closed in savage greed, and lust and envy and clod-hearted dispraise and treachery, all pressing forward to partake of his accursed ease. Serenely and above them all thou standest, Beautiful One. Thy look of love no wealth can possess. Thou art the heritage alike of king and beggar, and looking up to thee, thou loveliest child of humanity, the loneliest Magdalen, the vilest wretch whom generations of sin and misery and penury and mocking fate have combined to dishonor, may feel some quickening throb, some noble impulse of the divine deep hid beneath the wreck of mortal passion. Truly thou shouldst look in upon the market-place each day, that men might pause and be confounded with thy deathless beauty.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



pure, sweet face, with eyes of tender blue,
In whose clear depths the light of stainless
thought

Beams tranquilly; cheeks in whose delicate hue
Lingers God's impress: brow serenely
wrought,

From which the pale brown hair is softly drawn;
And lips that ope in music that doth dwell
On the charmed silence like a breath of dawn
Haunting the chambers of an ocean shell:

A brave, lithe form, replete with modesty,
Moving mid men with an unconscious grace,
As if her soul knew not, with bended knee,
In secret, all must look upon that face—
Such have I glimpsed in visions, yet 'twould seem
That fancy could not frame so bright a dream.



NEVER forget the tender dream, yes, close in reverent tears the brightest page revealed to mortal eyes and wear away a life in solitude and pain, than to descend to levels lower than the spirit's hope and prophesy. There is a love that singeth aloud at noonday, leers at us as we pass and with outstretched arms welcomes us to its palpitating bosom as if 'twould calm our longing quest; warm and eager are its kisses; its fireside rings with joy and laughter; and many friendly tokens doth its hand bestow to bring us lethe and repose. Poor pitiful thing. It knows not that its thought and life are envenomed, its paltry artifices doomed to an ephemeral triumph, and that in the sweet, pure light of morning all its painted splendor shall be wan and wretched indeed. . . . There is a love which greets the dawn with eyes of brightness and looks of grateful recognition as the day-star illumines hill and vale. Its golden tresses are soiled by no wanton touch, its smile is clear as morning light, its happy matin unsullied and serene. For a clasp of its true arms man might well surrender every other earthly joy; and to sit by the way and listen to the music of its call and perchance feel one breath of its lily soul wafted anear might fill our hearts with perennial perfume. This is thy child, my Aphrodite; this is thy chosen and beloved daughter, whose glances fall like starbeams o'er my lonely way and cheer and bless this midnight toil and anguish. This only will I love and cherish, and if that worshipful one perceives me not, hears not the tremulous adoration of my sigh, nor turns as 'twere to mark the rustle of a woodbird, still will I make her heart my shrine, nor stoop to aught less pure and beautiful.

O guard me still, my Eidolon, my Aphrodite!
When passion's wraith and madness darkle round me
O let my feet through pleasant flowery pathways
Thy footprints follow.

All, all is gone save thee, my Aphrodite:
Sweet loves of morning, passion's heat at noonday;
Now let thy hand in tender pity lead me
Into life's gloaming.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



HE is not here, not here!—give o'er thy quest
Thou passionate heart, to joy and hope
unknown;
She is not here, and thou must go alone
Into the silent land; thy life opprest
With care and sorrow, nevermore caressed
By those fond arms, or by that living tone
Touched to glad tears. Thy day on earth is gone—
That dream divine that hath thy fancy blest.

What then remains? Ah, tender as a rose
Laid on an infant's bier by thy farewell,
And as its perfume be thy prayer to God
That o'er thy pain thy evening light shall close
In quiet splendor, as o'er one who trod
Patient and wise the depths of saddest hell.



Aphrodite, sweet mother of a million loves, what burden falls upon my weary heart recalling that which I have seen this day! As in a dream I watched the happy glances of thy children to whose joyous eyes thy face had been revealed. I marked each delicate emotion, I heard the rippling laughter breaking from their gladness, I caught unseen each tender tribute unto thee—all was divine, and turning to my wretchedness and pain I asked, “Why, desolate spirit, to whose ear the voice of love is heavenly music, whose thoughts are all of gentleness and love, whose purest hours are those which record some recollection of human sympathy, why wear away thy years with fruitless longing?” This is not earth thou seest through thy tears. Oh no, these loving eyes look not upon the scenes familiar to thine own; but from some brighter world, not here, my heart; this band of happy immortals has wandered, to revel for a while amid the gardens once frequented by them and now grown dearer with the lapse of time. Thou hast not to do with them, look on their sunny loves and say if aught in thee may claim kinship with their joy. For a brief hour thou wast once illumined by their sun of love. Now all is changed. They have passed onward to celestial regions, while thy feet still tarry here to trace the lingering tokens of their presence, only alone, ever alone, nor can all thy passionate desire summon to thee one touch of their loving hands, one accent of affection from their unheeding hearts. Eternity may not vouchsafe to thee a joy like theirs yet that eternity is also thine, and thy caressing thoughts are not less hallowed because nourished amid the waste of isolation, and fed by dews of longing tears.

