

AN ORIGIN

To George Raffalovich

IN fire of gold they set them out,
The garlanded of old, who clomb
The Mount of Evil, strong and stout
To wrest from Venus' brow the comb.
*The fiery wind, the web unspun,
The nine stars and the circling sun.*

Not theirs to wander lost and lone,
Adream by mountain lake and sea;
Not theirs to bear a face of stone
Away from human mystery:
They pondered o'er the runes of time,
They slew the Serpent of the Slime.

The brutish brain, the nervous hands,
The conscious power of thew and mind;
The agony of burning sands,
The blithe salt breezes blowing blind—
The birth-pangs of the Emperor Thought,
Of Earth and Pain the wonder-thought.

They hurled them blindly on the breast
Of foaming hate, of wild desire:
From Time they held the old bequest,
The passionate pangs, the flash of fire—
Not through the gods they dreamed of ran
The stream that fired the veins of man.

They stanch'd the gaping wound with turf,
With water slaked the burning maw;
Rolling within the boiling surf,
They caught the brine in eye and jaw.
They roared and rushed with tangled mane
To rape and ruin in the rain.

The hours flew by all swift and red;
They gorged, they slept within the shade:
They yelled in fear with muffled head
When thunder made them sore afraid.
Loud laughed the gods to see the wild
Mad glory of their weanling child.

A flash of long-forgotten light—
I found again the men of old,
The wondering children of the night,
The ravagers of hill and wold—
Our sane, strong, savage satyr-sires,
In whom were born the artist-fires.

The scorching sun, the sleeping moon,
The yelling wind that clave the trees,
The monsters that they fled, the croon
Of squaws with babes upon their knees,
The wet woods' call, the insistent sea,
The blood-stained birth of mystery.

The scream of passion, and the foam
Upon the willing women's lips;
Green, dripping forests, love's dark home—
These were the god-enwroughten whips
That gave the eagle-cars of Art
First impulse in the cave-man's heart.

The artist-light is backward borne,
Master, within my brain to-night;
Back in the long-forgotten morn
I see the dawn of Thee and light;
The men that made me stare and stare
Through the great wood-fire's lurid glare.

And through the haze of time and life
Anew the dim, dark visions loom;
The matted bloody hair; the knife
Of jagged stone; the reeking fume
Of purple blood; the gore and bones
Rotting beneath the straight-aimed stones.

The dream is past; the night returns,
 Old mother of the primal Fear;
Within me, Master, throbs and burns
 The old gray wonder. Yea, I hear—
The heritage is mine; I take
The wand encircled by the snake.

Far in the night I wander; far
 Back in the forest of the Past,
Led by my sole and single star,
 Where I shall dwell in peace at last.
But once again I see Thee stand
Guarding the old forgotten land—

A silent land of dream and fear,
 Where thought-waves break upon the shore,
And reach the high gods' listening ear,
 And echo on for evermore
Through the dark ages, till they reach
Their long-sought goal, and burst in speech.