

SIGHT AND SONG WRITTEN
BY MICHAEL FIELD, *London*
78868



ELKIN MATHEWS
AND JOHN LANE
AT THE SIGN OF
THE BODLEY HEAD
IN VIGO STREET
LONDON 1892

ὄσ' ἂν λέγωμεν πάνθ' ὄρωντα λέξομεν.

SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Coloneus*.

'I see and sing, by my own eyes inspired.'

KEATS, *Ode to Psyche*.

PREFACE

THE aim of this little volume is, as far as may be, to translate into verse what the lines and colours of certain chosen pictures sing in themselves ; to express not so much what these pictures are to the poet, but rather what poetry they objectively incarnate. Such an attempt demands patient, continuous sight as pure as the gazer can refine it of theory, fancies, or his mere subjective enjoyment.

‘ Il faut, par un effort d’esprit, se transporter dans les personnages et non les attirer à soi.’ For *personnages* substitute *peintures*, and this sentence from Gustave Flaubert’s ‘ Correspondence ’ resumes the method of art-study from which these poems arose.

PREFACE

Not even 'le grand Gustave' could ultimately illude himself as a formative power in his work—not after the pain of a lifetime directed to no other end. Yet the effort to see things from their own centre, by suppressing the habitual centralisation of the visible in ourselves, is a process by which we eliminate our idiosyncrasies and obtain an impression clearer, less passive, more intimate.

When such effort has been made, honestly and with persistence, even then the inevitable force of individuality must still have play and a temperament mould the purified impression:—

‘When your eyes have done their part,
Thought must length it in the heart.’

M. F.

February 15, 1892.

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L'INDIFFÉRENT

WATTEAU

The Louvre

HE dances on a toe

As light as Mercury's :

Sweet herald, give thy message ! No,

He dances on ; the world is his,

The sunshine and his wingy hat ;

His eyes are round

Beneath the brim :

To merely dance where he is found

Is fate to him

And he was born for that.

He dances in a cloak

Of vermeil and of blue :

A

L'INDIFFÉRENT

Gay youngster, underneath the oak,
Come, laugh and love! In vain we woo ;
He is a human butterfly ;—
 No soul, no kiss,
 No glance nor joy !
Though old enough for manhood's bliss,
 He is a boy,
 Who dances and must die.

VENUS, MERCURY AND CUPID

CORREGGIO

The National Gallery

HERE we have the lovely masque
Of a Venus, in the braid
Of bright oak-boughs, come to ask
Hermes will he give a task
To the little lad beside her,
Who half hides and half doth guide her.

Can there be indeed good cause
Cupid should learn other art
Than his mother's gracious laws?
Hermes—Oh, the magic straws
In his hat!—as one that pineth,
To the pretty babe inclineth.

VENUS, MERCURY AND CUPID

Oh, the poignant hour serene,

When sweet Love that is a child,

When sweet Cupid comes between

Troubled lovers as a screen,

And the scolding and beseeching

Are just turned to infant-teaching.

DRAWING OF ROSES AND VIOLETS

LEONARDO DA VINCI

The Accademia of Venice

LEONARDO saw the spring
Centuries ago,
Saw the spring and loved it in its flowers—
Violet, rose :
One that grows
Mystic, shining on the tufted bowers,
And burns its incense to the summer hours ;
And one that hiding low,
Half-face, half-wing,
With shaded wiles
Hides and yet smiles.

DRAWING OF ROSES AND VIOLETS

Leonardo drew the blooms

On an April day :

How his subtle pencil loved its toil,

Loved to draw !

For he saw

In the rose's amorous, open coil

Women's placid temples that would foil

Hearts in the luring way

That checks and dooms

Men with reserve

Of limpid curve.

Leonardo loved the still

Violet as it blows,

Plucked it from the darkness of its leaves,

Where it shoots

From wet roots ;

Found in it the precious smile that weaves

Sweetness round Madonna's mouth and heaves

DRAWING OF ROSES AND VIOLETS

Her secret lips, then goes,
At its fine will,
About her face
He loved to trace.

Leonardo drew in spring,
Restless spring gone by,
Flowers he chose should never after fade
For the wealth
Of strange stealth
In the rose, the violet's half-displayed,
Mysterious smile within the petals' shade
That season did not die,
Like everything,
Of ruin's blight
And April's flight.

LA GIOCONDA

LEONARDO DA VINCI

The Louvre

HISTORIC, side-long, implicating eyes ;
A smile of velvet's lustre on the cheek ;
Calm lips the smile leads upward ; hand that lies
Glowing and soft, the patience in its rest
Of cruelty that waits and doth not seek
For prey ; a dusky forehead and a breast
Where twilight touches ripeness amorously :
Behind her, crystal rocks, a sea and skies
Of evanescent blue on cloud and creek ;
Landscape that shines suppressive of its zest
For those vicissitudes by which men die.

THE FAUN'S PUNISHMENT

CORREGGIO

The Louvre

WHAT has the tortured, old Faun been doing ?

What was his impious sin,

That the Maenads have ceased from pursuing

Cattle, with leaps and din,

To compass him round,

On woodland ground,

With cords and faces dire,—

Cords fastened with strain,

Faces hate-stretched ?

Why have they fetched

Snakes from the grass, with swift tongues of fire,

And a reed from the stream-sodden plain ?

THE FAUN'S PUNISHMENT

Beneath the sun's and the oak-leaves' flicker,

They settle near—ah, near!

One blows her reed, as dry as a wicker,

Into the old Faun's ear;

The scream of the wind,

With flood combined,

Rolls on his simple sense:

It is anguish heard,

For quietness splits

Within; and fits

Of gale and surge are a fierce offence

To him who knows but the breeze or bird.

One sits with fanciful eyes beside him;

Malice and wonder mix

In her glance at the victim—woe betide him,

When once her snakes transfix

His side! Ere they dart,

With backward start

THE FAUN'S PUNISHMENT

She waits their rigid pause ;
And with comely stoop
One maid, elate
With horror, hate
And triumph, up from his ankle draws
The skin away in a clinging loop.

Before the women a boy-faun dances,
Grapes and stem at his chin,—
Mouth of red the red grape-bunch enhances
Ere it is sucked within
By the juicy lips,
Free as the tips
Of tendrils in their curve ;
And his flaccid cheek,
Mid mirthful heaves
And ripples, weaves
A guiltless smile that might almost serve
For the vines themselves in vintage-week.

THE FAUN'S PUNISHMENT

What meaning is here, or what mystery,

What fate, and for what crime?

Why so fearful this silvan history

Of a far summer-time?

There was no ill-will

That day until

With fun the grey-beard shook

At the Maenads' torn,

Spread hair, their brave,

Tumultuous wave

Dancing ; and women will never brook

Mirth at their folly, O doomed, old Faun !

THE BIRTH OF VENUS

SANDRO BOTTICELLI

The Uffizi

FRILLS of brimming wavelets lap
Round a shell that is a boat ;
Roses fly like birds and float
Down the crisp air ; garments flap :
Midmost of the breeze, with locks
In possession of the wind,
Coiling hair in loosened shocks,
Sways a girl who seeks to bind
New-born beauty with a tress
Gold about her nakedness.

And her chilled, wan body sweet
Greets the ruffled cloak of rose,

THE BIRTH OF VENUS

Daisy-stitched, that Flora throws
Toward her ere she set her feet
On the green verge of the world:
Flora, with the corn-flower dressed,
Round her neck a rose-spray curled
Flowerless, wild-rose at her breast,
To her goddess hastes to bring
The wide chiton of the spring.

While from ocean, breathing hard,
With sole pressure toward the bay,—
Olive raiment, pinions grey
By clipt rose-stems thinly starred,
Zephyrus and Boreas pass,
One in wonder, one desire:
And the cool sea's dawnlit mass
Boreas' foot has lifted higher,
As he blows the shell to land,
Where the reed invades the sand.

THE BIRTH OF VENUS

She who treads the rocking shell—
Tearful shadow in her eyes
Of reluctant sympathies,
On her mouth a pause, a spell,
Candour far too lone to speak
And no knowledge on her brows ;
Virgin stranger, come to seek
Covert of strong orange-boughs
By the sea-wind scarcely moved,—
She is Love that hath not loyed.

ANTIOPE

CORREGGIO

The Louvre

NOONTIDE'S whiteness of full sun
 Illumes her sleep ;
Its heat is on her limbs and one
 White arm with sweep
Of languor falls around her head :
She cuddles on the lap of earth ;
 While almost dead
Asleep, forgetful of his mirth,
A dimpled Cupid at her side
 Sprawls satisfied.

