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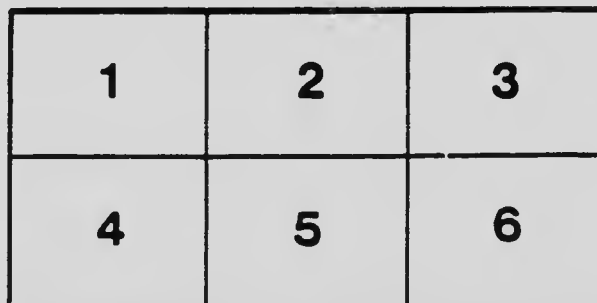
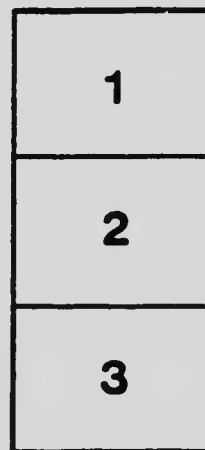
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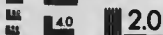
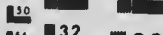
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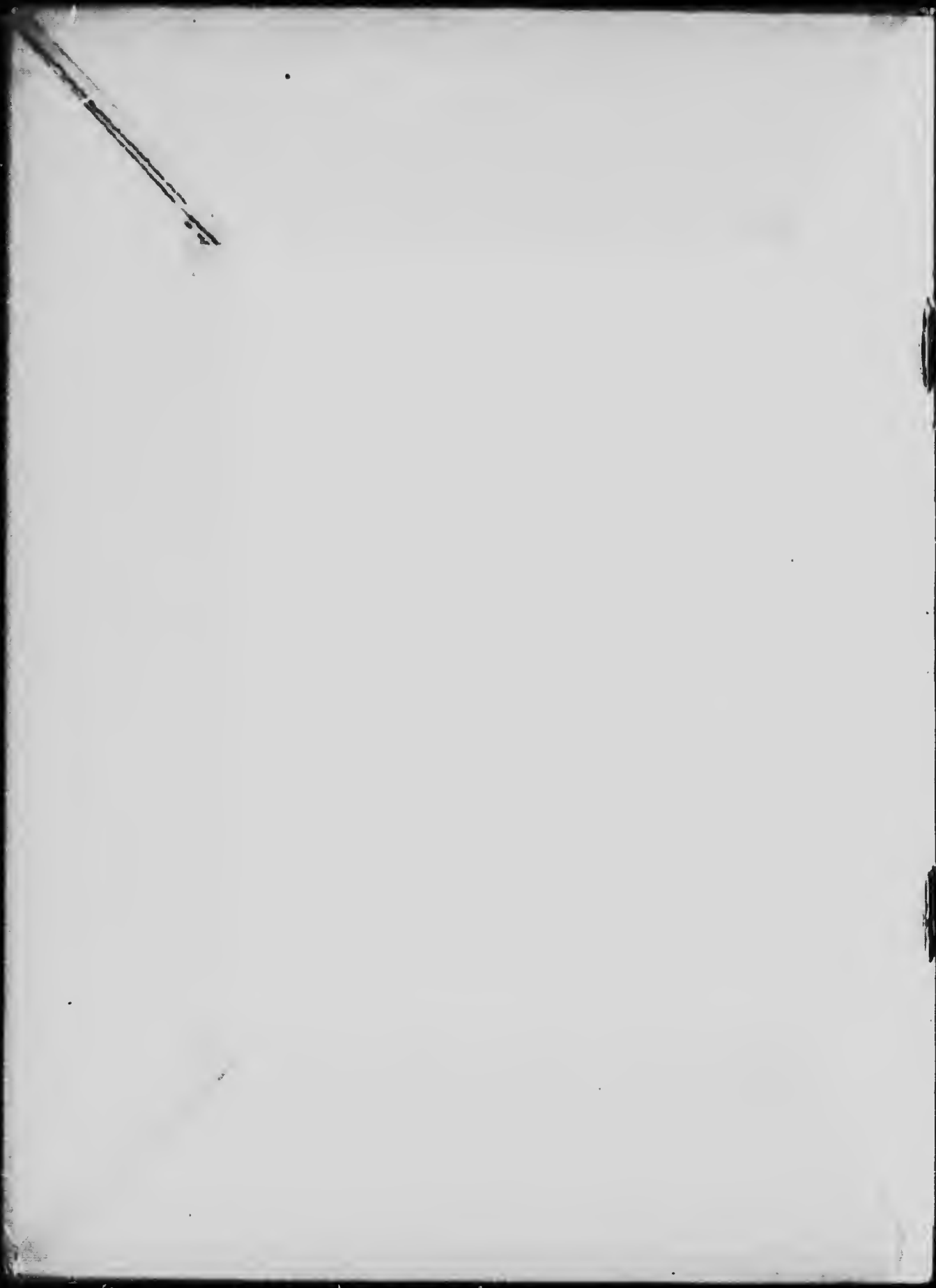