Lo, in this solitude I am with thee,
The world seeing not, and all my sacred passion
Laid at thy feet in agony of longing,
Mute Aphrodite.

The
Travail
of a
Soul

Look thou in pity on this desolation,
And smile on me that I may bear my burden
Bravely and true, and rise o'er every sorrow
Till death's release.



BEFORE a cliff of adamant I stand,
Behind me night and poverty and shame;
Full well I know that I can only claim
What I hew out alone with my right hand.
Fate, fortune, chance, I cannot understand;
Their influence is powerless to tame
My steadfast will, their kiss or blow the same;
I will achieve what I myself have planned.

Do angels smile on me? I see them not,
Albeit I hear the rustle of their wings.
My eyes are filled with tears of bitter pain,
The memory of my love is ne'er forgot;
Yet over all my spirit soars and sings
Dreaming one day it shall be free again.



UT death doth tarry and the way before me
leads through countless sorrows and amid waste
places where I shall find no rest save in the
memory of thee, O Aphrodite. Would but one
loving heart might whisper peace, all earth's
gladness seems so far away. And ever tenderer beam the
fires of higher passion in my bosom, ever dearer grows the
music of an imagined voice and the pressure of one loving
hand. Heaven and Earth repeat the everlasting song of
Love; the river lisps its story and the bending willows chant
the name of one whose footfall ne'er shall echo in my
listening ear.

O hearken now my Beautiful, my Aphrodite!
See where thy little Love-Boy pierced my bosom,
Whose arrow deep into my heart's blood sinking
Must slay me slowly.

Yet draw not, Mother, lest a sudden pathos
Should follow with life's current swift outgushing
And I should be as senseless stone, nor hear thee
Even in sadness.

O Aphrodite, then let my death be to thee
The sacrifice most loyal I can offer,
And o'er my dust the stranger pause and murmur:
Siste viator.

Joyful I hear the agony and longing,
Since thou art here to watch and weep above me,
And in my dreams thy loving eyes' sweet vigils
Shall guard and bless me.



HE is not here, not here.
Through many towns, by many landscapes fair,
I wander, and a phantom of despair
Lies on my wretched heart,
And tears of longing start.

To think she is not here.

She is not here, not here.
O night of pain, wherein no star-beam dwells!
O tide of grief that in my bosom swells!
Give back again to me
The joys that cannot be
While she's not here, not here.

She is not here, not here;
And birds are singing, and the air is sweet,
And almost I can fancy that her feet
Bear to my listening soul
The bliss that o'er it stole
When she, my love was here.

She is not here, not here;
And I must lay aside my staff and shoon
And by my sodden hearth-stone sit and croon,
Unanswered and unloved,
The songs her spirit moved
When she, my life, was here.



HERE is but one loving soul to waken mine, O Aphrodite. There is but one hand to lead, one loving voice to comfort and bid me rejoice. Her have I sought so long amid earth's children. And still I find her not, and evermore I creep into the silent chapel of my tender thoughts, and there before thy altar weep away my lonely heart to thee. O Beautiful One! Canst thou not vouchsafe unto thy votary one little hour of rest? In all this wealth of loving kindness must I forever know only the friendly touch and words of those who cannot see the spirit that sighs for its own and will not be comforted? And thou, sweet Death, why hast thou turned away thy gentle face? I scent thy perfumed footsteps near; thy fingers now are twined within mine own; thy soft breath kisses my brow; and above all mortal song floats thy clear chant soothing my senses with a nameless calm; yet thou lovest me not enough to dwell with me and fare unto the unknown land. If there be death in life, surely there shall be life in death when the long agony of isolation hath passed away.

She is not here, not here.