ANTIOPE

Conquered, weary with the light,

Her eyelids orb :

Summer's plenitude of might

Her lips absorb,—

Uplifted to the burning air

And with repletion fallen apart.

Her form is bare,

But her doe-skin binds each dart

Of her woodland armory,

Laid idle by.

She is curled beyond the rim

Of oaks that slide

Their lowest branches, long and slim,

Close to her side ;

Their foliage touches her with lobes

Half-gay, half-shadowed, green and brown :

Her white throat globes,

Thrown backward, and her breasts sink down

B

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ANTIOPE

With the supineness of her sleep,
Leaf-fringed and deep.

Where her hand has curved to slip
Across a bough,
Fledged Cupid's slumberous fingers grip
The turf and how
Close to his chin he hugs her cloak!
His torch reversed trails on the ground
With feeble smoke ;
For in noon's chastity profound,
In the blank glare of mid-day skies,
Love's flambeau dies.

But the sleepers are not left
To breathe alone ;
A god is by with hoofs deep-cleft,
Legs overgrown

ANTIOPE

With a rough pelt and body strong :
Yet must the head and piercing eyes
 In truth belong
To some Olympian in disguise ;
From lawless shape or mien unkempt
 They are exempt.

Zeus, beneath these oaken boughs,
 As satyr keeps
His watch above the woman's brows
 And backward sweeps
Her cloak to flood her with the noon ;
Curious and fond, yet by a clear
 Joy in the boon
Of beauty franchised—beauty dear
To him as to a tree's bent mass
 The sunny grass.

TREADING THE PRESS

BENOZZO GOZZOLI

The Campo Santo at Pisa

FROM the trellis hang the grapes
Purple-deep ;
Maidens with white, curving napes
And coiled hair backward leap,
As they catch the fruit, mid laughter,
Cut from every silvan rafter.

Baskets, over-filled with fruit,
From their heads
Down into the press they shoot
A white-clad peasant treads,
Firmly crimson circles smashing
Into must with his feet's thrashing.

TREADING THE PRESS

Wild and rich the ooziings pour
From the press ;
Leaner grows the tangled store
Of vintage, ever less :
Wine that kindles and entrances
Thus is made by one who dances.

S P R I N G

SANDRO BOTTICELLI

The Accademia of Florence

VENUS is sad among the wanton powers,
That make delicious tempest in the hours
Of April or are reckless with their flowers :
 Through umbrageous orange-trees
 Sweeps, mid azure swirl, the Breeze,
 That with clipping arms would seize
 Eôs, wind-inspired and mad,
 In wind-tightened muslin clad,
 With one tress for stormy wreath
 And a bine between her teeth.
 Flora foots it near in frilled,
 Vagrant skirt, with roses filled ;
 Pinks and gentians spot her robe
 And the curled acanthus-lobe

SPRING

Edges intricate her sleeve ;
Rosy briars a girdle weave,
Blooms are brooches in her hair :
Though a vision debonair,
Thriftless, venturesome, a grace
Disingenuous lights her face ;
Curst she is, uncertain-lipped,
Riggishly her dress is whipped
By little gusts fantastic. Will she deign
To toss her double-roses, or refrain ?

These riot by the left side of the queen ;
Before her face another group is seen :
In ordered and harmonic nobleness,
Three maidens circle o'er the turf—each dress
Blown round the tiptoe shape in lovely folds
Of air-invaded white ; one comrade holds
Her fellow's hand on high, the foremost links
Their other hands in chain that lifts and sinks.

SPRING

Their auburn tresses ripple, coil or sweep ;
Gems, amulets and fine ball-fringes keep
Their raiment from austereness. With reserve
The dancers in a garland slowly curve.
They are the Graces in their virgin youth ;
And does it touch their Deity with ruth
That they must fade when Eros speeds his dart ?
Is this the grief and forèthought of her heart ?

For she is sad, although fresh myrtles near
Her figure chequer with their leaves the drear,
Grey chinks that through the orange-trees appear :
 Clothed in spring-time's white and red,
 She is tender with some dread,
 As she turns a musing head
 Sideways mid her veil demure ;
 Her wide eyes have no allure,
 Dark and heavy with their pain.
 She would bless, and yet in vain

SPRING

Is her troubled blessing : Love,
Blind and tyrannous above,
Shoots his childish flame to mar
Those without defect, who are
Yet unspent and cold with peace ;
While, her sorrow to increase,
Hermes, leader of her troop—
His short cutlass on the loop
Of a crimson cloak, his eye
Clear in its fatality—
Rather seems the guide of ghosts
To the dead, Plutonian coasts,
Than herald of Spring's immature, gay band :
He plucks a ripened orange with his hand.

The tumult and the mystery of earth,
When woods are bleak and flowers have sudden birth,
When love is cruel, follow to their end
The God that teaches Shadows to descend,

SPRING

But pauses now awhile, with solemn lip
And left hand laid victorious on his hip.
The triumph of the year without avail
Is blown to Hades by blue Zephyr's gale.
Across the seedling herbage coltsfoot grows
Between the tulip, heartsease, strawberry-rose,
Fringed pinks and dull grape-hyacinth. Alas,
At play together, through the speckled grass
Trip Youth and April: Venus, looking on,
Beholds the mead with all the dancers gone.

A P O R T R A I T

BARTOLOMMEO VENETO

The Städel'sche Institut at Frankfurt

A CRYSTAL, flawless beauty on the brows
Where neither love nor time has conquered space
On which to live ; her leftward smile endows
The gazer with no tidings from the face ;
About the clear mounds of the lip it winds with silvery pace
And in the umber eyes it is a light
Chill as a glowworm's when the moon embrowns an August night.

She saw her beauty often in the glass,
Sharp on the dazzling surface, and she knew
The haughty custom of her grace must pass :
Though more persistent in all charm it grew

A PORTRAIT

As with a desperate joy her hair across her throat she drew
 In crinkled locks stiff as dead, yellow snakes . . .
Until at last within her soul the resolution wakes

 She will be painted, she who is so strong
 In loveliness, so fugitive in years :
 Forth to the field she goes and questions long
 Which flowers to choose of those the summer bears ;
She plucks a violet larkspur,—then a columbine appears
 Of perfect yellow,—daisies choicely wide ;
These simple things with finest touch she gathers in her pride.

 Next on her head, veiled with well-bleachen white
 And bound across the brow with azure-blue,
 She sets the box-tree leaf and coils it tight
 In spiky wreath of green, immortal hue ;
Then, to the prompting of her strange, emphatic insight true,
 She bares one breast, half-freeing it of robe,
And hangs green-water gem and cord beside the naked globe.

A PORTRAIT

So was she painted and for centuries
Has held the fading field-flowers in her hand
Austerely as a sign. O fearful eyes
And soft lips of the courtesan who planned
To give her fragile shapeliness to art, whose reason spanned
Her doom, who bade her beauty in its cold
And vacant eminence persist for all men to behold!

She had no memories save of herself
And her slow-fostered graces, naught to say
Of love in gift or boon; her cruel pelf
Had left her with no hopes that grow and stay;
She found default in everything that happened night or day,
Yet stooped in calm to passion's dizziest strife
And gave to art a fair, blank form, unverified by life.

Thus has she conquered death: her eyes are fresh,
Clear as her frontlet jewel, firm in shade
And definite as on the linen mesh

A PORTRAIT

Of her white hood the box-tree's sombre braid,
That glitters leaf by leaf and with the year's waste will not fade.
The small, close mouth, leaving no room for breath,
In perfect, still pollution smiles—Lo, she has conquered death!

SAINT KATHARINE OF ALEXANDRIA

BARTOLOMMEO VENETO

The Städel'sche Institut at Frankfurt

A LITTLE wreath of bay about her head,
The Virgin-Martyr stands, touching her wheel
With finger-tips that from the spikes of steel
Shrink, though a thousand years she has been dead.
She bleeds each day as on the day she bled ;
Her pure, gold cheeks are blanched, a cloudy seal
Is on her eyes ; the mouth will never feel
Pity again ; the yellow hairs are spread
Downward as damp with sweat ; they touch the rim
Of the green bodice that to blackness throws
The thicket of bay-branches sharp and trim
Above her shoulder : open landscape glows
Soft and apart behind her to the right,
Where a swift shallop crosses the moonlight.

SAINT SEBASTIAN

CORREGGIO

The Dresden Gallery

BOUND by thy hands, but with respect unto thine eyes how free—
Fixed on Madonna, seeing all that they were born to see!

The Child thine upward face hath sighted,
Still and delighted;

Oh, bliss when with mute rites two souls are plighted!

