

THE LOST ISLAND.

(ATLANTIS.)

SILENT and lonely, in the summer-night,
Lay the great city. Through the marble streets
No footstep moved: the palaces, the seats
Of wealth and power, the domes of malachite,
Where sculptured dragons, monsters carved in stone,
Alternated with statues clear and white,
Of ancient warrior-kings, that stood in rows
Along the Cyclopean porticoes,
Were hushed: and over all the moonlight shone.

Along the beach, beneath the massy wall,
The great sea rippled drowsily: afar
The headland glimmered, like a misty star,
Wearing a cloud wreath for a coronal;
And all the air was filled with tremulous sighs
Borne from the waste of waters, musical
Yet dreamy soft, as some old Orphic hymn,
That floated up, what time the day grew dim,
From Dorian groves, and forest privacies.

Yet, in the voiceless silence of the hour,
An awful presence moved. Unseen, unheard,
It glided onward on its way, and stirred
The sleepers' hearts with dreams of gloomy power,
Visions of fear, and throbbings of despair.
The plague was here. There was no house or bower,
Safe from his darts: from every door had gone
Some friend or father, some beloved one,
Borne to his grave by the red torches' glare.

And, as a lovely flower, that seems to fade
In summer's heat, and bows its golden head,
Turning from those fierce heavens overspread,
To muse, in sadness, on some dewy glade,
So, many a maiden perished, white and still,
And many a soft angelic face that made
The sunshine of its home, grown cold and gray
Beneath the coming shadow, passed away;
So warm of late, now passionless and chill.

Alas! the little children:—where was now
Their laughter, many voiced?—their sportive wiles,
Their bounding feet, and witchery of smiles,
With floating hair, and faces all aglow?
Silence and fear into their play had come,
Dulling each pulse and shadowing each brow;
And so they wept and wondered. Side by side,
Lay young and old, the bridegroom and his bride,
The child and sage, all summoned to one tomb.

So rose, at time, through all the moonlit air,
Faint and scarce heard, like voices in a dream,
Low wailing sounds, that told of grief supreme.
The utterance of mourners gathered there.
Almost it seemed that every star which set
Was as a winged messenger, to bear
Some human life to those unloved abodes,
Where dwell, implacable, the lower gods,
Silent as stone, stern eyed, with locks of jet.

Fast waned the night, yet, ere the morning came,
The portals of the palace opened wide,
The sculptured valves fell back on either side,
The lamps within flashed forth a sudden flame:
And swift, into the dim, uncertain light,
Which neither night nor day might wholly claim,
There stepped a figure of heroic mien,
Fair as a goddess, stately and serene,
A star-like apparition, pure and white.

This was the island queen, Evanoë;
All unattended, save by one stout thrall,
Who followed humbly, at some interval,
With noiseless foot she trod the marble way.
So passed she on, towards the open lea
That girt the town. In shadowy array,
The palm-trees, on her right hand, lifted high
Their crests, clear cut against the opal sky,
And, on her left, she heard the murmuring sea.

Then, as the first faint breeze of morning fanned,
With odorous breath, her cheek incarnadine,
And thrilled each leaf and flower, and crisped the brine,
That crept, like molten silver, to the strand,
She halted at a wayside cottage-door,
A lowly hut, that lay 'twixt sea and land,
Retired and peaceful as a hermitage,
Whose porch with orchids, blossoms of wild sage,
And bright convolvuli, was covered o'er.

There dwelt her aged nurse, now breathing slow
Her life away. With hand upon the latch,
The youthful queen a moment paused to watch
The splendour of the morning, and the glow
That deepened in the East. Across the bay,
She saw the hill-tops kindling, while, below,
The valleys lay in darkness. One by one,
The small clouds caught the flame: and lo! the sun
Leaped as a giant forth, and it was day.

With throbbing heart she stood, and thoughtful brow:
Then sighed "Alas! why, in a world so fair,
Must death have place?" Oh balmy summer air,
Sunshine and clouds, mountains and sea, and thou,
Illimitable dome of heaven above,
Phantoms of beauty, ever fresh as now,
Receive my greeting! Changeless as of old,
Ye still remain, when life and love are cold,
And the web rent, which youth so fondly wove."