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AGLAIA OF MELOS





To

W. D. Lighthall

from his very sincerely

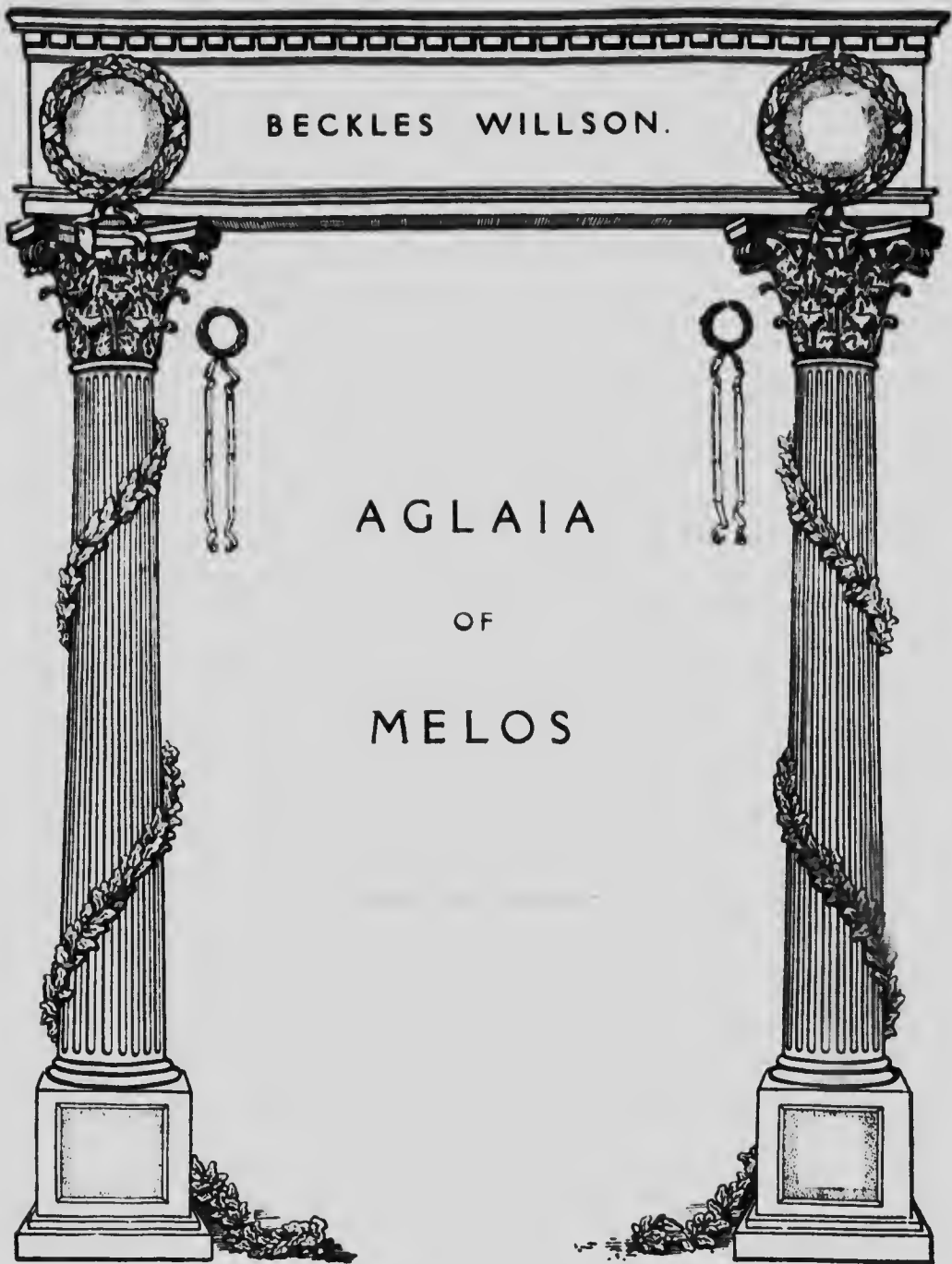
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AGLAIA

OF

MELOS

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No. 25



AGLAIA OF MELOS.