As the young aspen-leaves rejoice, though to the stem held tight,
In the soft visit of the air, the current of the light,

Thou hast the peril of a captive's chances,
Thy spirit dances,

Caught in the play of Heaven's divine advances.

SAINT SEBASTIAN

While cherubs straggle on the clouds of luminous, curled fire,
The Babe looks through them, far below, on thee with soft desire.
Most clear of bond must they be reckoned—
No joy is second
To theirs whose eyes by other eyes are beckoned.

Though arrows rain on breast and throat they have no power to hurt,
While thy tenacious face they fail an instant to avert.
Oh might my eyes, so without measure,
Feed on their treasure,
The world with thong and dart might do its pleasure!

A 'SANT' IMAGINE'

FIorenzo DI LORENZO

The Städel'sche Institut at Frankfurt

A HOLY Picture—variably fair
In colour and fantastic in device!
With what an ecstasy is laid
The pattern of this red brocade,
Blood-red above Madonna's seat for glory;
But gold and black behind the victor-two
Who, full in view
Of the great, central form, in thought
Live through the martyrdom they wrought;
Afresh, with finer senses, suffer and despair.
Why is their story
Set in such splendour one must note the nice
Edge of the arras and the glancing tone
Of jacinth floor, pale rose before the Virgin's throne?

A 'SANT' IMAGINE'

A young St. Christopher, with Umbria's blue
Clear in his eyes, stands nobly to the right
 And questions how the thing may hap
 The little, curious, curled-up chap,
That clings almost astride upon his shoulder
 And with uncertain baby-fingers lays
 A pat of praise
 On the crisp, propping head, should press
 Upon him to acute distress.
Vainly he turns ; within the child's eyes is no clue ;
 And he with colder
Heart must give succour to the sad in plight :
To him no secrets of his doom are known ;
Who suffers fate to load must bear the load alone.

And wherefore doth Madonna thus look down
So wistful toward the book upon her knees ?
Has she no comfort ? Is there need
Within the Scriptures she should read

A 'SANT' IMAGINE'

Who to the living Word her bosom presses?
With bliss of her young Babe so near,
Is it not drear
Darkly from books to understand
What bodes his coming to the land?
Alas, as any other child he catches at her gown
And, with caresses,
Breaks on her still *Magnificat*: to ease
And give air to her spirit with her own
Christ she must hold communion in great songs alone.

She bows and sheds no comfort on the boy
Whose face turns on her full of bleeding tears,
Sebastian, with the arrows' thrill
Intolerable to him still,
Full of an agony that has no measure,
That cannot rise, grow to the height and wane,
Being simple pain

A 'SANT' IMAGINE'

That to his nature is as bound
As anguish to the viol's sound :
He suffers as the sensitive enjoy ;

And, as their pleasure,

His pain is hid from common eyes and ears.
Wide-gaping as for air, breathing no moan,
His delicate, exhausted lips are open thrown.

And now back to the picture's self we come,
Its subtle, glowing spirit ; turn our eyes

From those grave, isolated, strange

Figures, to feel how sweet the range

Of colour in the marbles, with what grace is

Sebastian's porphyry-column reared aloft !

How waving, soft

And fringed the palm-branch of the stave

Saint Christopher exalts !—they must have all things brave

About them who are born for martyrdom :

A 'SANT' IMAGINE'

The fine, stern faces
Refuse so steadily what they despise ;
The world will never mix them with her own—
They choose the best, and with the best are left alone.

THE RESCUE

TINTORETTO

The Dresden Gallery

GREY tower, green sea, dark armour and clear curves
Of shining flesh ; the tower built far into the sea
And the dark armour that of one coming to set her free

Who, white against the chamfered base,
From fetters that her noble limbs enlace
Bows to confer
Herself on her deliverer :

He, dazzled by the splendid gift,
Steadies himself against his oar, ere he is strong to lift

And strain her to his breast :

Her powerful arms lie in such heavy rest
Across his shoulder, though he swerves

THE RESCUE

And staggers with her weight, though the wave buoys,
Then slants the vessel, she maintains his form in poise.

Her sister-captive, seated on the side
Of the swayed gondola, her arched, broad back in strain,
Strikes her right ankle, eager to dislumber it of chain,

Intent upon her work, as though
It were full liberty ungyved to go.

She will not halt,
But spring delighted to the salt,
When fetterless her ample form
Can beat the reflue of the waves back to their crested storm.

Has she indeed caught sight
Of that blithe tossing pinnace on the white
Scum of the full, up-bearing tide?
The rose-frocked rower-boy, in absent fit
Or modesty, surveys his toe and smiles at it.

Her bondage irks not; *she* has very truth
Of freedom who within her lover's face can seek

THE RESCUE

For answer to her eyes, her breath, the blood within her cheek—

A soul so resolute to bless

She has forgot her shining nakedness

And to her peer

Presents immunity from fear :

As one half-overcome, half-braced,

The man's hand searches as he grips her undulating waist :

So these pure twain espouse

And without ravishment, mistrust, or vows

Of constancy fulfil their youth ;

In the rough niches of the wall behind

Their meeting heads, how close the trails of ivy wind !

VENUS AND MARS

SANDRO BOTTICELLI

The National Gallery

SHE is a fate, although
She lies upon the grass,
While satyrs shout *Ho, ho!*
At what she brings to pass;
And nature is as free
Before her strange, young face
As if it knew that she
Were in her sovereign place,
With shading trees above.

The little powers of earth on woolly hips
Are gay as children round a nurse they love;
Nor do they watch her lips.

VENUS AND MARS

A cushion, crimson-rose,
Beneath her elbow heaves ;
Her head, erect in pose
Against the laurel-leaves,
Is looped with citron hair
That cunning plaits adorn.
Beside her instep bare
And dress of crimped lawn
Fine blades of herbage rise ;
The level field that circles her retreat
Is one grey-lighted green the early sky's
Fresh blue inclines to meet.

Her swathing robe is bound
With gold that is not new :
She rears from off the ground
As if her body grew
Triumphant as a stem ✓
That hath received the rains,

VENUS AND MARS

Hath softly sunk with them,
And in an hour regains
Its height and settledness.

Yet are her eyes alert ; they search and weigh
The god, supine, who fell from her caress
When love had had its sway.

He lies in perfect death
Of sleep that has no spasm ;
It seems his very breath
Is lifted from a chasm,
So sunk he lies. His hair
In russet heaps is spread ;
Thus couches in its lair
A creature that is dead :
But, see, his nostrils scent
New joy and tighten palpitating nerves,
Although his naked limbs, their fury spent,
Are fallen in wearied curves.

VENUS AND MARS

Athwart his figure twist
Some wreathy folds of white,
Crossed by the languid wrist
And loose palm of his right,
Wan hand ; the other drops
Its fingers down beside
The coat of mail that props
His shoulder ; crimson-dyed,
His cloak winds under him ;

One leg is stretched, one raised in arching lines :
Thus, opposite the queen, his body slim
And muscular reclines.

An impish satyr blows
The mottled conch in vain
Beside his ear that knows
No whine of the sea-strain ;
Another tugs his spear,
One hides within his casque



VENUS AND MARS

Soft horns and jaunty leer ;
While one presumes to bask
Within his breastplate void
And rolls its tongue in open-hearted zest :
Above the sleeper, their dim wings annoyed,
The wasps have made a nest.

O tragic forms, the man,
The woman—he asleep,
She lone and sadder than
The dawn, too wise to weep
Illusion that to her
Is empire, to the earth
Necessity and stir
Of sweet, predestined mirth !
Ironical she sees,
Without regret, the work her kiss has done
And lives a cold enchantress doomed to please
Her victims one by one.



THE DEATH OF PROCRIS

PIERO DI COSIMO

The National Gallery

AH, foolish Procris!—short and brown
She lies upon the leafy, littoral plain;
Her scarlet cloak, her veil have both slipped down

And rest

Across her loins; the naked feet are bound
With sandals of dull gold, their thongs being wide
And interlaced; the body's swelling side
Crushes the arm; each sterile breast
Is grey; upon the throat there is a stain
Of blood and on the hand along the ground.

She gave no mortal cry,
But voiceless and consumed by drouth,

THE DEATH OF PROCRIS

Far from the town she might not gain,
Beside a river-mouth
She dragged herself to die.

Her auburn tresses part or coil
Below a wimple of most sombre blue ;
They fleck the green of the luxuriant soil
Or drift
Thinly athwart the outline of her ear.
Time has been passing since she last drew breath ;
She has the humble, clay-cold look of death
Within the open world ; no rift
Has come between the eyelids, of a hue
Monotonous—a paleness drear.