She entered there: and in a moment stepped
From life to death, from sunshine into gloom,
From song of birds to stillness of the tomb,
Where all was silent, saving those who wept.
Through the half-opened casement floated in
The perfume of rare flowers: a lily crept
Along the sill, in drooping sympathy;
The while a honey-bee went humming by,
And faintly came from far the city's din.

Yet, as a lake's calm surface, dull and chill,
Is roused to wavelets by a falling stone,
The sinking soul, that seemed for ever gone,
Woke at the sudden footstep, and a thrill
Of recognition o'er the features passed.
Then, with a mighty effort of strong will,
She laid her hand, most gently, on the head
Of two fair children, kneeling by her bed,
With mute, appealing gaze; it was her last.

So all was done. Still shone the sun abroad:
And bird and insect, butterfly and flower,
Basked in the glorious splendour of the hour;
Still, through the air, like footsteps of a god,
Murmured the low, soft wind, and all was bright:
No shadow fell on these, nor were they awed,
When, through their midst, a naked human soul
Passed, like an exhalation, to its goal:
A bubble rising to the Infinite.

After few days, the pale form laid at rest
In grassy sward, beside the ocean-foam,
The queen set forth towards her palace-home;
And, not unmindful of that last bequest,
Took with her those two children as her own.
Weeping they left the comfortable nest,
Where their young life had passed its callow years,
But loving hands soon wiped away their tears,
And hope, now born, upon their pathway shone.

It was the even-tide. At home once more,
Within her chamber sat Evanoë,
Watching the shadows of the closing day
Gather and darken over sea and shore.
Her soul drank deeply of the soft repose
That lay on all things: so she pondered o'er
The past and present, and, on angel's wings,
Her spirit rose in wrapt imaginings,
Beyond the sphere of earth, and earthly woes.

She sat alone. It was an antique room,
Lofty, not large; the cornice pearl-inlaid;
The floor mosaic; and the wall arrayed
With tapestry whose softly shaded gloom
Was lit with life-like figures, passing fair,
The product of some long forgotten loom.
White marble forms, hunters and kings of old,
Stood in quaint nooks, and vases of wrought gold
Held richest flowers, whose perfume filled the air.

She thought of many a legendary rhyme
Told by her nurse, in the long vanished days
When she, a child, sat listening, with fixed gaze,
To those delightful stories of old time.
Here sat she, patient on her lowly stool,
And heard how, first, when struck the fated chime,
Out of the deep, like a fair lotus-flower,
ATLANTIS rose, and, warmed by sun and shower,
Expanded, bearing all things beautiful.

Thereon the gods came down, and dwelt with men:
Through the dim avenues of giant trees
They walked conversing; or on peaceful seas
Sublimely trod, nor shrank from human ken.
The air was musical with song and mirth
Of vigorous, lusty life; from glade and glen
Soft clouds of incense rose: the passing hours
Seemed garlanded with amaranthine flowers;
Nor yet was pain or sorrow known on earth.

How was it now? Alas, on all the land
Despair lay darkling, and a mournful cry
Went up, as when a crowded argosy
Sinks, perishing, upon a rocky strand.
"Oh," thought she, "if some god, some mighty one,
Should come to sweep, as with a conqueror's brand,
This pestilence from out the heavy air,
And bring back health, and joy, and all things fair,
Him would I honour: he should share my throne."

Scarcely had the wish been framed, when came a sound
Of sudden thunder, muttering afar,
Nearer it swelled, until, beneath the jar,
The strong walls shook and wavered all around:
A shiver ran along the marble floor,
Up-heaving like a wave: from out the ground
Mysterious murmurs came: then over all,
Darkness descended, deep, funereal,
Still as the grave, a sea without a shore.

A spheroid radiance, serene and clear,
Broke in upon the gloom:—so softly bright
It seemed some kindly star had lent its light,
Whence came these accents to her startled ear:
"Evanoë! Thy vow hath brought me down,
To woo and win thee as a saviour here.
Fear not. Within few days, I come again,
The plague removed; and thou shalt know me then,
Lord of the winds, a Marut, Sanadon!"

She heard: she trembled: and her heart beat high,
Amazed with thoughts conflicting: yet she stood
Calm and unfeared in her lion mood,
Fronting all chances with unquailing eye.
Round her the shadows deepened: then, at last,
She woke from stupor, and beheld the sky
All wild above and threatening, and the stars
Fast blotted out by gathering cloudy bars,
And heard the hollow moaning of the blast.

