

AN ILL DREAM.

IN the grim woods when all the bare black
branches

Creak out their curses like a gallows-tree,
When the miasmal pestilence-light dances,
A spectre-flame, through midnight's infamy.
My blood grows chill and stagnant with my shame.
O Love, to speak thy name!

O Life! O Heaven! O dreams long dead! Ye
Spirits

Rising unbidden from Hope's cobwebbed door,
Ye quick desires that every soul inherits,
Leave me to weep, and torture me no more!
My face grows grey with sheer despair; I shrink
From dreams; I dare not think.

I had a poet's dreams. My soul was yearning
To grasp the firmament and hold it fast,
To reach toward God, and, from His shrine
returning,
To sing in magic melodies the vast
Desires of God towards man—O dreams! O years
Drowned in these bitter tears!

I felt the springs of youth within me leaping,
Let loose my pleasure, never guessed that pain
Was worth the holding—now, my life is weeping
Itself away, those agonies to gain
Which are my one last hope, that by some cross
Eld may avenge youth's loss!

Yet still youth burns! The hours its pleasure
wasted
Compel their bitter memories to grow sweet;
Like some warm-perfumed poison if I tasted,
Felt its fierce savour pulse, and burn, and beat;
Yet in my veins its sleepy fire might bring
Strange dreams of some sweet thing.

Half a regret and half a shuddering terror,
The past lies desolate and yet is here,
Half guide, half tempter toward the stream of error,
On whose fresh bosom many a mariner
Puts out with silken sail—to find his grave
In its voluptuous wave.

Here are few rocks whereon a ship hath peril;
No storms may ruffle its insidious stream;
Only, no fish invade its waters sterile,
No white-winged birds above it glance and gleam,
Only, it hath no shore, no wave, but gloom
Wraps it within her womb.

No sun is mirrored in its treacherous water,
Only the false moon flickers and flits by
Like to the bloodless phantom shape of slaughter
Laughing a lipless laugh—a mockery,
A ghastly memory to wake and weep
—Should Sorrow let me sleep.

No current draws a man, to his fair seeming,
Yet all the while he whirls a stealthy sweep
Narrower, nearer, where the wave is steaming
With the slight spray tossed from that funnel deep
Which dips, one wide black shaft, most horrible,
Down to the nether Hell.

Yet there seems time. God's grief has not
forgotten
His mighty arm, and with His pitying breath
A strong wind woke me ere my boat grew rotten
With venom of the stream, that quivereth
Now as He blew upon it—fish and bird
Live at that silent word!

And I arose to seek the oars of Lying
Wherewith I had embarked—the wind had torn
Their wood to splinters—“Jesus! I am dying!
Send me Thy cross to fashion some unborn
Oarage of Truth to quit this stream of Death!”
O vain, O wasted breath!

I have no strength. Upright I kneel, lamenting
The days when Love seemed fair, the bitter years
When pain might have found truth, ere unrelenting
I shipwrecked Life! O agony of tears!
Vain tears! In silence, with abated breath
I drift, drift on to Death!