

THE CAMEO

To C. Hugh Davies

FLUSHED is the dawn that holds her heart in
snow;
The hours spring down, a waterfall, below;
Gray-shadowed myrmidons of fear and light
Wing out their way into the silent night;
The water breaks upon the stones, and so
Was born the mirror of the Cameo.

Light-fingered Eos thrusts the rustling silk
Of day's bright bed into the sea of milk,
And the gray clouds enwrap the old despair,
The terror of the demons of the air;
In gauzy pinions and with white wings slow
There grows the Image of the Cameo.

And on the shore there broke a foam of blood,
That tinged the land with green and purple scud;
The flashing emerald grew more vital yet,
The bloody ruby's eye that turned to jet,
The hot-heart centre of the sea aflow,
Gave form and colour to my Cameo.

The antithetical and ceaseless call
Of Her most melancholy wrought withal
New wonder to the slime and to the clay—
The warp of night, the insistent woof of day;—
The changeling devils of the empty spheres,
The thunder-call that cracked the listening ears—

O wonder-light! O long-forgotten sigh
That burned the empires of the dawning sky,
O emerald snake whose lips were sweeter far
Than any call of the bright star unto star,
O Mother of Despair, how long ago
Was wrought this wonder of the Cameo?

The way is set beyond the dark-armed trees,
Sweet harps whereon the spirits of the breeze
Play the enchanted song that led so far
The Wanderers awakened by the Star—
Astray in earth's most clinging slime they go;
The heart of earth they hear, the Cameo.

They seek and seek; the subtle ways of fire
Bring but a thirsty end to man's desire;
The spell of Darkness and the charm of Sleep
Lend bitterest force to this foul night-tide deep.—
Onward with stumbling, clamorous steps they go,
O saddest wonder, O my Cameo.

Name upon name the heavens hold in fire
Written, and smirched by winds of foul desire,
Nor is the frozen breath of martyrs crude
As thou, thou Demon of the Solitude.
Ah! lost, forgotten fools! I know, I know,
The darkness of the doom, my Cameo.

My Cameo, the day sinks down to death,
And this my song sinks low, even as the breath
Wherewith I seek to hide my shame in thee,
O Cameo mine, slow syren of my sea.
There is no word unuttered by my foe:
Lie in the gloom and sparkle, Cameo.