All night the tempest raged. Adown the street,
With thunder-call the mad winds raved amain:
Day dawned in gloom, and went, and came again,
And still the storm-winds, furious and fleet,
Coursed on, above: and sun and stars were dead.
Then came a change. Again with silver feet,
The moonlight came, and kissed each bruised flower;
And morning came, and all the healing power
Of freshened airs, and sunshine overhead.

So, like a nightmare vision, passed away
The pestilence, and all its gloomy shows.
The fourth day came to end: in hushed repose,
The golden gloaming faded into gray,
Gleaming with stars: and shadows vespertine
Filled all the room where sat Evanoë.
Then came again the god. As some strong spell,
She felt his presence, murmuring "It is well:
My people live,—are saved:—and I—am thine!"

Oh joy! oh happiness! In life's wide waste,
Are there not days whose memory remains
As of an oasis in desert plains;
A reminiscence not to be effaced
Throughout all griefs and all the after-time?
Still, through the gloom, it shines; a Pharos, placed
On that far line of youth's enchanted shore
Where lived we, in the golden days of yore,
When life was new, and all things in their prime.

And they were happy through long sunny years,
The island-queen and Sanadon. They moved
In a rich atmosphere of light, and roved
Throughout their realm, like those united spheres,
That walk in pairs along the starry sky.
What time the vault of heaven unveiled appears.
And those two children, once their grandame's care,
Eiridion and Thya, grew up fair,
And strong, and graced with gentle courtesies.

Joyous as summer-birds, they wandered oft
Through regions wild and full of loveliness,
Through lonely places, where the hum and stress
Of cities came not, and the air was soft
With balmy odours of sweet-scented pines;
Where, in clear blue, the white clouds sailed aloft,
And streams flowed on through plains, or leaped in falls
From rock to rock, in broken intervals,
Bordered with lotus-blossoms, and leafy vines.

Sometimes they went inland, and visited
The mountain-solitudes and privacies,
Wherein the island waters had their rise:

And taking, thus, some river at its head,
They drifted downwards on its placid stream,
Passing by caverns dark, and full of dread,
By headlands frowning vast, and flowery sward,
By golden sands, and beds of odorous nard,
And banyan groves, all wondrous as a dream.

Then, borne aloft in his aerial car,
The Marut brought them over sea and land,
Towards the rising sun, beyond the strand
Of far Iberia. Shining like a star,
Old Ætna raised aloft his crown of snow;
But they passed onward, o'er the sandy bar
Of rocky Salmidessus, white with foam,
And traversed so the Euxine, near the home
Of Scythians, and the broad Araxes' flow.

Far to the north they saw the boundless plain,
Where roved the mammoths; where, in dusky bands,
Innumerable as the ocean sands,
They wandered, with white tusks and shaggy mane,
Hugest of living beasts that looked on man.
So came they to a rugged mountain chain,
Gloomy and dark, a wilderness forlorn,
So wild, it seemed the world's extremest bourne,
Withered and grey with some unending ban.

Then, with a sudden, lamentable cry,
Thya exclaimed, "Oh father, oh my lord,
What awful shape hangs there, with brow all scored,
As if with flame of lightning from on high,
Yet unsubdued, and wearing as a king
The garment of his silent agony?
To whom the Marut: "This is Themis' son,
The Titan, who, for love to mortals shown,
Is doomed, by Zeus, to penal suffering."

"Go, aid him, if thou wilt. These are, to me,
An alien race, and alien deities;
But thou, sweet Thyra,—there can be, than this,
No task or office more befitting thee."
So went she, at the word, with hasty feet,
To some ravine hard by, where sparkled free
A tiny fount of water, icy cold,
And took a hollow shell, therein to hold
The precious draught, than Amrita more sweet.

With fearless heart, though hesitating gait,
Low bending in her earnest sympathy,
She stood before the Shape, and raised on high
The proffered cup, with eyes compassionate,
And touched his lips, with words of loving cheer:
And the great sufferer felt his pangs abate,
And looked on her with wondering, as one
To whom all kindness hath been long unknown,
And dropped, amazed, a solitary tear.

