

THE MORIBUND.

I.

THE Seven Wise Men of Martaban
Sate round the dying man.

They were so still, one would have said :
If he were dying, they were dead !

The first was agéd ; in his beard
He muttered never a weird.

The next was beautiful and gay :
He had no word to say.

The third was wroth and rusty red,
Yet not a word he said.

The fourth was open and bold :
His silence girt him like fine gold.

The fifth was ruddy and fair of face ;
He held his tongue a space.

The sixth was many-coloured, but
He kept his lips well shut.

The last was like a full great moon ;
He knew, but uttered not, his rune.

II.

Now when the time was fully come
The dying man was dumb,

But with his failing hand did make
A sign : my heart doth ache.

At that the kingly man, the fourth,
Rose up and spat against the North.

Then made the dying man a sign :
My head is running like strong wine.

The agéd man lifted his mouth
And spat against the South.

He clutched his throat in pang of death,
As if he cried for breath.

Whereat the second beat his breast
And frowned upon the West.

Then the man sighed, as if to say :
The glow of life is gone away.

At this the rusty and wroth released
His eyes against the East.

Then the man touched his navel, as
He felt his life thence pass.

Also he smote his spine ; the base
Of life burnt up apace.

Then rose the many-coloured sage ;
He was right sad with age.

With him arose the ruddy and fair ;
He was right debonair.

They twain to upper air and lower
Advanced the eyes of power.

Ay! but above the dead man's head
A lotus-flower was spread.

Thence dripped the Amrita, whereby
Life learneth not to die.

The seventh in silence tended it
Against the horror of the pit.

III.

Thus in a cage of wisdom lay
The dead man, live as they.

They hold him sacred from the sun,
From death and dissolution.

Within the charmed space is naught
Possible unto thought.

There in their equilibrium
They float—how still, how numb!

There must they rest, there will they stay
Innocent of the judgment day.

Remote from cause, effect retires.
Act slays its dams and sires.

There is no hill, there is not pit.
They have no mark to hit.

It is enough. Closed is the sphere.
There is no more to hear.

They perish not; they do not thrive.
They are at rest, alive,

The Seven Wise Men of Martaban;
And, moribund, the man.