

THE GARDEN OF YOUTH

I.

O haunted garden of eternal youth!
O darkling avenues of fir and pine!
O sunlit lawns! O fountains clear as truth!
O singing air! O life of sparkling wine!
A voice comes chanting slowly, "All is mine";
A million ears are strained to catch the lay;
A song floats upward in a curling line.
Breathing of roses, poppies, odorous hay,
And all the stars of night, and all the lore of day.

II.

I would the gods would whisper, "This is thine":
In every heart to plant a flower of May;
To bring each lip a measure of bright wine;
To teach each listening ear a roundelay."
Yet is there not, methinks, a perfect Way;
Each man a separate path must seek and tread.
No voice may mimic the red notes of Day;
No man the stars can summon overhead,
And so I sing, forlorn, to living and to dead.

III.

To-night, the wind shall play among the trees,
To-night, still waters shall reflect the sky,
To-night, the moonlight over wide stretch'd seas
Shall rouse the slumb'rous earth with melody.

Over waste lands shall rise a bitter cry:
"O Death! Sweet Death! Let me but hear thy wings!"
But Death, unseen, unheeding, shall pass by,
And bitter eyes shall seek the soul of things
Vainly. The Root is hidden by sharp-pointed stings.

IV.

O Garden of Youth Immortal! Were it well
To dwell for ever in thy sheltering shade?
Or were it good to seek the heaven and hell
That men have sought and loved,—have marred
and made?
The sun that warms the garden, many-rayed,
Beats down upon our heads; with dazzled eyes
We see, and, seeing partly, unafraid,
We shelter in our bosoms living lies,
And they ward off the sun of Truth that never dies.

V.

Thy statue, Hebe, in the varying light
Of cypress dark and gleaming laurel stands;
A jar of sparkling water, crystal-bright,
Is highly poised within thy strong white hands:
Oh! We are bound to thee with many bands;
O Hebe! Thou our dark world shalt redeem!
Pour out, pour out, over the thirsty sands
Of this, our age, a long unyielding stream,—
The water of Life and Youth, the sad world's fairest
dream.

VI.

Close not the portals! Let the sunlight stream
Through widened gates on to the outer bar;
Beyond, though all be darkened as a dream,
Shines every man's effulgent guiding-star.
Onward, through forest and o'er ford, the car
Of progress wends towards the light, and we,
Glancing within where our time's heroes are,
Give cheer and jest, and with our minstrelsy
Make light the way, and toiling, make the pathway
free.

VII.

The world has thrilled beneath the songs of men;
The nations have arisen but to die,
But a wild poet with an eager pen
The unforgotten thunders of the sky
Hears, and the cleansing lightning-flash sees fly,
And straightway song, that evermore shall free
The hearts of men in death of triumph-cry,
Brings earth and sky and market-place and sea
Into the world unknown, that yet men know shall be!

VIII.

O earth unborn that all the bards have sung!
O youth unplumbed that all the bards have
known!
Thy note shall spring upon the new world's tongue;
The earth to be shall make you all its own.

Gaze down, O Hebe! From thy starry throne,
Look up, O bards unknown of the new day;
It may not be that one should sing alone,—
That one alone should journey on the way
That leads unto the heights where Freedom holds her
sway.

IX.

O Garden of Youth Immortal! In thy shade
Has this, my song, been woven of air and light;
And at thy portal stand I unafraid,
For bear I am not a fire-brand for the night?
And shall my lyre not serve, when day is bright
Over men's heads? Ah Hebe! 'Tis to thee
I owe my song: let now thy finger white
Point out the path the world shall tread to me.
Farewell, O Garden of Youth, for now my steps are
free.