Then o'er the wilderness a shadow passed,
With sounds of spirit-wailing, soft and low.
From rock and valley, from the ground below,
From dark abyssal rifts, and spaces vast,
From mossy stone, and shrub, and lonely tree,
Came hollow murmurings: "Oh thou, who hast
So much loved man and all created things,
Thou who hast given us heaven-aspiring wings,
Prometheus! Soul of love! We weep with thee!"

Silent in thought, the four held on their way
Through sandy wastes, past Sindhu's rapid stream:
Till rose, among the hills, the distant gleam
Of Manasa: and here they made their stay.
It was a lake secluded, in deep calm,
From worldly tumult, and the troublous day,
Where peace unbroken reigned: so still and cool,
Here might repose the heart with anguish full,
And every sorrow here might find its balm.

At length, refreshed with welcome rest, they rose,
Crossing the Hima mountains, home of snow,
The stony girdle of the world, and so
Entered on Aryavart's sacred close.
Land of the marvellous! Here, being's tide
Swept on exultant, through the long repose
Of silent centuries: and glowing life
Came forth, with thousand forms of beauty rife,
On flowery plain and shady mountain-side.

So came they to a dwelling in the wild,
Where weeping filled the house: "Because, to-day,"
They said, "a Daitya comes to bear away
A victim from us. Shall it be our child,
That we must give? The mother, or the sire?
One must we offer, else, unreconciled,
He will not leave us. Oh, unhappy fate!"
So mourned the simple folk, disconsolate,
Lamenting loud, in mingled grief and ire.

The father spoke out then: "Me let him take:
I, I am old: the earth no more to me
Brings fresh delights, as once: the flowery lea,
Sunshine, and music, and sweet singing, wake
No answering echo in my spirit now;
The great gods smile on those who, for the sake
Of others, dare to die. My life is done.
But you, beloved ones, live on, live on,
Through lengthened years, and with unclouded brow!"

To whom the mother quickly made reply,
"And who will then protect our child, where all
Is strange and perilous, and help is small?
Some strong defender should be ever by,
And therefore is it better that I go."
This heard the boy, and raised, with laughing eye,
A blade of spear-grass in his hand, and said
"With this will I strike off the giant's head."
The parents heard, and smiled amid their woe.

Then, at the Marut's word, Eiridion
Took up his father's mighty sword, a blade
Forged by celestial hands, and lightly swayed
The heavy falchion, flashing in the sun,
And laughed to hear it whistle through the air.
So, terrible as Indra, strode he on,
Adown the forest path, all hushed and dim,—
A temple, sculptured fair with leaf and limb,—
And met, and slew the cruel Daitya there.

Such were the lessons which the Marut taught,
Lessons of pity and of hardihood.
Then rose the four from that green solitude,
And floated westward, over Hadramaut,
Region of death; and passed Canopus hoar,
Fresh as a vision of the morning then, and sought
The silence of the lonely western sea,
Unknown and vast, with wild waves rolling free,
Beyond Pyrene, and the sun-set shore.

Through the dim shadows of the moonlit night,
What phantom comes? The winds have sunk to sleep
There is no sound or motion on the deep,
Wrapt, as a bride, in veil of gauzy light.
What galley, slow and ghostlike, parts the foam,
With labouring oars, and shredded sails of white,
Battered with storms? "Behold," said Sanadon,

"Girt with his friends, Ulysses wanders on,
Adventurous, forgetful of his home!"

The large-browed chieftains from Scamander's plain:
Sages and warriors, kings of eldest time,
Sitting as gods,—Ulysses, with the rime
Of years upon his beard,—the sails,—the vane,—
Were seen a moment through the gloom; then passed
Beyond their ken, and all was night again.
Slow waned the hours: and when the morning came,
And all the pearly orient grew aflame
With crimson light, they reached their isle at last.

But now, strange notes of warning filled the air:
The sun grew dark at noon without a cloud;
And solemn voices nightly called aloud,
"The hour is well-nigh come! prepare, prepare;
Atlantis sinks in ruin, and the wave
Rolls over her who was erewhile so fair!"
Men heard and trembled. Throughout all the land,
Life, with its toils and pleasures, seemed at stand;
Death came apace, and none were there to save.

Then came a voice, by night, to Sanadon,
"Arise, and leave the island to its doom!"
Sadly replied he, "Let it be my tomb,
If Indra's sons can die!—I have put on
This human nature, with its warmth of love;
Shall I renounce the blessings I have won?
Shall I forsake these trusting hearts, and rise,
False, and a fugitive, to yonder skies?
I stay with them. Let the kind gods approve."

