

THE BLOOD-LOTUS.

THE ashen sky, too sick for sleep, makes my face
grey; my senses swoon.

Here, in the glamour of the moon, will not some
pitying godhead weep

For cold grey anguish of her eyes, that look to God,
and look in vain,
For death, the anodyne of pain, for sleep, earth's
trivial paradise?

Sleep I forget. Her silky breath no longer fans my
ears; I dream
I float on some forgotten stream that hath a savour
still of death,

A sweet warm smell of hidden flowers whose heavy
petals kiss the sun,
Fierce tropic poisons every one that fume and
sweat through forest hours.

They grow in darkness; heat beguiles their slug-
gish kisses; in the wood
They breathe no murmur that is good, and Satan
in their blossom smiles.

They murder with the old perfume that maddens
all men's blood; we die
Fresh from some corpse-clothed memory, some
secret redolence of gloom,

Some darkling murmurous song of lust quite
strange to man and beast and bird,

Silent in power, not overheard by any snake that
eats the dust.

No crimson-hooded viper knows; no silver-crested
asp has guessed
The strange soft secrets of my breast; no leprous
cobra shall disclose

The many-seated, multiform, divine, essential joys
that these
Dank odours bring, that starry seas wash white in
vain; intense and warm

The scents fulfil; they permeate all lips, all arter-
ies, and fire
New murmured music on the lyre that throbs the
horrors they create.

Omniscient blossom! Is thy red slack bosom
fresher for my kiss?
Are thy loves sharper? Hast thou bliss in all the
sorrow of the dead?

Why art thou paler when the moon grows loftier in
the troublous sky?
Why dost thou beat and heave when I press lips of
fire, hell's princeliest boon,

To thy mad petals, green and gold like angels'
wings, when as a flood
God's essence fills them, and the blood throughout
their web grows icy cold?

To thy red centre are my eyes held fast and fervent,
as at night
Some sad miasma lends a light of strange and si-
lent blasphemies

To lure a soul to hell, to draw some saint's charred
lust, to tempt, to win
Another sacrifice to sin, another poet's heart to
gnaw

With dubious remorse. Ho! flame of torturing
flower-love! sacrament
Of Satan, triple element of mystery and love and
shame,

Green, gold, and crimson, in my heart you strive
with Jesus for its realm,
While Sorrow's tears would overwhelm the warriors
of either part.

Jesus would lure me: from His side the gleaming
torrent of the spear
Withdraws, my soul with joy and fear waits for
sweet blood to pour its tide

Of warm delight—in vain! so cold, so watery, so
slack it flows,
It leaves me moveless as a rose, albeit her flakes
are manifold.

He hath no scent to drive men mad; no mystic
fragrance from his skin
Sheds a loose hint of subtle sin such as the queen
Faustina had.

Thou drawest me. Thy golden lips are carven
Cleopatra wise.
Large, full, and moist, within them lies the silver
rampart, whence there slips

That rosy flame of love, the spring of blood at my
light bidding spilt;
And thy desires, if aught thou wilt, are softer at my
suffering.

Fill up with Death Life's loving-cup! Give me the
knowledge, me the power
For some new sin one little hour, provoking Hell to
belch us up.

So in some damned abyss of woe thy chant should
dazzle as of old,
Thy kisses burn like molten gold, thy visions swing
me to and fro.

Strange fascinations whirl and wind about my
spirit lying coils ;
Thy charm enticeth, for the spoils of victory, all an
evil mind.

Thy perfume doth confound my thought, new long-
ings echo, and I crave
Doubtful liaisons with the grave and loves of Par-
thia for sport.

I think perhaps no longer yet, but dream and lust
for stranger things
Than ever sucked the lips of kings, or fed the tears
of Mahomet.

Quaint carven vampire bats, unseen in curious
hollows of the trees,
Or deadlier serpents coiled at ease round carcasses
of birds unclean ;

All wandering changeful spectre shapes that dance
in slow sweet measure round
And merge themselves in the profound, nude
women and distorted apes

Grotesque and hairy, in their rage more rampant
than the stallion steed ;
There is no help: their horrid need on these pale
women they assuage.

Wan breasts too pendulous, thin hands waving so
aimlessly, they breathe
Faint sickly kisses, and inweave my head in quiet
burial-bands.

The silent troops recede ; within the fiery circle of
their glance
Warm writhing woman-horses dance a shameless
Bacchanal of sin ;

Foam whips their reeking lips, and still the flower-
witch nestles to my lips,
Twines her swart lissome legs and hips, half ser-
pent and half devil, till

My whole self seems to lie in her ; her kisses draw
my breath ; my face
Loses its lustre in the grace of her quick bosom ;
sinister

The raving spectres reel ; I see beyond my Circe's
eyes no shape
Save vague cloud-measures that escape the dance's
whirling witchery.

Their song is in my ears, that burn with their me-
lodious wickedness ;
But in her heart my sorceress has songs more sin-
ful, that I learn

As she sings slowly all their shame, and makes me
tingle with delight
At new debaucheries, whose might rekindles blood
and bone to flame.

The circle gathers. Negresses howl in the naked
dance, and wheel
On poinard-blades of poisoned steel, and weep out
blood in agonies ;

Strange beast and reptile writhe ; the song grows
high and melancholy now ;
The perfume savours every brow with lust unutter-
able of wrong.

Clothed with my flower-bride I sit, a harlot in a
harlot's dress,
And laugh with careless wickedness that strews
the broad road of the Pit

With vine and myrtle and thy flower, my harlot-
maiden, who for man
Now first forsakest thy leman, thy Eve, my Lilith,
in this bower

Which we indwell, a deathless three, changeless
and changing, as the pyre
Of earthly love becomes a fire to heat us through
eternity.

I have forgotten Christ at last ; he may look back,
grown amorous,
And call across the gulf to us, and signal kisses
through the vast :

We shall disdain, clasp faster yet, and mock his
newer pangs, and call
With stars and voices musical, jeers his touched
heart shall not forget.

I would have pitied him. This flower spits blood
upon him ; so must I
Cast ashes through the misty sky to mock his
faded crown of power,

And with our laughter's nails refix his torn flesh
faster to the wood,
And with more cruel zest make good the shackles
of the Crucifix.

So be it! In thy arms I rest, lulled into silence by
the strain
Of sweet love-whispers, while I drain damnation
from thy tawny breast:

Nor heed the haggard sun's eclipse, feeling thy per-
fume fill my hair,
And all thy dark caresses wear sin's raiment on thy
melting lips—

Nay, by the witchcraft of thy charms to sleep, nor
dream that God survive;
To wake, this only to contrive—fresh passions in
thy naked arms;

And, at that moment when thy breath mixes with
mine, like wine, to call
Each memory, one merged into all, to kiss, to
sleep, to mate with death!