

Truth and Time

I saw, 'twas in a dream, I knew not where,
A mighty angel, girded with a sword
That slept in the sheath; motionlessly he moved.
As creeps a slow tide of the encroaching sea;
Passionless were his eyes, and in them shone
A cold light, clear with fate. To my struck soul
And its unuttered question, there replied
A voice that said: "This is that strong, slow Time,
Who fights for Truth, to set her on her throne,
Crowned, after many days." And then I saw
Beside him a bright shape, that momentarily
Changed, and was shadowed, and grew bright again,
Now royal, and now beggared and so poor,
Deformed beyond all knowledge; yet her eyes
Shone with a constant and a kindling light.
Stars of that sun, her soul. In my heart's heart
I knew her straight for Truth, the many-vestured,
The hardly-won, the evermore-desired,
God's human revelation when He speaks
To man in man's conception. Momently
She changed, more often in her misery
Than in her glory shrined; scaffold and axe,
The burning stake of torment, thousand forms
Of blind, mad zeal I saw. Yet at the last,
Bursting upon me as a lightning stroke,
Then growing as the broadening dawn of God,
A throne ringed round with light unbearable,
And on it that bright shape, with those clear eyes
Full of all light, nor more triumphant then
Than in her utmost bitterness of woe.
Near by, and leaning on his sheathless sword,
Dark with the blood of evil, strong, still Time.