The Voice made answer, "Thou hast spoken well:
All things grow old and change; but Love remains."
Again the Marut, "Ere our respite wanes,
Ere comes the end, and sounds the fatal knell,
Tell me, oh pitying spirit, may there be
Some rescue, some escape, for those who dwell
Beneath my sceptre?"—"Go thou forth alone,
Walk as a mortal through the dark Unknown,"
Replied the Voice,—"So shall the rest be free!"

Thoughtful the Marut rose from fevered sleep,
And went abroad. The moon yet shone on high;
The dews fell softly through the summer sky;
He walked along the margin of the deep,
And drank the healing quiet of the time.
What saw he then, that made his pulses leap
With quick surprise? A stranded bark lay there;
A wreck, with naked ribs and timbers bare,
Drifted, perchance, from some far Scythian clime.

Then came the light again into his eyes.
Homeward he went, and straightway summoned all,
By sound of trumpet, to the council-hall:
And told them, thus assembled, in what guise
Deliverance might come. As yet, the isle
Had launched no sea-boat: let the great emprise
Be ventured now: let strong and willing hands
Follow, as type, the wreck upon the sands:
So might the gods upon their labour smile.

They answered with a shout that shook the dome,
As if with thunder. Then the work began.
From sunny slopes, and meads Elysian,
From lonely bays, besprent with ocean-foam,
And dales, where summer's choicest blossoms shone,
Trooping they came, forsaking house and home.
So laboured they untiring, night and day,
And, ere two waning moons had passed away,
A fleet was ready, and the work was done.

Alas, ye lovely scenes, whose incense rose
Day after day, in silent orison,
Ye vales, and groves of palms, all overgrown
With trailing lilies, where the air was close
With scent of odorous gums, and passion flowers,
Your hour has come. Your ages of repose
Are now at end, and sudden ruin falls
On all the glory of your festivals,
And all the festal splendour of your bowers.

With quivering earthquake pangs, as if it feared
To meet its doom, the island slowly sank.
The ships were crowded. Last upon the bank,
Stood Sanadon, who waved his hand, and cheered
His parting friends, and bade them all farewell:
"The sentence of the gods must be revered,
And I remain, a willing sacrifice,
That ye may live. And now, no more than this:
Think of me sometimes, whoso'er ye dwell!"

Then rose a sound of many-voiced lament:
"Come with us, come! Thou art all our own,
Still lead us on! We may not go alone."
But he, as one that changeth not his bent,
Remained unmoving, and with mournful eye
Looked round on all that sad environment.
His cherished ones were near: swift to his side
Evanoë came with words of love and pride,
"Bravest and best! 'Tis sweet with thee to die."

The heavens darkened: yet the setting sun
Shed momentary splendour on the scene,
Where, with bowed heads, the Marut and the queen
Stood, with fair Thya and Eiridion
A pace or so behind. The maiden knelt
In silent prayer. The hero leaned upon
The mighty sword of proof, whose beamy ray
Now flashed a last farewell to light and day,
Ere in the depths below for aye it dwelt.

So with the sound of thunder, and the war
Of elements, and horror of deep night,
The ocean waves, with floods of foamy white,
And sinuous arms, wide-curving from afar,
Whelmed in the deep the long, indented shore.
The darkness passed; the light of moon and star
Came forth again; and gentle breezes swept
The plain of waters; but Atlantis slept
Far down, in silence, to awake no more.

And they, the wanderers, who ventured forth
To seek a home beyond the unknown sea,
How fared they on their way? They lived to be
Forefathers of the mighty ones of earth,
Founders of world-wide realms, now vanished long.
But still, to them, the island of their birth
Was always sacred; and its memory
Still lived, unfading, as the years rolled by,
A germ of legend, and a theme for song.

Age followed age: great empires rose and fell;
But still Evanoë and Sanadon
Lived in men's thoughts, and ever urged them on
To deeds heroic: and there was a spell
To youthful warriors, in Eiridion's name:
And maidens wept to hear their mothers tell
The story of sweet Thya, young and fair,
Who passed from out the golden summer air
To icy death. Such was their meed of fame.

Victoria, B. C.

E. T. F.