I see the asters nodding where she passed,
And all the woodland smiles as tho' her face
Had wakened it to joy, yet she is gone.

She is not here, not here.

O Night and Death, fold me away from earth,
Lest these still tears should touch some human heart
Which knowing all would break as mine has broken!

The
Travail
of a
Soul



cannot banish from my thoughts the hope
That thou wilt love me, though so oft hath
Love
Lured me with smiles only to mock and
prove
More bitter for her kiss. The weary slope
O'er which I climb no vista e'er doth ope,
Like the sweet picture in which thou dost move
Beside my lonely life, bending above
The griefs and darkling years with which I cope.

Now in this fading light I helpless stand
Before thy face, longing to follow thee,
To take within my own thy loving hand
And in its tender clasp be always free,
While a new glory lights the beauteous land
That still is folded in obscurity.



IS it a dream caught from some former life and wrought into this longing existence? Have these earthly aisles no answer for my trembling prayer? In bitter drops my soul is melted at the thought that here, where Beauty hath alighted, no token of love shall wake the living heart and bear me onward and upward into regions of the blest. What matters it that in some long hereafter all this mighty bereavement may be atoned, and children clasp me, and loving voices welcome home from daily toil their tired friend and father? Oh, for one day of that sweet fulfilment, one day of liberty and hope, that I might feel the fullest harmony of life and thought and deed. Backward I turn in vain to find the footsteps of her who in the memory of these desolate years thrilled my heart with rapture. Never again. I search and find her not—the darling image conjured by imagination to lend experience all that can vivify and hallow it, without which nothingness and insensibility are the sum of nature's dower. There is a peace I know that comes in twilight hours, when calm and passionless the spirit of man looks from its prison-home and joins in earth's vespers, mingling with the first forest hymn, the lowly outpourings of its resignation and faith. Yet even in this holy interval, high o'er the kneeling world hangs thy fair cresset, Aphrodite, and sweeter than all other beams, more beautiful than sunset tints or purpled hills or darkling flow of streamlet, shines thy glorious lamp of love to guide our thoughts and feet to thee. Perchance the blessed vision framed by fancy may be lovelier than the choicest gift it is in thy power to bestow, but oh, how can philosophy, which hath never seen with mortal eyes, gainsay the truth to which mankind bears testimony? Is it not true that happiness hath been and is and shall be while thou reignest, sovereign of our holiest thoughts?

The
Travail
of a
Soul



fate, thou camest to life's great feast
In sable shroud, masking thy radiant face
And seeming, to our senses, to efface
All joy and hope; yet as the tinted east
Oft veils the sun, and we perceive the least
At happy morn, when suddenly her grace
Appears and smiles. So is thy hidden face.
Like her we'll welcome thee, thou kingly guest.

Thou art the sovereign of our being; all
We think or feel is known to thee, and when
We most would chide, then suddenly thy smile
Illumes our lot, and earthly pleasures pall
Before thy majesty: so stay a while;
We bow before thee, kindest friend of men.



FROM selfish hearts I come to thee, my Aphrodite. From thanklessness and low ambitions, from company with those who would sacrifice to the Moloch of personal interest, the most gentle and sacred feelings that can sway a human soul. Sordid and unhappy indeed is the philosophy and success of the world. But now, as one who leaving a foul dungeon emerges into the sweet light of day, I stand once more in thy beloved presence, permeated with the quiet thoughts thou ever dost inspire, warmed and revived by the flame enkindled in thy chaste bosom—the memory of thee being always Lethe to thy hapless child. When, oh, when, shall I abide with thee and be at rest? So many days have gone since last I lifted my voice to thee, though morn and even thou hast heard the prayer breathed unto thee, when with slow steps I bade farewell or greeted thee returning from the dull routine of toil's apprenticeship. What glowing thoughts have moved thy fancy in this speechless interval? What wonders hast thou seen with those far-seeing eyes? Is barter no more in Sirius? Have the Pleiads seen in their encircling orbs no baseness and treachery and guile? Have the loves of Mars and Jupiter gone well, and is there then, in truth, beyond this sphere some sunlit Arcady, which to earth's children is but an enchantment of fabled song and story? Are these bright-winged imaginings one day to take flight thither, and shall all this load of care be laid with our tired dust? O Beautiful One! I cannot dream but that the light in thy celestial eyes reflects some happiness beyond our ken. Tell me what thou hast seen, thou glorious soul, looking into the blue ether above us; and if one ray of that ethereal fire that burns within thy loving heart may fall upon thy patient votary, oh, shed its kindling warmth upon this desolate, heart-broken life, to comfort and illumine.