*O, sculptured form adown the vista'd aisle
Whence camest thou? from whose high-dower'd hands?
Of whom art thou the image? What seer understands
Thy genesis—knows thy long mystery? List awhile:
Maid, thy marred beauty has but helped thy glory
Let one adoring pilgrim venture here thy story.*

I.

'Twas morning: and the sunlight sparkled through the grove
In Melos and the fluctuant, wanton breeze
Wafted from Greece with the tall ilex strove,
While myriad song-birds in the myrtles throve
And dazzling foam-flecks jewelled all the circling seas.

II.

About a vine-clad porch a comely youth there hung
With troubled brow, as if some grief he bare;
"O vain! Lysippus, minstrel without tongue;
"Why should'st thy brain with dreams and visions throng;
"Why canst thou fairly plan if not to fashion fair?"

III.

" Art, Art, thou'rt surely false ! O Nature, make us feel !
" In our own bosom stands the saintliest shrine,
" While Art, yon cheating priestess, comes to steal :
" To mask her mocking visage seems to kneel,
" Then drains our soul's bright chalice of its holy wine.

IV.

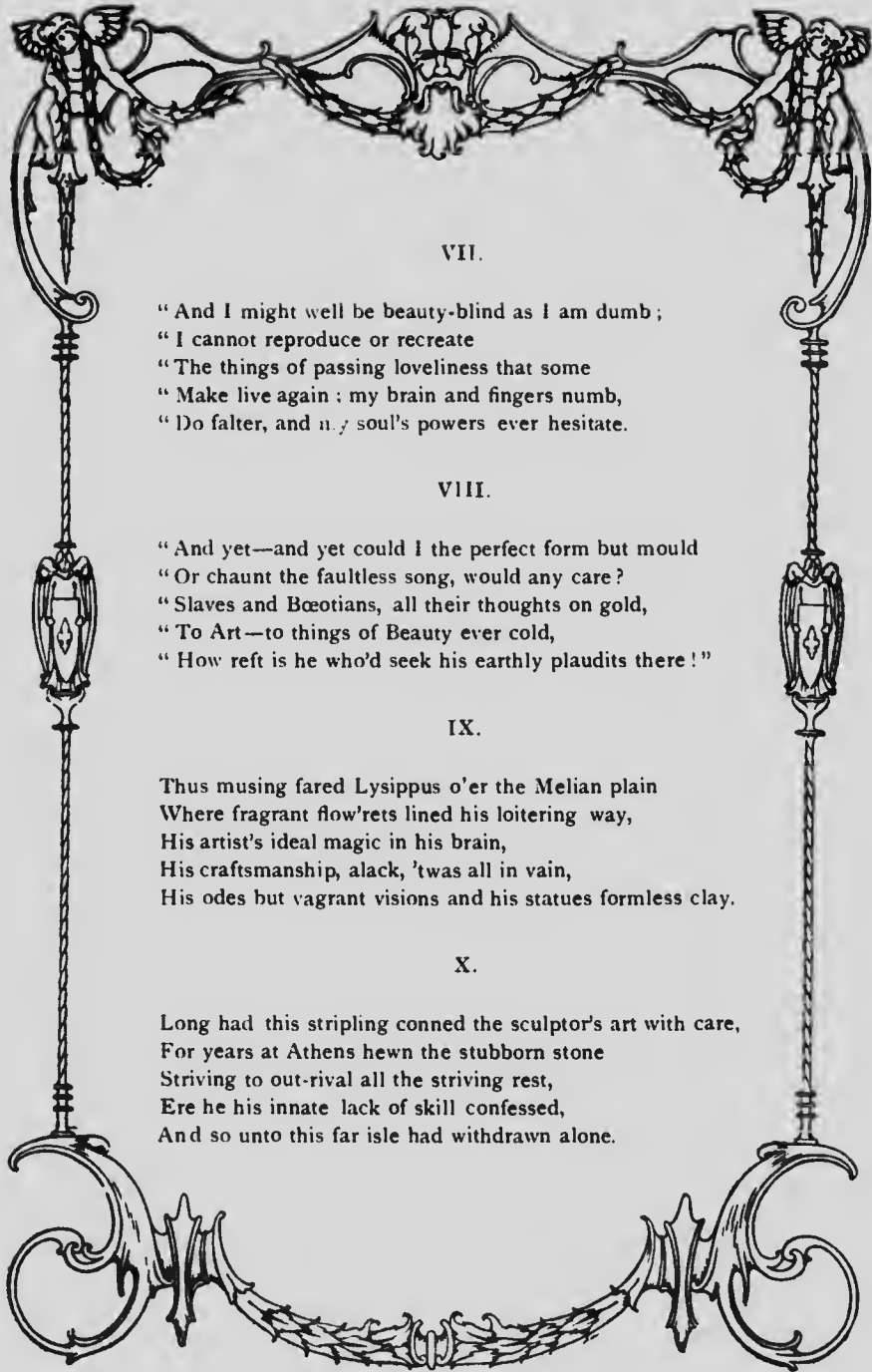
" Must I quaff vapid water ! Can I never stir
" This long-dumb lyre to Olympian strains ?
" Venus to thee hath lent her heavenly spur
" So vainly that, poor fool, in spite of her,
" Thou hast no worthy guerdon now for all thy pains ?

