

In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears fruit.  
 Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,—how its stem trembled first,  
 Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler; then safely outburst  
 The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when these too, in turn,  
 Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect; yet more was to learn,  
 E'en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit. Our dates shall we slight,  
 When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or care for the plight  
 Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced them? Not so! stem and branch  
 Shall decay nor be known in their place, while the palm-wine shall stanch  
 Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour thee such wine.  
 Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the spirit be thine!  
 By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou still shalt enjoy  
 More indeed, than at first when unconscious, the life of a boy.  
 Crush that life, and behold its wine running! Each deed thou hast done  
 Dies revives goes to work in the world; until e'en as the sun  
 Looking down on the earth though clouds spoil him, though tempests efface,  
 Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must everywhere trace  
 The results of his past summer-prime,—so, each ray of thy will,  
 Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill  
 Thy whole people, the countless, with ardor, till they too give forth  
 A like cheer to their sons, who in turn, fill the South and the North  
 With the radiance thy deed was the germ of. Carouse in the past!  
 But the license of age has its limit; thou diest at last:  
 As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose at her height,  
 So with man—so his power and his beauty forever take flight.  
 No! Again a long draught of my soul-wine! Look forth o'er the years!  
 Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin with the seer's!  
 Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make his tomb—bid arise  
 A gray mountain of marble heaped four-square, till, built to the skies,  
 Let it mark where the great First King slumbers; whose fame would ye know?  
 Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record shall go  
 In great characters cut by the scribe,—such was Saul, so he did;  
 With the sages directing the work, by the populace chid,—  
 For not half, they'll affirm, is comprised there! Which fault to amend  
 In the grove with his kind grows the cedar; whereon they shall spend  
 (See, in tablets 'tis level before them) their praise, and record  
 With the gold of the graver, Saul's story—the statesman's great word  
 Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The river's a-wave  
 With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when prophet-winds rave:  
 So the pen gives unborn generations their due and their part  
 In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God that thou art!

And behold while I sang . . . but O Thou who didst grant me that day,  
 And before it not seldom hast granted thy help to essay,  
 Carry on and complete an adventure,—my shield and my sword  
 In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word was my word,—  
 Still be with me, who then at the summit of human endeavor  
 And scaling the highest, man's thought could, gazed hopeless as ever  
 On the new stretch of heaven above me—till, mighty to save,  
 Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance—God's throne from man's grave!  
 Let me tell out my tale to its ending—my voice to my heart  
 Which can scarce dare believe in what marvels last night I took part.

As this morning I gather the fragments, alone with my sheep,  
 And still fear lest the terrible glory evanish like sleep!  
 For I wake in the gray dewy covert, while Hebron upheaves  
 The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and Kidron retrieves  
 Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.

I say then,—my song  
 While I sang thus, assuring the monarch and ever more strong  
 Made a proffer of good to console him—he slowly resumed  
 His old notions and habitudes kingly. The right hand replumed.  
 His black locks to their wonted composure, adjusted the swathes  
 Of his turban, and see—the huge sweat that his countenance bathes,  
 He wipes off with the robe; and he girds now his loins as of yore,  
 And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the clasp set before.  
 He is Saul, ye remember in glory,—ere error had bent  
 The broad brow from the daily communion; and still, though much spent.  
 Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same, God did choose,  
 To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose.  
 So sank he along by the tent-prop till, stayed by the pile  
 Of his armor and war-cloak and garments, he leaned there awhile,  
 And sat out my singing,—one arm round the tent-prop, to raise  
 His bent head, and the other hung slack—till I touched on the praise  
 I foresaw from all men in all time, to the man patient there;  
 And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then first I was 'ware  
 That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his vast knees  
 Which were thrust out on each side around me, like oak roots which please  
 To encircle a lamb when in slumber. I looked up to know  
 If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke not, but slow  
 Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it with care  
 Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow: through my hair  
 The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my head, with kind power—  
 All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a flower.  
 Thus held he me there with his great eyes that scrutinized mine—  
 And oh, all my heart how it loved him! but where was the sign?  
 I yearned—'Could I help thee, my father, in: venting a bliss,  
 I would add, to that life of the past, both the future and this;  
 I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages hence,  
 At this moment—had love but the warrant, love's heart to dispense!

The truth came upon me. No harp more—no song more! out-broke—

'I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw and I spoke:  
 I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in my brain  
 And pronounced on the rest of his hand-work—returned him again  
 His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I saw:  
 I report, as a man may of God's work—all's love, yet all's law.  
 Now I lay down the judgeship he lent me. Each faculty tasked  
 To perceive him, has gained an abyss, where a dew-drop was asked.  
 Have I knowledge? confounded it shrivels at Wisdom laid bare.  
 Have I forethought? how purblind, how blank, to the Infinite Care?  
 Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?  
 I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and no less,  
 In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is seen God  
 In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod.

And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew  
 (With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too)  
 The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete,  
 As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet.  
 Yet with all this abounding experience, this deity known.  
 I shall dare to discover some province, some gift of my own.  
 There's a faculty pleasant to exercise, hard to hoodwink,  
 I am fain to keep still in abeyance (I laugh as I think)  
 Lest, insisting to claim and parade in it, wot ye, I worst  
 E'en the Giver in one gift.—Behold, I could love if I durst!  
 But I sink the pretension as fearing a man may o'ertake  
 God's own speed in the one way of love: I abstain for love's sake.  
 —What, my soul? see thus far and no farther? when doors great and small,  
 Nine-and-ninety flew ope at our touch, should the hundredth appall?  
 In the least things have faith, yet distrust in the greatest of all?  
 Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift  
 That I doubt his own love can compete with it? Here, the parts shift?  
 Here, the creature surpass the Creator,—the end, what Began?  
 Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,  
 And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?  
 Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will, much less power,  
 To bestow in this Saul what I sang of, the marvellous dower  
 Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such a soul,  
 Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering the whole?  
 And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears attest)  
 These good things being given, to go on, and give one more the best?  
 Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at the height  
 This perfection,—succeed with life's day-spring, death's minute of night?  
 Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul the mistake,  
 Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now,—and bid him awake  
 From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set  
 Clear and safe in new light and new life,—a new harmony yet  
 To be run, and continued, and ended—who knows?—or endure!  
 The man taught enough by life's dream, of the rest to make sure:  
 By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss,  
 And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles in this.

'I believe it! 'Tis thou, God, that givest, 'tis I who receive;  
 In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe,  
 All's one gift, thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt to my prayer  
 As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air,  
 From thy will, stream the world, life and nature, thy dread Sabaoth:  
 I will?—the mere atoms despise me! Why am I not loth  
 To look that, even that in the face too? Why is it I dare  
 Think but lightly of such impuissance? What stops my despair?  
 This;—'tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!  
 See the King—I would help him but cannot, the wishes fall through,  
 Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich.  
 To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would—knowing which,  
 I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through me now!  
 Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou—so wilt thou!  
 So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown—