

XXVI

But the Consul's brow was sad,
 And the Consul's speech was low. 210
 And darkly looked he at the wall,
 And darkly at the foe.

"Their van will be upon us
 Before the bridge goes down ;
 And if they once may win the bridge, 215
 What hope to save the town?"

XXVII

Then out spake brave Horatius,
 The Captain of the Gate :
 "To every man upon this earth
 Death cometh soon or late, 220
 And how can man die better
 Than facing fearful odds,
 For the ashes of his fathers,
 And the temples of his Gods,

XXVIII

"And for the tender mother 225
 Who dandled him to rest,
 And for the wife that nurses
 His baby at her breast,
 And for the holy maidens⁴⁰
 Who feed the eternal flame, 230
 To save them from false Sextus
 That wrought the deed of shame ?

⁴⁰ holy maidens. The vestal virgins, whose duty it was to keep the fire burning on the altar in the temple of Vesta. Vesta was the goddess of the home, and the vestal virgins were bound by oath never to marry.