Her brows attest no thought ;
Her lips, that quick destruction stains,
Shall never kiss her husband, never sue
For pardon : she remains
A quarry none has sought.

THE DEATH OF PROCRIS

And thus she lies half-veiled, half-bare,
Deep in the midst of nature that abides
Inapprehensive she is lying there,

So wan ;

The flowers, the silver estuary afar—
These daisies, plantains, all the white and red
Field-blossoms through the leaves and grasses spread ;
The water with its pelican,
Its flight of sails and its blue countrysides—
Unto themselves they are :

The dogs sport on the sand,
The herons curve above the reeds
Or one by one descend the air,
While lifelessly she bleeds
From throat and dabbled hand.

Russet and large against the sky,
Two figures at her head and feet are seen ;

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THE DEATH OF PROCRIS

One is a solemn hound, one utterly

A faun,

A creature of wild fashion, with black fell

On which a fleshy, furred ear loops out ;

Under his chin the boorish bristles sprout

Distinct ; an onyx-banded horn

Springs from each temple ; slender legs between

The herbage peep and well-

Fleeced thighs ; his left hand grips

Her shoulder and the right along

Her forehead moves : his mellow eye

Is indecisive ; strong,

Coarse pity swells his lips.

The tall dog's vigil and the gaze

Of the wild man, by eagerness bent low,

Have each a like expression of amaze

And deep,

Respectful yearning : these two watchers pass

THE DEATH OF PROCRI8

Out of themselves, though only to attain
Incomprehensible, half-wakened pain.

They cannot think nor weep
Above this perished jealousy and woe,
This prostrate, human mass ;

 But with vague souls they sit
And gaze, while tide and bloom and bird
Live on in their familiar ways,
 By mortal grief unstirred
 And never sad with it.

Yet autumn comes, there is the light
Born of October's lateness in the sky
And on the sea-side ; leaves have taken flight
 From yon,
Slim seedling-birch on the rivage, the flock
Of herons has the quiet of solitude,
That comes when chills on sunny air intrude ;
The little ships must soon be gone,

THE DEATH OF PROCRIUS

And soon the pale and ruddy flowers shall die,
Save the untransient plants that block
 Their green out, ebon-clear,
Against the distance, while they drop,
On hound and satyr settled nigh,
 Red tassels that shall stop
 Till windy snows appear.

SAINT JEROME IN THE DESERT

COSIMO TURA

The National Gallery

SAINT JEROME kneels within the wilderness ;
Along the cavern's sandy channels press
The flowings of deep water. On one knee,
 On one foot he rests his weight—
 A foot that rather seems to be
The clawed base of a pillar past all date
 Than prop of flesh and bone ;
 About his sallow, osseous frame
 A cinder-coloured cloak is thrown
 For ample emblem of his shame.

Grey are the hollowed rocks, grey is his head
And grey his beard that, formal and as dread

SAINT JEROME IN THE DESERT

As some Assyrian's on a monument,
From the chin is sloping down.
O'er his tonsure heaven has bent
A solid disc of unillumined brown ;
His scarlet hat is flung
Low on the pebbles by a shoot
Of tiny nightshade that among
The pebbles has maintained a root.

He turns his face—yea, turns his body where
They front the cleanness of the sky and air ;
We feel, although we see not, what he sees.

From the hidden desert flows
An uncontaminated breeze
That terrible in censure round him blows ;
While the horizons brim
His eyes with silver glare and it
Casts, in its purity, on him
An accusation infinite.

SAINT JEROME IN THE DESERT

Sublime and fierce, he will not budge
Although each element becomes his judge :
For is not life the breath of God and thought
 God's own light across the brain?
Yet he, in whom these powers have wrought,
Hath dared with slow and lusting flesh to stain
 Their operations clear
As those of sunshine and the wind :
He is unfit for sigh or tear,
So whole the sin that he hath sinned,

Thus having done the man within him wrong.
He lifts his arm, the tendons of it strong
As rods, the fingers resolute and tense
 Round a flint-stone in the hand ;
 Against his breast, with vehemence,
He aims a blow, as if at God's command.
 His breast of flint awaits
 Much flagellation ; pleasure fills

SAINT JEROME IN THE DESERT

The body courage reinstates
Enduring what the spirit wills.

Dark wisdom, dread asceticism!—See,
The night-owl, set athwart a rock-bound tree
Below the cave, rolls pertinacious eyes
 On the penitence that bleeds,
 That in abashed absorption tries
To rouse the mere forgetfulness it needs.

 But lo! a white bird's wings
Find on the cliff a resting-place :—
If man looks forth on unsoiled things,
His own defilement he must face,

With somewhat of the hermit's rage of shame,
That only smarting chastisement can tame :
Yet Jerome's mood is humbler, surer far
 When, distressful penance done,

SAINT JEROME IN THE DESERT

His grey-bound volumes, his red Vulgate are
Laid on his lap and he within the sun
Is writing, undismayed
As the quiet cowherd who attends
His kine, beneath a colonnade,
Where yonder, ancient hill ascends.

METTUS CURTIUS

UNKNOWN

The National Gallery

HE comes from yonder castle on the steep,
No Roman, but a lovely Christian knight,
With azure vest and florid mantle bright,
Blown, golden hair and youthful face flushed deep
For glory in the triumph of the leap.
Though his mild, amber horse rears back at sight
Of the red flames, though poised for thrust his right
Hand grasps a knife, his countenance doth keep
Soft as Saint Michael's with the devil at bay.
So sweet it is to cast one's life away
In the fresh pride and perfume of its breath!
He smiles to think how soon the cleft will close:
And see, a sun-brimmed cloud above him throws
Its white effulgence, as he fares to death.

A FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE

ANTOINE WATTEAU

The Dresden Gallery

A LOVELY, animated group
That picnic on a marble seat,
Where flaky boughs of beeches droop,
Where gowns in woodland sunlight glance,
Where shines each coy, lit countenance ;
While sweetness rules the air, most sweet
Because the day
Is deep within the year that shall decay :

They group themselves around their queen,
This lady in the yellow dress,

A FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE

With bluest knots of ribbon seen
Upon her breast and yellow hair ;
But the reared face proclaims *Beware !*
To him who twangs his viol less
 To speak his joy
Than her soon-flattered choiceness to annoy.

Beside her knee a damsel sits,
In petticoat across whose stripes
Of delicate decision flits
The wind that shows them blue and white
And primrose round a bodice tight—
As grey as is the peach that ripens :
 Her hair was spun
For Zephyrus among the threads to run.

She on love's varying theme is launched—
Ah, youth !—behind her, roses lie,
The latest, artless roses, blanched

A FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE

Around a hectic centre. Two
Protesting lovers near her sue
And quarrel, Cupid knows not why :
 Withdrawn and tart,
One gallant stands in reverie apart.

Proud of his silk and velvet, each
Plum-tinted, of his pose that spurns
The company, his eyes impeach
A Venus on an ivied bank,
Who rests her rigorous, chill flank
Against a water-jet and turns
 Her face from those
Who wanton in the coloured autumn's close.

Ironical he views her shape of stone
And the harsh ivy and grey mound ;
Then sneers to think she treats her own

A FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE

Enchanted couples with contempt,
As though her bosom were exempt
From any care, while tints profound
 Touch the full trees
And there are warning notes in every breeze.

The coldness of mere pleasure when
Its hours are over cuts his heart :
That Love should rule the earth and men
For but a season year by year
And then must straightway disappear,
Even as the summer weeks depart,
 Has thrilled his brain
With icy anger and censorious pain.

Alas, the arbour-foliage now,
As cornfields when they lately stood
Awaiting harvest, bough on bough

A FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE

Is saffron. Yonder to the left
A straggling rose-bush is bereft
Of the last roses of the wood ;
For one or two
Still flicker where the balmy dozens grew.

On the autumnal grass the pairs
Of lovers couch themselves and raise
A facile merriment that dares
Surprise the vagueness of the sun
October to a veil has spun
About the heads and forest-ways—
Delicious light
Of gold so pure it half-refines to white.

Yet Venus from this world of love,
Of haze and warmth has turned : as yet
None feels it save the trees above,

A FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE

The roses in their soft decline

And one ill-humoured libertine.

Soon shall all hearts forget

The vows they swore

And the leaves strew the glade's untrodden floor.

