

A Vision of Sappho

On the way to welfare or misfortune;
 Dreamed the dream of youth through soft spring twilights
 With their sweet uncomprehended longings;
 Felt earth's incommunicable sadness
 In the destiny of all things mortal;
 And beheld through sunsets o'er the sea-rim
 Sails come in with stories of strange marvels,
 Foreign folk, and peril and adventure;
 Curious about the world as children,
 Always mooting some unanswered question;
 Took their pleasure; prospered, travelled, traded;
 Gave this life for beauty and repined not;
 Thanked the gods and passed and were forgotten,
 Leaving to the careless years a treasure
 Unsurpassed in lyric or in marble,
 To bear witness how eternal passion
 Sought in art what life could hardly furnish,
 Forms supreme for spirit's habitation,
 When the rosy heat of youth was glowing
 In the crucible of clay. Believe me,
 They were human long ago in Lesbos.

Shall we then go down into that city,
 Hear what news the merchants bring from Sidon;
 Listen to the sea-songs, while the sailors
 Warp their galleys out into the channel;
 See the long black ships begin to courtesy
 To the creak of rowlocks and make seaward,
 Slowly plunging as the foam salutes them?

We will gossip with the melon-vendor
 And the dark-eyed Syrian selling trinkets,
 Roam the streets, and overhear the women
 Bent upon their shopping, or returning
 From the Summer Festival. They chatter:
 "What a crowd this year to greet Adonis!"
 "Shall we be in time for the first chorus?"
 "But, my dear, Mnasicida was faithless,—"
 "You should see the gown which Phaon brought me,
 Broidered with dull gold and Tyrian crimson,
 And the loveliest of bracelets,—"
 Quickly,
 Look before she passes that next corner!
 Not as tall as you; an Oriental,
 Slim and dark; the blue-black hair that crinkles,
 Knotted at the neck; the smouldering crimson
 Mounting through the cheek's transparent tawny;
 And the earth-brown eyes that glow and darkle;
 Just the foil for her fair-haired companion
 With the azure eyes, whose arm she leaned on
 With such laughing and delicious fervor.