

THE HILLS.

TO OSCAR ECKENSTEIN.

WHENCE the black lands shudder and darken,
 Whence the sea birds have empire to range,
Whence the moon and the meteor hearken
 The perpetual rhythm of change,
On earth and in heaven deluded
 With time, that the soul of us kills,
I have passed. I have brooded, fled far to the wooded
 And desolate hills.

Not there is the changing of voices
 That lament or regret or are sad,
But the sun in his strength rejoices,
 The moon in her beauty is glad.
As timeless and deathless time passes,
 And death is a hermit that dwells
By the imminent masses of ice, where the grasses
 Abandon the fells.

There silence, arrayed as a spectre,
 Is visible, tangible, near,
To the cup of the man pours nectar,
 To the heart of the coward is fear:
Though the desolate waste be enchanted
 By a spell that bewilders and chills,
To me it is granted to worship the haunted
 Delight of the hills.

To me all the blossoms are seedless,
 Yet big with all manner of fruit:
And a voice in the waste is needless

Since my soul in its splendour is mute.
Though the height of the hill be deserted,
The soul of a man has its mate ;
With the wide sky skirted his heart is reverted
To commune with Fate.

Far flings out the spur to the sunset ;
Its help to the hope of the sun
That all be unfolded if one set,
That none be apart from the One ;
And the sweep of the wings of the weather,
Marked bright with the silvery ghylls
For flickering feather, brings all things together
To nest in the hills.

Like a great bird poised in the aether,
The mountain keeps watch over earth,
On the child that lies sleeping beneath her
Wild-eyed from a terrible birth.
But by noise of the world unshaken,
By dance of the world not bedinned,
The hill bides forsaken, yet only to waken
Her lover, the wind.

Like a lion asleep in his fastness,
Or a warrior leant on his spear,
The hill stands up in the vastness,
And the stars grow strangely near ;
For the secret of life and its gladness
Are hidden in strength that distils
A potion of madness from berries of sadness
Grown wild in the hills.

Though the earth be disparted and rended,
Thus only the great peaks change
That their image is moulded and blended
Into all that a fancy may range ;
And the silence my song could refigure
To the note of a bird did I will,

Of glory or rigour, of passion or vigour—
The change were to ill!

For silence is better than singing
Though a Shelley wove songs in the sky,
And hovering is sweeter than winging;
To live is less good than to die.
The secret of secrets is hidden
Not in the lives nor in loves, but in wills
That are free and unchidden, that wander unbidden
To home in the hills.

A strength that is more than the summer
Is firm in that silence and rest,
Though stiller the rocks be and dumber
That the soul of its slumber oppressed.
For stronger control is than urging,
And mightier the heart of the sea
Than her waves deep-merging and striving and surging
That deem they are free.

In spirit I stand on the mountain,
My soul into God's withdrawn
And look to the East like a fountain
That shoots up the spray of the dawn.
And the life of the mountain swims through me
(So the song of a thrush in me thrills)
And the dawn speaks to me, of old for it knew me
The soul of the hills.

I stand on the mountain in wonder
As the splendour springs up in the East,
As the cloud banks are rended asunder,
And the wings of the Night are released.
As in travail a maiden demented,
Afraid of the deed she hath done,
By no man lamented, springs up the sweet-scented
Pale flower of the sun.

So change not the heights and the hollows ;
The hollows are one with the heights
In that pallid grave dawn of Apollo's
Confusion of shadows and lights.
Unreal save to sense that can sense her
That maiden of sunrise refills
The air's grey censer with perfumes intenser
The higher the hills.

So, vague as a ghost swift faded,
Steals dawn, and so sunset may see
How her long long locks deep-braided
Fall down to her breast and her knee.
So night and so sunrise discover
No light and no darkness to heed.
Night is above her, and brings her no lover ;
And day, but no deed.

Such a sense is up and within me,
A tongue as of mystical fire !
Love, beauty, and holiness win me
To the end of the great desire,
Where I cease from the thirst and the labour,
As the land that no ploughman tills
Lest the robber his neighbour unloosen the sabre
From holds in the hills.

From love of my life and its burden
Set free in the silence remote,
Grows a sorrow divine for my guerdon,
A peace in my struggling note.
Compassion for earth far extended
Beneath me, the swords and the rods,
My spirit hath bended, bowed me and blended
My self into God's.

But God—what divinity rises
To me in the mountainous place ?
What sun beyond suns, and surprises

Mine eyes at the dawn of His face?
No God in this silence existing,
No heaven and no earth of Him skills,
Save the blizzards unresting, whirling and twisting
Adrift on the hills.

So witless and aimless and formless
I count the Creator to be;
Not strong as who rides on the stormless
And tames the untamable sea.
But motion and action distorted
Are marks of the paths He hath trod.
Hated or courted, aided or thwarted:—
Lo, He is your God!

But mine in the silence abideth;
Her strength is the strength of rest;
Not on thunders or clouds She rideth
But draweth me down to Her breast:
No maker of men, but dissolving
Their life from its burden of ills,
Ever resolving the circle revolving
To peace of the hills.

And dark is Her breast and unlighted;
But a warm sweet scent is expressed,
And a rose as of sunset excited
In the strength of Her sunless breast.
Her love is like pain, but enchanted:
Her kiss is an opiate breath
Amorously panted: her fervours last granted
Are sorrow, and death.

Nor death as ye name in derision
The change to a cycle of pain,
To a cycle of joy as a vision
Ye chase, and may capture in vain.
Endeth you peace, and your change is
Like the change in a measure that shrills

And slackens and ranges ; your passion estranges
The love of the hills !

Nay ! death is a portal of passing
To miseries other but sure.
Yet the snow on the hills amassing
The wind of an hour may endure ;
But as day after day grows the summer
The crystals melt one after one.
The hill—shall they numb her ? Their frost over-
come her ?
Demand of the sun !

That uttermost death of my lady
Revealed in the heart of the range
Is as light in the groves long shady
As peace in the halls of change.
The web of the world is rended ;
Stayed are the causal mills ;
Time is ended ; space unextended.
And end of the hills !