

PROLOGUE

SIN : AN ODE

YE rivers, and ye elemental caves,
Above the fountains of the broken ice,
Know ye what dragon lurks within your waves ?
Know ye the secret of the cockatrice ?
The basilisk whose shapeless brood
Take blood and muck for food ?
The sexless passion, the foul scorpion spawn ?
The witches and the evil-chanting ones
Who strangle stars and suns,
Eclipse the moon, and curse the dawn ?
Know ye the haunts of death ?
The hole that harboureth
The sickening breath,
Whence all disease is bred, and all corruption drawn ?

Nay, these ye know not, or your waters cold
Would stagnate, shudder, putrefy for fear ;
Your echoes hate existence, and be rolled
Into the silent desolate, dead sphere.
For in those sightless lairs
No living spirit fares

Caught in a chain, linked corpses for a lure !
Shall human senses feel
Or human tongue reveal ?
Nay, shall the mortal know them and endure
Whose little period
Is limited by God ;
Whose poor abode
Is the mean body, prey to all distemperature ?
Yet, mortal in the Light and Way Divine,
Gird on the armour of the Holy One :

Seek out the secret of the inmost shrine,
Strong in the might and spirit of the sun.
Arise, arise, arise,
Give passage to mine eyes,
Ye airs, ye veils; ye bucklers of the Snake!
I knew the deepest cells,
Where the foul spirit dwells;
Called to the dead, the drowned, arise! awake!
Their dark profoundest thought
Was less than She I sought,
It was as nought!
I drew my soul, I dived beneath the burning lake.

Thrise, in the vault of Hell, my word was born,
Abortive, in the empty wilderness.
False echoes, made malicious, turn to scorn
The awful accents, the Supreme address.
The Fourth, the final word!
All chaos shrank and heard

The terror that vibrated in the breath,
Hell, Death, and Sin must hear,
Tremble and visibly fear,
Shake the intangible chain that hungereth.
That Mother of Mankind
Sprang in the thunder-wind!
The strong words bind
For evermore, Amen! the keys of Hell and Death.

Central, supreme, most formidable Night,
Gathered its garments, drew itself apart,
Gaunt limbs appear athwart the coprolite
Veil of deep agony, display the heart;
Even as a gloomy sea,
Wherein dead fishes be,
Poisonous things, nameless; the eightfold Fear,
Misshapen crab and worm,
The intolerable sperm,
Lewd dragons slime-built stagnant, the foul mere

Crawled, moved, gave tongue,
The essential soul of dung
That lived and stung;
That spoke: no word that living head may hear.

Even as a veil imagining Beauty's eyes
Behind, lifted, lets flash the maiden face;
So that dead putrefying sea supplies
A veil to the unfathomable Place.
Behind it grew a form,
Wrapped in its own dire storm,

Dark fires of horror about it and within,
A changing, dreadful Shape:
Now a distorted ape;
Now an impending vampire, vast and lean;
Last, a dark woman pressed,
The world unto her breast,
Soothed and caressed
With evil words and kisses of the mouth of Sin.

The Breath of men adoring. "Worship we!
"The mighty Wisdom, the astounding power,
"The Horror, the immense profundity,
"The stealty, secret passes of thy Bower!
"Thee we adore and praise
"Whose breast is broad as day's;
"Thee, thee, the mistress of the barren sea,
"Deep, deadly, poisonous;
"Accept the life of us,
"Dwell in our midst; yea, show thy cruelty!
"Suck out the life and breath
"From breast that quickeneth.
"Such pain is death,
"Such terror, such delight—all, all is unto thee!"

I too, I also, I have known thy kiss.
I also drank the milk that poisons man,

Sought to assume the impenetrable bliss
By spells profound and draughts Canidian.
One lifted me: and lo!
Thalassian, white as snow,

The scarlet vesture and the crimson skin!
An Aphrodite clove,
The foam, incarnate Love,
Maiden, as light leaps the dawn-garden in,
So in the Love and Light,
Life slain, yet infinite,
The God-Mans's night,
Leaps pure the soul rearsen from the embrace
of Sin.

Yet, in the terror of that Breast, abides
So sweet and deadly a device, a lure
Deep in the blood and poison of her sides,
Swart, lean, and leprous, that her stings endure.
Even the soul of grace
Abideth not her face
Without vague longing, infinite desire,
Stronger because suppressed,
Unto the wide black breast,
The lips incarnate of blood, flesh, and fire,
So to slip down between
Thighs vast and epicene,
Morose and lean,
To that unnameable morass, the ultimate mire.

Wherefore behoved the Soul that leaps divine,
Even beholding darkly in a mirror,
The face of God, to sink before his Shrine.
Weeping: O Beauty, Majesty, and Terror,
Wisdom and Mind and Soul,
Crown simplex, Mighty Whole,

Lord of the Gods! O Thou, the King of Kings!
To me a sinner, me,

Lowest of all that be,
Be merciful, O Master Soul of things!
Show me thy face of ruth,
And in thy way of truth,
Guide my weak youth,
That stumbles while it walks, make discord when
it sings!

So, Mighty Mother! Pure, Eternal Spouse,
Isis, thou Star, thou Moon, thou Mightiest,
Lead my weak steps to thine Eternal House!
Rest my vain head on thine Eternal Breast!
Spread wide the wings divine
Over this shadowy shrine,
Where in my heart their hovering lendeth Light!
Bend down the amazing Face
Of sorrow and of grace,
Share the deep vigil of thine eremite!
So let the sighing breath
Draw on the Hour of Death,
Whence wakeneth
The Spirit of the Dawn, begotten of the night.