V.

" Yet, chaunt of skylark, music of the bounding flood,
" Rich magic of the mountain and the dale,
" Kind scenes that kindle pathos in the blood,
" Sweet sounds that make this ancient earth seem good,
" Pluck at my heart-strings, goddess, yet I fail.

VI.

" How rare the mystic radiance of the dawning sky
" With cloudlets dappled ! Or the lucent mere
" At moonlight when the birds of omen fly :
" Or cloud-draped Helios when he seems to lie
" Prostrate and splendid on a gold and crimson bier.



VII.

" And I might well be beauty-blind as I am dumb ;
" I cannot reproduce or recreate
" The things of passing loveliness that some
" Make live again : my brain and fingers numb,
" Do falter, and my soul's powers ever hesitate.

VIII.

" And yet—and yet could I the perfect form but mould
" Or chaunt the faultless song, would any care ?
" Slaves and Bœotians, all their thoughts on gold,
" To Art—to things of Beauty ever cold,
" How reft is he who'd seek his earthly plaudits there !"

IX.

Thus musing fared Lysippus o'er the Melian plain
Where fragrant flow'rets lined his loitering way,
His artist's ideal magic in his brain,
His craftsmanship, alack, 'twas all in vain,
His odes but vagrant visions and his statues formless clay.

X.

Long had this stripling conned the sculptor's art with care,
For years at Athens hewn the stubborn stone
Striving to out-rival all the striving rest,
Ere he his innate lack of skill confessed,
And so unto this far isle had withdrawn alone.

XI.

It chanced that by a Melian glade at this same hour
The fair Aglaia with her Scythian slave
Roamed free through tremulous fern and flower
Seeking her chaste and favorite bower :
Aglaia, the daughter fair of an Athenian brave.

XII.

Lycon, her warrior sire bent with the weight of age
Banished from Hellas was and sorely pined,
Heart-sick, in Melos, as a lion in cage,
Victim of envy and a tyrant's rage
Daily beseeching Zeus his prison portals t' unbind.

XIII.

While thus he chafed and sickened, Aglaia with a mien
Frank, yet demure, her sunny tresses bound
Loose on her crest, in the rich meadows green,
Her tall and noble shape would oft be seen
Shining through samite as she spurned the vernal ground.

XIV.

This morn they met : the youth in accents low
Accosted her. She smiling on him said,
" Hast wrought thy statue ? " " Faith," he answered " No,"
" The dreary days do come, the barren days do go.
" With ne'er one simple thing of beauty compassèd.



XV.

"Yet, daring, could I carve — Zeus in empyrean
"Or Prometheus filching the sacred flame
"Or to Apollo pen a glowing ode Nemean
"Or to proud Juno chaunt a tuneful pæan
"That would the Athenian bards make writhe in very shame.

XVI.

"More would I do, O maid. How fiercely would I toil
"To match the glowing concept in my brain
"That all the Muses now conspire to foil?
"Alas, meanwhile I shatter shards and spoil
"The virgin marble that now seems to shriek in pain."

XVII.

Lycon's fair daughter sighed; her bosom dropt and rose,
Then blushing spake: "'Tis strange, friend, but last night
Dreamt I in sleep that proud Athene chose
To visit me. But why, Athene knows!"
Lysippus chafing sorely, mocked in his despite,

XVIII.

And cried, "Alack, to me too oft that cruel goddess hies,
"It is scarce just of her to plague me so.
"'Tis skill I lack, not wisdom: I am wise
"And therefore helpless! Art's chief power lies
"In native fire. Believe me, Wisdom is its woe!"