A SHEPHERD-BOY

GIORGIONE

Hampton Court

A RADIANT, oval face : the hair
About the cheeks so blond in hue
It shades to greenness here and there
Against the ground of densest blue
A cloak flax-grey, a shirt of white,
That yellow spots of sunshine fleck ;
The face aglow with southern light,
Deep, golden sunbrown on the neck ;
Warm eyes, sweet mouth of the softest lips :
 Yea, though he is not playing,
His hand a flute Pandean grips,
 Across one hole a finger laying.

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A SHEPHERD-BOY

His flesh a golden haze, the line
Of cheek and chin is only made
By modulation, perfect, fine,
Of their rich colour into shade.
His curls have sometime veiled the top
Of the wide forehead,—we can see
How where the sunbeams might not stop
A subtle whiteness stretches, free
From the swarthy burning of their love :
 The opened shirt exposes
Fair skin that meets the stain above
 Half-cooly with its white and roses.

Not merely does he bear the sun
Thus visible on limb and head,
His countenance reveals him one
Of those whose characters are fed
By light—the largeness of its ways,
The breadth and patience in its joy.

A SHEPHERD-BOY

Evenings of sober azure, days
Of heat have influenced the lone boy
To dream with never a haunting thought,
To be too calm for gladness
And in the hill-groves to have caught
Hints of intensest summer sadness.

Yet pain can never overcast
A soul thus solemnly subdued
To muse upon an open past
Of sunshine, love and solitude.
Maternal nature and his own
Secluded mother are the sole
Companions he has ever known ;
His earliest innocence is whole :
His mouth, attuned to the silvan breeze,
Is mobile with the blowing
Of notes beneath the olive-trees
Or where an upland source is flowing.

A SHEPHERD-BOY

Ah, Golden Age, time has run back
And fetched you for our eyes to greet
And set you to repair our lack
Of splendour that is truly sweet,
By showing us how life can rear
Its children to enjoying sense
Of all that visits eye and ear,
Through days of restful reticence.
Delight will never be slow to come
To youth that lays its finger
On the flute's stop and yet is dumb
And loves with its dumb self to linger.

SAINT SEBASTIAN

ANTONELLO DA MESSINA

The Dresden Gallery

YOUNG Sebastian stands beside a lofty tree,
Rigid by the rigid trunk that branchlessly
Lifts its column on the blue
Of a heaven that takes
Hyacinthine hue
From a storm that wellnigh breaks.

Shadiness and thunder dout the zenith's light,
Yet a wide horizon still extends as bright
As the lapis-lazuli ;
Poignant sunshine streams
Over land and sky,
With tempestuous, sunken beams.

SAINT SEBASTIAN

He who was a soldier late is standing now
Stript and fastened to the tree that has no bough,
In the centre of a court,
That is bound by walls
Fancifully wrought,
Over which the daylight falls.

Arch and chimney rise aloft into the air :
On the balconies are hung forth carpets rare
Of an Eastern, vivid red ;
Idle women lean
Where the rugs are spread,
Each with an indifferent mien.

On the marble of the courtyard, fast asleep,
Lies a brutish churl, his body in a heap ;
Two hard-hearted comrades prate
Where a portal shows

SAINT SEBASTIAN

Distance blue and great,
Stretching onward in repose.

And between the shafts of sandy-coloured tone
Slips a mother with her child : but all alone
Stays Sebastian in his grief.
What soul pities him !
Who shall bring relief
From the darts that pierce each limb ?

Naked, almost firm as sculpture, is his form,
Nobly set below the burthen of the storm ;
Shadow, circling chin and cheek,
Their ellipse defines,
Then the shade grows weak
And his face with noonday shines—

Shines as olive marble that reflects the mere
Radiance it receives upon a surface clear ;

SAINT SEBASTIAN

For we see no blessedness
On his visage pale,
 Turned in its distress
Toward the heaven, without avail.

Massive is his mouth ; the upper lip is set
In a pained, protesting curve : his eyes have met
 God within the darkening sky
And dispute His will,
 Dark, remorselessly
Fervent to dispute it still.

The whole brow is hidden by the chestnut hair,
That behind the back flows down in locks and there
 Changes to a deeper grain.
Though his feet were strong,
 They are swoln with strain,
For he has been standing long.

SAINT SEBASTIAN

Captive, stricken through by darts, yet armed with power
That resents the coming on of its last hour,
 Sound in muscle is the boy,
 Whom his manhood fills
 With an acrid joy,
 Whom its violent pressure thrills.

But this force implanted in him must be lost
And its natural validity be crossed
 By a chill, disabling fate ;
 He must stand at peace
 While his hopes abate,
 While his youth and vigour cease.

At his feet a mighty pillar lies reversed ;
So the virtue of his sex is shattered, cursed :
 Here is martyrdom and not

SAINT SEBASTIAN

In the arrows' sting ;
This the bitter lot
His soul is questioning.

He, with body fresh for use, for pleasure fit,
With its energies and needs together knit
In an able exigence,
Must endure the strife,
Final and intense,
Of necessity with life.

Yet throughout this bold rebellion of the saint
Noonday's brilliant air has carried no complaint.
Lo, across the solitude
Of the storm two white,
Little clouds obtrude
Storm-accentuating light !

THE MAGDALEN

TIMOTEO VITI

The Accademia at Bologna

THIS tender sylph of a maid
Is the Magdalen—this figure lone :
Her attitude is swayed
By the very breath she breathes,
The prayer of her being that takes no voice.
Boulders, the grass enwreathes,
Arch over her as a cave
That of old an earthquake clave
And filled with stagnant gloom :
Yet a woman has strength to choose it for her room.

Her long, fair hair is allowed
To wander in its thick simpleness ;

THE MAGDALEN

The graceful tresses crowd
Unequal, yet close enough
To have woven about her neck and breast
A wimple of golden stuff.
Though the rock behind is rude,
The sweetness of solitude
Is on her face, the soft
Withdrawal that in wild-flowers we have loved so oft.

Her mantle is scarlet-red
In folds of severe resplendency ;
Her hair beneath is spread
Full-length ; from its lower flakes
Her feet come forth in their naked charm :
A wind discreetly shakes
The scarlet raiment, the hair.
Her small hands, a tranquil pair,
Are laid together ; her book
And cup of ointment furnish scantily her nook.

THE MAGDALEN

She is happy the livelong day,
Yet her thoughts are often with the past ;
Her sins are done away,
They can give her no annoy.
She is white—oh ! infinitely clean
And her heart throbs with joy ;
Besides, there is joy in heaven
That her sins are thus forgiven ;
And she thinks till even-fall
Of the grace, the strangeness, the wonder of it all.

She is shut from fellowship ;
How she loved to mingle with her friends !
To give them eyes and lip ;
She lived for their sake alone ;
Not a braid of her hair, not a rose
Of her cheek was her own :
And she loved to minister

THE MAGDALEN

To any in want of her,
All service was so sweet :
Now she must stand all day on lithe, unsummoned feet.

Among the untrodden weeds
And moss she is glad to be remote ;
She knows that when God needs
From the sinning world relief,
He will find her thus with the wild bees,
The doves and the plantain-leaf,
Waiting in a perfect peace
For His kingdom's sure increase,
Waiting with a deeper glow
Of patience every day, because He tarrieth so.

By her side the box of nard
Unbroken . . . God is a great way off ;
She loves Him : it is hard
That she may not now even spread

THE MAGDALEN

The burial-spice, who would gladly keep
The tomb where He lay dead,
As it were her rocky cave ;
And fold the linen and lave
The napkin that once bound
His head ; no place for her pure arts is longer found.

And these are the things that hurt ;
For the rest she gives herself no pain :
She wears no camel shirt,
She uses nor scourge, nor rod ;
But bathes her fair body in the well
And keeps it pure for God :
The beauty, that He hath made
So bright, she guards in the shade,
For, as an angel's dress,
Spotless she must preserve her new-born loveliness.

Day by day and week by week,
She lives and muses and makes no sound ;

THE MAGDALEN

She has no words to speak
The joy that her desert brings :
In her heart there is a song
And yet no song she sings.
Since the word *Rabboni* came
Straightway at the call of her name
And the Master reproved,
It seems she has no choice—her lips have never moved.

She stole away when the pale
Light was trembling on the garden-ground
And others told the tale,
Christ was risen ; she roamed the wide,
Fearful countries of the wilderness
And many a river-side,
Till she found her destined grot,
South, in France, a woody spot,
Where she is often glad,
Musing on those great days when she at first grew sad.

A PEN-DRAWING OF LEDA

SODOMA

The Grand Duke's Palace at Weimar

'Tis Leda lovely, wild and free,
Drawing her gracious Swan down through the grass to see
Certain round eggs without a speck :
One hand plunged in the reeds and one dinting the downy neck,
Although his hectoring bill
Gapes toward her tresses,
She draws the fondled creature to her will.

