

The Rock

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SEAWARD my terrace—seaward from
Is open; iris and geranium
Fledge it; beyond, the wardens of my will,
Stand olive, mulberry, almond; stern and still
Cypress and ilex. Then uprears its dumb
Portent the Rock, the town's Palladium—
Callous to its man-vermin's good or ill
For æons past, for chiliads to come!

The sea's eternal siege, the sky's disdain,
The earth's convulsions have not stirred its base.
The generations in their senseless pain,
Their aimless effort, their blind dreams insane
Have left but orts of rubble on its face.
Was this a temple? That a market place?
Here fortress? Cistren there? Beshrew thee, brain!
Guess, fancy, rhetoric cannot cloud the case!

Man—canst not thou hold memory of man?
Canst thou not read, thine own sires' testament?
Scornful, I spurn the ruins, and I scan
Sea, sky, and rock; I scrutinise the plan
Of Nature—is some Titan hugely pent
Under that bulk in rage by Vulcan rent?
Is it a God's throne? An Olympian
Altar? Or all planned? Gross accident?

I search my heart, I count life, scar by scar,
Explore the ruins of age on age of thought
And act—few years, but full—my fame, a star,
My love, aflame, my work, a tower—that are
Yet extant. But their meaning? They are naught.

I knew not what I did, nor what I sought.
Intelligence? Insuperable bar
To the enjoyment of all manly sport!

Its ruins fret not, wear not the rock.
Eternity ignores Time's trickle of sands.
Space compensates all motion, pens the flock
Of stars in silence. The event will mock
The agitation of the gods, whose hands
Twist, untwist, tangle, disentangle strands
To end where they began—shock counters shock—
I build life and I wreck it. The soul stands.