XIX.

"To win, O fair Aglaia, the precious favour of the Nine,
"To work in scroll or stone our passions deep
"Needs more than wisdom. I'll another sign
"For conquest seek ; one may be O, divine
"In wit, in craftsmanship, immortal gods, how cheap!"

XX.

Lysippus laughed, scarce noting in his scornful mood
How beauteous she, her tress and radiant glow
Of face : her form and poise. What Helot rude
But when he had such heav'nly beauty viewed
Would wonder at the sight and sigh forth, Agapo !

XXI.

Full noble too her mien when she all modest spake,
"My dream was this. I dreamt Athene came
"And said, 'Thou nast afriend and for thy sake
"If he will deign a goddess' counsel take
"I'll to thee whisper what will yield him breathless fame.

XXII.

'He fails that fears to fail, who ever uninspired
'Toils at some task his timid touch doth pall ;
'The warm afflatus comes not when desired
The red blood leaps not in his veins unfired ;
The artist in his bosom must have LOVE withal.



XXIII.

' If but himself he love then is the craftsman blind,
' He starves the sense of beauty in his heart.
' Your friend the secret of success may find
' If love he find and leaving self behind.
' Kneel at my sister's myrtle. All barren else thy art.' "

XXIV.

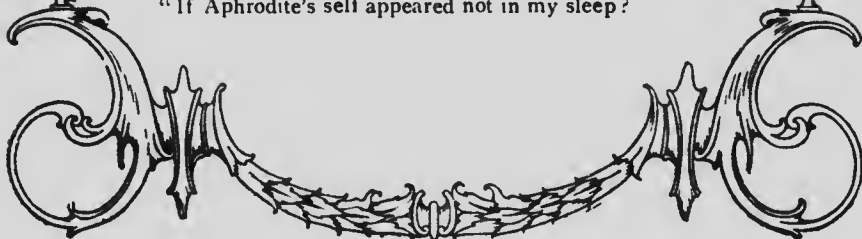
But still Lysippus mocking said, "O Love! What is it, say?
" Folly for fools, pastime for light-brained swain
" That lives his shiftless, short and sensual day.
" But to him striving all his powers to sway
" To works of beauty sempiternal, O sweet maid, how vain!"

XXV.

Whereat Aglaia's blue eye swam with wistful tears.
Her soul was vexed. Aside she would have turned,
When quick remembering, her pale visage clears
And brightly, (though he thus her tale had spurned,
Yet surely must Lysippus profit, if he only hears!)

XXVI.

She cried, "O mocker, heed give to my wondrous dream!
" For I a song then heard. How rhythm keep?
" How verses make unhelped on such a theme:
How could my brain with such odd fancies teem
" If Aphrodite's self appeared not in my sleep?



XXVII.

" She with her sister Pallas and : my ear then rung
" With magic lyric never writ nor read
" But on her scroll and never sung
" Save when I slept Love's goddess gave it tongue.
" Each word I can recall. Wilt hear? Lysippus bent his head.

XXVIII.

*" Love and Art go hand in hand,
" Art and Love together planned,
" If the heavenly twain are parted,
" Art goes helpless up the hill
" Faint and fasting up the hill,
" Pining, grieving sore until
" Empty-handed, broken-hearted
" Love can seek and find him,
" Love can closely bind him,
" Make him happy, make him whole,
" 'Till both reach to Beauty's goal!*

XXIX.

O, softly and sweetly sang the maid ; her slave
Then summoned gravely and in silence passed,
Clasping her lilies. In his heart a wave
Of admiration beat : a sudden cry he gave
" Venus herself in form and motion. Zeus, my die is cast !



XXX.

"In vain to me her lover's parables" he quoth,
"Yet mine this noble maid shall be. I swear
By Phoebus, though I'll ne'er plight lover's troth,
There is a worthy friend and model both,
If she consent I'll seize my perfect Aphrodite there!"

XXXI.

Lysippus laid his plans and when again this pair
Met by the strand which fronted happy Greece
He told her of his wish: Her cheek did flare:
And blushes crimson'd to her crown of hair,
But though Aglaia's bosom surged, within her soul was peace.

XXXII.

In secret and for his sake the maiden did consent
To pose before Lysippus hour by hour
Each shining morn. While he with zeal intent
Those hours in unremitting labor spent
That he the marble with her matchless grace might dower.

XXXIII.