She joys to bend in the live light
Her glistening body toward her love, how much more bright !
Though on her breast the sunshine lies
And spreads its affluence on the wide curves of her waist and thighs,
To her meek, smitten gaze
Where her hand presses
The Swan's white neck sink Heaven's concentrated rays.

MARRIAGE OF BACCHUS AND ARIADNE

TINTORETTO

The Ducal Palace at Venice

DARK sea-water round a shape
Hung about the loins with grape,
Hair the vine itself, in braids
On the brow—thus Bacchus wades
Through the water to the shore.
Strange to deck with hill-side store
Limbs that push against the tide ;
Strange to gird a wave-washed side
Foam should spring at and entwine—
Strange to burthen it with vine.

He has left the trellised isle,
Left the harvest vat awhile,
Left the Maenads of his troop,
Left his Fauns' midsummer group

MARRIAGE OF BACCHUS AND ARIADNE

And his leopards far behind,
By lone Dia's coast to find
Her whom Theseus dared to mock.
Queenly on the samphire rock
Ariadne sits, one hand
Stretching forth at Love's command.

Love is poised above the twain,
Zealous to assuage the pain
In that stately woman's breast ;
Love has set a starry crest
On the once dishonoured head ;
Love entreats the hand to wed,
Gently loosening out the cold
Fingers toward that hoop of gold
Bacchus, tremblingly content
To be patient, doth present.

In his eyes there is the pain
Shy, dumb passions can attain

MARRIAGE OF BACCHUS AND ARIADNE

In the valley, on the skirt
Of lone mountains, pine-begirt ;
Yearning pleasure such as pleads
In dark wine that no one heeds
Till the feast is ranged and lit.
But his mouth—what gifts in it !
Though the round lips do not dare
Aught to proffer, save a prayer.

Is he not a mendicant
Who has almost died of want ?
Through far countries he has roved,
Blessing, blessing, unbeloved ;
Therefore is he come in weed
Of a mortal bowed by need,
With the bunches of the grape
As sole glory round his shape :
For there is no god that can
Taste of pleasure save as man.

THE FIGURE OF VENUS IN 'SPRING'

SANDRO BOTTICELLI

The Accademia of Florence

I.

A SIMPLE lady full of heavy thought :
Behind her neck the myrtle-bowers lie cold ;
Her robe is white, her carmine mantle rolled
And lifted on her arm that beareth nought :
A flame-tipped arrow in its arc is brought
Above by Eros ; ornaments of gold
Are crossed chainwise about her chest to hold
The unfilled breasts ; her right hand as she sought
To bless is lifted and then stays at pause
As fearful to cast sorrow for delight
On her girl-votaries. Must her coming cause
Their stately freedom quite to disappear ?
Brings Love in truth a bitterness to blight
The yet unstricken gladness of the year ?

FIGURE OF VENUS IN 'SPRING'

II

Or is it Destiny that doth compel
Her hand to stay its blessing? On her right
Three virgins, flowerless, slow of step, unite
In dance, as they were guided by the spell
Of some Choragus imperceptible :
Beside them Hermes lifts his wand to smite
An orange from the bough ; they keep in sight
The severing of the golden fruit for hell.
What boots it therefore that so light of breath
Comes Flora, from her lapful tossing flowers,
Come Zephyrus and fleeing nymph, if these
Are travelling wanton toward the infernal powers ;
If the stern Moirai move beneath the trees
With eyes fixed on the harbinger of death?

APOLLO AND MARSYAS

PERUGINO

The Louvre

FAIR stands Apollo,
Magnanimous his figure sways :
He deigns to follow
The brutish notes that Marsyas plays ;
And waits in haughty, vengeful peace,
One hand on his hip,
While the fingers of the other quietly slip
Round a staff. He does not raise
His eyes, nor move his lip.

Breeze-haunted tresses,
Worn proudly, float around his head ;
His brow confesses
No wrath—and yet a sky grows dead

APOLLO AND MARSYAS

And silent thus, when fatal bolts
 Treasure up their might
Underneath its secret and attentive light.

 Lifted by a cord of red
 His lyre hangs full in sight.

 His face supremely
Is set against the lucid air ;
 And, as is seemly,
Round Marsyas' straining skull the bare
Knolls of the vale are dominant.

 Waters spread their way
By yon bridge and towers, developing the gay
 Sunshine-blueness everywhere :
 The god is bright as they.

 Although his colour
Is of an ivory-olive and
 His locks are duller
Than his pale skin, that, scarcely tanned,

APOLLO AND MARSYAS

Flushes to carmine at the knee,—
 Gracious, heavenly wit
From his members such effulgence doth emit,
 Mortals must admiring stand
 Simply for awe of it.

Unapprehending,
Absorbed, the brown, inferior man,
 On his tune spending
All honest power, believes he can
Put the young shepherd-god to shame.
 Scrutinise and hate
His spiritless brows, the red down on his pate,
 The diligent eyes that scan
 His fingers as they grate!

 The landscape spreadeth
In clarity for many a mile ;
 No light it sheddeth
Through stream and sky upon the vile,

APOLLO AND MARSYAS

Painstaking herdsman at his task.

Summer brings no ease,

He misses the glow on the olive-green trees :

A gyrfalcon stoops meanwhile

A wild duck's head to seize.

Wood-nightshade shooting

Purple blossom and yellow spark,

Or scarlet fruiting,

By Marsyas' uncouth limbs we mark,

Where anxious and infirm he sits ;

The poet's feet are placed

On a soil rich-flowering violets have enlaced

And the daphne-bush springs dark

Behind his loins and waist.

To end the matter,

He gives an ear to the abhorred

Strains of the satyr,

Counting it worthy to afford

APOLLO AND MARSYAS

Grace to so confident a skill ;
For he first did try
His strength and the rival did not fetch a sigh :
Lo, his rich-wrought heptachord
In silence he laid by.

Shame and displeasure—
The god of inspiration set
To hear a measure
Of halting pace ! But he will whet
A knife and without comment flay
The immodest faun,
Fearing poets should, indifferent through scorn,
License all that hinds beget
Or zealots feeble-born.

There is a sadness
Upon the lids, the mouth divine ;
He loathes the badness
Of what disturbs his senses fine,

APOLLO AND MARSYAS

But calmly sorrows, not that doom
Should harry ill-desert,
But that the offender callous, unalert
To contempt or threatening sign,
So grossly must be hurt.

THE BLOOD OF THE REDEEMER

GIOVANNI BELLINI

The National Gallery

SUNRISE is close: the upper sky is blue
That has been darkness; and the day is new,
Bleaching yon little town: where the white hue,
 Spread blank on the horizon, skirts
The night-mass there is strife and wavy rush
 Of beams in flush.

But, as the amber-spotted clouds unroll,
One stands in shade of a dark aureole;
His deeply-folded loin-cloth and His whole
 Wan body by the changing air
Made spectral, though the very wounds we see
 Of Calvary.

THE BLOOD OF THE REDEEMER

Is He indeed the Christ? Those transverse beams
Of yon high cross confine Him not; it seems
Simply a token. Walking as in dreams
He has paced onward and holds forth
Indifferent His pierced palm: O Life, O Clay,
Our fears allay!

But to the people wert Thou crucified;
To eyes that see, behôld, Thou dost abide
Dying for ever. Thus Thine Eastertide
Breaks over Thee,—the crown of thorn
Laid by, but the whole breaking heart in quick
Sorrow and sick.

The dawn is blue among the hills and white
Above their tops; a gladness creeps in sight
Across the silver-russet slopes, but night
Obscures the mortal ebb and flow
Flushing Thy veins; Thy lips in strife for breath
Are full of death.

THE BLOOD OF THE REDEEMER

For Thou art bleeding, bleeding; we can trace
Naught but a dizzy sickness in Thy face;
Thine eyes behold us not, yet round the place
 Whence flows Thy blood Thy conscious palm
With fervour of unbated will doth cling,
 Forcing its spring.

Thou standest not on earth, but raised apart
On a stone terrace, rich in cunning art;
Behind Thee, figures, diligent to start
 An altar-flame, in low relief
Are traced on tablets of a marble ledge
 At the floor's edge.

Blithe Pagan youths sculptured behind Thee go
Processional to sacrifice; some blow
A horn, some feed the censer, none can know
 What he should do; but Thou dost give
Thyself and consecrate their rites, how vain,
 O Lamb fresh slain!

