

“THE SONNET.”

I.

THE solemn hour, and the magnetic swoon
Of midnight in a poet's lonely hall!
Grave spirits answer (angels if he call)
The invocations of his lofty tune.
Thus in his measures nature craves the boon
To be reflected; and his rhymes appal
Or charm mankind as tides that flow or fall,
Waxes or wanes the tempestival moon.

Her course is measured in the sonnet's tether.
Waxes the eightfold ecstasy; exceeds
The minor sestet, where some passion bleeds
Or truth discourses: or eclipse may end,
Proof against thought; but if man comprehend
The stars in all their stations sing together.

II.

What power or fascination can there lie
In this fair garden of the straight-kept rows,
The sonnet? Surely some archangel knows
Why, having written in mere ecstasy

One sonnet-thought, the metre cannot die
But urges, but compels me to compose
More and still more, and still my spirit goes
Striving up glittering steps of symphony.

There is an angel who is guardian.
Surely her wings are rosy, and her feet
Black as the wind of frost; but oh! her face!
Whoso may know it is no more a man,
But walks with God, and sees the Lady sweet
Whose body was the vehicle of grace.

III.

Eternal beauty in eternal truth,
Isis! And Thoth, the scribe of destiny,
And Mary's excellent virginity!
Ye are the witness of the ageless youth
That crowns the sonnet. In your wondrous eyes
Lie hidden all the secrets of the world,
And as the lightning of your look is hurled
So glean I something of life's harmonies.

Look then upon me! Let my insight pierce
The clouds of this material universe
Unto your splendour that no mortal eye
May see and live. Even so, how small the price!
My soul accepts its own sweet sacrifice:
Let me but strike one perfect chord—and die.