Gravely he helped her doff her chiton white
And stand there Hera-like the throne upon,
O queenly shape, how full of grace and light,
Her left hand proffering an apple, and her right
Arresting, as it gently drooped, the chaste diploidion.

XXXIV.

Her slave to silence pledged, old Lycon never knew ;
And each day when they parted did she plead
To mighty Venus that her dream come true,
That he for her fond maiden's heart would sue
And yield what that heart so craved—a lover's meed.

XXXV.

O, long the ordeal was ! he, like his marble cold,
Did three months labour and yet three months more
Her shape and gracious attitude to mould.
The whilst her sire, Lycon, blind and old
Neglected died ; yet sought she still the sculptor's door.

XXXVI.

Daily and long she stood ! all hopeful she to win
Her guerdon : though ere long her bosom froze
As slow and silent and ending to begin
Lysippus toiled. O, wrought he grievous sin,
'Gainst Cytherea's mandments ere his peerless statue rose !

XXXVII.

Yea, for the sculptor's hopes were answered to the full
As he the Parian marble fashioned fast,
Pausing and wondering till the light grew dull,
At what did all his early fears annul ;
A masterpiece of beauty had he shaped at last !



XXXVIII.

" Look, gentle, glorious maid, behold what I have wrought,
" Not merely like to thee, 'tis very thou -!
" Thy noble grace my humble tools hath taught
" My groping hand hath guided, fired my thought,
" Aglaia, turn, and look upon my statue now ! "

XXXIX.

For strange ! till now the virgin scarce had fixed her gaze
Upon the marble ; now with kindling eye
Death-pale and seeming in a sheer amaze,
(Ah, it had cost her many weary days !)
The flouted beauty faced the statue's majesty.

XL.

Upflinging high her arms, she " Wondrous ! wondrous ! " cried,
" Immortal I ! How vain this flesh and blood.
" I pray this vital boon may be denied,
" To Pluto's shades my wandering footsteps guide,
" Now waft my spirit over Charon's sable flood ?

XLI.

" Tomorrow lay my body in its lonely tomb,
" My counterpart can never die ;
" Nor nymphs nor heroes ever from my womb
" Will issue ? Fates, cease now thy vital loom,
" Cut, Atropos, this hour short my mortal destiny ! "

XLII.

" For this, great Zeus, thou wrough'st me tall and fair,
" For this, my childish romps and virgin dreams,
" Farewell, Lysippus, may thy rapture ne'er
" Be less than mine ! Henceforth I proudly share
" The everlasting life her right a goddess deem."

XLIII.