THE BLOOD OF THE REDEEMER

Is it Thy Father's house, this pavement rare
Of chequered marbles, pale and brown, and there
For Thy beloved thus must Thou prepare
A place?—Across the burnished floor,
Save that an uplift urn its stream hath stopped,
Thy blood had dropped.

Once crucified and once given to the crowd,
But to Thy Church for aye a Victim vowed,
Thou dost not die, Thy head is never bowed
In death: we must be born again;
Thus dying by our side from day to day
Thou art the Way.

An angel kneels beside, in yellow sleeves
And robe of lovely, limpid blue; he heaves
With steady hand a chalice that receives
The torrent of the precious blood.
His ruddy hair, crisp, rising from the roots,
Falls in volutes.

THE BLOOD OF THE REDEEMER

Was he the angel bidden to infuse
Strength, when the Saviour yearned and could not choose
To drink the cup?—He has bright, scarlet shoes,
Plumes lit by the jay's piercing blue,
Yet kneels distressful service to perform
By this gaunt form.

One thing they have alike; the curls that fleck
The angel's temples in profusion deck
His Master's, silken on the staring neck.

Marred Son of Man, Thou once wert fair
As Israel's ruddy King who faintest thus:
Thou drawest us.

There is no light athwart these eastern skies
For us, no joy it is that Thou dost rise—
Our hope, our strength is in Thy sacrifice:
To-day, to-morrow must Thou die,
For ever drawing all men to Thy feet,
O Love most sweet!

THE SLEEPING VENUS

GIORGIONE

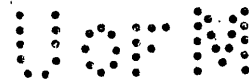
The Dresden Gallery

HERE is Venus by our homes
And resting on the verdant swell
Of a soft country flanked with mountain domes :
She has left her archèd shell,
Has left the barren wave that foams,
Amid earth's fruitful tilths to dwell.
Nobly lighted while she sleeps
As sward-lands or the corn-field sweeps,
Pure as are the things that man
Needs for life and using can 162

THE SLEEPING VENUS

Never violate nor spot—
Thus she slumbers in no grot,
But on open ground,
With the great hill-sides around. 14

And her body has the curves,
The same extensive smoothness seen
In yonder breadths of pasture, in the swerves
Of the grassy mountain-green
That for her propping pillow serves :
There is a sympathy between
Her and Earth of largest reach,
For the sex that forms them each
Is a bond, a holiness,
That unconsciously must bless
And unite them, as they lie
Shameless underneath the sky
A long, opal cloud
Doth in noontide haze enshroud. 28



THE SLEEPING VENUS

O'er her head her right arm bends ; 29
And from the elbow raised aloft
Down to the crossing knees a line descends
Unimpeachable and soft
As the adjacent slope that ends
In chequered plain of hedge and croft.
Circular as lovely knolls,
Up to which a landscape rolls
With desirous sway, each breast
Rises from the level chest,
One in contour, one in round—
Either exquisite, low mound
Firm in shape and given
To the August warmth of heaven: 42

With bold freedom of incline,
With an uttermost repose,
From hip to herbage-cushioned foot the line
Of her left leg stretching shows 46



THE SLEEPING VENUS

Against the turf direct and fine, 47
Dissimilar in grace to those
Little bays that in and out
By the ankle wind about ;
Or that shallow bend, the right
Curled-up knee has brought to sight
Underneath its bossy rise,
Where the loveliest shadow lies !
Charmèd umbrage rests
On her neck and by her breasts. 56

Her left arm remains beside
The plastic body's lower heaves,
Controlled by them, as when a river-side
With its sandy margin weaves
Deflections in a lenient tide ;
Her hand the thigh's tense surface leaves,
Falling inward. Not even sleep
Dare invalidate the deep, 69

THE SLEEPING VENUS

Universal pleasure sex 65
Must unto itself annex —
Even the stillest sleep ; at peace,
More profound with rest's increase,
She enjoys the good
Of delicious womanhood.

Cheek and eyebrow touch the fold 71
Of the raised arm that frames her hair,
Her braided hair in colour like to old
Copper glinting here and there :
While through her skin of olive-gold
The scarce carnations mount and share
Faultlessly the oval space
Of her temperate, grave face.
Eyelids underneath the day
Wrinkle as full buds that stay,
Through the tranquil, summer hours,
Closed although they might be flowers ; 82

THE SLEEPING VENUS

The red lips shut in
Gracious secrets that begin.

On white drapery she sleeps, 65
That fold by fold is stained with shade ;
Her mantle's ruddy pomegranate in heaps
For a cushion she has laid
Beneath her; and the glow that steeps
Its grain of richer depth is made
By an overswelling bank,
Tufted with dun grasses rank.
From this hillock's outer heaves
One small bush defines its leaves
Broadly on the sober blue
The pale cloud-bank rises to,
Whilst it sinks in bland
Sunshine on the distant land.

Near her resting-place are spread,
In deep or greener-lighted brown, 100

THE SLEEPING VENUS

Wolds, that half-withered by the heat o'erhead, ¹⁰¹

Press up to a little town

Of castle, archway, roof and shed,

Then slope in grave continuance down :

On their border, in a group,

Trees of brooding foliage droop

Sidelong ; and a single tree

Springs with bright simplicity,

Central from the sunlit plain.

Of a blue no flowers attain,

On the fair, vague sky

Adamantine summits lie. ¹⁰²

And her resting is so strong

That while we gaze it seems as though

She had lain thus the solemn glebes among

In the ages far ago

And would continue, till the long,

Last evening of Earth's summer glow ¹⁰⁸

THE SLEEPING VENUS

In communion with the sweet 119
Life that ripens at her feet :
We can never fear that she
From Italian fields will flee,
For she does not come from far,
She is of the things that are ;
And she will not pass
While the sun strikes on the grass. 120

A P I E T À

CARLO CRIVELLI

Lord Dudley's Collection

A MOTHER bent on the body of her Son,
Fierce tears and wrinkles around her eyes,—
She has open, stiffened lips
And an almost lolling tongue,
But her face is full of cries :
Almost it seems that the dead has done her wrong,
Almost it seems in her strife
Of passion she would shake the dead to life.
His body has been sold
For silver and crucified ; but He—
She laughs—from death He can recover ;
E'en now whatever He saith shall be :
She will win Him, He shall kiss and love her.

A PIETÀ

His body, once blond, is soiled now and opaque

With the solemn ochres of the tomb ;

The thorns on his brow are green

And their fine tips folded in

(Through the forehead forcing room)

By a swathe of the delicate, lifted skin :

The half-closed eyes show grey,

Leaden fissures ; the dead man's face is clay ;

And though the lips for breath

Leave room, there is no breathing, nor are

They gaping eagerly ; but parted

And vacant as a house-door left ajar,

From which the owner of the house has started.

A loin-cloth many-folded is on his thighs ;

One hand has fall'n crookt across the hood

Of his mother, one is held

With awe by the Magdalen,

Who darkly has understood

A PIETA

From the prayer on the cross, Christ must die for men.

That He once made hearts to burn

By the way He is touched alone we learn ;

No beauty to desire

Is here—stiffened limb and angry vein

And a belt, 'neath the hirsute nipple,

Of flesh that, flaccid and dragged from the strain

Of the cross, swells the waist with sinuous ripple.

Yet there is such subtle intercourse between

The hues and the passion is so frank

One is soothed, one feels it good

To be of this little group

Of mourners close to the rank,

Deep wounds, as to tend their unclean dead they stoop.

How softly falls in a streak

Christ's blanched tress toward his Mother's tear-burnt cheek

And how her sleeve of peach

A PIETÀ

That crosses the corpse's grimy gold
Gives it lustre! Her dark-hued kirtle
Is of the green that clouded sea-pools hold;
Her hood takes light like smooth leaves of the myrtle.

'Neath the third halo, wrought on a burnished ground
Of leafy stamp, is John's wailing face :
He shrieks ; but he does not lift
The body into the grave :
Beside him in noble grace
Bows the Magdalen, who, putting forth a brave
Hand, 'twixt her finger and thumb
Lifts the Redeemer's arm and with a dumb
Wonder looks in the hole
Scooped by the large, round nail : *So they hurt*
What one loves ! Yet about this silent creature's
Suppression there is promise ; an alert
And moving faith prompts the vigilant features.

