

INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION OF A
LONG POEM

I HAVE gone sometimes by the gates of Death
And stood beside the cavern through whose doors
Enter the voyagers into the unseen.
From that dread threshold only, gazing back,
Have eyes in swift illumination seen
Life utterly revealed, and guessed therein
What things were vital and what things were vain.
Know then, like a vast ocean from my feet
Spreading away into the morning sky,
I saw unrolled my vanished days, and, lo,
Oblivion like a morning mist obscured
Toils, trials, ambitions, agitations, ease,
And like green isles, sun-kissed, with sweet perfume
Loading the airs blown back from that dim gulf,
Gleamed only through the all-involving haze
The hours when we have loved and been beloved.

Therefore, sweet friends, as often as by Love
You rise absorbed into the harmony
Of planets singing round magnetic suns,
Let not propriety nor prejudice
Nor the precepts of jealous age deny
What Sense so incontestably affirms;

Cling to the blessed moment and drink deep
Of the sweet cup it tends, as there alone
Were that which makes life worth the pain to live.
What is so fair as lovers in their joy
That dies in sleep, their sleep that wakes in joy?
Caressing arms are their light pillows. They
That like lost stars have wandered hitherto
Lonesome and lightless through the universe,
Now glow transfired at Nature's flaming core;
They are the centre; constellated heaven
Is the embroidered panoply spread round
Their bridal, and the music of the spheres
Rocks them in hushed epithalamium.

I know that there are those whose idle tongues
Blaspheme the beauty of the world that was
So wondrous and so worshipful to me.
I call them those that, in the palace where
Down perfumed halls the Sleeping Beauty lay,
Wandered without the secret or the key.
I know that there are those, of gentler heart,
Broken by grief or by deception bowed,
Who in some realm beyond the grave conceive
The bliss they found not here; but, as for me,

In the soft fibres of the tender flesh
I saw potentialities of Joy
Ten thousand lifetimes could not use. Dear Earth,
In this dark month when deep as morning dew
On thy maternal breast shall fall the blood
Of those that were thy loveliest and thy best,
If it be fate that mine shall mix with theirs,
Hear this my natural prayer, for, purified
By that Lethean agony and clad
In more resplendent powers, I ask nought else
Than reincarnate to retrace my path,
Be born again of woman, walk once more
Through Childhood's fragrant, flowery wonderland
And, entered in the golden realm of Youth,
Fare still a pilgrim toward the copious joys
I savored here yet scarce began to sip;
Yea, with the comrades that I loved so well
Resume the banquet we had scarce begun
When in the street we heard the clarion-call
And each man sprang to arms—ay, even myself
Who loved sweet Youth too truly not to share
Its pain no less than its delight. If prayers
Are to be prayed, lo, here is mine! Be this
My resurrection, this my recompense!