The
Travail
of a
Soul



H, could I find expression for the pain
That moves my heart, the world would weep
to know
How desolate have been my years of woe,
And turn to me in pity; but in vain
I strive to speak, anguish and tears restrain
The music of my song, and choke the flow
Of deeper utterance, while sorrows grow
With silence burning ever in my brain.

Yet still 'tis mine to dream that I shall speak
In the long future, and that men shall rise
And shelter me and soothe with tenderest tears.
Then an eternal song shall sweetly break
From my cold lips and flow in harmonies,
Echoing ever through the trembling spheres.



BEAUTIFUL ONE. With what unspeakable despair I come once more to thee. Hear thou the tremulous sobbings of my burdened spirit; look thou in vast compassion on the anguish I have borne and still must bear in fealty unto thee and thy divine behest. For none is there I worship like to thee; no face so fair, no form so beautiful as that which man has crowned and called Love. How infinite is the abyss that stretches between me and thy smile. How unutterable the longing in my heart as I look into the dying sunset where hangs thy silver cresset, and hear evermore the closing of thy temple's portals, like a funeral knell echoing amid the ghostly chambers of my soul. Ah me, and shall this anxious life go down in pain? Are these faint tints of morning only the feverish recollection of a dawn that long has passed and will not break again? Thy countenance is full of light, Beloved One. Thine eyes see not the tears I pour for thy sweet recognition—I am as dead before thee, and this passionate zeal seems wasted in thy service. Oh deign to bend thy royal glance upon this solitude. Call to her whose spirit somewhere wanders seeking my own, and bid her hasten ere the fountain of these loving thoughts be congealed by sorrow that no human heart can long endure. Bid thy swift Love-Boy whisper to her ear the tender pathos of my spirit's history; touch her cold lips and say it is the kiss of him whose feet have followed after hers in all these bitter years, and tell her when he lies fainting by the wayside, that one little word spoken ere it be too late may wake again the life that now is dying, O Beautiful, my Aphrodite, hear my prayer!



OVER with wildwood blooms this quiet grave,
O Mother Nature! Let thy tears of dew
Be shed above my heart's dead dream, O wave
Thy fragrant boughs above me and renew
Each morn thy sweet caress! My love is laid
In snowy robes, and light of heaven scarce gone
Beneath the solemn sanctuary of thy shade—
Love, spent with weary wanderings, alone.

O wake me not again, Mother Divine!
But o'er this sleep the mantle of thy care
Fold with meek pity, as for one who died,
Hearing forever in the haunted air
Celestial voices, yet whom Fate denied
One little hour of love, save only thine.



ONCE more, and perchance for the last time, I come to thee, my Aphrodite. Be thou my witness then how loyal is my heart to thee, which in the sorrow of this lonely room hath answered to the inspiration of thy glorious presence. O guardian of my thoughts, be thou my comforter! In this new year watch ever lest the faintest evil desecrate thy brooding loveliness, or sentiment unkindly belie the holier life awakened in thy child. Thou canst not speak, but could thy voice be heard among the hearts of men I doubt not some kindred soul would shudder and turn pale, then look on me in pity, knowing the infinite solitude thou only dost behold, the tragedy that underneath this mask of playfulness works ever unseen into every woof of fortune some sombre threads of utter despair. Oh, stay not thy subtle charm till every gloomy recollection be exorcised, every misgiving lulled to rest. Lo, Love, I am as nothingness without thee: yet here even in this hushed retreat my face is turned toward that light which maketh all things beautiful, and in these humble studies there is peace. Let every sorrow hem me round; let all that makes the spirit, leap in splendor from the clear fountain where God's waters flow; let even thy beloved image be no more, and in the wintry halls of this sad heart sound never again the aeolian music of youth's hope and prayer—still will I soar and live for thee and thee alone, though every tender memory of thy face bring tears of anguish to these tired eyes, and every thought of thy long vanished kiss be like a draught of bitterness to my bereaved fancy. But thou, sweet Aphrodite, shalt remain, thou shalt abide Love's messenger—since Love herself hath fled—and together we will strew violets and amaranth upon that most gentle grave, and with dear vigils guard her sleep, lest even one passionate heartbreak should disturb her sacred repose.