A PIETÀ

O glorious spring of the brow, simple arch
Of the head that once was sunk so low
With the outpoured box of nard!
O solemn, dun-crimson mass
Of hair, on the indigo
Of the bodice that in curling wave doth pass!
How exquisite, set between
This blue and a vest of translucent green,
The glimpse of scarlet belt;
Or the glow, the almost emerald line,
Round the neck where the hood bends over
Such faint reds of the mantle as incline
To the sorrel-seed or the ripened clover!
So it comes to pass that to this reticent
And tender woman there is given sight
Of Christ new-born from the tomb:
The mother sees not her Son
In whom her soul doth delight,

A PIETÀ

She knows Him not, nor the work his cross hath done :

But to Mary with the sealed

Lips and hard patience Jesus is revealed.

His mother clasps his form,

Craving for miracle and must lack

For ever response to her passion :

The dead, if indeed we would win them back,

Must be won in their own love's larger fashion.

THE VIRGIN, CHILD AND ST. JOHN

LORENZO DI CREDI

Lord Dudley's Collection

A SPREADING strawberry-tree
Embowers an altar-throne ;
Behind its leaves we see
Fair waters blue in tone ;
Sharp rocks confront the stream and soft
Summits and misty towers :
But sweet Madonna in a croft
Is resting, brimmed with flowers.

Anemones are here ;
How sturdily they grow,

THE VIRGIN, CHILD AND ST. JOHN

Their brown-stemmed heads in clear
Design against the flow
Of the thin current scarce astir !
Through scrambling cresses strike
Petals of varied lavender
In chalice and in spike.

The summer light in streams
Has fallen where it can stray
On the blond girl who dreams
So lazily all day.

Dropt eyelids of a differing curve,
Deep-dinted lips austere,
Some curious grace of visage serve,
Half-wayward, half-severe.

No stain her cheek has got ;
Its sun-blanch is complete,
Save where one little spot
Sweats, rosy with the heat.

H

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THE VIRGIN, CHILD AND ST. JOHN

To keep that tender carmine free
In lustre, the arbut
Shields with a multiplicity
Of leaves its crimson fruit.

Of corn-flower blue, with gold
Her simple dress is sewn,
A cloak's cerulean fold
About her feet is thrown.
The lining of rich orange hue
Is visible just where
The brilliant and the paler blue
Would cruelly compare.

Mid windings of her wrap,
Her naked child upon
The cradle of her lap
Blesses adoring John,

THE VIRGIN, CHILD AND ST. JOHN

Whose flimsy, little shirt is tied
With lilac scarf; the slim,
Gemmed crosier, propped against his side,
Is far too long for him.

Her scarlet-sandalled foot
Soft resting-place has found;
Cup-moss and daisy-root
Are thick upon the ground
Almost as in our English dells:
But here is columbine
And one of its pellucid bells
Doth to the stream incline.

How sweet to bless and pray
And nothing understand,
Warm in the lovely grey
Of that illumined land.

THE VIRGIN, CHILD AND ST. JOHN

O boughs that such red berries bear,
O river-side of flowers,
No wonder Mary nurses there
Her Babe through summer hours !

L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHÈRE

ANTOINE WATTEAU

The Louvre

WHY starts this company so fair arrayed
In pomegranate brocade,
Blue shoulder-cloak and barley-coloured dress
Of flaunting shepherdess,
From shelter of the full-leaved, summer trees ?
What vague unease
Draws them in couples to a burnished boat ?
And wherefore from its prow,
Borne upward on a spiral, amber swirl
Of incense-light, themselves half-rose, half-pearl,
So languorously doth float
This flock of Loves that in degree
Fling their own hues as raiment on the sea ;

L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHÈRE

While one from brandished censer

Flings wide a flame and smoke

Diffusive to provoke

The heavens to consummation and to spread

Refluence intenser

Of sun and cool

And tempting azure on that bed

Of splendour, that delicious, variant pool?

I see it now!

'Tis Venus' rose-veiled barque

And that great company ere dark

Must to Cythera, so the Loves prevail,

Adventurously sail.

O happy youth, that thus by Venus' guile

Is summoned to her fabulous,

Her crystal-burnished isle!

Her virile votaries are not slack

In ceremonious worship: bravely clad

L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHÈRE

In coats of flickering velvet, crimson-greys
Of corn-field gold, they leap to give her praise,
They grasp long staves, they joy as they were mad,
Drawing their dainty Beauties by the waist
 To that warm water-track.
What terror holds these noble damsels back?
 Alack, what strange distaste
 Works in their hearts that thus
They sigh estranged? What pressure of what ill
 Turns their vague sweetness chill?
 Why should they in debate,
 Beneath the nodding, summer trees,
Dissentient dally and defer their fate?
 Methinks none sees
 The statue of a Venus set
Mid some fair trellis, in a lovely fret
 Of rose; her marble mien,
Secret, imperial, blank, no joy discovers
 In these uncertain lovers

L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHÈRE

That parley and grow pale :
Not one of them but is afraid to sail,
Save this firm-tripping dame who chooses
The voyage as a queen,
Conscious of what she wins and what she loses.
Her petticoat of fine-creased white
And, oh, her barley-coloured gown,
What miracles of silver-brown
They work amid the blues and puces !
As, full of whimsical delight
To mark a sister's half-abashed surrender,
Full proudly she doth bend her
Arched, amorous eyelids to commend her,
Gripping more tight
Her slender stave, that she may seem
Prompt to descend toward that dead, heated stream.

Her lover's face we lack,
Bent from us ; yet we feel

L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHÈRE

How fervid his appeal,
As raised on tip-toe he his lofty dame addresses.
Fine streaks of light across his raiment steal ;
For, though his cap is black,
When blossoms of japonica are spread
In sunshine, whiter-smiling red
Was never seen than glistens on his sleeve.
And how his furs flash to relieve
His lady's train of chrome !
Ah me, how long must these fond gallants blind
The fears and waive the light distresses
Of the coy girls who stay behind,
Nor yet consent to roam
Toward that soft, vermeil country far, so very far from home !

First of the twain is seen
A pale-tressed dame, couched on the grass, her bodice lambent green,
Her frilling skirt of salmon and primrose

L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHÈRE

And green of many a flower before it blows

Who, pettish in remorse,

Awhile her lover's urgent hand refuses,

Then rises buoyant on its welcome force.

But, see, this third

Sweet lady is not stirred,

Though at her side a man

Half-kneels. Why is he pleading in her ear,

With eyes so near

That Paradise of light,

Where angles of the yellow, open fan

And gown the sunken pink

Of dying roses rim her bosom's white?

Her eyelids are full-drooped, but under

The lids is wonder;

And, at her skirt,

Ah, woe! in pilgrim hood and shirt

Dressed whimsical, a cunning Cupid-lad:

Soon shall the naked urchin be

L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHÈRE

Plunged in the depths of that cerulean sea
Where life runs warm, delicious, limpid, free.

So pause the nearer groups : to the land's rim

Presses a dim

Confluence of hopes and angry amities :

'Forth to the fairy water, come ; thine hand . . .

Nay then, by force ; it is a god's command

And I by rape will bring thee to thy bliss.

What, sweet, so slow !'—'But ere I leave the land

Give me more vows ; oh, bind thee to me fast ;

Speak, speak ! I do not crave thy kiss.

To-morrow. . .'

Shall we not talk aboard ? Your skirts are wet ;

If once I lift

You in !'—'Nay, nay, I cannot so forget

The statue in the shade,

The fountain-trickle by the leafy grot.

L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHÈRE

Might not this mad embarking be delayed
An instant?—‘Dearest, would you cast your lot
In that dull countryside,
Where men abide
Who must be buried? Note the swell
Of colour ’gainst the coast.’—‘Then as you please.
How strange a story we shall have to tell!’

Two rowers wait; one shoves
The boat from shore, her cry
From luscious mouth, her bosom lifted high
Incite; and one doth wait,
With lip that hath full time to laugh
And hand on oar,
Conclusion of the soft debate.
Sudden the foremost of the fulgent Loves
Seizes a staff
From wanton hand; a thousand flambeaux pour

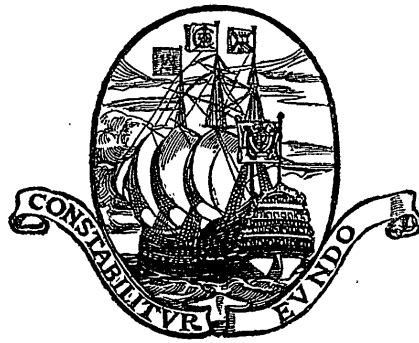
L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHÈRE

Their plummy smoke upon the kindled breeze
That wafts these silken loiterers to submerging seas.

*Now are they gone: a change is in the light,
The iridescent ranges wane,
The waters spread: ere fall of night
The red-prowed shallop will have passed from sight
And the stone Venus by herself remain
Ironical above that wide, embrowning plain.*

NOTE

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