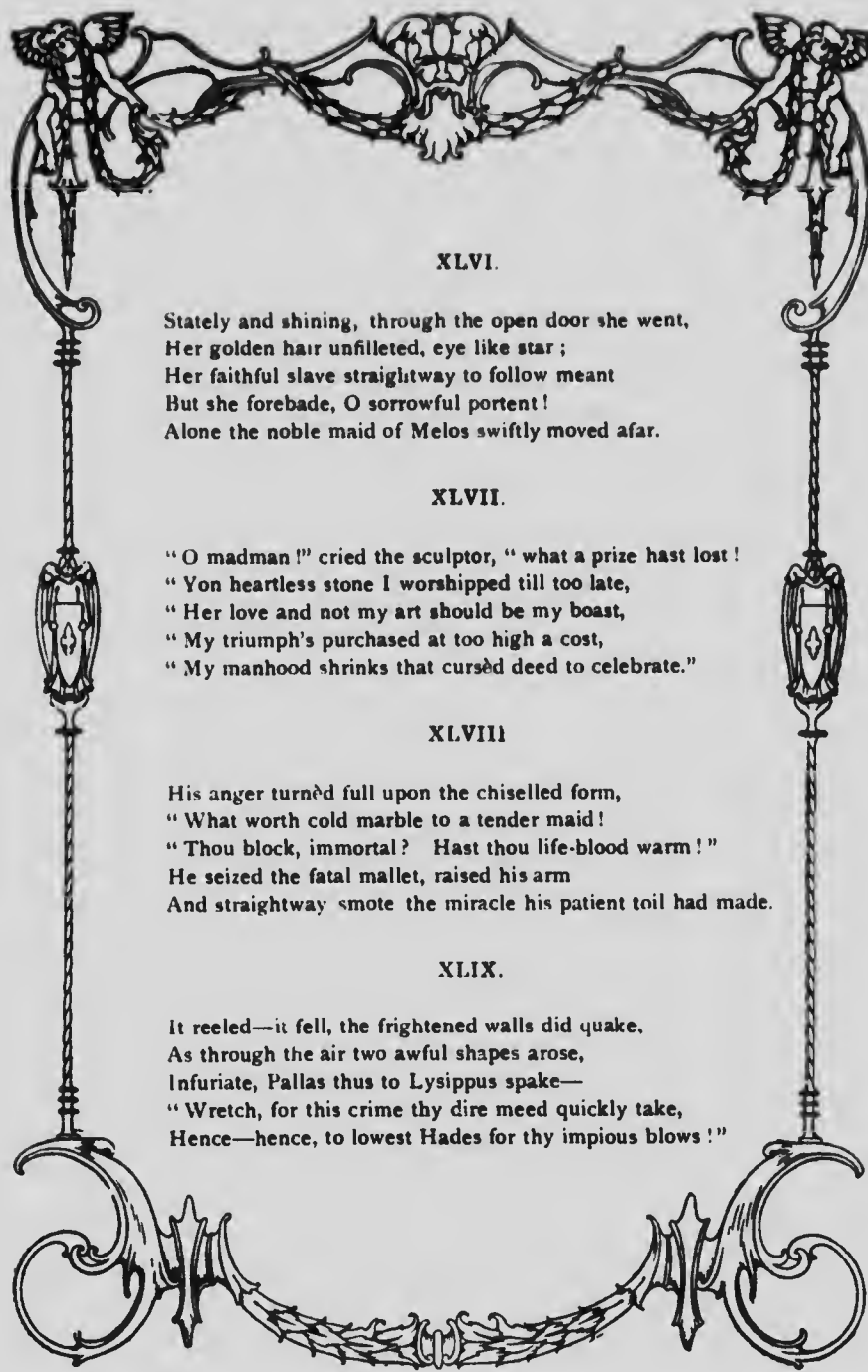
Her frenzied tones him pierc'd to the core,
He ran and clasped her, raining kisses hot
Upon her neck and hair, (which had been bliss before
But lo, the time for ecstasy was o'er,
More cold than she the marble's self was not.)

XLIV.

Remorseful, how he poured his passion in her ear,
" Forgive, Aglaia, thy tenderness I see,
" Chide not my blindness. Dry, O sweet, thy tear,
" Of my devotion henceforth have no fear."
" Too late," the virgin cried, " no love have I for thee !"

XLV.

" The time is overpast when Eros me beguiled ;
" Now know I that forever I shall stand
" Archtype of woman, as Cytherea's child,
" Virgin, serene, uplifted, undefiled,
" Men's praises high to win in every age and land."



XLVI.

Stately and shining, through the open door she went,
Her golden hair unfileted, eye like star ;
Her faithful slave straightway to follow meant
But she forebade, O sorrowful portent !
Alone the noble maid of Melos swiftly moved afar.

XLVII.

"O madman!" cried the sculptor, "what a prize hast lost!
"Yon heartless stone I worshipped till too late,
"Her love and not my art should be my boast,
"My triumph's purchased at too high a cost,
"My manhood shrinks that cursèd deed to celebrate."

XLVIII

His anger turnèd full upon the chiselled form,
"What worth cold marble to a tender maid!
"Thou block, immortal? Hast thou life-blood warm!"
He seized the fatal mallet, raised his arm
And straightway smote the miracle his patient toil had made.

XLIX.

It reeled—it fell, the frightened walls did quake,
As through the air two awful shapes arose,
Infuriate, Pallas thus to Lysippus spake—
"Wretch, for this crime thy dire meed quickly take,
Hence—hence, to lowest Hades for thy impious blows!"

L.

And as the goddess thundered an arrow dazzling sped
From Cytherea's hand and forthwith slew
Lysippus; who ne'er more raised his head,
Then with a frown each godless vanished,
O was their dual vengeance most terrible to view!

L.I.