HE loves"—"She loves me not." How softly
fall

The purple petals rent from beauty's chain,
Each trembling with alternate joy and pain;
How eloquently tender in their call

Borne from the heart of Nature! None, of all
Only the voice supreme doth yet remain.

Speak, oracle of heaven, thy fragrant fane
A lover's sweetest secret doth enthrall.

I dare not breathe the words; my soul is faint
With depth of wild emotion, and I seem
To catch a strain from some far distant sphere,
A glorious music, breaking from the plaint
Of sorrowing isolation as I hear
Over the fields, "*She loves me*" ringing clear.



At last, I have seen the precious image of thy love, O Aphrodite, clothed in grace beyond all human art to imitate or aught save divine imagination to conceive. I saw the flowing hair fall softly round her temples, the still, pure eyes shone full upon me, within whose secret depths the fire of dawning passion lay, the parted mouth breathed forth its silent tale of love, and the chaste bosom trembled with unuttered emotion. So innocent and lovely—what hand, I asked, hath shaped this faultless mould and in its holy treasury enshrined a living soul, more beautiful than star of summer morning; what fancy hath conceived aught so heavenlike and fair, so full of innocent joy, so delicately framed that thought can hardly grasp its pure ethereal loveliness?

O my Beautiful One, My Aphrodite, can it be true that I am called to receive the tender tribute of a love like hers? Can it be true that this exquisite soul beats in sympathy with my own, that this young heart unknown to guile yearns unto mine with all the devotion of love? Away, away, thou speakest to me of that which I have not found and which my eyes may never behold. And yet the sweet conviction haunts me night and day. Is it then but the fevered dream caught from the void of suffering and despair? But let not this dream be blighted, whose radiance is the last beam of sunlight that can illumine my earthly day. Oh bring my darling safely to my breast and bid her lay her arms about my neck and nevermore abandon to the terrors of despair the soul that lives only for her, whose only worldly peace shall be the consciousness of her pure devotion.

Too true, yet oh, I would not have it pass,
This vision, tho' alas,
 It soon may fade away,
 Fade like a star into the blazing day
Of life's reality. Hear, hear, I pray,
Spirit of endless Good,
Let not Love's sun go down upon my solitude.

The
Travail
of a
Soul

She comes. How soft her precious footstep falls
Along the wintry halls
Wherein my days have past.
She comes! And now, oh Heaven, I feel at last
Her heart to this cold bosom folded fast.
No, no, it is no dream
For in thy eyes, sweet girl, I see Love's living gleam.

Move on into the silence of the past,
Dim phantoms that so long have wandered o'er
The morning of my life. Fate has recast
The broken fragments of my soul, and more
Than this hour's joy I cannot ask. O, pour
Thy happy song unto the silver stars,
Thou tearful heart, that grief unuttered bore.
A breath of morning comes to kiss the scars,
And Love with tender hand the gates of heaven
unbars.

Kodak Gray Scale

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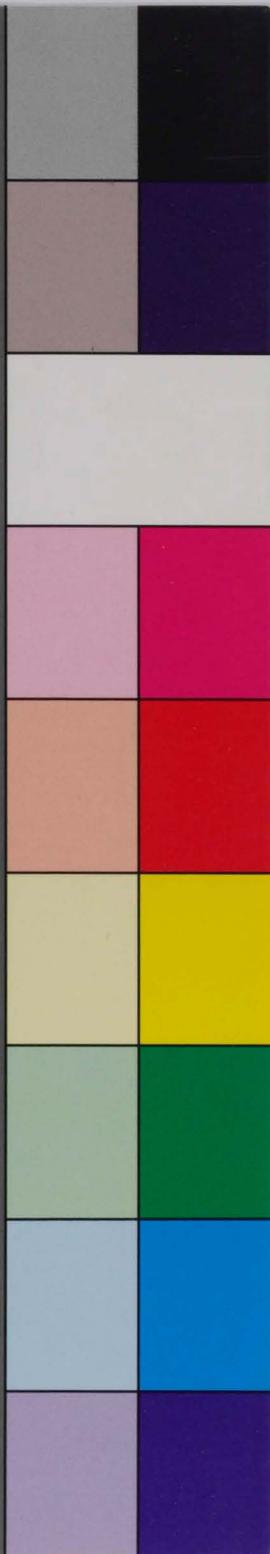