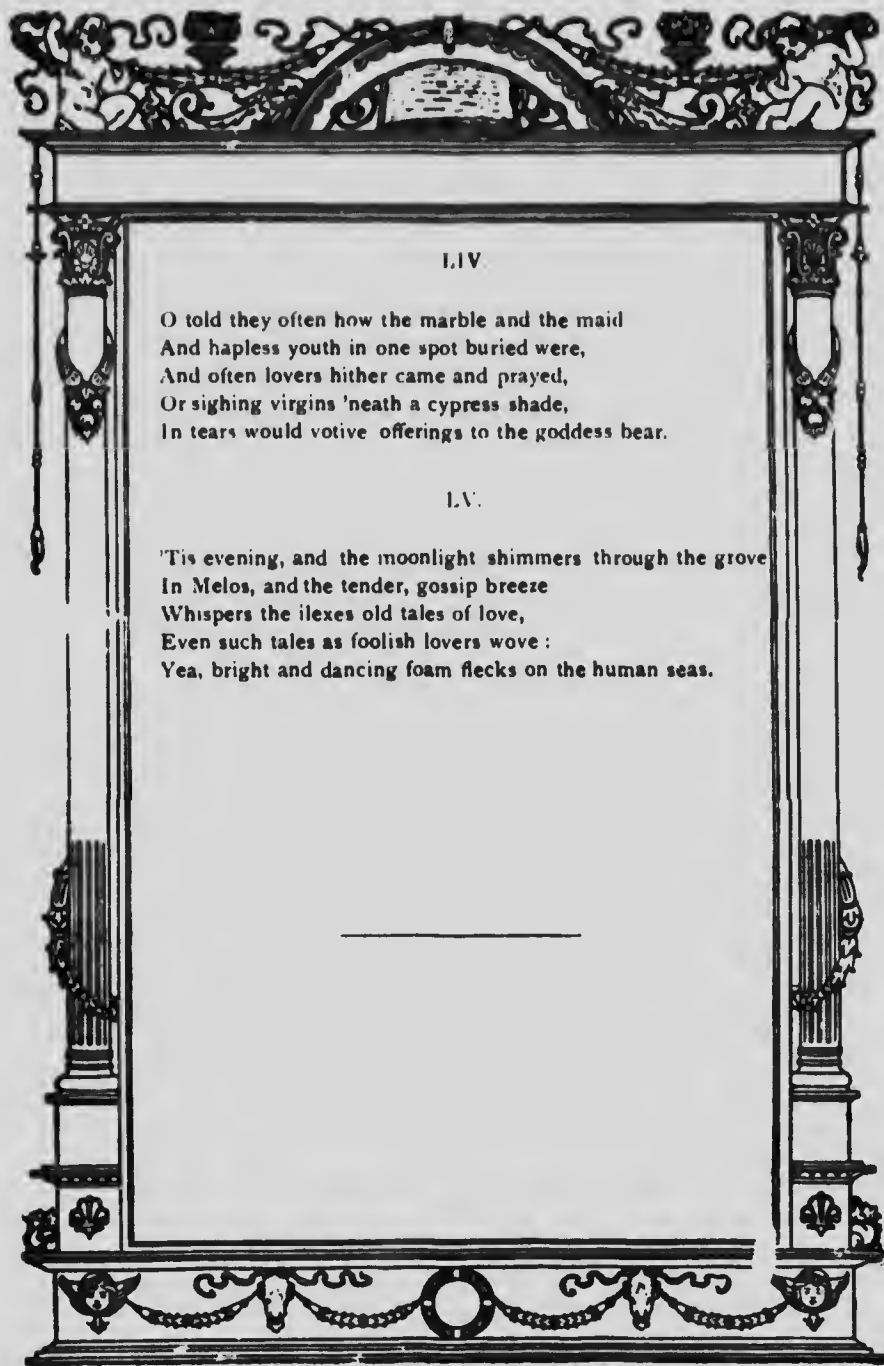
Prostrate both man and marble were as stark and cold,
His lifeless head upon her comely neck,
Her severed shapely arms beside him rolled
As if her errant lover tardily to enfold,
His temples on her snowy bosom left a crimson fleck!

L.II.

'Twas thus Lysippus perished in the pleasant isle
Of Melos, smitten by celestial hand.
Ere long his ashes from the funeral pile
Were borne by slaves who bitterly the while
Wept as they laid them 'neath the statue he had planned.

L.III.

Long for Aglaia sought her weeping slave in vain
In grove and grotto over Melos wide,
Until her peerless body by the restless main
Was flung ashore. The Scythian lone was fain
From the tall pyre to lay her white dust his beside.



L.IV

O told they often how the marble and the maid
And hapless youth in one spot buried were,
And often lovers hither came and prayed,
Or sighing virgins 'neath a cypress shade,
In tears would votive offerings to the goddess bear.

L.V.

'Tis evening, and the moonlight shimmers through the grove
In Melos, and the tender, gossip breeze
Whispers the ilexes old tales of love,
Even such tales as foolish lovers wove :
Yea, bright and dancing foam flecks on the human seas.