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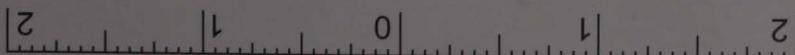
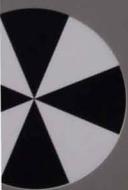
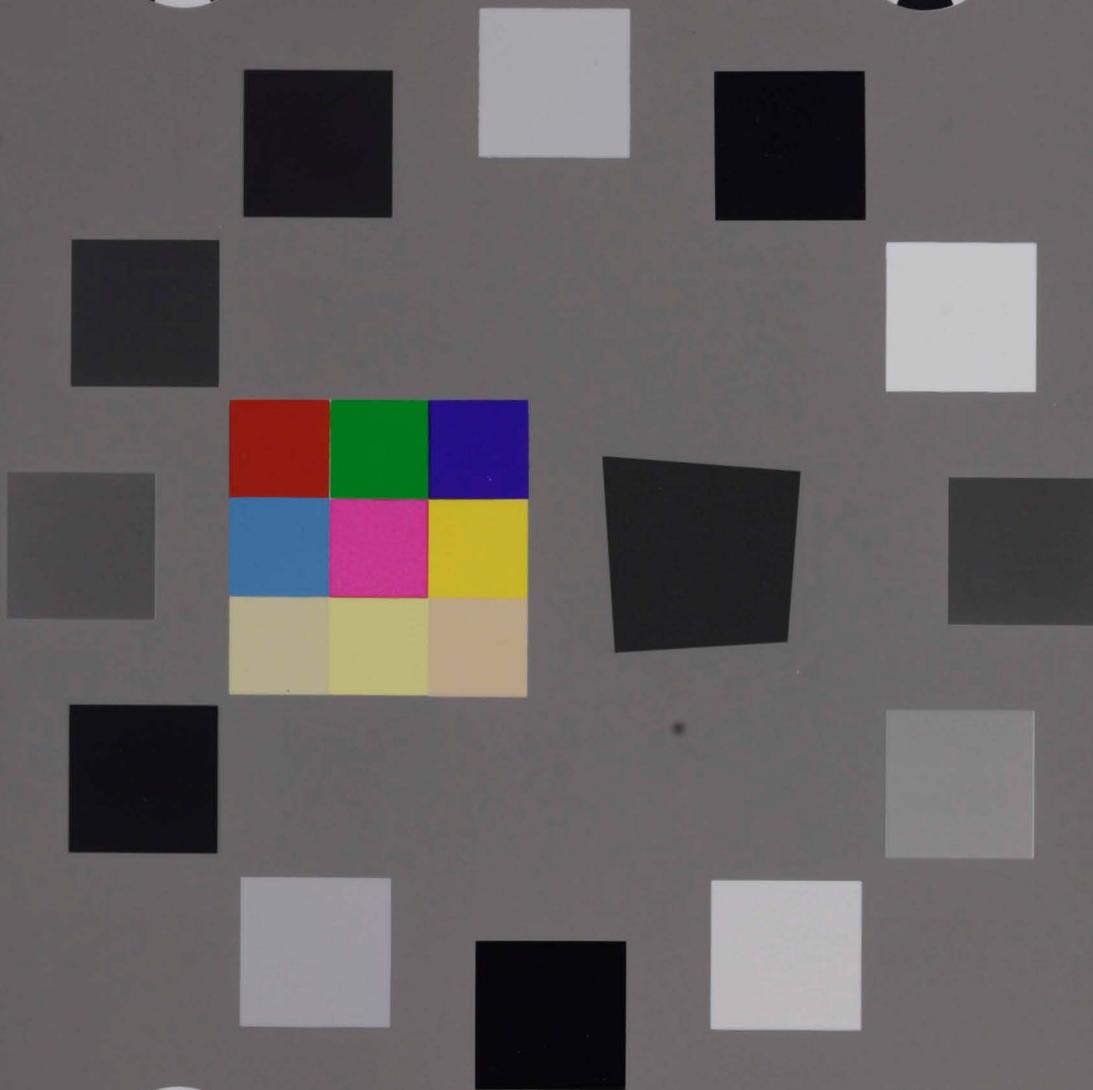
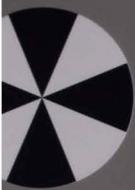
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